ESNsurvey
XV Edition
Making Quality Mobility a Reality for All

ESNsurvey - 15th Edition: Making Quality Mobility a Reality for All

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PREFACE

The ESNsurvey has been our flagship project for giving a voice to international students. Since its beginning, it has grown into a key tool for understanding the real experiences of students who study abroad, highlighting both the opportunities and challenges they encounter. As mobility programmes have expanded, so has the scope of the ESNsurvey, reflecting the increasing importance of student mobility as a core part of building a more connected and inclusive world.

What makes the ESNsurvey special is that it is a project led by students.From designing the questions to promoting the survey, every edition is powered by the dedication of ESN volunteers. This work is only possible thanks to the support of our many partners, all of whom play a crucial role in helping us reach more students and amplify their voices.

This 15th edition of the ESNsurvey is a milestone, gathering 23,000 responses. This exceptional level of engagement shows how much students across Europe trust ESN to listen to their experiences and advocate for their needs.

For more than 35 years, ESN has been at the heart of the Erasmus Generation, bringing people together through the power of student mobility. We believe that every exchange is an opportunity to build bridges, break down barriers and foster understanding. We are committed to ensuring that every student, no matter their background, has the chance to shape the future of mobility.

The ESNsurvey continues to remind us of what is possible — the friendships, the learning and the growth that comes from stepping outside of comfort zones and connecting with others. We are proud to carry this work forward, with the help of dedicated volunteers and supporters, one survey and one student at a time. Together, we can continue to make a difference and build a future where every student can explore, learn and grow through mobility.

Ana Rita Dias

President of the Erasmus Student Network 2023-2025

KEY FINDINGS

Key Finding 1
Participation in exchange experience abroad before Higher Education
(Figure 15, Page 33)

The majority of the participants of the XV ESNsurvey (51.11%) report that they had some form of international experience before going on exchange during their higher education; compared to 48.89% who did not have such opportunities. The most common pre-higher education experience was short educational trips in high school (23.90%), followed by summer programmes or language programmes (15.60%). These results suggest that shorter international experiences before embarking on mobility can be crucial in building the students' confidence and fostering an international mindset.

Key Finding 2
Duration of the Mobility Experience (Figure 16, Page 35)

The most common mobility duration is five months, chosen by 37.36% of respondents. The majority of participants (68.17%) opt for a period of four to six months, which typically constitutes one academic semester. However, with the introduction of shorter mobility options in this year's edition of the Erasmus+ programme, the new formats are expected to grow in popularity over time. Short-term and hybrid mobility also offer Higher Education Institutions a way to diversify their internationalisation offerings to better suit the needs and interests of their entire student community.

Key Finding 3
Attractors for exchange students and trainees to go abroad
(Figure 25 and 26, Page 46 and 47)

The five main factors influencing students to go on exchange are: *the ability to speak the language of instruction at the destination university* (M = 3.61; SD = 1.38); *the academic reputation of the host institution* (M = 3.56; SD = 1.10); *the affordability of the host city* (M = 3.83; SD = 1.04); *the availability of courses that can be recognised by their home institution; and the opportunity to engage with the local community during courses* (M = 3.79; SD = 1.26).

When comparing participants in exchange programmes to those in traineeships, it appears that traineeship participants place greater importance on *academic reputation* (3.69), *career aspirations* (3.33) and *community engagement* (3.57), whereas exchange students value *course recognition* (3.85) more highly.

Knowledge of non-mobile students about the EU initiatives

The most well-known initiative is Erasmus+ Studies (95.53%), followed by *Erasmus+ Traineeships* (58.08%) and *Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility* (34.99%). However, awareness of *Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters* (27.02%), *European Solidarity Corps* (18.47%) and the *European University Alliances* (17.57%) is notably low. These findings not only indicate a need to improve the visibility of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters and the European Solidarity Corps, due to their years of existence, but also the recognisability of the European University Alliances, a flagship initiative of the EU in the field of education. Suchfurther promotion will raise awareness of opportunities other than the Erasmus+ Studies, offering unique options for young people interested in studying abroad.

Pre-departure support

When we asked exchange students, 'Which pre-departure support do you find important to receive?', the following factors stood out: *information on financial support* (15.37%), *help with the application process* (12.43%), *details on available programmes* (12.29%), *hearing from previous exchange students* (11.84%) and *information on courses at potential host universities* (10.90%). These results highlight the importance students place on thorough pre-departure information and application support. Additionally, they show the value of peer-to-peer guidance, with alumni playing a crucial role as ambassadors of international mobility, especially within the Erasmus Generation.

Frequency of engagement of exchange students and full-degree students with different groups

The highest levels of engagement from both exchange students and full-degree students were with non-local groups, such as international students from different nationalities (62.5%/55.1%, 'very often') and students from the respondents' home country (35.7%/27.2%, 'very often').
However, full-degree students report more contact with local students and the local community than exchange students. Specifically, full-degree students have 49% interaction with local students and 37.9% with the local community, compared to 39.3% and 34% for exchange students, respectively.

Key Finding 7
Activities in the Local Community or the Host Institution (Figure 44, Page 69)

Notably, over half of the exchange student respondents (53.47%) did not participate in any activities in the local community or host institution. The highest participation rate was in local sports clubs or teams, with 21.78% of participants joining, followed by 15.26% who joined a local student or youth association.
The lowest rate of participation was in part-time student jobs (6.57%).
These results follow a concerning trend already observed in the XIV ESNsurvey and highlight a persistent lack of engagement by international students in the local community.

Key Finding 8
Issues Encountered Abroad and Their Impact
(Figures 46 and 47, Page 72 and 73)

Three main issues reported by the exchange students abroad highlight concerns over insufficient funding to cover living costs, which has now become the top issue for students (35.63%). Close behind, challenges related to finding affordable accommodation have also surged, with 35.5% of students identifying this as a significant issue. Academic difficulties remain a major challenge, with 33.97% of students reporting issues related to their courses.
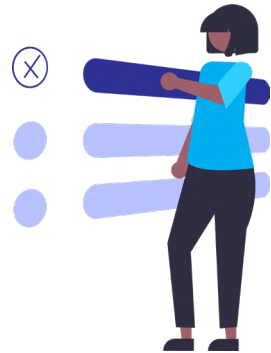
As the current survey results indicate, these difficulties lead to feelings of anxiety and stress for 42.3% of students, reduced motivation to study for 37.6%, and a diminished sense of belonging within the student community for 35.4%.

Key Finding 9
Means of Transportation and Their Influencing Factors (Fig. 50 and 52, Page 78 and 80)

The most preferred mode of transportation for travelling to the mobility destination is by plane, with 71.04% of participants choosing this option, and 70.05% preferring it for their return journey. However, for overnight trips during their mobility period, buses (40.02%) and trains (37.40%) are the preferred choices.
To understand the reasoning behind these choices, we asked students about the factors influencing their decisions. The results showed that the two primary factors were cost (M = 2.23; SD = 1.32) and travel time (M = 2.28; SD = 1.64).

Key Finding 10
Digital tools used as part of the Erasmus+ journey (Figure 53, Page 81)

The highest reported usage is for the Online Learning Agreement(44.14%). However, there still remains room for improvement, as only 22.45% of respondents indicated that their mobility procedures were conducted online and 22.25% reported that the recognition process was handled digitally. Other digital tools included the European Student Card (18.33%), online classes during the exchange (14.44%), courses offered by the host institution while students are at home (4.61%), the Erasmus+ App for obtaining mobility information (3.86%) and the Erasmus+ App for the application process (2.33%).

Key Finding 11
Respect for the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (Figure 59, Page 87)

Students were asked to reflect on their agreement with the responsibilities of higher education institutions, as outlined in the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education. The most positively rated aspect was the requirement for a *learning agreement signed by all parties, with all activities clearly described for outgoing students by both institutions* (M = 3.95, SD = 1.02). Lower-rated aspects included *providing full and accurate information on credit transfer and grade conversion procedures (at both the sending and host institutions)* (M = 3.57, SD = 1.12) and **availability of a clear mechanism to report problems and complaints (both institutions)** (M = 3.51, SD = 1.07).

Key Finding 12
Overall satisfaction with the Sending and Host Institutions (Figure 60, Page 88)

As illustrated in Figure 60, 63.88% of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with their Sending Institution, while 72.48% expressed satisfaction with their Host Institution. Compared to the previous XIV ESNsurvey (2021), these figures represent a noticeable decline in satisfaction levels. Satisfaction with the Sending Institution dropped from 67.25% to 63.88%, and satisfaction with the Host Institution decreased from 82.52% to 72.48%.

Key Finding 13
Timing of Grant Distribution (Figure 65, Page 97)

The data show that 37.26% of students received their scholarship before departure. Additionally, 36.84% received their scholarship within 30 days of arrival, while 25.9% had to wait more than 30 days after arriving to receive their funds. Comparing the results with the previous ESNsurvey from 2021, there has been an improvement in the timely delivery of grants for international students. However, it is important to note that 62.7% of respondents reported receiving their grant after departure, which is less than ideal, and it is imperative to improve this.

Key Finding 14
Credits taken and Credits Recognised (Figure 70, Page 103)

Upon returning to their home university, students had an average of 28 ECTS credits recognised, reflecting a discrepancy of 2 credits from their total earned credits. Notably, while the average recognition rate stands at 28 ECTS, 2.6% of respondents reported that none of their credits were recognised upon their return.

Key Finding 15
Before and After Mobility – Erasmus+ Students' Citizenship (Figure 73, Page 112)

Students who have studied abroad on average report a stronger connection to Europe, increasing from 3.99 (SD = 1.04) to 4.27 (SD = 0.92) and to the world as a whole, rising from 3.91 (SD = 1.07) to 4.16 (SD = 0.99). Notably, there is an increase in their sense of belonging to the EU, which grows from 3.81 (SD = 1.11) to 4.10 (SD = 1.11). There is also a slight increase in their connection to their continent, i.e.,from 4.01 (SD = 0.99) to 4.14 (SD = 0.95), while their sense of belonging to their own country remains rather stable, i.e., 3.99 (SD = 1.00) to 4.01 (SD = 1.05).

INTRODUCTION

The ESNsurvey is a Europe-wide research initiative that explores various aspects of student mobility and the internationalisation of higher education. Established in 2005, it is the largest volunteer-led programme of its kind. This year's edition, titled 'Making quality mobility a reality for all', is the most comprehensive to date, including responses from exchange students, full-degree international students and non-mobile students. This broader scope helps us understand mobility from different perspectives, ensuring a wider range of student experiences is heard.

The 15th edition of the ESNsurvey is particularly significant because it contributes to the mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme (2021-2027) and the first steps to shape the Erasmus+ Programme 2028-2034. By gathering feedback directly from students, the main beneficiaries of the programme, the survey offers valuable insights that will help shape future policies and improvements.
The results provide a clearer picture of how well the Erasmus+ priorities are being implemented, and they play a key role in discussions about the next phase of the programme, ensuring that students' needs are at the centre of its development.

This edition explores key parts of the student journey, including before, during and after mobility. It covers topics such as how students prepare for their exchange, the support they receive, the cost of living and the recognition of their studies abroad. It also focuses on broader themes connected to European higher education, including the priorities of the Erasmus+ Programme, the European Universities Alliances initiative, and efforts to promote inclusion, diversity and digital learning. By looking at both practical issues and personal experiences, the survey highlights what makes a quality mobility experience.

Special attention was given to the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE) and the Erasmus Student Charter, which set the standards for quality in student exchanges. The survey aligns with the ECHE monitoring guide, addressing key areas such as access to information, credit recognition and support services. By tackling these points, the ESNsurvey aims to improve the mobility experience for all students, ensuring that exchanges are well-supported, transparent and beneficial.

The success of the ESNsurvey comes from collaboration across Europe. ESN's local sections, National Organisations and ESN International work together to ensure the survey reaches students from diverse backgrounds. Support from National Agencies, universities and student groups helps us engage a wide audience and get a clear picture of student mobility today.

Over its 18-year history, the ESNsurvey has collected nearly 200,000 responses. The 15th edition achieved a record **23,000 responses**, reflecting exceptional engagement from students across the continent and beyond. The findings are compiled into the ESNsurvey report, which is shared with stakeholders such as the European Commission, National Agencies, HEIs, European University Alliances and other organisations involved in higher education. The report serves two main purposes: exploring issues related to mobility and providing insights that represent the real needs of students as well as helping to inform and shape future policies.

In recent years, the ESNsurvey has covered a range of topics, from student rights and cultural exchange to employment and accessibility. The XIV edition focused on how COVID-19 affected mobility, showing how the pandemic disrupted travel and learning for many students. This edition focuses on **widening participation** and improving the **quality of the mobility experience**.

The ESNsurvey remains a vital tool for stakeholders, including the European Commission, National Agencies and educational institutions. By providing reliable data on student experiences, it supports the continuous enhancement of mobility programmes and ensures that Erasmus+ and other initiatives evolve to better meet the needs of students. As we look towards the future, this edition emphasises the importance of making mobility accessible and beneficial for all, reinforcing the idea that quality mobility is achievable when student voices are at the forefront of policy development.

METHODOLOGY

The ESNsurvey – 15th Edition

The 15th edition of the ESNsurvey was designed to provide comprehensive insights into student mobility across Europe and beyond. Building on previous editions, this survey incorporated recent findings and comparisons with other relevant documents such as the annual reports published by the European Commission. Conducted every two years, the ESNsurvey remains an important tool for tracking trends, challenges and opportunities in student mobility.

This edition maintained a core focus on mobile students, particularly those participating in the Erasmus+ scheme. For the first time, the survey also included responses from other mobility types such as Turing Scheme and SEMP, and the addition of two additional groups: full-degree international students and non-mobile students. These groups were introduced to serve as control groups, allowing for comparative analysis to better understand how the experiences, perceptions and challenges faced by credit mobility students contrast with those of students pursuing degree mobility and those who did not participate in mobility opportunities.

experience • financial management • motivations • funding • mobility background • educational background • local community • support • civic engagement •

MOBILE STUDENTS
NON-MOBILE STUDENTS
FULL-DEGREE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The survey began with questions establishing the mobility background of participants, followed by sections tailored to specific aspects of their experiences. For mobile students, the questionnaire explored their educational background, perceptions and awareness of mobility opportunities and motivations for studying abroad. It also covered pre-departure support, initial guidance and detailed accounts of their experiences during the mobility period. Additional sections assessed the quality of support and guidance received, focusing on academic, administrative and personal aspects. The survey then explored financial considerations, such as funding sources, cost perceptions and scholarship provisions. Finally, the survey evaluated the long-term impact of mobility on skills development, career prospects and personal growth, concluding with demographic questions to capture the diversity within the sample.

For full degree international students, the survey gathered insights on their academic background, experiences with support services at host institutions, and integration into the local community. The questions also covered financial management during their studies, including funding and scholarship access, and issues related to the recognition of their diplomas. For non-mobile students, the survey aimed to identify barriers to participation in mobility programmes, such as financial constraints, lack of information, or other personal reasons. It also explored how non-mobile students perceive the benefits of mobility and their awareness of available opportunities.

All three groups were asked about their civic engagement, including voting intentions, awareness of rights and information on who to contact for support while abroad. This section also included questions about voting while residing in another country, aiming to understand students' civic participation and awareness, particularly in the context of the recent European Elections.

Data collection & analysis

The ESNsurvey - 15th Edition was conducted as a quantitative and qualitative research project, using an online questionnaire available from the 18th of May 2023, to the 31st of July 2023. The survey was promoted extensively through the coordinated efforts of ESN's local sections, National Organisations and ESN International. Dissemination was further supported by National Agencies, universities, networks of universities, European entities and other student organisations. This collaboration ensured that the survey reached a wide range of students across Europe and beyond.

In total, the survey collected approx. **23,000** responses!

A dissemination package was shared in order to facilitate the promotion of the questionnaire among students, Higher Education Institutions and other stakeholders. The survey was disseminated mainly through social media (such as Instagram, Facebook and X), and direct mailing to past participants. Participants were able to access the survey via a direct link: https://esnsurvey.org/survey.

The questionnaire consisted of 145 questions in total, incorporating established themes from previous editions and new questions reflecting the expanded scope. Recurring questions allowed for longitudinal comparisons, while new sections addressed specific needs relevant to the additional target groups and recent developments in higher education. Most of the questions were optional, enabling participants to omit sections they were not comfortable answering. However, a mandatory question required participants to specify if they were participating in international student mobility in higher education. This allowed students to be redirected to the most relevant part of the questionnaire based on their answer. Depending on their response, students were directed to targeted questions for exchange students, full-degree students, or non-mobile students.

In total, the survey collected approximately **23,000 responses**. Following data collection, responses were carefully reviewed to remove duplicates and incomplete entries. The final sample included 22,775 respondents. 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.

Limitations of the present study

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of the ESNsurvey - 15th Edition. The length and structure of the survey contributed to a higher dropout rate in certain sections, particularly in demographic questions. Completing the survey took approximately 25 minutes, and the use of conditional questions to filter responses based on the type and period of mobility prevented randomisation, which may have impacted completion rates. For example, there was a noticeable difference of 6,815 respondents between the total sample (22,775) and those who completed questions related to gender identity (15,960).

Another limitation concerns the survey's dissemination channels. Although ESN's local sections, National Organisations and ESN International led the dissemination, the involvement of National Agencies, universities, other student organisations and National Youth Councils played a crucial role in extending outreach. However, the primary reliance on ESN's established networks could lead to slight bias, attracting respondents already familiar with or supportive of ESN activities. Despite this, the collaboration with various agencies and organisations helped mitigate potential biases, achieving significant participation from students unaffiliated with ESN.

The diversity of mobility programmes also posed challenges in fully capturing nuanced experiences, particularly for full-degree international students and non-mobile students. Using these groups as control groups offered a comparative perspective, but certain aspects of their unique experiences may not have been fully explored.
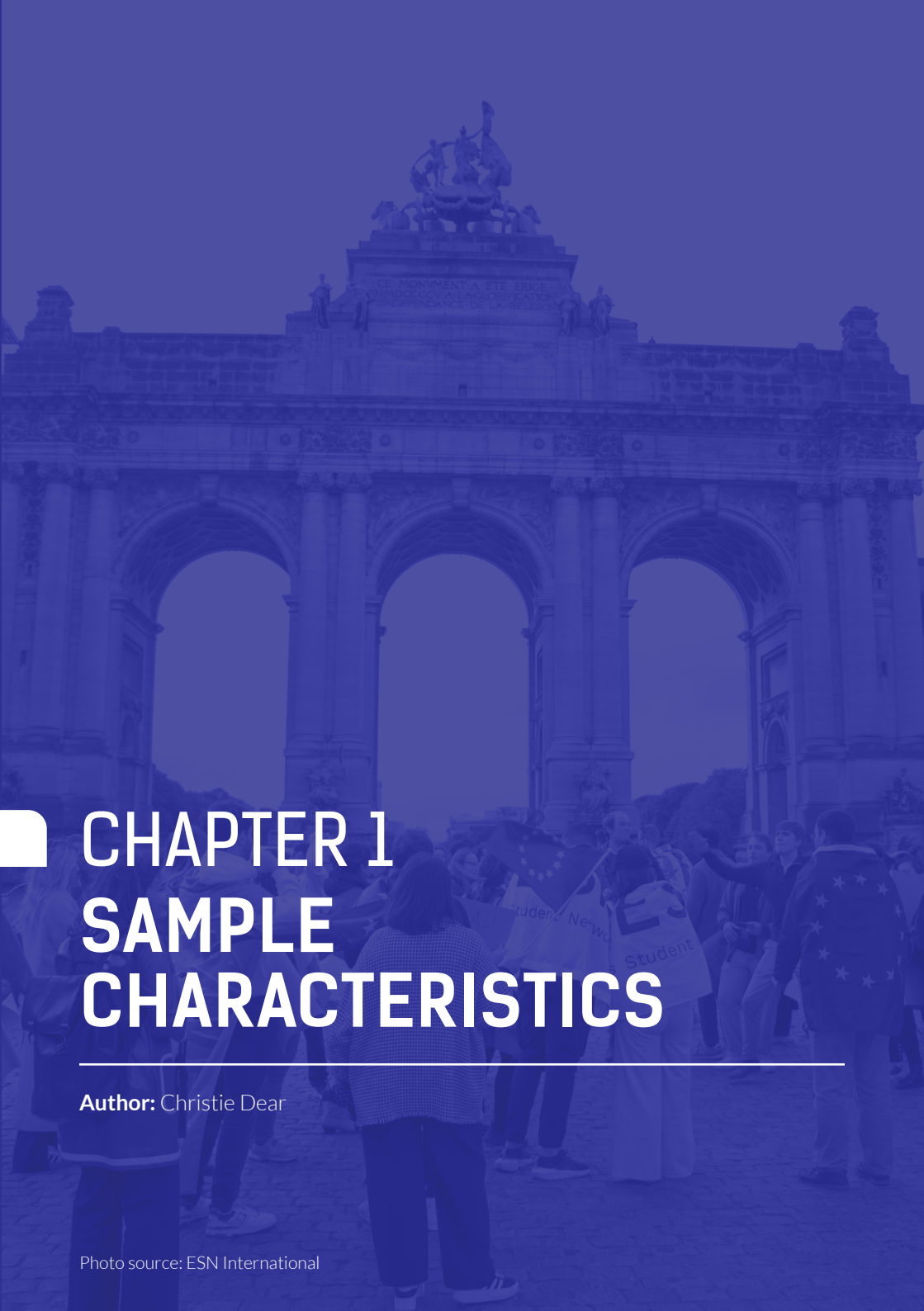
CHAPTER 1
SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Author: Christie Dear

In the first chapter, we will begin by examining the characteristics of the sample, including their engagement with mobility, gender identity, age, nationality, area of residence, family income, parental or guardian education level, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and disabilities.

These characteristics are presented to provide an understanding of the analysed sample and to ensure its representativeness, size, and diversity. As with all ESNsurveys, the responses were anonymous and will be used solely for research purposes by the Erasmus Student Network.

The sample characteristics are also crucial for making comparisons and gaining a deeper understanding of some key aspects of participation in mobility.

1. Mobility Engagement

In Figure 1, we begin by analysing the engagement in international mobility among survey respondents. The XV ESNsurvey discerns between three different audiences. The first are exchange students who are enrolled in one university but complete a part of their degree (typically one or two semesters) at another university abroad. Secondly, it includes full-degree international students who are enrolled at a university in a country where they did not complete prior education. Lastly, it looks at a control group of non-mobile students enrolled in the country where they followed secondary education and did not have tertiary education experience abroad.

Each group completes a specific section of the survey tailored to their experiences. This question was crucial in directing respondents to the part of the survey that best suited their background.

Analysing these three distinct target groups was essential to fully understand the perspectives of higher education students on international mobility and make meaningful comparisons between the groups. It is important to highlight that by analysing the responses of non-mobile students, we can specifically identify areas for improvement to make mobility more accessible to all higher education students.

Our sample consists of 22,775 answers, constituting 78.4% exchange students, 13.45% non-mobile students, and 8.15% full-time international degree-seeking students, ensuring a sufficiently diverse sample size for accurate analysis. It is important to note that the sample characteristics analysed above refer to the three target audiences. Furthermore, it needs to be taken into account that not all participants responded to all questions.

Figure 1

Participation in international mobility in higher education, percentage
(general sample, N= 22,775)

| 78.4% | 8.15% | 13.45% |

Yes, as an exchange student
Yes, as an international full-time degree student
No international experience in my higher education studies
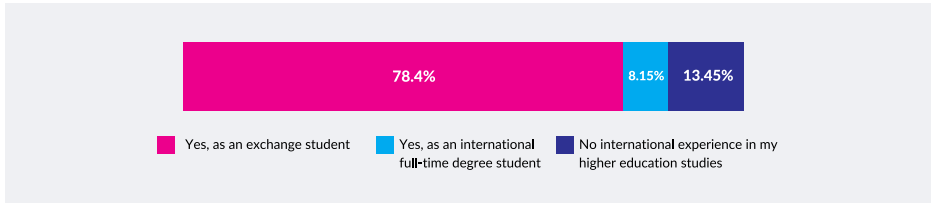
2. Gender Identity

Based on 15,960 responses, 65.22% of participants identified as women, 32.39% as men, 1.11% as non-binary, 0.14% as other, and 1.13% preferred not to disclose their gender identity (see Figure 2). This data provides a comprehensive overview of the gender identities represented in the survey, underscoring the diversity among participants. In terms of gender, this sample aligns with the trend observed in the Erasmus+ Annual Report 2022, where 60% of participants in the Erasmus+ Programme identify as women and 40% as men (European Commission, 2022).

Figure 2

Distribution of gender identity, percentage (general sample, N= 15,960).

A woman — 65.22%
A man — 32.39%
Non-binary — 1.11%
Prefer not to disclose — 1.13%
Other — 0.14%
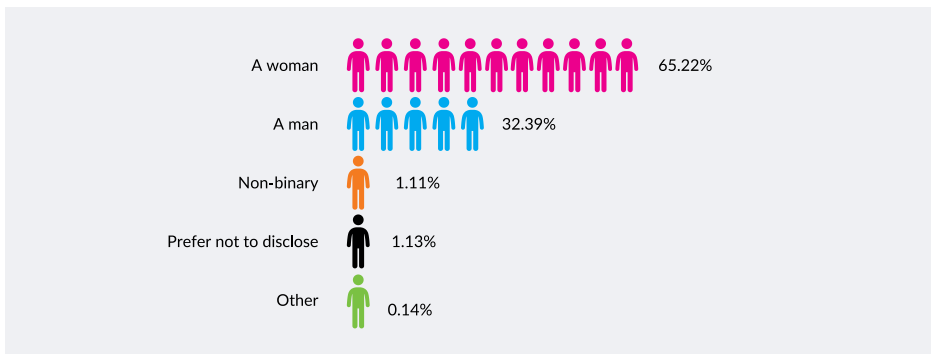
3. Age Groups

Based on 15,751 responses, 0.36% of participants were born before 1983 (aged 40 or more while answering the questionnaire), 2.71% between 1984 and 1993

(aged 30 to 39), 19.10% between 1994 and 1998 (aged 25 to 29), 73.26% between 1999 and 2003 (aged 20 to 24), 3.15% after 2003 (1922 participants younger than 20). 1.49% preferred not to disclose their age (223, see Figure 3). It's important to note that, according to the Bologna Process Implementation Report (European Commission, EACEA, Eurydice, 2024), the average age for students participating in higher education is between 18 and 34 years. Additionally, the Education and Training Monitor 2023 (European Commission, 2023) reports that 42% of the EU population now holds a tertiary education degree.

Figure 3

Distribution of the age of participants, percentage (general sample, N= 15,751)[1].
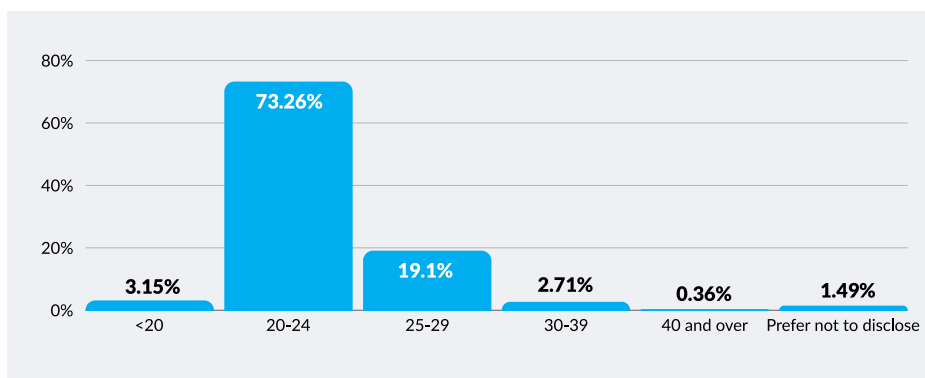
4. Nationality

Among the participants, 77.01% are nationals of one of the 27 EU Member States (see Figure 4). The most prominent nationalities are: 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 Turkish (3.04%), Indian (1.21%), and British (0.96%). In total, the survey recorded participants from 156 distinct nationalities. 1.44% of the respondents preferred not to disclose their nationality.

Interestingly, 14.78% of the participating exchange students indicated that their sending institution's country differs from their own nationality. This indicates that a notable portion of these students may have had prior exposure to an international study experience even before embarking on their current exchange programme.

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[1] Some entries were disregarded as they were not suitable for the analysis.

The differences in the state of higher education across EU countries, when compared to the nationalities of international students, reveal significant opportunities for improvement in terms of internationalisation and mobility. These disparities highlight the need for more concerted efforts to enhance student exchangen, particularly in countries where tertiary education is more advanced.

Figure 4

Nationality of Participants, percentage (general sample, N= 15,913).
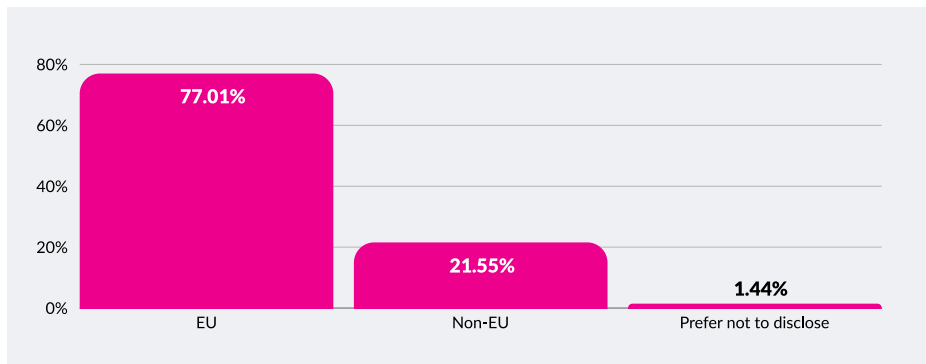
5. Home Area

Based on 15,950 responses, 46.32% of respondents grew up in a city or urban area, 34.02% in a town or suburban area, and 18.73% in a rural area. 0.93% preferred not to disclose their home area (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Distribution of respondents by their home area, percentage (general sample, N= 15,940).
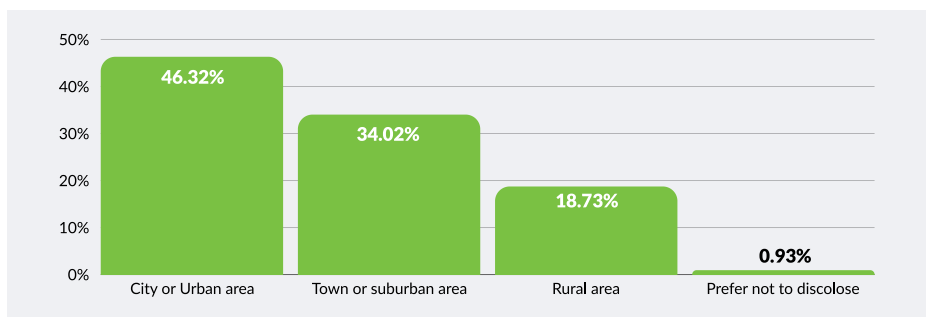
6. Family Income

The perceived family household income of participants when they were under the age of 18 was reported as average by 36.43%, slightly above average by 27.27%, above average by 12.55%, slightly below average by 12.23%, and below average by 7.33%. Additionally, 4% of respondents preferred not to disclose their family income (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Distribution of respondents by level of their family household income, percentage (general sample, N= 15,873).
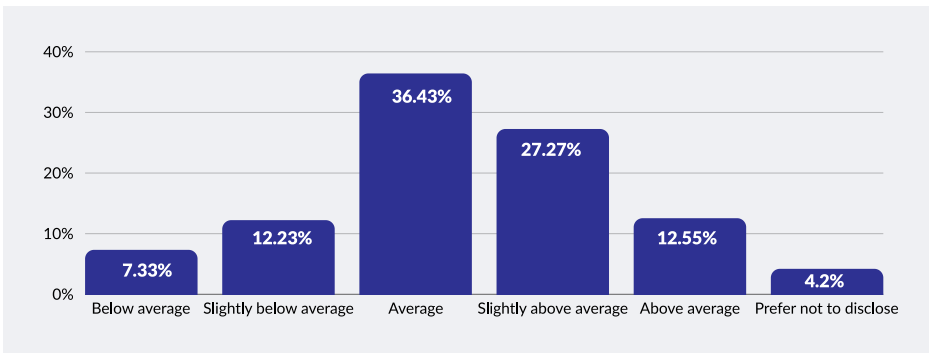
7. Parents' or Guardians' University Attendance

Based on 15,892 responses, 62.06% of participants reported that their parents or guardians attended university, 34.97% indicated that their parents or guardians did not attend university, 1.26% were unsure, and 1.71% preferred not to answer (see Figure 7).

