

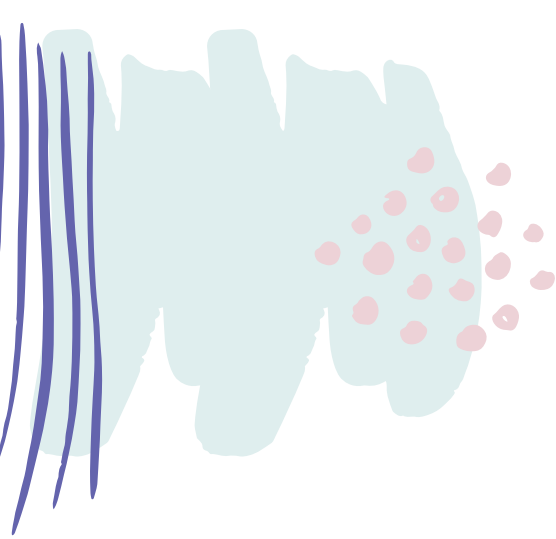


2020

**COVID-19
IMPACT ON
ERASMUS+
ICM
STUDENTS
FROM AND TO
ARMENIA**

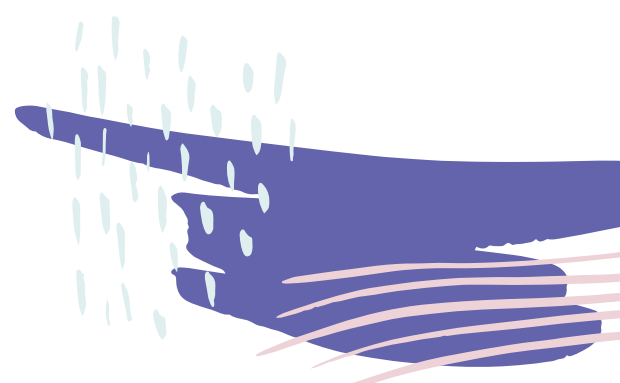
PREPARED BY

**ERASMUS STUDENT NETWORK
YEREVAN CS**



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Title: COVID-19 Impact on Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility Students from and to Armenia

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We are Erasmus Student Network (ESN) Yerevan CS by a non-profit international student organisation ESN International.

By joining an international network, we can build a stronger connection between Armenian and international students, simultaneously making the life of incoming students to Armenia easier. Thus, we aim to engage and support students participating in Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility Projects.

Although our initiative was launched in January 2020, we have succeeded to have National Erasmus+ Office (NEO) in Armenia as key strategic partner since first online partnership meeting and to build relationship with International Relations Offices (IROs) of higher education institutions across Armenia. Due to pandemic we are communicating via social media platforms, such as Facebook group of Erasmus+ and International Exchange Students.

Our team expresses gratitude to NEO in Armenia and partner IROs of the universities in Armenia for supporting us in promoting the survey among the international students across Europe and Armenia, providing feedback in order to have this report and, particularly, the students who, despite the unprecedented situation answered the questionnaire.

The survey team would like to assure that we will put every possible efforts to make life of international students easier.



ERASMUS+ AND
INTERNATIONAL
EXCHANGE STUDENTS

SUMMARY

This report was based on main challenges faced during Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility (ICM) both by outgoing from Armenia and incoming to Armenia in the light of COVID-19 pandemic.

As a result of the survey, more than half of the students faced major issues related to their exchange amid the pandemic.

The common issue was associated with the problems of transportation to return to home country, as well as problems with financial restrictions and the existence of supporting structures.

Consequently, a number of problems were identified and relevant suggestions were outlined to the respective parties. In this uncertain situation our team is eager to be the supportive hand for the international students.



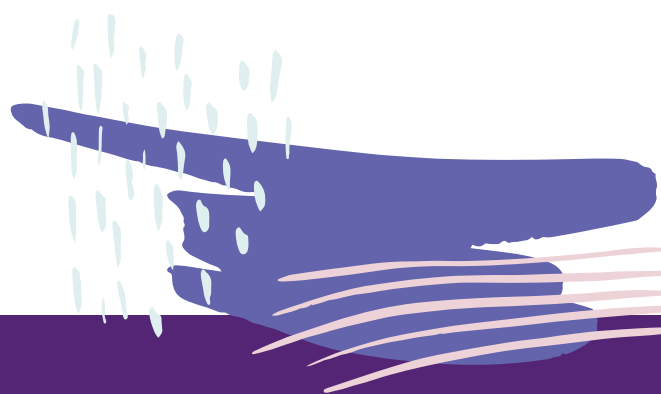
STUDY BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 crisis has disrupted nearly every aspect of the education system, especially on international academic mobility worldwide. According to UNESCO, on 1 April 2020, schools and higher education institutions (HEIs) were closed in 185 countries, affecting 1.542.412.000 learners, which constitute 89.4% of total enrolled learners.

According to the European Parliament the COVID-19 pandemic has also affected the 170.000 international students across the world involved in Erasmus+ or the European Solidarity Corps.

The pandemic has affected educational systems worldwide, leading to a near-total closures of schools, universities and colleges. Most governments around the world have temporarily closed educational institutions in an attempt to contain the spread of COVID-19.

As a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, the Government of the Republic of Armenia declared a State of Emergency on March 16, 2020. Actions included closure of schools and universities (which transformed education into online mode) prohibition of events with more than five persons in attendance, lockdown, as well as restriction of entry into and exit from the Republic of Armenia.



