

Mapping Queer Mobility

*A Comparative Study Report on the LGBTQIA+
International Student Experience in Greece and
Sweden within the Framework of the EU LGBTIQ+
Equality Strategy 2026-2030*

Executive Summary

This report analyses data from the LGBTQIA+ “Mapping Queer Mobility” Survey, a collaborative research initiative conducted by the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) Greece and Erasmus Student Network (ESN) Sweden. Grounded in the thematic priorities of the European Union’s LGBTQIA+ Equality Strategy 2026–2030, this study evaluates how human rights trends manifest within higher education and international student mobility.

Objective

The primary objective is to compare the day-to-day realities of exchange students across Greece and Sweden, identifying systemic gaps and highlighting cross-regional institutional practices regarding visibility, safety and inclusion.

The study used a hybrid survey design distributed across local international student communities, resulting in a sufficient sample from both Greece and Sweden.

Demographically, the dataset encompasses a diverse range of sexual orientations and gender identities, including a significant gender-expansive and transgender representation. To maximise participant psychological safety and lower response barriers, the survey employed mandatory baseline questions alongside strictly optional fields for sensitive, personal narratives of discrimination.

Insights and Observations

The empirical findings reveal a distinct geographical divide in everyday societal inclusion and personal expression. Students hosted in Sweden demonstrate exceptionally high comfort levels regarding public visibility, reporting highly positive scores in being able to express their identity in daily life.

On the contrary, the social reality in Greece remains heavily fragmented; more than half of the respondents in Greece encountered or witnessed explicitly hostile homophobic or transphobic

behaviour. Despite these regional differences, physical safety threats were reported at similar levels across both nations.

Everyday public environments like streets and transit networks represent the primary locations of vulnerability, accounting for most safety incidents, while structured environments, such as university campuses, remain comparatively safe.

The survey highlighted a significant gap in the provision of targeted and visible support by Higher Education Institutions. Systemic support gaps were reported by most students in both countries, directly driving the top two student-reported difficulties: a lack of an LGBTQIA+ community and severe psychological isolation. In contrast, civil society and peer networks like local ESN sections emerged as highly effective lifelines, receiving overwhelming positive support for creating actively inclusive student environments. While international students' resilience remains remarkably high, with most participants still recommending their respective host destinations, passive administrative tolerance is no longer sufficient.

Key Recommendations

The report concludes with a set of recommendations for key stakeholders.

Higher education institutions are strongly advised to:

- implement mandatory pre-arrival resource mapping;
- promote counseling networks during orientation;
- deliver explicit local public safety briefings.

Simultaneously, student networks are strongly advised to:

- formalise written codes of conduct;
- establish dedicated well-being contact personnel where possible;
- visibly express peer support across their communications to help reduce feelings of isolation.

Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the dedication, collaboration and shared vision of numerous individuals committed to advancing LGBTQIA+ equity and inclusion within international student mobility.

First and foremost, profound gratitude is expressed towards the international students who took the time to complete this survey. Sharing personal, and at times, highly sensitive, lived experiences requires trust and vulnerability. Their voices are the foundation of this study and their insights will directly serve to advocate for safer, more inclusive exchange environments for future generations of mobile students.

Sincere thanks are extended to the leadership and volunteers of both ESN Greece and ESN Sweden. This cross-regional initiative demonstrates the importance of international peer-to-peer collaboration in addressing human rights challenges within higher education across Northern and Southern Europe. Special recognition is due to the local ESN section volunteers in both hosting nations. Their continuous efforts in creating welcoming student communities, organising inclusive activities and providing vital peer-led support are directly reflected in the positive findings of this report. Finally, ESN Greece and ESN Sweden acknowledge the framework provided by the European Union's LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy 2026–2030 and the baseline benchmarks established by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). These frameworks have been important in guiding these research priorities and support the alignment of local student experiences with broader European human rights standards.

To everyone who contributed to the dissemination of the survey, the analysis of the dataset, and the drafting of this report: thank you for your unwavering support and commitment to meaningful structural change.

Special recognition is due to the core project team, coordinators and authors who led the data analysis, cross-regional alignment and drafting of this report:

Project Coordinators & Lead Authors:

Panagiotis Drosos (ESN Greece)

Christos Vazouras (ESN Sweden)

Data Analysts:

Panagiotis Drosos and Christos Vazouras (Lead Analysts)

Ieva Ramanauskaitė and Rania Dimopoulou (Contributing Analysts)

Graphic Designers & Editors:

Elena Katsantoni

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Introduction

This report presents an analysis of data collected through the LGBTQIA+ International Student Experience Survey, a collaborative initiative implemented by the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) Greece and ESN Sweden. Positioned within the framework of the European Union's

“LGBTIQ+ equality strategy 2026 - 2030”, this study focuses on the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ international students during their mobility periods. An example of this is being inspired by the pillars of the new strategy to ask participants about specific areas of their lives, such as the accommodation and safety areas. The primary aim of this initiative is to collect and compare the everyday experiences of these students in Greece and Sweden, ultimately highlighting regional similarities, differences, challenges and institutional good practices regarding safety, inclusion and visibility. To fulfill this aim, the survey established four core goals: to raise awareness of LGBTQIA+ inclusion across the international student community; to amplify real student voices and lived experiences; to foster meaningful dialogue on equality and diversity; and to provide data-driven support for future initiatives advocating for LGBTQIA+ rights within student mobility programmes.

In pursuing these goals, this study directly builds upon and contextualises the macro-level findings of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) LGBTIQ surveys. While the FRA provides comprehensive data on the general challenges faced by LGBTIQ+ individuals across Europe, international student mobility introduces unique vulnerabilities, such as temporary housing, institutional navigation and rapid cultural adaptation. By narrowing the lens to higher education, this initiative bridges the gap between FRA’s broader European trends and the specific, day-to-day realities of international students moving to Greece and Sweden.

