



Erasmus Student Network

More mobility, better mobility, more accessible mobility

The Contribution of the Erasmus Student Network
to the Council Recommendation on
a new Learning Mobility for all



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Introduction to ESN's contribution to the Learning Mobility Framework Council Recommendation

The Erasmus Student Network (ESN) is the largest organisation representing and supporting mobile learners in the European Union and beyond. ESN works on every aspect and stage of the mobility experience, from the promotion of mobility opportunities to the reintegration of mobile learners after their experiences by creating vibrant alumni communities that give back to their societies. Through its research and policy activities, ESN has become a key actor in European discussion about learning mobility and the internationalisation of education, but ESN is way more than an alumni engagement and advocacy organisation. **ESN's key activity across its 44 countries and more than 500 local student organisations are dedicated to the support of current, future and prospective mobile learners.** Every year ESN local volunteers support more than 350.000 thousand of them, working closely with all the institutions and stakeholders involved in mobility.

Three concepts constitute the bedrock of ESN's policy posture towards learning mobility, as described in the General Policies of the organisation: **more mobility, better mobility and more accessible mobility.** The Erasmus Student Network believes in international opportunities for all, with a special focus on the removal of barriers for those who face particular challenges to participate.

This contribution to the call for evidence builds on ESN's main research and policy work over the last few years, including an analysis of the progress made since the publication of the Youth on the Move Council Recommendation in 2011, a comprehensive "state of play" on learning mobility in Europe with a special focus on Higher Education, and a final set of recommendations that also incorporate **direct wording proposals** that ESN expects to see in the Council Recommendation.

The scope of this contribution is not limited to the Higher Education field, as many of the proposals are relevant to all educational sectors. **ESN uses its expertise in the Higher Education field and its excellent connections with organisations active in other fields to build proposals that can help to widen participation in mobility among all sectors.**

The proposals in this contribution target the European institutions, Member States, other subnational levels of government and different kinds of educational institutions. ESN firmly believes that the ideas included in this document can play an important role in building the new learning mobility framework.

Analysis of the Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 ‘Youth on the move’ – promoting the learning mobility of young people

Acknowledgement of the commitment to the Council Recommendations

The 2011 Council Recommendation set the objective to gradually **make learning periods abroad the rule rather than the exception**. Despite the significant steps towards building the European Education Area, such as the launch of the European University Alliances Initiative, as well as the adoption of the European Strategy for Universities, mobility still remains an exception, considering that **only 9.1% of students in higher education experienced a learning period abroad**.¹ Making learning mobility a reality for all requires full implementation of the Bologna process and removal of barriers to mobility, which makes the national commitments even more important. Every citizen should experience learning mobility at least once throughout their life and it is through exchange and lifelong learning that this could be achieved.

ESN appreciates the commitment of the European Union to removing obstacles to mobility and acknowledges the progress made with the new **Erasmus+ 2021-2027 programme**. At the same time, it is equally important that Member States take steps to widen participation in learning mobility which are proportionate to the ambitions of the programme, especially given the consideration that education and training are a competence belonging to countries.

¹ European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Education and Training Monitor 2022*, Publications Office, 2022

Learning mobility as a social and work mobility facilitator

Learning mobility is one of the key tools that facilitates social mobility across Europe, especially for young people with fewer opportunities. According to Erasmus+ Higher Education Impact Study², Erasmus+ participants are very open to international careers - 87% agree or rather agree that they definitely want to work abroad for at least some time. The careers of Erasmus+ graduates are more international than those of non-mobile students: 23% started their first job abroad. Even if they stay in their home countries, the jobs of Erasmus+ graduates have significantly more international aspects, compared to non-mobile graduates. Only 20% of Erasmus+ graduates state that their current job has no international characteristics.

However, these statistics vary regionally. It is important to note that it is not only mobility for studies that helps workers' mobility later in life - 40% of graduates who undertook an Erasmus+ traineeship were offered a position by the employer that hosted them. In the Erasmus Impact Study 2014 this share was 33%. Therefore, a traineeship abroad within Erasmus+ programme is likely going to lead to continuing working abroad.

As rightfully mentioned in the Council Recommendation, there is a positive correlation between learning and training mobility and work mobility. However, mobility for many young people, especially those with fewer possibilities, still poses significant challenges. **ESN believes that every young European should have the right to participate in a learning mobility experience, as a stepping stone in their personal and professional development process.** The Erasmus+ Higher Education Impact Study and ESN's research prove, such as the SIEM research report³, how impactful mobilities can be in terms of skills acquisition. Mobility opportunities can foster social mobility and improve access to the labour market, which then leads to more work mobility.

Information and guidance on opportunities for learning mobility

If it wasn't communicated, did it even happen? Communication and information sharing are key tools when it comes to the promotion of learning mobility opportunities. We are therefore

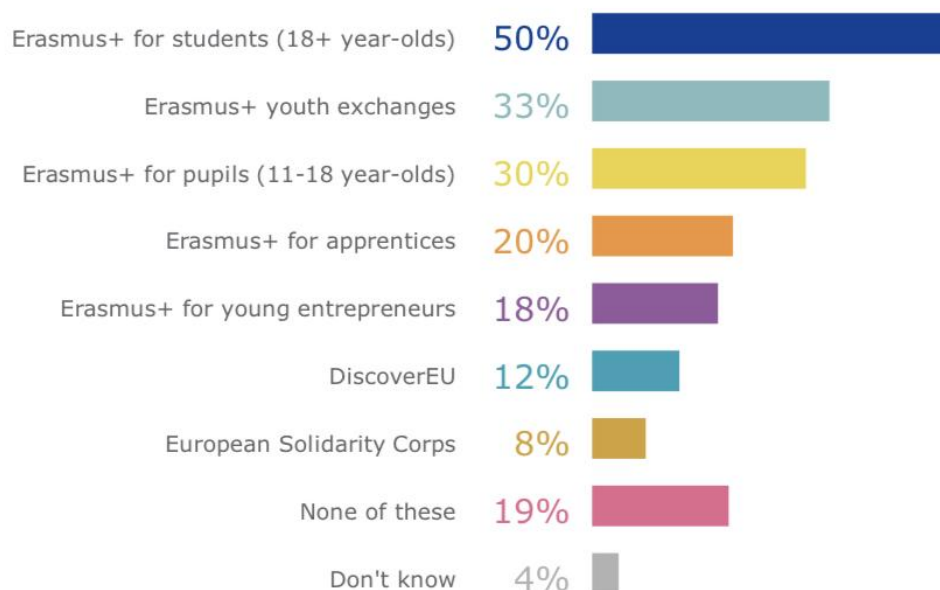
² European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Erasmus+ higher education impact study: final report*, Publications Office, 2019, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/162060>

³ Allinson K., Gabriels W.,(2021). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. SIEM Research Report, siem-project.eu

glad to see that the Council Recommendation addressed the importance of information and guidance in one of its first articles.

However, whilst the article stresses the significance of improving the quality of information and its outreach, there might still be some challenges in the exchange of information between Member States and their young citizens. According to the latest Eurobarometer “Youth and Democracy in the European Year of Youth”, **one in five young people is not aware of any EU-funded opportunity to stay abroad.** Although Erasmus+ is the most well-known programme for studies in higher education, the level of awareness for opportunities in other sections of education remains quite low.⁴

Below are some EU-funded opportunities for young people to stay in another EU country. Which, if any, have you heard of? [MULTIPLE ANSWERS] (% - EU27)



Base: All respondents (n=26 178)

⁴ Eurobarometer, “Youth and Democracy in the European Year of Youth”, 2022, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2282>, pg. 54

⁵**Regional and local levels are then less prone to receiving information and guidance on learning mobility and grant availability. Not surprisingly, learners from rural areas or disadvantaged backgrounds are also less likely to take advantage of a mobility opportunity.**

According to the SIEM research report (2021), 94% of mobile students found information about available funding useful when preparing for their mobility. Non-clear information from universities on scholarships, grants and bursaries available to students, eligibility requirements, indications of cost of living while abroad and any other practical information were therefore a crucial barrier to mobility.⁶ Better communication and specific targeting of non-mobile stakeholders should therefore be considered.

The Council Recommendation continues by highlighting the need for creative and interactive ways to communicate. Yet, it doesn't provide examples nor best practices. In **today's digitally connected world, it might be relevant to refer to the potential of social media platforms as effective tools to reach out to young people.** A positive example that might be referenced is the "This Time I'm Voting" online campaign by the European Parliament, which contributed to an increased turnout in the 2019 European Parliament elections, and continues to exist nowadays as "together.eu".

A positive practice to make information easily accessible to all young people is through centralised web portals, support centres and counselling services, as underlined by the Council Recommendation. These affirmations are supported by the data: according to the SIEM research report (2021), **88% of mobile students found support with the application process useful when preparing for their mobility, and 86% appreciated the help received for selecting a host university.**⁷ However, certain information-sharing portals, such as Euroguidance network or PLOTEUS, which were mentioned in the Recommendation, are not widely known or are incoherent and therefore result ineffective.

Another **best practice that is successfully coordinated at the EU level is the [Erasmus Days](#):** activities taking place on the ground with a centralised coordination from the European Commission and aim at promoting mobility opportunities across all sectors of education.

⁵ Eurobarometer, "Youth and Democracy in the European Year of Youth", 2022, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2282>, pg. 54

⁶ Allinson K., Gabriels W.,(2021). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. SIEM Research Report, siem-project.eu, p. 5

⁷ Ibid., pg. 12

Finally, the **total absence of mention of international non-governmental youth organisations is regrettable**. These are not only well-informed on learning mobilities, but also have a significant outreach towards young people in promoting mobility opportunities. They should therefore be seen as reliable partners that can work in tandem with national and regional agencies. Thanks to the capillarity of youth organisations such as the Erasmus Student Network, for example, they are able to reach out to local learners that might instead be easily forgotten by national stakeholders. Moreover, the work of youth organisations is appreciated by National Agencies, as their endeavour can increase their chances to provide clear, coherent and simple flow of information.

Motivation to participate in transnational learning mobility activities

In 2021 alone, nearly 650,000 people participated in training, study, or volunteering abroad, including roughly 500,000 students and trainees and 150,000 teachers and educators. Moreover, the total budget for the project was increased to €2,9 billion, with 19,000 projects and around 71,000 participating organisations.⁸ This is a stark growth compared to the 272,497 students, trainees, and staff that participated in Erasmus+ predecessor programme 2014-2020 in the first year of its implementation.⁹

The data speaks clearly: there seems to be a **high level of motivation to participate in transnational learning mobility activities**. Moreover, the motivation seems to have increased throughout the years thanks to an increased funding of Erasmus+ opportunities. Non-mobile students in fact claim that it is not a lack of interest or motivation that prevents them from participating in learning mobility.¹⁰ According to the data collected by Eurostudent, for example, on a cross-country average about a third of students who have not realised a temporary study abroad indicate either intending to embark on or are already preparing a study abroad period. Other factors linked to social, cultural and economic background therefore play a role in pushing students to depart or not for a mobility experience, beyond

⁸ European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Erasmus+ Annual Report 2021*, Publications Office of the EU, 2022, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/635340>

⁹ ICEF Monitor, "Erasmus+ participation doubles in 2014; boosts youth employment", 2016, <https://monitor.icef.com/2016/02/erasmus-participation-doubles-in-2014-boosts-youth-employment/>

¹⁰ Allinson K., Gabriels W.,(2021). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. SIEM Research Report, siem-project.eu

motivation.¹¹ Based on the ESNsurvey - XIV edition (2022), motivations to go on mobility include experiencing different learning environments, meeting new people and living abroad, as well as career development aspects.¹²

However, challenges still exist as young people keep facing barriers when they decide to go on mobility, which the SIEM research report (2021) categorises as institutional, attitudinal and environmental. Given these barriers, we appreciate the efforts of the Council's Recommendation to encourage networking between the relevant organisations and stakeholders as a tool to promote transnational learning mobility activities and motivate young people in participating in such activities. However, given the multitude of actors, this networking is not based on a centrally coordinated approach, but mostly relies on the proactivity of the single association.

Moreover, there is the absence of any mention of youth organisations in the text of the Recommendation. This appears odd, since **youth organisations are networking agents for young people and promoters of motivation to participate in transnational learning mobility activities.**

Youth organisations, particularly those composed of Erasmus+ alumni, are particularly successful in encouraging peer exchange between mobile and non-mobile learners and increasing the overall motivation to participate in the programme. **Alumni organisations can provide information about opportunities to go abroad and practical support.** The lack of these two elements was deemed as a major barrier (respectively, at 43% for lack of information and 45% for lack of practical support) by non-mobile respondents in the SIEM research report (2021), impeding young people to live a mobility experience. Given the key role played by these organisations, it would be essential to consider **structural and financial needs to reinforce their work. The result could be an even more effective motivational impact with a larger outreach.**

In this regard, ESN appreciates that the Council's Recommendation acknowledged the importance of mainstreaming mobility opportunities into all learning contexts. The 2021-2027 Erasmus+ programme has embraced this objective, by **increasing the funding to €26.2 billion**

¹¹ Eurostudent, "Social and economic conditions of student life in Europe", 2021, https://www.eurostudent.eu/download_files/documents/EUROSTUDENT_VII_Synopsis_of_Indicators.pdf, pg. 254

¹² Erasmus Student Network (2022). Understanding the experience and needs of exchange students in challenging times. ESNsurvey - XIV edition.

and making the programme more inclusive, digital and greener. Moreover, the programme has also attempted to promote the **value of learning mobility as a tool to an enhanced participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement.** Formal and non-formal learning activities support active citizenship and ethics in lifelong learning, as well as the development of social and intercultural competences, critical thinking and media literacy.

According to ESNsurvey - XIV edition (2022), **student mobility fosters internationalisation, global citizenship and European identity;** it also increases awareness and interest in the environment and climate change, human rights and international conflicts. Just as an example, respondents of the survey were twice as likely to be engaged in a cultural or human rights organisation and three times more likely to be engaged in organisations active in environmental issues when compared to the average European youth.¹³

The progress made to foster a mobility culture is therefore clear and its effects tangible. On this aspect, the Council's Recommendation was forward-looking. It could, however, have further promoted the **importance of recognising non-formal and informal learning experiences and volunteering during mobility and encouraged such activities** as a tool to increase the social value of learning mobility.

Moreover, to truly foster a potential definition of mobility culture could have been considered, as it was not currently defined in the Council's Recommendation. **Clearly defining what is meant by mobility culture makes it easier to put in place strategies that foster such a culture and increase its societal recognition.** Currently, the Mobility Scoreboard has a dedicated section on information and guidance on opportunities. However, promotion strategies of mobility are not well-coordinated nor monitored, therefore losing their impact. As the tool for monitoring developments in international mobility policies and the implementation of the 2011 Council Recommendation in European countries, the Mobility Scoreboard should try to fill this absence.¹⁴

For example, EU institutions could be more ambitious and aim at creating a clear promotion strategy according to the needs and interests of students, taking into consideration national context, monitored accurately and with the active involvement and support of organisations of mobile learners and mobile alumni. **At the moment, there is considerable variation in the**

¹³ Erasmus Student Network (2022). Understanding the experience and needs of exchange students in challenging times. ESNsurvey - XIV edition.

¹⁴ Mobility Scoreboard, www.national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/mobility-scoreboard

strategies and large-scale initiatives within EU Member States (e.g., as many as 15 education systems have no strategy in place). For those countries that have such communication initiatives, information and guidance for students is usually a minor aspect of the strategy.¹⁵

Preparation of opportunities for learning mobility, particularly with regard to foreign language skills and intercultural awareness

The journey towards learning mobility starts even before the departure, as rightly highlighted by the Council's Recommendation. **Providing students with language learning opportunities, as well as intercultural competences at early stages of education is a positive driver to encourage learning mobility.** These become powerful motivators to go abroad: according to the SIEM research report (2021), the majority of respondents were motivated to go abroad to improve their language skills (90%), develop interpersonal skills (92%) and learn about a new country or culture (93%).¹⁶

Based on the Council's Recommendation, the **EU has developed an effective tool for language learning.** The Online Language Support (OLS) is designed to help Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps participants improve their knowledge of the language in which they will work, study or volunteer abroad. The OLS has progressed since 2011 as it is now available for all EU languages and Erasmus+ programme languages, it includes an obligatory language assessment before departure and a personalised language learning pathway. The tool can therefore support and complement, rather than replace, efforts by educational institutions to foster language learning in intercultural contexts.

