

Student Perspectives on International Mobility

XVI ESNsurvey Sweden Report

ESN
Erasmus Student Network
Sweden

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Key findings

Key Finding 1

Timing of mobility decisions (Figure 2.1, p. 22)

Students decided to participate in mobility at different stages of their education. The most frequently reported point was **after learning about exchange opportunities through their university (45.31%), while 36.72% had already decided before starting university**. These results highlight the importance of providing information about international mobility **throughout students' educational journeys**, including before enrolment.

Key Finding 2

Motivations for mobility and choice of destination (Figures 2.2 and 2.3, pp. 24-25)

Students' motivations for international mobility were strongly connected to cultural experiences and personal development. The most frequently selected motivations were gaining knowledge of another culture and engaging with people from different cultural backgrounds (both 72.87%), followed by experiencing different learning environments (67.44%). However, when choosing a destination, academic considerations received the highest average importance ratings, particularly the availability of courses recognised by the home university and courses aligned with students' career paths (both M = 3.82).

Key Finding 3

People influencing students' mobility decisions (Figure 2.4, p. 26)

Previous exchange students, family members and friends had higher average influence scores on students' mobility decisions than university staff and professors. **Previous exchange students received the highest average score** (M = 2.60), followed by family (M = 2.51) and friends (M = 2.50), while university professors had the lowest (M = 1.80). However, the overall ratings suggest that the influence of these groups was relatively modest.

Key findings

Key Finding 4

Difficulties experienced during mobility (Figure 3.4, p. 35)

Generally, **incoming exchange students are most likely to struggle to connect with locals** (34.58%). This is also evident from Figures 3.1 and 3.2, which show that incoming exchange students were less likely to interact with local students and members of the local community (on average 33.51% indicated that they interact with them often or very often) than with international students (on average 77.99% indicating that they interacted with them often or very often). Additionally, on average 46.32% of incoming exchange students had 6 or more friends who were international students, while only 13.81% of incoming exchange students had 6 or more friends who were local students or from the local community. **Among outgoing students, course-related problems were the most frequently reported difficulty** (41.86%), while difficulties connecting with the local community were the fourth most frequently reported issue (20.16%).

Key Finding 5

Perceived equal access and responses to discrimination (Figure 3.10, p. 40)

Incoming students generally perceived international and local students as having equal access to academic facilities, social activities and health support, with agreement rates ranging from 63.64% to 79.79%. Agreement was particularly high regarding equal opportunities to discuss academic issues with professors (89.78%). **However, only 29.73% agreed or strongly agreed that insensitive, degrading or insulting remarks about international students were addressed**, while 43.78% disagreed or strongly disagreed. This indicates an important area for improvement in how higher education institutions respond to discrimination.

Key Finding 6

Institutional support after mobility (Figure 4.1, p. 43)

Outgoing students were generally satisfied with academic follow-up after mobility, particularly credit recognition, but support for making use of the exchange experience afterwards was considerably weaker. Only around **one quarter were satisfied with career-related guidance and reintegration activities**, while many responses were neutral or negative. This suggests that **institutions could strengthen post-mobility support** by helping students translate their international experience into career opportunities, supporting reintegration, and creating clearer pathways for continued engagement through alumni activities.

Key findings

Key Finding 7

Student engagement after mobility (Figures 4.5 and 4.6, p. 47)

Outgoing students expressed interest in remaining involved in international student activities after their mobility, particularly through becoming a Buddy or Mentor (56.76%) or a Mobility Ambassador (48.18%). However, **reported encouragement from sending universities was considerably lower**, with fewer than 35% agreeing that their university encouraged participation in any of the three activities examined. This suggests an opportunity for higher education institutions and student organisations to **strengthen cooperation and provide clearer opportunities for returning students to remain engaged.**

Key Finding 8

Improving the long-term value of mobility (Figure 4.9, p. 50)

Outgoing students identified several areas where support after mobility could be improved, **particularly regarding future career opportunities**. The most frequently reported need was better guidance on how to present mobility experiences in CVs and job applications (51.94%), followed by guidance on applying international experience to future careers (36.43%) and stronger connections between mobility programmes and potential employers (31.01%). These findings highlight the need for greater support in **translating international mobility experiences into professional opportunities.**

Key Finding 9

Improvement of skills (Figure 4.10, p. 51)

Students most frequently reported improvements in intercultural understanding, adaptability, and personal development. Competences such as cultural awareness and expression, intercultural learning, multilingualism, self-awareness, and flexibility were most frequently reported by students to have improved during the mobility. These **competences remain relevant beyond the mobility period**, as they can support students in adapting to new environments, communicating across cultures, working in diverse teams, and navigating future academic and professional contexts.

Introduction

The value of international student mobility extends far beyond the time students spend abroad. Through programmes such as Erasmus+, students have the opportunity to experience different educational environments, develop new skills, build international connections and gain perspectives that can influence their personal and professional lives. However, the benefits of mobility depend not only on the opportunities available abroad, but also on how students are supported throughout the entire experience, from preparation and participation to their return home.

Despite the opportunities offered by international mobility, students continue to face challenges throughout their experience. Financial barriers, administrative procedures, academic recognition and social integration can influence both access to mobility and its overall quality. Furthermore, the period following mobility requires greater attention. While students may return with new skills, competences and international experience, these are not always effectively recognised or translated into further educational and professional opportunities. Focusing on post-mobility support is therefore an important part of ensuring that the benefits of international mobility are fully realised.

Understanding these challenges and ensuring that students' perspectives are reflected in the development of mobility programmes is core to the work of the Erasmus Student Network (ESN). As one of Europe's largest student organisations, ESN supports international students and advocates for more accessible and higher-quality mobility opportunities under the motto of *Students Helping Students*. Through its local, national and international structures, the organisation works directly with mobile students while representing their interests towards higher education institutions and policymakers.

One of ESN's flagship projects is the ESNsurvey, a Europe-wide research initiative dedicated to understanding the experiences, needs and challenges of internationally mobile students. By collecting students' perspectives, the ESNsurvey provides insights into the implementation of mobility programmes. Its findings contribute to evidence-based advocacy and support discussions on the future development of international higher education and mobility policies.

Through the Swedish subset of the ESNsurvey, ESN Sweden aims to contribute to a better understanding of the experiences and needs of mobile students and provide an evidence base for discussions with higher education institutions, public authorities and other relevant stakeholders. The findings are intended to inform recommendations for improving international student mobility in Sweden, strengthening support throughout the mobility experience and ensuring that its benefits continue beyond the period spent abroad.

Methodology

The analysis presented in this report is based on data collected through the XVI ESNsurvey, conducted by the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) across Europe between May and August 2025.[1] The survey was distributed through an online questionnaire, with participation being voluntary. ESN Sweden received a subset of the collected data covering respondents with a connection to Sweden.

The analysis focuses on two groups of respondents: 322 incoming students who undertook mobility in Sweden and 129 outgoing students who undertook mobility abroad from Swedish higher education institutions, representing a total sample of 451 respondents. Data on non-mobile students and international full-degree students were also available but were excluded from the analysis due to the limited number of responses in these categories.

The analysis uses descriptive statistics to examine students' experiences and identify differences and similarities between the two groups. Depending on the nature of the questions, results are presented through frequencies, percentages, means, medians and measures of variation where appropriate. Responses to open-ended questions are included as quotations to illustrate individual experiences and provide additional context to the quantitative findings.

The number of responses varies between questions, depending on their relevance to individual respondents and whether participants chose to answer them. Consequently, results are calculated using the available valid responses for each question. Any specific data processing is described in the corresponding sections of the report.

As participation in the survey was voluntary, the sample may not fully reflect the wider population of incoming and outgoing mobility students in Sweden. Differences in sample sizes and respondent characteristics should also be considered when comparing the two groups. While these limitations should be taken into account when interpreting the results, the findings provide valuable insights into students' mobility experiences, identifying relevant patterns, challenges and opportunities for improving mobility programmes and student support.

1. Erasmus Student Network AISBL, XVI ESNsurvey (Swedish subset), unpublished survey dataset, 2025.



1. SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Author: Jimena Rubio

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Author: Jimena Rubio

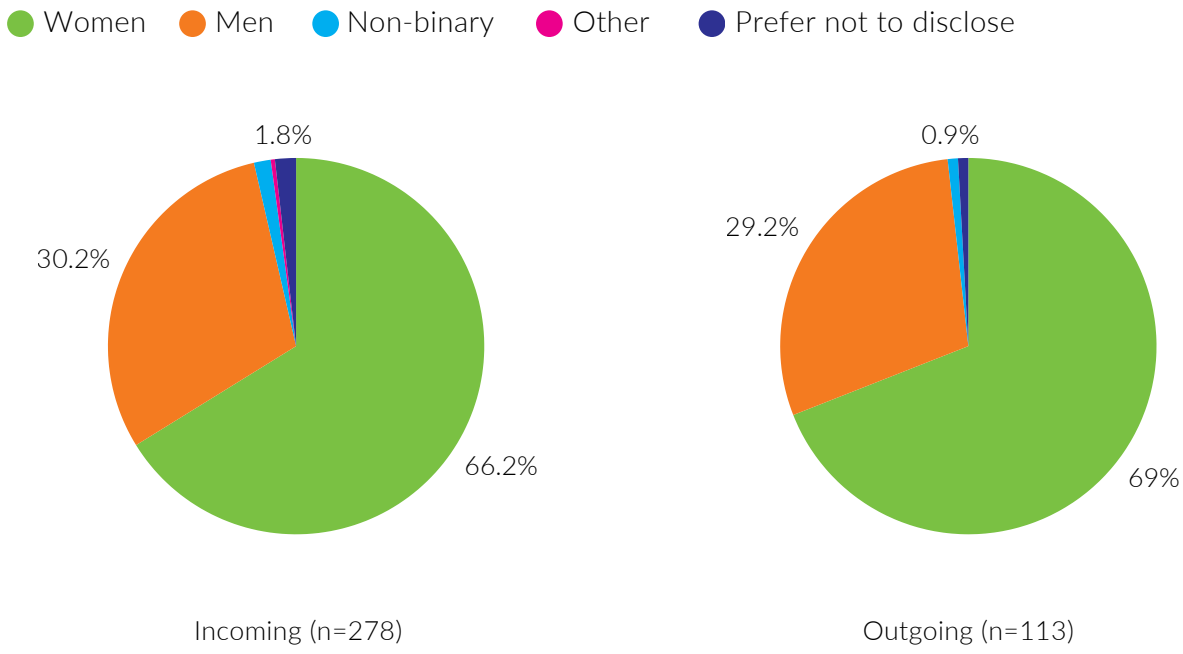
This first chapter will examine demographic characteristics and educational background of the sample, from their gender and nationality to their current education and past mobility experience. Like the rest of the report, it will compare incoming and outgoing students, distinguishing between those coming to Sweden and those leaving Sweden for other countries, providing insight into those engaging in mobility programmes.

The characteristics presented in this chapter provide context on the composition and diversity of the sample.

Gender

Figure 1.1

How do you identify yourself?

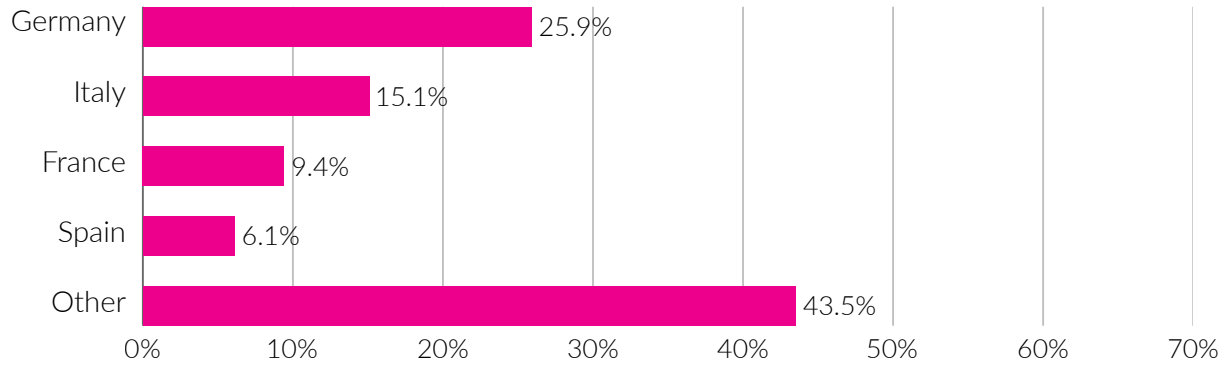


Of the 278 incoming students who responded to this question, 66.19% identify as women, 30.22% as men, 1.44% as non-binary, 0.36% as "other", and 1.8% choose not to disclose their gender. Similarly, of the 113 outgoing students, 69.03% identify as women, 29.2% as men, 0.88% as non-binary, and 0.88% prefer not to disclose their gender (Figure 1.1).

Nationality

Figure 1.2

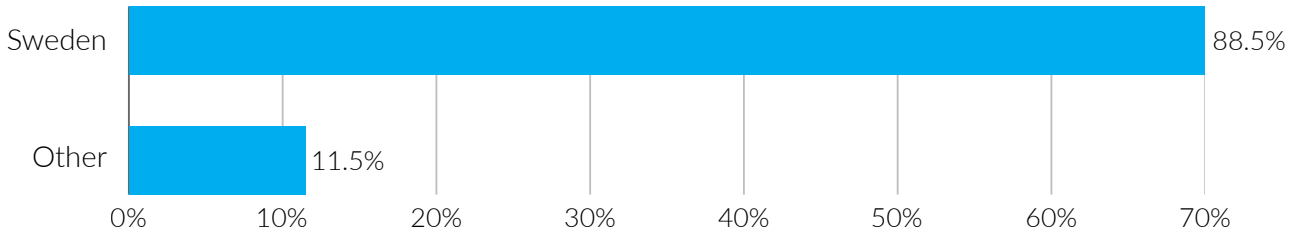
What is your nationality? (Incoming, n=278)



Based on 278 responses, 25.9% of incoming students have German nationality. The second most common nationality amongst these students is Italian (15.1%), followed by French (9.4%) and Spanish (6.1%) (Figure 1.2). The remaining 43.5% hold citizenship from a wide variety of countries, including the Netherlands, Belgium, Czech Republic, Portugal, Slovenia, etc.

Figure 1.3

What is your nationality? (Outgoing, n=113)

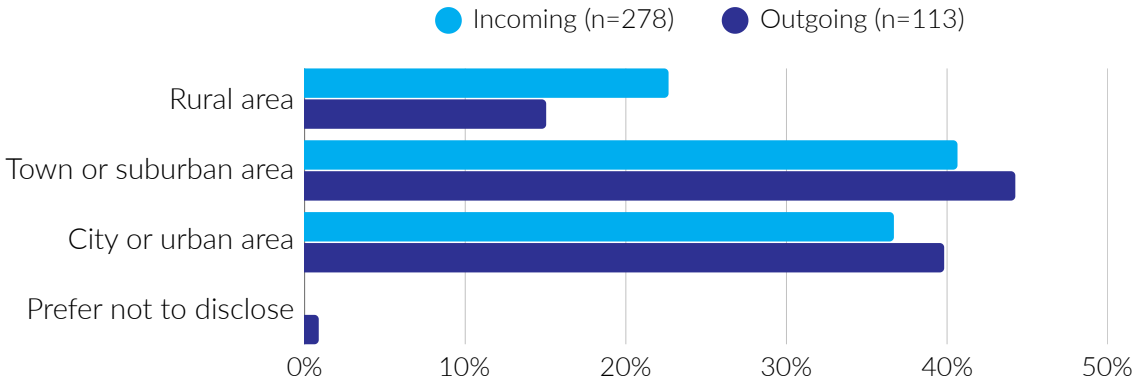


Meanwhile, the nationality of the 113 outgoing respondents to this question is predominantly Swedish (88.5%), but there are a few that hold different citizenships, like Spanish, Italian, Polish, etc. (Figure 1.3).

Area where mobility students grew up

Figure 1.4

How would you describe the area where you grew up?

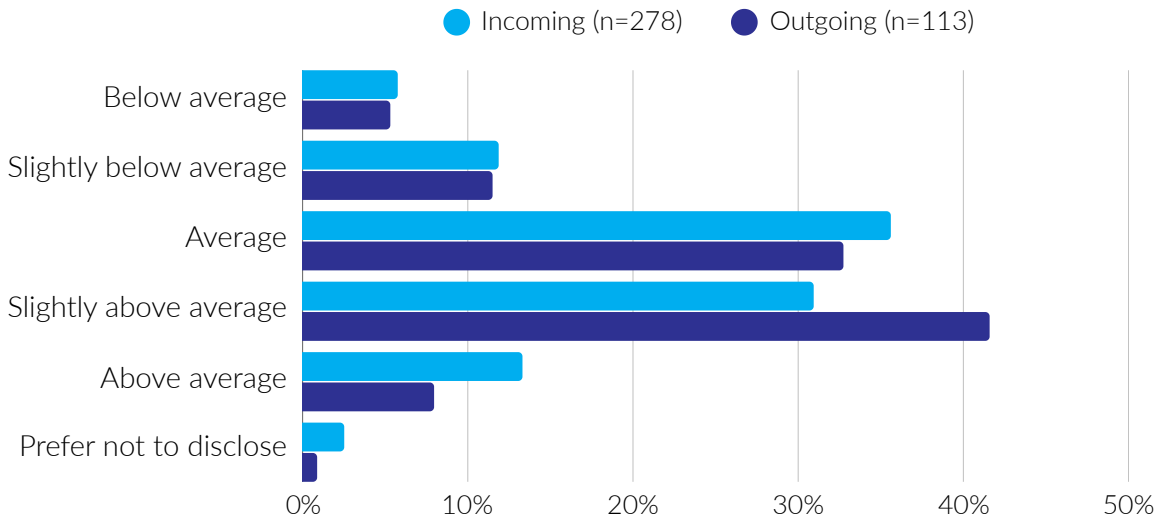


Based on 278 incoming and 113 outgoing responses, the distribution of the areas in which students grew up was similar between the two groups. 40.65% of incoming students and 44.25% of outgoing ones grew up in a town or suburban area, while 36.69% and 39.82% respectively grew up in a city or urban area. This contrasts with the 22.66% of incoming students and the 15.04% of outgoing ones who grew up in a rural area. Only 0.88% of outgoing students preferred not to disclose this (Figure 1.4).

Students' family household income

Figure 1.5

When you were under the age of 18, how would you describe your family household income?

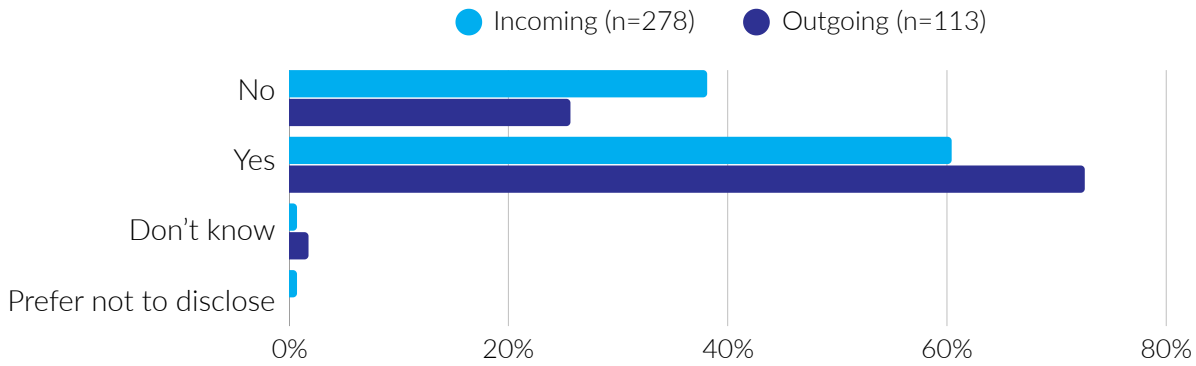


Most of the 278 incoming respondents grew up with a family household income they describe as "average" (35.61%) or "slightly above average" (30.94%). The pattern was similar for the 113 outgoing respondents, though in their case more of them considered it to be "slightly above average" (41.59%) than "average" (32.74%). In both cases fewer of them grew up with a family household income within the lower range of "below average" (incoming: 5.76%; outgoing: 5.31%) or "slightly below average" (incoming: 11.87%; outgoing: 11.5%). And 13.31% for incoming and 7.96% for outgoing had an "above average" household income. 2.52% and 0.88% respectively prefer not to disclose their estimated childhood family income (Figure 1.5).

Students with parents or guardians who attended university

Figure 1.6

Did either of your parents or guardians attend university?

