

SPIN-OFF
REPORT ⑤

EAIE BAROMETER

INTERNATIONALISATION IN EUROPE

Third edition

STUDENT NEEDS AND INTERESTS

by Jody Hoekstra-Selten, Rita Dias and Laura E. Rumbley

ABOUT THE EAIE

Founded in 1989, the **European Association for International Education (EAIE)** is the European centre for knowledge, expertise and networking in the internationalisation of higher education. As a member-led association of over 3000 members from more than 95 countries, our mission is to enable the international higher education sector, demonstrate the impact of internationalisation, and influence and engage policymakers and the public in support of our vision.

ABOUT ESN

Founded in 1989, the **Erasmus Student Network (ESN)** is the largest student organisation acting in the field of student mobility and internalisation of higher education. ESN is a non-profit organisation of more than 530 local sections in 45 countries in more than 1000 higher education institutions, comprising 15,000 volunteers. ESN provides support services to over 350,000 international students and works for their needs by facilitating their mobility period, ensuring social cohesion, reintegration and by enhancing intercultural awareness and active citizenship.

ABOUT MCKINLEY

McKinley Advisors (McKinley) is an award-winning association consulting firm dedicated to accelerating associations' positive impact on the world. They work in partnership with association executives and volunteer leaders to identify and address their most significant challenges and opportunities, and provide services through four practice areas: strategy and innovation, organisational excellence, business transformation, and research and insights.

EAIE BAROMETER: INTERNATIONALISATION IN EUROPE (THIRD EDITION)
Student needs and interests

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INTRODUCTION

Internationalisation in higher education is undertaken for many different reasons, however arguably one of the core motivations for doing so is to meet students' academic, personal and career development needs. But how central are students' needs and interests, really, to the work of internationalisation in European higher education today? To shed light on this question, the European Association for International Education (EAIE) and the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) joined forces – and pooled key data – from their signature research projects, *ie* the EAIE Barometer, third edition (2024) and the 15th edition of the ESNsurvey (2024).

The EAIE Barometer survey has been administered three times since 2015 and provides important indications of how professionals working in international higher education across Europe view various topics linked to their roles and their institutions. In its third edition, the survey garnered more than 2800 responses from international higher education professionals in 46 of the 49 European Higher Education Area (EHEA) countries. Embedded in their responses are strong indications that issues directly relevant to students – including curricular content, academic mobility and well-being – require *more or continued attention* from European higher education institutions (HEIs) moving forward. At the same time, there are also signs that stakeholders other than students tend to play a more prominent role in driving institutions' internationalisation goals.

For its part, the ESNsurvey is a Europe-wide research initiative that explores various aspects of student mobility and the internationalisation of higher education. First established in 2005, the 15th and most recent edition of the survey (titled 'Making quality mobility a reality for all') gathered 23,000 responses. The survey has become a flagship project for the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) for giving a voice to international students, and has grown into a key tool for understanding the real experiences of students who study abroad, highlighting both the opportunities and challenges they encounter.

The consideration of data from both the EAIE Barometer and the ESNsurvey opens the door on important conversations about the involvement of students in internationalisation in five key areas:

1. students as a driver for internationalisation
2. Erasmus+ outreach and recognition
3. attention to student well-being
4. the impact of internationalisation
5. barriers for students to engage in internationalisation opportunities

Together, the EAIE and ESN are committed to advancing greater understanding of student needs and interests with respect to internationalisation. More importantly, they are keen to educate key decision-makers around the substantive roles that students can and do play as allies in advancing meaningful internationalisation policies and practices. The introduction to the 15th ESNsurvey report asserts that “every exchange is an opportunity to build bridges, break down barriers and foster understanding.” From our perspective, the exchange of knowledge between the EAIE and ESN captured in this spin-off report exemplifies the best of this type of mutually enriching engagement and advancement of our shared knowledge base.

1. STUDENTS AS A DRIVER FOR INTERNATIONALISATION

Internationalisation is not a one-person job, but something that needs to involve various stakeholders, both internal and external. Current and former students (*ie* alumni) are two such important stakeholders – but to what extent are these groups seen as drivers of internationalisation by practitioners in international higher education. The EAIE Barometer, third edition survey included two questions related to the main drivers that have allowed institutions to successfully establish a clearly defined set of goals for internationalisation and the influence of certain stakeholder groups in driving those goals forward. Data from those questions paints an interesting picture about how students and alumni are perceived as drivers, as described in more detail below.

