



Erasmus Student Network
Finland

Student Exchanges in Times of Crisis

-

Country report

**on the impact of COVID-19
on student exchanges**

in Finland

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General information

This report is an addition to the Research Report "Student Exchanges in Times of Crisis Research report on the impact of COVID-19 on student exchanges in Europe"¹ released by ESN AISBL on April 9th, 2020.

The underlying dataset is the same as used by ESN AISBL, yet, the data used to conduct the following report is only data referring to students studying in Finland. The data sample used to conduct the report includes data from outgoing – *those students regularly studying their degree in a Finnish university* – and incoming – *those who are studying a degree outside of Finland and spending their mobility period in Finland* – students.

Hence, the report distinguishes between these two groups. The data sample includes data from 447 outgoing and 828 incoming students. Both datasets are adequate to draw certain conclusions about the analysed group.

The report focuses on the most important data for stakeholders of ESN Finland. Therefore, data about the host country treatment was mostly neglected or summarised in short paragraphs.

Further information on the methodology, limitation and other important information can be found in the Research Report of ESN AISBL.

The survey was open between 19.-30.03.2020, as shown in the timeline figure below.

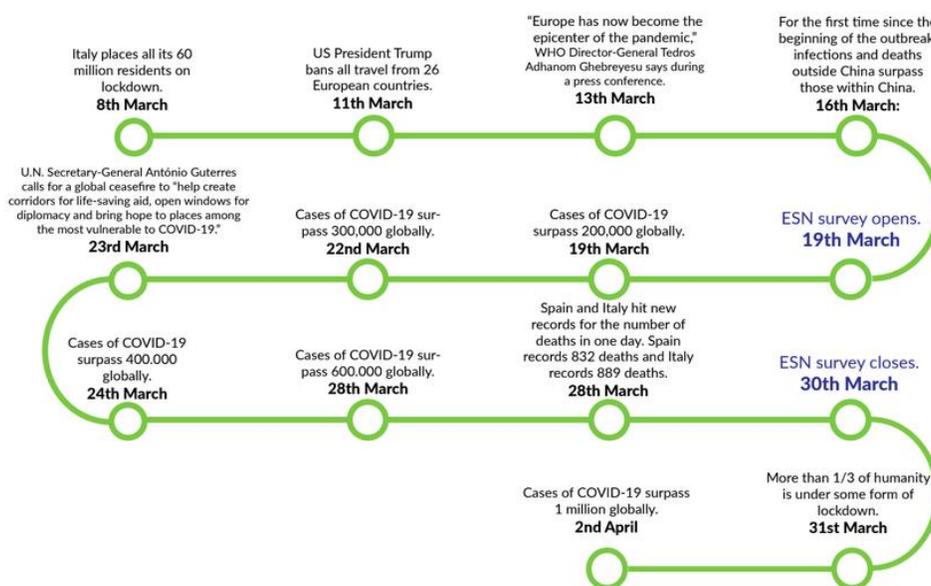


Fig. 1: Timeline – ESN survey Source: Gabriels, W., Benke-Aberg, R. (2020 -5)

¹ Gabriels, W., Benke-Aberg, R., (2020). Student Exchanges in Times of Crisis - Research report on the impact of COVID-19 on student exchanges in Europe. Erasmus Student Network. Can be viewed here: esn.org/covidimpact-report

ESN Finland

The Erasmus Student Network (ESN) is one of the biggest European student organisations acting in the field of student mobility and internationalisation of higher education. ESN provides support services to international-minded students and works for their needs by facilitating their mobility period, ensuring social cohesion, reintegration and by enhancing intercultural awareness and active citizenship.

ESN further works in the interest of international students by improving the conditions of student learning mobility (integration, advocacy on vertical levels, provision of information, evaluation of mobility programmes, promotion, motivation and preparation) and by enhancing internationalisation, intercultural understanding and active participation in Europe.

For more information, see esn.org

ESN Finland operates as National Organisation of ESN AISBL and consists of 17 sections all over Finland. ESN sections in Finland can be found in Helsinki (5), Joensuu, Jyväskylä, Kuopio, Lappeenranta, Oulu, Rovaniemi, Tampere (2), Turku (3) and Vaasa.

ESN Finland as national organisation provides training events for active members, negotiates national partnerships for international students, advocates for the interest of international students on national level in Finland and organises national events, such as the Pirates of the Baltic Sea (PoBS). In addition, ESN Finland's National Board supports the local sections through various means.

For more information, see esnfinland.eu

Outgoing students

In total 447 outgoing students filled the survey. We analysed the nationality, host country, mobility programme, mobility period, current situation (during the survey was opened) of the students, if they contracted with COVID-19 and how they were supported.

Furthermore, the impact on class schedule, financial consequences and the anxiety level was analysed through quantitative data.

The individual answers of the students were quantified and grouped, to make it more representative for the report.

