

Five years of Europass in Finland

The Ministry of Education and Culture appointed the Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE) as the Finnish National Europass Centre on 21st February 2005. The official Europass launch seminar was organised in Finland on 27th September 2005. This memorandum by the Finnish National Board of Education, Unit for Recognition and International Comparability of Qualifications explores development of the use and awareness of Europass over the last five years.

1. Background and objectives of the Europass scheme

The Europass scheme is based on Decision No. 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2004 on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass). Europass is a personal portfolio of documents, which citizens can use to present their qualifications and competences throughout Europe. Europass consists of five documents, which are used in the same format in all EU/EEA countries. People can use Europass when looking for work or applying for education and training programmes. The mobility of learners and workers follows the principle of free movement, which is one of the key pillars of the European Union and an important part of the new 'Europe 2020' strategy. Europass aims to increase the transparency of qualifications and competences, thus supporting citizens' opportunities for mobility both for work and learning purposes in the spirit of lifelong learning.

In Finland, responsibility for the Europass scheme rests with the Finnish National Board of Education, which operates as the Finnish National Europass Centre appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Within the FNBE organisation, responsibility for Europass activities has been placed with the Recognition and International Comparability of Qualifications Unit. The same unit also functions as the authority that makes decisions on the eligibility conferred by foreign qualifications for public posts in Finland. In addition, the unit is Finland's National Reference Point for international co-operation networks on recognition of higher education qualifications (ENIC/NARIC), the National Contact Point for information on recognition of professional qualifications and the National Co-ordination Point for the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). In other words, expertise relating to recognition and comparison of qualifications and competences and relevant instruments has been concentrated in a single unit within the Finnish National Board of Education.

1.1 Implementation of the Europass scheme

The Decision of the European Parliament and Council on the Europass scheme determines the core functions of the National Europass Centres as follows:

1. managing the Europass documents;
2. maintaining the national information system;
3. raising awareness of the Europass scheme and individual Europass documents;
4. providing citizens with information and guidance on learning opportunities and the structure of education and training systems in Europe (in particular through co-operation with the ENIC/NARIC, Euroguidance and EURES networks);

5. networking at EU level: participating in co-operation of the European network of National Europass Centres co-ordinated by the Commission and functioning as a liaison for other countries' National Europass Centres;
6. co-ordinating the Community financial support relating to the Europass scheme at a national level.

In addition to the basic functions defined in the decision, the European Commission draws up an annual action plan to set out the priorities for action in more detail. Based on the Commission's action plan, the Finnish National Europass Centre prepares a national action plan and budget and co-ordinates the use of Community and national funding shares. The National Europass Centre reports to the Commission on use of the Europass documents and its own operations every year.

1.2 Launch and development of the National Europass Centre's operations

During its first operating year, 2005, the National Europass Centre focused on launching operations: among other things, this involved appointing a steering committee with representation from the key partner organisations, including the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, the Centre for International Mobility (CIMO), labour market organisations and student organisations. The Centre disseminated information about the new scheme to its co-operation partners, prepared information material and organised a national launch seminar on 27th September 2005. The seminar was attended by more than 500 representatives of stakeholders.

In subsequent years, the National Europass Centre concentrated on strengthening and establishing operations. The Centre trained staff within guidance and counselling services, employment administration and educational institutions as well as other parties in a position to provide guidance and counselling for actual users of the Europass documents – students and job seekers. In support of training and information measures, the Centre designed a comprehensive information package and a diverse website, which also includes a news section. In addition, a mailing list was set up. Its staff participated in trade fairs, seminars and training events, visited educational institutions on request and trained students in use of the Europass.

As the National Europass Centre has established its operations and as awareness of the Europass scheme has increased, several forms of operation that have turned out to be useful have become embedded as part of annual routines. These include participation in certain annually organised events, publication of a customer magazine, training for co-operation partners, dissemination of information through the mailing list and website, and preparation and maintenance of information materials. At the same time, the focus of co-operation has shifted from educational institutions towards guidance and counselling services in particular. This also means that Europass users are no longer the main target group for the Centre's information measures and other operations; instead, the aim is to reach users primarily through educational institutions, guidance and counselling services and other similar parties, in addition to the website.

