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«COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE VIEWS OF EUROPEAN COMPANIES  
ON THE RECOGNITION OF THE BENEFITS OF TRANSNATIONAL MOBILITY»

# THE RENEWAL OF TRANSNATIONAL Mobility



2



A new opportunity for people  
looking to enter the labour  
market and for businesses

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# SUMMARY

<b>FOREWORD</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>CONTEXT OF THE STUDY</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK</b>	<b>13</b>
1. Theoretical references	13
2. Organisation of the survey	16
3. Countries survey	22
<b>COMPANIES PORTRAIT</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>OVERVIEW OF THE INTERVIEWEES</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>«HARD SKILLS», INTERCULTURAL SKILLS, «SOFT SKILLS» AND MOBILITY</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHICAL RESOURCES</b>	<b>56</b>
Bibliography	56
Sitography	62
<b>INDEX OF GRAPH AND TABLES</b>	<b>63</b>



# FOREWORD

*Today, recognised as an accelerator of integration into working life, the experience of professional mobility is an asset for the employability of the beneficiaries and constitutes a «detour» engaged by more and more young people and adult job seekers.*

*Often motivated initially by the acquisition of language skills, this mobility takes another dimension on returning home: over and above a reinforcement of professional skills, what have I learned about myself during my stay abroad? Confronted with a new professional environment, with different «codes», have I been able to show enough initiative? Have I adapted more quickly than in an identical situation in my own country? How can I express my achievements and capitalise upon them in job interviews?*

*Are the recruiters interested in these «non-formal» aspects? Are the skills acquired through a mobility experience those expected by employers?*

*All the questions raised by the RMT project, «The Renewal of Transnational Mobility, a new opportunity for people in integration and businesses». A strategic partnership that places the company at the heart of mobility pathways. Often absent from impact studies, the company is the key stakeholder targeted by all candidates in professional transition who decide to carry out a work-based placement abroad.*

*Two of the main objectives of the Erasmus + RMT project are to understand the perception of and the added value that companies attribute to periods of mobility and to change the practices for the capitalisation of prior learning.*

*The report «Cross-checking of European enterprises on the recognition of the achievements of international mobility» is one of the two research projects carried out within the partnership. It presents the results of a survey carried out in Germany, Spain, Italy, France and the United Kingdom, which invited 170 professionals in charge of recruitment to express their views on the impact of mobility experiences on the employability of beneficiaries both in terms of skills and professionalisation of the participants.*

*Together with the results of the research «Compendium of European Good Practice for Tools designed for Mobility», the report has contributed to the design of a methodological guide to vocational transnational mobility, the final objective of the Erasmus + RMT strategic partnership.*

# CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Today, many national and European studies highlight the role and importance of cross-curricular competencies in the current economic context. The conclusions are unanimous: business, technical and sectoral skills have a low level of transferability, whereas generic personal and professional skills possess a high level of transferability between sectors and occupations and thus promote employability. These studies also show that «there is a link between the transferability of skills and the risk of losing a job or not finding one [...] and that people with a multitude of skills have been less exposed to the risk of unemployment during the economic crisis »<sup>1</sup>.

Other contributions confirm these results and show how the recruitment modalities have evolved in recent years by adapting to the needs of the market: «soft skills» oriented towards human interactions and requiring emotional intelligence, are increasingly valued in the selection process, whereas those relating to theoretical, technical knowledge, diplomas, such as «hard skills» are no longer the exclusive recruitment practices »<sup>2</sup>.

Among the different «places» for the development of transversal competences, it has been demonstrated that transnational mobility programmes represent privileged contexts for deploying these capacities. Thus, according to the study «Hidden competences»<sup>3</sup>: «Autonomy, adaptability, creativity, ability to work in a team, self-confidence, serenity, determination and vivacity ...» are cited as skills directly related to employability alongside professional, intercultural and linguistic skills. The survey also stresses that «companies that want to remain competitive in a globalised and constantly evolving economic context must take into account so-called international skills particularly developed during a mobility experience in their recruitment process».

<sup>1</sup>RPIC-ViP. Transférabilité de compétences entre secteurs économiques : rôle et importance pour l'emploi au niveau européen. Luxembourg : Office des publications de l'Union européenne. 2011, ISBN 978-92-79-20947-5.

<sup>2</sup>SECRETAN-KLAYE Aurélie. L'importance des « softs skills ». ForumMagazine, N° 5. Consulté en juin 2016

Professional recognition of cross-curricular competencies resulting from periods of mobility has thereby also become a feature of the labour market: job vacancies that increasingly require these skills and include «An internship experience abroad would be a plus» are more and more common.

However, while the added value of cross-curricular competencies in terms of professionalization is now accepted, the formal link between the experiences abroad and the resulting increase in employability have not yet been fully explored.

Assessing the degree of transferability, capitalisation and evaluation of transversal skills remains complex and vary according to the profile and the context. Indeed, by their nature «They are applicable in a large number of situations, including new ones. Cross-curricular competencies thus have all the general attributes of competence but have the additional characteristic of not being mobilised in circumscribed and limited contexts. Thus, they are potentially transferable. It is therefore the task of identifying the new situation - in our case the intended job - and the transfer activity - the mobility experience abroad - that make it an effective competence »<sup>4</sup>.

What are the key points to make these competencies clear to employers? Do social, intercultural, transversal skills acquired during periods of mobility constitute genuine criteria for assessment as part of a recruitment process in the same way as proficiency in a foreign language? How are they addressed? How do recruiters succeed in making the link between the transferability of cross-curricular competencies gained abroad in a given professional context? How can candidates contribute to making this process clearer to potential employers?

<sup>3</sup>CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY. Hidden competences. Faktaa. Avril 2013

<sup>4</sup>TILMAN Francis, Définir les compétences transversales pour les enseigner. «Compétences transversales» et «compétences transférables» : des compétences qui facilitent les mobilités professionnelles. Note d'analyse n° 219, Centre d'Analyse Stratégique, avril 2011 [www.strategie.gouv.fr/system/files/2011-04-22\\_-na-competences-219.pdf](http://www.strategie.gouv.fr/system/files/2011-04-22_-na-competences-219.pdf).

By conducting this study, we wanted to find answers to these questions that are intrinsically linked to the theme of valorisation and recognition of the achievements of internships abroad.

# METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

## I. Theoretical references

After reading different points of view concerning intercultural competences, we chose to base our study on the research carried out by Spitzberg and Changnon (2009), evoked by Martyn Barret (2012). Indeed, the authors reviewed the available literature on the subject, which enabled them to list the essential components of these specific skills. Having reached consensus among academic researchers and international administrators, these definitions provided an interesting starting point for part of our questionnaire. Indeed, without being exhaustive, this list makes it possible to approach the concept of intercultural competence, under its various components - attitudes, capacities, knowledge and types of behaviour - while taking into account the relationships between them:

**Attitudes:** Respect for other cultures, curiosity for other cultures, desire to learn about other cultures, openness to people from other cultures, ability to suspend judgment, ability to tolerate ambiguity and appreciate cultural diversity.

**Abilities:** Capacity to listen to people from other cultures, ability to interact with people from other cultures, ability to adapt to other cultural, sociolinguistic and communicative environments, .... Ability to mediate intercultural exchanges, empathy, multi-perspectivity, cognitive flexibility, ability to critically evaluate cultural perspectives, practices and products, including in one's own culture.

**Knowledge:** Awareness of cultural belonging, awareness of communication, especially of different linguistic conventions and communication in different cultures, knowledge specific to culture, in particular knowledge of the points of view, practices and products of cultural groups, general knowledge of culture, in particular knowledge of the processes of interaction between cultures, societies and individuals.

**Behaviour:** Behaving and communicating both effectively and correctly during intercultural encounters, flexibility in cultural behaviour, flexibility in communicative behaviour, and being action-oriented, that is, being disposed to play an active role in society to promote the common good, in particular through the reduction of prejudice, discrimination and conflict»<sup>5</sup>.

However, although transversal by nature, the notion of intercultural competence could not provide answers our questions, on its own. Indeed, while cross-cultural skills seem to be relatively identifiable by recruiters, it was found during via a «hidden competencies» survey that recruiters had difficulty expressing clearly the added value of international mobility. On the other hand, the study shows that recruiters have a tendency to link the added value of international mobility to «hidden skills», which are more akin to the definition of soft skills.

Thus, apart from technical and intercultural skills (linguistics, cultural knowledge ...), we decided to pay particular attention to the development of soft skills. As the available literature on this concept is very broad, we have favoured studies on their analysis and definition in relation to the professional context and recruitment processes in the context of our research. In this sense, we rely on Sharma's conclusions that define «soft skills» as «skills that refer to the ability to communicate and interact with other employees, and include communication skills, interpersonal skills, time management, teamwork and cooperation, as well as the ability to motivate subordinates, conflict management and leadership»<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup>BARRET Martyn. « The components of intercultural competence » in: Developing intercultural competence through education. Pestalozzi Séries No. 3. Conseil d'Europe, Strasbourg. Référence ISBN 978-92-871-7745-2. www.book.coe.int.

<sup>6</sup>SHARMA Meenakshi. « How Important Are Soft Skills from the Recruiter's Perspective » in : CFAI Journal of Soft Skills. Jun 2009, Vol. 3 Issue 2, p 19-28.

