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Heading in a new direction with IdA

Mid-term review of the ESF programme
„IdA – Integration through Exchange“

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1. Introduction: Heading in a new direction with IdA

BY WOLFGANG HUSEMANN, FEDERAL MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

BACKGROUND: CHANGE FOR THE BETTER ON THE TRAINING MARKET

When at the beginning of the new funding period of the European Social Fund (ESF) in 2007 the German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS) began to plan the Integration through Exchange Programme – IdA, youth unemployment amounted to 8.4 %. At the start of the training year 2007/ 2008, there were only 18,000 vacancies for 33,000 applicants without a training place. The economic upswing has brought about a discernible turnaround on the training market: Youth unemployment has declined to 6.9 % (annual average in 2010), some 11 percentage points below the EU 27 figure. At the beginning of the training year 2011/ 2012, vacancies considerably exceed unplaced applicants. With the mid-term review of the Integration through Exchange Programme – IdA in this booklet, the first question to ask is: How has the programme fared under these changed conditions?

INTEGRATION THROUGH EXCHANGE – IDA: AN ESF PROGRAMME FOR DISADVANTAGED YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

The objective of the programme is to improve the chances of disadvantaged people on the labour and training market through work stays in other EU countries. The target group of the projects in the first funding period are youth and young adults with special support needs in the transition between school and training, such as school dropouts, as well as at the interface between training and occupation, such as young people after completion of ex-company training. Initial findings of our evaluation show that 80 % of participants had already been (long-term) unemployed for an average duration of 15 months, although they are only slightly over 23 years old on average. We need IdA for these target groups, despite, if not even precisely because of the turnaround on the training market.

For one thing, although the integration of disadvantaged youth is now much more effective, many still find it difficult to gain access to training. The IdA project networks can help them to do this.

For another, the favourable development on the training market also foreshadows a longer-term trend: the decline in numbers of applicants due to demographic change, which poses the largest challenge for the labour market in the years to come. While the number of economically active persons is on the decline, demand by businesses for qualified personnel will continue to rise. We cannot halt demographic change, but we can mitigate the adverse consequences by helping people to develop their full potential on the labour market. Besides women, older people and immigrants, this also holds in particular for youth. With a shrinking labour force, we cannot afford to leave disadvantaged young people without qualifications or jobs. With the IdA programme, we help them in a decisive development phase of their life to successfully enter into training or employment.

HEADING IN A NEW DIRECTION WITH IDA

The Integration through Exchange Programme – IdA is being conducted as part of the Federal Operational Programme for the European Social Fund 2007 to 2013. In the first funding period for youth and young adults, 69 project networks are receiving assistance with EUR 74 million in ESF and EUR 17 million BMAS funds. With this programme, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has adopted a new approach, because although mobility measures have been carried out for some time both at European and national level, most conventional programmes are aimed at students, trainees or young skilled labour. In his contribution, learning and working stays for disadvantaged and less employable youth in other EU countries, **Dr Peter Wordelmann** shows why traineeships abroad can also benefit the group of disadvantaged youth and explains how the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has closed a major assistance gap with the Integration through Exchange Programme – IdA.

Whoever sets out on a new path, though, must also pay special attention to stumbling blocks. When the IdA project networks began their activities in 2009, they faced the difficult task of combining previous experience from classic youth exchange programmes on the one hand with that gained in measures for the IdA target group on the other. This required the know-how of various actors. This is why no individual projects are promoted in IdA, just project networks. The involvement of basic income support agencies is mandatory here to ensure that the projects are geared to the needs of the regional labour markets.

Yet although a good institutional framework is a major component for effective assistance programmes, it can remain an empty shell, if it is not brought to life with high quality work by personnel in project implementing agencies and partners. In his contribution, quality management in the ESF IdA Programme, **Michael Alberg-Seberich** describes the quality framework he has developed on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs together with the project networks. Here, he summarises the practical experience gained and shows which special features must be taken into account during the different phases of an exchange measure for disadvantaged youth and young adults. Through active networking and support of projects, Alberg-Seberich thinks we have found a way in the Integration through Exchange Programme – IdA to ensure an active and open quality management in the project networks.

IMPROVING OPPORTUNITIES ON THE LABOUR AND TRAINING MARKET WITH IDA

Now how far has IdA actually improved the training and labour-market opportunities of disadvantaged youth and young adults? Most project networks have been in operation for two to two and a half years. To date, we have reached around 4,200 participants with IdA. We can therefore draw initial conclusions about the impact of the programme on the target group. Our initial premise was that the programme would improve the occupational competencies of young people, including foreign language proficiency in particular. As part of the overall evaluation of the Federal Operational Programme for ESF 2007 to 2013, as a consortium partner the Rhenish-Westphalian Institute for Economic Research is seeking to verify this by conducting a survey of the participants before and after the stays abroad. In his contribution, ESF Integration through Exchange Programme (IdA) – a mid-term review from the perspective of the Evaluation of the Federal Operational Programme, **Prof. Dr Jochen Kluge** presents initial affirmative findings of the survey: After their stay abroad, the young adults have a significantly more optimistic view both of their general future prospects and their occupational opportunities and they are substantially more motivated to take action to master occupational challenges.

In addition to the participant survey, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs commissioned a survey of personnel of project executing agencies, job centres and employment agencies to ascertain their assessment of the occupational competency gains of IdA participants, but also integration into employment or training. **Dr Peter Wordelmann** shows in his contribution, integration progress of participants in the Integration through Exchange Programme – IdA – assessments of project executing agencies and basic income support providers, that particularly the ability of participants to choose an occupation/ training course has improved. Very high ratings are also recorded for personal attributes, such as self-motivation/ self-reliance and self-confidence, so that we may assume a considerable improvement in the employability of participants overall.

This assessment of the project executing agencies is corroborated by the favourable destination data:

Up to six weeks after IdA, half of all participants are already in training or in socially-insured employment and up to six months after, the ratio increases to almost two-thirds. If, however, we just look here at the participants at the threshold of training/ occupation, almost two-thirds are in socially-insured employment up to six months after IdA. Considering that, as already mentioned, 80 % of IdA participants had already been in (long-term) unemployment, this is a remarkable finding.

Altogether, the outcomes presented in this booklet demonstrate that we are on the right track with the Integration through Exchange Programme – IdA.

2. New chances for disadvantaged youth and young adults through traineeships in other EU countries

BY DR PETER WORDELMANN, PEB WILDENBRUCH

MOBILITY BETWEEN SCHOOL AND EMPLOYMENT

Leaving their narrow social and educational environment to venture into the wide world has always been both a happy and challenging moment for young people. Young carpenters still take to the road today in continuous search of new experience. They are not just looking to put their abilities to the test and learn more; they also want to develop themselves as personalities in preparation for their future (working) life. The young gain experience abroad between school and employment during the important development phase of adolescence, when they are also (still) mobile enough.

Learning and working stays abroad are called 'transnational mobility' in the current language of the EU, which has been promoting this for some time with suitable programmes (Comenius, Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci as part of the Lifelong Learning Programme).

Spending a term abroad has already become standard practice for many students. One in four did so in 2009. With the amendment of the Vocational Training Act in 2005, trainees also have the option of completing up to a quarter of their training abroad. In Germany, though, only some 3 % (about 23,500) take part in a traineeship abroad. The Federal Government is looking to double this figure by 2015. Europe-wide, the EU Commission aims to reach its target of enabling 80,000 young people to complete traineeships in foreign enterprises by 2013 under the Leonardo da Vinci Programme.

The group of 'disadvantaged' youth, who are sometimes presumed to lack the initiative to leave their narrow walk of life, can also gain equally from the proven benefits of traineeships abroad. Aside from vocational trainees in non-company establishments, this group has been largely deprived of this opportunity till now owing to their poor employment prospects and /or lack of integration in standard systems.

TRAINEESHIPS ABROAD IN THE ESF-PROGRAMME IDA

The Integration through Exchange Programme (IdA) in Germany has closed this gap. Through European exchange projects, youth, unemployed young adults and young single parents are given the opportunity to gain practical work experience in other EU countries, improve their foreign language skills and enhance their social and occupational competencies. The aim is to better their chances of gaining a foothold on the local training and labour market.

This is the first time that a broad programme has been devised for this target group. It affords new prospects for disadvantaged youth, particularly also for those who otherwise fall through the gaps in the market inclusion net. Selection of the best is precisely what is not needed here. The readiness of society to let this group of young people participate in international qualification sends a clear signal to them and provides many with a fresh incentive for self-motivation. It also enables them to learn about Europe and open their minds towards new and other cultures and the opportunities these afford.

GAINING COMPETENCIES IN TRAINEESHIPS ABROAD

Sending young people abroad as part of a qualification has nothing to do with financing a holiday with occasional practical exercises. The learning phase abroad sets a high standard. The learning location in particular, a foreign company, affords the chance of gaining experience that is not available at home, including coping with the many new external conditions (accommodation, travel to work, etc.).

Organised transnational traineeships impart international competencies (foreign language proficiency, intercultural competency, international technical skills, network competency) aimed at broad international occupational competency. This is now indispensable for many skilled personnel, also in the commercial-technical sector.

Especially for disadvantaged youth, however, the priority is personal development. The practical training abroad fosters personal or self competency, which is associated with such notions as self-reliance, self-confidence, initiative, adaptability, ability for criticism and team ability, particularly also in foreign, intercultural groups. The acceptance and use of external counselling and educational aids is usually indispensable (learning competency). Transnational mobility has brought about considerable advances in personal development in the target group. It can be expected to give fresh impetus to their learning performance and occupational plans, which can then improve their placement prospects on the labour market.

The notion of 'self-empowerment' goes beyond this, however, and is particularly important for disadvantaged youth, whose previous life has been marred by various failures. It has to do with the challenges a person encounters, the specific experience (of success) gained and the resultant readiness to face up to future challenges. Experiencing your own effectiveness can build self-confidence in your ability to take life into your own hands. Traineeships abroad are a major step in this process, which is why they are also seen as a positive employment criterion by recruiting enterprises.

An example of this is using a foreign language abroad, certainly unimaginable for many young people in their previous school education. Taking up and coping with this challenge – more or less successfully – is a good springboard for future activities.

CONDUCTING TRAINEESHIPS ABROAD

Traineeships abroad offer a unique opportunity in a new learning environment to experience differences through unfamiliarity. This is not confined to the other culture and language; it also encompasses occupational aspects. Learning in a foreign company takes place in a new cultural climate, where familiar objects are perceived and tasks are carried out differently. Learning, however, also takes place in a different company setting, which is often quite different from what the participants are used to in their home country.

At the new international learning location, the young people bear far more responsibility for themselves than at home. They have to organise their own learning by doing. This is a major challenge for some, but it is also a great opportunity to 'free themselves' from the constraints, demands and judgements of their accustomed environment, to experiment, and above all discover and try out their own strengths.

IMPACTS, QUALITY AND EMPLOYABILITY

When planning a successful a traineeship abroad, duration is one of the most important determinants. The longer the stay, the greater the expectation of acquiring occupational skills. In shorter traineeships geared to personal development, preparation is particularly important. For longer stays, there is more leeway for solving some problems over time. Professional follow-on is indispensable in any case.

Many guidelines and quality criteria are now available for transnational mobility. It is, however, still important to apply these in practice. This is why introducing quality assurance systems for transnational mobility should be standard

practice in participant organisations, above all to rationalise procedures. The competency of personnel gained from practical experience in particular also plays a decisive role, especially for 'mobility coaches'. It is also important in this connection to consolidate the IdA Programme and maintain the competencies acquired by personnel.

Transnational traineeships for disadvantaged youth do not just promote mobility in the geographical sense. By fostering a more open-minded attitude among youth and improving their orientation, they contribute to improving individual employability. At a social level, they promote participation, so that 'unlimited opportunities' are not just reserved for select groups.

