Compass

Study Report

Research about stakeholders' practices when helping students to prepare their mobility

Authors:
Helena Alves & Viktoriya Terzieva
(European University Foundation)
Alice Zaglia (Erasmus Student Network France)

January 2023

Table of contents

List of figures

Executive Summary

The primary five categories of findings in this report - mobility procedures, profile of students who reach out for information, collaboration between stakeholders, peer-to-peer feedback and the Compass peer-to-peer platform - are consistent with the categories included in the quantitative and qualitative surveys.

The intent of the study was threefold:

- ⊘ Draw an overview of interactions between information seekers and information providers;
- ⊘ Establish whether parts of the orientation or preparation still remain unanswered;
- ⊘ Identify which structures can intervene in the different orientation and preparation stages.

The findings include both results from quantitative data with more than 130 respondents and from semi-structured interviews with 30 participants from higher education institutions (HEIs) leadership and international offices, as well as student associations and National Agencies (NAs).

The first category of findings concerns the **mobility procedures** that students interested in mobility usually follow to receive information about going abroad. The most common starting point for stakeholders is to direct students to the university's or international department's website. This is the place where they can find detailed information on important matters for mobility such as: the application process, the steps to prepare for mobility after being accepted, information on scholarships and funding available for mobile students, the learning agreement document, a list of all partner institutions and the benefits of going abroad. Furthermore, the study explored the communication channels that are usually available to interested students, and the results show that emails, phone calls and social media are the channels that stakeholders use the most. In terms of activities, stakeholders usually organise information meetings at their premises or online, but they also offer individualised support and find that testimonials of returning students are quite helpful as well. Finally, most of the respondents admitted that there are two areas of improvement: 1. The final step of the process, which is the evaluation of the mobility procedures, needs to be implemented more in depth or developed further; and 2. Connecting former and prospective mobility students usually happens on demand. Although it is an important part of the information process, it requires a bigger involvement of the university staff members. Therefore, it is necessary to create strategies for connecting students that do not burden staff.

The second category of findings is related to the profile of students who reach out for information. The results showed that the majority of students who are interested in mobility are in the age range between 20 and 25 and are either Bachelor or Master students. The qualitative research went more in detail exploring the types of degrees where students travel the most and the results showed the following: *Social Sciences* are the most frequent, followed by *Languages and Literature* and *Law*. It was also highlighted that in some degrees, international student mobility is mandatory, which might influence these results. This section also included an important subtopic which is "*what difficulties students encounter during the orientation phase?*". The answers focused on four main difficulties: lack of financial resources, equivalences between courses, fear of social exclusion and the application process. Difficulties related to the preparation phase

were also tackled. The results show that finding accommodation, obtaining a visa and providing documents are the most common difficulties met by students in this step. Further discoveries in the interviews included the different ways stakeholders use to support students that do not reach out and how mobility can be made more appealing to them. The answers to the first question were focused on increasing personalised support, providing more information about available scholarships, eventually through physical meetings, and offering more support/training for language learning. In regards to ways to make student mobility more appealing, stakeholders need to adapt their communication channels to students' preferences, increase the frequency and diversity of events, and encourage former students to share more testimonials.

The next category consists of exploring the collaboration between stakeholders during the mobility process. It is known that the collaboration between structures is not standardised. Therefore, this research aimed to map if there were clear collaboration moments and which stakeholders were involved. During the orientation phase and preparation phase, HEIs collaborate the most with other HEIs (30%) and NAs (25%). Less frequently during the orientation phase and more often in the mobility preparation stage, student associations (16%) and accommodation organisations (9%) also intervene with HEIs.

The fourth category included a definition of peer-to-peer feedback and explored what methods stakeholders are implementing to put former mobility students in contact with potential outgoing students. The results showed that, being mindful of the GDPR regulations, the stakeholders put students in contact through emails, private social media groups, disseminate student feedback provided in the feedback forms, events and buddy schemes. The main challenges, as mentioned above, are to respect the GDPR restrictions and motivate former students to contribute. According to the stakeholders' experience, the most discussed topics are social life experience, course catalogue at host institutions and accessibility for people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Finally, the study examined the potential usability of a peer-to-peer platform for stakeholders. Participants were asked if they would be willing to recommend such a platform to students and 100% of them replied that they would. Their expectations for such a platform are to be able to promote *international mobility, their institution and their city*.

The features they would imagine such a platform to include are: *presentations/testimonials, a chat, security measures, a forum, FAQ, Training for IROs on how to use the platform, guidelines for peers on how to share testimonials, mobility process information, information on the institutions included in the platform and a rating system.* They indicated many benefits, among which:

- ⊘ Offer the possibility to ask questions about the destination that a student would not ask otherwise (93%);
- ⊘ Encourage students to go on mobility (86%);
- ⊘ Value the experience of students that already went on mobility (74%).

Context of the research

This research is conducted within the framework of the Compass project and explores the practices and issues of stakeholders related to student support in the preparation and orientation phases of mobility. In order to bring a broad overview and drive thorough conclusions, the researchers conducted an online survey with more than 130 practitioners in the field of higher education and combined it with 30 semi-structured interviews to deepen the understanding on the topic. The quantitative survey was conducted and analysed by the Erasmus Students Network (ESN) in France, while the qualitative research was carried out by the European University Foundation (EUF). The target groups of this research consisted of university staff members and leadership, student organisation representatives, youth information and documentation centres, and higher education councils.

The researchers did a thematic analysis of the data keeping in view the objectives of the research: student support whilst they are going on mobility. The research allowed the consortium to identify which stakeholders intervene during the different stages of student mobility. The researchers also gained a better understanding of the mobility procedures that stakeholders are implementing, as well as of the tools and measures they use in their support to students. Additionally, the research sought to identify how those stakeholders collaborate between each other and how they support the interaction between former mobility students and students considering going abroad. Finally, the study revealed that the stakeholders are willing to disseminate and manage a platform that promotes peer-to-peer feedback (e.g. the Compass platform), listing multiple benefits for students.

Following the above-mentioned objectives, this report will be divided into 6 parts with the specific goals explained below:

⊘ Profile of Respondents - identifying the types of organisations and roles of the respondents that took part in the online survey and in the qualitative research.

⊘ Mobility Procedures - understanding the mobility preparation procedures in further detail, especially how the students reach out when they are interested in a mobility period abroad.

⊘ Profile of students that reach out - analysing the average student profile that approaches stakeholders to inquire about mobility.

⊘ Collaboration between stakeholders - grasping what type of collaboration exists amongst stakeholders involved in the preparation and orientation phases of mobility.

⊘ Peer-to-peer feedback - focusing on the importance and use of peer feedback in the mobility preparation procedures.

⊘ Future platform - aiming to investigate if a possible platform that promotes peer feedback would be useful for stakeholders, and delve into its benefits and drawbacks.

Methodology

The online survey was created and disseminated on the Eval&Go application, which also provides raw data transferred to an excel sheet. Once the raw data had been collected, graphics supporting each question were created and analysed by the Compass researchers.

After the quantitative research was completed, the researchers conducted semi-structured

interviews, to illustrate and complement the results of the statistical analyses, deepening some topics that needed further clarification. The raw qualitative data was examined and labelled with codes[1] to increase the quality of the analysis and the findings. In the final stage, the quantitative and qualitative research were merged, achieving the results showcased in the next sections in the report.

Profile of respondents

The first part of both the online survey and the qualitative research consisted of identifying the profile of the respondents. This included questions on the type of organisation they are currently working/ volunteering for, in which country they are located, their position within the organisation and their experience in the field of student mobility.

Online Survey results

Figure 1 below shows the share of respondents from HEIs compared to student associations and other organisations.

Figure 1: Type of organisation

- Higher Education Institution
- Association
- Other
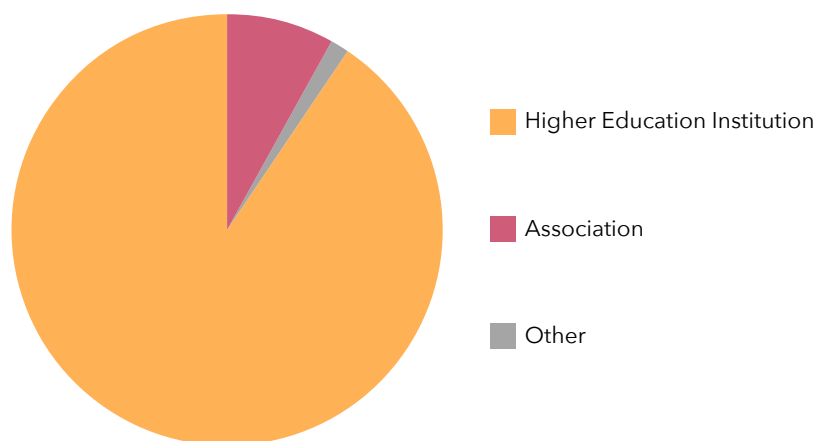
As it can be seen, most of the respondents are from HEIss (90,4%), which can influence the results of the survey. However, HEIs represent the main stakeholder that is involved in the support to students during the orientation and preparation phase. Student associations have a less active role in the initial stage, but their involvement increases later in the process, when the mobility destination is already selected. The analysis in the next sections reveals more details on their actions to support student mobility.

Most of the respondents of the survey are from France, Italy and the United Kingdom, as shown in the graph 2 below, which is coherent with how the survey has been disseminated throughout the consortium's networks. From the total number of answers (137), almost 30% of respondents

1   Coding is "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña 2015: 3)

are from France (38 answers), 20% (29 answers) from Italy and 13% (18 answers) from the UK. This means that the target audience in terms of nationalities had been reached. The other countries are less representative, but they are numerous, so they allow for a great diversity that is reflected in the typology of responses.

Figure 2: Location of the respondents
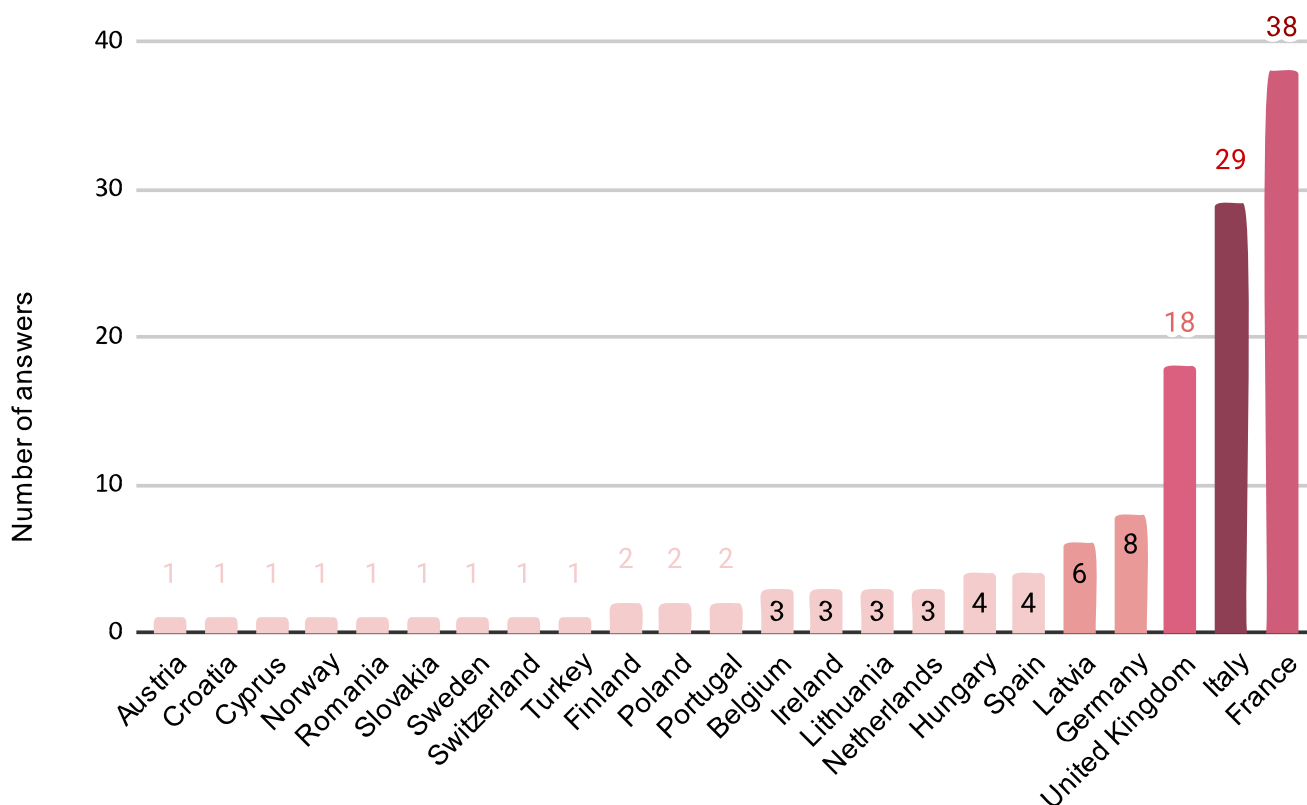
Figure 3: Position inside the organisation
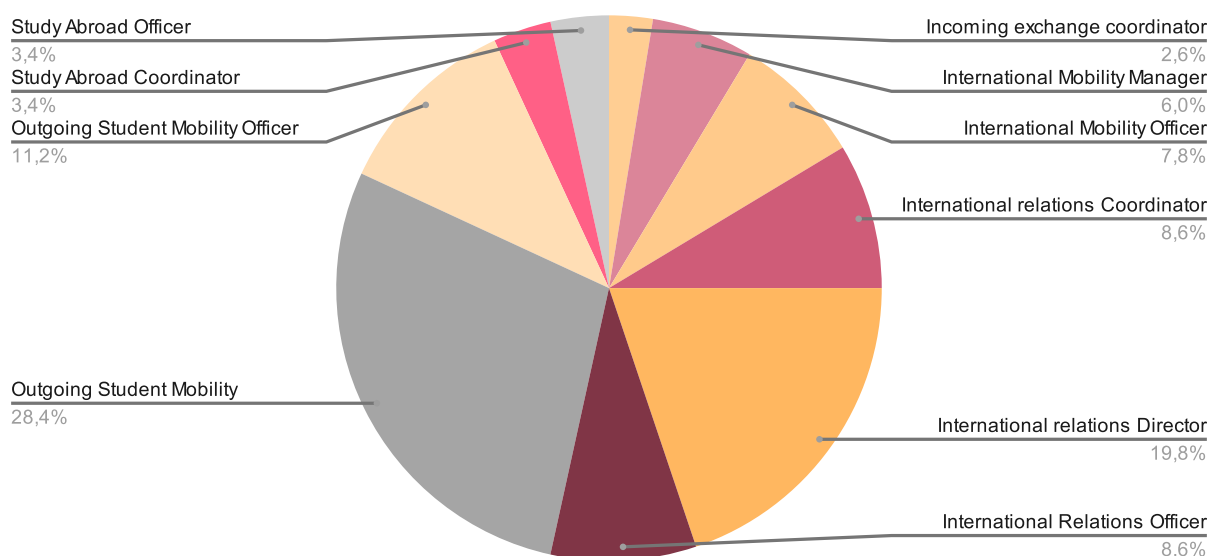
The third graph presents the different roles of the respondents inside their organisations. We can see that the majority of them (28,4%) are Outgoing Student Mobility Coordinators and International Relations Directors (19,8%). The second biggest group are Outgoing Student Mobility Officers (11,2%) and International Relations Officers (8,6%). The other positions are slightly different, but also related to the international exchange office.

Qualitative research results

The qualitative research included participants from 5 European countries (Austria, Croatia, Finland, France and UK), representing HEIs, student organisations and higher education councils. Their work experience varies between 2 and 18 years and they occupy positions such as: Head of international departments, International Relations Officers (IROs), Administrators, Programme managers, Volunteers at student associations, Policy advisors at higher education councils.

Mobility procedures

This section focuses on describing how HEIs and student associations inform students about the opportunities to go on mobility. The participants of the quantitative and qualitative research were asked to explain the steps involved in informing students, as well as what means of communication they use, what information they disseminate on their websites and what are the most appreciated actions by students according to themselves. Furthermore, the qualitative research extended this topic with more detailed questions such as: How do students reach the stakeholders? Have they got evaluation mechanisms that allow students to leave their comments about the information giving process? Do they put students who already went on mobility in contact with those who are considering going abroad? Do they provide any additional support/ information to students from disadvantaged groups?

Standard procedure for informing students about mobility

Online Survey results

As it can be seen from the graphic below, the respondents (HEIs) assess as the most common parts of the application process the filling of the application form/ files (37%) and gathering all of the required documents (32%). Then, 22% of them consider that going to an information meeting is valuable in the application process and 9% think that an interview is necessary to complete the application.

