Million of Erasmus Grants

Methodological guidelines
for student grant distribution

Contents

The aim of the Million of Erasmus Grants (MEGA) project is to facilitate the management of Erasmus+ grants at the university level and to develop a digital tool to ensure that these grants are paid to students in terms of both accuracy and time. It is aimed to develop the best possible tool to facilitate the management of Erasmus grants, taking into account the national and local contexts of HEIs throughout the Erasmus grant process. In order to design a valid and applicable system for all, the differences in grant management must first be identified.

The Erasmus grant management system differs between European countries. The purpose of PR1 is to identify what differences exist in grant management by collecting information from different countries. As there are different components to be considered in grant management, national, institutional and beneficiary data were analyzed. Especially at these levels, which points are triggers and have greater importance is the subject of the research. In this study, it is aimed to identify the main problems related to student grant management in IROs and to reveal the features needed in the digital tool.
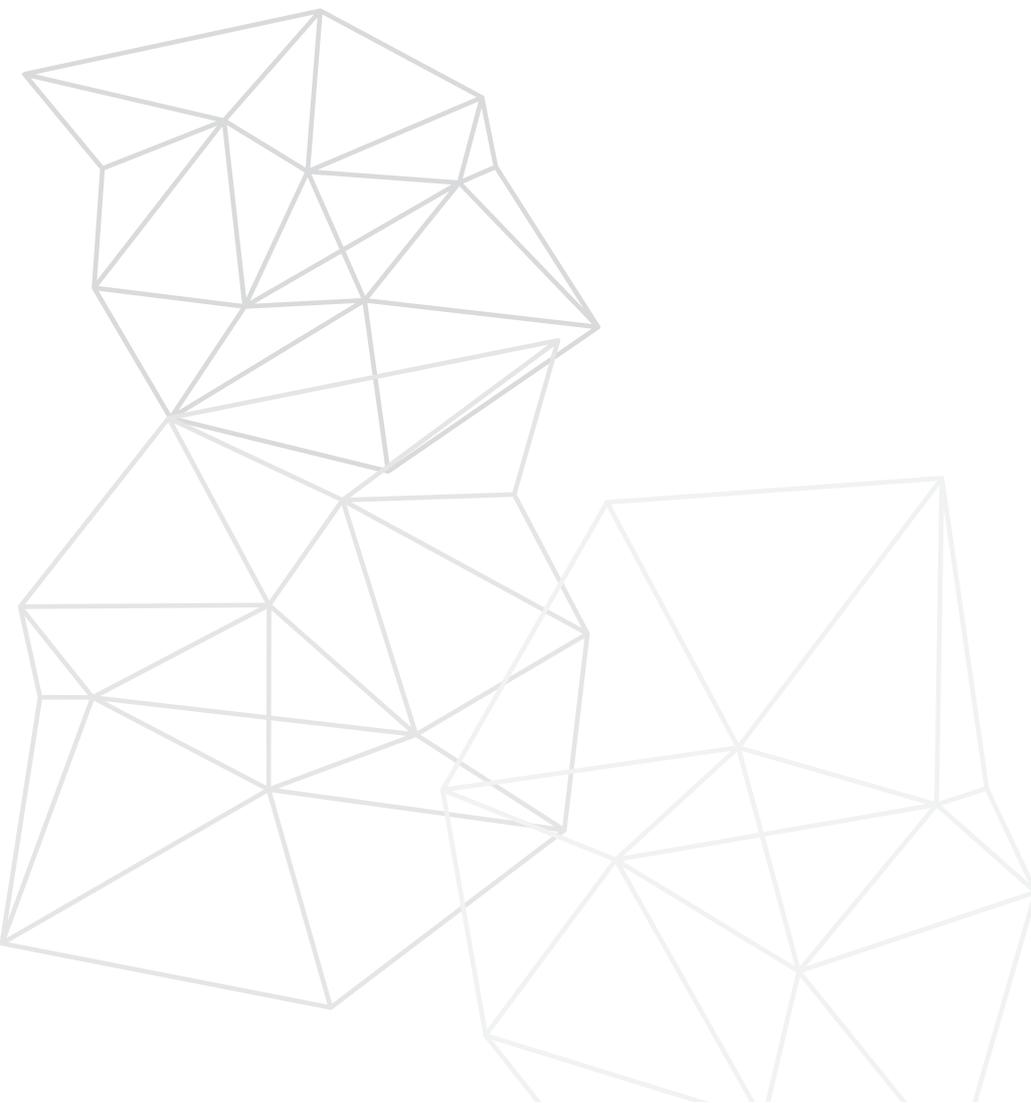
The digitalisation of the Erasmus+ grants management process is one aspect still untouched by the digitisation process. There are substantial gaps in our current knowledge and literature regarding Erasmus+ grants management. To be able to establish generally valid processes we need to identify differences from the national level, through to the institutional level, and then to the level of individual students. Based on the preliminary investigation among consortium partners, there are significantly different processes in force in individual countries. As a first step, a range of official documents and available secondary data such as previous studies, Erasmus+ Participant Reports, EU Survey data set have been analysed to form the basis for the student survey design and conduct further research and interviews.

It is generally known that the biggest obstacle to the mobility of students, who are at the center of the Erasmus program, is based on financial reasons. This situation has been highlighted by various studies and reports such as the European Parliament's "Improving participation in the Erasmus programme" study Vossensteyn et al. (2010). The study examines the barriers to participation of students in the Erasmus mobility program[1] and the extent to which they affect it. According to the results of the study, financial issues are the common and foremost obstacle for students in every programme country. Socio-economic infrastructure based on individual preferences and cost-benefit assessments is decisive in this regard. Different barriers like insufficient language skills and existing personal commitments are what follow the financial issues which varies from country to country. Bracht et al. (2006), Kehm (2005) and Souto-Otero et al. (2013) are among the studies emphasizing that financial[2] problems are[3] at the top of the problems[4] experienced by Erasmus students.

1 Vossensteyn, J. J., Beerkens-Soo, M., Beerkens, M., Cremonini, L., Besançon, B., Focken, N., Leurs, B., McCoshan, A., Huisman, J., Mozuraityte, N., Souto-Otero, M., & de Wit, H. (2010). Improving the participation in the Erasmus Programme. European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies. http://www.europarl.europa.eu/studies
2 Bracht, O., Engel, C., Janson, K., Over, A., Schomburg, H., & Teichler,U. (2006). The professional value of ERASMUS mobility . Kassel,Germany: International Centre for Higher Education Research,University of Kassel
3 Kehm, B. (2005).The contribution of international studentmobility tohuman development and global understanding. US-China EducationReview, 2(1), 18–24.
4 Souto-Otero, Manuel &Huisman, Jeroen & Beerkens, Maarja& de Wit, Hans & Vujić, Sunčica.(2013). Barriers to International Student Mobility Evidence From the Erasmus Program. Educational Researcher. 42. 70-77.10.3102/0013189X12466696.

However, there is no study in the literature on the effects of the existing grant payment systems of institutions, which are one of the most important sources of these financial difficulties to the best of our knowledge. Survey, observation, and interview-based research have been conducted to fill this gap in order to reveal the perspectives of students, IROs and NAs at the very beginning of the outputs that the MEGA project will produce. Determining these issues and the basic needs of the target groups will contribute to finding effective solutions. Our findings should help to create a methodological framework on relevant data bases and to prepare the basis for IT solution and Erasmus+ NAs to set up a simple, fast, clear, and transparent policy of the student grant management.
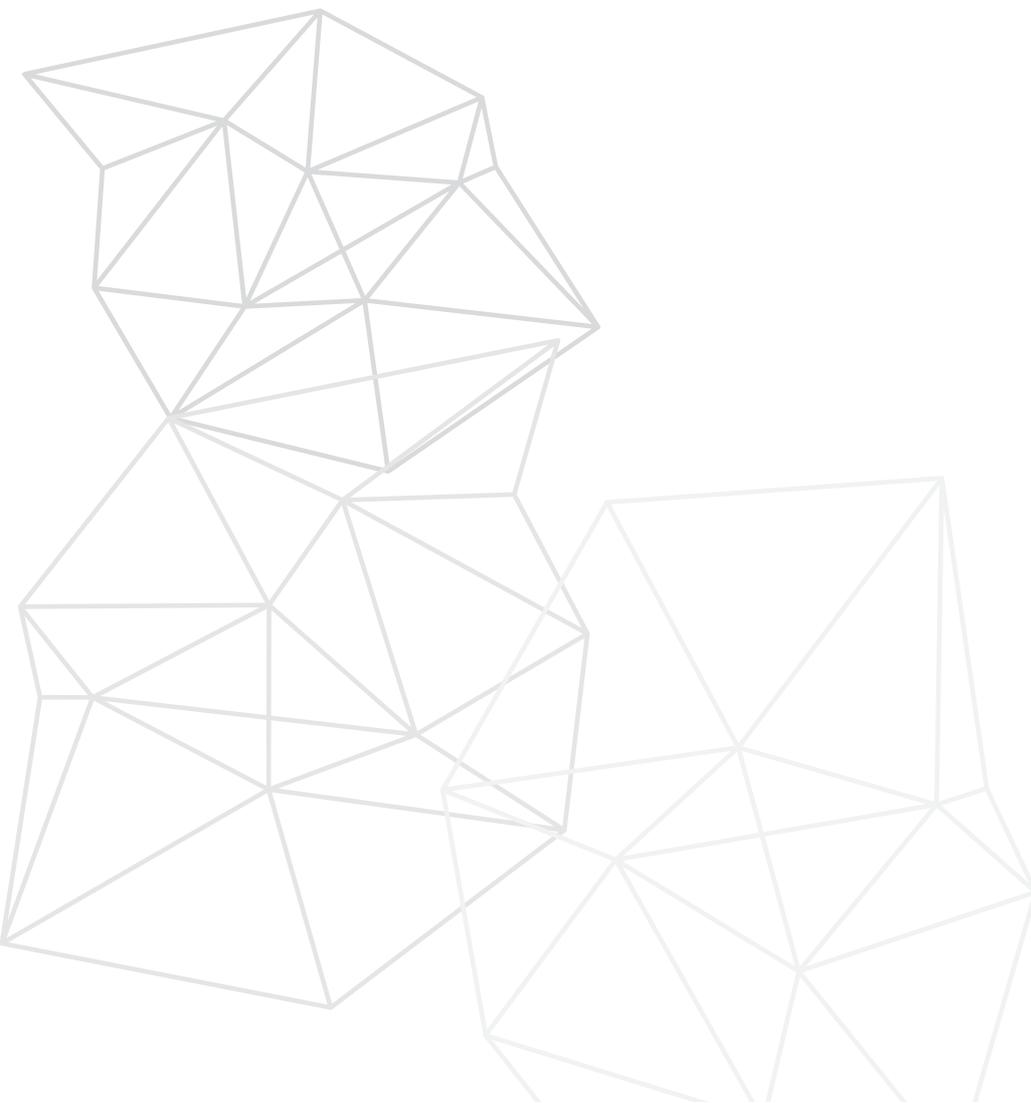
Despite some thirty years of social science research into the Erasmus + mobility program (f.i. Souto-Otero et al 2013), no research has been conducted regarding student grants distribution. There are substantial gaps in our current knowledge about this issue. This sociological research project explores the factors that affect the smooth redistribution of student grants and the ways in which individual universities handle this task. The overall aim of this research study is to identify key issues relating to student grant redistribution in the context of professional practice at IROs. Our findings should help us to create a methodological framework on relevant databases.

The aim of this research is to investigate the process of student grant redistribution within the European Union (EU) using a mixed-methods approach. The purpose of this research is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the financial management of scholarships across Europe. The focus will be primarily on the institutional level, specifically the relationship between national agencies, universities, and students. The main objective is to identify the key trigger points and critical moments in the scholarship payment process in different countries. In collaboration with the output leader for the project group responsible for developing an IT solution, we will create guidelines to facilitate this process.

The three levels of research have been designed related to the investigation of the process of grant payments for students participating in mobility programs. The three levels of research are:

1. National agencies: This level of research involves investigating the rules and regulations that national agencies have in place for grant payments, as well as the grant agreements that are used. The research may also investigate whether the national agency supports payments before mobility, after arrival confirmation, or has no preference.

2. International relations offices (IROs): This level of research focuses on the responsibilities and procedures that IROs, representing each program country, have in relation to grant payments. This research may also involve economic departments that are involved in the process.

3. Students: The third level of research focuses on the experiences of students in relation to grant payments. This may include investigating the time of payment, exchange rate differences, administrative burden, and the digitalization of grant payments. Possible methods for acquiring responses from students include obtaining information from IROs at selected universities, final reports from mobilities through the Mobility Tool, and administering questionnaires through social media platforms like ESN.

This research is accordingly structured into three distinct components, namely qualitative interviews, quantitative research among International Relations Offices (IROs), and quantitative research among students with and without prior experience with the Erasmus+ grant. The qualitative research phase involves conducting structured interviews within groups comprising project team members and their offices, predominantly IROs. The second group being investigated is the National Agencies for Erasmus+, with a particular focus on coordinators of mobility program grants. Subsequent to the qualitative research phase, a quantitative questionnaire will be administered to further explore the topic at hand.

As described, the research aims to gain a better understanding of the process of student grant redistribution within the EU and to provide insights and recommendations that can be used to improve the process of grant distribution. Several key steps in the scientific research process, include formulation of research questions, generating hypotheses, collecting and analysing data, and drawing conclusions.

The procedure was as follows:
1. **Formulating a research question:** This involves defining the research problemand the research question(s) that the study seeks to answer. In this case, the research team worked with the staff of the international relations offices of the participating universities to develop research questions.
2. **Literature review**: Before conducting research, it is important to review existing literature on the topic of interest.This helps to identify existing knowledge gaps and informs the development of hypotheses.
3. **Hypothesis generation:** Based on the research question and literature review, the research team proposes hypotheses that they will test through the research process.
4. **Data collection:** In this case, data was collected through interviews with staff members of the International Relations Offices of the participating universities and the research team. This data will be used to test the hypotheses and answer the research questions.
5. **Data analysis:** Once data has been collected and analyzed using appropriate statistical methods to determine whether the hypotheses are supported or not.
6. **Drawing conclusions:** Based on the results of the analysis, the research team will draw conclusions about the research question and make recommendations for future research or practical applications.

The questionnaire design methodology for this research involved the use of a structured and targeted approach to gathering specific information from the target population. The questionnaire was divided into three main parts, with the first part focused on collecting demographic data from the participants. The second part focused on exploring the participants' experiences with the Erasmus+ grant, while the third part was targeted specifically towards those who did not participate in the grant and aimed to uncover the reasons behind their decision.

The questionnaire contained a series of questions designed to elicit specific information related to the research objectives. The questions were carefully crafted to be clear and concise, avoiding any ambiguity or confusion. The questions included topics such as the grant payment process, the timing of grant payments, administrative procedures, and financial hurdles experienced by participants during their mobility period.

The questionnaire design also included measures to ensure the validity and reliability of the data collected. This involved pre-testing the questionnaire to identify any issues with the questions or design before it was administered to the target population. Additionally, the questionnaire was administered using a standardized protocol to ensure consistency across all participants.

