



MILETUS

Students' Mobility Capacity Building in Higher Education in Ukraine and Serbia

Guide to Virtual Mobility -The Future of Education-

Students will be learning outside, armed with different devices, listening to a teacher of choice. Skills will not be assessed on paper but based on their performance in the field. What on earth are we talking about? Welcome to the future of education.

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Why is mobility in general important for students and their learning experience?

Boost your employability after graduation!

And why not combining it with some fun and international friendships?!

International experience is becoming more and more vital for students generally as the economy becomes increasingly global. After graduation, former students, and now job candidates are expected to efficiently and effectively communicate and work with people from all around the globe – people of diverse customs, habits and cultures, and to resolve a variety of joint problems/situations on a daily basis. Taking part in a students' mobility program is the best way to practice and master these skills on time, and prepare yourself for the future career!

Participating in students' mobility programs has a whole range of its benefits. Let's take a look at some of the absolute winners:

➤ **Networking**

It refers to meeting young people from all over the world interested in the same or similar field of study and creating bonds with them, which can, in the future, lead to some **international career opportunities!**



➤ **Specific skills** of the 21st century that you will learn nowhere else, such as **effective communication** with other cultures and nations, **embracing differences**, and gaining **global competence** which is very highly rated by the employers nowadays in the ever-globalizing labor market!

➤ **Active or problem-based learning**

In the future, work will be structured around projects, not processes, and that's why education needs to keep pace with this important trend, too. "Active" or "problem-based" learning seeks to engage students' natural curiosity, rather than simply presenting them with information. Sounds like a lot of fun, doesn't it?



Now that we're clear on the fact that mobility is an absolute must in the higher education nowadays and that it provides irreplaceable enrichment to the regular education process, let's see what types of mobility are offered to students:

- **Physical mobility:** the one where students in higher education use another institution outside their own country to study for a limited time period and complement the study courses of their home university, and gain international experience or, in other words, travel to study abroad, such as within the Erasmus+ Programme.

- **Virtual mobility:** the lesser known one which refers to “the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to obtain the same benefits as one would have with physical mobility but without the need to travel” (elearningeuropa.info portal), or a set of ICT-supported activities, organized at institutional (university) level, that implement international collaborative experience in a context of learning, research and teaching. A variety of technologies is used to enable virtual mobility activities: videoconferencing, virtual learning environments (e.g. Moodle), as well as more commonly accessible media such as forums, chat and e-mail.

Virtual mobility creates exchange opportunities for students who are unable to participate in traditional Erasmus+ Programme. It is affordable for practically the whole student community rather than the small minority presently able to benefit from a mobility grant. Simply put, it gives almost everyone the possibility to have an experience of collaboration with people from different cultures and backgrounds, and to enrich their



skills and education experience without having to travel. Due to all of the abovementioned, virtual mobility can be called the **mobility of tomorrow** and the **future of education**.

- **Blended mobility:** the best of both – this concept combines both physical and virtual mobility. Blended mobility can support, complement and innovate both physical and virtual mobility in a way that a blended mobility participants can work on a joint project within a virtual mobility program, and yet spend some time abroad on face-to-face meetings or doing research at a host university. With blended mobility, virtual activities are combined with face-to-face experiences, such as class discussions, seminars and the physical presence of guest lecturers.

Virtual mobility – what is it exactly?

One of the maybe most complete definitions of virtual mobility is the one saying that virtual mobility is a form of learning which consists of virtual components through a fully ICT-supported learning environment that includes cross-border collaboration with people from different backgrounds and cultures working and studying together, having, as its main purpose, the enhancement of intercultural understanding and the exchange of knowledge.

This concept enables wide exchanges for all those not able to benefit from physical international exchange programs, due to social, economic, organizational or other reasons.

It can also serve well to prepare students for the physical mobility later on, e.g. students get to have a test run and try how studying in a foreign language works for them or how they get along with peers of different nationalities. Moreover, when speaking about virtual mobility (VM) being a

complement to physical mobility (PM), PM participants can establish so-called 'virtual alumni' organizations to foster life-long friendships and networks which, as previously mentioned, might result in joint projects or international job opportunities.

In today's globalized labor market, one of the priorities is the necessity to work in virtual environments within multinational teams with different people from all around the globe whom you never met and, what is more, in a foreign language!

What is likely to make a difference in choosing the right candidate for a job is whether or not they have the experience in situations alike. Taking part in virtual and blended mobility programs can make a difference for you and improve your employability chances!

What are the benefits of virtual mobility?

