

Young people spending time abroad: European targets partially achieved, but access remains unequal



A European indicator, constructed in part using data from Céreq's *Génération* survey, shows that France is fairly well positioned when it comes to the time the country's students spend abroad in the course of their studies, even though the 2020 target has not yet been achieved. On the other hand, very few of the young people in vocational secondary education or apprenticeships go abroad as part of their education or training. However, these indicators do not reflect the full diversity of the experiences abroad acquired in the course of their studies by the young people who left the education system in a given year.

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Since the Erasmus programme was launched in 1987, the European Union has brought in more schemes to encourage and extend the international mobility of young people in the course of their higher or secondary education and initial vocational training. In higher education, this mobility lies at the heart of the construction of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) as set out in the 1999 Bologna Declaration and the subsequent ministerial conferences. More recently, when devising its Education and Training 2020 strategy [1], the European Union extended its targets for the international mobility of young people in education and training to those in secondary vocational education. This extension of the targets was accompanied in 2011 by the introduction of two evaluation criteria (commonly known as "benchmarks") for the Education and Training 2020 strategy (Box 1) that specify the goals to be achieved with regard to young people's international mobility.

In October 2018, for the first time, the European Commission, using Eurostat data, published the data for the first benchmark (EC 2018) for higher education graduates. These indicators show that, in Europe in 2016, 10% of students spent a period of study or training abroad linked to their course; these stays abroad were of a minimum duration of three months and/or enabled the students concerned to obtain 15 ECTS (European Credits Transfer System) credits. In the case of France, the rate – 16% as it turned out – was computed in part on the basis of data from the 2013 *Génération* survey. This is close to, though slightly below, the target of 20% set at European level and not far off the German and Swedish rates of 18% and 14% respectively. It lies

between those of the UK (4%) and the Netherlands (23%). Luxembourg is very much an outlier (84%); the country's first and only public university was founded as recently as 2003 and the majority of students have traditionally gone abroad for their higher education.

The second benchmark, which concerns young people who followed vocational education programmes or took apprenticeships, is not currently computed by Eurostat. Nevertheless, data from the 2016 survey of the 2013 cohort can be used to provide an estimate for France. These data indicate that between 3% and 4% of the young people who completed secondary vocational education courses (CAP, BEP and vocational baccalaureate) spent at least two weeks abroad as part of their course. Thus the target of 6% set down in the Education and Training 2020 strategy was not met in the case of these young people who left the education system in 2013.

Access to international mobility remains unequal

Analysis of *Génération* survey data (see Box 4) reveals the diversity of the experiences abroad from which the 2013 cohort benefited but which is not fully rendered by the European indicators alone. A total of 324,000 young people, almost half of the 2013 cohort, spent time abroad in the course of their education and/or training (all levels of qualification taken into account). Twenty per cent went abroad to study, while 14% completed a work placement or internship; these are the two reasons for going abroad taken into account in the European benchmarks. For 47%, the time spent

TIME SPENT ABROAD
GENERATION
SURVEYS
INTERNATIONAL
MOBILITY
EUROPEAN
INDICATORS

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As part of its Education and Formation 2020 strategy, the European Union has set two quantified targets for learning mobility, in higher education and in secondary vocational education and training, including apprenticeships, respectively. These two benchmarks are unusual in that they were adopted by the Education, Youth and Culture Council on 28 and 29 November 2011, well before the member states were able to measure them on the basis of their national statistical systems.

These targets are formulated as follows:

- 1) At least 20% of higher education graduates should have had a period of higher education-related study or training (including work placements) abroad, representing a minimum of 15 ECTS credits or lasting a minimum of three months;
- 2) At least 6% of 18-34 year-olds with an initial vocational education and training (IVET) qualification should have had an IVET-related study or training period (including work placements) abroad lasting a minimum of two weeks.

In order to compute the first benchmark, Eurostat does not use data from an international comparative survey but collects data from different sources for each country. The indicator is then computed by adding together the instances of credit mobility (stay abroad in order to obtain a qualification awarded in the country of origin) and degree mobility (stay abroad in order to obtain a qualification awarded in the host country). For France, the rate of credit mobility, which accounts for the major share of learning mobility, is computed on the basis of data from the 2013 *Génération* survey. Degree mobility, on the other hand, is computed using administrative data from the host country and represents the number of French students registered in foreign higher education establishments. Some countries, such as the USA, do not provide these data, which causes the mobility indicator to be underestimated.

abroad was a holiday, while 10% attended a language course; 4% took a job and the remaining 5% went for some other reason (voluntary work, educational trip, conference, etc.). If the reasons for going abroad vary considerably, so too do the destinations. EU member states were the main destinations for the young people in the 2013 cohort who spent education-related time abroad (63%), in particular the UK, Germany and Spain, followed by North and South America, which accounted for 15% of the stays abroad for study or work placements (cf. map in Box 2). The length of time spent abroad also varied, with only 13% of stays lasting more than six months. This figure underlines how ambitious the target announced by the French president on 26 September 2017 at the Sorbonne actually is: 50% of the young people in any one age cohort are to have spent at least six months in another European country between now and 2024.

