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Mobilities for professionals and qualified employees of SMEs

Final Evaluation Report



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Undertaken in collaboration with



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1 Introduction

This report constitutes the second and final report under the contract between Technopolis Group and the MobiliseSME Consortium. The aim of the contract is to deliver research, analysis and evaluation services in the Framework of a feasibility study on a public support scheme for cross-border mobility experiences of employees of Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises.

The report presents the evaluation of the pilot project Mobilities for professionals and qualified employees of SMEs (MobiliseSME). This evaluation report builds on the Report on the Demand, State of Play, Opportunities and Obstacles for a “Mobility for Professionals” Scheme.

The MobiliseSME project has a structured approach to tackling the question of feasibility. First, the potential demand for such a scheme was assessed in a minimum of 20 countries in the report on demand, state of play, opportunities and obstacles mentioned above. The project then implemented a pilot scheme for 50 to 100 pilot exchanges, and evaluated the feasibility of the experiences made with the demand analysis and the pilot exchanges in the report at hand. The last step was engaging in the synthesis and dissemination of findings to key stakeholders, among others on the final conference held in Brussels in September 2017.

The work was undertaken by Technopolis Group in association with Henningsen Consulting.

The report is organised as follows:

- The remainder of Section 1 presents the MobiliseSME project as well as the purpose, objectives and the scope of this evaluation;
- Section 2 presents the approach used to evaluate the project;
- Section 3 presents the findings of the evaluation;
- Section 4 presents the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation.

The following appendices are attached to the report:

- Appendix A: Interviews undertaken
- Appendix B: Results of the participant surveys undertaken
- Appendix C: Pre-exchange surveys
- Appendix D: Post-exchange surveys (separate document)

1.1 Background of evaluation

The free movement of workers within the EU is one of the key pillars of the Single Market. This includes the rights of movement and residence and the rights for family members to be treated on an equal footing.

According to the Annual EU Labour Mobility Report 2016,¹ there are a little fewer than 11.3 million EU-28 movers of working age (20-64) across the EU-28, making up 3.7% of the total population of working-age across the EU-28. While intra EU mobility is on the rise, it trails significantly behind the US. There, mobility – as measured by the share of persons who lived a year ago in a different state – accounted for 2.7% of the population in 2011/2012. The corresponding values for the EU are only at about 10% of the U.S. level.

Labour mobility has many advantages – including new job opportunities, higher income and skills acquisitions for individuals. In host countries, mobile workers address skill shortages and widen the range of services available. From a macro-economic point of view, mobility helps address unemployment disparities between EU Member States and contributes to a more efficient allocation of human resources.

¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1154&langId=en>

The EU has taken many initiatives, legislative as well as non-legislative to facilitate forms of labour mobility. The most known initiatives include EURES and the Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs programme; more recent initiatives include tools such as a skills assessment for third country nationals under the Skills Agenda. For the period 2014-2020 labour mobility is also subject to EU funding via EaSI (the Employment and Social Innovation programme), which earmarks 18% of its total budget of roughly €919 million to intra-EU labour mobility under the axis of EURES, for support of the roll out of the EESSI for the social security coordination,² and depending on the choice of Member States, under the ESF.

While the discussion on labour mobility is quite elaborate regarding the general picture and issues, there is little discussion and data available regarding intra-EU mobility and the way SMEs could benefit and/or are affected. This is remarkable, given that SMEs account for the vast majority of the stock of firms and the majority of jobs offered. The SME intergroup organised by the European Parliament concluded in 2014 that “...bottleneck situations in skills supply harm most particularly small businesses that cannot count on prestigious in-house training programmes and large human resources departments looking for talent outside their region or country.”³ A recent paper highlighted respective policy responses at regional level, such as “bottom-up” projects in Germany that aim to recruit from abroad (primarily from Spain and other Southern European countries) for the benefit of local SMEs. The paper also underlined the lack of data in the context of labour mobility in general, such as with respect to barriers for mobility, the role of return migration, or skills acquired abroad.⁴

Additionally, to the aspect of labour mobility, Eurostat data also shows that cross border business activities of SMEs are in average lower than for example the international business activities of larger companies.⁵

The MobiliseSME project, funded under EaSI, aims to test the feasibility of an ERASMUS-like scheme applied to *professionals* working for/in SMEs. Its formal purpose is described as follows:

To verify the feasibility under which conditions and by which means, as well to test if feasible, a potential European programme or programme measure that supports “mobilities” of employees between Micro-, Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) in different European countries.

While there are some examples of this types of secondment schemes at national level, cross-border secondment meets to a large extent uncharted territory. The MobiliseSME project has a structured approach to tackling the question of feasibility by:

- i) Assessing the potential demand for such a scheme in a minimum of 20 countries
- ii) Implementing a pilot scheme with 50 to 100 pilot exchanges
- iii) Evaluating the feasibility of the experiences made with the demand analysis and the pilot exchanges, and
- iv) Engaging in the synthesis and dissemination of findings to key stakeholders

The assessment of the potential demand for such a scheme, considerations as regards conditions in legal, economic and organisational terms, and other feasibility considerations were the subject of a separate report, which was delivered in November 2016.

Following the approval of this report and its presentation at the MobiliseSME stakeholder event on 9th November 2016, the project consortium led by European Entrepreneurs CEA-PME initiated the implementation of the pilot scheme.

² <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1081&langId=en>

³ <http://www.othmar-karas.at/de/schwerpunkte.php?cat=2&id=1758>

⁴ Barslund, M., Busse, M. & Schwarzwälder, L. (2015): CEPS Policy Brief – Labour Mobility in Europe: An untapped resource?

⁵ See e.g. http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Statistics_on_small_and_medium-sized_enterprises#Indicators_of_international_trade_for_different_types_of_enterprises

This report concerns the evaluation of the scheme.

1.2 Presentation of the MobiliseSME pilot scheme

1.2.1 Project overview and objectives

The MobiliseSME pilot scheme tested cross border secondments and exchanges of employees among Micro-, Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs), contributing to the overall feasibility assessment. As presented in the Project Consortium's application the Pilot scheme aims at realising between 50 and 100 pilot mobility exchanges.

As to deliver on this operational objective the project consortium has implemented the following main activities:

- Design of the pilot scheme taking into account the report on the demand, state of play, opportunities and obstacles for a Mobility for professionals' scheme;
- Design, upload and management of an online match-making database for hosting and sending MSME (in 5 languages);
- Promotion of the scheme via various channels (online, earned media coverage, direct promotion to members of the organisations constituting the project consortium, organisation of events, distribution of MobiliseSME-videos as e.g. how an ideal exchange could look like);
- Direct facilitation of matchmaking between sending and hosting enterprises;
- Design of the necessary documentation (e.g. tripartite agreement);
- Support in the development of the learning plans and exchange agreements;
- Administrative and logistical support in the matchmaking phase;
- Grant management;
- Support to the evaluation (promotion of surveys, contacts to consortium members etc.); and
- Overall project management, including the provision of administrative and financial support to all actors.

In terms of results, it is expected that the mobility exchanges will:

- Improve skills and knowledge of MSME employees – including technical skills and non-technical skills such as language abilities of mobile employees;
- Improve mobile employees' knowledge on markets, technologies, methods and products of similar MSMEs in other EU-countries.

In turn, these results are expected to contribute to the following overall objectives:

- Increase and improve cross-border and international business activities of MSMEs in the fields of subcontracting, import/exports, distribution, market awareness, public tendering in consortia, and raising the success potential of joint ventures;
- Improved competitiveness of MSMEs.

Ultimately the project is expected to help contributing to the EU's 2020 strategy objective for smart and inclusive growth.

The main elements of the exchange scheme are as follows.

Purpose of the scheme

The exchanges are intended only for learning purposes. Filling manpower gaps and posting are explicitly excluded from the exchanges organised.

Type of companies

The target companies for the scheme are micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSME). One-man enterprises are allowed to participate if they are incorporated into a legal entity and have a VAT number. Other forms of self-employment are excluded. However, the scheme also caters for a set of liberal professions, as follows: lawyers, notaries, tax accountants,

certified financial auditors, medical doctors, pharmacists, psychologists, architects, engineers. Large companies (250+ employees) can participate but only as host companies.

All sectors are in principle allowed to participate. However, in tourism and agricultural sectors only employees in management positions can participate. As to avoid any potential issues with posting and filling employee gaps, job agencies, HR consultancies and other professional intermediary services that deliver work power to third parties are not admitted.

Eligible countries

Companies from EU Member States, candidate and potential candidate as well as EFTA countries can participate in the scheme.

Employees

In order to be eligible an employee must have at least 5 years of professional work experience. Alternatively, employees must have at least 3 years of professional work experience and a technical high school or a university degree. An employee is defined as a person who works full-time under an employment contract of indeterminate duration, or determined duration of the official end of the contract is at least 6 months after the end of the exchange. Also, management/owners and self-employed meeting the criteria set out for employees are admitted.

Length of the exchanges

In view of the pilot nature of the scheme, and the limited period of implementation, only four lengths of exchanges are possible: 2 weeks, 1 month, 1.5 month and 2 months. It is possible to arrange several visits within one exchange, subject to each visit being a minimum of one week.

Tripartite agreement

As to be eligible for the scheme a tripartite agreement must be signed by the sending and the hosting companies, as well as the employee. The agreement includes a learning plan which is to specify the purpose and expected learning outcomes for the employee, but also the objectives of all involved parties.

Funding

Employees participating in the exchange must keep receiving salaries from their employers (the sending company) and cannot be on paid or unpaid leave, sick leave, maternal or parental leave.

The scheme provides funding for additional travel, accommodation, and subsistence costs. The amounts maximum financial support available per exchange have been designed on the basis of the funding available for the "Erasmus for Entrepreneurs" scheme. Top up funding however, has been made available – especially for shorter stays (40% monthly rate increase for 2 weeks, a 20% increase for a month and a 10% increase for 1,5 months), reflecting expected higher costs for short term exchanges. Actual support ranges from €567 to €1170 for a two-week exchange, €756 to €1560 for a 4 weeks/month exchange and €1008 to €2080 for a 1.5 months exchange. Funding for two months exchange ranges from €1260 to €2600.

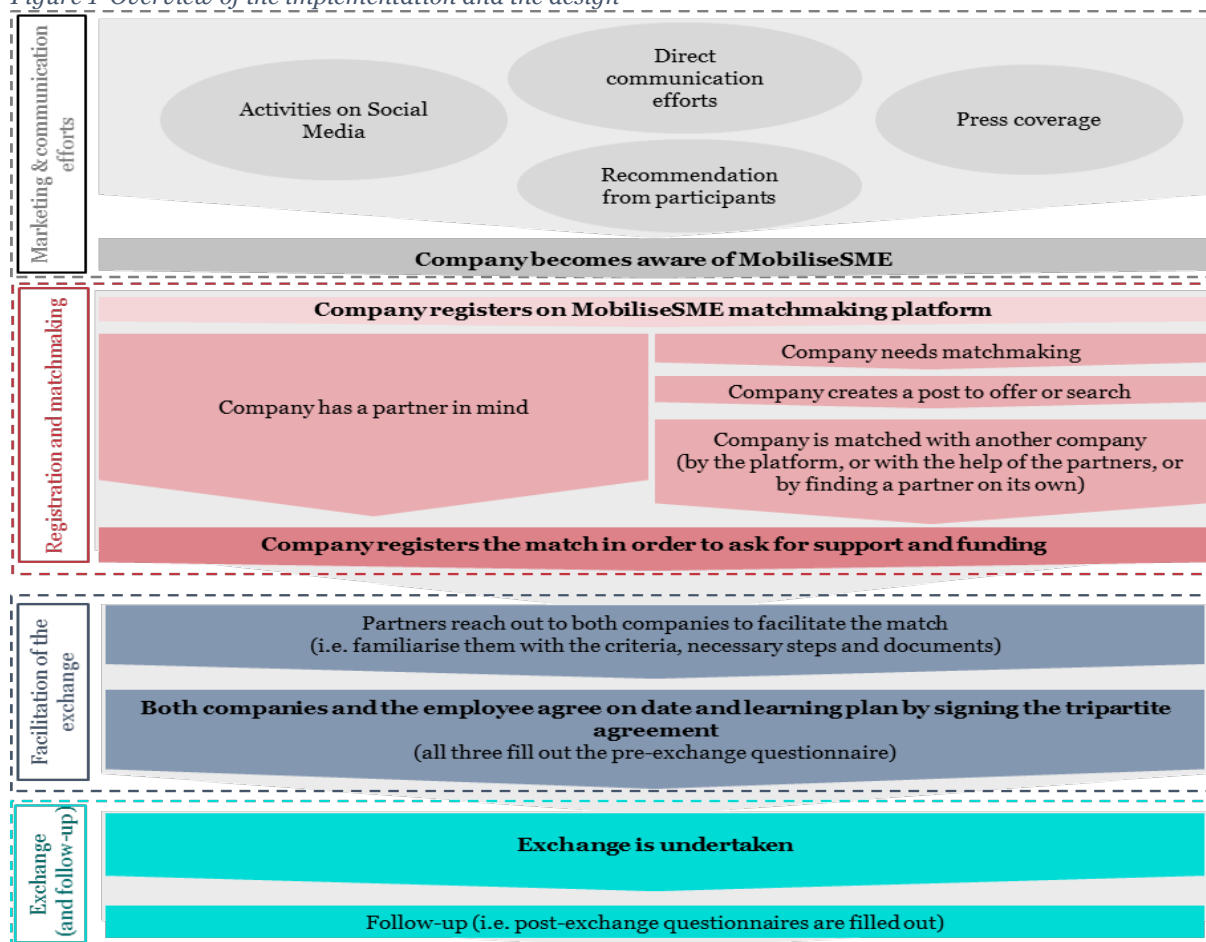
Multiple participation

The scheme explicitly excludes that an employee participates more than once. Moreover, each sending company can at maximum have two employees participating in an exchange and receiving funding in the framework of the project. Host companies, which do not benefit from funding can participate several times.

1.2.2 Implementation design

The approach chosen for the implementation of this specific project MobiliseSME can be described under four main headings: marketing and communication efforts; registration and matchmaking; facilitation of the exchange; exchange and follow up. Figure 1 below, provides a visual overview of the main project elements and how the project is implemented.

Figure 1 Overview of the implementation and the design



1.3 Purpose and scope of the evaluation

The purpose of this report is to provide an ex-post evaluation of the MobiliseSME pilot scheme. The evaluation considers the following criteria:

- Relevance of the MobiliseSME pilot scheme to enterprises in the EU;
- Communication;
- Efficiency of the the MobiliseSME pilot scheme – implementation and cost efficiency;
- Effectiveness of the MobiliseSME pilot scheme – delivery on the set objectives (objective completion); and
- EU added value (additional value resulting from the EU intervention).

The approach and coverage of the evaluation reflects the EC Better Regulation guidelines for evaluation⁶ and the associated main questions and evaluation criteria: relevance; effectiveness; efficiency and EU added value.⁷ The focus of the evaluation lies in relevance, implementation and effectiveness.

In terms of scope, the evaluation covers:

- All exchanges agreed and undertaken the start of the project implementation until 1 July 2017. Exchanges implemented after 1st July 2017 are not considered by the evaluation;

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/guidelines/toc_guide_en.htm

⁷ The criteria “coherence” covering internal coherence has been disregarded as internal coherence is not applicable (evaluation of a single action only) and external coherence (i.e. coherence with other (EU) actions is out of scope)

- Potential participation – as measured by the number of participating organisations, subscriptions to matchmaking database and qualitative consultations with companies which did not manage to ensure a project match;
- Communication activities to recruit potential participants to the exchange scheme;
- Other activities to support project implementation.

2 Study design

The evaluation approach and methodology was designed in the light of the purpose of the evaluation and the issues to be addressed. The report relies upon data collected through the following methods and tools:

- Desk research including analysis of the data from the match making platform, data on promotional activities and descriptive data on the exchanges;
- Interviews with the project partners, and the project management team;
- Interviews with “failed exchanges”;
- Survey of the participants prior to the exchange (sending organisations, hosts and employees);
- Post exchange surveys of the participants (sending organisations, hosts and employees).

It should be noted that the evaluation has been subject to some changes in methodological design. Compared with the original approach, additional data collection activities have been undertaken. These include in particular the design and implementation of pre-exchange surveys, interviews with project partners and interviews with “failed exchanges”.

2.1 Desk Research

All data provided by the MobiliseSME project partners have been compiled, reviewed and analysed. Data included extracts from the matchmaking database, data on the promotional activities undertaken and data from the individual exchanges. The desk research phase was supported by the design of a mapping sheet to collect data from each match. This sheet covered:

- Information relating to the hosts (country location, size of company, company sector and description of the enterprise and desired type of visiting employee);
- Information relating to the sender (country location, size of company, company sector and description of the enterprise and type of employee that the sender would like to send to the host); and
- Information relating to the mobile employee (role in sending company; age, educational attainment).

Information was provided on 48 exchanges, of which 44 have been carried out.

2.2 Interviews with the project partners, and the project management team

Consultations were undertaken with project partners and the project management team, including the team responsible for promotional activities centrally. The main purposes of these interviews were to collect general views on how the programme was implemented both centrally and by the partners. The interviews covered the partners’ experiences with setting up and conducting MobiliseSME, in particular regarding promotion, implementation, matchmaking as well as possible areas for improvements and their take on the overall feasibility of the programme.

In total, four interviews were undertaken with the project management team. Nine interviews were undertaken with the project partners.

The full list of interviewees is provided in Appendix A.

2.3 Interviews with “failed exchanges”

Eight consultations were undertaken with “failed exchanges” i.e. companies which were searching but did not find a partner. The main purpose of these interviews was to assess why the exchanges the companies were interested to participate in did not ultimately take place. Questions therefore concerned barriers to participation, but also how companies became aware of MobiliseSME, why they wanted to participate, and their overall impression of the implementation and administration of the programme.

The full list of interviewees is provided in Appendix A

2.4 Survey with the participants prior to the exchange

To gather data on the motivation of actual participants (employees, sending and hosting companies) the study team designed three pre-exchange surveys – one for each category. Survey replies were to be provided after the agreement was signed by all parties, but before the secondment took place.