3. Quality management in the ESF Programme “IdA – Integration through Exchange”

BY MICHAEL ALBERG-SEBERICH, ACTIVE PHILANTHROPY GMBH

THE QUALITY FRAMEWORK

The ESF-programme “IdA – Integration through Exchange” is a labour-market mobility programme that is not just aimed at improving foreign language proficiency and intercultural competency or just imparting new qualifications. It seeks to afford the young participants new prospects on the labour market. It addresses a target group that is frequently described as ‘disadvantaged’ or ‘difficult to place’. There are many reasons for these attributes. Working with this target group means that IdA projects require a higher quality of pedagogical support.

The quality of IdA projects therefore depends on experience gained so far in classic (youth) exchange programmes and from work with the target group in labour-market integration measures.

In (youth) exchange, the quality framework for these programmes has repeatedly been defined both in the specialist literature [e.g. Thomas et. al. (2008)¹, Gerardu/ Zeuschel (1996)²], and in practice. Examples of quality frameworks that have been developed in practice are the initiative, Gütegemeinschaft Au-Pair e.V. (Quality seal association for au-pairs, Au-Pair e.V.³) coordinated by the International Youth Service of the Federal Republic of Germany (IJAB) or the Arbeitskreis gemeinnütziger Jugendaustauschorganisationen (Umbrella organisation for non-profit youth exchange organisations – AJA⁴).

In IdA, the quality framework is geared to the different phases of an exchange programme. This means that an IdA project must prepare the participants for these phases with appropriate educational support. In the following, we shall outline the phases in IdA, the classic pedagogic elements and the special features and cite specific examples of methods:

■ Selection

Classic pedagogic elements:

Not everybody is suitable for a transnational exchange programme and an intercultural experience and/ or a person may be currently undergoing a phase where the exchange is not appropriate for them and/ or their circumstances.

Special features of IdA:

The selection process in this case is not confined to an interview. IdA projects collaborate closely with the participants to jointly ascertain their potential and competencies.

Examples of methods:

Individual consultation, profiling, assessment centre.

1 Thomas, Alexander/ Astrid Utler/ Ulrike de Ponte/ Stefan Schmid (Hrsg.) (2008): Realität und Innovation in der europäischen Begegnung, Göttingen.

2 Gerardu, John/ Uli Zeuschel (1996): Wirkungen von Jugendaustausch – Qualitätssicherung und -kontrolle, in Jahrbuch für Jugendreisen und internationalen Jugendaustausch, Bonn, S. 32-41.

3 <http://www.guetegemeinschaft-aupair.de>

4 <http://www.aja-org.de/qualitaet-im-schueleraustausch>

■ Preparation

Classic pedagogic elements:

The participants are prepared for the intercultural experience. This includes acquiring foreign language skills, learning about the new and own culture and raising awareness of themes such as intercultural communication.

Special features of IdA:

Besides the above preparatory elements, the IdA participants are taught about additional relevant practical occupational qualifications for the traineeship abroad. Information is also provided on the host country and exercises conducted on how to find their way around. Another important aspect is the practical preparation for the stay abroad. Many IdA participants are not very mobile and self-reliant. Many of them will be making a longer journey for the first time. Very practical exercises are of prime concern here (for example, finding their way around an airport).

In addition, the project executing agency concludes an agreement with the participant, including, for example, the main rights and duties during the stay in the host country.

Placement in the most suitable traineeship is another major element of the preparatory phase in IdA.

Examples of methods:

language training, intercultural competency, information on the country, mobility training, occupational guidance

■ Stay abroad

Classic pedagogic elements:

During the exchange programme, the participants need to be looked after. They must be given the opportunity to reflect on the experience gained. They must also be able to rely on support in the case of conflicts.

Special features of IdA:

Guidance must be provided during the traineeship abroad. This may mean that an assistant from the project in Germany is available on site throughout the stay abroad. On the other hand, the assistance ought not to be too close so as to foster the self-reliance of participants.

In some projects, this assistance is also performed by local transnational partners. This is time-consuming, as it can, for example, involve support at the traineeship workplace but also in quite everyday matters, such as visits to the doctor.

Examples of methods:

Local assistance, organisation to foster self-reliance, practical traineeship, contact via digital media (email, Skype, Facebook)

■ Debriefing

Classic pedagogic elements:

On return from abroad, the participants should reflect on their experience abroad under guidance.

Special features in IdA:

The executing agencies use the debriefing phase to prepare for job placement, training, (secondary) school or ex-post school-leaving qualification, etc. This is done in close consultation and cooperation with the job centres and/ or employment agencies (integration chain). Some projects provide a sequel traineeship in Germany.

Examples of methods:

Individual measures, application training, ascertainment of acquired competencies, Europass Mobility, preparing a plan for individual development/ prospects, assistance in application procedure/ in entering the integration chain, traineeship/ language certificate.

IdA practice has shown that the quality of implementation still depends on two additional components that are not part of classic exchange programmes. These are:

■ Recruitment of participants

The executing agencies of IdA projects must actively solicit participation in the programme. In many cases, the target group needs to be convinced of the opportunities the programme affords. The projects must allay misgivings to do with the private life of participants (e.g. what about my friends/ partner)? This can only be done through systematic promotion campaigns for the programme in close cooperation with the job centres and employment agencies.

■ Subsequent support for participants

After their return from abroad, the projects often find that their participants are very keen to plan their own occupational future. To harness this motivation, close assistance and coaching is necessary after the classic debriefing. To advance integration, it has proved effective to actively involve the job centres or employment agencies.

MANAGEMENT OF NETWORKS

These phases (see figure 1) are the key quality aspects when implementing the programme. They are supplemented with the general quality aspect of networking. IdA is carried out through regional networks in Germany. Good cooperation with the job centres and employment agencies is of key importance for the quality of the projects and networks. This kind of close networking is also necessary with the partners abroad, with whom the executing agencies maintain regular dialogue. In preparation for exchange, local visits are made where intensive discussion takes place on the course of the exchange and placement in local partner enterprises.

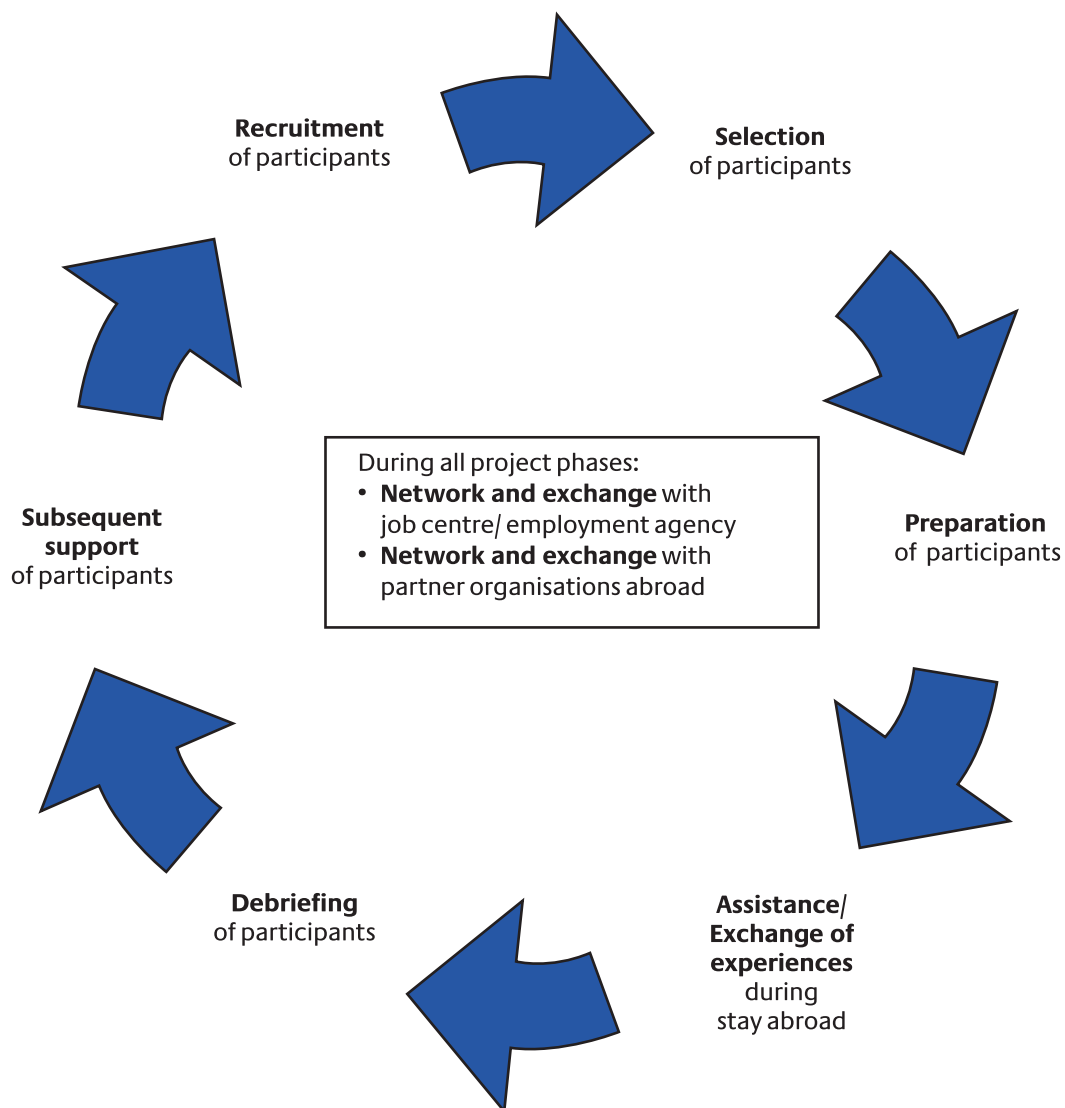


Fig. 1: Quality aspects of the IdA projects

LEARNING FROM MISTAKES

The quality framework described is based on practice in the IdA project networks. These must be able to engage in active exchange on their own issues and mistakes to find joint solutions for problems. Through an active support and networking process, the IdA Programme has found ways for project networks to pursue pro-active and open quality management. There is agreement that the basic idea of the pilot programme is right. This idea has been successfully translated into practice, as evidenced by the high integration rate into the labour market and the increased competency of participants.

4. Integration progress of participants: Assessments of project operators, jobcentres and employment agencies

BY DR PETER WORDELMANN, PEB WILDENBRUCH

TRAINEESHIPS ABROAD FOR DISADVANTAGED YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

The Integration through Exchange Programme (IdA) is a new approach for improving the integration prospects of disadvantaged youth and young adults on the training and labour market in Germany. By preparing, conducting and following-on traineeships abroad, it has added a labour-market policy element in the integration chain not explicitly used till now. The question here is how far transnational traineeships for disadvantaged target groups actually achieve the intended effects, because traineeships abroad need not be beneficial as such. In practice, however, these benefits are indisputable.

The reason is that traineeships abroad afford a unique opportunity both in everyday life and in the host company to experience differences through unfamiliarity. Quite different cultural behaviour can call for re-orientation and adjustments, even for abandoning familiar mechanisms. The organisational culture in the traineeship enterprise can differ markedly from the German. Other ways of working but also possible unknown technical aids pose challenges. Traineeships abroad therefore take place at a high level of learning theory [Kristensen (2004)]¹. They offer the opportunity to enlarge occupational and personal competencies, also, perhaps especially, for underprivileged youth and young adults. The traineeships are, however, always designed to suit the situation and must take account of the special needs of participants, who are at the centre of the intended learning processes. As far as possible, the stay abroad is planned with an open design to foster self-organised learning through experience without overstressing abilities. Many participants with difficult educational histories and/ or social backgrounds are given the chance to free themselves from expectations based on (adverse) experience of their accustomed environment and discover and try out their own strengths. If they then also acquire a new sense of self-esteem they have never experienced before through new friends and/ or supervisory personnel inside and outside the host enterprise, this will enhance these impacts further.

OUTCOMES OF TRAINEESHIPS ABROAD

Here we do not mean the outputs, but above all the outcomes of the IdA Programme. These are primarily the reduction or even elimination of obstacles to placement, the anticipated competency gains through practical training abroad and the subsequent employment effects.