This groundbreaking modern concept of distance learning basically means ***learning no longer depends on a location*** and learners are able to take courses wherever they are: at home, in the workplace, or while staying as an exchange student at a host university and taking a course from the home university or even a third one! On top of all, with virtual mobility, ***disadvantaged students get equal learning opportunities.***

Virtual mobility also means more ***freedom of choice for students*** and more flexibility than ever before! The offer is by far more attractive, wider and better: students get instant access to experts/teachers from other institutions, courses, learning materials and resources (such as libraries and laboratories) far beyond their own university, city and even country. This way, expertise has become available and easily transported.

Take part in virtual mobility and ***choose yourself what, how and when to learn!***



And there is even more for postgraduates! Virtual mobility provides them with competitive advantage to have ***direct access to top experts*** at other universities as if they were their 'own' university professors. In other words, researchers get ***access to high-quality research resources*** and to most prominent experts in any field.

When it comes to virtual mobility and career opportunities, internationalization is becoming increasingly important in business environments. Through virtual mobility, young people get the opportunity to develop the necessary skills needed in working life. More specifically, it is a ***practical preparation for new ways of working***, where the use of tools like videoconferencing and collaborative workspaces is a

commonplace. Also, virtual mobility encourages students to learn how to use the Internet effectively as a source of knowledge and information, which is an important skill for future workers.

Talking about common working environment nowadays, what has become an imperative in all modern jobs is working within multinational and multicultural teams with people who have different cultural backgrounds and customs and yet – share the same professional interests. In addition, all communication is usually done via ICT, and not face to face, which might pose additional challenges. Virtual mobility programs provide students with the **access to an international community of learners** that is potentially linguistically and culturally diverse. Students are presented with **cross-cultural viewpoints and given possibilities to discuss these viewpoints** with fellow learners and mentors from other countries, and hopefully **learn to reach agreements and overcome obstacles** in such communication and collaboration. This helps to develop the habit of intercultural communication for learning and non-learning purposes.

All students always want their education to be as practical as possible, right? Well, with virtual mobility there is never too much practice for a modern job seeker!

Project-based learning



Virtual mobility enriches traditional learning activities as learning processes are improved through **interactive and collaborative learning**. This means that you don't learn by passively receiving information, but rather actively – by doing something practical and specific (interactive feature) within a team (collaborative feature), and while working on such projects, you reach conclusions and new knowledge yourself. This is actually the basic concept and fundament of modern education.

Furthermore, as careers are adapting to the future freelance economy, students of today need to adapt to project-based learning and working. This means they have **to learn how to apply their skills in shorter timeframes to a variety of situations**. Again, completely in line with virtual mobility concept and project-based learning – methodology of learning that is often used in virtual mobility programs.

Project-based learning refers to working in a team (usually and preferably international, intercultural and interdisciplinary one) on a joint project. Students need to organize roles, responsibilities and tasks within a team, come up with a detailed working plan and timeline, work together closely, etc., and collaborate with a mentor whose main role is to provide them with guidance. In that process they need to learn how to effectively communicate among each other,

overcome potential problems and misunderstandings, learn to assess the work of others that affects them and their final mark as well. On top of all, they manage their own time with respect to workload and deadlines. All in all – unique practice of a real-life work situation and environment.

What skills are desirable to have to join virtual mobility?

While all students are welcome and encouraged to apply for virtual mobility programs, you should ask yourself where do you stand with the following ones and open yourself to further development and nurture of these:

- ✓ intercultural skills and attitudes
- ✓ networked learning
- ✓ active self-regulated learner skills
- ✓ autonomy-driven learning
- ✓ media and digital literacy
- ✓ open-mindedness



And what skills should one expect to gain/improve?

- **Problem solving** in multicultural environments
- **Personal skills** such as self-organization (including time-management), motivation and initiative, critical thinking and creativity
- **Social skills** which allow students to interact effectively with others, both verbally and in written form
- **Leadership** and **teamwork** skills which enable students to work in a team
- **Emotional intelligence** which facilitates understanding of other people, different in terms of their nationality, culture, status and lifestyle
- Drafting, planning and designing of the detailed work plan, independent research and distribution of work among peers
- Revising someone else's work and providing opinions thereof

Virtual mobility all in all – what’s in there really for students?

