

Institutional, structural and academic barriers to international student mobility

Results from the NORM survey for students

**Report prepared in the framework of the Erasmus+ project
“Making Mobility the Norm”**

by

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1. General information

The information presented in this report is based on the data collected from the replies to the survey “Institutional, Academic and Structural Obstacles in International Students’ Mobility”. This survey was launched in two different rounds: the first one from the 22nd of June to the 31st of July 2020 and the second one from the 12th of October 2020 to the 18th of January 2021. The survey was addressed to European undergraduate and master students, and it was completed by 2,639 students across Europe. We received responses from **more than 30 different European countries**, although they were unevenly distributed, as shown in Table 1. **Hungary, Greece, and Spain** accounted for **more than 70%** of the total answers received.

Table 1
Number of responses by country

Country	Responses	Percentage			
Hungary	761	28,3	Netherlands	3	0,1
Greece	683	25,4	Serbia	3	0,1
Spain	542	20,1	Azerbaijan	2	0,1
Lithuania	315	11,7	Croatia	2	0,1
Germany	115	4,3	Kazakhstan	2	0,1
France	105	3,9	Slovenia	2	0,1
Portugal	50	1,9	Albania	1	0
Italy	36	1,3	Andorra	1	0
Czechia	7	0,3	Bosnia and Herzegovina	1	0
Romania	7	0,3	Estonia	1	0
Turkey	7	0,3	Finland	1	0
Russia	6	0,2	Georgia	1	0
Austria	5	0,2	Iceland	1	0
Belgium	5	0,2	Ireland	1	0
Poland	5	0,2	Kosovo*	1	0
Ukraine	5	0,2	Liechtenstein	1	0
United Kingdom	5	0,2	Malta	1	0
Norway	4	0,1	Montenegro	1	0
Cyprus	3	0,1	Slovakia	1	0
			Total	2693	100

This unequal distribution is also found when we consider the universities to which respondents belong to. In correspondence with the results presented in Table 2,

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Eötvös Loránd University, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and **University of Barcelona** took clearly the lead (Table 2), as they concentrated the bulk of the answers.

Table 2
Number of responses by university

University	Responses	Percentage
Eötvös Loránd University	762	28,30
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki	684	25,40
University of Barcelona	492	18,27
Vytautas Magnus University	325	12,07
University Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines	92	3,42
University of Marburg	66	2,45
University of Alcalá	43	1,60
Other	229	8,50
Total	2693	100

By gender, the collected data show that almost **74% of the respondents are female**, whereas 25.1% are male (Table 3).

Table 3
Number of responses by gender

Gender	Responses	Percentage
Female	1977	73,4
Male	676	25,1
Prefer not to answer	22	0,8
Gender non-conforming	11	0,4
Intersex	1	0
Transgender male/man	1	0
Not listed	5	0,2
Total	2693	100

If we consider to what extent this survey was answered by mobile students or not, as in table 4, the results show that **most of the respondents planned on going on mobility abroad** (47.6%) **or had already been on mobility abroad** (37.9%).

Table 4
Number of mobile respondents

Please, indicate if you were or have been on mobility abroad during your studies	Responses	Percentage
No, but I plan on going on mobility abroad during my studies	1281	47,6
Yes, during my bachelor studies	815	30,3
No, and I am not planning on going on mobility abroad during my studies	393	14,6
Yes, during my master studies	204	7,6
Total	2693	100

A large percentage of respondents are **bachelor students** (67.5%), while almost 20% are currently studying a master's degree programme. Only 7.8% of our sample are former students (Table 5).

Table 5
Status in course of study

Please, indicate your current status in your course of study	Responses	Percentage
Undergraduate (Bachelor) student	1819	67,5
Graduate (Master) student	523	19,4
Former student	210	7,8
Other	141	5,2
Total	2693	100

Table 6
Study field

Study field	Responses	Percentage
Business and management	243	9,0
Medicine and health	208	7,7
Linguistics	193	7,2
Psychology	176	6,5
Economy	172	6,4
Biology and other life sciences	131	4,9
Law	128	4,8
Informatics and telecommunication technologies	126	4,7
Teacher training and education	110	4,1
Pedagogy	105	3,9
Political sciences	100	3,7
Literature	79	2,9
Physics	72	2,7
Sociology	69	2,6
History	53	2,0
Journalism and information	45	1,7
Architecture and construction	42	1,6
Fine Arts	40	1,5
Mathematics	36	1,3
Earth sciences	34	1,3
Chemistry	33	1,2
Geography	28	1,0
Agronomy, forestry and other agricultural sciences (excluding Veterinary)	27	1,0
Pharmacy	19	0,7
Philosophy	19	0,7
Civil engineering	18	0,7
Industrial technology and engineering	17	0,6
Anthropology	16	0,6
Statistics	16	0,6
Social work	13	0,5
Urbanism and regional planning	13	0,5
Veterinary	12	0,4
Aeronautical technology and engineering	9	0,3
Food and nutritional sciences	8	0,3
Theology	5	0,2
Astronomy and astrophysics	4	0,1
Other	274	10,2
Total	2693	100

(continued in the next column)

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Table 6 provides evidence on the respondents' study field. There is **a high degree of variation**, which is what we would like to find. However, 9% of the respondents are Business and Management students, almost 8% are Medicine and Health students, 7.2% are in the study field of Linguistics, 6.5% in Psychology, and 6.4% are Economy students. These 5 fields account for 36,8% of the total respondents. If we add to the former field Biology and other life sciences, Law, Informatics and telecommunication technologies, Teacher training and education, and Pedagogy we find that 12 study fields account by two-thirds of the total responses.

