

# ESNsurvey

## XIV Edition

Understanding the Experience & Needs of  
Exchange Students in Challenging Times

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## **ESNsurvey - 14th Edition: Understanding the Experience and Needs of International Students in the Pandemic and its Aftermath**

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**Authors:** Giovanni Telesca, Evgenii Puchkov, Salome Keshelashvili, Giuseppe Gruttad'Auria, Kostis Giannidis

**Editing:** Miranda Betchvaia, Juan Rayón González

**Design:** Patrycja Woszczyk, Vedrana Kovačić, Lina Mohorić

**Graphs Design:** Natasha Pascale Robinson, Diana Estefania Álvarez

**Conclusions & Recommendations:** Juan Rayón González, Miranda Betchvaia, Neli Kalinova, Rita Dias

**Contributions:** Members of the expert group, Wim Gabriels, Siem Buseyne

**Expert Group:** Oana Dimistrescu, Marija Mitić, Claire O'Leary, Irina Ferencz, Giorgio Marinoni, Christof Van Mol

**Proofreading:** Paulina Bednarek, Jasmin Schlehofer, Nicholas Kolya, Christie Dear, Nadine Schlehofer

**Cover photography:** ESN Germany

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Erasmus Student Network AISBL

Rue Joseph II 120

1000 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32 2 256 74 27

esn.org

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# PREFACE

The ESNsurvey, our flagship research project for representing the voice of Erasmus and international students and supporting them before, during and after their mobility experiences, has grown in size and relevance as a core research initiative to understand the situation of Erasmus and international students in Europe from a student perspective. Above all, the survey seeks to represent the experiences and challenges of the hundreds of thousands of students that every year undertake an international mobility. The survey has become broader in its scope as Erasmus has gained in relevance and impact in its way to become the European Union's most famous programme and possibly the world's most significant transnational educational programme.

Through all these years, ESNsurvey has remained a student and volunteer led initiative since its inception, and all its editions have only been possible thanks to the incredible work and commitment of all the ESN volunteers who have contributed to its creation, promotion and dissemination. It is equally important to acknowledge the central role that Higher Education Institutions, National Agencies, the European Commission, partner organisations and other players have had in its dissemination.

With more than 10.000 responses, the XIV edition of the ESNsurvey constitutes another example of ESN's unique capacity to collect data from students. The reason behind this continuous success is simple: students across Europe, from Ukraine to Portugal, know that ESN stands ready to advocate for their needs, challenges and dreams, and recognise the work our local associations so supporting students across Europe. Throughout our 33 years of existence, ESN has become synonymous with the Erasmus Generation that we have helped to shape, and the we have the honour to lead.

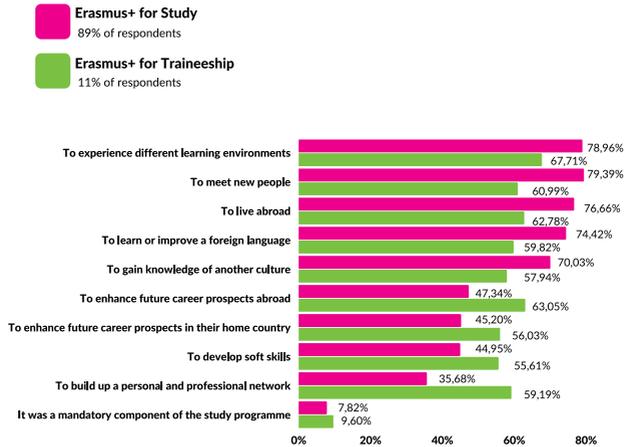
More and more students and citizens across Europe and the whole world share the idea that we can build a better world through Erasmus. ESN is ready to continue working towards that goal, one student and volunteer at a time.



**Juan Rayón González**  
President of the  
Erasmus Student Network 2021-2023

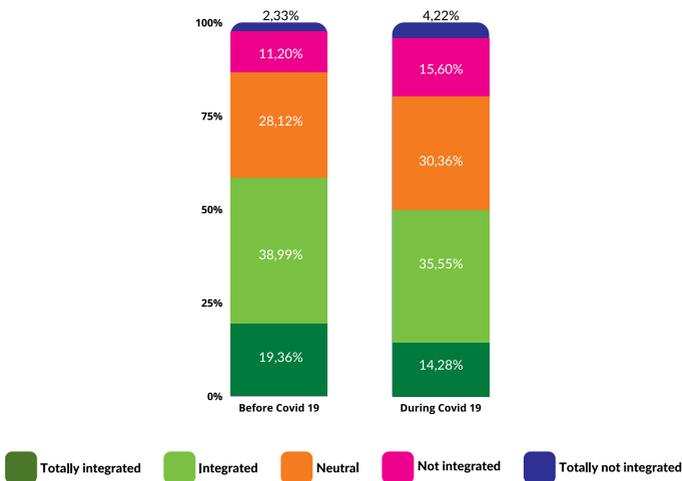
# KEY FINDINGS

## Motivations to Go on Mobility (Figure 18, page 35)



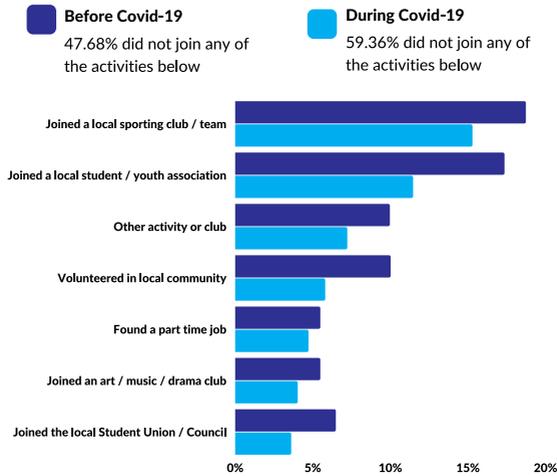
Experiencing different learning environments, meeting new people and living abroad are the main motivations for going on mobility among students. Mobile trainees have a bigger interest in career development aspects, such as enhancing career prospects or building a professional network, than participants in mobility for studies.

## Integration in Local Communities (Figure 22, page 40)



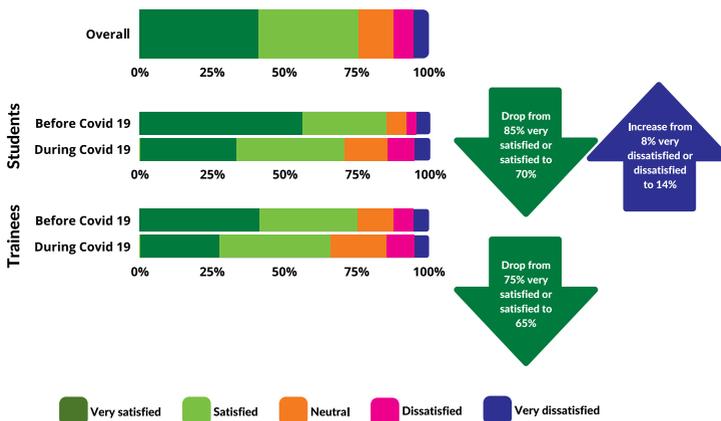
Almost half of the respondents did not feel integrated with the local community, with less than one-fifth feeling fully integrated (16.19%). Almost a third (29.24%) felt “neutral” about the question.

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



More than half of respondents (54.67%) did not take part in organised group activities in their hosting communities, with less than 8% volunteering during their mobility experiences. Sports clubs (16.64%) and student and youth associations (13.81%) were the most popular activities.

## Satisfaction with Social Life of Exchange Students (Figure 21, page 39)



Satisfaction with social life remained high even during the pandemic, with more than three-quarters of students being satisfied (34.33%) or very satisfied (41.06%) overall. However, there was a considerable drop compared to pre-pandemic times: the pre-pandemic level of satisfaction was 20% higher than the one during. Erasmus+ trainees have considerably lower levels of satisfaction than their peers doing Erasmus+ studies: 55% of students reported being very satisfied with their social life before the pandemic, while the figure for trainees was 41%.

### Satisfaction with Services Provided by Sending HEIs (0-5 scale)

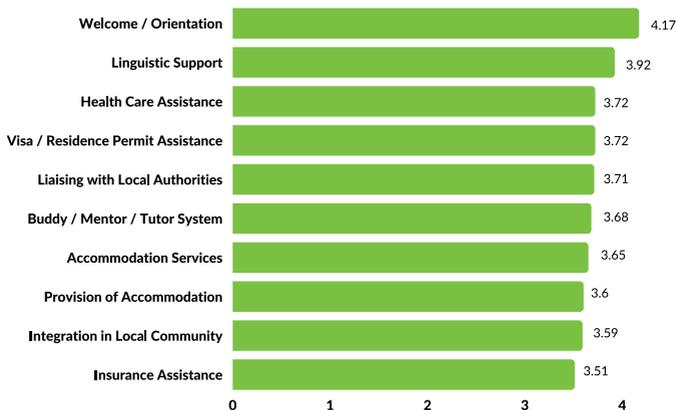
(Figure 24, page 43)



Reintegration activities and involvement in alumni communities have the lowest levels of satisfaction among the services provided by sending institutions, while application preparation and mobility information provision score the best results.

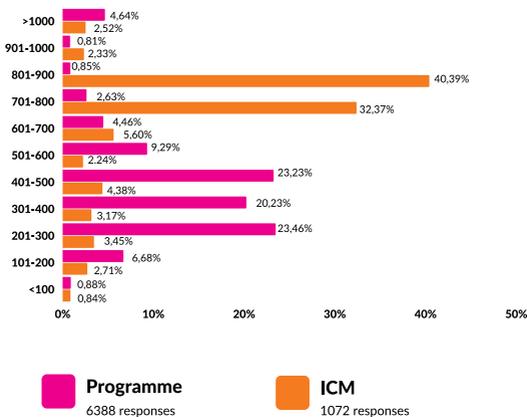
### Satisfaction with Services Provided by Host HEIs (0-5 scale)

(Figure 25, page 45)



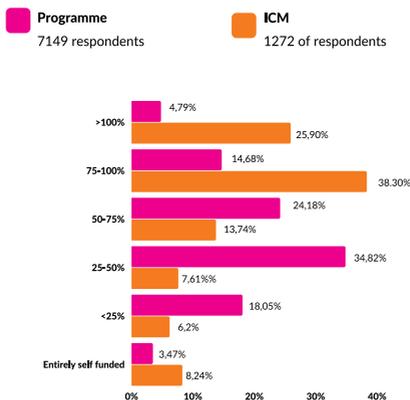
Among the services provided by host institutions, Insurance assistance, integration in the local community and accommodation receive the lowest levels of satisfaction, while welcome activities and linguistic support receive the highest satisfaction rates. The services provided by student organisations in the host institution also stand out for the level of satisfaction.

## Erasmus+ scholarships amounts (Figure 33, page 55)



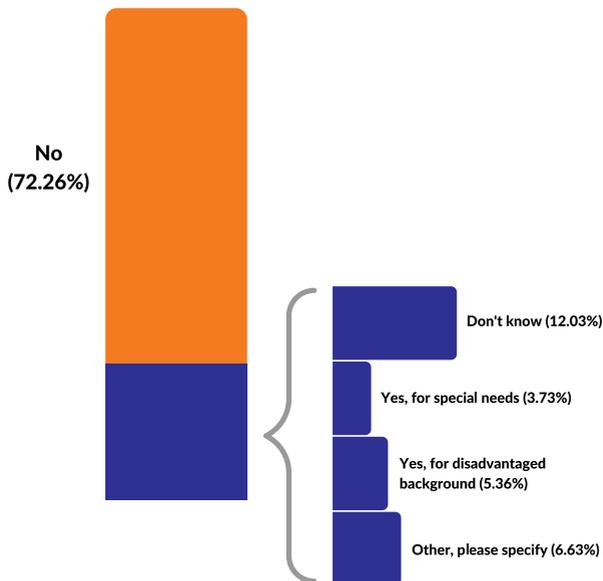
More than half of Erasmus+ scholarships lie within 201 to 500 euros per month, short of the financial needs reported by students. Moreover, more than a quarter of the sample reports a monthly scholarship of less than 301 euros. Grants for ICM students are considerably higher than those for intra-European mobility students: more than 70% report grants of over 700 euros.

## Cost Coverage of Erasmus+ Scholarships (Figure 29, page 51)



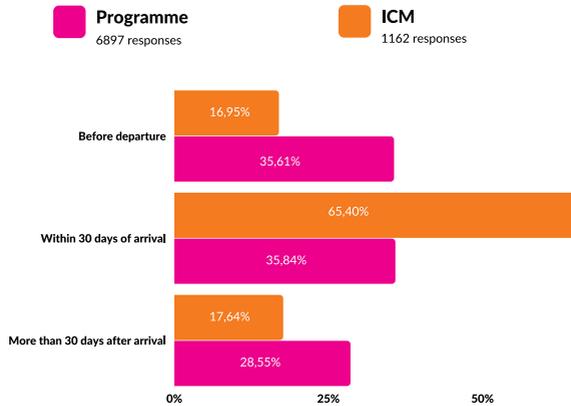
Almost half of the respondents can't cover more than 50% of the costs of their mobilities with their grants. Students participating in International Credit Mobilities (ICM - KA171) can cover for a much bigger part of their expenses due to the higher grants.

### Top-Ups in Mobility (Figure 30, page 52)



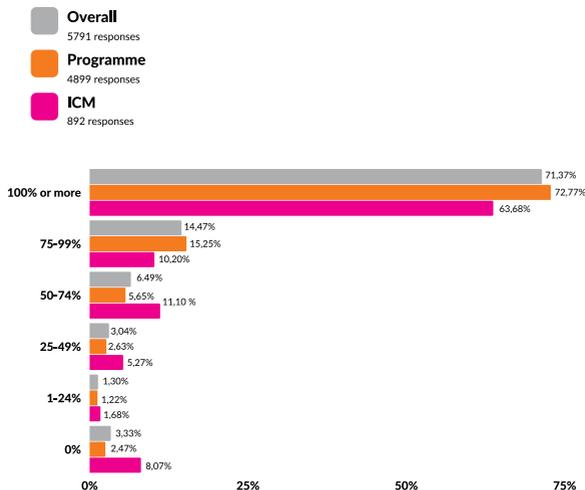
Around 15% of respondents reported receiving top-ups or additional grants, but lack of awareness of how Erasmus+ funding works is common: More than 12% of respondents reported not knowing whether they had received top-ups or not. Confusion between disadvantaged backgrounds and special needs is common among top-up recipients.

## Schedule of Grant Payments (Figure 35, page 57)



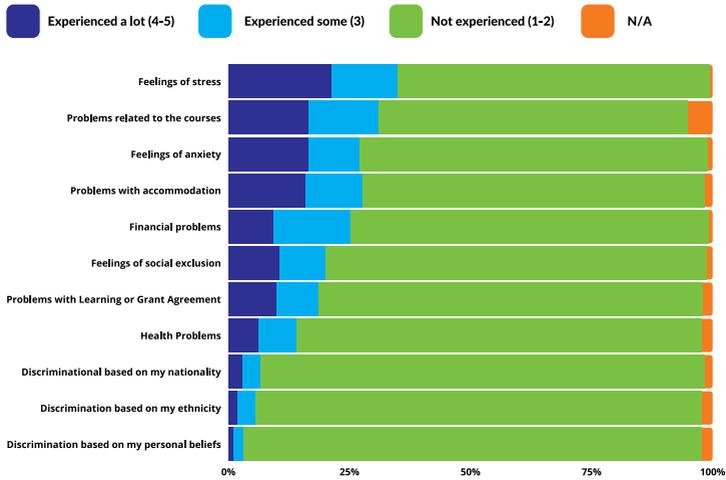
More than a quarter of respondents received their grants later than one month after the beginning of their mobilities, and only one-third received the grant before departure. Major differences exist among countries, with countries such as France, Spain and Italy having a bigger prevalence of late payments.

## Credit Recognition on Mobility (Figure 36, page 61)



Almost a third of respondents (28.63%) reported not receiving full credit recognition, far from the objectives laid out in the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education. Results for International Credit Mobility (72.77% full recognition) participants are considerably better than those from intra-European mobility Erasmus+ students (63.68%).

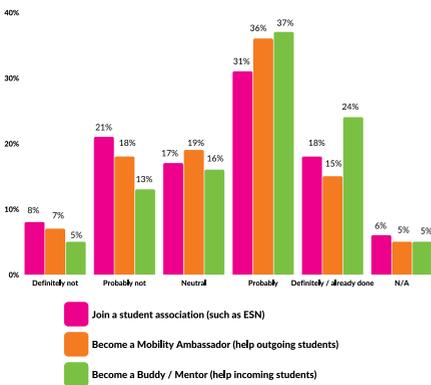
# Main Issues Encountered by Students on Mobility (Figure 37, page 64)



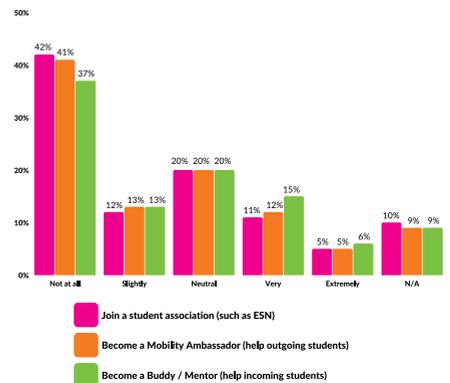
Stress, course-related problems and anxiety are the three main issues encountered by students. More than a fifth of the students reported “experiencing a lot” of issues related to feeling of stress. When it comes to the problems related to the courses, the percentage was 16.36%. Accommodation (15.73%) and financial issues also affect a considerable number of students.

# Students as Multipliers of Their Mobility Experiences (Figure 39, page 68)

After your mobility, would you consider to / did you...?

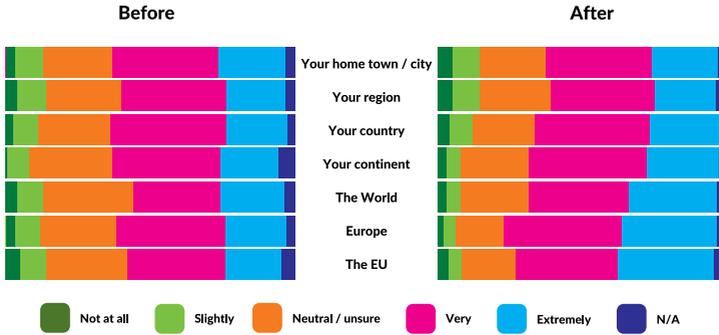


To which extent did you feel encouraged by your HOME University to...



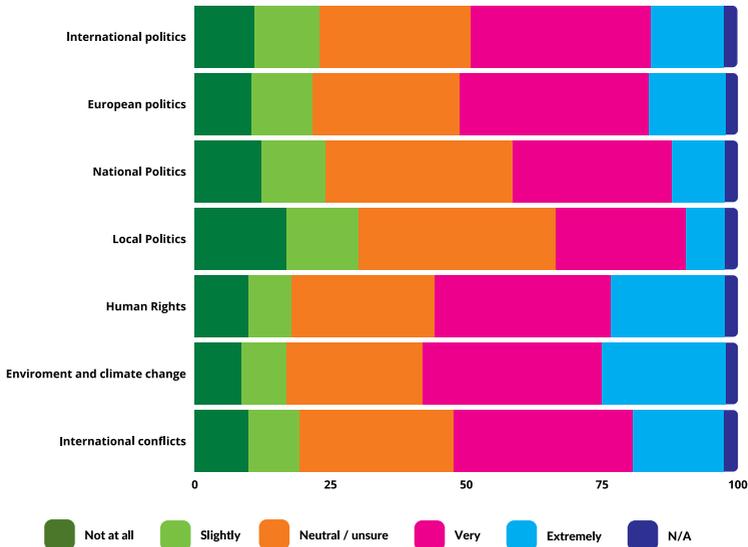
A majority of respondents are keen on becoming multipliers of their mobility experiences and supporting other students as members of associations, ambassadors or buddies, but less than one-fifth felt encouraged by the home Higher Education Institutions to do so.

### Student mobility, Internationalisation & Identity (Figure 38, page 67)



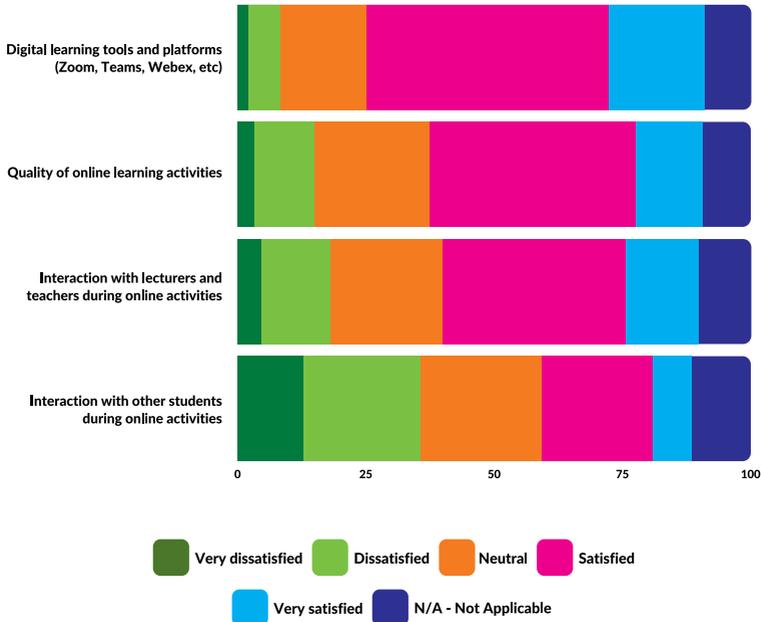
Student mobility fosters internationalisation, global citizenship and European identity: the majority of students would like to have more international experiences during their studies, they would like to live abroad, and they identify more with the world and the European Union, without losing identification with their countries or regions.

### Learning Mobility & Awareness of Global Issues (Figure 43, page 73)



Learning mobility increases awareness and interest in the environment and climate change, human rights and international conflicts. More than half of the respondents report that their mobility had an impact on their interest in climate change and the environment.

### Interaction with Peers during Online Learning (Figure 55, page 84)



More than a third of students who took part in online learning activities reported that they were either dissatisfied (23.19%) or rather dissatisfied (12.85%) with the interaction with other students. Digital learning tools and access to educational materials receive the highest scores.

# INTRODUCTION

The ESNsurvey is a Europe-wide research programme covering different topics concerning student mobility and internationalisation of higher education. It is the largest programme of its kind carried out by volunteers. In every edition since its establishment in 2005, the different ESNsurvey teams have developed an online questionnaire and disseminated it among students at European Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to collect information on their study abroad experience and related themes relevant to the internationalisation of Higher Education. The questionnaire looks at aspects such as: How have the lives of these students changed after their exchanges? What is the impact of the Erasmus+ programme on students who have had the opportunity to meet new cultures, make new friends, and live in an international environment through this programme? With these studies, we aim at underlining the key determinants of student mobility by focussing on different aspects of these experiences, ranging from the more technical ones to the ones that are more connected to the personal beliefs of students who are taking part in a student mobility programme.

Many associations, students, teachers, academics and various European institutions collaborate with ESN on the ESNsurvey programme. The tremendous outreach of the initiative is only possible thanks to the great support of all of them, together with the efforts of our network.

**Throughout the 16 years of its existence, around 200,000 responses have been collected through the survey, with an average of 12,000 answers per year.** These are analysed and compiled in a publication called the ESNsurvey report which is shared with the main stakeholders in higher education and student mobility programmes: the European Commission, National Agencies of the Erasmus+ programme, HEIs and many other associations dealing with higher education and student mobility. There are two key aims of the report: (a) exploring current issues connected to academic and non-academic mobility and education, and (b) getting a insight into student issues to represent their real needs.<sup>1</sup>

This 14th edition of the ESNsurvey aims to explore the core elements of student mobility related to the experience of the students, the support they receive, and the impact that mobility has on their lives once they

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1 More information can be found at [esn.org/ESNsurvey](https://esn.org/ESNsurvey).

go back home. Considering that student mobility has been affected to a big extent by the Covid-19 pandemic, as already highlighted by ESN in the 2020 research report “Student Exchange in Time of Crisis”, a special focus has been dedicated to the effect of COVID-19 on mobility experience, with the objective to have a better understanding of student mobility and how it was affected during the pandemic.

The main objective of the ESNsurvey is to capture the student experience when it comes to the quality of mobility. This will allow us to provide a consistent tool to be used by many stakeholders, as mentioned above, and to be able to advocate for specific issues raised by mobility students by showing reliable and significant data. The ESNsurvey will also work as a monitoring tool for the implementation of Erasmus+ in the upcoming years, by providing feedback on students’ experiences and expectations to the main stakeholders involved in the process, such as the European Commission and other Higher Education practitioners, to improve the quality of the Erasmus+ and other mobility programmes.

