

“On the LIPS course I heard from one of my fellow students that in Spain people at work talk more about their families than in Germany. And it was true that during my stay in Spain one of my older colleagues showed me pictures of her sons, daughters and even their boyfriends and told me all the details. I don't think that people in Germany would think that that is appropriate.” What helped Claudia from Germany to find the correct balance of private life and professional distance during her practical training will in the future be accessible to all students around Europe who are planning a practical training abroad.

LIPS stands for Linguistic and Intercultural Preparation of Students for the workplace and is a twelve week international course where students from 8 different countries work together in a virtual classroom. On the same course where Alberto from Spain is preparing for his work placement in Denmark, Claudia from Germany is trying to find out how to fit into a Spanish workplace. “Our course participants report that the intercultural input and the discussions with students from the other countries have made their first days in the new company and in the foreign country much easier” says project leader Dr. Laurent Borgmann from the University of Koblenz, Germany. “Just like the students, the teachers, too, are from eight different European countries and take it in turns to teach the different parts of the course.”

The international online course is one of the results of a two-year European LEONARDO project. Seventeen institutions such as universities, companies and research institutes from 8 European countries worked together to find out what the challenges of international work placements are and how students can be trained to overcome them. Apart from the course, the project consortium also produced an intercultural podcast as well as guidelines for students and also for employers in the context of international work placements. While at the start, even the project partners were not sure whether an intercultural training can really be done online, they realised that having such an international learning group turned out to be the main strength of this course. At their final meeting in Brussels the consortium will discuss how the course, which was originally planned for students going on an internship abroad, can be adapted to the needs of international offices who want to train their outgoing students or for companies who want to offer training to their employees who work in an international context. “I see three main advantages now, first the course was fun and put me in contact with other students across Europe, it helped me a lot, especially during my first week at work in Italy, and to be honest, the certificate signed by four European Universities will be very handy in my upcoming applications!”, says Péter from Pécs in Hungary.