



Key factors for successful mobility: a qualitative analysis of the Italian project **EURES** Targeted Mobility Scheme (2021-2023)



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for successful mobility:
a qualitative analysis of the Italian project
EURES Targeted Mobility Scheme (2021-2023)**

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Abstract

This report examines data and information collected from participants in the EURES Targeted Mobility Scheme (EURES TMS) project coordinated by the EURES Italy National Coordination Office between 2021 and 2023.

As part of the study, a focus group was conducted in Rome, in November 2022, with 15 participants from different countries; additionally, 7 online one-to-one interviews were conducted. The participants were called to discuss their experience of the project and in particular in what ways it was successful for them. Amidst the aftermath of the pandemic, and to some extent *because* of the experience of the pandemic, the project was appreciated for its *practical* support (providing finance to move abroad, but also a network of support and language classes). Importantly, added to this, the participants particularly liked the potential of the project to help them focus on experimentations and implementation of their overall goals and ambitions, which were suspended in part because of the Covid-19 pandemic. For this reason, the homonymous EU programme adds a bonus to other employment activation policies and realizes the potential of mobility as possible game changer in the process of transition to adulthood. Last but not least, the participants expressed a strong need to exchange views amongst each other and to construct a formalized network out of the encounter with each other, in view of making sense of the experience for themselves and of contributing to support others in subsequent versions of the project.

Introduction

With the experience of Covid-19 shaking across the globe the normal ways of looking for a job, and indeed of working, mobility as a tool to broaden ones' opportunities has also been under attack, with some scholars underlining the possibility of the end of the success of these programmes under the shape of a new turn emphasising an immobility mode (Cairns and Clemente, 2022). Not everyone would agree though; in fact, institutions supporting EU mobility programmes have continued to do so and we are now in a new phase, one where experiences have regained a significance and meaning that is similar to prior the pandemic. Similar, but not the same, given that the pandemic has left a new sense of purpose across generations and especially amongst young adults, the major users of mobility programmes.

This report seeks to reflect on the experience of the EURES Targeted Mobility Scheme (EURES TMS) project, an initiative financed by the European Commission, through the European Employment and Social Innovation Programme (EASI), coordinated by ANPAL - Ufficio di Coordinamento Nazionale EURES Italy, and implemented by a wide partnership covering a total of 13 EU countries represented by national EURES coordination offices, national and international public and private bodies, language schools, universities, representative bodies and the EURES Italy network. Eurodesk Italy participates in this partnership, as co-applicant, through the implementation of specific, informative and training activities addressed to young people, of which the organisation of the focus group is an integral part.

This falls into the wider objectives of community policies aiming to facilitate the match of supply and demand of labour, increase employment and improve the working conditions of European citizens with a view to the free movement of workers. It covers all EU countries (plus Norway and Iceland) and follows previous similar initiatives known as Your first EURES job (aimed at under-35s)¹ and Reactivate (aimed at over-35s).

EURES TMS allows all jobseekers over the age of 18 to participate, following the principle, turned into hashtags in the communication activities, that "it is never too late to move to a new country" or "it is never too late to start a new career".

As we will see, this implies that the project can be used in more varied ways that in turn deserve investigation. At the core of the activities lies a series of structured services for both *job seekers* and *employers*: assistance services, matching, education and recruitment during the experience of professional mobility, also through the network of employment services in different countries.

¹ YfEj 6.0. Survey on the obstacles to transnational mobility identified by Italian participants in the empowerment workshops Your first EURES job in the three-year period 2019/2021, available at: [web-YfEj6.0-Ricerca sugli ostacoli alla mobilità_EN V2_4.pdf](https://web-yfEj6.0-Ricerca_sugli_ostacoli_alla_mobilita_EN_V2_4.pdf)

Unlike other EU programmes, therefore, EURES TMS involves both parties, making the analysis of the project outcomes more complex, since there are two categories of actors involved. Indeed, it is logical to expect that each of them will present expectations, demands and needs that are mostly convergent, but it is equally predictable that they may express markedly different needs.

Within the project, the matching of labour supply and demand is facilitated by a digital platform (www.EURESmobility.anpal.gov.it) where available vacancies are published. This platform aims to facilitate contacts between potential candidates and employers through EURES advisers and other project advisers, responding to a very precise deficiency of the system, given that often the process of recruitment is perceived as complex, and difficult to navigate for job seekers. Through the project, it is intended to offer a further opportunity to make more extensive use of online recruitment tools, and help employers, including small ones which may have more difficulties in the process of recruiting, also in getting in contact with potential employees in other countries within the EU. The system at the basis of the project has therefore an integrated approach, putting in contact peoples and providing services including financial support to employers (small and medium-sized enterprises), who can offer both traineeships and actual employment and apprenticeship contracts. This is very much in line with the logic of active labour market policies where the final goal (employment) is considered to be accomplished also through intermediate goals (namely, additional education/training useful to reach employment).

