

## The perceived impact of Erasmus+ learning mobility: European university students' views concerning their competences and employability

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### Abstract

*The Erasmus+ programme represents one of the most tangible achievements of the EU: uniting people across our continent, creating a sense of belonging and solidarity. This statement reflects the programme's scope and the broad range of knowledge, skills, and attitudes (competences) expected to be developed by those participating in mobility exchanges. In this context, the European project Erasmus Skills aimed to create a self-assessment tool to support students, pursuing an Erasmus+ learning mobility for studies, to assess and better understand the competences developed during this experience. The present paper briefly presents the aims of the cross-institutional project and discusses the results of the confirmatory focus groups that were carried out in Greece, Spain, and Belgium. In specific, the data analysis depicts university students' views regarding the purpose of the Erasmus+ programme, the competences expected to be or already gained, and its impact on their employability. The study also explores participants' views on the institutional support needed and their recommendations concerning prospective Erasmus students. The results indicate that participants' views are generally aligned with the objectives of Erasmus+, while additional findings regarding the perceived impact of learning mobility might offer new insights in terms of the institutional support needed.*

### Keywords

Higher education institutions, mobility for studies, future career trajectories, soft skills.

### Περίληψη

*Το πρόγραμμα Erasmus+ αντιπροσωπεύει ένα από τα πιο απτά επιτεύγματα της ΕΕ: ενώνει τους ανθρώπους σε όλη την ήπειρό μας, δημιουργώντας το αίσθημα του ανήκειν και της αλληλεγγύης. Αυτή η δήλωση αντικατοπτρίζει όχι μόνο το πεδίο εφαρμογής του προγράμματος, αλλά και το ευρύ φάσμα*

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γνώσεων, δεξιοτήτων και στάσεων (ικανοτήτων) που αναμένεται να αναπτύξουν όσοι συμμετέχουν σε ανταλλαγές κινητικότητας. Σε αυτό το πλαίσιο, το ευρωπαϊκό έργο *Erasmus Skills* στόχευσε στη δημιουργία ενός εργαλείου αυτοαξιολόγησης προκειμένου να υποστηρίξει τους φοιτητές που επιδιώκουν μια μαθησιακή κινητικότητα Erasmus+ για σπουδές, να αξιολογήσουν και να κατανοήσουν καλύτερα τις ικανότητες που αναπτύχθηκαν κατά τη διάρκεια αυτής της εμπειρίας. Η παρούσα εργασία παρουσιάζει συνοπτικά τους στόχους του διαπανεπιστημιακού έργου και συζητά τα αποτελέσματα των επιβεβαιωτικών ομάδων εστίασης που πραγματοποιήθηκαν στην Ελλάδα, την Ισπανία και το Βέλγιο. Συγκεκριμένα, η ανάλυση δεδομένων αφορά στις απόψεις των φοιτητών/τριών σχετικά με τον σκοπό του προγράμματος Erasmus+, τις ικανότητες που αναμένεται να αποκτήσουν ή έχουν ήδη αποκτήσει και τον αντίκτυπο του στην απασχολησιμότητά τους. Η μελέτη διερευνά επίσης τις απόψεις τους σχετικά με την υποστήριξη που απαιτείται από τα ιδρύματα τριτοβάθμιας εκπαίδευσης και τις συστάσεις τους σχετικά με τους μελλοντικούς φοιτητές Erasmus. Τα αποτελέσματα καταδεικνύουν ότι οι απόψεις των συμμετεχόντων/ουσών είναι γενικά ευθυγραμμισμένες με τους στόχους του προγράμματος Erasmus+, ενώ ορισμένα επιπρόσθετα ευρήματα σχετικά με τον εκλαμβανόμενο αντίκτυπο της μαθησιακής κινητικότητας ενδέχεται να προσφέρουν νέες γνώσεις όσον αφορά την απαιτούμενη θεσμική υποστήριξη.

#### Λέξεις κλειδιά

Ιδρύματα τριτοβάθμιας εκπαίδευσης, κινητικότητα για σπουδές, μελλοντικές πορείες σταδιοδρομίας, ήπιες δεξιότητες.

## Introduction

In 2007, the Erasmus programme celebrated its 20th anniversary, setting in the spotlight the benefits, challenges, and obstacles of mobility in higher education (HE), as well as the need to develop mobility in other areas (Commission of the European Communities, 2007a). Since the Bologna Declaration (1999), mobility has been further supported and systemised about skills, competences, and employability. At the same moment, the Council of the European Union reported that mobility, particularly in HE, was a key priority, while the Commission's Lisbon Report called for Erasmus-type mobility to become a standard part of tertiary education (Commission of the European Communities, 2007b).

In 2009, the Leuven Communiqué postulated that in 2020, at least 20% of university graduates should have had either a study or a training period abroad, considering mobility as the “*hallmark of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)*” (EHEA, 2009). In this regard, the strategy “*Mobility for Better Learning*” (EHEA, 2012a) provided further insights and policy support by indicating concrete measures for implementation to realise the aims and targets of mobility and internationalise HE. For instance, the mobility target of the Leuven Communiqué has been specified with indicators including physical credit/degree mobility of all three cycles of the Bologna Process with quantitative indicators (e.g. at least 15 ECTS, or three months), as well as that the outward mobility should be also taken into account.

In 2012, the Bucharest Communiqué emphasised four main pillars (extended in ten themes): providing quality higher education for all, enhancing graduates' employability, strengthening mobility for better learning, improving data collection and transparency; yet it also set out the EHEA priorities for the period 2012-2015 one of which referred to the national implementation of the strategy "Mobility for better learning" (EHEA, 2012b). Along similar lines, the Yerevan Communiqué acknowledged mobility as a lever that not only fosters mutual understanding and graduates' employability but also promotes the inclusive character of HE, constituting a field for the implementation of agreed structural reforms such as degree and credit systems, joint programmes and degrees and recognition of credits acquired abroad (EHEA, 2015).

Based on this policy context, mobility is conceptualised as an effective way to promote graduates' employability, that is, according to EHEA (n.d.), "*the ability to sustainably hold one's own on the labour market (in employed or independent work, with national or private institutions, at home or abroad)*". This definition partially reflects the approach of Hillage and Pollard who pointed out that employability is the "*capacity to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment. For the individual, employability depends on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they possess, the way they use those assets and present them to the employer and the context (e.g. personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they seek work*" (Hillage & Pollard, 1998: 12).

