

# The feasibility of a mobility scheme for SME and their employees

*Results of the evaluation of MobiliseSME*

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MobiliseSME 

## Overview of the presentation

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- Background and objectives of the work undertaken
- Overview of the MobiliseSME scheme
- Main results of the evaluation of MobiliseSME
  - *Relevance & motivation*
  - *Communication*
  - *Implementation, matchmaking process and & efficiency*
  - *Effectiveness*
  - *EU added value*

## Background and objectives of the work undertaken

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### **Scope of our work**

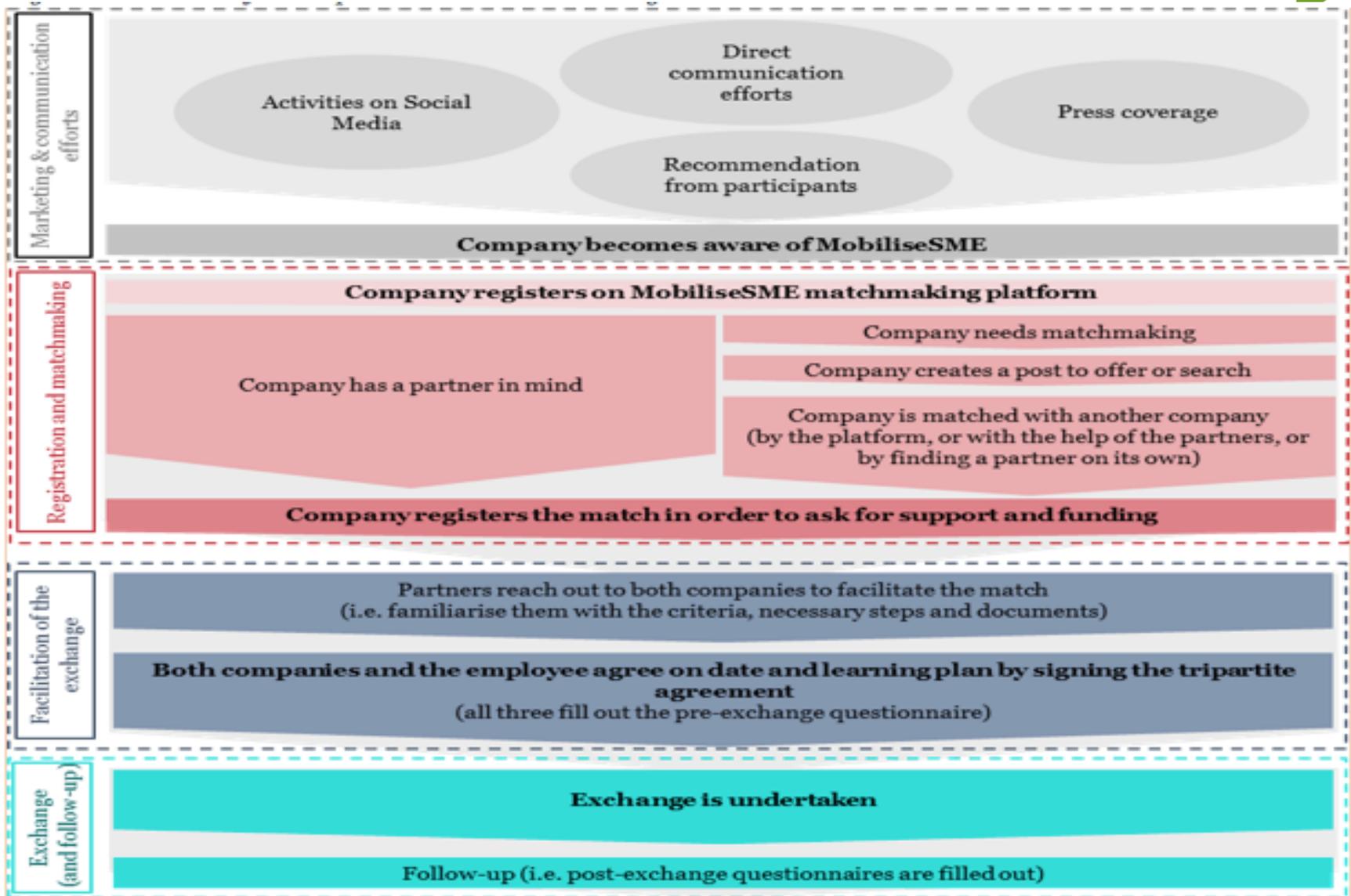
- Examine the state of play and the need for action at European level and the situation of companies
- Explore possible options for a future EU intervention in this area, possible benefits and obstacles
- Evaluate the pilot project covering employee exchanges between companies (MobiliseSME pilot)