Methodology and Data Sample

To ensure transparency and academic rigour, this section outlines the dataset, participant demographics and the structural design of the survey. The survey questionnaire was accessible to participants between March 25 and April 26, 2026.

Data Sample and Country Distribution

The survey collected a total of 146 responses from LGBTQIA+ international students. The distribution of respondents between the two hosting countries is as follows:

Greece: 80 respondents (54.8% of total sample),

Sweden: 66 respondents (45.2% of total sample).

Participant Demographics

The respondent profile represents a diverse cross-section of the international student community in both countries.

Academic and Mobility Status

The dataset successfully captures highly mobile demographics, with a heavy emphasis on formal exchange frameworks:

Erasmus+ Studies: 52.1% (n=76) formed the absolute majority of respondents.

Full-Degree International Students: 21.9% (n=32) were pursuing full Bachelor's or Master's degrees abroad.

Local ESN Volunteers: 11.0% (n=16) participated, providing vital institutional context on local student support structures.

Other Mobility Tracks: The remaining 15.0% (n=22) comprised Erasmus+ trainees/interns (n=7), alternative mobility programmes (n=6), Erasmus Mundus and European Solidarity Corps (ESC) volunteers (n=2).

Gender Identity

The survey gathered data across both cisgender and gender-expansive realities:

Cisgender Women: 62.3% (n=91)

Cisgender Men: 22.6% (n=33)

Gender-Expansive & Trans Identities: 15.1% (n=22) identified outside of cisgender categories.

This cohort includes Non-binary individuals (9.6%, (n=14), Trans women (n=3), Trans men (n=2), Demi-girls (n=1) and those preferring not to say (n=2). Together, these respondents represent 15.1% of the sample which is critical because it aligns directly with the thematic priorities of the

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, which notes that transgender and non-binary individuals experience disproportionately higher rates of structural discrimination and visibility risks.

Sexual Orientation

Respondents represented a broad pluralistic spectrum of sexual orientations:

Bisexual / Biromantic: 38.4% (n=56)

Lesbian: 18.5% (n=27)

Gay: 16.4% (n=24)

Queer: 10.3% (n=15)

Pansexual: 8.2% (n=12)

Asexual Spectrum: 4.8% (n=7)

Questioning / Unlabeled / Refused to specify: 3.4% (n=5)

Survey Design and Question Structure

The survey instrument was structured to maximise respondent privacy and comfort while gathering deep qualitative and quantitative insights.

Mandatory vs. Optional Questions: To encourage participation and respect the sensitive nature of LGBTQIA+ experiences, the survey used a hybrid structure. Core demographic information and baseline safety measures were mandatory, while more specific questions relating to experiences of discrimination, safety concerns or shortcomings in support provision were optional.

Data Integrity: The analysis within this report accounts for this flexible structure. Percentages cited in subsequent data chapters are calculated based on the total number of answers received for that specific question, rather than the overarching sample size (n=146). This ensures statistical integrity across sections where respondents chose to skip sensitive optional fields.

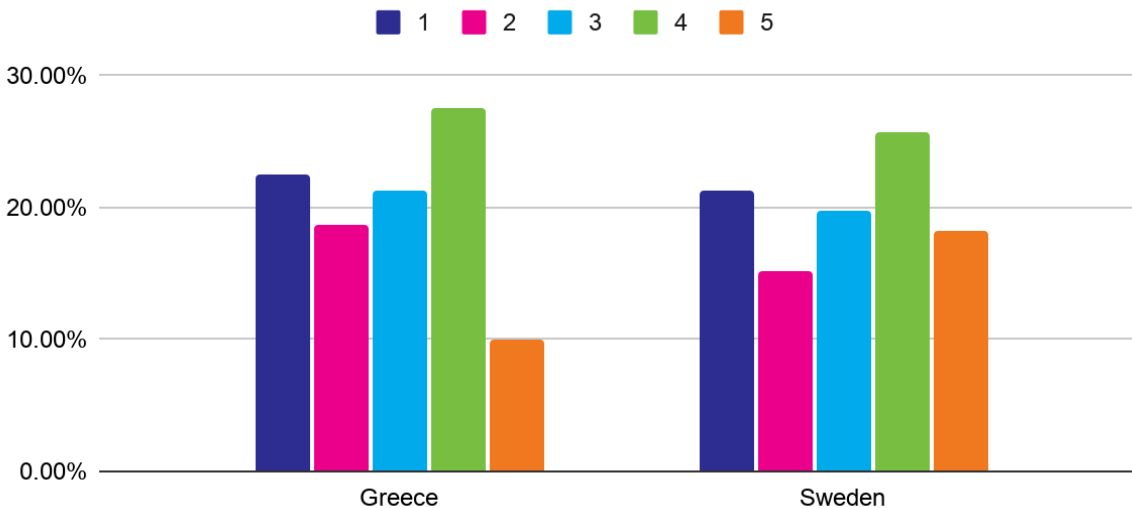
Findings

LGBTQIA+ Rights - Choosing Studying Destinations

When asked whether LGBTQIA+ rights or social acceptance had influenced their choice of study destination, responses were divided. As one can see in Graph 1 below, grouping the two lowest ratings together, around 41.2% of students in Greece and 36.3% in Sweden said it had little to no influence on their decision. On the other hand, around 37.5% in Greece and 43.9% in Sweden said it did play a role. The remaining fifth of respondents in both countries were neither positive nor negative. Overall, students in Sweden were somewhat more likely to say that LGBTQIA+ acceptance shaped their choice of destination, while in Greece the responses leaned slightly towards it not being a factor, though the difference between the two countries was insignificant.

