

8. Mobility and Internationalisation

8.1 Introduction

Throughout past “Bologna With Student Eyes” publications, the lack of financing for internationalisation and mobility has continuously remained a key issue. However, students do not suffer from the underfunding of mobility equally - by far the most left behind in this area are students from marginalized groups, e.g. students with disabilities or lower socio-economic background. The inequality of accessibility to mobility periods and activities related to internationalisation worsen a phenomenon frequently highlighted by a plethora of stakeholders - the lack of balanced mobility within Europe. These problems are repeated year after year, while the amount of students in Erasmus mobility schemes has grown over the last decade. Based on available sources, there were at least 1.6 million international students completing their tertiary education within the EU in 2015, and at least 365,000 international students who graduated in the EU during 2015 (EUROSTAT, 2017). Internationalisation overall seems to have taken a back seat in Europe. Lack of progress in legislation and institutional development has been consistent, pointing to a worrying trend - a continuous status quo of stagnation during a time when mobility and internationalisation is experiencing exponential growth. For example, mobility and internationalisation has not been mentioned in the context of the European Semester for any EU country for the past two years, despite other aspects of education meriting some attention.

The Erasmus programme has been a source of funding for the mobility of up to 4.3 million young people between 2007 and 2016 (European Commission, 2018). With the upcoming re-establishment of a Multiannual Financial Framework for Europe, including the long-serving Erasmus programme, a lot of attention must be paid to those left behind by the internationalization of higher education before now.

Since 2015, little progress has been made in regard to widening access, support for outgoing students, and support for incoming students. A particularly large problem in this field is the portability of grants. Between 2012 and 2018, little progress has been made overall. This is despite several commitments made by various governments and European projects. This issue is illustrated further in a graph below.

Fig. 8.01: Has there been progress on the development of mobility in your country on the following aspects since 2015?/Has there been progress on the development of mobility in your country on the following aspects since 2012?

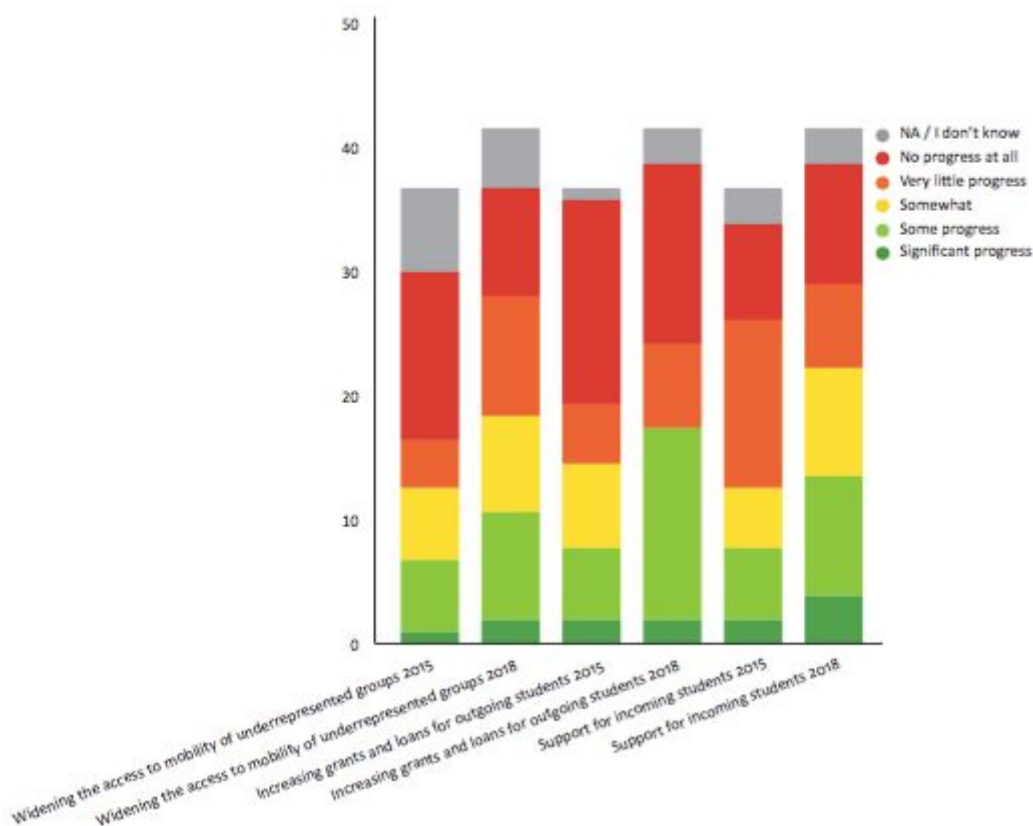


Fig. 08.01: Has there been progress on the development of mobility in your country on the following aspects since 2015?/Has there been progress on the development of mobility in your country on the following aspects since 2012?

