

Expanding the possibilities of working holidays

Policy paper

May 2024

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With the financial assistance
of the European Union

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Acknowledgements

The authors thank Camilla Castelanelli, Giulia Feni, Gizem Güzelant, Isabel Jess, and Şeyma Soylu for their helpful research assistance and Jennifer Tangney and other reviewers for their insightful comments. They also express their gratitude to the stakeholders who agreed to an interview for this project, and to the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) team implementing a Migration Partnership Facility (MPF) funded study on legal pathways for labour to the European Union.

Katsiaficas, C. and Frelak, J.S., *Expanding the possibilities of working holidays*. Brussels: ICMPD, 2024.

This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the EU, contracted by ICMPD through the MPF. Opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors alone.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Youth mobility schemes offer an array of potential benefits to participants (e.g., gaining international experience, enhancing foreign language skills, building networks), countries of destination (e.g., addressing short-term labour needs, engaging in public diplomacy, receiving tourism- and study-related revenue), and countries of origin (e.g., enhancing opportunities for skills transfer, developing of future workforce). Such programmes have generally been less politically sensitive due to their association with travel, their temporary nature, and participants' profiles.
- Embracing youth mobility can unlock opportunities for youth, employers, and EU Member States. Traditional working holiday programmes have a stated focus on cultural exchange and offer the chance to travel, work, and perhaps study in an EU country. Alternatives include internship or traineeship schemes; language learning schemes paired with work opportunities; foreign language teaching assistant programmes; and multi-country (remote) working holiday programmes. Some of these options are already a part of some EU Member State youth mobility initiatives and working holiday schemes outside of the EU.
- The strategic expansion of traditional working holiday programmes or the introduction of new initiatives can support Member States in achieving particular goals related to, for instance, cultural exchange, local labour needs, partnership, or development goals. While some Member States would opt for temporary migration schemes, others would want participants to remain in their labour markets.
- Whether the potential benefits are indeed realised ultimately depends on programme design. The goals of the programme should inform its creation and implementation, including the policy instrument chosen as well as scope, scale, and programme parameters. For instance, schemes focused purely or considerably on the element of work can most appropriately draw on labour migration frameworks. At the same time, sufficient oversight, monitoring, and evaluation are critical for measuring impact and ensuring that participants have a positive experience – which is key to programme reputation as well as talent attraction, diplomacy, and other potential goals.
- This paper explores the potential benefits of expanding mobility opportunities for third-country national youth to EU Member States and presents different options for making this possible. It also presents the potential trade-offs when it comes to programme goals and design and highlights key considerations for those looking to develop and launch new youth mobility schemes.

INTRODUCTION

Working holiday programmes and other youth mobility schemes offer a chance to live, work, travel, potentially train or study the local language, and more generally acquire experience in another country. Many working holiday programmes emphasise cultural exchange and tourism as their *raison d'être*, offering a chance for youth to gain international experience with the possibility of working to help finance their stay and travel. Other youth mobility schemes have a different focus, such as education or employability. Targeted at young people, these schemes can offer a range of benefits to participants, employers, destination countries, and origin countries alike. However, while EU Member States have initiatives in place to support such schemes, particularly work and travel, these remain limited in scope and scale. By contrast, programmes in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States are far larger in terms of participating countries, participating youth, and concurrently impact. Against this backdrop, this paper explores the potential benefits of strategically expanding mobility opportunities for third-country national youth to the EU and maps different options for making this possible. It additionally presents the potential trade-offs when it comes to programme goals and design and highlights key considerations for those looking to develop and launch new youth mobility schemes.

METHODOLOGY

There is no single definition of working holidays, which typically combine tourism and work: They “occupy a grey area between tourism and migration.”¹ Those undertaking working holidays are able to stay in another country for a temporary yet extended period of time (i.e., longer than under a tourist visa), with varying levels of immersion in the destination country’s economy, society, and culture.² For many participants, work is a key part of the experience, yet these programmes are often seen as distinct from other work-related temporary migration channels.³ Depending on the scheme in question, as well as individual resources or preferences, the balance during the stay may tilt more heavily toward leisure or toward work. Similarly, an individual’s stay may be more or less structured or independently determined.

Work and travel are the most common elements of working holiday schemes, but working holiday programmes exist within a broader youth mobility landscape. Additionally, some working holiday schemes allow for study or training, meaning there is some overlap with other youth mobility schemes. For these reasons, as well as to investigate how to more fully tap into the potential of

1 Wilson, J., Fisher, D., and Moore, K. (2010), ‘The OE goes ‘home’: Cultural aspects of a working holiday experience,’ *Tourist Studies* 9(1): 17.

2 Ibid, 4.

3 European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) (forthcoming), study on legal pathways for labour to the EU, Brussels: ICMPD.

working holiday schemes in the EU, this paper takes a broader look at youth mobility programmes. It includes schemes currently operating in EU countries, in addition to those in five non-EU countries with large working holiday programmes (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK, and the US). It does not include mobility schemes for academic study, focusing instead on language and practical training. It also does not look at mobility schemes for youth under age 18.

This policy paper focuses on international mobility schemes that are limited in duration and targeted to current students in tertiary education, recent graduates, or young adults of a particular age range. In contrast with many common conceptions of 'youth',⁴ these schemes may be open to individuals up to 35 years old.

This paper is based on desk research; a mapping of labour migration channels that is being prepared by the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM); and 15 interviews conducted with policymakers, industry practitioners, academia, think tanks, and employers inside and outside of Europe as part of the EU-funded and ICMPD-implemented Migration Partnership Facility (MPF) project "Expanding the possibilities of working holiday schemes." This included a feedback session at the Labour Mobility Practitioners' Network annual meeting in November 2023.

FORMS OF YOUTH MOBILITY

Although working holidays are the most common form of youth mobility schemes,⁵ youth mobility takes a variety of forms, and may include the following elements:

- Work
- Travel
- Language learning
- Other academic or vocational studies
- Internships/traineeships
- Volunteering

Programmes may allow for more than one of the above elements, in which case one might be the primary aim. The figure below illustrates common time-bound youth mobility arrangements in terms of their stated purpose and key elements. Certainly, there may be discrepancies between what is advertised and what happens in practice, depending on programme design, individual resources, and personal preferences, among other factors. For instance, while working holiday programmes are normally advertised as a chance for travel and cultural exchange, in reality work may be an important or even the central element of a youth's stay and experience.

4 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (n.d.), *Definition of youth*, fact sheet.

5 Coderre, M. and Nakache, D. (2022), 'From Working Tourists to Permanent Residents: Experiences of Migrant Workers with Youth Mobility Schemes in Canada,' *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 23: 972.

Typical time-bound youth mobility programmes



WORK AND TRAVEL

Holiday is typically put forth as the main purpose of working holiday schemes, with a focus on fostering cultural exchange, offering international experience, and promoting mutual understanding. Working to finance stay/travel is a possibility, but the duration of work may be restricted. Some programmes provide an open work permit, while others require a sponsor or pre-arranged job. Training or study may be possible and the duration of this may be restricted.



WORK-CENTRED

These schemes focus on certain jobs, such as au pairs, foreign language teaching assistants, and summer camp counsellors. They often require a job to be lined up prior to arrival and a certain number of hours to be worked per week.



LANGUAGE STUDY + WORK

Work is not allowed to be the main purpose of stay or interfere with studies, and work permits may come with restrictions. A certain level of attendance and hours of study per week may be required in order to maintain the right to work.



INTERNSHIP OR TRAINEESHIP

Internships and traineeships are typically lined up prior to arrival. Internships may or may not be paid, may or may not provide academic credit, and may be arranged directly with an employer or through a third party.



VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering entails unremunerated work for a host organisation located outside the volunteer's country of residence, arranged prior to arrival. The duration of stay can be anywhere from a couple of weeks to a year. Volunteers might have their basic costs covered (food, accommodation, transport, basic personal expenses).



STUDIES

Academic studies encompass enrolment in a degree programme, exchange programmes, and other short-term studies (e.g., language and culture courses, summer schools). Full-time international students are often granted the right to work a certain number of hours per week, which are typically higher during the summer and winter holidays than during the academic year. Students are normally required to enrol at accredited or recognised study institutions.