Nationality

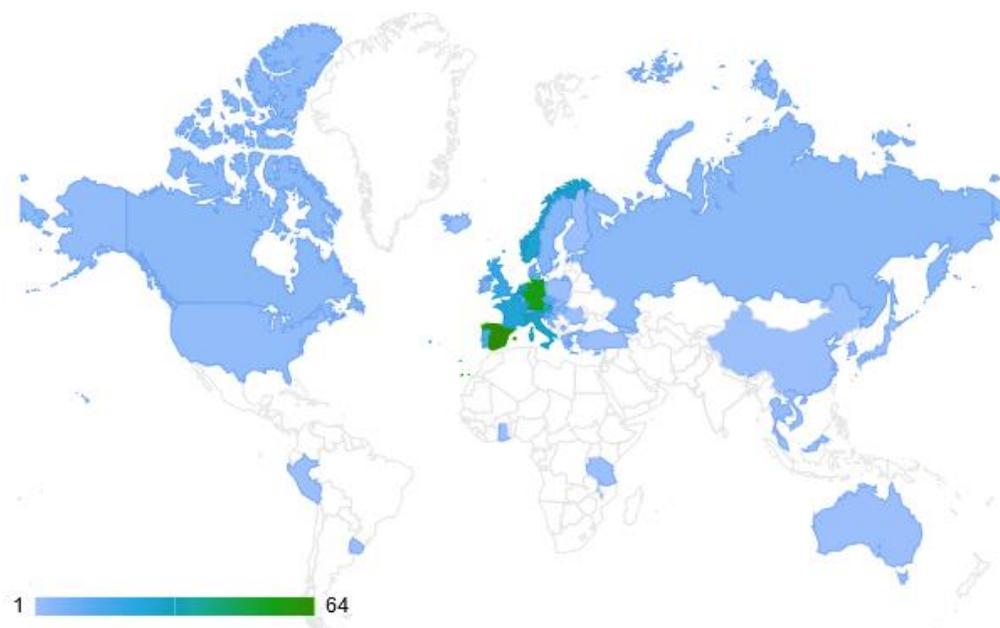
Of the 447 outgoing students, 423 (95%) were Finnish citizens and 24 international degree students from 14 different countries on their mobility abroad.

Nationality	Count of Nationality
Finland	423
Vietnam	5
Russia	3
China	2
France	2
Germany	2
Bangladesh	1
India	1
Italy	1
Peru	1
Poland	1
Portugal	1
Spain	1
Taiwan	1
United States of America	1

Fig. 2: Nationality of outgoing students

Host country

The students were staying in 95 different countries all around the world. The map shows the distribution of students per country. The most common exchange destinations were European countries, such as Spain, Germany and Austria.



Country	Count
Spain	64
Germany	56
Austria	38
The Netherlands	32
Italy	30
Norway	28
France	27
United Kingdom	20
Belgium	17
Portugal	16
Czech Republic	15
Slovenia	12
Switzerland	12
Denmark	9
Ireland	8
Hungary	6

Sweden	5
Canada	4
Estonia	4
Greece	4
Malta	4
Russia	4
United States of America	3
Croatia	2
Cyprus	2
South Korea	2
Thailand	2
Australia	1
China	1
Finland	1
Georgia	1
Ghana	1

Iceland	1
Japan	1
Kosovo	1
Liechtenstein	1
Luxembourg	1
Malawi	1
Malaysia	1
Peru	1
Poland	1
Romania	1
Singapore	1
Slovakia	1
Tanzania	1
Turkey	1
Uruguay	1
Vietnam	1

Fig. 3: Host country – map

Mobility Programme

Most mobile students who filled in the survey are participating in the Erasmus+ Student Mobility (84%) or the Erasmus+ Traineeship (7%). 9% are participating in other student exchange programmes, such as Swiss-European Mobility Programme, North2North or bilateral programmes.

Mobility period

The survey was answered by students currently on exchange and those who are planning for a mobility period during 2020. 98% of the students from Finnish universities were on their mobility period during the COVID-19 outbreak. Only 2% were planning their mobility period for autumn 2020. Therefore, this number cannot be viewed as being representative for the students going on exchange in autumn 2020. While the number of students on mobility is representative.

