



# LIVING AND LEARNING – EXCHANGE STUDIES ABROAD

A STUDY OF MOTIVES,  
BARRIERS AND EXPERIENCES  
OF FINNISH, NORWEGIAN  
AND SWEDISH STUDENTS

Living and Learning – Exchange Studies Abroad

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# INTRODUCTION

In the Nordic countries as well as in Europe as a whole, increased student mobility is a political priority. As members of the Bologna process, Finland, Norway, and Sweden share the target that at least 20 per cent of those graduating in Europe in 2020 should have been on a study or training period abroad.

The present report is the result of a cooperation project by the Centre for International Mobility (CIMO) in Finland, the Swedish Council for Higher Education and the Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education (SIU). The three offices are national agencies for the Lifelong Learning Programme in their respective countries, and they have the common task of promoting internationalisation in education, including international student mobility.

The cooperation project aims to provide comparable data from Finland, Norway and Sweden to increase our understanding of the driving forces of student mobility. The following are the main questions addressed:

- What characterises the group of students going on exchange in comparison with the non-mobile students, with regard to background factors, study orientation, and ambitions?
- What factors can be identified as important motivators and barriers for mobility?
- What sources of encouragement or discouragement are students exposed to, and how do they influence students' choices?
- How do students experience the exchange period with regard to outcome on social and academic related expectations?
- How do students experience the return to their home institutions with regard to recognition of studies, and with regard to recognition, use and relevance of the exchange experience in further study activity?

This report focuses on exchange mobility as opposed to degree mobility. While mobile degree students take

their full degree abroad, exchange students have their sojourn abroad as part of their study in the home country. For the purpose of the survey, exchange mobility is defined as having at least three months' duration, including mobility for study as well as for placement.

## STUDENT MOBILITY – DRIVERS AND BARRIERS

Research into the driving forces behind student mobility focuses on background factors of students, on subjective motives for going or not going, and on different types of more objective obstacles making a sojourn abroad difficult or even impossible to accomplish.

Studies from Europe suggest that the educational and cultural background of parents is more important than family economy. Evidence from Norway and Sweden shows that mobile students (both degree and exchange students) are a selected group in the sense that they are more likely to have parents with higher education (Rodrigues 2012: 10; Saarikallio-Torp and Wiers-Jenssen 2010: 29). Other background factors frequently pointed to are language competency and prior international experience of students themselves as well as of their parents (Rodrigues 2010).

In our survey we asked the mobile respondents about their motives for becoming exchange students. The

**“What characterises the group of students going on exchange in comparison with the non-mobile students?”**

Nordic Graduate Survey from 2007 identified the following as the two most widespread motives among internationally mobile Nordic students: interest in experiencing different cultures, and to live and study in a foreign environment. This is in line with other studies in the Nordic countries involving degree seeking as well as exchange students.<sup>1</sup> Getting access to education not available in the home country can be an important motive for degree mobility, with the large number of Norwegian medical students in Poland and Hungary and other countries as an example. For exchange mobility this should not be expected to be among the most important motives. That being said, motives related to educational outcome are also frequently given by our respondents.

<sup>1</sup>See Garam (2000), Hietaluoma (2001), Søvik and Eldøy (2010), Sifo (2008).

Regarding obstacles to mobility, research literature identifies two main barriers, namely financial limitations and language. On a global level these are clearly very important. For the countries covered in our survey, however, there is reason to assume that both economy and language are less important barriers than for many other countries. This is supported by the recent Eurostudent survey (Orr, Gwosc and Netz 2011).<sup>2</sup>

While economy on a general level is the main obstacle for mobility, the Eurostudent IV survey concludes that Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden are the only countries where the expected economic burden is not the obstacle most frequently identified by students. Rather, students from these countries point to the separation from family and friends as the main obstacle to enrolment abroad.

As economic limitations are not as important for Nordic students as for students in many other parts of the world, other barriers are given relatively more weight when accounting for non-mobility, such as social/family obligations. For many students, however, even the non-mobile, that kind of relations or obligations will not represent a definitive obstacle similar to for example lack of entry visa or inability to finance accommodation or in some countries tuition fees. Students who choose to go abroad do not necessarily have less developed social ties than their non-mobile co-students. The result from a survey on international mobility among PhD candidates at Norwegian higher education institutions is a case in point. While family ties and child care were given as the number one reason by non-mobile candidates for not going abroad during their PhD studies, the actual mobility rate was somewhat higher for candidates *with* children than for those without (SIU 2011)<sup>3</sup>. For some students, pointing to family and other social ties can be a way of rationalising non-mobility.

Trying to answer why student X chooses to study abroad while student Y stays in his or her home country throughout the study period, several factors must be taken into account. The mentioned background factors produce a part of the picture. The subjective motives given by the students themselves can increase our understanding. Furthermore, there is no doubt that personality matters – some seek adventures and challenges, while others are just as keen to avoid them. From our perspective, however, it is crucial

to draw the attention to those factors that can be influenced by policies and strategies or practices at the higher education institutions. To what extent are the students' propensities to go abroad for exchange studies the result of their experiences at their home institutions? Is it possible to point to practices, national or institutional, that clearly influence the students' mobility patterns?

Based on the results from this survey we find that mobility patterns are at least partly explained by such practices. We find that students in the three countries do not experience any single major obstacle, and that increased encouragement and motivation can make some of the non-mobile students mobile. While students generally assume that studying abroad for a period can be rewarding as far as personal experience and development is concerned, institutions should probably work harder to make sure that exchange is understood to be academically rewarding for the students.

## MOBILITY IN FINLAND, NORWAY AND SWEDEN

Before discussing the driving forces and barriers more in detail, we will present a general picture of international student mobility from the three countries, as this can represent a useful background when analysing the results of the survey.

Student mobility is resource demanding, and students in Finland, Norway, and Sweden can enjoy support from various sources, national loans and grants as well as programmes and funding schemes, with Erasmus as the single most important programme.

Table 1.1 presents some basic information about international student mobility in the three countries. Mobility patterns differ quite significantly. Finland stands out from the other two in the relation between exchange students and degree seeking students. While in the latter countries degree seeking students clearly outnumber exchange students, the situation in Finland is the opposite. The country has the highest number of exchange students in absolute terms. Differences in funding schemes are a likely explanation. While students from Norway and Sweden can get support for tuition fees abroad, this is not the case for students from Finland (Saarikallio-Torp Wiers-Jensen 2010: 25). From this perspective it makes sense in Finland to focus particularly on exchange mobility.

<sup>2</sup>Eurostudent is a project with the main aim to collate comparable data on the social dimension of European higher education, and includes questions about barriers and obstacles for international mobility.

<sup>3</sup>International Mobility among PhD Candidates at Norwegian Higher Education Institutions. SIU Report 02/2011.

**Table 1.1** Key statistics on student population and mobility in Finland, Norway, and Sweden.

	Finland	Norway	Sweden
Total student population 2010. (Source: Nordic Education Key Data 2012)	308,000	226,000	469,000
Share of female vs. male students in student population (%) (Source: Nordic Education Key Data 2012)	F: 54 M: 46	F: 61 M: 39	F: 59 M: 41
Outgoing exchange students 2011–2012*	9,931	8,114	6,233** (min.)
Outgoing degree seeking students (Source: Nordic Education Key Data 2012)	5,457	15,169	21,705** (max.)
Outgoing exchange students as share of student population (%)	3.2	3.6	1.3** (min.)
Outgoing degree seeking students as share of student population (%)	1.7	6.3	4.4** (max.)
Outgoing Erasmus Mobility 2011–2012 – studies	3,966	1,547	3,210
Outgoing Erasmus mobility 2011–2012 - placement	1,115	145	383
Outgoing Erasmus exchange students (studies and placement) as share of exchange students 2011–2012	51	21	58

\* Source: CIMO, Finland, State Educational Loan Fund, Norway; CSN, Sweden.

\*\* Figures for Sweden not directly comparable, as Swedish statistics do not clearly distinguish between degree mobility and short term mobility.

Finland is an active user of the Erasmus programme, and slightly more than half of the outgoing students have their sojourn abroad organised through that programme. The greatest difference between Finland and the two other countries is found in statistics on Erasmus outgoing mobility for placements. In Norway and Sweden such mobility is relatively low, while in Finland more than 1,100 students went abroad for Erasmus placement in 2011–2012.

Norway is the country with the highest level of outgoing mobility relative to the total student population, for both exchange and degree mobility. At the same time, the Erasmus programme plays a relatively limited role in exchange mobility from Norway. While half of the exchange mobility from Finland is Erasmus mobility, the same programme accounts for no more than 20 per cent of outgoing exchange mobility from Norway.

For Sweden, it is not possible to distinguish precisely between degree seeking students and the kind of short term mobility which is the concern of the present report. Probably, the distribution between the two mobility types is somewhat different than what table 1.1 suggests. The group ‘outgoing degree seeking students’ apparently includes some students enrolled in Sweden with a short term sojourn abroad outside of programmes or institutional agreements. Thus, the number of degree seeking students from Sweden must

be lower than the number given in table 1.1, and the number of short term mobile students correspondingly higher.

## THE SURVEY AND THE RESPONDENTS

The survey was sent to a total of 48,934 e-mail addresses of individuals enrolled as degree seeking students with or without previous mobility experience or plans to become an exchange student.<sup>4</sup> To the extent that incoming exchange students to the three countries are included in the survey, their response has been taken out in order not to disturb the picture. 6,531 students responded to the survey, which gives a response rate of 13.5 per cent. The response rate was highest in Sweden (16.9 per cent) followed by Norway (14.3 per cent) and Finland (9.0 per cent).

The survey included 75 closed and open questions, covering the following areas:

- Background information on students
- Account for actual or planned mobility
- Why they chose to go abroad
- Why they have not gone abroad
- Organisation of the stay abroad
- To what extent they have been encouraged/discouraged
- Experiences before, during, and after the stay abroad

<sup>4</sup>For a more detailed description of the survey and the methodology, see appendix.

- Experienced benefits and bad experiences
- Questions on attitudes towards studying abroad
- Separate battery on short term mobility (less than 3 months)

The questionnaire was structured according to different student groups, based on the respondents' experiences with or plans about studying/placement/internship abroad, for at least three months.

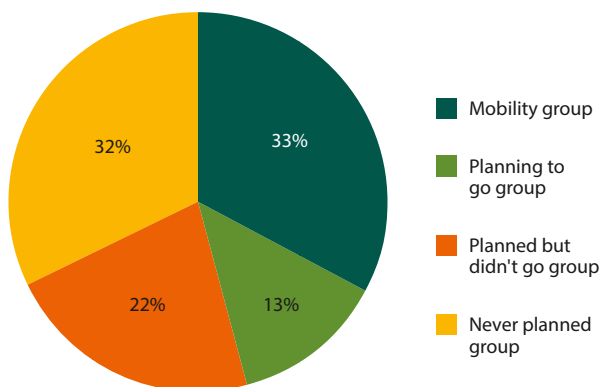
1. **MOBILITY GROUP:** respondents who had previously been abroad studying or doing a placement/internship or who were abroad for such purposes at the time of the survey.
2. **PLANNING TO GO GROUP:** respondents without previous mobility experience but who had specific plans for this during the last part of their studies.
3. **PLANNED BUT DIDN'T GO GROUP:** Students who neither were nor had been on an exchange, but who at some point had planned to go abroad for studies/placement/internship.
4. **NEVER PLANNED GROUP:** Students who neither were nor had been, nor at any point had planned to go abroad for studies/placement/internship.