On a national level, however, **education systems are sometimes still lacking the necessary courses on languages and intercultural skills,** meaning that students exit high-school with a low level of preparation. The Mobility Scoreboard shows that there are still significant differences between the length of compulsory foreign language learning in Europe.¹⁷ It further highlights the differences between general and vocational education programmes, where

¹⁵ European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2023. Mobility Scoreboard: Higher education background report 2022/2023. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, pg. 12, 13

¹⁶ Allinson K., Gabriels W.,(2021). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. SIEM Research Report, siem-project.eu, pg. 54

¹⁷ European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2023. Mobility Scoreboard: Higher education background report 2022/2023. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

learning two foreign languages is more common in general education than in VET, and thus pre-defining a disadvantage for VET learners entering higher education, for whom successful participation in learning mobility might be more challenging than for pupils coming from general education background who are more likely to have studied two foreign languages. Moreover, theoretical courses might not be enough, as most learning occurs through practice. ESN therefore highlights the **importance of social activities outside of the formal education setting, both before and during a mobility experience, to boost language and intercultural skills.**

Social activities are particularly relevant for non-mobile learners: **whilst not yet participating in learning mobility, they still manage to develop language and intercultural skills through the “internationalisation at home”**. In this regard, short-term mobilities (even during high-school) could be an effective tool for allowing non-mobile students to overcome language barriers and mobile-learners to gain confidence that will be needed later on during a long-term mobility.

ESN appreciates the special mention that was provided by the 2011 Council Recommendation to disadvantaged learners (point 3.b), who have specific needs and might be less prone to participate in a learning mobility experience. However, the Recommendation did not specify who these disadvantaged learners are, e.g. students with special educational needs. **Defining disadvantaged learners is essential since it is the first step to ensuring that the right types of support are put in place.** A clear definition also facilitates the measurement of equity in access to mobility programmes and allows for a systemic approach to remove barriers that stop students from accessing mobility experiences.

Furthermore, the 2011 Council Recommendation highlights the **need to foster the acquisition of digital competencies by young people, both before and during a mobility experience.** This objective should go hand in hand with the development of digital skills for the involved staff and teachers. ESN embraces the statement from the Recommendation that **virtual mobility should complement, and not substitute, physical mobility**¹⁸. ESN and the European Students' Union have addressed the challenges of virtual and blended exchange and made suggestions on how to successfully incorporate new formats of mobility in a [position paper in 2021](#). A positive

¹⁸ European Students' Union and Erasmus Student Network, *“Bringing the student perspective to the debate on mobility, virtual exchange and blended learning”*, 2021

practice that could be mentioned is the use of digital tools to offer support to students via virtual briefing sessions or office hours before their departure.¹⁹

ESN is glad to see that the preparation of opportunities for learning mobility has been given the spotlight in the 2011 Council Recommendation. However, **preparation cannot limit itself to the development of language skills and intercultural awareness before the departure.**

Preparation should encompass many more areas, with a specific focus on the elimination of barriers towards learning mobility experience. There are a multitude of actors that support Erasmus+ beneficiaries in preparing their period abroad: these stem from National Agencies and Higher Education Institutions to youth and student organisations.

Encouraging the development of partnerships to better prepare periods of mobility in the text of the Recommendation is therefore positive, but not sufficient. The preparatory visits between HEIs should be used as an instrument to improve support to students and further create synergies between study programmes, with a focus on learning outcomes. **Working collectively ensures that students sent abroad to study, work or volunteer are supported across all steps of the mobility process.**²⁰

Administrative and institutional issues relating to the learning period abroad

Despite addressing the administrative and institutional challenges in the 2011 Council Recommendation, **they still present a major blocking factor to participation in mobility particularly for non-EU students requiring a visa or residence permit.** Approximately 17% of respondents in the ESNsurvey - XIV edition (2022) claimed that the visa application process was too complicated or strict. Whilst granting visas and residence permits is a national commitment, EU institutions should facilitate the process by encouraging Member States to liberalise the application. It is surprising to see no mention of EU Delegations, which could play a major role in facilitating cooperation and partnerships with third countries, thus promoting learning mobility between the Union and other parts of the world.

¹⁹ Allinson K., Gabriels W.,(2021). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. SIEM Research Report, siem-project.eu, pg. 26

²⁰ Allinson K., Gabriels W.,(2021). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. SIEM Research Report, siem-project.eu

Since 2011 the EU has attempted to take steps in reducing these obstacles, with acts such as the Youth Action Plan in EU external action, which suggests an ever-expanding role of the Erasmus+ programme in the EU's external action strategy with more financial synergies and diplomatic support in the coming years. However, **a stronger commitment is needed in addressing current barriers that students from non-EU countries face to participate in mobility.** Obstacles such as lack of smooth procedures or digital barriers of international offices working on granting visas hint to a **potential breach of the EU's Directive 2016/801 on the conditions of entry and residence of students, researchers and volunteers.**²¹

Moreover, **visa problems create inequality problems, thus going against the Council's Recommendation on promoting an inclusive learning mobility.** Usually, students from wealthy States can enter the EU more easily than students from less developed nations. A Schengen visa might not always be granted to non-EU individuals for short exchanges or mobility purposes.

Other relevant barriers addressed by the Council's Recommendation, which however are still quite widespread, include the participation of minors in learning mobility schemes, as well as researchers and apprentices from vocational education. The latter, in particular, still face obstacles when it comes to insurance protection, labour standards, health and safety requirements and tax, social security and pension arrangements when abroad.²²

A positive practice to overcome some of these administrative and institutional challenges is the development of joint education and training programmes with institutions across countries. In the field of higher education, the **European University Alliances are a significant step towards enhanced learning mobility and towards internationalisation of higher education by strengthening the communications and partnerships between HEIs.** Improvements in the initiative, however, are still needed in order to reach the overall goal of embedding learning mobility in the curriculum or training programme of all students.

²¹Erasmus Student Network, "[Engaging Young People around the world through international opportunities - ESN's reaction to the Youth Action Plan in EU external action](#)", 2023

²² More about the awareness rate and interest in participation in mobility during secondary education can be explored in the research report "[Erasmus in Schools](#)" carried out by ESN France, EuroApp, ESN Spain and OBESSU

Portability of grants and loans

The 2011 Council Recommendation paid special attention to the portability of grants and loans, as this represents one of the major barriers to learning mobility. However, there is no further elaboration on the challenges surrounding portability, such as the adequate timing of receiving grants and loans, or the opportunity to keep receiving public grants during the learning mobility period abroad. According to the SIEM research report (2021), **82% of mobile respondents reported needing to advance the initial costs for a mobility period. Furthermore, more than a quarter of respondents to the ESNsurvey - XIV edition (2022) received their grants later than one month after the beginning of their mobilities, and only one-third received the grant before departure.**



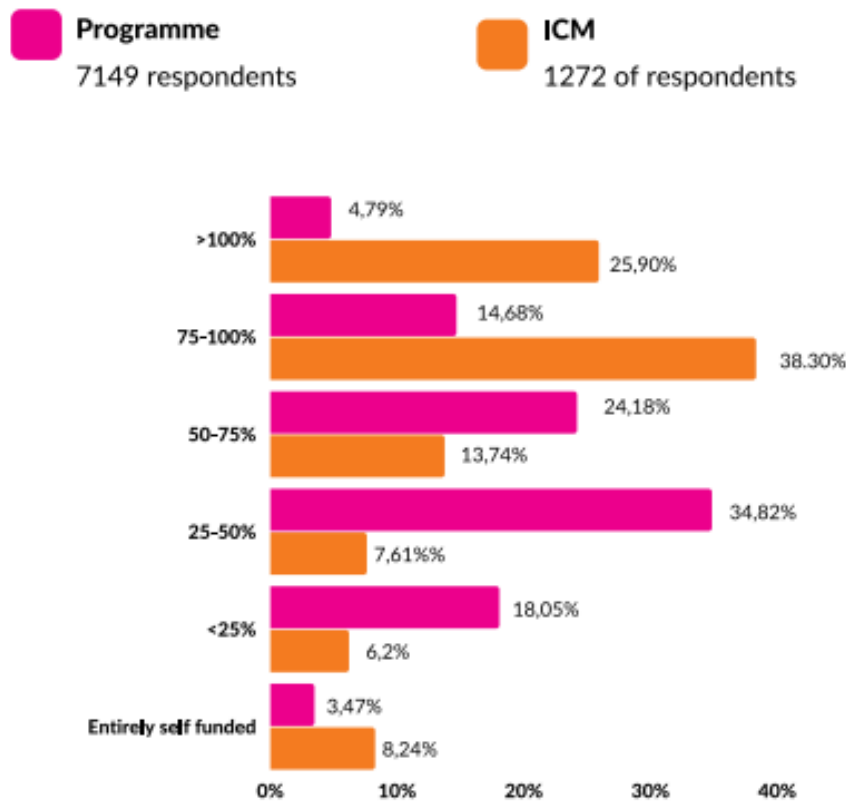


Figure 29 – Coverage of mobility costs by scholarship, percentage (by mobility type, n = 7,149, 1,272)

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ESN appreciates that grant levels were adjusted to inflation rates in 2022, but addresses the issue with overall grant levels, which still don't reflect the reality in numerous countries, or even within the same country but across different cities. For example, 67% of mobile respondents reported a monthly cost of living while on mobility of over €501 a month in the SIEM research report (2021), while, according to the ESNsurvey - XIV edition (2022), more than a quarter of the students reported a monthly scholarship of fewer than 301 euros. This means that quite often students wishing to participate in an Erasmus+ programme must have additional financial readiness to do so.

Therefore, **complementing Erasmus grants with national or regional co-funding should be further explored by national and regional authorities as means to support students willing to**

²³ Erasmus Student Network (2022). Understanding the experience and needs of exchange students in challenging times. ESNsurvey - XIV edition. Figure 29 - Coverage of mobility costs by scholarship

go abroad but without enough financial means to do so. This is particularly significant for students from fewer opportunities backgrounds.

Another relevant problem that was not addressed by the 2011 Council Recommendation was the **importance of informing participants on how grant levels are being defined on a national level and how the portability of public grants and loans functions.** Information on eligibility and other sources of funding should be made easy to understand. Furthermore, providing clear and transparent information relating to costs abroad, both in terms of living costs (travel, food and accommodation) and opportunities to work abroad, will enable students to better plan budgets for their mobility period.

Quality of learning mobility

Quantity should not eclipse the quality of a learning mobility. The efforts to expand the Erasmus+ programme to a larger audience should also be complemented with a focus on the quality deliverance of the programme, as rightly highlighted by the 2011 Council Recommendation. These quality standards reinforced by the **Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE)** must be accompanied by a clear monitoring framework.

For mobility to be of high quality it should encompass **automatic mutual recognition**, in order to ensure the full automatic recognition of learning periods abroad in the smoothest way possible. Moreover, sending and hosting institutions should strive to put in place clear arrangements in the **Learning Agreement**, to encourage the recognition of knowledge, skills and competencies acquired abroad. The Learning Agreement should further be used as a tool to address remaining recognition issues.

The main issues encountered by students abroad, which hinder the quality of mobility, also include stress, course-related problems and anxiety. In particular, the percentage of students that had course-related problems was 16.36%²⁴. Higher education institutions should therefore aim to clarify how learning will be assessed while the student is abroad and provide information on how the mobility programme will contribute to the student's academic progress. This could include, for example, credit-bearing modules or transferral of grades.

²⁴ Erasmus Student Network (2022). Understanding the experience and needs of exchange students in challenging times. ESNsurvey - XIV edition

Quality mobility begins with quality support and guidance pre-departure, which is addressed by the Council Recommendation. However, it does not elaborate further on the national and local responsibilities that would reflect learners' needs. For example, **learners preparing for a mobility experience could be supported via drop-in sessions or group sessions where they can seek advice on how to complete any required paperwork**; guidance could also include a timeline of the process that highlights key milestones and deadlines which students need to meet.

The 2011 Council Recommendation rightly highlighted the need for convenient and affordable facilities, such as housing, catering and transport, for mobile learners. Unfortunately, however, this remains problematic. **Concerns relating to finding accommodation either abroad or on return to the home country was reported by 49% for mobile students.** In particular, 20% of low-income respondents strongly agreed that concerns relating to accommodation were a barrier, compared to 12% for high income respondents.²⁵

The rise of inflation and the cost of living have contributed to worsening the situation. Additional accommodation issues that hinder the mobility period include: **lack of quality information on available housing options, discrimination and fraud, financial burden and insufficient student housing, especially for short-term mobility students or trainees.**²⁶ The housing situation of international students remains therefore a long-standing challenge in the implementation of Erasmus+ mobilities. This contradicts both the Council's Recommendation and the commitments in the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education.

When abroad, the quality of mobility is enhanced by feeling integrated in the host country or institution. The Council's Recommendation rightly encouraged mentoring and peer learning schemes to enhance integration. In this regard, 82% of mobile respondents to the SIEM research report (2021) found welcome meetings useful, in addition to student organised events (75%) and social events (78%).²⁷

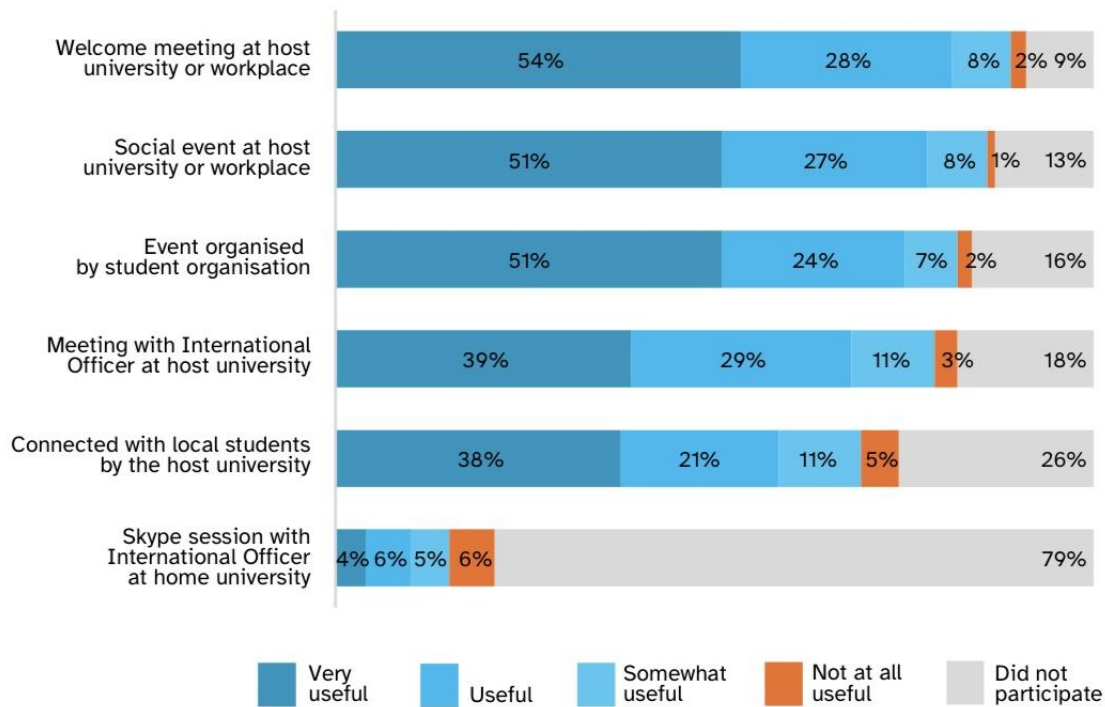
²⁵ Allinson K., Gabriels W.,(2021). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. SIEM Research Report, siem-project.eu

²⁶ Erasmus Student Network (2017). [HouseErasmus+ Research Report](#), pg. 6

²⁷ Allinson K., Gabriels W.,(2021). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. SIEM Research Report, siem-project.eu, pg. 60

Figure 11: Support offer while abroad

Q. Did you participate in any of the below activities while you were abroad? (mobile students, n = 8,342)



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Connecting mobile students with local students via a buddy or ambassador scheme helps students navigate the new institution or organisation, as well as the local area. This is particularly important in the early days of the mobility programme to help students settle and feel integrated into their new environment. Student bodies and organisations have an extremely relevant role in the attainment of integration objectives; **higher education institutions should therefore enhance the collaboration with youth associations, particularly those dedicated to integration activities and buddy programmes for mobile students.**

It should however be highlighted that 24% of respondents reported experiencing some form of discrimination while on a mobility programme. This makes integration harder and can potentially lead to mental health issues for students abroad. **Mental health was surprisingly never mentioned in the Council Recommendation, even if it represents a potential element contributing to the quality of learning mobility.**

²⁸ SIEM research report (2021), Figure 11 - Support offer while abroad, p. 60

Integration also happens once mobile students return back home, with support from the home university on how to make use of the competences acquired during the stay abroad and restoration into the academic and social life of the university. This was rightly pointed out by the Council Recommendation, however, it could further encourage the development of reintegration strategies and measures that would not only enable **Erasmus+ participants to become multipliers of their mobility experiences, but to also support alumni associations, ambassadors or buddies**. Yet, according to the data collected by ESNsurvey - XIV edition, less than one-fifth felt encouraged by the home Higher Education Institutions to do so.

