



# Strengthening Mobility Alumni Engagement in Sweden



Erasmus Student Network  
Sweden

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# Strengthening Mobility Alumni Engagement in Sweden

*Enhancing Student Participation, Skills Development and Institutional Impact*

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# INTRODUCTION

Erasmus Student Network (ESN) is the largest student organisation in Europe working in the field of internationalisation of higher education. Under the motto 'students helping students', ESN supports international students and promotes student mobility through peer-to-peer activities, advocacy and cooperation with higher education institutions.

ESN is active in 44 countries and is officially recognised at the European level, including as part of the Erasmus+ Student and Alumni Alliance (ESAA), positioning the organisation also as a mobility alumni network. In Sweden, ESN plays a key role in supporting incoming and outgoing students before, during and after their mobility period.

Mobility programmes play an important role in supporting the internationalisation of higher education and in fostering intercultural understanding among students. They also create opportunities for continued engagement after the mobility experience.

However, the potential of students after their return from mobility is not always fully realised. While many students show interest in remaining engaged, opportunities to do so are not always clearly structured or communicated within higher education institutions. This highlights an opportunity to strengthen the role of mobility alumni in contributing to internationalisation efforts.

This paper explores the engagement of mobility alumni in Sweden, identifies current challenges and provides recommendations for higher education institutions on how this engagement can be further supported. The topic is particularly relevant in the context of Erasmus+, where supporting participants after mobility and encouraging alumni engagement are key elements of programme implementation, as reflected in the commitments of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE).



# METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on a combination of policy documents, secondary data sources and survey data. The primary dataset used is the XV ESNsurvey. As ESN Sweden, the authors have access to a subset of the dataset containing responses from participants related to Sweden, which are respondents for whom Sweden was the sending country and those for whom Sweden was the receiving country. This dataset was analysed by the authors to examine patterns of participation, engagement and student perspectives on mobility.

In addition to survey data, the analysis draws on publicly available data from the European Commission, Eurostat and national sources, as well as previous ESN publications. These sources are used to provide contextual information on student mobility and policy frameworks in Sweden and across Europe.

All figures and graphs presented in this paper are based on the XV ESNsurvey Sweden dataset and the authors' own analysis, unless stated otherwise.



# STUDENT MOBILITY IN SWEDEN

Internationalisation plays an important role in Swedish higher education, particularly through student mobility, which connects students to international networks and creates long-term links between institutions and individuals. Mobility also creates the basis for continued engagement after the study period, forming a potential mobility alumni community.

In 2023, Sweden had 10 996 incoming students and 5 641 outgoing students under the Erasmus+ programme<sup>1</sup>, with the numbers increasing in 2024 to 11 940 incoming students and 6 331 outgoing students<sup>2</sup> (Figure 1). Sweden consistently receives significantly more incoming students than outgoing students, indicating an imbalance in mobility flows. While Sweden is effective in promoting itself as a study destination for incoming students, there are fewer structured efforts to communicate the experiences of Swedish students abroad to a domestic audience. When considered relative to the size of the student population, participation remains comparatively low. In 2023, outgoing Erasmus+ mobility corresponded to approximately 1.2% of tertiary students in Sweden<sup>3</sup>, placing among the lower-performing countries in terms of relative participation.

Figure 1

Mobility numbers in Sweden (2022-2024)

YEAR	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	NUMBER OF OUTGOING STUDENTS	NUMBER OF INCOMING STUDENTS
2022	484 150	5 406	11 490
2023	475 828	5 641	10 996
2024	-	6 331	11 940

<sup>1</sup> European Commission. Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture., *Erasmus+ Annual Report 2023: Annex*. (Publications Office, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.2766/059909>.

<sup>2</sup> European Commission. Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture., *Erasmus+ Annual Report 2024: Statistical Annex*. (Publications Office, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.2766/6002858>.

