



INTERNATIONAL STUDENT HOUSING:

How are exchange students in Europe
navigating the housing crisis?

Research report by the European Students Union and the Erasmus Student Network

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Introduction

This research report is the product of a collaboration between the European Students' Union and the Erasmus Student Network. The report analyses the findings of a snap survey launched in early November 2022, which came after several reports from students across Europe regarding the challenging housing conditions they were experiencing in the first months of their exchanges.

The survey was launched with the objective of collecting evidence on the housing situation of students doing their exchanges across Europe, in order to provide Higher Education Institutions and policymakers with an evidence based assessment of the situation, and to propose new initiatives that could help to tackle existing challenges.

The survey was remarkably successful, collecting more than 8000 answers from across Europe in less than 1 month. This great outreach was only possible thanks to the support provided by Higher Education Institutions, Erasmus+ National Agencies, National Unions of Students' and other stakeholders such as University networks.

Since the end of the data collection in December 2022, both organisations have engaged with a number of institutions and policymakers to ensure that the findings of the survey are considered in the discussions at the European, national and institutional level related to student mobility.

Limitations of the Research

The international student housing survey was carried out by two student-led organisations, ESU and ESN, and not by a professional team of researchers. The objective of the survey is to provide evidence in order to inform the discussions around international student housing in Europe, supporting the advocacy work of both organisations and the creation of adequate policies to tackle the housing countries.

The survey was launched at the beginning of November 2022 and it remained open for more than a month.

Besides the promotion in the social media channels of both organisations, the dissemination of the survey was done by the National Organisations of ESN and the National Unions of Students members of ESU, Erasmus+ National Agencies, Higher Education Institutions and other stakeholders.

Countries where the survey was disseminated more broadly, such as Spain and Italy, have a higher number of respondents. However, enough countries present quality samples that ensure that the survey provides a good overview of the housing situation of exchange students in Europe.

Key Findings



1 Only 16% of students found their accommodation after their arrival to the exchange destination, with important differences between countries. In Italy, 28% of students found it after, while in Poland it was only 8%.

2 Shared flats are the most common housing option for exchange students, but there are important regional differences, these are most common in Southern Europe. Housing owned by higher education institutions is the most common option in Central and Northern Europe, with 66% of incoming students in the Czech Republic living in higher education institution housing, compared to only 2% in Spain. Private student dorms are more common in Western Europe, especially Belgium and the Netherlands.

3 A quarter of survey respondents experienced scams, showing the need for better support measures in this area. More than 38% of students going to Italy suffered scams, while only 10% of students going to Finland did.

4 The average satisfaction with housing support by sending and hosting higher education institutions (HEIs) is considerably low, with an average of 2.9 among hosting HEIs and 2.3 among sending HEIs. Countries in Northern Europe receive the highest levels of satisfaction, and despite the housing crisis, The Netherlands receives a higher than average score.

5 Almost a third of students reported not receiving housing support from their higher education institutions. The most common type of support is the provision of information on how to find accommodation through a website. Direct contact with housing providers and information on the general market conditions were provided to around a fifth of respondents.

6 Overall satisfaction with housing quality standards is considerably high, despite considerable regional differences. Safety and security, friendliness towards internationals and location score well, while value for money receives the worst scores. Nordic countries score well across the board, even in quality for money.

7 More than half of students spent over 400 euros per month in their accommodation. Total housing expenses depend more on the availability of higher education institution housing than on the country's average prices for housing.



8 The difference in grant levels between countries is reflected in the percentage covered by the scholarships: students from countries with higher grants are usually able to cover a higher percentage of their housing costs.

9 Lack of information about housing conditions (41%) and excessive deposit payments of more than 1 month (49%) are the most prevalent issues reported by students.

The importance of student housing and the current challenges faced by students

Housing is one of the most important aspects in the life of students. Decent housing arrangements are essential for well-being, mental health and the possibility to conduct a fruitful academic career and student life. As indicated in the Statement of the European Students' Union on Housing and Transport, 'Housing is an essential part of a student's life, as without this basic need being fulfilled, there is no capacity to study'¹. While ensuring 'access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing' Housing is part of the 11th UN Sustainable Development Goal². The housing situation in Europe is facing increasing challenges, which are not just the result of the Covid-19 pandemic and of the recent inflation surge, but are ingrained in long term trends.

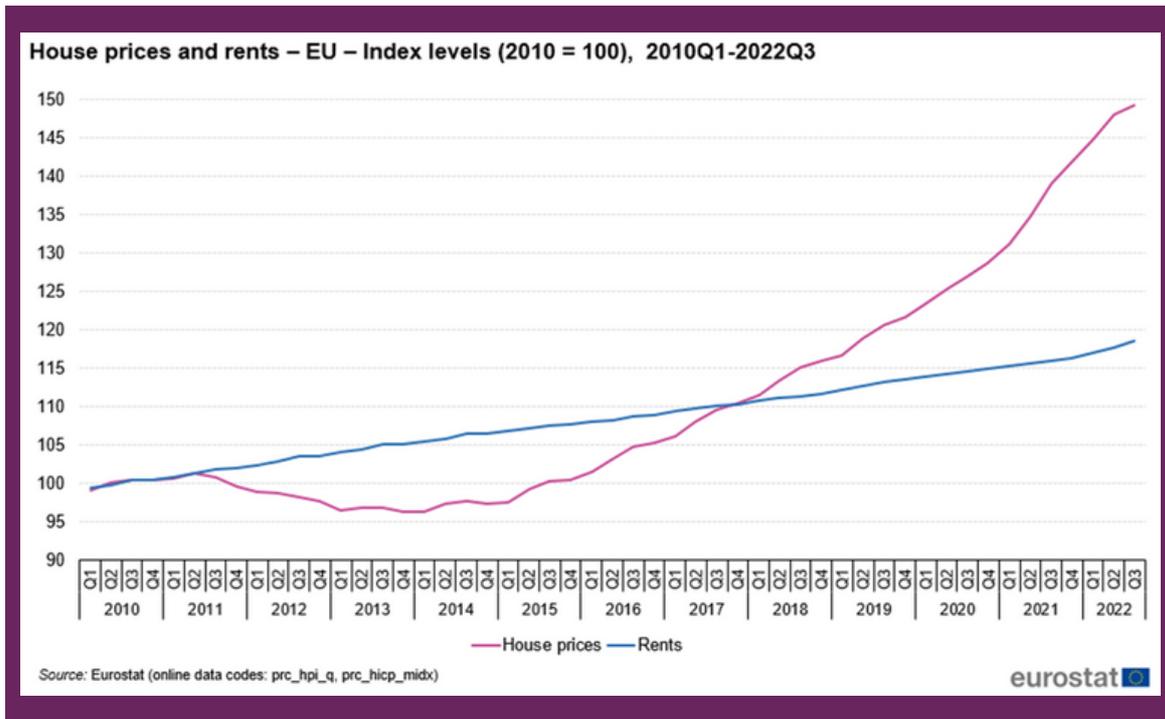
According to Eurostat, rents increased by 18.5% and house prices by 49.2% between 2010 and 2022 - compared to the third quarter of 2021, in the third quarter of 2022 rents increased by 2.1% and house prices by 7.4%. Within these aggregated data, national differences emerge: between 2010 and 2022, house prices decreased in only three EU Member States and rents in only one, while they increased in 24 and 26 Member States respectively, with some of the biggest surges in Estonia (+199% for house prices, +233% for rent), Lithuania (+137% for house prices, +151%), Hungary (+174% for house prices), Luxembourg (+140% for house prices), Latvia (+134% for house prices), Czech Republic (+133% for house prices) and Austria (+130% for house prices)³.



¹ <https://esu-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Statement-on-Housing-and-Transport.pdf>

² <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals/sustainable-cities-and-communities>

³ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Housing_price_statistics_-_house_price_index#Annual_and_quarterly_growth_rates



The European Parliament, in a 2021 'on access to decent and affordable housing for all', has recognised the housing crisis and called for the Commission and Member States to 'ensure that the right to adequate housing is recognised and enforceable as a fundamental human right through applicable European and national legislative provisions'⁴.

The housing situation for students is even more dire, especially for those students that do not live with their parents. According to the Eurostudent data, in 2019 65% of their income went on average to the basic costs of food, transport, and accommodation, with the latter counting for 35% of the total expenses, with peaks in countries like Denmark (47%), Finland (46%), France and Czechia (43%), Germany (42%) and Portugal (41%).

⁴ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0020_EN.pdf

Costs for accommodation, food, and transportation – students not living with parents
Expenses paid by students and others, monthly expenses as a share of total expenses including transfers in kind (in %)



Data source: EUROSTUDENT VII, F.3, F.68, F.142, and F.143. **No data:** AL.

Data collection: Spring 2019 except CH, FR (spring 2020 – reference period before COVID-19 pandemic), DE (summer 2016), IT, PT, RO, TR (reference period during COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and/or 2021). See Appendix C3 for details.

EUROSTUDENT question(s): 4.17 What are your average expenses for the following items during the current lecture period?

Note(s): Included are expenses of parents/partner/others in favour of the students as well as their provision of goods and services (= transfers in kind).

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT survey conventions: DE, FR, RO.

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT standard target group: DE, IE, IT, PL.

Source: EUROSTUDENT VII Synopsis of Indicators 2018–2021.

The share of accommodation expenses has increased over the years in a majority of countries. Eurostudent suggest that the reason could lie in an increase in the housing demand unmatched by an equal increase in the housing supply, and/or that student income in general, and public student support in particular, hasn't kept up with the inflation rate⁵. Furthermore, it has to be noted that the data from most of Eurostudent countries come from 2019, i.e. before the Covid-19 pandemic and the inflation surge in 2022, and it can be supposed that the share of student income spent on basic needs (including accommodation) has increased since then. As a result, a pan-European housing crisis has come to the fore in 2022, with examples in the UK⁶, Ireland⁷, the Netherlands⁸, France, Germany, Italy, Austria, Belgium, Portugal⁹ and more.

⁵ https://www.eurostudent.eu/download_files/documents/EUROSTUDENT_VII_Synopsis_of_Indicators.pdf

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/dec/26/uk-student-housing-reaching-crisis-point-as-bad-as-1970s-charity-warns>

⁷ <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20221201153059811#:~:text=Ireland's%20attraction%20to%20international%20students,to%20their%20pre%20pandemic%20levels>

⁸ <https://erudera.com/news/netherlands-parliament-urges-universities-to-not-recruit-more-intl-students-due-to-housing-shortage/>

⁹ https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/boomerang-youth-head-home-as-housing-crisis-bites/

Housing in the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education

Housing is one of the most important and challenging aspects of the exchange experience for the hundreds of thousands of students who take part in Erasmus+ and other mobility programmes every year. This important role is acknowledged in the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education, the quality framework for HEIs participating in Erasmus+, pointing to the responsibility of institutions in "**guiding mobile participants in the process of finding accommodation**". Housing support is equally mentioned in the Erasmus Student Charter, the document that outlines the rights and duties of Erasmus students, albeit the mention is less comprehensive than the one in the ECHE. The paragraph reads as follows: You are entitled to receive information on obtaining insurance, finding housing, securing a visa (if required), and facilities/support available for those with special needs.

The responsibilities of sending and hosting HEIs are better explained in the ECHE annotated guidelines, including a specific paragraph related to this issue on **page 17**. The paragraph is reproduced below, with bold letters included to highlight the specific elements of the Charter that are more relevant.

*The receiving HEI / enterprise / organisation **should explain clearly to the mobile participants what accommodation options are open to them and what the conditions for renting accommodation are** (i.e. costs, registration, and accommodation contract details, responsibilities), so as to minimise any problems upon their arrival. This should be done well in advance of the mobility period and implies that HEI/ enterprise / organisation takes stock of the housing situation for mobile students, so as to be aware of any potential obstacles in finding accommodation and how to overcome them. **They should propose solutions for potential issues encountered by participants by collaborating with housing providers, student organisations or other stakeholders** who offer accommodation or work on ensuring the quality and affordability of student housing.*

Housing information should be available on the receiving HEI's website, along with the contact details of the accommodation officer at the HEI. This information may include details about student housing in the receiving society or on campus premises (if available), frequently asked questions, feedback from previous students' experiences, and details on any potential attempted fraud or discrimination that may be encountered. Student organisations can also be an important source of information. If appropriate, their contact details should be available on the receiving HEI website.



