

## Internationalisation and Mobility Policy Paper

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Internationalisation can be seen as any internationally related policies from exchange programmes and language courses to activities to integrate international and mobile students with local students and cultures. The most visible and obvious activity of internationalisation is the international physical mobility of students, researchers, and staff, such as that provided by the Erasmus+ Programme. The rest of the international activities fall under internationalisation at home. By definition, parts of mobility and internationalisation at home overlap within the context of inbound mobility. Thus, the two cannot be entirely separated

and need to be seen under the larger umbrella of internationalisation.

## **INTERNATIONALISATION**

### **Definition and value**

Internationalisation can be a tool for achieving higher quality education, personal development and intercultural competencies of students, social cohesion and peaceful coexistence of people, as well as national and global sustainable development. It is important to keep in mind that internationalisation is a tool for increasing the added value of education, not an end in itself. Internationalisation must be seen as an integral part of education, not a standalone feature or source of profit. The demand for free education is bringing the direct need for it to open up and reflect on how knowledge is gathered, to widen and reflect the western-centric knowledge production with internationalisation.

In today's globalized world , the acquisition of intercultural competence, understanding, democratic values and skills, and language proficiency are crucial for building a harmonious society that accommodates individuals from diverse backgrounds. In order to ensure that higher education is globally inclusive and maintains high standards of teaching, learning, and research, it is essential for every academic institution to prioritize the creation of an international environment on their campus. Furthermore, governments and international organizations offering mobility programs should provide necessary measures and financial support to assist higher education institutions in achieving this goal. The role of students has taken on a notable importance in the European context, taking into account the Social Dimension and student participation as an engine of change and progress in Higher Education. For this reason, every student must have the chance to benefit from a diverse, cross-continental and cross-cultural internationalisation. To ensure the sustainability and quality of internationalisation, it must be seen as a cross-cutting theme and included in the curricula and learning outcomes for students. Moreover, the diversity of curricula in foreign languages should be designed and offered not only to incoming full or credit mobility students but also to domestic students. This process of creating an international environment must include student participation at every step of the way and shall fight against all types of discrimination at all institution levels.

Internationalisation and mobility should not be limited to Europe, rather there should be an aim for a global perspective. Global educational cooperation is fundamental for the quality of education and intercultural understanding of our societies. For example, when integrating international research into curricula, it is beneficial to include work from different areas of the world. In the same way, when European students engage in learning mobility, it is good that they have the

opportunity to do so outside of the borders of Europe. As well, European HEIs benefit from receiving students coming from outside the region. That's why ESU needs to maintain a close relationship with the Global Student Forum (GSF) and to contribute to their work with a European perspective to assure the opinions of European students are heard in global higher education fora.

## **Internationalisation at home**

Internationalisation at home is the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the curriculum within domestic learning environments, as well as any internationally related activity except for outbound mobility.

Higher education institutions should hire international teaching and research staff to provide a wider perspective on the subjects taught. This includes both recruiting permanent staff from abroad and staff exchanges between institutions. Mobility for staff should be promoted and valued as it contributes to a more international outlook within the institution, providing staff with relevant skills and experience needed for internationalisation at home and creating opportunities for further international cooperation for the students and institution. Furthermore, it also promotes the understanding of the added value of student mobility among the academic staff, thus can foster the promotion of mobility programs among students from the early stages of higher education. Higher education institutions must implement proper measures so that staff teaching in international programmes and/or courses have sufficient language, pedagogical and multicultural skills to ensure the quality of the courses and programmes. All types of staff should have the possibility of participating in staff exchange, regardless of position and social circumstances. Staff should be trained to work in an intercultural environment with mobile students, enabling the full inclusion of all students and staff in the day-to-day activities of the higher education institution. Programs providing funding for international exchange of staff should be strengthened, and barriers such as bureaucracy and restrictive migration policies should be removed. Knowledge and experiences acquired abroad by students and staff must be integrated upon return to the home institution, and their learning outcomes must be valued. Institutions have to be aware that internationalisation is more than changing the language of the program. It is also making sure that international students have equal opportunities to take part in the learning community. This, for instance, includes but is not limited to availability and diversity of housing, participation in representative bodies and student associations, on and off-campus student services, language courses, etc.

