

## Chapter B10

# International student mobility

Hendrik Schirmer

German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies (DZHW)

# Key

### Types of temporary international mobility

On cross-country average, a total of 24 % of students engaged in temporary forms of international mobility. 5 % of students were enrolled abroad temporarily, with an additional 1 % engaged in both enrolment and internships / work placements. Internships / work placements alone constituted 3 %, while 14 % participated in other study-related activities abroad. Variation between countries not only relates to the overall extent of students who have engaged in international mobility but also to the composition of mobility types.

### Social inequalities in international mobility trends over time

Over a quarter-century since the inception of the Bologna Process, international student mobility within the EHEA has seen dynamic shifts. Enrolment abroad for example peaked between 2012 and 2018, stagnating afterwards. Students' educational background influences participation, revealing consistent gaps favouring students from academic households across all mobility types with students from academic backgrounds generally showing higher participation rates.

### Diverse socio-demographic and study-related factors in student mobility

International student mobility is influenced by various socio-demographic and study-related characteristics, such as migration background, parental financial status, fields of study, HEI funding, and HEI research activity.

B  
10

# findings

## Patterns of temporary mobility throughout study

---

Specifics for each type of international student mobility become obvious when examining trends across degree programmes and years of study. Findings for enrolment periods abroad suggest that students inclined towards studying abroad may also have a tendency to pursue further studies with a second-cycle degree and that students in Bachelor programmes often choose to study abroad towards the conclusion of their first-cycle degree.

## Understanding students' intentions for temporary study abroad

---

While, on cross-country average, 6 % of students are actively planning to enrol abroad, 24 % express general intentions without concrete plans, suggesting a sizeable pool of prospective mobile students. Financing remains a major obstacle, particularly in earlier decision making phases, highlighting the need for targeted support programmes.

## Organisation, funding, and characteristics of international mobility

---

While Erasmus(+) is popular for organisation and funding of study periods abroad (60 %), internships abroad are mainly organised independently (55 %). Internship characteristics vary considerably with regard to degree of obligation and financial compensation. Activities abroad other than studies and internships include research, field trips, summer/winter schools, language courses, and unspecified activities. The rise of unspecified activities, potentially virtual, suggests adaptation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Main issues

Since the initiation of the Bologna Process, decision makers in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) have championed temporary international student mobility (ISM) in various forms. This commitment has been fundamental in fostering academic exchange and cultural understanding across borders. Recently, the European Commission has endorsed the proposal for a “Council Recommendation ‘Europe on the Move’ – learning mobility opportunities for everyone” (European Commission, 2023). This initiative seeks to embed learning mobility as an integral component into all education and training pathways within the European Union. Its ambitious goals include increasing the proportion of EU citizens benefiting from a learning period abroad, particularly targeting those individuals facing fewer opportunities: the proposal sets a new EU-level mobility target for 2030, aiming for at least 25 % of higher education graduates to have experienced learning mobility, up from the current 20 %. Moreover, the recommendation outlines measures to surmount mobility barriers, such as outreach, language enhancement, and improved recognition of learning outcomes. It also embraces emerging learning paradigms, including digital tools, and advocates for environmentally sustainable mobility practices, drawing upon the experiences gleaned from existing exchange programmes like Erasmus+. The new strategy thus builds on, details, and reinforces the principles of ISM formulated in point 8 of Annex II (EHEA Ministerial Conference, 2020a) to the Rome Communiqué (2020b).

Indeed, past studies reveal that socio-economic factors, particularly social background (i.e. student’s parental educational and economic status) and study-related aspects, such as subject-related cultures, significantly influence students’ engagement in temporary international mobility initiatives of the EHEA countries (Finger, 2011; Gerhards & Hans, 2013; Netz, 2015; Netz et al., 2021; Netz & Finger, 2016). These findings underscore the importance of addressing multifaceted barriers to participation and fostering inclusivity in mobility programmes to ensure equitable opportunities for all students. Recent research on ISM reveals emerging trends: Gender disparities persist, with women showing higher intentions and participation rates in study abroad programmes. This can partly be explained by parental characteristics (Van Mol, 2022) as well as gender differences in subject choice during school and in higher education (Cordua & Netz, 2022). However, concerns about family responsibilities and career interruptions may deter women, particularly those from low socio-economic backgrounds, from pursuing international experiences (Cordua & Netz, 2022). Socio-economic factors significantly influence participation, with students from higher socio-economic backgrounds being more likely to study abroad. Nonetheless, institutional contexts can play a role in shaping study abroad intent and participation (Entrich et al., 2024; Schnepf et al., 2024): Both high- and low-socio-economic status students can benefit from mobility scholarships when provided by higher education institutions (HEIs); nonetheless, an issue persists where privileged students tend to enrol in institutions with superior scholarship provisions, thereby contributing to their overrepresentation among internationally mobile students.

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly disrupted the landscape of temporary ISM (Di Pietro & Perez-Encinas, 2023), with measures such as lockdowns in HEIs and travel restrictions having influenced students’ behaviour concerning study-related

activities abroad. Vulnerable student groups, already facing socio-economic challenges, may have been disproportionately affected by these disruptions. Consequently, there is an urgent need to monitor trends in temporary study-related student mobility to assess the pandemic's lasting impact and mitigate disparities among student cohorts. However, the COVID-19 pandemic might not in all cases have had negative effects with regard to selection processes in ISM: While efforts of policymakers and HEIs to promote inclusivity and accessibility in mobility programmes continue (De Benedictis & Leoni, 2021; Van Mol & Perez-Encinas, 2022), participation rates among students with disabilities remained low in the past (Van Mol & Perez-Encinas, 2022) – which might have partly been counterbalanced in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic (Netz & Völk, 2023).

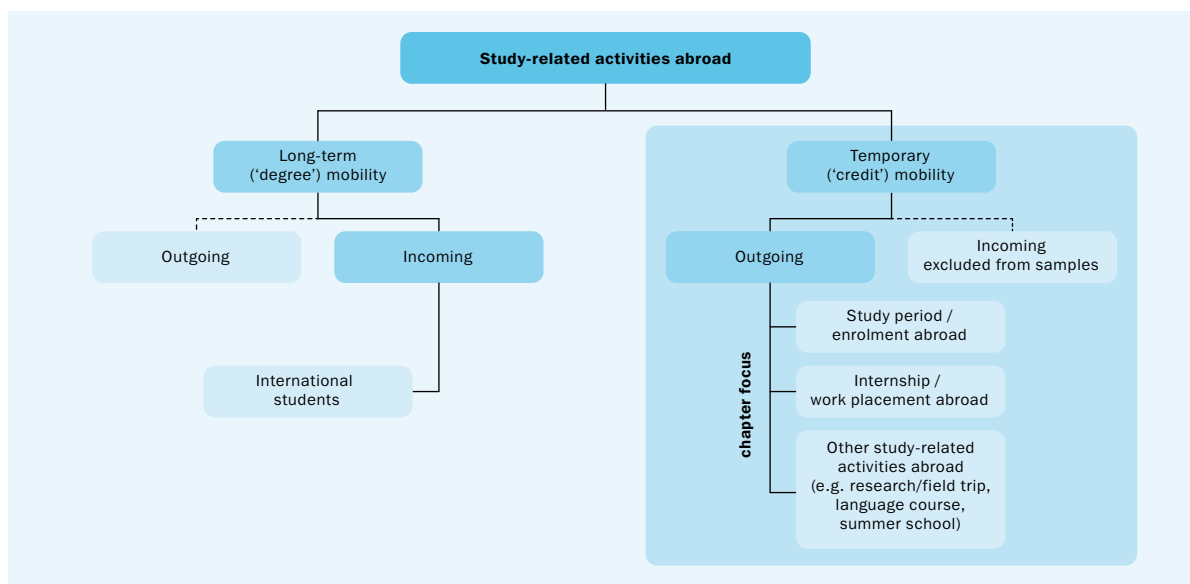
#### Box B10.1

### Methodological note: Types of temporary ('credit') mobility

The analyses in this chapter cover temporary types of mobility, commonly also known as credit mobility. Credit mobility encompasses various forms of study periods abroad ('enrolment abroad'), internships or work placements, and other study-related activities such as research/field trips, language courses, and summer schools (Figure B10.1). It is essential to note that our analyses exclusively encompass students within the EUROSTUDENT target group (see > [Chapter A3](#) for more details). The EUROSTUDENT target group consists of students pursuing degrees within the country of the respective survey. Consequently, incoming temporarily mobile students are excluded from our analyses. The situation of incoming long-term mobile students (also called 'degree mobility') is covered through analyses of > international students throughout the Synopsis of Indicators (e.g. in > [Chapter B1](#)).

Figure B10.1 [↓](#)

#### Types of international student mobility



## Data and interpretation

### Types of temporary mobility

24 % of students are engaged in diverse international activities across countries.

