WP3/A3 – REX PROJECT

Exploring Barriers and Drivers of Mobility - A Multi-Stakeholder Analysis

Findings - Analysis - Recommendations

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Overview

Student mobility, once seen as a hallmark of the European Higher Education experience, no longer holds the same symbolic or practical appeal for many students. While financial and administrative barriers remain relevant, they do not fully explain the observed disengagement. Increasingly, students report that mobility feels less unique, less essential, and less aligned with their individual expectations and values. The REX project was launched in response to this shift, with the objective of rethinking how mobility is perceived and experienced, starting from the very first point at which students are confronted with the decision to engage in a mobility programme. By better understanding how this moment of choice is shaped, REX seeks to contribute to a reinvigorated, more meaningful vision of mobility.

To ground this reflection, the project has so far completed **two key phases**. First, a **literature mapping (Work Package 2)** was conducted to identify how student mobility has been conceptualised, promoted, and experienced over the past decade, with a particular focus on changing expectations and participation trends. This was followed by an **empirical investigation (Work Package 3)**, involving surveys and focus groups with mobility coordinators and both mobile and non-mobile students. This phase aimed to capture the nuanced factors that influence student decisions, including motivations, perceived obstacles, and the symbolic value (or lack thereof) attached to Erasmus+ today. Together, these two phases provide an evidence-based understanding of the challenges that must be addressed to make mobility more relevant, appealing, and accessible.

The present report focuses on the analysis of findings from the empirical phase (WP3) and serves as a critical bridge to the next stage of the project. In Work Package 4, REX will develop and test an innovative technological intervention, a Virtual Reality prototype designed to transform the way students explore and select their mobility destinations. The insights presented here directly inform the design of that tool, ensuring it responds to real student concerns and expectations. More broadly, this report contributes to the project's overarching ambition: to reimagine the mobility experience in a way that speaks to today's students and reaffirms its transformative potential in a changing European landscape.

Introduction

Work Package 3 (WP3), titled "Deconstructing Student Mobility," occupies a central position within the REX project's overall structure. It serves as a critical link between the insights generated during the literature mapping phase (WP2) and the technological innovation to follow in WP4. While WP2 identified conceptual and empirical gaps in current research on Erasmus+ mobility, particularly concerning how students form their perceptions and make decisions, WP3 responds directly to these blind spots by collecting original, large-scale empirical data. The goal is to better understand students' and International Relations Officers' (IROs) lived experiences, expectations, and preferences surrounding mobility. These findings are not only significant in their own right, but are also intended to directly inform the development of a Virtual Reality tool that will make the destination selection process more engaging and meaningful for students.

The first phase of WP3 involved the design and distribution of a comprehensive survey targeting both students and IROs across participating Higher Education Institutions. This survey was constructed to move beyond the common focus on barriers to mobility, and instead capture students' broader decision-making processes - from the moment they become aware of Erasmus+ opportunities, to the factors that influence whether and how they choose to participate. Questions addressed not only logistical considerations but also students' motivations, values, preferred modes of information, and their perception of institutional support. The inclusion of IROs in the survey adds a valuable comparative dimension, offering insight into how institutions communicate mobility opportunities and how those efforts are received.

In parallel with the survey, WP3 also involved the organisation of qualitative focus group interviews at each of the four participating HEIs. These sessions provided space for deeper reflection on students' and staff members' personal experiences with Erasmus+, capturing a more nuanced understanding of mobility as it is felt and lived. Focus groups allowed for exploration of topics not easily accessible through standardised surveys, such as the symbolic value of mobility, the impact of peer influence, the importance of destination branding, and perceptions of digital communication channels (institutional websites, social media, promotional videos, testimonials, etc.). They also offered IROs the opportunity to share best practices, recurring challenges, and their own interpretations of what shapes student engagement.

The combination of survey data and qualitative insights results in a comprehensive empirical foundation that not only enriches the academic understanding of mobility, but also fulfils a crucial operational

function. The report emerging from WP3 presents an integrated analysis of these findings and includes a requirement analysis for the next phase of the project. This requirement analysis will guide the design and development of the Virtual Reality proof of concept in WP4, ensuring that the digital tool is grounded in real user needs, preferences, and behavioural patterns. By rooting technological innovation in robust empirical evidence, WP3 ensures that REX's final outputs are both pedagogically sound and experientially relevant for the next generation of Erasmus+ students.

Part. 1. Understanding the context, Defining objectives

1.1. Context and main issues

In a post-COVID context, student mobility is once again at the centre of attention.
Travel restrictions and digital learning during the pandemic deeply affected students' perceptions of what it means to study abroad. Through this project, we wanted to understand how these changes reshaped motivations, barriers, and expectations.

Our study covers five European countries - France, Luxembourg, Norway, Slovenia, and Türkiye. More precisely, we explore:

- the factors that influence the decision to go on mobility and the choice of destination;
- the roles of different stakeholders as perceived by students - from administrative staff to teachers and families;
- and finally, the barriers and difficulties encountered at each stage of the mobility process.

The ultimate goal is to provide evidence that can guide universities in improving their internationalisation policies and practices. Our work on mobility is part of a wider, iterative process between several Work Packages.

- **WP2** focused on *mapping the existing literature* and analysing previous studies on mobility decisions.
- **WP3**, which is our part, aims to *deconstruct* mobility behaviour through surveys and qualitative studies.
- **WP4** will then take our findings to design a *virtual experience tool* that can help future students prepare for mobility.

In other words, the idea is to move from *theoretical understanding* to *practical innovation*.

Each WP feeds the next one - WP2 gives us the framework, WP3 provides empirical data, and WP4 transforms these insights into a concrete tool for students

1.2. Review of literature: main features

The methodological and conceptual approach of WP3 is grounded in the comprehensive literature mapping conducted in WP2, complemented by more recent studies (Kirloskar & Inamdar, 2021; ESNsurvey, 2024; Erasmus GAP survey, 2025). This review synthesized a substantial body of academic and grey literature to establish a robust foundation for our empirical investigation. The landscape of student mobility research is characterized by several well-established yet dynamically evolving thematic clusters, which collectively informed the design of our survey and qualitative instruments.

The extant literature reveals that student mobility is a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon. The following key features, synthesized from the WP2 report, emerged as central to understanding contemporary mobility trends and directly shaped the research questions for WP3:

- The evolving push-pull factor framework: The decision to undertake a mobility period is often analyzed through the lens of push-pull factors. **Push factors**, which propel students away from their home country, consistently include desires for personal development, intercultural competence, and language acquisition. **Pull factors**, which attract students to a specific host destination, traditionally encompass the academic reputation of the institution, quality of life, and career prospects. However, recent studies, including the ESNsurvey (2024), indicate a shift where the intrinsic value of experience (the "push") often outweighs traditional academic "pull" factors. Conversely, barriers remain potent, with financial constraints, administrative hurdles, academic integration concerns, and family attachments consistently cited as major impediments, creating a constant tension that shapes student decision-making.

- Structural **asymmetries and uneven mobility flows**: A macro-level analysis of mobility data reveals persistent and significant disparities in participation across Europe. The literature clearly identifies patterns of certain countries and institutions acting as net "senders" while others are net "receivers". These asymmetrical flows are not accidental; they reflect deeper structural inequalities within the European Higher Education Area, influenced by factors such as perceived prestige of national education systems, language of instruction, economic disparities, and the strength of existing institutional networks. A comparative analysis highlights that these trends necessitate targeted, context-specific strategies rather than one-size-fits-all mobility policies.

- The transformation of mobility's symbolic value: While the instrumental benefit of enhanced employability remains a powerful driver, research suggests the **symbolic value of an Erasmus+ experience is transforming**. Once seen as a unique tool for building a European identity, mobility is now increasingly subjected to a cost-benefit analysis by students. It is perceived as less unique in a globalized world and must compete with other life and career goals, such as internships or early entry into the labour market. The literature indicates that the impact on identity is also more

nuanced; while mobility can foster a sense of European belonging, this outcome is not universal and is mediated by individual background, the nature of the experience, and the destination.

- The digital shift and new formats: The literature points to a significant digital transformation, encompassing the **rise of Internationalization at Home (IaH) and virtual mobility**. These digital and hybrid formats are seen as a means to broaden access, though they are not considered a full substitute for physical mobility.

By situating our work within these established and emerging perspectives, WP3 not only examines current patterns of participation but also directly addresses the critical questions of equity, inclusion, and personal meaning in contemporary student mobility, thereby filling identified gaps with original, comparative data.

1.3. Aims and Specific objectives of the study

Building upon the conceptual foundation established in the literature review, this study aims to conduct a granular, empirical investigation into the decision-making processes and influencing factors surrounding student mobility within the contemporary European context. The research is specifically designed to move beyond a **mere identification of barriers and levers, seeking instead to understand their relative weight, their interplay, and how they are subjectively experienced by students across different national and institutional settings**. The ultimate goal is to generate actionable insights that can inform the development of more relevant, appealing, and accessible mobility programmes.

1. The specific objectives of this study, to be explored across the five participating European countries (France, Luxembourg, Norway, Slovenia, and Turkey), are as follows:
    a. <u>To map and analyse the multi-faceted determinants of mobility decisions. This involves investigating the complex interplay of</u>:
        i. Individual and socio-economic profiles: Including gender, age, family background, and past travel experiences.
        ii. Academic context: Such as the level of study, discipline, and the influence of university-level incentive policies and communication strategies.
        iii. Value systems and soft factors: Exploring the role of personal values (e.g., innovation, ecology, political systems) alongside cultural, discovery, and tourism-related motivations.
        iv. Perceptions of attractiveness and quality of life: Assessing the importance of factors like destination city/country image, campus infrastructure, cost of living,

and a university's commitment to social responsibility and sustainable development.

b. <u>To identify and assess the relative impact of key barriers and levers to mobility participation</u>. This objective focuses on understanding not just what obstacles exist, but how they are perceived and which are most decisive in a student's choice to engage or not. It also seeks to identify potential catalysts that could effectively encourage participation.

c. <u>To derive an evidence-based requirement analysis for technological innovation</u>. The findings will be synthesised into a clear set of user needs and functional specifications to directly guide the design and development of the Virtual Reality proof of concept in WP4. This ensures the resulting tool is grounded in the authentic concerns, expectations, and behavioural patterns of its intended users.

By achieving these objectives, this study will provide a comprehensive, cross-national understanding of the contemporary student mobility landscape, creating a critical evidence base to reimagine and reinvigorate the Erasmus+ experience for a new generation of students.

Part 2. Research design and methodology

2.1 Framework

The main objective of the WP3 is to understand **how Erasmus+ mobility is perceived and experienced by both students and International Relations Officers (IROs), with particular attention to the factors that encourage participation (drivers) and those that discourage or limit engagement (barriers)**.

The theoretical approach guiding WP3 combines perspectives from the sociology of education, mobility studies, and European policy analysis. Erasmus+ mobility is understood not only as an individual educational experience, but also as a social and institutional process influenced by wider structures. Previous research highlights that participation in mobility programmes depends on a combination of structural factors (such as socio-economic background, institutional resources, and national funding mechanisms) and individual factors (including motivation, perceived benefits, and personal confidence). These dimensions interact to shape students' decisions and experiences before, during, and after mobility.

To explore these dynamics, the WP3 adopts a **mixed-methods design that integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches**. A cross-national survey provides a broad overview of participation trends and attitudes towards mobility, helping to identify patterns and variations across countries and groups. Complementing this, focus groups and semi-structured interviews allow for a deeper understanding of personal experiences and institutional practices, shedding light on the meanings participants attach to mobility, as well as the challenges they encounter.

This combination of methods makes it possible to connect statistical trends with lived experiences, offering a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Erasmus+ mobility today. The integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence not only enhances the robustness of the findings but also supports the formulation of evidence-based recommendations for improving accessibility, inclusiveness, and the overall impact of mobility programmes across Europe.

2.2. Methodology : combining quantitative and qualitative approaches

In WP3, our main objective was to understand mobility behaviour and the mobility process across the student journey. We designed the survey to examine profiles, determinants, and values that shape mobility choices. The research combined quantitative methods - such as econometric analysis and regression models - with qualitative exploration through interviews.

We relied on recent empirical studies and data from the Erasmus Student Network survey (end of 2024). The model specification was then **refined through individual interviews - one hour per student** - to capture nuances that numbers alone could not explain. Altogether, this created a robust foundation for identifying what truly drives or hinders mobility.

For the quantitative part, we launched an **online survey via LimeSurvey[1].** The target was around 400 respondents - about 100 per partner institution - and we reached **354 valid responses**. Data collection took place between May and September 2025, with intermediate checks to ensure balance between countries. The questionnaire combined closed and open questions to gather information about demographics, previous international experiences, motivations, barriers, satisfaction, and perceptions. After cleaning the data, we ran both descriptive statistics and regression analyses to identify key trends and relationships.

The qualitative study was initially structured around **20 focus groups of 6 students and 5 interviews[2]** with International Relations Officers (IROs). In practice, the implementation differed from this planned outline: **9 IRO interviews** were carried out and in total **12 focus groups with a total of 103 students**. Four focus groups were organised by the French partner, three by the Turkish partner and five by the Slovenian partner, while no focus groups could be carried out by the Norwegian partner. Focus groups explored topics such as:

- stereotypes about destination countries,
- the image of the "ideal university",
- personal experiences of integration and support.

The analysis combined semiotic, discourse, and rhetorical methods to interpret how students express their experiences and expectations.

Preliminary results, collected in October 2025, already highlight rich contrasts between countries and underline recurring themes such as financial stress, bureaucracy, and the search for belonging.

The research design for WP3 implements a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach, strategically integrating quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a comprehensive analysis of student mobility

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[1] The survey used in the study is provided in the appendix.
[2] The activities carried out as part of the study are provided in the appendix.

decision-making. This methodological framework was operationalized through a carefully planned sequence of data collection and analysis phases, ensuring that each stage builds upon and informs the next.

The implementation followed a clear temporal and logical progression:

- **Phase 1 (Exploratory): Preliminary qualitative investigation to refine research instruments;**
- **Phase 2 (Quantitative): Large-scale survey to map patterns and distributions;**
- **Phase 3 (Qualitative): In-depth focus groups and interviews to explain and contextualize findings**.

This sequential design enabled both breadth and depth of understanding, with the quantitative phase identifying what patterns exist across the multinational sample, and the qualitative phase explaining why these patterns emerge and how they are experienced by different stakeholders. The integration of these approaches at the analysis stage provides unique analytical leverage, allowing for triangulation of findings and the development of nuanced interpretations that would be impossible through either method alone.

The methodology was specifically crafted to address the complex, **multi-layered nature of mobility decisions**, capturing both structural determinants and individual experiences while maintaining the comparative perspective essential for a multinational study.
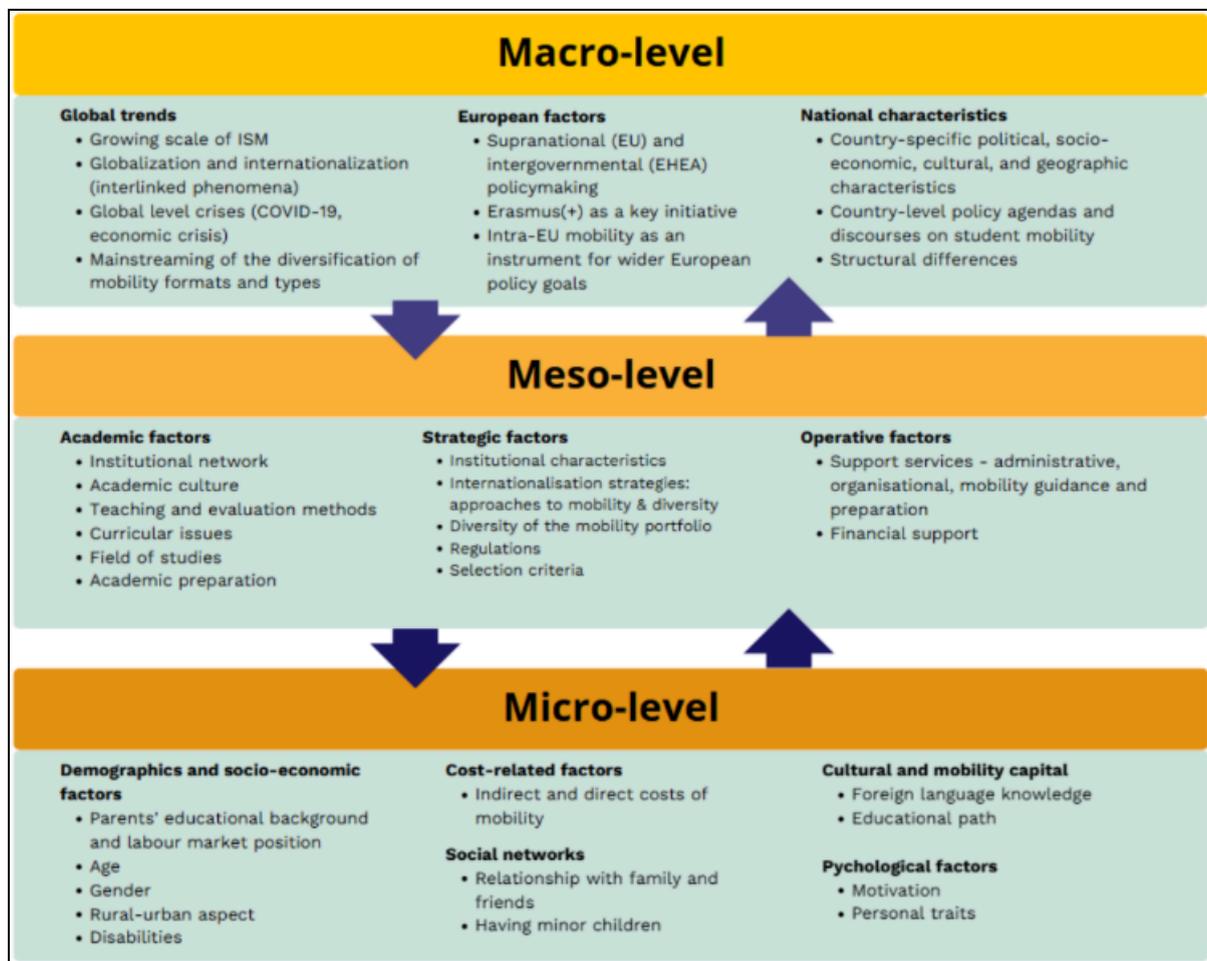
For a better understanding of the mobility behavior (profiles, determinants, values, the mobility process across the personal student life), a complementary research was implemented in order to design the survey methodology (hypothesis, information, innovation by combining quantitative and analysis approaches)

In particular, we based on some more recent empirical micro-studies (ESN Survey (end 2024), Erasmus Student network[3]) at individual level for an accurate investigation and foundations of micro surveys (sampling size, time period, methodology, questionnaire typology of statistical tests).

This complementary research lead us to design the following empirical model to be explored and analysed with both quantitative and qualitative studies:

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[3] Erasmus Student Network AISBL, *ESNsurvey - 15th Edition: Making Quality Mobility a Reality for All*, 2024.

Macro-level

Global trends
- Growing scale of ISM
- Globalization and internationalization (interlinked phenomena)
- Global level crises (COVID-19, economic crisis)
- Mainstreaming of the diversification of mobility formats and types

European factors
- Supranational (EU) and intergovernmental (EHEA) policymaking
- Erasmus(+) as a key initiative
- Intra-EU mobility as an instrument for wider European policy goals

National characteristics
- Country-specific political, socio-economic, cultural, and geographic characteristics
- Country-level policy agendas and discourses on student mobility
- Structural differences

Meso-level

Academic factors
- Institutional network
- Academic culture
- Teaching and evaluation methods
- Curricular issues
- Field of studies
- Academic preparation

Strategic factors
- Institutional characteristics
- Internationalisation strategies: approaches to mobility & diversity
- Diversity of the mobility portfolio
- Regulations
- Selection criteria

Operative factors
- Support services - administrative, organisational, mobility guidance and preparation
- Financial support

Micro-level

Demographics and socio-economic factors
- Parents' educational background and labour market position
- Age
- Gender
- Rural-urban aspect
- Disabilities

Cost-related factors
- Indirect and direct costs of mobility

Social networks
- Relationship with family and friends
- Having minor children

Cultural and mobility capital
- Foreign language knowledge
- Educational path

Pychological factors
- Motivation
- Personal traits

Source : Figure reproduced from the Erasmus GAP project Report (p. 7)[4]

2.2.1. Combining quantitative and qualitative approaches: why and for what?

WP3 aims to design and implement an online, predominantly **quantitative survey targeting 400 respondents** (100 per partner), administered via LimeSurvey. The questionnaire is developed using a random sampling approach and is informed by the outcomes of WP2, the integration of multiple data sources, and **an exploratory interview conducted at UVSQ on April 30, followed by a testing phase**.

The questionnaire design and testing are carried out between April and mid-May, with a finalization deadline of May 23. Online data collection is conducted from May 23 to mid-June, and statistical data processing takes place between mid-June and September.

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[4] Erdei, L., Kasza, G., Szulovszky, M., Laczik, D., & Dorner, H., *Erasmus GAP - Understanding and Addressing the Mobility Gap in Higher Education. Desk Research Report*, ELTE Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Institute of Research on Adult Education and Knowledge Management, Budapest, Hungary, 2024, p. 7.

The **analysis includes descriptive statistics, identification of key trends, comparative analyses, and bivariate analyses (regression analysis)**. The quantitative survey is complemented by qualitative research conducted in July, including interviews, focus groups, and open-ended questions, to enhance understanding of mobility decision-making processes, identify barriers and potential solutions, and capture themes feeding into the Virtual Experience (WP4).

The **qualitative component allows investigation of complex issues that are not fully addressed through structured questionnaires, such as psychological barriers, difficult experiences, and the nuanced impact of mobility**. This questionnaire proposal represents a structural framework based on the information currently available, and the final wording of survey questions will be refined during the quantitative survey design phase.

2.2.2. Sample description and research procedure

a. Exploratory phase

In preparation for the survey, an exploratory phase was indeed conducted on 30 April 2025. This phase was designed to gather initial, qualitative insights into student perceptions, which would directly inform the structure and content of the quantitative questionnaire.

The participants of these individual interviews were four student volunteers from the Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines (UVSQ). They were recruited through a university-wide communication calling for volunteers to participate in a study on student mobility. The cohort was composed of 1 male and 3 female students, representing a range of academic levels, from Bachelor to Master degree. The participants were enrolled in Social Sciences, Business and administration, and international law. To create a conducive environment and as a token of appreciation for their time and contribution, a breakfast was offered on-site at the beginning of the session.

The exploratory phase was organized as **a series of individual, semi-structured interviews**. This approach was chosen to allow for in-depth, personal accounts without the risk of groupthink or dominant voices influencing individual opinions. The sessions were held in person at the UVSQ campus in two separate, quiet rooms. To optimize time, two interviews were conducted simultaneously, with each one being facilitated by one of the researchers involved in the project. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was guided by a pre-established interview protocol that outlined the key themes and open-ended

questions to be explored. This ensured consistency across the interviews while allowing for flexibility to probe interesting leads as they emerged during the conversations.

With the explicit consent of all the participants, the interviews were recorded to ensure the accuracy of the data collection.[5] The recordings were then transcribed verbatim. The analysis of the transcript was qualitative and thematic. It was initially framed by the key concepts identified in the WP2 literature review, but the coding process also remained open to inductive categories that emerged directly from the students discourse. The primary objective of this analysis was to distill the most salient and recurring themes related to how students conceptualize and experience mobility.

The findings from this qualitative analysis were fundamental. They provided a nuanced, ground-level understanding that was directly leveraged to orient the construction of the main survey questionnaire. Specifically, this phase ensured that the survey included and prioritized questions on the issues that students themselves identified as the most critical, thereby enhancing the relevance and validity of the research instrument.

b. Survey for collecting quantitative data (WP3.A1)

i. Needs and specific objectives of the survey

The online survey was the main tool for collecting quantitative data to have a better understanding of student mobility. The survey was designed to address the core objectives of the REX project, which include:

1. **Identifying motivation**: To uncover the primary drivers for students who undertake international mobility.
2. **Understanding barriers**: To understand the obstacles and perceived challenges that prevent students from participating in mobility programs.
3. **Analysing institutional impact**: To assess the influence of universities policies, financial support, and social factors on students' mobility decisions.
4. **Evaluating awareness**: To measure students's knowledge and awareness of support mechanisms and programs such as Erasmus +.

The survey targeted a diverse population of students enrolled in European universities, including those who had previously participated in mobility, those planning to do so, and those with no current interest, ensuring a **holistic understanding of the student landscape**.

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[5] Ethical considerations are detailed on page 134.

The questionnaire was created and distributed online using the LimeSurvey platform. The survey was designed to be comprehensive yet efficient, with an estimated completion time of 5 to 15 minutes. It was available in three languages: French, Turkish and English. This multilingual approach was implemented to ensure a better understanding of the questions by students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. The English version was deemed sufficient for participants from Slovenia and Norway, as English is widely spoken and understood in these countries.

The **questionnaire contained a total of 56 items**, **organized into several logical sections**. This structure allows us to gather detailed information on different aspects of student mobility and to tailor the following questions based on previous answers (using skip logic). For example, students who hadn't been on mobility answered different questions than those who had.

The data and variables collected can be broken down into the following categories:

- **Socio-demographic profile**: This section gathered basic information about the respondents, such as their gender, year of birth, nationality, and the country where they are studying. It also asked about their current level of education and their fields of study.
- **Previous international experience**: These questions identified if the students had any experience abroad before starting university, such as traveling, studying in secondary school, or working. It also asked about the geographic regions where these experiences took place.
- **Mobility history and types**: It first asked students if they had ever participated in a student mobility program, and if they had, we asked more detailed questions about the type of mobility, the destination country, the duration, and how many times they had been abroad.
- **Motivations and decision-making**: For students who had been on mobility, this part explored their reasons for going. They were asked to rank their motivations, when they decided to go, who influenced their decisions, and what factors were important in choosing their host country and university.
- **Information sources**: This part investigated how students found out about mobility opportunities.
- **Barriers and difficultie**s: The questionnaire analyzed the challenges students face, by asking about problems encountered before, during and after mobility experience.
- **Plans and perceived obstacles for non-mobile students**: For students who hadn't been on mobility, we asked if they planned to go. If they did, we want to know what was holding them back.

If they didn't, we want to know what would motivate them to go or what obstacles would need to be removed.

- **University's role and communication**: This section assessed the students' perception of their home university and satisfaction with its support services. It asked if the university encourages mobility, how it communicates about the Erasmus + program, and whether students find this communication sufficient and easy to understand.
- **General perceptions and impact of mobility**: Finally, we asked all students about their view on the main benefits of mobility and the personal qualities needed to go abroad.

iii. Sample and data collection

From this online questionnaire, a total of **354 complete responses** were collected from the partner countries:

- France: 164
- Norway: 85
- Türkiye: 93
- Slovenia: 10
- Other countries: 2

The "Other countries" category includes respondents who were not from or studying in one of the main partner countries. The initial goal was to collect 80-100 responses from each country to allow for meaningful comparison between them.

iv. Analysis methods

For the analysis, we first use **descriptive statistics** to summarise the profiles of participants, including socio-demographic characteristics, mobility experiences, and prior international exposure. This allows us to map the diversity of student experiences and identify patterns in participation.

We then apply **econometric methods**, specifically a **qualitative regression model**, to examine the determinants of mobility outcomes. This approach helps to identify which factors - such as administrative support, financial resources, language skills, or emotional preparedness - significantly influence the likelihood of successfully completing mobility steps. The model also allows us to detect differences across subgroups (e.g., by nationality, level of study, or field), highlighting critical thresholds and barriers that can inform the design of targeted interventions like the VR tool.

c. Interviews and group activities (Focus group) for collecting qualitative data (WP3.A2)

i. Needs and specific objectives

Our qualitative survey aims to explore the meaning attributed to international mobility by two types of stakeholders in the international university ecosystem: students and administrative staff in charge of international relations. It is based on focus groups with students and semi-structured interviews with international relations officers (IROs).

The **overall objective is not only descriptive (identifying obstacles or practices), but also interpretative**: it seeks to understand how actors construct meaning around the 'international mobility experience', how they represent, anticipate, evaluate and justify it. The mobility experience is thus viewed as a complex process that is emotional, symbolic, organisational and discursive.

First, the survey analyses the student experience of international mobility based on focus groups conducted in three countries (France, Slovenia, Turkey). These **focus groups aim to identify the needs, expectations, obstacles, representations and levers perceived by students, while encouraging collective discussion focused on areas for improvement**.

Secondly, the survey is based on semi-structured interviews conducted with international relations administrative staff in five European countries. These **interviews aim to understand how IROs interpret the motivations and obstacles to mobility, how they describe the support processes, and what categories and representations they use when talking about student audiences, destinations and partner institutions**.

This dual approach responds to a central need of the project: **to cross-reference student and institutional perspectives in order to analyse convergences, tensions and discrepancies in the construction of the international mobility experience, and to identify relevant levers for action at different levels** (local, national, European).

ii. Questionnaire and Interview procedure

Semi-structured interviews: research design and survey logic

Qualitative research conducted **with administrative staff** is based on semi-structured interviews. This methodological choice is justified by **their ability to support a survey focused on the construction of**

meaning. The interviews combine prepared questions - ensuring minimal comparability between cases and countries - with the possibility of exploring the interviewees' interpretations in depth as the conversation progresses.

From this **hermeneutic perspective**, the interview does not aim solely to collect objectifiable facts, but to **gain insight into how IROs narrate their experiences, justify their choices, attribute causality and assess situations**. The investigator thus participates in the production of the material by supporting the development of meanings through dialogue, in particular through follow-up questions and further exploration.

The semi-structured interview **also makes it possible to reveal often implicit dimensions of organisational practices**: norms, institutional evidence, rationalisations, representations of audiences and perceptions of risks. This property is particularly relevant in the case of international relations, where barriers to mobility can be administrative, financial, symbolic and relational.

Finally, the **comparative approach between countries and between administrative roles requires a data collection tool capable of combining comparability and openness**, which is precisely what the semi-structured format provides.

<u>Participants</u>

The sample was structured to cover different levels of responsibility and different national configurations of student mobility:

- **France**: four people were interviewed (director of international relations, director of student mobility, incoming mobility officer, outgoing mobility officer).
- **Slovenia**: one international relations officer.
- **Norway**: one international relations officer.
- **Greece**: one international relations officer.
- **Turkey**: two international relations officers.

The interviews were conducted in English, except in France (French) and Turkey (Turkish). They lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours, which is consistent with the semi-structured format and the diversity of experiences reported.

<u>Interview guide: main topics</u>

The interview guide **explains the purpose of the research (barriers to mobility, practices, levers for action) and emphasises the search for experiences, perceptions and ideas rather than 'right answers'**. The main topics covered are:

- Career path and organisation of the international relations department
- Institutional mobility strategy
- Management and support process (before, during and after mobility)
- Profile of mobile and non-mobile students
- Perceived barriers, concerns and representations (including stereotypes)
- Partnership and inter-institutional relations
- Proposals for improvement at European, national and local levels

These themes allow us to understand the mobility experience as **a processual and multi-dimensional trajectory, partially shaped by institutional choices and organisational practices**.

Data collection procedure

The interviews were recorded with the explicit consent of the participants, in a confidential and anonymised setting. [6]The materials were transcribed and then translated into French and English to enable a comparative analysis between countries using a common working language. Transcription and translation are considered to be methodological steps in their own right, contributing to the construction of the analytical corpus.

iii. Focus groups

Epistemological positioning and relevance of focus groups

The focus group protocol is part of a qualitative interpretative philosophy that **focuses on the construction of meaning in context, linguistic and semiotic mediation, and the social uses of categories**. Focus groups are particularly relevant for studying phenomena that are open to interpretation, such as the experience of international mobility, whose meanings are negotiated, confronted and sometimes contested during exchanges.

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[6] Ethical considerations are detailed on page 134.

Methodologically, focus groups allow us **to observe not only individual opinions, but also the interactional processes of justification, disagreement, validation and revision of interpretations**. They thus make it possible to observe the dynamics of meaning production.

<u>Survey design and organisation of focus groups</u>

The survey is based on **11 focus groups**: 4 in Slovenia, 3 in Turkey and 3 in France. The discussions were recorded, transcribed and translated to enable comparative analysis. In addition to the verbal exchanges, the visuals produced by the students (drawings, maps, collective materials) were collected and integrated into the corpus, in accordance with a broader conception of qualitative data combining discourse and images.

The focus groups were structured around collective intelligence mechanisms aimed at exploring obstacles, levers and courses of action in terms of student mobility.

Workshop 1: Fears, representations and obstacles

- *The symbolic suitcase*
- *The obstacle course*
- *The wall of preconceived ideas*

These activities aim to externalise the emotional, symbolic and practical dimensions of mobility, to make stereotypes visible and to encourage the co-construction of meanings and solutions.

Workshop 2: The ideal university for mobility

The second workshop is based on the collective construction of a mind map of the services, support and mechanisms that an ideal university should offer to encourage mobility. This activity allows participants to collectively structure priorities and produce a semiotic object that can be directly analysed.

The analysis of focus groups combines several complementary qualitative frameworks:

- Interpretative phenomenological analysis
- Critical discourse analysis (CDA)
- Narrative analysis
- Membership categorisation analysis (MCA)
- Semiotic analysis of visuals

This plurality makes it possible to capture experiences of meaning, discourse, narratives, social categorisations and visual productions in order to reflect the complexity of the student experience of international mobility.
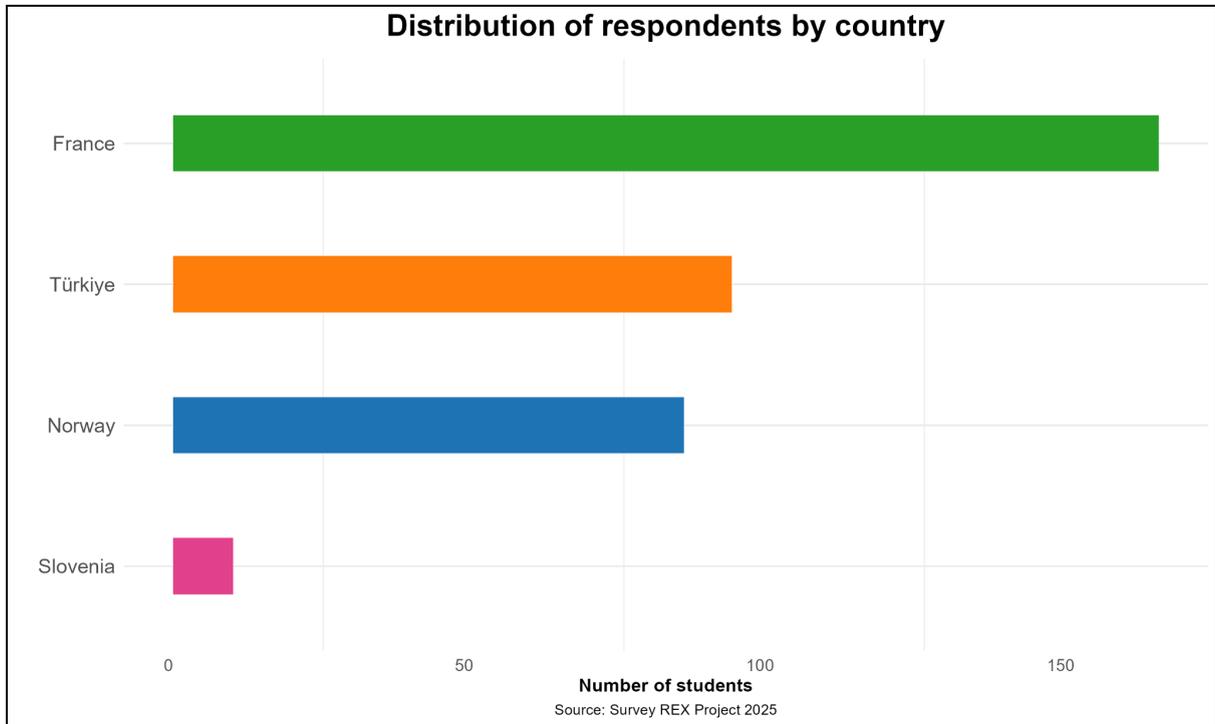
Part 3. Survey : data analysis and main findings

3.1. Profile analysis and results

3.1.1. Socio-demographic profile of the respondents

This section outlines the key socio-demographic **characteristics of the 354 participants in the study**. The sample is multinational, and encompasses a diverse range of academic backgrounds, providing a rich cross-section of the European student.

a.   Geographical distribution and sample composition

The sample is composed of respondents from four European countries, though the distribution is uneven. **France constitutes the largest national group with 164 individuals (47% of the total sample), followed closely by Türkiye (93 individuals, 26%) and Norway (85 individuals, 24%). The Slovenian cohort is significantly smaller, with only 10 participants (2,8%)**, which should be considered when interpreting findings related to this group. This distribution allows for substantive comparative analysis between France, Norway and Türkiye, while observations on Slovenia are more indicative.

Distribution of respondents by country

France

Türkiye

Norway

Slovenia

0	50	100	150

Number of students
Source: Survey REX Project 2025

This gives us a strong representation of Western, Northern, and Eastern European perspectives.
It also reflects the diversity of institutional contexts within the project.

The dominance of French respondents is expected, given UVSQ's coordination role in the data collection.

b. Gender and age profile

The overall respondent pool has a higher proportion of females (66%) than male (31%). In terms of gender, roughly **two out of three respondents are female**.

A small percentage of respondents identified as another gender (1,4%) or preferred not to indicate their gender (1,7%). However, notable national variations exist:

- France has the most pronounced gender imbalance, with 71% female respondents and only 24% male. It's also the only country with a notable proportion (3,7%) of respondents who preferred not to disclose their gender.
- Norway shows a more balanced gender distribution, with 59% female and 41% male respondents.
- Türkiye and Slovenia present relatively balanced pictures: Türkiye with 65% female and 33% male, and Slovenia with an equal 50% split.