The specific questions asked in the questionnaire:

1.Please indicate your level of study
2.Please indicate your field of study
3.Please indicate the country of the University you attended/are attending
4.Please indicate your previous experience in participation of Erasmus+ mobility
5.Which country have you been to Erasmus mobility?
6.Did you know what amount of money you were going to receive before your E+ application?
7.In how many instalments did you receive Erasmus+ grant?
8.When did you receive the first instalment?
9.What percentage of the final grant have you received in first instalment?
10.What percentage of the grant was sufficient to cover the earliest expenses (before and in the first two weeks of your stay)?
11.Do you think that the first instalment was sufficient to cover the earliest expenses?
12.When did you receive the full grant (respectively when the last instalment came)?
13.In what period of your mobility period did you experience financial burdens the most?
14.When do you think is the best time for the full grant to be paid?
15.How satisfied were you with the timing of the grant payment?

16.How would you evaluate the difficulty of administrative procedure to get the grant?
17.Who do you think is responsible for the late grant payment?
18.What was the biggest financial hurdle during your mobility period?
19.Who was in charge of signing the grant agreement with you?
20.How much time in total have you spent on paperwork before mobility?
21.Do you agree with the following statements concerning E+ grant?
22.Does your country offer an additional financial support system to Erasmus+ program?
23.If you must evaluate the Erasmus+ program among other scholarship programs available to you, how would it stand?
24.Could the delay of scholarship payment be an obstacle that influences student's decisions to go abroad?
25.What needs to be changed in the grant management system?
26.How important is it for you to get a grant on time?
27.What is your ideal grant process? Could the grant management system be different? Please, describe your ideas, tips and good practices.
28.What discourages students from participating in Erasmus+?

In summary, the procedural approach was comprised of three distinct phases, each of which adhered to rigorous scientific standards. The first phase involved qualitative interviews conducted among groups consisting of project team members and their respective offices, primarily IROs. The second phase centred on quantitative research conducted among International Relations Offices, with a particular focus on coordinators of mobility program grants. Following these two phases, the third and final phase consisted of a quantitative questionnaire administered to students, both those with and without prior experience with the Erasmus+ grant. Throughout each phase of this research, a robust and systematic approach was implemented to ensure that the results were reliable and trustworthy (see Student Survey Analysis).

The methodology used for designing the questionnaire in this research was similar to the approach taken when surveying students to gain a deeper understanding of their problems. A structured and targeted method was employed to gather specific information from the target group of IRO´s employees.

The questionnaire was organized into three main parts. The first part aimed to collect "demographic" information from the participants and their universities. Questions were related to the respondent's academic or professional background and their institution's involvement in the Erasmus+ program. We requested information about the respondent's position or role within the institution, about the total number of students in the institution and about the number of student motilities under the Erasmus+ program that the department realizes annually.

The second part focused on exploring the distribution of the Erasmus+ grant at the participants' institutions, with questions about the trigger points for the first and last installments, how student arrival and departure dates are monitored, and the number of installments for distributing the grant. The questionnaire was designed to evaluate the Erasmus+ program and compare it with other scholarship programs. The last part of the questionnaire focused on gathering feedback from the participants about the program, including their complaints, pros and cons, and suggestions for improvements.

To identify common problems and potential areas for improvement, the participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with various statements concerning the Erasmus+ grant. The evaluation of the program was further explored by asking the participants to rate the Erasmus+ program in comparison to other scholarship programs available to their students. Additionally, the participants were asked to provide their ideal grant process.

This study targeted both university employees of IRO and students to gather different perspectives on the program. The comparison between the two groups' responses provided valuable insights into the weaknesses of the Erasmus+ program, especially in terms of grant distribution. Overall, the questionnaire design allowed for a comprehensive evaluation of the Erasmus+ program and provided useful feedback for potential improvements.

The specific questions asked in the questionnaire:

1. How do you monitor a student's date of arrival and departure?: This field asks respondents to describe how they monitor student's date of arrival and departure for their mobility.
2. In how many instalments do you distribute Erasmus+ grant?: This field asks respondents to indicate how many instalments they distribute the Erasmus+ grant in.
3. What are the trigger points of the first instalment?: This field asks respondents to indicate the trigger points for the first instalment of the Erasmus+ grant.
4. What are the trigger points of the last instalment?: This field asks respondents to indicate the trigger points for the last instalment of the Erasmus+ grant.
5. What percentage of the final grant do you provide in the first instalment?: This field asks respondents to indicate what percentage of the final grant is provided in the first instalment.
6. When do you send the first grant instalment?: This field asks respondents to indicate when they send the first grant instalment.
7. How long does the payment process take?: This field asks respondents to indicate how long the payment process takes.
8. How much time approx. do you spend on paperwork with one outgoing student?: This field asks respondents to indicate how much time they spend on paperwork with one outgoing student.
9. Do you agree with the following statements concerning E+ grant?: This field asks respondents to indicate their level of agreement with various statements concerning the Erasmus+ grant.
10. If you have to evaluate the Erasmus+ program among other scholarship programs available for your students, how would it stand?: This field asks respondents to evaluate the Erasmus+ program among other scholarship programs available to their students.
11. What needs to be changed in the grant management system of Erasmus+ ?: This field asks respondents to indicate what changes they would like to see in the grant management system of the Erasmus+ program.
12. What is your ideal grant process? Could the grant management system be different? (Please describe your ideas, tips and good practices): This field asks respondents to describe their ideal grant process.

The survey was conducted over a period of six months, from June 2022 to November 2022. The 3,874 individuals from 33 countries participated in the survey. The country that was most represented in the survey was Italy, with 34.29% of the respondents. The next highest-represented countries were Norway (18.83%), France (5.60%), Germany (5.63%), and Luxembourg (4.95%). The remaining countries had lower levels of representation.
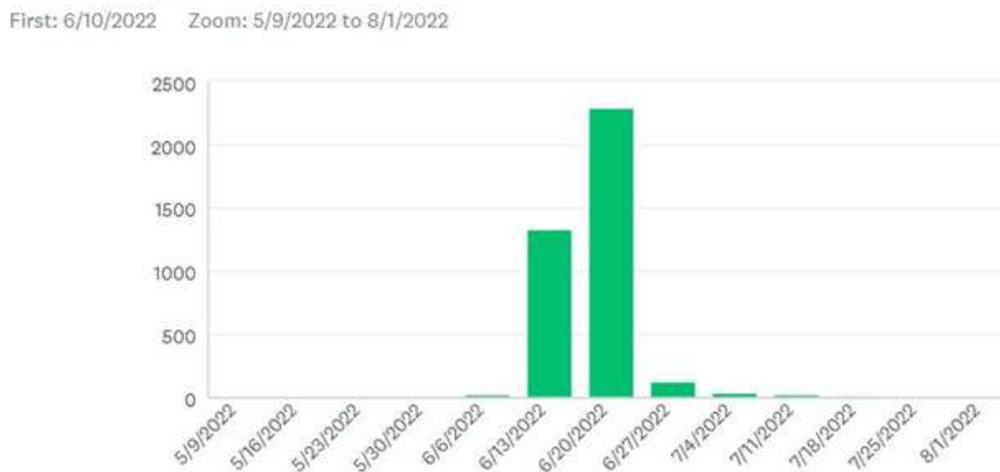

Figure 1 Trend of responding

The largest group of respondents (18.54%) was from the field of Business, Administration, and Law, followed by Health and Welfare (16.52%), Arts and Humanities (12.64%), Social Sciences, Journalism, and Information (10.62%), Natural Sciences, Mathematics, and Statistics (12.22%), Engineering, Manufacturing, and Construction (9.84%), Education (9.97%), Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) (5.46%), Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, and Veterinary (3.13%), and Services (1.04%). The data suggests that the respondents were diverse in terms of their academic backgrounds and professional expertise.
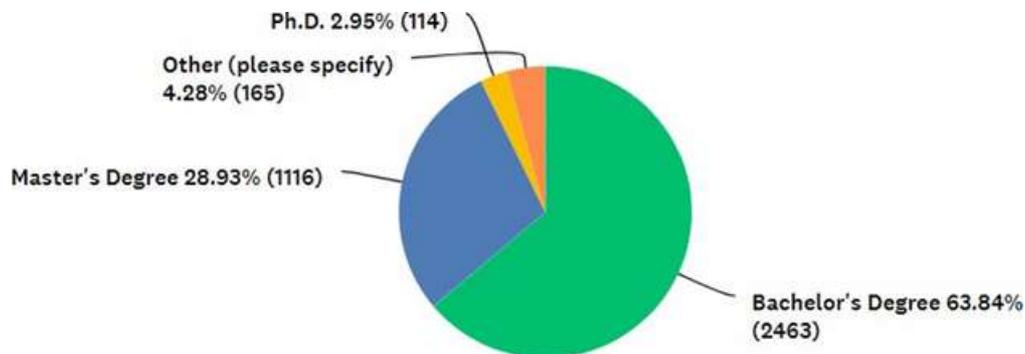
Figure 2 Level of studies

We asked our respondents about the previous experience in participating in Erasmus+ mobility programs. Based on the data, the largest group of respondents (56.55%) reported having no previous experience with Erasmus+ mobility. In contrast, 34.35% of the respondents reported previous experience with student mobility for studies, while 6.07% reported previous experience with student mobility for an internship or practical training. A smaller percentage of respondents (3.02%) reported having experience with both types of mobility.

The data suggests that the majority of the respondents have not participated in Erasmus+ mobility programs, which may have implications for the promotion and accessibility of these programs. Additionally, the data indicates a greater level of experience with student mobility for studies compared to mobility for internships or practical training. This information may be useful in identifying areas for program development and improvement within the Erasmus+ mobility framework.

The most visited country by the respondents during their Erasmus+ mobility is France, with 13.75% of the total responses. The next most visited countries are Spain with 16.20%, Germany with 10.03%, and Italy with 6.18%. It is important to note that 6.81% of the respondents specified "Other" as their answer, indicating that there might be other countries like Partner countries in ICM that were not listed in the options where they had their Erasmus+ mobility.

The majority of the respondents (63.84%) held a Bachelor's degree, while 28.93% held a Master's degree, and 2.95% held a Ph.D. Additionally, 4.28% of the respondents selected "Other" as their level of study and provided a specific response, but no information is given about the nature of these responses.

Based on the table, it appears that nearly half of the respondents (45.89%) believe that the International Relation Offices are responsible for grant payment for their Erasmus+ mobility. Meanwhile, 18.52% of respondents believe that their faculties/schools are responsible, and only 4.46% believe that their departments are responsible. It is interesting to note that 28.19% of respondents indicated that they do not know who is responsible for the grant payment. This may suggest a lack of clarity or communication regarding the grant payment process for Erasmus+ mobility among the respondents.

Who is responsible for the grant payment for your Erasmus+ mobility?
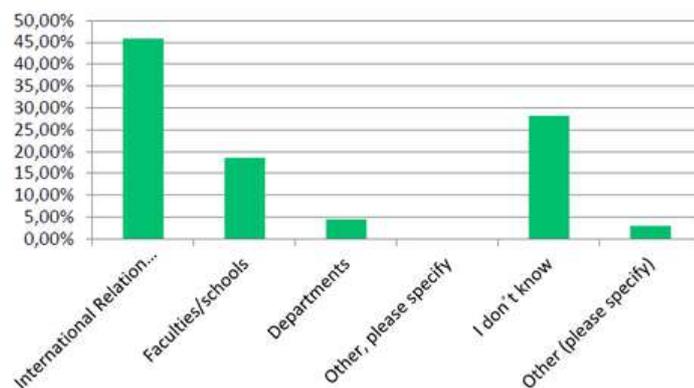
Did you know what amount of money you were going to receive before your E+ application?
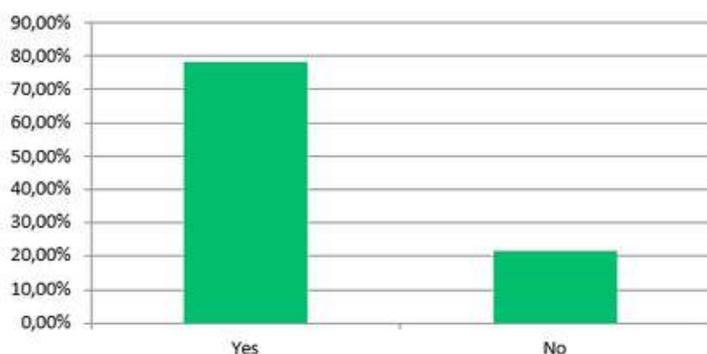
It appears that the majority of respondents (78.37%) knew what amount of money they were going to receive before submitting their Erasmus+ application. This suggests that there is a relatively high level of transparency and communication regarding the grant amount among the respondents' institutions. However, it is important to note that 21.63% of respondents indicated that they did not know what amount of money they were going to receive before submitting their application. This may indicate a lack of clarity or communication regarding the grant amount among some institutions.

Based on the table, it appears that a majority of respondents (51.88%) received their Erasmus+ grant in two installments. Meanwhile, 28.67% of respondents received their grant in a single installment, and only 11.68% received their grant in three or more installments.

Additionally, 7.76% of respondents indicated that they did not know in how many installments they received their grant.

In how many instalments did you receive Erasmus+ grant?
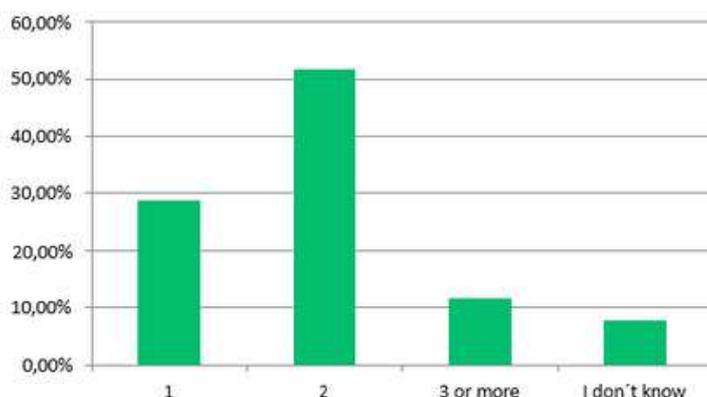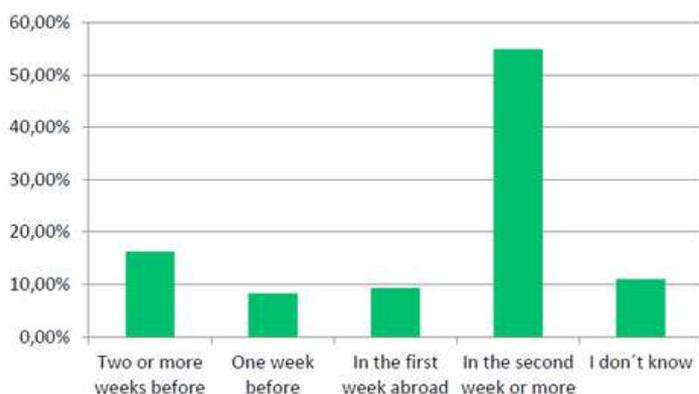
The majority of respondents (54.98%) received their first Erasmus+ grant installment in the second week or later after starting their mobility abroad. This may suggest that some students experienced financial challenges during their initial weeks abroad while waiting for the grant payment to be processed. However, it is worth noting that a significant portion of respondents (16.29%) did receive their first installment two or more weeks before their mobility abroad, which may have helped alleviate some of the financial stress. Additionally, a small percentage of respondents (8.34%) received their first installment one week before their mobility and 9.34% received it in the first week abroad. Finally, 11.04% of respondents indicated that they did not know when they received their first installment, which may suggest a lack of communication or clarity regarding the grant payment process.

