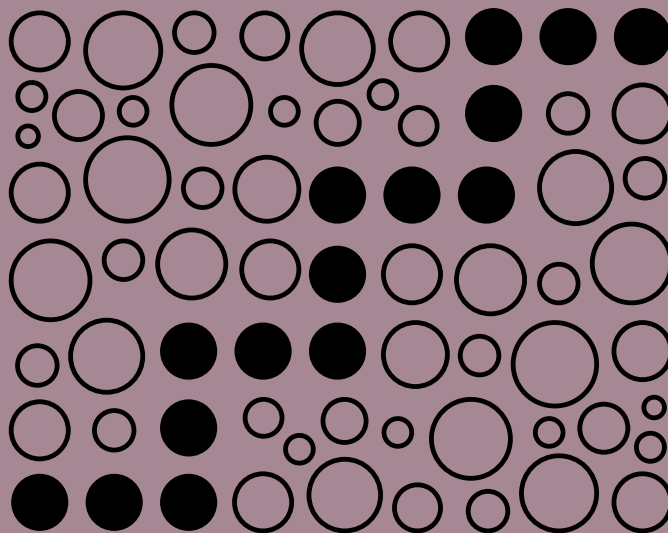


# Is mobility the key to a successful career?

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Tracer study report on vocational learners  
with transnational mobility experience





# **Is mobility the key to a successful career?**

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**Is mobility the key to a successful career? Tracer study report on vocational learners with transnational mobility experience**

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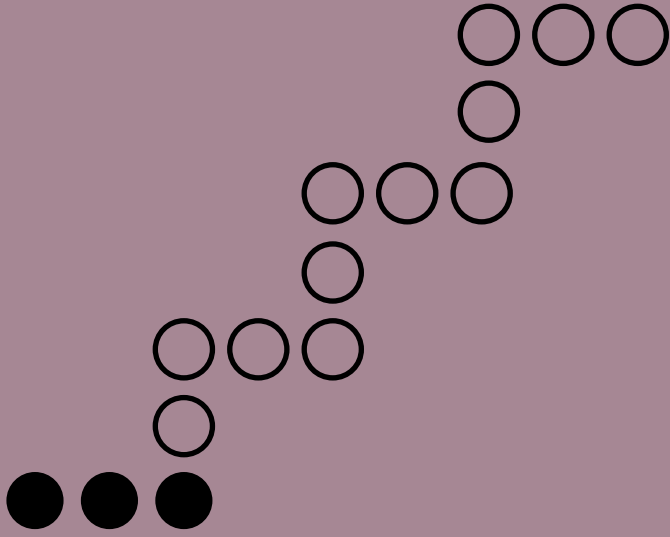
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# Introduction



The European Commission defines the transnational learning mobility as a trip abroad aimed at acquiring new knowledge and skills, learning a language and developing broad intercultural competences. Such mobility can be implemented at any stage of education, including vocational education and training<sup>1</sup>. Thanks to learning mobility abroad, students can not only improve their language skills and become acquainted with the culture of the host country, but also experience a different approach to learning and acquiring vocational skills, and become acquainted with new training methods applied in educational contexts different from the Polish one. Therefore, educational mobility can make a great contribution to the process of vocational education and training of students and trainees, whereas traineeships and internships at companies and training centres abroad can greatly facilitate the students' transition to the labour market.

Since 2007, the European Commission has funded over 60,000 mobilities of Polish vocational school students who served internships and traineeships abroad<sup>2</sup>. In view of limited resources, for many schools this was the only possibility to offer mobilities abroad thanks to which many students could for the first time participate in such training and stay abroad for a longer period of time. As part of the projects, the participants of transnational training mobilities interned at companies, training centres and other VET providers in Europe.

The main responsibilities of institutions managing European education programmes include providing financial support for the implementation of projects and monitoring their outcomes. Although the amount of positive feedback from institutions offering internships and traineeships abroad makes us believe that these activities have brought considerable advantages, due to the increasing level of their internationalisation and the improving quality of vocational education and training, it is much harder to give a reliable assessment of the impact of mobilities on their participants. The difficulty of making such an assessment has primarily resulted from the lack of information on later education and career paths of students, how their opinions about mobility have changed and how they have affected their educational and professional choices.

As part of a study whose results are presented in this report we contacted some former project participants and asked them about their opinions on their learning mobilities. The data collected through the surveys and interviews have allowed us to identify the competences the former trainees developed

- 
1. For more information on learning mobility, cf. *Green Paper. Promoting the learning mobility of young people* adopted by the European Commission on 8 July 2009.
  2. The data on the status of the implementation of programmes managed by the Foundation for the Development of the Education System are available in following reports: K. Szwałek (ed.), *Raport 2007–2013*, E. Miłoś (ed.), *Raport 2014*, J. Dąbrowska-Resiak (ed.) *Raport 2015*, A. Karolczuk (ed.), *Program Erasmus+ w Polsce. Raport 2016*, Warsaw: Foundation for the Development of the Education System 2015–2017.

and the extent to which these proved useful in their further learning, personal development and professional career. The information collected has also contributed to identifying the profile of former participants of internships and traineeships, their professional motivations and the reasons behind their choices related to work and further study. We hope that this paper will contribute to challenging stereotypes about vocational education and training, which have been perpetuated in recent years, and will show how interesting can be the opinions of school graduates, not only about internships and traineeships abroad, but also about the school system and labour market in Poland.

### Scope of the study

The study focused on internships and traineeships funded by European education programmes supporting activities in the area of vocational education and training:

- the Leonardo da Vinci Programme, which formed part of the *Lifelong Learning Programme* carried out in the years 2007–2013;
- the Erasmus+ programme, which is a continuation of the activities realized under the previous programming phase of EU funds in the current financial perspective, which is carried out in the years 2014–2020;
- systemic projects funded by the European Social Fund, within which the Foundation for the Development of the Education System (FRSE) has since 2012 supported beneficiaries placed on waiting lists of the above mentioned programmes (projects were implemented in accordance with the rules pertaining to the Leonardo da Vinci and Erasmus+ programmes).

### Scope of the study – offer of professional mobilities abroad in the framework of European education programmes

	Lifelong Learning Programme – Leonardo da Vinci	Erasmus+ Vocational Education and Training
<b>Project implementation time</b>	<b>2007–2013</b>	<b>2014–2020</b>
<b>Minimum duration of mobility</b>	2 weeks	
<b>Maximum duration of mobility</b>	39 weeks (approximately 9 months)	12 months
<b>Additional support from the European Social Fund</b>	<b>since 2011</b> (as part of Operational Programme Human Capital)	<b>since the beginning of Erasmus+</b> (as part of Operational Programme Knowledge Education Development)

The goal of these initiatives was to promote the mobility of workers in the European labour market and to introduce innovative solutions for raising qualifications in order to ensure that systems of education fully correspond to



the needs of the labour market. The purpose of these programmes was also to increase the transparency and recognition of vocational qualifications across Europe thanks to the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), Europass tools, and measures introduced to reinforce the quality of vocational education and training and continuing education, such as EQF/NQF<sup>3</sup> and EQARF<sup>4</sup>.

### Scope of the study – additional support from the European Social Fund

ESF project	Year in which the call was announced	Programme under which the call was announced
<i>Internships and traineeships for vocational education and training learners</i>	<b>2012/2013</b>	Lifelong Learning Programme – Leonardo da Vinci
<i>Internships and traineeships for students and graduates of VET schools and VET staff training</i>	<b>2014</b>	Erasmus+ Vocational Education and Training
<i>Internships and traineeships for students and graduates of VET schools and VET staff mobility</i>	<b>2015/2016</b>	Erasmus+ Vocational Education and Training

An internship as part of any of the above programmes could be served in any country participating in them, i.e.:

- Member States of the European Union (depending on their membership status in a given year);
- countries associated with the European Union in the framework of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and the European Economic Area (EEA), i.e. Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway;
- European Union candidate countries (depending on their status in a given year).

Not only schools, but also institutions having substantive supervision over training at the initial phase of vocational education and training could apply for funding offered by these programmes. The target group to which the foreign internship and traineeships offer was addressed was composed of:

- students of vocational and technical schools;
- apprentices (people during initial vocational training in the workplace);
- recent graduates<sup>5</sup>.

3. *European Qualifications Framework / National Qualifications Framework.*

4. *European Quality Assurance Reference Framework.*

5. Since 2014, it is required that mobility within Erasmus+ should take place at the latest one year after the participants complete their education.

Over the years of implementing programmes covered by the study, FRSE has received a lot of positive feedback from schools offering internships and traineeships for students at the initial stage of vocational education. This means that this form of developing vocational skills not only substantially affects the increase in project participants' skills, but also facilitates the transition to the labour market for recent graduates of vocational schools. VET teachers often stressed that thanks to the opportunity to become acquainted with a different learning context and new training methods applied at companies and training centres abroad students can better master their future profession and their practical experience gained abroad can prove an important asset in the eyes of future employers.

It should be added that in its day-to-day work, FRSE mainly maintains contact with mobility organisers, and not with its participants (individuals are selected directly by the institutions which have been awarded funding for conducting internships and traineeships abroad). As a result, the Foundation cannot establish and maintain contact with former project participants after they have submitted individual reports on completed mobilities. Collecting data about the education and career choices of the internship and traineeship participants on an ongoing basis is also difficult because VET providers in Poland do not deal with these issues in a systemic way. This is due to the scarcity of human resources capable of performing such tasks.

The study has allowed us to establish contact with former interns and trainees (these who have recently completed their mobility projects and those who have already entered the labour market) and learn their opinions on the relevance of internships and traineeships.

### **Methodology of the study and selection of the sample**

In the context of the study, for the first time an attempt has been made to assess the impact of transnational vocational mobility on the later education and career paths of its participants from Poland<sup>6</sup>. When developing premises and research tools, not only purely vocational skills acquired in the framework of formal education, but also soft skills obtained in the process of non-formal education as part of the agreed vocational mobility programme were taken into consideration. The main focus of the study was identified by formulating the following key questions:

→ Do transnational mobilities impact on future careers and personal development of former interns and trainees, and, if so, to what extent?

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6. The intended project implementation cycle regulates issues related to current monitoring of mobility and provides tools for identifying the level of satisfaction with participation in transnational training mobility directly upon the participant's return.

- What new competences and skills did mobility participants acquire or develop during practical vocational training abroad?
- To what extent have the acquired competences proven useful, especially in the context of professional status and standing on the labour market?

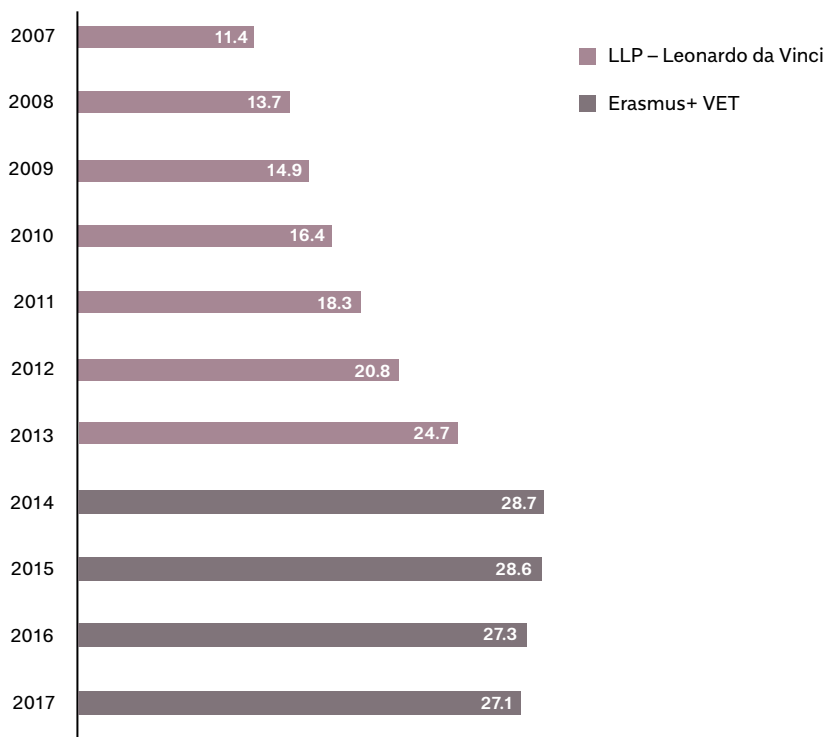
The study, which took into account both quantitative and qualitative techniques, was conducted from March to September 2017. The study results have been supplemented with data obtained as part of desk research (mainly contextual information and a statistical summary of programme implementation). The triangulation of adopted tools resulted from differing characteristics of the two respondent groups (vocational school students and graduates), and the triangulation of the planned research methods was primarily aimed at collecting in-depth information on experiences related to mobility and its effects.

The online questionnaire was used as the basic research tool. It was sent out to email addresses of former participants of internships and traineeships funded under the programmes covered by the study. A link to the questionnaire was also sent to the schools with the request to distribute it among former students and mobility participants who were still educated by the school. The quantitative part of the study covered the entire population of former internship and traineeship participants, and the only criterion for being included in the survey was the participation in mobility abroad as part of the programmes covered by the study. In the end, FRSE received more than 2,600 anonymous questionnaires with responses, and a large majority of respondents met the study criteria<sup>7</sup>.

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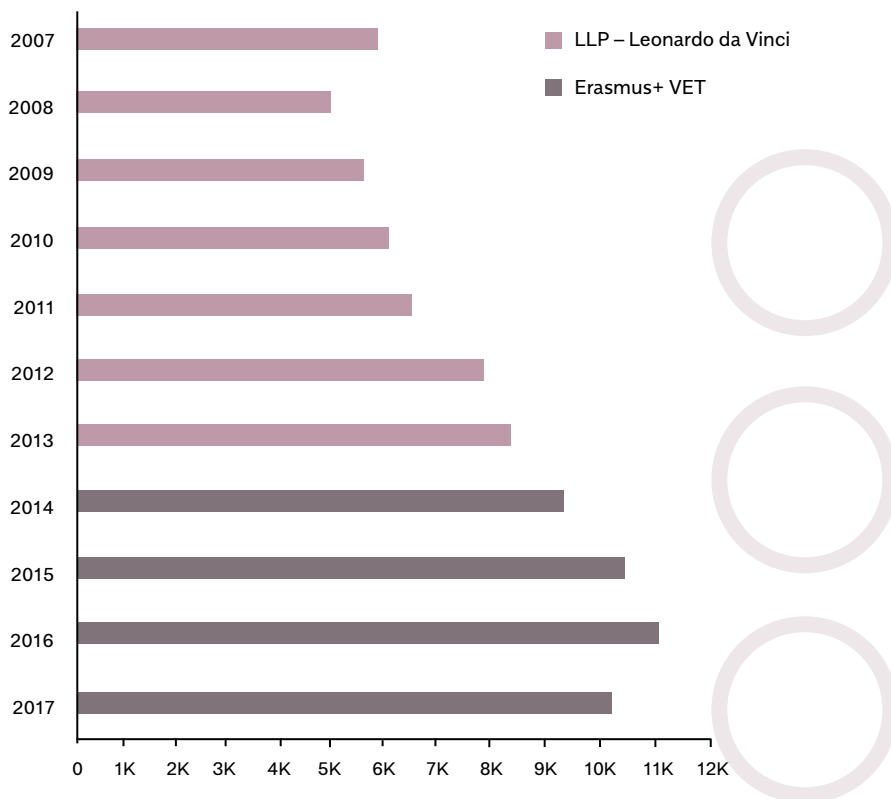
7. 53 respondents who did not clearly confirm participation in the programmes covered by the study were removed from the sample at the stage of further analysis of the results.

**Funds for Leonardo da Vinci (2007–2013) and Erasmus+ Vocational Education and Training (2014–2017) in millions of euro**



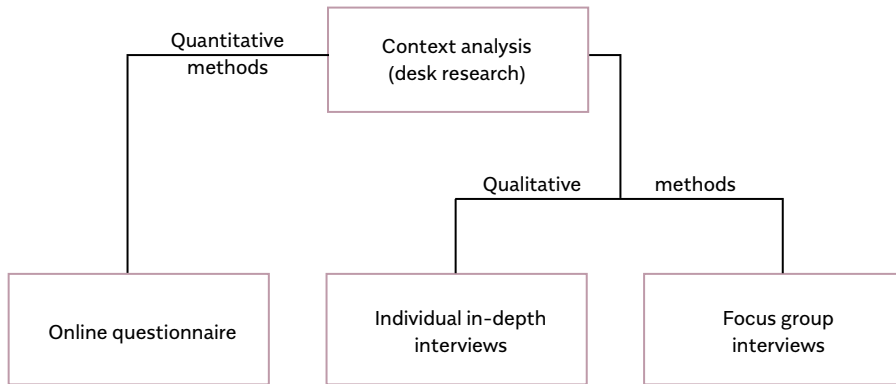
Source: *Raport 2007-2013. Programy Uczenie się przez całe życie oraz Młodzież w działaniu w Polsce*, Szwafek K. (ed.), Foundation for the Development of the Education System, Warsaw 2014, p. 16 (numbers for 2014-2017 based on data of Foundation for the Development of the Education System).

## VET learning mobility participants under Leonardo da Vinci (2007–2013) and Erasmus+ Vocational Education and Training (2014–2017)

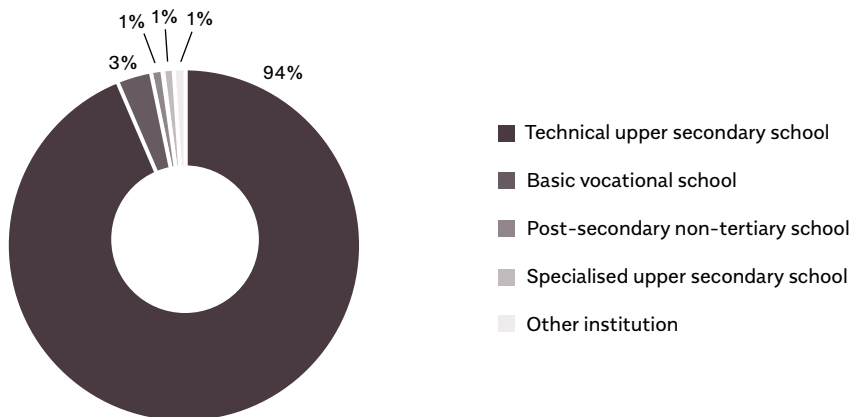


Source: *Raport 2007-2013. Programy Uczenie się przez całe życie oraz Młodzież w działaniu w Polsce*, K. Szwałek (red.), Foundation for the Development of the Education System, Warsaw 2014. s. 16.

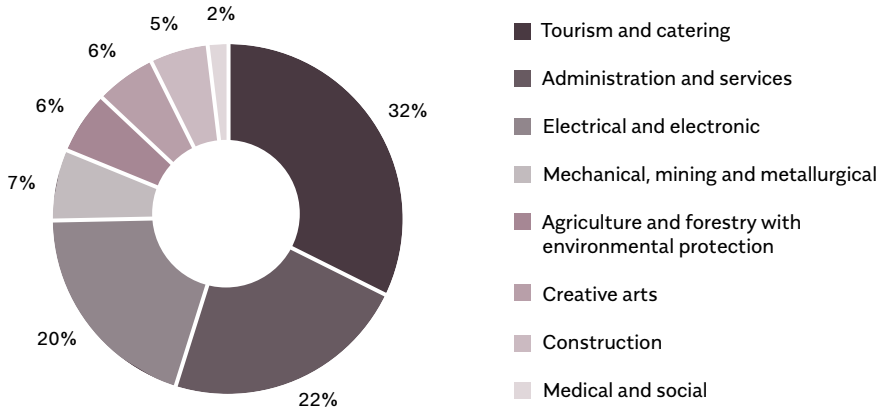
### Diagram presenting the main activities in the framework of the study



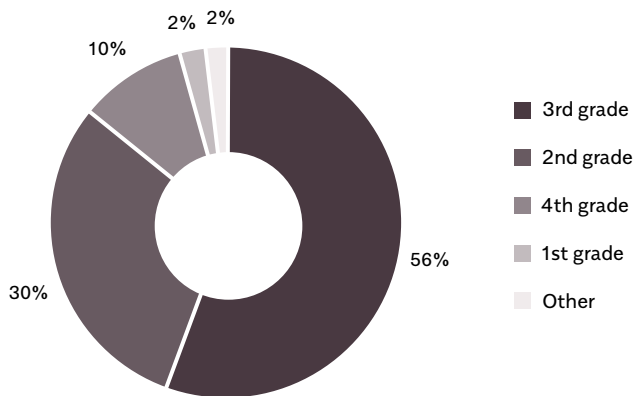
### Questionnaire respondents by type of sending institution (N = 2,592)



**Questionnaire respondents by type of education sector (N = 2,592)**



**Questionnaire respondents by stage of education at which they participated in mobility (N = 2,592)**



**Description of the quantitative study sample (Breakdown of the number of completed questionnaires into key groups of respondents. Data does not sum up as some respondents belong to more than one group)**

Respondents							
	Total	Vocational school learners	School graduates	Higher Education Students	Graduates of HEIs	Active on the labour market	Unemployed
<b>Total number of respondents</b>	<b>2,645</b>						
<b>Respondents meeting the study criteria</b>	<b>2,592</b>	<b>763</b>	<b>957</b>	<b>607</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>991</b>	<b>356</b>

The vast majority of respondents who completed internships were upper-secondary technical school students, slightly more than 3 percent were vocational school students, less than 1 percent attended post-secondary non-tertiary schools, and a little over 0.5 percent attended specialised upper secondary schools. The respondents also reported other sending institutions, such as: Voluntary Labour Corps, vocational higher education institutions, art schools and supplementary upper-secondary technical schools.

The questionnaire respondents were also asked to indicate the industry sector in which the mobility was conducted. The most popular sectors included: tourism and catering (more than 32 percent), administration and services (over 22 percent), and electrical and electronic (over 20 percent). Least popular was the medical and social sector, which was indicated by less than 2 percent of respondents. The majority of questionnaire respondents served their internships at further stages of school education (less than 3 percent participated in the mobility when they were students of the first grade of secondary school). More than 50 percent of the respondents were third graders at the time of their mobility, and many served their traineeships and internships at further stages of education.

The participants in individual in-depth interviews (IDI) were graduates of secondary schools who participated in mobilities offered as part of the programmes covered by the study. In total, 20 interviews were conducted with people living in different regions of Poland. Meetings were held at the former trainees' usual place of residence, their workplace or their school. A randomly selected sample was varied in terms of sex, areas of training, vocational qualifications and target countries of mobility. A vast majority of interviewees were graduates of upper secondary technical schools (Polish: *technikum*) (16 people), which reflects the actual proportions in terms of types of sending



institutions offering internships and traineeships abroad for the whole population of participants in the programmes covered by the study.

In the framework of the study, five focus group interviews (FGI) were also conducted with students who participated in transnational mobilities. They were carried out at five schools with a vast experience in implementation of VET mobility projects funded by the Erasmus+ and Operational Programme Knowledge, Education, Development (Polish: *PO WER*). Students of the second, third and fourth grade of technical upper secondary schools and of the second grade of basic vocational schools were interviewed. Among the focus group interviewees were also recent graduates who had completed their education in the school year preceding the study. In total, 65 people were interviewed.

It should be added that the study also played a very important role of an ex-post evaluation of the completed interventions. Although it was not a pure evaluation exercise, it covered a number of aspects – such as the relevance of the internship/traineeship programme, effectiveness of the training period at the host institution, usefulness of newly acquired competences, impact of the mobility on graduates' choices, and the sustainability of established contacts – which have helped verify the extent to which foreign mobilities proved successful and met the goals set at the planning stage. The study results have made it possible to carry out a qualitative assessment of European education programme offer addressed to the vocational education and training sector in Poland. This assessment focused in particular on supporting students in the acquisition of competences and recent graduates in entering the labour market.

One of the most important research questions was determining the skills that students managed to acquire or develop during practical training abroad. The categorisation of competences (professional, linguistic, social and soft) adopted in the study resulted directly from the test guidelines offered by the programmes covered by the study, which aim to make sure that project participants acquire these types of skills<sup>8</sup>. Such a specified catalogue of competences is also in line with the European Commission's strategy on lifelong learning<sup>9</sup>, in accordance with which it is important – and not just for young people – to acquire not only professional competences (associated with specific knowledge), but also key competences (e.g. knowledge of foreign languages) and horizontal skills (e.g. learning to learn, taking initiative, entrepreneurship and cultural awareness). It is also worth adding that a similar division, taking into account professional and linguistic skills as well as soft and social competences, appears in Polish studies on young people in the labour

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8. Cf. *The Lifelong Learning Programme* and *Erasmus+ Programme Guide* (available online at: [www.erasmusplus.org.pl](http://www.erasmusplus.org.pl), [www.llp.org.pl](http://www.llp.org.pl)).

9. *Improving competences for the 21st Century: An Agenda for European Cooperation on Schools*, Brussels 2008 ([bit.ly/2z1AF0q](http://bit.ly/2z1AF0q)).

market and on competences indispensable for further professional development, such as the Study of Human Capital carried out by the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development and the Centre for Evaluation and Analysis of Public Policies of the Jagiellonian University<sup>10</sup>. A comparable set of skills and their impact on further professional life of project participants can also be found in the report summarising a tracer study focusing on graduates of vocational schools published by the Educational Research Institute<sup>11</sup>. It is worth mentioning that the study – just like the activities discussed in this report – has made it possible to describe contemporary graduates of vocational schools in Poland and their aspirations and expectations concerning employment.

It should also be added that the question concerning the acquisition and development of competences and the impact of the mobility on participants' further professional life has been designed in such a way as to make sure the acquired data corresponds to the results of completed studies concerning programmes implemented by FRSE (e.g. the evaluation of the Human Capital Operational Programme and mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme). Such an approach makes it possible to compare results with the aim to improve the quality of the management of European education programmes in the subsequent financial perspectives of the European Union.

### **Limitations**

Reaching former participants of mobilities, which was of special importance for the quantitative part of the study, proved to be its major limitation. It should be mentioned here that the study's target group comprised the entire population of former interns. The main source of information on participants were individual reports filled in by mobility participants upon their return. In many cases, contact data provided there turned out to be out of date. What is more, obtaining new email addresses was not feasible. Some schools which sent out invitations to their graduates to participate in the survey and published a link to the survey on their social media profiles offered support to this end. Similar limitations could be observed in the process of selecting participants of the qualitative part of the study,

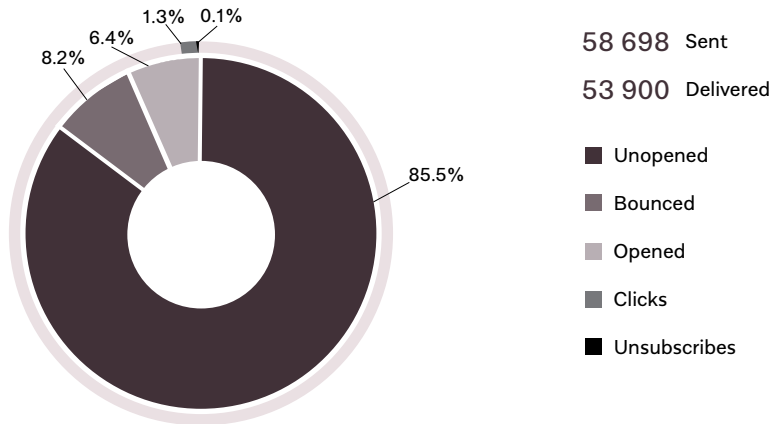
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10. For the needs of the study, 11 competence categories (cognitive, technical, IT, artistic, physical, self-organisation, interpersonal, clerical, managerial, related to predispositions and mathematical) were identified. All can be divided into four main areas which concern: the performance of professional tasks, communication, social competences and soft skills (cf. *Bilans Kapitału Ludzkiego. Najważniejsze wyniki pierwszej edycji badań zrealizowanej w 2010 roku*, Warsaw 2011).

11. Cf. M. Pawłowski, *Habitus zawodowy, współpraca, narracje aktorów społecznych i praca, która nie uszlachetnia. Raport z badania systemu kształcenia zawodowego i jego interesariuszy przy wykorzystaniu metod jakościowych*, Warsaw 2015.

in particular regarding the individual in-depth interviews. However, it should be stressed that due to much smaller sample and intentional selection of respondents, finding members of this group proved considerably easier.

**Basic survey campaign statistics (data based on the Freshmail mailing service)**

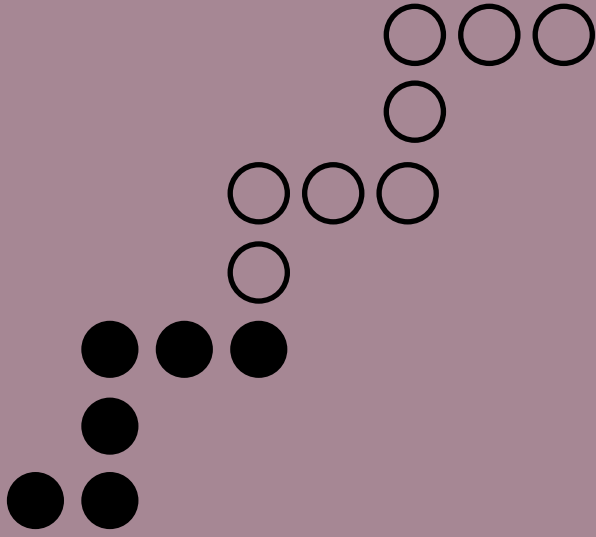


3,735 opened      4,798 bounced      50,165 unopened      750 clicks      55 unsubscribes

Although the study mainly focused on the competences acquired by the participants during vocational mobility abroad, please note that the collected data is of declaratory nature and only takes into account the mobility participants' points of view. This stems from the intended objectives of the study, which did not concern measuring the competences. However, the study made it possible to collect participants' opinions on the skills that they acquired or developed thanks to participation in transnational learning mobility projects. Noteworthy, the specific context of the vocational education sector and mobility programmes in Poland contributed to a smaller representation of some industries among the respondents. Therefore, the results on the least represented industries and areas of education in the survey should be treated as illustrative data.

It should also be noted that quotes presented in the report have been considerably abridged (particularly in the case of respondents providing long answers which spanned many topics) and edited (especially in order to eliminate additional remarks, digressions, unfinished sentences and colloquial phrases used by the respondents). This means that they are of indicative nature, and although in each case the literal meaning of the responses has been preserved, the quotes are not faithful records of actual conversations.

# Mobility experience



Home

This chapter presents the main aspects related to the experiences of transnational learning mobility and their influence on later education and career paths of students and graduates of Polish vocational schools. Information provided by mobility participants has made it possible to identify the most significant areas which impact on the qualitative assessment of internships and traineeships and indicate important determinants of the quality of the projects carried out.

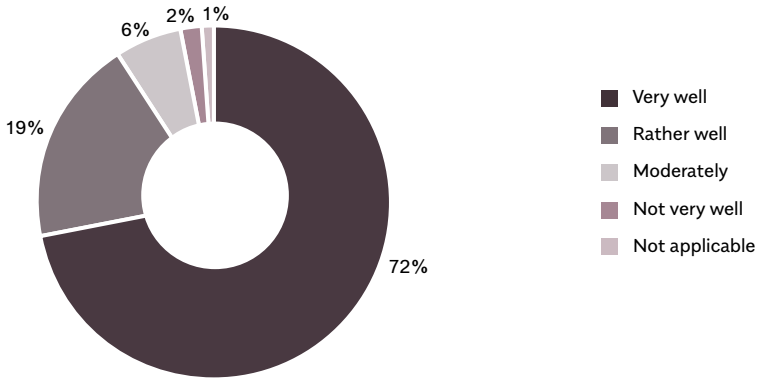
The results of the study show that learning mobility abroad is an important experience in the lives of young people and has a major impact on their choices. Sometimes, it even determines the paths of their professional development. The impact of mobility has been proven by a high level of Net Promoter Score (described in greater detail in later sections of this chapter) among the responders. The majority of the interviewees willingly shared their reflections on the completed mobility, and listed not only its strengths, but also those areas which require more attention at the planning and implementation stages of future mobilities.

