Erasmus+
Review 2021-2022

Higher Education – student and staff mobility

EUF EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY FOUNDATION

ESN Erasmus Student Network

ESU EUROPEAN STUDENTS' UNION

Contents

Introduction

Enabling students to live abroad for several months, forge friendships with peers from across the continent and beyond, and become acquainted with societies and traditions other than their own gives them the opportunity to benefit from an experience that fosters tolerance and has a direct positive impact on society at large. Erasmus+ is a tangible expression of the European project, known by most young Europeans and valued by European citizens as one of the most successful achievements of the European Union.

In trying times affected by the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war led by Russia in Ukraine interrupting decades of relative peace on the European continent, the Erasmus+ programme appears more than ever as a stronghold for mutual understanding and a spearhead for modernising the European Higher Education Area.

The new Erasmus+ programming period started in 2021 and will last until 2027. While the previous Erasmus+ programming period (2014-2021) was hit hard by COVID-19 restrictions imposed on student mobility, the lifting of those gave extra momentum to the new period. The programme has been designed as "an evolution rather than a revolution" vis-à-vis its predecessors but it nonetheless introduces important changes and novelties, such as a stronger focus on several horizontal priorities like inclusion, sustainability, and digitalisation.

How does the new programme fare? How have its novelties been received? What improvements should be considered? The Erasmus Student Network (ESN), the European Student Union (ESU) and the European University Foundation (EUF) have again[1] joined forces to find answers to such questions from the point of view of both students and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). We aim to support the European Commission, the European Parliament, and all relevant stakeholders in the preparations for the mid-term review of Erasmus+ through an open and constructive discussion on how to best achieve the full potential of the programme.

[1] https://uni-foundation.eu/uploads/2015_erasmus_1_year_review.pdf

Key recommendations

Key recommendations to improve the transition between programming periods:

1. Better anticipate the start of a new programming period to prevent massive operational issues, as for the start of this programming period this forced HEIs and students to switch to crisis mode.

2. Ensure funding levels remain constant when transitioning between Multiannual Financial Framework programming periods, since disruption has a knock-on effect on thousands of institutions and hundreds of thousands of students.

Key recommendation to support the green transition:

3. Increase the green travel grant top-up to 250 EUR to enable travel passes, like Interrail, and make green travel the rule rather than the exception in Erasmus+.

Key recommendations to support the management of the mobility programme:

4. Step up the support for HEIs to complete the digitisation process underway in the context of the European Student Card Initiative and ensure continued adhesion and support of and by the community.

5. Ensure the reporting tools of the programme respond to the business requirements laid out in the Erasmus+ programme guide to avoid 'a posteriori' issues for institutions and students.

6. Monitor the implementation of Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs) - notably with regards to their digital component - and ensure that this new mobility format does not hinder participation in longer credit mobility by decreasing available resources.

Key recommendations to improve the quality of study and training periods abroad:

7. Increase monitoring actions to decrease cases of (partial) non-recognition of study results achieved abroad and strive towards automatic recognition, notably by nudging European University alliances to complete this well ahead of 2025

8. Strive towards increasing the quality of Erasmus+ traineeships by creating an evaluation mechanism of hosting institutions.

9. Assess the possibility of financially supporting the introduction of intensive language courses by the host institutions to complement the available online language courses.

Key recommendations to improve the inclusion dimension of Erasmus+:

10. Consider establishing European scholarship schemes for students at risk in order to facilitate the support for students fleeing countries where they are exposed to danger.

11. Revise the way grant levels are defined to better fit the needs of the students and the socio-economic realities of their destinations.

Addressing the priorities of the programme

Making Erasmus+ carbon neutral

Making the Erasmus programme greener is one of the overarching priorities of the current programming period, and a lot needs to happen on this front to make this vision a reality.

[2] https://erasmus500.eu
[3] https://www.greenerasmus.org/#petition

During the first two years of the programme a "green top-up" of 50 EUR has been made available to participants choosing more sustainable means of transportation to and from their destinations. This is a welcome measure, although clearly insufficient to be significantly impactful. Furthermore, it remains a burdensome administrative task for HEIs to manage the reporting process in light of the limited grant amount available per top-up. We believe the reporting on the means of transportation used should be done by the students themselves during their final report and not by the institutions in the Beneficiary Module. This means that students should automatically be granted the green top-up when asking for it and declare it during their final report. In cases where this proof is not provided, we suggest that the amount is deducted from the final instalment of the grant payment.

In the context of the Erasmus 500[2] campaign, we have stressed the transformational impact of equipping all Erasmus+ students with an interrail-like travel pass to and from their destination. Until this is a reality, the Green Erasmus project (of which ESN, ESU and EUF are all partners) has launched a Green Erasmus petition[3], which advocates for a higher top-up grant of up to 250 EUR and up to seven days of travel support. Erasmus+ is essentially a journey of discovery of oneself, and this would ensure that academic exchanges are also a journey of discovery through the history and culture of Europe and a driving force behind the adhesion to the notion of a European citizenship. With the climate emergency and energy crisis only becoming more acute, this would make a tangible contribution to decreasing the amount of intra-European flights and reassure participants that they are participating in an initiative that is truly aligned with their values and concerns.

Making Erasmus more inclusive

Grant levels

One of the most important policy priorities that shape the 2021-2027 programming period is the goal of making Erasmus+ more inclusive - a goal we fully support. The single biggest deterrent to participation in mobility among non-mobile participants is the insufficient level of funding provided, as categorically demonstrated in the SIEM research[4] and the Bologna with Student Eyes[5] reports. The findings from the ESNsurvey[6] also show that over 50% of students participating in intra-European mobility can cover less than 50% of their expenses with their scholarship (see Graphic 1). The impact of such constraints among students with fewer opportunities is even higher (as also shown in the SIEM research report). Accordingly, improving this vital architectural aspect of the programme must be a political priority for the European Commission and National Authorities.