What is this report on? Objectives, approach and sample

This report seeks to discuss the feedback on the experience of EURES TMS as reported by some of the participants in the project, with a particular focus on the discussion of elements of success. Specifically, the report highlights few elements emerged from conducting a qualitative study in few subsequent steps. This involved conducting a focus group with participants, analyzing the transcript of it after it was conducted in Rome (in November 2022), reflecting on observation notes and interactions amongst participants and, as a last phase, conducting a fully verbatim transcribing and analyzing semi structured interviews with 7 participants in the project. All names appearing in this text are pseudonyms inspired by the names of the plants. The study obtained the approval of the ethical committee of the University of Cagliari, which carried out the empirical research and the analysis of data.

Unlike the study on the previous edition of the project (Your first EURES job), and in a complementary way, this study was characterized by an accent on what was considered successful by the participants, and as such worth repeating or inspiring for future versions of the project. The report is structured as following: after describing the project, it illustrates methodology and findings.

In terms of these latter, it reflects in particular on:

- Participants' motivation to join the project and how they embarked on it
- Definition of success that the participants worked out through joining EURES TMS
- Emergent needs in view of the experience of participating
- General considerations, including whether and why they would recommend the project to others

This report needs to start from the acknowledgment that participating in a focus group to tell ones' own experience with the project has been attributed a variety of meanings by the participants. These are clearly linked to the specific time in which their experience occurred over the course of their life, being most of them young adults in search for settling down, while in mobility; but also, importantly, in relation to the pandemic and the limitations that this occurrence has had in using the experience to the fullest amongst other things. To use one of the participants' words in offering reasons for taking part to the focus group:

«I wanted to share my experience and learn more from other experiences, what was positive but also challenging, because of course, I think there are some challenges in between the growth and how to improve this program». (Prunus, focus group)

As we will see in reflecting on the findings, the participants demonstrated a high level of reflexivity, which is, by the way, a typical way of approaching mobility experiences (Cairns, 2014).

The focus group was conducted face-to-face in November 2022, in Rome, and managed by Eurodesk Italy and ANPAL. Of the 20 participants who constituted the initial target group, 15 came from different European countries. Their experience was therefore varied in terms of where they had carried out their work experience or traineeship through EURES TMS, when it had been completed, and the country of departure and destination. Eurodesk Italy was responsible for the organisation and involvement of the participants.

The focus group was designed to include the following questions:

1. Can you introduce yourself (very briefly: name, provenience/country of origin, actual occupation)?
2. What are your expectations from this meeting (briefly)?
3. Can you tell us about your experience with EURES and at which stage of your life does the Targeted mobility scheme enter?
4. Why do you think it was a successful experience?
5. Can we work a bit more on your definition of success within EURES TMS?
6. Using a metaphor: what was the impact of the project on your life?

These questions were partly reworked over the course of the conversation in an ongoing and interactive dynamic. For some questions, memo were used on a board to facilitate discussion and input from all participants. For some others, order was changed due to emerging issues from the participants.

Question No. 6 was announced but then removed and re-proposed in the individual interviews conducted afterwards with the participants, leaving more room for discussion on the other areas. Furthermore, the participants were informed of the schedule before the start of the work and were able to think about the answer in advance (as this task involved a minimum amount of preparation time). Given its nature, it also worked as a prompt to keep connection and engagement with participants and maximise likelihood of further participation. Considering the feedback that emerged, which will be presented later, this proved to be a winning research strategy.

Since the title of the report explicitly referred to the reconstruction of stories of success within the programme, the assumption is that participants have something positive to tell about it. This may in part be considered a bias;

however, given that we have been quite open in making emerge any participant-led meaning about what constitutes success, we can say we have guaranteed a very interesting basin of responses. Additionally, some critical feedback on the programme emerges, which testifies of the fact that participants felt free (Cuzzocrea and Collins, 2019, 2015).

The focus lasted two and a half hours, but the discussion was lively throughout and there was a feeling that it could have gone on longer. The focus was video recorded with the written permission of the participants. At the beginning of the works, participants were informed about the course of activities, namely that they would have been offered several ways of contributing to the improvement of the project in the first instance by participating in the focus group. They were informed that immediately after the focus they had the opportunity to record a short video where in few words they could tell about the experience about the project.² They were also informed that a phase 2 of the research itself was planned for later on, and that in this second occasion they would have been invited to an online structured interview with a researcher to discuss in more depth about the details of their own experience of the project. In this way they were offered the possibility to follow the developments of the study as well as develop their own view in subsequent steps.