<sup>3</sup> Eurostat, 'Students Enrolled in Tertiary Education by Education Level, Programme Orientation, Sex and Field of Education', Eurostat, 2022, [https://doi.org/10.2908/EDUC\\_UOE\\_ENRT03](https://doi.org/10.2908/EDUC_UOE_ENRT03).

Figure 1. Eurostat (total number of students); European Commission, Erasmus+ Annual Report 2022; Erasmus+ Annual Report 2023; Erasmus+ Annual Report 2024.



Within the framework of the European Higher Education Area, countries have set a target that at least 20% of higher education graduates should have mobility experience<sup>4</sup>. While more recent policy documents place greater emphasis on inclusion and accessibility, this benchmark remains widely referenced in European higher education. Although this target has not been met across most programme countries, Sweden remains below this level. In the 2023/24 academic year, 11% of first- and second-cycle graduates had studied abroad during the preceding 12 semesters<sup>5</sup>.

While some programmes include mobility as a graduation requirement, studying abroad is generally not obligatory. Instead, mobility often depends on the availability of elective credits that can be taken abroad, rather than being structurally integrated into the curriculum. As a result, participation varies significantly between study programmes and is shaped by how mobility fits within the structure of a degree. This indicates that mobility participation in Sweden is influenced not only by student interest, but also by programme design.

Overall, mobility participation in Sweden remains uneven and below broader European ambitions, while also characterised by an imbalance between incoming and outgoing students. These conditions shape both the scale and composition of the potential mobility alumni base. This makes it particularly important to consider how mobility alumni can contribute to supporting students and strengthening internationalisation efforts in practice.

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<sup>4</sup> Mobility Strategy 2020 for the European Higher Education Area, *European Higher Education Area* (Mobility Strategy 2020 for the European Higher Education Area, 2012), [https://ehea.info/media/ehea.info/file/2012\\_Bucharest/39/2/2012\\_EHEA\\_Mobility\\_Strategy\\_606392.pdf](https://ehea.info/media/ehea.info/file/2012_Bucharest/39/2/2012_EHEA_Mobility_Strategy_606392.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ), *Sweden's Academic Landscape: Higher Education and Research Explained* 2025, 2025:18 (Swedish Higher Education Authority, 2025). <https://www.uka.se/download/18.69a0143819a7173d4e2189/1764151490613/SwedensAcademicLandscape.pdf>.



# THE ROLE OF MOBILITY ALUMNI

Mobility alumni represent a valuable resource to help students succeed, both during their studies and after graduation, especially as international study and career opportunities continue to grow. They create connections across cultures, which can contribute to their academic, personal and professional development. Engaging as an alumni can also lead to a stronger feeling of belonging—encouraging active citizenship and civic engagement<sup>6</sup>.

They play an important role in encouraging future mobility through peer-to-peer communication. As shown in the XV ESNsurvey, students are strongly influenced by other students when deciding to go on exchange and value hearing from them as part of pre-departure support. By sharing their own experiences, alumni act as credible ambassadors, thus making mobility more understandable and accessible. For Sweden in particular, 45.08% of the respondents (n=264) liked to hear from former mobility students as part of their pre-departure support (Figure 2).

***There are also some meetings with other students who have already been in the host country which I found truly useful.***