Two main issues have been identified as concerns representativeness. Among the Swedish respondents, students from 'Engineering, manufacturing and construction' are heavily overrepresented, and female students are significantly overrepresented among the respondents from Finland.

In all three countries, but particularly in Finland, students with mobility experience are overrepresented in the survey, cf. figure 1.1. Still, this should not significantly affect the representativeness of the respondents. Throughout the survey we distinguish between the mobility groups, and apart from the issues mentioned above, there is no reason to assume that our mobile and non-mobile respondents are not otherwise representative of their groups.

The report is organised into three thematic chapters. In chapter 2 we focus on non-mobile students and reasons for not going abroad. Chapter 3 draws attention to mobile students' motives for going abroad, while chapter 4 discusses evaluations of studying abroad – by students with, as well as without, personal mobility experience. A final, concluding chapter summarises the main findings of the project.

**Figure 1.1** Distribution of respondents according to mobility groups (N=6432)





## 2. REASONS FOR NOT GOING ABROAD

### MAIN FINDINGS

- Non-mobile students come from slightly lower educational background and they have less experience in moving to another place to study in their home country than mobile students. There are also some differences between subject areas in students' propensity to go abroad.
- There is a big variety of reasons for not going abroad, but none of them is agreed upon by a majority of students. There is not one single reason affecting all non-mobile students' decision.
- The most important experienced barrier to mobility is personal relations. Academic reasons are also considered relatively important. These are more common among students in fields leading to a regulated profession or in 'hard sciences', for example, medical sciences, law, engineering, natural sciences, or education.
- Encouragement or discouragement from other people has a role in students' decision to go abroad. Students who have not been abroad and especially those who have never planned to go abroad report significantly less encouragement from all sources than do mobile students. Teachers, student counsellors and international coordinators are important when aiming to overcome academic barriers to mobility. Students who experience low level of encouragement from these sources also emphasise academic reasons for not going abroad.
- A majority of non-mobile students do not regret at all or only a little the fact that they have not been abroad during their studies. If we think that studying abroad is a good experience, we should more clearly articulate its added value also to these students.
- Non-mobile students, and especially those who never planned to go abroad, participate less actively in shorter mobility periods. They also

participate slightly less actively in those various forms of international activities at the home institution, such as courses with an international focus, international buddy projects, and social activities with foreign students. Participating in different kinds of international activities seems to encourage students to go 'a step further' and enrol in longer study exchanges.

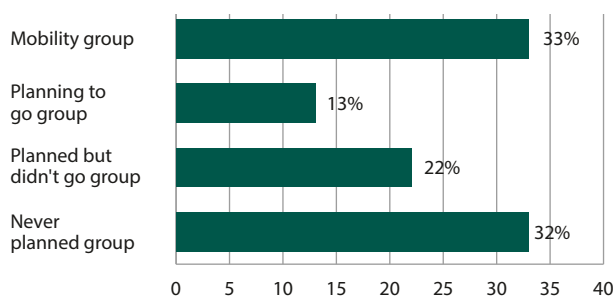
Non-mobile students form the majority of respondents in this survey. More than 54 % of the students either have never planned to go abroad or planned to go abroad but did not carry out their plans. This chapter looks in more detail at these students: who are they, what are their reasons for staying home and how do they evaluate afterwards their decision not to go abroad.

### WHO ARE THE NON-MOBILE STUDENTS?

There are some differences between mobile and non-mobile respondents. Male students go abroad less often than female students. There are also some differences between subject areas. On the whole, the biggest proportions of non-mobile respondents are in the field of education and teacher training and in many 'hard science' fields, e.g. medical sciences, mathematics and informatics, communication and information sciences and agricultural sciences. Respondents in 'soft' subjects such as humanities, social sciences and business are on average more mobile. Different subject fields have different study cultures and this may be reflected also in students' mobility plans. Therefore different subject areas should be focused differently when aiming to promote mobility. Similar gender and subject field differences are found also in the mobility statistics<sup>1</sup> of the participating countries.

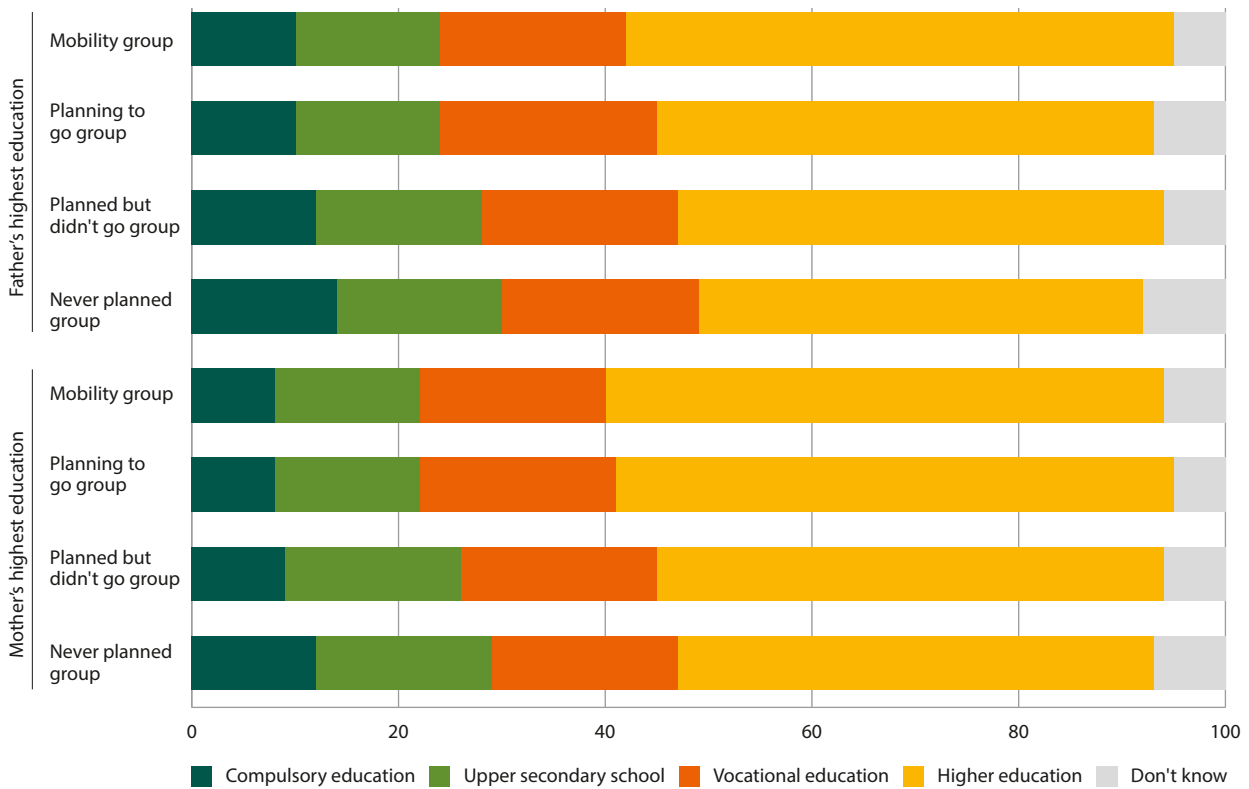
Non-mobile students report slightly lower educational levels for their parents (figure 2.2). This

Figure 2.1. Mobility groups (N=6432)



<sup>1</sup>CIMO (2011): Kansainvälinen liikkuvuus yliopistoissa ja ammattikorkeakouluissa 2011 [International mobility in universities and universities of applied sciences 2011] [http://www.cimo.fi/palvelut/julkaisut/selvitykset/tietoa\\_ja\\_tilastoja\\_-\\_raportit\\_3\\_2012\\_kansainvalinen\\_liikkuvuus\\_ammattillisessa\\_koulutuksessa\\_2011](http://www.cimo.fi/palvelut/julkaisut/selvitykset/tietoa_ja_tilastoja_-_raportit_3_2012_kansainvalinen_liikkuvuus_ammattillisessa_koulutuksessa_2011)

**Figure 2.2.** Parents' educational level, by mobility group (N=6432)



finding is in line with results from the Eurostudent survey 2011 which also pointed out social imbalance in study abroad experience: study abroad experience is more common among students from a high social background than among students from a lower social background. This was the case also in the Nordic countries, with Sweden as an exception, (Orr & Gwosc & Netz 2011).

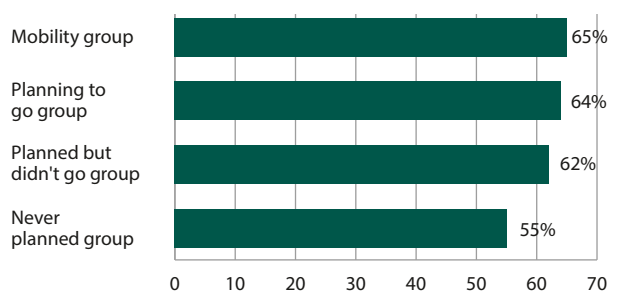
**“Mobility within national borders may thus facilitate mobility across borders later on.”**

Another interesting difference between mobile and non-mobile students is that non-mobile students, and especially those who never planned to go abroad, tend to have less experience in moving to another place to study in their home country (figure 2.3). Mobility within national borders may thus facilitate mobility across borders later on, whereas staying at home enables students to create established connections in their home town preventing them from moving. Students who have stayed in their home town may also be less flexible in the first place when it comes to changing environment.

### REASONS FOR NOT GOING ABROAD

**Personal relations** (didn't want to leave family or boy/girlfriend) is the most frequent reason for not going abroad (figure 2.4). This is emphasised more often than average by Finnish students, by female students, by older students, and by students who never planned to go abroad. Personal relations as an obstacle to mobility is also more important than average to students who have stayed in the same city/place in their home country for studies. These students may have more ties to their home town making it more difficult to go abroad.

**Figure 2.3.** Proportion of students who have moved from another city/place in the same country to study, by mobility group (N=6423)



**Academic concerns** (didn't want to be delayed in studies, didn't want to miss part of studies at home, would be difficult to fit into studies at home institution) can also be found at the top of the list of barriers to mobility. This indicates that in many cases there is still a lot of work to do if study abroad possibilities are to be an integral part of study programmes. Academic concerns are emphasised especially by Finnish students and younger students. Uncertainty about the quality of education abroad is not a very strong reason for not going, according to

**“Academic concerns can also be found at the top of the list of barriers to mobility.”**

this study, but those students who estimate their own academic level above average are more concerned about it. Neither is the risk of getting worse grades than at home a very strong reason for not going abroad. This reason is slightly more important to students who estimate their academic level below average.

There are some differences between subject areas as regards academic reasons. Students in subject areas leading to regulated professions and students in 'hard sciences' have more academically related concerns about studying abroad. Thus, students who study medical sciences, law, engineering and technology, natural sciences or agricultural sciences are more concerned about the quality of education abroad than students in other subject areas. Students in these subject areas are also more concerned than others about missing parts of their studies at home and being delayed in their studies. Fitting studies abroad into studies at the home institution seems to worry students in medical sciences and in education and teacher training.