Distribution of respondents by country and gender
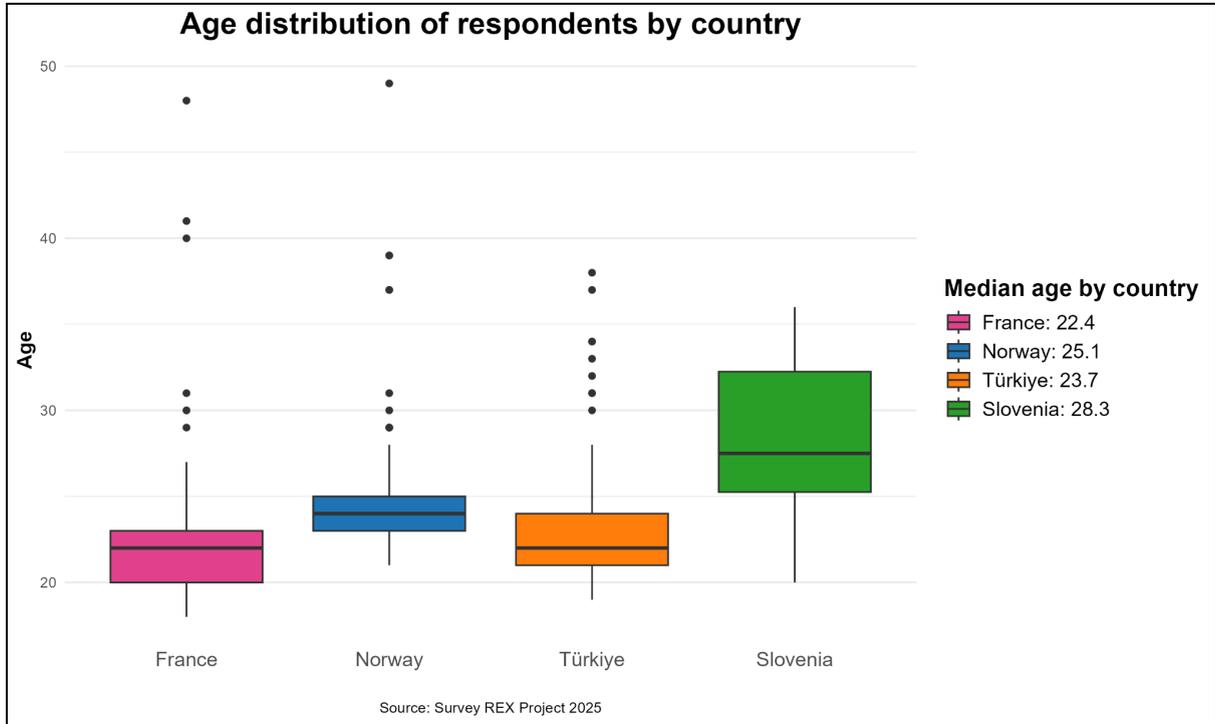
Source: Survey REX Project 2025
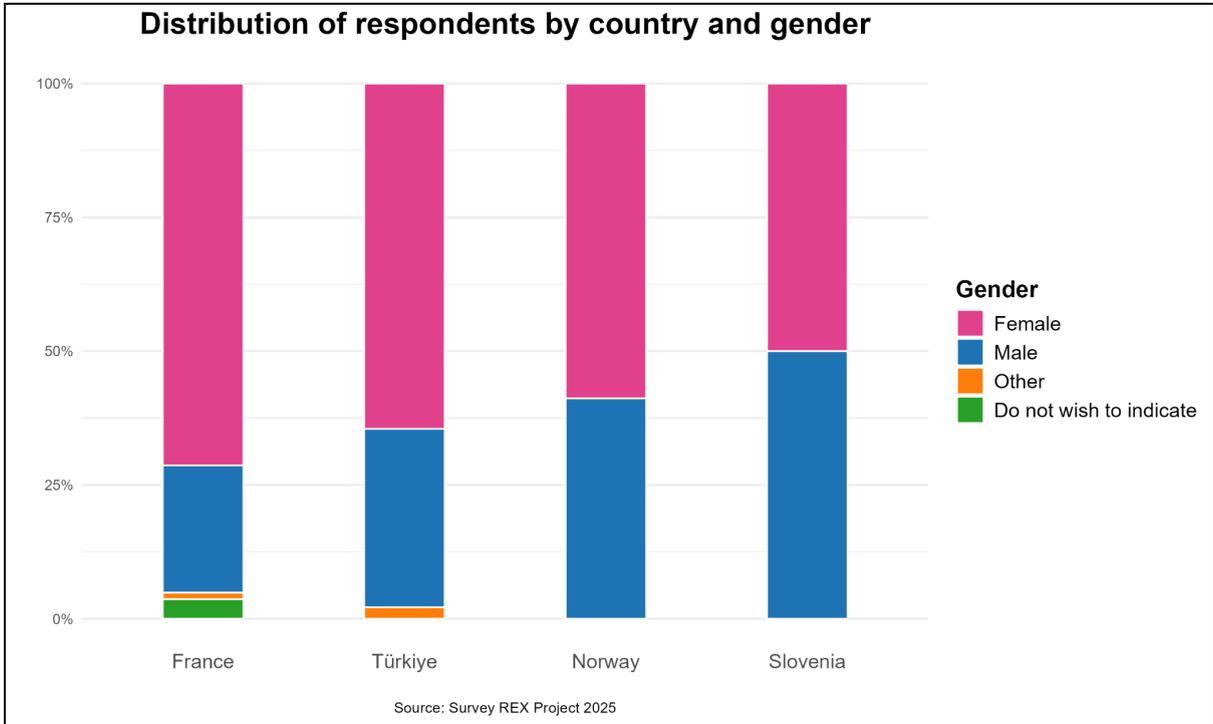
This gender imbalance in participation reflects both broader patterns in higher education and possible differences in willingness to respond to surveys on mobility. However, as we'll see later, men are statistically more likely to go on mobility despite being fewer in the sample - an interesting paradox.

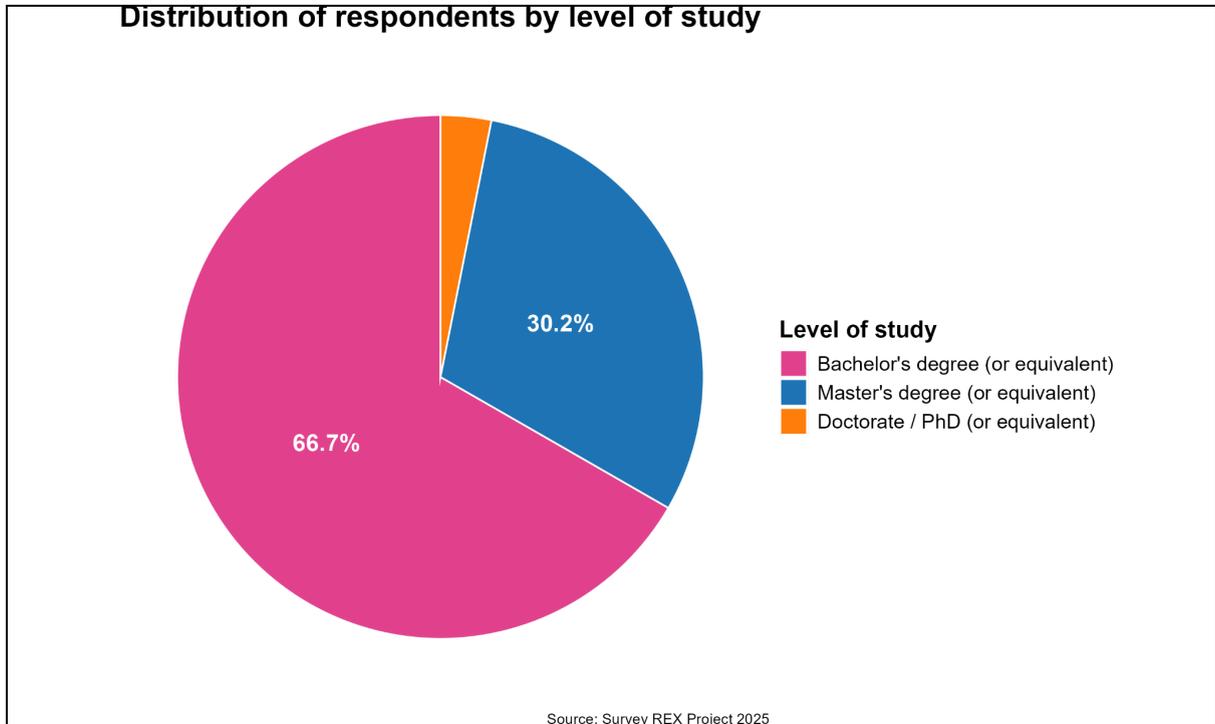The mean age across the entire sample is **23,6 years**.

Age distribution of respondents

Source: Survey REX Project 2025
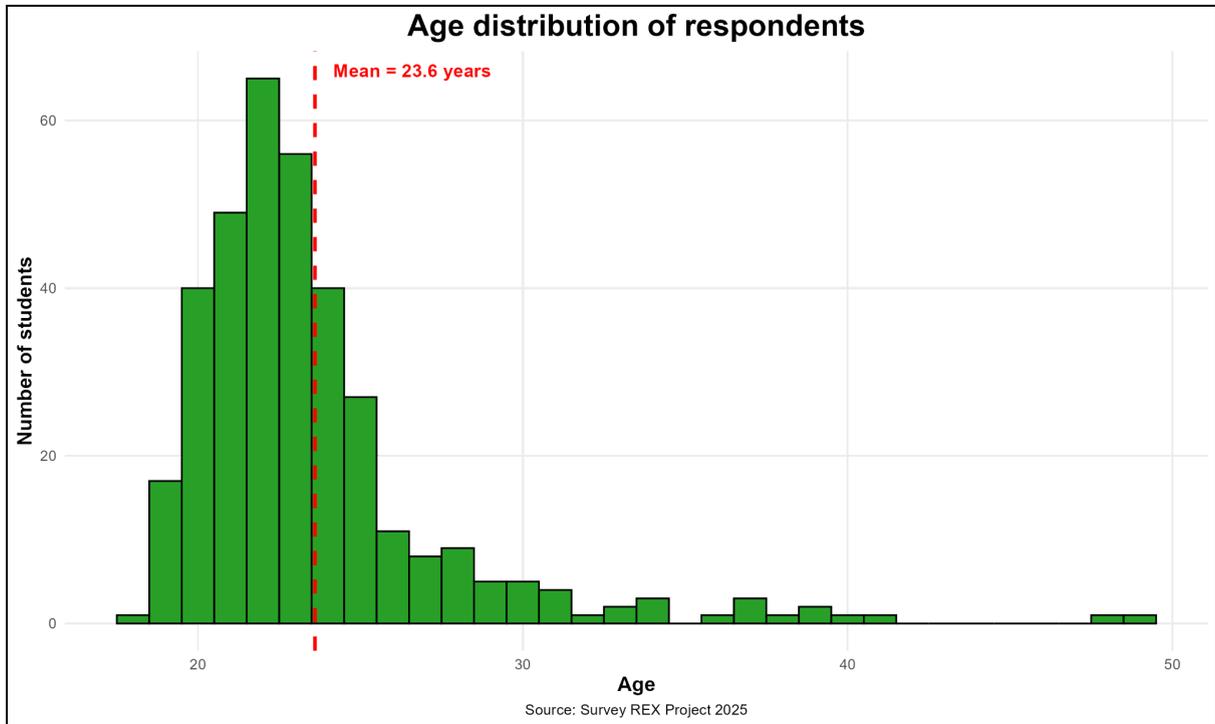
But national means reveal important differences in age structures:

- The French and Turkish sub-samples are the youngest, with mean ages of 22,4 ans 23,7 years, respectively.
- The Norwegian respondents are slightly older, with a mean age of 25,1 years.
- The Slovenian cohort is distinctly older, with a mean age of 28,3 years.

Age distribution of respondents by country

Median age by country
France: 22.4
Norway: 25.1
Türkiye: 23.7
Slovenia: 28.3

Source: Survey REX Project 2025

c. Academic profile

Looking at the level of study, **two-thirds of respondents are undergraduates**. Master's level students comprise 30% of the sample, while Doctorate or PhD candidates form a smaller group at 3,1%.

Distribution of respondents by level of study

66.7% — Bachelor's degree (or equivalent)
30.2% — Master's degree (or equivalent)

Level of study
- Bachelor's degree (or equivalent)
- Master's degree (or equivalent)
- Doctorate / PhD (or equivalent)

Source: Survey REX Project 2025

This distribution varies significantly by country, reflecting different national educational structures and recruitment focuses:

- Norway has an overwhelmingly undergraduate population (86% Bachelor's).
- France and Türkiye have a majority of Bachelor's students (56% and 71%) but substantial MAster's cohorts (43% and 22%).
- Slovenia's profile is unique, with an equal split between Bachelor's and MAster's students (40% each) and a high proportion of Doctorate students (20%), consistent with its older mean age.

Doctoral students remain a minority overall - around 7.5% in Türkiye and 20% in Norway.
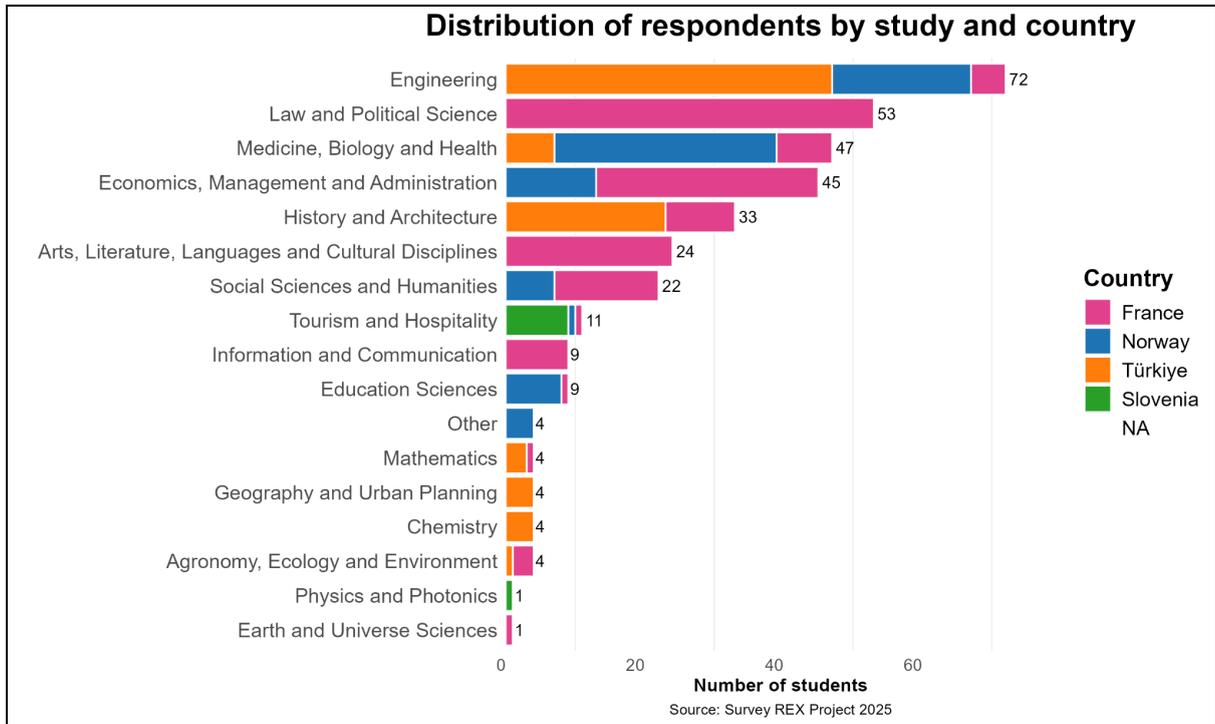
This heterogeneity across levels of study is important, because **motivations and barriers often differ strongly between undergraduates and postgraduates**.

When it comes to academic disciplines, we see quite distinct national patterns.

- In France, most students come from *law and political science* (32%), followed by *economics and management* (20%).
- In Norway, there is a clear concentration in *medicine and biology* (38%), and *engineering* (24%).
- In Türkiye, *engineering* dominates (51%), with a strong presence of *history and architecture* (28%).

- And in Slovenia, almost all respondents study *tourism and hospitality* (90%).

Distribution of respondents by study and country

Field	Number of students
Engineering	72
Law and Political Science	53
Medicine, Biology and Health	47
Economics, Management and Administration	45
History and Architecture	33
Arts, Literature, Languages and Cultural Disciplines	24
Social Sciences and Humanities	22
Tourism and Hospitality	11
Information and Communication	9
Education Sciences	9
Other	4
Mathematics	4
Geography and Urban Planning	4
Chemistry	4
Agronomy, Ecology and Environment	4
Physics and Photonics	1
Earth and Universe Sciences	1

Country
- France
- Norway
- Türkiye
- Slovenia
- NA

Number of students

Source: Survey REX Project 2025

These **specialisations can strongly influence both the desire and the feasibility of going abroad** - for instance, due to language of instruction or programme requirements.

The overall distribution of fields shows a clear dominance of certain disciplines. **Engineering stands out as the most represented field**, making up 20% of the sample. Following closely behind are Law and Political Science, which together account for 15%, and Medicine, Biology and Health with 13%. These fields are closely rivaled by Economics, Management and Administration, which also represent 13% of the total.

History and Architecture are also significant, comprising 10% of the sample. Meanwhile, the combined categories of Social Science and Humanities, and Arts, Literature, Languages categories make up 13% of the overall distribution. The remaining fields are less represented, with each contributing smaller proportions to the overall breakdown.

The analysis by country reveals that academic specializations differ significantly from one partner to another. This **highlights how each country's universities have distinct areas of focus, shaped by their specific**

academic and institutional contexts. As a result, the disciplinary composition varies, with each partner presenting its own unique profile in terms of the fields of study represented:

- The French cohort is predominantly oriented towards Law, Economics and Management (52%). A deeper look shows this is driven by strong representation in Law and Political Science (32%) and Economics, Management and Administration (20%). Social Sciences and Humanities (37%) is the second major pillar, with significant numbers in Arts, Literature, Languages (15%) and Social Sciences and Humanities (9,1%). Engineering, and Science, Medicine are minoritarian.
- The Norwegian group is heavily concentrated in Science, Medicine (38%) and Engineering (24%). Together, these STEM (Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields account for nearly ⅔ of the Norwegian sample. The remaining respondents are spread across Social Sciences and Humanities (19%), Economics and Management (15%), and other fields.
- The Turkish sample is dominated by Engineering students, who make up a striking 51% of the cohort. This is complemented by a strong focus on History and Architecture (28%). The Social Science and Humanities category accounts for 32%, though the detailed table shows this isn't from the same disciplines as in France. Science and Medicine are represented at 16%.
- The small Slovenian group is an extreme case of specialization, with 90% of its respondents concentrated on a single field: Tourism and Hospitality. The remaining 10% are in Physics and Photonics.

The socio-demographic profile paints a picture of a diverse but strategically segmented sample. It's predominantly a female population, at the Bachelor's level of study. The most significant finding is the profound interconnection between country of origin, field of study, and, to a lesser extent, age and level of study.

We don't have four similar national groups for comparison; rather, **we have four distinct sub-populations**. The French respondents are largely in Social Science, Law, and Management; the Norwegian in STEM fields; the Turkish in Engineering, and History and Architecture; and the Slovenians in Tourism. This segmentation means that **any analysis of attitudes or behaviors across the entire sample will be deeply mediated by these fundamental socio-demographic and academic divides**. For the purposes of this European research report, this diversity is a key asset, allowing for the exploration of how different national and disciplinary cultures shape perspectives, but it necessitates careful, contextualized interpretation of all subsequent results.

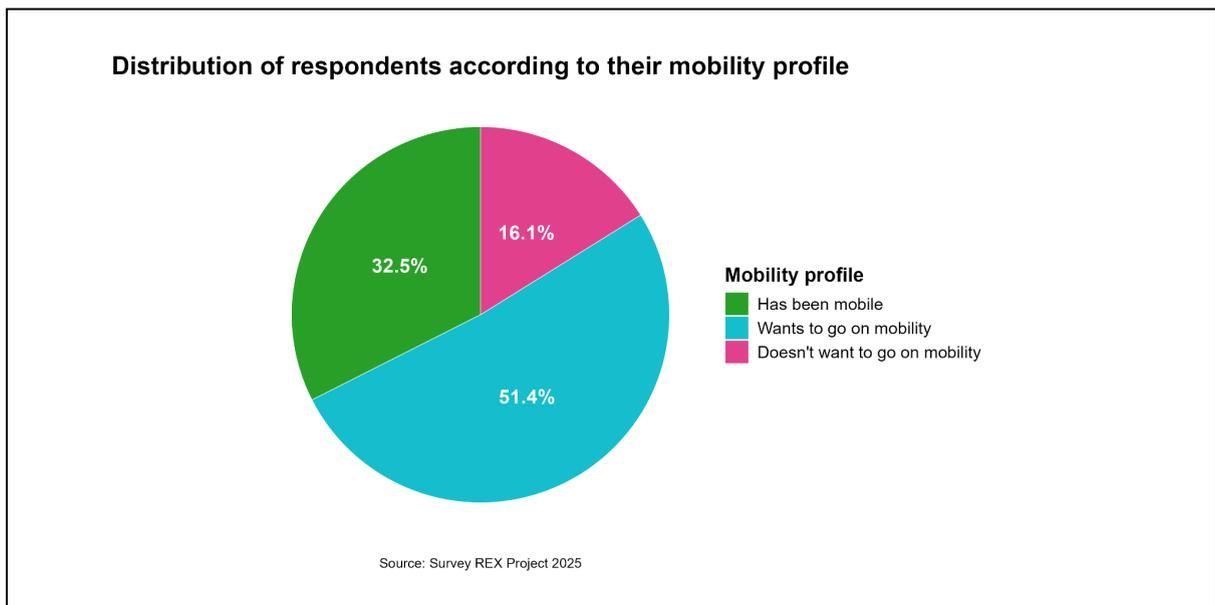### 3.1.2. General mobility profile of respondents

This section outlines the general mobility dispositions and characteristics of the student population surveyed. The analysis distinguishes between **three distinct mobility profiles: students who have been**

mobile, those who want to go on mobility, and those who don't want to go on mobility. Understanding these profiles is crucial for identifying factors that predispose students towards international experiences.

a. Distribution of mobility profiles

The surveyed student population is segmented into three clear groups, revealing a strong overall inclination towards international mobility. The largest cohort comprises students who express a desire for a future mobility experience (51,4%). This is followed by students who have already participated in a university exchange (32,5%). A smaller, yet significant, proportion of students report not wanting to participate in mobility (16,1%).

Distribution of respondents according to their mobility profile

Mobility profile
- Has been mobile
- Wants to go on mobility
- Doesn't want to go on mobility

Source: Survey REX Project 2025

This distribution indicates **a highly mobility-oriented sample**, with a combined 83,9% of respondents either having experienced mobility or aspiring to it. This suggests that **international exposure is an important consideration** for the vast majority of the surveyed students, though a notable minority remains resistant to the idea.

B.2. Factors influencing mobility profiles

A cross-analysis of mobility profiles with key socio-demographic and academic variables reveals distinct patterns, highlighting that mobility isn't a random phenomenon but is correlated with specific student characteristics.

Firstly, **gender disparities** are apparent across the profiles. Women are overrepresented in the "Wants to go on mobility" group (71%), while men constitute a higher proportion of the "Has been mobile" cohort (38% compared to 31% in the overall sample). The "Doesn't want to go on mobility" group has the highest percentage of students who don't wish to indicate their gender (5,3%).

Secondly, the **level of study** is also a powerful differentiator. Bachelor's students are strongly represented among those who "Want to go on mobility" (78%), likely reflecting their future-oriented perspective. Conversely, the "Has been mobile" and "Doesn't want to go on mobility" groups have a higher concentration of Master's students (respectively 32% and 54%). Doctorate students are most prevalent in the "Has been mobile" profile (7%), suggesting that advanced academic careers often involve or have involved international exchange.

Mobility profile by level of study

Source: Survey REX Project 2025
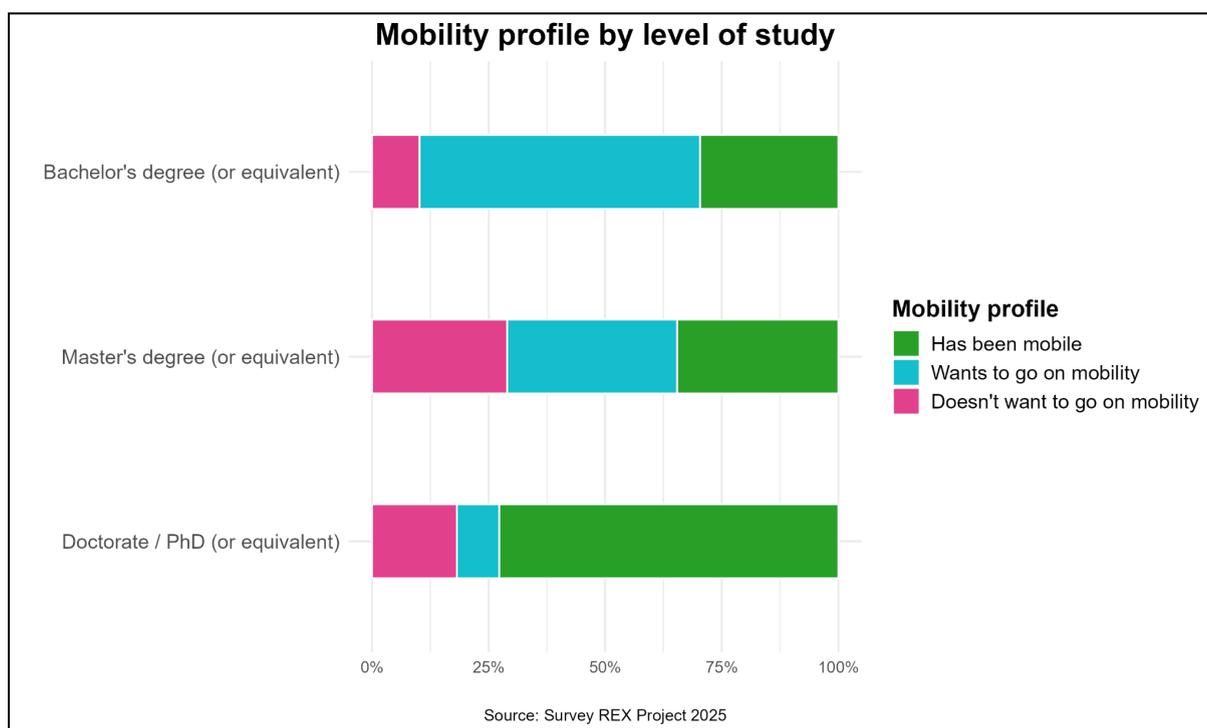
Finally, a clear **age gradient** exists between the profiles. The "Wants to go on mobility" group is the youngest (22,5), the "Has been mobile" group is slightly older (23,9), and the "Doesn't want to go on mobility" group is the oldest (26,4). This suggests that the window of opportunity or willingness for
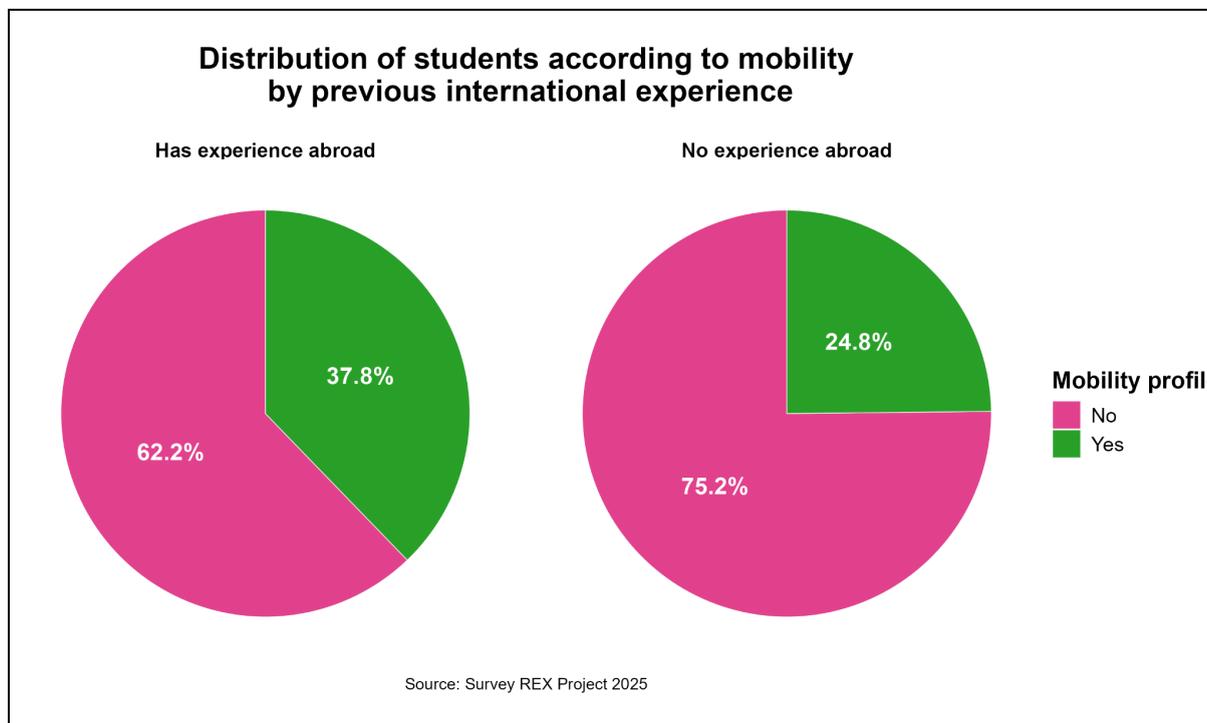
mobility may be influenced by life-stage, with older students potentially being more settled or having more constraints.

Average age by mobility profile					
Mobility profile	Overall	France	Norway	Türkiye	Slovenia
All students	**23.6**	**22.4**	**25.1**	**23.7**	**28.3**
Has been mobile	23.9	22.7	24.9	23.9	27.0
Wants to go on mobility	22.5	21.2	23.9	23.1	28.2
Doesn't want to go on mobility	26.4	24.9	27.5	33.3	29.3

B.3. Role of previous international experience

The data strongly suggests that prior international experience is a significant factor associated with both past and future mobility intentions.

Students with previous international experience before higher education are more likely to have been mobile during their studies (37,8%) compared to those without such experience (24,8%). This points to a **cumulative advantage or a self-reinforcing cycle** where early international exposure builds the confidence and capital necessary for further mobility.

Distribution of students according to mobility by previous international experience

Has experience abroad — 37.8% / 62.2%

No experience abroad — 24.8% / 75.2%

Mobility profile: No / Yes

Source: Survey REX Project 2025

This pattern is also reflected in future intentions. Among students with prior experience, 48,3% want to go on another mobility, whereas for those without experience, this figure is higher at 55,9%, indicating a strong latent demand. Crucially, the reluctance to be mobile is almost twice as high among those without prior experience (19,3%) compared to those with it (13,9%). This underscores how a lack of early international exposure may solidify into a reluctance to pursue it later.

Distribution of mobility profile according to previous international experience

Mobility profile
- Has been mobile
- Wants to go on mobility
- Doesn't want to go on mobility

Source: Survey REX Project 2025
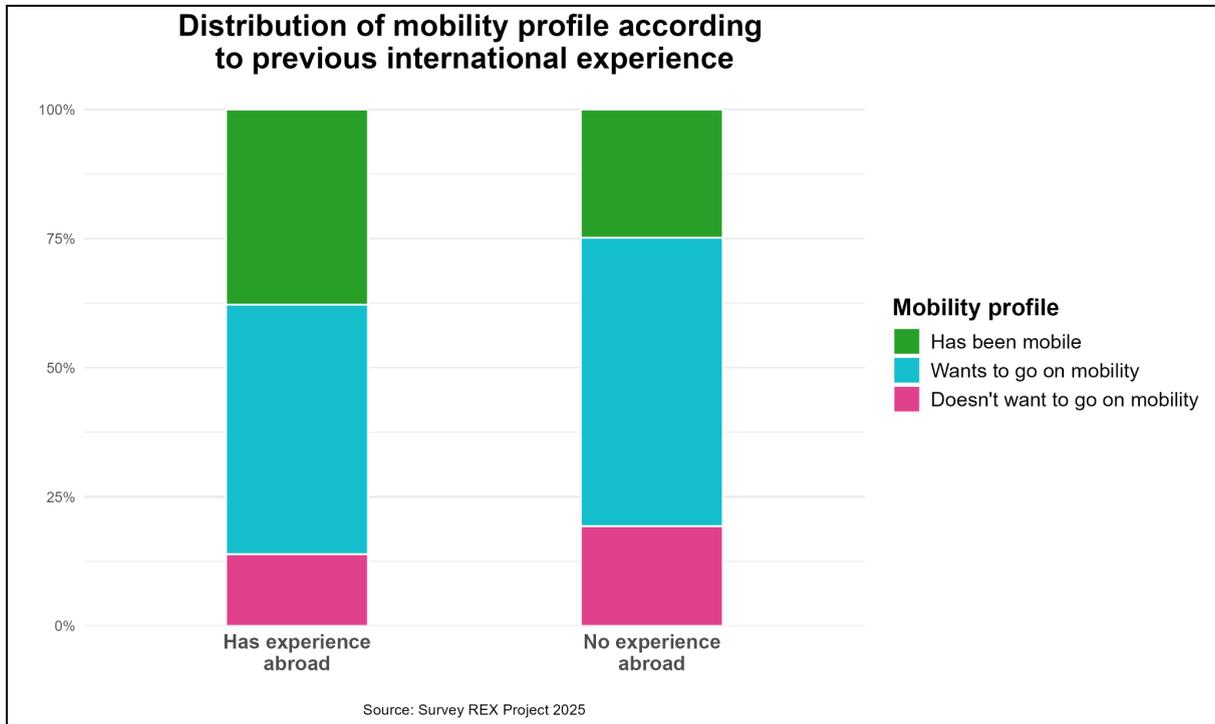
B.4. National specificities and context

The **country of origin is a critical variable, revealing diverse mobility landscapes and structural or cultural influences**.

In the first place, the composition of the mobility profiles varies significantly by country. French and Norwegian students are overrepresented in the "Doesn't want to go on mobility" group (60% and 30% of the profile, respectively). Turkish students dominate the "Wants to go" cohort (32% of the profile) but are strikingly underrepresented among those who "Don't want to go" (5,3%), indicating an almost unanimous desire for mobility. Norwegian students show a strong tendency towards having already been mobile (33% of that profile, compared to 24% in the overall sample).

When examining mobility distribution within each country, the contrasts are starker. In Türkiye, the desire for mobility is overwhelming, with 62,4% of Turkish students aspiring to go abroad. In Norway, the distribution is more balanced between those who have been mobile and those who want to go. In France, the "Wants to go" group is also the largest, but a significant 26,2% have already been mobile. Slovenia's small sample size warrants caution, but it shows a high proportion of students who have been mobile.

Distribution of respondents by country based on their mobility profile

France

Norway

Türkiye

Slovenia

Mobility profile
- Has been mobile
- Wants to go on mobility
- Doesn't want to go on mobility

Source: Survey REX Project 2025
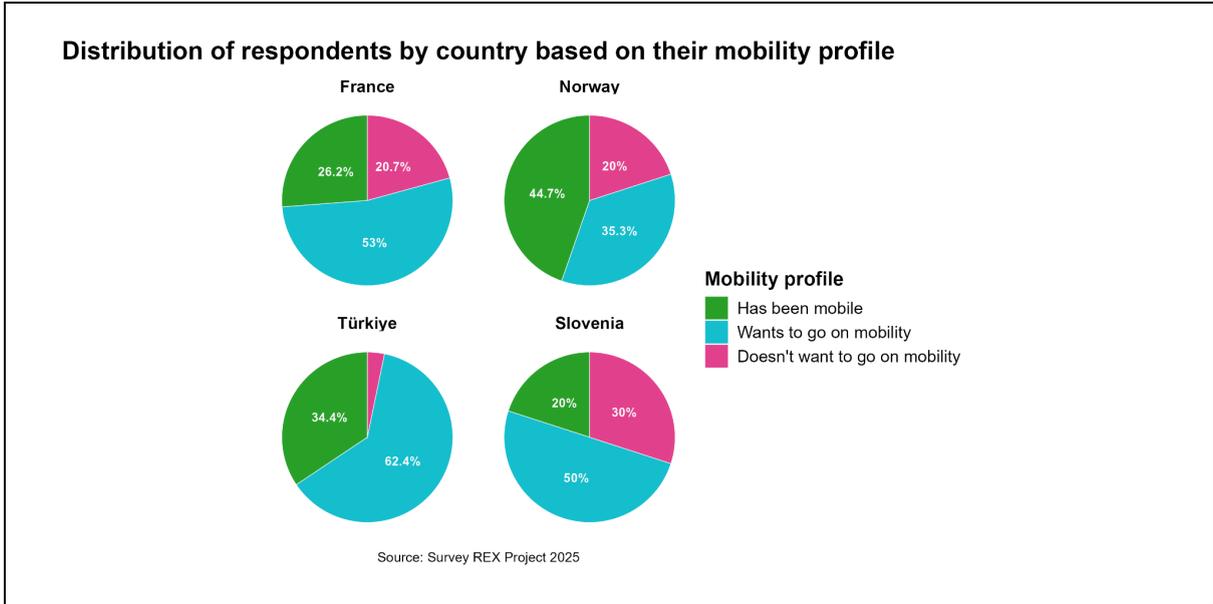
Then, the average age of students who do not want mobility is consistently the highest in each country, particularly in Türkiye (33,3 years), suggesting that local factors, such as the typical age of graduate students or career entry patterns, may heavily influence mobility decisions.

Average age by mobility profile					
Mobility profile	**Overall**	**France**	**Norway**	**Türkiye**	**Slovenia**
All students	**23.6**	**22.4**	**25.1**	**23.7**	**28.3**
Has been mobile	23.9	22.7	24.9	23.9	27.0
Wants to go on mobility	22.5	21.2	23.9	23.1	28.2
Doesn't want to go on mobility	26.4	24.9	27.5	33.3	29.3

Also, the data reveals national academic specializations. For instance, a high percentage of mobile and aspiring students in Türkiye are in Engineering, whereas in France, the fields of Law, Economics, and Management are predominant among these groups. This indicates that mobility opportunities and cultures may be strongly mediated by the disciplinary landscape within each national context.

B.5. Conclusion: A typology of mobile dispositions

In summary, the general mobility profile of the respondents is characterized by a majority with positive dispositions towards international experience, yet this majority is internally divided between aspiration and accomplishment. This division is systematically linked to different factors:

- The aspirational mobile (51,4%): Typically younger, often in Bachelor's degrees, with a high proportion of women and students from Türkiye. They may or may not have prior experience, but they represent the primary pool for future mobility programs.
- The experienced mobile (32,5%): More likely to have prior international experience, slightly older, with a higher representation of men, Master's/PhD students, and Norwegian nationals. They represent a success story of mobility circuits.
- The reluctant non-mobile (16,1%): The oldest cohort, more often in Master's programs, with a higher likelihood of lacking prior international experience, and overrepresented among French and Norwegian students. Their reluctance appears linked to life-stage and a lack of early formative international exposure.

	Comparison of student profiles by country and mobility experience											
	Has been mobile				**Wants to go on mobility**				**Doesn't want to go on mobility**			
Characteristic	France N = 43[1]	Norway N = 38[1]	Türkiye N = 32[1]	Slovenia N = 2[1]	France N = 87[1]	Norway N = 30[1]	Türkiye N = 58[1]	Slovenia N = 5[1]	France N = 34[1]	Norway N = 17[1]	Türkiye N = 3[1]	Slovenia N = 3[1]
Gender												
Female	63%	55%	56%	100%	78%	63%	67%	40%	65%	59%	100%	33%
Male	30%	45%	44%	0%	20%	37%	29%	60%	26%	41%	0%	67%
Other	2.3%	0%	0%	0%	1.1%	0%	3.4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Do not wish to indicate	4.7%	0%	0%	0%	1.1%	0%	0%	0%	8.8%	0%	0%	0%
Mean age	22.72	24.95	23.91	27.00	21.18	23.93	23.14	28.20	24.9	27.5	33.3	29.3
Level of study												
Bachelor's degree (or equivalent)	42%	79%	66%	50%	77%	90%	78%	40%	21%	94%	0%	33%
Master's degree (or equivalent)	53%	21%	19%	0%	23%	10%	21%	60%	79%	5.9%	67%	33%
Doctorate / PhD (or equivalent)	4.7%	0%	16%	50%	0%	0%	1.7%	0%	0%	0%	33%	33%
Previous international experience	70%	66%	69%	100%	60%	60%	45%	80%	47%	59%	67%	33%
Field of study												
Science, medicine	7.0%	39%	31%	0%	6.9%	40%	8.6%	0%	12%	29%	0%	33%
Engineering	7.0%	11%	34%	0%	2.3%	30%	62%	0%	0%	41%	0%	0%
Law, economics, management	44%	24%	0%	0%	60%	6.7%	0%	0%	41%	12%	0%	0%
Social sciences and Humanities	42%	18%	34%	100%	31%	20%	28%	100%	47%	18%	100%	67%
Others	0%	7.9%	0%	0%	0%	3.3%	1.7%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

[1] %; Mean

This typology demonstrates that student mobility is a socially stratified process. It's influenced by accumulated capital (previous experience), institutional context (level of study, field, and country), and individual characteristics (age, gender). Effective policies to promote mobility must therefore address these specific profiles and the barriers unique to each.

b. Profile of mobile students

This section outlines the profile of the **115 surveyed students who have undertaken international mobility**, detailing their socio-demographic characteristics, academic backgrounds, and the structural patterns of their mobility experiences. The data reveals a diverse yet patterned landscape of European student mobility.

c. Socio-demographic profile

The sample of mobile students is predominantly female (59%), with males representing 38%. A small percentage (2,6%) identified as "Other" or preferred not to indicate their gender. The average age is 23,86 years. Geographically, respondents originate from four countries: **France (37%), Norway (33%), Türkiye (28%), and Slovenia (1,7%)**. National profiles show variance: the **French and Norwegian subsamples are gender-balanced**, while the **Slovenian (though small) and Turkish subsamples skew slightly female and male**, respectively. The **Norwegian cohort is the oldest on average** (24,95 years), while the **French cohort is the youngest** (22,72 years).

Characteristic	Overall N = 354[1]	Has been mobile N = 115[1]
Gender		
Female	66%	59%
Male	31%	**38%**
Other	1.4%	0.9%
Do not wish to indicate	1.7%	1.7%
Age	23.6	23.9
Previous international experience	59%	**69%**
Country		
France	47%	37%
Norway	24%	**33%**
Türkiye	26%	28%
Slovenia	2.8%	1.7%
[1] %; Mean		

d. Academic profile

Academically, the majority of mobile students are enrolled in Bachelor's degree programmes (61%), followed by Master's students (32%), and a smaller proportion of Doctoral candidates (7%). This distribution, however, varies significantly by country of origin. While **79% of Norwegian** mobile students are at the **Bachelor's level**, the **French** cohort has a higher proportion of **Master's students (53%)**. **Türkiye** shows a notable presence of **Doctoral candidates (16%)**, a trend **mirrored in the small Slovenian sample**.