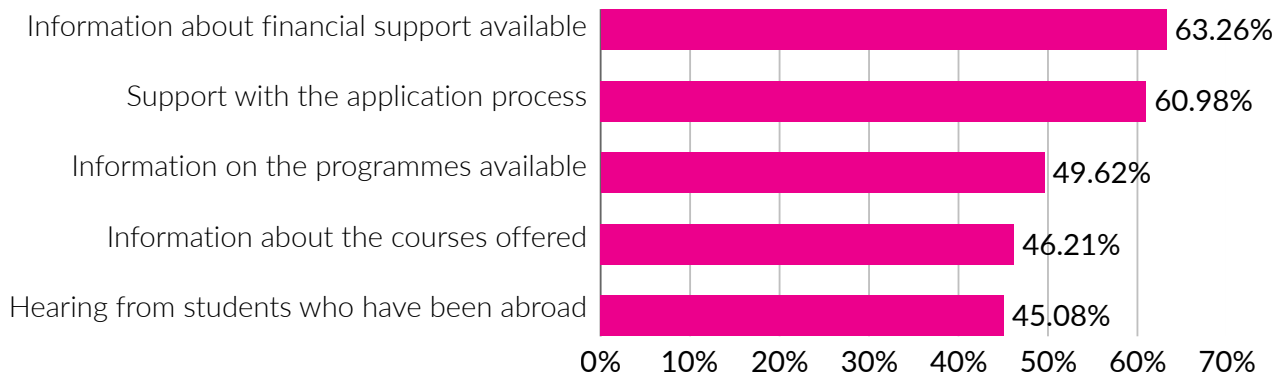
- an incoming exchange student

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<sup>6</sup> Erasmus Student Network AISBL, *Enriching Communities through Engaged Mobilities: Inclusion and Engagement in Mobility through Volunteering* (2024). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17056019>.

Figure 2

Which pre-departure support do you find important to receive? (Options with >30% respondent preference are presented, n=264)



In addition, mobility alumni can support incoming students by offering guidance and helping them integrate into the academic and social environment. These roles often take the form of buddy programmes or mentorships, which can enhance the overall mobility experience and contribute to the attractiveness of higher education institutions. In this context, alumni function as an informal support structure that complements the work of international relations offices, providing peer-to-peer interaction and insights that are less accessible through formal institutional channels.

Mobility programmes are also linked to students' future career development. Opportunities to connect with alumni networks can provide insights into different industries and support the development of professional networks. However, engagement in these activities is not formally recognised within higher education institutions, which may limit their visibility and perceived value for students.

Overall, mobility alumni can play an important role in supporting students, encouraging participation in mobility programmes and contributing to the attractiveness of higher education institutions. Strengthening how this engagement is recognised and supported can also enhance the visibility of the competences and skills developed through mobility and alumni involvement.



# GAPS IN MOBILITY ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT

While mobility alumni have the potential to play an important role in supporting students and encouraging participation in mobility, this engagement is not consistently realised in practice. Sweden-specific data from the XV ESNsurvey indicates that a significant share of students do not participate in alumni-related activities after their mobility period, often selecting "not applicable", when asked about such opportunities (Figure 3 and 4).

Figure 3

Did you participate in any social event with an international mobility component (exchange alumni, international student association)? How effective were they? (n=207)

