

Barriers and Obstacles to Student Mobility: Insights from Former Participants for Increasing Access and Inclusion

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Abstract

The internationalisation of higher education and the participation of students in international mobility programmes are strategic priorities for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA, 2020, p.6). These initiatives are linked to various outcomes, including academic, intercultural, and professional benefits (Souto-Otero et al., 2019). However, participation remains unequal. Numerous studies have shown low participation rates of students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, including from rural areas, first-generation students, and other vulnerable groups (Netz et al., 2012; Netz, 2015; Lörz et al., 2016; DiPietro, 2021; García & Villarreal, 2021; López-Duarte et al., 2021; Lomer et al., 2024). This situation prompts questions about the accessibility of such opportunities, the barriers and obstacles perceived by participants, and solutions to overcome such situations. To address these questions, we performed a thematic analysis on a data base of 58 interviews with former ERASMUS participants from Romania, Spain and Poland. In their narratives, former mobile students discussed several obstacles which affected them while considering becoming mobile, including:

1. Financial barriers: the need for additional resources and uncertainty regarding grants.
2. Informational and administrative difficulties: challenging bureaucratic procedures and deficient communication with the home/host institutions.
3. Psychological barriers: lack of confidence, socio-cultural anxiety, and insufficient support in both academic and personal contexts.
4. Academic constraints: curriculum differences and perceived difficulties in catching up with their studies.

Since in the end most overcome these barriers, we could also identify some practices for institutions to improve support for prospecting participants and offer better administrative assistance, accounting for their specific needs. This study enhances our understanding of how universities can promote equitable access to mobility programmes by addressing these barriers and obstacles, ultimately aligning with the



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transversal goal of "inclusion and diversity" within the ERASMUS 2021-2027 programme.

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