Current situation of the students

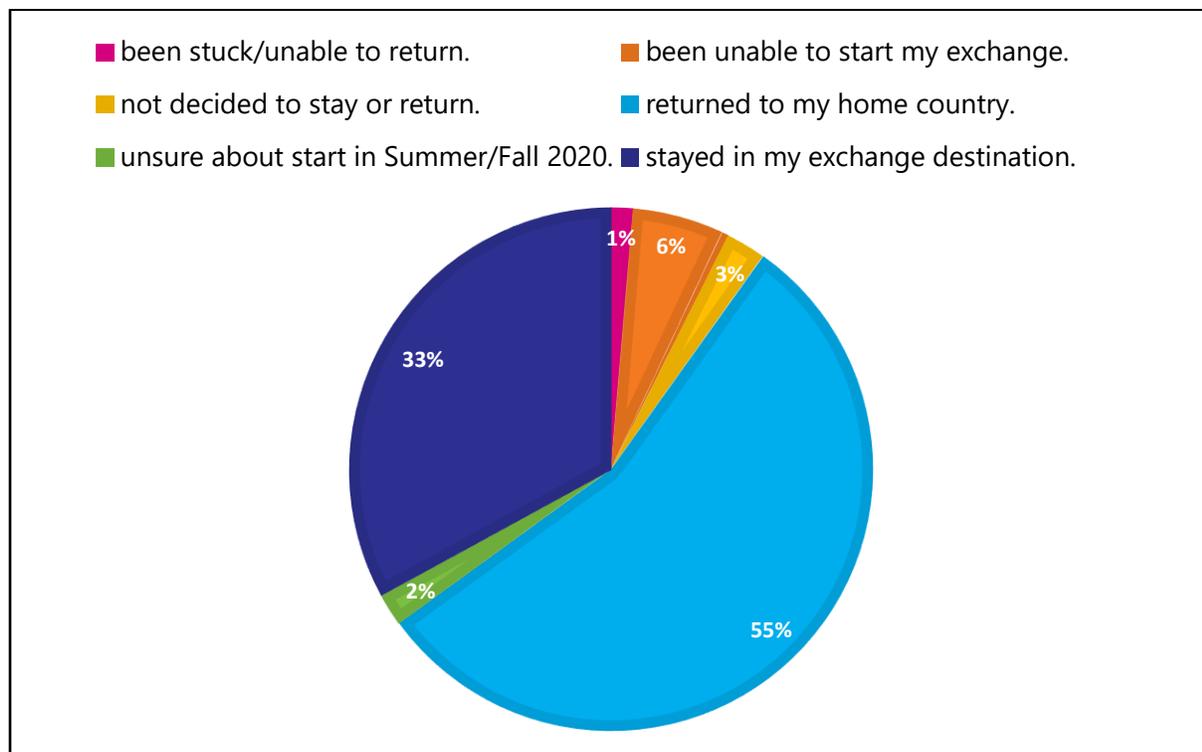


Fig. 4: Current situation of outgoing students

Even though most students on their mobility returned to their home country, almost one-third of students decided to stay in their exchange destination.

Several students have not been able to start their exchange period, this is due to the different starting times of the semester in various countries.

Unfortunately, some students also got stuck or were unable to return to Finland.

Did you contract COVID-19?

Most of the mobile students did not contract COVID-19.

Unfortunately, 1% did contract COVID-19. The students contracting COVID-19 have been in various exchange destinations within Europe. The high amount of people who are unsure (28%) signals the insecurity of the students.

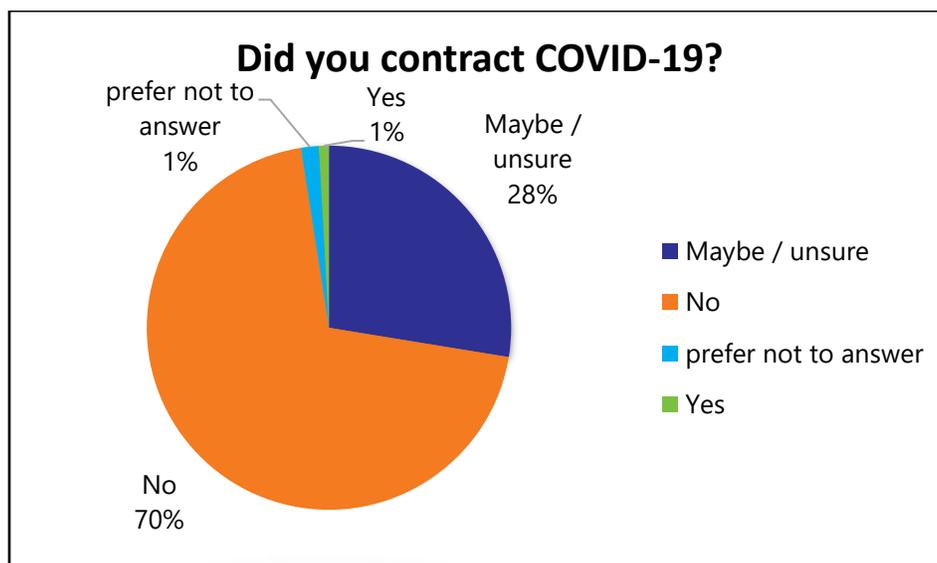


Fig. 5: Contraction with COVID-19

Support

The most received type of support by outgoing students was academic support with roughly 4 out of 5 saying they received it. All other support forms were received by notably fewer students. The most often referred to source of support was family and friends 75%, and host university 62%. Only about half of the students say that they received support from their Finnish home university.

"What kind of support was offered to you throughout the COVID-19 Quarantine period?"

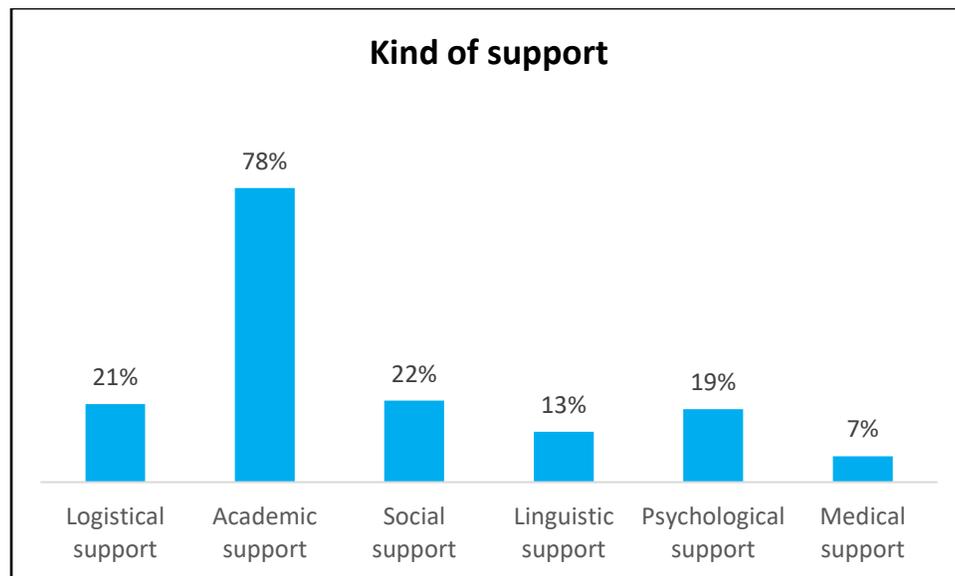


Fig. 6: Kind of support

"Who offered you support throughout your quarantine?"