If students experience fraud or discrimination, the HEI/ enterprise / organisation should offer guidance and support to overcome the issue.

The sending HEI should also assist the mobile participants in their search for accommodation by, whenever necessary, contacting their counterparts at the receiving HEI enterprise / organisation or by putting former mobile participants who are willing to help find accommodation in touch with prospective students. Sending HEIs should particularly reach out to mobile trainees, who are disproportionately affected by housing issues according to the HousErasmus+ Study.



In international credit mobility, it is good practice to use the student grant to pay for the deposit of dormitories.

In the recently created ECHE Monitoring Guide¹⁰, which was launched in February 2023, housing support is included as one of the monitoring points within the “student support” part of the core mobility principles. This new addition, which was achieved partly thanks to the advocacy efforts done by ESU and ESN as members of the ECHE Working Group, will increase the importance of the work done by HEIs in supporting mobile students with their housing needs while on exchange.

The satisfaction of students with the housing support provided by HEIs will now be evaluated through the Monitoring Grids, which are also part of the Monitoring Framework of the ECHE.

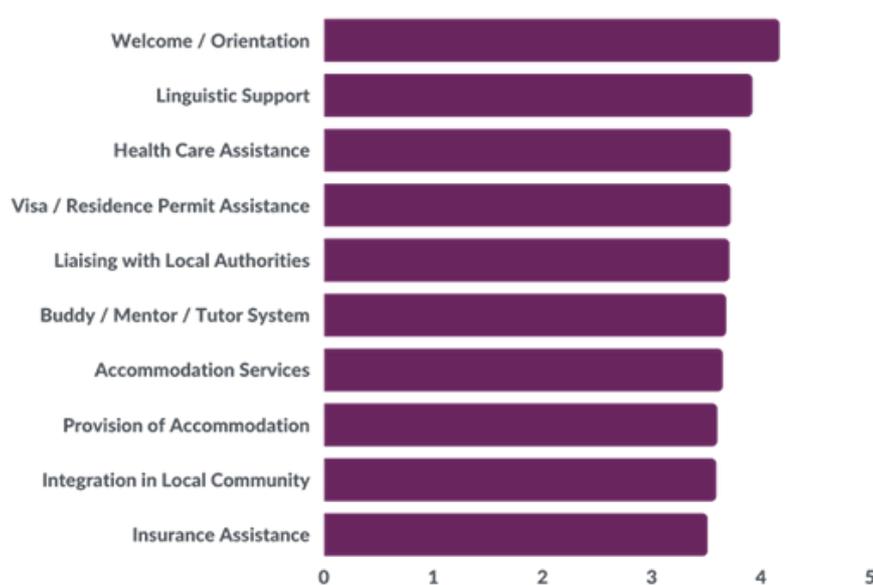
¹⁰ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f225d114-a82e-11ed-b508-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

Previous work in the area of Erasmus+ student housing

The topic of Erasmus+ housing has been analysed in a number of projects, including HouseErasmus+¹¹, which have shed light on the specific challenges faced by exchange students compared to their local peers, and propose a number of initiatives to tackle them. Unfortunately, the different realities across the European context have made progress quite uneven, with emerging great practices in some Higher Education Institutions and sticking points that remain challenging in many others.

Data collected in 2021 in the ESNsurvey XIV (ESN, 2022)¹² show that issues with accommodation are among the most commonly reported problems by exchange students, and that the level of satisfaction with both the guidance to find accommodation and the provision of accommodation scores low compared to other key services.

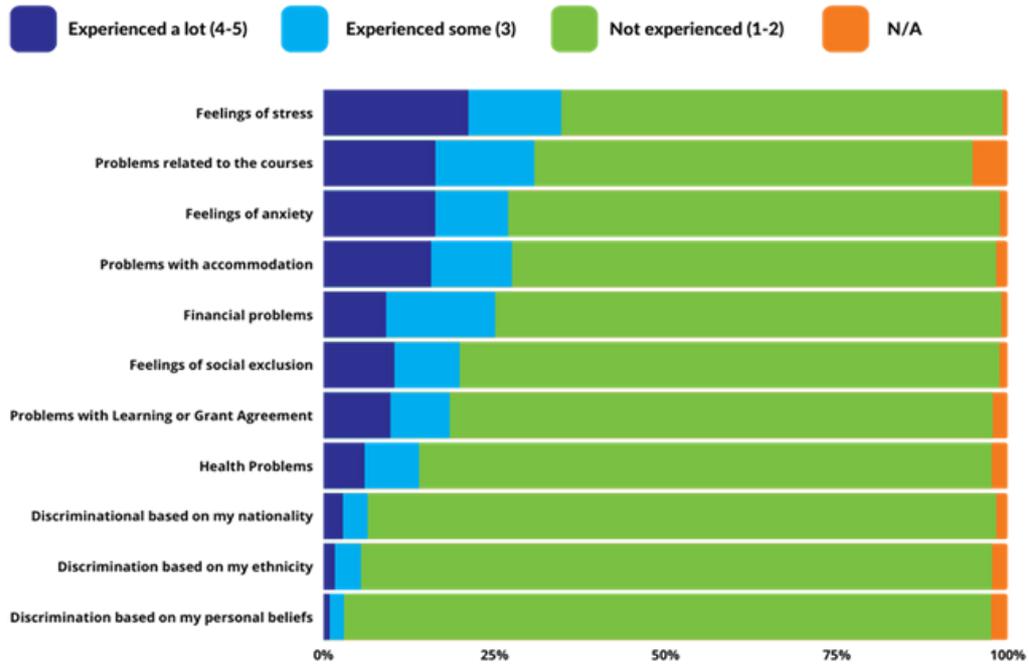
Graphic: Satisfaction with services provided by hosting Higher Education Institutions. ESNsurvey XIV (2022)



¹¹https://houserasmus.eu/sites/default/files/HE%2B_Final_Research_Report.pdf

¹²Erasmus Student Network (2022). Understanding the experience and needs of exchange students in challenging times. ESNsurvey - XIV edition.

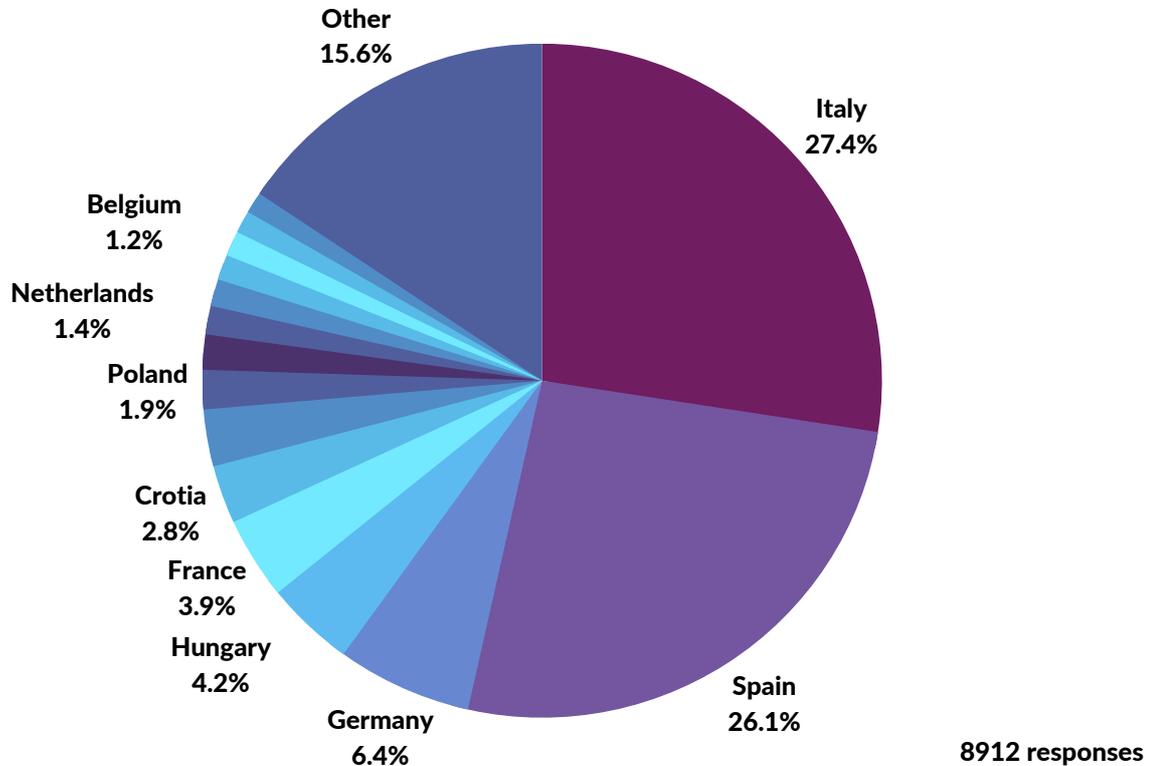
Graphic: Main issues encountered by students. ESNsurvey XIV (2022)



8428 responses

Demographics

Nationality

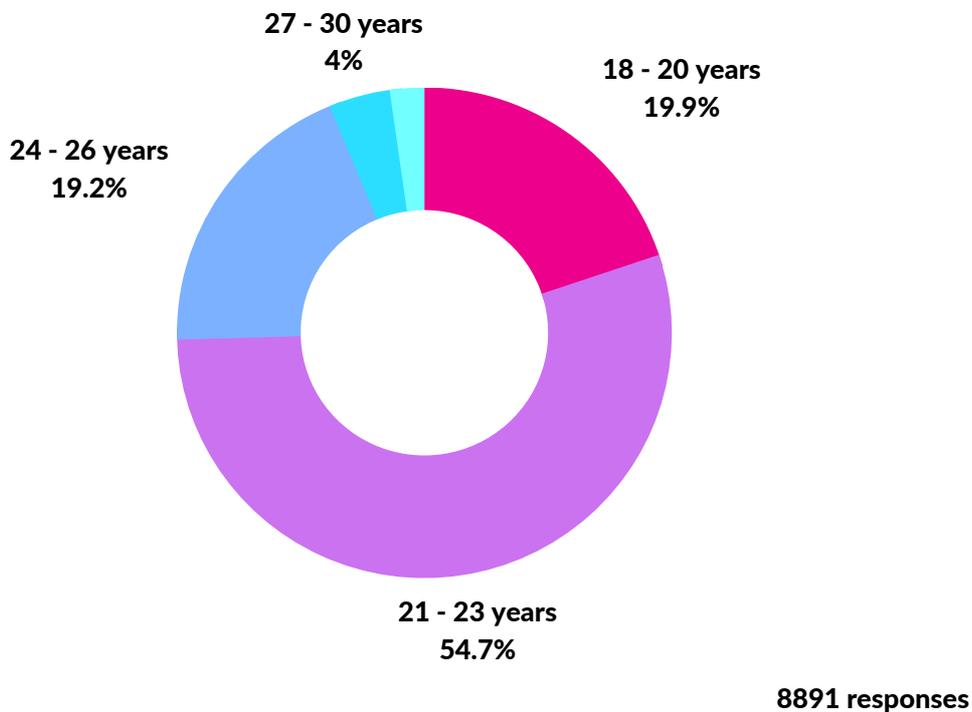


Based on the data obtained from 8,912 responses, the following conclusions can be drawn regarding the nationalities of the participants in the mobility program:

- Italian and Spanish participants constitute the largest percentage, with 27% and 26% respectively. This indicates a significant presence of students from these two countries in the program.
- German participants account for 6% of the total, suggesting a substantial representation from Germany in the mobility program.
- Hungarian, French, Croatian, Slovenian, Polish, Swedish, Dutch, Portuguese, Turkish, Belgian, Romanian, and Lithuanian participants each make up 4% or less of the total respondents. While these nationalities have a smaller representation individually, when combined, they constitute a notable portion of the participants (16%).