When did you receive the first instalment?

## What percentage of the final grant have you received in first instalment?
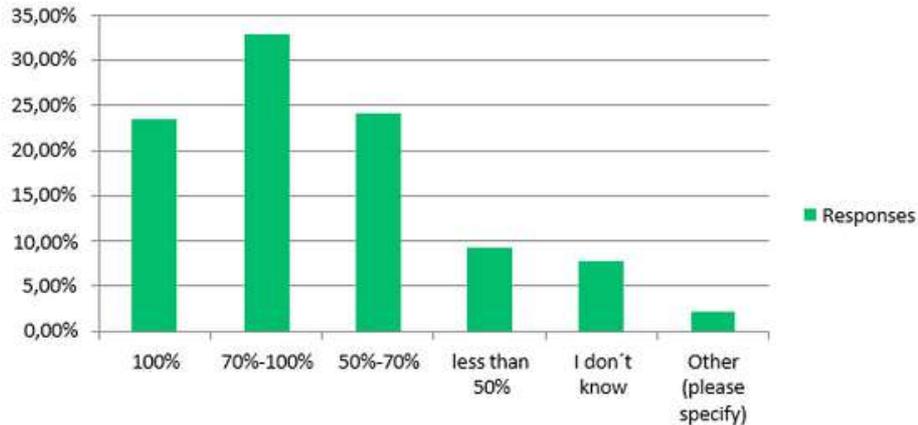
Based on the table, it appears that the majority of respondents received between 70% and 100% of their final Erasmus+grant in their first installment (32.97%), followed by those who received 50%-70% (24.09%). Meanwhile, 23.55% of respondents received the full 100% of their grant in the first installment, and 9.27% received less than 50%. It is worth noting that 7.88% of respondents indicated that they did not know what percentage of the final grant they received in the first installment, which may suggest a lack of communication or clarity regarding the grant payment process.

This table shows the percentage of respondents who felt that their grant was sufficient to cover their earliest expenses, specifically before and within the first two weeks of their stay.

About 20% of respondents felt that 70% or more of their grant was sufficient to cover these expenses. About 23.5% felt that 50-70% of their grant was enough, while the majority of respondents (38%) felt that less than 50% of their grant was sufficient. Additionally, 15.2% of respondents were unsure if their grant was enough to cover these early expenses.

What percentage of the grant was sufficient to cover the earliest expenses (before and in the first two weeks of your stay)?
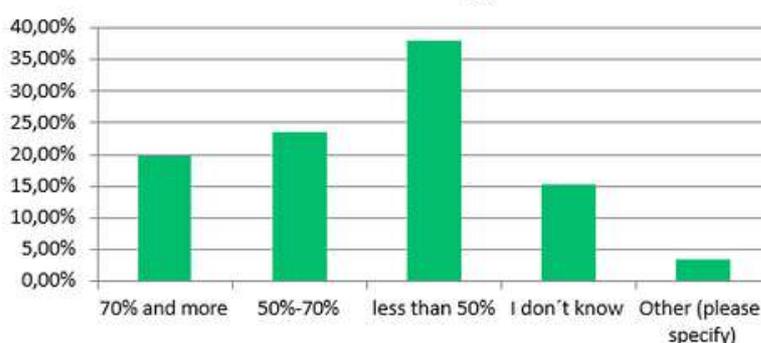
Overall, it appears that a significant portion of respondents felt that their grant did not provide enough financial support for the earliest expenses of their study abroad experience.

Based on the responses, it seems that many students experienced delays in receiving their grants, with some waiting up to two months or more. In some cases, the grant was not sufficient to cover early expenses, leading to financial difficulties for the students. Some students had to rely on personal savings or help from their parents to cover the initial costs. The percentage of the grant received in the first installment varied widely, with some receiving none or less than 20%, while others received almost 100% if the deposit for housing and other initial expenses were included. Overall, it appears that the timing and amount of the grant were significant factors in the student's ability to adjust to their new environment and cover their expenses during their study abroad experience.

These are responses from different individuals regarding their experience with receiving the Erasmus+ grant. Some had to pay for accommodation and travel expenses in advance using their own money because the grant had not arrived, while others received the first installment after a significant delay of 2.5 months. Some respondents did not receive the grant until Christmas or after their mobility was already concluded. One person received less than 50% of their grant in the first installment, while another received more than 100% but still had to pay out of pocket because their rent was more expensive than the grant. One respondent stated that the grant was not sufficient and they needed extra financial help. Finally, one person indicated that they had not received the grant because they had not left for their mobility yet.

Do you think that the first instalment was sufficient to cover the earliest expenses?
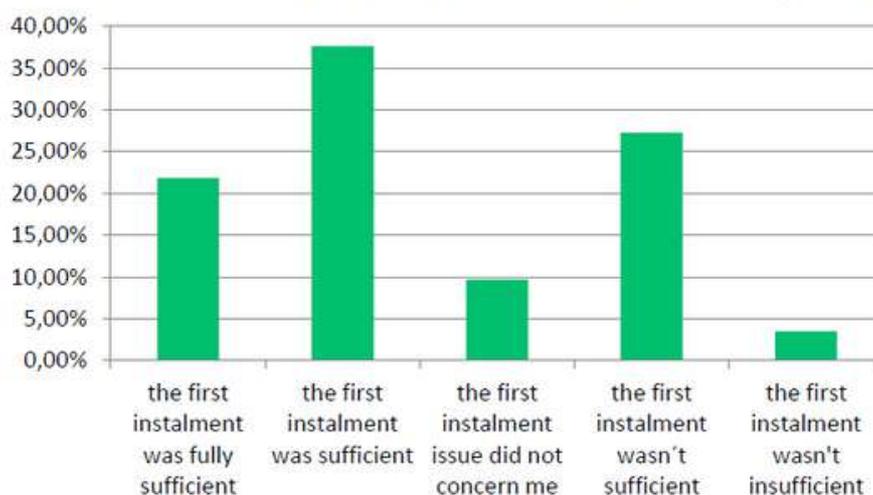
The majority of respondents (65.51%) felt that the first instalment of their grant was either fully sufficient or sufficient to cover their earliest expenses. However, a significant number of respondents (30.80%) felt that the first instalment was either not sufficient or insufficient to cover their earliest expenses. It is also worth noting that a small percentage of respondents (9.70%) did not encounter any issues with the first instalment. Overall, it appears that while a substantial number of respondents faced challenges with the first instalment of their grant, the majority were able to make it work.

When did you receive the full grant (respectively when the last instalment came)?
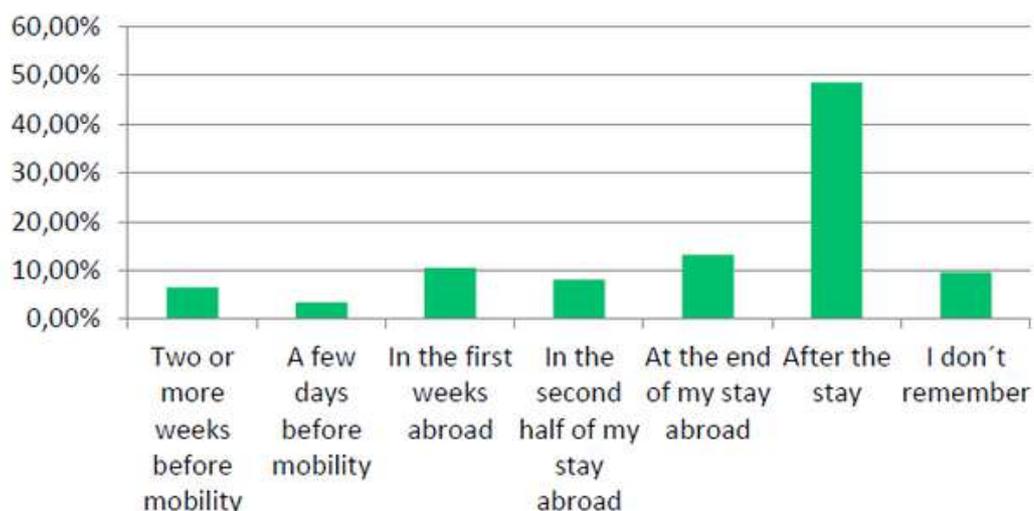
This table shows the timing of when respondents received the full grant or the last installment of the grant.

Only a small percentage (6.53%) received the full grant more than two weeks before their mobility. Another small percentage (3.42%) received the full grant just a few days before their mobility. The majority of respondents received the full grant either in the first few weeks (10.49%) or in the second half (8.16%) of their stay abroad.

A significant proportion (48.56%) did not receive the full grant until after their stay abroad had ended. A small percentage (9.63%) could not remember when they received the full grant.

Late payment of installments is a problem, as indicated by the data above. Only a small percentage of respondents received the full grant sufficiently in advance their mobility, while a significant proportion did not receive the full grant until after their stay abroad had ended.

This suggests that late payments of installments may cause difficulties for students relying on grant funds to support their mobility and can be a major hurdle in the decision to participate in the program.

In what period of your mobility period did you experience financial burdens the most?
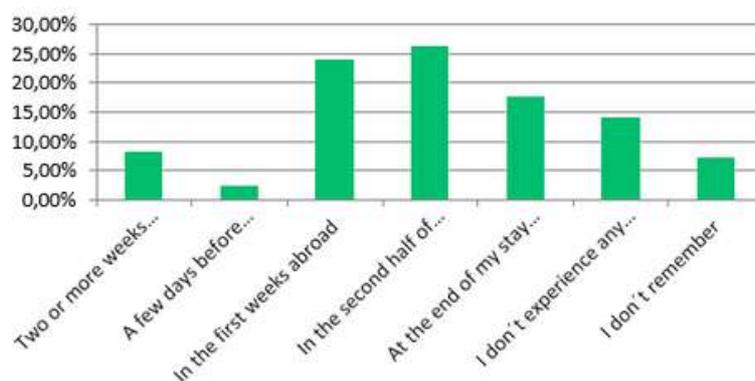
This table shows the responses of participants regarding the period of their mobility during which they experienced the most financial burdens. The highest percentage of respondents (26.24%) reported experiencing the most financial burdens in the second half of their stay abroad. The next most common period was in the first weeks abroad, with 24.15% of respondents reporting this. 17.65% of respondents experienced the most financial burdens at the end of their stay abroad. 14.01% of respondents did not experience any financial burdens, while 8.28% experienced the most financial burdens two or more weeks before their mobility.

When do you think is the best time for the full grant to be paid?
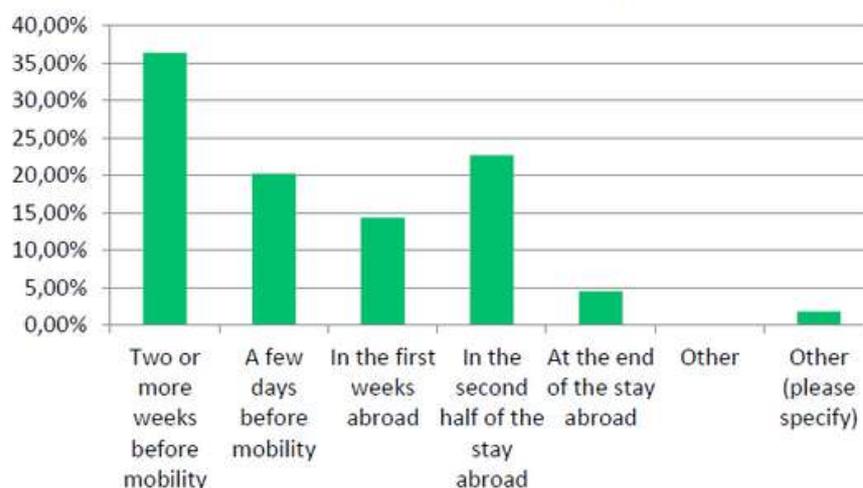
Based on the responses, the majority of the participants (36.4%) believed that the best time for the full grant to be paid is two or more weeks before mobility. The second most popular response was a few days before mobility (20.25%), followed by in the second half of the stay abroad (22.72%) and in the first weeks abroad (14.37%). A small percentage (4.48%) believed that the best time for the full grant to be paid is at the end of the stay abroad.

Based on the student responses, there are various opinions about the ideal way to receive the grant payment. Many students suggest receiving the payment in monthly installments, as it would aid in money management and budgeting. Some suggest splitting the payment in half, with the first half received before the mobility and the second half received monthly during the mobility. Others suggest receiving a certain amount every month, similar to other financial aid programs. Some students suggest receiving 60% of the grant at the beginning of the mobility and the remaining 40% when they have three months left. Another suggestion is to receive the payment periodically, every month. However, some students also suggest receiving the full amount of the grant at once, but with the condition that if a student fails their exams, they must pay back the amount they received.

How satisfied were you with the timing of the grant payment?
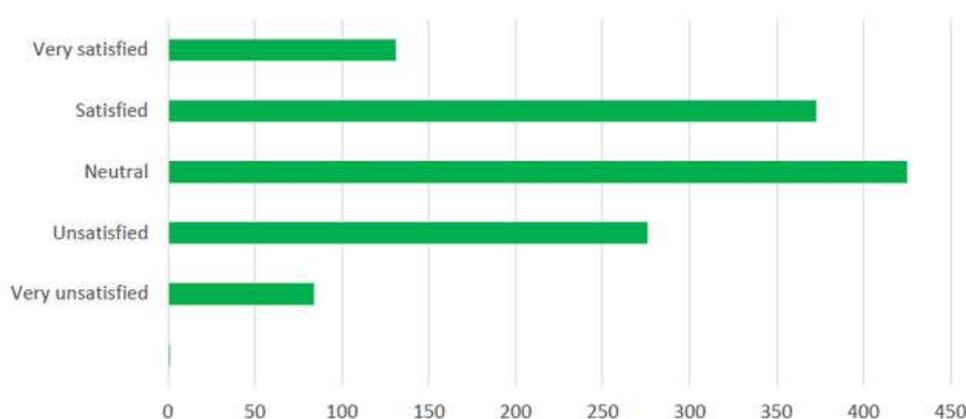
This table shows the distribution of responses from students regarding their satisfaction level with the timing of the grant payment. The table displays the number of respondents and the percentage of respondents who chose each option.

The options range from "very unsatisfied" to "very satisfied." From the table, we can see that 6.52% of students were very unsatisfied with the timing of the grant payment, while 21.41% were unsatisfied. The majority of students (32.97%) selected "neutral" as their response, indicating that they were neither satisfied nor unsatisfied. On the other hand, 28.94% of students were satisfied, and 10.16% were very satisfied with the timing of the grant payment.

Overall, the table suggests that a significant number of students were not completely satisfied with the timing of the grant payment, with more students expressing some level of dissatisfaction than satisfaction.