MAIN FINDINGS

As there was little representation of the Erasmus+ students from and to Armenia in the report conducted by the ESN international, our team has decided to launch a survey to identify the student status and collect data evidence to provide Erasmus+ students with better support.

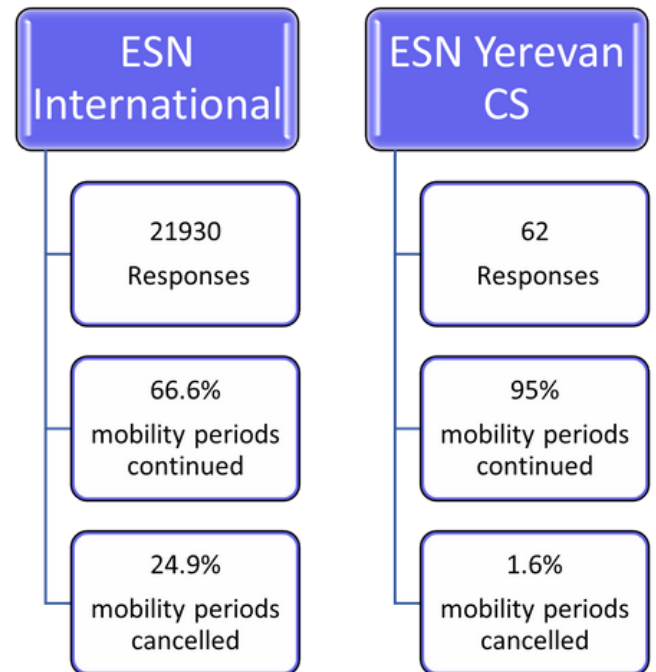


Figure 1. ESN International and ESN Yerevan CS study main findings

Our survey shows that over **84%** of respondents stayed in the host country, respectively, **16%** came back to home countries (Armenia and Italy).

According to **80.6%** respondents, they have experienced online mobility and **11.3%** have moved to blended classes with face to face meetings.

Close to **89%** of the students reported that they got some form of support from their host universities and **67.7%** said that the support was provided by the home universities.

We are happy to find out that **79%** of students had the opportunity to fully keep Erasmus+ scholarship, meanwhile **14.5%** has not received any information yet.



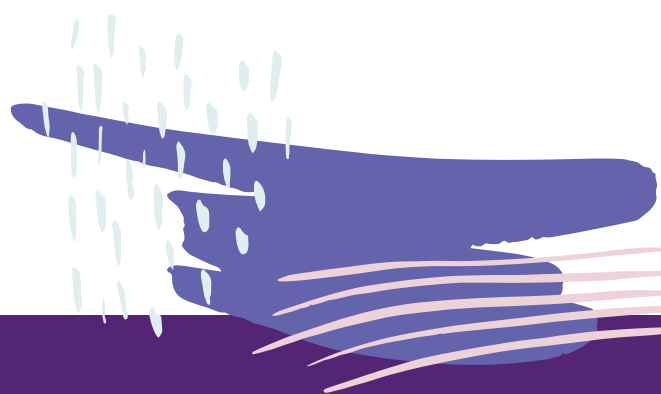
METHODOLOGY

According to the information provided to NEO Armenia by the IROs, the overall number of exchange students was approximately 90 in Spring 2020. Our survey collected data from 62 students (70%) within period of 2-20 June, 2020.

One of the key questions was to identify the physical location of students, who returned to home country or stayed in the host country. Then, which learning mode was offered and which support was provided. Last but not least, we aimed to identify difficulties, including issues with Erasmus+ scholarship and with the help of which support structures they overcame it.

So far, we have conducted a survey analysis of needs and challenges of Erasmus+ students, hence this report will be disseminated through relevant stakeholders and authorities.

Our survey included mainly closed questions with multiple choices and used rating scales. We also utilized open-ended questions in the “Other” section to provide space for students to respond in detail on key issues to show qualitative results. During the promotion of the survey we have been approached by Erasmus+ students in abroad requesting information. Hence, we could consult with them to collect personal stories and discuss particularly sensitive topics.



SURVEY RESULTS

Our team has conducted this survey with the purpose of enhancing the quality of Erasmus+ ICM in general and in particular in the times of crisis. We find this survey results helpful for the Armenian higher education institutions interested in getting mobility projects through Erasmus+ KA1 Mobility.

As for May-June 2020, we succeeded to reach out to 70% of the Erasmus+ students, both outgoing (98.4%) who were exchanged from Armenia to abroad and only one (1.6%) incoming from abroad to Armenia (Figure 2).

Based on the [national statistics](#) of planned Erasmus+ ICM numbers for Armenia, the number of Erasmus+ outgoing students have always exceeded the number of incoming ones.