The surveys covered the following main themes:

- Reasons for participation;
- Expected benefits from the scheme;
- How participants found out about the scheme
- Importance and added value of the following: financial support provided by the scheme and learning agreement.

As agreed by the MobiliseSME management team, the survey was designed as a text file, and was disseminated the MobiliseSME project partners. Response was not mandatory. The following replies were collected. Analysis of the results are provided in Appendix B. The surveys are provided in Appendix C.

	Sending company	Host company	Employee
Number of replies	44	38	42

2.5 Post exchange survey

To collect data on the effects and benefits of the pilot mobility scheme, the study team designed three surveys – one targeting the sending enterprise, one targeted the hosting enterprise, and one targeted the mobile employee. The surveys covered the following main themes:

- The activities completed by the employee
- How satisfied participants were with the exchange
- Whether the exchange matched participants’ expectations
- The most significant benefits and challenges of the exchange
- Whether financial aid was sufficient
- Recommendations for improvement

The surveys were undertaken online. It was mandatory for all participants to fill them in. The following replies were collected. Analysis of the results are provided in Appendix B. The surveys are provided in Appendix D.

	Sending company	Host company	Employee
Number of replies	44	43	43

3 Findings

3.1 Introduction

This section presents the main findings of the evaluation. It is organised in 5 main headings reflecting the main evaluation issues to be covered:

- Relevance and motivation;
- Communication;
- Efficiency and implementation;
- Effectiveness; and
- EU added value.

The evaluation covers the exchanges implemented from October 2016 to 31 June 2017. During this time, 44 exchanges were undertaken in total. Since 1 July until 15 September, an additional six exchanges were organised.

In the period under scrutiny, the most active sending countries were eastern European countries and Germany. Southern European (most importantly Spain) and western European countries like Germany were the most active hosting countries. Most exchanges took place from eastern Member States to western and southern Member States. Most of the companies participating were micro or small companies.

Exchanges took mostly place between companies of the same or similar sector and predominantly had a duration of 2 weeks.

3.2 Relevance and motivation to participate

The potential attractiveness and relevance of a business to business scheme was central to the intermediary report on *Report on the demand, state of play, opportunities and obstacles for a Mobility for professionals' scheme*.⁸ The feedback from this study was to some extent mixed, with around half of stakeholders consulted indicating that the scheme would be attractive to “some extent”. In contrast to the assessment of the stakeholders, many companies consulted indicated that a business-to-business exchange would be very relevant to them and many indicated that they would be very interested in participating.

Unavoidably, there will be a discrepancy between the number of enterprises who may have been interested at an early stage, when the main features of the programme were not yet defined (e.g. length of the exchange, financial contributions, learning requirements, employee requirements, overall timeframe of a potential project) and at a more mature stage where such features were defined.

In this context, this section of the evaluation considers actual relevance and attractiveness of the scheme as designed and implemented. It also considers which type of companies were interested in practice and what motivated participation.

The following main questions are addressed:

- How significant was the actual interest in the MobiliseSME exchange scheme?
- What type of companies were in practice interested in participating in the scheme? What were companies interested in (sending or hosting)?
- What motivated participants to participate?

⁸ Technopolis Group (2016) Report on the demand, state of play, opportunities and obstacles for a Mobility for professionals' scheme, for CEA-PME at <http://mobilisesme.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/MobiliseSME-Intermediate-Report.pdf>

- How many companies participated and how could more companies be motivated to participate in a business-to-business employee exchange scheme?

3.2.1 How significant was the actual interest in the MobiliseSME exchange scheme?

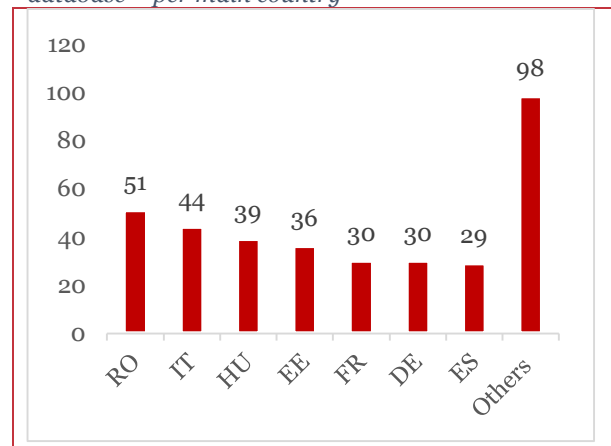
Given the available data, actual interest is best measured by the number of visitors and registrations to the matchmaking database. Data on visits is available only for the period 12th March to 30th June. In this period, there has been a total of 1,174 users entering into the webpage of the database. Most visitors are located in Italy, Estonia, Hungary, Romania and Germany representing 52% of total visits.

The number of actual subscribers to the matchmaking database is lower.

By 30 June, 357 companies were registered in the database. Of these, 102 had published a post looking for an exchange. As could be expected most database subscribers stem from the countries where the partners are located – with 73% of total subscribers having their legal seat in Romania, Italy, Hungary, Estonia, France, Germany and Spain.

The low numbers, unquestionably, are related to the novelty of the project and its approach. As such it could be expected that a longer implementation period, promotion of results from exchanges already undertaken, a wider network of project partners and “word of mouth” from past participants would imply more database subscriptions.

Figure 2 Number of subscribers to the matchmaking database – per main country



Source: Technopolis, based on the matchmaking data, base = 357

Nevertheless, the data available, combined with the very significant communication efforts, both by partners and third parties, suggests that the scheme overall may be of interest only to a limited number of enterprises. This is also confirmed by interviews with project partners. While a larger number of exchanges could be expected if the project were to be rolled out at a larger scale, most partners estimate that the annual number of exchanges that would be achievable in their countries would range between 10 and maximum 60. Calculating on an average number of 30 exchanges times 28 EU Member States, it may be estimated that the maximum potential would be below 1,000 exchanges/year. This estimation is based on the partner assumptions and therefore on the current characteristics and size of the partnership network carrying out this pilot.

3.2.2 What type of companies were interested in participating in the scheme – and who participated?

3.2.2.1 Company size

Most companies which had expressed their interest in the scheme by enrolling in the matchmaking database were micro-enterprises or self-employed (67%). Of those, just about half were self-employed, or had only one staff member. Most micro enterprises were small, with most employing in the range of 2 to 5 employees. Small enterprises (i.e. with staff in the range of 10 to 49 employees) represented 21% (or 76) of the companies in the database. 10% - or 37 enterprises – were medium sized (50-249 employees). Four large companies had subscribed to the database. The patterns for those active in the database (i.e. having submitted a post) reflect these general trends.

The large share of micro and small enterprises in the database is likely to reflect the nature of organisations which were involved as project partners – several of which are federating small companies and entrepreneurs.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that those enrolling in the database are much more frequently small micro enterprises and self-employed than those who originally indicated that they would be interested in the scheme (as measured by the feasibility survey undertaken before project

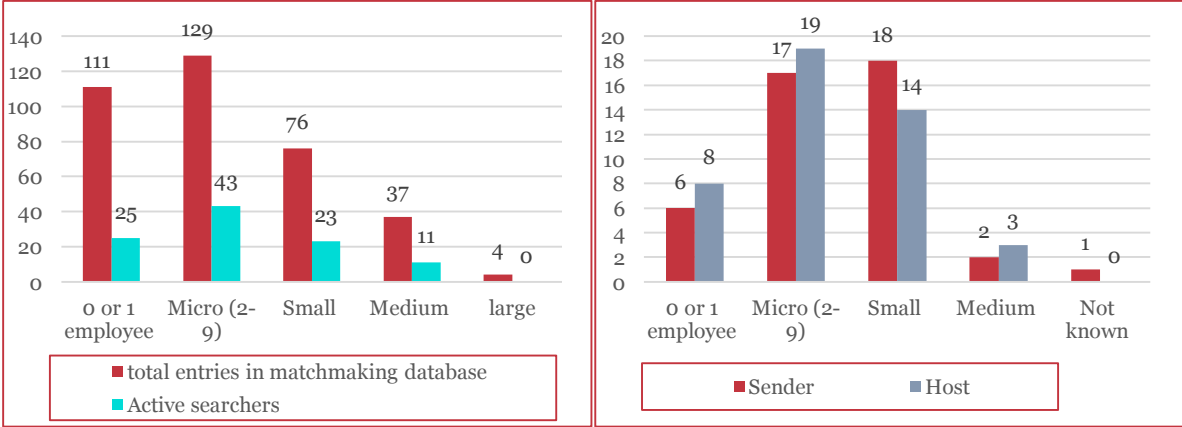
implementation) – and who likewise are likely to be associated to the partner organisations. In total, 42% of companies enrolled in the matchmaking database had a maximum of 2 employees whereas 17% of those responding to the feasibility survey had this number of employees. Half were small or medium sized enterprises. Moreover, among those saying they were interested in participating in the feasibility survey, the share of micro-enterprises was lower than 17%.

Actual company participation differs quite significantly from the data of the match making database. While companies participating in the exchanges are small, relatively few exchanges involve self-employed/companies with only one employee and more exchanges involve small companies.

Interestingly, actual participation patterns reflect to quite some extent the feasibility survey results – which suggests that small enterprises and “larger” micro enterprises are those most interested and most likely to participate.

The difference between those enrolled in the matchmaking database and those participating suggest that a stronger communication focus would be needed on small enterprises (as opposed to the self-employed and those with only one employee). Indeed, if a programme is to be rolled out in the future, small enterprises are in practice those more likely to be engaged.

Figure 3 Size of companies registering in the database and size of companies participating to the exchanges



Source: matchmaking data sheet analysis Base=357 and 102 (active searchers) and Data sheet analysis. Base=41 and 42

3.2.2.2 Company sectors

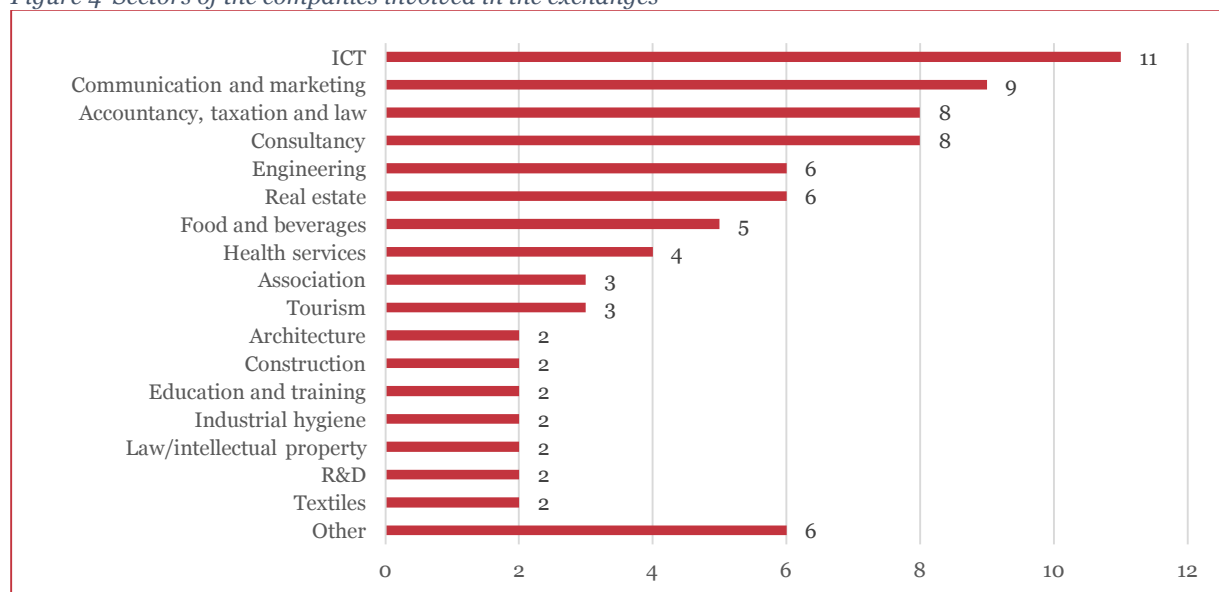
There is no comprehensive data available on the sectors of the companies enrolled in the database, and this section therefore concentrates on the actual participants.

Overall, no clear trends can be identified regarding the company sectors and no sector dominated. However, looking across all senders and host, it may be observed that companies in the ICT sector, communication and marketing, tax and legal advice and consultancy services represent 43% of the companies involved in the exchanges.

Interestingly, engineering represents only a relatively modest share – whereas this was the top category mentioned by both prospective senders and hosts in the feasibility survey undertaken in 2016 (about one in five mentioned this category).

If results from both the feasibility study and the pilot project are taken into account, it may be concluded that communication and marketing, ICT and business services appear to be the most promising company sectors for exchanges, should the scheme be piloted in specific sectors.

Figure 4 Sectors of the companies involved in the exchanges



Source: Data sheet analysis – Base 83 companies

3.2.2.3 Origin of companies and (potential) mobility flows

As could be expected, interested companies (as enrolled in the matchmaking database) mainly stemmed from countries where project partners were located. However, there are differences across main regions. Companies from the newer Member States, on average, appear markedly more interested in participating.

46% of companies subscribed to the database are from the EU-12⁹. 49% of those enrolled in the matchmaking database are from the EU-15. Among EU-15 companies, Southern Europe dominates. Half of all EU-15 companies are located in six southern Member States: Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Malta and Cyprus. 5% of companies in the matchmaking database are from countries outside the EU.

Across companies, there is a stronger interest in sending than in hosting. If one considers all offers available in the matchmaking database, there are nearly twice as many offers for sending than for hosting. In part, this may be due to the fact that partners were first tasked with finding senders, and only second became engaged in finding hosting companies. However, interviews with partners also suggests that companies see sending as more beneficial in terms of learning or gathering market intelligence. Moreover, hosting binds capacity at the host company and needs more trust than sending.

There are, however, differences across countries. In line with the findings from the feasibility study, there is markedly more interest in sending in the EU-12. Overall, companies from these Member States, are primarily interested in sending employees abroad – and when they participate they participate mainly as “senders”. Overall, 50% of all companies sending employees are in the EU-12. Only 19% of host companies are in the EU-12.

As few as 7% of the exchanges involved mobility from old to new Member States. As such there is a significant “east to west” flow in the patterns of the exchanges, with 37% of all exchanges involving sending from a new Member State to an old western or southern Member State. A second significant flow of exchanges is from central western Member States to southern Member States representing 14% of all exchanges. In total, western Member States hosted 39% of all exchanges and southern Member States hosted an additional 41%.

⁹ The founding members Belgium, Denmark, Germany, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and UK.

Overall, northern countries (i.e. the Scandinavian countries) were underrepresented in the exchanges that took place. Most likely this is due to the fact that none of those were covered by a dedicated partner organisation.

Third countries companies (Turkey) participated in three exchanges. In all cases, they were senders.¹⁰

A curious pattern resulted from Germany: where one could have expected a higher number of hosted employees, in fact, more German employees went abroad (10) than were received in Germany (5). This seems to contradict the often quoted “lack of skilled workers” in Germany.

Table 1 Countries of origin of the participating companies, in %

Hosting countries:	Sending countries:				Total
	Eastern Europe	Western Europe	Southern Europe	Third	
Western Europe	23%	2%	7%	7%	39%
Southern Europe	14%	20%	7%	0%	41%
Eastern Europe	11%	5%	2%	0%	18%
Northern Europe	0%	0%	2%	0%	2%
Total	48%	27%	18%	7%	100%

Source: Data sheet analysis – Base 44 exchanges.¹¹

3.2.2.4 What motivated participants to participate?

The pre-exchange surveys asked each target group about their motivation for participation in the scheme. Two aspects were covered: the motivation to participate and expected benefits from the scheme. In each case, respondents were able to choose up to three options from a selection of possible motivations and benefits. Survey respondents chose on average about 2 reasons for participating, and 2.5 expected benefits.

Across participants (senders, hosts and employees) learning and skill development is the most mentioned motivation to participate. Half of all the accumulated motivations mentioned relate to skill development. 70% of all sending companies and more than 70% of all the employees mentioned some form of skill development among the main reason to participate. In this respect, there is a high level of consistency between the pilot’s stated objectives and the companies’ reasons for participation.

In general, exchanges appear to be seen mainly as an opportunity for acquiring “additional” skills, knowledge and ideas of use to the company – rather than an opportunity to address skills weakness with current staff. Overall, only 16% of sending companies expected the exchange to address specific skill needs within the sending company. Among host companies, the share is 22%.

Beyond learning, main reasons for participation of companies relate to business development. Business development expectations relate both to the development of common projects with the partner company and to the gathering of market intelligence/business development in the country of the partner company. Additionally, career development (with the current employer) is an important motivation factor for employees to participate. In some cases, companies saw this also as a way to reward an employee, as a special benefit (e.g. in DE).

When looking at expectations, there are only small differences across groups. Sending companies, on average, are those most motivated by learning opportunities and opportunities to gather new ideas from the host company. Development of new business opportunities, consolidation or development of business relations with the host structure and/or new international contacts are also important and mentioned by significant shares of the companies (see Figure 5 below) – but they are secondary objectives to learning.

¹⁰ Only after the test phase, 2 employees from Belgium went on an exchange to Turkey.

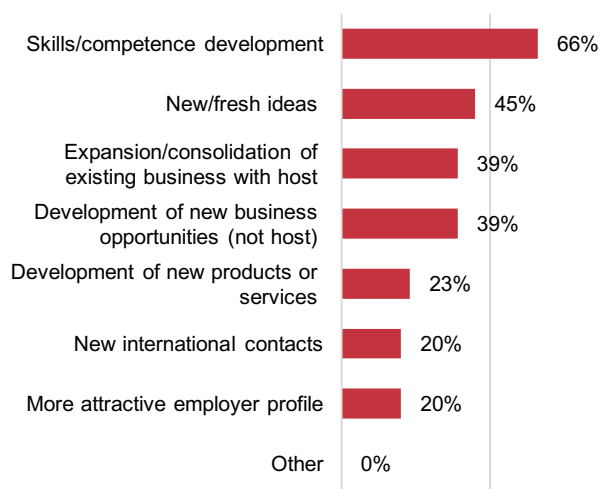
¹¹ In this case, it was decided to define it as an Eastern country, as economically, Estonia is more similar to the other Eastern European countries than to the Northern ones.