Of the total respondents, **a small fraction** (2,3%) indicated that have a **disability, learning difficulty or special need**, although 1.8% prefer not to answer.

Table 7
Disability, learning difficulties or special need

Please, indicate if you have a disability, learning difficulty or special need	Responses	Percentage
No	2581	95,8
Yes	63	2,3
Prefer not to answer	49	1,8
Total	2693	100

When considering whether the respondents were, have been or are **working while studying**, almost half of the respondents (45.41%) answered that “usually not working while studying”, whereas 27.63% were, have been or are “usually in part-time and casual jobs” (Table 8). Furthermore, 50.84% of the respondents indicated that they had never received any kind of scholarship; only 25% had received a scholarship from public institutions and for most of the years to study in their country (Table 9).

Table 8
Working while studying

Please, indicate if you were/have been/ are working while studying.	Responses	Percentage
Usually not working while studying	1223	45,41
Usually in part-time and casual jobs	744	27,63
With some time periods part or full-time employed and others unemployed, without unemployment subsidy	232	8,61
Combining part-time and full-time jobs, depending on the time period	175	6,50
Usually in full-time jobs	123	4,57
Mostly unemployed, without receiving unemployment subsidy	75	2,78
Prefer not to answer	27	1,00
With some time periods part or full-time employed and others unemployed, but with unemployment subsidy	26	0,97
Mostly unemployed, but receiving unemployment subsidy	10	0,37
Other	58	2,15
Total	2693	100

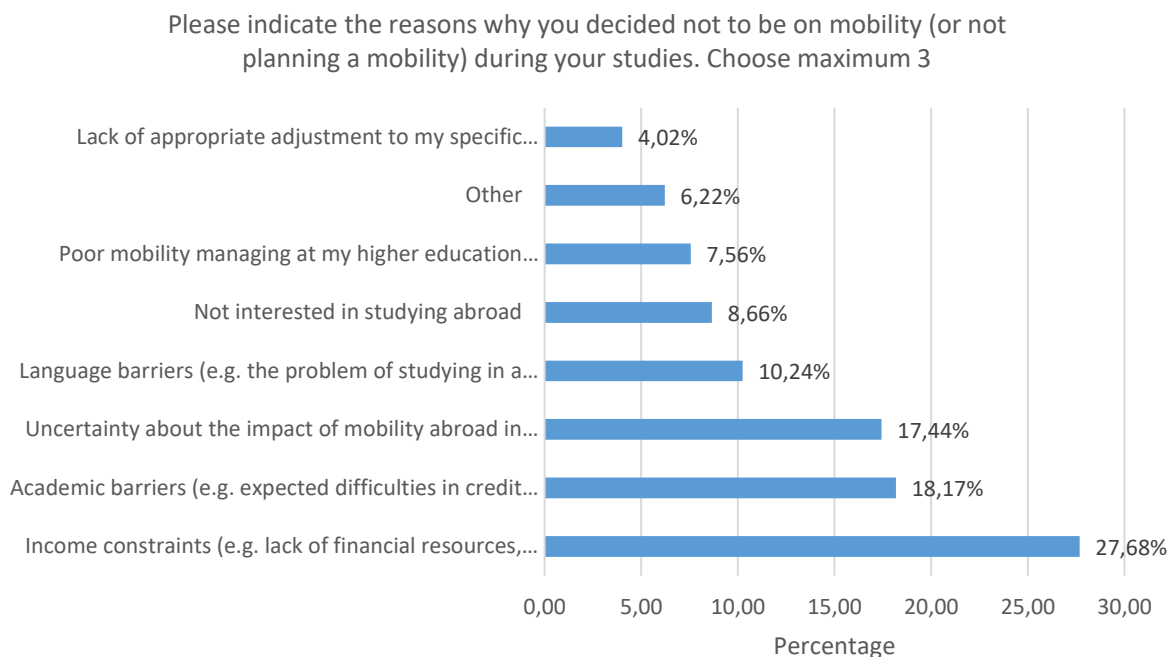
Table 9
Receiving scholarship to study

Please, indicate if you were/have been/ receiving any kind of scholarship to study in your country.	Responses	Percentage
I never received any kind of scholarship	1369	50,84
From public institutions and for most of the years I was studying	682	25,32
From public institutions, but only occasionally	341	12,66
Prefer not to answer	96	3,56
From both public and private institutions, but only occasionally	41	1,52
From private institutions and for most of the years I was studying	39	1,45
From private institutions, but only occasionally	34	1,26
From both public and private institutions and for most of the years I was studying	34	1,26
Other	57	2,12
Total	2693	100

