



CROSS-BORDER LONG-TERM APPRENTICE MOBILITY



Making it work: suggestions
for national policy-makers

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LONG-TERM
APPRENTICE MOBILITY
MAKING IT WORK:
SUGGESTIONS FOR NATIONAL
POLICY-MAKERS**

AIMING HIGH

1

APPRENTICESHIPS

Apprenticeships based on strong partnerships can bring benefits to the training and employability of young people, to company workforce skills, and to society as a whole. VET learner mobility (short-, as well as long-term) has proven to improve the employability of all VET students, including apprentices.

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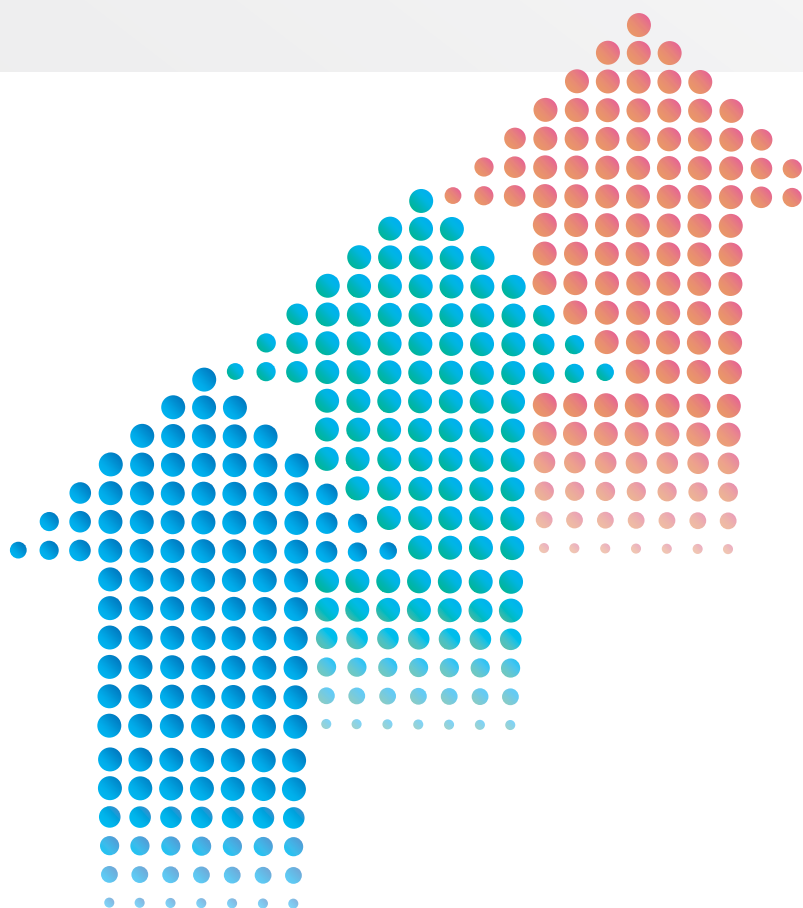
MOBILITY

Cross-border long-term apprentice mobility (CBLTMA), lasting more than six months, can be an excellent opportunity for companies and apprentices. It should be considered as a medium- to long-term VET policy priority. But making it happen is not easy, especially given that the pandemic has severely hindered people's mobility.

3

GUIDING PAPER

This guiding paper invites policy-makers at national level to reflect on the challenges that hinder CBLMA today and proposes suggestions to overcome them in the short-, medium- and long-term.



**POLICY
BACKGROUND**



- Apprenticeships have been a central aspect of European education and training policies in the past 15 years, from the [Bruges communiqué \(2010\)](#) to the [Osnabrück declaration \(2020\)](#) and the [2020 Council VET recommendation](#).
- EU-level policies related to high-quality VET and apprenticeships include measures to stimulate cross-border mobility of learners.
- The [2016 Commission communication Investing in Europe's youth](#) launched the [ErasmusPro](#) programme to increase long-term mobility abroad (from 6 to 12 months) among VET learners, including apprentices or recent graduates.
- A CBLTMA pilot project was sponsored by the European Parliament with a budget of EUR 4 million.
- Some Member States (such as France and Denmark) support apprentice mobility with national funding, in addition to initiatives by large companies.
- The [European Parliament resolution of 17 December 2020 on the Council recommendation on vocational education and training \(VET\)](#) ‘calls on the Commission to expand worthwhile mobility programmes for apprentices [...]; underlines that increased mobility opportunities can help to expand apprentices’ personal, educational and professional networks and make VET more attractive, rather than it being perceived as a second choice, and unlock the mobility potential of VET’.

BOX 1

**WHAT DOES
'CROSS-BORDER
LONG-TERM MOBILITY
OF APPRENTICES'
MEAN?**



CROSS-BORDER:

the learner spends time in another country, within the EU or beyond the EU, as part of an apprenticeship.