In spite of this challenging situation, the new programme has brought relatively few changes with regards to the grants received by mobile students. We welcome the increased social top-up for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, but such top-up benefits only
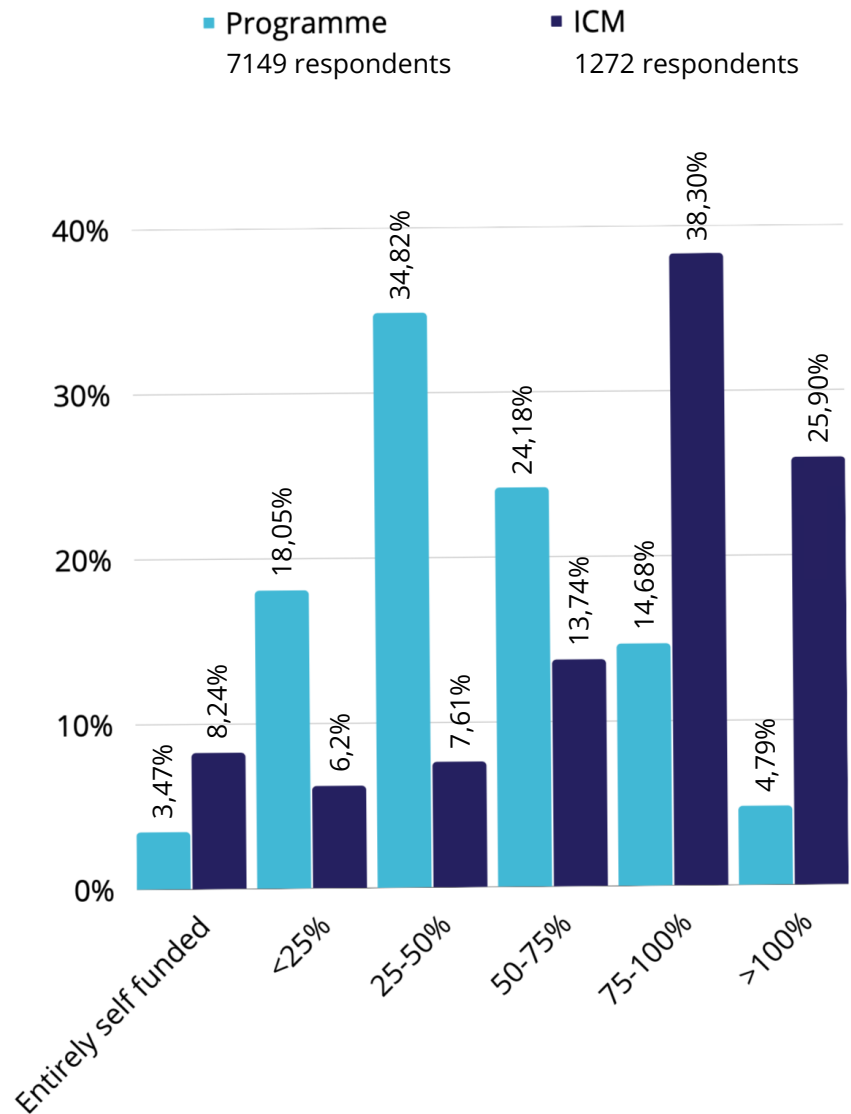
10% of the mobile learners[7] and the figure includes participants from outermost regions and is therefore reflecting a higher level of inclusion efforts for socio-economically disadvantaged students than it is the case in reality. We also welcome the 12% increase in grant spans announced by Commissioner Gabriel in November 2022. We hope this constitutes a first and important step towards a mechanism which ensures Erasmus+ grants keep up with inflation through a minimum automatic adjustment process; however, it should be noted that the current architecture of Erasmus grants does not mean that adjustments to the ranges directly translate into an increase of the grants. Indeed, recent months saw both increases and decreases of the rates stipulated by National Agencies, according to DG EAC's own data.

[4] https://siem-project.eu/documents/SIEM-survey-report_2022_10.pdf

[5] https://esu-online.org/bologna-with-student-eyes-2020/

[6] https://esn.org/esnsurvey

[7] See page 8 of Erasmus+ Annual Report 2021: https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ff16650b-7b6e-11ed-9887-01aa75ed71a1

Legend:
- Programme — 7149 respondents
- ICM — 1272 respondents

Category	Programme	ICM
Entirely self funded	3,47%	8,24%
<25%	18,05%	6,2%
25-50%	34,82%	7,61%
50-75%	24,18%	13,74%
75-100%	14,68%	38,30%
>100%	4,79%	25,90%

Graphic 1 - Percentage of costs covered by Erasmus+ grants when studying abroad, ESN Survey 2021.

For all these reasons, we believe more must be done to ensure all students can afford the possibility of studying abroad, and in light of the above it is impossible not to advocate for a more profound change in the way grant levels are established to make the programme more inclusive. A powerful way to achieve this is to index – at least to so some extent - grant levels to the costs of living of the destination cities/regions[8]. It is a well-known fact that costs of living often differ substantially within a country. Currently, most National Agencies set the exact grant amounts for the low, medium and high grants within the span indicated by the EC, which results in the fact that a student coming from the lowest living costs group of countries and going to either the medium or the high living cost group will receive the same amount of grant in both cases[9]. This bears little relation with the actual needs and circumstances of such mobilities, meaning the grants levels are neither fit to adequately support students nor geared towards maximising efficiency on how public resources ought to be used.

Indexing grants to actual living costs at the city/regional level could eventually be combined with the proposal put forth during the Erasmus 500 campaign[10], which defended the establishment of a baseline European grant for all students studying abroad in Europe. This is of enormous symbolic and practical value:

in addition to paving the way for an important simplification of payment processes, it would also help do away with the innate contradiction of establishing true European Universities while having to resort to mobility grants whose design remains rooted in a national logic. Given that ensuring broader participation in mobility is one of the transversal priorities of the Erasmus+ programme, it is critical to see concrete improvements in the remaining years of the current MFF that go beyond merely keeping up with high inflation. If profound (and much needed) changes must wait until the next programming period, a concrete step that should be considered at once is giving universities the tools and the flexibility to set their mobility grants in such a way that more accurately reflect the socio-economic reality of their partner institutions, while remaining within the ranges stipulated by European Commission.

[8] Currently the grant levels are based on three country groups.