Therefore, the scope of the present study is to explore university students' views regarding the impact of Erasmus+ learning mobility on their competences (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) and employability. By examining the views of two different student groups, those before and after the participation in Erasmus+ learning mobility, the study attempts to provide additional insights on potential differentiations that derive from the mobility experience *per se*, on five interrelated topics: the purpose of the Erasmus+ programme, the competences expected to be or already gained by students, the impact of the mobility on students' employability as well as their recommendations in terms of institutional support and prospective Erasmus+ students.

## 1. Literature review

### 1.1 Competences and skills: (un)common orientations

Competences and skills present a high diversification in terms of the multiple definitions provided, as they usually constitute the subject of interdisciplinary research conducted by academics, educators, practitioners, and researchers of different scientific backgrounds. As Kankaraš (2017) mentions, multiple terms are used to describe skills and their broader conceptual frameworks. In the present study, the authors adopt the following definitions concerning skills and competences. According to the EU definition, adopted also by the European Skills, Competences and Occupations classification (ESCO), skills refer to “*the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive, and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools, and instruments)*” (Council of Europe, 2008: 4).

Competence, on the other hand, is related to “*the proven ability to use knowledge, skills, and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and professional and personal development. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy*” (ibid). Cedefop (2014) further clarifies this definition with the following comment “*competence is not limited to cognitive elements (involving the use of theory, concepts or tacit knowledge); it also encompasses functional aspects (including technical skills) as well as interpersonal attributes (e.g. social or organisational skills) and ethical values*”. Additionally, the Council of Europe defines competence as “*combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes*” where:

- knowledge is composed of the facts and figures, concepts, ideas, and theories that are already established and support the understanding of a certain area or subject;
- skills are defined as the ability and capacity to carry out processes and use the existing knowledge to achieve results;
- attitudes describe the disposition and mindsets to act or react to ideas, persons, or situations (Council of Europe, 2018: 7).

The updated European Reference Framework on the key competence for lifelong learning (Council of Europe, 2018) entails four non-cognitive competences. The latter

include the personal, social, and learning to learn competence, in which key elements include reflection, self-management, resilience, emotional well-being, and physical and mental health. Secondly, citizenship competence refers to individuals' participation in civic and social life (society, economy, culture, sustainability), while entrepreneurship competence includes locating and transforming ideas and opportunities into value, creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, initiative-taking, collaboration skills, and preservation. Finally, cultural awareness and expression competence refers to the appreciation and understanding of various cultural forms, expressions of ideas, and experiences.

It should be noted though that the terminology may differ across countries, time, research fields, and social contexts. The vast literature on this area may return results of terms that have somehow similar meanings such as 21st-century skills, soft skills, life skills, behavioural skills, non-cognitive skills, youth development assets, workplace or work readiness competencies, social-emotional learning, character skills, personal qualities, strengths or assets (Lippman, Ryberg, Carney & Moore, 2015; Gates, Lippman, Shadowen, Burke, Diener & Malkin, 2016). Moreover, the social context shapes the terminology used; for instance, employers usually refer to such skills as soft skills. Nevertheless, even within particular fields, the terminology changes as well; in psychology, personality psychologists may describe these as sub-domains, sub-elements, or facets, while developmental psychologists refer to these constructs as developmental assets.

Lippman and her colleagues define soft skills as “*a broad set of skills, competencies, behaviours, attitudes, and personal qualities that enable people to effectively navigate their environment, to work well with others, to perform well and achieve their goals*” (Lippman et al, 2015: 11). They also mention that these skills “*are broadly applicable and complement other skills such as technical, vocational, and academic skills*” (ibid). Furthermore, OECD conducted a study on social and emotional skills (an alternative term for soft skills, or non-cognitive skills) defining them as: “*...individual capacities that can be manifested in consistent patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, developed through formal and informal learning experiences, and emerge as important drivers of socio-economic outcomes throughout individual's life*” (OECD, 2015: 35).

Thus, it can be concluded that the scope of “skills” is much more specific in comparison to the scope of “competences” which reflects a broader range that, *inter*

*alia*, entails skills. Hence, it could be argued that the term “competence” attempts to bridge the fragmentation of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, by laying emphasis, though, on individual’s responsibility and autonomy. This emphasis may be interpreted not only in terms of promoting the centrality of the individual in managing his/her own life, career, and (self-directed) learning, but also of unleashing “*the inborn capacity that is suppressed by institutional education*”, as Benson and Voller (1997) suggest regarding language education.

## **1.2 Erasmus+ mobility as a driver of competences development and employability enhancement**

The latest annual report on the Erasmus+ program illustrates that over the last three decades, more than 10 million people have participated in this life-changing mobility experience. Erasmus+ has proved to be “*a strong pillar in promoting the full range of knowledge, skills, and competences that help people succeed in the contemporary fast-changing societies, including transversal skills such as creativity, problem-solving, as well as an entrepreneurial mindset*” (European Commission, 2019: 10). Hence, the impact of Erasmus+ mobility programs on competences development and employability is viewed as a promising condition that may support transnational learning and employment mobility for young people. Similarly, the European Higher Education Area (2009) highlights that mobility brings an important contribution to personal development and employability, as it fosters respect for diversity and encourages linguistic pluralism (EHEA, 2009). According to Jacobone & Moro (2015), Erasmus+ provides students with the opportunity to directly come in contact with different European cultures, a process which supports the development of their multicultural skills and promotes European consciousness (Jacobone & Moro, 2015).