ESTABLISHING INTERNATIONALISATION GOALS

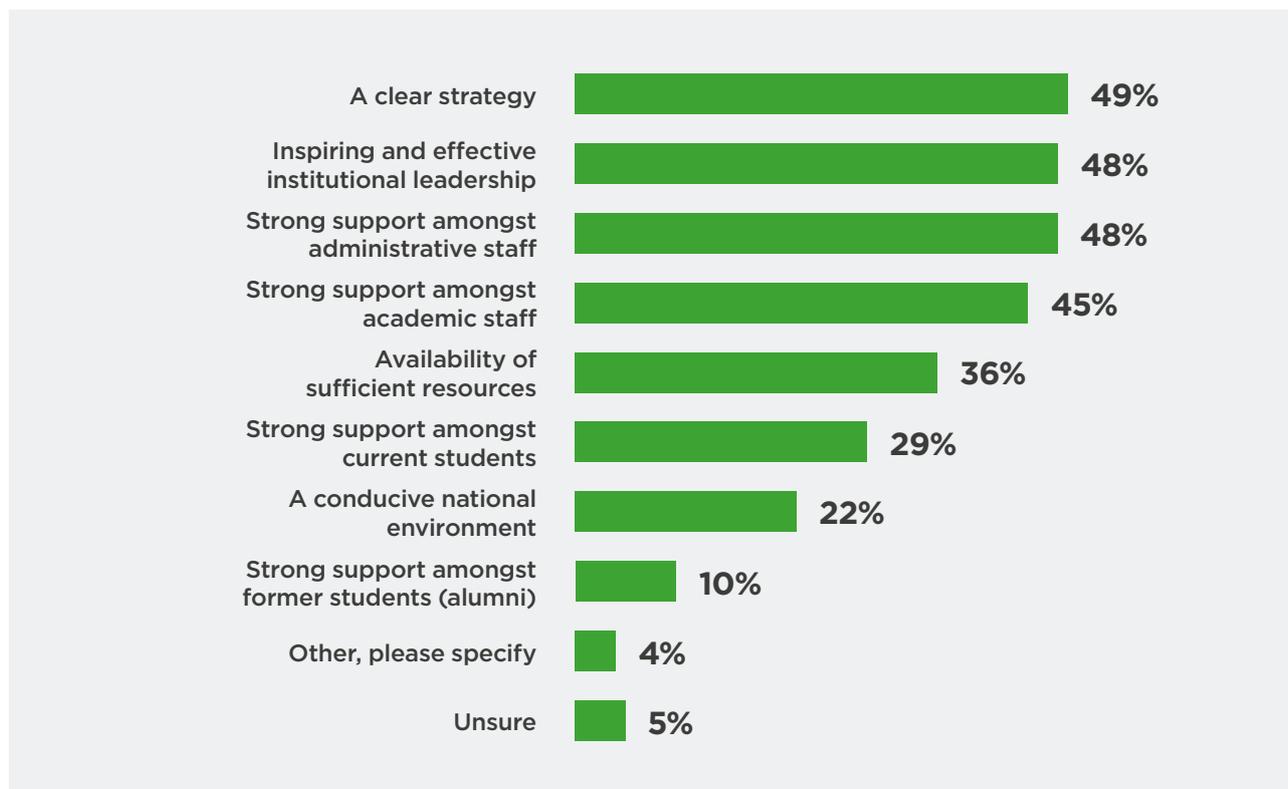
The Barometer data clearly shows that support from students and alumni is not frequently perceived as influential in the establishment of clear internationalisation goals for institutions, compared to factors such as effective leadership or support from administrative or academic staff (see **Figure 1**).

Respondents from Western Asia (38%) and Eastern Europe (36%) more frequently perceived students as playing a role as drivers of clear internationalisation goals, in comparison to only 26% or lower amongst respondents from Western, Southern and Northern Europe. A driving role by alumni was also more frequently perceived by respondents in Eastern Europe (17%) and Western Asia (13%), against 10% or less in the other three regions.

Meanwhile, respondents with the most experience (15 years or more) were more likely (31%) to choose ‘strong support amongst current students’ as a main driver than those with the least experience (0–2 years; 23%). A similar trend is visible when looking at the size of institution: 34% of respondents with 5000 or fewer FTE students saw current students as an important driver, compared to just 25% of those working at institutions with 20,000 FTE students or more. Respondents from smaller HEIs also more frequently indicated that alumni are an important driver than those at bigger HEIs.

Figure 1

What are some of the main drivers that you think have allowed your institution to successfully establish a clearly defined set of goals for internationalisation? (select all that apply) (n=854)



Source: *The EAIE Barometer, third edition (2024)*

ESN COMMENTARY

Internationalisation is not a job for a single stakeholder, and students can be a key driver to make the job more seamless for IHE professionals. While some professionals do not always recognise the value of student contributions in building the higher education community – and more importantly, in supporting democratic processes within it – many students do believe in the importance of their role.

In the 15th ESNsurvey, 37% of students indicated interest in joining an international organisation such as ESN, and 44% expressed interest in becoming a mobility ambassador to assist outgoing students. At the same time, only 30% felt encouraged to join an international student organisation or felt motivated by their institution

to become a mobility ambassador. These figures highlight a clear need for more active involvement from HEIs, especially considering that students who actively engage in mobility-related activities often have a multiplier effect, further promoting international opportunities within their communities.

A recent good-practice example of student involvement is linked to the European University alliances, where we see more students becoming part of advisory committees or other governing functions within these collaborations. According to the *2025 Report on the outcomes and transformational potential of the European Universities initiative*, 90% of the alliances' governance structures comprise a student board, and 98% of alliances include students in their governance, with 63% having full voting rights.¹ While the Barometer data shows current and former students not directly being seen as important drivers in the establishment of clearly defined goals for internationalisation, the reality shows us that there is a dedicated group of students spread out across Europe willing to be more involved in these type of processes and advising roles, and they can undoubtedly bring an important and relevant point of view to the internationalisation table.

DRIVING ESTABLISHED INTERNATIONALISATION GOALS FORWARD

Once internationalisation goals are established, the work of moving these goals forward is influenced by different actors to varying degrees. The Barometer survey found that the two most influential groups in this area were the executive board/team and academic staff (see **Figure 2**). Current students were considered an important voice as well, with just over three quarters of respondents (77%) seeing them as at least somewhat influential. However, alumni were considered not at all influential by a striking 42% of respondents.

1. European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, PPMI, Grumbinaitė, I., Colus, F., & Buitrago Carvajal, H. (2025). *Report on the outcomes and transformational potential of the European Universities initiative*, Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/32313>

Figure 2

How would you characterise the influence of the following stakeholder groups in driving your institution’s internationalisation goals? (n=1924)

	Highly influential	Influential	Somewhat influential	Not at all influential	Unsure
Executive board/team	39%	35%	16%	4%	5%
Academic staff	19%	42%	30%	6%	2%
Administrative staff	11%	32%	36%	18%	3%
Current students	10%	29%	38%	18%	4%
Former students (alumni)	5%	15%	27%	42%	12%
External advisory board	5%	16%	24%	27%	28%
National authorities	20%	38%	26%	8%	9%
European level authorities	17%	36%	26%	9%	12%

Source: *The EAIE Barometer, third edition (2024)*

Per level of influence: ● most common choice
 ● second most common choice ● third most common choice

Interestingly, respondents from publicly-funded HEIs/organisations were least inclined to see current students as (highly) influential (38%), while those at private for-profit institutions/organisations most frequently attributed (high) influence to students (56%). Once again, respondents at smaller institutions (*ie* those with less than 5000 FTE students) were more likely to see current students as (highly) influential (45%) than those working at larger HEIs (more than 20,000 FTE students; 32%). Regionally, respondents in Western Asia (60%) most often characterised the influence of current students in driving internationalisation goals as (highly) influential, followed by Eastern Europe (48%), with Western Europe (34%) and Northern Europe (32%) showing the lowest percentages.