This information is crucial for understanding the prevalence of first-generation students within families and their potential interest or participation in international mobility opportunities. Comparing these data between non-mobile and exchange student target groups, we find that the university attendance rate of parents is slightly higher among exchange students (62.61%) compared to non-mobile students (56.04%).

Figure 7

Distribution of respondents by the level of education of their parents or **guardians**, percentage (general sample, N= 15,892).
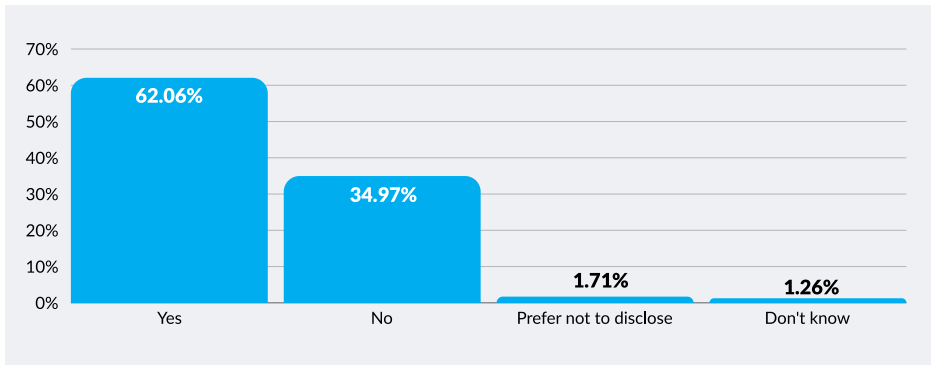
8. Sexual Orientation

Based on 15,906 answers, 72.39% of participants identified themselves as heterosexual, 11.36% as bisexual, 4.36% as homosexual, 2.75% as other, and 9.13% preferred not to disclose their sexual orientation (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

Distribution of respondents by sexual orientation, percentage (general sample, N= 15,906).
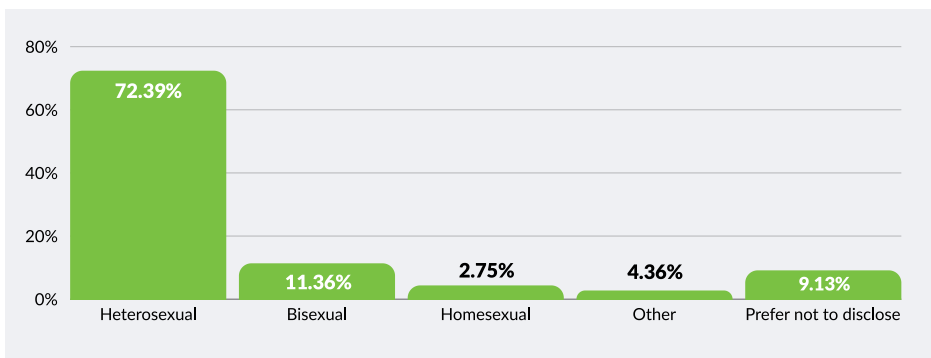
9. Ethnicity or Cultural Background

Based on 15,814 responses, 75.03% of participants identified as White/Caucasian/Europid, 5.20% as Middle Eastern, 3.17% as South American/Latinx, 2.59% as Roma/Traveller, 2.41% as South Asian, 2.01% as East Asian, 1.45% as North African, 0.99% as Central Asian, 0.90% as First Nation/Indigenous, 0.70% as Caribbean, 0.68% as Sub-Saharan African, 1.14% as Other Asian, 0.87% as Other African, and 4.10% as Other. Additionally, 7.16% preferred not to disclose their ethnicity (see Figure 9).

Figure 9

Distribution of respondents by ethnicity, percentage
(general sample, N= 15,814)[2].
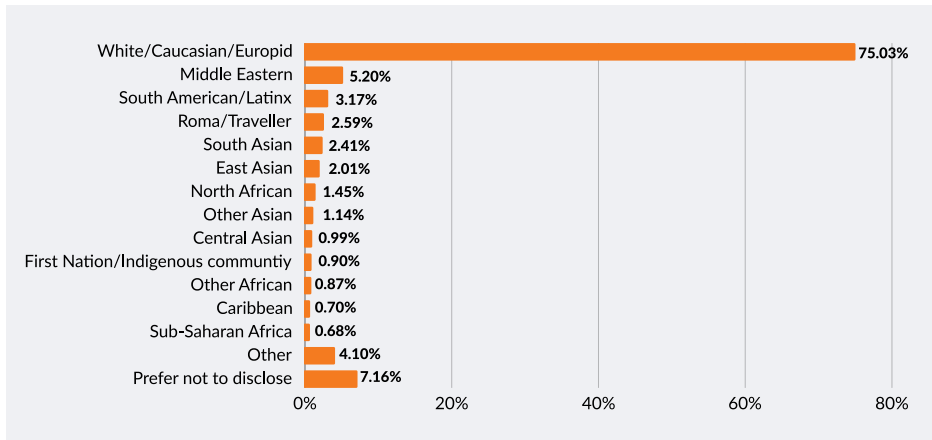
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[2] Participants were allowed to select multiple responses, so the percentages may total more than 100%.

10. Participants with Disabilities

Based on 15,667 responses, 92.69% of participants reported not identifying as a person living with a disability, 2.83% identified as having a learning disability, and 2% identified as having a physical disability. Additionally, 3.33% preferred not to disclose their disability status (see Figure 10).

This question is particularly important because, since 2021, the European Commission has prioritised inclusion and diversity as key pillars of the current Erasmus+ Programme. This emphasis aims to broaden access for students with fewer opportunities[3]. According to the Erasmus+ Annual Report 2022, 13% of participants in 2022 identified themselves as having fewer opportunities (European Commission, 2023)[4].

Figure 10
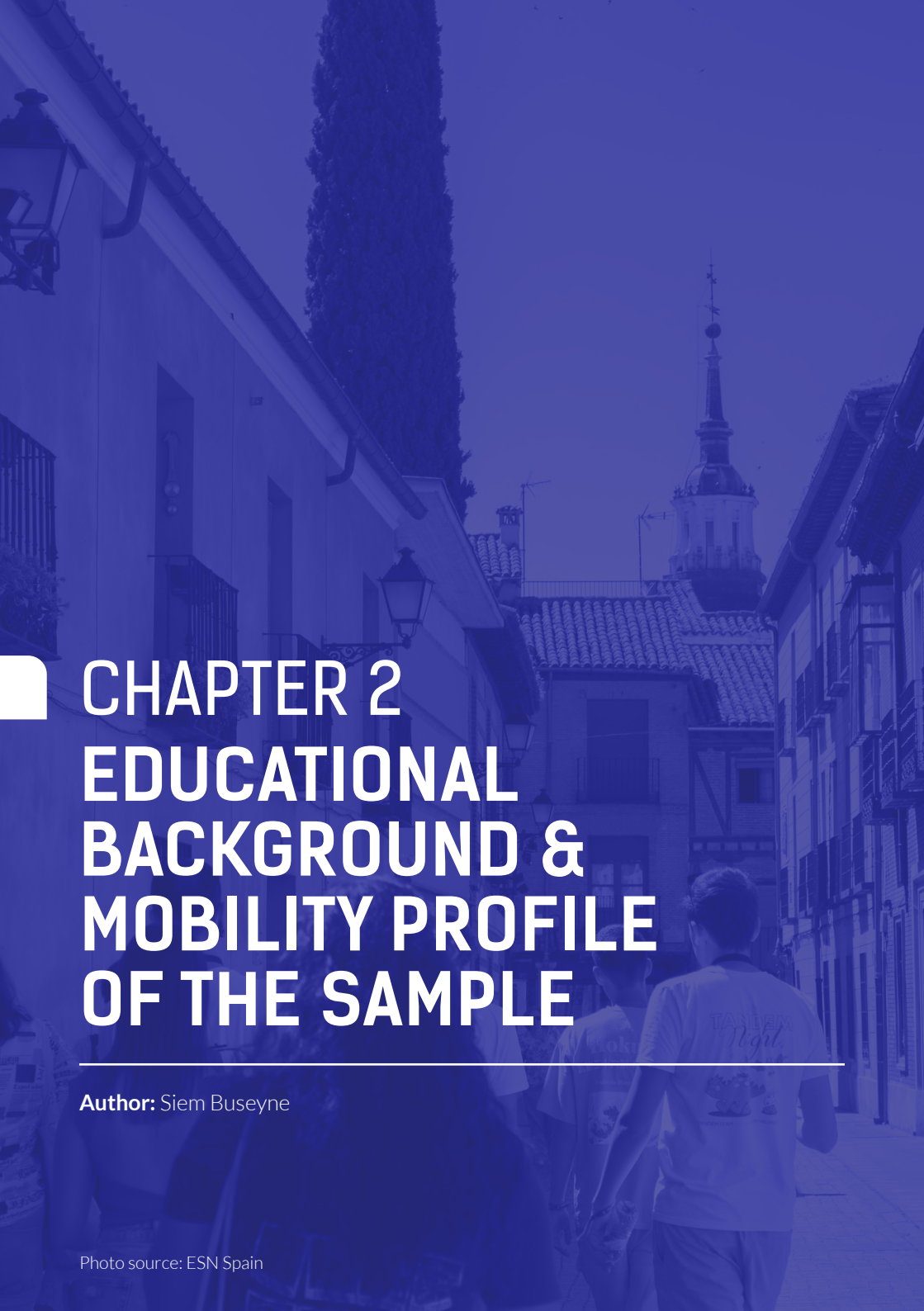
Distribution of respondents according to their identification of disability, percentage (general sample, N= 15,667)[5].

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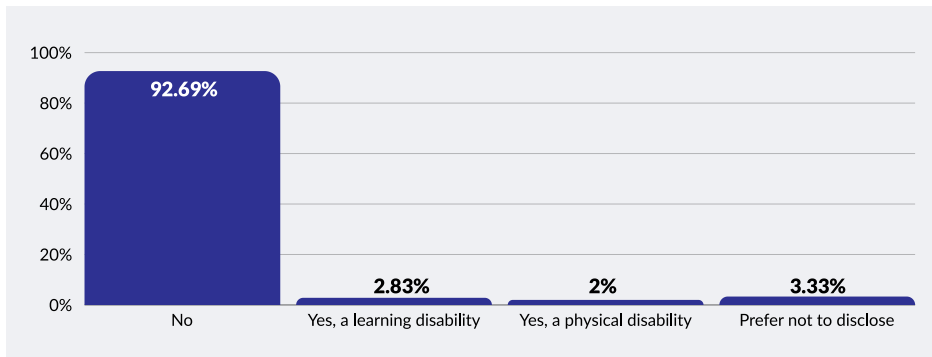
[3] According to the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy, persons with fewer opportunities can be identified as people with disabilities, health problems, barriers linked to education and training systems, cultural differences, social barriers, economic barriers, barriers linked to discrimination or geographical barriers (European Commission, 2021).

[4] Even though this point specifically addresses disabilities, which is one of the groups identified by the European Commission as part of those with fewer opportunities, it is still important to to be highlighted to fully grasp how much the EU is increasing its support for inclusion and diversity.

[5] Participants were allowed to select multiple responses, so the percentages may total more than 100%.

CHAPTER 2
EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND & MOBILITY PROFILE OF THE SAMPLE

Author: Siem Buseyne

To gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives of international students in our sample, it is essential to examine their educational background, including their level of study and field of study, as well as their mobility experience, i.e., their host and sending countries, the duration of their mobility experience, the period they went abroad, and the modality of their mobility. By analysing these factors, we can better understand student mobility flows and how these elements impact their participation in international mobility.

In order to achieve what is proposed above, this chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the key aspects that shape student mobility experiences and the student profile. It specifically focuses on two student groups —exchange students and full-degree international students, while also offering comparisons between the two groups to identify trends and gain deeper insights.

1. Academic Background

An initial aspect examined was the study level of students participating in mobility programmes. As shown in Figure 11, the majority of exchange students (63.99%) were pursuing a Bachelor's or equivalent level during their stay abroad. A smaller proportion (32.35%) were engaged in Master's studies, and 1.31% were enrolled in a Doctorate (PhD) programme. The numbers indicate a higher interest in participating in exchange opportunities at the Bachelor's level, aligns with the findings of our last two ESNsurveys (2019 and 2021). It's interesting to note that the presented data alignes with the main trends observed in higher education, where the majority of tertiary students are enrrolled bachelor level (58.8%)[6] (European Commission, EACEA, Eurydice, 2024, p.22), and also with the data from the 2022 Erasmus+ Annual Report, where "most of students in 2022 studied in Bachelor's level (62.5%), followed by 33.8% at Master's level" (European Commission, 2023). Although, according to 2021 data from the Education and Training Monitor, the share of credit mobile graduates at the bachelor's level was 7.7%, compared to 12.8% at the master's level (European Commission, 2023). This highlights two key issues: first, that mobility and internationalisation are still not priorities in higher education on a general overview, and second, that despite the higher participation in bachelor programmes, mobility participation remains lower compared to master's level programmes, although in Erasmus+ Programme mobility is higher in bachelor programmes.

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[6] While 21.7% are enrolled in second-cycle programmes (master's or equivalent), and 3.1% in third-cycle programmes (doctoral or equivalent). Additionally, 16.4% of tertiary education students are enrolled in short-cycle tertiary education programmes (European Commission, EACEA, Eurydice, 2024, p.22).

This alings with the respondents who were enrolled abroad for an entire degree, of which (52.18%) reported pursuing a Master's degree, while a smaller group (40.01%) were studying for a Bachelor's degree abroad. Notably, the percentage of PhD students among international full-time degree-seeking participants (4.57%) was higher than that of exchange students.

Figure 11

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

Bachelor or equivalent — 63.99%
Master or equivalent — 32.35%
Doctorate (PhD) or equivalent — 1.31%
Other — 2.35%
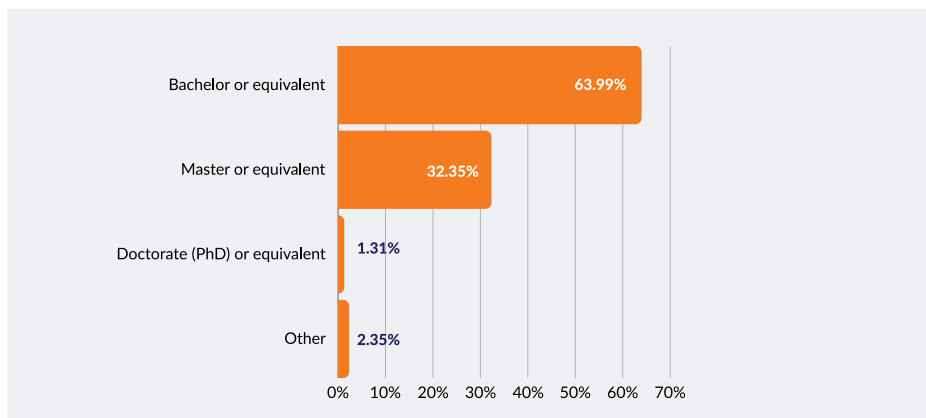
2. Field of Study

Next, we look into the distribution of students who participated in exchange programmes or full degree programmes abroad across various academic fields. For exchange students, 21.58% of our respondents indicated they were enrolled in a different study field during their mobility period abroad. For full-degree students, 26.90% reported studying a different field compared to their prior degree.

At their home institution, most exchange students sought degrees in Economic and Business Sciences (19.43%; e.g. Business Studies, Management Studies, Economics, Finance); Humanities (18.80%; e.g. Humanities, Languages, Education, Art); and Engineering (18.56%; e.g. Engineering, Technology, Computer Science, Architecture, Urban and Regional Planning). A smaller proportion of participating exchange students were from the fields of Natural Sciences (e.g. Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Biology, Geology, Environmental Sciences - 9.02%), Medical Sciences (e.g. Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy - 7.88%), and Social Sciences (e.g. Political Sciences, Law, Sociology, Psychology, Communication

and Information Sciences - 4.69%). This analysis aligns with the 2024 Erasmus+ Annual Report, which states that the top three fields of study for Erasmus+ students in 2022 were business administration, engineering, and law (European Commission, 2022).

For the full-degree students, the main fields again included Economic and Business Sciences (17.15%) and Engineering (16.88%). Compared to the exchange students, there were less students from the field of Humanities (11.90%) and more students from Natural Sciences (14.31%). Furthermore, as with the exchange students, there were lower proportions of students from Medical Sciences (7.02%) and Social Sciences (5.84%).

Figure 12

Relative frequencies of academic backgrounds of exchange (N= 18,089) and full-degree (N= 1,947) students [8].

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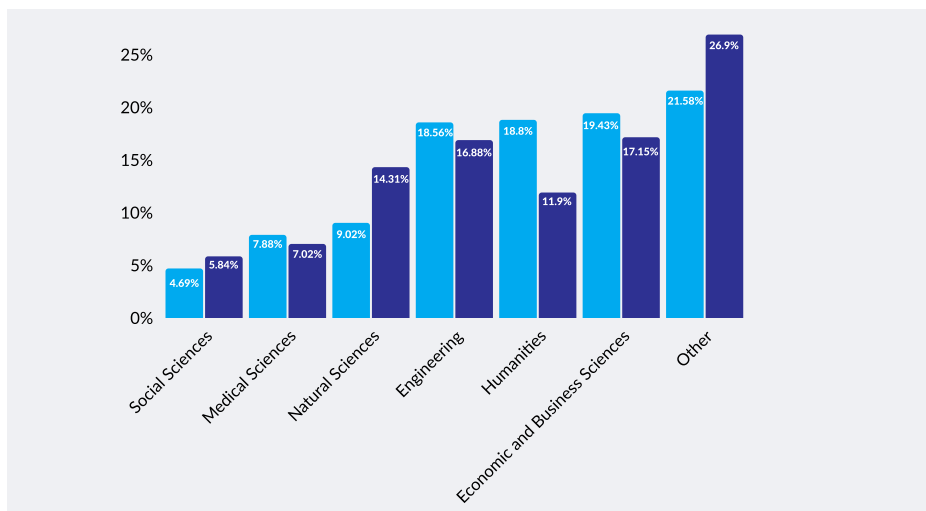
[8] Countries with a relative frequency lower than 1 % are excluded from this plot.

3. Home Institution of Respondents

An overview of the sending countries of exchange students is presented in Figure 13. Most participants in an exchange programme were from Italy (17.67%), Spain (9.96%), Germany (9.62%), France (5.73%), Czech Republic (5.69%), Poland (5.19%), Austria (4.23%), Greece (3.47%), Türkiye (3.15%) or Portugal (3.10%). Full-degree students were asked about the country where they graduated from high school. Most participating full-degree students indicated Spain (7.58%), Italy (7.47%), Germany (7.00%), India (6.59%), France (3.13%), Türkiye (3.02%), Iran (2.75%), United States (2.64%), Poland (2.47%), or Russia (2.03%).

When comparing the results of the exchange students with the Erasmus+ Annual Report 2022, we observe that the most frequent sending countries, in order, are France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Poland, Türkiye, the Netherlands, Portugal, Belgium, and Romania (European Commission, 2023). These findings show some similarities with the results from the XV ESNsurvey.

Figure 13

Relative frequencies of sending countries of exchange students
(N= 17,926)[9].

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%

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[9] Countries with a relative frequency lower than 1% are excluded from this table.

4. Host Institution of Respondents

The relative frequencies of selected host countries by exchange students are presented in Figure 14. In decreasing order, these include the following: Spain (12.95%), Italy (11.58%), Germany (9.46%), France (6.43%), Portugal (6.21%), Czech Republic (5.24%), Belgium (4.32%), Poland (3.74%), Sweden (3.16%), and Austria (2.95%). For the full-degree students, the following countries were most frequently selected: Italy (14.28%), Germany (11.95%), France (6.83%), Belgium (6.77%), Spain (5.57%), Austria (5.23%), Finland (4.10%), Netherlands (3.20%), Portugal (3.13%), and Sweden (3.07%).

When comparing the results of the exchange students with the Erasmus+ Annual Report 2022, we observe that the most frequent destinations, in order, are: Spain, Italy, Germany, France, Portugal, Poland, The Netherlands, Belgium, Czech Republic and Sweden (European Commission, 2023). Once again, these findings show some similarities with the results from the XV ESNsurvey and to the figure above.

Figure 14

Relative frequencies of host countries of exchange students (N= 17,721)[10].

Country	%	Country	%
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%		

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[10] Countries with a relative frequency lower than 1% are excluded from this table.

5. Participation in exchange experience abroad before Higher Education

To assess whether our target audience had been exposed to any internationalisation opportunities prior to higher education, we asked exchange students if they had engaged in any exchange experiences abroad before entering higher education (see Figure 15). Participants were allowed to select more than one option.

From a sample of 17,703 respondents, the majority had participated in some form of international experience before going on an exchange during higher education, compared to 48.89% who had not had such opportunities. The most common pre-higher education experience was educational short trips in high school (23.90%), followed by summer programmes or language programmes (15.60%). Additionally, 12.73% of participants noted that they had participated in an exchange during high school, and 10.96% mentioned involvement in youth exchanges or volunteering. A further 9.54% reported participating in other forms of international experiences.

This analysis suggests that shorter international experiences before embarking on Erasmus+ studies can be crucial in building students' confidence and fostering an international mindset.

Figure 15

Relative frequencies of exchange experience abroad before Higher Education (N= 17,703).
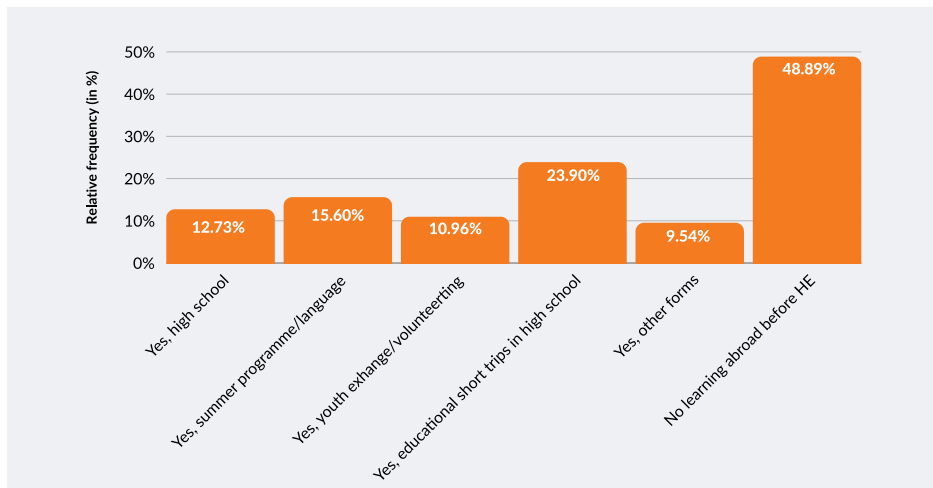
6. Duration of the Mobility Experience

Regarding the duration of exchange experiences for students, the most common period is five months, chosen by 37.36% of respondents, closely followed by four (14.38%) and six month (16.43%) durations. Interestingly, programmes extending beyond six months show only a participation of 9.75% favouring ten months and 3.32% opting for a full-year. It is important to take into account that factors such as programme availability and specific study fields may contribute to these choices.

From a student's perspective (see Figure 16), we observe that 9.07% of participants chose a mobility programme with a duration of less than three months, whereas with 68.17%, an interval of four to six months, equivalent to one academic semester, remained most popular. 22.75% of participants opted for mobility longer than one semester (seven months or more).

During the 2021-2027 period, the European Commission focuses on introducing and enhancing shorter mobility formats, such as the Blended Intensive Programmes. Insights from the SIEM Research Report shed light on why these shorter mobility programmes are likely to grow in popularity. The report reveals that many students were hesitant to commit to a full year abroad and instead opted for shorter mobility experiences—a trend particularly noticeable among students with fewer opportunities. For those concerned about going abroad, short-term programmes offered an attractive option, allowing them to test out a location or programme without a long-term commitment. In this context, diversifying mobility programmes to include short-term or group mobilities can be an effective way to re-engage students in international experiences (Allinson K., Gabriels, 2021).

The Erasmus Student Network has also advocated for the role of short term and hybrid mobility as stepping stones towards longer mobility experiences and as a way for Higher Education Institutions to diversified internationalisation offers that can suit the interests and characteristics of their whole student population (ESN Survey XIV).

Figure 16

Distribution of the duration of the mobility period of exchange students
(N= 17,727).
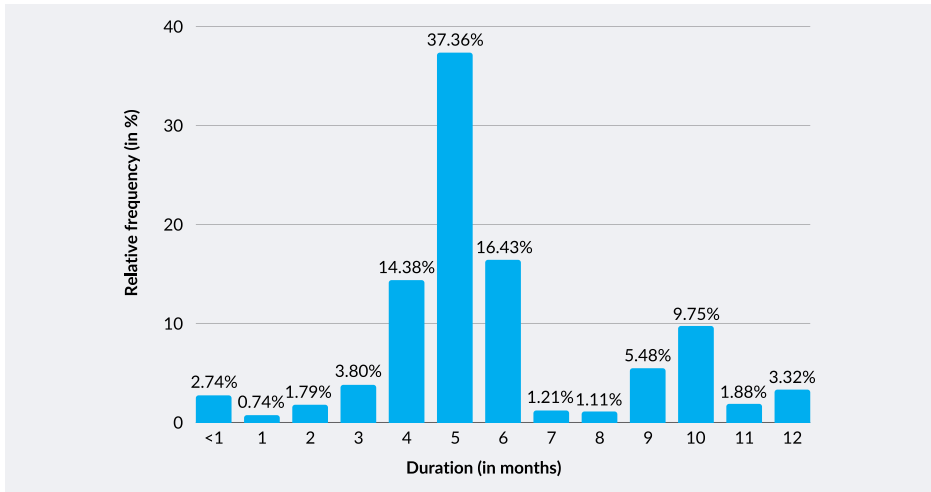
7. Mobility Period

Figure 17 presents an overview of the distribution of mobility periods among
exchange students in our sample. Notably, Spring 2023 stands out, encompassing
a majority with 61.28% of participants being on mobility. Autumn 2022 also
commands a significant share, with 43.16% of respondents. In contrast, earlier
semesters exhibit lower participation rates, with Spring 2022 and Autumn 2021
and periods preceding August 2021 representing only 18.53%, 12.91% and
13.65%, respectively.
The sum of the graph totals over one hundred per cent, as participants were
allowed to select multiple semesters. In host countries where semesters follow
a different calendar, in cases of longer mobility or in cases of vocational mobility,
students marked all semesters in which they were partially abroad.

Figure 17

Distribution of the mobility periods of exchange students (N= 14,040)[11].
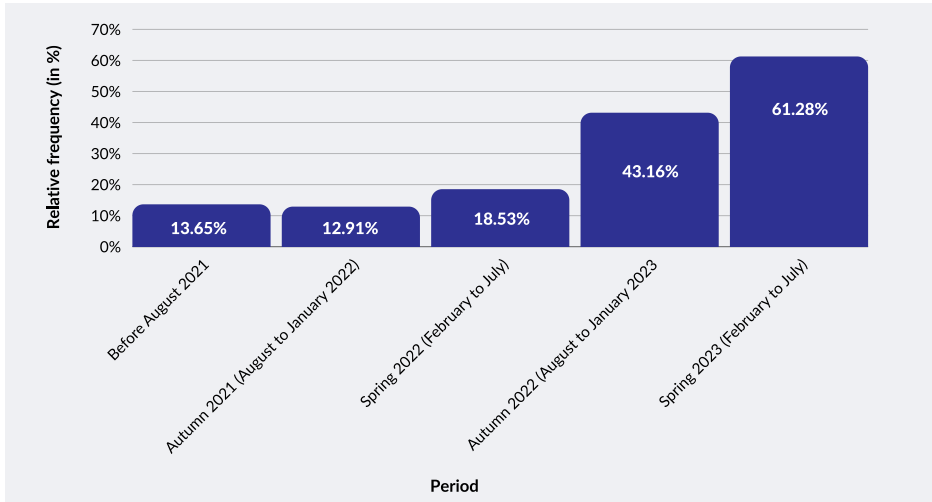
Figure 18 provides an overview of the distribution of study abroad years among full-degree students in our sample. Notably, the most recent academic year dominates, with 77.89% of participants having been enrolled abroad during this academic year. Following this, the academic year 2021-2022 includes 42.09% of participants, while the academic year 2020-2021 has the lowest percentage of respondents studying abroad during that year at 24.41%. This is likely due to our dissemination efforts primarily targeting actively enrolled students.

Figure 18

Distribution of mobility years of full-degree students (N= 1,782)[12].
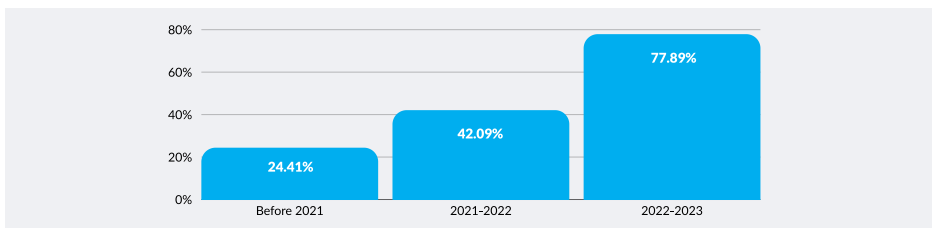
[11] The sum of all relative frequencies is higher than 100% because students could select multiple mobility periods in case their mobility took longer than one semester.

[12] The sum of all relative frequencies is higher than 100% because students could select multiple mobility years in case their mobility took longer than one academic year.

8. Modality of Mobility

For exchange students, the distribution of mobility types is illustrated in Figure 19. The vast majority (91.06%) participated in a study exchange at another institution. A smaller portion of respondents (7.05%) undertook a traineeship or internship placement at a company or organisation. Additionally, 1.50% participated in a short mobility programme, while 0.39% engaged in volunteer work abroad. The same trend is also verified in the 2024 Erasmus+ Annual Report, where in the year 2022 we have verified a number of 246.000 students compared with 102 000 trainers (European Commission, 2022). These figures and numbers highlight the overwhelming popularity of study exchanges compared to other mobility types, such as traineeships or volunteering opportunities. They also underscore the importance of promoting and providing equal information about all available mobility options.

Figure 19

Distribution of the mobility types of exchange students (N= 17,498).
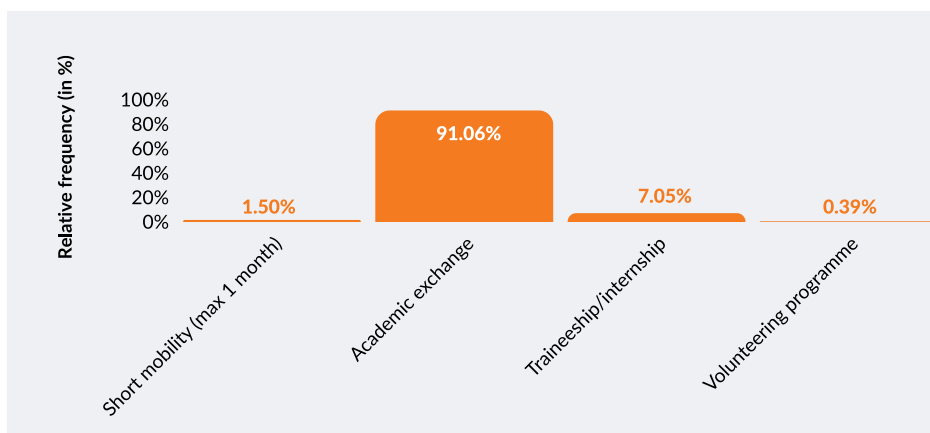
After assessing the types of mobility and the popularity of study exchanges, it is crucial to examine the specific exchange programmes in which students participated (Figure 20). Erasmus+ is the most prevalent, involving 91.44% of participants. In contrast, exchanges facilitated by inter-institutional agreements not part of dedicated programmes were less common, representing 5.43% of participants. Exchanges through the Swiss-European Mobility Programme (SEMP) and the Turing programme made up a smaller fraction, at just 2.51% and 0.62%, respectively.