Young people's experience of education-related international mobility is linked to socio-demographic characteristics, as could already be observed in the case of those who left education in 2010 [3]. For the same level of qualification, those young people whose parents do not have *cadre* (i.e. managerial or executive) status, those from a migration background and young foreigners studying in France are less likely to spend time abroad during their studies. And young people from urban policy priority districts also enjoy fewer opportunities to have this kind of experience. Thus although education-related international mobility for young people is regarded in the public debate as being of vital importance, access to experience of this kind remained very unequal for the young people of the 2013 cohort.

These inequalities are further compounded by those linked to academic profile: the more the level of qualification rises, the more likely the young people

are to state that they spent time abroad during their studies. Those without qualifications, that is young people with no qualifications at all or just the lower secondary leaving certificate, and those with the lowest vocational qualifications (CAP-BEP) are the groups least likely to have spent time abroad (23% and 24% respectively). Among those at the same level of the education system, inequality of access to education-related international mobility can be explained by differences between the various courses and pathways. Opportunities to spend time abroad often go hand in hand with the process of bringing education and training closer to the needs of the economy and the extent to which they are institutionalised and historically embedded varies from course to course. Thus engineers and business school graduates, for whom international mobility is an integral part of their courses [4], are the two groups most likely to spend time abroad as students (86 %). This is also the case for those who graduated from doctoral programmes (75 %), where considerable importance is attached to time spent studying abroad, particularly when it comes to obtaining academic research jobs. In the university sector, the specialism and type of degree play a role. In the case of those who studied for vocational degrees, for example, 62% of graduates in service-sector specialisms spent time abroad compared with just 45% of their counterparts in industrial specialisms. Similarly, for graduates from programmes requiring 5 years' post-secondary education (excluding the elite business and engineering schools), 68% of those who completed courses in the arts, humanities, management and law spent time abroad compared with only 59% of science and technology graduates.

Behind the European targets lies a diversity of experiences

The two European benchmarks outlined above relate solely to time spent abroad for the purpose of undertaking either a placement governed by an agreement or a course of study in an educational establishment, i.e. to just 34% of the education-related stays abroad. In reality, however, these evaluation criteria encompass a number of different types of stays abroad that do not necessarily concern the same groups of young people. In order to illustrate this diversity, a typology was constructed of the young people who spent education-related time abroad. Drawing on an analysis of the relevant data, six "typical profiles" (categories) of stays abroad were constructed, taking into account the reason for the stay (placement or study), its length, the way in which it was funded and whether or not – and how – any course followed was formally recognised (diploma, ECTS credit, work placement certificate, etc.).

Category 1 (9% of the survey population) encompasses stays funded by grants awarded within the education system (funding from an educational establishment or research institute, grant awarded on social criteria, etc.). This type of stay is more likely to involve a period of study (62% of cases) than a placement (38%).

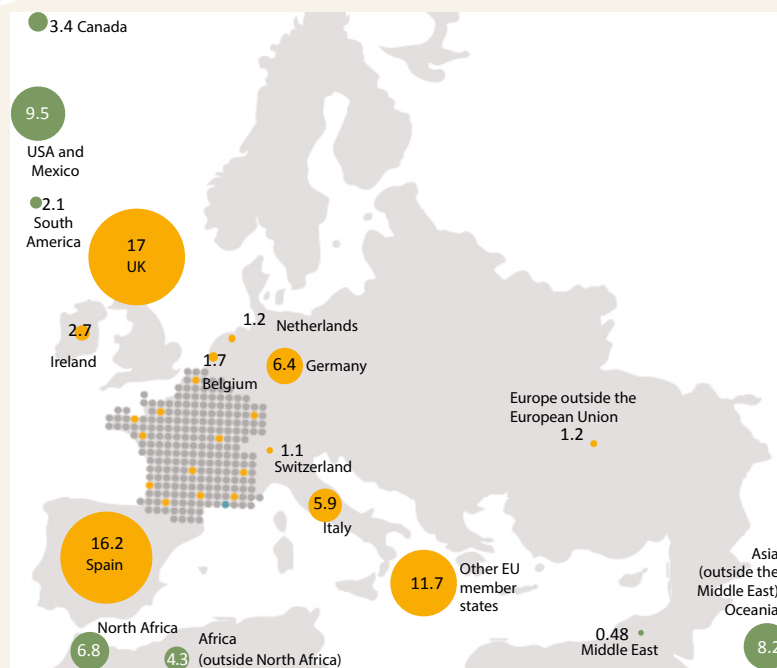
These stays vary in length, as does the way in which the courses followed are formally recognised.