Approximately 88.5% of the respondents have a nationality from an EU member state, reaffirming the predominantly European nature of their mobility. This aligns with the findings from the Erasmus+ Annual Report 2021, which stated that 85.5% of participants in Higher Education mobility had EU nationalities.

Age



Based on the provided data, it is possible to draw the following conclusions regarding the age distribution and generational representation among the participants:

1. Age distribution:

- 2% of the participants were born before 1992 (aged 31 or older), indicating a small proportion of older individuals in the study population.
- 4% of the participants were born between 1996 and 1993 (aged 27 to 30), representing a slightly larger portion of participants in their late 20s.
- 19% of the participants were born between 1999 and 1997 (aged 24 to 26), indicating a significant representation of individuals in their mid-20s.
- The majority of participants, accounting for 55%, were born between 2002 and 2000 (aged 21 to 23), representing a substantial portion of young adults in the study population.
- Lastly, 20% of the participants were born between 2005 and 2003 (aged 18 to 20), indicating a significant representation of individuals at the beginning of their adulthood.

2. Generational representation:

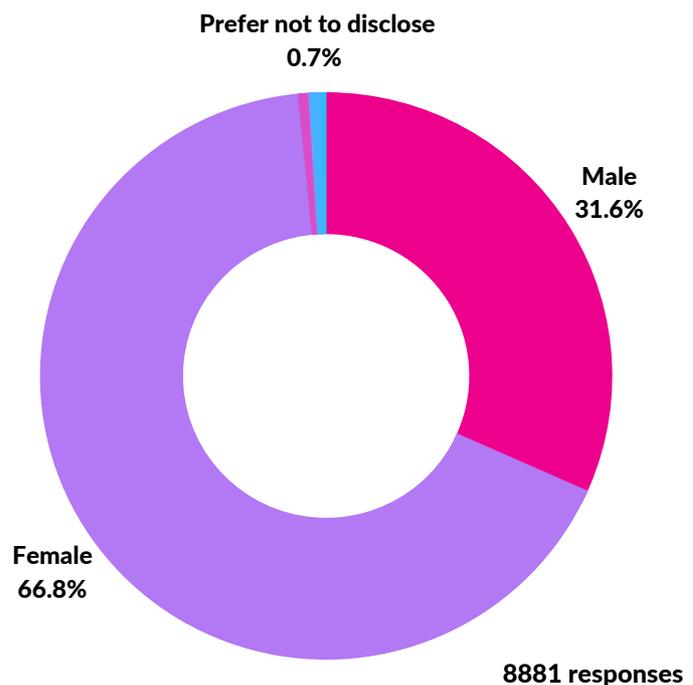
- Based on the age distribution, approximately 6% of the participants belong to the Millennial generation (born before 1996), comprising individuals aged 27 and older.
- The remaining 94% of the participants belong to Generation Z (born between 1996 and 2005), comprising individuals aged 26 and younger.

These findings suggest a predominantly young participant population, with the majority falling within Generation Z. The presence of a smaller proportion of Millennials indicates some diversity in generational representation but with a higher concentration of younger individuals. Understanding the generational composition is valuable when considering the perspectives, experiences, and characteristics of the study population.

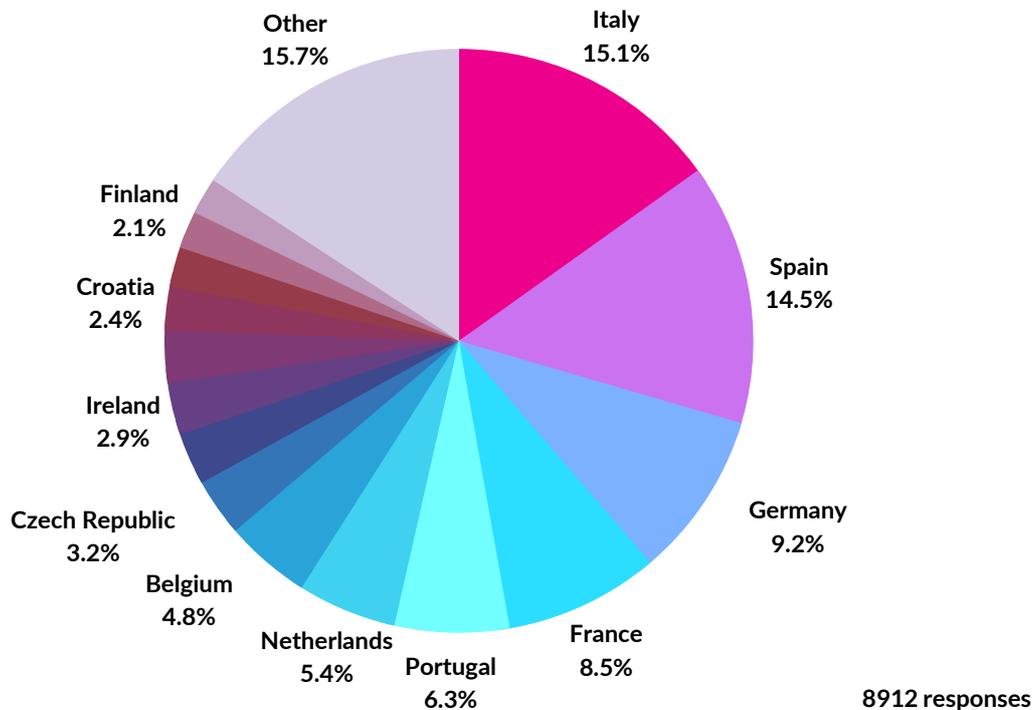
Gender Identity

Female participants: The majority of participants, comprising 67% of the total respondents, identified themselves as female. This indicates an **over-representation of female individuals among survey respondents compared to the Erasmus+ Annual Reports, published by the European Commission.**

Male participants: Approximately 32% of the participants identified themselves as male.



Country of mobility destination

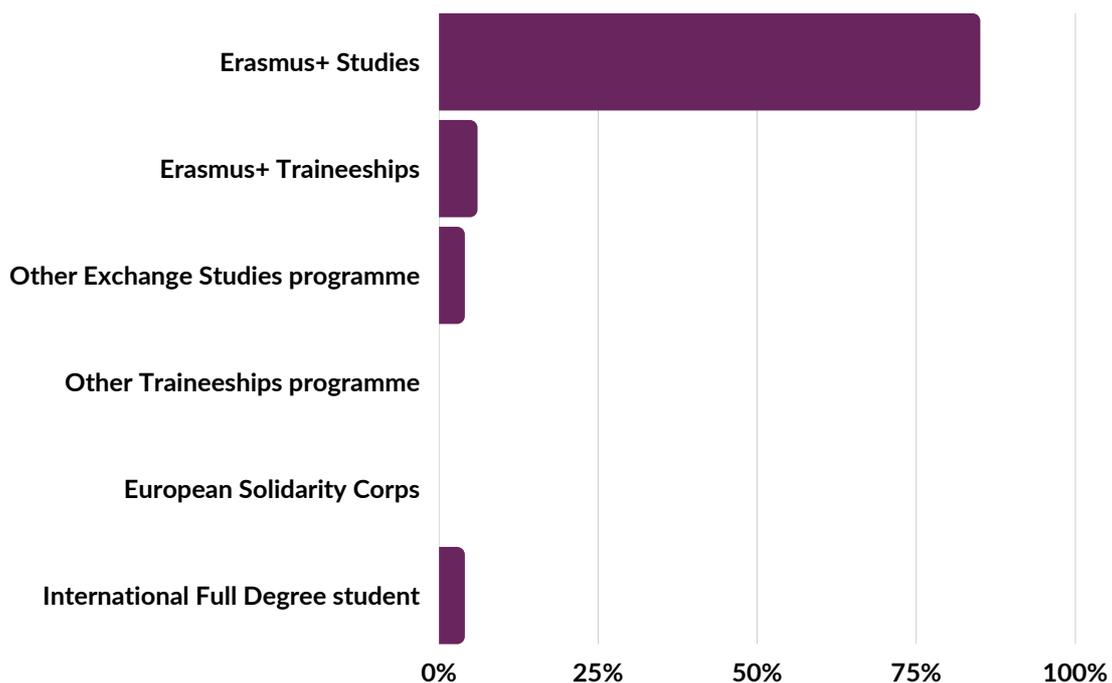


Based on 8,912 responses, the most popular mobility destinations among the participants were Italy (15%), Spain (14%), Germany (9%), and France (8%). Portugal, the Netherlands, Belgium, and several other countries also attracted a significant number of participants. These findings demonstrate the **diverse range of choices available** within mobility programs and highlight the **popularity of certain countries for student mobility**.

Type of mobility

Based on 8,912 responses, 85% come from students who have carried out their mobility within the Erasmus+ for Studies program and 6% come from students who have carried out their mobility within the Erasmus+ for Traineeship program. 4% come from students on similar exchange studies programs not under the auspices of Erasmus+ and 0,33% come from students on other Traineeship mobility programs not under the auspices of Erasmus+. 0,09% of the respondents in the survey were participants in the European Solidarity Corps program. 4% were International Full Degree Students.

Compared to the total number of participants in Erasmus+ mobilities, Erasmus+ trainees are considerably underrepresented. This can be explained by the fact that many students received the survey from their hosting Higher Education Institutions, or through ESN sections and student unions that have less direct outreach to mobile trainees. However, it is important to highlight that previous research done in the HouseErasmus+ project points to the added challenges that mobile trainees face due to the shorter duration of their stays and their lack of support system in their exchange destinations.

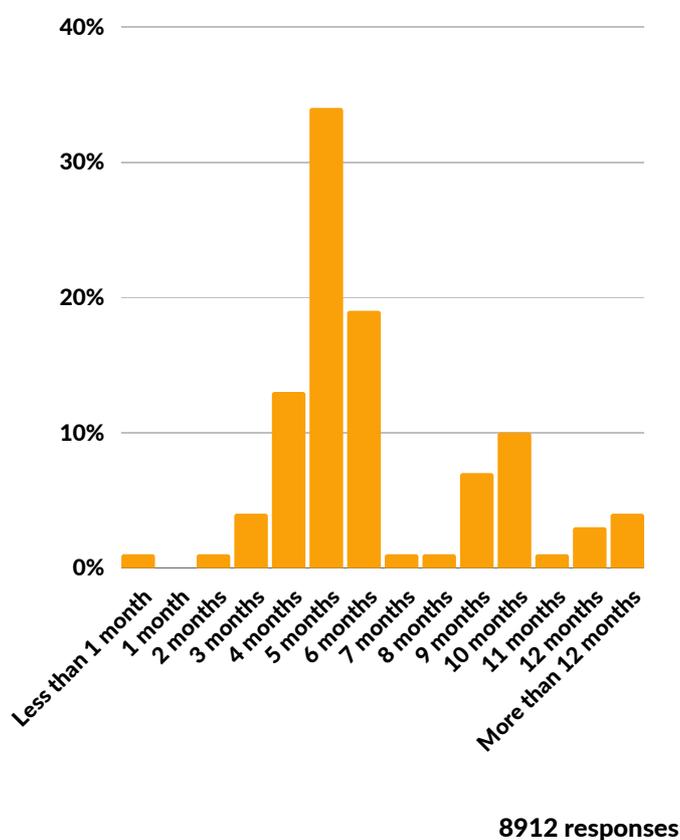


8912 responses

Duration of mobility

Based on 8,912 responses, 34% of the participants completed their mobility in a period of 5 months. 19% of the participants completed their mobility in a semester, 13% in 4 months, 10% in 10 months, 7% in 9 months, 4% in 12 months, 4% in 3 months, 3% in 12 months, 1% in 11 months, 1% in 8 months, 1% in 7 months, 1% in 2 months and 1% in less than 1 month.