Age range of participants was from 22 to 48. Summary of countries of origin and destinations of interviewees, who all had a master degree (except one who was at the second year of MA at the time of the interview) is as follows:

| From | To |
|--------|-----------------|
| France | Finland |
| France | Denmark |
| Italy | Norway |
| France | The Netherlands |
| Italy | UK ³ |
| Italy | France |
| Spain | Italy |
| Spain | Italy |

Individual interviews were conducted with 6 women and 1 man. All those who took part in the Rome focus group were invited to the interview (including those who did not participate in the end but had initially shown interest). As a matter of fact, it is not uncommon for women to be more willing than men in social research and for this reason there may have been a gender imbalance. Of the 7 respondents, two were offered a work contract (i.e. a job), the remainder an internship opportunity.

² The videos can be found here: My EURES TMS experience | How the project boosted my life! – YouTube.

³ It refers to work experiences and traineeships prior to the UK's exit from the European Union.





Motivations to join the project and how participants embarked on it

The motivations to embark on the project are mostly, as expected, a general lack of opportunities in one's country and/or also lack of opportunities in line with one's qualifications and interest both in the country of origin, but also sometimes in a country which is not his/her own but one where the applicant has an interest in living, for various reasons that may be professional reasons but may also pertain the private life (for instance, connecting with a partner or a family member). This second connotation is perhaps more relevant than in other programmes of mobility due to the relatively high average age of participants, whereby we assume they are more likely to have care-related responsibilities.

It is important to summarize how our informants report they actually embarked on the project. Some cases testify the fact that getting to know about the project appears to happen through scattered ways. For instance, participants mentioned that they came to know about the project through the regional job site, the job centre, a specialized recruitment agency or because "the HR mentioned the programme", or even more generally because "someone from work" did it. Another one said:

«I found a job [through the job placement], then I figured out it was EURES TMS. So at the beginning I was not searching for the project in general, I was not aware of it, and then later I figured out their financial support: you go there and get interviewed».

It should be noted that the participation in the project occurred in times of Covid-19 pandemic, which obviously has shrunk the labour market leaving fewer opportunities available than up to 2019. The mobility sector itself has had a phase of crises as a consequence of the pandemic (for instance see Cairns and Clemente 2023). Therefore the impact of the project should be reassessed at a later stage if any comparison is to be made with other mobility programmes. For now, it is pivotal to stress the interlinkages between the shortcomings of Covid-19 pandemic and the support (in good part of financial character) that has been recognized in applying to EURES TMS:

«The expectation was I wanted to have like... the allowance, the moving allowance, so that was really an expectation for me».
(Campanula, individual interview)

«I moved back to Italy about a year and a half ago, it was right after the Covid period, after spending up here about 11 years. So when I moved back to Italy it was after Covid and Covid rates were high and quite hard to find a job and I had three or four interviews, yes four interviews, but none of them went through because they said that I got no work experience. [...] So I guess what drew me to the EURES TMS project was wanting to get some working experience and thankfully to the TMS project I was able to do so». (Begonia, Focus group)

«I was fired after Covid, 2021, and during my employment with my previous company I was already looking to move abroad, because this is just my identity, I love being abroad, and I was discussing with my advisor and she told me that there was a project that I should check». (Campanula, Focus Group)

«Covid! [laughing] I say it changed all my perspectives and then I needed to find a job, something that would allow me to continue my studies..., and that was the closest one and the nicest opportunity, so as soon as I saw it I took it. [...] I found a job, then I found out that it was a job made available under EURES TMS. So in the beginning, I was not searching for the EURES project in general, I was not aware of it, and then later I figured it out». (Genista, individual interview)

Many times contextual conditions have been reported. A young scientist, for instance, made reference to her field of study, stating:

«I went to Italy, they liked me so they contracted me and I found EURES TMS, because one of the persons told me "You can apply for financial support" and I thought it was very nice because the contracts in Italy are not good in science also, so it was a good help». (Stellaria, focus group)

Others, in fact, made comparison to other mobility programmes they had experienced previously. This past experience probably might have motivated them to apply:

«It was very fast. I thought it would be a long process, because administrative things normally, when you want to get money, take a lot of time. I did like Erasmus before and it was a very long process, and I said "Okay I'll try and maybe if it doesn't work it doesn't work", but it was fast. [...] When you move somewhere, when you arrive, you need to pay for your life, you need to pay for accommodation, [...] in my case I couldn't have money, my salary, until I had like number from Finland, so it took a long time, so for a couple of months I didn't have a salary, so it was just for like to pay first things. [...] Everything went well and I'm still in Finland, so I think it's like a successful experience». (Magnolia, individual interview)

The possibility to attend a language course was also a reason for initial appreciation, even if, as we will see, not everyone was informed about this opportunity:

«It was so helpful, also because with the website I found the internship, I had so much help, if I hadn't this help I wouldn't have been able to take language courses. And also other organizations to go from your country to another country it's not so easy, so the fact to have like a counselor, it was very useful, he helped me, told me "Ok, you have to follow this procedure"». (Jasminum, focus group)