The definition of cross-curricular competencies related to the professional context, that is to say the generic competences that can be mobilised across a range of professional situations, also refers, on the one hand, to the contributions of the European Commission who have stated that «competency lies in the choice, the use and the combination of resources in order to behave appropriately in a particular context»<sup>7</sup>, and, on the other hand, to the work of 'France Strategy' who separate transversal competencies into two categories: those which are not dependent on a particular professional context but nevertheless indispensable for the exercise of a large number of trades and «skills that correspond to behavioural, organisational or cognitive abilities or general knowledge common to trades or situations Vocational training»<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>7</sup>Commission européenne. Description des compétences transversales et personnelles nécessaires pour l'emploi, Young Employment System for Mobility in Europe, Mai 2012.

<sup>8</sup>Centre d'analyse stratégique, «Compétences transversales» et «compétences transférables» : des compétences qui facilitent les mobilités professionnelles, Note d'analyse 219, Avril 2011.



## 2. Organisation of the survey

The survey took place from June 2015 to July 2016 and was divided into four main phases.

### Phase 1 - Construction of the questionnaire and definition of samples

A first draft was first proposed by the Nanterre Centre for Employment and Training and then discussed in the Steering Committee of the «Erasmus + RMT» project, composed up of representatives of the two other partners from Ile-de-France, the Ile De-France Regional council and the European Research and Training Institute (IERF).

Two main questions contributed to the definition of our starting hypothesis:

- Beyond cross-cultural skills and «hard skills», do experiences abroad contribute to the development of these «soft skills» increasingly sought after in the European labour market?
- In the context of selecting a candidate, do recruiters recognise a link between these soft skills and experience abroad?

In order to reduce the potential difficulties of respondents in clearly articulating the specific criteria that add value to international experience and allow them to add any other relevant advice from their experience, the original proposal provided for closed questions (yes / no), punctuated with open questions on the following three lines of analysis:

- 1 Taking into account intercultural competences and «hard skills» in order to identify, on the one hand, the criteria on which respondents rely to select a candidate and how they take into account intercultural competencies and «hard skills». On the other hand, during the processing of data, to identify the link between soft skills and intercultural skills.
- 2 The role of soft skills in recruitment in general (with or without international mobility) in order to understand the level of importance given to soft skills by the employers who took part in the survey, in the context of recruitment in general. Subsequently, depending on the importance given to soft skills in the selection of a candidate, and if the results show that international mobility favours the development of soft skills, we may consider that these skills are one of the factors promoting the employability of people who have gained international experience.
- 3 Does international mobility allow the development of soft skills? This theme provides a means to study the link between soft skills and international mobility and to understand the possible positive effects resulting from such experiences.

To ensure the comparability of the results, common guidelines for the execution of interviews were also defined. Priority was given to the face-to-face interviews with interviews via skype to be only as a last resort.

The final version of the questionnaire was prepared by all partners at the second transnational seminar held in Spain in 2015.

The process of designing the questionnaire was enriching, notably because of the multicultural nature of the team involved in the project, but also because of the varied practical experiences each partner. However, we were confronted with the need to harmonise the initial items to take into account the cultural specificities of all the countries, in terms of recruitment and/or the concepts used. This was also the case for the definition of scales in order to avoid specific bias, which in the initial version favoured the use of a 5-point scale rather than closed answers («yes/no»). Thus, following detailed analysis by all the partners, it was decided not to use these scales but rather «ranks», in order to oblige the interviewees to make a choice, the objective being to guarantee the sensitivity of responses from recruiters.

## Phase 2 - Testing and validating the questionnaire

This phase was conducted between July and September 2015 and responded to five main objectives:

- 1 Validate the feasibility of the survey in terms of sectoral targets and profiles of interviewees. The proposed sectors were: trade / retail, construction, non-profit organisations, industry, business services, tourism, employment agencies. The definition of profiles distinguished between HR managers, recruiters, managers and company directors.

- 2 Check the understanding of the proposed items on the categorisation of skills such as:

### «Hard skills»

- ✓ Qualifications;
- ✓ Knowledge and level of competency of one or more foreign languages;
- ✓ Technical skills;
- ✓ Knowledge of specific software packages.

### Intercultural Skills

- ✓ Curiosity, respect and openness towards other cultures;
- ✓ Ability to listen, interact and adapt to people from other cultures;
- ✓ General cultural awareness and interest in other cultures;
- ✓ Ability to work with intercultural teams and colleagues who come from other cultures;
- ✓ Ability to adapt behaviour in relation to the culture of others.

### «Soft skills»

- ✓ Initiative / autonomy / ability to take risks and decisions;
- ✓ Creativity (propose new ideas adapted to the company context) / Curiosity (interest in a variety of subjects, information on new developments in its field of activity);

- ✓ Confidence (in oneself, in one's colleagues and managers) / knowledge of one's axes of improvement;
- ✓ Effective communication (ability to convince others and adapt communication to people from different cultures) / Social skills (empathy, openness to others);
- ✓ Organisational skills (ability to plan stages of a project, manage time and priorities, anticipate needs);
- ✓ Adaptability;
- ✓ Ability to work in a team / Attention to others (ability to meet the needs of others and follow their advice).

- 3 Test the initial; version of the questionnaire by conducting 5 interviews in each partner country.
- 4 Edit the final version of the questionnaires in the 5 languages of the partnership.
- 4 Validate the relevance of the analytical threads of the questionnaire.

Corrections were made based on feedback from partners. For example, in the initial version of the questionnaire closed questions were followed by open-ended questions, after the test phase, it was decided to place these open questions before the closed questions, so as not to influence the recruiters' answers. This allowed us to broaden our knowledge of the qualities identified by recruiters to those with international experience.

Moreover, we were able to discover their real point of view and many answers to these open questions made it possible to go further in our reflection on the added value of a mobility experience. These open questions made it possible to have lively exchanges with the respondents about their daily practices and life in the workplace.

### Phase 3 - «Interviews» and analysis of results

Between October 2015 and February 2016, a total of 146 interviews were conducted, with data capture and analysis of results between April and July 2016.

In order to determine the most appropriate methods for entering the results and comparative analysis of the data, the partners were helped by the expertise of the evaluation team of the Ile-de-France regional council. In the last two phases of the survey, this transversal guidance provided us with a valuable framework for recoding the answers to open questions and their interpretation and allowed the formalisation of two excel databases: the first intended to capture data from results in each country; The second to transfer the data, perform dynamic crossings and formalise the statistical and qualitative analysis that is presented in the following pages.

### 3. Country surveys

Before going into the description of the results, it seems important to summarise the methodological context of the survey and the operational modalities that characterised the way that the interviews were conducted:

- All partners initially carried out telephone surveys to tell businesses about the project. In most cases, an e-mail explaining the scope of the survey and its objectives was subsequently sent to the recruitment officers.
- The staff responsible for conducting the interviews were trained by the members of the «Erasmus + RMT» project within the partner organisations. The training took place twice: before the test phase of the questionnaire, carried out on 5 companies and later, to explain how the questionnaire should be administered, to clarify any doubts in regard to interpretation about the proposed items, to determine common methods for compiling the results.
- 97% of the interviews took place face-to-face, 3% via Skype and 90% at the interviewees' workplaces.
- The number of staff involved varied according to the country and the geographical location of the companies. A total of 14 staff participated in the survey: 2 for the Ile-de-France Regional council (FR), the Valencia region (ES) and the Tuscany region (IT); 3 for the Berlin region (DE) and 5 for the United Kingdom.
- With the exception of the United Kingdom, where the choice was made for cultural reasons to send the questionnaire by e-mail to all the target persons in advance of the interview, the other partners chose not to send it before the meetings.
- The duration of the interviews was also variable, from 30 minutes to a maximum of 2 hours. Some people had more time to develop their answers even if mobility was not a contextual element in their work. Likewise, others were more interested in the proposed themes because they had taken part in a transnational mobility themselves.
- To satisfy the objectives of the survey, the partners contacted more than 250 companies. Although complex, this information and awareness raising phase was very useful because it made it possible to understand the impact of the themes and to better prepare the interviews, the presentation of the objectives of the survey, the management of time and the anticipation of any difficulties that were likely to occur during the interviews. According to the partners, this prospecting has resulted in renewed cooperation and new partnerships with companies, thereby laying the groundwork for the development of each partner's networks in the future.

