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# ESNsurvey XV

*Preliminary Report*





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## 1. Introduction

The ESNsurvey is a European-wide research project implemented by the Erasmus Student Network (ESN), covering different topics related to the Internationalisation of Higher Education. Being one of the biggest student-led initiatives of its kind, the ESNsurvey has inspired ESN's international student representation and advocacy efforts to improve the access, experience and impact of mobility since its first implementation in 2005.

The XVth edition aimed to enhance students' understanding and improve their overall mobility experience while also addressing the barriers that both mobile and non-mobile students encounter when participating in mobility programmes. The focus was on supporting measures, such as administration and financing, as well as on the academic and socio-cultural experiences of students.

ESN aims to monitor the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 by implementing three bi-yearly editions in 2023, 2025, and 2027 to track the progress of the Erasmus+ programme. Many sources were used in the design of this year's survey, such as the ESNsurvey XIV, the SIEM research publication and the Green Erasmus research publication, as well as the Eurobarometer and the Erasmus+ participants report, in order to set the scene for the survey to track the progress made within the programme implementation period.

The survey reached out to three different target audiences: exchange students, full-degree students and non-mobile students who were enrolled in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the academic year of 2021-2022 and/or academic year 2022-2023. The data shows that 78.40% ( $N = 17,855$ ) of participants participated in international student mobility as an exchange student, 8.15% ( $N = 1,856$ ) of participants participated in international student mobility as an international full degree student, and 13.45% ( $N = 3,064$ ) did not have any international experience in their higher education.



The respondents' demographics are closely mirrored with the Erasmus+ Annual Report 2022 data, with 65.22% identifying as women, 32.39% as men, and 1.11% as non-binary (European Commission, 2022). The majority of participants fell within specific age groups: 73.20% were between the ages of 20 and 24, 19.07% were between 25 and 29, and 3.15% were younger than 20. The remaining participants were either older than 29 or chose not to disclose their age.

Within the pool of participants in the ESNsurvey, 77.01% hold citizenship in one of the 27 Member States of the EU, with the most prominent nationalities being Italian (16.86%), German (9.06%), Spanish (8.09%), Polish (5.05%), French (4.68%), Austrian (4.49%) and Czech (3.89%). Notable representations outside the EU include 3.04% Turkish, 1.21% Indian and 0.96% British. In total, 156 distinct nationalities were recorded in the survey. 1.44% of participants preferred not to disclose their nationality.

ESNsurvey XV is a quantitative and deductive research project that utilised an online questionnaire for data collection. This questionnaire was initiated on the 29th of May and concluded on the 31st of July 2023, spanning a collection period of two months. The project received support from various stakeholders, including the European Commission, the European Parliament, National Agencies, HEIs, Networks of Universities, and European Alliances. In particular, our research received significant support from an Expert Group comprised of a diverse array of organisations and institutions, including ACA (Academic Association for Cooperation), EAIE (European Association for International Education), IAU (International Association of Universities), EUF (European University Foundation), Tilburg University, and former members of ESN, as well as contributors to the ESNsurvey.

To enhance dissemination among international students, it is crucial to emphasise the roles of ESN members and strengthen our relationships with external stakeholders, including HEIs, University Networks, National Agencies, and the European Commission. We are also grateful for the support of our partners, EUrail and Flixbus, who generously provided prizes for our prize draws.

A dissemination package was shared in order to facilitate the promotion of the questionnaire among students, HEIs and other stakeholders. The survey was disseminated mainly through social media (such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter) and direct mailing to past participants of the Erasmus+ Programme. Participants were able to access the questionnaire via a direct link: <https://ensurvey.org/survey>.

The research team acknowledges that even though a maximum effort was placed in reaching as many students as possible to fill in the questionnaire, the recruitment itself is based on a convenience sample, meaning that there might be a self-selection bias.



## 2. Exchange Students

### 2.1. Sample Characteristics

#### 2.1.1. Level of Study During Stay Aboard

Figure 1 presents the distribution of participants across different study levels during their study abroad. Of a total of 20,036 respondents, 63.99% were studying a Bachelor's or equivalent level during their stay abroad, 32.35% were studying a Master's or equivalent level during their stay abroad, 1.31% were studying a Doctorate (PhD) or equivalent level during their stay abroad, and 2.35% other.

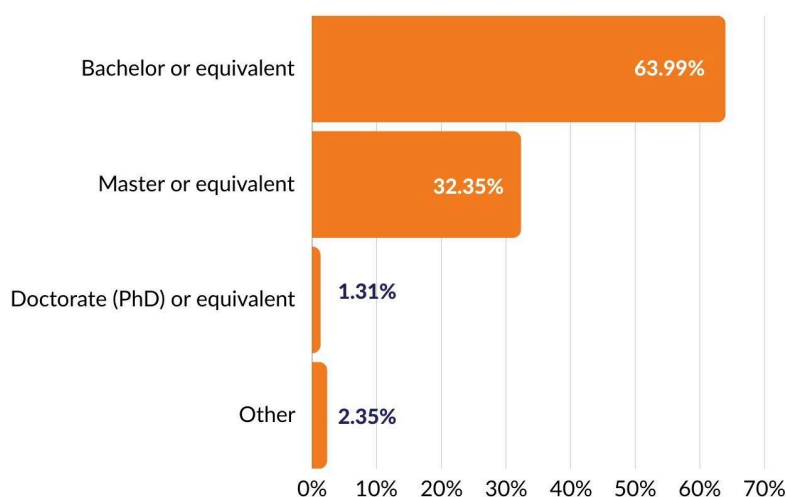


Figure 1: Relative frequencies of study levels of exchange (N= 18,089) and full-degree (N= 1,947) students

#### 2.1.2. Duration of the Exchange

Regarding the duration of exchange that students took on, based on 17,727 responses, the most common durations of mobility were 5 months (37.36%), 6 months (16.43%), and 4 months (14.38%), showing the preference of students for one-semester mobilities (see Figure 2).



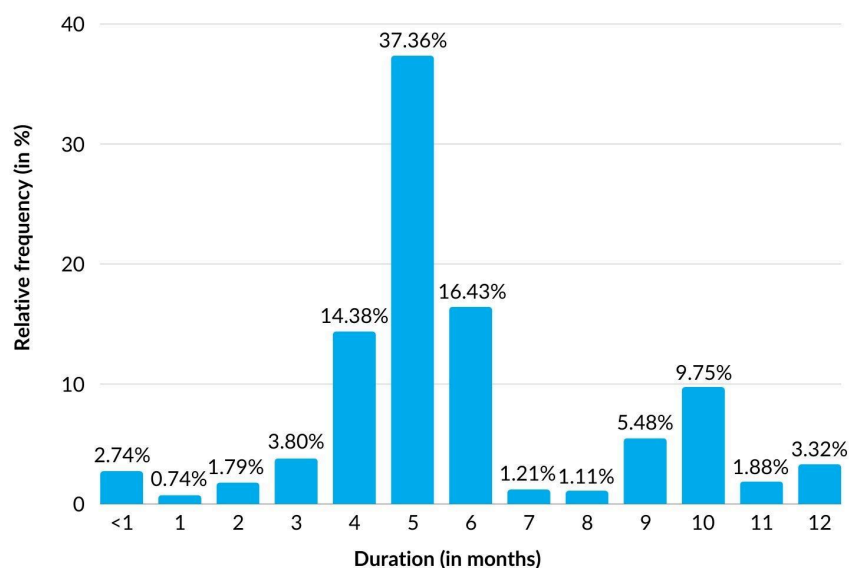


Figure 2: Distribution of the duration of the mobility period of exchange students (N= 17,727)

### 2.1.3. Top 10 Sending Countries

Figure 3 gives an overview of the top ten sending countries. The five most common sending countries of respondents (N = 17,926) were Italy (17.76%), Spain (9.96%), Germany (9.62%), France (5.73%), and the Czech Republic (5.69%). Additionally, several other countries also presented high participant rates in the XV ESNsurvey, such as Poland (5.19%), Austria (4.23%), Greece (3.47%), Romania (3.22%) and Turkey (3.15%). To provide a comparison, an analysis has been made taking into account the Erasmus + annual reports. The perception is that in the year 2020 (European Commission, 2021), the countries that sent more mobile students were Germany, Spain, France, Italy and Poland and in 2021 were France, Italy, Germany, Spain and Turkey (European Commission, 2022).



Italy	17.76%	Portugal	3.1%
Spain	9.96%	Switzerland	2.76%
Germany	9.62%	Belgium	2.53%
France	5.73%	Netherlands	1.96%
Czech Republic	5.69%	Finland	1.51%
Poland	5.19%	Sweden	1.47%
Austria	4.23%	United Kingdom	1.46%
Greece	3.47%	Hungary	1.32%
Romania	3.22%	Ireland	1.28%
Türkiye	3.15%	Croatia	1.18%

Figure 3: Relative frequencies of sending countries of exchange students (N= 17,926)

#### 2.1.4. Top 10 Hosting Countries

Based on 17,721 responses, the 5 most common hosting countries of respondents were Spain (12.95%), Italy (11.58%), Germany (9.46%), France (6.43%), and Portugal (6.21%). Additionally, several other countries also presented high participant rates in the XV ESNsurvey, such as the Czech Republic (5.24%), Belgium (4.32%), Poland (3.74%), Sweden (3.16%), Austria (2.95%). To provide a comparison, an analysis has been made taking into account the Erasmus + annual reports (European Commission, 2022). The perspective is that in the year 2020 (European Commission, 2021), the countries that received the most mobile students were Spain, France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom and in 2021, Spain, Germany, France, Italy and Poland (European Commission, 2022).



Spain	12.95%	Norway	2.62%
Italy	11.58%	United Kingdom	2.03%
Germany	9.46%	Greece	2%
France	6.43%	Croatia	1.79%
Portugal	6.21%	Ireland	1.53%
Czech Republic	5.24%	Türkiye	1.47%
Belgium	4.32%	Denmark	1.41%
Poland	3.74%	Switzerland	1.26%
Sweden	3.16%	Romania	1.16%
Austria	2.95%	Slovenia	1.15%
Netherlands	2.9%	Lithuania	1%
Finland	2.81%		

Figure 4: Relative frequencies of host countries of exchange students (N= 17,721)

### 2.1.5. Mobility Type

Based on 17,498 responses, the most common types of mobility were Academic exchange (91.06%) and traineeship/internship placement at a company/organisation (7.05%). 1.89% of respondents indicated other types of mobility. This data shows the significant difference between the participation in study exchange and other mobility types, presenting possible limitations in potential access to mobility opportunities even within the Erasmus+ framework.

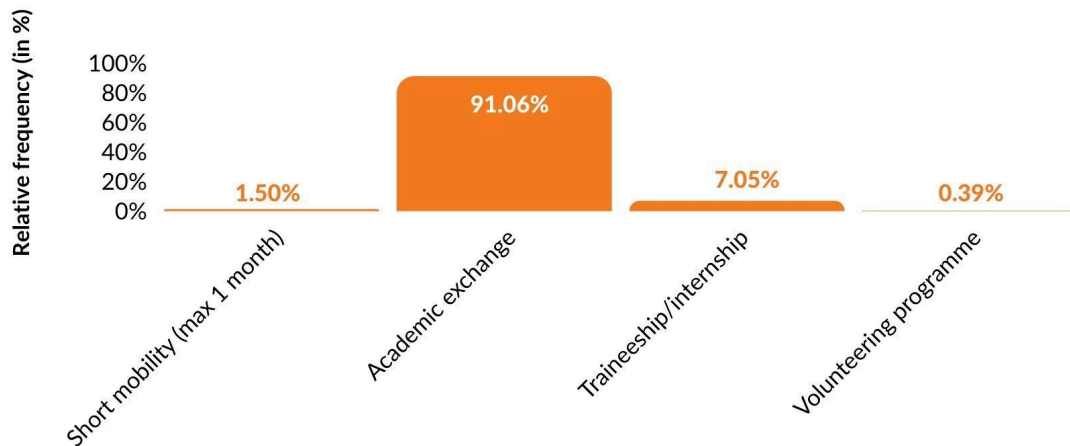


Figure 5: Distribution of the mobility types of exchange students (N= 17,498)

### 2.1.6. Exchange Programmes

These statistics (N= 17,080) provide valuable insights into the prevalence and popularity of different exchange programmes among ESNsurvey participants. Erasmus+ (91.44%) continues to be the most recognised programme. A lower percentage of respondents reported participation in other exchange programmes, such as agreements between institutions (5.43%), the SEMP programme (2.51%) and the Turing programme (0.62%), alongside various other programmes and mobility options mentioned by a smaller percentage of respondents.