These excerpts suggest that not necessarily were prosperous participants looking for a specific employment. In most cases they were looking for a job which corresponded to their own personal needs, ambitions and desires and only **"by chance"** they found EURES TMS which eventually helped them out significantly. And so their narratives of success with the project developed around the idea of "finding the right thing at the right time". However, there are at least two elements in this mechanism. The first is that the project helped in practical terms, for instance providing financial support and other practical aids such as sources of information and language classes. In particular, the project has been reported to be useful specifically because it provided financial support which was in turn necessary in order to gain some identified opportunity that otherwise they 'could not have afforded', as it is clear from the excerpts below:

«I applied to different countries by myself, just like a spontaneous application, and I had the possibility to go to Scandinavia and I chose to move to Helsinki. The day before I said yes and one week after I started my job, and one day before starting my job the employer said "Oh we have a Belgian guy and he applied for TMS. You can apply, you can have money from that" So I said "Okay!" and sent a message at like 10 pm, and then the day after I just started my work experience». (Digitalis, focus group)

«I spent years to create my company, covid destroyed my opportunity, so I said "What am I gonna do now?" and luckily for me, I found this opportunity from the regional employment system and I said why not! And then I moved to Austria, which is also close to my country, and then after that, I was being lucky again and I found a job. That's in short what happened to me, I'm happy with this result. I had really low expectations, just needed something to do after losing my first project». (Genista, focus group)

«It was someone from Belgium who applied one month before I did, so I knew about it and that's why I applied and I didn't know about it before. [...] I didn't know what it will be and I was like in a rush before like changing to another country, so I applied and I didn't check like everything, but I just like contacted and I said "I will see what will happen after"». (Magnolia, individual interview)

«Once I finished my studies I wanted to go to England to work. I then got in contact with an agency that was recruiting nurses, I did a phone interview and then I was successful to have a physical interview, and the day before leaving they contacted me from EURES and they told me “We can give you financial support, you go there and get interviewed”. So it was like that». (Laurus, focus group)

«I applied but I was applying like “Okay, I will not have some response”, but in the end, I had the response and I could benefit from the project so it was very nice, it was very helpful for me the first time because it was my first job. The second time, I already knew the project so it was easier for me, I just contacted the right people at the right moment, and for my company, because they didn't know about the project [...] The expectation I had was “We'll see if TMS could support us in this decision”». (Fagus, individual interview)

However, all these motivations to apply are always combined with some sort of general orientations to embark on certain routes. In particular, a strong interest in an **'international vibe'** that the project offers to fulfil was mentioned repeatedly. Several participants have a real hunger for developing experience in different countries and cultures, and EURES TMS speaks their language in this vein:

«So, I did my last year of studies at the University of California, and I had to go back to Italy because of Covid, during the year I had to come back, I was really sad, I think I cried 24 hours straight and then the next day I took the first plane because the situation was getting worse. Since that moment in my mind, I always wanted to travel again to another experience wherever in the world». (Ginko, focus group)

«Of course, I wanted to be independent, I didn't want to ask for money from my parents or other people. [...] From EURES, [...] to be honest, it happened from one day to another because I knew about this program at the very last minute, so I applied for this job and then the job agency told me “Ah but there is this opportunity” so I said okay yes, thank you, I'm happy to apply». (Prunus, individual interview)

«I really wanted to go abroad since I was 18, so I did my study, all that stuff, and after I... I don't know, but for a moment I've been like “Okay now I really want to go!”. So, I tried to find other... and I found [company name] on the website, I saw the EURES TMS project so I went on the website and I saw the work I'm currently doing». (Jasminum, focus group)

«So, I really wanted to have an experience like that and hopefully, I found this opportunity and I'm very happy about it. [...] I always

wanted to have a new opportunity like that, and I just said "Okay [Jasminum], you have to go, now you want to go, let's go and let's see"». (Jasminum, individual interview)

«I've always been open to going around Europe, working abroad, and studying abroad. So, I made the EURES project first version, and I did it twice. So, the first time I was in Spain, I worked on European projects, how to write down a project, quite similar to this one. And then during my work in Spain, I had the opportunity to go to Brussels but I needed some financial support, so I made another application and I got it and I went to Brussels and this was a very important experience for my personal life, and I would stay there longer but, due to covid and family situation that was not so easy, I had to come back»». (Nelumbo, focus group)

This famine for international experience is a positive attitude that is supported by institutions (Cairns et al 2017). However, it can also be seen as a limitation of the project, meaning that we know that this attitude is part of social capital that the project can further nurture as other mobility programmes (Cuzzocrea and Krzaklewska 2023, Cairns et al 2018), but not necessarily is able to motivate young people who do not possess it to begin with. In particular, the last excerpt above shows us that there is an increasing awareness, even within the narrative according to which 'everything happened by chance', that the project can be effectively used to their participants growing needs (Cuzzocrea and Krzaklewska 2023).