2. Use of the Europass scheme in Finland

The Europass scheme was well received in Finland. Europass was already familiar from the earlier Europass Training document within vocational education and training (VET), while the higher

education sector had already been using Diploma Supplements, now included as part of the Europass scheme, for some years. Educational institutions have indeed played an active role in the Europass scheme, but as described below, citizens have also made extensive use of Europass documents.

2.1 Finns are keen Europass users

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) has compiled statistics on use of the Europass on the Europass portal¹ since 2007, including breakdowns by country of residence and nationality. Finns are among the keenest Europass users in Europe: Finland is among the fifteen most active countries in terms of filling in Europass CVs and Europass Language Passports and using the Europass portal. In 2009, for example, more than 42,000 Europass CVs were completed in Finland, which is the ninth highest number in the whole of Europe ahead of countries such as the United Kingdom. In relative population terms, this is an enormous achievement. Europass CVs and Language Passports are used most frequently in Portugal, Italy, Spain, Germany and Romania.

CEDEFOP also collects data on document users, such as age, work experience and foreign language skills. A comparison of the data on users residing in Finland with all Europass users shows that those residing in Finland are slightly more skilled in languages and they are also younger, which means that they have less work experience.

- 58% of users residing in Finland report that they know three or more foreign languages compared with 37% of all users.
- 62% are aged 25 or younger, whereas this age group accounts for 46.5% of all users.
- 40% of users residing in Finland report that they have 5 years of work experience or less, while the figure for all users is 30.5%.

2.2 Europass documents

The Europass scheme covers the following documents aiming to promote international mobility and comparability of qualifications and competences:

1. Europass CV
2. Europass Language Passport
3. Europass Mobility
4. Europass Certificate Supplement
5. Europass Diploma Supplement.

Europass CV

The basic Europass document is the Europass CV (ECV), which learners or workers can supplement with other Europass documents as required. CEDEFOP has developed an online tool for filling in the Europass CV and Language Passport, which was introduced in late 2005. The Finnish National Europass Centre was responsible for preparing Finnish-language instructions and examples and has

¹The Europass CV and Language Passport can be filled in online on the Europass portal, using an electronic tool. Users can also download and save the documents as files on their own computers. Up-to-date statistical data is collected from the portal on both online use and numbers of downloaded documents. The portal also provides information on users based on the details that users themselves have indicated on the documents.

played an active role in developing the tool to make it more user-friendly. The online tool also collects statistics on use of the documents.

The Europass CV is the most well-known and widely used of the documents. Every year, millions of people use the Europass CV throughout Europe. Finns are keen users of the ECV and its use has increased continuously. In particular, Finns appreciate the online tool developed by CEDEFOP for filling in the ECV: it has continuously grown in popularity in Finland. The usage rates of the downloadable ECV template have remained more or less unchanged, with about 30,000 documents downloaded each year since 2006, even as the number of ECV users has increased by thousands every year.

The Finnish National Europass Centre aims to introduce the Europass CV to young people during their studies. The Centre has trained teachers, produced materials and created a section intended for teachers on the Europass website. A specific brochure has also been drawn up to present the document. Both Europass CVs and Language Passports are also used for international activities at educational institutions, such as when selecting students to participate in periods spent abroad.

Finns are keen to use the online tool to complete their Europass CVs. Just under a third of their ECVs are completed in Finnish and the rest in other languages, in particular English. Figure 1 shows the increase in the use of Europass CVs: the diagram indicates the numbers of both Finnish-language CVs and those completed in any available language by users residing in Finland. (CEDEFOP has only compiled statistics of ECV users by country of residence since September 2007.)