Figure 4: Most common application process steps undertaken by HEIs

Language tests
0,6%
Interview
9,0%

Going to an information meeting
21,5%

Filling the application form/files
36,8%

Gathering all of the required documents
32,1%
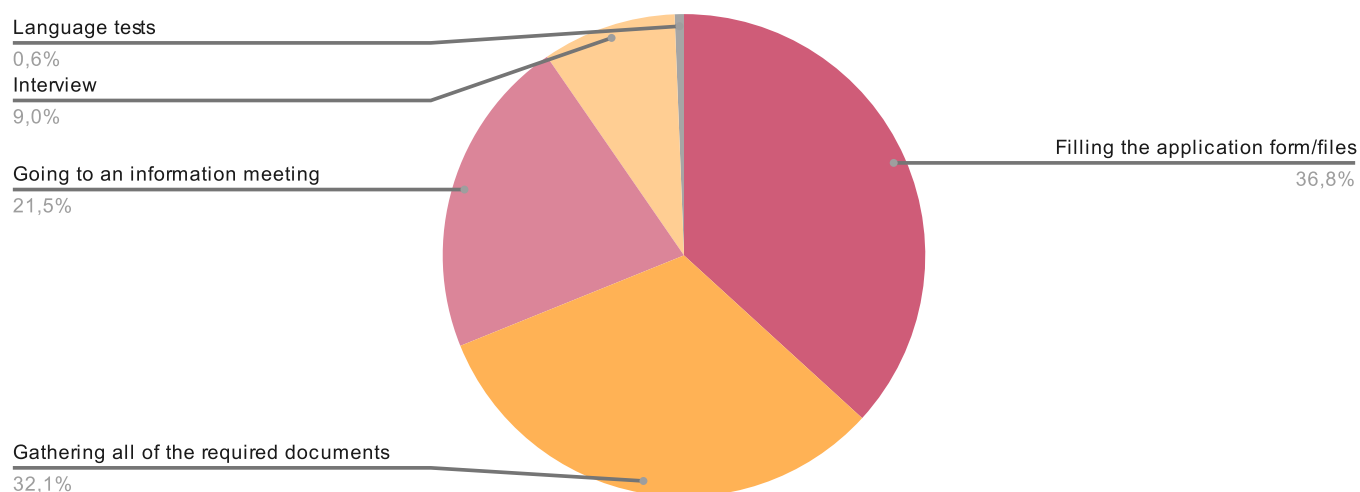
Figure 5: Documents required from students during the application process

Document	Percentage
Application form	27,2%
Personal statement/motivation letter	20,2%
Language certification	18,2%
Proof of requirements skills	13,4%
CV	11,4%
Research questionnaire on chosen destinations	8,7%
Other	0,9%
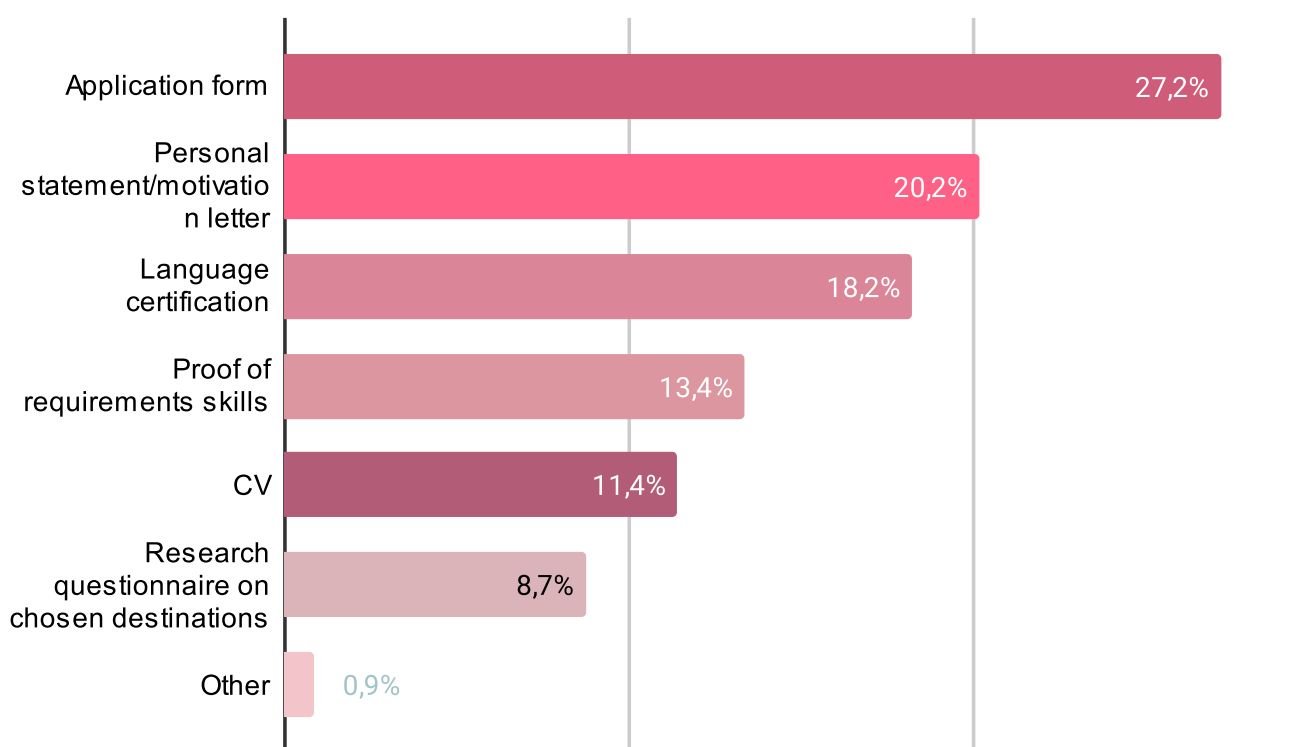
HEIs require different types of documents from students. The **Application form** is the most common document of the application process (27,2%), followed by **Personal statement** or **motivational letter** (20,2%) and **Language certification** (18,2%).

Additional documents that might be required by HEIs are Proof of requirement skills and CV, requested by 13,4% and 11,4% of HEIs, respectively. For mobility programmes other than

Erasmus, HEIs prepare different application forms that also include proof of requirement skills.

Finally, only 9% of HEIs required a research questionnaire on chosen destinations.

Figure 6: Number of associations or youth organisations that help students to fill in their application form

Yes
40,0%

No
60,0%
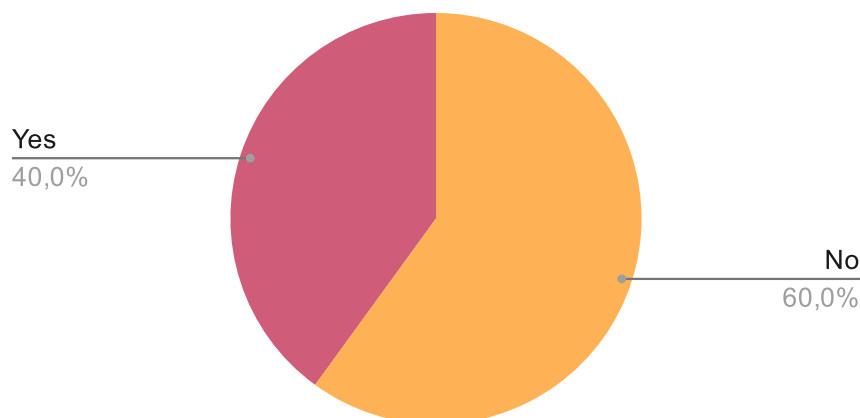
From the survey data analysis, we know that 60% of youth associations or associations do not help students with the application form versus 40% that do.

Qualitative research results

The qualitative analysis distinguishes two mobility procedures: those of HEIs and student associations. The examples below further narrow the topic and describe procedures implemented by different HEIs that took part in the interviews. In most of the cases, the interviewed stakeholders mentioned that they organise events to promote mobility and one-to-one meetings, where students can inform themselves in more detail. All mobility coordinators explained that their universities have application periods and some faculties have different procedures for mandatory mobility. On the one hand, there are procedures for online information materials available on HEIs' websites or application portals. On the other hand, there are scarcer procedures that only provide students with the possibility to contact the international relations office and search for information by themselves.

Codes:
- ⊘ HEIs' informing procedure
- ⊘ Student associations' procedures

HEIs' procedure
One of the international officers interviewed explained that their university has a "lifecycle" procedure for informing students interested in mobility. It begins at the **open days**, with an information booth about studying at that university. Once they start their studies, there is a **tutoring induction** at the first week, providing different information about mobility for the first year students, which is all about information on studying abroad, and for second year students or master's degrees students, what actions they need to take to apply for mobility. Within their careers' team they have a group called "Employability partners team", which is responsible to make sure that the information about mobility abroad is embedded into the induction programme

for students. After that, a "**study abroad**" event is organised in November, to showcase all the international opportunities for local students. Between September and January, **mandatory one-to-one meetings** are offered to all students who are interested in studying abroad, because the deadline for the first round of applications is the middle of January. There is a second round of applications open between February and March. After that, once the students are in the process of applying to the host university, two mandatory activities before their travel are offered: the **pre-departure briefing**, normally in person but online in the last couple of years, and a **travel safety course**, which consists of a two-hour course delivered by an external colleague. When students return from mobility, a survey is distributed to them to gather quantitative data. In addition, a non-mandatory meeting is organised with them, to gather qualitative data on their experience. Finally, an **online career pulse programme** is offered. There, students who are going abroad have an account aimed at developing certain skills, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Another university procedure was explained as follows: first the student has to contact their faculty coordinator and inform them that they are interested in a mobility abroad. The coordinator gives them information about available partner universities, places and details about the courses in the host institution. In case the student contacts directly the international office of the university, the officers also start by giving them the list of their partner universities, specific study fields, and help students clarify their ideas about mobility abroad. In some cases, they recommend that the student speaks with the host institution they choose, so that they gather more information before making a decision. When the application period is closed, the international officer downloads all application forms, checks the grades of students, the budget form, and the statement. Once everything is verified from the side of the coordinator, the documents are passed onto the academic exchange coordinator for final verification and approval. They are the ones that have more knowledge about their partner institutions (e.g. curriculum, threshold level of grades, etc.) In some cases, discussions are needed on particular applications. After this stage, the international officer reaches out to the student to inform them about the offered place. If the student accepts, the officer invites them to visit their learning platform and follow the module "Let's go abroad". The module contains information about visas, insurance, country guides (for each country and region), information about health, safety, well-being, cultural shocks and environmental shocks, academic differences, among others. The officer then puts them in contact with the host institution coordinator, so that they can discuss travel arrangements details, the curriculum, etc. Finally, in May, the office prepares a presentation or a meeting with all the students, going abroad either to study or to do a placement, to clarify final details and answer questions.

In other cases shared by participants, students are directly invited to go to a specific application portal which contains information about the partners and a handbook on how the process works. Further information can also be found there, such as presentations from partners and copies of their learning agreements. The purpose of having a portal is to have all information in one place, available to each student at any time. In addition, face-to-face meetings with faculty coordinators are also available to discuss details or even contact the partner institution in which the student is interested. By the end of the application period, the office offers virtual meetings with students to help them to complete the application forms.

Similar to the above procedure, another interviewee explained that their HEI has a website where the ranking procedure is explained and information about the partner institutions is given. Students can therefore consult online the application procedures and contact the mobility coordinators afterwards.

Student associations' procedure

To support the mobility process, the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) has published a dedicated webpage on their website with direct links for prospective Erasmus students to find more information about which HEIs are available for them to apply for mobility depending on their home institution.

Means of communication to inform about mobility

The next section reveals what means of communication are preferred by stakeholders when they communicate about student mobility. The online survey participants could choose between the options: website, video, guide, brochure, intranet, social media, poster/flyers and tutorial.

Online Survey results

Figure 7: Means of communication used by stakeholders
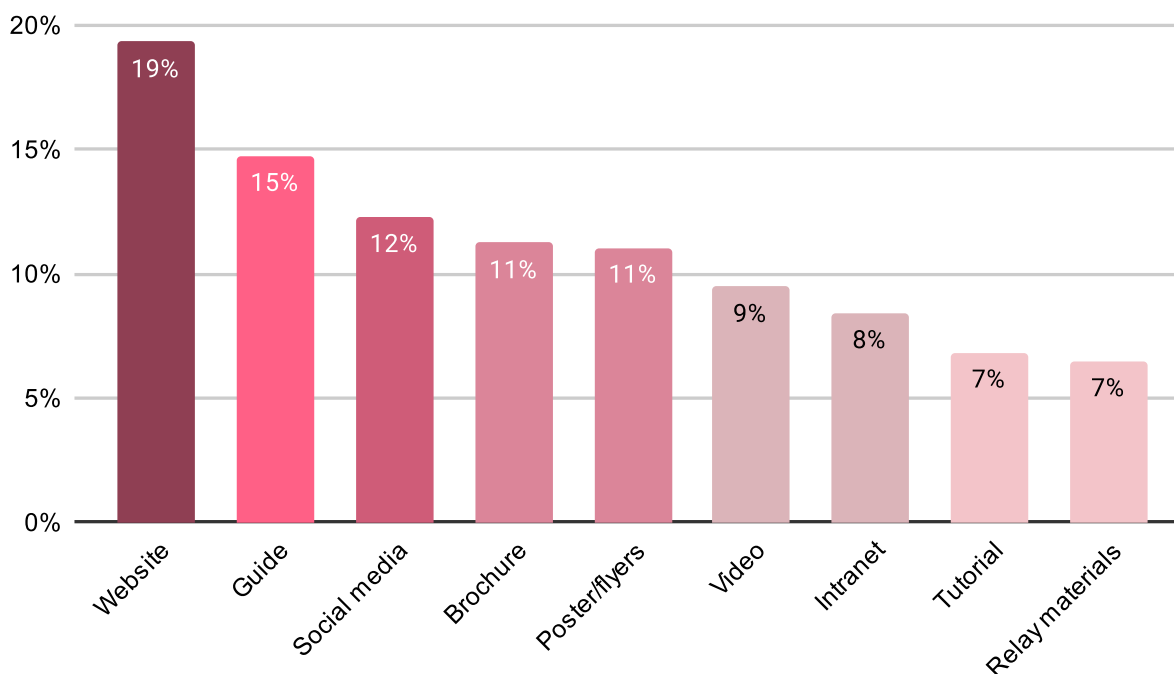
As we see in the figure above, **websites** are the main means of communication used by stakeholders (mainly HEIs) to communicate with students regarding international mobility. However, the same stakeholders consider that websites are the least appreciated by students, whereas they perceive the Tutorials and Poster/flyers to be the most appreciated ones.

An interesting fact is that when these results are compared with the student research[2] results, conducted by the Compass consortium in 2021, the perception of stakeholders is actually refuted: the most appreciated information channel for all students (preparing for mobility, while on mobility, back from mobility or who have given up mobility) is actually the website, in line with what is mostly used by stakeholders.

Information available on HEIs website

To understand the process of preparing for international mobility, it is important to look into the most used communication channel to convey information to students. We have therefore analysed the information available on HEIs' websites, to understand what type of content is made easily available to students. The focus on a particular stakeholder - HEIs - is justified by the fact that they are usually the main point of contact that will provide information on the official mobility preparation application and procedures.

Online survey results

The survey concludes that the information included in the HEIs' websites regarding international mobility is about administrative procedures and other logistic information like accommodation. The figure below shows more precisely the most common information available.

Figure 8: Information available on HEIs' websites

---

2   https://compass-youthmobility.eu/project/resources
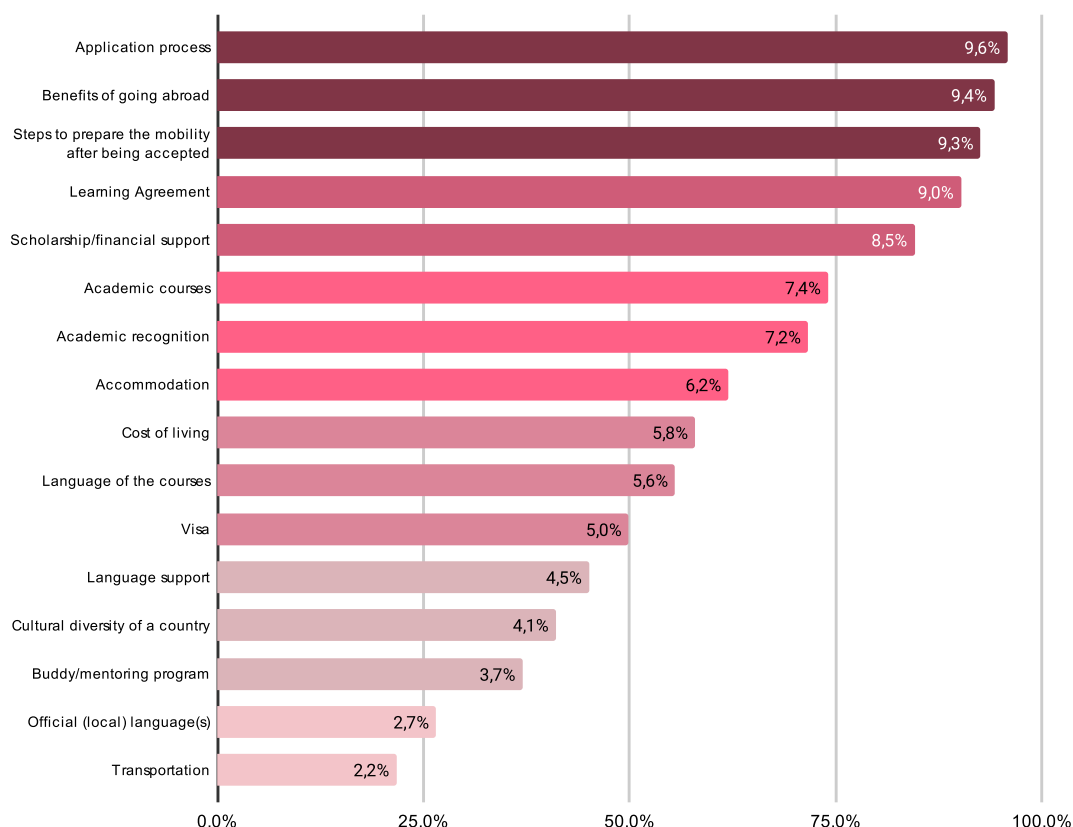
As shown above, a wide range of different topics are covered on HEIs websites, however most of the topics tend to revolve around administrative procedures: the application process, the different steps to prepare mobility after being accepted and scholarships or financial support in general. On the other hand, websites are less complete in terms of practical information like accommodation, cost of living and visa formalities. Finally, the last group of information that is a lot less mentioned on the website are: language support, cultural diversity of the country, buddy or mentoring program and transportation.

Qualitative research results

The interviewees also confirmed that there is abundant information about student mobility on their website. Therefore, our aim was to discover what this information contains for each one of them. It is interesting to mention here that many information topics overlap between HEIs' websites and those belonging to student organisations (e.g. ESN). Thus, the answers from both stakeholders are merged in the analysis below.

Codes:
- Most common information
- Less common information

Most common information
Most frequently, the type of information included in their website include:
- Application procedure (plus copies of the necessary forms to complete)
- Destinations (a list of all partner institutions)
- Available funding for students on mobility
- List of coordinators (faculty/schools)

Less common information
Additional information for students that was seldomly available included:
- Definitions (Learning Agreement, OLS, etc.)
- Which language is used at the partner institution for study and the required level
- Link to the reports from the former exchange students (informing about the level of language required, the teaching methods, the housing, the student life, etcetera)

Some of the interviewees were concerned that the website is too packed with information which makes it less appealing to students and probably pushes them away. This concern is tackled further in this report.

Examples:

"(…)There's a specific website, where students can search for their specific study program, find information, what partner universities are available for them, who is the contact person at the department, and there are also specific Erasmus websites at the various departments, which are as well standardised. We have provided a standardised format for this information to make it easier for students to find relevant information. The aspect of standardisation is very important, I think, at a large institution."