[9] As described on the Erasmus+ programme 2023, page 66: https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-12/Erasmus%2BProgramme-Guide2023-v2_en.pdf

[10] https://erasmus500.eu
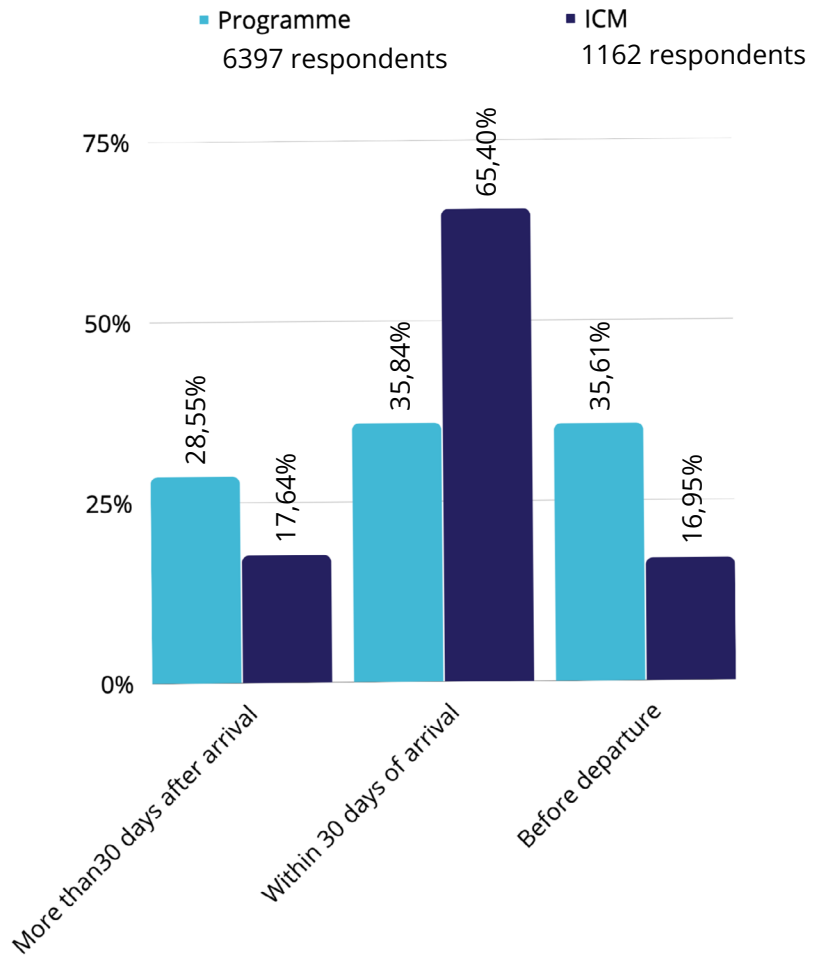
Graphic 2 - Percentage of schedule of grant payment.

Timing of the grant payments

Based on the findings of the SIEM research report, advancing initial costs is a key challenge for mobile students. The data from the ESNsurvey 2021[11] show that more than a quarters students report receiving their grants later than one month after the start of their mobilities, with around one third reporting receiving the grant before the start and 40% within one month. Differences between countries of origin are stark: in Spain, more than half report receiving their grant later than one month after the start of mobility, followed by France and Italy with students reporting this at respectively 47% and 32%. It is important to note that the size of the country and the number of mobilities is not the key determining factor in whether grant payments are made in a timely fashion: in Germany, only 16% of outgoing students report receiving their grants later than one month after the start of their mobility. This points to the importance of national and institutional policymaking to ensure that all students receive their grants on time. Changing the grant agreement, which is a legally binding document, could be a key step to offer clear assurances to students about the timing in which they will receive their grants.

Bringing Erasmus+ into the digital age

Enhancing the student experience and streamlining the administration of mobilities has been a longstanding goal of the Erasmus+ community, and one of the overarching priorities of the programme.

With regards to improving the student experience, important enhancements have been made to the Erasmus+ App[12], which is increasingly regarded as a single point of entry for this cohort. In 2020-2022, the existing App was thoroughly renewed and expanded by Eötvös Loránd University, ESN and EUF, offering a wide range of functionalities that guide, support and accompany all participants in a mobility experience. The current work provides a good basis for simplifying and improving their mobility experience further, i.e. by making it the single point for sharing feedback and enhancing quality assurance.

Conversely, the Erasmus Without Paper (EWP) initiative[13], which forms the interoperability backbone linking HEIs, saw its development stopped in 2019 and it was only resumed in early 2022. The fact that the new programme could not fully benefit from the advantages that EWP brings to International Relation

Offices amounts to a huge opportunity cost which engenders considerable frustration within the Higher Education (HE) community[14]. Looking ahead, we believe that current steps to reinforce support and communication measures towards HEIs are an important vector to implement the change management process that is underway and that involves thousands of staff members from HEIs, while also extending the capacity of the digital infrastructure to host an increasingly large number of users and use cases. As 2022 marks the 10th anniversary of EWP, we also emphasise that the community-driven approach of this digital transformation process has been a key factor of success which should be nurtured in a continued and considerate manner.

In addition to ensuring that both the Erasmus+ App and EWP are developed further and their full potential is reached, additional advantages can be derived from the integration of such systems with the likes of the EU Academy[15] and the Beneficiary Module [16].

[11] https://esn.org/esnsurvey
[12] https://erasmusapp.eu
[13] https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/european-student-card-initiative/ewp
[14] https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/news/latest-erasmus-without-paper-assessment-shows-ewp-works-but-some-connections-have-problems
[15] https://academy.europa.eu
[16] https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-esc/index/

Administration of the programme

Start of the new programme and funding bottleneck

The Erasmus+ regulation 2021-2027 was approved with a considerable delay, following a late approval of the whole Multiannual Financial Framework of the European Union. This has constrained the start of the new programme in many countries, bringing about an untenable funding situation among HEIs and, ultimately, students. Reports indicate that some universities saw early cuts of up to 34% year on year[17]. To add to this difficulty, the signature of the funding contracts was delayed[18] across many programme countries, with many universities only seeing the funding for the academic year 2021/2022 approved and formalised during the fall of 2021. Together with the other members of the Erasmus+ coalition, we published a joint statement in December 2021[19], expressing concerns about the situation and proposing a set of measures that could be taken in the short and mid term to mitigate the impact and avoid similar situations in the future.