**Financial concerns** (didn't have enough money) is the fourth most frequently reported obstacle for international mobility. This is reported more often by female students, and by those students who estimate their own academic level below average.

**Concerns related to self-confidence** (it would be too stressful to participate in an exchange programme, uncertain about studying in a foreign language) can also be found relatively high on the experienced barriers list. These concerns are emphasised more than average by those students who estimate their own academic level below average and by those students who never planned to go abroad. It is impor-

tant to notice that there are also students who report lack of self-confidence and language proficiency as important reasons for not going abroad. Even if more and more students are connected to international communities, this group should not be forgotten. They may need extra support and motivation. The added value of international experience could be especially big to this group.

**Lack of guidance and information from home institution** is reported as a reason for not going abroad more often in Sweden and Norway than in Finland. As mentioned before, students who have had mobility plans find this reason more important than those who never planned to go abroad.

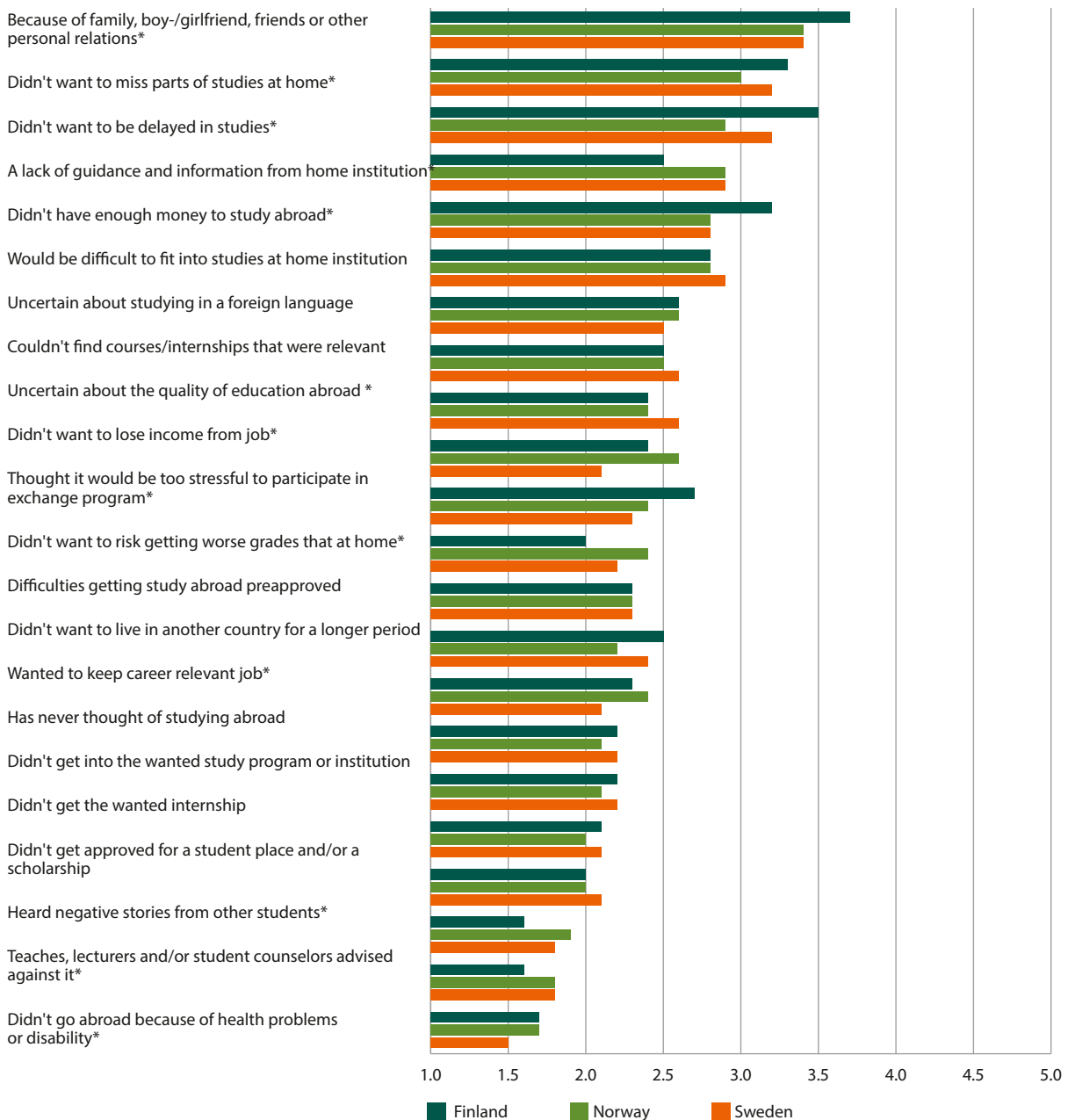
**Work related barriers** (didn't want to lose income from job, wanted to keep career relevant job) are neither among the most important obstacles nor at the bottom of the list. Older students find the risk of losing income a more important reason than younger students. Students who have stayed in the same city/place for their studies also find work related barriers more important than students who have moved to another city/place in home country.

**Negative influence from others** in the institution (teachers and lecturers advising against mobility, negative stories from other students) is not an important reason for not going abroad. Only a few students emphasise such reasons. However, there are some subject areas where respondents experience their teachers having more negative attitudes towards mobility than on average. These fields are engineering, medical sciences and social sciences.

But even for the most important reasons for not going abroad the score is near neutral. In fact, personal relations are the only reason for not going abroad with which respondents agree more than disagree. This indicates that there are not specific reasons that are particularly important in preventing students from going abroad. Instead, different respondents emphasise different reasons. This result suggests that a policy seeking to increase student mobility should take several kinds of obstacles into account, and not concentrate on just one.

The different barriers are connected, and one respondent may emphasise many barriers at the same time. Those students who are uncertain about studying in foreign languages also find getting worse grades abroad a big risk and participating in exchange programmes stressful. Moreover, uncertainty about the quality of education abroad correlates with concerns about missing parts of the studies at home.

**Figure 2.4.** Reasons for not going abroad, by country, (1 strongly disagree – 5 strongly agree) (N=3457-3466) \*significant differences between countries



When comparing the reasons for not going between different non-mobility groups, students who planned to go abroad at some point of their studies tend to emphasise the same more 'general' reasons as students who never planned to go abroad – personal relations, risk of missing part of studies or being delayed in studies, or lack of money. Figure 2.5 presents the reasons for not going abroad with a significant difference between students who planned to go abroad at some point and those who never planned.

The major difference can be found in the alternative 'has never thought of studying abroad' – a reason that the never planned group emphasise more often. Students who never planned to go abroad also find going abroad more stressful, do not want to live in another country for a longer period, are uncertain about their language proficiency, and experience family ties as a greater barrier.

The non-mobile students who planned to go abroad at some point were asked separately about four pos-

sible reasons for not carrying out their plans. These were all practical-institutional reasons related to the application process and approval, like ‘difficulties getting study abroad approved’, ‘didn’t get into the wanted study program or institution’, or ‘didn’t get approved for a student place or internship’.

None of these four reasons is very important for preventing students from carrying out their mobility plans (figure 2.6). A majority of the students who planned to go abroad disagree with them. There are no significant differences between the three countries on these possible reasons for not carrying out mobility plans. As for gender, male students find all four reasons slightly more important than female students. Age is not significant, although younger students emphasise these reasons more often than older students. There were no significant differences between subject areas either.

In the questionnaire, respondents were also able to write other reasons for not going abroad in answer to an open question. This makes it possible to broaden the picture of different factors behind the decision of not going abroad as part of a study programme. About 13 percent of the respondents (825) gave additional reasons for not going abroad.

The most often mentioned other reason is that students have not been abroad because **they simply are not interested** in it and cannot find a reason why they should go. This includes answers like ‘I’m not interested’, ‘why bother’, ‘I like it here’, and ‘I was too lazy to organise it’.

Another relatively frequently mentioned additional reason is that students **already have other kinds**

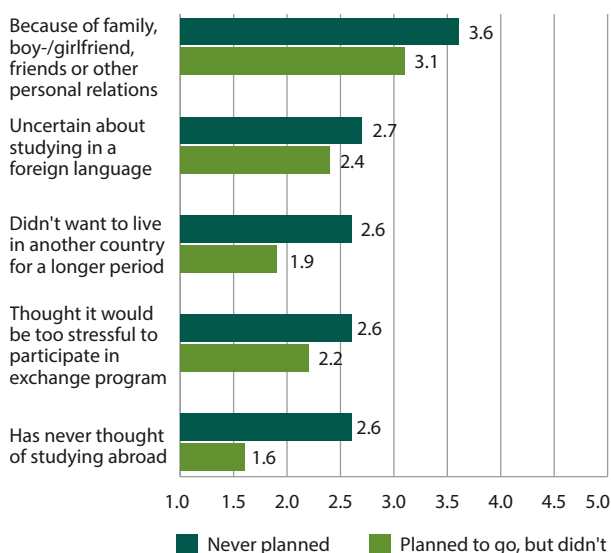
**of international experience.** They have, e.g., lived abroad, studied abroad, travelled a lot, or participated in a shorter exchange period. Because of this they feel that they have already had their share of international experience. This reason is interesting because it underlines the fact that some students value studying abroad mainly as a personal and cultural experience, not as an academic one. Therefore, any kind of international experience can fulfil a student’s ‘international quota’. Linking study periods abroad more closely to academic added value could motivate these students to go abroad again.

*I had lived abroad for two years during high school and therefore I didn’t feel such a strong need to move abroad again so soon.*

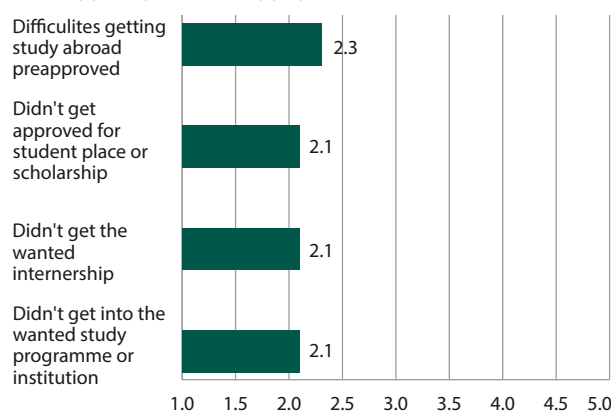
*I spent 11 months in London as an au pair for an English family of 4 children. It was amazing time, but it kind of gave me the adventure I wanted and now I satisfied with completing my studies and starting a new chapter in my life.*

**Flat/apartment or house in home country** was also given as a reason for not going by some students. These respondents underline that they have an apartment they have been waiting for or investing in and do not want to let or sell while abroad. They also cannot afford having two apartments at the same time, one at home and another in the host country.

**Figure 2.5.** Reasons for not going abroad by non-mobility group (1 strongly disagree – 5 strongly agree) (N=3442-3466)



**Figure 2.6.** Reasons for not going, planned but didn't go group, mean (1 strongly disagree – 5 strongly agree) (N=1369-1374)



*It would be difficult to keep my apartment during abroad period. It would be too much arrangement for that.*

*I have my own apartment and I did not like the idea of renting it out when it is so new and I have just settled in.*

Other reasons for not going abroad that were not so frequently mentioned as the ones listed above include:

- Students have pets they do not want to leave behind.
- Students have a hobby, sports career, position of trust, or other activities outside their studies they are engaged in and do not want to interrupt.
- Students feel their grades are not good enough for them to qualify for studies abroad.
- Students feel that the period abroad would give no added value to their studies or further career and that it is more important to build contacts in their home country.
- Some students did not go abroad because they feel they are too old or because they were foreign born.