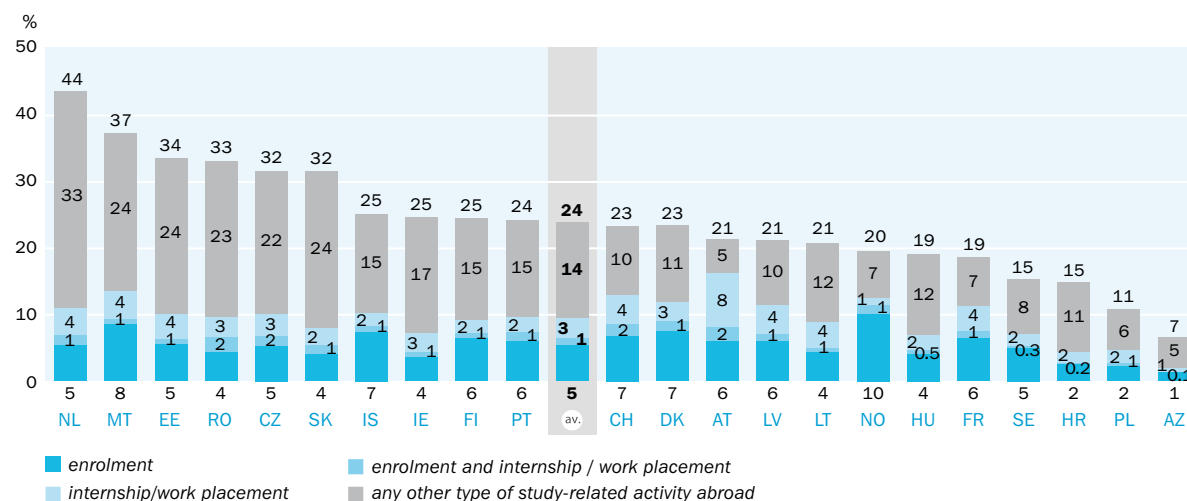
The cross-country data reveal that, on average, 5 % of students were temporarily enrolled abroad, with an additional 1 % engaging in both enrolment and internships or work placements abroad (Figure B10.2). Internships or work placements abroad (and no enrolment periods) were carried out at a cross-country average of 3 %. Moreover, 14 % of students were engaged in other study-related activities abroad (e.g. research/field trip, summer/winter school, language course). When summing up these categories, the total cross-country average of students involved in international mobility amounts to 24 %. This suggests a substantial degree of internationalisation of student experiences, with a significant emphasis on diverse study-related activities beyond mere enrolment.

Examining individual countries sheds light on the variations in ISM. Notably, the Netherlands stand out with 44 % of students having participated in various international activities, showcasing a robust commitment to global educational engagement. In contrast, students in Azerbaijan record the lowest overall percentage at 7 %, indicating a comparatively limited involvement in international mobility.

Figure B10.2 [↓](#)

#### Types of international mobility experience

Share of students (in %)



**Data source:** EUROSTUDENT 8, I.3. **No data:** DE, ES, GE.

**Data collection:** Spring 2022 – summer 2022 except CH (spring 2020), AT, FR, PT, RO (spring 2023 – summer 2023).

**EUROSTUDENT question(s):** 4.18 Have you done any internships (of at least one week, mandatory or voluntary) since you first entered higher education in #country? 5.6 Have you ever taken part in a temporary study period abroad since you first entered higher education in #country (e.g. #semester abroad)? 5.12 Have you ever been abroad for other study-related activities?

**Deviations from EUROSTUDENT survey conventions:** AT, CH, RO.

**Deviations from EUROSTUDENT standard target group:** IE, NL.

Country variation exists not only in terms of the variation in total shares of students who went abroad, but also in terms of their composition. Austria, Latvia, Lithuania, and Norway, for example, exhibit similar total percentages of about every fifth student

having completed some sort of stay abroad, yet the distribution differs when it comes to the different types of mobility, with Norwegian students emphasising enrolment and Austrian students placing a stronger emphasis on internships, while Lithuanian and Latvian students more commonly favour other stays abroad.

### Social inequalities in international mobility over time

The Bologna Process was launched a quarter of a century ago and the promotion of ISM has always been an integral part of the political agenda in the EHEA. An overview of the dynamic developments of temporary forms of mobility in the context of social disparities is therefore appropriate. The available data from different rounds of the EUROSTUDENT project reveal a noteworthy evolution in the patterns of mobility (Figure B10.3).

Temporary enrolment abroad rates increased from 4 or 5 % in the early years of the millennium (Euro Student 2000 to EUROSTUDENT III) over 7 % (EUROSTUDENT IV) to a peak of 8 % in the period between 2012 and 2018 (EUROSTUDENT V and VI), demonstrating a substantial growth in students pursuing academic experiences in foreign institutions. Since this phase, however, the proportion of students who undertake temporary studies abroad has slightly decreased (EUROSTUDENT VII to 8). Internships or work placements abroad witnessed a steady rise, reaching 5 % between 2012 and 2021 (EUROSTUDENT VII), showcasing an expanding interest in gaining practical experience in international settings. Similar to studies abroad, the proportion of students with internships abroad has slightly decreased in the current measurement period (EUROSTUDENT 8). A particularly strong increase, however, can be observed in other types of student mobility abroad in the current phase, which at 15 % is significantly higher than the proportions in the previous two survey periods. This increase suggests a diversification of study-related activities beyond traditional enrolment or internship, indicating a broader spectrum of international experiences for students: It can be assumed that, on the one hand, the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a switch to other mobility formats in many cases; however, this alone is not sufficient to explain shifts in mobility preferences over time, as study and internship abroad shares were already stagnating before the pandemic.

*Trends in ISM:  
From growth to  
stagnation.*

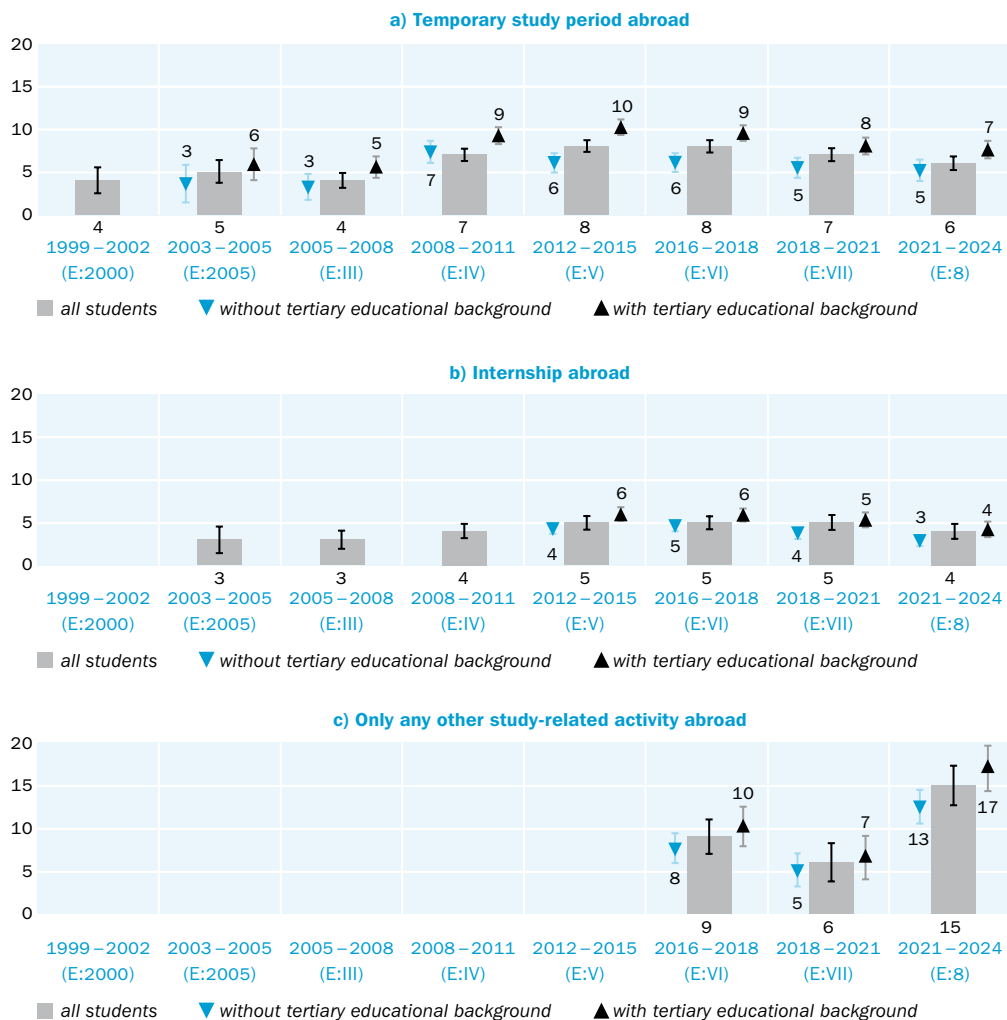
Investigating how parental education influences ISM sheds light on potential barriers and disparities, which can help in tailoring financial aid and support programmes to address specific needs. The differentiation between students with and without tertiary educational background unveils intriguing insights into social inequalities over the examined periods. For students without parental academic degrees, the data illustrate a consistent participation gap compared to their counterparts from academic households in all types of temporary international mobility. Remarkably, the social differentiation in terms of participation in ISM, especially in studies abroad, goes hand in hand with the overall measured level of stays abroad: The differences between students from non-academic families and academic households are particularly strong during the peak period of studies abroad 2012–2015 (6 % vs. 10 %). Similarly, in internships and work placements abroad, students from academic households consistently demonstrated higher participation rates even though the effect is less nuanced regarding this type of mobility. Notably, for other types of study-related activities abroad, a substantial divergence is observed in the current survey, indicating a burgeoning inequality with 17 % of students from academic households engaging (only) in diverse international activities, compared to 13 % among their counterparts without parental academic backgrounds.