The consequences of such a difficult start of the new programme range from students receiving their grants (much) later than planned to students seeing their mobility period cancelled. To mitigate such a situation, HEIs needed to identify mitigation mechanisms, whereby in some cases they had to reallocate internal financial resources; in other cases, national authorities stepped in with emergency funding, and in some other cases staff mobility was put on hold to give priority to student exchanges.

The fact that it was assumed that leftovers from the previous programming funding could cover the funding gap led to a situation where HEIs had to juggle parallel funding lines, which resulted in delicate situations where students in equal conditions received different grant amounts, jeopardising the principle of equal treatment.

Chief among the lessons that ought to inform future planning from the Commission is the notion that funding levels cannot vary wildly between the end of the last year of a programming period and the first of a new one. We advocate for a principle of continued and stable funding allocation for a programme that involves thousands of institutions. More specifically, we recommend considering a 7+1-year approach where the previous programme covers for the funding of the first year in the new programming period. We also advocate for an earlier announcement of new programmes, regulations and budgets to allow stakeholders (such as National Agencies and HEIs) to inform their respective target groups in advance. This could prompt a revision of TFEU (art 312)[20] to add clear deadlines, which are currently in place for the annual budget only; this will make sure that HEIs can roll out or discontinue programme features in a timely manner without having to turn into crisis mode for several months.

[17] https://franceuniversites.fr/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Baisse-des-subventions-du-programme-ERASMUS-La-CPU-demande-des-clarifications-urgentes.pdf
[18] https://uni-foundation.eu/funding-bottleneck-erasmus/
[19] https://lllplatform.eu/news/statement-erasmus-coalition-students-and-higher-education-institutions-ask-for-solutions-to-the-administrative-problems-of-the-new-erasmus-programme/
[20] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12016E312

Administration and reporting issues

The introduction of the [Beneficiary Module](#) [21] has been tumultuous, jeopardising reporting duties to an extent that at times it has affected the completion of grant payments. The inability to activate certain reporting functionalities (i.e. Blended Intensive Programmes) or simply not to respond/load properly rendered its usage difficult - if not impossible at times - and required HEIs to implement a shadow administration system internally until reporting options become available. We do recommend testing such tools at scale before introducing them to the entire HEI community.

We welcome the introduction of standardised management procedures for project applications, funding management and reporting. However, the introduction of the lump sum funding model for Collaboration Projects, alongside the return of the real-cost funding scheme for the Civil Society Cooperation grants, sent mixed messages to the potential applicants and did not necessarily reduce the workload required to manage such activities when the full project lifecycle is considered (from initiation to the reporting phase).

Mobility is at the core of Erasmus+ and of the internationalisation strategies of HEIs, as it is the most tangible way to connect the student population with peers from all over the world. The performance of HEIs in their ECHE commitments should be considered in the evaluation of cooperation projects, so that HEIs have increased interest in meeting the principles outlined in the charter.

Staff skills and competences

International cooperation activities in general, and the Erasmus+ programme in particular, are becoming larger, more sophisticated, and complex. Consequently, expectations towards staff members working in international relations are increasing, especially with respect to their ability to master topics like the digital and green transitions, quality assurance, automatic recognition, and advanced international project management.

Understanding the evolution of the requirements and expectations that define the daily work of International Relation Offices is thus essential for HEIs that, in an increasingly interconnected world, can ill afford to not put international cooperation front and centre. In turn, newer policy objectives such as the European Education Area also rely on HEIs, which are intrinsically internationally-minded.

The successful planning and execution of a comprehensive internationalisation strategy relies on the ability to ensure that staff members performing work in international relations or adjacent fields possess the adequate skills and competences, which must be continuously updated.

The premise that International Relation Officers are a critical success factor for the correct implementation of increasingly larger and diversified budget lines (including funds from the External Action service) and for enhancing the quality of student mobility inspired initiatives that sought to map and address the needs of staff working with and for mobile students; this is notably the case of the FESC project [22] (2018-2021), whose deliverables include an Erasmus staff competences framework [23].

While the development of staff competences in the field of internationalisation is a relatively recent subject, it is becoming clear that two parallel conversations will only become more relevant in the future. One focuses on what steps can be taken to avoid the risks inherent to a non-structured "learning on the job" approach. Another is whether, from a mid-term perspective, institutions which are responsible for a certain volume of Erasmus+ funding should be able to demonstrate that

they pursue a strategy to train and retain International Relation Officers to provide quality guarantees for the execution of the programme.

[21] https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-esc/index/
[22] https://fesc-project.eu
[23] https://fesc-project.eu/framework/grouped

Mobility features

Blended intensive programmes

The new programme brings along two important novelties: the possibility to undertake much shorter mobilities than before and the option to organise Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs).

BIPs for students

The BIPs are a welcome addition, effectively reversing the unfortunate decision made in 2014 to exclude summer/winter schools from the list of eligible Erasmus+ activities. HEIs have indeed decided to engage with BIPs in numbers despite the funding issues at the start of the programme. This new learning mobility format has brought its own set of challenges – for instance, how to embed BIPs within study programmes to award credits, ensure recognition, identify best partners for building a BIP, structure business process flows to scale the organisation of BIPs – and solving those will in return inform further enhancements of the scheme.

However, the introduction of such shorter mobilities comes with a set of broader issues that will require monitoring. Although there is merit in establishing avenues that allow students who could not otherwise partake in semester or yearly mobilities to get an impression of the essence of Erasmus+, it also stands to reason that such mobility arrangements have a proportionally higher carbon footprint. Furthermore, stakeholders have warned against the risk of establishing a 1st vs 2nd class dynamics where students are driven towards shorter mobilities owing to inadequate support (or a desire to boost participation statistics [24]).