Student mobility distribution by level of study

Source: Survey REX Project 2025
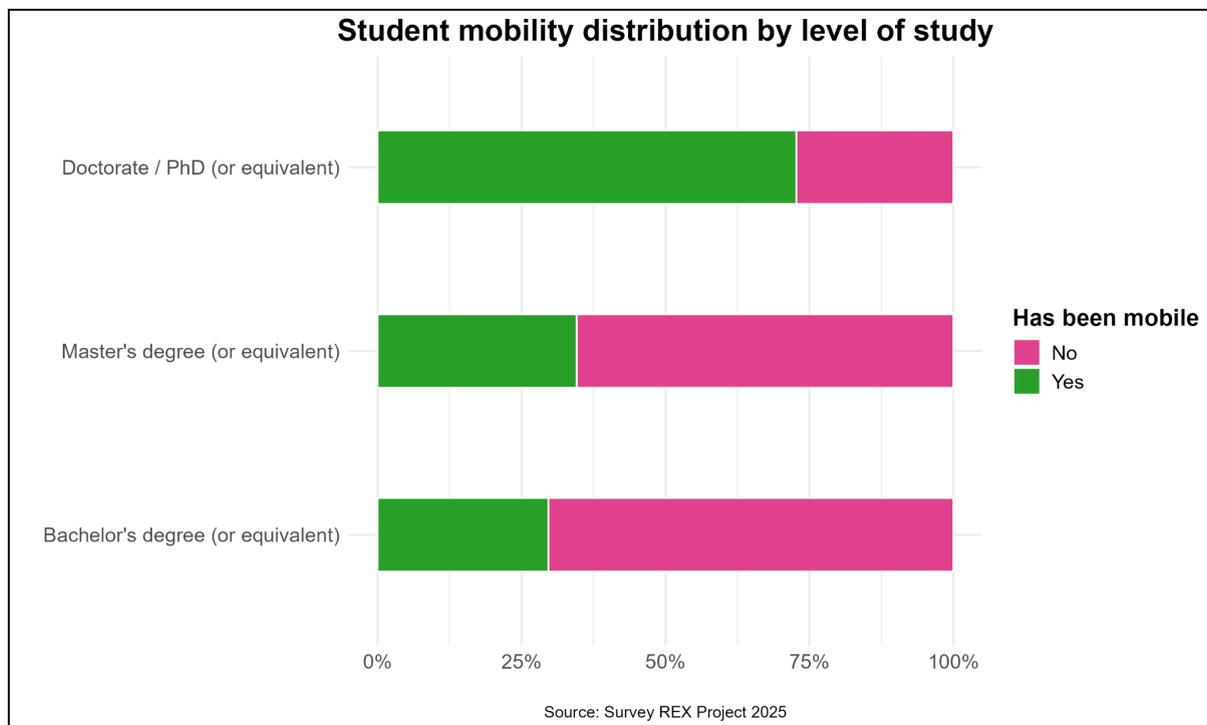
The fields of study are diverse, with the largest concentrations in Medicine, Biology and Health (18%), Economics, Management and Administration (16%), and Engineering (16%). National specialisations are apparent: **French students** are heavily concentrated **in Law, Economics, Management (44%)** and **Social Sciences and Humanities (42%)**; **Norwegian students in Science/Medicine (39%)**; and **Turkish students in Engineering (34%) and Science/Medicine (31%)**.

Field of study				
Science, medicine	7.0%	**39%**	31%	0%
Engineering	7.0%	11%	**34%**	0%
Law, economics, management	**44%**	24%	0%	0%
Social sciences and Humanities	42%	18%	34%	**100%**
Others	0%	**7.9%**	0%	0%
[1] %; Mean				

3.2. and tendency

Determinants for mobility

The next part of the analysis focuses on identifying the key determinants of student mobility. Our goal was to examine **how various factors** - such as gender, country, level of study, discipline, and prior international experience - **influence the probability of being mobile**.

To do this, we applied **econometric qualitative methods**, mainly **logit regression models, with a 5% significance threshold**. The dependent variable distinguishes between *mobile* and *non-mobile* students, while the independent variables capture personal and academic characteristics. This statistical approach allows us to go beyond simple observation and measure which factors truly make a difference in the decision to go abroad.

Motives given for going on mobility

Motive	Value
To enrich my personal journey	83.5
To discover a new culture	82.6
To have a rewarding experience	80.9
To discover new horizons	71.3
To strengthen my resume	69.6
To benefit from an interesting study programme	63.5
To improve my foreign language skills	62.6
To follow recommendations from friends, students or teachers	39.1
To take advantage of a scholarship opportunity	36.5
To study at a prestigious university	32.2

Source: Survey REX Project 2025

The analysis reveals clear patterns showing which students are more likely to choose an international mobility experience. The decision to study abroad is not evenly distributed across the student population. The analysis identifies **a clear profile associated with higher mobility**: typically, these are male students at an advanced academic level, particularly PhD candidates, and those who have already gained prior international experience. **Nationality also plays a key role**, with Norwegian and Turkish students showing a stronger propensity to go abroad than their French peers. However, this trend sees a notable reversal in certain fields; for instance, engineering students are significantly less likely to undertake mobility compared to those in social sciences, suggesting that **specific academic curricula can act as a barrier to international exchange**.

Motivations for mobility further illustrate how priorities vary by nationality and overall sample. When considering all students, the three most frequently cited motives are **personal enrichment (83,5%)**, discovering a **new culture (82,6%)**, and having a **rewarding experience (80,9%)**. In contrast, the least important motives are **studying at a prestigious university (32,2%)**, **taking advantage of a scholarship (36,5%)**, and **following recommendations (39,1%)**.

However, national rankings reveal distinct profiles:

- Norwegian students prioritize having a rewarding experience and discovering a new culture.
- French students rank enriching their personal journey highest followed by having a rewarding experience.
- Turkish students place the greatest importance on strengthening their resume and having a rewarding experience.

Notably, Turkish students are the only group to rank strengthening my resume as their top priority, while French and Norwegian students place it lower. Conversely, **academic prestige and scholarships are consistently ranked among the least important factors across all nationalities**, particularly for French students, for whom taking advantage of a scholarship opportunity is the least motivating factor.

Thus, the typical profile of a student with a high propensity for mobility is a male PhD student from Norway, who has already had an international experience. The decision is strongly linked to academic seniority and accumulated international capital, while motivations are largely driven by personal, cultural, and experiential factors rather than institutional prestige or financial incentives.

For summarizing: the results of our regression model provide several clear insights. The most significant positive determinants of mobility are:

- **Being male** - men are about 88% more likely to have gone abroad than women.
- **Having previous international experience** - this increases the likelihood of mobility by 86%.
- **Being from Norway rather than Franc**e - Norwegian students are more than twice as likely to go abroad.
- **Being at PhD level** - doctoral students are roughly eight times more likely to have mobility experience than bachelor students.

These results confirm that **mobility is not random: it's shaped by past exposure, social context, and opportunity structures**.

Interestingly, some factors such as being at Master's level or belonging to certain social science fields were not statistically significant.

These findings tell us several important things. First, **previous international exposure** acts as a strong enabler - students who have already travelled or studied abroad are **more confident and familiar with administrative procedures**. Second, the **gender gap** is persistent. Although women dominate higher education numerically, they remain slightly underrepresented in actual mobility. Third, **disciplinary background and institutional frameworks** influence access to mobility opportunities. For example, STEM fields often offer clearer exchange agreements, while humanities students may face more uncertainty.

Overall, these determinants reveal that mobility is influenced by both individual capital and structural conditions.

3.2.1. Mobility patterns: Type, duration and destination

The Erasmus + exchange is the **dominant mobility type (47,6%), followed by other university exchanges (28,6%) and work placements (22,2%)**. Pursuing a full degree abroad is rare (1,6%). National preferences differ: Turkish mobility is overwhelmingly Erasmus-based, while French and Norwegian students utilise a more balanced mix of Erasmus, other exchanges, and work placements.

Distribution of types of mobility by country

Source: Survey REX Project 2025
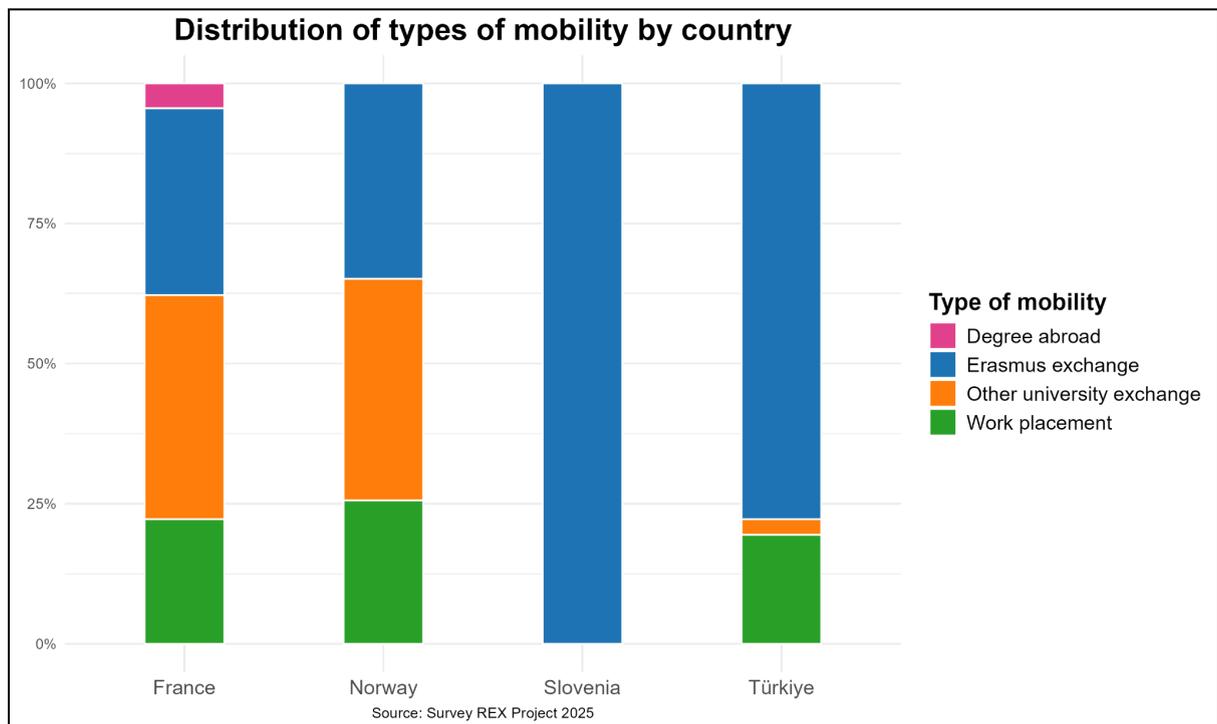
Mobility is typically short-term: 85% of experiences last one semester or less. Only 14% last a full academic year, and stays exceeding two years are exceptional (0,9%).
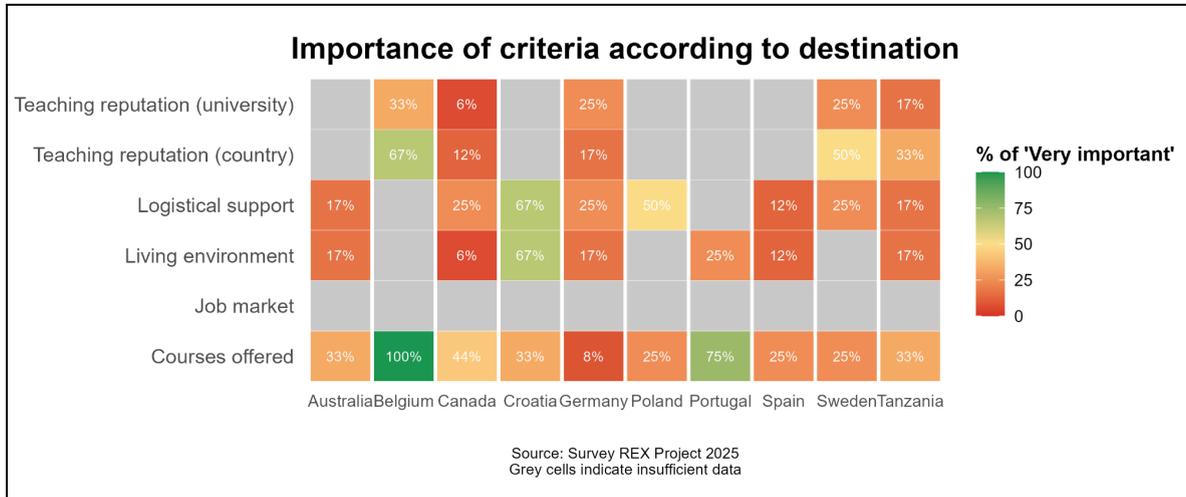
Distribution of mobility duration

Duration of mobility	Count	Percentage
More than two years	1	0.9
One semester or less	98	85.2
One year	16	13.9

Destination patterns reveal **distinct preferences depending on the mobility type and country of origin**. The top global destinations are Canada, Germany, and Spain, highlighting the strong appeal of non-European countries for non-Erasmus mobility. When focusing on Erasmus exchanges, the ranking shifts towards intra-European networks. The top destinations are Germany, Spain, and Poland. Other popular Erasmus hubs include Sweden, Portugal, Croatia, Belgium, Denmark, and Austria.

Top 10 student Erasmus destinations

Country	Number of students
Germany	10
Spain	6
Poland	5
Sweden	4
Portugal	4
Croatia	3
Belgium	3
Denmark	2
Canada	2
Austria	2

Number of students

Source: Survey REX Project 2025
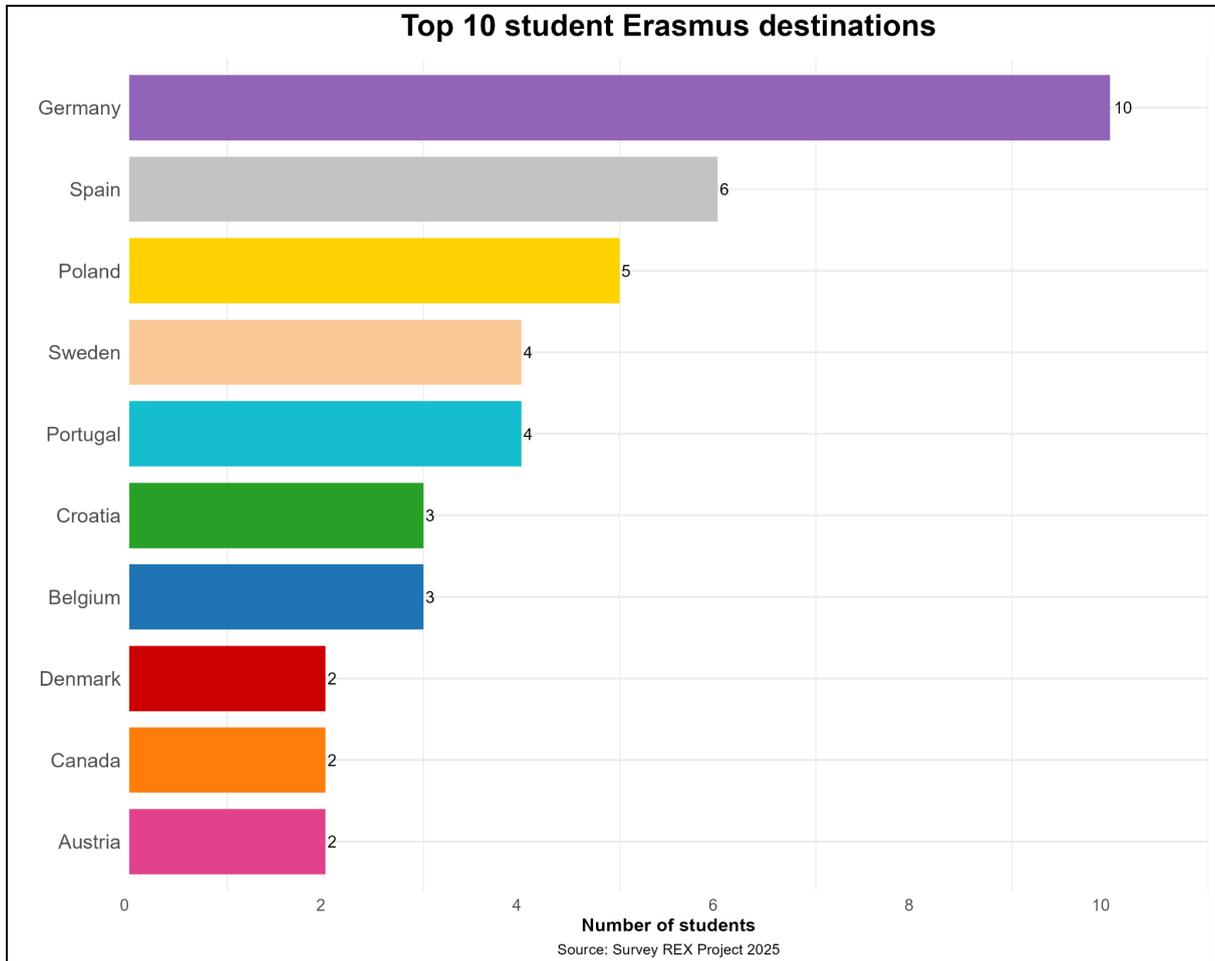
Some country-specific profiles can be observed:

- France: **French students' top Erasmus destinations are Spain, Germany, and Finland**. For overall mobility (including other programs), Canada is by far the leading destination, followed by Spain and Germany.
- Norway: **Norwegian Erasmus students favor Portugal, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Belgium**. For broader mobility, their preferences shift significantly towards Australia and Tanzania, followed by the Netherlands, South Africa, and Portugal.
- Türkiye: **Turkish student** mobility, heavily concentrated in Erasmus programs, is **strongly oriented towards Germany, followed by Poland, Sweden, Croatia, Slovakia, and Romania**.

Importance of criteria according to destination

	Australia	Belgium	Canada	Croatia	Germany	Poland	Portugal	Spain	Sweden	Tanzania
Teaching reputation (university)		33%	6%		25%				25%	17%
Teaching reputation (country)		67%	12%		17%				50%	33%
Logistical support	17%		25%	67%	25%	50%		12%	25%	17%
Living environment	17%		6%	67%	17%		25%	12%		17%
Job market										
Courses offered	33%	100%	44%	33%	8%	25%	75%	25%	25%	33%

% of 'Very important'
100
75
50
25
0

Source: Survey REX Project 2025
Grey cells indicate insufficient data

The choice of destination is driven by a **clear hierarchy of criteria**, which differs slightly when selecting a country versus a specific university.

For selecting a destination country, different criteria can be observed:

Main criteria for selecting destination countries

Criteria	Very important	Moderately important
Language	56.5	29.6
Teaching reputation	13.9	47.8
Personal network	13.9	26.1
Living environment quality	12.2	57.4
Distance from home country	7.8	14.8
Job market opportunities	3.5	20.9

Moderately important   Very important

Source: Survey REX Project 2025
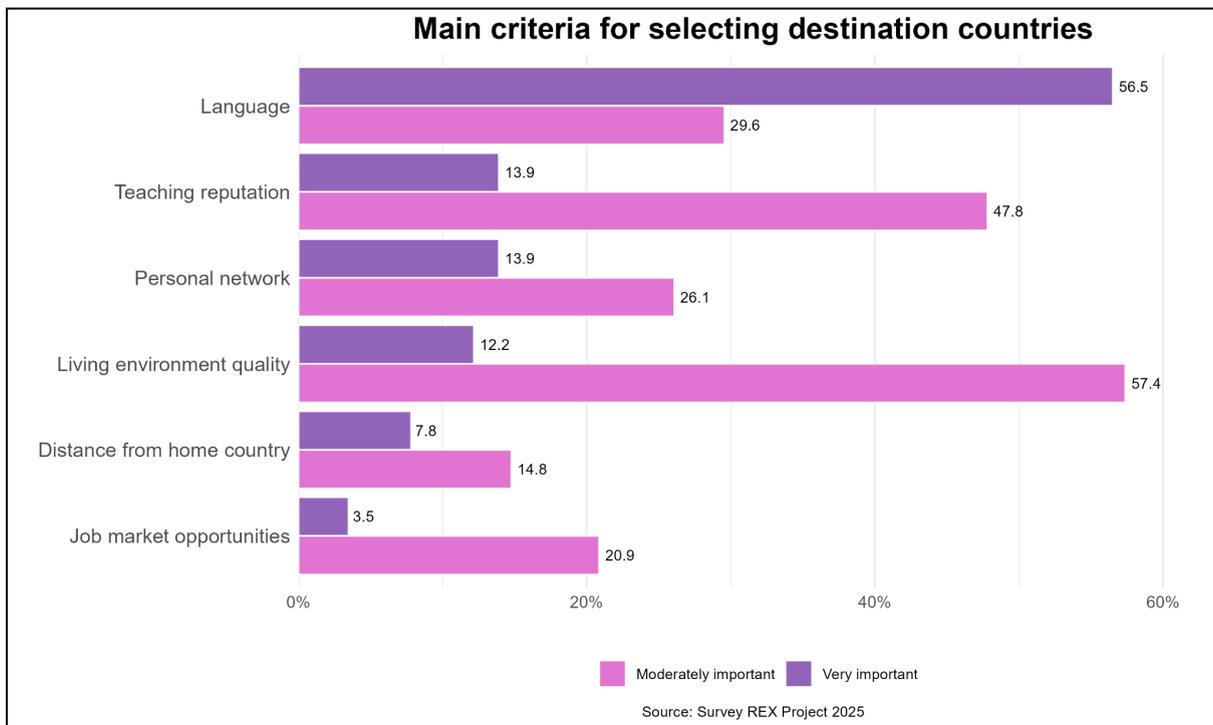
- For the overall cohort, the **quality of the living environment (60,5% very important) and language (57,4% very important)** are the paramount factors, followed closely by the desire to

discover a new culture and personal enrichment. The **country's teaching reputation (47,8% very important) and the presence of a personal network (40% very important)** are significant secondary drivers. Practical considerations like distance from home (29,6% very important) and local job market opportunities (13,9% very important) are less decisive.

- For the national level, some variations exist. Norwegian students place exceptional importance on the living environment (73,3% very important). French students are uniquely motivated by the teaching reputation of the host country (58,1% very important). Turkish students show the strongest emphasis on language (65,6% very important) and the teaching reputation (59,4% very important) of the destination country.

For selecting a destination university, the criteria are different:

Main criteria for selecting destination universities

Criteria	Moderately important	Very important
Language of instruction	33.7	56.5
Courses offered	30.4	38.0
Student life	40.2	33.7
Testimonials and recommendations	35.9	22.8
Logistical support	60.9	22.8
Values and ethics	46.7	20.7
Teaching reputation	32.6	10.9
Social media and communication	26.1	8.7

Source: Survey REX Project 2025

- Globally, **the language of instruction (58,5% very important) and the courses offered (40,2% very important)** are the most critical academic factors. The **quality of student life (46,7% very important)** is a major socio-cultural draw. Pragmatic support, such as **logistical assistance (35,9% very important), and social proof via testimonials and recommendations (35,9% very important)** are key practical considerations. Interestingly, the institution's teaching

reputation (32,6% very important) and its values and ethics (26,1% very important) are secondary concerns, while social media presence (8,7% very important) is negligible.

- On a national analysis, we can see that for Norwegian students, language of instruction (73,3% very important) and student life (70,0% very important) are overwhelmingly important. French students prioritize the courses offered (68,8% very important) above all else. Turkish students rely heavily on testimonials and recommendations (57,1% very important) and value logistical support (46,4% very important) more than the global average.

This detailed analysis confirms that **while academic quality (courses) is a primary driver, the experiential dimension (living environment, culture, student life) is equally, if not more, critical.** Pragmatic factors like language and logistics are fundamental enablers, whereas institutional prestige is a secondary consideration. National profiles reveal specific strategic priorities: Norway seeks a high-quality living and student experience, France prioritizes academic content and reputation, and Turkey values reliable information and strong support structures.

a) Difficulties encountered

Students face challenges both before, during and after their mobility.

The **main barriers encountered before going on mobility are, overall, financial and administrative (cited as "very important" by 51,3% of respondents), followed by social and psychological barriers (33% very important), and then academic barriers (22,6% very important)**.

Main barriers encountered before mobility

Source: Survey REX Project 2025
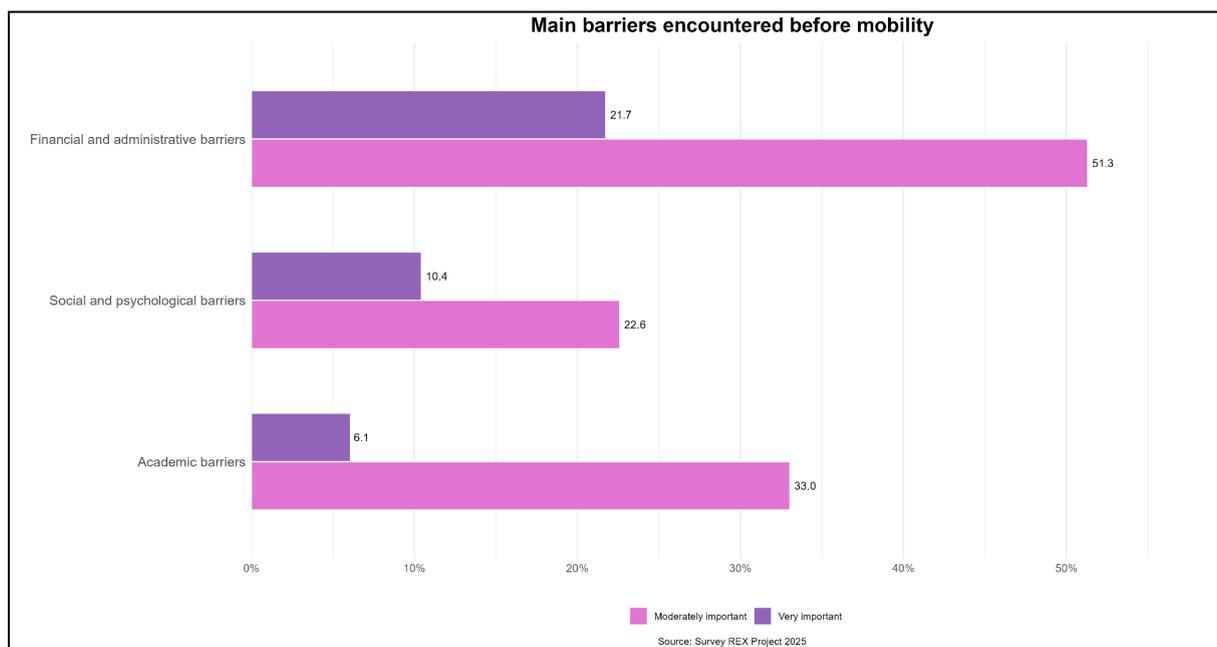
However, significant national variations exist:

- For French students, financial and administrative barriers are overwhelmingly dominant (48,8% very important).
- Turkish students face a particularly high combination of financial/administrative (53,1% very important) and academic barriers (46,9% very important).
- Norwegian students report financial/administrative barriers as the main concern (65,8% very important), with academic barriers also being notable (34,2% very important).

During mobility, the main difficulties are administrative (38,3% very important overall), followed by academic difficulties (25,2% very important) and psychological difficulties (19,1% very important). Feelings of insecurity and integration challenges are also reported.
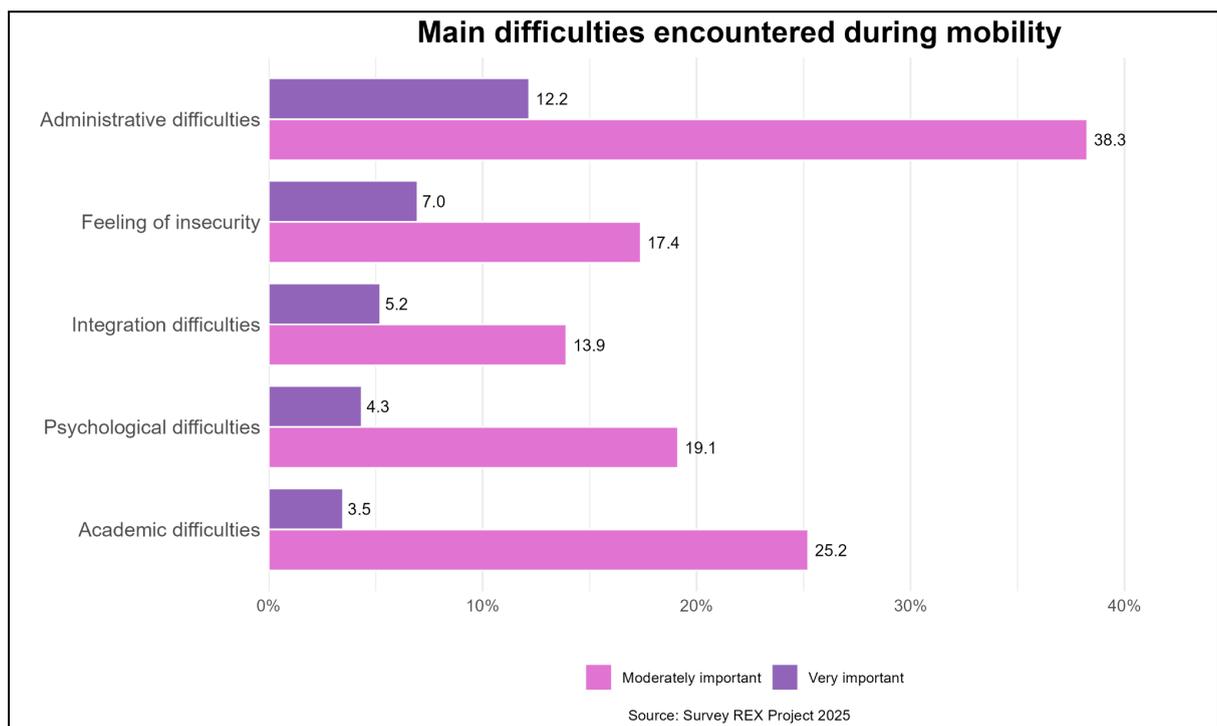
The national breakdown reveals distinct profiles:

- Turkish students experience administrative (46,9% very important) and academic difficulties (46,9% very important), alongside a significant feeling of insecurity (31,2% very important).

- French students primarily cite administrative (27,9% very important) and psychological difficulties (25,6% very important).
- Norwegian students' main challenge during mobility is also administrative (39,5% very important).

Post-mobility reintegration presents its own set of challenges, primarily of an academic and psychological nature. Overall, psychological difficulties are reported as the most significant post-mobility challenge (16,8% very important).

Main difficulties encountered after mobility

Psychological difficulties	16.8 / 3.7
Academic reintegration difficulties	16.4 / 16.4
Readaptation difficulties	12.1 / 3.7

Moderately important · Very important
Source: Survey REX Project 2025
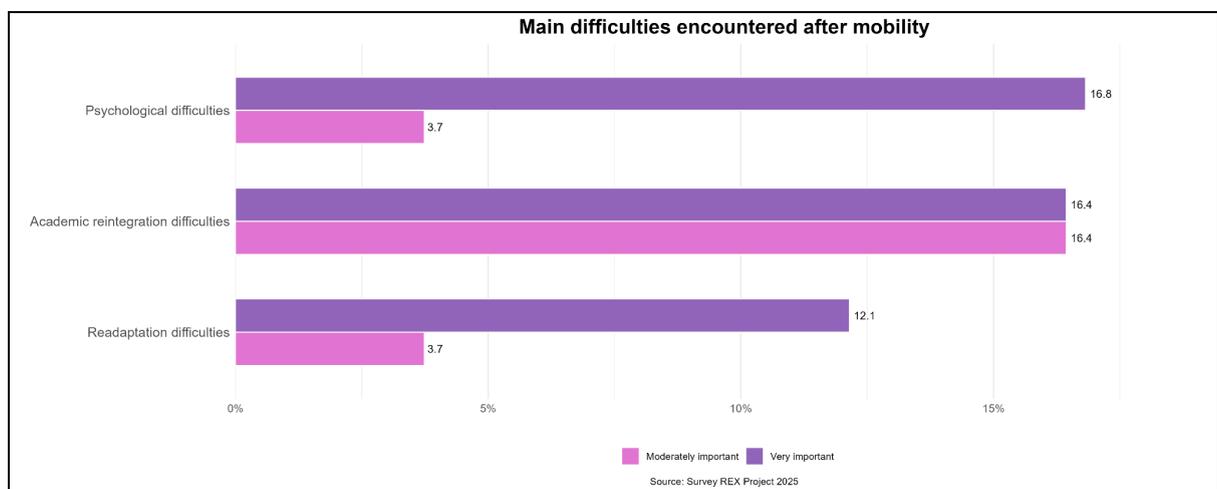
However, national data highlights crucial differences:

- Turkish students face severe academic reintegration difficulties (41,2% very important), which is their foremost post-mobility challenge, followed by psychological difficulties.
- French students encounter a balanced mix of psychological difficulties and readaptation difficulties (both 10% very important), along with academic reintegration issues.
- Norwegian students report academic reintegration as their main post-mobility difficulty (12% moderately important).

This underscores that **the end of the physical mobility period does not equate to an immediate return to "normalcy", and that the readjustment process which varies considerably by nationality and the specific challenges faced** (academic for Turkish students, psychological/readaptation for French students) and requires targeted institutional and personal support.

b) Conclusion: A segmented landscape

The **profile of the mobile student emerging from this data is not monolithic but distinctly segmented**. Mobility is influenced by **a confluence of individual capital** (gender, prior international

experience), **academic seniority** (doctoral candidates are highly mobile), and **national context** (with Norwegian and Turkish students showing higher propensities). Structural patterns are equally defining: **short-term Erasmus exchanges dominate**, particularly for certain nationalities, while **specific academic curricula, such as Engineering, can act as a barrier**.

The experience is fundamentally driven by **a quest for personal, cultural, and experiential enrichment, with institutional prestige and financial incentives ranking low as motivators**. However, this pursuit is consistently punctuated by **bureaucratic and administrative hurdles, from preparation through to the stay itself**. Crucially, the process does not conclude upon return; **a significant minority grapples with meaningful academic and psychological reintegration difficulties.** This underscores that mobility is a prolonged lifecycle requiring structured institutional support beyond the physical exchange.

Ultimately, this analysis paints a picture of European student mobility as a widespread and valued rite of passage, yet one that remains complex and uneven. It is shaped by layered determinants, characterised by distinct national profiles and strategic priorities in destination choice, and followed by consequences that extend well beyond the official mobility period.

3.2.2. Non-mobile students

This section provides a detailed socio-demographic profile of the **239 surveyed student population** that has not yet undertaken an international mobility experience. Understanding the characteristics of these "non-mobile" students is crucial for identifying patterns, barriers, and potential leverage points to encourage future mobility. The profile encompasses gender, age, nationality, and reveals initial insights into their mobility intentions and preparatory actions.

a) Socio-demographic profile

The analysis of non-mobile students reveals a distinct socio-demographic composition within the surveyed population across France, Norway, Türkiye, and Slovenia. In terms of gender distribution, **female students form the majority at 69%, followed by male students at 28%**. A small proportion of students

Gender	
Female	69%
Male	28%
Other	1.7%
Do not wish to indicate	1.7%

identified as "Other" (1,7%) or preferred not to indicate their gender (1,7%). This gender imbalance towards female respondents is a notable characteristic of this non-mobile sample.

The cohort is **relatively young**, with a mean age of **23,4 years**, indicating a population primarily composed of students in the early to middle stages of their higher education. Geographically, the **sample is predominantly French**, with 51% of respondents coming from France. **Turkish students form the**
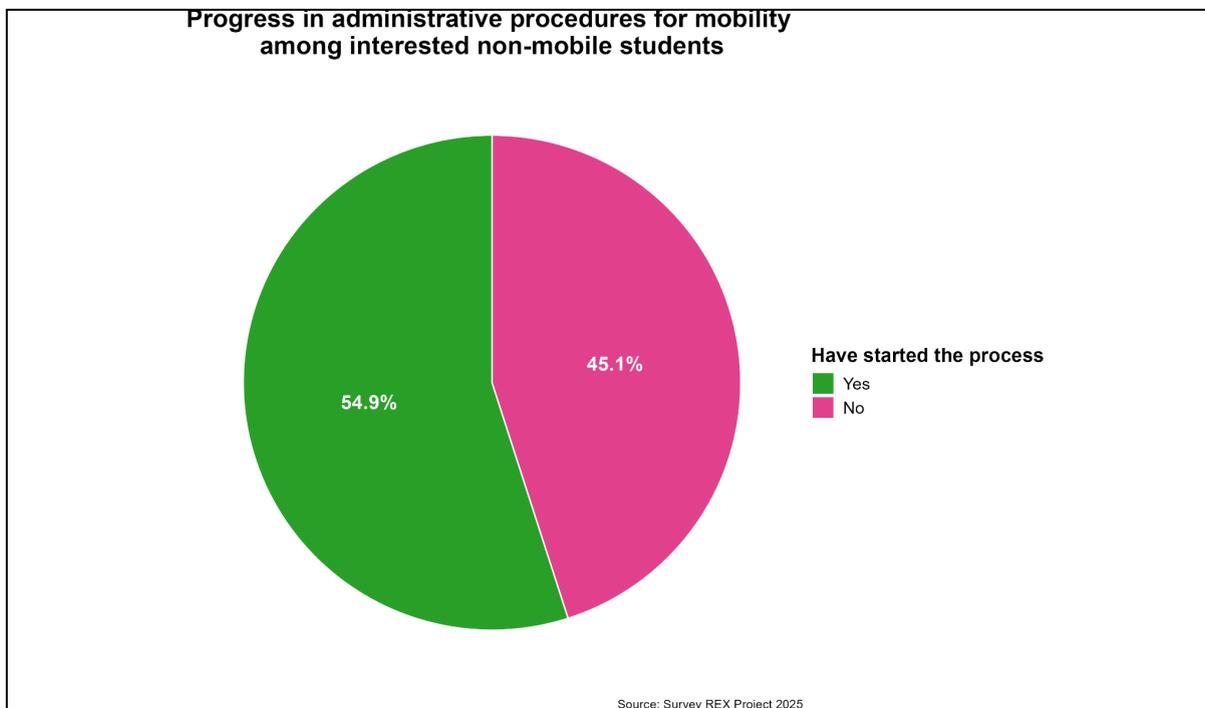
second-largest national group at 26%, followed by Norwegian students at 20%. Slovenian students constitute a smaller fraction at 3,4%, while the country of origin was unknown for two individuals. This distribution highlights the varied national contexts from which non-mobile students originate.

Mean age	23.4
Country	
France	51%
Norway	20%
Türkiye	26%
Slovenia	3.4%
Unknown	2

Regarding mobility disposition, the data shows that **a significant majority of these non-mobile students are not resistant to the idea of international exchang**e. Specifically, 76,2% express a desire to undertake a mobility period, while only 23,8% state they do not want to go abroad.