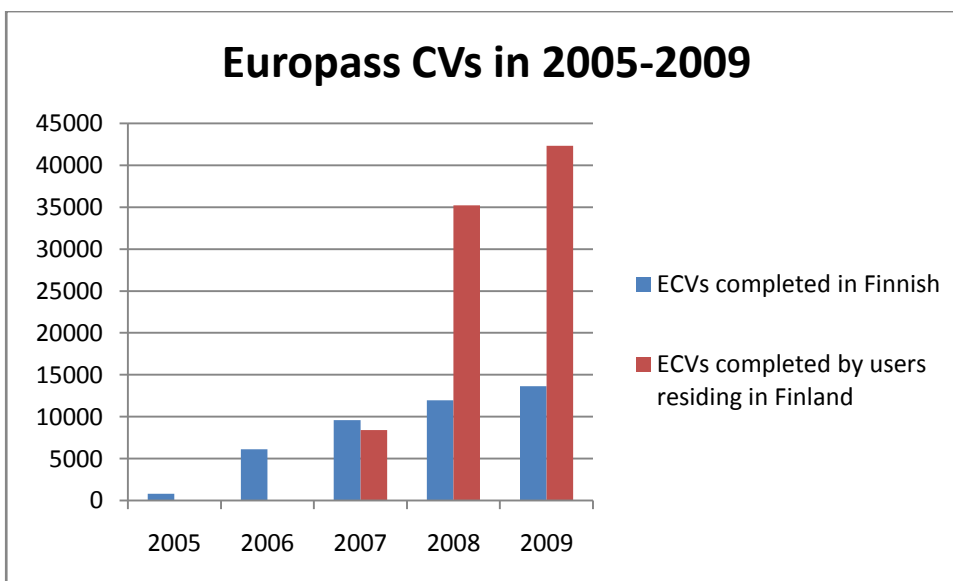


Figure 1. (Source: <http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/europass/home/hornav/Statistics.csp>)

Figure 2 provides a more detailed breakdown of use of the Europass CV in 2009. Europass CVs are frequently completed early in the year, which is an active period for young people and students looking for (summer) jobs and, in particular, during early autumn. The situation in 2008 is very similar to the situation in 2009.

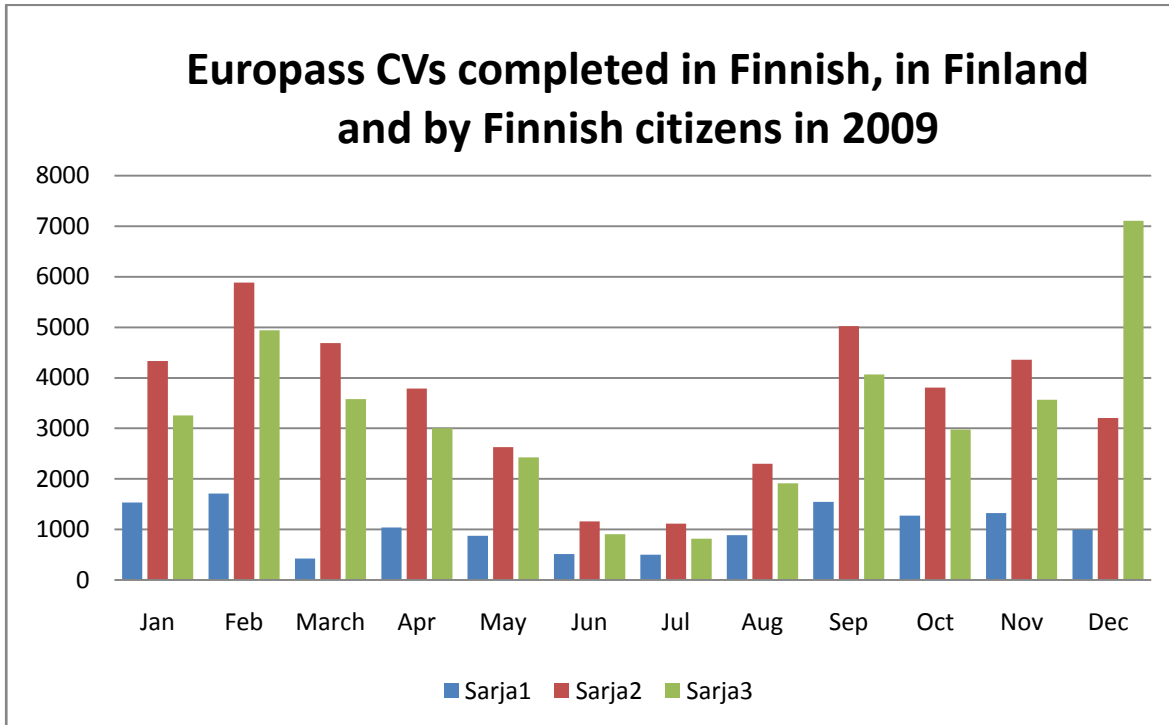


Figure 2. (Source: <http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/europass/home/hornav/Statistics.csp>)