Did LGBTQIA+ rights or social acceptance influence your decision when choosing your studying destination?

1: Not at all, 5: Very much



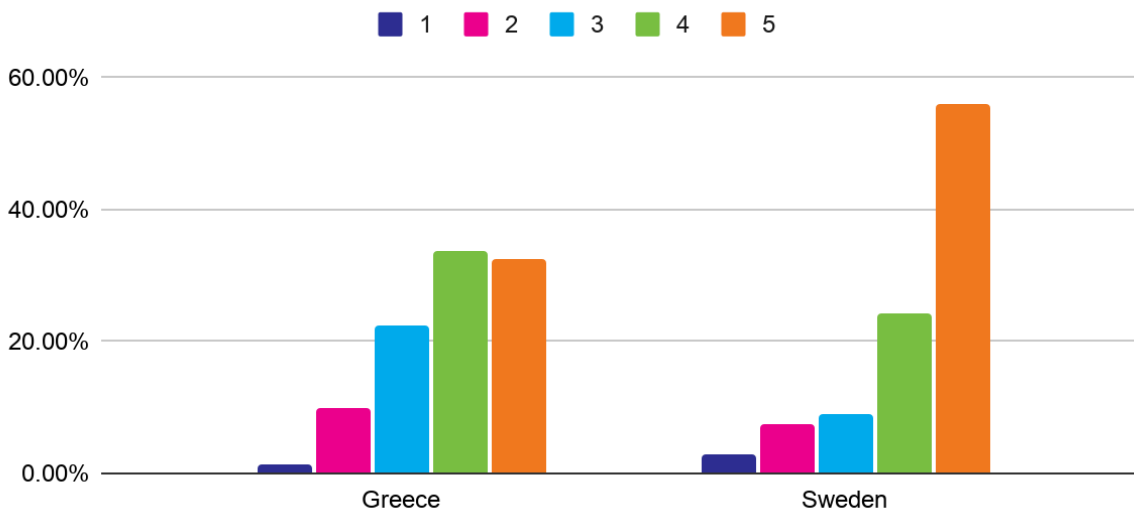
Graph 1. Influence of LGBTQIA+ rights or social acceptance on students when choosing their studying destination. Number of responses: 146.

LGBTQIA+ Identity Expression

According to Graph 2, students in Sweden feel substantially more comfortable expressing their LGBTQIA+ identity openly in daily life compared to those in Greece. In Sweden, a clear majority of 56% reported feeling completely comfortable, with roughly 80% expressing a positive level of comfort overall. In contrast, responses in Greece are much more evenly distributed across the spectrum. While a high level of comfort was the single most common choice among Greek students at 33.7%, nearly a third (32.5%) felt completely comfortable, bringing the total positive comfort level in Greece to just over two-thirds (66.2%). The remaining third of Greek respondents largely maintained a neutral stance (22.5%), with only a small minority reporting low or very low comfort. Overall, students in Sweden show a decisive leaning toward high daily comfort, whereas the Greek data reflects a more varied and divided sentiment.

Do you feel comfortable being openly LGBTQIA+ in your daily life in your host country (campus, social life, nightlife)?

1: Not at all, 5: Very much



Graph 2. Respondents' comfort levels regarding identity expression in their daily life, in their studying destination. Number of responses: 146.

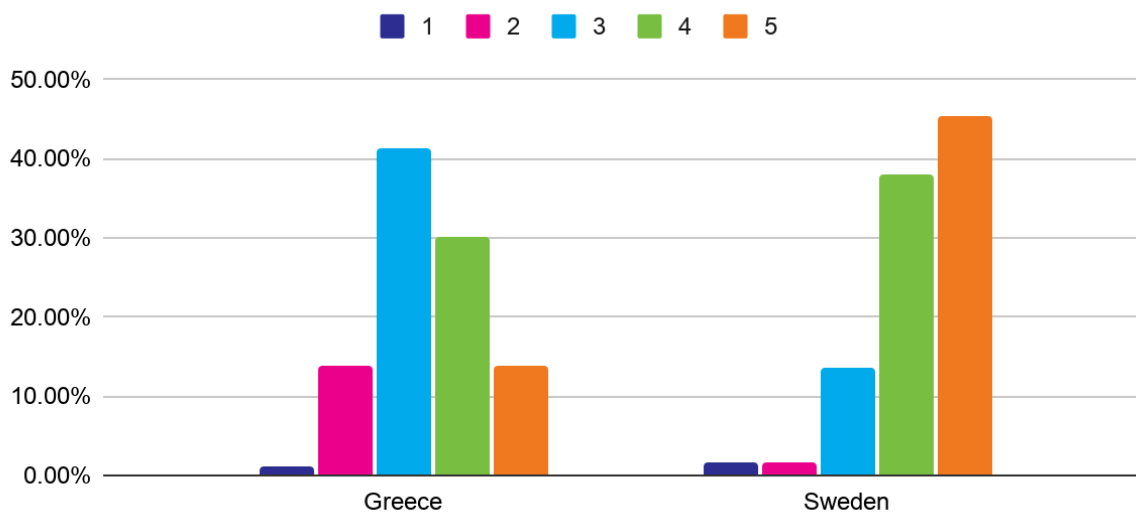
Local Society and Inclusivity

When asked whether local society is inclusive towards LGBTQIA+ students, responses from Sweden were noticeably more positive than those from Greece. In Sweden, a near-majority of approximately 45.4% viewed their local society as completely inclusive, contributing to a strong

overall positive consensus. In contrast, responses in Greece were much more widely distributed across the spectrum. The largest share of Greek students (around 41.2%) maintained a neutral stance, feeling that local society was neither positive nor negative, while a much smaller proportion viewed it as inclusive or highly inclusive (43.7% in total). Overall, while respondents in both countries showed a general leaning toward the positive end of the scale, students in Sweden were still considerably more likely to perceive their local society as inclusive compared to their peers in Greece.