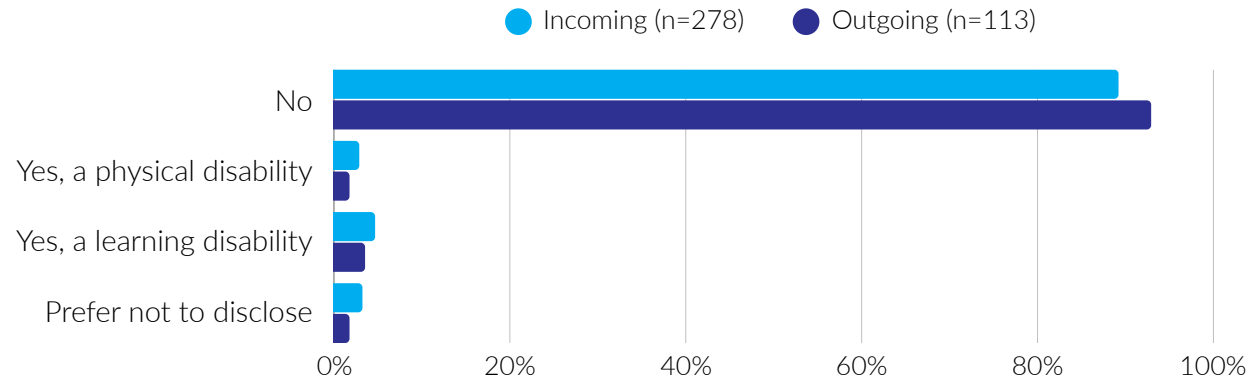


Most of the 278 incoming students and 113 outgoing ones have parents who attended university, especially amongst outgoing students (incoming: 60.43%; outgoing: 72.57%). A smaller proportion have parents who did not attend university (incoming: 38.13%; outgoing: 25.66%), and a minority of 0.72% of incoming students and 1.77% of outgoing ones don't know whether their parents attended university. And only 0.72% of incoming students prefer not to disclose it (Figure 1.6).

Disability

Figure 1.7

Do you identify as a person living with a disability?



The large majority of the 278 incoming respondents (89.21%) and 113 outgoing ones (92.92%) do not identify as a person with a disability, while a minority identify as someone with a physical disability (incoming: 2.88%; outgoing: 1.77%) or a learning disability (incoming: 4.68%; outgoing: 3.54%). 3.24% of incoming students and 1.77% of outgoing ones prefer not to disclose this (Figure 1.7).

Level of study

Figure 1.8

What was your level of study during your stay abroad? (incoming, n=319)

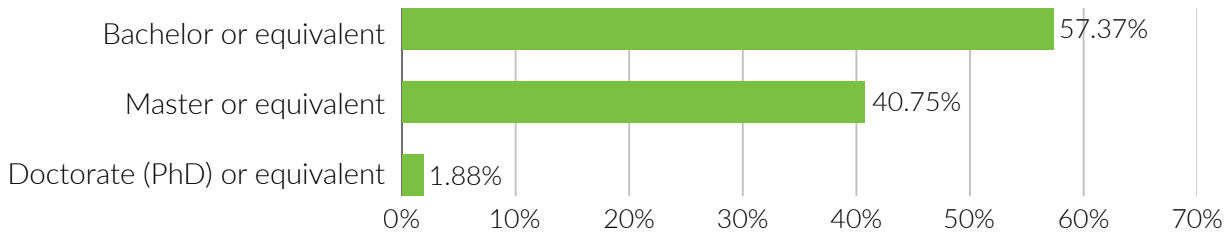
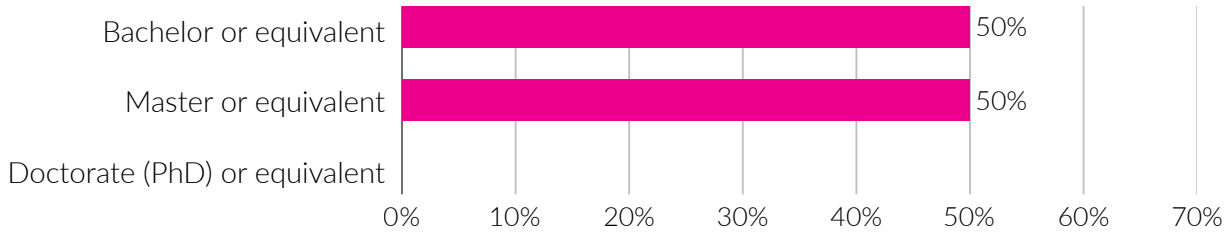


Figure 1.9

What was your level of study during your stay abroad? (Outgoing, n=128)



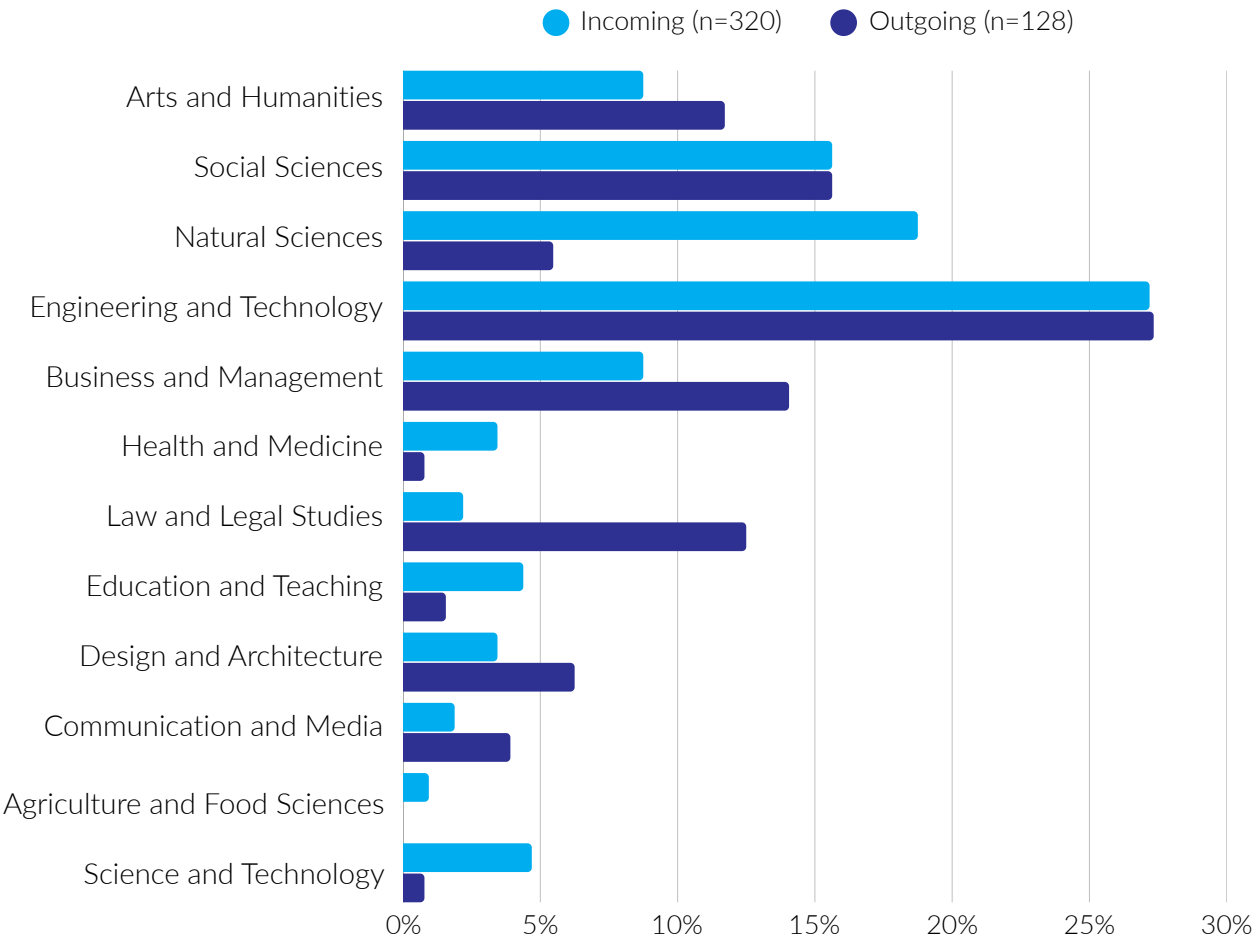
Based on 319 responses from incoming students, 57.37% are studying a bachelor's programme or equivalent during their stay abroad. Slightly lower (40.75%) is the proportion of students doing a master's programme or equivalent. Doctoral students accounted for only 1.88% of incoming respondents. In contrast, the 128 outgoing respondents are divided into two halves: 50% are studying a bachelor or equivalent and 50% a master or equivalent (Figure 1.9).

Field of study

The most represented field of study is the same for the 320 incoming students and 128 outgoing ones: engineering and technology (incoming: 27.19%; outgoing: 27.34%). The same occurs with the least represented one: agriculture and food sciences (incoming: 0.94%; outgoing: 0%). The remaining distribution of fields' representation differs between incoming and outgoing students. For incoming students, the following most represented fields are natural sciences (18.75%) and social sciences (15.63%); while for outgoing students they are social sciences (15.63%) and business and management (14.06%). Similarly, the following least represented fields for incoming students are communication and media (1.88%) and law and legal studies (2.19%); while for outgoing students they are health and medicine (0.78%) and education and teaching (1.56%) (Figure 1.10).

Figure 1.10

In which field of study were you enrolled when you went on exchange?

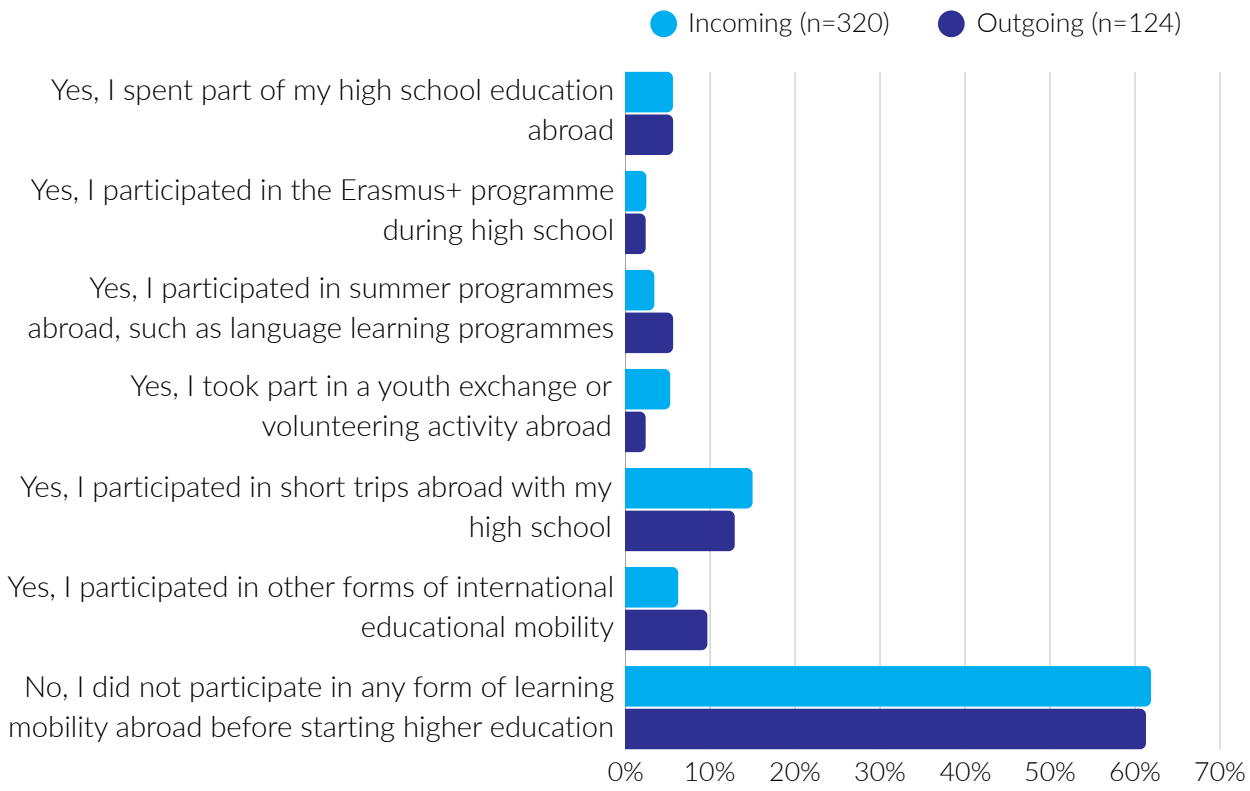


Previous exchange programmes abroad

Based on 320 incoming and 124 outgoing participants, most students (incoming: 61.88%; outgoing: 61.29%) have not participated in any form of learning mobility abroad before their higher education. Amongst the few that have engaged in some form of mobility in their previous education, the most common is to participate in short trips abroad with their high school (incoming: 15%; outgoing: 12.9%) (Figure 1.11).

Figure 1.11

Before starting your higher education studies (university), did you participate in any exchange programmes abroad?



Previous mobility schemes

Figure 1.12

In which mobility scheme have you participated? (Incoming, n=313)

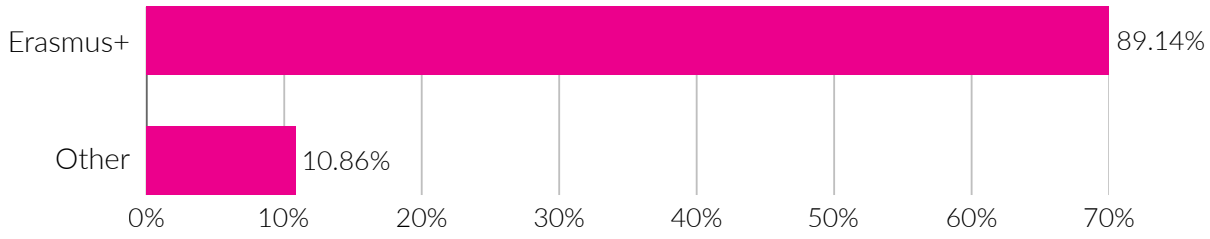
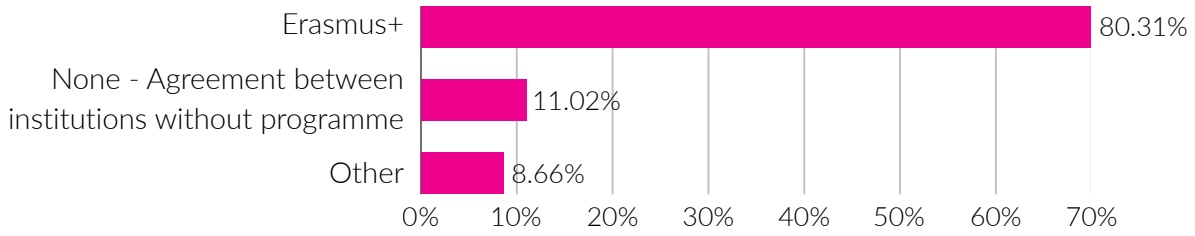


Figure 1.13

In which mobility scheme have you participated? (Outgoing, n=127)

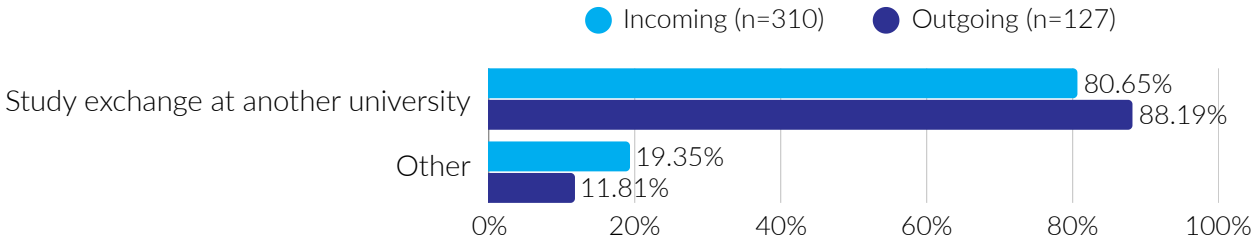


The large majority of the 313 incoming students and of the 127 outgoing ones who responded to this question have engaged in Erasmus+ programmes (incoming: 89.14%; outgoing: 80.31%). 11.02% of outgoing students have benefited from agreements between universities without a programme. And a minority (incoming: 10.86%; outgoing: 8.66%) has participated in other programmes, such as SEMP, Turing, and the European Solidarity Corps. In the case of incoming students this minority also includes those who engaged in agreements between universities without a programme.

Type of mobility

Figure 1.14

In which type of mobility have you participated?

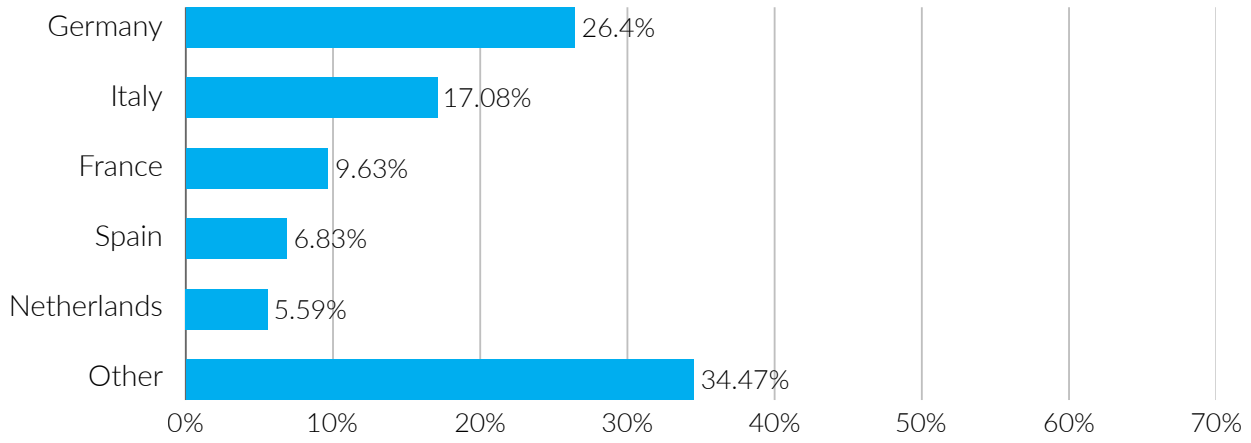


Based on 310 responses from incoming students and 127 from outgoing ones, most mobility students have participated in study exchanges at other universities (incoming: 80.65%; outgoing: 88.19%). The remaining 19.35% of incoming students and 11.81% of outgoing ones experienced different types of mobility, like traineeship or internship placements, short mobility programmes of less than one month, volunteer programmes abroad, or other types of mobility promoted by the European University Alliances.

Country of sending university

Figure 1.15

What is the country of your sending university? (n=322)

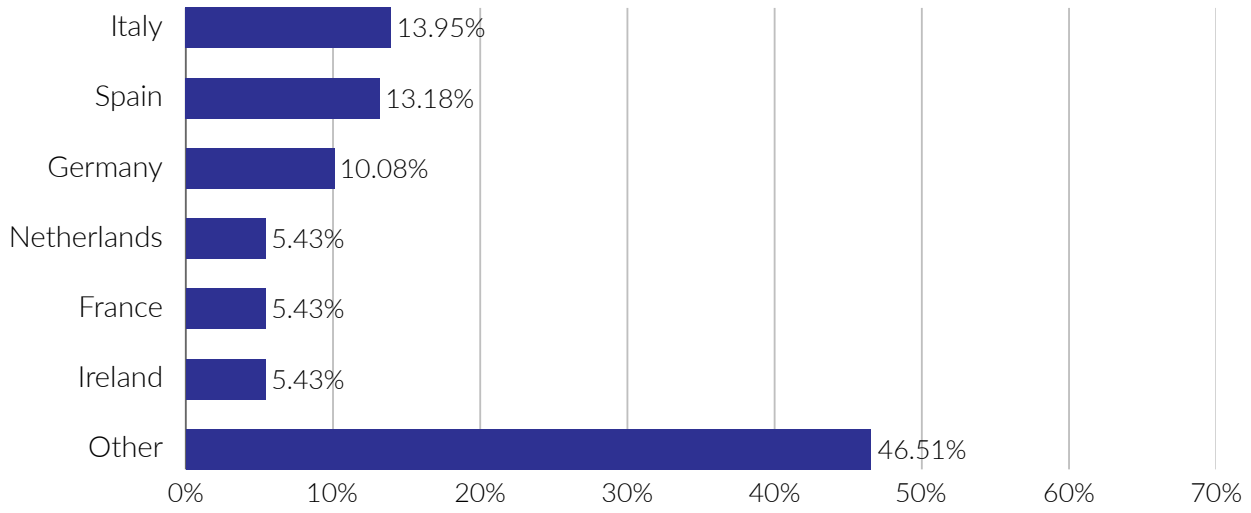


Based on 322 responses, most incoming students from the survey come from Germany (26.4%) and Italy (17.08%), followed by France (9.63%), Spain (6.83%), and the Netherlands (5.59%). The remaining 34.47% comes from a variety of countries, including Belgium, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Switzerland, etc. In total, incoming students come from 33 countries.

Country of host university

Figure 1.16

What is the country of your host university? (n=129)



In the case of outgoing students, based on 129 responses, the most common host countries in the survey are Italy (13.95%), Spain (13.18%), Germany (10.08%), the Netherlands (5.43%), France (5.43%), and Ireland (5.43%). The remaining 46.51% of respondents selected other host countries such as Austria, Japan, Norway, United Kingdom, etc. In total, outgoing students were hosted in 31 countries.