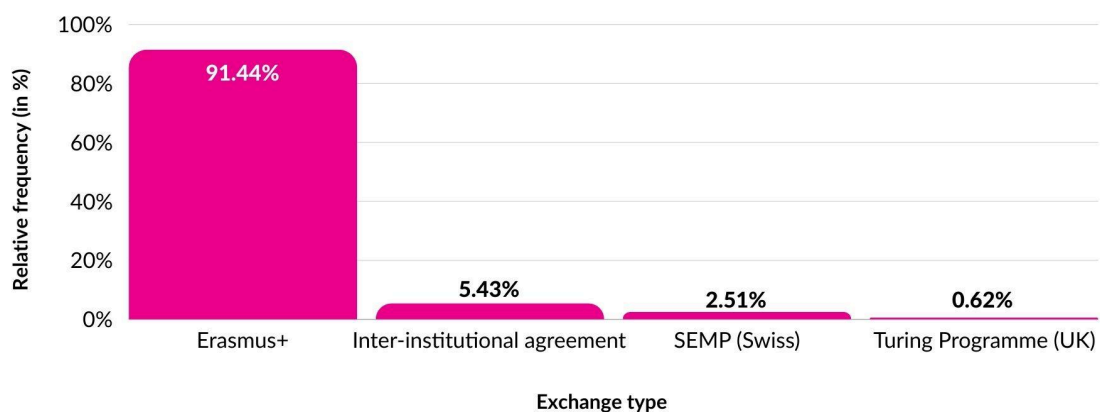


Figure 6: Distribution of exchange programmes (N= 17,080)

## 2.2. The Priorities of the Erasmus+ Programme

The ESNsurvey XV is the first one of a set of 3 surveys monitoring the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027. The four horizontal priorities are key to guiding the policy efforts done at different levels, and through the new ECHE, HEIs have increased responsibilities to implement actions that contribute to these priorities. Gathering data on the student perspective regarding the extent to which the programme is actually delivering can help to evaluate the overall perception of the programme's societal impact.

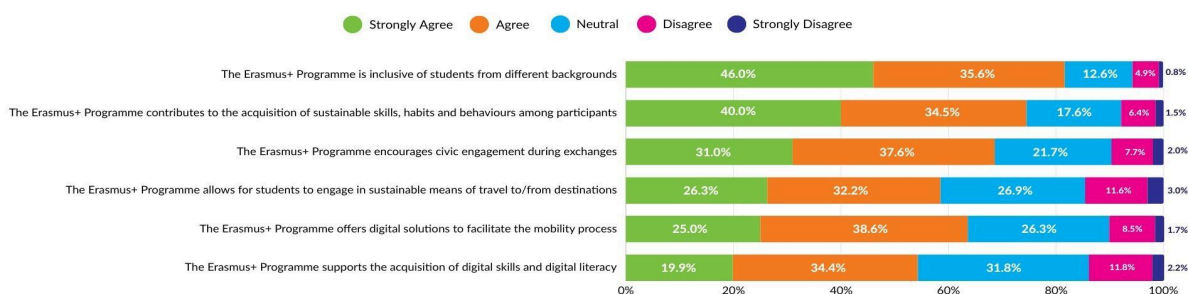


Figure 7: Distribution of the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 priorities, percentage (N = 14,737)

Looking at the students' (N = 14,753) perceptions of the Erasmus+ Programme (see Figure 7), there is a positive impact of the inclusion measures implemented. A significant 35.6% of respondents agree, while an even more substantial 46% strongly agree with these measures. Through this report, a better perception of the students regarding the topic of inclusion will be developed, especially when tackling the inclusion top-up.

Concerning environmental sustainability, 34.5% of respondents agree, and 40% strongly agree that the programme helps participants acquire sustainable skills and habits. Looking deeper into the results of the Green Erasmus research and comparing it with the means of transportation used by students, 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 (Diekmann, A., & Karaiskos, G., 2022).



On the topic of digitalisation, 38.6% of the participants agree, and 25% strongly agree with its positive impact. Throughout this new programme, we have seen some significant steps toward digitalisation. However, as it is explored in this report, there are areas where enhancements can be made, particularly in the implementation of the Erasmus+ App—a project in which ESN is actively involved and eager to see further developments. Additionally, there are opportunities for refinement in the administration procedures related to the mobility path.

Lastly, in terms of civic engagement, 37.6% of the participants agree, and 31% strongly agree with its positive influence. Despite this perception, there is room for improvement in fostering democratic participation. The results show that only 10% of students engage in volunteering activities during their Erasmus+ mobilities. To address this, there is a need for better support from students and alumni organisations on the ground, improving recognition of volunteering opportunities, and enhancing tools like the learning agreement to better track students' learning progress.

In this way, as described in the [SIEM technical recommendations](#) “the learning agreement should also be used as a guide for self-reflection on the mobility experience, accompanied by the Erasmus+ coordinators from the sending and hosting institutions” (Rayón González, J., Bartolozzi, F., Gabriels, W., Kalinova, N., & Dias, R., p.26, 2022). These measures can help students connect more with their local communities, a crucial aspect of programme enhancement.

## **2.3. Before Mobility**

### **2.3.1. Motivations to Go on Exchange**

When students were asked about their motivations for studying abroad, several factors emerged as significant drivers for international mobility (see Figure 8). These factors give insights into the range of motivations that influence students' decisions to pursue educational experiences abroad. In what follows, a short overview is provided of the different motivational categories and their importance for students. Even though the motivations for students to engage in mobility are varied, engaging with people from different cultural backgrounds



(79.63%), gaining knowledge of another culture (74.94%), and learning/improving a foreign language (72.35%) are the main factors score the highest in mobile students.

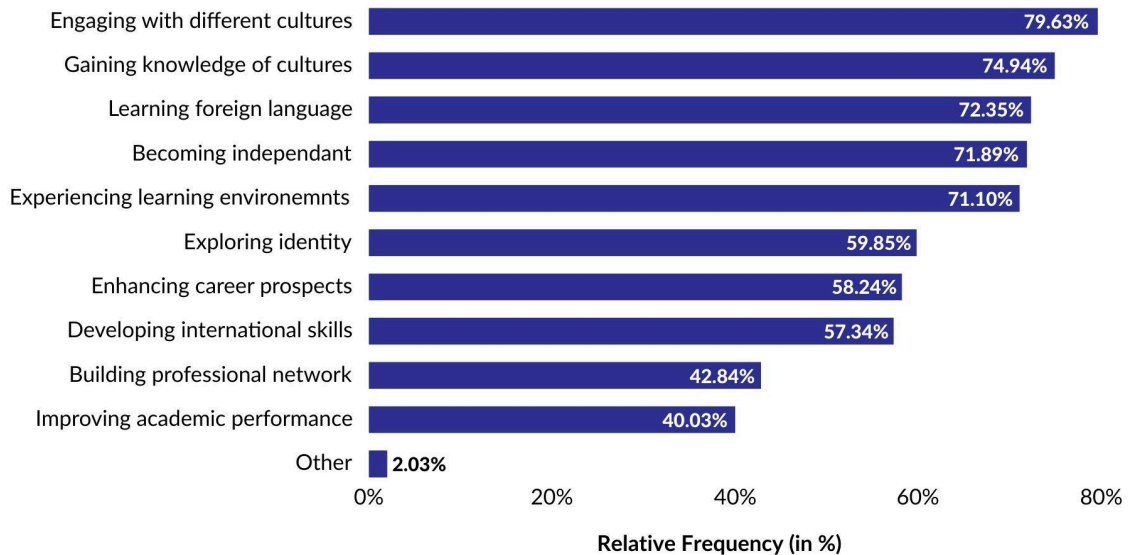


Figure 8: Relative frequency of important motivations selected by exchange students (N = 14,455)

Next, it is crucial to emphasise the main factors influencing participants' choice of a specific mobility destination (Figure 9). The foremost reason is the affordability of the host city, with 36% in agreement and 30% strongly agreeing. This is closely followed by the availability of courses recognised by their home institution, where 29% agree, and 37% strongly agree. Additionally, the ability to speak in the language of instruction at the destination university is also important, with 26% in agreement and 35% strongly agreeing.





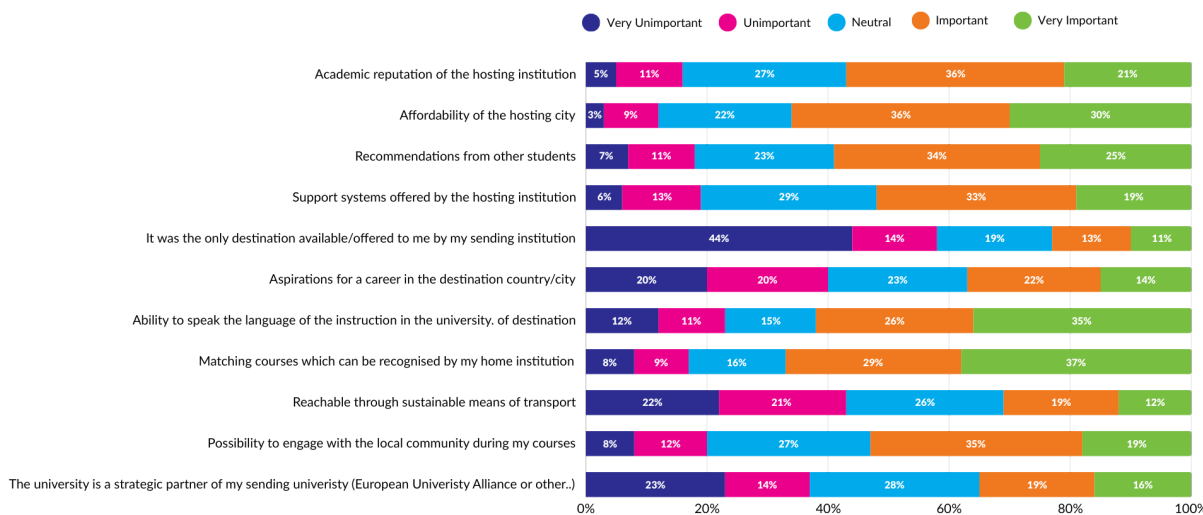


Figure 9: Relative frequency of important factors when choosing exchange destination (N = 14,455)

Conversely, the least chosen reason for selection was the destination recommended by the sending institution, with only 13% in agreement and 11% strongly agreeing. Similarly, choosing a destination based on career prospects in the city garnered 22% agreement and 14% strong agreement. Lastly, accessibility via sustainable transportation means received support from 19% in agreement and 12% strongly agreeing.

### 2.3.2. Pre-Departure Support

For international mobile students, the exchange experience begins way before they actually arrive at their destination. One of their needs is pre-departure support, either from their home institution or hosting institution, and they must have sufficient support to be able to succeed and have the best experience possible.

The highest priority, indicated by 15.37% of respondents, was the need for information about available financial support. Tools such as the [Erasmus+ Grant Simulator](#), available in the Erasmus General Portal, can be key factors in providing the adequate support that international mobile students need to make a well-informed decision on their mobility destination.

