



Executive Summary

ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform

ALMA: Supporting disadvantaged young people to take part in mobility under ESF+

Webinar

16 December 2021, online event

Young people have been one of the hardest hit groups by the COVID-19 pandemic over the last two years. To further support them, the **European Social Fund Plus** (ESF+) will finance **ALMA** (Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve)¹, an active inclusion initiative to empower the most vulnerable young people aged 18 to 30 not in education, employment or training (NEETs) by implementing a tailor-made approach to support them in finding a job and integrate in the society. The initiative offers counselling in their home country followed by a supervised work experience in another EU member state with the aim to their integration in the labour market and in society within their home country. ALMA will be one of the initiatives of the European Commission under the European Year of Youth 2022 and a key instrument to implement the Reinforced Youth Guarantee² adopted in 2020. The ALMA initiative can be implemented under ESF+ programmes for youth employment, social inclusion or social innovation.

The aim of the webinar was to present information about the **ALMA initiative** and to provide an opportunity for participants to ask **practical questions** regarding its implementation. The webinar included **testimonials** from former participants, ESF+ managing authorities and companies. In addition, the webinar provided information about existing support and guidance available, such as via the **Thematic Learning Network (TLN) Mobility**³, and an opportunity to enhance bilateral support between managing authorities. The event also presented the paper '**Learning from experience: integrating disadvantaged young people through mobility schemes**', produced in the context of the ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform.

A total of 295 participants attended the webinar, representing ESF+ managing authorities from 25 countries⁴, European social partners and European institutions.

Introduction to the ALMA initiative

ALMA is inspired by the innovative cross-border mobility scheme for disadvantaged young people implemented by the ESF+ German managing authority since 2008 (under the IdA 'Integration durch Austausch'⁵ programme), which in 2012 was used as basis for an ESF-

¹ ALMA initiative: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1549&langId=en>

² European Youth Guarantee: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079&langId=en>

³ TLN Mobility Network: <https://www.esf.de/portal/EN/Funding-period-2014-2020/TLN-Mobility/content.html>

⁴ The countries represented included: AT, BE-NL, BE-FR, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LV, LT, LU, NL, PL, PT, RO, SK, SI, ES and SE.

⁵ IdA – Integration through Exchange: <https://multimedia.next-ma.eu/icf-h/documents/86359c25-23a0-4743-89af-e29535dc9245.pdf>

supported transnational network of 15 member states and was further continued under the TLN Mobility. ALMA will take some of the learning points from this innovative approach, while providing a central coordination at European level. Member states are invited to programme ALMA under ESF+ at national and/or regional level. This represents an opportunity in terms of respecting the thematic concentration for youth employment and making use of the higher co-financing rate offered under the dedicated social innovation priority. However, ALMA is unique from other mobility schemes, such as Erasmus+, in that it targets the **most disadvantaged young people** amongst the NEETs through an **individualised and tailored-based approach**. It is important to stress that ALMA is an active inclusion initiative where mobility is one aspect of the activities, rather than the aim itself.

The ALMA initiative is based on a theory of change whereby young participants with low motivation, low self-confidence, and low chances in the labour market undergo a transformative experience and develop relevant skills, boost their self-confidence, and, as a result, they are motivated to participate in education and training or employment. Through the programme, young participants are prepared for a work placement in another EU member state for a period of two to six months with the objective of integrating them in their home country's labour market. The initiative is underpinned in a comprehensive project cycle implying tailored-based coaching and counselling at every step, including before, during, and after the stay abroad. The added value of the scheme also lies in the exchange as it is intended that participants become young ambassadors to the EU, they experience what the EU means and the support it can provide to its citizens. Results from TLN Mobility are encouraging with approximately 7 000 participants in total. The programmes obtained high integration rates into education, training or employment after participants' stay abroad, with Slovenia between 70% and 100%; Germany up to 55%; Trento (Italy) up to 44%; Poland and Sweden up to 43%; and Catalonia (Spain) up to 34%.

ESF+ will fund ALMA under **shared management**. That is, ALMA will be programmed by national and regional ESF managing authorities. ESF+ will cover **in-kind support** to participants including travel, accommodation, subsistence, and insurance (all of which are dependent upon the host country), as well as coaching and mentoring support. Participants will not receive a salary although companies may pay a stipend. However, this does not imply that work placements are unpaid since all **costs for participants are covered including the costs related to their individual counsellors/mentors**. Altogether, the cost per participant is estimated to be 15,000 EUR per cycle depending on the host country. Participants will continue to benefit from social security in their home country. The European Commission is currently developing a **Delegated Act on EU-level simplified cost options (SCOs) for ALMA**, which will help managing authorities and intermediate bodies to put in place suitable arrangements to help simplify the financial management of the initiative⁶ and updating a **database** for TLN Mobility project partners.

The power of mobility for participants, organisations and managing authorities

The webinar included an interactive discussion to inspire participants about the added value of mobility programmes and the difference it can make to young people who are considered as disadvantaged. The session provided three different perspectives – a former mobility participant from Germany and their counsellor, a company and an organisation involved in hosting disadvantaged young people during their mobility placement in

⁶ For further information please see European Commission (2021) 'Simplified cost options' and 'Financing not linked to costs' in the area of social inclusion and youth: A study complementing the ESF+ impact assessment'
<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8429&furtherPubs=yes>

Catalonia (Spain), and a managing authority (Czech Republic) who have been involved in ESF funded mobility activities for a number of years.

