

The Student Perspective to the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 Mid-term Evaluation

Contribution of the
Erasmus Student Network



Written and edited by Neli Kalinova, Rita Dias and Wim Gabriels of the Education & Policy Department of ESN AISBL.

For further information contact policy@esn.org.

Erasmus Student Network AISBL

Rue Joseph II 120
1000 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: +32 2 256 74 27

www.esn.org

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Introduction: The role of the Erasmus Student Network in the implementation of Erasmus+

The Erasmus Student Network is the largest student and alumni organisation supporting the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme and learning mobility experiences in general. Our multilevel structure allows ESN to have a direct engagement with all the key stakeholders involved in the programme. Our more than 500 local associations are connected with more than 1000 Higher Education Institutions active in Erasmus+, and our presence in 45 countries gives a broad perspective of the reality of both programme countries and countries not associated with the programme, mainly from the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership.

ESN has a unique capacity to gather the voices and experiences of the protagonists of the programme: the students. We combine a strong data collection tradition with direct contact with students on the ground, which allows us to represent their needs, interests and ideas.

ESN's contribution to the public consultation for the mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ is therefore based on a combination of ESN's research and policy initiatives carried out since the beginning of the programme period and ESN's experience working with students, Higher Education Institutions, National Agencies and the European Commission. ESN's research and policy outputs can be checked on our website: www.esn.org/policy

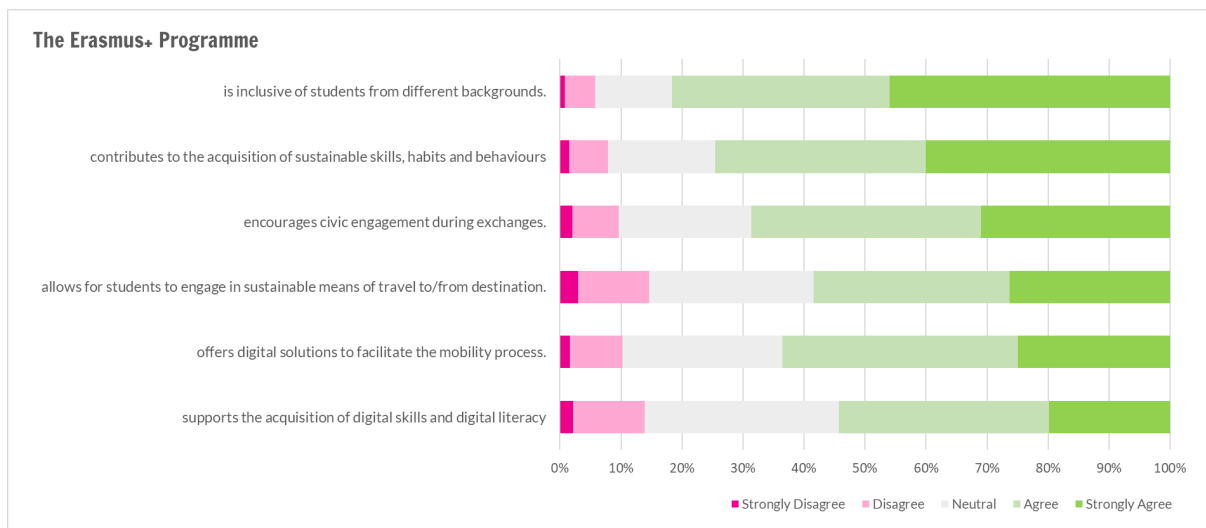
The Erasmus Student Network has already contributed to the call for evidence for the final evaluation of the 2014-2020 Erasmus+ Programme and the mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme 2021-2027. The contribution includes data concerning mostly the implementation of the previous programme, and it can be found on [ESN's website](#). The current contribution places a specific focus on the current programme period, and it is based on the data collected through the latest ESNsurvey XV (2023).

Additionally, ESN has contributed to the [European Parliament Erasmus+ 2021-2027 Implementation Report](#) as well.

Aspects for improvement based on the Priorities of the Programme for 2021-2027

Inclusion and Diversity

The XVth edition of the ESNsurvey sought to understand the students' perception of the four Erasmus+ horizontal priorities, evaluating the societal role of the programme. Both the participants in the programme and students who have not yet taken part in it consider that the programme lives up to its priorities.



ESNsurvey XV Preliminary report, 2023: To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the Erasmus+ programme?

In the first two years of the programme implementation, a higher focus has been placed on the inclusion priority, which has resulted in high levels of appreciation by the students. Overall, 36% of the ESNsurvey XV respondents have agreed and 46% have strongly agreed that the Erasmus+ programme is inclusive for students from different backgrounds. This largely corresponds with and even exceeds the data provided in the Research for the CULT Committee

on the EU funding programmes¹ where 73% of the wider stakeholder group felt the programme is contributing to diversity and inclusion to a very large or to a large extent.

Impact of the inclusion measures and the way forward

A number of guidance documents have been produced in the roll-out of the programme, such as the **Inclusion and Diversity Strategy**² and the **Framework of Inclusion Measures**³ but the challenges in the implementation of the inclusion priority lay in the capacity-building process among National Agencies and beneficiaries of the programme. From the management and distribution of the inclusion top-up to university support and campus-based activities, there is a long path to making the programme fully accessible and open to everyone.

Defining students with fewer opportunities

While the programme has made significant progress in establishing a **common understanding of who may be considered people with fewer opportunities**, there are severe differences in the national definitions, which create hurdles for National Agencies, Higher Education Institutions, and students. This is a persistent challenge, which may cause the opposite impact of all inclusion measures by making them unavailable to certain groups and creating a division in some way. Even though the definition and the measures outlined in the National Inclusion Action Plans adopted by NAs should be based on the specific needs of the country, it is important to make sure that nobody is left behind and that the needs of potential beneficiaries are reflected in those plans. ESN has addressed this challenge in the [SIEM Research Report \(2021\)](#)⁴ and has paid close attention to all students who face some kind of structural, institutional or social barriers to participation in education in general. It is of utter importance to create explicit definitions of the groups considered as participants with fewer opportunities in order to facilitate transparent access to information, with guidance from the European

¹ Carlberg M., Todaro L., Wacław M. & Zejerman I., 2023, Research for CULT Committee – EU funding programmes 2021-2027 in culture, media, education, youth and sports: first lessons, challenges and future perspectives: Erasmus+, European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, Brussels

² Implementation guidelines Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy, 29/04/2021

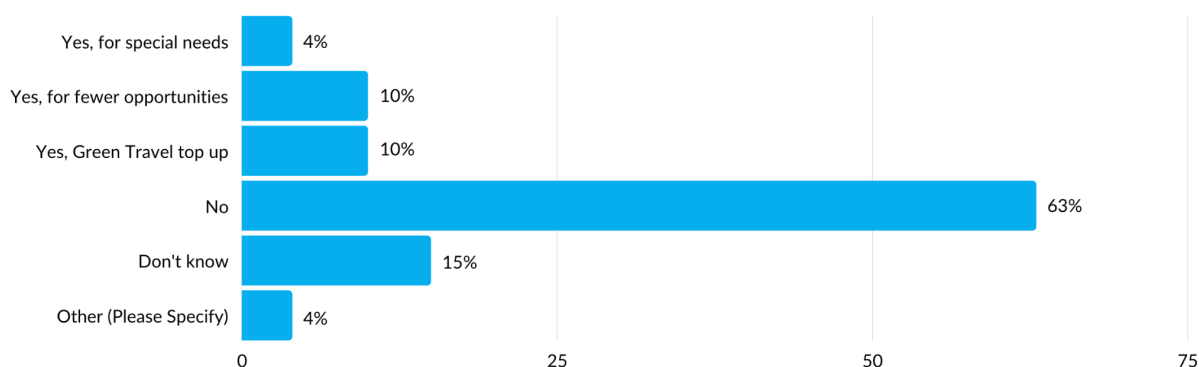
³ COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION (EU) 2021/1877 of 22 October 2021 on the framework of inclusion measures of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes 2021-2027

⁴ 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

Commission.⁵ **ESN calls for a common agreement on the definition of people with fewer opportunities and hopes to see more flexibility in applying the inclusion measures, so they reflect the essence of diversity.**

Inclusion top-up

The specific measure introduced with the new programme period, which aims to widen participation and offer access to the programme to students from fewer opportunities background, was the **250 EUR inclusion top-up**. Among the students who have received this additional financial support, the majority of them, **84%, agree or strongly agree that it has made the programme more inclusive**. Students who receive the top-up report fewer financial difficulties covering their living expenses, pointing to the partial success of the initiative. Additionally, the ESNsurvey XV preliminary results show that students who have received this top-up are more satisfied with the services provided by the Higher Education Institutions than average. Unfortunately, a comparative analysis of different programme countries shows remarkable differences, confirming the fears of a fragmented grant system that makes Erasmus+ programme opportunities too different depending on where people study.