How would you evaluate the difficulty of administrative procedure to get the grant?
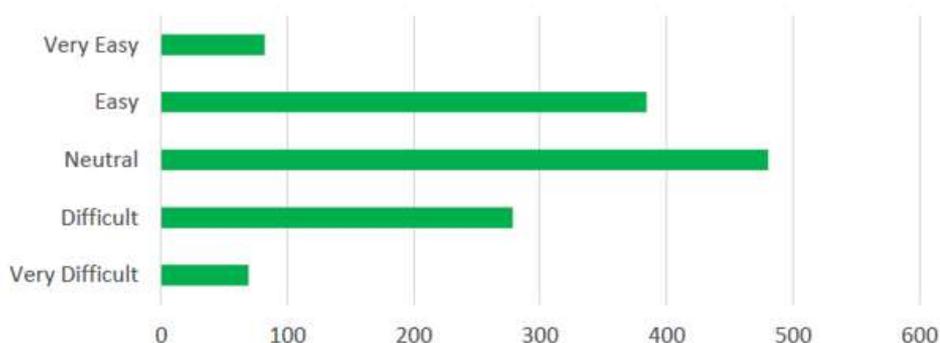
This table shows the responses of students regarding the difficulty of the administrative procedure to get the grant. The options range from "Very Difficult" to "Very Easy."

Out of the total respondents, 69 students (5.34%) found the procedure to be very difficult, while 278 students (21.50%) found it difficult. A majority of 480 students(37.12%) responded with "Neutral." Meanwhile, 384 students (29.70%) found the procedure to be easy, and 82 students (6.34%) found it to be very easy.

Who do you think is responsible for the late grant payment?
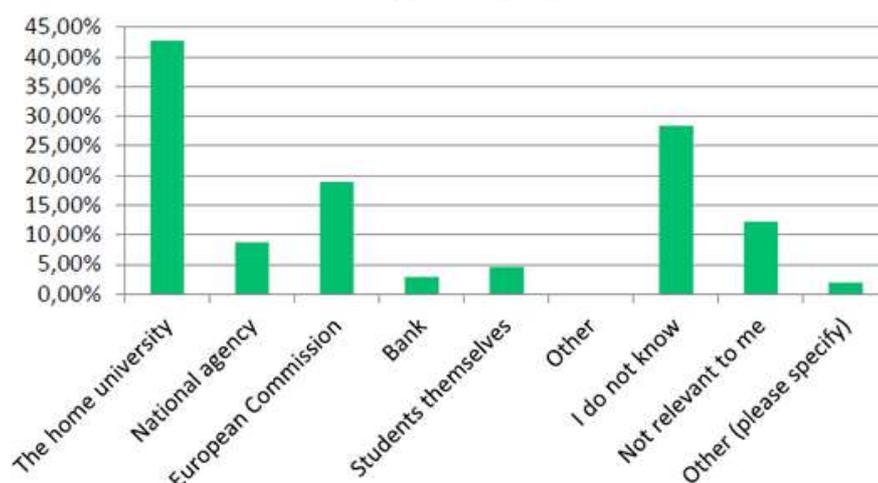
According to the table, when asked who is responsible for the late grant payment, the largest percentage of respondents (42.77%) think that the home university is responsible. This is followed by the European Commission (18.87%), and then the national agency (8.74%). A small percentage of respondents believe that the bank (2.86%) or the students themselves (4.56%) are responsible. A significant percentage of respondents (28.38%) indicated that they do not know who is responsible for the late grant payment, while 12.22% said that this issue is not relevant to them. Additionally, a small percentage of respondents (1.93%) provided other specific responses.

From the open questions, it appears that the responsibility for late grant payments is attributed to various parties. Some students attribute the delay to the receiving university, as they need to provide the necessary documents for the payment to be approved. Other students blame their home university for having a difficult and long bureaucracy. Some students also point to external factors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or technical problems. The host university is also mentioned as a responsible party in some cases, especially if they release grades late or if learning agreements need to be filled out before payment. The Swiss Government and MIUR (Ministry of Education, Universities and Research in Italy) are also mentioned as responsible parties in some cases. It seems that the reasons for late grant payments are diverse and vary depending on the individual situation.

What was the biggest financial hurdle during your mobility period?
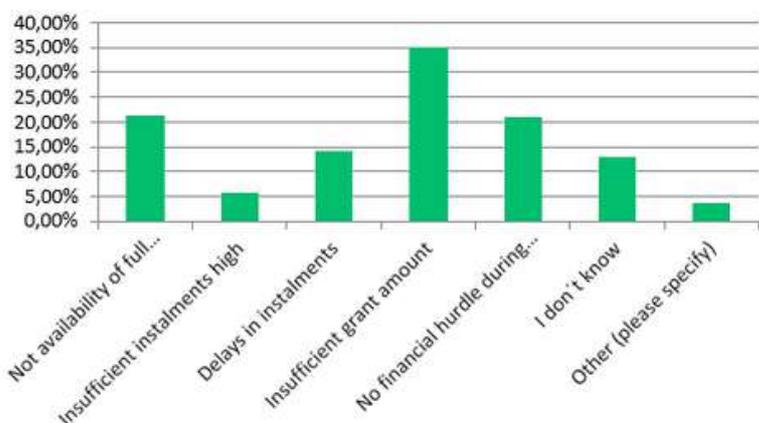
This table shows the responses of students to the question of what was the biggest financial hurdle during their Erasmus+ mobility period. More than a third (35.06%) of the respondents reported that the grant amount was insufficient, while 21.24% reported that the grant was not available in full from the beginning and was paid in instalments.

14.21% reported delays in instalments, 5.71% reported high insufficient instalments, and 21.08% reported that they did not face any financial hurdle during their mobility period. 13.05% of respondents indicated that they did not know what the biggest financial hurdle was during their Erasmus+ mobility period, and 3.78% specified "Other."

Based on the open questions provided, the biggest financial costs reported by students are mostly related to the high cost of housing and living expenses in the destination country. Other common expenses mentioned are flight tickets, travel costs, delays in receiving grant installments, unexpected expenses, and COVID-related issues. Some students also mentioned that the grant amount is not sufficient to cover all expenses, and in some cases, they had to use their own savings or get additional funding to participate in the program. Additionally, some students reported issues with delays in receiving grant payments or having to pay for expenses out of pocket before receiving the grant.

Who was in charge of signing the grant agreement with you?
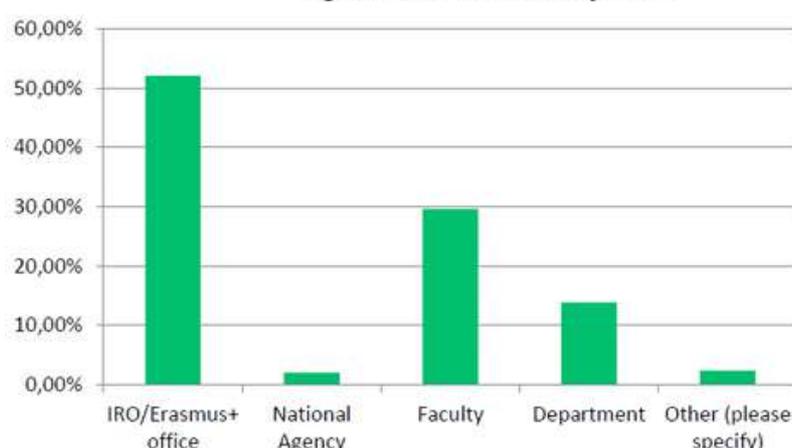
The majority of respondents (52.13% or 673) indicated that the IRO/Erasmus+ office was in charge of signing the grant agreement with them. A smaller percentage of respondents (2.01% or 26) indicated that the National Agency was responsible for signing the agreement, while 29.67%(383) reported that their Faculty was in charge of signing the grant agreement. A smaller percentage of respondents (13.87% or 179) reported that their Department was responsible for signing the agreement. Finally, 2.32% (30) of respondents reported that "Other" entities were responsible for signing the agreement, but did not provide further details on who these entities were.

How much time in total have you spent on paperwork before mobility?
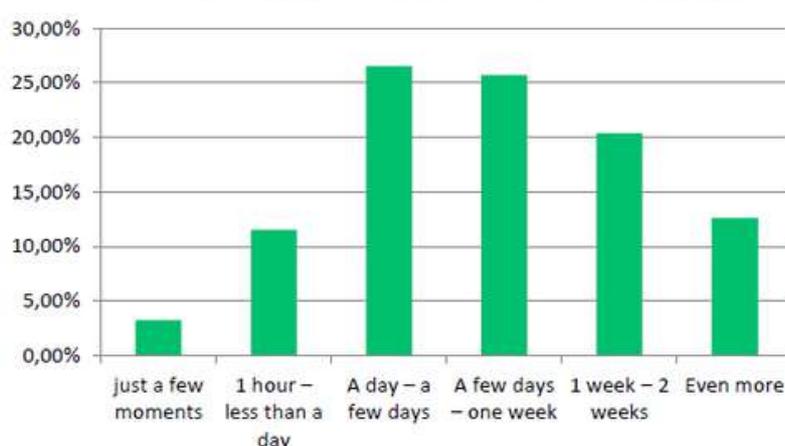
This table shows the distribution of responses to the question "How much time in total have you spent on paperwork before mobility?"

The majority of respondents (25.71%) spent a few days to one week on paperwork, followed by 1 day to a few days (26.56%), and 1 week to 2 weeks (20.39%). A smaller percentage of respondents spent just a few moments(3.24%) or even more time (12.59%) on paperwork.

The table shows the responses of the students to a survey about their perceptions regarding different aspects of the Erasmus+ grant.

The responses were measured on a five-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Do you agree with the following statements concerning E+ grant?
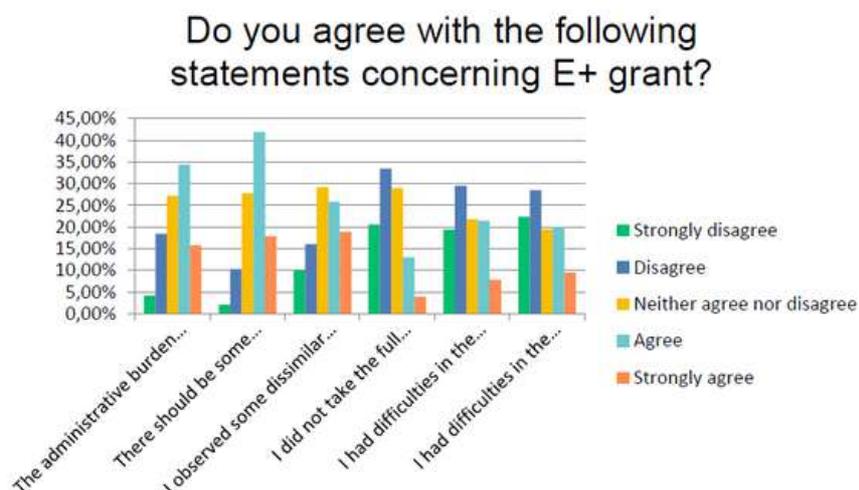
For the statement "The administrative burden before mobility bothered me a lot," most respondents agreed (34.39%), followed by neither agreeing nor disagreeing (27.19%) and disagreeing (18.44%).

For the statement "There should be some reduction of administrative agenda before mobility," the highest percentage of responses was agreeing (41.89%), followed by neither agreeing nor disagreeing (27.85%).

Regarding the statement "I observed some dissimilar treatment in Erasmus grant payment system among other E+ students during my mobility (like different final amount of grant, different number of instalments, etc.)," the highest percentage of responses was neither agreeing nor disagreeing (29.19%), followed by agreeing (25.85%) and disagreeing (16.07%).

For the statement "I did not take the full benefits of Erasmus Mobility because of grant payment system in my country," most respondents disagreed (33.46%), followed by agreeing (13.03%) and strongly disagreeing (20.59%).

Regarding the statement "I had difficulties in the beginning of the mobility because I did not receive enough of my E+ grant," most respondents had difficulties (48.96%) either agreeing (21.45%) or strongly agreeing (19.43%).

For the statement "I had difficulties in the beginning of the mobility because I did not receive the first installment on time," most respondents had difficulties (50.9%) either agreeing (20.06%) or strongly agreeing (22.39%).

The table shows the responses of the participants to the question "Does your country offer an additional financial support system to Erasmus+ program?".

The responses were divided into three categories: "Yes", "No", and "I don't know".

Does your country offer an additional financial support system to Erasmus+ program?
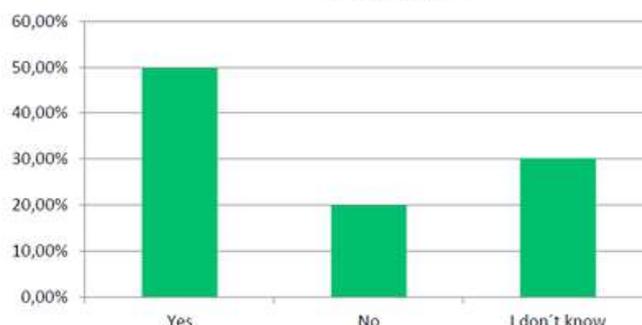
Out of the total participants who responded to the question, 49.81% (1410) answered "Yes", indicating that their country offers an additional financial support system to the Erasmus+ program. 19.96% (565) answered "No", indicating that their country does not offer any additional financial support system to the program. Finally, 30.24% (856) answered "I don't know", indicating that they were not aware whether their country offers any additional financial support system to the program or not.

Could the delay of scholarship payment be an obstacle that influences student's decisions to go abroad?
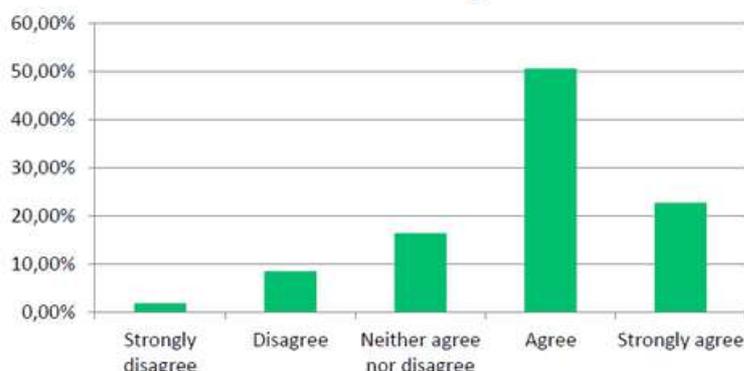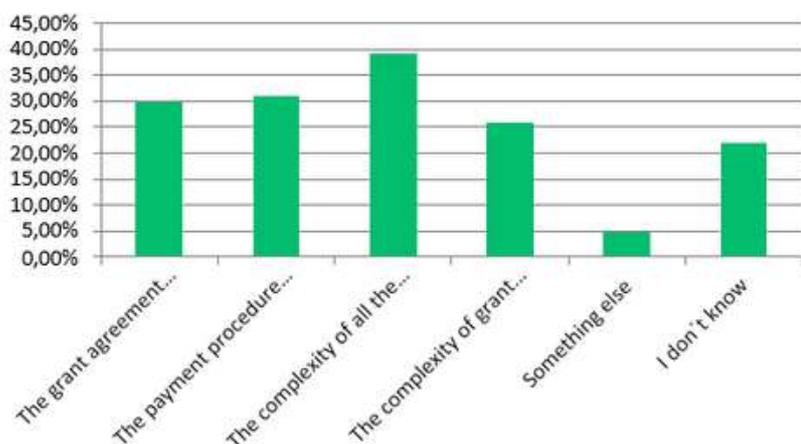
The table shows the responses of students to the question of whether the delay of scholarship payment could be an obstacle that influences their decision to go abroad.