Figure 20

Distribution of exchange programmes (N= 17,080).
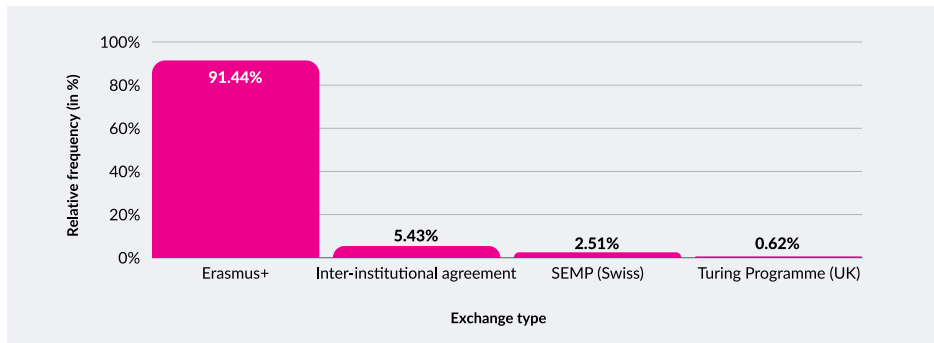
CHAPTER 3
BEFORE MOBILITY

Author: Siem Buseyne & Yazeed Haddad

Mobility is structured into three phases—before, during and after—with each phase playing a crucial role in ensuring a successful experience for international students. This chapter focuses on the first phase, before mobility, where the motivations and key reasons that drive exchange students to go abroad will be explored, examining the initiators, attractors and moderators of their decisions. Following this, the students' satisfaction with the information activities they participated in prior to their mobility experience will be assessed, alongside an analysis of whether students had already benefited from internationalisation at home opportunities and their prior knowledge of educational initiatives.

Finally, the pre-departure support received before mobility will be explored, including the proportion of students who received the Erasmus Student Charter, the timing of its distribution, and an evaluation of their satisfaction with the services and support provided by their host institution before their arrival.

Throughout this fourth chapter of the XV ESNsurvey, relevant comparisons will be made with the other two target groups, full degree students and non-mobile students, to provide a comprehensive perspective. Additionally, considering the importance of exploring other mobility types than mobility for studies, further comparisons between study exchange programme participants and traineeship participants are provided in this chapter.

1. Period of Choice to Study Abroad

The first aspect under investigation is when students make the choice to participate in international student mobility. Students were asked the following multiple-choice question: 'When did you decide you wanted to study abroad?' Answer options included before enrolling in higher education; at the start of higher education; at the end of a prior higher education degree; and before application deadlines.

Results show that the majority (43.62%) of students opted to study abroad before enrolling in higher education. A larger portion (35.26%) made this decision at the start of their higher education journey, while a very small proportion (6.33%) of respondents decided to study abroad at the end of their higher education degree. Furthermore, a minority (14.78%) of the students made this choice right before the application deadlines.

These results were further analysed by type of mobility, delving into the perceptions of those participating in study exchange programmes and traineeships (see Figure 21). The data shows that the decision to participate in a traineeship or a study exchange is more frequently made before enrolling in higher education and at the start of the higher education journey.

Additionally, the proportion of students opting for traineeships towards the end of their higher education period is higher compared to study exchange programmes, possible indicating that students could see a traineeship opportunities as bridges towards employment opportunities.

Figure 21

Relative frequencies of when exchange students (N= 12,855) and trainees (N= 976) made the choice to participate in international mobility.
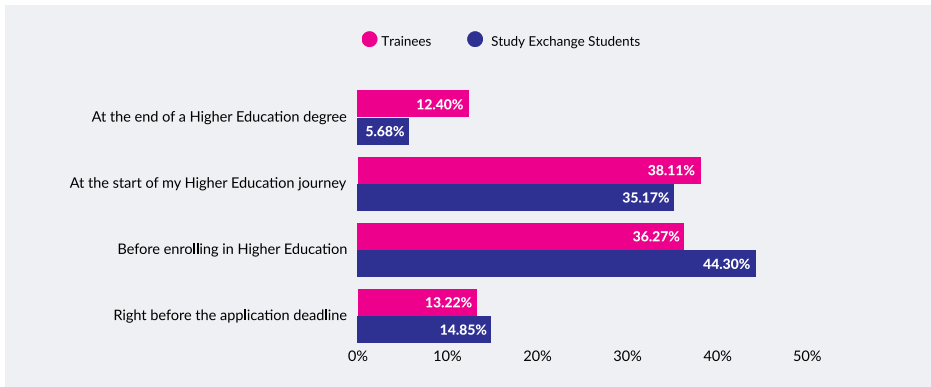
The same question was also asked to full-degree students, who could select among the following options: *at the end of a previous higher education degree; at the end of my high school degree; and during an exchange abroad during a higher education degree.*

Results show that most full-degree students made the decision to study abroad at the end of their high school degree (50.46%). 35.79% decided to pursue their higher education abroad at the end of a previous higher education degree. To a lower extent (13.75%), full-degree students made this decision during an earlier exchange abroad as part of a higher education degree.

2. Motivational Factors for Going on Mobility

Understanding the motivational factors behind international student mobility is crucial for educational institutions and policymakers, aiding in programme design aligned with students' expectations (Yasmin et al., 2022). These factors, denoting reasons behind studying abroad (McMahon, 1992), encompass challenges in the home country (i.e., push factors) and opportunities in a foreign country (i.e., pull factors) (Rabenu & Shkoler, 2020). Push factors mainly influence the decision to go abroad, while pull factors relate to the choice of destination (González et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2007). In recent literature, Rabenu and Shkoler (2020) refined the push-pull framework, introducing initiators (i.e., push factors; e.g., human, financia, and psychological capital) and attractors (i.e., pull factors; e.g., host country, academic institute and host city), conditioned by moderators. In what follows, we delve into each of these factors and their importance for students adopting this framework.

2.1. Initiators

Initiators (or push factors) encompass challenges and limitations in students' home countries, which make studying abroad an attractive option. Students were asked to select their push factors for going on exchange from a list.
The following ten factors were included in this list: to be able to be my true self or explore my identity; to become more independent/resilient; to build up a personal and professional network; to develop my skills related to internationalisation; to engage with people from different cultural backgrounds; to enhance my future career prospects; to experience different learning environments; to gain knowledge of another culture; to improve my academic performance and to learn/improve a foreign language. Data analysis for this section included the calculation of relative frequencies to identify the importance of each of the factors.

Five factors were selected as important by more than 70% of the respondents, including the students' wish to (a) engage with people from different cultural backgrounds (80%); (b) to gain knowledge of another culture (75%); (c) to learn/improve a foreign language (72.35%); (d) to become more independent/resilient (72%) and (e) to experience different learning environments (71%).
Next, several factors were of medium importance. These include the students' wish (a) to be able to be their true self / explore their identity (60%); (b) to enhance their future career prospects (58%); (c) to develop their skills related to internationalisation (57%); (d) to build up a personal and professional network (43%); and (e) to improve their academic performance (40%).

Figure 22

Relative frequency of important push factors selected by exchange students (N= 14,455).
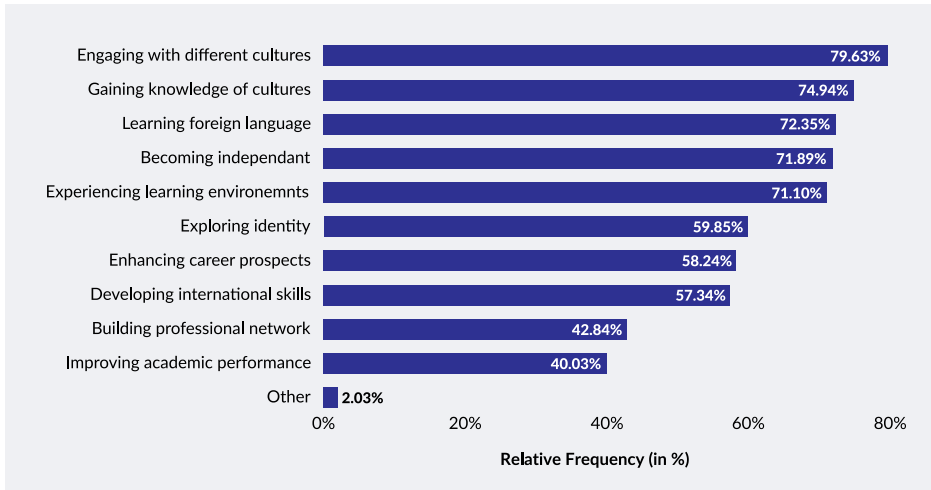
These results were further analysed for two sub-groups: study exchanges and traineeships (Figure 23). The analysis reveals that the traineeships sub-group shows significantly lower values compared to the study exchange group in the following categories: engaging with different cultures; independence; career prospects; knowledge of cultures; learning a foreign language and learning environment. However, the values are relatively similar when it comes to networking and identity. Notably, traineeships are valued more than study exchanges in terms of international skills acquired abroad, with a difference of 55.14% compared to 41.67%, and academic performance, with a difference of 50.05% compared to 39.08%.

Figure 23

Relative frequency of exchange students (N= 13,049) **and trainees** (N= 1,001) on important push factors.
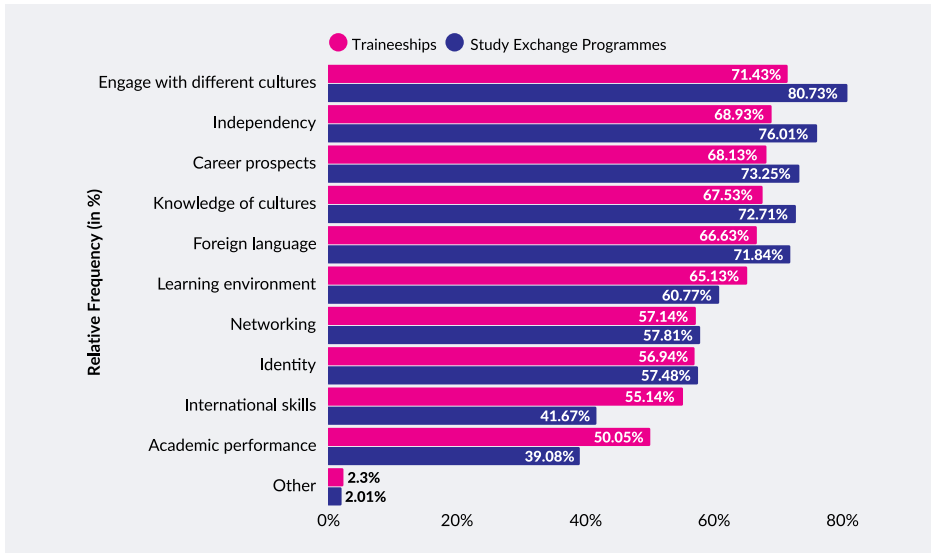
Slight differences can be observed with the push factors selected by full-degree students (see Figure 24). For example, to a greater extent, full-degree students selected enhancing career prospects (73% compared to 58%) and networking (55% compared to 43%). To a lower degree, gaining knowledge of cultures (61% compared to 75%) was of importance for full-degree students. Similar trends could be observed for foreign language development (55% compared to 72%), engaging with different cultures (71%, compared to 80%), experiencing different learning environments (66% compared to 71%), becoming more independent/resilient (65% and 72%) and gaining international skills (53% compared to 57%).

Figure 24

Relative frequency of important push factors selected by full-degree students (N= 1,723).
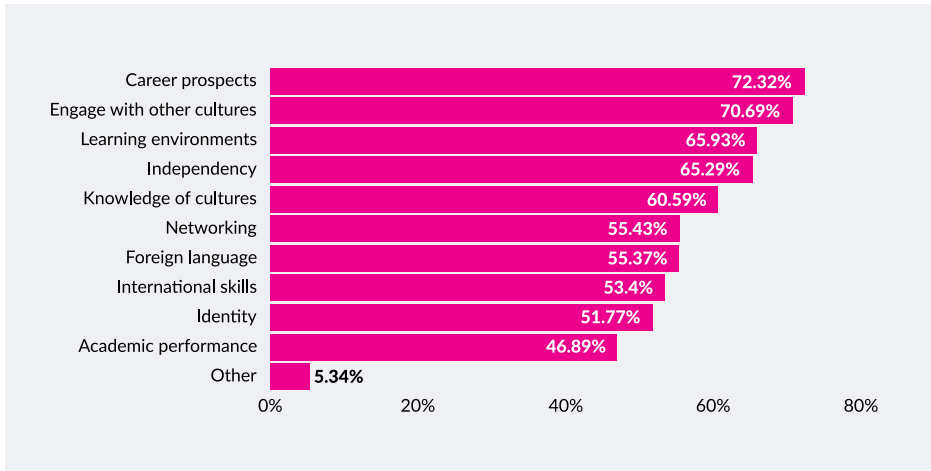
2.2. Attractors

Attractors (or pull factors) attract students to study abroad, highlighting the positive attributes and opportunities offered by foreign countries or institutions. Students were asked to rate the importance of pull factors on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from very unimportant to very important). Specifically, the following question was asked: 'How important were the following factors when choosing your exchange destination?'

In line with the literature on pull factors, items were included relating to different levels of pull factors. First, at the national level, this included the student's aspirations for a career in the destination country/city. Second, at the city level, we included (a) the affordability of the hosting city and (b) the possibility of engaging with the local community during my courses. Third, at the institutional level, the following factors were included: the academic reputation of the hosting institution; the availability of matching courses which can be recognised by my home institution; the support systems offered by the hosting institution; the students' ability to speak the language of instruction in the university of destination; the support systems offered by the hosting institution and the relationship of the host university and the home university (i.e., whether the student's home university is a strategic partner of the sending university). Data analysis for this section included the calculation of the relative importance of each of the factors.

Looking into the average importance of the selected factors (Figure 25) by students, five of them were identified as of higher importance (i.e., with an average score higher than 3.50): the ability to speak the language of the instruction in the university of destination (M = 3.61; SD = 1.38); the academic reputation of the hosting institution (M = 3.56; SD = 1.10); the affordability of the hosting city (M = 3.83; SD = 1.04); matching courses which can be recognised by my home institution and the possibility to engage with the local community during courses (M = 3.79; SD = 1.26).

Next, several factors were found to be of moderate average importance (i.e., with an average score between 3.00 and 3.50). These include (a) the possibility to engage with the local community during courses (M = 3.45; SD = 1.15) and (b) support systems offered by the hosting institution (M = 3.45; SD = 1.11). Last, of lower average importance (i.e., with an average score lower than 3.00) were (a) students' aspirations for a career in the destination country/city (M = 2.88; SD = 1.33) and (b) the fact that the student's home university is a strategic partner of the sending university (M = 2.90; SD = 1.37).

Figure 25

Average importance of pull factors in students' mobility choices (N= 14,487).
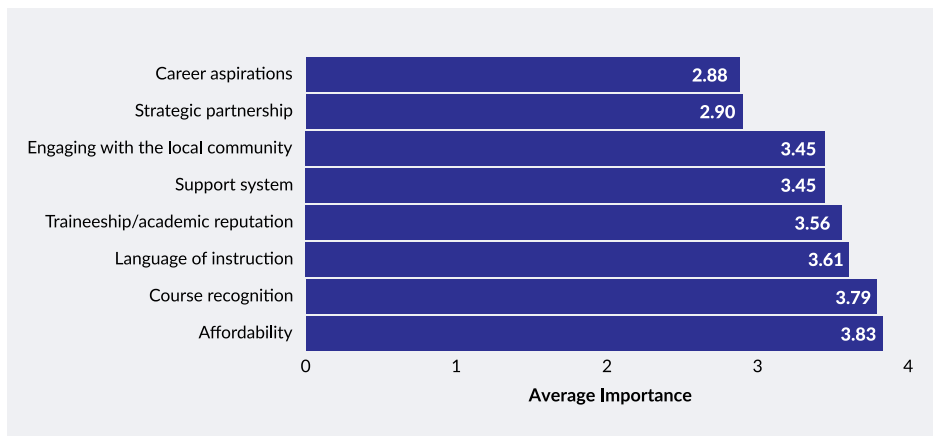
Further detailed analyses for the sub-groups are presented in Figure 26. The most significant differences for traineeship compared to the study exchange programme target group are observed in academic reputation, which increased to 3.69 compared to 3.54 in the other sub-group, as well as in career aspirations (3.33 compared to 2.84) and engagement with the community (3.57 compared to 3.43). Conversely, a noticeable difference is seen in course recognition, where this factor holds greater importance for study exchange students (3.85) than for trainees (3.1).

Figure 26

Average importance of exchange students (N= 13,077) **and trainees** (N= 1,005) **on important pull factors.**
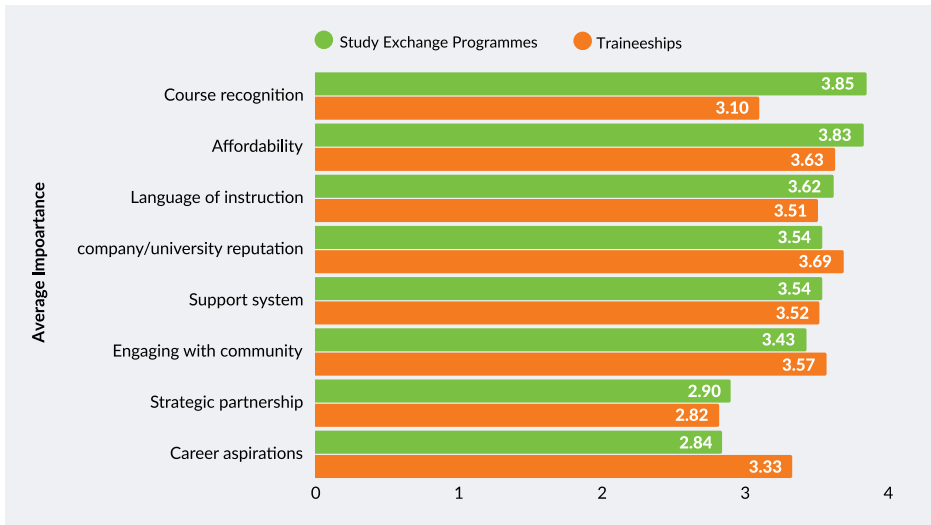
Similar to exchange students, full-degree students were also asked about how important several pull factors were in their choice for a mobility destination. Again, the affordability of the host city was ranked as an important factor (M = 4.02; SD = 0.96). Similar scores were given for the academic reputation of the host institution (M = 4.01; SD = 0.99) and the recognition of the degree abroad (M = 3.97; SD = 1.16). These factors were, respectively, followed by the language of instruction (M = 3.82; SD = 1.20), the provision of support systems by the host institutions (M = 3.70; SD = 1.02), career aspirations in the destination country or city (M = 3.53; SD = 1.20) and the possibility of engaging with the local community (M = 3.46; SD = 1.08).

Figure 27

Average importance of pull factors in Full Degree students' mobility choices.
(N= 1,735).

	Average Importance
Affordability of host city	4.02
Academic reputation host institution	4.01
Recognition of degree abroad	3.97
Language of instruction	3.82
Support system by institution	3.7
Recommendations from students	3.55
Career aspirations in destination country	3.53
Possibilty to engage with local commmunity	3.46
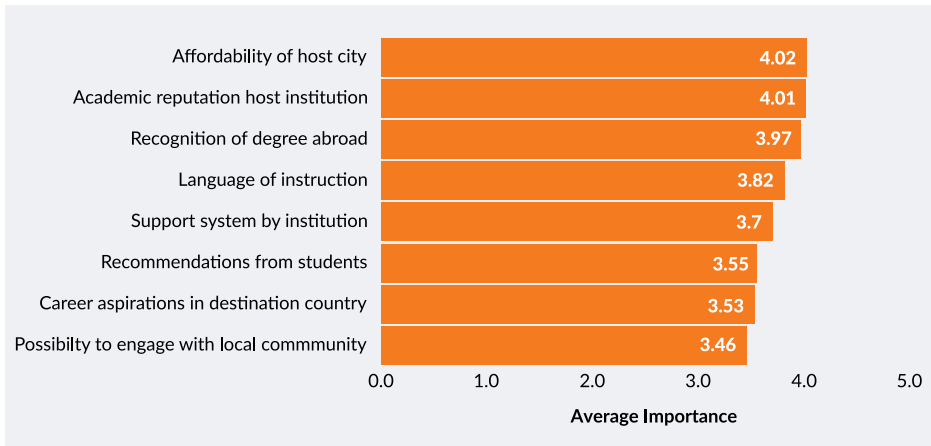
2.3. Moderators

Moderators are crucial factors that condition both initiators (human, financial and psychological capital) and attractors (host country, academic institute and host city) in the decision-making process of international student mobility.

First, students were asked to rate different moderating factors on a 5-point Likert scale with the following question: 'How important were the following factors when choosing your exchange destination?'. Moderating factors included in the questionnaire are recommendations from other students, the availability of host destinations (i.e., 'It was the only destination available/offered to me by my sending institution') and the reachability through sustainable means of transport. Data analysis for this question included the calculation of the relative importance of each of the factors.

Second, to get insights into the importance of people, which can serve as moderating variables (Shkoler & Rabenu, 2022), students were asked: 'Who played a role in your decision to go abroad?'. To respond to this question, students had to rank different types, including university staff, friends, university professors, family and other students. The most influential person needed to be ranked first (i.e., a score of one) and the least important last (i.e., a score of five).The mean ranks for each of these items were calculated. Data analysis for this question included the calculation of average ranks for each of the groups.

Two factors were rated as of lower importance for exchange students. These included the fact that it was the only destination available/offered by the sending institution (M = 2.33; SD = 1.44) and the reachability through sustainable means of transport (M = 2.77; SD = 1.30). On the other hand, recommendations from other students (M = 3.60; SD = 1.17) were indicated as of higher importance.

For full-degree students, all three factors generally resulted in higher average scores than exchange students. However, the reachability of the destination through sustainable means of transport (M = 3.25; SD = 1.23) and strategic alliances with the university (M = 3.13; SD = 1.34) remained of lower importance. Recommendations from fellow students were rated more highly (M = 3.55; SD = 1.05).

This last point is particularly noteworthy given that the European University Alliances initiative is one of the most promoted by the European Union. Despite this, both exchange and full-degree students seem to undervalue the strategic significance of these alliances. This feedback suggests a need for improvement, particularly in raising awareness and enhancing the promotion and communication of this key initiative to better inform and engage students.

The results of the ranking data showed the importance of different groups of persons. For exchange students, on average, the most influential persons in their (N = 14494) decision to go abroad are friends (Mrank = 2.36; SD = 1.21) and family (Mrank = 2.41; SD = 1.37). On average, other students were ranked third (Mrank = 2.90; SD = 1.31). Professors (Mrank = 3.61; SD = 1.28) and university staff (Mrank = 3.72; SD = 1.29) were ranked as of lower importance.

Figure 28

Descriptive statistics relating to the ranking data of students' influential persons (N= 14,488).
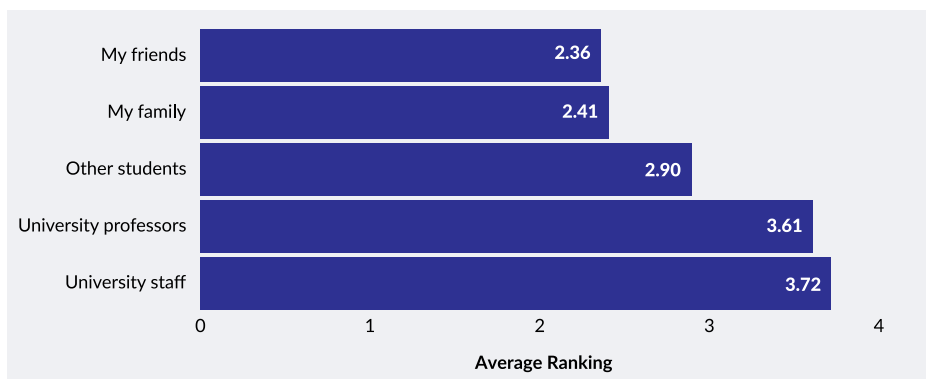
The same question was asked to the full degree students. The most influential persons in these students' decision to go abroad are family members (Mrank = 2.22; SD = 1.39) and friends (Mrank = 2.55; SD = 1.22). This result is different from exchange students, where friends received the highest average ranking, followed by family members. On average, other students were ranked third (Mrank = 3.14; SD = 1.33). Next in rank are professors (Mrank = 3.27; SD = 1.32) and university staff (Mrank = 3.83; SD = 1.22).

Figure 29

Descriptive statistics relating to the ranking data of Full Degree students' influential persons (N= 1,738).
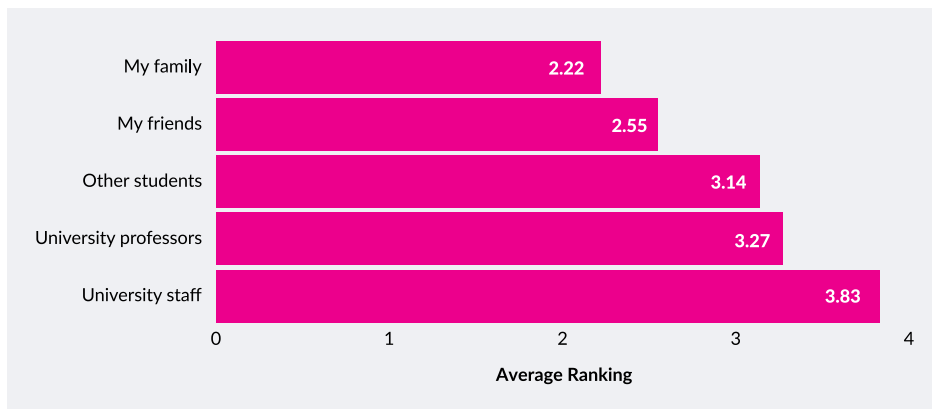
3. Participation in information activities before mobility

First, students were asked whether they participated in different types of information activities when going abroad. If applicable, students were also asked about their satisfaction with these information activities. The following types of activities were included: A group information session about exchange opportunities; a social event with an international mobility component (exchange alumni, international student association); individual meetings with university staff members; and a Study Abroad fair with an overview of opportunities.

It was found that students mostly participated in group information sessions about exchange opportunities (83%). Slightly lower participation rates were found for individual meetings with university staff members (71%) and social events with an international mobility component (exchange alumni, international student association) (69%). To a lesser extent, students reported participating in study abroad fairs with an overview of opportunities (61%).

Second, students who participated in an information initiative were asked about their satisfaction with it on a 5-point Likert scale. The survey results indicate a generally positive satisfaction level among students regarding information initiatives organised by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Study Abroad fairs, providing an overview of opportunities, received positive feedback with an average satisfaction score of 3.73 (SD = 1.10). Similar results were found for individual meetings with university staff members (M = 3.75, SD = 1.09), suggesting that personalised interactions contribute positively to students' perception of exchange opportunities. Social events with an international mobility component, such as exchange alumni or international student associations, achieved a satisfaction score of 3.76 (SD = 1.08). The highest satisfaction was observed in group information sessions about exchange opportunities, with an average score of 3.81 (SD = 1.03).

Figure 30

Average satisfaction with information initiatives (N= 14,497).
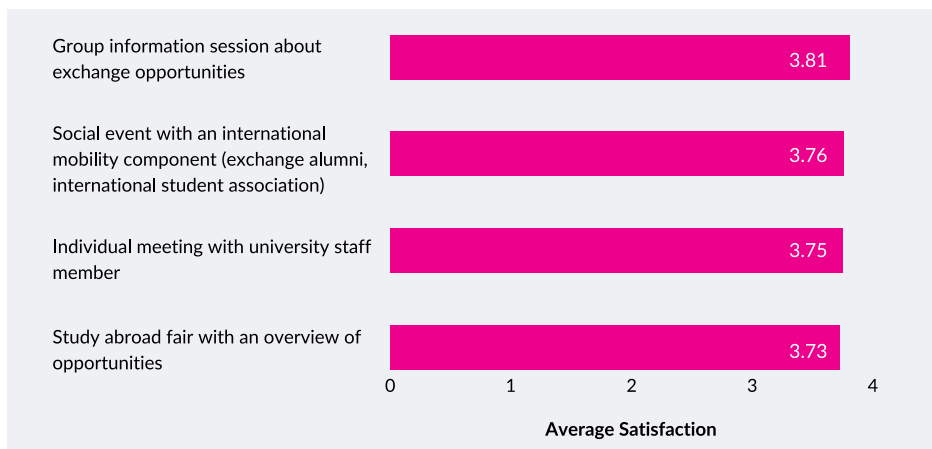
4. Internationalisation at home opportunities

Through the previous questions, we have explored the motivations that drive exchange students and full-degree students to study abroad. However, it is important to recognise that internationalisation opportunities can also occur at home, often serving as a first step towards future international mobility experiences.

HEIs are increasingly prioritising the integration of international opportunities for their students. To better understand the current landscape of international opportunities offered by HEIs, this subchapter will examine non-mobile students' perspectives. We will assess their satisfaction with the international activities provided by their institutions, identify the areas HEIs should prioritise and determine the extent of awareness among non-mobile students regarding EU initiatives in the field of international education.

4.1. Interest of non-mobile students in participating in international mobility experiences

To give context to this chapter, we start by analysing the perceptions of higher education students who have not yet studied abroad. Non-mobile students were asked about the type of mobility experience they would be interested in if given the opportunity (Figure 31). This information is crucial for identifying ways to increase student participation and diversity in Erasmus+ opportunities.

The majority of respondents expressed a preference for participating in a study exchange programme (79.94%) or a traineeship/internship programme (59.06%). To a lower extent, students were interested in full-degree programmes abroad (31.63%), short mobility programmes lasting less than one month (29.72%) or volunteering abroad (34.96%). The least popular option among these students was participation in a blended mobility programme, with only 13.02% expressing interest.

Figure 31

Distribution of potential mobility types of non-mobile students (N= 2,826).
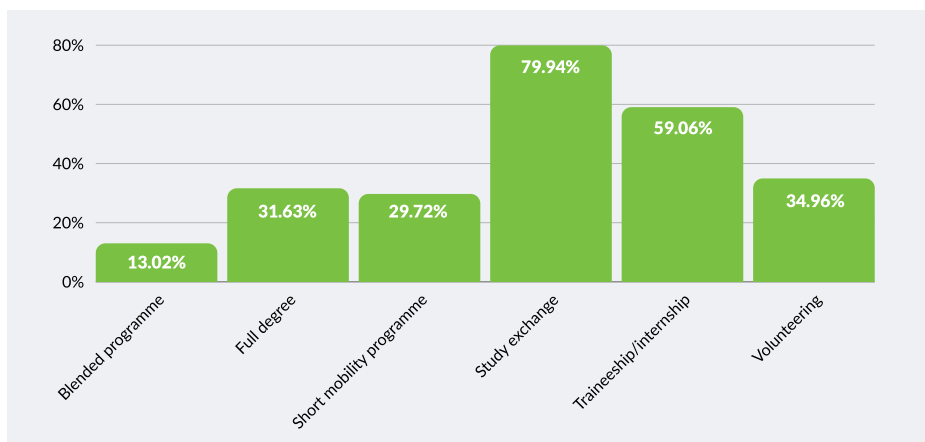
4.2. Satisfaction with internationalisation aspects of Higher Education Institutions

To start, non-mobile students were asked to report on their satisfaction with several aspects of their HEIs' internationalisation at home opportunities. Specifically, they had to rank five aspects on a 5-Point Likert scale: an internationalised curriculum that helps students to gain perspectives on global issues; intercultural learning activities; opportunities to learn and practise foreign languages; opportunities to meet students from other backgrounds and cultures; support to engage with international student associations.

On average, students expressed relatively high satisfaction with opportunities for foreign language development (M = 3.76, SD = 1.16) and for opportunities to meet students from other backgrounds and cultures (M = 3.79, SD = 1.14). In comparison, students reported a moderate level of satisfaction with the internationalised curriculum aimed at providing perspectives on global issues (M = 3.67, SD = 1.01) and support for involvement in international student associations (M = 3.54, SD = 1.13). Satisfaction with intercultural learning activities was slightly lower (M = 3.46, SD = 1.12), suggesting some room for improvement.

Figure 32

Average satisfaction with internationalisation at home opportunities at HEIs reported by non-mobile students (N= 2,353 to N= 2,663).
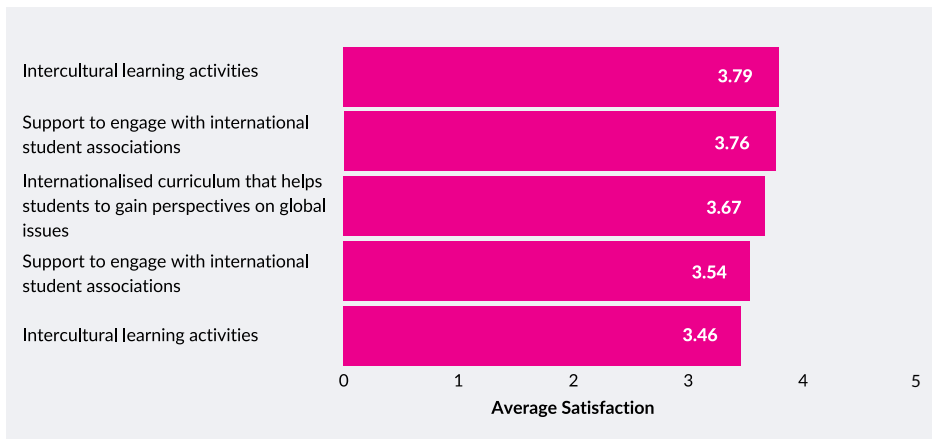
4.3. Priorities of the Higher Education Institutions

Non-mobile students were also asked to prioritise various aspects they consider important for their higher education institutions. As in the previous section, they were asked to rank five aspects on a 5-point Likert scale: facilitating exchange opportunities for all students; supporting collaboration between students from different universities; creating initiatives to tackle societal challenges in the communities they serve; establishing joint degrees with other universities across Europe; increasing opportunities for international research projects; and adopting innovative learning methodologies.