Furthermore, 12.43% of participants emphasised the significance of obtaining comprehensive programme information to make informed decisions about their study options abroad. Equally important was support throughout the application process, with 12.29% of respondents seeking guidance in navigating the complexities of applying for study abroad programs.

Peer-to-peer support is also highly valued, with 11.84% of participants desiring insights from former study abroad students. Additionally, 10.90% of respondents highlighted the importance of understanding the courses offered by potential host universities to align their academic goals with available offerings. While slightly lower in priority, 7.48% of participants expressed a need for assistance in selecting the most suitable host university. When comparing with the data from the SIEM Final Report (Allison, K., & Wim, G., 2021), students reported that to prepare for their mobility experience, it is of utmost importance to have information about available funding (94%), support with the application process (88%) and help to choose a host university (86%).

Meeting other students and understanding the potential impact on academic performance abroad were equally important to 7.18% of respondents. Meeting students from the host university held slightly less importance, with 5.93% considering it a valuable aspect of their preparations. Finally, support in finding an internship placement received the lowest priority, with only 4.81% of participants deeming it important in their pre-departure preparations.



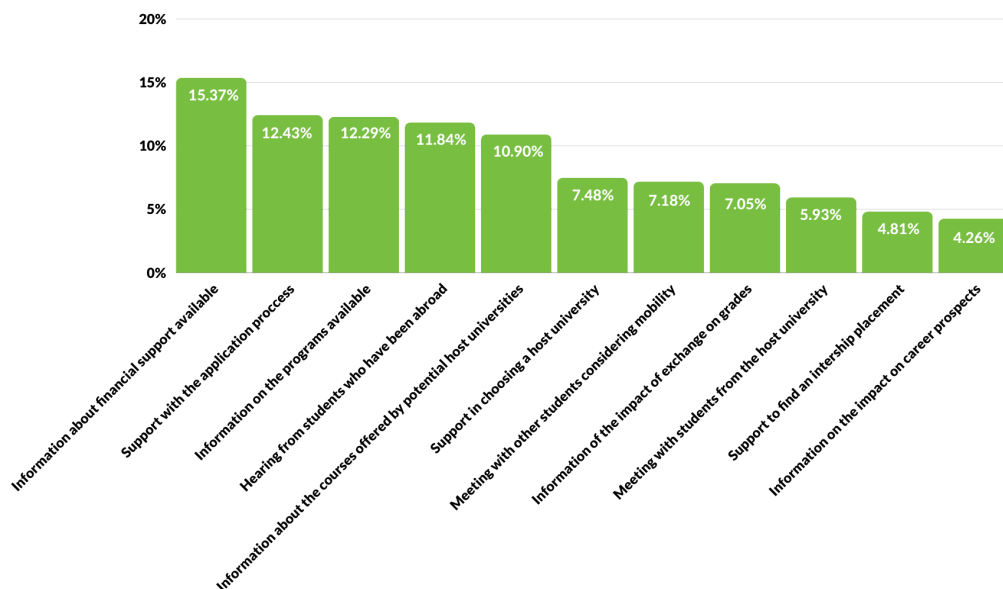


Figure 10: Relative frequency of the factors related to the importance of types of pre-departure support  
 (N = 14,495)

These insights provide valuable information for HEIs to tailor their pre-departure support programs effectively to meet the diverse needs and expectations of students planning to study abroad.

## 2.4. During Mobility

### 2.4.1. Means of Transport Used for Travelling During Exchange

Participants were asked which means of transport they used during key moments of their mobility (N=14,489). Upon reviewing the results, it becomes apparent that the most preferred mode of transportation for travelling to the mobility destination is still the plane, with 71.04% of participants choosing this option and 70.05% preferring it for the return journey to their home country. However, for overnight trips during their mobility, buses (40.02%) and trains (37.4%) emerge as the preferred choices.

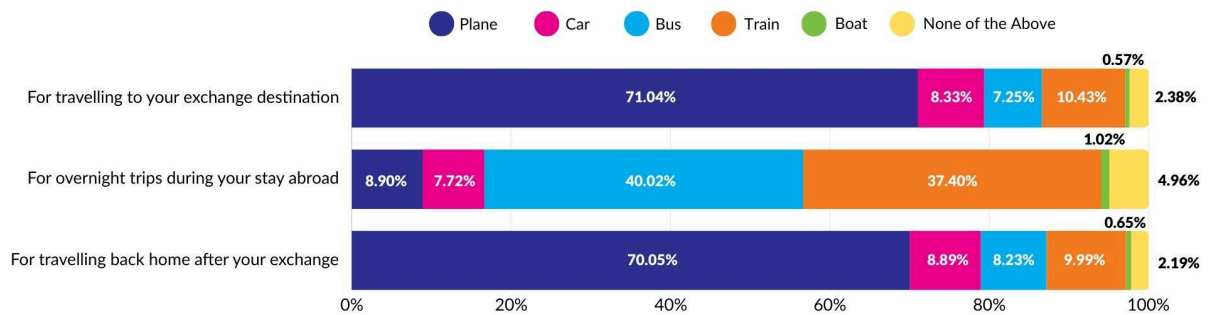


Figure 11: Means of transport used for travelling at the three key moments of your exchange, percentage (N = 14.489)

To gain a deeper insight into the factors influencing these transportation choices, participants were asked to rank the importance of specific reasons when selecting their mode of transport, using a rating scale from 1 (most important) to 7 (least important). A total of 14,489 responses were collected. The two main reasons for choosing the means of transport are cost/price relation, with 2.23 indicating it as their top priority, and time to complete the journey, with 2.28 of the respondents indicating it as their main priority as well.

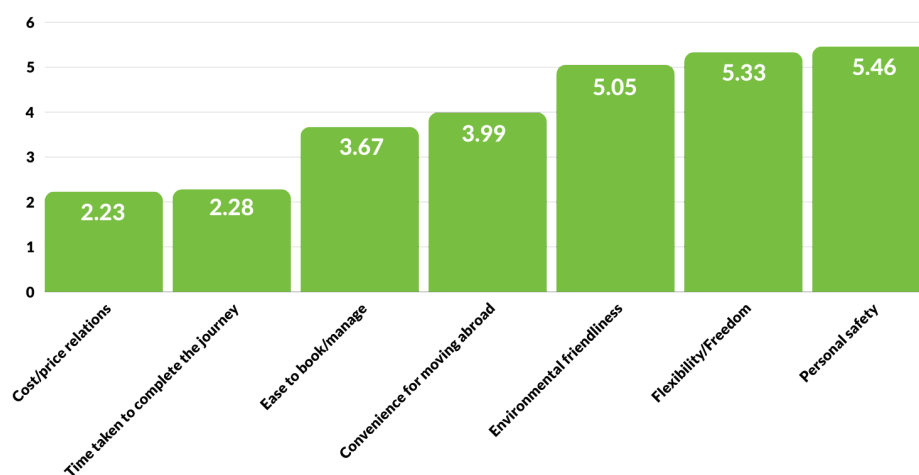


Figure 12: Factors influencing students' transportation choices (general sample, N=14.489)

When comparing the findings of participants who have received the green top-up (9.56%) with the results from the Green Erasmus report, it becomes evident that the number of participants opting for sustainable means of travel has not increased. According to the Green Erasmus Report (Diekmann, A., & Karaiskos, G., 2022), air travel continues to be the preferred mode of transportation among Erasmus students. The XV ESNsurvey reveals that 71.04% of participants travelled to their mobility destinations by plane, closely aligning with the 73.1% reported in the Green Erasmus Report. Additionally, 70.5% of participants chose air travel as their return method of transportation, similar to the 69.8% documented in the Green Erasmus data (Diekmann, A., & Karaiskos, G., 2022). The limited availability of the Green Travel top-up does not appear to correlate with a significant rise in the use of sustainable means of travel among mobility students.

#### **2.4.2. Challenges faced by the Students**

Identifying the primary challenges faced by students participating in Erasmus+ is crucial for developing effective measures to support mobility throughout its various phases. These results reveal several similarities with the XIV ESNsurvey and the former Erasmus+ Programme Annual Report (European Commission, 2022). However, when comparing both surveys, it becomes evident that the issue of insufficient funding to cover the cost of living has increased, now ranking as the top concern reported by students (35.63%). This issue is closely interlinked with the delayed disbursement of grants and scholarships, which further emphasises the challenges, accounting for 20.11% of reported concerns.





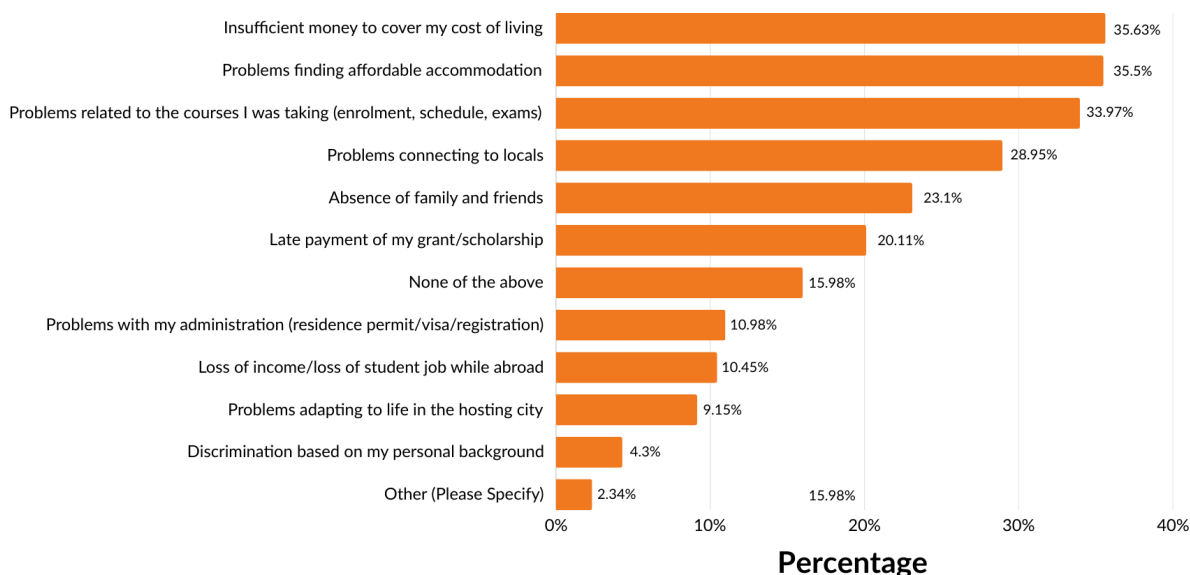


Figure 13: Issues encountered during the stay abroad by exchange students (general sample,  $N = 14,568$ )

This is closely followed by challenges related to finding affordable accommodation (35.5%), which has also seen an increase compared to previous years. For instance, the XIV ESNsurvey showed a 15.73% percentage regarding this issue. The problems with accommodation have also been tackled in the [Housing Survey Report](#), where almost half of the respondents can cover less than 50% of their accommodation costs with their scholarships (ESU & ESN, 2023).

Problems associated with the academic courses are a significant concern, with 33.97% of students reporting difficulties in this regard. Furthermore, issues related to integrating with local students are also significant, with 20.11% of students experiencing difficulties in this area.

Similar to the last ESNsurvey, the least commonly experienced problem among students was discrimination based on personal background, which was reported by only 4.3% of respondents.

These problems lead students to experience feelings of anxiety and stress (42.3%). The least commonly experienced effect of the problems experienced during mobility was feelings of isolation and social exclusion, with 22.9% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that the issues impacted them in this way.