50.56% of the students agreed that the delay of scholarship payment could be an obstacle that influences their decision to go abroad, while 22.70% strongly agreed.

On the other hand, 1.87% of the students strongly disagreed, 8.47% disagreed, and 16.38% neither agreed nor disagreed.

This suggests that the delay of scholarship payment is a significant concern for a majority of the students, and it could potentially influence their decision to participate in the program. It highlights the importance of timely and efficient scholarship payment systems to ensure that students can fully benefit from the program.

## What needs to be changed in the grant management system?

The table shows the responses of the participants regarding the changes that need to be made in the grant management system. The majority of the respondents, 39.17% (1109), expressed that the complexity of all the paperwork needs to be changed.

This is followed by the payment procedure, with 31.05% (879) of the respondents indicating that it needs to be changed, and the grant agreement procedure (administrative work) with 29.88% (846) of the respondents. The complexity of grant approval, with 25.86% (732) of the respondents, is the least cited factor that needs to be changed. Additionally, 4.80% (136) of the respondents chose "something else," while 21.79% (617) of the respondents chose "I don't know."

The table presents the responses of students who were asked about the factors that discourage them from participating in the Erasmus+ program. The results show that the most common factors that discourage students from participating in Erasmus+ are the "insufficient amount of the grant" (21.18%), followed by "existing personal commitments" (17.37%), and "insufficient language skills" (17.76%). Other factors that were mentioned include "recognition issues" (11.18%) and "other" (8.64%).

What discourages students from participating in Erasmus+?
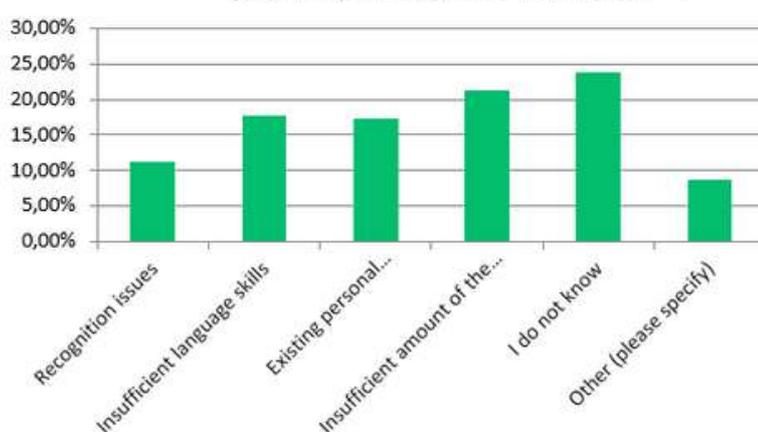
It is worth noting that a significant proportion of respondents (23.87%) selected "I do not know" as their response, which suggests that there may be a lack of information or awareness about the program among students. This highlights the need for more effective communication and outreach efforts to promote the benefits of the Erasmus+ program and address any concerns or misconceptions that students may have.
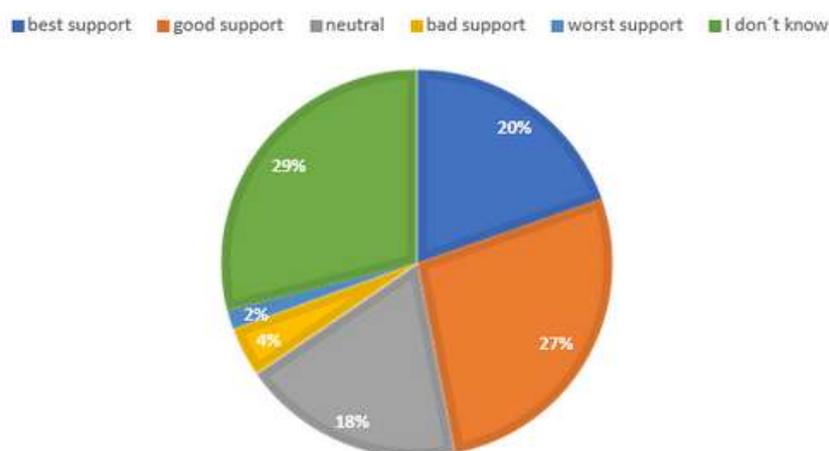
Figure 3 If you must evaluatethe Erasmus+ program among other scholarship programs available to you, how would it stand?

The table provides data on the number of respondents who rated the Erasmus+ program on a support scale ranging from "best support" to "worst support" and "I don't know". There were 555 respondents who rated the Erasmus+ program as the "best support," 774 respondents who rated it as "good support," 524 respondents who rated it as "neutral," 115 respondents who rated it as "bad support," and 45 respondents who rated it as the "worst support." Additionally, 820 respondents were unsure and rated it as "I don't know."

To evaluate the Erasmus+ program among other scholarship programs, we can see that a majority of respondents rated the Erasmus+ program positively, with 51.61% rating it as either "best support" or "good support." On the other hand, only 4.07% of respondents rated it negatively as either "bad support" or "worst support."

Overall, the table suggests that the majority of students had a positive perception of the Erasmus+ program, with a significant proportion of students rating it as the best or one of the best support options among other scholarship programs available to them. However, there were also some students who were unsure about how to evaluate the program, and a small minority who rated it as the worst support option.

The table shows the responses to the question "How important is it for you to get a grant on time?"
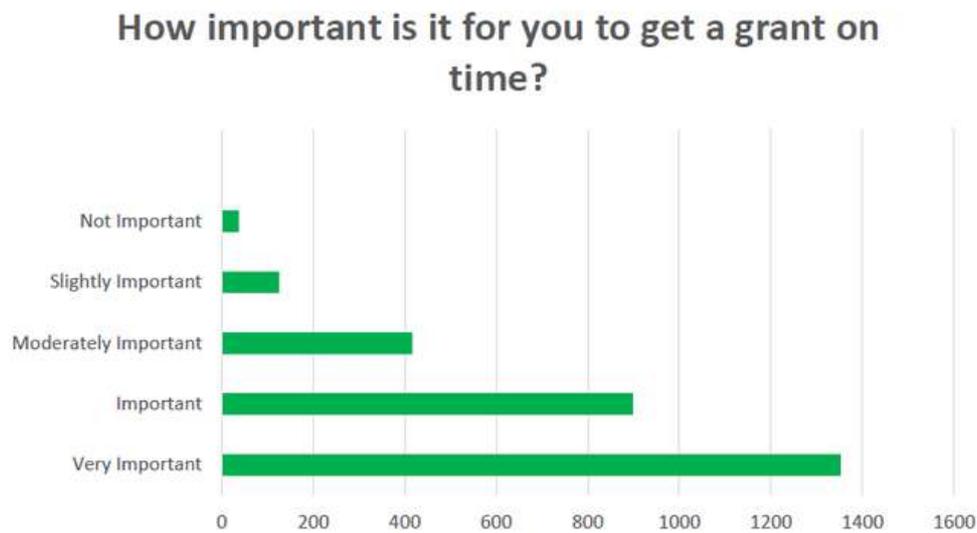
How important is it for you to get a grant on time?

The table shows the responses of students to the question of whether the delay of scholarship payment could be an obstacle that influences their decision to go abroad. The responses were rated on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "Very Important" and 5 being "Not Important." The majority of respondents (47.76%) rated it as "Very Important" to receive the grant on time, while 31.72% rated it as "Important." 14.73% of respondents rated it as "Moderately Important," 4.45% rated it as "Slightly Important," and only 1.34% rated it as "Not Important." This suggests that timely grant payment is a crucial factor for most students.

The responses from students indicate that an ideal grant process should be more structured and have better communication with clear steps and instructions. They also suggest reducing paperwork and making it easier to understand and fill in the forms. Additionally, students recommend increasing the subsidy and paying the first installment before the start of mobility, as well as having a person in charge of writing separate emails to each student or group of students. Some students suggest monthly payment, while others recommend smaller grants in more parts. There is a general consensus that the grant process should be done online and have better communication to manage the max and min amount in each country and different wages. Students also recommend more support from the people of the management system and reducing the bureaucratic burden.

Finally, some students suggest incorporating financial support based on individual needs and an open playing field to all national residents in the EU that apply.

Based on the responses provided, it seems that there are a few key areas for improvement in the Erasmus+ grant process.

Many students feel that the grant amount should be increased to better cover the costs of studying abroad, particularly in expensive countries. This includes covering costs like accommodation, food, travel, and insurance. Students also would like the grant payment process to be quicker and more efficient. Some suggest that the grant should be paid out in monthly instalments, or at least partially before the student departs for their study abroad. Others suggest that the grant should be paid out all at once when the student arrives in their destination country. They would like the grant application process to be streamlined and more transparent. This includes having clear information on the grant amount and payment dates, as well as a simple and easy-to-use application process. It could also include having a designated person or office to help students navigate the process. Lastly, some students feel that the grant should be adjusted to better accommodate the needs of different students, particularly those who may have higher costs for things like accommodation. This could include offering more personalized grant amounts based on each student's unique circumstances.

To summarized key areas for improvement in the Erasmus+ grant process:

1.**Communication** is important. Students want to know exactly how long they will be supported and the terms of their grant.

2. Students would like to **receive the grant before** their Erasmus program begins, as this is the time when they need the money the most.

3. Some students **would like to see improvements in the Learning Agreement** process, which they found to be confusing.

4. Students want **a more standardized and unified system across Europe**, with clear communication and accountability.

5. Students would like to **receive more support** and advice from their home institutions.

6. Some students experienced **difficulties in getting a response from the International office** at their home university.

7. There is a **preference for receiving the majority of the grant at the start of the program.**

8. Some students would like a **"manual" or guideline** to help them complete all the necessary documents.

9. There were **suggestions for money based on credits.**

10. **Some students would like the grant to be paid in advance** of the exchange to cover starting costs such as insurance, opening accounts, and rent deposit.

The main problem with the Erasmus+ grant process seems to be the timing of payments. Many students expressed the need for the grant to be awarded in advance so they can pay for accommodation, flights, and other expenses related to their study abroad program.

Some students also mentioned the need for a more streamlined process, with less paperwork and a centralized system that links all Erasmus partner universities. Others suggested that the grant amount should be increased or paid in more installments to help students manage their expenses better.

To summarize several ways in which the grant process could be improved to better serve students in need:

1.Amount of funding: Some students suggested that the amount of funding awarded should be based on the true cost of living in the host country. Students also suggested that the funding should be divided among more students in need to provide greater access to opportunities.

2. Simplifying the process: Several students suggested streamlining the application process to reduce paperwork and make it easier to apply for grants. The grant management system should be simplified with fewer procedures and less bureaucracy to make it easier for students without family support to apply. An automated system that pre-fills basic information could be helpful in this regard. Students also expressed a desire for clear and easy-to-understand instructions for filling out documents such as the learning agreement. Some suggested automatic granting of the grant upon signing the contract, while others suggested sharing previous expenses with the offices in order to receive partial grant earlier.

3. Timing of payments: Many students expressed a desire to receive their grants before their mobility begins or at the very beginning of their mobility. Several respondents noted that delays in receiving the grant can cause financial difficulties for students. It would help students better plan and budget for their expenses while abroad. The grant should be received on time and at the beginning of the mobility, ideally in one round or with the first installment of at least 70% 1-2 weeks before leaving.

4. Accountability: Some students suggested that there should be consequences for students who do not fulfil their agreements or fail to meet requirements. This could include having to pay back part of the grant.

5. The grant amounts should be revisited and re-calculated based on the chosen city and family status to give everyone an equal opportunity.

6. Students should be allowed to take more courses even outside the university, and grants should be given from the beginning of the year, not just during exam periods, to support students' needs throughout the year.

7. Equity: Some students expressed concern about the equity of the grant process, stating that students who have a national scholarship should not receive preferential treatment. They recommended ensuring equal access to the grant for all students, regardless of their financial situation. There should be more understanding and consideration towards the expenses of students, such as their spending. Offering more substantial financial aid to students who cannot afford to participate in the program. Economic situation: Several students expressed concern about the economic situation of some students, recommending that the grant process should be inclusive and provide sufficient financial support to all students regardless of their socio-economic background.

8. Installments: The payment should be split into multiple installments to make it easier for students to manage their expenses. Several respondents suggested that the grant be paid in installments, with the first installment received before the mobility and the second received during the mobility period.

9. Standardization: Some respondents noted that they would prefer standardization across universities in terms of the amount of the grant and the process for receiving it.

10. Communication: Some respondents suggested that universities provide more information and communication about the grant process, including technical guidelines and information meetings.

Several other suggestions were made, including receiving the grant on a monthly basis, rather than in installments, to better manage expenses. Students also suggested that the amount of the grant should be proportioned to the cost of living in the city they are staying in, to make it more affordable for all. It was also suggested that the paperwork should be made easier to understand and that a manual should be provided for every potential participant. Some students reported difficulties in filling out the documents, and more instructions and transparency would be helpful.

Overall, the Erasmus+ grant process could be improved by ensuring that payments are made on time and that the process is more transparent and user-friendly for students. From the answers provided, it seems that there is a general consensus that the grant process should be more unified and standardized across all participating countries and universities. There were complaints about the complicated and confusing process, with some students not receiving their grants on time or in full.

From the answers provided, it seems that there are several common suggestions for an ideal grant process:

1.**Clear and easy-to-understand steps and concrete timelines**. A simplified procedure with less paperwork.

2. Students want a grant management **system that is transparent, efficient, and easy** to navigate.

3. **Assistance**, with individual support to help with paperwork, concerns, and questions.

4. **Payment of the grant before departure**, preferably in one or two installments, to cover expenses such as rent, travel, and other needs.

5. **Monthly payments of scholarships** to help students manage their financial needs.

6. **Recognition of the full length of the Erasmus period** and easier demonstration of the time spent abroad.

7. Some students also suggested **having a list of partner companies that accept students for internships** and having a phone number available to contact administrators and get concrete information.

8. **Loans or similar options** to help students manage their finances.

9. **Access to finance for all students**, especially those who come from families that can't afford the expenses.

10. **Reconsideration of the grant amount** depending on the country's standards and costs of living.

11. **Stable payment that is delivered on time**, preferably before the mobility or in the middle of the experience.

12. Other suggestions include **creating a calculator that enables students to know the exact amount of the grant**, reducing bureaucracy and paperwork, faster payment procedures, and improving collaboration between the different parties responsible for the Erasmus program.

13. **The grant should be given more in advance,** preferably before or during the period abroad, and in monthly installments.

14. **The grant should cover the real expenses**, which can be quite high, and there should be more financial support for students who cannot afford to go on an Erasmus program.

15. **The grant should be available when the student confirms the decision to leave** and the first part of the grant should be paid before starting the mobility or just a few days later.

16. **The grant management system could be more linguistically oriented** and **consider other factors** besides grades and academic performance.