BENEFITS OF YOUTH MOBILITY

For youth embarking on short-term mobility, the motivations for and benefits of doing so are intertwined.⁶ Many have multiple reasons for making the trip, including a mixture of personal, educational, and professional factors such as fostering personal development, improving foreign language skills, exploring other cultures, improving future employment prospects, and the possibility of adventure.⁷ Another reason could include the idea of a productive pause before taking further steps in education, career, or adulthood more generally.⁸ Globally, youth are traveling more often today than in the past, and are interested in combining a formal purpose with leisure.⁹ Motivations may differ by gender, as well as other individual factors. Underscoring this point, a study of Swiss youths distinguished between three groups: 'the curious', 'the professionals', and 'the pragmatic'.¹⁰ Another prominent study developed a four-category typology of travellers based on their work- and travel-related motivations: 'travelling professional workers', 'migrant tourism workers', 'non-institutionalised working tourists', and 'working-holiday tourists'.¹¹ Another article similarly notes the stratification between youth focusing on travel and culture and those looking mainly to work, and relates this to nationality.¹²

Working holiday schemes offer the chance to travel to new places, enjoy time with peers, and feel a sense of freedom and autonomy, all while earning money.¹³ They can provide employment opportunities, cosmopolitan living, a base for further travel, and a temporary home in another country.¹⁴ With increased demand for authentic and experiential tourism, youth may opt for working holidays in order to engage in such travel in a budget-friendly way.¹⁵ These programmes also enable cultural immersion (i.e., longer, slower, and more intensive travel, with connections to locals). Beyond tourism-related considerations, working holidays offer a unique work experience and cultural capital that contributes to social status.¹⁶ With regard to employability in particular, the benefits of work and travel schemes include gaining work experience in another cultural context, developing foreign language skills, and building an international social and professional network.¹⁷ The experience

6 Haldimann, L., et al. (2022), 'Temporary youth mobility: motivations and benefits from a life-course perspective,' *Children's Geographies* 20(6): 862.

7 Ibid, 1, 2.

8 Amit, V. (2011), "'Before I Settle Down": Youth Travel and Enduring Life Course Paradigms,' *Anthropologica* 53(1): 79-88.

9 Author interview with representatives of World Youth Student and Educational Travel Confederation, The Netherlands.

10 Haldimann, L., et al., 'Temporary youth mobility.'

11 Uriely, N. (2001), "Traveling Workers' and 'Working Tourists': Variations across the Interaction between Work and Tourism,' *International Journal of Tourism Research* 3: 1-8.

12 Vosko, L. F. (2023), 'Through the back-door: How Australia and Canada use working holiday programs to fulfill demands for migrant work via cultural exchange,' *Journal of Industrial Relations* 65(1): 88-111.

13 Olimpia, M.C. (2011), 'Forms of youth travel,' *The Young Economists Journal*: 118-122, 120; Yoon, K. (2014), 'Transnational youth mobility in the neoliberal economy of experience,' *Journal of Youth Studies* 17(8): 1014-1028.

14 Wilson, J., Fisher, D., and Moore, K., 'The OE goes 'home',' 4.

15 Meng, B. and Han, H. (2019), 'Determinants of working holiday makers' destination loyalty: Uncovering the role of perceived authenticity,' *Tourism Management Perspectives* 32, 1.

16 Yoon, K., 'Transnational youth mobility in the neoliberal economy of experience,' Meng, B. and Han, H., 'Determinants of working holiday makers' destination loyalty,' 1-2.

17 Olimpia, M.C., 'Forms of youth travel,' 120.

can increase employability, as it indicates maturity, soft skills, self-awareness, and independence. Furthermore, as a distinctive international cultural experience, it can distinguish participants within the job market, making them more competitive in comparison with other jobseekers.¹⁸

Programmes can also bring a host of benefits to receiving employers, economies, and societies. For governments, they are a tool for bilateral relations that helps to foster connections and cultural exchange at the individual level.¹⁹ Employers are able to access a pool of temporary labour and can find temporary workers more quickly and easily than through temporary labour migration channels (although this has also generated criticism).²⁰ Tourism revenue is another way in which youth are contributing to local economies.²¹ In Australia (one of the largest working holiday programmes), the tourism-related spending resulting from youth mobility schemes is significant, and studies indicate that these youth create more jobs than they fill.²² Many actors in the field of tourism stand to benefit, including transportation operators, owners of accommodation, entertainment venues, insurance providers, and visa assistance providers.²³ A study of working holiday programmes in China found that these schemes can increase destination loyalty for participants, meaning they are likely to visit again, speak of the destination positively, and suggest it to friends and family, potentially resulting in future visits.²⁴ It is not just participating youth themselves, but also friends and family members visiting them or others they 'influence' to visit the destination, that adds to tourism revenue.²⁵ Moreover, the World Youth Student and Educational Travel Confederation predicted already in 2017 that an increasing number of youth will seek to become digital nomads, given the rise in location-independent jobs and the desire to travel, leading to an increased demand for suitable accommodation, co-working spaces, and tourist offers. This presents an important opportunity for the tourism industry, one that an increasing number of countries in Europe (and elsewhere), as well as the private sector, are eager to tap.²⁶

It should also be noted that such programmes have generally been less politically sensitive due to their temporary nature, their association with travel, and the profiles of participants (who typically have high socioeconomic status).²⁷ Youth mobility thus offers a more politically expedient way to satisfy demand from countries of origin and their youth for pathways to Europe, as well as that of

18 Yoon, K., 'Transnational youth mobility in the neoliberal economy of experience.'

19 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) (2019), *Evaluation of the International Experience Canada Program*.

20 IRCC, *Evaluation of the International Experience Canada Program*; Meng, B. and Han, H., 'Determinants of working holiday makers' destination loyalty,' 1-2, 2; Coderre, M. and Nakache, D., 'From Working Tourists to Permanent Residents,' 972; Costa, D. (2011), *Guestworker diplomacy: J visas receive minimal oversight despite significant implications for the U.S. labor market*, Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute; Author interview with representative of International Cultural Youth Exchange, Germany.

21 IRCC, *Evaluation of the International Experience Canada Program*.

22 Brennan, C. (2014), 'Backpackers or Working Holiday Makers? Working Tourists in Australia,' *Qualitative Sociology Review* X(3): 94-114.

23 Clarke, N. (2004), 'Free Independent Travellers? British Working Holiday Makers in Australia,' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 29(4): 499-509, 501; WYSE Travel Confederation (2023), 'WYSE Travel Confederation: Growth and developments in the digital nomad market since COVID-19.'

24 Meng, B. and Han, H. (2019), 'Determinants of working holiday makers' destination loyalty: Uncovering the role of perceived authenticity,' *Tourism Management Perspectives* 32: 1-10.

25 Author interview with representatives of World Youth Student and Educational Travel Confederation, The Netherlands; WYSE Travel Confederation, 'WYSE Travel Confederation'.

26 WYSE Travel Confederation, 'Growth and developments in the digital nomad market since COVID-19.'

27 Coderre, M. and Nakache, D., 'From Working Tourists to Permanent Residents.'

employers in the EU, and paves the way for better socio-economic ties between participating states and their peoples. Certainly, different governments have different interests with regard to youth mobility; during conversations with stakeholders in the public sector and academia, it became clear that, while some countries are concerned with reducing visa overstays, others would like to encourage people to stay long term as part of broader talent attraction efforts.²⁸

The benefits for origin countries have received comparatively less attention in the literature. Nevertheless, these countries stand to benefit from such opportunities for their youth in the form, for instance, of skills transfer and the development of their future workforce. Particularly for youth who end up leaving longer term, benefits might be realised in the form of remittances, as well as the sharing of ideas and networks.²⁹ For programmes in which reciprocity is a key element, officials have noted the benefits of youth going abroad and returning with enriched life, work, and language experience.³⁰

CURRENT SCHEMES IN THE EU

WORKING HOLIDAY SCHEMES

There is no EU-wide working holiday scheme; instead, this paper looks at the various schemes that exist in EU Member States.³¹ Most have a working holiday scheme in place, although the majority are modest in scale and scope. They typically allow for a holiday in one particular EU country (although participants are able to travel within the Schengen area), during which employment can be sought to help pay for the stay and travel. In some cases, the period of work allowed during the stay is limited. Some schemes allow for study, which may also be limited in duration. The emphasis put forth in existing Member State working holiday schemes is on promoting cultural exchange and gaining international experience rather than meeting labour market needs or setting the stage for long-term migration. Most working holiday schemes do not enable participants to extend their participation or participate more than once.