Placement obstacles can, for example, include lack of initiative and self-confidence, little determination and general demotivation and diffidence in demeanour and behaviour. Added to this is the lack of occupational experience of many participants. Depending on individual conditions, the preparation, planning and follow-on of the stays abroad differ. Besides the choice of destination country, for the traineeship itself this entails the occupational field, the training enterprise and the duration.

In shorter traineeships abroad (about 4 to 6 weeks), the personal development of the participants is mostly the prime concern. They foster personal or self competency, as is associated with such notions as self-reliance, self-confidence, initiative, adaptability, ability for criticism and team ability, particularly in foreign, intercultural groups. Transnational mobility has resulted in considerable advances in personal development not only as experienced by the target group itself. They can be expected to gain a new impetus in learning behaviour and their occupational planning, which can then improve their placement prospects on the labour market.

In longer traineeship phases abroad, activities centre on the envisaged increased competency of participants. In technical terms, this takes place in the new learning location, the foreign enterprise, but also through the challenges the participants face in their environment and in coping with everyday problems in their new surroundings. This is particularly the case, if they have little previous experience with mobility.

¹ Kristensen, Soeren (2004): Learning by leaving – placements abroad as a didactic tool in the context of VET in Europe, Cedefop, Thessaloniki

Of particular importance in longer stays is the acquisition of occupational, especially also international competencies [Wordelmann (2010)]², which is increasingly in demand by companies. International occupational competency includes the following elements [Borch u. a. (2003)]³:

- **International technical occupational competency:**

Knowledge of the economics, geography, society, culture and politics and law of the destination country as well as specific features and professional-technical regulations in the destination country that differ from Germany (e.g. delivery, payment and guarantee terms and conditions, accounting rules and industrial standards).

- **Foreign language proficiency:**

Adequate knowledge of at least one foreign language for oral and written everyday communication so that the partners can both understand the contents; added to this knowledge of the foreign language at work (i.e. occupational and technical), ideally the language of the customer, but generally English as lingua franca; knowledge of additional languages, such as Spanish, French or also Russian and Chinese, can be advantageous.

- **Intercultural competency:**

Ability to communicate and/ or cooperate with people of other cultural origins or backgrounds; also occupational intercultural competency, meaning the ability to cope with occupational communicative situations, taking host country customs into account.

- **Network competency:**

Ability to properly handle electronic media, the Internet as well as the new social web media in general and for work; network competency is also essential for being able to communicate across borders and therefore solve cooperation problems with the international learning location.

Limited basic international competency can suffice, especially also for the performance of the occupation in the home country. The required standard is low and has three aims:

- in foreign language proficiency (mostly English): not faltering in contacts, such as telephone calls, etc.
- in intercultural competency: learning that many things can be different somewhere else and being able to develop ways of settling intercultural conflicts.
- in network competency: being able to use the new social web media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) to maintain contacts also during absence/ stays abroad.

These minimum requirements could also be an approach for agencies promoting disadvantaged groups in internationalising their measures. This has been shown by the success of IdA projects, e.g. in teaching and applying foreign languages.

2 Wordelmann, Peter (Ed.) (2010): Internationale Kompetenzen in der Berufsbildung. Stand der Wissenschaft und praktische Anforderungen, Bonn/ Bielefeld

3 Borch, Hans et al. (2003): Internationalisierung der Berufsbildung. Strategien – Konzepte – Handlungsvorschläge, Bonn/ Bielefeld

FINDINGS OF SURVEY OF PROJECT OPERATORS, JOBCENTRES AND EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES

The following is a summary of the interim results of the survey of project operators, job centres and employment agencies. It includes responses on assessments of the ability to choose an occupation, occupational competencies, key inter-occupational qualifications and integration progress of IdA participants.

56 IdA projects nationwide took part in the survey. By the final phase of the survey in October 2011, 1,228 questionnaires had been evaluated. This amounts to a response rate of more than 25 % of stays abroad up to then.

The age structure of the participants (see figure 1) indicates the overall programme range of youth and young adults aged 14 to 35. Making up approximately one third, the predominant age group is between 18 and 21. Two-thirds of participants are under 25.

For the school education of participants, the highest qualification was evaluated (see figure 2). More than half are still at 'school' level. Most of these young people have only lower secondary school education or less (no certificate, special school-leaving certificate). Most of the young adults above school level have completed an apprenticeship.

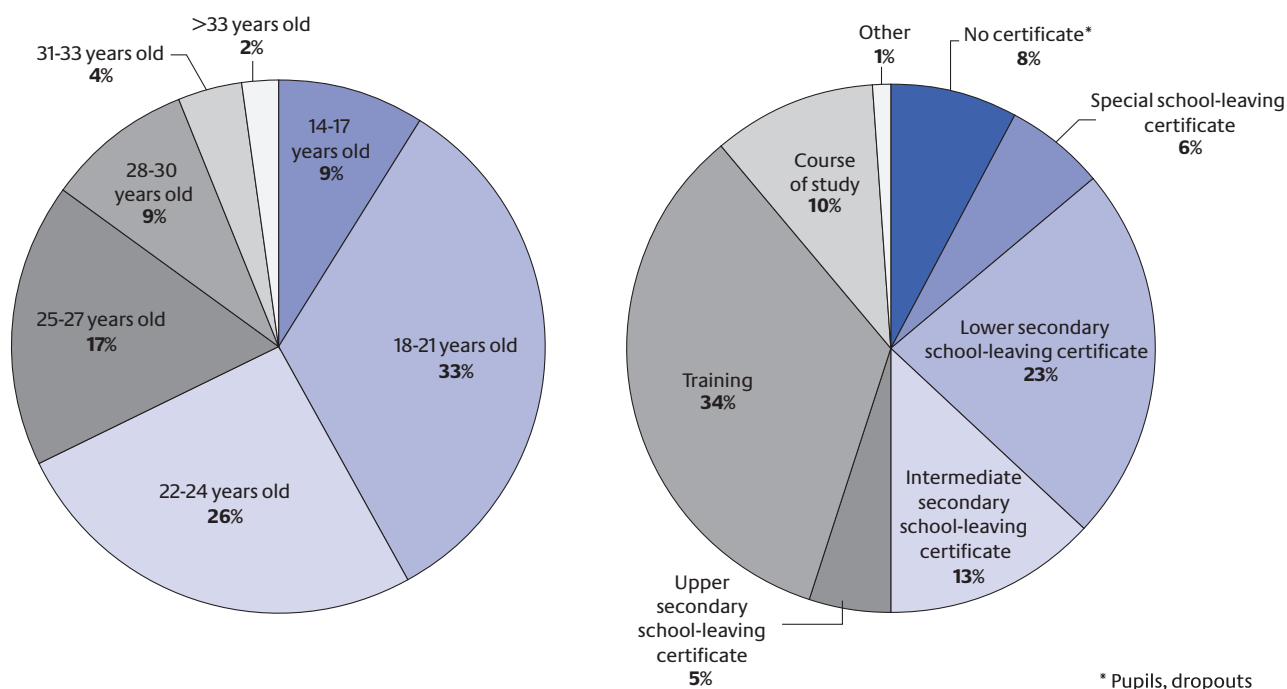


Fig. 1: Age (1,276 responses)

Fig. 2: School education and training (1,257 responses)

Duration of unemployment before entry into the IdA measure could not be fully ascertained because of the diversity of participants. However, an evaluation of about one-third of participants reveals a rough division of four duration categories of 1 to 4 months, 5 to 8 months, 9 to 16 months and 17 to 24 months. Both short-term and longer-term unemployed youth and young adults are therefore represented in the evaluation. A survey carried out in parallel (see Chapter 5 : An interim review from the perspective of the Evaluation of the Federal ESF-Operational Programme) of the participants themselves with a similar rate of response revealed that 79 % had already experienced long-term unemployment for an average duration of 15 months before taking part in IdA.

The obstacles to placement for 140 participants were assessed by the basic income support providers (see figure 3). As indicated by the number of multiple citations, this group comprises above all participants with multiple problems, averaging over three obstacles. The most frequent qualification deficits cited are poor or no qualifications but predominantly lack of occupational experience. The social and personal competencies impeding placement include above all lack of initiative and motivation, lack of self-confidence and determination as well as diffidence, but also lack of knowledge of German. Health impairments primarily concern psychological issues, with learning impairments and disabilities largely cited. Lack of work qualities includes social conduct and demeanour, team and conflict ability, lack of perseverance and reliability. Lack of flexibility/ mobility would therefore seem to be more of a secondary obstacle to placement, because the IdA participants have already taken a major step here. Special obstacles, such as single parenthood, were surmounted in some projects.

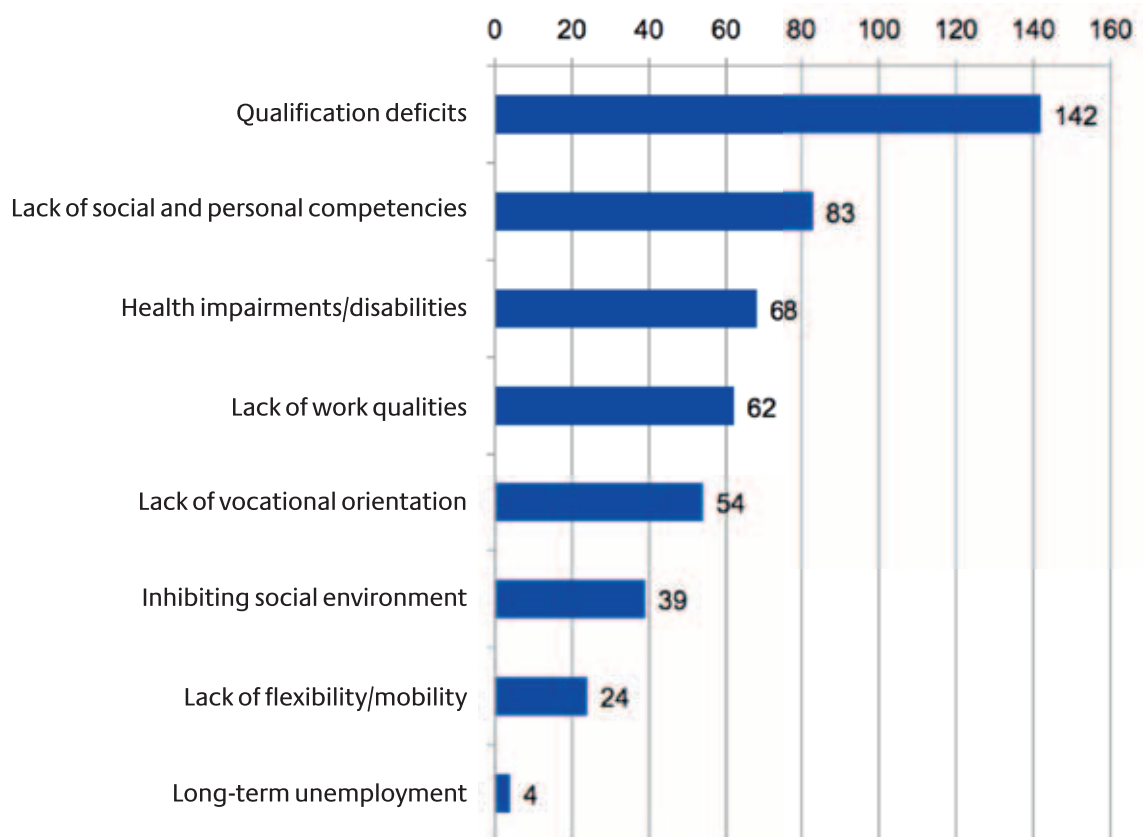


Fig. 3: Placement obstacles: Assessments by jobcentres/ employment agencies (140 free responses, in groups)

Raising mobility in Germany is nevertheless a relevant aspect, as shown in the assessment of the integration agreements in support planning by the basic income support providers. The main focus, however, is in gaining occupational experience, which corresponds with the qualification deficits, and the promotion of the ability to choose a training course or occupation and the improvement of foreign language proficiency (see figure 4). The latter is a particular expectation of stays abroad as well as the attainment of objectives such as experiencing esteem, change of environment and stabilisation.