2. Potential factors negatively affecting international mobility

Were structural and academic barriers factors preventing international mobility? As expected, **income constraints** come first, but **academic barriers** and **uncertainty about the impact of mobility abroad in the academic formation** of the student are next (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Reasons discouraging mobility in non-mobile students

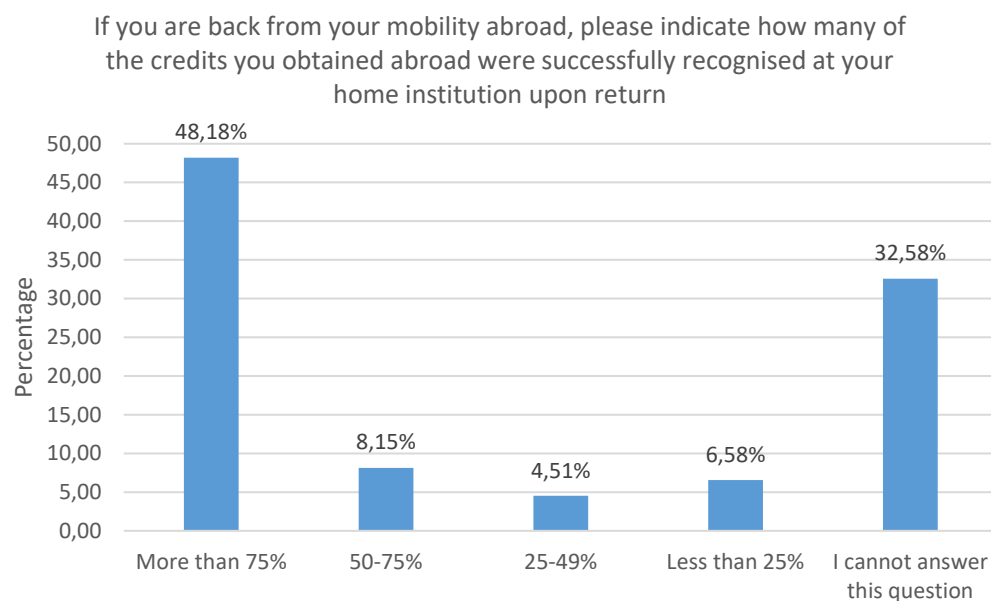


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3. The role of credit recognition as a potential academic barrier for those students that decided not to be on mobility

Of the potential academic barriers, credit recognition could be an important potential discouraging factor among those who decided not to be on mobility. Nevertheless, when the issue of credit recognition is specifically asked a large percentage of respondents (48.18%) answered that **more than 75% of credits were successfully recognised**.

Figure 2
Credit recognition



For those who stated that more than 75% of their credits were recognised (Figure 3), the respondents consider that of the various reasons suggested to explain successful credit recognition, the most relevant were the following:

- **Syllabus** in similar courses were **rather compatible** between the home and the host institutions.
- **Regulations in the home HEI were rather flexible** in accepting the courses chosen abroad.
- **Academic staff is rather willing to accept courses chosen abroad.**

Figure 3
Explaining successful credit recognition

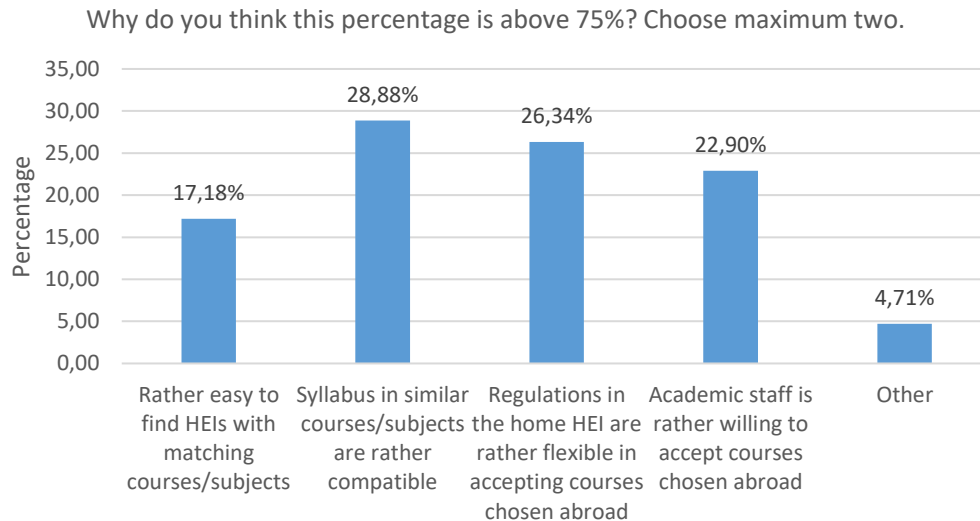
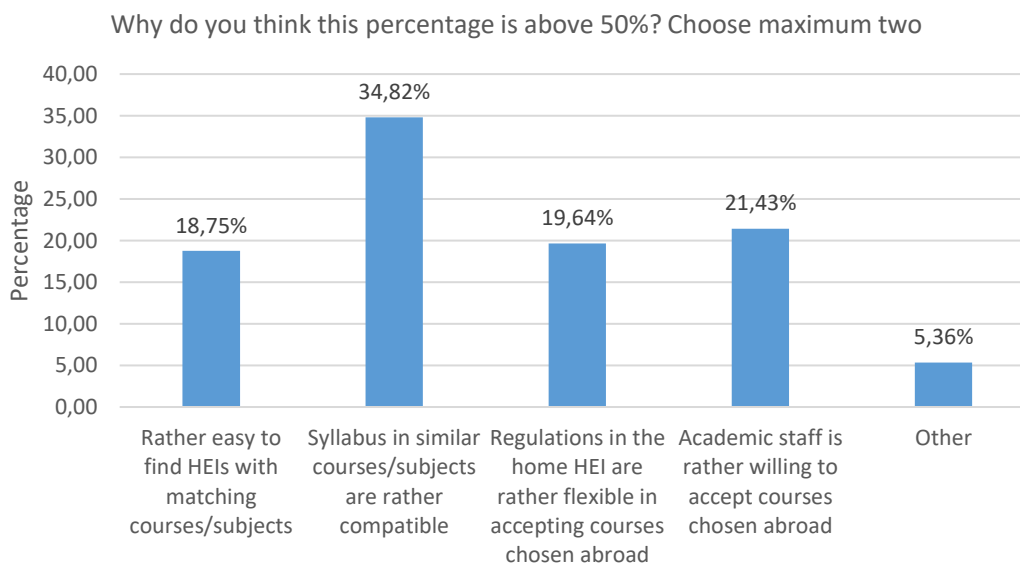


