

NEW MONITORING FRAMEWORK OF THE ERASMUS CHARTER FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

An opportunity to boost institutional
transformation through student mobility

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New monitoring framework of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education

An opportunity to boost institutional transformation through student mobility:

The contribution of the Erasmus Student Network

The European Commission has recently published the [new Monitoring Guide of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education 2021-2027](#), the quality framework for participation in Erasmus+ mobilities and cooperation projects for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The guide contains a full monitoring package, including the evaluation grids and guiding questions for monitoring visits. In this document, ESN shares some reflections on the importance of the new guide and its priority areas.

The Erasmus Student Network welcomes the publication of the new Monitoring Guide and celebrates its increased level of ambition. ESN considered that an ambitious implementation of ECHE principles, in line with the ECHE Annotated Guidelines and with the rights enshrined in the Erasmus Student Charter, is fundamental to ensuring quality mobility experiences for all students, and truly advances the implementation of the priorities of the programme. The new monitoring framework priorities key aspects that students report as important challenges in their mobilities, such as automatic recognition, timely payment of grants, student support and inclusion measures,

ESN believes that it is of paramount importance that this implementation process is supported by comprehensive monitoring systems that help HEIs to build capacity and have a clear improvement through the programme. The objective should not be to punish anyone, but rather make sure that the document and its monitoring help HEIs to develop their internationalisation strategies and support measures, responding to the needs and challenges of students. In that regard, ESN has included several references to this monitoring process 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 these recommendations in the implementation and monitoring of the ECHE commitments.

The monitoring guide was created with the support of a working group coordinated by the European Commission, NAs, experts, and representatives from stakeholder organisations, including the Erasmus Student Network and the European Students' Union. ESN would like to thank the European Commission and NAs for coordinating this co-creation process, and especially for the involvement of students and the quality of the discussions. ESN hopes that this successful process can be followed for collaborations with student organisations involved in student mobility at the national level, and stands ready to facilitate them.

ESN is committed to supporting the implementation and monitoring of the ECHE through its activities, research and policy work. In 2020, [ESN published a document explaining how local student associations](#) can play an important role in implementing ECHE commitments. Through the ESNsurvey, ESN will also analyse how students perceive the implementation of ECHE commitments throughout the current Erasmus+ programming period. The next ESNsurvey will be launched in late May 2023, and it will target specifically many of the pressure points of the new ECHE.

The new pressure points

The recently published Monitoring Guide continues with the same monitoring structure adopted in the previous [Monitoring Guide of 2016](#), defining pressure points with linked monitoring grids that can facilitate the process for NAs.

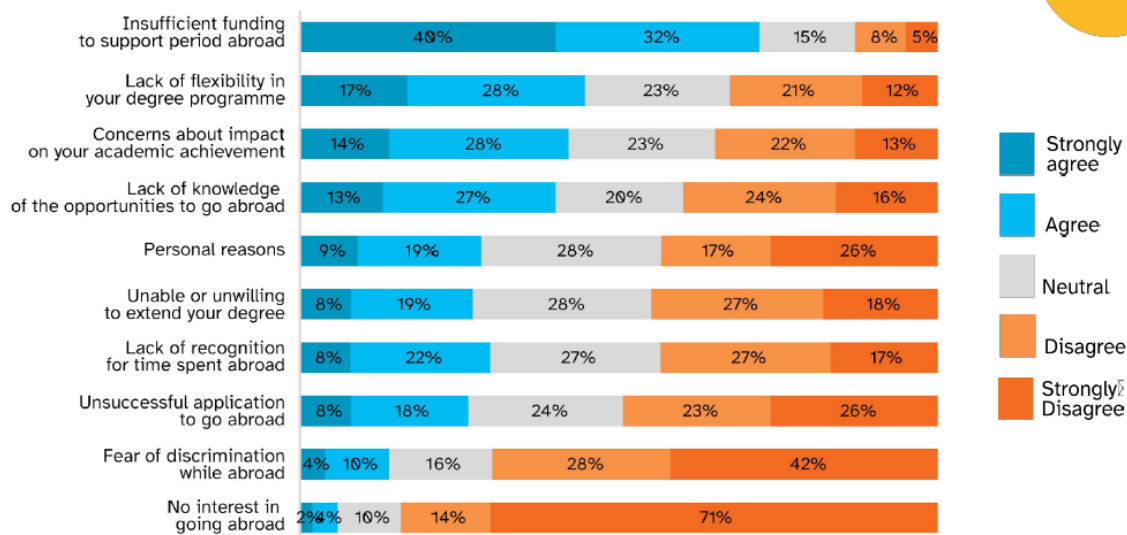
ESN understands the importance of simplified monitoring procedures but also believes that a comprehensive monitoring system is necessary to further boost the quality and impact of Erasmus+ mobilities. In that regard, ESN considers that the use of the grids and pressure points should be accompanied by an analysis of the other ECHE commitments and the advancement of the objectives laid out in the Erasmus Policy Statements of HEIs.