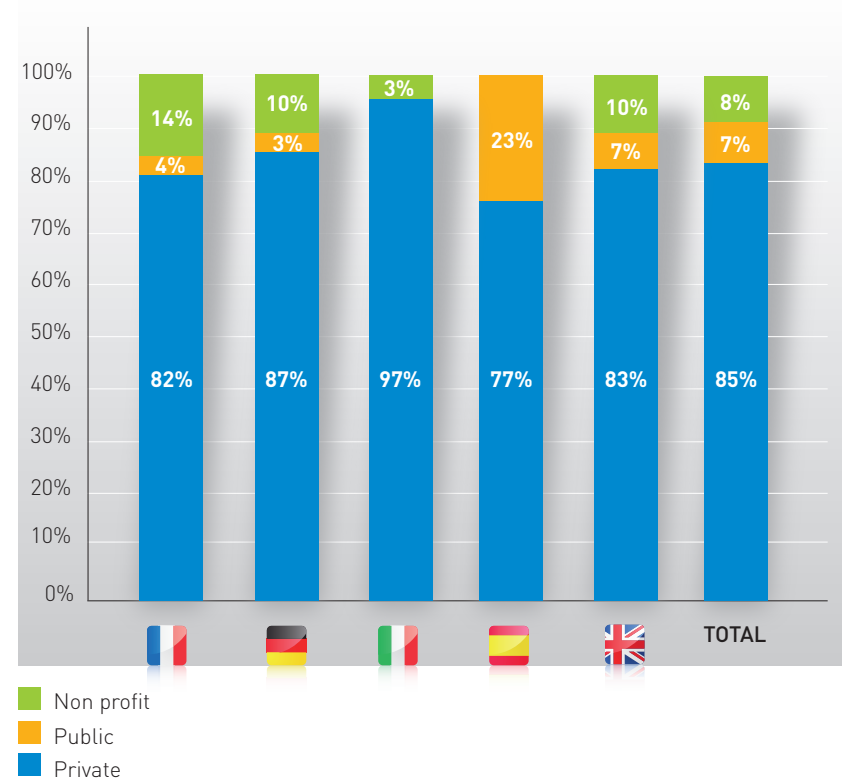
Moreover, in spite of the time devoted to business research, which far exceeded the estimates made during the drafting of the project, all the overseas partners stressed that the themes of the questionnaire were very useful to give companies a more in-depth understanding of the stakes and impact of mobility for the employability of candidates. Likewise, these exchanges have enabled partner organisations to better understand the developmental needs of companies with a view to guaranteeing the quality of mobility programmes for themselves, for staff involved in supervising internship activities and finally for the candidates.

# OVERVIEW OF THE COMPANIES

In line with our forecast, a total of 171 interviews were conducted: 50 in France, 30 in Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom and 31 in Italy.

Concerning the status of companies, private companies were the most represented category in all countries. It should be noted that due to the specific nature of the network of companies with which the Italian partner works - mainly micro-enterprises and SMEs in the artisanal sector – no public organisations feature in their sample.

Graph 1. Company Status



The distribution in terms of company typology was discussed and validated by all the partners. At the first transnational seminar, we stressed the importance of having a strong representation of the very small, small and medium sized companies for two main reasons:

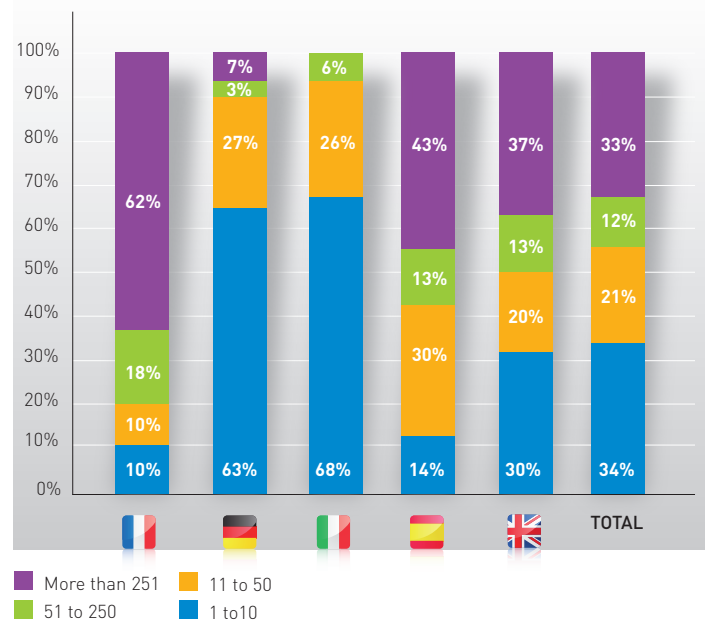
- 1 Small and medium companies account for 90% of all businesses in the EU. They are the backbone of the economy. They generate two out of every three jobs. In 2013, more than 21 million SMEs employed nearly 90 million people in the EU. According to European Commission reports «they foster entrepreneurship and innovation, helping to promote competitiveness, economic growth and employment in Europe»<sup>9</sup>. We have also introduced in our study the definition adopted by the European Union, namely:
  - Micro-enterprises: employ fewer than 10 people and its annual turnover (amount of money received in a given period) or its balance sheet (statement of assets and liabilities of the company) does not exceed 2 million euros.
  - Small businesses: employ fewer than 50 people and its turnover or balance sheet does not exceed 10 million euros.
  - Average business/company: employs fewer than 250 people and its turnover does not exceed 50 million euros or its balance sheet does not exceed 43 million euros.
- 2 These three categories, on their own, represent the 75% of companies that host European trainees under mobility programs such as the former Leonardo da Vinci<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>9</sup>Recommandation de la Commission du 6 mai 2003 concernant la définition des micros, petites et moyennes entreprises [notifiée sous le numéro C (2003) 1422] [JO L 124 du 20.5.2003, p. 36-41]. [www.eur-lex.europa.eu/](http://www.eur-lex.europa.eu/) - Recommendation of the Commission dated 6 May 2003 concerning the definition of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (notified under document number C).

<sup>10</sup>COMMISSION EUROPÉENNE. Leonardo da Vinci. Faits et chiffres. Luxembourg : Office des publications de l'Union européenne, 2012 ISBN:978-92-79-23651-8. [www.ec.europa.eu/](http://www.ec.europa.eu/)

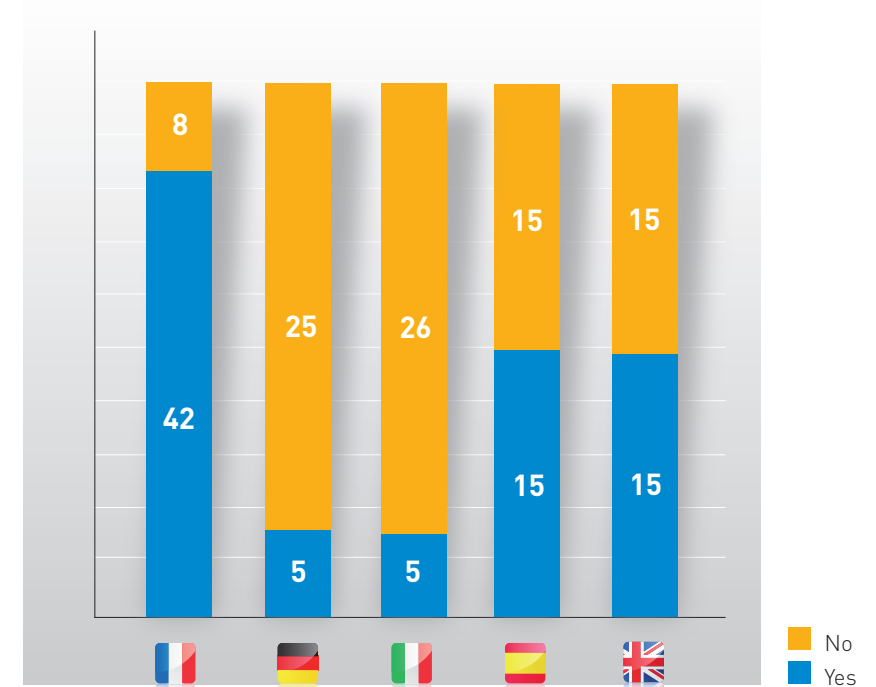
The results are in line with our expectations because, on the overall sample, the average enterprise rate of 1 to 50 employees reaches 51%. The major contribution to this result is to be sought in the sample from Italy and Germany. Likewise, this typology of companies is strongly present in the economic fabric of the Tuscany region characterised by a very high rate of artisanal and multi-sectoral enterprises (108,000 in 2015, Source ISTAT, 2015). The Italian sample is representative of the collaborations and activities carried out by our partner which has involved more the companies of its usual network, all with private status and the majority belonging to the craft sector. The same applies to the representativeness of VSEs and SMEs in from Berlin which is justified because of the composition of the business network of our partner who works mainly with family businesses and start-ups.

**Graphic 2. Number of employees**



The French, English and Spanish sample, although probably not representative of national rates, reflect respectively the economic fabric of the Ile-de-France region whereas in the Bristol and London districts and the Valence region, the presence of large firms is higher.