It is therefore clear that these new mobility formats should be seen as an addition to the internationalisation offer of HEIs, rather than a substitution: the SIEM project[25] has found that 83% of students disagree or strongly disagree that duration of mobility is too long when asked about obstacles to mobility. Furthermore, research carried out in the HLiTL project [26] stressed that participation in BIPs cannot realistically be expected to replace the kind of skills and competences developed during

longer mobility periods; instead, BIPs are ideal to complement more immersive international activities and further innovative teaching and learning. In that sense, BIPs can be used to provide internationalisation opportunities to students in their first years of HE, acting as a stepping stone towards long-term mobility or broader international engagement. They should prioritise interaction among students during both the online part and the physical mobility and have a clear flow that helps students to develop their collaborative online skills.

A lot of work thus remains to be done to make the most of BIPs, both in terms of uptake and ensuring it will not be used in a way that limits the further growth of longer quality mobility. The emergence of a quality framework for blended mobility could provide guidance regarding the ideal duration of the mobility components, which current research [27] situates at around 3 or more weeks. We also recommend assessing how the digital learning component has been received by learners and the various formats of implementation used. Eventually, the minimum number of participants of 15 learners for the BIPs puts some of the trainings at risk of not being funded in situations where some participants are obliged to cancel their participation for whatever reason. We therefore recommend introducing a greater flexibility for this minimum threshold.

[24] Joint position paper by the European Students Union and the Erasmus Student Network: https://www.esn.org/news/esu-esn-position-paper-mobility-virtual-exchange-blended-learning

[25] https://siem-project.eu/documents/SIEM_Research_Report_2021_03.pdf

[26] https://uni-foundation.eu/uploads/2022_HLITL_Policy%20recommendations_FINAL.pdf

[27] https://uni-foundation.eu/uploads/2022_HLITL_Policy%20recommendations_FINAL.pdf

Language learning

The renewed online language learning offer of the European Commission has been launched in July 2022 and the course content has been embedded in the EU Academy [28] platform. We welcome the open access policy that has been adopted by the European Commission for these language courses – this is a major step forward from the 2014-2021 situation. However, the fact this comes at the expense of the tutors that used to accompany students in their learning activities is simply unacceptable and suggests that promoting multilingualism is something the programme no longer attaches serious importance to.

While it is too early to assess the user-friendliness and impact of the new learning courses, we recommend assessing the added value of these courses and allocating funding to ensure that these introductory online courses are complemented with more advanced, intensive physical courses, as offered already by several HEIs. This would truly build upon the very encouraging results produced by the pilot programme implemented by the Campus Europae [29] flagship project until 2014, which combined online language classes with physical intensive courses.
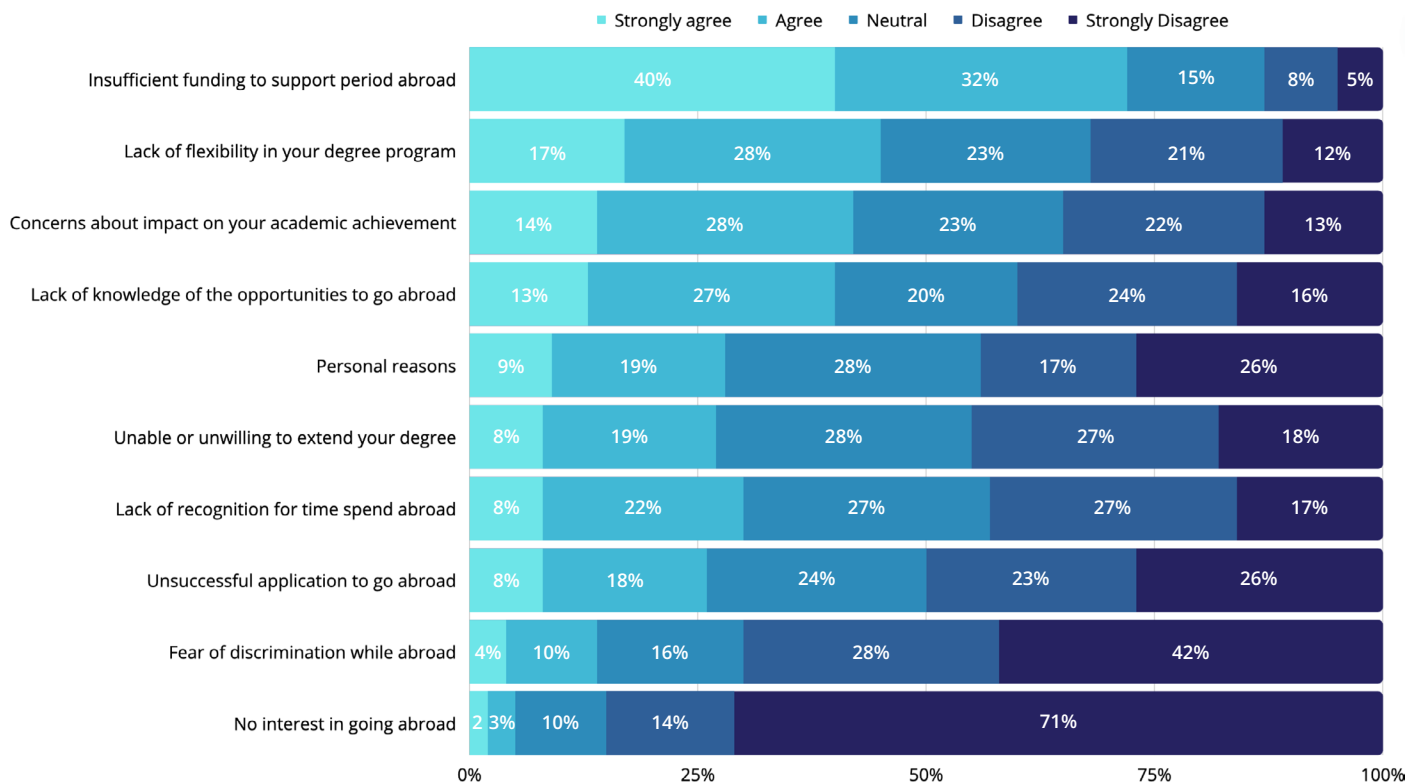
Recognition

Recognition continues to be one of the main problems impacting almost every aspect of the Erasmus experience, affecting both the access, the experience itself and the reintegration process. Data from the ESN Survey 2021[30] again demonstrated that potential recognition and problems with the flexibility in the degree programme are among the top three reasons preventing students from studying abroad (see Graphic 3). The SIEM research report shows that problems related to lack of flexibility in degree structure affect students from fewer opportunities backgrounds more directly than their peers.