The ex-participant from Germany highlighted her positive experience through the mobility programme. Despite the language barriers encountered, she benefited from **exploring a new environment** and having **structure** throughout the programme to boost their motivation to search for vocational education training (VET) in their home country. The support received throughout the programme was very useful and tailored to her needs. In addition, the ex-participant stressed that the mobility experience gave her an opportunity to step out her environment and gave her a fresh perspective and sense of opportunity. Their counsellor, who is a social worker, stressed the importance of **listening to young participants' and their problems** to provide them with the most effective support possible.

The Catalan mobility project partners involved in mobility exchanges stressed the need to create a **comfortable and professional environment** for young participants to develop solid relationships based on **trust**. This is particularly relevant, as many carry forward emotional and other issues that can be an obstacle to their success in the programme. Furthermore, participants are interviewed during the initial stage to inform them about their role and contributions in the programme, and regarding the expectations. Participants also receive the necessary language training to conduct the work placements abroad.

The Czech managing authority provided useful guidance for other managing authorities interested in participating in mobility schemes. They maintained the importance of providing a **higher level of support** to the young participants due to their (potential) difficult backgrounds, for example by providing a **dedicated mentor**, and of **building trust between project operators**. The Czech managing authority also stressed that it is important to have constant communication with project promoters, and their experience has showed that this helps to ensure a smooth running of the programme as it allows for issues to be identified early on. The managing authority also develops an understanding of the project and their target group and in time can further enhance, develop and refine their guidance and support to projects. The managing authority stressed that setting up the mobility scheme was the most critical aspect as it is during this stage where the right implementation framework is chosen, and practically how the programme and support will work. However, they encouraged other managing authorities to get involved using various methodological approaches that comply with national or regional ESF+ regulations and building on practices from TLN Mobility. Language barriers did not pose a problem since participants take part in **intensive language course training** and their mentors spoke their native language, English, and the language of the host country.

Integrating disadvantaged young people through mobility schemes: available support and guidance

This session presented the forthcoming publication from the ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform 'Learning from experience: integrating disadvantaged young people through mobility schemes.' The paper is an outcome of the Community of Practice Employment, Education and Skills Peer Review on 'Supporting disadvantaged young people to take part in mobility' and builds on the experiences of the TLN Mobility network. It covers possible approaches for managing authorities, experiences at project and partnership level, and lessons learnt about the support to participants. Managing authorities are encouraged to use **'off-the-shelf' solutions** and adopt **flexible** project delivery and anticipated results to adapt to the changing situation of the target groups, host organisations, and travel restrictions. **Prior experience** in working with the target group is important, and project applications should provide detailed information on a range of issues, including outreach to the target group, responsibilities within the partnership, support activities throughout the mobility phase, and follow-up. Lessons learnt indicate

that project staff need to **tailor support** to the individual needs, and that the role of mentors is crucial for this purpose. In addition, **measuring the evolution** of participants throughout the programme cycle can demonstrate the impact of mobility. Moreover, the paper contains inspiring examples from member states and regions involved in TLN Mobility.

The TLN Mobility has developed **support and guidance** for managing authorities and intermediate bodies interested in implementing their own mobility programmes. The network developed a **manual of guidance** and the terms of reference for a transnational **coordinated call** in 2014 that describes a basic proposal for a mobility scheme and contains extensive guidance on all aspects of programme implementation. In addition, the network created a **partner search database**⁷ to find transnational cooperation partners. Organisations included in the database have been quality-checked by the TLN members. The network is also available to provide **technical support and advice** to managing authorities and intermediate bodies tailored to specific national circumstances and developments during programme implementation.

Next steps

- **Funding opportunities and future calls:** The main budget for ALMA will come from ESF+ shared management, i.e. it will be programmed and implemented by Member States and regions. In addition, the Commission intends to launch a 15 million EUR call for proposals to build partnerships and pilot projects in the second half of 2022. . Member states should not wait for this call to plan programmes; it is recommended to plan the programmes directly under ESF+.
- **Timeline for the ALMA initiative:**
 - At Member State level: ESF+ managing authorities are expected to start ALMA programming from the start of the year, with a launch for calls for national partnerships during the second quarter, and implementation to start during the third quarter of 2022.
 - At EU level: the manual and database will be updated and the Delegated Act on ALMA EU-level SCOs will be published in the first quarter of 2022. A calls for proposals at EU level will be launched in the second half of 2022. The European Commission may organise a follow-up webinar when the manual and database are updated in the first quarter of 2022. There will be an ALMA launch event around 9 May 2022 (to be confirmed)
 - TLN Mobility will hold a technical meeting in Ljubljana, Slovenia in May 2022 (to be confirmed) to discuss the implementation of the ALMA initiative.
- **Taking forward lessons from previous experience:**
 - Participants are encouraged to read the forthcoming paper from the ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform, 'Learning from experience: integrating disadvantaged young people through mobility schemes.'
 - Participants are encouraged to read through the materials already produced by TLN Mobility and to contact the TLN Mobility Network in case of further questions concerning previous experiences

⁷ TLN Mobility partner search database: <https://www.esf.de/portal/EN/Funding-period-2014-2020/TLN-Mobility/Partner-Search-Database/content.html?jsessionid=60B1052D15345885AFDA7778A74D0CF4>

Further information

ALMA initiative:

<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1549&langId=en>

TLN Mobility network webpage:

<https://www.esf.de/portal/EN/Funding-period-2014-2020/TLN-Mobility/content.html>

Webinar resource page (including useful background materials):

<https://next-ma.eu/landing/resources-esf-alma-webinar>



Questions and Answers

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[This document contains the questions submitted by participants during the webinar on 'ALMA: Supporting disadvantaged young people to take part in mobility' on 16 December 2021. In some instance, questions may have been amalgamated. If you have further questions that are not answered please contact \[EMPL-ALMA@ec.europa.eu\]\(mailto:EMPL-ALMA@ec.europa.eu\)](#)