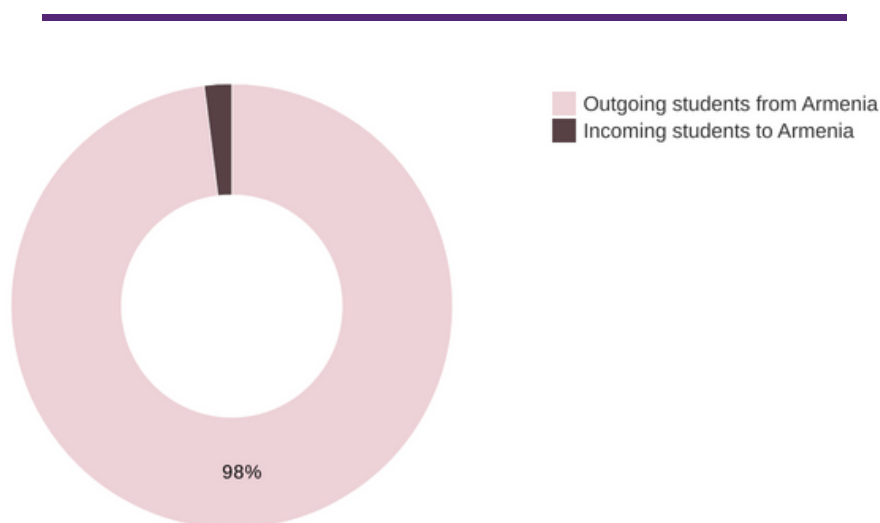


Figure 2. The portion of incoming and outgoing students

Figure 3 shows that the vast majority of 62 responded students from 14 public, private and intergovernmental higher education institutions were pursuing their bachelor's degree (53%), followed by master's degree (39%) and PHD (8%) within Erasmus+ ICM.

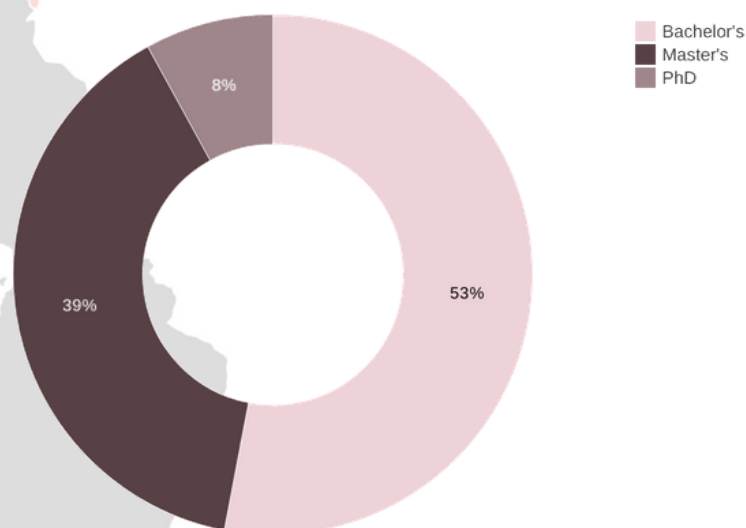


Figure 3. Respondents' educational degree

Table 1 (Annex 1) reveals that over half of the respondents (54.8%) were students of state(public) universities in Armenia. Apparently, we have had contribution of the 13 universities in Armenia and 1 university in Italy to the promotion and completion of the survey.

According to the received data in Table 2 (Annex 2), more than 27% of students studied in 8 cities of Spain, about 13% in 6 cities of Poland, 8% in 4 cities of Italy, and the rest in other European countries (Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Belgium, Greece, France, Norway, Portugal, Armenia, Sweden, Lithuania, Croatia, Czech Republic, Cyprus).

We find that Erasmus+ students can be more united if they are situated in close cities in emergency situations. This is especially important in terms of their return, as the large number of students may collectively contribute to the effective organization of flights.

Spain, being a preferred country of the largest number outgoing students from Armenia, has less Armenian representatives terms of Embassy or Consulate.

Based on the national statistics of planned Erasmus+ ICM numbers for Armenia, Spain is the preferable mobility destination and there are also many agreements with Polish Universities.

THE IMPACT ON THE EXCHANGE PROCESS

In the purpose of finding out the real impact of COVID-19 on continuation of Erasmus+ KA107, it is essential to understand what changes have been made to the mobility period, whether they have continued as a normal process or stopped.

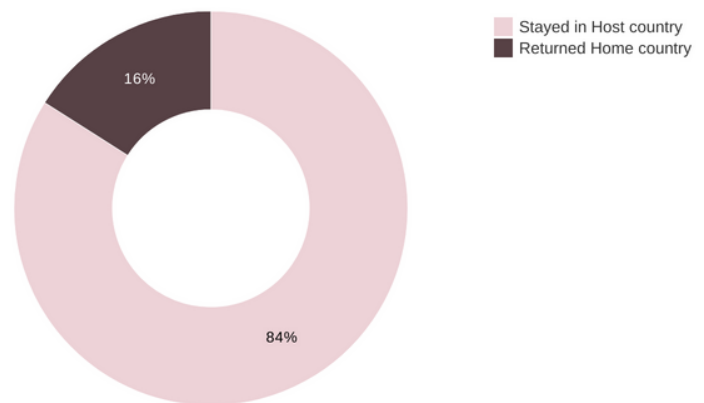


Figure 4. Respondents' physical location during the pandemic

Highlighting the need to identify the status of Erasmus+ students in this unprecedented situation, respondents were asked about their physical location during the pandemic. Figure 4 shows that 83.9% of them reported that they decided to stay in their host countries at the moment of completing the survey. On the other hand 16.1% returned home while doing their Erasmus+ ICM.