### **Focus of today's presentation**

- Results of the evaluation the MobiliseSME pilot
  - *Relevance & motivation*
  - *Communication*
  - *Implementation, matchmaking process and & efficiency*
  - *Effectiveness*
  - *EU added value*

## Overview on MobiliseSME – and main elements

- 1. Marketing and communication to generate awareness of the scheme among potential participants**
  - *Social media, advertising and press coverage*
  - *Promotion via partners communication tools, events and one-to-one*
  - *Multiplication – from one company to another*
- 2. Registration and matchmaking**
  - *With known partner: Registration on the platform*
  - *Without a partner in mind: Research on the platform, search and facilitation by project partners*
- 3. Facilitation of the exchange**
  - *Companies made aware of requirements*
  - *Companies agree on the main exchange elements – including the learning plan*
- 4. Exchange is undertaken**
  - *Feedback collected via evaluation forms*



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## Main evaluation findings

## Relevance and interest in the scheme – how many & who

### Overall interest

- By 30 June, **357 companies were registered** in the database
- Of these, **102 had published** a post looking for an exchange
- **50 exchanges** were organised during the pilot project

### Those interested and participating were

- Most interested: micro-enterprises or self-employed (67%) <5 employees
- Most participating: Small (10 or more); some micro companies.
- No clear trends in terms of company sectors – but communication and marketing, ICT and business services appear to be the most promising company sectors for exchanges

### Interested in

- Sending – more than hosting
- Hosts in EU-15 (and more in central and northern EU)

## Relevance and interest in the scheme – how many & who

### Geographical differences

- Companies from the **newer Member States**, on average, appear markedly more interested in participating. 46% of companies subscribed to the **database** are from the EU-12, 49% of from the EU-15 (here, Southern Europe dominates)
- Companies from the **newer Member States also participate more**, especially as senders – 48% of all sending companies are located in EU12.
- Hosts tend to be located in EU-15

## Relevance and motivation to participate

- 64% of the **employees** wanted to improve/acquire **work related skills**; and 60% wanted **to develop their careers**, followed by motivations like language learning or experiencing a different culture
- **Sending companies** participated to **gain fresh ideas (61%)** or to develop the **skill set of the employee (45%)**, followed by new international contacts
- **Hosting companies** participated to **develop the skill set of their employees (66%)** or **to gain fresh ideas (45%)**, followed by **strengthening the partnership** with the sending company

## Relevance – strengths

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- MobilseSMEs generated sufficient interest to pilot test the project
- Motivations of the participating enterprises are articulated around learning opportunities. There is thus a high level of consistency between the pilot's stated objectives and the companies' reasons for participation
- There are opportunities to expand on the project generating more exchanges (estimated somewhere below 1000 exchanges/year)

## Relevance – avenues for further development

- The numbers of prospective participants have been sufficient for the pilot. However, a larger poll of prospective participants will be needed for a roll out of the scheme.
- A longer implementation period, promotion of results from completed exchanges, a wider network of project partners and “word of mouth” is likely to generate more applicants.
- But increased promotional efforts are likely to be needed to generate the full potential. Best targeted at the following groups:
  - *Small enterprises (>10 employees)*
  - *Enterprises in EU-15*
  - *Enterprises in countries which are of high “hosting” demand*
  - *Sectors of greatest potential*

## Communication

The first feasibility report highlighted that generating awareness and advertising MobiliseSME would be a key success factor for generating participation.

MobiliseSME project partner have undertaken a wide range of activities to promote the scheme using a multitude of channels:

- Social media channels, digital advertisement and online content creation (MobiliseSME videos)
- Media channels of the partner companies (News articles online, in newsletters, events, one to one promotion)
- MobiliseSME Electronic Newsletter and Press releases

## Communication – strengths

- The MobiliseSME project partners have undertaken considerable efforts in communicating and advertising the programme – using a multitude of face to face, online, social and traditional media channels
- Personal channels (direct mails, calls, events and “word to mouth”) and partner newsletters have worked best to motivate participants
- Communication efforts have worked best at a local level – and in the language of the participants.