Among hosts, business development (developing projects with sender, market intelligence) are more frequently mentioned as reasons to participate (compared with learning objectives). In contrast, when looking at expected outcomes, both hosts and senders mention learning and new ideas among the top expected outcomes.

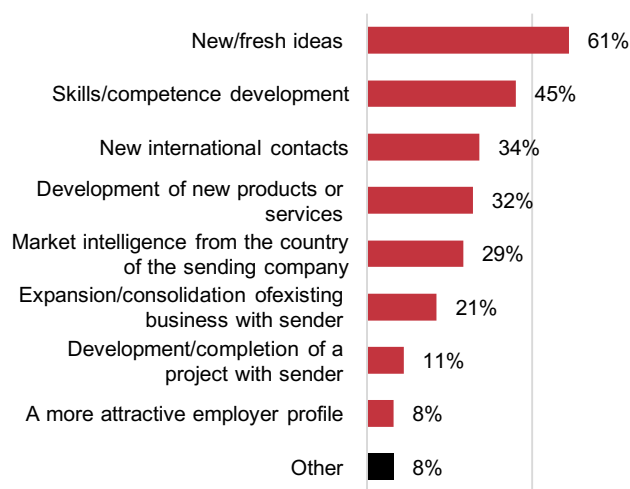
Both groups also had high expectations regarding business development – with the partner company (39% sender, 21% host), in terms of new international contacts (20% sender, 34% host), market intelligence (29% host) or business opportunities (39% sender).

Nearly one third of the hosts (32%) and one quarter of the senders (23%) expected that they would develop new products and services as a result of the exchange.

Figure 5 Expected gains - sender



Expected gains host



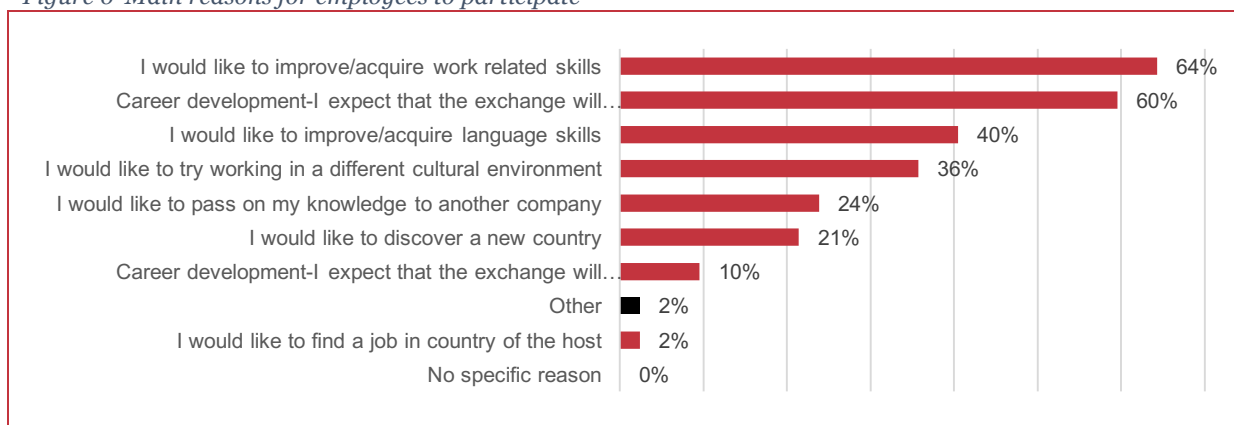
Source: Technopolis, based on survey data. Base = 44 and 38

The expectations of visiting employees follow a similar picture to the hosts and sending organisations. Nearly three quarters (71%) suggested that they were participating to gain new ideas and inspiration, and, cumulatively, high shares mentioned skills in the core area or outside the core area as a main expected outcome. However, in contrast to hosts and sending organisations, employees generally rated expansion of their professional network higher (55%) and a majority saw it as an opportunity to improve career opportunities.

The opportunity to go abroad also seemed to be a major motivation factor for employees. 36% of those participating indicated as main reasons to participate that they would like to work in a different cultural environment and a further 21% indicated that they would like to discover a new country.

Significantly, only 2% of employees say that they are looking for a job in the host's country. This means MobiliseSME would not support intra-European work migration from low wage countries with a modest welfare state to high wage countries with a good welfare system with EU-funds, as maybe some western or northern EU Member States might fear.

Figure 6 Main reasons for employees to participate



Source: Technopolis, based on survey data. Base = 42

3.2.3 How many companies participated and how could more companies be encouraged to participate to a business-to-business employee exchange scheme?

In order for the pilot scheme to be rolled out successfully and to increase efficiency, it will be necessary to mobilise and motivate more companies to participate in the exchanges – realising the expected potential.

As outlined in the previous section, a total of 44 exchanges had been organised and implemented by end June 2017. Four exchanges were interrupted just a day before they started due to administrative or practical reasons. During the period July – September 2017, the project partners have reached the stated minimum target of 50 exchanges, as six more exchanges were organised.

Total participation however, is low. This is further evidenced by the fact that several companies participated in several exchanges. According to the data provided, there were 59 singular companies that participated in the programme. In 20 cases, companies participated more than once, either by sending more than one employee, by hosting more than one employee, or by sending and hosting. This amounts to a share of 34% of companies that were participating more than once.

In the cases of this “repeated participation”, 14 companies participated twice, four companies participated three times, one company participated four times and one five. Seven companies participated twice or more (only) as host, six companies participated twice (only) as sender, while seven companies participated both as sender and as host.

In the view of the partners, there are several reasons for companies participating more than once, one being economies of scale, i.e. that it becomes easier to participate more than once after getting acquainted with MobiliseSME and its processes. When searching for possible hosts, it was also easier to get in touch with companies that already participated than having to reach out to companies unfamiliar with MobiliseSME.

If the MobiliseSME scheme is to be rolled out, a (much) wider poll of companies will be necessary. The participation patterns and data on interest and motivation (including from the feasibility study on a public support scheme for cross-border mobility experiences) suggest that the following avenues should be considered if the scheme is to be rolled out:

- In order to concentrate resources on the most likely participants a strong focus should be placed on small enterprises as they have the greatest matching potential (as opposed to the self-employed and companies with only one or two employees).
- If participation is to be expanded significantly beyond the main countries currently participating, additional country partners would be needed. It is not realistic to assume that partners in other countries can generate significant interest outside their home country. The selection should place attention to membership – inviting especially partners having small enterprises as members.

Interest from the self-employed and small micro-enterprises might be high, but it appears difficult to generate exchanges with such groups.

- In order to increase the likelihood of a match, there would be benefit in gradually expanding the exchange scheme in different sectors – starting with those where there is seemingly the largest potential. Judging by the actual matches communication and marketing, ICT and business services appear to be the most promising company sectors for exchanges.
- There is more interest in sending than in hosting. As hosting implies more efforts, relatively more resources need to be given to the recruitment of potential hosts.
- Both expressed interest among potential company participants (as measured in the first feasibility report) and actual participation data suggest that desired exchange flows are likely to go from East to West, West to West and West to South. The recruitment strategy should consider such desired patterns for exchange, and the countries which are of high “hosting” demand. If it is not possible to generate a relatively wide offer of hosts in countries of high demand, it is unlikely that the project can achieve its potential.
- The chance to build skills and knowledge for all participants is a major appealing factor to the programme. The corresponding motivations of hosts and sending organisations to participate means there is an alignment of expectations before the exchange takes place. Highlighting this potential, with real life examples, is likely to be a key factor which may generate additional interest. There would be benefit in focusing on how companies hosting other employees have benefited – considering both skills and business development - as host companies are those “most difficult to get”.

3.3 Communication

The first feasibility report highlighted that generating awareness and advertising MobiliseSME would be a key success factor– ensuring awareness and ultimately participation to the scheme. In view of the importance of this aspect, this section considers the communication undertaken, and the tools and channels which appear to have been most successful to attract potential participants. The following questions are addressed:

- What actions were undertaken to generate awareness and to advertise the MobiliseSME scheme?
- Which avenues proved most effective to generate participation?

3.3.1 *What actions were undertaken to generate awareness and advertise the MobiliseSME scheme?*

The MobiliseSME partners took a very active role in the promotion and advertising of the scheme, and a wide number of communication activities were undertaken. All partners relied more or less on the same tools and activities: emails/newsletters, social media, news articles, events and most importantly, the personal contacts of the coordinators.

Main communication activities to promote and advertise are listed below with the available associated output data (i.e. reach and outtakes). Across these activities – and individual contacts with potential companies – the main approach was to recruit potential sending companies first, and get these subscribed in the database.

- **News articles online by the project partners.** The Lead Partner European Entrepreneurs CEA-PME published news articles linked to MobiliseSME on the project website. In total, 32 articles were published. Additionally, the partners of MobiliseSME published a wide number of online articles. Total number of articles published by partners was 23.
- **Online articles by third parties.** Partners in the project encouraged other organisations to publish articles on the scheme. This promotion generated a total of 55 online articles in 17 different languages spread among 14 EU Member States and 3 non-EU countries.
- **MobiliseSME Electronic Newsletter.** The MobiliseSME consortia published a monthly electronic newsletter send to companies registered on the MobiliseSME website, participants in the

focus groups organised as part of the first feasibility study, participants in the MobiliseSME Stakeholder Conference in November 2016 and users of the matchmaking platform. The list was regularly updated to include all new registrations. The number of recipients gradually increased over the project lifespan. By end June, there were 1,062 recipients.

- **Partner Newsletters** In addition to the project newsletter, all project partners published information and articles in their own electronic newsletters. In total, 22 articles were published, sent to a total of 25,800 recipients. Most of these were in Germany (16,000).
- **Press releases.** Two press releases were issued by the lead partner. Each was sent to a total of 230 respondents. 39 opened the first release, 50 opened the second. There is no data on the media coverage generated
- **Digital advertisement.** MobiliseSME purchased space for digital advertisements on the following online platforms: EUobserver and EurActiv. Digital advertisement covered banners and newsletter advertisement. Total impressions for banners was 329,544. Total impression for newsletter advertisement was 59,259. The banners generated in total 197 clicks and newsletter advertisement generated 289 clicks – implying a click rate of 0.0006 and 0.005 respectively.
- **Videos.** MobiliseSME produced and launched on the web three videos to promote its activities – a MobiliseSME “tutorial video”; a “MobiliseSME “Testimonials Video” and a MobiliseSME “Launch of the Pilot Phase” video.¹² Videos were translated into the main partner languages. Total viewership online was 998 – most of which was for the tutorial (693 views).
- **Event organisation/participation.** The scheme was promoted at events across Europe by the project partners. In total, 24 events were organised or attended – reaching a total of 1,120 companies. Nearly half were reached through the Turkish partner MÜSIAD Yearly EXPO (500 reported reached). Of the 24 events, 8 were specific MobiliseSME events. They had a total reach of 168 participants.

Besides the activities above, the MobiliseSME exchange pilot scheme was heavily promoted throughout three **social media** channels: Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. A total of 282 tweets were published using the hashtag #MobiliseSME. The tweets generated in total 194,400 impressions (or about 689 impressions per tweet) and a total of 3,522 engagements (i.e. engagement rate of 0.018). On Facebook, the partners published a total of 210 posts, with an estimated total number of impressions of 18,873 (or about 89 impressions per publication) and a total of 885 engagements (i.e. engagement rate of 0.046). Finally, partners published 60 posts on LinkedIn leading to some 8,100 impressions (or about 135 impressions per post) and a total of 44 engagements (i.e. engagement rate of 0.054).

3.3.2 Which avenues proved most effective to generate participation?

The key success factor for communication of a project like MobiliseSME is the extent to which it has been successful in attracting potential participants to the scheme. Nevertheless, communication is not solely responsible for such effects, as the attractiveness of the overall scheme to potential participants obviously plays a key role for potential engagement.

As presented above, MobiliseSME has heavily invested in communicating and advertising the programme – using a multitude of channels. Judging by the feedback from both the project partners and those actually participating some channels appear in practice more efficient than others.

When asking those participating how they found out about the project, half of the sending enterprises, refer to two tools: direct contacts between the participant and the partner in the given country (30% of exchanges) and newsletter or website of the project partner (20%).

Hosting enterprises have first and foremost been informed by other companies (45%). This needs to be seen in a context where the MobiliseSME project partners implemented a deliberate strategy of first

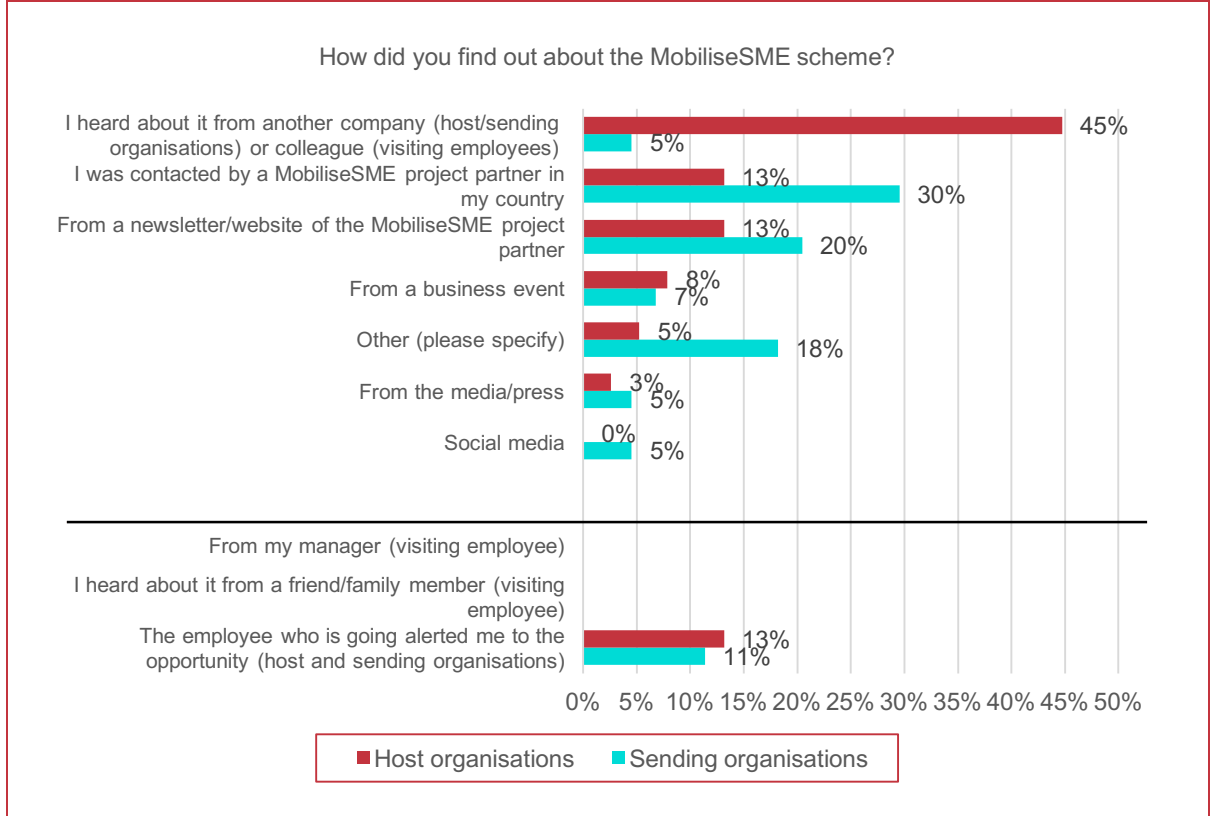
¹² MobiliseSME: A New Exchange Program for SME Employees in Europe” is a video illustrating in a clear manner the MobiliseSME mobility scheme, aiming to be a tutorial on how to apply to participate. “MobiliseSME Testimonials Video” is a video collecting the positive opinions of SME entrepreneurs and employees about the idea of a mobility scheme. “MobiliseSME - Launch of the Pilot Phase” is an introduction to the project and a summary of the Stakeholder Conference best moments.

aiming to attract potential senders. As outlined above, most of the matches were in practice between companies that knew each other beforehand. Consequently, most of the company “referrals” refer to hosts being informed by senders (14 of 17). However, a smaller share (3 hosts and 2 senders) were informed by other companies via “word of mouth”.

Besides direct contacts with other prospective participants, avenues through which partners became aware are largely similar between hosts and senders (and employees which found out themselves). Across all participants, personal contacts and newsletters of partners are the main sources. Events are not often mentioned (6 hosts and senders and 2 employees who had not been informed by their company). However, the total reach of events is much smaller than for other communication activities (see above) – suggesting that events have a greater potential than what the survey data suggests. Only very few hosts and senders became aware through social media (2) and press/independent media (3).

Interestingly, a number of senders also mention business advisory and similar support functions to which the company has access (5), suggesting that these channels have a potential for generating wider awareness.

Figure 7 How host organisations, sending organisations and visiting employees found out about the MobiliseSME scheme



Source: Technopolis, based on survey data. Base = 38 (host organisations), 44 (sending organisations) and 42 (visiting employees)

Partners perceptions of effective channels to a large extent reflect the above data. Promotion of the scheme is generally perceived to work best at personal level and following personal contacts. Personal contacts were seen as being the most crucial to market the project, be it via the phone or events. Advertising, especially online advertising, was perceived to have worked less well in terms of generating interest. This is also reflected in the low click through rates for banners and newsletter advertising. Likewise, social media based communication appear – judging by the reach and engagement rates – not to have worked effectively. In this respect, some partners stated that they saw no effects of social media based communication. Others were more positive in their assessment.

Finally, information at the “central level”/EU level was perceived to work less well than information in the country. For communication to be effective, it has to be done locally and ideally in the language of the country. This represented a challenge for the countries where there was no local partner.

Face-to-face promotion and then, “word to mouth” was also what worked best in **motivating** companies to participate. However, all also agreed that this took time to achieve results, and that it was complicated to communicate new and relative complex idea like MobiliseSME. These factors contributed to a slow take-off of MobiliseSME.

3.4 Implementation and efficiency

In a pilot project evaluation context, implementation and efficiency implies the assessment of the suitability of the scheme design, support and implementation by the partners and lastly cost efficiency.