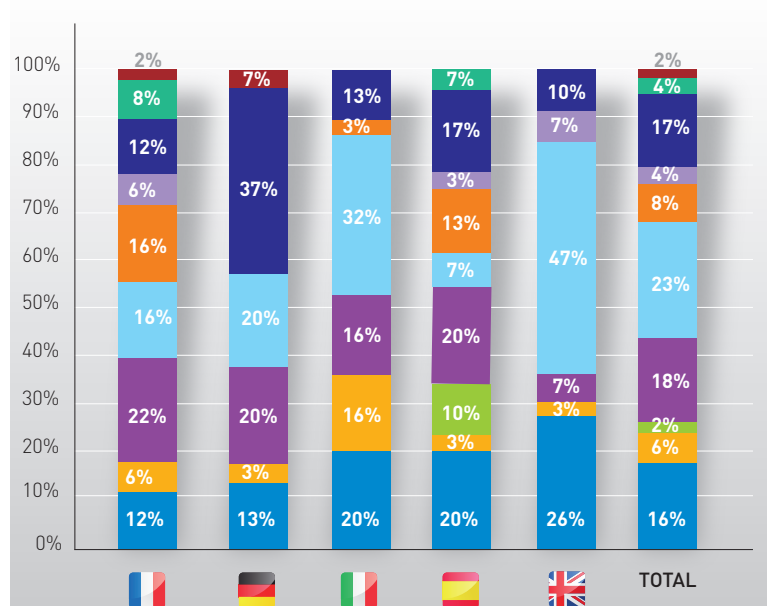
**Graphic 3. Is your company part of a group?**



This question explains the results in terms of belonging to a group, which most often characterises large firms. The highest rate is represented by companies in the Paris Region (85%), followed by Spain and the United Kingdom (50%). And lastly, Italy and Germany with an equivalent rate of 15%.

For the definition of economic sectors, the distribution of the sample makes reference to the typologies of the fields most requested by the beneficiaries and was defined on the basis of the statistics carried out annually within the partner organisations.

**Graphic 4. Business area**

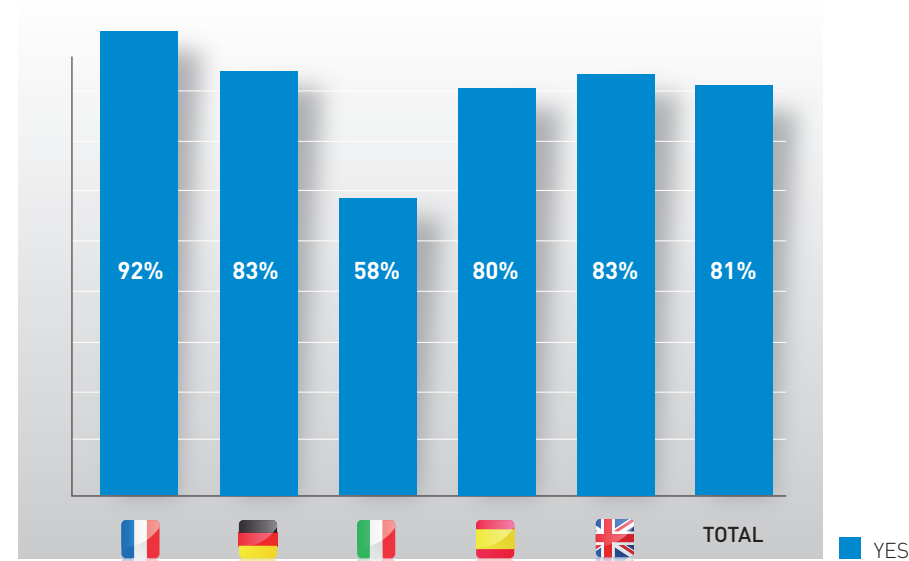


- Other
- Services to companies
- Industry
- Tourism
- Temporary agencies
- Finance
- Social, éducation, research
- Construction
- Commerce/sales
- Transport

Significant efforts were made by the partners to ensure that the relative forecasted distribution is taken into account in its entirety. The average results correspond, for the most part, to the rates resulting from our analysis, except for the tourism sector, which, in terms of placements, accounts for 25% of applications, instead of the 17% indicated in the «Total» column, and in the social sector where levels are around 18% instead of the indicated 8%.

At the end of the first part of the business portrait questionnaire, we asked two other questions:

**Graphic 5. Have you ever recruited an applicant who has international work experience?**



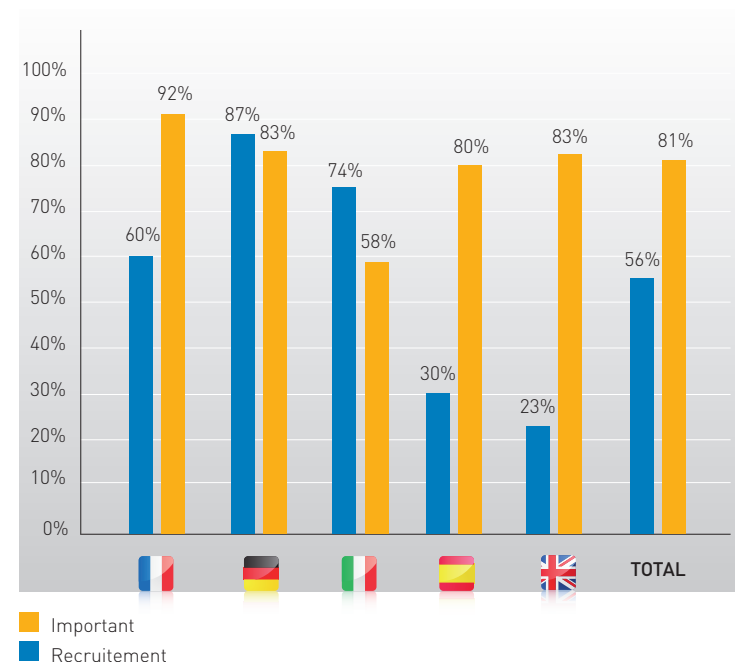
■ YES

In the graph for each country, it can be seen that, with the exception of Italy, whose result (58%) is consistent with the typology of firms and their propensity to internationalisation, the response rates in the partner countries are very positive and around 81%. It can be seen that France goes even further, reaching 92%. At first glance, this data, combined with the indicators presented so far, would make it possible to affirm the coherence of the context in relation to the main objectives of the survey and the initial hypotheses.

Nevertheless, when the results of the second question are integrated, «Is international experience a criterion for recruitment?» rates drop considerably for France (60%), Spain (30%) and the United Kingdom (23%). As the representation of large firms is higher in these countries, it would be expected that the «yes» answer would be larger. Paradoxically, for Germany and Italy, whose samples are mainly represented by a majority of small and medium-sized businesses, rates are higher: for 87% of German companies and 74% of Italian companies, international experience would be a criterion for recruitment.

How to explain these rather contradictory results?

**Graphic 6. Is international experience a recruitment criterion? / Rate of recruitment of overseas staff**



How to explain these rather contradictory results?

At this stage of the analysis to try to give a more qualitative explanation, we will take the Spanish situation as an example. Indeed, the data shows that 80% of Spanish companies have hired candidates with experience abroad and that the hiring rate of candidates of foreign origin reaches 60%. These findings show that even though 70% of firms do not take international experience as a selection criterion, in fact 80% of those hired satisfy this criterion.



## OVERVIEW OF THE INTERVIEWEES

The reason for this apparent contradiction is that, in the initial phase of administering the questionnaire, most interviewees tend to implicitly associate international experience with mastery of a foreign language, ability to manage relationships and negotiations with foreign clients and do not take into account the repercussions of international mobility experiences in terms of personal and professional development or cross-curricular competencies.

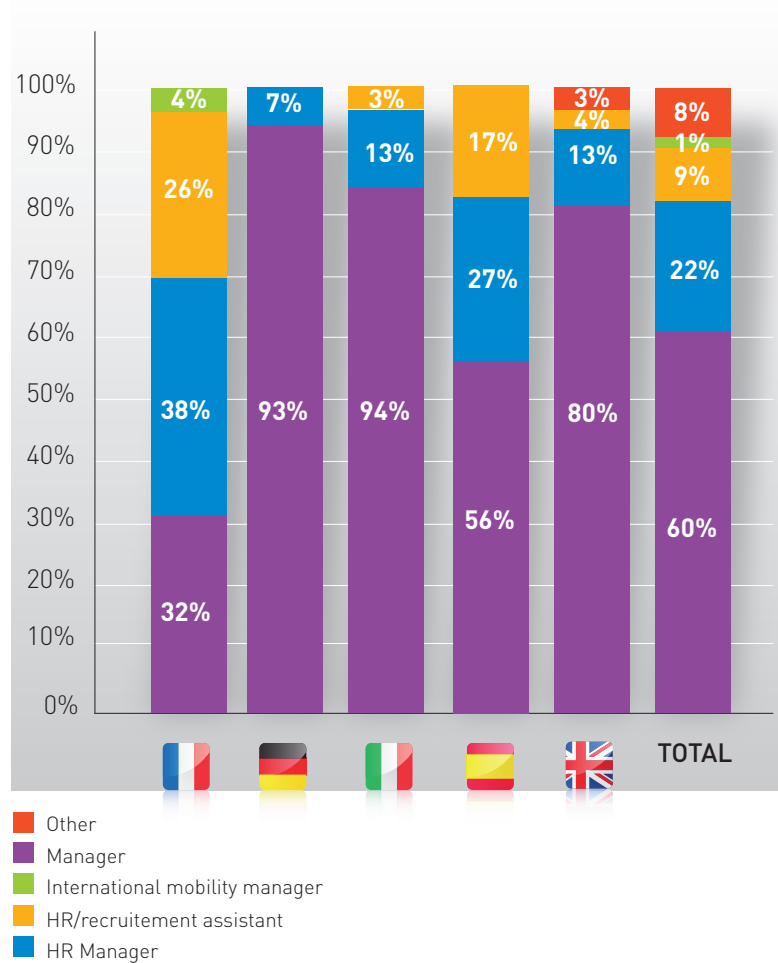
The same applies to French and English companies. Whereas for interviewees in Italy and Germany, it would seem that international experience is interpreted in a broader way recognising more transversal added value.