ESNsurvey XV Preliminary report, 2023: Use of top-up grants by Erasmus students.

The Erasmus+ Annual Report 2021⁶ shows that in the first year of the new programme implementation, 8% of learners with fewer opportunities in the higher education sector received the inclusion top-up. At the same time, the recently published Erasmus+ Annual Report 2022 demonstrates slightly higher data of 12% of students in higher education

⁵ For more inclusive & engaging Erasmus+ mobilities: Technical recommendations to adapt the Erasmus+ documents involved in Erasmus+ student mobilities (2022)

⁶ European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Erasmus+ Annual Report 2021, Publications Office of the European Union, 2022

benefiting from the additional support, indicating a slow increase.⁷ **ESNsurvey XV (2023) data also shows a gradual increase in the use of the fewer opportunities top-up, with 10% of students reporting to have received it.** Notably, there is a positive trend of slowly improving the outreach of inclusion support. Students who receive the top-up report fewer financial difficulties covering their living expenses, pointing to the partial success of the initiative and the importance of the measure for the individual student. 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 period by national agencies; therefore, more efforts should be made to a centralised approach, and guidance should be taken. Higher Education Institutions should provide better access to information to students with fewer opportunities related to their additional support to participate in mobility.

Inclusion support: real cost

The **inclusion support through the real cost financing mechanism** is also a welcomed measure, which unfortunately still faces a number of struggles during implementation. Almost three years into the implementation of the current Erasmus+ programme, a number of National Agencies are still developing their online tools for application for real cost support due to uncertainties in the interpretation of the rules and considerations related to the privacy of data. Variations exist across countries in the definition of the eligible groups for the real cost funding and budget allocation, with some National Agencies allocating higher amounts than others, with a view to ensure more support for more people. At the same time, resources remain either limited or underutilised while the demand remains high. A good example of combining European resources is the case of Germany, where resources from the European Social Fund are allocated to Erasmus+, providing additional support to participants from fewer opportunities backgrounds. **ESN welcomes such good practices and has been encouraging National Agencies to explore more thoroughly opportunities for co-funding of Erasmus+ from both EU and national and regional resources** to increase support for students willing to participate in mobility but do not have enough financial means to do so. ESN is therefore glad to see that this recommendation is present in the new Commission Proposal for Council

⁷ Erasmus+ Annual Report 2022, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2023

Recommendation “**Europe on the move**” - learning mobility opportunities for everyone,⁸ which calls for appropriate funding for accessible learning mobility for people with fewer opportunities and their hosting organisations, by fostering synergies among different EU, national and regional funding instruments.

Allocation of Mobility Budget & Organisational Support

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, 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.

ESN believes that the funding allocation system to Higher Education institutions needs to be reviewed in the Erasmus+ programme guide, moving from a system based on past performance to a funding strategy that takes into account both past performance and growth margins of the institution to do their part to meet the mobility targets set at European, national and institutional level, taking into account the environmental context the institution operates in, in order to ensure institutions can account for inclusion measures for all their students with fewer opportunities. The European Commission and National Agencies should consider the overall student share with fewer opportunities in the total allocation of Erasmus+ mobilities to Higher Education Institutions and accordingly grant extra funds to HEIs with more students from fewer opportunity backgrounds to increase participation.

ESN believes that the inclusion support for organisations (from Programme Guide 2024, 125 EUR per student with real cost support), should be extended to students with fewer opportunities and reach beyond those that require additional financial support through the top-up mechanism in order for institutions to be able to deploy other inclusion measures such as mental health support, anti-discriminatory actions and crisis support. This should also be reflected in the expected purpose of the overall Organisational Support received by

⁸ Commission Proposal for Council Recommendation “Europe on the move” - learning mobility opportunities for everyone, Brussels, 15.11.2023 COM(2023) 719 final 2023/0405

institutions, which should be tied to the correct implementation and monitoring of quality standards as described in the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education.

In that regard, ESN considers that the quality of implementation of mobilities should be strengthened through the reinforcement of ECHE commitments. We understand the importance of simplifying monitoring procedures brought by the new guide, but we also believe that a comprehensive system is necessary to boost the quality and impact of Erasmus+ mobilities further. 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.

Measuring the impact of the inclusion measures

Good monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are at the core of successful public policies, and learning mobility is not an exception. The Framework of Inclusion Measures⁹ adopted by the Commission states that there should be *“dedicated monitoring activities, using a set of specific indicators, [which] should provide qualitative and quantitative data to gradually support an even more strategic and targeted use of the available budget under the Programmes.”* Furthermore, ESN welcomes the Commission’s proposal for Council Recommendation “Europe on the move”¹⁰, suggesting a target in all education and training and youth and sports systems, which states that **people with fewer opportunities should account for at least 20% of all learners benefiting from learning mobility abroad, by 2030.**

These targets and indicators should be used for improving data collection and monitoring and to boost national and institutional efforts to improve participation rates in learning mobility across sectors. Currently, there are a lot of data sources, and the European Commission and the National Agencies lack enough human resources to analyse, use and disseminate all the data they collect. Furthermore, there is a lack of transparency regarding Erasmus+ data from participant institutions and final beneficiaries. **Monitoring the implementation of the inclusion measures should be strictly linked to the barriers to mobility**, such as the lack of recognition of

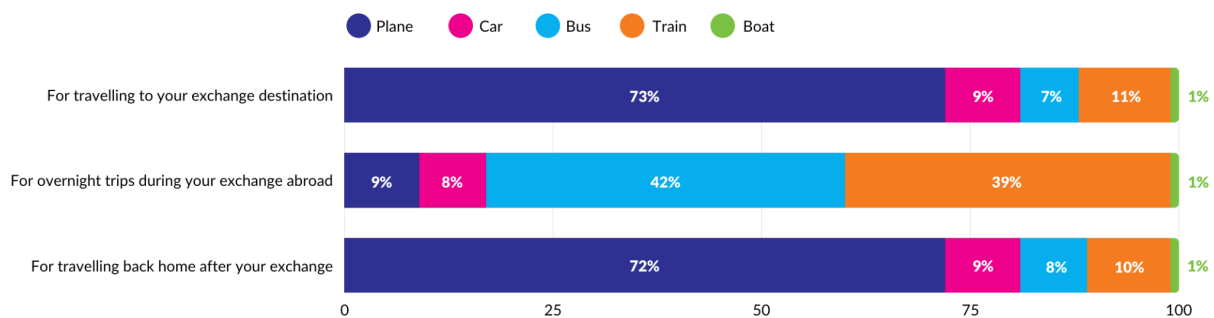
⁹ Commission implementing decision of 22.10.2021 on the framework of inclusion measures of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes 2021-2027

¹⁰ Proposal for a COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION ‘Europe on the Move’ – learning mobility opportunities for everyone, Brussels, 15.11.2023

study periods abroad. Performing below quality standards should have implications for institutions, and improvement should be supported and rewarded.

Environment and fight against climate change

The current Erasmus+ programme aims to be a key instrument for building the knowledge, skills, and attitudes on climate change and supporting sustainable development both within the European Union and beyond. When asked about it, students report that, in their opinion, **the programme does contribute to the acquisition of sustainable skills and habits**, with 75% of them either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement.



ESNsurvey XV, preliminary report (2023): What means of transport did you use for travelling at these three key moments of your exchange?

At the same time, when taking a closer look at some of the key findings of ESNsurvey XV and the results of the [Green Erasmus research](#), one can notice that there is a certain gap between attitudes and practice among Erasmus students when it comes to the adoption of more environmentally sustainable habits and behaviours.¹¹ Despite the introduction of the green top-up, travelling by plane remains the most preferred option by students to get to their mobility destination and return. The ESNsurvey XV gives a very important insight into the use of the green travel top-up, showing that **only 10% of the participants have received the green top-up**. This key finding clearly correlates with the data published with the most recent

¹¹ Green Erasmus Partnership, 2022

[Erasmus+ Annual Report 2022](#)¹², which presents that only a slightly higher percentage of 11% of students in higher education have benefited from the support to travel sustainably.

This highlights the need for the **integration of more sustainable requirements and actions in education policies**, and it is a call for more initiatives to be undertaken by higher education institutions and student organisations, which could eventually result in a shift in behaviour. More centralised actions, such as **a possible revision in the funding policies of the Erasmus+ programme with regard to travel support**, could lead to a more significant change in the ecological footprint of Erasmus participants.