Figure 4
Explaining successful credit recognition



For those that stated that more than 50% of their credits were recognised (Figure 4), the respondents considered that of the various reasons suggested to explain successful credit recognition, the most relevant were the following:

- **Syllabus** in similar courses were **rather compatible** between the home and the host institutions.
- **Academic staff is rather willing to accept courses chosen abroad.**

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- regulations in the home HEI were rather flexible in accepting the courses chosen abroad.

For those that stated that less than 50% and less than 25% of their credits were recognised in the home institution, the main restriction in credit recognition was that **it was not easy to find HEIs with matching courses/subjects abroad** (Figure 5 and 6).

Figure 5
Explaining failed credit recognition

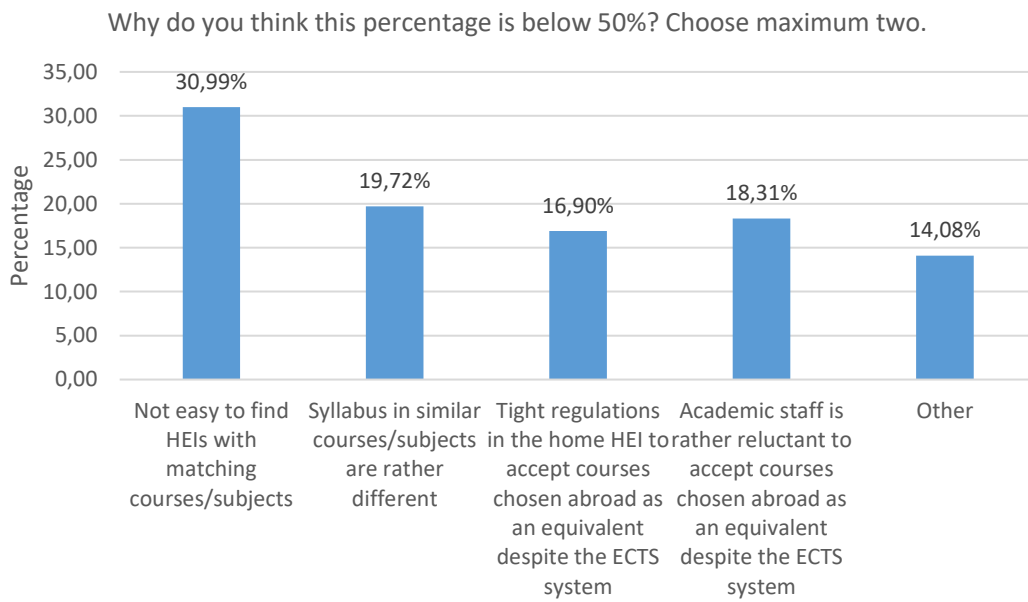
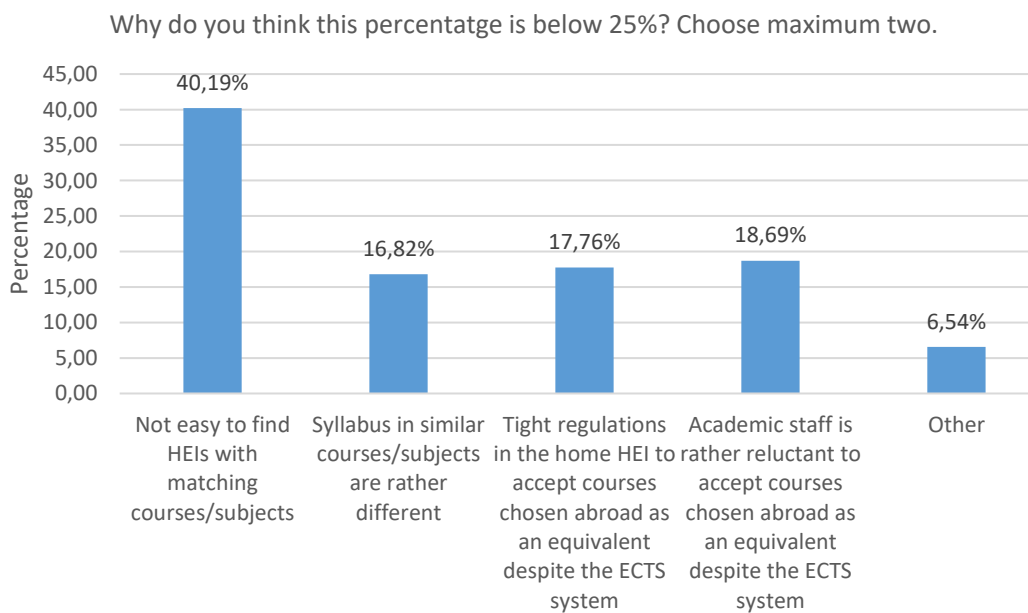