### DISCOURAGEMENT AND LACK OF ENCOURAGEMENT AS A REASON FOR NOT GOING ABROAD

Students can be encouraged – or discouraged – to go abroad by a variety of sources: friends, other students, international coordinators, student counsellors and/ or teachers. In the questionnaire, students in the three countries were asked to evaluate whether they had experienced encouragement or discouragement from these sources. The role of encouragement for the decision to go abroad is discussed further in chapter 3.

The overall picture is that students, including non-mobile students, have experienced very little discouragement when it comes to international mobility. Friends and family are the most important sources of discouragement. This goes well together with the result that personal relations are the most important reason for not going abroad. But even here the average score is very low. There are no differences between mobile and non-mobile students in experienced discouragement. Thus, on the whole, experienced discouragement is not a reason for not going abroad.

There are some interesting connections between the (lack of) encouragement students report from different sources and the reasons for not going abroad. Students reporting a low level of encouragement from teachers also emphasise barriers related to academic matters, like the risk of getting lower grades and worries about getting delayed in studies. Little encouragement from student counsellors and international coordinators is reported when fitting studies abroad into studies at the home institution is an important reason for not going abroad. This points out that teachers, students counsellors and international coordinators are all crucial when wanting to overcome the academic barriers to international mobility.

When there is hardly any encouragement from the international coordinators, the lack of guidance and information from home institution is a significant reason for not going. Lack of encouragement from other students or friends and family is strongly related to more personal reasons for not going – students who report the former, also report the latter. Moreover, when it comes to encouragement from friends and family, the financial issues (didn't want to lose income from the job/ didn't have enough money to study abroad) were significant. Students who did not get any encouragement from family and friends were thus more often concerned about the money issues than other students.

<b>Low level of encouragement from ...</b>	<b>→ Tendency to emphasise the following reason for not going abroad:</b>
teachers	– Didn't want to risk getting worse grades – Didn't want to get delayed in studies
student counsellors	– Difficult to fit into studies at home institution
international coordinators	– Difficult to fit into studies at home institution – Lack of information and guidance from home institution
other students	– Personal relations (family, boy/girlfriend)
friends and family	– Personal relations (family, boy/girlfriend) – Didn't want to lose income from a job – Don't have enough money to study abroad

## REGRETS OF NOT GOING ABROAD

Most students (two out of three) who have not been abroad during their studies do not regret their decision at all, or regret it just a little. This is an important message to educators aiming to increase international mobility: a majority of non-mobile students do not feel that they have missed a lot by not going abroad. When comparing the three countries, Norwegian students show some more regret than Swedish and Finnish students (figure 2.7).

There is clear difference between students who never planned to go abroad and those who planned but did not go: students who planned to study abroad but for some reason did not manage to carry out their plans regret the lack of international experience much more often than those who never planned to go. There is no gender difference as regards regret. Students who evaluate their academic level above average report regret slightly more often than students who rate themselves below average. According to this study, students from business studies and languages and philological sciences regret more often than others that they did not go abroad for studies.

When comparing reasons for not going abroad with regret, there are some significant differences. Students who regret not going abroad experience more often lack of guidance and information from their institution as a barrier to mobility. The outcome is the same for all countries. This is understandable, since the lack of information could make students feel that the decision of not going abroad was, in a sense, not their own. These results stress the need for high quality institutional support.

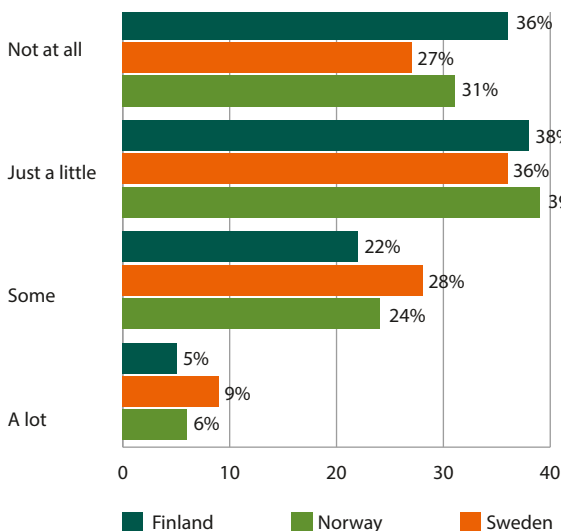
In comparison, students who do not regret very much not going abroad agree more often with reasons for not going abroad related to academic matters (uncertain about the quality of education abroad, didn't want to be delayed in studies, didn't want to miss studies), personal relations (family, boy/girlfriend), and the fact that they never thought about going abroad.

## PARTICIPATING IN SHORT TERM MOBILITY AND INTERNATIONALISATION AT HOME

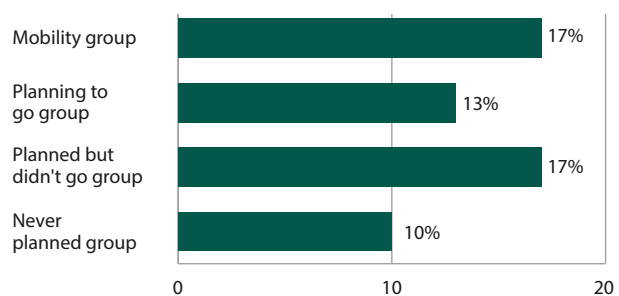
Short-term mobility periods and various forms of international education at the home institution may offer international experience to those students who cannot or do not wish to go abroad for a longer period. Do non-mobile students take advantage of these opportunities? In fact, non-mobile students who never planned to go abroad also have less experience in shorter stays abroad. However, for students who did not go abroad but planned to do so, the situation is somewhat different. They have as much experience in shorter stays abroad as mobile students. For some of them, short visits seem to work as an alternative to get international experience (figure 2.8).

Students can also get relevant international and intercultural experience at their home institutions. International education at the home institution can be an alternative way of having international experience for those students who cannot or do not want to go abroad. In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to evaluate how often they participate in different forms of internationalisation at home. The most common forms are participating in courses

**Figure 2.7.** Regretted not going abroad for studies/placement/internship, by country (N=3480)



**Figure 2.8.** Proportion of students who have been on shorter stays abroad as part of their studies, by mobility group (N=6432)



taught in English by the home institution's lecturers and courses where foreign students are present (figure 2.9).

There are not significant differences between non-mobile and mobile students when it comes to participating in courses where foreign students were present, in group work with foreign students, in courses taught in English, or in courses given by visiting lecturers. These forms of international education are provided by the institutions and study programmes equally to all students.

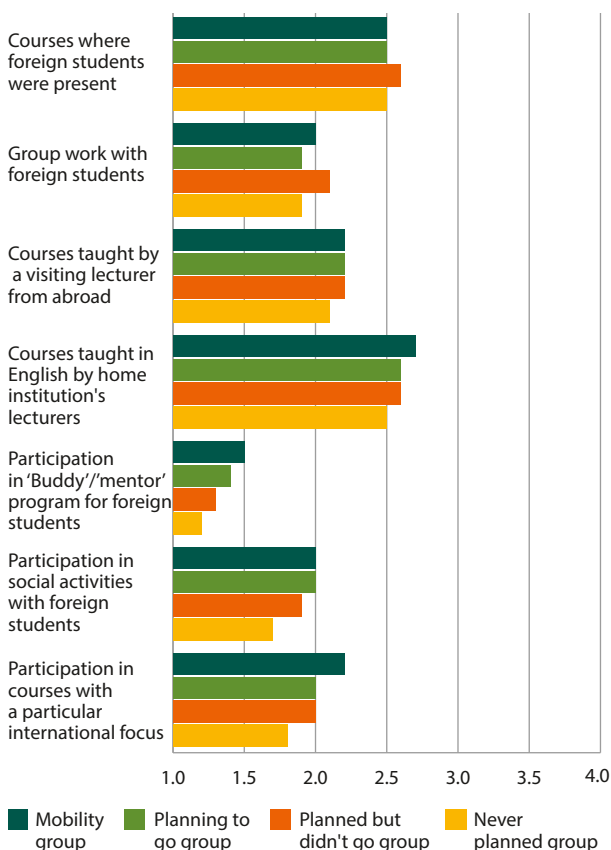
There are some differences between non-mobile and mobile students in participating in international buddy programmes, social activities with foreign students, and courses with an international focus. Non-mobile students participate less in these activities than mobile students. These activities depend more on the student's own choice. It seems that non-mobile students are not as interested as mobile students in participating in international possibilities offered by their home institution.

According to the findings above, there is a small tendency that international mobility periods, short term mobility and some forms of international education offered by the home institution accumulate in the same mobile student group. Extra efforts should thus be made in order to persuade non-mobile students to participate in these activities. Internationalisation at home and shorter mobility periods may motivate students to go abroad for a longer period.

Non-mobile students who have participated in different forms of international education at their home institutions report less often uncertainty about studying in a foreign language as a barrier to international mobility. This indicates that participating in different modes of international education may also increase students' confidence in using foreign languages and may thus help them decide to go abroad.

When scrutinising the participation in internationalisation at home between different subject areas there are some differences. These differences are not very important, but they point out, once again, a difference between 'harder' and 'softer' study fields. Participating in courses with foreign students, participating in group work with foreign students and participating in courses taught in English is slightly more common among students in natural sciences, geography and geology, engineering and technology, and mathematics and informatics. This indicates that the largest group of international degree students have been recruited from these subject areas. Business studies and languages and philological sciences are the subject areas where students participate in 'buddy/mentor' programmes for foreign students more often than students among other subject areas. Business studies and social sciences stand out as subject areas where participation in courses with an international focus is more common than in other areas.

**Figure 2.9.** Internationalisation at home, by mobility group (1 not at all – 4 a lot) (N=6377-6401)





# 3. MOTIVES FOR GOING ABROAD

## MAIN FINDINGS

- The top three motives for the great majority of exchange students are: getting to know another country or culture, improving language skills, and gaining new perspectives on studies.
- Attainment of both academic quality and personal growth are seen as outcomes of educational exchanges, but personal growth outweighs academic quality in respondents' understanding of the value of studying abroad, especially among younger exchange students. This is reflected in the motives describing why students take part in educational exchanges.
- To a large extent, students are motivated to take part in educational exchanges for similar reasons, regardless of age, gender, or nationality. However, older students are slightly more motivated by the expected academic quality of the exchange.
- Friends and family can be both a major reason for not studying abroad and an important source of encouragement for exchange studies.
- Encouragement seems to play an important role in a student's decision to go or not to go abroad. Students who have been abroad report significantly more encouragement from all sources than those who have not, and especially than those who have never planned to go abroad.
- The home institution's support appears to be perceived differently by students of different nationalities. This variance might warrant further investigation to shape interventions that align with students' preferences for guidance.

## BACKGROUND

It is the political ambition of all three countries to increase outward student mobility. To encourage more students to take part in educational exchanges, it is important to pinpoint the factors that enable such mobility to happen. In other words, exactly what motivates mobile students enough to overcome

the barriers that stop others from going abroad? This chapter examines the characteristics of the mobility group and their motives for studying abroad. Variation within the mobility group – and between the mobility group and other students – will be considered across the following key factors: age, gender, nationality, and encouragement and home institution support. This analytical structure can be used to target specific groups of students for further research or information efforts.