Distribution of non-mobile students according to their desire to do a mobility

23.8%

76.2%

Want to go on mobility
- No
- Yes

Source: Survey REX Project 2025
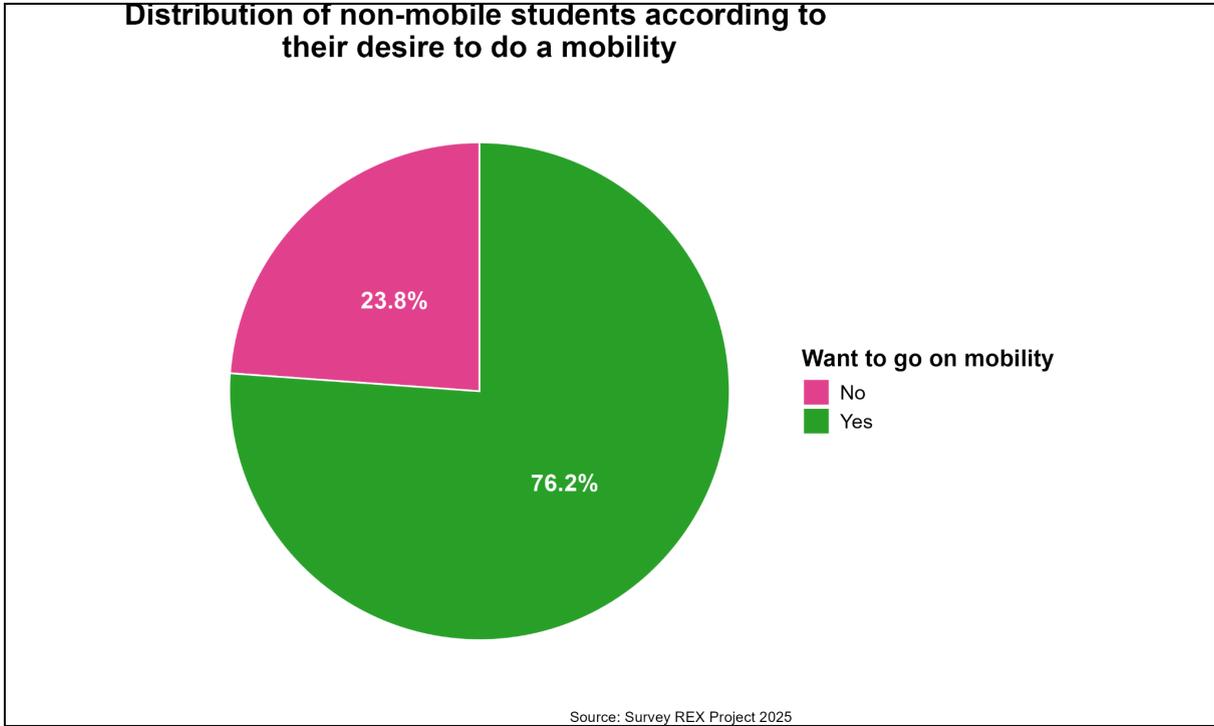
This finding is crucial as **it dispels the notion that non-mobile status is necessarily linked to a lack of interest**. Among those interested in mobility, engagement in preparatory steps is split: 54,9% have initiated administrative procedures for mobility, whereas 45,1% have not yet started the process, suggesting a point where **intention has not fully transitioned to action for a considerable portion**.

Progress in administrative procedures for mobility among interested non-mobile students

Have started the process
- Yes (54.9%)
- No (45.1%)

Source: Survey REX Project 2025

Prior international experience appears moderately associated with current mobility aspirations. Among students who want to go abroad, 55,5% had some form of experience abroad before entering higher education, compared to 44,5% with no such prior experience. Interestingly, this pattern is similar among those who do not want to go abroad (50,9% with prior experience vs 49,1% without), indicating that **while prior exposure may slightly correlate with interest, it is not a decisive or preventing factor on its own**.

Mobility intentions by prior international experience

Mobility intention	Experience abroad before higher education	
	Yes	No
Doesn't want to go abroad	50.9%	49.1%
Wants to go abroad	55.5%	44.5%

In summary, the typical non-mobile student in this profile is a young female Bachelor's student, most likely from France, who is interested in an international mobility experience but may not have progressed far into

the practical preparations. Their non-mobile status is thus not primarily a function of disinterest but likely intersects with other restraining factors, which will be explored in the following sections.

b) Academic profile

The **majority of respondents (69%) are enrolled in a Bachelor's degree or its equivalent**, forming the core of this cohort. Master's degree students constitute a significant minority at 29%, while Doctoral candidates represent a very small fraction at 1,3%. This distribution suggests that **the phenomenon of non-mobility is most prevalent at the foundational level of higher education**, with interest potentially waning or facing different structural barriers at more advanced levels.

In **terms of disciplinary background, the sample shows a balanced spread across major fields**. Social Sciences and Humanities collectively form the largest group at 33%, closely followed by students from Law, Economics, and Management at 30%. Engineering students represent 23% of the cohort, while those in Science and Medicine account for 14%. A minimal proportion (0,8%) falls under "Other" fields.

However, **the academic level emerges as a significant differentiating factor**. The regression model reveals that, **compared to Bachelor's students, those at the Master's level have significantly lower odds** (OR =

Level of study	
Bachelor's degree (or equivalent)	69%
Master's degree (or equivalent)	29%
Doctorate / PhD (or equivalent)	1.3%
Field of study	
Science, medicine	14%
Engineering	23%
Law, economics, management	30%
Social sciences and Humanities	33%
Others	0.8%

' %; Mean

Level of study (ref: Bachelor)	
Master's degree (or equivalent)	1.29e-01
Doctorate / PhD (or equivalent)	1.25e-02

0,129) **of wanting to go abroad**, and **the odds for Doctoral students are lower still** (OR = 0,0125).

Both results are highly statistically significant (p < 0,01). This strong, inverse relationship suggests that **the stage in the academic journey is a critical element**. The **decreasing propensity for mobility intention at higher levels may be influenced by program rigidity, thesis commitments, shorter program durations, or a prior missed window for mobility during the Bachelor's phas**e. This academic temporal dimension is thus a key feature distinguishing the non-mobile population's profile and aspirations.

c) Restraining or preventing factors

Despite a strong expressed desire for mobility (76,2%), **non-mobile students face a complex web of restraining and preventing factors that successfully hinder their participation in international exchange programs**. The analysis reveals that barriers are multifaceted, combining practical, financial, academic, and personal dimensions, with notable variations across national contexts.

Main factors preventing mobility

Factor	Moderately important	Very important
Financial constraints	22.6	29.0
Housing difficulties	38.7	25.8
Personal/family reasons	22.6	16.1
Lack of family support	22.6	6.5
COVID-19 impact	12.9	

Source: Survey REX Project 2025
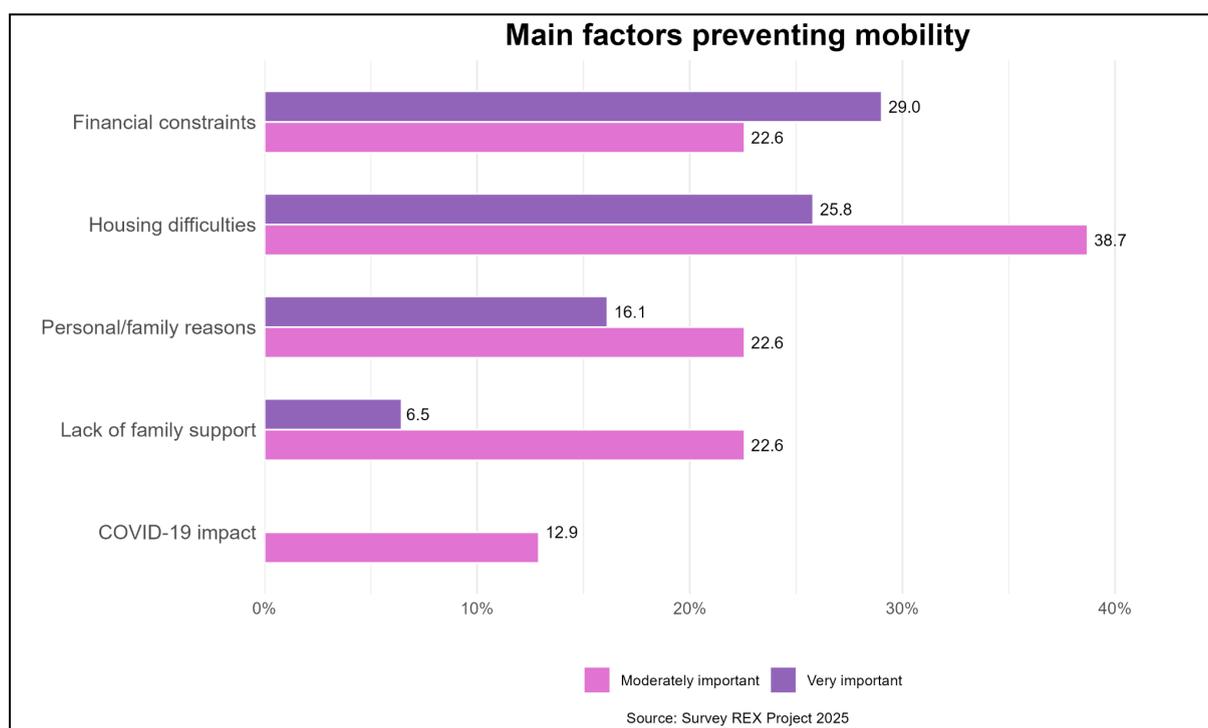
At the aggregate level, **financial constraints and housing difficulties** emerge as the two most pervasive obstacles. For nearly all non-mobile students, financial limitations are a critical concern, cited as "very important" by 29% and "moderately important" by 22,6%. The challenge of securing accommodation abroad is equally daunting, perceived as "very important" by 25,8% and "moderately important" by 38,7%.

Personal or family reasons (38,7% combined) and a lack of family support (29,1% combined) also represent significant personal and relational barriers. The lingering impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, while less prominent, remains a "moderately important" factor for 12,9% of students.

Delving deeper into specific barrier categories, **academic concerns stand out as the single most significant hindrance for the overall non-mobile population**, rated as "very important" by 45,5%. This suggests that fears about course recognition, delayed graduation, or incompatibility of curricula are paramount. This is followed by **practical constraints** (55,1% combined importance) and **institutional barriers** (39,3% combined), which encompass administrative complexities, lack of information, and bureaucratic hurdles within home universities. **Psychological barriers**, such as fear of the unknown or leaving one's comfort zone, are "very important" for 20,8% of students, while a perceived lack of attractive destination options deters 26%.

However, a **national comparative analysis reveals striking differences in the hierarchy of obstacles, indicating that restraining factors are heavily context-dependent**. For Turkish students, barriers are acute and almost absolute. Financial and practical constraints are universal concerns, cited as "very important" by 88,5% and 46,2% respectively, representing an overwhelming structural blockade. In contrast, Norwegian students face a more balanced but significant set of barriers, with psychological barriers, practical constraints, lack of motivation, and academic concerns being equally prominent (33,3% "very important" each). Financial constraints are also the most important, with 44,4%. French students report a similar profile, with financial and practical constraints as their top concerns (35,9% and 28,2% consider them "very important"), but cite unattractive destinations as their third barrier to mobility (10.3% of "very important"). This national breakdown is corroborated by data on factors that prevented mobility. For Turkish and French students, financial and housing issues are the main barriers, while Norwegians are most restrained by financial constraints (14,3%) but mainly personal/family reasons (21,4%).

In conclusion, while the intention for mobility is high, its realization is thwarted by a strong confluence of barriers. The nature of these barriers is not uniform but is filtered through national and personal circumstances.

3.2.3. Factors that could encourage mobility

To translate the strong desire for mobility into actual participation, non-mobile students have clear expectations regarding the levers that could encourage them. Their responses highlight **a need for better**

institutional support, more practical resources, and enhanced perceived value of the mobility experience, with distinct priorities emerging at the aggregate and national levels.

Average ranking of factors that would encourage students to go on mobility

The lower the score, the more important the factor

Factor	Average position in the ranking
More attractive destinations	3.86
Incentives from the alumni network	3.83
Better recognition of international mobility by employers	3.14
Nothing	3.00
Better promotion of international mobility by the university	3.00
More partnerships with my university	2.92
More student feedback	2.23
More information	2.00

Average position in the ranking
Source: Survey REX Project 2025

Overall, students identify **improved information dissemination and peer feedback** as the most critical encouraging factors. When asked to rank potential motivators, "More information", "More student feedback" (testimonials, reviews) and "More partnerships with their university" receive the lowest average scores (2, 2,23 and 2,92 respectively on a scale where lower scores indicate higher importance), signifying they are the top priorities. Frequency data confirms this, with "More student feedback" (5,6%), "More partnerships with my university" (5,1%) and "More information" (4,7%) cited as the most frequent key encouragers. This underscores a demand for transparent, relatable, and peer-validated information to reduce uncertainty. Conversely, factors like "Incentives from the alumni network" or "More attractive destinations" are ranked as less influential on average, suggesting that while logistical and inspirational barriers exist, the primary deficit is often in foundational communication and trust-building from the institution.

This **need for foundational support** is mirrored in the obstacles students wish to overcome. At the aggregate level, the most important hurdles to address are "Better recognition of credits" (top-ranked) and "A wider choice of courses", followed by "Better knowledge of destinations" and "Academic support". The most frequently mentioned specific obstacles are "Personalised support" (18,8%), "Academic support" (17,9%), and "More scholarships" (17,5%). This paints a clear picture: **students seek guarantees that mobility will be academically seamless** (credit recognition, course compatibility), **supported by tailored guidance and sufficient financial aid**.

National analyses reveal important variations in these motivational levers, aligning with the specific barriers identified earlier. For French students, the call for better institutional communication and academic security is pronounced. Their top-ranked encouragements are "More student feedback", while their foremost obstacle to overcome is "More scholarships", followed closely by "Personalised support" and "Academic support". For Turkish students, facing overwhelming structural barriers, prioritize institutional action and academic security above all. Their top-ranked encouraging factor is "Better promotion of international mobility by the university", and their most critical obstacles to address are "A wider choices of countries". Norwegian students present a different profile, where the perceived value and attractiveness of the mobility offer are paramount. Their top-ranked encouraging factor is "Better recognition of international mobility by employers", tied with "Nothing" (suggesting a segment is firmly decided against going). Their main obstacles are "A wider choice of countries" and the need for "More scholarships".

While a universal need for better information and peer insights exists, effective encouragement strategies must be nuanced. For French students, targeted financial and personalized academic support is crucial. For Turkish students, institutional advocacy and robust academic guarantees are essential to counter structural barriers. For Norwegian students, enhancing the career and diversity of the mobility portfolio is key.

3.2.4. Conclusion: A gap between intention and action

This analysis of non-mobile students reveals a critical paradox: **a large majority (76,2%) expresses a desire for international mobility, yet this intention is systematically thwarted by a complex matrix of barriers**.

Distribution of non-mobile students according to their desire to do a mobility

23.8%

76.2%

Want to go on mobility
- No
- Yes

Source: Survey REX Project 2025
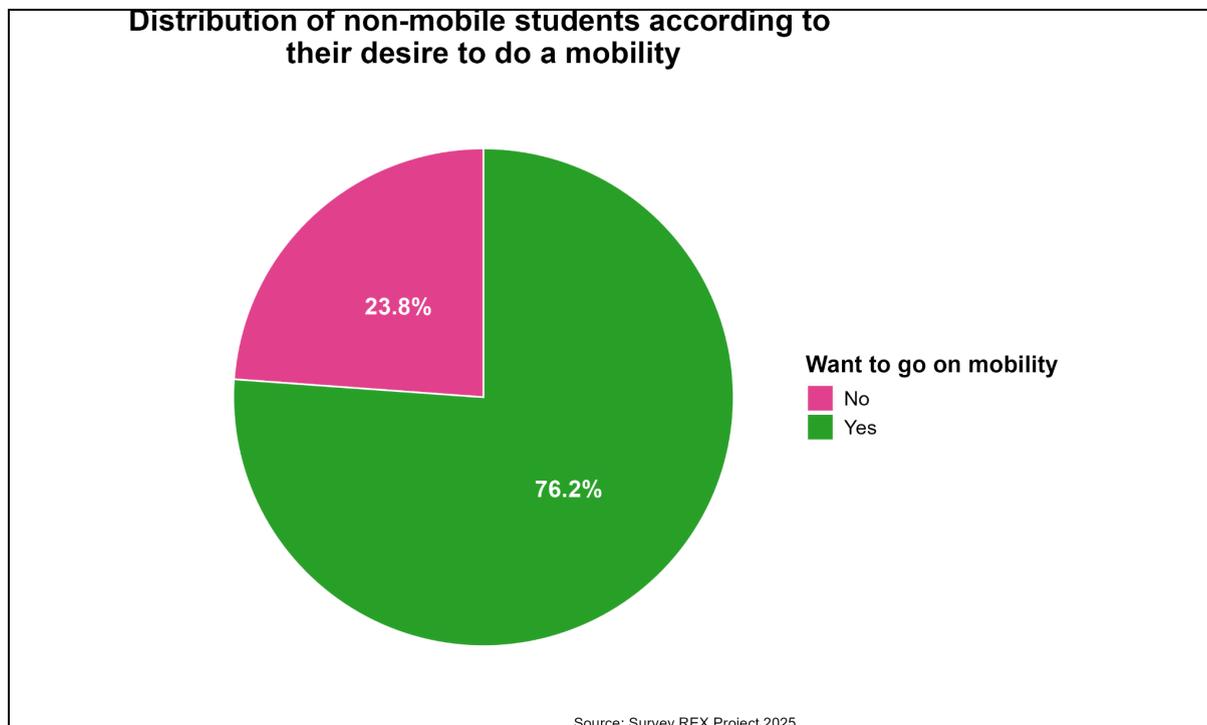
The typical non-mobile student is a young female Bachelor's student, demonstrating that **non-participation is not a function of disinterest**. **Instead, the transition from intention to action is blocked by significant and context-specific obstacles**. For Turkish students, overwhelming structural barriers like finance and housing are paramount. French and Norwegian students face pronounced institutional and academic concerns, alongside financial and motivational hurdles, respectively.

Crucially, the data points to clear leverage points for intervention: **enhancing transparent information, providing peer feedback, guaranteeing academic recognition, and offering tailored financial and personalized support**. Addressing these specific, nationally nuanced factors is essential to converting latent mobility aspirations into realized experiences.

3.3. Knowledge and satisfaction regarding universities

3.3.1. Mobility Experience (Status of the Student)

Now, let's look at their actual experience of mobility.

About **one-third of the students (32.5%) have already participated in a university exchange** - this is our "mobile category". The remaining two-thirds (67.5%) have never gone abroad yet.

Distribution of respondents according to their mobility profile

16.1%

32.5%

51.4%

Mobility profile
- Has been mobile
- Wants to go on mobility
- Doesn't want to go on mobility

Source: Survey REX Project 2025
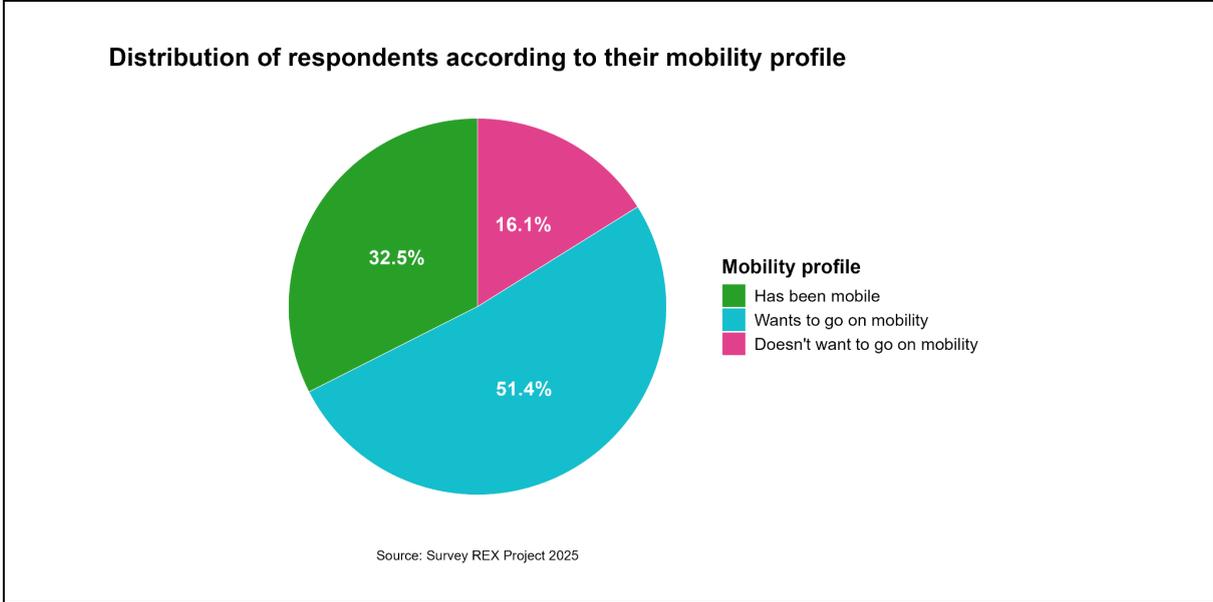
Among the non-mobile group, most students wish to go abroad in the future - that's about 51% of all respondents, or 76% of those who haven't yet left. Only 16% declare they do not wish to go on mobility at all. This means that the potential for future mobility remains very high across all countries.

3.3.2. Focus on Non-Mobile Students

Let's take a closer look at the students who haven't been abroad yet.

As we just saw, **around 76% of them would like to go abroad** - a very significant potential. More than half of these have already started the administrative process, such as looking for host universities or preparing applications.

Previous considerations regarding mobility among uninterested students

45.6%

54.4%

Have considered a mobility
- No
- Yes
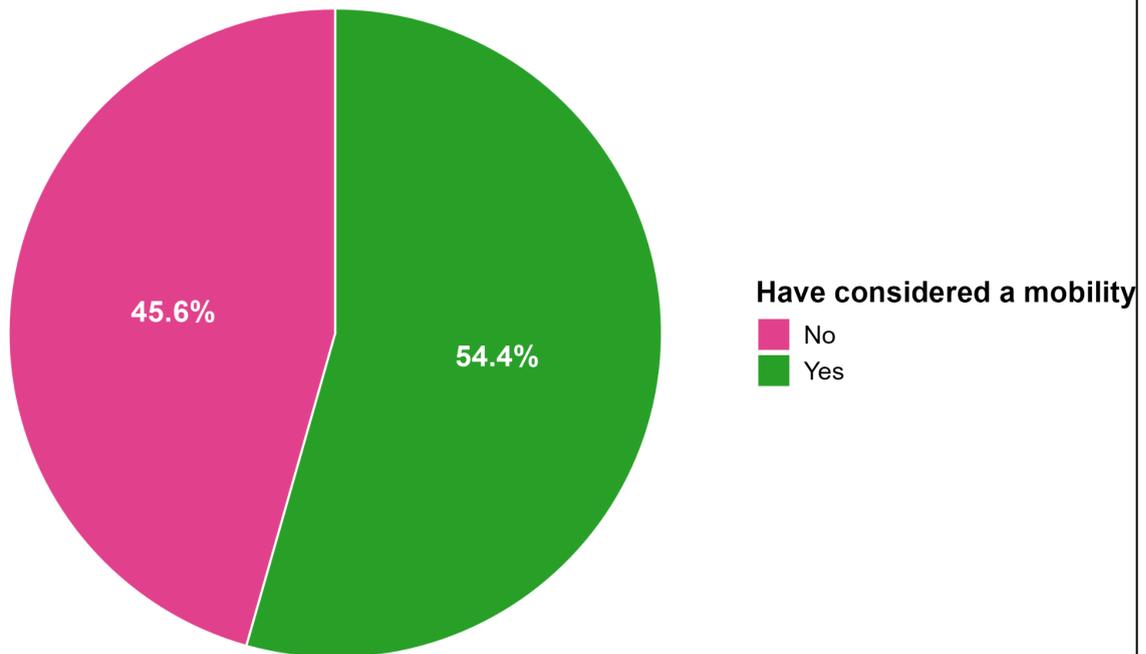
Source: Survey REX Project 2025

Interestingly, **about half of those who say they don't wish to go actually *had considered mobility in the past***. So we can say that many "non-mobile" students are not *uninterested*, but rather *discouraged* - what we might call *renunciable status*.

This highlights that barriers, rather than lack of motivation, often explain non-mobility.

3.3.3. Mobility Experience by Country

When we break these categories down by country, we observe interesting contrasts.

- In Norway, the balance between mobile and non-mobile students is quite even - around 45% and 55%.
- In Türkiye, there is a very strong "mobility spirit": about 35% have already been abroad, 62% want to go, and only 3% are reluctant.

- In France and Slovenia, the rates of desire are high, but fewer have actually gone abroad - typically 20-25%.

Distribution of respondents by country based on their mobility profile

France

Norway

Türkiye

Slovenia

France: 26.2% (green), 20.7% (pink), 53% (cyan)
Norway: 44.7% (green), 20% (pink), 35.3% (cyan)
Türkiye: 34.4% (green), 62.4% (cyan)
Slovenia: 20% (green), 30% (pink), 50% (cyan)

Mobility profile
- Has been mobile
- Wants to go on mobility
- Doesn't want to go on mobility

Source: Survey REX Project 2025
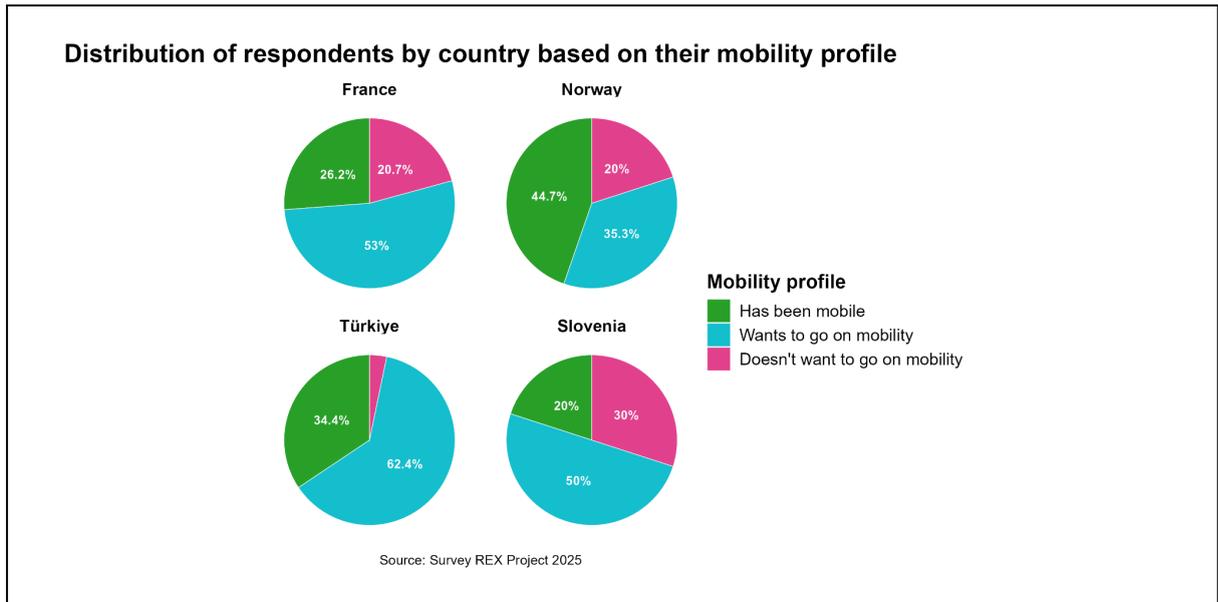
So, **the intention to go abroad is strong everywhere, but the *realisation* of that intention varies widely**, due to structural and institutional factors.

3.3.4. Mobility Experience by Level of Study

Now, looking at the level of study again but from a mobility perspective:

- **Bachelor's students show the highest desire to go abroad, but the lowest level of actual experience.**
- **Master's students show a balance between intention and past experience.**
- **Doctoral students have the highest rate of past mobility,** which makes sense given research networks and conferences.

Mobility profile by level of study

Source: Survey REX Project 2025
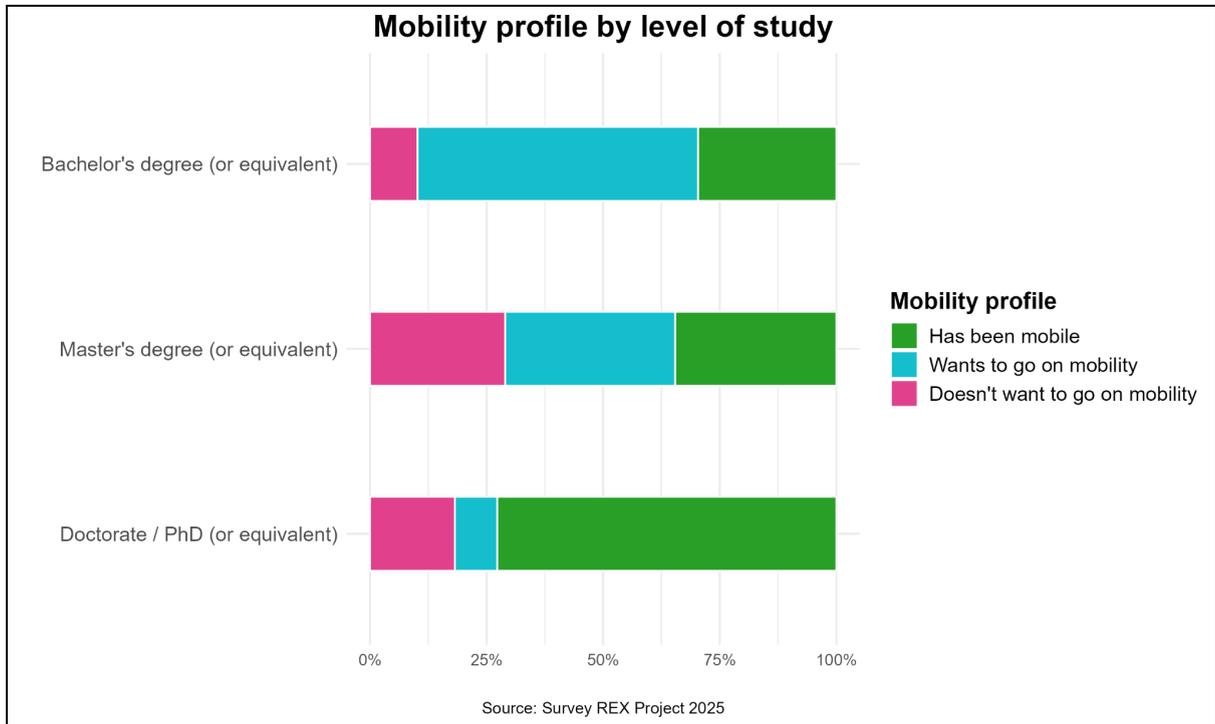
This trend confirms that mobility opportunities expand with academic level, but the desire is already strong from the early years.

3.3.5. Type of Mobility Experience

Among those who have already gone abroad, the majority participated in Erasmus exchange programmes.

More than half of mobile students had an Erasmus experience. About **one-third went through other exchange schemes**, such as bilateral agreements or short-term study visits. Internships abroad remain rare - less than 2% of total respondents.

Distribution of mobile students according to previous international experience

France
30.2% No
69.8% Yes

Norway
34.2% No
65.8% Yes

Türkiye
31.2% No
68.8% Yes

Slovenia
100% Yes

Experience abroad before higher education
- No
- Yes

Source: Survey REX Project 2025
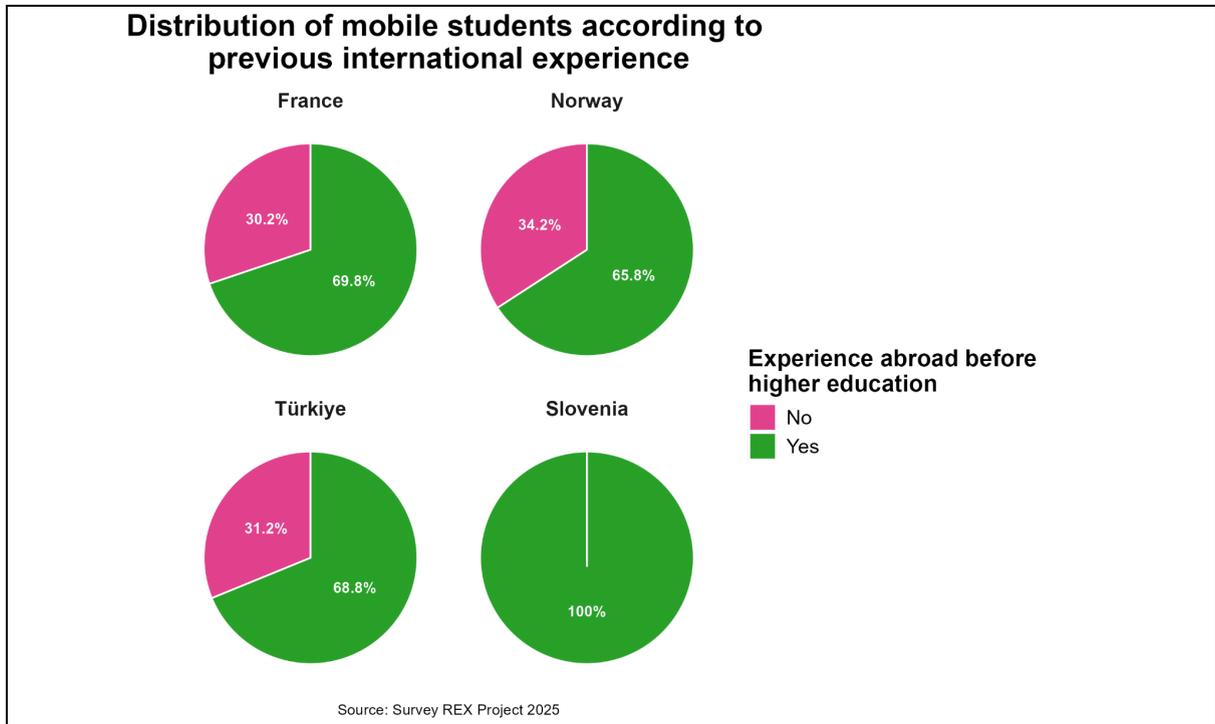
These findings suggest that institutional frameworks, such as Erasmus, still play a central role in shaping mobility behaviour, while alternative pathways remain underused.

3.4. Mobility: Wishes, Motives and Decisions

When we look at what drives students to consider going abroad, we classify motivations into three main categories:

1. **Personal developmen**t - students see mobility as a life-changing experience that helps them grow and gain independence.

2. **Cultural capital** - they want to discover new cultures, meet people from other backgrounds, and broaden their horizons.

3. **Human and professional capital** - mobility is also viewed as an investment in the future, improving employability, language skills, and CV value.

Main factors that would encourage students to go on mobility

Factor	Value
More student feedback	5.6
More partnerships with my university	5.1
Better promotion of international mobility by the university	5.1
More information	4.7
Nothing	4.3
More attractive destinations	3.0
Better recognition of international mobility by employers	3.0
Incentives from the alumni network	2.6

Source: Survey REX Project 2025

In short, mobility is not only about academics - it's about identity, opportunity, and self-discovery.

Despite their strong motivation to participate in exchange programmes, many students encounter significant obstacles before, during and even after their mobility experience. It is essential to identify these challenges in order to understand how institutions can better support students, whether through improved financial aid, clearer administrative procedures or stronger emotional support.

Before departure in particular, several recurring obstacles arise. Financial constraints remain the main concern, with students frequently mentioning the high cost of living abroad, double rent and insufficient scholarships. Administrative and procedural complexity is also a major difficulty, with lengthy administrative procedures, unclear steps, visa requirements and insurance issues often causing stress and uncertainty. In addition, psychological and family factors, such as fear of the unknown, emotional separation or limited parental support, can further discourage students.

These combined obstacles sometimes prevent highly motivated students from taking advantage of mobility opportunities. The following section presents the analysis and main conclusions of the focus groups, which provide a more in-depth insight into how students experience and perceive these obstacles.

Part 4. Focus groups : analysis and main findings

This section draws on data collected during focus group discussions held in Slovenia, Turkey and France. Through students' discussions and the representations they produced, these sessions offer a deeper insight into how international mobility is experienced, interpreted and imagined in different contexts.

By bringing together oral testimonies and visual expressions, the analysis seeks to capture both the explicit narratives that students construct around mobility and the more symbolic dimensions that underlie their perceptions. Taken together, these perspectives shed light on the meanings students attach to mobility, the tensions they experience, and the ideals they project onto the university as an international space.

The section concludes by bringing these different contexts into dialogue, highlighting both the common dynamics and the contextual specificities that shape students' representations of mobility.

4.1. The Slovenian focus groups

4.1.1. Oral data : mobility as lived negotiation between aspiration and friction

a) Settling in, finding your bearings, reconfiguring yourself: an everyday affair

In the Slovenian focus groups, international mobility (often thought of in terms of Erasmus) is not described as a simple 'study trip', but as a **complete change of scene that affects routines, relationships, spatial landmarks and one's relationship with oneself**. Students first describe very concrete concerns - housing, distances, organisation of daily life - as if academic success depended on a prerequisite: successfully settling in (finding a hairdresser, a washing machine, etc.)

This experience is underpinned by a common thread: the **feeling of orientation/disorientation**. Leaving is desirable (adventure, discovery), but the experience quickly revolves around a practical question: who will help me, when, and how do I know that I am taking the 'right' steps? This motif is important because it shows that **mobility is not solely a matter of individual motivation**: it depends on the ability to make the new environment understandable and practicable, particularly with regard to everyday life (what clothes to wear, how to deal with logistical issues, etc.).

b) Emotional ambivalence: social openness and vulnerability (fear of isolation)

Mobility is also experienced as a **relational challenge**. On the one hand, it promises to expand one's social network (meetings, events, student life). On the other hand, it reactivates a vulnerability: the fear of being alone, missing loved ones, the worry of not finding one's place. The corpus expresses this ambivalence with very direct formulations: "*You miss your friends…*".

This tension reveals a central need: a support infrastructure (peers, tutors, staff) capable of turning the experience from "difficult" to "manageable". The challenge is not to remove autonomy, but to **prevent autonomy from turning into loneliness**.

c) Motivations: a set of promises… constantly "negotiated"

The motivations expressed resemble promises: a change of scenery, learning (language, methods), meeting people, gaining confidence, strengthening one's CV. But these promises are rarely stated as obvious facts; they are negotiated in the face of risks and costs. The analyses summarise this logic well: the **decision to leave is made on the basis of a cost/benefit analysis**.

d) Barriers: it is not 'an obstacle', it is the sum of frictions

Slovenian focus groups show that **demotivation does not come from a single barrier, but from the accumulation of small frictions** (paperwork, uncertainties, costs, language, housing, health). Before departure, the most significant barrier is the anticipation of risk: fear of making a mistake, the mental burden of documentation, doubts about financing, the need for stable reference points. Preparation becomes a skill in itself, and the lack of support turns opportunity into stress. During mobility, barriers become part of everyday life: adapting to the city, and above all language (as a condition for accessing courses, friends and services). Language is ambivalent: it can be a source of motivation (to improve) or an obstacle (not understanding, not daring to ask). Overall, the analysis offers a useful grouping: resources (scholarships, information, support), frictions (paperwork, language, cost), strategies (getting organised, asking for help, choosing accommodation nearby, working on the language), consequences (stress, delays, but also pride). This model is valuable for understanding demotivation: **when resources arrive late, frictions become unmanageable**.

e) The mobility process: a 'before-during-after' trajectory and a need for 'supported autonomy'

Slovenian students emphasise a complete temporality: Erasmus is not only 'during', but also before (preparation) and after (recognition, reintegration). Even when they talk about their experiences abroad, they link them to what came before and what came after: **mobility is a process**.

f) Stereotypes: patterns of anticipation (and a moral issue of speech)

In this corpus, stereotypes do not appear only as "fixed opinions ', but as **simplification tools used to quickly understand, anticipate behaviours, or recount an experience**. Classic stereotypes associating France with love or lack of hospitality, Spain with partying, and Scandinavian countries with cold weather are counterbalanced by the fact that one returns a "completely new person".

g) The ideal university: an institution that 'reduces friction' and provides security

When Slovenian students talk about the 'ideal university', they are not describing an abstract utopia, but a **response to irritants they have experienced or anticipated.** The ideal university is one that reduces friction and increases the capacity for action.

Four dimensions in particular structure this ideal:

1. **Study conditions and well-being**: short hours, restaurant and cafeteria, sports, close relationships with teachers.
2. **Reliability** ('zero errors'): a strong expectation of robust processes (files, credits, deadlines).
3. **Student life and integration**: welcome and social ties - not as a supplement, but as a condition for well-being and success.
4. **Material organisation** (access, spaces, services). Participants anchor the ideal in tangible elements, because it is the 'little repetitive things' that, if they malfunction, exhaust the student.

The Slovenian focus groups do not say 'students no longer want to leave'; rather, they say that students want conditional mobility, i.e. mobility that is practicable, understandable and does not threaten their career path. **The decline in motivation can be explained above all by the anticipation of uncertainty and the accumulation of friction, particularly on a daily basis**.

4.1.2. Visual data : thresholds, gains and institutional conditions

a) International mobility experience: a trajectory experienced as 'assembly' and transformation

Slovenian visual productions describe Erasmus not as a simple 'study trip', but as an assembly of heterogeneous elements: desire for autonomy, anticipation of risks, search for friendships, professional projection, and need for support. The visual aspect is decisive here: it reveals a **mosaic experience, composed of micro-episodes** (administrative, relational, emotional, practical) rather than a single linear narrative.