Figure 6
Explaining failed credit recognition

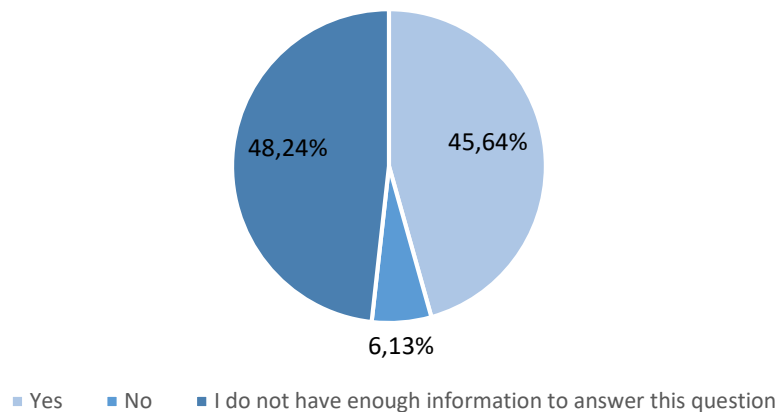


4. The possibility of taking part in an exchange programme

Whereas 48,24% (N=1299) of the respondents do not have enough information to answer the question Q13 of the survey, i. e. *please, indicate if students' mobility is/was incorporated in the curricula of your study program*, those that have enough information (51,76%) have mostly indicated that **mobility is/was incorporated in the curricula of their study program (45,64%)** (Figure 7).

Figure 7
Assessing the incorporation of students' mobility in the curricula

Please, indicate if students' mobility is/was incorporated in the curricula of your study program.

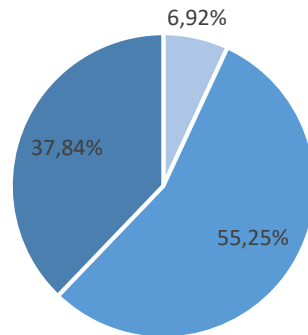


The data collected in this study suggests that **there is room for improving the embeddedness of mobility in the study programmes**. Among those students who answered that mobility was incorporated in the curricula of their study program (N=1229), 55.25% of them indicated that there is/was a term well-suited for student mobility in their study programme, although a remarkable percentage (37.8%) suggested the opposite. In addition, only 6.92% (N=85) of the respondents indicated that mobility is/was mandatory in their study programme (Figure 8).

The results also show that **when mobility is not incorporated** in the curricula **restrictions** for going on mobility abroad are **very high**. Indeed, among those students who answered that mobility is/was non incorporated in the curricula of their study programme (N=165), 59.39% of the respondents indicated that student mobility is not possible in their study programme, but it is possible in other study programmes at their university. Only 3.64% (N=6) of the respondents indicated that student mobility is/was not allowed at their university.

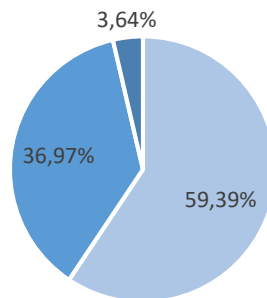
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Figure 8
Assessing the incorporation of students' mobility in the curricula



- Yes, student mobility is/was mandatory in my study programme
- Yes, there is/was a term well-suited for student mobility in my study programme, but it is/was not mandatory
- Yes, but there is/was not a term well-suited for student mobility in my study programme, neither it is/was mandatory

Figure 9
Lack of mobility in the curricula



- No, student mobility is not possible in my study programme, but it is possible in other study programmes at my university
- No, student mobility is not possible in my study programme
- No, student mobility is not allowed at my university