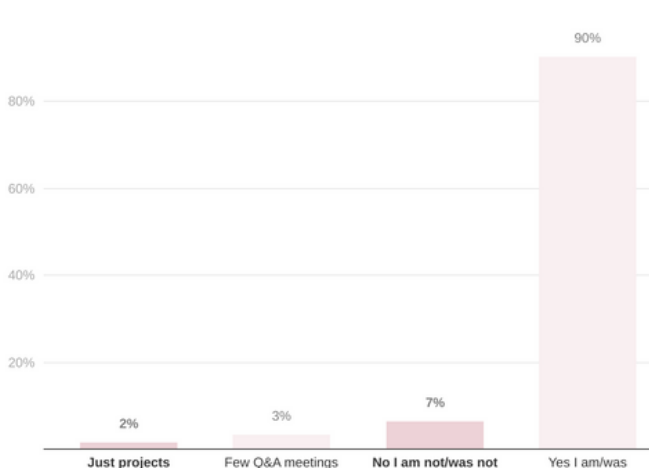


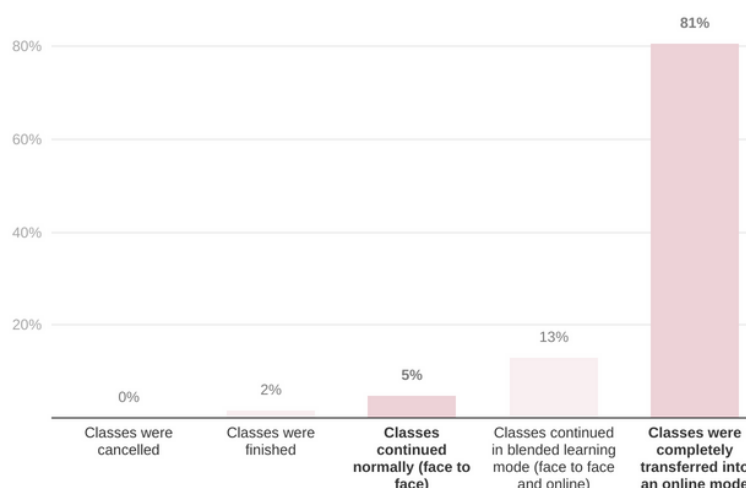
Figure 5. Engagement in online courses offered by Host University

As presented in figure 5, 90.3% of the respondents reported that they were engaged in online courses offered by their host universities, while 6.5% said that they were not engaged in it at the moment of completing the survey. 3.2% of the respondents maintained that their host universities gave other opportunities, such as few meetings in the form of questions and answers, as well as presentation of projects.

Although there were students who came back to home country, they continued their online courses from home country.

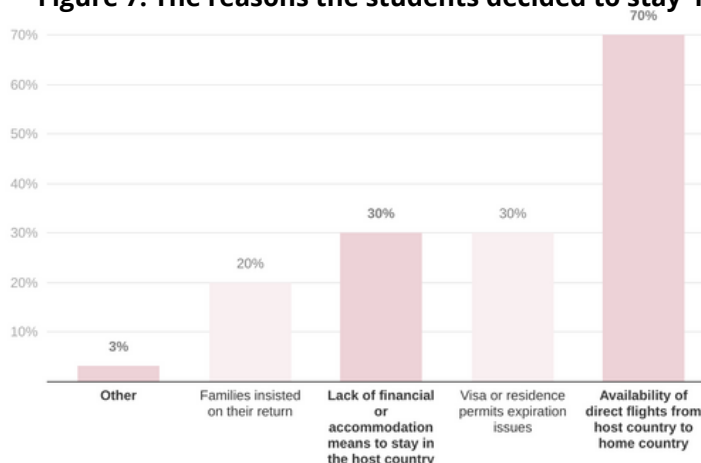
Figure 6. COVID-19 lockdowns impact on the classes

When asked how the COVID-19 lockdowns impacted on their classes during mobility, 80.6% of respondents answered that the classes were completely transferred into an online mode,



4.8% of respondents reported that they continued face to face. A small percentage (12.9%) of the students have got online offers and face to face courses (blended classes). No response was provided regarding total cancellation of classes, while one of the respondents (1.6%) informed that classes were finished (see figure 6).

Figure 7. The reasons the students decided to stay in Home Country



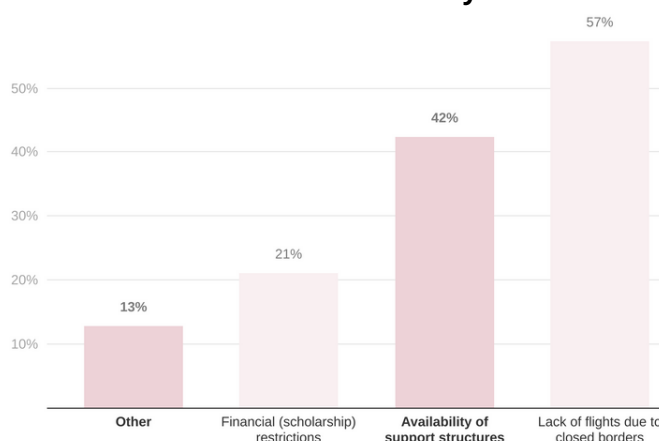
As displayed in figure 7, when the respondents were asked about the reasons they decided to return to their home countries (overall 16.1% of respondents) listed the following:

20% of them reported that their families insisted on their return, 70% indicated the availability of direct flights from host country to home country at that moment, 30% claimed the main reason was lack of financial or accommodation means to stay in the host country, as well as 30% of students faced visa or residence permits expiration issues.

In the “Other” section we have the only Erasmus+ student in Armenia as a respondent (1.6%) that indicated as “the number of COVID-19 cases in Armenia was increasing and there was a risk to be blocked in the host country for an unknown period of time”. Another 1.6% stated that the mobility has already ended up before the Coronavirus outbreak.