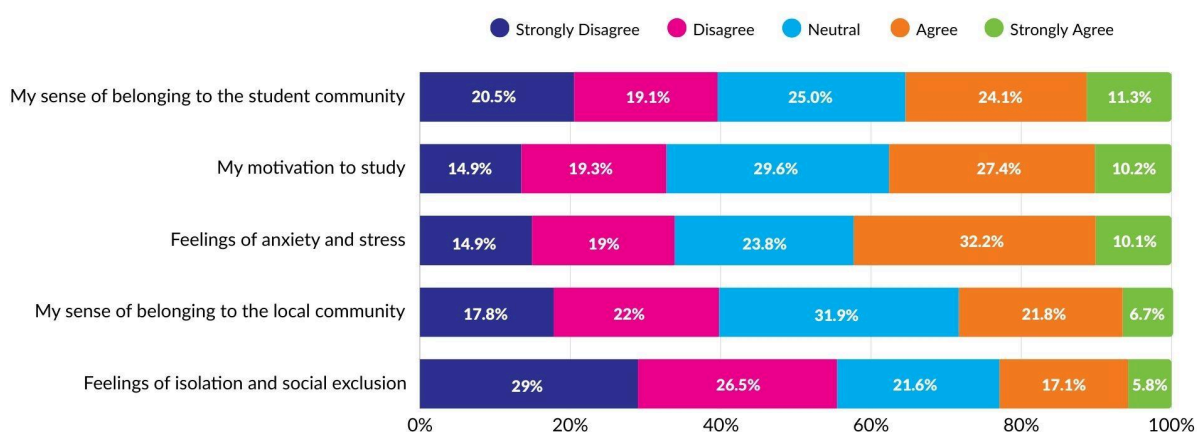


Figure 14: Impact of the issues experienced while abroad (general sample, N = 14,478)

### 2.4.3. Satisfaction with the Sending and Hosting Institutions

Regarding the services offered by HEIs, it is important to highlight that students participating in Erasmus+ continue to be considerably satisfied with the services and support provided by both the hosting ( $n = 14,483$ ) and sending institutions ( $N = 14,495$ ). However, satisfaction with both hosting and sending HEIs has shown a decline compared to the previous XIV ESN survey (ESN, 2021) and the last programme edition. In that survey, only 3.9% of respondents expressed being very dissatisfied with their sending institutions, while this figure has risen to 5.7% in the current survey. Additionally, it is noteworthy that a greater number of respondents now remain neutral about their sending institution, with the percentage increasing from 17.4% to 20.52%. 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 45.31%. However, the rate of those being very satisfied has decreased from 27.4% to 18.57%.



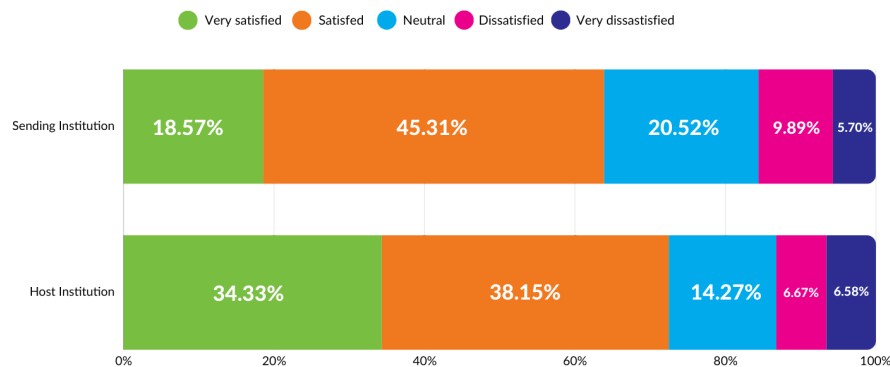


Figure 15: Percentages of the overall satisfaction with the services provided by the Sending ( $N = 14,489$ ) and Hosting Institutions ( $N = 14,477$ )

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 6.58% in the 2023 survey. The dissatisfaction rate has also increased from 5.1% to 6.67%. Neutral responses have seen an increase from 9.4% to 14.27%, while the satisfaction rate remains largely unchanged. The number of students stating they are very satisfied has decreased from 43.6% to 34.33%.

The return after the COVID-19 pandemic and difficulties in implementing grant payments during the academic year of 2021-2022 may explain students' dissatisfaction with institutional services. Additionally, the growing housing crisis, as outlined in [ESN and ESU's report](#), could be another contributing factor.

However, the introduction of new initiatives, such as the European Universities, may have diverted some necessary attention away from improving mobility services. Addressing this issue is crucial, as it will not only benefit mobile students but also enhance the entire student population's experience by creating a more internationally focused Higher Education environment.



#### 2.4.4. Funding of the Mobility Period

Considering that the main problem identified by the students is “Insufficient money to cover my cost of living” (35.63%), it is important to understand how much students are funded for their mobility experiences (N=12,732). Figure 17 illustrates the total cost covered by the scholarship for exchange students, divided into five categories. Upon analysis, the following observations are made: approximately 34.79% of students can cover between 25% and 50% of their mobility expenses, with the programme covering the rest. Around 25.38% of students have between 50% and 75% of their costs covered by the programme. 15.28% of students receive extensive financial support, with between 75% and 100% of their costs covered by the programme. 17.23% of respondents receive less than 25% of their costs covered by the scholarship. The final report of the ESNsurvey, will aim to compare these five categories with the programme countries in order to identify which ones offer the most financial support to international students.

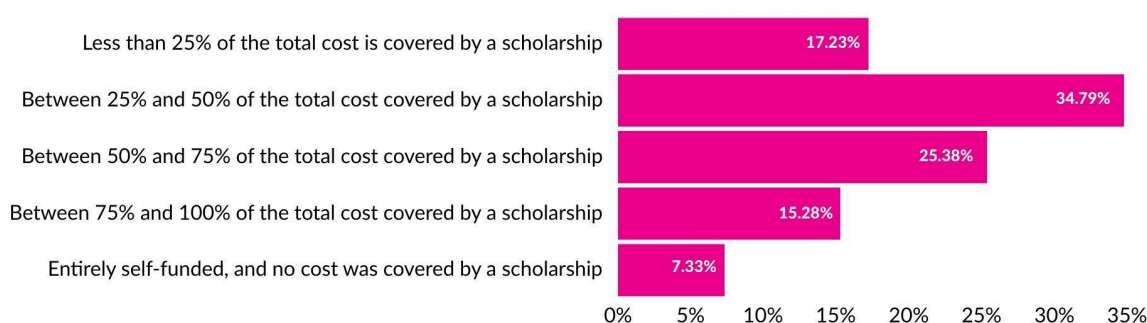


Figure 16: Funding of the total cost of mobility for exchange students (N = 12,721)

#### 2.4.5. Timing of the Grants

Ensuring that the grants are received before the beginning of the mobility experience is fundamental to facilitating the participation of students (N= 11,765). Despite the visible efforts made to improve the timing of the grant payments. When compared to the findings of the previous ESNsurvey, it becomes evident that more students are now receiving grants within 30 days after their arrival, with an increase from 32.92% to 36.84%. However, it is worth noting that fewer students are receiving grants more than 30 days after their arrival, with a decrease from 32.92% to 25.9%. Additionally, more students are receiving grants prior to their

departure, marking an increase from 32.92% to 37.26%. In this way, it is visible that ongoing efforts are showing positive results, although there is still more to be done to ensure that all students receive their grants on time.

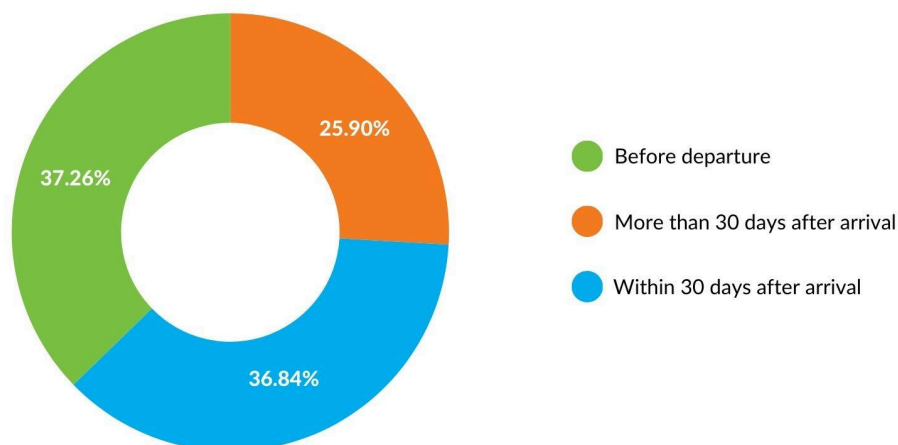


Figure 17: Timing of receiving the scholarships for exchange Students (N = 11,757)

Furthermore, it is essential to acknowledge that national differences play an important role, as countries like Spain (67%) 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 in these countries 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 program shows that changes in administration at the national and institutional levels can improve the situation.

#### 2.4.6. Scholarship per Month

The results indicate that the average grant amount has increased significantly, now standing at nearly €100 more than what was reported in the Erasmus+ Annual Report 2020 (i.e., €374): €468 (European Commission, 2020). This increase can be attributed to the implementation of top-ups and grant increases by national agencies, which represent 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.

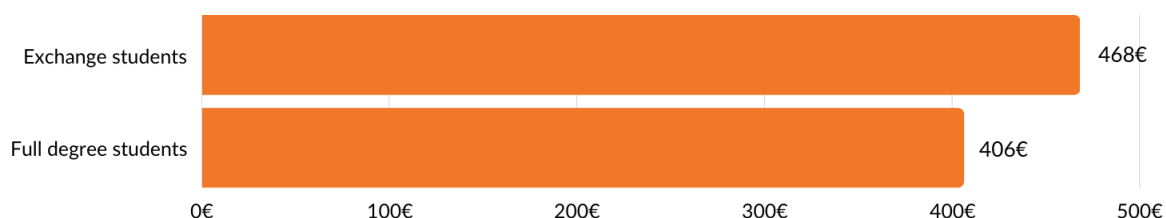


Figure 18: Monthly scholarship allocation of exchange students (N = 11,162)

Countries in South-Western Europe tend to have grant levels that approach the minimum, while Central and Eastern European countries, both in the northern and southern regions, typically enjoy higher grant levels. It is imperative that decisions regarding national grant levels involve consultation with student organisations and other relevant stakeholders, taking into account various trade-offs and providing transparent assessments of factors like national co-financing of the programme. This transparency and collaboration should be established during the current programming period, with information on different grant levels and the decision-making process made publicly available at the European level.

### 2.4.7. Top-Ups

Grant top-ups represent a highly welcomed improvement, offering additional financial support to students and broadening access to mobility experiences. These top-ups not only enhance mobility but also foster greater participation among students who may have fewer opportunities to engage in such opportunities, thus significantly improving the overall mobility experience for all.

Firstly, it is important to highlight that the top-up for students with fewer opportunities has had a noteworthy impact, with 9.55% of students reporting that they have received one. When comparing this with the question “Erasmus+ programme is inclusive of students from different backgrounds”, participants who have received the top-up, 34% agree, and 47% strongly agree, indicating a positive response to this initiative, which aligns with ESN's endorsement and strong recommendation for its reinforcement. 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.

As for the Green top-up (9.56%), as previously analysed in preferred means of transportation used by students, it appears not to have led to a substantial increase in the use of sustainable means of travel among mobility students.

It is crucial to highlight that 14.09% of respondents (N=12,239) reported not knowing whether they had received top-ups or not. This underscores the importance of providing clear financial information and effectively informing students about the new initiatives introduced under Erasmus+ to ensure that they can fully benefit from these opportunities.