The following sub-sections reflect these issues covering the general design of the scheme, the level of financial support provided, the lengths of exchanges, the day-to-day support of the partners and the role of the language. We also assess the efficiency of the scheme for both matchmaking and other implementation aspects. Reflecting the importance of matchmaking (both via the platform and manually by the partners) for overall implementation and success this issue is covered first. Consequently, the section addresses the following questions:

- To what extent was the matchmaking process effective to generate company matches?
- How appropriate were the design choices (company and employee requirements, possible lengths of exchanges; tripartite agreements)?
- Were matches possible between sectors?
- Was language an issue for the implementation of exchanges?
- To what extent did the project partners support optimally the implementation of the exchanges?
- Were the funds provided sufficient to optimally support the exchanges?
- Were the exchanges cost efficient?

3.4.1 *To what extent was the matchmaking process effective to generate company matches?*

3.4.1.1 Matching via the database

One of the findings of the feasibility study was that a well working matchmaking system would be likely to be the key success factor for MobiliseSME. Good matching would be key for exchanges to be organised between companies that do not know each other already.

To be able to facilitate matches in an efficient way, the project consortium set up a matchmaking platform with the aim of matching interested sending companies and their employees to host companies also interested in an exchange. On this platform, companies could register and post either ‘offers’ to host or ‘search’ for host companies and would then be presented with possible matches to contact.¹³ The idea of a matchmaking platform was to have a way of automatically generated matches thus minimising the effort a person might need to put into matchmaking.

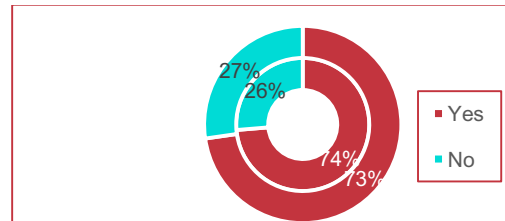
In practice, however, the matchmaking platform was not instrumental in generating most of the exchanges that took place within the pilot. There were several reasons for this.

¹³ On this platform, companies could register and post either ‘offers’ to host or ‘searches’ for host companies and would then be presented with possible matches to contact. They then would partner up and reach out to the respective country partner to seek assistance with the next steps, i.e. with finding the right administrative documents and handing them in, finding the right time span of the exchange, drafting the learning agreement and so on.

First, many of the prospective participants already knew the potential partner. As such, matching via the database was not needed. In practice three quarters of companies that participated in MobiliseSME were already familiar with each other before applying to the scheme (both for senders and hosts).

This finding is consistent with the impression of the partners interviewed, who expressed that in most cases, companies knew each other already when they approached the MobiliseSME country partner.

Figure 8 The proportion of host organisations (inner ring) and sending organisations (outer ring) that knew one another before applying



Source: Technopolis, based on survey data. Base = 38 (host organisations), 44 (sending organisations)

Second, the matchmaking platform was not instrumental in generating the exchanges because the platform lacked the necessary number of registrations. The issue of number of registrations gradually improved during project implementation but affected overall matching potential.

Third, there were issues with usability and data quality which affected negatively possible matching. Issues especially related to the lack of the necessary information to generate meaningful matches. There is a general trade-off between making it as simple as possible for companies to register in order to attract as many companies as possible to the platform and between asking them for a lot of information thus making registration more difficult and more likely to be aborted. In the case of MobiliseSME, it was decided to make registration as easy as possible and ask only in a second step for more information, which is likely to have affected the number of matches that could be generated, and their quality.

This is also reflected in the views of companies that could not participate. Of those eight companies interviewed, none had a partner in mind when approaching MobiliseSME. For most of the unsuccessful companies interviewed, not having the right partner was the main barrier to participating in MobiliseSME.

The aspects raised above are most likely the explanation why the overall feedback regarding the matchmaking platform was mixed. While the partners expressed that the platform became more useful in the course of the project due to gaining more and more registrations, partners also saw room for improvements regarding the overall user-friendliness. In some cases, the partners needed to assist interested companies in the use of the platform.

These impressions were shared by several of the unsuccessful companies interviewed and are also reflected in the survey results among participating enterprises. When the companies that participated in MobiliseSME were asked to rate the quality of the information, guidance and support in relation to the matching process and implementation of the exchange, respondents in all groups rated the matchmaking platform least positively of seven broader supports.¹⁴ Some of the respondents clarified that the matchmaking tool could be simpler to use, or that the pool of companies to choose from could be increased.

While the platform leaves room for improvement, it should also be noted that it was necessary to be implemented in a timely manner and to keep track of applications for exchanges and the exchanges itself (see also Figure 1 above). It also informed the evaluation of the pilot. Lastly, designing and implementing a platform to match interested companies is a challenging undertaking and providing functionality relies to a high degree on the number of registrations (see also chapter 3.2.3).

¹⁴ Respondents were asked to rate the following: Information on the scheme and how it operates; the matchmaking platform; the matchmaking services and in particular a support in searching for a host company and assistance provided during the negotiation process; guidance on potential legal challenges related to the exchange; administrative and logistic support from the MobiliseSME project before the exchange visit (submitting forms, search for accommodation, etc.); administrative and logistic support from the MobiliseSME project team during the exchange; overall organisation and coordination.

Some of the observations made regarding the matchmaking by the platform can be considered to apply generally to platforms of this type, especially when they are new. While this is most likely true for an incremental increase of registrations over time or for the trade-off between simple registration and data quality, the need to increase overall user-friendliness can be seen as a specific factor for this platform.

3.4.1.2 Matchmaking support by partners

During the project, the shortcomings of the matchmaking platform in terms of producing meaningful matches were to a very large extent compensated by the country partners. Where a partner was needed, the MobiliseSME partners often facilitated matches with the help of the networks of their organisation or their personal networks, often in collaboration with the other country partners.

According to the survey, the companies were very satisfied with the quality of the matchmaking services provided by partners. All participants were asked to rate the quality of the matchmaking services. For sending organisations and employees this meant rating the support they had received when searching for a host company and the assistance provided during the negotiation process. 79% of sending organisations said the services had been excellent or good, while 83% of employees said the support had been excellent or good.

When asked the same question with regard to finding a sending company, 82% of hosts replied that the support they had received was excellent or good. These high percentages across most participants indicate that the support they received was of a similar standard across the board. Unsuccessful companies consulted likewise indicated that the partner search support had been very good, even if, in the end, a match had not been possible.

3.4.2 How appropriate were the design choices?

3.4.2.1 Company and employee requirements

The most important company and employee requirements of the MobiliseSME pilot were that the scheme was eligible for MSMEs (large companies were only eligible as a host company) and for employees (including the self-employed subject to matching certain requirements) with a certain work experience or educational level.

Overall, these requirements were seen appropriate by all project partners. The participants of the scheme fulfilled the requirements. All companies were MSMEs, as presented in section 3.2. Likewise, all employees participating were experienced and most well educated. Of the 41 employees on whom there was data, 32 had university degrees. Sent employees were on average 38 years old. Most employees were in their 30s or 40s – with about 30% of the participants in each of these groups, followed by 22% who were between 20-29 years old. 10% of participants were 50 or above.

Regarding the role of the mobile person in the sending company, most were in management positions. In most of cases (64%), the person sent was either a CEO, a director or another high-level manager (e.g. of the sales division). In six cases, the sent employee was the owner of the sending company. The seniority of the employees needs to be seen against the backdrop of the relatively small companies participating.

Table 2 Role of the sent employee in the sending company

Stated role	Number	%
Owner/co-owner	6	15%
Director	9	22%
Manager	11	27%
Other employee	11	27%
Not known	4	9%
Total	44	100%

Source: Data sheet analysis.

Partners generally did not feel that the requirements constituted an obstacle to participation. In a few cases however, partners noted that some employees of family-owned businesses (offspring of the owners) would have been a relevant target audience, but were unable to participate due to insufficient work experience.

Another important aspect of participation is the gender of the participants. Overall, 24 men and 20 women participated.

3.4.2.2 Possible lengths of exchanges

During the pilot, the time span could be between ca. two weeks and two months. In practice, most exchanges (79%) were of a two-weeks duration, as illustrated in the table below.

Table 3 Lengths of the exchanges

Stated role	Number	%
2 weeks	34	82
4 weeks/one month	6	14%
1.5 months	2	5%
Total	44	100%

Source: Data sheet analysis.

With regard to the lengths of exchanges, and similar to the findings of the feasibility study, there is no clear picture of an ideal length of exchange, as participants’ and partners’ views on the subject varied.

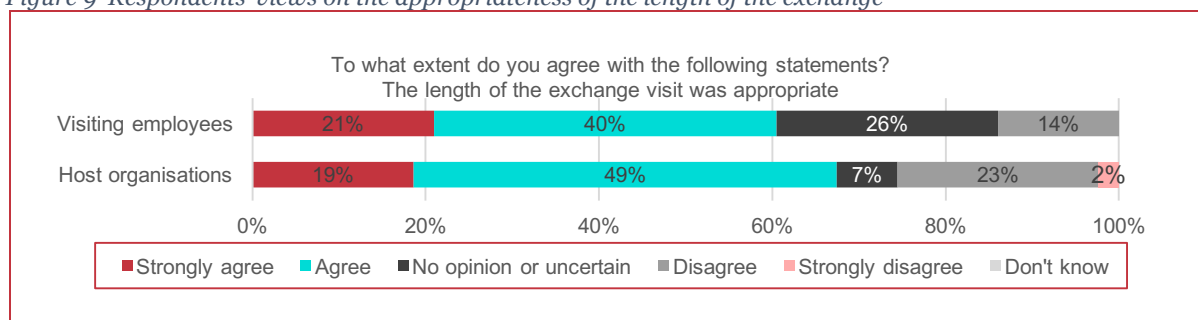
Most hosting enterprises felt that the length was right (67% of hosts either strongly agreed or agreed that the length of the exchange was appropriate). Likewise, 61% of the employees agreed or strongly agreed that the length was right.

However, a significant minority, felt that there were issues regarding the length of the exchange. One in four (26%) of the hosting organisations disagreed that the length of the exchange was appropriate and 14% of the send employees also expressed this view.

When asked about any major difficulties related to the exchange seven host organisations stated that the (long) length of the exchange was problematic, and one host stated that two weeks was too long to host another employee. However, a similar number of hosts (six respondents) suggested that the exchange was too short. Similarly, sending organisations often commented on the length – with 4 sending organisations stating that the exchange period was too long, considering that sending organisations were without an employee for that period of time. One also suggested that a shorter time period could be considered for independent professionals/small business owners. Conversely, the other two sending organisations thought that the time abroad for their employee was not sufficient to gain value for money.

Generally, many sending, hosting and employees also commented spontaneously on the length – commenting that it was either too long or too short (B.2.3 . Q14). For instance, of the six employees that specifically mentioned the length of the exchange, four wished the exchange had been longer – and two suggested that it should have been shorter.

Figure 9 Respondents' views on the appropriateness of the length of the exchange



Source: Technopolis, based on survey data. Base = 43 (host organisations), 43 (visiting employees)

Similarly, partners' impressions of the ideal time span of an exchange varied. Most of the partners agreed that two weeks was also the most popular choice as the short overall timeframe of the project and the spontaneous planning needed from the SMEs would not allow for longer exchanges.

For some partners, two weeks as a minimum was too high as some companies favoured shorter options of a few days. In their view, a few days would be sufficient for e.g. participating in a training or for finding business partners. For other country partners, two weeks as the most preferred option (see section 3.2 above) was too short to realise learning effects. Longer stays would also make it easier to arrange for affordable accommodation.

In practice, the short duration of most of the exchange was most likely due to the overall short timeframe of the project. In this respect, some partners noted that HR planning often takes a year in making absences in general, but especially longer absences hard to organise. Against this backdrop that seems to have affected 77% of the exchanges (see Table 3 above), it is not possible to indicate general criteria impacting the choice of the lengths going beyond the effect of the overall implementation period of the project.

3.4.2.3 Tripartite agreements

The tripartite agreement was the one important legally binding contractual document that all three parties of an exchange needed to sign.

A key aspect of the tripartite agreement was the learning plan, which defined the expected learning and main activities of the exchange. Sending and hosting partners most commonly regarded the learning plan to be of high importance to their participation. Nearly three quarters of hosts reported that the learning plan was very important and that they would not have participated without it (71%). The share was somewhat lower for the sending organisations - with 64% stating that the learning plan was 'very important'. Nearly all participants, however placed some value on the plan for the organisation of the exchange. Only two senders and one host considered that the learning plan had no value.

In the view of most partners the learning plan was useful to manage expectations between host and sent employees. Some partners however also noted that its value varied depending on the exchange, with some seeing the potential of the agreements especially for longer exchanges than 2 weeks. Others pointed out that it was also important that the agreements provide enough flexibility to allow for changes during the exchange period. Where the agreements were seen as of limited use they were in no cases seen as harmful.

Beyond the importance of the learning plan, the tripartite agreement also had other benefits. In the view of the partners, the documents were beneficial in allowing for some control of the exchanges and could also make it easier to get e.g. a Visa as it showed the intention of the sent employee to return home. As all three parties were contractual partners, legal problems could potentially also be encountered by any of the target groups, although the particulars of each legal difficulty cannot be known for certain.

The project partners supported the design of the tripartite agreement – especially in relation to legal support. Not all had used these advisory functions. However, those who had stated in a strong majority (+80%) that the support provided had been good or excellent.

3.4.3 *Were matches possible between sectors?*

Matching between companies of different sectors would greatly facilitate the organisation of exchanges.

The first Feasibility study, however, suggested that matching would be needed between companies in the same industry as most of the companies consulted would only be interested in exchanging with an enterprise from the same sector. The review of the exchanges undertaken confirm that the most exchanges are likely to happen between companies in the same or related sectors. Of the 43 exchanges on which there is sector data, 34 (79%) of exchanges were organised between companies of the same or of a similar sector. With 9 of 43 exchanges between companies of different sectors, the data could also suggest that inter-sector company exchanges in some cases are possible. Those cases, however, mostly concern companies active in sectors like accountancy, IT or consultancy and can therefore most likely be categorized as “horizontal” exchanges.

3.4.4 *Was language an issue for the implementation of exchanges?*

In the feasibility report, language was identified as one potential barrier to participation. In practice, language seemed to have been an issue only in a few cases, both regarding the implementation of exchanges but also in regard to the attractiveness of participation in the MobiliseSME pilot.

As part of the pre-survey, hosts and employees were asked to define the language they expected to converse in during the exchange. Predictably, a large proportion of participants (83% of visiting employees and 84% of hosts) stated that English would be the language they would speak in. This shows a match of expectations which laid groundwork for a successful exchange before it took place. Interestingly, 10% (4 employees) hoped to speak German, and two employees hoped to speak either Russian or Turkish.

When asked to describe the main challenges and difficulties faced during the programme, a small proportion of both employees and hosts mentioned language difficulties (<10%). This was also highlighted by some partners interviewed. While the proportion of exchanges with issues related to language is small, it could be expected that some potential participants did not consider participation due to concerns about potential language issues. To address this issue, it could be considered offering language classes to employees prior to the exchange.

3.4.5 *To what extent did the project partners support optimally the implementation of the exchanges?*

In addition to their role in the matchmaking process MobiliseSME project partners were also heavily involved in the overall administration and management of the exchanges. In the view of the partners, they “*took the employee and the companies by the hand and guided them through the exchange*”. This support related mainly to preparing the exchange, but to some degree also during the exchange.

Before commitment to participate, information was necessary on the scheme and how it operates. Participants generally felt that these aspects were well communicated. Employees, hosts and sending organisations were all largely positive about the information they received – with 88% of employees, 95% of sending organisations and 86% of hosts saying the information was good or excellent.

After the match, partners needed guidance through the administrative documents, assistance with finding accommodation in the host countries or to help with the registration on the matchmaking process which was obligatory equally for companies that knew the partner company already.

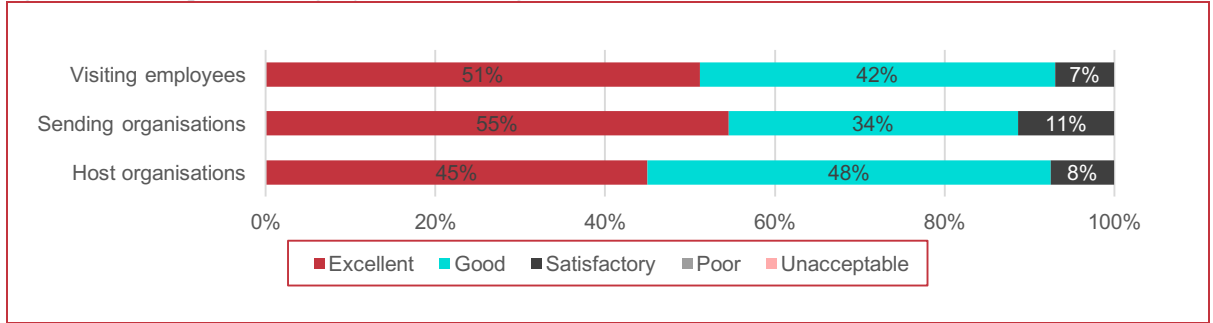
The overall satisfaction of the participants in regard to the received support and received guidance on potential legal challenges was high, suggesting that the partners supported the implementation optimally. Moreover, the approach to organisation and coordination of the scheme appears to suit all groups, as hosts, senders and employees all were very positive about these aspects. Each of the support

areas¹⁵ - coordination, administrative and logistic support before the exchange visit; administrative and logistic support from the MobiliseSME project team during the exchange; information on the scheme and how it operates; and guidance on potential legal challenges related to the exchange - were rated as 'excellent' or 'good' by at least 81% of all groups of respondents.¹⁶

Reflecting this positive assessment 93% of visiting employees, 93% of hosts and 89% of the sending companies rated the *overall organisation and management* of the programme as 'excellent' or 'good' (see Figure 10 below).¹⁷ None of the participants considered the support provided – or any of the supporting aspects – to have been “poor” or “unacceptable”.

The partner organisations assessed the administrative effort for companies to be manageable. Partners however, described the effort they had to guide the participants through the process to facilitate an exchange as higher than expected.