Figure 8. The reasons the students decided to stay in Host Country

In the light of COVID 19, over 40.000 citizens of Republic of Armenia returned with the support of the Commandant's office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of RA, since March 15, 2020.



As the majority of the respondents (83.9%) was to stay in the host country, they could face diverse challenges and difficulties. In order to provide most relevant support to our international students, we should have studied their needs via our survey. Thus, we were eager to find out the reasons why the students decided to stay in the host country during this difficult period. Among them, we have large amount of reasons as lack of flights due to closed borders (57.3% of respondents), then the availability of support structures (see below) that helped them to overcome challenges in situation (42.3% of the students), last but not least financial (scholarship) restrictions (21.1% of respondents) (figure 8).

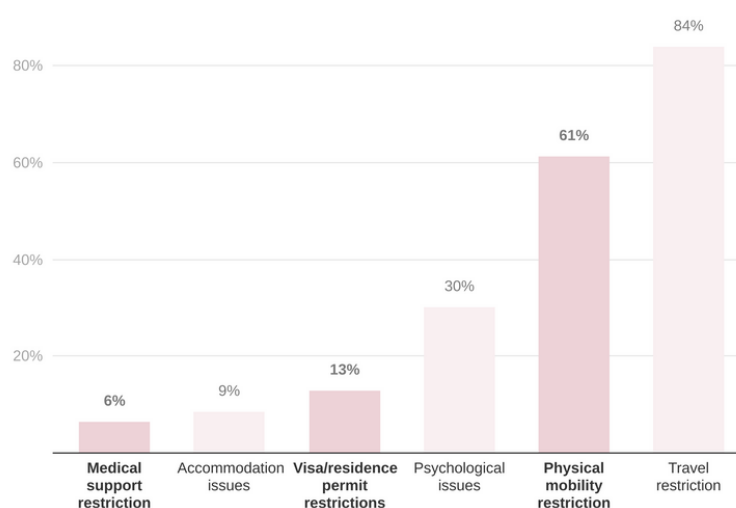
Those students who have common reasons by choosing multiple options, also declared some reasons in “Other” section that affected mobility participants’ decision to stay in host country. Among the barriers they cite that they were full of hope the situation will end up soon. As well as they imagined the imposed measures were relatively more controllable in their host country rather than home country. Moreover, they indicated the situation was not critical in their host country and hence they chose not to miss the opportunity of international mobility. Apparently, the main condition for studying abroad is independence, so the difficulties, especially amid COVID-19 restrictions, should be overcome on their own.

We once again highlight that the above-mentioned reasons relate to those who stayed in the host country (83.9%).

FACED DIFFICULTIES AND PROVIDED SUPPORT

Erasmus+ Spring 2020 both outgoing and incoming students have probably faced some difficulties and challenges they would not expect. So far, the aim of this study was to capture them and relevant support structures to exchange students regarding the impact of COVID-19 on their mobility experience. In this section, we are going to capture main difficulties and relevant support they have received (figure 9).

Figure 9. Difficulties encountered



- **Psychological issues** (lack of socializing, fear of uncertainty) represent more than 35% as huge proportion of students left for abroad and did not manage to properly connect and communicate with their coursemates, professors, buddies etc.

In practice, the exchange students are vulnerable especially during their first mobility. Hence, they are in need of assistance and guidance, as well as friendly atmosphere. According to the result of our survey, most of the respondents (61.29%) claim they got psychological support such as useful contact numbers, advice/orientation, etc.

- There were **medical support restrictions** (6.45%) that students have faced and our survey showed 6.45% of respondents got health related support.
- Then **physical mobility restrictions** (61.29%) include inability to attend classes in the campus, to have access to the library and share practical knowledge in specific areas of study (e.g. medical). Hence, 62.9% of the students were supported academically with online classes, exams, recognition of credits, etc.

- **Travel (83.87%) and visa/residence permit restrictions (8.6%)** have played a crucial role for Erasmus+ mobility. In fact, we had some concerns among the Armenian students who were close to visa date expiration but there were no flights back to home country. As a result, we have 3.2% of the students who contacted to the Armenian Embassies or Consulates in the host countries and only one student (1.6%) indicated he did not receive support from any structure. This mismatch is grounded by the large number of students who stayed in the host country. At least, these difficulties should be resolved in case of availability of flight tickets so as to ensure the safety and security of the student.
- As long as the **financial and accommodation issues (8.6%)** are one of the key indicators for students especially away from their families, we found out that students have got various types of supports as follows:

14.5% of the students were financially supported (Erasmus+ force majeure funding, health insurance, etc.). Unfortunately, one of the respondents had to face an issue related to medical insurance which was mentioned in the ‘Other’ section. Amid the pandemic, the student had COVID-19 symptoms (high fever) and had to take the test, but the insurance of home country did not reimburse it.

79% of students had the opportunity to fully keep Erasmus+ scholarship, while 14.5 % has not received any information yet. Only 3.2% of respondents claim they had the opportunity to keep the scholarship partially, and the same percentage had to return the scholarship as a result of mobility cancellation (figure 10).