"All different kinds of information. So we have information (...) on the semester structure, the course catalogue for incoming students, accommodation, etc. And also for the outgoing students the process is described for bachelor students and master students, how they can apply for an exchange term. What internationalised studies options there are, if they don't want to go abroad for an entire semester, because there are also quite a few of those. Then we have a partner university map, we have experience reports from students that have previously been abroad, students can access and can read, and how the accreditation, when they want to have the the ECTS they took abroad accredited towards their curriculum, how they can do that, contact information for the office of accreditation and things like that."

Communication channels available for interested students to reach out

Qualitative research results

For this question, almost all responses were alike. To distinguish each stakeholder's opinion, the below examples specify the role of the participant next to their statement: student association (SA), officers from central offices and faculty departments (IRO). The two main communication channels used by stakeholders are emailing and phone calls. The participants, however, agree that this is a quite burdensome task and streamlining the process would significantly facilitate the international officers' job.

Codes:
- Email
- Virtual office hours and phone calls
- Social media

Email
Most commonly, the students use the international office email address as a first communication channel to reach out for information about mobility. Then, the officers are responsible for replying and explaining further details over a call or a face-to-face meeting.

Example:
"Usually we communicate via mail, but we are also present on Facebook and Instagram." (IRO)

Virtual office hours and phone calls
Other ways mentioned by the interviewees included reaching out to their faculty coordinator first, joining the virtual office hours, by phone or coming directly to the office (less common after the pandemic Covid19).

"Students still contact us mostly via phone or email, and at the office during consultation hours." (IRO)

Social media

Used perhaps more rarely, social media is also one way for students to reach out to HEIs for information.

Example:
"Mostly through Facebook, and Instagram. And some people email us through the link on our web page, but it's rare." (SO)

Activities organised to promote mobility and how they are adapted to the students' needs

To complete the analysis on the mobility processes implemented at the stakeholders, the researchers included a section in both the qualitative and quantitative research on the different activities organised to promote mobility. The section also explored how these activities are adapted to the students' needs.

Online survey results

The figure below reveals what type of information activities are implemented the most by stakeholders.

Figure 9: Activities organised to promote mobility

Conference or information meetings, individual support, as well as **testimonies by**
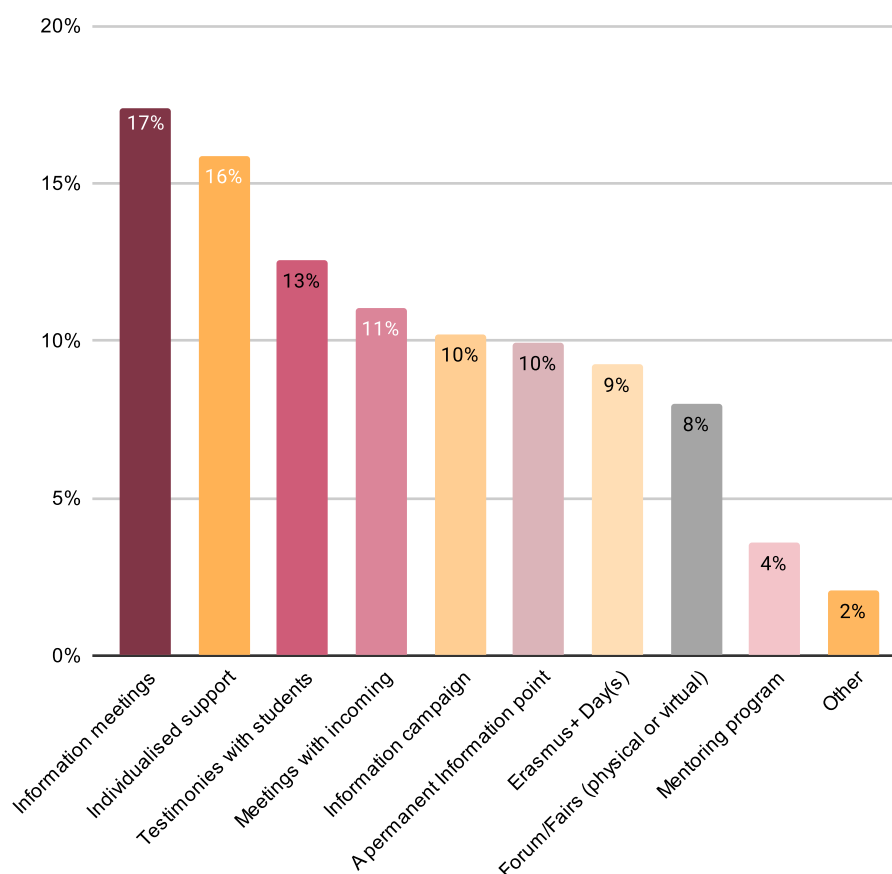
students are the main actions put in place by stakeholders (mainly HEIs), as nearly 40% of respondents selected those answers.

However, this question shows, once again, incoherence between what stakeholders perceive as students' needs and stakeholders' actions. Comparing the two figures, 9 and 10, we can see that the actions that are most appreciated by students according to the respondents are mentoring programmes, Erasmus+ days, information campaigns and forums/fairs. Interestingly, those are the actions that are the least offered by the same HEIs, presumably because of their work-intensive nature.This is an important result which shows that better communication between students' needs and stakeholders' support is needed.

Figure 10: Actions perceived as most appreciated by students (averages)
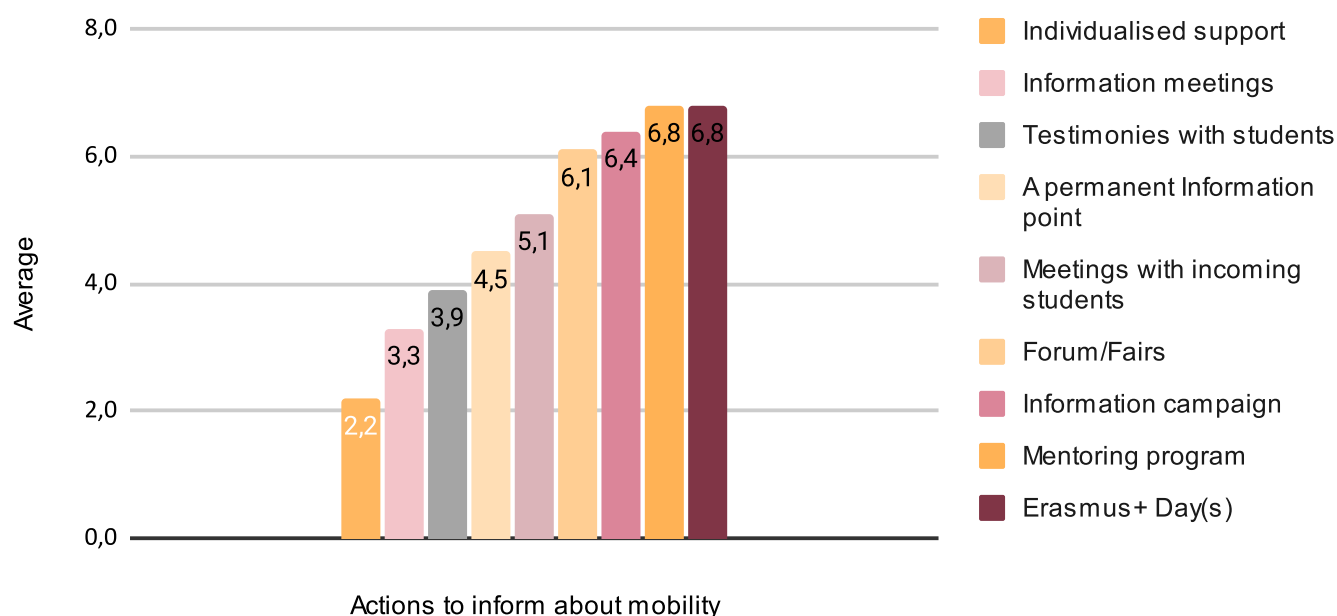
It is interesting to compare the actions actually put in place by stakeholders (Figure 9) with the ones students seem to prefer (Figure 10 and 11): **Erasmus Days, Information meetings and Meetings with incoming students** are the actions that students prefer, while Information meetings, Individualised support and Testimonies by students are the most common actions put in place.

Qualitative research results

To collect more qualitative data on this question, the interviewees were also asked what kind of activities institutions organise for students planning to go abroad. The answers given focused on two main types - physical and social media and virtual events.

Codes:
- Physical events
- Social media and virtual events

Figure 11: Actions perceived as most appreciated by students (rate)

Legend:
- Information meetings
- Individualised support
- Testimonies with students
- Meetings with incoming students
- A permanent Information point
- Forum/Fairs
- Mentoring program
- Information campaign
- Erasmus+ Day(s)
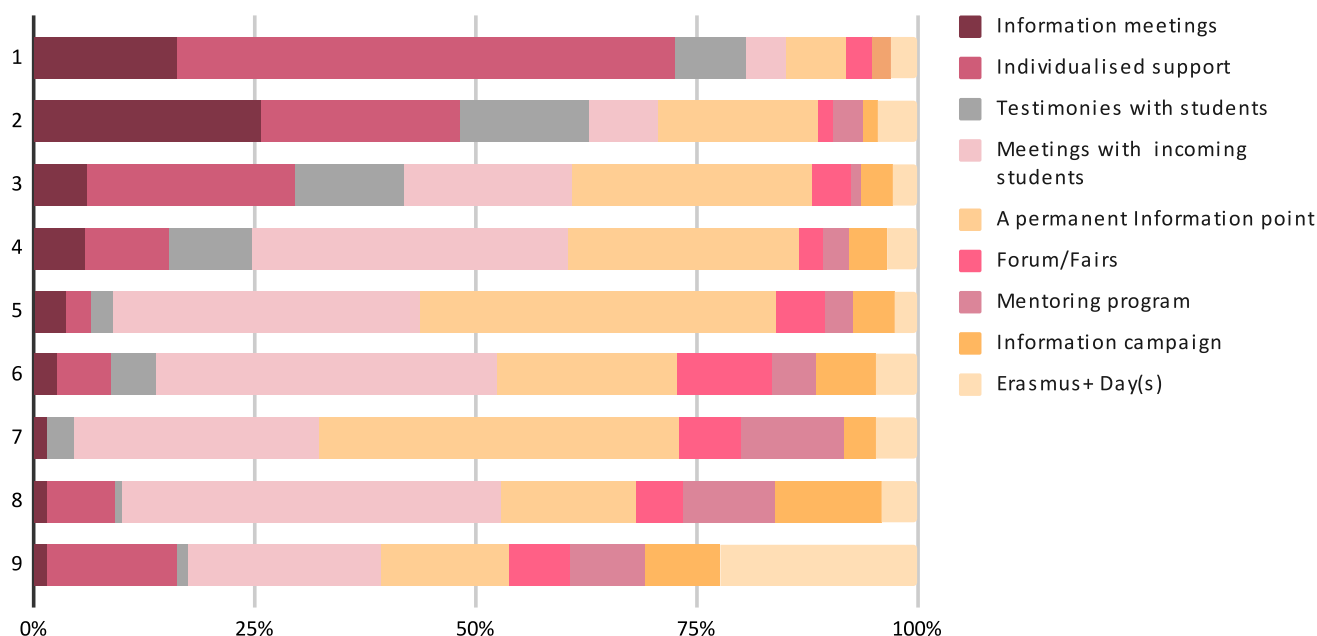
Physical events

Some universities focus more on organising events to gather students by interest and present what their institution has to offer, including mobility for studies. Examples of events include: Erasmus days, international open days/weeks, "Student success festival", "Mental health day", "Focus on yourself day", "Going abroad fair". Most of them are organised at the beginning of the first semester to inform about the mobility options at their institutions and answer basic questions. Furthermore, there are orientation sessions for those students who are already selected for mobility.

Social media and virtual events

One of the interviewees commented that the activities definitely changed and took different forms over the last few years due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Physical contact gave place to virtual forms of communication. Short face-to-face information meetings with each student gradually decreased and became online presentations, and recently the presentations took new formats such as promotional videos or webinars, popularised through the HEIs' websites and social media. In terms of social media activities, some institutions preferred developing their Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok and LinkedIn as they believed that this is the way to reach their students and pass on more information about student mobility.

Examples:
"(…)welcoming fair with all kinds of activities for our students, with lectures, concerts, games… We have an international corner during this festival where students can come directly to meet us, and we also organise a round table on mobility experiences. Whenever the call for applications for going abroad opens, we also have some kind of promotional activities so we can reach the students with the information. All in all, we have a lot of activities during the year. We have activities

during the Erasmus days as well."

"(…)we have our information sessions in autumn (…), where the students get an overview of all the different options they have when going abroad…there are always first semester events organised by our Public Relations Office. And then, we have a few smaller events, which are mostly organised by the coordinators… we also have digital tools such as the newsletter, for example, or Instagram and Facebook. So we also try to spread information through this way."

Respondents were also asked to specify how those activities and information provided were adapted to the students' needs. The majority shared that this is a complex topic, where most of them need to work on. The easiest way is to constantly keep asking the students how HEIs' can improve support to reach out to them. For instance, this could help HEIs understand what social media platform students use the most and if they are aligned or whether their communication strategy should be revised.

Evaluation mechanism to adapt information to students' needs

The qualitative research further explored the evaluation measures on the actions implemented by stakeholders to support students in the preparation of mobility.
The question about the existence of evaluation mechanisms led to various answers provided by the participants- from lack of any evaluation mechanisms, to a completely established system with several channels to gather students' feedback. The below table summarises the codes, following the given answers, supported by examples and the number of participants that gave the same answer.

Codes	Number of answers
No and not planned	3
"We usually get feedback from all the outgoing students through the feedback they give us after their mobility, but it's mostly about their mobility experience. Sometimes we get comments about our activities, but not always. But we don't really have any other feedback opportunities for the students regarding the activities that we organise (…) I think it is a really good question, it's important, but we also have a lot of work, so I don't know if we could change this." *"No, because for example, the International Office gives them all the formalities, which we don't do, because we are not the right person to do that."*	
No, but planned to have one	1
No, but keeping log of feedback coming from students	1
"Sometimes students give feedback by email."	
Yes with an online feedback form/ evaluation sheets	3

Feedback survey including questions such as: "Are you happy with the preparations and the service/information that you have received? With the presentations that you have been invited to, the support that you have received either from the administration side or the academic side of the exchange coordinators?"

Evaluation sheets asking students for specific feedback about the mobility procedures: how they found information, what they think of the website, what information was missing, their opinion about the information sessions, etc.

"In the context of the Erasmus+ grant all the students have to fill in a survey after their mobility, so we can get the data where they describe the services and the information they received before their departures."

Yes, by using a student ambassadors platform	1

"A system connecting mobility ambassadors with international officers. The system, among others, is used for gathering feedback from students regarding the support provided by HEIs."

Yes, requesting evaluation two weeks after departure	1

Students are requested to evaluate how well prepared they were for going abroad.
"Then you do get feedback on how the International Centre performed."

Yes, asking for feedback before and after a promotional event	2

"We gather their email, phone number so that in the future they can be added to our mailing list, which is then used to share opportunities and programs that we might have in the future."

"Ask them to complete an evaluation survey after the fair."

Yes, through several channels	3

Evaluation in person, with an online form and through a virtual system allowing students to consult and assess all the promotional marketing activities of the international officers, especially in the area of support for students from disadvantaged groups. Last but not least, monthly meetings with representatives from the Students' Union are helpful also to evaluate the promotional activities carried out by HEI."

"We have the information market and a lottery for scholarships, so a student can win a scholarship before going abroad. But they also have to fill in the form with feedback on the market itself so that we take that into account."

Connecting former exchange students with students interested in mobility

This topic was part of the qualitative research only and focuses on it and on how stakeholders connect former exchange students with prospective mobile students. The majority of respondents replied that usually it happens on demand. If an interested student asks to get in touch with a former mobility student, the latter is contacted by the officer by email and if they are willing to

help, they can reach out to the interested student themselves. Stakeholders going through this process face GDPR concerns, which demands a bigger involvement from their side and a bigger workload.

Another possibility mentioned during the interviews was connecting former students with future mobility students during the "Welcome back" events, which some HEIs organise for the returning students. The examples shown below are divided into three groups of stakeholders: higher education council, international officers and student associations.

Examples:

International officers
"Yes, upon request. With the experience report, students can claim whether they would be okay to be approached by another student that would like to go also on mobility to this university. This used to be easier before GDPR, of course, but now I inform the former students that there is someone who would like to get in touch with them. We also have a course on intercultural competence, where we invite former outgoings for certain parts of the course to share their experience."

"We do this in the framework of Erasmus days(…). At a departmental level, when the departments organise their information sessions, we ask them to get some experience reports, because the reports are much more convincing when provided by a student who went abroad. At the buddy level, ESN buddies and our buddies, we help them to meet each other and to share information."

Student association
"Yes, we have done this in different ways actually. We always invite students to talk at our information session so there are always students who have been on an exchange that will come and talk, and I think that's very useful and it's very nice to hear their experience and they are very often willing to discuss with the students and they will hang out together. We need to look at these things because it's not always to just put people together and expect that everything works out. We need to look at the structure and how things are done. This is definitely something where incoming students are helpful, but we also ask for the support of the ones who just came back. We have a programme called student ambassadors, and as ambassadors they write blogs and use Instagram and social media to post things while they are on mobility. We have a pool of students as well whom we can ask to help out if we need students to come to an information meeting or to be at the stand during a fair."

"Yes, we do, we always try to bring one or two students who have been abroad with us whenever we organise an activity. They are usually happy to share and discuss their experiences, and it works quite well. I guess sometimes it is more motivating for students to hear this kind of experience, some anecdotes or something like that."

Additional support/information to students from disadvantaged groups

Inclusion is a topic that should be part of any discussion related to student mobility. Thus, the researchers asked interviewees what additional support/ information they provide to students from disadvantaged groups.

Qualitative research results

This section has only one code labelled "support" and reveals the different kinds of support provided to students from disadvantaged groups.

Code:
⊘ Support

When the interviewees were asked if there was any additional support or information provided to students from disadvantaged groups, the majority of the mobility staff responded that additional funding is the main support they offer. The student associations' volunteers participating in the interviews have not yet met such cases, but confirmed that they would implement additional support should it be necessary. A representative of a higher education council in Belgium confirmed that, in order to encourage students from underrepresented groups to go abroad, they provide additional financial support to them, in addition to the basic scholarship amount. Moreover, interviewees from the UK also mentioned the actions thought out for "Widening participation" students within the Turing[3] scheme.

There was one particular example for individuals working at the IRO, who decided to go the extra mile and make sure that the information given to students from disadvantaged groups was sufficient. This officer is paying attention to the way they communicate the information to these students and they also discuss everything with the department of the university dealing with persons from disadvantaged groups before taking any action.