ESN commentary

Students can take on different roles when it comes to helping drive certain internationalisation goals at institutions, for example mobility. The 15th ESN survey found that 12% of respondents identified 'hearing from students who have previously studied abroad' as an important factor, making it one of the most highly ranked aspects of pre-departure preparation. When exchange students were asked about their satisfaction with the services provided by their sending institutions after the end of their exchange, one of the lowest-scoring options was 'alumni community and ambassador roles', which received a score of only 2.92 out of 5 on the Likert scale. This shows a resemblance with Barometer data and the work that could potentially be done to successfully include alumni in these processes.

The value of peer-to-peer support should not be underestimated. For example, hearing from former exchange students plays a significant role in preparing and supporting future participants. This is a critical role alumni can play as ambassadors of international mobility, helping shape a more inclusive and responsive higher education environment. Empowering students with responsibilities and integrating them into decision-making processes allows them to act as a bridge between their peers and higher education professionals. This can lead to more efficient support services, as professionals benefit from students' insights and lived experiences. Ultimately, this approach fosters active citizenship, enhances the student voice, and supports young people in shaping both their academic communities and their own professional paths.

2. ERASMUS+ OUTREACH AND RECOGNITION

At the time of writing this report, discussions around the future of the Erasmus+ programme are intensifying. While many will agree that the programme has the ability to change lives, there is room for improvement. Stakeholders will need to collaborate and contribute to shaping the next phase of the Erasmus+ programme, ensuring it evolves to meet the needs of a dynamic and diverse student population.

EAIE BAROMETER DATA ON STUDENTS AND ERASMUS+

Barometer respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a selection of statements linked to European Union-funded programmes, policies and initiatives focused on internationalisation (see **Figure 3**).

Figure 3

The European Union (EU) funds a number of programmes, policies and initiatives focused on different aspects of international higher education/internationalisation. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements related to some of these actions. (n=1864)

Strongly agree + agree	Neither agree nor disagree + unsure	Strongly disagree + disagree
My institution promotes Erasmus+ student mobility for studies or traineeships within Europe		
86%	10%	4%
My institution promotes Erasmus+ student mobility for studies or traineeships beyond Europe		
60%	26%	14%
EU initiatives in recognition have made recognition procedures in my institution more efficient and transparent		
50%	41%	9%
My institution has created an environment that encourages student participation in Erasmus+ mobility		
77%	18%	5%
The different mobility opportunities (short-term, long-term, blended, traineeships) offered by the Erasmus+ programme fit the needs of the students in my institution		
69%	24%	7%

Source: The EAIE Barometer, third edition (2024)

Large percentages of respondents agreed that their institutions promote Erasmus+ student mobility for studies or traineeships within Europe (86%) and have created an environment that encourages student participation in Erasmus+ mobility (76%). Many fewer respondents, however, agreed that their institutions have been promoting Erasmus+ student mobility beyond Europe, and even fewer indicated that EU initiatives in recognition (an important topic to students) have made the recognition procedures in their institutions more efficient and transparent.

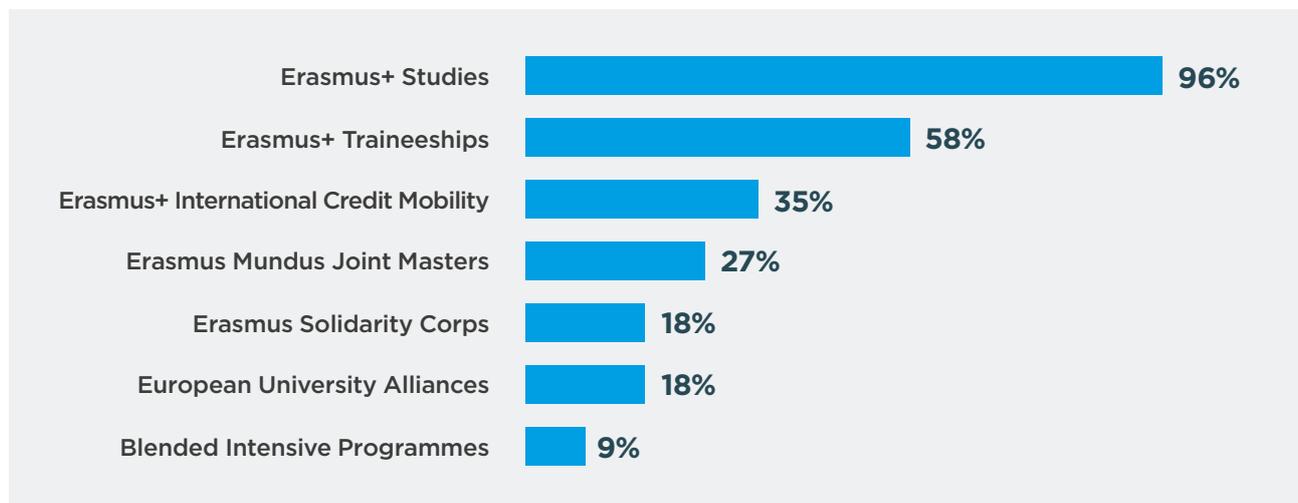
DIVERSIFYING THE PROMOTION OF MOBILITY OPPORTUNITIES

Although the promotion of Erasmus+, particularly for study opportunities (*ie* Erasmus+ for studies), is widely recognised and well supported within the sector, there is still considerable room for improving the promotion of different mobility opportunities. Almost one in four Barometer respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement that different mobility opportunities offered by the Erasmus+ programme fit the needs of students at their HEI, with another 7% (strongly) disagreeing (see **Figure 3**).

The 15th ESNsurvey report showed similar results. Data from non-mobile students suggests that the most well-known EU initiatives are Erasmus+ studies (96%), followed by Erasmus+ traineeships (58%) and Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility (35%). However, awareness of Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters, the European Solidarity Corps, and the European University alliances remains notably low (see **Figure 4**).