*Social inequalities  
in ISM persist over  
time.*

Figure B10.3

## Temporary mobility by educational background from E:2000 to E:8

Cross-country averages (in %) with between-country 95 % confidence intervals



**Data source:** EURO STUDENT 2000, National Profiles 47; EUROSTUDENT 2005, National Profiles 43, 48; EUROSTUDENT III, Subtopic 53; EUROSTUDENT IV, I.1, I.3, I.4; EUROSTUDENT V, K.1, K.2, K.16, K.17; EUROSTUDENT VI, I.2; EUROSTUDENT VII, I.4; EUROSTUDENT 8, I.3. **No data:** E:2000, AT, BE(w/b); E:2005, E/W, FI, IT; E:III, E/W, EE, LT, LV, SCO; E:IV, E/W, SI; E:V, -; E:VI, CH; E:VII, AL, CZ, DE, LU; E:8, CH, DE, ES, GE.

**Data collection:** E:8: Spring 2022 – summer 2022 except CH (spring 2020), AT, FR, PT, RO (spring 2023 – summer 2023).

**EUROSTUDENT question(s):** E:8: 4.18 Have you done any internships (of at least one week, mandatory or voluntary) since you first entered higher education in #country? 5.6 Have you ever taken part in a temporary study period abroad since you first entered higher education in #country (e.g. #semester abroad)? 5.12 Have you ever been abroad for other study-related activities?

**Note(s):** The percent values shown are 'predictive margins' as computed after a multiple linear regression with the variable 'country' as additional control variable, so that the effect of different country participation in the various project rounds is at least partially corrected.

**Deviations from EUROSTUDENT survey conventions:** AT, CH, RO (E:8).

**Deviations from EUROSTUDENT standard target group:** IE, NL (E:8).

The phenomenon of social disparities in student mobility observed in the previous evaluation at the broad level of cross-country averages over time can also be seen when taking a detailed look at the individual countries in the current measurement period (Table Bro.1). Statistically significant differences between students with and without tertiary educational backgrounds exist in all countries. And apart from a very few indi-



vidual countries in specific forms of stays abroad<sup>1</sup>, the trend towards higher participation of students with tertiary educational backgrounds in mobility extends across the entire spectrum of participating countries. This finding is particularly pronounced in Malta, Slovakia, and Ireland and much less distinct in Norway and Denmark.

#### Box B10.2

### Methodological note: Statistical tests for between-country differences

Several statistical tests have been performed to validate the findings in this chapter, some of which are also presented in selected figures and tables. In figures where only cross-country averages are presented (e.g. Figure B10.3, Figure B10.5), between-country tests have been performed in order to express the validity of this condensed form of data presentation. The wider the distance between the endpoints of a confidence interval in such a figure, the greater the uncertainty or variability in the individual values of the countries in the EUROSTUDENT sample – the intervals show the range within which we can be 95 % confident that the true cross-country mean lies.

### Socio-demographic and study-related differences in temporary mobility

Although educational background is considered a key determinant of ISM, it is worth taking a broader look at other socio-demographic and study-related characteristics if inclusive and diverse access to stays abroad during studies is to be guaranteed (Netz et al., 2021). Figure B10.4 illustrates some of the conceivable differentiating student characteristics in the form of cross-country averages:

- No notable cross-country differences in international participation emerge regarding students' sex.
- The data reveal distinct patterns in ISM based on migration background. First-generation migrants demonstrate higher engagement in all types of mobility compared to second-generation migrants or students without migration background (see also Netz & Sarceletti, 2021).
- There are no notable differences in mobility participation regarding study-limiting disabilities. However, this finding should not be overinterpreted, because the group of students reporting study-limiting disabilities summarised here encompasses a variety of different conditions (see > [Chapter B1](#)) with different implications for obstacles to international mobility.
- Students dependent on self-earned income display a high participation rate in temporary enrolment abroad, at first glance a result of a higher level of financial independence and, consequently, greater opportunities for abroad experiences. On the other hand, students dependent on family resources exhibit a higher percentage in the category of other types of study-related activities abroad, suggesting a potential need for additional financial support to encourage a more diverse range of international experiences.

*Migration background, income structure, parental prosperity, field of study, and HEI characteristics shape ISM participation.*

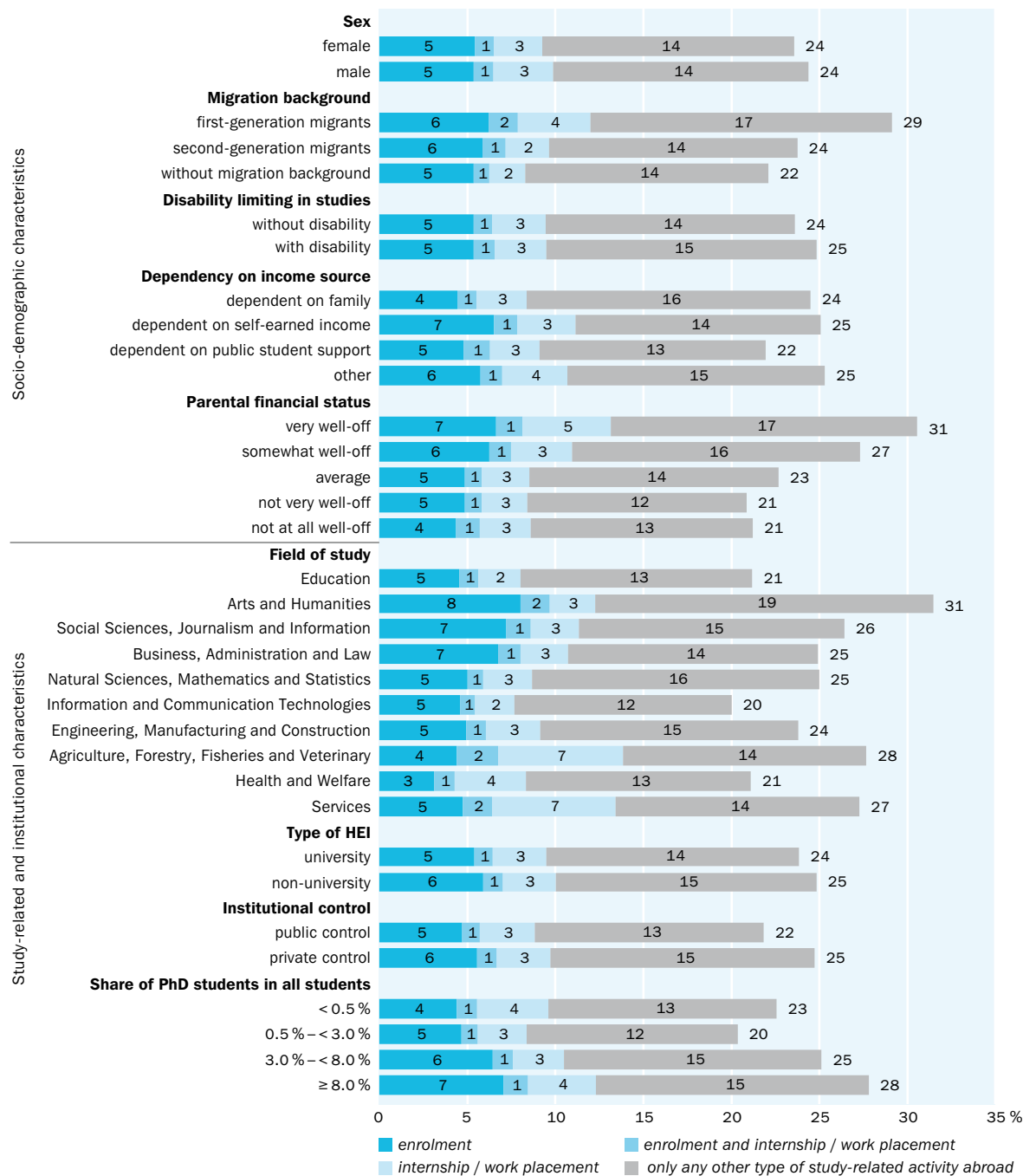
<sup>1</sup> Students without tertiary educational background in the Netherlands more frequently perform both enrolments as well as internships abroad (not, however, when looking at those who only go abroad for enrolment or internship) than students with tertiary educational background. Non-academic background students in Norway more commonly go abroad for internships or any other type of stay than their academic background peers.



Figure B10.4

Types of students' international mobility experience by student characteristics

Cross-country averages (in %)



Data source: EUROSTUDENT 8, I.3. No data: DE, ES, GE.

Data collection: Spring 2022 – summer 2022 except CH (spring 2020), AT, FR, PT, RO (spring 2023 – summer 2023).

EUROSTUDENT question(s): 4.18 Have you done any internships (of at least one week, mandatory or voluntary) since you first entered higher education in #country? 5.6 Have you ever taken part in a temporary study period abroad since you first entered higher education in #country (e.g. #semester abroad)? 5.12 Have you ever been abroad for other study-related activities?

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT survey conventions: AT, CH, RO.

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT standard target group: IE, NL.

- Parental financial status is clearly related to participation in international mobility. The basic pattern shows that more well-off parents mean greater participation in student mobility (in its various forms).
- Disparities in ISM are observed across various fields of study. Arts and Humanities students show an overall exceptionally high participation rate in mobility (31%), while students in the fields of Information and Communication Technologies (20%), Education (21%), and Health and Welfare (21%) overall engage comparatively seldom in stays abroad. In addition, different preferences for certain types of stays abroad can be observed in the different fields of study.
- On average across countries, there are only minor differences in participation in international mobility between students at universities and non-universities.
- In contrast, the type of HEI funding source is associated with variations in ISM. Students enrolled at privately funded institutions are overall more commonly engaged in abroad activities.
- Overall, it can be said that higher research activity of an HEI (here operationalised as the proportion of PhD students to all students) is also accompanied by an increased degree of ISM (especially studies abroad).