Working holiday programmes are typically developed using bilateral agreements, often within the same pool of countries (particularly those in Australasia, North America, South America, and East Asia). These agreements spell out the contours of the pathway, which often differs within a given Member State (for instance in terms of possible country-specific participant quotas, eligibility requirements like age, the length of stay permitted, and length of employment or study allowed during stay). Several of these agreements are reciprocal, to enable youth from both countries to partake in and benefit from exchanges. Whether or not a visa is required and what type of visa is

28 Author interviews with various stakeholders in government and academia.

29 Ratha, D. (2023), 'Resilient Remittances,' International Monetary Fund; Migration Data Portal (n.d.), 'Remittances,' IOM Global Migration Data Analysis Centre.

30 Author interview with representatives of IRCC.

31 This paper draws on ECDPM research and other available information about national schemes; it examines the majority but not all 27 EU Member States.

granted depends on the Member State and the youth nationality.³² There is thus a patchwork of working holiday schemes both across the EU and within Member States.

Member State working holiday schemes are newer and smaller compared to those of the major actors in this space – Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK, and the US (see box below). Several Member State programmes have been initiated since 2000, including those in [Germany](#) (2000), [Finland](#) (2002), [Ireland](#) (2003), [Belgium](#) (2004), [Lithuania](#) (2009), and [Portugal](#) (2014). In many cases, there is a small number of youths arriving in EU countries via Member State programmes, and there may even be a larger volume of youth outgoing than incoming.³³ For instance, where annual country-specific participant quotas are in place, they range from 50-400 in Portugal, 100-400 in Ireland, and 500-2,000 in Spain.³⁴ The small number of arrivals suggests that there is a limited impact on local labour markets, although there is little information or analysis available of working holiday schemes in the EU.

Global working holiday schemes

[Australia's Working Holiday Maker](#) (WHM) programme dates back to 1975. It currently includes more than 40 partner countries or jurisdictions and two visa subclasses (subclasses 417 and 462, based on nationality), with a series of [bilateral, reciprocal arrangements](#). There are country-specific [annual caps](#) for visa subclass 462; these visa holders have more application requirements compared to those accessing subclass 417. Participants in the WHM programme are permitted to work (with a 6-month limit per employer) and to study (up to 4 months). The working holiday visa is valid for 12 months, and under certain conditions, participants can obtain a second or third working holiday visa. These conditions are that visa holders take up a job in a specific sector in a certain part of the country for a stipulated amount of time. In recent years, over 200,000 people from 44 countries have come to Australia each year through the WHM programme.³⁵

[International Experience Canada](#) (IEC), which launched in 1951, has bilateral and reciprocal youth mobility agreements and arrangements (YMAS) with 38 country and territory partners. Reciprocity is an important element of the IEC programme, and the emphasis on reciprocity has influenced the setting of [country-specific quotas](#) and efforts to encourage more Canadian youth to travel under this programme.³⁶ In limited circumstances, youth in some non-partner countries may also apply using a [recognised organisation](#) (for youth in partner countries, going through recognised organisations is optional, for those who would like support with finding a job or training, planning travel, or other assistance). IEC is split into three streams: the Working Holiday Program (WHP), Young Professionals Program (YPP), and International Co-op (ICP). WHP provides an open work permit, and participants can work for almost any employer in any part of the country. YPP grants employer-specific work permits for youth who have already secured a job in their field of study that contributes to their professional development; they are

32 See for example German Missions in the United Kingdom (n.d.), '[D-Visa: Working Holiday](#)'; Embassy of Ireland, Canberra, Australia (n.d.), '[Working Holiday Authorisations](#)'; Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Unión Europea y Cooperación (n.d.), '[Youth mobility visa](#)'.

33 ECDPM.

34 Citizens Information (2023), '[Working Holiday Visas in Ireland](#)'; updated 9 August; ECDPM.

35 Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia (2020), [Final Report of the Inquiry into the Working Holiday Maker Program](#), Canberra: Joint Standing Committee on Migration, v.

36 IRCC, [Evaluation of the International Experience Canada Program](#).

required to work for the employer who provided the offer of employment that supported their application for the duration of their stay. ICP facilitates employer-specific work permits for post-secondary students who must undertake an internship or work placement as part of their studies; they must have a job offer and work for the same employer in the same location for the duration of their stay. The majority of youth coming to Canada under IEC do so as part of WHP.³⁷ The terms and conditions vary by country or territory. Typically, the age range for participants is between 18 and 35, although eligibility for some YMA ends at age 30. Work permits are granted for as long as 36 months. Youth can participate up to three times, depending on the YMA. Between 2019 and 2023, approximately 207,000 youth arrived in Canada under an IEC work permit.³⁸

New Zealand's Working holiday scheme has been operating since 1985 and currently includes 45 countries. While the criteria are different for each country (as per bilateral agreements), working holiday visas are generally granted for 12 months, with a few shorter and a few longer. Some countries have an annual quota, while others do not. Participants can study or train for up to 6 months total; working conditions differ depending on the bilateral agreement in question (e.g., participants may have a 3-month or 6-month limit per employer). Those who undertake 3 months of seasonal work in the horticulture or viticulture industries may be eligible to extend their working holiday visa for 3 months.

The UK's Youth Mobility Scheme (YMS) enables youth from 13 countries to stay in the UK for up to 2 years. Visa holders can work, be self-employed, and study (with certain requirements). Applicants from certain places must [enter a ballot](#) if they wish to apply for a YMS visa. This includes an India-specific scheme, [India Young Professionals](#). YMS national visa quotas are determined annually, and are linked to reciprocity for UK youth; there is no overall cap. Australia, Canada, and New Zealand nationals can extend their visa by 1 year. Youth can only use the YMS visa once. In 2023, nearly 23,000 YMS visas were granted.³⁹

The US Summer Work Travel programme is housed under the [J-1 visa scheme](#) for exchange visitors, which was created in 1961. Under this programme, current full-time post-secondary students can come to the US for up to 4 months (and can participate more than once). Youth must apply to be sponsored for a visa; they are not required to already have a job if they are from a visa waiver country. Applicants must sufficiently demonstrate that they will return to their home country after finishing the programme. In addition to the general programme, [there are four country-specific initiatives](#), named pilots (although they have been in existence for quite some time): two Summer Work Travel Pilot Programs, for Australians and New Zealanders; an Intern Work Travel Pilot Program for citizens of Ireland, and the WEST (Work, English Study, and Travel) Pilot Program for South Koreans.

37 Vosko, L. F., 'Through the back-door.'

38 Data shared by IRCC.

39 UK Home Office (2024), Outcomes of applications for entry clearance visas, 2005 to 2023 Q4, [Entry clearance visa applications and outcomes detailed datasets, year ending December 2023](#).

OTHER YOUTH MOBILITY SCHEMES IN THE EU

Beyond working holidays, several other national channels exist that are targeted primarily at younger adults. At the EU level, the [Erasmus+](#) programme focuses on the mobility of higher education students but also includes opportunities⁴⁰ for vocational students, apprentices, teachers, youth workers, and volunteers to study, train, or volunteer in EU Member States. The [European Solidarity Corps](#) facilitates cross-border volunteering, and is open to nationals of programme and partner countries.⁴¹ On a smaller scale, the European Commission's "[Blue Book](#)" [traineeship programme](#) has a limited number of spaces available to third-country nationals. Additionally, in the Skills and Talent Package Communication of April 2022, the European Commission announced a feasibility study to develop and assess potential options for a European Youth Mobility Scheme, which is ongoing.⁴²

At the national level, some programmes combine work and study, including language study. For example, [Ireland](#) allows long-term study visa holders to combine education with part-time work. Third-country nationals who are in [Malta](#) to study English can work up to 20 hours per week after their first 90 days; they must apply for an employment license and must continue their studies for a certain number of hours per week. During their second year living and studying in Malta, they may work full-time.