5. The most relevant academic and structural barriers to student international mobility

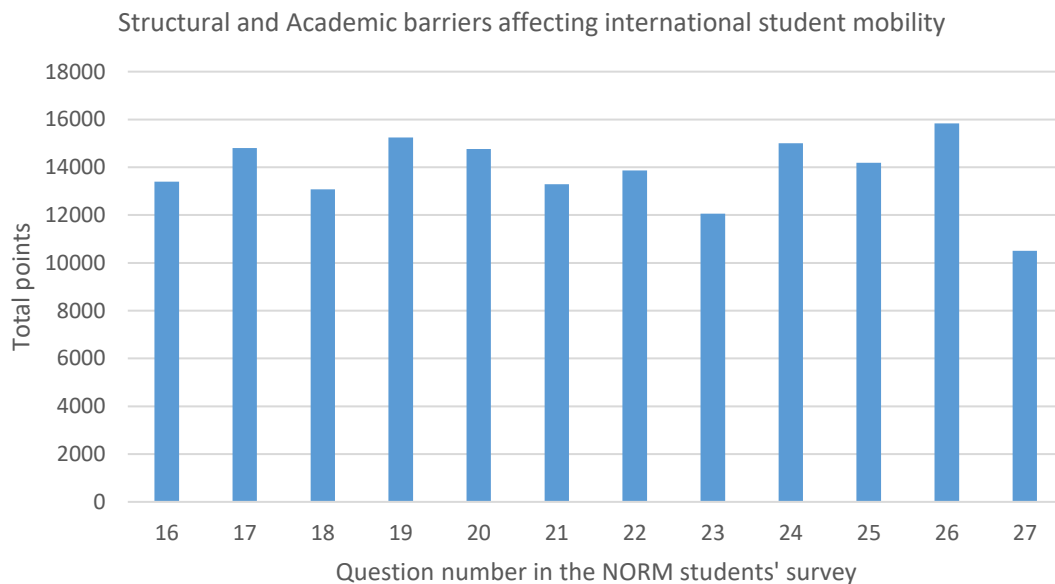
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Out of a list of 12 options, the respondents of the NORM survey for students consider that **the possibility that mobility abroad can prolong studies at the home university (Q26)** is the most relevant institutional, structural and academic barrier to international mobility.

The other four most relevant academic and structural barriers are the following by order of importance:

- Difficulties in credit recognition between the host institution and the home university (Q19),
- Complex procedures to apply for mobility (Q24),
- Uncertainty or lack of information on courses and syllabus at the host institution (Q17) and,
- Poor matching between the courses/subjects of the host university and those offered by the home university (Q20).

Figure 10



Legend: Question number: 16. Incompatibility of the academic calendar between the host institution and my home university); 17. Uncertainty or lack of information on courses and syllabus at the host institution; 18. Uncertainty about the quality of the courses and the level of knowledge obtained abroad relative to those provided at my home university; 19. Expected difficulties in credit recognition between the host institution and my home university; 20. Poor matching between the courses/subjects of the host university and those offered by my home university; 21. Lack of study programs in English at the host university; 22. Lack of support from my home institution to help students to prepare their exchange abroad (e.g. selecting the destination, paperwork, finding accommodation); 23. Lack of incentives from the lecturers of my home university; 24. Complex procedure to apply for mobility (e.g. too much paperwork); 25. Complexity of the available information on international mobility; 26. Possibility that a mobility abroad could prolong my studies at my home university; 27. Lack of attractiveness of the network of university partners.

*Total points were calculated by multiplying the number of responses obtained per item value (from 0 to 10) by the value indicated by the respondents. We finally add all the scores obtained in each option.

Of course, there are remarkable differences across universities (Figure 10). The **possibility that mobility abroad can prolong studies at the home university (Q26)** is also the most important structural and academic barrier affecting international students' mobility at the Ramon Ramon-Muñoz & Eva Gea-Orriols (2021): "Institutional, structural and academic barriers to international student mobility. Results from the NORM survey for students"

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and, particularly, at the **Eötvös Loránd University**. It is also very important at the **University of Marburg** and the **University of Barcelona**, in both cases together with **complex procedures to apply for mobility** (e.g. too much paperwork) (Q24).

The **lack of support from my home institution to help students to prepare their exchange abroad (Q23)**, the **complex procedure to apply for mobility (Q24)**, and the **complexity of the available information on international mobility (Q25)** are the most noticeable aspects negatively affecting international students' mobility at the **University Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines**.

The **uncertainty or lack of information on courses and syllabus at the host institution (Q17)** is the most important factor affecting international students' mobility, together with **the poor matching between the courses/subjects of the host university and those offered by my home university (Q20)** at the **University of Alcalá**, and the **Vytautas Magnus University**.

Relative to the average sample values, differences between universities are even more apparent (Figure 11). At the **Aristotle University of Thessaloniki**, the **lack of study programs in English at the host university, alongside with poor matching between the courses/subjects of the host university and those offered by my home university**, and the **possibility that a mobility abroad could prolong my studies at my home university** are the most remarkable factors relative to the average.

At the **Eötvös Loránd University**, the possibility that a **mobility abroad could prolong studies at the home university** remains as the main academic and structural barrier, but, relative to the average sample, **expected difficulties in credit recognition between the host institution and my home university** and **complexity of the available information on international mobility** are also worth noting.