High quality of mobility should be ensured also for trainees. Positive practices include guidance of a competent supervisor, access to robust evaluative and complaints channels to monitor progress, provision of adequate information at the beginning of the experience, the existence of a written and legally binding contract between the educational institution, intern/apprentice and hosting organisation, amongst others.²⁹

Finally, to ensure constant progress and improvement of learning mobility, **it is crucial to include regular feedback mechanisms following a period of learning mobility**. For the mechanism to be successful it is essential **to include students and/or student representatives in the monitoring process** (e.g., by designing tools that enable them to report issues or using existing ones such as the Erasmus+ App). This would allow institutions to collect data properly, address existing problems and, overall, improve the mobility experience. Sharing the collected data and insights from the **Erasmus participants' reports** with stakeholders is crucial for internal and external monitoring and design of measures for improvement of the student experience.

Recognition of learning outcomes

The recognition of learning outcomes obtained abroad today still remains one of the major challenges to mobility. According to the ESNsurvey - XIV edition (2022), **almost a third of respondents (28.63%) reported not receiving full credit recognition, in contradiction to the commitments laid out in the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education**. Moreover, results for International Credit Mobility (72.77% full recognition) participants were considerably better

²⁹ European Youth Forum, "[European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships](#)", 2011

than those from intra-European mobility Erasmus+ students (63.68%).³⁰ It is therefore laudable to see one point dedicated to this issue in the Council's recommendation.

Learning mobility fosters the development of key competences and experiences that are crucial for active participation in society and in the labour market. These include, for example, learners' confidence, independence, social integration and the creation of a sense of European identity. However, **recognition procedures are often slow, left to the discretion of individual institutions, not sufficiently transparent and may impose extra costs to students** (e.g., students might be requested to carry out extra coursework or exams).

There has been progress in the matter with the adoption of the Council's Recommendation on automatic mutual recognition of qualifications and learning periods abroad.³¹ Four years later, the European Commission evaluated the implementation of the Recommendation. It has discovered that the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is widely used around Europe, but not always in a consistent way. There is considerable variation in how workload and learning outcomes are combined. **Whilst recognition falls under Member States' competence, it is a cornerstone towards establishing a European Education Area by 2025 and highly relevant for the success of learners' mobility within the Erasmus+ programme.**

Disadvantaged learners

In view of increasingly diverse societies, whose members are often in vulnerable positions due to current global events, from the pandemic to various geopolitical conflicts, the informal, formal and non-formal education has never been a more important agent of equality and inclusiveness.

As stated in the [Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy](#) inclusiveness and equality are core EU values, visible also in the Treaties - "In all its activities, the Union shall observe the principle of the equality of its citizens, who shall receive equal attention from its institutions, bodies, offices and agencies." The quote applies to the Erasmus+ programme as well, and has seen its implementation in the 2021-2027 version, where inclusion

³⁰ Erasmus Student Network (2022). Understanding the experience and needs of exchange students in challenging times. ESNsurvey - XIV edition

³¹ Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad, 2018, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1568891859235&uri=CELEX:32018H1210\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1568891859235&uri=CELEX:32018H1210(01))

and diversity are one of the objectives. The Programme aims to ensure equal opportunities by funding and promoting projects involving people of different ages, cultural, social and economic backgrounds, people with fewer possibilities and disabilities, as well as those living in rural and remote areas.

Erasmus+ is not the only initiative with which the EU wants to reach out to the ‘unusual suspects’. The **EU Youth Strategy** and **European Youth Goals**, together with the **European Education Area** initiative, aim at involving people facing different barriers into education, training and youth work. Moreover, the European Council sees education, culture and sport as bridges to inclusive and cohesive societies, with mobility and exchanges highlighted as key tools in building those.

Having in mind the increased sensitivity towards vulnerable members of society, it is of utmost importance to update and further develop the 2011 Council Recommendation. The Recommendation only briefly mentioned people from a different background under “**disadvantaged learners**” and simply proposes to provide them with targeted information on available programmes and support tailored to their specific needs. ESN believes that, in order to make our society inclusive, mobility plays an important role and that needs to be explicitly mentioned in the Recommendation. Furthermore, the term ‘disadvantaged learners’ has to be expanded in order to transparently indicate which groups need more focus and how the approach should be adapted to accommodate different young people. Erasmus+ has been significantly modified to cater to needs of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, however, the necessity for thoughtful understanding of what different groups need, how they should be reached and included persists.

ESN welcomes the adoption of the **Implementation guidelines for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy** as a step in the right direction. Additionally, ESN acknowledges the clearer definition of participants with fewer participants introduced in the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027. At the same time, there are plenty of obstacles related to the implementation of the strategy on a national level due to different interpretations of the definition in the national context and the complexity of society in each country. Furthermore, it is important to note that the lack of clear definition in the period between the adoption of the 2011 Council Recommendation and the adoption of the current Erasmus+ programme has caused a lot of missed opportunities for thousands of learners.

ESN welcomes the introduction of the top-up grant for inclusion support to participants with fewer opportunities, which in contrast to the previous programme period 2014-2020 is an addition to the base individual grant support. **The Erasmus+ Annual Report 2021 shows that in the first year of the new programme implementation 8%³² learners with fewer opportunities in the higher education sector received the inclusion top-up.** However, further support measures and outreach strategies should be developed by National Agencies and higher education institutions in order to increase the participation rate of students with fewer opportunities backgrounds. Monitoring data regarding learners with special needs and fewer opportunities has been considered challenging in the past programme period³³ by National Agencies, therefore more efforts in a centralised approach and guidance should be taken.

Partnerships and funding

At least twice is the importance of various local, regional and private actors mentioned in the 2011 Council Recommendation. It is in direct connection with the motivation to participate in transnational mobility activities, but also one of the administrative and institutional issues relating to the learning period abroad. The Council recommends mentioned actors to network and connect in order to make mobility opportunities more visible and accessible to the youth, but also to minimise administrative burdens applying and executing the period abroad, whether it is learning mobility or VET mobility. In reality, the two go hand in hand. Motivation is directly linked to the administrative process and accessibility of information. According to the Flash Eurobarometer on Youth and Democracy in the European Year of Youth, 19% of respondents report lack of information on mobility opportunities, a problem that lies on institutions on all levels - international, national, regional and local. With a better network and exchange of information, this very problem could be avoided. However, it seems that since 2011 and 2022, not much progress has been achieved in this field if this issue keeps resurfacing.

³² European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Erasmus+ Annual Report 2021*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2022

³³ Study by the EPRS, [Inclusion measures in the Erasmus+ programme \(2014-2020\)](#) - European Implementation Assessment, September 2021

Current state of play of learning mobility in Europe

General overview

The Erasmus Student Network has been researching and analysing student mobility in higher education since 2005, when the first ESNsurvey report was published.³⁴ During the programme period 2014-2020 ESN has been gathering perspectives from both mobile and non-mobile students to better understand their needs and to help design effective support measures. ESN's most recent research report ESNsurvey - XIV edition (2022) collected more than 10.000 answers in 2021, allowing us to analyse the student experience before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. Our data and constant contact with students on the ground allow us to understand the current state of play in the Erasmus+ programme through the students perspective.

Even though the 2022 Eurobarometer³⁵ shows that the Erasmus+ programme is known by 50% of the young people within the EU, the overall participation rate in mobility remains low and it varies significantly from country to country and across educational sectors.

Being aware of students' motivators to participate in learning mobility is important for the design of incentives and promotion of learning mobility according to their interests. Strong motivational factors, if further incentivised, would lead to higher participation rate in mobility. Data from ESNsurvey - XIV edition (2022) shows that experiencing different learning environments, learning a new language and enhancing career prospects were among the strongest motivators to participate in mobility. Furthermore, non-mobile students reported in the SIEM research report (2021) that hearing from alumni who used their mobility experience to obtain employment or understanding the impact of mobility on their academic achievements would have been a powerful encouragement to go abroad during their degree programme.³⁶

³⁴ <https://www.esn.org/ESNSurvey/2005>

³⁵ Eurobarometer, "Youth and Democracy in the European Year of Youth", 2022, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2282>

³⁶ Allinson K., Gabriels W.,(2021). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. SIEM Research Report, siem-project.eu

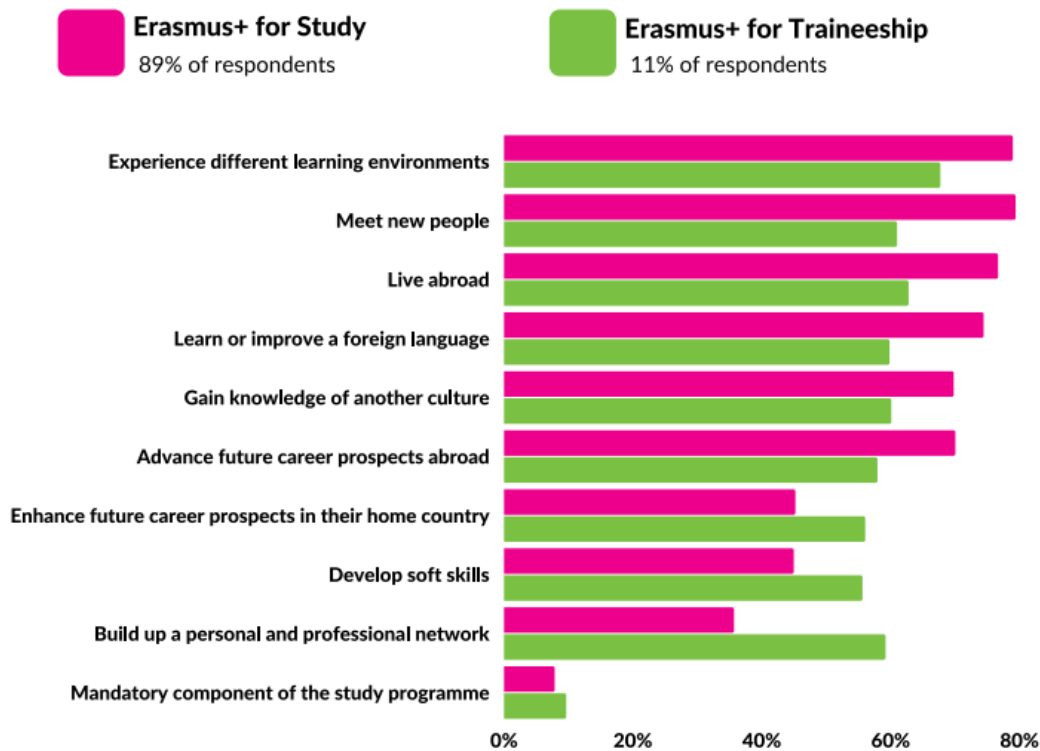


Figure 18 - Main factors to study abroad, by mobility programme (n = 10,315)

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Students do not perceive the duration of mobility as a barrier. Moreover, 85% of non-mobile students claim to have interest in going abroad.³⁸ Despite the high interest and strong motivational factors to participate in mobility, students report facing various challenges in doing so.

Categorisation of barriers to participation in mobility

The Social Inclusion and Engagement in Mobility research report³⁹ highlighted that students from fewer opportunities backgrounds face multiple challenges that hinder their participation in the Erasmus+ programme, including **institutional, environmental, and attitudinal barriers**.

³⁷ Erasmus Student Network (2022). Understanding the experience and needs of exchange students in challenging times. ESNsurvey - XIV edition. Figure 18 - Main factors to study abroad, by mobility programme

³⁸ Allinson K., Gabriels W.,(2021). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. SIEM Research Report, siem-project.eu, Figure 16 - Support offer while abroad

³⁹ Allinson K., Gabriels W.,(2021). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. SIEM Research Report, siem-project.eu

The SIEM research report (2021) defines **institutional barriers** as those that reflect the programmes that are being offered and the regulations that coincide with these programmes that may impact the access of specific student groups to mobility opportunities. Examples include insufficient funding, advancing initial costs, loss of financial support, no recognition of credits obtained abroad, lack of information about mobility opportunities and funding, difficult application processes, etc. The most efficient approach to tackle these institutional barriers is to analyse the existing mechanisms and support measures.

The **environmental barriers** include environmental and societal factors that influence the person's decisions to take part in mobility. The environmental barriers illustrate the impact of personal background on participation in mobility and include family, low income/loss of income, low involvement on campus due to other commitments/commuting, etc.

Attitudinal barriers tackle the belief system and emotions around the topic of mobility opportunities, to see how they influence their participation rates. Internalised barriers can severely impact their identification with the opportunity. Examples include the belief that Erasmus+ is an opportunity for wealthier students, society does not value the competencies gained abroad, family and friends don't support studying abroad, etc.

The remedy for environmental and attitudinal barriers requires the design and implementation of outreach strategies and collaboration with actors within and beyond the university. Creating an internationalisation culture will make students and their environment more prone to thinking that mobility is also for them.

Access to information about mobility opportunities and pre-departure support for more inclusive learning mobility

The mobility journey begins way before the arrival at the mobility destination. It starts with informing students about the available mobility opportunities and providing them with support in the preparations for mobility.

Findings from the SIEM research report (2021) demonstrate that both mobile and non-mobile students consider information about available funding for mobility programmes of the highest

importance. Furthermore, there is a general positive response by both groups of students (80% or over) that receiving support with the application process and choosing a host university is very helpful.⁴⁰ Overall, non-mobile students demonstrate high interest in participating in physical pre-departure events that would help them prepare for the mobility experience, while mobile students found it very useful.

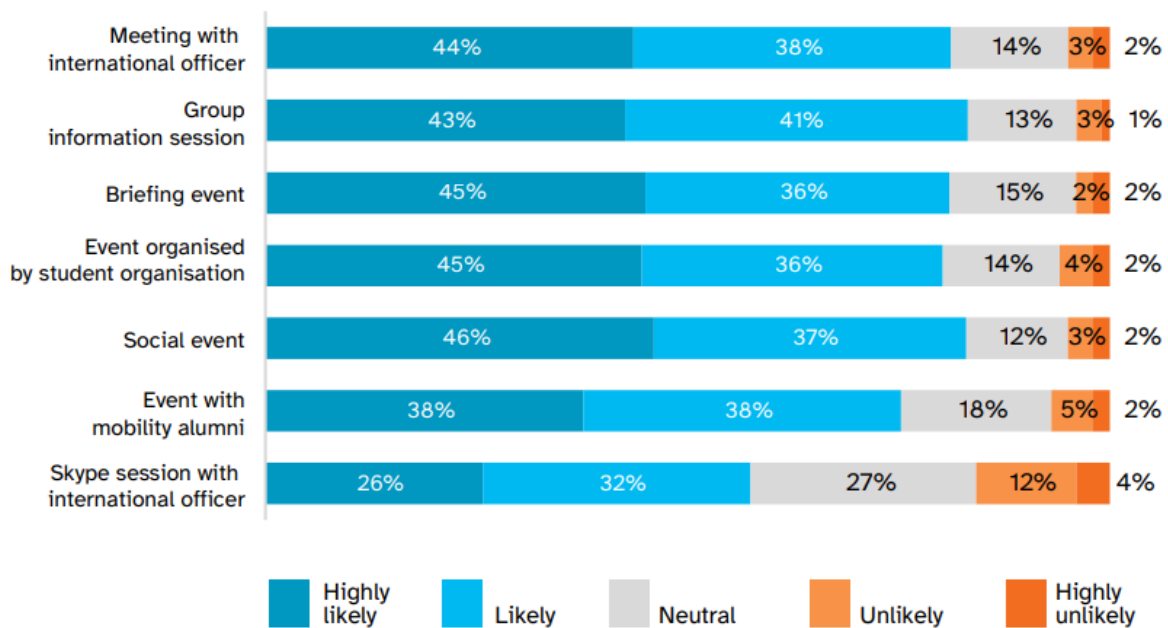


Figure 10: Interest in pre-departure events
 Q. If you were to go abroad, and the following activities were available to you prior to departure, how likely is it that you would participate in them? (non-mobile students, n = 4470)

This data highlights the **importance of pre-departure support and activities provided by sending higher education institutions**. Such activities should be designed and implemented in collaboration with student organisations. Clear guidance with the application process and the exact conditions of the mobility should be prioritised.

Although students report having high satisfaction with the application assistance and provision of mobility information by the sending institution, there is still room for improvement.⁴¹ HEIs

⁴⁰ Allinson K., Gabriels W.,(2021). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. SIEM Research Report, siem-project.eu

⁴¹ Erasmus Student Network (2022). Understanding the experience and needs of exchange students in challenging times. ESNsurvey - XIV edition. p. 44

continue to face administrative burden, that keeps their focus away from improving the support given to outgoing students. **Sending HEIS should ensure the development and implementation of tailor-made activities and policies for the outgoing student during the whole cycle of their mobility, including the reintegration activities.** Sending HEIs should equip students with relevant information and assistance regarding insurance, visa, credit recognition, linguistic support, learning agreement preparation, application preparation and general information provision for mobility. The Learning Agreement preparation process should become more flexible and digital.⁴²

Grants

The most significant challenges remain related to the grants. Not being able to receive the Erasmus grant before departure in order to advance initial costs, such as travel expenses and accommodation, is considered to be the biggest practical barrier to mobility by 86% of students⁴³. Additionally, fears of losing money, jobs or accumulating debt are prevalent among mobile learners according to the SIEM research report (2021).