This chapter will elaborate on several issues and pitfalls regarding mobility and internationalisation that have become apparent throughout research and data collection.

8.2 Main findings

Financing mobility and internationalisation

By far, the most prevalent obstacle to outgoing mobility is students' financial situation. Financing has continuously been a major and known barrier to mobility for over a decade, and yet remains unsolved. Students who engage with Erasmus+ mobility still tend to come from higher socioeconomic groups. This has been apparent in both statistical data collections and several research papers, e.g. Ballatore & Ferde (2013), focus on the elitist nature of mobility programmes and the effect that produces. Students who have participated in international mobility tend to have higher income and access to job opportunities, which gives the impression that international mobility is related to privilege

among students (Ballatore & Fredere, 2013). This is further corroborated by research done in Germany, which empirically shows that in the current situations, mobility programmes tend to deepen the divide between students from lower and higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Netz & Grüttner, 2018). This deepening of the divide is not in concurrence with the goals and values of European mobility programmes, and requires immediate attention. This lasting situation is in direct contradiction with commitments made in the Yerevan communique of 2015, which states that EHEA will “enhance the social dimension of higher education, improve gender balance and widen opportunities for access and completion, including international mobility, for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.” (Yerevan Communique, 2015) Mobility can be a tool for enhancing the learning and skills of all learners, but cannot reach its full potential until the inherent inequalities that exist within the current system(s) have been addressed.

Internationalisation in general includes several obstacles that are caused by lower income, the number of dependants and other economic factors. This has been proven and re-proven in several publications, such as EUROSTUDENT VI (DZHW, 2018), the Erasmus Student Network’s yearly surveys on mobility, and previous “Bologna With Student Eyes” publications. In 2016, only 10.2% of students in international mobility considered that 80% or more of their expenses were covered [during mobility] (Erasmus Student Network, 2016). A further problem is the students’ need to cover the costs of their travel and mobility themselves in advance, because the grants are paid out too late to account for costs when necessary. 46% of students in mobility schemes encountered this problem according to ESNSurvey 2015 (Erasmus Student Network, 2015).

Since 2015, little progress has been made in regard to financial and social support for both incoming and outgoing students - a field that has been stagnating for over a decade now. In the “Bologna With Student Eyes” publication of 2015, a significant part of the chapter concerning internationalisation and mobility focused on this same lack of progress and pointed out the need to move forward in this area. A similar sentiment was expressed in the Yerevan communique (Yerevan Communique, 2015).

This is not to say, that no progress has been made at all; two good examples are Hungary and Malta, who have launched new initiatives regarding students engagement in mobility. Progress has also been made in regard to the creation of concrete internationalisation strategies, which is elaborated on below. However, this progress remains marginal compared with an overwhelming situation of stagnation across the EHEA.

If the current situation continues, Europe will be experiencing a decline in internationalisation and mobility instead of growth. Considering that financial issues are by far the most prevalent barrier to mobility, immediate attention needs to be paid to the socio-economic side of internationalisation. According to the ICEF monitor, between 2012 and 2015, based on global population, the number of outbound students decreased from 6% to 5%, and this is projected to continue unless significant changes are made. The most significant factors in stagnation of mobility according to the monitor stem from local i.e. national causes (ICEF, 2018), such as a lack of flexibility in curricula, lack of encouragement for students to engage in outgoing mobility etc.

Balanced mobility

The situation of measures aimed at addressing balanced mobility flows is highly varied in Europe. Only six national unions of students are aware of initiatives to balance the mobility in their country. However, some of these unions still consider these initiatives to be too low, e.g. French and Romanian students highlighted that while statistics regarding mobility are collected, these results are not used to produce strategic solutions to existing problems. In many cases, measures aim at encouraging students from underrepresented groups to apply for mobility programmes, but do not include more substantial measures to enable their mobility.