## Communication – avenues for further development

- It took time to achieve results (i.e. generate participants) – and this needs to be factored in for an eventual roll out.
- For communication to work the best – communication resources needs to be concentrated with local partners & avenues which till date have generated best results.
- Communication via business advisory services, incl. those supporting internationalisation of SMEs, is likely to have potential.
- The concept of a transnational B2B exchange scheme is difficult to communicate. Using exchanges undertaken to showcase how companies benefit has potential.
- Due to the complexity of the scheme advertising and other forms of bought coverage are unlikely to generate engagement

## Implementation: matchmaking

- Online matchmaking platform was intended to operate as the backbone of the matching process
- In practice, the matchmaking platform was not instrumental in generating most of the exchanges:
  - *many of the prospective participants already knew the potential partner OR*
  - *partners facilitated the matches manually*
- This worked to the satisfaction of the companies:
  - *79% of sending organisations said the services had been excellent or good, while 83% of employees said the support had been excellent or good.*
  - *Also agreed on by unsuccessful companies*

## Implementation: organisation

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Several aspects associated to implementation:

- Company and employee **requirements** (MSMEs and employees with a certain work experience and educational level)
- **Lengths** of exchanges 2 weeks and 2 months-well
- **Tripartite agreements** (incl. learning plan)
- Provision of **funding** for travel and subsistence (but not for other aspects)
- Choice of **working language**: for the partners to agree

## Implementation – strengths

### **Overall very well designed and implemented scheme**

- High satisfaction with matchmaking support when it was needed
- Flexibility in lengths catered for company needs
- Tripartite agreements and learning plan – useful to manage expectations and agree on focus
- Funding necessary for exchanges to happen – and mostly sufficient
- None of the company and employee requirements seemed to significantly affect participation
- High level of satisfaction with partner support during the exchanges, as well as with overall organisation, coordination and guidance received by the partners
- Language mostly not an issue

## Implementation – avenues for further development

- Matchmaking platform was not instrumental in generating most of the exchanges - but it did serve other functions (overseeing exchanges, gathering data, etc.)
- While manual matchmaking addressed weakness of the platform – some level of automatization and standards are necessary for matching at a larger scale. This calls for
  - *improvement of the matchmaking platform.*
  - *“standard service level for matching” for potential participants (As matching will still need to be supported manually)*

### **Other aspects to improve implementation**

- Allow for limited top up funding for visits to “high cost capitals”

## Effectiveness - were the **matches suitable** to deliver on the stated objectives?

Matches between participants **are very well-regarded:**

- Good match between needs of sending companies and host companies
- The participating employees had the right qualifications
- Satisfaction with the work and tasks undertaken by the visiting employee is high.
- High satisfaction with the experience and the tasks undertaken by the employees participating

## Effectiveness - did the **exchanges deliver on the expected results?**

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All hosts and senders stated that the scheme

- Has benefited skills development,
- Allowed them to gain new ideas or approaches for products, services or organisational development
- Brought them market opportunities or market intelligence

Generally the **results are above the actual expectations** – especially as regards:

- New ideas for approaches for product, services or organisational development
- New international contacts

## Effectiveness - did the **exchanges deliver on the expected results?**

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### **Employees** especially:

- Developed professional networks
- Gained new ideas and inspiration
- Developed skills in their core area of work
- Improved career opportunities – with the current employer

In all of the above areas the **results are above the actual expectations**

## Effectiveness – outcomes

Both hosts and sending enterprises have high expectations regarding the impact on business.