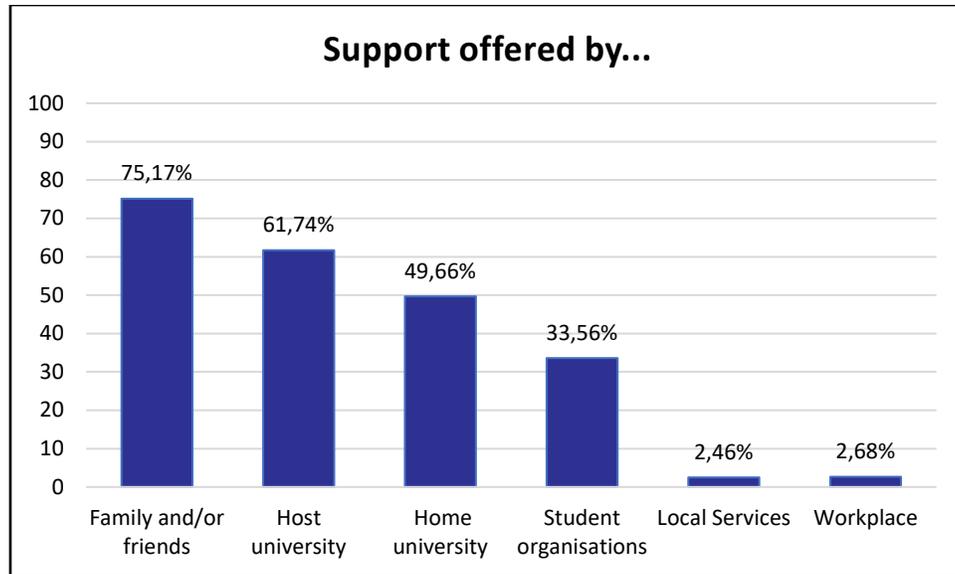


Fig. 7: Support offered by

Impact on class schedule

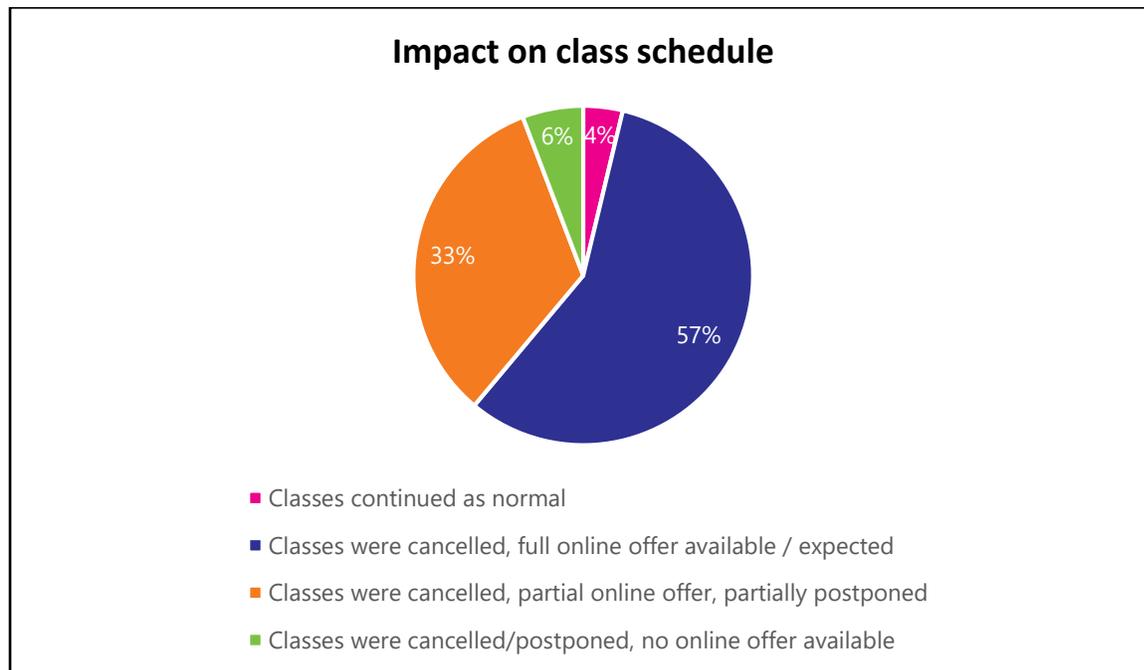


Fig. 8: Impact on class schedule

Luckily, it seems that most universities adapted quickly to the new situation and the classes for exchange students were switched to an online offer. This implies that the Corona situation won't affect degrees in Finland too much, while of course cases have to be evaluated individually.

Financial consequences

The financial consequences for the students were mostly – for about 71% - unclear and the students were in discussions with the universities. This seems to be a major issue for the students and a situation where clear communication from the authorities is desirable.

19% of the students are able to keep the full amount of the Erasmus+ grant and 8% will be able to keep at least parts of the grant. 1% will lose their grant fully or will only be able to keep the grant on certain conditions.

Anxiety and stress

51% of the mobile students from Finnish universities felt anxiety and stress to a very great or great extent. Only 18% felt moderately anxious and stress and 27% were little or not at all stressed about the COVID-19 situation when the survey was conducted.

Obviously, such a special situation led to mental health issues that should also be addressed by the Finnish universities and health care services when the students return to Finland.