LONG-TERM MOBILITY:

the period spent abroad should have a duration of minimum six months, and typically lasts up to 12 months.

APPRENTICESHIPS:

are recognised as a specific form of vocational education and training that consists of systematically alternating periods at the workplace and in an education and training institution. The apprentice is contractually linked to the employer and receives compensation (wage or allowance). The employer assumes responsibility for providing the apprentice with training leading to a specific occupation. Apprentices should have the status of ‘apprentice’, as defined in his or her home country. During the placement abroad s/he should ideally have a similar status.

Source: definitions as per Cedefop study (Box 2).

THE PROBLEM



- CBLTMA is still limited, despite generous European investment.
- Data and comparative research on apprentice mobility are scarce and data limitations make it difficult to assess the potential policy demand for CBLTMA across Europe (see Box 3, p.18).
- Preliminary evidence on overall VET mobility suggests that the majority of mobile VET learners are students in school-based VET or apprentice graduates, not current apprentices.
- In the Erasmus+ programme, VET learner mobility, including that of apprentices, is typically short-term (two weeks up to three months), while mobilities lasting more than three months are an exception. Originally the duration of long-term mobility was set at six months.
- Employers are generally supportive of young people looking to learn and train abroad in the context of EU-funded programmes in the form of a traineeship and of short-term duration: three quarters of VET learners going abroad with the [Erasmus+ programme](#) took part in a company-based learning experience in the form of a traineeship.
- Getting employers involved in CBLTMA (either to receive apprentices from abroad or send apprentices abroad) is not that evident. Its uptake is hindered by factors that are inherent to the characteristics of apprenticeships and, in particular, the nature of the relationship between the apprentice and the employer.

BOX 2

CEDEFOP STUDY ON CROSS-BORDER LONG-TERM MOBILITY IN APPRENTICESHIPS



OBJECTIVES

To better understand what hinders the implementation of CBLTMA, Cedefop carried out a research study on the topic from December 2019 to October 2020. The objective was to examine the state of play of CBLTMA (both outgoing and incoming) in the EU, identify challenges and obstacles to its take-up, and discuss the necessary conditions and actions potentially favouring its implementation.

METHODOLOGY

In-depth research was carried out in six Member States (AT, DK, FR, IE, NL) and on three project case studies ([Apprentices in motion](#), [EuroApp](#) and [Travel to farm](#)); these helped to highlight common obstacles and identify good practices, and potential actions to make CBLTMA a reality in the EU. Discussions were held with EU social partners in three sectoral focus groups (agriculture, construction, tourism) and one cross-sectoral, to understand the degree and nature of their involvement with CBLTMA policies and how it could be further enhanced.

FINDINGS

While the study findings partly reflect the impact of the pandemic on people's mobility, they account for structural constraints, report on past experiences and try to elaborate guidelines and suggestions within a medium- to long-term perspective. This paper is based on the study findings. The full findings will be published later in 2021.

Source: Cedefop.

CHALLENGE 1:

APPRENTICES ARE PART OF COMPANY MANPOWER AND EMPLOYERS ARE AFRAID OF LOSING THEM DURING/AFTER MOBILITY

ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED

CBLTMA PERCEIVED AS LOSS OF PRODUCTIVE WORK

Despite their interest in providing training to ensure the future sustainability of their trade, employers have, above all, a need for manpower, including apprentices, to ensure production. Employers usually count on apprentices being present at the workplace the whole in-company training time. CBLTMA leads to a discontinuity in this supply of manpower. As a result, employers perceive that the main disadvantage for CBLTMA is the loss of productive work. This is more challenging for micro and small enterprises. Medium and large companies, and especially multinationals, can compensate, for example through rotation schemes.

TIMING OF CBLTMA DURING APPRENTICESHIPS

Apprentices may be readier to go on mobility abroad during the more advanced years of their programme, as they are more mature and more prepared. However, employers may be more reluctant to let go apprentices who have become well-established employees, making valued contributions to the organisation (and bringing greater return on investment for the company). SMEs already struggle with releasing apprentices for off-the-job training, especially towards the latter stage of the programme, for the same reasons.

RISK/FEAR OF POACHING

Apprentices participating in outward, long-term mobility may not return to the sending firm or might be poached by competitive employers abroad, as all employers seek to attract and retain talent in companies. Employers see outward mobility as a risk of losing their investment in apprentices.

RISK/FEAR OF BRAIN AND LABOUR FORCE DRAIN

CBLTMA could exacerbate a sense of competition among countries with different wage levels/living conditions. Apprentices might wish to leave and stay abroad because they can be better paid there. This fuels companies' concerns of brain and labour force drain. Employers are even more eager to keep their apprentices in the company when there are already identified skill shortages in the country and labour markets are tight. This might also weaken the political interest in and motivation to support CBLTMA among social partners or State authorities in sending countries where wages are lower.