Looking at the data on the staff interviewed, the overall data shows that the most significant profile is «Manager» across all partner countries reaching 60%, (except in France). This is once again correlated with the typology of the companies selected by the partners, their size and their local organisation.

Indeed, for Italy and Germany, where 94% and 90% respectively of the sample consists of companies with between 1 and 50 employees, the category «Manager» refers almost exclusively to entrepreneurs, managers and owners. The United Kingdom follows with 50% of companies of the same size in which 80% of interviewees were managing owners.

The aggregate data for SMEs and large companies, which in Spain is 56% and for France 80%, explains the more significant percentages in terms of the representativeness of the «HR» and «HR Assistant» profiles in other countries.

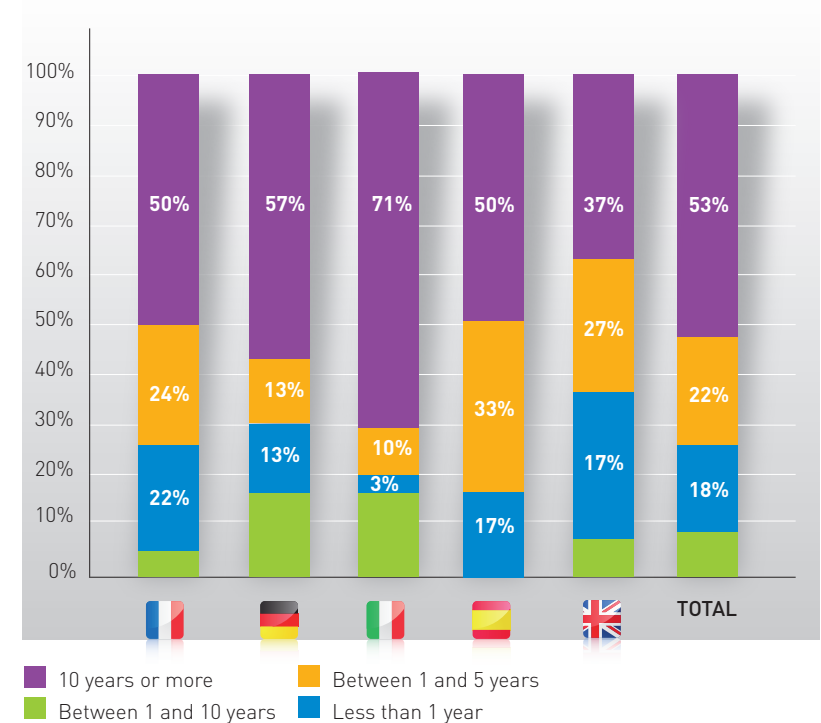
**Graphic 7. Current position in the company**



Concerning the length of experience, the average country of categories ranging from 5 to more than 10 years of experience in recruitment, amounts to 75% and is aligned in particular with the French and German results. The Italian and Spanish data, with an additional 10% gap, harmonise the English rate, which is proportionately lower at 64%.

As part of our study, this fact is very positive because the level of experience can attest to an expertise in the assessment of usable and potential competences in the recruitment processes as well as the criteria necessary for successful applicants across the full range of different professional categories.

**Graphic 8. How much recruitment experience do you have (over your entire career)?**

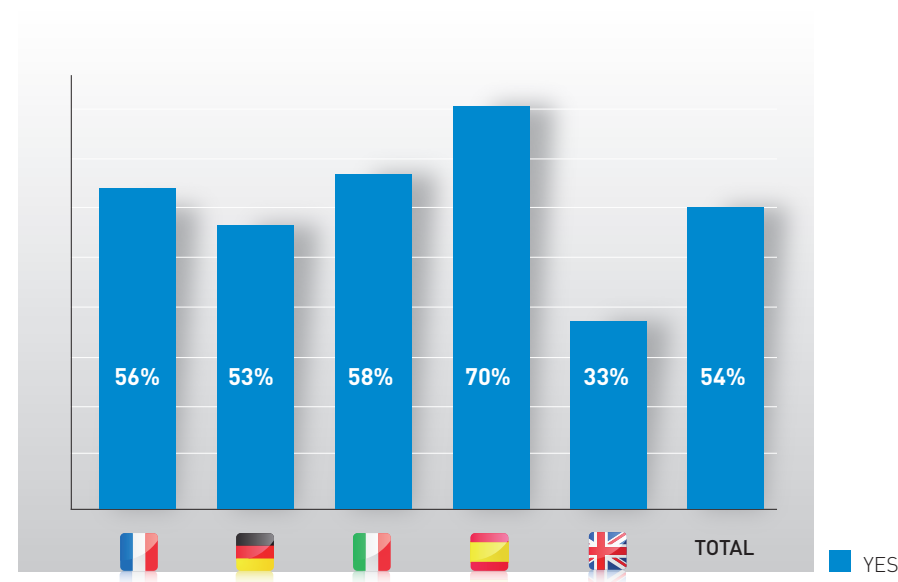


Moreover, with the exception of the United Kingdom, where mobility is as widespread as in other countries, the majority of interviewees in each country (which varies from 53% in Germany to 70% in Spain) had benefited from international experience, whether during an exchange programme, their studies or a work-based experience.

This result suggests that the majority of interviewees are particularly aware of the added value of international mobility and the hidden skills that such experiences develop. This point of view is shared by our English partner, who, despite the relatively low rate of interviewees, found that staff with experience abroad were more aware of the benefits and added value of mobility and its' impact on employability. Moreover, according to European Placement Network and CEDIT, the same staff allotted more time for the interviews.

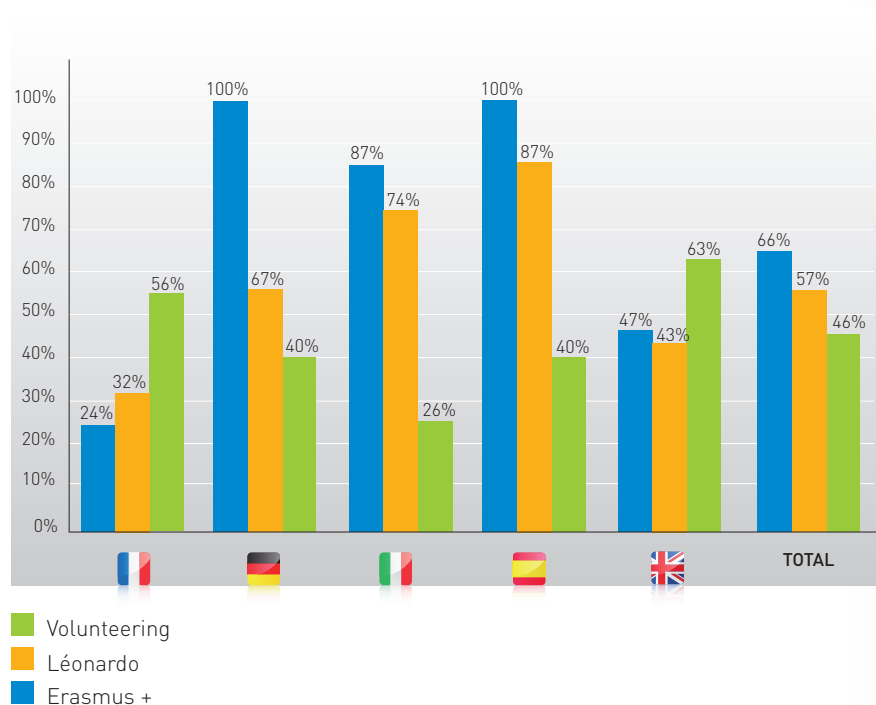
This is an additional element which could be seen as evidence for the reliability of the answers. However, this variable may also be biased. Indeed, for all these interviewees, the experience abroad was considered as exceptionally rewarding. This most certainly influenced the responses in regard to the added value of international mobility as part of a person's career.

**Graphic 9. Have you an experience abroad (professional, mobility programmes, studies...)?**



Finally, the results of the last question asked need to be analysed according to the composition of the sample of companies in each partner countries. The very high rates of knowledge of mobility schemes, notably for Erasmus+ and Leonardo da Vinci, for Germany, Italy and Spain are explained by the nature of the collaborative relationships that these organisations have established with the companies interviewed. The sample consists almost entirely of companies that host European trainees through these two programs. On the other hand, the sample from the English partner was mixed: on one side, companies that were part of their established network, on the other of the new companies targeted to respond as closely as possible to the sectoral categories required in the study.

**Graphic 10. Have you heard about the following mobility programmes?**



The level of knowledge of European programmes shown by French companies is also correlated with the method of prospecting and the final composition of the sample which was constructed in a mixed way, with companies who regularly work with the Nanterre Centre for Employment and Training, and via telephone contacts, following internet searches, according to the targeted sectors and also through prospecting during job fairs organised in the Paris region.

We conclude this section by pointing out that the country samples were predetermined in the first phase of the study. The objective is to be able to benefit from replies, from actual recruitment experience, coming from both companies with experiences of mobility programmes and others with less direct experience coming from staff outside these programmes.