An exception here is Denmark - unfortunately not in a positive sense. In Denmark, HEIs are financially 'punished' if they fail to keep the mobility flows balanced. The regulation regarding funding universities states that within a 3-year period, there must be a balance between incoming and outgoing students in Denmark. If the balance does not exist, in particular if the number of incoming students is higher than that of outgoing students, the difference in funding will not be covered by the state. (Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet, 2017) The National Union of Students in Denmark (DSF) is of the opinion that it is the state's responsibility to finance the cost that higher education institutions have relating to students. While balance in mobility is important, it is problematic that universities are economically pressed to send students abroad or take in less incoming students. The balance of mobility should be based on academic motivations, not on economic ones.

Some countries have endeavoured to improve the balance by creating projects aimed at counselling students not engaged in mobility to see it as a realistic option. These programmes have had varying effects. While in some countries the popularisation of mobility has yielded some positive results and an increase in interest towards mobility, it is not a sustainable or permanent solution to unreached target goals in internationalisation. These programmes can be very inefficient and highly inconsistent with other developments and activities taking place within higher education. The overall, lack of effective measures and inconsistencies between existing measures is perceived as key problems with reaching internationalisation targets. Inconsistency and inefficiency are key issues in France. According to research by Cnajep (Comité pour les relations nationales et internationales des associations de jeunesse et d'éducation populaire), 50% of French youth find public communication and information about mobility opportunities complicated, and 31% regard them as completely invisible. 20% stated that they had never seen communication and information regarding mobility. Only 6% of respondents found the available information useful for themselves. (Cnajep, 2018: 26) This illustrates a lack of strategic and useful communication by the French education sector regarding mobility and internationalisation opportunities. French students see the programs created to tackle mobility obstacles as very inefficient.

According to OECD, the imbalance of mobility between Western and Eastern Europe remains severe. While more than 24 000 students moved from the east to the west to engage in student mobility, less than a third of that went into international mobility from west to east. Roughly, for every two students from Eastern Europe in student mobility programmes in Western Europe there is one student from Western Europe engaging in

international mobility programmes in Eastern Europe (OECD, 2013). This data does show some improvement since 2008, but is still far from a balance of mobility within Europe. While mobility is a great tool for integrating an international, intercultural, and a global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of education (De Wit & Hunter, 2015: 45), it cannot be left to balance itself out in a 'free market'. Constant imbalance of mobility will inevitably lead to institutionalised facilitation of brain drain in countries with higher outgoing than incoming mobility rates.

The treatment and situation of international students

This research has identified various initiatives that aim to increase the incoming flow of international students. These exist on governmental and institutional level, but the role of student unions' initiatives in this regard cannot be understated. According to the collected data, the majority of initiatives regarding the social integration of students are managed and run by local and national Student Unions. In contrast, initiatives by governments are vastly in the minority, especially in regard to students in short-term mobility programmes. At the same time, the majority of attention overall seems to be paid to students in short-term mobility programmes, leaving international degree students to fend largely for themselves. Much more attention is directed at attracting students to engage in international mobility than in supporting them once they are there.

Fig. 8.02: Are there any initiatives that aim to enhance social integration of incoming students?

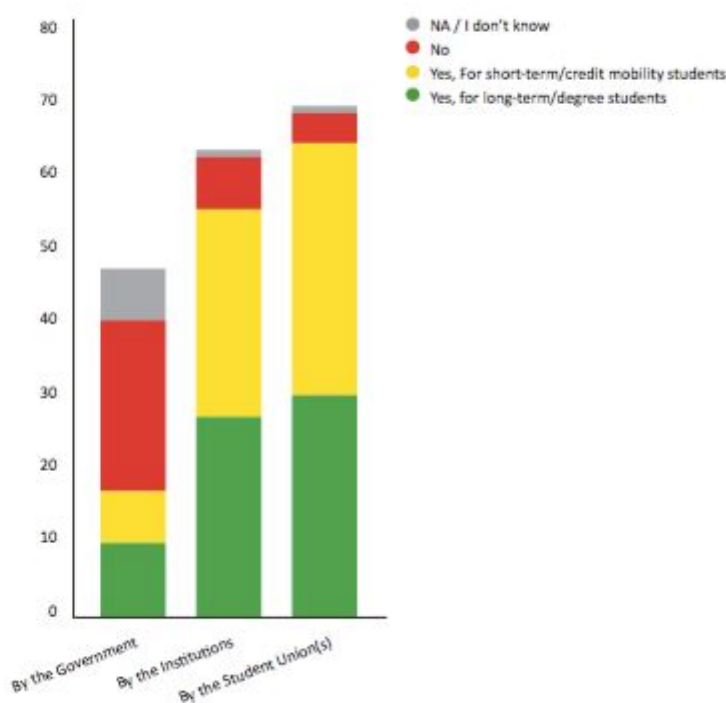


Fig. 08.02: Are there any initiatives that aim to enhance social integration of incoming students?