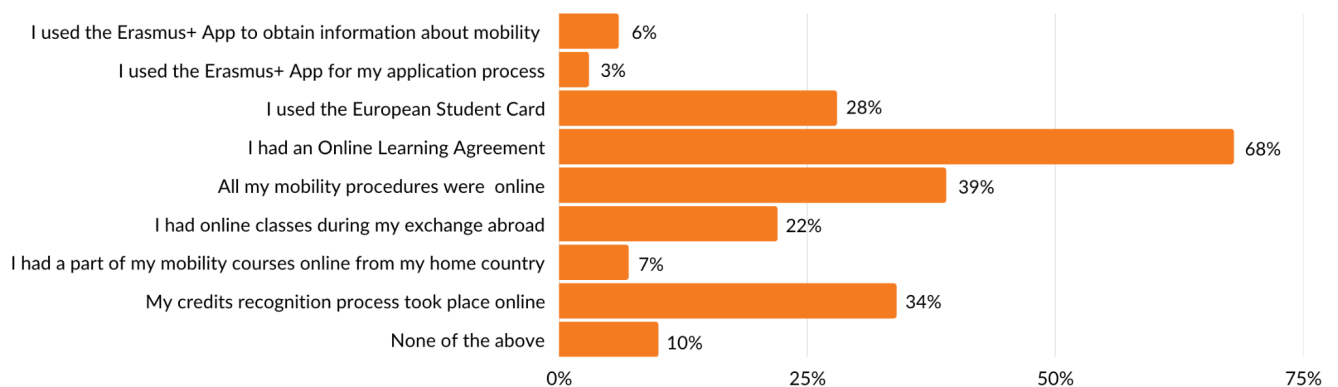
In this sense, ESN welcomes the new funding rules for green travel introduced by the Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2024. ESN highly appreciates the transformation of the funding rules, awarding green travel support to participants based on the travel distance between their place of origin and their mobility destination and return, should they choose to travel sustainably.

At the same time, ESN regrets the opportunity for National Agencies to opt out of providing travel support for long-term intra-European student mobility in mobility projects supported by internal policy funds. ESN believes that having this option contradicts the purpose of the measure to support student mobility, especially for students with fewer financial resources, and specifically contradicts the priority to make the programme greener and leave a greater impact on society as a whole. Furthermore, the existence of such an opt-out clause contradicts equal access to opportunities for students and holds a risk of creating deeper inequalities across countries and HEIs. ESN calls for transparency in decision-making and clear guidelines under which circumstances this option is acceptable, as well as which other national resources will substitute the Erasmus+ travel support for students. Furthermore, we call for support from the European Commission to Higher Education Institutions and National Agencies to provide clear guidelines on how the travel support will be implemented. Transparency and clear guidelines will be key for the institutions implementing the novelties to have a full understanding of the implications and ultimate benefits for the future of international mobility.

¹² Erasmus+ Annual Report 2022, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2023

The Digitalisation of Mobility

The ambition of the current programme is to develop a high-performing digital education ecosystem and to support actions aiming at enhancing digital skills and competence development at all levels of society and for everyone. In practice, this has translated into digitalisation novelties in programme management. **ESN believes that the focus of this process should be to facilitate participation in Erasmus+ through administrative simplification and to streamline all procedures so students are not discouraged from taking part in an Erasmus+ exchange because the process lacks clarity.**



ESNsurvey XV Preliminary report, 2023: Which tools did you use as part of your Erasmus+ journey?

The data gathered by the ESNsurvey XV shows a varied picture:

- 63% of students agree or strongly agree that the programme supports the acquisition of digital skills and digital literacy
- 68% of students reported having an Online Learning Agreement
- 39% of students reported that all their mobility procedures were online.
- 6% of students reported using the Erasmus+ App to obtain information about mobility, and 3% used it for the application process.

The qualitative section of the survey shows that students who did not have their procedures online expressed dissatisfaction with the administration of their mobility. **More focus on dissemination and usability of the Erasmus+ App will be needed to make it work for students,** as very few seem to have been able to use it for mobility procedures. ESN has advocated for a

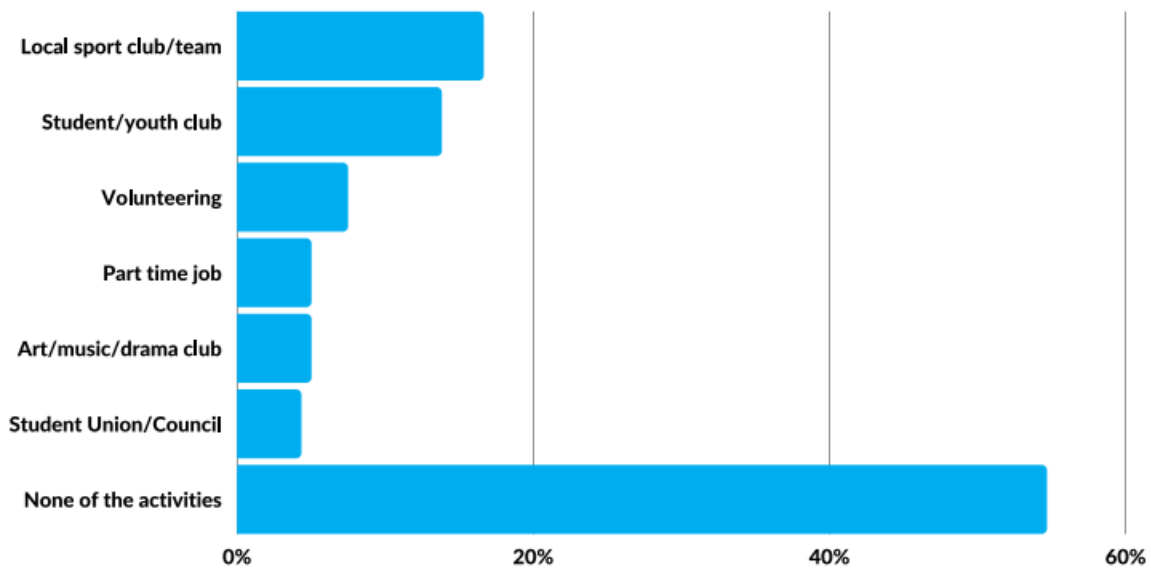
stronger engagement component in the rollout of the Erasmus+ App and the use of the tool to ensure the quality implementation of the programme.

Participation in democratic life

The Erasmus+ programme's fourth priority addresses the limited participation of citizens in democratic processes and aims to encourage community engagement and active citizenship. Only 38% of students agree, and 31% strongly agree that the programme encourages civic engagement during the mobility exchange. Despite this overall positive perception, **ESN believes that there is a lack of transformative measures to achieve the full potential of this priority and that of the programme.**

The new Erasmus+ programme has highlighted once more the importance of civic engagement through learning mobility, but it also pointed attention to the long-lasting challenge of facilitating the interaction between international students and their local communities. For example, data from the XIVth edition of the ESNsurvey (2022)¹³ showed that, on average, before and during the Covid-19 pandemic, only 8% of students engaged in volunteering activities during their exchange. The share of students volunteering during mobility has only slightly increased to 10% according to the ESNsurvey XV, which means that prioritising civic engagement in the current programme period has not yet led to any significant improvement and that there is no considerable change in the approach taken by HEIs.

¹³ ESNsurvey XIV (2022)



ESNsurvey XIV, 2022: Level of participation in group activities on mobility

This lack of engagement with the local community, which continues to be one of the main issues with the programme, could be tackled with **better structural support to student and alumni organisations on the ground, better recognition of volunteering opportunities and an enhancement of the tools used to track the learning process of students**, such as the learning agreement, which at the moment does not include any reference to the actual competencies learned abroad, but only the courses.

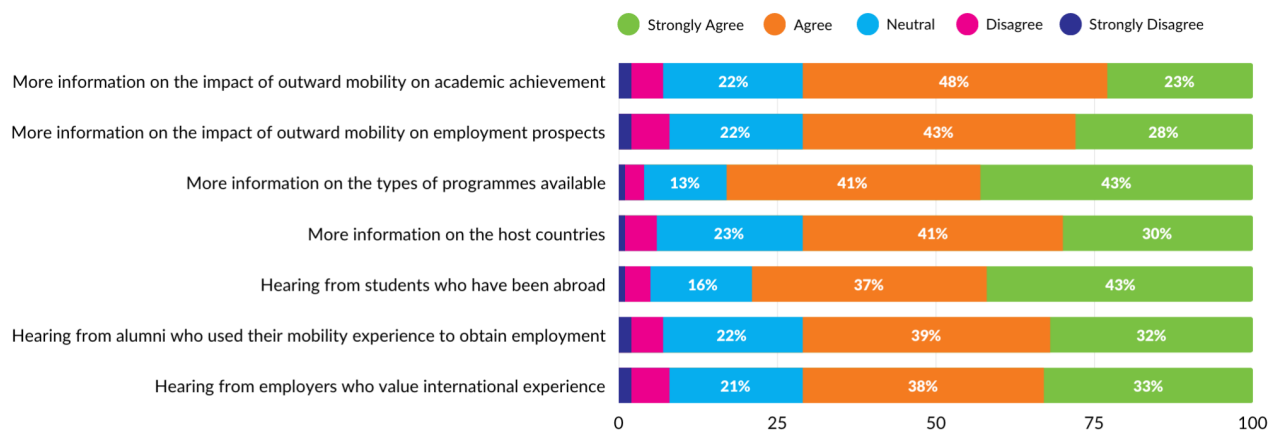
Concrete measures to foster civic engagement should be incorporated into the inclusion and diversity action plans of the National Agencies in order to build capacity among Higher education institutions. The Erasmus Student Network calls for a boost in the use of Bologna tools such as the ECTS and the Diploma Supplement to recognise these experiences.