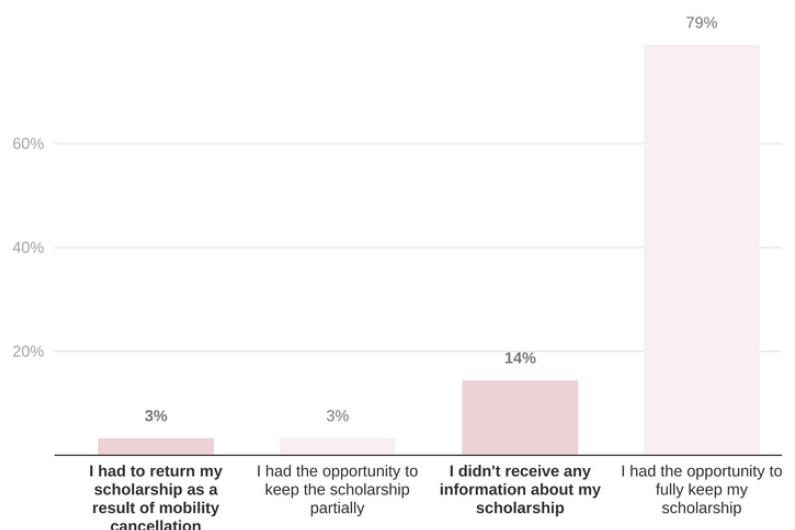


Figure 10. Erasmus+ scholarship

In the “Other” section of type of supports we have 4.8% of respondents who have got no kind of support, while in the question of restrictions we have 1.6% indicated there was no need of support.

In order to find out which support structures were mostly engaged in assisting students, below we analysed the answers of the respondents. As displayed in figure 11, close to 89% of the students reported that they got some form of support from their host universities, more than half of the respondents (67.7%) said that the support was provided by the home universities, as well as ESN local section (17.7% of respondents), Erasmus+ National Agency in their host country (16.1%) and National Erasmus+ Office in Armenia (4.8%).

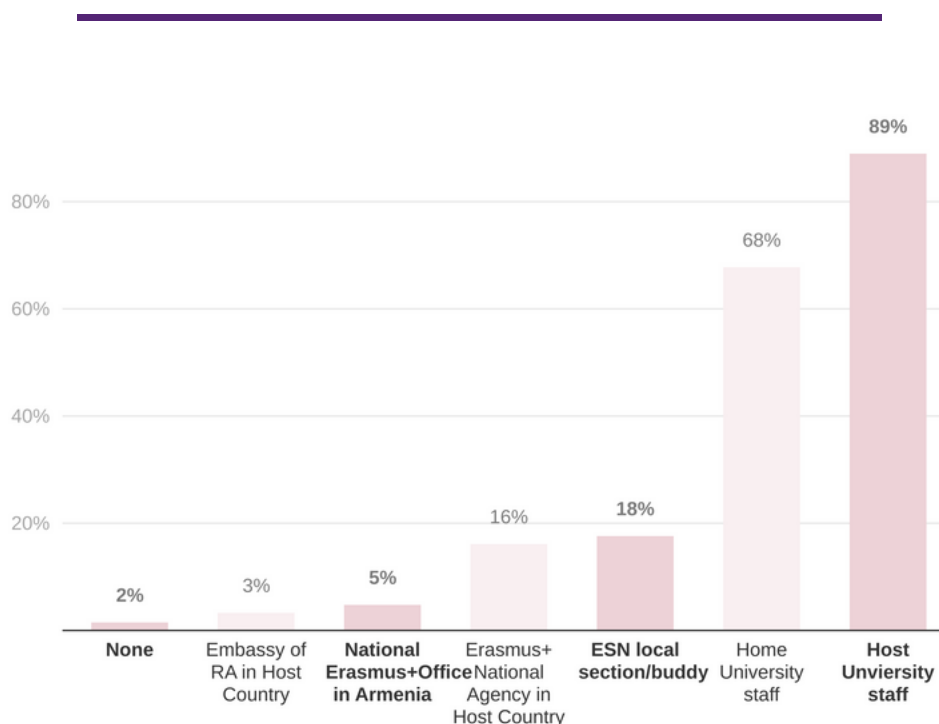
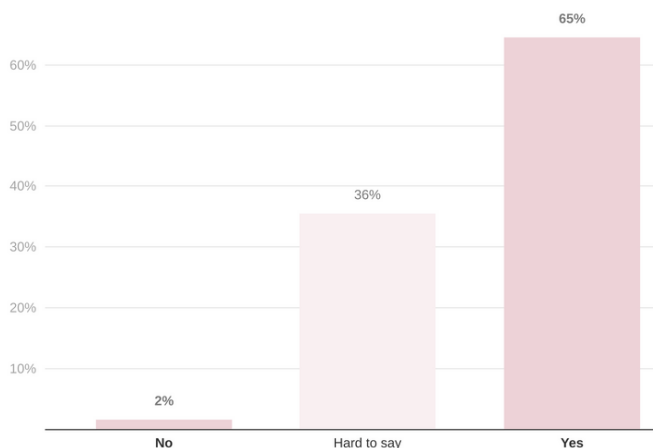


Figure 11. Support Structures

LEVEL OF SATISFACTION

The difficulties faced and relevant support received will be helpful amidst further crisis situations to improve our support structures and stand ready to help students so far.