The focus on increasing the influx of students seems to only partially be paired with a focus on increasing governments' and institutions' capacity to really address international

students' study and living conditions. Administrative staff, e.g. counsellors, coordinators etc, are often not prepared to answer the questions and needs of international students. According to ESU member unions, 1 non-academic staff receive training for this in only six countries according to our members. In 17 countries, the administrative staff only receive specialized training to be able to respond to the needs of increased internationalisation in some of the institutions. These results show some improvement since 2015 - unfortunately, it seems that exponential growth in the needs of international students has not been met with a similar fast development in staff training to fulfil the needs of the new student population.

Attention for international students' needs is lacking on several levels across Europe. In the majority of countries, students are either badly addressed or only receive partial attention in regard to their overall needs, apart from the situations that need immediate action (such as emergencies, deportation etc). The majority of student unions see international students' needs as badly addressed.

In particular, there is a worrying trend that international and local students get 'treated equally' without a chance for real and practical equality. This seems to stem from the perception of local and international students as having similar needs, which is mostly not the case. There must be no discrimination between a local student and a student from another (EHEA) country, but accounting for differences in access to services is also essential. When comparing the number of initiatives aimed at integrating short-term mobility students to those aimed at degree students, there also seems to be a significant gap. Furthermore, while access to study facilities is often equal for all students, access to health care, student grants and internships is highly dissimilar. In several countries, health care is only freely and/or easily accessible to EU students, but not international students from non-EU countries. In addition, international students are often forced to pay for additional health insurance, which is not a cost local students have to deal with - this is the case in the UK, among other countries.

Strategic internationalisation - a story of regression

The utilisation of internationalisation strategies seems to have stagnated completely in Europe. Since 2012 there has been very little development in creating and implementing internationalisation strategies in general, despite growing internationalisation. This is in direct contradiction to several commitments made by the EHEA.

Only nine student unions out of 43 stated that their country has a national internationalisation strategy that is well implemented and has clear target goals. Furthermore, only nine unions said they had been included in the process of the creation of these strategies. Remarkably, a large part of the unions who said the target goals are clear and the unions who were included in creating the internationalisation strategies overlapped. Most worryingly, comparing "Bologna With Student Eyes" survey results from 2018 with those of 2015 shows that students experience with internationalisation strategies has become more negative over time.

Compared with 6 NUSes who said that their country has a well-implemented internationalisation strategy in 2015, only 3 NUSes expressed the same opinion in 2018.

More thorough analysis of the data shows that progress seems to have been made in regard to discussing the need for strategic internationalisation, but a lack of real steps in that direction is apparent. The map below illustrates the students' satisfaction with the content and implementation of said strategies.