EMPLOYERS' RESPONSIBILITY FOR APPRENTICE TRAINING WHEN ABROAD

Employers may fear not having enough information about what the apprentice will learn in a company abroad. This becomes a more serious issue if companies are formally responsible for the apprentice's learning outcomes, but they are not able to oversee what happens abroad.

TIPS FOR POLICY-MAKING



SHORT-TERM

- 01** Organise CBLTMA across bordering regions; encourage VET institutions in these regions to have mobility coaches.
- 02** Organise CBLTMA at the end of the apprenticeship period, coupled with short-term mobility during the apprenticeship period.
- 03** Find windows for mobility that affect the production cycle less, e.g. in sectors with a high degree of seasonality (like tourism).
- 04** Compensate the employer by arranging exchanges with an ideally similarly qualified incoming apprentice.
- 05** Predefine the apprentice's training plan and related objectives during the mobility.
- 06** Identify a partner in the receiving country to oversee the apprentice training while abroad.

MEDIUM- TO LONG-TERM

- 01** Collect evidence about the long-term benefits for the sending companies from apprentice training abroad (e.g. language, new technology or processes) and then raise awareness of them.
- 02** Reinforce educational investment in apprentices, as a counterweight to fears of losing productive manpower.
- 03** Provide financial incentives to employers for the period they lose their apprentices during long-term mobility abroad.
- 04** Introduce incentives for apprentices to return to their sending company (e.g. bonus on programme completion, top-up wage if hired after graduating).

CHALLENGE 2:

EMPLOYERS (PARTICULARLY SMEs) SEE LITTLE BENEFIT FROM CBLTMA, WITH VARIATIONS ACROSS SECTORS

ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED

LIMITED EVIDENCE ON THE BENEFITS

Even large companies are reluctant to send apprentices abroad, since the benefits of both short- and long-term mobility are not evident for companies. SMEs have a general perception that CBLTMA is more beneficial to the apprentices for their own personal development than to the performance of day-to-day business operations. Companies usually find the costs of cross-border apprenticeship mobility higher than the benefits. Employers may perceive the training of an apprentice who will return home after a mobility period as a 'waste of time' from their perspective.

PREFERENCE TO HOST GRADUATES RATHER THAN CURRENT APPRENTICES

Employers tend to prefer having graduates from abroad, since they are fully qualified, and the employer is under no formal obligation to assist their learning for a specific set of learning outcomes linked to a formal qualification. The benefits from training an apprentice who might then return to his/her home country and company are less visible.

UNCLEAR EXPECTATIONS ABOUT INCOMING APPRENTICE SKILLS/CONTRIBUTION

Employers are unsure which and what level of skills they can expect of apprentices coming from other countries, as opposed to their much clearer understanding of the skill levels of apprentices in their own country, and their ability to contribute, or not, to the day-to-day running of the company.

SECTORAL VARIATION

It might be more difficult to make the case for CBLTMA in sectors where return on investment takes longer (even beyond the end of apprenticeship), such as where the occupation involves work with complex machinery and technology. Similarly, CBLTMA looks less suitable for sectors with less internationalisation, where apprenticeships are traditionally offered. Likewise, in some sectors, occupations are characterised by country specific cultural elements and values, which, in some employers' view, are difficult to learn abroad or to be linked to an international framework for qualifications and their recognition.

TIPS FOR POLICY-MAKING



SHORT-TERM

- 01** Survey companies' interest in which of the benefits of CBLTMA could matter the most to them.
- 02** Collect evidence on benefits and raise awareness, using good experiences and promoting them from peer to peer.
- 03** Focus mobility experiences on skills that are valued by sending companies, such as those that are new or not possible for apprentices to acquire at home.
- 04** Inform hosting companies of apprentice level ahead of mobility or involve them in their selection.
- 05** Pilot CBLTMA in sectors with a strong tradition in apprentice mobility or worker international mobility, relying on the support of existing structures and alliances.

MEDIUM- TO LONG-TERM

- 01** Approach the policy at a sectoral level, involving social partners to support employers and develop broad-scale, sector-specific measures and networks/alliances to implement CBLTMA.
- 02** Nest CBLTMA in a sector- or occupation-specific strategy, e.g. to relaunch and strengthen the attractiveness of the sector or occupation. Or in sectoral internationalisation strategies, to promote the 'made in country X' abroad (through outward mobility) and to get other countries' specific know-how (inward mobility).
- 03** Create cross-border multi-stakeholder alliances/networks at the sectoral level to facilitate the organisation of CBLTMA reflecting sectoral needs and specificities.
- 04** Collect evidence in a systematic way about the long-term gains of CBLTMA (e.g. increasingly diverse skills development, innovation, transfer of knowledge, improvement of the employer brand, retention and loyalty, potential to attract talents) and raise awareness of them.