Individual answers

In the open text fields from students going on exchange from Finland, were significantly less answers than from the students coming for exchange. The most mentioned issue was accommodation that cannot be cancelled, even if the mobility was cancelled before it started. 7% of the respondents mentioned their accommodation and the related financial impact. 3% of outgoing exchange students had problems with their studies abroad, ranging from problems with online implementation to feeling like needing to stay in the country to complete the courses by attending physical exams to receive the ECTS and full Erasmus Grant. The Erasmus Grant was also mentioned by 3% in their open text answers: often in combination with the accommodation or an expensive journey home.

Incoming students

For the incoming students the analysis goes a bit deeper than for the outgoing students. This is due to the set of questions that was asked from the students. As the answers of outgoing students would only provide data for their host universities, while the cohort of incoming students will provide data from their host university in Finland. The report does not distinguish between the different Finnish Higher Education Institutions but can only provide an overview on the overall situation in Finland.

A total of 828 students on mobility in Finland have filled in the survey.

Nationality and home university

The 828 students who filled the survey came were nationals of 59 different countries. 718 of these students are EU-citizens (86,7%) while there were as well 110 students who are citizens of non-EU countries. The most represented non-EU country is Russia.

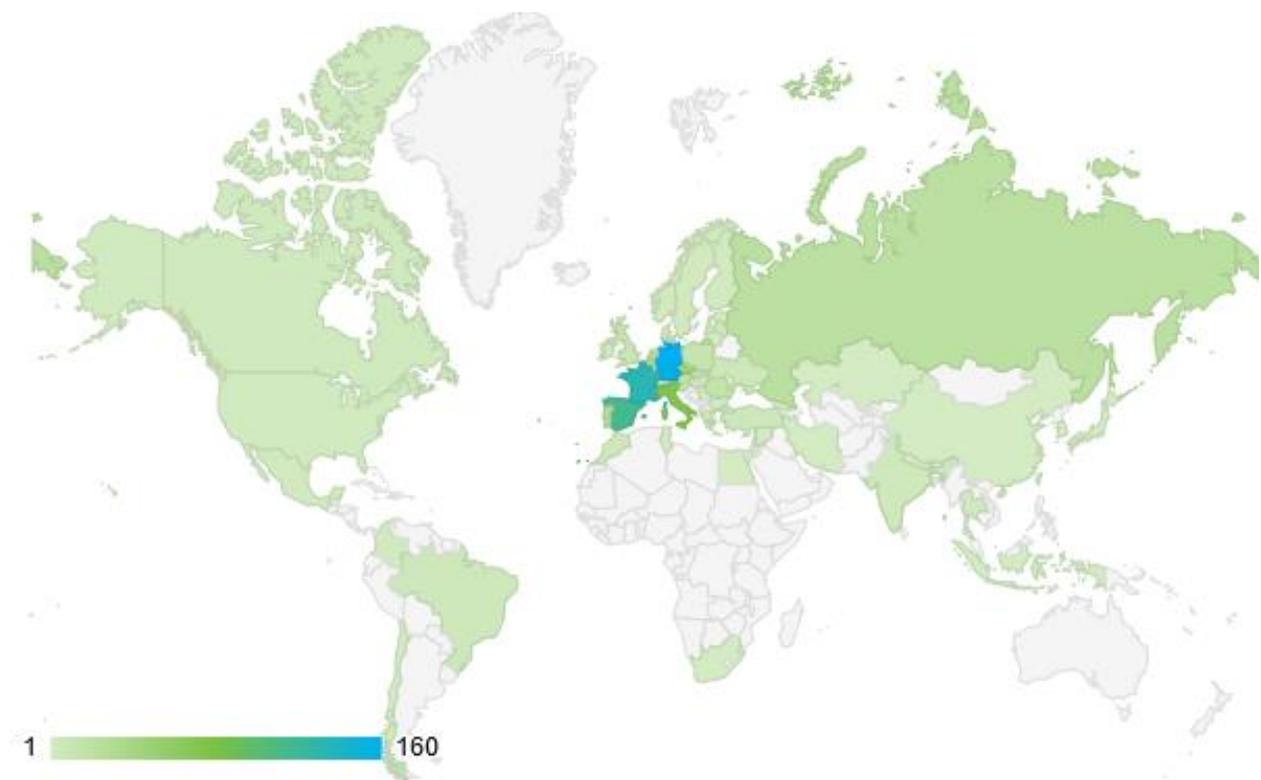


Fig. 9: Nationality incoming students – map

Nationality	Count
Germany	160
France	132
Spain	115
Italy	73
Czechia	50
Belgium	31
Portugal	27
Russia	22
The Netherlands	21
Slovakia	17

Fig. 10: Nationality Top 10 count

Mobility Programme and Mobility Period

Most incoming students were participating in an Erasmus+ programme. 81% of those who filled the survey were students participating in the Erasmus+ Student Mobility, 9% were participating in an Erasmus+ Traineeship and 4% were participating in the Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility. 6% were participating in other student exchange programmes, such as the Swiss-European Mobility Programme or FIRST+.

99% of the students were conducting their mobility in Finland during the COVID-19 outbreak. 71% only came to Finland for the spring 2020 semester, while 28% spent the whole academic year 2019-2020 in Finland

Current situation

When the survey was conducted a majority of 56% of the students stayed in Finland, while a third (32%) returned to their home country. 4% of the students (28 in total) were stuck in Finland and unable to return. At that time 3% of the students were undecided if they are going to stay in Finland or go back home.