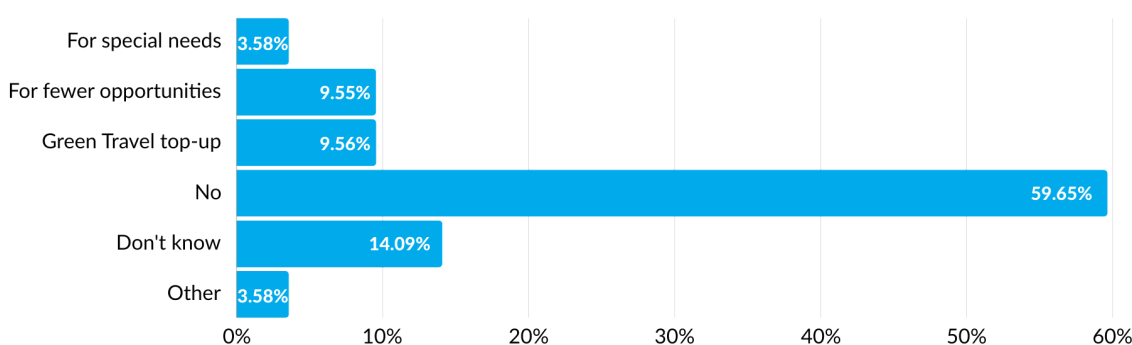


Figure 19: Top-up grants received by exchange Students (N = 12,233)

#### 2.4.8. Digital Tools Used on Mobility

The introduction of digitalisation as a priority within Erasmus+ has been a significant and positively received innovation in the new programme. This advancement is designed to simplify administrative processes and make procedures more efficient, thereby reducing potential barriers that might deter students from participating in mobility opportunities. The results from the qualitative section of the survey reveal that students who did not have access

to online procedures expressed dissatisfaction with the administration of their mobility experience.

While analysing the data, it is perceived that the implementation of the Online Learning Agreement (44.14%) has been the most successful, and the Erasmus+ App is the one facing the most necessary strengthening. It is crucial to prioritise and focus on further enhancing the digitalisation of procedures, with specific attention given to improving the Erasmus+ App. ESN has advocated for a stronger engagement component in the rollout of the Erasmus+ App and for the use of the tool to ensure the programme's development.

Additionally, it is also important to highlight, in terms of credit recognition, the development of effective solutions for these procedures online, addressing the challenges students encounter in relation to academic courses. This commitment to digital transformation has the potential to greatly improve the overall experience of Erasmus+ participants and contribute to the continued success of the programme.

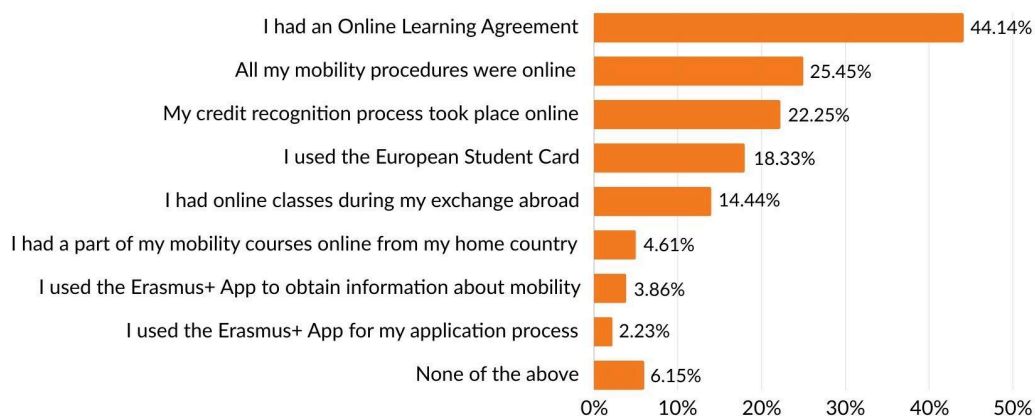


Figure 20: Digital tools used as part of the Erasmus+ journey, percentage (N = 14.743)

## 2.5. After Mobility

### 2.5.1. Recognition of Credits

While choosing their mobility destination, students consider “Matching courses which can be recognised by my home institution” (66%) as a key factor for their decision, making recognition the second most important factor, only behind the affordability of the hosting city (Figure 9).



In this context, it is crucial to dive deep into our understanding of this issue. The chart below (i.e., Figure 22) illustrates the recognition process that exchange students undergo during their mobility period. Initially, students have an average of 33 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) in their Learning Agreements. Upon arrival at the host university, students typically need to make an average adjustment of 14 ECTS. On average, students successfully complete and receive credit for 30 ECTS, indicating that they usually pass all their courses during their mobility. Upon returning to their home university, the average number of recognised credits is 28 ECTS. This represents a difference of -2 credits on average, but the majority of courses taken during their exchange period are recognised.

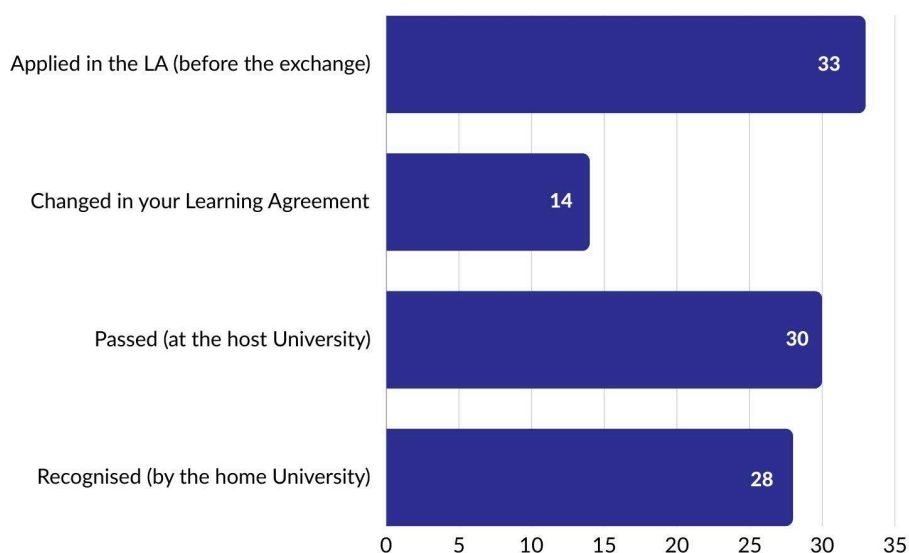


Figure 21: Recognition of learnings abroad, the credits taken compared with the credits recognised (N = 6,620)

While we will further analyse these results in the final report and provide clarity on the regional differences on this matter, it is important to note that 42% of the respondents revealed that their courses needed to be changed during the exchange. This underscores the ongoing need to ensure automatic credit recognition for exchange students and reinforces the objectives set by the [Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of](#)

[higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad.](#)

Even though, on average, 28 credits are recognised, it is important to highlight that 2.6% of the survey respondents did not get any of their credits recognised upon their return to their home university.

The examination of the qualitative data from the ESN survey provided a better understanding of the structural problems related to this issue. These problems include a lack of flexibility in degree programs, 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.

In the same perspective, as highlighted in ESN's Contribution to the new Learning Mobility Framework (Kalinova, N., Bo, M., Ljubičić, I., & Rayón González, J., 2023), after the evaluation of the Council Recommendation on automatic credit recognition of qualifications and learning period abroad (Council of the European Union, 2018), there is the perception that the ECTS is widely used around Europe, but not always in a consistent way. Although this falls under the Member States' competencies, it is key for the establishment of a European Education Area by 2025 and highly relevant to the success of learners' mobility within the Erasmus+ programme.

In order to provide more details on the matter, especially in terms of differences between countries and regions, a more detailed analysis will be provided during the final report, with a comprehensive understanding of these variations.

### **2.5.1. Skills Improved During Exchange**

In the light of the European Year of Skills, mobile students were asked which skills they developed the most during their mobility experience. Based on 14,489 responses, the top 5 skills were Language skills (86.22%), Communication skills (75.86%), Open-Mindedness skills (74.76%), Social skills (69.27%), and Adaptability to Change (67.46%).



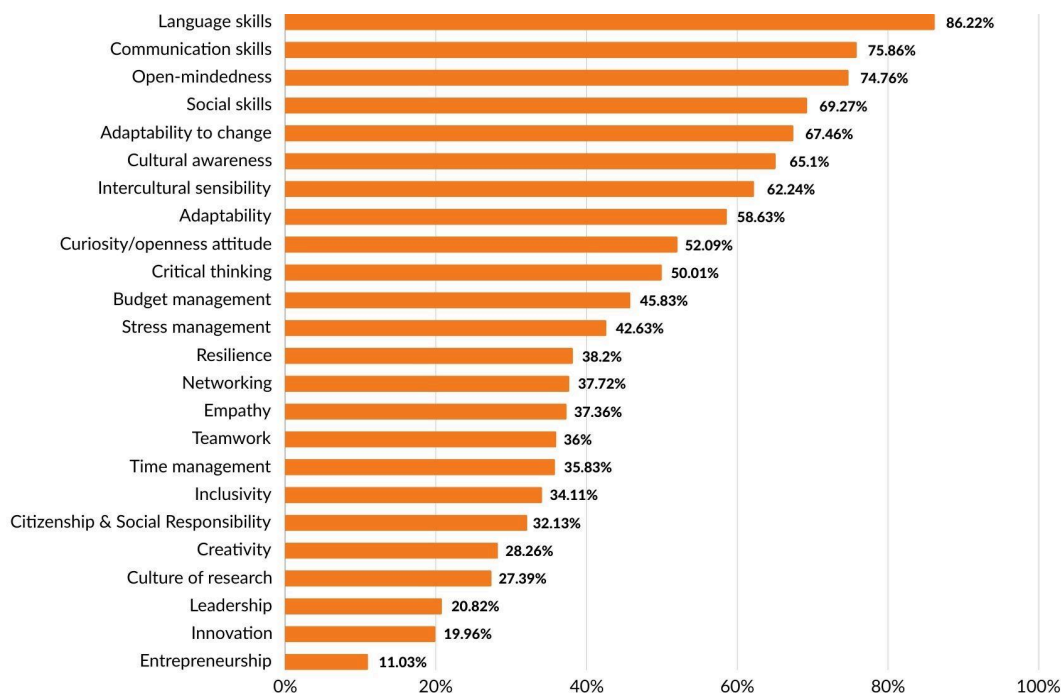


Figure 22: Relative frequency of skills improved during the exchange, percentage (general sample,  $N = 14,489$ )

In this context, the success of the Erasmus+ programme priorities, such as facilitating language acquisition abroad and promoting intercultural awareness, is undeniably evident. Erasmus+ serves as a powerful catalyst, presenting individuals with invaluable opportunities to not only elevate their language proficiencies but also to enhance their aptitude for effective communication with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Beyond the expected educational and professional growth, Erasmus+ plays a pivotal role in fostering profound personal development, enriching the lives of its participants on multiple dimensions.

### 3. Full Degree Students

#### 3.1. Motivations to Study Abroad

In the case of full-degree students, it is important to recognise that their motivations for studying abroad differ somewhat from those of exchange students. The primary motivation for full-degree students is to enhance their future career prospects, with a substantial 72.32% citing this as their foremost objective for pursuing studies abroad. Engaging with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (70.69%) remains a popular motivation among full-degree students, closely followed by the desire to experience different learning environments (65.93%). Notably, the least frequently chosen motivation factor for studying abroad is "to improve my academic performance," selected by 46.89% of respondents. This insight provides valuable understanding into the distinct aspirations and goals of full-degree students pursuing education abroad.