Findings regarding fields of study and institutional characteristics are problematic if access to them is socially selective (e.g. in case certain study subjects, private universities, or academically excellent HEIs are only accessible to a wealthy population group; > [Chapter B4](#)). They can therefore provide information about selection processes that remain hidden when only looking at socio-demographic characteristics.

All these group differentiations may be interconnected with other student characteristics, influencing the observed patterns. For instance, students with a migration background might be overrepresented in certain fields of study, or private institutions might offer specific fields of study more commonly (> [Chapter B4](#)), impacting the highlighted trends. Possibly most important to keep in mind: students' income structure is highly related to students' age (> [Chapter B7](#)) and, in consequence, their study progress and duration (> [Chapter B3](#)) in which a stay abroad could have taken place (Figure B10.5).

Furthermore, it should be noted that only overarching or prevailing trends are analysed here, as only cross-country averages are presented. This does not mean that in some countries, for example, there may be differences in mobility behaviour based on gender.

### Development of participation in different types of temporary mobility over the course of studies

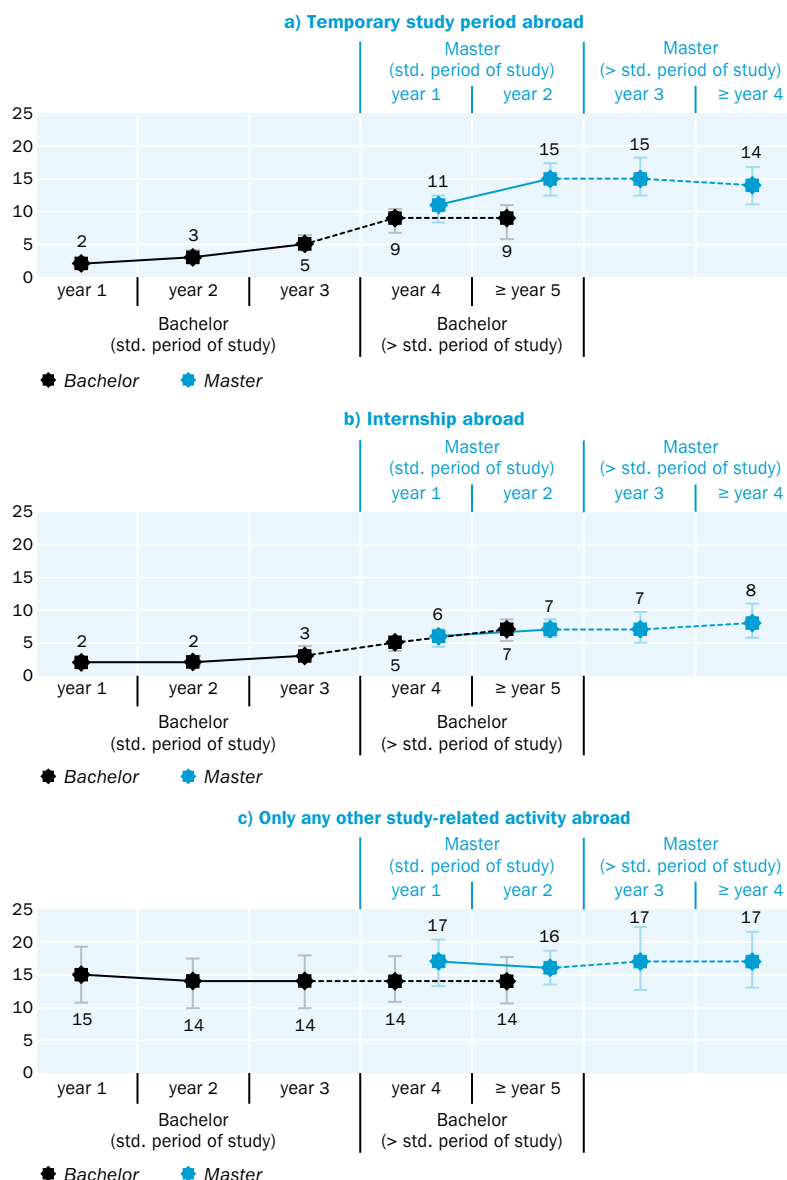
While graduate surveys (e.g. 'Eurograduate') are the suitable source of information in assessing the progress towards reaching European student mobility goals, cross-sectional data among student populations (as presented in Figure B10.5) can offer valuable supplementary insights into the patterns of ISM throughout the course of studies, even for those students who might drop out of studies later along the student lifecycle and not graduate after all (> [Chapter B4](#)). Certain specifics for each of the investigated temporary types of ISM become obvious when examining the distinctive trends across degree programmes and years of study.

*Distinctive patterns of ISM across degree programmes and study years.*

Figure B10.5

## Temporary mobility by years of study in Bachelor and Master programmes

Cross-country averages (in %) with between-country 95 % confidence intervals



**Data source:** EUROSTUDENT 8, I.3. **No data:** DE, ES, FR, GE.

**Data collection:** Spring 2022 – summer 2022 except CH (spring 2020), AT, PT, RO (spring 2023 – summer 2023).

**EUROSTUDENT question(s):** 4.18 Have you done any internships (of at least one week, mandatory or voluntary) since you first entered higher education in #country? 5.6 Have you ever taken part in a temporary study period abroad since you first entered higher education in #country (e.g. #semester abroad)? 5.12 Have you ever been abroad for other study-related activities?

**Deviations from EUROSTUDENT survey conventions:** AT, CH, RO.

**Deviations from EUROSTUDENT standard target group:** IE, NL.

Regarding temporary study periods abroad, there are strong differences between students in the standard period of study (increase in both Bachelor and Master programmes) and those who exceed the standard period of study (stagnation in the case of Bachelor programmes, decrease in Master programmes). At the same time, it becomes apparent that there is a connection between studying abroad and the transi-

tion to a Master’s degree programme, because students in a Master’s degree programme very often state that they have already completed study periods at HEIs abroad. On the one hand, this underscores that students inclined towards studying abroad may also have a tendency to pursue further studies with a second-cycle degree. On the other hand, it suggests that students in Bachelor programmes often choose to study abroad towards the conclusion of their first-cycle degree.

There are no connections between (non-)compliance with the standard period of study and internships abroad or any other types of international mobility. Instead, the proportion of students who complete an internship abroad gradually increases over the course of first- and second-cycle studies. In contrast, other types of stays abroad seem to be feasible almost constantly throughout the entire course of study, probably because they might be more easily embedded at any point of studies due to their typically shorter length.

### Temporary study abroad decision making

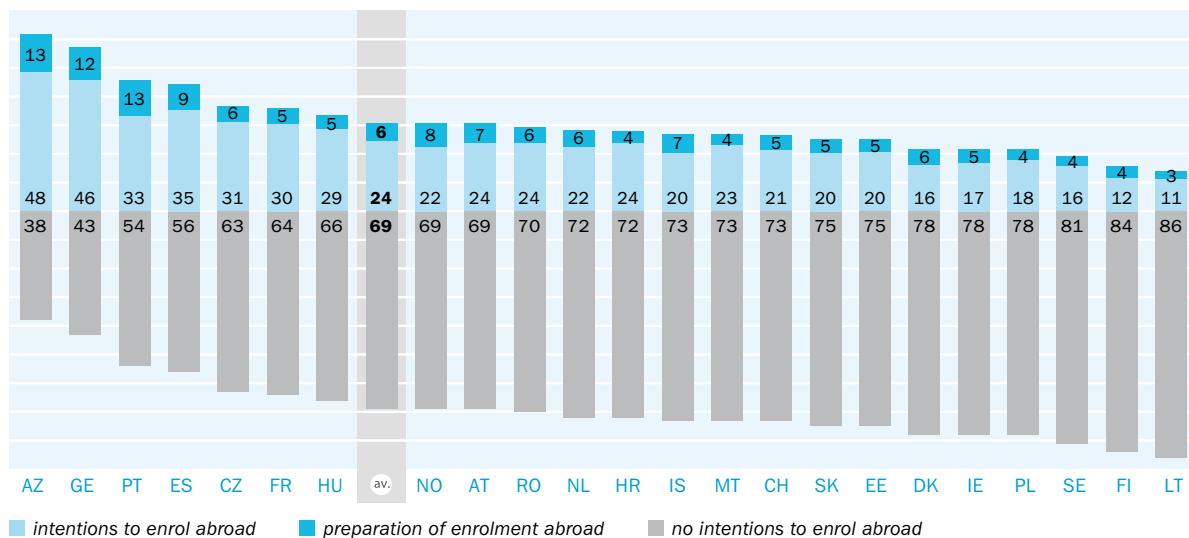
Investigating students’ intentions to pursue temporary study abroad experiences is crucial for assessing countries’ enrolment abroad potential. On average, 6 % of students without study abroad experience have progressed to actively planning their enrolment abroad, while a substantial 24 % express general intentions to study abroad without concrete plans, indicating a sizeable pool of students potentially becoming internationally mobile (Figure B10.6). Notably, a significant majority, at 69 %, currently have no intentions to enrol abroad.

69 % of students without study abroad experience do not plan to enrol abroad.