Do you think the local society is inclusive towards LGBTQIA+ students?

1: Not at all, 5: Very much



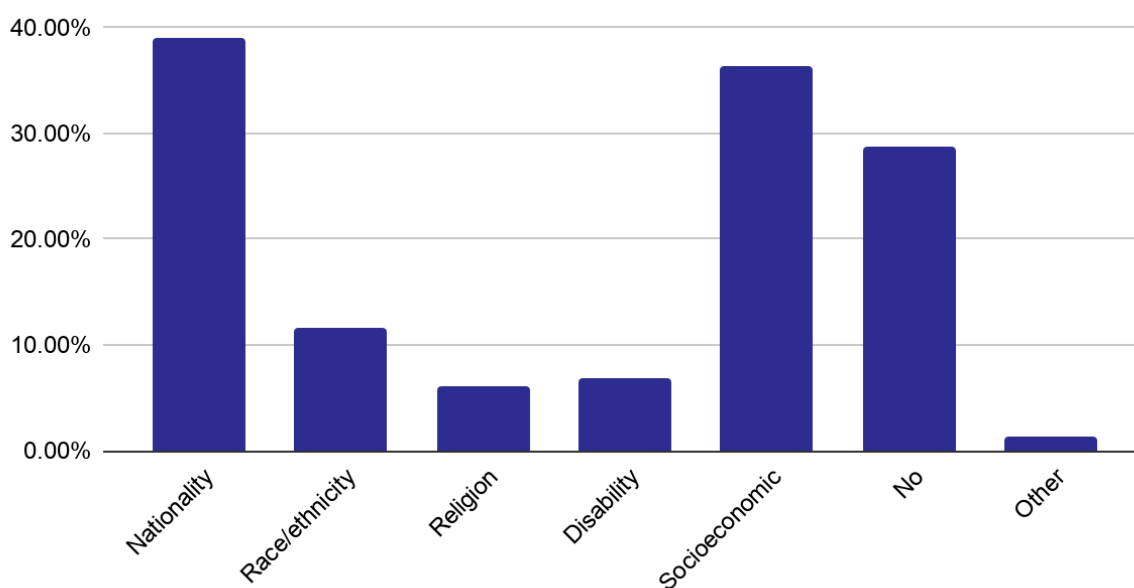
Graph 3. Respondents' perception of the inclusivity of local societies towards LGBTQIA+ students. Number of responses: 146.

Aspects of Identity Influencing The Mobility Experience

Regarding the impact of other personal characteristics on their Erasmus+ or wider international student experience, responses highlighted nationality and socioeconomic background as the most influential factors. As the data shows, nationality was the most commonly cited aspect at 39%, followed closely by socioeconomic background at 36.3%. In contrast, nearly one third (28.7%) of respondents indicated that no other aspect of their identity had played a role in their experience. Cultural and physical factors were less prevalent;

race or ethnicity was mentioned by 11.6% of participants, while religion and disability were minor considerations, each cited by fewer than 7% of respondents.

Other aspects of identity influencing the mobility experience



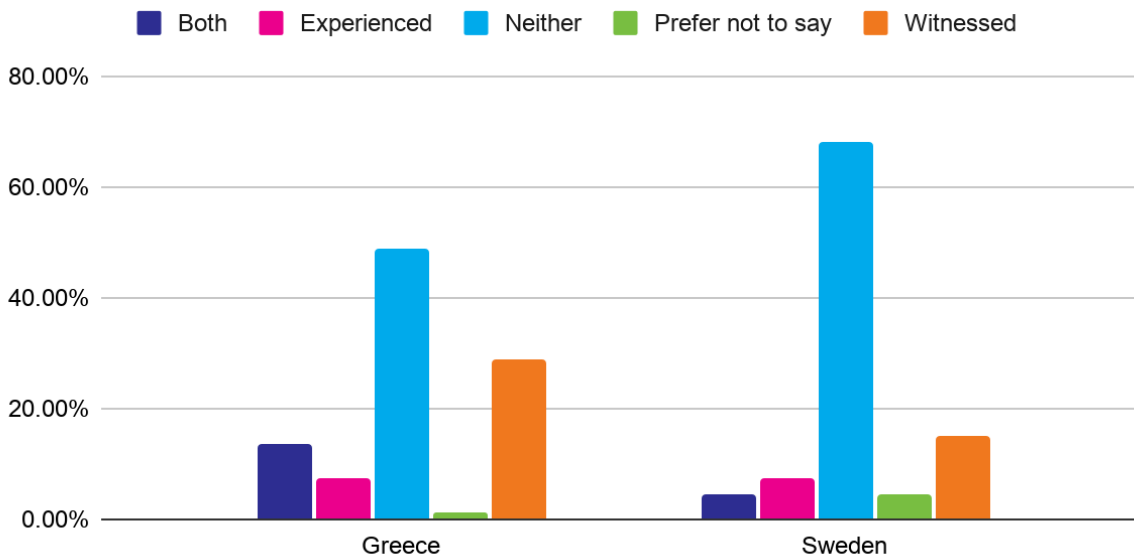
Graph 4. Respondents' perception of different aspects of identity negatively influencing their mobility experience. Number of responses: 146.