Almost all questionnaire respondents confirmed that the mobility abroad was clear in their memory. A large majority of respondents reported that they remembered their internship very well (over 72 percent) or well (more than 19 percent). The survey results also show that neither the sector in which training took place nor the current education or professional status of respondents affect how well they remember the experiences related to mobility abroad. However, it should be added that the respondents who continue their education (either at a school or a higher education institution) more frequently reported that they remembered their internships and traineeships well. This is probably due to the fact that the majority of respondents from these groups served their internships quite recently (this is particularly true of students who still attend vocational schools).

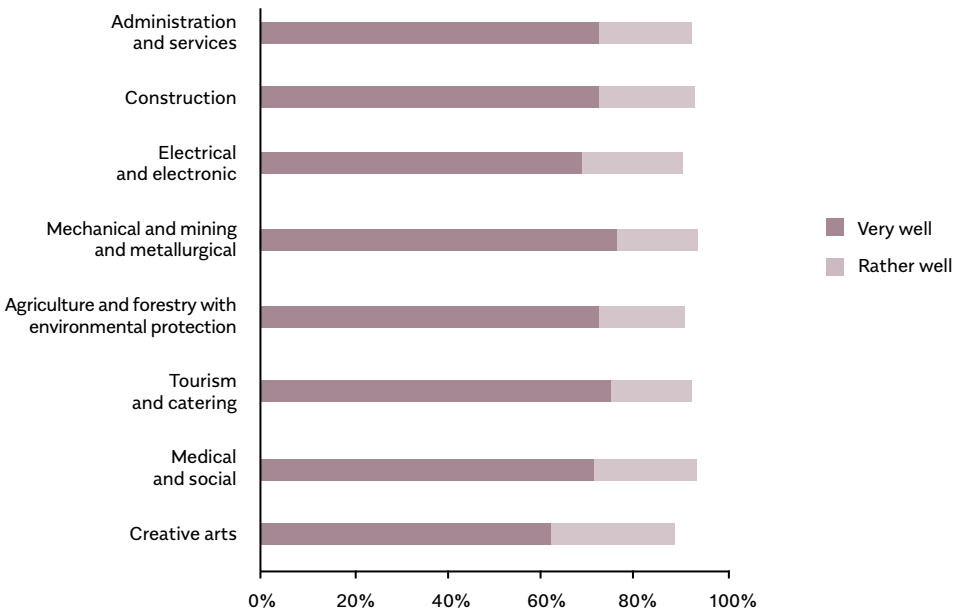
The results of the qualitative study prove the significance of vocational mobility experience for its participants. Interviewees often stressed that their internships and traineeships were experiences which they would remember throughout their lives and which were important from the point of view of their further professional development. The respondents also often reported that an internship abroad proved to be a valuable life experience which contributed to their personal development. More importantly, respondents who were professionally active and could test the value of knowledge and skills acquired during the training abroad in practice in the context of actual requirements of the labour market paid special attention to this aspect.

Learners and recent graduates who participated in focus group interviews often called the learning mobility 'the chance of a lifetime', which may not be provided again, and therefore cannot be wasted. They also pointed out that mobility abroad is not only a professional adventure, but most of all an experience

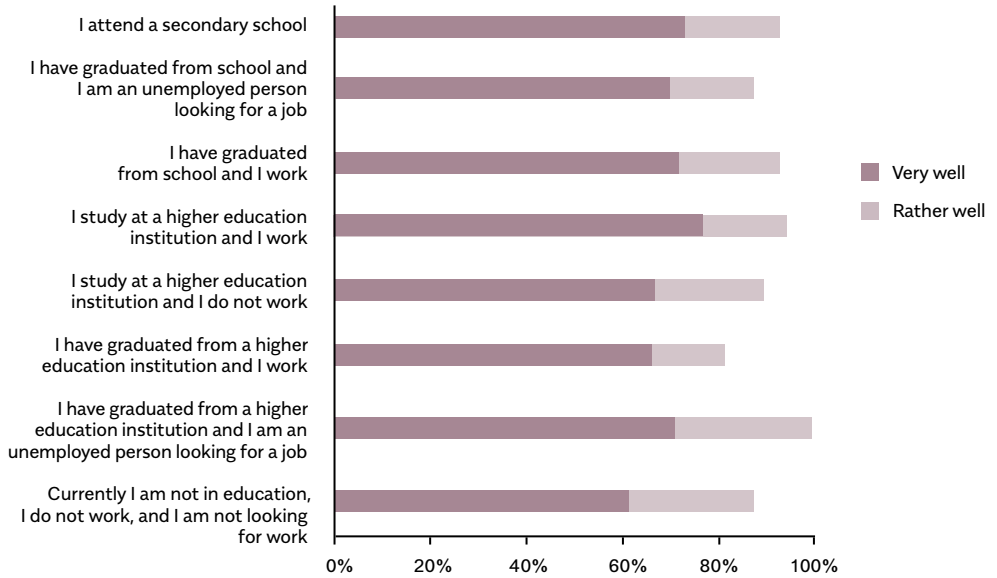
**How well the participants remember their stay abroad (N = 2,592)**



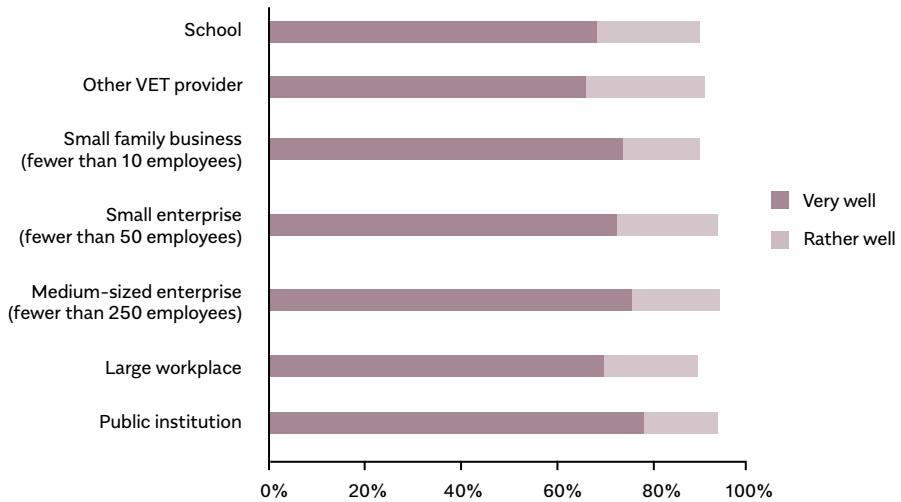
**Summary of responses to the question: 'How well do you remember your mobility abroad?' (breakdown by industry sector in which internships were served, N = 2,952)**



**Summary of responses to the question: 'How well do you remember your mobility abroad?' (breakdown by professional status of respondents, N = 2,952)**



**Summary of responses to the question: 'How well do you remember your mobility abroad?' (breakdown by the most popular type of host institutions, N = 2,952)**



of living in a new place which offers conditions different from those experiences in one's everyday life. Vocational mobility abroad gave young people the opportunity to break away from everyday life, which often involved abandoning existing habits, and the need to become autonomous and to take responsibility for themselves.

*I know no one who could offer me a job in a Michelin star restaurant. This was an opportunity of a lifetime, so if you were lucky enough to get it, you had to make the most of it.*

Both quantitative survey participants and interviewees positively evaluated their participation in transnational vocational mobility projects in terms of opportunities for acquiring new knowledge and practical skills. A vast majority of former trainees sees the participation in the mobility as an important element of their training, which goes beyond the framework of formal education and allows for experiencing the reality of work in a given occupation (often for the first time in the trainees' life).




This aspect proved to be particularly important in the context of searching for a job and was reflected in responses to the questionnaire (more than two-thirds of the respondents declared that they would recommend practical training abroad to other labour market entrants). The NPS ratio that has been achieved in the questionnaire serves as a confirmation of not only a high rating of the quality of completed traineeships (nearly 70 percent of positive opinions with less than 10 percent of negative opinions), but also proves that the transnational vocational mobility offers presented by the schools are recommendable and thus should be continued so that subsequent classes can benefit from them.

The interviewees also agreed that transnational vocational mobility proved a very positive and needed experience which allowed them to directly draw on specific solutions seen abroad and to verify their usefulness in a new work context (among significant dissimilarities, they indicated different attitudes to the performance of duties in a given position, the question of work ethics and the organisation of work specific to a given organisation).

When asked about specific expectations related to the mobility, the interviewees mainly listed:

- the desire to acquire professional experience and practical skills;
- the desire to improve language proficiency (especially in the context of everyday communication when abroad);
- the desire to become better acquainted with the industry and practicalities related to professional duties;





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- 
- the desire to test themselves in a completely new situation (for some of the respondents the mobility was their first stay abroad or even outside the family home);
  - the desire to boost employability (in the opinion of the respondents, having served a traineeship abroad makes a candidate more attractive to prospective employers).

The international dimension of learning mobility projects was very important to former trainees. In many cases, mobility was their first experience of a longer stay outside Poland and for some of the respondents it was the first opportunity to travel abroad. Among reasons for participating in the mobility, the respondents often cited the desire to visit a different country and familiarise themselves not only with its culture and residents, but also with work organisation and methods of operation of local businesses. Some respondents treated the internship as a kind of holiday and opportunity to stay away from school, although this approach did not exclude commitment to training objectives. In a few cases, students indicated an economic factor associated with the possibility of putting aside some of the pocket money as a reason for mobility, although it must be added that not every facility offered students additional funds to cover their expenses (this depended on internal arrangements with individual schools).

*It was primarily an adventure and a new experience. I was very curious about living abroad and wanted to know if I could cope there and overcome the language barrier. I also wanted to know what the work of a logistician was really about. I am bored with theory, I prefer a hands-on approach.*

*An internship is a new experience for those who have never been abroad and do not know what work in another country looks like.*



The information provided during interviews suggests that participants usually made independent decisions about serving an internship or traineeship abroad. Respondents who admitted that they were convinced by teachers and parents formed a small minority. There was not a single participant who took part in mobility against their will. However, it should be remembered that willingness to participate did not guarantee involvement in the project, as in most schools students had to meet a number of requirements, mainly concerning a grade-point average in vocational subjects.

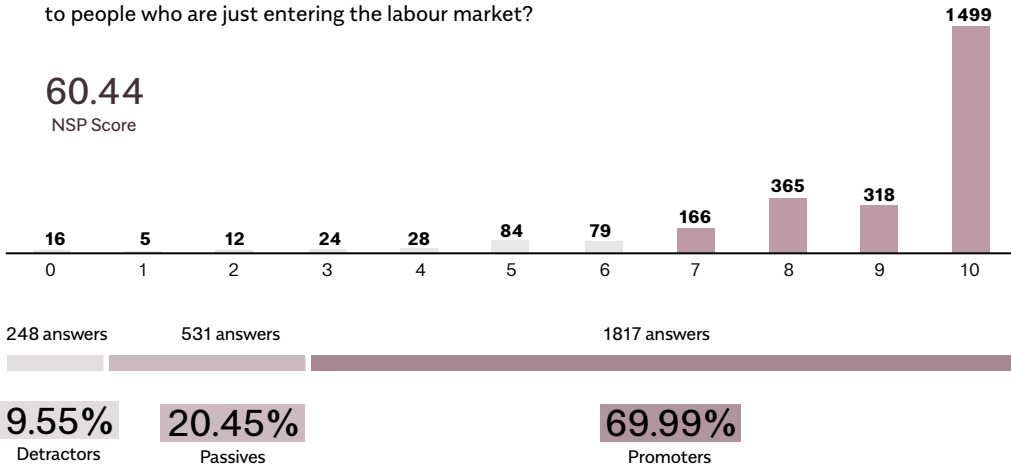


**The level of NPS (Net Promoter Score) – the assessment of satisfaction with and willingness to recommend transnational vocational mobility funded by the surveyed programmes (N = 2,592)**

On a scale from 0 to 10, how likely is it that you would recommend transnational mobility to people who are just entering the labour market?

**60.44**

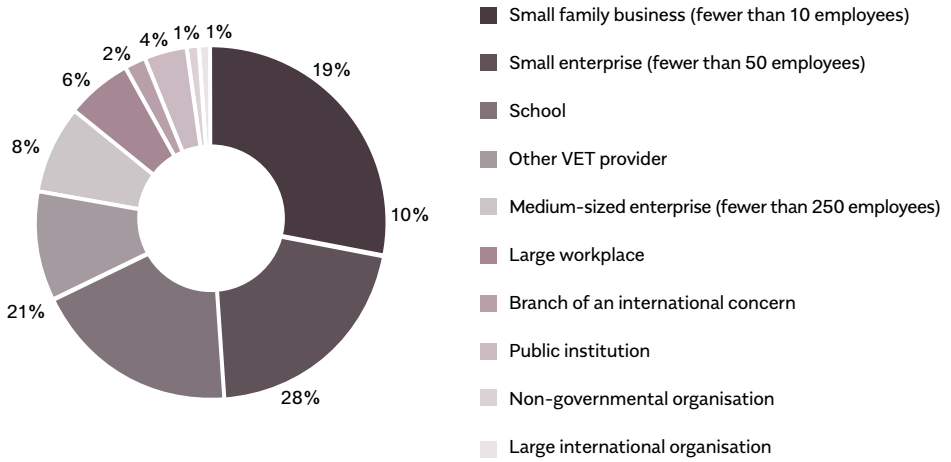
NPS Score



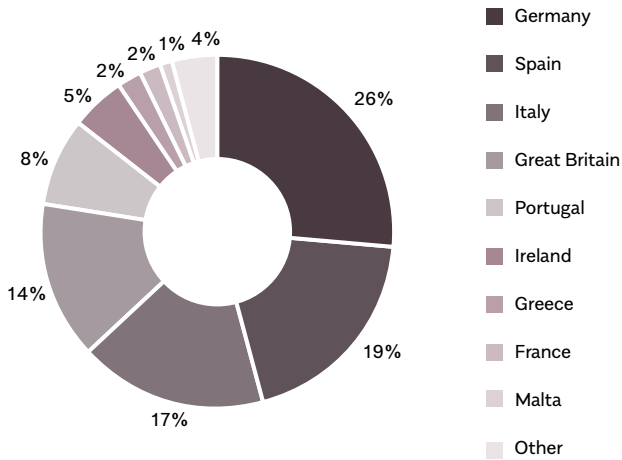
**Most popular associations of the focus group interviewees related to transnational vocational mobility**



### Types of host institutions (N = 2,592)



### Internships and traineeships by mobility destination country (N = 2,592)



## **Mobility organisation models**

Although students' stays abroad were mainly determined by the principles of the programmes under which the funding for mobility was awarded, arrangements made by the sending and host institutions were also of great importance, particularly in the context of the organisation of internships and traineeships. These arrangements concerned, among other things, accommodation, supervision over students, the specifics of mobility and the size of the group working in a given place.

The results of the study have shown that organisational models had a significant impact on the course of mobility and competences acquired by its participants. It also turned out that the model of training had a considerable impact on the qualitative assessment of internships by their participants. It has to be noted that respondents had divergent, sometimes even opposing, opinions about benefits of participation in training abroad.

The respondents also mentioned the differences between institutions hosting trainees from Poland. These were, on the one hand, schools and training centres and, on the other, private enterprises. The type of host institution not only determined the kinds of tasks performed during mobility, but also, according to respondents, was one of the key factors affecting the assessment of training quality.

More than 50 percent of questionnaire respondents served an internship or traineeship in the small and medium-sized enterprise sector – mainly in small companies and enterprises with up to 50 employees. Also, many vocational mobility projects were carried out in the framework of the training programmes offered by various types of VET providers.

Every fourth mobility participant served an internship or traineeship in an institution located in Germany and every fifth learning mobility was carried out in Spain. A similar number of projects was carried out in cooperation with partners from Great Britain. Respondents also reported visiting other countries, such as Portugal, Ireland, Greece, France and Malta.

In the case of group mobilities to practical training institutions abroad, where students worked together, the proposed work programmes had to be adjusted to the skill level of the whole group. In the opinion of the former trainees, such a solution on the one hand allowed the organisers to prepare a coherent training schedule, but on the other generally did not provide room for modification to ensure that it met the expectations of individual students.

The situation was different with mobilities to enterprises, where employers often personally supervised the trainees or appointed mentors for them. Respondents emphasised the fact that such training was primarily based on real needs of the trainees and the company itself and that the trainees were involved

in the given company's current operations. As a result, the trainees had more opportunities to learn the specifics of the host institutions and to adapt the work schedule to their individual expectations.

Because of many types of host institutions' internal organisation and specific tasks performed by the trainees, their work schedules varied and their leisure time sometimes did not overlap. In the case of internships where students worked as a group, they moved everywhere together, also after work. They ate meals and spent their free time together at their place of residence. This form of mobility organisation, although undoubtedly more convenient for the organisers, made it difficult for the trainees to interact with the local work environment and to establish contacts which could bear fruit in the future.

*We saw other students during breaks and certain classes, but we mainly took part in the activities organised especially for us. We had a work schedule prepared for all weekdays.*

*We stayed at a hotel which was situated about two kilometres from the school and we were driven everywhere by bus. At the hotel, in the morning we had breakfast together and then the whole group from Poland was driven to classes.*

*At school, we stayed in our group, together with the teacher who spoke Polish. Only at the canteen, for a brief moment, were we able to come in contact with people who spoke German.*

*It definitely would have been much better if instead of at the school we were trained at a place where we could gain practical experience, like a company for example. It would have been better to try our hand at tasks in different areas and work in more specialised positions.*

In the case of training at companies, the performance of daily duties related to work fostered establishing contacts with other employees, including other trainees from different countries. According to the respondents, some trainees were offered jobs by their employers. Thus it can be concluded that individual stays at enterprises provided more opportunities not only to experience the characteristics of the local labour market, but also to better understand the cultural context and local mentality.

It is worth emphasising that regardless of the type and the specifics of the host institutions, the vast majority of the respondents were very satisfied with the working conditions they were offered. They praised the organisers for their readiness to offer help and provide job-related support during training. The majority of former trainees spoke highly about work organisation and atmosphere.

## Support from the supervisors

In accordance with the principles of the programmes covered by the study, students participating in mobilities were accompanied by mentors, whose role was to make sure that the students were safe and focused on professional responsibilities, without the need to worry about mundane issues, so that they could reap maximum benefit from the training abroad. While abroad, the majority of respondents availed themselves of the support of a mentor.

*Our mentor accompanied us everywhere we went. The teacher knew the city, she showed us every hotel and restaurant where we received our training and she showed us the way to them. She accompanied us during the first visit to the company, she introduced us to the boss, and together we discussed the conditions of the internship. If anything happened, she was always there for us.*

*The hairdressing instructor and German teacher were with us all the time. The former helped with hairstyling, and the latter translated more difficult phrases.*

While mentors from Poland tended to focus on administrative and pedagogic supervision, their foreign counterparts primarily concentrated on the substantive part of the traineeship. In the opinion of the respondents, the support from the foreign mentors had a large impact on the trainees and often proved critical in the process of their acquiring practical knowledge and new skills.

*There was a coordinator who organised our work for the whole day. He assigned us to individual groups and showed us how the work should be done.*

The study has revealed differences between the roles played by mentors in enterprises and in training institutions. Although at training institutions mobility participants from Poland most often used the services of assigned vocational training teachers, a more flexible approach to monitoring tasks performed by trainees was required at companies. It was usually a team leader or other team member who acted as a mentor for the trainees working at the company. The study participants reported that in many cases those company members were treated by the trainees as true mentors, as they soon earned their respect due to the knowledge and experience they displayed.

*It was a prestigious restaurant with a very demanding chef who said to our mentor: "Bring the boys to me and I will turn them into men". Work in the kitchen can be compared to work in the army. There is a clearly defined hierarchy – everyone is assigned an exacting task that he/she must fulfil.*

*Throughout my training, I worked along one cook to learn the work in a specific workstation. We performed all the tasks together, at the same time. So first he showed me what to do, and then we worked together on preparing dishes. Everything was perfectly organised, like in the army.*

*It was good cooperation. It is people, atmosphere and communication that make a kitchen. We worked together really well.*

Former trainees also suggested that a good mentor motivated them to work, created a favourable atmosphere and was able to notice individual students' predispositions. The mentors also aimed to show the trainees different types of work and teach them many aspects of their occupation. This seems particularly important in the context of the education and career paths of mobility participants – the larger the scope of areas of work they became acquainted with, the greater the chance they stand to meet the expectations of prospective employers.

There were also cases in which the trainees had a significant impact on the organisation of their work. Most often, this was the case when project participants were very keen to gain additional experience, which usually resulted in the implementation of additional tasks, even at the expense of free time. Some participants willingly benefited from additional support provided by the mentors, although it should be noted that this was observed in relation to training offered at companies and not training centres.

*In our free time, when others were going out, I opted for evening shifts to gain more knowledge and experience.*

It should be added that such situations were not often observed, because of the work schedule envisaged for the trainees, which was generally binding and designed in accordance with a model which did not take into consideration the type of training provider (students had to do things as a group and had to conform to top-down requirements). Taking an individual approach to a traineeship was easier in small companies, where a student's autonomy and his/her winning the trust of the mentor was a precondition for success.

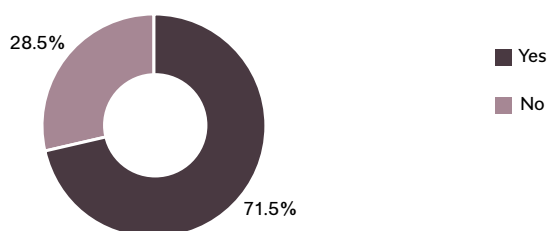
### **Training abroad and work in Poland**

Due to the fact that foreign mobility formed part of a longer training period for the majority of respondents, upon their return from abroad students often underwent additional training with Polish employers. More than 80 percent of questionnaire respondents confirmed that training abroad allowed them to become acquainted with a work system and context different from the

ones observed in Poland. The majority of school leavers agreed that such an experience had a significant impact on their professional careers. However, it was emphasised that such impact was dependant on many factors, such as the length of stay, the nature and extent of work, recruitment criteria and the quality of organisational arrangement and mentoring provided.

### **Respondents' experiences related to participation in training in Poland (N = 2,592)**

In addition to transnational mobility, did you also take part in internships in Poland?



The majority of respondents noticed significant differences between vocational training in Poland and abroad (less than 30 percent of the respondents did not notice any dissimilarities). The majority of interviewees more positively assessed training which they underwent abroad than that in Poland, and they emphasised that such an assessment resulted not so much from the attractiveness of the stay abroad as from a better organisation of training, which formed a cohesive element of the learning process.

In addition, nearly 50 percent of the respondents believed that students of vocational schools in Poland are as well prepared for taking up employment in their relevant occupations as students trained in other countries. These opinions suggest that a more positive perception of practical training abroad by Polish students results not so much from a poorer quality of education in Polish schools, but from an inadequate offer of internships/traineeships presented by Polish employers.

Regardless of the type and character of the institution in which they were trained, the vast majority of the respondents was very pleased with the working conditions and infrastructure. They praised the infrastructure and the availability of appropriate equipment and appreciated the fact that the organisers of traineeships were ready to replenish the equipment if needed. To some of the interviewees, it was also important that they had an opportunity to become



acquainted with state-of-the-art technologies and to work using professional equipment. This was very strongly emphasised by respondents who were trained or worked in industries where the level of technological development was of particular importance. Participants in individual interviews, the majority of whom had already been active in the labour market, mentioned that many of the solutions they observed abroad could be applied by training organisers in Poland.

*After my return to Poland, everything annoyed me, because here everything is a mess. People were unable to organise their work, and I was used to the fact that each item had its assigned place, so at any time I could enter the kitchen with my eyes closed and be positive that everything was done properly.*

*In my case, these were two totally different types of training. The one in Germany was much more interesting than the one in Poland.*

*Obviously, we worked using the latest equipment.*

Graduates pointed to limited access to modern solutions and technologies at Polish enterprises. They noticed that many resources and tools used abroad were not available in Polish companies offering training to students. This was often a result of a lower level of technological development of companies in Poland and could not be attributed to a specific industry. At least in some of the cases, obtaining knowledge offered as part of the traineeships abroad would not have been possible during training served in Poland.

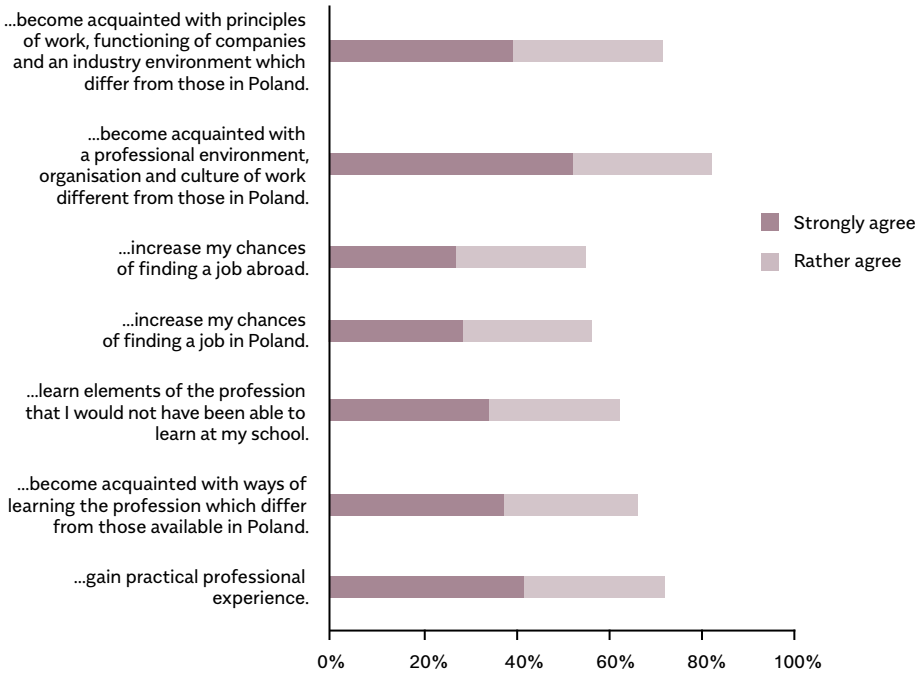
*In Poland, it is simply not possible to undergo such training, as renewable energy is not popular in our country. The biggest power plant in Poland is 25 percent smaller than the ones operating abroad.*

*In our country it is unthinkable for a company to deliver cars which can be disassembled. But it is possible there.*

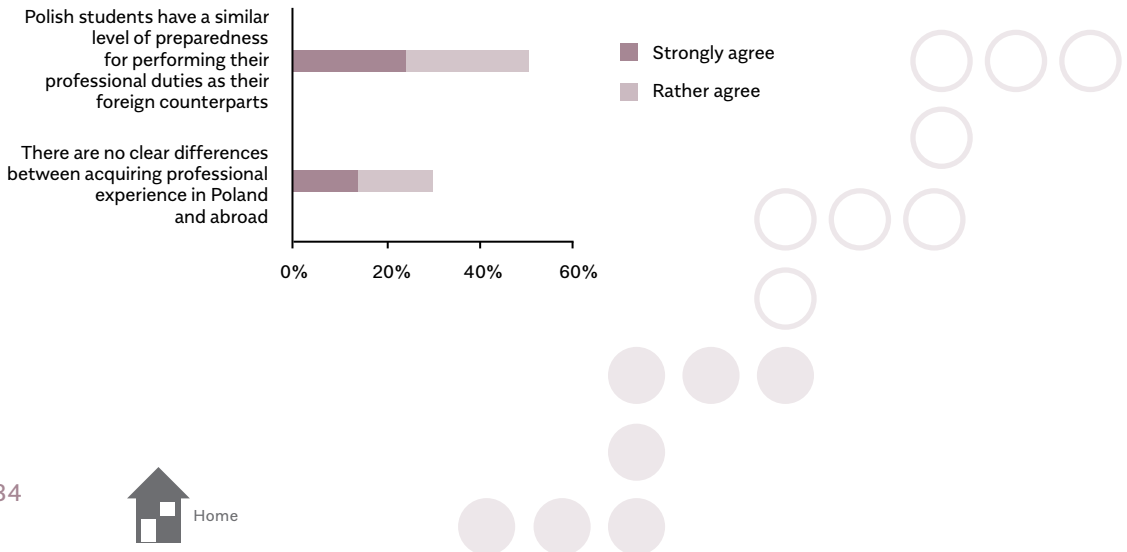
Study participants positively assessed the fact that international training organisers had a different approach to trainees' work and treated them differently, as compared to representatives of Polish institutions. On many occasions, employers in Poland were not interested in using the skills acquired by the trainees during training abroad and entrusted them with tasks which were too simple or which other employees did not want to undertake.

**The benefits of mobility in the context of vocational training offered in Poland (the graph takes into account data of respondents who agreed with a given statement, N = 2,592)**

Taking part in transnational mobility allowed me to...



**Respondents' opinions on added value of traineeships and internships abroad (N = 2,592)**



Respondents often stressed that they were treated seriously by their international mentors. They were given a lot of freedom, but could always seek advice and explanations from their mentors, and thus make maximum use of the opportunity to acquire knowledge and practical skills.

*Definitely, the atmosphere was different than in Poland, where you have to do exactly what you are told by your superior, who controls you and gives you orders. Abroad, an instructor described the hairstyle that we had to prepare and gave us free hand on how to do it.*

*These are two different worlds. In Poland, trainees are supposed to perform the simplest tasks and cannot learn as much as during training abroad. During our month spent abroad, we learned a lot more than in the same period in Poland.*

Participants of the study emphasised that during training they were treated on an equal footing with their colleagues employed full time. This was particularly important for students who were trained in typically 'male' occupations. Female respondents also mentioned that in Poland, because of their sex, it was difficult for them to find an organisation which would accept them as trainees (the biggest problems were observed in construction and energy industries).

*There is a world of difference. We were always busy during the training abroad and there was always a task for us to complete.*

*At the company abroad, I did not have to work in an office simply because I am a girl. I did not feel discriminated.*

The majority of students and recent graduates who participated in group interviews had a better opinion about training offered in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme than of traineeships/internships served in Poland, although it should be added that not all respondents in this group completed training in Poland. Those who completed training both at home and abroad said that during their training abroad the atmosphere at work was more positive and employers and colleagues were more friendly towards them.

*Those who served their internship in Poland were given tasks that no one was willing to complete and regretted that they had not decided on training abroad. They felt exploited.*

*You can see the difference in how co-workers treat you in Poland and in France. In Poland, all they do is point out our mistakes.*

*The restaurant customers and staff treated us in a completely different way. Everyone was open, nice and helpful there.*

*In France, employees are treated much better. All people are equal – waiters, cleaners and managers.*

Some of the students and graduates appreciated experiences related to the execution of more difficult tasks which involved responsibility. In particular, former trainees in the hotel and catering industry appreciated the opportunities they were given to perform tasks related to customer service or independent preparation of dishes according to previously mastered recipes. They also noted that such a level of autonomy during practical training in Poland was rare and that companies in Poland tended to offer training during which students performed undemanding and tedious tasks.