Moreover, the “Youth on the Move” report concluded that learning mobility contributes to improved communication skills in foreign languages, awareness of another culture, greater adaptability to new situations, interpersonal skills, and academic knowledge, while the acquisition of new professional competences and intercultural competence should also be considered as benefits of the mobility experiences (European Commission, 2010). In similar lines, Konevas and Duoba (2007) suggested that the most important skills acquired from a study period abroad include cultural experiences, individual growth and academic knowledge, whereas Engel (2010) concluded that nearly 90% of the 4,500 students included in the VALERA report, indicated that the

Erasmus+ mobility positively impacted their personality and careers mainly either by obtaining their first job or by having more long-term career prospects. In this regard, Teichler and Janson (2007) found that the impact of Erasmus+ on students' careers is more horizontal rather than vertical, implying that the learning mobility is perceived to be associated with international mobility, international competences, and visibly international work tasks. Additionally, Wiers-Jenssen (2011) underlined that exchange students obtain more international jobs than nonmobile students, whereas the first do not seem to encounter any particular difficulties in the transition from higher education to work

Several surveys have suggested that the benefits of the exchange period abroad are not merely academic. Personal development, confidence, adaptability, a global mindset, and enhanced employability are among the most frequently mentioned benefits of mobility experiences (Perez-Encinas, Rodriguez-Pomeda & de Wit, 2020; Soares & Mosquera, 2020). In the VALERA study (Professional Value of Erasmus Mobility), conducted by the International Centre for Higher Education Research in 2006, the experts participating in the study mentioned that students developed the following competences after an Erasmus mobility experience for studies: foreign language proficiency; intercultural understanding and competences; knowledge of other countries; preparation for future employment and work; and academic knowledge and skills. In addition, spending a period studying in another country has proved to be beneficial both for the students' learning process and for the growth of their competences such as:

- acquiring academic knowledge (theories, methods, and basic disciplinary knowledge) in areas of expertise that are not taught in the home country at all or only on a lower level;
- gathering and experiencing field knowledge of the economy, society, and culture of the host country of study;
- successful studying in fields that are genuinely border-crossing (e.g. International Law);
- learning internationally comparative approaches;
- broadening the mind and improving reflection through contrasting experiences of different countries, different academic cultures, etc.;

- acquiring international/intercultural communication techniques and styles, e.g. foreign languages (Bracht, Engel, Janson, Over, Schomburg & Teichler, 2006: 46).

Furthermore, findings from the survey of former Erasmus students, revealed that students perceive the contribution of their Erasmus+ experience mostly about their personal development, including reflective thinking and enhancement of specific areas such as intercultural competences (i.e. foreign language proficiency and knowledge of the host country), while the general academic and professional value was viewed more cautiously. Nevertheless, as Engel (2011) noted, studying abroad via Erasmus is assessed positively by both former Erasmus students and employers, while it has a positive impact on students' competences and their career development after graduation.

The 2014 Erasmus+ HE impact study analysed the effects of mobility on students' employability and competences as well as on HE institutions' internationalisation. Focusing on the first part, a mixed quantitative and qualitative study was conducted aiming at six personality traits: a) tolerance of ambiguity: to be tolerant towards other people's culture and attitudes and adaptability to new situations; b) curiosity: openness to new experiences; c) confidence: trust in own competence; d) serenity: awareness of own strengths and weaknesses; e) decisiveness: the ability to make decisions; and f) vigour: the ability to solve problems. The results indicated that beyond the development of transversal skills, the enhancement of employability constitutes a significant motive for 85% of the Erasmus students, while, eventually, Erasmus students have better employability skills after a mobility experience in comparison to 70% of all students (European Commission, 2014).

In 2016, another publication of the Erasmus impact study shed light on the regional differences concerning the Erasmus+ Programme. The study contributed to the identification of regional trends in the effects of mobility on students' employability, skills, careers, and social lives, in Northern, Southern, Western, and Eastern Europe. Overall, at least 90% of Erasmus students in all regions participate in Erasmus to experience life abroad, meet new people, and learn or improve a foreign language as well as to develop their soft skills. Additionally, participants from all regions perceived that enhancing their employability abroad (87%) is more important than in their home country (77%). Another interesting finding is that the Erasmus students coming from Southern Europe have the highest motives in comparison to all other regions (Northern, Western, Eastern) concerning the development of their linguistic and soft skills, as well



as the enhancement of their career prospects abroad (European Commission; CHE Consult, 2016).

Similar conclusions are presented in the most recent Erasmus+ higher education impact study that analysed the responses of 77,000 participants. The study found that students who have completed an Erasmus+ mobility for studying or training boosted their employability skills, with a large majority (72%) stating that it had been beneficial or highly beneficial in finding their first job. Almost three out of four Erasmus students reported that they had a better idea of what they want to do in their career after their mobility (clarity of future career goals), while the highest impact on their academic development in terms of progress and competences for effective learning, experience with innovative teaching methods and the motivation to complete the studies is reported by Erasmus students from low GDP countries, Southern European Programme Countries and Partner Countries (European Commission; ICF Consulting; CHE Consult, 2019).

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 The Erasmus Skills project

The *Erasmus Skills* project<sup>3</sup> consists of a multidisciplinary consortium of partners that have extensive expertise in different fields, including learning mobility (ESN and EUF), labour mobility (Expertise in Labour Mobility - ELM), and three public universities (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid - UAM, Gent University - UGent, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki - AUTH) representing students and university staff as direct participants and experts of the project activities. The scope of the *Erasmus Skills* project is to prepare university students before their mobility abroad for pursuing their studies under the Erasmus+ Exchange Program. Additionally, the project aims to help students assess their learning curve before, during, and after their mobility experience, as well as to support students in better understanding the skills developed from this experience. To do so, the project provides a set of innovative tools to help Erasmus students enhance and acknowledge the soft skills and competences gained from their mobility experiences.

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<sup>3</sup> Further information may be accessed here: <https://www.erasmusskills.eu/eskills/>

## **2.2 Research aim**

The present paper aims to examine university students' views regarding the Erasmus+ learning mobility that they will experience or have already experienced. In particular, the study objectives focus on inquiring about participants' views concerning the following:

- a) What is the purpose of the Erasmus+ programme?
- b) Which KSA (competences) are expected to be gained or have been already gained by students?
- c) What is the perceived impact of the mobility experience on students' employability?
- d) What recommendations do students provide regarding institutional support?
- e) What recommendations do students provide for prospective Erasmus students?