# METHODOLOGY

## The ESNsurvey - 14th Edition

Many sources were used in the design of this year's survey, such as the previous reports of the ESNsurvey itself, but also more recent publications such as the European Commission's Erasmus Impact Studies, or other policy documents that are of key importance in the implementation of mobility programmes, such as the new Erasmus Charter for Higher Education.

The survey focuses on four main aspects connected to student mobility: experience, support, impact, and effect of COVID-19. Additionally, data on demographics, personal variables, and situation variables was also collected, with the aim to describe the profile of mobility students and to better understand how diverse this population is. In what follows we will further elaborate on these aspects.

The first part of the survey covered different aspects of the mobility experience. The aim of this part is to collect information about different aspects such as the type and the duration of the mobility, students' motivation to participate in a mobility programme, as well as their formal learning experience, non-formal/informal learning experience, and their experiences in the local community. Participants were asked questions such as "How satisfied were you with the social life experienced during your mobility?" or "While on mobility, which activities did you carry out in the local community or the HOST institution, if any?".

The second part of the survey was aimed at evaluating the support services for mobility students, both at their home Higher Education Institution and at their host Higher Education Institution. Participants were asked questions regarding the type and amount of support services available and their satisfaction with them. Some questions were also covering the economic support received and the recognition of the mobility experience once finished.

The aim of the third part of the survey was to measure the impact of the mobility experience on participants' lives after they return to their home university and in the local community. We aimed to do this by asking questions about their involvement in the community and to what

extent the mobility experience determined a change in their beliefs and interests.

Finally, considering that, since the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, student mobilities have been impacted in a very significant way, the last part of the survey aimed at understanding in detail the impact of the pandemic on mobility experiences. Participants were asked to describe how they dealt with the consequences of the pandemic, the problems encountered, and different aspects such as the continuation of their mobilities via online or blended learning.

## Data Collection & Analysis

ESNsurvey - 14th Edition is quantitative and deductive research based on an online questionnaire. The survey was launched on the 4th of January 2021 and was officially closed on the 8th of February 2021. In order to increase dissemination among international students, the role of ESN members and, specifically, ESNlocal associations and National Organisations, was essential. A dissemination package was shared in order to facilitate the promotion of the questionnaire among mobility students, HEIs and other stakeholders. The survey was disseminated mainly through social media (such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter). Participants were able to access the survey via a direct link: [esn.org/survey2021](https://esn.org/survey2021).

**The key targeted participants were students with previous mobility for study or for a traineeship with special attention to the academic years 2018/2019, 2019/2020, and the first semester of the academic year 2020/2021.** The primary target group is Erasmus+ students and trainees, but not exclusively, students who attended other mobility programmes (e.g. overseas, free mover, bilateral agreements, etc.) were considered as well. People who participated in more than one mobility experience were asked to refer to their last experience.

The questionnaire consisted of 55 questions in total, 10 of these questions were related to the impact of Covid-19 on mobility. The majority of the questions were not mandatory. We made this choice in order to allow each participant to decide whether they wanted to answer a question or not. The only mandatory question was the one regarding the semester(s) during which the participants were on mobility. The aim of this was to determine whether or not their mobility was affected by Covid-19. Only participants who selected spring semester 2020 (February to July) or autumn semester 2020 (August to January) were

asked to fill in the questions related to the impact of Covid-19. The questionnaire was distributed only in English. The dissemination through a snowball research strategy aimed at reaching all students or graduates in the target group mentioned above and helped to reach a wide audience, but cannot provide a precisely calculated return rate.

**The questionnaire gathered a total of 16,521 answers.** After the closing of the data collection phase, a first analysis was done in order to cut double answers, and, taking into account the choice to not have mandatory questions, we decided to eliminate incomplete answers that did not allow us to determine whether the participants to the survey were mobility students. Finally, we eliminated answers from people that participated in other types of mobility (e.g. short-term mobility, study exchange, volunteering abroad, etc.) and in international full degree programmes (e.g. Erasmus Mundus or other full degree programmes) and, in line with our primary target, we considered only the respondents who participated in Erasmus+ mobilities for studies and for a traineeship, or in other similar mobility programmes (e.g. overseas, free mover, bilateral agreements, etc.).

The number of respondents who participated in the questionnaire, that will be treated in most of the cases as the total value, is 10,691. Of these, 6,410 (59.95%) participated in a mobility experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, while 4,281 (40.05%) participated in a mobility experience before the pandemic.

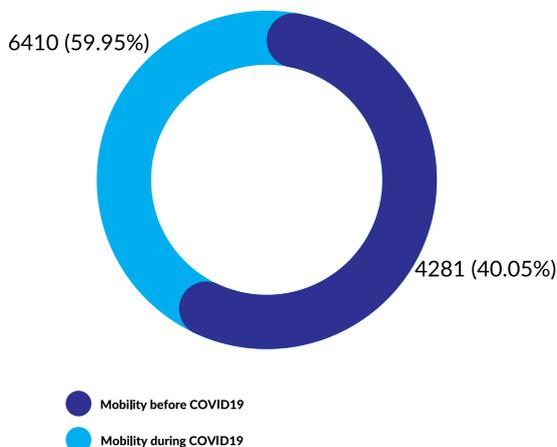


Figure 1 - Distribution of respondents by mobility period (before or during the COVID-19 pandemic) (n = 10691)

The sample of respondents cannot be considered fully representative and therefore the results cannot be generalised to the entire population. Descriptive statistics are used to describe the individual chapters. Given the choice to allow the participants to choose to answer the questions if they felt comfortable in doing so, the total number of answers for each research question may vary. For this reason, in the figure descriptions in the report, there is a number “n” in brackets showing the total number per figure (i.e. n = 10691). The data collection was followed by an analytical process leading to the conclusions and recommendations shared through this research report within the ESN network and with stakeholders at the local, national, and European levels.

### **Limitations of the Present Study**

Bearing in mind that every research can be improved, we would like to underline some limitations of the present study and foster some recommendations that could be beneficial, both for the ESNsurvey project and for future research on the topic of student mobility.

First, the questionnaire was long (around 15 minutes were required in order to fill in all its parts) and, given the need of assessing and filtering the respondents that participated in a mobility programme during the semesters affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, contained many conditional answers' options that did not allow us to randomise the questions. This caused a high rate of drop out that affected many questions and above all the demographic data. For example, between the total number of respondents (n=10,691) and the number of respondents that answered to the question related to gender identity (first question in the demographics section, n=8,030), there was a difference of 2,661 respondents. For this reason, future ESNsurveys should consider this problem and try to minimise the length of the questionnaire (e.g. by designing a shorter questionnaire and/or by randomising the questions when possible).

Another limitation of the present survey is that the dissemination was done mainly through the social media channels of our organisation, both at the international, national and local levels; this may have attracted a specific audience that is more engaged with our organisation and/or more satisfied with their mobility experience. Consequently, it is possible that a part of mobile students has not been reached by the survey because, for example, there were no ESN sections in the home or the host university. However, there seems to be a considerable improvement regarding the outreach to students who were not connected to ESN. Considering

this situation, it is possible that the data collected (e.g. evaluation of mobility support) is positively skewed and does not take into account the experiences of the students that received less support during their mobility experience.

In addition to these two limitations, it is important to stress that mobility programmes such as Erasmus+ are very different from other international study experiences such as joint degrees or full-degree studies. Even if we tried to design the survey in an accessible way for any type of international study experience, while still bearing in mind our main target, we received feedback that the survey did not take into account some features of the international full degree studies. Given the number of students that every year decide to take part in a joint master's degree or to enrol in a full degree programme as international students, more specific research is needed to study this type of international study experience.

Last but not the least, to conclude this chapter, the ESNsurvey is a project carried out solely by volunteers. The amount of data that every edition of the survey is able to gather could be very beneficial for research on the topics connected to international education, but, given the characteristics of the project, it would be difficult to provide analysis that is different from descriptive statistics, both due to the lack of time and competences of the volunteers that work on the survey. Therefore, we would like to invite institutional stakeholders, HEIs, research structures, and other youth organisations to show interest in cooperating with the project and join forces in order to increase the quality of our research.

# SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

## Gender Identity

Based on 8,030 responses, 32.17% of the participants identified themselves as men, 65.40% as women, 0.31% as gender-fluid, 0.42% as gender non-conforming, 0.45% as non-binary, 0.12% as other and 1.13% prefer not to disclose. 30.23% of the participants who preferred not to answer the question regarding their nationality preferred not to answer the question about their gender identity as well.

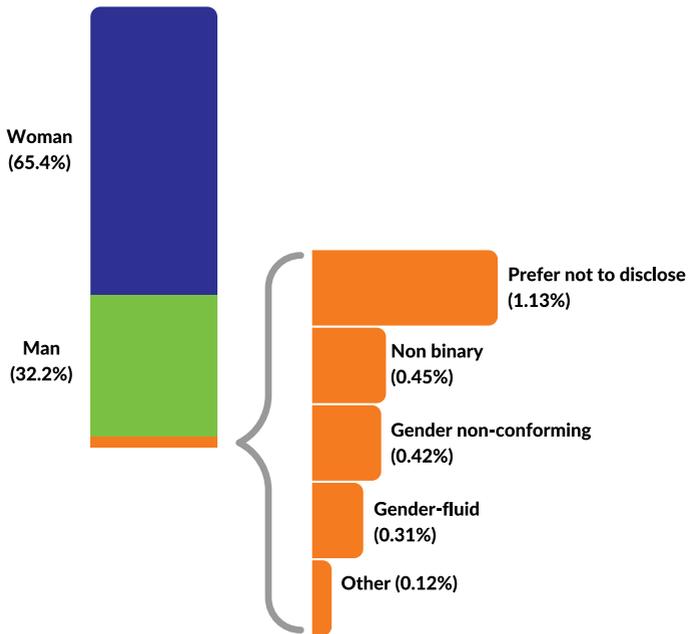


Figure 2 - Distribution of respondents by gender (n = 8,030)

## Birth Year / Age

Based on 8,010 responses, 0.64% of participants were born before 1980 (aged 40 or more while answering the questionnaire), 2.47% between 1980 and 1989 (aged 30 to 39), 20.39% between 1990 and 1995 (aged 25 to 29), 75.11% between 1996 and 2000 (aged 20 to 24), the 0.76% after 2000 (younger than 20 y.o.) and 0.64% of respondents preferred not to disclose their age.

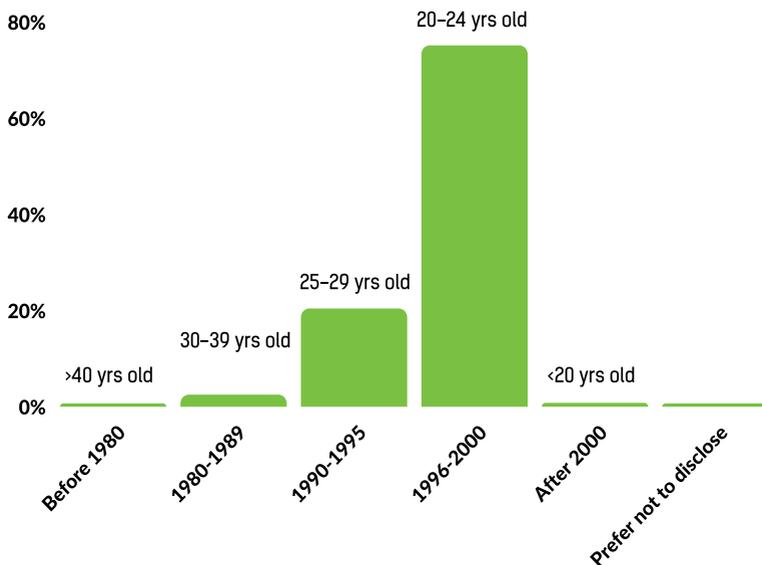
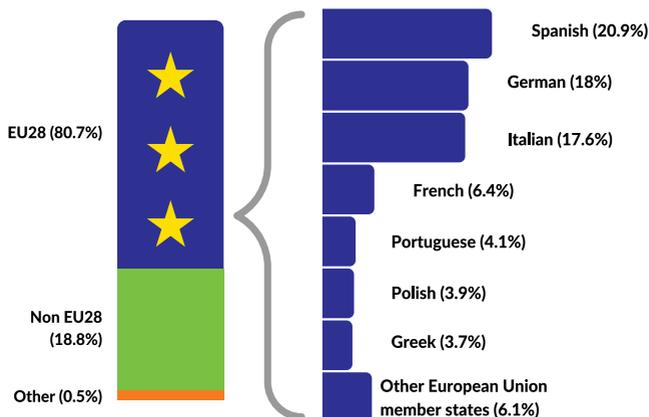


Figure 3 - Distribution of respondents by birth year and age (n = 8,010)

## Nationality

Based on 7,978 responses, 80.66% of the participants have a nationality of one of the 27 Member States of the EU, in particular 15.84% Spanish, 13.64% German, 13.32% Italian, 4.85% French, 3.08% Portuguese, 2.97% Polish and 2.82% Greek. Notable representations outside EU28 include 2.67% Russian, 1.72% Turkish, 1.40% Ukrainian and 1.07% Jordanian. 0.54% of participants preferred not to disclose their nationality.



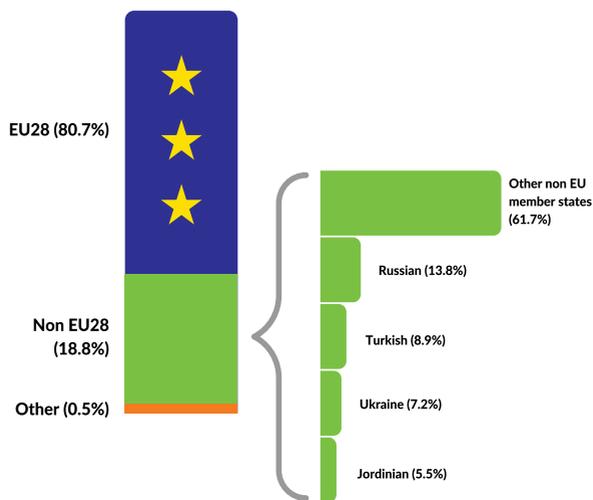


Figure 4 and 5 - Distribution of respondents by nationality (n = 7,978)

## Area

Based on 8,012 responses, 44.38% of respondents come from a city or urban area, 35.37% from a town or suburban area, 19.37% from a rural area and 0.87% preferred not to disclose their home area.

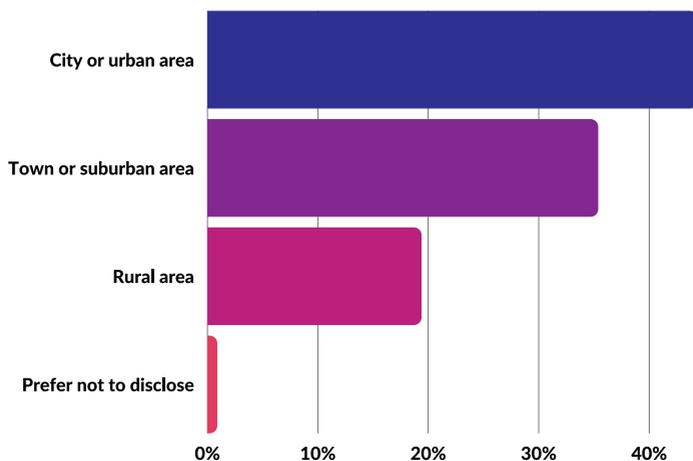


Figure 6 - Distribution of respondents by their home area (n = 8,012)

## Family Income

Based on 7,979 responses, the family household income based on the perception of participants when they were under the age of 18 was 39.98% on average, slightly above average for 27.31%, above average for 9.95%, slightly below average for 12.23, below average for 6.20% and 4.32% of respondents preferred not to disclose their family income.



Figure 7 - Distribution of respondents by level of their family household income (n = 7,979)

## Parents/Guardians University

Based on 8,009 responses, 59.46% of participants' parents/guardians went to university, 38.33% did not go to university, 0.72% of participants cannot answer the question and 1.49% preferred not to answer.

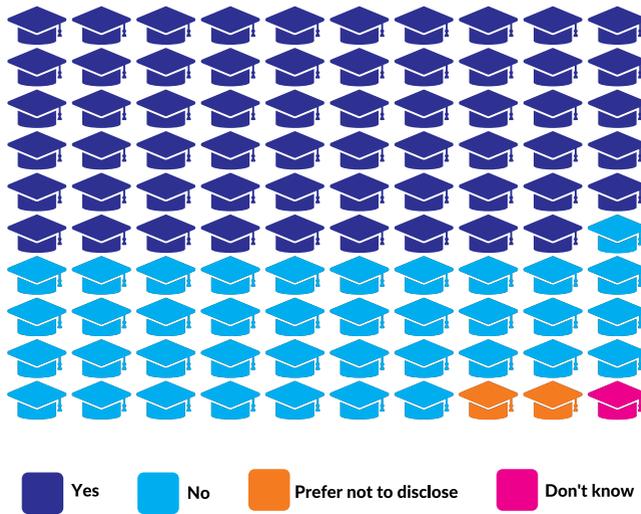


Figure 8 - Distribution of respondents by level of education of their parents (or guardians, n = 8,009)

### Sexual Orientation

Based on 8,003 responses, 76.93% of participants said they are heterosexual, 9.37% bisexual, 3.87% homosexual, 1.95% answered other and 7.87% prefer not to disclose their sexual orientation. Similar representation trends have been registered also in other countries with a very limited national sample of responses.

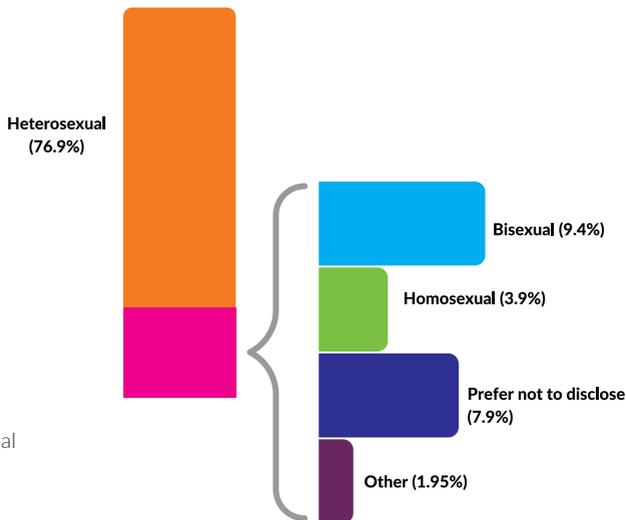


Figure 9 - Distribution of respondents by sexual orientation (n = 8,003)

## Ethnicity

Among the 8,481 responses, 69.41% of participants said they were White/Caucasian/Europid, 4.76% Middle Eastern, 3.94% Roma/Traveller, 2.32% South American/Latinx, 1.62% North African, 1.31% Central Asian, 1.12% East Asian, 7.11% prefer not to disclose their ethnicity and 0.71% cannot answer because their national law does not allow it.

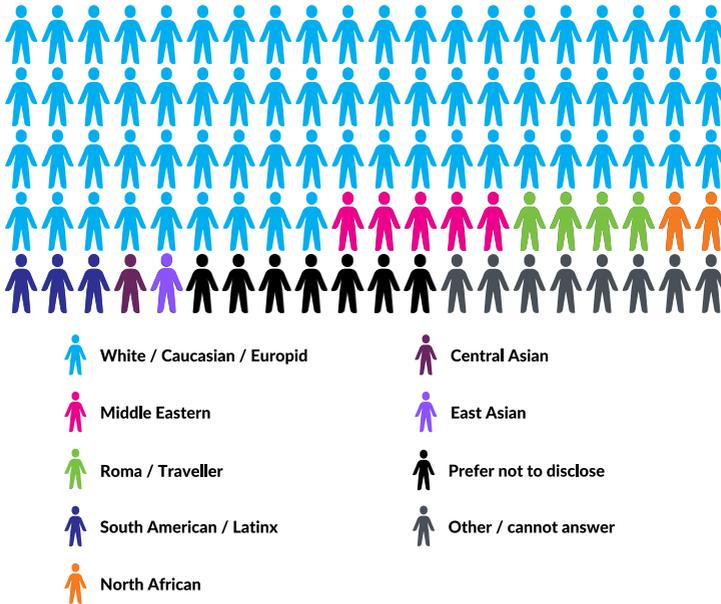


Figure 10 - Distribution of respondents by ethnicity (n = 8,481)

# MOBILITY EXPERIENCE

## Mobility Programme - Academic Background

Based on 10,691 responses, 9200 (86.05%) come from students who have carried out their mobility within the Erasmus+ for Studies program. 69.33% of them are bachelor's students, 28.15% are master's students and 1.03% are PhD students. Another 1,115 responses (10.43%) come from students within the Erasmus+ for Traineeship program. 47.44% of them are bachelor's students, 40.90% are master's students and 5.83% PhD students. 358 responses (3.52%) come from students on similar programs not under the auspices of Erasmus+. 69.95% of them are bachelor's students, 23.94% are master's students and 2.66% are PhD students. This survey, therefore, especially represents the experience abroad of students participating in the Erasmus+ program.

Overall, 67,07% are bachelor's students, 29,33% are master's students, 1,97% are PhD students and 1,59% have selected other study levels (mainly VET). 59.95% of them carried out mobility during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

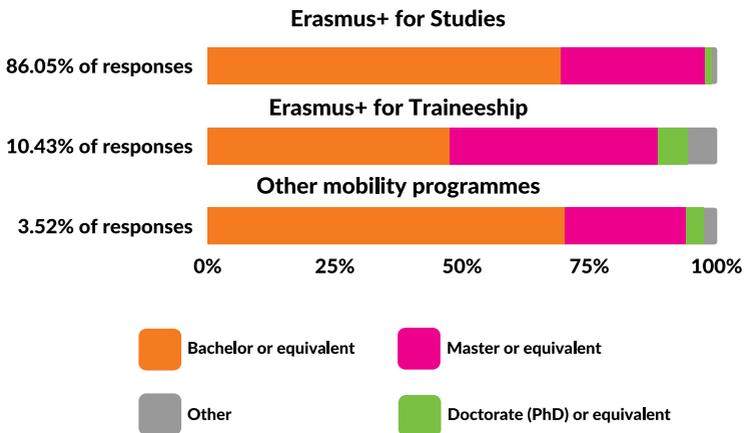


Figure 11 - Distribution of respondents by mobility programme and level of study (n = 10,691)

## Field of Study

Based on 10,691 responses, the most represented field of study is that of Business, Administration and Law associated with 23.39% of responses, followed by Arts and Humanities with 18.50%, Engineering,

Manufacturing and Construction with 13.98%, Social Sciences, Journalism and Information with 11.43%; with all other responses gathering below 8% of respondents. Detailed distribution of this data is represented on figure 11 below.

Considering the gender representation in our data, the ESNsurvey results has been compared with available data about the median percentage of women among enrolled students in the Bologna Process Implementation Report of 2020<sup>2</sup>. The comparison finds that ESNsurvey sample is overrepresentative towards women (with more than 20% difference in some fields, such as ICT), however, in some areas, e.g. in Education, Health and Welfare, and Master’s in Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary and in Social Sciences, Journalism and Information, the data is quite similar (withn 2-5% difference). Overall, women’s representation in ESNsurvey - 14th Edition is 65.40%.