If we want to sum up and give concise overview of the gains that students of all levels are likely to have by taking part in virtual or/and blended mobility programs, besides the obvious academic gains, virtual mobility provides students with the opportunity to:

- improve **foreign language skills**
- improve **computer skills** – with special reference to those pertaining to online learning: getting better acquainted with modern online platforms and tools in education, using the Internet for collecting information and learning
- **network with colleagues/peers** internationally and across a variety of disciplines
- **make choices regarding curriculum and schedule** – students get to pick topics for their joint projects and organize their time & schedule accordingly
- **learn and work on real examples from the practice** and in real-life working situations and environments, instead of gaining merely theoretical knowledge which makes the main part of university studies



- **acquire and practice** in real-life situations valuable **soft skills** even before entering the labor market – skills that are increasingly and very highly valued by employers nowadays
- **gain global competence** – an added value of virtual mobility courses and extremely valued quality of today’s job applicants around the globe

Soft skills – a few words about them

Technological progress and globalization are changing the skills needed in the labor market. Sixteen core skills were identified as the ones needed in the 21st century. These essential skills are a combination of cognitive skills (dominated by STEM skills: science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and soft skills.



In case you're wondering what these really are, soft skills refer to a combination of communication skills, social skills, personal skills, social intelligence, emotional intelligence, etc. or, in simple words, they include team spirit, self-confidence, assertiveness, inquisitiveness, trustworthiness, empathy, creativity, etc.

In addition to having the right attitude, according to the studies, most important soft skills for leaving a good impression on your potential future employer are flexibility, oral communication skills, the ability to make a professional introduction, and punctuality.

As it turns out, according to recent studies, employers more and more often report a lack of soft skills as a reason for not hiring job candidates!

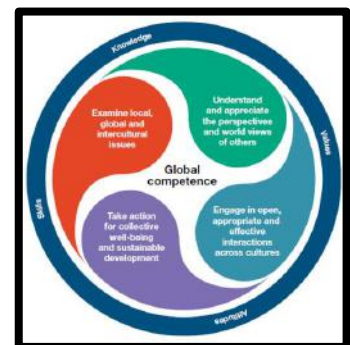
On the other hand, the biggest difference in employers' perception of young job candidates and their own perception of themselves stands for the following skills: written communication skills, being self-critical, knowing one's own strengths and weaknesses, conflict management and knowing when to listen and when to speak.



All of this suggests that there is a gap in the soft skills that employers want and the ones that are supplied by workers. Mind the gap! Virtual mobility programs are just the right opportunity to develop and perfect these precise soft skills!

Global competence – what is it really and why do we need it?

Global competence is the capacity to examine local, global and intercultural issues (e.g. poverty, economic interdependence, migration, inequality, environmental risks, conflicts, cultural differences and stereotypes), to understand and appreciate the perspectives and world views of others, to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions with people from different cultures (people of different national, ethnic, religious, social or cultural backgrounds or gender), and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development.



'Competence' is not merely a specific skill, but is a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values.

Young people today must not only learn to participate in a more interconnected world, but also appreciate and benefit from cultural differences. With a new global and virtual working arena,

global competence has become one of the most wanted qualities in young people entering the labor market. In this context, cultivating students' global competence can help them to capitalize on digital spaces, better understand the world they live in and responsibly express their voice. And be that one job candidate that stands out!

Finally, are virtual mobility courses officially recognized?

Generally speaking, there are three types of virtual mobility:

- formal: when there is an institutional agreement
- semi-formal: when the recognition of credits system is implemented
- informal: when there is no institutional agreement and no recognition of credits

At this moment, unfortunately, there are no virtual mobility programs in Serbia that are regulated in such a way for student participants to be granted ECTS credits. However, there are active projects and initiatives working on this issue and hopefully, necessary structural changes are soon to be made for mobility programs to be properly regulated.

Nevertheless, don't forget that credits mustn't be the only motive for choosing a mobility program to embark on!

In the meantime, while official recognition of virtual mobility programs is being prepared and regulated, the documents that should be issued to participants in order to get a recognition of the program are:

- learning outcomes - knowledge, intellectual and practical skills and competences which students acquired after completion of the program (e.g. joint project)
- transcript of records – which contains component title at the host institution completed by the student, number of ECTS credits (or equivalent), grade if exists, name of the supervisor, etc.
- certificates – which contain the basic information about trainees, information about sending/receiving institutions, traineeship title and period, number of working hours for students, and detailed program per module. The certificate should be signed by responsible person/coordinator of the program.



Virtual student placements

Some programs even offer students a chance for virtual internships. These internships provide a practical preparation for modern way of work where students have a chance to get used to a corporate environment through international team work (collaborative work) and to using tools like videoconferencing in professional purposes. Also, this way the educational institution internationalizes its course offer making it more up-to-date and adapted to current economy and labor market demands.

Such placements can be organized between a higher education institution and a company in different countries. Using ICT to support a virtual internship within a foreign company is very practical as it is suitable for all students equally, including those who can't travel abroad for any reason.