On average, students expressed relatively high satisfaction with all the options but rated facilitating exchange opportunities for all students (M = 4.36, SD = 0.79) and increasing opportunities for international research projects (M = 4.37, SD = 0.78) the highest. Slightly lower, but still rated highly, were supporting collaboration between students from different universities (M = 4.29, SD = 0.83), innovative learning methodologies (M = 4.29, SD = 0.84), and establishing joint degrees with other universities across Europe (M = 4.24, SD = 0.89). The lowest scoring aspect was creating initiatives to tackle societal challenges in the communities they serve (M =4.09, SD = 0.85).

Figure 33

Relative importance of priorities of HEIs (N= 2,374 to N= 2,800).
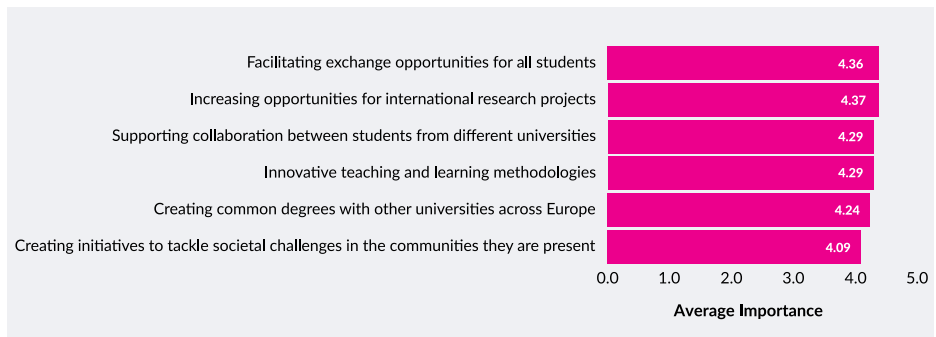
4.4. Knowledge about the EU initiatives

To conclude, non-mobile students were asked about their knowledge of EU initiatives in the field of learning mobility. To ensure accuracy in this section, the relative frequency of awareness for the following opportunities was analysed: Erasmus+ Studies, Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility, Erasmus+ Traineeships, Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters, Blended Intensive Programmes, European University Alliances and the European Solidarity Corps.

As expected, the most well-known initiative is Erasmus+ Studies (95.53%), followed by Erasmus+ Traineeships (58.08%) and Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility (34.99%). However, the most intriguing findings emerge in the subsequent categories. Awareness of Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters (27.02%), European Solidarity Corps (18.47%) and the European University Alliances (17.57%) is notably low.

Despite the long-standing presence of the first two initiatives, it's important to highlight that the European University Alliances initiative is the EU's flagship project for higher education, with an allocated budget of approximately €1.1 billion under the Erasmus+ Programme (European Commission, n.d.).

This findings not only indicate a need to improve the visibility of Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters and the European Solidarity Corps due to their years of existence, as well as the European University Alliances, given its prominence in higher education. This further promotion, will raise awareness of other opportunities beyond Erasmus+ Studies, offering unique options for young people interested in studying abroad.

Finally, it is crucial to note that the Blended Intensive Programmes were recognised by only 8.84% of respondents, indicating a need for better communication regardingthis opportunity. This is especially important considering the findings from Chapter One (Section 5: Duration of the Mobility Experience), which highlighted that students with fewer opportunities, who may be hesitant to commit to longer mobility experiences, find short-term programmes particularly attractive.

Figure 34

Relative frequency of the knowledge about the EU initiatives (N= 2,772).

Bar chart showing:
- Erasmus+ Studies: 95.53%
- Erasmus+ Internships: 58.08%
- Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility: 34.99%
- Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters: 27.02%
- Erasmus Solidarity Corps: 18.47%
- European University Alliances: 17.57%
- Blended Intensive Programmes: 8.84%
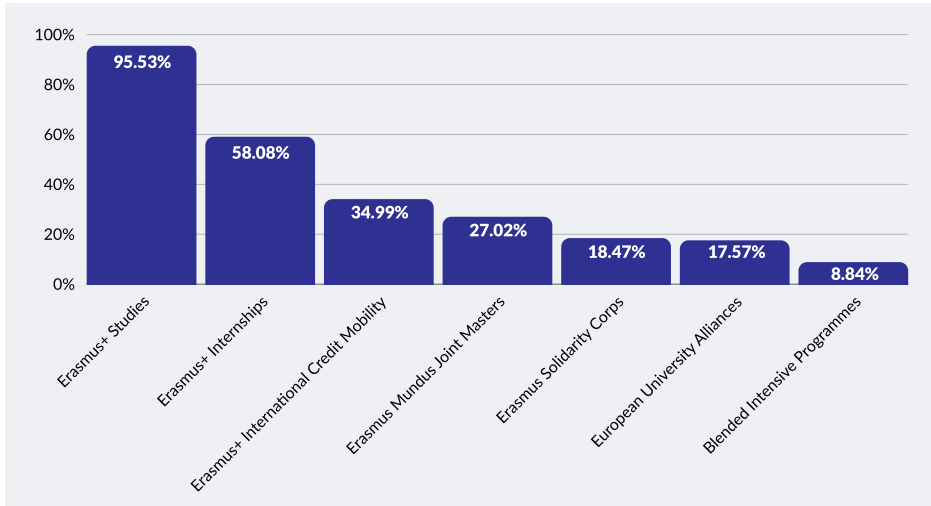
5. Pre-departure support

Pre-departure support is a crucial factor that can significantly influence the overall experience of students going abroad. When we asked exchange students, 'Which pre-departure support do you find important to receive?' several key factors emerged. These include information about available financial support (15.37%), assistance with the application process (12.43%), details about the programmes offered (12.29%), hearing from students who have previously studied abroad (11.84%) and information about the courses offered by potential host universities (10.90%).

These results highlight the importance students place on receiving comprehensive information before they embark on their international experience and the need for robust support during the application process. The data also underscores the value of peer-to-peer support, indicating that hearing from previous exchange students plays a significant role in preparing future participants. This demonstrates the critical role alumni can play as ambassadors of international mobility, particularly as part of the Erasmus Generation.

These findings align with the SIEM Research report, which states, 'Across all the project's target groups, the respondents followed the same pattern as the total cohort but reported finding the support activities provided useful or very useful at a higher rate' (Allinson & Gabriels, 2021, p. 56).

On the lower end of the scale, we find factors such as support in choosing a host university (7.48%), opportunities to meet with other students considering mobility (7.18%), information on the impact of exchange on grades (7.05%), meetings with students from the host university (5.93%), support in finding internship placements (4.81%), and information on the impact on career prospects (4.26%).

Figure 35

Relative frequency of the factors related to the importance of types of pre-departure support (N= 14,495).
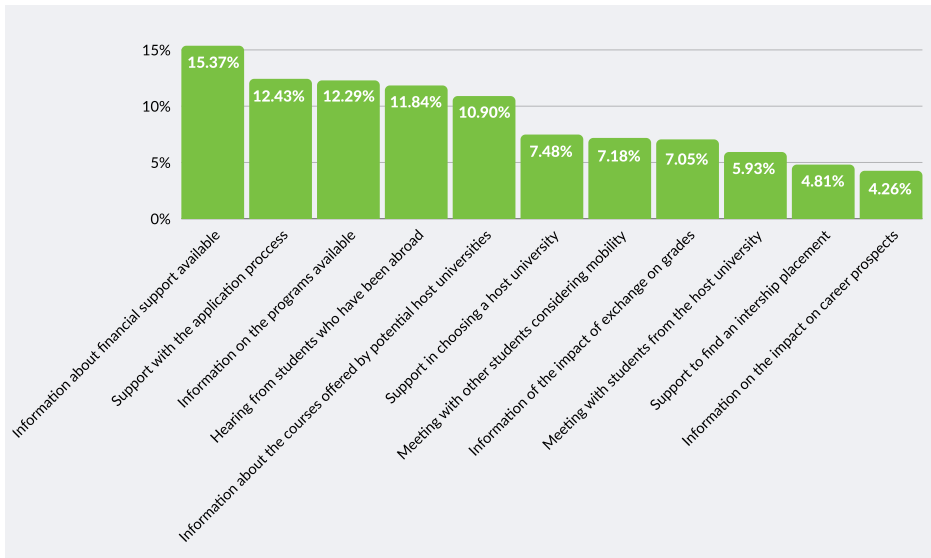
> ❝
> *I would have appreciated if they did some intercultural events or give us the opportunity to talk with previous students who have done the same exchange*

"

I think it was very nice we had meetings with students who previously went on an exchange to the destinations we were going to. For me personally this was not possible because I was the first one to go to Iaşi in five years, but I love that they offered this possibility for other students. They also prepared us for any kind of cultural shock we might encounter.

5.1. Satisfaction with the services and support provided by the Sending Institution (before arrival)

The XV ESNsurvey explored the satisfaction of exchange students with the services provided by their sending and host institutions across different stages of mobility—before, during, and after. These questions aimed to capture students' overall perceptions of the services offered by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and to understand what students expect from these institutions at each phase of their mobility experience.

This section focuses on the satisfaction with the services and support provided by the sending institution before arrival. Participants were asked to rate various services on a Likert scale ranging from 'very dissatisfied' (1) to 'very satisfied' (5).

As shown in Figure 36, the most valued services by students are as follows: *information on mobility opportunities before application* (M = 3.92, SD = 0.97), *information about available funding/financial aid* (M = 3.91, SD = 3.91), *support in preparing the Learning Agreement* (M = 3.82, SD = 1.14), *support for mobility application* (M = 3.80, SD = 1.10), *information and support on grade transfer, ECTS, and study recognition* (M = 3.74, SD = 1.16), *international components in teaching and learning at the sending university* (3.72, SD = 1.07), *intercultural and other international activities at the sending university* (M = 3.62, SD = 1.15), *linguistic support* (M = 3.58, SD = 1.16), *and support for people with fewer opportunities or special needs* (M = 3.52, SD = 1.18).

It is noteworthy that all services received ratings above 3 points, indicating the high relevance placed on the role of the sending institution before mobility.

Figure 36

Average satisfaction with the support provided by Sending Institutions before arrival (N= 14,491).

Average satisfaction with the support provided by Sending Institutions before arrival.

Information on mobility opportunities for university students (before mobility application) — 3.92
Information about available funding/financial aid — 3.91
Support in the preparation of the Learning Agreement — 3.82
Support for mobility application (how to apply for mobility, to write motivation letters, e.t.c) — 3.80
Information and support on grade transfer, ECTS and mobilities study recognition — 3.74
An international component in teaching and learning activities in sending university — 3.72
Linguistic support (online language support, language courses) — 3.62
Intercultural and other international activities at the sending university — 3.58
Support for people with fewer opportunities or special needs — 3.52

Avarage Satisfaction Score

> " They provided check-list to help me make sure that I had done everything I needed before, during, and after my mobility.

5.2. Satisfaction with the services and support provided by the Host Institution (before arrival)

Before arrival, it is crucial to understand students' perceptions of the services provided by their Host Institution. Participants were asked to rate various services on a Likert scale ranging from 'very dissatisfied' (1) to 'very satisfied' (5).

As shown in Figure 37, the services most valued by students are as follows: support in communicating with faculty and professors (M = 3.70, SD = 1.14), assistance in communicating with other departments and services within the higher education institution (M = 3.56, SD = 1.19), help with the visa and residence permit process (M = 3.41, SD = 1.27), support in finding accommodation (M = 3.26, SD = 1.42), information about the cost of living in the host country (M = 3.25, SD = 1.21), and assistance with obtaining insurance (M = 3.14, SD = 1.28).

Notably, none of the services received a rating below 3 points, underscoring the overall importance students place on pre-arrival support from both sending and host institutions.

Figure 37

Average satisfaction with the support provided by Host Institutions before arrival (N= 9,953 to N= 12,732).
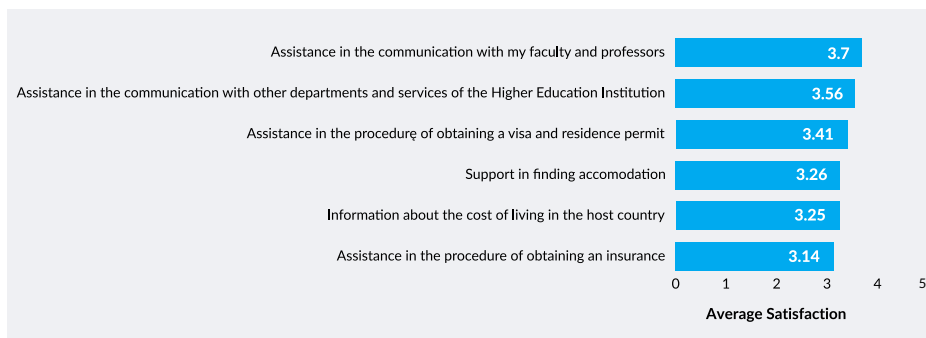
6. Erasmus Student Charter

The Erasmus Student Charter embodies the core values and priorities of the Erasmus+ Programme, serving to adequately inform participants about their rights and responsibilities, and ensuring the smooth implementation of their mobility experience. As such, it stands as one of the essential documents that students must have proper access to and knowledge of before embarking on their journey abroad.

In response to the question, 'Were you informed of the rights of Erasmus students included in the Erasmus Student Charter during your mobility?' (Figure 38), the findings reveal that 38% of students received this information when they first learned about Erasmus opportunities, 22.1% when submitting their Erasmus+ application, and 19.1% when signing the Erasmus+ grant agreement.

However, it is concerning to note that 20.7% of the 14,751 respondents reported not being informed about the Erasmus Student Charter at all (approximately 3,053 students). This underscores the urgent need to enhance the promotion and dissemination of this crucial document in the coming years.

Figure 38

Time of the provision of the Erasmus Student Charter to exchange students, **percentage** (general sample, N= 14.751).

- 19.1%
- 38%
- 20.7%
- 22.1%

When I submitted my application for Erasmus+

When I signed the Erasmus+ Grant Agreement

When I was informed about Erasmus+ Opportunities

I was not informed about the Erasmus Student Charter
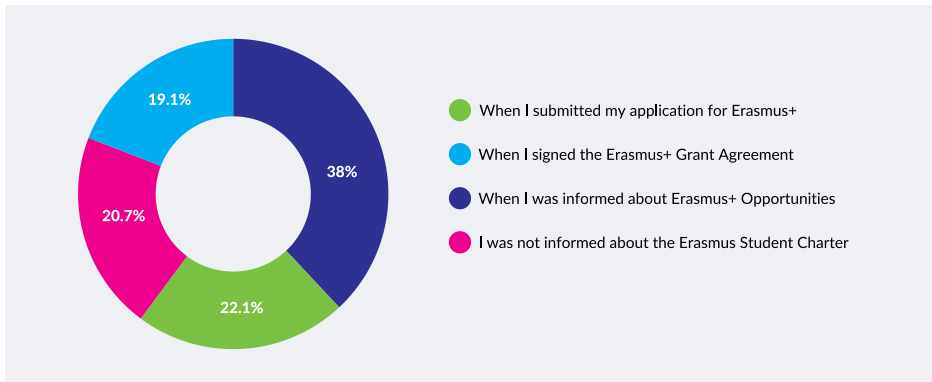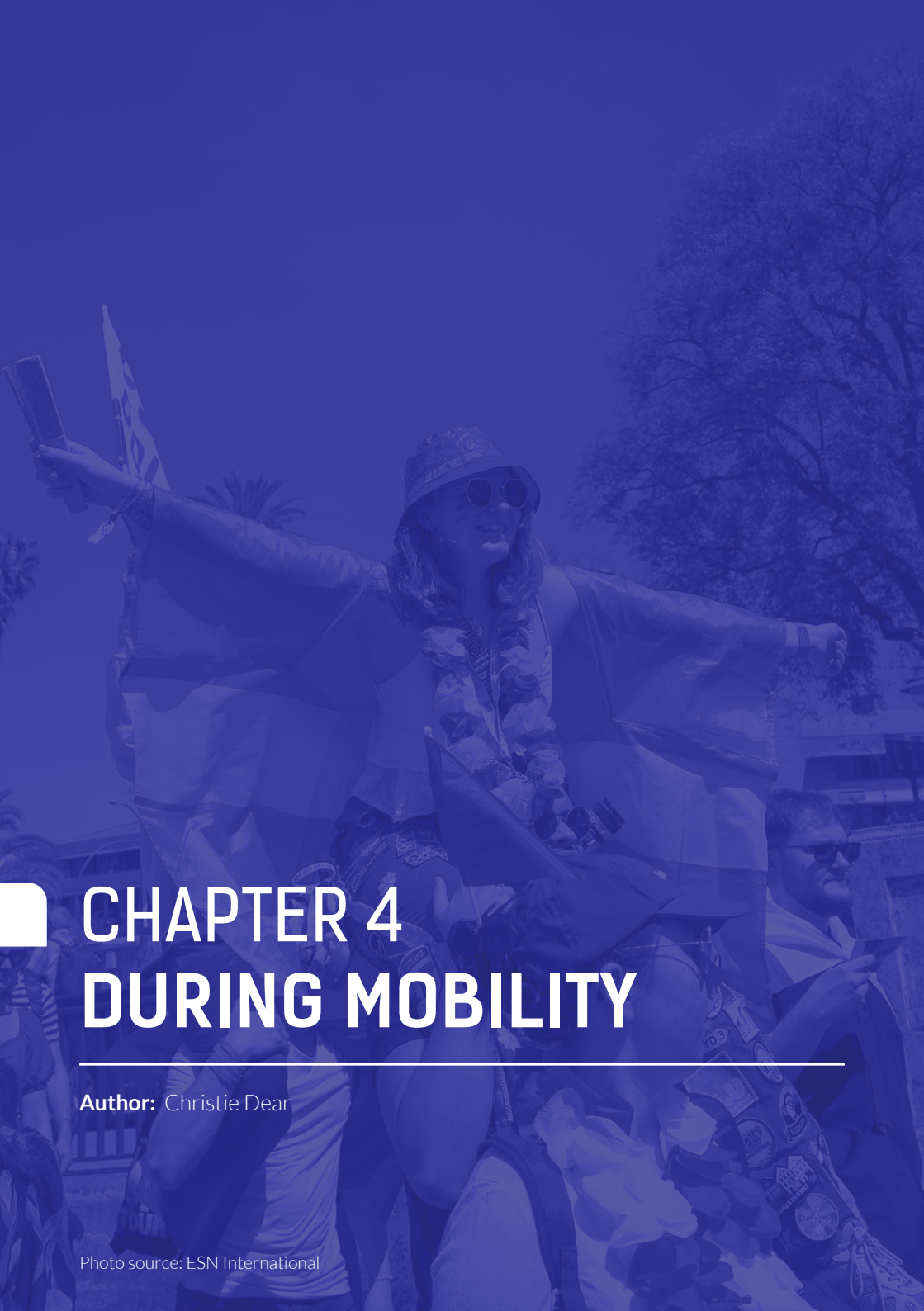
CHAPTER 4
DURING MOBILITY

Author: Christie Dear

This chapter, focused on the second stage of the mobility experience, delves into the 'during mobility' phase. It begins by examining the involvement of international students within the local community, as one of the programme's key goals is to encourage engagement with both local students and the broader community. We start by exploring how international students interact with various groups while abroad, identifying the activities they participate in within the local community and assessing their involvement with Erasmus Student Network local sections or other similar organisations.

Next, we address the challenges encountered by international students during their stay and analyse the impact of these issues, followed by an understanding of the teaching and learning methods applied by the host institution. The chapter concludes by evaluating student satisfaction with the support and services provided by the host institution during their time abroad, offering a comparison with the data previously examined in Chapter 3.

As with the other chapters, Chapter 4 primarily focuses on the experiences of exchange students, but relevant comparisons with full-degree students are also provided. Additionally, national comparisons are included where the data sets allow.

1. Engagement with different groups while aboard

1.1. Frequency of engagement

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents 'never' and 5 represents 'very often', data from 14,396 respondents reveals a clear pattern in engagement levels with different groups. For exchange students (Figure 39), the group they engaged with the least was members of the local community, with only 34% of respondents indicating that they engaged with this group 'often' or 'very often'.

In contrast, the highest levels of engagement were with non-local groups, such as international students from different nationalities (62.5%, 'very often') and students from the respondents' home country (35.7%, 'very often').
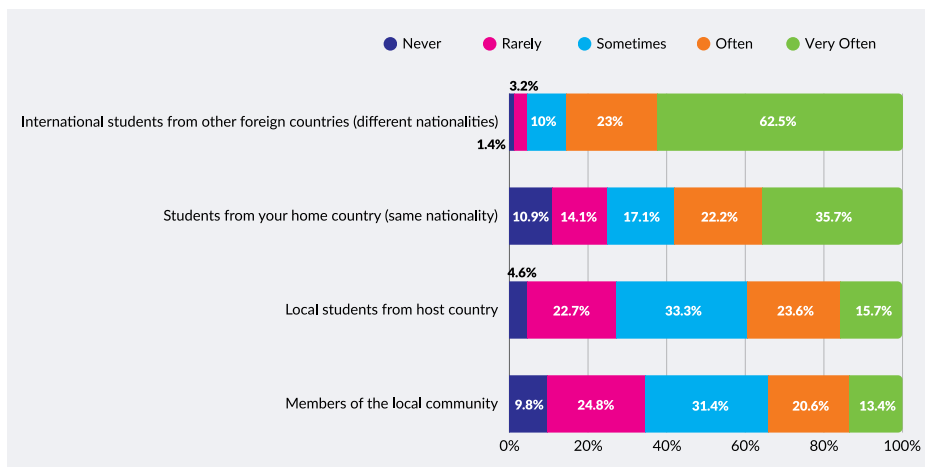
When it comes to local groups, the most common response was 'sometimes', with 33% for engagement with local students and 31% for engagement with members of the local community. These data indicate that international students tend to engage more frequently with other international students rather than with locals, highlighting a gap in their interaction with the local community.

When examining the exchange students group, we compared the results for students and trainees, noting some positive trends in local engagement and differences between the trainees and the exchanges students. The data shows more interaction with members of the local community among trainees, with 26.8% reporting 'very often', and with local students from the host country, where 20.4% also indicated 'very often'.

Conversely, there is a decline in engagement with students from their home country, with only 24.4% reporting 'very often', and with international students from other foreign countries, where 'very often' drops to 43.6%.

Figure 39

Exchange students' distribution of the frequency of interaction with different groups (N= 14,396).

For full-degree students (Figure 40), less engagement across all groups was observed. Although *very often* remains the most common response for non-local groups, the percentage drops to 55.1% for international students from other countries and to 27.2% for students from their home country.

However, when combining the data for 'often' and 'very often', a different pattern emerges: full-degree students actually report more contact with local students and the local community than exchange students. Specifically, full-degree students have 49% interaction with local students and 37.9% with the local community, compared to 39.3% and 34%, respectively, for exchange students.

This suggests that, despite the general decrease in engagement, full-degree students may have more frequent interactions with both local students and the community than exchange students do.

Figure 40

Full-degree students' distribution of the frequency of interaction with different groups (N= 1,713).
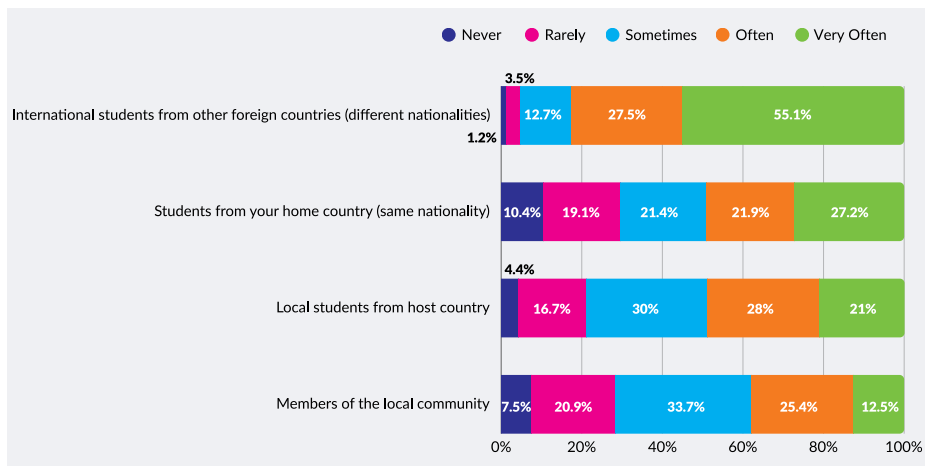
1.2. Number of international friends from each group

To gain a comprehensive understanding of engagement with different groups, we also asked survey participants to rate the number of friends they made from various groups during their time abroad.

Based on a sample of 14,017 responses (Figure 41), exchange students predominantly made friends with people from other nationalities, with 92.92% reporting that they made two or more friends in this group[14]. In contrast, 68.15% of respondents reported making two or more friends from their own nationality, with 36.1% indicating they made 2 to 5 friends in this category. Interestingly, 67.55% of respondents made two or more local friends, with a notable increase in the 2-5 friends category.

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[14] This and the following analysis corresponds to the sums of the categories "2-5 friends", "6-10 friends", "11-15 friends" and "more than "16 friends".

Similar to previous findings, a comparison was made between students and trainees, noting a general decline in the number of friends in the two groups among trainees. Specifically, only 55%[15] of trainees reported having more than two friends from their own nationality, compared to 69.1% of students. A similar trend was observed with international students from different nationalities, where 81.8% of trainees reported having two or more friends, compared to 94% of students. Interestingly, this trend did not extend to the local friends group, where 71.6% of trainees and 67.1% of students reported having two or more local friends.

Figure 41

Percentage of number of international friends of exchange students (N= 14,017).
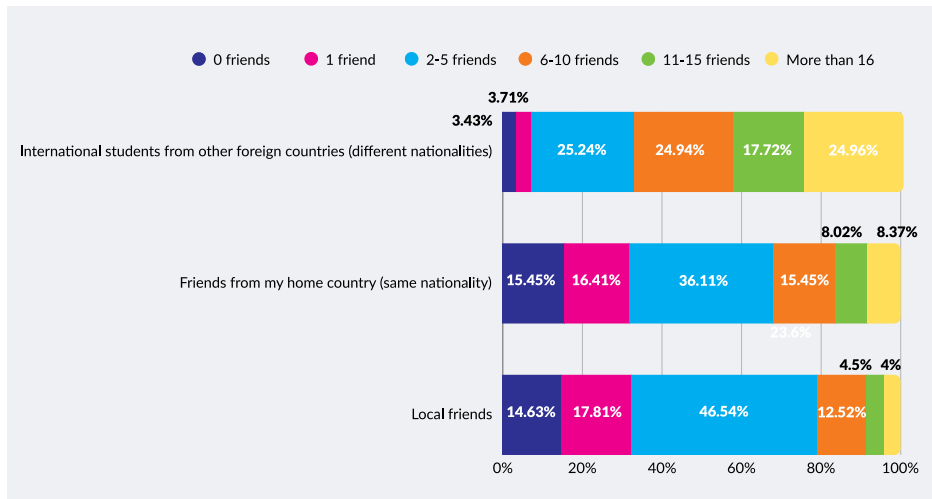
The same trend is observed in the full-degree student sample, despite their greater opportunities for interaction with local students. Based on a sample of 1,673 responses (Figure 42), the group where respondents made the most friends was again international students of different nationalities, with 93.42% reporting that they made at least 2 friends in this category. Interestingly, the number of local friends and friends from the same nationality also increased compared to the previous sample.

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[15] This and the following analysis corresponds to the sums of the categories "2-5 friends", "6-10 friends", "11-15 friends" and "more than "16 friends".

Figure 42

Percentage of number of international friends of full degree students (N= 1,673).
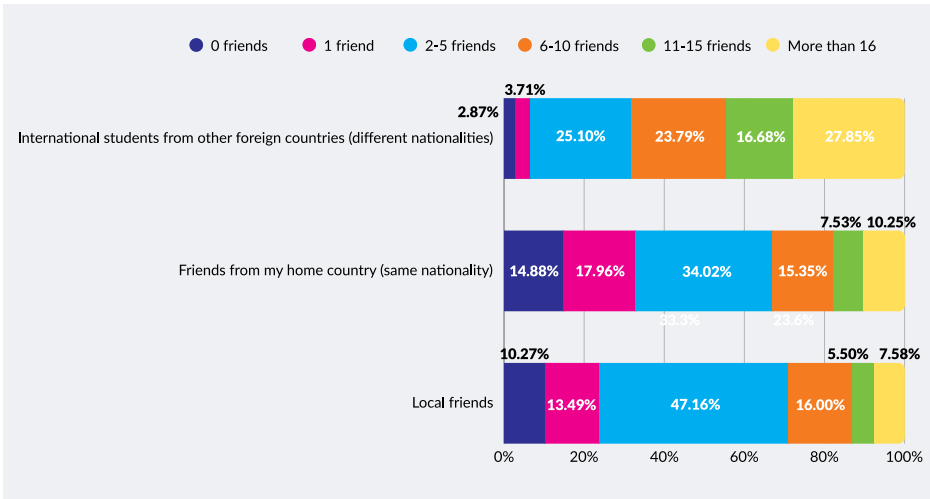
For this question, we also compared two different aspects: the overall number of friends exchange students made while abroad (Figure 42) and their participation in ESN activities (Figure 43). The results indicate a possible impact of attending ESN events on international students' ability to make friends; however, proving correlation would require a dedicated analysis.

Figure 43 illustrates a comparison between the engagement of exchange students with friends from the same country and their attendance at ESN activities. The data indicate that students who participated in ESN activities were more likely to have friends from different nationalities, with 71.8% reporting having two or more friends if they engaged in ESN activities, compared to 53.2% who reported having two or more friends without such engagement.

It is important to note that although not visually represented in a graphic like Figure 43, engagement in ESN activities is also an important factor in increasing the number of local friends and friends from different nationalities. This demonstrates that local sections of the Erasmus Student Network serve as effective hubs for international students to connect with both each other and local students.

Figure 43

Distribution of the amount of friends of the same nationality as the participant, split between participants who participated in ESN events (N= 1,501) and those who did not (N= 7,365).
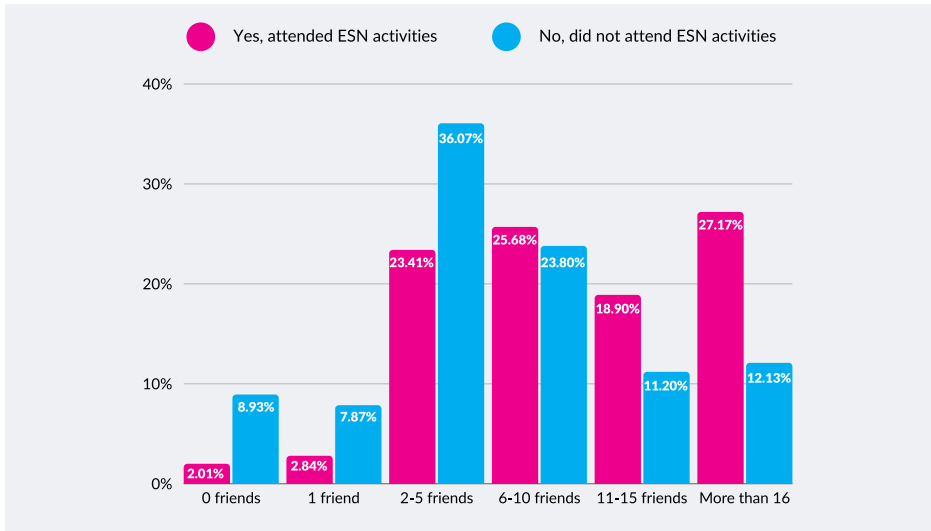
2. Activities in the Local Community or the Host Institution

In a sample of 14,568 responses, 21.78% of participants reported joining a local sports club or team, 15.26% joined a local student or youth association, 9.52% volunteered in the local community, 7.13% became members of the local Student Union or Council, 6.76% participated in an art, music, or drama club and 6.57% found a part-time student job. Notably, over half of the respondents (53.47%) did not participate in any of these activities, while 3.83% indicated involvement in other types of activities.

Interestingly, the results differ for the full-degree student group. Among them, 31.63% found a part-time student job, 30.16% joined a local student or youth association, 26.88% joined a local sports club or team, 22.48% volunteered in the local community, 15.79% became a member of the local Student Union or Council, and 9.92% participated in an art, music, or drama club. Only 27.35% of full-degree students did not engage in any of these activities, while 4.28% participated in other activities.