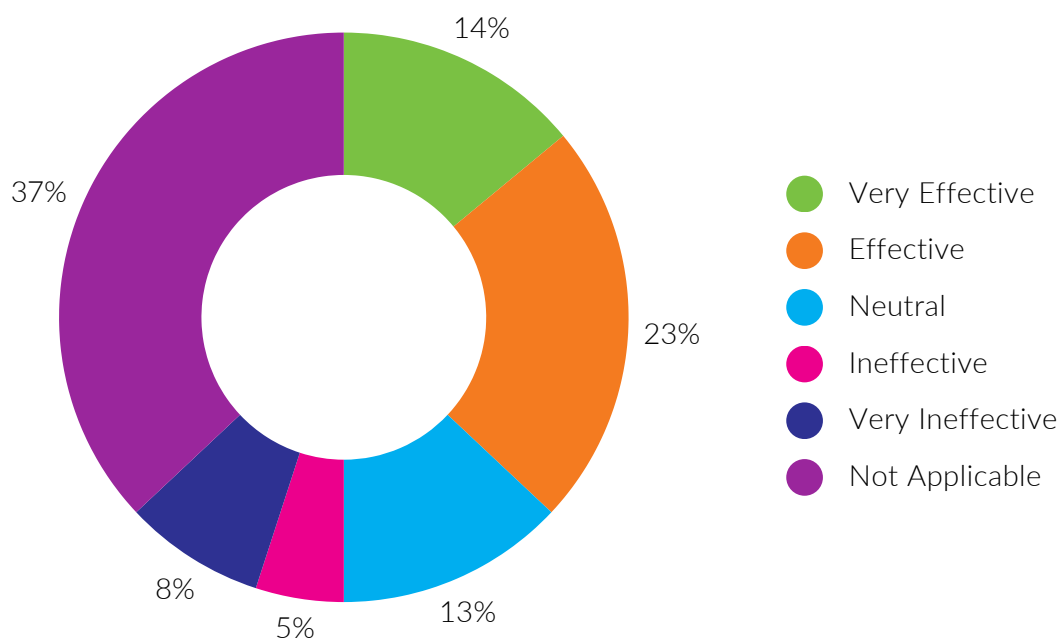
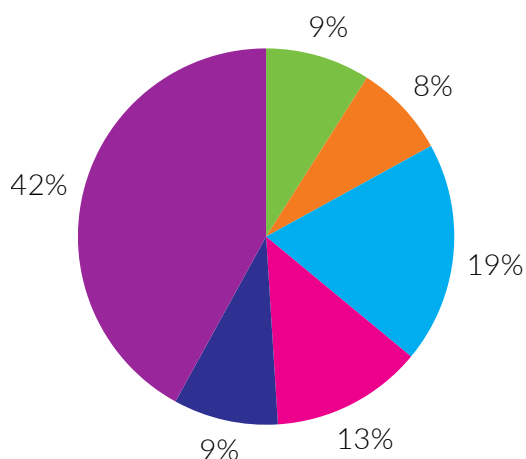


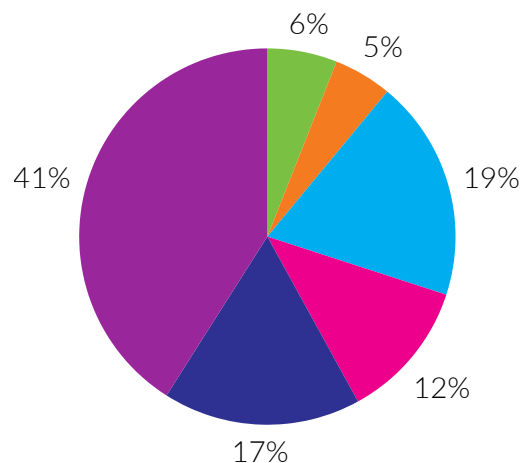
Figure 4

How satisfied were you with the following services and support provided by your SENDING institution after the end of your exchange? (n=172)

● Very Satisfied ● Satisfied ● Neutral ● Dissatisfied ● Very dissatisfied ● Not Applicable



Involvement in the alumni community as exchange ambassador/mentor upon return



Reintegration activities (e.g. “welcome back” day, reverse culture shock seminar etc.).

At the same time, survey data shows that students express an interest in remaining engaged after mobility, particularly in roles such as mentoring, ambassador activities or supporting incoming students (Figure 5). However, this willingness is not matched by the level of encouragement reported by students. In Sweden, a substantial share of respondents indicate neutral or negative responses when asked whether they were encouraged to engage after mobility (Figure 6). Data from the XV ESNsurvey further shows that encouragement from sending institutions is generally limited (Figure 7), suggesting that this gap is not only a matter of individual initiative, but also reflects how engagement is supported at the institutional level. This is particularly relevant in the context of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE), which commits higher education institutions to supporting participants throughout the mobility cycle, including encouraging continued engagement after mobility.

