

Motion

# Inclusive Learning Mobility: Addressing Visa Barriers for Youth

signed by: Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations (Alliance), European Educational Exchanges - Youth for Understanding (EEE-YFU), European Federation for Intercultural Learning (EFIL), Erasmus Student Network (ESN), World Esperanto Youth Organisation (TEJO), Youth for Exchange and Understanding (YEU)

## Inclusive Learning Mobility: Addressing Visa Barriers for Youth

'I am fully committed to making the European Education Area a reality by 2025. We need to bring down barriers to learning and improve access to quality education. We need to enable learners to move more easily between education systems in different countries. And we need to change the culture of education towards lifelong learning that enriches us all.'

President von der Leyen in the political guidelines for the Commission (2019-2024)

### Preamble

In the contemporary landscape, learning mobility serves as a cornerstone in fostering intercultural dialogue and active citizenship among young people. It facilitates the development of critical skills, promotes social inclusion, and nurtures a sense of active participation in local and global communities. By encouraging young people to engage in cross-border activities, learning mobility nurtures a deep understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures, promoting empathy and enhancing intercultural dialogue. We have been happy to see that the attitudes towards learning mobility remain supportive. On 15 November 2023, the European Commission adopted the Council Recommendation 'Europe on the Move' – learning mobility opportunities for everyone as part of the Talent Mobility package. While laying out some welcome, ambitious targets for learning mobility in Europe, the document lacks attention to one of the primary hurdles for youth on the move - visas and residence permits.

Pursuing learning mobility opportunities abroad is often met with challenges arising from restrictive visa policies. Young people aspiring to partake in exchange programs for studies, research, language courses, volunteering, humanitarian aid, and many types of internships encounter daunting obstacles, ranging from lengthy and convoluted application processes to stringent eligibility criteria. These visa-related bureaucratic hurdles frequently impede access to transformative international experiences, limiting the capacity of young individuals to broaden their horizons, acquire new skills, and foster

cross-cultural understanding. The complex and often inconsistent visa regulations across different countries hinder the full realisation of the potential benefits of learning mobility, perpetuating disparities and inhibiting the holistic development of the youth.

### Problem Statement

In the European context, young people face visa-related challenges, which vary depending on their specific categorisations. EU citizens within the Schengen Area generally enjoy seamless mobility, while those from non-Schengen countries face barriers both within the EU and abroad. Bureaucratic complexities and prolonged processing times often hinder their participation in exchange opportunities across the region. In addition, EU candidate member-states and applicants, including Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership regions, face challenges aligning their visa policies with EU standards, resulting in discrepancies in application procedures and barriers to accessing learning mobility opportunities. Extended processing times may lead young individuals to lose their placement in host organisations due to arrival deadlines, cancelling their mobility. The processing times, sometimes more than half a year for different types of mobility, are also problematic at the renewal stage of visas, where, depending on nationality, the applicants are not able to travel out of the country while their visa is being renewed.

These visa barriers can even be more burdensome in short-term mobilities where there is not enough time to spend on obtaining the required entry/residency documents. It is also a challenge for joint programmes that take place in multiple countries, which would then require going through the same process more than once. Furthermore, there continues to be a lack of a comprehensive legal framework and a standardised approach to volunteering and solidarity activities. Where educational exchanges are often planned ahead by both participants and institutions, it's not uncommon to see internships or volunteering opportunities emerge last-minute.

The complex and changing visa requirements and steps to obtain visas are hard to navigate for some young people. Lacking overly bureaucratic language that is not easily accessible to the general population and primarily available in a secondary language

for non-natives. This underscores the need for clear guidelines and straightforward procedural instructions for sending and hosting organisations. The emerging trend of governments outsourcing visa processes to commercial entities also raises concerns. It seems to create a situation where both the external service providers and the government evade responsibility for issues during the visa process, leaving young people alone with problems like misleading communication, missing documents, and inadequate customer service. Resolving these challenges is essential for a more accountable and efficient visa application system.

It is clear that young individuals, irrespective of their EU affiliations, commonly confront challenges such as demanding documentation requirements, prolonged processing times, financial barriers (including stringent income requirements), unclear visa regulations, and complex residence procedures once in the host country. These obstacles collectively impede their participation in learning mobility programs and cross-border experiences.

## Objective

This motion aims to raise attention to streamlining visa procedures for young people and promoting accessible and inclusive learning mobility programs across Europe. It seeks to mitigate bureaucratic barriers and ensure equitable opportunities for all, fostering cross-cultural understanding and empowering youth.

The European Union and national governments should propose policy changes that streamline visa procedures for young people participating in learning mobility programs and encourage the adoption of standardised and simplified visa regulations.

## Call to action

The European Youth Forum Calls for:

### **Harmonisation of Visa Procedures**

the harmonisation of visa procedures across the European Union and associated countries of EU youth programs, ensuring a uniform and simplified process for young learners across member states. This could involve the creation of a standardised application process with clear guidelines and

requirements applicable to all EU countries. Such a standardised process should also include increased accountability for processing and communication errors arising in the visa process that disproportionately affect the applying young persons.

### **Recognition of various forms of learning mobility Categories**

Distinct visa categories tailored to different learning mobility programs should be established, including dedicated visa pathways for study, internships, volunteering, and exchange programs. Such categories should incorporate streamlined application processes and reduced bureaucratic complexities to facilitate smoother mobility for young learners.

### **Introduction of Extended Visa Validity Periods**

There should be an extension of visa validity periods for young learners participating in long-term educational programs, internships, or volunteering activities. This would reduce the administrative burden and allow participants to focus on their learning experiences without the concern of frequent visa renewals. Propose lightened procedures and faster processes during visa renewals.

### **Enhancement of Visa Flexibility and Faster Processing Times**

Advocate for increased flexibility within visa regulations, allowing for easier transitions between different learning mobility activities for young individuals. This flexibility and predictable, fast processing times should enable participants to explore diverse educational and experiential opportunities without unnecessary restrictions or bureaucratic impediments.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this motion plays a crucial role in advancing equitable learning mobility opportunities for young people. By addressing existing visa challenges, we are fostering an inclusive environment for their educational and experiential growth. This facilitates the development of intercultural understanding and respect, promoting a deeper appreciation for diverse cultures and perspectives; it contributes to the cultivation of peace, encouraging the exchange of ideas among young individuals from different

backgrounds; it fosters a deeper understanding of democratic values, empowering young people to actively engage in civic participation and decision-making processes. Additionally, it promotes multilingualism, enabling effective communication and facilitating meaningful interactions among individuals from various linguistic backgrounds. Ultimately, these endeavours contribute to the creation of a more interconnected and empowered European community grounded in mutual respect, peace, democratic values, and linguistic diversity.





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