It is first and foremost up to HEIs to provide this crucial support, and they should not delegate such a task to other entities. Nevertheless, institutions should offer all the

necessary instruments and resources to foster the participation of student associations for the realization of this goal.

## **Transnational education, university networks, and joint degrees**

Through increased demand for international education, the establishment of transnational education, franchises, offshore campuses, university networks, and joint degree programmes are becoming ever more frequent. Transnational education should not be used for branding higher education institutions or seeking profit from such arrangements. Instead, transnational education should benefit the local community and the learning environment by providing students with opportunities for quality assured education and mobility, free of charge. International cooperation between institutions within and outside the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is one of the pillars underpinning the internationalisation of the Higher Education. This cooperation must be established on an equal footing, based on tolerance, mutual understanding and respect. Internationalisation, achieved through cooperation, brings a great benefit to society by making it more multicultural and multilingual, providing a different vision, as well as new ways of thinking, contributing to the improvement and advancement of society. This is why internationalisation must be accessible to everyone, regardless of their environment, status or socioeconomic class. To this end, international cooperation must be introduced in all areas of Higher Education. When higher education institutions collaborate internationally, such as on university networks, under legal statutes or joint degrees, this can be of great benefit to the learning and international outlook of students. However, the aim of such activities must be enhancing quality in an accessible way for the wider benefit of students, and not elitism or prestige. The funding of higher education networks under the Erasmus+ programme must not be allowed to lead to a reduction in the relative share of mobility-focused funding in the Erasmus budget. Funding for university networks must come primarily from the European level. It is the duty of the national governments and the international organisations to ensure that these collaborations are established to the benefit of the European Higher Education system by ensuring the inclusiveness of any proposed general scheme of transnational collaboration of HEIs, both towards the institutions themselves and the students involved. Physical mobility should be made accessible to all those enrolled in transnational activities. Proper quality assurance and feedback mechanisms must be ensured in these activities.

## **Students' role in internationalisation**

As the majority sector and main beneficiary of Higher Education, students should play a central role in the design and implementation of internationalisation strategies, as well as in the different mobility programmes, especially in the design of scholarships and grants and the requirements for their concession. They should also be involved in the decisions taken by authorities and institutions in the implementation of these strategies and measures. In the same way, for the construction and development of projects and programmes, institutions and governments should consult with the student representative bodies and student associations that develop their main activity around Higher Education or student mobility, involving them and raising the voice of the students, which will create a sense of belonging in the university community. In addition, the actual participation of international students in institutional governance and student self-governing structures should be enabled, actively promoted and equal opportunities created. ESU stresses that students' rights must remain at the core of the internationalisation process, and strong and democratic representation of students in the development of such activities must be ensured. Furthermore, effective student representation should be established whenever new governing structures are devised. In the event of the establishment of any deep, comprehensive or structural collaboration between HEIs, students should have the same rights regarding access, tuition fees and student welfare. For each of these rights, the minimum benchmark has to be set by the institution that has the highest standard. Institutions must set out a clear roadmap for this upward convergence on students' rights.

## **Internationalisation through digitalisation**

### Access to research and open educational resources

Resources from all over the world are essential for the quality of research outcomes, as well as for giving students and researchers a global perspective on their field. Therefore, higher education institutions and decision-makers should stand for making all research and educational resources open and freely available, for example by publishing in open-access journals. Research and educational resources should also be open, freely available, and presented in an understandable way to groups outside of academia. Internationally conducted research should be included in the curricula and teaching to enhance the learning experience, and students should be given free access to these resources. Furthermore, research cooperation brings new sources of information, insights,

news ways of thinking and resources from different parts of the world, all of which are essential for the quality of research results. Consideration should also be given to the inclusion of research in curricula and teaching, to enhance the learning experience of students in subjects or to include research mobility programmes to stimulate entrepreneurship, leadership and professional development. In addition, there is a need to strengthen research at the European level with increased funding from programs like HORIZON.

### Virtual international exchange

Virtual exchange is a form of online learning that has an integrated international and intercultural component. However, this is not mobility as it doesn't include physical movement abroad. Virtual education activities provided across countries can be used as a positive tool for increased internationalisation if the activities are of high quality. It is an add-on, not a replacement for physical mobility, as the international experience gained by mobile students can only be truly experienced in person. Therefore when counting participants in international mobility, participants in virtual activities should not be counted as mobile students but as another category, and funding for these activities should not be taken from the budgets for student mobility. ESU opposes with the notion that virtual international activities can be utilized as a means of increasing access to mobility opportunities for marginalized groups, or as a tool to meet mobility targets. Groups who are currently underrepresented should not be given virtual options as a "discount solution" to widening access - rather access to high-quality international education, including physical mobility, should be widened for all.