[28] https://academy.europa.eu/local/euacademy/pages/course/community-overview.php?title=learn-the-basics-of-[22]-languages-with-the-online-language-support

[29] www.campuseuropae.org

[30] https://www.esn.org/ESNsurvey

Graphic 3 - Non-mobile students' blocking factors to go abroad, ESNsurvey 2021.

Legend: Strongly agree · Agree · Neutral · Disagree · Strongly Disagree

Factor	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Insufficient funding to support period abroad	40%	32%	15%	8%	5%
Lack of flexibility in your degree program	17%	28%	23%	21%	12%
Concerns about impact on your academic achievement	14%	28%	23%	22%	13%
Lack of knowledge of the opportunities to go abroad	13%	27%	20%	24%	16%
Personal reasons	9%	19%	28%	17%	26%
Unable or unwilling to extend your degree	8%	19%	28%	27%	18%
Lack of recognition for time spend abroad	8%	22%	27%	27%	17%
Unsuccessful application to go abroad	8%	18%	24%	23%	26%
Fear of discrimination while abroad	4%	10%	16%	28%	42%
No interest in going abroad	2%	3%	10%	14%	71%

The Erasmus Charter for Higher Education monitoring carried out by National Agencies should become stricter over the new cycle to ensure that recognition procedures are implemented, including more qualitative components to get a better understanding of the experiences of students. We further suggest that continued participation in new ambitious collaborative programmes such as European University Alliances should be conditioned to levels of automatic recognition[31], in order to reinforce the institutional importance of these processes. These recommendations are based on the results of the ESNsurvey 2021 where less than 73% of students reported full recognition of their studies abroad (see Graphic 4).

The Erasmus+ App should also become a clear tool to channel possible complaints and challenges encountered by students, offering the opportunity to share this information with relevant stakeholder organisations, incl. student representative organisations.
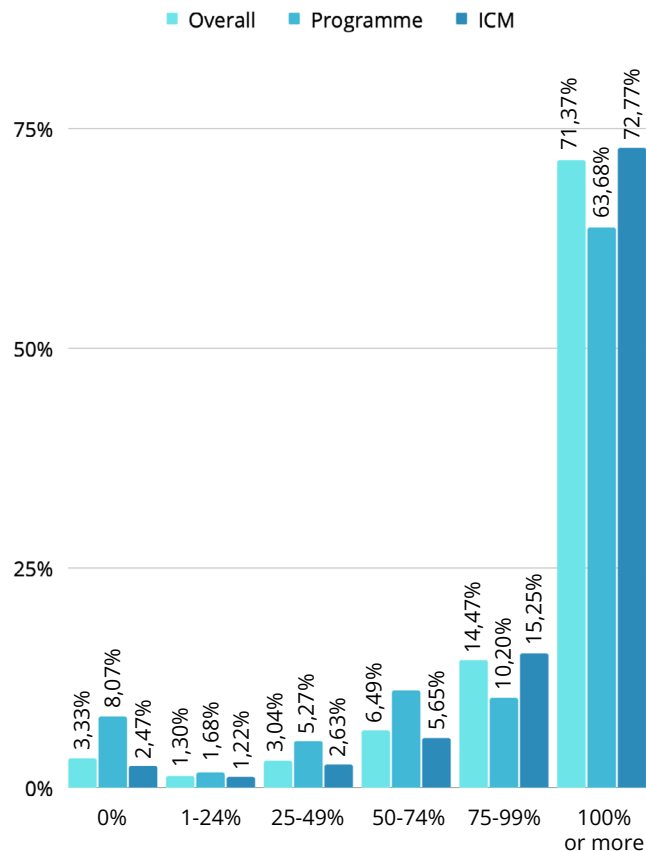
Graphic 4 - Recognition of studies abroad, ESNsurvey 2021. Note: overall sample and distribution by mobility type ($N_{OVERALL}$ = 5,791, $N_{PROGRAMME}$ = 4,899, $N_{PROGRAMME}$ = 892).

[31] 2018 Council Recommendation on automatic recognition: https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/inclusive-and-connected-higher-education/automatic-recognition-of-qualifications

Staff mobility

While advancing student mobility in Europe is generally recognised as one of the primary successes of the Erasmus+ programme, this same success has not yet been achieved to a comparable extent with regards to the mobility of academic and administrative staff. Participation of faculty and staff in mobility is useful not just in and out of itself, in that it plays a vital role in furthering the internationalisation of HE systems and contributing to their modernisation; it can also be seen as a powerful catalyst for "turbocharging" student participation in mobility, by having actors with first-hand experience in Erasmus+ promoting it to students to an even greater extent than what is possible today.

Recognition

To further increase interest and benefits of staff mobility (for teaching[32], staff training or job shadowing), institutions should be further encouraged to embed such mobility options in their Human Resource policies and practices and notably count such activities towards career progression of staff members.

Funding

The funding available for staff mobility is often not sufficient to encourage more staff members to participate in a mobility programme. Moreover, the grant supporting travel and subsistence costs can be subject to taxation depending on national regulations (e.g. in Spain). This unfortunately discourages a larger number of staff members from participating in staff mobility.

Mobility targets

We recommend that the European authorities consult stakeholder organisations about setting ambitious mobility targets that ought to be followed with appropriate funding allocation and institutional strategies ensuring that most of their staff members have undertaken a staff mobility. This is also aimed at making sure staff mobility options are widely available and also support junior staff members in building their international networks and experience.

