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The programme of study visits is part of the lifelong learning programme 2007-13 (1), supporting cooperation among European education and vocational training specialists and decision-makers. During the three-to-five day intensive exchange, participants from different European countries examine and discuss education and training policies and practices, share experiences and expertise, look for common approaches and effective solutions to challenges, and network for future cooperation.

In 2008/09, 2,532 decision-makers and practitioners from 30 countries took part in 246 study visits hosted by 29 countries. The largest participant groups were head teachers and teacher trainers (25%), directors of education and vocational training institutions, guidance and validation centres (15%) and representatives of local, regional and national authorities responsible for education and training (10%).

During April–May 2010, Cedefop conducted a survey of participants of 2008/09 study visits to learn what they had gained from their participation. Replies were received from 583 participants representing various education and vocational training sectors.

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MAJOR BENEFITS IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOLLOW STUDY VISITS

IMPACT ON 2008/09 STUDY VISIT PARTICIPANTS
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Figure 1. Participant satisfaction with the study visits (N=983)

Participating in study visits offers a REAL OPPORTUNITY

93% of respondents said that they became more aware of the common aims of, and differences among, education and training systems in other European countries, as well as of similar challenges that can be addressed by applying successful solutions learned about during the visits.

The most beneficial part of the study visit was active demonstration of education policies implemented across the system. [...] the visits to education institutions [...] were really important. Plus, the exchange of views among the study visit participants and with experts or school staff provided greater insight into the innovations / practices we saw (participant from Greece).

Participants also became more aware of European cooperation in education and training (70%), lifelong learning strategies of the EU and Member States (50%), benchmarks for education and training in Europe (41%), and European tools and principles such as EQF, ECVET and Europass (24%). Following the visits, 80% continued to explore the themes and issues they learned about through discussions with colleagues or cooperation projects.

Now I have contacts with education professionals around Europe [...]. I think that these visits improve links among Europeans as members of the same continent (participant from Spain).

91% learned about examples of effective policies and practices from other countries.

We learned about good practice in the schools we visited, ranging from equal opportunity for slow learners and pupils with special needs, to the use of ICT, cooperation among schools, and career planning (participant from Germany).

Based on the information they gained during the study visits, 55% of respondents proposed changes to the work of their institutions, about half of which have been taken on board. Among difficulties in implementing changes, participants emphasised the need for education and training systems and management to become more open to the world and new ideas.

The visit provided 52% of participants with solutions to the problems they had been working on.

I met a lot of people with the same interests working in other situations and in other countries, but our vision of good education is the same and that supports me in my work. I saw a lot of practical examples (participant from Belgium).
Participating in study visits is, in most cases, a door to increased involvement in European cooperation and programmes; 84% of participants stayed in contact with people they met during the visit. Within a year of the visit, about one third of respondents managed to develop and submit a proposal for a cooperation project. A quarter of them helped their institution to host a study visit, while 91% encouraged others to participate in the study visits programme.

**Figure 2. Summary of responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact of study visits on participants 2008/09</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dissemination of knowledge gained during the study visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Became better aware of education and training systems in Member States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learned about examples of good practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Found solutions to problems in work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed changes to the institution’s work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed suggestions to education and training policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed and submitted cooperation project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Cedefop (2010), Impact assessment of 2008/09 study visits

During my visit, I found hard-working, serious and really motivated partners to improve teaching and learning in Europe (participant from Portugal).

The study visit was a chance for me to find partners for European cooperation: I found partners for my school and also for two other schools to apply for a Comenius school project (participant from Turkey).

92% of respondents found that participation was beneficial for their personal skills, making them more confident in communicating in a foreign language on issues related to their professional activities (81 %) and in communicating with people from other cultures (87 %).

I have learned a lot about special education system in other countries, collected many new ideas and developed my English knowledge (participant from Hungary).
A large number of participants brought the outcomes of their visits to the attention of policy- and decision-makers at local (57%), regional (33%) and national (15%) level, including ministries of education.

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The study visits programme for education and vocational training specialists, part of the lifelong learning programme (2007-13), is an initiative of the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Education and Culture. Cedefop coordinates the programme at the European level, whereas the national agencies implement the programme in the participating countries.

A great deal of additional information on the European Union is available on the Internet. It can be accessed through the Europa server (http://europa.eu).

Luxembourg:
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