Other channels have a work-related focus, including internship, traineeship, and limited-term work opportunities. France's [Young professional](#) scheme enables young people from 17 countries⁴³ to gain professional experience in France and strengthen their linguistic and cultural knowledge. This programme aims to improve career prospects in countries of origin via skills development. Other channels focus on certain occupations, especially au pairs (e.g., [Denmark](#), [Estonia](#), [Germany](#), [Romania](#),⁴⁴ and [Sweden](#)). Some countries, such as [Czechia](#), [France](#), and [Spain](#), recruit foreign language teaching assistants for temporary placements in their school systems. Greece has a specific channel [for members of foreign archaeology schools](#). Additionally, some EU countries, including [Denmark](#), [Germany](#), and [Romania](#),⁴⁵ have intern or trainee schemes (see below for more about targeted internship opportunities funded by Germany).

40 For more on country eligibility for various activities, see European Commission (n.d.), [Erasmus+ Programme Guide](#).

41 These are EU Member States, Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Georgia, Iceland, Israel, Jordan, Kosovo*, Lebanon, Libya, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Montenegro, Morocco, North Macedonia, Norway, Palestine, Russia, Serbia, Syria, Tunisia, Türkiye, and Ukraine. For more see European Solidarity Corps (n.d.), '[Countries covered](#)'. *All references to Kosovo in this document should be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

42 European Commission (2022), [Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Attracting skills and talent to the EU, Brussels](#).

43 Algeria, Argentina, Benin, Canada, Cape Verde, Congo (Brazzaville), Gabon, Georgia, Mauritius, Montenegro, Morocco, New Zealand (agriculture only), Russia, Senegal, Serbia, Tunisia, and the US.

44 ECDPM.

45 ECDPM.

Internships funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)⁴⁶

- **Combined study and practical stays for engineers from developing countries (KOSPIE) in cooperation with the Argentine Ministry of Education (ALEARG):** Through this [scholarship](#), advanced Argentinean engineering sciences students spend one semester at a German university and then complete a 4- to 6-month industrial internship. It is co-financed by the Argentine Ministry of Education and DAAD.
- **ERA Green Hydrogen Fellowships for international Master students:** This fellowship programme provides funds to [master's](#) and [PhD](#) students for a self-organised internship in a German company or at a non-university institution in the field of green hydrogen.
- **Gilman-DAAD Germany Scholarships:** The new cooperation "Gilman-DAAD Germany Scholarships" between DAAD, the U.S. Department of State, and the Institute of International Education is meant to provide [extra opportunities](#) for American students to study in Germany by providing up to 40 scholarships per year by DAAD. Eligibility criteria include internships in Germany that last at least 6 weeks and will ultimately bear credit from the home institution in the U.S.
- **Practical Traineeships for Foreign Students of Natural and Technical Sciences, Agriculture and Forestry (IAESTE):** This [programme](#) aims to improve the professional and practical qualifications and intercultural skills of programme participants. It funds internships in commercial enterprises as well as research and higher education institutes, and is offered in countries where there is an IAESTE national committee.
- **RISE Germany – Research Internships in Science and Engineering:** This scholarship, offered at the undergraduate, master's, and PhD levels, promotes the exchange and development of North American, British, and Irish students in the fields of science and engineering. For [undergraduate students](#), the programme funds research internships under supervision at German universities, non-university research institutes, or universities of applied sciences during the summer break, for 10 weeks to 3 months. For [master's and PhD students](#) as well as recent graduates, funding is provided for up to 6 months for research internships at German companies or non-university research institutions with a strong connection to industry.

Some national programmes are targeted specifically at members of the diaspora, with the aim of maintaining cultural and economic ties; promoting language, culture, and identity; and potentially attracting people to come to the country to study or work. Lithuania's diaspora policy features several measures aimed at encouraging return and (re)integration, including study and traineeship programmes.⁴⁷ Cultural and practical activities include familiarising diaspora youth with Lithuania, offering intensive language courses, connecting youth to companies, and working to foster a positive impression of the country.⁴⁸ Several government and NGO programmes in the country are dedicated to attracting young diaspora talent to the local labour market. These initiatives focus on fostering

46 DAAD, 'Scholarship Database - DAAD - Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst,' accessed 2 January 2024.

47 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania (2021), *Strategic guidelines for the Lithuanian diaspora policy "Global Lithuania" for 2022–2030*, 9.

48 Author interview with representative of the Ministry of Economy and Innovations, Lithuania; author interview.

engagement through short-term projects with public administration, facilitating summer internships with local employers, and offering grants to encourage their participation in the Lithuanian workforce. Ireland's diaspora strategy includes a focus on youth engagement, encompassing working holiday programmes, study abroad programmes, and other short-term opportunities.⁴⁹

Other national schemes enable temporary stay and work in an EU country but are not restricted to or specifically aimed at youth. These include temporary and seasonal labour pathways, as well as digital nomad visas and job-seeking visas offered by some EU Member States. The EU Seasonal Workers Directive and several national schemes exist to facilitate the mobility of seasonal workers, while national schemes may also enable the entry of other temporary workers.⁵⁰ Amidst an increase in remote work, several EU countries have adopted digital nomad visas, with Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Portugal, Romania, and Spain all adopting programmes since 2020. These programmes typically allow foreign nationals to remain in the country and work for themselves or for a company outside of the country for a certain amount of time, provided that they meet a certain earning threshold or can otherwise finance their time in the country.⁵¹ With regard to job-seeking visas, Germany introduced the Opportunity Card to streamline the job seeking process, allowing third-country nationals to work in Germany without a lengthy recognition procedure, providing they have at least two years of vocational training or a university degree and proficiency in German (A1) or English (B2). The Card allows for a two-week trial job, or part-time employment of up to 20 hours a week, and a one-year stay in Germany. In the Netherlands, international graduates have enjoyed special access to the Dutch labour market through the Orientation Year programme. Effective from 1 March 2016, the programme offers a residence permit for highly educated migrants seeking employment, catering to foreign students in the Netherlands, graduates from top foreign universities, and foreign scientific researchers. These highly skilled migrants thus have the opportunity to find employment in the Netherlands without prior approval. In both countries, upon finding a job, there is the possibility to transition to another, longer term migration status.

Selected global schemes

Australia's Skilled – Recognised Graduate visa (subclass 476) enables recent engineering graduates from a list of global institutions under 31 years of age to live, work, or study in the country for up to 18 months.

New Zealand's Student and Trainee Work Visa is aimed at those looking to gain career-related practical experience. The **German Law Student Visitor Visa** enables German law students and graduates to be an unpaid observer in a New Zealand law firm for a maximum of 6 months and learn more about its functioning.

49 Government of Ireland (2020), *Global Ireland: Ireland's Diaspora Strategy 2020–2025*, 14.

50 European Migration Network (2020). *Attracting and protecting the rights of seasonal workers in the EU and the United Kingdom – Synthesis Report*. Brussels: European Migration Network.

51 Fragomen, Del Rey, Bernsen & Loewy, LLP, Fragomen Global LLP and affiliates (2024), *Digital nomads and remote workers fact sheet*.

The UK has several temporary work visas, including those aimed at recent graduates, who can work, look for work, or be self-employed ([High Potential Individual visa](#)) and people arriving via exchange programmes, who can work a second job part time ([Government Authorised Exchange visa](#)). Other temporary work visas are aimed at particular types of work, including those conducting voluntary work, who can also hold a part-time job in the same sector ([Charity Worker visa](#)) and those in the creative industry, who can have a second part-time job in the same sector or on the shortage list ([Creative Worker visa](#)).