## **2.3 Participants**

Six focus groups were organised by the three partner universities, consisting of 22 participants (16 females, six males) from various disciplines. Half of those participated in the focus groups concerning an upcoming mobility experience and the other half concerning a prior experience. 16 were undergraduate students aged ranging from 20-23 years old, while six of them, with an age range from 21-23 years old, were attending a postgraduate program in their home universities in Belgium, Greece, and Spain

## **2.4 Data collection and data analysis**

The focus group process was developed according to the methodological guidelines and considerations provided by Krueger (2009) and it was divided into two sections; the first, which is beyond the scope of the present study, included a pilot testing of the draft self-assessment questionnaires which contained items based, as much as possible, on pre-existing items from relevant surveys, grouped in three dimensions (knowledge, skills, and attitudes). During the second part of the focus groups, participants discussed their views concerning the questions posed by the facilitators about the research objectives. The discussions were recorded, upon written consent of the participants, and were transcribed into text. The analysis of the qualitative data was performed via Qualitative Content Analysis (Mayring, 2014), based on an inductive formation of the categories. In other words, the features of the summarising content analysis were used with the exception that neither the entire material was regarded for analysis, nor the step

of building paraphrases was implemented. The focus group sessions were conducted by trained researchers to ensure consistency in data collection. We employed protocols and moderator guidelines to minimise variability in the questioning and probing techniques across different groups. To further ensure the validity of our study, we employed various data sources to cross-validate the results and interpretations, contributing to convergence in the findings and reducing the risk of drawing conclusions based on isolated perspectives. Additionally, the researchers maintained a record of the research process, including detailed descriptions of the focus group procedures, data collection techniques, and analysis methods, allowing for potential replication and verification of the study.

### 3. Results

The analysis of the qualitative data obtained is presented below, based on the distinction between the prospective Erasmus students (“before mobility”) and the students that have already participated in an Erasmus+ mobility program (“after mobility”).

#### 3.1 Purpose of the Erasmus+ programme

Students intending to participate in a mobility experience mainly described Erasmus+ for studies as an opportunity to obtain intercultural awareness, create a sense of European belonging and develop or improve language skills. Indicative statements include: “*united in diversity*” (FG2-St. 1), “... *improve my English and learn a new language, the one from the host country I mean*” (FG3-St. 3). Additionally, participants reported that the purpose of the Erasmus+ programme is to compare different academic environments and experience different teaching methods and conditions, as a way of improving their studies: “*To learn something new...Have a new experience and see what it is like to study in another country*” (FG1-St. 2). An additional sub-category that arose in the narratives of the participants, is that the Erasmus+ programme offers participants an impulse of personal change, as they are expecting to meet new people, live in a different country, and exchange ideas with other students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Some of the statements include: “*I will become more independent*” (FG1-St. 4), “*I will get out of my comfort zone*” (FG3-St. 1), “*I am going to live in another country, meeting and interacting with people of different cultures*” (FG2-St. 2). In the case of demotivated students, an Erasmus+ mobility is an alternative way to relax and is

perceived as an opportunity for improving/regaining their personal/academic motivation.

Apart from personal development, several participants also described the purpose of the Erasmus+ programme in their career development. Namely, they associate the mobility experience with proactive exposure to multicultural settings that will eventually support them in getting prepared for working and/or living abroad in the future. Students suggested that: “*Erasmus+ is a good way to test if you would like to work and stay abroad in the future*” (FG2-St. 2), “*I think the mobility abroad will look nice on my cv...*” (FG1-St. 3) and “*I think this exchange will bring me more self-confidence which will help me in finding a job*” (FG3-St. 2).

Students that have already participated in an Erasmus+ learning mobility revealed several differentiated perspectives, as participants from different universities seemed to emphasise different aspects. For instance, the Spanish and Greek students were focused on the personal implications of the Erasmus+ programme rather than the academic, while students of the UGent made explicit statements regarding various academic objectives such as working on a thesis, gaining lab experience, and advancing their language skills. However, the latter also made references to personal growth mostly in terms of living abroad and challenging their comfort zone. Some indicative statements are: “*It changes you, it strengthens your personality*” (FG4-St. 1), “*It is a chance to leave your comfort zone and develop important competences, both in the professional and the personal contexts*” (FG5-St. 1), and” *It is an opportunity to be yourself freely: a chance to be free, to break free, to be whom you want to be, to know yourself*” (FG6-St. 2), “*It is an opportunity to prove yourself that you are able, to gain self-confidence*” (FG6-St. 3).

Regarding the sense of a common European identity, students from UGent mentioned that Erasmus+ mobility helps people to “*respect others and respect different opinions and attitudes*” (FG5-St. 1), “*respect other cultures and cherish diversity*” (FG5-St. 2), “*learn how to coexist with others while keeping your own identity and culture*” (FG5-St. 3). In similar lines, the Spanish students stated that Erasmus+ “*opens your mind and gives you a European feeling and a more international understanding of the world*” (FG6-St. 1), “*creates a European identity and helps you realise that you are a global citizen, you are aware of global issues like wars and peace, climate change*” (FG6-St. 2). Nevertheless, a rather interesting distinctive finding was reflected in the discourse of the Greek students. Although they recognise and acknowledge European

integration as an important goal of the Erasmus+ programme, almost all stated that they feel less European, after returning from the mobility experience. Based on their discussion, it was evident that they paid more attention to what distinguishes their own culture (Greek) from the others, rather than finding commonalities among them. For instance, students reported: “*It is easier for someone to pay attention to differences*” (FG4-St. 1), “*When you are abroad, in Europe, you see the differences and feel more Greek*” (FG4-St. 2), “*You may feel and have a European sense of belonging while being in a different environment (e.g. Asia). Then, you connect yourself more with Europeans (Swedish, German than others)*” (FG4-St. 3) and “*Erasmus mobility helps to define borders. It can affect me to be more tolerant, but it makes it also easier to define my own culture*” (FG4-St. 4). The results can be summarised in the following table.

**Table 1:** Students’ perceptions about the purpose of Erasmus+ learning mobilities

Prospective Erasmus students	Erasmus students (already completed mobilities)
Promoting a sense of European belonging.	Fostering a sense of European identity and respect for diversity.
Obtaining intercultural awareness	The overall feeling of being less European is due to the focus on cultural distinctions rather than commonalities.
Developing or improving language skills, including the host country’s language.	Advancing language skills.
Comparing different academic environments and experiencing diverse teaching methods.	Achieving academic objectives during mobility (working on a thesis, gaining lab experience).
Undergoing personal change and growth by meeting people from diverse cultural backgrounds.	Strengthening personality and personal growth from living abroad and stepping out of comfort zones.
Being proactively exposed to multicultural settings for future international work or living.	
Enhancing their CV and gaining self-confidence for better job prospects.	
Increasing personal and academic motivation	

### 3.2 Competence development in Erasmus+ mobility experience

Students of the “before mobility” focus groups could mainly recognise two main types of knowledge that they expect to gain: a) the academic knowledge and experiences of new teaching methods in their discipline of studies and b) the language of the host country. In specific, having the experience of different learning and teaching methods