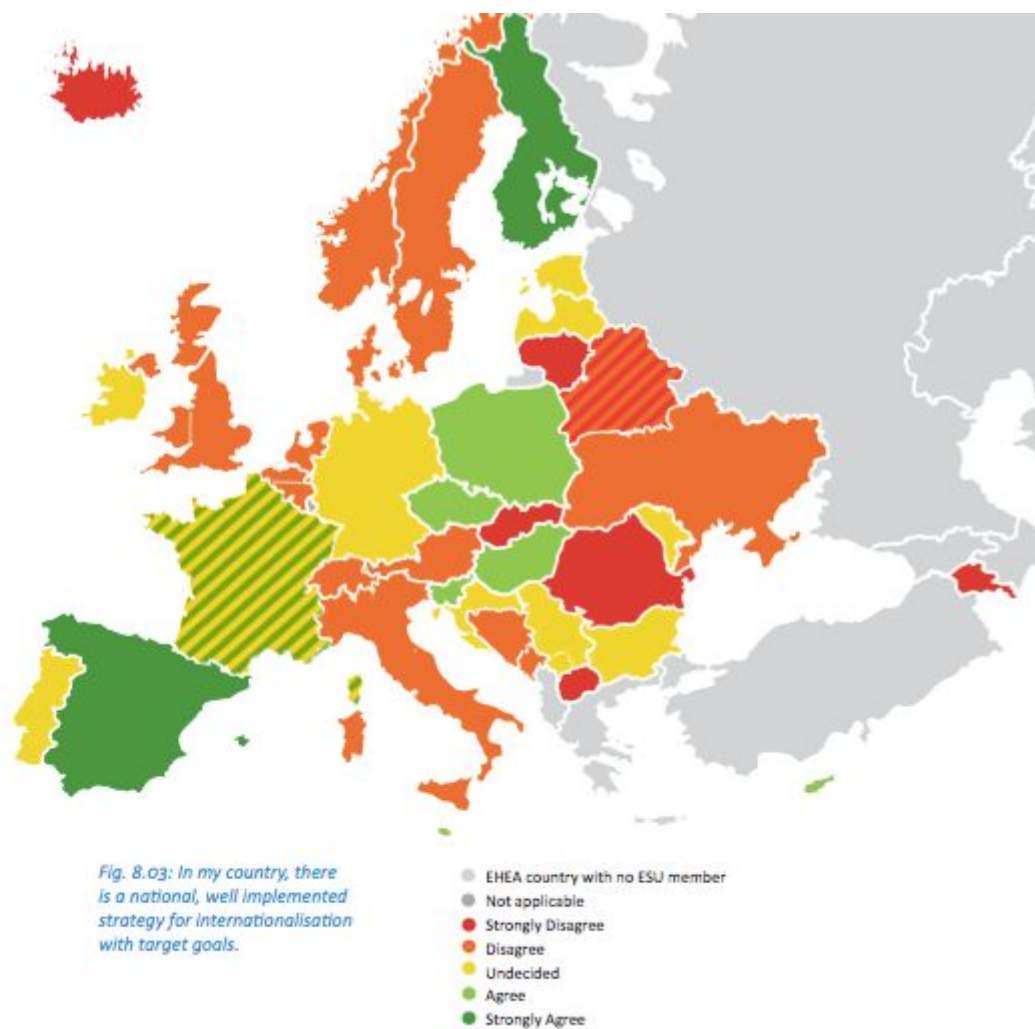


Fig. 08.03: In my country, there is a national, well implemented strategy for internationalisation with target goals.

Internationalisation at home

Internationalisation at home can be a useful tool for an increased interest in mobility and a greater understanding of the value of internationalisation. However, it is important to state that internationalisation at home should never be seen as a means to reduce demands regarding the number and/or accessibility of outgoing mobility programmes. The need for equitable access to mobility has been acknowledged for a while now, but the barriers remain largely unsolved. The degree to which the concept of internationalisation at home is utilised varies, but in practise it mostly relies on courses taught in English or other foreign languages and/or the mobility of lecturers, professors etc. The integration of international and local students for internationalisation experiences is worryingly uncommon. The

amount, subjects and quality of courses in other languages offered by HEIs varies greatly. For this great variation in conditions, local students can be reluctant to engage in them, which further reduces contact between local and international students. While in some countries the variety of programmes and courses offered to international students is quite wide, other countries have a minimal amount of quality courses available for international students.

Free language courses in higher education seem to follow a trend of disappearance. One of key skills international students often have to acquire is the local language. Access to (free) language courses has, however, declined over the past three years. In seven European countries, language courses are provided free of all charges to all students in the country. In a further 23 countries, language courses are provided for international students in some, but not all of the institutions and programmes. In Montenegro, Armenia and Macedonia, international students have access to neither paid nor free language courses. However, in three countries international students do not have any access to language courses within higher education as a part of their mobility, and in five countries, these courses are provided for a fee. In 2015, only 32% of students had access to language preparation, but one third of those students had to pay for it themselves (Erasmus Student Network, 2015).