Figure 12. Effectiveness of the support

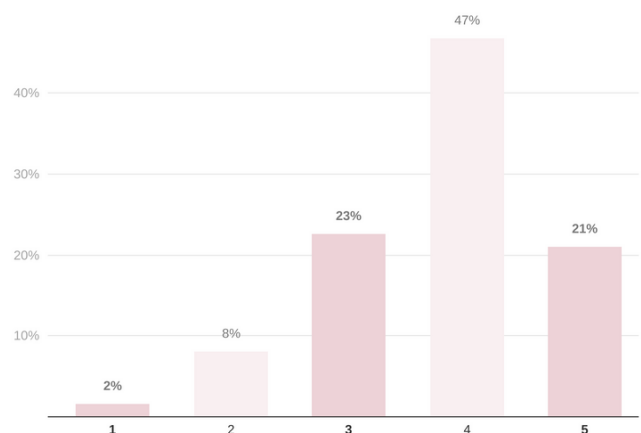


Nonetheless, while asking about the satisfaction of Erasmus+ mobility amid COVID-19 pandemic, according to figure 13, the majority (67.8%) of the respondents are satisfied with their Erasmus+ experience by grading above average. 30.7% treat their mobility neither positive, nor negative considering the above-mentioned factors. Whereas, the mobility did not meet the expectations of one of the respondents (1.6%).

Erasmus+ ICM has faced enormous issues in Spring 2020, thus, our team has gathered majority of them in this report. With the purpose to overcome possible challenges for the upcoming mobilities, we have come up with following recommendations which can be beneficial for all stakeholders.

Figure 12 shows that the number of responses who found this help useful (64.5%) is twice the number of responses who were doubting about it (35.5%). The high rate of effectiveness could be explained by strong connection with the support structures (Host & Home University). At the same time, there were students who either got support or did not get any, but it was hard for them to state whether it was effective. Only student (1.6%) who graded the effectiveness with “No” is among those who did not receive any kind of support from support structures.

Figure 13. Level of satisfaction of Erasmus+ mobility experience during the pandemic



RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1

Erasmus+ students are concerned about their Erasmus+ experience due to the emergency situation of COVID-19. In order to give 2020 Spring-Fall cohort the opportunity to gain full Erasmus+ experience, we recommend the following:

- To give opportunity (respecting 12 months) to those students who experienced their mobility amid COVID-19 pandemic and prioritize their applications for another mobility.
- To facilitate/automatize credit recognition process by diverse assessment methods

Target group: IROs of Host/ Home Universities

RECOMMENDATION 2

Erasmus+ scholarship plays a ground role for students to cover their living and travel cost. In general and in particularly during further emergency situation, we recommend our target to provide travel accessibility (e.g. via ESN card) to Erasmus+ students by ensuring the necessary reimbursement of the purchased tickets.

Target group: ESN partner sections, Embassies/Consulates in Host/Home countries

RECOMMENDATION 3

Organize mandatory pre-departure meetings on documentation flow and inform about potential risks (e.g. health insurance, accommodation, financial and academic issues) for Erasmus+ students.

Target group: IROs of Host/Home universities, Erasmus+ alumni, ESN local section

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 4

Travel/health insurance should be accessible especially during emergency situations. Hence, we recommend our target to be more careful while guiding students through travel/health insurance agencies in both host & home countries.

Target group: IROs of Host/Home Universities, partner insurance agencies

RECOMMENDATION 5

Necessary sources and information (e.g. online libraries, Moodle, Zoom etc.) should be provided and be inclusive to all groups of students when having blended mode of education.

Target group: IROs of Host/Home Universities, ESN local section

RECOMMENDATION 6

Our research studied support structures and explored the wide gap between their effectiveness. In order to bridge the gap, we suggest the following.

- To provide guidebook with relevant information and tools how to approach support structures
- To reach out to the Erasmus+ students and conduct need assessment
- To share results of assessment and find solutions together with other support structures.

Target group: IROs of Host/Home Universities, NEO in Armenia, Erasmus+ National Agencies, ESN local section

2020 ERASMUS+ ICM MEMORIES

BELOW WE SHARE STORIES OF ERASMUS+ STUDENTS FROM DIFFERENT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS ON THEIR CHALLENGES AND MEMORIES DURING PANDEMIC.

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN ARMENIA

<https://bit.ly/AUArmenia>

FRENCH UNIVERSITY IN ARMENIA

<https://bit.ly/UFARSpain>

ARMENIAN NATIONAL AGRARIAN UNIVERSITY

<https://bit.ly/ANAUSpain>
<https://bit.ly/ANAURomania>
<https://bit.ly/ANAURomania2>
<https://bit.ly/ANAURomania3>
<https://bit.ly/ANAUGermany>
<https://bit.ly/ANAUGreece>
<https://bit.ly/ANAUGreece2>
<https://bit.ly/ANAUNorway>

RUSSIAN-ARMENIAN UNIVERSITY

<https://bit.ly/RAUBulgaria>
<https://bit.ly/RAUGreece>

ARMENIAN STATE UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS

<https://bit.ly/ASUEGermany>
<https://bit.ly/ASUE2020>

YEREVAN STATE UNIVERSITY

<https://bit.ly/YSUItaly>

YEREVAN STATE MEDICAL UNIVERSITY

<https://bit.ly/YSMUPortugal>

V.BRUSOV STATE UNIVERSITY

<https://bit.ly/BSU-Armenia-Italy>

ARMENIAN STATE PEDAGOGICAL UNIVERSITY AFTER KH.ABOVYAN

<https://bit.ly/ASPU-Finland-Spain-Lithuania>

EURASIA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

<https://bit.ly/EIULithuania>
<https://bit.ly/EIUPoland>

SHIRAK STATE UNIVERSITY AFTER M. NALBANDYAN

<https://bit.ly/SHSUSpain>



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ANNEX 1

TABLE 1. HOME COUNTRIES/UNIVERSITIES

Home Country	Home University	Students
Armenia	Armenian National Agrarian University	12
	Armenian State University of Economics	11
	Yerevan State University	11
	Yerevan Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences	7
	Eurasia International University	4
	Gavar State University	3
	American University of Armenia	3
	Russian-Armenian University	3
	French University in Armenia	3
	Armenian State Pedagogical University	1
	Vanadzor State University	1
	National Polytechnic University of Armenia	1
	Shirak State University	1
Italy	University of Verona	1