Figure 10 Participants' ratings of the overall organisation and coordination



Source: Technopolis, based on survey data. Base = 40 (host organisations), 44 (sending organisations), 43 (visiting employees)

3.4.6 Were the funds provided sufficient to optimally support the exchanges?

As outlined in section 1.2 the MobiliseSME scheme provides funding for travel, accommodation, and subsistence costs – to cover additional expenditure associated with the exchanges. Employees participating in the exchange must keep receiving salaries from their employers. Hosts are not intended to provide any funding for the exchange. While the financial support provided has been increased during the implementation of the project, funds are relatively low.¹⁸

3.4.6.1 Importance of the funds for agreeing to the exchange

The provision of funds to cover additional costs (in other words the “no cost” principle for hosts) is in practice key a factor for most participating companies – especially when signing the exchange. The pre-survey asked hosts and sending organisations how important these items were for their participation. 60% of the sending organisations considered financial support very important, and indicated that they would not have participated without it. And additional 35% indicated that it was somewhat important. Only two of the sending companies, considered that it was of no importance.

Similar results are seen for the host organisations. Half (49%) indicated that funding for travel and subsistence was a condition for participation, and 43% indicated that it was somewhat important. 54% of hosts moreover indicated that “no cost” was a condition for participation, and an additional 34% indicated that it was somewhat important.

¹⁵ Overall organisation and coordination; administrative and logistic support from the MobiliseSME project before the exchange visit (submitting forms, search for accommodation, etc.); administrative and logistic support from the MobiliseSME project team during the exchange; Information on the scheme and how it operates; guidance on potential legal challenges related to the exchange.

¹⁶ 81% of employees (30 respondents) (A.2.3 Q.8a), by at least 82% of hosts (28 respondents) (A.2.1 Q8a), and by at least 85% of sending organisations (28 respondents) (A.2.2, Q6a).

¹⁷ See Appendix B.

¹⁸ Actual support ranges from €567 to €1170 for a two-week exchange, €756 to €1560 for a 4 weeks/month exchange and €1008 to €2080 for a 1.5 months exchange. Funding for two months exchange ranges from €1260 to €2600.

When host organisations were asked whether they had considered contributing to the cost of visiting employees, the vast majority (76%, 29 respondents) stated that they had never contemplated this option. 21% indicated that they had considered it, but most indicated that they had agreed to not contribute financially. Only a single host indicated that they agreed to cover the employee's accommodation during the exchange. These responses indicate hosts in most cases are unlikely to support the exchange financially – and eventual additional costs consequently need to be funded by the sending company.

3.4.6.2 Adequacy of the funding level for the exchanges

The overall evidence suggests that the funds provided were in some cases sufficient, but in other cases too low. Nearly all partners described the level of funding as insufficient at least in some cases. While the level of funding might seem high when compared with EYE or Erasmus+, partners pointed out that the target group of employees, especially in countries with higher salaries, are also in another life phase than students or young entrepreneurs.

The level of funding was especially problematic for those employees going from Eastern European countries to larger, western European cities. Especially in cases where host companies were located in cities like Amsterdam or Paris funding was not sufficient.

While the level of funding was an issue, it however, does not appear to have a major participation obstacle. To the evaluators knowledge, there were only two cases where companies chose not to participate due to the level of funding or the funding modality.¹⁹

The fact that funding was often not sufficient is also confirmed by the survey results. A slight majority of employees (53%) reported that the grant had been sufficient. The other half reported that they or their company had additional costs from the exchange. In more than half of these cases, the sending companies had covered the additional costs. However, in 16% of the exchanges, the employees had also covered personally additional costs. These additional personal costs were on average estimated at €492, with one respondent indicating that their employer had paid an additional €1,600.

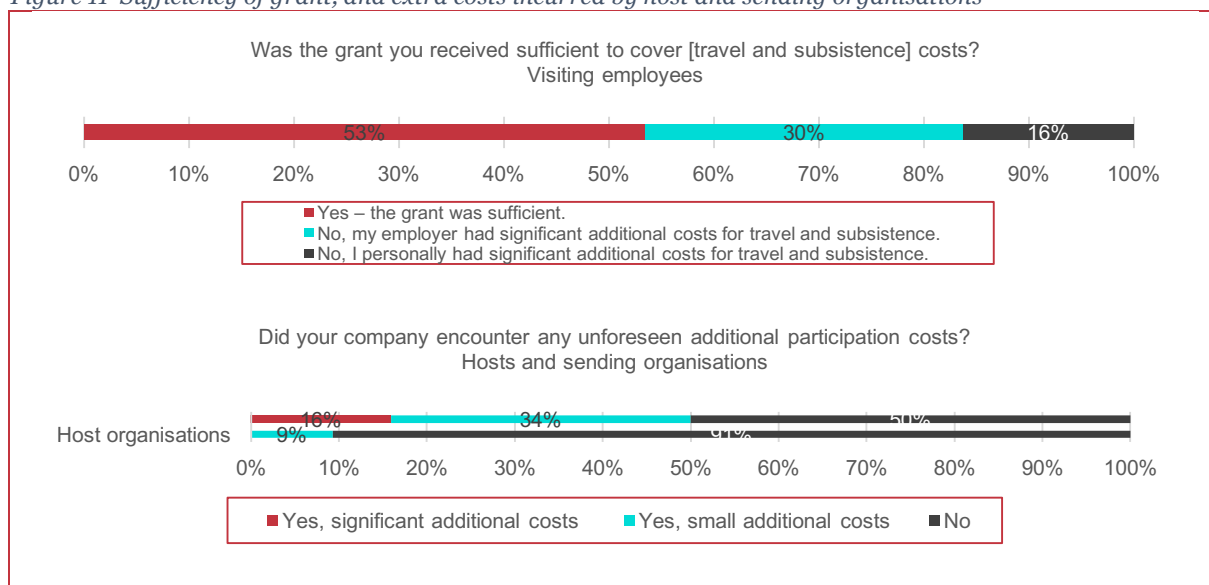
That half of the sending companies had additional costs is also confirmed by the survey among sending enterprises (see figure 11). Where sending companies had additional costs they estimated these to be €452 on average, with the largest expenditure totalling €900.

Only a small number of hosts indicated incurring additional costs (9%) and the estimated costs were generally lower (average value of €217, with the highest estimate given being €500).

Despite these figures, there were very few comments about financial burdens in the survey replies which may suggest that paying extra for the experience was not too much of an issue.

¹⁹ In one of the two cases, an entrepreneur couldn't advance the funding needed for going abroad.

Figure 11 Sufficiency of grant, and extra costs incurred by host and sending organisations



Source: Technopolis, based on survey data. Base=43 (host organisations), 44 (sending organisations), 43 (visiting employees)

3.4.7 Were the exchanges cost efficient?

Total expenditure of the project of MobiliseSME as co-financed by the EU budget is in the range of €1.42 million. This expenditure covers all costs including activities which are not related to the implementation of the pilot (feasibility study and evaluation research, conferences on the project, partner travel costs etc.). The costs for evaluation, events (and communication for events), audit and travel as well as the 7% indirect costs relating to those costs were excluded. The remaining costs were then attributed to the three phases of the project, namely phase 1 for assessing the feasibility (10 months), phase 2 for implementing the pilot (9 months), and phase three for dissemination (2 months). To calculate the cost-efficiency of the implementation of the pilot, there are two options:

The first option follows the logic that some of the costs of phase 1 need to be considered when calculating the overall cost-efficiency, as the research undertaken in this step was also used by partners to e.g. market the programme and reach out to companies interested. It may be estimated that this represents a share of 30% of the costs of phase 1. The sum of this share of phase 1 and of the costs of phase 2 (including costs for the matchmaking platform and the mobilities) is around €560,000 and represents a share of around 40% of the total expenditure of MobiliseSME. If these costs are divided by the number of 50 successfully undertaken exchanges, the average cost of an exchange was €11,170.

The second option considers only the costs of phase 2 (again including costs for mobilities and the matchmaking platform). These costs were around €360,000 or roughly 25% of the total expenditure of MobiliseSME. If this amount is divided by 54 exchanges (i.e. the successful exchanges plus the four exchanges cancelled in the last minute due to *force majeure*), the average cost of an exchange was €6,700.

Due to the large range between the two calculations, no judgement on the cost-efficiency is possible.

3.5 Effects and effectiveness

Effectiveness considers how successful an action (or set of actions) has been in achieving or progressing towards stated objectives in terms of results and outcomes. In the context of MobiliseSME expected results refer specially to improved skills and knowledge of MSME employees learning from other companies, acquiring new ideas, market intelligence and testing/developing potential business relations.

Expected outcomes related to contributions to business development in particular cross-border and international business activities of MSMEs expected in turn to improve the competitiveness of the

participating enterprises. Effectiveness also considers other additional or unintended effects. Effect measurement has been undertaken through surveys among hosts, senders and participating employees, following the exchanges.

The following evaluation questions are covered:

- Were the company matches suitable to delivery on the stated objectives?
- To what extent did the exchanges deliver on the expected results?
- What outcomes and developments resulted from the exchange?

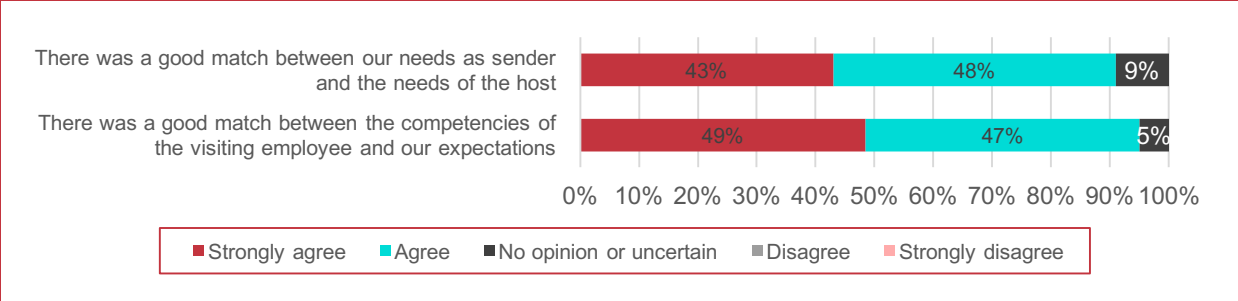
We conclude the section with an examination of factors that influenced the participation and programme success.

3.5.1 *Were the company-employee matches and the activities undertaken suitable to delivery on the stated objectives?*

Suitable matches between participants are of key importance to the success of exchanges. Suitable matches in this context concern the extent to which there during the actual implementation was is a match of expectations, needs and competences and the extent to which the tasks undertaken were relevant and provided learning opportunities for the hosted employees.

Overall, the matches were well-regarded. Both host companies and sending companies felt that the actual match corresponded well with their needs – and those of the partner (see Figure 12). The data collected also show that host companies generally were very satisfied with the qualifications of, and with the work undertaken by, the hosted employee. Four in five of host considered that the activities undertaken by the latter were better than expected, and the same share indicated that qualifications of the employee were above their expectations. A significant share of stated that the quality of the work or the qualifications of the sent employee were “outstanding” (respectively 40% and 32%)

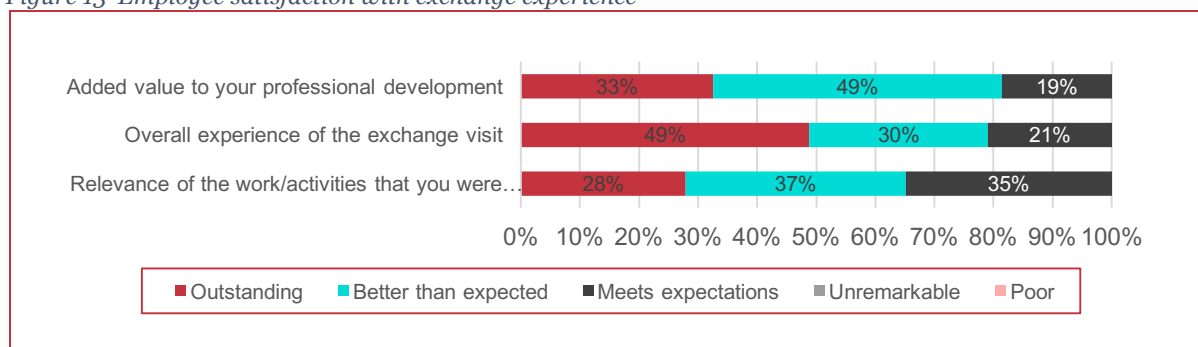
Figure 12 Perception of the match – senders and host



Source: Technopolis, based on survey data. Base=43 (host organisations), 44 (sending organisations)

Similarity, sent employees were very positive about the opportunities provided. Overall, two out of three of the sent employees felt that the activities undertaken were highly relevant – exceeding their expectations. Even higher shares stated that the exchange added value to the professional development of the employee – at a level beyond what was expected (79%). The feedback of the employee also suggest that hosting companies had made efforts to ensure a positive exchange experience overall. When commenting on the visit, 79% indicated that visit overall had exceed their expectations – with half of the participants (49%) indicating that the overall experience had been “outstanding”. None of the hosts and employees rated the exchange below their expectations – with respect to these indicators.

Figure 13 Employee satisfaction with exchange experience



Source: Technopolis, based on survey data. Base=43

The activities undertaken by the visiting employees also seem to support the expected learning well. A broad range of activities were reported – covering activities such as development of business plans, participation in client meetings, project meetings, research activities incl. market research, meetings with stakeholders or other companies etc. Hosts also said that they trained employees in task specific, or sector specific activities.

3.5.2 To what extent did the exchanges deliver on expected results?

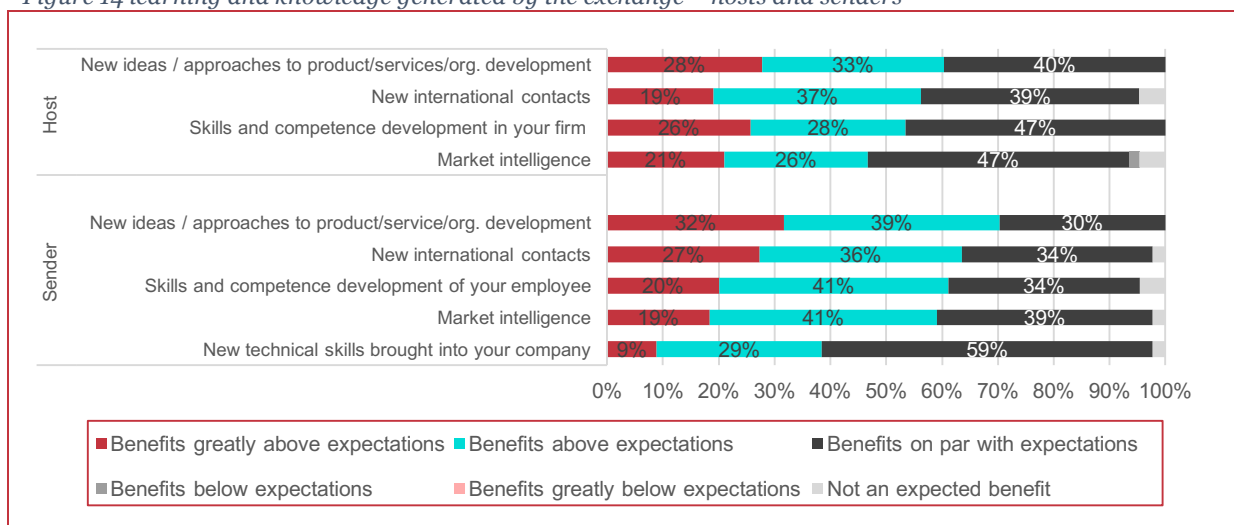
To measure result delivery all participants were asked about how well the exchange had delivered on a stated set of common possible results. Four indicators were used to measure expected results: competence development, acquisition of new ideas or approaches to product/service or organisational development, international contacts and market intelligence. Considering the importance of learning, senders were also asked if they felt that the exchange was an efficient way to develop the employee's competences and if the skills acquired by the employee were useful to the sender. Employees were asked a set of questions related to the learning during the exchange.

Overall senders, hosts and employees on exchange were very positive about the results of the exchange. All hosts and senders stated that the scheme had benefited their skills development, had allowed them to gain new ideas or approaches for product, services or organisational development; and had brought them market intelligence and new international contacts. For a majority of senders and hosts these gains were above expectations. Where results did not exceed expectations, they were at least met. Across all aspects only a single respondent stated on single issue that his expectations had not been met. In all other cases the gains had been above or on par with expectations.

It is interesting to note that while sending organisations most commonly rated 'new ideas/approaches for product/services or organisational development' as having exceeded expectations, they rated 'New technical skills brought into your company (from the host)' rather less well –with results more as being on par with their expectations. Hosts were not asked about technical skills gained. Interestingly however, 8 of the 43 hosts surveyed (19%), spontaneously mentioned that they had gained technical skills from the visiting employee. This data suggests, that the sort of skills gained are more likely to be non-technical than technical in nature.

When prompted on the most significant benefits in a subsequent open question, the majority of hosts stated that gaining knowledge and new approaches or methods was the single most significant benefit of their exchange. This came in the form of an interchange of working methods from employee to host, or exchanging of mutually beneficial information. The replies across senders were more varied. Interesting, new contacts was reported as the most significant benefit by a quarter of sending organisations in a subsequent open question. Nine organisations stated that a major benefit for them was the international experience their employee would garner.

Figure 14 learning and knowledge generated by the exchange – hosts and senders

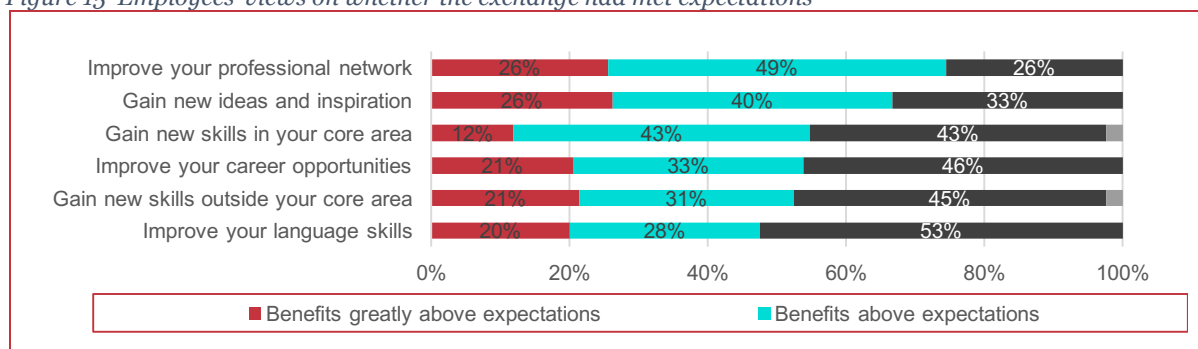


Source: Technopolis, based on survey data. Base=43 and 44

Visiting employees were particularly positive about the benefits of the exchange improving their professional network (74%, 32 respondents) and gaining new ideas and inspiration (67%, 29 respondents). Gaining skills (within and outwith employees’ core areas) and improving career opportunities were each reported as greatly above or above expectations by more than half of employees, while less than half (48%, 19 respondents) rated improvements to language skills as exceeding their expectations.