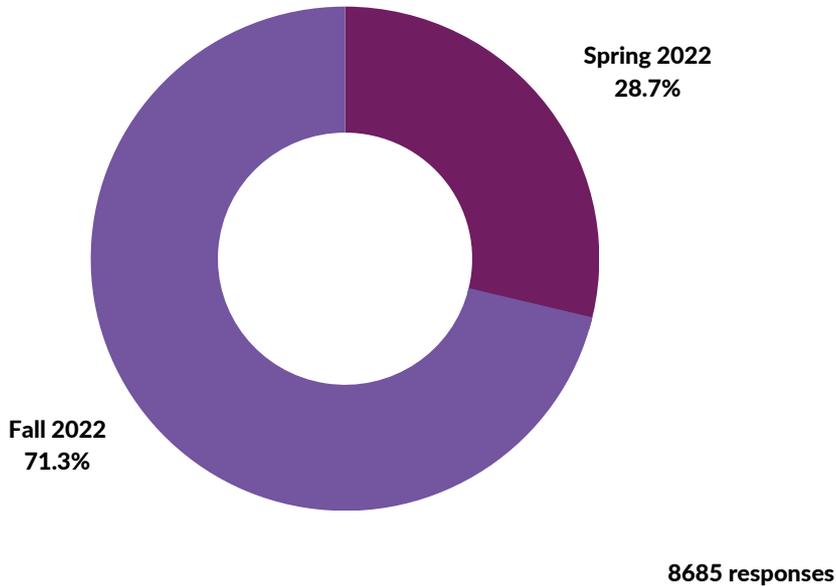
These findings demonstrate the variability in the duration of participants' mobility experiences, with a range of options available to suit individual preferences and program requirements. The data highlights the popularity of mobility periods, such as 5 months and a semester, while also showcasing the presence of participants who opt for longer duration of 10 or 12 months.



The qualitative part of the report also shows that, in some cases, the length of the mobility can also present challenges to students. This was the case of this student:

I had to pay for more months than my stay (my stay was February - July and I paid also for August and September)

Mobility period



Based on 8,685 responses, 71% of the respondents have been on mobility in Fall 2022 while 29% have been on a mobility program in Spring 2022.

These findings highlight the higher popularity of fall mobility programs among the study participants, possibly influenced by the alignment with the typical academic calendar. However, it is important to note that individual circumstances, academic requirements, and program availability may vary, leading to a diverse range of timing preferences for participants' mobility experiences.



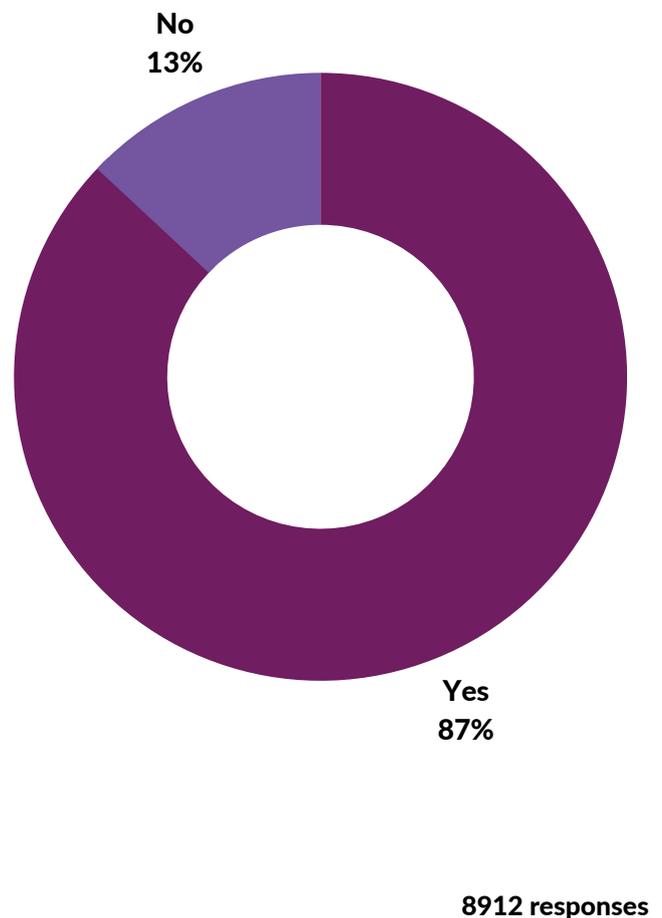
The Process of Finding Accommodation

Finding permanent accommodation

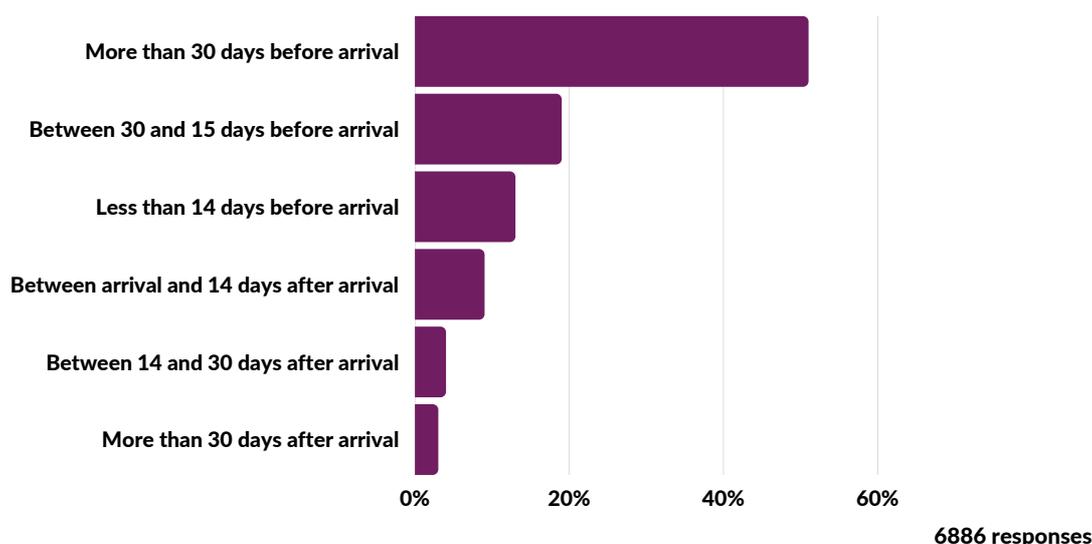
Based on 8,912 responses, **87% of the students found permanent accommodation during their mobility program**. This indicates a high success rate in finding suitable housing arrangements for the duration of their stay. Unfortunately, a considerable minority of students to the level of 13% did not succeed to find permanent accommodation. This highlights the challenges that a notable portion of students encountered in securing suitable housing options.

Among the countries with the highest percentage, the Netherlands (19%) and Italy (16%) stand out. Coincidentally, these two countries have been in the spotlight of the international student housing debate precisely for the difficulties to find accommodation.

These conclusions underscore the importance of addressing housing challenges faced by students during mobility programs, particularly in countries where the difficulties are more pronounced. Efforts should be made to improve housing options, increase availability, and enhance affordability to ensure a smoother and more successful experience for students participating in mobility programs.



Timing of the housing confirmation



Finding reliable housing before the beginning of the exchange experience is important for many students who feel more comfortable by having the most important components of their mobility sorted out before starting the journey. On top of that, many HEIs across Europe are recommending exchange students confirm their accommodation before travelling to the exchange destination, and in some extreme cases, even telling students not to come if they have not found accommodation before.

Based on 6,886 responses, **the verification of accommodation for over half (51%) of the respondents' students took place more than 30 days before arrival at their mobility destination**. Nevertheless, as close as the confirmation of housing is to the arrival the precarious conditions are increasing. 19% of the students received a confirmation between 30 days and 15 days before arrival and 13% confirmed less than 14 days before arrival. While 16% received a final confirmation after their arrival.

In detail, 9% of the students confirmed between arrival and 14 days after arrival, 4% between 14 and 30 days after arrival, and 3% more than 30 days after arrival.

The impact of the uncertainty till the final confirmation, especially if it is prolonged after the departure to the mobility destination, creates unnecessary distress for students. A respondent who received a final confirmation one month after said **"Finding a house was the most stressful thing of moving abroad. I was mentally in a very bad situation, very stressed and crying out of stress and desperation regularly."** Even if this is an isolated situation that does not represent the experience of all students, it is important to put the necessary measures in place to ensure that students don't have to go through such issues.

28% of exchange students in Italy found their accommodation after starting their mobilities. In Poland, it was only 8%

Considerable differences exist between countries, with clear regional differences.

In Italy, 28% of students found accommodation after the beginning of their mobility, and in Spain, it was 21%. South Western European countries seem to present important challenges to students, while Northern and Central European countries seem to be less challenging in that respect: in Sweden, only 10% of students found accommodation after the start of their mobilities, and in Poland it was only 8%.

Therefore, there is a clear correlation between the provision of housing by Higher Education Institutions and the timing of the housing confirmation: **the more public housing is available, the sooner the students book their accommodation.**

Finding accommodation before mobility can also result in bad experiences for some students. In that sense, many scams seem to be connected with pre-departure booking that turns out not to be what students thought. In that sense, check-up systems or other measures that guarantee that the housing on offer is trustworthy could help to alleviate the problem. At the same time, the conditions to book accommodation without being in the city should be clearly explained to students.

Payment before arrival was only possible by credit card. It was a problem both for me and other exchange students from my country, since we had to pay the 2 months deposit at once, and no one of us or from our family members had a limit set high enough to be able pay the amount (even though we had enough money on the bank account). I think it is a rude and lazy gesture by the housing provider. It's not a common practice to have such a high limit on credit card in our country.

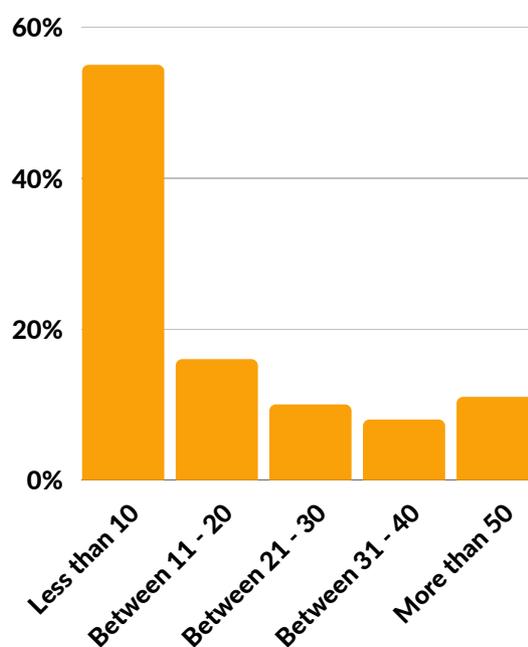
- Slovenian student in The Netherlands: technical aspects related to use of credit card

According to respondents a regular type of scam is in social media platforms, where in informal housing-providing groups deceitful individuals pretending to be landlords are asking for a deposit without any visit before the arrival to the hosting country.

Unfortunate students fell into this trap. An individual responded, “The landlord canceled my reservation the same day I had the check-in and scammed me for 600 euros.”. In these cases the search period is extended, so students need to find temporary accommodation such as hostels, short-term renting platforms, and hotels. In the end, the overall expenses are multiplied.

Number of housing providers contacted before finding accommodation

Based on 6,886 responses, **more than half of the respondents (55%) contacted less than 10 housing providers before finding accommodation in their mobility destination.** More specifically, 13% in Finland, 25% in Croatia, 59% in France, 52% in Portugal, and 39% in Ireland.