Aspects for improvement based on the mobility cycle

Before Mobility

Mobility promotion and preparation

Even though the 2022 Eurobarometer shows that the Erasmus+ programme is known by 50%¹⁴ 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. According to the latest Education and Training Monitor 2023, only 6 countries within the EU have credit mobility rates exceeding 10%.¹⁵ There could be various reasons for these trends, but they certainly indicate that more effort is needed to raise awareness of the Erasmus+ programme, funding opportunities, and support with the application process. In total, 84% of students with no mobility experience have reported in the ESNsurvey XV that they agree and strongly agree that should they have had more information about the types of mobility programmes available, they would have felt more encouraged to go abroad during their degree programme.



ESNsurvey XV Preliminary report, 2023: Could the below scenarios have encouraged you to go abroad during your degree programme?

¹⁴ Eurobarometer, “Youth and Democracy in the European Year of Youth”, 2022

¹⁵ Education and Training Monitor 2023

Mobile students (66%) also reported that having information about the programmes available and receiving support with the application process are among the most important aspects related to pre-departure support.

Mobility promotion and preparation initiatives are key to convincing those learners who might not have considered taking part in a mobility opportunity, helping them overcome environmental and attitudinal barriers.¹⁶ Promotion and pre-departure preparation strategies should be¹⁷ multilayered and involve stakeholders representing learners in the design and implementation. They 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 levels. **Mobility alumni and incoming international learners should be core pillars of these strategies.**

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.¹⁸

Providing adequate information to help learners choose their mobility destination should be a priority for HEIs. 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 mobility. Institutions and Member States should use data from previous participants to adapt this information sharing and show learners how others value their experiences.

¹⁶ The SIEM Research Report (2021) identifies environmental barriers as “ environmental and societal factors that influence the person’s decisions to take part in a mobility”, and the attitudinal barriers as those that “tackle the belief system and emotions around the topic of mobility opportunities, to see how they influence their participation rates”.

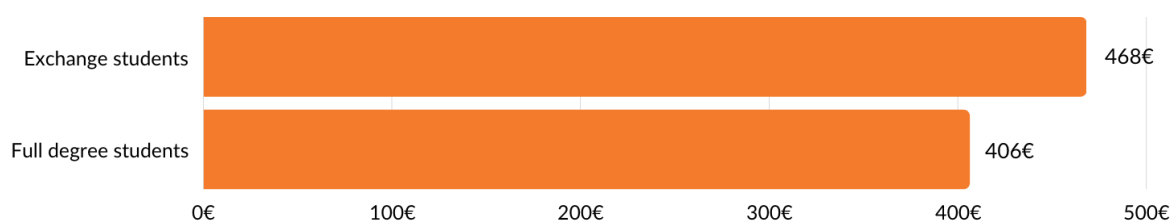
¹⁷ Allinson K., Gabriels W.,(2021). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. SIEM Research Report, siem-project.eu

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

Grant amounts and purchasing power

The Erasmus+ programme cannot be inclusive, if there are no decent grant levels which allow students from different backgrounds to participate in the programme. ESN believes that there are 3 key elements that ensure a quality grant:

- **Clarity in the information and processes to receive the funds:** students should be able to easily understand how their grant will work when it will arrive and what they need to do to receive it.
- **Adequate amount that covers most of the living costs:** low grants make the participation of students with less financial means extremely difficult.
- **Timing of the reception of the grant by the student:** students who receive their grant late can not properly cover initial costs if they don't have other sources of income.



ESNs survey Preliminary report 2023: Scholarship per month

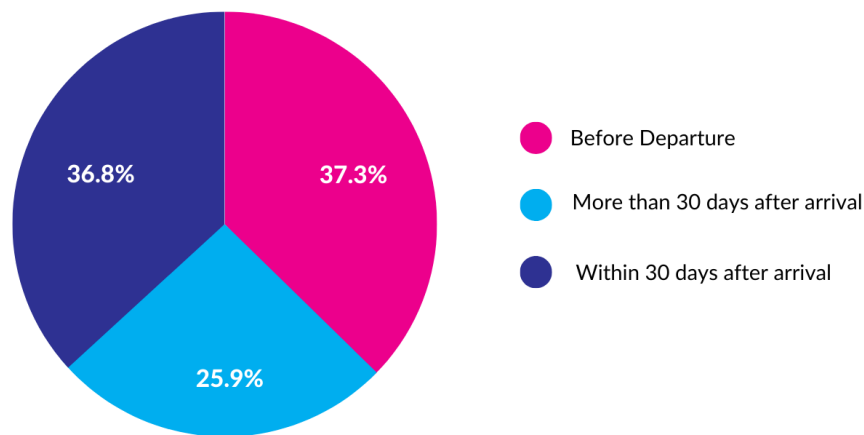
Data from the ESNsurvey XV (2023) indicates that the average grant amount has increased significantly, now standing at nearly €100 more than what was reported in the Erasmus+ Annual Report 2020 (€374): €468. This increase can be attributed to the implementation of top-ups and grant increases by National Agencies, representing a positive development. However, it conceals substantial variations among countries, which are not always linked to differences in purchasing power but rather reflect the opacity of the grant determination system outlined in the Erasmus+ Programme guide.

The top-up system incorporated in the Erasmus+ programme is one of the most important novelties compared to the previous one. Students who receive the top-ups report fewer financial difficulties covering their living expenses, pointing to the partial success of the

initiative. ESN further welcomes the recently announced improvements in the funding rules for students with the Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2024, especially with a view to the travel support. Providing additional travel support, in combination with the transfer of a number of countries from Group 3 with lower cost of living to Group 2 with medium living costs, will significantly reduce students’ struggles with covering initial costs related to their mobility and will substantially increase the total average grant per participant.

Timing of the grant payments

Receiving the grants before the beginning of the mobility experience is fundamental to facilitating the participation of students with fewer financial resources. However, despite efforts by the European Commission to ensure students receive the grant before embarking on their mobility, 36.8% still reported receiving the grant within 30 days after arrival, and 26% received it more than 30 days after arrival.



ESNsurvey XV Preliminary report, 2023: When did you receive the scholarship?

Severe differences exist between countries, with students in South-European countries receiving their grants more than a month after arrival, which is totally unacceptable. In countries like Spain (67%), institutions tend to disburse grants one month after the start of mobility, while Germany (26%) follows a different pattern of distribution. Interestingly, a substantial percentage of students (37.3%) receive their grants before departure, indicating

that national regulations may not be the primary barrier to advancing grant payments. The timid improvement in the percentage of students who receive the grants before the start of the mobility programme shows that changes in administration at the national and institutional levels can improve the situation.

The timing of the grant payment is crucial to meet the needs of students embarking on their mobility journey. ESN welcomes the adjustments made for students, who have fewer opportunities to be paid their grants with priority before their mobility begins, and continues advocating for pre-payments of the Erasmus grants for all students.

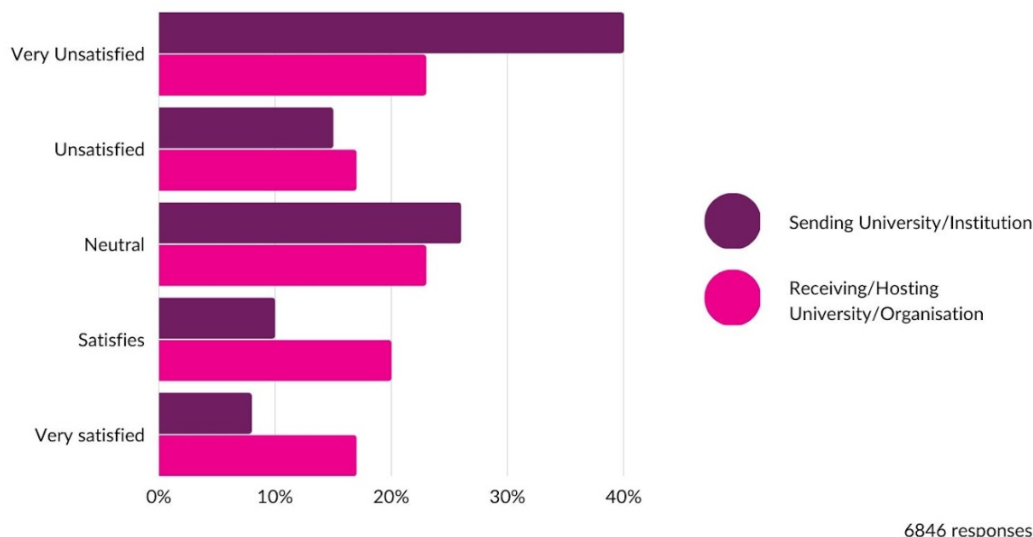
Housing crisis and the impact on student mobility

Challenges related to finding affordable accommodation, together with insufficient funding to cover the cost of living are both rated by students as the two biggest issues (35%) they experience during their mobility period abroad. The share of students has significantly increased since the previous ESNsurvey XIV, where 25% of students reported experiencing problems with accommodation, and that is alarming.