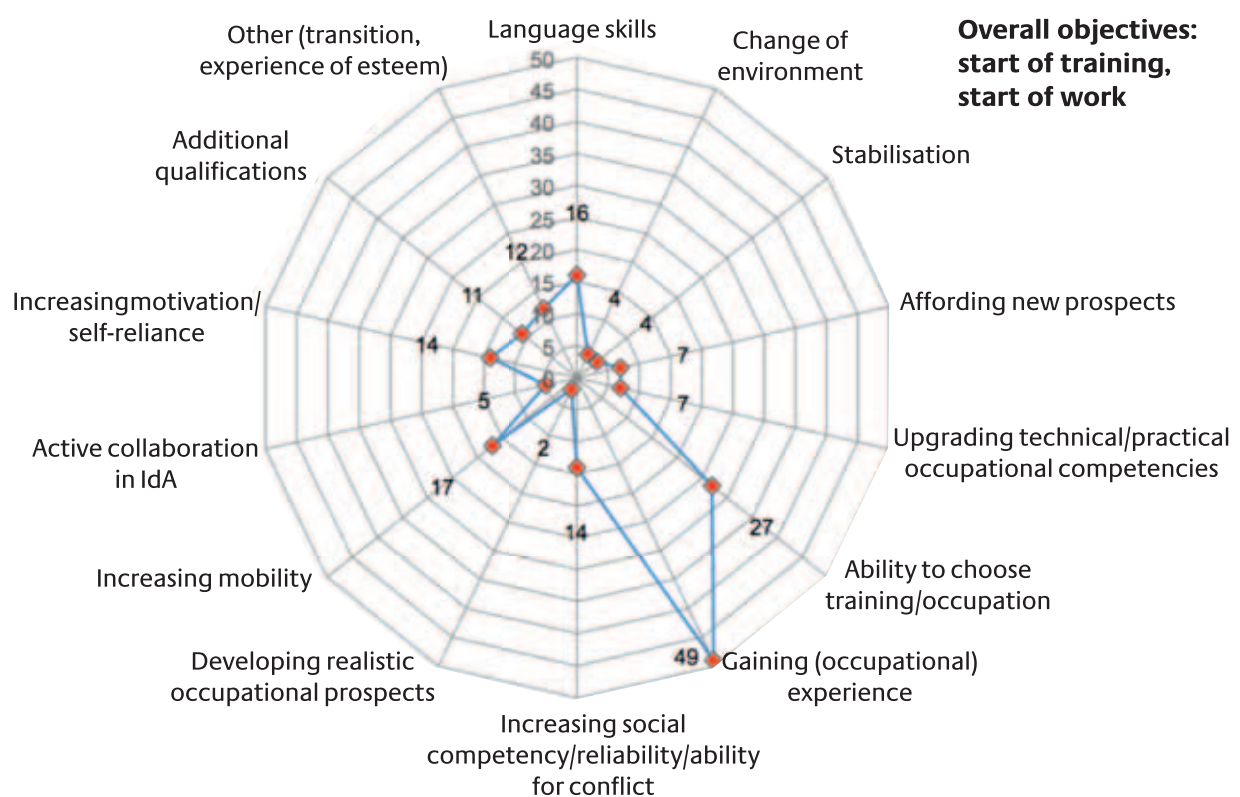


Fig. 4: Integration agreements in support planning: Assessment of jobcentres/employment agencies (139 free responses, in groups)

The overall objectives, such as start of training and/or commencement of work are generally included and are not therefore itemised separately in the chart.

In assessing the outcomes of traineeships abroad, the envisaged competency gain for the individual participants is the prime concern and is at the centre of the integration chain. A distinction is made between social competencies and enhanced employable competencies. These were assessed by the basic income support providers before and after the IdA measure on a grading scale of 1 to 6. Across all competency elements, a general improvement was recorded of about one grade, with the average initial grade at between 3 and 4 for all competencies before participation in IdA.

Self-motivation/ self-reliance, self-confidence and demeanour/ behaviour belong more to personal attributes (see figure 5). Here, the effects are assessed as comparatively high, which is likely attributable above all to the positive impressions that the participants usually make on those around them directly after their return. To what extent the frequently observed advances in personal development are also sustainable in the longer term has not been empirically verified yet. Nevertheless, the frequently noted fresh impetus on return from abroad should be taken up by counselling personnel and integrated in a structured, individual follow-on.

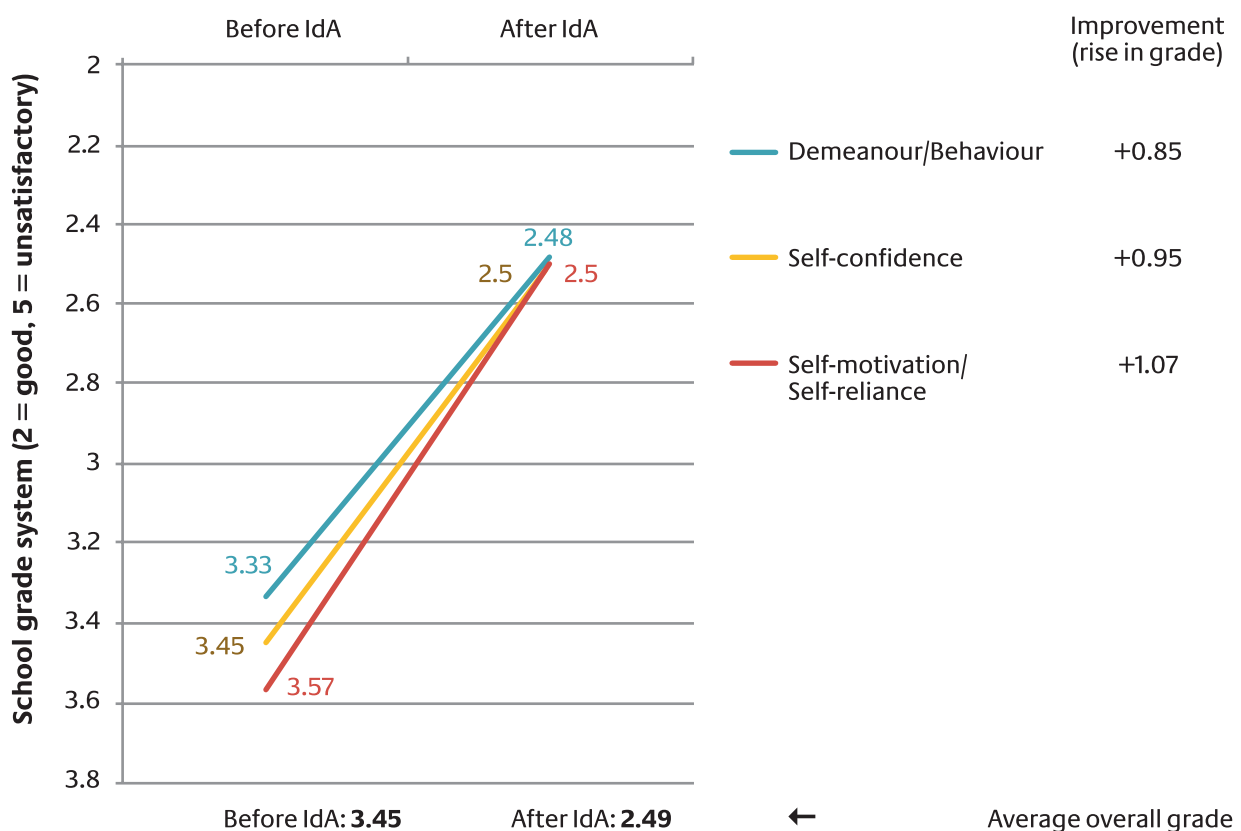


Fig. 5: Competency gain (average grades): Assessment of personal attributes (924 responses)



Cooperativeness and team ability, ability to cope with conflict and communicate can be understood as the specific outcome of acquired intercultural competency. This is important not just abroad but also in work at home. Improvements are also high here (see figure 6), but the grade is lower for improvement in the ability to communicate.

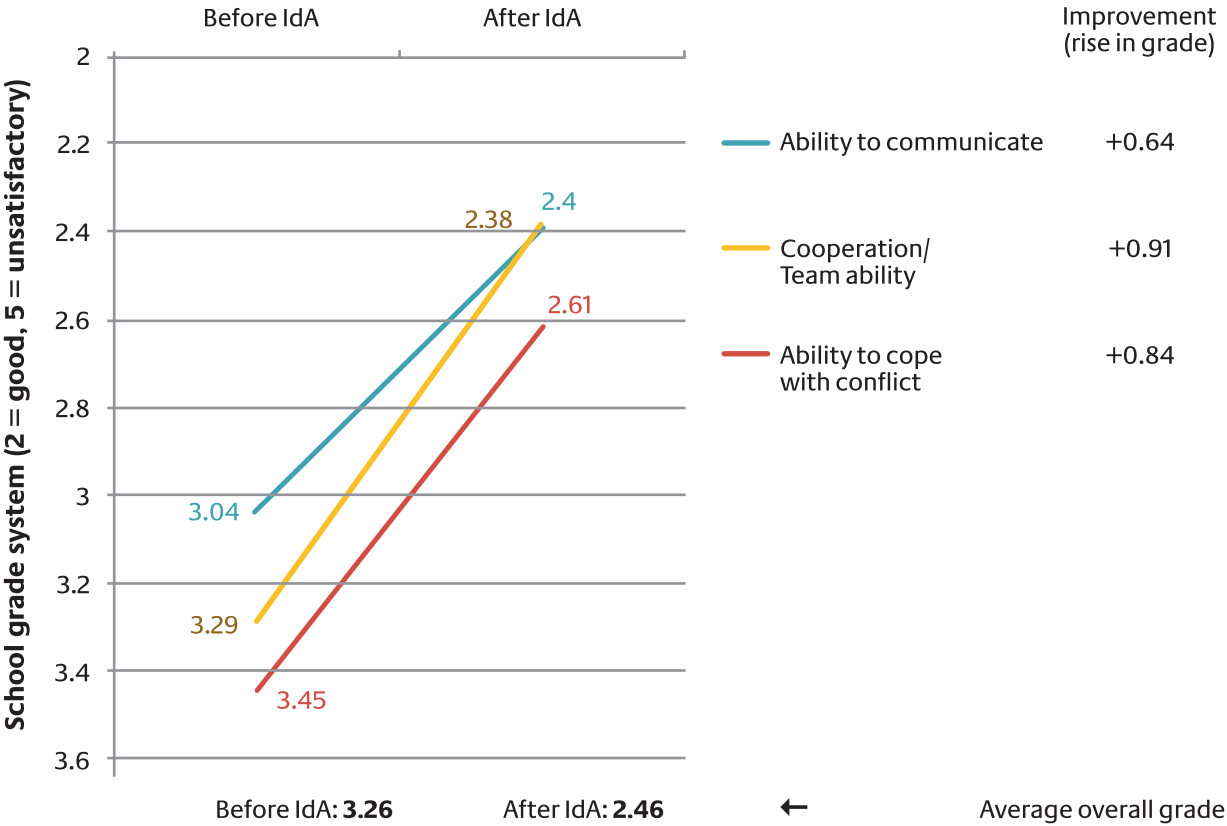


Fig. 6: Competency gain (average grades): Assessment of social competencies (1.137 responses)

This is a little surprising, because in assessing competencies of relevance to placement, foreign language proficiency is rated higher on average by over one grade on the basis of the worst initial grade (4.43, see figure 7). This is followed by occupational competencies and mobility. The latter recorded the second worst grade at 4.22 before participation in IdA. The reasons for this lie in particular in diverse practical restrictions on mobility, e.g. letting out accommodation, problems in relationships, loss of social contacts, etc.