The Finnish National Europass Centre has also worked to promote awareness of the Europass CV in the world of work by means such as meeting employers and maintaining contacts with different social partners, while also charting various forms of co-operation. The Europass steering committee has had representatives from the Federation of Finnish Enterprises, the Confederation of Finnish Industries and the Finnish Confederation of Salaried Employees (STTK). In addition, issues of the Europass customer magazine have been sent to all Chambers of Commerce. The Centre has co-operated with Monster job search services in order to expand use of the Europass CV. A section called 'Job-seeking tools' was opened on the Europass website in the autumn of 2009. The section provides a compilation of different ways of using the Europass documents in support of seeking a job and employees' own experiences of using Europass. In addition, representatives of the National Europass Centre have met major employers operating in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area and recruiting young people in particular (such as Stockmann stores and Helsinki Cooperative Society Elanto) and co-operate with Monster job search services.

Europass Language Passport

The Europass Language Passport (ELP) is based on the European Language Portfolio developed by the Council of Europe. The Language Passport is the reporting section of the Language Portfolio, where a language learner describes his or her language proficiency on a 6-step scale of skills levels (the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). Similar to the Europass CV, the Europass Language Passport can be completed using an online tool. The National Europass Centre is responsible for designing the content of the tool.

The Europass Language Passport has remained modest among the Europass documents in terms of user volumes, in particular when compared with the Europass CV, which is a similar document. The Language Passport was not used very much initially, and while user volumes have increased more sharply than those of the Europass CV, its use still remains at a low level (see Figure 3). The situation is the same throughout Europe. By way of example, a total of 2.7 million Europass CVs were completed

in 2009, compared with only 51,000 Language Passports. The Language Passport may have become overshadowed by the Europass CV to some extent: just like the Language Passport, language proficiency is also indicated on the Europass CV using the 6-step scale of skills level, thus providing a broader picture of language proficiency than a regular CV. Not necessarily everybody needs to indicate their language skills in more detail. On the other hand, the Europass Language Passport is part of the broader European Language Portfolio and passports used as part of the portfolio are not necessarily completed on the Europass portal. This also means that any Language Passports filled in elsewhere are not included in the statistics.

Figure 3 shows the relative shares of use of Europass CVs and Language Passports by native Finnish speakers in 2008 and 2009. Statistics on Language Passport users are not compiled by nationality or country of residence, because the data is collected from the documents and these details are not indicated on Language Passports. However, it is possible to indicate the native language in both documents. In 2009, 42,285 ECV users resided in Finland, 38,546 were Finnish citizens and 35,916 were native Finnish speakers. It is therefore fair to assume that use of the Language Passport in Finland is also somewhat more frequent than statistics suggest. Statistics are also compiled according to the language in which the documents were completed: in 2009, only 13,616 ECVs and 465 Language Passports were completed in Finnish. Finns actually use the documents more often in other languages.