When commenting qualitatively on benefits, employees indicated that the most significant benefits for them were that they got the chance to work internationally, experiencing foreign markets in the sector in which they have experience at home. Of those who indicated that internationalising was a benefit for them, a majority said that opening communication channels with other countries and adopting a global outlook was very important to them. Employees also stated that improving language skills was a benefit from the exchange.

Figure 15 Employees’ views on whether the exchange had met expectations



Source: Technopolis, based on survey data. Base=39-43

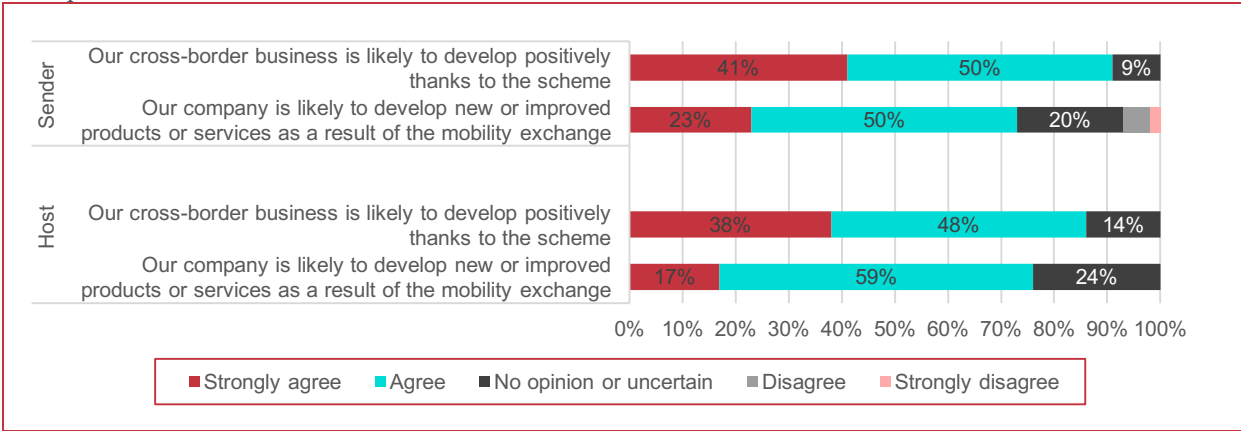
3.5.3 What outcomes and developments resulted from the exchange?

This section examines the main outcomes of the scheme for the parties involved in the exchange. For senders and hosts the following potential outcomes are considered: development of new products or services, expanded or consolidated business/business relations with the sending company and other new business in another country. Employees gains in terms career development is also considered. Finally, the section considers if the scheme generated any unintended outcomes.

Overall, both hosts and sending enterprises are very positive about the outcomes of the exchange and have high expectations regarding the impact on business. Not less than 91% of sending companies and 85% of hosting indicated that they expected the company’s cross-border business to develop positively thanks to the exchange organised. Judging by the survey results these effects appear to be generated mainly though the consolidation or expansion of business relations with the partner company. Impacts on wider internationalisation efforts are seemingly smaller.

The exchanges also appear to have supported very actively the development of the businesses and the services or products that they sell. More than three quarters of hosts (76%) strongly agreed or agreed that their company was likely to develop new products as a result of the scheme. Just below three quarters of senders said the same (73%). The remaining shares – about one company in four – stated that they were unlikely to develop new services or products or that they did not know yet.

Figure 16 senders and hosts expectations on the outcomes and impact of the scheme - cross border business and new products or services

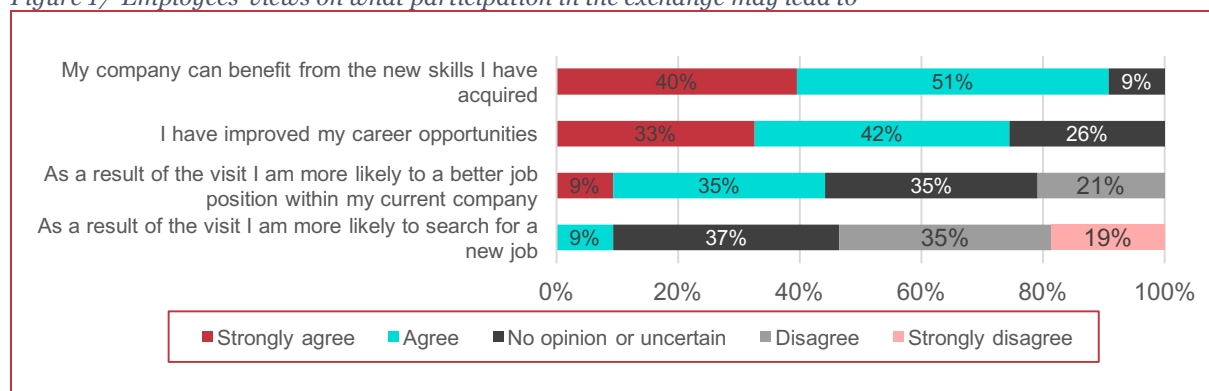


Source: Technopolis, based on survey data. Base=41 (host organisations), 44 (sending organisations)

Visiting employees were equally positive regarding the outcomes of the exchange. Close to all employees (91%) felt that the skills and knowledge acquired would be of direct benefit for their employers. Moreover, they, in a very clear majority felt that the exchange would have a positive impact on their career opportunities. Almost three quarters (74%.) said that they strongly agreed or agreed that they have ‘improved [their] career opportunities’. A direct effect in terms of career progression was also assessed positively, albeit fewer expected such a direct impact: 44% of employees strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that they were more likely to get a better job at their company as a result of the scheme.

Also positive is the fact that very few of the employee expected to use the exchange as an opportunity to change employer. Only 9% of visiting employees (4 respondents) agreed that as a result of the scheme they would be more likely to search for a new job – with 54% disagreeing that they would consider a job change. As such, the scheme does not appear to support in any substantial fashion loss of the sent employee – which could be expected as being potentially the most significant unintended effect of the scheme. As to identify other unintended impacts, the “post exchange surveys” left several opportunities for participants to comment on effects, including unintended effects. The examination of these open responses reveals no unexpected negative results or impacts.

Figure 17 Employees' views on what participation in the exchange may lead to

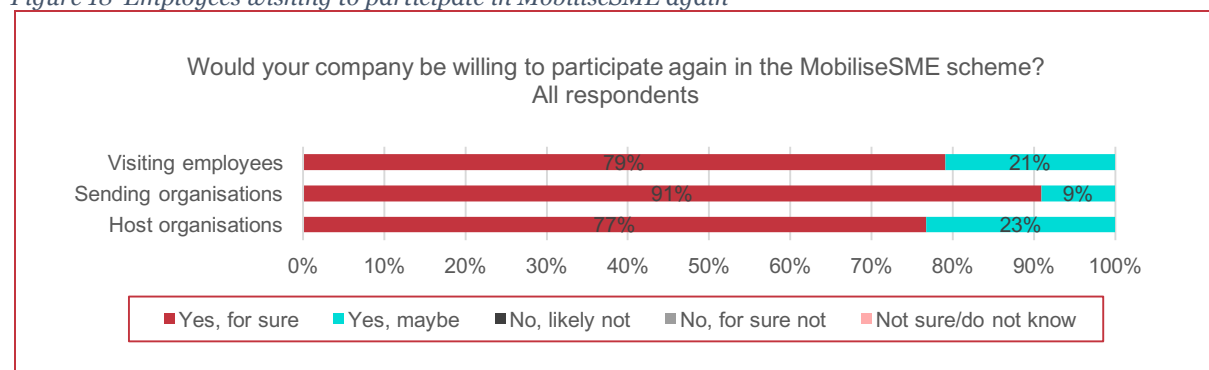


Source: Technopolis, based on survey data. Base=43 (host organisations), 44 (sending organisations),

As a final measure of results and outcomes, the post surveys asked participants if they would participate again, if they had the opportunity. Not surprisingly, reflecting the overall positive results, respondent groups most commonly reported that they would 'for sure' be willing to participate in the MobiliseSME scheme again, suggesting broad satisfaction with their experiences.

Sending organisations were most certain of repeat participation, with 91% (40 of 44) saying they would send an employee on exchange again. This indicates that sending organisations were most satisfied with the exchange and the benefits it brought to their company.

Figure 18 Employees wishing to participate in MobiliseSME again



Source: Technopolis, based on survey data. Base=43 (host organisations), 44 (sending organisations), 43 (visiting employees)

3.5.4 What factors influenced the achievements observed?

In order to understand what challenges and difficulties participants faced during the programme, host senders and employees were invited to offer comments to an open text question. Language barriers, the length of the exchange and "filling the gap left by the employee abroad" were among the difficulties faced. Language difficulties and the length of the exchange were the most commonly-discussed challenges, with a small number of respondents suggesting that language training period before the exchange took place would be beneficial.

Difficulties related to the length of the exchange varied in rationale: for example, some sending organisations suggested that filling the gap left by the sent employee was a major difficulty of participation in the exchange.

3.6 EU Added value

The European Commission's Better Regulation Guidelines stipulate that the value resulting from EU interventions that is additional to the value that would have resulted from interventions initiated at regional or national levels must be assessed.

The evaluation results, coupled with the results from the first feasibility study, show that a scheme supporting transnational exchanges between companies within the EU, brings EU added value at several levels.

The first feasibility study highlighted that currently there is no mobility scheme for learning opportunities between enterprises across the single market similar to the idea of MobiliseSME. Mobility with the purpose of learning is however a common approach successfully used already business-to-business under various smaller national schemes targeting people from apprentices to experts and also by larger companies in internal programmes. At the EU level there is another scheme that deals with European learning opportunities for enterprises, which is Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs. However, this scheme is targeting actual and potential entrepreneurs.

Evidence from this report highlights the benefits of transnational exchanges between businesses in Europe. It moreover shows that these exchanges would have been unlikely without EU support for the organisation and implementation of these. As such there is evidence of both "input additionality" with the MobiliseSME scheme supporting exchanges which otherwise would not have been implemented and "outcome additionality" – with exchanges supporting business development which otherwise was unlikely to have happened.

Survey results from senders, hosts and participating employees suggests that the key added value of MobiliseSME lies in the transnational aspect of the exchange scheme – allowing employees to work internationally, experiencing a foreign culture, and foreign markets in the sector in which they had experience at home, and adopting a global outlook. This added value directly benefits the participating companies. Of the 35 sending organisations who commented on the lessons they had learned from the programme, 10 stated that they had gained new perspectives. When analysing these responses, it is clear that some organisations have learned vicariously through the cultural experiences of an employee meeting new people and immersing themselves in a foreign environment. Seven companies also commented on the international network they gained from the experience, supporting the idea that they prioritise globalising their business as well as their employees.

Overall host structures benefit less from this transnational and "cultural" aspect of the exchange scheme. They are however, likely to gain other benefits, as presented above. This is also illustrated by the replies to the question related to the lessons learned from the programme. Of the 34 replying eight hosts specifically said that they learnt new technical knowledge from the visiting employee. Six hosts stated that they had realised potential for cross-border business, reiterating employers' acknowledgment of the benefits of this EU mobility programme for the distribution of knowledge within Europe. These survey answers about lessons learned are corroborated by interview responses indicating that value was added by the opportunity to learn.

This fits the definition of added value in this context, i.e. the value of the EU-funded scheme exceeding what is available at other levels (nationally or regionally).

4 Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

Relevance of the scheme to enterprises and motivation to participate

By September 2017, a total of 50 exchanges has been organised. 44 of these exchanges, involving in total 59 enterprises, were subject to this evaluation. Some 350 companies have shown interest in the project, subscribing to the database. 101 companies have published posts looking for partners.

Overall, these numbers are low. The low numbers, unquestionably, are related to the novelty of the project and its approach, as well as the short time (8 months) available for the implementation of the test phase. As such it could be expected that a longer implementation period, promotion of results from exchanges already undertaken, a wider network of project partners in all EU Member States and “word of mouth” from past participants would lead to more exchanges. Nevertheless, the data available suggests that the scheme overall may be of interest only to a limited number of enterprises. Building on the data available, it may be estimated that the maximum potential would be below 1,000 exchanges/year in EU28.

For a European exchange scheme between enterprises to be rolled out successfully and to increase efficiency, it will be necessary to mobilise and motivate more companies to participate in the exchanges – realising the expected potential.

Most companies *expressing an interest* in the scheme are small micro-enterprises (<5 employees) or self-employed. However, companies *actually participating* are more likely to be small enterprises (10 to 49 employees) or “large” micro enterprises (>5 employees). The difference between those enrolled in the matchmaking database and those participating suggests that a stronger communication focus would be needed on small enterprises (as opposed to the self-employed and those with only one employee).

No clear trends can be identified regarding the company sectors and no sector dominated. However, ICT, communication and marketing and business services appear to be the most promising company sectors for exchanges, should the scheme be piloted on specific sectors.

Across companies, there is a stronger interest in sending than in hosting. There is also an asymmetric demand, with companies in the EU-12 keen to send, largely to the EU-15. However, there is seemingly not a corresponding demand from EU-15 companies to send to EU-12 companies. EU-15 companies seemingly are also interested in sending to other countries of the EU-15.

Across participants, learning and skill development is the main motivation to participate. There is thus a high level of consistency between the pilot’s stated objectives and the companies’ reasons for participation. Exchanges appear to be seen mainly as an opportunity for acquiring “additional” skills, knowledge and idea of use for the company – rather than an opportunity to address skills weakness with current staff. Beyond learning, the main reasons for the participation of companies relate to business development i.e. the development of common projects with the partner company; gathering of market intelligence or business development in the country of the partner company. Career development (with the current employer) is an important motivation factor for employees to participate.

Communication

A key success factor for MobiliseSME is effective communication, attracting potential participants to the scheme. The MobiliseSME project partners have heavily invested in communicating and advertising of the programme – using a multitude of face to face, online, social and traditional media channels. Most effective channels to raise awareness and motivate participants have been personal channels (direct mails, calls and events). Among the other tools used, partner newsletters have worked the best. Social media and advertising have worked least well.

Overall, communication efforts have worked best at a local level, communicating directly from the local partners to prospective participants in their native language. Communication via centralised MobiliseSME channels have worked less well. Face to face promotion and, “word of mouth” was also what worked best in motivating companies to participate within the specific context of this project (that

was set among others also by the composition of the project consortium). However, all partners also stated that it took time to achieve results by this means, and that it was complicated to communicate a new and relatively complex idea like MobiliseSME. These factors contributed to a slow take-off of MobiliseSME.

Organisational efficiency

The question of organisational efficiency of the MobiliseSME scheme is related to three aspects: the efficiency of the matching process, efficiency of the MobiliseSME design and implementation efficiency.

An online matchmaking platform was intended to operate as the backbone of the matching process. In practice, however, the matchmaking platform was not instrumental in generating most of the exchanges that took place within the pilot. In many cases, companies participating knew each other in advance, so matching was not necessary in those cases. In most of the remaining cases, partners facilitated the matches manually. Issues with the matchmaking platform were twofold. First, the number of general registrations was too low to generate matches. Second, the quality of information was insufficient to support a quality match. Further issues were associated with the database functionality (regarding overall usability and user-friendliness).

Besides database issues, the scheme was well designed and implemented. The eligibility requirements regarding companies and employees worked well and did not affect the attractiveness of the scheme in any substantive way. Minor adjustments could however, potentially attract new relevant groups. The tripartite agreement, including the learning plan, worked well supporting actively the organisation of exchange.

The current options for exchanges (from two weeks to two month) seem to cater for a potential demand – and most participants were satisfied with the actual length of the exchanges. The decision to include two weeks exchanges appears to have worked well, as most exchanges in practice were of this length. However, some participants also suggested that exchanges should be even shorter than 2 weeks. Judging by the length of the pilot exchanges, it appears unlikely that exchanges will last more than 2 months.

In general, the scheme was well implemented. Participants were very satisfied with the overall organisation, coordination and guidance received by the partners. Language was generally not an issue and most participants indicated that the budgetary support was sufficient to cover additional costs. There were however, occasional language challenges and a number of issues with sufficiency of the grants to cover travel and subsistence.

Overall, the manual matchmaking support, and the detailed support and guidance provided to all parties participating to the exchange, implied that more HR resources from the project partners were needed. This made the overall implementation less efficient than anticipated. Nevertheless, all partners were positive about rolling out MobiliseSME and would like to be a future partner.

Cost efficiency

Total expenditure of MobiliseSME was around €1.42 million. This expenditure covers all costs including activities which are not related to the implementation of the pilot, such as conferences, research and evaluation, audit and travel cost.

If costs for these other activities as well as 25% of costs for project management are disregarded, and when calculating 54 exchanges (50 successful ones and 4 cancelled last minute due to force majeure), then costs for realising exchanges were in average around €6,700 per exchange. If calculating with 50 exchanges, and including costs for project management, the average costs per exchange were €11,170.

Effectiveness

Judging by the feedback from the participating parties, the scheme has been successful, delivering on and mostly also exceeding the participants' own expectations. Matches between participants are well-regarded, the participating employees had the right qualifications and satisfaction with the work and tasks undertaken is high.

The feedback is also very positive as regards the results of the exchange. All hosts and senders stated that the scheme had benefited their skills development, had allowed them to gain new ideas or approaches for product, services or organisational development; and had brought them market intelligence and new contacts. Visiting employees were particularly positive about the opportunities to gain new skills, new ideas and inspiration and to improve their professional network.

For most senders, hosts and employees gains were above – or significantly above - expectations.