The following two categories include young people who completed a placement abroad. Category 2 concerns 4% of the survey population and encompasses placements funded by both a placement allowance and a grant awarded under the terms of an external public programme for supporting young people spending education-related time abroad; these programmes may be European schemes (Erasmus +, Leonardo, etc.) or initiated by a French regional authority (regional council, municipality etc.). Of these placements, 80% lasted more than three months. Category 3 (30% of the young people surveyed) includes placements that relied at most on just one of these two funding sources. Twenty-six per cent of these stays were funded just by a grant awarded under the terms of an external public support programme, 29% by a placement allowance and 35% by the student's family. These stays were variable in length. In both these categories, placements are recognised as a matter of course by a certificate awarded at the end of the stay.

The last three categories include young people who go abroad to study in an educational establishment. They can be differentiated by the length of stay, the award (or otherwise) of a certificate and the type of funding declared by the young person concerned. Category 4 (23% of the young people who spent time abroad) includes long stays involving a course of study leading to a qualification and financed by a family support grant and/or a grant awarded under the terms of an external public support programme. The majority (79%) of these stays lasted 6 months or more, while 18% lasted between 3 and 5 months. Almost all of them (90%) led to the award of a foreign diploma or certificate and/or ECTS credits. Category 5 (18% of the young people surveyed) encompasses short study visits (82% lasted less than a month) not leading to the award of

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Destinations of education-related stays abroad



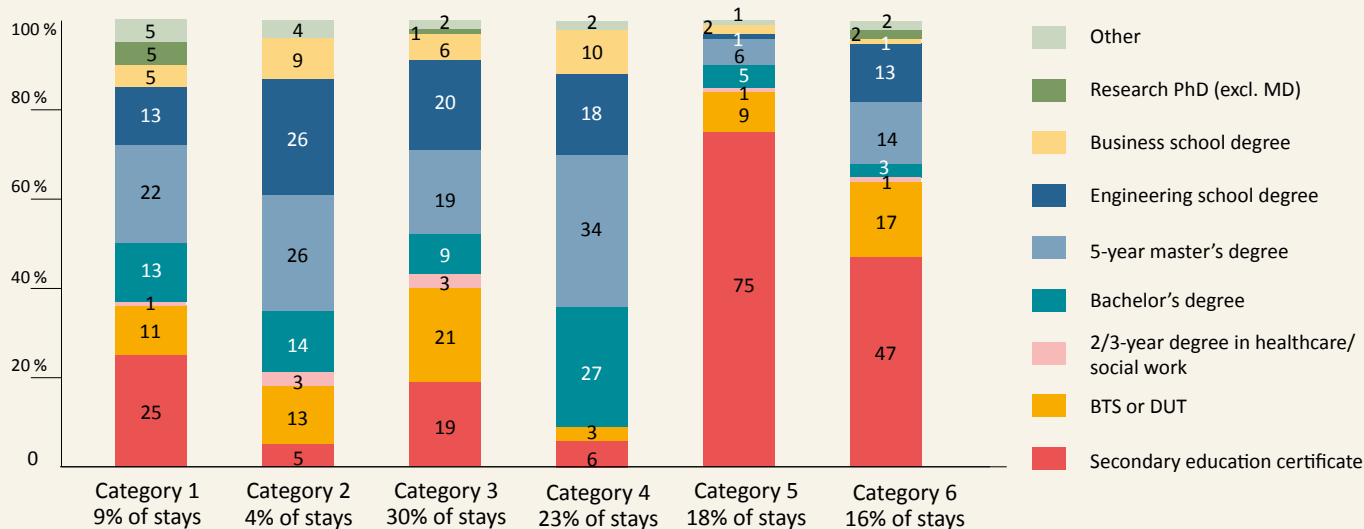
Source: Céreq, 2013 Génération survey 3 years after leaving education.

Scope: young people having undertaken at least one education-related stay abroad.

a qualification (95% of cases). In the vast majority of cases (87%), these trips were funded solely by the students' families; the others were funded by grants awarded under the terms of an external public support programme. Category 6, finally, which concerns 16% of the population surveyed, encompasses study trips with no financial assistance of any kind. One third of the young people in this category said they had worked before or during their trip in order to finance it. The length of stay and qualifications obtained (ECTS credits, diplomas, certificates of accreditation, etc.) varied but in the majority of cases (64%) no qualification was obtained.