The average Erasmus+ scholarship was 374 euros per month, based on the data provided by the **Erasmus+ Annual report in 2020**⁴⁴, far from the average amount of money that students need to cover their expenses, as the findings from the SIEM research report (2021) and the ESNsurvey - XIV edition (2022) demonstrate. In the SIEM research report (2021), 67% of students reported a monthly living cost of over 501 euros. Insufficient funding to support the mobility period abroad is considered the biggest blocking factor by 72% of non-mobile students⁴⁵.

⁴² Erasmus Student Network (2022). Understanding the experience and needs of exchange students in challenging times. ESNsurvey - XIV edition

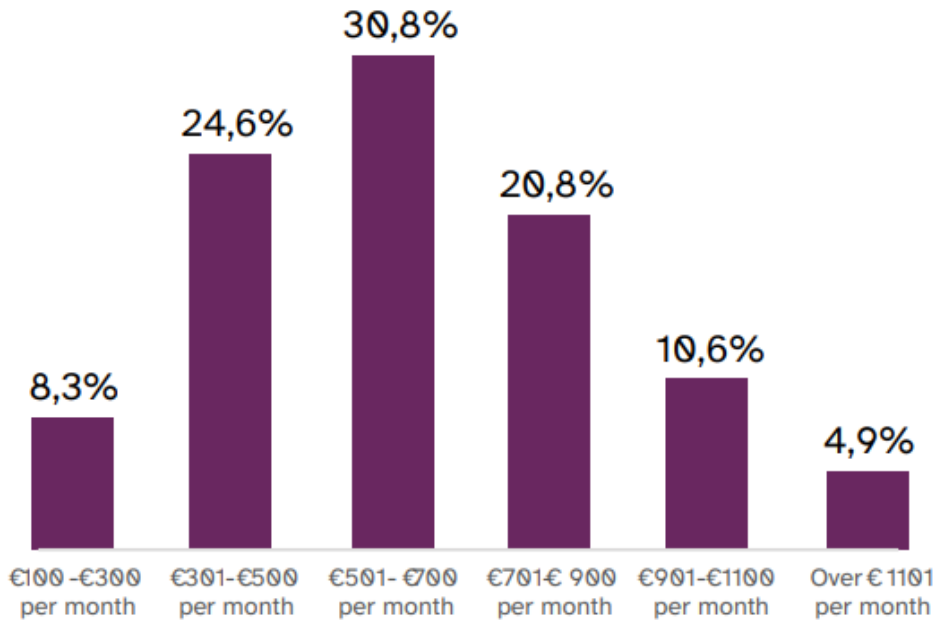
⁴³ Allinson K., Gabriels W.,(2021). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. SIEM Research Report, siem-project.eu, Figure 15 - Practical barriers to mobility

⁴⁴ European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Erasmus+ Annual Report 2020*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2021

⁴⁵ Allinson K., Gabriels W.,(2021). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. SIEM Research Report, siem-project.eu, Figure 16 - Support offer while abroad

Figure 13: cost of living per month while abroad

Q. What was your average cost of living per month while you were abroad? Please consider the cost of accommodation, travel, food and pocket money.? (mobile respondents; n = 8,350)



In times of higher living cost and inflation the most impacted people are those coming from fewer opportunities backgrounds. It is therefore important to ensure that the Erasmus grants do not lose purchasing power. **ESN welcomes the decision of the European Commission from November 2022 to adjust the grant levels in the 2023 Erasmus+ call for the individual support of students according to the inflation.** ESN hopes that this is a step towards a mechanism which ensures that grant levels are keeping up with inflation.

COUNTRY	BEFORE	AFTER	MORE THAN 30 DAYS AFTER	TOTAL ANSWERS
Spain	11,02%	22,42%	66,56%	1298
France	13,90%	38,42%	47,68%	367
Italy	24,81%	42,45%	32,74%	1060
PROGRAMME AVERAGE	35,61%	35,84%	28,55%	6897
Portugal	21,45%	52,00%	26,55%	275
Denmark	43,03%	36,07%	20,90%	244
Turkey	48,70%	35,06%	16,23%	154
Germany	40,63%	43,37%	16,00%	1056
Greece	59,73%	25,79%	14,48%	221
Austria	46,22%	42,86%	10,92%	238
Poland	60,40%	35,60%	4,00%	250
Romania	63,25%	32,91%	3,85%	234

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The **timing of grant payments** matter almost as much as the grant amount. Almost a third of the ESNsurvey - XIV edition (2022) respondents reported receiving their grants later than one month after the beginning of their mobilities. Major differences exist among countries, with some such as France, Spain and Italy having a bigger prevalence of late payments, while in Germany only 16%⁴⁷ outgoing students report receiving their grants later than one month after the start of the mobility. This data demonstrates that the size of the country and the number of mobilities are not the determining factors of the grant payments timing, and that there definitely is room for policy changes and technical adjustments that would allow receiving the grants before the mobility starts.

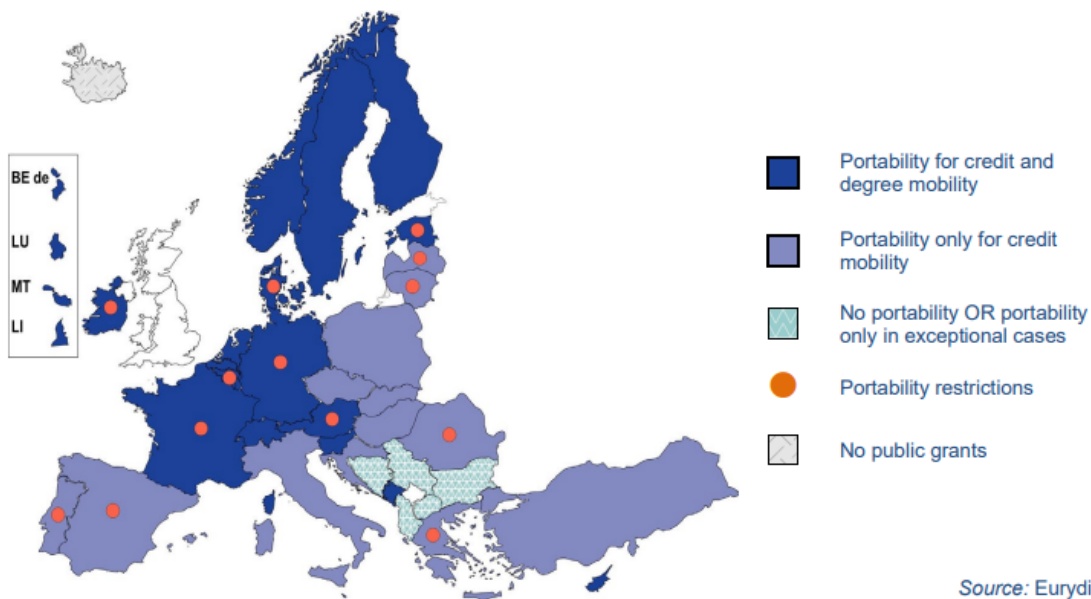
⁴⁶ Erasmus Student Network (2022). Understanding the experience and needs of exchange students in challenging times. ESNsurvey - XIV edition, Table 3 - The schedule of the first grant/scholarship payment to mobility participants

⁴⁷ Erasmus Student Network (2022). Understanding the experience and needs of exchange students in challenging times. ESNsurvey - XIV edition

ESN congratulates the European Commission’s decision to **prioritise advanced payment to students from fewer opportunities backgrounds**. While we consider this a huge step forward, we firmly believe that it should be a priority to move towards **pre-departure payments for all students**, as the newly published ECHE Monitoring guide recommends.

On the other hand, huge decision-making power lies in the hands of the National Agencies, which need to decide on the exact grant levels of students. This can play a fundamental role in increasing the grant amounts for students or the number of available mobilities. With co-financing by other sources being one of the two specific criteria when determining the grant levels, it is even more important to have available information at European level about how programme countries co-finance mobility. Having comparative data is key to improving mobility and widening participation.

Figure 3.2: Portability of public grants, first and second cycle, 2022/2023



Portability of national grants is another key factor that can contribute to widening participation in mobility and further support mobile students. However, the overview provided by the Mobility Scoreboard 2022/2023 report shows big differences from country to country, with some, such as Bulgaria, where public grants are not portable even for credit mobility periods

⁴⁸ European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2023. Mobility Scoreboard: Higher education background report 2022/2023. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

abroad. This issue adds to the complexity of the grants dilemma, as fear of losing money is one of the blocking factors to participation in mobility. In some cases where portability of grants is not possible, it also means that mobility will cause missed opportunities for public grants received at national or local level, due to administrative barriers related to the physical absence of students at the home university while abroad. **Lack of full grants portability also breaches the Erasmus students' rights, who, as described in the Erasmus Student Charter, are entitled to continue receiving the same student grants or loans from their sending country while abroad.**

Accommodation

Next to financial challenges, finding accommodation abroad and upon return home is considered one of the biggest barriers to mobility. As data from the SIEM research report (2021) shows 49% of both mobile and non-mobile students fear facing problems with accommodation which turns out to be a huge blocking factor for them. Furthermore, 16.72% of mobile students report low satisfaction with accommodation provision by the host institution in the ESNsurvey - XIV edition (2022). Although the numbers are lower than those reported in ESNsurvey 2016, when 34% of students were not provided with any kind of assistance with accommodation, housing continues to constitute a growing challenge for student mobility.

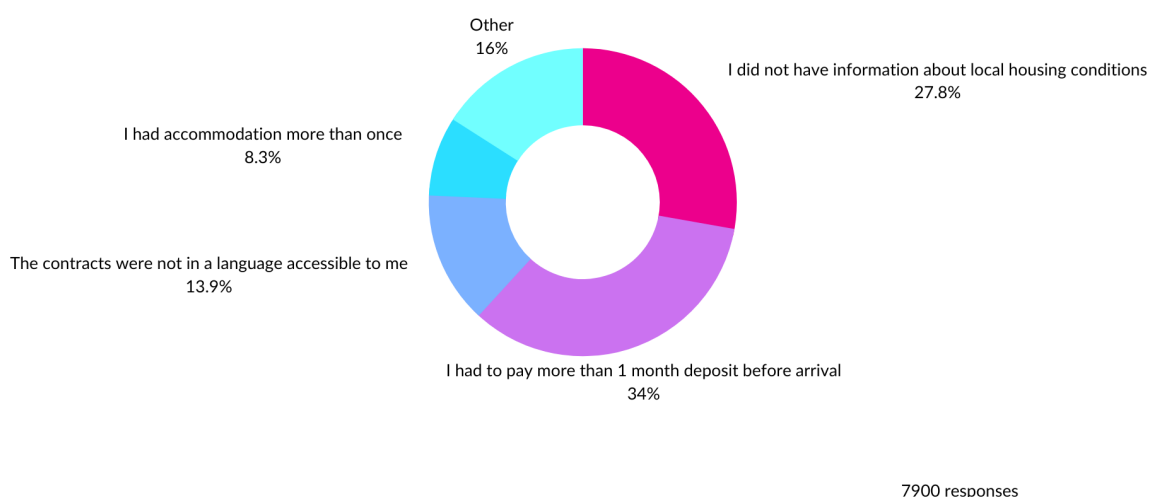
Student housing is fundamental to ensure quality mobility. Therefore, to gain an in-depth understanding of the housing situation, **ESN and the European Students Union conducted a housing survey in November 2022 which collected over 8000 answers for more than 15 countries**⁴⁹. A quarter of the respondents declared being victims of housing scams, with many of them being related to pre-departure bookings of the housing. Furthermore, students share that it is challenging having to pay a housing deposit before arrival, which is also linked to issues with the timing of Erasmus+ grant payments. Moreover, while the average Erasmus grant is 374 EUR⁵⁰ more than half of the respondents reported spending more than 400 EUR to pay for their accommodation.

⁴⁹ The final report has not been published at the time of publication of this contribution, but preliminary results are available following this link: [■ ESU - ESN Housing survey \(1\).pdf](#) .

⁵⁰ European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Erasmus+ Annual Report 2020*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2021

Another persisting issue is the **lack of information about housing conditions at the mobility destination provided by the hosting institution**. Even though satisfaction with provided support varies from country to country, there is a tendency for higher satisfaction rates in the countries where accommodation is either provided by the higher education institution, or simply the host institution provides information about housing. Therefore, besides the importance of making more university housing available, improving information-sharing systems can play an important contributing role.

Which issues did you experience?



While the housing situation is a multi-layered barrier, there are many aspects that can be tackled. ESN appreciates that providing assistance with finding accommodation by HEIs is now part of the ECHE monitoring process⁵¹, and that NAs are encouraged to monitor the satisfaction of the support mechanisms at place. However, the responsibilities regarding accommodation support between sending and receiving institutions must be clearly divided, in order to reduce frustration. Revamped inter-institutional agreements could lead to a possible solution. Next, information-sharing, guidance and quick reaction in case of emergencies, as well as collaboration with local authorities and legal counselling for students are some of the key

⁵¹ Monitoring Guide of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education 2021-2027

steps to prevent many of the issues that students face, and thus, increase student satisfaction with the provided support by HEIs.

Satisfaction with support services provided by HEIs during mobility

Overall satisfaction with both home and hosting institutions has been improving over the years, which can be seen by comparing satisfaction rates reported by Erasmus+ students in the latest ESNsurvey (ESNsurvey - XIV edition, 2022) and the first ESNsurvey of the programming period 2014-2020 (ESNsurvey 2016). This progress could be explained with an improved implementation of the ECHE commitments, better monitoring process, but also with HEIs gaining more experience in managing and implementing increasing numbers of mobilities. However, the existence of successful practices should not lead to complacency. There are still many fields in which the provided services and support by HEIs can be further improved, in line with the ECHE commitments.

According to ESNsurvey - XIV edition (2022) data⁵², students tend to be more satisfied with the support services provided by the hosting institution rather than those provided by the sending institution. **Students are more satisfied with a range of services provided by the sending institutions**, including the process of preparing the application and the learning agreement, recognition procedures, and welcome activities.

⁵² Erasmus Student Network (2022). Understanding the experience and needs of exchange students in challenging times. ESNsurvey - XIV edition, Figure 24, 25

Satisfaction with Services Provided by Host Institutions

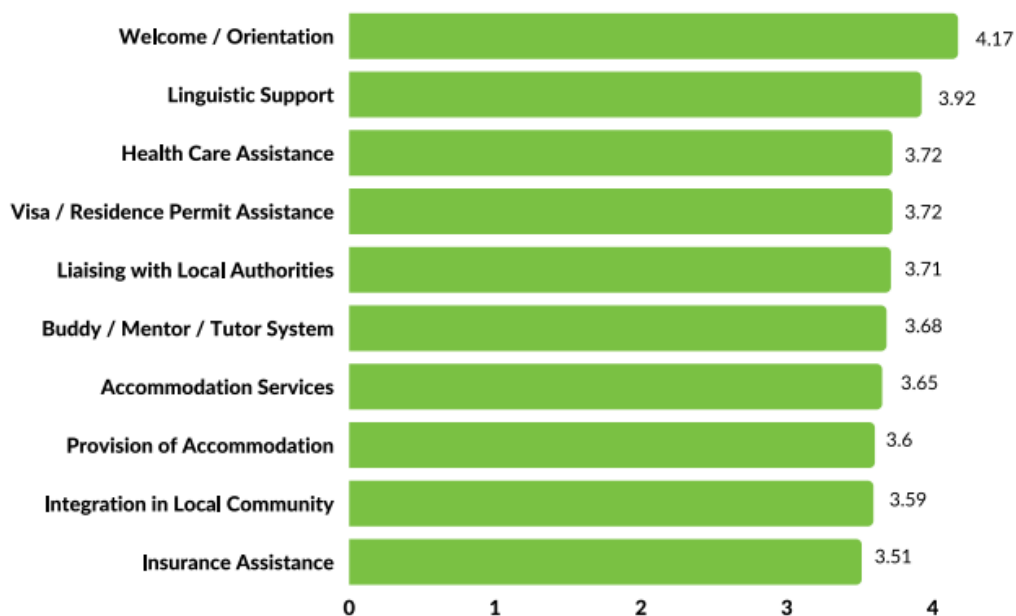


Figure 25 – Mean satisfaction with host institution services (general sample, n = 8,463 to 8,409)

At the same time, **the highest levels of dissatisfaction among students are related to the pre-departure preparation**, such as assistance with insurance and visa application, and reintegration support offered by sending Higher Education Institutions. In the case of hosting institutions, integration into the local community, support with finding accommodation and insurance assistance get the highest levels of dissatisfaction.

As suggested in the ESNsurvey - XIV edition recommendations and SIEM technical recommendations⁵³ There should be a clearer allocation of responsibilities on providing support to students between sending and hosting institutions, which are in line with the ECHE commitments and the Erasmus Student Charter entitlements. This division could be better defined in the inter-institutional agreements in order to prevent misunderstandings and provide better guidance, support and assistance to students.