Examples:
"(...) the more I talked to staff in the access and engagement team, the more I realised that there are student support groups that we can just go and talk to, that we don't know about. We need to get in touch, talk to any other disability group, any other widening participation group and actively go and say: "You are able to take a year abroad. There is support for whatever needs that you may have. You may be able to link into these groups remotely. Each of our partner universities have this in place. And actually if we start the process earlier, we can make sure that you have whatever support requirements are there." So it's really important that we actively go out to talk to these groups and networks and identify as many as we can, rather than passively hoping that they're going to possibly think about doing it."

"We don't have that specific focus yet during the information markets nor in the faculties. We do have information on our websites regarding the grants, but we don't really reach out to them before they think of going abroad. And that is something that we think is important because if they don't even choose to apply then it doesn't really matter that they might get a top-up for a grant because they haven't even applied yet. We do have a team that works with students with

---

3   The Turing Scheme is the UK government's programme to provide funding for international opportunities in education and training across the world. https://www.turing-scheme.org.uk/

disabilities, but it isn't really focused on going abroad."

"Yes, we have a disability centre, which is responsible for providing direct and indirect services to all students of the university, and that also includes all international students. In all the faculties there is also a disability coordinator who is there to help and give advice to the students in this situation."

"We will do whatever we can to support them when we send our students with disabilities abroad, but we don't have this specific way of targeting them necessarily before they apply."

Profile of students that reach out

Most common degrees of students interested in mobility

Online Survey results

Discovering patterns in the profile of students seeking to go abroad is important to understand if there are any groups that are being left out and if they could be tackled with further measures. On the other hand, it is also important to analyse the target group that stakeholders are dealing with when it comes to the mobility orientation and preparation procedures. For this reason, the Compass consortium has included in this research questions about the most common degrees and age of students that apply for mobility. Most students preparing for international mobility are between 21 and 25 years old. The majority of this age group are students holding a Bachelor degree and about one third of them are in Master studies. Phd students do not really come to see HEI for information, indeed, they are the group that goes least on international mobility.

Figure 12: Most common degrees of students interested in mobility
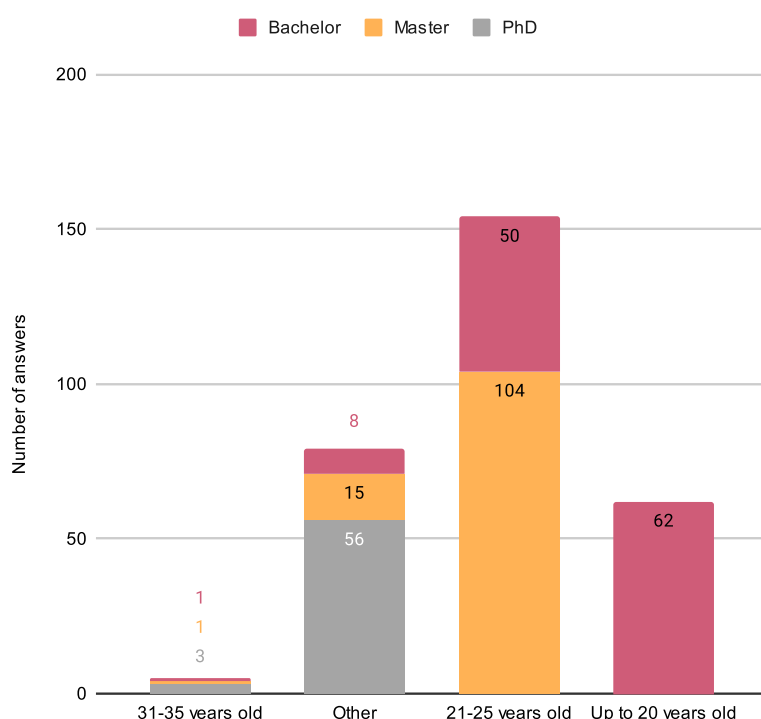
Qualitative research results

The qualitative research completed the surveys, asking about the actual degree of the students that are interested in mobility. According to the interviewees, the average degree of students reaching out for information about mobility was Business Management and Economics. Furthermore, the differences between different degrees are influenced by the actual structure of the degree itself. There are some areas where international mobility is mandatory, therefore it is normal that those degrees are more frequently mentioned as going on mobility. Nevertheless, they agreed that it is hard to define an average since there are students from many disciplines going on mobility.

However, other frequently mentioned degrees were:
- ⊘ Social Sciences (Psychology, Sociology, Politicy);
- ⊘ Languages and Literature;
- ⊘ Law;
- ⊘ Architecture, History, Creative arts;
- ⊘ Sports;
- ⊘ Engineering and Mathematics.

Type of information requested by students interested in mobility

Online Survey results

In order to dive into the information requested by students, first it is important to analyse the kind of mobility they are interested in.

Figure 13: Type of mobility students do ask about

- Turing (semester or year abroad) 5,6%
- Traineeship 11,3%
- Double degree 14,9%
- Internship 16,0%
- Internship with Erasmus+ scholarship 22,5%
- Erasmus+ 28,4%
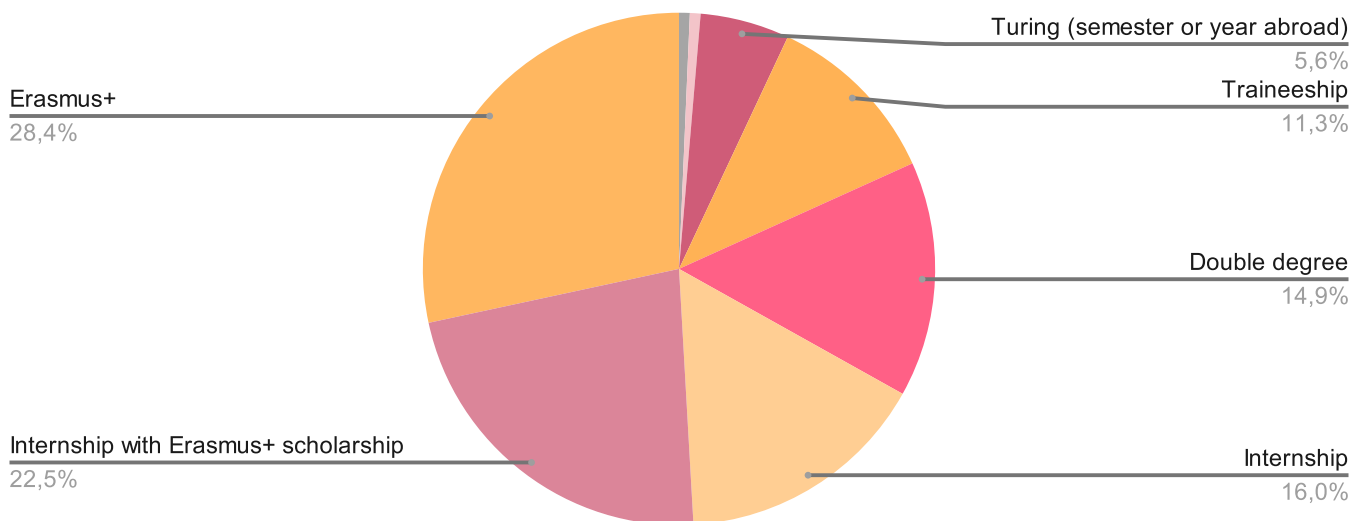
It turns out that students mostly ask about Erasmus+ mobility, both for studies but also for internships, which is in line with the geographic scope of the survey being countries within the EU, where Erasmus+ is the most popular programme to study abroad. Other types of international mobilities such as the European Solidarity Corps and other volunteering programmes were less mentioned, which could be due to the fact that student associations that could provide a different answer are underrepresented. One interesting fact is that stakeholders often point out that students seek information about short mobility programmes and mobilities outside of the EU. The survey also included a question regarding the actions put in place to help inform students about mobility opportunities, the type of information provided to students during and what seems to be the most appreciated by them in terms of action. The figure below shows the responses to the questions above:

Figure 14: Type of information provided to students during the orientation phase
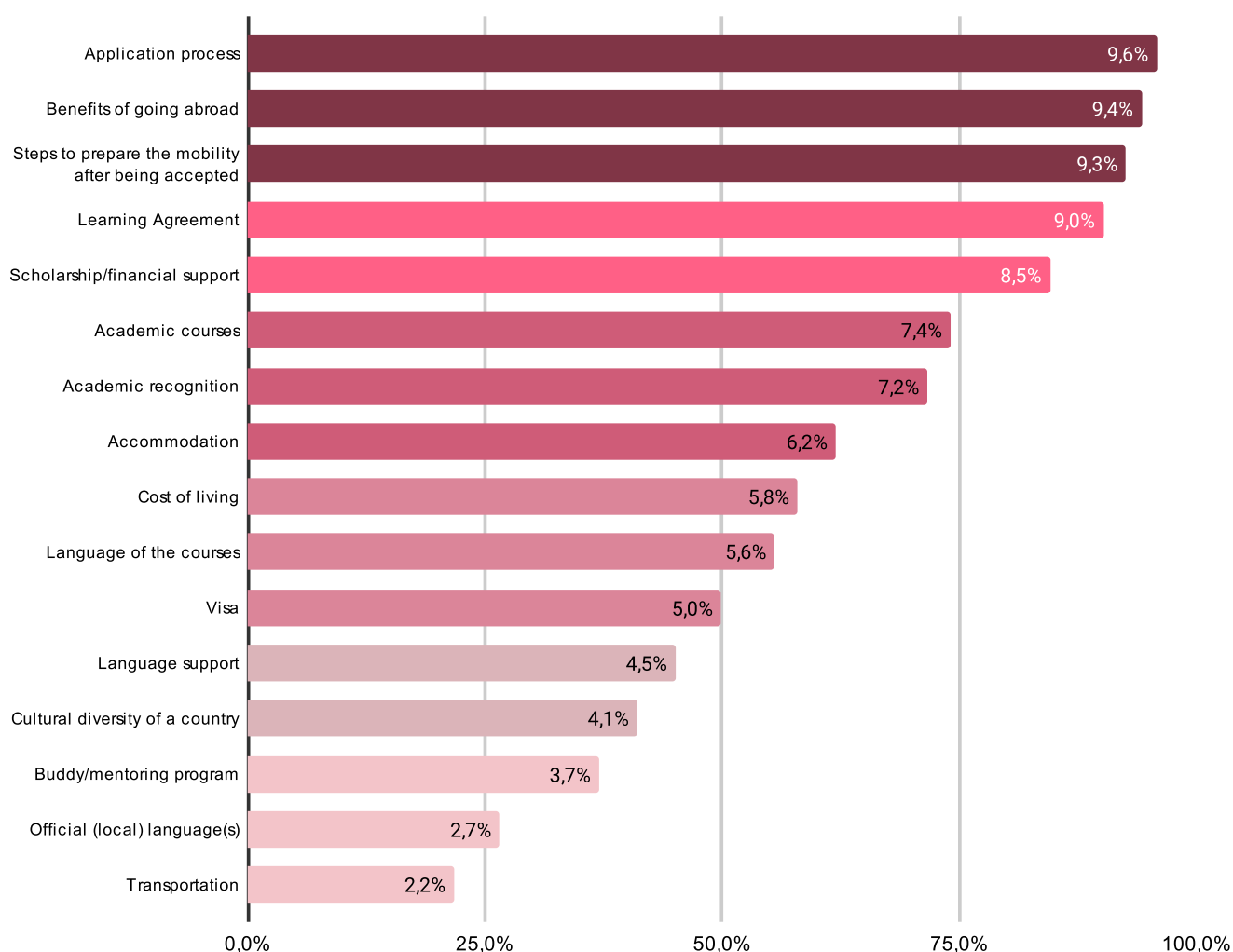
Application process, benefits of going abroad, administrative steps to prepare for mobility after being accepted are the three types of information most often provided to students by HEIs. In fourth and fifth place, Learning Agreement and scholarships available are also mentioned by respondents.

On the contrary, there is a lack of information about interculturality, mentoring programs, official local language and transportation. This type of information is mostly about everyday life and less about academic life.

Qualitative research results

The analysis of the qualitative research, on the other hand, shows the most frequent topics that students want to discuss with stakeholders.

Codes:
- Destination country
- Experience abroad
- Administrative procedure
- Study programme
- Funding
- Contact with peers

Destination country
Many interviewees mentioned that students are mostly interested in the destinations offered by their institution when they first approach mobility coordinators.

Experience abroad
A lot of students also ask about the actual experience of mobility during their first contact with the mobility coordinators. This includes questions about accommodation, the culture and the language, campus life, etc. It is important to mention that international officers, especially of bigger structures, often experience difficulties to provide information about an experience abroad due to so many destinations to consider and so many variables involved. At the first phase of orientation, students are not yet particularly interested in practical and administrative matters related to their departure, but seek more to gather a perception of what it is like to live abroad.

Administrative procedure
When they have decided where they want to go, they request for more bureaucratic information. A few participants mentioned that their students also ask if the competition to get a spot at one university is high and what are the selection criteria.

Study programme
Another frequent information requested is about courses (the study programme) that they could follow or if they could combine courses or do courses at different faculties.

Funding
The majority of interviewees mentioned that funding/grants is another very important concern of the students.

Contact with peers
Finally, they also request often to connect with students who returned from mobility.

Examples:

"The first step is of course the application process. But the next thing is information regarding the partner universities, everyday life, tuition and accommodation, which is rather important for them, of course."

"Most of them want to know which study program they can take abroad and if this study program will be fully recognized towards their study program at the home university. There are also requests regarding funding, services at the host university, accommodation, transportation and other services offered by the university."

Difficulties encountered by students in the orientation phase of mobility

Online Survey results

During the quantitative research, stakeholders were asked to rate difficulties encountered by students when they are considering going on mobility. They had to attribute a score from 1 to 5 (1 being the least common issue and 5 being the most) to a total of 8 different difficulties. When we look at the results, we can see that the lack of financial resources is the most voted one (average of 3,7) with the equivalence between courses (3,2 on average) and the application process (3,1 on average) following closely by. Regarding the actions stakeholders put in place to mitigate these difficulties, the most commonly organised are information meetings about scholarships and personalised support. When it comes to tackling the fear of social exclusion, which is one of the least common difficulties but that usually affects disadvantaged students, stakeholders propose language and intercultural training.

Figure 15: Main difficulties encountered by students in the orientation phase of mobility
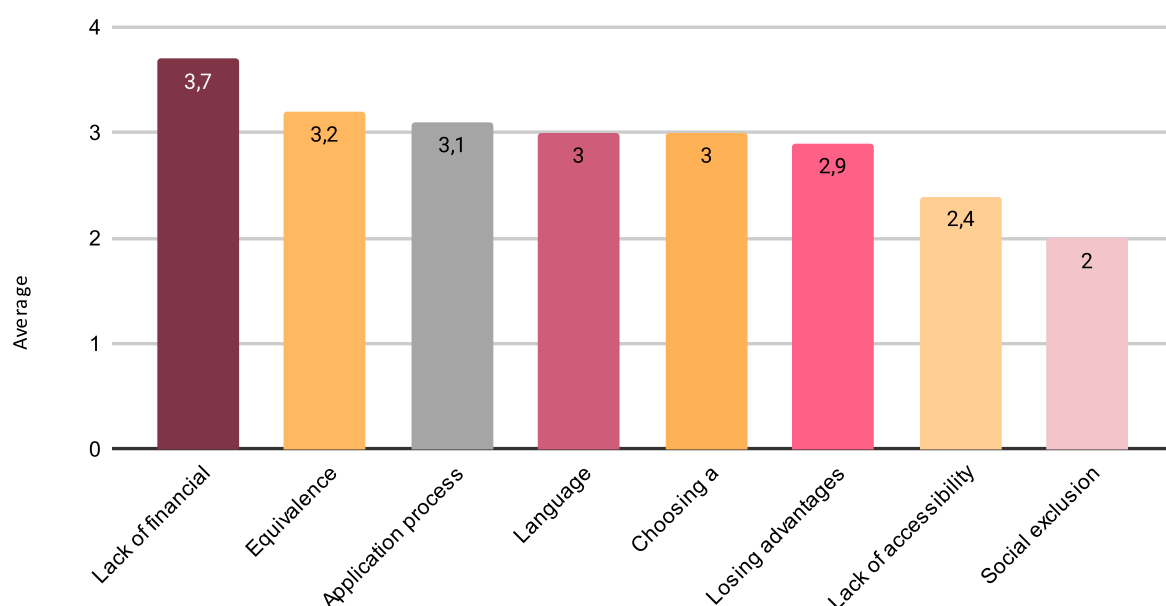
According to the answers given to this question, the **Lack of financial resources** is the main barrier stopping students during the first phase of mobility - the orientation.

Besides the eight choices proposed in the questions, participants were given the option to add other difficulties or write additional comments. These revealed that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are struggling during the orientation phase. Some of them mentioned another difficulty, which is the lack of a clear and easy way to find information on the institutions' websites. Some students appear to not be able to participate due to differences in accreditations between countries. Especially for courses like Engineering or Accounting, there does not seem to be much international cooperation when it comes to recognition.