This dynamic of transformation is made explicit by the **visible verbatim quotes**, notably the statement: 'COMPLETELY NEW PERSON!'. The return is therefore foreshadowed from the outset as an expected effect of the stay. The Erasmus experience appears to be an "intensive" period: it produces confidence ('Become confident'), openness, learning ('New knowledge') and convertible benefits ('Job opportunities').

But **this transformation is not idealised without reservation: it is constantly linked to a series of concrete challenges and vulnerabilities**. The images show both enthusiasm and specific difficulties (fear of falling ill, 'Problems with documentation', etc.), which prevents a naively heroic interpretation of the departure. Visually, mobility is less a 'success story' than a montage in which one must simultaneously juggle academic, everyday and emotional aspects.

b) Obstacles and motivations: a temporal logic of 'before/during/after' and a cost/benefit analysis

The materials implicitly distinguish between three time frames: anticipation (before), the specific challenge (during) and capitalisation (after). This segmentation is particularly important for understanding the decline in motivation: obstacles are not only found 'before' (doubts), but also 'during' (loneliness, adaptation) and "after" (ambivalent return).

The **'before' is filled with conditions and fears**, often associated with very concrete elements: money, language, paperwork, unfamiliar environment. The visible verbatim quotes give immediate texture to these anxieties: 'Making a plan in advance', 'Fear of a different environment', 'Language barrier'.

The **'during' phase is represented by obstacles and challenges**: adaptation, health, housing, managing daily life, loneliness. Here again, the visuals reveal vulnerabilities that are often underestimated in promotional discourse: lack of friends ('No friends'), nostalgia ("Homesickness"), language difficulties

('Different language'). These elements indicate that mobility is, at its core, an experience of uprooting: we change our environment, our bearings, our routines and our networks.

After the stay, **the return is presented as a transformation** (autonomy, confidence, knowledge, opportunities). The phrase 'NEW KNOWLEDGE' encapsulates this logic of accumulation and symbolic conversion. But the document adds a crucial point: the return can be ambivalent (fatigue, disconnection, feeling that the home university does not offer 'the same experience'). This is where a lasting institutional stereotype emerges: 'foreign universities are better than local ones', which can fuel higher expectations and frustration with the home institution.

Motivations are formulated as "cumulative" gains: 'New experience', 'New opportunities', 'Meeting new people', 'New knowledge'. They add up like capital (social, cultural, symbolic). The obstacles, on the other hand, are 'granular': material details (documentation, health) and emotions (fear, homesickness). Mobility is worthwhile if it is supported - without financial, administrative, social and psychological support, the obstacles become dominant.

c) The mobility process: from preparation to 'capitalisation', a chain of dependencies

Even if the media are visual, they provide a great deal of information about the process: **mobility is not an event, but a chain of dependencies**. We can thus see a four-stage process emerging, consistent with the three-part division of before/during/after:

1. Starting point (before): planning, conditions, preparation ('Making a plan in advance'), question of resources (money, information) and ability to plan ahead.
2. Entering the trial (during): confrontation with systems (housing, health, documentation), routines, and above all the relational dimension (making friends/not being isolated).
3. Transformation (during → after): acquisition of autonomy and confidence, with the promise of convertible gains ('job opportunities').
4. Return and re-comparison (after): re-evaluation of the university of origin, possible lasting hierarchy ('foreign universities are better than local ones').

Motivations mobilise a logic of individual responsibility (learning the language, stepping out of one's comfort zone), **while obstacles reveal institutional dependencies** (information, costs, documentation, transport). This tension indicates that 'succeeding' in Erasmus is less a question of will than of organised conditions.

d) Stereotypes: the 'wall' as a cognitive barrier and learning challenge

Stereotypes play a central role and are presented as a **two-sided phenomenon: clichés associated with countries/identities, but also obstacles to be overcome in the international experience**. The Netherlands - openness, France - love, Spain - partying, Mediterranean people are extroverted, Scandinavians are cold...

e) The ideal university: a 'liveable' institution that reduces friction and supports mobility

The 'IDEAL UNIVERSITY / MY IDEAL UNIVERSITY' posters make a shift: the ideal university is not described as elitist, but as **practicable and liveable**, **capable of providing concrete support to students and making the experience 'fluid, fair, sustainable'**. The ideal university is constructed as a map of spaces (campus, services) and a list of 'implicit rights' (support, accessibility, time). It is important to emphasise the pragmatic nature of this definition: **what is ideal is what reduces everyday friction** (timetables, meals, rest areas, workspaces, sport, access to teachers, administrative clarity).

In the Erasmus context, the ideal university also becomes **an institution capable of accommodating mobility**: language assistance, social integration, services for international students, and simple administrative recognition. Above all, the ideal university appears to mirror the tensions identified in the Erasmus experience: if mobility exposes students to loneliness, paperwork and anxiety, then the ideal university must provide connections, clarity and services. The **ideal is not unrealistic**: it is formulated as a series of concrete corrective measures; in short, **it is not more prestigious, it is more liveable**.

4.1.3. Oral and visual data in perspective

a) The visual stabilises and hierarchises; the oral unfolds and negotiates

Slovenian productions stabilise the experience into **shareable categories** (fears/conditions, obstacles, benefits), notably via the three-part division of before/during/after. The visual acts as a **collective 'formatting'**: it transforms a potentially disordered experience into manipulable categories. Conversely, oral data (which is sequential in nature) would highlight the order of arguments, hesitations, disagreements and accounts of episodes.

b) Visuals make the co-presence of contradictions visible, without having to 'resolve' them

In these posters, Erasmus appears as **an assemblage where enthusiasm and concrete challenges (documentation, health, loneliness) coexist**. Visuals are very well suited to this co-presence: we can write "New opportunities" next to "Homesickness" without immediately having to arbitrate. Oral

communication, on the other hand, often tends to produce argumentative sequences (justifying, qualifying, counter-arguing) . In other words, the **visual more clearly shows ambivalence as a structure** (a 'mix'), whereas the **oral would show ambivalence more as discursive work** (how we say it, how we manage it).

c) The visual "counts" (list, inventory); the oral 'tells' (episodes)

Motivations are presented as additive gains ('New experience', 'Meeting new people', etc.) and obstacles as concrete details ('Problems with documentation', 'Language barrier'). This **visual economy produces a kind of table of values**. Whereas the **oral would probably unfold situations** (how the paperwork went, what 'No friends' means in everyday life), the **visual keeps the information at the level of the label**.

In conclusion, the Slovenian focus groups show that international mobility is understood less as a global transformative experience and more as something that simultaneously involves students' daily lives, social relationships, emotions, and institutional trajectories. The results highlight a strong ambivalence between the motivations expressed and an accumulation of concrete, often anticipated frictions that undermine the decision to leave.

4.2. The Turkish focus groups

We will begin by presenting the analyses of the audio data, followed by those of the visual data, focusing on the motivations and apprehensions regarding international student mobility, the internationalisation process, any stereotypes mobilised by students, and finally their conception of an ideal university in terms of student mobility for Turkish students, produced during their three focus groups. Like the Slovenian students, the Turkish participants have an ambivalent relationship with international mobility.

4.2.1. Oral data : mobility as ordinary resilience

a) Holding together: autonomy and uncertainty

In the corpus, the Erasmus experience is described as a mixture of discovery, daily management and collective negotiation of meaning. This **experience is constantly bordered by fragilities**. On the one hand, leaving

is associated with the joy of meeting new people: '*It's very exciting to meet new people*,' and the statement '*Meeting people is a positive thing*' indicates that the value of mobility is measured as much by socialisation as by courses.

On the other hand, the experience is seen as a challenge that can be disorienting and worrying, in particular, the fear of being alone, without friends and far from family is strong ('the fear... of being forgotten by friends, or of being alone').

This **ambivalence also relates to identity**. On the one hand, the mobility experience is empowering (you learn to fend for yourself, make decisions and find your way), but also uncertain (you depend on procedures, administrative responses, financial resources and networks). Finally, the students reveal a tone of 'ordinary resilience': the **experience involves difficulties that are sometimes significant, but the group reclassifies them as surmountable challenges** - '*But we succeeded*.' This sentence has strong rhetorical value: it **transforms the difficulty into proof of ability** and therefore into an argument in favour of the experience (despite everything).

b) Mobility as capital (skills, network, future) and as transformation

The **motivations mentioned in the corpus are both existential** (transformation, discovery) **and instrumental** (accumulating academic and professional capital). Students associate their objectives with very concrete elements: '*visa, studying abroad, meeting new people, learning a new language, making new friends*'. The Erasmus experience is thus represented as a coherent whole: it is not 'a single benefit', but a **constellation of expected gains**.

Another motivational register emerges: mobility as **exploration** and as a **broadening of possibilities**. " *We know that every exploration can be an experience*" gives mobility an almost educational status: to explore is to learn, and to learn is to become.

The **capitalisation dimension** is explicitly present in the way students articulate opportunities and trajectories: the possibility of accessing programmes, enhancing their profile and, more broadly, broadening their horizons (master's/PhD, career). Leaving is seen as an investment whose 'return' is played out afterwards (degree, employment).

What is important, however, is that **these motivations remain conditional**: they are not enough to trigger departure if the mobility infrastructure (visa, accommodation, equivalencies, security) appears too risky. In other words, in the Turkish corpus, motivation is not an internal stock: it is a dynamic balance between the desire for openness and risk management.

c) Bureaucracy and academic recognition: the ordeal of paperwork, credits and deadlines

The **most significant obstacle** to international mobility is bureaucracy, understood both as a **practical problem** and as an **identity issue**. Students describe it as a world where 'existing' means being documented: documents, stamps, appointments, emails, proof. Bureaucracy is a system that imposes mandatory procedures and access thresholds (the right paperwork, the right department, the right date) .

This bureaucracy becomes particularly critical when it comes to visas and learning agreements: '*To obtain a visa, we need accommodation and an online learning agreement*'; '*the learning agreement causes us a lot of harm and makes us afraid*'. The visa is not a simple formality: it is a passage that can block everything and turns entry into mobility into a high-risk gamble.

The **challenge continues after the stay via recognition**: 'When we return from Erasmus, the transcript of our credits is late.' Here, mobility not only threatens comfort; it threatens the continuity of the course and the timing of the degree.

d) Language: a barrier to belonging and a source of vulnerability

Language appears to be a central barrier, but above all a **boundary of belonging**: it determines access to courses, services and socialisation. The corpus formulates a radical equation: '*If you don't know English, you're alone, alone.*' This sentence clearly states that language is not just a tool: it **distributes inclusion/exclusion**. Speaking the local language means speaking of legitimacy (or not having answers), trust, and fear of not being good enough (not having friends).

e) Housing and money: material vulnerability and anxiety about downward mobility

Housing and money are described as **signs of security or exposure**. One quote is particularly striking: '*I'm afraid of being homeless.*' This fear is not only individual: it signals that, for some, mobility can tip over into extreme material insecurity if access to housing fails. The economic context (prices, inflation) is also used to justify hesitation: '*prices… are rising*', '*we're not saying we won't experience this stress*'. **Mobility is therefore perceived as exposure to unpredictable costs that are difficult to control**.

f) Security, health, food: managing risk on a daily basis

Another significant obstacle is security (urban and social) and risk management (health, place of residence, transport). Students discuss security as a major criterion. They also mention **fears related to dietary differences** ("*The difference in food... scares us*'), which reflects a very **concrete apprehension about adaptation**.

g) The mobility process: a chain of 'trigger → preparation → friction → adjustments → effects'

This process is experienced as a series of stages in which **students must continually prove themselves** (competence, seriousness, ability to adapt). They **mobilise collective strategies**: seeking out peers who have already left, asking for information, relying on old friends, and above all, calling for coordination mechanisms. The idea of a 'coordination group' appears explicitly: '*We first wanted there to be a coordination group.*' Digital technology plays an ambivalent role here: it can help (platforms, emails, websites), but it can also increase the feeling of loss of control if procedures are fragmented, opaque, or if responses are delayed.

h) Stereotypes: anticipating the unknown, managing reputation, avoiding exposure

In the Turkish corpus, **stereotypes appear as tools for anticipation and 'shortcuts' for deciding where to go and how to protect oneself**. 'Germans are very cold people,' or comparisons about racism ('in Italy, there is less racism than in other countries'). An important point is that these stereotypes are rarely presented as certainties: they circulate via 'I was told', feedback, comparisons between countries, and are sometimes contextualised ('not all of Germany, just one city'). This caution shows that stereotypes **serve mainly to reduce uncertainty, but remain negotiable - and potentially reconfigured by experience**.

These stereotypes are **also linked to safety**: students discuss the safety of the country or city as a key criterion, which transforms representations (positive/negative) into decision-making variables. The challenge becomes: *how to choose a destination without putting oneself at risk (socially, economically, symbolically)?*

i) The ideal university: an 'accessible' institution that cares

When describing the ideal university, Turkish students do not talk about prestige first and foremost: they describe **a university that reduces the friction of the mobility process and supports students at critical moments**. Several expectations emerge clearly. The ideal university **must be accessible and responsive**: '*Yes, we must be accessible*', and criticism of '*late replies to emails*' shows that administrative timeliness is seen as decisive for anxiety and success. In addition, it **must support students with advice**

and stable mechanisms aimed at making mobility manageable. Another dimension of the ideal university is its a**bility to create bonds and support between peers** (tutoring/buddy system): 'It would be great… to have… tutors, students a year above…'. This is a major expectation: autonomy is desired, but not isolation. This search for social connections goes beyond peers to include teachers. The ideal includes helpful teachers and conditions that make studying sustainable. In addition, students imagine a more protective university, both materially, financially and in terms of security. Thus, the ideal university is sensitive to inequalities in resources and takes care of the urban and security aspects of student life.

4.2.2. Visual data : capital, risk and institutional expectations across stages

a) The Erasmus experience: a rite of passage

International mobility seems to be a rite of passage, **a two-sided experience: a promise of openness and exposure to very concrete constraints**. The images construct the Erasmus experience as a complete trajectory that begins before departure and continues after return. Far from a linear narrative of 'I leave - I study - I come back' , the media depict a succession of micro-events and thresholds to be crossed: visas, financial proof, accommodation, linguistic adaptation, making friends, transport, then return and readjustment.

The suitcase is **a 'condenser' of aspirations and concerns**. It serves to bring together, in a single graphic framework, heterogeneous elements: objectives (travelling, learning, validating credits), resources (scholarships, support), but also threats (loneliness, discrimination, health problems, delays). In other words, the **Erasmus experience is cumulative**. We 'carry' expectations and concerns simultaneously, and their weight evolves over the course of the stay.

The keywords written on the suitcases ('*TRAVEL*', '*NEW FRIENDS*', '*NEW LANGUAGE*', '*MASTER OPPORTUNITIES*', 'CREDITS') reveal the perception of Erasmus as an investment. But the risks are also apparent: 'Loneliness', "Homesickness", 'No friends', 'Problems with documentation' and, in some cases, 'Health issues/Health problems'.

The Erasmus journey is represented by **a series of obstacles and milestones**. The point of arrival ('*arrived*') functions as symbolic validation: succeeding in Erasmus means crossing a series of thresholds, not just 'having left'. Above all, the journey includes the return ('*Leaving the Erasmus City*') and an explicitly named emotional phase ("*Post Erasmus Depression* "). This is a powerful result: students give the return a status of event and recognise the possibility of a psychological cost. The **stay then appears as a peak of**

intensity: it transforms, but this transformation can be fragile when it comes to 'coming back down" to everyday life.

b) Motivations and obstacles: a "before - during - after" logic (investment vs friction)

The productions clearly distinguish three moments, not only through words, but also through the **spatialisation of information**: checklist/suitcase (before), journey/stages (during), effects/return (after). Before departure, motivations are formulated as expected gains: travelling ('*TRAVEL*'), meeting people ('*NEW FRIENDS*'), learning a language ('*NEW LANGUAGE*'), strengthening one's career path ('*CREDITS*', '*MASTER OPPORTUNITIES*'). Erasmus is represented as an **investment in experience, social capital and academic capital**.

But visually, these motivations coexist immediately with structural obstacles. The visa is a major barrier: written in capital letters ('*VISA*'), sometimes depicted as a 'mountain', and associated with failure ('*visa declined*'). This shows that **entry into mobility is not guaranteed**: it depends on administrative procedures that are perceived as uncertain and potentially disqualifying. Around the visa, documentation and financial proof ('*Money + money proof*') construct a 'regime of proof': in order to leave, one must demonstrate compliance (file, supporting documents, deadlines). Hence a recurring proposal: '*Single platform for all documentation*', which reveals that the issue is not only the quantity of procedures, but also their fragmentation and lack of clarity.

During the stay, the obstacles shift to the material and relational aspects of daily life. The images reveal 'situated problems': '*Transportation Problems*', '*Accommodation help*', and the confrontation with a language 'in context' ('*School language*', '*Language barrier*', or the example of Greek writing '*Ελληνικά*'). **Language is no longer just a learning objective; it becomes a condition for access to courses, services, and integration**.

Above all, **isolation appears as a possible stage of the experience** ('Loneliness,' 'No friends,' 'Homesickness'). By placing it on the same level as money or paperwork, students normalise the idea that the **emotional dimension is structuring**: one can "fail" Erasmus socially even if one 'succeeds' academically. The distance from family is objectified by a figure ('4235 km'), giving the distance a measurable materiality. This **quantification transforms an emotion (longing) into data (distance)**, reinforcing the idea that the experience is as much a test of separation as it is an academic project.

After the stay, the corpus shows a dual trend: on the one hand, **capitalisation** ('*NEW KNOWLEDGE*', '*New opportunities*', career opportunities/master's/PhD); on the other, the **fragility of the return** ("*Post Erasmus Depression* "). The aftermath is therefore not automatically happy: it may require support and reintegration work.

Motivation to go abroad is not enough; it must be transformed into the ability to navigate the various steps involved (procedures, platforms, deadlines). Successful Erasmus participation requires the skill of '*Making a plan in advance*'. But the corpus suggests that this skill must be supported by the institution - hence the centrality of information, communication and coordination. This is why students are proposing **organisational solutions** (single platform, Teams channel, videos, language support) to facilitate departures and their well-being.

c) Stereotypes: guiding choices and exposing students to discrimination

The posters construct **an informal and moral map**: some cities/countries are associated with safety ('*Barcelona (security)*', '*Milan (security)*', '*SAFE → Germany → Austria*'), others with dirtiness ('*Athens (dirty)*'). These **judgements influence the desirability of destinations beyond academic quality**. The explicit presence of '*RACISM*', '*XENOPHOBIA*', '*DISCRIMINATION*' and '*Racial discrimination*' shows that mobility is thought of as potentially exposing: **leaving means risking exclusion**.

Stereotypes are not only listed: they are discussed, nuanced, and sometimes refuted (presence of ✓ and ✗). The example '*In Paris, you must speak only French*' is explicitly rejected (' ✗ '), showing a collective effort to correct clichés. Similarly, the statement '*Polish people were not as cold as I imagined*' highlights the possibility that experience may contradict expectations. Finally, an **institutional stereotype** appears: 'foreign universities are better than local ones'. It can be motivating (to seek "better" elsewhere), but it also establishes **a symbolic hierarchy that can devalue the university of origin**.

d) The ideal university: a 'trustworthy infrastructure' (legible, connecting, redistributive)

The ideal university is first and foremost **accessible and fast**: '*Easily reachable with Erasmus Office and fast mail answers*'. Access to reliable answers is a prerequisite for reducing anxiety and the risk of error. Administrative pedagogy is explicitly requested: '*Online videos for application process*'. The core of the ideal system is **centralisation**: '*Single platform for all documentation*' / "*SINGLE PLATFORM (APPL. PROCESS)*'. This request reveals that the fragmentation of procedures is seen as a major obstacle. Centralisation reduces uncertainty, wasted time and errors. In addition, the ideal university creates a **continuous community between future and former students**: '*MS TEAMS CHANNEL... - INTERACTION*'. It also supports equal access: '*Increase scholarship*' and '*Accommodation help*'. The trio of '*3 TOP IDEAS*" sums up this logic: clarity, connection, resources.

Another major dimension of an ideal university is the **explicit consideration of the aftermath** (return, psychological support). Verbatims such as '*Return*' and '*Psychological help for students*' '*Post-Erasmus depression*' indicate that the ideal university is not only one that sends and welcomes students; it is one that **accompanies them throughout the entire emotional and institutional cycle**.

4.2.3. Oral and visual data in perspective

The comparison between the oral and visual corpora shows **less of a difference in content than a difference in mode of knowledge**: the oral brings the experience to life through narrative, justification and situated emotion; the visual creates a collective 'map' of mobility, structured in stages, obstacles and solutions.

a) Temporality: the oral narrative recounts scenes; the visual narrative transforms Erasmus into a 'before-during-after' system

In the oral narrative, mobility unfolds through lived experiences: the fear of being alone, the excitement of meeting new people, the difficulties of managing administrative procedures, the anxiety associated with housing or language. We hear about an experience unfolding, with its contradictions ('exciting' and "scary").

The visual, on the other hand, objectifies temporality: suitcase (before), dotted road (during), return (after). The addition of '*Leaving the Erasmus City*' and especially '*Post Erasmus Depression*' to the journey makes the 'after' a moment in its own right. The stay becomes a complete cycle, immediately legible.

b) Affects: the oral nuance and explains; the visual condenses and intensifies

The **oral discussions provide access to the mechanisms**: why is there English conditions integration ('*If you don't know English, you're alone, alone*'), how fear arises, how one 'holds on' despite the difficulties.

The **visual condenses the emotions into strong labels** ('*Loneliness*', '*No friends*', '*Homesickness*') **and introduces a very salient psychological marker** ('*Post Erasmus Depression*'). Emotion becomes an item on the same level as visas, money or transport: this produces collective recognition, but also useful dramatisation (a warning signal).

c) Bureaucracy: the oral expression conveys the burden and fear; the visual 'points' to the obstacle and suggests a remedy

In the oral presentation, bureaucracy is described as stressful and threatening (visas, learning agreements, credit delays): the emphasis is on fear, disorientation, deadlines and the consequences for the

degree. **In the visual presentation, bureaucracy becomes an iconic lock** ('*VISA*', '*visa declined*', '*Money + money proof*', '*Problems with documentation*') **and, symmetrically, a system to be improved** ('*Single platform for all documentation*', application videos). In other words, the oral describes the ordeal; the visual creates a reform programme.

d) Stereotypes: the oral negotiates; the visual externalises and maps

In the oral, stereotypes often appear in a cautious, contextualised, discussed manner (e.g. Germans' coldness, racism compared by country), because the utterance morally engages the speaker. **The visual allows for externalisation**: stereotypes are written on a 'wall', distanced, validated/invalidated (✓ / ✗). This facilitates collective mapping (safe/risky destinations) and makes the direct effect on decisions visible.

e) Ideal university: oral communication emphasises human support; visual communication prioritises and 'puts into perspective'

In oral communication, the ideal university is described in terms of accessibility, tutoring, coordination, real help (answers, support, reduction of errors), with a strong focus on lived experience. **In visual communication, the ideal is transformed into a prioritised 'action plan'**: a single platform, Teams channel, increased grants + housing, psychological support upon return.

In other words**,** the oral data reveals mobility as a situated experience (uncertainty, relationships, fear, strategies). The visual data transforms this experience into a governable system (thresholds, obstacles, solutions).

In summary, the Turkish focus groups show that the motivation to leave does not collapse due to a lack of desire: it erodes when mobility is perceived as too costly (visas, documents, equivalencies) and when vulnerabilities (housing, money, language, security, isolation) appear to be insufficiently mitigated by the institution.

4.3. French focus groups

The presentation of the French focus group results will be organised in a similar way to the Slovenian and Turkish data analyses. We conducted four focus groups in France. Two of them were large (14 and 30 students). The students worked in subgroups of 7 to 10 people, while the discussions based on the visuals produced by each subgroup were conducted collectively.

Like the Slovenian and Turkish students, the French participants emphasised that international mobility is not an event but a highly emotional and engaging process.

4.3.1. Oral data : international mobility is an embodied and emotionally charged phenomenon

In the French focus groups, international mobility (often thought of in terms of Erasmus, but also experiences outside Europe, such as Canada) is described less as a one-off event than as a lived trajectory made up of thresholds, turning points and adjustments.

a)   The experience of international mobility as a 'total project'

The oral exchanges in the French focus groups reveal an experience of international mobility that is thought of as a 'total project': a geographical move, certainly, but above all a temporary (and reversible) reconfiguration of life landmarks, routines, student identities and material security. Mobility appears as a **departure from the comfort zone that is both desired** (curiosity, transformation) **and feared** (material risks, isolation, administrative errors). Students do not primarily talk about a trip: they describe **a trajectory, divided into phases** (pre-departure (planning, hesitation), during (loss of bearings, rebuilding daily life), after (assessment, comparison, reappropriation of meaning)) and **structured by trade-offs where enthusiasm never overshadows calculation or fear**. Mobility is not spontaneously experienced as a smooth adventure, but as a series of frictions to be anticipated, managed and 'endured'.

This experience is very concretely **'materialised' by objects and devices**: emails, forms, platforms, appointments, supporting documents, course equivalencies, scholarships, accommodation. These elements are not mere decorations. In the stories, they become points of reference (things to hold on to) or, conversely, points of disorientation (things that are frightening, that block progress, that are exhausting). Mobility is therefore experienced as **a relationship with the world** in which students must continually find their bearings, figure out who knows what, who can help, where to click, what to send, and in what order.

b) Motivations: discovering, transforming oneself, 'come back with something'

Motivations appear to be a combination of factors, never purely "touristic" or purely 'academic'. They are articulated at the **intersection of personal transformation, social exploration and strategic capitalisation**, where the desire for experience coexists with calculated expectations about future opportunities.

c) Otherness as a driving force

Leaving is first and foremost thought of as an experience of otherness: discovering a country, a rhythm, a culture, another way of studying and living. The orientation towards the unknown is often associated with curiosity and the desire for experiences 'that one would never have elsewhere'. **Mobility then becomes a space of possibilities**: we expect to be surprised, displaced, transformed.

d) Self-transformation (autonomy, confidence, maturity)

A second register is explicitly about identity: leaving to become more autonomous, learning to 'fend for oneself', maturing. In discourse, **motivations are initially expressed as a desire for a break and openness**. The motive for a change of environment comes up directly: 'I would like to change my environment, my life.' Mobility then appears as a way out of the familiar, bringing existential benefits (breathing elsewhere, reinventing oneself, experiencing autonomy). The discussions suggest **a norm of 'good mobility'**: being able to cope with the unexpected, rebuild one's routines, and communicate despite discomfort. This norm is often ambivalent: it motivates (challenge) but also causes anxiety (fear of failure).

This register is interspersed with learning experiences and older 'dreams': going abroad is not always a late option, but sometimes a biographical continuity. One participant anchors mobility in a long-standing dream: *"I started learning French when I was five... a childhood dream..."* Here we see how **motivation is fuelled both by a desire for personal fulfillment and a promise of identity coherence** ('finishing what I started").

Finally, motivation is **also fuelled by observed experiences**: peers, stories, images, feedback from alumni. Even if the oral exchanges do not theorise at length about the collective imagination, the students show that they are dealing with representations of accessibility (language, culture, supposed 'ease'): *"I went to Canada... it was easier because it was French-speaking...'* Here, motivation is based on a **calculation of effort**: leaving, yes, but to an environment perceived as less risky from a linguistic point of view.

e) Capitalisation: language, CV, study plans

However, this quest for transformation is rarely 'pure": it is combined with a logic of **accumulating linguistic and professional capital**. Students associate mobility with increasing their skills, strengthening their profile, and differentiating themselves in a supposedly competitive job market: '*Practising a language... it can help you expand your vocabulary afterwards,' 'I marked a professional opportunity*.'

Indeed, **instrumental motivations strongly structure the meaning of departure and are varied**: learning a language, improving English/Spanish, enhancing one's CV, securing a master's degree or career project. One idea comes up clearly: mobility is not only 'good at the time', it is also valuable because it allows one to 'come back with something' (skills, confidence, network, legitimacy).

f) Obstacles: accumulation, opacity and the risk of 'carrying everything alone'

The barriers mentioned are not presented as a fixed list; they shift over time (before/during/after) and often operate by **accumulation**. In other words, what discourages people is not necessarily a single obstacle, but the feeling that there are too many uncertainties at the same time.

1. The **administrative obstacle**: 'existing through paperwork' and the fear of making mistakes :
The most prevalent theme is the logic of proof: accessing mobility means producing the right documents (files, certificates, insurance, appointments, email exchanges) . Students describe a world where documents 'open' or "close" access to a right. In this context, **the central fear is not only of working hard, but of making mistakes**: sending to the wrong contact, forgetting a document, missing a deadline, misunderstanding an instruction. "*Administrative procedures... aren't always taught very well... accessing the right information can be complicated.*" Bureaucracy is experienced as an ordeal that colonises the anticipation of the experience, where the student must prove their organisational competence. In these accounts, the institution is sometimes seen as a resource, sometimes as a labyrinth.

2. **Time** as 'soft violence': deadlines, waiting, emergencies :
The accounts place a strong emphasis on temporality: waiting for information, email exchanges, long deadlines, the impression of endless procedures. Time becomes **a constant source of pressure**. It causes **anxiety** and is used as an argument to criticise the organisation ('it takes a long time', 'we don't know'). Students show how mobility can be turned on its head: the desire is there, but slowness, opacity and uncertainty make the project fragile.

3. **Money and housing**: materialised precariousness and necessary trade-offs :
The core of the obstacles, in oral exchanges, is material and logistical. Money is not background noise: it is **the primary selection factor**. Students mention grants, cumulative costs, 'double expenses', particularly

housing. One concrete statement sums up the constraint: '*In terms of the financial aspect, I already pay for housing... so I would either have to give up my flat or pay for two flats at the same time.*' The obstacle is therefore not just 'lack of money', but **having to choose between two forms of security: keeping a foothold in France (their flat, their stability) or sacrificing it to leave**. Mobility becomes a gamble, sometimes too costly. Students discuss the cost of living, grants, unexpected expenses, and the difficulty of knowing 'how much to take' to be on the safe side.

4. **Language and communication**: fatigue, isolation and access to courses :

Language is an ambivalent obstacle. On the one hand, it motivates (learning, challenging oneself); on the other, it causes concern (understanding classes, managing accents, daring to speak, not remaining isolated). Students show that going to a country where their language is already spoken is perceived as 'easier', while the requirement to speak English or the prospect of classes in the local language can be a deterrent. Language is therefore not only an academic issue: it **determines integration and confidence**.

5. **Socialising, integration, mental health**: the fear of being alone :

In addition to these practical obstacles, there are also emotional barriers. The issue of social integration is a recurring theme in the discussions: the fear of not making friends, of being left out. Participants emphasise that when you arrive 'without your bearings', relationships become an essential source of guidance and well-being. Isolation is not described as an individual failing, but as a **structural risk of mobility if the welcome, buddy schemes or meeting places are not sufficiently organised**.

In addition, there is the uprooting from loved ones, the fear of loneliness, the fear of "losing" something back home. The **theme of loss and connection** comes up with great intensity: "Sometimes, after a while, you can get homesick...", "The feeling of missing out on something while you're away..." The obstacle here is temporal: leaving means accepting a desynchronisation (life goes on without you), and therefore a risk of disconnection.

6. **Health and disability :**

Finally, the oral exchanges reveal specific vulnerabilities that are often less visible in public discourse on Erasmus: accessibility, health, disability. The obstacle is not only 'fear' but structural impossibility: 'It's an obstacle (PMR, accessibility) - there's no adaptation.' This sentence is decisive because it reverses the angle: the problem is not the student, but **the environment (and the organisation) that makes mobility unworkable**.

g) The mobility process: a journey of thresholds and a negotiation between individual responsibility and institutional responsibility

French data clearly reveal a structural tension: students must be independent, but the institution is held accountable. In other words, **participants oscillate between an individualistic interpretation** ('you have to fend for yourself, be bold, adapt') **and a structural interpretation** ('services must inform, simplify, respond, protect'). This oscillation creates a norm of 'good mobility': be autonomous, yes, but don't be abandoned in the complexity.

The **process can be described as a chain**:

1. Planning phase :

During the planning phase, **we imagine, compare destinations and motivate ourselves**. But as soon as the idea has to become a plan, reality sets in: procedures, accommodation, timetable, equivalencies. This is often when doubt sets in: 'Am I capable?'

2. Administrative set-up phase :

Before departure, the mental load is dominated by preparation: documents, budget, information gathering, decision-making. The transition to mobility is therefore largely invisible work: compiling files, understanding, planning. This is a critical phase: accumulating documents, exchanging emails, fragmented information, deadlines. Students describe learning about 'right channels' (who to contact, how to follow up). This is where **the group transforms complaints into recommendation**s ('you have to...', 'I advise...'). Several accounts of experiences (Belgium, Canada, Spain) show that mobility can be experienced as a test of competence: language tests, requirements, difficulties, but also pride and reassurance afterwards. '*I went to Belgium... we had to take an English test... and write 20 pages about our motivation.*' Selection and justification ('proving that you deserve to go') are an integral part of the experience - sometimes even before you leave.

3. Arrival and rebuilding daily life

During mobility, the challenge shifts to adaptation: language, daily life, climate, integration. One statement sums up the 'during' phase as a sometimes difficult period of adjustment: '*During: complicated adaptation, climate, social networks...*' Once there, the experience is initially one of losing one's bearings: one must learn to find one's way around the university, the city, the services, and the social codes. Interactions become tools for orientation. Routines (transport, food, habits) are rebuilt. Other accounts describe the extent of the acculturation effort: '*I had to learn French quickly... it was very difficult... I would probably do it again.*' The experience is therefore ambivalent: hardship + desired repetition.

4. Assessment and capitalisation

Afterwards, **the return is not simply a 'happy ending': it can be accompanied by nostalgia and the work of reintegration**. The students explicitly mention this third phase: '*Budget management, ... nostalgia on return.*' They rewrite the meaning: what was transformative (independence, confidence) and what was costly (administrative stress, loneliness, uncertainty). This assessment influences their recommendations to others, and therefore the collective dynamics of motivation/dissuasion.

h) Emotions: a state of ambivalence (excitement, anxiety, loneliness, nostalgia)

The emotional register is **never separate from the practical register**. Emotions accompany each stage: anxiety before, possible isolation during, nostalgia upon return. Homesickness and loneliness are expressed directly: "*Homesickness... you can feel lonely.* ', '*The onset of anxiety...*', '*Nostalgia...*' Added to this is a typical social emotion: the fear of missing out ('FOMO"), which ties the student to their world of origin. These emotions are not presented as individual weaknesses but as **predictable effects of the mobility system** (separation, uncertainty, novelty). The oral presentation thus shows that 'motivating people to leave' cannot be reduced to selling benefits: it is also necessary to provide emotional tools and guidance to help them navigate their ambivalence.

i) Needs: information, tools, connections and reassurance

The needs expressed in the oral exchanges are very concrete. They primarily concern **access to information and feedback**: '*Ask former students who have already left...*' Useful knowledge is not only institutional: it is experiential, conveyed by peers. Next come **practical tool**s: translation and language ('*Use Google Translate, Duolingo...*'), budget ('*Apps to manage your budget...*'), health coverage ('*European health insurance cards...*'). Finally, **relational needs** are omnipresent: creating connections before or upon arrival, meeting people, feeling welcome. Students cite informal mechanisms: '*WhatsApp groups to meet people...*' '

j) Stakeholders: "facilitating" institution vs. 'service desk' institution

Students describe an **ambivalent relationship with university services**. They expect the administration to help, guide and reassure them, but they also report unequal access to this assistance and the sometimes opaque nature of the channels. 'Information meetings' and liaison officers appear to be sources of support: '*Information meetings; a degree programme representative helped me...*' Finally, families remain central as a source of emotional support: '*Daily messaging ritual with the family...*'

k) Stereotypes: shortcuts for decision-making, but also risks of closure and hurt

Focus groups show that stereotypes function as **"ready-made expectations"**: they precede the encounter and serve as a guide in the unknown. A typical example is the image of a 'cold' and "serious" Germany; other stereotypes circulate about cultural habits or climates of discrimination. Oral exchanges contain **few structured national clichés** (this point is clearly evident when compared with visual productions). On the other hand, they convey pragmatic representations of accessibility: a country is 'easier' if it is linguistically close ('French-speaking') and if one can imagine oneself there without too much disruption. The choices cited ('United Kingdom', "Canada", 'Southeast Asia') paint a picture of **desirable destinations where language, attractiveness and 'feasibility' intertwine**.

But the corpus is not limited to a simple reproduction of clichés. Two important dynamics emerge:
- The **negotiation of meaning**: students often tone down their judgements ('it's a cliché', 'I feel like'), a sign that they know that stereotyping is morally risky.
- The **possibility of transformation**: mobility is presented as a laboratory for revising stereotypes, provided that interactions are real and diverse, and that spaces for mediation exist (buddies, mixed groups, activities). Stereotypes can then be converted into curiosity rather than closed-mindedness.

Ultimately, stereotyping is less an isolated issue than a cross-cutting mechanism: it influences the choice of destination, integration, linguistic confidence, and the feeling of being legitimate or not in the host social space.

l) The ideal university: a 'liveable', understandable and coordinated institution (before, during and after)

A striking feature is the **constant comparison between universities and systems**. For example, a highly structured narrative contrasts an organisation considered 'not very exciting' in France with perceived efficiency in Canada (office, choice of courses, possible arrangements). This type of comparison is not only used to say 'elsewhere is better': it serves to formulate a norm (what a supportive university should be) and to make criticism actionable.

Even if the expression 'ideal university' is not formulated as such in oral statements, it is reconstructed on the basis of needs and expectations: an ideal university is one that reduces uncertainty (clear information), supports initiatives (guidance), connects (peers, groups, associations), provides security (insurance, health), and recognises vulnerabilities (accessibility). In other words, from an oral perspective, **the ideal is not a 'dream campus', but an institutional and social environment that transforms a risky experience into a sustainable one**.

Four pillars emerge.

1. <u>Clarity and anticipation :</u>

Before departure, **students want actionable information**: clear steps, timelines, documents, costs, housing solutions. Not a pile of pages, but guidance that transforms uncertainty into feasible tasks.

2. <u>Human presence and responsiveness :</u>

The ideal is not solely digital: it relies on identifiable contacts, quick responses, and relationships. Human presence also acts as **an emotional buffer** (when students have doubts, become isolated, or get lost in the process).

3. <u>Institutional coordination</u>

Students expect the university to function as **an integrated system**: services that communicate with each other, consistent procedures, decisions without grey areas (equivalencies, enrolment, accommodation). From the student's point of view, internal administrative boundaries should not exist: students should not be 'bounced around' between departments.

4. <u>Student life and inclusion (integration as a condition for success)</u>

The ideal university creates **spaces for socialisation that avoid segmentation and facilitate entry into groups**. Integration is not a bonus: it is a prerequisite for well-being and, indirectly, academic success.

In conclusion, these focus groups show that a decline in motivation is not necessarily a lack of desire to 'travel': it is often a weakening of the project when mobility is perceived as too opaque, too slow, too costly or too solitary.

4.3.2. Visual data : from lived narrative to structured scenario

Visual data from French focus groups (post-it notes, diagrams, mind maps, " suitcases' and lists) construct Erasmus mobility as a **transformative experience** rather than a simple academic interlude. They do not merely "represent" mobility: they organise it, breaking it down into stages (prepare → leave → settle in → 'find your feet" → return) and highlight the major tensions (desire for openness vs. fear/risk). The very form of the productions (arrows, columns, positive/negative oppositions, lists of actions) transforms uncertainty **into manageable steps and creates a shared 'normality' Shared Erasmus**: what it is legitimate to want, to fear, and what one should do to succeed. The visual productions from the French focus groups function

as another way of accessing the mobility experience: they condense, prioritise and materialise what is recounted orally over time. Where the discussions describe sequences, the visuals pose 'problem objects' and 'resource objects', images of countries, lists of criteria and organisational diagrams.

a) The mobility experience: a 'total' transformation (language, relationships, routines, self-image)

1. Mobility that engages the whole person

French materials emphasise mobility that simultaneously affects language, social relationships, the way of living in a place and self-image. The wording emphasises the **idea of 'socialisation in a foreign language'**: the experience is not only academic, it is relational and identity-based. Mobility is presented as a means of 'learning through immersion', where one learns as much from interactions and everyday situations as from lessons.

2. Expectations and vulnerabilities

The suitcase symbolises what we 'take with us': resources (curiosity, organisation, support from loved ones) but also vulnerabilities (fear, stress, financial worries, fear of not fitting in). It gives mobility the form of a rite of passage: **we leave with fears (shyness, anxiety, stress) and the experience promises to convert them into skills (autonomy, confidence)**. The productions explicitly refer to 'fighting your fears' and 'help in the process of becoming independent and autonomous'.