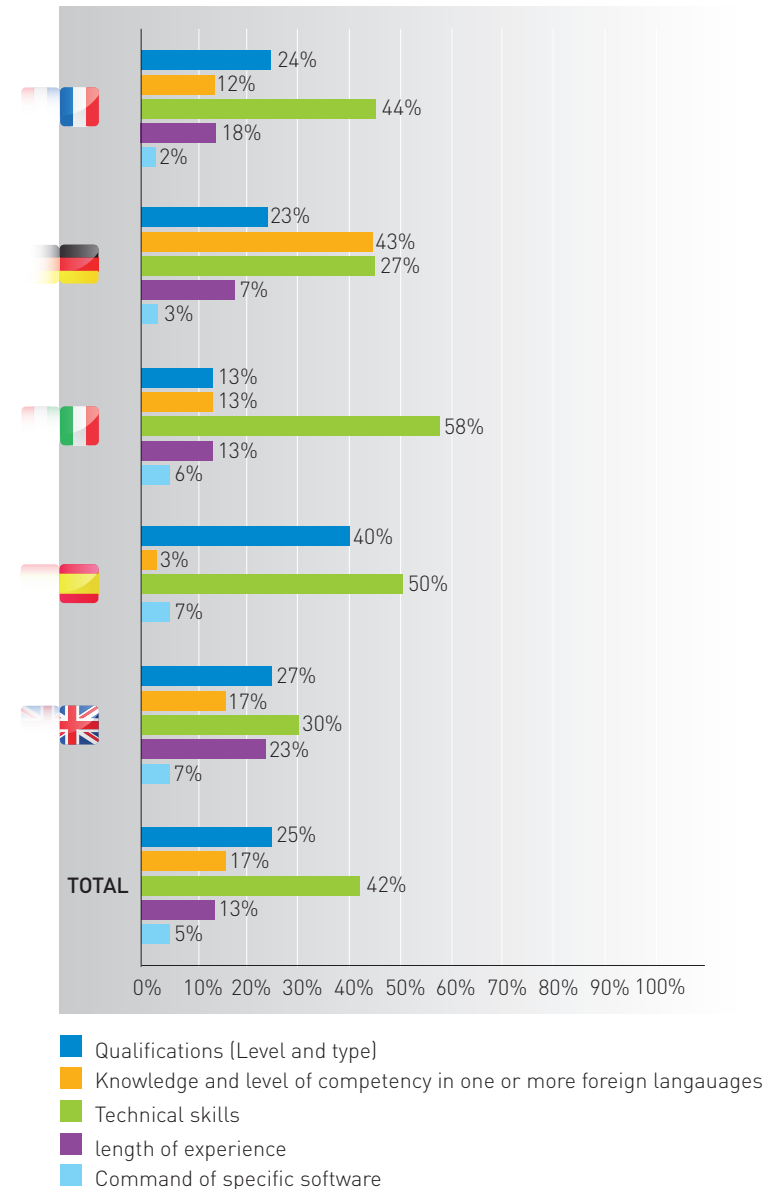


# «HARD SKILLS», INTERCULTURAL SKILLS, «SOFT SKILLS» AND MOBILITY

This third part of the questionnaire aims to describe the selection criteria that companies take into account in the recruitment process. Although practices are influenced by culture, the country results that we have obtained are fairly homogeneous:

- «Technical skills» is shown to be the most important criterion for partner countries, with the exception of Germany, which ranks «Knowledge and level of proficiency in one or more languages» as the most important criterion. A result correlated with the national characteristics of German companies, where the English language is used in the professional context almost as much as the German language.
- Next come «Qualifications», «Knowledge and level of proficiency of one or more foreign languages» and «Length of experience», except for the United Kingdom, where «Length of Experience» precedes the criterion «Knowledge and the level of proficiency in one or more foreign languages» with a rating gap of 6%.

Graphic 11: Hard skills identified as most important



This part of the questionnaire also informs us about the nature of the intercultural competencies developed abroad, beyond the language skills, and their transferability to other situations.

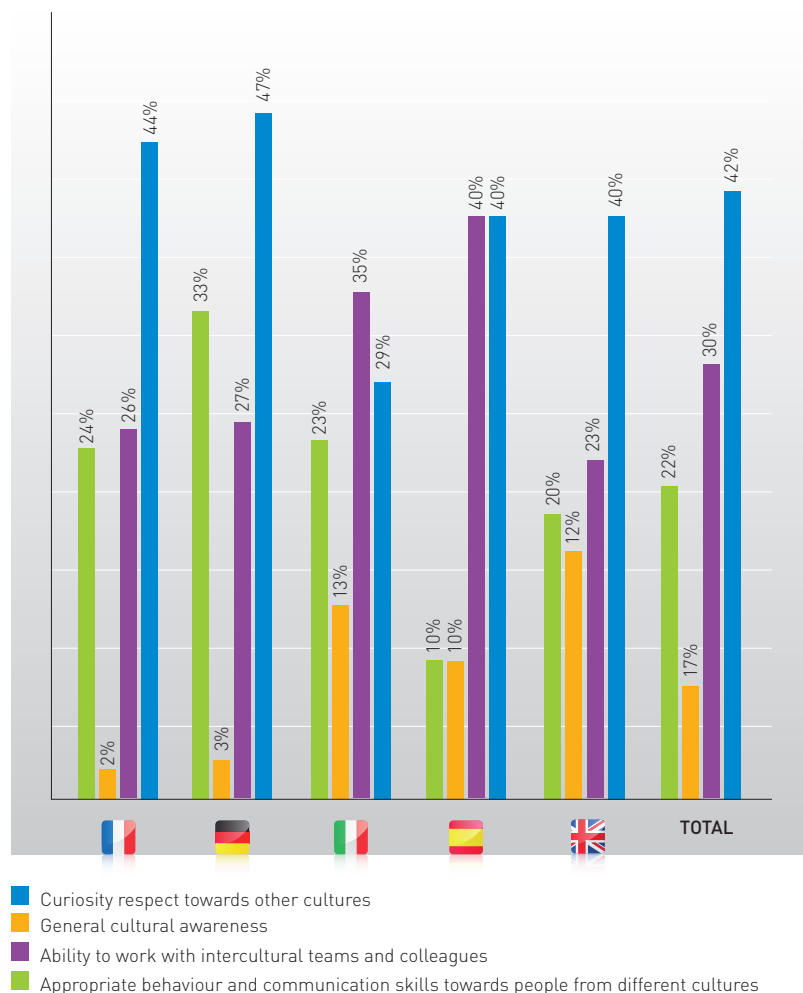
Furthermore, the objective of the open-ended questions was to know the point of view of the interviewees on the link between the development of soft skills and international mobility, but also to understand the characteristics that international experience would help to develop.

Using open-ended questions, the objective of this part of the questionnaire was also to understand if and how intercultural skills are transferable, especially when the person returns to work in his or her country of origin. For example, can intercultural competence «adaptation to other cultures» enable the development of the «soft skill» of «adaptation», and thus allow a person to adapt to different professional contexts and also to different people from the same culture? Or does openness to other cultures lead to an openness of mind that can also be applied to subjects other than intercultural?

It should be noted that this exercise was not straightforward, that the field of definition of intercultural competences is very broad and that for about 30% of those interviewed, the notion of interculturalism was not included in the description of professional profiles. In general, we have observed that, regardless of the business context, intercultural skills are part of the routine: factories and organisations with or without subsidiaries abroad all have multi-cultural teams, although almost the concept of multi-culturalism is often ignored, not valued, and therefore not associated with intercultural competencies.

The open questions allowed us to get an idea of the point of view of the interviewees on this subject when we introduced the topic «soft skills» related to the last part of the questionnaire. Indeed, for many of them, the varied intercultural competencies proposed here were associated with the soft skills proposed in the next section, and hence the transferability of intercultural competencies had become more widely understood. For example, adaptation and openness to other cultures have been associated with adaptation and open-mindedness. Moreover, communicative capacities, in the broad sense of the term, are frequently cited as skills particularly developed during experience abroad. To a lesser extent, the ability to work with intercultural teams, or to question one's own culture when in contact with others, was also related to soft skills acquired during periods of mobility.

Graphic 12. Intercultural skills identified as the most important



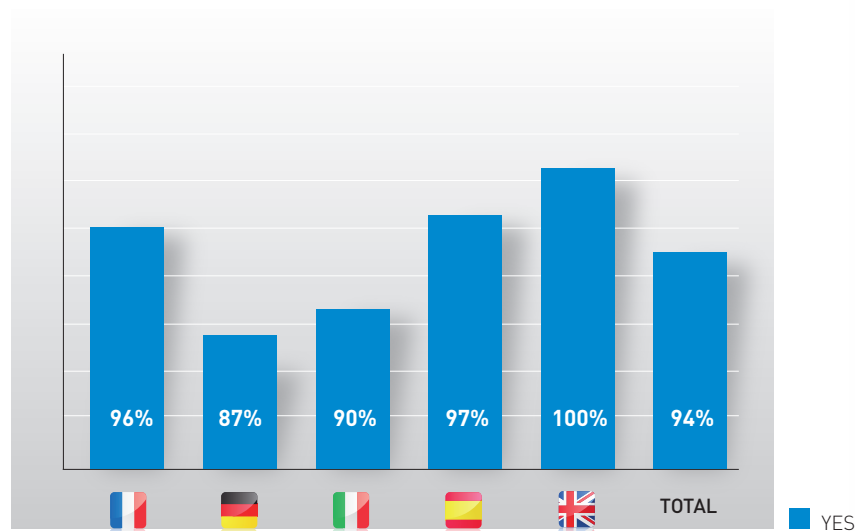
In spite of the difficulties of interpretation, as with «hard skills», the country results are aligned and seem to us generally applicable. Recruiters place first the ability to adapt behaviour according to the culture of others. The second criterion most important criterion is the «Ability to work with intercultural teams». There follows «Curiosity, respect and openness for other cultures» and finally, with a much lower score, «General culture and interest for other cultures».