Figure 16: Main difficulties encountered by students in the preparation phase of mobility

Transportation
1,6%

Fear of departure
8,0%

Leaving friends and family
9,3%

Insurance
9,7%

Planning of timetable
11,6%

Providing documents
14,5%

Finding an accomodation
24,5%

Getting a visa
19,0%
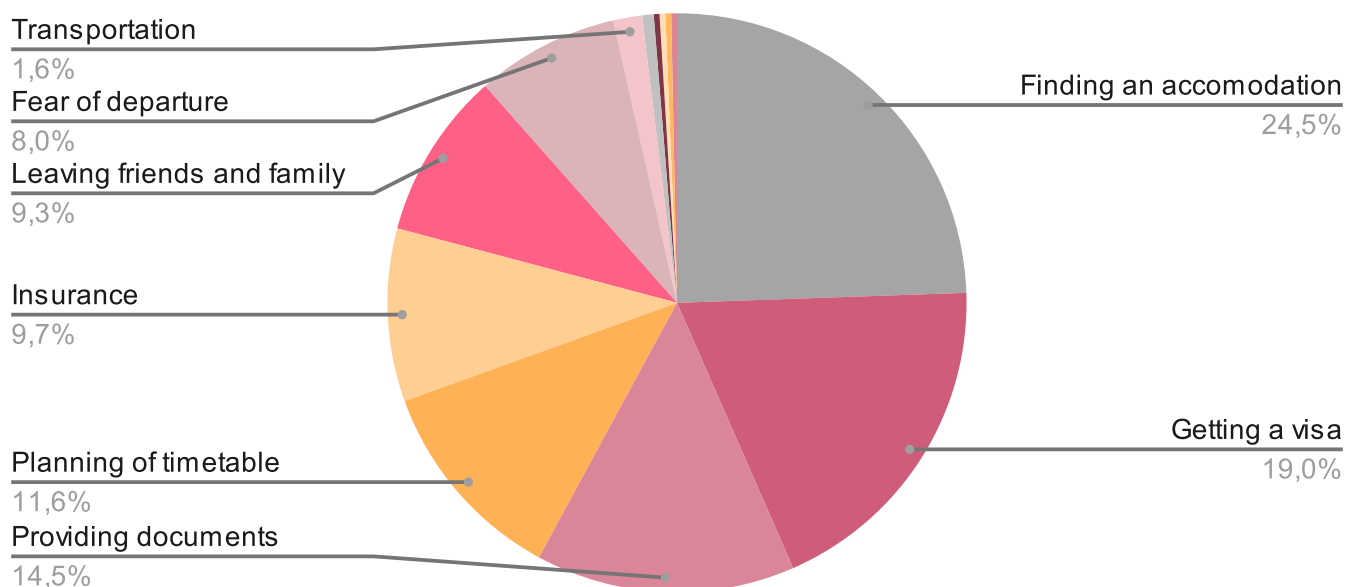
Continuing on the topic of difficulties faced by students, we take a closer look at the ones that occur while preparing for international mobility. The **graph above** shows that finding accommodation and receiving a visa are the main difficulties encountered by students at this specific step. Other noteworthy difficulties that are still interesting to notice are administrative procedures (planning a timetable, providing documents, insurance, among others). As a main solution to mitigate this, respondents propose to work with the host HEI to find and provide solutions. This can of course be extremely useful for establishing learning agreements and finding student accommodation. However, there are a few difficulties that cannot be mitigated through the collaboration between HEIs, such as leaving friends and family and fear of departure.

Main challenges to convey the necessary information to students

Qualitative research results

Since the quantitative research explored the difficulties that students face during their orientation and preparation phase for mobility, it was only fair to also ask stakeholders what kind of challenges they face when conveying important messages to students. This was investigated during the semi-structured interviews, organised under qualitative research.

Codes:
- Concise information
- Matching of study programmes
- Practical information (visas)
- Support on incentivising students to go on mobility
- Physical distance

Concise information

Not surprisingly, the main challenge according to the interviewees is to make the information as concise and explanatory as possible. The example given focused on sending the information about administrative and selection procedures via email. It is a long message to convey and it is difficult to make it appealing to the student, who usually does not have the patience to read such long emails. Similarly, students are also not inclined to read what is already available on the institutions' websites. It is thus challenging to encourage students to go over long blocks of information.

Matching of study programmes

Another challenge is to make them understand that the study programme of the host institution has to match the one at their home institution. In this logic, it is also challenging to make them aware that the time on mobility is still directly related with their degree completion, and they need to meet certain criteria to get their diploma. Stakeholders that were new to the mobility coordination role shared that, for them, it is particularly difficult to convey information about the study programme of the host institutions - especially in bigger institutions - because they have not yet learned all partner institutions' study programmes and where to find them. Moreover, the programmes might not be available a year ahead, while the students require this information to prepare their mobility.

Practical information (visas)

Interviewees from UK institutions were all unanimous that questions about visa details were among the most challenging, especially in the post-Brexit world.

Support on incentivising students to go on mobility

Another challenging case is where international staff is not supported by the academic staff in incentivising students for mobility - two interviewees from different institutions replied that some students are more disadvantaged than others as there are barriers related to their field of study being very "historical" where professors are not willing to contribute to the international mobility of their faculty and students might lack support. Therefore, this group of students feel more insecure to reach out for information.

Physical distance

For universities that have different locations/campuses in different parts of the city, it is more

difficult to reach out to all students. In cases where the central office is not easily reachable, fewer students go to the international fairs and events. Participants that shared this difficulty said that a solution could be to "try to go to the diverse buildings and give the students our outgoing guide".

Examples:

"I recently did a count of how many outgoing exchange webpages my university has and it's 107(...). I also get the feeling that from a student perspective you could find yourself getting lost in too much information and not enough clarity."

"We are often astonished, but giving a "to do" list doesn't work. What really works is when students come to our office; then they understand everything that they need."

Barriers of students interested in mobility to reach out for information

Qualitative research results

Codes:
- Self-confidence
- Fear
- Attachment to home
- Perception of the administrative process
- Financial barrier

Self-confidence
Some respondents have the impression that some of the students fear that they will not be selected because of their perception from the promotional materials that only a certain type of students go on mobility.

Fear
Fear is another factor that prevents students from reaching out. For instance, they can be afraid that they would lose a lot of study time and have to repeat certain courses. Also, several others were mentioned: the fear from the language barrier, the social contact, that their academic profile is not good enough to be picked, that they might fail the exams/tests, as it would be even harder abroad, and thus they would miss the semester.

Attachment to home
Another reason for not reaching out and asking for information about mobility was that certain students are too attached to the practicalities of their life at home, such as jobs, apartments, or more personal things, such as friends, boyfriend/girlfriend that they fear losing, etc.

Perception of the administrative process
According to one interviewee, even though we focus on the barriers to reach out, there are other moments down the road that can prevent the students from finishing the application process. After the first contact is made and the initial information is conveyed, they may show an interest. However, there are cases when interested students drop out after they receive more detailed information about the application process, because they perceive the administrative process as quite burdensome and think that they are not able to deal with it.

Financial barrier
Finally, the lack of financial resources was mentioned by the majority of the participants, especially from UK institutions - some students think they could not afford to go abroad.

Examples:

"There are a lot of mature students that are sort of thinking about going abroad but they don't reach out, because they think the opportunity is not for them. It's for someone younger that doesn't have as many responsibilities as them, in comparison to the younger students. Also, what tends to prevent them is fear, they are scared of going abroad."

"When they do receive all the information and before actually booking an appointment or coming to my drop-in session, I think this is the stage where they think about the options and they think that actually there is a challenge in front of them and they need to overcome and they need to secure the placement. So they realise that not everything is done for them. There is a lot of support that we provide them, but not everything is really there waiting for them. So I think this is the stage where students might actually not get back to us because they think, well there is a lot to do and I might not be able to do so."

"I think there are personal reasons, because it's quite easy to just inform yourself and it's actually not that hard to go abroad at our university."

"(…) one hears that you cannot afford a semester abroad or you would lose a lot of study time and have to repeat certain courses. So I think these preconceptions are the reason why some students do not. They decide without gathering too much information that maybe this project is not makeable for them."

"(…) one is, of course, finances."

"(…) one of the factors why students do not go abroad is certainly financial issues. They have a hard time covering their studies and they cannot think about how they could eventually cover the expenses abroad. Then, of course, it's a matter of recognition. Do the students get all the courses they do abroad recognised? And a lot of focus nowadays is on finalising their studies as soon as possible. So I think it's a challenge for students to first of all, get ready for the job market, and at the same time, have a study experience abroad. And sometimes the value of a study experience abroad is not that clear to students, I think peers can do a lot to really convey this study experience."

Ways to support students that do not reach out

Through this research, we aimed not only to look into the students that look for information and start planning to go abroad, but also those that do not even reach out to understand what can be done better to support them. The results of the survey are shown in the graph 16 below:

Online Survey results

Figure 17: Type of support provided to students to encourage them to reach out for information on mobility

- Personalised support 36,7%
- Information meetings about scholarships 31,6%
- Intercultural (dialogue) training 10,4%
- Language support/training 16,5%
- Other 4,7%
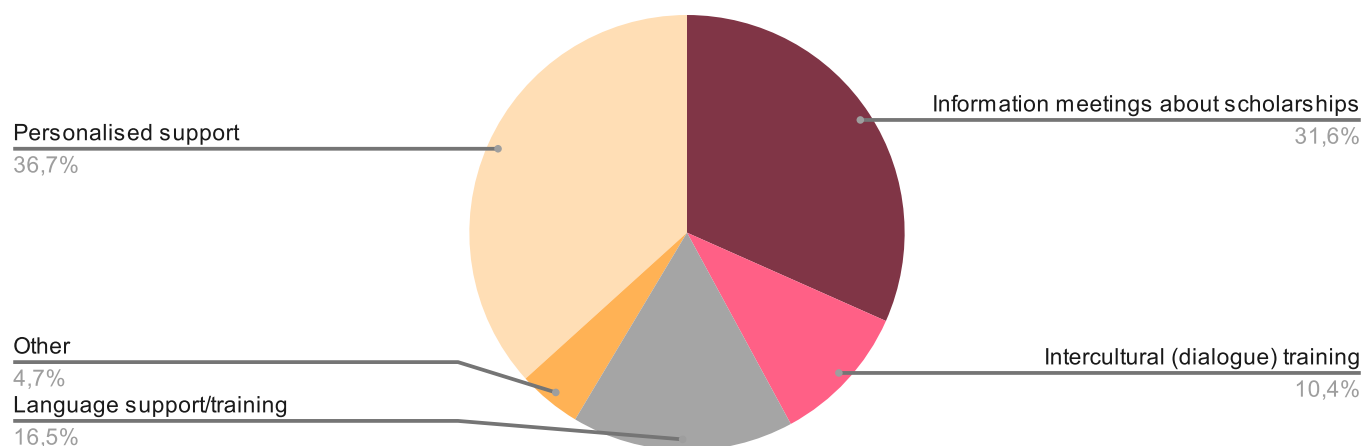
Personalised support is the action that HEI staff use the most to lift the barriers that prevent students from reaching out. Besides this support, 31,6% of respondents also offer information meetings about the scholarship possibilities and how students can apply.

Qualitative research results

During the interviews, participants were also asked what are the important areas where they can still improve their support to students that do not reach out. The main ones mentioned were: improving the information format to make it more appealing to those students, teaching teachers and professors better ways to inform about mobility, as they are constantly in contact with students, and increasing the support made available by students who already have a mobility experience.

Codes:
- ⊘ Information format and channels
- ⊘ Teachers' / professors' support
- ⊘ Peers' support

Information format and channels
Many interviewees mentioned that their HEI needs to improve the information about international mobility on the institution's webpage and make it less complicated. More presence on social media was another topic that was mentioned many times during the interviews as an area that could be improved.

Example:
"The university homepage might be too complicated to find concrete information."

Teachers' / professors' support
Having teachers'/professors' support could be very beneficial to increase the number of students going on an international student exchange. Teachers can support IROs more as they have a "thick international network", and increasing the discussions and mentions of international mobility in class could have an important effect in the encouragement towards mobility.

Peers' support
Showing good examples of students that were on mobility and returned with full ECTS credit and a great experience was one example given by several interviewees in the context of other students' support. Looking at their peers' experiences and how they turned out could be a great catalyser for mobility.

Example:
"What would be useful would be a platform where they could get the information and step by step process for both study and work placements."

Ways to make student mobility more appealing

Qualitative research results

The respondents explained that student mobility would be more appealing if the communication is more diverse compared to what is offered now and if the frequency of the events increases during the academic year. They gave four main recommendations, which are described below.

Codes:
- Information format and channels
- Frequency of events
- Diversity of events
- Students testimonials

Information format and channels
For the mobility coordinators interviewed, it is crucial to revise how the online information is passed to the students. In the digital era, changes are happening very fast and sometimes the information channels stakeholders use might not be the ones that students use the most. Coordinators are therefore looking into adapting to students preferences to streamline the conveyance of information.

Frequency of events
Everyone expressed their regret that Covid-19 shifted physical events to an online format, which had consequences on the ease of communication and conveyance of information to students.

On a general basis, participants shared that the more information events are being organised on a regular basis, the better. Moreover, short introductory sessions are more beneficial and should be organised again post-covid, as during the pandemic there was a tendency to concentrate more on one or two big annual events.

Diversity of events
Some participants suggested that a way to make mobility more appealing is to diversify the topics of the events that international offices organise for students. For example, one interviewee mentioned that they are planning to organise an intercultural event for the outgoing students and help them prepare better for the cultural differences of the destination country.

Student testimonials
Including student testimonials was a quite frequent answer among participants. The reports that students have to fill in after mobility were pointed out as one of the easiest ways to arrange the contact between former mobile students and interested students. The former can enter the email address and tell students that they are welcome to get in touch with them.

Examples:

"Create a platform informing about different topics related to mobility."

"I think the first one will be to improve the homepage, because it's the first contact students try to use."

Improvements in the support to students interested in mobility

Qualitative research results

It is generally believed that the support to students should include more aspects of inclusion. Moreover, if the collaboration between different stakeholders (home and host HEIs, as well as HEIs and other structures, such as student organisations) is improved, this would convince more students to seek international mobility.

Codes:
- Inclusion
- Collaboration with stakeholders
- Students' stories
- Communication campaigns and social media

The interviewees gave different suggestions for improving the support to students interested in mobility. The current level of support they provide and the size of their institution were two factors that influenced the nature of their answers.

One interviewee shared that at their university (small size), there are more incoming students than outgoing and thought this might be because there is not a lot of information shared for outgoing students. Recently they had made significant changes to improve that, including: sharing more information about mobility on the institution' newsletter, informing staff about opportunities available to local students to go abroad, starting collaboration with the marketing team, connecting with the Student Union, the Chaplaincy team and every structure involved in mobility. Furthermore, they created promotional cards that were distributed in coffee shops around campus and in the canteen, as well as promotional videos on TV informing about the destinations available for mobility.

In the section "Activities organised to promote mobility and how they are adapted to the students' needs" various virtual and physical activities were mentioned. Besides those, interviewees gave suggestions of improvements that could be made, in order to make student mobility more appealing.

Inclusion

Working on improving the inclusion and the communication to students from disadvantaged groups was mentioned by several participants. They were also confident that the new Erasmus+ grants will help in this direction.

Collaboration with other stakeholders

One interviewee mentioned that a close collaboration with student organisations, such as ESN, is very important and should be improved at their HEI. Another respondent also included that it is important to have a good relationship and communication with the partner institutions.

Students' stories

The majority of respondents had the opinion that students enjoy hearing about the experience of other students on mobility. Thus, providing more students' stories could be a stimulus for going abroad. One of them suggested identifying groups of students and reaching out directly to them - "so we are pushing information onto them rather than expecting them to pull information from us".

Communication campaigns and social media

ESN interviewees suggested that they can do more communication campaigns when the application process opens and they can be even more present on social media and post about application steps, where to find information, who to ask, and all other helpful topics.

Collaboration between stakeholders

The preparation of student mobility involves different stakeholders. However, the collaboration

between them is not standardised. Through the research, we aimed to map if there were clear collaboration moments and which stakeholders were involved.

Stakeholders involved in the preparation and orientation of student mobility

Online Survey results

We asked the survey participants to indicate which other stakeholders they collaborate the most with when they are helping students prepare their mobility. The results are shown in the graph below.

Figure 18: Collaboration with other stakeholders to help students prepare their mobility
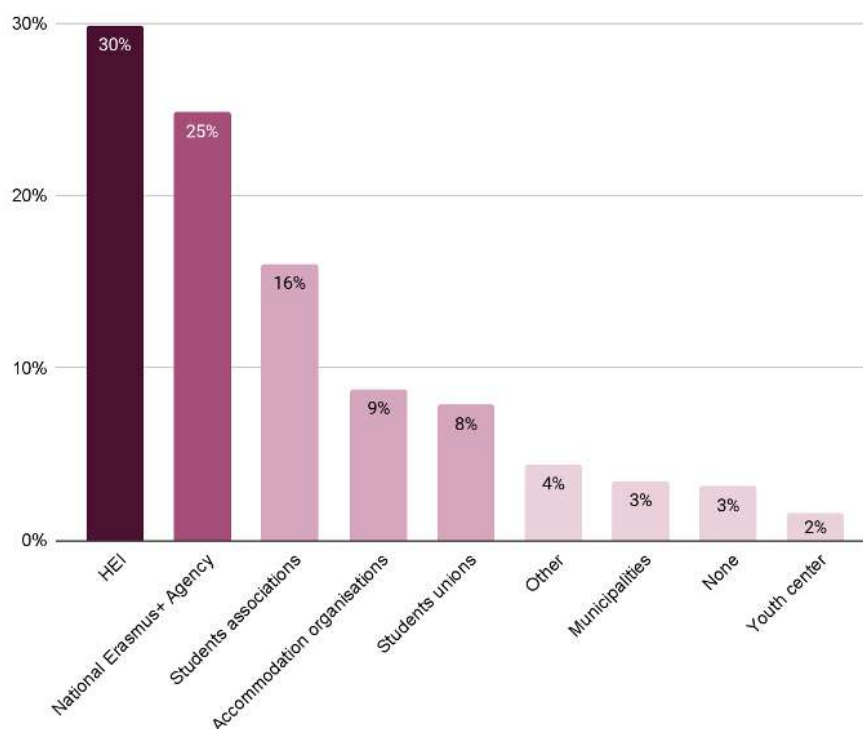
Answers show that HEIs collaborate the most with other HEIs (30%) and National Erasmus+ Agencies (25%). A significant number of responses also indicated Students associations (16%) and accommodation organisations (9%) as a source of information and support to students in practical matters, such as finding accommodation. Other types of stakeholders like municipalities and youth centres are seldomly involved in collaborations in the orientation and preparation of student mobility. Finally, 3% of respondents do not collaborate with any other stakeholder.

In an open question about how they make sure to complement each other's services, the respondents mostly stated that sharing information and best practices is crucial. Regular

meetings, planning tasks ahead and avoiding duplication of work were also mentioned many times.

Qualitative research results

The qualitative research completed the survey with more details about which stakeholders are involved during the preparation and orientation of the student mobility process. Below is a non-exhaustive list of stakeholders collected from the respondents' answers, divided in four groups: stakeholders inside HEIs, student organisations, private stakeholders, government stakeholders and others.

Stakeholders inside HEIs
⊘ The HEI leadership
⊘ Academic staff
⊘ Departmental coordinators
⊘ The Study Abroad committee
⊘ The language centre
⊘ The centre for students from disadvantaged groups
⊘ Other exchange programmes: CEEPUS[4] programme coordinators, (e.g. Degree programme directors)
Student organisations
⊘ ESN
⊘ Alumni club
⊘ Students Union
Private stakeholders
⊘ Organisations offering jobs
⊘ Accommodation providers
Government stakeholders
⊘ Embassies and consulates
Others
⊘ Partner institutions
⊘ International Councils
⊘ National agencies for Education/Erasmus+ (such as OeAD in Austria)

The collaboration between these different structures appears to always be managed by the International/Study Abroad Office. In certain cases it is triggered by requests from students, whilst in others it is already a standardised procedure that is included in the international mobility preparation process.