Figure 4

Knowledge about EU initiatives amongst non-mobile students. (n = 2772)



Source: 15th ESNsurvey (2024)

While Erasmus+ studies should remain at the core of the programme, new mobility opportunities should be explored as stepping stones towards longer-term mobility experiences. This includes formats with a digital component, such as blended intensive programmes, which should be promoted especially to students with fewer opportunities to pursue mobility, as they offer a valuable chance to gain international experience in a more flexible fashion. HEIs could strengthen their internationalisation and outreach strategies by setting internal targets for student participation in learning mobility activities and other international opportunities.

RECOGNITION OF LEARNING ABROAD

Figure 3 highlighted that just 50% of Barometer respondents felt that EU initiatives in recognition have made recognition procedures in their institutions more efficient and transparent. Exchange students recognise this challenge, with 34% of the 15th ESNsurvey respondents indicating that one of the main obstacles to studying abroad includes issues related to the recognition of academic courses.

A closer examination of the qualitative data from the 15th ESNsurvey reveals several structural issues contributing to this problem. These include inflexibility in degree programmes, trust issues between partner institutions, recognition decisions influenced by individual professors, a lack of understanding of the ECTS system by international students, limited access to information about available courses, and inadequate pre-departure support related to the learning agreement. The lack of automatic recognition of credits earned while on exchange creates significant challenges, including a sense of mistrust amongst students considering participation in Erasmus+ and difficulties for students in continuing their academic journey upon returning to their home institutions.

3. ATTENTION TO STUDENT WELL-BEING

Student well-being continues to be a topic of importance, discussion and interest in IHE across Europe. In the EAIE Barometer, third edition report, respondents were asked to indicate which levels of attention should be applied to 14 different topics in order for their institution to achieve its internationalisation goals over the next three to five years. ‘Student/staff well-being’ was the third-most chosen topic, in terms of needing more or continued levels of attention (95%), only surpassed by ‘student/staff mobility’ and ‘partnerships and networks’ (both 96%). With only 2% indicating that ‘student/staff well-being’ should receive less attention, there seems to be a general consensus that this area is, or should be, a focal point for the coming years.

STUDENT/STAFF WELL-BEING AS A TOPIC OF INTEREST

Alongside perceptions of institutional priority, the Barometer survey also asked respondents whether they, as individuals, have a professional or personal interest in student/staff well-being. Notably, 37% of the 2092 respondents to this question indicated this was the case, making it the most frequently selected topic of particular interest. This trend was similar across all EHEA regions, with higher-than-average interest amongst respondents in such countries as Czechia (63%), Azerbaijan (62%) and Hungary (61%), as well as amongst those respondents identifying as ‘faculty/academic staff’ (50%).

INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE

The respondents who picked student/staff well-being as a topic of interest were asked to answer a set of follow-up questions. As indicated in **Figure 5**, these questions probed respondents’ perceptions about the performance of their institution/organisation in relation to such matters as planning, resourcing, commitment from leadership and assessment activity. One positive data point to highlight here is the perception that institutions have leaders who are committed to their institution’s student/staff well-being activities (59% agree). On the other hand, less positive findings emerge when it comes to perceptions of investment of sufficient financial resources (29% disagree) and clear planning for these activities (28% disagree).

Figure 5

My institution/organisation... (n=766)

Strongly agree + agree	Neither agree nor disagree + unsure	Strongly disagree + disagree
Has a clear plan for the student/staff well-being activities it is pursuing		
48%	34%	18%
Has leaders who are committed to the student/staff well-being activities it is pursuing		
59%	25%	16%
Is investing sufficient financial resources in the student/staff well-being activities it is pursuing		
36%	35%	29%
Is providing stakeholders with sufficient non-financial resources (eg time, training) to support the student/staff well-being activities it is pursuing		
33%	44%	23%
Has a clear plan to measure the effects of the student/staff well-being activities it is pursuing		
32%	46%	22%
Has a clear plan for using the data it collects on student/staff well-being activities to improve its performance		
29%	50%	21%
Has made progress with respect to student/staff well-being in the last 12 months		
43%	41%	16%

Source: The EAIE Barometer, third edition (2024)