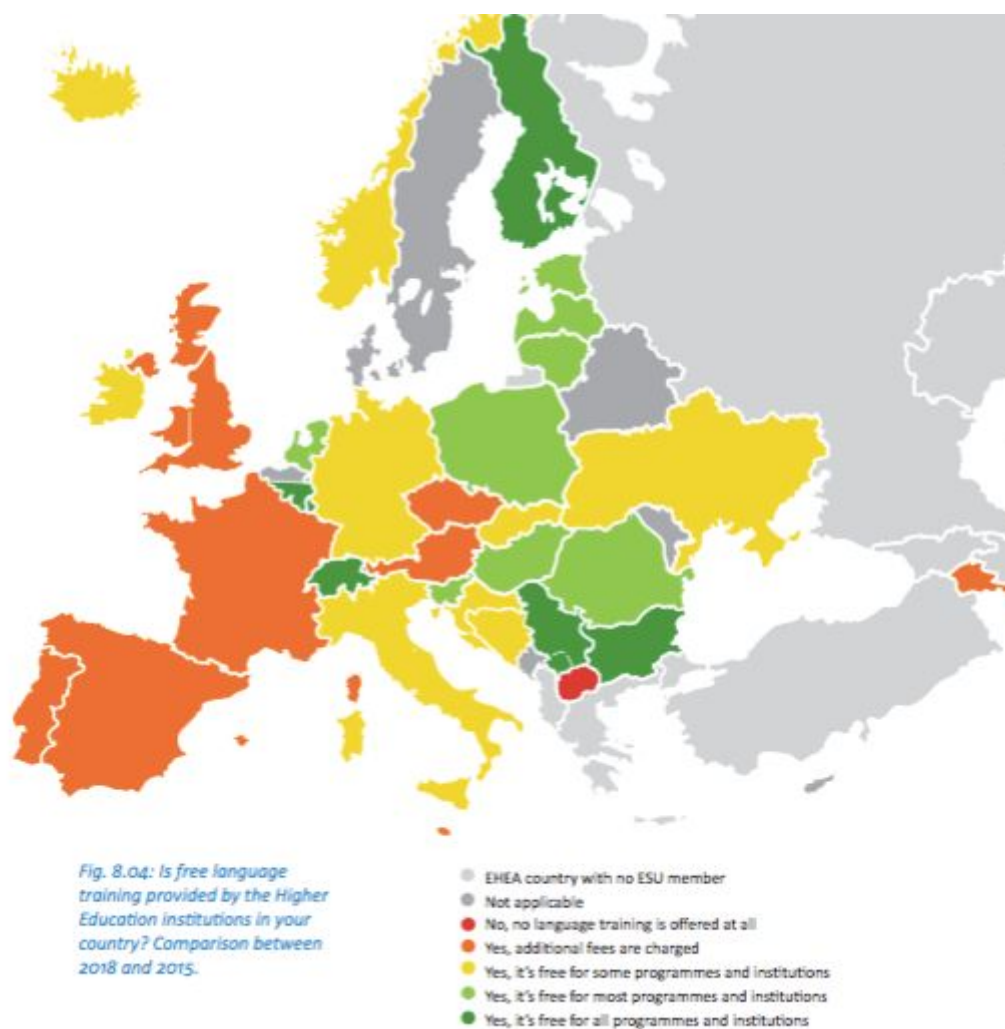


Fig 08.04: Is free language training provided by the Higher Education institutions in your country? Comparison between 2018 and 2015.

Worryingly, international students are not treated equally amongst themselves - the availability and cost (or lack thereof) of language courses can depend on the length of the mobility period. While a large part of degree students seem to have access to at least some form of courses, students in Erasmus-mobility programmes do not always receive the same treatment (Erasmus Student Network, 2015).

Students from marginalized groups in mobility

Students from marginalized groups remain a topic often discussed but the situation is seldom directly improved upon. The phrase “marginalized group” can apply to an incredibly large range of people and groups, everyone from learners from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds to racial and national minorities to students with disabilities. It is clear that as higher education becomes more and more of an universally expected level of education for all, not all access to higher education is equal.

Students with disabilities remain a group that are minimally represented in mobility programmes; this is mainly due to difficulties with accessibility, both in a financial and a physical sense. In a world of increasing diversity, universal design has become a vital value and should be regarded as a matter of principle. Every service, facility, study material and event targeted to students should be accessible to all students.

Tackling (known) obstacles

As with most policy areas, there are certain well-known and long-standing obstacles for mobility and internationalisation. The following part will take a look at if and how these are being targeted.

Several new national and institutional programmes have been put in place since 2015 to tackle mobility obstacles. Worryingly, very few of these programmes seem to have had any noticeable effect on these well-known obstacles. The most common tool in regard to mobility and counselling remains offering advice and information to students who could engage in mobility. However, this counselling seldom goes beyond essentially marketing mobility, and looks at practical issues students face when considering mobility.

In France, for example, the programmes looking to increase mobility flows have been found to be very ineffective. According to one of the national unions of students in France, the problems stem from several factors. These include poor communication of available opportunities, the regionality of different programs, which creates significant divides across the country and complicates an already complex system. Another barrier is the fact, that French students are largely monolingual, but most international mobility programmes require a working knowledge of English. However, a major reason for the inefficiency of French programmes is their inability to solve the most prevalent barrier to international mobility - financial difficulties and great socio-economic divides.

Worryingly, the trend of continuing and unchanging issues in mobility and internationalisation overall is also a prevailing issue here. Below is a word cloud illustrating the major obstacles to outgoing mobility in Europe according to 2015 and 2018 Bologna With Student Eyes survey results.