The last part of the questionnaire aimed to try to gain an understanding of the interest of companies in «soft skills» in relation to the recruitment process and to verify the extent to which transnational mobility can be an added value in terms of developing cross-functional skills in job interviews.

The country results are very positive with an overall average of 94% for all countries combined, with a rate of 100% for the United Kingdom, where «soft skills» are rated as one of the most important and sought competencies for employment<sup>11</sup>. This is followed by Spain (97%), France (96%), Italy with a 90% rate and finally Germany, whose response rate is 7 percentage points lower than the overall average.

<sup>11</sup>BRITISH COUNCIL. Culture at work. The value of intercultural skills in the workplace, 2013, [www.britishcouncil.org](http://www.britishcouncil.org).  
 ALBANDEA Ines, GIRET Jean-François, L'effet des soft-skills sur la rémunération des diplômés, Net. doc. 149, CEREQ, janvier 2016.  
 WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, The Future of Jobs Employment, Skills and Workforce Strategy for the Fourth Industrial Revolution, January 2016, [www3.weforum.org](http://www3.weforum.org).

Graphic 13. Are Soft Skills an important criterion in your recruitment process?



Given the importance in the eyes of recruiters, we focussed on the evaluation process by introducing the question «Do you ask candidates to take a personality test as part of the recruitment processes?». Indeed, to reiterate the reflection developed earlier in the «Context of the study» section, many experts point to the difficulty of assessing cross-curricular competencies, a task that becomes more complex when recruiters must also determine their transferability in a given professional context. «Identifying soft skills means first accepting that they exist».

To do this, one can ask the question of what makes a person special and unique.

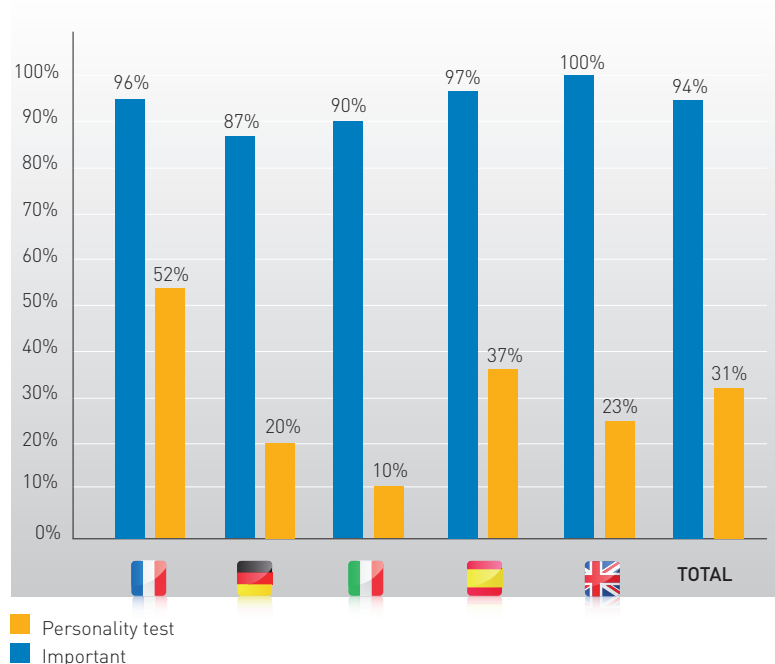
In regard to recruitment, what characterises the uniqueness of the person who has submitted an application? The recruiter who has to meet several candidates for the same position must define the added value in human terms that a person can bring to the same «technical» job or position. Indeed, it is important to keep in mind that soft skills are linked to hard skills. These soft skills allow an employee to optimise the technical aspects of the job and also the interpersonal relationships involved in the position. They represent to a large extent, the human «capital» of the company»<sup>12</sup>.

The results of our survey underline the same difficulty: the question of how to evaluate soft skills remains open, especially if we compare the relative importance accorded to «soft skills» in the recruitment processes by our target companies in each country to the use of personality tests. The fact that these tests are very little exploited: France with 52% has the highest rate with Spain (37%), which are justified because these two countries present the largest proportion of large companies in their samples. The large companies have, in fact, more financial and human resources to develop and make use of this typology of tool.

<sup>12</sup>BOURET Julien, HOARAU Jérôme, MAULEON Fabrice. Le Réflexe Soft Skills. Dunod, 2014.



**Graphic 14. Importance of soft skills / evaluation in regard to recruitment**

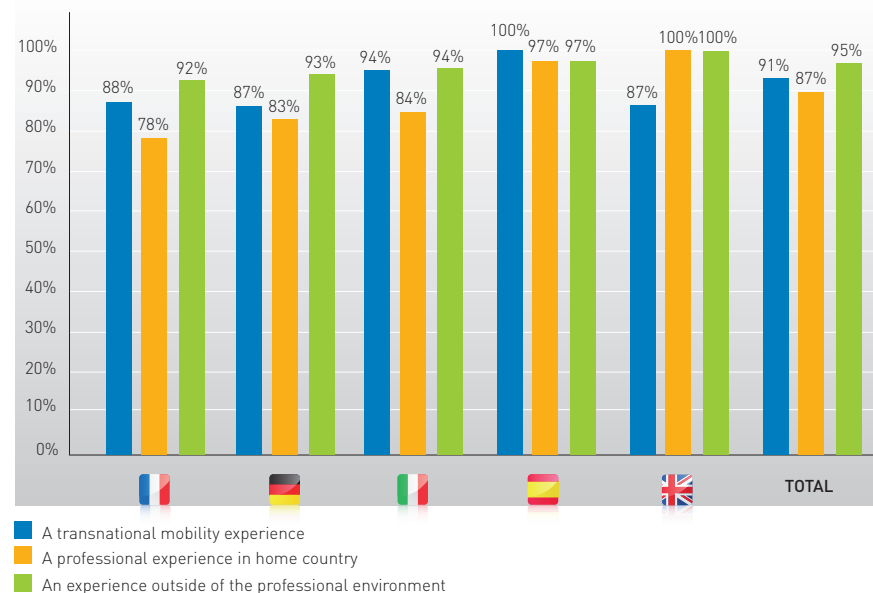


The subject of evaluation should have had a more important place in our study. Proposing one single closed question, limited to the use of psychological tests, certainly influenced the answers. Some additional open-ended questions would have moved us forward by allowing interviewees to explain other internal or local methods and practices.

This also applies to the results obtained on the last question: «In your opinion, does a mobility experience in the following fields help people to develop soft skills?»

Further digging into this subject would have led to greater variety of replies in relation to the proposed items. As it was, we can see that for the interviewees and across all countries, «soft skills» develop at the same level during «an experience of international mobility», «a professional experience in the country of origin» and «experience gained outside of the professional environment».

**Graphic 15. In your opinion, does a mobility experience in the following fields help people to develop soft skills?**



Despite the limitations of the Companies questionnaire, the results were highly anticipated. The answers are unanimous: mobility favours the development of soft skills and more particularly of a «European family» composed of seven transversal skills / competences:

**Effective communication:** having relational qualities, conviviality, management of emotions, ...

**Adaptation:** working in various situations, being comfortable with change, evolving from one situation to another with ease, ...

**Organisation:** actively looking for solutions, problem solving, priority management, ...

**Working in a team:** having a taste for collaborative work, listening skills, empathy, ...

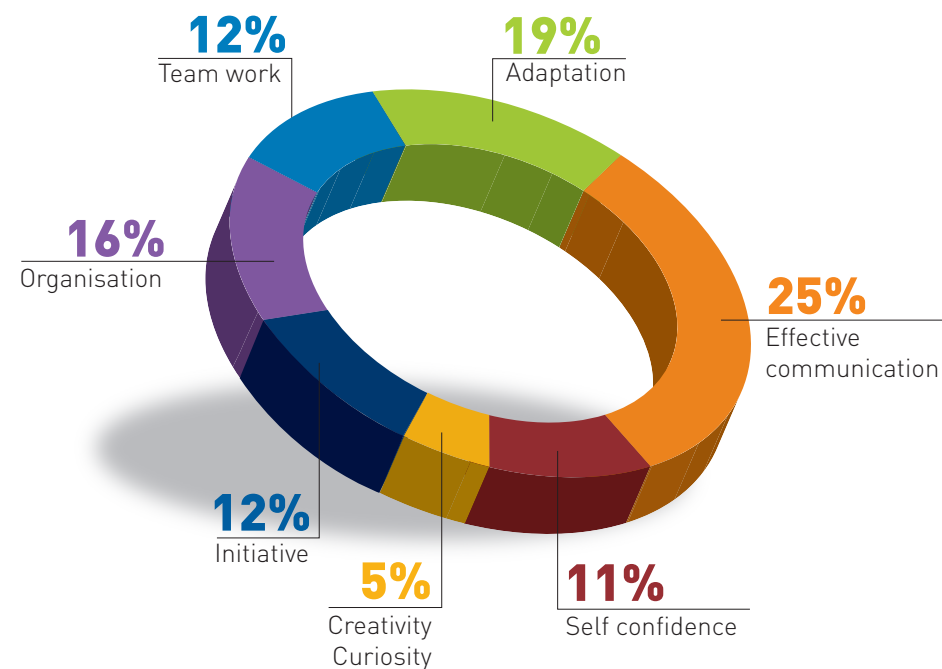
**Initiative:** to consider new solutions, to be able to think outside the box

**Self-confidence:** being committed and involved in one's work, being autonomous, perseverance to achieve one's goals, ...