These findings suggest that a longer stay in a country leads to greater engagement with local community activities, as full-degree students have more time

to integrate and interact with the local community. These findings also align with Figure 39, which suggests that full-degree students may have more frequent interactions with both local students and the community than exchange students.

Figure 44

Actions taken by exchange students (N= 14,568) **and full-degree students** (N= 1,704) **in the local community or host institution** (general sample, N= 14,568).
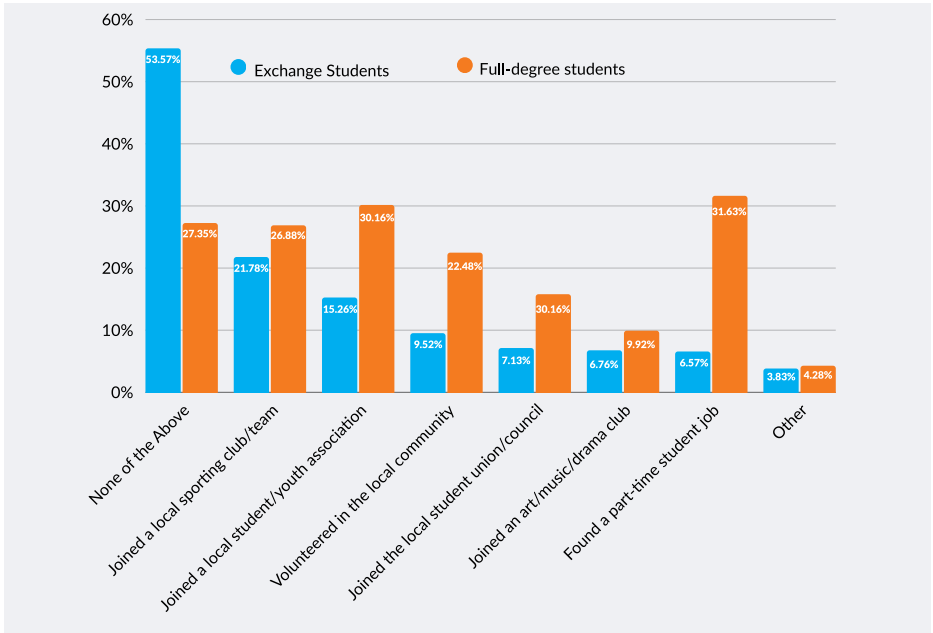
When comparing these results with the XIV ESNsurvey (2021), we observe a similar trend, with a noticeable decrease in the overall engagement in activities within the local community of the host institution. Pre-COVID-19 data shows that 47.68% of participants reported not participating in any activities, compared to 53.37% in the XV ESNsurvey.

There is, however, a slight increase in the participation in specific categories: Joined a local sporting club/team rose from 18.71% to 21.78%; found a part-time student job increased from 5.47% to 6.57%; joined an art/music/drama club went from 6.47% to 6.76% and joined a local student union/council increased from 5.42% to 7.13%. However, there a slight decrease in those who volunteered in the local community, which went from 10% to 9.52% (Erasmus Student Network, 2021).

The persistent lack of engagement by international students in the local community is concerning, particularly when contrasted with the prioritisation of this area as the fourth priority in the Erasmus+ Programme. The gap between students' perceptions and their actual participation highlights the need for better implementation of this priority through concrete actions in the future.

3. Events Organised by the Local Sections of ESN or by Other Organisations for International Students

In a sample of 14,480 responses, 79.92% of participants reported taking part in activities organised by a local ESN section or another organisation working with international students. Of these, 52.5% attended activities specifically organised by a local ESN section, 9.02% participated in activities organised by another organisation and 18.4% attended activities by both. On the other hand, 10.7% of respondents indicated they were not interested in these activities, while 9.3% mentioned that no such organisations were available.

Interestingly, the responses from full-degree students differ. Among this group, 71.7% participated in activities organised by a local ESN section or another organisation. Specifically, 41.3% attended activities by a local ESN section, 11.4% participated in activities organised by another organisation and 19% attended activities by both. Additionally, 15.3% of full-degree students reported not being interested in these activities, and 13% noted that no such organisations were available.

When comparing the data from exchange students with the XIV ESNsurvey (2021), particularly regarding participation in activities before COVID-19, we observe a significant increase in the number of participants in ESN activities (from 40.52% to 52.5%). There is also a slight decrease in participation in activities organised by other organisations (from 11.26% to 9.2%). It is encouraging to note that more students are now aware of the existence of ESN, as evidenced by the reduction in the option No, there was no such organisation from 12.87% to 9.3%. Additionally, there has been a decrease in the percentage of students who reported a lack of interest in participating, with this figure dropping from 11.6% in 2021 to 10.7% in 2024.

"

There are multiple international students' organisations which do their best to make us feel welcome and at home. They are very friendly and helpful in every situation.

Figure 45

Distribution of participation in activities organised by ESN sections or other organisations working with international students by exchange students (N= 1,4480) **and full-degree students** (N= 1,716).
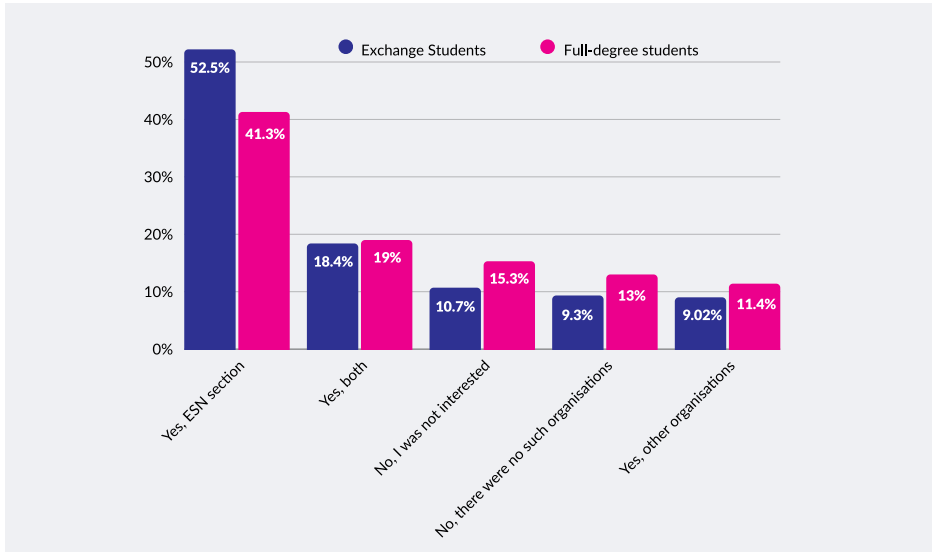
4. Issues Encountered Abroad

Identifying the primary challenges faced by exchange students participating in learning mobility[16] is essential for developing effective measures to support mobility throughout its various phases. The results of the XV ESNsurvey reveal several ongoing issues, consistent with previous ESNsurveys. However, a comparison with the XIV ESNsurvey (2021) highlights a notable increase in the concern over insufficient funding to cover the cost of living, which has now emerged as the top issue reported by students (35.63%). This financial strain is further exacerbated by delays in the disbursement of grants and scholarships, which account for 20.11% of the reported concerns (Erasmus Student Network, 2021).

Close behind, challenges related to finding affordable accommodation have risen sharply, with 35.5% of students citing this as a significant issue—an increase compared to previous years (27.6 from XIV ESNsurvey)[17]. The Housing Survey Report also addresses this concern, revealing that nearly half of respondents

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[16] It is important to note that although this subchapter focuses on the challenges faced by exchange students, the difficulties encountered by full-degree students are similar, underscoring the universal nature of these issues for participants in learning mobility experiences.

can cover less than 50% of their accommodation costs with their scholarships (European Students Union & Erasmus Student Network, 2023).

Academic difficulties remain a major challenge, with 33.97% of students reporting problems related to their courses. Additionally, issues with integrating with local students have also become more pronounced, with 28.95% of students facing difficulties in this area. This is closely related to the analysis in Figure 39 of this chapter, which shows a lack of engagement between international and local students, particularly among exchange students.

Consistent with previous surveys, the least frequently reported problem was discrimination based on personal background, affecting 4.3% of respondents. It is important to note that although the percentage related to this issue is smaller compared to others, discrimination remains a significant concern reported by exchange students.

An analysis of these challenges in comparison with earlier ESNsurveys reveals that many of these problems have persisted for a long time. Even as far back as the ESNsurvey 2016, key issues such as enrolment in courses, accommodation and living expenses, admission and arrival difficulties, finances and IT connectivity were already highlighted (Erasmus Student Network, 2016). Given the enduring nature of these challenges, it is crucial to take follow-up actions to address and mitigate these concerns effectively.

Figure 46

Issues encountered during the stay abroad by exchange students (general sample, N= 14,568).

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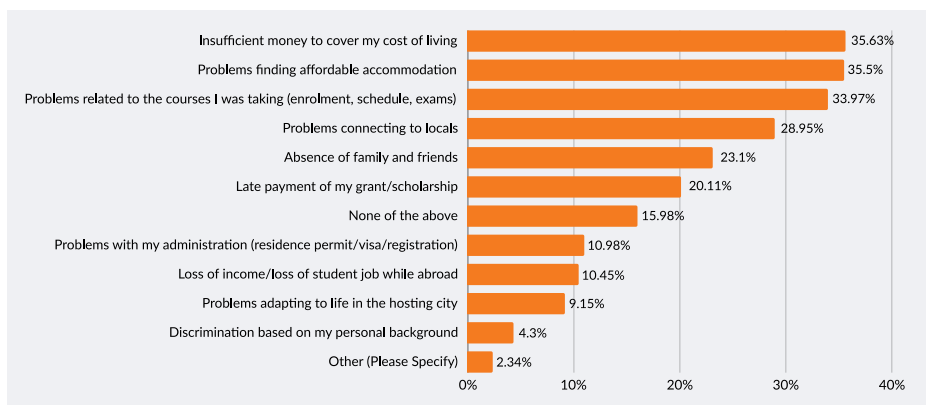
[17] Due to limitations in the data, the responses were analysed as a Likert scale, allowing for a more streamlined data display.

The challenges faced by students impact their overall experience (Figure 47). Specifically, as the results of the current survey show, these difficulties lead to feelings of anxiety and stress for 42.3% of students, reduced motivation to study for 37.6% and a diminished sense of belonging within the student community for 35.4%. Additionally, 28.5% of students report a weakened sense of belonging to the local community and 22.9% experience feelings of isolation and social exclusion.

Figure 47

Impact of the issues experienced while abroad (general sample, N= 14,478).
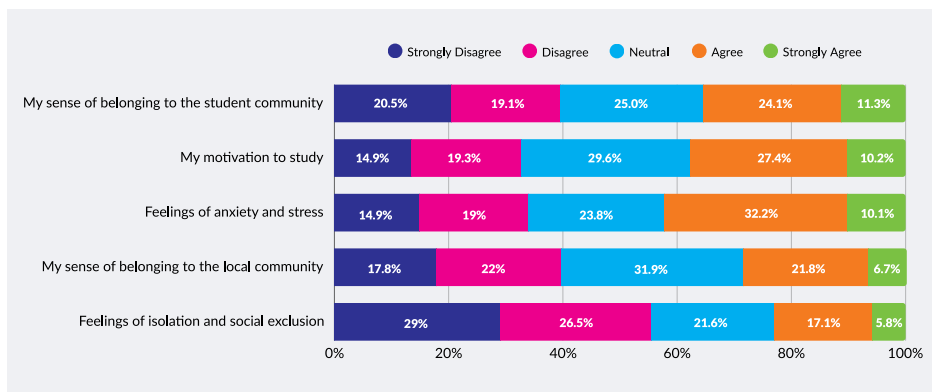
5. Teaching & Learning methods applied in the host university

Looking at Figure 48, we can observe the different teaching and learning methods applied by host universities to exchange students. Participants in the XV ESNsurvey had the opportunity to rate these methods, ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*.

The results indicate that 69% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the teaching methods used by their host institution enhanced critical thinking, making it the highest-rated method. This was followed by the use of innovative digital approaches, with 52% of students expressing agreement. Furthermore, 48% of students believed that the teaching methods included societal challenge-based education and 43.1% noted that environmental sustainability was discussed across subjects. The lowest rating was for teaching methods that involved engaging with the local community, with only 42.4% in agreement, reflecting the findings in Chapter 3, Point 4, where the importance of international students engaging with civil society during their exchange was highlighted.

It is important to note that, apart from the option of enhancing critical thinking, the other methods were rated fairly average by students. This suggests that there is still considerable room for improvement in teaching and learning methods to meet the expectations of international students.

Figure 48

Level of agreement with the teaching and learning methods applied to the host university (N= 12,434 exchange students).
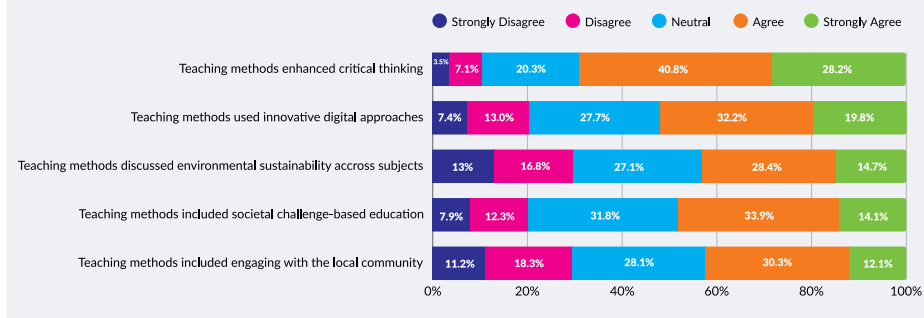
6. Satisfaction with the services and support provided by the Host Institution during mobility

To conclude this chapter, and building on the previous analysis related to student satisfaction, we now turn to the perceptions of students regarding the services provided by their Host Institution during their mobility period. Participants were asked to rate several services on a Likert scale ranging from very *dissatisfied* (1) to very *satisfied* (5).

As shown in Figure 49, the services that students value most while abroad are welcome and *orientation events and initiatives* (M = 3.37, SD = 0.90), *linguistic support* (M = 3.23, SD = 0.96), *support during communication with local authorities* (M = 3.04, SD = 0.98) and *access to healthcare services* (M = 3.03, SD = 0.98).

Services rated below 3 points, indicating lower satisfaction, include *assistance with obtaining a visa and residence permit* (M = 2.98, SD = 0.99), *support for people with fewer opportunities* (M = 2.96, SD = 0.93), *support for integration into the local student community* (M = 2.95, SD = 0.97), *mentoring and support services* (M = 2.93, SD = 1.05), *assistance with obtaining insurance* (M = 2.87, SD = 1.00) and *support in finding accommodation* (M = 2.67, SD = 1.12).

Figure 49

Average satisfaction with the services and support provided by the Host Institution during mobility (N= 12,842).

Service	Average Satisfaction (1-5)
Welcome and orientation events and initiatives	3.37
Linguistic support	3.23
Support during communication with local authorities	3.04
Access to health care services	3.03
Assistance in the procedure of obtaining visa and residence permit	2.98
Support for people with fewer opportunites	2.96
Support for integration in the local students' community	2.95
Mentoring and support services	2.93
Assistance in the procedure of obtaining insurance	2.87
Support in finding accommodation	2.67

Average Satisfaction (1-5)

"

I truly appreciate the multicultural aspect of this university I felt like I didn't stand out in a bad way, I felt safe and I've never experienced any discrimination. Also the help that I received from local students was amazing, I was offered help with everything that I had problems with.

CHAPTER 5
AFTER MOBILITY

Author: Yazeed Haddad & Luca Mistretta

In this final phase of mobility, we focus on the post-mobility experience. The analysis begins by exploring students' overall perceptions of their mobility experience, encompassing insights from all three mobility stages.

We start by examining the means of transportation students used during their mobility journey, providing a comparative analysis across five countries from different regions of Europe, followed by an exploration of the reasons behind their transportation choices.

Next, we review the digital tools used throughout the Erasmus+ journey and compare the experiences of international students at their host universities with those of local students. We then assess students' engagement with civil society organisations after mobility and examine the skills they developed while abroad.

Finally, we analyse the satisfaction of international students with the services provided by HEIs. This includes evaluating their satisfaction with the services offered by Sending Institutions after the exchange, adherence to the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education 2021-2027 and overall satisfaction with both sending and host institutions.

As with other chapters, comparisons between different target groups will be made where relevant, with a particular emphasis on analysing differences across various national contexts.

1. Means of transportation used during mobility journey

Participants were asked which means of transport they used during key moments of their mobility. Upon reviewing the results, it becomes apparent that the most preferred mode of transportation for travelling to the mobility destination is 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, bus (40.02%) and trains (37.40%) emerge as the preferred choices.

Figure 50

Means of transport used for travelling at the three key moments of your exchange, percentage (N= 14,489).
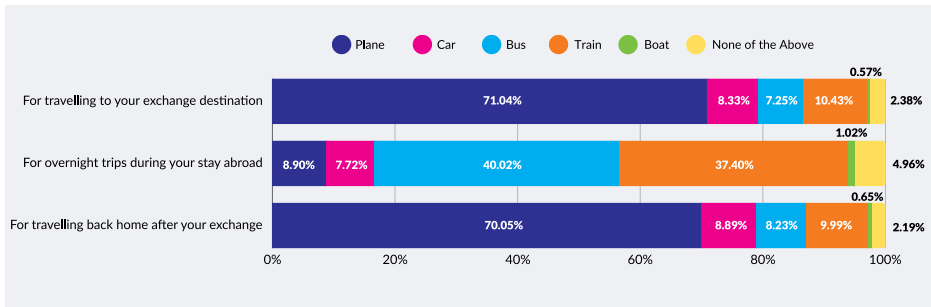
To better understand students' travel preferences, we compared the top 10 sending countries from the ESNsurvey (Figure 51). While the plane remains the preferred method of travel to the mobility destination across all countries analysed, notable differences emerged between them.

Greece had the highest percentage of students choosing to fly (95.9%), followed by Spain (88.3%), Italy (78.8%), Poland (70.6%) and Romania (70.5%). In contrast, Austria (61.9%), France (56.7%), the Czech Republic (55.2%) and Germany (50.6%) had lower percentages of students travelling by plane, showing a greater preference for buses and trains in these countries.

Figure 51

Relative frequencies of transportation option to the mobility destination per sending country (N= 14,484).
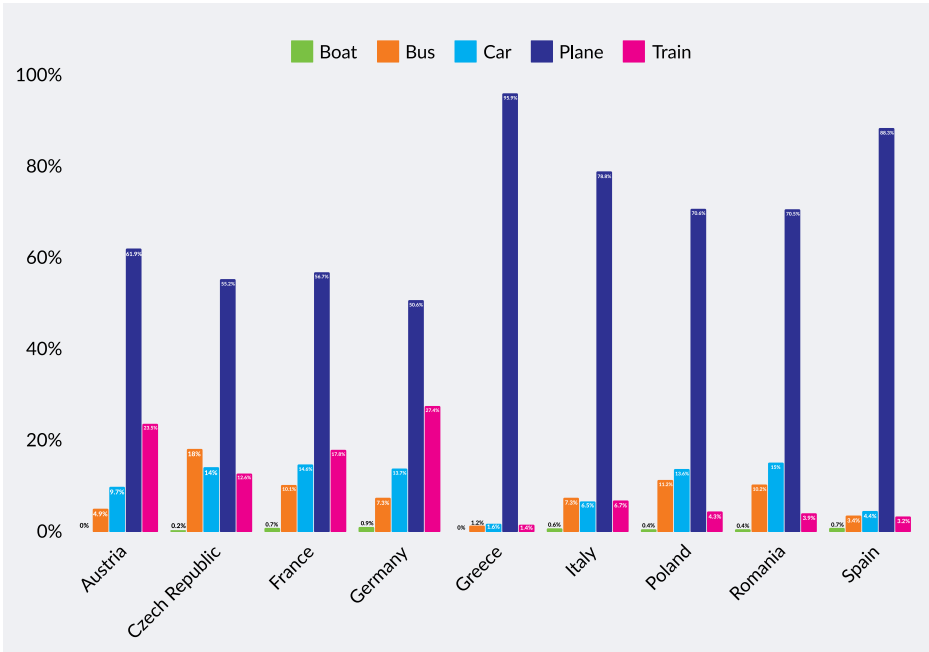
To better understand the factors influencing students' transportation choices (see Figure 52), participants were asked to rank the importance of specific reasons from 1 (most important) to 7 (least important). The results revealed that the two primary factors driving these decisions were cost (M_{rank} = 2.23; SD = 1.32) and travel time (M_{rank} = 2.28; SD =1.64). With these primary reasons highlighted, we understand the challenges of implementing greener transportation options for international students. These two factors must be addressed if we aim to improve students' travel habits during exchange.

Moderately important factors included ease of *booking and management* (M_{rank} = 3.67; SD = 1.26) and convenience for moving abroad (M_{rank} = 3.99; SD = 1.70). The least influential factors were environmental friendliness (M_{rank} = 5.05; SD = 1.68), flexibility and freedom (M_{rank} = 5.33; SD = 1.75) and personal safety (M_{rank} = 5.46; SD = 1.43).

When comparing the participants who have received the green top-up (9.56%) with the findings 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, air travel continues to be the preferred mode of transportation among Erasmus students. The ESNsurvey reveals that 71.04% of participants travelled to their mobility destinations by plane, closely aligning with the 73% reported in the Green Erasmus Report. Additionally, 70.5% of participants chose air travel as their return method of transportation, similar to the 70% documented in the Green Erasmus data (Green Erasmus Partnership, 2022).

As anticipated, the limited availability of the Green Travel top-up has not resulted in a significant increase in the use of sustainable travel among mobility students. We are still awaiting the outcomes of the newly implemented travel support measures introduced in the Erasmus+ Annual Report 2024.

Figure 52

Factors influencing students' transportation choices (general sample, N= 14,489).
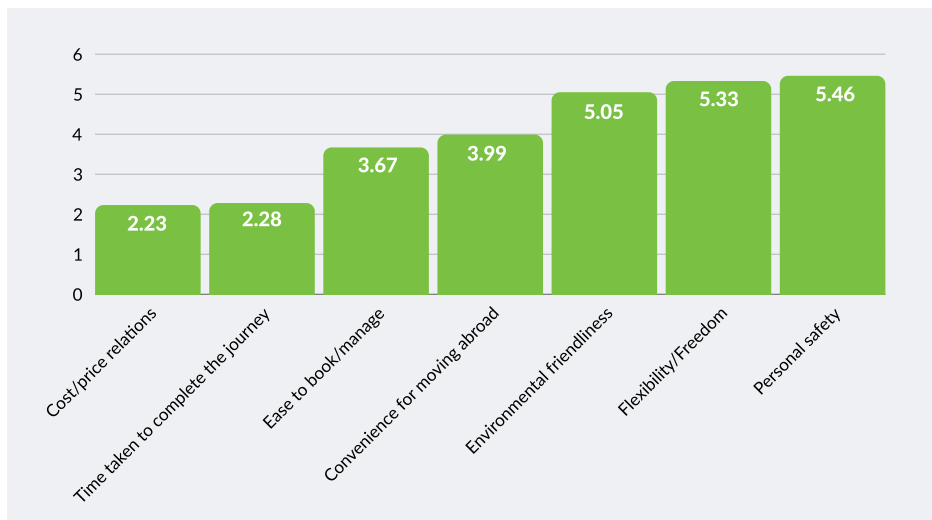
2. Digital tools used as part of the Erasmus+ journey

Examining the digital tools utilised during the Erasmus+ journey (Figure 53), the most widely used tool was the Online Learning Agreement, with 44.14% of participants indicating they used it. Additionally, 22.45% of respondents noted
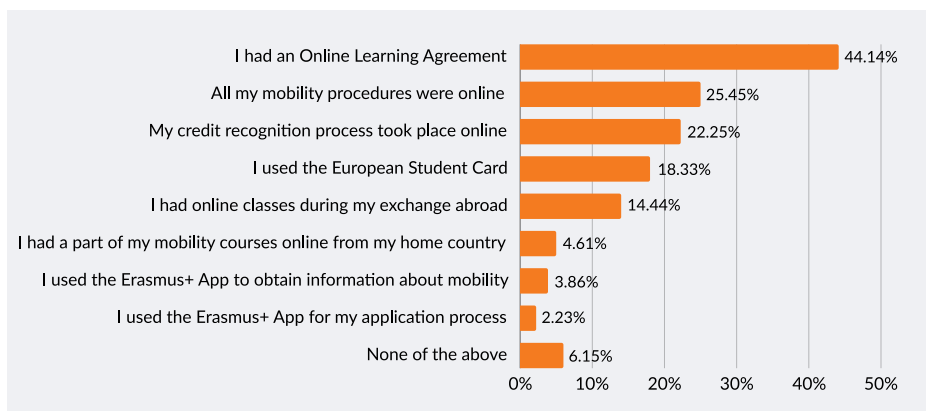
that mobility procedures were conducted online and 22.25% reported that the credit recognition process was handled digitally. Other digital tools included the European Student Card (18.33%) and online classes during the exchange (14.44%).

Less commonly used were courses offered by the host institution whyle students are at home (4.61%), the Erasmus+ App for obtaining information about mobility (3.86%) and the Erasmus+ App for the application process (2.33%). Notably, 6.15% of participants did not use any of these digital opportunities.

These results highlight significant room for improvement in the adoption of digital tools, both by students and Higher Education Institutions. The improvement of the usage and promotion of the tools will be necessary to meet the digitalisation goals set by the Erasmus+ Programme.

Figure 53

Digital tools used as part of the Erasmus+ journey, percentage (N= 14,743).

Category	Percentage
I had an Online Learning Agreement	44.14%
All my mobility procedures were online	25.45%
My credit recognition process took place online	22.25%
I used the European Student Card	18.33%
I had online classes during my exchange abroad	14.44%
I had a part of my mobility courses online from my home country	4.61%
I used the Erasmus+ App to obtain information about mobility	3.86%
I used the Erasmus+ App for my application process	2.23%
None of the above	6.15%

> **"**
>
> *Most if not all information I needed during the process was available online. There were even tutorials and everything so that was very helpful.*
>
> *The application process itself was all online, so you always knew how far along you were in the process.*

3. Experience of being an exchange student in the host university compared with the local students

In the previous chapter, we explored the engagement of exchange students with various groups during their time abroad, as well as the number of international friends they made from each group (Chapter 4, Section 1). In this chapter, we will examine how exchange students perceive their self-assessed experiences at the host university, particularly compared to their perceptions of the local students' experiences (Figure 54).

Using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strong disagreement (i.e., 1) to strong agreement (i.e., 5), the following results were observed: exchange students indicated high satisfactions on several key aspects, reflecting a generally positive experience. Specifically, they strongly agreed on having equal access to university academic facilities, such as libraries (M = 4.39, SD = 0.87); having equal opportunities to discuss academic issues with professors (M = 4.20, SD = 0.96); and having equal access to social and recreational activities on campus (M = 4.19, SD = 0.96).

Other aspects scored slightly lower but still relatively high. These include having psychological and health support on campus (M = 3.80, SD = 1.08) and the fact that insensitive, degrading or insulting remarks made about exchange students are addressed through the same university processes (M = 3.47, SD = 1.27). These slightly lower scores compared to the other aspects, highlight areas for improvement.

Figure 54

Average agreement score with statements reflecting experience as exchange student compared to local students (N= 12,889).
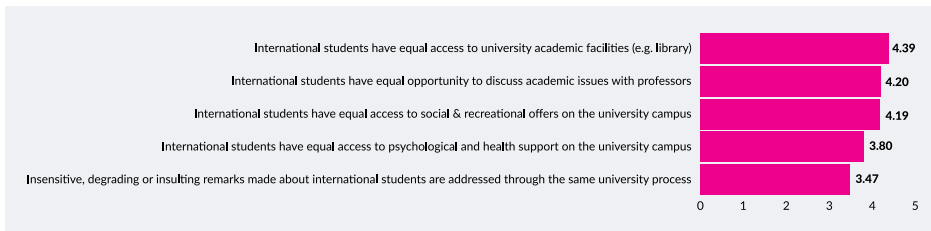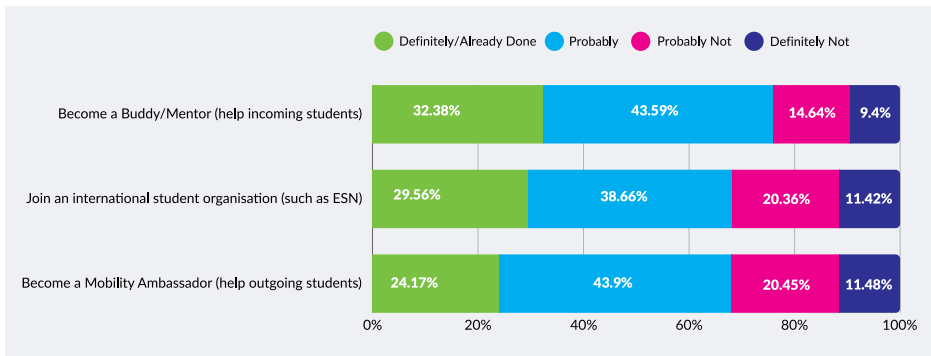
4. Engagement with civil society organisations after mobility

After assessing the experiences of international students compared to local students, we now turn to whether their mobility experience has positively influenced their willingness to engage with or join civil society organisations.

Based on a sample of 14,489 responses (Figure 55), 43.59% of respondents indicated that they are likely to become a buddy or mentor to support incoming international students at their institution, 43.90% are inclined to become a mobility ambassador to assist outgoing students and 38.66% are interested in joining an international organisation like ESN.

Figure 55

Engagement with civil society organisations after mobility, percentage (general sample, N= 14,489).

It is also crucial to assess whether the sending institution plays a role in encouraging students to engage with civil society organisations after their mobility experience (Figure 56). According to the survey, 36.91% of respondents agree or strongly agree that their sending institution influenced their decision to become a buddy or mentor, 29.61% felt encouraged to join an international student organisation and 30.05% were motivated to become a mobility ambassador.

As highlighted in the analysis of the 2021 ESNsurvey, this level of support from Higher Education Institutions remains relatively low. There is a clear need for increased involvement from these institutions, particularly considering that students who are actively engaged in mobility-related activities can have a multiplier effect. They can inspire other students and provide valuable peer-to-peer support—an aspect identified as crucial for international students in Chapter 3, Part 5.

Figure 56

Encouragement from the sending institution to participate civil society organisations after mobility, percentage (general sample, N= 14,489).

Legend: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

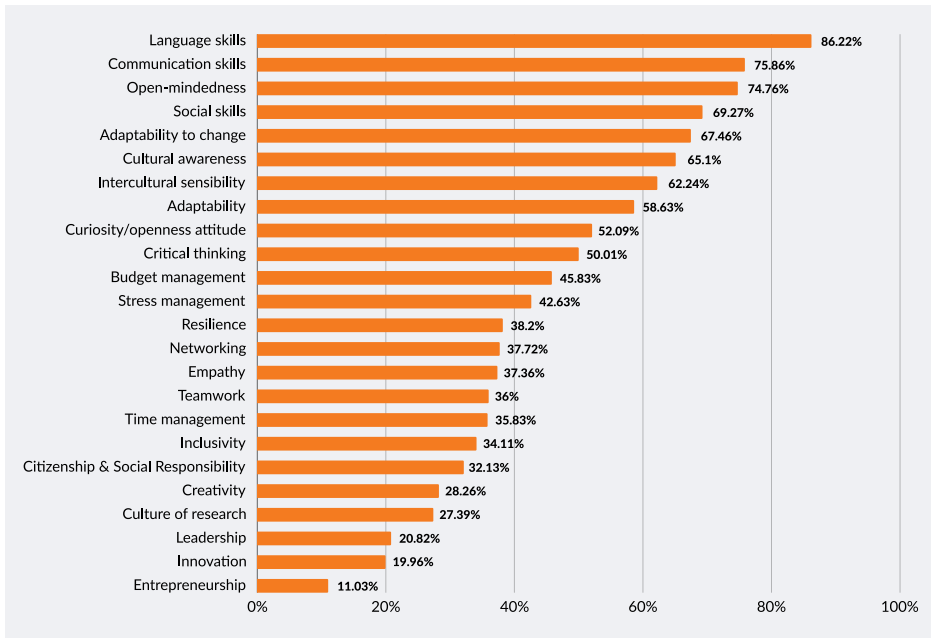|	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Become a Buddy/Mentor (help incoming students)	13.48%	23.43%	28.41%	17.48%	17.20%
Join an international student organisation (such as ESN)	10.57%	19.04%	29.68%	21.28%	10.43%
Become a Mobility Ambassador (help outgoing students)	10.07%	19.98%	30.55%	20.29%	19.11%
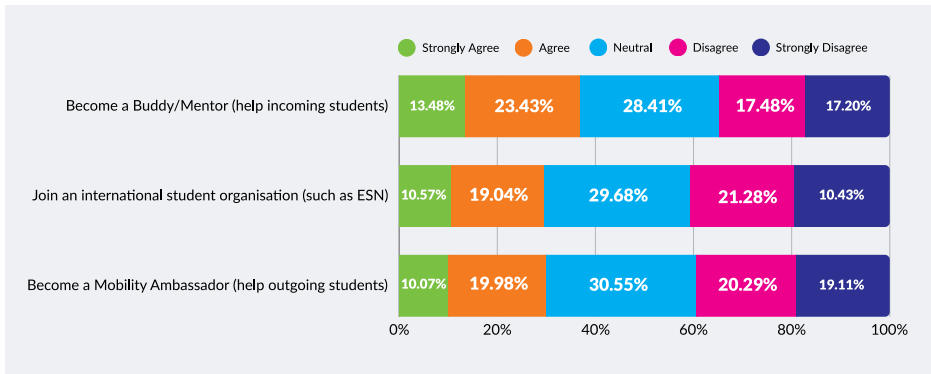
5. Skills improved while abroad

Regarding the skills developed by international students while abroad, a sample of 14,489 responses revealed insights into the top 10 self-assessed skills that exchange students improved during their stay. The most enhanced skills include *language skills* (86.22%), *communication skills* (75.86%), *open-mindedness* (74.76%), *social skills* (69.37%), *adaptability to change* (67.46%), *cultural awareness* (65.1%), *intercultural sensitivity* (62.24%), *adaptability* (58.63%), *curiosity/openness* (52.09%) and *critical thinking* (50.01%).