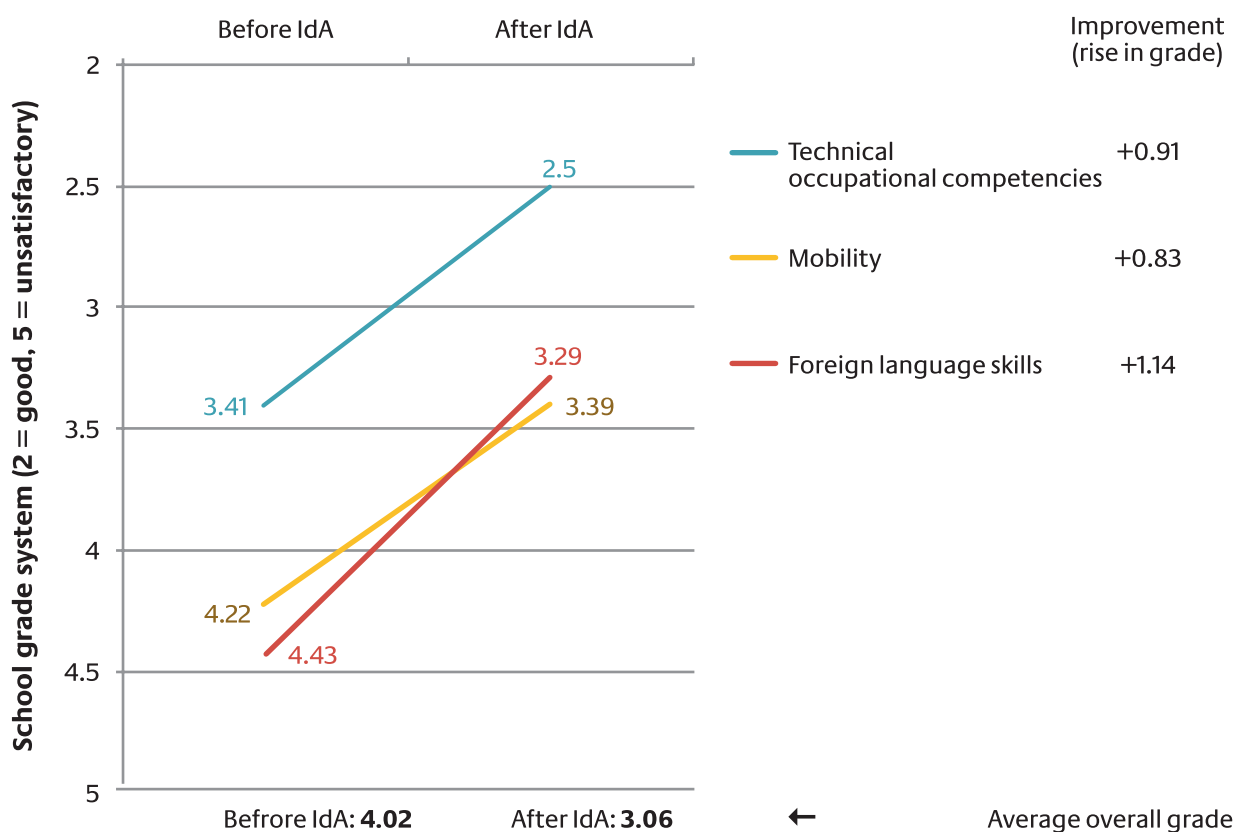


Fig. 7: Competency gain (average grades): Assessment of labour-market opportunities (1,077 responses)



Ability to choose an occupation/ training records the highest improvement in the assessments of the jobcentres and employment agencies and thus makes up a priority in the integration chain (see figure 8). The other specific attributes of relevance to placement, flexibility and application behaviour also record higher grades, generally indicating a considerable improvement in employability.

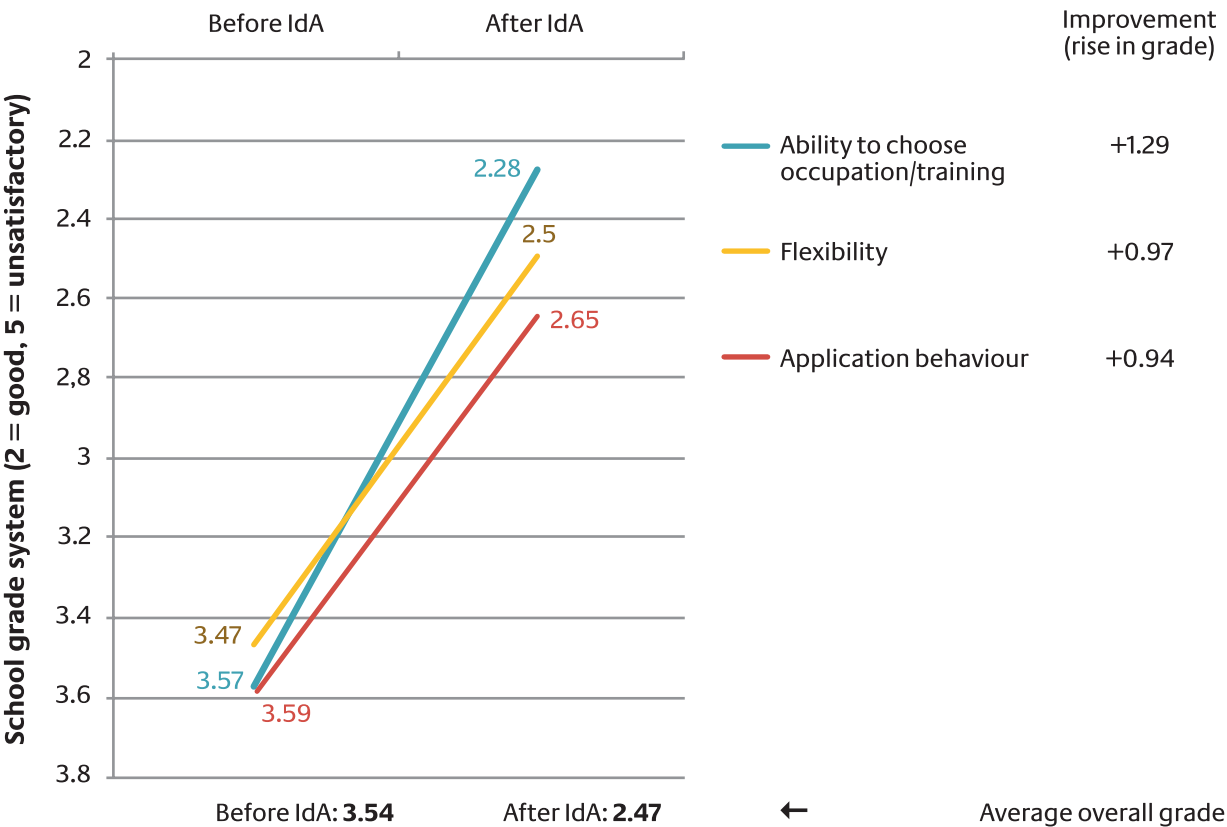


Fig. 8: Competency gain (average grades): Assessment of labour-market behaviour (776 responses)

These effects are also evident in the destination studies. Although in its approach, the IdA Programme is not an occupational programme, aiming instead at improving employability, almost half of all participants are in training/ a course of study or in socially-insured employment 6 weeks afterwards (see figure 9). About a quarter are still in the integration process or are unemployed. Another quarter are involved in various measures and/ or are attending school.

Up to six months after IdA, almost two-thirds of participants are already in training/ a course of study or socially-insured employment (see figure 10). Only 18 % are still unemployed or in the integration process. While school attendance has increased again slightly, the ratio of participants in qualification measures, minijobs and one-euro jobs only amounts to 12 % in all.

If we just look at the IdA participants at the second threshold, that is, those in transition from training to employment, almost two-thirds are in socially-insured employment up to 6 months after IdA. 12 % are in schools, training or courses of study and only 13 % are still in the integration process.

From a labour-market and training policy viewpoint, this tallies largely with experience from other transnational projects and programmes aimed at these outcomes. Nor is a larger sample survey towards the end of the IdA Programme expected to reveal any large changes. The outcomes described reveal the whole potential of transnational mobility and not only vindicate the design of the programme but also argue for a continued support of traineeships abroad for underprivileged youth and young adults.

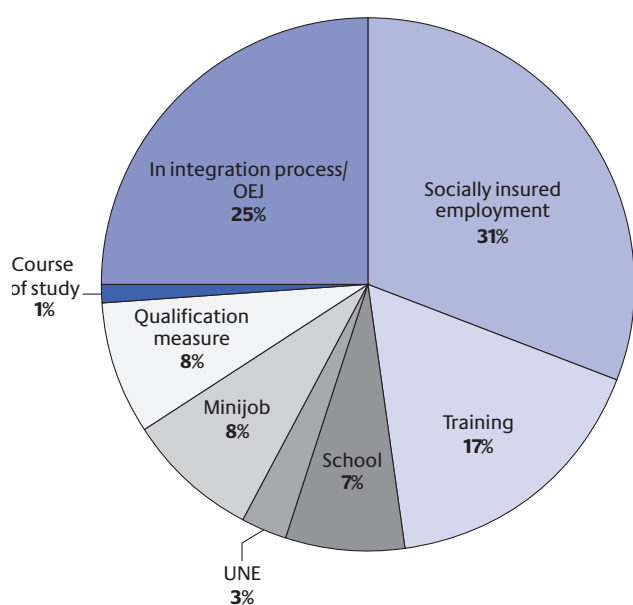


Fig. 9: Destination up to 6 weeks after IdA

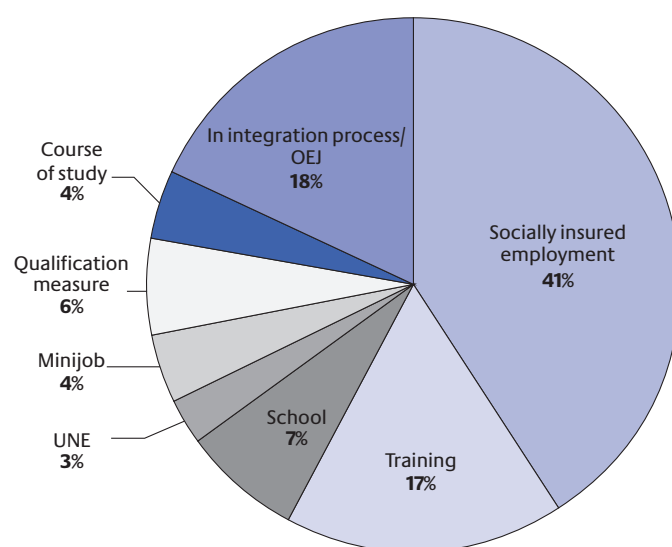


Fig. 10: Destination up to 6 months after IdA

5. A mid-term review from the perspective of the Evaluation of the Federal ESF-Operational Programme – survey of participants

BY PROF. DR JOCHEN KLUVE, HUMBOLDT UNIVERSITY AND RHENISH-WESTPHALIAN INSTITUTE FOR ECONOMIC RESEARCH

Besides the evaluation of individual programmes and projects, the Federal Operational Programme for ESF in the funding period from 2007 to 2013 is undergoing an overall evaluation to obtain findings on its implementation, effectiveness and efficiency as a whole. A thematic examination of transnational measures is also a core task of the overall evaluation. Here, as the largest transnational programme of the ESF Federal Operational Programme, Integration through Exchange – IdA – is a major focus.

Three results indicators are of particular interest to the ESF Federal Operational Programme for evaluating IdA: first, the number of youth taking part in transnational measures; second, the ratio of participants who have improved their occupational competencies through the transnational measure; and third, the ratio of youth who have improved their foreign language skills. To assess these indicators, a survey was designed to be able to depict the development of the occupational and language competencies of participants in IdA and analyse its effectiveness. Besides the key indicators of the Federal Operational Programme, with specific reference to IdA the personal situation and the employability of participants are also included along with their assessments of the course and their stay abroad.