17. **Provide clear conditions for the grant,** such as the required number of ECTS credits.

18. **Provide the grant earlier**, so students can use it to pay for initial expenses like rent and flights.

19. Vary the **grant amount according to the cost of living** in the country of study.

20. **Divide the grant into installments**, with some paid at the beginning and some paid in the middle of the mobility period.

21 .**Provide a video tutorial or online platform** to help students with the application process.

22. **Standardize the grant process** and base it on official semester dates.

23. Some respondents suggested that the **grant should be tailored to individual needs**, such as providing extra payments for students with delicate lives or allowing students to choose between a monthly or semester grant.

24. **Flexibility**: Participants recommended a flexible system that allows students to decide when to receive their grants and make changes if necessary.

25. Some suggest having **a centralized system** that would make it easier for them to submit their applications and manage their grants.

Regarding the time when the grant is disbursed, students suggested it should be paid quickly, without delays or issues. It was also suggested that the system should be able to check that students are genuinely using the funds for their study, and some additional amount could be given to international students who have to pay for health insurance.

It is also clear that some students are satisfied with the current grant process, while others believe that the amount of the grant is the main problem. There are also concerns about the bureaucratic process, the timing of the grant payment, and the difficulty of managing the grant money during the mobility period

Overall, there seems to be a general consensus that the grant process could be improved to better meet the needs of students, with many calling for a simpler, more efficient process and more support for students throughout the program.

It is interesting to note that some students are more concerned with the experience and cultural immersion than the amount of money they receive. Overall, students suggest that the ideal grant process would be one that is simple, transparent, equitable, and flexible, with regular payments that cover all necessary expenses.

Based on the answers provided, it seems that the ideal grant process should be more transparent, with clear communication of the amount and timing of grant payments. Some respondents suggested that the paperwork process could be simplified and centralized on a website, while others proposed receiving 100% of the grant before mobility to cover expenses like flight tickets and accommodation deposits.

Several students also mentioned that they would like to receive the grant in larger amounts at the beginning of their mobility, rather than smaller payments throughout. There were also requests for more support in case of unexpected crises, and a suggestion to not cut off scholarships for students who fail courses.

Some students mentioned that they were not familiar with the grant process, and that more accessible information would be helpful. Overall, it seems that students want a more streamlined and supportive grant process that allows them to focus on their studies and international experiences. Some students have had positive experiences with the grant process and believe that their universities have handled it well.

Others suggest that there should be an independent body that deals with the grant process rather than leaving it to the universities.
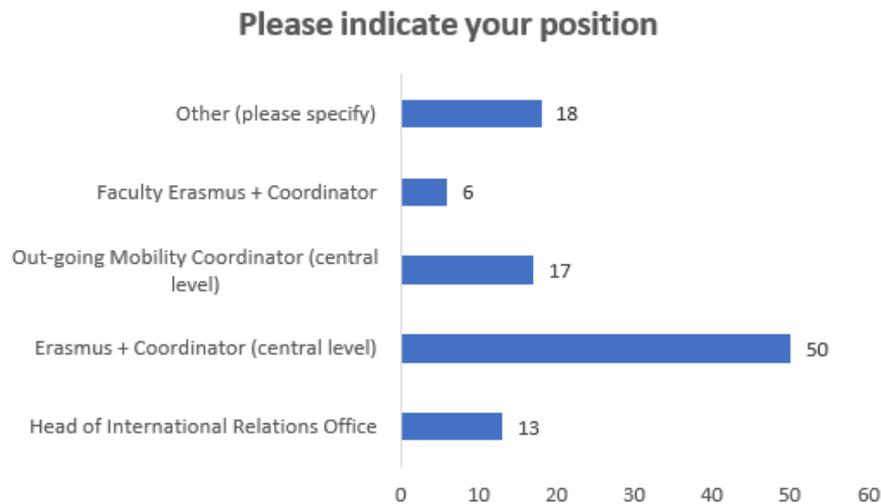
To sum up the ideal grant process from a student perspective: it would be efficient, predictable, and flexible, and that provides students with the necessary funds to cover their expenses throughout their program or semester abroad. There are several ways in which the Erasmus+ grant process could be improved. Some common themes include increasing the grant amount to better cover the costs of studying abroad, particularly in expensive countries, streamlining the application process, providing clear information on the grant amount and payment dates, and having a designated person or office to help students navigate the process.

Additionally, students would like the grant payment process to be quicker and more efficient, with some suggesting monthly installments or at least partial payments before the student departs for their study abroad.
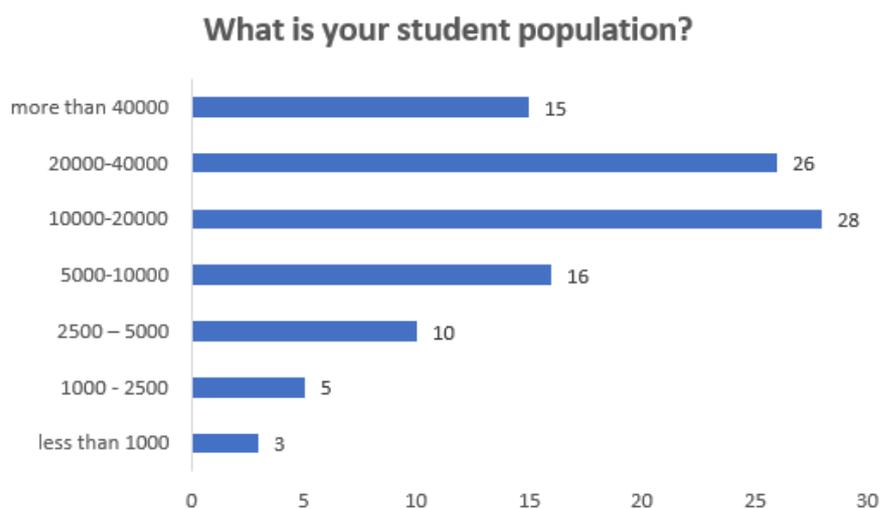
Finally, some students feel that the grant should be adjusted to better accommodate the needs of different students, particularly those who may have higher costs for things like accommodation. Generally, students want a grant process that is simple, transparent, and flexible, and that provides them with enough financial support to cover their expenses and allow them to fully enjoy the Erasmus+ experience.

The chapter is based on a survey conducted among 107 employees from universities in 32 European countries who filled up a form regarding the Erasmus+ grant distribution. Through this survey, we will examine the distribution process, its benefits and limitations, and how it affects the universities' overall performance. The findings will provide insight into the effectiveness of the program and help identify areas for improvement.

Please indicate your position

| Position	Count
Other (please specify)	18
Faculty Erasmus + Coordinator	6
Out-going Mobility Coordinator (central level)	17
Erasmus + Coordinator (central level)	50
Head of International Relations Office	13

Almost half of the participants who filled out the Erasmus+ staff survey are seen as 48% Erasmus+ Coordinator (central level). The least represented group was Faculty Erasmus + Coordinator with 5.7%.

What is your student population?

Population	Count
more than 40000	15
20000-40000	26
10000-20000	28
5000-10000	16
2500 – 5000	10
1000 - 2500	5
less than 1000	3

In the student population question, 27.1% chose the option 10000 - 20000, and 25.2% chose the option 20000 - 40000. That is, the institutions participating in the survey are generally universities with more students. About 3% have a student population of less than 1000.

Participation in the survey from universities with a large number of students suggests that the number of Erasmus+ mobility in these universities may also be high.

How many student mobilities under Erasmus+ does your department realize per year?
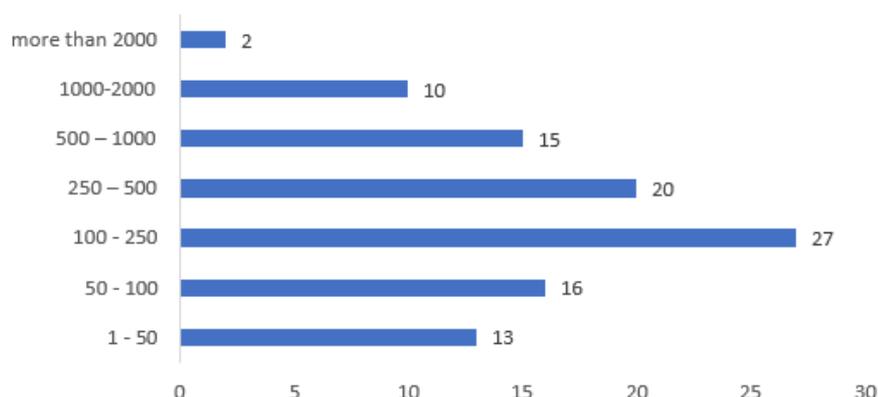

26.2% of institutions carry out Erasmus+ student mobility between 100 and 250 per year. Although the answers given to the other options are in similar percentages, the part that makes more than 2000 movements annually has a share of approximately 2%.

Please select the staff/unit who is responsible for sending a scholarship payment order to the bank?
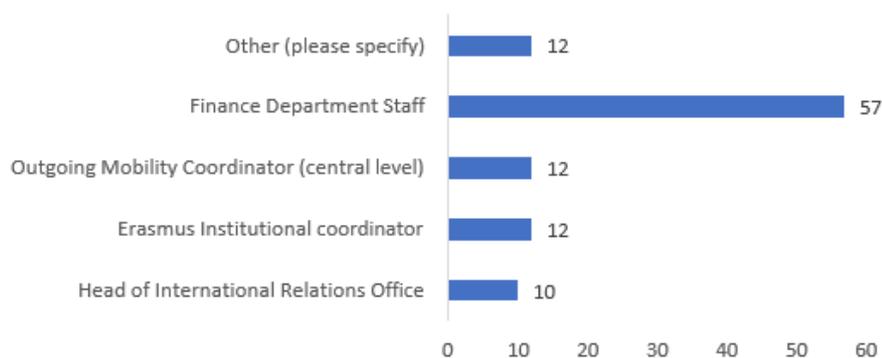
In the participating institutions, it is seen that the payment order is given by the finance department staff with a large percentage of 55%. For this reason, it would be appropriate to examine the stages that may be directly related to the payments and, if any, other procedures that affect the payment process.

## How do you monitor a student's date of arrival and departure?
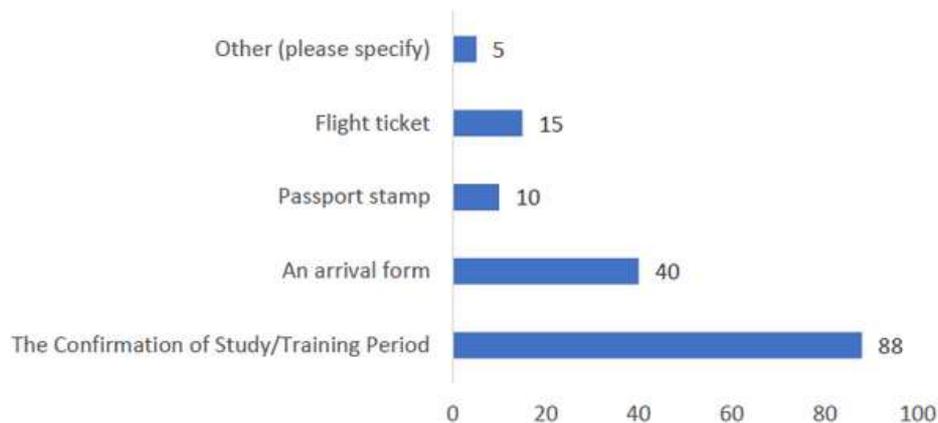
The participants were asked which method they used to monitor the planned mobility dates. Because it is known that these dates are an important criteria used in the calculation of the grant. A large majority of 85.4% stated that they did this using the confirmation of study/training period and 38.8% using the arrival form.

According to the Erasmus Programme rules and regulations, the grant amount of the beneficiaries should be based on the mobility period they spent abroad. There are different procedures in monitoring the dates of arrival and departure of the students. According to the responses, 91 institutions out of 107 accepts "Certificate of Confirmation" for monitoring student's movement. This is followed by "Arrival Form", "Flight Ticket", "Passport Stamps" respectively considering that this question allowed participants to select multiple options.

Confirmation Certificate is issued by the host institution showing the arrival and departure dates and approved by signatures and stamps. However, this process can be easily transformed to the digital platforms through the EWP network. The exchange of data instead of paper would contribute to the timely payment procedure and thus to the project.

In how many instalments do you distribute Erasmus+ grant?
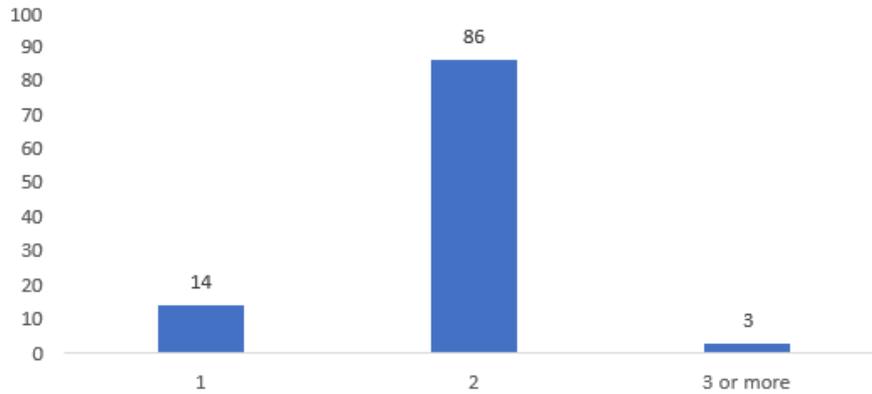
It is seen that the majority of the institutions participating in the survey pay the Erasmus+ grant to the beneficiaries in two installments. While 82.2% of the institutions pay the Erasmus grant in two installments, 13.1% prefer to pay in one installment. The remaining 2.8% pays the grant in three or more installments.

What are the trigger points of the first instalment?
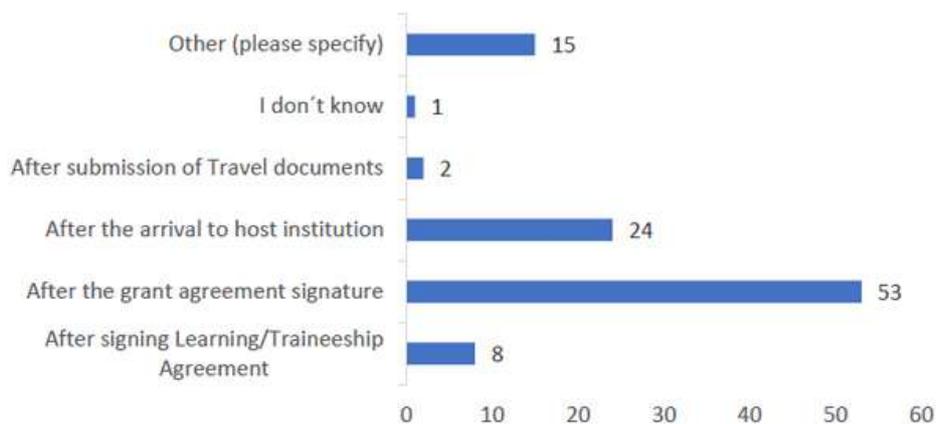
In this question, it was aimed to identify the factors that trigger the first installment of the payment, which is a critical step in the improvement of the grant management system.