*In Poland, nobody gives young people the chance to demonstrate their skills.*

*Over the first three months of my training in Poland my only responsibility was peeling vegetables.*

*Trainees in our country are at the trainers' beck and call.*

*In Poland, we are only given orders and no one shows us how to perform specific tasks. And then we are rebuked for not having followed the orders. In France, we were shown how to do a given thing. And if my attempt did not come out well, the supervisors helped me improve.*

In the opinion of the respondents, it was not always possible to see the substantive relationship between the training they underwent at home and abroad. Such a relationship to a large extent depended on the strategy adopted by the school and the level of commitment of supervisors and people responsible for the organisation of training at each school. Although at some institutions training abroad formed an element of a previously agreed general plan of practical training offered by the school, at others this process was more or less random.

Former trainees who attended schools which cared about linking mobility with training offered in the country more often stated that thanks to combining the two training programmes they were given the opportunity to experience a wide spectrum of occupational duties, and as a consequence gained more comprehensive knowledge about their future occupation. Polish companies also benefited from this. They could make better use of the knowledge and skills of international training participants if a school decided to consult project assumptions and the contents and schedule of planned educational mobilities with them.

*At our school, we were the first year to serve training abroad. The following year a local company assumed patronage over a form at our school. So, in addition to regular training, the students at that form had additional training supervised by their coach. I think that some conclusions were reached from our mobility. The school applied some solutions we saw abroad, improved some elements of its teaching offer, and abandoned others.*

The respondents also noted that the lack of connection between the training programmes organised in Poland and abroad could also result from a tough negotiating position of Polish schools against foreign intermediaries offering training opportunities. Sometimes, partners imposed a predefined schedule and substantive scope of internships. Respondents also pointed out negligence on the part of persons responsible for the quality of learning mobilities offered by the schools.

The absence of a coherent strategy for planning training at home and abroad also resulted from the fact that often it was the students who had to find employers willing to offer them training. If a given school allowed students freedom of choice of a training venue and did not interfere in it, establishing a coherent plan for training in Poland and abroad was virtually impossible.

If the students were responsible for finding their own training venue, lack of information about the internship contents and the organisation of work also proved problematic. In the opinion of the participants, such knowledge would help students better choose the training venue and more thoroughly agree the training programme. These issues proved very important for more ambitious students who already at the stage of learning tried to strategically plan the development of their future careers.

*During training abroad, we worked with modern machines and milling tools, and in Poland we only had hand-held tools at our disposal. There is no comparison between the two.*



*First, we had three hours of theory and then four hours of practical training. The plant and laboratories were in the same building. We applied theory in practice the same day we learned it.*

Not all respondents agreed that internships abroad provided more opportunities to learn the secrets of the profession than training in the country. Although various reasons for such opinions were given, according to the respondents this situation was mainly due to poor quality of training already at the stage of project design and to improper monitoring of traineeship quality by sending institutions. Some of the graduates also stressed the fact that host institutions' offers were at variance with the skills of trainees and sometimes even with working conditions observed in Poland. In some cases, too high a level of technological advancement hampered learning during the training (this was particularly true for traineeships in factories, where lack of specialist knowledge prevented students from performing more advanced tasks). Among advocates of undergoing training in Poland were those respondents who during their training were obliged to perform tasks which were not related – partially or fully – to the specialisation selected by them.

*I acquired more practical skills in Poland; in Germany we were taught more theory.*

*In reality I did nothing during my training abroad. They had machines which were much too advanced and I could not operate them.*

*I underwent training in a small company in Poland, and no one looked down on me or treated me badly there. On the contrary. To tell the truth, I'd rather be trained in Poland, because it is easier for me to find my way around here.*

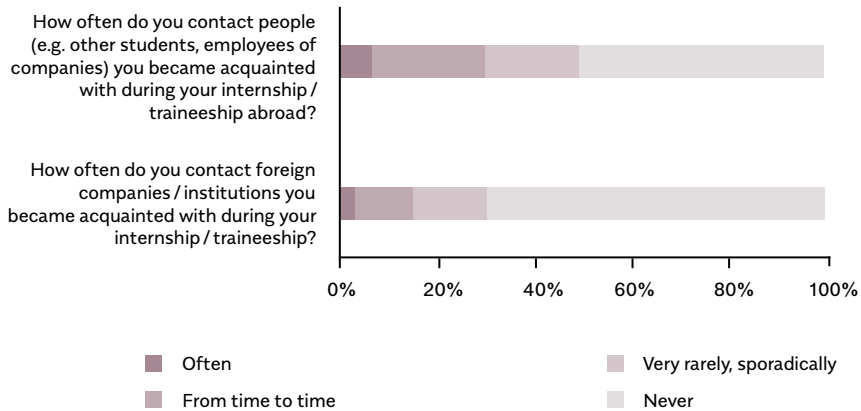
*I learned nothing in Spain. In Poland, after two weeks of training I can already do a lot of things.*

*When it comes to technology, the school abroad was much better than ours.*

### **Sustainability of contacts established abroad**

One of the objectives of foreign learning mobilities is to facilitate international contacts. However, the study has shown that it is not always easy for young interns and trainees to establish sustainable professional contacts and the participation in training abroad alone does not guarantee building relational capital, which in the future can help mobility participants to find work abroad

## Sustainability of contacts established abroad (N = 2,592)



The results of the survey have confirmed that the vast majority of respondents does not maintain any contact with companies abroad where they were trained and more than half of them do not stay in touch with people they met during training. Only slightly more than 2 percent said they were in frequent contact with their host institutions and less than 6 percent confirmed that they maintained relationships established while in training abroad.

The study has also shown that although establishing lasting relationships by the trainees was difficult (regardless of the model of training organisation), it was slightly easier to socialise in enterprises. Certainly, daily contacts with colleagues and supervisors were conducive to that. In the case of training offered by training institutions, its participants had contact only with instructors who were mentors for trainee groups. Thus, it was hard to expect that such a mobility would result in many new professional and social contacts.

In the opinion of the respondents, the organisation of mobility had a far greater impact on the sustainability of established relationships than the time elapsed from the completion of training. Similar opinions were presented as part of the qualitative study. Regardless of the amount of time that had passed since the completion of the learning mobility, the majority of former participants of training abroad did not maintain contacts with people they met there.

If the trainees managed to establish sustainable relationships during mobility, the contact with former colleagues and employers is maintained via email, instant

messaging applications and social media. Often, the contacts are of social nature, although some respondents said that after the training they received job offers from abroad. In the case of students, such offers mostly pertain to summer jobs and sometimes former trainees used this opportunity.

*I stay in touch with two cooks. We write messages to each other.*

*I am in touch with my former manager at the restaurant. We send each other Christmas cards. I think it is nice.*

*Although we do not write letters or emails on a regular basis, we are in touch via Facebook.*

*I think that many people stay in touch with their bosses from abroad and they could go back to work there.*

*Last summer, I worked abroad. I was invited by the company.*

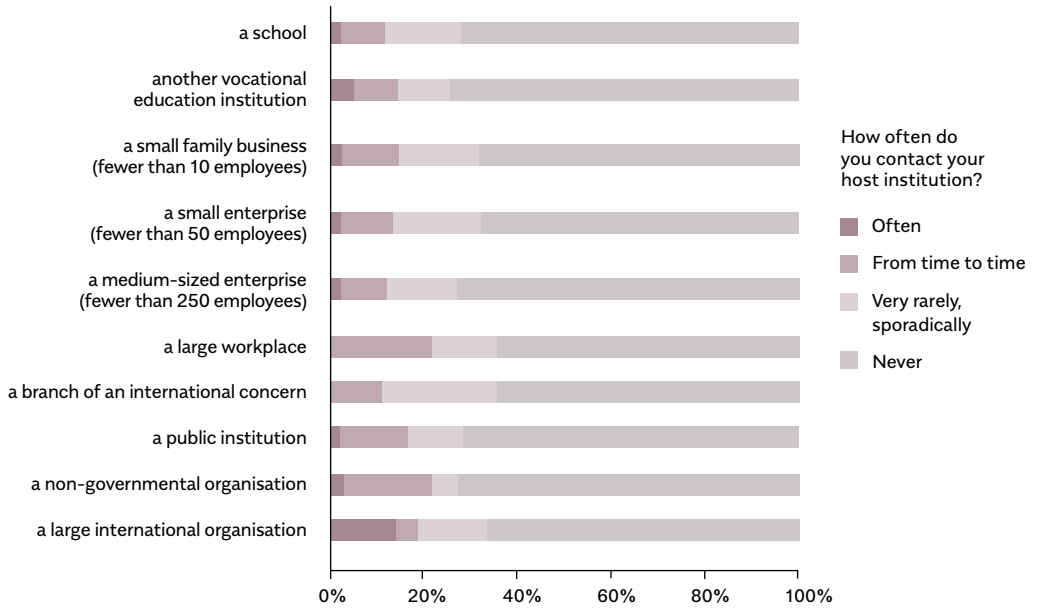
In the opinion of the respondents, the sustainability of contacts with host institutions after the mobility is primarily the result of initiatives taken by the host institutions and the former trainees expect to be contacted by their former employers rather than initiate contact themselves. Unfortunately, the language barrier seems to be the most frequently observed obstacle for such initiatives. Respondents are not sure if their knowledge of foreign languages is sufficient to establish or maintain social contacts, not to mention professional ones, with people from other countries. Problems with insufficient knowledge of the language were mostly experienced by persons who served their internships in countries where it was difficult to communicate in English or German (e.g. in Italy, Greece and Spain). The respondents said that these barriers did not pertain to the training alone, but also to everyday communication, which made establishing rapport or making friends with people met outside the workplace difficult.

*If not for the language barrier, it would have been much easier.*

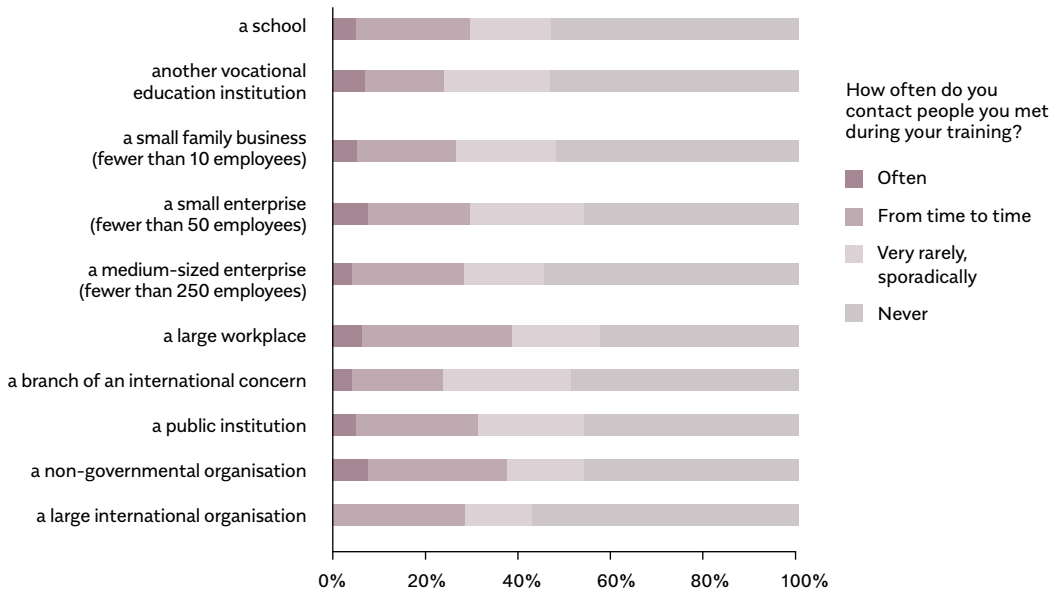
*And what am I supposed to do? Call them? I do not speak Spanish, so I cannot tell them that I want to work for them during the summer.*



**Sustainability of contacts with host institutions abroad after the completion of training (N = 2,592)**



**Sustainability of contacts with individuals met during the traineeship after the completion of training (N = 2,592)**



*After the training, we did not stay in contact. It was organised in such a way that they hosted students and then sent them back. We did not go there to establish contacts, but to acquire experience.*

A larger number of respondents declared that they maintained contacts with individuals they met during their internship and traineeship abroad. Although in the majority of cases respondents spent time with their peers from school and did not have contact with foreigners, there were situations conducive to integration, mainly with local staff, students or trainees from other countries.

*There were people our age there. They had some friends with whom we were going out. There was no problem with communication, we could speak English.*

*We made friends with a few Norwegians. We did not hang out only with Poles.*

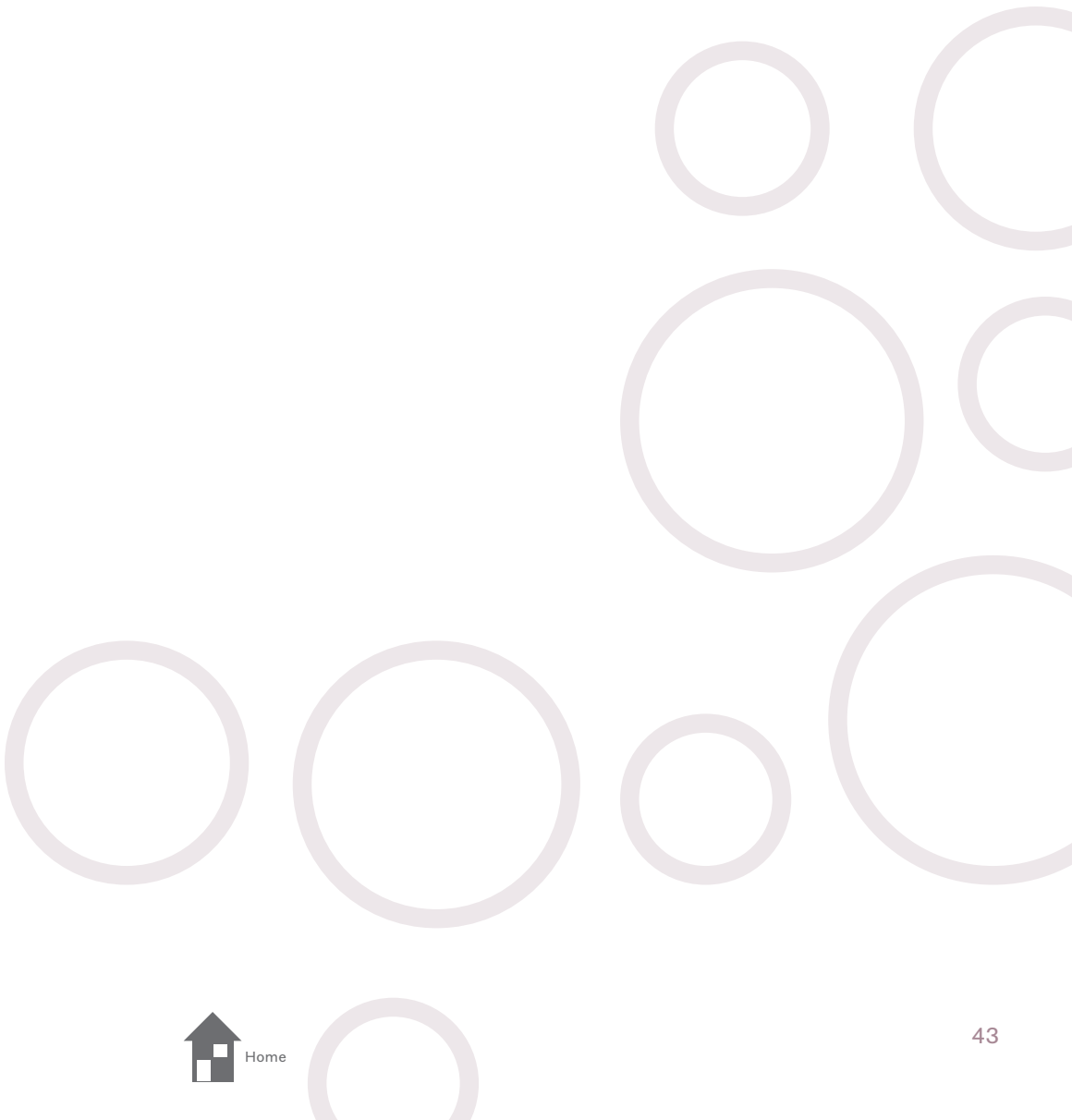
The respondents who completed training relatively recently (students and recent graduates participating in focus group interviews) confirmed that the sustainability of contacts with host institutions and individuals met during the traineeship depended primarily on the type of mobility organisation. Both the form of work and the nature of the host organisation largely determined the opportunities for Polish students to make friends and establish lasting relationships with their co-workers. The respondents reported that this was possible in companies where students served internships individually or in small groups.

Those respondents who managed to establish lasting relationships stay in touch with their co-workers and employers mainly via the Internet (email, instant messaging services and social media). However, the respondents reported that these were occasional exchanges (birthday or holiday cards), although some students were offered summer jobs and even permanent employment by their employers.

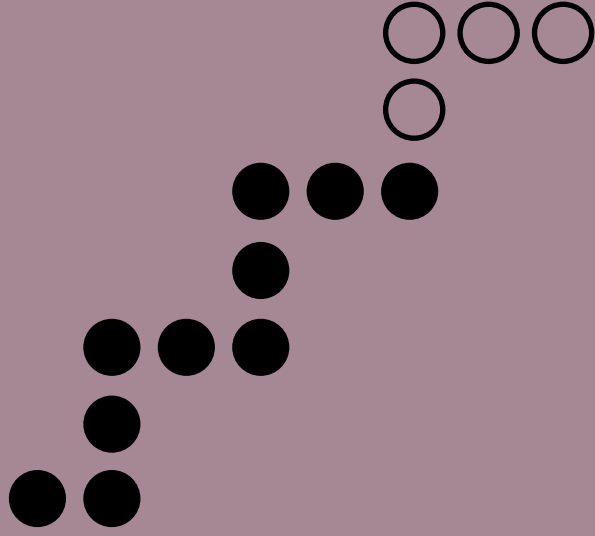
*Well, we do not exchange emails, but we are friends on Facebook.*

*I met a boy on a trip and we sometimes text each other.*

*I am Facebook friends with a boy I used to play basketball with. But I do not message him.*



# Development of competences



The most important goal of foreign traineeships and internships was an increase in participants' knowledge and the acquisition of new competences which would be useful in their further education and professional life. In addition to acquiring new skills directly related to the occupation, respondents also mentioned soft skills (including: teamwork, ability to independently solve problems, ability to cope in difficult conditions) among the benefits of foreign internships. The opportunity to learn about the specifics and different contexts of work in other European countries was recognised as the main added value of the project. The experience of transnational mobility often allowed participants to confirm the validity of the choice of industry they are training in, while the acquired competences declared by the former participants of the mobility would be difficult to obtain during the same period of study spent at school alone.

### **Occupational competences**

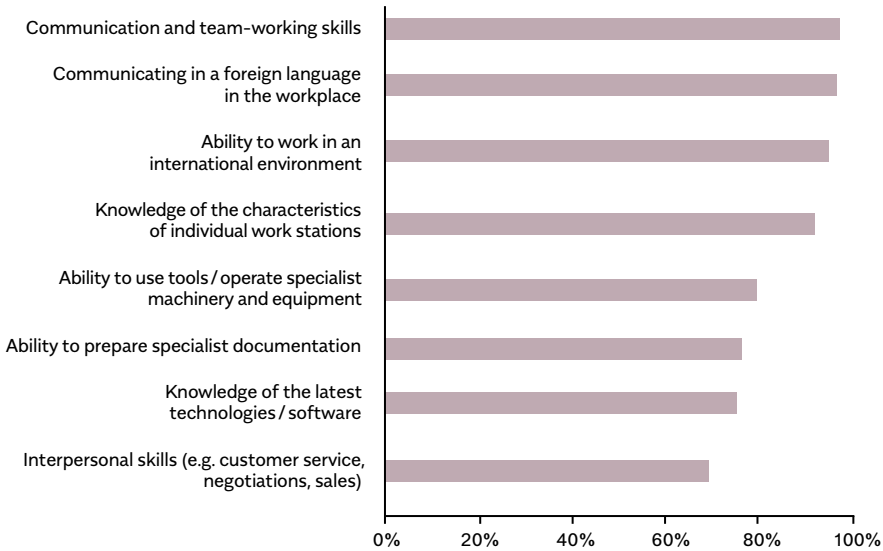
In accordance with the principles of the programmes surveyed within the study, transnational learning mobility projects above all intended to contribute to the acquisition or enhancement of occupational competences, which students were thereafter expected to improve at further stages of their education and then utilise in the labour market. Thanks to the experience of foreign internships, they could not only test themselves in a particular position, but also see what work and on-the-job training looks like in other European countries.

The results of the study showed that simply getting to know the context of professional work turned out to be a very important benefit for many participants. Over 92 percent of the questionnaire respondents confirmed that transnational mobility has helped them to learn the specifics of the job at a given position. Many interviewees also pointed out that the period of on-the-job training abroad allowed them to better understand the principles and mechanisms of the functioning of a given company. Some of the respondents emphasised that the mere fact of receiving everyday tasks from the employers and performing interesting, varied activities had a significant impact on their getting to know the specifics of work in a given profession.

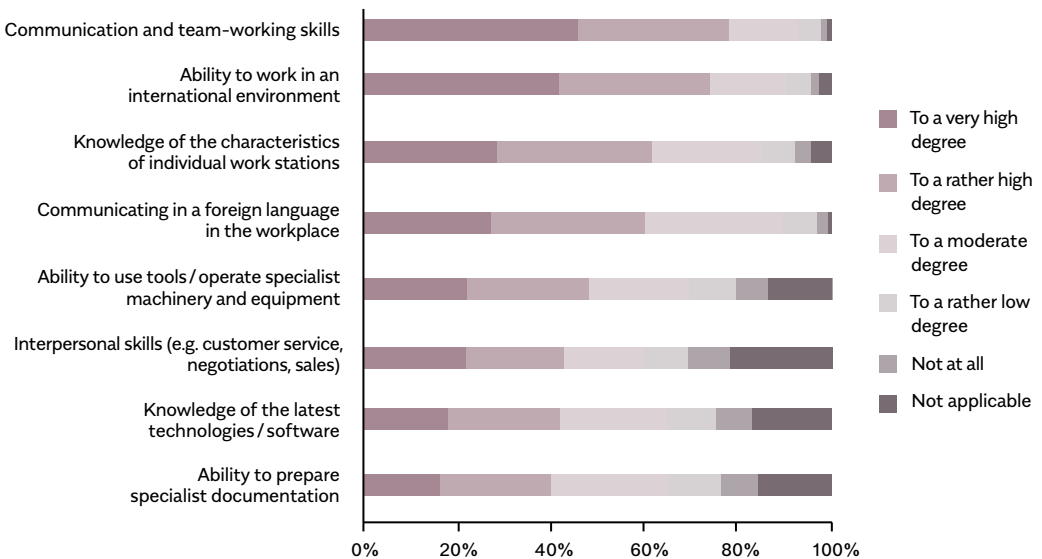
*An internship is a completely new experience for young people who have never worked abroad.*

*We were able to observe how a particular company works. I saw different types of relationships within the company, how specific departments cooperated, how they were connected and how they performed their activities. This is useful knowledge, especially for those who would like to set up their own business in Poland.*

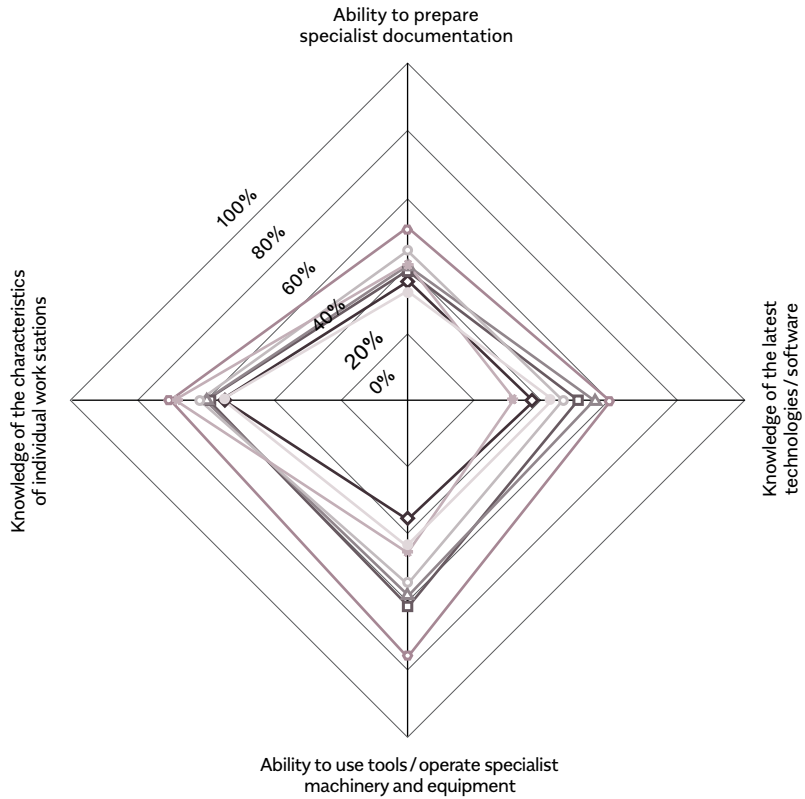
## Impact of learning mobility on occupational competences (N = 2,592)



## Impact of mobility on occupational competences. A summary of answers to the question: 'To what extent did the internship/traineeship abroad allow you to acquire or develop the following competences?' (N = 2,592)



**Impact of learning mobility on occupational competences of trainees\* (N = 2,592)**

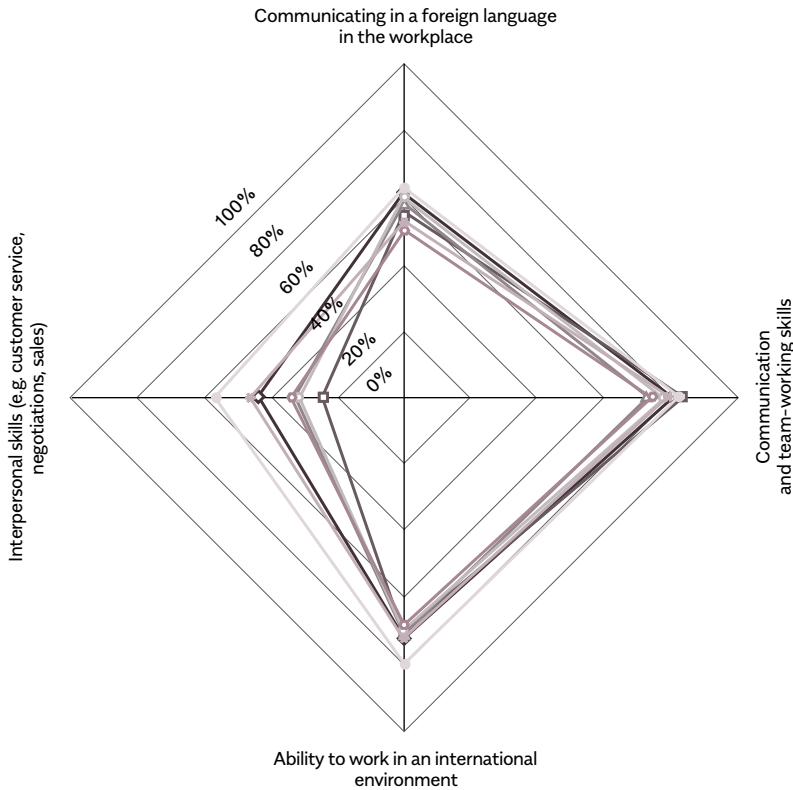


Type of industry:

- ◇— Administration and services
- ◇— Agriculture and forestry with environmental protection
- Construction
- ◇— Tourism and catering
- △— Electrical and electronic
- ◇— Medical and social
- ◇— Mechanical, mining and metallurgical

\* The data refers to respondents who declared that they acquired a 'very high' or 'rather high' degree of the indicated competences.

## Impact of learning mobility on communication competences of trainees\* (N = 2,592)



Type of industry:

- Administration and services
- Agriculture and forestry with environmental protection
- Construction
- ◇— Tourism and catering
- △— Electrical and electronic
- ◇— Medical and social
- Mechanical, mining and metallurgical

\* The data refers to respondents who declared that they acquired a 'very high' or 'rather high' degree of the indicated competences.



*It allowed me to observe work from the perspective of the back office and see things that you cannot see when you enter the store as a customer. Now I know how to encourage someone to make a purchase or to use a particular service.*

A significant number of respondents also declared that participation in foreign internships and traineeships allowed them to confirm the validity of their choice of industry. This was particularly true of those individuals who had previously not participated in practical training, as well as those cases where previously implemented national traineeships did not meet students' expectations of gaining a better understanding of the industry they were training in or the context of future professional work.

In some cases, having the opportunity to better understand the ins and outs of a given position led students to the conclusion that the chosen profession is not their dream career, which ultimately prompted them to change their future career paths. It is worth noting, however, that even in such cases the experience of the internship was most often assessed positively as an episode that helped them choose a more satisfying profession.

*At that point in time I did not predict that this industry would draw me in so much. I thought that I would be just an IT generalist with no specialisation. However, after the internship abroad, and then after the training in Poland, I understood that I should choose a specialisation. A specific direction in information technology can give a better salary and more stable work.*

*I participated in the foreign internship one year after starting upper secondary school. While I was at lower secondary school, I did not know exactly what I would like to do. It was during the transnational learning mobility that I decided to become a landscape architect.*

*I chose the upper secondary technical school of culinary arts because, at that point, I was still interested in cooking. However, during my time at the school I realised that I did not want to work as a cook. I found that out thanks to the traineeship. Even though I learned a lot and I was very happy with the way the traineeship was organised, I discovered that I am more interested in working as a waiter.*

*Even if someone does not want to work in a given profession in the future, they can still include this experience in their CV to inform potential employers about the internship they participated in and its effects.*

The results of the study show diverging opinions about the impact of foreign internships and traineeships on the acquisition or development of competences. While the vast majority of the respondents noted the significant impact of learning mobility on increasing language and communication competences, skills directly related to vocational learning were much less common in respondents' declarations. Nearly all the surveyed participants of international mobilities confirmed that the experience of working abroad had an impact on their gaining various competences, however this impact was not always equally important to the development of each and every one of them. The aforementioned issue of the impact of transnational mobility on becoming acquainted with the characteristics of a given position or an individual work station can serve here as an example. Although the vast majority of the respondents confirmed that the international internship gave them the opportunity to increase their knowledge of the general work context in a given role, less than two-thirds of them recognised that transnational mobility contributed to acquiring knowledge to a 'very high' or 'rather high' degree.

Similar discrepancies concerned such competences as: ability to prepare specialist documentation, knowledge of new technologies and software, as well as interpersonal skills related to customer service, negotiation or the use of sales techniques. Less than half of the surveyed internship participants stated that the mobility contributed to their development of the abovementioned skills to a "rather high" or "very high" degree. However, it should be noted that such a distribution of responses resulted more from the diversity of industries in which projects were implemented than from the general critical evaluation of internship programmes offered. Many of the respondents pointed out that some of the competences which they were asked about in the study were not applicable to their internship programmes, which resulted from the specifics of work tasks in a given institution and the specificity of practical vocational education in given fields of study. Differences in the perception of the benefits of learning mobility also stem from different competency models, considered to be indispensable to practice in a given industry.