At the **University of Alcalá**, the main academic and structural barrier relative to the average sample is the **uncertainty about the quality of the courses** and the **level of knowledge obtained abroad relative to those provided at my home university, followed by the poor matching between the courses/subjects of the host university and those offered by my home university**. Also noteworthy is the **complexity of the available information on international mobility**.

At the **University of Barcelona**, the **lack of support from my home institution to help students to prepare their exchange abroad** (e.g. selecting the destination,

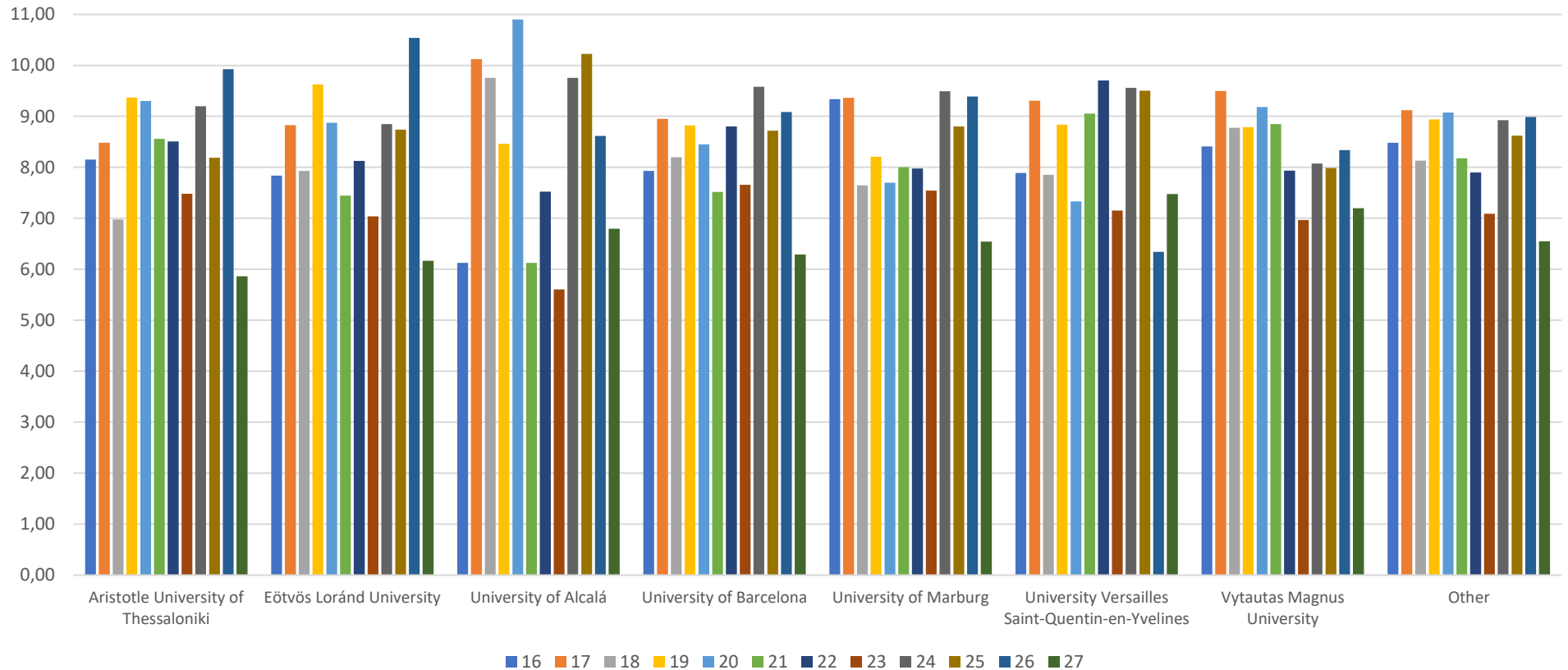
paperwork, finding accommodation), the **lack of incentives from the lecturers of my home university**, and the **complex procedure to apply for mobility** are the most important academic and structural barriers relative to the average sample.

At the **University of Marburg**, the main academic and structural barrier relative to the average sample is the **incompatibility of the academic calendar between the host institution and the home university**, while the **uncertainty or lack of information on courses and syllabus at the host institution**, the **complex procedure to apply for mobility** (e.g. too much paperwork) and the **lack of incentives from the lecturers of my home university** have remarkable relative to the average sample.

At the **University Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines**, the **lack of attractiveness of the network of university partners**, followed by the **lack of support from my home institution to help students to prepare their exchange abroad** (e.g., selecting the destination, paperwork, finding accommodation) are the most remarkable academic and structural barrier relative the average sample. It is also worth noting the **lack of study programs in English at the host university**.

At the **Vytautas Magnus University**, the **lack of attractiveness of the network of university partners** is by far the most remarkable academic and structural barrier, followed by, **uncertainty about the quality of the courses and the level of knowledge obtained abroad relative to those provided at the home university** as well as the **lack of study programs in English at the host university**, always relative to the average values.