The US has programmes for [au pairs](#), [camp counsellors](#), [interns](#), and [international visitors](#) as part of its J-1 exchange programmes. It also has a range of [exchange programmes](#) aimed at young professionals.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT WORKING HOLIDAY PROGRAMMES

The majority of research available on youth mobility in the EU focuses on intra-Europe mobility. Overall, there is relatively little information available on the outcomes and impact of working holiday programmes in the EU. However, key lessons can be drawn, mainly from outside the EU:

 ***The governance of working holiday programmes is characterised by a patchwork of arrangements and conceptual and practical tensions.*** Working holidays are a highly fragmented area – not just because they are regulated by a series of bilateral agreements with differing conditions, but also because they may fall under various policy areas. This patchwork can be difficult for youth and employers to navigate, especially if they cannot easily access clear information about the programme.⁵² The US programme, for instance, has faced criticism for not involving the Department of Labor or providing related protections for US workers or enforcing labour violations, despite bringing in a large number of people each year for temporary work.⁵³ Australia’s working holiday programme falls under its national tourism strategy and therefore benefits from sophisticated marketing that has helped it attract participants.⁵⁴ At the same time, participants’ tourism experiences are frequently limited, given that the primary focus of the programme is on meeting labour market needs, particularly agricultural labour in remote areas. This dual emphasis on labour market needs and tourism objectives highlights the complexity and potential trade-offs inherent in the design and implementation of such programmes. It also illustrates potential tension between

52 Coderre, M. and Nakache, D., ‘From Working Tourists to Permanent Residents,’ 978-79; Author interview with representative of Go International, Canada.

53 Costa, D., *Guestworker diplomacy*.

54 Author interview with representatives of World Youth Student and Educational Travel Confederation, The Netherlands; Coates, B., Wiltshire, T., and Reysenbach, T. (2023), *Short-changed. How to stop the exploitation of migrant workers in Australia*, Melbourne: Grattan Institute.

independent and structured stays. While working holidays are usually seen as separate from labour migration channels, and this is reflected in their governance, work is often a central component.

There are also more practical tensions at play. Both open and employer-specific permits come with benefits and drawbacks with regard to worker protections. Open work permits make it easier to change employers (e.g., to get a better or higher paid job or if problems occur with the initial employer), but lead to the possibility that youth take up dangerous work. Limiting work can theoretically channel youth into higher quality jobs, for instance in positions where they can interact with locals or are working for vetted employers, but can leave them more vulnerable to potential abuse. Similarly, the participation of (mandatory or voluntary) sponsors⁵⁵ may differ, and their role, motivations, fees, and accountability can make a big difference in the experiences youth have during their working holiday. Sponsors can play a helpful role in advising youth on their options; helping them get settled (providing orientation and tips for finding accommodation, setting up a bank account, and engaging in social activities including relevant discounts and apps); helping them find a new job as they move around the country; and ensuring employer and youth programme compliance.⁵⁶ However, their role can also be problematic, especially if they are motivated by profit-making, if they are not subject to sufficient oversight, and if there is a need or desire to change employer.⁵⁷



There may be discrepancies or tensions with regard to programme goals. A programme may have multiple goals, which can potentially conflict with each other. For instance, working holiday programmes have been criticised for placing a stated focus on cultural exchange but in practice (directly or indirectly) serving to fill undesirable or even precarious jobs.⁵⁸ The US exchange programme is overseen by the diplomatic arm of the government, yet the Summer Work Travel program is in practice a temporary labour migration channel.⁵⁹ Australia's programme has seen a shift over time to prioritise work over tourism, with the aim of recruiting relatively young, flexible, and cheap labour to mitigate worker shortages.⁶⁰

Furthermore, the goal of policymakers may differ from that of participating youth. For example, youth may focus on working full-time or saving up as much money as possible during their stay, leaving limited time for cultural or social activities.⁶¹ Research in Canada has shown the prioritisation of work over travel among working holiday participants: An IEC programme evaluation found that 90% of youth self-reported working during their time in Canada (a

55 For example, [in the US](#), State Department-designated sponsors screen and select prospective exchange visitors, and are authorised to issue the Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) Status, needed to support a visa application. [In Canada](#), youth in partner countries can but do not need to go through recognised organisations, while those in non-partner countries (where possible) must apply using a recognised organisation.

56 Author interview with organisation in the youth mobility industry.

57 Costa, D., *Guestworker diplomacy; author interview with representative of Economic Policy Institute, US*.

58 Vosko, L. F., 'Through the back-door.'

59 Costa, D., *Guestworker diplomacy*.

60 Coderre, M. and Nakache, D., 'From Working Tourists to Permanent Residents,' 974; Vosko, L. F. (2023), 'Through the back-door,' 95.

61 Coderre and Nakache, 980; author interview with representative of Economic Policy Institute, US.

considerably higher rate than employers reported on their payroll).⁶² Here, the broader migration policy landscape is relevant to understanding the actual utilisation of working holiday schemes. A study for the European Parliament notes that “Without proper labour migration schemes, schemes intended for cultural exchange are, in all likelihood, open for misuse, as has been the case with au pairing.”⁶³ This tension between cultural and labour elements has been the source of considerable criticism related to existing working holiday programmes.



There is a risk of poor labour and living conditions that necessitate an appropriate degree of regulation, oversight, and protections. Another significant area of criticism is the poor working and living conditions that some youth face. In Australia, surveys indicate that working holiday makers and students are more likely to be underpaid than temporary skilled migrants. Exploitation of working holiday makers goes beyond underpayment, with reports of unsafe housing, false job offers, and intimidation – including confiscation of passports.⁶⁴ In addition, directing working holiday makers to engage in the horticulture sector, particularly in rural or remote Australia, also amplifies challenges to seeking assistance in cases of exploitation.⁶⁵

While participating youth often have a positive experience with working holidays, when things go wrong, they tend to go very wrong.⁶⁶ In addition to potentially serious consequences for the youth affected, this can generate bad press about the programme and could even undermine the country’s reputation. Conversely, adding more protections can make all parties involved more comfortable, including parents.⁶⁷ Some interviewees stressed that programmes through which youth can work should have more stringent requirements put in place – on par with other temporary labour migration channels – to provide proper protections for incoming workers.⁶⁸ Other potential protections include ensuring that information is clear, up-to-date, and accessible; conducting exit interviews with participants; establishing a complaint mechanism; and other activities to monitor experiences and prevent scams and exploitation.⁶⁹ For hosting countries, a positive experience is fundamental not just to programme reputation but also for related talent attraction, diplomacy, or other goals of mobility schemes.



More robust data collection is needed to determine the impact of working holiday programmes. Because youth mobility schemes are often seen as connected to tourism, they typically receive less political scrutiny, limiting the amount of information available about these programmes.⁷⁰ This includes critical information on how schemes function in practice – in other words, how they foster cultural exchange, skills development, or other purported

- 62 Coderre, M. and Nakache, D., ‘From Working Tourists to Permanent Residents,’ IRCC, *Evaluation of the International Experience Canada Program*, 24.
- 63 De Lange, T. et al. (2022), *The EU legal migration package: Towards a rights-based approach to attracting skills and talent to the EU*, Brussels: European Parliament, 80.
- 64 Coates, B., Wiltshire, T., and Reysenbach, T., ‘Short-changed.’
- 65 Law Council of Australia, ‘[Unlawful underpayment of employees’ remuneration](#),’ submission to the Senate Economics References Committee, 28 October 2019, 10-11.
- 66 Author interview with representative of OU Law, University of Oklahoma, US.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Ibid.; De Lange, T. et al., *The EU legal migration package*, 79.
- 70 Coderre, M. and Nakache, D., ‘From Working Tourists to Permanent Residents,’ 973.

goals. More information is required concerning the profiles of current participants as well as the effects on local labour markets and various industries in which they are engaged: Are youth finding work? What types of roles do they take up? Are national workers being displaced?⁷¹ A study of the US J-1 Exchange Visitor Program (which includes the Summer Work Travel Program) found that the Program can have negative repercussions for US workers and other international temporary workers by, for instance, bypassing local workers and applying downward pressure on local wages,⁷² but data collection and transparency about programme outcomes remain a challenge to gaining an accurate picture.⁷³ More research is also needed on the operation and impact of youth mobility schemes in EU Member States to enable policymakers and other actors to better understand the impact of these programmes, whether they achieve their stated aims, and how they might be strengthened.