Differences in the perception of the impact of mobility on the acquisition and development of individual occupational competences are also shown in the breakdown of results by industries. While more than three-quarters of participants of internships within the mechanical industry indicated that transnational mobility helped them to familiarise themselves with tools and specialist equipment, only every third participant from the administration and services sector signalled similar progress. Significant differences in the perception of the benefits from participation in transnational mobility also related to the impact of foreign trips on increasing knowledge of modern technologies and software – this factor proved to be much more important for graduates of courses related to the mechanical

engineering industry (over 60 percent), the electrical and electronic sector (more than 55 percent) and construction (in excess of 50 percent), than for people participating in internships within the administration and services industry (over 37 percent) or in tourism (more than 32 percent).

*While working at the reception, I learned how to use the hotel's booking software. I was shown how to store important documents, I learned how to check in and check out guests.*

The opportunity to learn about new technologies was particularly stressed by the graduates of IT courses, who often appreciated the opportunity to familiarise themselves with equipment and software that is more advanced than that used in Poland. According to the respondents, technological differences most often resulted from much greater financial capabilities of foreign host institutions. This meant that they could provide the participants with computers of the latest generation and modern multimedia equipment.

*In Poland, we were one of the last classes to learn using computers with a system that was already considered obsolete at the time. Abroad, we had access to very advanced computers and very good technical facilities.*

*All of the computers that we worked on had the latest software. I suppose that this is the standard in European companies, but it is not always the case in Polish ones.*

Participants of internships and traineeships in the construction industry also emphasised the differences in technological advancement between Polish and foreign partner institutions. Former interns mentioned that the host institutions, in addition to granting access to modern and well-equipped facilities, were able to provide additional tools and specialised equipment if this was necessary to carry out the work.

*The host institution provided everything that we needed to work. We had all the equipment required for laying paving stones at our disposal, and whenever we lacked something the management of the institution bought the necessary tools.*

*The most interesting experience in Germany for a fifteen / sixteen-year-old was the ability to operate machines. We worked with huge industrial planers, putting in large, long pieces of wood which came to us almost straight from the forest. We learned how to safely place them in the machine and plane the boards.*

*If I was to compare the equipment at our school with the facilities at the German school, then I would rate our school as being a few years behind. The German school spent about one million euros on one room alone where a miniature production line was installed including stations and machines running on electrical components.*

The opinions of the former participants of transnational learning mobility were decisively more unified with regards to obtained benefits related to new knowledge and skills connected with communication, in particular language skills (less than 1 percent of the respondents considered that learning mobility did not contribute to their foreign language skills). The biggest differences in the perception of benefits of internships and traineeships concerned their impact on the development of interpersonal skills in the areas of customer service, sales and negotiations. The acquisition of these types of competences was more often declared by the former participants of internships carried out in the tourism and catering industry (more than 57 percent) than in the mechanical sector (over 32 percent), electrical and electronic industry (in excess of 32 percent) or agriculture and forestry with environmental protection (33 percent).

The model of internship organisation impacted not only on the qualitative evaluation of mobility projects (cf. the chapter entitled Mobility organisation models). The results of the study revealed some differences in the assessment of the quality of training trips, mainly due to whether the foreign internship was organised in an enterprise or in a vocational education and training institution (VET providers). The experience resulting directly from the internship organisation format and the nature of the host institution meant that in the context of the development of individual competences the respondents assessed the suitability of the offer of transnational learning mobility in various ways. Individuals who carried out internships in foreign companies have more often indicated the impact of the trip on the increase of competences related to establishing contacts and communicating (for example, using a foreign language in the work environment, customer service, negotiations, sales). In turn, participants of courses and trainings in VET providers more often paid attention to the development of specific skills related to the performance of duties at a given workplace (for example, handling machines and tools, preparation of documentation, practical knowledge of technology and software). The emerging differences in assessments resulted primarily from the nature of training in these two types of institutions – enterprises offered a greater opportunity to learn about the work environment, while vocational education and training providers facilitated systematic learning of individual elements of professional work in the form of specialised courses. The results of the study do not allow us to state clearly which of the presented internship organisation models proved to be more beneficial from the perspective of learning the specificity of individual job positions, because both groups assessed this aspect in a very similar way (62 percent of former participants of internships in companies and 61.5 percent – in VET institutions).

However, it should be emphasised that in the opinion of the interviewees, the very nature of the functioning of foreign host institutions had a great impact on the competences acquired. In the opinion of former participants of transnational mobility an important factor in determining how the students worked and how they gained knowledge was the division into internships in which the whole group worked together (usually in VET institutions) and those in which the trainees carried out their duties individually or in smaller groups, most often with various employers. The individuals who attended internships within foreign vocational education and training providers more often pointed out that the host institutions tried to adapt the proposed training programme to the skills and training needs of the entire group. This approach, on the one hand, helped to implement the overall training plan, but, on the other, hindered the possibility of an individual approach of organisers to the participants.

*I remember that we had hairdressing training heads at our disposal, which we worked with for a whole week, for several hours a day. We did a lot of different tasks: waves, curls, modelling, perming and colouring. There was no time to be bored. A few days before the end of the training, we were supposed to take part in a photo session, so beforehand we were cutting and colouring each other's hair. We helped each other. There was no other way, as there was one supervisor per fourteen chatty girls. He could not always approach each and every one of us to demonstrate a given activity. Therefore, we stood at a long table and if one of us was struggling, the girl next to that person helped as much as she could.*

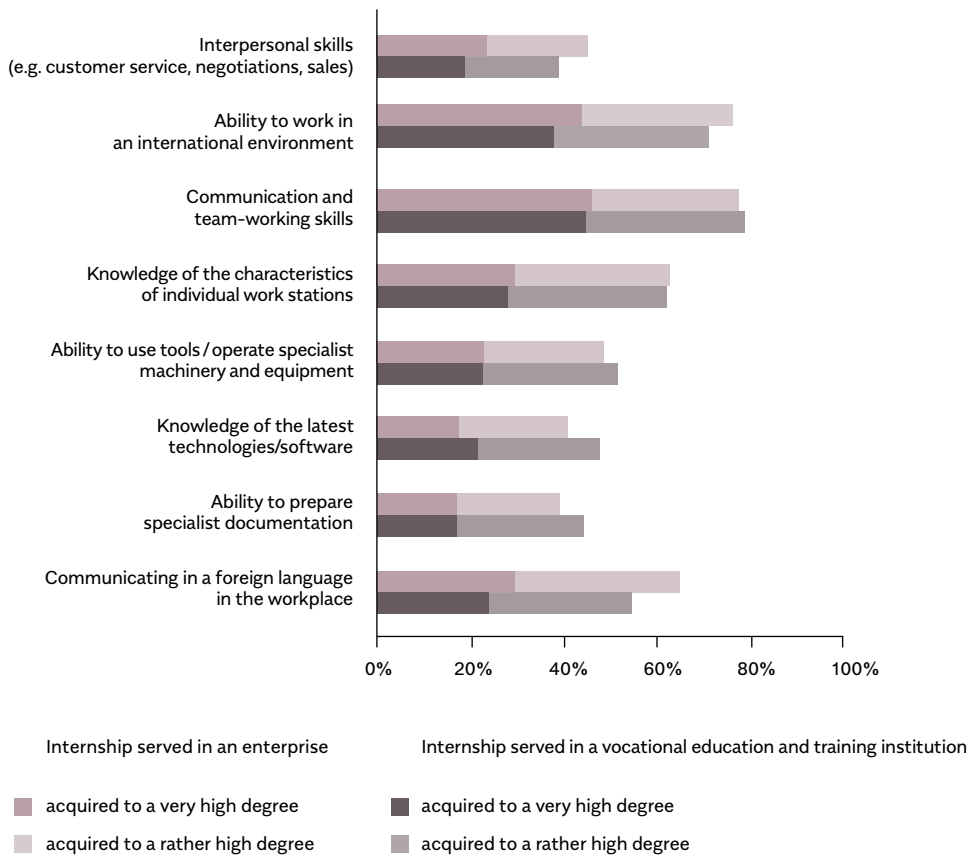
Those who carried out foreign mobility in enterprises, which most often accepted students for an individual internship or conducted them in small groups, had a completely different experience. Although respondents with work experience in an enterprise often mentioned different kinds of difficulties resulting from the language barrier, cultural differences or the imposed pace of work, these were temporary and mainly concerned the first days of the internship. Usually, it turned out that the stay in an enterprise granted the possibility of a flexible approach to the individual training needs of the participants, and those who completed the internships in an enterprise more often identified a direct relationship between the internship and the real work context in a given role.

*Each of us worked in a different place. In the case of cooks there was a maximum of three trainees per one restaurant, but I wanted to work alone. I like situations where I can gauge myself. Being with friends is important, but I also like to get to know my abilities.*

*It's better to work alone because it allows you to learn more.*

When asked about the scope of activities performed at the workplace, respondents mentioned many tasks they undertook, varying from very simple physical activities that did not require specialised knowledge or skills, through duties matching students' skills and consistent with their professional specialisation, to demanding tasks directly related to their education path and requiring specialist knowledge and skills. Differences in the nature of the tasks and responsibilities resulted not only from the nature of the industry and individual host enterprises, but also – as many respondents emphasised – from the involvement of employers themselves.

**Impact of mobility on the acquisition of occupational competences in enterprises and in vocational education and training institutions (N = 2,592)**



*The boss gave me a very demanding task. I was supposed to build a website. We worked on it together and he explained the subsequent stages of the project to me. He treated me like a professional.*

*At the beginning, the cook showed me everything in the smallest detail: everything in the kitchen, how to lay out the equipment, how to wash it and how to clean up after work. He would also explain things to me when I did not understand something. I started off – as usual – peeling vegetables, but with time, as I was learning what the other employees were doing, I was allowed to do more and more. In this fashion I got to know many secrets of French cuisine in the space of two weeks.*

*In Spain, they allowed us to do more. I went through all the levels: reception, housekeeping and the dining room. Regardless of whether someone worked in a hostel or a three-star hotel, the scope of tasks was greater than during the traineeship in Poland.*

In the opinion of most respondents, the selection of foreign host companies was predominantly consistent with the professional specialisation of mobility participants. Future mechanics usually worked in car servicing companies or automotive workshops, IT specialists worked in companies involved in the creation of websites or computer services, hairdressers worked in hairdressing salons, chefs worked in various catering establishments, and hoteliers worked in hotels and resorts.

Some interviewees, however, declared that the organisers did not always manage to match the nature of the tasks and the specificity of the host institution to the industry or the area of students' education. This applied most often to those industries in which work required specialised knowledge or a high degree of language competences. Sometimes the discrepancies between a student's expectations and the actual substantive programme of the internship resulted from the lack of knowledge about the profile of the host company. This usually happened when the students received such information only a few days before departure or at the very beginning of their stay in a given country. However, such situations occurred sporadically and concerned sectors in which finding an internship placement proved difficult.

*We received the list of host companies only a few days before the departure. We knew where we were going, but we had no idea what these companies did, so we had to find information about them online.*

*It is not easy to find an internship location suitable for our course (ports and terminals management). We cannot be accepted for an internship at airports, because that requires fluency in English. Similarly, we can't secure a placement in warehouses, as there candidates need to know more than what we've learned at school.*

*We were supposed to have our placement in the laboratory, but unfortunately this never materialised. I do not know who was at fault, but it seems to have been an organisational mistake. Some succeeded – individuals in food technology courses went to work in bakeries and pastry shops, according to their profile. As a food analyst and technologist, I was supposed to carry out tests in the laboratory, but I ended up washing dishes, which was in no way related to my field of study.*

In the opinion of the vast majority of interviewed graduates, the overall experience of the internship was mainly influenced by the foreign mentors, as well as the level of preparation of the staff of the host institution for the arrival of Polish students. The respondents' statements also show that a high appraisal of the internship was not always determined by a meticulously prepared training programme, or even a cast iron consistency in its implementation. Sometimes, the professional approach and commitment of the organisers was much more important, while the key role in a student's knowledge acquisition was attributed to the internship supervisors appointed by the host institutions. In the case of group trips to foreign practical training institutions, the function of the internship supervisor was usually undertaken by the leading instructor, who indicated specific tasks to be performed by the students independently or in teams. On numerous occasions (especially in the case of learning mobility carried out in Germany) such individuals were partially or even fully fluent in Polish. This model of internship organisation greatly facilitated the implementation of the main function of mobility, which is the training of young trainees. Internships organised jointly for the whole group of students facilitated the acquisition of knowledge, while the surveyed graduates often emphasised that the internship supervisors explained with patience the various stages of the assigned work.

Internships in enterprises, unlike internships offered by VET providers, were usually associated with the appointment of a mentor who looked after a given student. This task was often carried out directly by the person managing the team in the company. Respondents pointed out that such a solution offered the possibility of an individual approach based on the real needs and expectations of the intern, who was often engaged in the company's ongoing activities to the same extent as other employees. This particularly pertained to situations when the role of the internship supervisor went beyond the typical tasks of the instructor – for Polish students they were mentors, experienced masters – passing over secrets associated with work in a given profession.

Time spent with supervisors as part of the carried-out tasks often fostered positive relationships, and sometimes even friendships, which often turned out to have a direct impact on the skills acquired. Some respondents have also admitted that the process of acquiring knowledge tended to be difficult, especially when the internships were supervised by a demanding mentor. Such voices appeared



most often among trainees in the catering industry, where the specificity of restaurant kitchen operation requires not only strict cooperation with other team members, but also absolute subordination to the head chef.

*Everything was organised like in the army. The chef was harsh, but he taught me how to cook. I toughened up, and that's a good thing.*

*The tension was often so great that the head chef would finish work with bloodshot eyes and a red face, because he was so stressed and tired. He had to manage all the waiters, room staff, trainees and the kitchen. We were all exhausted, but the satisfaction from work was so huge that we forgot about the fatigue.*

*I still maintain contact with the internship supervisor who worked with me in the restaurant. We write to each other all the time and I am always welcome to visit him during the summer.*

The survey also showed that the perception of the benefits resulting from the internship varies depending on the respondents' experience in the labour market. The study participants who had not yet graduated proved to be far less critical in assessing the suitability of the internship against the expectations of the labour market. Over 80 percent of the surveyed upper secondary school students declared that the internship allowed them to gain practical professional experience to a high degree. However, similar declarations concerned less than 70 percent of students of higher education institutions and slightly over 68 percent of professionally active people. Differences can also be seen in assessing the issue of increasing the chances of former learning mobility participants to find employment. While more than two-thirds of upper secondary school students felt that the mobility experience increased their chances of finding a job in Poland (over 69 percent) and abroad (above 68 percent), similar declarations concerned just over 51 percent of higher education institution students and less than half of the respondents who are in employment.

The results of the questionnaire study confirm particularly the opinions of the upper secondary school students, higher education institution students and young graduates who during the interviews more often than the older graduates assessed the performed tasks as "too simple", devaluing the experience that they have gained from internships and traineeships. Certainly, this is mainly due to the young age of the respondents, who do not yet know the realities of the labour market. It seems that older and more experienced individuals have been able to appreciate to a greater extent that occupational skills can also be obtained by carrying out simple work.

*My colleague was given a lot of tasks, but he didn't have the appropriate working conditions to carry them out. In turn, I had good working conditions, but I did not have any assigned tasks, and as a result I did not have anything to do there.*

*In some cases, the treatment was really unfair. Some people worked for a full eight hours, while others could go home after three hours, although they complained that they would have preferred to be given something to do.*

*I felt a bit sorry because some people got better placements and you can see the difference between our internships.*

Although the former participants of learning mobility generally assessed the involvement of foreign host institutions positively, it is also important to point out the problems they highlighted. Some of them mentioned poor organisation on the employer's side, while others indicated that the proposed internship programme did not always fully meet their expectations, which had a negative impact on the process of acquiring knowledge and new skills. In the opinion of interviewees, such situations could have resulted from poor communication between the partner institutions.

*I think that employers did not always know who they would host. When I joined the company to serve my internship, people were surprised and said: 'A girl?' [laughs] We were supposed to have a guy joining us'.*

*I actually don't even exactly know what the enterprise was dealing with... I couldn't do much, because the machines were too advanced for me. In addition, it was difficult to communicate because only one person spoke some English. As a result, I was given a spanner and was asked to tighten bolts. For six hours a day, I might add.*

### **Mobility organisation models in the opinion of the participants (the list includes opposing terms regarding group and individual internships, used by the interviewees)**

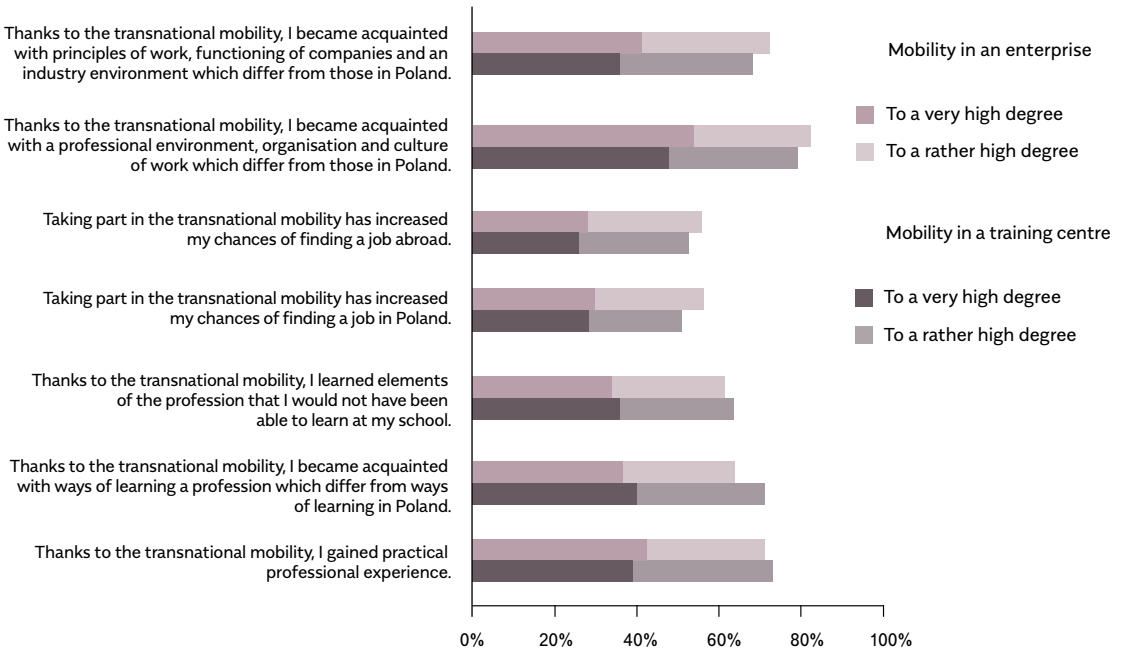
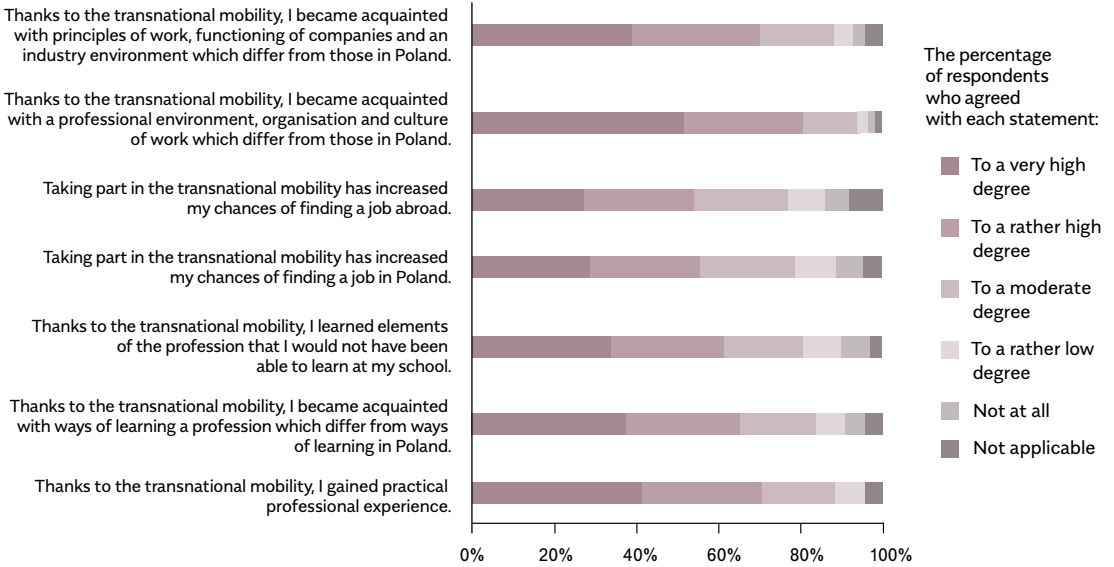
#### Internship carried out individually

- better chance to get to know yourself
- independence
- integration with the work team
- more practice

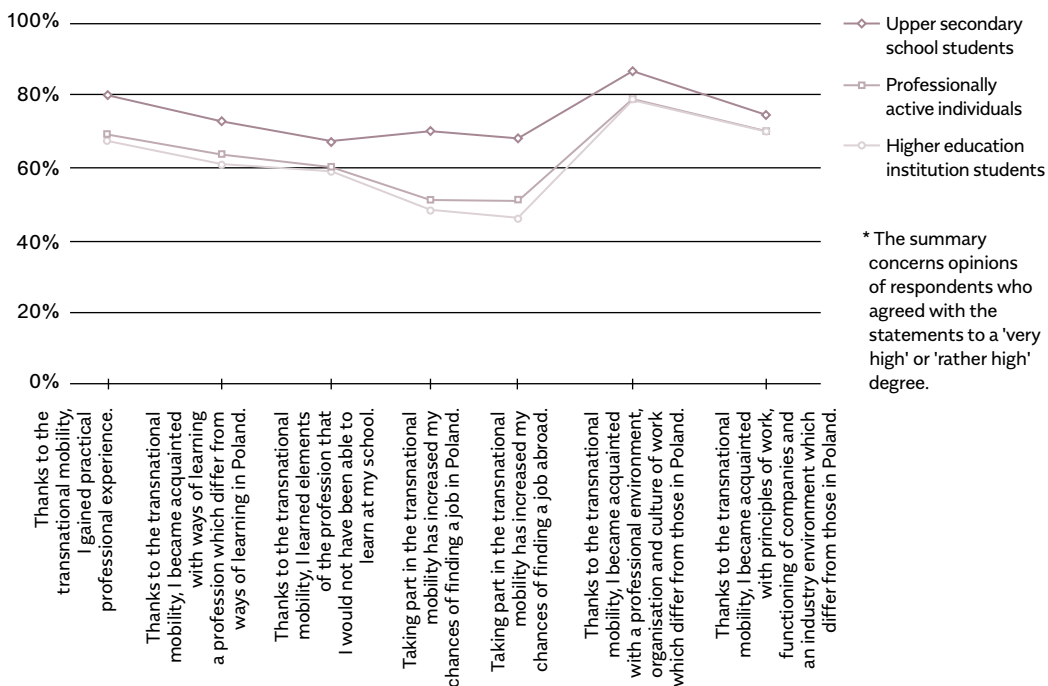
#### Internship carried out in a group

- collectivity
- better chance to get to know other students
- integration with other students
- more theory

## Impact of mobility on occupational competences in enterprises and training centres (N = 2,952)

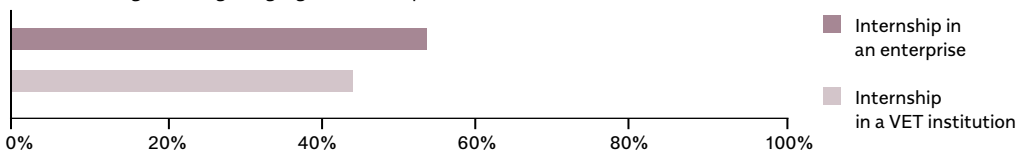


**Evaluation of occupational benefits from the perspective of the needs of the labour market. Compilation of statements of the respondents split into 3 categories: upper secondary school students, higher education institution students and professionally active individuals (N = 2,012)**

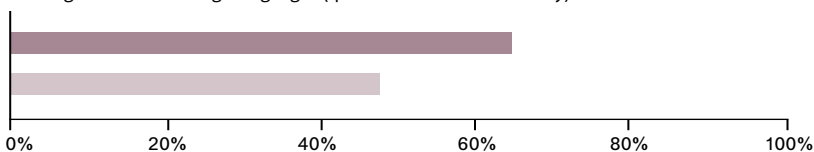


**Effect of the internship on language competences of the participants. Comparison of declarations of individuals who participated in internships in enterprises and training centres (N = 2,952)**

Communicating in a foreign language in the workplace



Reading materials in foreign languages (question to HE students only)



## Language competences

The international nature of projects related to learning mobility resulted in a significant increase in the language competence of their participants, making it one of the most visible effects of the vocational training. Over 97 percent of the respondents confirmed that participation in learning mobility had a positive impact on their language competences, and more than two-thirds recognised that transnational mobility improved their ability to communicate in a foreign language in the work environment to a high degree.

It is also easy to see the relationship between the declared improvement of foreign language skills and the choice of internship organisation model. More than 64 percent of respondents who served internships in enterprises declared a 'very high' or 'rather high' increase in foreign language skills, while similar declarations were made by only just over half of the former participants of internships carried out in training centres.

*My self-esteem has increased, because I always claimed to be an 'anti-polyglot' and yet, somehow, I managed to communicate with others.*

*I have certainly developed and improved my knowledge of English since communicating in this language was a necessity.*

*Theoretically, I knew the language, but in practice I was afraid to say something which was grammatically incorrect. For our coordinator this was not a problem. She was glad that someone from the group was trying to have a chat with her and towards the end she thanked me for making the effort and trying to communicate with her.*

Declarations regarding the acquisition of new language skills also appeared in interviewees' statements in the context of the foreign trip itself, the occupational language used, and alongside development of social competences. The majority of the respondents also mentioned that working abroad has not only improved their language skills, but most of all it has helped them to conquer their fears of not knowing complex grammatical structures, and at the same time allowed them to break the communication barrier. In many cases, the breakthrough resulted not so much from the implementation of a specific internship programme, but from the necessity of communicating with other people – in such situations, the need for communication overcame shyness and complexes regarding inability to insure linguistic correctness. Often such a mental overcoming positively influenced the decision to continue further education, prepare for final exams or take up a job abroad. It should be added, however,

that this last aspect was discussed mostly declaratively, more often by recent graduates than those already operating in the labour market.

*When you are thrown in the deep end you must deal with it. Different people, different languages, these are barriers that must be overcome.*

*I experienced a break-through in using the English language while being abroad. It was not possible earlier, during school lessons, where I could always slip in some Polish words.*

The development of foreign language skills was notably influenced not only by the stay abroad, but also by the earnestly planned period of preparation for the implementation of the mobility. According to the declarations of interviewees, it was foreign language lessons that were a key element in preparation for international internships, although it should also be added that the satisfaction of the students largely depended on the extent to which the learning material was adjusted to the needs of the given group. Former participants of mobility saw the tailoring of vocabulary used during the lessons to the specificity of a given job position as a very important issue, alongside the actual number of classes completed. Most of the respondents indicated that the duration of their language course prior to departure was 80 to 100 hours, however sometimes the time between the decision to qualify participants and the trip was so short that it was impossible to carry out all the planned lessons.

*I think that the increase in knowledge of industry-related language was already visible in the school, and we applied this knowledge during the mobility. The classes at the school were enough to allow us to communicate freely during the internship.*

*We had 80 hours of language classes as part of our preparation, but when someone goes abroad and has to communicate in a foreign language, it is certainly not easy. I think that people who did not know German should have taken part in a longer course. Without a good command of the language during our stay abroad we had to help ourselves with gesticulation and mimicry, like children. The school course should be longer, even 100–120 hours.*

Respondents indicated a significant added value stemming from the difference between participation in a language course and practical learning while performing professional duties abroad. Upon arriving in the country where the internship was to be carried out, it often transpired that knowledge of the language learned at school was purely theoretical. Some emphasised that classes would be much more effective if they were held abroad, which would allow intensive contact with

the language. Such postulates particularly concerned people who worked in larger groups (e.g. in training centres and other VET institutions) and were not exposed to everyday interactions with foreign colleagues to the same extent as people who worked, for example, in small businesses.

*It would be useful to introduce some form of linguistic practical classes because we were thrown into the deep end without knowing how to swim. During our stay abroad, we stumbled when we encountered the language barrier. As a result, no one could fully explain to us how to do our job and we had to work it out ourselves.*

*Our vocabulary certainly improved. At school it tends to be treated cursorily. We are taught grammar and spelling instead of being taught how to communicate, while abroad everything was geared towards practical knowledge. We had to use both occupational and everyday vocabulary. At school it's all about the theory, while abroad we had a chance to listen and speak more, so we absorbed the foreign language much more readily.*

In the case of some educational mobility projects, especially those implemented in languages other than English, the students could engage the help of translators who assisted them in communicating with the instructors. Such a solution was possible during mobilities carried out in groups as part of training programmes offered by vocational education and training providers where the whole team was spending time together in the classroom. However, attention was drawn to the discrepancies between the terminology used by the translators and that which was used in the industry. Difficulties associated with linguistics meant that such a solution did not always guarantee full and trouble-free participation in the course, and the language barrier – although partially diminished – remained present in the daily communication of students with instructors.

*We had a translator who was very helpful. If it wasn't for him, we would not have understood much because everything was explained in German.*

*We were accompanied by an interpreter who always stayed with us during classes. We knew the German technical language, while she often had to translate it descriptively, so when we guessed what she was describing, we told her the Polish technical term. It was, in a way, a mutual learning process: she could pick up some technical vocabulary from us, and we were getting much needed help.*

Some respondents also declared that being accommodated in the homes of foreign families during the period of the internship helped them to learn the language, although it should be added that this depended on the willingness

and attitude of both the guests and the hosts. Such a situation certainly forced – despite initial stress – the use of a foreign language in everyday communication with the household members, which positively impacted on the development of language competences.

*My language skills have improved because I lived with an Irish family and worked with people who did not speak Polish. I had no other option but to communicate with them in English. Initially, I resorted to using gestures as a sort of sign language, but later I began to understand more.*

*I lived with an elderly lady who wanted us to talk to her. At the beginning, we could hardly manage to string a few sentences together, but she kept encouraging us, and later she said that we were getting better and better.*

Problems related to communicating in a foreign language occurred in situations where the language used during the internship differed from what was initially established. As a rule, this was the case when the employees of the hosting company did not know English well enough to be able to communicate with the interns. Often the problems also stemmed from the fact that the interns did not receive adequate language training before going abroad. This made it more difficult to perform given tasks at the workplace (even if the foreign mentor was fluent in the accepted language of communication) and to get to know the cultural context of a given country.

*Not many people spoke English at the place of our internship. The employers did not know the language at all.*

*Overall, I liked it a lot, and the people were extremely nice. However, there was a problem at work – we all went abroad with a good knowledge of the English language, but once we arrived it turned out that practically no one there spoke English.*

In the opinion of the interviewees, the aforementioned situations occurred particularly in internships located in Spain and Germany. In the first case, the problem was mainly due to the insufficient knowledge of the English language amongst Spaniards, and in the second – due to the interns' lack of knowledge of German. However, it should be mentioned that interns going to these countries expected the training programme to be carried out in English.