For this, IdA participants are surveyed in three waves, as illustrated in Figure 1. In an initial wave in the preparatory phase, some core socio-demographic attributes are collected shortly before the stay abroad and a number of questions posed on basic competencies, self-assessment and leisure pursuits. Respondents are also asked for an initial assessment of the IdA course. The second survey wave is conducted directly after the stay abroad and measures its direct effects on the competencies and self-assessment of participants. The third survey wave is to be conducted 6 - 12 months after the stay abroad and include the subsequent destination of participants in training and employment.

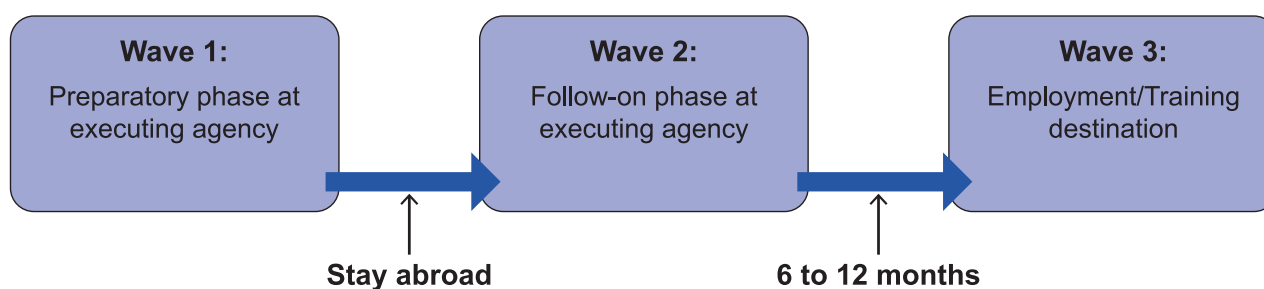


Fig. 1: Survey in three waves

The IdA programme is based on individual project networks, i.e. every executing agency decides itself on major programme design elements, such as number of groups, size of group, scheduling and length of stay abroad. This had to be taken into account in the questionnaire design, as, for example, no uniform survey would be possible on a particular date for all executing agencies. The design therefore provides for each agency carrying out the survey itself at the relevant times for its groups. Agencies were provided with the questionnaires and implementation directives by the evaluators. The procedure was presented and discussed in detail at a meeting of all project networks, where the feedback of the executing agencies was used for improving and fine tuning the design and questionnaires. The respondents also remain anonymous for their executing agencies, as they seal their answer sheets in envelopes before these are collected by the respective agency and sent to the evaluators.

SURVEY FINDINGS

In November 2010, the questionnaires of Wave 1 were sent to all 69 executing agencies. Since then, the survey has been carried out in the above-described „rolling system“ of groups and executing agencies. It has therefore been underway for almost a year so that the response to date comprises Waves 1 and 2. For the evaluation of the interim review, 1,088 questionnaires of the first wave and 434 questionnaires of the second wave are available. For a panel group of 340 persons, the responses of the two waves are linkable so that the information provided before and after the stay abroad is directly comparable at the individual level. The questionnaires currently available for evaluation stem from 58 project executing agencies.

Wave 1: Before the stay abroad

Among the 1,088 respondents of the first survey wave, 53 % were men and 47 % women. At 23.5 years-old, the average age corresponds with the target group of young adults. 91 % of respondents are single and not cohabiting. 92 % have no children and 7 % have one child. Among the participants, German nationals make up by far the largest part (90 %). Four per cent of IdA participants are of Turkish nationality with numerous other nationalities represented in very small percentages.

35 % of IdA participants report being unemployed directly before the beginning of IdA. This is by far the most frequent citation. Other significant ratios are the 11 % of respondents who attended school before IdA participation; 9 % were in a joint agency job creation scheme; 8.8 % have undergone on-the-job or school training. Almost half of respondents (525 of 1,088) report a lack of any vocational qualification, including young people who are still at the first threshold.

The information on labour-market experience points to the target group of disadvantaged young adults. On the one hand, 56 % of respondents indicate that they have already worked for a total average of 22 months since completion of school or vocational training. On the other hand, 79 % of respondents have, however, already experienced (long-term) unemployment, with an average total duration of 15 months.

Figure 3 depicts four selected aspects of the question, 'How satisfied are you with the IdA project?' to which the respondents could answer the statements in five categories: 'Strongly agree', 'Agree', 'Partly agree/ disagree', 'Disagree', 'Strongly disagree'. Sections A and B respectively show that more than 80 % of respondents were largely or fully of the view that the supervisors/ trainers are able to explain well and that the preparation for the stay abroad is very good. Section C shows that slightly more than 60 % of respondents see the IdA project as beneficial for their occupational future. About 10 % do not think so and almost 28 % are still uncertain. Section D in turn shows that about 80 % of participants say they are able to follow the project contents well or very well.

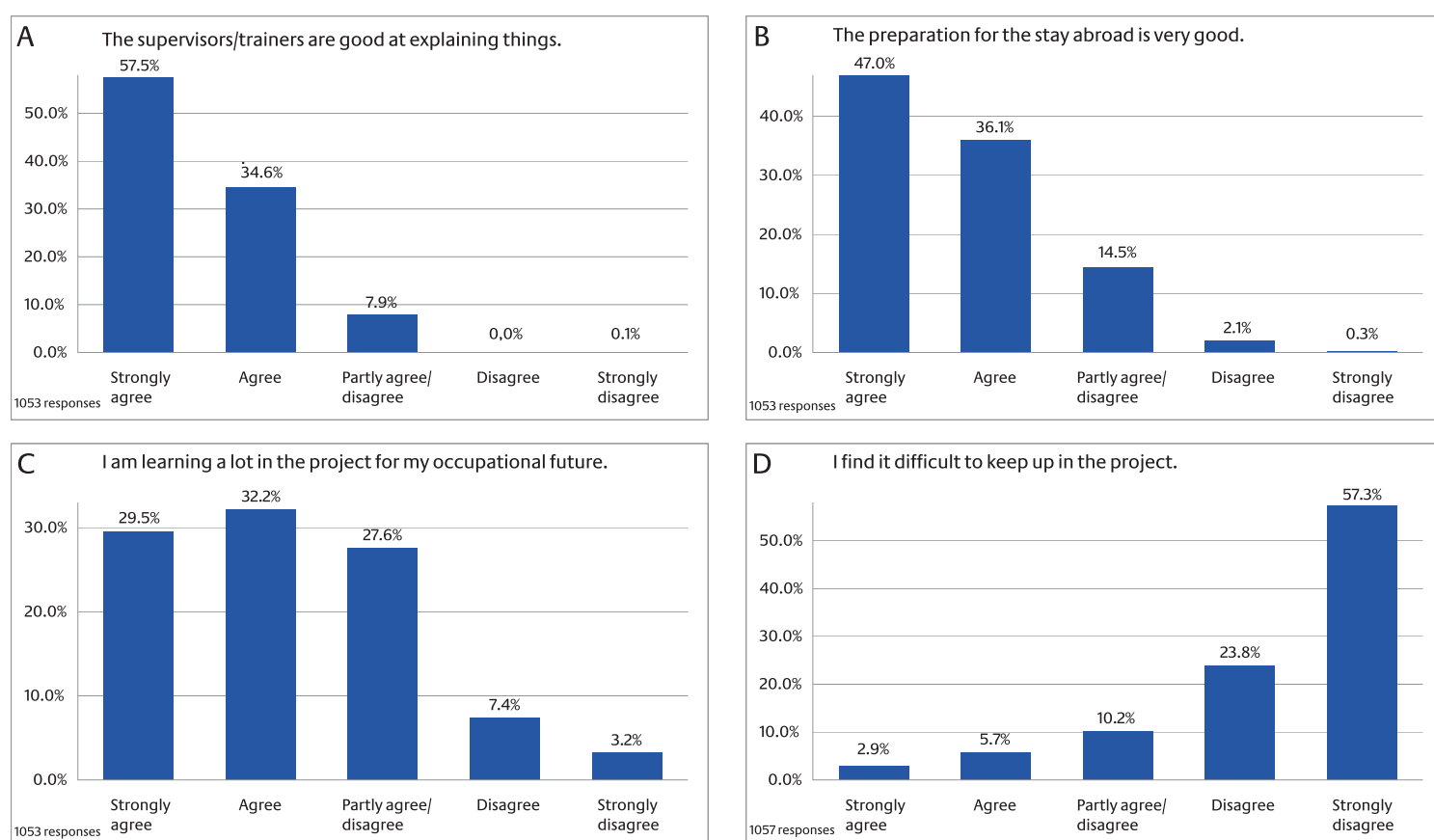


Fig. 2: How satisfied are you with the IdA project?

Wave 2: After the stay abroad

In the questionnaire about the traineeship abroad the participants were asked first about the country of stay. The response distribution is shown in Figure 4 and indicates a rather uniform distribution over more than nineteen European countries. The respondents report an average length of stay of seven weeks, with a minimum of one week and a maximum of 13 weeks. 59 % of IdA participants indicate that that they would have liked to stay longer abroad, while only 11 % say that they would have preferred to return earlier.

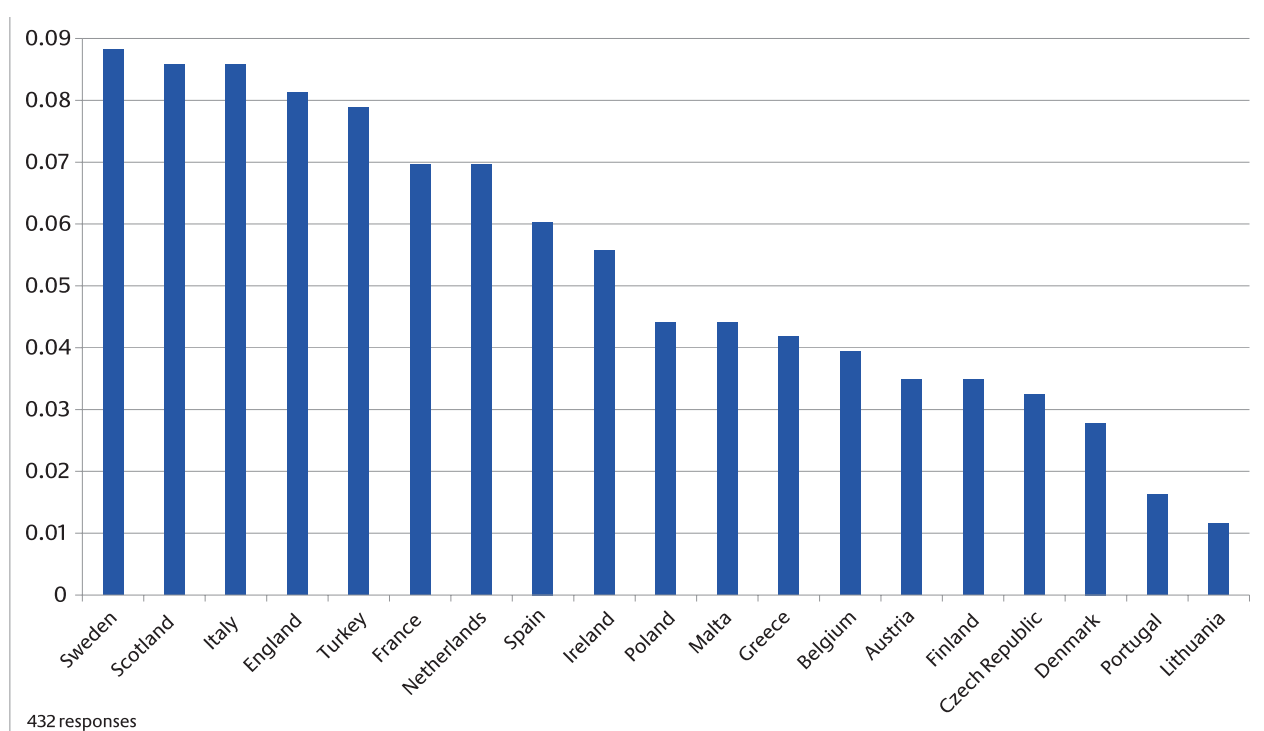


Fig. 3: Country of stay abroad

Also following the stay, altogether almost 80 % of respondents say that they had been well or very well prepared (see figure 4). The visible change of the two highest columns 'good' and 'very good' in comparison with figure 2 B does not detract from this affirmative assessment, presumably indicating above all a certain realisation of local reality (abroad).