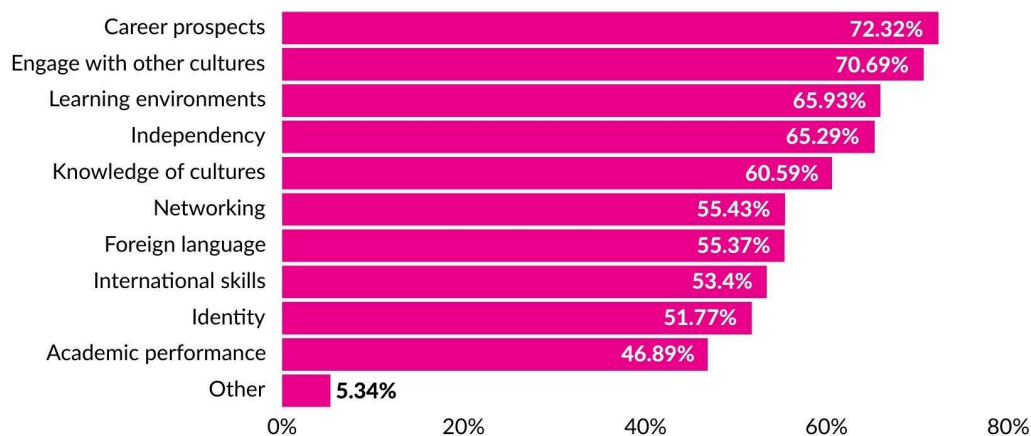


Figure 23: Relative frequency of important motivations selected by full-degree students (N = 1,723)



### 3.2. Pre-Departure Support

Similar to the responses from exchange students, full-degree students have also expressed in their highest priorities regarding pre-departure support ( $N = 8,696$ ) the importance of receiving information. Among them, "information about financial support available" stands out as the top priority, with a significant 75% of respondents emphasising its importance. Following closely behind is "information on the programme available" and "hearing from students who have studied abroad," both of which are considered vital by 61% of the respondents. The value of peer-to-peer support is also evident, with 61% of respondents expressing a desire to hear from students who have already experienced studying abroad.

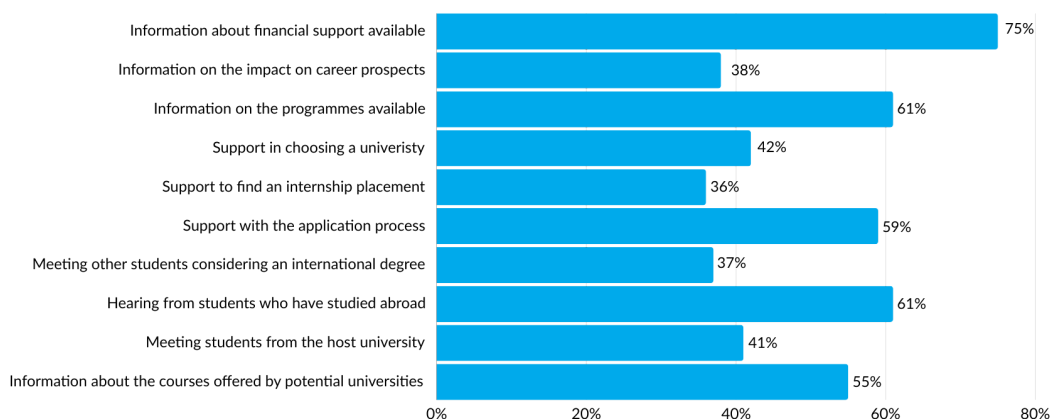


Figure 24: Relative frequency of the factors related to the importance of types of pre-departure support ( $N = 8,696$ )

On the other hand, some other aspects have received lower scores, such as "information on the impact on career prospects," with 38% of respondents. "Meeting other students considering an international degree" and "support to find an internship placement" are also seen as somewhat less critical, with 37% and 36% of respondents considering them important, respectively.

### 3.3. Challenges Faced by the Students

This graph provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by full-degree students during their international experiences ( $N = 1,727$ ). It is evident that they encounter both common and distinct issues compared to exchange students.

One significant challenge faced by full-degree students is finding affordable accommodation, with 43.54% highlighting this as their primary concern. Following closely is the absence of family and friends (36.94%), which can be attributed to the longer duration of their mobility experiences, making connections and support networks even more critical.

Difficulties in connecting with the local community are also prominently featured as the third most common issue, with 36.60% of respondents facing this challenge. What's interesting to note is that full-degree students express lower satisfaction levels (32%) with the welcome and orientation events and initiatives provided by the host institution compared to exchange students (46%). ESN recognises these events as crucial for fostering integration and community engagement.

Another notable finding is that full-degree students encounter more difficulties with administrative processes (21.71%) compared to exchange students (10.98%). This indicates the need for improved support and guidance in navigating administrative aspects related to studying abroad.

Although problems with courses remain a concern for full-degree students, with a decrease from 21.71% to 10.98% to 21.71% compared to exchange students.



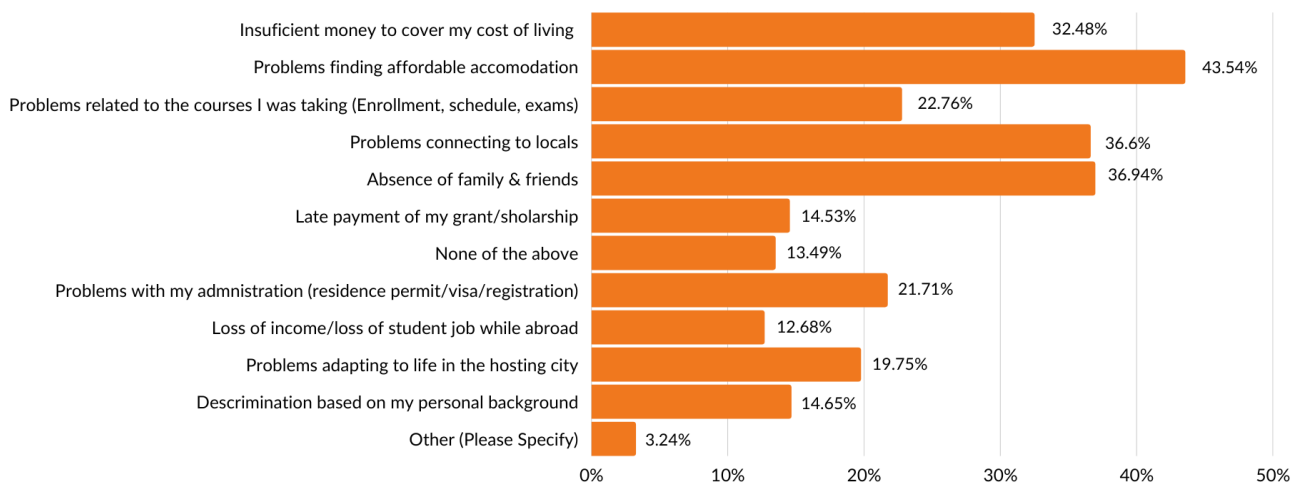


Figure 25: Issues encountered during the stay abroad by full-degree students (general sample, N = 1,727)

### 3.4. Funding of the Full-Degree Period

Considering that full-degree students (N= 1,681) are not supported by Erasmus+ grants, it is relevant to explore how they fund their mobility abroad. A closer examination of Figure 26 reveals that 38.9% of respondents reported that their international experience was self-funded, although 21.8% of respondents stated that they received funding covering 75% to 100% of their expenses, highlighting a notable disparity in funding opportunities among full-degree students.

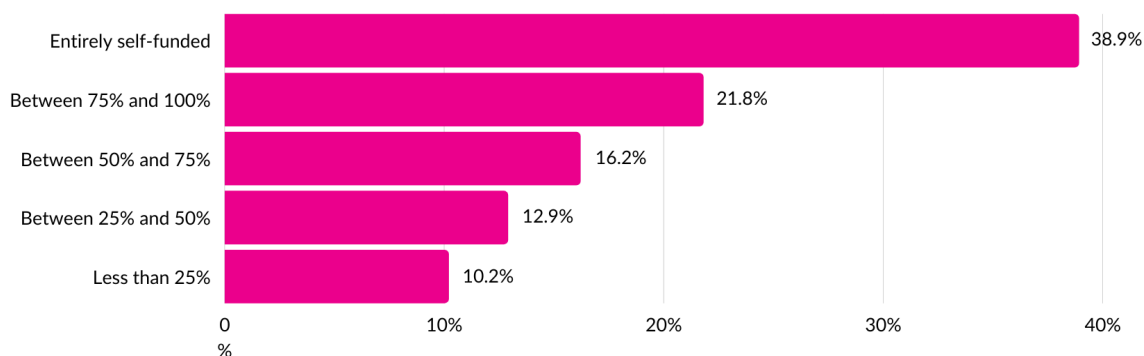


Figure 26: Funding of the total cost of mobility for exchange students (N= 1,681)

When comparing these results with the sources of funding of exchange students (N=1,681), using a Likert scale from 1-5, where one is the higher and five the lower, 3.88% of the average of the respondents obtained a job during their mobility experience, and 3.32% had a job before their mobility. Only 1.74% of students are using family contributions.

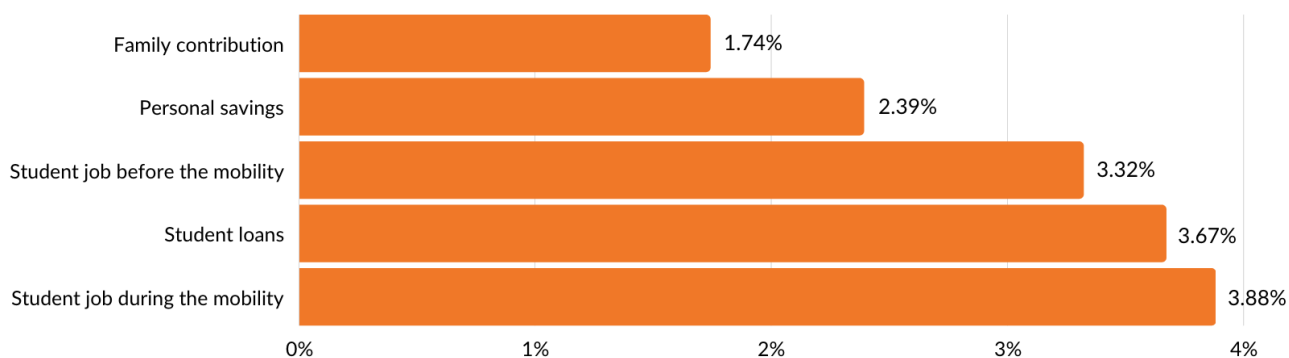


Figure 27: Another source of funding used by full-degree students (N = 1,681)



In the final report, it would be valuable to cross-compare these two analyses to gain a deeper understanding of how full-degree students ensure their financial sustainability during their experiences aboard.

### 3.5. Recognition of Credits

On the topic of Recognition of Credits, it is interesting to understand the difficulties still faced by full-degree students in getting their credits recognised (N=1,693). Specifically, regarding the automatic recognition of credits abroad, approximately 25% of respondents reported that the credit recognition process took less than 1 month, while 24% indicated it took between 1 to 3 months. A smaller percentage (5%) experienced delays of 3 to 5 months, and 4% faced even longer delays of over 6 months. In total, a significant 58% of full-degree respondents did not have their credits automatically recognised, indicating the need for further improvements in this area. ESN believes that automatic credit recognition should be ensured for all mobile students, and measures at the national level should be implemented to make this possible for all students.

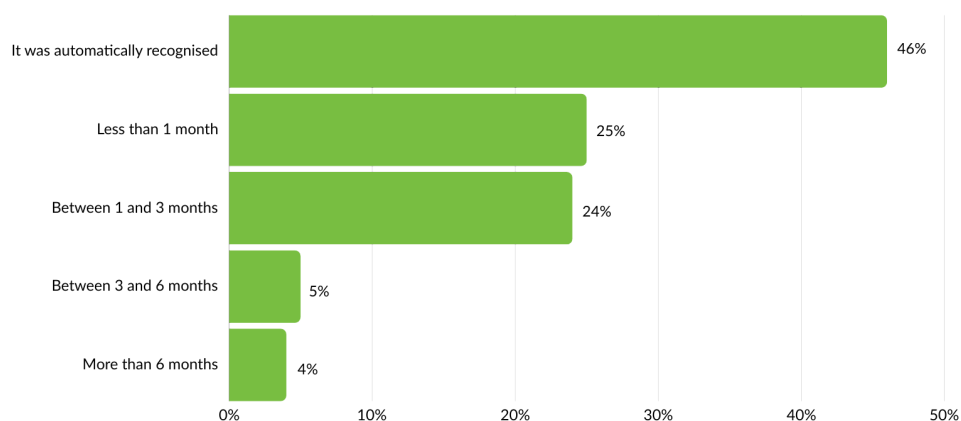


Figure 28: Timing needed for the recognition of qualifications in order to access the current degree abroad (N = 1,693)

On another note, about difficulties in the recognition of diplomas after mobility (n=1,675). Only (6%) reported difficulties in their own country, while 7% encountered recognition challenges in a different country, and 24% have not yet pursued degree recognition. In this way, a substantial 45% of respondents did not encounter any difficulties with degree recognition. This suggests positive progress and good news considering the feature measures being taken into place for the implementation of the European Degree pilot project.