3. A journey in several stages: departure, settling in, life on site, return

The images reveal a 'scenario': preparation (procedures), departure (break, separation), settling in (accommodation, routines), life on site (classes, language, encounters), then return (reintegration and storytelling). This structure is important: it shows that the **Erasmus experience is thought of as a series of shifts, where the challenges change**. Before departure, concerns are mainly administrative and material; on site, they become relational and linguistic; afterwards, they revolve around the recognition and appreciation of what has been acquired.

b) Motivations and obstacles: a 'balance' before–during–after

1. Motivations: the idea of broadening horizons (world, culture, self)

The visuals reveal **a dominant motivation: to open up**. We find the idea of 'discovering other countries... while continuing one's studies, of meeting people, enriching one's personal culture, stepping outside one's comfort zone, and 'maturing, growing, opening up to new things'. Mobility is presented as **an opportunity for personal development** ('self-discovery') **and everyday cosmopolitanism** (being mobile, curious, adaptable). The visual aids give the motivations a quasi-inventory form. These are presented as short, displayable, shareable units, halfway between a slogan and an objective: '*Learn a new language*', '*Discover a*

new culture', 'Develop new skills', 'Enrich my CV', 'International experience'. This visual representation of motivation is accompanied by an emotional tone expressed through emotional words: *'Hope'*, *'Excitement'*. The visuals thus attest to a dual movement: the international experience is seen as an acquisition (language/skills/CV) and as an experience (otherness, encounters, transformation). Through the very form (isolated words, rays, centres), the students make it clear that motivation is composite: **it is not a single driving force, but a constellation**.

2. <u>'Pre-departure' obstacles: administrative, financial, relational (and fear of making mistakes)</u>

Before departure, the obstacles are very concrete: 'insurance', 'accommodation', 'paperwork', and more broadly, the **mental burden of preparation**. The obstacles appear in the visuals as objects and categories that "weigh" heavily: *'Administrative paperwork'*, *'Documents'*, *'Insurance'*, *'Budget'*, *'Visa'* / *'Complicated visa'*, "Anxiety ', 'stress', 'difficulty integrating', 'arriving in an unfamiliar social network"*. Here, the power of the visual lies in the fact that it materialises the abstract: **anxiety becomes one item among others, just like visas or insurance**. The decision to leave appears to be a trade-off between the desire for openness and the perception of risk. Two fears recur strongly: the fear of isolation (*'fear of not being able to integrate', 'facing difficulties alone without support'*) and the fear of deprivation (*'not having enough money'*), with mention of compensatory resources *('→ help from parents'*). Mobility is therefore seen as **a 'conditional' project, dependent on family and financial support that is unevenly available**.

3. <u>"During" obstacles: settling in, 'finding your place', managing language and routines</u>

During the stay, the **obstacles shift to settling in and organising daily life**: establishing routines, navigating between academic demands and the demands of everyday life (housing, shopping, local procedures, transport, health). The expression "*finding one's place*" sums up the challenge well: finding one's place, making connections, understanding the unspoken rules. Language is a source of ambivalence: it motivates (progress) but causes anxiety (not understanding, not being able to learn, not being able to interact). The visual corpus also provides access to the often underestimated logistical dimension of mobility: *'Adapters'*, *'Chargers'*, *'Toiletries bag'*, *'Money/bank card'*, *'Documents'* . Mobility is not just about 'leaving', it is about transporting the means of continuity (tools, papers, means of payment) that guarantee the possibility of living and studying elsewhere. **The obstacle is therefore not only the lack of resources, but also the risk of material disruption** (not being able to pay, not being able to prove, not being able to connect, not being able to adapt).

4. <u>'After' obstacles: recognition, translation into skills, readjustment</u>

After mobility, the materials point to a major challenge: the experience must 'count'. The recognition of acquired skills (language, soft skills, international experience) is presented as necessary, otherwise the effort may seem insufficiently recognised. Returning home is also a **phase of readjustment**: returning with changed perspectives can make the local environment seem more rigid or less stimulating. Thus, the aftermath is not just a happy ending: **it is a stage that must be supported and recognised institutionally**. This overview of obstacles suggests a very pragmatic approach to the experience: if the obstacle can be named, it can be anticipated; if it is anticipated, it can be dealt with.

c) The mobility process: from diffuse uncertainty to a sequence of actions (organisation, anticipation, support)

French visual productions make procedural logic very clear: **mobility is a series of tasks**. Lists, arrows, bubbles and steps convert the unknown into actions: prepare, anticipate, organise, find accommodation, take out insurance, understand the procedures, then settle in and integrate. This formatting produces a soft norm: succeeding in Erasmus requires willpower, perseverance and organisation - which can be encouraging (you can prepare for it), but also individualise responsibility (if things go wrong, it's because you didn't anticipate enough). However, the materials reveal a counter-argument: **success also depends on resources (parental support, budget, material conditions), so autonomy is socially situated**.

This tension is central to understanding the decline in motivation: **if the process is perceived as too opaque or too burdensome, students may anticipate costs (mental, financial, social) that outweigh the benefits**. The images, by 'scripting' Erasmus, show precisely where the critical thresholds lie: administrative preparation, accommodation, budget, integration, language, and then recognition upon return. The visuals particularly emphasise the logic of anticipation (checklists, organisation): '*packing your suitcase*' functions as a metaphor but also as a method - gathering, checking, securing. The visual makes the experience 'manageable': if we can break it down, we can equip ourselves.

d) Stereotypes: less an explicit 'wall' than an implicit moral geography (and a norm of cosmopolitanism)

In the French visual corpus, stereotypes are not necessarily presented as an explicit 'wall'; rather, they appear in a diffuse way, **through categories that organise the imaginary of elsewhere**. Elsewhere is constructed as a space of novelty and enrichment ('discover', 'new way of life', "culture"), which produces a positive stereotype: leaving = growing, opening up, becoming more competent and more tolerant. This framing values 'mobile' subjectivity (curious, adaptable) and can make other experiences (fatigue, exclusion, discrimination) - not because they do not exist, but because the dominant narrative is one of self-improvement.

Stereotypes also function as expectations of oneself: one should be socially comfortable, able to 'step out of one's comfort zone' and 'meet new people'. This norm can act as a filter of legitimacy: some will feel 'made for Erasmus', others less so. At the same time, the corpus shows a space for admitting fears ('fear of not being able to integrate', 'fear of wanting to go home'), a sign that positive imagery coexists with a realistic awareness of the difficulties.

The photographic corpus of stereotypes is one of the most salient contributions of the visual data. It shows how **students associate countries with recurring attributes, producing quick, sometimes ambivalent, often evaluative portraits**.

- Germany is configured by an ethos of seriousness and rigour ('*Seriousness*', '*rigour*', '*bureaucracy*', '*cold*'), combining efficiency and social distance.
- Spain is strongly associated with a hedonistic image: 'Spain = "party", "tapas", "climate"', where the sun is a sign of desirability ('Sun → I'm going there').
- Greece combines heritage and landscapes ('islands,' history), while also highlighting the language barrier ('Greece - language').
- The Nordic countries are often viewed from a cost perspective: the sign "expensive" becomes a decision-making factor ('Expensive → I'll avoid it'), even if other values are added (ecology, cycling, good living).

Beyond national portraits, the visuals reveal latent hierarchies: North/South (cold/hot), expensive/affordable, tradition/modernity, welcoming/cold. In other words, stereotypes are not just clichés: they are **heuristics that help us make decisions, reassure ourselves and reduce uncertainty**. Visuals make this pragmatic function visible: classifying in order to choose.

e) The ideal university: an institution that provides support before, during and after (and reduces inequalities in access)

In oral accounts, the ideal university often appears 'in negative', based on what is lacking (responsiveness, clarity, support) and real-life examples (what helped or hindered). In the visual, it is transformed into a programme: tutors/alumni, step-by-step guides, support during studies, mentoring, feedback, recognition of prior learning, and above all, practical solutions (shared accommodation, flat+job packages, job dating). This operationalisation is a major difference: **the visual shifts from complaints/expectations to concrete, prioritised and 'designable' levers**. The visual productions on the ideal university depict an

institution that is expected to be a sustainable living environment, not just a place to attend classes. The criteria are broken down into broad categories.

1.   Before: clarity, guidance, resource persons

The strongest expectation is for **a clear path**: 'step-by-step guide (with deadlines)', 'information day/student fair', 'early awareness-raising'. The implicit model is one of reducing mental load: it is not enough to have information, there must also be a structure, a timetable and points of contact. Hence the importance of mediators: 'tutor/mentor/alumni who have already left', 'guide to finding equivalent courses'.

2.   Material and financial resources: a facilitating university (accommodation, jobs, financial aid criteria)

The material dimension is dealt with in a very operational manner: 'new criteria for financial aid', 'flat + job package', 'flatmate database', 'apartment exchange options', 'job dating'. This shows that access to mobility is perceived as a problem of infrastructure and inequality: the ideal university is one that **redistributes resources and connects students to concrete solution**s (accommodation, work, reliable information).

3.   During: support and organised social integration

The ideal university does not 'abandon' students once they leave: it **provides support during mobility, a contact person, and integration measures** (mentoring, activities, integration days). Integration is seen as a prerequisite for well-being (and therefore success), not as a bonus. Finally, the visuals evoke more general expectations about university life: " culture', 'organising events', 'activities to meet people".

4.   After: recognition, feedback, institutional learning loop

Feedback must be recognised: **recognition of language skills, soft skills, international experience, and the implementation of 'feedback'**. This request is strategic: it transforms mobility into a collective resource (alumni help future students) and gives meaning to the effort by making it visible in the academic and professional trajectory.

5.   Time and academic sustainability

Students explicitly demand sustainable schedules: 'no classes before 10 a.m.', 'not very busy schedules (+ productive)'. The ideal university is one that **allows students to succeed without exhausting themselves** - 'liveable excellence'.

6.   Physical environment and tangible hospitality

The visuals mention **concrete evidence of hospitality**: 'comfortable rooms,' 'park + vegetation,' and even micro-features that signal consideration (the 'little signs' of everyday life).

7.   Values and atmosphere

The visuals evoke expectations of **respect and serenity** (non-conflictual atmosphere, symbolic security). In addition, humanistic values and environmental preservation seem to be important to students.

Overall, the visual ideal university resembles a design brief: it lists features (support, rhythms, spaces, community, housing, employment, values). This is precisely what makes this data important for a VR tool project: it translates expectations into elements that can be scripted. The productions on the ideal university depict a university as a 'trusted infrastructure' that is both efficient (administration, clarity) and welcoming (integration, culture, events). They are organised around one principle: the university must be involved at every stage of the mobility cycle, not just 'validating papers'.

4.3.2. Oral and visual data in perspective

A comparison of oral and visual data shows a difference in function rather than 'content': **the oral data brings out the experience as a situated narrative, while the visual data creates a collective grammar of mobility, structured in stages, categories and levers for action**. The most striking difference lies in the form of the experience: in the oral data, mobility is recounted as a situated story, while in the visual data, it is condensed into a system of criteria and objects.

a) The oral narrative recounts scenes and tensions experienced; the visual narrative orders and stabilises a scenario

In oral exchanges, students describe concrete situations: the anxiety associated with the process, the difficulty of planning ahead, comparisons between university systems (e.g. the contrast between an organisation perceived as cumbersome in France and more flexible elsewhere), emotional ambivalence (desire vs. fear), and micro-strategies (following up, asking questions, seeking out peers). **Oral communication provides access to the dynamics**: how motivation can be undermined, how uncertainty can become discouraging, how support (a contact, a friend, information) can restore confidence in the project. In oral exchanges, the experience unfolds over time. Students speak in sequences ('before/during/after') and charge these sequences with emotions: excitement, fear, loneliness, nostalgia. **Oral communication allows for biographical depth**: we hear about trajectories (learning a 'dream' language, experiences in Belgium/Canada/Spain), justifications, ambivalences ('it was difficult' but 'I would do it again'). It makes experiences visible: homesickness, the fear of 'missing out', administrative fatigue, the tension between desire and caution. **Oral accounts also reveal specific vulnerabilities**

(accessibility/people with reduced mobility) that are rarely mentioned in promotional discourse. In other words, oral accounts are **a place for storytelling, dilemma and emotional management**.

Visual media, on the other hand, transforms these dynamics into a stabilised scenario: prepare → leave → settle in → find your place → return. The graphic form (arrows, lists, columns) does not so much 'tell' as it orders, and produces 'manageable' mobility by breaking it down into tasks. Visual data, on the other hand, **changes the register**: they externalise the experience in the form of items, categories and diagrams. Instead of telling 'how' fear is created, they present it as an object ('anxiety', 'stress') alongside other objects ('visa', "documents", 'budget'). **Visuals also reveal what the spoken word often leaves in the background**: stereotypes. Where the spoken word tends to evoke pragmatic representations of accessibility (countries that are 'easier' linguistically), visual data produces national portraits and latent hierarchies (North/South, expensive/affordable, welcoming/cold). Visuals thus play a revealing role: they **bring to light decision-making heuristics, cultural 'shortcuts' and the values attached to destinations**.

Finally, when it comes to the ideal university, the **verbal remains implicit**: it allows us to reconstruct an ideal based on needs (information, support, connections), but without producing a fixed list. The **visual, on the contrary, creates a specification: rhythms, infrastructure, facilities, integration, security**. In other words, visuals transform a vague ideal into design requirements.

These differences are not contradictions: **they are complementary**. Oral communication explains the dynamics (why it is scary, how uncertainty is experienced, how we cope), while visuals make the structure visible (what matters, what is classified, what is missing). For a virtual reality project aimed at motivating and reassuring, this complementarity is strategic: we can script both the lived experience (verbal) and the points of friction/expected functionalities (visual).

b) The oral component nuances and explains emotions; the visual component condenses fears into shareable labels

As with the Slovenian and Turkish focus groups, **in the French oral component, fears and enthusiasms are discussed, justified, and sometimes contradictory**: language motivates and worries, autonomy attracts and frightens, socialisation is desired but uncertain. The oral format **allows us to hear the texture of hesitations and 'shifts'** (for example, when administrative or financial uncertainty takes over).

The **visual, on the other hand, condenses**: fears become items ('fear of not being able to integrate', 'fear of wanting to go home', 'not having enough money') . This condensation has a powerful effect: **it makes emotions objectifiable and therefore collectively discussabl**e ('it's a shared risk'), but it can also flatten the mechanisms (how, when, why this happens).

Oral communication places greater emphasis on the negotiation between individual responsibility and institutional responsibility; visual communication tends to 'standardise' autonomy through organisation

In oral communication, the tension is very explicit: students say they are responsible ('you have to manage'), while demanding that the institution be accountable (respond, explain, coordinate). **Criticism of dysfunctions is often based on specific experience**s (delays, fragmented information, rigidity).

In the visual, normativity takes the form of gentle injunctions: 'anticipation', 'organisation', "willpower", 'perseverance'. Structural constraints appear (parental support, money, housing), but the formatting can shift responsibility to the individual, while paradoxically opening up a space for demands (requests for guides, mentors, platforms, packages).

Stereotypes: oral communication can bring out more specific examples; visual communication mainly shows a 'positive' but normative otherness.

Oral discussions make it easier for representations of certain countries or systems to emerge, as well as experiences or fears related to exclusion, because oral communication allows for storytelling and argumentation (with nuances, precautions, and counter-examples).

The French **visual corpus, on the other hand, mainly presents an image of elsewhere as enrichment** ('discovering', 'new way of life', 'opening up'). Fears are present, but otherness remains largely framed as a resource.

As with the Slovenian and Turkish data, all of the French material describes mobility as a 'before-during-after' trajectory and, above all, as a system that needs to be made liveable (information, procedures, housing, sociability, recognition), where the desire to leave coexists with a heavy mental burden.

4.3.3. International comparison of focus groups

A comparative analysis of the focus groups in the three countries highlights both commonalities and differences in framing. An important cross-cutting finding is that **the differences between countries relate as much to the themes as to the registers of discourse**: the Slovenian data document an

'everyday' experience, the TUCs' feedback discusses the mechanisms and procedures, and the French focus groups verbalise the subjective dimension (emotions, shifts, mental burden) more.

a) Mobility experience: a shared exposure to uncertainty... with three styles of experience

A common foundation: Erasmus as a 'period of uncertainty'

In all three countries, mobility is described as more than just a stay: it is a period during which students are exposed to uncertainty, particularly in terms of accommodation, administrative procedures and social integration (a condition of stability). Students say that the challenge is not just 'going somewhere', but **making life feasible in an unfamiliar environment**.

A **common visual grammar represents mobility as a trajectory and a 'rite of passage'**. The repetition of lists of steps and positive/negative items on the same medium shows that, for students, mobility is fundamentally ambivalent: it simultaneously holds the promise of emancipation and vulnerabilities (loneliness, fear, practical uncertainties). **In all three countries, the experience is also depicted as a rupture**: leaving means 'quitting' (family, friends, landmarks) and facing a world of routines to be rebuilt. The visible textual traces ('Having to leave your country, your family, everything' , 'Homesickness', 'Loneliness') anchor this rupture in transnational emotions, independent of the national context.

...With three perspectives

1. Slovenia: a 'granular' experience, made up of micro-challenges and adjustments

The Slovenian corpus is distinguished by **a very specific narrative, close to a report**: the experience is a succession of micro-challenges (where to sleep, how to understand, how to get around) and improvised solutions that gradually build routines.

The Slovenian visual corpus also highlights the texture of everyday life and very concrete micro-risks: 'Missing a flight', 'Accommodation issues', "Transport", 'Health care concerns'. The undulating road brings together the ordinary (transport, settling in) and more structural threats, as if mobility were **a continuum of events in which one oscillates between pleasure and vigilance**. This focus provides a very 'embodied' experience: the stay is a life to be lived, made up of practical decisions, improvisations and specific challenges. Here, Erasmus is described as **a learning process through small local steps, less as a grand narrative of transformation than as a practical skill that develops through action**.

2. Turkey: an experience 'framed by the system', experienced as a project-based journey

The Turkish corpus describes the Erasmus experience as a journey: idea → steps → arrival → integration, with recurring 'sticking points' (administrative, housing) and a stay that resembles a project to be completed

successfully (validation, credits, organisation). The **experience is often commented on in terms of what should be improved in the system, and not only in terms of events that have been experienced**.

The Turkish visual data give much **more prominence to the institutional conditions of the experience**: 'VISA', 'CREDITS (GPA)', 'DELAY OF GRADUATION', "ECONOMY". Even though loneliness and family are present ('LONELINESS' , 'FAMILY', 'LOVERS'), they are linked to the question of securing one's future: leaving also means risking a penalty in terms of one's trajectory (delay, credits). The suitcase becomes 'institutionalised': it contains markers of legitimacy (university, scholarship, visa, credits), a sign that mobility is seen as a negotiation of access as much as an adventure.

3. France: a 'reflexive' experience, focused on shifts, mental load, and self-reconstruction

The French corpus formulates Erasmus as a **trajectory of transformation**: leaving one's comfort zone, losing one's bearings, reconstructing oneself, with a vocabulary of emotion and mental load. Students emphasise mediation: who helps, when, and how support transforms a challenge into a learning experience. The idea of an 'obstacle course' is explicitly present, from the 'idea that germinates' to doubts about one's own ability to leave.

The French visual corpus highlights another perspective: **mobility is a combination of infrastructures (scholarship, accommodation, insurance, networks, platforms) that must hold together**. Where A dramatises the unexpected and B focuses on the academic trajectory, C emphasises viability: how to make the experience feasible from start to finish through information, relays, and the connection between resources. This "infrastructural" logic reconfigures the experience: Erasmus is less of an adventure and more of a journey through a system of dependencies.

b) Motivations for mobility: desire for openness, instrumental benefits, and quest for transformation

One thing in common: the desire exists... but it must be "secured"

Motivations converge: learning a language, a change of scenery, travelling, making new friends, discovering cultures, 'stepping out of one's comfort zone', and transforming the experience into opportunities (academic/professional). Items such as 'New language', 'New city', 'Meeting new people +', 'Learning about different cultures +', 'Job opportunity +', and 'Master's opportunities' are explicitly mentioned. This convergence paints a stable European picture of mobility: **experiential cosmopolitanism and capitalisation**.

In all three countries, motivation is not absent; rather, it is fragile and conditional.

Differentiated motivations

1. Slovenia: implicit motivation, linked to the experience itself

In Slovenia, motivations often appear implicit: 'desire to move', 'see other places', 'experience something different'. They are expressed less as a cost/benefit calculation than as **a drive towards experience** - and are immediately put to the test by practical considerations (time, energy, money).

2. Turkey: motivations structured in instrumental and exploratory registers

In Turkey, motivation is expressed more clearly in instrumental (language, CV, academic success) and exploratory (discovery) terms. This **rationalisation of benefits** is central: it is a question of 'justifying' mobility and turning it into an investment.

3. France: motivation intertwined with fear ("desire", 'I don't know if I can do it')

In France, **motivation is not linear**: it is described as intertwined, with the desire to leave coexisting with the fear of not being capable.

The three visual corporas show that motivations and obstacles coexist: they are not two separate lists but two sides of the same coin. Visually, this says something powerful: the decision to leave is not 'pure'; it is made in **a constant tension between the desire for openness and anticipated risks**.

c) Barriers to mobility: four common categories and one key idea — accumulation

Four barriers common everywhere: material, bureaucratic, linguistic, psychosocial

The three corpora converge on four categories of barriers: budget/housing, documents/deadlines, language, fear/isolation. A major point: **the decisive obstacle is not necessarily an isolated difficulty, but the opacity and accumulation of small uncertainties that saturate attention**. The repetition of these categories indicates a core of transnational barriers, which are particularly decisive in reducing motivation.

Different sensitivities

1. Slovenia: the 'practical' obstacle

Slovenian students emphasise what happens when things get stuck: how to find a solution, who to ask, what workarounds can be used to move forward. The **barrier is experienced as a sum of local uncertainties (small risks, small delays, small shortcomings) which, together, produce saturation and attentional fatigue**.

The Slovenian visual data singles out **obstacles through practical uncertainty**: 'NOT KNOWING WHAT TO PACK' - mobility is anticipated through ordinary actions (packing a suitcase, eating, travelling). The obstacle is not just a lack of resources, it is anxiety about details and the unexpected.

2. <u>Turkey: anticipated barrier and barrier produced by the system (opacity, slowness, multiplicity of interlocutors)</u>

The corpus of Turkish oral data describes **anticipated obstacles** (fear, language level, budget, procedures) and systemic obstacles (opacity, slowness, multiplicity of interlocutors). The challenge is to obtain a stable version of the 'instructions for use': who to contact, what to send, by what date. This can also be seen in rhetoric where digital objects (emails, platforms, documents) structure access thresholds and risks (losing a document, missing a deadline, not understanding an instruction).

The **visual data emphasises external and structural obstacles**: visas, finances, health and, above all, academic risk ('DELAY OF GRADUATION', 'CREDITS (GPA)'). The word 'VISA', written in large letters on the outside of the suitcase, acts as a visual lock: access to the experience depends on a threshold that cannot be controlled individually.

3. <u>France: obstacle experienced as mental load and relational vulnerability</u>

In France, the **obstacle is formulated as an emotional experience**: fear, doubt, possible loneliness. Students talk about the need for an identifiable human presence, quick responses, and peer support to make the experience 'tenable'. The stress felt is not only due to emotional tensions but also to problems of institutional coordination or the ability to assemble resources and circulate the right information at the right time.

d) Mobility process: from "idea" to 'return', and the decisive question of support

A common structure: before / during / after

The three countries organise mobility according to a complete timeline. This **process-based interpretation describes a typical chain: trigger (desire/curiosity/necessity) → preparation (information, procedures, resources) → friction (barriers, misunderstandings, stereotypes) → adjustments (help, strategies, pooling) → effects (autonomy, reconfiguration of representations)**. This model explains why the same obstacle (e.g. housing) does not have the same impact depending on whether or not a student has 'connections' (guides, contacts, peers, checklists) at the right time.

An important difference concerns 'who should bear the burden': the individual or the institution. Comparative analyses show that **Slovenian students tend to naturalise constraints more as a fact of context** ('you have to persevere'). They frame temporality in the form of episodes: hazards ('missing a flight'), impressions ('bureaucracy/first impression'), emotions (separation). The process is experienced as a series of events where one 'holds on' from day to day.

Turkish participants express direct expectations of the systems (reception/information) and explain institutional thresholds: visa → credits → risk of delay → economy. The process is 'projected': one must achieve compliance, secure evidence, and avoid penalties.

French students see responsibility as shared by the stakeholders in the mobility process: first themselves, in the form of a transformation of identity, and then their entourage and the university, in a strong interdependence.

e) Stereotypes: active before and at the beginning, modulated by isolation or encounter

Convergence: stereotypes are 'interpretative frameworks', especially in the initial phase around reception, security and vulnerability

The three corpora indicate that stereotypes are mainly active before and at the beginning (when uncertainty is high). They can be reinforced in cases of isolation and deconstructed when they are repeated and positive. Everywhere, stereotypes crystallise around welcome (friendly/unfriendly) and safety (safe/danger). The items 'Xenophobia', 'Racism' and 'Discrimination' indicate that the Erasmus experience is also affected by the issue of social vulnerability.

Stereotypes play a cross-cutting role: they influence the choice of destination, the perception of safety, and expectations regarding hospitality. However, the corpora differ in the way they make them visible.

Differences in position

1. Slovenia: stereotypes in the background, treated through anecdotes and everyday experiences

In Slovenia, **stereotypes appear more as a backdrop to the encounter** (cultural expectations, surprises, misunderstandings), often defused by anecdotes. Examples: 'Mediterranean countries' perceived as "unwelcoming", or the Netherlands as 'open-minded'.

2. Turkey: stereotypes as a factor in decision-making and integration; focus on discrimination/racism

Turkish oral data more often frame stereotypes as representations that influence the decision to leave and integration, with a greater focus on discrimination and comparative assessment of countries (e.g. 'less racism'). At the same time, visual data put stereotypes up for 'test' debate (✓ / ✗)**.** Some statements are corrected ('In Paris, you must speak only French ✗ '); others are rendered ambivalent. **The stereotype becomes a collective object to be discussed, sometimes to be nuanced, sometimes to be retained as a practical rule** (e.g. transport, security).

3. <u>France: stereotypes explained and analysed for their emotional effects (vigilance, embarrassment, distance)</u>

French students discuss the cliché as a cliché ('very cliché'), show its effects (distance, apprehension), and link its deconstruction to meaningful contacts.

f) The ideal university: less a utopia than a response to mental load

Similarities: a common 'liveable' ideal

In all three countries, the ideal university is a set of guarantees:
- Administrative clarity (procedures, documents, understanding),
- Logistical support (housing, health, transport),
- Social integration (combating loneliness),
- Academic consistency (recognition, avoiding delays).

Different emphases

1. <u>Slovenia: the ideal as immediate operational support ('giving a helping hand')</u>

Participants formulate **the ideal in contrast to what has been lacking: quick responses, practical guidance, concrete support, particularly with regard to housing and the steps involved**. Based on very concrete problems, the ideal Slovenian university appears to be a local institution: arrival information, practical assistance, security in everyday life (housing/healthcare) and reduction of everyday uncertainty.

2. <u>Turkey: the ideal as a coherent system (checklists, calendar)</u>

The ideal Turkish university is **described as a system: clear procedures, coordination between departments, support before, during and after, with a strong expectation of clarity (checklists, timetables) and consistency, plus integration measures such as buddy schemes and events**. It is supposed to protect students′ progress: it avoids penalties ('DELAY OF GRADUATION'), secures credits,

and makes thresholds passable (visas, documents). It is a regulatory vision: the institution guarantees the fairness of the course and the academic value of the experience.

3. <u>France: the ideal as a relational institution, which makes the experience emotionally liveable</u>

French students **place greater emphasis on the relational dimension**: actionable information + identifiable human presence (advisor), continuity of support, social architecture that combats loneliness. In other words: not just 'being well informed', but 'being there' at times of change. The ideal French university is distinguished by **a 'service-oriented' image**: it connects students to infrastructure (banking, housing, transport, platforms, networks), organises information and reduces fragmented dependencies.

To conclude, Slovenian students tend to recount scenes and DIY solutions, Turkish participants 'proceduralise' the experience (scripts, steps, mechanisms), while French respondents recount subjective turning points and discuss the legitimacy of requests (recognition, asymmetries).

Thus, if we seek to motivate and reassure, no single corpus is sufficient on its own:
- The Slovenian corpus helps to understand the concrete micro-problems that cause dropouts (and therefore what needs to be 'made visible' at a very early stage).
- The Turkish data indicate what needs to be stabilised on the system side: checklists, consistency, coordination, temporality. Thus, mobility is conceived as an institutional project.
- French feedback shows that motivation comes from reducing mental load and securing transitions.
- Mobility is therefore a system of interdependencies that needs to be organised.

Taken together, these data sets show that motivating/reassuring (including via an immersive tool) is about reducing uncertainty at critical moments: making the steps clear, securing the thresholds (housing/finances/administration), preventing isolation, and protecting the academic trajectory. Having explored mobility from the students' standpoint, we will now turn to institutional actors in order to examine how mobility is framed, managed and interpreted from within the university system.

Part 5. Interviews : analysis and main findings

This section mirrors the structure adopted for the student focus groups, while shifting the perspective to institutional actors. We begin with the reflections of the Slovenian international relations officer, then move on to the two Turkish participants, before turning to their four French counterparts. The section concludes with a joint presentation of the contributions of the Norwegian and Greek international relations officers.

In all these national contexts, the analysis follows the same thematic threads identified in the student data, ensuring continuity and comparability. In the cases of Slovenia, Turkey and France, the views of professionals and students are brought into dialogue to highlight convergences, tensions and blind spots. The section concludes with a series of reflections on the development of the virtual reality tool, based on the institutional experiences and recommendations shared by the international relations officers.

5.1. Viewpoint of the Slovenian IRO

One international relations officer participated in this survey. We will first present the analysis of their feedback before looking at the feedback from Slovenian students and the international mobility professional.

5.1.1. Analysis of Slovenian IRO interview

a) The Erasmus experience: an 'experience' framed as an administered and reliable process

In the Slovenian interview, **the Erasmus experience appears less as an intimate narrative** (culture shock, emotions, socialisation) **than as a chain of actions supported by objects** (documents, platforms, certificates) and a division of labour (faculty, international office, partner university). The IRO thus constructs the student experience as a pipeline where the major challenge is continuity: being accepted, being expected, being compliant.

This framework is based on **a logic of 'evidence-based governance'**: the Learning Agreement and the alignment of courses are central from the outset ('we see if the courses are consistent... we proceed with the preparation of the learning agreement'), and the student is described as someone who must anticipate, document and adjust. The institutional role is that of a reliability operator: the experience is 'valid' if it is properly supervised and traceable.

b) Motivations and obstacles: converting desire into action... without breaking the momentum

The Slovenian international relations officer describes **motivation as a process to be activated and stabilised**: informing, promoting, giving a 'clear' picture of what awaits students, relying on ambassadors and feedback. The aim is to increase mobility.

The most significant obstacles appear to be:

- **Informational and administrative complexity**: students must understand the steps involved, produce documents, follow instructions and coordinate with several different parties.
- **Course compatibility/subject similarity**: the IRO identifies this as a potentially major obstacle, as it determines whether students can go 'where they want' without academic risk. " ...maybe the biggest obstacle... the similarity of the subjects.'
- **Financing/inflation**: he qualifies this ('not the most important obstacle"), but emphasises that motivation also depends on the certainty of being able to cover most of the costs.
- A key point - **late withdrawal and 'personal reasons'**: The IRO points to a critical organisational phenomenon: some students decide to go abroad and then change their minds, sometimes at a late stage. It cites 'personal' reasons that are difficult to investigate, which reminds us that the university only controls some of the determining factors.

c) The mobility process: a multi-stakeholder workflow (before/during/after)

The description is highly sequential.

1. <u>Before departure: selection, academic alignment, nomination, information</u>

The 'first step' is an internal application where students choose a partner faculty and compare courses. If the courses 'align', the Learning Agreement is prepared, then the IRO nominates the students to the partners. The student then follows the partner university's instructions, obtains information on accommodation/study plan, and puts together their file (including the language certificate).

2. <u>During mobility: adjustments, support, organised social activities</u>

The IRO emphasises the **ability to adapt** (possible changes to the Learning Agreement) and the role of mediation ('if I can solve it, I solve it... in cooperation...'). ...If there is a need to change the learning agreements... we are in contact.'

As for integration, he describes **a 'tool-based' socialisation process**: welcome meetings, get-togethers, and the formation of groups to facilitate rapid communication. '...they meet their colleagues... they form a group... Erasmus."

3. <u>After the return: evidence, recognition, financial closure</u>

Closure is achieved via transcripts/records/certificates and a feedback meeting. Funding is described as conditional on the submission of documents (logic 'evidence → balance'). '...at the beginning 80%... at the end... the rest, 20%...' "

d) Stereotypes: a subject treated with caution, reconfigured by experience and peers

The theme of stereotypes appears as an expectation that influences the decision and the move, but the IRO **treats it cautiously and indirectly**, emphasising above all the mechanisms of correction: reliable information and the experience of peers.

The main driving force is that what helps students most to 'change' their stereotypes is feedback from students who have already left '...the most important information... comes from the experience of students who have already been there.'

Thus, **stereotypes are thought of less as 'cultural prejudices'** than as simplified images of how universities work (courses, language, procedures, quality), and the preferred remedy is not moral, but informational and experiential (testimonials, ambassadors, realistic scenarios).

e) The ideal university: a university that makes mobility predictable, understandable and possible

From the IRO's point of view, **the ideal university for students is first and foremost a governing university**: clear roles, identified support, structured communication, and the ability to resolve issues quickly. It does not eliminate difficulties, but it makes them manageable through a transparent system.

Throughout this interview, **the student experience is mainly seen as a test of reliability**: succeeding in Erasmus means succeeding in aligning your coursework, documents, deadlines and evidence. Motivations exist (travel, openness, learning, networking), but they only become an effective departure if the university reduces uncertainty: clear information, realistic scenarios, curricular compatibility, responsive support.

5.1.2. Commonalities and differences between the student focus groups and the feedback from the Slovenian international relations officer

This comparison contrasts two 'versions' of the same phenomenon (international mobility), produced from two different positions: the student experience and institutional mediation. Overall, the two bodies of work **converge on the idea that mobility is a transformative but costly experience**, which plays out as much in academic dimensions as in very concrete micro-challenges. The **differences mainly concern what is defined as 'the real problem', the time frame, and the level of granularity** (emotions and daily life vs. procedures and academic compatibility).

a) Mobility experience: agreement on transformation, but with different perspectives

Both sources agree in presenting Erasmus as a moment of rupture that 'makes you grow': exploration, autonomy, confrontation with the unknown, and situated learning (cultural, relational, practical).

From the students' perspective, the experience is described as an adventure that is both stimulating and demanding, where mobility becomes a space for expansion (encounters, new reference points, feeling of freedom). **From the IRO's perspective, we find the same idea of transformation, but expressed through a 'journey' logic**: the experience is made possible provided that the framework works (information, choice of courses, administrative steps) and that the student has a clear idea of what to expect.

While the student version emphasises the student experience (intensity, fatigue, excitement, difficulties in finding one's way, cognitive load of daily life), **the IRO version 'depersonalises' the experience**: it describes it more as a system of conditions (organisation, academic compatibility, procedures) than as a subjective experience. This difference is fundamental: it can create a gap between what the institution considers 'reassuring' (a clear process) and what students experience as 'reassuring' (being supported emotionally, socially, and in practical details).

b) Obstacles and motivations: same triad (money/uncertainty/academic), but divergent prioritisation

In both corpora, **obstacles and motivations are organised around three poles**:
- **Motivations for openness and experience**: discovering a country, travelling, meeting people, 'experiencing something different'.
- **Academic/CV motivations**: value of the degree, added linguistic value, signal of mobility.
- **Material obstacles and uncertainty**: cost of living, need to save money, fear of not being able to cope once there, risk of 'unpleasant surprises'.

However, there are **differences in the weight given to the obstacles perceived** by the two types of respondents. **For students, the obstacle of 'money and daily life' is seen as an immediate risk**. For its part, the **IRO considers the academic obstacle of compatibility to be the main one**. **As for funding, the IRO sees it primarily as a management parameter** (improvement, payment rules conditional on documents), while students experience it as a concrete vulnerability and a daily constraint.

c) Mobility process: agreement on the centrality of 'frictions', disagreement on their nature

Both types of participants recognise that mobility is not just a departure, but **a series of steps where the slightest friction can cause doubt**. However, **for students, it is a test of self-management**. There is a sense of tension: having to be independent while being exposed to uncertainty. **For the IRO, the process is a chain of compliance**. Finally, the **IRO also emphasises the risks of a gap between what partner universities offer and reality**, which students mention less directly, as their attention is more focused on the difficulties they experience in everyday life.

d) Stereotypes: same presence, but opposite functions (social compass versus variable to be managed)

Both corpora confirm the use of stereotypes in mobility: images of countries, cities, people, and even universities. Among students, these stereotypes take on a very concrete form. The IRO also recognises the existence of stereotypes, particularly with regard to universities and destinations.

For students, stereotypes serve to represent the unknown, to anticipate, to decide, but they can also produce fear and symbolic barriers. For the **IRO, stereotypes are more of a communication variable**: they must be corrected through information, feedback and clarification mechanisms.

e) Ideal university: strong convergence on a 'liveable' university, but different justifications

The two bodies of work converge on a very 'pragmatic' definition of the ideal university: **an institution that reduces friction and makes student life run smoothly** (clear administration, access, services, sociability, support). Nevertheless, **for students, the ideal is first and foremost a university that protects their daily lives**. For its part, the **IRO emphasises academic continuity**.

This comparison reminds us that reassuring students cannot be limited to 'explaining the procedure'; it is also necessary to address the experiential dimension (micro-frictions, emotions, socialisation) that

professionals do not always prioritise, even when they sincerely seek to support students through a reliable framework.

5.2. Perspective of Turkish international relations officers

Two Turkish international relations professionals participated in this survey. We will first present the analyses of their interviews before focusing on the feedback from Turkish students and professionals supporting their mobility.

5.2.1. Analysis of feedback from Turkish IROs

The two interviews focus on how international relations staff describe, evaluate and 'narrate' mobility (mainly Erasmus), its benefits, constraints and stakeholders.

a) IROs' perception of students' international mobility experience

Both Turkish respondents describe mobility as **a transformative experience that is both educational and cultural, producing effects of openness, identity repositioning and capacity building**. IRO B emphasises the 'results' in terms of perspectives and confidence: mobility allows students to 'gain different perspectives' and 'the student's self-confidence increases'. The experience is presented as an **introduction to other ways of teaching and learning** ('When he takes a class at another university...'), which reconfigures the way students perceive themselves in their academic journey.

IRO A complements this vision with a highly experiential approach, focused on what students bring back, recount and pass on. The return is not just an administrative formality: it becomes a moment of 'debriefing' where the IRO seeks out stories, practical details and cultural surprises. IRO A tries to preserve this as a **'pool of experience' that can be passed on to others**: 'I try to chat with him... I feed on what he told me, I keep it in that pool of experience'. This stance reveals an understanding of mobility as collective narrative capital (knowledge gained from experience that is passed on).

However, the experience is not described as entirely 'idyllic'. IRO A observes that certain social dynamics remain segmented, including in incoming mobility: 'The Scandinavians grouped among themselves. Mediterranean countries among themselves.' In other words, mobility opens up, but does not automatically dissolve symbolic boundaries: **it can also make visible the logic of exclusivity**.

Finally, the two Turkish professionals perceive mobility as **a space of administrative and emotional challenges** (visas, budget, uncertainties), which colours the experience with ambivalence: transformation and vulnerability coexist.

b) Motivations and barriers to mobility according to the two IROs

1. Motivations (project logic, career, 'vision')

The motivations reported are primarily related to **career and resource development** (networking, distinction, international experience). IRO A explicitly states: "the career of the students is very important for them... he wants to create a network... Third, he wants to see different countries. ' The argument is threefold: (1) enriching one's profile, (2) expanding one's network, (3) living/discovering. This motivation is also associated with disciplines perceived as particularly 'mobile" (architecture, IT), with a logic of accumulating experience and proving competence.

IRO B adds a structuring motivation: the **search for a 'European experience' and, sometimes, a professional settlement horizon**. This respondent notes that demand is high among students in their intermediate years: "2 and 3 are more in demand... students who want to gain European experience. ' Mobility can even become a serial: 'Those who go once, go again.' In narrative logic, the experience 'calls for' a second (or third) mobility: coming back does not always end the story, it can restart a project.