Fig. 8.05: Obstacles preventing outgoing mobility

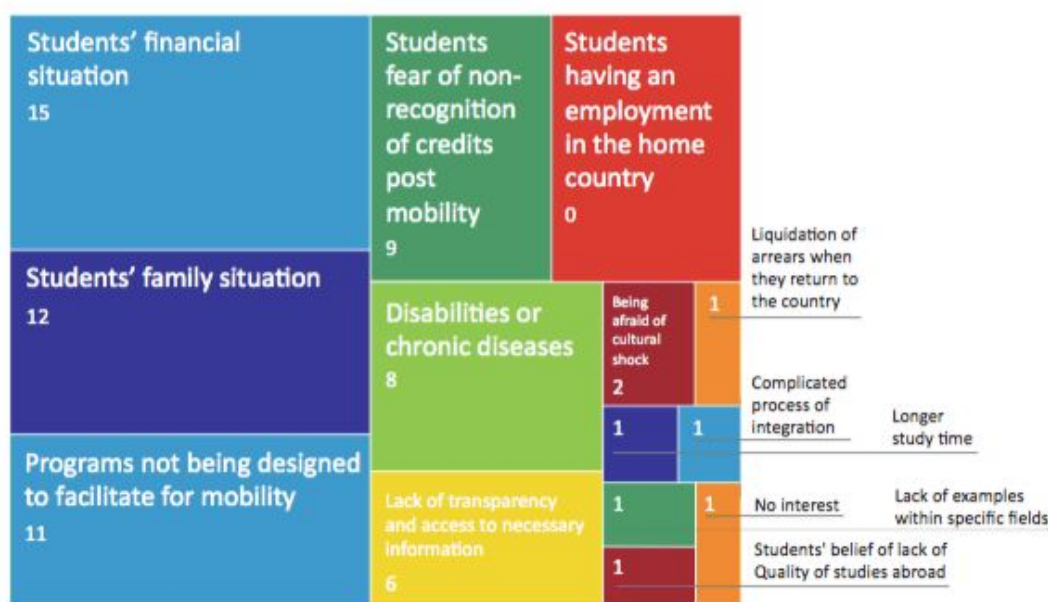


Fig 08_05 Obstacles preventing outgoing mobility

Difficulties with visas will likely be an issue that European higher education will increasingly have to tackle in the future as the amount of international students from outside of Europe/EU increases. Currently, China and India account for roughly half of the worlds tertiary-education-aged population, the two countries accounting for about 40% of all students in outbound mobility between 2012 and 2015. (ICEF, 2018). These numbers have likely increased since latest data has been made available for analysis. The British council expects that by 2017, the students of China and India will account for 60% of all students in mobility programmes globally (ibid).

Considering the impending Brexit, special attention needs to be paid to updating, modernising and equalising visa policies in Europe, especially in regard to non-European international students, who currently face significant difficulties and costs when applying for visas. A known barrier is the length of student visas. It is troubling that some students who are matriculated to attain a full degree as an international student in Europe must still re-apply for visas annually resulting in a realistic risk of deportation in the middle of completing a degree.

NUS-UK, USI and the students of UK and Ireland post-Brexit

The National Union of Students in the United Kingdom (NUS-UK) and ESU are extremely concerned about the impact Brexit will have on student and academic mobility, and internationalisation. Any agreement between the UK and EU is currently likely to have a negative impact on both EU students studying in the UK as well as UK students studying in the EU. The current uncertain situation regarding negotiations has left students, graduates and researchers with a great deal of uncertainty about their future. International cooperation and collaboration has come under threat, which is likely to compromise the quality of education for students in the UK in the long run. Education is enriched by the participation of international students, but internationalisation cannot thrive in situations of unclear future prospects. Particularly worrying is the trend of flatlining inward mobility in the UK at a time when, higher education is becoming more and more international. This development is likely to either leave UK behind in development or reverse some progress completely.

NUS-UK is endeavouring to play its part in creating a more welcoming and inclusive environment that would attract international students to the UK. NUS-UK see the value in developing a student experience that develops the international literacy of students graduating in the UK. This can be achieved by both inward and outward mobility. However, there is a danger that both will become prohibitively expensive, thereby restricting the numbers of students able and willing to take up the opportunity. This both diminishes the overall student experience, and creates a new level of inequity in the higher education system. NUS-UK is calling for a simplification of the visa systems that may be established post-Brexit and develop a national strategy that “sets increased targets for both inward and outward student mobility”. These steps cannot be fully successful without the inclusion of student representatives by the UK government. However, this seems unlikely to happen. At present, the UK government is looking to review the extremely high tuition fees that apply to both local and international students. Sadly, not all of the committees that will be reviewing the situation even include student representatives - instead, the focus seems to be on the profit and financial security of higher education institutions.