Sending institutions should equip students with relevant information and assistance on insurance, visa application, credit recognition, and linguistic support, and should provide them

⁵³ Erasmus Student Network (2022), For more inclusive & engaging Erasmus+ mobilities, siem-project.eu

with general information related to mobility. At the same time, HEIs should pay special attention to the reintegration of returning students and their involvement in alumni communities. Student organisations and mobility alumni should be actively involved in tailor-made pre-departure activities that would help outgoing students prepare for all aspects of their mobility experience.

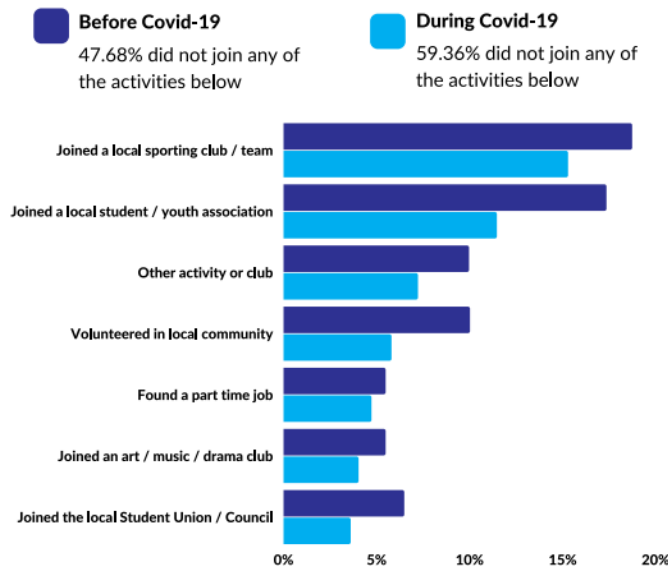
Integration in the local community and social life satisfaction

Half of the student respondents in the ESNsurvey - XIV edition (2022) did not feel integrated in the local community. Integration in the local community is among the university services with the lowest satisfaction rate among students. These results show that local integration remains an aspect which requires a lot more attention and more work should be done by hosting institutions. New measures and specific support are required to ensure progress with local integration, which would correspond to the commitment to make Erasmus+ a more inclusive programme and experience for young people.

Even though one of the main motivations to participate in mobility for both students and trainees is to meet new people, the level of engagement with other local or international students during mobility remains low.⁵⁴ Moreover, students report low levels of engagement in activities organised in the hosting community, with participation in a local sports club being the most popular activity (18% of respondents), while joining student representation bodies is the lowest with only 5% of respondents taking part in such structures. Volunteering during exchange is still quite unpopular with only 10% of students reporting having volunteered.

⁵⁴ Erasmus Student Network (2022). Understanding the experience and needs of exchange students in challenging times. ESNsurvey - XIV edition

Participation in Group Activities Involving the Hosting Communities (Figure 20, page 38)



This data demonstrates a clear correlation between the low numbers in participation in group initiatives and the low satisfaction levels with integration in the local community. Supporting students to engage with these different group activities can result in increased integration down the line. Encouraging them to participate in volunteering activities, engaging with local civic organisations and interacting with different social groups could be a remarkable step towards fostered internationalisation at home, which expands beyond the doors of the university.

Integration of international students in the local community should be of a higher importance to hosting institutions, in line with a university’s commitment of service to society. ESN truly believes in the enrichment of society through international students, a statement which has been proven countless times through the interaction of exchange students with the local community. A stronger partnership between HEIs and local authorities and local social actors will not only be a driver for societal change, but it will also contribute to creating a hospitable local environment towards international students. Facilitating an interaction between students and the local population, both within the academic community and outside of it, will boost internationalisation at home.

Different experience for Erasmus interns

Students report higher levels of satisfaction with their social life during mobility than with the local integration. However, **there is a remarkable gap in terms of satisfaction with the mobility experience between Erasmus students and Erasmus trainees** which indicates that the trainees have a rather difficult time during their exchange. While Erasmus students benefit from a considerably well-established support system, such as welcome activities, buddy systems and support by student organisations, that is quite different for the Erasmus trainees. The lack of clear application processes and the absence of established support systems for trainees can be some of the reasons behind the difference in satisfaction levels. As suggested by the ESNsurvey XIV recommendations, there is a need for targeted measures to improve the support systems for Erasmus trainees, which also requires closer collaboration with student organisations, local authorities and HEIs present in the cities of the mobility destinations of trainees.

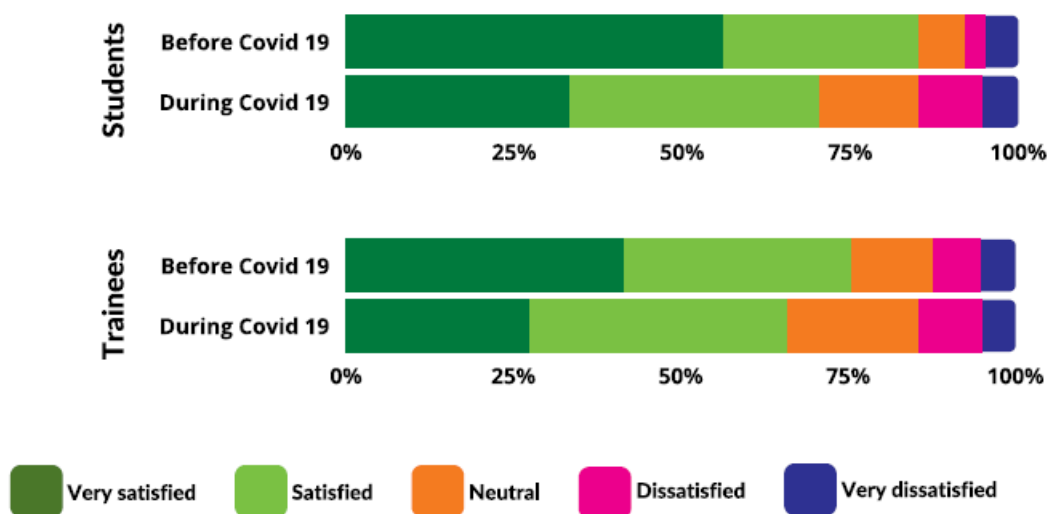


Figure 21 - Level of satisfaction with social life on mobility (general sample, before and during COVID-19 pandemic, by type of mobility, n = 10,245)

It is recommended that HEIs incorporate the Erasmus+ internships in their internationalisation strategies and streamline the application processes, while at the same time working together with business partners, student organisations and National agencies to ensure proper pre-departure support systems in place. Supporting and integrating Erasmus interns in the local

economy and community could lead to a greater benefit for society. Furthermore, a reinforced Erasmus internship quality framework should be created in correspondence with the ECHE commitments and their application to the reality of internships.

Main issues reported by students

Despite the improving satisfaction with the support received from HEIs, students still report various issues they experienced during their mobility period abroad. Examples include feelings of stress and anxiety, problems related to courses or the Learning Agreement, or even health problems. Moreover, a quarter of the mobile students report that they experienced discrimination during their exchange.⁵⁵

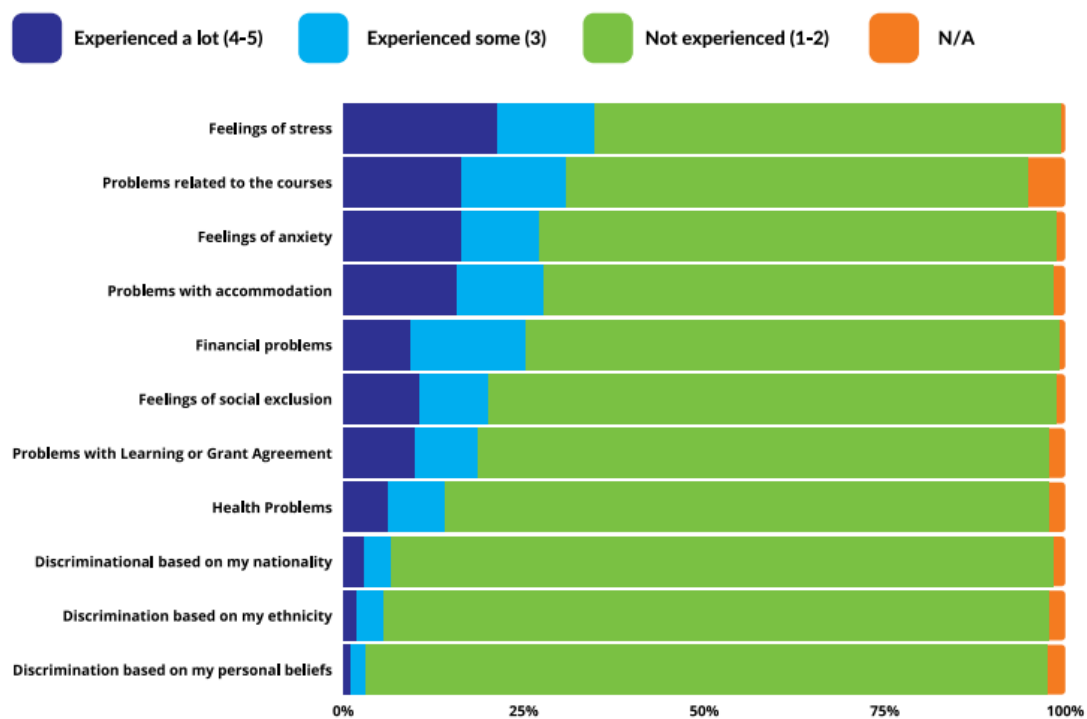


Figure 37 - Issues encountered on mobility (Likert scale, grouped, general sample, n = 8,428)

56

⁵⁵ Allinson K., Gabriels W.,(2021). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. SIEM Research Report, siem-project.eu, p.75

⁵⁶ Erasmus Student Network (2022). Understanding the experience and needs of exchange students in challenging times. ESNsurvey - XIV edition, Figure 37

All of these problems can be addressed even before mobility has started. **Pre-departure support and preparing students for crisis management will not only help reduce the stress level endured by students during their exchange, but it will also prevent students from cancelling their mobilities due to these factors.** The existence of accessible support mechanisms in the host institutions available to international students suffering from stress and anxiety is vital for student’s health and well-being, and it goes in line with HEIs commitment to make mobility more inclusive.

Furthermore, the SIEM research report (2021) illustrates that even though the majority of students have a positive experience at the host university, there were still mobile students (34%) who were treated unfairly or negatively by students or professors while they were abroad. Some students (15%) felt that they did not have equal access to resources and opportunities compared to home students, while 16% of respondents did not feel comfortable to discuss academic issues with their professors.

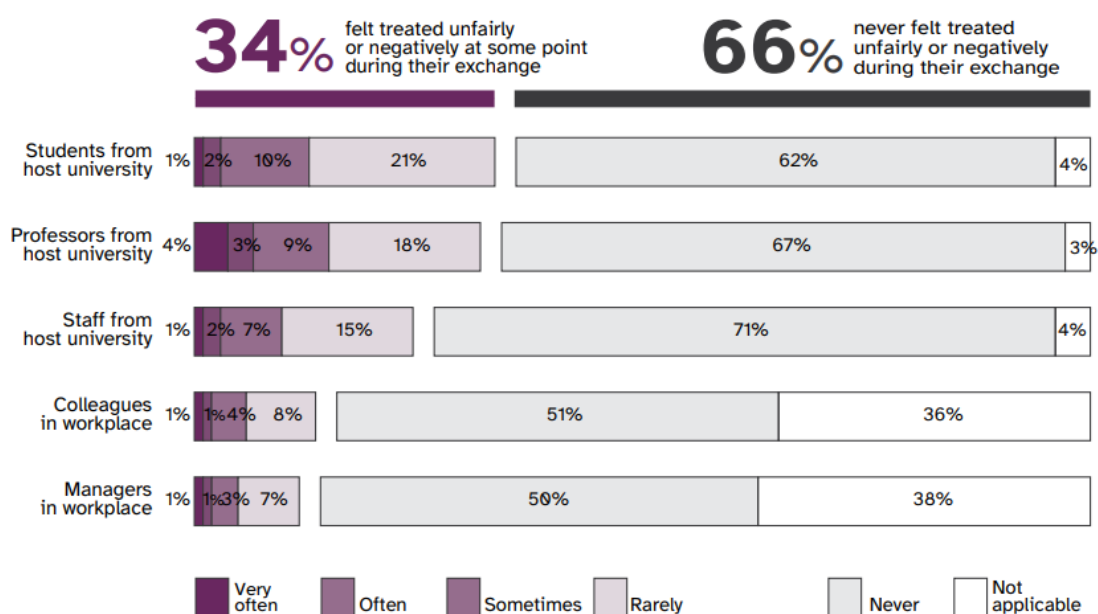


Figure 17: Treatment by members of the host society

Q. How often did the following people treat you unfairly or negatively while you were an international student? (mobile students, n = 8 340)

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⁵⁷ Allinson K., Gabriels W.,(2021). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. SIEM Research Report, siem-project.eu, Figure 17

This data suggests that **while one of the main motivators of students to participate in mobility is to experience a new learning environment⁵⁸, that is still not a very positive experience for a significant number of students.** Therefore, hosting institutions should pay special attention to creating a safe environment where students can discuss their concerns and report issues they experience, without fear of judgement. HEIs should proactively propose feedback sessions with incoming students to improve their mobility experience. **It is a responsibility of each HEI to build and maintain an environment where the internationalisation of education is nurtured and valued, and where international students feel safe and can fully immerse themselves into the academic life.**

National Agencies should actively monitor the main issues encountered by students at all stages of mobility at both sending and receiving institutions and use tools and mechanisms at their disposal to address these challenges. A closer monitoring of the HEIs' policies for student support, help with visa, insurance, etc., can lead to an increased quality of the mobility experience.

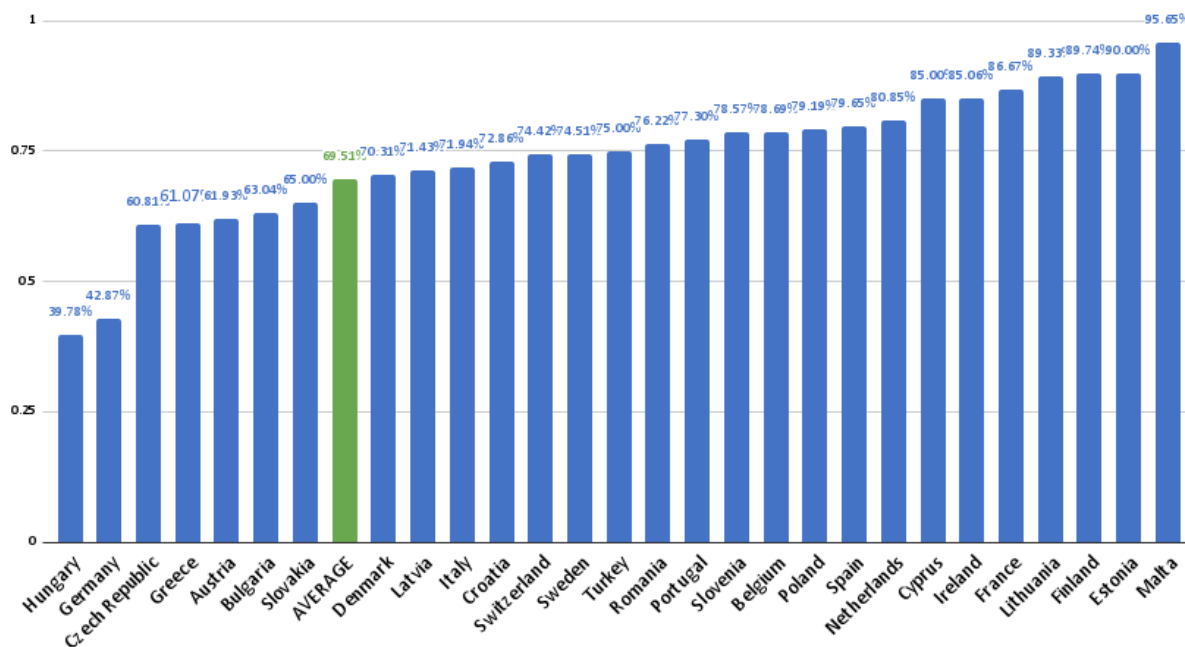
Recognition and grading

Recognition is probably the most important institutional aspect of learning mobility because it is what makes the mobility period complete. However, lack of recognition for the time spent abroad is considered a barrier to participation in mobility by 30% of non-mobile student respondents in the SIEM research report (2021). Students also feared that participation in mobility would lead to extension of their studies, usually because of difficulties with the recognition of learning outcomes which would lead to repeating the year at the home university.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, these fears are not groundless as the most recent data from ESNsurvey - XIV edition (2022) shows that only 71.37% of students have full credit recognition of their mobility period.