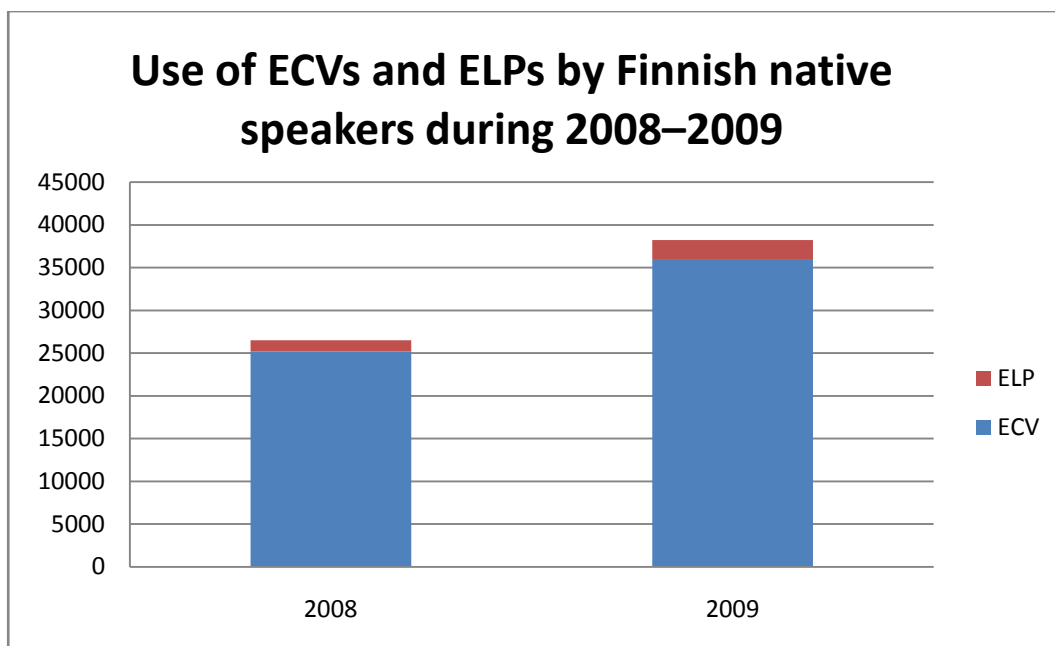


Figure 3. (Source: <http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/europass/home/hornav/Statistics.csp>)

Some Finnish educational institutions have incorporated the Europass Language Passport as part of their teaching, or it is used in international activities in parallel with the Europass CV. Information about opportunities for educational institutions to use the Europass Language Passport and CV as tools for teaching foreign languages, global education or entrepreneurship education has been disseminated through bulletins and material packages directed at language teachers, among others, and by preparing a specific website for the purpose. A specific brochure has also been drawn up to present the document.

Europass Mobility

The Europass Mobility document is the most recent addition to the Europass document set: it was introduced in August 2005. The National Europass Centre grants educational institutions user rights and monitors use of the documents. At present, the Europass Mobility document is used in upper secondary vocational education and training in Finland. The National Europass Centre has supported work carried out at educational institutions by providing training and producing instructions and materials. Materials have been developed in co-operation with users.

The Finnish National Europass Centre has supported both the introduction of the document at all levels of education and the development of relevant technical solutions. Broader introduction of the Europass Mobility document in Finland and throughout Europe requires development of an effective information system. A representative of the Finnish National Europass Centre has been actively involved in the efforts of the European Commission and CEDEFOP to create a common European database system for the purposes of managing and awarding Europass Mobility documents since 2006. However, development work has experienced some technical and data security issues, which have delayed introduction of the database system for several years. This is why the Europass Mobility Passport is still almost exclusively used within the upper secondary vocational sector in Finland. Nevertheless, user volumes have increased.

The Finnish National Europass Centre has also co-operated with higher education institutions to identify solutions suitable for the higher education sector: the sector has expressed interest but has lacked sufficient resources to introduce the Europass Mobility document.

Data on use of Europass Mobility documents is compiled for statistical purposes and reported to the European Commission. Statistics are based on reports submitted by educational institutions.



Figure 4.

Europass Certificate Supplement

The Europass Certificate Supplement is an appendix to vocational qualification certificates for use in international contexts. In Finland, Certificate Supplements have been drawn up for all upper secondary, further and specialist vocational qualifications. The Finnish National Europass Centre has implemented a national database solution allowing users to search for and print out supplements. In addition to educational institutions and qualification-holders, the database caters for parties such as employers and authorities both in Finland and abroad. Administration of the database was transferred to the Finnish National Board of Education in 2010. As the National Core Curricula for upper secondary vocational qualifications and the Requirements of Competence-based Qualifications have recently been reformed, the Certificate Supplements are also being updated.