Virtual exchange should foster internationalisation and promote further physical mobility of the whole student body, especially targeting those students who were not originally eager to engage in mobility. It should also be used to encourage the exchange of students who cannot or do not want to be mobile because of their socio-cultural background and status, disabilities and chronic diseases, family and parental obligations, financial issues or language proficiency. Furthermore, new competencies such as digital communication skills, flexibility, teamwork and creativity must be given an especially strong boost. However, participation in virtual exchange should be an option and not an unavoidable choice. Virtual exchange programs require the allocation of adequate resources to ensure the quality of offered courses, provide necessary online infrastructure, training for academic staff to create and facilitate virtual exchange, etc. Virtual exchange cannot be used as an instrument to avoid investing in physical mobility to make it more inclusive for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, as that would be at the expense of equality and the versatility of learning opportunities.

## Blended mobility

Blended learning is a deliberate combination of both physical and online learning activities, based on educational design. This can go in two directions: a predominant physical course, supported by online learning, or a predominant online course supported by physical learning (e.g. at the start or the end of a one-year online project or seminar). However, we must not forget that the quality of online learning must be guaranteed at all times, and the learning outcomes of it must be comparable to those of physical learning.

Blended mobility programs can be especially interesting as a way to attract students to international student mobility in the first years of the degree, increasing their participation in long-term physical mobility later in their studies. However, they should not be seen as the only option for students who tend to participate less in mobility due to personal reasons, since it is important to develop proper strategies to incorporate those students into long-term mobility as well. Blended mobility cannot be used to cover for lack of funding for mobility and should ensure that students participating in virtual learning activities are given equal opportunities for participation.

Participants in blended programmes need specific support provided both by the sending and the hosting institutions in aspects such as accommodation and initial integration into the host institution and local community. Students who participate in physical mobility for a short time are likely to struggle to find accommodation and receive all the needed information to take the most out of their mobility.

## LEARNING MOBILITY

### Definition and values

ESU defines international **learning mobility (hereinafter mobility)** as any activity where learners or educators physically go to another country for the purpose of learning, teaching, or research activities.

A mobile student, educator or staff can be defined as an individual who participates in an organised exchange for a specific amount of time, usually as part of an exchange programme. An international student, educator or staff can be defined as an individual who goes abroad for learning or teaching purposes, regardless of whether it is as part of an exchange programme or not.

The purposes of mobility should be the improvement of education quality by increasing international outlook and circulating knowledge, as well as building intercultural understanding, independence, and transversal skills in students. However, some higher education institutions see the value of mobility to rather be a way of promoting themselves in a global competition or making a profit from international students. When economic reasons steer the internationalisation of higher education with the objective of making a profit, higher education institutions focus on attracting fee-paying students and establishing franchises. There is a danger that only economically exploitable and financially profitable programmes will thrive, leading to certain countries or regions receiving more attention at the expense of quality in education, students rights, and the fundamental values and other regions.

### Financing

Representation, inclusion and involvement of international students must be ensured within the higher education community. To avoid credit mobility becoming the privilege of a few students with a good financial situation, mobility must be financially supported. Financing is still the main obstacle for students to be mobile. Student grants must be sufficient to cover costs directly associated with mobility period - travel costs, living cost (accommodation, meals, public transportation, etc.), and learning materials and activities, as well as paid out in a timely manner to support the costs students are incurring pre-departure, such as deposit payments for accommodation, travel costs, insurance, etc. Grant calculation schemes need to take into consideration the living costs in the host country and city to allow for more inclusive and targeted financial support for mobile students. Furthermore, grant amounts need to be reviewed regularly and the inflation rate needs to be taken into consideration when adjusting the grant amounts in order to