The addition of student support (as part of the section “core mobility principles”) and inclusion as pressure points represent really important steps to ensure Erasmus+ mobilities continue to improve and that many of the existing challenges are tackled through better support measures at the local level. On top of this, the course catalogue, recognition, and grading aspects continue

to be pressure points. As the SIEM research report shows, recognition and grading aspects should also be understood as highly relevant for inclusion, since the perceived lack of flexibility and fears related to recognition continue to constitute relevant barriers to mobility, as can be seen in Graphic 1.

Graphic 1: Academic aspects such as lack of flexibility and concerns about the impact on academic achievement scores are among the highest blocking factors to going abroad.
 Source: SIEM research report: siem-project.eu

Non-mobile students' blocking factors to go abroad



The core mobility and inclusion sections in the pressure point and monitoring grids refer to key aspects that continue to appear in ESN’s research as some of the main challenges for students, both mobile and potentially mobile. This document reflect on some of the most relevant monitoring points, linking them with available student data and aspects to consider when approaching the implementation and monitoring of these measures.

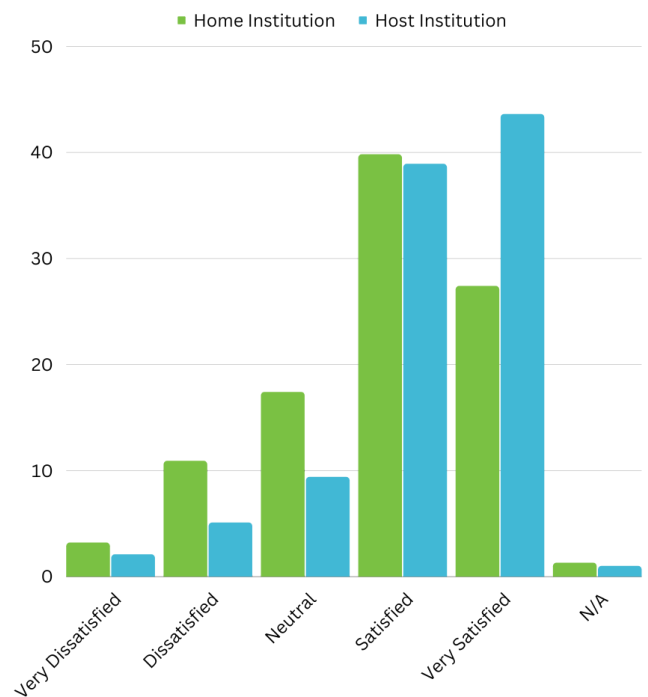
The monitoring points are included in the monitoring grids, which are also supported by guiding questions included in the monitoring guide.

The importance of the ECHE and the main challenges ahead

The implementation of the ECHE has proved to be quite successful, which can be seen by comparing satisfaction rates reported by Erasmus+ students in the last ESNsurvey ([ESNsurvey XIV](#), published in 2022) and the first ESNsurvey of the programming period 2014- 2020 ([ESNsurvey 2016](#)).

The satisfaction is higher with home and host institutions, but home institutions receive considerably lower scores (see graphic 2).

Students are more satisfied with a range of issues, including the process of preparing the application and the learning agreement, recognition procedures, and welcome activities (see graphic 3).



Graphic 2 (up): Satisfaction with support and services provided by Home and Host HEIs. **Source:** ESNsurvey XIV
Graphic 3 (left): Satisfaction with different services provided by Home institution. **Source:** ESNsurvey XIV

Satisfaction with the services and support provided by HEIs has improved throughout the last programming period.