2.
BEFORE MOBILITY

Author: Sarah Ouedraogo

BEFORE MOBILITY

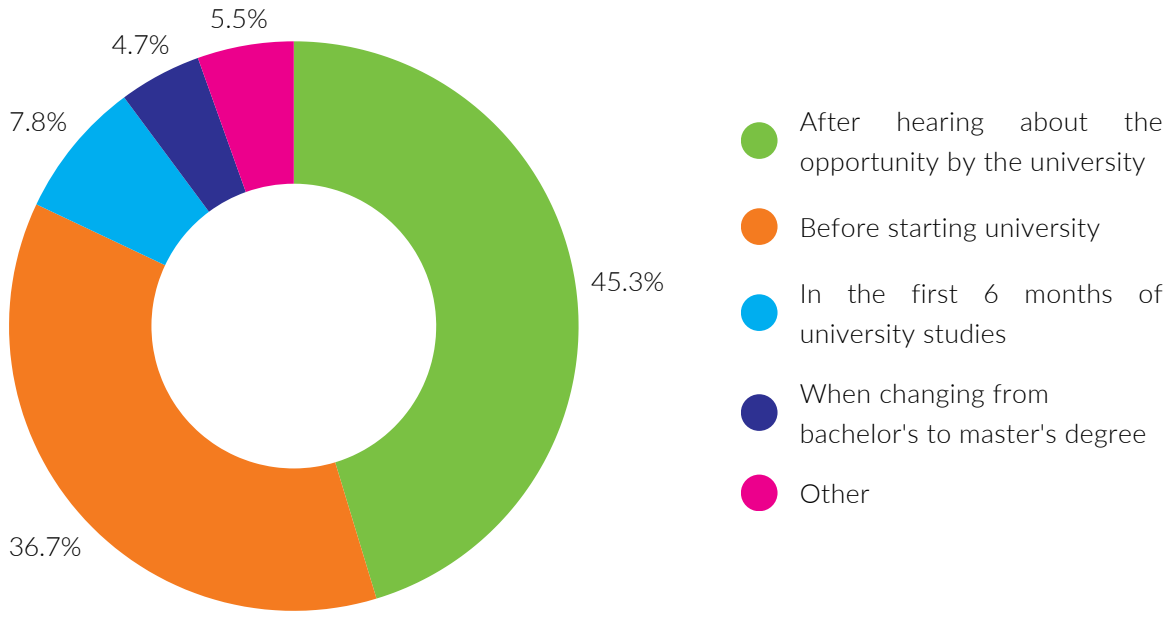
Author: Sarah Ouedraogo

PERIOD OF CHOICE TO STUDY ABROAD

The students were asked the following multiple-choice question: 'When did you decide that you wanted to go on an exchange?' Possible answers included: 'It was mandatory'; 'Before starting university'; 'In the first 6 months of my university studies'; 'After hearing about the opportunity by the university'; 'When changing from bachelor's to master's degree' and 'oOher'. The results showed that based on the 128 respondents, students mostly decided to go abroad after hearing about the opportunity by the university (45.31%). Before starting university was the second most common response (36.72%). A smaller proportion decided during the first six months of university (7.81%), while 5.47% selected "Other". The least common response was the transition from bachelor's to master's studies (4.69%).

Figure 2.1

When did you decide that you wanted to go on an exchange? (n=128)



MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS FOR GOING ON MOBILITY

This question deals with the motivational factors influencing the students' decision for going on mobility (Figure 2.2). These motivational factors can be defined as push factors and pull factors. Push factors influence the decision to go on mobility, whereas pull factors influence the choice of destination. This framework has been amended by introducing initiators for the push factors and attractors for the pull factors.[2]

Initiators (Push Factors)

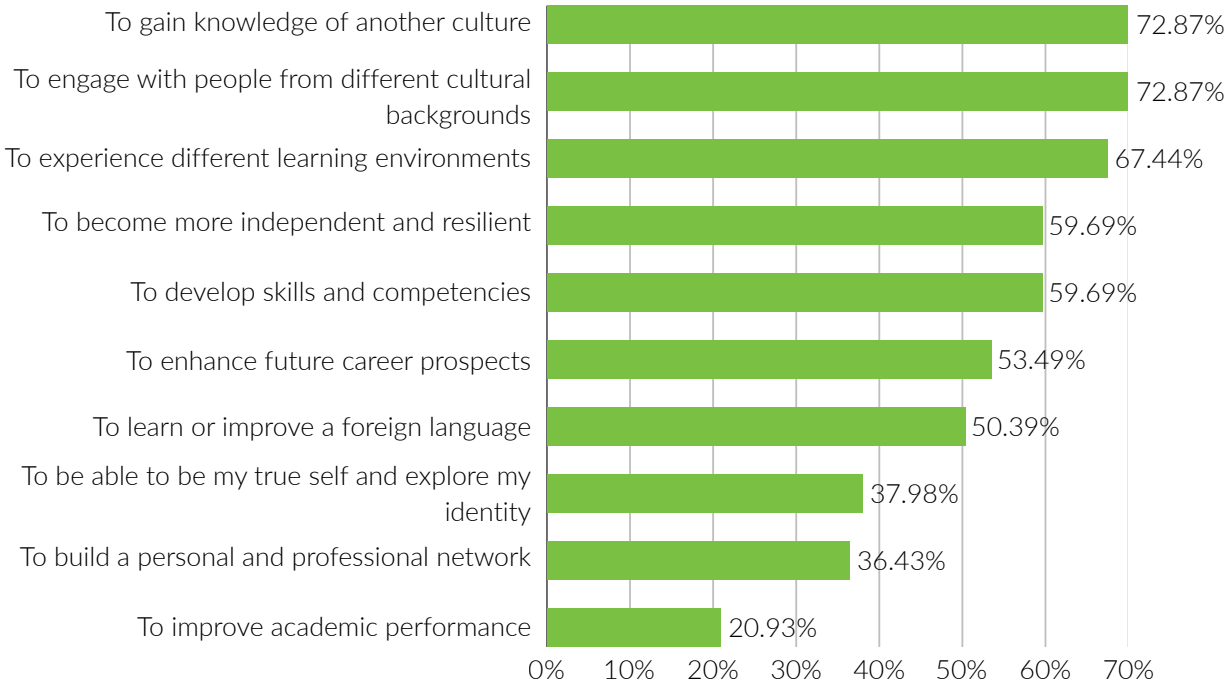
Initiators refer to personal goals that students seek to achieve through international mobility and may perceive as difficult to achieve in their home country. These include the development of human, financial and psychological capital.[3] Respondents were asked to select their motivations for participating in mobility from 13 possible options, with multiple answers allowed. The relative frequency of each response was calculated to identify the most commonly selected motivations.

The most frequently selected motivations were gaining knowledge of another culture and engaging with people from different cultural backgrounds (both 72.87%), followed by experiencing different learning environments (67.44%). Becoming more independent and resilient and developing skills and competences were also frequently selected (both 59.69%), alongside enhancing future career prospects (53.49%) and improving foreign language skills (50.39%). Other motivations included exploring personal identity (37.98%), building personal and professional networks (36.43%) and improving academic performance (20.93%). Motivations selected by fewer than 10% of respondents were excluded from Figure 2.2.

2. Edna Rabenu and Or Shkoler, "The Reasons for International Student Mobility," in International Student Mobility and Access to Higher Education (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 61–125, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-44139-5_3.
3. Rabenu and Shkoler, "Reasons for International Student Mobility."

Figure 2.2

What were the motivational factors for going on an exchange? (n=129)



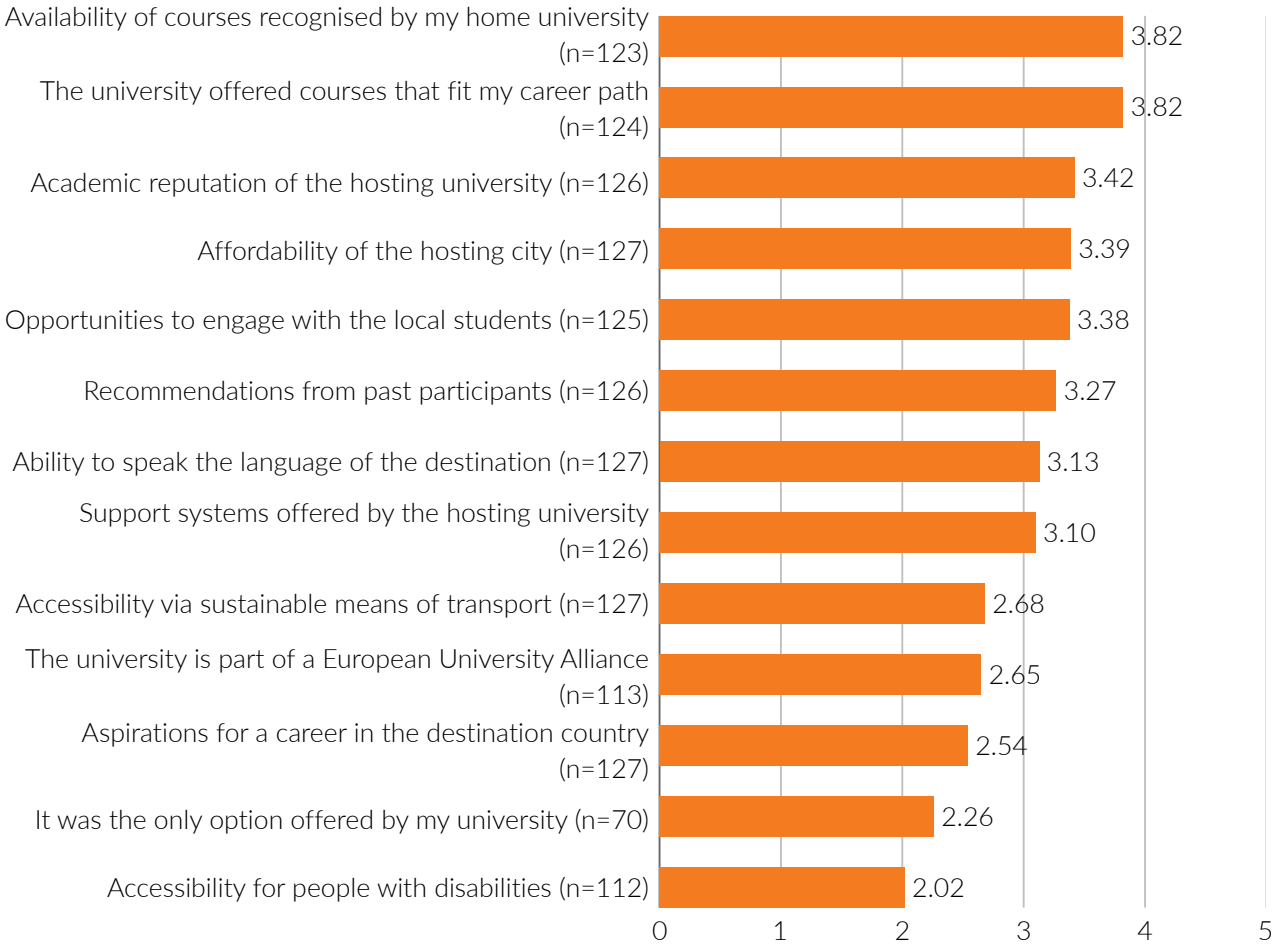
Attractors (Pull Factors)

Attractors emphasise positive opportunities that foreign countries or institutions offer. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of factors in the decision to choose a certain exchange destination on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important). Higher mean scores therefore indicate a greater perceived importance of the respective factor. The main question was: 'How important were the following factors in your decision to choose your exchange destination?'. The data analysis of this contained calculation of the relative importance of each factor. Two of the factors were identified as of higher importance with an average score higher than 3.50: 'The availability of courses recognised by my home university' (M = 3.82, SD = 1.19, n = 123) and 'The university offered courses that fit my career path' (M = 3.82, SD = 1.08, n = 124). However, although both factors have the same mean rating, the slightly higher standard deviation for the 'Availability of courses recognised by my home university' indicates a greater variation in the respondents' evaluation. Six factors were considered of moderate average importance ranging between 3.00 and 3.50. These factors are academic reputation of the hosting university (M = 3.42, SD = 1.00, n = 126); affordability of the hosting city (M = 3.39, SD = 0.93, n = 127); recommendations from past participants (M = 3.27, SD = 1.25, n = 126); opportunities to engage with the local students (M = 3.38, SD = 1.11, n = 125); ability to speak the language of the destination (M = 3.13, SD = 1.38, n = 127) and lastly support systems offered by the hosting university (M = 3.10, SD = 0.99, n = 126).

Of lower average importance with an importance lower than 3.00 are 'Accessibility via sustainable means of transport'; 'The university is part of a European University Alliance'; 'Aspirations for a career in the destination country'; 'It was the only option offered by my university' and 'Accessibility for people with disabilities'. The relatively low average importance assigned to 'Accessibility for people with disabilities' (M = 2.02) should be interpreted with caution, as it may reflect the limited proportion of respondents requiring such accessibility measures, and does not indicate that they are unimportant for students with disabilities.

Figure 2.3

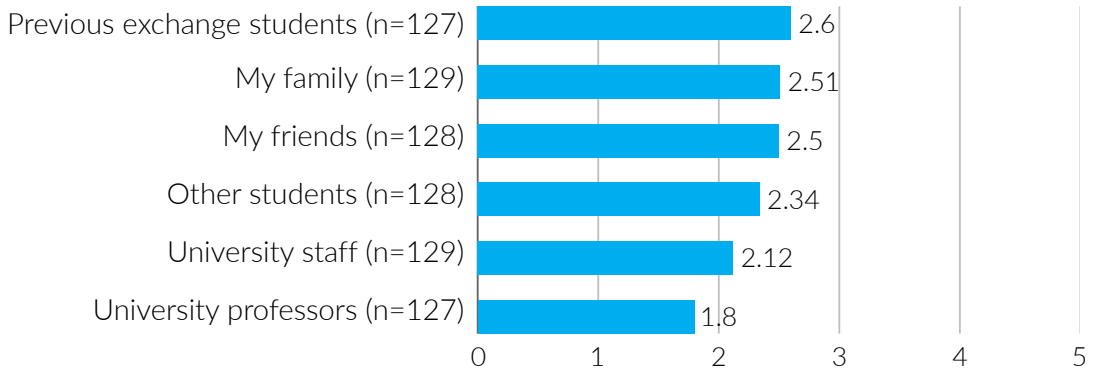
How important were the following factors in your decision to choose your exchange destination?



INFLUENTIAL PERSONS

On a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much), respondents were asked to rate the influence of people in their decision to go abroad with the following question: 'To what extent did the following people influence your decision to go abroad?'. Higher mean scores indicate a higher influence in the decision making. Based on the respondents, previous exchange students seem to have the highest influence (M = 2.6, SD = 1.46, n = 127), followed by family (M = 2.51, SD = 1.30, n = 129) and friends (M = 2.5, SD = 1.40, n = 128). University professors had the least influence (M = 1.8, SD = 1.12, n = 127).

Figure 2.4

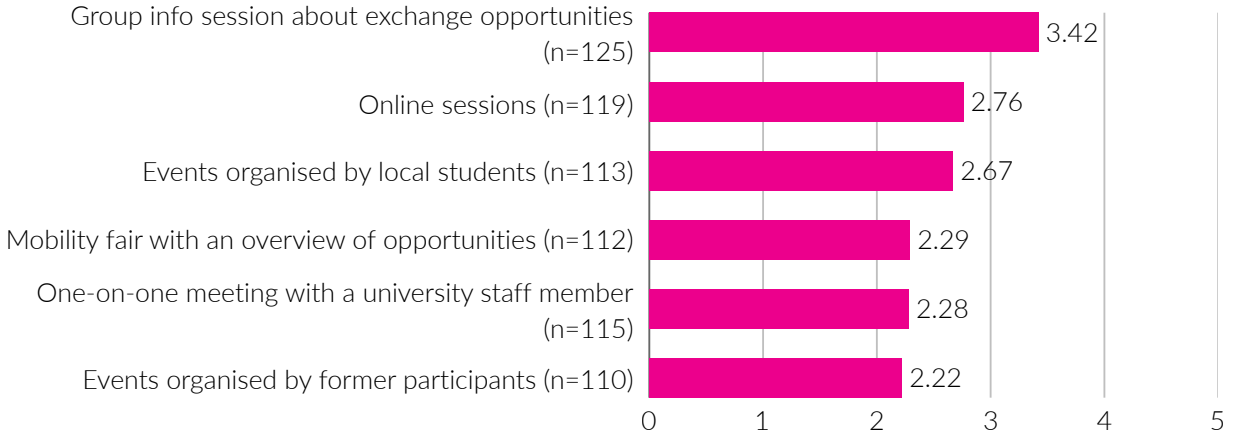


AVERAGE IMPORTANCE OF ACTIVITIES BEFORE MOBILITY

In the beginning students were asked if they took part in any kind of the following activities: 'Group info session about exchange opportunities'; 'Events organised by former participants'; 'Events organised by local students'; 'One-on-one meeting with a university staff member'; 'Mobility fair with an overview of opportunities'; 'Online sessions'. Afterwards, they were asked to rate the importance of these activities on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). Group info sessions about exchange opportunities received the highest average importance rating (M = 3.42, SD = 1.33, n = 125). Online sessions (M = 2.76, SD = 1.35, n = 119) and events organised by local students (M = 2.67, SD = 1.44, n = 113) were considered to be of medium importance. Lastly, mobility fair with an overview of opportunities (M = 2.29, SD = 1.37, n = 112), one-on-one meeting with a university staff member (M = 2.28, SD = 1.33, n = 115) and events organised by former participants (M = 2.22, SD = 1.34, n = 110) had the lowest average importance rating.

Figure 2.5

Did you take part in any of these activities? On a scale of 1 to 5, how important were these events for your journey abroad?

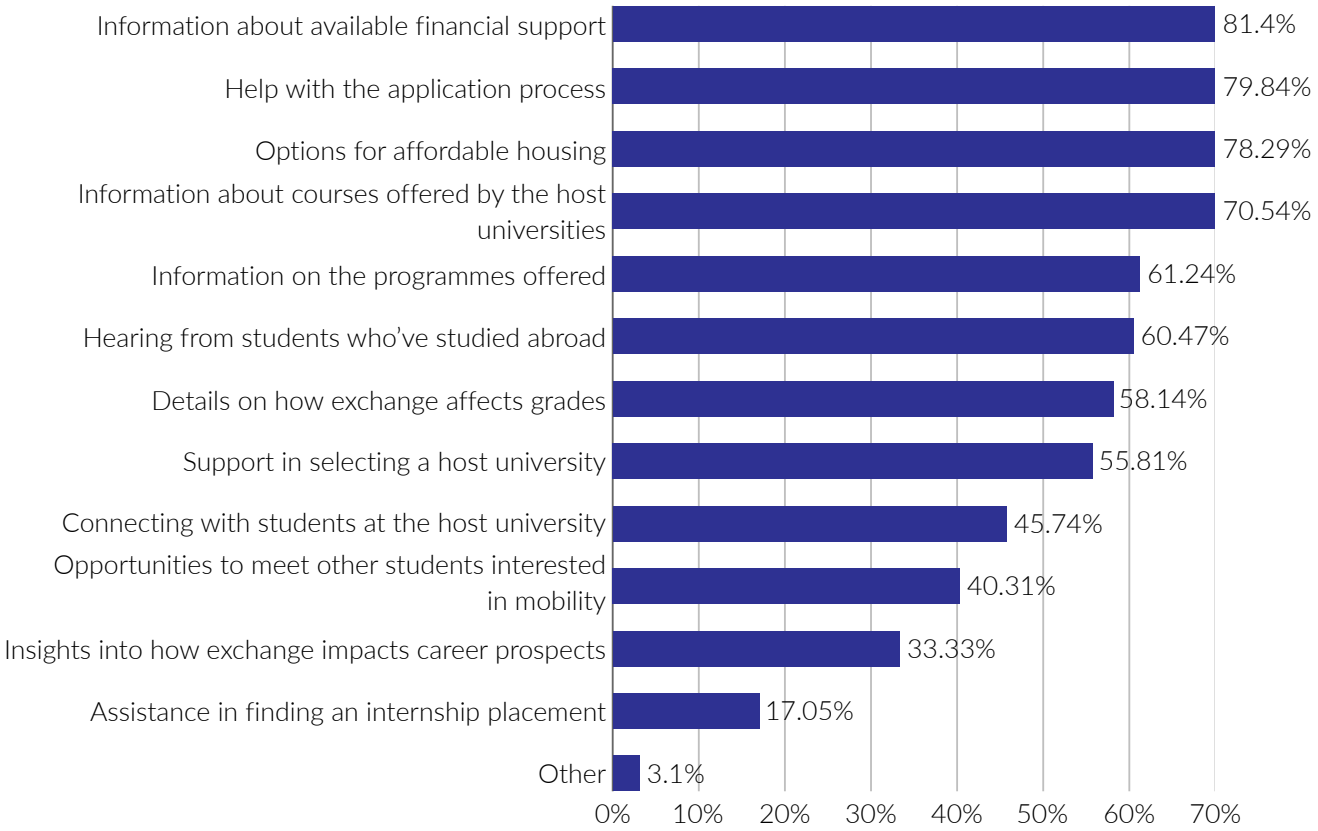


PRE-DEPARTURE SUPPORT

Respondents were asked which types of pre-departure support they considered important. The most frequently selected were 'Information about available financial support' (81.40%), 'Help with the application process' (79.84%), 'Options for affordable housing' (78.29%) and 'Information about courses offered by the host universities' (70.54%). Hearing from previous mobility participants was also frequently selected (60.47%). Other forms of support, including connecting with students at the host university (45.74%), understanding the career benefits of exchange (33.33%) and assistance in finding an internship placement (17.05%), were selected less frequently (Figure 2.6).