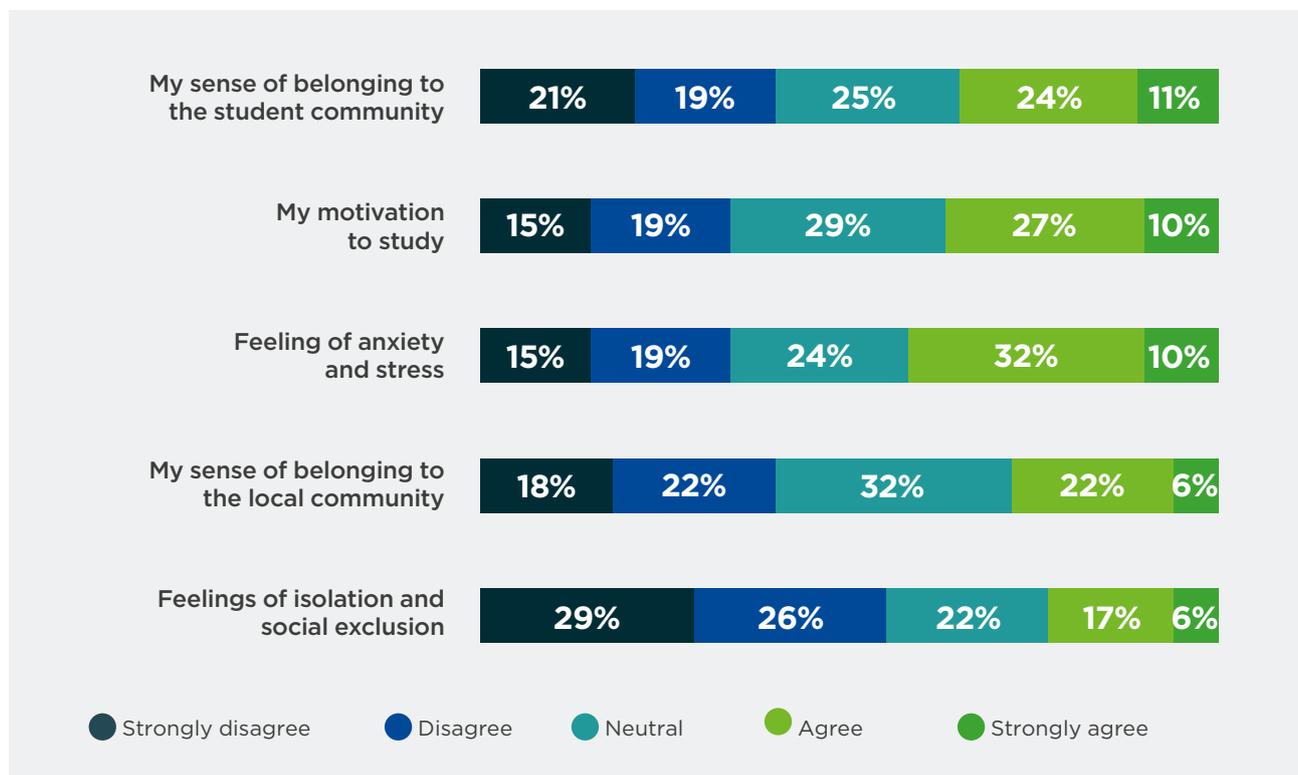
ISSUES FACED BY STUDENTS ABROAD

A closer look at the 15th ESNsurvey shows that the challenges faced by exchange students also significantly impact their well-being and overall mobility journey. These challenges affect the overall student experience. Specifically, as shown in **Figure 6**, such difficulties lead to feelings of anxiety and stress for 42% of students, reduced motivation to study for 38%, and a diminished sense of belonging within the student community for 35%. Additionally, the qualitative analysis of the survey results highlights that one of the biggest struggles students face while abroad is the lack of proper healthcare support, particularly in terms of access to professional mental health services. This lack of support is a key concern and can lead to students deciding not to go abroad at all, or even withdrawing midway through their mobility experience.

While good-practice examples from the field show that progress has been and continues to be made when it comes to dealing with student well-being – in particular mental health – there is still room for improvement. The fact that this area is identified by both students and IHE practitioners as one where more and/or continued attention is needed, shows that this topic continues to be top of mind and worthy of further exploration and investment.

Figure 6

Impact of issues experienced while abroad (n=14,478)



Source: 15th ESNsurvey (2024)

4. THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONALISATION

Much remains unclear about the impact of internationalisation, whether that is at the level of individuals, organisations and/or societies more broadly. The [EAIE Barometer, third edition – Perceptions of impact](#) spin-off report addressed some key aspects of this discussion. The current report highlights the role of students in this conversation.

SOURCES OF PRESSURE TO PRODUCE IMPACT

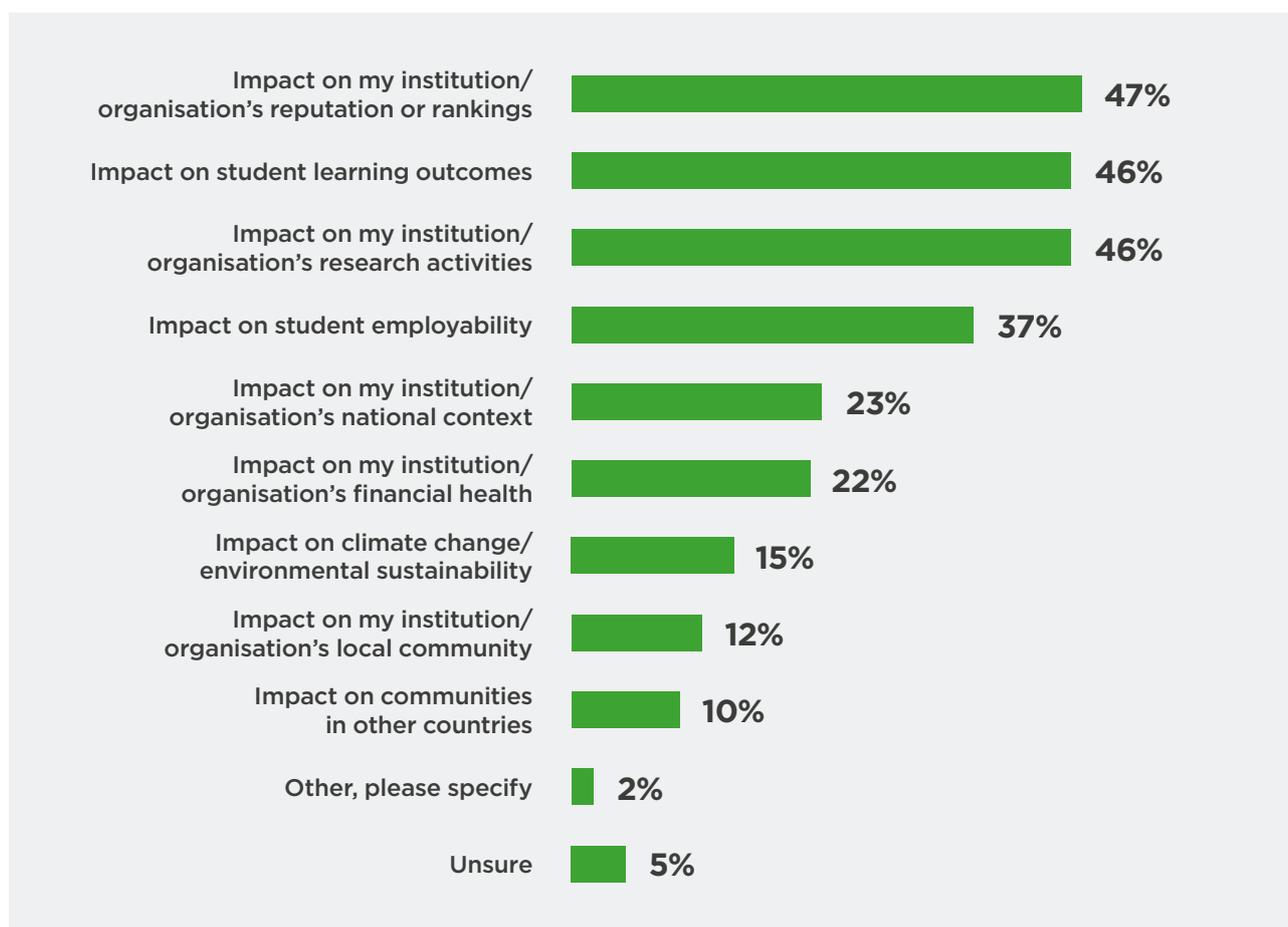
Across the EHEA, a robust 79% of Barometer respondents indicated that institutional/organisational leadership is a key source of pressure to produce evidence of impact from internationalisation, followed by national governments or national higher education authorities (62%). In contrast, just 19% of respondents felt that such pressure is exerted by current students and even fewer (7%) saw alumni exerting such pressure. Interestingly, the Barometer exercise found that current students were most often perceived as sources of pressure to produce evidence of impact by NGOs (30%) and private enterprises/companies (27%). At the other end of the scale, respondents from ministries or government agencies were least likely to see students as key sources of pressure.