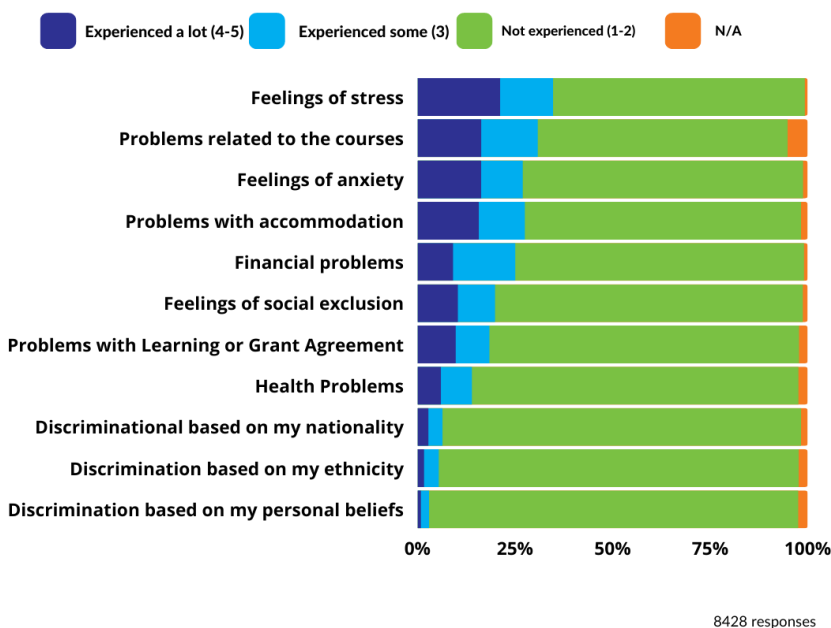
Home institutions receive lower satisfaction scores than hosting institutions

The positive developments in terms of satisfaction with the mobility experience of students should not lead to complacency: progress in many of the commitments of the previous ECHE remains limited, and the lack of qualitative analysis in mobility projects, next to the limited tools to boost improvement in the implementation of ECHE commitments present a challenge to the

advancement of these commitments. In the SIEM technical recommendations, ESN proposes a number of ideas that can contribute to this implementation.

Main issues reported by students and support needs

Graphic 4: Main issues reported by mobile students. Source: ESNsurvey XIV



The issues reported by students in the ESNsurvey XIV (see Graphic 4) highlight the importance of some of the pressure points included in the ECHE Monitoring Guide. Information provision and availability of support services for students suffering from stress and anxiety can be a decisive factor to improve these issues, and it goes in line with a broader commitment that hosting organisations should have to make mobility more inclusive.

Recognition and grading

Next to these aspects, the findings of the survey show that ‘problems related to the courses’ continue to pose challenges for more than a quarter of the respondents. The qualitative part of the survey shows that **recognition and grading aspects appear significantly here**. ESN believes that the current focus on inclusion makes tackling these issues more important than ever, since the **SIEM research shows that the perception of recognition and grading-related issues are one of the main blocking factors to going abroad among non-mobile students**.

Finances and accommodation

Accommodation and financial problems are two other aspects that are included in the new monitoring guide, reflecting the experience of the student population. Data from the ESNsurvey and the SIEM research report shows that, in terms of finances, **the timing of the**

grant payment is as important as the amount, and therefore it should be a core priority to move towards pre-departure payment for all students, as the Monitoring Guide recommends. ESN has included this measure as one of the [recommendations in the call for evidence](#) in the evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme and hopes that the ECHE monitoring framework will play a decisive role in this process.

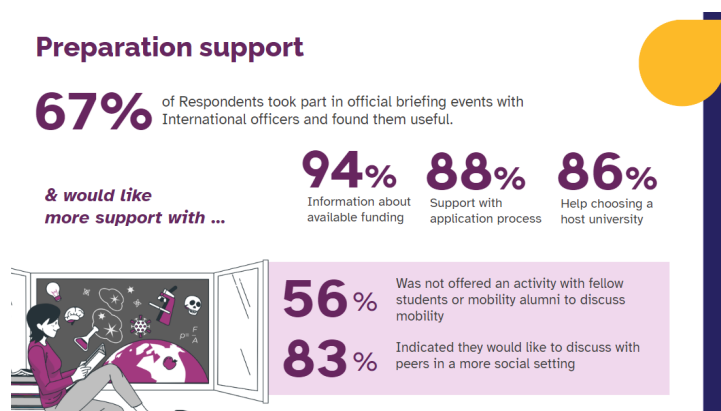
When it comes to accommodation, a recent survey carried out by ESN and ESU (presentation with key findings available here) shows that a quarter of respondents of the survey declare being victims of scams, and that the search for accommodation is a bigger challenge than the actual quality. Besides the importance of making more university housing available, improving information-sharing systems can play an important contributing role.

Preparation support for more inclusive mobilities

The inclusion pressure point of the ECHE monitoring guide includes “outreach actions towards participants with fewer opportunities to encourage them to take part in mobility and cooperation activities” as one of the monitoring points, next to the other two related to fair selection procedures and awareness of national criteria for top-up grants.

The findings of the SIEM survey show the importance of these actions, especially those related to clear financial information (including top-ups) and support with the process of applying for mobility and choosing a university (See Graphic 5). Universities and NAs should gather data from non-mobile learners, including students who dropped out before starting their mobilities, to get a better understanding of their perception of these measures.