*I could communicate with some people in English, however in the case of hotel maids, for example, it wasn't so easy. In general, Spaniards do not know English very well. I often had to use gestures in order to communicate with them.*

*I tried to speak German because I knew the basics of this language, but if I did not understand something, then we would switch to using English.*

*We couldn't hold a conversation with our internship supervisor because he only communicated in Spanish. He translated some sentences into English or Polish via Google, but it didn't work very well, and we usually had difficulty in understanding what he was trying to say. He showed us various documents, but we understood their content only partially.*

*In Poland, we participated in an occupational Spanish language course, but it was carried out very cursorily, so we ended up not using the language at all. The superior spoke with us in English. It was easier because our occupational vocabulary is quite difficult.*

Despite the declared problems, it should be noted that the use of even very basic language skills in practice gave the majority of students a great deal of satisfaction. Respondents tried to use the opportunity to learn a foreign language even in spite of the barrier resulting from lack of proper preparation.

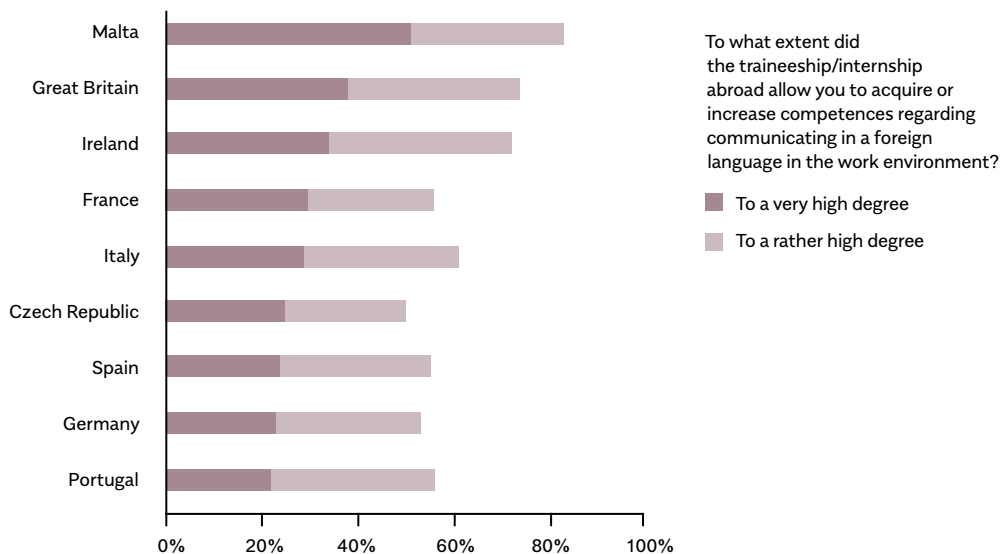
*We tried hard to speak Spanish and avoid English. I would explain to the guests how to get to different places or recommend nice places to dine in. Sometimes we had to book their tickets or order a taxi.*

*Communicating with the head chef required a good vocabulary, you just had to know the words. We did not speak in full sentences because there was no time for it. We used single words and simple commands to signal what needed to be done, it was the fastest and easiest way.*

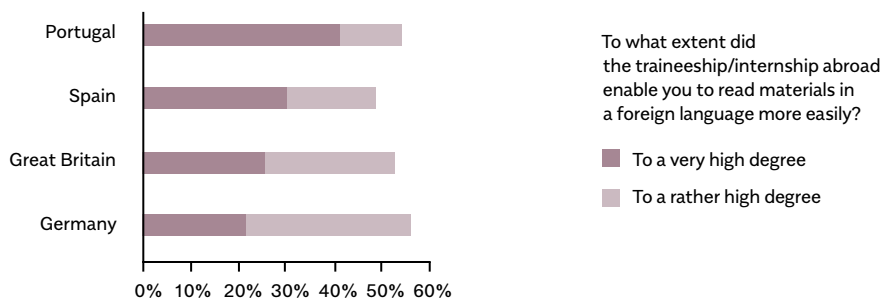
*It is obvious that during the trip we had little time to learn both general and occupational language, but it just came naturally.*

The development of language competences often influenced the interns' decision to continue the process of learning the language. The stay abroad made them realise that knowledge of foreign languages is necessary and can also be useful later on in life – in both a professional and a personal context. Some respondents also

**Impact of the traineeship on language competences of participants. Data broken down by the most popular target countries of mobility (N = 2,592)**



**Impact of the traineeship on language competences of participants. Data broken down by the most popular target countries of mobility (the question was addressed to current students and graduates, N = 670)**



emphasised that they were trying to use the acquired linguistic skills after the end of the mobility project, during trips abroad or when in contact with foreigners.

*I do not speak English well, but participation in the internship gave me the motivation to improve my skills in this area.*

*Last year I went to Germany and that trip was very useful – I overcame the language barrier which I experienced when I visited the country for the first time.*

*My command of the German language improved a lot during my stay there. I acquired language course DVDs from school, and with regards to the technical language I was able to read the technical documentation at work. We also had an interpreter at the office who was available to help us whenever we required some support.*

### **Cultural competences**

A longer stay abroad and working in an international environment meant that the young interns had the opportunity to interact with representatives of other cultures and nationalities, and thus experience different cultural contexts. Contact with new situations that they had not dealt with in Poland was a factor in opening them up to the world. What's more, people who had previously experienced multiculturalism expressed similar opinions.

*First and foremost, it was a very interesting cultural experience. We managed to find a common language.*

*I became fascinated with Spanish culture and I feel more open to meeting new people.*

*I enjoy meeting new people and engaging with new cultures, therefore it did not surprise me that people abroad spoke, looked and behaved differently. I must admit that now I am even more open than before the internship.*

Better understanding of cultural contexts was facilitated by a series of trips that combined entertainment with expanding knowledge regarding the culture, history and traditions of a given country. Such activities were often – to a greater or lesser extent – related to the topic of the internship, which allowed for a better understanding of the functioning of various industries, such as tourism (thanks to visiting monuments), gastronomy (due to getting to know the impact of culture

and history on local cuisine), and gardening and landscape architecture (through observation of local solutions used in gardens).

*We learned about garden design solutions through the architecture of the place in which we worked. In Frankfurt, an area which was once a residential development had been revitalised. We observed how it had been transformed into a park and we learned what plants were used and how the land was developed. We also visited a square, situated next to a school, which was designed adequately to the needs of children, so that they could actively spend their free time there. We were also granted insight into the works carried out during the process of setting up a garden at a centre for disabled people.*

Observing everyday life in other countries also allowed participants to learn about the local working conditions within the given industry. Interestingly, for the majority of respondents this aspect turned out to be much more important than learning about the culture and history of the country in which the internship took place. This was noticed especially by interns working in the hotel industry, in tourism and gastronomy, although it should be added that people studying in other industries also noted the relationship between the culture and lifestyle in a given country and how this relates to professional work. The opportunity to learn about a different cultural model turned out to be very important when working in restaurants – thanks to this, trainees could get to know the secrets of the national cuisine, learn how to prepare local dishes and gain the understanding of how to serve other types of customers, different from those they were accustomed to in Poland.

*We also cook during the traineeships in Poland, but in France we prepared completely different dishes using different ingredients and spices.*

*It's not only about learning the history of Spain, but also about getting to know the local cuisine, understanding what kind of dishes the guests like, what customs prevail in the restaurant, whether the tip is included in the price of the meal or if it is specified on the receipt (which is not usually done in Poland), etc. We had an opportunity go to a café and order what we wanted, get to know the local dishes, talk to the waiters and see how they settled the bill.*

Due to the nature of those trips, all of the cultural similarities and differences were observed by the participants of the mobility primarily through the prism of the professional work they were carrying out. Often, it was the manner of performing duties by the local employees or their attitude to work in a given

company that allowed participants to overcome or consolidate generally accepted opinions and stereotypes about representatives of other nations.

*Their culture is defined by “mañana” – they always have time for everything. If they don’t do something today, then they will do it tomorrow. They are never in a hurry. The organisation of the day looks completely different from back home. You can take a nap in the afternoon and nobody complains about it. Poland and Spain are two different universes.*

*No TV programmes or other people’s stories are enough to understand a local culture. You just have to go there and see with your own eyes how people from a given country live and behave.*

Some students had the opportunity to work not only with locals, but also with representatives of other nationalities, including Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Slovaks, Czechs, Hungarians, Turks, Algerians, Japanese, Americans, and Italians. In the opinion of the trainees, this was an additional advantage of the trip, and everyday contact with representatives of other nationalities and cultures was an opportunity to exchange experiences and worldviews, and allow them to get to understand cultural differences and similarities. Students who had the opportunity to meet individuals from different cultures most often praised the good atmosphere at work (although they were much less likely to notice its direct impact on their specific professional skills). According to the former participants of mobility, working 'side by side' was more common than performing tasks jointly, which often stemmed from an additional language barrier.

*Together with Lithuanians and Ukrainians, we created our own 'mini-culture'. It was great because we could chat with them and observe how they work.*

*An American was working with my boss. He was from a different cultural background, so I could gain a new social experience, compare myself with someone else, from a different community, from a different culture.*

*The cook was from Turkey, but he knew French well. We had a great way of communicating with each other. I would teach him Polish and he would teach me French.*

The study also showed that the increase in cultural competences of the participants of the trips was influenced by the way in which the accommodation was organised. Trainees who were accommodated with families often emphasised that they had the opportunity to learn more about the specificity of a given country.

This was particularly true when students managed to establish closer relations with members of the household they stayed in, who on occasion would come up with the initiative of trips or joint outings, which in turn was an opportunity to learn more about the lifestyle, local culture and customs of a given country. Although accommodation with families was usually associated with less integration within the group of trainees, according to many respondents it gave them the opportunity to learn independence and test themselves in new conditions. It should be mentioned, however, that this solution did not always work well and there were occasional misunderstandings between students and hosts. Problems usually related to issues such as the organisation of meals or setting the schedule of the day, and most often they were the result of cultural differences (which the organisers did not anticipate at the planning stage of the project).

*The host with whom we lived took us to a boxing club for training.*

*We managed to play rugby together.*

### **Soft skills**

Foreign internships and traineeships gave students the opportunity to test themselves in new conditions, away from their home and everyday habits. Most of the respondents emphasised that participation in the project had a significant influence on changing their views and attitudes, as well as contributing to their soft skills development. Often it was a real-life lesson for them – the first experience of actual professional work – and, often, it was also their first independent longer stay away from their families. Over half of the respondents of the survey admitted that participation in educational mobility projects helped them later on in life find appropriate solutions in difficult and unusual situations (over 59 percent of respondents) and cope with stress (more than 56 percent). The soft skills acquired by the trainees concerned, among others, taking initiative, team work skills and increasing openness to change. Participants of the interviews often also stressed that the very fact of coping with new conditions definitely strengthened their self-confidence and became an impulse to undertake further action.

*I was still a “quiet mouse” type of person during the internship, but when I discovered that I was able to communicate with foreigners in their language, I began to believe in myself. Internship offers many different benefits and we have the opportunity to reinvent ourselves.*

*It's really worthwhile to improve language skills in order to be able to work in another country and in a new culture. Although we had accommodation, we were given pocket money for food. Since we cooked for ourselves, we also had to be able to do our own shopping.*

*If I had not participated in transnational mobility, I would still continue my education and I would still – with better or worse results – get by at school. But this trip gave me more motivation: now, because I managed to achieve something, I want more.*

Respondents highly appreciated the impact of the mobility on the development of their interpersonal skills. Over 69 percent of the internship graduates admitted that the experience of working abroad allowed them to establish rapport with other people more easily. Thanks to the experience gained, they are also better at performing tasks in teams (over 77 percent) and working in an international environment (above 74 percent).

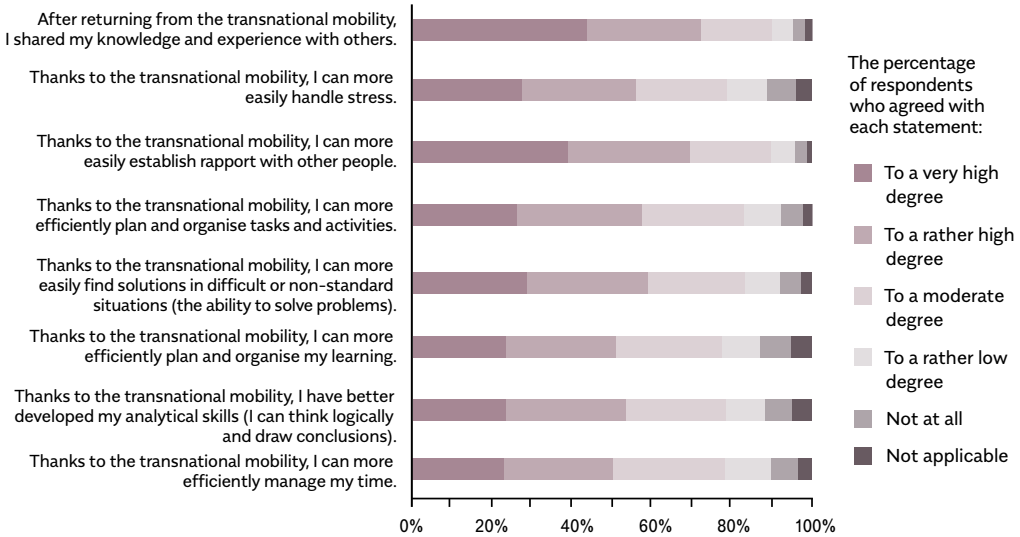
Individuals who participated in educational mobility organised by vocational education and training providers and training centres more often pointed out that it was also conducive to establishing new acquaintances in peer environments. Although the participants were sent abroad mostly in larger groups, they often did not know the students from other classes, therefore a joint foreign trip was an opportunity not only to meet foreigners, but also to make friends with other students from their school or strengthen ties with friends from their class. A very important factor in this context was the experience of working together, thanks to which the participants learned how to make decisions in a group, share tasks, and sometimes also resolve conflicts that could not always be avoided during the implementation of the tasks. All of this allowed the students to acquire or develop new interpersonal skills. Obtained social competences (for example: negotiation skills, assertiveness or the ability to critically self-evaluate) can certainly be counted among the positive effects that have been achieved thanks to foreign mobility.

*It was a truly amazing time. We became very emotional when it was time to leave because we did not want to go back. It's even visible in one of our group photos where we are all crying.*

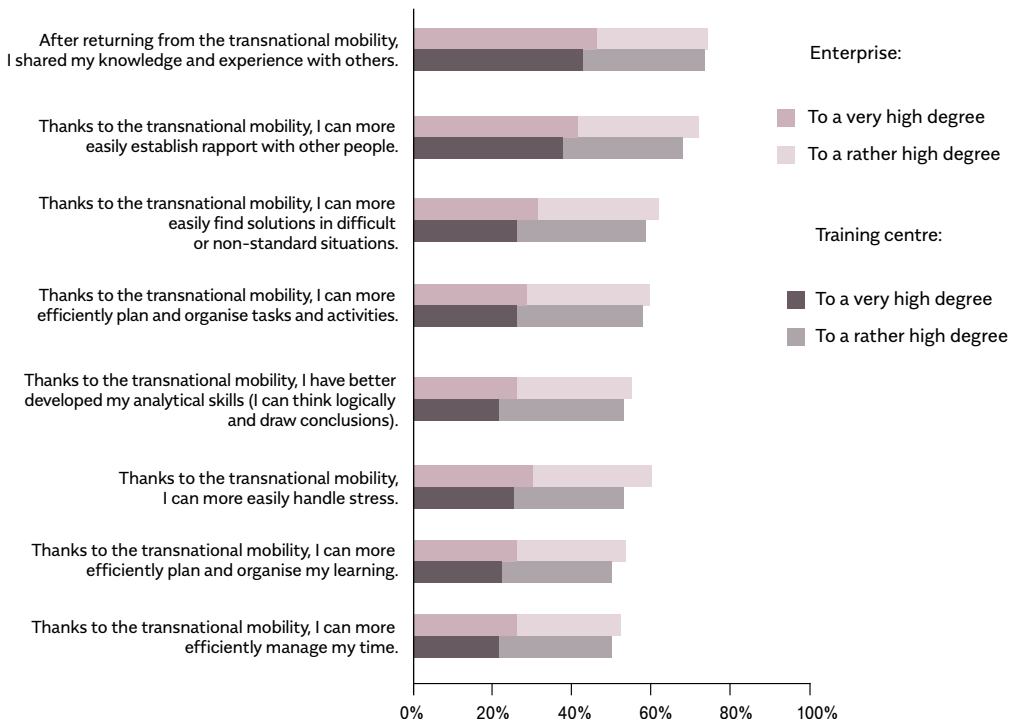
*This project is not only about an internship, it has many other benefits. Students who did not get along at school got to know each other better and became friends. We helped each other, and we gradually got better at working together. It was a test of adulthood away from home.*

*Since returning from the internship I have been the class president for two years in a row. Thanks to the mobility, I acquired the ability to manage a team and I used it practically.*

## Effect of the internship on soft skills acquisition (N = 2,592)



## Impact of mobility on soft skills and social competences, divided by internships served in enterprises and in training centres. The list includes answers of individuals who agreed with a given statement to a 'very high' or 'rather high' degree (N = 2,592)





In the case of those individuals who were participating in internships organised in enterprises, contact with foreign mentors was very important. Their authority often influenced a change of attitudes amongst the interns. However, it should be noted that the achievement of positive effects depended primarily on the degree of a mutual understanding that the trainee and his/her guardian had managed to establish, and on the level of involvement of the representatives of the host institutions.

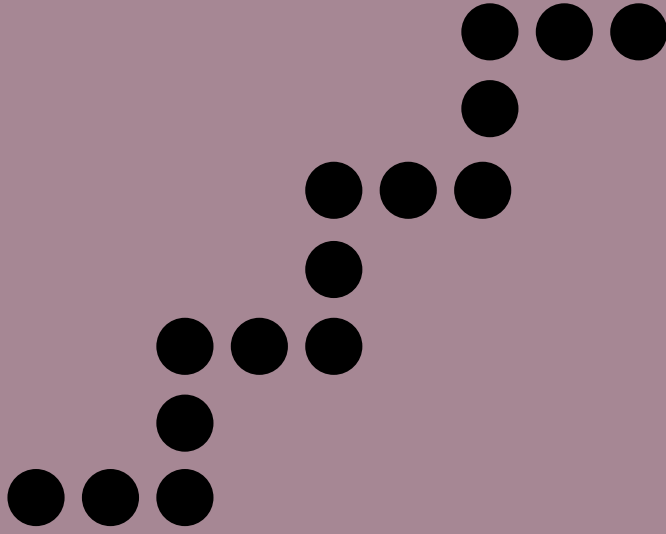
The interviewees emphasised that learning mobility projects had a great impact on building their independence. The vast majority of respondents said that thanks to participation in the internship they acquired the ability to plan and learn independently (over 51 percent of respondents confirmed that this impact was very noticeable) and gained better time management skills (more than half of the respondents assessed that the impact of the internship on this skill was noticeable). The participants of the study also noticed that the internship significantly influenced the way they organise their work – thanks to educational mobility over 57 percent of the respondents acquired the ability to plan and organise their tasks and activities.

Many of the respondents praised the internship organisation model which assumed not only work in companies, but also the need to organise (or co-organise) other elements of the trip. Young participants of the group interviews often particularly emphasised that organising travel to their workplace or the preparation of part of their daily meals required not only a degree of independence, but above all self-control and reasonable disposition of funds allocated as part of their pocket money. Some respondents admitted that they had some difficult and stressful situations as a result of that.

*For some, it was the first independence test. It was possible to catch a glimpse of what it looks like to live an adult life, live on your own, manage your money and time. It was a really great solution.*

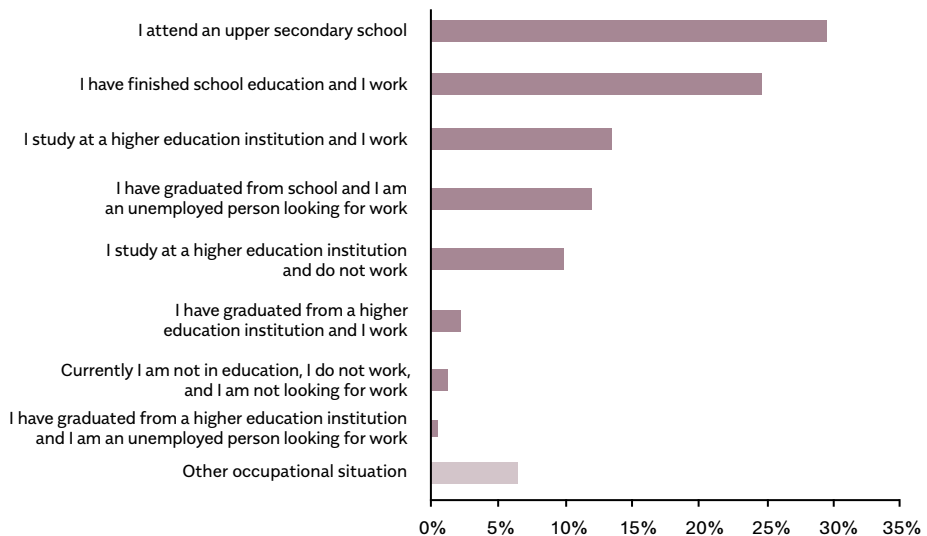
*We had to learn independent thinking. We could not constantly ask about everything – it was necessary to act intuitively.*

# Career paths



This chapter concerns the further education and career paths of former internship and traineeship participants. One of the objectives of the study was to ascertain in what way the acquired and developed competences turned out to be useful in the labour market and to what extent they influenced the choices made by graduates in their adult life. This part of the report is the result of the analysis of the statements made by respondents who graduated from upper secondary schools; in particular, professionally active individuals and those who decided to continue their education at higher education institutions or further training courses. The collated results also allowed us to “paint a picture” of contemporary graduates of Polish vocational schools – who they are, what factors determine their professional choices and what their expectations regarding the labour market are.

### Current educational and professional status of the respondents (N = 2,592)



### Current professional status

Over 70 percent of the respondents completed their studies at the upper secondary school level, and over 38 percent started a paid job. One in four of the vocational school graduates started studying at a higher education institution, and more than half of them undertook a paid job at the same time. Among the respondents who are active on the labour market, over 26 percent are upper secondary school graduates, and only 2 percent – graduates of higher education institutions. However, it should be noted that the relatively small representation of higher education institution graduates in the study results both from the specificity of the programme’s implementation (the growing popularity of the

mobility offer in recent years has meant that the general population of the participants is dominated by young people enrolled in state education), as well as the ability to reach respondents (the dynamics of change appropriate for the young target group of the research makes it more difficult to find former participants of the project who graduate each year).

One in five respondents was unemployed, most often in search of employment. In this group the largest number were graduates of upper secondary schools who did not complete studies at a higher education institution. At the time when the study was being conducted, over three-quarters of those participants who were in search of a job did not have any previous professional experience. Considering the young age of the respondents, this proves that many of them are merely at the threshold of adulthood, and the period of looking for employment can turn out to be only a short episode in their professional life. Only every tenth respondent had been seeking employment for more than three months and less than 2 percent of the participants had been seeking employment for over a year.

It is worth noting that the relatively high percentage of unemployed individuals among the participants of the study is also due to the specificity of the period in which the quantitative research was carried out (May–August 2017), because some of the respondents who were in the final year of their school education completed the survey before the end of the school year as students, and some after it has ended as graduates. The latter truthfully declared that at that time they were not in education (because they had just finished school), did not work and did not seek employment. Taking into account the study schedule, it is difficult to consider all of them as representatives of the NEET group (not in employment, education or training – permanently remaining outside the sphere of employment and education).

Among the individuals declaring themselves to be unemployed (including those falling into the NEET category), there were also those students who were waiting for university entry exams or were in the process of making decisions about their further educational and professional paths. Similar declarations also appeared among respondents who chose the answer 'another professional situation', which can also be seen in the participants' explanations given in the 'additional comments' section and in answers to open questions (the ambiguity of a large part of those cases significantly hinders their reliable classification).

Although the interviewees often declared that the internship confirmed the validity of the choice of industry they were training in (cf. the chapter entitled Development of competences), the results of the survey show some corrections of career paths of former trainees who are active in the labour market. Respondents from this group were asked to indicate the industries most suited to the substantive areas of implemented mobility projects. The list of available industries has been developed according to the classifications of the Ministry of

National Education (Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej), in which eight areas of education were identified: administration and services, construction, electrical and electronic, mechanical and mining and metallurgical, agriculture and forestry with environmental protection, tourism and catering, medical and social, and creative arts<sup>12</sup>. Three additional areas of professional activity have been added to this list (education and the school system, public administration, army and uniformed services), which – although have no direct connection with the areas of education in vocational schools – reflect the professional choices of school graduates and complement the list of potential sectors of respondents' professional activity.

A comparison of the declared sectors of training and of the current employment of school graduates shows that the proportions between those values have not changed radically. In addition to the added areas (education, public administration and uniformed services), in which just over 7 percent of the respondents found employment, the most noticeable change is an increase in the amount of people active in the administration and services industry (by more than 12 percent) and a decrease in the number of individuals employed within the tourist and electrical and electronic industries. The comparison has also shown that the percentage of those respondents serving internships and being employed in the construction and electrical and electronic industries remained almost unchanged.

It is worth adding, however, that only slightly more than 40 percent of the respondents declared that finding a job in their trained profession is very important. It can be assumed that while for some respondents it is important to find satisfactory and well-paid employment regardless of the industry sector, a proportion of the respondents do not want to be employed within the profession they have been trained in, aiming to change the employment sector. This is confirmed by the statements of some of the interviewees, for whom leaving school, starting higher education or entering the labour market has meant a significant change in their educational and professional path.

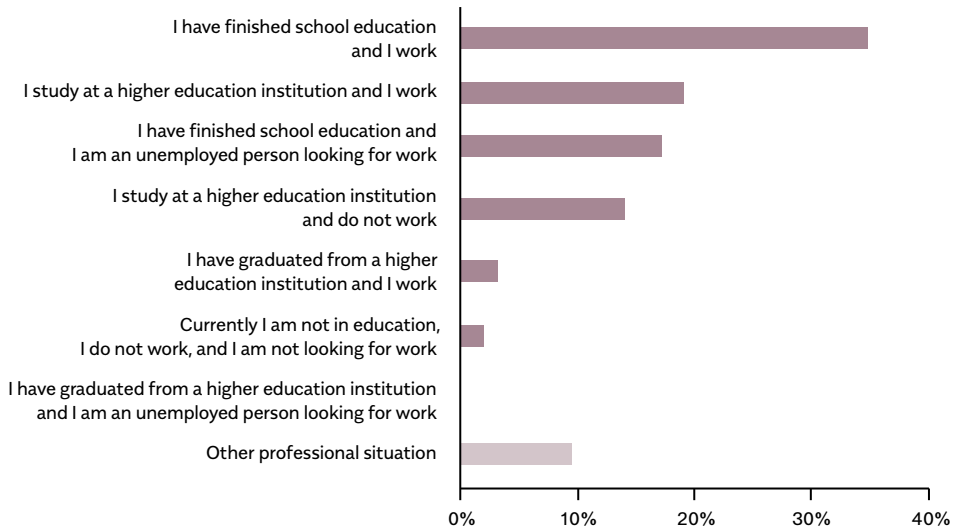
*Hairdressing is still important to me, but I treat it as a hobby, an occasional source of extra income, not a full-time job.*

*I work in the production of household appliances, and although I graduated from a food technical school I came to the conclusion that this was not my forte. I was more interested in the industrial sector.*

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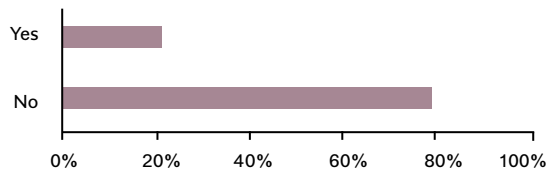
12. In accordance with the classification contained in the regulation on the core curriculum of vocational education (Polish: *Rozporządzenie w sprawie podstawy programowej kształcenia w zawodach*) adopted in 2017 (Internet source: [bit.ly/2JScF4M](http://bit.ly/2JScF4M)).

**Current educational and professional status of graduates of upper secondary schools  
(N = 2,592)**



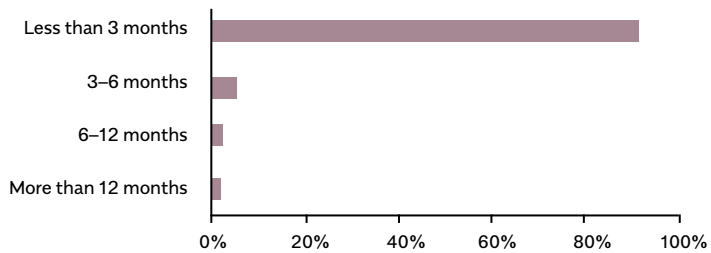
**Professional experience of participants seeking employment (N = 360)**

Have you worked professionally since completing your studies?

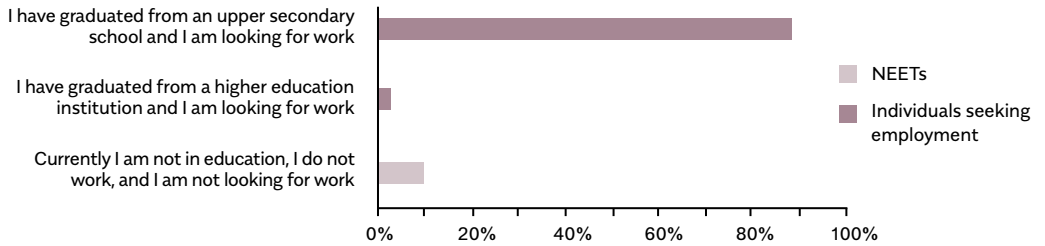


**Search for employment by unemployed graduates (N = 324)**

How long have you been searching for employment?