⁵⁸ Erasmus Student Network (2022). Understanding the experience and needs of exchange students in challenging times. ESNsurvey - XIV edition

⁵⁹ Allinson K., Gabriels W., (2021). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. SIEM Research Report, siem-project.eu, Figure 15, 16

Chart: percentage of students reporting full credit recognition. Based on ESNsurvey XIV data



Despite the ambition for automatic recognition of learning outcomes being one of the core elements that will lead to the achievement of the European Education Area, there is still a lot of work to be done. Automatic mutual recognition is a key flagship of the European Strategy for Universities, and it is one of the major requirements in the ECHE that higher education institutions commit to. Even though a number of steps have been taken to put this into practice ever since the Council Recommendation on automatic recognition of learning periods abroad⁶⁰ has been adopted, more needs to be done.

The progress report by the European Commission on the implementation of the 2018 Council Recommendation on automatic recognition states that the European average level of automatic recognition of learning periods abroad in 2020 was 84.4%.⁶¹ This number is significantly higher than the one reported in the ESNsurvey - XIV edition (2022), which highlights the necessity of providing various data sources related to the Erasmus Charter on Higher Education monitoring, such as participants' report data, in order to build the full picture

⁶⁰ Council Recommendation 2018/C 444/01

⁶¹ European Commission, *Report from the Commission to the Council on the implementation of the Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad*, Brussels, 23.2.2023

of the recognition situation. More qualitative components should be included to get a better understanding of the experiences of students.

The new Erasmus+ programme for 2021-2027 has been set in place to achieve full automatic recognition of learning periods abroad. **Therefore, the ECHE monitoring should become more strict to ensure that the recognition procedures are implemented.** Stricter monitoring should go hand in hand with a set of measures to be implemented that would lead to quality learning experiences during the mobility period abroad. Student associations and representatives should be involved in the monitoring process, especially at places with lower rates of recognition and satisfaction with the academic experience.

HEIs should provide better support when choosing the mobility destination and when preparing the learning agreement. There is a general lack of knowledge and information among students of how the Bologna process and tools work, which prevents them from being able to address their challenges properly. HEIs should provide information on how credits and grades are transferred. At the time of application students should be provided with comprehensive information about the grading systems of the host institutions and how the ECTS system works in practice.

Furthermore, in line with the ECHE commitments, **HEIs should make the information about offered courses fully accessible and up to date, which would make the preparation of the learning agreement easier.** At the same time, the selection of courses should be based on the added value of the mobility experience, and not on the search for identical or matching subjects. Having the opportunity to experience a new learning environment and subjects that are in line with the study programme, but are not available at the sending institution, is the biggest benefit of learning abroad and it should not be at the expense of recognition. **Recognition should be based on learning outcomes over specific courses.** Moreover, the learning process should be adapted to the needs of students, especially those from fewer opportunities backgrounds, as problems related to lack of flexibility affect those students more directly.

The decision making process on whether or not the learning outcomes should be recognised lies at the discretion of the HES, and in most cases, in the faculties and Erasmus+ coordinators

in particular. As the progress report by the Commission suggests that many times the recognition process is blocked because of quality concerns on faculty level raised by professors. This kind of lack of trust between partnering institutions is very problematic and it hinders participation in mobility. If HEIs are not fully committed to full academic recognition within the framework of existing inter-institutional agreements, those should not be continued as they dismiss the value of international experience in academic terms. **Universities should cherish the diversity of study programmes across their partners, as exchange of knowledge and teaching practices are among the key values of learning mobility.**

Embedding mobility windows in the learning programmes will not only contribute to the internationalisation of higher education, but it will also significantly improve credit recognition of learning outcomes and would lead to safer and easier credit transfer processes, making the mobility experience much less stressful for students. Courses should be designed with an international approach, focusing on the learning outcomes.

Civic engagement as part of the learning mobility experience

It is undeniable that the Erasmus+ programme has supported the creation of a generation of active citizens that led to the increased involvement of young people in democratic life. In 2019 ESN conducted "[ESNsurvey 2019 - Active citizenship and student exchange in light of the European elections](#)" which clearly demonstrates that students with an exchange experience are far more engaged in civil society organisations than the average European youth. Furthermore, the ESNsurvey 2019 shows that while students with an exchange experience are more likely to vote in European elections, students currently on mobility vote less due to procedural barriers. For example, 70.54% of mobile students reported that they intend to vote in the elections in 2024, but only 51.19% of them expected to do it in 2019 due to barriers they encounter to vote abroad.

In light of the upcoming elections for the European Parliament in 2024, ESN has launched the [Erasmus Generation in Action](#) (EGiA) project, supported by the European Parliament. The project aims to raise awareness about EU citizenship opportunities and mobility-related rights of citizens, as well as to foster active citizenship among European youth. The project has an ambitious goal to reach out to 2 million people by promoting voting and EU benefits through an

online voting platform and communicating resources for voting abroad. Increasing the overall turnout of young voters requires a collective and continuous effort and the Erasmus programme has the potential to foster this process.

The new Erasmus+ 2021-2027 programme has highlighted once more the importance of civic engagement through learning mobility, but it also pointed the attention to the long-lasting challenge of facilitating the interaction between international students and their local communities. ESN Survey - XIV edition (2022) data shows that **less than 8% of students took part in volunteering activities during their exchanges, and more than half did not engage in any group activities with members of the local community.** Comparisons in ESNsurvey data since 2005 show that this percentage has barely improved. These numbers illustrate that despite placing civic engagement at the central stage of Erasmus+ priorities, there is no considerable change in the approach taken by HEIs.

ESN has been advocating for a more social Erasmus+ programme through projects like [SocialErasmus](#) which places the interaction with local communities at the centre. ESN has also developed the [activities.esn.org](#) platform to support the social impact measurement of our activities and advocate for a stronger role of engagement initiatives in Erasmus+ mobilities. These projects clearly demonstrate that making civic engagement a priority in learning mobility experiences in HEIs will expand the impact of mobilities beyond the individual level.

HEIs should play a more active role in supporting and encouraging students to engage in volunteering, informal and non-formal learning activities as part of their learning mobility. Additionally, they should focus on creating partnerships with local actors and civil society organisations, which could foster the engagement of international students with the local community. **HEIs should award students with ECTS as an instrument to recognise their participation in projects engaging with local communities.** Both ESNsurvey - XIV edition and SIEM technical recommendations⁶² suggest that those ECTS should be considered for the acquisition of the diploma, or stored as extra credits in the diploma supplement. Moreover, the learning agreement could be adapted in a way that enables the enrichment of the students'

⁶² Erasmus Student Network (2022), For more inclusive & engaging Erasmus+ mobilities, [siem-project.eu](#)

learning experience by allowing them to get recognition of informal and non-formal learning outcomes.

Reintegration of mobile students

The role of multipliers for the promotion of learning mobility has been highlighted by the 2011 Council Recommendation and its importance has been reiterated by the Erasmus 2021-2027 regulation. ESN fully supports that, and argues that this ambition should be accompanied by proportional support measures for students and alumni organisations.

Despite acknowledging the central role of multipliers in motivating others to participate in mobility, the Mobility Scoreboard report 2022/2023⁶³ shows that only 20 out of 39 national education systems within EHEA use multipliers in publicly supported initiatives. Moreover, countries report that they rely on multipliers mostly for the purposes of promotion of learning mobility. At the same time, ESNsurvey - XIV edition (2022) shows that only 44.14% of students are involved in alumni communities upon their return from mobility, and that there are high levels of dissatisfaction with reintegration activities offered by home HEIs. There is a significant correlation between the data from both sources, indicating that **reintegration support services are either not provided in every institution, or are not encouraged enough by the national education system or the HEIs.**

⁶³ European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2023. Mobility Scoreboard: Higher education background report 2022/2023. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

Satisfaction with Services Provided by Home Institutions



Figure 24 – Mean satisfaction with home HEI services (general sample, n = 8,514-8,434)

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With more than 500 local associations, 15.000 volunteers, from whom more than 70% are Erasmus Alumni⁶⁵, and outreach of more than 350.000 young people every year, ESN is proud to be the biggest Erasmus Alumni organisation in Europe. ESN provides space for networking, personal development and interaction with like-minded people, bringing together mobile alumni and non-mobile students and young people. The focus on providing support to mobile students and reaching out to young people from various backgrounds and stages of education gives purpose to our members who clearly see the importance of their belonging to the organisation.

ESN aims for maximum coordination of our actions in order to achieve impactful activities. This is why ESN believes that the current form in which alumni support is channelled through the ESAA tender⁶⁶ does not match the needs of students and alumni. A revamped system in which the allocated funding is divided among alumni organisations based on their outreach and size, with better planning and design of activities by the alumni organisations in agreement with the

⁶⁴ Erasmus Student Network (2022). Understanding the experience and needs of exchange students in challenging times. ESNsurvey - XIV edition, Figure 24

⁶⁵ Based on internal data

⁶⁶ Information about ESAA is available at: <https://www.esaa-eu.org/>. The Alliance is supported by a tender of the European Commission.

European Commission and in accordance with the Erasmus+ priorities, would lead to boosted role of the alumni organisations in terms of learning and capacity building.

Monitoring and evaluation

It is of high importance that the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme is supported by comprehensive monitoring systems and evaluation processes with the participation of stakeholders and all relevant actors. The existence of monitoring instruments at both national and European level is crucial for informed decision and policy making and constant development of the Erasmus+ and other mobility programmes. The objective of monitoring should be to ensure that HEIs develop internationalisation strategies and support measures that respond to the needs of students and the challenges they face.

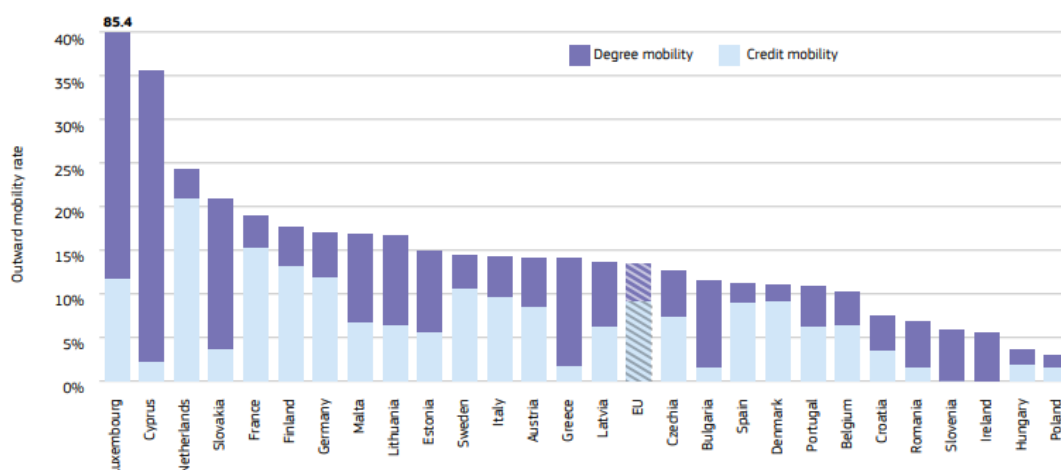
The recommendations laid out in the 2011 Council Recommendation “Youth on the Move”, together with the targets defined in the Education and Training 2020 framework led to the establishment of monitoring tools such as the **Mobility Scoreboard** and the **Education and Training Monitor**. Nevertheless, there are various challenges in the monitoring process of policy targets at European level. First of all, the first **Mobility Scoreboard report** was published just in 2016, a couple of years after the adoption of the 2011 Council Recommendation. Obtaining data in a timely manner is crucial for analysis and informed policy decisions and the absence of a proper tracking tool in the first years of implementation of the Recommendation slowed down the progress. Furthermore, it follows the development of only six thematic indicators and relies on data gathering from the Eurydice network, which is dependent on the existence of quality and comprehensive monitoring systems at the national level.

At the same time, the **Education and Training Monitor** has been overseeing the progress towards achieving the EU-level targets as part of the strategic framework for European cooperation in the field of education and training. Both instruments can be further optimised, expanding to other fields of education, such as school and adult education. They can also be further enriched by adding more indicators that reflect the development of other aspects of the Erasmus+ programme and its priorities, as well as the commitments in the European Strategy for Universities. Currently, there is lack of consistency in the Education and Training Monitor,

especially after 2020, when the new strategic framework for Education and Training entered into force, which doesn't include mobility targets.

As the most recent Mobility Scoreboard report shows, there are issues in many areas that require countries' efforts, as there is no education system that complies with all criteria in every indicator.⁶⁷ This highlights the importance of monitoring, as well as the role of national governments in enabling change, especially when it requires legislative measures. There are still significant differences between countries in recognition, portability of grants and even information and guidance on learning mobility. **At the same time, the Education and Training Monitor 2022 shows that Europe is still far from achieving the goal of at least 20% of higher education graduates to have a study period abroad by 2020 with only 9.1% credit mobility rate in 2020, and 9.1% pre-Covid in 2018.**⁶⁸

Figure 20. A temporary stay abroad remains the favoured option for most mobile graduates



Source: European Commission calculations based on Eurostat (UOE 2020 on inward degree mobile and outward credit mobile graduates in the EU and EEA) and OECD (on EU-originating graduates and students in the other OECD countries). [Download data](#)
 Note: calculations and metadata are detailed in the downloadable Excel file.

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The ambitious goals set out in the new Erasmus+ programme, should be supported not only by an equally ambitious budget but also by policy support measures that will boost the policy efforts at national level. **Reintroducing mobility targets** accompanied by a monitoring

⁶⁷ European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2023. Mobility Scoreboard: Higher education background report 2022/2023. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

⁶⁸ European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, [Education and Training Monitor 2020](#), Figure 55

⁶⁹ European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, [Education and Training Monitor 2022](#), Publications Office of the European Union, 2022, Figure 20, p.43

framework to track the progress towards them will boost national and institutional efforts to improve participation rates in learning mobility across sectors. Even though education is a national competence, it is important to use the instruments at hand. The various differences between countries, as shown in the Mobility Scoreboard, Education and Training Monitor, ESNsurvey and many other research projects, highlight that **national policy making in internationalisation does make a difference**. ESN welcomes the empowerment of National Authorities and National Agencies which have clearer roles assigned to them in the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 Regulation, and calls for clearer guidance in the new Learning Mobility Framework on how Member States can boost the translation of European priorities into the national context.

The Erasmus Student Network has developed several recommendations to the monitoring process of the Erasmus+ programme in the [Technical recommendations of the Social Inclusion and Engagement In Mobility \(SIEM\)](#) project and the [policy recommendations of the ESNsurvey XIV edition](#), and it encourages National Agencies (NAs) and HEIs to consider them in the implementation and monitoring of the ECHE commitments. ESN supports a reinforced ECHE and its monitoring, in line with the commitments in the European Strategy for Universities, and in a [reaction to the new Monitoring Guide](#), welcomes the increased level of ambition, which prioritises important challenges that students face, such as automatic recognition, timing of the grants payment, student support and inclusion measures.

Inclusion and diversity in learning mobility

The Erasmus Student Network has been a long-standing advocate for a more inclusive Erasmus+ programme with a bigger outreach and inclusive support services for students, as presented in ESN's vision in the [#ErasmusUpgrade Manifesto](#) in 2018. Therefore, ESN celebrated the inclusion priority in the new programme period and further invested efforts in exploring barriers and challenges not only to student participation in mobility, but also to the inclusive implementation of the programme that would widen participation.

While the Inclusion and Diversity Strategy for the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme and the Commission Implementing Decision on the framework of inclusion measures of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 outline the main barriers to participation in mobility and describe the

inclusion measures of the Programme, ESN believes that a higher impact can be achieved by embedding specific changes in the Erasmus+ documentation. Achieving the inclusion priority requires considerable adaptations at all levels of the Programme implementation. For example, the KA131 selection mechanisms should include qualitative criteria that would enable HEIs with higher overall student population with fewer opportunities and with specific measures in place to promote inclusive mobility to be awarded with extra operational support. These and other technical recommendations are presented in the [Technical recommendations of the Social Inclusion and Engagement In Mobility \(SIEM\)](#) and build on the results of the SIEM research report (Allinson & Gabriels, 2021).

Reinforced Green travel support for a more sustainable Erasmus+

In line with the EU priorities, the new Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 supports the development of skills needed for the green transition of Europe, and strives for carbon-neutrality by promoting sustainable travelling and environmentally responsible behaviour. However, the current measures are not strong enough to support that change. The GreenErasmus research report shows that financial barriers are once more hindering the development of more sustainable habits among Erasmus students, especially in terms of being able to afford sustainable modes of transportation to and from their mobility destinations.⁷⁰

The Erasmus+ programme has the potential to lead the change and develop green skills and competencies in students. However, an improved financial support is required to enable this change. According to the GreenErasmus research, 75% of students chose to travel to their mobility destination by plane because it is cheaper and faster, compared to the greener alternatives. Even though the decrease of air travel requires systemic change of European infrastructure, there are still incentives that could be used in order to encourage sustainable ways of travel. This is why ESN, together with the GreenErasmus Consortium, has launched the [GreenErasmus petition](#), asking for adjustment in the green travel support. **More than 5000 signatures were collected**, demanding an increased green travel support from the current 50 EUR to a universal top up of up to 250 EUR, proportional to distance covered. Furthermore, the signers of the petition call for increasing the current 4 days up to 7 days for additional travel

⁷⁰GreenErasmus is a project coordinated by ESN, www.project.greenerasmus.org/

support, covering additional substance costs and/or accommodation needs linked to green travel for the round trip.