The most important trigger for the first installment is the signing of the grant agreement (50.5%), and the second important factor is arriving to the host institution (22.4%). That is, half of the institutions pay without waiting for the student to go to the host institution.

What are the trigger points of the last instalment?

Similar to the previous question, it was desired to identify the important and less important factors that triggered the final installment of the grant payment. Institutions that make the last installment of the payment taking into account the confirmation of study/training period constitute 50% of the respondents. This document, which confirms the student's participation date and activity, is taken as the basis for the remaining payment by the majority.

The second important factor to be considered was the EU Survey (16.6%). Transcript and final report options were chosen equally and constituted a 25% of the total.

What percentage of the final grant do you provide in first instalment?
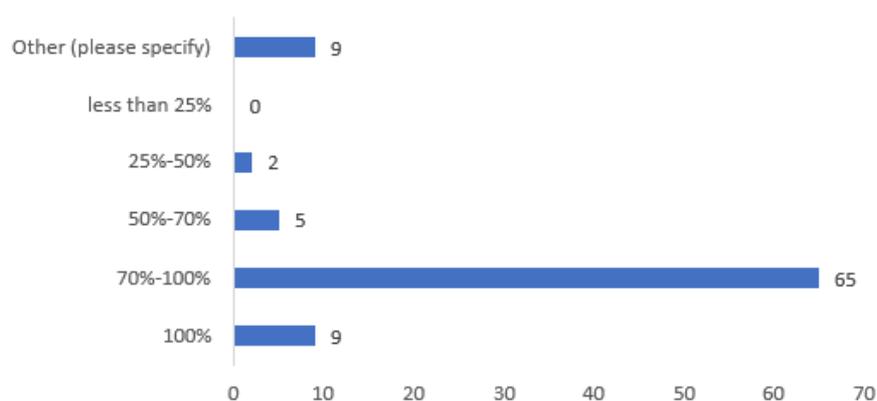
Those who pay between 70-100% of the total grant in the first installment of the grant have a large proportion of 72.2%. There is no institution that pays less than 25% of the total grant while the institution paying the whole grant is in the 10% percentage.

It is understood that institutions generally pay more than half of the total grant in the first installment.

When do you send the first grant instalment?
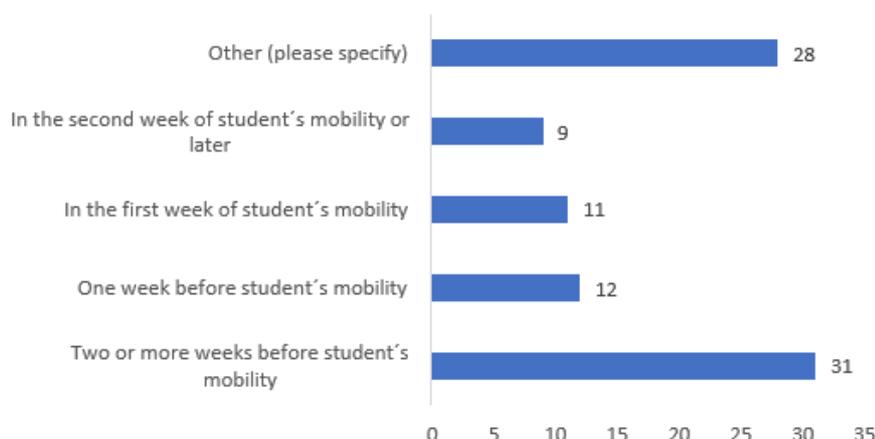
This is an important question in terms of understanding the delays, if any, whether the grant payment is made on time or not. 34% of the participants stated that they pay two or more weeks before the mobility started.

The institutions that pay one week before the mobility (13.1%) and pay in the first week of the mobility (12.1%) were almost equally represented. Institutions that pay two or more weeks after the mobility begins have a 10% rate.

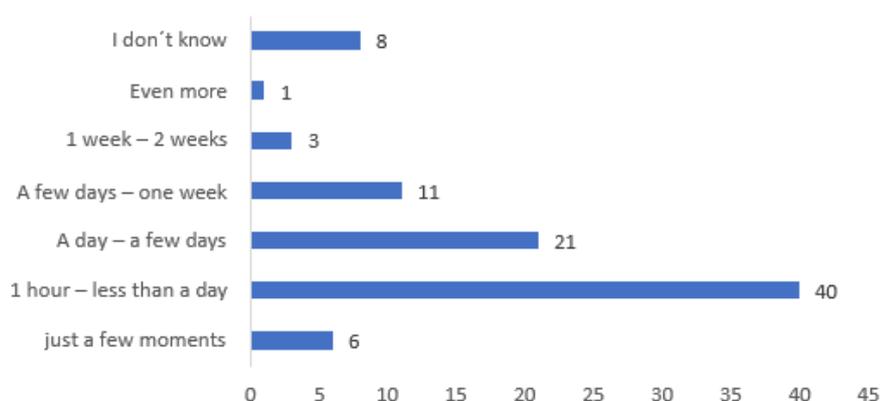## How long does the payment process take?
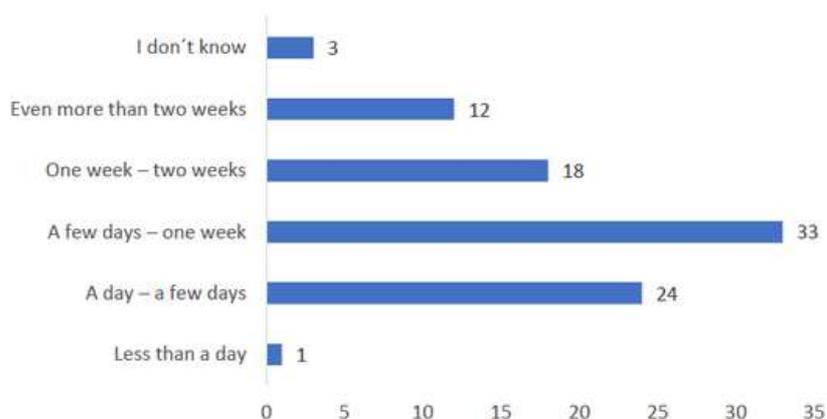
How long the payment process takes is a very important issue for the MEGA project.

36.2% of the participants gave the answer of a few days - one week, 26.3% of them gave the answer of a day - a few days. While approximately 20% of the respondents answered the question in one week - a few weeks, those who stated that it would take even more than two weeks corresponded to 13%.

It has been observed that more than half of the institutions participating in the survey allocate a few days to the payment process.
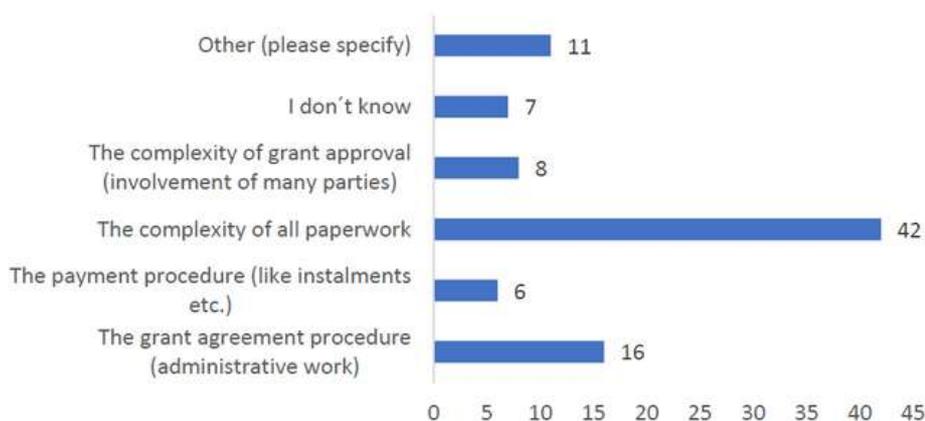
How much time approx. Do you spend on paperwork with one out-going student?

Answer	Value
I don't know	8
Even more	1
1 week – 2 weeks	3
A few days – one week	11
A day – a few days	21
1 hour – less than a day	40
just a few moments	6

This question, which is a more specific version of the previous question, sought to find out how much time institutions allocate for paperwork for one outgoing student.

On average, 44.4% of the participants allocate one hour to less than one day for the paperwork of an outgoing student. Institutions that spend a day or a few days for paperwork have 23%, and institutions that spend a few days and one week have 12%. As can be seen from the answers, a significant amount of time is allocated for the paperwork of an outgoing student.

What needs to be changed in the grant management system of Erasmus+ ?

| Answer	Value
Other (please specify)	11
I don't know	7
The complexity of grant approval (involvement of many parties)	8
The complexity of all paperwork	42
The payment procedure (like instalments etc.)	6
The grant agreement procedure (administrative work)	16

46.6% of respondents stated that the complexity of all paperwork in the grant management process should change. This answer is followed by the grant agreement procedure (administrative work) with a rate of 17.7%. Those who answered that the complexity of grant approval should change is 8.8% and the payment procedure should be changed had the rate of 6.6%. The participants mostly gave feedback that the paperwork complexity needs to be changed in the grant management system of Erasmus+.
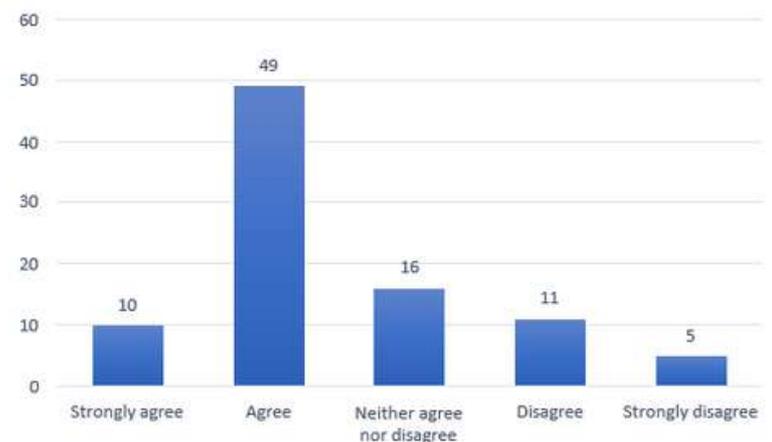
Likert Scale Questions:

The administrative burden for a student before mobility is considerable
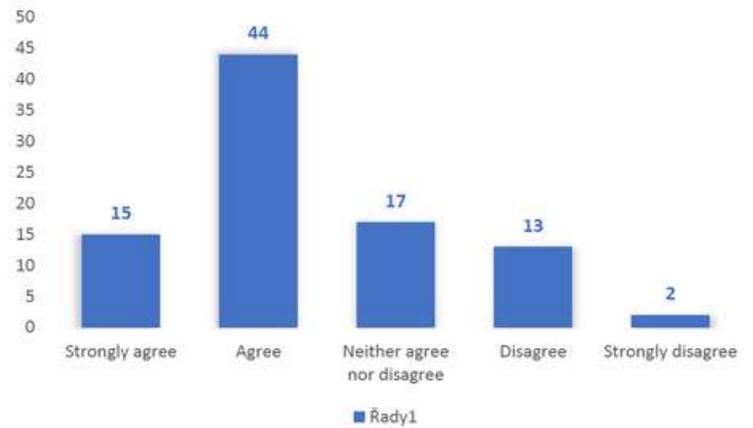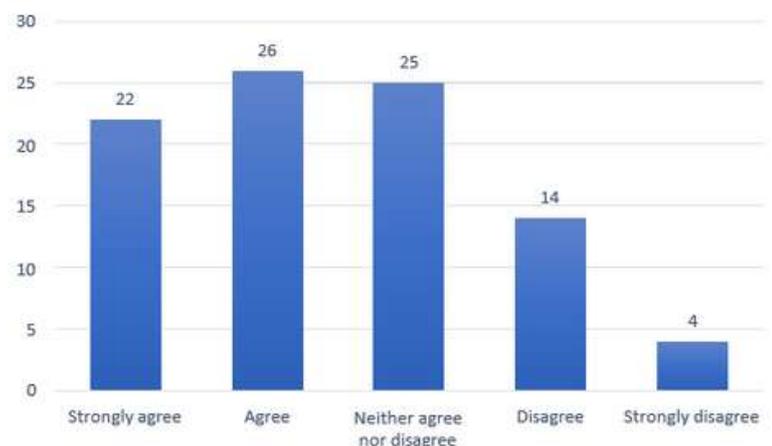

There should be some reduction of administrative agenda before mobility
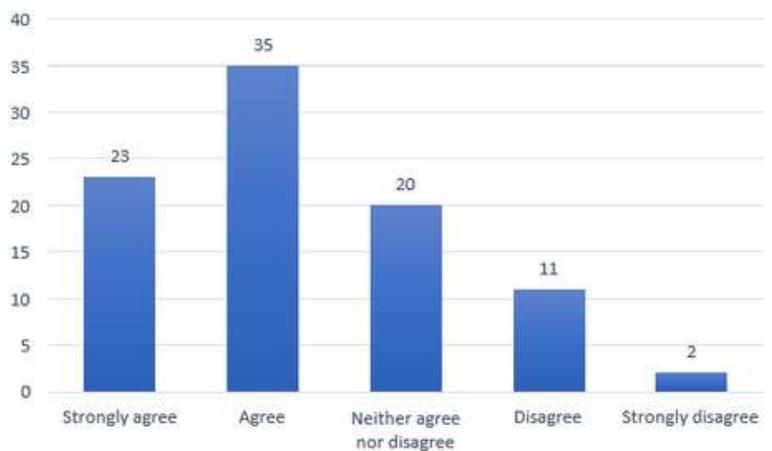
Students often complain about the difficulty of all administration of Erasmus+ mobility

It is feasible to reduce inspection instruments (flight tickets check etc.)

In Erasmus mobilities documents are sometimes exchanged multiple times until a final result is established and also institutions require additional data for which the EU commission does not provide templates. These would consequently bring students to struggle for more document preparation.

The first three group of statements above are questioning the complexity of the administrative procedure in coordinating Erasmus+ mobilities for both the staff and student sides. According to the results, the administrative burden is considerably high and it should be designed in a way that is simpler and less bureaucratic. The results of the last statement suggests that there is a room for decreasing the number of documents to be inspected. The automatisaton of grant payments, in this sense, should be facilitated for a more inclusive and participatory programme as it has been supported by the European Student Card Initiative "ESCI".