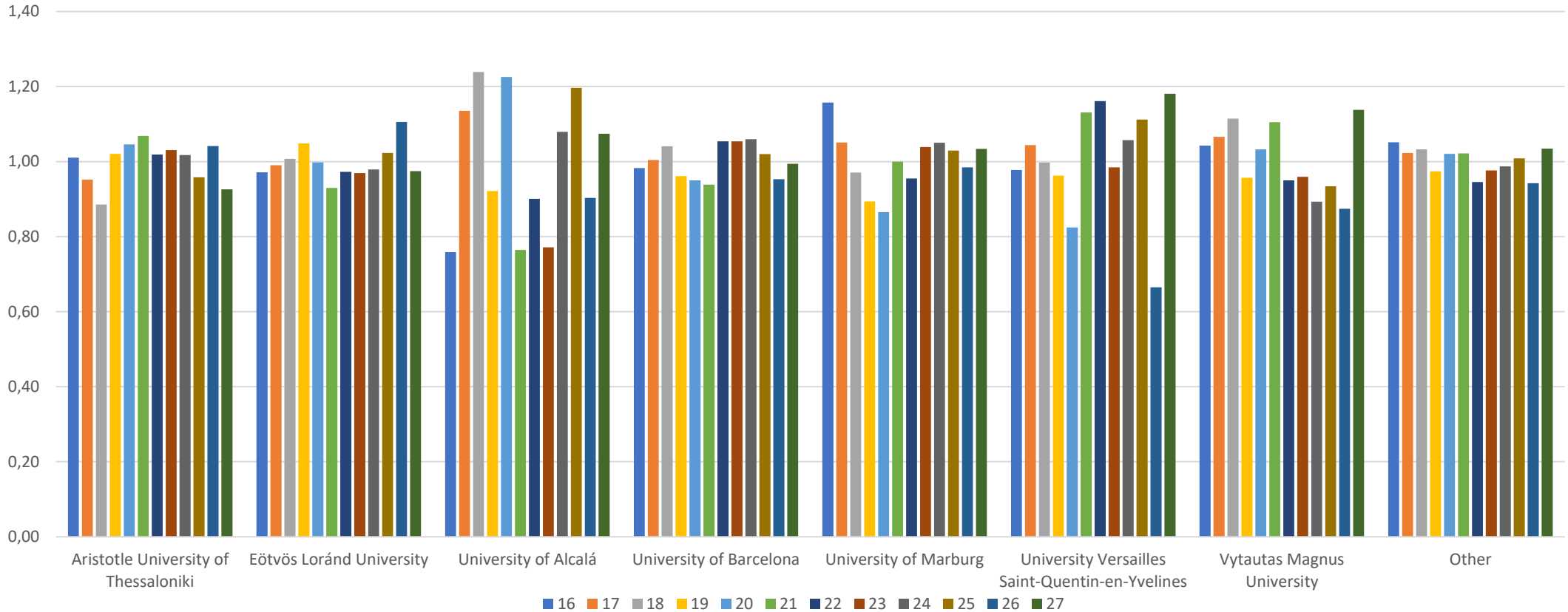
Figure 11
Structural and Academic barriers affecting international student mobility by universities
(as a percentage relative to each university, total values at each university=100)



Legend: Question number: 16. Incompatibility of the academic calendar between the host institution and my home university); 17. Uncertainty or lack of information on courses and syllabus at the host institution; 18. Uncertainty about the quality of the courses and the level of knowledge obtained abroad relative to those provided at my home university; 19. Expected difficulties in credit recognition between the host institution and my home university; 20. Poor matching between the courses/subjects of the host university and those offered by my home university; 21. Lack of study programs in English at the host university; 22. Lack of support from my home institution to help students to prepare their exchange abroad (e.g. selecting the destination, paperwork, finding accommodation); 23. Lack of incentives from the lecturers of my home university; 24. Complex procedure to apply for mobility (e.g. too much paperwork); 25. Complexity of the available information on international mobility; 26. Possibility that a mobility abroad could prolong my studies at my home university; 27. Lack of attractiveness of the network of university partners.

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Figure 12
Structural and Academic barriers affecting international student mobility by universities
(relative to the average sample values, the same value that the average sample value=1)



Legend: Question number: 16. Incompatibility of the academic calendar between the host institution and my home university); 17. Uncertainty or lack of information on courses and syllabus at the host institution; 18. Uncertainty about the quality of the courses and the level of knowledge obtained abroad relative to those provided at my home university; 19. Expected difficulties in credit recognition between the host institution and my home university; 20. Poor matching between the courses/subjects of the host university and those offered by my home university; 21. Lack of study programs in English at the host university; 22. Lack of support from my home institution to help students to prepare their exchange abroad (e.g. selecting the destination, paperwork, finding accommodation); 23. Lack of incentives from the lecturers of my home university; 24. Complex procedure to apply for mobility (e.g. too much paperwork); 25. Complexity of the available information on international mobility; 26. Possibility that a mobility abroad could prolong my studies at my home university; 27. Lack of attractiveness of the network of university partners.

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