The national Union of Students in Ireland (USI) and the regional Union of students' of Northern Ireland (NUS-USI) have significant concerns on how Brexit may affect Further and Higher Education across the island of Ireland. Cross-border mobility is a specific concern, as many students frequently move between the North and the South. The impact of Brexit on both sides of the Irish border continues to be entirely unclear, and negotiations to date have excluded issues of education. The rights of citizens on the island have not been secured, creating uncertainty on the ability to travel freely and to continue to access supports currently in place. Specific issues of recognition of qualifications, cross border research collaboration, academic and student cohesion, student fee status, apprentices, workers rights, and the rights of international students, have not been agreed or sufficiently discussed.

USI is particularly concerned that a lack of fee regulation for non-EU students could result in further commodification of international education. International student applications to HEIs in the South are increasing in the wake of Brexit, placing greater responsibility on Government and institutions to ensure greater funding is provided. The imposition of any change to the status, rights, or implementation of the Good Friday Agreement will have a

detrimental effect on the students of USI and NUS-USI. Students' rights need to be protected during Brexit.

8.3 Conclusions and considerations for the future

The current stagnation of strategic planning during a time of exponential growth in internationalisation is fundamentally unacceptable and irresponsible. Students have not seen much progress in mobility since 2012, and the prevailing obstacles to engaging in mobility largely remain the same. Financing has been and remains a key issue in mobility and internationalisation, and a barrier to solving many of the known obstacles. These long-lasting obstacles have created an Europe with unbalanced mobility, both in a geographical and social sense. Constant imbalances in mobility are likely to have a long-lasting negative effect and increase the brain-drain from certain European areas.

Students from marginalized groups, in all the meanings of that phrase, are less likely to engage in and benefit from mobility - our research has highlighted several issues relating to this. Special attention must be paid to those who have so far been left behind by the internationalisation in higher education. In future research, special attention should be paid in regards to collecting data relating to marginalized students and students with disabilities - this includes the upcoming 'Bologna With Student Eyes' surveys.

Internationalisation, although a key feature in the development of higher education in Europe, seems to also have taken a back seat. Language learning opportunities for both international and local students has declined since 2015. Similarly, insufficient attention has been paid to the language skills of both academic and non-academic staff at HEIs. Despite the growing number of international students in Europe, taking their needs into account has not kept up with the quantitative progress. International students must be seen as an opportunity, not as potential cash-cows for European HEIs. This means, that the needs of students in or looking to engage in international mobility must be seen as important.

With the growing number of students from non-European countries, notably India and China, increasing in Europe, creating a reliable and student-friendly visa system in Europe is likely to become an important issue within the next period of the Bologna process. The Visa Directive and Schengen visa processes must take into account learners' needs. To ensure increasing internationalisation, the global perspective must be taken into account.

The issue of Brexit is likely to change much about the conversations of increasing mobility and global internationalisation. Both NUS-UK and USI are extremely concerned about the effects of Brexit on the students of UK and Ireland. Students' rights and education will need to be protected during Brexit negotiations.

8.4 Recommendations

- Mobility and internationalisation in Europe must stop treading water. Internationalisation must finally be a prioritised topic in Europe to achieve set goals.

- Special attention needs to be paid to internationalisation strategies. Students as a crucial part of internationalisation must be included in the creation and implementation of said strategies.
- Language learning must be made available to both international and local students in Europe as language skills are crucial for quality internationalisation. Attention must also be paid to developing the language skills of both academic and non-academic staff in higher education institutions.
- Integration of international students in the the local student body is imperative. Furthermore, continuing obstacles international students face when in mobility does not encourage further internationalisation. Negative experiences and unresolved long-lasting problems will deter students from engaging in mobility in the future, thus compromising the longstanding efforts in this area.
- The EU Visa Directive must be implemented efficiently. Visa periods that last the entirety of a degree students stay in a country, sufficient opportunities to work are essential. Students must be included as important stakeholders when creating and updating visa regulations, both nationally and internationally.
- Initiatives regarding marginalised groups in mobility must be priorities over the next Bologna cycle. The integration of students from lower socioeconomic background, students with disabilities, and refugees into higher education is a must.
- Students' rights and access to education need to be protected during Brexit negotiations.

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