 The insufficient grant amount is most important factor which discourages students from participation in Erasmus+.
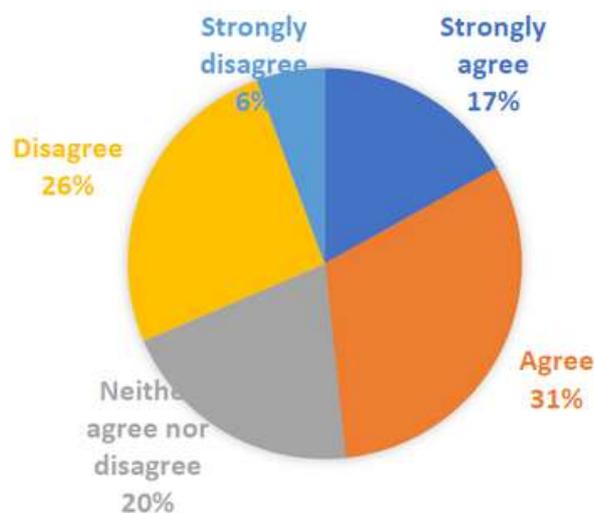

 We can interpret that 48% of the Erasmus+ coordinators from IRO (International Relations Office) agreed that the insufficient grant amount is the most important factor that discourages students from participating in the Erasmus+ program. This suggests that almost half of the coordinators surveyed perceive that the grant amount provided by the program is not sufficient to cover the costs associated with studying abroad, which may discourage students from participating in the program.

On the other hand, 32% of the coordinators disagreed with this statement, indicating that they do not believe that the grant amount is the most significant factor affecting student participation in the program.

Overall, this suggests that there is a difference of opinion among Erasmus+ coordinators regarding the impact of the grant amount on student participation in the program. However, the fact that almost half of the coordinators surveyed agreed with this statement highlights the importance of considering the grant amount when evaluating the effectiveness and accessibility of the Erasmus+ program.

Students often complain about first instalment amount to cover earliest expenses.
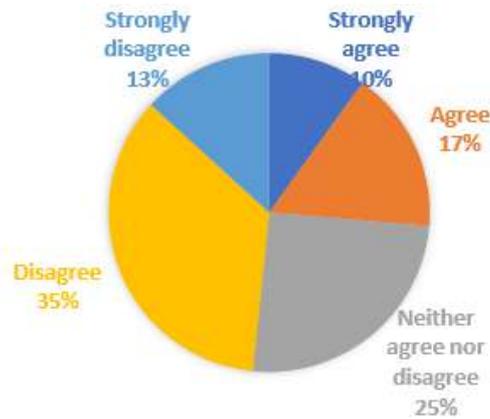

Overall 27% of Erasmus+ coordinators from IRO (International Relations Office) agree that students often complain about the first installment amount to cover the earliest expenses, in comparison with 38% who disagree. This suggests that a smaller proportion of coordinators surveyed perceive that students frequently voice complaints about the amount of the first installment compared to those who do not think so.

On the other hand, a larger proportion of coordinators, i.e., 38%, disagree with the statement, indicating that they do not face that students often complain about the first installment amount. It is worth noting that the majority of coordinators surveyed did not express an opinion on this issue, so their experiences are unknown. This suggests that there is a difference of opinion among Erasmus+ coordinators regarding students' complaints about the first installment amount.

However, the fact that only a small percentage of coordinators agree with this statement indicates that, from their perspective, students may not face significant challenges related to the first installment amount. This highlights the importance of conducting further research and gathering more data to understand the issues faced by students participating in the Erasmus+ program.

To summarize, the university staff revealed that 48% of the participants were Erasmus+ Coordinators at the central level, and only 5.7% were Faculty Erasmus+ Coordinators. The 27.1% of the participating institutions had a student population between 10,000 and 20,000, and 25.2% had between 20,000 and 40,000 students.

The survey results indicated that institutions with a large student population generally have higher numbers of Erasmus+ mobility. 26.2% of institutions had between 100 and 250 Erasmus+ student mobility per year, and only 2% had more than 2,000 mobility annually. The majority of the institutions paid the Erasmus+ grant to beneficiaries in two installments, with the first installment triggered by the signing of the grant agreement and the second triggered by the confirmation of study/training period. Most institutions paid between70-100% of the total grant in the first installment, and 34% paid two or more weeks before the mobility started. The payment process takes a few days to a few weeks, according to the majority of respondents, with most institutions spending one hour to less than one day on paperwork for an outgoing student.
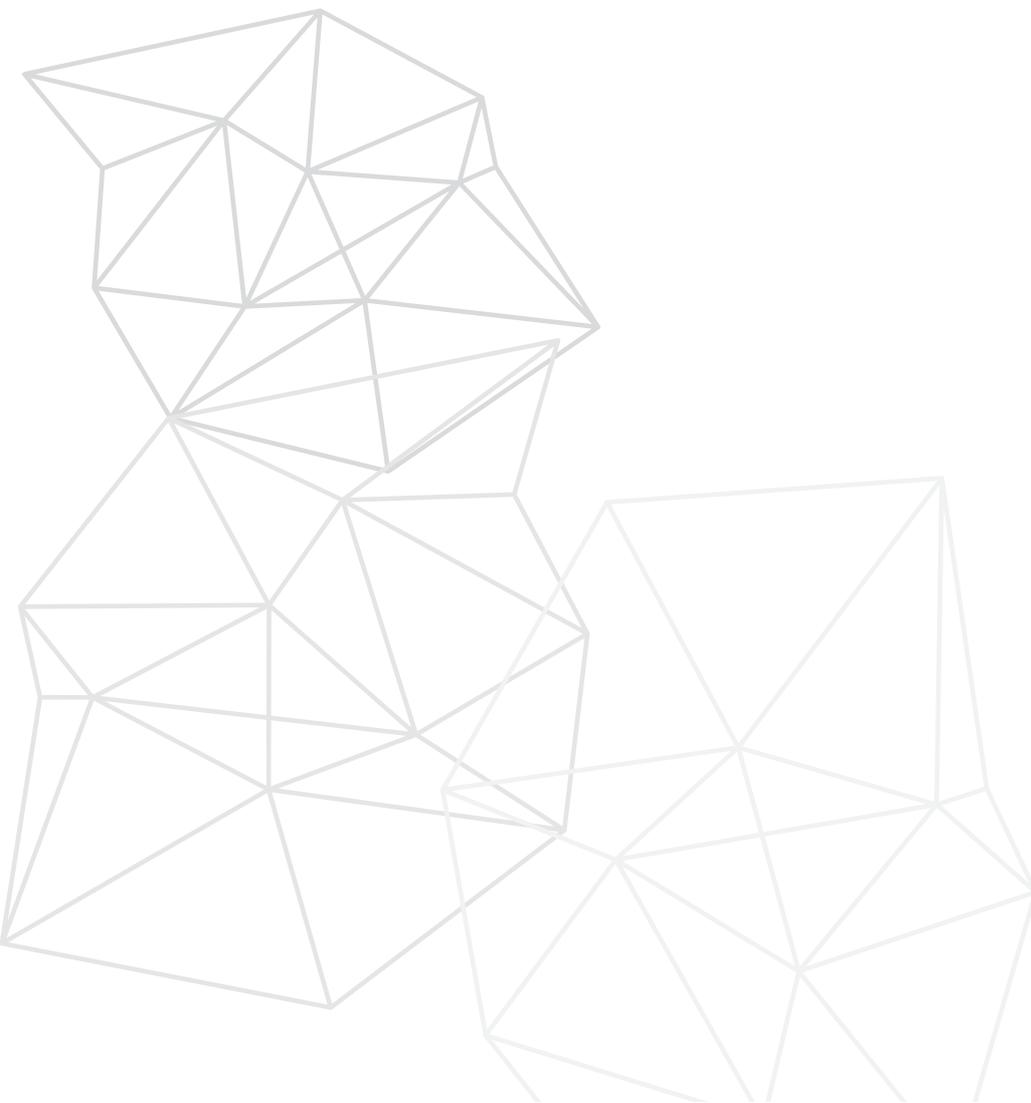
The interviews conducted with representatives of National Agencies responsible for grant distribution during EAIE in September 2022 (only the Turkish and Czech agencies have been intertwined on different occasions), showed that the internship payment is not managed centrally by the National Agencies. Instead, universities manage the payment, and there is no official procedure for managing the payment. The grant is divided among universities based on an algorithm that considers factors such as the number of students enrolled in the university, the demanded fund, the previous year's contracted amount, and the rate of paybacks done for previous years' grants. The National Agencies try to be as transparent and just as possible in their allocation mechanism. The grant application process involves universities submitting an application multiple times, and the last one is considered as valid. The National Agencies aim to conduct at least one interim report but are willing to do more if necessary. The NA Czech Republic has done two reports in 2022 and four in 2021. Students can receive between 70 to 100% of the grant before departure, but each university decides on its own. The National Agencies check whether students receive their scholarships on time during the desk check and audit, and the account statements are required. It has been reported that challenges concerning scholarships occur often, mainly concerning the rate, and are resolved at the National Agency level. NA is aware only of a few issues with scholarship payments. Overall, they do not perceive any systematical problem. If there are any delays in payments, complaints can reach the NA, and they will take action. Some NA receives complaints from students about scholarship-related issues, and they directly get in contact with the University to request an explanation for the situation. If the student is right, the NA will ask the University to follow the rules of the Program. All NA agree that it is part of their job to solve the problems in grant payment if they are not solved between the beneficiary HEI and participant.

MEGA

The aim of the Million of Erasmus Grants (MEGA) project is to develop a digital tool to facilitate the management of Erasmus+ grants at the university level, which pays students accurately and on time. In order to design a valid and applicable system for all, the differences in grant management must first be identified. The Erasmus grant management system differs between European countries. The project has been divided into three levels of research: National Agencies, International Relations Offices (IROs), and Students. From the student perspective, the ideal grant process would be efficient, predictable, and flexible. It should provide students with the necessary funds to cover their expenses throughout their program or semester abroad. Some common themes include increasing the grant amount, streamlining the application process, providing clear information on the grant amount and payment dates, and having a designated person or office to help students navigate the process. Additionally, students would like the grant payment process to be quicker and more efficient, with some suggesting monthly installments or at least partial payments before the student departs for their study abroad.

The common recommendations based on the findings:

1. **Simplify** the application process, reduce paperwork, and provide clear instructions.
2. Provide **individual support** to students with concerns and questions.
3. Provide the **grant before departure**, preferably in one or two installments, and in monthly payments during the mobility period.
4. **Consider the cost of living** in the host country when calculating the grant amount and vary it according to individual needs.
5. **Ensure equal access to the grant** for all students, regardless of their financial situation.
6. Provide a **more transparent and efficient grant management system** that is easy to navigate.
7. Provide a **list of partner companies that accept students for internships** and a phone number for administrators to provide concrete information.
8. **Provide loans or other financial support options** to help students manage their expenses.
9. **Consider the full length of the Erasmus period** and provide **recognition for the time spent abroad**.
10. Provide a **video tutorial or online platform to help students** with the application process.
11. **Standardize the grant process** and base it on official semester dates.
12. **Provide flexibility in the system** to allow students to decide when to receive their grants and make changes if necessary.
13. **Ensure accountability for students who do not fulfill their agreements** or fail to meet requirements.
14. **Divide the grant into multiple installments** to make it easier for students to manage their expenses.
15. **Ensure the grant amount covers the real expenses** of students.
16. Provide **more substantial financial aid to students who cannot afford to participate** in the program.
17. **Consider other factors** besides grades and academic performance in the grant management system.

Nearly half of the IRO´s respondents (48%) agreed that the insufficient grant amount is the most important factor that discourages students from participating in the Erasmus+ program. This suggests that a significant part of coordinators surveyed perceive that the grant amount provided by the program is not sufficient to cover the costs associated with studying abroad, which may discourage students from participating in the program.

On the other hand, 32% o fthe coordinators disagreed with this statement, indicating that they do not believe that the grant amount is the most significant factor affecting student participation in the program.

Overall, there is a difference of opinion among Erasmus+ coordinators regarding the impact of the grant amount on student participation in the program.

However,the fact that almost half of the coordinators surveyed agreed with this statement highlights the importance of considering the grant amount when evaluating the effectiveness and accessibility of the Erasmus+ program.
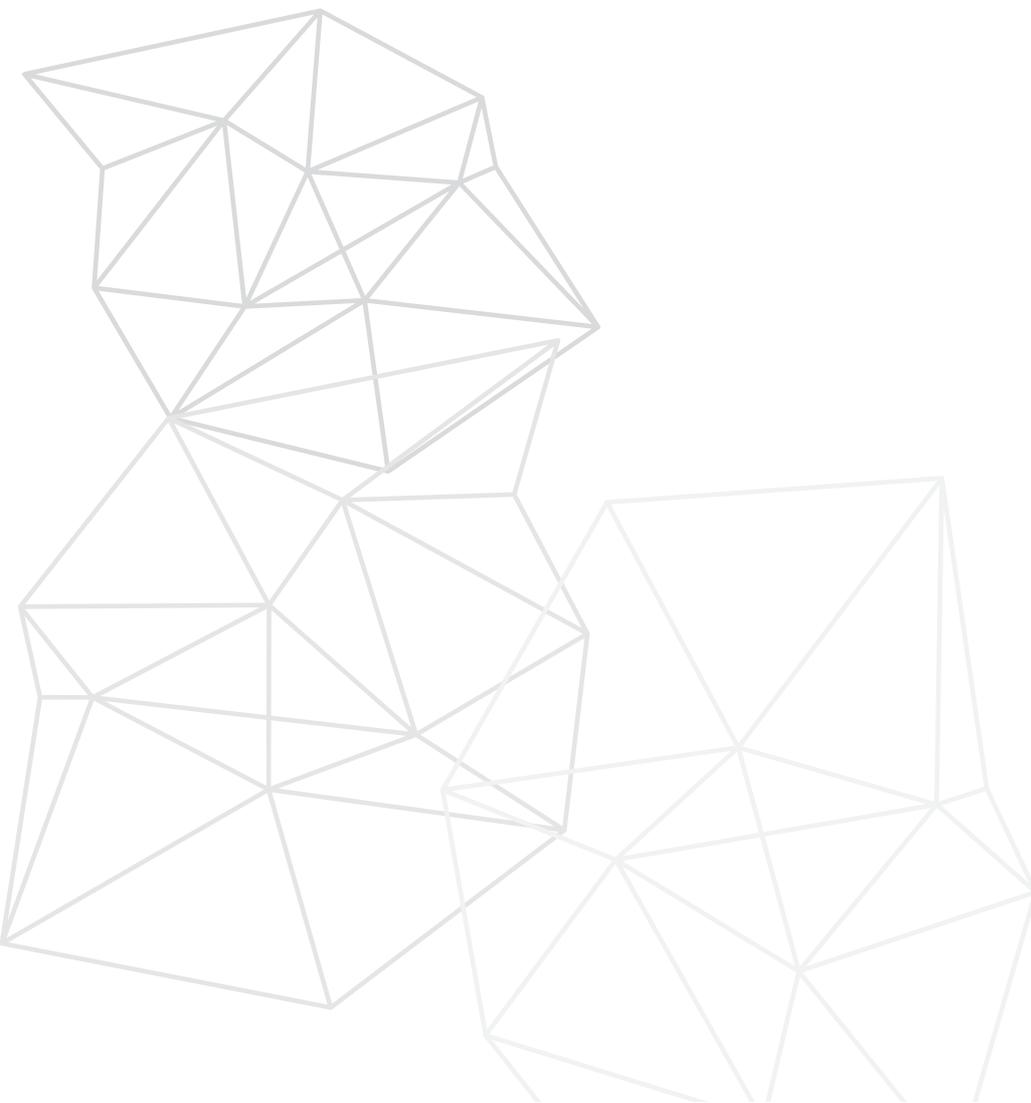
Methodological guidelines for student grant distribution

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