CHALLENGE 3:

COMPANY SIZE MATTERS: SMALL AND MICRO COMPANIES FACE MAJOR OBSTACLES COMPARED TO MEDIUM AND LARGE ONES

ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED

LACK OF ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY AND KNOW-HOW

Dealing with the administrative aspects is a cost for companies when organising both inward and outward CBLTMA. Many challenges and issues emerge: how to deal with contracts, taxation, healthcare and social security, etc. Companies do not always have a full picture of the entire process.

This is cumbersome for medium and large companies, and even more for small and micro companies that would not have enough human resources to cover the administrative aspects. Companies are confronted with the complexity of differences in administrative procedures and regulatory frameworks among the hosting and sending countries.

The less frequent the CBLTMA in a company, the more the difficulties encountered have to be dealt on a case-by-case basis, making it problematic to streamline the process and balance the costs and benefits for companies.

LIMITED EXPOSURE TO INTERNATIONALISATION

Small and micro companies may be less exposed, as compared to medium and large firms, to doing business/ having customers abroad. Therefore, they may be in less need of learning and work experiences with other countries as a way to develop better understanding of foreign markets, diverse skills, innovation and transfer of knowledge. The lack of language skills might be more evident in companies with fewer employees, resulting in a major barrier on the company side.

DIFFICULTY INTEGRATING CBLTMA IN TRAINING STRATEGIES

Small and micro companies may not have a systematic, structured and strategic approach to training as often as medium and large companies may do. Therefore, the potential to integrate CBLTMA in company training strategies is lower in small and micro companies. It is also likely that SMEs would have limited capacity to train apprentices from abroad who may have additional training and support needs.

TIPS FOR POLICY-MAKING



SHORT-TERM

- 01** Increase capacity and involvement of VET institutions to ease the burden of participating companies.
- 02** Provide clear guidance to both companies and VET institutions on how to support and implement CBLTMA in the context of both outgoing and incoming apprentices (including checklists, guidelines, tips).
- 03** Improve the offer of language training to develop and strengthen managers' and tutors' language skills.

MEDIUM- TO LONG-TERM

- 01** Set up organisations or agencies that take care of organisational and practical aspects (e.g. accommodation, social security and residence permits) and match apprentices with companies.
- 02** Train and deploy mobility coaches (from mobility institutions, VET providers or employer associations) that work with companies to help them engage in mobility with lower administrative cost.
- 03** Build (sectoral) cross-border SME networks that allow rotation schemes, so that a sending company can become a receiving one too.



CHALLENGE 4:

LITTLE APPETITE AMONG APPRENTICES

ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED

AGE OF APPRENTICES

Being too young or too old may both hinder mobility. Young students (such as age 14 or 15) are usually not ready to leave their families and live abroad in unfamiliar conditions for a long period; their parents are hesitant to let them go abroad. Organising mobility for young adults (age 18 and above) greatly alleviates administrative problems but older students might have other responsibilities (including family), which can block long-term mobility.

POOR KNOWLEDGE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Apprentices often have poor foreign language skills (also compared to students in school-based VET), a problem that may be related to teaching of foreign languages in lower-secondary schools.

PREFERENCE TO COMPLETE TRAINING, GET A JOB AND NOT LOSE EARNINGS

For some apprentices, parents may be averse to their child engaging in CBLTMA before having completed their training and being fully qualified in the trade for which they are preparing.

Many apprentices may not want to leave on long-term mobility, or they would prefer short-term mobility, for fear of losing the employment they have in their home country while they are abroad for a long time. An apprentice may be reluctant to go on mobility in countries with lower remuneration without compensation for the loss of earnings or non-monetary benefits. Moreover, the socioeconomic background of apprentices influences their interest and their self-confidence for CBLTMA. Students who have the ambition to go abroad tend not to opt for apprenticeship but for school-based VET.

LIMITED EVIDENCE ON CBLTMA NEED AND BENEFITS FOR APPRENTICES

Apprentices lack examples showing the opportunities and the full range of benefits of an experience abroad for apprentices specifically. There is also little information available on the extent to what apprentices have and express a need for international experiences.

TIPS FOR POLICY-MAKING



SHORT-TERM

- 01** Survey the interest of apprentices and their families before investing in the policy.
- 02** Select priorities: direct long-term mobility to apprenticeship graduates and short-term mobility to current apprentices.
- 03** Use good experiences of schools and apprentices; word-of-mouth among apprentices is the most efficient way to reach and motivate them to engage with mobility opportunities.
- 04** Organise awareness-raising campaigns and preparation of apprentices who are about to travel.
- 05** Make it clear to apprentices what skills and competences CBLTMA may offer, that they cannot learn at home.