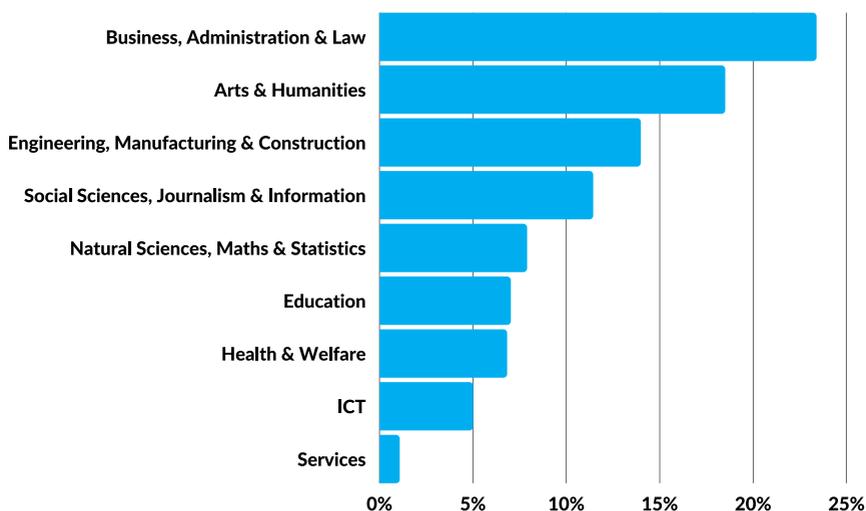


Figure 12 - Distribution of respondents by field of study (n = 10,691)

## Home Institution of Respondents

The majority of participants, based on the 10,691 responses, came from institutions located in Spain (17.67%), followed by Germany (13%), Italy

<sup>2</sup> The European Higher Education Area in 2020: Bologna Process Implementation Report, p. 104

(12.88%), France (5.03%), Portugal (3.50%), Poland (3.19%), Austria (3.03%), Denmark (2.99%), Czech Republic (2.75%), Greece (2.71%), Romania (2.69%), Russia (2.38%), Turkey (1.99%), Belgium (1.91%), Hungary (1.66%), Ireland (1.59%), Lithuania (1.38%), Croatia (1.32%), Bulgaria (1.21%), UK (1.04%) and Jordan (1.02%). A total of 112 nations are represented by the survey participants.

|                       |               |                  |              |
|-----------------------|---------------|------------------|--------------|
| <b>Spain</b>          | <b>17.67%</b> | <b>Russia</b>    | <b>2.38%</b> |
| <b>Germany</b>        | <b>13%</b>    | <b>Turkey</b>    | <b>1.99%</b> |
| <b>Italy</b>          | <b>12.88%</b> | <b>Belgium</b>   | <b>1.91%</b> |
| <b>France</b>         | <b>5.03%</b>  | <b>Hungary</b>   | <b>1.66%</b> |
| <b>Portugal</b>       | <b>3.5%</b>   | <b>Ireland</b>   | <b>1.59%</b> |
| <b>Poland</b>         | <b>3.19%</b>  | <b>Lithuania</b> | <b>1.38%</b> |
| <b>Austria</b>        | <b>3.03%</b>  | <b>Croatia</b>   | <b>1.32%</b> |
| <b>Denmark</b>        | <b>2.99%</b>  | <b>Bulgaria</b>  | <b>1.21%</b> |
| <b>Czech Republic</b> | <b>2.75%</b>  | <b>UK</b>        | <b>1.04%</b> |
| <b>Greece</b>         | <b>2.71%</b>  | <b>Jordan</b>    | <b>1.02%</b> |
| <b>Romania</b>        | <b>2.69%</b>  |                  |              |

Table 1 - Distribution of respondents by country of their home institution (n = 10,691)

## Host Institution of Respondents

The majority of participants, based on 10,691 responses, completed a mobility period in an institution located in Spain (14.38%), followed by Germany (10.32%), Italy (7.42%), France (7.34%), UK (5.18%), Poland (5.14%), Portugal (5.10%), Czech Republic (3.84%), Belgium (3.49%), Austria (3.26%), Sweden (3.13%), Finland (3.07%), Netherlands (2.97%), Denmark (2.82%), Norway (1.98%), Ireland (1.89%), Greece (1.87%),

Hungary (1.81%), Slovenia (1.54%), Romania (1.47%), Turkey (1.37%), Lithuania (1.11%) and Croatia (1.1%). A total of 94 nations are mentioned in the survey answers.

|                       |               |                    |              |
|-----------------------|---------------|--------------------|--------------|
| <b>Spain</b>          | <b>14.38%</b> | <b>Netherlands</b> | <b>2.97%</b> |
| <b>Germany</b>        | <b>10.32%</b> | <b>Denmark</b>     | <b>2.82%</b> |
| <b>Italy</b>          | <b>7.42%</b>  | <b>Norway</b>      | <b>1.98%</b> |
| <b>France</b>         | <b>7.34%</b>  | <b>Ireland</b>     | <b>1.89%</b> |
| <b>UK</b>             | <b>5.18%</b>  | <b>Greece</b>      | <b>1.87%</b> |
| <b>Poland</b>         | <b>5.14%</b>  | <b>Hungary</b>     | <b>1.81%</b> |
| <b>Portugal</b>       | <b>5.1%</b>   | <b>Slovenia</b>    | <b>1.54%</b> |
| <b>Czech Republic</b> | <b>3.84%</b>  | <b>Romania</b>     | <b>1.47%</b> |
| <b>Belgium</b>        | <b>3.49%</b>  | <b>Turkey</b>      | <b>1.37%</b> |
| <b>Austria</b>        | <b>3.26%</b>  | <b>Lithuania</b>   | <b>1.11%</b> |
| <b>Sweden</b>         | <b>3.13%</b>  | <b>Croatia</b>     | <b>1.1%</b>  |
| <b>Finland</b>        | <b>3.07%</b>  |                    |              |

Table 2 - Distribution of respondents by country of their host institution (n = 10,691)

## Duration of the Mobility Experience

Out of a total of 10,540 responses, 74.39% of the participants completed their mobility in a period of a semester. 6.46% of participants completed their mobility in three months, 14.43% in four months, 30.66% in five months and 19.26% in six months. Meanwhile, 24.95% completed their mobility between seven months and a year: 6.69% in nine months and 10.04% in ten months. 0.65% of mobility students were abroad for more

than 12 months.

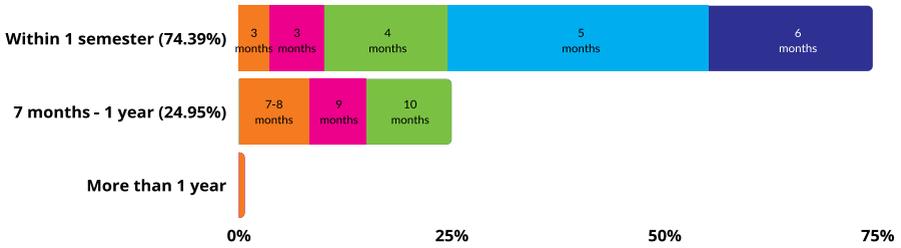


Figure 13 - Distribution of respondents by duration of their mobility experience (n = 10,540)

## Mobility Period

Out of a total of 10,691 responses, 3403 (31.83%) respondents have been on mobility between February 2020 and July 2020, 3,158 (29.54%) between August 2020 and January 2021, 2,977 (27.85%) between August 2019 and January 2020, 1,346 (12.59%) between February 2019 and July 2019, 1,025 (9.59%) between August 2018 and January 2019, and 436 (4.08%) before autumn 2018.

Mobility experience of 9,037 respondents has fallen within the provided semester periods, while mobility of 1,654 respondents has fallen outside of the provided periods (thus, for example, a mobility experience of one year will technically fall within both half-year periods provided as options, so will a 3-months exchange within both periods). Possible discrepancies between responses to this question and mobility lengths provided above can be attested to the fluidity of academic and mobility schedules.

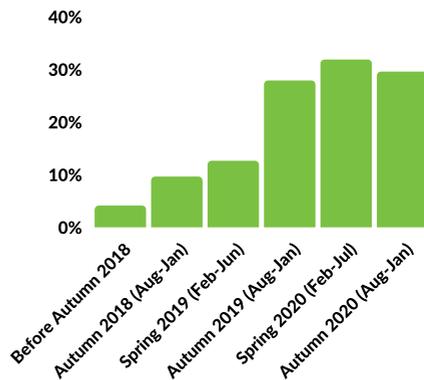


Figure 14 - Distribution of respondents by the semester(s) of their mobility experience (n = 10,691)

## Modality of Mobility

Out of a total of 10,691 responses, 59.35% of participants carried out their mobility physically, 32.69% blended and 7.59% virtually. Based on 9,200 responses of Erasmus+ for Studies participants, 56.54% were on a physical mobility, 34.67% on blended mobility and 8.41% virtually. Based on 1115 responses of Erasmus+ for Traineeship participants, 78.83% were on a physical mobility, 19.01% on blended mobility and 1.79% on virtual mobility. Considering 376 respondents in other mobility programmes, 70.21% were on a physical mobility, 24.73% on a blended mobility and 4.52% on a virtual mobility. Data shows a strong preference of the firms to keep mobility physical while implementing virtual mobility in sporadic cases. Meanwhile, universities flexibly implemented virtual and blended mobility.

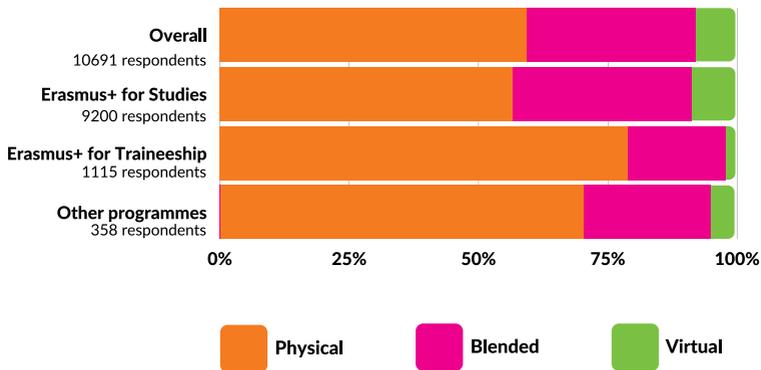


Figure 15 - Distribution of respondents by modality of mobility and mobility programme (overall sample, n = 10,691)

Analysing the specific differences between modalities of mobilities in fall semester of 2019/2020 academic year (pre-COVID), the spring semester of 2019/2020 and the fall semester of 2020/2021, it is possible to see how universities and firms reacted to the Covid-19 pandemic with regards to the approach to the modality of the mobility. General sample shows that pre-pandemic, blended and virtual mobility accounted for around 20% of all mobilities (19,64% for blended and 0,67% for virtual). However, with the emergence of the pandemic, the amount of physical mobilities has halved for the spring of 2020 (from 79.68% to 38.32%), while majority of mobilities have become blended (54.33%, more than twofold increase from previous semester). While amount of fully virtual mobilities remained comparatively low, it did show the most growth (7.35%, more than 10 times higher). The proportion in autumn of 2020

shows that fully virtual mobilities, which couldn't be used massively in case students already arrived and started studying, as was the case in spring, has once again increased - to 16,96%, while physical and blended mobilities decreased approximately 5% each - to 33,26% and 49,78% respectively.

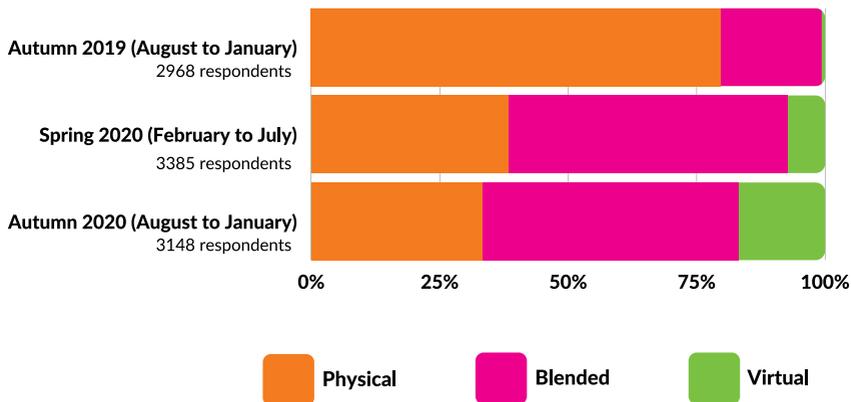


Figure 16 - Distribution of respondents by modality of mobility and mobility semester (for autumn semester 2019/2020, spring semester 2019/2020 and autumn semester 2020/2021, general sample, n = 2,969, 3,385 and 3,148)

In terms of differences between study programmes and traineeships, when looking at difference between Erasmus+ strands for these types of mobilities, it could be seen that while Erasmus+ for Studies follows the general sample distribution due to academic mobility being a large proportion of the sample, the data for traineeships shows a larger preference for physical mobilities despite the pandemic - physical mobility remains the largest share of mobilities. Before the pandemic physical mobility amounted for 90,94% of traineeship mobilities, during spring semester of 2020 the share of physical mobilities was the lowest and amounted to 67,03%, while in autumn semester of 2020 the number has slightly recovered to 72,09%. The share of blended traineeships has adjusted accordingly - from 8,30% before the pandemic to 30,79% in spring semester of 2020 and 25,20% in autumn semester of 2020. Amount of virtual mobilities in traineeships remained low - from 0,75% before the pandemic to 2,18% and 2,71% in both semesters of 2020 respectively. This information is represented graphically on Figure 17 below.

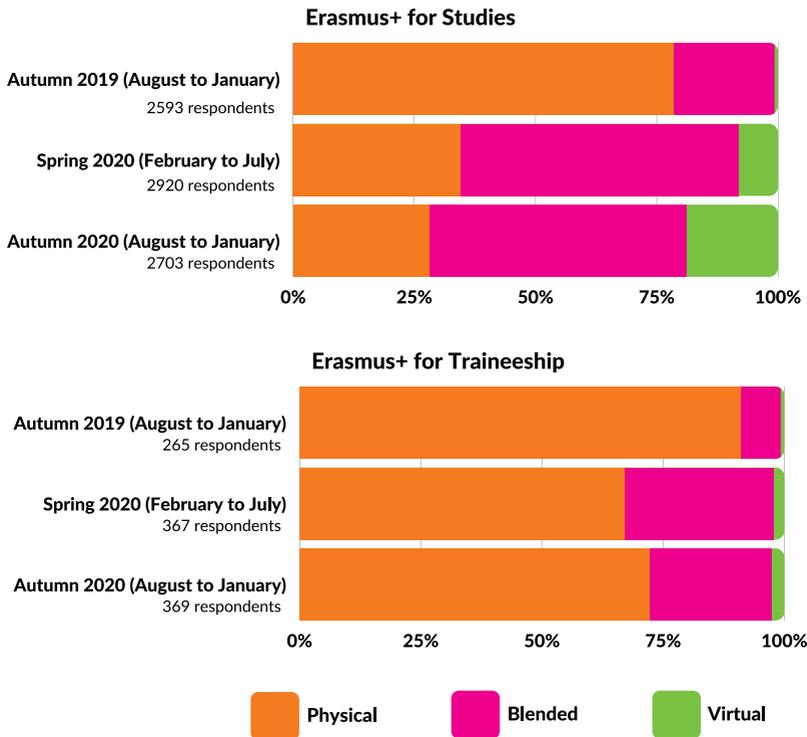


Figure 17 - Distribution of Erasmus+ for Studies and Erasmus+ for Traineeships respondents by type of mobility (for autumn semester 2019/2020, spring semester 2019/2020 and autumn semester 2020/2021, n = 2,593, 2,920, 2,703; 265, 367, 369)

## Motivational Factors for Going on Mobility

Out of a total of 10,315 respondents, 89.12% participated in Erasmus+ for Studies and 10.81% in Erasmus+ for Traineeship. They decided to go abroad to experience different learning environments in 78.96% and 67.71% of the cases, respectively, in 79.39% and 60.99% of the cases to meet new people, in 76.66% and 62.78% of the cases to live abroad, in 74.42% and 59.82% of the cases to learn or improve a foreign language, in 69.77% and 60.09% of the cases to gain knowledge of another country, in 70.03% and 57.94% of the cases to gain knowledge of another culture, in 47.34% and 63.05% of the cases to enhance future career prospects abroad, in 45.20% and 56.03% of the cases to enhance future career prospects in their home country, in 44.95% and 55.61% of the cases to develop soft skills, in 35.68% and 59.19% of

the cases to build up a personal and professional network and in 7.82% and 9.60% of the cases' mobility was a mandatory component of their study programme. **Trainees were more oriented to their professional life, while mobilities for study purposes were more characterised by educational, social and cultural choices.**

Out of a total of 10,315 respondents, 89.12% in Erasmus+ for Studies and 10.81% in Erasmus+ for Traineeship decided to go abroad respectively. In term of Erasmus+ for students case, key drivers to go on a mobility included meeting new people, experiencing a different learning environment and living abroad. For the Erasmus+ Traineeship participants, the key drivers also included experiencing a different learning environment, living abroad and enhancing future career prospects abroad.

To discover other related factors, please consult the table below.

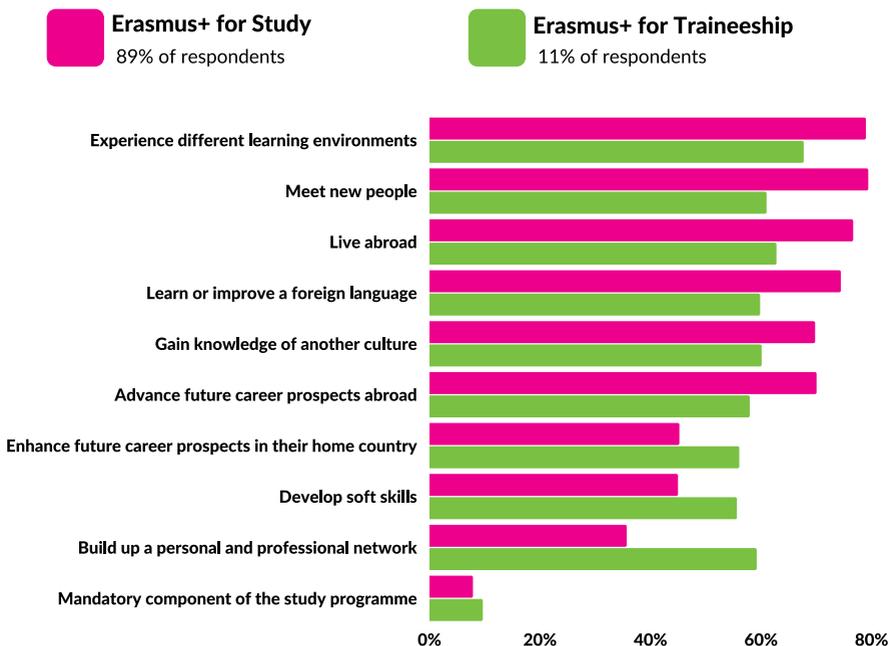


Figure 18 - Main factors to study abroad, by mobility programme (n = 10,315)



My key driving factor was leaving my home university for a while, to come back with a different perspective, to step outside my comfort zone, experience an “exciting adventure” and meet people from all over the world.

### **Engagement with Groups**

On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 representing ‘never’, to 5 representing ‘always’, out of a total of 10,024 responses, the participants engage with local students on average 2.49, out of 9,823 responses, the participants engage with international students from other foreign countries on average 2.49 out of 9,075 responses, the participants engage with students from the same home country on average 2.47 and on 9,345 responses, the participants engage with a wider group of members of the local community on average 2,52.

### **Activities in the Local Community or the Host Institution**

Out of a total of 10,691 responses, before the COVID-19 pandemic, 18.71% of participants joined a local sports club/team, 17.33% joined a local student/youth association, 9.95% joined other activities or clubs, 10% volunteered in the local community, 5.47% found a part-time job, 6.47% joined an art/music/drama club, 5.42% joined the local Student Union/Council and 47.68% did not join any of these activities. While during the Covid-19 pandemic 15.27% of participants joined a local sporting club/team, 11.45% joined a local student/youth association, 7.21% joined other activities or clubs, 5.79% volunteered in the local community, 4.71% found a part-time job, 4.02% joined an art/music/drama club, 3.60% joined the local Student Union/Council and 59.36% did not join any of these activities. On average, before and during COVID-19 pandemic, more than half of respondents (54.67%) did not take part in organised group activities in their hosting communities, with less than 8% volunteering during their mobility experiences. Sports clubs (16.64%) and student and youth associations (13.81%) were the most popular activities.



I didn't feel well-integrated and taken care of as the group of international students at my university was rather small and there was no bonding organisation.

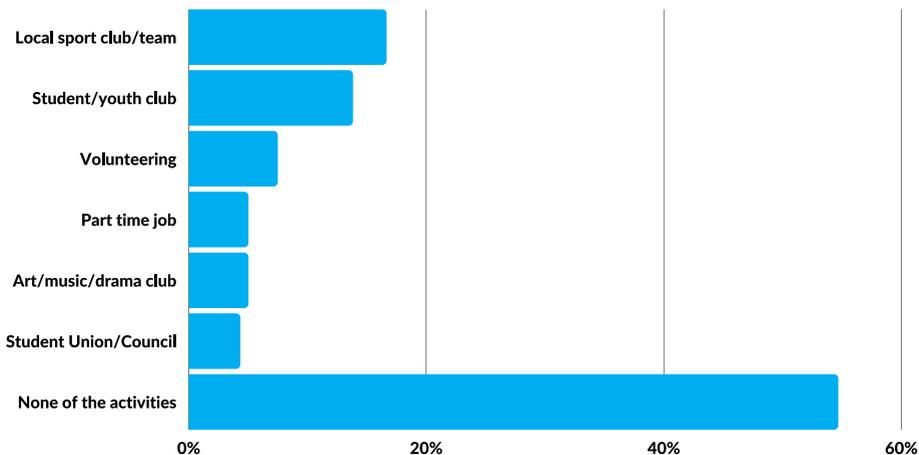


Figure 19 - Level of participation in group activities on mobility (n = 10,691)

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

Out of a total of 10,572 responses, before the COVID-19 pandemic, 40.52% of the participants participated in activities organised by an ESN section, 21.76% in activities organised by ESN and other organisations and 11.26% in activities of other organisations, in 12.87% of cases there were no organisations of this type, 1.91% attended another kind of events and 11.66% of the participants were not interested in participating in the activities. While during the pandemic 37.85% of the participants participated in activities organised by an ESN section, 15.06% in activities organised by ESN and other organisations and 8.43% in activities of other organisations, in 18.36% of cases, there were no organisations of this type, 5.94% attended other kinds of events and 14.36% of the participants were not interested in participating in the activities. These trends show how, during the pandemic, students were still engaged in the activities organised by the organisations even if online, but also the pandemic increased the feeling to not have such organisations active on the territory and the general interest, while they preferred to join other kinds of events.

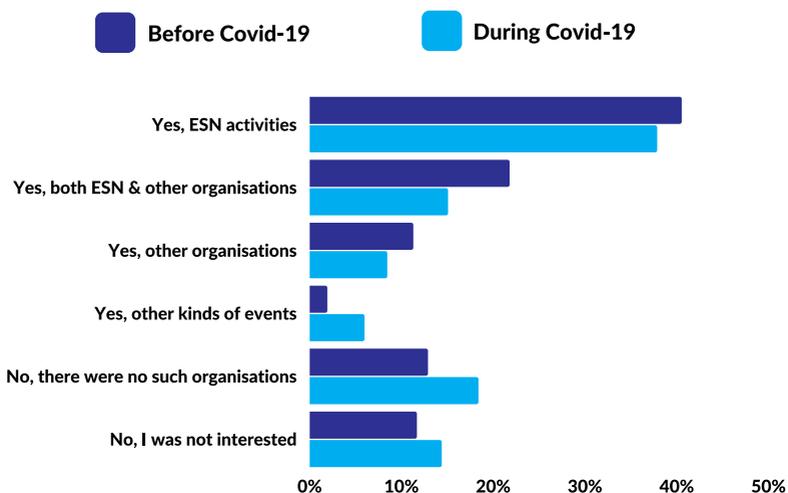


Figure 20 - Level of participation in events organised by ESN section or other student associations on mobility (before and during COVID-19 pandemic) (n = 10,572)



There were no welcome activities and the overall feeling was that you were an unnecessary burden (from both the host and home universities).

### Social Life Satisfaction

Out of a total of 10,245 responses, 41.06% of the participants said they were very satisfied, 34.33% satisfied, 12.20% neutral, 7.11% dissatisfied and 5.28% very dissatisfied with their social life.

### Studies: A 20% Drop during the Pandemic Period

During the pandemic period, participants in the Erasmus+ for Studies program declared that they were very satisfied in 32.99% compared to 55.89% in the period before the pandemic, respectively satisfied with 37.34% during and 29.05% before it, neutral 14.76% during and 6.92% before it, dissatisfied 9.38% during and 3.20% before it and very dissatisfied 5.53% during and 4.94% before the pandemic.

## Traineeships: Satisfaction with Social Life is Lower

During the pandemic period, participants in the Erasmus+ for Traineeship program declared that they were very satisfied in 27.31% against 41.41% in the period before the pandemic, respectively satisfied 38.47% during and 33.88% before it, neutral 19.53% during and 12.24% before it, dissatisfied 9.69% during and 7.06% before it and very dissatisfied 4.99% during and 5.41% before the pandemic.

The significant difference between studies and traineeship mobilities can be attributed to the added challenges trainees face during their mobilities: Unlike Erasmus+ studies participants, they do not normally take part in Welcome Week activities or buddy systems, among others, and they are less aware of their possibilities regarding the support from student organisations. Since Erasmus+ Traineeships are a high priority of the European Strategy for Universities, it is key to design engagement strategies to ensure that trainees receive the proper support to improve their satisfaction with their mobility experiences.