Contract with COVID-19

Fortunately, most of the students were sure that they did not contract COVID-19. 78% stated clearly that they did not catch the virus. Yet, 20% of the students were unsure about their health status. Less than 1% contract with COVID-19, a total of 4 international mobile students in Finland stated that they contract COVID-19 when the survey was conducted. 2% preferred not to say anything.

Support

85% of the incoming students have received academic support, with the most mentioned supporter being the Finnish hosting university (72%). The second most mentioned support type (31%) was social support, which was defined as social gatherings online in this survey. Roughly 1 in 5 students have received psychological support.

“What kind of support was offered to you throughout the COVID-19 Quarantine period?”

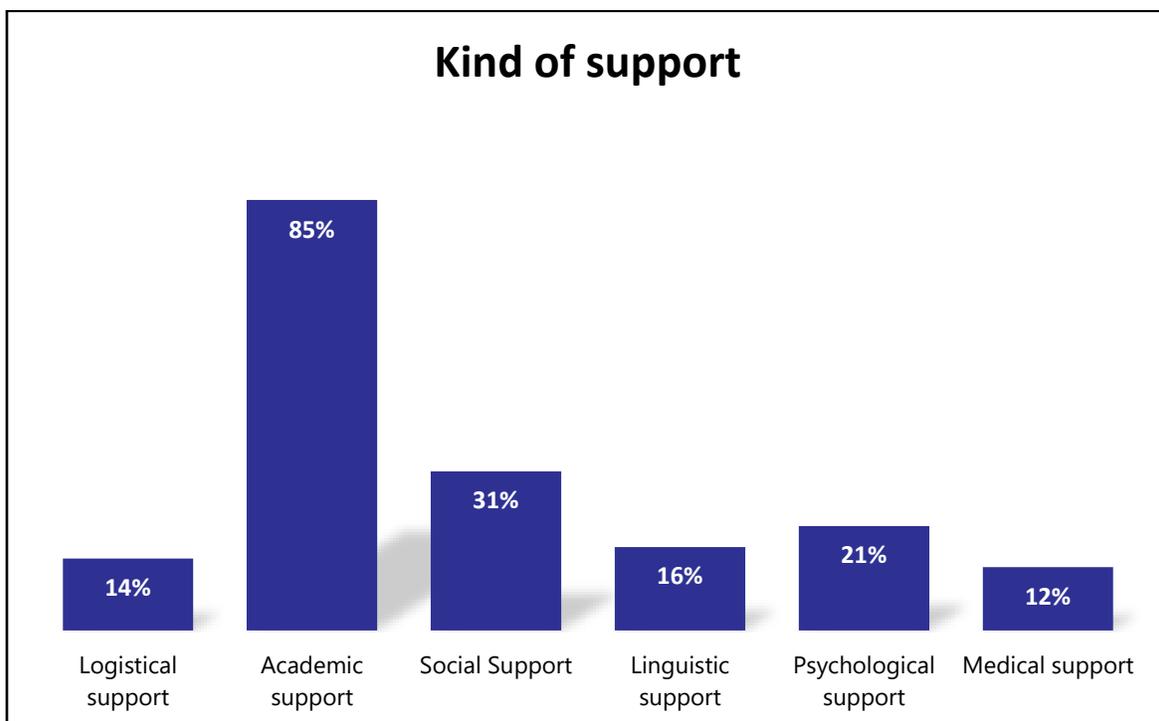


Fig. 11: Kind of support – incoming students

"Who offered you support throughout your quarantine?"

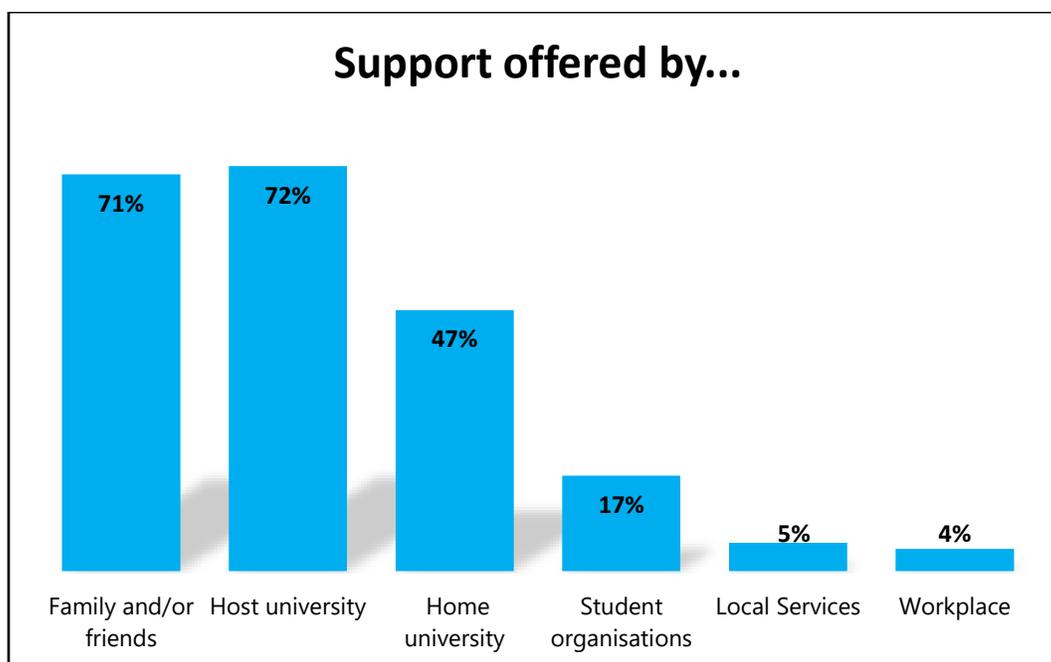


Fig. 12: Support offered by – incoming students

Effect on Mobility and Class schedule

Most of the students (68%) continued their mobility – either at home or in Finland. Unfortunately, 24% of the students had to cancel their mobility due to the COVID-19 outbreak. 8% of the student were unsure about their situation or did not start their mobility yet.