Notably, the Government of Canada has conducted an evaluation of its IEC programme, covering the fiscal year 2013-14 to the fiscal year 2017-18. While the evaluation explores various aspects of programme outcomes and alignment with government priorities, it notes that more information is needed on labour market impact.⁷⁴ What is known is that youth working under short-term mobility schemes often work in lower skilled positions and earn less than other temporary migrants, which may be because they are working to support their travel.⁷⁵ Meanwhile, a study of Youth Mobility Scheme participants in London found that language, race, gender, and nationality influenced the employment experiences of youth,⁷⁶ demonstrating that data disaggregation should also be a part of data collection and monitoring efforts.



Cultural aspects typically receive less attention. Work is a central element for many participants, even if it was not their original intention. A look at the experiences of New Zealanders in the UK found that while many intended to take maximum advantage of cultural opportunities during their working holiday, in reality some spent little time socialising outside of their ethnic community.⁷⁷ Some South Korean participants in Canada noted that their international experience was not as helpful in building their CV as they had anticipated because they worked long hours that made language learning difficult, or because they were not able to secure their preferred work placement and ended up working in an immigrant-owned small business rather than an international company.⁷⁸

In many cases, participants could benefit from more robust cultural enrichment or language learning opportunities. Potential actions might include ensuring employment in a mixed workforce (i.e., beyond working holiday participants); placing a cap on the number of hours that can be worked to ensure sufficient free time; encouraging employer-led museum

71 Author interview with representatives of IRCC.

72 Costa, D., *Guestworker diplomacy*, 2.

73 Author interview with representative of Economic Policy Institute, US.

74 IRCC, Evaluation of the International Experience Canada Program.

75 Coderre, M. and Nakache, D., 'From Working Tourists to Permanent Residents,' 974.

76 Oommen, E.T. (2019), 'Privilege and youth migration: polarised employment patterns of youth mobility workers in London,' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 47(5): 1119-1135.

77 Wilson, J., Fisher, D., and Moore, K., 'The OE goes 'home.'

78 Yoon, K., 'Transnational youth mobility in the neoliberal economy of experience.'

trips or other cultural activities; offering free or low-cost language training; and providing information about social and cultural activities and discounts.⁷⁹



There is frequently a disconnect between working holiday programmes and talent attraction. Generally speaking, working holiday agreements appear to be negotiated for diplomatic reasons,⁸⁰ via agreements related to trade, investment, or culture, for instance,⁸¹ rather than to meet immediate labour needs or for alignment with a national migration or talent strategy to address longer term needs. Where initial mobility leads to longer term talent attraction, it tends to happen spontaneously.⁸² This is in sharp contrast with conventional temporary labour migration schemes, which are typically driven by or connected to labour shortages. Reflecting this, there is often limited data available globally on the labour market participation and impact of working holiday visa holders, even if, as illustrated, work is a key element in practice for many participating youths. It is also often difficult to gain an accurate picture of how many youth have transitioned to a longer term migration status or have even become permanent residents.⁸³

Although participants are technically able to transition to another immigration status (while in the country or after leaving), working holiday programmes generally do not provide a clear pathway to long-term settlement. In some cases, points-based immigration systems mean that the language or work experience gained during a working holiday can give youth a leg up when they apply for a longer term channel. However, *skilled* work experience is usually required, and the temporary nature of working holiday schemes (especially where youth are restricted to working a certain number of months per employer) means that the majority work in lower skilled occupations that may not grant them the requisite points needed to obtain a visa for an extended stay.⁸⁴ Even when a status change is possible, the process can be difficult to navigate.⁸⁵ Despite these challenges, participants are perceived as ahead of the game when it comes to settling in. They gain experience living and working in the country of destination and a certain degree of local language proficiency.⁸⁶ Emotional connections, networks, and language exposure obtained through short-term mobility schemes can thus support Member State talent attraction and retention efforts.⁸⁷

Beyond policy, the design of temporary mobility schemes can also support talent attraction. After surveying working holiday participants in China, researchers recommended the creation of goal-related work elements (e.g., a performance-based certificate or bonus; jobs that tourists would not be able to experience) and cultural events (e.g., festivals and performances), while noting that meaningful activities like cultural experiences might be more important to

79 Author interview with representative of Economic Policy Institute, US; author interview with organisation in the youth mobility industry.

80 ECPDM.

81 Coderre, M. and Nakache, D., 'From Working Tourists to Permanent Residents,' 972.

82 Author interview with representative of Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Ireland.

83 See for example the US case: Costa, D., *Guestworker diplomacy*, 9.

84 Vosko, L. F., 'Through the back-door,' 104.

85 Author interview with representative of Go International, Canada.

86 Author interview with representatives of IRCC.

87 Author interview with representative of Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Ireland.

participants than economic activities in generating destination loyalty.⁸⁸ This suggests that schemes might be implemented in ways that build a meaningful connection with participants that makes them want to stay longer or return in the future.



Access to working holiday schemes remains limited. Since working holiday programmes generally come about via bilateral agreements, they are typically limited to youth in certain countries of origin. Within this group of eligible countries, youth who are nationals of particular (higher income) countries may receive preferential treatment such as a wider eligible age range or repeat participation. Meanwhile, the US Work and Travel Program, although not restricted to certain nationalities, is limited to university students. While this is meant to reduce the occurrence of visa overstays, it also ends up limiting participation to youth of a certain socioeconomic status.⁸⁹ Overall, while the ability to work does allow for access to a wider group of participants,⁹⁰ participation in youth mobility schemes is considerably influenced by socioeconomic status, especially if scholarships or stipends are not available.⁹¹ Many working holiday programmes require proof of sufficient funds to support stay in the working holiday country and return to the origin country. In addition, the need to purchase a flight and perhaps pay a sponsor fee mean that the cost of participation is relatively high, especially considering that the majority of jobs taken up are not highly paid.



There is considerable interest in working holiday and other youth mobility schemes among youth and employers. Working holiday programmes have grown globally, in terms of both the number of countries and number of youth participating. The largest working holiday schemes are all in Anglophone countries, and indeed, the ability to use, practice, and refine foreign language skills, especially English, can serve as a motivation for potential participants. This points to particular opportunities for certain EU Member States, such as Ireland and Malta, and for industries where English is commonly spoken, like IT. Additionally, a multi-country scheme in EU Member States could spur further youth interest in coming to the EU and choosing Europe over the more common and established working holiday destinations by enabling them to undertake a working holiday in more than one Member State. Arrangements (for work, housing, etc.) would need to be made in each EU country, which may be both challenging for participants⁹² and represent an opportunity for service providers.

Interviewees mentioned interest from youth in countries not part of current working holiday schemes (outside of the EU),⁹³ as well as interest in internship schemes in the EU.⁹⁴ There is also growing interest among private sector stakeholders, who view people who have studied in the area and have potentially taken language courses favourably, seeing them as more likely to stay than the typical international candidate.⁹⁵ With regard to youth mobility for

88 Meng, B. and Han, H., 'Determinants of working holiday makers' destination loyalty.'

89 Author interview with representative of OU Law, University of Oklahoma, US.

90 Author interview with representatives of IRCC.

91 Author interview with representative of International Cultural Youth Exchange, Germany; Haldimann, L., et al., 'Temporary youth mobility,' 2, 3.

92 Author interview with representatives of World Youth Student and Educational Travel Confederation, The Netherlands.

93 Author interview with representative of Go International, Canada.

94 Author interview with organisation in the youth mobility industry.

95 Author interview with representatives of Fragomen.

work, traineeships have become particularly important, and some multinational companies encourage mobility across different companies within the same group as a way to learn about the company and gain work experience.⁹⁶

Insights from other youth mobility schemes

Insights from other youth mobility programmes provide food for thought for those considering expanding a youth mobility scheme. Relevant takeaways include:

- A survey of international Cultural Youth Exchange alumni who participated in an exchange or volunteer year reported heightened intercultural sensitivity, expanded worldviews, and personal growth, which influenced career paths. In contrast to short-term, tourism-focused volunteering, longer term volunteering has greater potential to foster in-depth understanding of other countries and develop competencies such as communication and problem-solving.⁹⁷
- International internships can offer valuable international experience and exposure to other cultures, yet traveling alone does not automatically increase cultural competence; purpose and intention play an important role. A study of US university students participating in an international internship programme found that the degree of cultural intelligence gained from this mobility was influenced by the design and implementation of the curriculum.⁹⁸ This underscores the importance of thoughtfully designing a scheme in order to maximise its benefits.
- A small narrative research study of university students who participated in an international internship found that certain elements increased their growth and cross-cultural adaptation: the student's preparation and personal capacity; a good volume of work that was challenging and satisfying; a mentor or work supervisor who was engaged; a sense of camaraderie and security in their accommodation; and a local cultural guide (colleague, supervisor, community member, etc.).⁹⁹ This again indicates the importance of ensuring careful design and implementation.
- According to a 2016 OECD working paper, studying abroad increases the likelihood of later working outside the origin country, although the chances vary depending on the research study, the graduates' field of study, and other factors.¹⁰⁰ Given that study abroad influences perspectives for international careers, trajectories should be further explored with regard to working holiday and other types of youth mobility.