Information on use of the Certificate Supplements has been provided by drawing up a guide for educational institutions and students, for example. Information bulletins about the Certificate Supplement and the database have been sent to all upper secondary level institutions. Finnish educational institutions are obliged by law to provide certificate-holders with a Certificate Supplement on request. Educational institutions have been encouraged to award supplements automatically to all students completing their qualifications and to ensure that they are familiar with the Europass scheme and the Certificate Supplement database.

Europass Diploma Supplement

Europass Diploma Supplements are used by all higher education institutions in Finland. The National Europass Centre has focused on developing the content of the Diploma Supplement and its quality assurance through providing advice and training for higher education institutions. In addition, the National Europass Centre is responsible for updating the description of the national higher education system included as part of Diploma Supplements. The Centre maintains a specific website for the purpose of awarding Diploma Supplements. The website compiles documents, guides and examples drawn up by the Centre or international networks to support work carried out at higher education institutions.

Changes occurring in the higher education sector require regular updating of Diploma Supplement materials, including both the description of the national education system and instructions for completing the Diploma Supplement. There are two types of instructions: general instructions for filling in the document item by item, with examples as required, and complete texts for section 5.2 of the Diploma Supplement, which describes the degree-holder's professional qualifications. The guidelines and the system description have been updated on an annual basis.

The Finnish National Europass Centre was involved in an international project aiming to improve the quality of the Diploma Supplements and support higher education institutions' work in Europe. The project also involved an employer representative (Business Europe) and one of its remits was to examine the document from the perspective of employers. The project report was completed in late 2008 and the results were utilised by drawing up new guidelines for Finnish higher education institutions for awarding Diploma Supplements. The new guidelines aimed to pay special attention to use of the document when entering the labour market. Experts from the National Europass Centre and the Recognition and International Comparability of Qualifications Unit also participate in Finland in the development work of the Diploma Supplement Label co-ordinated by the European Commission.

During the autumn of 2010, the National Europass Centre carried out a questionnaire survey on the Diploma Supplement practices in place at Finnish higher education institutions. The results of the survey will be compiled into a report and utilised nationally to improve the Diploma Supplement work and support quality assurance at higher education institutions.

3. Raising awareness of the Europass scheme and individual Europass documents

Introduction of the Europass scheme requires efficient and diverse information measures and direct contacts with education providers, students and employers. Europass work essentially involves training and information meetings, participation in seminars organised by partner organisations, networking, as well as preparing and sharing information materials.

Information and training measures aim to disseminate information and to train and motivate users and stakeholders and increase their commitment. Information meetings are also used to identify new users and user groups, gather experiences and opinions and discuss challenges and opportunities for developing Europass and enhancing implementation.

Information measures are targeted at co-operation partners, on the one hand, and Europass users, including young people, students and new certificate-holders in particular, on the other. The National Europass Centre's core information measures comprise the website, various brochures and guides, complete with the customer magazine. In addition, other information measures are carried out every year as required. A general graphic design recurring in all information materials was created in 2006.

The following sections present measures geared towards raising awareness of the Europass scheme and documents by means of information, training and networking in more detail.

3.1 Information measures

Over the last five years, the target groups of information measures have remained the same: 1) Europass users, including young people, students and new certificate-holders in particular, but increasingly those already on the labour market as well; and 2) educational institutions, guidance and counselling professionals and other co-operation partners, which provide Europass users with information and training in their own areas. Further target groups include employers and the social partners.