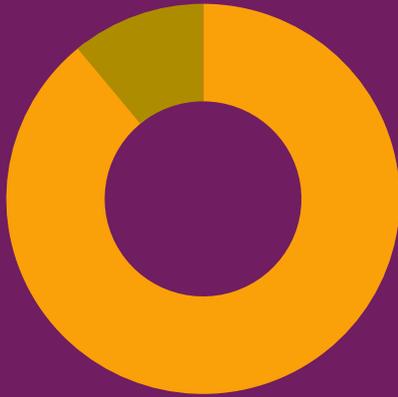
6886 responses

Subsequently, 16% contacted between 11 and 20 providers, 10% between 21 and 30, and 8% between 30 and 40. Unfortunately, 11% of the responding students contacted more than 50 housing providers until final confirmation. **24% of incoming students in Ireland reported contacting more than 50 providers.**

24% of incoming students in Ireland reported contacting more than 50 providers

I cancelled my mobility and returned home

11%

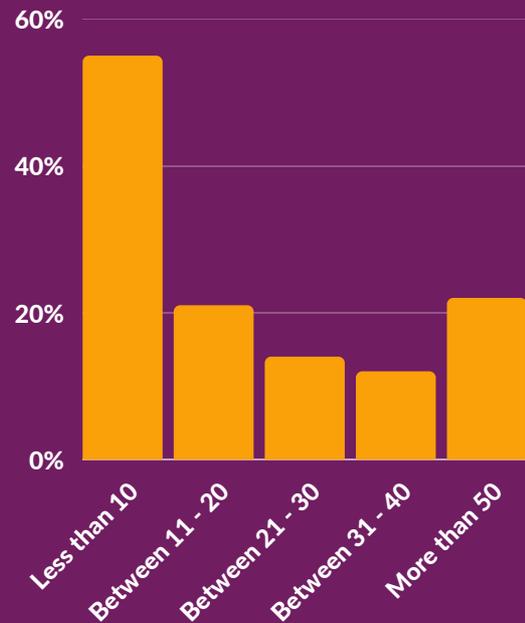


I stayed in temporary accommodation the whole time
89%

728 responses

Regarding those students who in the end did not find permanent accommodation (728 respondents in total) the vast majority answered that they stayed in temporary accommodation the whole time (89%) while **11% cancelled their mobilities.**

Furthermore, 10.5% of the respondents did not get a final confirmation for housing. All of these students contacted multiple housing providers. In detail, 30% contacted less than 10, 21% contacted between 11-20, 14% between 21-30, 12% between 30-40, and 22% more than 50.

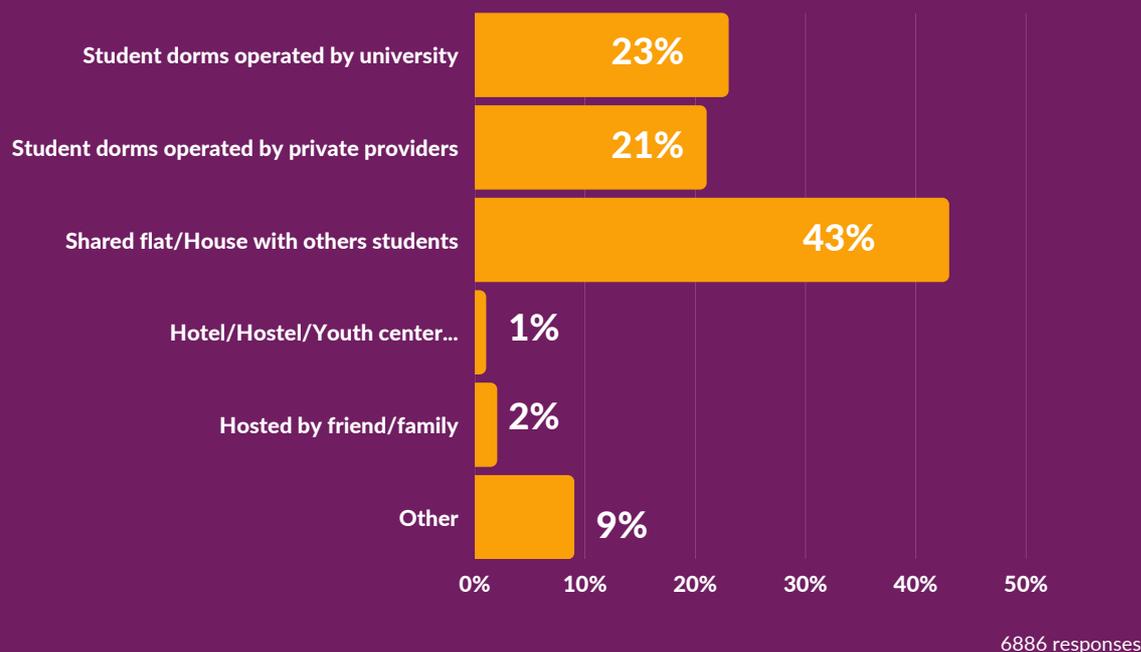


728 responses

The Housing Experience of Students

Type of accommodation

Based on 6,886 responses, a division can be made on the accommodation choices into two main groups: those who opted for public housing (housing operated by HEIs) and those who chose private housing options. The analysis points to a strong correlation between the availability of public housing and a higher level of overall satisfaction with the accommodation, as well as a reduction in the number of issues faced by the students.



Dormitories

- 23% of students stayed in dormitories operated by the higher education institution.
- This indicates a significant portion of students (44%) preferred the convenience and community atmosphere provided by higher education institution-operated dormitories.
- Public dormitories offered by universities can be an attractive and accessible option for students during their mobility programs.

Private Housing

- 21% of students stayed in dormitories operated by private providers, while 43% shared a flat or house with other students.
- The high percentage of students (43%) opting to share a flat or house suggests a preference for more independent and potentially cost-effective living arrangements.
- Private providers play a significant role in accommodating students, with 21% opting for privately-operated dormitories.
- The availability of private housing options, such as shared flats, is essential to meet the diverse preferences and needs of students during their mobility programs.

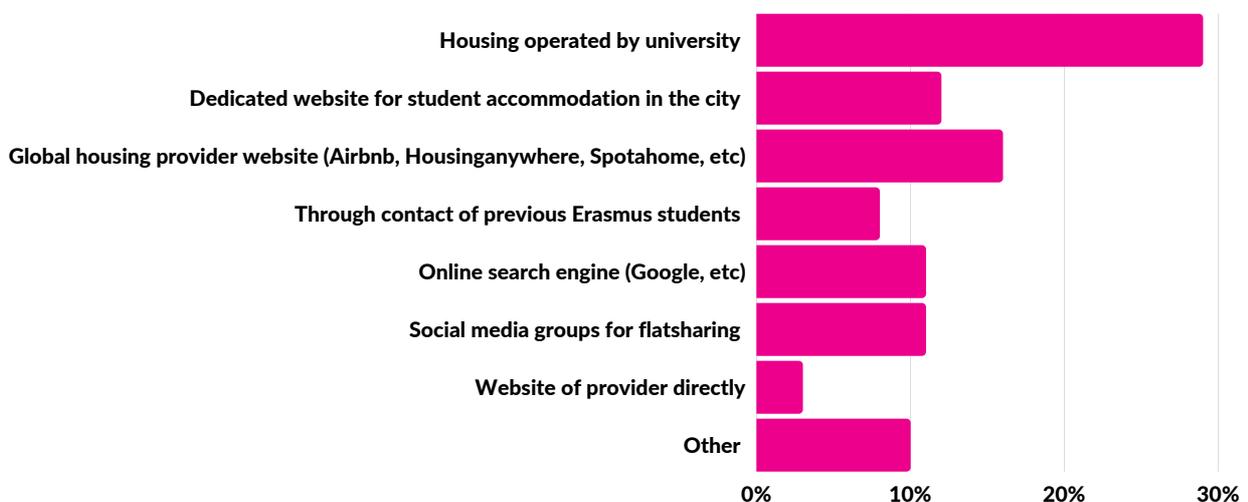
Overall, the data highlights the importance of both public and private housing options in accommodating students during their mobility programs. While higher education institution-operated dormitories offer a sense of community and convenience, private housing options provide flexibility and independence. Providing a range of housing choices can enhance the overall experience and satisfaction of students during their mobility programs.



66% of students going to Czech Republic stay in dormitories operated by HEIs

However, it's important to note that there are **significant variations in housing choices across Europe**. For instance, in the Czech Republic and Sweden, a large proportion of students (66% and 48%, respectively) stay in dormitories operated by Higher Education Institutions. On the other hand, in countries like Spain, only a minimal number of students (2%) choose this option. Private student dormitories are particularly prominent in Belgium (34%) and the Netherlands (35%). Shared flats, on the other hand, are most common in Southern European countries. These findings highlight the **regional differences in housing preferences and the impact of local housing availability and cultural factors**.

Ways to find accommodation



6886 responses

Based on 6,886 responses, a considerable amount of students used different types of housing online portals to find accommodation.

The most common way to find accommodation remains the housing operated by the higher education institution, with 29% of students reporting finding it that way. Although this reality is vastly different depending on the country. For instance, ES:6%, IT:9%, DE: 51). Housing operated by HEIs is most common in Central and North Europe.



In Spain, only 6% of students found their accommodation through housing operated by their HEIs, while in Germany it was 51%.

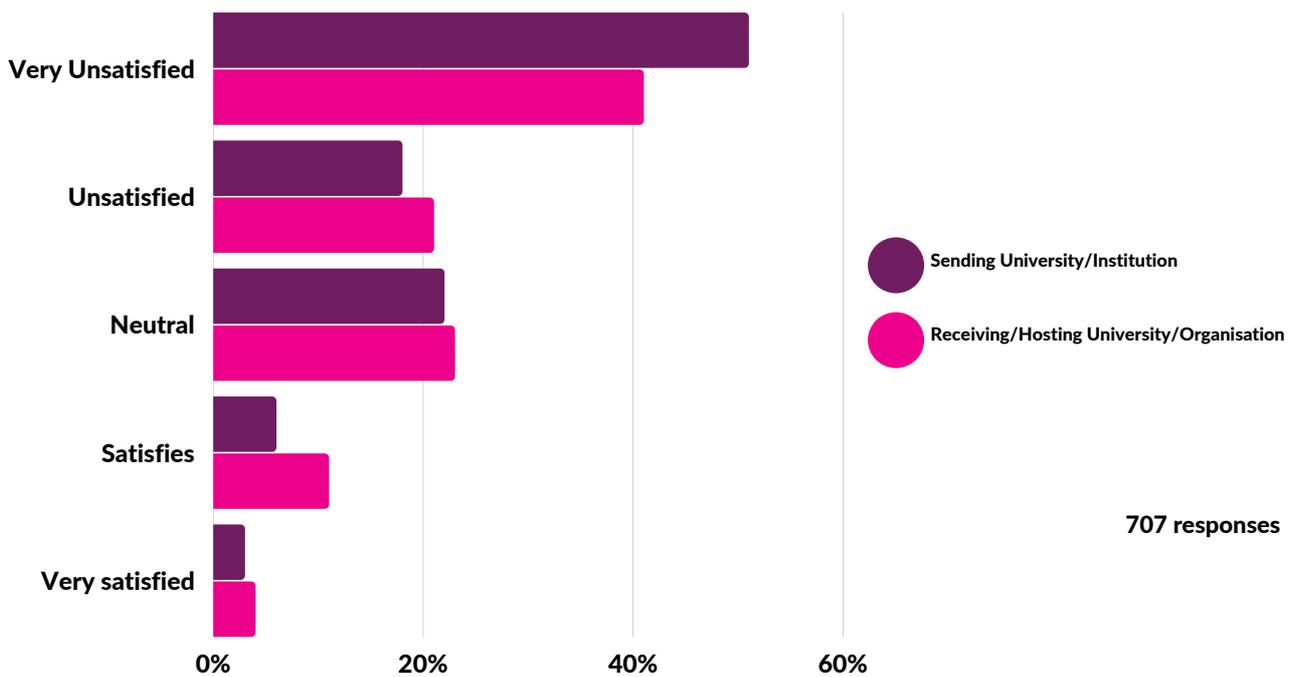
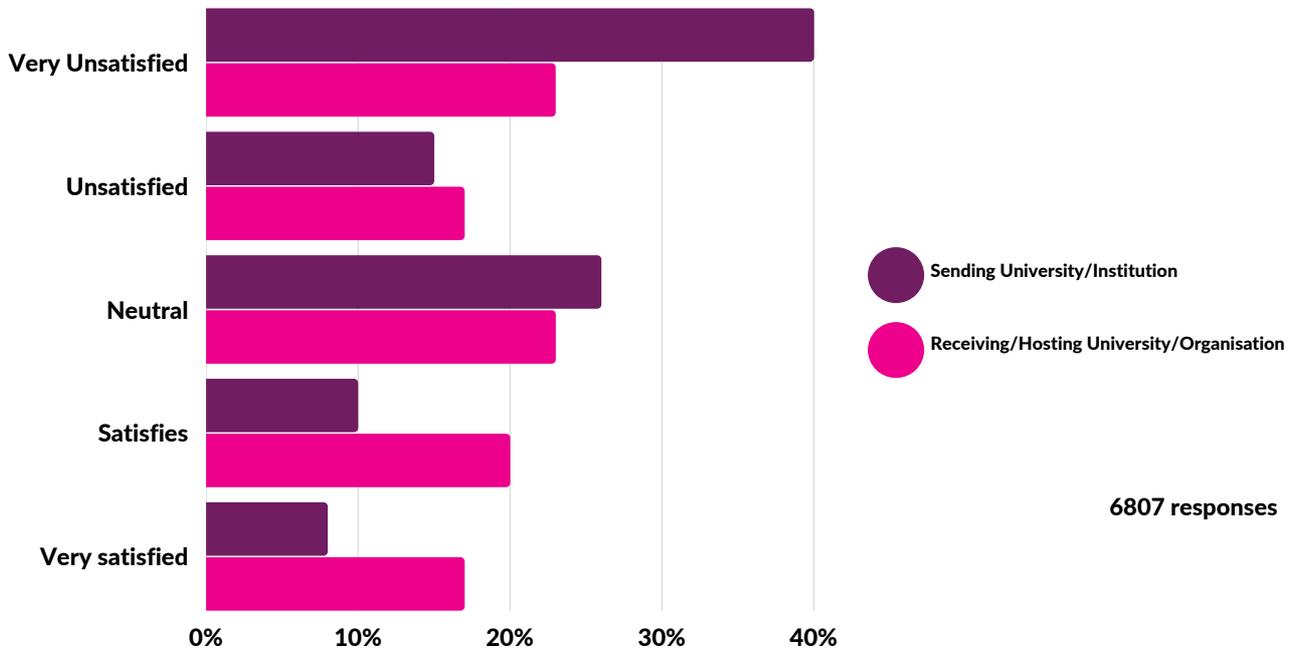