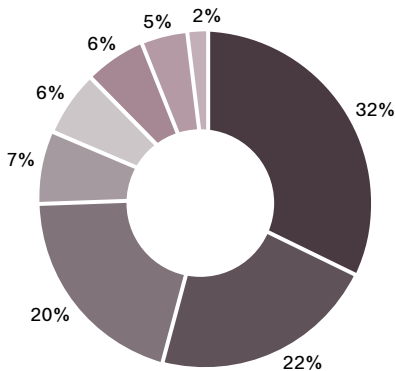


**Classification of unemployed graduates of international internships and traineeships (N = 356)**

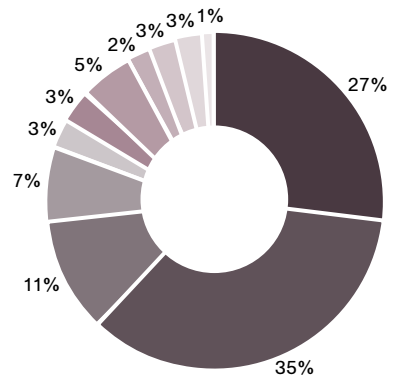


**Comparison of industries in which the internships were served with industries in which the respondents are currently employed (N = 2,952)**

Industry sector in which the internship was carried out

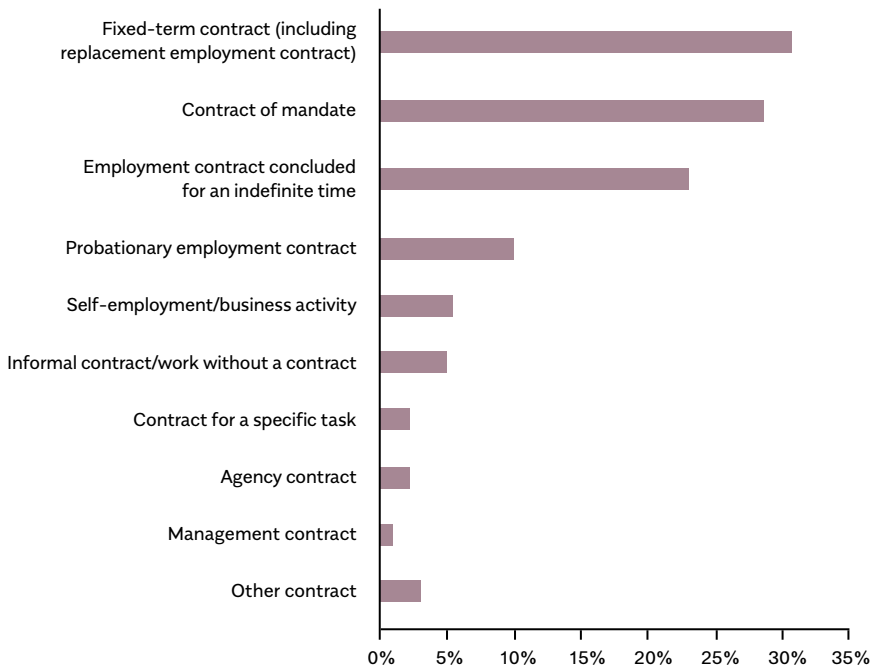


Industry sector in which the surveyed school graduates are employed



- tourism and catering
- construction
- administration and services
- medical and social
- electrical and electronic
- education and the school system
- mechanical and mining and metallurgical
- public administration
- creative arts
- army and uniformed services
- agriculture and forestry with environmental protection

## Employed respondents' current form of employment (N = 1,051)



### Conditions of employment

According to their declarations, over 70 percent of the questionnaire respondents are employed on the basis of an employment contract, and nearly every fourth respondent works on the basis of an employment contract concluded for an indefinite time. One in three of respondents from the studied group has signed a contract of mandate with their current employer. Among other forms of employment, respondents most often indicated various forms of professional internships, which is appropriate for the examined age group and results from the fact that many of them are just starting their career path.

Over 94 percent of working respondents, regardless of the form of employment, declared satisfaction with their current professional situation (with the conditions and nature of the work performed). Positive appraisals of professional work include such aspects as: the possibility of professional development, a good atmosphere in the workplace, a friendly team of colleagues, and working hours allowing for a balance between work and private life.



*I am very happy with my job. Friends my age who are looking for employment often work somewhere for a while and then move on because they do not enjoy working there. Compared to them, I feel I found the right company to work for.*

*The team is great. We all know and like each other. We often joke while working together. I also enjoy the flexible working hours.*

It should be noted, however, that those most willing to talk about their further education and career were graduates who were not only satisfied with their current educational and professional situation, but also consciously pursued a well-thought-out career path. The remaining respondents were more willing to answer questions about the internship, but it was harder for them to determine to what extent the experience of mobility influenced their further professional life. Some laconic answers from the latter group of respondents may result from their young age, and from the fact that they are only just taking their first steps in the labour market. Some also admitted that they do not have specific professional plans yet.

*You could say my professional situation is satisfactory. I have a permanent job, and because I am single and live in the family home, my pay is currently adequate to my needs. I know, however, that this will change at some point, and I will strive to change my job to one that is related to my field of study.*

*Although I'm quite happy with my current job, I sometimes think about changing it. I would like to do programming, which would allow me to continue to develop. Job opportunities in the IT industry are very broad, and testing, which I'm currently engaged in, is too monotonous.*

Out of all the respondents, it is those who recently entered the labour market who claim that their current work is satisfactory mainly in the context of further development and gaining experience, and at the same time declare that a positive assessment of their current workplace results from the fact that the opportunity to change their job is limited in their case (especially for those at a very early stage of professional development). Some respondents also admitted that regardless of their level of satisfaction, they treat the current professional situation as a transition period – a stage on the way to their dream job.

Although over 92 percent of working respondents recognised that their remuneration is satisfactory, only one-fifth of the participants admitted that the received salary satisfies them to a high degree and is commensurate with their competences. Taking into consideration the fact that the questionnaire respondents indicated high earnings as one of their occupational priorities

(over 68 percent of respondents, cf. the chapter entitled *Preferences, choices and professional expectations*), it should be concluded that they treat their current financial conditions as temporary. This is confirmed by the statements of the participants of the qualitative research, who often admitted that the salary received directly after entering the labour market turned out to be too low and definitely did not meet their expectations.

*At the beginning, my salary was much lower, but now it is at a satisfactory level.*

*I am not sure what could convince me to change my job. With regards to pay, after completing a vocational school, as a student, I work on slightly different terms than the others. I have a contract for three years and I know that the next one will be permanent. During this period, I receive the lowest possible rate of pay – I have the same responsibilities as other employees, but they receive twice as much as I do. I am aware of this, but after three years our salaries will be equal. The current situation does not bother me, because I'm constantly learning new things.*

*I have a quiet job in my profession, but I'm not going to hide the fact that my salary could be better.*

*My salary? I hope it will be higher one day.*

Participants of the study were also asked to determine the amount of their remuneration. Almost half of all working respondents declared net monthly earnings below PLN 2,000, and more than one-fifth – below PLN 1,500.

Respondents with the highest rate of pay are employed in the following industries: mechanical and mining and metallurgical, electrical and electronic, and construction. The largest wage spread concerned the agricultural and forestry industry – employees in this industry had the biggest problem with declaring the amount of their earnings (over one-fifth of respondents chose the answer 'hard to say'). This is largely due to the forms of employment used in this industry – every tenth respondent works on the basis of an unregulated employment relationship, an informal contract or without a contract at all.

Slightly over 6 percent of the respondents are self-employed or work in their own companies, and over one-third of these are representatives of the agriculture and forestry sector. Therefore, it can be assumed that this form of employment concerns mainly graduates of agricultural schools, and results from the nature of work in this particular industry. Every tenth participant who is self-employed or runs in his/her own company works in the construction industry,

and the share of other industries does not exceed 10 percent. This data indicates that at an early stage of professional development (a significant proportion of the respondents are just entering the labour market) graduates seek employment with employers, and the decision regarding undertaking their own professional activity is conditioned by the necessity resulting from the specifics of a particular industry.

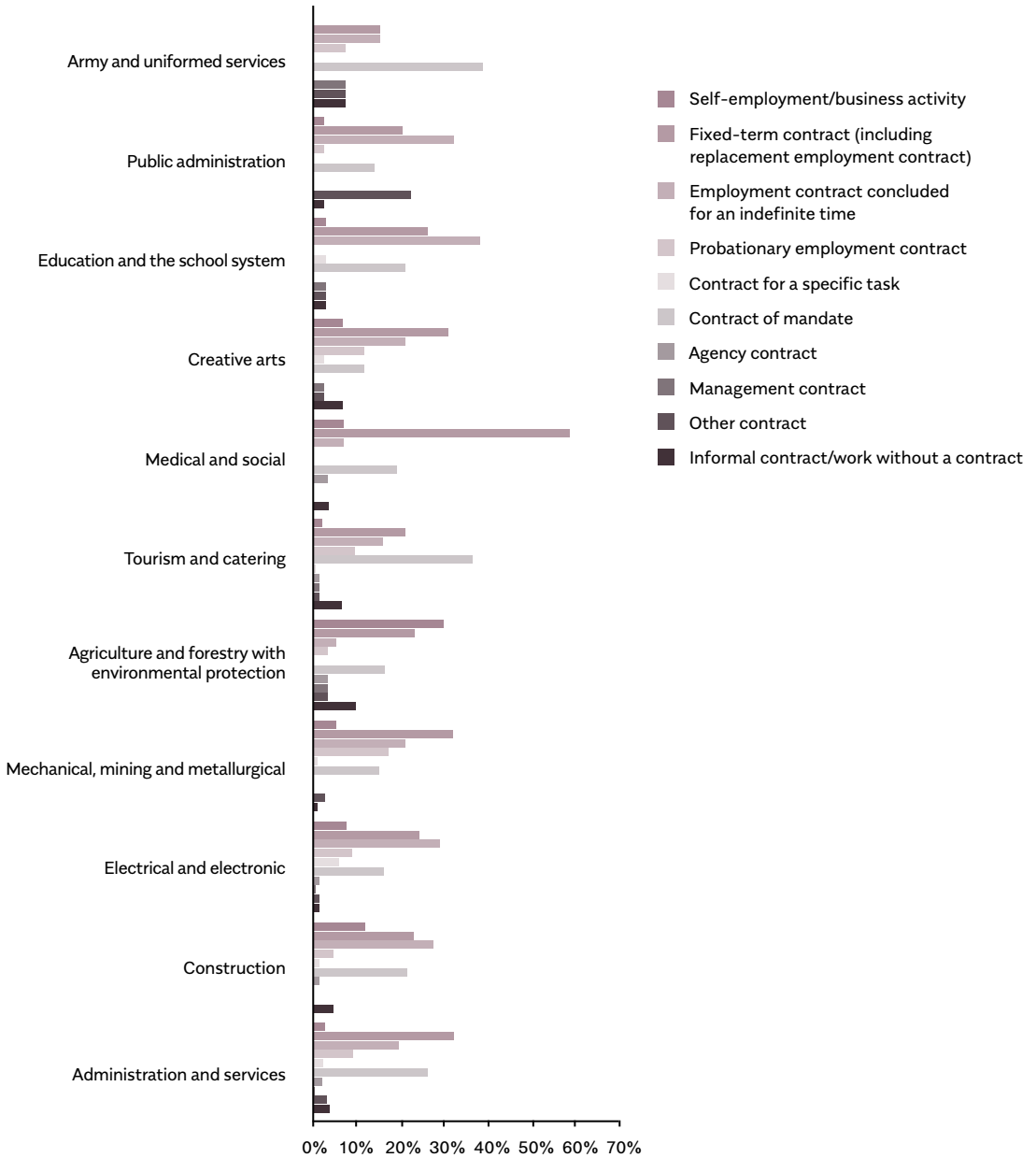
This does not mean, however, that respondents in this group have not identified the connection between the experience of foreign educational mobility and the development of competences related to entrepreneurship. Over 80 percent of self-employed individuals and business owners confirmed they had become more enterprising thanks to participation in the internship, 53 percent of them confirmed that they acquired a high degree of this competence, and 60 percent declared that the experience of mobility had an impact on the decision to set up their own company. Only one in four respondents did not indicate any impact of the internship on their current professional activity.

For many participants of the qualitative study, certificates confirming participation in foreign internships and apprenticeships also proved to be very important. More than 68 percent of the respondents confirmed that such documents turned out to be useful while looking for a job, although it should be added that only some of them assessed their usefulness as very high (over 19 percent) or high (15 percent). Similar declarations concerned the Europass Mobility document, which is a standard certificate developed by the European Commission, confirming knowledge and qualifications acquired during internships and training in various European countries (every third respondent felt that having this document had a significant impact on obtaining employment).

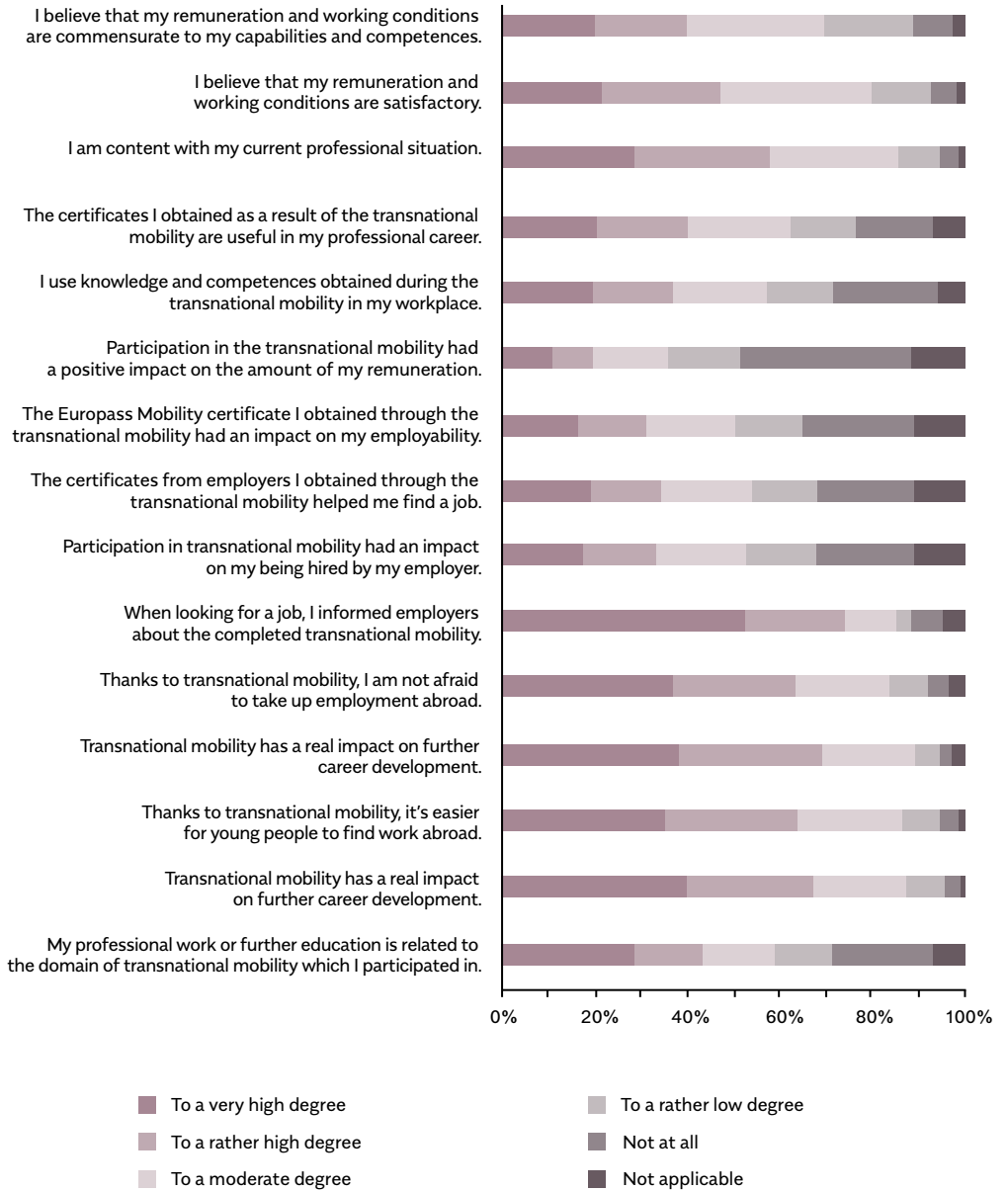
The participants of the qualitative study, however, pointed out that the documents confirming participation in foreign learning mobility were often very helpful when looking for a job abroad. Such declarations concerned, in particular, Europass Mobility documents, and interviewees often stressed that their biggest advantage is the fact that they are recognised not only in Poland, but also outside of the country.

Many respondents also emphasised that a foreign internship is a good investment in their future in the labour market, and that the acquired knowledge and skills strengthen their position during the recruitment process, giving them an advantage over those peers who do not have similar experience. The participation of potential employees in mobility projects was perceived by employers as an essential practical professional experience, all the more valuable for the fact that it was gained abroad (which is something most employment candidates cannot boast of).

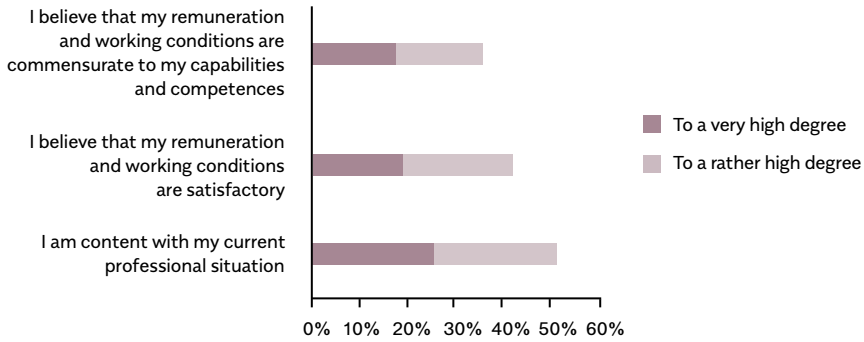
**Conditions of employment of respondents broken down into sectors of declared professional activity (N = 1,049)**



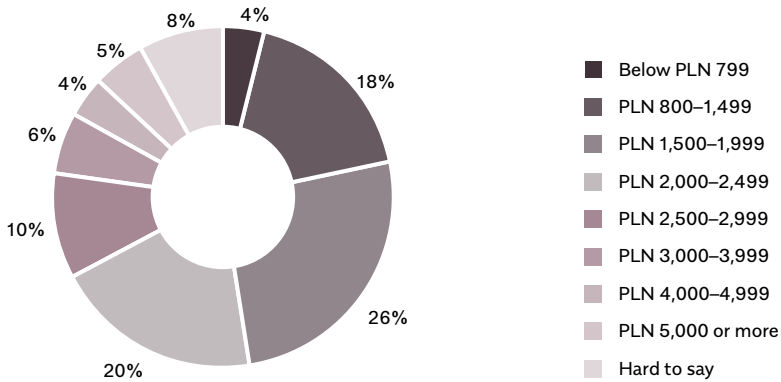
## Declared impact of the internship on the current professional situation (N = 1,049)



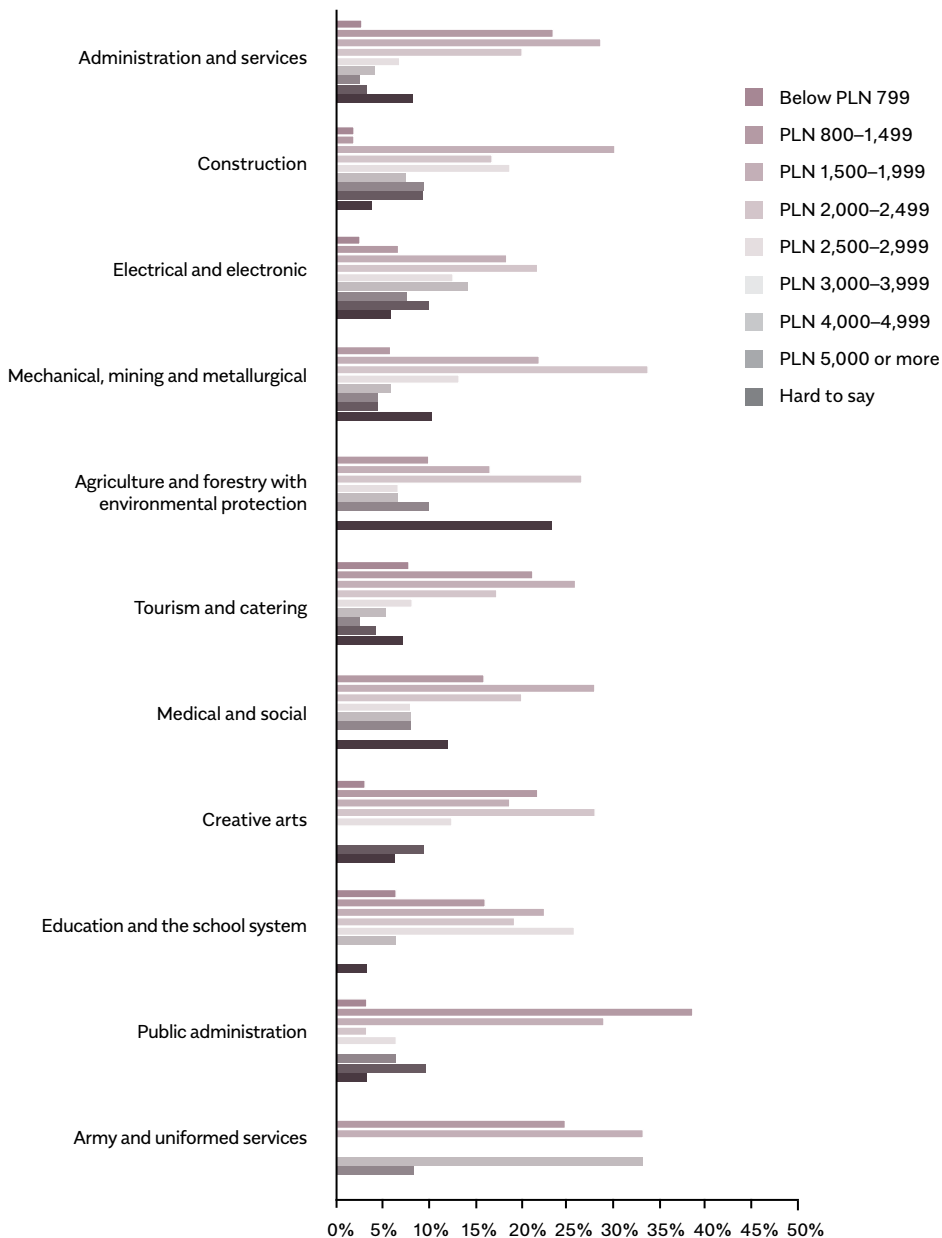
**Satisfaction with working conditions and remuneration (the results relate to respondents who agreed with a given statement to a high degree, N = 1,049)**



**The amount of net remuneration of former participants of learning mobility (N = 1,047)**



**Remuneration of the respondents broken down by industry of professional activity  
(N = 1,047)**



## Most often declared remuneration of graduates by industry (N = 1,047)

### Administration and services



### Construction





### Electrical and electronic industry



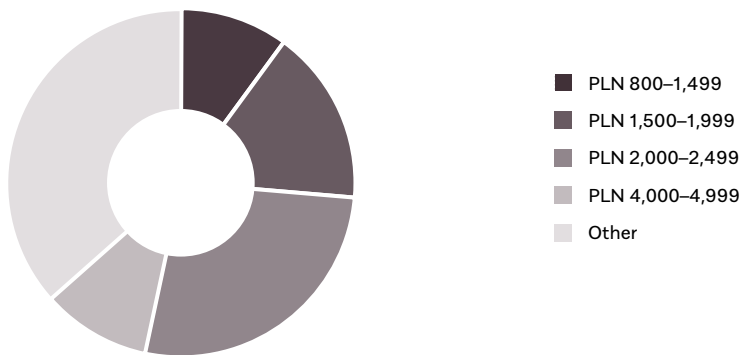
- PLN 1,500-1,999
- PLN 2,000-2,499
- PLN 2,500-2,999
- PLN 3,000-3,999
- Other

### Mechanical and mining and metallurgical industry



- PLN 1,500-1,999
- PLN 2,000-2,499
- PLN 2,500-2,999
- Other

### Agriculture and forestry with environmental protection



### Tourism and catering



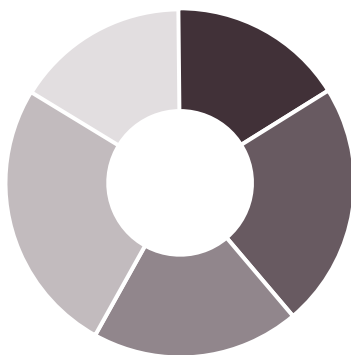
### Medical and social industry



### Creative arts



### Education and the school system



- PLN 800–1,499
- PLN 1,500–1,999
- PLN 2,000–2,499
- PLN 2,500–2,999
- Other

### Public administration

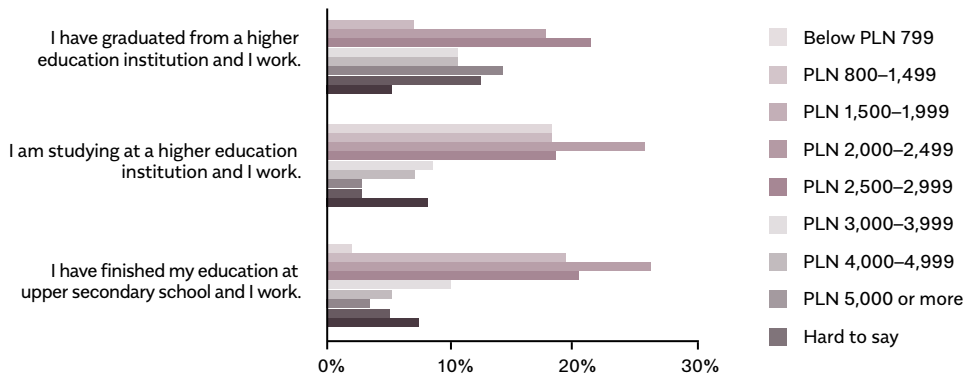


- PLN 800–1,499
- PLN 1,500–1,999
- Other

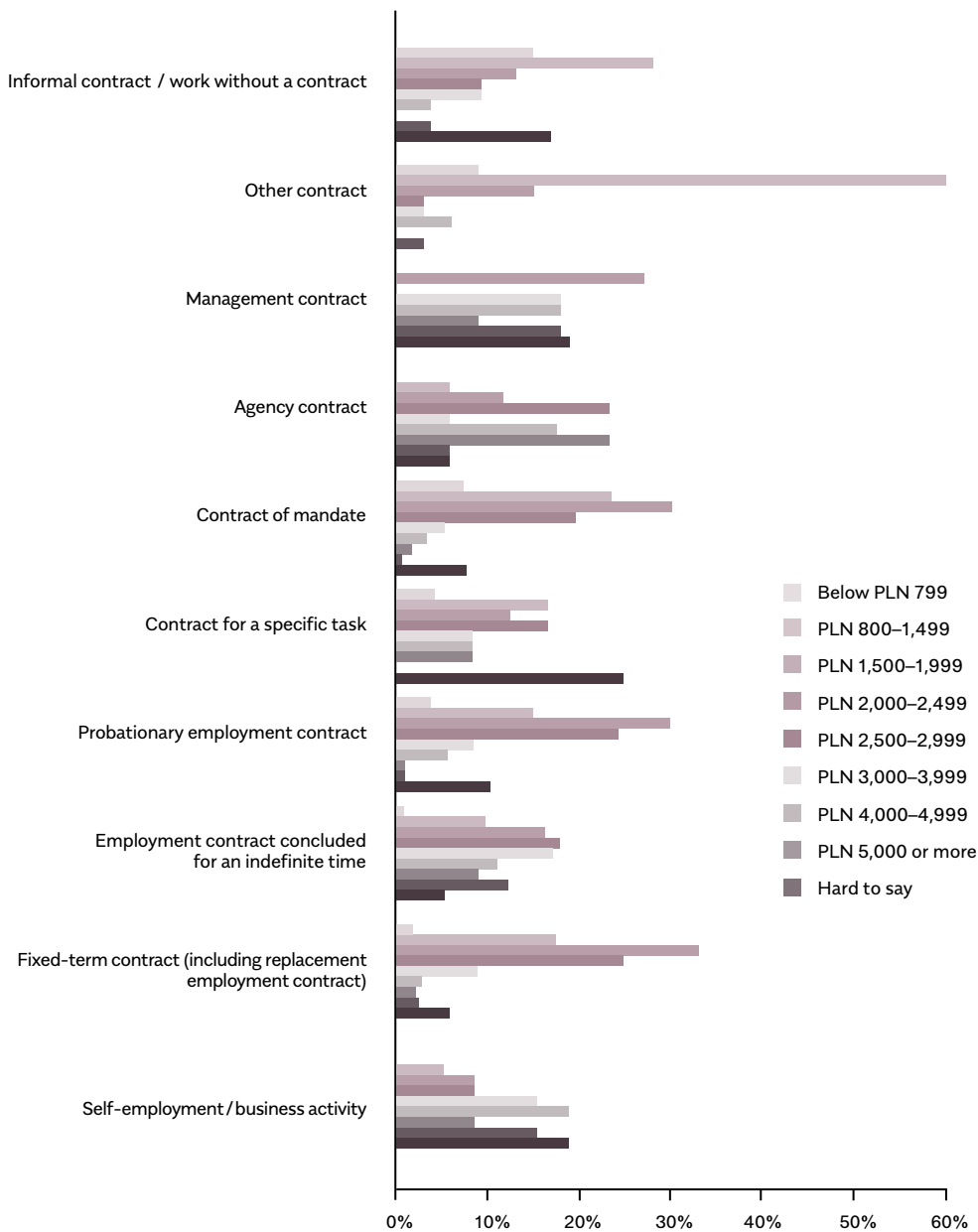
### Army and uniformed services



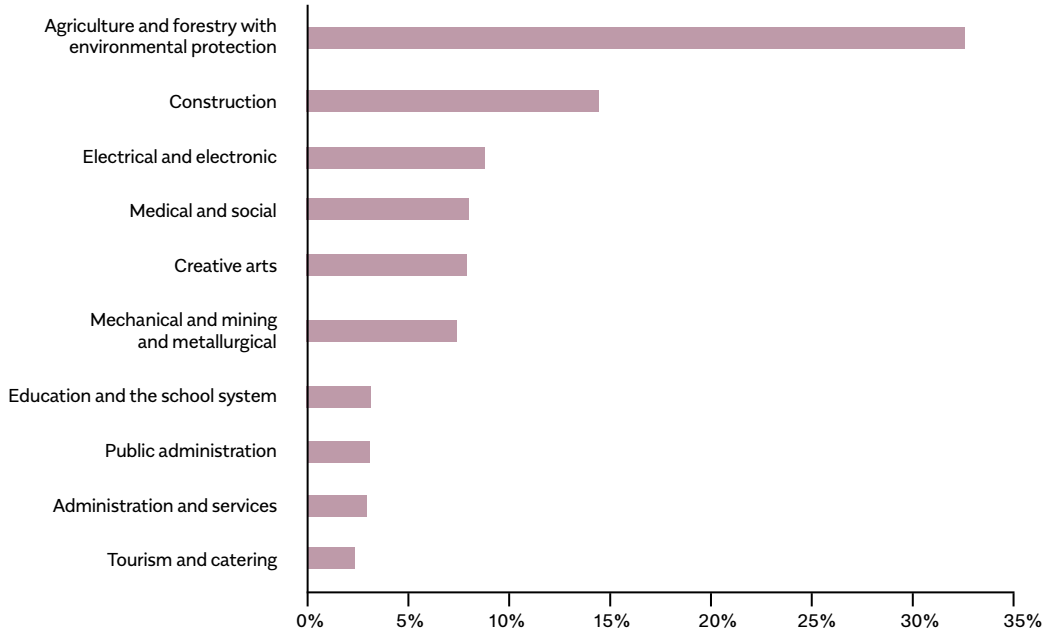
### Remuneration at various stages of respondents' educational and professional career (N = 1,047)