Even though only 68% continued their mobility, there has been a full replacement of courses online for 72% of the students. 21% had at least a partial replacement or the courses were postponed. 4% continued normally with their classes. And only 3% of the courses were not available online and not replaced in any other way.

Financial impact

Most students were unclear about the financial impact the COVID-19 outbreak means for them. 68% of the students did not know if they must pay back their grant or get the full amount.

13% will be able to keep the full amount of their grant and another 14% will be able to at least keep the amount for the time they spent abroad.

2% of the students had costs not covered by the grant. The others either did not receive a grant in general or had other not further described financial issues.

Applicable Statements

The question asked in the survey was "to what extent do the following statements apply to you regarding the past 2 weeks?". The following answers can give an overview on the situation of the incoming exchange students in Finland on various issues.

Health

"I felt there was enough information on health and safety measures available"

Most students "felt there was enough information on health and safety measures available". 57% of the students said that they felt this information was available to a very great or great extent. 25% felt it was at least moderate and only 16% said that there was no or almost no information available.

Information accessible in English

"I felt there was enough information in English/accessible language for international students available."

64% of the students felt that there was no or only little problems with accessing information in English or a language they understand. 19% had at least some access to information and 15% of the students were struggling with getting informed about the situation.

Transport back

"I am/was able to find transport back to my home country"

30% of the students had no problem with finding transportation back to their home country. 15% were struggling moderately and 21% had big or very big trouble finding a way to return to their home country.

However, 34% of the students said that this statement did not apply to them. This is probably because they already decided to stay in Finland.

Racism

"I experienced COVID-19 related racism based on my ethnicity."

Unfortunately, 8% of the students conducting a mobility period in Finland experienced racism to some extent. Even though this means 92% did not experience any kind of racism, every single person who is judged upon based on ethnic characteristics is one too many.

Isolation and anxiety

"I experienced feelings of isolation and social exclusion."

The feeling of isolation and anxiety was relatively low within the mobile students in Finland. 43% did not experience it at all and 24% only to a little extent.

15% experienced anxiety and/or isolation to a great or very great extent and another 15% to a moderate extent.

Information provided by host university on health measures

"How useful was the information provided to you by your host university on health measures to be taken?"

The information provided by the host university on health measures that should be taken were extremely or very useful for 50% of the students. On the other hand, 15% of the students considered this information to be not useful at all or only slightly useful.

This might be due to the various different HEIs giving out different information, a common national communication strategy in times of crisis might be helpful here.

Information on travel instructions

"How useful was the information provided to you by your host university on travel instructions for exchange students?"

The host universities provided extremely useful or very useful information to 35% of the exchange students. Many of the students considered it to be somewhat useful (31%) but also 32% of the students were unsatisfied with the information given out by the host universities.

Considering that several students were planning to stay in Finland, travel instructions probably were not the most relevant information they needed. Furthermore, there have been complains of students about the way how this information was communicated, as in some cases it seemed to be a request to leave the country, which according to this survey most students did not want to.

Impact examination

"How useful was the information provided to you by your host university on the impact on tasks and examination."

The information on how exams can be taken, and other tasks were extremely or very useful for 51% of the students.

17% of the students did not receive enough information on their tasks and examination.

Impact Accommodation

"How useful was the information provided to you by your host university on the impact on student accommodation?"

30% of the students were not satisfied with the information provided on the impact the COVID-19 situation has on their accommodation. And only 32% considered it to be extremely or very useful.

The accommodation and how to terminate rental agreements were one of the major topics for the students. Several housing providers tried to be somewhat understanding, however for many of the students this seemed to be a dissatisfying situation, which they also stated in several of the open answer fields.

Problems

“Did you encounter any of the following problems?”

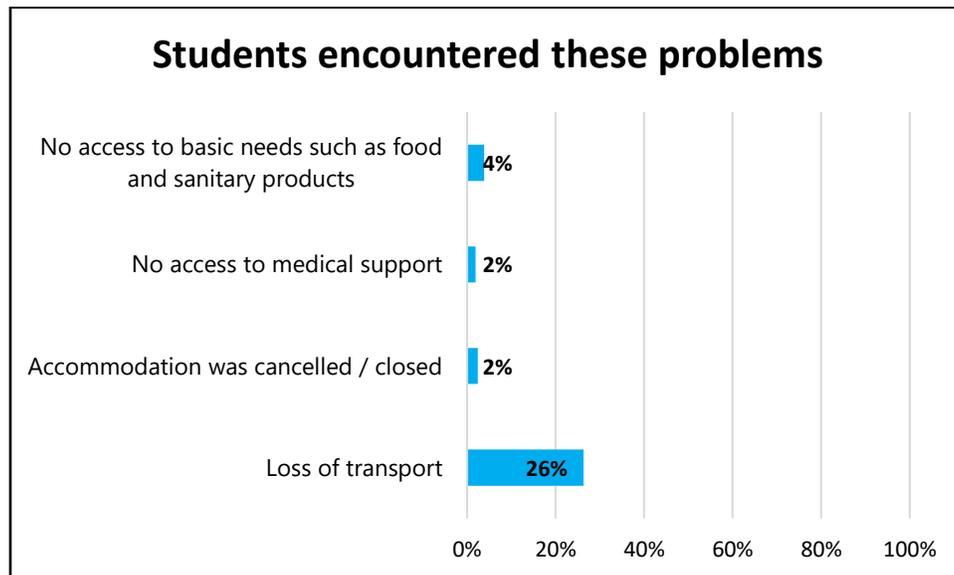


Fig. 13: Problems encountered – incoming students

Individual answers and problems

In the open text fields, the main issues of exchange students hosted in Finland were clustered around the following topics: 1) leaving the country, 2) money worries, 3) study problems.