remain coherent with the current cost of living of the host country. Underrepresented groups often face additional barriers to accessing mobility periods, including financial obstacles. Therefore, it is important that grants and financial aid are designed to provide more support to these groups. Grants should be portable and universal, meaning they should be available to all students regardless of their background or circumstances. The grant amount should also be sufficient to cover all costs associated with higher education, especially for underrepresented groups who may require additional resources to overcome financial challenges. In order to make mobility periods more accessible, it is also important that the calls and respective results for participating in these experiences are published on time, so that every student can have the appropriate amount of time to properly organize their mobility period. The national agencies are responsible for the implementation of these adjustments. Grants should be topped with structural and institutional financing to ensure that no barriers are created at any point of the mobility period. Travelling to home countries for major family events, holidays, or other life events can be economically challenging for students engaging in learning mobility. In the same way, having to travel to their home or host countries given exams or other academic tasks can also be an economic issue. Funding or other initiatives for lowering these burdens should be encouraged. Daily transportation needs in the host country should ideally be free for all students. In case it is not, a transportation pass should be provided for international students at the same price as for local students, and it should cover the entire mobility period. A financially supported mobility also means equal chances in access to higher education regarding tuition fees. That is why HEIs and governments have to ensure that no discrimination ensues between EU students and non-EU students in regards to tuition fees.

It is important that substantial public funding is set to achieve the goal of wide access to high-quality mobility. On the European level, funding for education within the Multiannual Financial Framework should be increased so that the funding allows for a realistic realisation of the set goals. This entails promoting and supporting individual mobility, providing capacity building opportunities for all levels and stakeholders involved in education and safeguarding the functioning of international organisations.

Moreover, during the renewal period of financial instruments for mobility, consideration must be given to the transition from one to another to ensure predictable, stable or increased funding for student grants – both in the terms of grant amounts and number of available grants, and to avoid sudden budgetary decrease. There needs to be a sustainable mechanism to help the sending and host institutions to assure students can participate in the mobility programs on equal terms as their peers, especially when it comes to access to available

financial support without depriving the funding provider's budget of its flexibility. Countries are responsible for providing portable grants. Financial support for mobility should be a universal right and neither restricted based on political decisions nor on merit nor parental income of the student nor based on work placements a student might take while on a mobility. While working towards portable grants in all countries should be the first priority, destination countries should also be encouraged to devise scholarship schemes for international students.

In terms of access to EU-funded learning mobility programs, the advocacy towards decoupling most political and economic issues from education is crucial. Gross violations of international law and human rights naturally constitute an exception to this principle. The governments and the European Commission should constructively work on common solutions for enabling access to Erasmus+ program. The integration of the countries from Region 14<sup>1</sup> represents an extension of opportunities for young Europeans since they are offering a diversified range of learning and cultural experiences and help strengthen the European identity. The current lack of access to the Erasmus+ programme puts them at a disadvantage, especially in regards to the financial aid available for mobility. It is crucial to promote mobility between Europe and the rest of the world without forgetting the immediate neighbourhoods which are not included for political reasons. That is why Erasmus+ mobility programme needs to be decoupled from non-related political negotiations in order to safeguard the student' interests and a strong European education sector.

## **Information provision**

A prerequisite for making an informed choice of study destination is the transparent and comprehensive provision of information on the rights and opportunities of mobile students. Equal and balanced information provision from and for all parts of Europe should be provided regardless of the students' nationality and country of origin.

ESU stresses that the marketing of study programmes, research and labour opportunities must be factual and accessible, and must not be profit-seeking. Rather than prioritising the marketing or recruiting processes, priority should be given to improving the conditions for applicants and the quality and availability of information on study programmes and opportunities. Higher education institutions, career centers and/or employment offices should assist international students by offering career counselling and providing information on employment

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<sup>1</sup> <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-a/eligible-countries>

opportunities, legal rights and duties.

Currently, there is a lack of transparency and dissemination of information about the rights of international students and the support opportunities for students facing accessibility barriers. This must be improved through dialogue between education institutions and other responsible bodies between the sending and hosting countries, involving students previously engaged in international experiences and student representatives, and through the introduction of online tools for informing the potentially mobile students.

When deciding on participation in credit mobility and choosing the host institution, students need clear and readily available information on the financial support they would be receiving, including eligibility criteria for additional support for students from marginalised groups and students with caring responsibilities, green travel top-ups, government grants, etc., as well as information regarding the timeline for receiving the grants. In addition to other means of disseminating information, efforts should be made to develop and increase peer-to-peer information.