Figure 2.6

Which pre-departure support do you think is important to receive? (n=129)

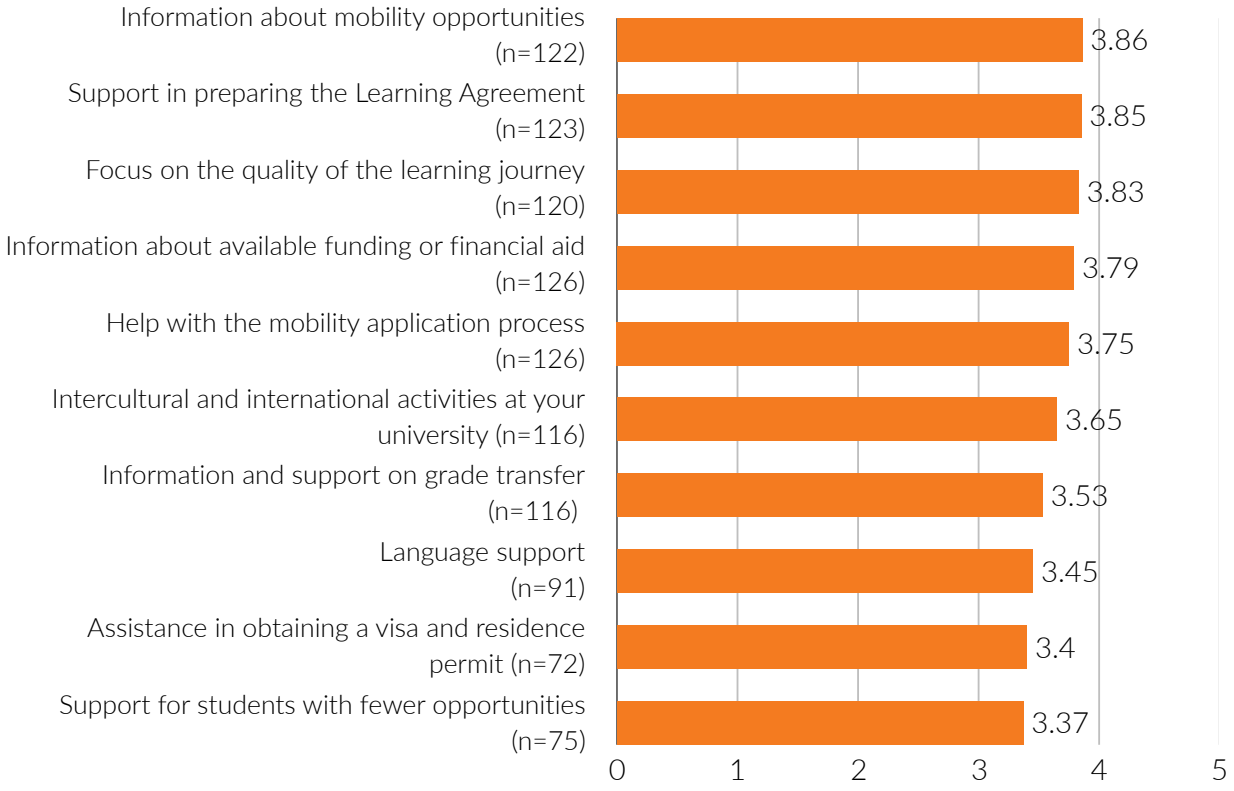


SATISFACTION WITH THE SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE SENDING INSTITUTION

In this section, students had to rate their satisfaction based on the services and support provided by the sending institution before arrival on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (very unsatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). The mean satisfaction ratings for the different services were as follows: focus on the quality of the learning journey (M = 3.83, SD = 0.93); intercultural and international activities at your university (M = 3.65, SD = 1.11); information about mobility opportunities (M = 3.86, SD = 0.96); help with the mobility application process (M = 3.75, SD = 1.09); information about available funding or financial aid (M = 3.79, SD = 1.10); support in preparing the Learning Agreement (M = 3.85, SD = 1.00); information and support on grade transfer (M = 3.53, SD = 1.08); support for students with fewer opportunities (M = 3.37, SD = 0.87); assistance in obtaining a visa and residence permit (M = 3.4, SD = 0.91); language support (M = 3.45, SD = 0.85). All of the services receive ratings above 3.0, indicating generally neutral to positive evaluations, although satisfaction varied between different types of support.

Figure 2.7

How satisfied were you with the following aspects of support provided by your sending institution before you left?

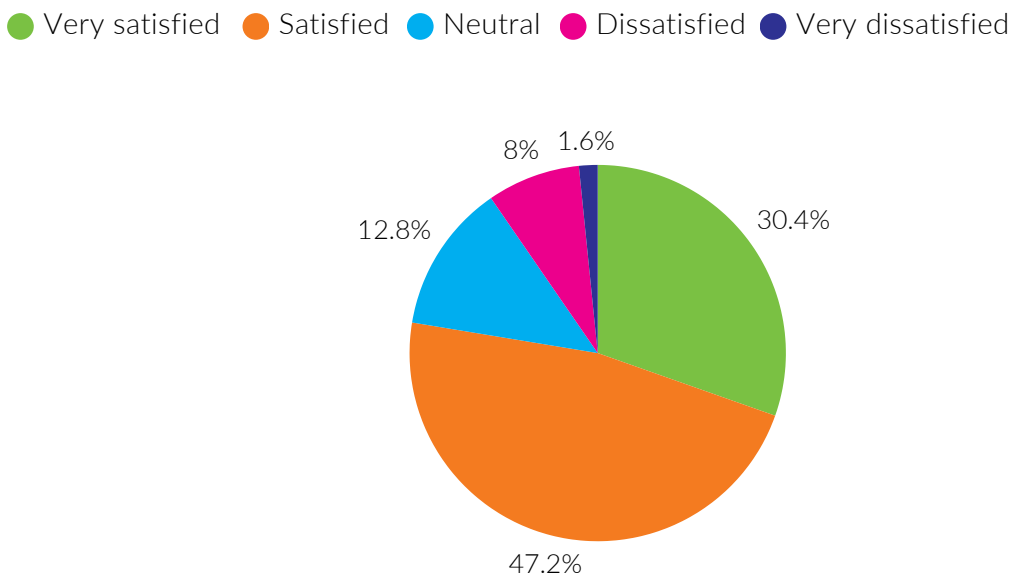


OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH THE SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE SENDING INSTITUTION

Overall, 77.6% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the services provided by their sending university, while 9.6% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Some respondents indicated that they would have benefited from more information from their sending institution and additional guidance on preparing the Learning Agreement. Others reported feeling left alone while navigating the application process.

Figure 2.8

Overall satisfaction with the services provided by the sending university? (n=125)





3.
DURING MOBILITY

Authors: Michele Biendara & Emma Neofotistos

DURING MOBILITY

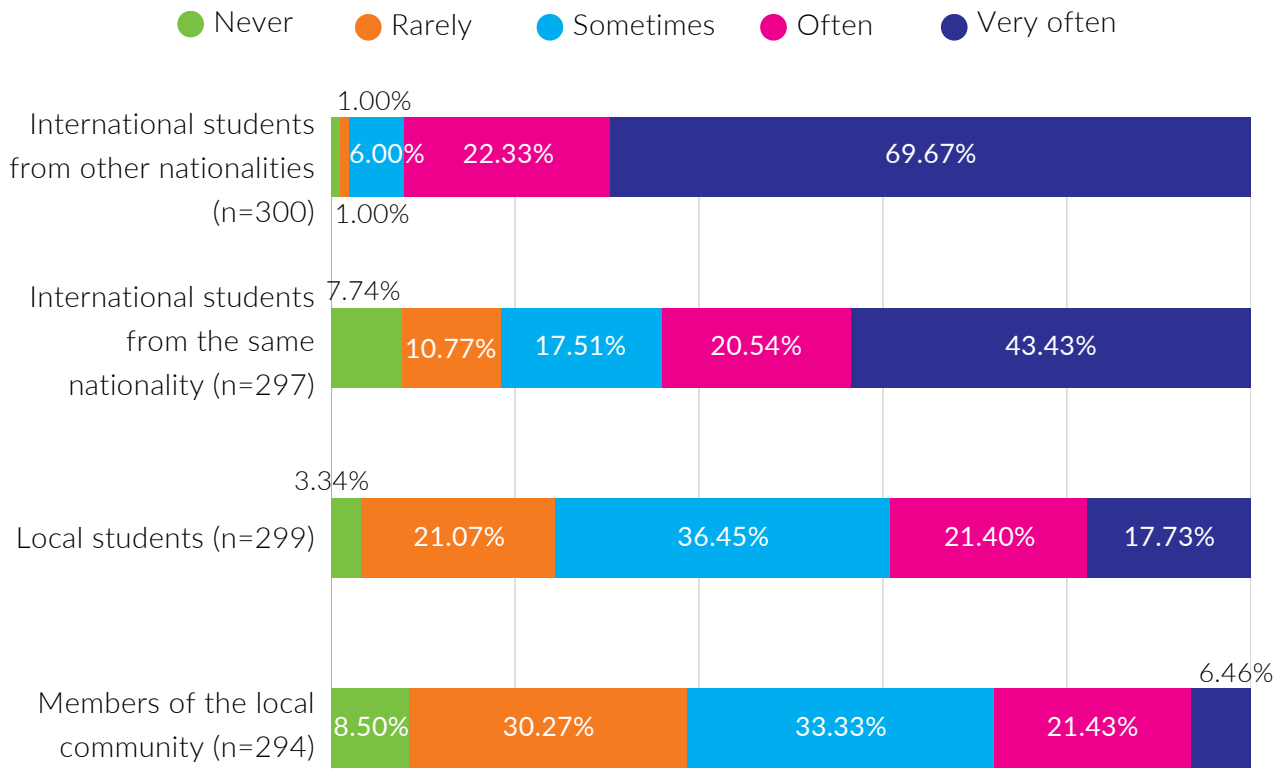
Authors: Michele Biendara & Emma Neofotistos

SOCIALISING DURING MOBILITY

Generally, incoming exchange students interact less with the local community and local students compared to international students. More precisely, incoming students are most likely to interact with international students from other nationalities (92.00% stating that they interact with them often or very often) as well as from the same nationality (63.97% stating that they interact with them often or very often). Incoming exchange students are the least likely to interact with local students and members of the local community (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1

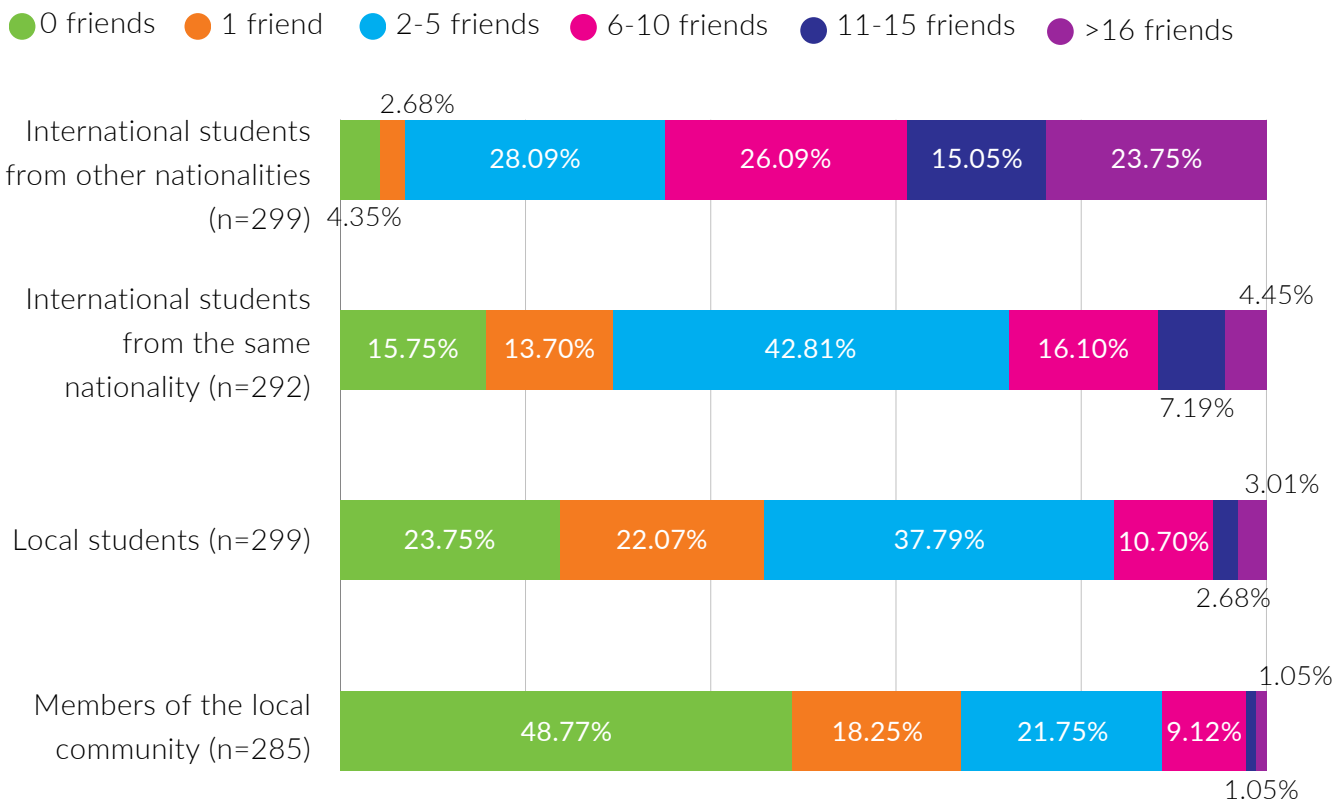
How frequently did you interact with the following groups of people during your mobility?



A similar pattern emerges when examining the number of friends exchange students made from different groups. Among incoming students, 45.82% reported having no more than one local student friend, while 67.02% reported having no more than one friend from the local community. At the same time, many incoming students have 6 or more friends from other nationalities (64.89%) and their own nationality (27.74%). This indicates that incoming students interact less with the local community and local students compared to international students (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2

How many friends did you make from each of the following groups during exchange?



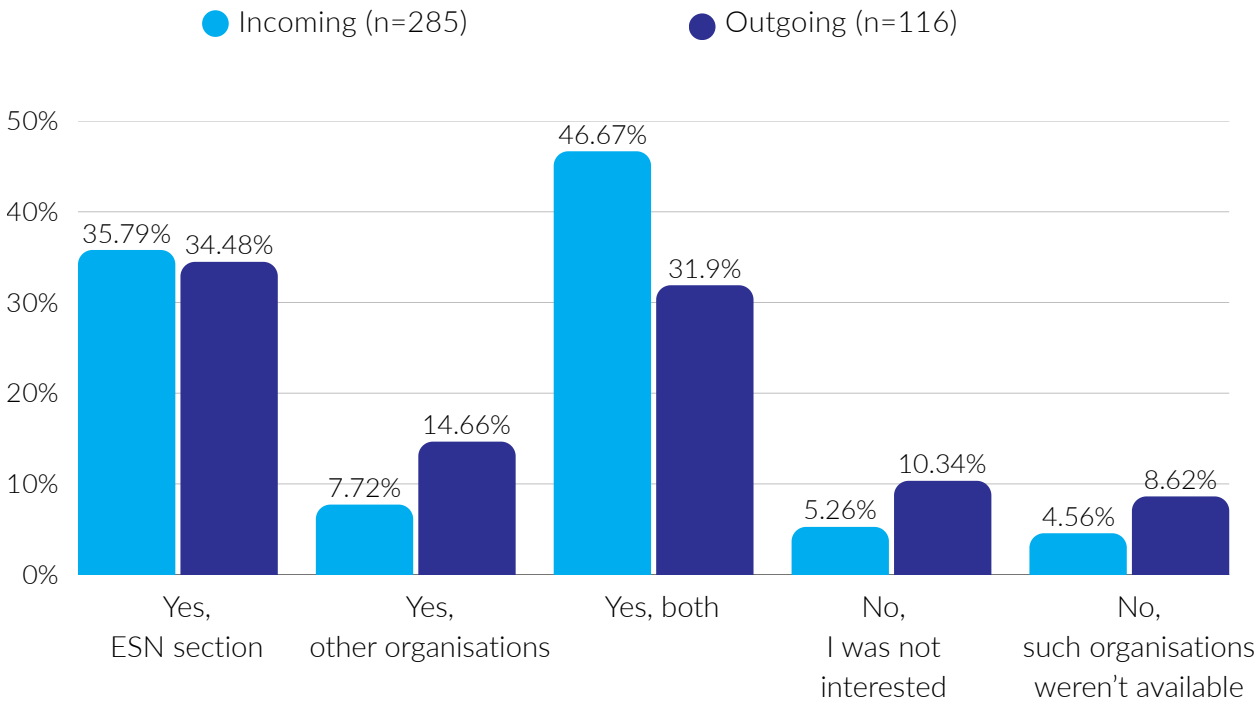
The classes for internationals were separate from the other classes and that made it very hard to connect with local students.

- Incoming exchange student

Overall, a large portion of students (90.18% of incoming and 81.04% of outgoing students) attended activities organised by ESN and/or other groups for international students. However, outgoing students seemed to be generally less interested in attending such activities, as well as reporting a higher number of such organisations not being available. Among incoming students, participation in ESN activities was more common than participation in activities organised by other international student groups. Overall, 82.46% attended at least one ESN activity, compared with 54.39% who attended an activity organised by another group (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3

Did you attend activities organised by the local ESN section or other groups for international students?



A lot of activities are organised by both the ESN and other exchange groups, so it was really easy to meet people.

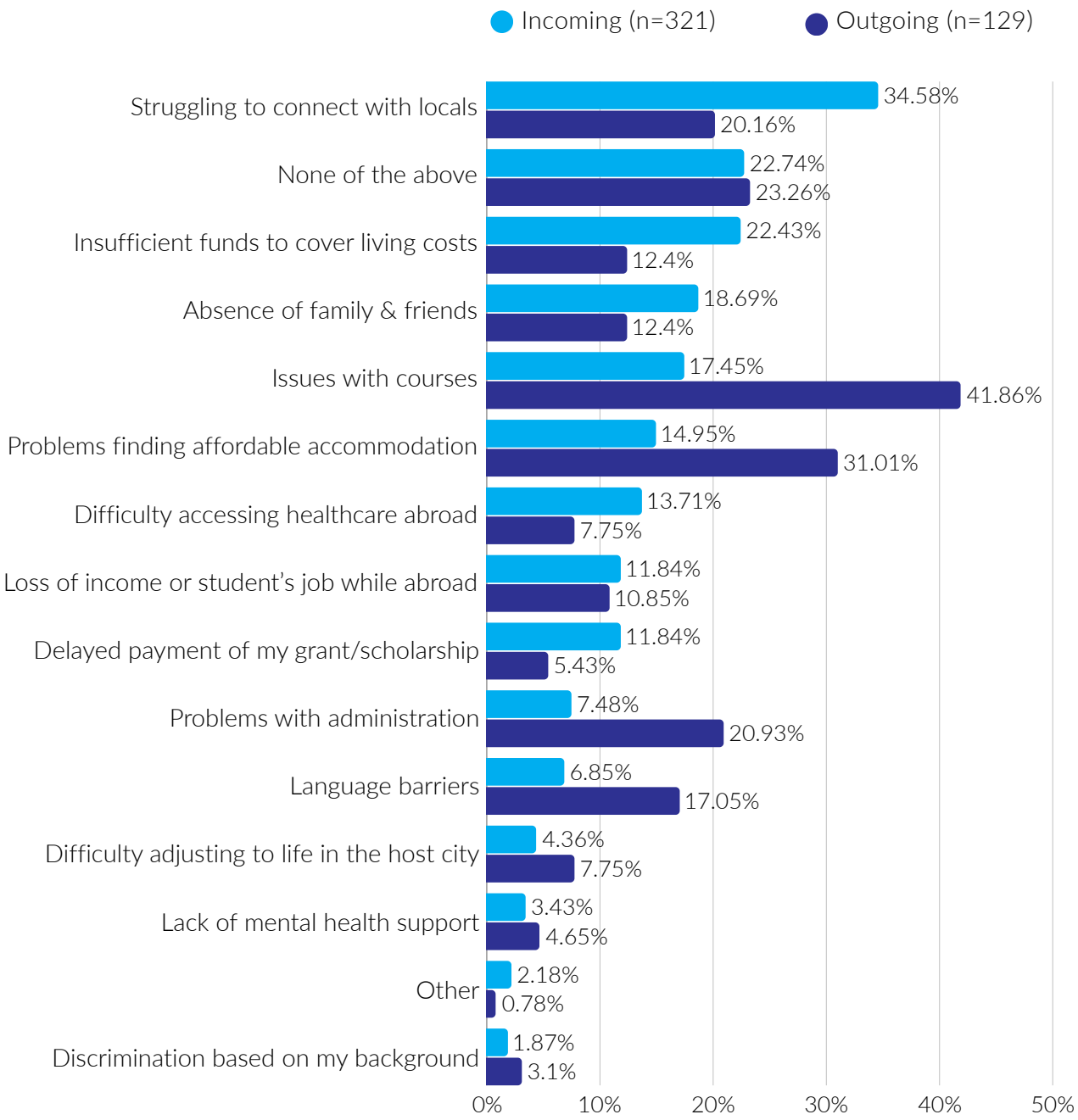
- Incoming exchange student

ISSUES EXPERIENCED DURING MOBILITY & THEIR IMPACTS

Difficulties connecting with locals were the most frequently reported issue among incoming students (34.58%), compared with 20.16% of outgoing students. Among outgoing students, course-related problems were most common (41.86%), followed by difficulties finding affordable accommodation (31.01%). Approximately one in four respondents in both groups reported experiencing none of the listed issues (Figure 3.4).