## THE MOBILITY GROUP

About one third of the respondents say that they either are or have been abroad during their studies. The students who take part in educational exchanges are very positive about the overall experience. Over 80 per cent report a very positive or positive impression, while less than two per cent state a negative view.

Across the entire mobility group, the motives expressed for studying abroad tend to be something other than purely academic. It seems that the students consider educational exchanges an important complement to their studies rather than something that primarily strengthens their subject knowledge as such. Only one in five respondents thinks that students who go abroad have an advantage when it comes to academic quality, although as discussed below, variations within the mobility group exist, for example between age groups.

The fact that academic quality does not seem to be a primary concern is not to say, however, that the students do not find it important or rewarding to take part in educational exchanges. On the contrary, all respondents, mobile and non-mobile, express a significant bias in favour of those who have studied abroad when it comes to considering which students undergo greater levels of personal growth. However the respondents define personal growth, a concept not clarified in this study, it might be seen as something that improves career prospects. Just as students see educational exchanges as a way to obtain high levels of personal growth, almost 40 per cent view mobile students as the ones with the best job opportunities – either in the home country or abroad. This is also in line with the results in a Swedish study on employers' views on study or placement abroad.<sup>1</sup> The study shows that although Swedish employers do not explicitly value such experience, they do value communication

<sup>1</sup>Arbetsgivares syn på utlandserfarenhet 2010

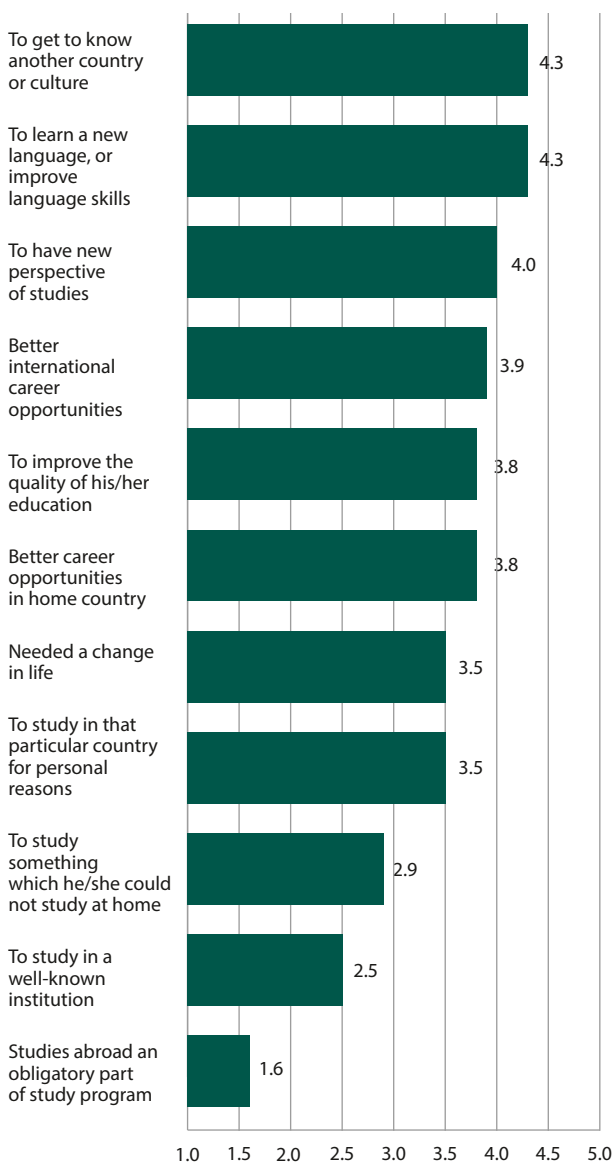
skills, adaptability and foreign language skills – skills that employers perceive as benefits from studying abroad.

### WHAT MOTIVATES STUDENTS TO GO ABROAD?

Looking more closely at the topic of motivation, when students were asked directly about their motives for going abroad the top three responses were:

1. Getting to know another country or culture.
2. Learning a language or improving language skills.
3. Gaining a new perspective on studies.

**Figure 3.1.** Motives for going abroad (1 strongly disagree - 5 strongly agree) (N=2907-2925)



The motives as shown in figure 3.1 can be grouped into three main categories: motives related to personal growth, career related motives and academic motives.

The responses are well in line with results from previous studies where personal growth, intercultural understanding and language skills are mentioned as main motives for studying abroad.<sup>2</sup> The career related motives were also reported as relatively important, whereas motives related to academic quality, such as taking courses not available at home, or studying in a well-known institution, seem to be of somewhat less importance.

### Personal growth

Getting to know another country or culture can be seen as a motive mainly, but not necessarily only related to personal growth; some of the open answers clearly relate this motive to career perspectives. Some answers refer to the host country, whereas others might relate to getting to know other countries and cultures more generally.

*I would like to work in this country after my graduation, in the future.*

*Better my options for a good career, as well as it is a fun way to discover new cultures and meet new people.*

### Career

As for the second most important motive of learning a new language or improving language skills, this could be seen at least as both a career related motive and related to personal growth. The answers might refer to the language of tuition – in most cases English - or to the language of the host country. Some of the open answers seem to refer to the latter:

*I have added one more language to my CV, that's quite good I think!*

*For me, a soon-to-be high school teacher of Spanish, travelling to Spain was not only something I did to 'improve my language skills'. Reading about the 'central content' of what the different language courses in high school (and primary school, for that matter) in Sweden shall contain (...) CULTURE is becoming a bigger and bigger part of what is expected to be highlighted in the language classroom.*

<sup>2</sup>Sifundersökning 2008: Utlandsstudier och internationellt utbyte; Eurostudent – om svenska studenter i en europeisk undersökning, hösten 2009

## Academic motives

*Academic motives* are here defined as motives directly connected to the outcomes of studies. Improved quality of education is mentioned as a relatively important motive, but few of the open answers elaborate further how this is interpreted. Some of the answers related to educational quality mention the quality of the host institution as the main objective; however, to study in a well-known institution was not a frequent motive. Studies abroad as an obligatory part of the studies was the least frequent motive in this survey.

*My primarily objective with my MSc studies abroad will be to get to an institution with a very high education quality.*

*To improve my academic results by having studied in a better university than my home university.*

Gaining new perspectives on studies, which is also mentioned as an important motive, can be interpreted as a purely academic motive, or seen in a wider perspective.

*To broaden my experience and perspective. To get an eye opener and to be able to compare our system with that of another country's in order to use that experience in my future career.*

When considering the most frequent motive, 'To get to know another country or culture', it is also interesting to examine how students socialise when they are abroad. In fact, many students most frequently socialise with people from their home countries while abroad. Many students also spend more time with people from other countries than with those from the host country, a fact which might be related to questions of accommodation and the organisation of studies and social activities specifically for exchange students. It could be seen as negative that exchange students spend less time with people from the country they choose to visit than with people of other nationalities. But as long as mobile students interact to a large extent with people of any different nationality, such contact arguably helps to achieve the aims of internationalisation, at least in an individual perspective. However, taking into account national ambitions of increased internationalisation of higher education institutions, this can nevertheless be problematic, as can the unexploited potential for 'internationalisation at home' that might

result from this lack of integration of international students in the ordinary academic life of institutions.

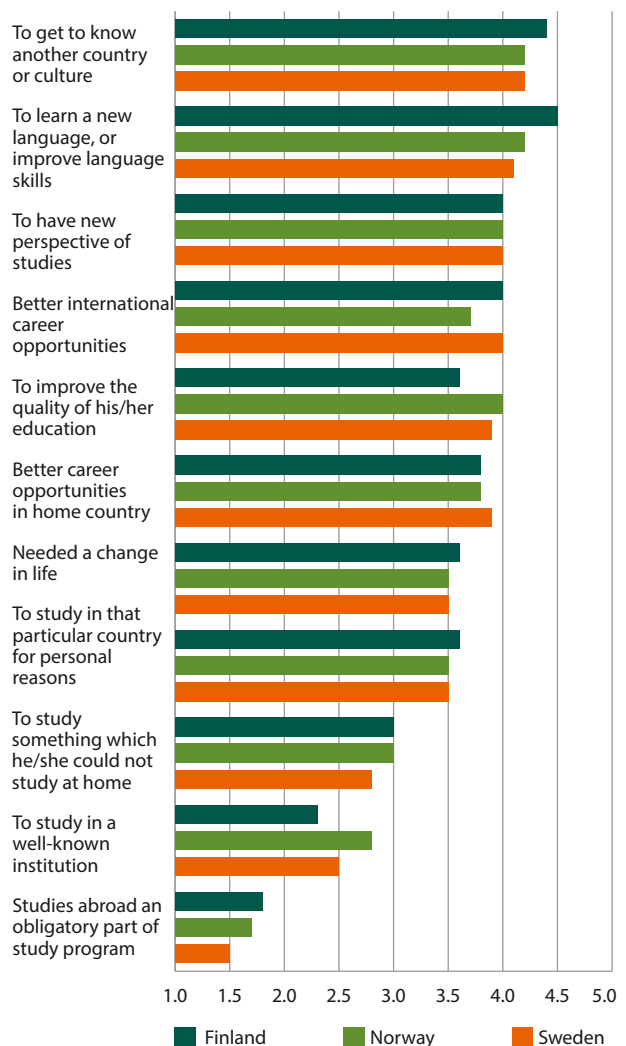
Overall, more work could be done to strengthen the internationalisation of education at students' home institutions. Internationalisation encompasses many facets beyond student mobility, and a number of the benefits that arise from studying abroad can be gained through interaction with non-native students and lecturers at a home institution. At the same time, interaction with visiting foreign students and faculty staff may help provide the inspiration and build the links that can drive further student mobility.

## NATIONALITY

In terms of specific motives for mobility, there are no major differences across the nationalities, as shown below in figure 3.2.

The opinions of each nationality follow the overall trends with some minor differences.

**Figure 3.2.** Motives for going abroad, by country (1 strongly disagree - 5 strongly agree) (N=2907-2925)



Finnish students tend to express higher motivation overall but by a small margin, with improving language skills as the most pronounced motive.

*It's almost as if it is expected of you. (F)*

On the contrary, to study in a well-known institution, and to a smaller extent, to improve the quality of one's education, seem to be somewhat less important motives for Finnish students. However, this might be partly explained by the correlation between motives and age (see section below).

Swedish students appear slightly more motivated by career-related gains, but the margins are small in this case, too.

*I strongly thought about my carrier possibilities and how it hopefully would facilitate my opportunity to get a good job after my final semester on my masters. (S)*

Norwegian students score in between the other nationalities with regard to most of the motives examined by the study, but they do express the highest motivation when it comes to the chance to study something not available at home, go to a well-known institution, and improve the quality of their education.

*I want to apply for the Masters degree in Denmark, and I know I have better chances with an exchange-semester there! (N)*

In responding to the open questions about motives, students from the three countries mention the following additional types of reasons, more or less corresponding to the motives described above:

**Table 2** Additional Motivations for Student Mobility

Finland	Norway	Sweden
To increase confidence/courage/independence.	To challenge myself/ to become more independent.	To gain new experiences.
To gain new experiences.	To meet new people/ develop my professional network.	To meet new people.
To get new friends / develop an international professional network.		To challenge myself.
Simply for fun.		For my personal development.
Now is the last chance to do this.		For fun.
Better climate.		Family reasons (e.g., family background from or partner in a particular country).