Finally, IRO B places mobility within **an institutional mission to develop "visions"**: 'We want more students to go to Europe... We want their visions to develop." Here, the motivation is no longer solely individual: the IRO also speaks on behalf of the university's educational goals.

2. Barriers (money, visas, administrative burdens, partnerships)

The most significant barrier is **financial**. IRO A highlights the frequency of material impossibility: 'the number of people who say I can't afford my family is not low at all.' The post-2020 context is presented as aggravating (pandemic, energy crisis, rising cost of living): 'After 2020... after the energy crisis... life became expensive... Finance is very important for them.'

A second major obstacle is **visas**, with an explicit emotional charge: 'They were very sad because of the visa... hard time even getting an appointment... Still, they can refuse.' The IRO reports feelings of incomprehension and injustice ('I showed my documents... Still, they can refuse'), which places students in a state of anxiety-inducing uncertainty.

IRO B also mentions a structural obstacle: **annual financial aid is insufficient and forces the institution to seek compensation**: "That budget is insufficient for students. We are trying to find additional resources." Despite this, the desire to leave is growing: "The motivation to go to Europe has

increased." Students are cobbling together solutions (savings, loans): 'There are students who save money... Or someone who borrows... or gets a loan.'

Finally, the **range of destinations on offer is limited** by the difficulty of establishing certain partnerships, particularly with English-speaking countries: 'It is very difficult to make an agreement with English schools.'

c) The mobility process (before/during/after) as described by the IROs

    1.   <u>Before: information, selection, preparation, security</u>

The process begins with **the promotion and accessibility of information**. Both interviews mention dedicated events. IRO B: 'We have an Erasmus Day event... We introduce programmes... we have office hours.' IRO A describes Erasmus Days as a deliberately friendly and unbureaucratic format: 'friendly, cheerful event', where former participants come to answer questions live (microphone, questions and answers).

The **selection process is described as relatively standardised**: opening of applications, verification, English test, calculation of scores and publication after objections. IRO A emphasises the supra-university framework, certain criteria are 'non-negotiable', and a centralised portal (TURNA) now structures applications.

Preparation includes nomination, compiling files, and above all the visa/passport sequence: 'There are visa processes... Students who do not have a passport are issued with one.' On the academic side, course balance and validation are co-produced with departments and coordinators: 'consultancy... course balance... passed through the faculty board.' IRO A adds a more 'preventive' dimension: orientation, a second guidance session, and instructions on cultural differences and managing discouragement: 'keep your morale high... there may be cultural differences.'

    2.   <u>During: maintaining contact, problem solving, mediation with the partner</u>

During the stay, the IROs describe **a role of ongoing support**. IRO A: 'We are constantly in contact... we pay attention to answer when they need us.' According to IRO B, the office intervenes in courses, academic matters, but also accommodation: " We support students in both sheltering, choice of lessons and academic matters." Here we see a broader definition of support: mobility is treated as an "ecosystem" (academic + logistical + emotional).

    3.   <u>After: administrative closure + feedback (but not very formalised)</u>

After returning, IRO B describes a **highly standardised chain**: collection of documents (confirmation form, transcript), passport verification, payment of scholarship balance, grade balance, and survey via beneficiary module: 'we collect the return documents... transcript... we look at their passports... a link comes

to the student for the survey.' IRO A emphasises that **beyond the EU requirements, the university does not really systematise written capitalisation**: 'we don't actually apply written surveys. It stays in my conversation.' This creates tension: a lot of useful knowledge exists, but remains informal.

d) Student stereotypes about destinations according to the two Turkish professionals

IRO A provides the richest material on stereotypes. The IRO notes **anticipated cultural representations** ('People in Europe can be very cold-blooded'), illustrated by micro-scenes and different interactional norms. This shows that stereotypes do not only relate to countries, but also to **ways of relating to others**.

One explicit stereotype mentioned: 'Germans are very disciplined and hardworking.' But experience sometimes deconstructs it: one student says he has seen 'people who aren't like that... it's not like that in every German.' IRO A comments: 'It breaks the prejudices.' **Mobility is therefore described as a mechanism for revising expectations: it replaces generalisations with lived experiences**.

However, IRO A also shows that certain symbolic boundaries persist even within international groups. And **sometimes, negative discourse circulates among students**: 'They say something negative about another country...'. This indicates that the Erasmus space can also reproduce implicit hierarchies (desirable vs. less desirable countries) through cautionary tales.

IRO A even extends these representations to partner institutions: **some countries are said to be slower or more bureaucratic**. Example: 'Mediterranean countries... slowly... Spain... bureaucracies were not very easy.' IRO B, more cautious, refers instead to **criticism targeted at a specific university** (Athens): 'students are satisfied academically, but... exams are prepared late, they return late.' Finally, IRO mentioned **experiences of discrimination on the part of partner universities** ('for some reason... they didn't want to have a relationship with us'), with a localised example ('a German school... Frankfurt'). Here we see how stereotypes can also be 'institutional' (regarding reliability, openness, recognition).

e) The 'ideal' university that encourages international mobility (based on the expectations and criticisms expressed)

Based on the two interviews, **the ideal university is defined less as a slogan than as a support structure**, combining resources, procedures, relationships and care.

1. <u>A university that makes access concrete and human</u>

IROs value **embodied, accessible, and interactive formats of information** (Q&A seminars, appointments, presence). IRO A values the role of alumni who speak up and a non-bureaucratic IR service atmosphere. IRO B emphasises 'office hours' and the availability of the office. In this configuration, the ideal university does not just provide information: it builds trust and reduces institutional distance.

2. Continuous (before, during and after) and multi-dimensional support

The **ideal university maintains contact** during the stay: 'constantly in contact... answer when they need us' and also supports non-academic issues: 'sheltering' (accommodation) as well as courses and academic problems. It also knows how to work with departments (equivalencies, faculty board).

3. Sufficient (or compensated) financial resources and a policy of fair access

Both interviews agree that money is the tipping point. IRO B: 'That budget is insufficient for students... trying to find additional resources.' The **ideal university is therefore one that increases the effective starting capacity** (scholarships, additional resources, redistribution). IRO B gives a concrete example: a portion of the 'organisational mobility grant' is transferred to students, and if it increases, 'we will be able to support the students more.'

4. A fluid, digitised administration and systems that 'work'

IRO B clearly expresses an expectation for improved tools: 'Through digitalisation, I think the processes can be accelerated.' The European module is considered slow: 'works a little slowly... may need to be accelerated or improved.' The **ideal university reduces the administrative burden, secures deadlines, and reduces the friction** that turns mobility into an obstacle course.

5. Systematic capitalisation of feedback (beyond technical surveys)

IRO A is very explicit: there is a wealth of feedback, but it is not very institutionalised: 'we don't actually apply written surveys.' ' The **ideal university would implement a structured (qualitative) collection of feedback**, as the Commission 'asks more technical questions" and may miss the cultural dimension of the experience. Here, the challenge is strategic: transforming individual experiences into continuous improvement.

6. A diverse, professional and respectful portfolio of partners

IROs also associate the quality of mobility with the responsiveness of partners: 'Some of them are more professional. They answer much faster... not everyone is the same.' **The ideal university secures reliable partnerships and acts against the forms of discrimination/eviction** mentioned by IRO A. It also broadens horizons (Europe and 'third countries'), with a view to spreading opportunities worldwide.

In short, this analysis shows that the decision to leave is mainly influenced by reducing uncertainty (budget/visa/accommodation), managing emotions (stress, sadness, need for reassurance) and deconstructing stereotypes about destinations.

a) Mobility as a means of broadening one's horizons and understanding of the world, a view shared by students and international mobility professionals

As already mentioned, both IROs describe mobility as **a means of personal and cultural development**. This interpretation is in line with the student narrative, which associates Erasmus with a transformative experience, made up of cultural discoveries and learning through exposure to otherness. However, students also describe an intense experience. One striking statement presents **departure as a trial that 'makes you grow'**: "Living in another country is a scary thing... it forces you to push yourself". This 'rite of passage' tone is consistent with the IRO A idea that some people leave to 'see how he does it there'.

b) Two relatively different sensibilities: embodied experience vs. 'processualised" experience

As in the Slovenian corpus, here too the major difference concerns the level of embodiment. Students talk more about how it 'feels' (fear, excitement, loneliness, integration), while IROs frequently describe the experience in terms of conditions of possibility (visas, funding, timetable, equivalencies), as if the experience depended primarily on the stability of the framework.

There is also a contrast in perceived competence: IRO A emphasises **a form of identity robustness among students** ('IT students are very sure of themselves'; "no time to be sad about the visa), **while the student materials more directly highlight emotional ambivalence and the need for support** (post-Erasmus depression).

c) Motivations and barriers to international mobility

Both IROs and Turkish students describe **mobility as an investment**: discovering, meeting people, learning, planning for the future. On the student side, this appears directly: 'TRAVEL', 'NEW FRIENDS', 'NEW LANGUAGE'. On the IRO A side, the same logic is formulated in terms of trajectory and

orientation to the world: 'he wants to see different countries'. The same professional insists that 'the career of the students is very important' and that they want to 'create a network'. On the students' side, their orientation towards the future appears through academic and trajectory markers (conversion of experience into opportunities).

Major shared obstacles: money, financial proof, visas, documentation. IRO A observes material obstacles ('I can't afford...') and a centrality of finance ('Finance is very important for them') . Students identify exactly the same barriers: 'Money + money proof', 'Problems with documentation', and above all 'VISA' (even 'visa declined').

IROs identify emotions mainly in relation to 'visas'. Students **extend the list of obstacles to socio-emotional experiences**: "Loneliness", 'Homesickness', "No friends", and even "Post Erasmus Depression" as an anticipated issue to be addressed. Here, there is a difference in perspective: for the IROs, the obstacle is "systemic" (visa/administrative chain); for the students, it is "experiential" (isolation, nostalgia, mental health), and therefore can hinder departure as much as money.

d) The mobility process (before, during, after)

IRO B describes a **highly sequenced process**: promotion (events), applications, English exam, ranking/publication, nomination, application to the host institution, visa/passport, choice of courses/equivalencies, then management during the stay and closure upon return. The grammar of the process is **procedural** ('we do...', 'we collect...', 'we support...'), and emphasises **co-production between stakeholders**: the IRO, Erasmus departments/coordinators, the council/board, the host institution, and the national agency (scholarship). The 'pendant' is presented as active support: 'we support students in both sheltering, choice of lessons and academic matters'. Upon return, the process is **heavily documented**: ("confirmation form, transcript), platform entry and survey.

Students are calling for administrative guidance and a reduction in uncertainty: 'Online videos for application process', 'fast mail answers', 'Single platform for all documentation' . In addition, a significant point of divergence is the aftermath. Student materials include the return as a time of risk and explicitly request 'Psychological help for students with Post-Erasmus depression'. IRO B does mention 'support for returning students' (scholarship, documents, closure) , but the available verbatim accounts do not mention structured emotional support. In other words: **for the IRO, returning corresponds to a compliance with documentation and financial settlement; for students, returning is synonymous with psychological and social re-landing**.

e) Student stereotypes about destinations

Focus groups show the existence of 'mental maps' of destinations. Countries are associated with cultural and relational traits ('cold/closed' vs. " warm/similar"), but also to imagined dangers, which shapes preferences and rejections. **On the IRO side, stereotypes are less prominent but focus on localised administrative criticism relating more to the organisational reliability of partners** (deadlines, letters of invitation, management).

f) The ideal university that encourages international mobility

Students describe an ideal university as **a comprehensive infrastructure, providing informational, administrative, social, financial and emotional support**. The requests expressed by Turkish students are along these lines: 'Easily reachable with Erasmus Office and fast mail answers', 'Single platform for all documentation', "MS TEAMS CHANNEL... - INTERACTION', 'Increase scholarship' / 'Accommodation help', 'Psychological help for students with Post-Erasmus depression". According to the two IROs, this is partly the case, as they are attempting to make information more user-friendly and ritualise guidance. Here we see a strong convergence with students' demand for human contact and peer-to-peer communication (former/departing students). In IRO B, internal coordination via Teams ('we have a Teams group... share up-to-date information quickly') also shows a culture of instantaneous information.

However, a difference between the two types of respondents emerges. **Whereas students insist on redistribution ('increase scholarship', 'accommodation help'), the IRO places greater emphasis on managing procedures and providing documentary support**. Both agree on the need for support, but not always on the nature of the priority support: material security and housing for students; administrative streamlining and compliance for the IRO (even though the IRO explicitly recognises the financial pressure and the crisis).

Overall, mobility professionals and students share a positive view of mobility as an experience of openness, trust and opportunities. The differences mainly concern what threatens the experience: for the former, the margin for manoeuvre lies in the procedural chain, while for the latter, the fragility of the experience is the main concern.

5.3. Viewpoint of French student mobility professionals

Four French international relations professionals participated in this survey. We will first present the analysis of their feedback before comparing it with that of French students.

5.3.1. Analysis of interviews with French international relations officers

We will present the reflections of French international mobility experts using the same thematic structure as for Slovenian and Turkish professionals.

a) Students' international mobility experience: a 'rich' journey, between openness and friction

In the four interviews, the IROs describe the **mobility experience as a comprehensive journey that goes far beyond the academic stay**. It begins well before departure and continues after return, with a series of thresholds where the student can 'hold on' or 'give up'. This complexity is first apparent in the emphasis on the evidence and documents that frame the experience: IRO A stresses that mobility involves "accountability" and cites the documents that are expected, including the 'end-of-stay report' and 'proof of return'. In other words, **the experience is not only lived; it must be documented, certified, and converted into verifiable elements**.

The experience then include**s a settlement dimension which, for the IROs, is central to success or failure**. IRO B shows how arrival produces a density of micro-problems that transform the international into administrative hospitality work: 'individual interview', insurance verification, social security registration, signing the 'certificate of arrival'. This is not a simple symbolic "welcome"; the IRO describes a meticulous support process ('it takes almost an hour per student'), which aims to secure the trajectory from the moment of entry.

This density is also found in accounts of obstacles that are invisible to students before departure but very concrete once they arrive. IRO C takes the example of electricity: " they don't speak French' and 'they can't do it (pay their electricity bills) online" because they don't have a local number. This type of element feeds into the IRO's conception of the experience as a test of friction: **a set of details that seem minor but consume time and energy and can undermine confidence**.

French participants also highlight **the experience of returning home as an often underestimated and emotionally delicate moment**. IRO A notes that, upon their return, some students 'don't feel like it' and that 'coming back... is difficult'. Here, the mobility experience does not end with the return flight; it is replayed in the readjustment to classes, the rhythm and the institutional normality. Mobility thus appears to

be a process that can produce a disconnect: the student has changed, and the university expects them to immediately 'become' an ordinary student again.

Finally, the interviews reveal **an experience marked by clear emotions: fear, apprehension, fragility, but also indirect pride and a sense of emancipation**. IRO A explicitly reports that 'it's scary to leave', while IRO B describes "fragile" students and notes that some 'are not doing very well'. These formulations anchor the experience in an emotional dimension that is not simply a backdrop: it shapes choices (whether to leave or not), destinations, and the support expected from the institution.

b) Motivations and obstacles: balancing desire, costs and vulnerabilities

The motivations for mobility, as perceived by the IROs, are **structured around two poles: student desire (experience, openness, value on the CV) and institutional objectives (attractiveness, influence, funding)**. IRO D clearly explains this second pole: mobility and internationalisation are part of a logic of 'influence' and 'international attractiveness'. He also presents mobility as a strategic issue. Thus, even when mobility is driven by individual projects, it is also governed by metrics and supply policies (courses, partners, resources).

In terms of obstacles, the interviews strongly converge on three main areas.

1. <u>Financial obstacles: the question that precedes all others</u>
IRO B is very explicit: 'The first question... is: "Are we going to get financial support?"' She adds that, for some, 'they are not entitled to anything'. This makes mobility an opportunity that is unevenly accessible: **international experience is desirable, but conditional on financial capacity and eligibility criteria**. From this perspective, student motivation (to go abroad) is immediately reconfigured into a calculation (being able to go abroad).

2. <u>Linguistic and educational barriers: course availability as a condition of possibility</u>
IRO B highlights a very concrete point: if the partner university does not offer 'courses in English', 'it will be a major obstacle'. Similarly, IRO D describes the internal limitations: 'we (the French university) are at 5%' of courses in English. He mentions capacity-building measures and a 'holy grail' (EFC certification): 'translating courses into English', 'major investment', 'holy grail'. Here, mobility depends on educational infrastructure: without sufficient language provision, intentions and partnerships remain theoretical. The obstacle is therefore not only 'English' as an individual skill; it is **English as an organisational asset (the ability to produce courses, to welcome and to send students)**.

3. Psychosocial obstacles: fragility, fear, and post-Covid

The IROs describe a climate of increased vulnerability. IRO A sums it up: 'It's scary to leave.' IRO B talks about 'fragile' students. In these excerpts, **mobility is not just a rational choice; it becomes an emotional ordeal, sometimes perceived as disproportionate to the expected benefit**s. These obstacles help explain phenomena such as dropouts. IRO A provides a telling indicator: 'out of 180 students... about 30 cancelled'. This figure tells a story: the intention to move abroad is hampered by obstacles that arise late in the process (final funding, documents, fear, health), leading to a chain of dropouts and administrative overload.

c) The mobility process: before, during and after - a chain of dependencies

1. Before: selection, nomination, 'study contract' and evidence

The interviews describe a **pre-departure period saturated with administrative steps**. Mobility is structured by platforms and calendars: IRO A details the logic of nomination and deadlines and the time constraints for action. This framework makes mobility a procedure in which students must be able to respond quickly and correctly, with the right supporting documents.

The key element is **the 'study contract': it crystallises the alignment between courses, credits and recognition**. IRO C shows that the logic is far from stable: the student 'draws up their study contract', then 'it changes' and 'we have to make modifications'. The pre-departure phase is therefore a period of uncertain stabilisation: the agreement exists, but it can be reopened, renegotiated and corrected, which generates anxiety and coordination work.

2. During: settling in, managing 'small details' and local support

During the mobility period, the IROs mainly describe **the invisible side of the experience: settling in, local rules, procedures**. IRO C recounts the arrival process: certification, insurance, social security registration, individual interviews. She emphasises being 'there for them', a sign of a relational support approach.

This phase highlights a significant tension: **on the one hand, the institution expects students to be independent; on the other, local realities make independence difficult** (language, telephone, procedures). The example of electricity is revealing: without French and without a local telephone number, students are stuck. Mobility is then experienced as a series of practical barriers, and success depends on human mediation (IRO and other support staff).

3. Afterwards: return, closing documents, academic recognition and readjustment

After the stay, the process continues in the form of administrative closure and academic reintegration. IRO A emphasises the documents to be provided and the difficulty in obtaining them

('proof of arrival... they never send it to me'). Closure is a matter of compliance: without this evidence, financial aid may be blocked, files may be incomplete, and the institution cannot 'report'.

The return is also an existential moment: IRO A notes that some return with a desire for a break and that "re-entering... is difficult." This is a powerful statement: it suggests that the ideal university should not only manage the before (files) and the during (settling in), but also the after (re-welcoming, getting back into the swing of things, valuing the experience).

d) The accommodation/visa loop: the most telling example of circular dependency

IRO C provides a structuring metaphor: for some countries, visas and housing form a 'snake biting its own tail'. This point is crucial: **it shows how an institutional process can produce compromises (or even circumvention) when requirements are incompatible with each other**. Mobility is therefore not only governed by rules; it is also permeated by the necessary improvisations required to 'make the system work'.

e) Stereotypes and representations of destinations: symbolic attractors and implicit hierarchies

The interviews highlight collective representations of destinations, structured by images, reputations and student imaginations.

1. <u>'Desirable' destinations: the power of images and symbolic prestige</u>
IRO A illustrates the effect of social networks: the example of "Stockholm" and images ('photos on Instagram') fuels desire and symbolic value. The stereotype is not just an idea; it is **materialised by visuals, circulating narratives and signs of prestige**. In this context, certain destinations become 'brands': they concentrate desire, legitimacy and an impression of excellence.

2. <u>'Avoided' destinations: fear, language, cost and uncertainty</u>
At the same time, IROs show that destinations are evaluated according to their feasibility: financial assistance, language, accommodation, visas. As a result, **certain destinations are chosen not because they are 'ideal', but because they are less risky**. The IRO's perception of this dynamic is evident in IRO D, who observes that 'European' destinations are preferred. Here, the stereotype is combined with a risk management approach: Europe is perceived as a simpler space (procedures, recognition, proximity), in contrast to countries outside Europe.

3. <u>Institutional work to break down stereotypes: teachers and framing opportunities</u>

IRO A identifies a key lever: teachers. She states that 'they are the ones who can... capture students' attention'. This sentence indicates that the university can influence stereotypes and implicit hierarchies by mobilising actors who are credible to students. In other words, **the fight against stereotypes is not only carried out through institutional brochures, but also through educational mediation**: a teacher can make a destination 'desirable' by making it intelligible, useful and aligned with a study project.

f) The ideal university that encourages mobility: an ecosystem, not a counter

Based on the interviews, five pillars of the ideal university emerge.

1. Structured language skills: course offerings, labels, translation

The ideal requires a course offering that is consistent with mobility. IROs describe a double barrier: partners without 'courses in English' (blocking) and limited home institutions (≈ '5%' of courses in English). **The ideal university therefore invests in language infrastructure as a condition of fairness (of access) and attractiveness**.

2. Clear and fair financial support: answering the 'first question'

Since the first question is 'financial aid', the ideal university is one that clarifies: amounts, criteria, timetable, remaining costs, alternative solutions. The fact that some 'are not entitled to anything' highlights a risk: mobility becomes a privilege. **The ideal university does not eliminate all inequalities, but it reduces them through measures and, above all, through transparency (avoiding late disappointments that fuel dropouts)**.

3. Process engineering: robust platforms, realistic deadlines, support for the 'study contract'

According to IROs A and C, **the ideal university is one that takes mobility seriously as a production chain**: a system where break points are reduced (simple tools, consistency checks, change scenarios, rapid assistance). It also **anticipates impossible housing/visa loops** by offering institutional solutions (housing lists, standard letters, residence partnerships, mediation).

4. A 'care' welcome policy: time, individual, peers, micro-problems

Participant C describes a very concrete ideal organisation: individual interviews, insurance checks, 'arrival certificates', and above all, time. She adds the idea of student mentors who help resolve certain everyday issues. **The ideal university does not abandon students upon their arrival; it provides human mediation and practical resources**.

5. Emotional support and organised 'aftercare': fragility, fear, reintegration

IROs describe a context of fragility. **The ideal university therefore includes emotional support: preparation measures (stress management, testimonials, peers), and an 'after' (feedback, recognition, support for resumption)**.

IROs paint a picture of international mobility that is both desirable and costly: it requires resources (financial, linguistic, administrative) and exposes students to vulnerabilities (fear, fragility, overload). The major obstacles identified- financial aid, language/course offerings, visa-housing loop, psychological fragility - are not solely a matter of individual motivation; they are part of an institutional ecosystem.

5.3.2. Comparison of student versus French IRO perspectives

a) International mobility experience: 'adventure' vs. "infrastructure"

Both groups recognise that mobility is not 'smooth'. It **combines opportunities and friction**. A first contrast runs through both groups: students recount the experience, while IROs mainly recount the conditions that make the experience possible. **For students, mobility is framed as a formative experience, a 'rite of passage' in which successive thresholds are crossed** (visa, accommodation, language, sociability). The visual support emphasises the dual nature of the experience: **the promise of openness and very concrete constraints**. On the IRO side, the student experience appears more as a supervised journey, the quality of which depends on a series of actors and procedures that are sometimes external to the university. Mobility is thus presented as a vulnerable chain: when one link is missing, everything comes to a standstill. IRO C expresses this 'vicarious' experience in the form of a constrained sequence. IRO D, for its part, describes **mobility not only as an experience, but as a system limited by thresholds (places, funding)** and points to the tension between 'scholarships' and effective access to international opportunities.

b) Motivations and obstacles: desire for openness vs. structural barriers

The student motivations that emerge from the materials appear to be **a mixture of personal aspirations (discovery, autonomy) and development goals (languages, career path)**. But it is above all the mapping

of obstacles that becomes very salient. Both types of participants agree that mobility requires resources (linguistic, financial, social) and not just willpower.

The **most explicitly highlighted obstacle is language**, which is experienced as a wall: 'the biggest barrier was language'. Added to this is a major emotional dimension: **the fear of integration** ('the biggest fear... not being able to integrate'). These two obstacles (language and integration) show that mobility is not just a matter of paperwork, but also the ability to inhabit a new social situation.

IROs recognise these obstacles but often reformulate them in more structural terms: **access to mobility depends on grants, places and structured schemes**. IRO C illustrates how 'external' constraints (visas, banks, housing) can become cascading obstacles, and therefore potentially demotivating.

c)   Mobility process (before/during/after): two "maps" of the same journey

Students and IROs share the idea that mobility is a process; however, they do not have the same "map".

In the student materials, the "before" is loaded: **the visual document emphasises the thresholds (visas, financial proof, housing) that precede even arrival**. The **"during" phase is dominated by integration** (language, networks, adaptation), with specific anxieties (fear of not fitting in). The "after" phase is less developed in the verbatim extracts here, but the general framework indicates **a "return and readjustment"**.

On the IRO side, the 'process' is described as **a series of procedures and documents**: IRO A, in particular, emphasises the importance of supporting documents in the administrative closure of mobility. Similarly, IRO C highlights the dependence on external documents and validations (visa/bank/accommodation).

While the IROs emphasise control of the 'before' (file, constraints) and "after" (supporting documents), **the students give weight to the 'during' (language, integration, emotions)**. In other words, each holds a part of the truth about the process - but the organisational risk is that these two maps remain poorly superimposed, producing grey areas.

d)   Destination stereotypes: student salience, low IRO explicitness

In focus groups, stereotypes appear explicitly as cultural shortcuts. This type of statement shows that destinations are not only evaluated on academic criteria, but also on social imaginaries (supposed welcome, warmth of relationships, etc.). Stereotypes thus become a factor in orientation (choice/avoidance) and emotional anticipation (fear of loneliness, fear of rejection).

On the IRO side, in the most salient excerpts here, the issue of stereotypes is much less prominent: **IROs tend to talk about agreements, strategy (or lack thereof), scholarships, and mechanisms**. This

asymmetry is informative: it suggests that students experience destinations as social worlds, while IROs think of them primarily as objects of partnership.

e) The ideal university that encourages mobility: 'securing' vs. 'empowering'

The student materials paint a picture of an ideal university that secures the student's path: clear information, support before departure, help with integration, reduction of uncertainties. On the IRO side, the ideal university appears more as **a university that empowers**: it provides mobility with resources and coherence.

Thus, the two bodies of work converge on a 'two-sided' mobility: **the promise of transformation and the experience under constraints**. Students highlight the emotional and relational aspects (language, integration, fear), while IROs highlight **the socio-administrative architecture and structural ceilings**. The critical point for an effective mobility policy is the imperfect overlap of the process maps: IROs dominate the administrative requirements, while students bear the brunt of the challenges they face. **The ideal university would therefore be one that combines security and capacity**.

5.4. Feedback from Norwegian and Greek international mobility experts

Two further interviews with international mobility professionals were conducted, notably with a Norwegian expert and a Greek professional. In the following paragraphs, we will present the elements relating to experience, motivations and obstacles, the process, stereotypes and the supposed ideal university that these two respondents share, without forgetting to highlight their potential differences of opinion.

The analysis highlights different approaches to the issue: in Norwegian universities, mobility is mainly made "feasible" through digitalisation and support mechanisms (information, preparation, group security), while in Greece it is seen as a system that needs to be stabilised in the face of macroeconomic (inflation), urban (housing, infrastructure) and academic constraints (recognition). In other words, **two 'ecologies' of international mobility are emerging: one where the main challenge is to optimise mobility that is already relatively 'feasible' (Norway), and the other where the challenge is first and foremost to make it tenable (Greece), given the extent to which material and academic constraints weigh on the decision to leave**.

a) Perception of the international mobility experience of students

Both IROs describe mobility as **a formative experience, involving confrontation with cultural and institutional otherness**. On the Norwegian side, this experience often begins with culture shock, even when students 'read a lot' and 'watch films': they prepare themselves, but 'it's a bit difficult at first'. Mobility is then described as a mechanism of deconstruction: 'oh, it was nothing like what I was worried about before'. On the Greek side, the experience during the stay is described as a transition where the difficulties change in nature: once the obstacles 'before' have been dealt with, the core of the challenge becomes adaptation and integration into the "educational" and cultural environment. In both accounts, mobility is therefore not just a move; it is a gradual transformation (first 'setting out', then 'holding on', then "returning" during a re-reading).

The main difference lies in what each IRO places at the centre of the experience. **The Norwegian expert emphasises mobility with a prominent cultural and existential dimension**: it crosses the 'mindset' and reconfigures initial apprehensions. **The Greek IRO places greater emphasis on the link between experience and organisation**: students are caught up in an educational environment and integration requirements, and it is these adjustments (rather than culture shock itself) that cause difficulties. Another important difference is that **the Norwegian respondent identifies a blind spot in the return process**. There are debriefings 'only for certain groups', but 'for others... no follow-up', even though some students have 'so much to tell'. **In the Greek interview, the issue of return is less of a collective narrative gap**; the emphasis is more on the structural conditions (curricula, recognition) that enable students to continue their studies without interruption.

On the Norwegian side, mobility is described as a marked path, which the institution seeks to make clear and manageable. The IRO emphasises the visibility of the process: students must not only 'submit an application', but also be able to continuously track their progress through the various stages, seeing what has been validated, what is missing and what is holding them back. This logic is crystallised in the idea of a dedicated application: '*I can easily see where they are in the process (...) they can also evaluate the institution (...) and leave comments*'. In this context, the student experience is therefore as much administrative and informational (traceability, feedback, progress) as it is cultural.

On the Greek side, the experience appears more fragile, as it is subject to external constraints. The IRO describes a mobility programme that may remain attractive, but whose success depends on a series of 'micro-conditions': accommodation, funding, academic recognition, and the practical ability to manage the process. It talks about maintaining continuity despite the obstacles: '*you must ensure the continuity of Erasmus mobility, despite the obstacles (...)*'. The experience is thus structured as a test of sustainability: leaving is not just a matter of 'wanting' to do so, but of being able to absorb the costs (financial, emotional, organisational) without compromising one's studies.

b) Motivations and barriers to mobility

The two IROs agree on one point: **mobility is achieved by overcoming practical obstacles and anticipated fears, often related to administration and funding**. At the Norwegian IRO, motivations appear to be relatively stable: mobility is associated with openness, learning and a path to professionalisation. The IRO notes that students are driven by disciplinary and vocational interests. The motivation is not merely 'touristic': it is based on a skills development project (discovering other systems and professional practices), which reinforces the institutional legitimacy of departures.

The Greek IRO places greater emphasis on motivations as a thwarted desire: students may be very attracted to the international experience, but this attraction immediately comes up against material conditions. Its way of phrasing things suggests a 'conditional' motivation: the desire is there, but it is not enough. In this context, motivational measures must above all reduce uncertainty and provide reassurance (accommodation, loans, actual costs), otherwise motivation will wane.

The Norwegian IRO highlights a relatively protective funding environment (national funds, scholarships, supplements), which shifts the problem: the question is not so much 'do I have enough to live on?' as 'do I have enough to cover specific costs (transport, visas, unforeseen expenses)?' It highlights the existence of support and "funds" as buffers, including outside Europe: '... *they benefit from the Erasmus grant, but they can also apply for national funds...*'.

In Greece, the IRO explains a more brutal logic of inequality. Mobility is described as socially sorted, because you have to be able to finance the rest of the costs: "*you just have to be rich enough to cover the rest of the money you need...* Here, the financial barrier is not an 'inconvenience': it is a condition of access. One barrier has become central: access to housing. **Mobility is hampered by a rental crisis and inflation, which make settling in uncertain**: 'It is much more difficult for them to find a flat.' Even when students leave home, the burden sometimes shifts to the family ('*Parents take care of them*'), confirming that mobility depends on domestic resources. Finally, another concrete obstacle: **calls for 'green travel' are hampered by the lack of suitable infrastructure**.

The Greek expert describes a concern that can cause the decision to leave to fail: the fear of not validating, of wasting time, or of not obtaining the expected credits. He puts it very bluntly: '*They are afraid that they will lose the semester... that they will not get the credits...*'. This fear reflects **a perception of mobility as academically risky, which undermines initial motivation**.

On the Norwegian side, recognition is not absent, but it is dealt with more through tools (monitoring, stages, information): the institutional objective is to make the risk 'visible' and manageable, in particular through a system of feedback and evaluation of partner institutions.

The Norwegian professional individualises certain obstacles more: when faced with a 'big job', some students will say 'no... too much work'. The barrier is thus partially reclassified: it is not only structural, but also depends on a profile (ability to endure bureaucratic effort). **For the Greek respondent, on the contrary, the obstacles are highly 'structuralised'**: the IRO describes a chain of macro constraints (inflation, housing, infrastructure) and, above all, an academic obstacle: the lack of flexibility in recognition.

Finally, the nature of the 'pendant' barriers differs: the Norwegian IRO emphasises above all the initial culture shock, while her Greek counterpart highlights an uncertainty about adaptation that is close to a psycho-emotional register ('I wouldn't say exactly... mental health, [but] uncertainty').

c) Mobility process

The two IROs agree on one point**: bureaucracy can become an obstacle in itself, not because it is technically 'difficult', but because it creates uncertainty and mental strain**. Both present an institutional effort to simplify and tool the process. The Norwegian expert states that 'there isn't much paper anymore... everything is more digital' and that 'with our app, everything is so much easier'. The Greek respondent describes an 'all online' system, minimising documents and organising selection via a formal system. Both therefore present the same objective: to reduce administrative friction and cognitive cost.

The Norwegian IRO promotes the idea of a process where students know 'where they stand' and where the institution collects feedback to improve the system. The approach is based on data and experience. **The Greek professional, on the other hand, emphasises the need for simplification**: 'minimising administrative steps and the necessary documentation'. He also mentions the importance of selection/allocation systems that are perceived as fair and transparent. In both cases, we see that "process" does not only mean 'forms': it is an institutional experience that can be either supportive or discouraging.

d) Student stereotypes about destinations (and their effects)

Both IROs acknowledge the existence of 'preconceived ideas', but describe them as unstable and contextual. The Norwegian respondent indicates that students often arrive better informed (reading/films) but that the experience on the ground reconfigures their perceptions. Her Greek counterpart also talks about preconceived ideas that can be 'verified and deconstructed'. The difference lies in the effect on decision-making. The Norwegian expert tends to downplay stereotypes as a major barrier, as teachers and systems prepare students. On the other hand, the Greek IRO asserts that these perceptions have a 'very

significant impact' on choice: the image of capital cities ('Berlin... Rome... Paris') shapes preferences, and the 'top 5 countries' correspond to the '5 largest in the European Union' because students assume that they are the best.

On the issue of stereotypes, the Norwegian IRO highlights an often underestimated issue: stereotypes do not only apply to countries, but also to education systems and professional standards. It reports on a possible attitude among some teachers: *"they probably think they are teaching in the best Norwegian system in the world*.' This type of discourse can create an indirect barrier: if the educational environment implicitly values local superiority, leaving may seem pointless or even risky.

e) The 'ideal" university that encourages international mobility

Both IROs agree on **an ideal university that reduces administrative burdens, actively supports students, and works as an ecosystem**.

The Norwegian representative paints a picture of an ideal university **focused on student engagement and experience**: inspiring, sharing stories, making departures safe, and above all, filling the return gap with spaces where students can 'tell' and pass on what they have learned. It is also a university where teachers are actively involved in the narrative and support for mobility. In addition, it mitigates inequalities through support and funding, including when mobility involves visas and additional costs.

For its part, the Greek IRO envisages **a more structural and political ideal university**: funding must be increased, mobility must be integrated into curricula, more courses in foreign languages must be developed, and action must be taken on green housing/transport, linking institutional and national levels and, finally, with a low bureaucratic burden.

In short: t**he ideal Norwegian university is one of optimisation** (improving management, quality and educational commitment), while **the ideal Greek university is one of sustainability** (securing everyday life, reducing academic risk and reducing bureaucracy).

The comparison made by the two experts in international mobility highlights two complementary models for 'manufacturing' mobility. The Norwegian model is one of accessibility engineering (digital, paper reduction, communication, collective security) that makes departure more likely. The Greek model is one of governance under constraints: the institution must balance funding (inflation), administrative

simplification, objective selection, multi-stakeholder networks, and above all curricular recognition to make the experience academically 'risk-free'.

5.5. Comparison of feedback from Slovenian, Turkish, Norwegian, Greek and French IROs on international student mobility

Throughout the corpus, **the mobility experience is described as an intensely transformative but non-linear journey**: it combines the promise of openness (intercultural discovery, empowerment, maturation) with exposure to very concrete material constraints (housing, costs, formalities, academic calendar, uncertainties). The IROs agree that **mobility is not limited to an academic stay**: it is a 'test' of adjustment (language, social codes, work rhythms, relationship with the administration) that requires skills of adaptation and resourcefulness.

Another common point is **the perception of a high degree of heterogeneity in student experiences**: some have an 'expansive' experience (networks of friends, sense of accomplishment, international identity), while others have a 'fragile' experience (loneliness, anxiety, feeling of linguistic incompetence, administrative fatigue).

IROs also agree that **emotions are not 'side issues'**: excitement before departure, stress and cognitive overload at the beginning, alternating euphoria and disenchantment during the stay, sometimes 'return shock' or disappointment afterwards, especially when academic recognition goes wrong.

However, IROs in each national area are also characterised by specific notes :
- <u>Turkey:</u> the student experience is more influenced by external constraints (administrative, political or reputational) and by perceived asymmetries between destinations.
- <u>Norway:</u> the experience is described as generally supported by institutions. Mobility is presented as 'excellent' in terms of supervision and quality.
- <u>Greece:</u> the experience is often interpreted through the tension between cultural attractiveness (desirable destination) and organisational capacities under pressure.
- <u>Slovenia:</u> the experience is frequently framed as 'accessible' and "close" within a European space, but with a marked focus on the quality of integration and fine-tuning.France: mobility is presented as a lever for training, but also as an object of 'management' (regulation of flows, compliance, securing pathways).

a) Student motivations and barriers

Motivations are fairly consistent: **desire for cultural openness and adventure, language improvement, academic and professional capital strategy, search for autonomy and emancipation, and sometimes relational motivation**. The converging barriers are just as clear: finances, housing, fear of the unknown, administrative burdens, fear of academic loss and personal ties. IROs also agree on a social mechanism: mobility benefits students who already have resources (financial, linguistic, informational). In other words, the 'desire to leave' is widely shared, but the 'ability to leave' is socially and institutionally distributed.

Once again, a few local specificities concerning motivations and barriers can be identified :
- Turkey: barriers often take a 'reinforced structural' form: intensification of visa/international administrative obstacles, perceived uncertainties about certain destinations, and the weight of external perceptions (country/destination reputation). Family and normative barriers may also be more prominent (social acceptability, concerns, protection), with a strong emotional dimension (anxiety, need for reassurance).
- Norway: financial and material constraints, particularly with regard to peripheral costs.
- Greece: the barrier may come from accommodation capacity and infrastructure (housing, tourist season), which sometimes transforms a 'desirable' destination into a 'risky' destination in terms of comfort and budget.
- Slovenia: motivations are often aligned with a European logic (proximity, academic compatibility, relative simplicity), but the obstacle lies more in the clarity of the pathways, the correspondence of courses, or the ability to project oneself into an environment that is less 'obvious' than very popular destinations.
- France: IROs often describe an informational and organisational obstacle: difficulty in 'fitting' mobility into a curriculum, perception of procedural complexity, and inequalities in support.

b) The mobility process

All IROs describe a three-stage process, each with its own vulnerabilities:
- **Before: the decisive phase of 'converting' the desire to actually leave**. It involves gathering information, guidance, selection, administrative evidence, financial security, and drawing up the study contract. It is also the phase with the greatest asymmetry: students with networks/experience fare better.

- **During: a phase of rapid adjustment** (enrolment, timetables, courses, accommodation, integration, health). IROs agree on the importance of a relational safety net: accessible advisors, clear procedures, ability to resolve incidents quickly.
- **After: an often underestimated but critical phase**: credit recognition, end-of-stay documents, administrative reintegration, valuing the experience. Tensions arise when rules are rigid or reintegration is problematic.