Discrimination

When asked whether they had experienced or witnessed homophobic or transphobic behaviour in their host country, responses revealed that a clear majority of students in both destinations had not encountered such incidents. As illustrated in Graph 5, this sentiment was particularly pronounced in Sweden, where over two-thirds of respondents (68.1%) indicated they had experienced neither. In Greece, the share of students who had unaffected experiences was also the largest single category, though notably lower at 48.7%. Conversely, a higher proportion of students in Greece reported encountering negative behaviours compared to those in Sweden. Specifically, 28.7% of students in Greece witnessed such behaviour and 13.7% experienced both witnessing and directly facing it. In comparison, only 15.1% of respondents in Sweden reported witnessing these incidents, with only 4.5% experiencing both. In both countries, only a marginal minority reported directly experiencing harassment alone or preferred not to answer. Overall, while the vast majority of students in Sweden reported an

environment free from these behaviours, the data from Greece reflects a noticeably higher prevalence of both witnessed and direct discrimination.

Have you experienced or witnessed homophobic or transphobic behaviour in your host country?

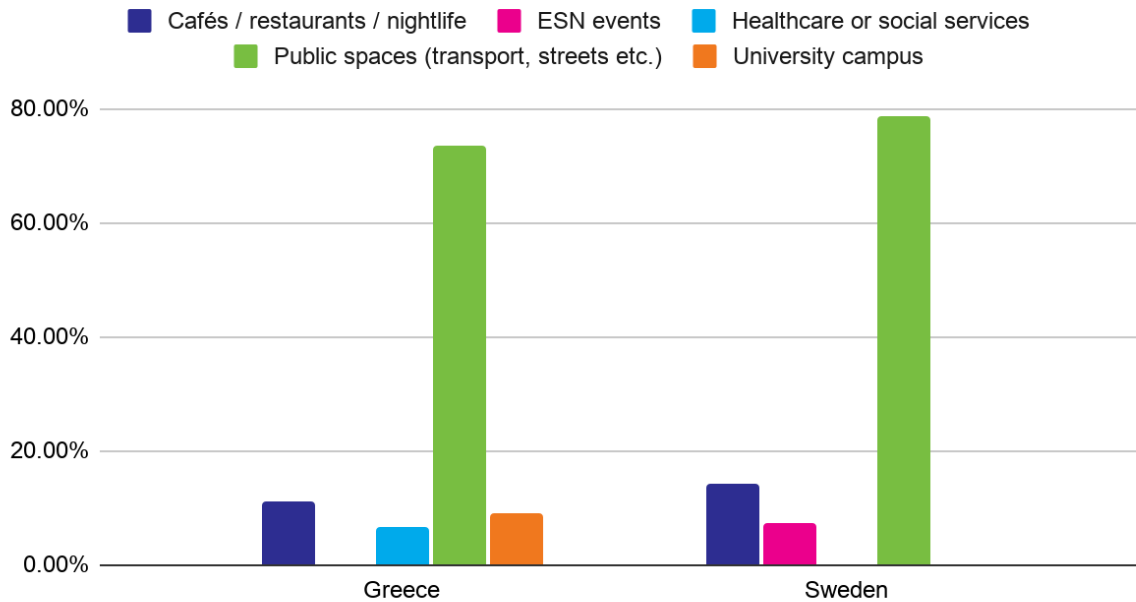


Graph 5. Discrimination percentages LGBTQIA+ students have witnessed or experienced in their studying destinations. Number of responses: 146.

Public Spaces and Safety

Among the respondents, 59.6% said they had never felt unsafe because of their LGBTQIA+ identity in their host country. Of the remaining 41.4% who had felt unsafe, public spaces such as streets and public transport were by far the most commonly cited setting, accounting for 74.6% of responses and this was consistent across both countries. Cafes, restaurants and nightlife places were the second most cited, at 11.9%. University campuses and healthcare or social services were each cited by fewer than 9.0% of those who had felt unsafe. Overall, while the majority of students had not experienced a sense of unsafety, those who had were most likely to encounter it in everyday public spaces rather than in institutional or social settings.

Places where LGBTQIA+ Students felt unsafe

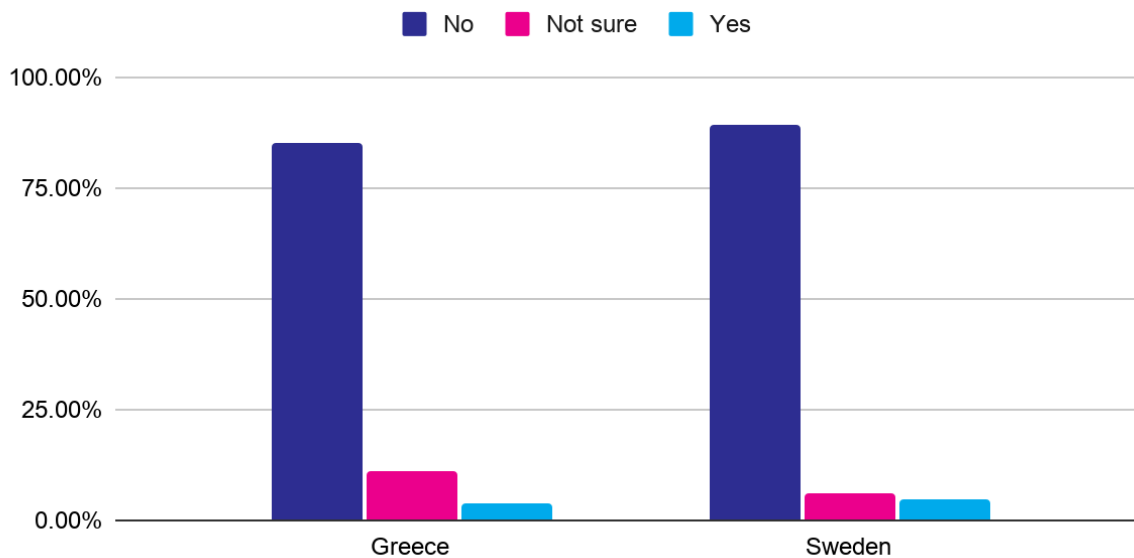


Graph 6. Respondents' perception of the places where LGBTQIA+ students have felt unsafe in their studying destinations. The students who haven't felt unsafe are not included in the graph. Number of responses: 59.