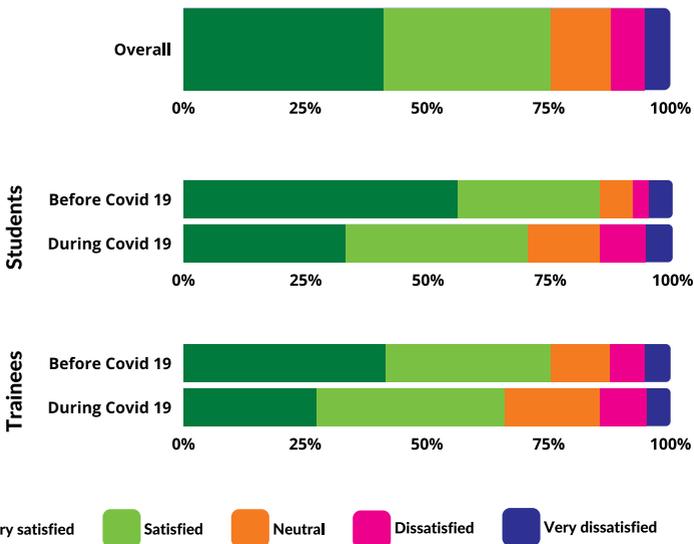


Figure 21 - Level of satisfaction with social life on mobility (general sample, before and during COVID-19 pandemic, by type of mobility, n = 10,245)

## Integration in the Local Community

Out of a total of 10,608 responses, before the COVID-19 pandemic,

19.36% of the participants declared that they were totally integrated, 38.99% integrated, 28.12% neutral, 11.20% not integrated and 2.33% totally not integrated. During the pandemic, 14.28% of the participants declared that they were totally integrated, 35.55% integrated, 30.36% neutral, 15.60% not integrated and 4.22% totally not integrated.

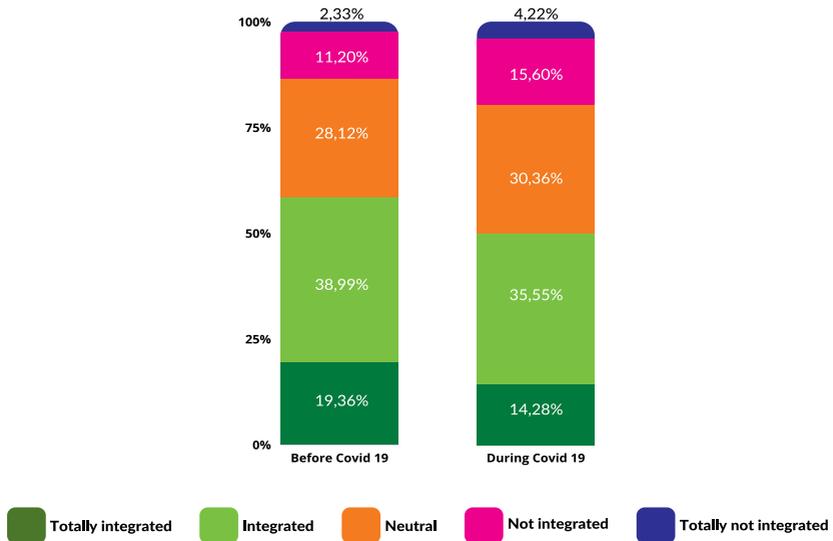


Figure 22 - Level of integration in local community on mobility (before and during COVID-19 pandemic, n = 10,608)

# MOBILITY SUPPORT

The provision of exchange-related services to the future exchange student begins long before the actual departure on the exchange. In this edition of the ESNsurvey, we aspired to cover the whole lifecycle of exchange/international students and enquire about services provided both by host and home institutions, as well as by student organisations at host institutions, with a focus on those services that are related to the achievement of institutional requirements according to the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE). Additionally, this chapter also covers recognition issues, scholarship coverage and issues encountered by respondents during their mobility period as these topics are connected to the provided support.

## Overall Satisfaction with the Services Provided by Institutions

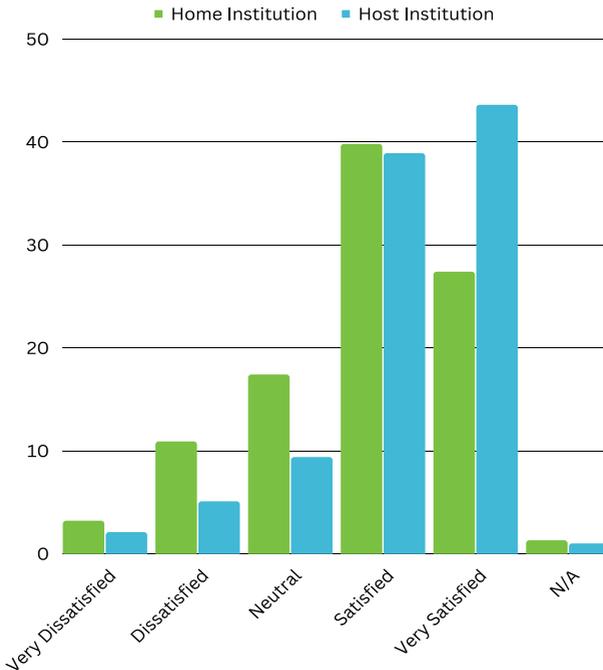


Figure 23 – Overall satisfaction with services provided by HEIs (general sample; n Host institution = 8,456; n Home institution = 8,453)

Concerning the services provided by HEIs themselves, the overall satisfaction shows improvements from previous editions of the ESNsurvey which covered services provision – in 2016, 11.2% of students were dissatisfied by services provided by host institutions, while only 2.05% report the same dissatisfaction in the current edition. Accordingly, the percentage of students satisfied or very satisfied has risen – to 39.19% and 43.51% from 31.3% and 31.7% in the ESNsurvey 2016. Overall, 82.52% of students are satisfied or very satisfied with services provided by the host institution, compared to 63% in the ESNsurvey 2016<sup>3</sup>.

This rise is of utmost importance considering the majority of our respondents have had their exchange periods during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic – and thus, this result shows the resilience of home institutions and their ability to provide quality services even in such calamitous times. Mean overall satisfaction for host services is 4.18, while satisfaction for students making their exchange between Erasmus+ Programme countries is 4.14, and for ICM students mean satisfaction is 4.36, showing higher satisfaction with services provided to ICM students.

However, the difference between home and host institutions is noticeable – only 67.25% are satisfied or very satisfied with services at the home institution, with 14.32% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their home institution services, thus highlighting the necessity of additional focus on departure activities, recognition procedures and re-integration activities undertaken by home universities. The difference is also evident in mean values – mean overall satisfaction for services provided by home institutions is lower than for host – mean for the overall sample concerning home institutions is 3.78, while means for Erasmus students and ICM students are 3.76 and 3.86 respectively.

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3 ESNsurvey 2016, p. 32

## Satisfaction with Services Provided by Home Institutions

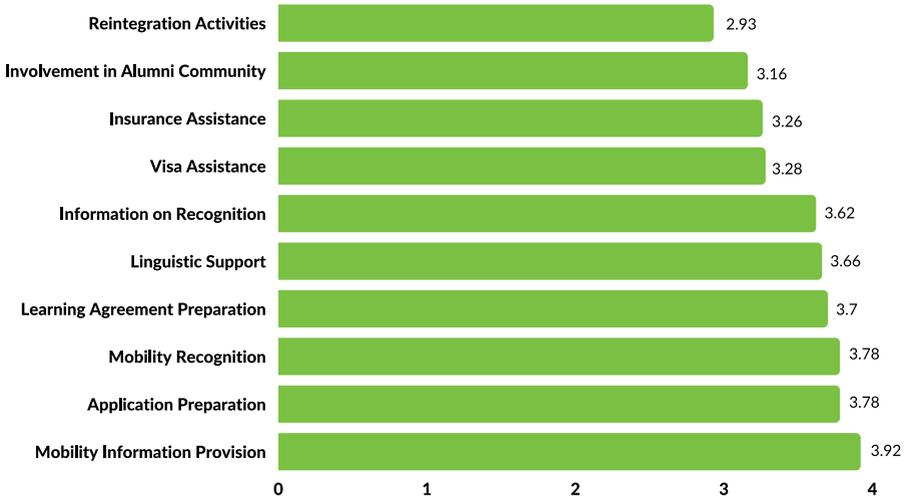


Figure 24 – Mean satisfaction with home HEI services (general sample, n = 8,514-8,434)

Concerning the mean overall satisfaction with services provided by home institutions, the mean satisfaction with services is 3.5 out of 5. However, there are significant differences between services, as well as in the provision of these services to the students. The majority of respondents marked the services related to visa support from their home university as not applicable to them (61.82%), which could be explained by the specifics of such services. The same could be said regarding insurance provision (30.56%). On the other hand, a high amount of such responses is given for the services which should be provided by the institutions – such as reintegration services (38.11%), involvement in alumni communities upon return (44.14%) and linguistic support (21.18%). This shows that these services might not be provided in every institution.



**... the Visa problem was severe. My home institution did not have any idea about visa applications and submitted my information too late, so I went through a lot of hassle applying for a visa and trying to get it in Vienna.**

High overall satisfaction is observed with the basic services provided to the students by their home institutions – such as information provision (mean satisfaction – 3.92), credit recognition procedures and mobility application support (both have mean satisfaction of 3.78), learning agreement preparation support (mean – 3.7) and information provision on credit transfer procedures. However, high overall dissatisfaction is seen with several of the base mobility support services as well – from 1.21% (for learning agreement preparation support) to 9.61% (for linguistic support). This data highlights the necessity of continual improvement in the provision of those services in home universities.

Differences in mean satisfaction between ICM and Erasmus programme country participants are small, but in general ICM students report higher satisfaction with services provided in their home institutions than the respondents who participated in mobilities between programme countries (the average difference is 0.17). ICM students are more satisfied with reintegration activities (0.40 increase), visa and insurance support (0.34 and 0.25 respectively) and less satisfied with provided language support (-0.19 difference, the only service where ICM students are less satisfied with compared to programme countries students).

Additionally, the service which shows the highest levels of dissatisfaction – reintegration activities, which reports 22.95% of dissatisfaction, as well as 38.11% of «not applicable» answers, is consistent in its lowest results with the findings of the previous ESNsurveys<sup>4</sup>. The results on the involvement in alumni communities upon return are rather close to the overall result on reintegration activities and show that these areas require much work by home institutions in the reintegration field.

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4 ESNsurvey 2016, p. 64-67.

## Satisfaction with Services Provided by Host Institutions

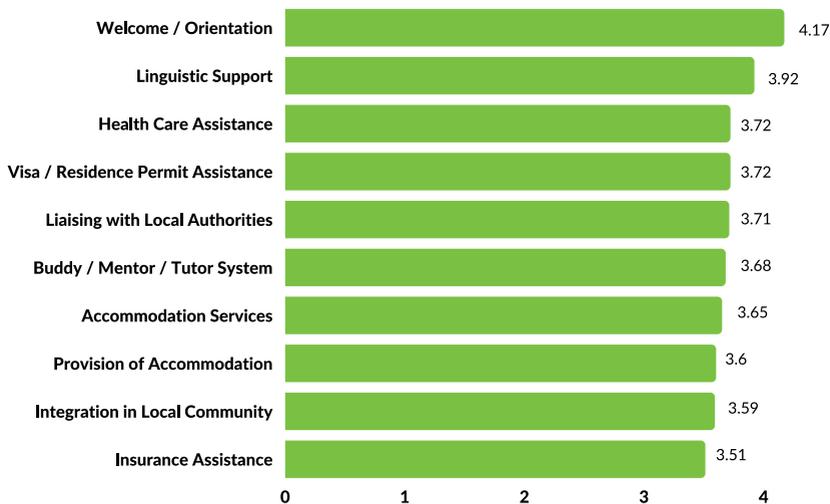


Figure 25 – Mean satisfaction with host institution services (general sample, n = 8,463 to 8,409)

Concerning services provided by host institutions, we can see that services provided by host institutions generally are more satisfactory than those provided by home institutions – mean satisfaction for the services included is between 4.17 and 3.51, while overall mean is 3.72. The most satisfactory service provided is welcome and orientation services (mean - 4.17), and after it – linguistic support is provided, including language courses (mean - 3.92). The majority of services report similar overall means – from 3.72 to 3.65, with 3 services reporting visible lower satisfaction – accommodation provision (3.60), support for integration into local communities (3.59) and assistance with insurance (3.51).

The lead of welcome activities about satisfaction among mobility participants is corroborated by previous research – welcome events were the most and the third-most available according to ESNsurvey 2016 data<sup>5</sup>. While looking at dissatisfaction rates by services provided, we notice that several of the types of services with dissatisfaction rate of more than 12%, while the percentage of not applicable answers ranges from 6% (for orientation activities) to 76.93% (support for students with disabilities), while mean percentage of such answers amounts to 28.62%. 17.77% of respondents were dissatisfied with accommodation support,

5 ESNsurvey 2016, p. 30.

and 16.72% of respondents were dissatisfied with accommodation provision, highlighting the problems with accommodation for mobile international students in their study destinations. This is especially concerning since previous research has looked into how that universities and other host institutions play a vital role in securing accommodation if it is not provided by the universities themselves<sup>6</sup>.



**I believe that the host institution could have done a better job at helping out with some administrative issues within reach of the university and accommodation as well as residence permits. If I didn't have unrelated friends from their university in X country, I don't think I would be able to do anything.**

However, it could be said that the availability of these services is higher than has been previously, as ESNsurvey 2016 shows that 34% of respondents were not provided with any kind of assistance with accommodation<sup>7</sup>. However, if we look at the issues' evaluation in the same report, we see that 18.3% of respondents highlighted accommodation as an issue – thus the data can be interpreted both ways. Dissatisfaction with local integration activities is also very high – 17.51% of respondents were dissatisfied by it. A similar amount is dissatisfied with different mentoring support services – 16%. As those two types of services are somewhat interlinked with each other, this data shows that not all institutions take proper action on ensuring proper integration and support from the local student community and this area has a high potential for improvement. However, the progress here is also visible – 32% of respondents in the ESNsurvey 2016 were not provided with any kind of mentoring support<sup>8</sup>, while the dissatisfaction is lower and there is only 15.48% of “non-applicable” answers to this question – this shows that the provision of such services has increased. However, this can also be explained by pandemic-related issues.

Another service which shows high dissatisfaction is support with communication with authorities – 12.10% of respondents were

6 HouseErasmus+ Final Research Report, p. 44, 47-49.

7 ESNsurvey 2016, p. 30.

8 Ibid.

dissatisfied with support in such communication provided by the universities. As universities are the first point of contact for international students while on their stay abroad, it is important to note that the findings show that not all institutions provide quality support in communication with authorities, which has proved to be a crucial aspect to ensure a smooth mobility experience, especially in cases of language barriers. Higher Education Institutions might partner up with student and alumni organisations to ensure that students receive peer-to-peer support and that their needs are taken into account. Considering that dissatisfaction with support for migration procedures is considerably lower (5.08%), we suggest that this percentage reflects the lack of support in problematic cases and or countries.

Considering the satisfaction differences between Programme and ICM students, the trend of ICM students being more satisfied with services provided continues to be present in the case of the host institution services as well – ICM students are more satisfied with all the services included in the survey question. The mean satisfaction for ICM students is 3.97, while the mean for the programme countries sample is 3.65. Overall, ICM respondents report 0.31 higher satisfaction than their counterparts from programme countries. Respondents are also showing bigger satisfaction with accommodation services (0.42), as well as for the services which are used more by the ICM students, such as communication with local authorities (0.32), and visa and residence permit support (0.39). Interestingly, the difference between programme and ICM samples for integration activities is also rather high – 0.32. Services which report lower differences are linguistic support (0.17) and orientation activities (0.14), which can be explained by a high overall satisfaction in those services.

These results show that, while international students are more satisfied with host services, some of the most crucial ones, including accommodation and local integration, remain the ones where the most work should be done by host institutions, especially for mobilities within programme countries. More measures have been taken in the last few years regarding accommodation support, including its upcoming addition as one of the criteria for the evaluation of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education, but new measures and specific support are required to ensure progress within local integration. This aspect is key to the achievement of the inclusion and democratic participation priorities of the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027.

## Satisfaction with Services Provided by Student Organisations

The availability of student organisations and utilisation of their services can indirectly speak of the percentage of students and universities who have been covered by peer-to-peer volunteer support and mobility-enhancing activity on the exchange.

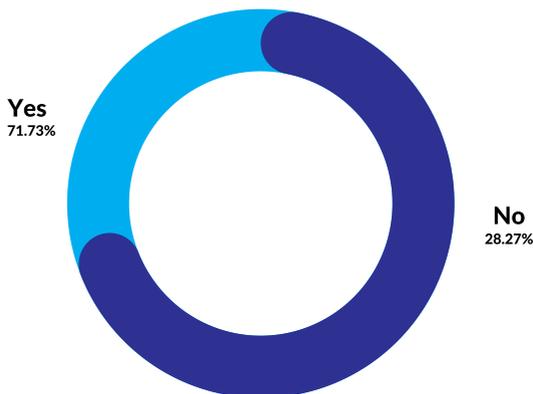


Figure 26 – Usage of services provided by student organisations at the host institution (general sample, n = 8,443)

It is observed that 28.27% of the sampled respondents have not used any service provided by student organisations and associations. These results are higher than the data reported in the ESNsurvey 2016, where 11% of respondents stated that no student organisation or association helping international students were available to them<sup>9</sup>. The lack of substantial difference can be explained by the specificities of the sample (i.e. high number of trainees and other mobility participants) as well as the specificities of the COVID-19 pandemic.

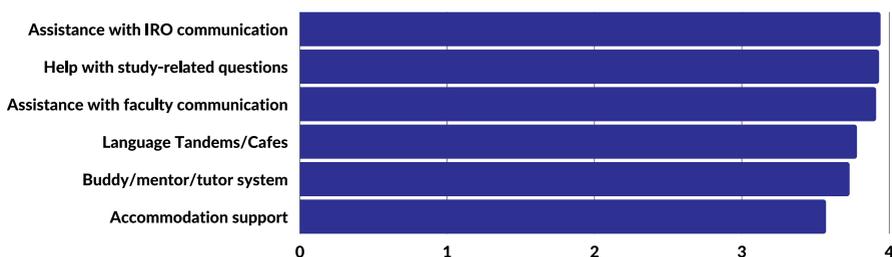


Figure 27 – Usage of services provided by student organisations at the host institution (general sample, n = 8,443)

<sup>9</sup> ESNsurvey 2016, p. 30.

Services provided to mobile students during their mobility period by a student organisation play a vital role in enriching the mobility experience and overall satisfaction with mobility. Mean satisfaction for surveyed services is 3.79, which is the highest value per service breakdown throughout the four types of services surveyed. It is evident from these results that local students provide various assistance support, which is most appreciated when dealing with local university employees. The lowest mean satisfaction is reported for accommodation support, which tracks with the overall issues in accommodation that were seen with host institution satisfaction.

When compared to previous data, the last time the activities of student organisations were surveyed was in 2013 and 2011 ESNsurveys<sup>10</sup>. However, those research reports focused mostly on all activities a student organisation does, while in this edition of the survey, we cover most services related to the educational component of mobility. The main satisfaction with buddy systems has risen from 3.67 in 2013 and 3.5 in 2011, albeit incrementally.



Erasmus programme moves thousands and thousands of students from all kinds of economic situations. I reckon the administration should calculate the basic costs of each city where they're sending the students and then decide on the monthly scholarship, as for me, it was too difficult to manage to pay the rent + food + transportation each month I was in Paris. FYI only accommodation costs more than 400€ if you want to be near the campus, and if you find any cheaper than it's at the banlieue and apart from being a bit of a risky area it requires a heavy transportation cost of around 80€/month for transportation. So being economically independent, it's impossible to live and study in Paris without stressing about money and how to pay bills.

## Funding and Scholarships

Funding and scholarships are one of the biggest barriers to mobility. The questionnaire thus included several questions related to cost coverage and availability of funding in order to analyse the financial situation of mobility participants.

10 ESNsurvey 2013, p.36, ESNsurvey 2011, p. 49

## Scholarship Cost Coverage

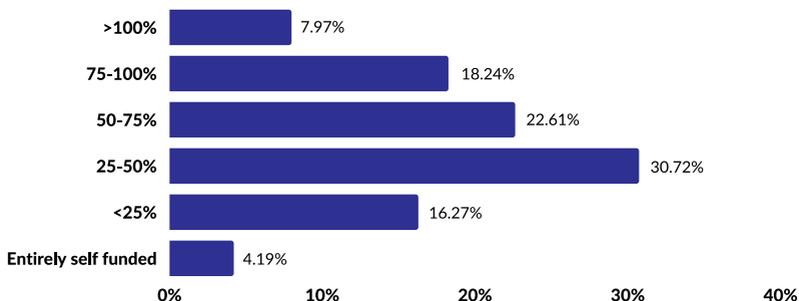


Figure 28 – Coverage of mobility costs by scholarship, percentage (general sample, n = 8,454)

Overall mobility cost coverage by scholarship is an important indicator of affordability of mobility experience with scholarship amount provided. Only 26.21% of respondents report that more than 75% of their expenses during the mobility has been covered by their grant and/or scholarship. SIEM survey has shown comparable results – only 19% of participants have said that at least 75% of their costs were covered by scholarship<sup>11</sup>. 7.97% of respondents report that they were even able to save some money from that grant after the end of the mobility. 48.82% have less than 50% of their costs covered and 73.79% of respondents have less than 75% of their mobility costs covered. This figure is of special concern, as in the SIEM survey, it was stated by more than half of non-mobile participants that 75% of cost coverage is the necessary amount for them to consider participating in any international mobility<sup>12</sup>. Data shows that this is not currently the case even for those who go on mobility, thus exacerbating inequalities in mobility access.



**The scholarship was a bit too low to live in an expensive country like Sweden - had to work part-time and ask my parents for help to live and allow myself more than just eating at home but travelling, etc.**

11 SIEM survey, p.13

12 Ibid.

Differences in data between this research and the SIEM survey can be explained by the larger presence of participants of non-Erasmus students, as well as by the larger amount of ICM mobility participants sampled. Moreover, the largest number of respondents indicated that only 25%-50% of their costs have been covered, thus supporting the above-mentioned points. The overall distribution of cost coverage is broadly consistent with the one reported in the SIEM survey<sup>13</sup>, as well as with the one previously reported by ESNsurvey 2016<sup>14</sup>.

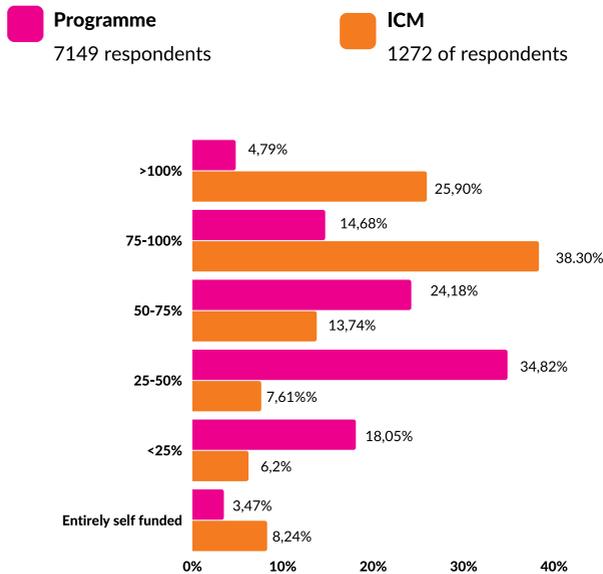


Figure 29 – Coverage of mobility costs by scholarship, percentage (by mobility type, n = 7,149, 1,272)

When we look at the difference between mobilities within Erasmus+ programme countries and mobilities including a partner country (International Credit Mobilities under the Erasmus+ programme), we see wide differences in cost coverage by scholarship. We see that scholarships for mobilities to/from partner countries or obtained through other programmes usually are sufficient for full or almost full coverage of mobility costs – almost two-thirds of respondents (64.2%) reported that no less than 75% of their costs were covered by the scholarship. 25.9% of ICM respondents report that their scholarship permitted them

13 SIEM survey, p. 62.

14 ESNsurvey 2016, p. 22.

not only to cover their incurred costs but also to actually have more money than their costs, which could permit them, for example, to travel more extensively during the mobility period, not being contained to their mobility destination and its immediate surroundings. For mobilities within programme countries, the percentage of similar cost coverage is around one-fifth of the sample (19.47%). Peak coverage for programme countries mobilities is a cost coverage of 25-50% of total costs (34,82), while peak coverage for ICM mobilities is 75-100% range (38.30%). This data reports a stark contrast between scholarship cost coverage depending on the home university and host destination. While the situation for the ICM students is better, with more than one-fifth of the sample (22.05%) having less than half of the costs covered, the situation for students having their mobility within programme countries is the opposite – more than half of them (56.34%) have less than half of their cost covered by the scholarship.