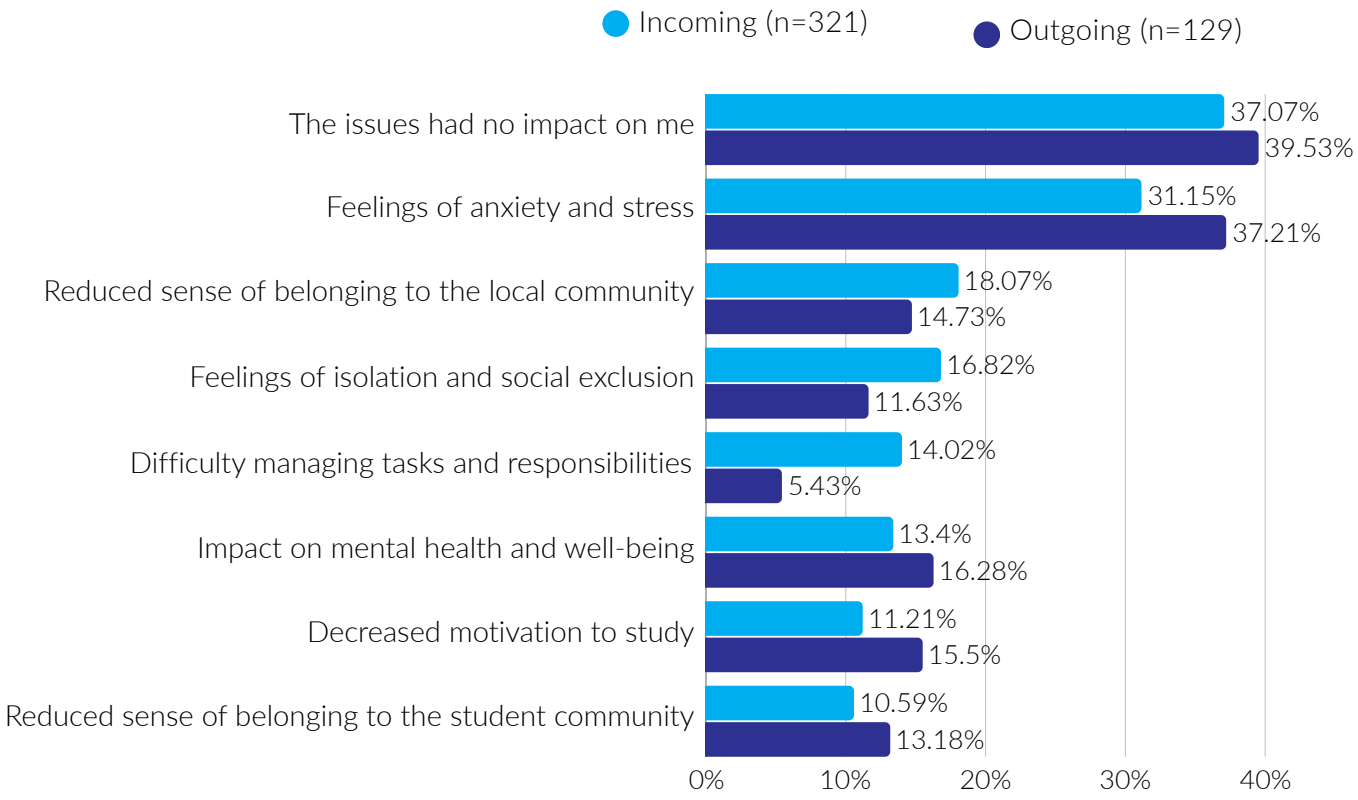
Figure 3.4

Did you face any of the following issues during your study abroad?



The two most common answers of both incoming and outgoing students regarding the impact of the issues experienced were that they had no impact on them (incoming: 37.07%, outgoing: 39.53%) and that they induced feelings of anxiety and stress (incoming: 31.15%, outgoing: 37.21%). In line with previous answer patterns, incoming students were more likely to experience a reduced sense of belonging to the local community than outgoing students (incoming: 18.07%, outgoing: 14.73%). Similarly, incoming students were more likely to have feelings of isolation and social exclusion than outgoing students (incoming: 16.82%, outgoing: 11.63%). However, more outgoing students (13.18%) experienced a reduced sense of belonging to the student community compared to incoming students (10.59%). Additionally, incoming students were almost three times more likely to have difficulty managing daily tasks and responsibilities (14.02%) than outgoing students (5.43%) (Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5



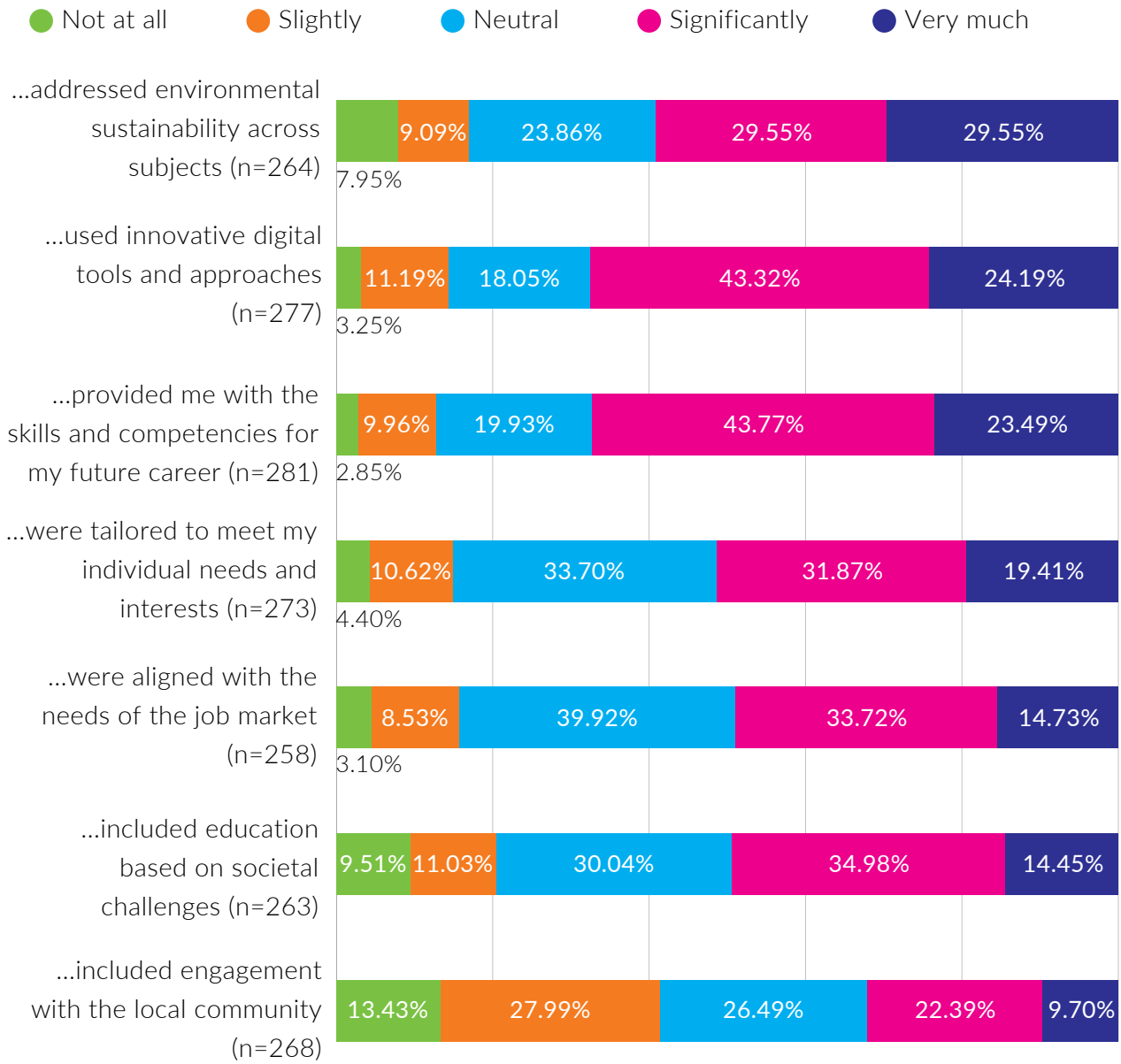
TEACHING METHODS IN SWEDEN

Incoming students generally evaluated several aspects of teaching positively, although responses varied across the statements. Engagement with the local community received the lowest positive response, with only 32.09% indicating that their teaching methods included such engagement to a significant or very high extent (Figure 3.6). This may be relevant to the wider difficulties students reported in connecting with local communities.

Figure 3.6

To what extent do you agree with the following statements about teaching methods applied by your host university?

Teaching methods...



Some courses forced the students to have both local and international students in the groups, this really encouraged mingling between the different nationalities.

- Incoming exchange student

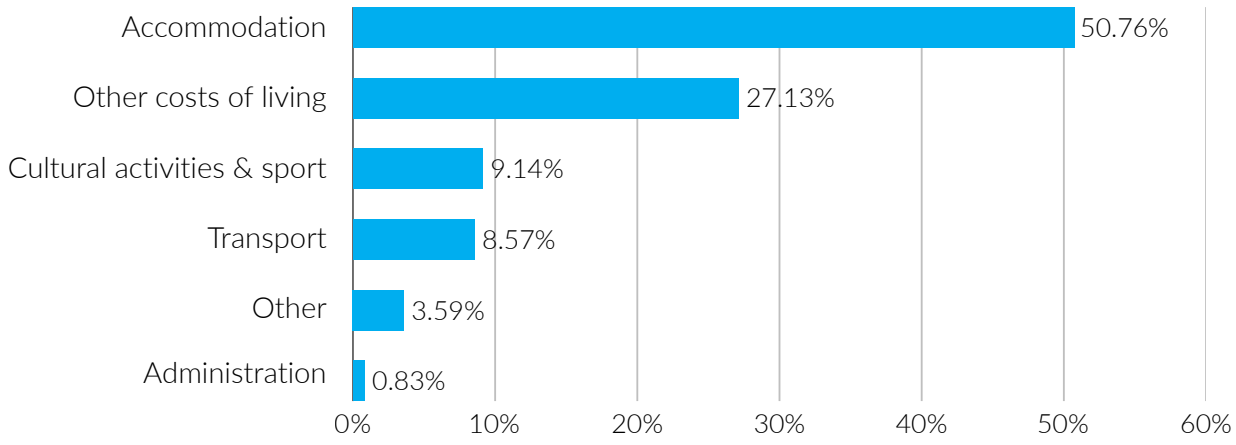
FUNDING & BUDGETING

Answers regarding incoming students average monthly cost of living ranged from €1.2 to €6,000. Since these extreme values could have skewed the mean across all participants, the report shows the median (Q2) as well as quartile 1 (Q1) and quartile 3 (Q3), which are more robust against outliers. Among incoming students (n=277), the median monthly cost of living was €850, with the middle 50% reporting monthly costs between €700 (Q1) and €1,000 (Q3).

On average, incoming students spend roughly 50% of their budget on accommodation, followed by approximately 27% on other costs of living and 9% on cultural activities and sport. All incoming students whose answers to these categories summed up to anything between 98% and 102% were included in the analysis, to account for small counting and typographical errors (Figure 3.7).

Figure 3.7

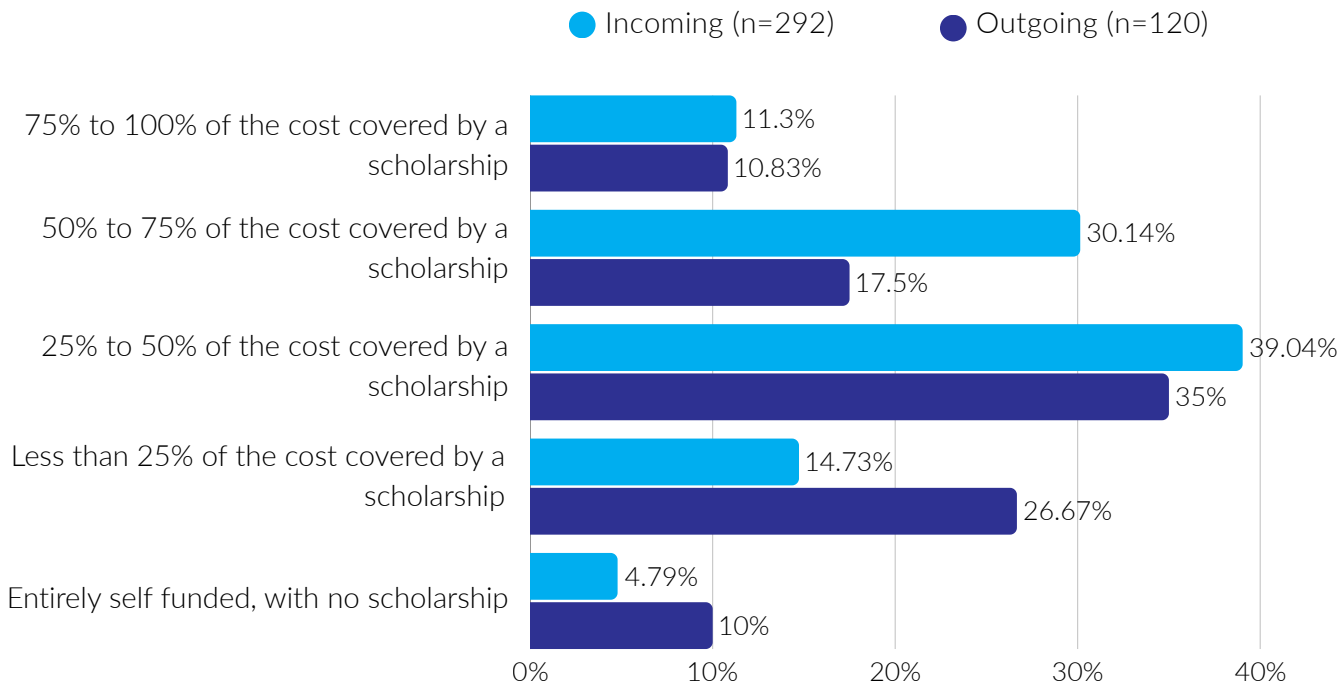
What percentage of your budget did you spend on the following categories during your exchange? (n=240)



A larger proportion of outgoing students reported having less than 25% of their mobility costs covered by scholarships, including those who received no scholarship at all (36.67%), compared with incoming students (19.52%). This suggests differences in scholarship coverage between the two groups, although the data do not establish how students financed the remaining costs (Figure 3.8).

Figure 3.8

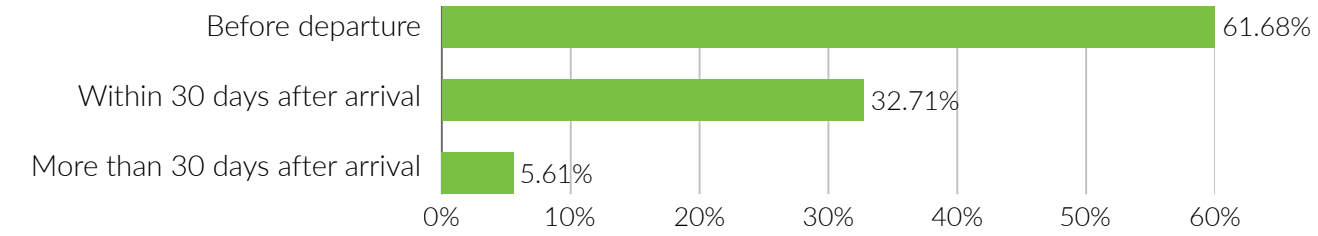
How was your mobility funded?



Most outgoing students received their scholarship before departure (61.68%), followed by students receiving their scholarship within 30 days after arrival (32.71%) and more than 30 days after arrival (5.61%; Figure 3.9).

Figure 3.9

When did you receive the scholarship? (n=107)

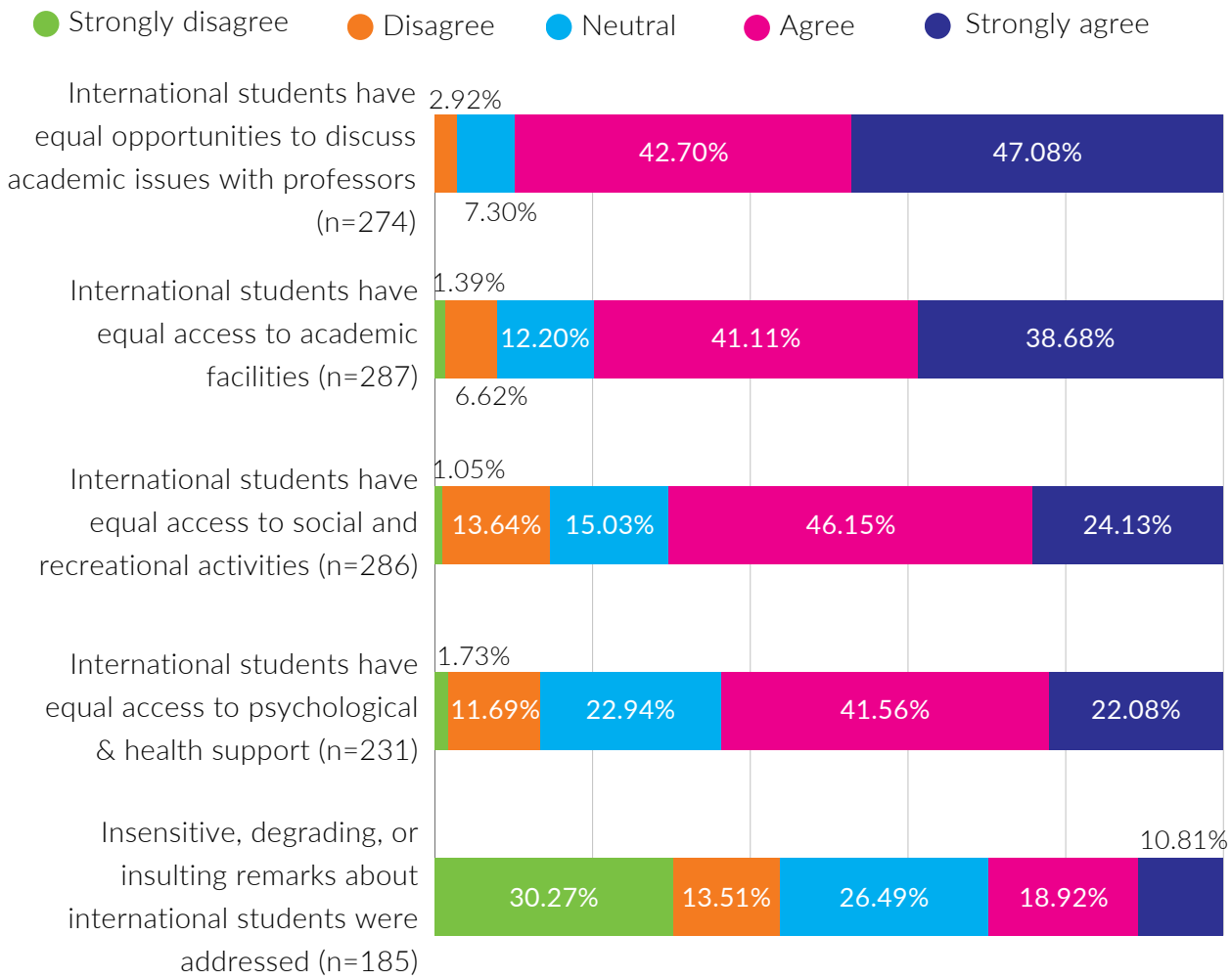


ACCESSIBILITY & DISCRIMINATION

Incoming students generally agreed or strongly agreed (at least 63.64%) that international students and local students have equal access to academic facilities, social and recreational activities, psychological and health support, as well as opportunities to discuss academic issues with professors. However, only 29.73% of incoming students agreed or strongly agreed that insensitive, degrading, or insulting remarks about international students were addressed. Meanwhile, 43.78% of incoming students strongly disagreed or disagreed that insensitive, degrading, or insulting remarks about international students were addressed (Figure 3.10).

Figure 3.10

Read the following statements and rate how much you agree or disagree based on your experience as an international student compared to local students.

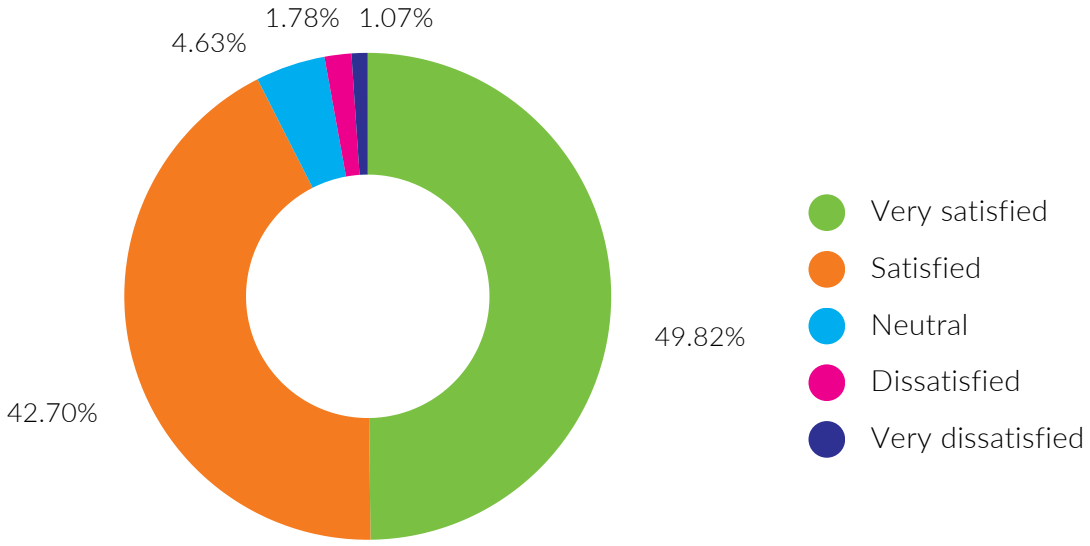


SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE HOSTING UNIVERSITY

Overall, incoming students reported high satisfaction with the services provided by their hosting universities. Of the 281 respondents, 92.52% were satisfied or very satisfied, with almost half (49.82%) indicating that they were very satisfied. Only 4.63% reported neutral experiences, while 2.85% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. These results indicate that the majority of incoming respondents had positive experiences with the services provided by their hosting universities (Figure 3.11).