Accommodation

Regarding whether their LGBTQIA+ identity had impacted their search for accommodation, the overwhelming majority of respondents in both countries reported that it was not a factor. As shown in the graph, this sentiment was nearly universal, with 89.4% of students in Sweden and 85.0% in Greece stating that their identity had no effect on finding housing. In contrast, only a tiny fraction of respondents in either destination explicitly felt that their identity had created an impact, amounting to less than 5% of students in both Greece and Sweden. The remaining small segment of the student cohort in both countries, 11.2% in Greece and 6.0% in Sweden, remained uncertain about whether their identity had played a role. Overall, the data reveals a highly consistent trend across both host environments, indicating that the vast majority of LGBTQIA+ students do not encounter identity-related obstacles when securing accommodation, with Swedish respondents showing a slightly more definitive consensus.

Did your LGBTQIA+ identity affect your experience finding accommodation?



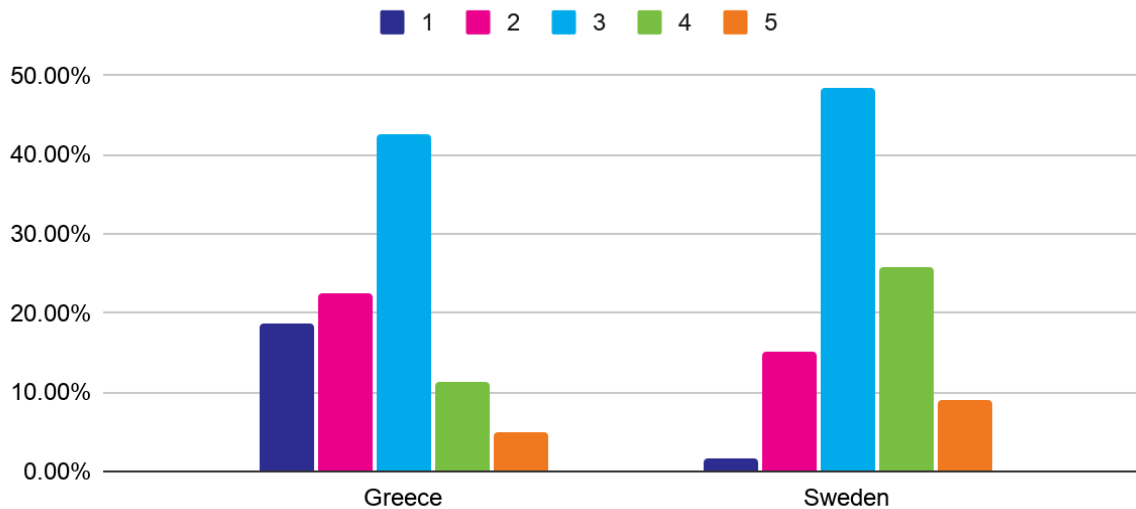
Graph 7. Respondents' perception of the perceived impact of LGBTQIA+ identity on securing accommodation. Number of responses: 146.

Higher Education Institute Support

According to Graph 8, the data reveals a widespread perception that universities in both countries fall short in addressing LGBTQIA+ matters. This sentiment is particularly pronounced in Greece, where the vast majority of international students (83.7%), reported that their Higher Education Institution (HEI) does not provide adequate support. While the trend is somewhat less severe in Sweden, a clear majority of 65.1% likewise indicated a lack of sufficient institutional assistance. In contrast, only a minor segment of the student cohort felt well-supported by their universities; over a third of respondents in Sweden (34.8%) believed their HEI provided adequate support, compared to a much smaller minority of just 16.2% in Greece. Overall, while Swedish universities are perceived as noticeably more supportive than Greek universities, the findings highlight a significant gap in institutional LGBTQIA+ support across both study destinations.

Do you feel that your university provides adequate support for LGBTQIA+ students?

1: Not at all, 5: Very much



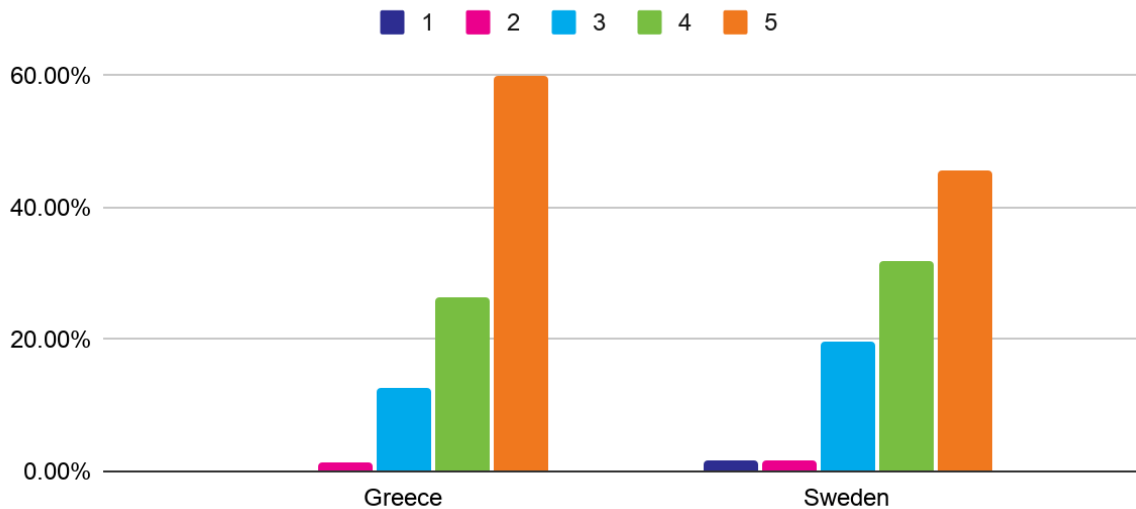
Graph 8. Respondents' perception of the support that Higher Education Institutes provide towards LGBTQIA+ students. Number of responses: 146.