In line with the expected results, skills and knowledge gathering – such as learning about new approaches or methods, experiencing different approaches – are the main results of the programme. This came through an interchange of working methods from employee to host, exchange of mutually beneficial information or more broadly through employees immersing themselves in a foreign environment. New international contacts were a second key result. For a quarter of the senders' new contacts was reported as the most significant benefit. The acquisition of technical skills is reported less frequently. However, only about one in five of all hosts saw this as the primary result of the exchange.

Overall, both hosts and sending enterprises have high expectations regarding the impact on business. A majority of companies participating expect to develop new services or products or practices as a result of the project. Moreover, more than four of five companies expect cross border business to develop positively thanks to the exchange organised. These effects appear to be generated mainly through the consolidation or expansion of business relations with the partner company. Impacts on wider internationalisation efforts are seemingly smaller.

There is no evidence to suggest that the exchange scheme has generated any substantive unintended impacts. Some challenges however, were experienced in the form of language barriers, high living costs for short term exchanges and in expensive cities, and the length of the exchange (which were sometimes too short and sometimes too long).

Added value

The evaluation results, coupled with the results from the first feasibility study, show that a scheme supporting transnational exchanges between companies within the EU, brings EU added value at several levels. There is evidence of both “input additionality” with the MobiliseSME scheme supporting exchanges which otherwise would not have been implemented, and “outcome additionality” – with exchanges supporting business development which otherwise was unlikely to have happened.

Key to these benefits are the transnational aspects of the exchange scheme – allowing employees to work internationally, experiencing a foreign culture, and foreign markets in the sector in which they had experience at home and adopting a global outlook.

4.2 Recommendations

The evaluation results highlight that the MobiliseSME scheme overall has generated important learning benefits, which can be expected to contribute positively to business and employee development among those participating. However, cost efficiency and organisational efficiency considerations also show that substantial efficiency gains would be necessary for a roll out. For this to happen, a higher number of companies willing to participate will be necessary.

Reflecting these considerations, we list below our recommendations for a potential roll out of a company-to-company mobility scheme. The recommendations are organised according to the main steps: Marketing and communication, registration and matchmaking and implementation. Considerations regarding the organisational set up are also provided.

Marketing and communication

For the scheme to attract more potential participants and generate its full potential, communication and marketing of the scheme will be key. The following issues and avenues for communication should be given attention:

- Available communication resources should be concentrated on communication undertaken by local partners – maximising already available communication tools and instruments, and ensuring that communication is undertaken in the local language. Due to the complexity of the scheme advertising and other forms of bought coverage are unlikely to generate engagement. Communication via business advisory services, including those supporting internationalisation of SMEs, in contrast, is likely to have significant potential.
- To concentrate resources on the most likely participants a strong communication focus should be placed on small enterprises, as they have the greatest matching potential (as opposed to self-employed and companies with only a single or two employees). Furthermore, there might be benefits in targeting more proactively medium sized enterprises.
- Engaging hosts, overall, is more challenging than identifying potential senders. As hosting implies more efforts, relatively more resources need to be given to communication to, and recruitment of, potential hosts.
- Both data on interest and actual participation data suggest that desired exchange flows are likely to go from East to West and West to South. The communication and recruitment strategy should consider such desired patterns and the countries which are of high “hosting” demand. If it is not possible to generate a relatively wide offer of hosts in countries of high demand, it is unlikely that the project can achieve its potential in a cost-efficient manner.
- The concept of a transnational business-to-business exchange scheme is not straightforward to communicate to potential participants – and benefits might not be obvious. However, the scheme as implemented has generated substantive benefits for those engaged and most participants would be keen to participate again. There seems therefore to be a significant potential to use the exchanges undertaken to showcase with real life examples how companies benefit from participating to an exchange. In this context participants might operate as potential ambassadors for the programme.

Registration and matchmaking

For participation and matchmaking to operate effectively and efficiently consideration needs to be given to the following aspects:

- Improvement of the matchmaking database. For matching to happen at a significant scale, some level of automatism of the identification of potential partners will be necessary. Otherwise, there is a risk that only those already knowing a likely partner will participate or that substantive manual resources will be necessary to identify potential partners. For the matchmaking database to work, the database will need to be optimised, the user interface and functionalities improved and more company data will be needed. This will require more resource inputs into the design and testing of this tool.
- While a user-friendly and comprehensive database provides a first step towards matching, manual support by the partners in the matching phase is likely still to be needed in many cases. To ensure uniform service delivery – but also to avoid that unreasonable resources are spent on matching – there would be benefit in designing a “standard service level for matching” for potential participants. This may also help managing potential participants’ expectations and maintain interest.

Implementation

The main design choices and implementation mechanisms have generally operated well. Smaller adaptations however, could improve implementation and effectiveness. In view of these results there would be benefit in:

- Maintaining the tripartite agreement. Especially, the learning plans were instrumental to organising the exchanges and should stay obligatory.
- Maintaining the different employee requirements²⁰ – but allowing for some flexibility in specific cases. The main reason for the experience and education provisions was to eliminate the possibility

²⁰ Including that employees participating in the exchange must keep receiving salaries from their employers while on exchange and cannot be on paid or unpaid leave, sick leave, maternal or parental leave.

of the scheme being abused to post relatively cheap labour to another Member State. In practice, however, this excluded family-owned businesses which would have liked to send young and relatively inexperienced family members to learn company management. As such it could be an improvement to exclude family members of family-owned business from the employee requirements. Similarly, more flexibility might be required, if the scheme is to cater more for staff which is not in management positions.

- Maintaining the financial support provided to participants on exchange. Providing funding for travel and subsistence is a necessary condition for participation of most companies. The funding ceilings provided are in most cases sufficient. However, there would be benefits in allowing for a top-up of up to €500 per exchange, as this would cater for most of the additional expenses currently paid for by the companies.
- Maintaining the current options for exchange length. While several participants noted that a longer exchange period could be beneficial, few in practice took up longer periods of secondment. As such a maximum of two months could seemingly cater for most needs. While some participants suggested that the exchange should be even shorter than two weeks, we recommend continuing to require a two weeks exchange, as shorter exchanges are unlikely to generate the desired learning potential.
- Providing the opportunity for employees to receive language training prior to the exchange – to address language barriers, and remove language obstacles to participation.

Finally, to ensure continued evaluation and follow up of the scheme, there would be benefits in requiring that the project partners collect regular feedback from the participants, based on a set of agreed indicators.

Organisation and management

It is out of the scope of this evaluation to consider how a potential scheme might be funded in the future. However, if a consortium of partners were to be selected for a roll out, or for a second pilot, there would be benefit in considering the following aspects:

- **Country coverage of the partners managing the project:** If participation is to be expanded covering all EU-28 country partners from each of these would be needed. It is not realistic to assume that partners in other countries can generate significant interest outside their home country.
- **Importance of membership:** To maximise the likelihood that project partners can reach out to and engage potential participants the selection criteria should pay attention to membership – ensuring that organisations participating have a wide member base of small and medium sized enterprises.
- **Gradual expansion of the exchanges:** To increase the likelihood of a match, there would be benefit in gradually expanding the exchange scheme in different sectors – starting with those where there is seemingly the largest potential. Judging by the actual matches communication and marketing, ICT and business services appear to be the most promising company sectors for exchanges.
- **Timeline:** In order to give employers adequate time to plan the exchanges there would be benefit in having an effective implementation period of above one year.

Appendix A List of interviews conducted

Name	Type	Organisation
Stefan Moritz	Lead partner	European Entrepreneurs CEA-PME
Aneta Bodlakova	Lead partner	European Entrepreneurs CEA-PME
Luigi Della Sala	Matchmaking & partner for countries covered centrally	European Entrepreneurs CEA-PME
Lorenzo Marchese	Communication	European Entrepreneurs CEA-PME
S�everine Varet	Partner FR	AFDEE
Sevgi Oeksuez	Partner DE	BVMW
Mikel Sarriegi	Partner ES	ADEGI
Isabella Condino Fernando Ippoliti	Partner IT	CONFAPI
Raivo Altmets	Partner EE	EVEA
Denisa Samek	Partner RO	PTIR
Luigi Della Sala	Partner BE	BDG/CEA-PME
Tolga Senel	Partner TUR	M�USIAD
Szilvia Borb�ely	Partner HU	P�ATOSZ
Rosa Maria Caprino	Company	Socomer grandi lavori
Robert Somoig	Company	Openet Technologies S.p.A
Roxana Turcu	Company	PROSPERITATEM
Michael M�unch	Company	Riskonomic
Merle Laks	Company	Daemon O�
Tiina Kuuler	Company	Veinim�oisnik O�
Peter Korodi	Company	K�orodi Project Management Kft.
Anik� Ligeti	Company	Ligeti Anik� - registered accountancy

Appendix B Survey responses

B.1 Pre-exchange questionnaires

B.1.1 Host organisations

Q1. How did you find out about the MobiliseSME scheme?	Number	%
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From a business event	3	8%
From a newsletter/website of the MobiliseSME project partner	5	13%
From the media/press	1	3%
I heard about it from another company	17	45%
I was contacted by a MobiliseSME project partner in my country	5	13%
Other (please specify)	2	5%
Social media	0	0%
The employee who is going alerted me to the opportunity	5	13%
Base	38	100%

Q2(a). Did you/your company know the sending company before applying for this scheme?	Number	%
Yes	28	74%
No	10	26%
Base	38	100%

Q2(b). If yes: What is the relationship with the sending company?	Response	%
We are already collaborating/doing business together	7	26%
We know each other- but are currently not collaborating	13	48%
Our relationship is new: we contacted the sending company when we heard about this opportunity (or the sending company contacted us)	6	22%
Other (please specify)	1	4%
Base	27	100%

Q3. What are the main reasons for your company to participate in this exchange scheme? (Maximum 3 answers)	Number	%
We need to acquire market intelligence. We want to expand/develop business in the country of the sender.	11	31%
We have a project with the sending company- MobiliseSME allows us to host an employee to work with the sending company on this project.	3	8%
Our staff is lacking skills, which we need to develop our business. We think the incoming employee will bring us these competences.	8	22%
We want to give an opportunity to another company to learn from us.	19	53%
We have considered developing a project/business with the sending company- MobiliseSME allows us to host an employee to test feasibility/develop business.	15	42%
No specific reason-we think that this maybe could give us some fresh ideas.	6	17%
Other (please specify)	3	8%
Base	36	100%

Q4. How important are the following for your company's participation in the scheme?	Financial support provided by the scheme to cover travel and subsistence	"No cost" for the hosting/your company	The learning plan agreed with the sending company and your employee	Other (please specify)
Very important (we would/could not participate without)	49%	54%	71%	--
Somewhat important	43%	34%	26%	--
Not important	9%	11%	3%	--
Base	35	35	34	2

Q5. How does your company expect to gain from this mobility experience? (Maximum three answers)	Number	%
Development of new products or services	12	32%
Expansion/consolidation of (already existing) business relations with the sender	8	21%
Development/completion of a specific project with the sending company	4	11%
New ideas from the visiting employee	23	61%
Skills and competence development-learning from the incoming employee	17	45%
New international contacts	13	34%
A more attractive employer profile (providing international/interesting working experiences)	3	8%
Market intelligence from the country of the sending company	11	29%
Nothing in particular	0	0%
Other (please specify)	3	8%
Base	38	100%

Q6. Did you consider/discuss contributing financially to the cost of the visiting employee?	Number	%
Yes, and we are paying the sending enterprise to cover part or the full salary costs	0	0%
Yes, and we are paying a top up allowance to the incoming employee (to cover additional costs)	3	8%
Yes, but we have agreed that we will not be contributing financially in any form	5	13%
No	29	76%
Other (please specify)	1	3%
Base	38	100%

Q7. In which language do you expect to interact with the visiting employee?	Number	%
English	32	84%
Dutch	1	3%
French	2	5%
German	4	11%
Hungarian	3	8%

Italian	1	3%
Spanish	4	11%
Turkish	1	3%
Base	38	100%

Q8. Do you have any other comments regarding your motivation to participate, the matchmaking experience or other issues? [Open responses]

B.1.2 Sending organisations

Q1. Please indicate how you are participating in the scheme	Response	%
My enterprise is sending an employee	32	74%
I own a company or practise a liberal profession and I am going on secondment myself	11	26%
Base	43	100%

Q2. How did you/your company find out about the MobiliseSME scheme?	Response	%
From a business event	3	7%
From a newsletter/website of the MobiliseSME project partner	9	20%
From the media/press	2	5%
I heard about it from another company	2	5%
I was contacted by a MobiliseSME project partner in my country	13	30%
Other (please specify)	8	18%
Social media	2	5%
The employee who is going alerted me to the opportunity	5	11%
Base	44	100%

Q3(a). Did you/your company know the hosting company before applying for this scheme?	Response	%
Yes	32	73%
No	12	27%
Base	44	100%

Q3(b). If yes: What is the relationship with the hosting company?	Response	%
We are already collaborating/doing business together	9	29%
We know each other-but are currently not collaborating	17	55%
Our relationship is new: we contacted the host company when we heard about this opportunity (or the host company contacted us)	4	13%
Other (please specify)	1	3%
Base	31	100%

Q4. What are the main reasons for your company to participate in this exchange scheme? (Maximum three answers)	Number	%
Our staff is lacking skills that we need to develop our business	7	16%
We have a project with the host company- MobiliseSME allows us to send an employee to work with the host on this project	3	7%
We want to expand/develop business in the country of the host	17	39%
We would like to acquire a specific knowledge or develop a specific competence from the host	9	20%
We need to acquire market intelligence. We believe that this exchange will help	5	11%
Our employee informed us about the project, as she/he would like to participate. We wanted to give him/her this opportunity	6	14%
We have considered developing a project/business with the host- MobiliseSME allows us to send an employee to test feasibility/develop business relationships	12	27%
We believe that this opportunity could help the visiting employee to acquire new skills, knowledge or experience. We like to invest into our employees and their professional development	31	70%
Marketing reason: we want to appear as an attractive employer	3	7%
No specific reason: we think that this could maybe give us some free ideas	0	0%
Other (please specify)	2	5%
Base	44	

Q5. How important are the following for your company's participation in the scheme?	Financial support provided by the scheme to cover travel and subsistence	The learning plan agreed with the host company and your employee	Other (please specify)
Very important (we would/could not participate without)	60%	64%	0%
Somewhat important	35%	32%	0%
Not important	0%	5%	0%
Other	5%	0%	0%
Base	43	44	0

Q6. What does your company expect to gain from this mobility experience? (Maximum three answers)	Number	%
Development of new products or services	10	23%
New/fresh ideas (from the employee on secondment/acquired with the host company)	20	45%
Expansion/consolidation of (already existing) business relationships with the host company	17	39%
Skills and competence development (of the visiting employee)	29	66%
Development of new business opportunities in the country of the host company (other than with the host company)	17	39%
New international contacts	9	20%
A more attractive employer profile (providing international/interesting working experiences)	9	20%
Other (please specify)	0	0%
Base	44	

Q7. Any other comments regarding your motivation to participate, the matchmaking experience or other issues? [Open response]

B.1.3 Visiting employees

Q1. How did you find out about the MobiliseSME scheme?	Response	%
From a business event	2	5%
From a newsletter/website of the MobiliseSME project partner	6	14%
From my manager	14	33%
From the media/press	2	5%
I heard about it from a colleague	4	10%
I heard about it from a friend/family member	1	2%
I was contacted by a MobiliseSME project partner in my country	6	14%
Other (please specify)	5	12%
Social media	2	5%
Base	42	100%

Q2. How did you get engaged in the project?	Response	%
My manager suggested that I was sent on secondment	23	55%
I suggested participating to my manager	10	24%
Other (please specify)	9	21%
Base	42	100%

Q3. What are the main reasons for you to participate in this exchange scheme? (Maximum 3 answers)	Number	%
Career development-I expect that the exchange will improve my career opportunities in my current company	25	60%
Career development-I expect that the exchange will improve my career opportunities in other companies when I return home	4	10%
I would like to find a job in country of the host	1	2%
I would like to improve/acquire language skills	17	40%
I would like to improve/acquire work related skills	27	64%
I would like to discover a new country	9	21%
I would like to try working in a different cultural environment	15	36%
I would like to pass on my knowledge to another company	10	24%
No specific reason- I think that this could give me some fresh ideas	0	0%
Other (please specify)	1	2%
Base	42	

Q4. What do you expect to gain from this mobility experience? (Maximum three answers)	Number	%
Learning new skills in my core area	16	38%
Learning new skills outside my core area	14	33%
To gain new ideas/inspiration	30	71%
Learning new managerial skills	10	24%
Increased career opportunities	9	21%
Improved language skills	10	24%
Expanded professional network	23	55%
Nothing in particular	0	0%
Other (please specify)	0	0%
Base	42	

Q5. In which language do you expect to interact with the host company?	Response	%
English	35	83%
French	2	5%
German	4	10%
Hungarian	3	7%
Russian	1	2%
Spanish	2	5%
Turkish	1	2%

Q6. Do you have any other comments regarding your motivation to participate, the matchmaking experience or other issues? [Open response]

B.2 Post-exchange questionnaires

B.2.1 Host organisations

Q1. Company name and agreement number [Open response]

Q2. What type of activities were undertaken by the employee? [Open response]

Q3. To what extent did the mobility exchange match your company's expectations? Please rate the extent to which the scheme delivered on the following	Skills and competence development in your firm thanks to the employee you hosted	New ideas / approaches to product / services / organisational development	New international contacts	Market intelligence	Expanded or consolidated business/business relations with the sending company	New business in another country (other than with the sending company)
Benefits greatly above expectations	26%	28%	20%	22%	24%	3%
Benefits above expectations	28%	33%	39%	27%	33%	18%

Benefits on par with expectations	47%	40%	41%	49%	43%	64%
Benefits below expectations	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	9%
Benefits greatly below expectations	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%
Base (excl. 'Not an expected benefit')	43	43	41	41	42	33

Q4. How satisfied have you been with the visiting employee? Please comment on the following	Qualifications of the visiting employee	Quality of the work/activities performed by the visiting employee	Added value to your company
Outstanding	30%	42%	23%
Better than expected	44%	33%	42%
Meets expectations	26%	26%	35%
Unremarkable	0%	0%	0%
Poor	0%	0%	0%
Base	43	43	43