ANNEX 2

TABLE 2. HOST COUNTRIES/UNIVERSITIES

Host Country	Host University	Students
Spain	University of Valladolid	4
	Universidad de Alcala	3
	University of Almeria	3
	University of Cadiz	2
	University of Santiago de Compostela	2
	Universidad de Murcia	1
	Universidade de Coruña	1
	Complutense University of Madrid	1
	University of Lodz	2
Poland	Adam Mickiewicz University	2
	Bialystok University of Technology	1
	University of Economics Cracow	1
	The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin	1
	University of Economy in Bydgoszcz (WSG)	1
Italy	Ca'Foscari University of Venice	2
	University of Verona	2
	Sapienza University of Rome	1
Belgium	Hasselt University	2
	Catholic University of Louvain	2
France	Grenoble INP ESISAR	1
	Aix-Marseille University	1
Greece	Panteion University	1
	University of Piraeus	1
Norway	The Norwegian Institute of Bioeconomy Research	1
	UiT The Arctic University of Norway	1
Romania	University of Pitesti	1
	University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Cluj-Napoca	3
Germany	College Geisenheim University	4
Bulgaria	D.A. Tsenov Academy of Economics	4
Hungary	University of Miskolc	3
Portugal	University of Porto	1
Croatia	University of Osijek	1
Cyprus	Frederick University	1
Czechia	University of Hradec Kralove	1
Sweden	Linnaeus University	1
Lithuania	Mykolas Romeris University	1
Armenia	Brusov State University	1

ANNEX 3

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. WHAT WAS YOUR CYCLE OF EDUCATION DURING ERASMUS+ INTERNATIONAL CREDIT MOBILITY?

- Bachelor's
- Master's
- PhD (Aspirantura)

2. HOW DO YOU SELF-IDENTIFY?

- Outgoing student from Armenia
- Incoming student to Armenia

3. YOUR HOME UNIVERSITY?

4. YOUR HOST UNIVERSITY?

5. YOUR HOST CITY AND COUNTRY?

6. HOW HAS COVID-19 PANDEMIC AFFECTED YOUR ERASMUS+ MOBILITY?

- Mobility period continued/remained uninterrupted at the Host Country
- Mobility period continued at Home Country
- Mobility period was cancelled
- Other

7. WHAT WAS YOUR PHYSICAL LOCATION DURING THE PANDEMIC?

- Stayed in Host Country
- Returned to Home Country

8. ARE YOU OR HAVE YOU BEEN ENGAGED IN ONLINE COURSES OFFERED BY YOUR HOST UNIVERSITY?

- Yes, I am/was
- No, I am not/was not
- Other

9. HOW HAVE THE COVID-19 LOCK DOWNS IMPACTED YOUR CLASSES DURING MOBILITY?

- Classes continued normally (face to face)
- Classes continued in blended learning mode (face to face and online)
- Classes were completely transferred into online mode
- Classes were cancelled
- Other

10. WHAT IS/ARE THE REASON(S) YOU DECIDED TO STAY IN YOUR HOST COUNTRY?

- There were support structures that helped me overcome the difficulties
- Financial (scholarship) restrictions
- Lack of flights due to closed borders
- Other

11. WHAT IS/ARE THE REASON(S) YOU DECIDED TO RETURN TO YOUR HOME COUNTRY?

- My family insisted
- Lack of financial/accommodation means to stay in Host Country
- Availability of direct flights from Host Country to Home Country
- Visa or residence permit expiration
- Other

12. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STRUCTURES HAVE PROVIDED YOU WITH SUPPORT DURING THE PANDEMIC?

- Home University staff
- Host University staff
- ESN local section/buddy
- Erasmus+ National Agency in your Host Country
- National Erasmus+ Office in Armenia
- Other

13. WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT HAVE YOU RECEIVED?

- Health related (medical support, etc.)
- Financial (Erasmus+ force majeure funding health insurance, etc.)
- Psychological (useful contact numbers, advice/orientation, etc.)
- Academic (online classes, exams, recognition of credits, etc.)
- Other

14. WAS THIS SUPPORT USEFUL FOR YOU?

- Yes
- No
- Hard to say
- Other

15. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING OPTIONS APPLIES TO YOUR CASE?

- I didn't receive any information about my scholarship
- I had the opportunity to keep the scholarship partially
- I had the opportunity to fully keep my scholarship
- I had to return my scholarship as a result of mobility cancellation
- Other

16. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING RESTRICTIONS HAVE YOU ENCOUNTERED DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC?

- Accommodation issues
- Visa/residence permit issues
- Medical support restrictions
- Travel restrictions
- Physical mobility restrictions
- Psychological issues
- Other

17. HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH YOUR OVERALL ERASMUS+ MOBILITY EXPERIENCE?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

18. DO YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO IMPROVE ORGANIZATION OF ERASMUS+ CREDIT MOBILITY IN CASE OF FURTHER EMERGENCY SITUATION?