Graphic 5: Preparation support - perceptions of mobile and non-mobile learners. Source: [SIEM Research report](#)

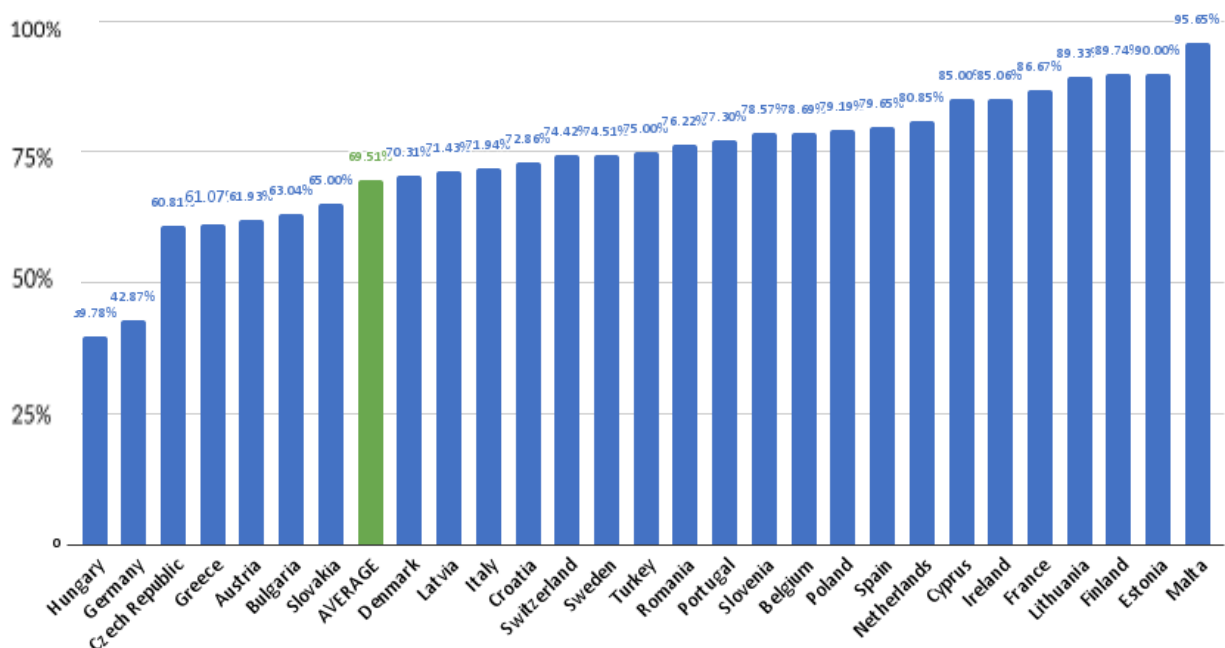


Barriers to recognition should be overcome to make mobility more inclusive

Full automatic recognition of periods of learning abroad is a core objective of the Bologna Process and the European Union. The recent report on the Council Recommendation on Automatic Recognition, published by the European Commission in early 2023, paints a diverse picture in terms of the national realities regarding full automatic recognition of periods of learning abroad in Higher Education. The data presented in the reports comes from Erasmus+ participant's reports. Data from the ESNsurvey presents worse results (see Graphic 6), which can partly be explained by the smaller sample size or the way in which the questions were formulated.

Monitoring of recognition and grading procedures should necessarily become stricter to ensure that mobility becomes more inclusive for all students. Universities involved in initiatives such as the European University Alliances should lead by example and ensure 100% automatic recognition to all students.

Graphic 6: percentage of students reporting full automatic recognition of all their credits done abroad (source: ESNsurvey XIV data). Erasmus+ countries with available data + Switzerland



Timely grant payments: a fundamental step to ensure inclusive mobility for all

Advancing initial costs emerged as the main barrier to mobility among the mobile students participating in the SIEM survey launched in 2020. These numbers, next to the results of the ESNsurvey XIV (see Graphic 7) show that only 35.61% of students receive their grants before the start of their mobilities, highlighting that supporting HEIs in order to transition to pre-departure payment systems should be a fundamental priority in the implementation and monitoring of the ECHE commitments. The positive results of many large Erasmus+ countries such as Poland, Germany and others show that these pre-departure payments are perfectly doable, even in the case of large fluxes of students. There is no evidence that pre-departure systems will cause any risk to HEIs, and measures can be put in place to prevent those issues. Ensuring pre-departure grant payments is possibly the most impactful short-term measure to make mobility more inclusive.



Of students reported advancing initial costs to be a barrier to participate in mobility
Source: SIEM research report

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

Graphic 7: Timing of Erasmus+ grant payments (arrival of the first instalment) by sending country.
Source: ESNsurvey XIV

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