Figure 5

After your mobility, would you consider to/did you... ? (n=166)

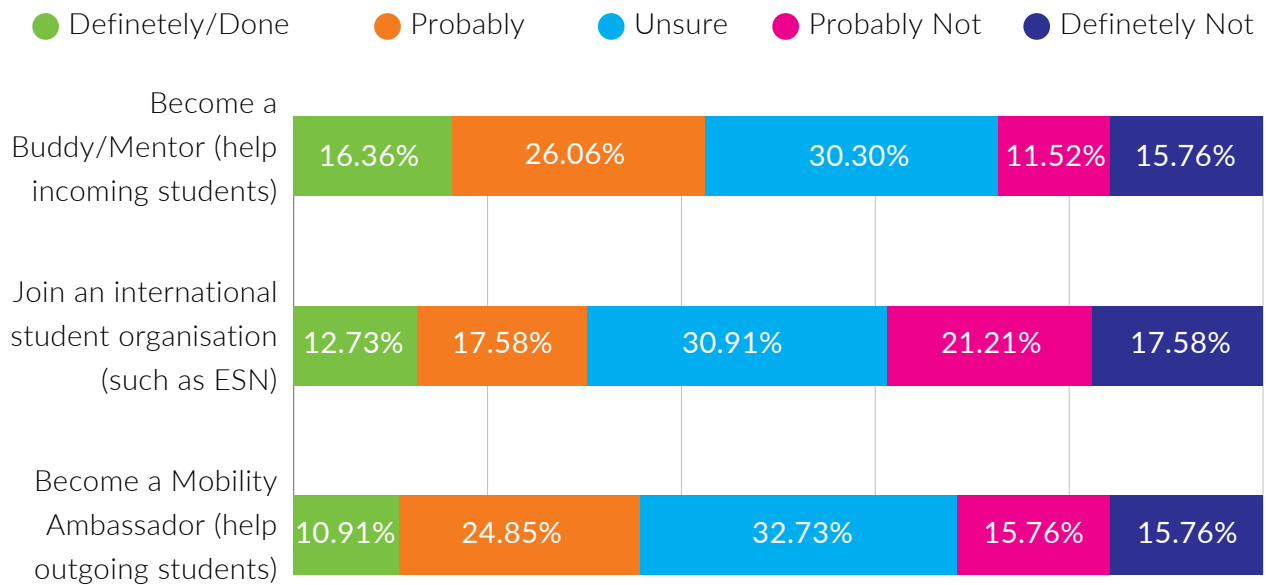


Figure 6

To which extent would you agree that your SENDING institution encouraged you to...? (n=165)