(e.g. project-based learning), students assume that they will become more independent and practical by applying their knowledge in real-life practice. For instance, students mentioned: *“It will be easier to work with an application or a new software”* (FG1-St. 1). Students from the Faculty of Education were eager to experience the well-known, innovative Finnish or Swedish educational system: *“I hope to learn a lot on outdoor education, I want to learn about the Finnish school system...”* (FG1-St.2), *“For me it is similar, I want to learn about the Swedish education system...”* (FG1-St. 4). Furthermore, students partially associated linguistic skills with social skills suggesting that *“It will be easier and more comfortable to start a conversation in another language different from mine”* (FG3-St. 4), and *“Improving my English... as you’re being ‘forced’ to speak another language”* (FG1-St. 3). However, some students also related the mobility experience with attitudinal changes not only at a personal level, by meeting new people with diverse backgrounds, but also at an interpersonal level, by changing the way that other people see them. Some indicative statements were: *“I mainly do this exchange for myself, I’m not thinking about my career, but I’m sure it is an added value, like seeing things from a different perspective”* (FG1-St. 1), *“Probably I will develop further my social skills...Seeing things from a different perspective and this might help me in solving problems in a better way”* (FG3-St. 4) and *“...Smoothens the communication with students from other countries”* (FG2-St. 3).

Students of the “after mobility” focus groups listed additional types of knowledge that they acquired during their mobility experience, related to the social and political conditions that existed in the host country, including the: way of life, medical system, history, politics, as well as aspects that are associated with ecology, feminism, and religion. For instance, students stated: *“I also learned for example about social security systems in other countries”* (FG6-St. 3), and *“I have learned things about religions that I had only heard of, but discussing with fellow Erasmus students helped me to understand more things”* (FG4-St. 4). However, they highlighted the cultural knowledge they acquired about their host country and the home country of their peers. They perceived that Erasmus+ provided the space for comparing social practices between countries and cultures. For instance, Spanish students were comparing Spain with other cultures, a process which led to a more favoring opinion about their own country/culture: *“Spain is not so bad eventually”* (FG6-St. 1) or *“Spain is a good place to live and grow old”* (FG6-St. 3).

Students of the “after mobility” focus groups also highlighted the academic and linguistic knowledge that they have acquired and/or further improved during their mobility experience. Specifically, students mentioned that they enhanced their academic–scientific knowledge, by experiencing new methods of teaching, such as project-based learning and the use of information and communication technologies in the learning process. In this regard, students reported: *“I have learned a lot thanks to active teaching methods, which are not common in Spanish universities”* (FG6-St. 1). However, they especially valued the more practical and applied learning approach of the host institutions compared to their home universities. For instance, students gained experience with the actual teaching practice (e.g. Finland’s education system) by visiting schools and other organisations; this experience helped them to better understand that the context plays an important role in the teaching process or as a participant stated: *“you cannot simply transfer a teaching method in the Greek cultural context”* (FG4-St. 2).

There were also several statements concerning the university degrees’ organisation, structure, and flexibility when choosing courses, in comparison to their home university, as well as regarding the facilities and people’s discipline entailing cleanness, security of the university campus, and respect of public areas and buildings. In this respect, students stated: *“German universities have discipline and very well organised program of studies with strict time sheets and deadlines”* (FG4-St. 2) and *“I was surprised about the university degrees’ organisation and structure and the flexibility when choosing courses in comparison to Spanish university”* (FG6-St. 3).

Extensive references were also made to their linguistic skills. Students mentioned that they have acquired knowledge of at least one European language and have become aware of the country’s culture (e.g. Italian, Spanish, Finnish). Some indicative comments include: *“In my research group there were a lot of Italians, and they did not speak a lot of English, so I was happy; I took an Italian course before I went on mobility. In the beginning, it was hard to communicate but by the end, I understood almost everything they said. This also really helped me to integrate into the group, which was nice”* (FG4-St. 4), and *“I was there to learn Spanish mainly, so I actively connected with my fellow Spanish students”* (FG5-St. 2). In general, students agreed that Erasmus+ mobility is a vital experience that improves both their professional and personal skills; they developed communication skills, such as expressing their ideas and opinions in another language, interacting with other people,

and working in groups. Upon completion of their mobility experience, they became more self-confident, more extroverted, and open in terms of networking, listening, and understanding ideas and opinions expressed by others. They highlighted that they gained discussion abilities in debates: they can acknowledge the cultural barrier in debates, they can *“put themselves in other peoples’ skin”* (and better understand their point of view) (FG6-St. 4), and they *“...no longer try to “win” the debate but focus on listening and understanding”* (FG4-St. 3).

They also stated that they have improved their time management, flexibility, and organisational skills, while almost all students agreed that the mobility experience challenged their comfort zone, helping them become more independent. For instance, students stated: *“I have acquired useful skills like language, networking, working in a group, writing papers in the group”* (FG4-St. 3), and *“I learned to be independent and solve my own problems as the support in the laboratory was limited”* (FG6-St. 1), *“I improved my time management skills”* (FG4-St. 1) and *“ ...Dealing with deadlines as you have to manage a lot of administration on top of your ongoing studies and tasks”* (FG5-St. 2).

Concerning students’ attitudes, those who have returned from a mobility experience claimed that they changed their attitudes by becoming more sensitive, towards specific global issues, such as ecology: *“I have become more sensitive on environmental issues”* (FG4-St. 3). Additionally, their attitude towards money changed, as they reflected on their consuming behaviour. One student reported: *“I now realise the monetary cost of everything I do”* (FG6-St. 2). Greek students also acknowledged and appreciated the privilege of not paying tuition fees in Greek Higher Education. Indicative statements include: *“I now respect more the benefits that we have such as “free education” without any tuition fees, or costs for books”* (FG4-St. 2). Finally, students became more confident and self-aware of their abilities (e.g., *“I feel more confident around people who do not speak my language”* (FG5-St. 3)), while emphasis was laid on their intercultural understanding and respect of other cultures. Some students reflected *“... in different countries, there are different social norms for greeting people (hugs, kisses, etc) and someone can experience discomfort”* (FG5-St. 1). The results can be summarised in the following table.