MEDIUM- TO LONG-TERM

- 01** Improve foreign language teaching both at lower secondary levels and during apprenticeship.
- 02** Foresee a reimbursement system, through which students undertaking mobility abroad can recover any lost income.
- 03** Include provisions that regulate CBLTMA in the legal framework as a right of the apprentice.
- 04** Collect systematic evidence on the benefits acquired abroad (learning outcomes, language, exposure to new technology), and promote their acknowledgement so that apprentices see additional CBLTMA value.

CHALLENGE 5:

APPRENTICESHIPS ARE TOO DIVERSE ACROSS COUNTRIES

ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED

'APPRENTICESHIPS' FUNDAMENTALLY DIFFERENT ACROSS COUNTRIES

Translating and communicating training objectives to employers in other countries can be challenging. The main issue is between apprenticeship systems, where companies provide structured learning to achieve agreed learning outcomes, versus systems where apprentices just apply at the company (any) knowledge learned in school. Comparability of such types of in-company experiences is limited.

HETEROGENEITY OF VET QUALIFICATIONS

Alignment of qualifications in VET is still not as advanced as in general and higher education, where mobility has a stronger tradition. It is therefore harder to recognise and validate knowledge acquired abroad through CBLTMA. Such heterogeneity makes CBLTMA more difficult to organise in VET.

DISPARITY OF APPRENTICE STATUS AND RELATED PROTECTION

Across the EU countries, the status of apprentices varies from one of employee (or equivalent) to one of learner. The former is covered by the social security system, regulations for safety and health as well as for overtime/shift work (especially for minors), while the latter is not. This raises concerns about the legal protection of apprentices during periods of CBLTMA in countries where apprentices do not enjoy the status of employee or equivalent. Additionally, social security regulations may differ between countries and that might pose problems for CBLTMA. Comparison of industry standards from one country to another and the implications this may present for health and safety in the context of CBLTMA is also of concern.

EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIP AND RELATED OBLIGATIONS

In countries where an apprentice is an employee or equivalent, the contract remains valid even during CBLTMA; employers are generally obliged to pay apprentice salaries and are also legally liable from an employment perspective. This might encourage apprentices to leave, knowing they will get back to their post in the sending company upon return. But it also raises questions for employers in relation to whether, how and at what cost they can let the apprentice leave (e.g. should they keep paying the apprentice while abroad?).

Apprenticeships nested in employment contracts are associated with a high degree of apprentice dependency on the employer. This may also translate into less flexibility to fit mobility in the training programme and define the relative learning outcomes.

TIPS FOR POLICY-MAKING



SHORT-TERM

- 01** Exempt employers from paying apprentice salaries while abroad, with government and/or hosting companies covering the relative direct and indirect costs.
- 02** Clarify the employer's liabilities in the event of work-related accidents, before mobility.
- 03** Design training packages/modules of what has to be done and taught during CBLTMA (in the host company); examples of good practice would be helpful.
- 04** Envisage a secondment agreement without putting the employment contract on hold.
- 05** Introduce distance courses for those apprentices that also need to undertake theoretical training (to overcome the differences in alternance structure).

MEDIUM- TO LONG-TERM

- 01** Create a common quality framework for CBLTMA and identify a partner abroad to reduce administrative and bureaucratic work and ensure that certain rules are respected in terms of safety and training content.
- 02** Reinforce or set up mechanisms for the recognition of learning outcomes acquired while on mobility.
- 03** Work with professional branches and social partners to improve clarity, coherence and comparability of apprenticeship competence standards, to build transparent and flexible qualifications and curricula based on a learning outcomes and competence-based approach.
- 04** Work at EU level towards the convergence of social, health and safety protection rights of apprentices.

NEED FOR SHORT-TERM INCREMENTAL CHANGES AND A MEDIUM- TO LONG-TERM STRATEGY

1

Although the potential benefits of mobility (also long-term) of apprentices are recognised in theory and supported at the EU level, the offer and take-up of CBLTMA is still very limited in practice.

Most mobility programmes are short-term (two weeks to six months) and mostly target learners in school-based VET. Apprentices are currently underrepresented in VET learner mobility, and long-term mobility is generally rare, mostly chosen by apprenticeship graduates.

2

There seems to be more to lose than to gain – both for companies and apprentices.

Several challenges come together to hinder CBLTMA: high dependency on employers who are responsible for their apprentices; employers (in particular small and micro companies) cannot afford to release a quasi-qualified worker for a long period of time; there is little evidence on, and awareness of, the benefits of long-term mobility compared to short-term mobility and on the financial implications of the former; age of apprentices and their preference to get fully qualified and get a job.

3

What to do.

Adopt short-term incremental changes and start building a medium- to long-term strategy.