**Respondents' remuneration in the context of the declared form of employment  
(N = 1,047)**



**Self-employment and own business activity of respondents in particular sectors of professional activity (N = 58)\***

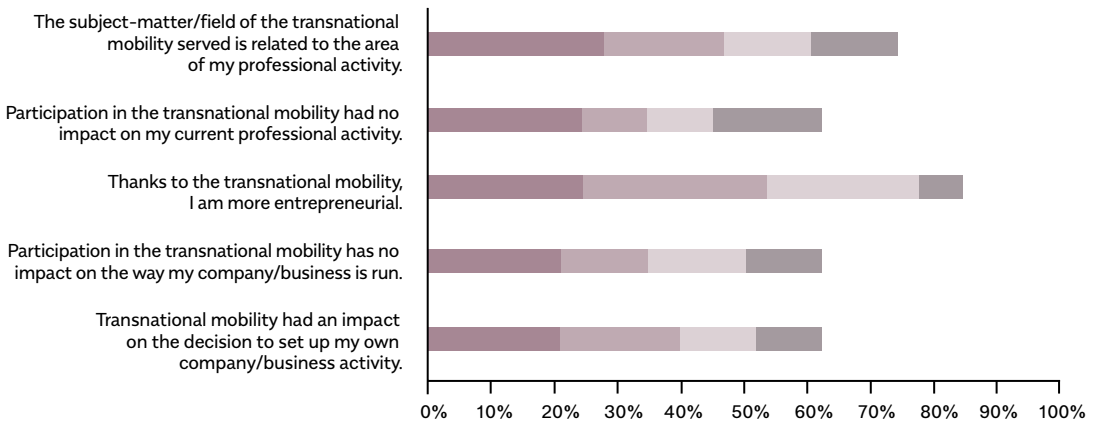


\* Army and uniformed – 0%

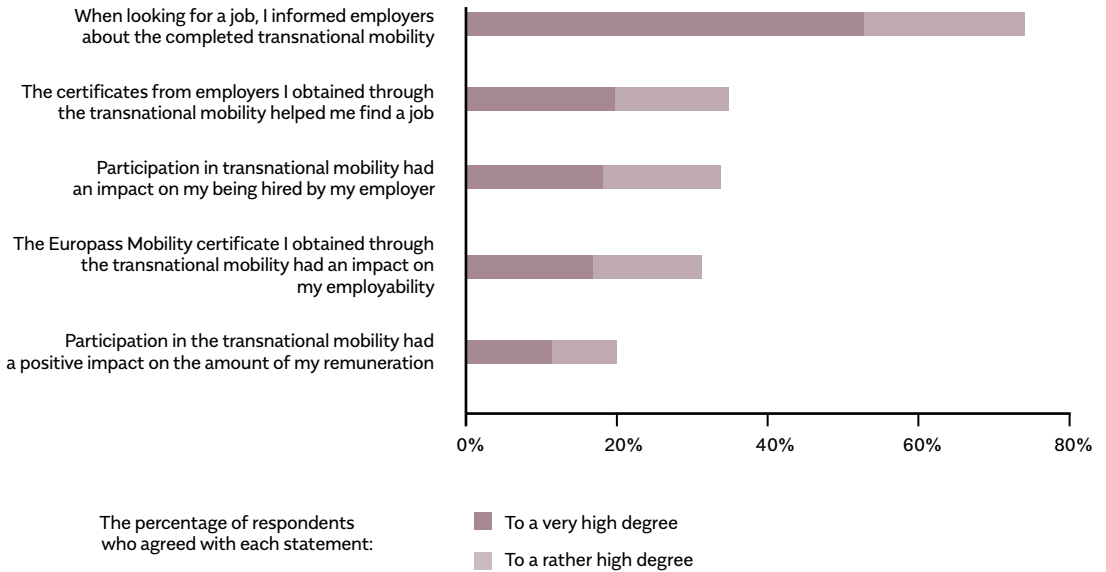
**Influence of foreign internships on participants' entrepreneurial attitudes (N = 58)**

The percentage of respondents who agreed with each statement:

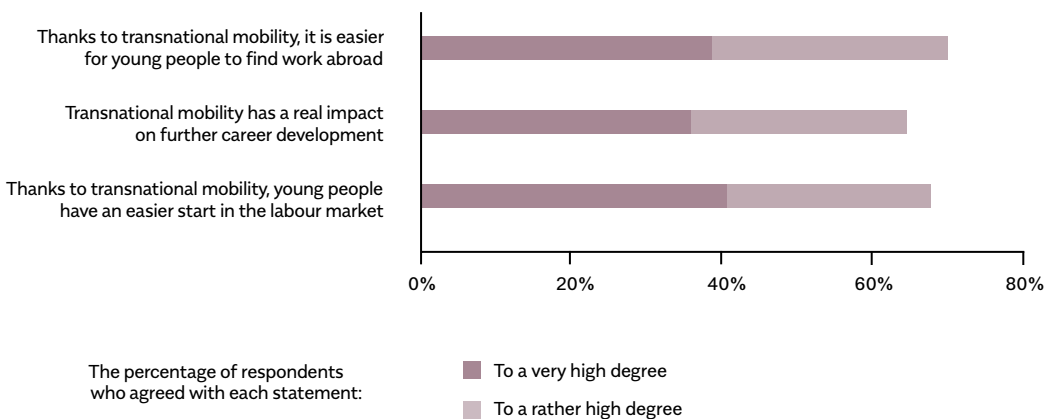
very high    rather high    moderate    rather low



**Significance of documents confirming participation in transnational leaning mobility  
(N = 1,049)**



**Impact of the internship on participants' professional career (N = 1,049)**





*One of the companies contacted me because of the traineeship I served in Spain. They were interested in this experience and decided to invite me for an interview because of it.*

*Such an experience looks good on your CV. If you can mention something like this during a job interview, then you can impress a potential employer and show that you have gained knowledge and experience despite your young age.*

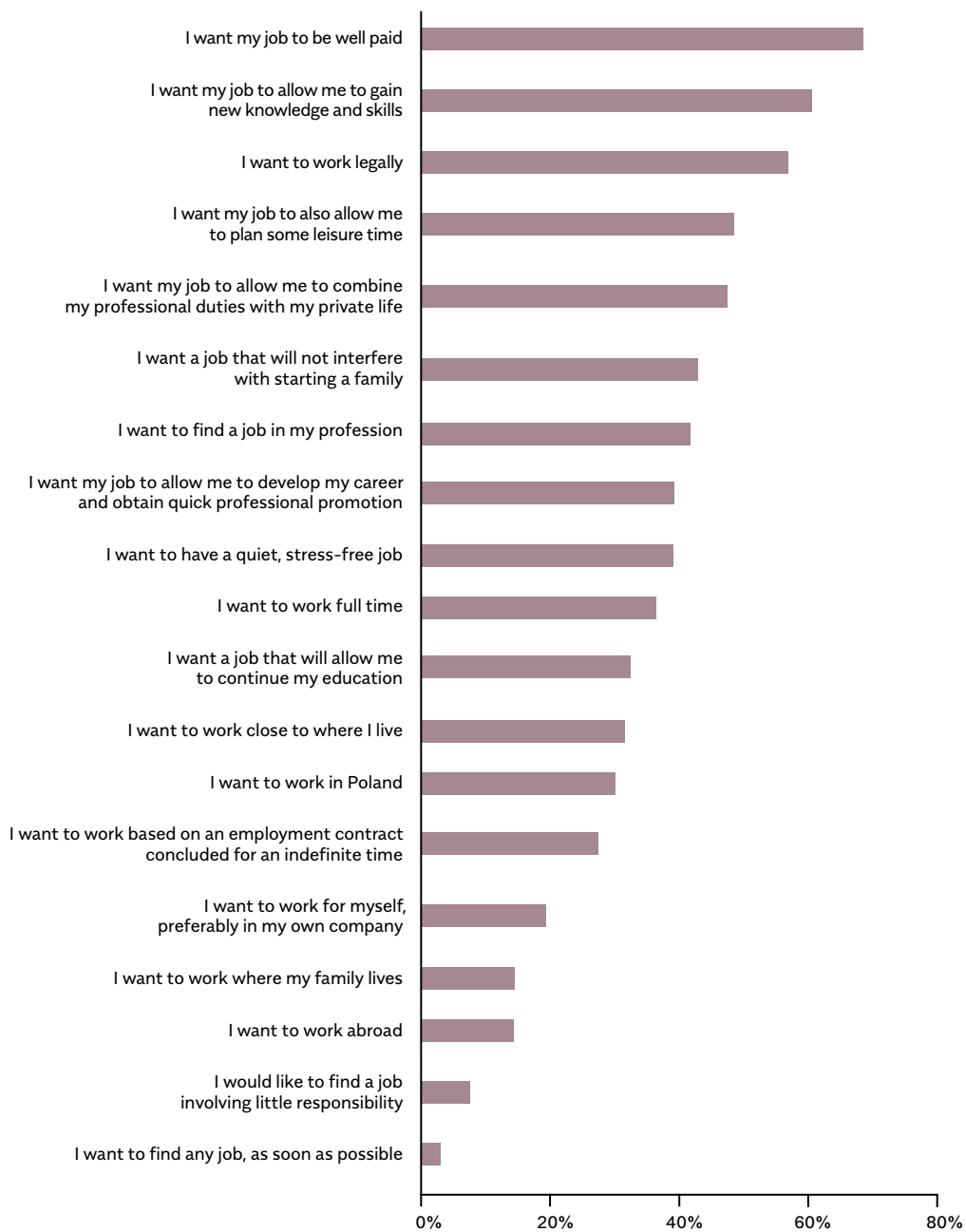
Although the participants of the study positively assessed the impact of foreign internships and traineeships on increasing their chances of entering the labour market, their opinions differed depending on their educational and professional situation. The transnational learning mobility offer was assessed highest by those who were active on the labour market, and lowest by those who were unemployed when the study was being carried out. In the case of students – both secondary school students and those in higher education institutions – the NPS (Net Promoter Score) indicator for the programme was relatively high (over 60 points among both groups of students), which may result from the high optimism of people who are just entering the labour market, in the context of using knowledge acquired during foreign mobility. It can also be noted that professionally active individuals are slightly more critical towards experience acquired in school, even as part of practical training abroad. This is also confirmed by the statements of interviewees who mentioned that foreign educational mobility should be treated as an episode within the broader period of theoretical and practical vocational training.

**Correlation between the NPS (Net Promoter Score) indicator and the educational and professional situation (N = 2,424)**

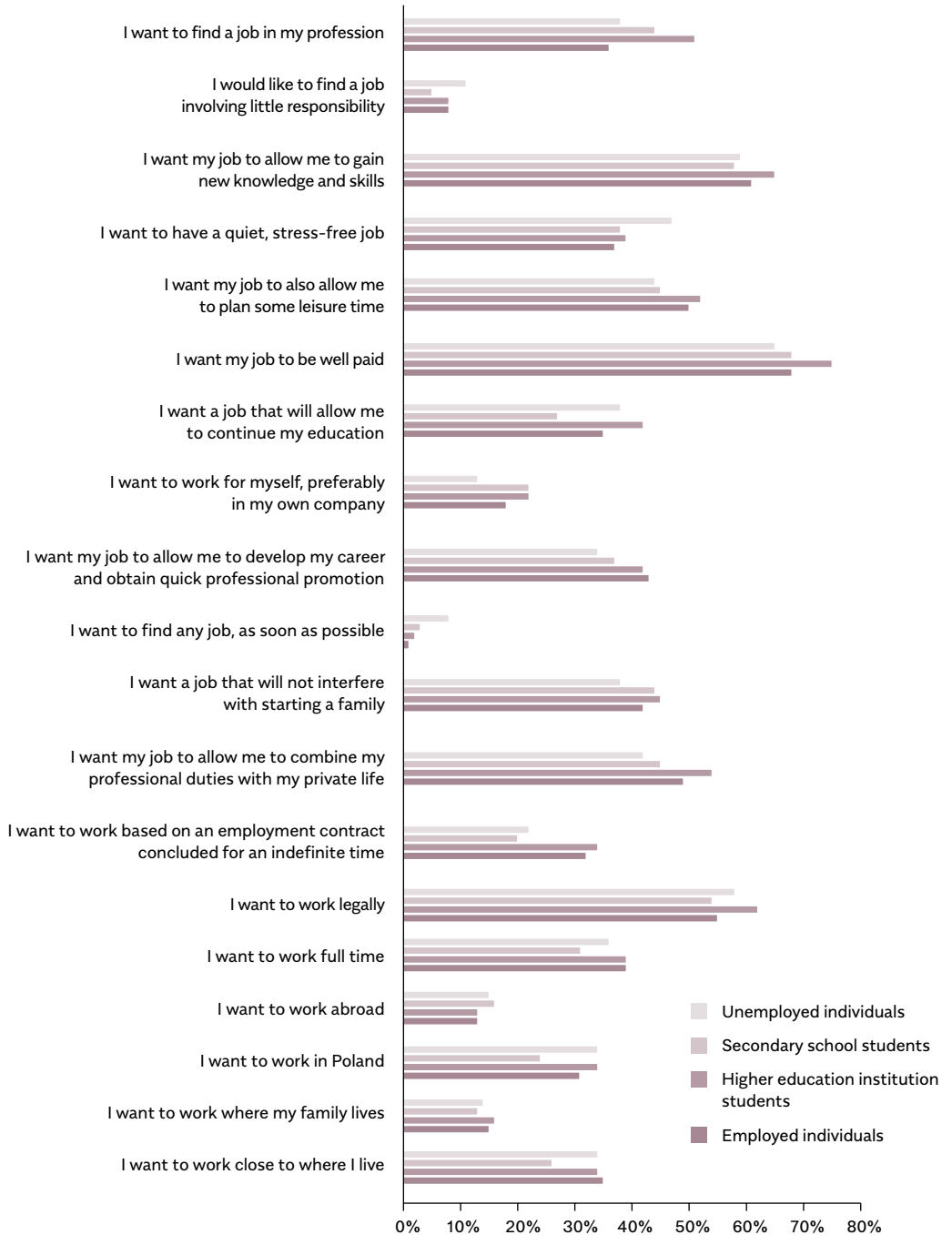
	NPS Score	Detractors	Passives	Promoters
Unemployed	49.16	12.36%	26.12%	61.52%
School students	62.26	7.60%	22.54%	69.86%
Students	61.78	10.05%	18.12%	71.83%
Employees	64.95	9.17%	16.71%	74.12%



## Professional preferences and expectations of the respondents (N = 2,592)



**Preferences and professional expectations of respondents at various stages of professional development (N = 2,424)**



## **Preferences, choices and professional expectations**

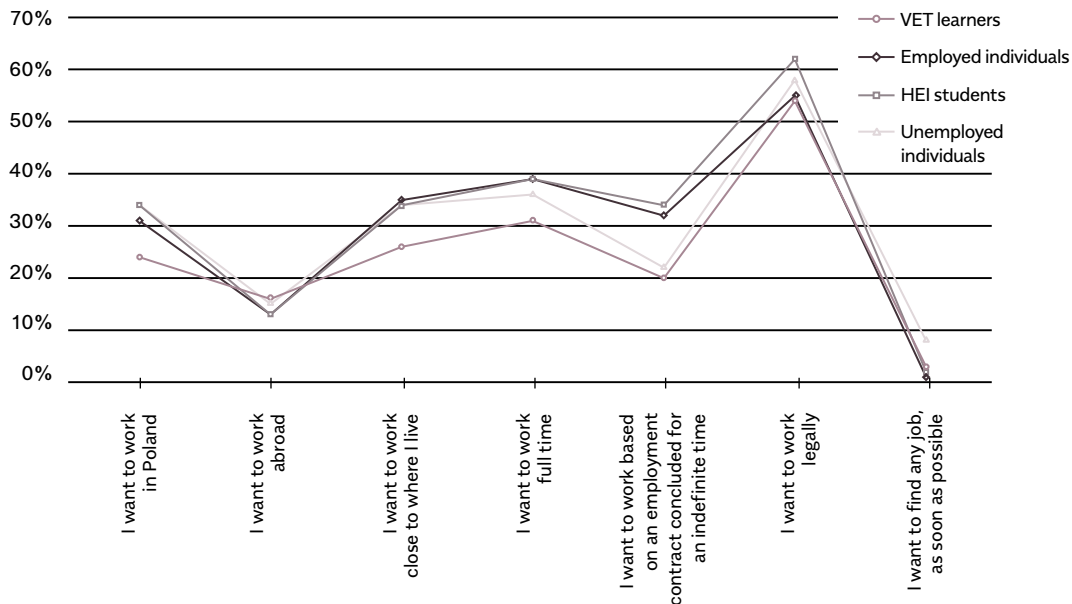
In the questionnaire part of the study, former trainees and interns were asked what conditions of employment they would find satisfactory. For the vast majority of respondents, one of the most important issues was adequate remuneration (over two-thirds of the respondents declared that they would like their work to be well paid). At the same time, more than 56 percent of the respondents considered that employment based on a legally concluded contract is significant, and the prospect of professional development as well as the possibility of combining work and private life are almost as important. The respondents attributed less significance to the forms of employment. Fewer than one-third of respondents claim that it is important for them to work on the basis of a contract concluded for an indefinite period.

Based on the results of the study, it can be recognised that for those Polish graduates of vocational schools who are active in the labour market (regardless of the industry) the most important aspects are good working conditions and the possibility of professional development (less than 1 percent of employed, and less than 8 percent of unemployed respondents decided that the most important thing is to quickly find any type of employment). This observation is also confirmed by the results of the qualitative study, indicating that Polish graduates of foreign internships and traineeships are primarily focused on acquiring new skills (especially those that are considered valuable in today's labour market) – not only at the stage of seeking employment, but also while performing daily duties at their workplace. This is evidenced by statements of respondents for whom the choice of a further career path was often conditioned by the prospect of working in increasingly prestigious institutions and the possibility of performing interesting professional duties.

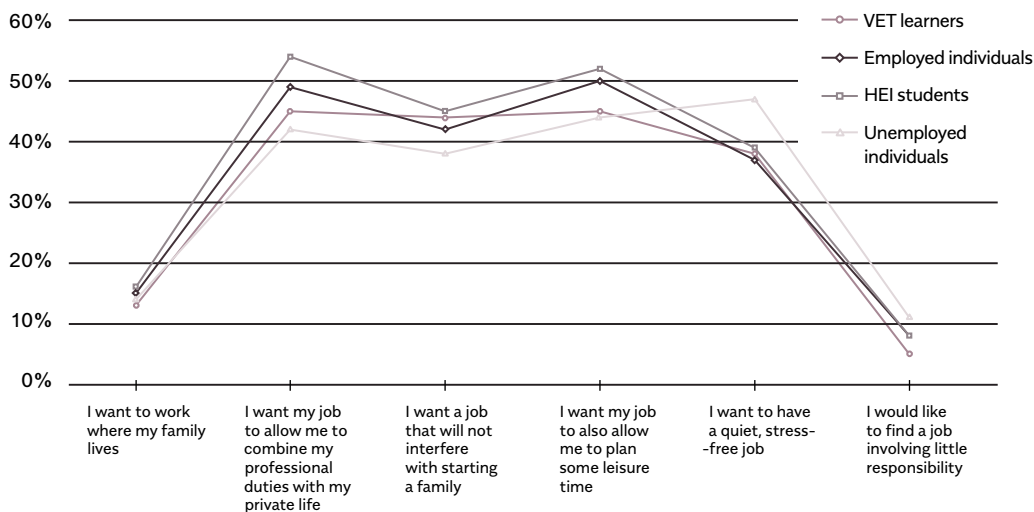
*I have worked in increasingly better and more prestigious hotels, so my CV looks very attractive now, much better than if I had graduated from general upper secondary school. I think I did well. In my school there were many professionals who taught us well and provided us with decent knowledge.*

*Not every hairdresser has to be employed in a hair salon. You have to fight, create, be an artist and have your vision. You can open your own salon, work at photo sessions or for TV. One hairdresser does not have to do the same thing as the next one. You do not need to know everything and be an expert in every field. Some people are good at styling, so they can work at photo sessions or on film sets. Others are better at cutting hair, so they can create stylisations and show them on social media. You do not have to be an anonymous hairdresser – you can be a real artist.*

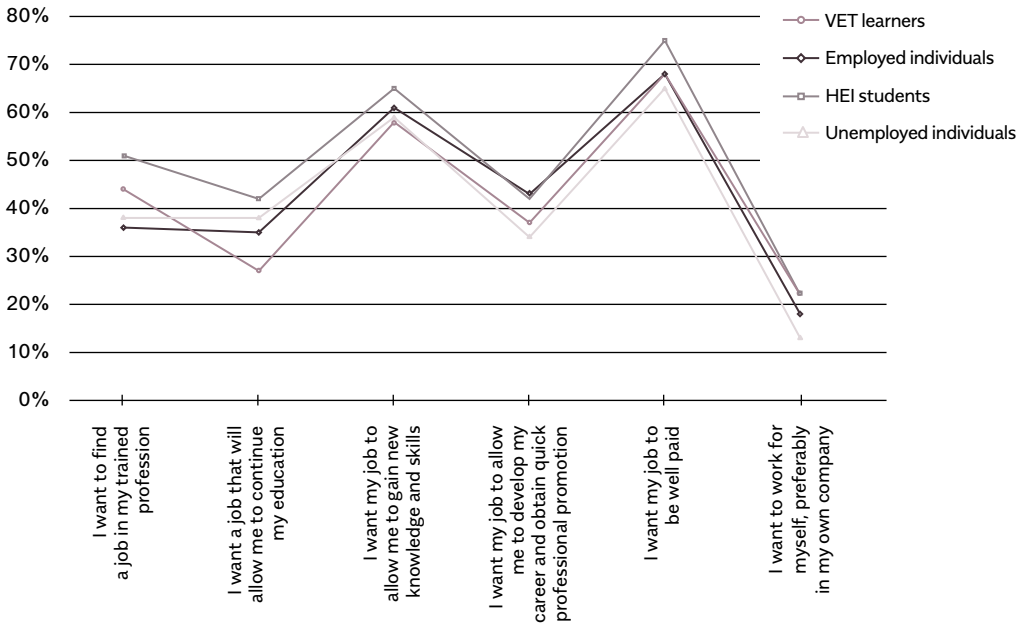
### Expectations regarding conditions of employment at various stages of professional life (N = 2,424)



### The issue of work-life balance at various stages of professional life (N = 2,424)



**The issue of development opportunities and continuing education at various stages of professional life. A summary of answers to the question: 'Which of the following issues seem most important to you when looking for a job?' (N = 2,424)**



The respondents' professional ambitions were often accompanied by ambitious plans for acquiring new knowledge, not only in the professional realm, but also in private life. Some of the interviewees emphasised that they would not take up a job which would not give them the opportunity to improve their professional competences. Therefore, for them an important aspect of offers from potential employers was the opportunity to learn, among others through training.

*I do not like to stand still. I want to develop, get to know new things. People learn throughout their lives, and I just cannot imagine my life without learning. Work alone does not give me as much joy as the prospect of work with training.*

In this context, it was also pointed out that the offer of foreign internships was in many cases the decisive factor in choosing a particular educational institution. Most of the respondents were looking for a school that would allow them to acquire specific skills, resulting directly from their chosen path of professional development.

*I was looking for a school which would give me an opportunity to find a job and do something with my life. When I learned that one of them offered foreign internships it convinced me to choose this school. Having the opportunity to go abroad was one of my goals.*

The surveyed graduates of technical upper secondary schools explained that they decided to take up vocational school training first and foremost due to the possibility of obtaining both a secondary education certificate (Polish: *matura*) and a diploma confirming vocational qualifications. The prospect of graduating from a general upper secondary school (especially in the case of ending education after this stage) was often perceived as a waste of time, mainly due to the inability to develop specific professional competences, and thus the lack of clear prospects for finding a satisfying and well-paid job.

*I always had a rational approach to life. I knew that after a general upper secondary school I would have to go to university without gaining any professional experience. So I decided that a technical upper secondary school is a better solution. I preferred a school that could guide me towards an occupation.*

*I could choose either a general upper secondary school or a vocational upper secondary school. After a technical upper secondary school, you can go to university, and if you do not want to continue your education, you have already learned your trade. I decided this was the best solution.*

*I did not want to go to a general upper secondary school, that's why I chose a technical upper secondary school. I felt that learning in a general upper secondary school could prove to be too difficult, and additionally it does not guarantee a trade occupation.*

It is worth adding that for many participants of the questionnaire, taking up a vocational school was a conscious, pragmatic decision based on the desire to acquire specific skills. Respondents pointed out that the obligation to undergo traineeships as part of vocational education means that students quickly gain experience necessary in the labour market. What's more, reckonable years of service (calculated including traineeships) allow them to get promoted faster after obtaining employment.

*My decision was well thought out. I know that many students choose a general upper secondary school because they don't have specific plans for the future. After finishing school, such people often still do not know what they want to do. I decided that I would not make this mistake.*

*I wanted to gain practical skills. General upper secondary school involves only theory, while in a technical upper secondary school there is a traineeship involved, which allows you to see what real work looks like. My siblings also went to a technical upper secondary school, because our parents encouraged us to do so. After this type of school, you gain a profession, while completing general upper secondary school only offers the opportunity of further study, so if someone does not want to take that route, then there are no other prospects at the end of it.*

*I decided to choose a technical upper secondary school, after which I can progress to a higher education institution, rather than to waste three years in a general upper secondary school. This way I will obtain both a secondary education certificate and a vocational qualification.*

*Some of my friends regretted that they chose a general upper secondary school instead of a vocational school, after which they would also have been able to study. And if they did not continue their education, they would still have a learned profession.*

Some respondents emphasised the fact that learning at a technical upper secondary school offers a wide range of choices pertaining to their career path. This type of school combines the advantages of a general upper secondary school (Polish: *liceum*) and a vocational school, as it represents the convergence of general education and practical training. It offers secondary education qualifications attested by a secondary education certificate and specific occupational skills confirmed by a vocational qualifications examination. Such a choice gives students considerable flexibility, as in the event of resignation from continuing education it does not leave them in the labour market without any qualifications (which is a scenario which can potentially occur after a general upper secondary school) and does not close the path to study without completing additional education (which is a scenario which can potentially occur after a vocational school).

*In lower secondary school I was a good student, although not always a systematic one. I graduated lower secondary school with distinction and everyone told me to apply to a general upper secondary school or to a technical upper secondary school. I chose the second option, because I decided that I wanted to obtain a trade qualification. I was fascinated with the work of my father, who is a mechanic in a large company that manufactures cars. The school I chose operated under the patronage of this company. My father told me that if I studied hard, I would get a good job, which is very important nowadays.*

According to the opinions of the former trainees, an additional advantage of technical upper secondary schools is the possibility to postpone the decision to continue studies in higher education institutions. Before deciding on the field



of study they would like to pursue as part of tertiary education, graduates of technical schools can start professional activity directly upon the completion of secondary education thanks to the vocational qualifications they have acquired. Work experience obtained this way significantly improves their standing in the labour market. In the opinion of many participants of the research, the prospect of graduating from a general upper secondary school (especially in the case of ending education after this stage) was often perceived as a waste of time, mainly due to the inability to develop specific professional competences, and thus reducing their chances of finding a satisfying and well-paid job. Many respondents already had crystallised expectations, not only concerning the choice of school profile, but also their future professional activity, in the course of their learning. These often resulted from their interests (a dream job a given student always wanted to do), local characteristics (prevailing industry in a given region or the location of a large plant in the vicinity of their place of residence), and family traditions (intention to work in the family business or in the profession in which their parents work).

*I chose the profession thanks to my mother. She is a hairdresser and I could not imagine doing any other work.*

*I wanted to continue my education in a general upper secondary school, but that year there were no available specialised subject modules, which I had planned on choosing. That's why I went to the Secondary School of Hotel Administration and fulfilled the wishes of my mother, who wanted me to study there.*

*I work in accounting. During the summer, I worked with my mother at her office, performing typical duties relating to accountancy, and now I analyse data, prepare reports and look for the best solutions. I have learned a lot and I am positive that I would like to continue to do this until the end of my studies, the more so because it is a job that allows me to develop and does not interfere with my studies.*

### **Continuing education**

In justifying the choice of the technical upper secondary school, respondents emphasised that it offered them the widest range of options for choosing their further educational and professional path. In contrast to a general upper secondary school, the completion of a technical upper secondary school entails the student taking a vocational qualifications examination confirming the acquisition of specific occupational skills. This means that upon leaving the

confines of the school graduates are prepared to start working in the profession they have been trained in, and any decisions on continuing education should be considered as voluntary rather than obligatory. Participants of the interviews often stressed that although a university diploma is an important and attractive document in the eyes of employers, the mere fact of completing higher education studies does not necessarily mean that graduates possess skills which are required on the labour market.

The situation in which most graduates leave secondary vocational schools with specific knowledge and skills means, in their own opinion, that continuing studies at university does not condition their career in the labour market, although such opinions may also testify to the debasement of higher education. However, the results of the questionnaire survey showed that over a quarter of the respondents were students or graduates of higher education institutions, and 68 percent of them are pursuing an academic career or plan to start one.

After graduating from a technical upper secondary school, some respondents decided to continue their education or have plans in this area. Such a decision was dictated most often by the desire to continue an educational path chosen in school or to modify this path in a specific area.

*I am undertaking a dual study programme. It is a combination of studying and doing an internship in a company. The subject of my study differs from the professional profile of the school which I graduated from. Earlier, I wanted to study mechatronics, but after the professional exam I found that this was not what I was after. I therefore chose mechanics and the construction of machines.*

It should also be noted that the progression to higher education institutions was also largely dependent on the training sector of the teaching facilities that respondents attended. While in some areas of vocational education the higher education institution is a natural continuation of the educational path and completion of higher education is a frequent requirement posed by employers, there are several industries in which possession of a professional title is sufficient to achieve success in the labour market. It should be noted that a significant amount of study participants (over 50 percent) combine studies at higher education institutions or other courses with work. Most interviewees who continue their education at higher education institutions confirmed that they are part-time students because it is the most convenient form of education that allows simultaneous studies and professional work.

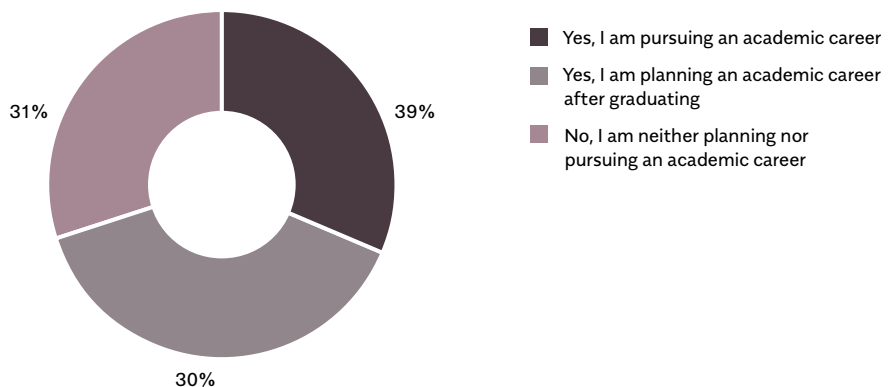
Among the reasons (other than financial ones) to take up work in parallel with studies at a higher education institution, respondents mentioned both the desire to broaden the knowledge base and skills acquired at the initial vocational education

stage and the willingness to test and use the acquired skills in practice. A significant proportion of respondents also declared that they work in their profession, although this does not mean that for all those surveyed their current work is a natural consequence of their chosen career path. Some of the respondents treat their current employment as a transitional stage on the way to a dream job, or an obligation resulting from the necessity to be self-sufficient or support family members.