**Table 2:** *Students' perceptions about competence development in Erasmus+ learning mobilities*

Prospective Erasmus students	Erasmus students (already completed mobilities)
Gaining academic knowledge and experiencing new teaching methods.	Enhancing academic-scientific knowledge through new teaching methods and practical learning.
Learning about innovative educational systems in the host country.	Changing attitudes towards specific global issues, such as ecology and consuming behavior.
Improved language, social, and communication skills.	Developing linguistic skills and becoming aware of other cultures, leading to improved communication and networking abilities.
Anticipating attitudinal changes by meeting diverse people and gaining new perspectives.	Gaining cultural knowledge about the host country and promoting intercultural understanding; becoming more sensitive about social and political conditions (e.g., ecology, feminism, and religion).
Expecting the mobility experience to positively impact their career, even though the main motivation is personal growth	Increasing confidence and self-awareness of their abilities; challenging their comfort zone, leading to personal growth.
Mobility is perceived as an opportunity to become more independent and practical by applying knowledge in real-life situations	Improving time management, flexibility, and organisational skills, and becoming more independent.

### 3.3 Perceived impact of Erasmus+ mobility experience on students' employability

Prospective Erasmus students mentioned that they expected the Erasmus+ programme to be beneficial for them at various levels. Based on their views, the mobility experience may support those who intend to search for a job or seek opportunities for future research abroad. In this respect, students stated: *"It's a good 'test drive' for working or studying abroad in the future"* (FG3-St. 1) and *"You can definitely use it in your CV. This was also my motive for participating in the Erasmus+ programme. Among other positive things, Erasmus+ is an exceptional way to present that you are open and maybe you can continue for Erasmus+ placement"* (FG1-St. 1).

Students also reported that the Erasmus+ learning mobility will help them develop transversal skills such as flexibility and adaptability in new places, while it may also challenge their comfort zone and make them more independent, productive, and result oriented despite the difficulties that may arise. Some indicative comments include: *"I developed competences such as language, networking, social and I am not afraid of new challenges"* (FG1-St. 2), *"I think mainly the language skills and being*

*independent. I can work on my own and network*” (FG2-St. 1) and *“I can easily communicate with people speaking another mother tongue or having another background...”* (FG3-St. 2). Furthermore, many students shared the opinion that the Erasmus+ mobility will be an additional work experience that may be considered an asset, or an additional qualification compared to someone who doesn't have such an experience. Hence, students stated that their resumes would be more appealing to potential employers in their country or abroad, as the mobility experience provides evidence of adaptability and interest in making the most out of their studies. In specific, students stated that *“Erasmus mobility is an opportunity that “opens you the door” to other countries and labour markets*” (FG2-St. 3) and *“Well your CV is strengthened, and employers might perceive it positively, especially compared to someone who has not been in Erasmus”* (FG1-St. 1). In this regard, Moreover, some students reflected that a foreign employer may also perceive the Erasmus experience as an added value, in case a candidate has already lived in the country and therefore will be familiar with the cultural context.

Participants of the “after mobility” focus groups presented similar views to the students of the “before mobility” focus groups, concerning the benefits of the Erasmus+ programme on their employability. They pointed out benefits mostly related to life/career skills such as adaptability, linguistic skills (ability to speak other languages), and teamwork. Students mentioned, *“...I feel more confident around people who do not speak my language now”* (FG4-St. 3). Additional skills located in students' discourse included problem-solving, analytical, and communication skills such as defending one's opinion, self-confidence, networking, and access to new labour markets. For instance, students reported: *“...I was really pushed to go out to meet people. I've noticed that I'm less shy and I easily address people. My social skills improved”* (FG5-St. 2). However, some students couldn't recognise a direct impact on their career prospects. Even though they perceived that they have gained and developed the aforementioned skills, they don't feel that these will be valued by the local labour market. Hence, for those students, the mobility experience may have had an indirect positive impact, as they have enhanced their academic interests and, maybe, the experiences gained will help them to better define their future career goals, including master studies, new directions towards their specialisation and/or continuing their life/career abroad. Some indicative statements are: *“It's a good test drive, in case I decide to study or search for a job abroad in the future”* (FG6-St. 4), *“I am not sure that this experience will be valued*

*back in my country; things there are more conservative” (FG4-St. 1) and “I have definitely learned about new topics that were not covered in my home institution and perhaps I will focus on those in my master studies. I feel that they are more current and progressive” (FG5-St. 3). The results can be summarised in the following table.*

**Table 3:** *Students’ perceived impact of Erasmus+ learning mobilities on their employability*

Prospective Erasmus students	Erasmus students (already completed mobilities)
Expecting Erasmus+ to benefit their future job and research opportunities abroad.	Helping them refine their academic interests and career goals.
Considering the mobility experience as a valuable "test drive" for working or studying abroad.	
Viewing Erasmus+ as an exceptional way to showcase openness and increase chances for further Erasmus+ placements.	Considering master's studies, exploring new specialisations, or pursuing their career abroad.
Developing transversal skills like flexibility, adaptability, language proficiency, and networking.	Recognising improvements in life/career skills, including adaptability, linguistic abilities, and teamwork.
Enhancing their resumes, making them more appealing to potential employers.	Expressing concerns about whether the labour market of their countries, values these acquired skills directly.
Viewing the Erasmus+ mobility as an additional work experience and a qualification that differentiates them from others in the job market.	

### 3.4 Recommendations for institutional support

Prospective Erasmus students mainly requested easier access to information and communication with the receiving institution/coordinator/tutor, as well as support and guidance for housing. Indicative statements include: “I think some additional support in selecting the courses would be good, things were not always very clear, you have to figure it out yourself” (FG1-St. 4) and “- I don’t feel fully prepared, I don’t have a place to stay yet, although other things like learning agreement, admission is fine” (FG2-St. 1) and “ ..normally I would have had a dorm from the university, but now I’m on the waiting list, so I do not have any housing yet. I’m not too worried, I’m going to Finland, together with three other students, it’s not Ghana (a previous international exchange experience), so I’m sure we’ll figure something out...” (FG3-St. 3).

Students also referred to the organisation of “Welcome Days/Week” and social media groups for Erasmus students, which they consider an effective way of networking

and gaining a first insight into the local culture and habits. For instance, students reported: *“My host university organises welcome days and although the program seems to be rather boring, I am going to go to meet other Erasmus students. It’s a perfect way for meeting new people”* (FG1-St. 3) and *“My host university has a Facebook group for incoming students, that helps”* (FG2-St. 2).