96 Author interview with representatives of Fragomen.

97 Author interview with representative of International Cultural Youth Exchange, Germany; International Cultural Youth Exchange (2021), *Former Exchangee Survey*, Berlin: ICYE.

98 Snodgrass, L.L., Hass, M., and Ghahremani, M. (2021), 'Developing cultural intelligence: Experiential interactions in an international internship program,' *Journal of Global Education and Research* 5(2): 165-174.

99 Jensen, K.D. (2022), 'Key Components Contributing to Student Development and Cross-Cultural Adaptation During an International Internship,' *Educational Research: Theory and Practice* 33(1): 22-28.

100 Weisser, R. (2016), *Internationally mobile students and their post-graduation migratory: An analysis of determinants of student mobility and retention rates in the EU*, OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers No. 186, Paris: OECD Publishing, 29-30.

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX: OPTIONS FOR TAPPING INTO THE POTENTIAL OF YOUTH MOBILITY

Making youth mobility schemes in EU countries accessible to a wider geographic range of youth – and (future) skilled workers – can support various Member State priorities and can be designed in line with these goals. Potential goals include meeting short-term labour needs, supporting long-term talent attraction efforts, fostering development in origin countries, facilitating cultural exchanges, and strengthening ties with partner countries. Thinking creatively about what such schemes might achieve offers insights into what types of approaches Member States might adopt.



An internship or traineeship scheme. Practical experience can enable youth to get a head start on their career by applying their studies to the world of work. Youth could travel to an EU Member State with the purpose of participating in a pre-arranged internship or apprenticeship in their field of study. This could be tied to talent attraction efforts if a possibility to transition to a long-term pathway is offered. In this case, the internship/traineeship serves as a trial period for both the intern/trainee and the employer. It also enables the intern/trainee to learn about the country, culture, and language, and see if they might want to start their career there. Here, formally incorporating a cultural element into the scheme would be beneficial. If the intern/trainee cannot stay for a longer time, or does not wish to do so, they would return home having further developed their skills for the local labour market or elsewhere. Such a scheme might be aimed at current students or recent graduates and target specific sectors, such as the fields of IT, biotech, engineering, and the green transition, to align with needs in the country of origin or destination. Internships and apprenticeships that are appropriately designed and compensated, with vetted employers, can help ensure quality.



A language learning scheme paired with work opportunities. In many cases, strengthening foreign language skills can unlock better work opportunities and strengthen cultural connections. Such a scheme might have a heavier focus on work, with basic or job-related language learning part-time, or place a heavier focus on language training, with the possibility for full- or part-time work. Including a structured language element makes it easier to provide robust cultural offerings, as language learning institutions in many cases already provide such cultural enrichment activities to their students. Studying the language in country could make it easier for youth to find a job in their field of study while in the country and to subsequently settle in (migration rules permitting), and might be aligned with national talent attraction ambitions. This language-and-work approach could target current tertiary students and/or recent graduates in particular fields and offer an open work permit or require an employer-specific work permit with a vetted employer.



A foreign language teaching assistant exchange programme. Learning another language not only makes communication easier, it also provides valuable cultural insights. Youth who are native speakers can play an important role in supporting the foreign language learning

of EU students and the internationalisation of education in EU Member States. For some, teaching assistant exchange programmes provide valuable experience towards a career in education; more broadly, they can provide a paid opportunity to live in another country while interacting with local residents. Such initiatives enable sustained, two-way cultural exchange over the course of the academic year between the teaching assistants, students, and school staff. This can enrich language learning in Member State school systems, for instance in commonly taught major world languages such as English, French, and Spanish, where youth from North America, North Africa, and South America, for instance, could come and work in EU schools. In cases where teaching assistants only work a small number of hours per week, the ability to have a second part-time job would help more youth to afford their stay and travel.



A multi-country (remote) working holiday programme. One of the key factors attracting people to live and work in the EU is the ability to travel widely, and visa-free, within the Schengen area. A multi-country scheme could provide the opportunity for youth to work and travel in more than one Member State, for instance in an EU region (e.g., Baltic countries, the Iberian Peninsula, Scandinavia, etc.). EU Member States already tend to have bilateral agreements with a similar pool of partner countries and this could make it easier to facilitate intra-EU cooperation.¹⁰¹ Such a scheme might also include the possibility to work remotely to cover the costs of the stay in one or more of these countries. In this case, such a programme may be most appropriate in countries that already have a digital nomad policy in place, but could also serve as a way to test a digital nomad scheme on a smaller scale. Such schemes have become an increasingly popular way to enable the mobility of remote workers who arrive with a job rather than finding one in the local labour market. Fostering exposure to the local culture is more difficult in the context of remote work, meaning that structured cultural activities and language course offerings become more important. Flexibility with regard to earnings requirements might also be considered, to boost access for young people with fewer years of experience in the labour market. This scheme could also tap into established meet-up groups, co-working spaces, and group accommodation that serve digital nomads, as well as programmes serving youth travellers. This type of scheme could target youth more broadly, e.g., those up to 30 or 35 years of age.



Expanding traditional working holiday programmes. Expanding traditional Member State working holiday programmes, currently limited in scale, presents another opportunity to expand youth mobility. When it comes to working holiday schemes, clarifying programme goals, particularly finding the appropriate balance between work and travel/cultural objectives, is crucial. Given that such programmes place international exchange at their centre, emphasising cultural elements and ensuring that programmes offer sufficient information on cultural opportunities, perhaps even direct cultural programming (where possible), is key. In addition, ensuring that worker protections are embedded in working holiday schemes is critical for ensuring appropriate working conditions and thus helping address criticism related to work quality. Another way to enhance work quality could be exploring ways to encourage placements in higher-skilled and better-paying jobs. Because participants may secure longer

¹⁰¹ Author interview with representatives of Fragomen.

term employment during their working holiday, whether for their current employer or a new one, and because working holidays can provide a chance to conduct in-country recruitment, facilitating a (smooth) transition to longer term migration pathways could align well with talent strategies.

Given that accessibility and socioeconomic barriers limit participation, a novel approach might involve expanding youth mobility schemes to a more diverse array of countries or target groups (e.g., vocational students) and exploring financial support options like scholarships or loans to make such a scheme accessible to a broader group of youth globally.¹⁰² This inclusive approach promotes wider accessibility and extends benefits to a broader range of young individuals, but it requires a more structured and resource-intensive scheme.

Expanding youth mobility schemes

In an expanded scheme, youth may be targeted geographically (if desired) by, for instance:

- Aligning with national priority countries or EU Talent Partnership countries to enhance skills on the local labour market as well as prepare another potential mobility
- Supporting development goals with partner countries by unlocking work and study opportunities
- Increasing youth mobility from EU candidate countries to strengthen intra-regional exchanges
- Expanding to visa liberalisation countries to increase international cooperation
- Supporting reconstruction efforts in post-conflict contexts
- Engaging members of the diaspora, including those who are several generations removed in the Americas and Australasia

Alternately, schemes could be open to all youth of any nationality, subject to their status as:

- A current tertiary education student
- A recent graduate
- Belonging to a particular age range

For Member States looking to test a new or expanded approach to youth mobility through any of these channels, pilots (such as the [labour mobility pilots funded by the European Commission through the MPF](#)) represent one strategy,¹⁰³ paired with a legal instrument to facilitate admission. While many existing schemes are regulated via bilateral agreements, a multilateral agreement remains another possibility, whether EU-wide or among a subset of Member States.