**Creativity / Curiosity:** asking questions, wanting to learn,...

With the exception of the «Creativity / curiosity» skill, a competence whose degree of transferability would seem to be even more appreciated according to the specificity of certain professions and fields of activity, the survey also underlines that all the other skills are important in the context of recruitment, necessary for working in any profession, independent of the sector, the status, and the job profile sought.

**Graphic 16. Soft Skills developed through transnational mobility**



# CONCLUSION

Through this European survey, carried out within the framework of the «Erasmus + RMT» strategic partnership, we sought to better understand the perception and added value that companies attribute to mobility experiences abroad and to determine the impact on the employability of the beneficiaries both in terms of skills and the professionalisation of the participants.

The results confirm and qualify a number of assumptions at the origin of the study, of which we mention the most significant findings.

The first observation is on the impact of mobility paths on the typology of skills acquired: the results confirm that, beyond linguistic, technical and intercultural competences, experiences abroad represent contexts favourable to the development of professional transversal competences highly sought after by recruiters. Numerous national and international studies (British Council 2013, Cedfop, 2013, World Economic Forum, 2016) highlight the added value of soft skills for vocational purposes and have drawn up lists that may differ according to the intercultural context in which they were identified or to sectoral targets. Comparisons of recent studies carried out in partner countries confirm our results: the seven soft skills identified by the interviewees - Effective Communication, Adaptation, Organisation, Teamwork, Initiative, Confidence, Creativity Curiosity - appear in all classifications and correspond to those most quoted.

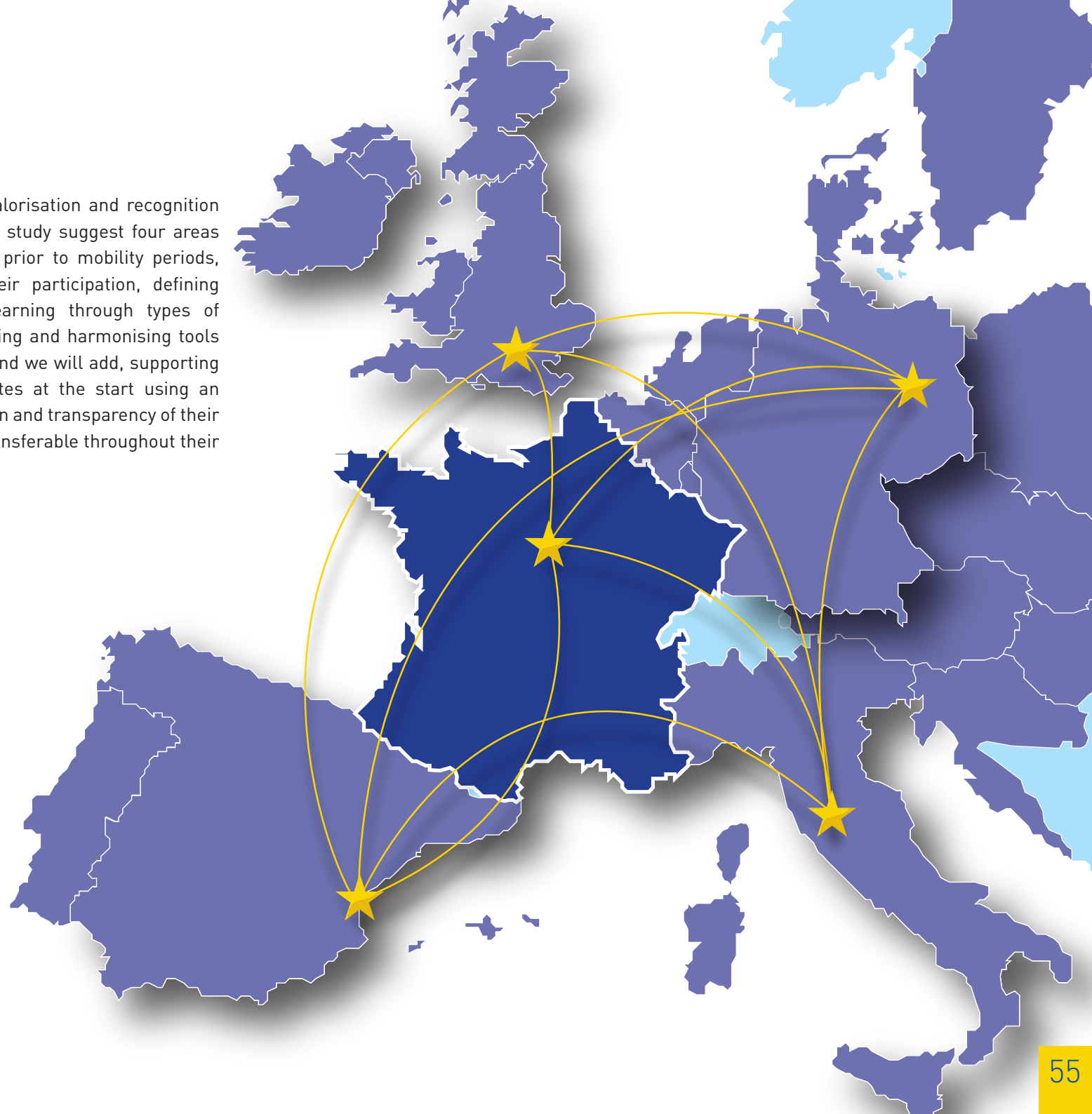
The results of the survey suggest that the added value of overseas experiences in terms of employability is mainly due to this «intrinsic» mobility feature of providing a preferred place for the development of soft skills. The link between softs skills and employability is also reflected in other research carried out in France and internationally, which highlights the role that these competencies have on the generating effect of job opportunities. With parity of diplomas and

comparable technical skills, young people with better soft skills would have more opportunities to secure employment (Miller, 2016). Other studies carried out a few years after entering the workforce go further and highlight the positive influence of these skills on the level of salary and career development (Cereq, 2016).

If the added value of the mobility period in regard to soft skills is an observation shared by the interviewees, our survey shows that the question of their evaluation remains open. How to measure skills related to emotional intelligence? With what tools? Who is responsible for the task? The analysis of country-based results is homogeneous and highlights the disparity in the means of evaluation between large companies and small and medium companies. Present in the majority of job vacancies, in the absence of tools and sometimes of training in the selection phase, skills softs are assessed subjectively, according to the experiences of the recruiter. This is difficult to explain to candidates because soft skills rely on developed capacities for self-analysis, just as complex to detect for employers who need know to ask the right questions, to analyse behaviour & personality in order to identify potential ...

While knowledge of European programmes varies according to the country sample, many professionals interviewed believe that getting involved in mobility schemes is too complex from an administrative point of view and they stress the need for more communication on the subject on the part of the European Commission and the stakeholders involved in mobility.

In conclusion, in order to improve the valorisation and recognition of periods of mobility, the results of the study suggest four areas on which to focus: involving companies prior to mobility periods, capitalising on the value added by their participation, defining a common vocabulary between the learning through types of mobility and the world of work, formalising and harmonising tools to assist in the evaluation of soft skills. And we will add, supporting / monitoring the positioning of candidates at the start using an explanatory tool for improved capitalisation and transparency of their «personal attributes», transversal and transferable throughout their professional career.



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# INDEX OF GRAPHS AND TABLES

Graph 1: Company Status

Graphic 2: Number of employees

Graphic 3: Is your company part of a group?

Graphic 4: Business area

Graphic 5: Have you ever recruited an applicant who has international work experience?

Graphic 6: Is international experience a recruitment criterion? / Rate of recruitment of overseas staff

Graphic 7: Current position in the company

Graphic 8: How much recruitment experience do you have (over your entire career)?

Graphic 9: Have you an experience abroad (professional, mobility programmes, studies...)?

Graphic 10: Have you heard about the following mobility programmes?

Graphic 11: Hard skills identified as most important

Graphic 12: Intercultural skills identified as the most important

Graphic 13: Are Soft Skills an important criterion in your recruitment process?

Graphic 14: Importance of soft skills / evaluation in regard to the recruitment Soft Skills developed through transnational mobility

Graphic 15: In your opinion, does a mobility experience in the following fields help people to develop soft skills?

Graphic 16: Soft Skills developed through transnational mobility



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