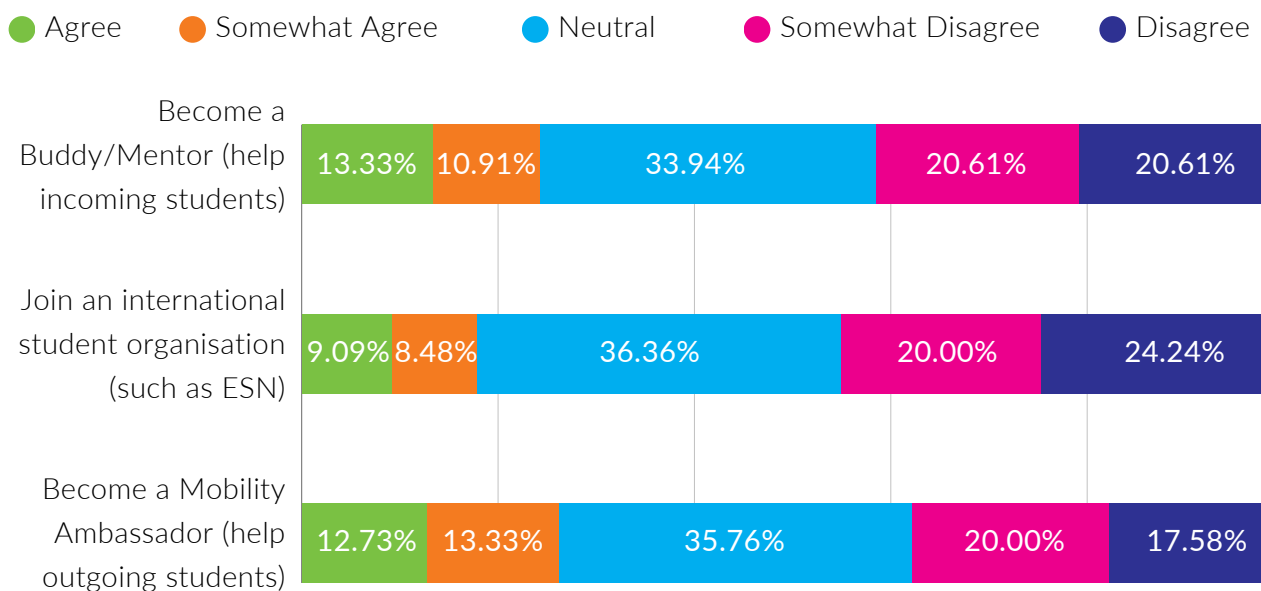
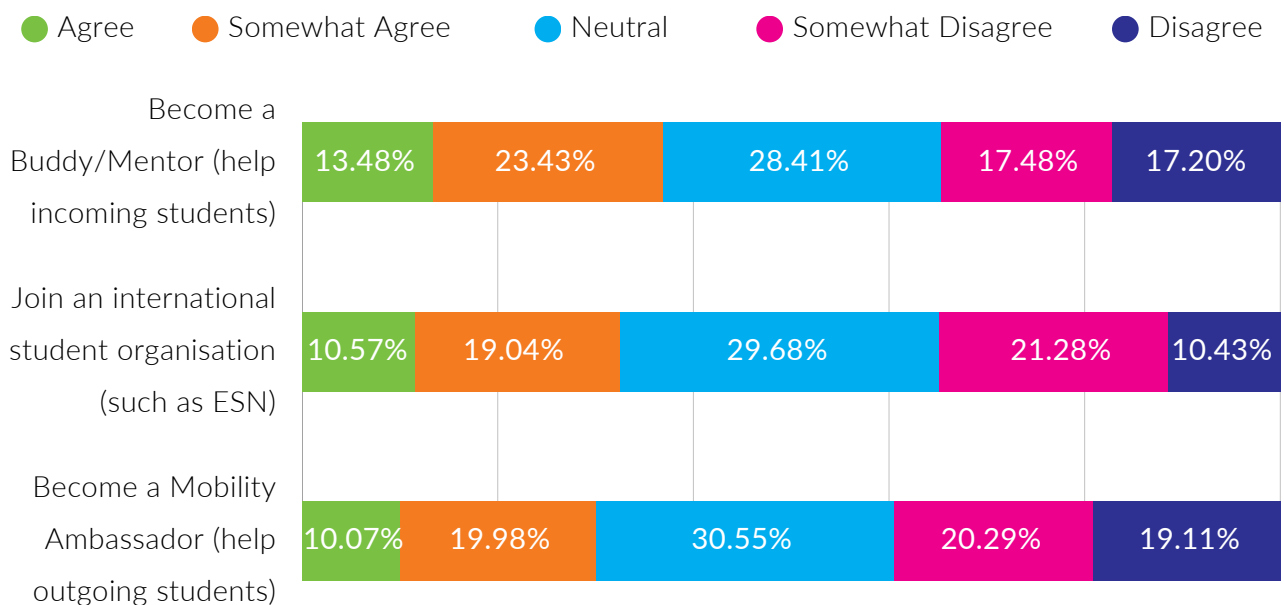


Figure 7

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



This may point to limited availability, visibility or accessibility of such opportunities. Engagement activities exist, but are not always presented as part of a clear and continuous pathway for students to remain involved after their mobility experience. As a result, participation may rely more on individual initiative than on structured pathways.

Together these findings suggest that while interest in engagement exists, it is not consistently supported in practice, limiting the extent to which mobility alumni engagement is realised.

***The information from the university was too scarce. Exchange studies were only mentioned on introduction day, but nothing else; no encouragement or any stories from alumni.***



- an incoming exchange student

Figure 7: Erasmus Student Network, XV ESNsurvey Report



# RECOMMENDATIONS

As shown in the ESNsurvey, there is clear interest from mobility alumni in remaining engaged after their mobility experience. However, this potential is not currently being fully utilised in Sweden. While initiatives exist, they are often fragmented and inconsistently supported. The following recommendations focus on how higher education institutions can better make use of mobility alumni by improving how these opportunities are communicated, structured and recognised.