This data shows the necessity of increasing scholarship amounts for mobilities in general, as financial pressures remain the biggest obstacle to mobility. However, the major focus here should be aimed at increasing mobility within programme countries in general, while at least retaining the current situation within ICM mobilities. This data seems to support one of the outcomes of the SIEM survey, which stated that 53% of non-mobile respondents need at least 75% of their costs covered to consider going on a mobility<sup>15</sup>, while this figure is higher for low-income and other disadvantaged backgrounds.

## Top-Up Grants

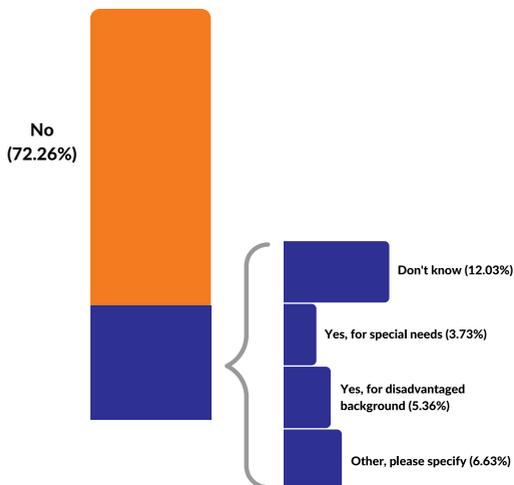


Figure 30 – Distribution of top-up and additional grants (general sample, n = 8,421)

More than 70% of respondents report that they haven't received any top-up grants or additional scholarships bar the main scholarship provided. 12.03% of the sample do not know whether they have received such, which might suggest issues with communicating about such possibilities by the institutions. 3.73% of respondents received a top-up grant for special needs and 5.36% received a top-up grant for disadvantaged backgrounds. 6.63% specified other reasons for receiving various top-up grants (from their national/regional governments, or additional scholarships from different sources).

The results for mobilities within programme countries (N = 7,149) are similar to overall, while results for ICM mobilities (N = 1,272) report a higher percentage of those not knowing about whether they received a top-up grant (15%), a lower amount of grants for disadvantaged background (1%), higher amount of grants for special needs (7%) and a higher proportion of "other" top-up grants (10%).

The distribution of top-up grants is generally consistent with the one previously reported by ESNsurvey 2016<sup>16</sup>. However, current data suggests that more people are receiving various top-up grants than previously – as in 2016, 79% of students reported that they have not received such a grant, compared to 72,26% in the current research. However, the distribution of Erasmus+ programme grants has changed – 2016 data shows that 6% were receiving both specific needs and disadvantaged background top-ups, while these numbers are 5.46% and 3.73% in this survey.

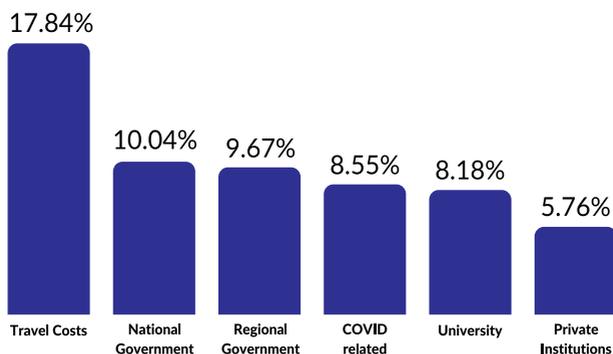


Figure 31 – Top-up grant types by receiving authority and grant purpose (n = 538)

16 ESNsurvey 2016, p. 23

6.63% of respondents have also chosen “other” top-up scholarships. From this number, 538 respondents have filled out an open question where they could elaborate on the nature of the scholarship. Figure 31 below represents the most popular types of scholarship (both by issuing authority and goals of the scholarship).

Most common types of top-ups received are to reimburse travel costs (17.84%) and reimburse COVID-19-related expenses (travels, prolonged stay, tests) (9.97%). National government scholarships (10.04%) are mostly represented by national grants for French, German and Italian students, as well as by Danish support for incoming mobility participants. Regional government grants (9.67%) are mostly represented by grants from Spanish and French regions and communities. Private institution grants (5.76%) are mostly represented by contributions from various companies and banks. Additionally, we see evidence of national grant portability in different countries, however, the amount of responses doesn't warrant stating that this is a widespread occurrence.

### Amount of Scholarship (per Month)

The questionnaire also included a question related to the number of grant payments received by the mobility participants. The question was formulated in a way to analyse the monthly amount of scholarships/grants allocated to mobility participants. Some respondents could not provide an exact sum, thus lowering the overall amount of answers to this question. The monthly scholarship amounts and their distribution is presented in Figure 32 below.

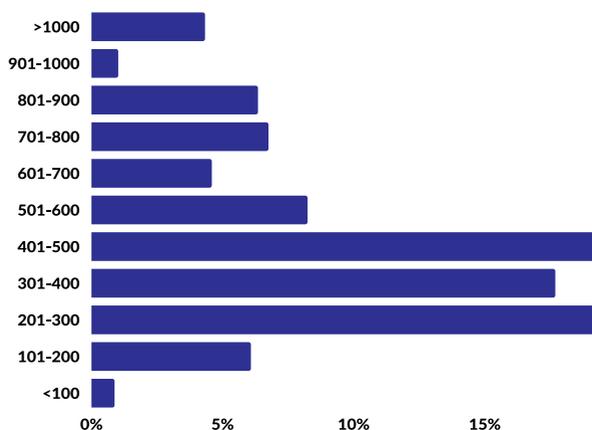


Figure 32 – Monthly scholarship (grant) distribution (general sample, in euro, n = 7,460)

Considering the monthly amount of scholarship provided (in euro), the overall monthly sum amounts to 499.99 euros, while the mean monthly scholarship for participants within the programme country equals 455.92 euro and for ICM participants – 762.57 euro. Scholarships over 2000 euros per month were considered outliers and not included in the data. The majority of scholarships (58.19%) lie within 201 to 500 euros per month, which explains their insufficiency for coverage of total mobility costs. Moreover, more than a quarter of the sample (27.41%) reports a monthly scholarship of fewer than 301 euros, and the range of 201-300 euros per month is among the two most prevalent, with the range of 401-500 euros (20.47% and 20.40% respectively).

These amounts are a bit higher than the average for Erasmus+ grants for mobilities within Programme countries - which is 370 euros according to Erasmus Annual Report<sup>17</sup>. The sum for ICM mobility is roughly consistent with the amounts provided for by Erasmus+ programme, with differences in amounts that could be explained by additional grants or different mobility schemes for participants in the sample. Considering the cost coverage reported above, it can be estimated that the overall cost of living can range between 500 and 700 euros per month, which is broadly consistent with the results of the SIEM survey<sup>18</sup>.

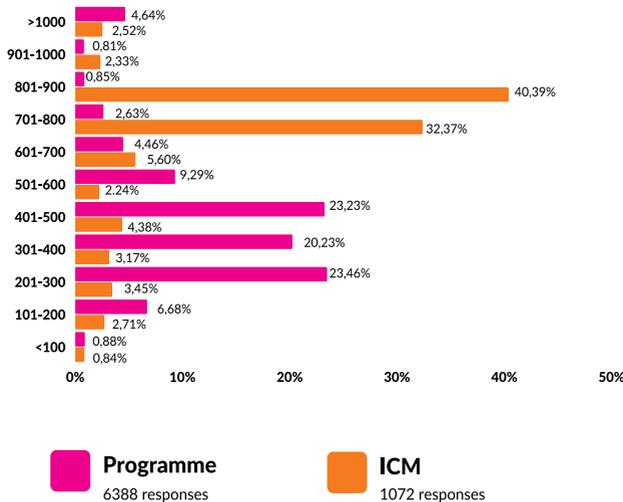


Figure 33 - Monthly scholarship (grant) distribution (by mobility type, in euro, N = 1,072, 6388)

17 [European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Erasmus+ Annual Report 2020, Publications Office of the European Union, 2021.](#)

18 SIEM survey, p. 62.

Monthly scholarship significantly differs between mobilities within the programme country and mobilities to/from partner countries. ICM scholarship peaks within the 701-900 euro range (72.76%), while scholarship amounts for mobilities within programme countries peaks at a wider range of 201-500 euro (66.92%), along with more normalised distribution along the range. This data roughly concurs with the general rules of the scholarship provisions for the Erasmus programme, thus conforming to the general prevalence of Erasmus mobilities in the sample, while the highest amounts are generally reported by students with additional grants or other mobility types/programmes. It can also be expected that ICM scholarships do appear to cover more costs than the ones offered for mobilities within programme countries.

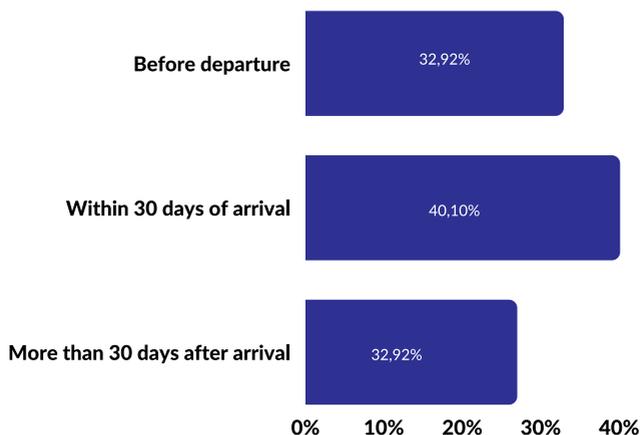


Figure 34 - The schedule of the first grant/scholarship payment to mobility participants (general sample, n = 8,059)

When it comes to the schedule of payments, the most crucial point is when the first payment of the grant is being made to the mobile student. To maximally ease the financial burdens for mobile students, the grant should be paid as soon as possible in order to facilitate the initial stages of mobility. However, our respondents show that this is not often the case. Almost a third of our respondents, indeed, received their grants before departure to their mobility destination (32.92%). The largest number of respondents received their grant within a month after arrival (40.10%), while 26.98% received it more than a month after arrival, which puts mobile students at severe financial burden and stress.

“

I received the 33% of the scholarship I was granted several months after I landed in my host country. This means that people with financial hardship cannot afford to study abroad despite the scholarships. I could not have survived without the assistance of my family, whose financial status was severely affected. Therefore, Erasmus+ is a great opportunity for middle-class students, but unreachable for the lowest social class students. The EU thus should reevaluate how financial support can be given to democratise access to this awesome programme.

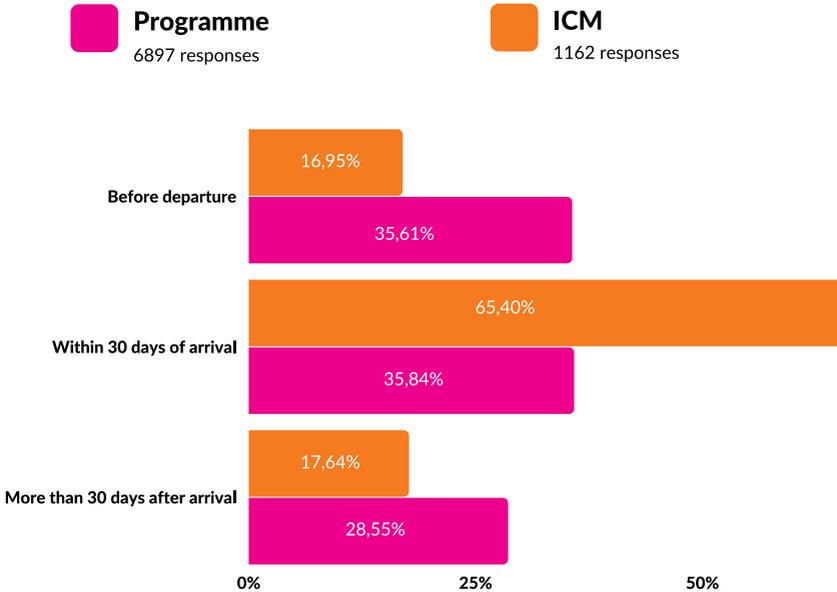


Figure 35 - The schedule of the first grant/scholarship payment to mobility participants (by mobility type) (n = 1,162, 6,897)

However, when we look at the distribution between ICM mobilities and mobilities within programme countries, we, once again, see a wide disparity with the grant receipt schedule – ICM students have less than twice the chance to receive their first grant payment before departure. They are also less likely to receive their pay more than a month after. Almost two-thirds of ICM students receive their grant within 30 days of arrival, which, compared to additional pressures usually required for payment (such as setting up your bank account abroad), while being suboptimal, is much more quickly than it would be expected. On the other hand, ICM mobility participants can also lack the ability of quickly access their funds back home without any additional charges from the banks, thus the timely receipt of the grant (preferably before departure) would be especially beneficial to those mobility participants. Since this could not be possible due to internal and banking regulations (e.g. ICM mobility participants coming to programme country university would be expected to open up an account in the bank of the host country, thus making it impossible to issue payment before the departure), the solutions to this issue could be either done through changes to such regulations or by alternative means (e.g. cash payments).



**I received the scholarship two months later than when I was supposed to, so during the first three months I struggled financially a lot.**

| COUNTRY                  | BEFORE        | AFTER         | MORE THAN 30 DAYS AFTER | TOTAL ANSWERS |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Spain                    | 11,02%        | 22,42%        | 66,56%                  | 1298          |
| France                   | 13,90%        | 38,42%        | 47,68%                  | 367           |
| Italy                    | 24,81%        | 42,45%        | 32,74%                  | 1060          |
| <b>PROGRAMME AVERAGE</b> | <b>35,61%</b> | <b>35,84%</b> | <b>28,55%</b>           | <b>6897</b>   |
| Portugal                 | 21,45%        | 52,00%        | 26,55%                  | 275           |

|                |               |               |               |             |
|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|
| <b>Denmark</b> | <b>43,03%</b> | <b>36,07%</b> | <b>20,90%</b> | <b>244</b>  |
| <b>Turkey</b>  | <b>48,70%</b> | <b>35,06%</b> | <b>16,23%</b> | <b>154</b>  |
| <b>Germany</b> | <b>40,63%</b> | <b>43,37%</b> | <b>16,00%</b> | <b>1056</b> |
| <b>Greece</b>  | <b>59,73%</b> | <b>25,79%</b> | <b>14,48%</b> | <b>221</b>  |
| <b>Austria</b> | <b>46,22%</b> | <b>42,86%</b> | <b>10,92%</b> | <b>238</b>  |
| <b>Poland</b>  | <b>60,40%</b> | <b>35,60%</b> | <b>4,00%</b>  | <b>250</b>  |
| <b>Romania</b> | <b>63,25%</b> | <b>32,91%</b> | <b>3,85%</b>  | <b>234</b>  |

Table 3 - The schedule of first grant/scholarship payment to mobility participants (programme countries mobilities, by country of home institution as grant operator, select countries)

Discussing national comparisons in grants payment schedule, we can see that from the programme mobilities, there exists a wide variety between countries in adherence to the established rules. It should be noted that national results can not be very reliable due to the specifics of the sample, however, those countries with a large number of respondents show that there exist countries with a lot of late payments (Spain, Italy) as well as those who, comparatively, leave fewer students waiting for grants receipt (e.g. Germany).



**I got 70% of the scholarship before departure (in comparison to other home universities from other countries, it was very in time) and 30% after the successful recognition of the ECTS which makes no sense to me because the funding is supposed to help me during the mobility and not afterward and even if I failed my classes, according to the Grand Agreement, I would have to pay the money back, so they are safe anyways.**

## Recognition of Mobility

The survey featured a test of a different methodology to assess the credit recognition of mobility at their home university. Respondents were asked to provide the number of credits passed in their host institution and then the number of credits recognised by their home university. Additionally, they were able to state whether the university has recognised their mobility in full, and if not – what were the issues that prevented them from achieving full recognition.

The answers to the recognition questions were analysed and grouped in percentage bins to facilitate the discussion of the results. Several respondents did not provide sufficient data to calculate their recognition percentage and were thus excluded from this part of the analysis. Moreover, some of the respondents did state that full credit recognition was achieved without providing the number of credits – those respondents were assessed as those with full recognition. Respondents who went on mobility without the need for proper credit recognition (due to internships, thesis research etc.) were also excluded from the answers, thus explaining the lower number of valid responses.



**My home university was seeking full compliance between the courses I took abroad and those included in my programme at the home university. Since all universities offer very different courses from each other, after a full academic year spent in the host university, I had only 2 courses recognised, plus a language course. This means that I had to retake all 10 courses that I didn't attend at my host university because of my 1-year exchange abroad.**

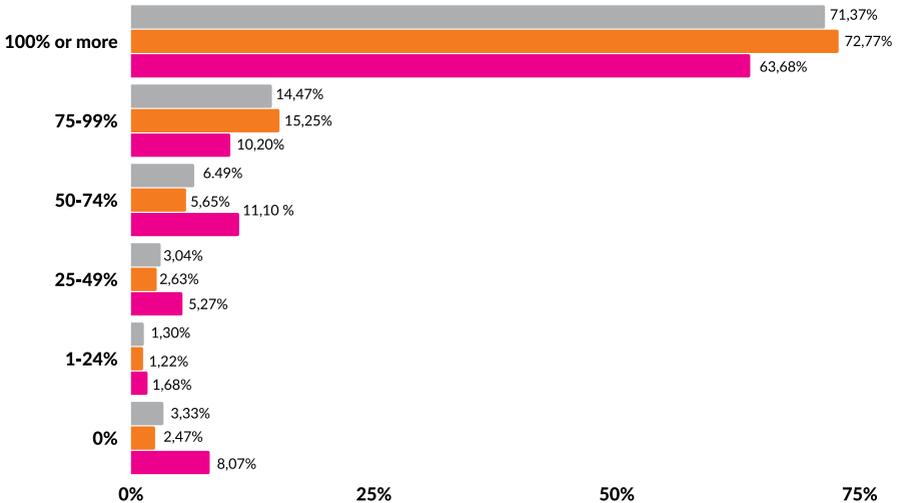


Figure 36 - Mobility recognition percentage in home university (overall sample and distribution by mobility type, n = 5,791, 4,899, 892)

It is seen that full recognition is only achieved by 71.37% of the respondents, thus going in contrast with the goals of full credit recognition for mobilities stated by ECHE and rules of other mobility programmes. This data highlights, once again, that the recognition percentage reported at 100% in 2016<sup>19</sup> doesn't corroborate by existing data. This finding, along with others, highlights the necessity of providing various data sources related to the Erasmus Charter on Higher Education monitoring, such as participants' report data, so that civil society organisations as well as experts and researchers in the field could benefit from publicly available data. This data can also feed into the planned Observatory on Higher Education.

19 [European Court of Auditors \(2018\) Mobility under Erasmus+ : Special Report 22/2018, art. 30, citing DG EAC 2016 Annual Activity Report.](#)

It is also seen that a high number of respondents obtained 75-99% or 50-74% recognition, most probably, having issues with one or two courses from overall mobility. The number of students with extremely low recognition remains under 5% overall, slightly higher (6.95%) for programme country mobilities.

The comparisons between ICM (International Credit Mobility) and programme mobilities reveal an overall better situation with recognition for ICM students, which could be explained by a difference in attitudes with regard to such mobilities. The high number of 0% (8.07%) responses for programme countries could be explained by respondents who had just finished their mobility before replying to the questionnaire, and thus waiting for the process to be completed, which could have brought up the full recognition percentage higher overall, bringing the programme strata to the level of ICM mobility.

Previous reports devoted to the recognition, PRIME 2009 and 2010 showed that full recognition was obtained by 61.5% in 2009<sup>20</sup> and 82.35% in 2010 (in case of matching field studies)<sup>21</sup>. However, data for the recognition within the study fields in the 2010 report shows a spread between 85% and 66% for full recognition<sup>22</sup>. It is believed that current results when accounting for ongoing recognition procedures, do not corroborate arguments for achieving a closer percentage of full recognition than shown in 2010.

## Issues with Recognition

The questionnaire also included an open question on issues that hindered the full recognition of mobility studies at the home university. To analyse the open questions, a word cloud was generated using the programmable world cloud generator from the WordCloud library package for Python programming language.

Widely used words and terminology related to recognition were put into a stopwords list for the word cloud generation and thus were not included in it. The stopwords list for wordcloud on recognition issues included such words as “credits, courses, university, before, during, mobility, Erasmus, problem(s), student(s), didn’t needed, problem,

20 PRIME 2009, p. 39.

21 PRIME 2010, p. 61.

22 Ibid, p. 62.

institution, because, subject”, as well as all words with less than 4 letters.

Several issues do stand out from the generated word cloud - such as lack of equivalence of courses and programmes, the possibility of arbitrary decisions by professors and program coordinators, issues with learning agreements and issues with transferring credits to another system. All of those problems appear to be more or less endemic and those issues need to be covered in order to achieve full recognition.

An additional highly prevalent problem, which can be seen from the answers, is the lack of recognition for language courses. This problem seems understandable – as the study of languages might not be included in the programme, they might not be recognised as part of the degree. However, this fact goes in contradiction with the actual goal of these language courses, which allow for deeper integration into the host community, and promote tolerance and intercultural understanding, as well as the culture of the host country. Thus, devising additional rules and regulations to ensure their recognition, maybe in the form of an extra course, could be a possible solution to such an issue. The same could be said for other issues with related cultural courses offered by host institutions.

## **Issues Encountered on Mobility**

This part describes the main issues that students encountered during their mobilities. A comprehensive understanding of the problems faced by students while on exchange is key to define proper support measures before, during and after the mobility. Support with these issues is extremely important in light of the current efforts to widen participation in student mobility, especially among students from fewer opportunities backgrounds.

Due to limitations in displaying the data, the graph is structured by combining the responses on both ends of the Likert scale, which provides for a more streamlined data display, while allowing for analysis.

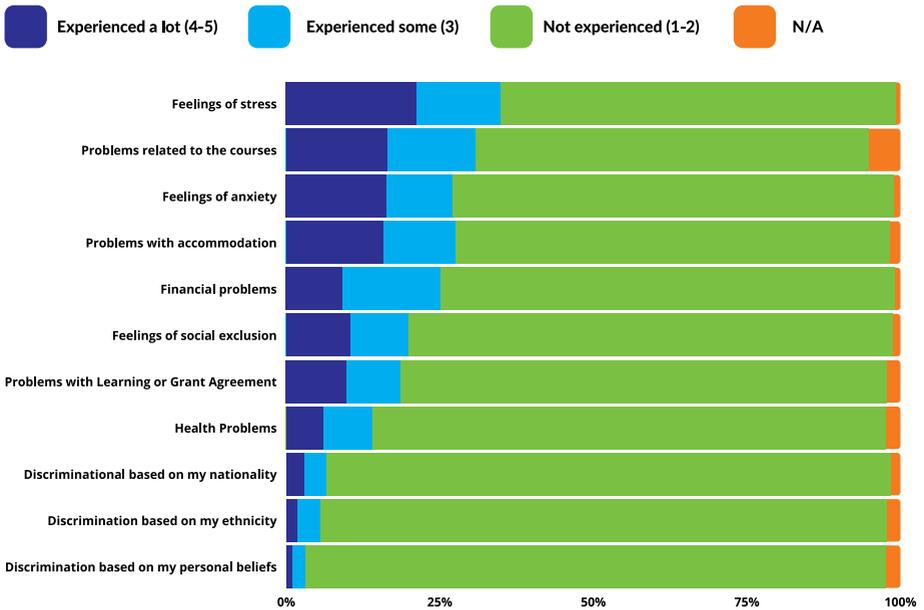


Figure 37 - Issues encountered on mobility (Likert scale, grouped, general sample, n = 8,428)

## Open Answers

Additionally, the question on encountered problems during mobility experience contained an open question, allowing respondents to provide additional insight on their experience. The answers to that question were cleaned from irrelevant inputs (such as “no other issues to report”) and then analysed through the same process used for the word cloud for recognition issues. The stopwords list for this word cloud was adapted accordingly and included the following words: “before, during, mobility, Erasmus, problem(s), student(s), didn’t, abroad, needed, university, problem, institution, because, subject”, as well as all words with less than 4 letters.



London was a very expensive city and I experienced anxiety related to financial problems, particularly accommodation.

There are at least four major topics that are prominent in the respondent's open answers. Those are issues with courses and classes, issues with learning agreements, issues with accommodation and issues with human interaction and contact. The pandemic also remains prevalent in the answers, as well as various topics related to travel and entrance to the country. Other topics, such as feelings of stress and anxiety, finances and various documentation, are less prevalent but are also featured in the answers.