On the other hand, skills that were rated lower, at 20% or below, include *creativity* (28.26%), *research culture* (27.39%), *leadership* (20.82%), *innovation* (19.96%) and *entrepreneurship* (11.03%).

Figure 57

Relative frequency of skills improved during the exchange, percentage (general sample, N= 14,489).

Skill	Percentage
Language skills	86.22%
Communication skills	75.86%
Open-mindedness	74.76%
Social skills	69.27%
Adaptability to change	67.46%
Cultural awareness	65.1%
Intercultural sensibility	62.24%
Adaptability	58.63%
Curiosity/openness attitude	52.09%
Critical thinking	50.01%
Budget management	45.83%
Stress management	42.63%
Resilience	38.2%
Networking	37.72%
Empathy	37.36%
Teamwork	36%
Time management	35.83%
Inclusivity	34.11%
Citizenship & Social Responsibility	32.13%
Creativity	28.26%
Culture of research	27.39%
Leadership	20.82%
Innovation	19.96%
Entrepreneurship	11.03%

6. Satisfaction with the services provided by the Sending Institutions (after the end of the exchange)

In a sample of 11,766 responses, exchange students were asked how satisfied they were with various types of services provided by their home institution after their exchange. In this section, a large number of responses[18] mark that some of these services were not applicable, i.e. they did not receive such services.

Overall, 91.80% of the respondents report that they interacted with the sending institution on the recognition of learning outcomes over their exchange. Those who did receive this service, reported an average satisfaction of (M = 3.85, S = 1.17) on the Likert scale (1 = *very dissatisfied*, 5 = *very satisfied*).

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[18] Percentages of non-applicable ranged between 8.76% and 0.18.81% of the responses.

92.77% of respondents said they receive services from the sending institution when it comes to understanding the benefits of exchange. They reported a satisfaction of (M = 3.76, S = 1.09) with these services. Roughly four in five respondents (81.64%) were aided by their sending institution in linking their exchange with potential employment opportunities, and we see a decline in satisfaction, with (M = 3.14, S = 1.27) on the Likert scale. The two categories that performed most poorly in both number of students receiving the service and satisfaction with services received were reintegration activities and alumni community. Reintegration activities such as welcome back days and reverse culture shock seminars, with only 71.14% of students receiving any of these and reporting a poor satisfaction of (M = 2.66, S = 1.40). Hosting institutions provided an alumni community or services as exchange ambassadors in only 71.02% of cases, and when offered, students reported a satisfaction of only (M = 2.92, S = 1.33).

Figure 58

Satisfaction with the services provided by the sending institution (after mobility), Likert Scale (general sample, N= 10,532).

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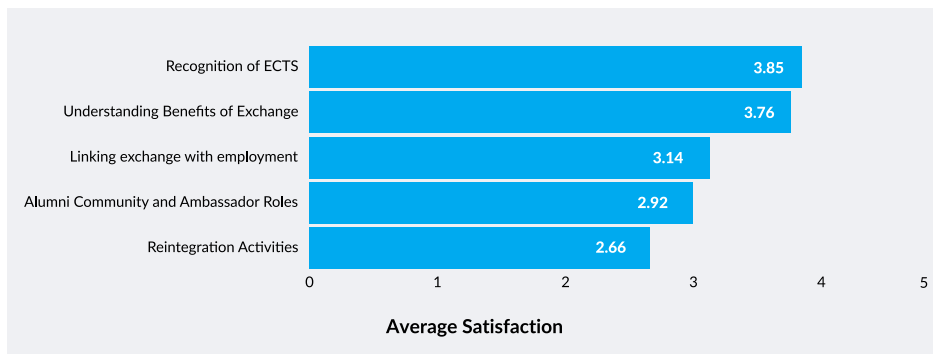
My sending institution had been helping me every step of the way during and after my application process. They were always available for any questions I had, before, during and after the mobility.

# 7. Respect for the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education

In addition to assessing students' perceptions of the support provided at different stages of the mobility process, we also explored whether students believe that HEIs are fulfilling their responsibilities towards exchange students as outlined in the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education.

Students were asked to rate their agreement with several statements reflecting these responsibilities on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The most positively rated aspect was: *learning agreement signed by all parties with all activities clearly described for outgoing students* (both institutions) (M = 3.95, SD = 1.02). This was closely followed by *fair and transparent selection procedures for outgoing students* (sending institution) (M = 3.93, SD = 0.99). Next are *full automatic recognition of learning outcomes of the study mobility, using ECTS or a compatible system, in a reasonable time* (sending institution) (M = 3.84, SD = 1.08), *timeliness of grant payments to students* (sending institution) (M = 3.75, SD = 1.12), *accessibility and completeness of the course catalogue, allowing students to check available courses* (hosting institution) (M = 3.71, SD = 1.14) and *provision of and information on student support and services* (hosting institution) (M = 3.71; SD = 1.03). Lower rated were *providing full and accurate information on credit transfer and grade conversion procedures* (both at sending and hosting institutions) (M = 3.57, SD = 1.12) and *availability of a clear mechanism to report problems and complaints* (both institutions) (M = 3.51, SD = 1.07).

It is important to note that none of these priorities scored higher than 4 points, highlighting a clear need for improvement in how HEIs meet their responsibilities as outlined in the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education.

Figure 59

Average Agreement Score with Statements Reflecting Responsibilities of Higher Education Institutions towards Exchange Students (N= 12,824).
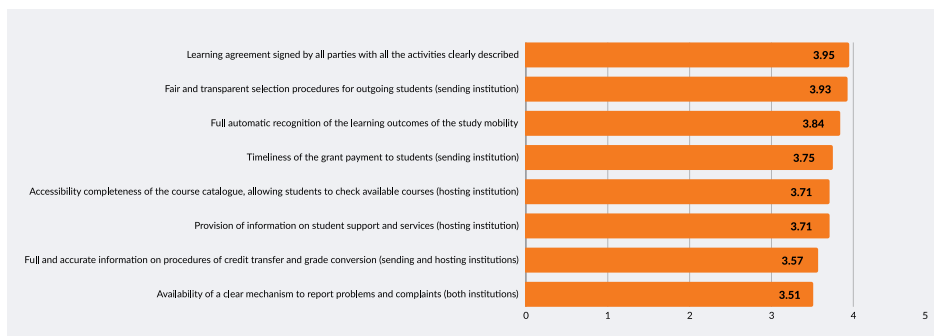
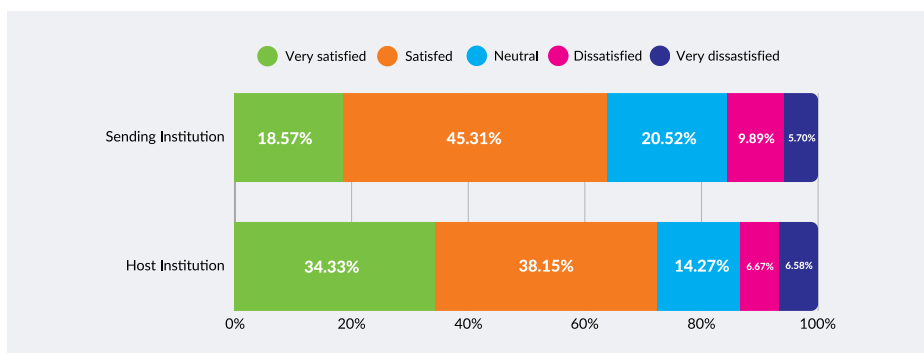# 8. Overall satisfaction with the Sending and Host Institutions

After analysing students' specific perceptions of the services provided by Sending and Host Institutions, it is essential to assess their overall satisfaction. Participants were asked to rate their satisfaction from *very satisfied* to *very dissatisfied*. Unlike similar analyses, the results are presented as percentages rather than on a Likert scale to facilitate comparison with previous survey editions.

As illustrated in Figure 60, 63.88% of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with their Sending Institution, while 72.48% expressed satisfaction with their Host Institution. Compared to the previous XIV ESNsurvey (2021), these figures represent a noticeable decline in satisfaction levels. Satisfaction with the Sending Institution dropped from 67.25% to 63.88%, and satisfaction with the Host Institution decreased from 82.52% to 72.48%.

One particularly interesting point to note is the decline in satisfaction, as reflected in comparison to previous ESNsurveys. This calls for further investigation into potential reasons behind the decline and opportunities for improvement in the next Erasmus+ Programme edition.

Figure 60

Percentages of the overall satisfaction with the services provided by the Sending (N= 14,489) **and Hosting Institutions** (N= 14,477).

Regarding the Sending Institutions, which had 63.88% overall satisfaction, the lowest scores were found related with services before arrival where funded in *support for students with fewer opportunities or special needs* (3.52), *intercultural and other international activities at the sending university* (3.58) and *linguistic support* (3.62). In relation to the services provided by the sending institution after mobility scoring the lowest we have *reintegration activities* (2.66), *alumni community and ambassadors roles* (2.92) and *linking exchange and employment* (3.14) (Fig. 36 & 58).

For the Host Institutions, which received 72.48% overall satisfaction, areas scoring lower included pre-mobility services assistance in the procedure of obtaining insurance (3.14), information about the cost of living in the host city (3.25) and support in finding accommodation (3.26). After mobility, lower scores were observed in support in finding accommodation (2.67), assistance in the procedure of obtaining insurance (2.87) and mentoring and support services (2.93) (see Figures 37 & 49). It is interesting to note that, compared to other satisfaction analyses, the average satisfaction of students with the services provided by the host institution during mobility scores lower.

These results might suggest that students place varying expectations on the responsibilities of their Sending and Host Institutions, with greater emphasis on the Sending Institution's responsibilities. However, further analysis is needed to confirm this hypothesis fully. This indicates the necessity for better communication and clarification of the responsibilities outlined in both the Erasmus Student Charter and the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education, ensuring both institutions and international students are well-informed.

Additionally, as highlighted by Erasmus Student Network (2021), these results emphasise the need for a stronger focus on pre-departure activities, recognition procedures and reintegration efforts by home universities. There is a growing necessity to enhance support during mobility, particularly in areas such as welcome and orientation activities, accommodation and integration into the local community.

Despite this decline, the relatively high percentage of positive responses still underscores the importance of continuing to provide robust support to students during their mobility experiences.

"

The program was marketed much differently than what it actually was. I was told that they would be helping us every step along the way and they did not. Most of the information I had to find out and figure out by myself. It made this whole process very stressful and much more difficult than it needed to be. I felt very unsupported and I was questioning whether I should continue with the process or stop.

They were very enthousiast to send many students abroad. This made me very excited to go for a mobility project. They guided us with lectures only for outgoing students, about the programme and all the administrative work. During the exchange we kept in touch and if something was wrong they would definitely help me. Overall I'm really pleased with how my home institution handles the outgoing students.

CHAPTER 6
MOBILITY SUPPORT

Author: Kevin Topi

After analysing the various phases of mobility, we have identified that providing support throughout each phase is crucial for ensuring higher satisfaction levels among international students. Additionally, it is important to recognise that student satisfaction is closely tied to the challenges they may encounter during their studies abroad, particularly the three main issues highlighted in Figure 46: *insufficient money to cover my cost of living, problems finding accommodation and problems related to the courses I was taking*. Moreover, satisfaction is not only related to these challenges, but also to the effectiveness of the support provided by Higher Education Institutions to help students overcome them.

In 2023, ESN, in collaboration with the European Students' Union (ESU), published the 'International Student Housing Report', which offers a comprehensive analysis of housing-related issues, identifies the main pressure points and provides recommendations to address them.

Since we already explored various approaches to the current housing challenges in detail, this chapter will focus on the other two major problems identified by students in the XV ESNsurvey: *insufficient money to cover my cost of living and problems related to the courses I was taking*. We will delve deeper into these issues to better understand how students can be supported more effectively during their mobility experiences.

In the subchapter on funding, we will analyse the cost of living in mobility destinations, the funding available during the mobility period, the coverage provided by scholarships and the role of top-up grants. In the subchapter on the recognition of learning, we will examine the credits earned by students abroad, compare them with the credits recognised upon return, explore issues related to recognition and review the final grades awarded after the mobility experience.

As with other chapters, our analysis will primarily be based on the responses from exchange students, with comparisons made to other target groups and various national contexts where relevant.

1. Funding International Student Mobility

1.1. Cost of Living in the Mobility Destination

Figure 61 summarises the average monthly living costs for exchange students (N =12,194) and international full-degree students (N = 1,601). The data reveal that the average monthly cost of living for exchange students is approximately €790, while for international full-degree students, it is slightly higher at €808. Looking at Figure 67 below, we can see the average grants received according to

the participants: €468 for exchange students and €406 for international full-degree students. This reveals a significant discrepancy between the cost of living and the financial support provided, with exchange students facing an average shortfall of €322 and international full-degree students facing an average shortfall of €340.

Figure 61

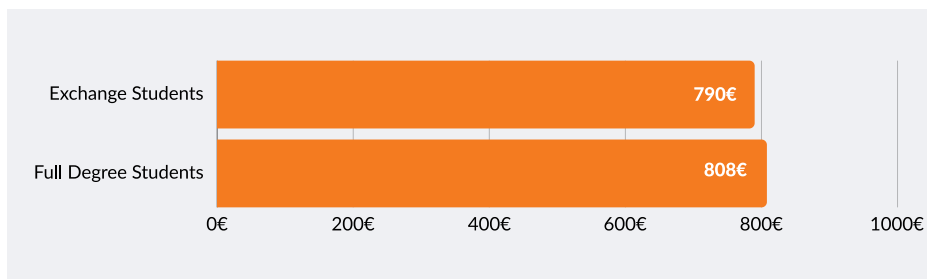**Average monthly costs of living for exchange students** (N= 12,194) **and international full-degree students** (N= 1,601).


Figure 62 provides a breakdown of the expenditures of exchange students across various categories during their mobility period.

For exchange students, accommodation and housing related bills, along with living expenses such as food, account for approximately 72.71% of their total budget. On average, 48.03% of their budget is allocated to accommodation and other housing related bills and 24.68% is spent on other costs of living such as food. The remaining budget is distributed as follows: 10.24% on transportation, 12.46% on cultural activities and 8.04% on other activities.

For international full-degree students, accommodation and food account for about 73% of their budget. On average, they allocate 45.5% of their budget to accommodation, including housing and related bills and 28.3% to food. The rest of their budget is spent as follows: 5.6% on transportation, 9.4% on cultural activities and 10.7% on other activities.

Figure 62

Expenditure breakdown of exchange students (N= 12,276) **across various categories during their exchange programme.**
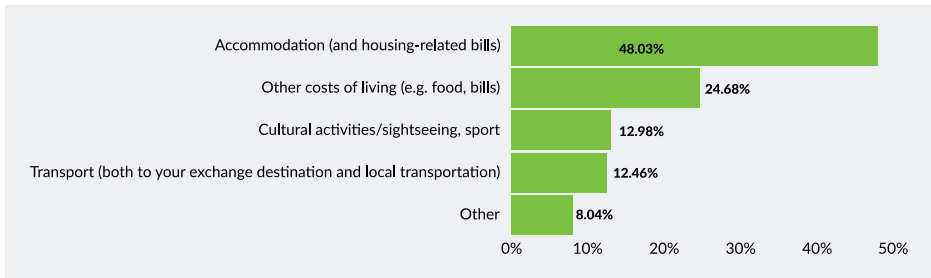
1.2. Funding of the mobility period

Figure 63 illustrates the extent to which scholarships cover the total costs for exchange students, divided into five categories. The first category includes students with less than 25% of their costs covered by the scholarship. This group comprises 17.2% of exchange students and 10.2% of full-degree students, indicating that these students rely heavily on external funding sources.

The second category includes students with 25% to 50% of their costs covered by the scholarship. This group represents 34.79% of exchange students and 16.5% of full-degree students. These students cover a significant portion of their mobility expenses out of pocket, with the remainder funded by the exchange programme or other financial support in the case of full-degree students. This is the largest category for exchange students.

The third category includes students with 50% to 75% of their costs covered by the scholarship. This category includes 25.4% of exchange students and 12.9% of full-degree students. These students still cover a portion of their expenses but receive substantial financial support from the Erasmus+ Programme or other sources.

The fourth category includes students with 75% to 100% of their costs covered. This group includes 15.3% of exchange students and 21.8% of full-degree students, suggesting that they are largely financially supported during their mobility.

The fifth category includes students who fund their exchange entirely by themselves. This category represents 7.3% of exchange students and 38.8% of full-degree students. It is the largest category for full-degree students and the smallest for exchange students.

Figure 63

Funding of the total cost of mobility for exchange students (N= 12,721).
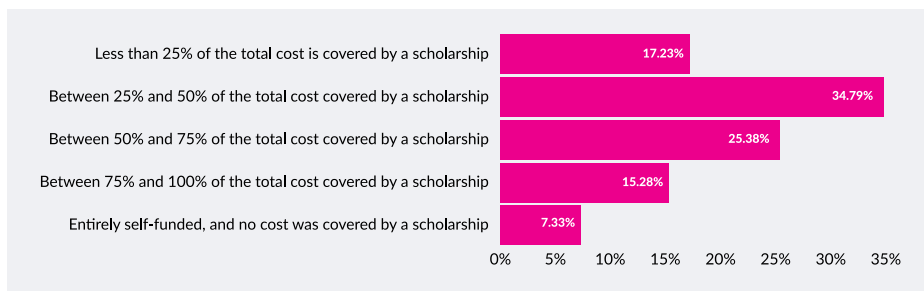
To gain a better understanding of the situation in different regions of Europe, we compared responses from a selection of countries across several regions with high response rates, including Italy, Spain, Germany, Denmark and Bosnia and Herzegovina. These comparisons consider these countries as host destinations. The inclusion of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH; N = 82) in the analyses, while having a lower number of respondents compared to the other selected countries, offers valuable insights into the Western Balkans, a key region for the EU's current enlargement priorities and provides an opportunity to examine perspectives from third countries not associated with the Erasmus+ Programme[19].

In Figure 64, the similarities in funding across the four EU countries are illustrated. In Italy, it is more common for students to have their mobility costs covered between 25% and 50% by a scholarship, while the least common scenario is for mobility to be entirely self-funded, with only 7.53% of respondents indicating no costs were covered by a scholarship. A similar pattern is observed in Spain, where 35.65% of respondents report having 25% to 50% of their total costs covered by a scholarship, and only 5.74% are entirely self-funded. The trend continues in Germany, where 32.16% of students fall into the 25%-50% category, and 7.47% are self-funded. In Denmark, 43.16% of respondents fall into the first category, while only 6.32% are self-funded.

The analysis differs only in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the only non-EU country included, where 73.68% of students report having 75% to 100% of their total costs covered by a scholarship, with none indicating that less than 25% of their costs were covered by a scholarship.

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[19] According to the information provided in https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-a/eligible-countries

When examining these results, it is important to consider the potential influence of the cost of living in these countries, particularly where a higher percentage of students, such as in Denmark, indicate that their scholarship covers less than their expenses. However, when comparing the percentages between Italy (Group 1 according to the Erasmus+ Programme Guide) and Spain (Group 2 according to the Erasmus+ Guide)[20], the differences do not seem to be large. Although we lack the statistics to definitively confirm whether there is a significant difference, and a city-specific analysis would be necessary (i.e. since costs can vary significantly depending on whether students are in the capital or other regions), these findings suggest an interesting discussion about potential adjustments to the funding groups outlined in the Erasmus+ 2024 Programme Guide and possible future modifications.

Figure 64

Comparison between Italy (N= 1,461)**, Spain** (N= 1,672)**, Germany** (N= 1,219)**, Denmark** (N= 190) **and BiH** (N= 19) **on the funding of the total cost of mobility for exchange students** (N= 12,721).

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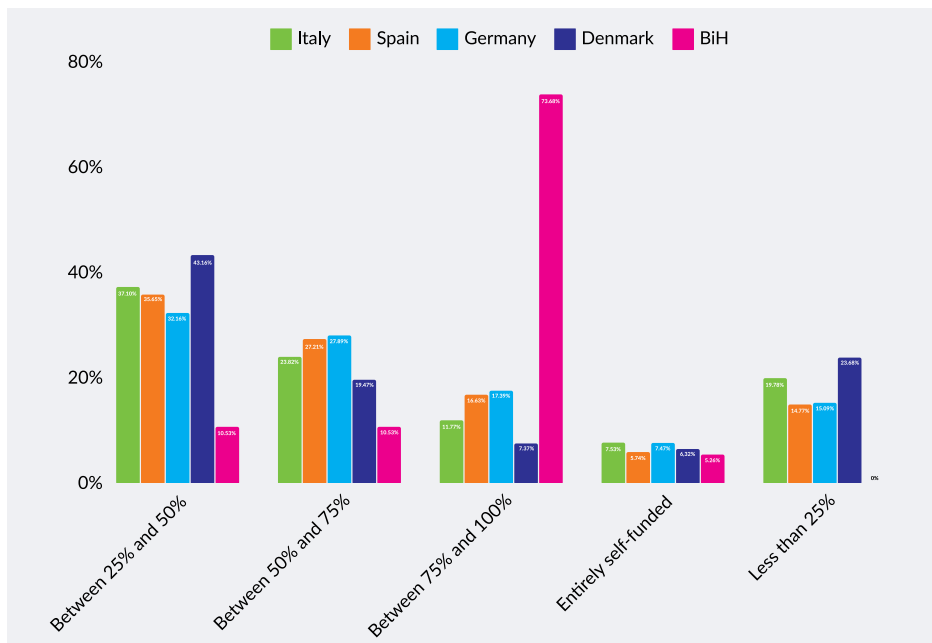
[20] According to the Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2024, 'EU Member States, third countries associated with the Programme, and third countries not associated with the Programme from Regions 13 and 14 are categorised into three groups based on living costs: Group 1 includes countries with higher living costs; Group 2 comprises countries with medium living costs; and Group 3 consists of countries with lower living costs'.

1.3. Timing of Grant Distribution

Figure 65 illustrates the timing of scholarship disbursement for exchange students. The data show that 37.26% of students received their scholarship before departure. Additionally, 36.84% received their scholarship within 30 days of arrival, while 25.9% had to wait more than 30 days after arriving to receive their funds.

Comparing the results with the previous ESNsurvey from 2021, there has been an improvement in the timely delivery of grants for international students. In the 2021 survey, 32.92% of respondents indicated they received their grant before departure, while in the XV ESNsurvey, this increased to 37.26%. This suggests that Higher Education Institutions have made progress over the past three years in delivering funding according to the timelines stipulated by the Erasmus+ guidelines (Erasmus Student Network 2021).

Figure 65

Timing of receiving the scholarships for exchange Students (N= 11,757).
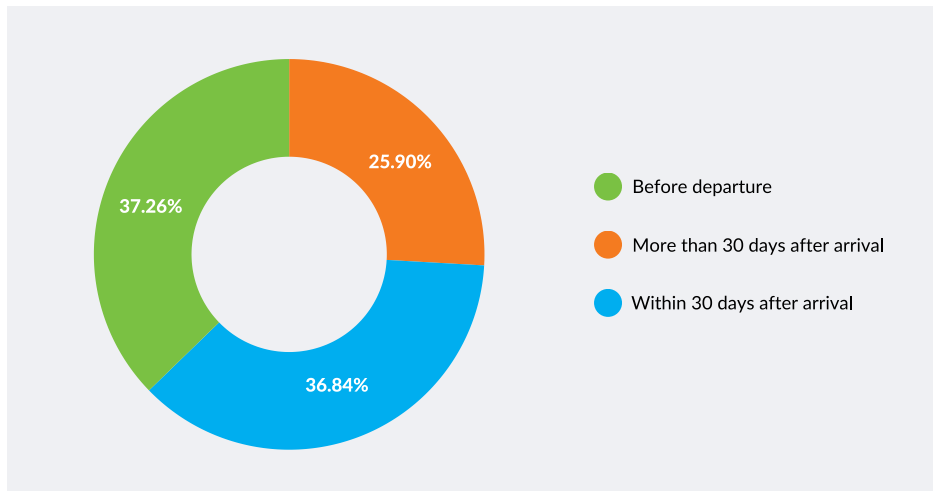
It is important to note that 62.7% of respondents reported receiving their grant after departure, which is less than ideal, especially considering the measures aimed at increasing access to international mobility for students with fewer opportunities. To gain a better understanding of the different realities across countries, we compared the timing of grant distribution among Italy, Spain, Germany, Denmark and BiH. For this analysis, we used the sending countries as indicators, given their responsibility for distributing funds to international students.

As illustrated in Figure 66, Denmark has the highest percentage of students receiving grants before departure (71.15%), followed by Germany (36.34%). Italy has 20.49%, Spain 11.60% and Bosnia and Herzegovina has the lowest percentage, at 5.45%.

This indicates that Denmark is the country most compliant with the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education regarding the timing of grant distribution, while Bosnia and Herzegovina shows the most need for improvement.

Examining the timing of grant receipt more closely, Spain has the highest percentage of students receiving their grants more than 30 days after arrival (64.05%), followed by Italy (37.13%). Conversely, BiH has the highest percentage of students receiving their grants within 30 days after arrival (78.18%), with Italy following at 43.38%.

It is worth noting the irregularity in Germany's case, where the percentage of students receiving their grants before departure (36.34%) is very close to the percentage receiving theirgrants within 30 days after arrival (40.37%). To better understand the situation in Germany, future analyses could compare the performance of individual Higher Education Institutions within the country on this matter.

Figure 66

Comparison between Italy (N= 2,230), Spain (N= 1,121), Germany (N= 1,241), Denmark (N= 52) and BiH (N= 55) on the timing of receiving the scholarships for exchange Students (N= 11,757).
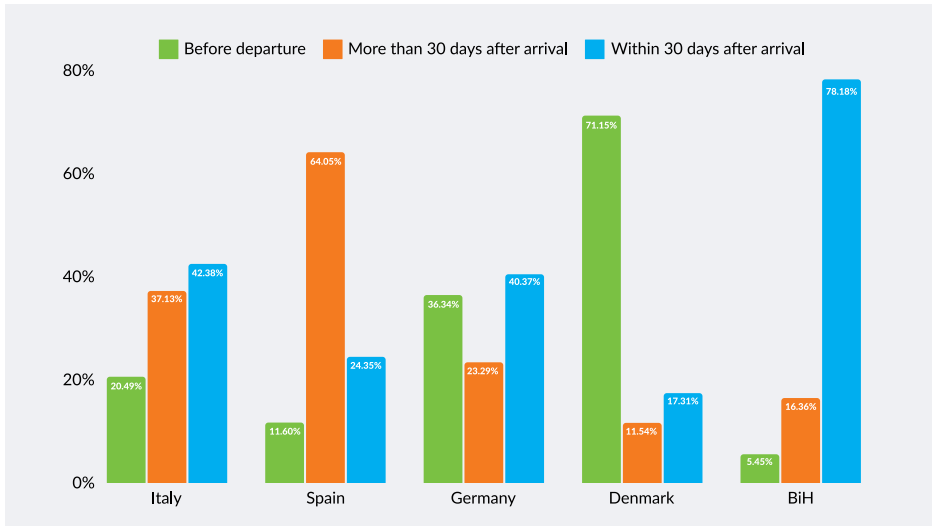
> 66
>
> *I did not receive the grant on time which caused a lot of stress.*

1.4. Monthly Scholarship Allocation

Figure 67 represents the scholarship per month of exchange students and full-degree students, where in the first case it is 468€ and in the second 406€.

Comparing Figure 67 with the Erasmus+ Annual Report 2020, we observe a significant increase in the average grant amount, which has risen by nearly €100 (as the current is €468), up from €374, as reported in the 2020 report. This increase is largely due to the implementation of top-ups and grant increases by National Agencies, marking a positive development. However, this overall

improvement masks considerable variations between countries, which are not always correlated with differences in purchasing power. Instead, these discrepancies often highlight the lack of transparency in the grant determination system as outlined in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide.

In South-Western Europe, grant levels tend to hover near the minimum, whereas Central and Eastern European countries, both in northern and southern regions, generally benefit from higher grant levels. It is crucial that decisions regarding national grant levels involve consultation with student organisations and other relevant stakeholders. These discussions should carefully consider various trade-offs and provide transparent assessments of factors such as national co-financing of the programme. Such transparency and collaboration should be prioritised during the current programming period, with clear information about different grant levels and the decision-making process made publicly accessible at the European level.

Figure 67

Monthly scholarship allocation of exchange students (N= 11,162).
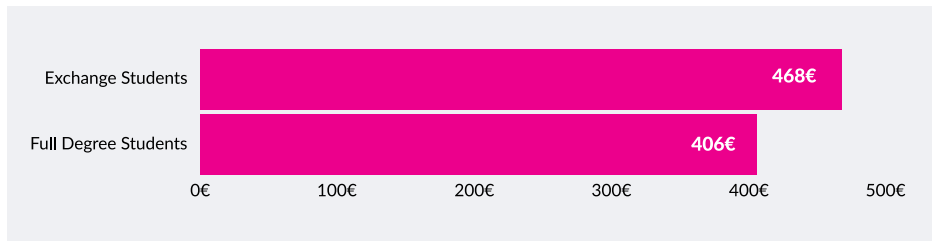

1.5. Other sources of funding

Figure 68 illustrates the various sources of funding used by exchange students to finance their mobility period. Student had the change to choose between five categories of alternative funding sources, the choice was not limited to one answear. Figure 68 presents the average of each source of funding from 1 to 5, where 1 is the highest and 5 the lowest.

Of major importance were family contributions, with an average rank of 1.75 (SD = 1.11). This shows strong agreement, indicating that financial support from families was a significant source of funding for students' mobility abroad. Personal savings received an average rank of 2.20 (SD = 0.96), indicating agreement that personal savings were of great importance to finance students' mobility. A job before the mobility received an average rank of 2.99 (SD = 1.03), reflecting

neutrality and suggesting that some may have been employed before participating in the programme. In contrast, of lower importance were student loans, which got an average rank of 3.64 (SD = 1.38) and a student job during the mobility period, with an average rank of 4.42 (SD = 1.24).

Figure 68

Other source of funding used by exchange Students (N= 11,927).
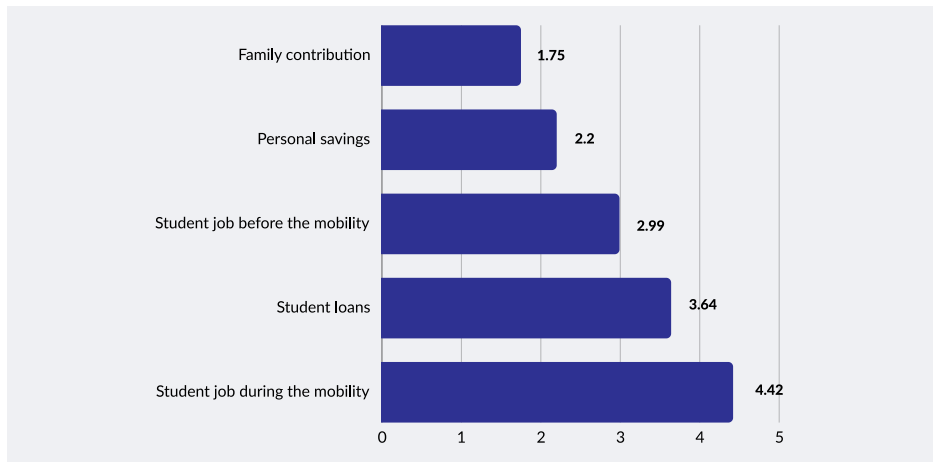

1.6. Top-Up Grants

Figure 69 details the distribution of top-up grants received by exchange students to support their mobility. The data reveals that 59.65% of students did not receive any top-up grants. Furthermore, 9.56% received grants for Green Travel, while 9.55% received top-ups designated for students with fewer opportunities. Additionally, 3.58% of students were granted funds for special needs. Another 3.58% were uncertain about whether they had received a top-up grant and 14.08% cited other sources of funding.