AREAS TO DELIVER IMPACT

Barometer respondents most frequently perceive that their institutions are concerned with delivering impact from internationalisation in three key areas – reputation/rankings, student learning outcomes and research activities – although student employability is also somewhat on the radar (see **Figure 7**). Student learning outcomes were also perceived differently across institutional types, as was the matter of student employability. While student learning outcomes was the third-most chosen topic for respondents working at research universities (43%), it was the top topic for those working at universities of applied sciences (56%). Student employability was also chosen more often as an important area to deliver impact by respondents at universities of applied sciences (46%) than those working at research universities (33%).

Figure 7

From your perspective, in which areas is your institution/organisation most concerned with delivering impact from its internationalisation activities? (select up to three) (n=2135)



Source: The EAIE Barometer, third edition (2024)

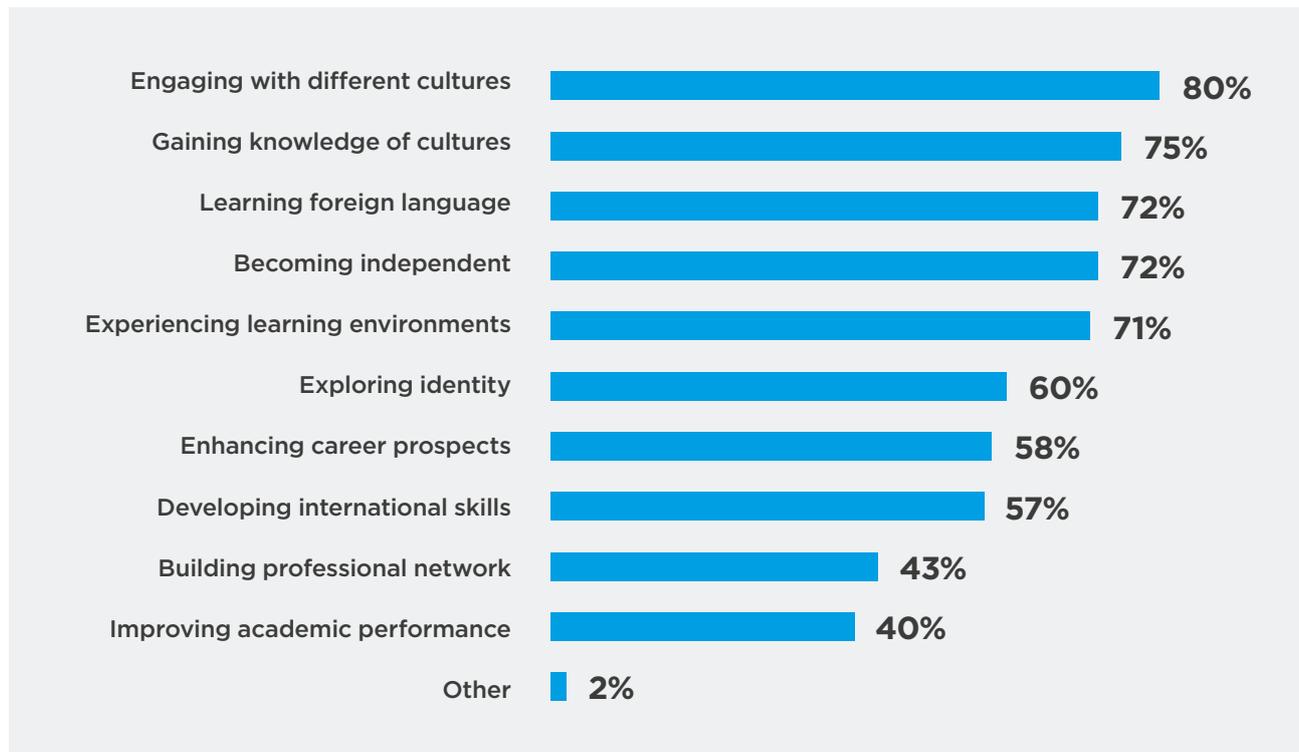
KEY FACTORS IN EXCHANGE DESTINATION CHOICE

In light of the information about where institutions/organisations are seen to be most concerned with delivering impact from their internationalisation activities, it is interesting to understand what students consider to be the key motivational factors when choosing to go abroad and picking an institution. Since international mobility is one of the most recognised forms of internationalisation in higher education, analysing these motivations provides valuable insight into where HEIs potentially should focus their efforts to create meaningful impact.

In the 15th ESNsurvey, five motivational factors were identified as important by more than 70% of respondents (see **Figure 8**). These include students' desire to engage with people from different cultural backgrounds, to gain knowledge of another culture, to learn or improve a foreign language, to become more independent and resilient, and to experience different learning environments. In addition to these general motivations, several push factors also tend to influence the choice of mobility destination. These include the ability to speak the language of instruction at the host institution, the affordability of the host city, and the availability of matching courses that can be recognised by the home institution. However, the academic reputation of the host institution also plays an important role; it was the second-most frequently chosen motivational factor, although this does vary from region to region.