These results do correlate with the prevalent issues according to the analysis of the provided answers to the questions, discussed above, and also with the previous attempt as text-mining of open question answers about encountered problems in ESNsurvey 2016, where, among others, issues with courses enrolment and accommodation were some of the most prominent<sup>23</sup>. Therefore, we can assess that these problems, highlighted by the students seven years ago, remain prevalent to this day. This is especially concerning since all the above-mentioned issues are also included in the list of issues respondents were able to choose before the open question – the need to elaborate on the encountered problems in the field suggests that the respondents really struggled with them.

The relative prevalence of lack of human interaction and country-related problems could be linked to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on international mobility, which will be discussed in one of the following chapters of the report.

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23 Ibid, p. 62.

# MOBILITY IMPACT

## Mobility Impact of the Erasmus+ Programme on Students

The following chapter will describe the mobility impact of the Erasmus+ programme on students' lives. Below are observed and described how certain feelings and attitudes have been shifting, and transforming when students are engaging in Erasmus+ mobility opportunities. The survey seeks to identify students belonging towards their own citizenship before and after mobility. Additionally, whether they consider contributing to help the future Erasmus+ generation after their arrival to their home country, like joining a student association, becoming a mobility ambassador for outgoing students or a Buddy/Mentor for incoming students. Continuing with shaping statements concerning students' future plans, experience and approaches towards the global topics that have been influenced after the exchange period.

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

The section's two opening questions serve to detect contrast within the feelings of students' citizenship before and after their respective Erasmus+ mobility period. Here, students have been asked – “How much did you identify as a citizen of (following) your - hometown/city, region, country, continent, the world, Europe and the European Union- BEFORE/ AFTER mobility?” and accordingly, the respondents needed to choose from the answer scale options starting with Not at all, Slightly, Neutral till Very and Extremely.

The results of the students' belonging before mobility towards hometown/city, region, country, and continent have not changed much or have changed slightly after the mobility period. The identity of **hometown/city**, both with an indicator very by 37% (2,846) and the last answer option - extremely with 23% (1,774) - remained unaffected. While insignificant changes occurred in the feelings (extremely) towards the **region** before – 20%, after – 21%, when very indicator in the **country** identity, which prior the mobility was 40% but after the exchange slightly declined to 39%. For the **continent** percentage outcomes, while neutral declined from before 28.69 % to 23.50% after, but very 37.19% and extremely 20%, identity feelings have risen to 40.67% and 24%.

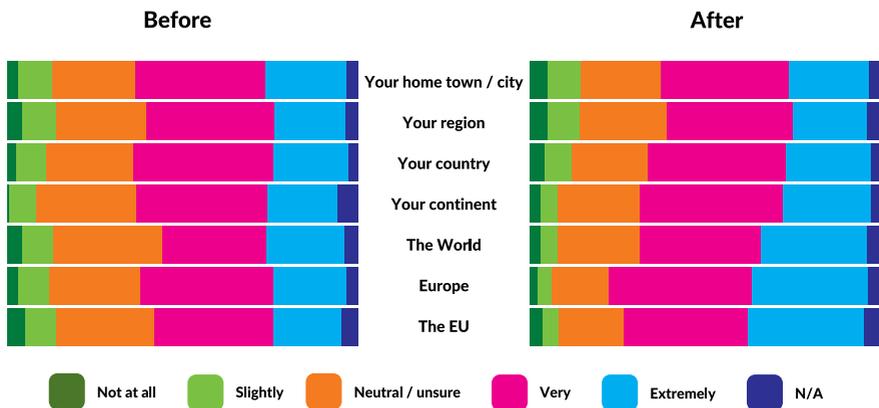


Figure 38 - Identification and feeling of belonging with different geographical dimensions before and after Erasmus mobility experience among mobile students (general sample, n = 8, 803)

But the same is not true for the rest of the answer options. Prior to the exchange experience, **37.94% of the participants felt very or extremely European**, these **attitudes grew to 41% and 33% after the exchange**. When it comes to the feeling of the European Union identity, the Erasmus+ students' answers increased extremely by around 14 points - before mobility 19.43% to 33% after the end of the exchange. Equally, it is true for the perception of the world's citizen, which has risen from 29.88% to 34.67% and extremely from 22% to 30%.

The mentioned outcomes can be compared to the Erasmus+ Higher Education Impact Study (Final Report) 2019, which indicates that “An Erasmus+ mobility contributes to creating a stronger European identity: Erasmus(+) participants are mainly pro-European and become even more so during their mobility” (p.103). According to the study before Erasmus+ mobility “one-quarter of Erasmus+ students feel **only or primarily European**” and after the mobility, 32% of Erasmus+ students identified themselves only or primarily as European, which is “**by nearly one third (an increase of 7 percentage points) to 32%**” in comparison to 25% before the mobility period (p.4). Furthermore, when we learnt from the Erasmus+ Impact Study 2019 that “The weaker the European identity prior to mobility, the larger gain results from the mobility period with Erasmus” (p.4), fairly the ESNsurvey can argue about the same attitude of students addressing their citizenship identity as witnessed in the world, Europe and the European Union feelings have risen relatively, while hometown/city, region, country, continent identities stayed unaffected.

## Returning Exchange Students Local Involvement

A specific focus is laid on the impact of measuring and describing returned Erasmus+ students' intention to help and contribute their gained knowledge to a future Erasmus+ generation. Likewise, the question - **"After your mobility would you consider to/did you... ?"** has been asked where three given statements were about - joining a student association (such as ESN), becoming a Mobility Ambassador for outgoing students or a Buddy/Mentor for the incoming students.

According to the results, **overall 49%** (very - 31%, extremely - 18%) of Erasmus+ students considered or joined the student association. In like manner, **36.31% very much take into account becoming the mobility ambassador**, including 18.74% who still remain neutral. The same is true for the buddy/mentor where 37% are very positive to provide help for incoming students, while 24% say extremely and less than 6% do not at all think of becoming a buddy/mentor.

### After your mobility, would you consider to / did you...?

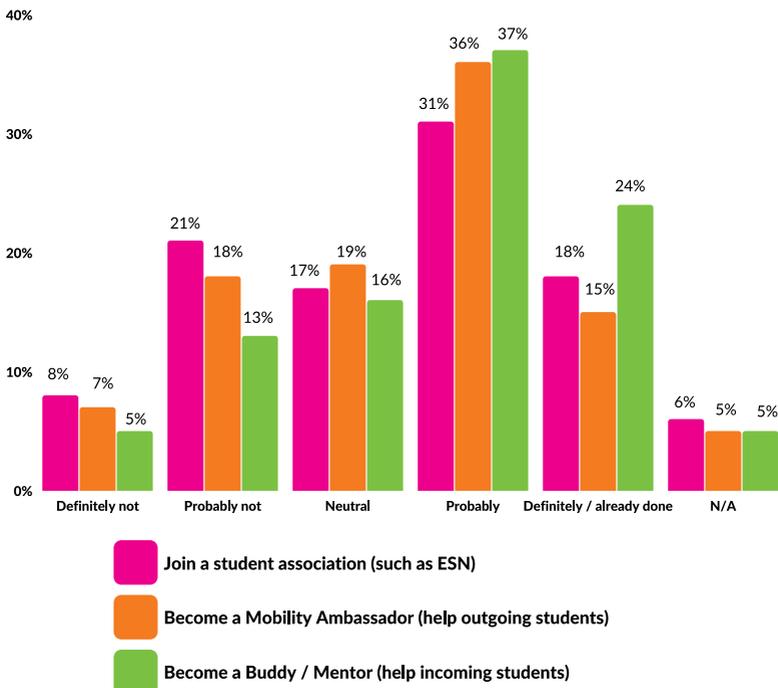


Figure 39 - Interest to engage in internationalisation at home initiatives after the end of their mobilities among mobile students (general sample, n = 8,864)

Moreover, the ESNsurvey - 14th Edition observed how the home institutions value their students' help and to what extent or not Erasmus+ returning students were encouraged to participate in all the above-mentioned activities.

Results show that the encouragement attitude from the home institutions is very low. More than 37% of students say they have Not at All been encouraged to join the student association (42.22%) or to become the mobility ambassador for outgoing students (41.45%) or the buddy/mentor for the incoming students (37.03%), while around 20% remain neutral answering the question.

### To which extent did you feel encouraged by your HOME University to...

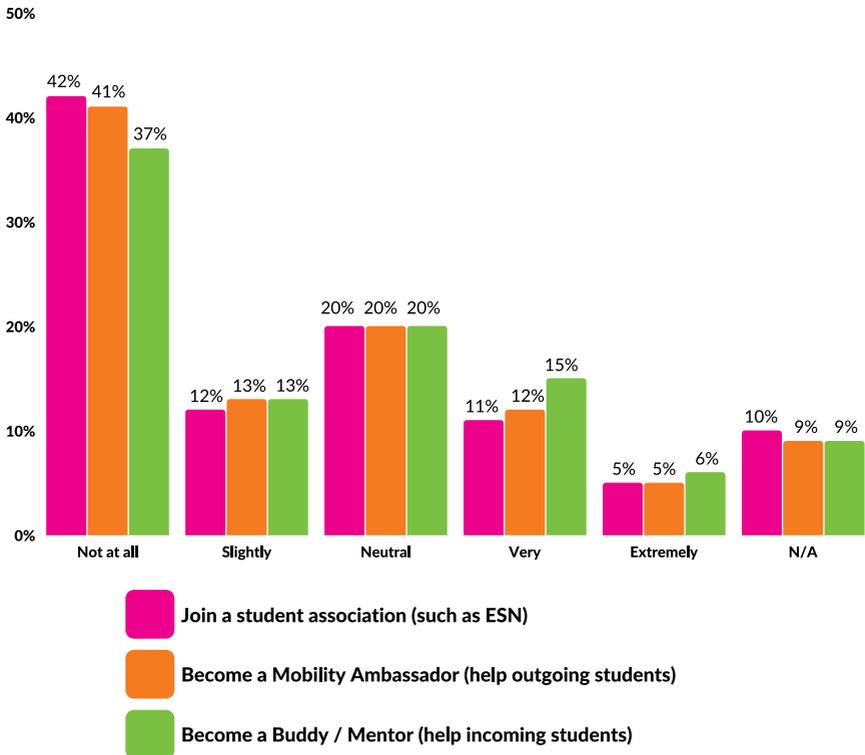


Figure 40 - Perception of encouragement from Home institutions to participate in internationalisation activities at home after the end of the mobility experience (general sample, n = 8,855)

The results points to the need from the HEIs to encourage and engage more students who experienced an Erasmus+ exchange semester. Keeping them in the positions, such as the above-mentioned student associations, mobility ambassadors or buddy/mentoring system, can bring the two main actors into a win-win position. On the one hand, using their own students and giving them a certain acknowledgement for their achievements, while motivating future generations to help them grow towards the same experience. On the other hand, already arrived students to the home university would have recent motivation and willingness as has been already shown that after mobility Erasmus+ students are contributing in those three directions - student association, mobility ambassador or buddy/mentor position.

## **Mobility Impact on Personal Development, Employability & the Global Topics**

The next section will look at the Erasmus+ students' relations towards their study, life, job, future feelings and perspectives after graduation, also, what has been changed during the exchange period and how the understanding of the global issues has been impacted on their personal judgment. For the question "Do you agree with the following statements concerning your future?", students were invited to choose from Strongly disagree to Strongly agree between the following opinions – if they would like to study/ to live/ to apply for a job abroad after graduation, or apply for a job in their home country with an international component and have another international experience during their studies. 42% of Erasmus+ students strongly agree and would like to study abroad after their graduation, while 46% have a strong feeling about living abroad after graduation and likewise, 43% prefer to have a job abroad after their graduation. While 41% consider applying for a job in their home country with an international component. Remarkably, **54.40 % would like to have another international experience during their studies.**

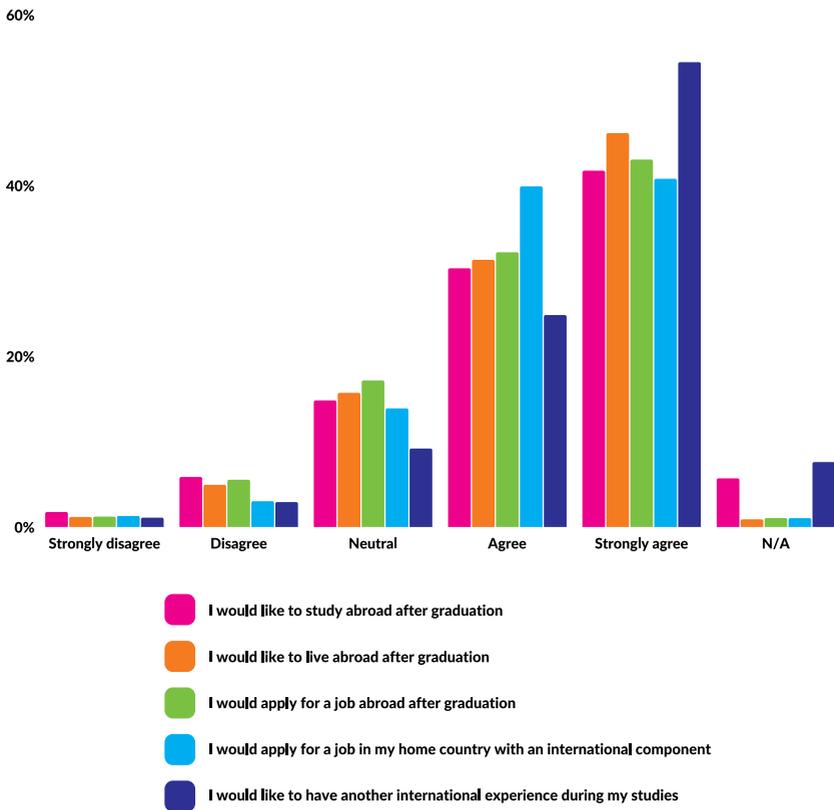


Figure 41 - Mobility impact on student's willingness to have further international experiences (general sample, n = 8,880)

In line with the Erasmus+ Higher Education Impact Study 2019, students after their Erasmus+ experience, “72% have a better idea of what they want to do in their future career”. Furthermore, overall “72% of respondents consider their Erasmus+ experience beneficial or highly beneficial for finding their first job” (p. 75). As stated in the current survey, 41% consider applying for a job with an international component and as reported in the Erasmus+ impact study 2019 “The careers of Erasmus(+) graduates are strongly affected by aspects of internationalisation.... only around one in five Erasmus(+) graduates reported no international characteristics at all in their job, while a substantial part of the participants who reported some international characteristics in their job confirmed that this entailed international” (p.95) and also, 15% moved abroad from their current job.

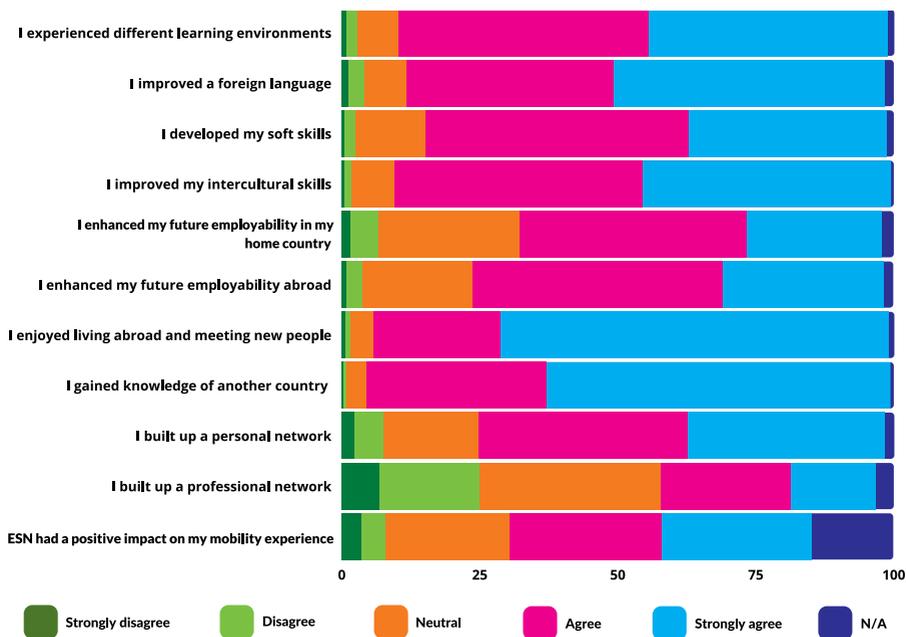


Figure 42 - The impact of exchange in developing student's skills and knowledge (general sample, n = 8,883)

The ESNsurvey - 14th Edition also observes statements about students' learning environment, improved or developed skills, improved employability opportunities home and abroad, living abroad and growing network. Respondents have been asked if they agree or disagree with the above-mentioned statements about their mobility experience. The results describe that 45% have experienced different learning environments, while 50% advanced their foreign language proficiency, likewise, 48% developed soft skills and 45% improved intercultural skills. Moreover, importantly, 42% think that they enhanced their future employability in the home country, while 46% also consider that they enhanced their future employability, but abroad. Dominantly, 71% enjoyed living abroad and meeting new people, including 33% who feel neutral about the build-up of a professional network, while 23% (very) consider that they established a professional network.

Erasmus+ students positively report about the Erasmus Student Network, **54.92%** (very - 28.09%; extremely - 26.83%) **say ESN had a positive impact on their mobility experience.** Notably, **students recognise their**

**Erasmus+ mobility and participation as improving their skills and employability chances**, which are the main motivations for Erasmus+ students as stated in the Erasmus+ impact study 2019 -70% of students experience life abroad. In addition, students improve their language (62%) and soft skills (49%), expand their social network (49%) and improve their career chances (49%) while spending their Erasmus+ period abroad.

Again, in line with the Erasmus+ impact study 2019 as former Erasmus+ participants' perceived skills' improvement in critical thinking - 79%, knowledge of the host country's culture, society and economy 91%, similarly, the ESNsurvey - 14th Edition found out how impactful students' mobility was towards the widening horizons and perspective in global topics. **The Erasmus+ students' exchange experience has been very impactful for 33.32% to grow their interests towards international politics.** Equally, 35% report that their state of interest regarding European politics has been impacted, when attentiveness flow remained neutral about national politics by 34.47% and by 36.45% about local politics.

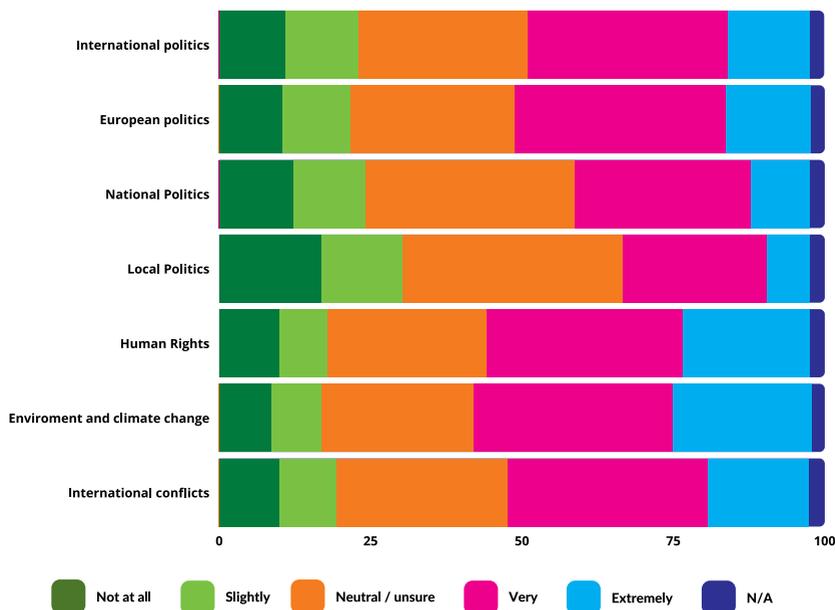


Figure 43 - The impact of exchange on student's interest in the specific topics (general sample, n = 8,868)

Global topics such as **human rights, environment and climate change and international conflicts receive the highest scores in terms of the interest gained by students during their mobilities**. Human rights and international conflicts issues were mentioned by 32% and 33% of respondents respectively, but overall the highest percentage was for environment and climate change topics. In that regard, 55% of respondents answered with very or extremely (very - 33.08%; extremely - 22.72%) to the question of how impactful their mobilities had been to their interest in climate change.

## Conclusion and Key Findings

The section represented the impact of the Erasmus+ Programme on students' life, to analyse which programme has the strongest impact on students' growth and development. The ESNsurvey - 14th Edition can conclude as follows:

- After an Erasmus+ exchange period, students more strongly **identify their citizenship as European and of the European Union**;
- Returning Erasmus+ students are more likely to be considering joining or have already joined a student organisation (31%). Moreover, they would like to be/are the **mobility ambassadors (36%)** for outgoing students or a **buddy/mentor (37%)** for incoming students. Interestingly, the mentioned students' involvement has **not been encouraged by the home institutions**;
- Erasmus+ students would like to study, live, and work abroad after their graduation. They look for a job in their home country with **an international component (41%)** and **55% would like to have another international experience during their studies**;
- The students' interest towards international, European, national and local politics has increased. Equally, in relation to the other global topics, the mobility period has risen Erasmus+ students' interests in **human rights (53%), environment and climate change (55%) and international conflicts (45%)**;
- The major number of Erasmus+ students experienced **different learning environments (45%) improved a foreign language (50%), and increased soft and intercultural skills**. Likewise, the students consider that they **enhanced their future employability in the home country (42%) or abroad (46%)**. With the highest percentage (**71%**), **Erasmus+ students have enjoyed living abroad and meeting new people**.

# IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MOBILITY EXPERIENCES

## Impact of COVID-19 on Mobility Experiences

The present chapter will focus on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mobility experiences. Even if it is possible to say that the pandemic massively impacted the movement of university students that decided to take part in a study mobility programme, these experiences have not been stopped during the entire duration of the pandemic and many were allowed to continue their studies abroad with different types of adjustments (e.g. digital learning activities). The chapter aims to shed light on how mobilities were carried out, how students were affected during the pandemic, which services were offered by the universities in light of the particular situation, and how students evaluated the digital learning activities.

As already mentioned in chapter 1, out of 10,691 participants, 6,410 (60.00% of the total sample) participated in a mobility experience during one of the semesters that were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, i.e. the mobility (or part of the mobility) happened during the spring semester of the academic year 2019/2020 or during the autumn semester of the academic year 2020/2021. These students were asked to fill out a section of the survey with questions specifically related to the pandemic.

## Impact of COVID-19 on Mobility

The participants were asked how their mobility took place. Out of 6,383 respondents, 55.22% stated that their mobility took place in a blended format (through a combination of both virtual and physical learning activities), 35.85% declared that their mobility happened physically and 11.94% said that the format of their mobility was virtual.

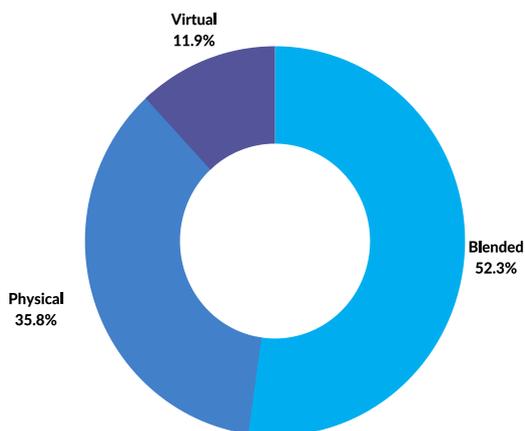


Figure 44 - Mobility format during COVID-19 (general sample, n = 6,383)

When asked how the COVID-19 pandemic affected their mobility (n = 4,076), the majority of the participants, 60.82%, declared that their mobility started normally and continued with online learning activities. 13.40% of the respondents stated that their mobility either started and either finished normally or was continuing normally and the pandemic had no effect on it. 11.43% of the respondents declared that their mobility started and took place entirely online, while 11.16% declared that their mobility started with online learning activities with the possibility to continue physically when and if the conditions would allow it. A little more than 3.00% of the respondents declared that their mobility was either suspended, postponed or cancelled.