Figure 3.11

Overall satisfaction with the services provided by the hosting university (n=281)



The housing system was perfect. [...] The Erasmus coordinator [...] was very friendly and helpful [...]. The extracurricular and leisure activities organised for international students were very high in count, variability and quality made for an unforgettable exchange semester.

- Incoming exchange student



4.
AFTER MOBILITY

Author: Patricia Mielke

AFTER MOBILITY

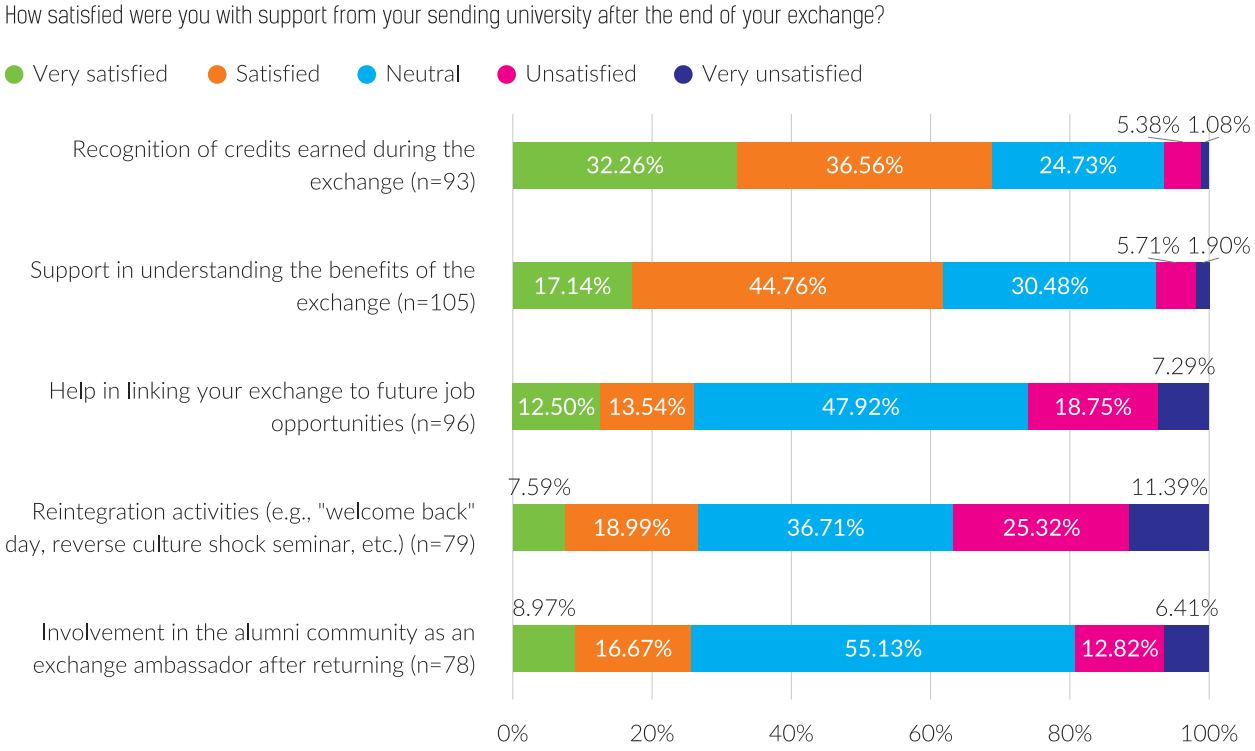
Author: Patricia Mielke

SATISFACTION WITH SUPPORT

Outgoing students were most satisfied with the recognition of credits earned during the exchange, with 68.81% reporting that they were satisfied or very satisfied. Support in understanding the benefits of the exchange was also viewed positively, with 61.90% expressing satisfaction.

In contrast, support related to the longer-term use of the exchange experience was weaker. Only 26.04% were satisfied or very satisfied with help linking the exchange to future job opportunities, while 47.91% gave a neutral response. Reintegration activities also received low satisfaction ratings, with only 26.57% satisfied or very satisfied and 36.70% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Involvement in an alumni community was also characterised by weaker satisfaction, with 19.23% feeling very unsatisfied or unsatisfied.

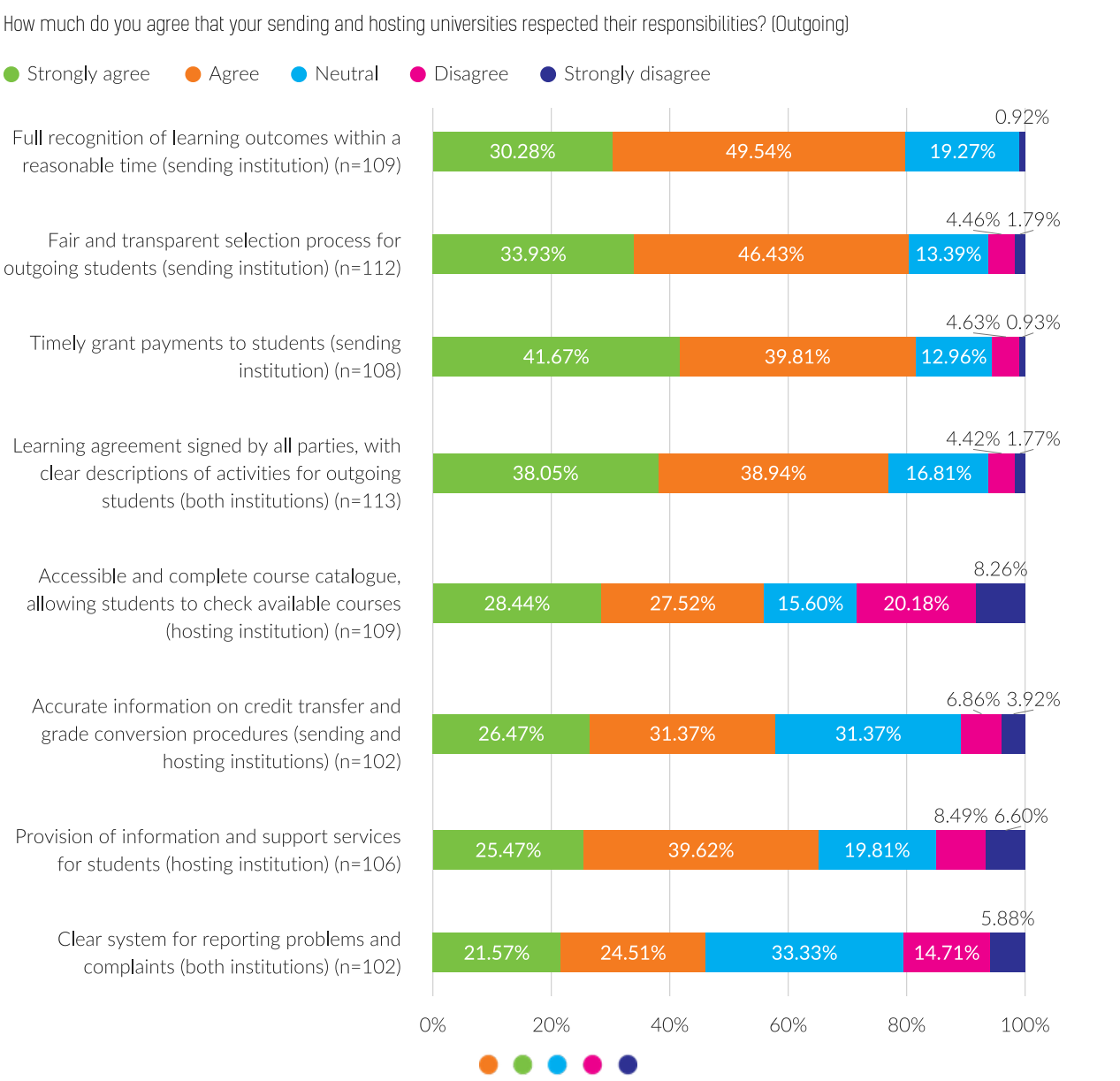
Figure 4.1



HEIS' FULFILMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES – OUTGOING STUDENTS

The 113 outgoing respondents generally agreed that their sending and hosting universities fulfilled their responsibilities towards exchange students. The strongest results concerned timely grant payments, with 81.47% agreeing or strongly agreeing, followed by the fairness and transparency of the selection process at the sending institution, at 80.34%. Full recognition of learning outcomes also received a high level of agreement, at 79.81%. The Learning Agreement process was also viewed positively, with 76.98% agreeing or strongly agreeing that agreements were signed by all parties and clearly described the planned activities. However, only 55.96% agreed that the host university provided an accessible and complete course catalogue, while 28.43% disagreed or strongly disagreed, making this the most negatively rated responsibility. Information on credit transfer and grade conversion also showed some uncertainty, with 31.37% selecting neutral. The clearest area for improvement was the system for reporting problems and complaints. Only 46.06% agreed or strongly agreed that such a system was clear, while 33.33% were neutral and 20.58% disagreed.

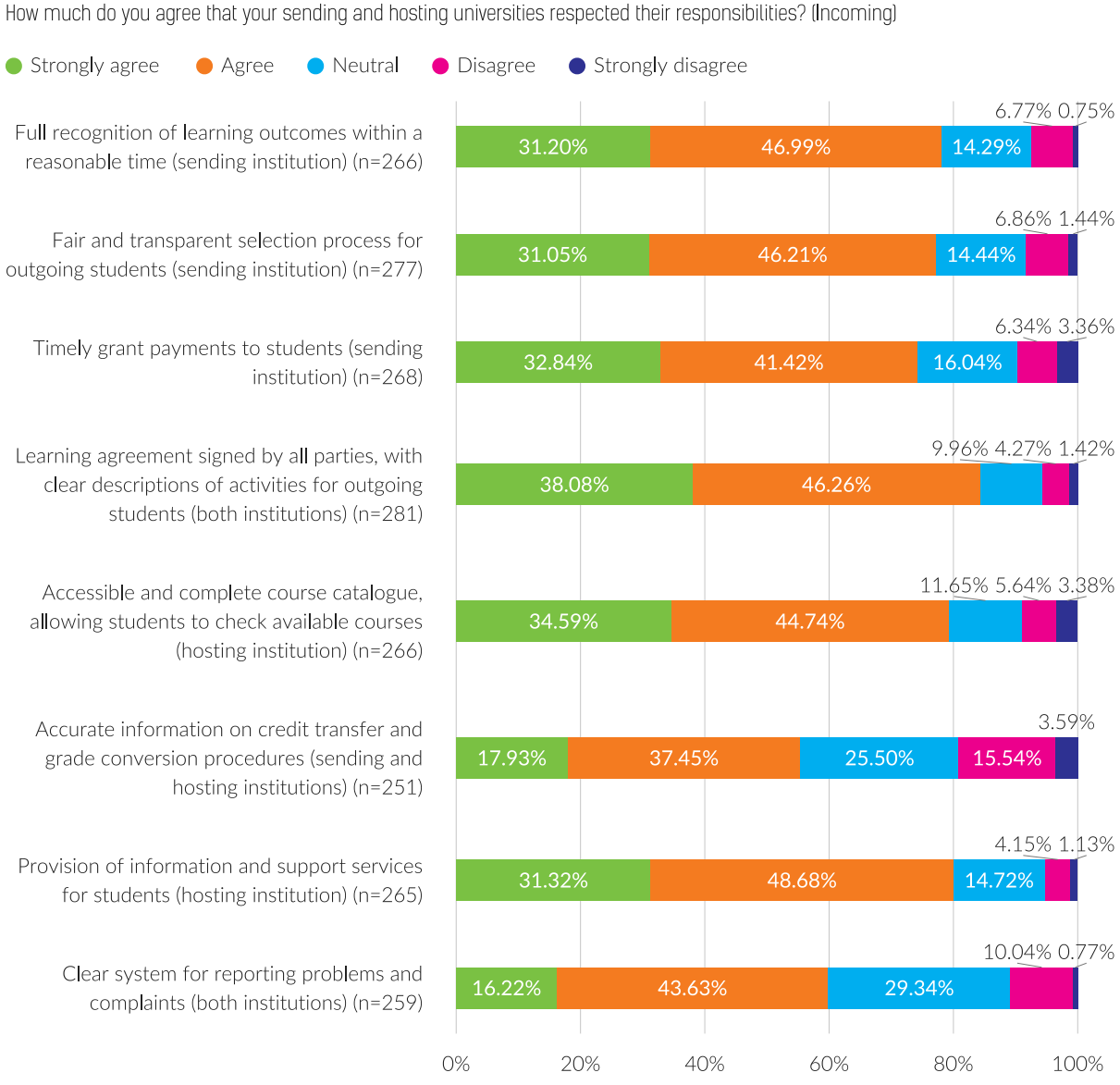
Figure 4.2



HEIS' FULFILMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES – INCOMING STUDENTS

Most incoming respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their universities had fulfilled the responsibilities examined in Figure 4.3. Agreement was particularly high regarding the Learning Agreement (84.34%), information and support services (80.00%), and the availability of a complete course catalogue (79.32%). In contrast, respondents were less positive about information on credit transfer and grade conversion (55.38%) and the system for reporting problems and complaints (59.84%), where neutral and negative responses were more common.

Figure 4.3



CREDIT RECOGNITION

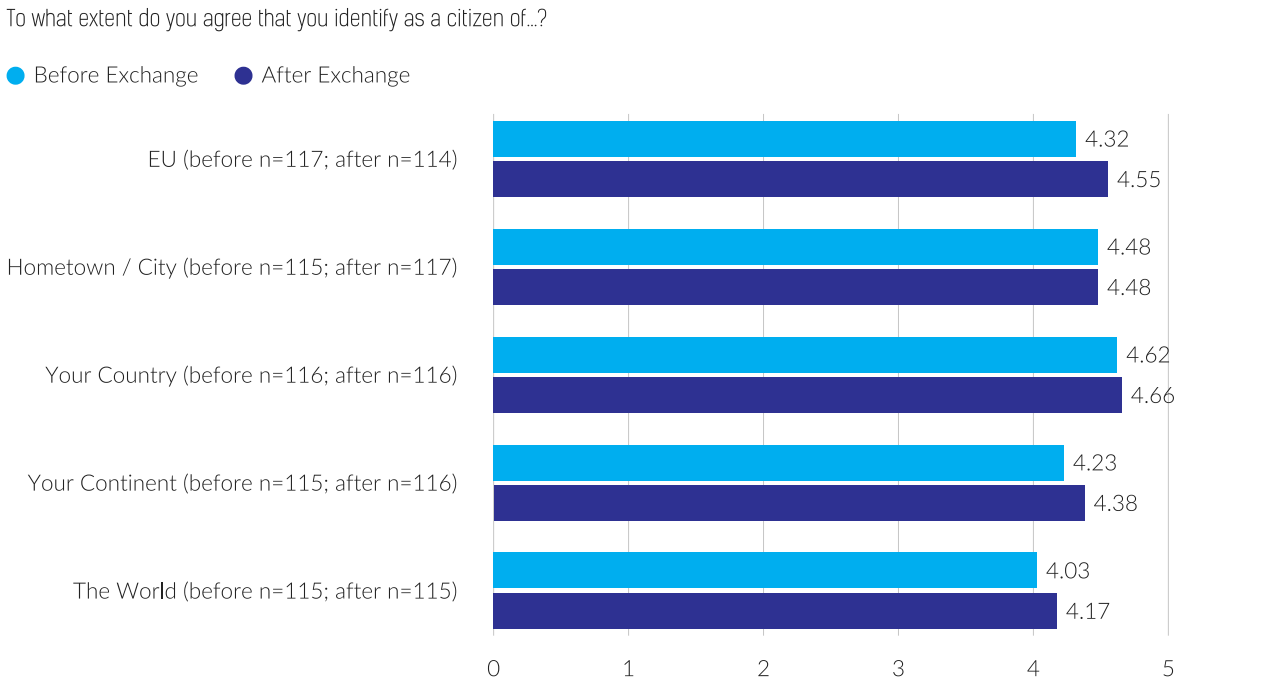
Among the 103 outgoing respondents, 94 (91.26%) reported that all credits passed abroad were recognised by their home university, while 9 (8.74%) had fewer credits recognised than they passed.

IDENTIFICATION

In the following, the extent to which respondents identify as citizens of different geographical levels before the exchange is evaluated on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, whereby 1 represents strongly disagree and 5 represents strongly agree. The results show that respondents generally identified strongly as citizens across all five geographical levels. Identification was strongest with their country (M = 4.62, SD = 0.67, n = 116), followed by their hometown/city (M = 4.48, SD = 0.72, n = 115) and the EU (M = 4.32, SD = 0.82, n = 117). Identification with their continent was slightly lower (M = 4.23, SD = 0.86, n = 115), while identification as a citizen of the world was the lowest (M = 4.03, SD = 0.92, n = 115).

After the exchange, respondents continued to report strong identification across all geographical levels. Identification remained strongest with their country (M = 4.66, SD = 0.65, n = 116), followed by the European Union (M = 4.55, SD = 0.68, n = 114). Compared with before the exchange, identification with the country increased slightly from M = 4.62 to 4.66, while identification with the hometown remained unchanged at M = 4.48. More noticeable increases were observed for the EU (4.32 to 4.55), continent (4.23 to 4.38) and world (4.03 to 4.17). Standard deviations also decreased across these categories, particularly for the EU (SD = 0.82 to 0.68), indicating lower variation among respondents after the exchange.

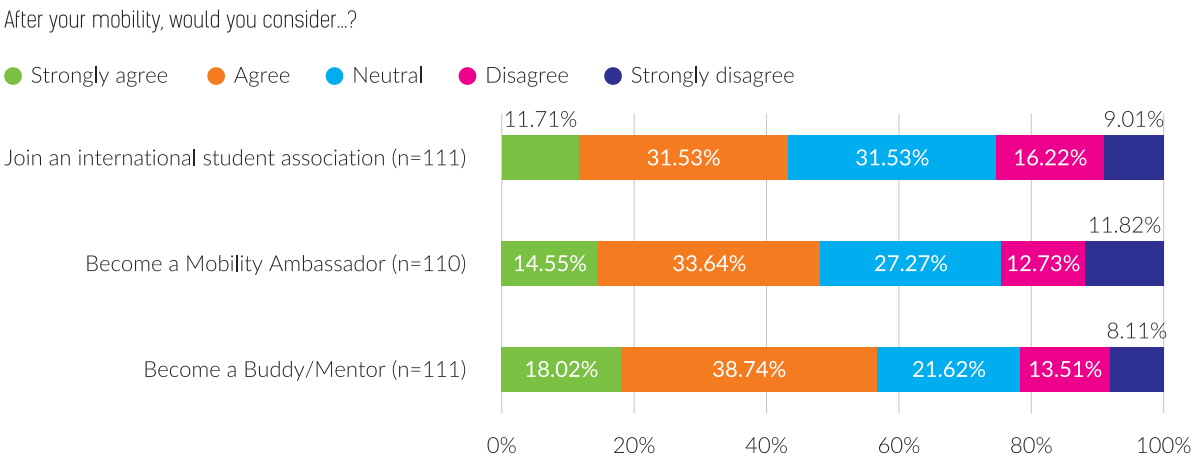
Figure 4.4



ENGAGEMENT AFTER MOBILITY

Outgoing students expressed interest in remaining involved in international activities after their mobility (Figure 4.5). The highest level of interest was in becoming a Buddy or Mentor, with 56.76% agreeing or strongly agreeing, followed by becoming a Mobility Ambassador (48.18%) and joining an international student association (43.24%). Although interest varied between activities, these results suggest that a considerable proportion of returning students would consider continuing their involvement in international mobility.