Leaving the country

The most mentioned topic - 25% of respondents referred to this - was the problem of leaving the country, which depending on the case can be problems getting transportation to the student's home country, cancellation of this transportation, closed borders or simply the cost of getting home. Similarly, students who decided to stay for the rest of the semester expressed their anxiety about the possibility to return after the semester ends. The most referred reason to stay in Finland was feeling safer than having to travel back to their home country and/or stay in their home country at the time of filling the survey. Of the NON-EU citizens who decided to stay, some have mentioned anxiety about getting a new Visa or Residence Permit in time due to appointment cancellations.

Some students felt there was not enough information given about the COVID-19 situation in Finland available in English to make a good decision about staying or leaving.

Financial

5% of respondents have referred to financial impacts due to uncancelable accommodation contracts in their open text field answers. Many of them stated the exact sums – roughly 1000 € and more - they are due to pay for accommodation, that they cannot use, which is probably a good indicator of the added stress they feel due to this situation. This is probably related to the relatively high costs of student accommodation in Finland - according to ESN's House Erasmus+ Research, Finland is #5 in accommodation costs, after the Scandinavian countries and Switzerland.²

Apart from the high accommodation costs, some students said they lost (at least part of) their grants and many also needed very expensive last-minute transportation to their home countries, where often a second concurrent rental agreement had to be paid for.

Study Problems

Although the online courses seem to go well generally, there are some problems any student could encounter, that some of our exchange students have encountered: 1) Problems doing their studies from home due to missing equipment, lab environment, software or silence and peace in their accommodation. 2) Problems continuing their studies due to missing information, this can be course information only given in Finnish, no timely replies from their host or home university or course cancellations. 3) Additional work due to switch from contact to online classes, sometimes reporting the amount of teaching hours being expanded. Some students had problems keeping up with the normal workload while travelling back to their home countries and arranging their quarantine there.

Most students, who are about to lose credits due to e.g. course cancellations or missing laboratory courses and such are also anxious about not being able to fulfil their criteria for their Erasmus grants or even whole degree programs.

Apart from these three topics, 2% of respondents would have needed more information in English about the Corona situation, 2% mentioned not having access to health care and 5 respondents out of 828 did not feel safe enough in Finland, due to other people's behaviour.

² See Fig 4.11 in HousErasmus+ Research Report. Available at <https://houserasmus.eu/research>

Recommendations

After reviewing the data from the survey, ESN Finland would like to express some recommendations for the stakeholders in Finland to combat this and future crisis situation in a better way for the international student community.

Recommendation #1

We recommend informing incoming students on options if they are not able to leave the country after the spring semester or their visa is not prolonged.

There is a likelihood that some of the students who decided to stay in Finland will not be able to return to their home country after May. The HEIs and national bodies shall try to find solutions for these students to find a place to live until they can *safely* return to their home country. It is very important not to pressure any of the students but rather finding common solutions with housing providers and Migri (if visas must be prolonged). Furthermore, support structures to ensure their financial security shall be thought through.

Recommendation #2

We recommend taking good care of returning students mental health.

Various outgoing students expressed a high level of anxiety during the first phase of the COVID-19 outbreak. Most of these students will return to Finland or are already back. It is very important to provide them with individual support, but also giving them the information that they are not alone in their situation.

Recommendation #3

We recommend compiling a national information package on the most important information for all international students in Finland.

The package should include at least information on; where to get information in English (e.g. yle, thl), travel recommendation (recommended to stay or leave Finland and explanation on possible impact), contact of support structures (e.g. yths, mental health support) and information on where to get further information within their respective university to be adjusted by the universities before sending it to their students.

There are various other conclusions that can be drawn from this report and the report by ESN AISBL. However, we see these three recommendations as the most important for the Finnish student community.

Acknowledgment

We would like to thank the Finnish National Erasmus Agency Opetushallitus for their support in distributing the survey.

Furthermore, a big thank you to the Finnish Student Unions SAMOK and SYL, for distributing the survey and their interest in international affairs and the work of ESN Finland.

And another huge thank you to the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (Suomen opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö) for a great cooperation and for taking up our ideas to support international students in Finland.

**Kiitos paljon for your support. Tack så mycket for the good cooperation in this time.
Thank you for all the great work for the international community in Finland!**

Thank you to ESN AISBL for their work in conducting the survey and publishing the report. These people managed to write a huge research report for all our countries very fast. We are proud to be part of such a network, where everyone is using their skills to improve the lives of all others. Students helping students aren't only empty words, this is what the network does daily.

Another **thank you** to all **our sections in Finland**, to the volunteers who are working to make the lives of those exchange and international degree students who stayed in Finland so much better. For their tireless effort to solve every occurring issue and for their innovative ideas to combat the crisis. It is encouraging to see that in people work closely together, no matter how far apart we might be.