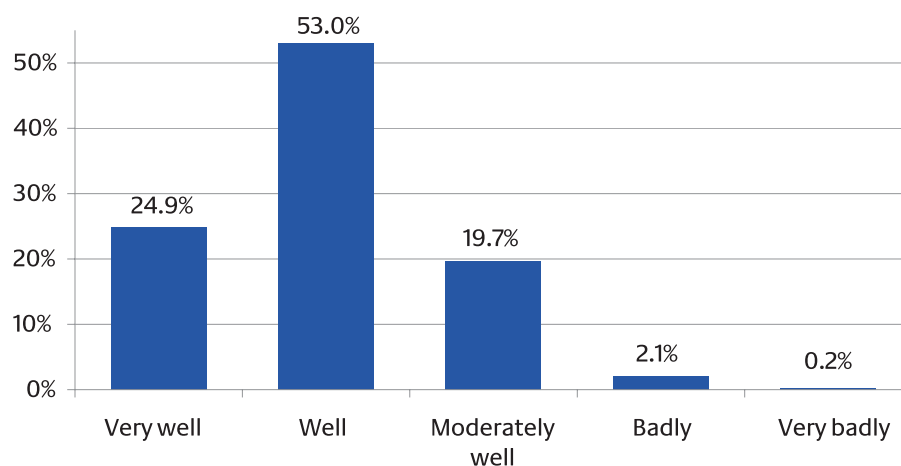


Fig. 4: How well were you prepared in the Ida project for the stay abroad?

Figure 5 supplements this with six additional selected aspects of the question, ‘How satisfied are you with the stay abroad?’ The subcharts reveal a quite uniform picture regardless of whether questions were asked about (A) Practical relevance, (B) Benefit for occupation and training, (C) Supervision/ Counselling during stay, (D) Accommodation/ Housing, (E) Contacts with the population or (F) Cooperation with colleagues on site. In each case, about 70 to 80 % answer with ‘good’ or ‘very good’, about a fifth are undecided and only a single-digit remainder were quite or completely dissatisfied. The scepticism of about a third of the respondents (here: the three categories on the right, ‘moderate’, ‘poor’, ‘very poor’) can be seen in Section (D) as to the accommodation/ housing. Altogether, however, most IdA participants were clearly satisfied with the time spent abroad.

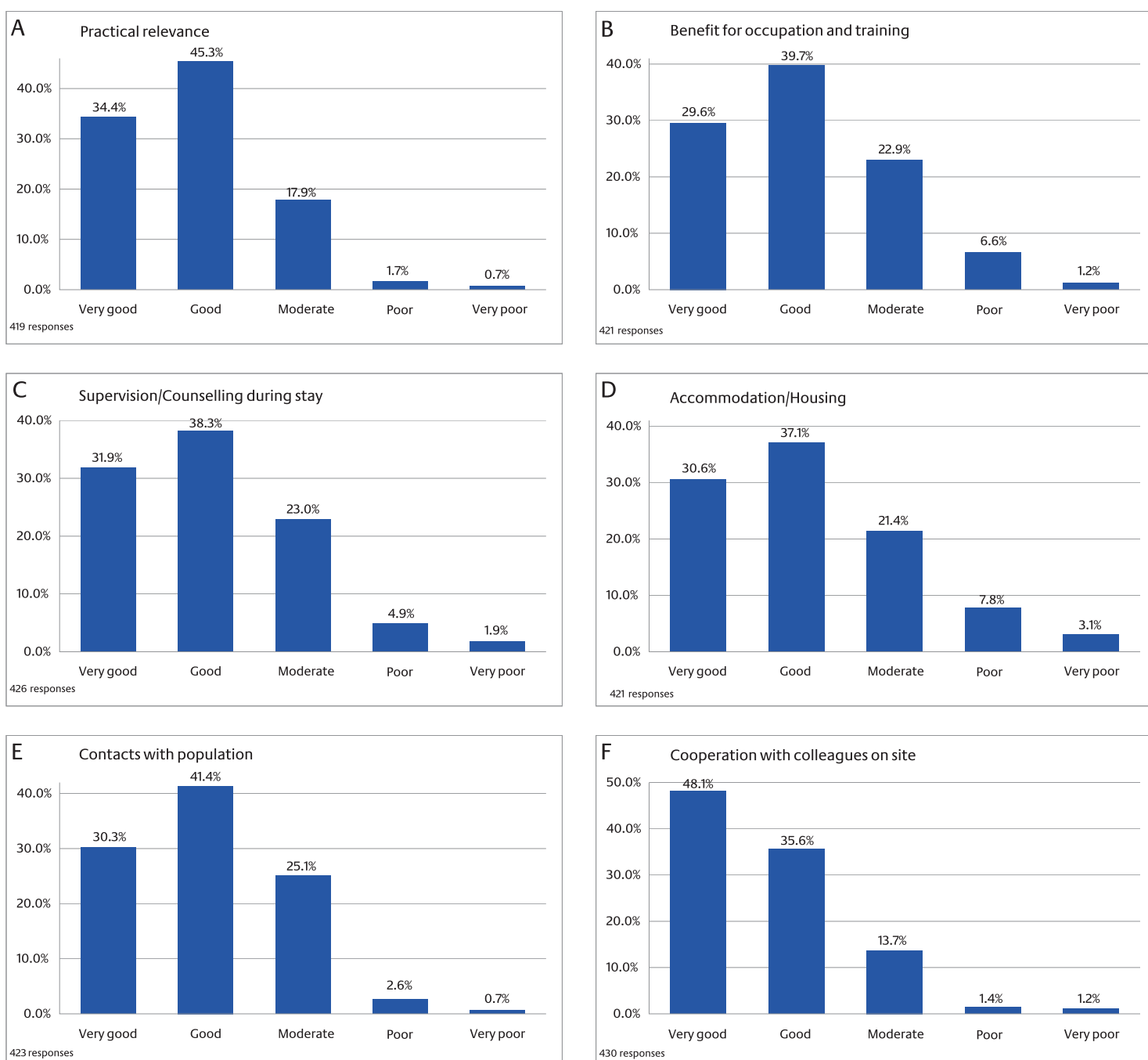


Fig. 5: How satisfied are you with the stay abroad?

Besides the questions on the assessment of the course and/ or planning of the stay abroad, the participants were also asked to report on how it influenced them personally. Section A in Figure 6 shows that approximately 70 % of the respondents indicate that they now feel more self-assured and self-confident thanks to the traineeship abroad. Almost 20 % are undecided on this and only 9 % say this is not the case. This pattern is even more pronounced in Section B, where more than 80 % say that they have learned much about another country. This recurrent pattern in the previous answers, with a 70 - 80 % positive assessment, a fifth undecided and under 10 % adverse assessment - is not, however, apparent in Section C: In answer to the question whether they have learnt a lot for their occupation, most respondents answer 'partly' (about a third), while the remainder tend both towards a positive and also negative assessment. This diverse picture could, however, have to do with the relatively short overall duration of the stay abroad (see above) that enables participants to gain substantial experience with new cultures and foreign languages, but possibly provides little decisive learning impetus for their own occupation. A possible explanation for the pronounced middle category could also be that the notion 'my occupation' does not yet have a clear meaning for youth at the first threshold.

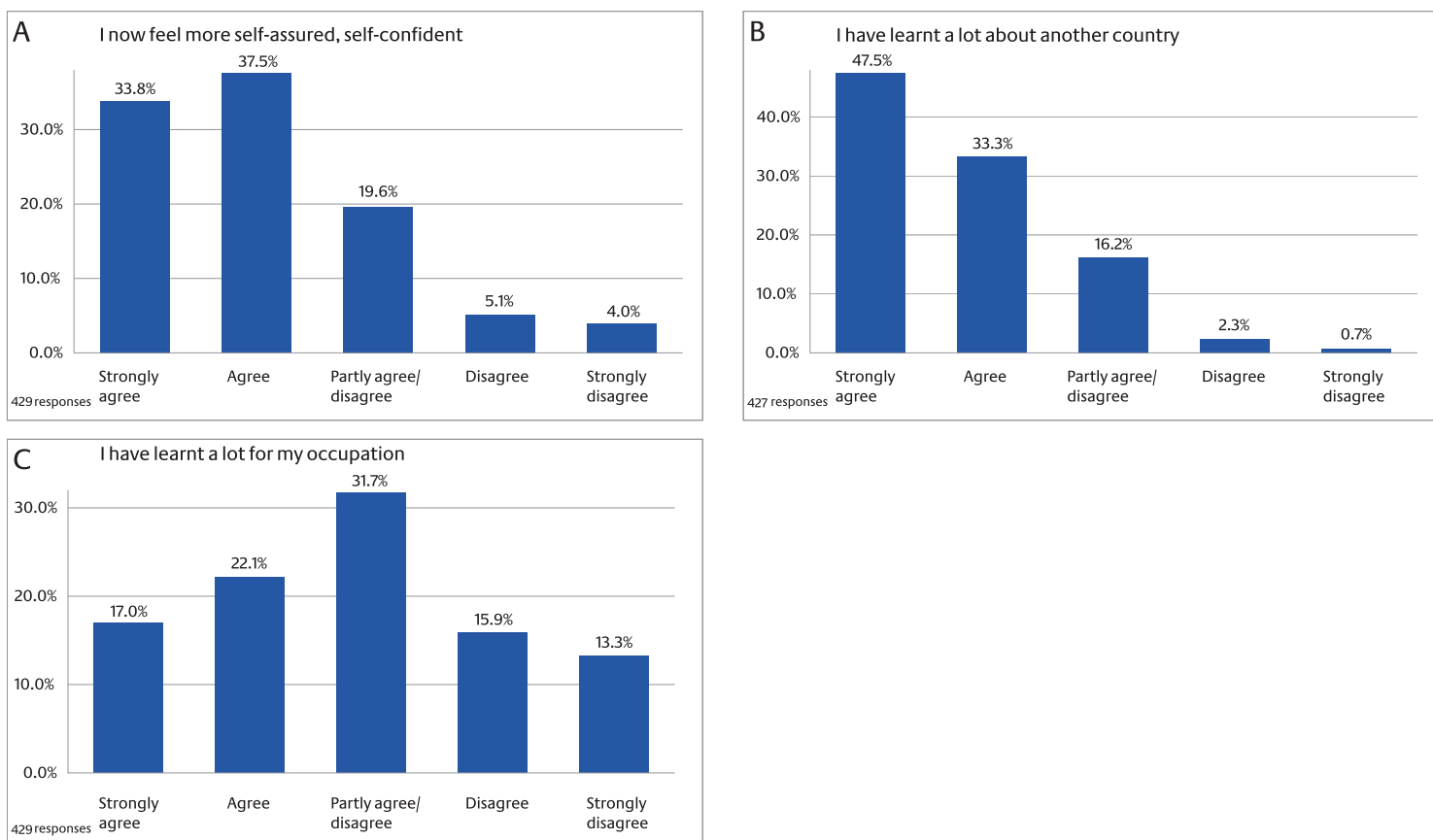


Fig. 6: How did the stay abroad affect you personally?



The typical pattern of responses is, however, evident again in figure 7, which presents the overall distribution of answers to the question on the assessment of the stay abroad. 90 % of respondents would also return on holiday to the country where they had stayed and as much as 45 % would go there again to work.