Figure B10.6 ↓

#### Students’ intention to study abroad for limited periods

Share among students without experience of studying abroad temporarily (in %)



Data source: EUROSTUDENT 8, I.10. No data: DE, LV.

Data collection: Spring 2022 – summer 2022 except CH (spring 2020), AT, ES, FR, PT, RO (spring 2023 – summer 2023).

EUROSTUDENT question(s): 5.10 [Only students who have not done a temporary study period abroad yet] Taking a closer look at temporary study periods abroad: How would you best describe your intentions?

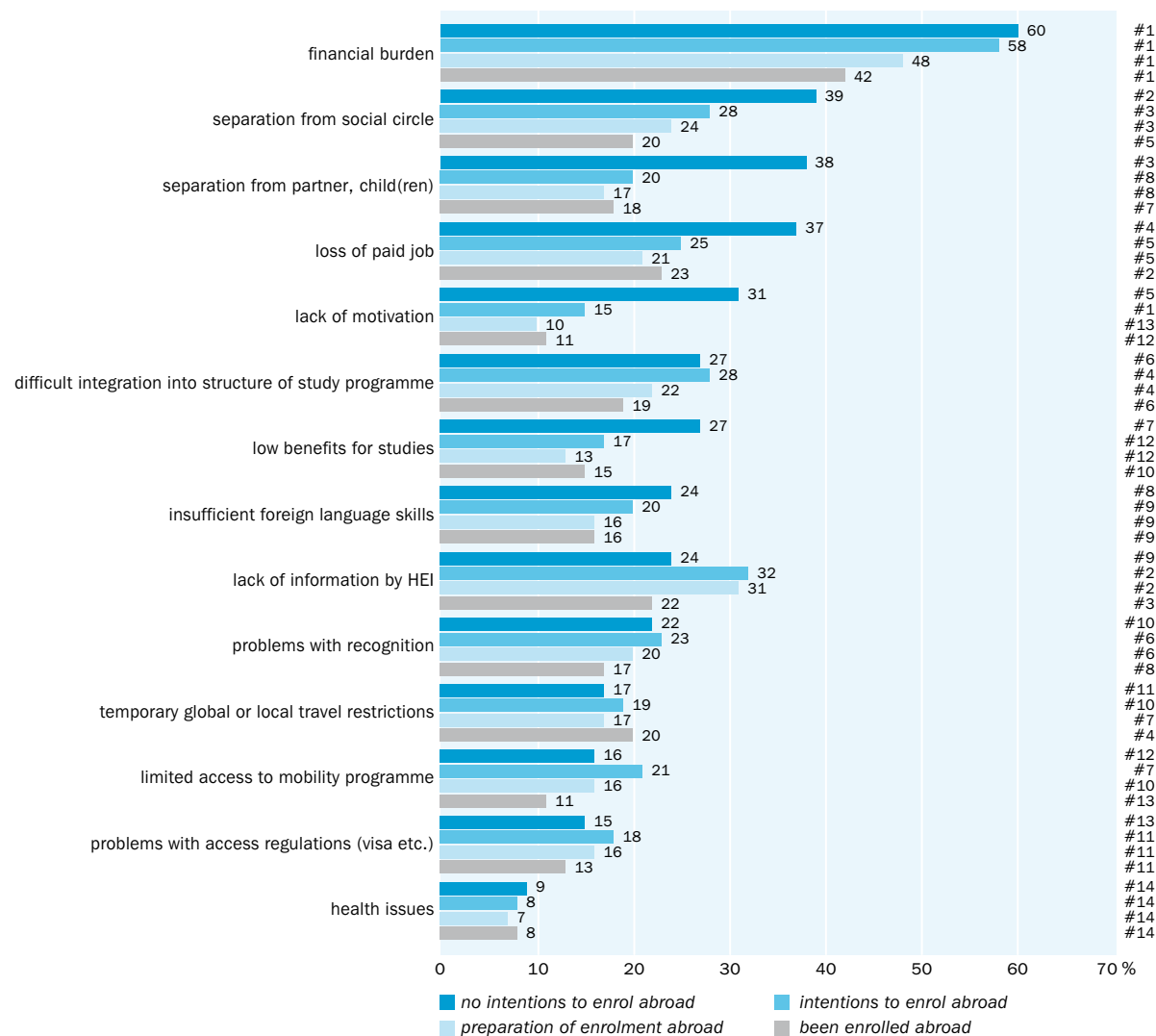
Deviations from EUROSTUDENT survey conventions: AT, CH, DK.

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT standard target group: IE, NL.

Figure B10.7 ↓

**Obstacles to temporary enrolment abroad by status of planning**

Cross-country averages (in %), # = rank of obstacle within reference group

**Data source:** EUROSTUDENT 8, I.12, I.14, I.16, I.18. **No data:** DE, LV.**Data collection:** Spring 2022 – summer 2022 except CH (spring 2020), AT, ES, FR, PT, RO (spring 2023 – summer 2023)**EUROSTUDENT question(s):** 5.11 To what extent are or were the following aspects an obstacle to you for enrolment abroad?**Note(s):** Shares relate to the percentage within the respective reference group of students (e.g. those without intention to enrol abroad).**Deviations from EUROSTUDENT survey conventions:** AT, CH, NO.**Deviations from EUROSTUDENT standard target group:** IE, NL.

- Countries such as Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Portugal exhibit high percentages of students actively planning to study abroad, at 13 % to 12 %, respectively, as well as considerable shares of general intentions to study abroad (between one third and almost half of hitherto non-mobile students).
- In contrast, countries such as Finland and Lithuania show low shares in both active planning and general intentions, hinting at a less pronounced interest in temporary study abroad experiences among those not yet having been enrolled abroad – their enrolment abroad potential seems to have been almost exhausted with those who have already enrolled abroad (Figure Bro.2).

The findings at hand underscore the importance of understanding country-specific factors that may influence students' attitudes and decisions regarding studies abroad.

Acknowledging the challenges students face in realising their plans is essential, as it provides a realistic perspective on the obstacles that may impede the attainment of the projected international mobility goals. However, what are the actual obstacles, determining the degree of intention to study abroad?

A differentiation of various obstacles for studying abroad according to the decision making phases ((non-)intention, planning, realisation) reveals some patterns. For example, financing problems are the biggest hurdle in all four groups; however, the proportion of those who cite financing difficulties as a (big) obstacle decreases with progressing degree of realisation (Figure B10.7). However, this is not because funding studies abroad is not such a big problem but rather reveals a selection process: Students who have the basic intention of studying abroad do not have to struggle with financial bottlenecks to the same extent as those who rule out studying abroad. According to this pattern, the assessment of the different obstacles relates to an increasingly selective group with each successive step towards actual realisation of studies abroad.

*Financing remains top obstacle across study abroad phases.*

A similar general pattern holds true for most obstacles. Exceptions relate mostly to the less commonly mentioned obstacles, which are mostly related to external factors, i.e. a lack of information, which emerges to be especially relevant for students with the intention to enrol abroad or in the planning phase of an enrolment period abroad, or temporary global or local travel restrictions, which is a general obstacle across planning stages.

### Organisation, funding, and characteristics of international mobility

On cross-country average, 60 % of students opt for the Erasmus+ programme to facilitate their temporary study periods abroad, indicating widespread popularity and accessibility (Figure B10.8). Meanwhile, 6 % of students leverage other EU programmes. Notably, a considerable proportion of 16 % of students choose non-EU programmes. Independently organised study periods abroad account for 18 %. Comparing the data among different countries sheds light on varying approaches to facilitating ISM. While vast majorities of students in a large number of countries make use of the Erasmus+ programme to organise their studies abroad – headed by Lithuania, Spain, and Croatia, with percentages surpassing 80 % – there are some distinctive patterns in a small group of certain (typically non-EU) other countries. Students in Georgia, for example, frequently organise studies abroad through EU programmes other than Erasmus+, while students in Azerbaijan predominantly organise studies abroad through a non-EU programme. A majority of Norwegian students, however, tend to organise their study stay abroad independently.

*60 % choose Erasmus+ for studies abroad.*

Distinct patterns also emerge when looking at the organisational frameworks of internships abroad. On average, 29 % of students engage in internships abroad through the Erasmus+ programme, indicating a significant but comparatively lower utilisation than in temporary study periods. 5 % of students utilise other EU programmes for internships, while 11 % of students opt for non-EU programmes. Remarkably, independently organised internships constitute the majority at 55 %, indicating students' initiative