The last few years have seen an increase in the number of platforms focusing on student housing. The survey results confirm that trend, making it the second most common option among respondents. 16% used a global housing provider website (Airbnb, Housing Anywhere, Spotahome, etc.). Global housing providers are more prominent in countries where Higher Education Institutions provide less housing. (ES: 37%, IT: 25%)

While 12% used a dedicated website for student accommodation in the city. 11% of students found accommodation through online search engines like Google, Bing, etc. 11% confirmed their accommodation in social media groups for flat sharing, and 3% directly to the website of the provider. However, 29% of the responding students found accommodation through the higher education institution and 10% used different ways.

Only 8% of respondents reported finding accommodation through contact with previous Erasmus+ students, pointing to the potential for better peer-to-peer initiatives such as house swapping.

Level of satisfaction with the support provided by sending and hosting HEIs



The satisfaction with the support provided by the sending and hosting Higher Education Institutions is an important indicator to analyse their performance in this key aspect of student mobility. The findings show that students do not only value results, but also efforts made by the institutions.

On a scale of 0-5, the average satisfaction with sending institutions stands at 2.3, while the one with hosting stands at 2.9. These are considerably low numbers compared to other services that are analysed in the ESNsurvey.

Comparing the two categories of support, **it is evident that satisfaction levels were generally higher with the receiving/hosting higher education institution/organisations compared to the sending higher education institution, in line with the trends captured in the ESNsurvey XIV.** The overall satisfaction levels were higher, with 20% of students being satisfied and 17% being very satisfied with the receiving/hosting higher education institution/organisations, as opposed to 10% and 8% respectively with the sending higher education institution.



However, it is important to note that even **within the receiving/hosting higher education institution/organisations, a significant portion of students expressed dissatisfaction or a neutral opinion**, indicating room for improvement in their support services.

The satisfaction level with both types of institutions varies significantly across countries. As indicated before, the availability of student housing managed by the HEIs brings a higher satisfaction rate among hosting institutions. Central European and Nordic countries present remarkably high satisfaction rates, with the Czech Republic having an average of 3.54, and Sweden 3.9, one of the highest.

This being said, there are other factors that play a role in the opinion of the students. Despite the difficulties to find student housing in the Netherlands, the level of satisfaction with the support provided by HEIs from that country among incoming exchange students is higher than average (3.01 compared to 2.9 average). This clearly shows that a focus on student support will have an impact on the perception of the students beyond the actual results.

Additionally, when focusing on students who had not found permanent accommodation at the time of the survey, both the sending and receiving/hosting universities/organisations experienced a decrease in satisfaction levels. This suggests that these students faced more challenges and difficulties in finding accommodation, leading to higher levels of dissatisfaction.

Overall, the data highlights the need for universities and organisations involved in the accommodation process to enhance their support services. Strategies should be implemented to address the concerns and challenges faced by students, particularly those who struggle to secure permanent accommodation. By doing so, universities can improve the overall satisfaction and well-being of their students during the housing search process.



Types of support received from HEIs



Based on a sample of 9,668 respondents, it is evident that a significant number of students relied on various sources of support to find accommodation.

One of the most common types of support received by students was through higher education institution-operated housing, with 24% of respondents reporting this as their source of support. This indicates that **higher education institutions play a crucial role in providing accommodation options for students.**

However, it is important to note that the extent of this support varied significantly by country. For instance, in France, a substantial 34% of students found their accommodation through higher education institution-operated housing, while in Spain the figure was only 14%.

The second most common type of support reported by students was information provided by the higher education institution on how to find accommodation in the city on their website, accounting for 36% of respondents. This suggests that universities are actively involved in assisting students in navigating the local housing market, providing valuable resources and guidance.

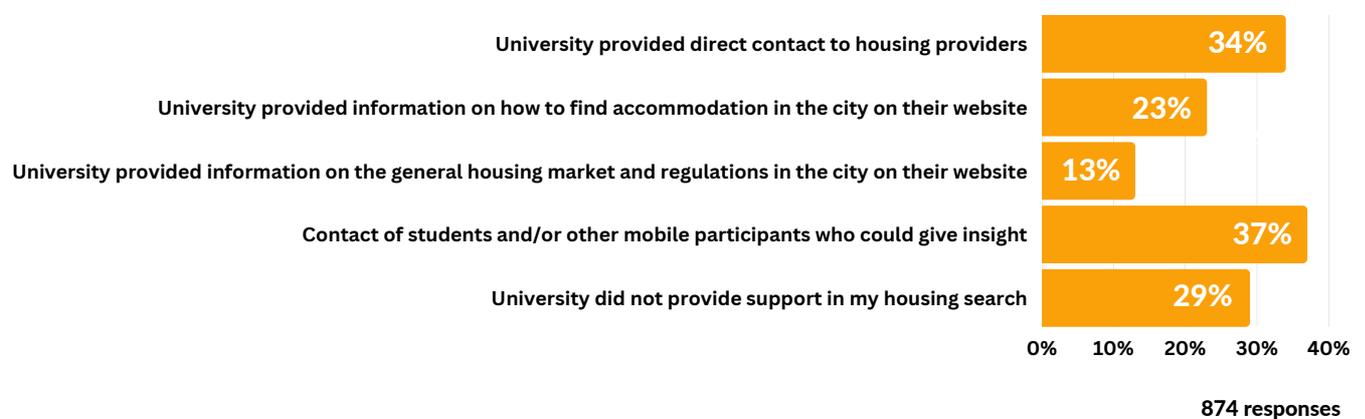
Furthermore, 20% of students reported that their higher education institution directly connected them with housing providers. This type of support indicates that universities have established partnerships or contacts with external entities to facilitate students' housing search.

In terms of general information on the housing market and regulations in the city, 21% of respondents stated that their higher education institution provided such information on their website. This highlights the universities' efforts to equip students with knowledge about local housing dynamics and legal frameworks, enabling them to make informed decisions.

Additionally, 14% of students mentioned having contact with other students or mobile participants who could offer insights into the housing situation. This peer-to-peer support indicates the potential for collaborative efforts among students, fostering a sense of community and shared experiences.

Surprisingly, 29% of respondents reported that their higher education institution did not provide any support in their housing research. This suggests that there is room for improvement in terms of support services offered by universities, as a significant portion of students may be left to navigate the housing market on their own.

Overall, the data indicates that universities play a crucial role in supporting students in their housing research, with various approaches ranging from providing accommodation options to offering information and facilitating connections. However, there are notable differences between countries, highlighting the need for tailored support strategies based on the specific housing landscapes of each region.



In comparison, **students who did not confirm or find any permanent accommodation** (13% of total respondents) received varying levels of support from their universities.

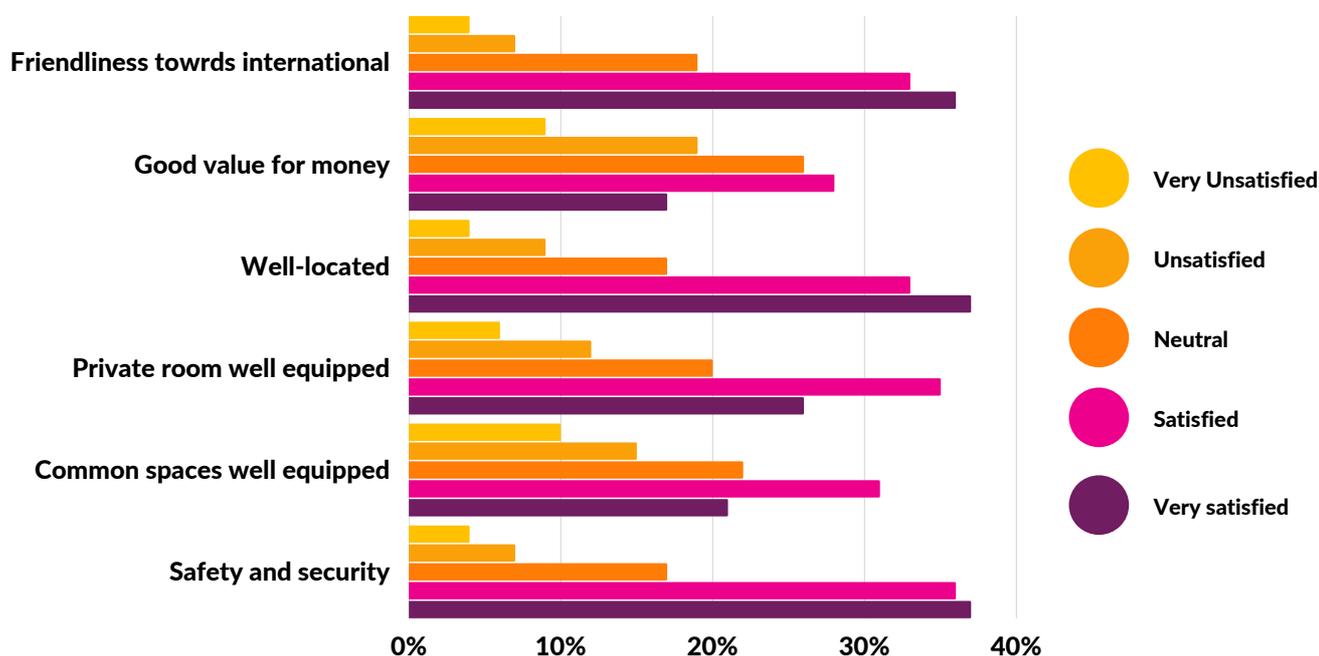
Among these students, 17% reported having access to direct contact with housing providers through their higher education institution. Furthermore, 34% of students had access to information on how to find accommodation in the city through their higher education institution's website.