ESN Support

Findings regarding ESN indicate that the organisation is widely perceived as inclusive and supportive toward LGBTQIA+ individuals. In both destinations, the most common response was a maximum rating of complete satisfaction, which was selected by 60% of respondents in Greece and 45.4% in Sweden. This positive finding is further supported by a large proportion of participants in both countries, indicating generally positive perceptions of the support and environment provided by ESN. In contrast, only a small amount of participants reported low or very low ratings across both datasets, strongly suggesting that the vast majority of international students feel ESN successfully fosters a welcoming and supportive environment. Overall, while Greek respondents demonstrated an even higher concentration of top-tier satisfaction, ESN achieved a decisively positive consensus across both student groups.

Do you think ESN is friendly and supportive towards LGBTQIA+ students?

1: Not at all, 5: Very much

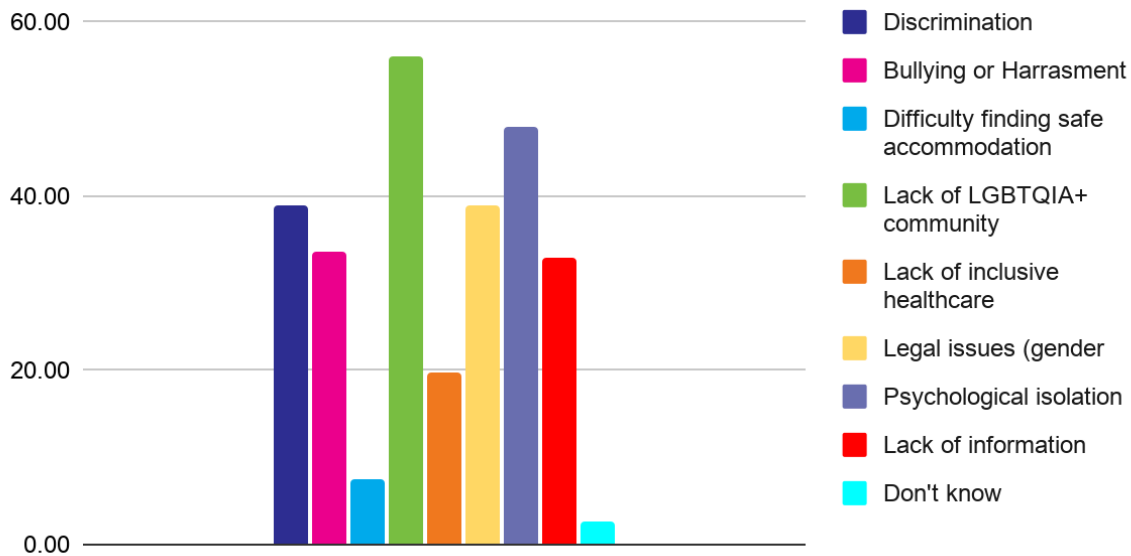


Graph 9. Respondents' perception of ESN as a friendly and supportive organisation towards LGBTQIA+ students. Number of responses: 146.

Biggest Challenges

Regarding the challenges encountered by the cohort, respondents were permitted to select multiple options, revealing that the absence of a dedicated LGBTQIA+ community as the most widespread obstacle, cited by a clear majority of 56.1% of respondents. Psychological isolation emerged as the second most prevalent issue, affecting nearly half of the participants at 47.9%. Systemic and interpersonal challenges were also substantial; both discrimination and legal hurdles were reported by identical shares of 39.0% of respondents, followed closely by bullying or harassment at 33.5%. Overall, these findings reveal that while overt harassment is a major concern, the primary struggles for international LGBTQIA+ students center heavily around institutional erasure, emotional detachment and structural vulnerabilities within their host environments.

Which of these mentioned below do you think are the biggest problems LGBTQIA+ students face?



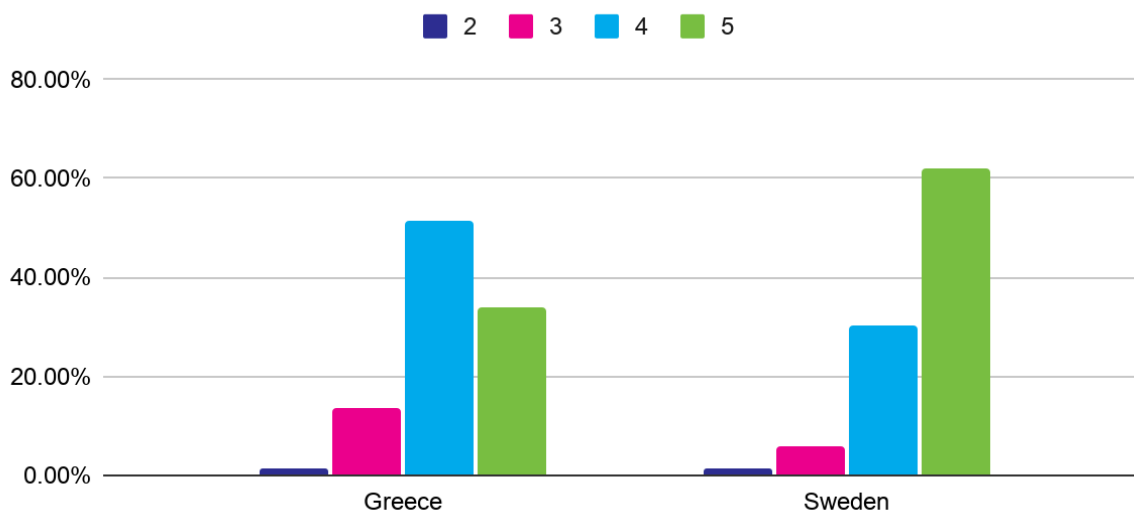
Graph 10. Respondents' perception of the biggest problems LGBTQIA+ students face. Number of responses: 146.