*Majorities opt for independent organisation of internships abroad.*

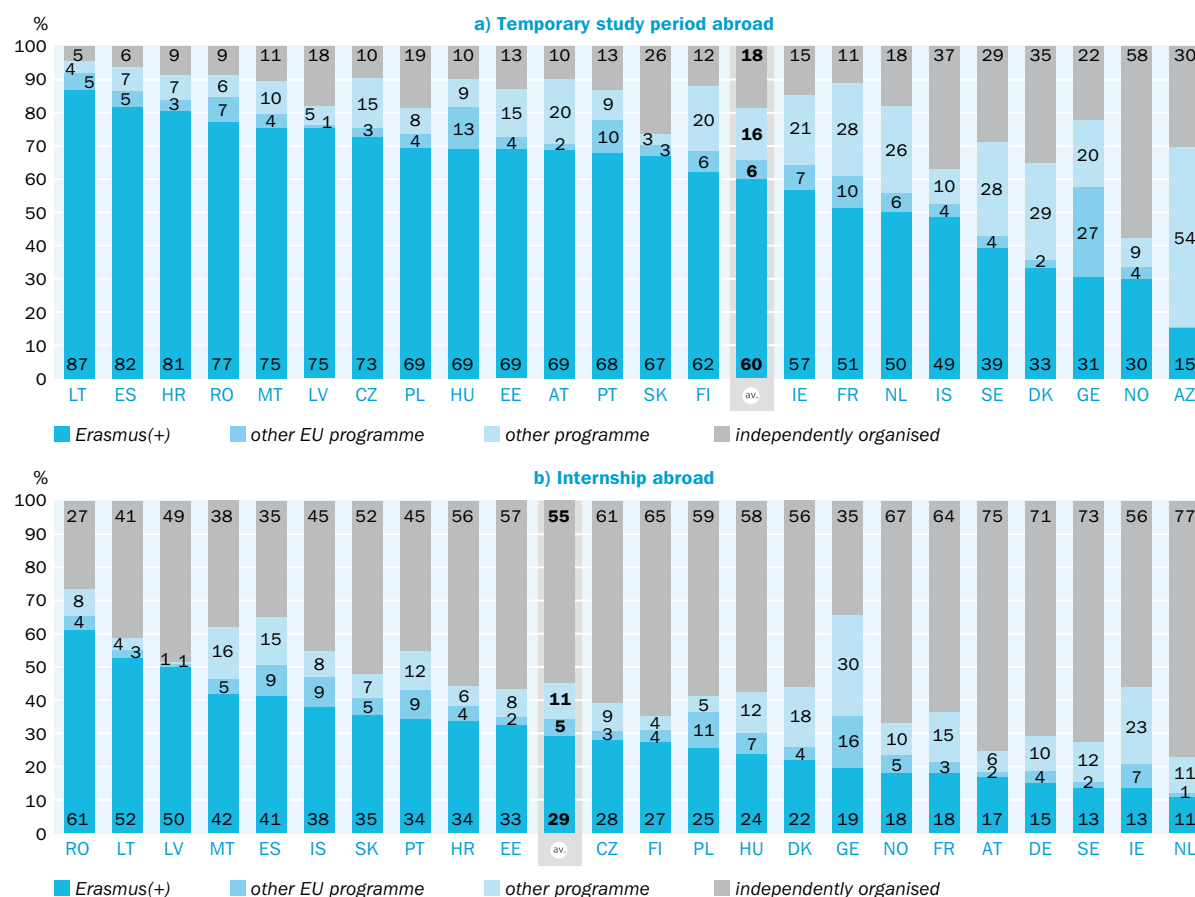
and proactive approach in securing international work experiences autonomously on the one hand and a possible lack of (easily accessible) programme frameworks for internships on the other hand.

- While students in countries like Romania, Lithuania, and Latvia exhibit a comparatively high reliance on the Erasmus+ programme, with percentages equal to or exceeding 50 %, countries such as the Netherlands, Austria, and Sweden demonstrate a remarkable preference for independently organised internships, with percentages around 75 %.
- Interestingly, countries like Georgia or Ireland present contrasting dynamics, where a significant portion of students opt for non-EU programmes, potentially reflecting strategic alliances beyond the European borders or distinct institutional partnerships.

Figure B10.8

Organisational framework of enrolment periods and internships abroad

Share of students who have been abroad for the respective activity (in %)



Data source: EUROSTUDENT 8, I.9, I.24. No data: CH; DE (temporary study period abroad). Too few cases: AZ (internship abroad).

Data collection: Spring 2022 – summer 2022 except DE (summer 2021), AT, ES, FR, PT, RO (spring 2023 – summer 2023).

EUROSTUDENT question(s): 5.7 [Only students who did a study period abroad] Within which of the following organisational frameworks was your most recent temporary study period abroad organised? 5.1 [If internship done abroad indicated in 4.18] Within which of the following organisational frameworks was your most recent internship abroad organised?

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT survey conventions: AT, DK.

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT standard target group: IE, NL.



The findings highlight that internships abroad differ considerably from temporary studies abroad in terms of their organisational and financial structure and that the opportunities for students to acquire global labour market experience depend not only on students' wishes and institutional support but also on their individual financial scope (Figure Bro.9).

### Characteristics of internships abroad

Cross-country average data regarding the character and remuneration of internships abroad reveal that 17 % of internships are mandatory and paid, while 26 % are mandatory and unpaid. In contrast, 26 % of internships are voluntary and paid, with 31 % being voluntary and unpaid.

*Varied distribution of mandatory vs. optional and paid vs. unpaid internships abroad.*

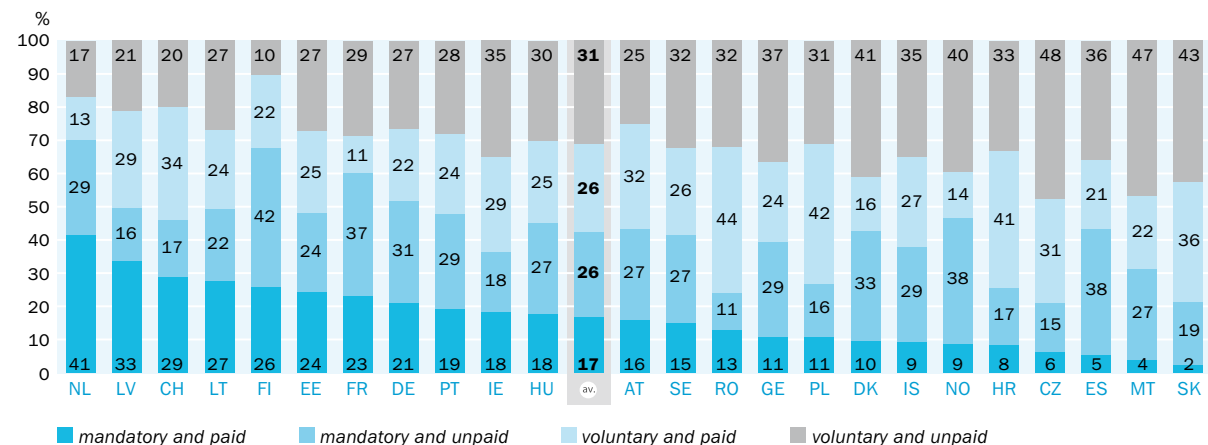
- Regarding mandatory internships, the Netherlands display 41 % as mandatory and paid, contrasting with shares of mandatory but unpaid internships in Finland, Norway, Spain, and France (around 40 %).
- Romania, Poland, and Croatia notably show more than 40 % of voluntary internships as paid. In contrast, the Czech Republic and Malta demonstrate a significant portion (almost half) of unpaid voluntary internships, indicating potential challenges in accessing remunerated opportunities abroad.

The data underscore potential socio-economic disparities among European countries, where the prevalence of unpaid internships alongside the predominance of independently organised internships without programme funding may exacerbate inequalities in access to valuable international work experiences, especially among economically disadvantaged students.

Figure B10.9 ↓

#### Character and remuneration of internships abroad

Share among students who have been abroad for (an) internship(s) (in %)



Data source: EUROSTUDENT 8, I.22. Too few cases: AZ.

Data collection: Spring 2022 – summer 2022 except CH (spring 2020), DE (summer 2021), AT, ES, FR, PT, RO (spring 2023 – summer 2023).

EUROSTUDENT question(s): 5.2 [If internship done abroad indicated in 4.18] Was your most recent internship abroad ... (Mandatory part of the curriculum; Voluntary (= not part of the curriculum)) 5.3 [If internship done abroad indicated in 4.18] Was your most recent internship abroad paid or unpaid?

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT survey conventions: CH.

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT standard target group: IE, NL.

## Composition of other study-related activities abroad

Based on the cross-country average data, it is evident that approximately 5 % of students across the surveyed countries engaged in research or field trips abroad (Figure B10.10). 2 % of students participated in summer or winter schools, while language courses accounted for approximately 4 %. Notably, another – unspecified – activity constituted a substantial proportion at 10 %. Comparing the data across different countries reveals varying patterns in types of mobility apart from enrolment periods and internships abroad:

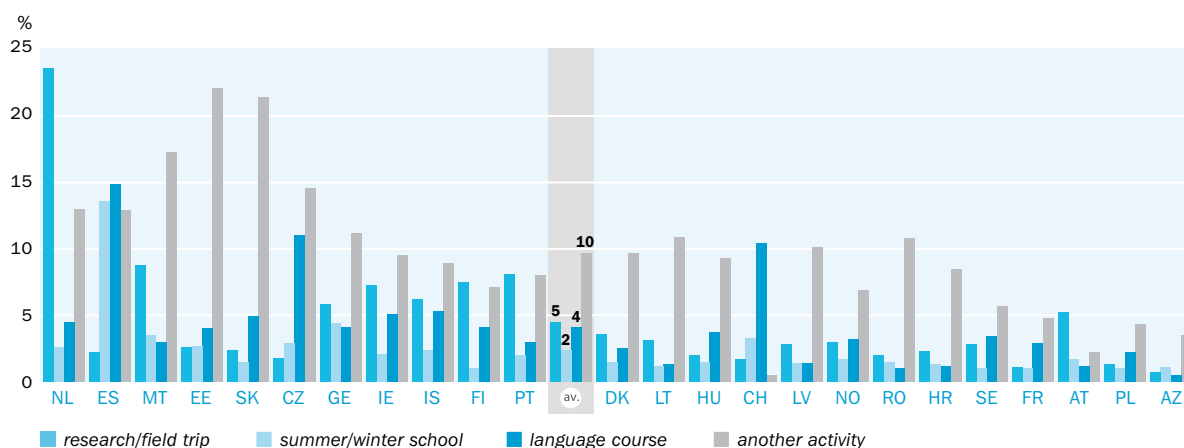
- For instance, the Netherlands show a high proportion of students participating in research or field trips (24 %), while students in Spain, the Czech Republic, and Switzerland commonly go abroad for language courses (15, 11, and 10 %, respectively).
  - What is particularly significant in this context, however, is that students in the vast majority of countries (apart from the Netherlands, Spain, Finland, Portugal, Switzerland, and Austria) most often indicate that they went abroad for another activity.
- 10 % of students engage in unspecified activities, possibly reflecting virtual mobility amid COVID-19.**

Given the sharp increase in the proportion of students who have only undertaken types of stays abroad other than enrolment periods or internships abroad (Figure B10.3) in combination with the measures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a strong assumption that these unspecified activities abroad are in fact virtual forms of student mobility. However, this assumption could not be verified.