Figure 8

Important motivations for exchange students (n=14,455)



Source: 15th ESNsurvey (2024)

IMPACT OF MOBILITY EXPERIENCE ON STUDENTS

An interesting area for students where the impact of an international mobility experience can be seen is the perception of citizenship before and after study abroad experiences. The 15th ESNsurvey included a question on this (with a Likert scale from 1 [strongly disagree] to 5 [strongly agree]). The data reveals that, before their mobility experience, students feel less connected to the EU, instead having a stronger sense of belonging towards their hometown and country. However, these perceptions shift after a mobility experience. Students who have studied abroad on average report a stronger connection to Europe, increasing from 3.99 (SD² = 1.04) to 4.27 (SD = 0.92) and to the world as a whole, rising from 3.91 (SD = 1.07) to 4.16 (SD = 0.99). These findings highlight the transformative impact of mobility experiences, which not only expand students' perspectives and contribute to personal growth but also strengthen their sense of European citizenship and unity.

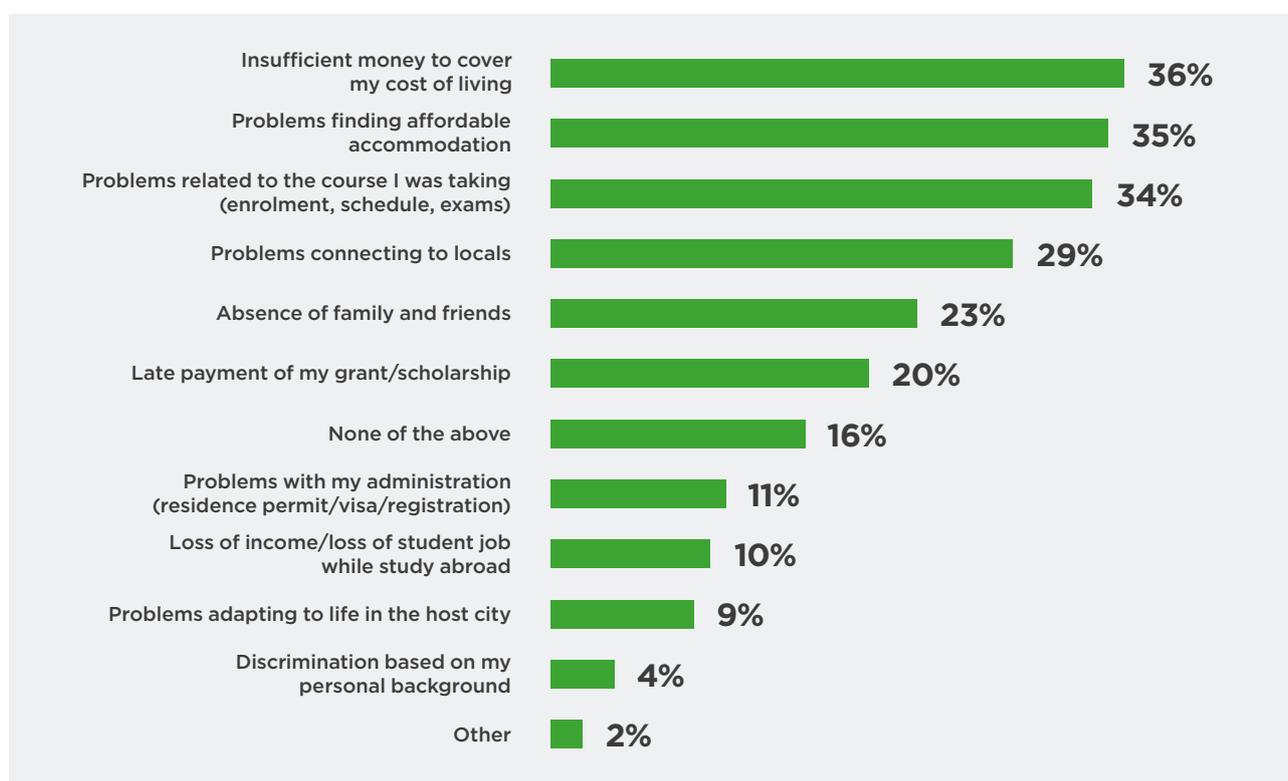
2. SD refers to standard deviation.

5. BARRIERS FOR STUDENTS TO ENGAGE IN INTERNATIONALISATION OPPORTUNITIES

For students from all backgrounds to truly engage in the future of internationalisation, it is crucial to address some of the key barriers they currently face. As highlighted in **Figure 9**, the three main challenges reported by exchange students in the 15th ESNsurvey are: insufficient funding to cover the cost of living, difficulty in finding affordable accommodation, and, as previously mentioned, issues related to academic courses. A similar trend is observed among students who have not yet gone abroad. For them, financial barriers (average score: 3.75 out of 5), limited access to accurate information (3.29), and psychological and emotional factors (2.78) rank among the most significant obstacles to participating in mobility opportunities.

Figure 9

Issues encountered by exchange students while abroad (n =14,568)



SATISFACTION WITH HOST/SENDING INSTITUTIONS AND INFORMATION PROVISION

What is interesting to note is that 64% of ESNsurvey respondents reported being either satisfied or very satisfied with their sending institution after their mobility experience, while 72% expressed satisfaction with their host institution. However, compared to the previous 14th ESNsurvey (2021), these figures show a noticeable decline in satisfaction levels. Satisfaction with the sending institution dropped from 67% to 64%, and satisfaction with the host institution fell more sharply, from 83% to 72%. These results highlight the need for a stronger focus on student support and a continued effort to break down barriers to mobility, ensuring a more consistent and positive experience for all participants.

Providing accurate and comprehensive information before going abroad is one of the key elements that contributes to the success of an international experience. The results highlighted in the 15th ESNsurvey demonstrate the importance students place on receiving clear and timely information, as well as the need for robust support during the application process. Students identified the following as the most important types of information to receive before their mobility: details about available financial support (15%), assistance with the application process (12%), information about the programmes offered (12%), testimonies from students who have previously studied abroad (12%), and course information from potential host institutions (11%).