It is worthy to highlight the partnership between International Offices and student organisations. They are not only mentioned as providing students with more details about their destination country/city, or the type of extracurricular activities they will be able to engage with, but they are actually involved in the definition and improvement of the mobility process.

Examples:

---

4   https://www.scholarshipportal.com/scholarship/ceepus-central-european-exchange-programme-for-university-studies
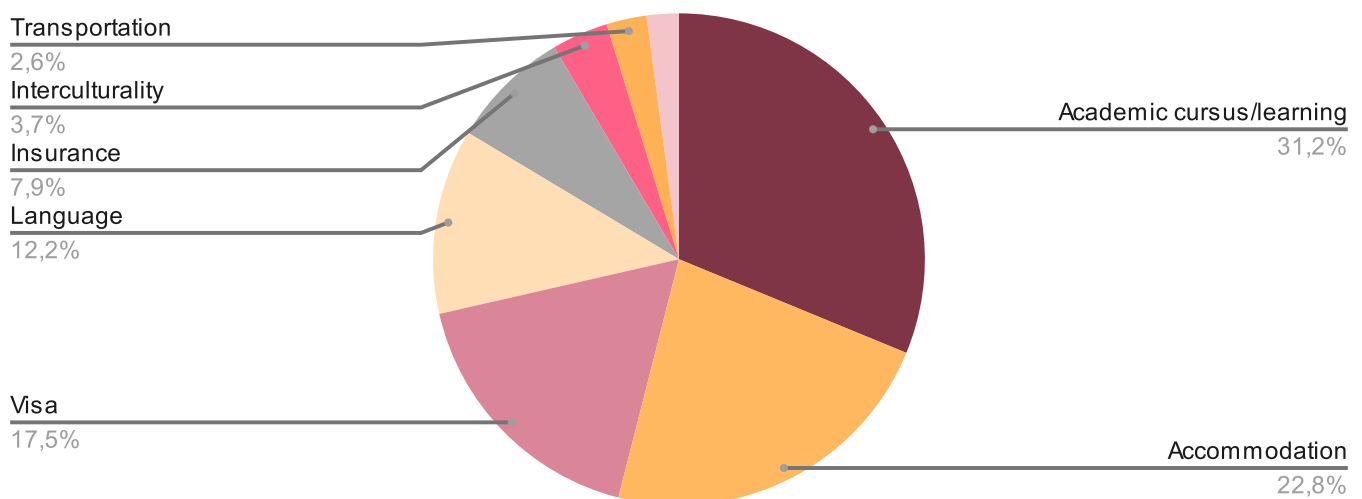
"(...) we have a monthly catch-up between (the team) and the Students Union where there's always an item on international mobility: how to promote the mobility scheme a bit more, how to support the students who are here from exchange partners, how to support integration of international students on exchange and how to support our students from disadvantaged backgrounds, how to make the most of ambassadors (...)"

Additional information transmitted by stakeholders

Online Survey results

Figure 19: Additional information transmitted by stakeholders between HEIs

Transportation
2,6%
Interculturality
3,7%
Insurance
7,9%
Language
12,2%

Visa
17,5%

Academic cursus/learning
31,2%

Accommodation
22,8%

According to the quantitative research, when HEIs collaborate with their host HEIs to prepare and orientate students for their mobility, they mostly work together on finalising the academic cursus and the Learning Agreements (31,2%), and on solving accommodation issues (22,8%), visa (17,5%) and language barriers (12,2%). They collaborate also on other topics like insurance, transportation and interculturality but in a lesser measure.

The collaboration between host and home HEIs consists mainly of preparing the academic courses and the Learning Agreement, and arranging accommodation issues and visas, where applicable. To a smaller extent, HEIs are dealing collaboratively with language and insurance matters, and very few of them work together on interculturality and other practical and psychological issues, such as local transportation and fear of departure. The latter are aspects in which other stakeholders, such as student associations, are dealing with. In general, as can be verified, on the frequency of replies of the blue and the orange bars, university staff members collaborate more with other HEIs' staff than other stakeholders. However, areas such as insurance, transportation, fear of departure, require unavoidably more specialised support.

In the additional question on the topic, respondents revealed that if they do not collaborate with the host HEI in providing support to students, they most often relay useful information or put students in contact with students that did have a mobility experience in the HEI/city.

Figure 20: Topics on which stakeholders collaborate with each other
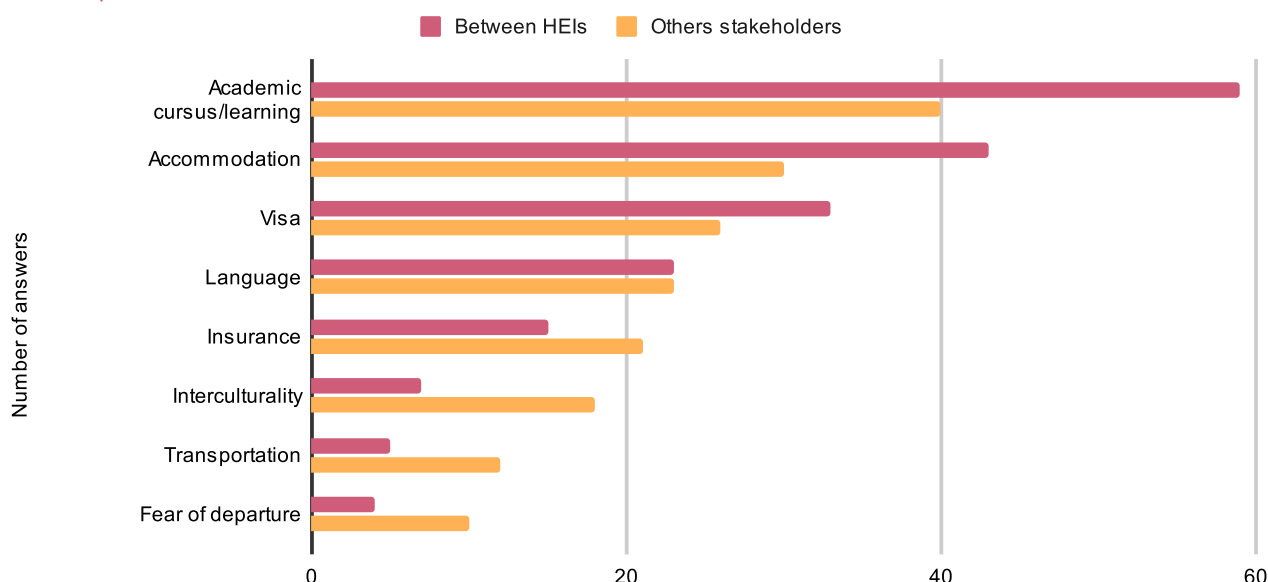
Qualitative research results

In addition to the findings on the topics where stakeholders collaborate with each other, the qualitative research brought more clarity on what type of information each stakeholder provides students the most. Besides the ones mentioned below, there are also cross-check information topics, shared by multiple stakeholders.

International officers of home institutions inform about:
- The requirements of the mobility places
- The requirements regarding the recognition of their study program abroad

"The main part is, of course, the administrative process of the Erasmus+ Programme. We always have to check that all documents are there, that they are correctly filled in, that they are signed and stamped, etc, and that the learning agreements and the grant agreements are ready. Of course, we try to help out if a student calls us and if there are problems, but in general, the most important work we are doing is definitely the administrative procedure."

Academic exchange coordinators/departmental study abroad representatives inform about:
- Accreditation of programmes
- The requirements regarding the recognition of their study program abroad, in case International Officers cannot clarify all the questions.

Examples:

"(...) each department has a nominated Study Abroad representative who supports outgoing

and incoming students, both ways. They are the main point of contact when we need something from the faculty that's purely academic. So if, for example, a student has a question about the accreditation of the programme, whether they can participate in a specific activity, they would go to that person and that person can find the information for them."

International officers of Host institutions inform about:
- The student' programmes of their HEIs
- The process of settling in the new institution/city

"(...) for incoming students, we provide information on the modules, we help them speak to the accommodation team, the immigration team in the International Office, etc. If a student has special needs or a disability, we will put them in touch with the well-being team or we will give them the information to contact the student well-being team."

Student organisations inform about:
- general information about the cultural and social life abroad, providing testimonials from alumnus and other students.

"I guess the main difference is that, in the case of ESN, they are on location, they are where the students are going to study or work, and as I said they do have more practical information about life there. We are there to help them with the paperwork on the administrative side."

*"(...) in terms of **student societies**, they tend to fall pre and at the application stage. And also they fall towards the arrival stage in terms of making sure that, for example, incoming students get an introduction from the ESN network to make sure that on top of all the university structures, they have a group of friends, students running things for students…"*

Study abroad/programme National Agencies inform about:
- general information about going abroad through a self-organised programme and information about scholarships

"(...) especially when we do not have a grant that fits the students needs, our national agency always refers them to a webpage of the national agency where they can find all the different funding possibilities students have in the country."

Embassies and consulates inform about:
- Types of visa
- Requirements to apply
- Costs associated with the visa request

"The US Embassy in [country] has often volunteered to deliver sessions, either to many students or specifically to our institution, on how you choose which of the two main visas to enter the US, J1 or F1, and things that students need to know, such as approximate costs. That's really helpful."

Reference to other stakeholders for difficult questions

Qualitative research results

The summary below presents the answers that the interviewees gave for their particular stakeholders group:

International officers contact mainly:
- Curriculum department (for Learning Agreements)
- Student organisations
- Their partner HEIs
- The NA
- Faculty Deans (about accreditation questions)
- For Austria - OeAD, Austrian exchange service

National Agencies for mobility programmes
- Student grant authority
- Language schools (GMAT, GRE, TOEFL)

Peer-to-peer feedback

Peer-to-peer feedback, in general terms, is feedback that comes from other people with a similar profile that went through similar experiences. In the case of the Compass project, peer feedback is understood as mobility students who already went on an international student mobility abroad sharing remarks with students who are preparing to go abroad.

The importance of peer-to-peer feedback for students in the preparation of student mobility

Online Survey results

The respondents rated from 1 to 5 different benefits of the peer-to-peer method and different benefits were pointed out by the survey's respondents, such as access to **testimonies from other students**, reassuring students preparing for mobility as well as **mutual help between students** (these three benefits received the highest number of maximum votes). As the graph below shows, there are other benefits as well which were very well evaluated by the respondents, like "Promotion of international mobility" and "Complementary with the supports/services

proposed by the HEI". Through the positive rating of all these benefits, one can agree on the importance of peer-to-peer feedback for students in the preparation of mobility.

Figure 21: Benefits of the peer-to-peer feedback for students
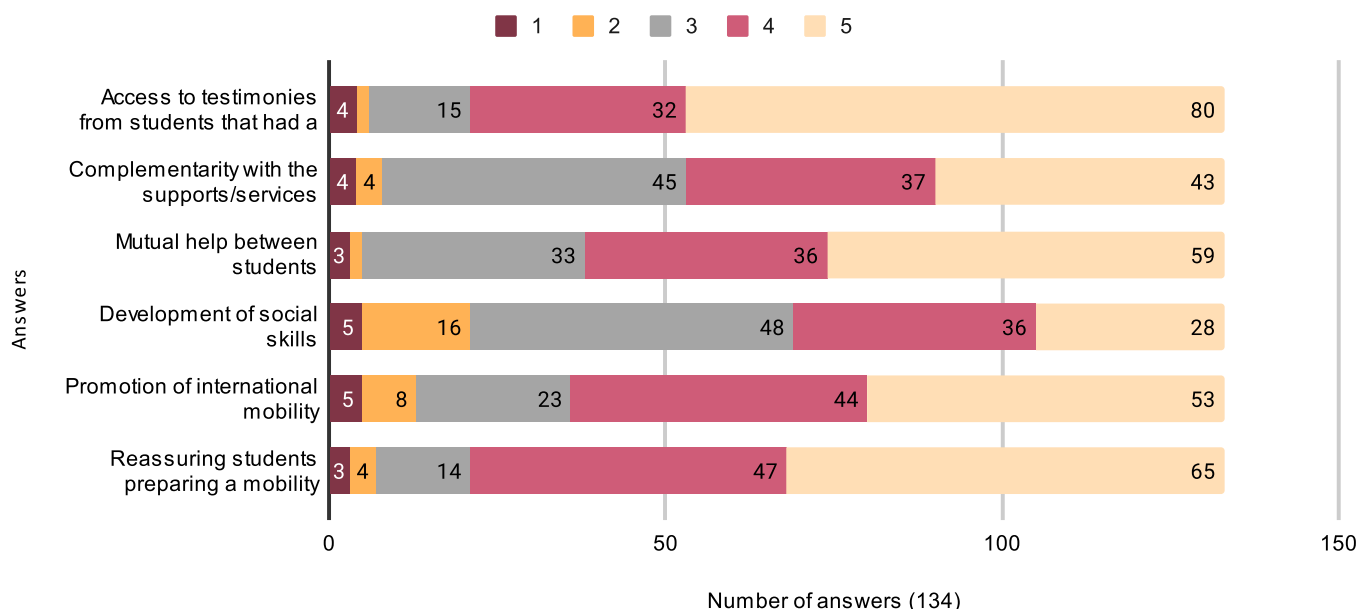
Qualitative research results

Interviewees were asked about their opinion on the peer-to-peer feedback for the prospective students and 100% of them agreed that peer-to-peer feedback is a major factor for having better preparation and a better experience abroad.

Examples:

"Absolutely… Formal things, such as paperwork and bureaucracy, are perhaps not the most relevant thing for peer-to.peer information, but informal things like how to behave, what to look for in other countries, I think that is what peer-to-peer can be used for." (IRO)

"Of course, that's the main communication tool for mobility when we try to make someone go on mobility. For example, with the Erasmus information days, there were around 10 people who came to meet us, six of them became members and three of them are going on mobility this year. That's how everything works, like word of mouth, when you're just talking to people. So we are working on that as well." (SA)

Procedures to connect peers with students interested in mobility

Online Survey results

To explore the efforts of stakeholders in connecting students who already went on mobility with those considering/preparing to go, we surveyed them on the methods they use to put these two groups in contact.

Figure 22: Methods to put in contact former mobility students and potential outgoing students
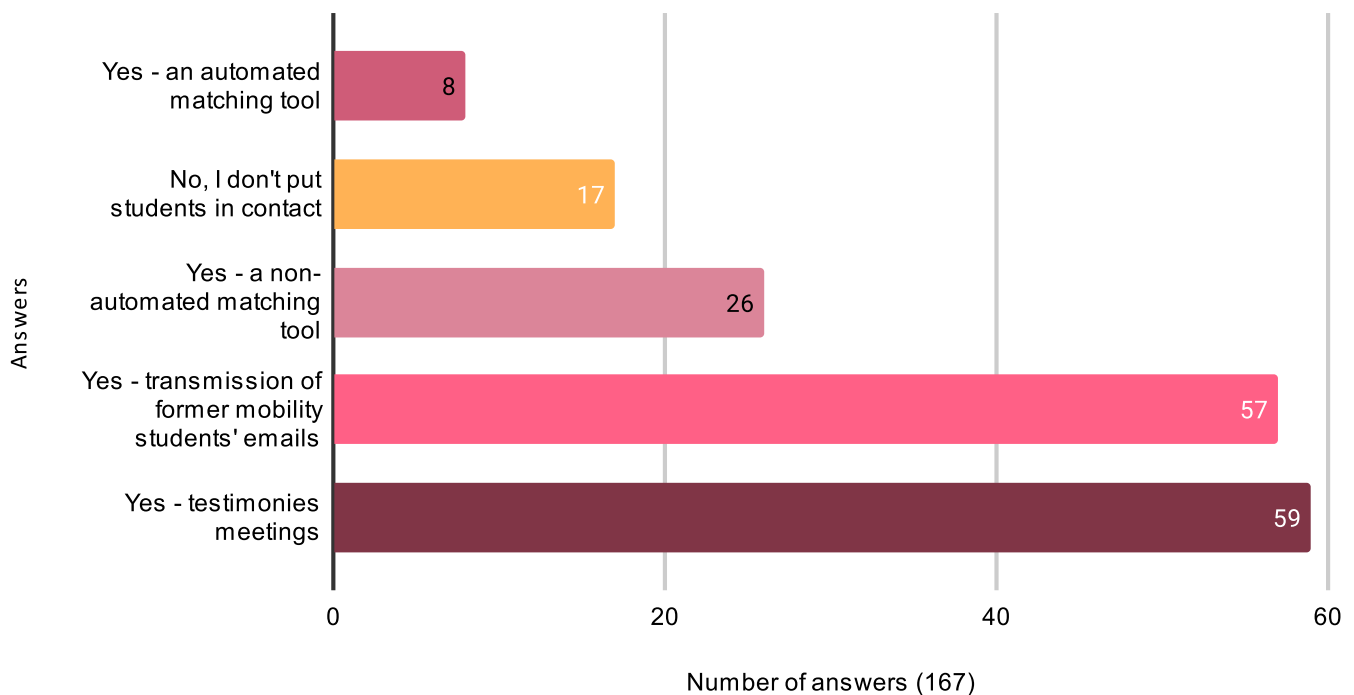
The majority of stakeholders do put students in contact (only 17 respondents out of 167 do not). The ones that do it put former students in contact with potential outgoing students through **testimonies meetings** (59 out of 167) and **transmission of former mobility students' emails** (57 out of 167). Then, two other methods are mentioned but less frequently: a non-automated matching tool and an automated matching tool.

Qualitative research results

The interview respondents were asked about how they connect former exchange students with prospective ones. They described five different processes of doing so, which are explained in the paragraphs below. It is important to mention that, in most cases, prospective mobility students ask to be connected with former exchange students, and this is not part of the regular tasks of the international relations officers and the other stakeholders.

Codes:
  - Email
  - Private, social media groups
  - Student feedback
  - Events

Email

A prospective mobility student asks their international relations officer to be connected with students that went previously on mobility. The IRO then asks the former mobility students if they agree to be contacted to answer questions/thoughts about their mobility and, if they agree, the officer gives the contact details to the prospective student. This method requires additional steps due to GDPR restrictions.