Host Countries and Student Recommendations

Despite both countries presenting distinct advantages and challenges for LGBTQIA+ individuals, the vast majority of respondents in both destinations would recommend their study location to other LGBTQIA+ students. In both Greece and Sweden, a resounding majority of over 84% gave a positive recommendation. However, the distribution of these responses shows a notable difference between the two countries. In Sweden, a majority of students expressed the highest level of enthusiasm, with over 60% indicating they would strongly recommend the experience. In Greece, responses were more moderate, with the largest share (approximately 51.2%) selecting a moderately positive endorsement. Overall, while both destinations receive strong endorsement, recommendations appear more strongly positive among respondents in Sweden compared to those in Greece.

Would you recommend your studying destination to other LGBTQIA+ students?

1: Not at all, 5: Very much



Graph 11. Likelihood of LGBTQIA+ students to recommend their study destination. Number of responses: 146.

General Recommendations

To bridge the gap between the macro-level objectives of the European Union’s LGBTQIA+ Equality Strategy and the localised daily realities of mobile students, structural adjustments are urgently required. Passive administrative tolerance must be replaced by active, institutionalised inclusion. The recommendations that follow are not abstract policy proposals, instead they are drawn directly from the suggestions of the LGBTQIA+ international students themselves, offered when reflecting on their own experiences.

Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions

Students feel that university support should be more visible and easier to access from the very beginning of their mobility. Students suggested the following:

- **Provide Pre-Arrival Information:** Universities should include LGBTQIA+ information in their welcome guides. This includes details on local safety, anti-discrimination laws and available student groups.

- **Promote Existing Resources:** Many universities already have student health services, counselors and queer student groups. However, international students often do not know they exist. These resources need better promotion during orientation week.
- **Map Out Safe Spaces:** Institutions should provide a list or map of LGBTQIA+-friendly spots in the city, such as cafés, bars and community centers, to help students find safe social spaces quickly.
- **Address Public Safety:** Universities should offer general safety tips about the host city, including which areas or neighbourhoods might be less safe for minority groups.

Recommendations for ESN sections

Students want ESN to show clear allyship, make events more inclusive and provide better peer-to-peer support. This is why students made suggestions based on their experience with our organisation and based on their experience in our events:

- **Show Visible Allyship on Online Platforms:** ESN sections should use inclusive symbols, like rainbow flags, on Instagram and websites. This lets incoming students know immediately that ESN is a supportive and safe space.
- **Diversify Event Formats:** Not all LGBTQIA+ students want to go to clubs or parties (these are the most common LGBTQIA+ events). ESN should organise more relaxed, daytime activities like BBQs, hiking, or social outings. These casual events make it easier to talk, bond and share experiences.
- **Organise Specific Community Events:** ESN should host specific mixers or events where LGBTQIA+ students and allies can meet, network and build a strong community together.
- **Create a Well-being Point of Contact:** Local ESN sections should have a designated "well-being officer". This person can support students who face difficulties and guide them to professional help if needed.
- **Establish Clear Safe Space Policies:** ESN must ensure that all participants feel respected at events. Sexual orientation and gender identity should never be a source of concern or discomfort during activities. To achieve this, sections should implement a

formal code of conduct, clear rules and enforceable guidelines, rather than relying solely on passive statements like “everyone is welcome”.

Conclusion

This report offers a critical, comparative look at the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ international students during their mobility periods in Greece and Sweden. The findings reveal a complex intersection of student expectations, everyday structural challenges, safety concerns and institutional support systems. The data paints a clear picture of the regional disparities that persist across the European higher education landscape. A visible divergence between Northern and Southern Europe is highlighted, where students in Sweden report significantly higher levels of comfort in expressing openly their identity in their daily lives and perceive local society as noticeably more inclusive. In Greece, students face a more fragmented social reality, with over half reporting encounters with or witnessing homophobic and transphobic behaviour. Across both countries, an important trend emerged regarding physical safety. While institutional settings like campuses feel relatively secure, everyday public spaces, such as streets and public transport, remain the primary sites of vulnerability, accounting for the vast majority of all reported safety concerns.

Furthermore, the study underlines that the LGBTQIA+ experience cannot be isolated, as nationality and socioeconomic background frequently intersect to shape a student's safety and comfort abroad. A key finding of this research is the gap between students' expectations and the level of proactive support currently offered by HEIs. An overwhelming majority of students in Greece and a significant majority in Sweden feel their universities fail to provide adequate LGBTQIA+ resources, a systemic absence that leaves students exposed to profound community deficiencies and psychological isolation. Where official university frameworks fall short, peer-to-peer student networks step in. The highly positive ratings given to ESN Greece and ESN Sweden prove that international student organisations serve as a vital lifeline, creating the safe, inclusive environments that students mention in their recommendations. Ultimately, despite distinct regional obstacles and safety risks, the spirit of international mobility remains resilient, as the vast majority of respondents across both destinations would still recommend their study abroad location to other LGBTQIA+ students. However, goodwill and peer solidarity are not enough to ensure long-term, systemic equity. To bridge the gap between macro-level

EU equality strategies and the daily realities of exchange students, a shift from passive tolerance to active, structured inclusion is urgently required.