EAIE COMMENTARY

With 96% of Barometer respondents indicating a need for more/continued levels of attention for student/staff mobility, it is clear many HEIs are focusing on this. Student feedback as collected via the ESNsurvey can play a significant role in improving institutional processes, for example linked to information provision and supporting mobile students from start to finish. At the same time, the rapid pace of developments within the field are challenging to keep up with. Amongst those respondents who have been working in the same position for the previous three years, just over 80% indicated that their roles have changed in some way and for a majority this relates to an increase in both time and effort as well as the need for new or different skills. The ever-changing character of the current IHE climate proves challenging to both professionals and students, and collaboration and continued conversation is key.

LACK OF FUNDING SOURCES AND HOUSING OPTIONS

When considering the main issue of insufficient financial support to cover the cost of living for students, the 15th ESNsurvey reveals a significant funding gap. According to the data, the average monthly cost of living for exchange students is approximately €790, while the average grant received amounts to just €468. This results in an average shortfall of €322, highlighting a clear discrepancy between actual living costs and the financial support provided. Accommodation and housing-related expenditures, along with essential living expenses such as food, account for the majority of students' budgets: approximately 73%. More specifically, 48% of their budget is spent on accommodation and other housing-related costs, while 25% goes toward food and other basic living expenses. A concerning issue is the timing of grant disbursement. No less than 63% of respondents reported receiving their grant after departure, a situation that is far from ideal. This delay is particularly problematic when considering the aim of making mobility more accessible to students with fewer opportunities.

The housing problem for international students runs deeper than it may initially appear. Shared flats are the most common housing option for exchange students³, indicating a clear lack of available student residences. This is already a significant issue that is complex to solve, and one that requires the cooperation of multiple authorities. However, there are other pressing concerns that also affect students' housing experiences and may be more feasible to tackle in the short term. In the 2023 *International student housing: How are exchange students in Europe navigating the housing crisis?* report, a quarter of survey respondents reported experiencing scams, and nearly one third stated that they did not receive any housing support from their HEIs. This limited support is reflected in the low levels of satisfaction with both sending and hosting institutions when it comes to housing assistance. Even if HEIs are unable to directly provide accommodation due to limited capacity, they should ensure that students receive comprehensive guidance and reliable information to help them secure safe and affordable housing.

3. ESU, ESN (2023). *International student housing: How are exchange students in Europe navigating the housing crisis?*.

EAIE COMMENTARY

Budget shortfalls are clearly an issue for students, but, interestingly, such concerns did not stand out in the findings from the EAIE Barometer survey, which included questions on budget satisfaction amongst IHE professionals who hold budget responsibilities of some sort. Quite notably, more than 70% of these respondents were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the size of the budget they work with. It will be interesting to see what the results for this same question will look like in the next Barometer edition, taking into account current political developments both within a range of different countries across Europe as well as in the larger geopolitical context. The student accommodation issue, however, will continue to be of importance and it will be especially crucial to talk to stakeholders outside of the IHE sector, such as local communities and housing providers, to collectively work towards finding solutions. At the same time, balancing the wide range of different priorities that Barometer respondents clearly indicate need more or continued levels of attention over the next three to five years will unquestionably place demands on resources that will need to be addressed.

CONCLUSION

Students have been at the heart of the internationalisation agenda in European higher education for nearly four decades: since the start of the Erasmus+ programme in 1987, some 15.1 million people have been provided with the opportunity to study, train, work and volunteer abroad⁴. Currently, the European international higher education community is collectively conducting the mid-term review of the 2021–2027 Erasmus+ programme, while simultaneously looking ahead to shaping the next edition of the Erasmus+ programme for 2028–2034. This is an important moment for stakeholders to debate, discuss and dream, as we continue to create opportunities within the field of internationalisation for learners, teachers and researchers. And timely data from both students and IHE professionals is vital input for these conversations.

To this end, this EAIE Barometer spin-off report, deeply enriched by ESN's definitive voice for student mobility in Europe, offers a much-needed perspective on students' needs and interests with respect to internationalisation. Notable findings in this edition include:

- While 77% of Barometer respondents considered current students as at least somewhat influential in driving internationalisation goals forward, both current students and alumni were much less frequently perceived as influential in the establishment of clear internationalisation goals for institutions.
- Although the promotion of Erasmus+ (particularly for study opportunities) is widely recognised and well supported within the sector, there is still considerable room for improvement, especially when it comes to recognition, an area in which 1/3 of ESNsurvey respondents indicated experiencing issues.
- Student well-being was identified by both students and IHE practitioners as one key area where more and/or continued attention is needed, which shows that this topic continues to be top of mind and worthy of further exploration and investment.
- Respondents frequently perceive their institutions as being concerned with impact of internationalisation on reputation/rankings, student learning outcomes and research activities. Academic reputation was likewise the second most-often chosen motivational

4. European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Erasmus+ annual report 2023*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/833629>

factor for international students in the 15th ESNsurvey (with some regional variation), suggesting some harmony in the priorities of students and HEIs.

- Before their mobility experience, students feel less connected to the EU, instead having a stronger sense of belonging towards their hometown and country. However, these perceptions shift after a mobility experience, which highlights the transformative impact of mobility experiences.
- Areas of attention based on data from the 15th ESNsurvey include information provision from HEIs, lack of funding sources, and the continuing housing problem.

Many questions remain unanswered, of course, but one thing is certain: students are a crucial stakeholder, and their voices must be heard.

As new challenges and opportunities shape the field of international higher education in Europe in the coming years, it will be even more important for the full range of stakeholders to continue to collaborate on the diverse scope of topics that relate to student needs and interests – from types of mobility opportunities offered, to credit recognition, housing quality and availability, student well-being and more. There is clearly work ahead, but keeping the doors to conversation open, and drawing on timely and relevant data to inform these conversations, will help to positively shape the future – one exchange at a time.