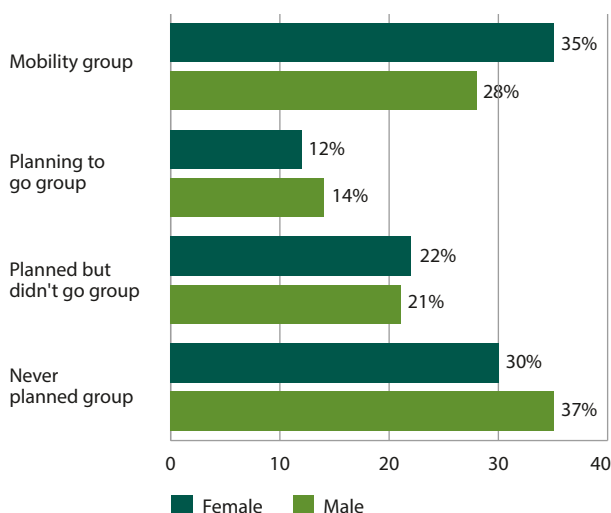
## GENDER

There are both quantitative and qualitative differences between female and male student participation in educational exchanges and internationalisation more broadly. According to the present survey women take more often than men part in educational exchanges, and more men than women have never planned to study abroad. Figure 3.3 below illustrates the different mobility groups according to gender.

The differences in motives for studying abroad for men and women are rather modest. The top three motives for both sexes are improving language skills, getting to know another culture, and gaining a new perspective on their studies. The only aspect that appears to be more important in motivating male students as compared to female students is the chance to study in a well-known institution. Then again, this motive is the second least recurrent of all responses provided by men, and the actual difference in its frequency between male and female responses is small. It is reasonable to conclude that the motives for participating in educational exchanges are principally the same for students, regardless of gender.

One interesting difference that does exist between men and women is the timing of exchange participation. Male students tend to go abroad later in life and later in their studies. It is not clear, however, whether the men are waiting until they are older to go abroad or simply until they are pursuing more advanced academic studies, which do not commence until earlier degrees are completed and the students are somewhat older. The male students are fairly evenly spread over their bachelor's studies (42%) and master's studies (45%) in terms of mobility. Female students on the other hand tend to go abroad earlier; over 50 per cent

**Figure 3.3.** Mobility groups, by gender % (N=6411)

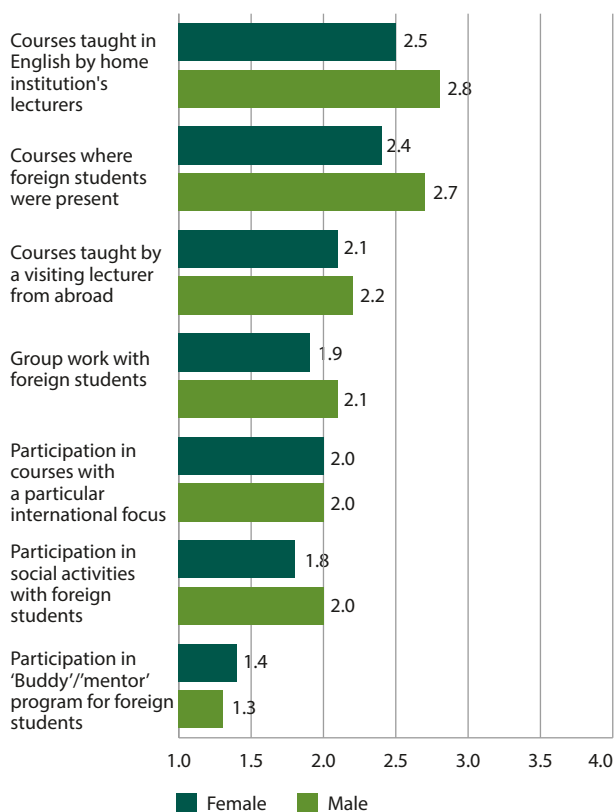


go during their bachelor's studies and only 30 per cent during their master's studies. Female students tend to go abroad earlier in their studies than male students, whereas male students stay abroad for longer periods (over six months). The students' responses about motives for studying abroad appear to offer no explanation as to the cause of this difference.

Another striking distinction between women and men concerns the integration with students of other nationalities – while abroad and back at the home institution. Not only do more female students participate in educational exchanges, but they are also more active than their male counterparts in integrating themselves with domestic students when they are abroad. Approximately 40 per cent of the female students state that they study mainly with domestic students when abroad compared to just below 30 per cent for the male students. It is somewhat surprising, therefore, that male students tend to be slightly more active within efforts related to internationalisation at their home institutions. Figure 3.4 below shows the varying participation rates by gender in different international activities at home institutions.

While further research would be required to get a clearer picture, it may be that these differences in

**Figure 3.4.** Participation in different modes of internationalisation at home, by gender (1 not at all - 4 a lot) (N=6359-6381)



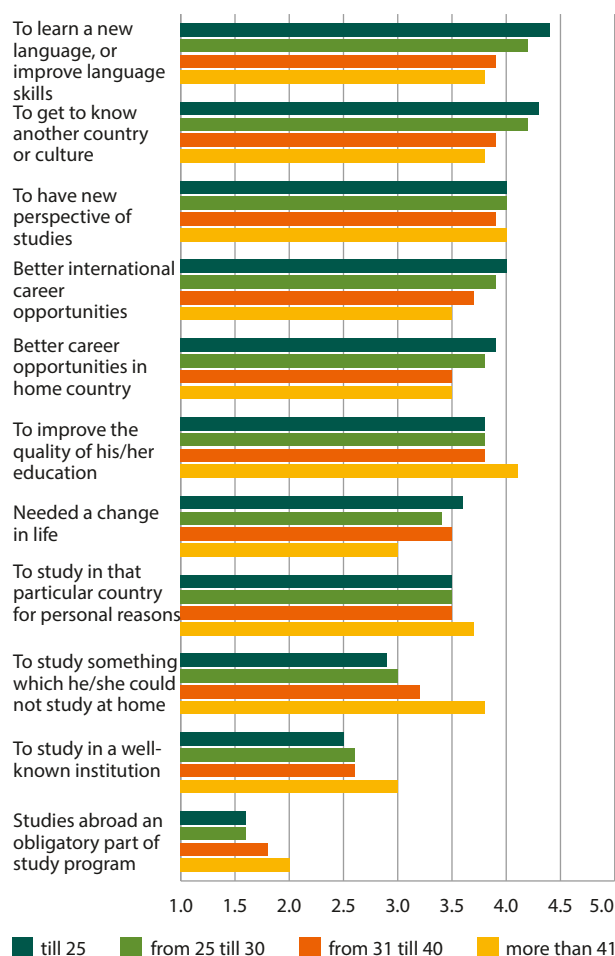
involvement stem from existing gender imbalances within certain kinds of courses and social activities that might feature a greater proportion of non-native students as well as native male students. Along these lines, it is interesting to note that women do outnumber men – although by a small margin – within mentoring or 'buddy' programmes for foreign students, assumedly the only type of activity on the graph with integration as the chief aim.

## AGE

Younger students participate more often in exchange mobility than older students. This difference seems however not to be due to a lack of motivation on the part of the older students. On the whole, there are few distinctions as regards the level of motivation across different age groups.

A closer look at the results nevertheless reveals some differences in the kind of motivational factors reported by younger and older students respectively. Thus, younger students seem to deem as more impor-

**Figure 3.5.** Motives for going abroad, by age group (1 strongly disagree - 5 strongly agree) (N=2907-2925)



tant motives concerning personal growth, language skills and intercultural understanding. Older students, on the other hand, tend to attribute more importance to motives of academic quality, such as getting access to courses not available at home or well-known institutions abroad, or the need to study abroad as a compulsory part of their study programme at home.

Apart from the differences noted above, the priorities made between motives are rather similar across the age groups. Improving the quality of education is the most important motive for the older students, and only number six for the youngest group, but it is still an important motive to all four age groups. All four groups also rank as overall important motives improving language skills, getting to know another culture, and getting new perspectives on their studies.

Although fewer older students participate in educational exchanges, they seem to be no less positive than the younger ones when they do, as shown in part 4 of the present study. Further, in response to the open questions, some students mentioned age as a barrier to studying abroad, so it may be the case that some differences in mobility for students of varying ages are caused by the existence of obstacles rather than by a lack of motivation.

Thus, as the data show that older students are already largely motivated and positive towards exchange studies, perhaps most attention should be paid to eliminating the barriers that might prevent this particular group from going.

## ENCOURAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

### Encouragement

The encouragement by others to study abroad could clearly also be seen as a motivating factor for mobility. The question of encouragement was asked to all respondents of the survey, and it appears that the students of the mobility group consider encouragement from various sources as considerably more important than those who have not studied abroad. The results also bring out some noteworthy differences among the three countries.

The survey found that Finnish students recognise greater levels of encouragement overall. Other students seem to be the most important motivator for students in all three countries. This points towards the importance of using students with mobility experience in initiatives at higher education institutions

seeking to increase student mobility. Friends and family is another important source of encouragement.

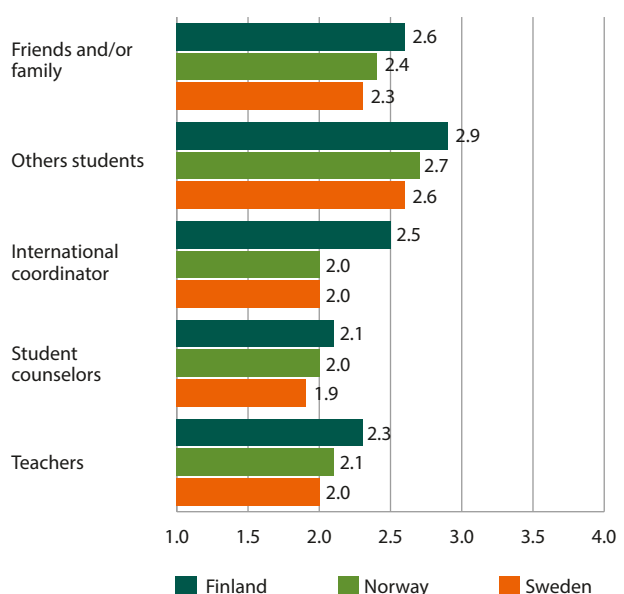
The most important discrepancy relates to how students appraise the encouragement of their home institution's international coordinator, a source of support that seems to have more resonance among the Finnish respondents. The results suggest that international coordinators play a more important encouraging role in Finland than in Sweden and Norway. This may also reflect the fact that in Finland, the services provided by international coordinators are better available. It is a common practice in Finnish universities that all faculties have their own international coordinator taking care of issues related to international mobility.

Furthermore, teachers and lecturers seem to be a more important source of encouragement to Finnish students than to students from Norway and Sweden.

There appears to be no significant gender differences regarding encouragement.

Younger students report substantially more encouragement than older students from all the listed sources. This might also account for some of the national differences described above, since the Finnish respondents are somewhat younger than the Norwegian and Swedish respondents.