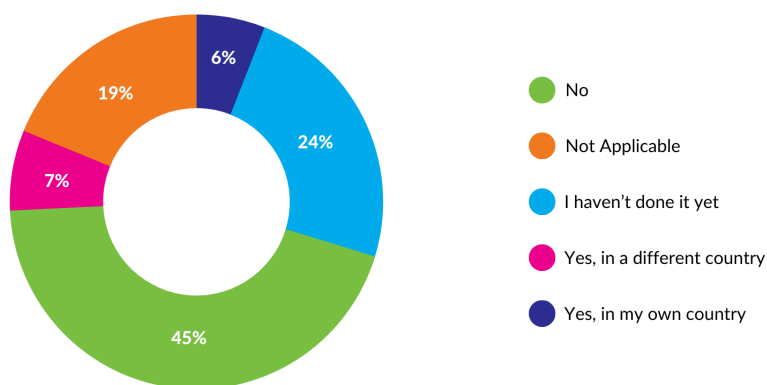


Figure 29: Frequency of Issues with Credit Recognition (N = 1,675)

Participants who faced difficulties were asked which problems they were facing. 70% hadn't encountered any difficulties, 14% had problems with administration and procedures, 7% had high administration costs, 6% the degree did not meet all the conditions, and 4% their degree did not exist in other countries.

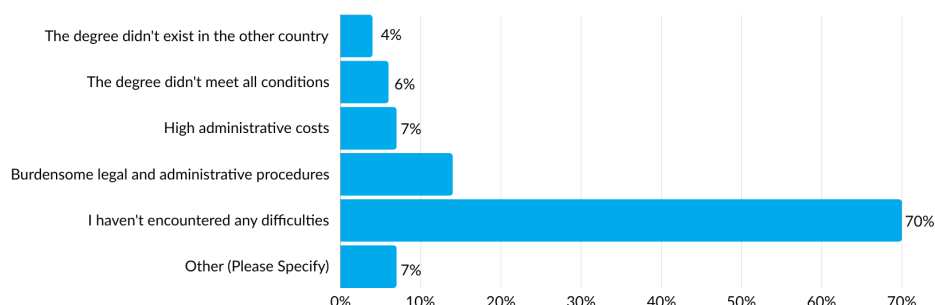


Figure 30: Difficulties encountered in degree recognition (N = 1,545)



These findings underscore the importance of continuing efforts to streamline credit and degree recognition processes for full-degree students, ensuring a more accessible and seamless international education experience.





## 4. Non-Mobile Students

### 4.1. Motivational Factors to Go Abroad

The motivation factors for going abroad among students are quite similar across the various target audiences, including non-mobile students. The key motivation factors include learning and improving a foreign language (72%), gaining knowledge of another culture (69%), and engaging with people from different cultural backgrounds (69%). While improving academic performance is the least chosen option among non-mobile students, it still motivates 46% of respondents to study abroad.

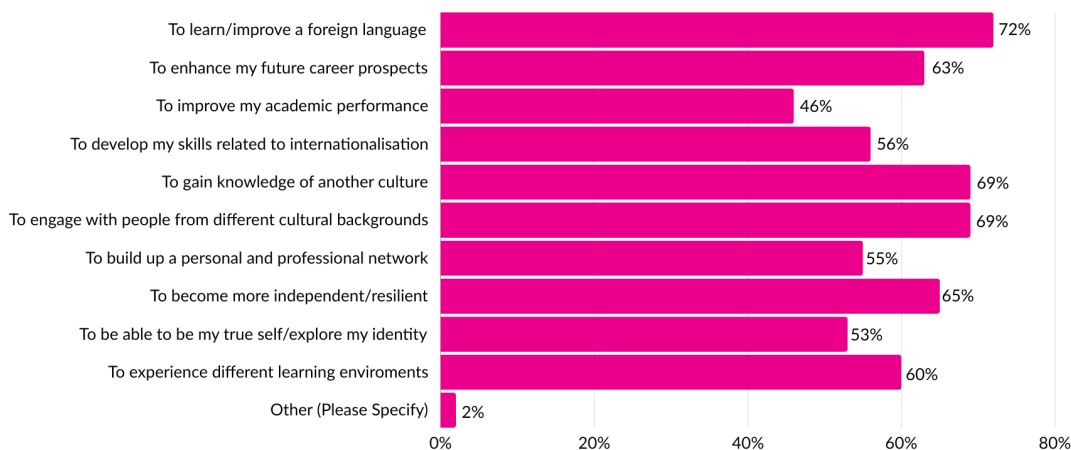


Figure 31: Relative frequency of important motivations selected by exchange students (N = 2,678)

Additionally, while analysing the scenarios chosen by students that could have encouraged them to embark on their mobility journeys, 41% agree, and 43% strongly agree on the importance of providing more information on the programmes available. Furthermore, 37% agreed, and 43% strongly agreed that “hearing from students who have been abroad” would encourage them to participate in mobility. It is important to note that the Erasmus+ regulation highlights the role of Erasmus+ alumni in the promotion of the programme. Unfortunately, there have been very few developments on tangible measures to support these initiatives. ESN considers that new measures funded by the programme, such as an established funding

mechanism distributed by NAs to national and local student and alumni organisations, could increase access to mobility.

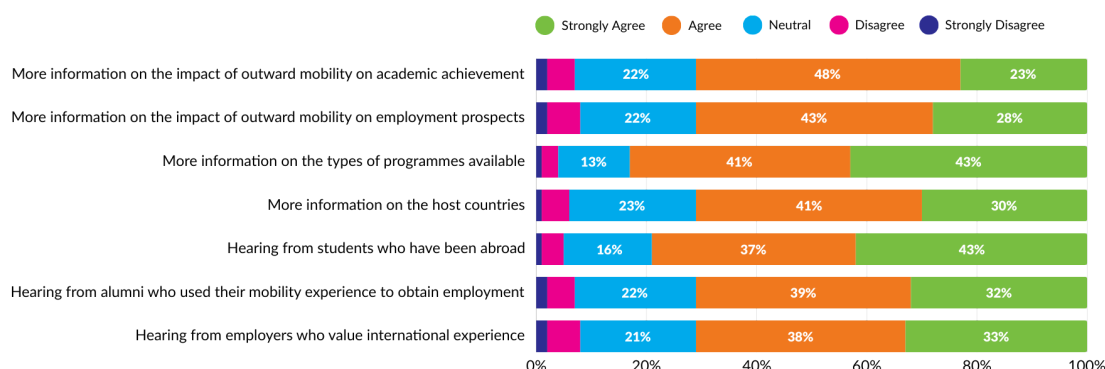


Figure 32: Encouragement Factors To Go Abroad (N = 2,578)

## 4.2. Initiatives from the European Union

When non-mobile enquired about students and their awareness of various EU initiatives, it became evident that Erasmus+ for studies remains the most well-known, with a remarkable 95.53%. This was followed by Erasmus+ Traineeships, acknowledged by 58.08% of respondents, and the International Credit Mobility programme, recognised by 34.99%.

Regrettably, initiatives such as Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters (27.02%), European Solidarity Corps (18.47%), European Universities Alliances (17.57%), and the Blended Intensive Programme (8.84%) appear to be underrepresented in the awareness of higher education students. The implementation of more comprehensive information among higher education students is necessary.

It is important to note that both European Universities Alliances and the Blended Intensive Programme are relatively recent additions to the Erasmus+ programme, and their growth and recognition may evolve in subsequent programme years. It is necessary to continue evaluating their growth in the next editions of the ESNsurvey in order to ensure these initiatives reach their full potential in benefiting higher education students.

To complement, it is important to address [ESNs' Contribution to the new Learning Mobility Framework](#), and the complementary data on the last Eurobarometer, “Youth and Democracy in the European Year of Youth”, considering that one in five young people is not aware any EU-funded opportunity to stay aboard, and regional and local levels are even less prone to receive any information and guidance on learning mobility and grant availability (Eurobarometer, 2022).

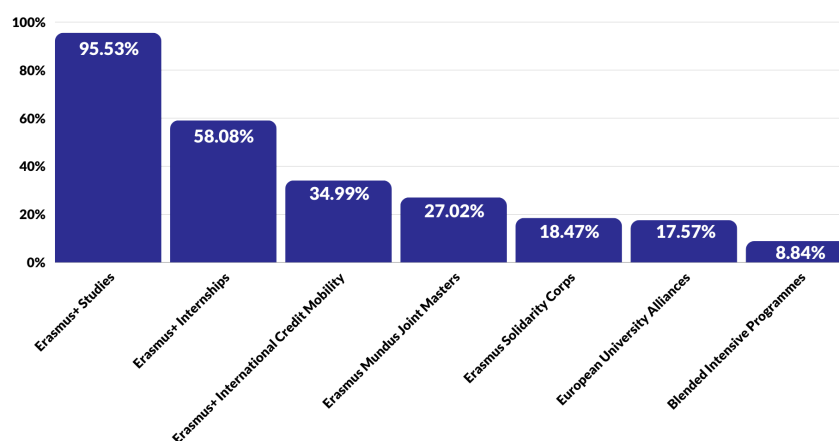


Figure 33: Relative frequency of the knowledge about the EU initiatives (N = 2,772)

### 4.3. Funding of the Mobility Period

In our analysis, it is equally crucial to comprehend the funding opportunities of our non-mobile students who aspire to participate in mobility programmes (N=2,830). The results reveal a diverse range of financial needs. Approximately 33% of respondents indicate a requirement for funding that covers between 50% and 75% of their total mobility costs. Following closely, 31% express the need for substantial support, seeking funding that covers between 75% and 100% of their expenses. About 24% need funding to cover between 25% and 50% of their mobility expenses. A smaller group, comprising 7% of respondents, anticipate needing less than 25% of their total costs covered to embark on their mobility journey. Encouragingly, 5% of respondents report being entirely funded for their upcoming mobility opportunities.

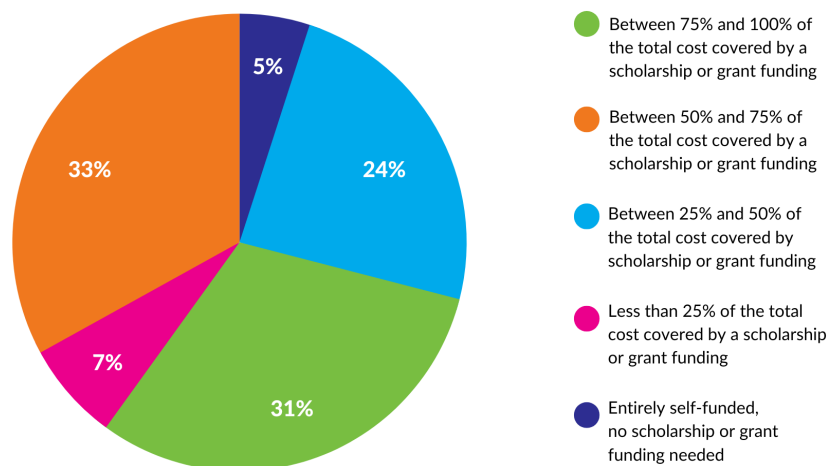


Figure 34: Required Level of Funding for Mobility Period Abroad (N = 2,830)

#### 4.5. Barriers to Participate in Mobility

Understanding the challenges that hinder non-mobile students from participating in international student mobility programmes is pivotal for fostering inclusivity in the internationalisation of higher education. Among these non-mobile respondents (N = 3,064) are both students who have the intention to partake in some type of international mobility in the coming years (N = 2,333) and students who do not (yet) have the intention to go on mobility (n = 449). Another part of the respondents did not indicate whether they had this intention or not (n = 282). In what follows, an elaboration will be made on each of the barriers encountered by non-mobile students.