Private, social media groups

One of the respondents shared that every Friday their international relations department publishes testimonials from former students on the university's or international office's social media, with photos and a short report sentence. The participating students also agree to include their social media names on the report.

Student feedback provided during dissemination events

Another way to connect peers is through the feedback forms that students complete after they return from mobility. They are made available to everyone or provided during dissemination events and in the form they can agree (or not) to share their contact details.

Events

Several respondents mentioned that, when they organise welcome events to the new coming students, there are specific workshops focusing on mobility. At these workshops, mobile students are usually invited to talk about their experience. This provides a great opportunity to connect prospective students with former mobile students. The farewell events, organised at the end of the mobility year/semester, are another opportunity to bring together incoming and outgoing students. They are asked to provide contact information if they want to. Other events which also connect peers are international mobility events/fairs, dinners, sessions, Erasmus days, etc.

Buddy schemes

The ESN's Buddy programme became an important part of the preparation process for students going on Erasmus+ mobility. The Buddy scheme allows students who have buddies to talk about formal and informal topics, for instance, related to the cultural life of the destination country.

Main challenges to connect former exchange students with students interested in mobility

Qualitative research results

There are several obstacles related to connecting students who already went on mobility with those who are considering/preparing to go, the main one being the GDPR data protection. The following part explains some of the challenges that participants met when trying to ensure communication between peers.

Codes:
- ⊘ Data protection
- ⊘ Willingness of former mobility students

Data protection

Many participants referred to GDPR as the main challenge when it comes to connecting former mobility students with the ones planning to go. Indeed, stakeholders should ensure that their actions do not cause any breach of this regulation. Especially in this situation, this usually requires them to add further steps to the process of putting students in contact.

Willingness of former mobility students

Another major challenge is related to finding students who are keen to collaborate. For many students, once they return from mobility, the journey is over and they move on to other important things in their lives. One student organisation shared that they offer vouchers to students who show up at their fairs. One central officer shared that the department/ faculty coordinators are better placed than central international officers to gather information and put peers in contact in the case of big universities with many departments. Otherwise it is challenging to handle this connection for all departments.

Examples:

Student associations

"I think the fact that we cannot really monitor what the students will say or discuss can sometimes be problematic."

"I guess that some students are very shy and maybe they don't want to speak English. They seem to be very reluctant to mingle with the international citizens. We would have to organise these meetings better. We haven't really had time to do it properly again after the pandemic. I guess again it depends on the resources and on whether we have time to plan and what we can do in the future, but I still think the idea is good and it should be done."

Mobility coordinators

"I think it was more in trying to match and trying to meet the expectations of the students that are thinking of going. Because the students that have just come back, what I noticed is that they come back different and because they've had an amazing time, they just want to share as much as possible and help as much as possible. Whilst with the students that are thinking of going there is still a bit of apprehension."

"The only challenge, I would say, is that not all the students who were abroad come to the meetings, which is typical with students and student events where we invite, for example, 100 students, but we find that 60, 70 do not attend."

"I think, especially for students who have already graduated, sometimes it's difficult to reach them. We only contact students who are accepted, so we add them to our mailing lists and then

we contact them using their private email. However, they really seem busy after graduating and it just might be difficult to reach them."

Benefits of a peer-to-peer approach

Qualitative research results

The respondents were asked about their views on the benefits of using the peer-to-peer approach. They listed the following ones:

- It helps students to prepare better for their mobility.
- It helps students to gain self-confidence and lose the sense of abstractness for the whole experience.
- It helps students to feel supported. *"The feeling that they are not alone in this new adventure and there are other students like them is very important (same university, age, city, degree, etc)." "The feeling they belong to a group."*
- It helps students along with their coordinators for practical questions such as finding accommodation, best transportation to reach the destination, public transport, social life, campus life, etc.
- It helps students to receive encouragement and hear first hand the experience of someone who has actually been there: *"This first hand experience is more valuable than information that you can find on the website. It's also a good way to prepare for international experiences, like for a possible cultural shock. It's positive for both participants, for the one who is starting the process, and for the one who comes back, as a way of processing and reintegrating back home."*

Most important topics discussed between peers on mobility and how they differ from topics discussed with HEIs or others stakeholders involved in their support

Qualitative research results

Codes:
- Social life expectations
- Course catalogue at host institutions
- Accessibility for people from disadvantaged backgrounds

Social life expectations
According to the interview participants, the most discussed topics between students preparing

to go on mobility and those who already came back focus on social life expectations. The main difference is that they discuss more informal topics between themselves, as well as practicalities related to their life abroad, while with HEIs and other stakeholders they discuss the administrative procedures before, during and after mobility.

Course catalogues at host institutions
Another topic that is often discussed between peers is the course catalogue changes/updates. Former or enrolling students can have more accurate information about that than home institutions, and even share their opinion about the quality of the courses.

Accessibility for people from disadvantaged backgrounds
For students from disadvantaged groups with disabilities, it could be important to discuss with peers which places are accessible for people on wheelchairs.

Examples:

"Number one is the cost of living. So, you can plan your budget, how to behave, where to buy things, what not to buy, should you go to bars or not. And I think also accommodation, how to get there, how is the transportation and so on." (SA)

The Compass peer-to-peer platform

One of the most important findings that the researchers are seeking with this quantitative and qualitative analysis is whether a peer-to-peer platform, such as the one developed within the framework of the Compass project, would be useful and well accepted by stakeholders (HEIs, sStudent associations and students). Therefore, the last part of this research will analyse the willingness to disseminate and/or use the Compass platform that promotes peer-to-peer feedback and will aim to receive relevant feedback from the participants on what needs to be included and how to moderate it.

## Willingness to recommend the Compass platform

Online Survey results

A platform could be useful for 84% of the survey's respondents, while others are not completely negative about the idea of using it, but suggest some specific features in it. The respondents were asked if they would be ready/available to help moderate the content relating to their city/HEI and 65% of them responded positively.

52

Figure 23: Willingness to recommend the Compass platform

No
2,6%
I don't know
13,2%

Yes
84,2%
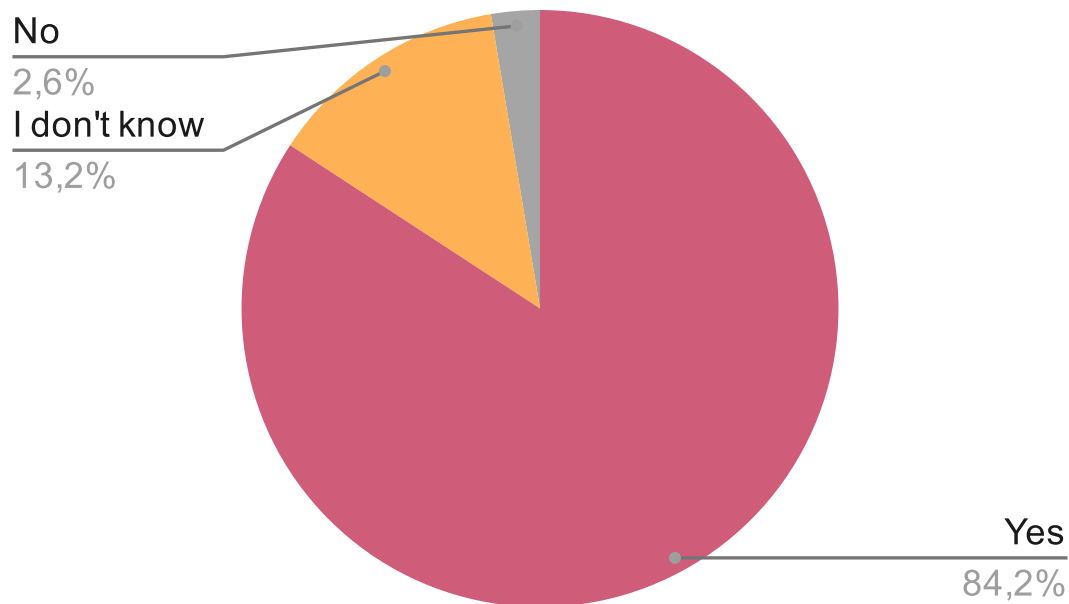
Qualitative research results

100% of the interviewees replied that they would definitely recommend such a platform and expressed the urgent need of having it available. Some of them even expressed their regret that such a tool does not exist already for a long time, since mobility and studies abroad have existed for many years and it could have already benefited several generations of students going abroad.

The following examples are only a few out of a large number of similar statements collected from the interviews.

Examples:

*"Something like this will be priceless and I would definitely promote it. This is something that can be actually added to all the communication we have with the students from the beginning of the academic year. **Networking, learning and information at the same time**."*

*"I think that would be very, **very beneficial and actually so much easier to have everybody on one platform instead of just trying to reach different students**."*

*"It would be **really useful, because then students could get the feedback from other students**, not just from their university. They're more likely to be able to get the feedback they're looking for, because there's more students there available to answer."*
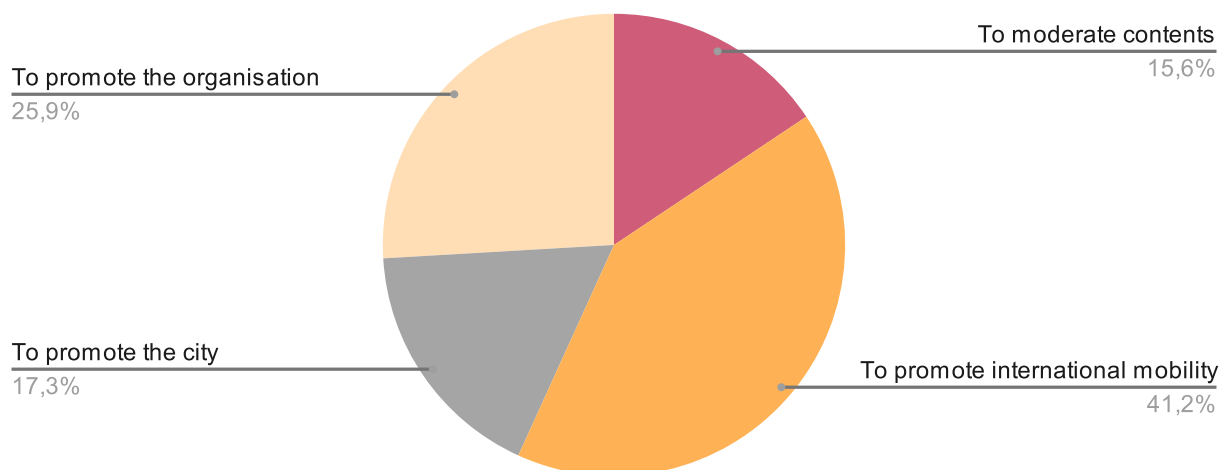
*"**Yes, if it is a professional platform.** There are Facebook groups, but we do not really want to recommend them, because we cannot really check the information there. But if there would be a real professional platform with professional content, definitely."*

*"**We will recommend it, if it is safe.** That's something very important for us to think of and that's why we use Facebook and not Instagram or Tiktok because they're not public. And the conversations amongst our students should be kept within the university, in our opinion."*

Expectations of stakeholders and usefulness of the platform

Online Survey results

Figure 24: Usefulness of the platform

To moderate contents
15,6%

To promote the organisation
25,9%

To promote the city
17,3%

To promote international mobility
41,2%

According to the survey results, 41,2% of respondents would use the future platform to promote international mobility and 25,9% to promote the organisation. These are the main uses they think the platform should have. 16% of them think that the platform should be used to moderate content and promote the city of destination.

Figure 25: Awarding ECTS credits to students sharing information about their mobility on this platform

Yes
26,2%

No
73,8%
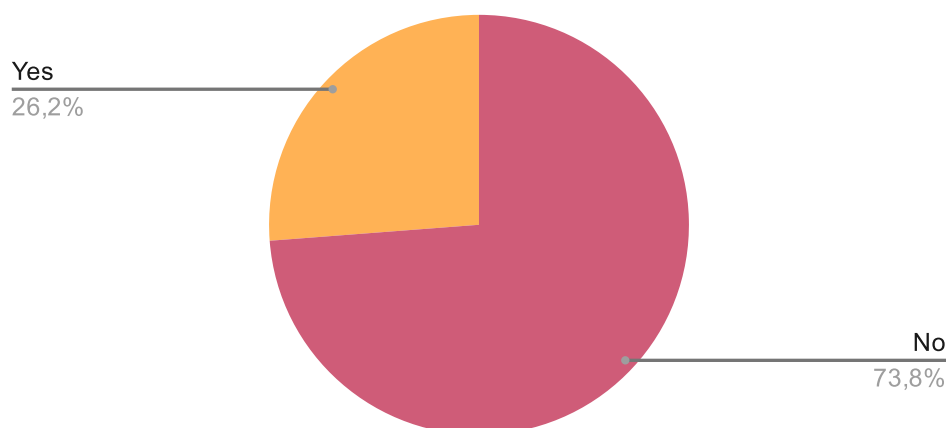
73,8% of the survey respondents are not ready to award ECTS credits to students who give information about their mobility on the platform. Only 26.2% of them are willing to do it. It is thus unlikely that ECTS credits can be used as a method to entice students returning from mobility to share their experiences on the platform.

Qualitative research results

The participants of the interviews gave various responses, including many preferred features that they wish would be on the platform. They also raised the importance for students to update the platform regularly, to avoid obsolete information. There is a list of codes below, labelling the different expectations of the stakeholders from the platform. It was important to know which stakeholders emphasise the particular code. This is why, next to the explanations of the codes, there are the abbreviations of the stakeholder that mentioned them: student associations (SA) or international officers (IRO).

Codes:
- Presentations/testimonials
- Chat
- Security measures
- Forum
- Matching students
- FAQ
- Training for IROs on how to use the platform
- Guidelines for peers to share testimonials
- Mobility process
- Information about the institutions
- Rating system

Below are examples of the most frequently mentioned features.

Presentations/testimonials (SA)
Participants expressed their preference in having pre-recorded presentations, videos and small spoken testimonies of students, mentioning their time in the host city or their time in the host country. Their reasoning was that visual presentations and showing past experiences are usually very helpful tools for attracting students towards mobility.

Chat (IRO)
Another suggestion was to add a chat function, as this would allow to choose pairs according to the country/city and speak directly with them, rather than email the IRO team. The respondents think that it would also facilitate stakeholders' work, as they have to look at who has just come back from the particular country/city to put students in touch.
"It would be of a great importance to have sections on the platform where (...) students can actually speak to them, or have the contact details or anything, that would be brilliant." (IRO)

Matching students
Some interviewees mentioned that the ethnic and the cultural aspects are very important and

need to be included in the platform. They suggested a functionality that gives the opportunity to match students from different countries, even from the same country, matching students that have been abroad to students that are thinking of going. (IRO)

Security measures and Forum (IRO)
Another useful feature according to the participants is a forum. However, the most important thing according to most of them is just making sure that students can contact other students in a safe environment.

FAQ section (IRO)
A FAQ page with questions or pre-recorded presentations was mentioned several times by the interviewees. This page could solve open questions that often interest students.

Training for IROs on how to use the platform (IRO)
From an IRO perspective, from which most of the respondents were looking, it would be interesting to include training on how to use the platform and how to better promote it to students.

Guidelines for peers to share testimonials (SA)
The few students association representatives we interviewed shared that they would expect actually the student's name not to be anonymous and that they would have to log in so that one can be sure that they are real students. Furthermore, they suggested students be given some rules or guidelines for writing their tips.

Mobility process explained (SA)
Another suggestion by student association representatives was to make clear that the processes differ from university to university and from country to country. There are different procedures, different deadlines, different selection criteria. If the main principles are explained in the platform, that would also be useful for prospective students.

Information about the institution (IRO)
Besides the information about the destination countries and cities, some interviewees suggest to also include information about the HEIs offering mobilities. This would include information on the semester dates among others.

Scoring system (IRO)
Many interviewees considered a scoring system on aspects of things such as, whether the accommodation in that destination is good, what the academic help is like, what cultural activities exist, to be an important feature of the platform. According to them, this would add a significant value to the platform.

Trust in the information provided there

The interview respondents were all confident that students will trust such a platform, containing first-hand information from students like them. According to them, there are two factors that will influence the trust in the platform: endorsement by the HEI and the first impression of the platform.

Codes:
- Endorsement by the HEI
- First impression of the platform

Endorsement by the HEI
Some of the respondents shared their opinion that students would definitely trust such a platform if they have the endorsement by their HEIs. Even more, if the IROs are signposting it to them, they would be much more willing to use it.

First impression of the platform
One very valuable comment was given by the interview participants: the first impression of an application is always important and it is what will stay in people's minds. This is why the first and most important thing when launching the platform is to be 100% prepared. This means to have verified that there are no technical errors, that the tool is easy to navigate and that it is user-friendly.

Examples:

"It just depends on the type of reviews and the number of reviews because I think it will be like Google, you go and have a look and then it's up to you to decide if you trust it or not."

"I think yes, they would be interested to have information from other students, it should not be a problem."

Ways to motivate former mobility students to leave their feedback/testimonies on the platform

Online Survey results

The most frequently mentioned methods to motivate students to leave feedback/testimonies on the platform were:
- "To engage with students immediately after their return from their exchange because they are still motivated to share their experience"
- "To motivate students explaining them the benefits of sharing informations and knowledges about their experiences"
- "To select some students as ambassadors and send them personalised email, involve them in "International Days, deliver certificates and recommendation letters to enhance their CV"
- "To make the sharing of experience a mandatory form to fill at the end of mobility"
- "To do a social media campaign to promote students' intervention through videos"

Qualitative research results

When interview participants were asked how they could motivate students to leave their feedback/ testimonials on the platform, they gave very diverse answers. Some of them had a viewpoint that students would voluntarily share their experience with other students, after they return. Others said that the most realistic way of encouragement for them was to send an email. A third group had the opinion that an incentive should be put in place, in order to motivate students to register on the platform and share their experiences. Below we give several specific examples on how the interviewed stakeholders would approach that matter.