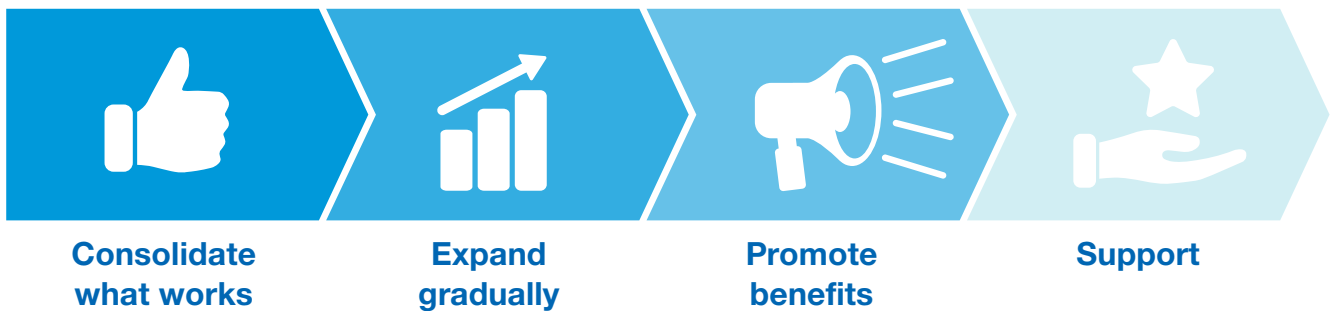
CBLTMA: NOT AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL APPRENTICES SOON

Mobility in apprenticeship is more challenging than mobility in school-based VET or in higher education because of the high dependency on employers. At the moment, partly because of a short-sighted perspective, both employers and apprentices may see more to lose and less to gain from participating in CBLTMA.

All interested parties should look at it as an option to be pursued as part of a long-term strategy. But efforts to make it work should not wait until tomorrow. A step-by-step approach to implement incremental changes at national level seems to be the most appropriate way to make CBLTMA a reality in a sustainable manner ⁽¹⁾.

⁽¹⁾ Evidence underpinning the policy recommendations in this chapter is taken from the analysis of the country and project case studies carried out within the Cedefop study (see Box 2).

Apprentice mobility is a long-term investment.
SHORT-TERM INCREMENTAL CHANGES are needed
AT NATIONAL LEVEL to open CBLTMA to more apprentices.



CONSOLIDATE WHAT WORKS AND EXPAND IT GRADUALLY

CBLTMA has worked better in certain settings, sectors or under specific conditions. Identifying and consolidating successful cases would be a first step forward. This could include systematising and mainstreaming pilots or the work of networks, so that they become even more robust and smoothly functioning. Success factors need to be clearly understood, documented and reinforced. Ad-hoc procedures followed can become more formalised and structured, so that they can be transferred to different companies, sectors or apprenticeship occupations.

This process will help expand CBLTMA carefully when similar conditions exist. Choices in slowly piloting and gradually expanding apprentice mobility might target selected priorities: what duration (short- or long-term mobility), for which target groups (apprentices or graduates), in which sectors (those with tradition in mobility or any sector), and at which geographic level (cross-border regions or distant countries).

- Starting from short-term mobility and then moving on and working on long-term mobility would help build a solid experience in apprentice mobility and provide evidence of its benefits for the parties involved (with specific reference to apprenticeship). Short-term and long-term mobility should not be mutually exclusive, nor should they be developed at the expense of each other.
- Adjusting the audience targeted could be another step. Short-term mobility of apprentices could be combined with long-term mobility of apprenticeship graduates. It seems more suitable to organise CBLTMA once the 'regular' apprenticeship training is completed, as an option or additional module for apprenticeship training graduates and young skilled workers alike. In this case, time and learning pressures associated with long-term mobility will be reduced for apprentices (especially those close to the final apprenticeship exam). The complexity of organising CBLTMA will decrease: no obligatory schooling, no/low personnel support in host country needed, no obstacles related to the management of the apprenticeship contract and training/alternation. Potential participants will be older and, therefore, probably more inclined to see the benefits of undertaking CBLTMA.
- In the short-term, it might be more sensible to pilot and gradually expand CBLTMA in sectors with a strong tradition in, and propensity for, international mobility of apprentices or workers. These sectors should be

able to rely on the support of existing structures and alliances. European social dialogue in those sectors might be a vehicle to promote CBLTMA.

- Promoting regional cross-border mobility (internationalisation on a 'small scale') probably on a daily (or weekly) basis would have the additional advantage that the apprentice would reside at or be close to home and not miss peers/friends/family. That approach will have to be accompanied by the establishment of regional support structures.

PROMOTE WHAT WORKS AND ITS BENEFITS

Such carefully selected, targeted approaches will help achieve a 'snowball effect', aiming to reach a critical mass to implement CBLTMA on a sustainable scale: the more companies and apprentices participate in CBLTMA, the more potential actors are informed about it and its positive outcomes, hence more will probably participate.