[32] As outlined in the Teaching With Erasmus+ policy recommendations: https://www.canva.com/design/DAEizBMct-A/Va6kuS-NLuROFZUF02yS6A/view?utm_content=DAEizBMct-A&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=viewer

Erasmus+ traineeships

Erasmus+ traineeships are an extremely valuable part of the Erasmus+ programme, and the interest among students has increased constantly. More recently, the Commission has included references to Erasmus+ traineeships in the new European Strategy for Universities, including a benchmark of 100,000 traineeships per year. The programme 2014-2020 proved that Erasmus traineeships require dedicated support measures to ensure the best experience possible for all participants, notably regarding the following aspects:
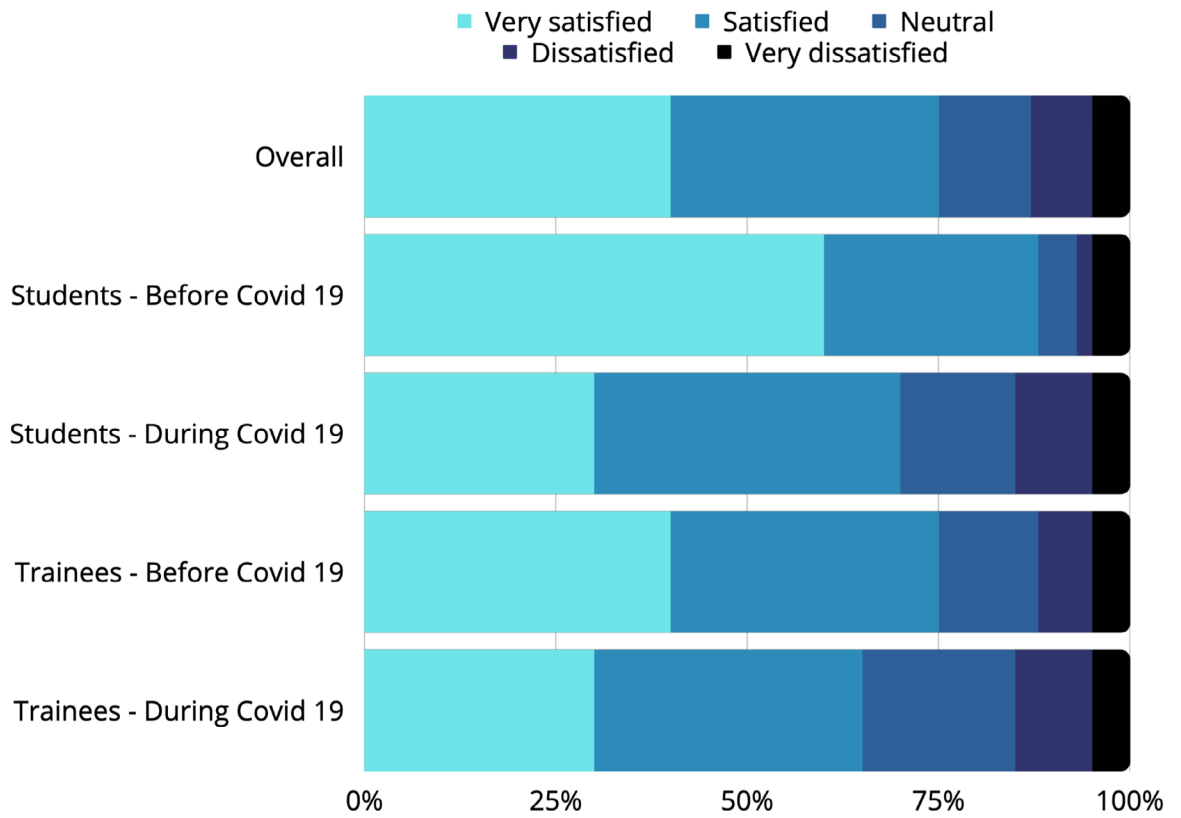
Satisfaction with social life

The results of the ESNsurvey 2021[33] show that Erasmus+ trainees report significantly lower satisfaction with their social life compared to participants in Erasmus+ study mobility. Trainees struggle to get access to the same support services as their peers doing study mobilities, such as welcome weeks or buddy systems. On the ground, student unions and student organisations support trainees just like they support students but reaching out to them is more difficult. We recommend a greater focus on providing support measures for trainees, involving HEIs present in cities where the trainees are going and facilitating access to information provided by local student associations through the Erasmusintern.

org platform and the Erasmus+ App. We also advocate for the full implementation of the European Student Card to give Erasmus+ trainees access to student services in their host cities, including services hosted by HEIs.

Language preparation

While traineeships under the Erasmus+ programme have become more popular over the past years, they remain an underused possibility. One reason is that the inadequate language proficiency of the students or graduates prevents them from fully benefiting from the learning experience. The current language preparation courses offered through EU Academy only focus on beginner levels and are therefore insufficient to remove this language obstacle. Language and cultural skills are essential for exchange students to navigate different cultural landscapes, and even more important when mediating their professional integration abroad.

[33] https://www.esn.org/ESNsurvey

Graphic 5 - Satisfaction with social life of exchange students, ESNsurvey 2021.

Need for increased quality checks and support for hosting organisations

Hosting organisations are de facto the most important factor in the quality of the traineeship experience of Erasmus+ trainees. There is a lack of monitoring measures related to the quality of the experiences provided by these hosting organisations and a lack of capacity building and guidance measures on how to provide quality traineeship experiences.

We therefore recommend that hosting organisations be required to sign a quality charter that defines the quality standards to be met by hosting organisations, in line with the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education. The Erasmus+ trainees should then be invited to evaluate whether the hosting organisation has met the principles outlined in the quality charter when filling out the beneficiary report. Hosting organisations could also be required to acquire a PIC code when signing the quality charter (this could be a digital process) and the participant final questionnaire could be linked to the PIC code of the host organisation. Furthermore, in the context of ensuring high-quality traineeships, it is also important to ensure regular monitoring by the home institution.

Administration and support

In line with the recommendations above, we propose to expand the Erasmusintern.org platform to become the key platform for the management of the traineeship agreements. Expanding the platform will create more opportunities for trainees to share their experiences and to connect with student organisations that can support them during their exchanges.

Funding

Finally, in some countries students are asked to take out a third-party liability insurance policy ahead of their traineeship - which sometimes costs a considerable amount of money, making participation difficult for students. We therefore recommend that such liability insurances should be covered by the host organisations. We also recommend that National Authorities put in place regulations that lead host institutions to co-fund such traineeships, which would help enhance quality and, critically, afford more students the opportunity to participate.