Considering these data and the results provided in Figure 50, it becomes evident that there is a gap between the environmental ideals of international students and their actual behaviour, as air travel remains the preferred mode of transportation during their mobility period. The Green Erasmus petition report highlights this discrepancy and calls for changes to encourage more sustainable travel choices among Erasmus+ participants. In response, the Erasmus Student Network has advocated for an increase in both the top-up grant value and the number of days of individual support to facilitate these changes (Erasmus Student Network, 2023).

In November 2023, the European Commission introduced new travel support measures in the updated Erasmus+ Programme Guide, aimed at better supporting these proposed improvements. It will be interesting to see in the next ESNsurvey how these new measures are received by international students and whether they lead to more sustainable travel practices, such as travelling more sustainable to and from the mobility destination.

Figure 69

Top-up grants received by exchange Students (N= 12,233).

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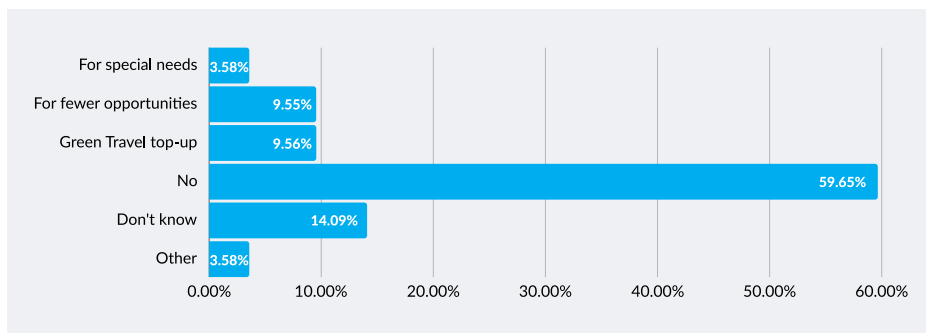
I missed out on the special needs grant due to troubles in the process.

2. Recognition of Learnings Abroad

2.1. Credits taken and credits recognised

One of the primary challenges faced by students remains to be issues related to academic courses, with 33.97% of respondents reporting such difficulties (Figure 46). To address this, it is essential to analyse the problem. Figure 70 illustrates the recognition process that exchange students undergo during their mobility period.

Students initially include an average of 33 ECTS in their Learning Agreements. Upon arrival at the host university, they typically need to adjust an average of

14 ECTS. On average, students successfully complete and receive credit for 30 ECTS, indicating that most students pass all their courses while abroad. However, upon returning to their home university, the average number of recognised credits is 28 ECTS, representing a discrepancy of 2 credits. Despite this, the majority of courses taken during the exchange are recognised.

It is important to note that while the average recognition rate is 28 ECTS, 2.6% of survey respondents did not have any of their credits recognised upon their return to their home university.

A closer examination of the qualitative data from the XV ESNsurvey reveals several structural issues contributing to this problem. These include inflexibility in degree programs, trust issues between partner universities, recognition decisions influenced by individual professors, a lack of understanding of the ECTS system, limited access to information about available courses and inadequate pre-departure support related to the Learning Agreement.

Figure 70

Recognition of learnings aboard, the credits taken compared with the credits recognised (N= 6,620).
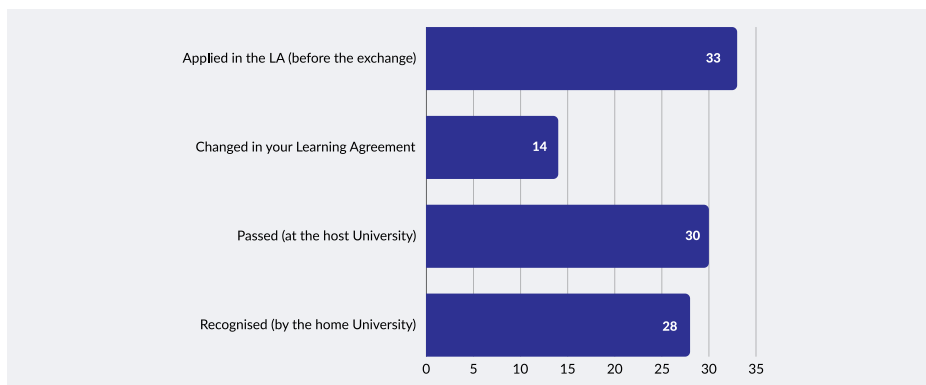
In one case, the teachers considered that the classes I took during my mobility set me behind my classmates and in the other case, they considered the course was irrelevant to my studies.
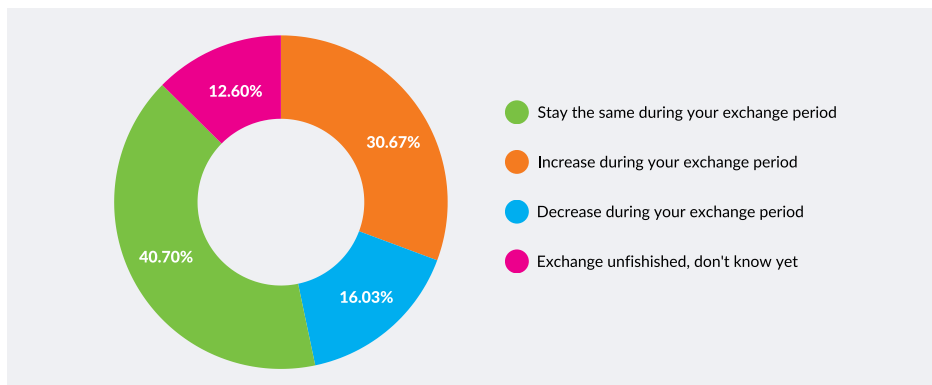
2.2. Grades after the mobility experience

Figure 71 highlights the impact of the mobility programme on students' academic performance. According to the data, 40.70% of students reported that their grades remained unchanged during their exchange period. Meanwhile, 30.66% of students experienced an improvement in their grades while abroad. In contrast, 16.02% of students indicated that their grades declined during their exchange. Additionally, 12.60% of students noted that their mobility programme is still ongoing, so they have not yet determined whether their grades have changed.

These results suggest that, despite challenges such as the need to request changes in their Learning Agreement or the possibility of not having all credits fully recognised after mobility, most students maintain or even improve their academic performance during their exchange. The fact that the majority of students either see no change or an increase in their grades is a positive outcome, reflecting the overall academic benefits of the mobility experience.

Figure 71

Grades variation for exchange Students (N= 11,764).

Legend:
- Stay the same during your exchange period
- Increase during your exchange period
- Decrease during your exchange period
- Exchange unfishished, don't know yet

Values shown: 12.60%, 30.67%, 40.70%, 16.03%

66

They should be more transparent in terms of the courses they offer, they don't clarify the language of that courses and if international students are able to take certain courses or not.

CHAPTER 7
PRIORITIES OF THE ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME

Author: Christie Dear

In the 2021-2027 edition of the Erasmus+ Programme, the European Commission introduced four key transversal priorities:
- Inclusion and Diversity;
- Digital Transformation;
- Environment and the Fight Against Climate Change;
- Participation in Democratic Life, Common Values and Civic Engagement.

After three years of implementation, and as we approach the end of the mid-term review of the Erasmus+ Programme 2021-2027, it is crucial to assess the outcomes of these priorities from the students' perspectives.

This chapter is dedicated to analysing the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 priorities (Figure 72), focusing on each one individually. To ensure a comprehensive evaluation, we not only considered the specific survey questions related to these priorities but also compared them with other findings from the XV ESNsurvey. This approach allows us to draw meaningful connections between students' beliefs and their actual actions, providing a well-rounded assessment of the priorities' impact.

It is important to note that only the participants who chose the option yes, as an exchange student on the question referring to Figure 1, were asked questions for this section.

Figure 72

Distribution of the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 priorities, percentage (N= 14,737).
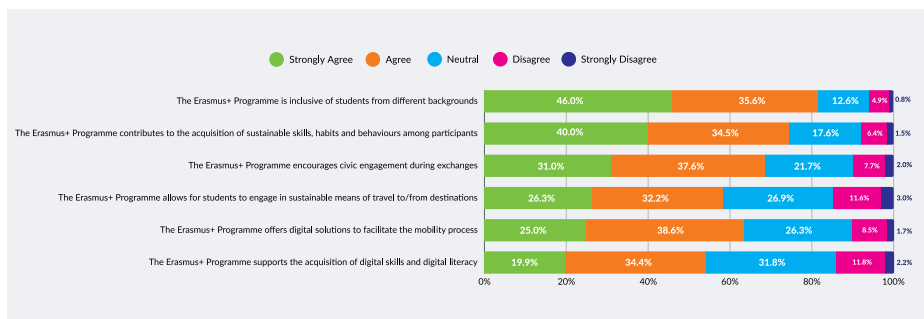
1. Inclusion and Diversity

In the 2021-2027 edition of the Erasmus+ Programme, considerable attention has been dedicated to ensuring that mobility is more accessible to a broader range of students, thereby promoting greater diversity among participants. Since the programme's launch, significant efforts have been directed towards this priority, notably with the introduction of the Inclusion and Diversity Strategy for Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps. This initiative has been further strengthened by the establishment of the Inclusion Officer role and the development of National Inclusion Action Plans. These measures underscore a strong commitment to implementing this priority effectively.

Looking at Figure 72, which highlights the option *The Erasmus+ Programme is inclusive of students from different backgrounds*. It is evident that this is the highest-ranking response among exchange students, with 46% strongly agreeing and 35.6% agreeing, totalling 81.6% positive feedback on this key programme priority.

What is particularly noteworthy about this priority is that students' perceptions align consistently with the responses to other questions in the XV ESNsurvey. For instance, when students were surveyed about the use of top-up grants (Figure 69), it was found that a significant percentage (13.13%) benefited from special needs and fewer opportunities top-ups—a figure closely matching the 2022 Erasmus+ Annual Report, which reported a similar percentage (13%) with fewer opportunities, special needs, disadvantaged background from outermost regions in mobility activities under Key Action 1, supported in learning mobility in 2022 (European Commission, 2023, p. 37).

Additionally, a preliminary analysis comparing student satisfaction with their higher education institutions and the use of top-up grants reveals that students eligible for these top-ups tend to be more satisfied with their institutions. This correlation suggests that the availability of these grants may positively influence students' experiences and perceptions of their education abroad. When asked about the Erasmus+ priorities, students who have received the top-up believe the Erasmus+ Programme is inclusive of students from different backgrounds, with 33% agreeing and 48% strongly agreeing. Furthermore, the top-up receivers report being more satisfied than average regarding the support from the sending and host universities. On the sending institution, 46% were satisfied (1% increase) and very satisfied 20% (1% increase) and on the hosting institution we understand that 36% are very satisfied with the support from this institution[21].

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[21] As indicated in Figure 60, the average satisfaction of all respondents shows that for the sending institution, 18.57% are "very satisfied." For the host institution, 34.33% of respondents reported being "very satisfied." Additionally, for the sending institution, 18.57% of respondents chose "very satisfied," while 34.33% selected "satisfied."

2. Environment and fight against climate change

When examining the environmental sustainability priority, based on 14,738 responses, we see that 26.3% of participants strongly believe that the Erasmus+ programme enables students to engage in sustainable travel to and from their destinations, with an additional 32.2% agreeing. On the other hand, 11.6% disagree, 3% strongly disagree and 26.9% hold a neutral opinion on this matter, resulting in an average score of 3.67 on a 5-point Likert scale.

Regarding the statement, 'The Erasmus+ Programme contributes to the acquisition of sustainable skills, habits and behaviours among participants', 40% strongly agree and 34.5% agree. Conversely, 17.6% disagree, 6.4% strongly disagree and 17.6% remain neutral, resulting in an average score of 4.32.

Interestingly, although students' perceptions of this priority are generally positive, the XV ESNsurvey reveals a disconnect between their beliefs and actual behaviours. For instance, students still overwhelmingly prefer air travel as their primary mode of transportation for mobility, as illustrated in Figure 50. Financial considerations play a significant role in this choice, with students citing cost and travel time as the main factors influencing their decision to fly (see Figure 52).

This data aligns with the findings from the Green Erasmus project research report (Diekmann, & Karaiskos, 2022). According to this report, air travel remains the dominant choice among Erasmus students, with 73.1% choosing to fly to their destination and 69.8% using the same method to return. Given the strong emphasis students place on cost as a factor in their travel decisions, these results are unsurprising. Notably, the Green Erasmus project report research highlights that ecological concerns do not necessarily translate into more sustainable practices. While more than half of the respondents (53.1%) expressed being very concerned about climate change, and 40.7% were fairly concerned, these concerns do not consistently lead to action (Diekmann, & Karaiskos, 2022).

Considering the findings from both studies and the critical role this priority plays in fostering knowledge, skills and attitudes on climate change among Erasmus+ participants, the recent change in funding rules with the Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2024 (European Commission, 2023)—from the green top-up at the beginning of this programme edition to green travel support— we believe that there is still a need for further development and systematic changes for these issues.

3. Digital Transformation

In response to the statement, 'The Erasmus+ Programme offers digital solutions to facilitate the mobility process', 25% of respondents strongly agree and 38.6% agree, leading to 63.8% expressing positive feedback. Meanwhile, 26.3% of respondents remain neutral, 8.5% disagree and 1.7% strongly disagree. The average Likert scale score of 3.77 highlights a generally positive sentiment among the respondents. For the question, 'The Erasmus+ Programme offers digital solutions to facilitate the mobility process', 25% of respondents strongly agree and 38.6% agree, totalling 63.8% positive responses. In contrast, 8.5% disagree, 1.7% strongly disagree and 26.3% hold a neutral stance.

When considering students' perceptions of whether the programme supports the acquisition of digital skills and digital literacy, the values drop significantly, with 19.9% strongly agreeing, 34.4% agreeing and 31.8% remaining neutral. On the other hand, 11.8% disagree and 2.2% strongly disagree. The average Likert scale score of 3.58 reflects a rather moderately positive sentiment among the respondents.

Although this priority scores slightly lower compared to the previous two, the overall results still reflect a positive belief among international students. However, a similar issue arises as with the previous priority: when examining other questions related to digitalisation in the XV ESNsurvey, it becomes evident that the use of digital tools (Figure 53), such as the usage of the Erasmus+ App for obtaining information about mobility (3.86%) and the European Student Card (18.33%), still needs improvement. Even though there has been progress compared to previous years, the recognition of learning through digital tools could be further enhanced to improve the automatic recognition of learning for international students, and its usage should be maximised.

Interestingly, in the XIV edition of the ESNsurvey, within the chapter dedicated to the impact of COVID-19 on mobility experiences, participants were asked to rate their satisfaction with online learning during their time abroad on a scale of 1 to 5. This included satisfaction with digital learning tools and platforms, access to educational material, the readiness of institutions to implement online activities and the quality of online learning activities. Most aspects were rated fairly positively, averaging around 3.8 out of 5, demonstrating that despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, it was possible to create digital alternatives that facilitated mobility. However, a closer look at this analysis reveals that only 39.19% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with access to digital devices provided by both home and host institutions. This indicates that already 2 years ago, there was a need to enhance digitalisation processes to improve access to learning mobility under the Erasmus+ Programme (Erasmus Student Network, 2022).

4. Participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement

To conclude, regarding the fourth priority and the statement, 'The Erasmus+ Programme encourages civic engagement during exchanges' 31% of respondents strongly agree and 37.6% agree. Meanwhile, 17.6% hold a neutral stance, 7.7% disagree and 2% strongly disagree. The average Likert scale score for this question is 3.92, indicating a generally positive perception among the respondents.

Furthermore, while analysing the remaining questions in the XV ESNsurvey, it becomes evident that the Erasmus+ Programme is indeed contributing to participation in democratic life. As detailed in the breakout report from the XV ESNsurvey, 'Participation in Learning Mobility as a Driving Force for Change in the European Union', mobility experiences encourage young people to be more mindful about voting in the 2024 European Elections. Additionally, they increasingly consider themselves global citizens, as well as citizens of their own country and the European Union, following their mobility experiences. This trend was already observed in the XIII ESNsurvey (2019) (Erasmus Student Network, 2024).

However, when examining the promotion of civic engagement during exchanges—specifically the activities students participated in at their host institutions—we see a decrease in participation compared to the XIV ESNsurvey (p. 36). As noted in two previous ESNsurveys, 'motivating students to volunteer, and join civil society organisations, sports clubs, or other cultural or social groups during their exchanges can be a significant step towards fostering internationalisation at home, even beyond the walls of Higher Education Institutions. Students with exchange experience are far more likely to engage in civil society organisations and volunteering. With additional incentives and encouragement during their exchange, the multiplier effect upon returning to their home country can be substantial' (Erasmus Student Network, 2022 & Erasmus Student Network 2019).

Considering the results of the current survey analysed data, we believe that one of the major goals of the Erasmus+ Programme has been achieved—the very purpose for which the programme was created: to increase awareness of the European Union and use education to support the integration of EU citizens. However, the declining participation in civil society organisations is concerning. If this trend continues, it could result in this horizontal priority not being attained in full effect, and therefore reduce the effectiveness of the Programme. Hence additional effort must be made to ensure that students are encouraged to seek engagement in democratic life during and after their mobility.

CHAPTER 8
EUROPEAN WAY OF LIFE

Author: Siem Buseyne & Luca Mistretta

The Erasmus+ Programme was established with the aim of increasing EU citizens' awareness of their rights and fostering a stronger sense of European identity through a comprehensive education initiative. As education is a supporting competency of the European Union, the EU's role is to 'support, coordinate, or complement the actions of its Member States. It has no power to pass laws and may not interfere with member countries' ability to do so' (European Commission, n.d.). However, by implementing a Europe-wide educational initiative, the Erasmus+ Programme helps the EU achieve common goals set by the Member States, aligned with the objectives of the European Higher Education Area and the newly introduced European Strategy for Universities.

In the final chapter of the XV ESNsurvey, we will explore exchange students' perspectives on how their mobility experience has influenced their feelings towards the EU and their sense of European citizenship. The chapter will examine how students perceived their citizenship before and after their exchange, analyse their voting intentions and assess their views on the importance of EU policies.

It is important to note that during the European Parliament Elections 2024, the Erasmus Student Network (2024) published a report titled 'Participation in Learning Mobility as a Driving Force to Change the European Union'. This report delves deeply into these issues, offering analysis based on various surveys, EU documents and cross-country comparisons.

1. Before and After Mobility – Erasmus+ Students' Citizenship

Figure 73

Comparison between the feelings towards citizenship before and after going abroad (N= 11,038 to N= 11,539 and N= 10,908 to N= 11,285).
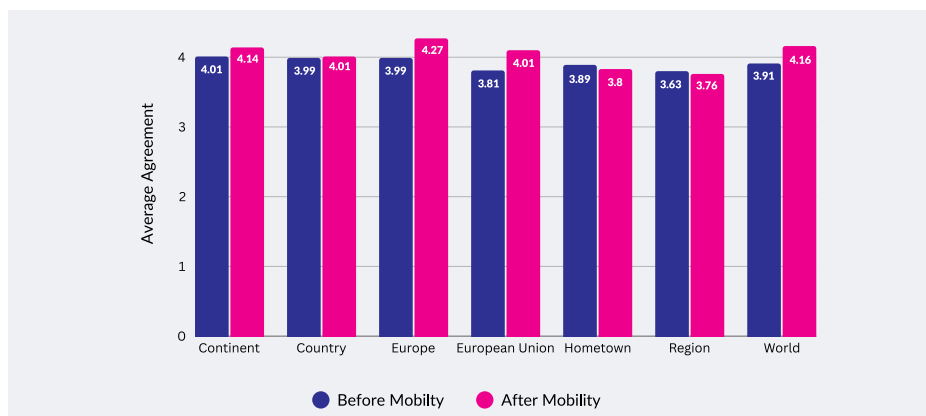
Using a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), we analysed international students' perceptions of citizenship before and after their study abroad experiences. Initially, students felt the least connected to the EU, while their strongest sense of belonging was towards their hometown and country. However, the data reveals that these perceptions shift after their mobility experience. Students who have studied abroad on average report a stronger connection to Europe, increasing from 3.99 (SD = 1.04) to 4.27 (SD = 0.92) and to the world as a whole, rising from 3.91 (SD = 1.07) to 4.16 (SD = 0.99). Notably, there is an increase in their sense of belonging to the EU, which grows from 3.81 (SD = 1.11) to 4.10 (SD = 1.11). There is also a slight increase in their connection to their continent, i.e.,from 4.01 (SD = 0.99) to 4.14 (SD = 0.95), while their sense of belonging to their own country remains rather stable, i.e., 3.99 (SD = 1.00) to 4.01 (SD = 1.05). These findings highlight the transformative impact of mobility experiences, which not only expand students' perspectives and contribute to personal growth but also strengthen their sense of European citizenship and unity.

2. Voting Intention in the EU Elections

As we can observe in Figure 74, the voting intentions of mobile students in the next EU elections scored high, with 45% and 31% showing intentions to vote. Figure 74 also shows that 12% are not eligible to vote, most likely because they are not EU citizens.

Figure 74

**Voting intention of mobile students in the next EU elections** (N= 11,252).
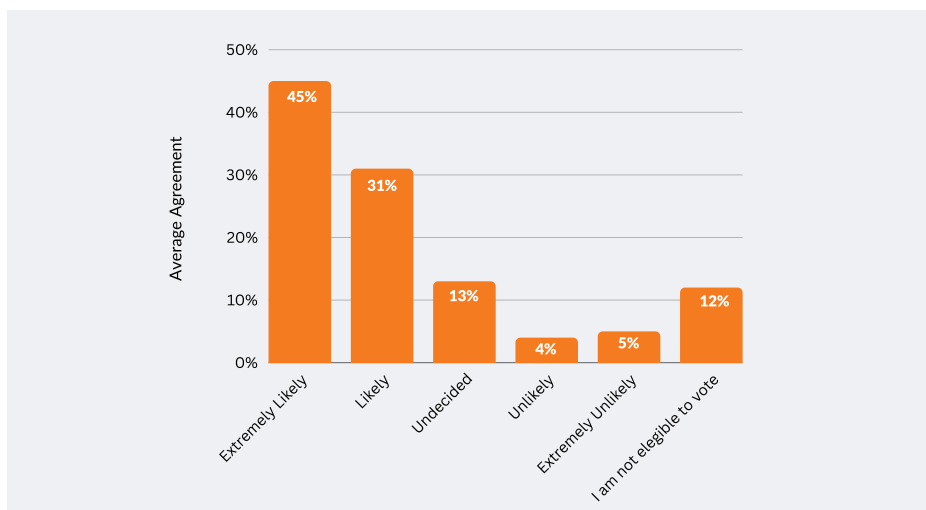
3. Importance of EU Policies

While looking at the importance of rights, freedoms and policies (Figure 75), it is not a surprise that the highest priority among mobile students is *access to exchange opportunities like Erasmus* (M = 2.91, SD = 0.42). However, it is important to note that the differences in scores among the other priorities are not highly significant. *Cohesion policies* (M = 2.89, SD = 0.46), *programmes that promote social inclusion* (M = 2.87, SD = 0.50), *policies on environmental sustainability* (M = 2.81, SD = 0.59) and even the *possibility to live, work, and study in any other Member State* (M = 2.78, SD = 0.63) all score closely, reflecting their importance to exchange students.

Figure 75

Importance of the rights, freedoms and policies for exchange students
(N= 488 to N= 1,276).
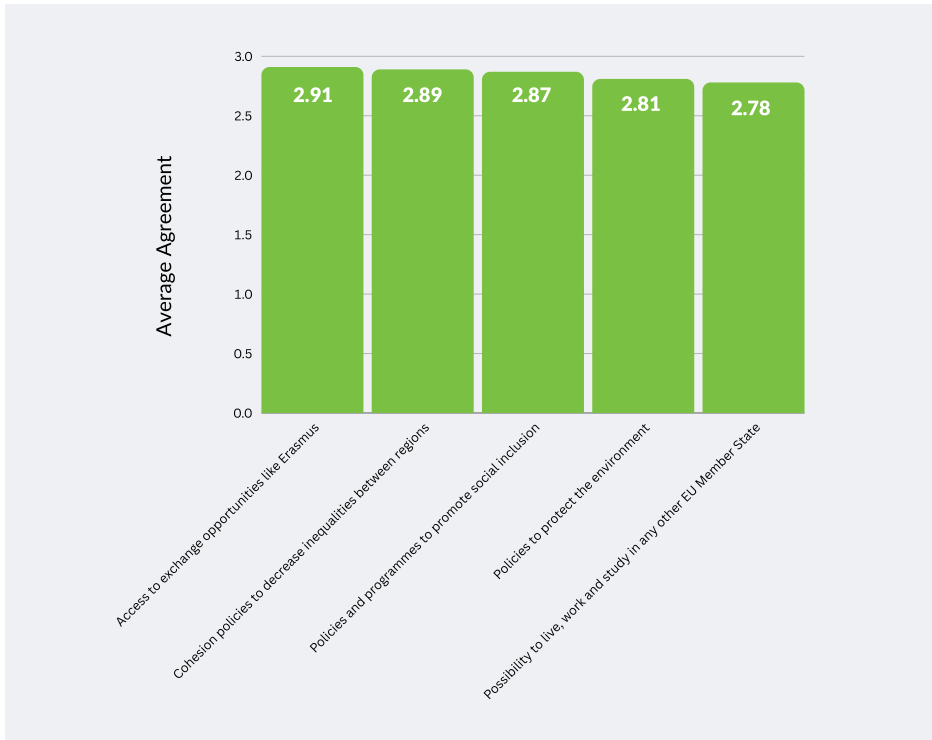
In Figure 76, the matters that were rated as most important on the agenda of exchange students in light of the European elections include the *fundamental rights, democracy and the rule of law* (M_{rank} = 2.45, SD = 2.17), *the economic situation* (M_{rank} = 4.12, SD = 2.53), *climate change and environmental sustainability* (M_{rank} = 4.51, SD = 2.86) and *education policies and programmes* (M_{rank} = 4.73, SD = 2.08). Of lower importance were *immigration*, with participants averagely ranking it at 6.72 (SD = 2.51); *freedom of movement* (M_{rank} = 8.36, SD = 3.07), *the role of Europe in the world* (M_{rank} = 8.38, SD = 2.49) and *digital transition*, which scored lowest (M_{rank} = 9.16, SD = 2.28).

Figure 76

Most important issues for exchange students in light of the European Elections 2024 (N= 9,678).
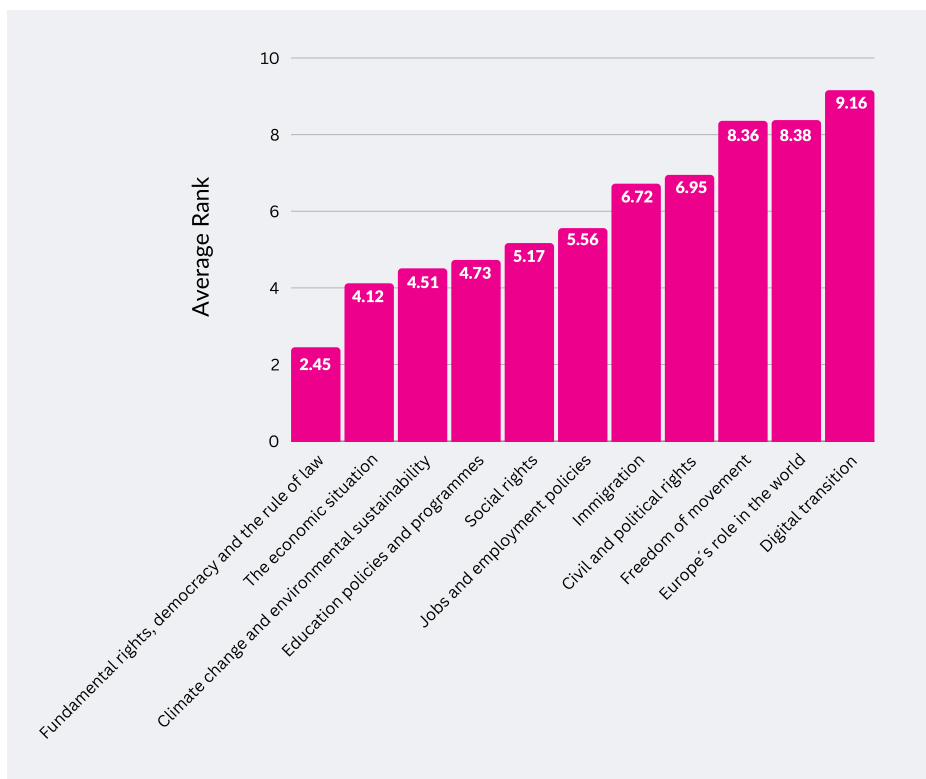
CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The ESNsurvey - 15th Edition recommendations seek to improve the quality of mobility programmes and the general experience of international students while abroad. The key focus of these recommendations is on Erasmus+ learning mobility for individuals, but just like the rest of this research project, they are applicable to other mobility schemes and, to an important extent, also to the experiences of degree mobility students.

It is important to note that some recommendations were already highlighted in the previous ESNsurvey reports, and in this edition, they have been adapted and further enhanced to reflect evolving needs and insights.

The ESNsurvey recommendations complement other existing policy positions of the Erasmus Student Network, which can be found on ESN's webpage.

1. Increasing participation of students in international mobility opportunities

The findings from the XV ESNsurvey reveal that Erasmus+ still has a long path to go in order to be a reality for all. Participation in mobility programmes remains limited to a small group of students, with Erasmus+ being more commonly known at the bachelor's level, where most students go abroad. However, overall, international mobility experiences are more prevalent at the master's level, highlighting the need for greater efforts to expand opportunities for a wider range of students, especially to meet the ambitious goals set by the Learning Mobility Framework[22].

Additionally, there are noticeable differences in participation across academic fields. Medical students, for example, often struggle to access Erasmus+ opportunities and prefer to go on full-degree programmes. This limits students' chances to experience internationalisation, as the commitment required for a 1- or 2-year study abroad programme differs significantly from a mobility experience. The support offered through Erasmus+ or similar makes shorter stays

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[22] 23% of higher education graduates should benefit from a learning mobility experience.

more manageable and accessible. We also observe an imbalance in mobility flows across countries, with some countries having a higher number of Inter-Institutional Agreements and attracting greater student interest, resulting in unequal mobility opportunities. Furthermore, apart from Erasmus+ studies, other mobility types such as Erasmus Mundus Joint Master, the European Solidarity Corps and Blended Intensive Programmes have lower participation rates. While long-term mobility will remain a core part of Erasmus+, other learning formats should be encouraged to offer students a variety of opportunities and provide a pathway to longer mobility experiences.

This should be the case for the European University Initiative. However, students do not perceive the existence of such alliances as a key factor when choosing their university, and many non-mobile students are unaware of the initiative. To fully implement the European Strategy for Universities, this gap must be addressed by ensuring that alliances focus on excelling in key factors that motivate students to study abroad.

Finally, students have different motivations and profiles when it comes to mobility. HEIs should develop innovative internationalisation and outreach strategies to tackle these issues, reduce dropout rates and make their institutions more attractive. It is also essential that universities provide quality support during the application process to ensure that all students can successfully engage in mobility opportunities.

★   **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Higher Education Institutions should strengthen their internationalisation and outreach strategies by setting internal targets for student participation in learning mobility and other international opportunities. This process should involve a thorough analysis of the unique characteristics of the student population, identifying specific groups that may be underrepresented and the types of mobility programmes that are currently lacking participation.