In terms of discussing motivations, added to these perhaps predictable ones, others have been brought to the discussion. For instance, participants applied after some other opportunities failed, thereby EURES TMS was not their first choice, or once after realized that they could not guarantee the skills required in a certain labour market due to lack of experience in a specific field. This is perfectly in line with rationale of active labour policies to which this project is related. In some cases the project was useful to make a change of sector in employment already secured - i.e. change from one position to another in a different working area - which could have been a too risky or too unlikely business to be done on one's own, especially in times of Covid, and therefore proved a unique source of support. Some others, in this line, reported that they got interested in the EURES TMS project just because they found difficult to change country on their own:

«I didn't have a job, I didn't want to stay in France, I wanted to move to Berlin, it's the principal reason. [...] I wanted to find a job to rebuild my life in Berlin [...] I accepted my contract because it was a way to have a German experience, in Germany, so I say yes I am staying, I want to learn ...»». (Chamomilla, individual interview)

« I had worked in Amsterdam for three years after that and then during covid I went back to France, it was a difficult couple of years and there were just a lot of things happening like I think many people have experienced, and I always wanted to go back to The Netherlands

because it's... I don't know, I just always kinda thought it was the place for me. [...] I mean, I was lucky to have some kind of network, but I was also going through like a professional conversion so it was also very helpful with that.» (Tulipa, focus group)

«Abroad, I had the opportunity to open my perspective and change sector. [...] I had money aside to move, so I was ready, however I think it helped me because I didn't have a lot, I had the barely minimum to move, so it took a lot of time of course, I was not prepared that it took so long actually, but I got kind of help thanks to my unemployment advisor in Paris, because I kept 'coping' her and she would contact EURES to double-minded message». (Campanula, focus group)

Additionally, the fact that often the gateway to another country was provided through an internship rather than through an employment contract itself was not viewed necessarily as a limitation, but rather as a sensible opportunity to further understand one's ability and orient themselves better immediately after. It was not considered a waste of time by any means; with the words of one participant: "[It] changed my point of view about different things". In this sense the project offers a space for experimentation that is valued in itself as 'eventually' leading to a job, but certainly providing for some positive experience in ones' path, especially for those with few personal resources (because of the support through the project).

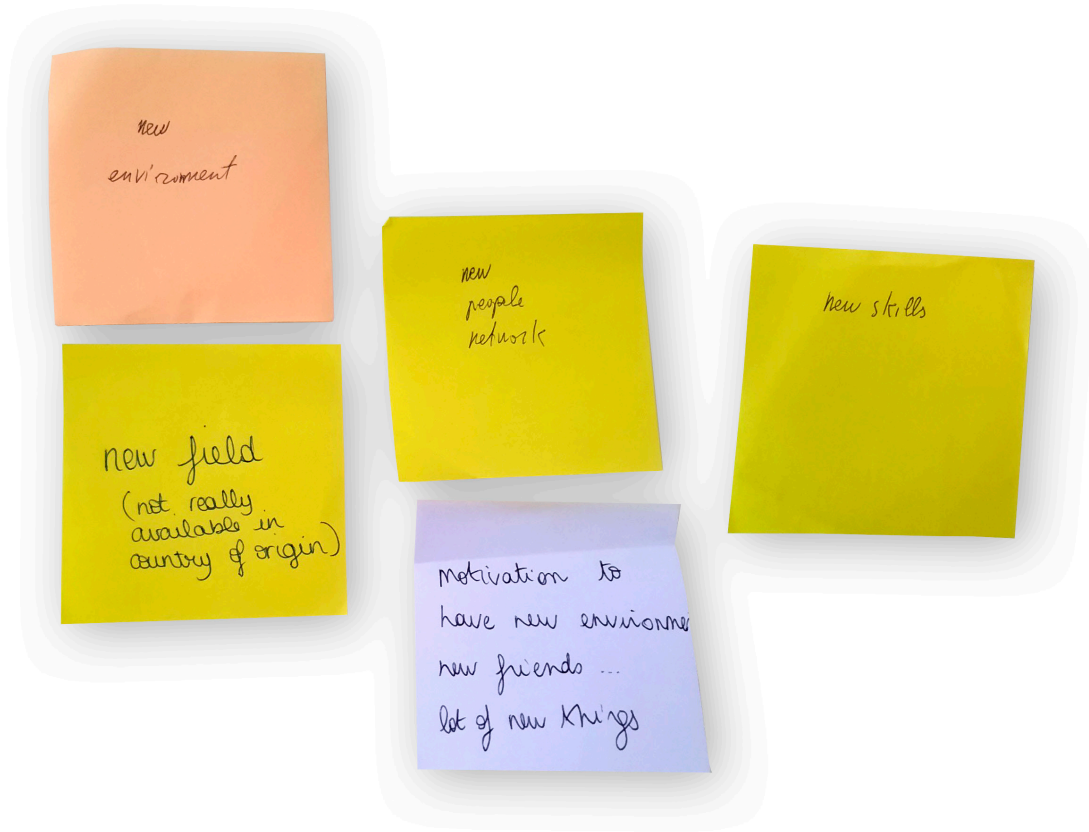
Why was EURES TMS successful?

