



European Medical Students' Association

Association Européenne des Étudiants en Médecine

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Accessibility of Professional Mobilites for Medical Students

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The European Medical Students' Association (EMSA) represents medical students across Europe. We envision a healthy and solidary Europe in which medical students actively promote health. EMSA empowers medical students to advocate health in all policies, excellence in medical research, interprofessional healthcare education and the protection of human rights across Europe.

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Problem statement

Global mobilisation is a rising need for future physicians in today's world. Medical students are in a huge need to have necessary competencies of their social and practical skills to be able to provide services to different cultures, populations, and races. The greater attention to global health correlates with more and better implications of student mobility in the medical field. Academic medical mobility helps prepare future physicians to work in a global environment. International student mobility also emphasises the fact that medicine is an intercultural discipline, and recognizes the need of physicians to have the cultural competence to work in their appropriate fields.

It is therefore crucial to evaluate the accessibility of professional mobility to medical students. In Europe, most medical students are offered sufficient opportunities for international travel through numerous projects and initiatives introduced by the European Commission, Council of Europe, and individual governments of member countries, which make it easier for students to access opportunities to travel abroad and enroll in internships internationally. Youth Exchanges, Erasmus + Project, Projects of the European Youth Foundation and other co-funded initiatives are only a few of the examples available. In addition, sometimes individual universities and faculties also have programs or projects available for students who would like to travel more.

However, not all students have the same access to such programs. This can be caused by a lack of financial resources or social privileges, such as family and personal connections. In this context, socioeconomically disadvantaged students may receive fewer opportunities to participate in professional mobility. As a consequence, students that have worse access to professional mobility may face challenges in their professional lives, not only because of possibly insufficient intercultural experience but also because their curricula vitae may be considered less valuable. Intercultural experience is often correlated with but not tied to professional exchanges. The expectation to demonstrate extensive international experience does however apply to all medical students. This bears the danger that the quantity of exchanges is valued above their quality. EMSA believes that exchange is not a requirement for, but can facilitate, professional development.

The benefits of exchange are always to be considered in relation to the cost imposed on the environment. An increase in professional mobility will necessarily result in an increase of traffic, which in turn is to be evaluated with respect to the sustainability of the mode of travel. This is particularly to be considered with regards to air travel which is a major contributor to the global climate crisis (Lee, 2021). EMSA therefore prioritises exchanges that allow for sustainable mobility.

On top of the COVID-19 pandemic, pushing a never-before-seen type of halt to student mobility in early-2020, despite financial support opportunities offered by the European Commission and the Council of Europe, the costs of travelling and living expenses abroad can easily exceed individual resources.

- Differences in the structure of the educational system in the students' home countries and destination countries might complicate the application process due to accreditation issues.
- For students coming from certain non-EU countries, the European Commission statistics published in 2020 assert that almost 14% of Schengen visa applications that year were refused due to unexplained official reasons, with their holders not granted access to

entering the Schengen area from land, air, or sea.

In summary; academic performance of students, family income, personal informal networks, economic and political climates, characteristics of educational systems such as curriculum or accreditation discrepancies, travel issues, lacking program updates, costs of living and study opportunities all play an important role in the complicated process of student mobility. But it can't be denied that large-scale factors outside the control of medical students influence the quality of access of given students to certain opportunities. Within the EU; language barriers, curriculum mismatch, and living costs can still present themselves as obstacles against mobility, EMSA believes that European institutions, university administrations, and NGOs should work towards reducing these barriers with the goal of providing equitable access to professional mobility for all medical students.

Our view. Aim

Throughout the years, EMSA and specifically European Integration and Culture Pillar has focused on several topics mainly circulating around medical student mobility opportunities and the intercultural competence vitality integrated into these exchanges. The methods would involve organising mobility programs themselves under the well-known name of Twinning Projects, cultural programs, awareness campaigns and collaborations with other student organisations. All of these efforts are towards one goal, preparing future physicians harnessed with social and practical skills that are necessary for understanding global health, which can be achieved comprehensively if the medical students are able to access medical mobility easily.

Taking into consideration that medicine is an international discipline, mobility projects should be promoted and made accessible for medical students while at the same time being considerate toward the quality of the mobility provided as well as potential damage that results from the exchange.

Recommendations

EMSA calls on the Medical Students and Faculty Member Organisations across Europe to:

- Plan activities for promoting medical mobility programs such as the EMSA Twinning or Erasmus Projects as well as creating new initiatives and opportunities in medical faculties;
- Promote the feasibility of student mobility programs and strive to make the application process accessible to all medical students in the FMO's by explaining the application details, necessities and the whole process in depth;
- Assess the quality of the exchange with selective criterias included in surveys or reports to be filled in after the eventuated exchange, to ensure better exchanges to happen in the future by interpreting the given feedbacks;
- Continuously work with determination and brainstorm for new content ideas within the team responsible from the mobilities, to improve the exchange projects according to the feedback received especially about the financial accessibility to the them;

- Encourage their members to organise and participate in a mobility project of high quality, including both academic and cultural activities to ensure a broadened perspective regarding both aspects at the end of the Project;
- Advocate for wide-ranging exchange programs and create collaborations with other student organisations especially from other professions to help promote the execution of these programs;
- Participate in as much as medical mobility projects as they can during their education years via using opportunities provided by their faculties/student organisations without facing curricular mismatch issues or any other educational limitations;
- Share their experiences with their peers to build interest and trust towards the programs as well as providing an insight with solid, reliable and intriguing informations.

EMSA calls on the Medical Faculties and Respective Medical Educators to:

- Provide adequate education to medical students concerning the available and accessible medical student mobility programs and allow them to participate in them;
- Allow open discussions between the mentor and mentee to further discuss the program and seek ways to be involved in the most suitable format for the student;
- Provide financial support when needed to increase the accessibility of the exchange programs,
- Provide the required documents for Visa, such as the student certificate, and accreditation processes to facilitate the procedure;
- Establish necessary accreditation coherency with an international collaboration so that students would be able to have their internships as well as basic medical science lectures without needing to repeat them again with “losing a year”.

EMSA calls on the Healthcare & Medical Education NGOs to:

- Raise awareness on the need for culturally competent healthcare professionals in the globalised healthcare system for the future;
- Advocate for a globalised healthcare system that involves qualified staff and highlight the importance of culturally inclusive environments in the workplace;
- Collaborate with student organisations and provide medical mobility opportunities for medical students;
- Organise webinars to give detailed information about different medical mobility opportunities that medical students can take advantage of;
- Create online platforms where medical students can share their mobility experiences to other medical students who are curious for medical mobility in order to enhance peer-tutor relationships.

EMSA calls on the Governmental Organisations to:

- Encourage universities to inform and advice on professional mobility;
- Establish an administrative infrastructure which accommodates and supports the professional mobility of students;
- Encourage universities to offer accessible places for incoming exchange students;
- Fund bodies which centrally coordinate professional mobility for students;

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- Fund sponsorship programs to medical students who are willing to participate in medical mobility programs for their expenses that mostly revolve around travelling.

Abbreviations

EU: European Union

NGOs: Non-governmental Organisations

EMSA: European Medical Students' Association

FMO: Faculty Member Organisation

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