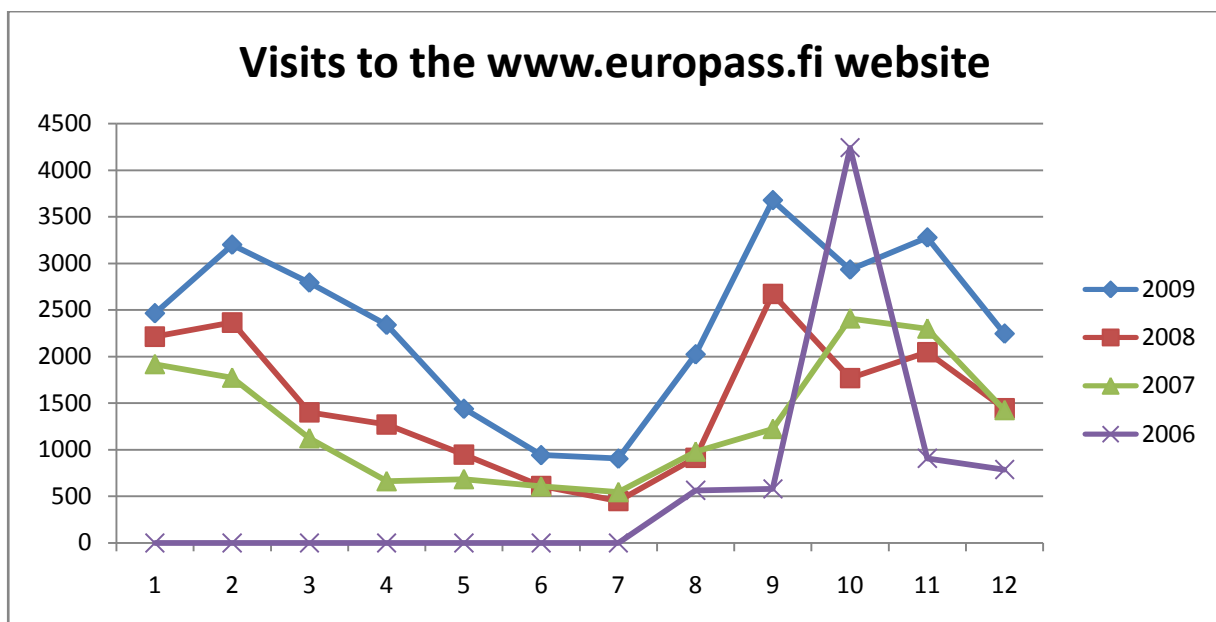
The means of providing information have changed to some extent: during 2006–2008, extensive annual information campaigns for young people and students were designed and implemented in co-operation with student organisations. Such extensive campaigns directly targeting end users have not been carried out in the last two years and the focus of information measures has shifted more towards parties that are closer to users, such as educational institutions. These partners have also been trained purposefully since 2007. In addition to educational institutions; the National Europass Centre has also provided training for Employment and Economic Development Offices and employment administration in co-operation with the Euroguidance Centre co-ordinated by CIMO. Since 2007, the National Europass Centre has published the online 'Osaaja' customer magazine, which has become an important information channel for users, but especially for partners. The website has been developed so as to cater for users and other stakeholders.

The National Europass Centre plans and produces various types of marketing materials as required, including pens, reflectors and T-shirts, which have been used as part of information campaigns and distributed at trade fairs and other events. In addition, Europass has been advertised in student magazines, student calendars, and guides distributed to students free of charge.

3.2 The National Europass Centre website

The new Finnish National Europass Centre website was launched in 2006. The site was divided into three subsites according to users: 1) general Europass information; 2) information for Europass users; and 3) information for educational institutions. The subsites are 'colour coded': the 'Skilled people' subsite for users is green, the subsite for educational institutions is blue and the general information subsite is orange.

Europass site visits have been systematically tracked using Google Analytics software since August 2006. The number of visitors has increased steadily and the website currently attracts about 2,400 visitors per month. The highest numbers of site visits have been logged early in the year, when young people and students are seeking summer jobs, and in autumn when they are starting their studies, as well as just before the Christmas holidays. Visitor numbers were also influenced by advertisements published in student calendars in early 2008 and 2009. In addition, information campaigns for young people and students were organised in the autumns of 2006–2008, which were also visible as an increase in site visits, in particular in 2006. The Finnish-language Europass customer magazine, 'Osaaja', has also been published every autumn since 2007.



Visits to the www.europass.fi website

Figure 5.

The website is to be transferred to the FNBE publication system during 2011. At the same time, both its content and layout will also be reformed.

Finns are also frequent visitors to the Europass portal maintained by CEDEFOP. The portal was already available in Finnish in October 2005, just a few months after its launch.