## **Information exchange**

To assure access to mobility programs, simplify the administrative procedures and increase efficiency, bureaucratic obstacles need to be eliminated and information exchange between home and host institutions automated, removing the necessity for manual input of data when possible. Much faster information exchange can be ensured via an online platform, providing the host institution with student data directly, removing the need for the student to resubmit the application. Interoperability between the different information systems should be prioritized over creating new administrative structures. The online platform would also enable students, teachers, and institutions to manage and share academic data and documents, such as transcripts, diplomas, and learning agreements, securely and electronically. This will eliminate the need for paper-based documents and administrative procedures, such as sending documents by post, and will reduce the administrative burden for students and institutions.

## **Quality and recognition**

Possibilities for mobility should be offered in all education types and all cycles, whether in the form of an exchange, full-degree mobility, short-term courses, or internships. The quality of learning in these mobilities should be properly ensured and not sacrificed with the excuse of an enriching intercultural experience.

International students must have the same rights regardless of the type of mobility they engage in – for example, no services should be exclusively reserved for full-degree students. The quality of international internships must be ensured, with a focus on learning, adequate supervision, and workload measured in ECTS. Student representatives should be included in the administration and development of all mobility programmes as well as the designing of new programmes and initiatives at all levels. Measures must be taken; to properly prepare students for their mobility periods, to provide support throughout, as well as to guarantee the reintegration of students returning from a stay abroad. This includes high-quality study guidance which should be person-centered and adapted for specific necessities, for example, through tutoring and the presence of study supervisors. The expertise students gain from having spent time abroad should be taken into account in the design, development and implementation of the programmes. Student feedback should be used to improve the quality of mobility periods and provide a reference point for students considering going abroad. Recognition of prior learning must be in place across the EHEA and should be beyond, to ensure all students get equal access to the programmes they have the necessary knowledge and competencies for. Procedures to identify if specific courses and education activities are comparable between two education institutions should be transparent and user-friendly to enable students to fill their education with the components they wish, and to avoid students ending in the situation of not being able to get all the learning recognized they achieved during mobility.

There need to be mechanisms in place assuring that the study courses and education activities chosen for the mobility period abroad are the ones the student undertakes, eliminating the possibilities of partial or full non-recognition of the mobility period when returning to the home institution. Not having all mobility periods recognised upon return can have negative long-term impacts, such as prolonged study time, loss of financial aid, etc.

Additionally, to avoid study delay, study programmes should be flexible enough to make mobility periods possible. And at the same time, when designing the curricula, mobility windows need to be considered, to assure students have the possibility to flexibly choose when to engage in learning mobility. HEIs should also have a system in place to issue required temporary documents for students to meet the application deadlines of the HEI abroad, if these deadlines require an application before finishing the ongoing degree program. There should also be recognition of the informal learning students get from mobility. Including learning outcomes related to intercultural understanding and communication in the curricula, and giving ECTS for it, should be encouraged. However, it should be voluntary for students whether they wish to count such learning outcomes within the ECTS they collect after a mobility period.

## **Language learning**

Learning through another language than the student's first language makes mobility an academically and culturally enriching experience, contributing to better integration in the hosting institution and country, and to students becoming responsible and active global citizens. The resources for tuition-free language courses of the destination country must be ensured, also taking into account students with special needs. Language courses that are not part of the curriculum should always be voluntary.

Free language courses can also be provided at the home institution prior to the mobility period to secure a sufficiently high level of both general and academic language knowledge to learn through a given language. In the event that language courses of the study programme in the destination country are not offered for free, these should be paid by the student's home institution or country. Institutions' multilingualism policies should address students' knowledge and competences, provide accessible materials, and address the needs and capabilities of students to actively participate in society. Hence, decreasing language barriers, for example, by making translations of meetings available for international students, can be a first step to enable them to participate at an equal level with local ones. Learning and teaching in languages other than the student's first language should be supplemented by courses emphasising academic language and intercultural communication. Free language courses must be offered to both exchange students and full degree students and should be provided to such an extent that will enable full participation in society. Such courses must also be available for all national students who wish to participate, such as refugees and migrants, to ensure equal access to education and mobility. This should include preparatory courses before entry to education as well as continuing access to language courses throughout their education. Language courses should also be freely available for students who speak sign language, so they can become confident in international sign languages as well as the sign language of the hosting institution. When it comes to the assessment of language skills and competence in higher education, existing measures should be supplemented by measures assessing students' knowledge of language in their specific subject area in order to provide a more genuine outline of language learning outcomes.