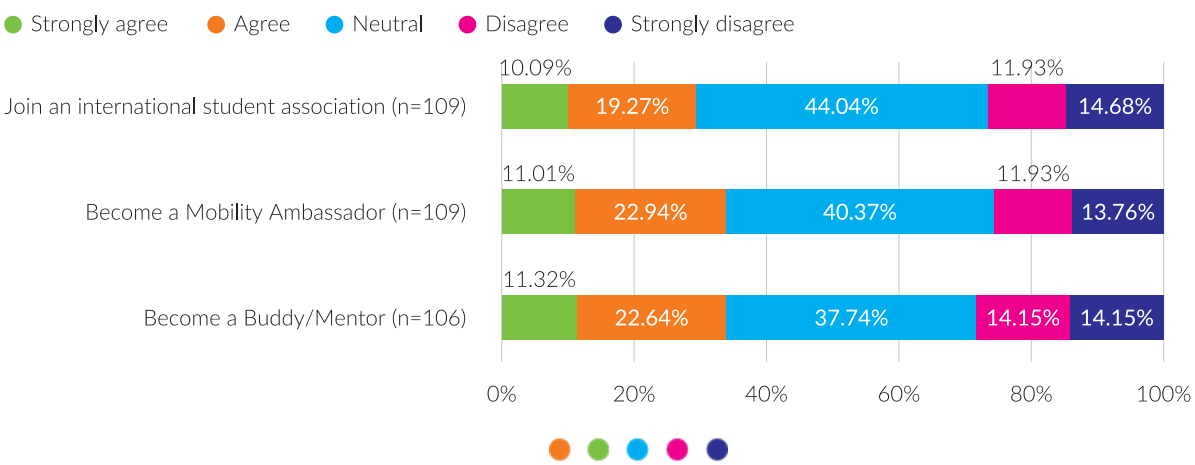
Figure 4.5



ENCOURAGEMENT FOR ENGAGEMENT AFTER MOBILITY

Encouragement from sending universities was considerably lower (Figure 4.6). Only 33.96% agreed or strongly agreed that their university encouraged them to become a Buddy or Mentor, 33.94% to become a Mobility Ambassador, and 29.36% to join an international student association. Neutral responses were the most common across all three activities, ranging from 37.74% to 44.04%. The difference between students' willingness to participate and the encouragement they reported receiving suggests that HEIs could do more to promote opportunities for continued engagement after mobility.

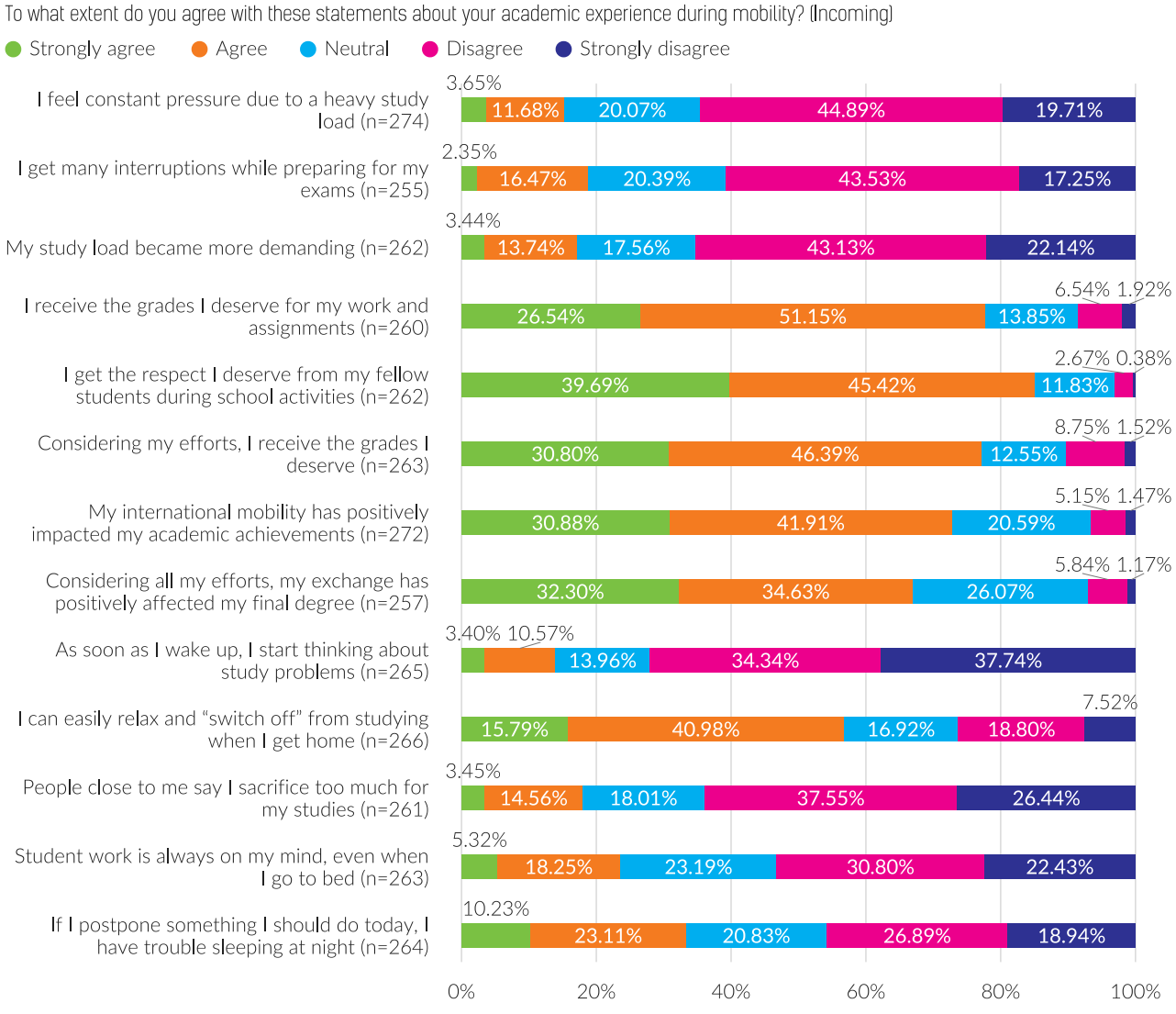
Figure 4.6



ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE DURING MOBILITY – INCOMING STUDENTS

The respondents reported a generally positive academic experience during their mobility. Around 64.60% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they felt constant pressure due to a heavy study load, while 65.75% disagreed or strongly disagreed that their study load had become more demanding. Similarly, 72.08% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they started thinking about study problems as soon as they woke up. Students also reported positive experiences regarding fairness of assessment and treatment during academic activities. A large majority, 77.69%, agreed or strongly agreed that they received the grades they deserved for their work and assignments, while 77.19% felt their grades fairly reflected their overall effort. Respect from fellow students was rated particularly highly, with 85.11% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they received the respect they deserved during academic activities. The perceived impact of mobility on academic outcomes was also positive. Approximately 72.79% agreed or strongly agreed that international mobility had positively affected their academic achievements, while 66.93% felt that their exchange had positively influenced their final degree.

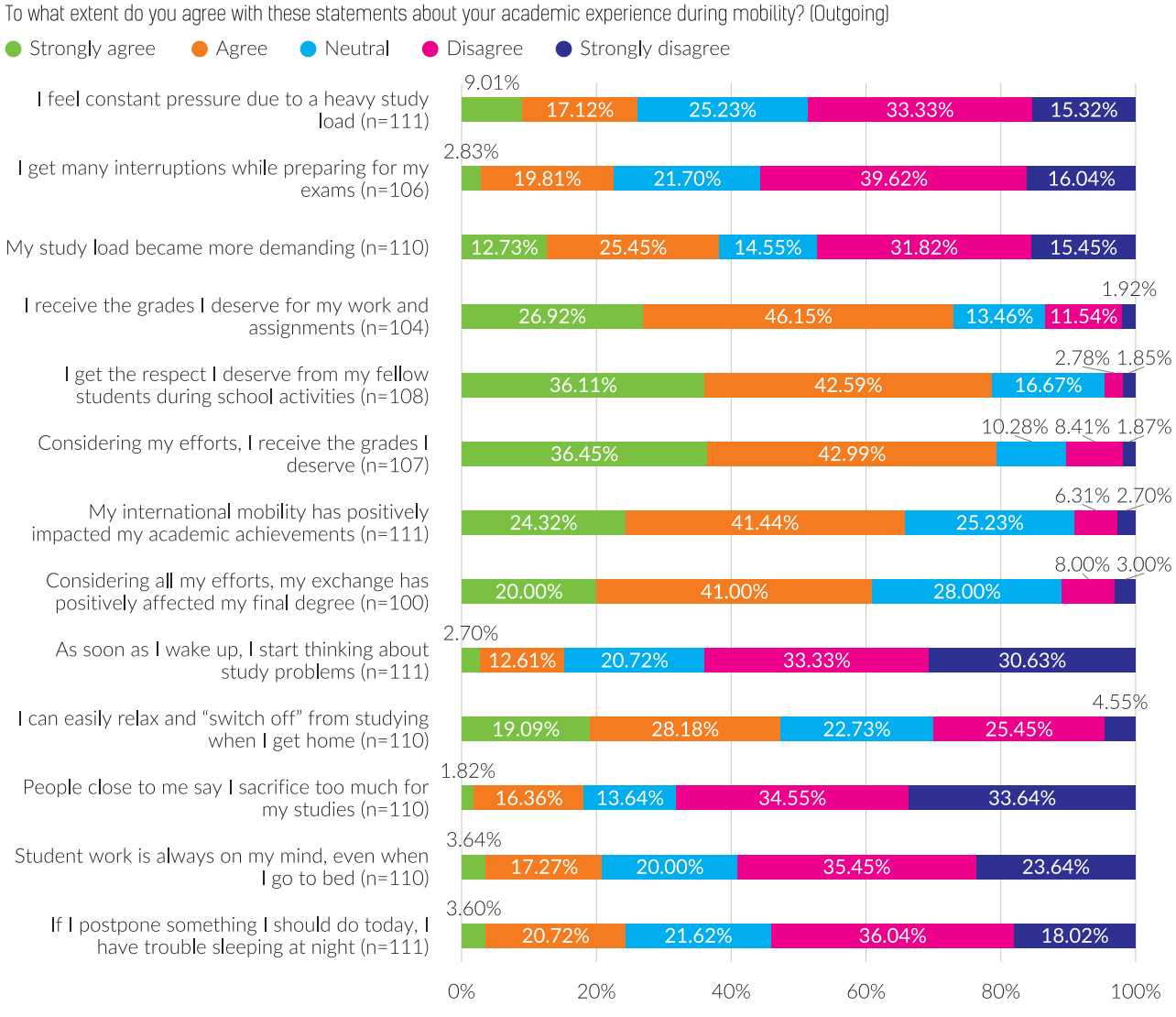
Figure 4.7



ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE DURING MOBILITY – OUTGOING STUDENTS

The responses from outgoing students indicate that students generally viewed their academic experience during mobility positively, although some reported increased academic demands. Almost half of respondents, 48.65%, disagreed or strongly disagreed that they felt constant pressure from a heavy study load, while 26.13% agreed or strongly agreed. Similarly, 47.27% disagreed or strongly disagreed that their study load had become more demanding, but 38.18% agreed or strongly agreed, suggesting that workload experiences varied noticeably between students. Perceptions of assessment and treatment were largely positive as 73.08% agreed or strongly agreed that they received the grades they deserved for their work and assignments, while 79.44% felt their grades fairly reflected their effort. Respect from fellow students was also rated highly, with 78.70% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they received the respect they deserved during academic activities. The academic impact of mobility was also viewed positively. Around 65.76% agreed or strongly agreed that international mobility had positively affected their academic achievements, while 61.00% felt that the exchange had positively influenced their final degree.

Figure 4.8

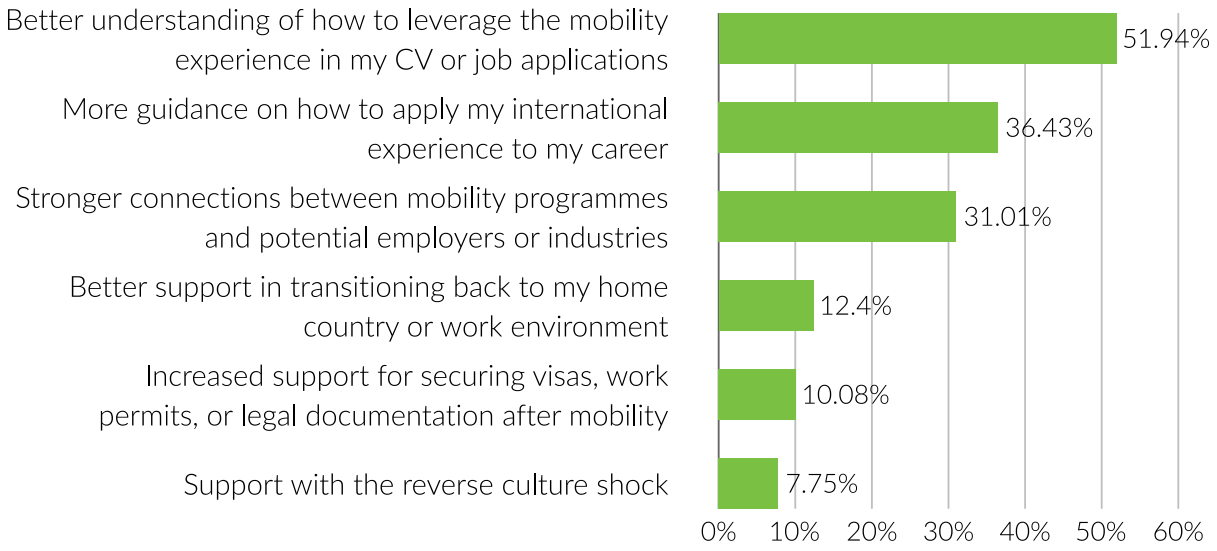


MOBILITY IMPROVEMENTS

The results from 129 outgoing students suggest that respondents mainly saw room for improvement in career-related support after mobility. The most frequently identified need was better guidance on how to present and leverage the mobility experience in CVs and job applications (51.94%), followed by more guidance on applying international experience to a future career (36.43%) and stronger connections between mobility programmes and potential employers or industries (31.01%).

Figure 4.9

After finishing your mobility, what do you think could have been improved? (n=129)

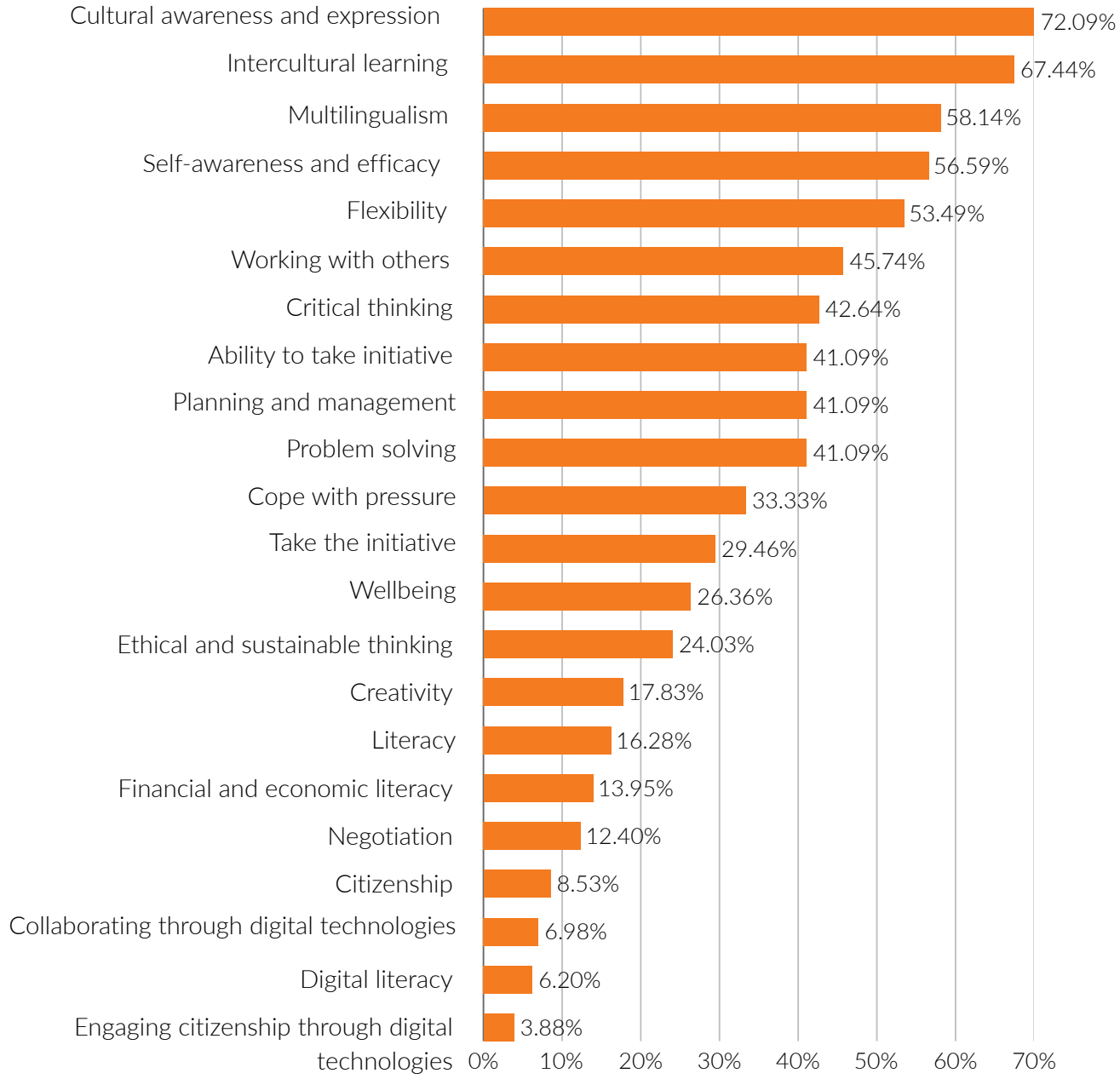


IMPROVEMENT OF SKILLS

The most frequently reported improvements by the 129 respondents were in cultural awareness and expression (72.09%), intercultural learning (67.44%), multilingualism (58.14%), self-awareness and efficacy (56.59%), and flexibility (53.49%). In contrast, fewer respondents felt that they had improved in areas such as digital literacy, digital citizenship, citizenship, negotiation, financial and economic literacy, and literacy. The respondents were able to select multiple answers.

Figure 4.10

Which skills do you believe you improved during your exchange? (n=129)

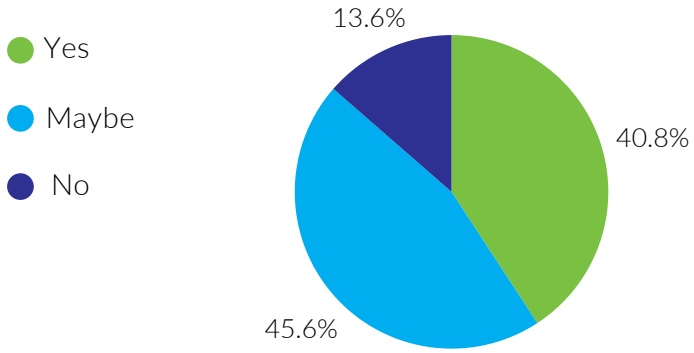


INTEREST IN A EUROPEAN DEGREE

The results from 103 outgoing students show a positive interest in pursuing a European degree. Only 13.59% said no, suggesting that most respondents were either interested in or open to the idea of completing a European degree.

Figure 4.11

If you had the chance, would you like to do a European degree? (n=103)

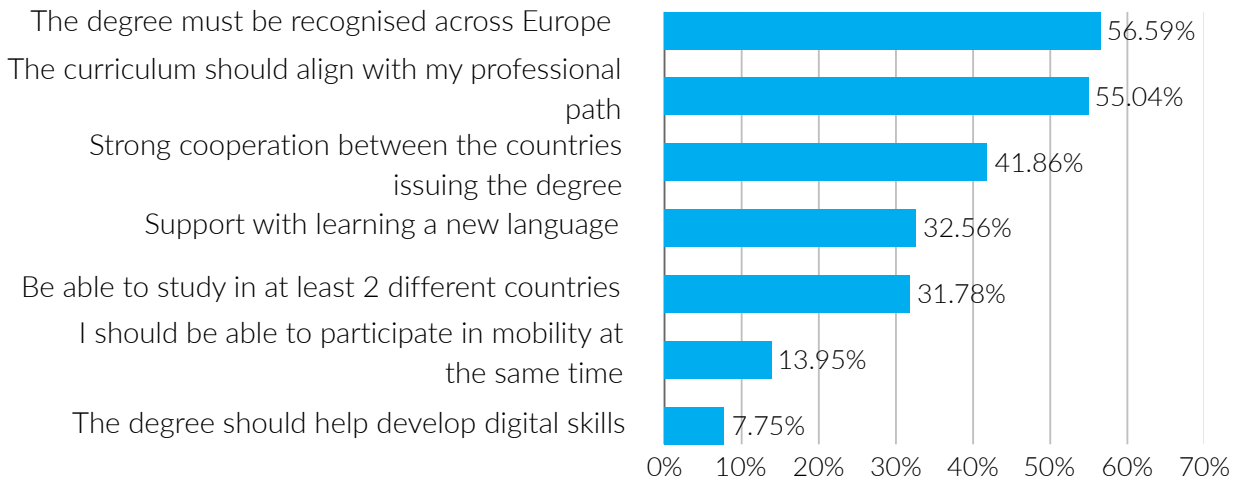


CONDITIONS FOR A EUROPEAN DEGREE

The 129 respondents indicated that they placed the greatest importance on the academic relevance and recognition of a European degree. The most frequently selected conditions were that the degree should be recognised across Europe (56.59%) and that the curriculum should align with the student's professional path (55.04%). The respondents were able to select multiple answers.