Codes:
  ⊘ Leave feedback/testimonials voluntarily
  ⊘ Leave feedback/testimonials through incentives

Leave feedback/testimonials voluntarily
According to some respondents, students are usually quite willing to give testimonials on their experience abroad. If there is enough awareness about the platform, they will know that their experience will help other students and this will motivate them to participate voluntarily. Moreover, one of the respondents said that sometimes students actually underestimate the skills or underestimate the experience that they go through. Therefore, by easily encouraging them to speak out about what they have done and what they have learned, they will realise how much this experience has brought them and will also motivate them to share that with others: *"If you just remind them that they would have benefited from the same platform and ask them to invest five minutes and help someone else, they will be willing to give feedback."* Another respondent said: *"They have to write what they call experience reports, which are shared with other students. They're always willing to come along to the Open Days and Visit Days at the university. They provide quotes, sort of testimonials for our HEIs' web pages and there is always that call of really wanting to help."*
The voluntary feedback helps also with the reverse culture shock. *"And one of the examples of reverse culture shock is you come back from having been abroad with all these stories to tell, but your peer group has moved on. So maybe we would try and bind it up. Tell them that there is a place where they can share their ideas with people who are also sharing their experiences for people who want to come and hear about those experiences, and they might not get it when they come back, with their peer group, but there's another peer group waiting for them."*

Leave feedback/testimonials through incentives
Another way to motivate the students to provide feedback, mentioned quite a lot during the interviews, was through incentives. Certificates of completion of certain mobilities was one of the examples given by respondents: *"If there is an authorised certificate that we could send to students after they leave feedback or participate in the platform, many of them would engage with it."* Another suggestion was to give a prize: *"(...) if you [student] send us your experiences, you can win a travel voucher (...)."*

Benefits from the platform

Online Survey results

58

The advantages the respondents see in such a platform for them and for their students are displayed in the graph below. The most important benefit, according to 93 respondents out of 100, is that it offers the possibility to ask questions about the destination that a student would not ask otherwise. Other highly ranked responses included the encouragement it gives to students to go on mobility and the opportunity it gives to returning students to valorise their experience.

Figure 26: Benefits of the Compass platform for students
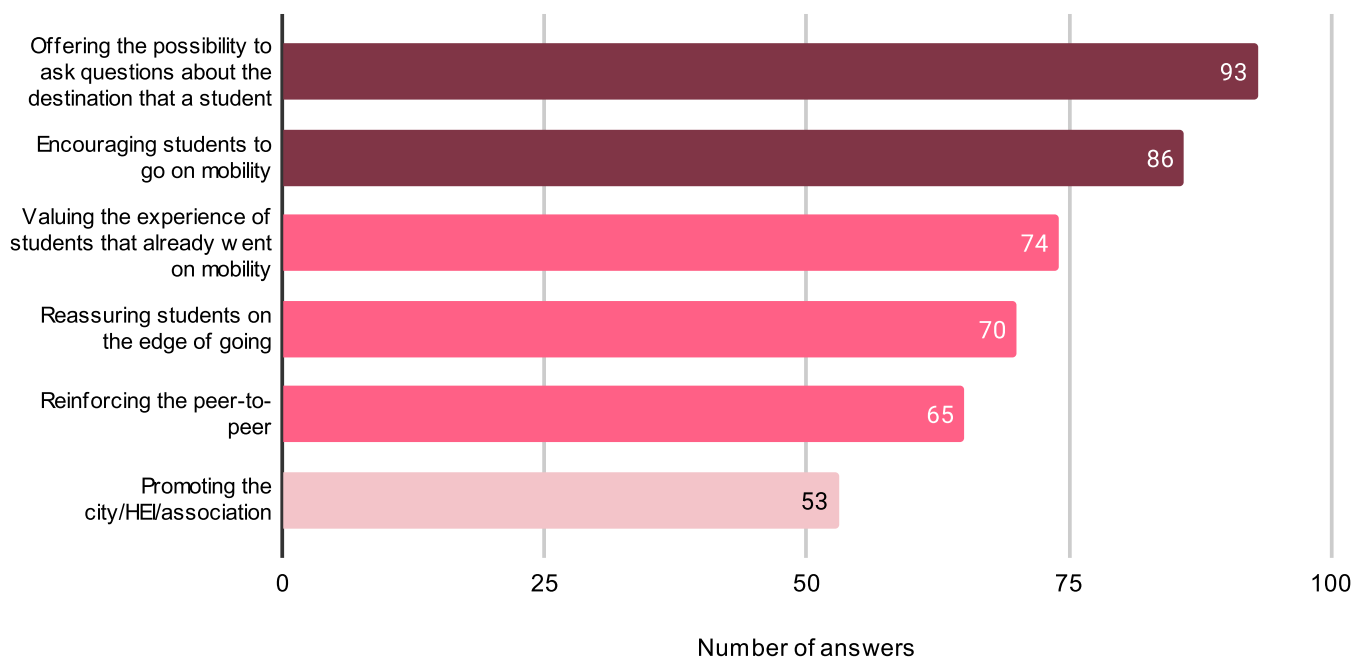
Qualitative research results

The benefits section has two codes - benefits for students and benefits for stakeholders. The participants described them in the examples below.

Codes:
- ⊘ Benefits for students
- ⊘ Benefits for stakeholders

Benefits for students
As mentioned above, the entire group of interviewees shared their positive opinion about the usefulness of the Compass platform. Below is the list of the most repeated reasons why this platform should exist for students:
- ⊘ It would help to create a sense of community for mobile students and encourage students who return from mobility to stay engaged.
- ⊘ It would offer good networking opportunities and sharing of information beyond their university: *"(…) having this opportunity to give more context to students who are going abroad. If they see that there is a real person behind that project and that there is a real student, who is struggling with the same things that they are struggling with, this would really benefit them and if this is done in a professional way, on such a platform, instead of just*

contacting the other student by email, it would look really nice and it would show them that they can trust it."

⊘ Possibility to access feedback not from one or two students, but potentially from several students.

Benefits for the stakeholders

⊘ It would help university staff members to incentivise students to go abroad or to consider the idea of going abroad.

⊘ It would reduce staff's workload and duplication of tasks.

Drawbacks of the platform

The interview included an additional question concerning drawbacks from the platform, which was not part of the survey. The answers will not be split in codes here. There were only a few participants that could find drawbacks of the platform, but their answers seem more like a warning to avoid certain possible risks, then an actual disadvantage of the existence of such a platform.

Examples:

"The most important part is to think of how to engage the students who went abroad in the past, how to make it nice for them as well, and how to make it beneficial for these groups of students. So not only for students who are planning on going, but how can students who went abroad in the past actually benefit from engaging in that platform?"

"Drawbacks would be making sure that it's a positive place for people to be. It's okay to be able to raise issues, but when it just becomes people discussing how terrible things are at this university, it can actually then perpetuate negative feelings, negative impacts."

"A drawback would be if the expectations of the prospective students do not really fit with their peers' experience."

Discussions and conclusion

In this report, the Compass consortium examined different aspects of interactions of stakeholders with students, collaboration between stakeholders and possible improvements, from the perspective of the stakeholders themselves.

The higher education structures, such as institutions and student associations, play an important role in supporting and promoting international mobility to students. However, this role is often accompanied by obstacles and impediments, and partnering with students could be a win-win strategy for both students and stakeholders in order to increase the number of those benefiting from a valuable experience abroad.

Some difficulties occurred during the analysis of the quantitative data, due to an inconsistent number of responses between the different stakeholders. 93% of the answers were provided by HEI representatives which potentially could influence the nature of the answers.

The following paragraphs highlight some of the avenues that could be improved in terms of changing wrong perceptions or thinking of creative ways to build stronger relationships between students and stakeholders.

The results show that there is a certain degree of misperception regarding the importance of the stakeholders' websites as means of information. According to the online study, stakeholders consider websites to be the information channel least appreciated by students, while the results of the previous Compass study done with students, show that websites are the most appreciated.

For very important messages concerning deadlines, risks and important actions to be taken, it is important to find more efficient ways to inform students by clear and yet not overwhelming communication. Emailing is an easy and fast way to contact students, but is it for long and complicated messages? According to the interviewees, students often do not read emails in detail and come back even more confused, which doubles the time and effort for the officer to convey a particular message. Finding new ways to promote and share information is something that is not solved yet and needs further attention.

Some participants have the impression that some of the students fear that they will not be selected because they understand from the promotional materials that only a certain type of students go on to mobility. Thus, it is advisable to broaden the examples showcased, with various groups such as older students, working students, from a low-income background, with a child, with relatives who have care needs, etc.

Finally, a recommendation for student organisations would be to prioritise their time and focus on ways to increase the connections among local students, volunteers, and incoming students.

Annex I

Quantitative research - Questionnaire

Research about the stakeholders practices when helping students preparing mobility

1. Identity
*You are work or volunteer for :
• A higher education institution
• An association
• A youth information center
• Other: please specify

*What is the name of your organisation ?

* Can you specify your position :

*Country:
<Insert list of the EU+ countries> Plus UK

*City:
<Open question>

2. Profile of the student audience

Age range:
• up to 20 years old
• 21 - 25 years old
• 26 - 30 years old
• 31 - 35 years old
• Other: specify

Degree level :
• Bachelor
• Master
• PhD Doctorate (other doctoral qualifications)
• Other :

What kind of mobility do students ask you about ?

• Erasmus+ (semester or year abroad in the cursus)
• Internship
• Internship with Erasmus+ scholarship
• Double degree
• European solidarity corps
• Traineeship
• Apprenticeship
• Turing (semester or year abroad)
• Other :

3. Actions put in place
*What actions are put in place to help inform students about mobility opportunities ?
• Conference/information meetings
• Personalised/individualised support
• Meetings with students back from abroad and testimonies
• Meetings with incoming exchange students from partners
• A permanent Information point
• Forum/Fairs (physical or virtual)
• Mentoring program
• Information campaign
• Erasmus+ Day(s)
• Other :

*What seems to be the most appreciated by the students ?
• Conference/information meetings
• Personalised/individualised support
• Meetings with students back from abroad and testimonies
• Meetings with incoming exchange students from partners
• A permanent Information point
• Forum/Fairs (physical or virtual)
• Mentoring program
• Information campaign
• Erasmus+ Day(s)
• Other :

*What type of information do you provide to students during the orientation phase?
• Accommodation
• Cost of living
• Academic courses
• Benefits of going abroad
• Application process
• Learning Agreement
• Steps to prepare for mobility after being accepted (administrative documents etc.
• Transportation
• Cultural diversity of a country

- official (local) language(s)
- Language of the courses
- Language support
- Buddy/mentoring program
- Visa
- Scholarship/financial support
- Academic recognition
- Other : please specify

4. Educational/communicational materials
*Do you create educational/communicational materials to inform the students ?
- Video
- Guide
- Brochure
- Website
- Intranet
- Social media content
- Poster/flyers
- Tutorial (short video or document showing how to do something for instance finding information, filling the application etc.)
- I don't create materials
- I relay materials from other organisations or partners
- Other :

*If you create materials, what seems to be the most appreciated by students ? (Ranking)
- Video
- Guide
- Brochure
- Website
- Intranet
- Social media content
- Poster/flyers
- Tutorial (short video or document showing how to do something for instance finding information, filling the application etc.)
- I don't create materials
- I relay materials from other organisations or partners
- Other :

*What are the topics of these materials ?
- Accommodation
- Cost of living
- Academic courses
- Benefits of going abroad
- Application process
- Learning Agreement

• Steps to prepare the mobility after being accepted (administrative documents etc.
• Transportation
• Cultural diversity of a country
• official (local) language(s)
• Language of the courses
• Language support
• Buddy/mentoring program
• Visa
• Scholarship/financial support
• Academic recognition
• Other : please specify

5. Application process
*If you are an HEI, what is the application process that students have to go through if they want to go on mobility - select all that apply
• Going to an information meeting
• Interview (small assessment center)
• Gathering all of the required documents
• Filling the application form/files
• Other: please specify

*If you are a HEI, what documents do you require from students ?
• Research questionnaire on chosen destinations
• Proof of requirements skills
• Language certification
• Personal statement/motivation letter
• CV
• Application form
• Other : please specify

*If you are an association or any other kind of youth organisation, do you help students to constitute their application form ?
• Yes
• No

*If yes, how ?
• Helping them with their CV and motivation letter
• Preparing them to language certification
• Preparing them for interviews
• Other : please specify

6. Difficulties encountered by the students
What are the main difficulties encountered by the students in the orientation phase ? (either ranking or scale 1 to 5)

• Choosing a destination
• Application process
• Lack of financial resources
• Fear of not talking and/or understanding, or at least not well, the local language or the academic language.
• Fear of losing their advantages in their hometown (accommodation , scholarship, students job etc.)
• Fear of not having an equivalence between the courses proposed by their home university and their host university
• Fear of social exclusion (fear of being excluded or discriminated against due to one's gender, religion, race, sexual orientation, social background etc.)
• Lack of accessibility or support for students with disabilities
• Other :

*Do you put something in place to solve these difficulties ?
• Information meetings about scholarships
• Personalised support
• Language support/training
• Intercultural (dialogue) training *Intercultural dialogue is an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups belonging to different cultures that leads to a deeper understanding of the other's global perception in order to prepare to potential culture shock
• Other :

7. Relationship with other stakeholders
With which other stakeholder do you work when helping students prepare their mobility?
• HEI
• students associations
• students unions
• Youth center
• Cities
• Accommodation organisations
• National Erasmus+ Agency
• Other : please specify

*How do you ensure that your services complement one another ?
<Open answer>

8. Preparation
*Once the application has been done and approved, what are the main difficulties encountered by students ?
• The learning agreement
• Finding an accommodation
• Planning of timetable
• Getting a visa (plus evidence of finance for visa application)
• Providing all necessary documents
• Insurance

• Transportation
• Fear of departure
• Leaving friends and family
• Other : please specify

*Do you :
• Help students with these topics (unilaterally)
• Leave the host HEI take care of it
• Work with the host HEI to provide help/solutions to the students

*If you don't collaborate with the host HEI in providing support to students, do you :
• Provide individualised support to help them prepare their mobility (administrative paperwork, finding an accommodation etc.)
• Relay useful information
• Refer to the right actors
• Put students in contact with students that did a mobility in the HEI/city
• Organise language training
• Organise intercultural training
• Other : please specify

About which topics ?
• Academic cursus/learning agreement
• Visa
• Insurance
• Accommodation
• Language
• Interculturality
• Fear of departure
• Transportation

*If you work with the host HEI, how ?

*About which topics ?
• Academic cursus/learning agreement
• Visa
• Insurance
• Accommodation
• Language
• Interculturality
• Fear of departure
• Transportation

9. Peer-to-peer
*Do you put something in place to put in contact former mobility students and potentiel outgoing students ?
*If yes, is it :

• An automated matching tool
• A non-automated matching tool
• Transmission of former mobility students' emails
• Testimonies meetings
• Other :
• Nothing

*In your opinion, what are the main benefits of peer-to-peer ? - On a scale from 1 to 5
• Access to testimonies from students that had a mobility experience
• Complementarity with the supports/services proposed by the HEI
• Mutual help between students
• Development of social skills
• Promotion of international mobility
• Reassuring students preparing a mobility
• Other :

10. Future platform

*If a digital platform existed where students wishing to go on mobility could talk and ask questions to other students (either local students from the destination of interest or students that went on mobility there), would you recommend it to your students ?
• Yes
• No
• I don't know

*According to you, what would be the main advantages of this platform ?
• Encouraging students to go on mobility
• Promoting the city/HEI/association
• Reassuring students on the edge of going
• Offering the possibility to ask questions about the destination that a student would not ask official representatives of HEI
• Valuing the experience of students that already went on mobility
• Reinforcing the peer-to-peer

*If you are a HEI, would you be ready to award ECTS credits to students of your university giving information about it on this platform ?
• Yes
• No
• I don't know

*What methods could you use to entice students returning from mobility to share their experience in this platform and to inform other students ?
<Open answer>

*Would you be ready to help moderate the content relating to your city/HEI ?
• Yes
• No

*What would be your use of this platform ? How would it serve you ?
• Promoting the organisation
• Promoting the city
• Promoting a mobility experience
• Moderating contents
• Other : please specify

Annex II

Qualitative research - interview questions

I.   Identity

1.   What type of organization are you working/volunteering for?
2.   In which country is it located?
3.   What is your position inside your organization? What are your main responsibilities in your current job/volunteering position?
4.   How long have you been working/volunteering there? Did you previously work in similar roles? For how long?

II.   Mobility procedures

5.   What would be the standard procedure for a student interested in going on mobility to get information?
6.   Do you have information available on your website? If so, of what kind?
7.   How do students reach you if they are interested in a mobility experience?
8.   What kind of activities does your institution organize for students planning to go abroad?
9.   How are the activities and information provided adapted to the students' needs? Do you have any sort of evaluation mechanism in which students can leave their comments about the information giving process?
10.   Through those activities, do you put students who already went on mobility in contact with those who are considering it?
11.   Do you provide any additional support/information to students from disadvantaged groups?

III.   Profile of students that reach out

12.   On average, in which degree are the students who reach out to you?
13.   What type of information do students request when considering going on mobility?
14.   What are your main challenges when it comes to conveying the necessary information to students?
15.   Have you noticed certain students that, even though they are interested, don't reach out to you? If so, what do you think are the reasons for this?
16.   What do you think could be done to support students that don't reach out? How to make international student mobility more appealing to them?
17.   Do you identify any topics/actions where you could improve your support to students ?

IV.   Collaboration between structures

18.   Do you know any other stakeholders involved in the preparation and orientation of student mobility? If so, what is your relation with them? (If needed, provide example of ESN)

19.   What is the difference between you and other different stakeholders? What information does each one convey?

20.   If you receive a question you don't know how to answer, do you usually refer to any other information source/organisation that could help?

V.   Peer-to-peer

21.   Would you consider peer-to-peer feedback to be important for students in the preparation of a student mobility abroad?

22.   In the activities/actions you organise for students seeking to go abroad, do you put students who already have been on mobility in contact with those who are considering it?

23.   If you do, what are the main challenges you face when putting them in contact?

24.   Do students request you directly any peer-to-peer feedback regarding the institution, city or country they are considering applying for?

25.   In your opinion, what are the benefits of a peer-to-peer approach when preparing for student mobility abroad?

26.   What are the most important topics when talking to their peers? How do they differ from the ones offered by your organization or others involved in their support?

VI.   Future platform

27.   If a digital platform existed where students could share their mobility experience and answer questions of students planning a mobility, would you recommend it to them?

28.   What would you expect from this platform?

29.   If it was to support you in your current role, what would this platform have to include?

30.   Do you think students would trust information if it were from other students who are non-accredited people? If not, what would you recommend to mitigate this?

31.   Imagine you would have to market this platform: how would you motivate former mobility students to leave their feedback/testimonies?

32.   What could be the possible benefits from such a platform?

33.   What could be the possible drawbacks?

Authors:
Helena Alves & Viktoriya Terzieva, European University Foundation
Alice Zaglia, Erasmus Student Network France

Contributors:
The Compass project consortium