International dimension of the programme

The two funding lines under the internal and external policy funds are a welcome opportunity for HEIs to open up mobility opportunities on a global scale. The fact that internal policy funds only support outbound mobility results in a situation where external policy funds are often used to fund only incoming mobilities. Simplifying the framework by making both options available under both funding lines would therefore be a welcome development.

We note as well that the efforts made to welcome Ukrainian refugees have been hampered by the fact that this was enabled using the regular mobility funds allocated to the HEIs for their ongoing exchanges. As a result, we highly recommend to consider the call for establishing a European scholarship scheme for students[34] at risk supported by the European Students' Union.

In addition, we call for re-integrating Switzerland and the United Kingdom back into the Erasmus+ programme as programme countries and not international partners. The fact that both countries have been excluded from the programme is the result of political processes that have been underpinned by lack of mutual understanding and considerations for the common future of Europe as a continent. The Erasmus+ programme strives to build mutual understanding and is therefore the most adequate response to ensure that future generations will be in the best position to take appropriate decisions for the future of their countries – which has been proven by the generational gap of the Brexit vote, whereby more senior British citizens did not have the opportunity to travel the world as their younger counterparts have nowadays[35].

[34] https://futureu.europa.eu/pl/processes/Education/f/36/proposals/129163
[35] https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-36619342

The need for a better and more inclusive governance of Erasmus+

The Erasmus+ programme involves a wide variety of stakeholders, complex processes and financial rules. All organisations and bodies in charge of its implementation should follow basic principles of good governance. A high level of democracy, transparency and accountability should be respected by the European Commission, the Executive Agency, National Agencies and HEIs to ensure the most cost-effective processes and to best serve the interest of the final beneficiaries, namely students and staff, across all Europe. Within National Agencies and European Commission programme committees, the inclusion of stakeholders would allow both students and stakeholders to voice their concerns and suggestions on how the programme is implemented.

About the authors

The European Students' Union (ESU) is the umbrella organisation of 45 National Unions of Students (NUS) from 40 countries. The aim of ESU is to represent and promote the educational, social, economic and cultural interests of students at the European level towards all relevant bodies and in particular the European Union, Bologna Follow Up Group, Council of Europe and UNESCO. Through its members, ESU represents almost 20 million students in Europe.

https://esu-online.org

The European University Foundation (EUF) aims to accelerate the modernisation of the European Higher Education Area. The Foundation focuses its action on five pillars and it stands for diversity and social fairness in Higher Education. The network membership counts on over 70 HEIs spread across 29 countries of the European continent.

https://uni-foundation.eu

ESN

Erasmus Student Network

Erasmus Student Network (ESN) is a non-profit international student organisation. Its mission is to represent international students, thus providing opportunities for cultural understanding and self-development under the principle of Students Helping Students.

https:// esn.org

Reference initiatives

The "Erasmus for All" project aims to tackle the low levels of HE student participation in Erasmus mobility exchange by proposing a more economically viable scholarship scheme that will allow any HE students to spend part of their studies abroad in any of the 33 programme countries.

https://www.up.pt/erasmus-for-all/

The SIEM project aimed to make the Erasmus+ programme more inclusive and to increase the interaction between international students and local communities.

https://siem-project.eu/

The Green Erasmus project strives to improve the environmental sustainability of the Erasmus programme.

https://www.greenerasmus.org

The Erasmus Goes Green (EGG) project aimed to increase environmental awareness of mobility and to encourage more sustainable internationalisation strategies.

https://www.egg-project-eu.uvsq.fr

The Million of Erasmus Grants (MEGA) project's ambition is to create and develop a digital tool that will simplify the management of Erasmus+ mobility grants at university level and secure the payment of these grants to the students concerned, both in terms of accuracy and calendar.

https://projects.uni-foundation.eu/mega/

The aim of the TWE+ project was to create an online "marketplace" for teaching staff to facilitate, encourage, and promote teachers' mobility across Europe and provide a framework/guidance for teaching mobility.

https://uni-foundation.eu/project/twe/
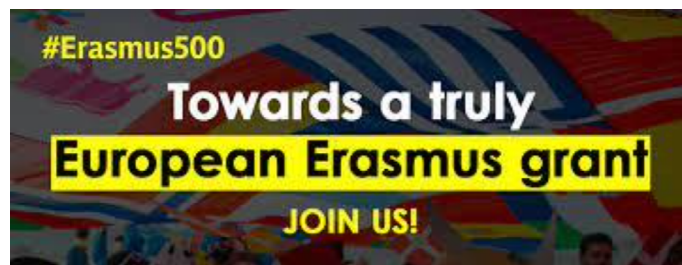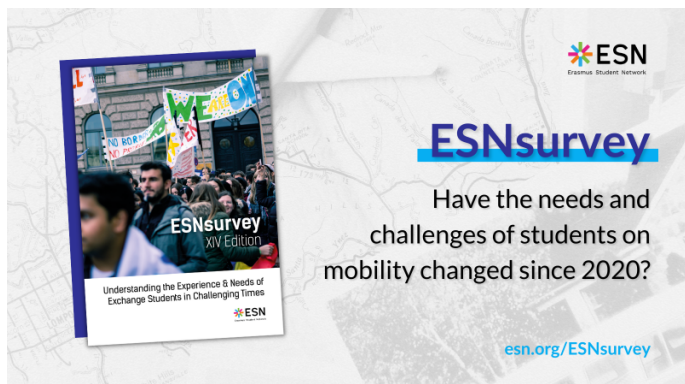
The ESNsurvey is a Europe-wide research project covering different topics concerning mobility and education. It is the largest project of its kind carried out solely by volunteers. Every year since the establishment of the project in 2005, the ESNsurvey team develops an online questionnaire and disseminates it among students at European HEIs to collect information about students' experiences from their exchange period abroad.

https://esn.org/ESNsurvey

The Erasmus500 campaign came to an end in December 2020 after 8 months of raising awareness of the ideas embodied in the Erasmus500 declaration. The European University Foundation, the Erasmus Student Network and the European Students' Union would like to thank all universities, student organisations, networks, students and stakeholders for their support!

https://erasmus500.eu

Bologna with Student Eyes is a reality-check of what has been agreed upon by national governments within the Bologna Process and what the actual situation is for students.

https://esu-online.org/bologna-with-student-eyes-2020/