Figure 4.12

What conditions should be met for you to participate in a European degree? (n=129)

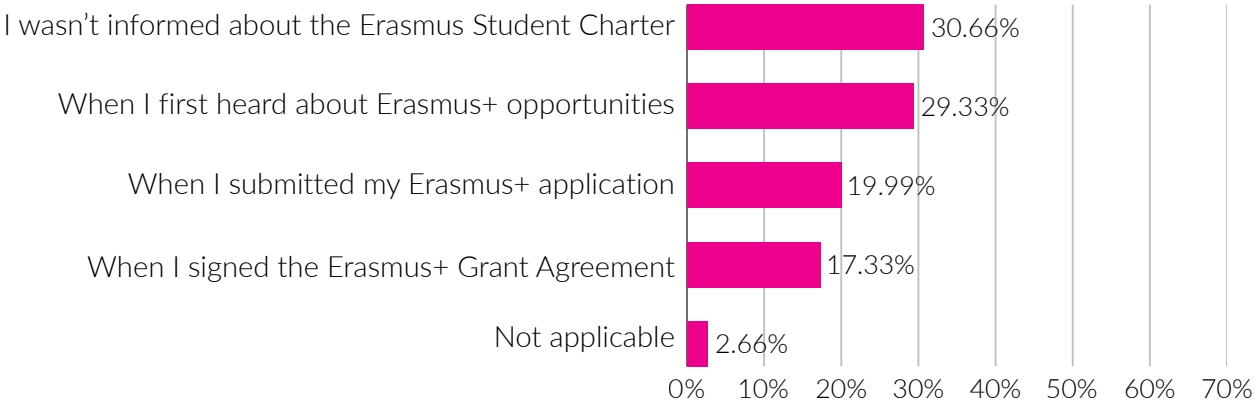


INFORMATION ABOUT RIGHTS AS AN ERASMUS STUDENT

Among the 75 outgoing respondents, 30.66% reported that they had not been informed about their rights under the Erasmus Student Charter. While 29.33% received this information when they first learned about Erasmus+ opportunities, another 37.32% received it only when submitting their application or signing their Grant Agreement. This highlights the need to ensure that students are informed about their rights early in the mobility process, allowing them to better understand their responsibilities, entitlements and the responsibilities of participating institutions (Figure 4.13).

Figure 4.13

Did you get information about your rights as an Erasmus student, as mentioned in the Erasmus Student Charter? (n=75)

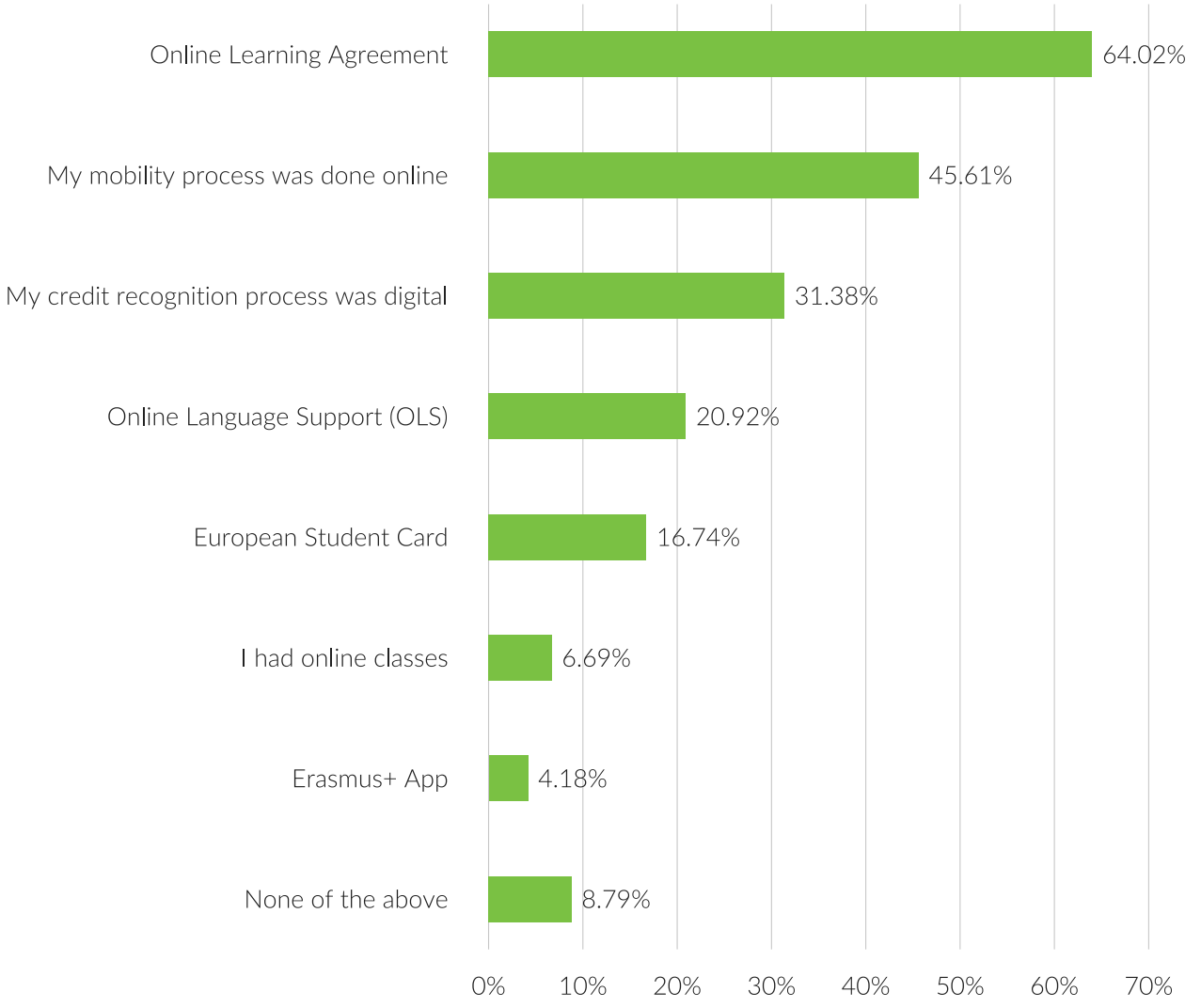


TOOLS USED DURING ERASMUS – INCOMING STUDENTS

Among the 239 incoming respondents, the Online Learning Agreement was the most commonly used Erasmus+ tool (64.02%), followed by completing the mobility process online (45.61%) and digital credit recognition (31.38%). Online Language Support (OLS) was used by 20.92% of respondents, while 16.74% reported using the European Student Card. Online classes (6.69%) and the Erasmus+ App (4.18%) were used less frequently, and 8.79% indicated that they had used none of the listed tools (Figure 4.14).

Figure 4.14

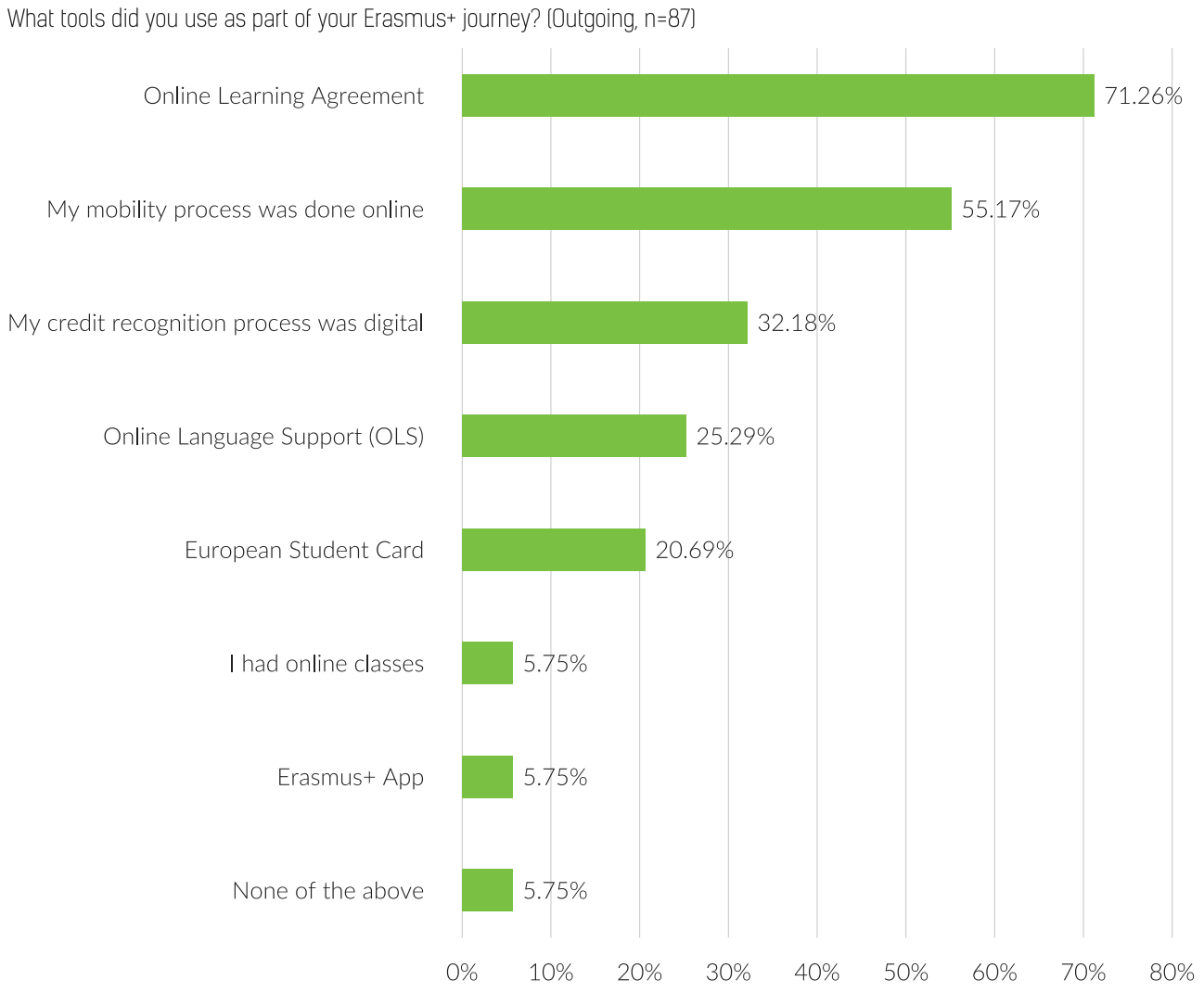
What tools did you use as part of your Erasmus+ journey? (Incoming, n=239)



TOOLS USED DURING ERASMUS – OUTGOING STUDENTS

Among the 87 outgoing respondents, the Online Learning Agreement was the most commonly used Erasmus+ tool (71.26%), followed by completing the mobility process online (55.17%). Digital credit recognition was reported by 32.18% of respondents, while 25.29% used Online Language Support (OLS) and 20.69% used the European Student Card. Online classes and the Erasmus+ App were each used by 5.75% of respondents, while another 5.75% indicated that they had used none of the listed tools (Figure 4.15).

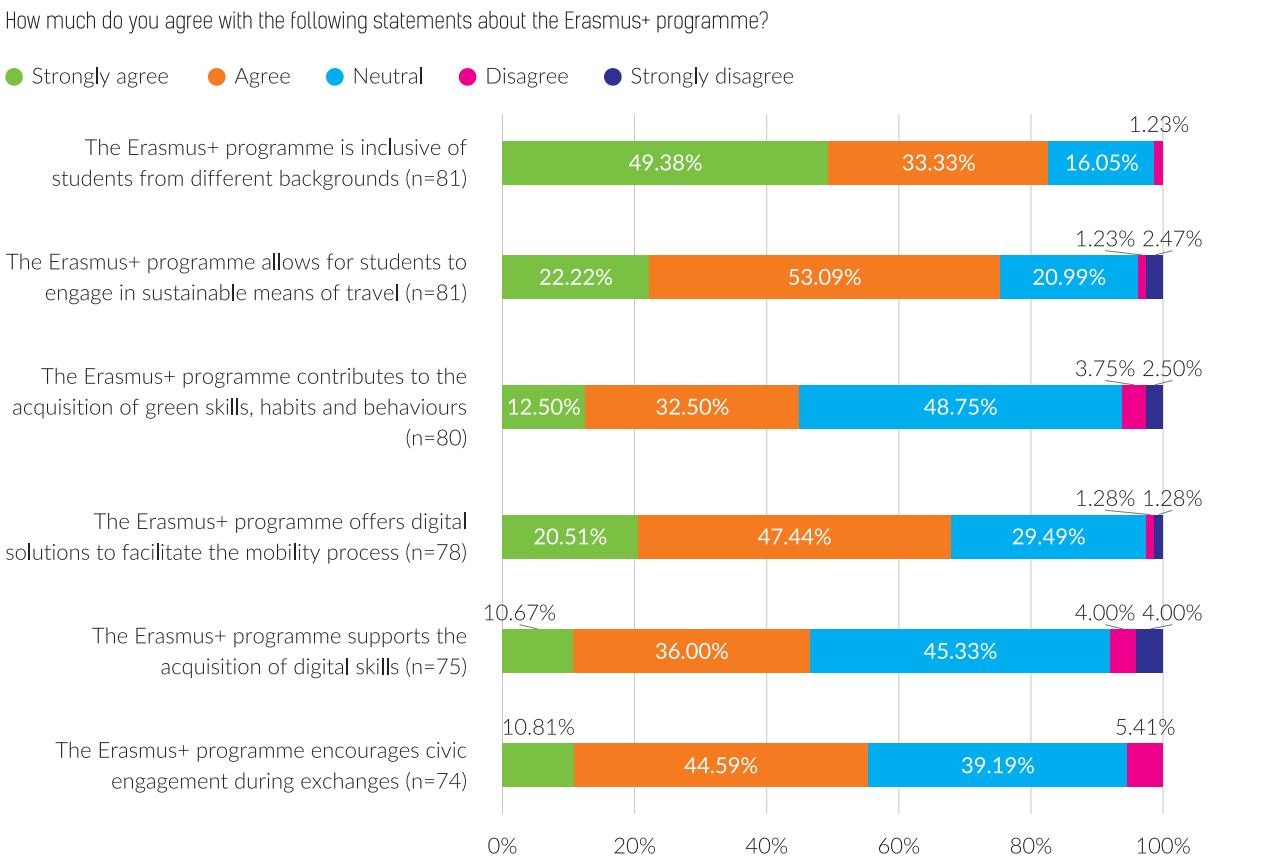
Figure 4.15



AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENTS ABOUT THE ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME

The responses from outgoing students indicate a generally positive view of the Erasmus+ programme. The strongest agreement concerned the programme's inclusiveness, with 82.72% agreeing or strongly agreeing that it is inclusive of students from different backgrounds. Respondents were also positive about opportunities for sustainable travel (75.30%) and the availability of digital solutions for the mobility process (67.94%). Views were more mixed regarding the programme's contribution to green skills, digital skills, and civic engagement, where neutral responses were relatively common.

Figure 4.16





5. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Author: Niki Jaško

CONCLUSIONS

Author: Niki Jaško

The findings of the XVI ESNsurvey Sweden report indicate that international mobility is generally viewed positively by participating students. Cultural exchange, personal development and exposure to different learning environments were among the most frequently reported motivations for going abroad. Students also reported high levels of satisfaction with their hosting institutions, generally positive experiences with academic recognition and improvements in a range of personal and intercultural competences.

However, these positive experiences coexist with challenges throughout the mobility process. Incoming students particularly struggled to connect with local students and communities, while outgoing students more frequently reported difficulties related to courses and accommodation. Financial considerations also remained important, both in preparing for mobility and during the exchange itself. The findings suggest that providing academic opportunities abroad is only one aspect of ensuring a successful mobility experience.

The period following mobility presents further opportunities for improvement. Although students reported developing valuable competences, satisfaction with institutional support for applying these experiences to future career opportunities was relatively low. Similarly, students expressed interest in remaining engaged in international activities after returning, but reported receiving considerably less encouragement from their HEIs.

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of supporting students throughout the entire mobility experience, including after their return. While the voluntary nature of the survey limits the extent to which results can be generalised, they identify several areas where higher education institutions, public authorities and student organisations can contribute to improving international mobility in Sweden.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Author: Niki Jaško

BEFORE MOBILITY

1. Promote international mobility before higher education

The findings show that 36.72% of outgoing students had already decided they wanted to go on exchange before starting university (Figure 2.1, p. 22). This highlights the relevance of introducing students to international mobility opportunities before they enter higher education. Swedish higher education institutions already have established cooperation with upper-secondary schools through educational outreach and student ambassador programmes, alongside initiatives involving former Erasmus+ participants as ambassadors. Building on these existing structures, universities could strengthen the promotion of international mobility among prospective students. Involving Erasmus+ ambassadors, mobility alumni and ESN sections in school visits and other outreach activities would allow students to learn about mobility opportunities directly from those who have experienced them, making international mobility a more visible and accessible possibility for students considering higher education.

2. Expand peer-to-peer preparation for mobility

Previous mobility participants can provide valuable practical insights to students preparing for an exchange. In the survey, 60.47% of outgoing respondents identified hearing from students who had studied abroad as important pre-departure support (Figure 2.6, p. 28). Higher education institutions should further involve mobility alumni in their preparation activities, cooperating with ESN sections, student unions and other student associations to facilitate contact between outgoing and returning students. Destination-specific information sessions, peer consultations and informal discussions could complement official institutional information with personal experiences of academic life, accommodation, social integration and everyday practicalities. These activities would also provide returning students with opportunities to share their experiences and remain involved in international mobility.

DURING MOBILITY

3. Strengthen integration into local student and community life

Social integration remains a challenge for incoming students in Sweden, with 34.58% reporting difficulties connecting with locals (Figure 3.4, p. 35). Although 90.18% participated in activities organised by ESN or other international student groups, interaction with local students and communities remained comparatively limited (Figures 3.1–3.3, pp. 32–34). Greater attention should therefore be given to connecting international students with existing local communities. Cooperation between higher education institutions, ESN sections, student unions, faculty associations and local organisations could create more opportunities for international and local students to participate in activities together. This could include opening existing student activities to international students, developing joint initiatives with sports and cultural associations, and encouraging interaction through academic activities. ESN sections could play an important role in facilitating these connections and helping international students discover opportunities beyond activities specifically organised for exchange students. The objective should be to support sustained participation in local student and community life throughout the mobility period.

AFTER MOBILITY

4. Encourage students to reflect on their mobility experiences

International mobility offers opportunities for personal development that extend beyond academic achievements. Students should be encouraged to reflect on their experiences, the challenges they faced, how they have developed and how these experiences may influence their future choices. This is particularly relevant given the improvements in personal and intercultural competences reported by outgoing students (Figure 4.10, p. 51). Higher education institutions and student organisations could facilitate this process through reflection workshops, peer discussions or other activities where returning students can exchange experiences and perspectives. ESN sections and student unions could provide informal spaces for these discussions, allowing students to explore the broader personal and social value of their mobility. Supporting students in understanding their experiences could help them identify opportunities to build on what they have gained in their future education, professional development and personal lives.

5. Develop formal recognition of competences gained through mobility

Students reported improvements in a wide range of competences, particularly cultural awareness and expression (72.09%), intercultural learning (67.44%) and multilingualism (58.14%) (Figure 4.10, p. 51). At the same time, 51.94% identified a need for better guidance on presenting their mobility experience in CVs and job applications (Figure 4.9, p. 50). Beyond the recognition of academic credits, higher education institutions should explore more systematic approaches to documenting, validating and formally recognising competences developed through international mobility. Existing European instruments, such as *Europass Mobility*, could provide a starting point for documenting learning outcomes, while further cooperation with academic departments and career services could help develop appropriate recognition practices. Student unions, ESN sections and other student organisations could contribute through their experience in non-formal learning and competence recognition, particularly regarding skills developed through volunteering and international engagement. Strengthening these mechanisms could help students demonstrate the value of their international experiences in further education, employment and other professional contexts.

6. Promote continued engagement after mobility

The findings indicate considerable interest among outgoing students in remaining involved in international activities after returning home. More than half expressed interest in becoming a Buddy or Mentor (approximately 57%), while around 48% would consider becoming a Mobility Ambassador. However, fewer than 35% reported encouragement from their sending universities to participate in any of the three activities examined (Figures 4.5 and 4.6, p. 47). Universities should cooperate more closely with ESN sections, student unions and other student organisations to actively promote opportunities for returning students to remain engaged. These could include mentoring, mobility promotion, volunteering, participation in student associations and involvement in relevant student representative bodies and committees. Returning students could also contribute to preparation activities for outgoing students and outreach initiatives in upper-secondary schools. Such engagement would allow mobility alumni to continue applying their international experiences while contributing to their academic and wider communities.

7. Establish systematic post-mobility support and engagement opportunities

Building on the recommendations of ESN Sweden's 2026 paper *Strengthening Mobility Alumni Engagement in Sweden*,[4] higher education institutions should work towards establishing a more coordinated approach to the post-mobility phase. Opportunities for reflection, competence recognition and continued engagement should become established parts of mobility support, extending beyond the completion of administrative procedures and academic credit recognition. Stronger cooperation between university international offices, career services, student unions and organisations such as ESN sections could help connect existing initiatives and develop clearer pathways for returning students. ESN Sweden could support this process by facilitating cooperation between institutions and its sections, sharing successful practices and contributing to the development of common approaches. A more systematic approach would help ensure that opportunities to benefit from international mobility remain available after students return and that their experiences can continue contributing to university life and wider society.

4. Erasmus Student Network Sweden, "Strengthening Mobility Alumni Engagement in Sweden," May 23, 2026, https://esnsweden.org/2026/05/23/strengthening-mobility-alumni-engagement-in-sweden/.

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Erasmus Student Network Sweden