The corpus also agrees on the role of organisational artefacts (platforms, forms, lists, calendars, correspondence tables): they make mobility safer, but also generate frustration and fatigue. The emotions associated with the process are also similar: enthusiasm at the start, stress about compliance beforehand, a feeling of 'urgency' at the beginning of the stay, relief or anger on return depending on the recognition obtained.

These results may vary locally :
- <u>Turkey:</u> the "before" tends to be more burdensome and risky (files, external constraints, uncertain timelines). The "during" may be marked by the management of more sensitive adaptation situations (status, perception, security), which reinforces the role of IROs as protectors and mediators.

- <u>Norway:</u> the 'during' phase is highly structured (reception, support).
- <u>Greece:</u> the process is more affected by seasonality and flows: anticipation (before) and local coordination (during) are central, with service pressure and a need to 'maintain' reception when volumes increase.
- <u>Slovenia:</u> the process emphasises academic alignment, with a focus on reliability and European compatibility.
- <u>France:</u> feedback highlights the role of IROs as translators between rules and specific cases.

c) <u>Student stereotypes about destinations</u>

IROs agree on the **existence of powerful social images that influence choices**: 'festive', 'sunny', 'prestigious', 'easy', 'safe', 'expensive', "cold" and 'administratively complicated' destinations. These stereotypes are **rarely purely cognitive: they are emotional** (desire, fear, fantasy of freedom, fear of isolation) and normative (what is valued by peers).

- <u>Norway:</u> stereotypes polarised around cost/climate/isolation vs. quality/safety. The destination may be admired but feared in material terms.

- <u>Greece:</u> strongly 'tourist' stereotypes (sea, holidays, friendliness), sometimes at odds with the idea of academic rigour or logistical constraints in high season.
- <u>Turkey:</u> stereotypes that are more sensitive politically and in the media (security, stability, international image), with an impact on reciprocal attractiveness and IRO work more explicitly geared towards rebranding the image (reassuring, explaining, 'correcting' perceptions).
- <u>Slovenia:</u> stereotypes that are less 'massive' but present in the form of implicit hierarchies (well-known destinations vs. lesser-known destinations). The challenge becomes visibility and the narration of specific assets.
- <u>France:</u> stereotypes often structured by the stories of alumni and social networks; IROs describe a fad, with a focus on certain destinations, and the need to diversify perceptions to balance partnerships.

d) The ideal university for encouraging mobility

IROs describe an ideal university as an ecosystem of security and meaning, combining:
- **Clarity** (simple information, consistent timetable, clearly marked pathways);
- **Human support** (identified advisors, availability, empathy);
- **Administrative reliability** (harmonised procedures, deadlines met, standardised documents);
- **Social justice** (appropriate financial aid, support for less well-off students, reduction in advance payments);
- **Quality of welcome and integration** (accommodation, buddy system, community life, language support);
- **Robust academic recognition** (transparent rules, reasonable flexibility, rapid management of exceptions).

IROs also agree on one key idea: the ideal university does not 'sell' mobility as a slogan; it makes it **practicable**. It takes the emotional dimension seriously: it **anticipates stress, normalises difficulties, and supports students' ability to cross thresholds**.

Local nuances of the ideal university can be identified :
- <u>Turkey:</u> the ideal university more explicitly includes a **protective function** (enhanced support, international mediation, securing trajectories).
- <u>Norway:</u> the ideal university conceives of **international mobility as a holistic experience of well-being as much as an academic on**e.

- <u>Greece:</u> the ideal university emphasises **organisational capacity in the context of flows**.
- <u>Slovenia:</u> the ideal university is one that **makes mobility academically fluid**.
- <u>France:</u> the ideal university appears to be one that manages to articulate internationalisation and strategic constraints: **reducing administrative friction and integrating mobility as a curricular norm rather than an exception**.

Overall, the five IRO groups construct **a convergent representation of mobility as an institutionalised rite of passage**: desirable, formative, but fragile because it depends on administrative, economic and relational infrastructures. **The differences are less due to opposing visions than to distinct national and organisational ecologies**. Taken together, these perspectives shift the analytical focus from *whether* mobility is valuable to *how* it can be made sustainable, intelligible and secure across contexts. If mobility is structured by critical thresholds - application, funding, housing, recognition, integration and return - then any supportive intervention must operate precisely at these points of vulnerability.

The following section therefore builds on both student and institutional findings to formulate concrete recommendations for WP4, dedicated to the development of the virtual reality tool. Rather than conceiving VR as a promotional device, we approach it as an infrastructural support mechanism: a tool capable of reducing uncertainty, rehearsing critical transitions and rendering the mobility process cognitively and emotionally manageable.

Part 6. Recommendations for WP4 : designing a virtual reality tool grounded in empirical findings

The analyses conducted with student focus groups and interviews with international relations officers converge on one key conclusion: mobility does not fail due to a lack of willingness. It falters at certain thresholds where administrative opacity, financial uncertainty, academic insecurity and emotional vulnerability accumulate.

Students do not primarily need inspiration, but stabilisation. **Institutions, for their part, do not lack procedures, but are confronted with fragmentation, repetition and the invisibility of recurrent micro-obstacles** (unclear sequencing of steps, duplicated documentation, delayed responses, housing insecurity, funding uncertainty, credit validation doubts) that could seem minor individually but collectively produce cognitive overload and discourage departure. **WP4, dedicated to the development of a virtual reality tool, should therefore be designed not as a communication device, but as an immersive infrastructure**. Its objective should be to anticipate vulnerability, make processes legible, and allow students to practise critical transitions before encountering them in real life.

Designing such a tool therefore requires more than listing difficulties and matching them with digital features. It implies **a process of analytical translation**: identifying recurrent vulnerability clusters across national contexts, distinguishing between structural thresholds and situational micro-frictions, and transforming these into programmable scenarios. The recommendations below propose to reorganise empirical material into operational categories that can inform immersive design. In this sense, WP4 could be a space where qualitative findings are converted into structured experiential architecture.

6.1. Making the mobility process understandable: an immersive narrative architecture

One of the most striking conclusions in all national contexts is that students perceive mobility as a fragmented and sometimes opaque sequence of tasks. Turkish participants "proceduralise" the experience using checklists and scripts; French students describe turning points and moments of legitimacy; Slovenian participants recount improvised solutions to micro-problems. In each case, mobility is experienced as a succession of thresholds rather than a smooth journey.

What appears across the data is not simply a lack of information, but a lack of sequencing. Students frequently possess fragments of knowledge- about visas, housing, or credit validation - but struggle to situate these fragments within a coherent temporal order. This produces anticipatory anxiety: the fear of having forgotten something essential. The VR environment can function as a temporal scaffold, allowing users to visualise not only what must be done, but when and in relation to which other steps. In this respect, the immersive narrative structure is less about storytelling than about restructuring time.

The virtual reality tool must therefore be structured as a **narrative architecture organised around critical phases**: preparation, departure, arrival, integration, academic adaptation and return. Rather than presenting these stages as abstract information modules, virtual reality can embody them spatially. Students would move through recognisable environments - an admissions office, a digital portal room, a housing search space, an airport lobby, a first classroom, an exam office, a return office - each corresponding to a specific stage.

The goal is not aesthetic realism, but **cognitive mapping**. Students need to be able to see the sequence of actions, the dependencies between steps, and the consequences of a delay. A visible progress bar or roadmap **would allow them to situate themselves**: 'Where am I? What do I still need to do? What is holding me back?' This directly addresses the recurring demand for clarity and anticipation.

The immersive narrative architecture also responds to a deeper asymmetry identified in the interviews with IROs: institutions think in procedural flows, while students experience isolated tasks. By spatialising procedures and embodying them in traversable environments, VR reconciles these two logics. It makes institutional rationality experientially accessible. Each immersive scene should end with **a concise operational summary**: what has just been done, what now needs to be done in reality, the required documents and those responsible (student, home university, host university, external authority). This avoids the risk of VR becoming a passive spectacle; it becomes a **rehearsal space** linked to real administrative action.

By making the entire process visible, the tool addresses a fundamental problem identified by both students and IROs: fragmentation. Students often only discover the next requirement once the previous step has been completed, which generates stress and reactive behaviour. VR can pre-structure this temporal experience and transform mobility into a predictable journey rather than a series of surprises.

6.2. Anticipating and rehearsing administrative friction

Administrative complexity is not just an inconvenience, it is a decisive deterrent. Administrative deterrence operates cumulatively. No single document is decisive; rather, it is the accumulation of forms, signatures, platforms and conditional instructions that generates a perception of opacity. In several focus groups,

students described this as 'carrying everything alone' or 'being afraid of missing something invisible.' **The simulation of paperwork is therefore not a gamification strategy, but a de-dramatisation mechanism**: repetition without consequence reduces the symbolic weight of error. Thus, students cite lengthy administrative formalities, unclear procedures, inconsistent information, visa uncertainties and delayed responses. IROs, for their part, describe repetitive email exchanges and avoidable errors.

The virtual reality tool should include an **administrative simulation module** that transforms bureaucratic opacity into structured repetition. This would not trivialise the procedures, but would take the drama out of them by allowing students to practise without risk.

A **'file creation' sequence could simulate the collection of documents for applications, study agreements, insurance or visa applications**. Students would identify missing items, understand sequential constraints and receive immediate feedback on common errors. For destinations requiring a visa, a consular interview simulation could model typical questions and the financial evidence required. Such rehearsal directly addresses the fear of irreversible administrative errors.

Time management must also be integrated. **Deadlines can be visualised as dynamic clocks linked to each stage**, showing how one delay leads to others. If a student misses a simulated deadline, the scenario should not end in failure, but should lead to a recovery path: who to contact, how to justify the delay, what alternatives exist. This corresponds to the reality described in the focus groups, where students often rely on improvised 'DIY solutions'. Importantly, the inclusion of recovery pathways reflects a central empirical observation: mobility is rarely linear. Students frequently encounter unexpected changes - modified course catalogues, delayed confirmations, conflicting instructions. **By embedding repair logics into the tool, VR acknowledges contingency rather than denying i**t. This prevents the implicit message that 'good students never encounter problems' and instead normalises adjustment as part of the process.

An **'uncertainty radar'** could be integrated at the beginning of the virtual reality experience. Students would indicate their main concerns (documentation, housing, academic recognition, financial aid, language, safety). The tool would then **prioritise relevant scenarios and provide structured decision trees**: if X happens, contact Y within Z days. This ultra-practical format echoes the Turkish demand for scripts and the French need to reduce mental load.

For IROs, a background visualisation of frequent friction points (e.g., repeated confusion about changes to study agreements) would provide targeted clarification. Thus, VR does not replace institutional actors, but rather strengthens coordination. From an institutional perspective, this dual functionality is crucial. If VR

logs recurrent simulation failures (for instance, repeated confusion regarding visa documentation), these **patterns can inform targeted communication strategies**. In this sense, the tool operates as a diagnostic interface between student perception and institutional procedure, revealing friction zones that might otherwise remain anecdotal.

6.3. Making financial and housing realities tangible

Financial insecurity appears to be one of the most significant barriers to mobility. Students mention insufficient scholarships, double rent, unexpected deposits, late payments and hidden costs. Finding accommodation appears to be an additional stress factor, particularly when combined with language barriers and distance. Also, financial anxiety differs from administrative anxiety in one crucial respect: **it is tied to feasibility rather than procedure**. Students are not only asking 'How do I do this?' but 'Can I afford to do this at all?' The shift from vague fear to structured calculation is therefore decisive. By transforming abstract costs into manipulable elements within a virtual environment, the tool reduces catastrophic projection and replaces it with scenario-based reasoning.

The virtual reality tool should incorporate a **budget and accommodation simulator** based on realistic scenarios. Students would set a monthly budget by selecting the type of accommodation, transport options, food expenses and insurance. The system would **visualise remaining funds and potential vulnerabilities**. It is essential that the scenarios include unforeseen events: delays in the payment of Erasmus grants, higher-than-expected deposits or unexpected expenses. Rather than causing anxiety, these simulations should present coping strategies: emergency funds, negotiation of instalment payments, institutional assistance.

Modules on housing could **immerse students in three typical options: university residence, shared flat, and private rental**. Each would present trade-offs (cost vs. distance, sociability vs. privacy, stability vs. flexibility). Scenarios for detecting scams could teach students to recognise warning signs in contracts or online advertisements. If the student is unable to find accommodation in time, a recovery scenario would show them institutional contacts or temporary solutions to counter catastrophic thinking. The housing simulation also addresses a symbolic dimension repeatedly visible in the Slovenian and Turkish visuals: the fear of isolation materialised through empty rooms, walls or physical distance. **Allowing users to explore accommodation types and visualise their social implications (shared kitchen, residence events, commuting fatigue) connects material choices with relational outcomes**. Housing is thus repositioned not only as a financial issue, but as **a structuring factor of integration**.

By visualising financial flows and housing procedures, the tool transforms an abstract fear into a concrete assessment. Students move from 'I don't know if I can afford it' to 'I understand what I need and where the risks lie.' This shift from uncertainty to calculation reduces dropout rates before mobility.

6.4. Ensuring academic continuity and recognition

In many contexts, the fear of losing credits or delaying graduation appears to be a structural anxiety. Mobility is perceived as enriching, but potentially risky for the academic career. **Academic insecurity is often under-communicated because it is less visible than financial barriers, yet it has a powerful deterrent effect**. Students who fear credit loss or delayed graduation are less likely to take risks, particularly those from non-traditional or financially vulnerable backgrounds. The academic simulation module therefore contributes directly to equity: it reduces the perception that mobility is reserved for those who can 'afford to experiment' with their curriculum.

A **course matching and academic risk** module should allow students to simulate the construction of a timetable, compare ECTS values and explore programmes. An automated compatibility checker could highlight overlaps or insufficient credit loads. Through interactive dialogue with an "academic advisor avatar", students would practise formulating recognition requests and understanding institutional criteria.

Adjustments to learning agreements based on scenarios are particularly important. Many students discover upon arrival that courses have changed. Virtual reality can simulate this disruption and guide the user through the modification procedure step by step, indicating who signs what and in what order. This reflects the fragility experienced in academic validation. By rehearsing the modification process in advance, VR transforms what is usually experienced as a sudden destabilisation into **a manageable administrative variation**. This anticipatory rehearsal addresses what French participants described as 'legitimacy anxiety': the fear of asking for adjustments or appearing incompetent.

An **'academic calendar viewer' could display exam periods, course add/drop deadlines, and transcript submission deadlines**, thereby reinforcing temporal awareness. By repeating academic contingencies, the tool addresses what Greek IROs have described as a curricular risk and what French students have described as legitimacy anxiety.

6.5. Address social integration, language insecurity, and emotional transitions

Students from all countries report emotional swings: excitement, doubt, loneliness, adjustment, and difficulty reintegrating. These dimensions are often less visible in institutional communications, but they profoundly influence retention. Emotional fluctuation does not indicate failure; it is intrinsic to transition. However, without explicit normalisation, students may interpret doubt or loneliness as personal inadequacy. The integration of an emotional curve into VR reframes these phases as predictable and temporary. This subtle reframing can reduce early withdrawal and prevent silent disengagement.

The virtual reality tool should include a **'first 48 hours' module**, simulating arrival, key collection, navigating the campus, the first class and the first social interaction. Micro-dialogues would allow students to practise everyday exchanges: introducing themselves, asking for clarification, resolving minor misunderstandings.

Language insecurity can be addressed through situational micro-scenes rather than abstract lessons. Students would participate in short contextual interactions (conversation with the landlord, group project meeting, administrative office) with encouraging feedback. The emphasis on situational language rather than grammatical instruction reflects the empirical material: students rarely feared linguistic imperfection itself; they feared communicative breakdown in concrete situations. Short, replayable micro-scenes enable rehearsal without exposure, increasing confidence before real interaction.

An **'emotional curve visualisation' could normalise the phases of doubt and adaptation**. At key moments (day 3, week 2, month 1), the system would present typical feelings and suggest coping strategies: joining associations, contacting a friend, establishing routines. This echoes French narratives about subjective turning points and Slovenian testimonials about improvisation.

The return must also be integrated. A reintegration module would simulate the confirmation of credits, the retrieval of transcripts, the articulation of skills for CVs, and reflection on the skills acquired. By explicitly addressing the return, the tool counteracts the tendency to consider mobility as over once abroad. Integrating return into the same immersive architecture signals that mobility is a cyclical rather than episodic experience. The post-return phase, often neglected institutionally, can include emotional readjustment and difficulty reintegrating into the home academic environment. By anticipating this phase, the VR tool extends institutional care beyond departure and reinforces continuity.

6.6. Integration of community, feedback and institutional sustainability

Finally, mobility is relational. Students rely on peer advice, informal networks and the credibility of testimonials. IROs seek better coordination and a reduction in repetition. The integration of peer-generated content must, however, remain structured. Unfiltered testimonials can reproduce myths or exceptional

experiences. A tagged and moderated system preserves authenticity while maintaining reliability. This echoes the students' expressed need to distinguish between rumour, anecdote and institutional source.

The VR tool should therefore **incorporate a structured system of testimonials and feedback**. After completing their mobility, students could record short tagged experiences (accommodation, academic validation, language, integration). Future users would filter testimonials by field of study, budget level or destination. This would preserve authenticity while avoiding an overload of unstructured anecdotes.

A **pre-departure networking** feature could connect students travelling to the same destination, encouraging the creation of micro-communities before departure.

For institutions, **aggregated and anonymised data on frequent points of tension** would enable targeted adjustments to be made. If many users regularly encounter difficulties with the same administrative step in the VR, this indicates a real communication problem.

By closing the loop between student repetition and institutional optimisation, the VR tool becomes a living ecosystem rather than a static product. This feedback loop transforms the tool into a dynamic observatory of mobility experience. Rather than relying solely on retrospective surveys, institutions gain access to real-time indicators of perceived complexity. Such responsiveness enhances institutional sustainability and prevents the VR environment from becoming obsolete.

Overall, these recommendations position the VR WP4 tool as a systemic intervention. It should reduce uncertainty at critical thresholds, visualise dependencies, repeat recovery and stabilise the emotional and academic dimensions of mobility. Rather than amplifying aspirations alone, it must transform fragility into accompanied autonomy.

Conceptually, the WP4 virtual reality tool can be understood as an engineering of reassurance. It intervenes at the intersection of individual vulnerability and institutional organisation, translating fragmented experience into structured anticipation. Its added value does not lie in technological sophistication alone, but in its capacity to reorganise perception: to make invisible infrastructures visible, to transform uncertainty into rehearsal, and to convert fragility into accompanied autonomy. In doing so, it contributes not only to participation rates, but to the qualitative sustainability of mobility itself.

Ethical considerations

All participants were informed in advance about the objectives of the study, its methodological framework, and the intended use of the data collected. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained prior to any data collection. Participants were explicitly told that they could withdraw from the study at any time without providing justification and without any negative consequences.

Data collection and processing were conducted in full compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)[7]. No directly identifying personal data were included in the analysis. All responses were anonymised at the earliest possible stage, and any potentially identifying elements were removed during transcription and analysis. The data were stored securely, accessible only to authorised members of the research team, and used exclusively for research purposes within the framework of the REX project.

Confidentiality was guaranteed throughout the research process, including during reporting and dissemination. Quotes used in the report were anonymised, and care was taken to ensure that individual participants or institutions could not be indirectly identified.

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[7] Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 (General Data Protection Regulation), Official Journal of the European Union, L 119, 4 May 2016; applicable since 25 May 2018.

Appendix

Questionnaire about mobility — REX Project

Presentation

Dear students,

As part of the REX project (Reimagining the Erasmus Experience), we are seeking your participation in this questionnaire, which aims to better understand:

- the reasons that motivate you to pursue an international mobility;
- the obstacles that deter you from going abroad;
- and the influence of university policies on your decisions.

This questionnaire is open to all students, whether they have already been abroad, are planning to, or are not interested in international mobility. Your answers will help improve the international mobility policies.

Estimated time: 10 to 15 minutes maximum.

This questionnaire is strictly anonymous and your answers will only be used for research purposes.

Thank you for your interest and participation!

This project is subsidised by Erasmus + and is carried out in collaboration with the University of Maribor (Slovenia), UVSQ (France), EUF (Luxembourg), HVL (Norway) and İzmir Institute of Technology (Türkiye).

Socio-demographic profile

1. (SEXE) What is your gender?
    1. Female

2. Male
3. Other
4. Do not wish to indicate
2. (NAISS) What year were you born?
3. (NATIO) What is your nationality?
4. (PAYS) In which country are you studying (excluding international mobility)?
5. (NIV) What level of study are you currently enrolled in?
    1. Bachelor's degree (or equivalent)
    2. Master's degree (or equivalent)
    3. Doctorate / PhD (or equivalent)
6. (DISCIP) What field is your current study related to?
    1. Mathematics
    2. Physics
    3. Earth and Universe Sciences
    4. Chemistry
    5. Engineering
    6. Medicine, Biology and Health
    7. Agronomy, Ecology and Environment
    8. Economics, Management and Administration
    9. Law and Political Science
    10. Social Sciences and Humanities
    11. Education Sciences
    12. Information and Communication
    13. History and Architecture
    14. Geography and Urban Planning
    15. Arts, Literature, Languages and Cultural Disciplines
    16. Tourism and Hospitality
    17. Other (please specify):

Introduction

7. (EXP) Have you ever had any experiences abroad before your higher education (such as a travel, secondary school studies, or professional experience)?
    1. Yes
    2. No → *MOBIL (9)*

8. (EXPCONT) In which geographical area(s) did you have an experience abroad before your higher education(such as a travel, secondary school studies, or professional experience)?
    1. Northern Europe
    2. Southern Europe
    3. Eastern Europe
    4. Western Europe
    5. Asia
    6. North America
    7. South America
    8. Africa
    9. Middle East
    10. Oceania
    11. Antarctica
9. (MOBIL) Have you been on a student mobility programme (exchange, work placement, degree abroad)?
    1. Yes
    2. No → *ENVMOB (16)*
10. (TYPEMOB) What type(s) of international mobility have you undertaken?
    1. Work placement → *STAGE (11)*
    2. Erasmus exchange → *ERASMUS (12)*
    3. Another type of university exchange → *ECHANGE (13)*
    4. Degree abroad → *DIPL (14)*
    5. Other: → *AUTR (15)*
11. (STAGE) In which country did you do your work placement?
12. (ERASMUS) In which country did you do your Erasmus exchange?
13. (EXCHANGE) In which country did you do your other type of university exchange?
14. (DIPLOME) In which country did you do your degree abroad?
15. (AUTRE) In which country did you do this other international mobility?
16. (ENVMOB) Are you planning to have an experience abroad during your studies (exchange, work placement, degree)?
    1. Yes → *RETIENT (38)*
    2. No → *ENVISAGE (39)*
17. (PREVU) Have you started the process to go on an international mobility?
    1. Yes

2. No

Motivation and preparation

Group A

1. (NBMOB) How many times did you participate in an international mobility?
    1. 1 time.
    2. 2 times.
    3. 3 times.
    4. More.
2. (NIVMOB) What level(s) of study are concerned?
    1. Bachelor's degree (or equivalent)
    2. Master's degree (or equivalent)
    3. Doctorate / PhD (or equivalent)

University exchange → TYPEMOB = "Erasmus", "other exchange", "diploma" (10)

1. (UNIV) During your last international mobility, which university did you attend?
    Please indicate the name of the host university and the country.
2. (VOEU) In your wish list, the university where you did your international mobility corresponded to your:
    1. 1st choice
    2. 2nd choice
    3. 3rd choice
    4. 4th choice or more

International mobility in higher education → MOBIL = "yes" (9)

1. (TEMPS) As part of your higher education, how much time did you spend abroad in total?
    1. One semester or less
    2. One year
    3. A year and a half
    4. Two years
    5. More than two years

2. (MOTIFS) What were your main reasons for participating in an international mobility?
   Select and rank the reasons in order of priority (choose only those that apply to you).
   1. To benefit from an interesting study programme
   2. To study at a prestigious university
   3. To strengthen my resume
   4. To have a rewarding experience
   5. To improve my foreign language skills
   6. To discover a new culture
   7. To enrich my personal journey
   8. To discover new horizons
   9. To take advantage of a scholarship opportunity
   10. To follow recommendations from friends, students or teachers

3. (PARTIR) When did you first decide to take part in a student mobility program?
   1. Before I started higher education
   2. At the start of my higher education
   3. At the end of a previous semester at university
   4. Just before the application deadline
   5. Other :

4. (INFLU) To what extent did the following people or influences make you want to go abroad? *(Not at all influential; Not very influential; Quite influential; Very influential; Decisive in my decision)*
   1. Family
   2. Friends/peers
   3. Colleagues
   4. Teachers
   5. Administrative staff at your university
   6. Social networks
   7. Films/TV shows/media

5. (CRITPAYS) When choosing a country to study/work abroad, how important are the following factors? *(Not at all important; Slightly important; Moderately important; Very important; Decisive in my decision)*
   1. Teaching reputation
   2. Language of instruction
   3. Local job market
   4. Cost of living

5. Climate
6. Living environment
7. High-performance healthcare system
8. Safety
9. Culture
10. Values (diversity, equality, inclusion, ecology, etc.)
11. Existing social connections
12. Distance from home

University exchange → TYPEMOB = "Erasmus", "other exchange", "diploma" (10)

1. (CRITUNI) When choosing your host university, how important are the following factors? *(Not at all important; Slightly important; Moderately important; Very important)*
    1. University's reputation
    2. Courses offered
    3. Language of instruction
    4. Services offered (accommodation, sport, culture, etc.)
    5. Student life
    6. Geographical location (transport, etc.)
    7. Values (diversity, equality, ecology, etc.)
    8. Good relations with the International Relations Department
    9. Information available before departure
    10. Student testimonials
    11. Social networks
2. (INFO) Where did you get information about opportunities for international mobility?
    1. University website
    2. Information meetings
    3. Contact with dedicated departments
    4. Contact with teachers
    5. Testimonials from other students
    6. Alumni network
    7. Student fairs
    8. Mailing list / newsletter
    9. Social networks
    10. Personal online research
    11. Other :

3. (DIFFADMIN) What challenges, if any, did you face with administrative procedures? *(Multiple choice)*

   1. Application process
   2. Equivalence and transfer of credits
   3. Visa process
   4. Housing search process
   5. To obtain a grant
   6. To manage learning agreements
   7. Other

4. (SATISSOUT) Are you satisfied with the support you received from your home university during the application and preparation phase? *(Dissatisfied; Somewhat dissatisfied; Somewhat satisfied; Satisfied)*

   1. Educational support
   2. Administrative support
   3. Logistic support
   4. Moral support
   5. Information about the country
   6. Information about the host university
   7. Guidance in designing the international mobility project

5. (NOUVMOB) Has your international mobility experience made you want to do it again?

   1. Yes
   2. No

6. (ZONEMOB) In which geographical area(s) would you like to go?

   1. Northern Europe
   2. Southern Europe
   3. Eastern Europe
   4. Western Europe
   5. Asia
   6. North America
   7. South America
   8. Africa
   9. Middle East
   10. Oceania
   11. Antarctica

Obstacles and difficulties

Group A

35. (FREIN) How important are the barriers you encounter before your international mobility? *(Not at all important; Slightly important; Moderately important; Very important)*
    1. Financial contraints
    2. Administrative complexity
    3. Limited information on grants
    4. Fear of isolation
    5. Limited choice of university
    6. Limited choice of courses
    7. Little contact with the host university
    8. Fear of new teaching/professional practices
    9. Different academic/work habits
    10. Fear of not fitting in
    11. Language difficulties
    12. Fear of feeling different from others
    13. Distance from relatives

36. (DIFFPENDANT) How important are the difficulties you encounter during your international mobility ?*(Not at all important; Slightly important; Moderately important; Very important)*
    1. Financial contraints
    2. Administrative complexity
    3. Limited information on grants
    4. Isolation
    5. Limited choice of courses
    6. Little contact with the host university's international department
    7. New teaching / work practices
    8. Different school / work habits
    9. Integration problem
    10. Language difficulties
    11. Homesickness
    12. Feeling different from others
    13. Feeling disoriented
    14. Distance from relatives
    15. Feeling of insecurity

37. (DIFFAPRES) How important are the difficulties you encounter after your international mobility experience? *(Not at all important; Slightly important; Moderately important; Very important)*
    1. Difficulty of reintegration
    2. Feeling isolated
    3. Low mood
    4. Depression
    5. Issue with the recognition of earned credits
    6. Loss of motivation for academic work at the home university
    7. Difficulties adjusting back to academic routines (pace, teaching methods, etc.)

Group B→ *ENVMOB (16) = "yes".*

38. (RETIENT) If you haven't planned to go on an international mobility yet, what factors are holding you back? *(Not at all important; Slightly important; Moderately important; Very important)*
    1. Lack of motivation
    2. Financial constraints
    3. Fear of the unknown
    4. Family-related obligations
    5. Overloaded academic schedule
    6. Lack of family support
    7. High academic requirement
    8. Language requirement
    9. Unatractive destinations
    10. Risk of negatively affecting my current studies
    11. Risk of delaying my entry into the job market
    12. Uncertainty about the credit recognition
    13. Lack of encouraging communication from academic staff or teachers
    14. Lack of information
    15. Administrative issues
    16. Emotional and psychological overload
    17. Lack of time required to manage the application alongside my studies
    18. Selection process

39. (ENVISAGE) Have you considered going on an international mobility during your studies?
    1. Yes
    2. No → *MOTIV (42)*

40. (RETENU) How important are the factors that prevented you from going on a student exchange?
    (Not at all important; Slightly important; Moderately important; Very important)
    1. Financial constraints
    2. Lack of clear information
    3. Complexity of administrative procedures
    4. High academic requirements (language level, grades, etc.)
    5. Personal/family-related reasons (health, fear of being far from home)
    6. Limited choice of partner destinations in my field of study
    7. Concerns about recognition of studies/credits
    8. Perceived difficulty in finding accommodation abroad
    9. Lack of support from the home university
    10. Lack of family support
    11. Difficulty in interrupting a job/specific training
    12. Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic
    13. Lack of knowledge about destinations (countries and universities)
    14. Other :

41. (OBST) How important are the following obstacles to be resolved in order for you to apply for an experience abroad? *(Not at all important; Slightly important; Moderately important; Very important)*
    1. More scholarships
    2. Better recognition of credits
    3. Personalised support
    4. Better knowledge of destinations
    5. A wider choice of countries
    6. A wider choice of courses
    7. Academic support
    8. Other :

42. (MOTIV) What would make you want to go abroad?
    Select and rank the reasons in order of priority (choose only those that apply to you).

1. More information
2. More student feedback
3. More partnerships with my university
4. Better recognition of international mobility by employers
5. Better promotion of international mobility by the university
6. Incentives from the alumni network
7. More attractive destinations
8. Nothing

Role of the university

43. (INCIT) In your opinion, does your university encourage you to have a mobility abroad?
    1. *1 to 5 (Not at all; Somewhat; Quite a bit; A lot)*

Knowledge of Erasmus programme

44. (CONNAIS) Do you know the Erasmus programme?
    1. Yes
    2. No→ *MEILLCOM (49)*
45. (CONNAISCOMMENT) How do you know about the Erasmus programme?
    1. Through the university
    2. Through social media
    3. Through friends
    4. Other :
46. (COM) How does your university communicate about the Erasmus programme?
    1. Through its website
    2. Through their social networks
    3. Mailing lists
    4. Poster compaign around campus
    5. Information meetings
    6. Discussion with teaching teams
    7. Events (Erasmus Days, etc.)
    8. Don't know

9. Other :

47. (COMSUFF) Generally speaking, do you find the communication about Erasmus mobility sufficient?
    1. *Insufficient; Somewhat insufficient; Somewhat sufficient; Sufficient*

48. (INFOACCES) Generally speaking, do you find information on Erasmus mobility easy to access?
    1. *Difficult; Rather difficult; Rather easy; Easy*

49. (INFOCOMP) Generally speaking, do you find information on Erasmus mobility easy to understand?
    1. *Difficult; Rather difficult; Rather easy; Easy*

50. (MEILLCOM) How do you think your university could improve its communication and support for Erasmus mobility?
    1. *open question*

Satisfaction (university of departure/arrival)

All groups (but filter by group)

51. (SATISUNIVOR) In general, are you satisfied with the measures your home university has put in place for international student mobility?*(Dissatisfied; Somewhat dissatisfied; Somewhat satisfied; Satisfied)*
    1. Communication
    2. Quality of relationships with university departments
    3. Diversity of destination countries
    4. Diversity of partner universities
    5. Support before mobility
    6. Support during mobility
    7. Support after mobility
    8. Financial assistance
    9. Recognition of the experience
    10. Educational recognition (credits)
    11. Inclusion (disability, LGBT+)
    12. Tips and advice

Group A

52. (SATISUNIVACC) In general, are you satisfied with the measures your host university has put in place for international student mobility? *(Dissatisfied; Somewhat dissatisfied; Somewhat satisfied; Satisfied)*

    1. Communication
    2. Support before mobility
    3. Orientation and integration
    4. Support during mobility
    5. Teaching practices
    6. Contacts with local students
    7. Contacts with international students
    8. Course information
    9. Student life
    10. Housing assistance
    11. Quality of relationships with university departments
    12. Inclusion (disability, LGBT+, etc.)
    13. Tips and advice

Vision of other countries

53. (AFFIRM) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? *(Strongly disagree; Somewhat disagree; Somewhat agree; Strongly agree)*

    1. Some European countries are economically more attractive than others.
    2. Some European countries are less committed to ecological, social and technological change than others.
    3. Some European universities have more attractive teaching methods than others.
    4. Some European cities are more culturally dynamic than others.
    5. Some European countries have more attractive climates than others.

Perceived impact of mobility

54. (AVANTAGE) In your opinion, what are the main advantages of student mobility?
    Rank your answers in order of priority.

    1. Cultural enrichment

2.   Personal enrichment

3.   Maturity

4.   Autonomy

5.   Stronger foreign language skills

6.   Better integration into the job market

7.   None

55. (ATOUT) What do you think are the essential strengths required to participate in a student mobility programme?

1.   Self-confidence

2.   Motivation

3.   Open-mindedness

4.   Independence

5.   Adaptability

6.   Organisation

7.   Language skills

8.   Academic skills

9.   Professional skills

10. Personal network

11. Financial resources

12. Other :

Conclusion

56. (COMMENT) Would you like to add a comment about student mobility in Europe?

57. (RESULATS) Would you like to receive the results of our survey?

If you agree, an e-mail address will be requested in the next question.

1.   Yes

2.   No

58. (MAILRESULT) At which e-mail address can we inform you of the results of our survey?

59. (RECONTACT) Would you like to be contacted later to take part in a discussion group and go into more detail on certain points?

If you agree, an e-mail address will be requested in the next question.

1.   Yes

2.   No

60. (MAILFG) At what e-mail address can we contact you to take part in a focus group for our survey?

Thank you for your participation!

We appreciate you taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your answers are essential in helping us to better understand the challenges and opportunities surrounding international student mobility.

If you would like to be kept informed of the results of the project or take part in other Reimagining the Erasmus Experience (REX) initiatives, please visit our website.

The REX project team

Facilitator Guide – Workshop 1:

"Fears, Perceptions, and Obstacles to Mobility"

_____

Purpose of Workshop 1: To bring out emotions, perceptions, and stereotypes related to mobility.

- Identify perceived and real obstacles at the start.
- Reflect collectively on the drivers and resources needed.

Facilitation tips for this workshop:

- Create a safe and supportive atmosphere leading to honest sharing.
- Encourage the expression of all viewpoints, including hesitant or ambivalent ones.
- Rephrase important ideas and write them down on a board if possible.
- Don't hesitate to prompt with open-ended questions.

Activity 1: The Symbolic Suitcase (20 minutes)

Objective: To bring out expectations, fears, and personal resources.

Duration: 20 minutes

Materials needed:

- A2 sheets or large white sheets
- Markers and pens in different colours
- (Optional) Post-it notes to add ideas during discussion
- Board or wall to display the final work

Group division :

- Each group works in 2 sub-groups (A and B) – 10 minutes
- Quick sharing: 1 to 2 key ideas per sub-group (one spokesperson per sub-group) → one suitcase – 10 minutes

Instructions for participants :

- Draw a suitcase.

- Inside, symbolically place what you would take with you when leaving for abroad (goals, hopes, support, fears, doubts, etc.).
- On the outside or around it, indicate what might prevent you from packing in.

Facilitation prompts:

- Ask questions like: "What factors are supportive?", "What holds you back?", "What would you leave behind?"

Activity 2: The Obstacle Course (20 minutes)

Objective: To visually represent the barriers to mobility and reflect on solutions.

Duration: 20 minutes

Materials needed:

- A2 sheets or large white sheets
- Markers and pens in different colours
- (Optional) Post-it notes to add ideas during discussion
- Board or wall to display the work

Group division:

- Each group works in 2 sub-groups (A and B) – 10 minutes
- Quick sharing: 1 to 2 key ideas per sub-group (one spokesperson per sub-group) → the course – 10 minutes

Instructions for participants :

"Draw the imaginary journey of a student deciding to go abroad. What obstacles do they face? What resources help them overcome these? »

- Obstacles can be administrative, financial, emotional, cultural, familial, etc.

- Resources can include financial aid, peers, guidance, information, etc.

Facilitation prompts:

- Encourage the use of symbols: river = isolation, mountain = cost, bridge = Erasmus grant…
- Ask: "Which of these obstacles is the hardest to overcome?", "What could help?"

Activity 3: The Wall of Stereotypes (20 minutes)

Objective: To identify cultural stereotypes and their influence.

Instructions :

- Write down common stereotypes or clichés heard about Erasmus destinations (in the media, among friends/family, or society). What seems true or false to you?
- Each group notes several stereotypes (e.g. "Italy = disorganised", "Germany = cold", "Spain = all about partying").
- Display these on a wall or board.
- Brief discussion: which ideas influence the decision to go abroad or not?

Group division:

- Work as a whole group (no sub-groups needed beforehand)
- Presentation (using A2 sheet, post-it, board) and discussion points

Facilitation prompts:

- Questions: "Have you experienced anything that confirms or challenges these clichés?", "What image makes you hesitate to go?"

Facilitator Guide – Workshop 2

Mind Map of the Ideal University for Student Mobility

Objective

To identify students' expectations, needs, and concrete proposals regarding international mobility through the creation of a mind map representing the *ideal university for mobility*. This activity encourages collective intelligence, allows students to share experiences, and supports the co-construction of practical solutions.

Duration: 1 hour

- Mind map creation in sub-groups: 30 minutes
- Group presentations and discussion: 30 minutes

Materials Needed

- A2 sheets or large blank paper
- Markers and pens in different colours
- (Optional) Post-it notes for additional ideas during discussion
- Board or wall to display the mind maps

Group Setup

- Mixed groups of 6 students with diverse backgrounds (combining groups A and B)
- Each group creates one collective mind map

Instructions for Participants

"You will imagine an **ideal university** where international student mobility is **facilitated**, **valued**, and **encouraged** by all students.

Your task is to visually represent this vision as a **mind map**, to help the University's communications department design an effective strategy for promoting mobility."

- In the center of the page, write: **'Ideal University for Mobility'**
- Around it, create branches representing key areas of action (see suggested categories below)

Suggested Branches for Structuring the Mind Map

1. **Information and Communication**

   → How to effectively inform students of all profiles? What tools, channels, and timing?

2. **Preparation for Departure**

   → Support, workshops, admin guidance, simulations, alumni connections

3. **Support During Mobility**

   → Advisors, peer mentoring, emergency services, support groups, digital tools

4. **Return from Mobility**

   → Credit recognition, experience recognition, mentoring future outgoing students

5. **Material and Financial Support**

   → Housing, scholarships, targeted financial aid, inclusivity and accessibility

6. **University Climate and Culture**

   → Inclusion, encouragement, testimonials, inspiring events, institutional recognition

Facilitator's Role

During the creation phase:

- Clearly explain what a mind map is
- Support groups if they get stuck, without enforcing a strict structure
- Encourage diverse ideas and circulate with guiding questions like:
  - "What would you need to feel fully prepared to go abroad?"
  - "How would you convince a hesitant student to take the leap?"
  - "Which kinds of support should be prioritised?"

During the presentation phase:

- Ask each group to present (max 5 minutes)
- highlight original or recurring ideas
- Lead a discussion on feasibility and potential impact of their ideas
- Optionally, propose a vote on the top 3 ideas to implement first

Closing the Workshop

- Facilitate a collective summary:
  "What concrete ideas could the university implement tomorrow to make mobility easier?"
- Display the mind maps in the room
- Take photos for archiving and showcasing

⚠️ **Important:**

The final presentation and group discussion (15−20 minutes) should be audio recorded for documentation and future use.