Figure B10.10 [↓](#)

### Composition of stays abroad other than enrolment or internship

Share of students (in %)



Data source: EUROSTUDENT 8, I.4. No data: DE.

Data collection: Spring 2022 – summer 2022 except CH (spring 2020), AT, FR, PT, RO (spring 2023 – summer 2023).

EUROSTUDENT question(s): 5.12 Have you ever been abroad for other study-related activities?

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT survey conventions: CH, RO.

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT standard target group: IE, NL.

## 77 % enrolment vs. 44 % internship average recognition rates. Recognition practices

The cross-country average data reveal variations in the recognition of temporary enrolment periods and internships abroad (Figure B10.11). On cross-country average, 64 % of temporary enrolment periods abroad are fully recognised at the home institution, while 14 % are partially recognised. In contrast, internships abroad show lower recog-

nitiation rates (at least regarding credit points), with an average of 44 %. When comparing recognition practices across different countries, notable differences emerge.

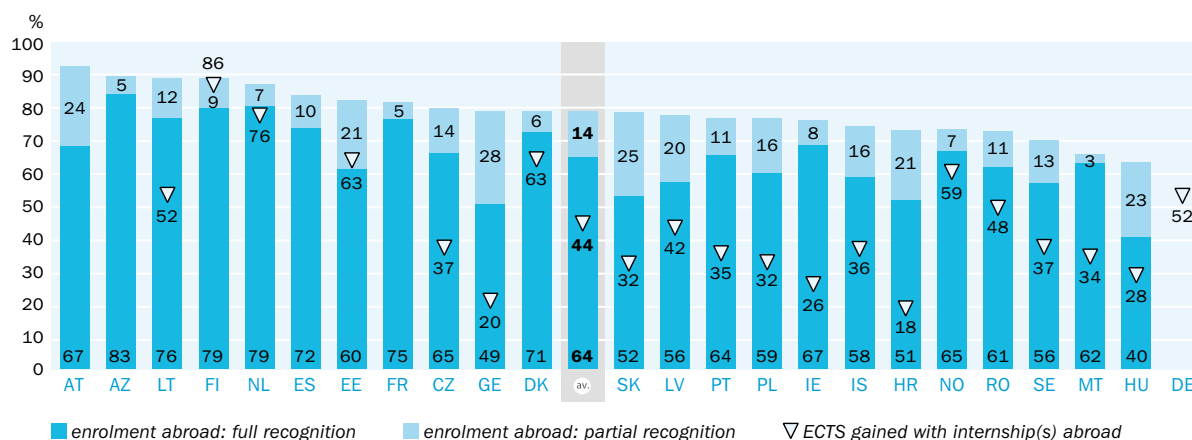
- While enrolment periods abroad in a vast majority of countries are fully recognised by (considerably) more than 50 %, this is not the case in Hungary (40 % fully recognised) and Georgia (49 %).
- Internships abroad are usually recognised in the form of credit points in Finland (86 %) and – at the other end of the spectrum – only seldom in Croatia (18 %) and (again) Georgia (20 %).

These discrepancies underscore the importance of standardising recognition protocols (European Commission et al., 2023) and enhancing transparency to ensure equitable opportunities for ISM across diverse educational landscapes.

Figure B10.11 [↓](#)

### (Partial) recognition of credits gained with study-related activity abroad

Share among students who have been abroad for the respective activity (in %)



**Data source:** EUROSTUDENT 8, I.8, I.25. **No data:** CH; AT, ES, FR (internship abroad); DE (temporary study period abroad). **Too few cases:** AZ (internship abroad).

**Data collection:** Spring 2022 – summer 2022 except DE (summer 2021), AT, FR, PT, RO (spring 2023 – summer 2023).

**EUROSTUDENT question(s):** 5.9 [Only students who did a study period abroad] Were the credits (ECTS, competences, certificates) you gained in your most recent temporary study abroad period recognised towards your study programme in #country? 5.5 [If internship done abroad indicated in 4.18] Was your most recent internship abroad recognised in the form of ECTS towards your study programme in #country?

**Deviations from EUROSTUDENT survey conventions:** SK.

**Deviations from EUROSTUDENT standard target group:** IE, NL.

## Discussion and policy considerations

The findings in this chapter highlight significant trends and factors influencing temporary ISM within the EHEA. We found that approximately 24 % of students engage in temporary forms of international mobility, with considerable variation between countries. Over the past quarter-century, enrolment abroad experienced dynamic shifts, peaking between 2012 and 2018 but stagnating thereafter. Despite all the differences between countries in terms of participation in international mobility, there is a persisting commonality in terms of social exclusion in relation to studies and internships abroad as well as other forms of mobility, i.e. with regard to students' educational background. Various further (and interconnected) socio-demographic and study-re-

lated factors influence student mobility participation, such as migration background, parental prosperity, and fields of study. Understanding these factors is crucial for designing inclusive mobility programmes. Patterns of temporary mobility evolve throughout students' academic journeys, with distinct trends emerging across degree programmes and years of study. While a significant proportion of students express intentions for temporary study abroad, financing remains a major obstacle, underscoring the need for targeted support programmes. Additionally, the findings reveal insights into the organisation, funding, and characteristics of international mobility. While Erasmus+ is popular for study periods abroad, internships abroad are predominantly organised independently. The rise of unspecified activities, potentially virtual, suggests adaptation to the COVID-19 pandemic. Temporary enrolment periods abroad are fully recognised by 64 % across countries, while internships abroad have lower recognition rates at 44 %. Standardisation of recognition protocols is crucial for equitable opportunities in ISM.

### Considerations for policymakers

The identified general and persisting social differences, especially regarding educational background / parental financial status, underline the necessity of a solid funding structure for stays abroad, which remains the cornerstone of ISM promotion. Valuable insights for policy improvement for each EHEA country are laid down in the Mobility Scoreboard reports (European Commission et al., 2023).

In recent years, the efforts of institutions entrusted with ISM have also focused on promoting virtual forms of mobility (EHEA Ministerial Conference, 2020b). The information now available also suggests that these offers have been accepted with great student participation, at least during the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure B10.10; Geifes et al., 2024). Overall, however, it remains highly questionable to what extent such non-physical, usually digital exchange formats should be a strong focus of mobility promotion. Students who have been virtually mobile can for sure add an item to their curriculum vitae that may have a signalling effect on their labour market entry. However, recent findings suggest that the formation of social networks is restricted by digital teaching and learning (Schirmer, 2024) – therefore, while non-physical forms of international mobility may be suitable for “enhancing the competences, knowledge and skills of those involved”, it can be assumed that “promoting (...) personal development of the mobile people and strengthening the cultural identity of Europe” (EHEA Ministerial Conference, 2012) is more easily achieved by actual physical mobility. In this respect, it is important to consider whether virtual exchange should be seen as a compromise that has come into focus simply due to the needs of the COVID-19 pandemic, which can – at best – complement physical forms of mobility (O’Dowd, 2021).

Erasmus+ remains the major organisational framework for temporary studies abroad, while the impact of national initiatives, such as the Pannónia Scholarship Programme<sup>2</sup> in Hungary, should be subject to future evaluations. The establishment of funding schemes specifically aimed at supporting internships abroad could incentivise and facilitate greater participation in international work experiences in case employers abroad are not willing to remunerate interns.

2 <https://pannoniaosztondij.hu/about-the-pannonia-scholarship-programme>.

### Considerations for HEI staff

HEI staff should prioritise ensuring the accessibility of and raising awareness about their international office and available funding schemes, such as Erasmus+ or national initiatives. Additionally, they should consider the integration of mobility windows, recognising the challenges of enrolling abroad during Bachelor courses (Figure B10.5), which may explain the trend of students going abroad towards the end of their first-cycle programme. Lastly, it is important to establish programme frameworks that support and facilitate internships abroad, enhancing the overall mobility experience for students.

### Considerations for researchers

Many explanatory approaches in the present analyses are limited by the aggregate data structure of the underlying indicators. More in-depth, micro-data-based research so far has been limited to few countries at best, e.g. Netz (2015). Therefore, the EURO-STUDENT Scientific Use Files from project round VII (Cuppen et al., 2023) and 8 (forthcoming) should be further exploited to explore identified determinants on broad-scale cross-national level against each other.