The question remains to what extent current EU or national legal frameworks (pathways) would potentially allow for the expansion of any of the abovementioned programmes. For example, the EU Seasonal Work Directive provides a potential regulatory framework for work-focused schemes, particularly in sectors like tourism and hospitality. It offers advantages such as a clear regulatory structure, faster processing times, and the protection of workers' rights. However, challenges include

¹⁰²Feedback from session at the Labour Mobility Practitioners' Network annual meeting in November 2023, Brussels; author interview with representative of International Cultural Youth Exchange, Germany.

¹⁰³ICMPD (2022), *Student working holidays as a step towards youth mobility*, Vienna: ICMPD.

a limited stay duration, sector-focused limitations, limited Member State collection of data on education and skill levels, and the fact that some Member States exclude crucial sectors for working youth like tourism and hospitality, instead focusing on agriculture and forestry. These jobs are often low-paid and may not align with the type of work that youth are seeking.¹⁰⁴ Ensuring a robust cultural element might also pose a challenge, since the main focus of the Directive is employment. Another example is the EU Students and Researchers Directive, which defines conditions of entry to the EU and for residence for the purpose of study, training, voluntary service, and au pairing. This Directive might provide an opportunity for adding a unified legal framework for certain third-country nationals arriving in the EU.¹⁰⁵ However, it does not regulate admission or residence for employment purposes (beyond the employment of students attending tertiary education institutions in the EU), which might be problematic depending on the scheme in question and would need to be addressed. Erasmus+ can potentially be used to bring non-EU youth to Europe for a range of activities, including youth exchange visits and adult education; however, a 25 per cent global cap on non-partner country participation could be a hindrance to further expansion. While less commonly used by non-EU youth, the European Solidarity Corps also presents a potential avenue for expanding mobility. Here, support could be increased for non-EU volunteers and their hosts to increase uptake, and internships and traineeships could be reintroduced. For both Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, additional funding, capacity building in sending countries, and expanding outreach beyond the usual suspects could boost applications from individuals outside the EU.¹⁰⁶

At the national level, existing temporary labour migration schemes, intern/trainee channels, and student visas (D visas) might be appropriate frameworks for an expansion, depending on the nature of the new/expanded scheme. However, cumbersome admission regulations and long processing times could pose challenges to the smooth implementation of these programmes, especially as they are shorter in duration. They could leave youth unable to take up a job or internship offer, make employers more hesitant to recruit from this group, or leave youth with a less than positive first impression of the country, thus potentially hindering international talent attraction and retention.

Clearly, the policy instrument selected should depend on the nature of the youth mobility scheme adopted. To what extent existing EU or Member State frameworks can be used is an area for further exploration. Notably, while the options presented all include an element of work, the intensity and type of work varies considerably; therefore, different legal instruments may be appropriate for different youth mobility schemes. Where work is allowed, proper protections should be put in place. Illustrating this point, a study for the European Parliament noted in its literature review that working holiday or youth mobility schemes should not be considered as substitutes for labour migration schemes for states seeking to attract migrant workers.¹⁰⁷

104 European Migration Network (2020), *Attracting and protecting the rights of seasonal workers in the EU and the United Kingdom – Synthesis Report*, Brussels: European Migration Network.

105 De Lange, T. et al., *The EU legal migration package*.

106 Author interview with representative of RAY Research Network; author interview with representative of Youth@Work.

107 De Lange, T. et al., *The EU legal migration package*, 76.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Youth mobility programmes can play a valuable role in offering young individuals opportunities for international exposure, cultural exchange, and personal growth. These programmes can contribute to addressing both immediate and potential long-term labour needs in the destination country; support the professional development of young people; and contribute to international development or diplomacy goals. Navigating the tensions between multiple goals can be difficult and requires sufficient clarity in design and communication as well as robust evaluation. Whether any of these benefits are fully realised, however, depends considerably on how the scheme is designed, implemented, and evaluated. In addition, whether the potential of youth mobility is more fully tapped depends on how many youth are able to take part in such programmes.

As youth mobility schemes gain prominence across the globe, questions arise about distinctions among youth workers, including issues of privileged mobility, precarious migration, and immobility; the balance between work and travel; low-skill and high-skill employment (and compensation); temporary and permanent migration;¹⁰⁸ and students and workers. At the same time, the growing trends of remote work and digital nomadism increasingly blur traditional boundaries between tourism and work and raise new questions for migration policies. Furthermore, the concept of ‘talent’, traditionally tied to highly educated professionals, has evolved to also encompass international university and vocational students.¹⁰⁹ All of these should be considered in expanded Member State programmes.

This paper has presented a menu of options for expanding youth mobility and laid out the potential benefits of doing so. Its objective was not to assess feasibility but to explore the possibilities. Implementation of one or more of the ideas presented here could well begin with national-level feasibility studies that consider the relevant current legal instruments for admission/stay as well as migration initiatives, to see where youth mobility could be included, as well as the testing of new ideas via a pilot project (see Annex 1 for a list of related considerations).

108 Coderre, M. and Nakache, D., ‘From Working Tourists to Permanent Residents.’

109 Katsiaficas, C. and Frelak, J.S. (2021), *How can Lithuania harness international talent to drive growth?*, Vienna: ICMPD.

ANNEX 1

CHECKLIST: KEY ELEMENTS OF PROGRAMME DESIGN

This checklist highlights some key considerations when expanding current or implementing new youth mobility schemes. These questions are meant to be answered by those contemplating or designing a programme.

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-  **What goals?** What does this scheme want to achieve for participating youth, employers, education institutions, economies, governments, and other stakeholders? Is it aimed primarily at building ties with governments and with people; meeting short- or long-term labour needs in the destination country; fostering growth and innovation in origin countries; or another goal? What are the secondary objectives? 
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-  **For whom?** Which countries of origin are targeted, or can youth from any country participate? Is the scheme restricted to current students, recent graduates, and/or a certain age range? Are certain language skills or fields of study/work required? Are there any measures to boost equitable access among eligible participants (e.g., loans, scholarships, free health insurance)? Which employers or study institutions are able to participate? 
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-  **How many participants?** Is there an overall ceiling? Are there country-specific caps on the number of participating youth? If not, is the number of participants open, or tied to demand? 
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-  **For how long?** How many months can participants remain in the country? Is their stay restricted to a certain time of year (e.g., university vacation, certain seasons)? Can they work/train/study this entire time, or for just a portion? Can they extend their stay, and if yes, under what conditions? 
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-  **Under which legal pathway?** What migration channel will be used? What requirements must be met by youth, employers, and study institutions? 
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-  **How is the programme administered?** What agency is in the lead and what other agencies take part (e.g., education, labour, migration, tourism, foreign affairs, development ministries/agencies)? What is the role of employers, education providers, and NGOs in origin and destination countries? Is the stay fully structured, fully self-organised, or somewhere in between? Is a sponsor required, and if so, what is its role and accountability? Is collaboration with other EU Member States desired? 
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What working permissions and restrictions? Is the work permit tied to an employer, or open? Is a job required prior to departure, or can it be found after arriving? Are employers vetted by the programme? Is there a limit on the number of hours worked per week, or the number of months worked for each employer? Is work permission tied to any study requirements? What worker protections will be in place?



What cultural opportunities? Will cultural enrichment activities and/or language courses be offered directly through the programme, or will these be accessed independently? If they are meant to be accessed independently, what will be done to encourage uptake?



Any skills development opportunities? What language and vocational training is available to participants? Is this provided through the programme or available for autonomous access? Are internships or traineeships paid or unpaid?



What data collection and monitoring? What data will be collected about participating people and organisations? How will the programme be monitored and evaluated, including to provide oversight of the programme and wellbeing of participants, as well as to measure the impact on local economies?



What longer term prospects? Can youth participate more than once, and if yes, under what conditions? Can employers rehire, and if yes, under what conditions? Is there any possibility to transition directly or in the future into a longer term migration channel, including one that provides for permanent residency, or to receive preference under existing labour migration schemes (e.g., in a points-based system)? Would the applicant need to leave the country, or can they apply while already there?