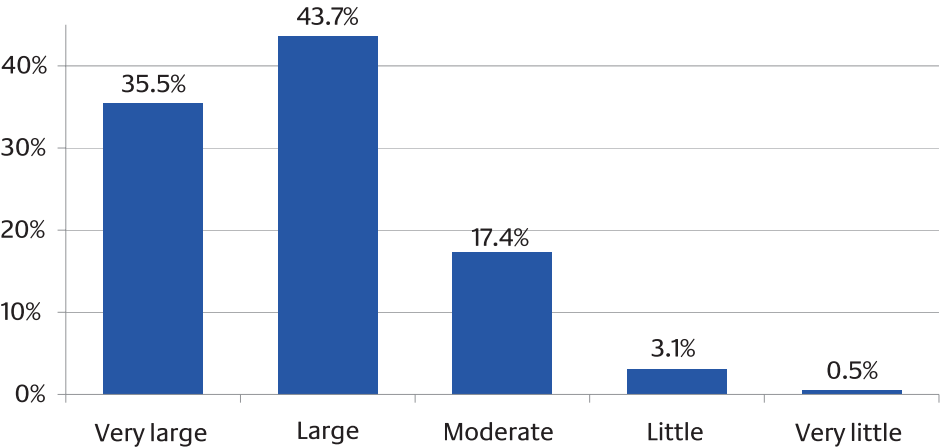


Fig. 7: What general benefit has it had for you?

EVALUATION OF THE PANEL GROUP

As pointed out initially, the answers of the first and second wave are linkable for 340 respondents and can therefore convey an initial impression of the effects of the traineeship abroad. In Figure 9, a before/ after comparison is made of these 340 respondents regarding an assessment of their future prospects. Section A shows that significantly more participants assess their general future prospects as good (52.7% as compared with 44.1 %) or very good (14% as compared with 10 %) after the stay abroad. The result is similar for the slightly more specific question about the opportunities of a training place or job: After the stay abroad, 45.3% consider these to be 'good' (36.7% before) and 13.7% as 'very good' (10.2 % before).

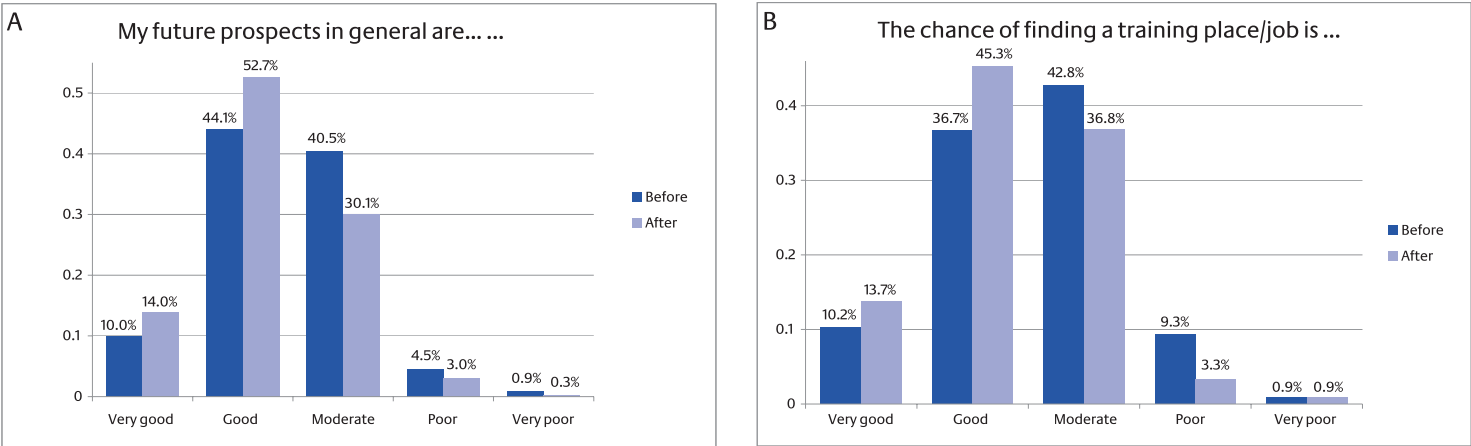


Fig. 8: How do you assess your future prospects?

The questionnaires of the first and second wave also contain a list of questions for motivation and ability indicators. Figure 10 shows four selected aspects of these indicators for self-assessment before and after the stay abroad. Section A reveals the self-assessment in response to the statement 'I know what I want in life.', indicating a clear before/ after change: In particular the ratio of the answer 'Strongly agree' increases from 28.0 % before to 38.6 % after. A clear change for the better is also evident for the statement 'I am making new plans/have new ideas for my life' in Section B, where in particular the second reply category 'Agree' increases from 31.4 % to 40.5 %.

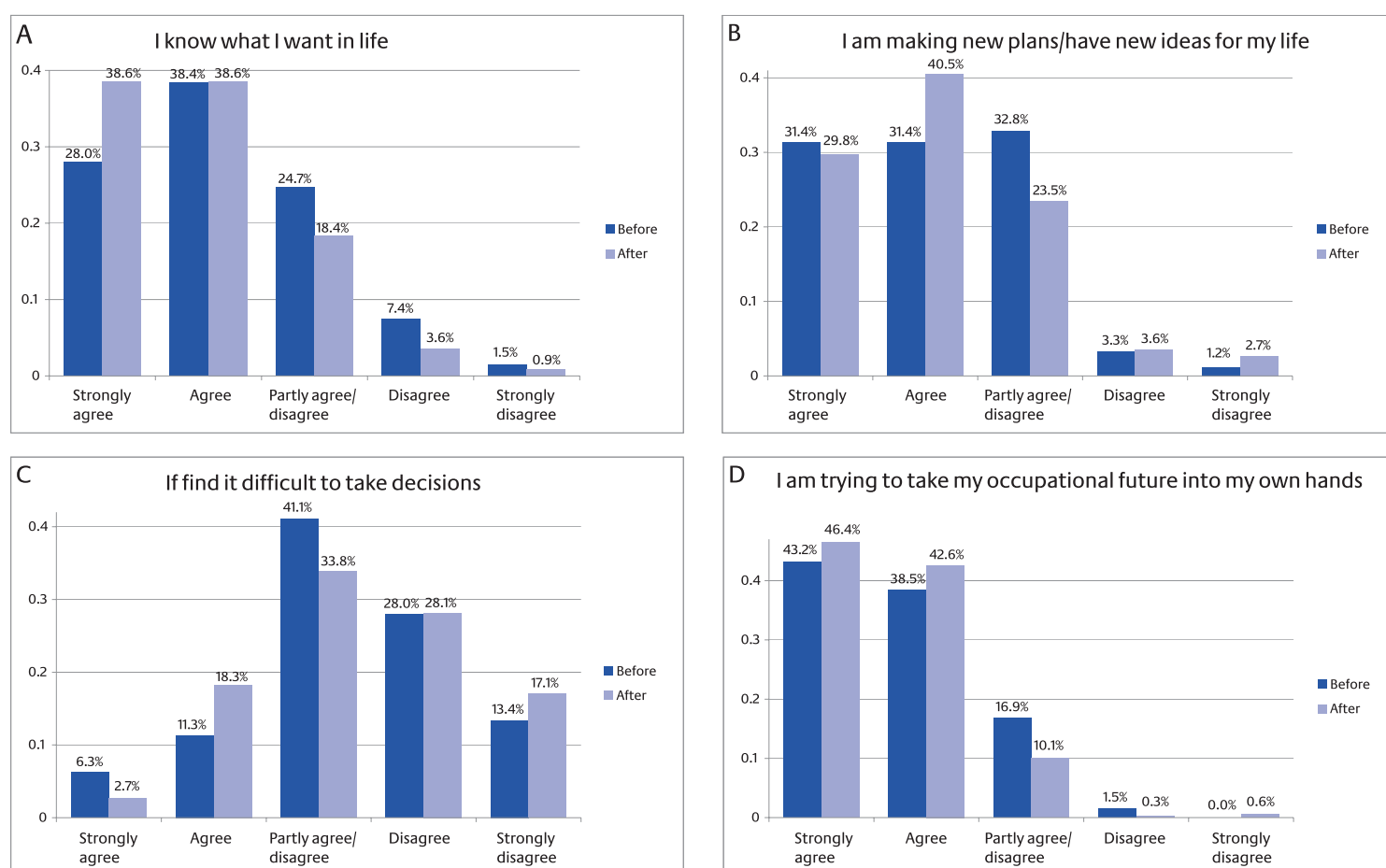


Fig. 9: Self-assessment before and after

In Section C on possible indecision ('I find it difficult to make decisions.') an equally clear, positive picture does not emerge. Although the ratio increases in the category 'Strongly disagree' from 13.4 % to 17.1 %, the ratio in the category 'Agree' also increases from 11.3 % to 18.3 %. Interpreted positively this could also mean that the young adults think more about their life and their occupational future as a result of their stay abroad. The latter would verify Section D, where 46.4 % strongly agree with the statement, 'I am trying to take my occupational future into my own hands.' after the stay abroad (43.2 % before) and 42.6 % agree (38.5 % before).

RECAP

Overall, the implementation of the IdA Programme shows that it reaches men and women to almost the same extent (53 % and 47 % respectively) and the clear majority of participants are German. It also reaches the target group of underprivileged youth and young adults. The participants are on average 23.5 years old, frequently lacking vocational qualification and with a significant experience of unemployment.

The average stay abroad lasts seven weeks. The clear majority of respondents feel well prepared, an assessment that also holds ex-post. Almost 80 % assess the stay abroad as good to very good and almost 60 % would like to have stayed longer. This (very) positive assessment tallies with the first trend for the effects of the stay abroad: The young adults gauge their own occupational prospects as better thanks to the stay and they are more motivated to actively meet the challenges of their occupational future.

6. 10 Success factors in the ESF programme „IdA – Integration through Exchange“

BY REPRESENTATIVES OF IDA PROJECT EVALUATIONS¹

1. For sustainable success, transnational exchange needs a joint strategy for all cooperating actors that besides the basic pedagogic approach also caters for relevant economic, structural, scheduling, regional and gender equality aspects.
2. The central concern of transnational exchange measures is the promotion of self-reliance and enhancing the self-empowerment of participants. In a resource-based approach, the participants are involved as potential personnel.
3. Mobility is more than travelling, because it fosters the geographic, mental and emotional adaptability of participants and they learn and live under unfamiliar conditions. This engenders personal changes in their attitudes and behaviour.
4. Essentially, IdA projects help to provide occupational and personal guidance to participants and develop their competency. Dealing with unfamiliar environments not only helps them to acquire new coping strategies and self-assurance but also broad new competencies, which improves individual employability.
5. Competency can be efficiently raised, if the exchange measures offer adequate opportunities to gain experience in dealing with differences and unfamiliar situations. The more diverse these are, the broader the scope for individual improvement.
6. The sound methodological-didactic mix of formal and informal learning opportunities aims at all-round competency gains. For multidimensional and long-term effects, learning opportunities must be planned individually. The best way to assure learning outcomes is with the help of cross-project indicators defined for the planned objectives.
7. Experience alone does not suffice for sound competency development. To gain individually valuable experience, there is a need for reflection with pedagogic support. This should be done during the stay abroad and in a follow-on phase, so that the participants personally assimilate what they have learnt and can maintain this, also through the involvement of their social environment.
8. Instead of an obstacle, language is value added. Limited language proficiency suffices at first if participants are also willing to speak imperfectly. Besides foreign language proficiency when abroad, the participants also develop communicative competency to cope with an unfamiliar language and culture.
9. Essential for the success of transnational exchange measures is open-mindedness on the part of all actors to ensure equal opportunities and counter prejudices about the suitability of target groups or also individual participants. The measures also help to consolidate and sustain a previous climate of tolerance.
10. Transnational exchange promotes intercultural learning in a unique way: Disadvantaged youth experience Europe in everyday life. Their attitudes and behaviour change in the process and their employability is enhanced.

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His main activities focus on: vocational-training and labour-market research (research on disadvantaged persons, international competency and qualifications research, mobility research, internationalisation of organisations), evaluation (ESF programmes, transnational mobility projects, etc.), consultancy (organisational development, executive staff development) and further training (project management, problem-solving methods, regulatory impact assessments, strategic management).

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