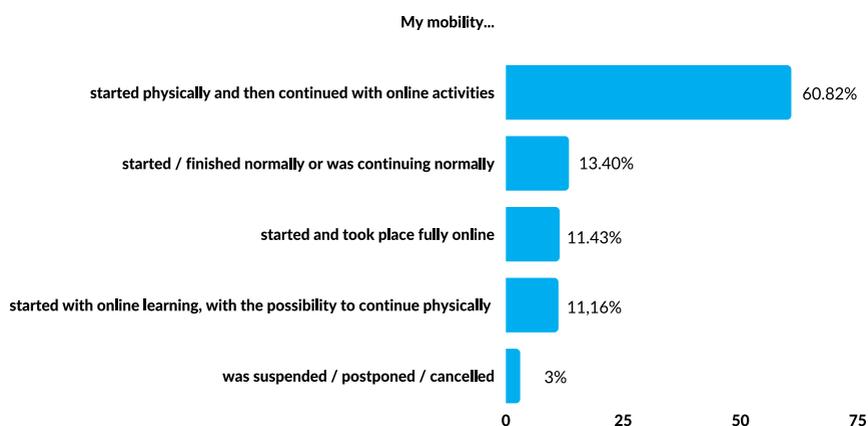


Figure 45 - Mobility impacted by COVID-19 (general sample, n = 4,076)

Following up on the previous question, we asked a series of questions to the participants aimed at understanding where they spent time during their mobility and the reasons behind this choice. Specifically, participants whose mobility continued or took place entirely online following the start of the pandemic were asked where they were during the online learning period. Out of 3,374 respondents, the vast majority, 78.96%, declared that they either stayed or travelled to the country of their host institution, 19.04% returned to the country of their home institution, while 2.02% returned to their country of residence when different from their home institution one.

Participants who decided to stay or travel to their host country were asked which were the reasons why they did so. Out of 5,046 answers (it was possible to select more than one option), 43.66% of respondents indicated that it was their choice to remain, 19.78% indicated that they felt safer staying in their host country, 11.00% of respondents stated that it was difficult to return due to logistical reasons, 8.11% stated that they were not able to return due to travel restrictions, 5.43% declared that it was difficult to return due to economic reasons, while 4.28% of participants were asked to stay in their host country by their host institution.

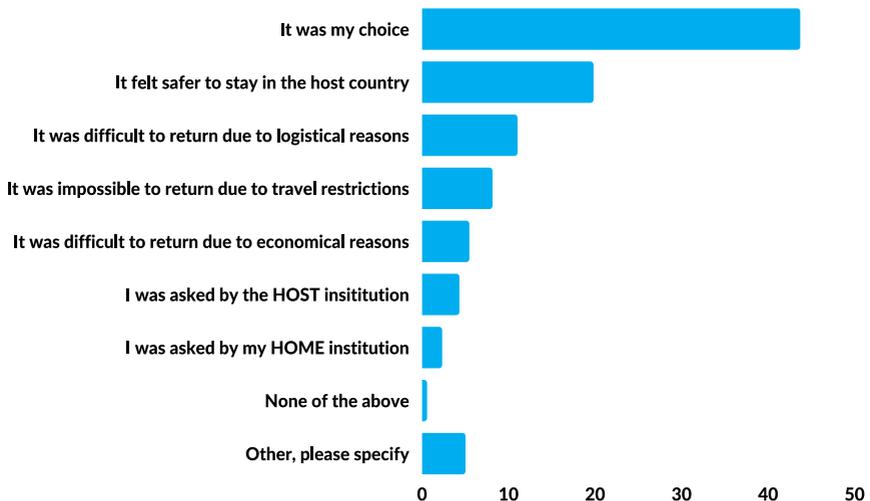


Figure 46 - Motivation behind student's decision to stay or travel to their host country (general sample, n = 5,046)

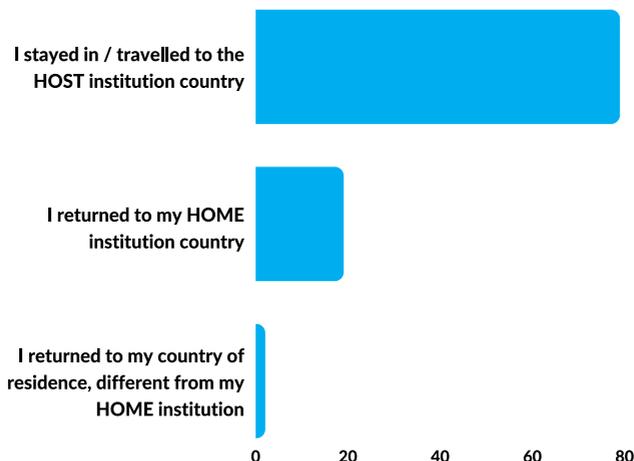


Figure 47 - Impact of COVID-19 on student's mobility location (general sample, n = 3,374)

Participants whose mobility started online during the pandemic were asked where they were during the online learning period. Out of the total respondents (n = 870), 92.99% stated that they travelled to the country of their host institution, and 7.01% remained in the country of their home institution or their country of residence if different from the previous one.

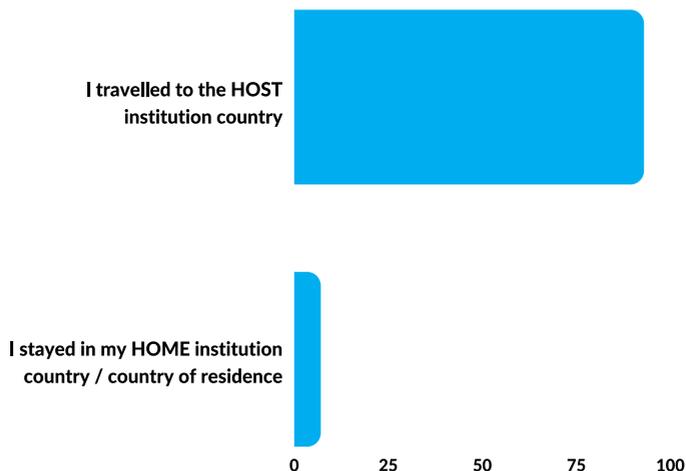


Figure 48 - If your mobility started online did you travel to your host institution country? (general sample, n = 870)

The participants whose mobility started online during the pandemic and who decided to travel to their host university country were asked the reasons why they did so. Out of 1,079 answers (it was possible to select more than one option), 63.76% of the respondents indicated that travelling to their host country was their choice, 12.23% reported that they were asked by their host institution, 11.21% stated that they felt safer in travelling to their host country and 5.10% reported that their home university asked them to do so.

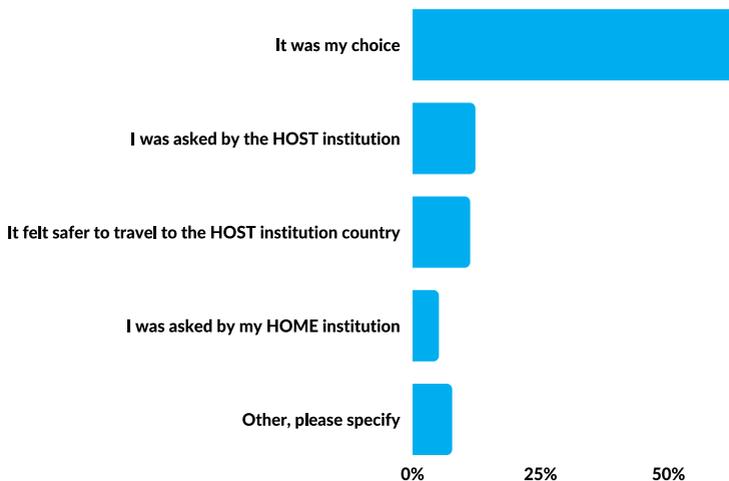


Figure 49 - Reasons behind travelling to the host institutions during COVID-19 (general sample, n = 1,076)

Participants whose decision was to remain in their home institution country or in their country of residence when mobility started online were asked which were the reasons that motivated their choice. Out of 115 answers (it was possible to select more than one option), 20.00% of the respondents stated that it was their choice to go back, and 18.26% stated that they decided to stay because it was impossible to travel to their host country, 16.52% answered that they felt safer in their home institution country or in their country of residence. 8.70% of the respondents answered that they decided to stay for family reasons, 8.70% stated that they were asked to stay by their home institution, 7.83% stated that it was difficult to travel to the host institution country due to logistical reasons, 7.83% state that their host institution asked them to remain in their home institution or in their country of residence, and 6.09% of the respondents indicated that it was difficult to travel due to economic reasons.

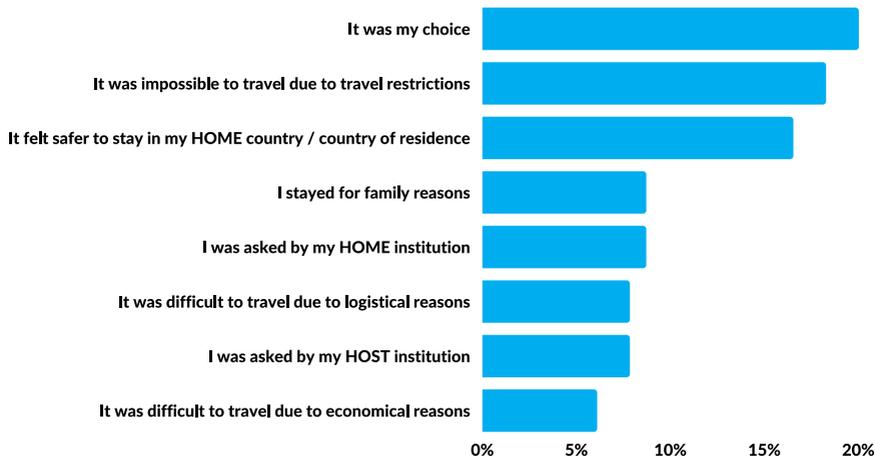


Figure 50 - Reasons behind remaining in home country during COVID-19 (general sample, n = 115)

Respondents whose mobilities were suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic were asked whether they resumed their mobility. Out of 64 respondents, 25 stated that they had resumed and already concluded their mobility, 24 participants declared that they did not resume their mobility, 13 participants stated that they had resumed and were finishing their mobility in the period they filled the survey, and only 2 respondents stated that they had planned to resume their mobility, but while one of them had already planned when, the other one was still unsure of the timing.

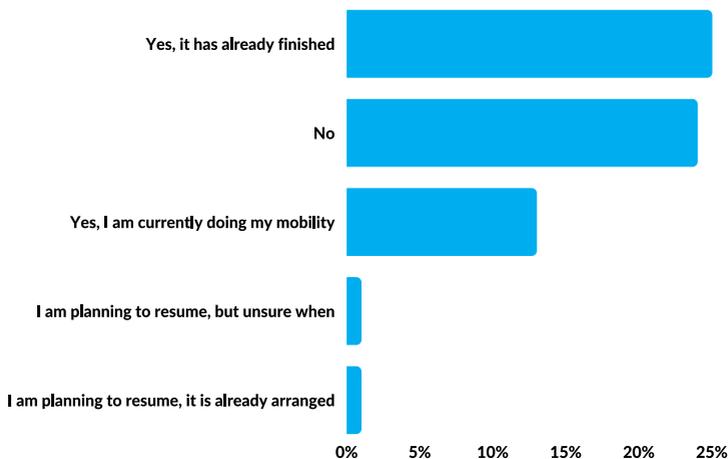


Figure 51 - Student's experience on resuming mobility during COVID-19 (general sample, n = 64)

Finally, participants were asked how their scholarship was impacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Out of the total number of respondents (n=4,056), 44.23% responded that the full amount of the scholarship was awarded, 37.55% received the scholarship for the period that was actually spent abroad, 4.17% of respondents declared that they received the scholarship and some extra funds connected to emergency expenses, 2.51% of the participants stated that they did not receive any scholarship. 11.54% of the participants responded that their mobility did not comprise a scholarship or the option “N/A - Not applicable”.

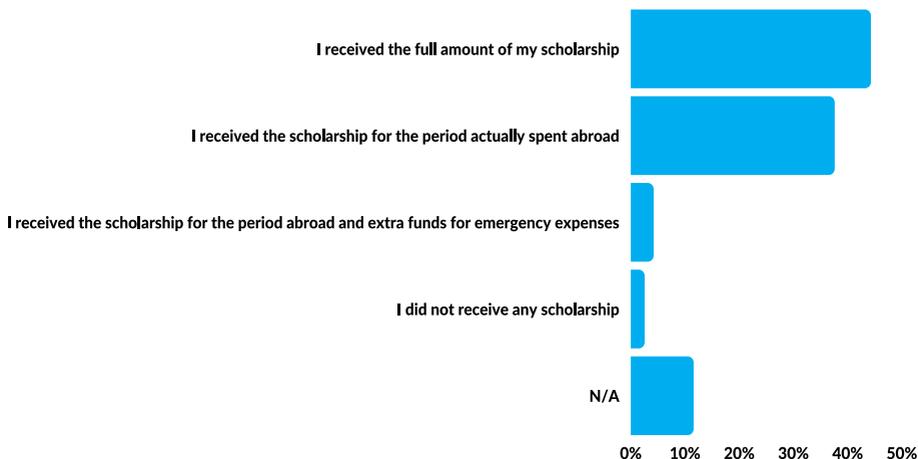


Figure 52 - The impact of COVID-19 on scholarships (general sample, n = 4,056)

## Support Services Provided by the Institutions during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Participants were asked which kind of support specifically connected to the COVID-19 pandemic was offered to them during their mobilities. Out of 7,825 answers (it was possible to select more than one option), 21.76% of the respondents stated that they received academic support specifically connected to information on online classes and educational material, and 17.64% reported having received support related to information provided on the measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic issued by governments, 12.28% of respondents declared that they received psychological support. Other forms of support were assistance with accommodation (6.79%), medical support (6.04%), accommodation for quarantine (5.55%), support related to food provision (5.37%), financial support (4.38%), and linguistic support (3.77%). Interestingly, 15.63% of the respondents selected the option “none of

the above”, this could entail that they have not received any support related to the COVID-19 emergency.

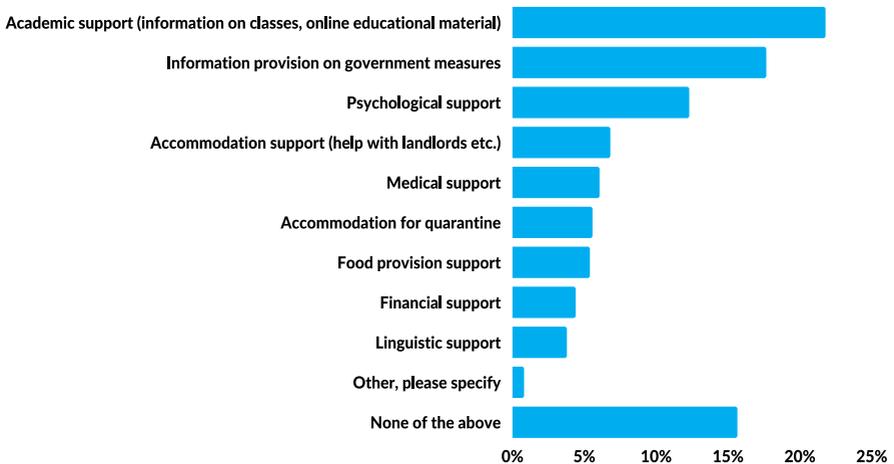


Figure 53 - Support offered throughout the mobility period in the light of COVID-19 (general sample, n = 7,825)

Finally, participants were asked to evaluate, on a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 means “very dissatisfied” and 5 to “very satisfied”), some aspects connected with the online learning activities attended while on mobility during the COVID-19 pandemic: digital learning tools and platforms, access to educational material, the readiness of the Institution to implement online activities, quality of online learning activities, the inclusion of international students during online activities, access to digital devices from the home/host institution, interaction with lecturers and teachers, and interaction with other students. All the options received around 4,000 answers (n.min = 3,986; n.max = 4,001).

As shown in the figure below, most of the aspects were evaluated in a moderately positive way, in a range between 3.82 out of 5 (st.dev.=0.91) for digital learning tools and platforms, and 3.47 out of 5 (st.dev.=1.08) for the interaction with lecturers and teachers. The only exception to this trend was the interaction with other students that have been evaluated at 2.86 out of 5 on average (st.dev.=1.19).

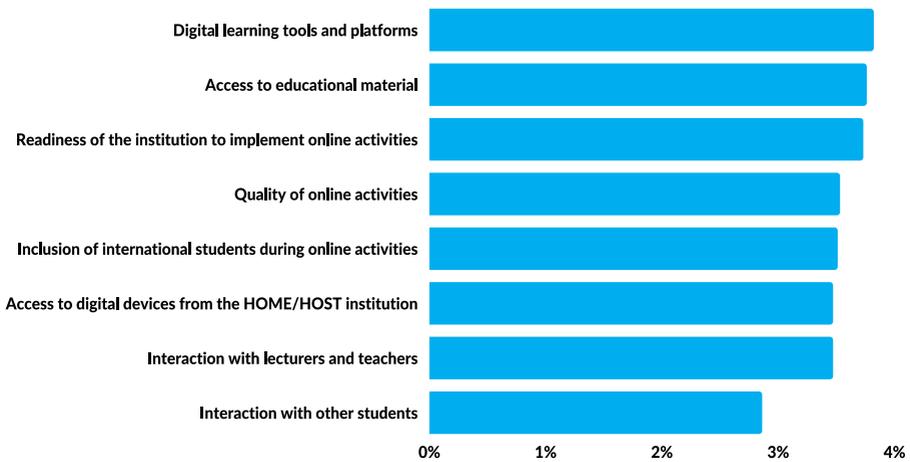


Figure 54 - Evaluation of online learning activities (general sample, n = 4,001)

By analysing more of the different evaluations, as shown in figure 6.12 below, it is possible to see that 66.06% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the digital learning tools and platforms that were used during the online learning activities, 60.25% were satisfied or very satisfied with the access to educational materials provided by the institutions, 57.27% were satisfied or very satisfied with the readiness of the institution to implement online learning activities during the COVID-19 emergency, 53.21% were satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of the online learning activities provided by their institutions, 50.38% were satisfied or very satisfied with regard to the interaction with lecturers and teachers, and 48.75% were satisfied or very satisfied with the inclusion of international students during the online learning activities. Only 39.19% of the respondents declared themselves satisfied or very satisfied with the access to digital devices provided by both home and host institutions, while 26.99% selected the option “N/A - Not applicable” to this question: this could mean either that respondents did not need any help in getting digital devices or that university did not provide such services.

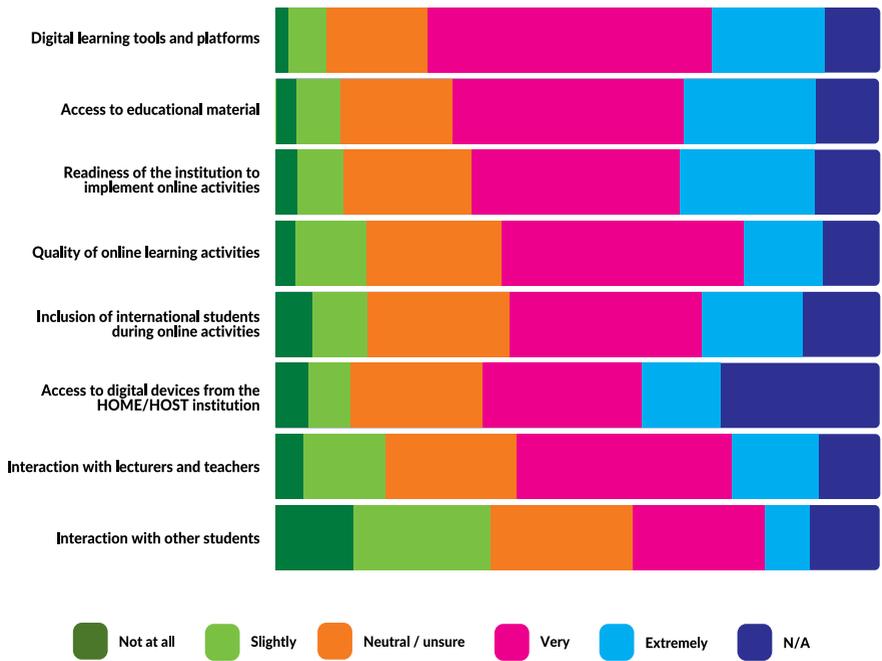


Figure 55 - Experience with the aspects of online learning activities (n min. = 4397; n max. = 4418)

# CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The ESNsurvey - 14th Edition recommendations seek to improve mobility programmes and the general experience of international students while on mobility. The key focus of these recommendations is on Erasmus+ mobilities, but just like the rest of this research project, they are applicable to other mobility programmes and, to an important extent, also to the experiences of degree mobility students.

The ESNsurvey recommendations complement other existing policy positions of the Erasmus Student Network that can be found on [ESN's webpage](#).

## 1. Widening participation in mobility: strategic outreach and varied opportunities to bring more students into internationalisation opportunities

The findings from the ESNsurvey - 14th Edition show that **students have different motivations to undertake mobility opportunities**, and that their profiles present differences compared to the whole Higher Education student population in the [countries of the European Higher Education Area](#). In order to increase participation in international opportunities among the student body, **it is important to adapt the promotion of these mobility opportunities depending on the different target groups and their profiles**. This is evident from the difference in motivations between students and trainees. Different types of mobility opportunities, or different mobility destinations, can be appealing for certain student groups. In that regard, collaboration between International Relations Offices, orientation services and other relevant Units in Higher Education Institutions can help to reach those students that might not have the same inner motivation to participate in international opportunities.

An important development on the attraction of international students can be a more strategic promotion of mobility destinations and mobility programmes that starts from the first years of Higher Education,

and even earlier through collaboration with High Schools and other educational institutions and youth centres. This reasoning comes from a joint analysis of the ESNsurvey data and other data sources such as the [SIEM data](#), that shows that more than 80% of students believe that support choosing a mobility destination is fundamental in the pre-departure<sup>24</sup>.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Higher Education Institutions should set up outreach initiatives, including internal targets for students participating in learning mobility and other international opportunities.** HEIs should consider how to target the promotion of the opportunities and destinations based on the characteristics of the student population, building on the feedback given by previous mobile students and on qualitative data from mobile and non mobile students. The use of the KA131 International mobility funds should be diversified beyond a few mobility destinations, prioritising mobility beyond Europe.<sup>25</sup>
- **National Agencies should include a strong focus on outreach in the capacity building activities for Higher Education Institutions,** including new transnational cooperation activities (TCAs and LTAs) in the matter. This should be done with a focus on widening participation of underrepresented students, including those who are underrepresented due to their study programme or other academic aspect. More attention should be put at the role of National Agencies supporting Higher Education Institutions with their incoming mobile students, and not only the outgoing ones.
- **The European Commission should contemplate financial incentives for Higher Education Institutions with low mobility numbers,** in order to build a more level playing field and make sure that Higher Education Institutions that lag behind can catch up with more internationalised institutions. For that, the criteria to allocate Erasmus+ Higher Education mobilities should be further defined and become more transparent.<sup>26</sup> A possibility could be to include an optional qualitative part in the application that institutions which

24 [Allinson K., Gabriels W.,\(2021\). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. SIEM Research Report](#)

25 [European Commission \(2021\),Science for Policy Briefs, Studying abroad- benefits and unequal uptake.](#)

26 [European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020. Mobility Scoreboard: Higher Education Background Report 2018/19. Eurydice Report: Publications Office of the European Union.](#)

want to increase their mobility numbers can apply for.

- **Higher Education Institutions should seek to create diversified internationalisation offers that can suit the interests and characteristics of their whole student population.** Long term mobility for studies and traineeships should be at the core of the offer, but the number of short term opportunities such as Blended Intensive Programmes or summer/winter schools should also increase. These kinds of opportunities should be prioritised in the first years of study so they can act as stepping stones towards long term mobility, especially among students who belong to social groups that are underrepresented in mobility.
- **Internationalisation at home should be part of the international offer,** including volunteering in international student organisation and prioritising support for student initiatives with an international components. The use of ECTS in the recognition of these experiences should become the norm across Europe, building on existing practices
- **National Agencies and the European Commission should monitor the implementation of internationalisation strategies as part of the ECHE Monitoring framework,** seeking to advice and support them in the proces of increasing the internationalisation portfolio through opportunities to take part in activities with an international component at home and abroad.<sup>27</sup>

## **2. Mobility experience: Making civic engagement during and after the mobility experience a key internationalisation priority**

Civic engagement and participation in democratic life is one of the new priorities of the programme, but this has not resulted in a considerable change in the approach taken by HEIs. Comparisons in ESNsurvey data since 2005 show that the percentage of students taking part in volunteering activities during their exchanges have barely improved, despite growing awareness on the importance of civic engagement. Making civic engagement a priority in learning mobility experiences in Higher Education would contribute to the achievement of objectives laid out in the European Strategy for Universities, and it would constitute an integral part of the horizontal priorities of inclusion and participation in democratic life of the Erasmus+ programme.

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27 [Project report example - Erasmus+ KA 103 from the British National Agency](#)

There is a clear correlation between the low numbers in participation in group initiatives and the low satisfaction levels with integration in the local community. Supporting students to engage with these different group activities can therefore result in increased integration down the line.