The joint research by ESN and ESU on International Student Housing (2023)¹⁹, which presents a snapshot of the housing situation in the academic year 2022/2023, presents alarming findings. For example, **16% of students reported they could find accommodation only after their arrival**, but considerable differences between countries exist (Italy: 28%; Spain: 21%). The findings of the survey confirm what we knew: **available public/university housing and investment in accommodation improve the student experience for all, including exchange students.**

¹⁹ ESU, ESN (2023). International student housing: How are exchange students in Europe navigating the housing crisis?, <https://esn.org/news/launch-international-student-housing-report>

Level of satisfaction with the support in finding accommodation by



International student housing report (2023): Level of satisfaction with the support provided by sending and hosting institutions

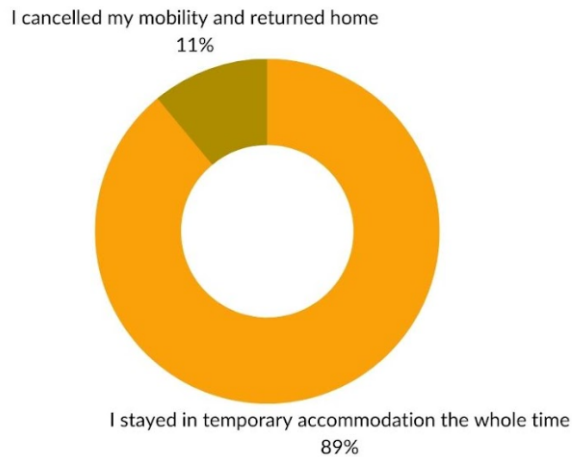
Students tend to be happier with the services provided by host institutions, and especially if there is available student housing managed by the HEI, but considerable differences between countries exist. For example, despite the difficulties with accommodation in the Netherlands, students have high satisfaction rates, which means that students value not only results but also support services offered by the university. There is a lot of frustration within HEIs as well due to unclear distinction of responsibilities between host and sending institutions. **That is why ESN recommends considering revamped inter-institutional agreements where these aspects could be better elaborated, as well as in the ECHE monitoring process.**

While building new housing takes time and resources, there are so many other aspects that can be tackled related to the support received by HEIs, such as:

- scams prevention, by sharing information about housing conditions,
- timing of grant payments so students can afford to pay deposits in advance,
- Legal support offered to students with regards to contracts,
- Enhanced collaboration with student organisations and local municipalities for better host environment and direct student support,

- Improved data collection and evaluation mechanisms about the housing conditions and support received in the host destination.

What happened to your mobility in the end?



714 responses

International student housing report (2023): What happened to your mobility in the end? Response by students who did not find permanent housing during their mobility.

Unfortunately, not all students are successful in finding permanent accommodation (13%). During the search process, a lot of students fall victim to scams, which could have been easily prevented should there have been a better support system in place. **Regrettably, 11% of students who did not manage to find permanent housing during their exchange had to cancel their mobility.**

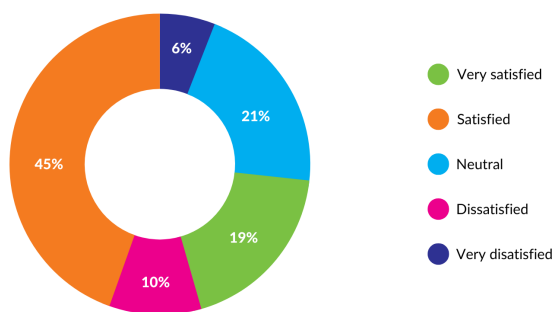
Another important aspect remains the **housing cost**, with almost half of the students reporting that they can only cover less than 50% of their accommodation with the grant received. Despite the average Erasmus+ grant being lower than 400 euros, almost half of the respondents spend more on their accommodation.

During Mobility

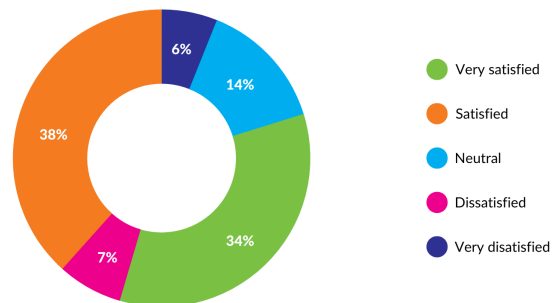
Satisfaction with Higher Education Institutions

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are the ultimate enablers of quality Erasmus+ experiences. In the ESNsurvey XV, ESN asks students for their overall satisfaction with the services provided by sending and hosting Higher Education Institutions.

Sending Institution



Hosting Institution



ESNsurvey XV Preliminary report, 2023: Overall satisfaction with services provided by SENDING and HOSTING institution

It is important to highlight that students participating in Erasmus+ continue to be considerably satisfied with the services and support provided by Higher Education Institutions. **However, the latest data shows that overall satisfaction with both sending and receiving higher education institutions is now lower than at the end of the last programming period.**

Compared to the ESNsurvey XIV (2022), where only 3.9% of respondents expressed being very dissatisfied with their **sending institutions**, the figure has risen to 6% in the current survey. It is equally important to highlight differences in satisfaction. In 2021, 39.9% of respondents reported satisfaction, whereas in the current survey, this number has increased to 45%. However, the rate of those being very satisfied has decreased from 27.4% to 19%. A larger proportion of students remain neutral, which might indicate that they have struggled to identify specific services received by the institution.

A similar trend is observed with satisfaction regarding **services provided by host institutions**. In 2021, only 2.1% of students reported being very dissatisfied with their host institutions, but this figure has risen to 6% in the 2023 survey. The dissatisfaction rate has also increased from

5.1% to 7%. Neutral responses have seen an increase from 9.4% to 14%, while the satisfaction rate remains largely unchanged. The number of students stating they are very satisfied has decreased from 43.6% to 34%.

This data is not alarming and could be attributed to a number of factors, but it is important that it is taken into account. **The implementation of new initiatives at the institutional levels should not take the attention away from improving mobility services**, as this will benefit not only mobile students but the whole student population through the creation of a more internationalised Higher Education environment.

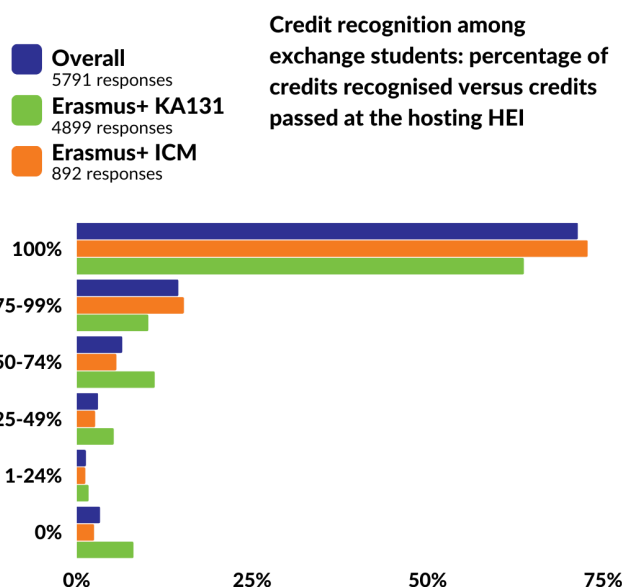
The Erasmus+ programme architecture should give more incentives to HEIs so they can tackle the challenges encountered by students, such as a new organisational support mechanism. In this sense, **ESN welcomes the increase in the organisational support for inclusion introduced with the new Programme Guide 2024, from 100 to 125 EUR**. ESN believes that additional funding could be invested in the development of support services for incoming students, especially those related to mental health. Currently, there are significant differences in the variety of services provided by HEIs to local and incoming students. While some HEIs have exemplary practices, others struggle to dedicate resources to the establishment of inclusion and diversity structures. The programme should support and encourage HEIs to mobilise different structures across the university campus, invest in training on inclusion and diversity, improve information flows between faculties and other university structures related to inclusion support, develop inclusion strategies and adopt inclusive practices. More capacity-building efforts in ensuring equal access to support services for all students are necessary.

After Mobility

The importance of credit recognition

ESN has been monitoring closely the progress in automatic mutual recognition of periods of study abroad and has developed several recommendations based on its own research through the [SIEM research report \(2021\)](#), [ESNsurvey - XIV edition \(2022\)](#), and preliminary data from the [ESNsurvey XV](#).