## **Visas, permits and workers' rights**

Free movement must be ensured for students, teachers, staff and researchers undertaking stays for either study, educational training or research respectively.

Bureaucracy and inconsistency in the provision of student visas and residency permits constitute barriers for both short and long-term mobility and for the integration and employment opportunities of international students. Getting visas and permits should be made as easy as possible for students. The procedures for getting student visas should be made to fit the procedures of getting admission to the education institution, to ensure that students will receive their visas in due time. ESU is therefore in favour of regulations on how quickly visa applicants must receive a reply on their applications. Getting visas should be an inclusive process. Therefore, age limits for fee waivers for visas should be raised, application forms should be gender-sensitive, offices for handling visa-applications should be designed in an accessible way, and procedures should be in place to make it easy to apply for visas no matter where you are located.

ESU suggests using all EU member state embassies as the visa contact point for a visa to any EU member state on the contrary to the current procedures demanding to acquire the visa at the country embassy where the intended stay is expected for the longest period. Digitalisation becomes a substantial part of visa policy modernisation, therefore online uploading of supporting documents and tracking of the visa application status should be secured. The online tools used for visa processes should be accessible, based on universal design principles, and easy to use. All documents and websites needed for visa and permit application processes should be available in all official European languages, and staff should have good communication skills in the languages that are used in the international context. All costs for students related to visa procedures, such as travelling to embassies, documents preparation, translations costs, financial statements obligations, proofs of savings for the entire period of stay and finally the visa fee, are all negatively affecting study accessibility. ESU calls for fees on student visas and permits to be abolished. This includes free applications for work-permits all students regardless of EU citizenship status. Visas should be valid for the entire duration of the study program plus some time before and after to give the student time to move and adjust to the new country before beginning the study, and to start applying for jobs after graduation if they wish to stay.

Furthermore, graduates should have a fair and accessible chance to expand their visa indefinitely to remain in the country after graduation. It should not be necessary to renew the student visa every year. Students should be allowed to work on the side of the studies to the same extent as national students, and there should not be any limit on the number of work hours that does not exist for students in general. Students from all countries regardless of their citizenship status should be granted the right to work and study in the hosting country on the same level as domestic students, even if we do not consider that students should have to work during their study period. International students should have access

to the same rights as other citizens, including the right to protest and strike.

The procedures to recognise one's refugee status are extremely time-consuming and they affect people's right to live normally and safely. They affect refugees' rights to education. Not only do these procedures have to be shortened and simplified, but it is also urgent that Higher Education Institutions can accept asylum seekers as students even during the waiting period. Similarly, it is important to protect migrants' and refugees' rights and allow them to quickly apply for a visa and engage in international mobility, thus being able to study and work with the same rights as every other student. Regardless of their employment status or EU citizenship status, all students should maintain the same rights as nationals within that country with respect to the access to and supply of goods and services made available to the public.

### **Access, support, and equality**

ESU demands equal access to knowledge and education for all. This also includes student mobility. ESU is against tuition fees and other extra costs imposed on international students, regardless of EU citizenship status. ESU condemns the discrimination, stereotyping, and negative rhetoric international students face. All students should have the possibility to be mobile while they should also be free to choose not to be mobile, without any negative consequences on their education. For example, international mobility periods cannot be a prerequisite for receiving a qualification.

The mobile student population should reflect the diversity of the population. Governments and higher education institutions should conduct research on the barriers non-mobile and underrepresented groups face. Mobility programs must oppose inequalities. Therefore special programs and funding for students facing all types of discrimination as stated by international law guaranteed by the United Nations, prohibited the article 21 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the ESU's Students Right Charter need to be established, and HEIs should be given additional funding to provide suitable access for those groups. In order to make mobility a real opportunity for all, governments and higher education institutions need to take measures for widening access for all, in addition to taking a comprehensive approach to dismantling existing barriers to mobility. In order to increase the participation of underrepresented student groups such as students with disabilities, students with caring responsibilities, from remote rural areas and students from disadvantaged or lower socio-economic backgrounds, adequate support measures and resources must be put in place, and students must be well informed about their opportunities for going abroad and their opportunities for

getting support.