In this section we comment on why the experience was described as successful, and what made it positive to the eyes of the participants. In order to discuss this, we will review what form of support received from EURES TMS was mentioned and, more generally, to what accomplishments the EURES TMS experience led. In sum, their responses on this point indicate us what they feel it remains today and what they think to have gained. One of the most important results is certainly the possibility to establish one's own direction:

«The opportunity with EURES TMS changed my point of view about different things». (Nelumbo, focus group)

Prunus complains about how miserable he felt in the previous situation and, in contrast, how the project was a game changer:

«I was not growing up, and I needed to go abroad, because I wanted to confront other cultures, and I needed to find new motivation to grow». (Prunus, focus group)



Picture 1: memos from the focus group, accent on 'novelty' and "new".



Picture 2: pic of post-it from focus group (November 2022)

It very much contributes to the idea of one's own success that the participants see a way, through the project, to excavate their road, through finding some financial means not to worry too much for some time about bills to pay, etc. So at the same time the contribution is material but also carries with it a very important symbolic meaning:

«It's very complicated to find an apartment and the money before starting. So, in this case, the experience of EURES TMS is not only financial but it gives people the opportunity to keep going and to keep going in the project that people have». (Fagus, focus group)

Indeed, it contributes to reach success because the money it provides is not that much valued for itself but for the freedom that it guarantees in experimenting with roles, positions, sectors, countries, working environments, and so on and so forth. All this experimentation is considered to be crucial by participants, whether one direction has been taken already or not:

«So it's not only the money, because we know that we have a little money and in this way it's easier to take the decision, to make our life at the beginning, because if not we have to run, we have to take some decisions under pressure, and in this way, it's easier, we can make some errors, it's okay to make some errors, but sometimes it's better if we can be more tranquil. So yes, it was very helpful. [...] Sometimes people want to change country because it's not possible to find a job in the sector they work, or because they want to go to this country because it's their dream, and EURES TMS could get the opportunity to make possible a dream or a change of life. [...] So it brings not only the money but it brings the possibility to make something possible, it's a successful project in this way because it brings the possibility to the people to make their dream real or to change life, if it's possible, or necessary». (Fagus, individual interview)

«I think my biggest takeaway from this experience was the insight of finding out the kind of field I want to work in [...]. So, I think my biggest successful part of the story was finding out exactly what I want to do and continuing on my way». (Begonia, focus group)

«It overcame my expectations because I didn't know the rules, I didn't know there were so many opportunities, so much support... Of course, it was a positive experience. [...] What else? I became more independent, self-confident, and, as I said also during the meeting in Rome, I accepted the challenge even if it scared me a bit at the beginning but I always wanted to try to get out of my comfort zone and to test myself in another context». (Prunus, individual interview)

«[In the post it] I wrote new skills, new environment and new people network, because I think changing country changes all that you're used to, even if there's a small change. [...] This new

input can open new opportunities, and you are forced to get used to new people with new heads, because they are different heads from different countries. If you're able to integrate and get used to different things you can use this to achieve new things and jobs». (Genista, focus group)

«So, it gave me the knowledge, gave me also the possibility to get in touch with the company I wanted to, and yes, it opened a door, because probably if I haven't had it, I could not have access to the company, not in that way». (Genista, individual interview)

So far so good! From reading these excerpts one may think that the project ran totally smoothly. However, the success narratives presented by the participants also revealed some critical issues that will be explored below.

Emerging needs

This section provides constructive feedback from participants on EURES TMS, policy requirements and suggestions for improving the project. While the current study focuses on the reasons why participants describe the project as 'successful', one of the reported weakness of it is that it is relatively little known - or at least this is the perception that was reported, among either prospective participants and companies alike. While this is an expected result given the short life of the project, added to the fact that it changed name from a very similar previous version, the focus group discussion shows that this is a problematic aspect, especially when it comes to 'convincing' companies of the **real existence** of the project and its **reliability**. This is certainly a level of difficulty that pertains the demand side (with all the differences that may incur from sector to sector, from country to country, and from different levels of specialization, which was of course generously object of discussion among participants). In particular, participants discussed the difference they found between the different national recruitment systems and the impact this had on their experience (followed by praise, for instance, of the French system). A participant stated that *"nobody knows about this project"*, to the point that *"a lot of people were like it's an illusion"*. Others said:

«Not so many people here know this type of project, and also employers, I don't see this type of job offer, the proposal to apply for EURES TMS». (Prunus, individual interview)

«I learned in Rome that you can find an internship, or an organization, by yourself and propose to them to apply to the EURES TMS, I didn't know before. [...] I didn't understand at the beginning and I think it's like an amazing opportunity to do it also in this case, but you have to know it, you have to know this possibility, and it's a bit sad it's not so, I mean in my friends circle, it's not much known. [...] The fact to have maybe a book to explain well

what is EURES TMS would be very useful, also for me to tell my friends and also organizations to understand it better. Maybe there is already one, I just didn't find it». (Jasminum, individual interview).

«There are many things you don't know about the project. So maybe they need to develop more, to be clearer about what they offer». (Campanula, individual interview).

«What is important for me is that people, in general, know about this project, it's not like Erasmus, everybody knows Erasmus. For the EURES TMS is not like that, not everybody knows it and this is one of the problems that this project has, it's still not known, not so famous enough». (Genista, individual interview).

On another level, that of the individual, the fact that the programme still suffers from poor recognition among companies also implies that for participants it is difficult to capitalize from the experience in the terms already discussed in literature in relation to older and better known mobility programmes (for examples Erasmus +, see Cairns et al 2018; Cuzzocrea and Krzaklewska 2022). In these cases, mobility programmes not only may work as a gateway to access the labour market, but more broadly allow participants to add on incremental capacities and build a career out of subsequent mobility experiences. Additionally, it emerged from the discussions with participants that they came to know in a late stage about some of the ways in which the project could be of additional support for them (for instance, paying for language courses, etc.).

In terms of making profit of the whole offer of services, several have stressed that the implementation of the project (rather than the rationale) can actually improve:

«The support we received financially and the location it's very good, but maybe something more could be done to accompany the people when they go to the country [...] Or maybe giving support that is not only financial, because some people say "Okay, I will receive the financial support". It's not only that, there is a human project beside that, so here is a suggestion, to promote, I don't know where, maybe among the future worker; maybe the university promotes this project to give us the opportunity to think about working abroad or to think about it». (Fagus, focus group)

«The financial support is very nice, but in some situations the support could be more practical and other kinds of help complementary to the financial help, like some guidance, some tips when the people go to a country. For example, all the administrative tasks from one country to another are very different [...] I'm not stressed when I arrive in a new country, but I know that some people are, so to facilitate the life change, with a guidance or with a human support, with someone who could respond to questions that the people can have, I think it could be

really nice to have that help. I think it's okay at a financial level, but maybe at the administrative level, at the human level, some things could be done for the project». (Fagus, individual interview)

However, these statements start suggesting us that apart from support on services such as language classes, financial means, etc., more general needs emerge, including that of creating some sort of community:

«I was looking forward to meeting other people that I was thinking might have things to share, because we all have an international focus, and wanted to share many things. And also what I like about this morning here is that we all come from different fields, so it's very good because usually in everyday life you meet people that are from your same working area, and I like that here we are all from different sectors and do different jobs». (Ginko, focus group)

«I'm looking forward to hearing everybody's experience, so if I need to move to another country I will also know» [...]. I think there must be a follow up [of the focus group]. I said Europe is small for me, I want to think bigger, so if there can be a EURES TMS+ just like an Erasmus+, this is my suggestion». (Campanula, focus group)

«I feel now part of a sort of community. We are not so many participating in this kind of project. [...] I had to learn a new base to start working on a European project, maybe it was on one field that I didn't know exactly [...] I think that one good point of this project is that you get out of your comfort zone [...]». (Nelumbo, focus group)

«Let's build a community!». (Nelumbo, focus group)

For these reasons, getting involved in reflecting on the programme was very much appreciated. A participant, talking about the focus group in Rome, said:

«It was also a good idea for the project and I think everybody was very happy to be there and bring their testimony about the project. And there was also the idea somehow to create a kind of community or to continue to work together to improve the project, if there are any chances to improve it, to make it better, of course like everything, and there was a good connection». (Prunus, individual interview)

«I think it would be nice to promote this project and involve the community». (Jasminum, focus group)

«Of course, if I didn't have the allowance I would have struggled a little bit more, and the difference that it made it's also the evaluation you had in Italy, in Rome, the fact that I had the chance to connect with other people that also applied with the EURES TMS that makes a community». (Campanula, individual interview)

General remarks

In this section we discuss the general remarks that emerged on the project at the end of the interviews and that respond to the question "Did you/would you suggest EURES TMS to someone else?". From the responses we can see how EURES TMS is used for the need to leave one comfort zone and as a mean for a variety of plans:

«In France I am too old, people are looking at me and they think in their mind "She's too old, she can't work, she's too expensive" I don't know, but it's very difficult in France to find a job at my age. [...] It was a way to learn, I had the possibility to learn again [...] The reassurance that I can work, and that I can try to work in another country. It's never too late! I learned that. I also learned to use new software, but next year there will be another one and another one again, but... I can adapt, I know that...». (Chamomilla, individual interview)

«Summarizing my experience, it's a very positive one, so I would suggest to everybody, to young people that want to make a new experience abroad to use this kind of project, because it's one of the best, I think, among those ones that I know. It's a very good opportunity to grow, open your mind... and I think we should all make an effort, me and all the other people who accepted to be involved in this focus group and interview to spread the word about this project. I think it's very successful». (Prunus, focus group)

«You can get stuck of course, you can have a problem, but at the same time you can have the opportunity to blend in, to change your habits in a positive way. It's an opportunity, I mean, you can take it in a positive way or in a negative way. I think it's useful especially for Europeans in general, because we can know other countries better. If we want to stay in the Union, maybe we should know more, because right now there is a lot of prejudice. Yes, there is Erasmus that also helps, but when you're a little more mature is... I mean, until you study is a thing, when you into real life is another, you change perspective, for sure». (Genista, individual interview)

«I spoke to some people about the project, [...] some expats or other people I met in my life, I suggested the project [...] It's a chance and if I can help people to receive this opportunity, I do that with a lot of pleasure, it's important for me. I consider that if I received this opportunity in this way I have the...not the obligation, but the pleasure to share that it's possible and to help people to make some dreams or plans possible and real». (Fagus, individual interview)

Conclusions

Overall, the people who spoke to us were clearly positive about the project and shared a sense of gratefulness for what it provided, including the possibility to meet after the project ended, and have the possibility to start something together. In other words, the project was appreciated for a sense of continuity and development it provided, perhaps not only *despite*, but also *because* of the massive interruption that the Covid-19 meant in their job search and life planning.

This positive ambience that emerged immediately before, during and after the focus group can be seen as a further testimony of the openly declared necessity to establish a community of the project users. This was proactively discussed. The emergence of this need seems to us conceptually really interesting because it speaks of the willingness to keep, maintain, and strengthen social bonds – an understandable need in the aftermath of the pandemic - but it also configures itself as a more professional need to limit isolation and have maybe an institutionalized network which can in turn work as a point of reference for themselves, but also for others who may want to embark in similar projects in the future, similarly to networks such as the ESN (Erasmus Students Network), and to further help out, liaise and strengthen existing professional services such as those provided by the EURES network, Eurodesk Italy, employment centres and others.

This point is symbolised, in the data collected for the research, by 'seeing' plants that belong to different ecosystems speaking to each other. Let us add that it is interesting to note the emergence of forms of solidarity that go beyond the project, and which seem to be in line with the 'European' feelings shared by young people in mobility. In fact, individual interviews in particular revealed the interconnection between the experience of mobility and the building of one's identity as a much wider issue than the need to find a job (or a better job) only. From the professional side, we noted a strong alignment to mechanisms of skills building in relation mainly to entrepreneurship (Cuzzocrea and Krzaklewska 2023) that are in turn a traditional pillar of European youth policies (Cuzzocrea in press; Cairns 2022).

Not necessarily did the expectations on the project realized fully or corresponded, in the end, to how the project was seen in terms of success. However, the project did provide something important: not only a job, but more generally new stimulus, impetus, drive and motivation, helping to construct new meanings. As was clear from the qualitative research we conducted, it offered a sense of continuity, within the disruption caused by the pandemic, and the awareness that the world, albeit imperfect, can be changed for the better, including the possibility of changing a pre-existing career, or a country of residence, or doing something more in line with one's own sensibilities and plans.

These are not necessarily the main objectives of active labour market policies, but we suggest nonetheless them as strong emerging positive elements of success, added in particular to the sense of togetherness that also was evaluated positively, and was perhaps the main motivation to participate in our research and contribute with us to the creation of a better support structure. The construction and deconstruction of the dimensions of success that have emerged through speaking with participants, and through reflecting with them about the symbols they have chosen to convey and represent this idea of success, also suggest the efforts that these young adults are making in using mobility programmes for producing a complex set of meanings whereby mobility maintains a key role in transitions, beyond the technicalities of the project (Robertson et al 2018).

We wish to end the report by mentioning the image of a *suitcase* which was suggested by one of the participant as representing why the project was a success for her. In fact, this image conveys several meanings attributed to the experience of EURES TMS: the idea of a journey, the idea of 'landing' somewhere interesting (for her, a job contract in a company she likes and where she feels appreciated), the taste of that 'international vibe' that is so appealing to participants.

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