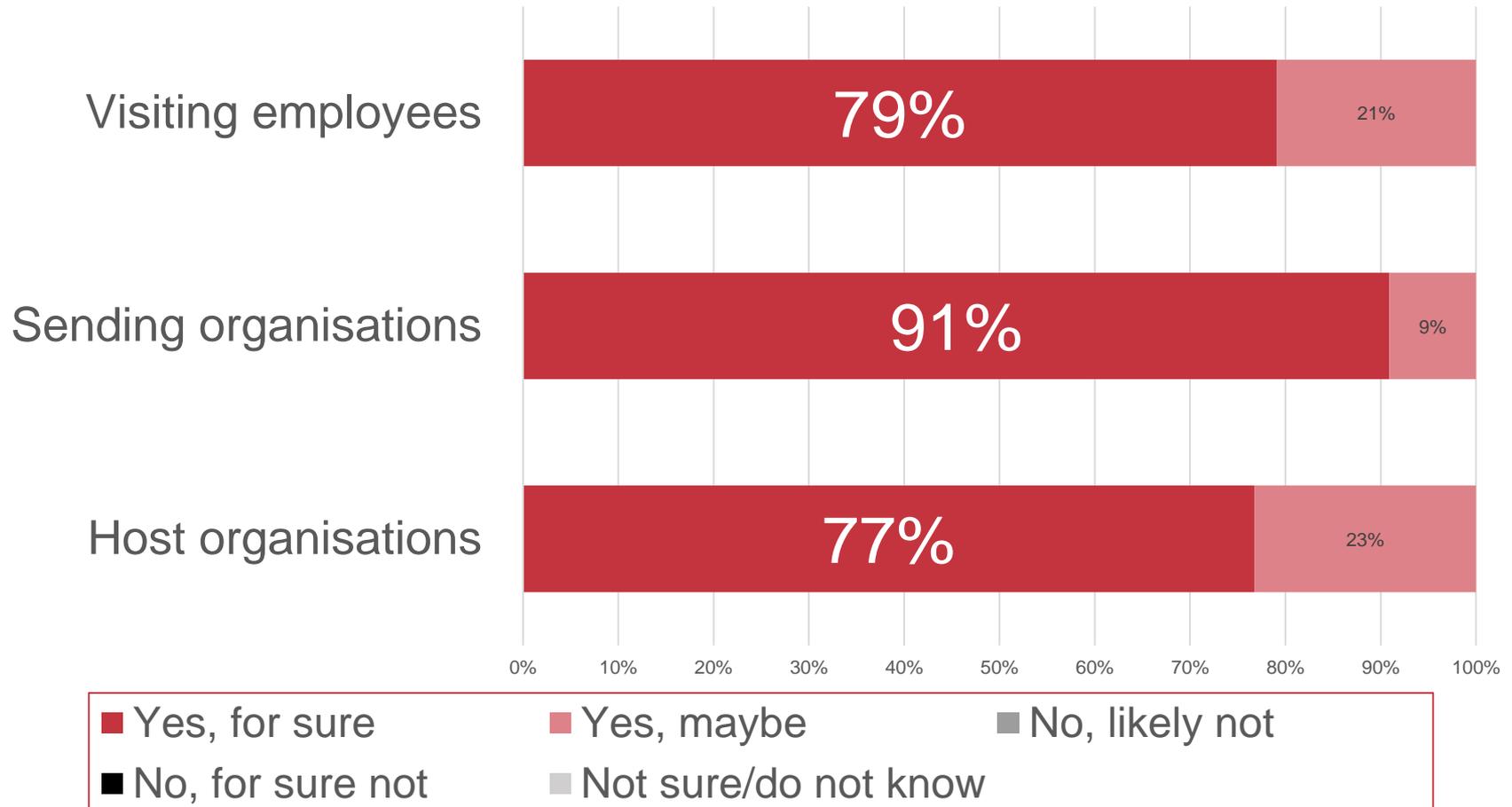
- A majority of companies participating expect to develop new services or products or practices as a result of the project.
- More than four of five companies expect cross border business to develop positively thanks to the exchange organised.

These effects appear to be generated mainly through the **consolidation or expansion of business relations with the partner company**. Impacts on wider internationalisation efforts are seemingly smaller

## Effectiveness – strengths

- In line with the expected results, **skills** and **knowledge gathering** – such as learning about new approaches or methods, experiencing different approaches – are the main results of the programme.
- Effects were generated via
  - *interchange of working methods from employee to host,*
  - *exchange of mutually beneficial information or*
  - *more broadly through employees immersing themselves in a foreign environment.*
- New **international contacts** were a second key result
- The acquisition of **technical skills** is reported less frequently. However, about one in five of all hosts saw this as the primary result of the exchange.

## So .... would they participate again?



## Effectiveness – avenues for further development

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- No evidence to suggest that the exchange scheme has generated any substantive unintended impacts – but many positive results and outcomes
- Consequently – avenues for further developments relate rather to implementation issues

## Added value - strengths

- The first feasibility study highlighted that currently **there is no mobility scheme** similar to the idea of MobiliseSME

Evidence of both *input* and *outcome* additionality

- Exchanges supported that otherwise would not have taken place (*input* additionality)
- Exchanges supporting business development which otherwise was unlikely to have happened (*outcome* additionality)
- **Key added value** of MobiliseSME: the transnational aspect of the exchange scheme

## Recommendations - overall

- MobiliseSME scheme **overall** has generated important learning benefits, which can be expected to contribute positively to business and employee development among those participating.
- But more companies need to be motivated to participate in the future
- Cost efficiency would be improved with more participants
- Organisational efficiency should be improved for a roll out

## Recommendations

- **Implementation:** Maintain the overall design of the scheme: **tripartite agreements**, employee **requirements en gros**, **financial support en gros**, **flexibility** regarding the length of exchanges
- **Timeline:** provide an effective implementation period of above one year
- **Country partners** from each of the EU-28 would be beneficial
- **Partner organisation** should have a **wide membership** base of small and medium sized enterprises
- **Possible approach:** consider starting from some sectors (like communication and marketing, ICT, business services) and expand the scheme from there

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**Thank you!**