In terms of general housing information, 23% of students had access to information on the housing market and regulations in the city on their higher education institution's website. Additionally, 13% of students mentioned having contacts with other students or mobile participants who could provide insights.

However, it is worth noting that **37% of respondents reported that their higher education institution did not provide any support in their housing research.** An interesting correlation for the importance of housing support by higher education institutions.

While efforts were made in certain areas, there is room for improvement in terms of comprehensive support services to ensure that all students receive adequate assistance in finding accommodation.

Satisfaction with quality standards



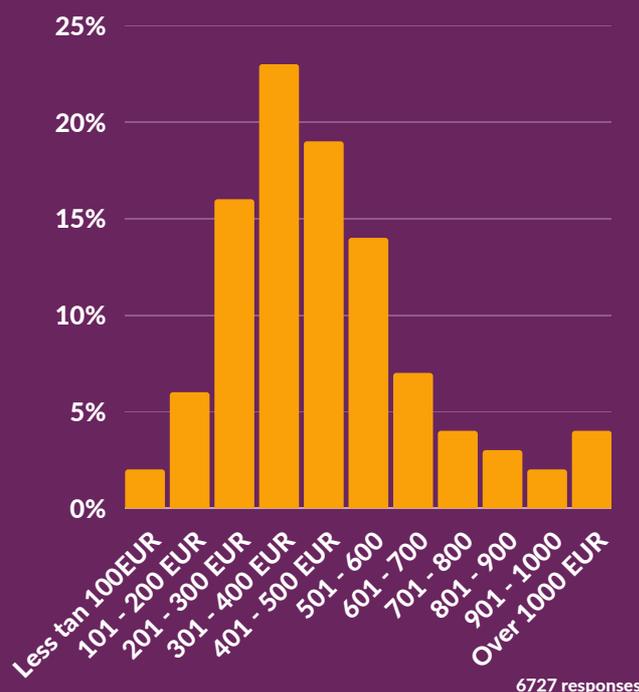
The majority of students were generally satisfied with the quality standards of their housing, showing that the problems with student housing are generally more connected to the challenges in finding it, scams, and other administrative issues than the actual quality of the housing

More than two-thirds of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the safety and security of their housing (73%), with their location (70%), and with the friendliness towards international students (70%). These aspects tend to score high in almost all countries, and they can be used as important factors to attract more students to participate in exchange programmes.

The level of satisfaction for the equipment in the private rooms (61%) and of the common spaces (52%) is also high, with however one-fifth of students unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with their private rooms, and one-fourth with the common spaces. Satisfaction with these aspects is higher in Nordic countries.

The value for money is the indicator where the students have mixed experiences, with 45% of students being satisfied with it, 26% neutral, and 28% unsatisfied. In general, satisfaction with value for money is higher in countries with more housing provided by Higher Education Institutions. Dissatisfaction was mainly associated with the material conditions of the accommodation and the provided services. However, it is to be noted that some students experienced racism against non-European students from housing providers, as reported in the comments.

The cost of Housing



With the average Erasmus+ grant being lower than 400 euros, almost half of the respondents spent more than that in their monthly accommodation expenses. The data shows that total housing expenses depend on the availability of university housing more than on the country's comparative levels. For instance, the prices in the Nordic countries seem to be considerably similar to the ones in Italy, in average terms.

20%

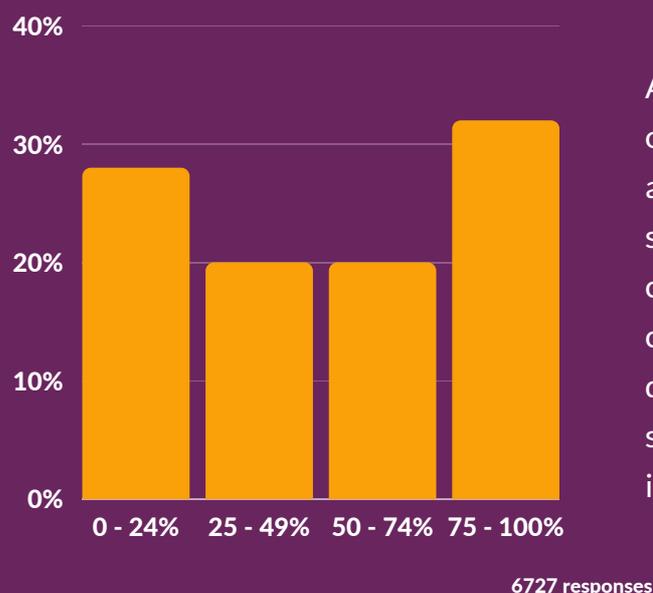
of students reported paying more than 600 euros per month

The most common range in the survey was 301-400 euros per month, with 23% of respondents declaring paying that amount.

There are stark differences between countries, which confirm that student housing prices might differ from other comparative price levels¹² that are normally considered when defining the overall cost of living.

- 69% of incoming students in Sweden report housing costs between 300 and 500 euros.
- 63% of incoming students in the Czech Republic report housing costs between 100 and 300 euros
- 65% of incoming students in Italy report housing costs between 300 and 600 euros

Percentage of housing costs covered by scholarships

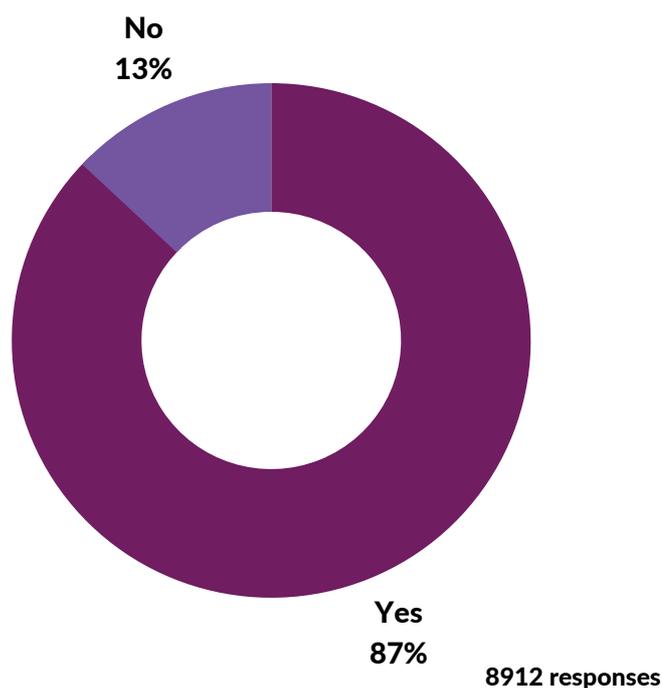


Almost half of the students can only cover less than 50% of their accommodation costs with their scholarships. There are considerable differences between countries as grant levels are defined at the national level, and in some cases also adapted at the institutional level.

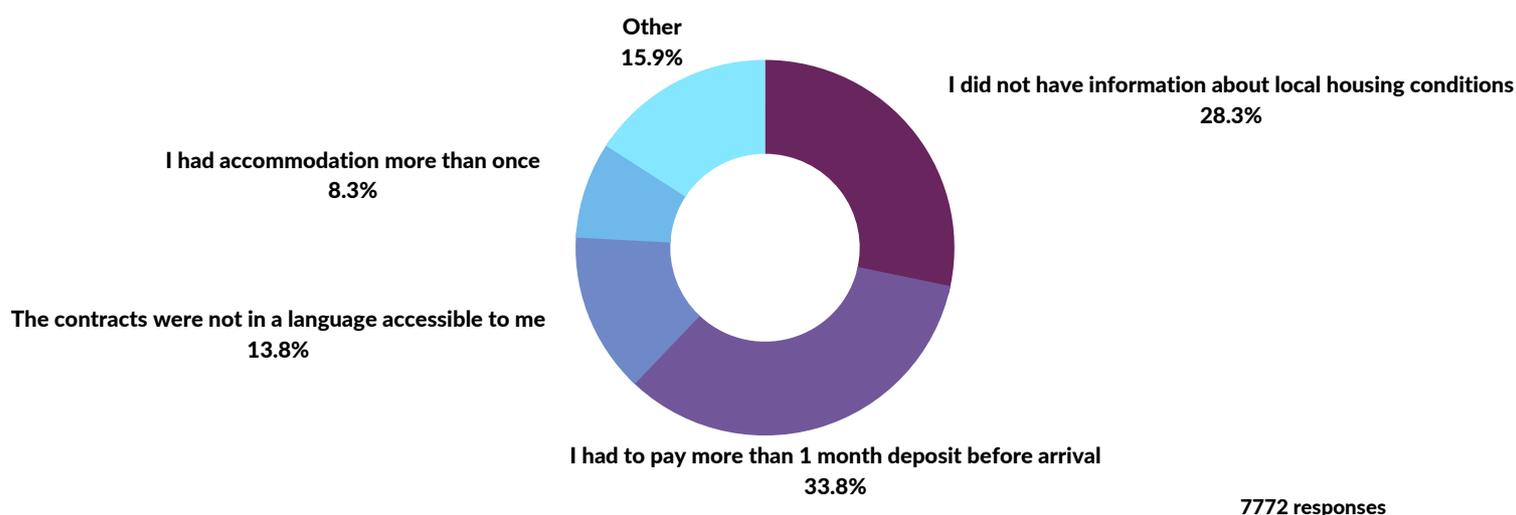
¹³https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Comparative_price_levels_of_consumer_goods_and_services

When it comes to the exact distribution, 28% reported being able to cover less than a quarter of their housing expenses, 20% reported being able to cover from 25 to 49%, and the same percentage also from 50 to 74%. Finally, 32% of respondents reported being able to cover from 75 to 100%.

Students from countries with higher Erasmus grants, such as Germany or Poland, are normally able to cover a higher percentage of their accommodation costs. This is relevant, as the Erasmus+ grants are supposed to support the overall living costs, while in at least two-thirds of the cases, the entirety is spent to only partially cover the sole housing costs.



Issues experienced by students



The most common issue among respondents was having to pay more than 1 month's deposit before arrival, which can put students under tremendous financial stress. This situation is incentivised by the fact that a majority of students do not receive their Erasmus scholarships until weeks, or even months, after the beginning of their exchanges, a situation that ESN and ESU have highlighted to the European Commission on several occasions.

The lack of information about local housing conditions is highlighted as an issue by 41% of students, pointing to the importance of better collaboration in these issues between sending and hosting higher education institutions. Working on clear guidelines on the housing situation with student organisations, involving students who are currently on exchange at the higher education institution, can be a way to make sure that the available information matches the needs of students.

Another important issue that presents a challenge to more than a fifth of the students is the language barrier related to housing contracts. In this sense, 21% point out that these contracts were only in a language that was not accessible to them. In order to ensure that the rights of the students are protected, it is important that HEIs and municipalities put systems in place so students can ensure these contracts are legally sound and the conditions have been clearly explained to the students.



Hard to find housing when not in the country, didn't know where it was nice to live, could not go to viewing, had to be online and didn't have UK details such as number, bank and guarantor

-Norwegian student in the UK - lack of information

A total of 12% of respondents pointed out that they had to move to a different accommodation during their exchanges, which considering the short length (60 per cent stayed for 6 months or less) can also be a challenging experience.