To create a full picture of the current state of play, it is important to highlight that the correct use of ECTS is supposed to make education more flexible and student-centred, removing administrative barriers and facilitating seamless mobility. However, data from non-mobile learners point to the role which the lack of proper implementation of the 2018 Council Recommendation has on their perceptions of blocking factors to go on mobility. In that sense, **45% of students considered that the lack of flexibility in their degree programmes was blocking their participation**, especially in the case of students from backgrounds with fewer opportunities. Besides the broader perception of the level of flexibility, **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).²⁰



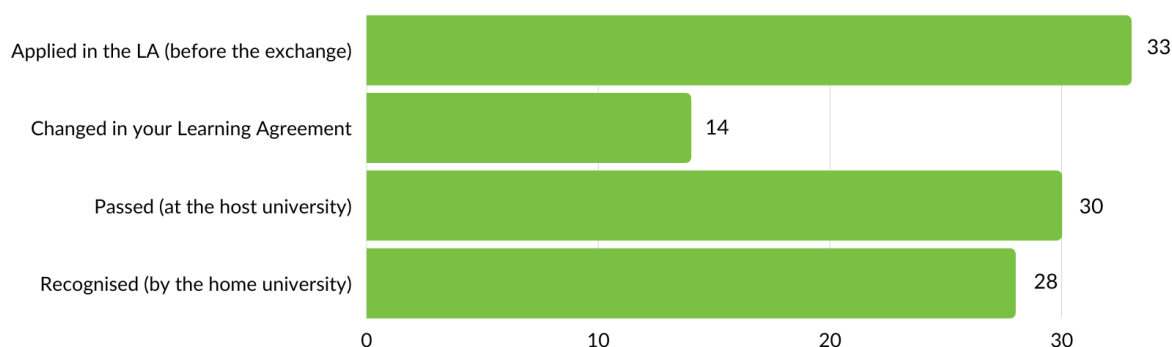
Graph: Percentage of credits recognised compared to credits included in the Learning Agreement. ESNsurvey XIV (2022)

Unfortunately, students’ concerns become a real problem, as data from ESNsurvey XIV (2022) shows that **only 71.37% of respondents report receiving full credit recognition of their mobility period**, although considerable differences between countries exist. Furthermore, the most recent ESNsurvey XV preliminary report (2023²¹) illustrates that the concerning trends in recognition are consistent. While choosing their mobility destination **students consider “Matching courses which can be recognised by my home institution” (66%) as a key factor for**

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

²¹ <https://esn.org/news/esnsurvey-xv>

their decision, making recognition the second most important factor, only behind the affordability of the hosting city. Moreover, it’s important to note that **42% of the respondents shared that their courses needed to be changed during the exchange.**



ESNsurvey XV Preliminary report, 2023: Recognition of learning: How many credits you take & how much did your university recognise?

In order to avoid biases or challenges related to the lack of understanding of “full automatic credit recognition”, the ESNsurvey allows open-box responses for further elaboration. The analysis of the qualitative data from the ESNsurvey XV identifies the following major issues with automatic mutual recognition:

- lack of flexibility in degree programmes,
- trust issues between partner universities,
- recognition decisions influenced by individual professors,
- a lack of understanding of how the ECTS system works,
- limited access to information about available courses, and insufficient pre-departure support for preparations related to the learning agreement.

The data shows the existence of systematic challenges, which need to be seriously addressed at both European and national levels. ESN acknowledges the complexity of the topic and understands that there is no silver bullet to solve all the existing issues, but believes that recognition should remain at the very core of the European and national policy agenda in the field of higher education.

ESN presents a deeper analysis of the current state of play in automatic mutual recognition in higher education in the policy brief [“How to ensure Automatic Mutual Recognition of Learning Periods Abroad for all students?”](#).

Reintegration of mobile students

The role of multipliers in 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 2022/2023 shows that only 20 out of 39 out of 63 national education systems within EHEA use multipliers in publicly supported initiatives. Moreover, countries report that they rely on multipliers mostly for the purpose of promoting 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.

Satisfaction with Services Provided by Home Institutions

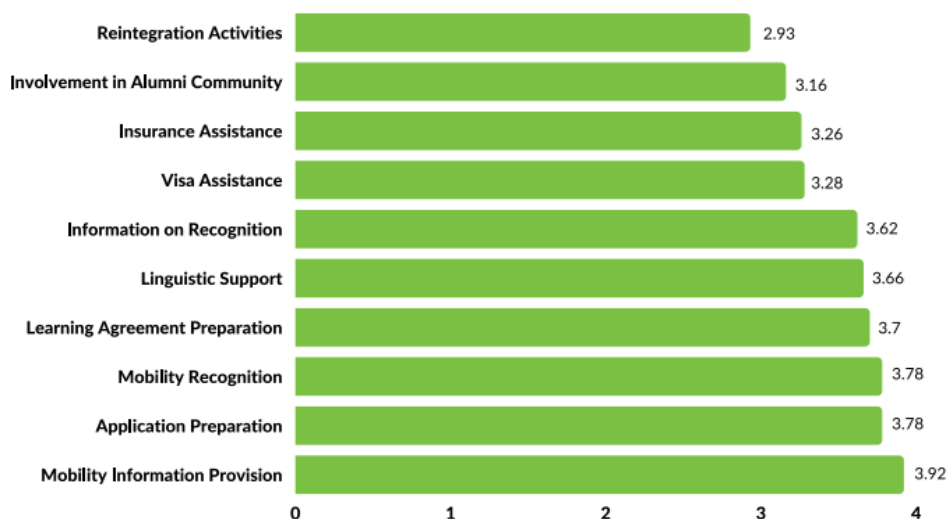


Figure 24 – Mean satisfaction with home HEI services (general sample, n = 8,514-8,434)

Empowering Erasmus+ Students & Alumni to be ambassadors

In order to ensure that Erasmus+ students and alumni are mobilised to actively take part in society as advocates for the Erasmus+ programme and by extension, the importance of a European Education Area, it is important to take more specific actions for the empowerment of students and alumni. ESN noticed that while several strategies were developed in the other three horizontal priorities, we see a lack of concrete policy instruments being introduced for the fourth priority: Democratic Participation and Active Citizenship.

According to the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study 2022²² released by The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), there was a decrease in trust in politics as well as a decrease in civic knowledge among young people. This indicates a clear need for the development of policies to strengthen this policy area in light of the upcoming European Parliament election in 2024 and the empowerment of Erasmus+ students & alumni to be ambassadors for values shared among the European Union.

²² Schulz, Wolfram Ainley, John Fraillon, Julian Losito, Bruno Agrusti, Gabriella Damiani, Valeria Friedman, Tim Education for Citizenship in Times of Global Change - ICCS 2022 International Report

The European Commission operates the Tender²³ for the Provision of services for Erasmus+ International Student and Alumni Networks and activities, which should contribute to the empowerment of Erasmus+ students & alumni to be active citizens.

ESN as a member of the Erasmus+ Students & Alumni Alliance, one of the Alumni Networks operated in the structure, questions the success rate of this student & alumni engagement instrument since its launch in 2015. There are insufficient impact measurements and a lack of transparency in the budget invested in the initiatives organised within the framework of these alumni networks. Furthermore, we believe student and alumni voices are insufficiently represented in the decision-making processes in the funding mechanisms in order to ensure a co-creative participatory process. Proper stakeholder engagement connecting the Erasmus+ Students & Alumni with the National Agencies, Erasmus+ Offices and EU Delegations around the world would be required to bring the student voices and benefit from the power of the multiplier effect that the Erasmus+ programme should have beyond the individual participation.

With more than 500 local associations, 15.000 volunteers, of whom more than 70% are Erasmus Alumni, 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, 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 tender²⁴ 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 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.

²³ <https://etendering.ted.europa.eu/cft/cft-document.html?docId=151607>

²⁴ Information about ESAA is available at: <https://www.esaa-eu.org/>. The Alliance is supported by a tender of the European Commission.

Aspects for improvement on other mobility types

Erasmus+ internships: considerable untapped potential

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 recommendations²⁵, 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.**

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 are 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, ensuring that companies commit to supporting quality traineeship experiences that lead to a learning experience adjusted to the current study level and career trajectory of the trainees.**

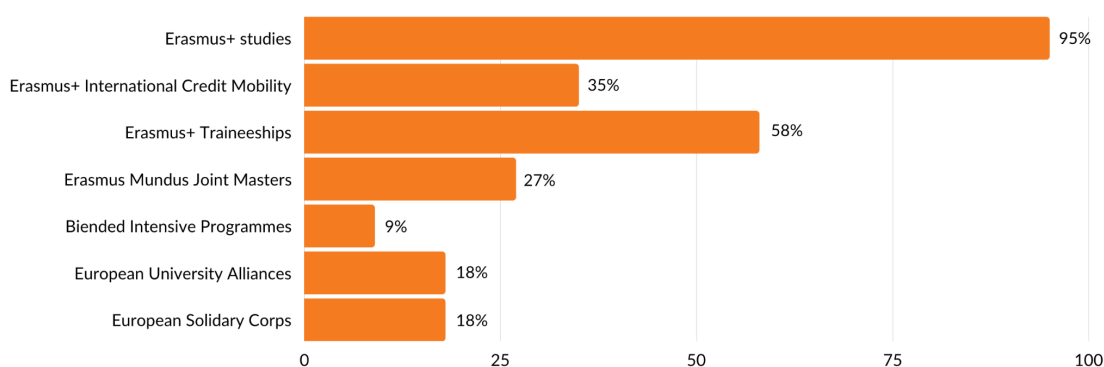
Blended Intensive Programmes

The evolution of blended learning mobility has undergone profound transformations, particularly in response to the challenges precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs) represent a significant opportunity for quality education,

²⁵ ESNsurvey XIV (2022)

fostering comprehensive learning experiences that should ideally lead participants toward further engagement in diverse educational and learning mobility programmes.