Similarly, students of the “after mobility” focus groups suggested better communication between the home and host universities, but also provided more concrete recommendations for the host and home institutions to support Erasmus students. For example, one student noted, *“If the tutors and coordinators could just communicate better between our home and host universities, it would be really helpful”* (FG5-St. 2), whereas another one underlined the importance of clear correspondence regarding the learning agreements *“They should really check and standardise how the coordinators handle our learning agreements. It would make everything smoother and less confusing”* (FG4-St. 3). Additional recommendations, included reducing bureaucracy, *“making the whole bureaucratic process easier; you know? Like, give us all the information we need in advance, so we understand what paperwork we got to do”* (FG6-St.1), as well as receiving support from the university professors *“I wish they would give us a clear guide to each course we take. Like, what readings we need and what is expected from us”* (FG5-St. 3) and the International Relations Offices *“...with longer hours, a user-friendly website, and staff who actually respond to our calls and emails”* (FG4-St.1). Finally, one student highlighted that the Erasmus+ grant should be increased *“... to cover more of our living expenses in the new country”* (FG6-St.2). These suggestions are summarised in the following Table.

**Table 4:** *Students’ recommendations for institutional support about Erasmus+ learning mobilities*

<b>Home institution</b>	<b>Receiving/host institution</b>
Make the bureaucratic process as easy as possible.	Provide information about the bureaucratic process and the necessary paperwork.
Better communication/coordination between the tutors/coordinators of the home and host institutions.	Improve the communication process with administrative staff before the mobility and provide support with housing arrangements.
The amount of the Erasmus grant should be closer to the living costs of the country/city of the receiving institution.	Provide a concrete study program, flexibility in the evaluation of the Erasmus students, and diminishment of recognition problems.
The office of International Relations should have wide opening hours, an updated website with clear information, and friendly effective, and efficient staff	There should be an academic course guide, in which the bibliography, as well as the demands of the course, should be outlined, for the Erasmus students to know what is expected from each

that answers phone calls and e-mails.	course.
Check the quality of the Erasmus coordination by listing equivalent subjects of the home and host institutions, to standardise the criteria applied by coordinators/tutors in learning agreements.	Language courses in the local language should be provided free of charge and be obligatory for Erasmus students. These courses should be practical and involve local students in the teaching process.
Create a network/platform of former Erasmus students, in which the latter can share their experiences and provide useful insights for the host universities.	Organise integration activities such as meetings, parties, and social events not only with Erasmus but also with native students.
	Collaborate with ESN or similar structures and make use of the Erasmus app.

### 3.5 Recommendations for prospective Erasmus students

Students who have already participated in an Erasmus+ learning mobility were asked an additional question that inquired their views regarding the recommendations that they would provide to those intending to pursue an Erasmus+ mobility for studies. All students of the three countries involved in the focus groups agreed that having an “*open mind/attitude*” and trying to meet native people of the host country, as well as other Erasmus students, is a good way not only to adapt in the new environment but also to have a positive experience, advance the language skills and make the most out of the mobility experience. Students described: “*...seize the day and welcome every new challenge (make new friends experience different approaches, food, weather, travel...) try to be open to new adventures and experiences*” (FG4-St. 1), “*Don’t stay behind, in case you don’t know well the language*” (FG5-St. 3), “*Try to get as much as more experiences of the local academic and professional environment (visiting schools, banks, networking with professionals and professors)*” (FG4-St. 4), “*Maximise the experience and if someone invites you to go and get to know the city, you should go even if you don’t feel like doing so*” (FG6-St. 4).

Regarding, more practical recommendations, some students acknowledged the important role of making a conscious choice of the country and the host university, as “*it affects your living costs and the type/quality of teaching/learning*” (FG4-St. 1). However, they all recommended that those who have decided on an Erasmus+ mobility should enjoy their experience wherever they will be selected. For instance, students stated that: “*the destination is not that relevant if you have an open mind*” (FG5-St. 1),

and “*you should try enjoying an Erasmus mobility regardless of whether you get the destination you wanted or not*” (FG4-St. 3).

Students also recommended attending social events organised by host universities, such as the welcome days and events organised by the library and sports clubs since it is “*a good way of networking with other Erasmus students and receiving useful help*” (FG5-St. 2). However, trying to meet native students and avoid being always with other Erasmus students is a good strategy for the improvement of language and social skills. Some students reflected: “*For sure attend the welcome days. I arrived later and most international students already knew each other*” (FG6-St. 3) and “*...I really wanted to learn Spanish, so I had a lot of Spanish friends, but if you are mainly interested in other Erasmus students, you have to make less effort. The recommendation is, if you are going there for the local language and put in a lot of effort, it won't happen automatically*” (FG4-St. 1). Additional suggestions refer to finding an apartment near the city or arranging to share a house with other Erasmus students, not forgetting though, important administrative procedures such as the learning agreements and the choice of courses. The results can be summarised in the following table.

**Table 5:** *Students' recommendations for prospective Erasmus+ students*

Erasmus students (already completed mobilities)
Regardless of the destination, having an open mind is crucial for a positive mobility experience.
Embracing new challenges, experiencing different aspects of the culture, and being open to new adventures.
Attending social events organised by the host university helps with networking and support.
Meeting people from the host country and other Erasmus students helps to adapt.
Meeting native students helps with improving social skills and overcoming language barriers.
Engaging with the local academic and professional environment for a richer experience.
Paying attention to important administrative procedures such as learning agreements and course choices.
The choice of the country and host university impacts living costs and the quality of education.
Finding accommodation near the city or sharing a house with other Erasmus students.

#### 4. Discussion

Overall, the results of the present study suggest that the university students' views are generally aligned with the objectives of Erasmus+ learning mobilities and the wider

goals of the Erasmus+ programme. However, some interesting findings provide additional perspectives and insights based on the different focus groups (before and after mobility).