2. Higher Education Institutions should diversify the use of the KA131 International mobility funds by expanding mobility destinations beyond Europe, with a particular emphasis on regions outside the United Kingdom and Switzerland. While these countries may continue to be a priority for funding allocation, there should also be a clear pathway for their eventual re-entry into the Erasmus+ programme

3. Higher Education Institutions should aim to diversify their internationalisation offerings to better cater for the interests and needs of the entire student population. While Erasmus+ studies should remain at the core of the programme, new mobility opportunities should be explored as stepping stones towards longer-term mobility formats. This includes mobility options with a digital component, such as Blended Intensive Programmes, which should be particularly promoted among students with fewer opportunities, as they provide a valuable chance for international experience. Furthermore, HEIs should explore and promote other types of mobility programmes, such as the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees, which can serve as a gateway for establishing more joint degree programmes in the near future (XIV ESNsurvey, 2022).

4. Higher Education Institutions should actively promote the European University Alliances as the flagship initiative of the European Union in the field of higher education, which is in line with the European Strategy for Universities. An effective outreach strategy should be developed to ensure the initiative reaches its full potential and engages the diverse student population. As perceived, the data of XV ESNsurvey reveals that many students are unaware of the initiative or lack access to clear and centralised information on how to participate. Higher education institutions should focus on providing accessible and centralised resources to guide students in engaging with alliances and their key initiatives, ensuring the it's true success.

5. Higher Education Institutions should seek to understand the factors contributing to student dropout rates from mobility opportunities. HEIs have reported consistent instances of students withdrawing from mobility programmes. To ensure the sustainability of international mobility, it is essential to investigate the reasons behind these dropouts in collaboration with the students who have experienced them and explore potential solutions to address these challenges.

6. Higher Education Institutions should seek to understand the key factors that attract students to study abroad, as reported by the survey participants: the language of instruction at the host university, the affordability of the host city, the availability of compatible courses with recognition and opportunities to engage with the local community are considered as relevant factors. Based on this understanding, HEIs should implement the necessary changes to make their institutions more attractive to incoming students.

7. Higher Education Institutions should provide quality support throughout the application process. At the time of application, students should be given comprehensive information about the accessibility of courses and the ECTS system. Erasmus+ coordinators should play a key role in guiding students to select a host institution that aligns with their expectations and in assisting with the preparation of their learning agreement, with a focus on prioritising learning outcomes and ensuring an impactful academic experience (XIV ESNsurvey, 2022).

2. The importance of the reintegration phase and Erasmus+ as an engine for a more competitive Europe, helping students further recognise the competencies and skills they acquire

Erasmus is characterised by 3 phases: before, during and after mobility. While observing the results of the XV ESNsurvey, it is noticeable to see the importance of the last phase, the reintegration phase, and how much it is still underexplored in the Erasmus+ Programme. While participants often considered themselves part of the Erasmus Generation, our efforts to effectively communicate the outcomes and value of this experience need to be increased. Understanding and communicating the true value of mobility—not merely through storytelling but by presenting compelling data—can help stakeholders grasp the impact of one of the EU's most successful programmes.

The potential of the Erasmus+ alumni has yet to be fully explored by the Erasmus+ Programme. As highlighted by the survey respondents, exchange students are significantly influenced by peer-to-peer support when deciding to go abroad and greatly value their assistance prior to their mobility experience. This presents numerous opportunities for further development and strategic use of Erasmus+ alumni in the coming years. The Erasmus Student Network, as the largest Erasmus+ alumni network, engages with approximately 15,000 students annually. However, the full potential of this collaboration remains untapped. Our network its comprised primarily with former programme participants that are in consistent contact with thousands of Erasmus+ alumni each year, providing a unique platform to leverage the Erasmus+ Programme goals.

Furthermore, mobility is widely regarded as a pathway to employment. However, as highlighted by Mario Draghi in the EU Competitiveness Report, more focus is needed to understand the tangible impact that mobility opportunities can have on employment. A key aspect of this is identifying the skills and competencies international students gain during their mobility and understanding how these translate into employability.

The ErasmusCareers project[23], currently led by ESN, is actively exploring this topic. Preliminary findings highlight the need to strengthen the connection between the competencies acquired abroad and their recognition in the job market. This effort should not only focus on enhancing the link between study mobility and employability but also include other mobility opportunities, such as Erasmus+ Traineeships, bridging the gap between mobility and the job market.

While analysing the results of the XV ESNsurvey, it is evident that the pattern observed in previous editions persists—participation in Erasmus+ Traineeships[24] remains significantly lower compared to Erasmus+ study mobility. Furthermore, students who participate in traineeships report lower levels of satisfaction with their integration compared to those involved in study mobility. This underscores the need for more tailored support and targeted attention for participants from different mobility types, particularly those engaging in Erasmus+ traineeships, to enhance their overall experience and integration.

To maximise the potential of the Erasmus+ Programme, it is essential to address the challenges in the post-mobility phase, promote the value of traineeships, leverage the role of ambassadors more effectively and incorporate flexible learning pathways. Initiatives like micro-credentials and new mobility opportunities, including the European Degree, will contribute to making Europe more competitive. These measures will not only strengthen the connection between mobility and employability but also reaffirm the transformative impact of the Erasmus+ Programme on Europe's education and labour landscape.

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[23] The main objective of the ErasmusCareers project is to ensure that the competencies gained from mobility contribute to the career prospects of Erasmus+ participants. Preliminary research indicates that students receive limited support in understanding the learning pathways they undertake or in identifying and assessing the competencies they gain through formal and informal activities during their studies or internships abroad. To empower international students to successfully navigate their career paths and excel in future job applications, this project aims to revisit and align with key policy agendas. The goal is to evaluate how the Erasmus+ Programme has contributed to these agendas and, ultimately, to the employability and career readiness of young people.

[24] The Erasmus Student Network is currently developing another project that intends to navigate the field of traineeships, Digitalising Erasmus Traineeship Application Support (DETAS). The project aims to enhance the Erasmus+ traineeship experience by improving digital tools that assist students in securing and maximising the benefits of international internship opportunities. It addresses existing gaps in support systems for Erasmus+ traineeships, with a particular focus on pre-departure preparation, on-site integration, and post-exchange follow-up. By advancing the functionality and accessibility of the Erasmus+ Intern portal, DETAS seeks to make the Erasmus+ traineeship process more user-friendly, inclusive, and efficient. This aligns with the European Union's broader objectives of promoting employability, advancing digitalisation, and fostering mobility for young people across Europe.

★ **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Higher Education Institutions should actively expand Erasmus+ Traineeships in their academic offer, enriching opportunities to attract a wider range of students and positioning these experiences as a bridge to the job market. By demonstrating how mobility participation can enhance employability, institutions can encourage more students to take advantage of Erasmus+ internships, aligning the programme with both personal career growth and broader economic benefits. Furthermore, HEIs can implement a strategic approach by collaborating with local authorities to link Erasmus+ internships with local innovation ecosystems and incorporate an entrepreneurship component. This approach not only enriches the internship experience for students but also contributes positively to the local economy and community, fostering a mutually beneficial relationship between students and their host environments.

2. Higher Education Institutions should strive to streamline the application process for Erasmus+ Internships, ensuring broader student participation and providing comprehensive pre-departure support for interns. HEIs should work closely with student organisations to keep students well-informed about available opportunities throughout their mobility experience and to ensure a welcoming arrival in their host countries. Given that interns often arrive individually rather than alongside Erasmus study participants, collaborating with student organisations to provide tailored support is essential for successful integration into the local community.

3. Higher Education Institutions should collaborate with student organisations to create comprehensive guides supporting students' reintegration after their mobility experiences. While many students have highlighted the benefits of receiving guidance materials for going abroad, there is an equally important need for resources that assist them upon their return. A well-structured guide offering information on further opportunities, post-mobility engagement options and reintegration activities can provide essential support for students, helping them navigate the often-challenging transition back into their home environment and can provide a valuable opportunity for individuals to gain awareness of the skills they have acquired. Such a guide could include practical advice, local networks to join, career and skill-building resources, and opportunities to continue engaging with international experiences. By providing these resources, institutions and student organisations can ease the adjustment period for returning students, ensuring they feel supported and empowered to build upon the skills and connections they gained during their mobility journey.

4. The European Commission, National Agencies and Higher Education Institutions should further explore the potential of former Erasmus+ participants to be the Ambassadors of the Erasmus Generation, leveraging their personal experiences to promote the programme's benefits and impact. By formally engaging these alumni, institutions can create a powerful network of advocates who can reach prospective students, educators and policymakers, demonstrating the tangible advantages of international learning mobility.

5. The European Commission, National Agencies and Higher Education Institutions should fully explore the potential of Erasmus+ participation by not only gathering personal stories but also systematically analysing the impact of mobility through a data-driven approach. While storytelling remains a valuable tool for sharing Erasmus+ experiences, as supported by ESN, robust data analysis is essential to substantiate these narratives and reveal the programme's broader impact. Institutions should improve their ability to showcase the transformative power of mobility using concrete data points, enabling stakeholders beyond the Erasmus+ community to grasp the programme's impact in measurable terms. By presenting clear evidence, Erasmus+ can strengthen its influence and attract further support from policymakers.

6. National Governments and Higher Education Institutions should seek the development of micro-credentials providing opportunities for the flexibilisation of curricula and validating non-formal and informal learning, raising the visibility of individuals' skills, empowering learners and enhancing their response to the current labour market needs (Draghi, 2024; Gaušas et al., 2024).

7. National Governments should actively pursue the approval and implementation of the European Degree to enhance the competitiveness and recognition of higher education within the European job market. Mario Draghi has highlighted that European universities often lack sufficient academic excellence and strong connections to employment opportunities. The Council's proposal for the European Degree aims to address these issues by fostering deeper transnational cooperation among higher education institutions, thereby aligning academic offerings more closely with labour market needs. Pilot projects have demonstrated that such initiatives can significantly improve the quality and relevance of higher education in Europe (Draghi, 2024; European Commission, 2024).

3. Enhancing the international student experience with the improvement of services and tailored support

Over the past 35 years of supporting international students, ESN has continuously identified ways to improve their experience. However, as highlighted by the findings in this edition of the ESNsurvey, many areas for improvement remain closely tied to the mobility journey itself. The results particularly underscore how enhanced services and support can significantly improve beneficiaries' experiences.

These challenges are intrinsically linked to the implementation of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education and raise critical questions about the fulfilment of rights outlined in the Erasmus Student Charter. Feedback from students consistently highlights these concerns, pointing to gaps in support and unmet expectations for services, particularly before departure. This reinforces the need for stronger alignment between institutional practices and the rights established by the European Commission.

A key area of focus is pre-departure support, where providing clear and comprehensive information is crucial. Many students continue to express a need for better guidance on the application process, understanding available programmes and accessing financial support. Additionally, students emphasise the importance of improving assistance in other critical areas, such as securing accommodation, navigating visa processes and enhancing the digitalisation of the Erasmus+ Programme. Addressing these aspects is essential to elevate the overall mobility experience and ensure the programme meets the evolving needs of its participants.

★ **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Higher Education Institutions should seek ways to simplify information regarding mobility procedures, ensuring that the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education is respected and that all necessary details are consolidated in one accessible location. This information should be made available in a digital format to enhance accessibility for all students. Additionally, to improve the delivery of information, HEIs are encouraged to collaborate with student associations to develop comprehensive checklists outlining the steps students need to take before studying abroad.

2. National Agencies should implement stricter monitoring of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE) to ensure that course catalogue information is provided well in advance and that recognition procedures are applied in full compliance with the charter commitments. This would facilitate a smoother reintegration process for students returning from mobility and help maintain their trust in the Erasmus+ Programme. Additional tailored support measures should be envisioned for higher education institutions that are not fulfilling the objectives in their ECHE applications to encourage them to continuously improve the academic experience of their students.

3. National Authorities should simplify visa procedures for international students pursuing learning opportunities abroad. It is strongly recommended that visa policies be standardised to provide young students with a unified and streamlined application process and ensure they can travel after their applications are accepted. Furthermore, introducing a unique visa classification for various learning mobility programmes, such as an 'Erasmus Visa', is proposed. This initiative would create a more efficient and cohesive process for international students, significantly enhancing their overall mobility experience.

4. The European Commission, National Agencies and Higher Education Institutions should collaborate to enhance the digital tools available to students as part of their Erasmus+ journey. This collaboration should aim to ensure that all mobility procedures can be conducted online. Such advancements would significantly improve student satisfaction while simplifying mobility processes and increasing accessibility to the programme.

5. Higher Education Institutions should intensify their efforts to support international students in securing accommodation before going abroad. Although, in most cases, universities do not have their own housing options to offer, the International Student Housing Report by ESN and ESU highlights that students highly value when universities provide information about potential accommodation solutions. Therefore, improving the flow of information regarding available options—even when direct accommodation cannot be provided by the institution—should be prioritised. This effort can significantly enhance students' satisfaction with their mobility experience and the support provided by their institution.

6. Higher Education Institutions should work side by side with student organisations to enhance the outreach and awareness of the Erasmus Student Charter. This document outlines the rights, responsibilities and duties of international students before, during and after their mobility, making it essential for students to be well-informed about their entitlements and obligations. Moreover, students should be made aware of the mechanisms available to report complaints and issues as specified in the charter. By collaborating with student organisations, HEIs can ensure effective peer-to-peer support, a highly valued resource among international students. This partnership also equips student organisations with critical knowledge about the charter, fostering a more informed and supportive student community.

7. Higher Education Institutions should actively implement the European Student Card to enhance the accessibility of services for international students. This initiative can serve as a crucial tool to support students in navigating their transition between their sending and host universities, ensuring a smoother integration process. Additionally, the card can facilitate better access to on-campus services, further improving the overall student experience and fostering inclusivity within the university environment.

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As a student with a learning disability, it was an absolute struggle to get accommodations during the exam period.

4. Financial conditions and the well-being of international students

The survey responses highlight that financial barriers remain a significant obstacle to student mobility, aligning with findings from previous research conducted by ESN, such as the SIEM research report. A key takeaway is that most students rely on personal savings, work during their mobility or face financial constraints that entirely exclude them from studying abroad. Addressing these challenges must be a priority to ensure that the Erasmus+ Programme becomes more inclusive, accessible and truly a reality for all.

One significant issue that has constantly arisen is the insufficiency of the Erasmus+ grant. Many students report that the grant needs to adequately cover their living costs, leaving those unable to co-finance their mobility excluded from the programme. This is particularly problematic for student workers, who often

face the opportunity cost of leaving their jobs or the uncertainty of securing employment abroad, making mobility unaffordable for many.

Another pressing concern is the delay in grant payments, which disproportionately affects students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Late payments lead to financial instability and uncertainty during the mobility period. The variability in payment timing across countries further complicates this issue, underscoring the need for improved national policy-making and monitoring. Since addressing this problem requires no additional financial resources but only a revision of administrative processes, it should be treated as an urgent priority by all stakeholders.

Furthermore, the lack of national and regional co-financing limits the inclusivity of the programme. Currently, there is insufficient transparency and data on how member states and regions contribute to co-financing the Erasmus+ Programme. Clear and comprehensive data is essential to understand the full scope of the issue and to design effective solutions. Financial contributions from national, regional and local authorities must play a central role in making the programme more inclusive.

These financial challenges not only prevent access to mobility opportunities but also contribute significantly to stress and anxiety among students, adversely affecting their overall experience and well-being. Tackling these barriers is crucial to ensuring that the Erasmus+ Programme fulfils its potential as an inclusive and transformative initiative for all students.

★ **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Higher Education Institutions should aim to improve the timing of grant distribution to exchange students, ensuring that students receive their grants before starting their mobility. Many universities have reported that delays are often caused by the documentation required for students to receive the grants. It is important to emphasise that, according to Erasmus+ regulations, only three key documents are required to be signed to go on mobility: the Learning Agreement, the Transcript of Records and the Certificate of Arrival and Departure. Any additional documents introduced due to legal or institutional requirements should be processed in a way that does not jeopardise the student's mobility experience.

2. Higher Education Institutions should provide better access to information to students with fewer opportunities related to their additional support in participating in mobility. Additionally, considering the lack of applicability of the groups considered as having fewer opportunities, both National Agencies and Higher Education Institutions should create explicit definitions for these groups in order to reach better results and address the challenges (XIV ESNsurvey, 2022).

3. National Agencies and National Authorities should provide national and/or regional co-financing to all students to ensure more substantial mobility grants, with a particular focus on prioritising students from fewer-opportunity backgrounds. Additionally, synergies with other European funding mechanisms, such as the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), should be explored to enhance the quality and adequacy of grants provided to international students.

4. Higher Education Institutions should intensify their efforts to address all forms of student well-being, especially in relation to services connected to mental health, ensuring that the needs of young people are fully met. Data highlights a clear link between insufficient financial support for mobility and increased feelings of anxiety and stress. Therefore, prioritising the well-being of international students throughout their entire mobility journey has become more crucial than ever. By providing robust mental health and well-being support, HEIs can create a more inclusive and supportive environment, enabling students to thrive academically and personally during their time abroad (Gaušas et al., 2024)

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Support for health issues of any kind, for the international students needs improvements.

5. The 4th Pillar of Erasmus+: Enhancing participation in civil society and strengthening the engagement with the local community

As identified in past ESNsurveys, significant challenges persist in engaging students effectively within the framework of the 4th pillar of the Erasmus+ Programme. The issue of fostering active participation among young people has also been consistently highlighted in several reports published over the past year. The EU Education, Youth, Sport, and Policy Report notes that 'despite existing EU

initiatives, democratic participation among young people remains insufficient, and civic participation spaces for young people are lacking in many Member States' (Gaušas et al., 2024). While mobility often fosters a stronger sense of EU and global citizenship and motivates students to participate in democratic processes, such as voting on the 2024 EU elections, there is little infrastructure to channel these sentiments into sustained civic engagement.

One of the most pressing concerns is the low level of engagement with the local community. Students often report limited interaction with local students and minimal involvement in activities within the host institution's community while abroad. Moreover, there has been a noticeable decline in participation in local community activities during mobility. This lack of integration undermines the programme's broader goals of fostering intercultural exchange.

Additionally, there is a clear need for Higher Education Institutions to encourage students to join civil society organisations after their mobility experiences. This is particularly important as students often express dissatisfaction with the support services provided by host institutions, especially regarding reintegration activities upon their return home. Higher Education Institutions should provide better support by offering meaningful opportunities for students to engage and apply their experiences after mobility.

A revamped approach to recognising informal learning could play a critical role in this transformation. By prioritising the use of existing tools, such as ECTS and the diploma supplement, Higher Education Institutions could create a more supportive environment for students to engage in meaningful civic activities. Recognising volunteering and civic engagement as integral parts of the learning experience would not only incentivise participation but also reinforce the long-term impact of mobility on individuals and society.

Students should not be viewed merely as beneficiaries of international experiences but as active drivers of societal change. They should be empowered to engage in activities that benefit their peers, communities and society at large. Ensuring that mobility experiences leave a lasting impact and encouraging students to act as multipliers of societal transformation is essential to the success of the Erasmus+ Programme. These efforts will also contribute to addressing wider societal challenges, promoting democratic values and strengthening the inclusivity of civic participation across Europe.

★ **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Higher Education Institutions should ensure that international students are integrated into classrooms alongside local students and that course curricula are adapted to foster meaningful interaction within the classroom environment. With the support of student organisations, HEIs can also organise on-campus activities that bring local and international students together, promoting inclusion and cultural exchange.

2. European University Alliances should develop a comprehensive dissemination and reporting plan to effectively showcase their on-campus initiatives, as they exemplify the successful integration of local and international students. The activities organised by the alliances serve as exploratory pathways for innovation in the higher education sector, and, in this way, they can play a crucial role in fostering collaboration, inclusion and cultural exchange, further strengthening the collaboration between the local community, the international students and the local students.

3. Higher Education Institutions should formally recognise students' volunteer work and participation in civic engagement activities within the local community. This can be achieved through existing tools such as ECTS recognition and the diploma supplement. Additionally, European University Alliances, through the development of the student board, can play a pivotal role in fostering such practices. By integrating formal recognition of student board activities into their frameworks, alliances can better motivate students to engage in these initiatives. This approach can also pave the way for the adoption of such practices across the entire higher education sector.

4. Higher Education Institutions should actively support the reintegration journey of international students, empowering them to give back to the community. This can be achieved by encouraging students to join civil society organisations as part of their post-mobility journey or by involving them in innovative activities and initiatives being developed on campus. Such efforts not only benefit the community but also allow students to apply their experiences and skills gained during their mobility in meaningful ways. HEIs can seek the support of student organisations to achieve these goals.

5. The European Commission should guide National Agencies and Higher Education Institutions in leveraging Bologna tools to foster the recognition of informal and non-formal learning outcomes during mobility exchanges. This includes promoting flexible learning paths, aligning with trends being set by other mobility programmes that recognise the diverse nature of learning experiences, and ensuring Erasmus+ evolves

in this direction. The Learning Agreement should be reimagined to reduce bureaucracy while enriching the student learning experience by integrating mechanisms for recognising informal and non-formal learning outcomes. In this regard, ESN recommends a complete revamp of the Learning Agreement as part of the Erasmus+ 2028-2034 Programme, ensuring it supports innovative and flexible learning pathways that reflect the needs of modern learners (XIV ESNsurvey, 2022).

6. Higher Education Institutions should seek to incorporate service learning as an integral part of their internationalisation strategy, encouraging students to engage in activities within the local community as part of their educational experience. International students should also be actively encouraged to take part in service-learning activities. Their involvement in community engagement can serve as a transformative step towards embedding civic participation within the learning mobility framework. To further emphasise the value of these activities, institutions should strive to align them with ECTS credits or, where this is not feasible, ensure they are recognised in the diploma supplement, highlighting the importance of participation in such activities (XIV ESNsurvey, 2022).

6. Ensure meaningful youth participation during the Erasmus+ cycle

An important connection with the 4th pillar of the Erasmus+ Programme lies in understanding how civil society organisations are being involved in the Erasmus+ cycle, particularly in its policymaking process.

For effective policymaking, it is essential to ensure that grassroots perspectives are represented in the decision-making process. This approach helps address the real challenges faced by society while fostering a stronger connection between policy-making and the community. The same principle applies to the Erasmus+ cycle, particularly in how civil society is being involved and engaged in its processes.

As highlighted during the conclusion of the European Year of Youth 2022, the EU aims to strengthen the participation of young people in democratic processes, with the enhancement of European citizens' initiative serving as a clear testament to this commitment. However, to ensure meaningful youth involvement in the Erasmus+ cycle, several aspects require improvement. Specifically, attention must be given to how civil society organisations are engaged in these processes, the types of dialogues being created to involve them, and the spaces to which they are invited to contribute. Strengthening these mechanisms will be critical to ensuring that young people and civil society organisations can provide valuable input, thereby enhancing the inclusivity and effectiveness of Erasmus+ policymaking and truly achieving the ambitious goals set by the legacy of the European Year of Youth.

★ RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. European, regional, national and local authorities should strengthen formats for regular dialogue with relevant stakeholders. At the European level in particular, there should be structured formats for regular dialogue with stakeholders and civil society organisations. These dialogues will enable policymakers to better understand ongoing issues and create higher-quality policies while also improving their policy implementation on the ground. Furthermore, civil society organisations' experts on specific topics should be included in existing discussion spaces rather than creating new, separate forums exclusively for civil society organisations. This approach avoids redundancy and ensures the efficiency and impact of the contributions civil society organisations can offer to policymakers.

2. National Agencies and National Authorities are well-positioned and equipped to collaborate with the youth and encourage the participation of student and alumni representatives in the implementation of the Erasmus+ Programme through concrete actions, such as the creation of working groups, stakeholder committees and other established activities. Such commitments are expected to create a spillover effect, fostering the development of a more inclusive, diverse and sustainable Erasmus experience as well as higher education systems (XIV ESNsurvey, 2022).

3. National Agencies should actively involve student associations and representatives in the monitoring of the European Charter for Higher Education, reinforcing this as a standard practice. This approach is particularly crucial in instances where improvements are needed by HEIs in supporting international students. By integrating the perspectives of student organisations, National Agencies can address these challenges more effectively and enhance the overall quality of the mobility experience.

4. Higher Education Institutions should place greater emphasis on increasing student participation in creating their internationalisation strategies. To achieve this, HEIs should actively seek regular feedback and recommendations from students, particularly those who have participated in Erasmus+ mobility. This approach ensures that students can fully leverage their learning experiences from mobility, enabling them to become ambassadors of the Erasmus Generation and inspiring others to engage in international opportunities (XIV ESNsurvey, 2022).

6. Fundamental changes that must be addressed for the full implementation of the Erasmus+ Programme

As already highlighted above, according to the results of the XV ESNsurvey, there are three critical challenges faced by exchange students: lack of financial support, difficulties in finding accommodation and issues with the recognition of learning outcomes. These challenges must be addressed as foundational cornerstones for the next edition of the Erasmus+ Programme. They not only impact the quality of the mobility experience but also act as significant barriers to participation, undermining the programme's accessibility and overall impact on society.

Regarding financial measures, an examination of the expenditure breakdown of exchange students across various categories reveals that nearly 48% of costs are spent on accommodation, with an additional 25% covering essential living expenses such as food and bills (Figure 62). Moreover, the average cost of living during mobility is €322 higher than the average Erasmus+ grant (Figure 61). This financial disparity underscores the urgent need for increased grant funding to ensure that students can participate in mobility opportunities without undue financial strain and also for better solutions to be found regarding student accommodation.

The findings of the XV ESNsurvey also reveal that issues related to recognition remain persistent for mobile students, with 2.6% of survey respondents reporting that none of their credits were recognised upon their return to their home university. The qualitative data highlights that this lack of trust between institutions undermines the value of international experiences in academic terms and creates additional barriers to mobility.

However, these challenges cannot be effectively addressed without greater collaboration across different Directorates-General (DGs) and Committees of the European Parliament and the European Commission. Increased cooperation must be supported by significant investments in human resources within the Erasmus+ infrastructure. Addressing these issues also requires aligning Erasmus+ policies with broader frameworks, such as the European Strategy for Universities, the Learning Mobility Framework, the development of European University Alliances and the proposed European Degree.

Crucially, the budget for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028-2034) must increase exponentially—by at least fivefold—to adequately support the programme's growing demands and ensure its continued success.

★ **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. The new Commissioner for Energy and Housing, alongside Local and National Authorities, must prioritise addressing the structural challenges of student housing in Europe. It is crucial to ensure tha accessible and affordable student housing is available for both national and international students. These efforts are vital to sustaining mobility programmes, particularly with the introduction of new mobility opportunities, and to guarantee that students can continue to study abroad in a safe and secure environment.

2. The European Commission and the European Parliament, along with their respective Directorate-Generals (DGs) and Committees, are encouraged to enhance their communication and collaboration to address cross-cutting topics more effectively. While the Erasmus+ Programme is primarily managed by the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC) and the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education (CULT), certain areas, such as skills development and employability, benefit from the involvement of other DGs and Committees, such as DG EMPL, which contributes to the decision-making process in these domains to be shared. Strengthening cooperation between these entities will support the achievement of shared objectives and further enhance the Erasmus+ Programme for its beneficiaries. Such collaboration ensures a more comprehensive and efficient approach, addressing the multifaceted needs of the programme while maximising its impact.

3. National Governments and Higher Education Institutions must intensify their efforts to ensure the automatic recognition of learning outcomes from Erasmus+ mobility. Despite the 2018 Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition and the 2022 Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation, the recognition of learning outcomes for international students remains inconsistent. This lack of automatic recognition creates significant challenges, including mistrust among students considering participation in Erasmus+ and difficulties in continuing their academic journeys upon returning to their home institutions. National authorities should provide clearer guidance to Higher Education Institutions and conduct thorough assessments to identify the extent to which automatic recognition practices are not being implemented in different countries. Addressing these gaps can be effectively aligned with the revisions to the ECTS Users' Guide approved during the last Bologna Follow-up Group meeting in Tirana.

4. The European Commission should seek to establish a centralised redistribution mechanism for Erasmus+ funding. The Erasmus+ Programme should address the disparity in funding demands across different countries by creating a centralised redistribution mechanism. As evidenced in the Erasmus+ Annual Report 2022, some countries, such as Italy and Germany, experience higher demands for Erasmus+ funds, while others have excess funds that often need to be reallocated within Key Actions (e.g., KA1 to KA2) or risk being returned unspent. This mismatch creates inefficiencies and limits the programme's potential impact. To address this, a centralised redistribution mechanism could be established, allowing unutilised funds from countries with lower demands to be reallocated to those with higher needs. Such a mechanism would ensure a more balanced and effective use of resources, meeting the diverse needs of countries while enhancing participation in the programme.

5. The European Commission and National Agencies should ensure that Erasmus+ data from beneficiaries and participants is made publicly available to facilitate the programme improvement. A significant amount of valuable data is collected through Erasmus+ tools, which, despite challenges, represents a rich resource for understanding the programme's impact. Currently, only a limited portion of the most relevant data is shared through the Erasmus+ Annual Report, restricting opportunities for comprehensive research. Making documents such as the Erasmus+ Participants Report and national and local data accessible could significantly benefit an understanding of the impact of the programme. Moreover, the lack of detailed data and analysis on the programme's results, particularly regarding tangible effects among participants, restricts the ability of policy-makers outside the Erasmus+ sphere to fully understand the impact of the programme.

6. National authorities must prioritise investment in national railway infrastructure in order to fully achieve the objectives of sustainable travel, as set by the travel support measures implemented in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2024. To make green travel measures fully successful, it is urgent for governments to enhance railway connections, ensuring that train travel becomes a viable alternative for everyone who wishes to go abroad. Furthermore, in collaboration with the European Union, national authorities should seek better coordination among countries to facilitate seamless cross-border train travel. These steps are crucial for encouraging sustainable travel behaviours among students and the wider public, aligning with the Green Deal objectives and ensuring that sustainable mobility becomes a truly attractive option.

7. The European Commission, National Agencies and Higher Education Institutions should prioritise increasing human resources to ensure the proper implementation of the ambitious goals set by the Erasmus+ Programme. In the case of National Agencies, while creating new roles to address the horizontal priorities, such as inclusion officers and digital officers, these responsibilities are often added to existing roles without allocating adequate time or resources. This limits the ability of staff to fully explore and implement the horizontal priorities effectively. Higher Education Institutions, especially international relations offices, should be sufficiently staffed to provide students with proper guidance and coaching on their mobility journeys.

8. The Erasmus+ budget should be increased 5 times more to ensure its continuation, development and ability to address future challenges. For the 2028-2034 Multiannual Financial Framework, a substantial budget increase is critical to meet the growing demands of existing target groups without compromising the quality of support already provided, maintain the same number of mobilities expected in 2027, and to address new priorities, such as the European University Alliances and the potential implementation of the European Degree. It is also vital to fully achieve the mobility targets set by the Learning Mobility Framework and to tackle persistent challenges, such as insufficient mobility grants and declining participation rates. As Mario Draghi emphasised, 'To reach every young person in the EU, the funding of the programme would need to increase five-fold for the 2028-2034 programming period' (Draghi, 2024).

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It must be ensured that the financial grant provided is sufficient to meet the needs of the students.

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The success of the ESNsurvey reflects the strength of our community, united by a shared belief in the power of mobility and cultural exchange. Together, we continue to build bridges, foster understanding and create opportunities for students across Europe and beyond.

CHARTS & TABLES

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ABBREVIATIONS

BiH - Bosnia Herzegovina

ECTS - European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

EC - European Commission

EHEA - European Higher Education Area

EHCE - Erasmus Charter for Higher Education

ERASMUS - European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students

ESN - Erasmus Student Network

ESU - European Student Union

EU - European Commission

HEI - Higher Education Institution

IRO - International Relations Office

M - Mean (statistical average)

N - Sample Size

NA - National Agency

OLA - Online Learning Agreement

SD - Standard Deviation

SEMP - Swiss-European Mobility Programme

SIEM - Social Inclusion and Engagement in Mobility

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ABOUT ESN

The Erasmus Student Network (ESN) is the largest student organisation in Europe dedicated to supporting student mobility. Founded on October 16, 1989, and legally registered in 1990, ESN was established to facilitate student exchange. As a non-political, non-profit and non-religious organisation, ESN operates through a network of over 15,000 volunteers, active in more than 1,000 higher education institutions across 45 countries. Each year, ESN engages more than 29,000 young people, providing services to approximately 350,000 international students.

ESN aims to create a more mobile and flexible educational environment by promoting and enhancing student exchange opportunities. It also strives to offer an intercultural experience to students who are unable to participate in exchange programs, a concept known as 'Internationalisation at Home'. Guided by the principle of 'Students Helping Students', ESN's vision is to enrich society through international students, fostering global understanding and cooperation.

ESN is a full member of the European Youth Forum and the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe. Additionally, it is affiliated with several key international and European organisations, including the European Association for International Education, the Informal Forum of International Student Organisations (IFISO), the Global Student Forum (GSF), Generation Climate Europe (GCE), the International Association of Universities (IAU), the European Movement International (EMI), the European Citizen Action Service (ECAS) and the Lifelong Learning Platform (LLLP).

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