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Qualification being studied for in the year of the stay abroad



Source: Céreq, 2013 Génération survey 3 years after leaving education.

Scope: Young people having undertaken at least one stay abroad to study or complete a placement.

The results presented in this issue of Bref are derived from analysis of the 2013 *Génération* Survey data. This survey was conducted among a sample of 19,500 young people that was representative of the 693,000 young people who left the education system in metropolitan France and the overseas departments for the first time in 2013. Only those young people living in France at the time of the survey, which took place between April and July 2016, were included in the survey. The young people were questioned in particular about their educational trajectories and their employment situation month by month during the three years following the completion of their education.

Student mobility is not a question that is much investigated in the various systems set up to track young people's progress in the world of work, whether at local or national level. In this regard, the *Génération* survey is the most reliable source in France for investigating this phenomenon. In the 2013 *Génération* survey, a specific module of questions on education-related international mobility, jointly financed by the Erasmus Plus agency and SIES was added to the main questionnaire.

Stays that differ depending on level of education

The characteristics of these education-related stays abroad seem to be strongly linked to the level of qualification being studied for at the time of the stay (see Figure 3). Thus just one quarter of the short study stays not leading to a qualification (category 5) were undertaken by young people in higher education, whereas this was the case for 53% of the study stays without financial assistance (category 6) and for virtually all of the stays in the other categories. The stays in categories 5 and 6, which are usually undertaken for the purpose of preparing for secondary-level qualifications, are also those that the young people are least likely to regard as having improved their chances of getting a job on leaving education (39% and 24% respectively of the young people in these categories). Furthermore, these two categories have the lowest share of young people whose father has *cadre* status and of those whose mother is educated beyond first degree level. Thus young people from the most modest social backgrounds and those studying for secondary-level qualifications suffer from a double cumulative effect: they are less likely to go abroad as part of their education and, when they do go, the time spent abroad is less advantageous to them in the labour market.

Conversely, those young people who went on category 2 placements or category 4 stays were more likely to say that their time abroad had given them an advantage when it came to finding employment (80% and 75% respectively of the young people in these categories). The vast majority of these stays were undertaken by those with qualifications requiring 3 or more years' post-secondary education, further underlining the disparities between the various levels of the education system.

The aim of the European targets is to encourage young people to spend time abroad while in education, since such stays abroad are generally regarded as an asset when they enter the labour market. Nevertheless, those same targets do not, because of their global nature, reflect the diversity of the stays undertaken and fail to capture the effect of the time spent abroad on the young people's employability. The typology set out above underlines the fact that the long placements and study stays leading to qualifications, which the young people consider the most beneficial, are concentrated among the most highly qualified. This would seem to lead to an accumulation of advantages for this latter group when it comes to the education-to-work transition. Nevertheless, for the same level of qualification, analyses of the *Génération* survey in this area tend rather to conclude that the effect on the education-to-work transition in France three years into the working life is fairly limited. This conclusion requires some degree of qualification, however. Firstly, the effects on the young people's competences (language skills, multiculturalism, etc.) are as yet little documented [5]. Secondly, other benefits can be perceived, in particular the fact that international mobility in the early stages of the young people's working lives is made easier. Those who spend time abroad during their studies acquire a sort of capital [2] on which they often draw in order to undertake further stays abroad when they enter the labour market. To this day, there are no national data sources in France (whether administrative or survey-based) that shed light on all the benefits of time spent abroad while in education, particularly for those young French people who have emigrated permanently. This is what the *Génération* survey is proposing to do in future. More broadly, the question of young people's international mobility during and after their time in education invites us to ask whether a European labour market is being constructed.

Further reading

- [1] Education and Training Monitor 2018, European Commission Report.
- [2] «Expériences à l'étranger en cours d'études et insertion : des liens complexes, pour quelle plus-value ? », J. Calmand, S. Condon, K. Pietropaoli, P. Rouaud, E. Santelli, *Formation Emploi*, 142, 2018.
- [3] « Séjours à l'étranger en cours d'études, une plus-value sur l'insertion en France ? », J. Calmand, P. Rouaud, E. Sulzer, *Céreq Bref*, 348, 2016.
- [4] « Mobilité internationale des étudiants du supérieur et débuts de vie active », N. Havet, *Working paper GATE*, 2016.
- [5] « Mobilité internationale des étudiants et débuts de vie active », H. Schomburg et U. Teichler, *Formation emploi*, 103, 2008.