The findings show that institutional barriers, such as those described in the [SIEM research report](#), are the biggest barrier to mobility. Financial constraints emerge as the main barrier to participating in student mobility, with an average score of 3.96. The data underscore the pronounced impact of tuition fees, living expenses, and travel costs as obstacles that influence non-mobile students' contemplation of joining mobility initiatives. Language-related challenges, encompassing difficulties in communication in the host country's language, manifest as moderate barriers with an average score of 2.71. Cultural differences are, on average (M = 2.11), not perceived as a main barrier to participation in international mobility.

Last, lack of access to support mechanisms, encompassing academic materials and services in the host country, is indicated as a barrier with an average score of 3.04. Ensuring comprehensive and readily available resources for students' academic journey abroad assumes significance in alleviating this concern. Addressing financial concerns through accessible scholarships, grants, or financial aid becomes a crucial avenue for widening participation.

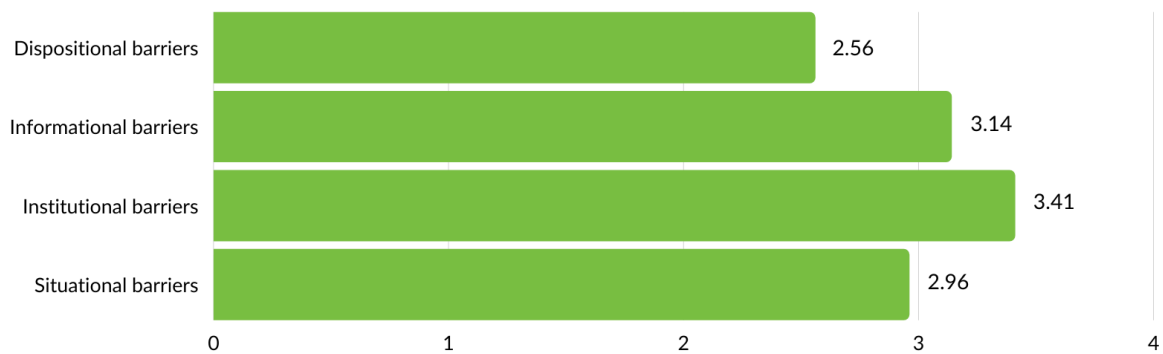


Figure 35: Barriers To Potential Participation in Exchanges (N = 3,064)



## 5. Participation in Mobility as a Reinforcer of European Identity

### 5.1. Before and After Mobility – Identity of Erasmus+ Students' Citizenship

Considering that the Erasmus+ Programme aims to promote European identity, the exchange students were surveyed on their perception of their identity before and after their mobility experiences.

Before embarking on their mobility journey, 37% of ESNsurvey participants identified strongly with their hometown/city, region, and country. Simultaneously, 37% felt like citizens of the world, 38% considered themselves citizens of Europe, and 35% felt connected to the European Union.

Upon returning from their mobility experiences, these identity perceptions have shifted. While 32% reported agreeing with being citizens of their hometowns/regions, a notable 40% strongly agreed with being citizens of their own countries. Furthermore, a substantial 48% strongly agreed with feeling like citizens of the world, 50% identified strongly as citizens of Europe, and 47% strongly associated themselves with the European Union.

Of particular significance is the increase in the sense of being citizens of Europe and the European Union when compared to previous surveys. In 2021, only 33.05% strongly agreed with being citizens of Europe, increasing to 50% in the current ESNsurvey edition. Similarly, the percentage of those strongly agreeing with a sense of belonging to the European Union has risen from 33% in the past to the current 47%.



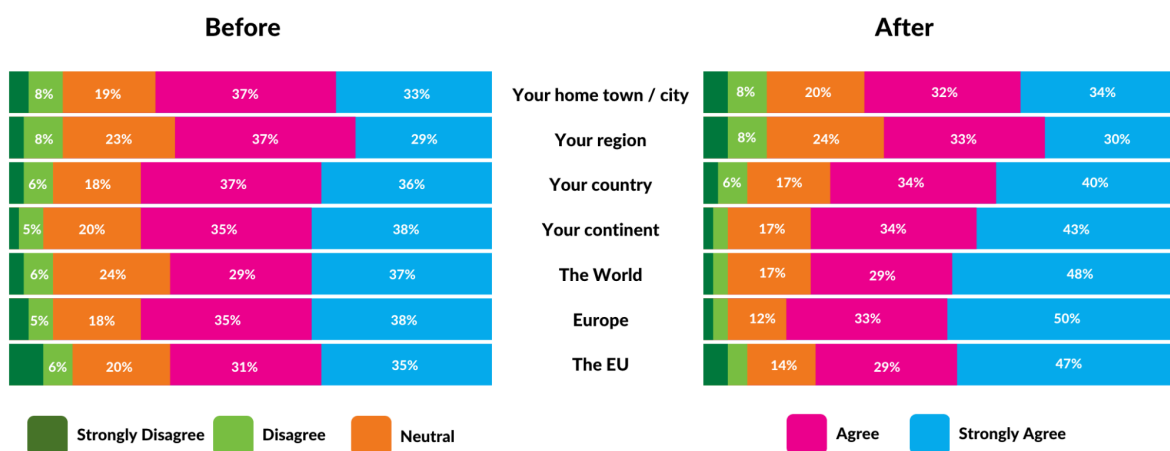


Figure 36: Comparison between the feelings towards citizenship before and after going abroad (N = 11038 to N = 11539 and N = 10908 to N = 11285)

These findings underscore the transformative power of mobility experiences, which not only broaden horizons and enrich personal growth but also foster a stronger sense of European identity and unity among participants.

## 5.2. European Parliament Elections 2024

As the European Parliament Elections approach, our exchange students were surveyed on their motivations to vote in the near-term European Parliament elections (N=11,260). After analysing the results, 76% are motivated to do so, with 45% being extremely likely and 31% likely to vote. Notably, 13% remain undecided. It is worth highlighting that ESN, under the [EGiA \(Erasmus Generation in Action\) Project](#), will support mobile voters abroad in understanding their voting rights and processes. This initiative aims to empower Erasmus students to actively participate in the democratic process and ensure their voices are heard in the European Parliament elections.



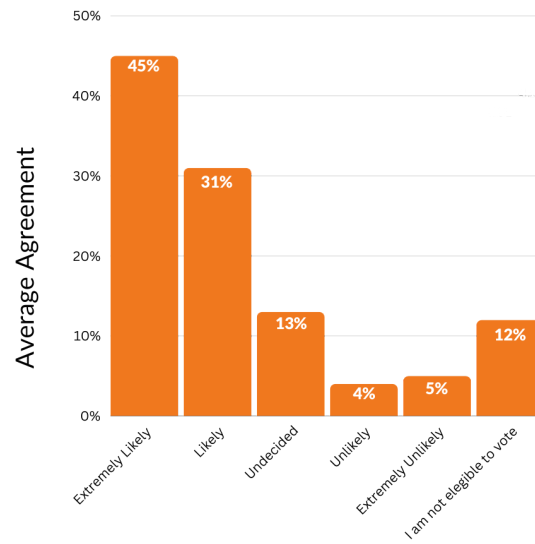


Figure 37: Voting intention of mobile students in the next EU elections (N = 11,252)



## 6. First Conclusions

Under the theme of *making mobility a reality for all*, the XV ESNsurvey draws our attention to the student perspective on international mobility. This first analysis of the results intended to assess the key points for making international mobility more accessible and impactful while focusing on topics such as the priorities of the programme, the support given by the HEIs, the funding mechanisms, the automatic recognition of credits and the European identity of mobile citizens. During this report, we also accessed the first results regarding the full-degree students and understood the motivations and barriers for non-mobile students to go abroad. In the final report, published in December, a more comprehensive analysis is expected, where comparisons with the previous survey editions (and programme editions), other ESN projects, and European policies will also be highlighted.

Taking this into account, these are the first conclusions taken by the XV ESNsurvey:

- **Mobile students**
  - **Priorities of the Erasmus+ Programme:** the student's perspective on programme inclusion has increased, particularly when facing inclusion top-ups. In fact, an average of 46% of respondents strongly agreed that the inclusion measures are being well implemented by the Erasmus+ programme;
  - **Pre-departure support:** access to information is crucial for students: 15.37% of the respondents asked for more financial support in the pre-departure moment;
  - **Means of transport used during mobility:** flying is still the most popular means of transportation to arrive at the mobility destination, with 71.04% and 70.05% of the respondents using it as the method of transport to arrive and depart from mobility. Although it is important to highlight that the bus is the preferred method for trips during mobility;
  - **Challenges faced by the students:** the XV ESNsurvey's findings show significant similarities to the XIV ESNsurvey, where lack of funding, problems finding affordable accommodation and difficulties with matching courses are reported as the main problems faced by students.

- **Satisfaction with hosting and sending universities:** students are reportedly satisfied with the services provided by the HEIs, although by comparing to the previous XVI ESNsurvey, the percentage of dissatisfaction has increased both with the sending and hosting institutions.
- **Timely payment of the grants:** by comparing with previous data, it is clear that more students are now obtaining grants on time, with an increase from 32.92% to 36.84%. Although, there are necessary improvements to be made in order to continuously support the students.
- **Digitalisation:** students who did not have access to online processes were dissatisfied with the administration of their mobility experience.
- **Recognition of credits:** it is important to highlight that 42% of students reported courses to be changed during the exchange. This emphasises the continuous need to maintain automatic credit recognition for exchange students.
- **Full-degree students**
  - **Funding of the experience aboard:** 38.9% of respondents self-funded their international experience, while 21.8% claimed that funding for 75% to 100% of their expenses was actually provided to them. This distinction emphasises an important gap in funding opportunities among full-degree students;
  - **Recognition of credits:** significantly more than 45% of respondents said they face difficulties getting their degrees recognised. However, it is important to highlight that 46% of respondents did not encounter any difficulties with degree recognition after mobility.
- **Non-mobile students**
  - **Motivations to participate in mobility:** similar to the other target audiences, 37% and 43%, respectively, of non-mobile students agreed and strongly agreed that "hearing from students who have been abroad" would motivate them to take the step and participate in mobility abroad.
  - **Knowledge of the Erasmus+ initiatives:** it became clear that Erasmus+ for studies remains the most well-known, with a staggering 95.53%. The International Credit Mobility program and Erasmus+ Traineeships, both

identified by 58.08% and 34.99% of respondents, respectively, came next. However, programmes like the Blended Intensive Programme (8.84%) and the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters (27.02%, 18.47%, and 17.57%, respectively, tend to be underrepresented in the understanding of higher education students.

- **Barriers to participation in mobility:** financial restrictions appear to be the biggest obstacle to participation in student mobility.
  
- **Students as multipliers of European values**
  - **Identity before and after the mobility experience:** before the beginning of their mobility adventure, 37% of ESNsurvey participants strongly associated with their hometown/city, region, and nation, while after the mobility, a significant 48% strongly agreed with feeling like global citizens, 50% strongly identified as European citizens, and 47% strongly identified with the European Union.
  - **Intentions to vote in the next European Parliament elections:** mobile students are highly engaged in the European elections, with 66% showing intention to vote, 45% highly likely, and 31% likely.

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