**Figure 3.6.** Encouragement to go abroad, by country (1 not at all – 4 a lot) (N=6257-6390)



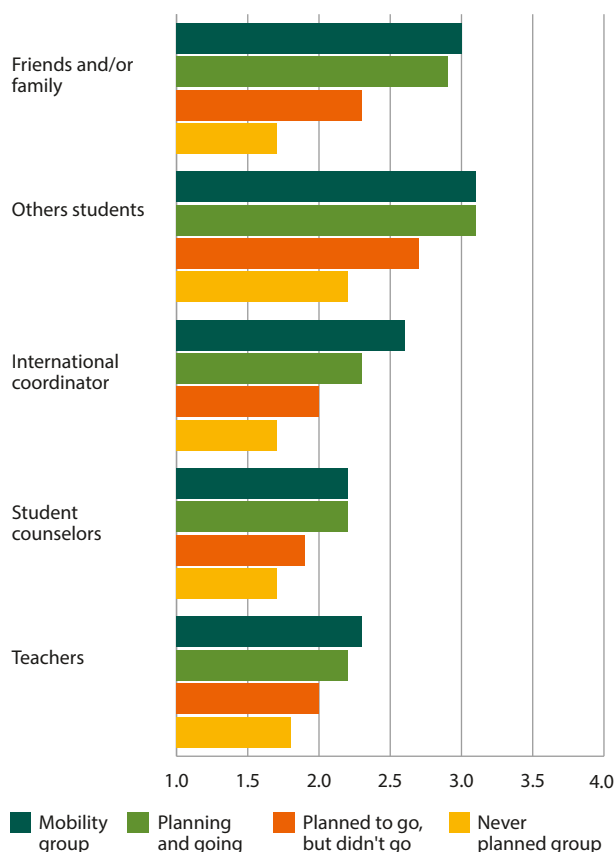
Encouragement seems to play an important role in a student's decision to go or not to go abroad. Students who have been abroad report significantly more encouragement from all sources than those who have not, and especially than those who have never planned to go abroad, as shown in figure 3.7.

**“Friends and family can be both a major reason for not studying abroad, and an important source of encouragement for exchange studies.”**

Students who have been or who plan to go abroad as exchange students thus report a much higher level of encouragement from various sources. This is particularly true of the two most important sources of encouragement, i.e., other students, and friends and family.

It is worth noting that according to this survey friends and family can be both a major reason for not studying abroad, and an important source of encouragement for exchange studies.

**Figure 3.7.** Encouragement to go abroad, by mobility group (1 not at all - 4 a lot) (N=6257-6390)



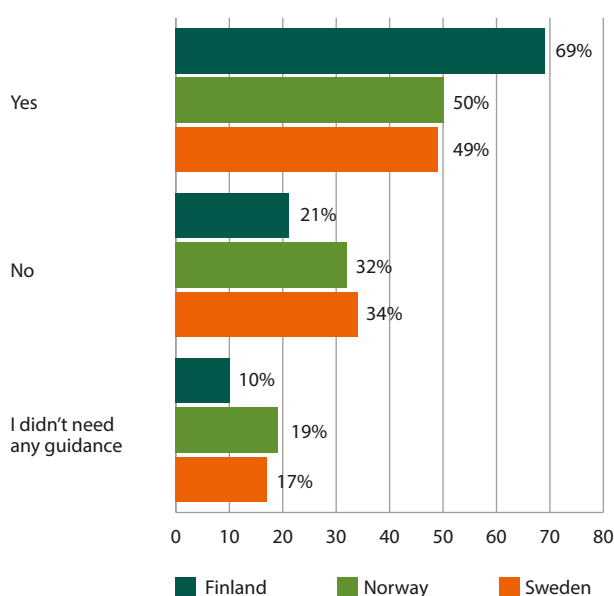
### Guidance and support

When looking at guidance across the three countries, the most obvious distinction is considerably more Finnish students say that they were offered support before studying abroad. Figure 3.8 shows that nearly 70 per cent of the Finnish respondents were offered guidance, while the equivalent figures for Sweden and Norway are around 50 per cent.

Teachers and supervisors have a particularly strong influence over the mobile Finnish students, who state this kind of support as a factor in the decision making with a higher frequency than their Nordic peers. As mentioned previously, the data also suggest that international coordinators might play a more important role in Finland than in the other countries (figure 3.9).

Examining various types of guidance more closely, the students from the three countries express similar levels of satisfaction with different forms of support. As illustrated in figure 3.10 below, the respondents are most satisfied with the guidance they receive from fellow students at home that already have exchange experience. The respondents are least satisfied with guidance from their home institution's teachers and lecturers. Similar to the situation with levels

**Figure 3.8.** Offered guidance before going abroad, by country % (N=2109)



of encouragement (figure 3.6), the most significant difference in terms of satisfaction with guidance is the Finnish students' somewhat higher approval of the assistance provided by their international coordinators.

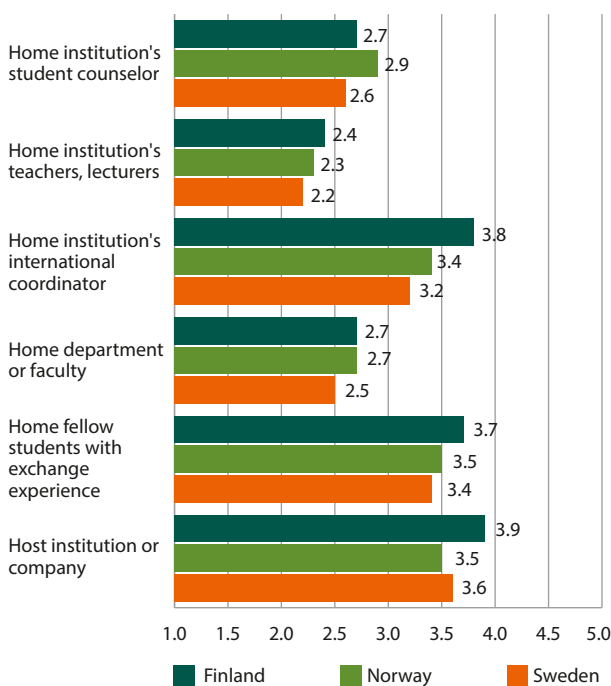
As the Finnish students also say that they receive more guidance at their home institutions overall, it would be worth considering how these colleges and universities provide support on mobility. For example, the Finnish students are obliged to report on their period abroad to a greater extent than their Swedish and Norwegian peers. Almost 90 per cent of the mobile Finnish students were required to talk about their exchange experiences with fellow students within classroom presentations or other forums, compared to less than 70 per cent of students from Norway and Sweden. More Finnish students also report that teachers and lecturers have shown an interest in what they have learnt while abroad. Overall, however, the respondents in the present study score fairly low in terms of whether their experiences have been used later within their studies at their home institutions. This finding is somewhat unexpected, given how positive the respondents are with regard to their time abroad. Perhaps even more students would choose to study abroad if the experiences of returning exchange students were better integrated in the learn-

ing environment at the home institution. Not only might enhanced exploitation of mobility experiences inspire other students to go abroad, it might also help build the case that educational exchanges can contribute to improved academic quality.

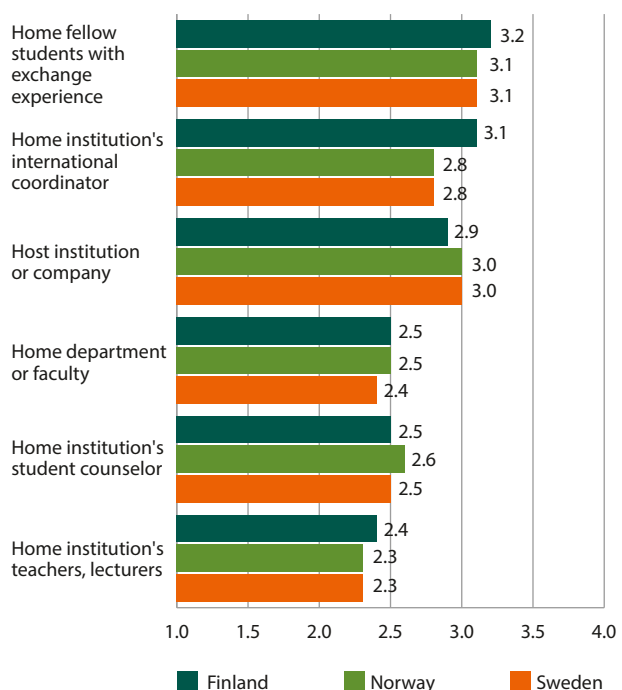
**“Perhaps even more students would choose to study abroad if the experiences of returning exchange students were better integrated in the learning environment at the home institution.”**

An area within higher education that might be especially apt for better information-sharing on mobility is represented by subjects in which comparatively few students study abroad. For example, students in teacher training or education belong to the group with the lowest level of mobility (18.5 per cent of respondents in teacher training) compared to subjects with the highest rates: languages and philological sciences, closely followed by law and business studies. It would seem particularly unfortunate that students in education and teacher training do not participate in educational exchanges to a greater extent, as internationalisation is part of their future task as educators.

**Figure 3.9.** Guidance, importance of guidance, by country (1 not at all important – 5 very important) (N=1127-1144).



**Figure 3.10.** Satisfaction to the offered guidance before going abroad, by country (1 not at all – 4 to a great extent) (N=2109)





## 4. VALUE OF STUDIES, PLACEMENT OR INTERNSHIP ABROAD

### MAIN FINDINGS

- The overwhelming majority of the students find their stay abroad very valuable. Personal and social aspects of mobility seem to be more important to the younger students, whereas educational quality becomes somewhat more important with age.
- When asked about negative sides of going abroad, many students mentioned lack of socialisation with local students. It seems crucial that international students should not only 'live in a bubble' with other international students.
- There is a strong positive relationship between mobility experience, or plans to go abroad, and the overall opinion on exchange studies. But even most of the students who never went abroad and never planned to go, express a positive view on exchange studies.
- All respondents lumped together assess the personal growth benefits of going abroad to be very high. Many also believe that going abroad gives better job opportunities. Belief in the value of going abroad is lowest regarding academic quality.
- Mobile students generally assess the value of exchange as higher than the students who are planning to go, thus it seems that the perceived benefits of exchange exceed the expectations.

From a national point of view, student mobility has both cultural and economic value: Cultural competence, linguistic skills, international social networks and impulses from abroad are crucial to a country's cultural and economic development. Nordic governments, in various ways, therefore try to encourage students to go abroad. For most higher education institutions, outgoing mobility is part of a broader strategy to connect the institution to the international academic community. Mobile students and staff bring home impulses from educational and research institutions abroad. They also make contacts which might prove important in terms of international publications and research cooperation/funding.

Both governments and higher education institutions thus see potential benefits in student mobility, but what does it look like from the students' perspective? How do they assess the value of studying abroad, and how important is actual mobility experience to their evaluations? To address these questions in our survey, those with mobility experience were asked about different types of potential benefits. Moreover, all the students in the survey, regardless of mobility experience, were encouraged to express their general opinion on studying abroad. They were also asked to assess the 'added value' of going abroad, when it comes to attained academic quality, personal growth and job opportunities.