Final Recommendations

The following set of recommendations builds on the analysis of the progress made since the publication of the current Council Recommendation, the state of play in the field of learning mobility and the experience of the Erasmus Student Network supporting mobile learners for more than three decades. All recommendations are based on an analysis of the sources referenced in this contribution.

The focus of the recommendations targets learning mobility with a cross-sectoral perspective. Most of the recommendations are more relevant in the Higher Education context, but are quite transferable to other sectors.

The recommendations seek to influence both the wording of the Council Recommendation and the follow-up initiatives that will appear at the European and National levels. They also seek to contribute, in the relevant aspects, to the Midterm review process of the Erasmus+ programme.

The recommendations are clustered in thematic blocks. Each block includes an introduction to ESN's position on the specific topic, several targeted recommendations and **specific wording proposals**, following the usual style of Council Recommendations.

The recommendations build on ESN's latest policy and research work, including the ESNsurvey - XIV edition⁷¹, and the SIEM Recommendations for more inclusive and engaging mobilities⁷².

⁷¹ Erasmus Student Network (2022). Understanding the experience and needs of exchange students in challenging times. ESNsurvey - XIV edition

⁷² Erasmus Student Network (2022), For more inclusive & engaging Erasmus+ mobilities: technical recommendations of the SIEM project, siem-project.eu

1. Funding for organisations and individuals

Fair and inclusive funding mechanisms and opportunities should be at the core of mobility policies and programmes. A commitment of public institutions at all levels is needed to make mobility a reality for all, with a reinforced role for national and regional authorities, who are set to benefit the most from learning mobility.

Funding distribution should focus on providing more opportunities to those who have more challenges accessing them. This means that mechanisms to allocate funding to educational institutions should have an inclusive approach, moving beyond the allocation of funds based on past performance and considering the characteristics and ambitions of the institutions.

Details matter when it comes to funding. Learners should be provided with a clear understanding of the exact conditions of funding opportunities so they can plan their mobilities properly and reduce the mental burden of going abroad. Institutions facilitating mobilities should set out systems such as calculators so that any learner can understand funding conditions easily.

Recommendations

- 1. Inclusive distribution of mobility funding to institutions:** The allocation of mobility funding should consider the realities of different institutions and their existing mobility rates, trying to level the playing field among institutions by allocating extra funding to those lagging behind in terms of participation rates, and especially those with a high percentage of students with fewer opportunities. Institutions should be encouraged to diversify their mobility, focusing especially on those fields of study where numbers are lower. Applications for mobility projects should therefore give space to propose innovative practices that can boost participation in mobility.
- 2. Selection of participants to access mobility funding:** Selection of participants in mobility should not be done solely following academic criteria, trying to incorporate other elements that can make it more inclusive for underrepresented groups. Participation in learning mobility should seek to mirror the diversity of the different educational sectors, and the main focus in the next few years should be to prioritise access to the mobility of all underrepresented groups.
- 3. Higher grants for those who need them:** High grants for learners that need them should be a priority. Therefore, programmes should increase grant levels and consider

personal and socioeconomic background when allocating grants to individuals, compensating for the “opportunity cost” that many students face when deciding to go on mobility. The range of people who can receive such grants should be broadened, in order to make sure that all learners who otherwise could not participate in mobility can access it. All institutions with a role in education policy should contribute to increasing the financial contribution to learning mobility, as well as encourage other actors such as private companies to offer complementary financial support to learning mobility. Grants should be indexed to inflation and revised every year to avoid a loss of purchasing power among mobile learners.

4. **Pre-departure funding should be the norm:** The Council Recommendation should stress the importance of making sure that mobility grants are given to participants before their mobilities start, regardless of the sector. **Grant agreements** across programmes and sectors should state the right of mobile learners to receive their grants at the beginning of their mobilities, or regularly at the beginning of the month. All learners should receive their grants before mobility, but those with fewer opportunities should have special priority. This pre-departure payment should be promoted to reassure learners considering going abroad who might have financial concerns.
5. **Adapting mobility support to the costs of hosting cities:** Mobility grants should be adjusted to the costs of the city of destination by giving more flexibility to define the final amount to the educational institutions operating the mobility. A national minimum grant can be established for a certain country, with the possibility of including a top-up depending on the living expenses of the city of destination.

Wording proposals for the Council Recommendation

Whereas:

Adequate financial support is key to making participation in mobility a reality for all. Increasing the financial support can help learners with fewer opportunities to participate in mobility and create a positive and inclusive image of mobility opportunities.

Better financial conditions go beyond higher grant amounts, and they also include pre-departure payments for all mobile learners and clear financial information on the exact conditions of their grants.

The Council recommends the Member States and the European Commission work along the following lines:

- (a) *Provide additional financial support to those educational institutions with lower mobility numbers, ensuring a level playing field, and exploring the creation of additional financial support mechanisms to build the capacity of institutions supporting the participation of learners with fewer opportunities.*
- (b) *Ensure pre-departure payments of all mobility grants by removing all potential legal hurdles and monitoring the implementation of European and national funding programmes. Data on the timing of grant payments will be collected by the European Commission and shared regularly in the Mobility Scoreboard.*
- (c) *Gradually increase grant rates and adapt them to match the actual costs of the city of destination by reviewing funding schemes, including those in Erasmus+.*
- (d) *Ensure full portability of grants and loans to further support the learning mobility of young people.*

2. Mobility promotion and preparation

Mobility promotion and preparation initiatives are key to convincing those learners who might not have considered taking part in a mobility opportunity, helping to overcome environmental and attitudinal barriers.⁷³ Promotion and pre-departure preparation strategies should be multilayered and involve stakeholders representing learners in the design and implementation, and should also be adapted to the different target groups and their specific needs. Data from previous participants should be used to target the messages to the common challenges faced by learners, as well as the key attraction factors that convinced them to participate in mobility in the first place.

Promotion and pre-departure preparation strategies should be embedded in broader internationalisation strategies at the institutional and national level. Mobility alumni and incoming international learners should be core pillars of these strategies.

⁷³ Allinson K., Gabriels W.,(2021). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. SIEM Research Report, siem-project.eu

Since online communication is more likely to reach those who are already interested, on-site promotion in educational centres and other public and private spaces should also be considered. Promotion initiatives should reach all learners but focus especially on those of young age.

New online collaborative formats such as virtual exchanges and blended learning should also be used to promote and prepare students for learning mobility opportunities, serving as stepping stones towards long-term learning mobility abroad.⁷⁴

Recommendations

- 1. Creation of national cross-sectoral mobility promotion strategies:** Member States should develop cross-sectoral mobility promotion strategies, including targets for participation in different sectors and an analysis of their current state of play. These strategies should be gathered and analysed by the European Commission, focusing on the results over time.
- 2. Incorporating mobility promotion in the planning of mobility experiences:** sharing your experience as a learner abroad should be considered a key part of the mobility experience, contributing to higher awareness and increased interaction with local communities.⁷⁵ Member states should support educational institutions to incorporate this component in the planning of mobility and facilitate the recognition of the time and competencies gained while doing it.
- 3. Structured collaboration with mobility promoters:** Organisations representing learners engaged in mobility promotion should be provided with institutional support for their dissemination work. Member States and the European Commission should put in place measures to support their engagement with other educational institutions and to offer them visibility in institutional spaces. These organisations should be included in the planning of the promotion strategies, and funding should be made available according to their outreach capacity. Such organisations should also be involved in the pre departure preparation of learners, with the organisation of activities and structures like pre-departure mentorship sessions.

⁷⁴ European Students' Union and Erasmus Student Network, "[*Bringing the student perspective to the debate on mobility, virtual exchange and blended learning*](#)", 2021

⁷⁵ Allinson K., Gabriels W.,(2021). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. SIEM Research Report, siem-project.eu

4. **Comprehensive internationalisation from an early age:** mobility promotion initiatives should be embedded in internationalised educational curricula and planning that incorporates international realities into educational content from an early age. Digital technologies and blended initiatives, combining short-term mobilities which prioritise neighbouring countries and online collaboration, should be prioritised at an early age to help learners acquire an internationalisation culture they can boost throughout their lives. These initiatives will not only help to convince learners to go abroad, but also prepare them to make the most out of their mobility.

Wording proposals for the Council Recommendation

Whereas:

A new approach to mobility promotion and the preparation of learners before taking part in a mobility experience abroad is needed to boost participation rates in mobility, helping to remove attitudinal and environmental barriers among potential participants. The involvement of learners in the design and implementation in the creation of such strategies will be a key part of its success.

Diverse internationalisation at home initiatives such as online collaborative learning, participation in international volunteering organisations and a more internationalised curriculum across educational sectors can also have a positive impact on the participation of learners in mobility while improving the overall quality of education.

Hereby recommends that Member States and the European Commission:

- (a) *Within one year of the adoption of the Council Recommendation, Member States will publish a cross-sectoral mobility promotion strategy, either as a standalone document or as part of their internationalisation strategies in the fields of education and training. It is recommended that the strategies include targets for mobility in the different sectors, using commonly agreed indicators as a reference. The strategy should prioritise the promotion of learning mobility opportunities among young people, including also a strong lifelong learning dimension. The European Commission will gather those strategies and publish them in the European Education Area portal.*
- (b) *Support hosting educational institutions to incorporate mobility promotion to local communities as a core part of the educational experience abroad of mobile learners.*

- (c) *Collaborate with organisations of learners active in mobility promotion, allocating financial and institutional support when possible. In order to foster a pan-European approach to learning mobility promotion, the European Commission shall create a special label recognising those trustworthy organisations with a proven track record of promoting learning mobility.*

3. The role of host countries, cities and organisations

Even if the role of hosting organisations is widely acknowledged when it comes to guaranteeing quality mobility for learners, discussions on how to widen participation normally focus solely on policies implemented by sending organisations and institutions in order to increase participation. Based on the existing evidence and in ESN's experience supporting learning mobility, the Erasmus Student Network reaffirms that Member States, cities and organisations can play a key role and implement strategic measures focusing on their profile as hosts of mobile learners. Great support measures⁷⁶ exist across Europe at all levels, but they should be boosted and scaled up.

The first step to boost this strategic hosting role is reflecting on the current situation regarding the hosting of mobile learners, and the creation of a clear policy of attraction of international talent, with a specific focus on inclusion. Reinforcing visibility to the learners hosted by the country, city and institution will help to create a mobility culture that also contributes to increasing outward mobility.

Financial support to incoming learners can be an extremely positive measure to make mobility more inclusive. This support can be provided at any level and can take the form of subsidised and affordable housing, subsistence support, public transport support or cultural promotion support, among others.

Available information on support mechanisms and the experience of previous learners should be made available and widely disseminated, building on existing platforms.⁷⁷

Finally, improving the exchange of information between sending and hosting organisations is key. Programme regulations and support documents (such as the Charters in Erasmus+) should

⁷⁶ The Erasmus Student Network launched the revamped concept of the "Erasmus Destination of the Year" in 2023, awarding cities where great support services for incoming students.

⁷⁷ Allinson K., Gabriels W.,(2021). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. SIEM Research Report, siem-project.eu, Figure 8 - Encouragement of non-mobile students

clearly define the responsibility of each organisation regarding each aspect and stage of the mobility experience.

Recommendations

1. **Boosting financial support to incoming learners responding to their needs:** Member States, regions and cities should boost support financial support measures for incoming learners, helping them to make mobilities more affordable while becoming better integrated. These measures can be done in aspects such as housing, food and subsistence, public transport, culture or other areas, and prioritise learners with fewer opportunities, and can be done at the region or city level, with educational institutions having an important role as well if they manage enough resources. Access to this extra support can be conditional to being part of the fewer opportunities group.
2. **Establishing support services to respond to the needs and challenges of learners:** The establishment and adaptation of support services in aspects such as administration and health, both physical and mental, can also be extremely important to reassure prospective mobile learners about their stay abroad. Empowering local associations supporting learners through financial support and institutional recognition can improve the available support for incoming learners while helping to create a culture of learning mobility.
3. **Providing adequate information to help learners choose their mobility destination:** Information on the availability of support measures and services should be widely shared, next to detailed information regarding the academic (for mobilities happening in the non-formal education sectors) aspects of the mobility. Institutions and Member States should use data from previous participants to adapt this information sharing and show learners how others value their experiences.
4. **Attract companies as hosting organisations for quality traineeships:** National Authorities should incentivise and support companies which decide to host mobile learners such as trainees and apprentices, with a special focus on those who allocate financial resources. National Agencies should work with local and regional authorities to ensure that mobile learners that participate in these learning experiences in a workplace also have access to personal and social support systems, which can be provided by existing learner organisations such as ESN if the necessary support and information is provided to the local associations and the incoming students. Quality

standards for traineeships should consider the specifics of international traineeships, and existing quality frameworks in programmes like Erasmus should be adapted to better respond to the needs of mobile trainees.⁷⁸

Wording proposal for the Council Recommendation

Whereas:

Hosting countries, cities and organisations have a fundamental role to play in making mobility a reality for all. Beyond ensuring a quality experience for learners, actions such as better information sharing, financial support measures to incoming learners or support services that address the needs of learners with fewer opportunities can also help to make mobility more inclusive while making them more attractive destinations.

Hereby recommends that Member States and the European Commission:

- (a) Support the allocation of resources and support measures for mobile learners by host regions, cities and educational institutions, contributing to key aspects of the mobility such as housing, transport, or mental and physical health support.*
- (b) Empower local, national and international volunteering organisations that offer support to mobile learners, encouraging the collaboration at all levels, the provision of financial, legal and logistical support, and the collaboration in creating connections with the local community.*
- (c) Improve the availability of information about the conditions of countries, cities and educational institutions, with a special focus on support services available for learners with fewer opportunities.*
- (d) Incentive companies and organisations to host mobile trainees, working with National Agencies and learners' organisations to improve quality standards for work based mobility.*

⁷⁸ Erasmus Student Network (2022). Understanding the experience and needs of exchange students in challenging times. ESNsurvey - XIV edition, p. 92-94

4. Multilevel policy-making and administrative capacity

The disparity between Member States and educational institutions in a range of aspects, from participation rates in learning mobility⁷⁹ to satisfaction with the support provided by institutions⁸⁰, point to the importance of multilevel policy-making related to mobility. The European Union should have a stronger steering role, with a reinforced mandate from Member States which should eventually lead to Treaty reform. Next to this, Member States should strengthen their commitment to learning mobility through new policies, stronger institutions working in the field, better financing and stakeholder engagement initiatives. Even if European programmes should continue to provide the base for the organisation of most mobility activities in the European Union due to its high European added value, there is still a lot that Member States need to do to increase the accessibility and quality of mobility in their countries.

Recommendations

- 1. Reinforcing the policy and strategy role of National Internationalisation Agencies in Education and Youth:** The National Agencies dealing with Erasmus+ should not be limited to an administrative role in the management of the programme, receiving a reinforced mandate from their National Authorities to be responsible for policies related to internationalisation of education. This increased policy role should result in more research, stakeholder engagement, capacity building and dissemination activities about learning mobility.
- 2. Boosting national funding of mobility opportunities through co-financing and complementary initiatives:** The continuous increase in EU funding to mobility should be accompanied by a commitment from Member States and their different levels of government to boost their national financial support to learning mobility opportunities. The preferred form of financial support for learning mobility should be national co-financing of the Erasmus programme, ensuring higher availability of grants and an increase of individual grant levels for learners. This funding should be allocated in a strategic way that also serves to boost the administrative capacity of organisations involved in learning mobility, focusing both on outgoing and incoming mobility. The

⁷⁹ European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, [Education and Training Monitor 2020](#), Figure 55 - Outward degree and credit mobility of graduates, 2018 [%]

⁸⁰ Erasmus Student Network (2022). Understanding the experience and needs of exchange students in challenging times. ESNsurvey - XIV edition, p. 41-47

European Commission should monitor this financial support and report on it through the revamped Mobility Scoreboard and the Education and Training Monitor, analysing the different types of support created by the Member States and the effectiveness of the funding in improving access and quality.