After a gradual start, a fully supported implementation of CBLTMA will make it easier to build the evidence of its benefits. Such benefits should be sought across a wide range: improvement of the foreign language level of apprentices and company staff working with them; development of transversal skills; better understanding a foreign market; and developing specific technical skills that may be scarce in the sending country. Evidence on participation in mobility (see Box 3) and better grasp of the benefits sought (through surveys) and realised (through evaluations) by companies, apprentices (current or graduates) and VET institutions would help construct clear selling points for new participants.

There is much need for outreach and promotional work. To this end, it would be useful to leverage those actors (schools, VET providers, employers) with established cooperation in mobility to set and showcase examples of good practice that could act as a pull factor. Word-of-mouth and promotion of successful past experiences are strong tools for attracting new learners and companies.

PROVIDE ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Involving VET institutions and/or other supporting organisations, both in the sending country and receiving country, is necessary. Their role could include matching apprentices with in-company placements, defining the training plan and related mobility objectives before the apprentice leaves, providing know-how and support to address the many logistical and practical aspects related to organising mobility (accommodation, social security and residence permits, housing and utilities, bank accounts). Micro and small companies would benefit from such support the most as they are more affected by such administrative costs and counterincentives.

Solutions need to be found, such as having charters signed between VET institutions on the model of higher education to facilitate networking and the establishment of relations of trust between the sending and the receiving institutions. Counterparts with clear responsibilities need to be appointed to secure apprentice rights are respected and training takes place as intended. Professionals from the vocational training centres interviewed stress the importance of having previously established a relationship of trust with the training centre in the sending or host country. VET institutions, in particular, need clear guidance on how to support and implement CBLTMA in the context of both outgoing and incoming apprentices.

Guidelines, tips, checklists and other practical tools that help structure and manage CBLTMA experiences would make the job of all involved parties easier and increase the willingness to engage.

BOX 3

HOW MANY APPRENTICES ARE IN LONG-TERM MOBILITY?



Information on how many apprentices undertake mobility may be found in DGEAC data of VET participants in Erasmus+ mobility programmes, broken down by ‘apprentices’ and ‘other VET participants’. Extensive quality checks and validation of the data from the Cedefop study (Box 2), revealed that these data suffer from several shortcomings, which cast doubts on their ability to capture the true level of long-term apprentice mobility in the EU. Evaluating and designing CBLTMA policies requires more robust and reliable data on the number of mobile apprentices in the EU.

First, it would help if the beneficiary authorities of Erasmus+ programmes systematically classified apprentices as a different group from VET learners.

Second, a considerable improvement would come from beneficiary authorities indicating data on the duration of the mobility scheme. This would allow monitoring long-term and short-term mobility policies separately and avoid confusion among the two groups of participants.

Third, it would be important to monitor existing mobility outside the Erasmus+ schemes. This would require extensive research to identify the countries where additional schemes are in place, and an effort from national data providers to collect data on participants in these schemes.

Source: Cedefop.



CBLTMA can work as part of a **LONG-TERM STRATEGY**, not as a standalone objective. Actions may be taken mostly at national level with the support of the EU.



PREPARE THE CONDITIONS FOR CBLTMA AT SYSTEM LEVEL

At education and training system level, more effort needs to be made to improve apprentices' foreign language capabilities by raising provision and quality of relevant teaching both at lower secondary education and during apprenticeships. At the same time, raising the language level of hosting companies would also facilitate CBLTMA.

Further, the issue of recognition of learning outcomes from mobility abroad still needs to be addressed from two angles:

- recognition of the student's prior learning in the host country;
- recognition of prior learning related to the period of mobility abroad in the context of preparing for an upper secondary qualification in one's country of origin.

Financial support for companies and apprentices should preferably be systematic and long-term. Short-term funding schemes are often project-based and therefore short-lived. CBLTMA needs to be supported with a dedicated, structured funding scheme at national level (such as a reimbursement system, see Box 4). That would require interventions of a more stable nature in a wider range of policy areas.

Exempting employers from paying apprentice salaries or social security costs while abroad would remove one of the major financial barriers to CBLTMA. Government or sectoral funding would be necessary to cover the relative costs, protecting both employers and apprentices. While it might take time to set up such funding mechanisms, discussions could start at national level by taking inspiration from existing practices in this domain. Besides remuneration, ways need to be found to suspend or ease overall employer liability for mobile apprentices while abroad. The French case is an example in this sense (see Box 5).

At the EU level, employers need a clearer and simpler framework in terms of legal procedures relevant for the organisation of CBLTMA. The creation of such a European framework, along with an organisation tasked with helping companies to set up mobility exercises, may be necessary steps to allow CBLTMA to take place on a larger scale. Work is also necessary at EU level towards the convergence of social, health and safety protection rights of apprentices. This would require the political will to turn CBLTMA into a priority.