Q5. Please describe in your own words the most significant benefits of this mobility exchange for your company. [Open response]

Q6. To what extent do you agree with the following statements	There was a good match between the competencies of the visiting employee and our company	The length of the exchange visit was appropriate	Our cross-border business is likely to develop positively thanks to the scheme	Our company is likely to develop new or improved products or services as a result of the mobility exchange
Strongly agree	49%	19%	38%	17%
Agree	47%	49%	48%	59%
No opinion or uncertain	5%	7%	14%	24%
Disagree	0%	23%	0%	0%
Strongly disagree	0%	2%	0%	0%
Don't know	0%	0%	0%	0%
Check	100%	100%	100%	100%

Q7. Please describe briefly the major challenges and difficulties you have experienced during this mobility exchange [Open response]

Q8(a). How would you rate the quality of the information, guidance and support you received	Information on the scheme and how it operates	The matchmaking platform	The matchmaking services and in particular a support in searching for a sending	Guidance on potential legal challenges related to the exchange	Administrative and logistic support from the MobiliseSME project before the exchange visit (submitting forms, search	Administrative and logistic support from the MobiliseSME project team during the employee's	Overall organisation and coordination

in relation to the matching with the host company and the implementation of the exchange?			company and assistance provided during the negotiation process		for accommodation, etc.)	stay in your company	
Excellent	37%	21%	30%	28%	47%	52%	45%
Good	49%	39%	52%	62%	35%	37%	48%
Satisfactory	9%	29%	18%	7%	18%	11%	8%
Poor	2%	11%	0%	3%	0%	0%	0%
Unacceptable	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Check	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Q8(b). Do you have any other comments regarding the implementation of the scheme? Please provide them here. [Open response]

Q9. In order to participate in the MobiliseSME project, it is necessary to agree on details of the exchange visit (Tripartite Agreement). How useful was this Tripartite Agreement for the preparation of the exchange?	Number	%
The Tripartite Agreement was extremely useful; it helped all parties to better clarify the expectations and purpose of the exchange.	18	42%
The Tripartite Agreement was useful to confirm in writing a purpose of the exchange - but we had already agreed on most/all aspects before.	18	42%
The Tripartite Agreement was mainly an administrative requirement. We did not find it very useful.	7	16%
Other	0	0%
Base	43	100%

Q10. How useful was the Tripartite Agreement for organising the actual visit and the day-to-day activities of the visiting employee?	Number	%
Useful	23	53%
Some impact	16	37%
Not useful	4	9%
Base	43	100%

Q11. The MobiliseSME scheme provides a grant for the employee on secondment to cover his/her travel costs and subsistence. Did your company encounter any unforeseen additional participation costs?	Number	%
Yes, significant additional costs	0	0%
Yes, small additional costs	4	9%

No	39	91%
Base	43	100%

Q12. Please describe the lessons your company drew from this exchange scheme [Open response]

Q13. Would your company be willing to participate again in the MobiliseSME scheme?	Number	%
Yes, for sure	33	77%
Yes, maybe	10	23%
No, likely not	0	0%
No, for sure not	0	0%
Not sure/do not know	0	0%
Base	43	100%

Q14. What would be your recommendations for improvement? [Open response]

Q15. Any other comments? Please provide them here [Open response]

B.2.2 Sending organisations

Q1. Company name and agreement number [Open response]

Q2. To what extent did the mobility exchange match your company's expectations and the expected gains? Please rate the extent to which the scheme delivered on the following	Skills and competence development of your employee	New technical skills brought into your company (from the host)	New ideas / approaches to product / services / organisational development	New international contacts	Market intelligence	Expansion or consolidation of business / business relations with the host company	New business in another country (other than with the host company)	Other
Benefits greatly above expectations	21%	9%	32%	28%	19%	19%	8%	0%
Benefits above expectations	43%	30%	39%	37%	42%	33%	28%	0%
Benefits on par with expectations	36%	60%	30%	35%	40%	48%	53%	0%
Benefits below expectations	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	11%	0%
Benefits greatly	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

below expectations								
Base (excl. 'Not an expected benefit')	42	43	44	43	43	42	36	0

Q3. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?	The mobility exchange is an effective mean to develop the employee's competences	There was a good match between our needs and the needs of the host company	The skills that the employee acquired are relevant and useful to our company	Our cross-border business is likely to develop positively thanks to the scheme	Our company is likely to develop new or improved products or services as a result of the mobility exchange
Strongly agree	59%	43%	43%	41%	23%
Agree	39%	48%	52%	50%	50%
No opinion or uncertain	0%	9%	0%	9%	20%
Disagree	0%	0%	2%	0%	5%
Strongly disagree	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Don't know	2%	0%	2%	0%	0%

Q4. Please describe briefly the major challenges and difficulties you have experienced during this mobility exchange [Open response]

Q5(a). How would you rate the quality of the information, guidance and support you received in relation to the matching with the host company and the implementation of the exchange?	Information on the scheme and how it operates	The matchmaking platform	The matchmaking services, and in particular a support in searching for a host company and assistance provided during the negotiation process	Guidance on potential legal challenges related to the exchange	Administrative and logistic support from the MobiliseSME project before the exchange visit (submitting forms, search for accommodation, etc.)	Administrative and logistic support from the MobiliseSME project team during the employee's stay in the host company	Overall organisation and coordination
Excellent	50%	26%	44%	45%	59%	56%	55%
Good	45%	33%	35%	39%	26%	35%	34%
Satisfactory	5%	31%	21%	15%	15%	9%	11%
Poor	0%	10%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Unacceptable	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Base (excl. 'Not relevant/did not use')	44	39	34	33	39	34	44

Q5(b). Do you have any other comments regarding the implementation of the scheme? Please provide them here. [Open response]

Q6. In order to participate in the MobiliseSME project, it is necessary to agree on details of the exchange visit (Tripartite Agreement). How useful was this Tripartite Agreement for the preparation of your exchange?	Number	%
The Tripartite Agreement was extremely useful; it helped all parties to better clarify the expectations and purpose of the exchange.	16	36%
The Tripartite Agreement was useful to confirm in writing a purpose of the exchange - but we had already agreed on most/all aspects before.	21	48%
The Tripartite Agreement was mainly an administrative requirement. We did not find it very useful.	6	14%
Other please specify here:	1	2%
Base	44	100%

QX. The MobiliseSME scheme provides a grant for the employee on secondment to cover his/her travel costs and subsistence. Did your company encounter any unforeseen additional participation costs?	Number	%
Yes, significant additional costs	7	16%
Yes, small additional costs	15	34%
No	22	50%
Base	44	100%

Q7. Please describe the lessons your company drew from this exchange scheme. [Open response]

Q8. Would your company be willing to participate again in the MobiliseSME scheme?	Number	%
Yes, for sure	40	91%
Yes, maybe	4	9%
No, likely not	0	0%
No, for sure not	0	0%
Base	44	100%

Q9. What would be your recommendations for improvement? [Open response]

Q10. Any other comments? Please provide them here. [Open response]

B.2.3 Visiting employees

Q1. Employee name and agreement number [Open response]

Q2. What type of activities did you undertake during the visit? Please describe briefly [Open response]

Q3. How satisfied were you with the exchange visit? Please comment on the following	Overall experience of the exchange visit	Relevance of the work/activities that you were involved in the host company to your job at home	Added value to your professional development
Outstanding	49%	28%	33%
Better than expected	30%	37%	49%

Meets expectations	21%	35%	19%
Unremarkable	0%	0%	0%
Poor	0%	0%	0%
Base	43	43	43

Q4. To what extent did the mobility exchange match your expectations? Please rate the extent to which the visit made you...	Gain new ideas and inspiration	Gain new skills in your core area	Gain new skills outside your core area	Improve your professional network	Improve your language skills	Improve your career opportunities
Benefits greatly above expectations	26%	12%	21%	26%	20%	21%
Benefits above expectations	40%	43%	31%	49%	28%	33%
Benefits on par with expectations	33%	43%	45%	26%	53%	46%
Benefits below expectations	0%	2%	2%	0%	0%	0%
Benefits greatly below expectations	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Base (excluding 'not an expected benefit')	42	42	42	43	40	39

Q5. Please describe in your own words the most significant benefits of this mobility exchange for you
[Open response]

Q6. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?	The scheme was an effective way to acquire new skills	The host company was well-chosen for me to learn	I have improved my career opportunities	My company can benefit from the new skills I have acquired	The length of the exchange visit was appropriate
Strongly agree	47%	53%	33%	40%	21%
Agree	44%	42%	42%	51%	40%
No opinion or uncertain	7%	5%	26%	9%	26%
Disagree	2%	0%	0%	0%	14%
Strongly disagree	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Base (excl. 'don't know')	43	43	43	43	43
Q6. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?	There were no language issues	Main benefits of the visit were to discover a new country/culture	As a result of the visit I am more likely to a better job position within my current company	As a result of the visit I am more likely to search for a new job	The amount of grant provided proved adequate to support the exchange
Strongly agree	26%	23%	9%	0%	5%
Agree	63%	37%	35%	9%	35%
No opinion or uncertain	5%	14%	35%	37%	23%
Disagree	7%	23%	21%	35%	35%
Strongly disagree	0%	2%	0%	19%	2%
Base	43	43	43	43	43

Q7. Please describe briefly the major challenges and difficulties you have experienced during this mobility exchange [Open response]

Q8(a). How would you rate the quality of information, guidance and support you received in relation to the matching process and the implementation of the exchange?	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Unacceptable	Base (excl. 'Not relevant / did not use')
Information on the scheme and how it operates	47%	42%	12%	0%	0%	43
The matchmaking platform	14%	60%	16%	9%	0%	43
The matchmaking services and in particular a support in searching for a host company and assistance provided during the negotiation process	31%	51%	17%	0%	0%	35
Guidance on potential legal challenges related to the exchange	43%	38%	19%	0%	0%	37
Administrative and logistic support from the MobiliseSME project before the exchange visit (submitting forms, search for accommodation, etc.)	61%	33%	6%	0%	0%	36
Administrative and logistic support from the MobiliseSME project team during your stay in the host company	63%	29%	9%	0%	0%	35
Overall organisation and coordination	51%	42%	7%	0%	0%	43

Q8(b): Do you have any other comments regarding the implementation of the scheme? Please provide them here. [Open response]

Q9. In order to receive participate in the MobiliseSME mobility exchange it is necessary to agree on details of the exchange visit (Tripartite Agreement). How useful was the Tripartite Agreement for the preparation of the mobility exchange?	Number	%
The Tripartite Agreement was extremely useful; it helped all parties to better clarify the expectations and purpose of the exchange.	18	42%
The Tripartite Agreement was useful to confirm in writing a purpose of the exchange - but we had already agreed on all aspects before.	15	35%
The Tripartite Agreement was mainly an administrative requirement. We did not find it very useful.	9	21%
Other please specify here	1	2%
Base	43	100%

Q10. How useful was the Tripartite Agreement for organising the actual visit and the day-to-day activities during your visit?	Number	%
Some impact	15	35%
Useful	18	42%
Not useful	10	23%
Base	43	100%

Q11(a). The MobiliseSME scheme provides a grant for the employee on secondment to cover his/her travel costs and subsistence. Was the grant you received sufficient to cover these costs? Please tick the one that apply	Number	%
Yes – the grant was sufficient.	23	53%
No, my employer had significant additional costs for travel and subsistence.	13	30%
No, I personally had significant additional costs for travel and subsistence.	7	16%
Base	43	100%

Q12. Please describe briefly the overall lessons you learned from this mobility exchange. [Open response]

Q13. Would you be willing to participate again in the MobiliseSME scheme?	Number	%
Yes, for sure	34	79%
Yes, maybe	9	21%
No, likely not	0	0%
No, for sure not	0	0%
Not sure/do not know	0	0%
Base	43	100%

Q14. What would be your recommendations for improvement? [Open response]

Q15. Any other comments? Please provide them here. [Open response]

Appendix C Pre-exchange surveys



Survey for sending enterprises

Agreement number:

S.1 Please indicate how you are participating to the scheme

My enterprise is sending an employee.

I own a company or practice a liberal profession and I am going on secondment myself.

S.2 How did you/your company find out about the MobiliseSME scheme? *One option*

From a business event	From a newsletter/website of the MobiliseSME project partner
From the media/press	I was contacted by a MobiliseSME project partner in my country
I heard about it from another company	The employee who is going alerted me to the opportunity
Social media	
Other: Please specify	<input type="text"/>

S.3 Did you/your company know the hosting company before applying for this scheme?

Yes

No – we found the partner in the MobiliseSME matchmaking database



If yes: What is the relation with the hosting company

We are already collaborating/doing business together

We know each other – but are currently not collaborating

Our relation is new: we contacted the host company when we heard about this opportunity (or the host company contacted us)

Other

Please specify:

S.4 What are the main reasons for your company to participate in this exchange scheme?

Maximum of 3 options!

Our staff is lacking skills that we need to develop our business.	We have a project with the host company – MobiliseSME allows us to send an employee to work with the host on this project.
We want to expand/develop business in the country of the host.	We would like to acquire a specific knowledge or develop a specific competence from the host.
We need to acquire market intelligence. We believe that this exchange will help.	Our employee informed us about the project, as he/she would like to participate. We wanted to give him/her this opportunity.
We have considered developing a project/business with the host – MobiliseSME allows us to send an employee to test feasibility/develop business relations.	We believe that this opportunity could help the visiting employee to acquire new skills, knowledge or experience. We like to invest into our employees and their professional development.
No specific reason – we think that this could maybe give us some fresh ideas.	Marketing reason: we want to appear as an attractive employer.
Other: Please specify	

S.5 How important are the following for your company’s participation in the scheme?

Very important (we would/could not participate without) Somewhat important Not important Other

Financial support provided by the scheme to cover travel and subsistence

The learning plan agreed with the host company and your employee

If other, please specify here

S.6 What does your company expect to gain from this mobility experience?

Maximum of 3 options!

Development of new products or services	New/fresh ideas (from the employee on secondment/acquired with the host company)
Expansion/consolidation of (already existing) business relations with the host company	Skills and competence development (of the visiting employee)
Development of new business opportunities in the country of the host company (other than with the host company)	New international contacts
A more attractive employer profile (providing international/interesting working experiences)	
Other, please specify:	

S.7 Any other comments regarding your motivation to participate, the matchmaking experience or other issues? Please provide your comments here:



Survey for host companies

Agreement number:

H.1 How did you find out about the MobiliseSME scheme? *One option*

From a business event	From a newsletter/website of the MobiliseSME project partner
From the media/press	I was contacted by a MobiliseSME project partner in my country
I heard about it from another company	The employee who is going alerted me to the opportunity
Social media	
Other: please specify	<input type="text"/>

H.2 Did you/your company know the sending company before applying for this scheme?

Yes

No – we found the partner in the MobiliseSME matchmaking database

➔ If yes: What is the relation with the sending company

We are already collaborating/doing business together

We know each other – but are currently not collaborating

Our relation is new: we contacted the host company when we heard about this opportunity (or the host company contacted us)

Other, please specify:

H.3 What are the main reasons for your company to participate in this exchange scheme?

Maximum of 3 options!

We need to acquire market intelligence. We want to expand/develop business in the country of the sender.	We have a project with the sending company – MobiliseSME allows us to host an employee to work with the sending company on this project.
Our staff is lacking skills, which we need to develop our business. We think the incoming employee will bring us these competences.	We have considered to develop a project/business with the sending company – MobiliseSME allows us to send an employee to test feasibility/develop business

We want to give an opportunity to another company to learn from us.

No specific reason – we think that this maybe could give us some fresh ideas.

Other, please specify:

H.4 How important are the following for your company’s participation in the scheme?

Very important (we
would/could not
participate without) Somewhat
important Not
important Other

Financial support provided by the scheme to cover travel and subsistence

“No cost” for the hosting/your company

The learning plan agreed with the sending company and your employee

If other, please specify here

H.5 What does your company expect to gain from this mobility experience?

Maximum of 3 options!

Development of new products or services	New ideas from the visiting employee
Expansion/consolidation of (already existing) business relations with the sender	Skills and competence development – learning from the incoming employee
Development/completion of a specific project with the sending company	New international contacts
Market intelligence from the country of the sending company	A more attractive employer profile (providing international/interesting working experiences)
Nothing in particular	
Other, please specify:	<input style="width: 100%; height: 25px; border: 1px solid black;" type="text"/>

H.6 Did you consider/discuss contributing financially to cost of the visiting employee

No

Yes, but we have agreed that we will not be contributing financially in any form

Yes, and we are paying a top up allowance to the incoming employee (to cover additional costs)

Yes, and we are paying the sending enterprise to cover part or the full salary costs

Other, please specify here

H.7 Any other comments regarding your motivation to participate, the matchmaking experience or other issues? please provide your comments here



Survey targeted visiting employees

Agreement number :

E.1 How did you find out about the MobiliseSME scheme? One option

From my manager	From a business event
I heard about it from a colleague	I was contacted by a MobiliseSME project partner in my country
From a newsletter/website of the MobiliseSME project partner	From the media/press
I heard about it from a friend/family	Social media
Other, please specify:	<input type="text"/>

E.2 How did you get engaged in the project?

My manager suggested that I was send on secondment

I suggested to participate to my manager

Other: please specify:

E.3 What are the main reasons for you to participate in this exchange scheme? Maximum of 3 options!

Career development – I expect that the exchange will improve my career opportunities in my current company	Career development – I expect that the exchange will improve my career opportunities in other companies when I return home
I would like to find a job in country of the host	I would like to improve / acquire language skills
I would like to improve / acquire work related skills	I would like to discover a new country
I would like to try working in a different cultural environment	I would like to pass on my knowledge to another company
No specific reason – we think that this maybe could give me some fresh ideas.	
Other, please specify:	<input type="text"/>

E.4 What do you expect to gain from this mobility experience?

Maximum of 3 options!

Learning new skills in my core area	Learning new skills outside my core area
To gain new ideas / inspiration	Learning new managerial skills
Increased career opportunities	Improved language skills
Expanded professional network	Nothing in particular
Other, please specify:	<input type="text"/>

E.5 In which language do you expect to interact with the host company?

E.6 Any other comments regarding your motivation to participate, the matchmaking experience or other issues? Please provide your comments here