- 3. Increasing local, regional and national administrative support for smaller organisations involved in mobility:** Member States should support the participation of smaller educational institutions by creating local and regional support offices that offer direct help with the application, management and evaluation of mobility projects. Municipalities and regional governments can set up internationalisation offices that offer targeted support to newcomers and less experienced organisations, helping educators to focus more on the educational side of the project while reducing the administrative burden. Anecdotal evidence seems to indicate that wherever similar offices exist, awareness of EU-funded opportunities and participation in projects tends to be higher. These offices could be in direct touch with National Agencies, which could offer direct guidance by setting up communities of practice where organisations of learners are also represented.
- 4. Creating new stakeholder engagement models at the national and institutional levels with the participation of learners:** The involvement of organisations representing learners in European policies and programmes regarding learning mobility, such as the Erasmus Student Network, has been a key element of its success. However, stakeholder engagement in policy decisions at the national level has not followed the same pattern in most countries, and learners are less involved in the creation of strategies, policies and initiatives. As national policies related to learning mobility and programme management become more important, National Authorities and National Agencies should incorporate new stakeholder engagement models that include learner organisations in defining national priorities and in decisions related to monitoring, funding, and capacity building or promotion, among others. This involvement will immediately result in a boost in the quality of mobilities, as well as an increased awareness about these opportunities.
- 5. Qualitative allocation of extra organisational/administrative support to educational institutions:** Organisational support plays a key role in the development of internal procedures to support quality learning mobility among organisations. Mobility programmes should allocate considerable resources to boost the administrative

capacity of organisations. Beyond the regular amount allocated automatically depending on the number of learners, there should also be a possibility for organisations to request extra funding if they want to implement more innovative practices related to mobility promotion⁸¹.

- 6. More Human Resources for learning mobility in DG EAC:** Mobility numbers will only increase if the European Commission has enough human resources to support national policy making and work in the implementation of mobility policies and programmes. DG EAC suffers a chronic staff shortage that hampers progress in mobility, despite the great efforts of its staff. More in-house capacity should be created, rather than relying so much on consultancies for policy work.

Wording proposals for the Council Recommendation

Whereas:

Member States can support learning mobility by allocating financial resources, creating policies and bodies that work on the topic, and working with organisations representing learners to get a better understanding of their needs. Member States that implement more support measures complementing EU programmes tend to have higher mobility numbers.

National Agencies responsible for learning mobility can have a fundamental role in the development and implementation of strategies, policies and programmes related to learning mobility, with educational institutions benefiting directly from their work. Agencies whose role goes beyond administration and also have a high involvement in learning mobility policies are better positioned to support increasing mobility numbers, while ensuring quality learning experiences.

Education policies and programmes in the European Union have benefitted from a high level of involvement of learners representing, who have helped to promote mobility opportunities and identify issues faced by both mobile and non mobile learners related to mobility. Higher involvement of learners in decision making processes related to mobility at the national and institutional level should be further enhanced.

⁸¹ Erasmus Student Network (2022), For more inclusive & engaging Erasmus+ mobilities: technical recommendations of the SIEM project, siem-project.eu

Hereby recommends that Member States and the European Commission:

- (a) *Allocate financial resources to support learning mobility, either as co-financing of EU programmes or through the creation of complementary initiatives that help to expand opportunities for learners.*
- (b) *Strengthen the role of National Agencies supporting learning mobility, equipping them with sufficient resources and empowering their role in policy-making, stakeholder engagement and evaluation of learning mobility in the national context.*
- (c) *Boost the administrative support to smaller organisations that seek to be involved in learning mobility, working with cities and regions to establish support offices that cooperate with National Agencies and organisations supporting learners.*
- (d) *Include organisations representing learners in decision-making processes, providing them an advisory role and including them in the design, implementation, evaluation and monitoring of policies and programmes at the national level.*

5. Impact and quality of mobility

Learning mobilities should be planned taking into account the benefits they can bring to all the actors involved, including the participants and their peers, sending and host communities, educational institutions and educational systems at large. **Mobilities in all sectors should be planned thinking about the acquisition of competencies through formal, non-formal and informal learning**, and prioritising learning related to inclusion, civic engagement, sustainability and digital transition. Concrete measures, such as facilitating access to voting from abroad, will not only benefit mobile learners but **all mobile citizens**.

Educational institutions should implement **whole-institution strategies where the different departments acquire responsibilities for learning mobility**, focusing on all kinds of aspects including teaching and learning, support services, housing and social services, and the cultural life within institutions.

The **greening of mobility** should put the acquisition of green competencies at the core, offering financial and educational incentives for those who travel green to their mobility destinations. The focus should be on empowering people to be more sustainable.⁸²

⁸² Recommendations based on key GreenErasmus, a project coordinated by ESN, www.project.greenerasmus.org/

Mobile learners should be provided with **guidance before, during and after their mobilities** to help them reflect on their learning throughout their mobility journeys. A more youth-oriented approach for mobilities in formal education involving young people should be applied, adapting tools such as the Youthpass and learning lessons from the support systems existing in that sector.

Mobility in formal education should strive to recognise the competencies acquired through the participation in non-formal and informal learning activities, such as volunteering in local communities.⁸³ At the same time, **language learning** should be a core part of all mobility experiences, with support being offered by sending and hosting organisations.

Recommendations

- **Recognition of civic engagement while on exchange:** Participation in civic engagement activities on mobility should be a priority in the planning of exchanges. The learning outcomes should be recognised, using established systems such as ECTS whenever possible, and learning objectives should be incorporated in learning agreements or equivalent documents. Civic engagement should be used to boost the interaction between members of the local community and mobile learners. Host organisations should promote engagement opportunities at the beginning of the mobilities, and collaborate with learners organisations to improve the quality and impact of these opportunities.
- **Prioritise institutional transformation through learning mobility by implementing whole institution approaches:** All the departments of an educational institution involved in learning mobility should be involved in the support to mobile learners, and consider the added value of hosting international learners for the transformation process of an institution. In institutions with enough capacity, specific staff members in the departments where exchange students need more support should be designated to offer targeted support in those areas.
- **Ensure awareness of their rights as European citizens among mobile learners:** Mobility programmes should be used to help citizens to be fully aware about their rights as European citizens, or non EU citizens residing in Europe. National Agencies should work with relevant Ministries, local authorities and learner organisations to ensure that

⁸³ Erasmus Student Network (2022). Understanding the experience and needs of exchange students in challenging times. ESNsurvey - XIV edition, p. 87-89

all mobile learners are aware of their rights and they exercise them while abroad. The participation of mobile learners in the upcoming elections to the European Parliament should be a priority.

Wording proposals for the Council Recommendation

Whereas:

The participation of mobile learners on community engagement activities contributes to the acquisition of civic and democratic competences, and spreads the benefits of learning mobility to the host communities.

Mobile learners still face considerable barriers to fully access their rights while abroad, including voting in national and European elections, and full integration in host communities remains a challenge that should be addressed.

Hereby recommends that Member States and the European Commission:

- (a) *Facilitate the recognition of informal and non-formal learning on mobility, incorporating more informal learning components in formal mobility experience. Adapt tools such as the Youthpass so all young people can enhance their competences regardless of the type of sector, working to create synergies between educational institutions and organisations active in different sectors and seeking to involve all mobile learners in community engagement initiatives while abroad.*
- (b) *Put measures in place to ensure a full awareness of their rights among mobile citizens, removing administrative barriers that prevent mobile citizens to fully exercise their rights while abroad.*

6. Monitoring and evaluation

Good monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are at the core of successful public policies, and learning mobility is not an exception. There is tremendous room for improvement in how learning mobility programmes and experiences are monitored and evaluated at all levels, and part of the success of the upcoming Council Recommendation will depend on its ambition in these areas, bringing a rethinking of existing processes in mobility programmes.

Innovation and the implementation of new practices among participating organisations should be rewarded by the European Commission, National Agencies and National Authorities. Funding mechanisms should be revised so incorporating proposals that enhance the quality and impact are easier to incorporate into mobility projects.

A revamped approach to the use of data in mobility should be at the core of the new Council Recommendation. Learning mobility is a key part of the work of the EU in the field of education, but the current way data is being used is not supporting a continuous improvement of the programme. The European Commission and the National Agencies lack enough human resources to analyse, use and disseminate all the data they collect, and there is a lack of transparency regarding Erasmus+ data from participant institutions and final beneficiaries.

Recommendations

- 1. Including a new set of indicators and targets in the Council Recommendation for all educational sectors:** The renewed ambitions of the Council Recommendation should be backed by a set of indicators and targets that will allow to measure progress, improve the use of data and analyse the effectiveness of public policy. In 2011, the Council Recommendation on benchmarking of learning mobility created a set of targets that were unfortunately not achieved but paved the way for clear improvements that would have been even higher had not the COVID pandemic arrived. These targets should be adapted to the reality of each sector. The Erasmus Student Network recommends the creation of a target of 40% of Higher Education graduates in the European Union by the end of 2030 with a learning mobility experience of at least 2 months abroad, and the creation of a new youth mobility indicator that measures participation in any kind of mobility opportunity, including non-formal and informal learning. Progress on the targets should be published annually in a revamped edition of the Mobility Scoreboard.
- 2. Stronger monitoring of mobility projects incorporating a capacity-building approach⁸⁴** : The monitoring of mobility projects by National Agencies and the European Commission should be reinforced, with a major focus on those aspects that are linked to existing barriers to mobility such as the lack of recognition of periods of study abroad. Performing below quality standards should have implications for institutions, and improvement should be supported and rewarded. More data from monitoring should be

⁸⁴ ESN's position on the monitoring of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education can be found on the following link: <https://www.esn.org/news/new-monitoring-framework-erasmus-charter-higher-education>

made public by institutions and National Agencies, allowing for better comparison between institutions. National Authorities and National Agencies should create capacity building initiatives linked to the areas where institutions are lagging behind. Organisations representing learners should be included in monitoring processes, building on the success of quality assurance mechanisms.

- 3. A new Mobility Scoreboard to understand the situation of learning mobility across the European Union:** The revamp of the Mobility Scoreboard is listed as one of the objectives of the new Council Recommendation. The new document should build on the different sources related to learning mobility, combining information on national policies and the quantitative progress achieved in participation in learning mobility and other aspects, such as recognition of periods of study abroad and funding, including co-financing schemes, grant levels in each country and timing of grant payments. The progress towards inclusion objectives, both outgoing and incoming, should also be reported there. There should also be an analysis of how organisations of learners are involved in decision making processes related to learning mobility.
- 4. Better in-house research capacity through a stronger collaboration with the Joint Research Centre:** The Joint Research Centre has produced some of the most relevant publications in the field of learning mobility in recent times, but there does not seem to be a structured collaboration with DG EAC and other relevant parts of the Commission working on learning mobility. The vast amount of data collected through Erasmus+ could be used to improve mobility policies and programmes across Europe. In a context where the Commission is proposing a number of policy innovations and the interest in learning mobility has been confirmed by the recent European Citizen Panels in learning mobility, this stronger collaboration in mobility research Boosting the research work in the field done by JRC could reduce the dependency on external consultancies and improve evidence based policy making in mobility.

Wording proposals for the Council Recommendation

Whereas:

The monitoring of mobility projects, during and after its implementation, is fundamental to ensure the enhancement of their quality and identify potential areas for improvement.

The systems of Charters and accreditations have proved effective at reducing administration, but should be accompanied by strong monitoring systems where all the actors, including learners, are involved, ensuring that areas for improvement are identified and the necessary measures are put in place.

Quantitative and qualitative data on the experience of mobile learners and the performance of organisations involved in learning mobility are key to properly evaluate the progress made regarding the access, quality and impact of these experiences.

The work done by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) in the fields of education, youth and fairness can contribute to better evidence-based policy making in the field of learning mobility, helping the European Commission, National Authorities and educational institutions to define their strategies.

New mobility targets

- 1. The Council has agreed to set up a new set of mobility targets, building on the ones created in the benchmarking Council Recommendation and adjusting the level of ambition to the increased funding in the Erasmus+ programme.*
- 2. The Council agrees that by 2030, an average of 40% of Higher Education graduates in the European Union should have a physical learning mobility experience, be it of studies, traineeship or a combination of both, of at least 2 months. The European Commission will report to the Council on the progress towards this target through the Mobility Scoreboard and the Education Training Monitor.*
- 3. The Council agrees on the creation of a “Youth Mobility Indicator”, which will set the foundation to collect aggregated data on the participation of young people in all types of learning mobility.*

Hereby recommends that Member States and the European Commission:

- (a) Reinforce monitoring mechanisms of mobility projects, making sure that commitments acquired in mobility projects in aspects such as funding, recognition or implementation of programme priorities are duly implemented, and offering support to participant institutions and organisations.
- (b) Develop a new structure for the Mobility Scoreboard that combines the analysis of national policies with available quantitative data from individual participants and educational institutions, and that incorporates more information on the co-financing and programmes put in place by Member States.

Main research and policy outputs by the Erasmus Student Network since the beginning of the Erasmus+ 2014-2020 programme

In 2015 ESN and EUF published a joint [review on the first year of the implementation of Erasmus+ 2014-2020](#), which focused on the administration and funding of learning mobility for higher education students, already touching upon the need of improving grant calculation mechanisms.

The [ESN Survey 2016](#), which gathered one of the highest numbers of total respondents (24,532) in ESN's research history, explored the topic of **international friendliness of universities** and the role of mobility flows, host-university services, literary adaptation, social adaptation and home-country reintegration in the resulting satisfaction with a study abroad experience. According to the Survey, **only 10.2% of students considered that 80% or more of their expenses were covered by their grant**. Furthermore, the ESN Survey highlighted the **importance of the host university's role in offering more social activities** to exchange students to increase the overall satisfaction of their stay abroad. Moreover, **the role of the home university** proves to be equally important to students with close to 70% of respondents believing that re-entry services should be offered to students after their return from abroad.

[The HouseErasmus+ project](#) helped to gain a keen understanding of the international student housing situation and to be able to formulate recommendations to all stakeholders in the field about improvements that can be made to better support students in their international mobility. The results are published in 2 separate documents, the research report and the policy recommendation booklet:

- [Policy Recommendations Booklet](#)
- [Final Research Report](#)

The [ESN Survey 2018](#) edition, which goes under the title “**Mapping the challenges and enablers of international mobility for students with disabilities**” aimed at analysing the experience of students with disabilities, both with and without mobility experience and explored further how higher education institutions can act to improve their accessibility, both for their domestic and mobility students with disabilities. Only 15.1% of respondents with disabilities mentioned that their Home Higher Education Institution provides information on the Erasmus+ special needs grant, while 31.3% of the students with disabilities who successfully received the Erasmus+ Special Needs Supplementary Grant, mentioned that all of their access needs were covered by the grant. 83.8% of the sample of students with disabilities were either satisfied or very satisfied with their mobility experience.

In 2018, following over 2 years of consultations, the Erasmus Student Network released the [#ErasmusUpgrade Manifesto](#) which contains 13 recommendations to improve the successor of the Erasmus+ 2014-2020 Programme.

The [ESNsurvey 2019](#) research report under the title “**Active citizenship and student exchange in light of the European elections**” explored the impact of Erasmus+ on the civil, social and political participation of young people in Europe. Even though the Survey shows that Erasmus+ Alumni have higher interest and are more likely to vote in European elections than the European average, students who are currently on exchange reportedly vote less, due to procedural barriers. Furthermore, the ESN Survey proves that students with an exchange experience are far more engaged in civil society organisations than the average European youth and that EU students with an exchange experience wish for more rights as EU citizens and for more European civic education in schools.

The ESN Survey 2021, which focused on the experience of international students before and during COVID, will be published in Autumn 2022 in esn.org/esnsurvey. A preliminary version of the key findings can be found [here](#).

The Survey called “[Student exchanges in times of crisis: research report on the impact of COVID-19 on student exchanges in Europe](#)” collected responses from 22,000 international students and trainees in Europe, who provided information about their mobility experiences during the pandemic.

[The Social Inclusion and Engagement in Mobility Research report](#) has been a breakthrough in the existing literature and data collection in the field of inclusive mobility among students from fewer opportunities backgrounds. It collected more than 12000 answers from students, almost 1000 from HEI staff and a number of focus groups and study visits. The final set of

recommendations targeting all stakeholders can be a source of inspiration for new inclusion measures in Erasmus+.

During the first year of implementation of the new Erasmus+ Programme, 2021-2027 ESN published a [reaction to the framework of inclusion measures of the new Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes](#). This document provides ESN's analysis of some of the critical steps in the new framework and recommendations on their implementation.

The [GreenErasmus research report](#) published in 2022, and carried out as part of the GreenErasmus project coordinated by ESN, compares over 10.000 students' consumer behaviour, travel behaviour, and daily life habits while at home and during their mobility.

ESN launched a [reaction paper to the Youth Action Plan in EU external action](#) in 2023.

In March 2023, ESN, together with the European Students Union and the European University Foundation published a [joint review](#) of the first years of the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027.

The Erasmus Student Network [welcomed the publication of the new Monitoring Guide of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education 2021-2027](#) and published a contribution.



Erasmus Student Network (2023).

More mobility, better mobility, more accessible mobility: The Contribution of the Erasmus Student Network to the Council Recommendation on a new Learning Mobility Framework.