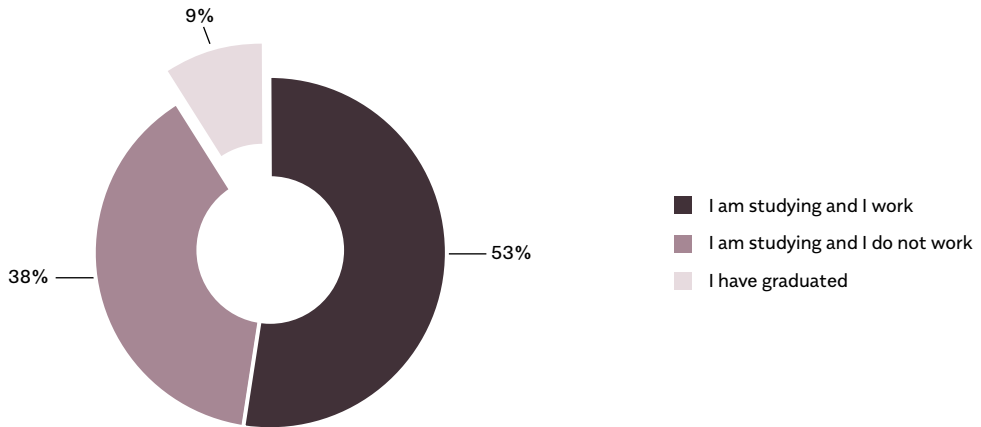
A number of the respondents declared that the continuation of education resulted from the desire to pursue a passion which was born at the stage of vocational training in secondary schools. It seems that while the choice of vocational upper secondary school was dictated by rationally weighing up the pros and cons of such a move (e.g. employment opportunities), the desire to pursue a particular field of study in a higher education institution resulted from real professional interests. The convergence of the field of study with the vocational qualifications obtained at school was also confirmed by the results of the survey. More than half of the respondents who at the time of the study were continuing their education at higher education institutions confirmed that their chosen field of study is related to the profession they learned at school. The results also showed that there are no significant differences in this scope between people who study and work at the same time, and those who do not combine studies with work.

### **Respondents' plans for pursuing an academic career (question directed to the students and graduates of higher education institutions, N = 672)**

Are you pursuing or planning a further academic career?



## Combining studies with professional work (N = 607)



Every fifth questionnaire respondent confirmed that the experience of a foreign internship had a significant influence on the choice of their field of study. At the same time, the analysis of data obtained from the interviews suggests that the experience of learning mobility had a major impact on the decision taken by the former interns to continue their vocational training by progressing to a higher education institution. Mobility was an important factor in shaping a conscious approach to developing professional skills. This also relates to situations in which trainees changed their area of education. In such cases, the experience of working abroad has helped them to make the often-difficult decision to change their profession.

*I think that we have more opportunities to find and keep a job after graduating from a technical upper secondary school. I am in the third year of studies related to construction. It is exactly what I was hoping for: first I studied landscape architecture at a construction and building trade school, and now construction at university. At some point I would also like to gain some knowledge related to interior design.*

*I just finished school and applied to the faculty of energy at a university of technical sciences. I do not know if I will be admitted, but I would like to continue my education in my learned profession, that's why I am participating in the training offered by the Technical Inspection Office (Polish: Urząd Dozoru Technicznego), after which I will start a three-month internship as a fitter of solar panels.*

It is worth noting that none of the respondents declared that further education results from the desire to obtain an academic title. It can be assumed that having a professional title is enough for some of them, and their thinking is not related to a clearly defined academic path (which is characteristic of general school graduates).

According to the statements of participants of the survey, interruptions of study at a higher education institution were most often caused by the inability to fit their work around the schedule of classes. Some of the respondents declared that work and the opportunity to gain practical experience turned out to be decidedly more important than studies. In many cases, the decision to temporarily suspend studies was caused by the need to maintain a source of income. It is worth adding, however, that many respondents declared that they intend to return to the higher education institution.

*I am very glad that I postponed my studies. In effect, I already have considerable experience in the profession.*

*I do not work professionally. I intend to continue my education. I would like to study IT at the University of Wrocław.*

*I studied at a university of technical sciences, but I was surprised by the course of study and the timetable. I quit because I work in my profession at the same time. In October, I will return to studying, but at another university.*

*I studied electrical engineering, but university interfered with my work to the point that, unfortunately, after a year I was forced to quit my studies. This year, however, I plan to return to a different course related to the construction of machines.*

### **Domestic and foreign migrations**

While analysing the declared professional expectations of the survey respondents, it can be observed that migration issues were much less important for them than remuneration and terms of employment. Less than 15 percent of former internship and traineeship participants confirmed that they would like to work in the town or city where their family lives, while working close to their place of residence was important only to every third respondent. However, these declarations do not necessarily mean that the participants of the study have a willingness to change their place of residence in connection with taking up work or studies.

The analysis of the results collected during the questionnaire study did not reveal any noticeable trends related to the national migration of professionally

active school leavers. Differences between the place of residence of trainees during school and their current place of residence do not exceed one percentage point in the majority of voivodships (the exception is the Świętokrzyskie voivodship, where the difference in the indications was over 1.2 percent).

Slightly greater dynamics of change of place of residence can be observed in the case of participants who decided to continue education at a higher education institution, although it should be added that in the case of the majority of voivodships the differences in respondents' indications also did not exceed 1 percent. The largest changes concerned the following voivodships: Małopolskie, Dolnośląskie, Wielkopolskie and Mazowieckie, which results from the prestige of the higher education institutions in those regions and the diversification of the education offer.

*I come from Rzeszów, I live in Wrocław, and I study in Cracow. I could not find the field of study which interests me in my hometown.*

*I started with an internship in a company, it was my first job. In order to get it, I had to move to Gdańsk.*

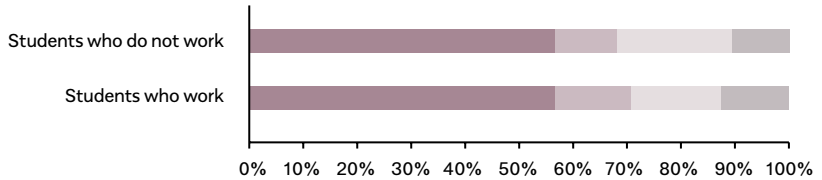
The collected data confirm that vocational school graduates do not show a tendency to migrate between regions of Poland, nor do they move en masse to larger urban centres. More than half of the respondents currently live in rural areas or in towns with fewer than 100,000 inhabitants, and four out of ten respondents indicated their current place of residence as a small town, village or rural area (a town with fewer than 3,000 inhabitants).

The results of the survey show that observed migration trends concern not only working people, but also students continuing their education in higher education institutions. More than 36 percent of the respondents from this group live in rural areas, and only every third respondent indicated a city of over 100,000 inhabitants as a place of residence. This means that the majority of students did not move to cities and are commuting to attend classes (undertaken by some of them in part-time mode), continuing their studies at higher education institutions in smaller towns or in cities situated within the boundaries of their voivodship.

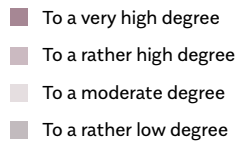
Although over 70 percent of professionally active respondents confirmed that foreign internships and traineeships significantly increase their chance of finding employment in another country, it should be emphasised that the vast majority of former participants of mobility permanently live in Poland, and less than 7 percent of the respondents stay permanently or temporarily abroad. The study showed that even people who have work experience in other countries do not

## Compatibility of the field of study with vocational qualifications acquired at school (N = 607)

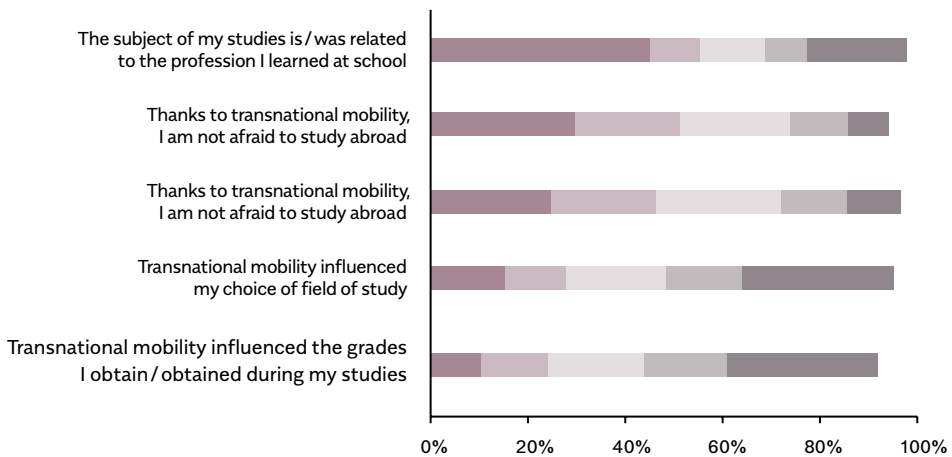
Is your field of study compatible with the vocational qualification you obtained at school?



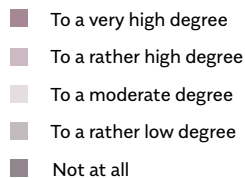
The percentage of respondents who agreed with each statement:



## Mobility in the context of continuing education in a higher education institution (N = 679)



The percentage of respondents who agreed with each statement:



show a readiness to leave Poland to seek employment. Less than 15 percent of respondents declared that they would like to work abroad. This is half the number of people who would like to obtain employment in Poland (in total over one-third of all survey participants).

Some participants of the study mentioned that they received job offers from companies which had hosted their internships. There were instances where potential employers indicated that they wanted to offer a position to the interns after they completed their studies, which motivated them to continue their education.

*A representative of the company where I served my internship told me that if I am looking for a job after completing my studies, I should forward them my CV, as there is a high probability that I would be accepted.*

*We kept in touch with our foreign internship coordinator, who said that if we were ever in the area, or looking for a job, we could always visit him.*

*The owner of the salon wanted to offer me a permanent position, but I refused because I wanted to work in my mother's salon. If my mother was not a hairdresser, there is a possibility that I would be working abroad now.*

According to some of the respondents, foreign mobility had a positive impact on their decision to start working abroad, mainly by allowing them to overcome the language barrier. It is worth emphasising, however, that for the respondents attaining work abroad was not a goal in its own right, but more a result of the lack of professional prospects in Poland. Those of the respondents who are satisfied with their current job in the country would definitely not want to go abroad for the purpose of generating income.

*I am twenty-three years old and a lot has happened in my life in the last five years. Last year I went to Germany and participation in transnational mobility helped me to make some important decisions. In order to work in another country, it is important to learn about its language and culture. The foreign internship was a good training ground and it allowed me to overcome many barriers.*

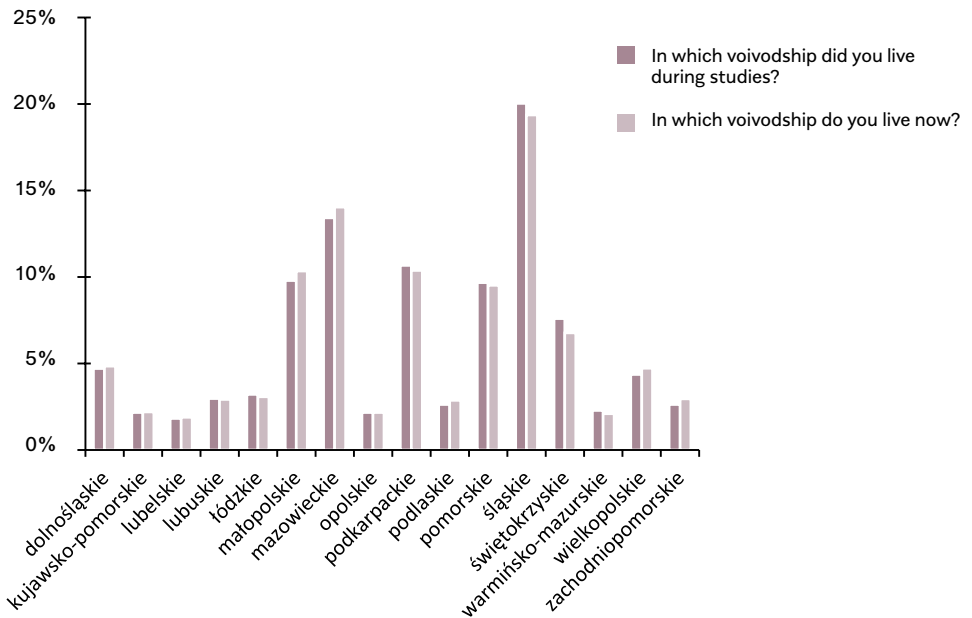
*I worked in the Czech Republic for a while. I think that due to the time I have spent there I am not afraid of working abroad.*

*My current job facilitates a decent life in Poland and I do not feel the need to move abroad.*

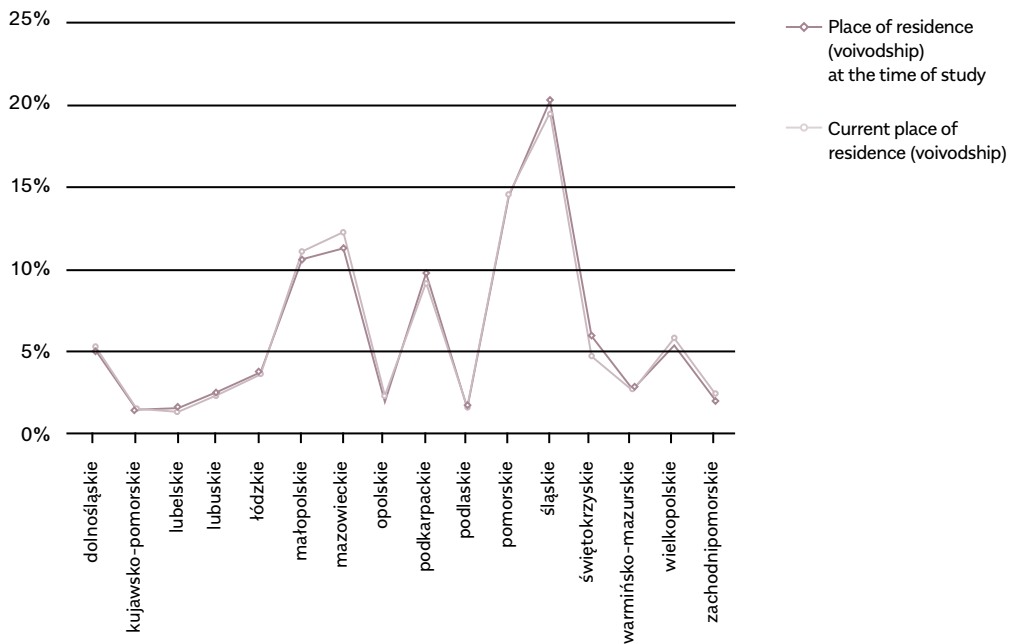


Based on the data obtained from the questionnaire, it is difficult to state clearly whether the mobility experience was the decisive factor that had a direct impact on the choice of country of permanent or temporary residence. In the vast majority of instances, the selected countries are not only frequent places of internships and apprenticeships, but also very popular destinations when it comes to the migration trends of Polish citizens. Nearly two-thirds of the declared foreign places of permanent or temporary residence concerned a stay in Germany, and almost a third of them – in Great Britain. There were less frequent mentions of countries such as the Netherlands, Portugal or Spain.

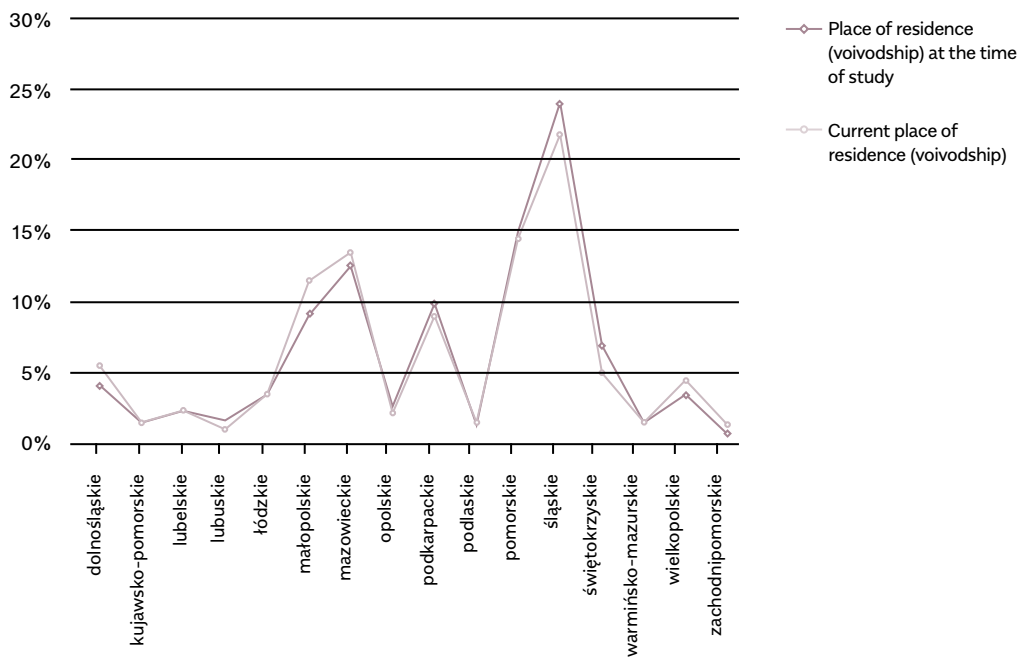
**Domestic migrations of former mobility participants between Polish regions (voivodships) – upper secondary school graduates (N = 2,542)**



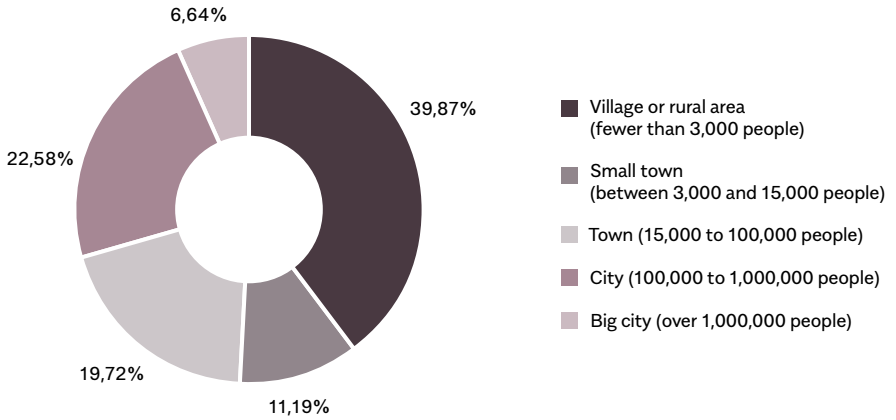
### Domestic migrations of professionally active former mobility participants (N = 1,047)



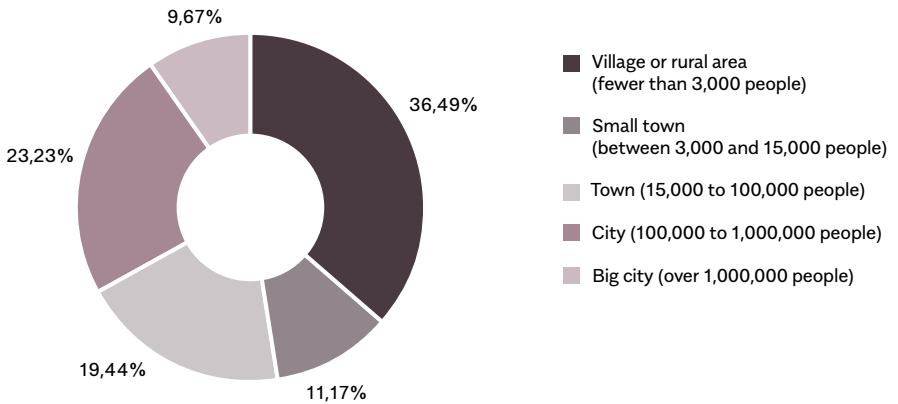
### Domestic migrations of former mobility participants – students (N = 607)



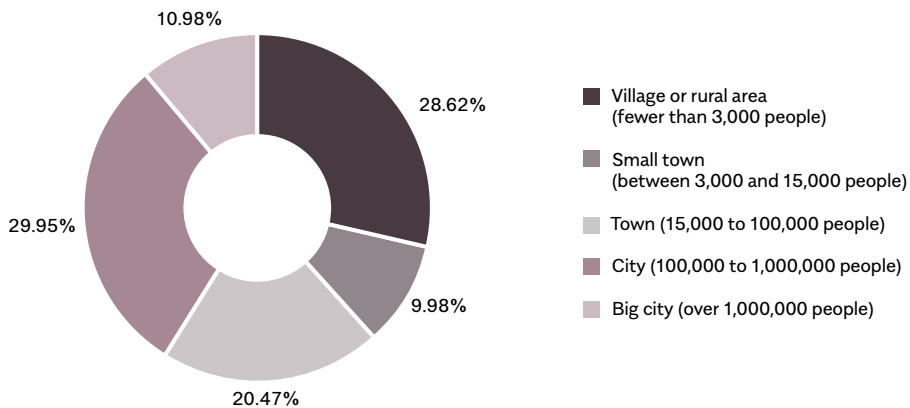
**The size of the current place of residence of the mobility participants (N = 2,542)**



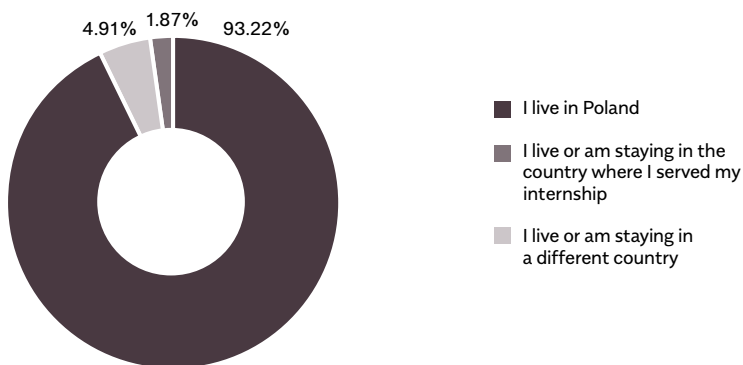
**Current place of residence of respondents active in the labour market (N = 1,047)**



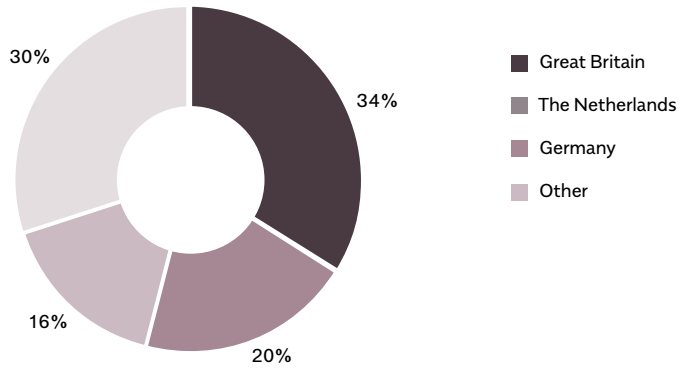
**Current place of residence of respondents who study at a higher education institution (N = 607)**



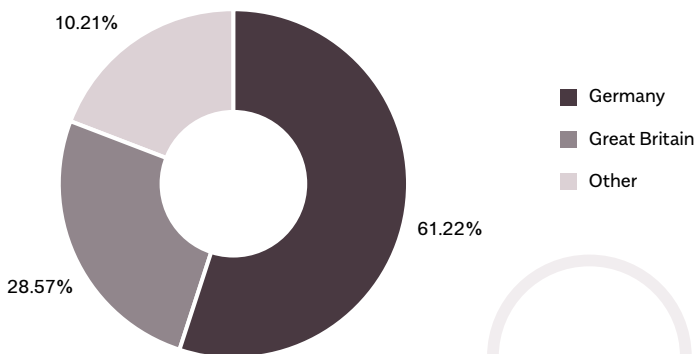
**Foreign migrations. Current place of residence of former mobility participants (N = 2596)**



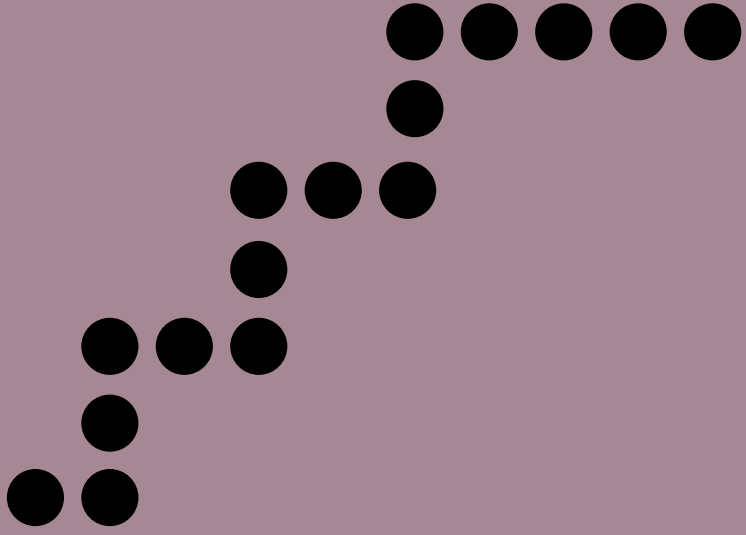
**Migration target countries, other than the country where the mobility was implemented  
(N = 129)**



**Country of permanent or temporary residence (if the same where the internship was carried out, N = 49)**



# Conclusions and recommendations



1 Students tend to choose vocational schools which offer traineeships and internships abroad. The responders declared that the prospect of practical training abroad was a factor affecting their selection of school, although it should be noted that not all the interviewees were aware that a given school offered such opportunities. Thus, it is well worth disseminating the outcomes of learning mobility projects among wider audiences and presenting the results of traineeships also during meetings with prospective students and during open doors at schools. It turns out that an offer of traineeships and internships abroad attracts prospective students to a given school, and the implementation of transnational mobility projects enhances the prestige and standing of an institution in the local education market.

2 Many former trainees had planned their education and career paths already at the stage of selecting a school, and the training abroad was just an element of a larger career plan. However, based on the study results, it is difficult to say if such an approach is characteristic for all vocational school graduates or only for the specific group of former trainees. Many learning mobility participants mentioned that their participation in these projects was a result of a recruitment process (a multi-stage one), whose aim was to select talented, ambitious and best-performing students. However, it should be remembered that for this group of students training may only be an episode in their education and should not necessarily be treated as a precondition for a successful professional career. Therefore, during the recruitment for participation in training it is worth making sure that the selection for internships and traineeships abroad is not only a reward for the best students, as transnational mobility could be of help for weaker and less able ones as well, including those at risk of social exclusion.

3 In the opinion of the former trainees and interns, participation in mobility abroad decidedly enhances their professional experience. More than 75 percent of them confirmed that the training allowed them to become acquainted with work systems and contexts different from the ones observed in Poland. At the same time, more than 25 percent of school graduates would recommend this form of training to individuals entering the labour market. Some of the respondents admitted that the experience of working abroad contributed to their finding employment upon graduation. Such opinions prove that international professional mobility is needed and should be present in the teaching offer of as many Polish schools as possible. However, survey participants often stressed that the quality of traineeships and internships abroad mainly depends on the programme prepared by Polish institutions. Therefore, it is worth making a thorough analysis of students' actual training needs before embarking on a specific mobility organisation model.

# 4

The vast majority of the respondents who have not yet graduated perceive learning mobility as an important element of their training, which goes beyond formal education and at the same time provides them with a taste of adult responsibilities coupled with an opportunity to test themselves in the world of work. The majority of respondents emphasised the fact that participation in a mobility project challenged their views and attitudes, and significantly contributed to the development of soft competences. More than 50 percent of the respondents admitted that thanks to their stay abroad they learned to cope with stress and to find solutions in difficult and unusual situations. In particular, the training contributed to the development of interpersonal skills and those related to team-work and work in an international environment. Planning trainees' stay abroad, it should be ensured that they are given some space to act on their own. Many study participants praised the training model which provided not only for their work in companies, but also required independence from them (e.g. the need to cater for themselves and commute to work).

# 5

Another important factor affecting the quality of training is the selection of the appropriate host institution, which is best suited to the needs of training participants. Study participants often stressed the fact that group training in a single institution hindered interactions with the local work environment. Individual training served with various employers provided opportunities to become acquainted with the specifics of the local labour market, different cultural contexts and the mentality of the residents of a given country. It also involved working under the supervision of a foreign mentor, and in the opinion of the former trainees it was the mentor on whom the quality of practical training abroad depended. It should be added that work in enterprises was also conducive to establishing contacts, which could turn into lasting friendships (although these are relatively rare).

# 6

In the opinion of former trainees, participation in traineeships and internships not only results in improved language skills, but also serves as an excellent opportunity to overcome the language barrier. In many cases, the training was an impulse to continue learning a given language and even to take up employment with international employers. Survey respondents often stressed the fact that language courses offered in Poland played a pivotal role in the process of preparing for mobility. Taking this into account, schools should carefully plan contents of language classes and pay particular attention to lexis, which should include both vocabulary related to every-day life and professional jargon. It is necessary to agree beforehand with partners abroad in what language the instructions will be given during training and to provide thorough language training to students in order to avoid communication problems and unnecessary stress for mobility participants.



# 7

Due to the fact that foreign mobility formed part of a longer training period for the majority of the respondents, upon their return from abroad students often underwent training with Polish employers. Most respondents noticed significant differences between practical training in Poland and abroad. During the latter, trainees were impressed by infrastructure, availability of equipment and mentor care, and most of all the opportunities to perform more interesting tasks. For some of them, the lack of cohesion between the contents of training at home and abroad was problematic. Therefore, mobility projects should form part of a broader strategy to ensure a high quality of training served by the students during their time at school, as well as to provide them with opportunities to learn the context of work in a given occupation or profession and to become acquainted with the realities of international and domestic labour markets. In this context, it seems necessary to establish closer cooperation with local entrepreneurs.

# 8

Traineeships and internships abroad often confirm the validity of students' decisions concerning the selection of their educational and career path. More than 75 percent of graduates active in the labour market confirmed that there was a link between their current job and the industry in which their traineeship was served, and over 50 percent of the students declared that their pursued field of study is linked with the training in a given occupation they underwent at school. Individuals whose work or education were not related with school education also stressed that it was the experience of the traineeship abroad that helped them make (sometimes a tough) decision to change their profession. This means that schools can apply professional mobility abroad as an element of career guidance forming part of a broader strategy for qualitative planning of students' careers and further steps of education.

# 9

Although many study participants drew attention to the fact that practical skills were more important to them than university qualifications, it should be underlined that more than 25 percent of them were students or completed higher education programmes. What is more, more than two-thirds of this group continue or intend to continue their careers in academia. The vast majority of vocational school graduates who participated in the study combine study and work, many of them in line with their education, which is a consequence of the previous selection of the school (graduates of upper secondary technical schools are awarded secondary school leaving certificate [*matura*] as well as an occupational qualification). When developing the programme and contents of traineeships and internships abroad, students' plans concerning their education should be considered in order to make sure that practical training involves the acquisition of competences that are useful in their further learning.

# 10

More than 75 percent of professionally active respondents confirmed that internships and traineeships abroad significantly helped young people to look for a job in another country. Those who were trained abroad more willingly declare readiness to go abroad to find employment in another country, although only one respondent in six said that they would definitely do this. It should also be stressed that the vast majority of the respondents live in Poland and only less than 7 percent of them live abroad or are staying there temporarily. This means that learning mobility does not have a significant impact on migration decisions, which in general result from a lack of job prospects in Poland.

# 11

To many study participants, the possibility of having the participation in international internships and traineeships formally recognised proved very important. More than 75 percent of the respondents reported that diplomas and certificates issued by their employers had been useful when looking for a job. They stressed, however, that such documents were more useful when searching for employment abroad than in Poland. That is why it is necessary to ensure their larger visibility also among employers at home. This applies in particular to the Europass Mobility certificate, which in the opinion of study participants is a valuable tool for confirming knowledge and skills acquired during training served in various European countries. It seems, however, that it does not enjoy sufficient recognition in the labour market in Poland, as respondents more frequently related to it in the context of seeking employment abroad.



Home

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