Measures should also be taken to make mobility programs accessible to participate in for all institution types, not only wealthy or prestigious institutions. All students, regardless of the length of the stay, must be guaranteed equal access to all the student support services of the hosting countries and institutions, including health care, student grants and child care services. Guaranteeing equal access to healthcare for international students is a duty of every government, especially when new policies are developed that involve the entire population, as was the case during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, when it is requested to fulfill new health regulations, international students should have the possibility to have access to the healthcare system without paying any additional fee. HEIs have a responsibility to ensure that international or mobile students are aware of any new health regulations and are not left behind when they need to rely on the healthcare system. The need for mental health support needs to be acknowledged and taken into account to ensure that all students in need of counselling and therapy get access to them, whatever boundary conditions they are facing; this includes access to information, raising awareness and funding, and counselling and therapy offered during mobility periods.

The needs of international students should be catered for by ensuring that staff have relevant expertise and language skills to provide such services. The specific needs of students with disabilities must be taken into account by governments, higher education institutions and student unions, as lack of support for students with disabilities during the stay abroad creates a barrier to participation and at present results in students with disabilities being severely underrepresented in mobility. Therefore, mobility grants should also cover the extra expenses related to having a disability or illness.

Transparent and accessible information should be available online about the accessibility of education institutions and student housing, so international students can be well-informed when choosing where to go abroad. This information should include for example accessibility for students with disabilities, the gender-sensitivity of facilities, and the possibilities to freely practice religion on campus. Ensuring a certain level of accessibility should be a prerequisite for an institution being allowed to participate in the Erasmus program. Ministries or agencies should give targeted support to institutions which can't currently provide the required level of accessibility.

Governments, higher education institutions, and municipalities must guarantee affordable, quality accommodation for incoming students so that housing does not become a barrier. International students are more vulnerable to exploitation in the housing market because they often lack a network and an understanding of



the hosting country's housing laws. Measures should be in place to prevent discrimination of international students by all types of housing providers, as well as to provide international students with information about their rights in the housing market to prevent fraud. The hosting HEIs have a special responsibility in supporting every international student in finding an accommodation that will allow them to start their mobility period and learning path on time and in an adequate condition. Policies affecting the rental market should take into account their effect on housing accessibility for mobile students as well as students with diverse needs in terms of for example family situation or the need for physical accessibility.

Lastly, incoming international students should be clearly informed of the risk of running into housing scams and preventative measures should be taken by hosting institutions in places where this exists, particularly where there is a housing shortage.

## **Balanced mobility**

Mobility of students and staff benefits both sending and hosting institutions by circulating knowledge and exposing students to different cultures. Hosting countries also benefit by spreading an understanding of their culture to the home countries of the visiting students, as well as increasing the cultural diversity in their workforce through those international students who choose to stay after graduation. These benefits should be equally distributed between countries, and brain drain should be avoided, rather brain circulation should be made attractive and accessible. Degree mobility schemes that allow joint programmes between traditionally sending and traditionally receiving countries can help both as retention mechanisms and as brain circulation schemes.

Unbalanced mobility where some countries receive many more students than others can be a sign of barriers in the mobility system. This could, for example, be in the form of prejudice, lack of opportunities for language learning, or insufficient financial support. Therefore, when unbalanced mobility is observed, it should be taken seriously, and the underlying reasons should be addressed. The solution to brain drain is not to make quotas for how many people should be sent between countries, the solution is rather to address the underlying reasons why the mobility may currently be unbalanced.

## **Green mobility**

Higher education plays an important role in securing sustainable societies and solving the climate crisis. Mobility schemes and programs also need to reflect this.

Making sure that transportation options to the host country from the home country are sustainable must be a priority already in the strategic designing of mobility schemes and programs. Green or sustainable modes of transportation – especially trains – should be promoted, and special grants to cover additional expenses of choosing green or carbon-compensated options over traditional modes of transportation should be made available to all mobility staff and students. Guidance on all aspects of sustainable travel (transportation, packing etc.) and living (accommodation, taking advantage of sustainable opportunities and practices in the host country) should be made available to staff and students. At the same time, this should not mean that students' opportunity to take part in mobility would be impacted if there are no sustainable travel or accommodation options available.