Motivating students to volunteer, and join civil society organisations, sports clubs or other cultural or social groups during their exchanges can be a remarkable step to fostering internationalisation at home, even beyond the walls of the Higher Education Institution. At the same time, student satisfaction with integration in the local community will increase. Moreover, as previously discovered in the ESNsurvey 2019, students with an exchange experience are far more likely to engage in civil society organisations and volunteering. If they have additional incentive and receive more encouragement during their exchange, the multiplier effect when they return to their home country will be significant.

A relaunched approach of the recognition of informal learning that prioritises the use of existing tools such as ECTS and the diploma supplement will enable a more encouraging environment at Higher Education Institutions and will give an additional incentive to students to take part in impactful civic engagement activities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **The European Commission should guide National Agencies and Higher Education Institutions** on how the Bologna tools can be used to foster recognition of informal and non-formal learning outcomes during the exchange. The Learning Agreement can be adapted in a way that reduces bureaucracy, but at the same time enriches the learning experience of students by allowing them to get recognition of informal and non-formal learning outcomes. In that regard, ESN recommends a full revamping of the Learning Agreement as part of the Erasmus+ 2021/2027 mid term review process.
- **National Agencies should incorporate aspects related to civic engagement and democratic participation in their Inclusion Action Plans**, by including practices and targets that are closely linked to the respective national needs. They should ensure that these plans are made public and foster stakeholder involvement as much as possible. Through opportunities, such as the transnational cooperation

activities, National Agencies can build capacity among higher education institutions and stimulate the implementation of innovative practices for civic engagement of students.

- **Higher Education Institutions should play an active role in supporting and encouraging students to engage in activities as part of their learning experience.** Additional guidance should be provided by coordinators to foster the self-reflection of the students and the recognition of their learning experiences. Higher Education Institutions should incorporate service learning initiatives as part of their internationalisation strategy and prioritise an intercultural dimension by keeping a number of spots for international students. Including these activities in the courses offered to exchange students will ease the recognition of learning outcomes gained through informal education. Awarding ECTS for the participation of Erasmus students in community engagement experiences can be a transformative step towards incorporating civic participation in learning mobility. If adding these ECTS to the learning agreement is not possible, they should at least be integrated in the diploma supplement as means to recognise participation in such opportunities.
- Additionally, **Higher Education Institutions should focus on creating partnerships with local actors and civil society organisations, involving student organisations in the design and implementation.** Such partnerships will not only help building capacity in the institution, but will also facilitate students' interaction with the local community, and thus lead to strengthening internationalisation at home.
- **Higher Education Institutions should give formal recognition of students' volunteer work and participation in civic engagement activities** in the local community through existing tools, such as ECTS and the diploma supplement.

### 3. The application process, academic experience and recognition

The findings of the ESNsurvey show that recognition continues to be an issue for mobile students, and a cross analysis with other sources such as the SIEM research report shows that it also acts as a barrier to access mobility opportunities. s Students are afraid that they will not be able to prepare a learning agreement and get their credits recognised, and due

to word of mouth, even isolated issues related to recognition can have a harmful impact on the perception of students.

The qualitative data related to courses, recognition and grading show European and national trends that require concrete responses to allow internationalisation to further develop. Lack of trust between Higher Education Institutions, and ultimately dismissal of the value of the international experience in academic terms, are persistent elements in the mobility experience. If Higher Education Institutions are not ready to commit to full academic recognition and fair transcription of records within the framework of existing agreements, those agreements should not be continued, and students should know about the existing challenges.

There is a general lack of awareness of how the [ECTS system](#) actually works<sup>28</sup>, and what steps a student needs to take to go on mobility. A considerable number of Higher Education Institutions do not seem to prioritise learning outcomes, going against the spirit of the ECTS guidelines. This lack of awareness also prevents students from articulating their challenges openly. Academic guidance plays a fundamental role in the application process. In that regard, it is important to stress that Erasmus+ coordinators should prioritise learning outcomes over specific courses when designing learning agreements for their students.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **The European Commission should use the digitalisation process in higher education to improve access to information on mobility and to ease the application process for students.** The Commission should exhort a stricter monitoring process of the ECHE commitments, creating a complaint system through which students can submit their problems when they arise. This can be implemented through existing student-friendly digital tools, such as the Erasmus+ App. However, the Commission must assure that complaints and challenges shared by students are heard and addressed by the institutions in charge, and share this information with student organisations which can help improve the student experience.<sup>29</sup>

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28 [European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, ECTS users' guide 2015, Publications Office, 2017.](#)

29 [European Commission, Mobility and Learning Agreement, procedure and inter-institutional agreements](#)

- **National Agencies should implement stricter ECHE monitoring to ensure recognition procedures are applied in compliance with the commitment**, including more qualitative components to get a better understanding of the experiences of students. For that purpose, the National Agencies should involve student associations and representatives in the monitoring, and reinforce this as a practice, especially in cases where lower levels of ECTS recognition and satisfaction with the academic experience has been recorded. Additional incentives and support measures should be envisioned for Higher Education Institutions that achieve the laid out objectives in their ECHE applications, to encourage universities to continuously improve the academic experience of their students.<sup>30</sup>
- **National Authorities should reinforce their commitment to pursue and implement the objectives and tools of the Bologna process in their own systems of higher education.** These objectives and tools should be included in internationalisation of Higher Education strategies, and the implementation of European programmes such as Erasmus+ should contribute to its dissemination and use.
- **Higher Education Institutions should prioritise learning outcomes and learning experiences over specific courses**, showing as much flexibility as possible when implementing recognition procedures. HEIs should make full use of staff exchanges to work on overcoming attitudinal barriers to furthering their inter-institutional relations and achieving better synergy between academic programmes. At the same time, universities should cherish the diversity of study programmes across their partners, as exchange of knowledge and teaching practices are among the key values of learning mobility. Initiatives, such as the European University Alliances, should reinforce the importance of the recognition processes and be closely linked to the level of automatic recognition of participating higher education institutions.
- **Higher education institutions should put emphasis on quality support during the application process.** At the time of application students should be provided with comprehensive information about the grading systems of the host institutions and how the ECTS system works in practice. Erasmus+ coordinators should have an enhanced role in supporting students to choose a host institution and to prepare their learning agreement, prioritising learning outcomes

and impactful academic experience, over specific courses.

#### **4. Support given to mobile students and trainees by sending and hosting Higher Education Institutions**

The ESNsurvey has revealed that satisfaction levels of students significantly differ between the sending and hosting institutions. **According to the data, students tend to be more satisfied with the services provided by the hosting institution rather than a sending institution.** Among the services offered by sending institutions, participation in alumni communities and reintegration activities are the lowest ranked, while application assistance and the providing of mobility information receive the highest evaluations. It is worth noting that the services that score the lowest levels of satisfaction in the hosting institutions are housing, integration into the society, and insurance support. In contrast, the most satisfied services are welcome activities and linguistic support. The level of satisfaction with the services offered by the host institution's student organisations also stands out, pointing to the benefits of collaboration between Higher Education Institutions and these student organisations.

The improvement in the satisfaction with services can be related to a number of factors that have concurred during the last programming period. Higher Education Institutions have gained experience, managing increasingly high mobility numbers and adapting to the different changes in the programme. Capacity building events have become more common, and there have been renewed efforts to increase institutional engagement in internationalisation. However, the administrative burden that HEIs and National Agencies still face shows that there is a need for a transformative shift in the role of staff working on internationalisation. Through a rethinking of mobility processes and more training, tools and stakeholder engagement, we should start moving towards a more strategic role that empowers to focus on student support and the implementation of more inclusive and impactful mobilities.

**One of the most striking findings of this ESNsurvey is the remarkable gap in terms of satisfaction with the mobility experience between Erasmus students and Erasmus trainees.** The findings indicate that the latter have considerably lower satisfaction levels with their social life and other related aspects. The lack of clear application processes and the absence of established support systems for trainees, who unlike mobile

students do not generally benefit from aspects such as welcome weeks and buddy systems managed by Higher Education Institutions, can be some of the reasons behind the difference in satisfaction levels. This points to the need of developing targeted measures to improve their support systems. Better collaboration with student organisations, local authorities and Higher Education Institutions present in the cities of destination of the trainees can be important steps in that direction.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **The European Commission should support the HEIs to develop transparent and comprehensive activities and support mechanisms for incoming and outgoing international students.** The Learning Agreement preparation process should become more flexible and digital, which requires an unified system and a portal where the sending and receiving institutions can interact with each other and students to keep the learning agreement compliance process clear, transparent and up to date. The European Commission is well positioned to address the issue and develop an universal platform for this purpose.
- **National Agencies should actively monitor the main issues students encounter before, after and during the mobility at their sending and receiving institutions and utilise tools at their hands to address given challenges.** NAs should closely monitor the HEI's policies and their implementation in terms of international students, including their welcome events, visas and insurance assistance, liaising with local authorities and mobility information provisions, among others.
- **Sending Higher Education Institutions should ensure the development and implementation of tailor-made activities and policies for the outgoing student during the whole cycle of their mobility, including the reintegration activities.** Sending HEIs should equip students with relevant information and assistance regarding the insurance, visa, credit recognition, linguistic support, learning agreement preparation, application preparation and general information provision for the mobility. Great focus should be also given to emphasising the importance of returning students' involvement in alumni communities.<sup>31</sup>
- **Hosting and sending Higher Education Institutions should work**

31 [Obermair Emma, Learning Agreement Survey Report 2021.](#)

**together to clearly allocate responsibilities on providing support to students in line with ECHE commitments and Erasmus Student Charter entitlements.** The current division of responsibilities is not always clear for students, which can lead to dissatisfaction among mobile students. Besides the revision of the interinstitutional agreement by the European Commission and National Agencies, working together with partners in this division can be an important step to ensure quality mobilities for all students.

- **Hosting Higher Education Institutions should give a greater focus to supporting the integration of international students in their hosting communities.** HEIs can benefit from stronger partnerships with local and regional authorities, and should include this interaction with the local population, both within the academic community and outside of it, as part of their strategies.
- **The European Commission and National Agencies should develop a new quality framework on Erasmus internships,** in line with the objectives of the European Strategy for Universities. This framework should be created in collaboration with stakeholders and should have the objective of adapting ECHE commitments to the reality of Erasmus internships, thinking about potential measures that can be implemented by sending and hosting organisations in the process of Erasmus internships. The Erasmusintern.org should be further supported to become the key platform in the management of internship agreements, allowing for better peer reviews and giving hosting organisation.
- **Higher Education Institutions involved in Erasmus+ internships should consider the role of these internships in their internationalisation strategies,** streamline their application processes and work together with their partners, student organisations and National Agencies to ensure that interns have proper pre-departure support systems in place and they are informed about their opportunities during their mobilities. **HEIs and National Agencies should engage with local authorities and student organisations** to plan support measures for the students which can also benefit the local economy and community, trying to link Erasmus internships with innovation ecosystems and adding an entrepreneurship component.

## 5. Implementation of the Erasmus+ programme and connection with the European and national policy agendas in internationalisation of Higher Education

Due to its recurrent character and its longevity as a research initiative, the ESNsurvey provides a unique analysis of how Erasmus+ has developed throughout the years. This part of the conclusions reflects on the implications of certain aspects within Erasmus+ and the broader EU policy agenda in Higher Education and learning mobility, providing recommendations that can be implemented in the short and medium terms. Some of these recommendations are quite aligned with the [SIEM technical recommendations](#), which complement and elaborate on the ideas explained in this report.

As it has been stated before, the ESNsurvey - 14th edition paints an upbeat picture of how Erasmus+ mobilities have improved throughout time, albeit still leaving considerable room for further enhancement of the student experience. The growing relevance of internationalisation in EU policies should be seen as an opportunity to further advance in long standing issues related to mobility, such as recognition, information provision and available funding. As the EU policy agenda in the field of Higher Education continues to expand, it is important to connect the dots and make sure that Erasmus+ mobilities are implemented in a way in which they can contribute to ambitious objectives in aspects such as inclusion, entrepreneurship, sustainability or civic engagement.

Learning mobility is a core part of the plans to create a [European Education Area by 2025](#), and also a priority area within the [Strategic Framework for European cooperation in the field of Education and Training](#). The funding to support these mobilities has doubled in the new Erasmus+ programme, but certain policy support measures that are key to boost policy efforts at the national level, such as the mobility targets and a clear monitoring framework of the progress towards them, have been scaled back compared to the previous framework that finished in 2020, which included a set of indicators and targets in the field of learning mobility. The European Commission has included a proposal for a Council Recommendation on a new Learning Mobility Framework in its Work Programme for 2023

The Erasmus+ programme, and mainly its mobilities in the field of Higher Education, have now become a normal part of the day to day life of the vast majority of Europe's Higher Education Institutions. This gives the

European Commission leverage to push harder in order to solve these long standing issues.

Since the competences of the EU in the field of education are limited, it is important to maximise the use of programme instruments to try to address existing problems. It is clear that **the programme acts as a soft policy instrument** in the internationalisation of HEIs that participate, but it can be stated that this implementation has lacked teeth in terms of the correction of mistakes done during the implementation of mobility projects. It is also clear that it has also sometimes lacked the tools to support those that might want to create new innovative yet easy to implement practices but lacked the resources to do so. Since it is important to build on existing tools, **the best possible approach is to reinforce the role of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education and its monitoring, in line with the commitments included in the European Strategy for Universities.**

The remarkable differences between countries in a number of parameters analysed in the survey, such as timing of grant payments or satisfaction with the services of Higher Education Institutions, show how much national policy making in internationalisation can matter. This can also be seen in the huge differences in participation rates in mobility opportunities among graduates shown in the [Education and Training monitor](#), with only a few countries actually reaching the previous target of 20% of Higher Education graduates having a mobility experience, while some Member States have participation rates below 10%.

As the number of students grows and the societal role of mobility becomes more important, it is crucial that national authorities develop measures to increase their support to student mobility, starting with, but not limited to, better financial support. Synergies between different authorities with a role in international student mobility are also quite important, since qualitative data from the ESNsurvey clearly shows that aspects such as visas and administrative processes with authorities remain an issue in the implementation of international study mobilities. In order to make mobility a reality for all, one of the objectives of the European Education Area A and the Strategic Framework, local and regional authorities should be further involved in aspects related to student support.

In that regard, it is worth pointing out that the latest policy developments in the European Union clearly show a tendency towards

more empowerment of National Authorities and National Agencies, with clearer roles being allocated to them in the [Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 Regulation](#) and the [Council Recommendation on Building bridges for effective Higher Education Cooperation](#). National authorities have a key role in the translation of European and international priorities to the national context. This is why, the aforementioned Learning Mobility Framework should offer guidance on how Member States can boost.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **The European Commission and the Council of the European Union should negotiate a new set of learning mobility targets and indicators as part of the new Council Recommendation on a learning mobility framework**, increasing the ambition in comparison with the ones approved in 2011. Targets should be used to improve data collection and monitoring, and to boost national and institutional efforts to improve participation rates in learning mobility across sectors. In line with the cross sectoral component of the upcoming Council Recommendation, the targets and indicators should cover all sectors, adapting to the different particularities of each one. The objective should be that by the end of the decade, a majority of young European can access mobility opportunities during their youth.
- **The European Commission and National Agencies should make Erasmus+ data from beneficiaries and final participants publicly available**, facilitating research and stakeholder analysis. An incredible valuable amount of data is collected through Erasmus+ tools, which have had a rocky start in the 21-27 programme. Only a small part of the most relevant data is shared through the Erasmus+ Annual report, making research on Erasmus+ more difficult. Documents such as the Erasmus+ participants report could contribute greatly to the work done by stakeholders, which could also adjust their own research projects to complement it.
- **The European Commission and National Agencies should consider the performance of Higher Education Institutions in Higher Education mobilities in the evaluation of their applications for other types of Erasmus+ project applications, as well as the monitoring of the implementation of these projects.** Cooperation initiatives such as the European University Alliances should be used a tool to improve the quality and quantity of Erasmus+ mobilities, and to solve issues in aspects such as funding, recognition or integration

in local communities. HEIs that face issues related to these aspects should be encouraged to apply for cooperation projects or other related initiatives in those areas.

- **The European Commission should consider a new type of qualitative Organisational Support (OS) that Universities can apply for when submitting their KA1 applications**, in order to foster the creation of innovative practices in line with ECHE commitments. This fund could complement the existing unit cost system, providing incentives to those Higher Education Institutions that are ready to implement new mobility support practices, without having to resort to a KA2 project.
- **The European Commission should increase its Human Resources in DG EAC working directly with the implementation of Erasmus+ mobilities in Higher Education.** The implementation of the priorities of the programme in its most famous and widespread action, Higher Education mobilities, requires sector specific support to National Agencies, beneficiaries and stakeholders. Propping up the human resources of the Erasmus+ team in the Higher Education Unit would be an important step to make sure the programme continues to live up to its objectives.
- **The European Commission, National Authorities and National Agencies should increase guidance and available information in the creation of synergies between EU funding sources**, such as the European Social Fund and other structural funds. More exploratory work should be done on the different possibilities of national and regional contributions to Erasmus+, mapping out the current contributions given by Member States and regions.

## 6. Financial conditions and quality Erasmus+ scholarships

The survey answers have clearly demonstrated that financial aspects remain as one of the key barriers to mobility, in line with the findings of the SIEM research report.<sup>32</sup> The majority of students need to use their savings, work during their mobilities or simply do not study abroad because of financial reasons. Given issues need to be addressed in a timely manner to make the mobility process inclusive.

32 [European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, \(2019\). Erasmus+ higher education impact study : final report, Publications Office.](#)

Students face three main issues related to finances and their mobilities. The study respondents have greatly focused on the issues related to grant amount and timing of the scholarship payment. Study shows that grants are too low compared to their cost of living, excluding from mobility students who can not afford co-financing the mobility. The opportunity cost related to the loss of a student's job or the uncertainty related to the costs makes the situation more difficult. Late grant payments also affect students from fewer opportunities backgrounds disproportionately, and they hamper a lack of clarity of their financial condition during the mobility. The national differences in the timing of the arrival of grant payments show that national policy making and monitoring are crucial to solve this issue. Since the timing of the grants does not require extra financial resources but just a rethinking of administrative processes, it should be a fundamental and urgent priority for all the parties involved.

If Erasmus is to become truly inclusive, financial contributions by national and regional authorities are key. **At the moment, there is no available data on the different contributions that the Member States make as co-financing to the Erasmus+ programme**, a necessary condition to understand the extent of the issues more and work on solving it. The importance of national, regional and local cofinancing to make the programme more inclusive can not be overstated, and should be included.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **The European Commission and National Agencies should introduce mechanisms to adapt Erasmus+ Scholarships to the economic instabilities, particularly inflation.** Besides, it is essential to further develop a scholarship system which increases the minimum grant rates and introduces top-ups based on the students' needs as well as the price of living in specific locations. The European Commission is well-positioned to provide direct guidance to National Agencies, national authorities and stakeholders on the possible synergies between funding programmes, such as the European Social Fund+.<sup>33</sup>
- **Higher Education Institutions should provide better access to information to students with fewer opportunities related to their additional support to participate in mobility.** Additionally,

33 [GIURI, Synergies between European Structural and Investment Funds and other EU funding programmes.](#)

considering the lack of applicability of the groups considered as 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.<sup>34</sup>

- **The European Commission, National Agencies and Higher Education Institutions should make the necessary adjustments at the respective levels to ensure that all students receive their Erasmus grants before the start of their mobility.** This requires adapting the grant agreement to clarify the conditions of receipt of the grant, ensuring that payments to National Agencies and Higher Education Institutions are done on time as well, and removing potential national or institutional administrative barriers that may hamper participation.
- **National Agencies and National Authorities should provide national and/or regional co-financing to all students to ensure better mobility grants** and encourage HEIs to adopt pre-departure payment schemes with all their exchange students, prioritising students from fewer opportunities backgrounds. They should also implement support measures for both outgoing and incoming students, either through grant support or in other frameworks.

## 7. Impact of mobility, Active citizenship, student involvement and outreach initiatives

Students should not be seen as mere beneficiaries of international experiences but as drivers of change, taking part in opportunities for the benefit of the whole student community and society at large. It is essential to ensure the long-lasting impact of mobility and encourage students as multipliers of societal change.

The ESNsurvey has identified the impacts of mobility, including student's increasing sense of belonging towards European values and identity. Besides, the students have expressed high interest in becoming active citizens via joining student associations, becoming mobility ambassadors or becoming a buddy or a mentor and helping outgoing and incoming students. In addition, the mobility experience has positively impacted the student's willingness to extend their involvement in international activities, including working, studying or volunteering abroad. When it comes to the interest towards international, European, national and local

34 [European Commission, Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility Handbook](#)

politics, students have demonstrated their increasing interest towards them, including global topics, such as human rights, environmental and climate change, and international conflicts.

As the data demonstrates, after mobility, students are willing to be more engaged and become active citizens to contribute to the development of their societies. They deserve to be granted the adequate environment and opportunities to put their passions and interests in practice.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **The European Commission and European Institutions should encourage the increasing interest of youth in policy cycles and incorporate students' involvement in the guidance related to the implementation and monitoring of ECHE commitment.**

Besides, building up on the passion and enthusiasm of the mobility students, it is key to maintain their participation in the international activities, for instance, prioritise capacity-building actions in student involvement through the TCAs and the work of the newly created SALTO centres, while maintaining the diverse and inclusive nature of internationalisation processes.

- **National Agencies and National Authorities are well-positioned and equipped to cooperate with youth and encourage 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 reinforce a spillover effect and encourage the development of more inclusive, diverse and sustainable erasmus experience and higher educational systems.
- **Higher Education Institutions should give a great emphasis on the increasing participation of students in their internationalisation activities.** In order to get there, HEIs should incorporate student involvement as a priority practice in the internationalisation strategy, receive constant feedback and recommendations from students, especially of the ones that took advantage of the erasmus+ mobility. HEIs should also encourage students to be active citizens, one of the ways to reach the goal is via fostering the recognition of civic engagement initiatives through ECTs, including references to it in the learning agreement and the diploma supplement. Besides, it is key to consider an overhaul of the learning agreement and add areas of

the non-formal elements from the Youthpass and boost the learning experience.

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# ABBREVIATIONS

- EC** - European Commission
- ESN** - Erasmus Student Network
- EU** - European Union
- EHEA** - European Higher Education Area
- ECHE** - Erasmus Charter for Higher Education
- GDP** - Gross Domestic Product
- HEI** - Higher Education Institution
- IRO** - International Relations Office
- NA** - National Agency
- R&D** - Research and Development
- LGBT+** - lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and more

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# ABOUT ESN

The Erasmus Student Network (ESN) is the biggest inter-disciplinary European student organisation in the field of mobility. ESN is a non-political, non-profit and non-religious organisation with over 15,000 volunteer members from local student groups (so-called sections) in more than 1,000 Higher Education Institutions in 41 countries. Supported by so-called buddies, ESN involves around 40,000 young people. ESN supports educational, social and cultural integration of international students and provides practical information for incoming and outgoing students about various exchange programmes. It was born on the 16th October 1989 and legally registered in 1990 for supporting and developing student exchange.

Furthermore, ESN provides intercultural experiences to students who cannot access a period abroad (internationalisation at home). The vision of ESN is the enrichment of society through international students – thus, ESN works to foster the mobility of students under the principle of Students Helping Students. The organisation provides its services annually to about 350,000 international students in Europe and beyond. ESN's activities comprise hundreds of projects developed at all levels.

[ESNsurvey](#) is a European-wide research project covering different topics concerning mobility and education. It is conducted annually and surveys students at higher education institutions, with an average response rate of 14,000 answers. Starting in 2005, the ESNsurvey is the biggest regular European research project planned and carried out entirely by students for students. So far, it has investigated the following topics – Experience of Studying Abroad (2005), Exchange Students' Rights (2006), Generation Mobility (2007), Exchanging Cultures (2008), Information for Exchange (2009), E-Value-ate Your Exchange (2010), Exchange, Employment and Added Value (2011), Exchange: Creating Ideas, Opportunities and Identity (2013), International Experience and Language Learning (2014) and Local integration, economic impact and accompanying measures in international mobility (2015), The International Friendliness of Universities (2016), Mapping the challenges and enablers of mobility for students with disabilities (2018), and finally, Active citizenship and student exchange in light of the European elections (2019).

The Erasmus Student Network is a full member of the European Youth

Forum and is a member of the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe. ESN is also a courtesy member of the European Association for International Education, a full member of the Informal Forum of International Student Organisations (IFISO), the European Movement International (EMI), the European Citizen Action Service (ECAS) and the Lifelong Learning Platform (LLLp).

# CONTACT

If you have any questions or would like to know more about ESN, please contact us directly at [secretariat@esn.org](mailto:secretariat@esn.org).

ESN AISBL  
Rue Joseph II, 120,  
1000 Brussels, Belgium

[www.esn.org](http://www.esn.org)