Year	Portal visits	Visits from Finland
2006	2,768,666	80,133
2007	4,158,137	100,721
2008	6,047,691	116,339
2009	7,487,763	126,126

Figure 6.

(Source: <http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/europass/home/hornav/Statistics.csp>)

3.3 Customer magazine

The National Europass Centre has published a Finnish-language customer magazine entitled ‘Osaaja’ (“Skilled”) since 2007. About 6,000 copies of the magazine are printed annually and these are mailed to parties such as the Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment, the Employment and Economic Development Offices of the largest cities, Chambers of Commerce, higher education institutions, selected units of CIMO and the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, and ministries, and delivery was extended last year to cover vocational institutions as well. In addition, issues have been made available at trade fairs and other events, such as the annual European Job Day recruitment fair.

A reader survey was carried out in 2009 to chart readers’ perceptions of the magazine. The survey was conducted using an online form from October 2009 to March 2010. About 700 responses were received and feedback was almost exclusively positive; the only criticism concerned the magazine’s layout. Respondents considered the magazine to be informative, interesting and important. The magazine is also developed on the basis of feedback from readers. For instance, the survey charted whether readers would prefer a printed or electronic magazine. The reader survey was repeated in the autumn of 2010 and the magazine will be revised in 2011.

3.4 Training

The Finnish National Europass Centre provides training for educational institutions and professionals from guidance and counselling services and employment administration and is involved in events organised by other parties by providing training and information. The objective of training is to ensure the efficient, extensive and appropriate use of Europass documents, on the one hand, and to reinforce expertise in partner organisations, on the other. The Centre does not have enough resources to reply to all questions that citizens have on their minds or to train everyone in the use of Europass, which makes it particularly important to train experts working in guidance and counselling services and employment administration.

The Centre also operates a Europass mailing list for educational institutions and co-operation partners. There is an electronic feedback form on the Europass website that allows different parties to send feedback and questions to the Centre and to order information materials. In addition, the website has been developed so as to diversely support Europass work carried out at educational institutions.

3.5 Networking and co-operation partners

An essential part of the Finnish National Europass Centre's work consists of developing and consolidating co-operation with upper secondary level educational institutions, higher education institutions, CIMO, guidance and counselling services, the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, employment services and other co-operation partners, as well as creating new networks and finding new partners. The Centre keeps contacts and has regular meetings with partners. One or two major events are organised every year.

A representative of the Finnish National Europass Centre has played an active role in international co-operation with representatives of other National Europass Centres, the Commission and CEDEFOP. The Finnish National Europass Centre's operations have widely attracted positive attention and it has hosted several study visits from other National Europass Centres.

The National Europass Centres have geographical co-operation networks, including the network of the Nordic and Baltic countries, as well as the network of the Nordic and Baltic countries, the Benelux countries and the United Kingdom, and the Finnish National Europass Centre has taken an active part in their operations. In 2011, the Finnish National Europass Centre will organise a meeting for the network of the Nordic and Baltic countries.

Summary

The Finnish National Europass Centre has operated since 2005. The centre has developed established operating methods, co-operation networks and partners. Europass documents are widely used in Finland and user volumes started to increase rapidly from the very beginning. When compared with other EU countries, Finns are very active Europass users: in 2009, more than 14,000 Finns filled in a Europass CV or Language Passport, while ECV and ELP instructions, examples and templates were downloaded 31,000 times. Europass Mobility documents were awarded to more than 800 people and all of the about 41,000 higher education graduates received Europass Diploma Supplements. In addition, a considerable proportion of those completing vocational qualifications have received Certificate Supplements.

A specific challenge for the National Europass Centre is to ensure that numbers of Europass users continue to grow in Finland and that co-operation partners continue to disseminate information about Europass actively to users and update their own expertise on the Europass scheme. It is also essential to improve the quality of the documents continuously. It is important to reach out to those user groups who could benefit from Europass but who do not receive information through educational institutions or employment offices, for example. It is also important to increase and enhance co-operation with labour market representatives and raise awareness of the Europass scheme among employers. Extensive national co-operation and active participation will also help influence development of Europass in the context of European co-operation.