When asked about Erasmus+ initiatives in the ESNsurvey XV, while Erasmus+ for studies commands an impressive 95% acknowledgment rate, **the Blended Intensive Programme is known to only 9% of non-mobile students.** This low awareness rate emphasises the need for more information-sharing efforts, outreach strategies and awareness about the added value of participating in blended mobilities in contemporary education landscapes.



ESNsurvey XV, Preliminary report 2023: Which of the following education initiatives funded by the EU have you heard of? (non-mobile students)

In response to the rising significance of virtual exchanges and blended learning in Higher Education, prioritising student involvement in design, implementation, and evaluation remains pivotal. Key recommendations from ESN and ESU²⁶ stress the need to secure dedicated funding for underrepresented student groups in virtual activities, optimise blended learning duration and interaction, strategically plan physical mobility experiences, support blended programme participants, and encourage longer exchange periods. These recommendations aim to foster inclusivity, maximise learning opportunities, and bolster support for students engaging in diverse mobility programs, ensuring a richer educational experience.

²⁶ [ESU and ESN launch a joint position paper on mobility, virtual exchange and blended learning, 2021](#)

Aspects to ensure that Mobility must be a reality for all

Ensure continuous access to Erasmus+ for Hungarian students

Erasmus+ plays a crucial role in the journey of Hungarian students, enriching them with unparalleled experiences and contributing to their personal, professional and educational development. According to the Preliminary Results of XV ESNsurvey, the primary driving force behind participating in mobility is engaging with people from different backgrounds, gaining knowledge of another culture, and learning or improving a foreign language. Furthermore, the results demonstrate significant improvement in students' language skills, cultural awareness, and social and communication skills during and after mobility.

The ongoing access of Hungary to the Erasmus+ programme is crucial for the mutual benefit of both Hungary and the EU, considering the Programme contributes significantly to the increase in the number of students, staff, and cooperation projects, enhancing the overall quality of these initiatives. According to Erasmus+ factsheets, from 2017 to 2021, more than 61,000 international students participated in the Erasmus+ programme in Hungary.

Inclusivity and equal opportunities constitute a cornerstone of the Erasmus+ programme. Hence, no one should be left behind. ESN urges both parties to create a pathway for continuous funding of Erasmus+ opportunities in Hungary, as we emphasise the significance of separating the concerns about the rule of law from the participation in learning mobility opportunities within the broader context of EU-HU political negotiations.

A further elaboration on ESN's position towards the situation with Erasmus+ funds can be found in this publication: [Mobility must be a reality for all: ESN International and ESN Hungary call for continuous access to Erasmus+ for Hungarian students.](#)

Ensure the smooth return of the UK and Switzerland to Erasmus+

On the same perspective as above, we must ensure the reintegration of both the UK and [Switzerland into Erasmus+](#). We have recently seen the United Kingdom signing the agreement to rejoin Horizon Europe, which we welcome. Although, it's important to recognise **that**

students are the future researchers, and they are not benefiting from broadening access to Erasmus+. By not broadening students access to Erasmus+, we are denying them the possibility of enriching their future with new professional opportunities. Together with our ESN National Organisations, we have continually called for access for both the UK and Switzerland to Erasmus+ opportunities.

International credit mobility & association of third countries to the programme

According to the Erasmus+ Annual Report 2021, in 2021, only 8% of the mobility activities were international, from or to non-programme countries²⁷, while at the same time, the demand for international credit mobility is high. At the beginning of the roll-out of the new programme period, the delay in approving the budget for international credit mobility caused many missed learning opportunities for a number of students, in combination with the impact of COVID-19 and the pressure on the education sector. Fortunately, post-Covid, we witnessed a positive trend of a slow increase in the numbers of international mobility in the latest Erasmus+ Annual Report 2022, pointing to 12% of total mobilities in higher education being to/from third countries not associated with the programme. However, as we learn from the same report, there is a clear imbalance between student and staff international credit mobilities supported with external funds: 35% are students and 65% are staff members.

At the same time, a closer look at the implementation of ICM reveals that there is a positive trend in certain aspects. Data from the ESNsurvey - XIV edition (2022) illustrates that ICM participants:

- have **higher satisfaction rates with the services provided by the host and sending HEIs** than participants within programme countries,
- are **less likely to receive their grant payments before mobility** (only 16.95%), but for them it is more likely than for programme country mobilities to receive their grants within 30 days after the beginning of the mobility period (65.40% of ICM students, compared to only 35% for programme),
- the **recognition of credits is overall better** for ICM students.

²⁷ Erasmus+ Annual Report (2022)

This progress should not lead to complacency. It is crucial to take into account the present obstacles that students from non-EU countries must overcome in order to participate in mobility, such as **management, student support, and receiving support to fulfil visa requirements**. To fully facilitate international credit mobility, the challenges related to visas should be better managed. **A significant share of students, 11%, reported having faced problems with administration, such as residence permit, visa and registration in the ESNsurvey XV.** Schengen visas are not always granted to non-EU citizens for short-term exchange or movement purposes due to the aforementioned issues.

As also recommended by the new Council Recommendation [‘Europe on the Move’ – learning mobility opportunities for everyone](#), for the Erasmus+ programme to be truly inclusive, a stronger commitment is needed in addressing current barriers that students from non-EU countries face to participate in mobility. Obstacles such as a lack of smooth procedures or digital barriers of international offices working on granting visas hint at a potential breach of the EU’s Directive 2016/801 on the conditions of entry and residence of students, researchers and volunteers.

A bigger focus should be placed towards balancing the flow of outgoing and incoming students through the ICM. For example, the Erasmus+ Annual Report 2022 illustrates the demand for mobilities in the United Kingdom and Switzerland, as both countries appear to be the most popular destinations for international credit mobility.²⁸ **This data clearly shows the importance of both the UK and Switzerland should rejoin Erasmus+, which ESN strongly supports.**²⁹

ESN is delighted to see that significant efforts are made to widen opportunities for the involvement of neighbouring countries, such as opening the European Universities Erasmus+ call in 2023, which allocated funds to support the participation as full partners of higher education institutions from the Western Balkans countries not associated to the Erasmus+ programme. Furthermore, ESN fully appreciates that North Macedonia and Serbia are fully associated with the Erasmus+ programme, but also believes that **the rest of Western Balkan**

²⁸ Erasmus+ Annual Report 2022, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2023

²⁹ [Switzerland's reassociation to the Erasmus+ Programme, 2023, Erasmus is a big + - Press release 04/05/2023](#) by ESN Switzerland, ESU and VSS-UNES-USU

countries should also be fully affected with it. Education and learning mobility can foster integration and support these countries on their way to EU accession.

At the same time, ESN raises a bit of caution on the integration model of the Western Balkan countries in the Erasmus+ programme. The financial mechanism of the Erasmus+ programme is built in a way where students from the Erasmus+ partner countries receive higher financial contributions compared to the Erasmus+ programme countries. Changing the status from a partner country to a programme country will result in a lower scholarship for students from Western Balkans countries. Therefore, we believe that the European Commission should take into consideration the socio-economic status of the population of Western Balkan countries and offer adequate Erasmus+ scholarships for the students. Allocating more funds, particularly from IPA III and the NDICI, is important to ensure sufficient support for academic cooperation and enhanced mobility opportunities between Erasmus+ programmes and partner countries.

Aspects for improvement on the Programme Governance

Governance, Monitoring and Evaluation

Creating new stakeholder engagement models at the national and institutional levels with the participation of learners is a key aspect of transparent and efficient governance of the Programme. 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.

Furthermore, 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 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. 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 that proposals that enhance the quality and impact are easier to incorporate into mobility projects.

More data from monitoring should be 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.** ESN welcomes existing

practices of involving student representatives in the monitoring and evaluation, such as in Slovenia (CMEPIUS), and encourages more National Agencies to adopt similar approaches.

The new [ECHE monitoring framework](#) prioritises 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 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.

The Erasmus Student Network has developed several recommendations for 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 [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.