Regarding the purpose of the Erasmus+ programme, both prospective students and students who have already participated in Erasmus+ mobility for studies, highlighted acquiring intercultural awareness, fostering a sense of European belonging, and developing or improving language skills. Participants also viewed the program as an opportunity to compare different academic environments and teaching methods, enhancing their studies. Moreover, the Erasmus+ mobility was seen as a catalyst for personal growth, encouraging participants to become more independent, step out of their comfort zones, and interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. However, in terms of regional responses, some differentiations are evident in the after-mobility focus groups; namely, students of Southern Europe (in this case from Greece and Spain) laid more emphasis on aspects related to their personal and career development, while students from Western Europe (in this case from Belgium) highlighted the academic impact of the mobility experience. Some indicative areas included proactive exposure to multicultural settings that can prepare them for working and living abroad in the future, as well as that the international experience would positively impact their careers and boost their self-confidence. This finding is in line with the results of the 2016 regional report which concluded that Erasmus students coming from Southern Europe have the highest motives in comparison to all other regions (Northern, Western, Eastern) concerning the development of language and soft skills, as well as regarding the enhancement of career prospects abroad (European Commission; CHE Consult, 2016). Furthermore, the Erasmus+ mobility experience was also found to contribute to the development of a common European identity, as it encourages respect for others, diversity, and coexistence while preserving one's own cultural identity. However, a distinctive finding emerged from the discourse of Greek students, who reported feeling less European after their mobility experience. For them, the program highlighted the differences between their own culture and others rather than promoting a sense of commonality. This finding seems to be in contrast with the Erasmus+ HE impact study (European Commission; ICF Consulting; CHE Consult, 2019) indicating that future research could further explore this aspect.

About the competences gained or expected to be gained from learning mobility, the university students made explicit references to the wide range of competences

referred to in other studies and reports such as intercultural competence (Marcotte, Desroches & Poupart, 2007; European Commission, 2010; Engel, 2010; Opengart, 2018), linguistic competence (Jacobone & Moro, 2015), and the cultural awareness and expression competence (Council of Europe, 2018; Tran, Phan & Bellgrove, 2021). Concerning intercultural competence, the current study further supports the literature consensus that mobility programmes, regardless of their duration, improve participants' intercultural competence with a long-lasting effect (Tannous, Gaffney & Prasad, 2023).

Additionally, students either expected to gain or stated that they have already gained valuable skills that (will) contribute to their future life/career (i.e. communication, time management, flexibility, and organizational skills, living and working abroad in multicultural settings) (European Commission; CHE Consult, 2016; Di Pietro, 2019) and communication skills, such as expressing their ideas and opinions in another language, interacting with other people and working in groups (Bracht, Engel, Janson, Over, Schomburg & Teichler, 2006). Overall, it is evident that the mobility experience requires students to deal with diverse challenges and opportunities, conditions which cultivate and/or improve their adaptability to new circumstances (Perez-Encinas, Rodriguez-Pomeda & de Wit, 2020) as well as their generic competences, thus, contributing to a proactive preparation for future life-career situations (Dvir & Yemini, 2017).

Furthermore, prospective Erasmus students are looking forward to experiencing new teaching methods in their study discipline, a motive which is also reported by the Erasmus+ HE impact study (European Commission; ICF Consulting; CHE Consult, 2019). Nevertheless, an additional feature that emerged from students' experience refers to global competence, "*the capacity [of the individual] to examine local, global and intercultural issues....*" (OECD, 2018: 7). The latter has been reflected in students' discourse mostly in terms of becoming aware and more sensitive on the social and political conditions that exist in the host countries, including the way of life, the medical system, history, politics, as well as aspects that are associated with ecology, feminism and religion; in this regard, Marcotte, Desroches and Poupart (2007: 656) highlight that "*the experience of living and studying in a different cultural, political and economic context exposes students to "best practices" in other countries and better prepares them for their future careers*". Several students also reported changes in their consuming and monetary behaviour after the completion of the Erasmus+ mobility program, while the



Greek students made an additional reference to their appreciation regarding the privilege of not paying tuition fees in the Greek HE institutions.

The impact of learning mobility on students' employability has been either explicitly reported or implicitly mentioned by students while discussing the competences gained or expected to be gained. This finding indicates the interconnection of competences and employability that may function as a bridge in terms of demystifying the content of competences and bridging the gap between higher education and labour markets. This is particularly important considering that international experiences are valued by employers, only when graduates can practically apply the competences acquired during their daily work (Predovic & Dennis, 2019). Based on the results of the present study, students claimed that their self-confidence and self-acceptance were enhanced, benefits that assisted them in the process of job search, while similar findings have been also reported by other researchers (Dolga, Filipescu, Popescu-Mitroi & Mazilescua, 2015; Gallarza, Fayos, Currás, Servera & Arteaga, 2019; Álamo-Vera, Hernández-López, Ballesteros-Rodríguez & De Saá-Pérez, 2020). Moreover, Erasmus+ has been perceived as an important factor in future career planning, since it may constitute an asset in comparison to non-mobile students, a statement confirmed in the VALERA study (Bracht, Engel, Janson, Over, Schomburg & Teichler, 2006) and may be perceived positively by potential employers (Engel, 2011). The participants of the "after mobility" focus groups echoed similar sentiments, noting the programme's positive impact on their employability, particularly in terms of adaptability, language skills, teamwork, problem-solving, and communication skills. Some students, however, were uncertain about the direct impact on their career prospects in their home country, but they recognised the indirect positive influence on their academic interests and future career goals, which might involve further studies or pursuing opportunities abroad.

Considering that institutional support affects the quality of the mobility experience (European Commission; ICF Consulting; CHE Consult, 2019), the study also attempted to explore students' views on the recommendations that they would provide. In that sense, students' suggestions may be reversely translated into their concerns and perceived difficulties. The prospective students mainly proposed easier access to information and communication with the receiving institution/coordinator/tutor, as well as support and guidance for preparation, accommodation, administrative matters, recommendations also included in the

VALERA study (Bracht, Engel, Janson, Over, Schomburg & Teichler, 2006). On the other hand, students who have already benefited from a learning mobility experience provided more concrete suggestions (see Table 4). Even though, institutional support has improved since 2014 (European Commission; ICF Consulting; CHE Consult, 2019), the present study indicates that there is additional space for further improvement. Last but not least, Erasmus students provided some recommendations to prospective Erasmus students; those include the development of interpersonal relationships not only with Erasmus students but also with native people of the host country, the conscious choice of the host country and university, as well as various practical tips concerning the attendance of social events, accommodation and administrative processes related to their studies.

Finally, some of the limitations of the present exploratory study refer to the number and geographical allocation of the participants. However, the authors assume that it provides rather interesting findings that may be both of European and national interest. Regarding the latter, the study attempts to contribute to an initial mapping of outgoing mobility students' views on relevant topics, while it may also offer insights into national implications in terms of informing the policies designed and implemented by the HE institutions.

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