Such standardisation would benefit if apprenticeships are more comparable at EU level. National authorities and social partners could work towards aligning occupations, comparing standards, and enhancing learning outcomes/competence-based approaches in curricula development. Any progress in this direction would benefit CBLTMA take-up, ease administrative tasks, and increase transparency and trust in the learning provided.

BOX 4

DANISH PIU PROGRAMME

In Denmark, mobility is supported by the PIU programme, which reimburses some of the costs for students as well as employers. The regulatory instruments are geared towards outgoing mobility, notably by requiring that host employers abroad pay a salary to mobile apprentices, hence ensuring that students' subsistence and accommodation costs are taken care of without placing the financial burden on the Danish employer or the VET school.

Source: Country case study for Cedefop study (2021, forthcoming).

BOX 5

LEGAL BASIS ADJUSTMENTS IN FRANCE

In France, procedures for apprentices to train abroad have recently been simplified under the 2018 Law on the liberty to choose one's future career. Recent reforms to the Labour Code (March 2018) and to the VET system (September 2018) include a section dedicated to international and European mobility of apprentices, including longer mobility periods (1 to 12 months). Under the new law, French employers are no longer legally responsible for the remuneration of apprentices and for ensuring compliant working conditions for apprentices during their period of mobility abroad, as was the case before. The host employer or training provider is now solely responsible for compliance with aspects such as the apprentice's working time, health and safety, remuneration, and weekly leave, in accordance with the legal and contractual provisions of the country concerned. Salary costs for the period of mobility are covered by government funding.

The skills operators (OPCOs) may also provide additional funding to cover all or part of the costs incurred as part of mobility abroad. The OPCO may, depending on its strategy and priorities, cover financial costs of any kind, including those corresponding to social contributions paid by the employer and, where appropriate, remuneration and ancillary costs associated with mobility outside the national territory (such as travel and accommodation). The OPCO must also cover the mobility costs borne by the training providers (the costs related to the missions/trips of training providers apprenticeship coordinators). These possibilities are seen as enablers of CBLTMA in France.

Source: Country case study for Cedefop study (2021, forthcoming).

BOX 6

THE EUROPEAN PAINTING SECTOR STRATEGY TO INCREASE ITS ATTRACTIVENESS

UNIEP, the [International Association for Painting Contractors](#) has observed a lack of young people entering the profession, quality issues in education/training, and a lack of innovation among contractors and training institutes in the painting/decorating sector. UNIEP has therefore invested in mobility to improve the image of the sector among young people. UNIEP is also a member of the [EuroApprenticeship](#) Network, an online community to promote, implement and enhance learning mobility for SMEs and apprentices. The network comprises more than 350 competent bodies, intermediate organisations and vocational education and training (VET) providers, which organise in-company learning mobility or provide expertise, information, help and support to learning mobility projects for the benefit of SMEs, skilled crafts companies, apprentices and young people in work-based learning.

Source: Cedefop study (2021, forthcoming).

EMBED CBLTMA IN SECTORAL STRATEGIES AND PROVIDE SUPPORT AT SECTORAL LEVEL

CBLTMA could be a strong tool for a sector's modernisation, internationalisation or upskilling. Sectoral strategies linked to tackling the problem of skills shortages or attractiveness of a profession, its update, development and alignment to sectoral (international) qualifications may include CBLTMA as a complementary way to pursue those objectives. Such strategies may be linked to a future vision of sector goals and how to achieve them, as not all companies may be sufficiently mature to work individually in such direction. Embedding mobility in a sectoral strategy may also be an indirect way to strengthen dialogue at European level (not just national) between VET and labour market stakeholders.

Mobility could also fit in with, and (indirectly) benefit from, overall improvements in the sector; recognition of qualifications, for example, could be beneficial for the sector in general, not just for the sake of mobility. Increased collaboration between education and business could help keep curricula up to date or match skill needs more efficiently. Reinforced dialogue would be the precondition to designing transparent and flexible training pathways and qualifications, as well as curricula on a learning outcomes and competence-based approaches.

Working at the sectoral level, agencies for supporting CBLTMA seem crucial for the establishment of relations of trust. All influential stakeholders in the sector need to be represented in such agencies at national level. The way forward would include establishing bilateral and mutually binding partnerships with similar agencies among receiving and sending countries, preferably agencies linked to the same sector. Once bilateral partnerships are established, the agencies may work towards creating transnational alliances with shared values and principles.

CBLTMA has its place among the variety of measures to improve the quality and image of apprenticeships. However, this needs to be undertaken at sectoral level, with social partner involvement, and be understood as a long-term process.

It will take time for **CBLTMA** to become an opportunity for more of the apprentices and companies who are interested.

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