Simpler access to funding for civil society organisations

Despite positive changes such as the introduction of lump sums for cooperation projects, access to project funding for civil society organisations remains considerably challenging in several aspects. The key measure to support a vibrant civil society in the education sector, the operating grants, has become more complex with the new programme. These grants should become more long-term and not ask civil society organisations to contribute to concrete EU policy priorities but rather to support overarching goals of the European Union while maintaining strong independence regarding their priorities so they can also properly execute their monitoring role towards the EU institutions and national governments.

Reporting should be made easier and based on the achievement of the agreed objectives. Cooperation partnerships should allow for flexible access to funding for affiliate members in pan-European organisations, thus helping civil society organisations build capacity and strengthen their network. This is especially important in the case of access to funding for organisations in partner countries, which normally really need financial support from their organisations but struggle to get it due to the complexity of the programme.

Impact of the programme

The Erasmus+ programme continues to build on the huge successes achieved by all its predecessors, helping students to acquire relevant transversal competencies. Students highlight the impact of their mobilities on their personal growth and self-confidence, intercultural communication and language skills, and a better understanding of their host communities.

Furthermore, the success of the programme is also linked to the main reasons students decide to participate in mobility. In this way, students are highly motivated to learn about different cultures learn environments and improve a foreign language. Moreover, we can observe why participating in Erasmus+ also enhances the identification of participants to the European Union without any decrease in their identification with their countries and regions.

Erasmus+ students consider that access to exchange opportunities like Erasmus+ are very important to them (81% consider it so), as well as the possibility to live, work and study in any other EU Member State (77%). Participating in Erasmus+ makes students strong advocates for a united Europe.

Main recommendations for improvement of the Erasmus + Programme

Priorities of the Erasmus+ Programme 2021-2027

1. National Agencies and Higher Education Institutions **should create explicit definitions of the groups considered as participants with fewer opportunities to facilitate transparent access to information**, with guidance from the European Commission. Each National Agency should define its strategy according to the country's specifications, which means that each country has its own group priorities and definitions. For a clear understanding of who can benefit from the support measures, it's necessary to create explicit parameters to define which groups can access support measures available for participants from fewer opportunities backgrounds.
2. The European Commission and National Agencies **should make the results of the report publicly available at the institutional, national and European levels to increase transparency and support the improvement of the programme**. A considerable amount of relevant data has already been gathered through the participants' reports, but this information is not used publicly. First, students should be made aware of evaluations done in key aspects such as recognition or satisfaction with academic and social life since this can be an important factor in the selection of their mobility destinations. Second, national data gathered by National Agencies can provide an extremely useful picture of the comparisons between Higher Education Institutions, which can foster the exchange of best practices and capacity building. Finally, at the national and European levels, the data can help researchers, students and stakeholder organisations to analyse the implementation of the programme and make proposals to improve it.
3. ESN encourages **National Authorities to explore more thoroughly opportunities for co-funding of Erasmus+ from both EU and national and regional resources** to increase support for students willing to participate in mobility but do not have enough financial means to do so. ESN is therefore glad for the example shown by the German National Agency, where resources from the European Social Fund are allocated to Erasmus+, providing additional support to participants from fewer opportunities backgrounds.

4. **Review the system to allocate Erasmus+ funding to Higher Education institutions** in the Erasmus+ programme guide, moving from a system solely based on past performance to an increased focus on institutional inclusion, more support to HEIs with lower rates of participation and more emphasis to quality mobility to the strengthening of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education.
5. Create new incentives for Higher Education Institutions to better implement the principles of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education and the priorities of the Erasmus+ programme, **such as a new way to allocate extra organisational support to reinforce inclusive mobility**, in line with the SIEM technical recommendations.
6. Prioritise higher grants for students who need the funding by **increasing the use of the fewer opportunities top-ups** and publishing an official report on the different uses of the top-up.
7. Reinforce the need for the **grant increase based on the travel support proposed by the new Programme Guide 2024** and provide clear guidelines and transparency about its implementation to the National Agencies and Higher Education Institutions.
8. **Administrative simplification is key** for ensuring that students are supported through their whole mobility journey, that mobility is accessible for students with fewer opportunities, and that International Relations Offices have the dedicated time to properly coach the students through their mobility journey. We call for better streamlined procedures on Erasmus+ that will ensure that the possibility of going on mobility is right on the fingers of international students.
9. **Develop sector-specific strategies** for the implementation of the participation in democratic life Erasmus+ priority, including specific funding for engagement and mobility promotion initiatives implemented by alumni for Erasmus students through calls coordinated by National Agencies.

Mobility cycle: before, during and after mobility

10. **Pre-departure support measures must be enhanced** and embedded in broader internationalisation strategies at the institutional and national levels. In this perspective, students must have access to all the necessary information to make their mobility journey a success before the application process. Providing adequate

information to help learners choose their mobility destination must be a priority for Higher Education Institutions, where academic achievements, employment prospects, and the affordability of the host city will be the most sought-after information by students. To support mobility promotion, Erasmus+ alumni are the core pillars of these strategies since they are the best possible ambassadors to assist students driven by their own experiences.

11. Ensure **timely grant payments** to all Erasmus+ participants by modifying the grant agreement and ensuring enforcement through the monitoring of the ECHE and the final reports of mobility projects. Reinforcing the payment of the grant before departure will also support students in having better access to **housing opportunities** while studying abroad.
12. The Monitoring Framework of the **Erasmus Charter for Higher Education should be used to increase the attention to student housing at the national level**. National Agencies should regularly incorporate discussions between ECHE holders on their housing support mechanisms and should be given a mandate by National Authorities to carry out initiatives related to international student housing.
13. **Strengthen the ECHE monitoring in the aspects related to full automatic recognition**, with a bigger focus on capacity building and the progress achieved over the programming period, and expand the circle of stakeholders involved in the monitoring process to student associations and representatives.
14. **Embedding mobility windows** in the learning programmes will not only contribute to the internationalisation of higher education by allowing more flexibility, 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. Higher education institutions should be more ambitious, and when developing or adapting degree programmes, mobility windows should be part of the learning path, meeting the needs of students and catching up with fast-paced trends in a globalised world with a constantly changing labour market.
15. **Structured collaboration with mobility promoters and alumni**: 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.

16. Reinforce the planning and design of activities by **ESAA** in agreement with the European Commission and in accordance with the Erasmus+ priorities, would lead to a boosted role of the alumni organisations in terms of learning and capacity building, revamping the system in which the allocated funding is divided among alumni organisations.

Strengthening other mobility types

17. Reinforced **Erasmus internship quality framework** should be created in correspondence with the Institutions' ECHE commitments and their application to the reality of internships, ensuring that companies commit to supporting quality traineeship experiences that lead to a learning experience adjusted to the current study level and career trajectory of the trainees.
18. **Ensure student involvement in the design, implementation, and evaluation of Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs)** to safeguard that the BIPs reflect inclusion measures and innovative teaching and learning methods. This involvement is crucial for engaging with challenge-based education and contributing positively to the creation of learning mobility pathways, further internationalisation opportunities, and bolstering support for students engaging in diverse mobility programs. This approach aims to enhance the overall educational experience and promote richer, more inclusive learning environments.
19. **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.

Mobility must be a reality for all

20. **Create a pathway for Erasmus+ mobility opportunities for Hungarian students,** emphasising the significance of separating the concerns about the rule of law from the participation in learning mobility opportunities within the broader context of EU-HU relations and the importance of continued investment of Hungarian youths' participation in Erasmus+.
21. **Reassociation of Switzerland and the United Kingdom to the Erasmus+ programme** to facilitate mobility flows with these nations and ensure opportunities for further collaboration beyond mobilities.

Governance of Erasmus+

22. With eyes into the future, **Erasmus+ must be one of the European Union's priorities for the next Multiannual Financial Framework.** It's vital that the EU ambitions match a continued investment in higher education and Erasmus+ and a pathway to ensure that more students will have access to more quality mobility opportunities.
23. Overhaul the governance system of the Erasmus+ programme at the European and national levels, **enshrining the participation of students and alumni representatives in the decision-making processes** related to opportunities for students (such as the distribution of funding, grant levels and others) in a potential revision of the Erasmus+ regulation and in the next programmes.
24. **Work towards the harmonisation of visa procedures across the European Union, ensuring a uniform and simplified process for young learners across Member States.** This could involve the creation of a standardised application process with clear guidelines and requirements applicable to all EU countries. Furthermore, the establishment of distinct visa categories tailored to different learning mobility

programmes should be considered, including dedicated visa pathways for study, internships, volunteering, and exchange programs. Such categories should incorporate streamlined application processes and reduced bureaucratic complexities to facilitate smoother mobility for young learners.

25. Ensure **Operational Funding for Civil Society Organisations in a stable manner** that allows civil society actors the space to focus on their role in independently monitoring the implementation of both European and national policies in the field of Education, Training and Youth.