# Tables

Table B10.1

## Types of students' international mobility experience

Share of students (in %)

	All students				Educational background								Test statistic Chi <sup>2</sup> test (p-value)
					Without tertiary educational background				With tertiary educational background				
	Enrolment	Internship/work placement	Enrolment and internship / work placement	Any other type of study-related activity abroad	Enrolment	Internship/work placement	Enrolment and internship / work placement	Any other type of study-related activity abroad	Enrolment	Internship/work placement	Enrolment and internship / work placement	Any other type of study-related activity abroad	
AT	6	8	2	5	5	7	2	5	7	9	2	5	0.000
AZ	1	1	0.1	5	1	0.1	0.0	2	2	1	0.1	6	0.000
CH	7	4	2	10	6	3	1	10	8	5	2	11	0.000
CZ	5	3	2	22	4	2	1	19	6	4	2	24	0.000
DE	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.
DK	7	3	1	11	6	3	1	10	8	3	2	12	0.003
EE	5	4	1	24	4	4	0.4	20	6	4	1	26	0.000
ES	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.
FI	6	2	1	15	4	2	1	14	7	2	1	16	0.000
FR	6	4	1	7	5	3	1	6	7	4	1	8	0.000
GE	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.	n. d.
HR	2	2	0.2	11	2	1	0.1	8	3	2	0.2	14	0.000
HU	4	2	0.5	12	3	2	0.3	9	5	3	1	15	0.000
IE	4	3	1	17	3	1	1	13	4	4	1	21	0.000
IS	7	2	1	15	5	2	1	12	9	2	1	17	0.000
LT	4	4	1	12	4	2	0.1	10	5	5	1	12	0.001
LV	6	4	1	10	5	3	1	8	7	5	1	11	0.000
MT	8	4	1	24	9	2	1	19	9	4	1	30	0.001
NL	5	4	1	33	4	4	2	30	6	5	1	34	0.000
NO	10	1	1	7	8	2	1	7	11	1	1	6	0.005
PL	2	2	1	6	1	1	0.2	4	3	2	1	8	0.000
PT	6	2	1	15	4	2	1	13	8	3	2	17	0.000
RO	4	3	2	23	3	2	2	22	6	4	3	26	0.000
SE	5	2	0.3	8	3	1	0.2	6	6	2	0.3	9	0.000
SK	4	2	1	24	3	1	1	21	5	4	2	28	0.000
av.	5	3	1	14	4	2	1	12	6	4	1	16	

n.d.: no data. Rounded values are shown. Decimal points only shown for values &lt; .5.

**Data source:** EUROSTUDENT 8, I.3.**Data collection:** Spring 2022 – summer 2022 except CH (spring 2020), DE (summer 2021), AT, ES, FR, PT, RO (spring 2023 – summer 2023).

**EUROSTUDENT question(s):** 4.18 Have you done any internships (of at least one week, mandatory or voluntary) since you first entered higher education in #country? 5.6 Have you ever taken part in a temporary study period abroad since you first entered higher education in #country (e.g. #semester abroad)? 5.12 Have you ever been abroad for other study-related activities?

**Note(s):** The Chi<sup>2</sup> test is a statistical method used to determine if there is a significant association between categorical variables by comparing the observed frequencies in a contingency table to the expected frequencies under the null hypothesis.

**Deviations from EUROSTUDENT conventions:** CH, RO, AT.**Deviations from EUROSTUDENT standard target group:** IE, NL.

## References

- Cordua, F., & Netz, N. (2022).** Why do women more often intend to study abroad than men? *Higher Education*, 83(5), 1079–1101. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-021-00731-6>
- Cuppen, J., Muja, A., Hauschildt, K., Daniel, A., Buck, D., Mandl, S., & Unger, M. (2023).** Eurostudent VII (3.I.O) [dataset]. <https://doi.org/10.21249/DZHW:ES7:3.I.O>
- De Benedictis, L., & Leoni, S. (2021).** Inclusive universities: Evidence from the Erasmus program. *Applied Network Science*, 6(1), 83. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41109-021-00419-x>
- Di Pietro, G., & Perez-Encinas, A. (2023).** The effect of COVID-19 on international student credit mobility: A gravity model approach. *Education Economics*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09645292.2023.2297151>
- EHEA Ministerial Conference (2012).** Mobility for better learning. Mobility strategy 2020 for the european higher education area (EHEA). [http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2012\\_Bucharest/39/2/2012\\_EHEA\\_Mobility\\_Strategy\\_606392.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2012_Bucharest/39/2/2012_EHEA_Mobility_Strategy_606392.pdf)
- EHEA Ministerial Conference (2020a).** Annex II. Principles and guidelines to strengthen the social dimension of higher education in the EHEA. [https://ehea.info/Upload/Rome\\_Ministerial\\_Communique\\_Annex\\_II.pdf](https://ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique_Annex_II.pdf)
- EHEA Ministerial Conference (2020b).** Rome Ministerial Communiqué. [http://www.ehea.info/Upload/Rome\\_Ministerial\\_Communique.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique.pdf)
- Entrich, S. R., Netz, N., & Matsuoka, R. (2024).** The role of institutional contexts for social inequalities in study abroad intent and participation. *Higher Education* (online first). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-023-01170-1>
- European Commission (2023).** Proposal for a council recommendation ‘Europe on the move’ — learning mobility for everyone. [https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-11/europe-on-the-move-recommendation-COM\\_2023\\_719\\_1\\_EN.pdf](https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-11/europe-on-the-move-recommendation-COM_2023_719_1_EN.pdf)
- European Commission, EACEA, & Eurydice (2023).** Mobility scoreboard: higher education background report 2022/2023. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/001589>
- Finger, C. (2011).** The social selectivity of international mobility among German university students. A multi-level analysis of the impact of the Bologna Process (Discussion Paper SP I 2011–503; WZB Discussion Paper). WZB. <https://www.econstor.eu/obitstream/10419/56619/1/689859066.pdf>



**Geifes, S., Flores, D. A., Maschuw, T., & Wilking, S. (2024).** Studierendenbefragung 2023. Auslandsstudium im Wandel. Erfahrungen mit physischen und virtuellen Studienaufenthalten und mit der Anerkennung von Studienleistungen. [Student survey 2023. Study abroad in transition. Experiences with physical and virtual study stays and with the recognition of academic achievements.] DAAD. [https://eu.daad.de/medien/eu.daad.de.2016/dokumente/service/auswertung-und-statistik/auswahlergebnisse-erasmusplus-2021-2027/studierendenbefragung\\_2023\\_rz\\_barrierefrei.pdf](https://eu.daad.de/medien/eu.daad.de.2016/dokumente/service/auswertung-und-statistik/auswahlergebnisse-erasmusplus-2021-2027/studierendenbefragung_2023_rz_barrierefrei.pdf)

**Gerhards, J., & Hans, S. (2013).** Transnational human capital, education, and social inequality. Analyses of international student exchange. *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 42(2), 99–117. <https://doi.org/10.1515/zfsocz-2013-0203>

**Netz, N. (2015).** What deters students from studying abroad? Evidence from four European countries and its implications for higher education policy. *Higher education policy*, 28(2), 151–174. <https://doi.org/10.1057/hep.2013.37>

**Netz, N., & Finger, C. (2016).** New horizontal inequalities in German higher education? Social selectivity of studying abroad between 1991 and 2012. *Sociology of education*, 89(2), 79–98. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040715627196>

**Netz, N., Klasik, D., Entrich, S. R., & Barker, M. (2021).** Socio-demographics. A global overview of inequalities in education abroad participation. In A. C. Ogden, B. Streitwieser, & C. van Mol (Eds.), *Education abroad: Bridging scholarship and practice* (pp. 28–42). Routledge.

**Netz, N., & Sarceletti, A. (2021).** (Warum) beeinflusst ein Migrationshintergrund die Auslandsstudienabsicht? [(Why) does a migration background influence the intention to study abroad?] In M. Jungbauer-Gans & A. Gottburgsen (Eds.), *Migration, Mobilität und soziale Ungleichheit in der Hochschulbildung* (pp. 103–136). Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-31694-5\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-31694-5_5)

**Netz, N., & Völk, D. (2023).** Studienbezogene Auslandsmobilität und soziale Ungleichheiten im Kontext der Coronapandemie. [Study-related international mobility and social inequalities in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.] *DZHW Brief*, 3. [https://doi.org/10.34878/2023.03.DZHW\\_BRIEF](https://doi.org/10.34878/2023.03.DZHW_BRIEF)

**O'Dowd, R. (2021).** Virtual exchange: Moving forward into the next decade. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 34(3), 209–224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2021.1902201>

**Schirmer, H. (2024).** Digitalisation of teaching, learning, and student life. EUROSTUDENT 8 topical module report. [https://www.eurostudent.eu/download\\_files/documents/TM\\_Digitalisation.pdf](https://www.eurostudent.eu/download_files/documents/TM_Digitalisation.pdf)

**Schnepf, S. V., Bastianelli, E., & Blasko, Z. (2024).** What can explain the socio-economic gap in international student mobility uptake? Similarities between Germany, Hungary, Italy, and the UK. *European Educational Research Journal*, 23(4), 479–502. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14749041221135080>

**Van Mol, C. (2022).** Exploring explanations for the gender gap in study abroad: A case study of the Netherlands. *Higher Education*, 83(2), 441–459. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-020-00671-7>

**Van Mol, C., & Perez-Encinas, A. (2022).** Inclusive internationalisation: Do different (social) groups of students need different internationalisation activities? *Studies in Higher Education*, 47(12), 2523–2538. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2022.2083102>