**Making mobility more visible through social media** can help prospective participants better understand and relate to the experience of studying abroad. While Sweden is effective in promoting itself as a study destination for incoming students, fewer structured efforts focus on outgoing students. Developing similar approaches that highlight the experiences of Swedish students abroad can make mobility more visible and relatable in a domestic context. Involving mobility alumni and students currently on exchange in communication efforts, for example through student-led content or peer-to-peer formats, can provide accessible and credible insights into mobility and help address uncertainties among prospective students.

**Providing structured pathways for continued engagement** can help students remain involved after mobility without relying on individual initiative. While activities such as mentoring, ambassador roles and buddy programmes already exist, they are often experienced as separate or informal. Bringing these into a more visible and coordinated structure can make engagement more accessible and easier to sustain, while also supporting both incoming and outgoing students. The period after mobility is a key moment for engagement. Many students experience challenges when returning, including reverse culture shock or difficulties readjusting to their previous environment. Providing structured opportunities during this phase, such as peer support, mentoring roles, or activities for returning students, can help maintain connections and support reintegration while also serving as an entry point into longer-term alumni engagement.



**Recognising competences developed through mobility and engagement** can strengthen their visibility and perceived value for students. Mobility and alumni engagement contribute to the development of competences such as intercultural communication, adaptability, problem-solving and collaboration, which are directly relevant in professional contexts. Making these competences more visible can help students better articulate their experiences when entering the labour market. Several approaches already exist to support this. In Sweden, universities such as Malmö University, Lund University and KTH Royal Institute of Technology offer Certificates of International Merit or Global Competence. These frameworks typically combine mobility with participation in intercultural activities, courses, or volunteering, and in some cases also include engagement in international student communities. Other approaches, such as co-curricular transcripts or recognition within diploma supplements, similarly aim to capture competences developed outside formal coursework. However, these approaches are not consistently applied across institutions and do not always include continued engagement after mobility. Expanding recognition frameworks to explicitly include activities such as mentoring, ambassador roles, or contributions to international student communities can strengthen the perceived value of engagement while also making these opportunities more visible and accessible.

**Introducing engagement opportunities early** and maintaining continuous communication can support more consistent involvement throughout the mobility cycle. While many opportunities are presented to students after they return, they are not always visible beforehand. Making students aware of engagement possibilities already in the pre-departure phase can help set expectations and make it more likely that they remain involved after mobility. Maintaining communication throughout the mobility cycle can further support this continuity and reduce reliance on individual initiative.

Strengthening mobility alumni engagement in Sweden is less about creating new initiatives and more about improving how existing ones are connected, communicated and supported. Aligning these efforts across the mobility cycle can support students more effectively, increase participation in mobility and strengthen the overall impact of internationalisation in higher education.



# CONCLUSION

Mobility alumni represent an underutilised resource within higher education in Sweden. While students show interest in remaining engaged after their mobility experience, this potential is not consistently supported in practice. As this paper has shown, engagement opportunities often depend on visibility, structure, and the extent to which they are integrated into institutional approaches to internationalisation.

Addressing this gap does not require entirely new initiatives, but a more coherent approach to those already in place. Strengthening communication can make mobility more visible and relatable, particularly by integrating alumni perspectives into pre-departure and outreach efforts. Recognising competences developed through mobility and continued engagement can increase their value for students, particularly in relation to employability. At the same time, providing structured and accessible pathways for engagement, including during the reintegration phase, can enable more continuous involvement beyond the mobility period.

Taken together, these measures position mobility alumni not only as participants, but as active contributors to internationalisation. By embedding engagement more systematically across the mobility cycle, higher education institutions can better support students, strengthen mobility participation and enhance the long-term impact of international experiences.

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