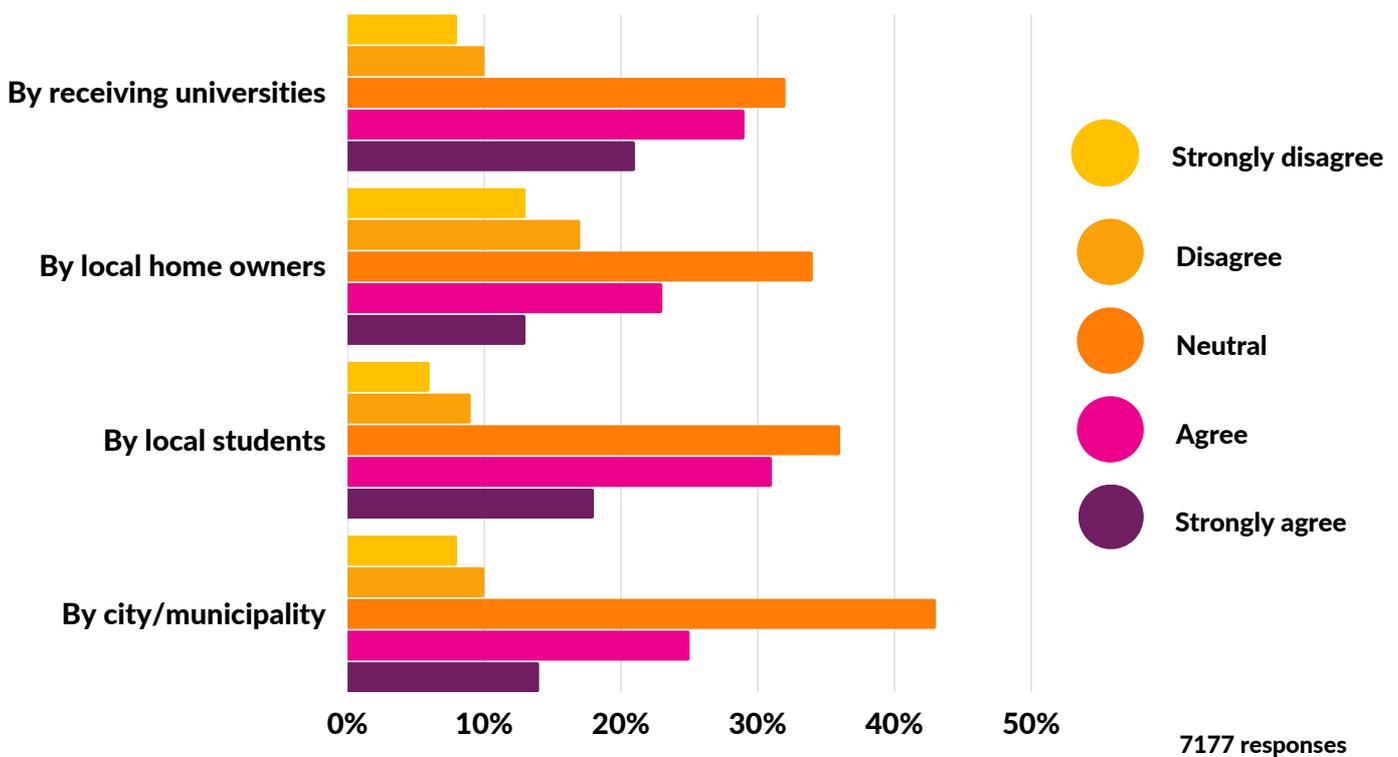
In this section, students could also share their experiences through an open box, something than 23 percent of them did. Some of the experiences reported:

In general, the issues reported by students point to two aspects:

- As an important actor in their communities, HEIs need to engage with local and regional governments, as well as private actors, to ensure that proper housing conditions for students are available. As the data shows, in many cases the challenges are not related solely to market factors, but also to aspects such as contractual requirements where the public sector can play an important role. This will make cities more attractive destinations.

- It is clear that quality higher education institution housing is the best way to ensure a satisfactory experience for students, but other housing support measures also matter. Aspects related to communication, exchange of information, legal support, and others can make a difference in the exchange experience of students regardless of the type of housing available, and it is key that Higher Education Institutions prioritise these elements.

Equal treatment when finding housing



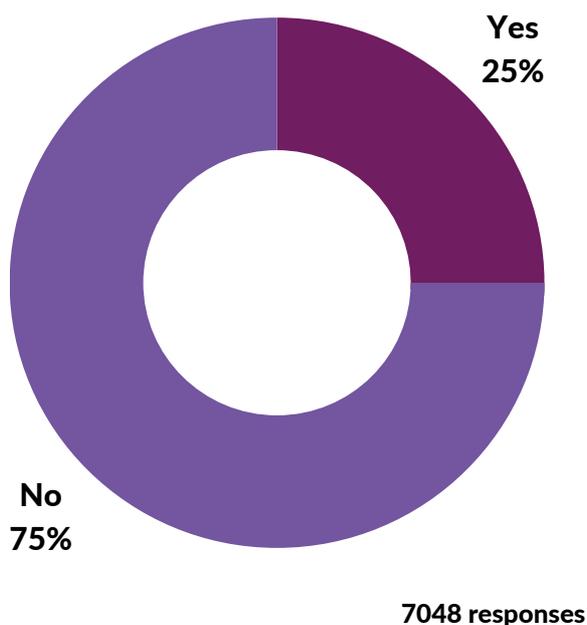
Equal treatment when looking for accommodation during mobility is crucial. When they move to a host city to pursue their studies in a new abroad city, exchange students can face specific challenges in finding suitable accommodation by facing barriers related to equal treatment. It is essential to ensure that all students have fair and non-discriminatory access to housing opportunities in the hosting city.

In all the categories, almost a third of respondents feel neutral when it comes to equal treatment while searching/accessing housing. We still can notice a higher neutral feeling when it comes to equal treatment from municipalities (43%).

When focusing more on the categories which are the most helpful for students, receiving universities (29% agree & 21% strongly agree) and local students (31% agree & 18% strongly agree) seem to be the ones receiving the majority of the credit. What we can see here, is that in addition to the role that hosting universities accomplish for what regards equal treatment, peer-to-peer solidarity is the best alternative solution.

On the contrary, the treatment by local homeowners seems almost evenly split between negative (30%), neutral (34%), and positive (36%). Local homeowners are the category that is perceived by far most negatively, with all the others not reaching 20% of dissatisfaction. This can be linked to different treatments towards international students, for instance in the widespread practice of asking for a guarantor in order to rent the accommodation to an international student.

Scams faced by the students



The survey shows that a quarter of respondents have experienced housing scams during their mobilities, a high number that makes the issue a key challenge in the exchange experience of thousands of students.. It's important not to hide this reality, take precautions when looking for accommodation and to act vigilantly to avoid scams.

Having fewer scams is highly correlated with higher satisfaction with the support provided by HEIs.

Availability of HEI housing matters, but it is not the only factor: despite the similarities, incoming students in Spain report significantly lower levels of scams than those in Italy (21% ES/38% IT). Scams are also more common in Sweden than in Finland, despite similar housing conditions.

Preventing scams should be a priority for Higher Education Institutions and all other stakeholders supporting student mobility. Collaboration with local and regional authorities, as well as law enforcement, is key to ensure this.

Whenever scams happen, it is essential that students know how to report the incident to the relevant authorities and contact their sending and hosting institutions. The institutions should monitor these developments to keep a record and to guide students in the best way possible.

While the Erasmus program should be a way for students to emancipate, scams can make their mobility a truly frustrating, and even painful, experience. Some students thought about going home early, as

as they were in impossible financial situations. Some wouldn't recommend Erasmus mobility to other students, given the conditions and the total abandonment.

Housing remains one of the biggest expenses for students, and housing scams can make it even more difficult for students to afford mobility. Efforts to avoid scams should not be put on mobile students' shoulders. It is a matter of public responsibility to take action.

I was a victim of a scam, because my first roommate asked more rent than the actual price was, so me and the other roommate paid her rent as well. Additionally, I had no real signed contract with the landlord of the house. After nearly a month, my problematic roommate told me to find a new accommodation because she had troubles with the landlord and said it would be better if we all leave. So for a certain period of time, I thought I will be homeless in a couple of days and had a stressful time trying to find a new accommodation. Luckily, after the problematic roommate left, I got a real contract for the same apartment and I have an acceptable rent.

-German Student in Italy: problems with contracts and victim of a scam

Recommendations



The following set of recommendations builds on the findings of the survey and the experience of both organisations representing and supporting students all over Europe.

The recommendations target mainly Higher Education Institutions participating in mobility programmes, but also other key actors such as local and regional governments, National Agencies, and European institutions. Both organisations believe that collaboration between different actors is critical to improving the housing support provided to exchange students.

The recommendations are structured in four parts: general considerations, before, during, and after the mobility.

General considerations on quality housing for exchange students

- **Public student housing should be expanded across Europe, with a special focus on countries where it is less prevalent, such as South European countries.**

Besides benefiting the whole student population, student housing can have great benefits for internationalisation and student mobility if the particular needs of mobile learners are taken into account. Therefore, expanding student housing should be considered in internationalisation strategies.

- **EU Structural funds should be used to support the creation of new student housing in regions where it is less prevalent,** which will also support the internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions while alleviating the housing situation of all students.

- **Mobile students with fewer opportunities should be given priority access to higher education institution housing**, with hosting Universities ensuring that all the benefits available to local students also apply. Providing direct financial support to incoming students through cheaper housing options can help to make Universities more inclusive.
- **The new Monitoring Framework of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education should be used to increase the attention to student housing at the national level.** National Agencies should regularly incorporate discussions between ECHE holders on their housing support mechanisms and should be given a mandate by National Authorities to carry out initiatives related to international student housing.

Before mobility

- **Housing aspects should be considered when signing inter-institutional agreements**, making sure that there is a basic understanding of the housing conditions in the hosting cities.
- **Sending and hosting Universities should agree on their exact responsibilities in housing information and provision throughout their mobility journey.** Sending institutions should be able to provide students with a general understanding of the housing situation of the destination city, based on the information provided by the Higher Education Institution and on feedback from students.
- **Students should be supported to find their housing before moving to their exchange destinations, in order to avoid complications once they move.** Universities, student organisations and public authorities should collaborate to ensure students are aware of the housing situation in the hosting country, and that they have an understanding of the relevant legal aspects.

During the mobility

- **Higher Education Institutions should help to set up peer-to-peer housing support mechanisms in their institutions**, which can help students going to an exchange to let their rooms to other students coming to their exchange destination.
- **Higher Education Institutions should prioritise mixing local and international students in student dorms, contributing to internationalisation at home.** At the same time, institutions should put in place incentives to increase interaction between local and international students also through house-sharing schemes, which can increase the interest of local students in internationalisation from the beginning of their Higher Education journey.
- **Universities and local governments should collaborate to ensure rent conditions for students are fair. In order to support students to afford their deposit payments**, HEIs should make sure grants are paid completely upfront before the mobility starts, avoiding the payment of any parts of the grant after the end of the mobility.
- **Higher Education Institutions and municipalities should incentivise the sharing of accommodation among local and international students** as part of their internationalisation strategies, including such aspects in the management of buddy systems and similar schemes.
- **Higher Education Institutions and local governments should prioritise measures to ensure the prevention of scams.** These can include:
 - Informative materials and sessions on tips and tricks to find reliable housing. After receiving the confirmation of their exchange destination, students should be fully informed about these issues, either through the creation of materials or the organisation of information sessions by the hosting higher education institution.

- Legal advice on aspects such as contracts. Setting up legal support systems can be a great way to ensure scam prevention. In most cases, students only need basic legal advice. Specific systems, such as support positions in International Relations Offices or collaborations with the housing/legal departments of the higher education institution can be organised.
- Initiatives to support the renting of houses to students. Reliable housing providers should be encouraged to rent rooms to students. Local authorities should encourage agreements between tenants' and landlords' organisations in realising advantageous housing contract frameworks for students.

After the mobility

- **Hosting institutions should incorporate evaluation mechanisms so students can share their experience living in the city**, including on the quality of support measures, as well as to signal housing-related problems during the mobility period where the hosting higher education institution could give support. It is recommended to include stakeholders from local authorities and to co-create these evaluation mechanisms with student representatives, so there is a clear understanding of the main trends that need to be considered in these evaluation mechanisms.
 - **Sending higher education institutions should set up feedback systems to collect information from their outgoing students while on exchange and when they return** regarding the housing situation, and to engage with prospective students to inform them about housing aspects.
 - **Higher Education Institutions should carry out an annual analysis of the changes in housing trends from their incoming exchange students**, and consider the findings for the planning of housing support initiatives.
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About the organisations



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>



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>



Erasmus Student Network – European Students' Union

International student housing: How are exchange students in Europe navigating the housing crisis?