### WHAT BENEFITS DO STUDENTS SEE IN INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY?

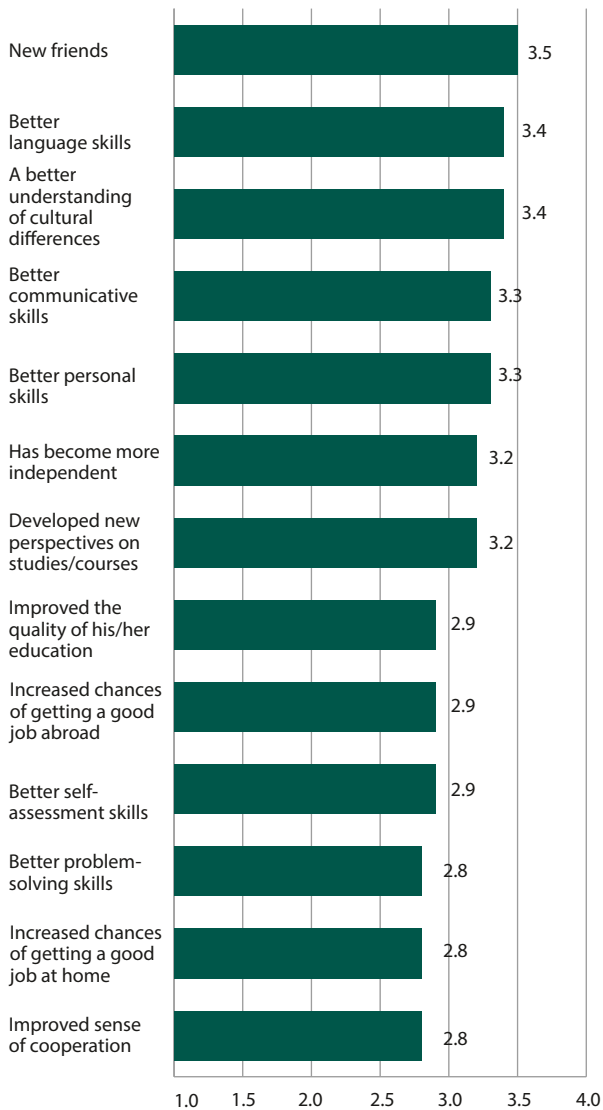
Those students who had been abroad and/or were abroad at the time of the survey were asked to rate how they had benefited from it, on a scale from 'not at all' to 'a lot'. As figure 4.1 shows, they do not rank academic or career benefits highest. Instead, more personal and social aspects of going abroad, such as making friends, language learning, cultural understanding and personal skills, are seen as most beneficial. On these issues, the students on average answer that, to them, going abroad has been somewhere between 'some' (3) and 'a lot' (4) beneficial. Regarding academic value and job effects, the students perceive of these to be somewhat lower, between 'just a little' (2) and 'some' (3). These results are in line with what we saw in chapter 3, regarding students' motives for going abroad.

Do Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish students with mobility experience see the same benefits in going abroad? Figure 4.2 shows the mean answers to those questions where there are significant and substantial national differences.

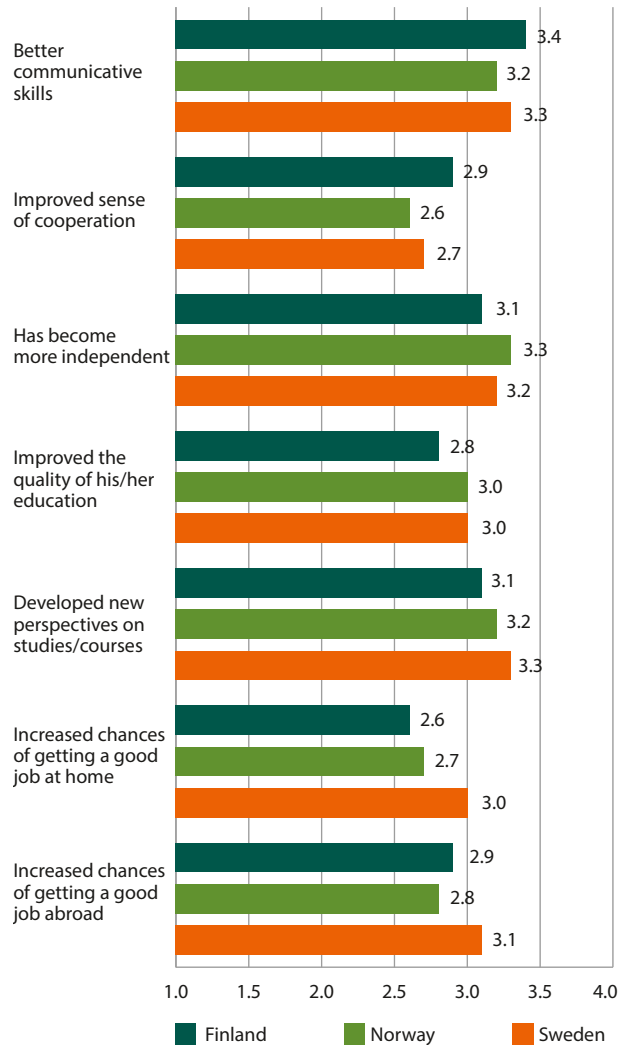
Finnish students report somewhat more benefits than the other two groups regarding communicative skills and sense of cooperation. Norwegian students say, to a greater extent than the Finnish and Swedish students, that studying abroad has made them more independent and has improved the quality of their education. Finally, Swedish students think to a greater extent that they have increased their chances of getting a good job.

It has to be kept in mind that this survey does not measure hard facts, but the subjective impressions and views of students who are still enrolled in higher education. Especially the questions on job prospects

**Figure 4.1.** Benefits achieved from studies/placement/internship abroad (1 not at all - 4 a lot) (N=2093)



**Figure 4.2.** Benefits achieved from studies/placement/internship abroad, by country (1 not at all - 4 a lot) (N=2093)



must be read from this premise, since most of the students answering the survey will not yet know how their mobility experiences will in fact affect their careers.

When we look for gender differences in the perceptions of benefits, we find that there are hardly any. The only noticeable one regards becoming more independent, where female students answer a bit more confirmatively than male students. As for age, the younger students tend to report more benefits than the older ones (figure 4.3).

These variations along age (and, for sense of independence, gender) may be explained in connection to people's life experiences. A student's communicative skills, independence and job prospects are related to age, gender and life cycle, regardless of whether he/she goes abroad to study or not. Younger students will

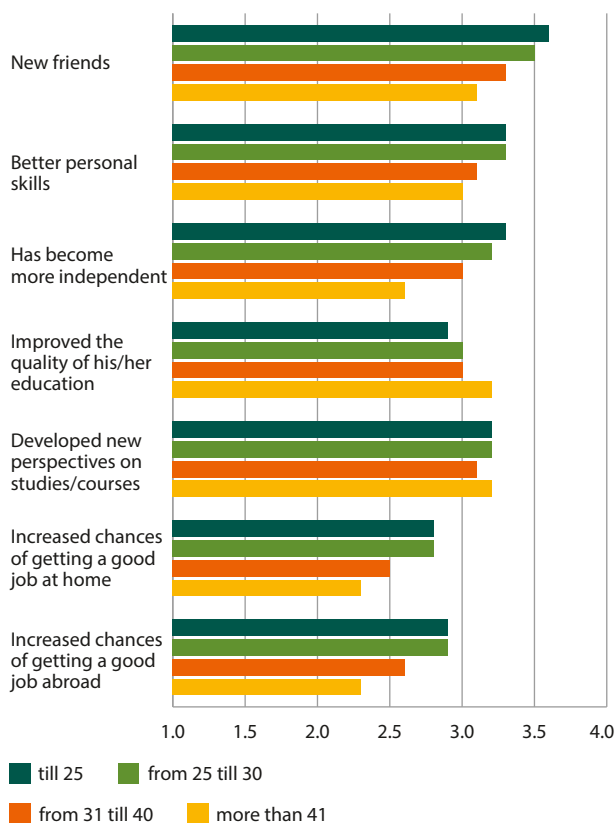
therefore on the whole experience a period abroad as more influential (in terms of personal skills, new friends, independence) than older students, who have more experiences in the first place. Another factor is that older students may have been more times abroad before (for studies or other purposes) than younger

**“The personal and social aspects of mobility are more important to younger students, whereas educational quality becomes a bit more important with age.”**

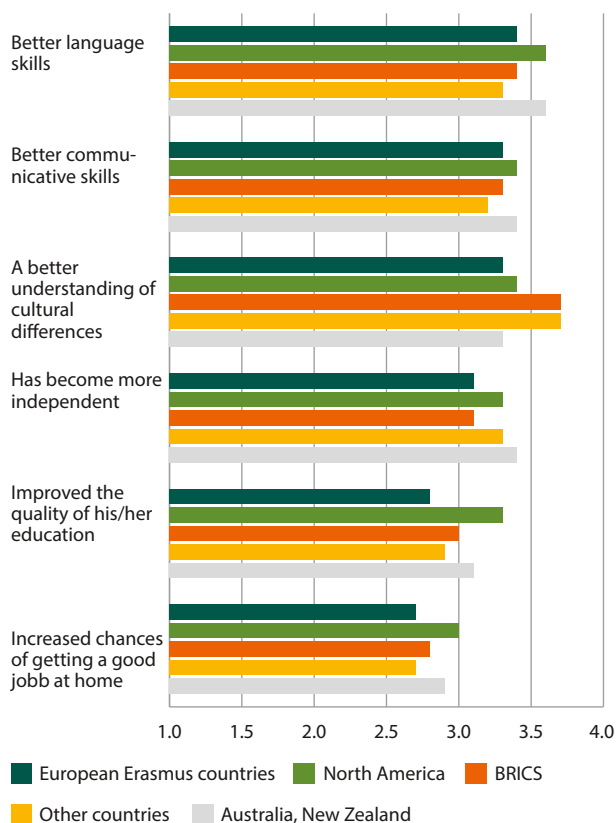
students, and that they already lived through some of these benefits earlier.

There is, however, one noticeable exception from the ‘younger students see more benefits’ pattern, and

**Figure 4.3.** Benefits achieved from studies/placement/internship abroad, by age (1 not at all – 4 a lot) (N=2093)



**Figure 4.4.** Benefits achieved from studies/placement/internship abroad, by destination (1 not at all – 4 a lot) (N=2093)



that is regarding the academic aspects: quality of education and new perspectives on studies. Here, older students answer the same or more affirmatively than younger students. To sum up, the personal and social aspects of mobility are more important to younger students, whereas educational quality becomes a bit more important with age.

#### HOW IMPORTANT IS THE DESTINATION?

Do the mobile students see different types and degrees of benefits, dependent on where they go? As the next figure shows, the differences are rather small (figure 4.4).

We nevertheless see a tendency for those who go to North America, Australia or New Zealand to report more benefits overall than those who go to other destinations. The main explanation for this is probably the simple fact that these countries are English speaking, and that it is therefore relatively easy for Nordic students to manage and succeed, in educational settings but also socially on and off campus. The exception to this picture is ‘better understanding of cultural differences’, a benefit which,

understandably, students who go outside Europe and the Anglo-American world rate higher.

#### GOOD MOBILITY, BAD MOBILITY

Students who are or have been mobile thus on the whole see it as beneficial, but what about negative sides of going abroad? The survey contained an open question, after the series on benefits: ‘Would you like to add any bad experiences?’ About one in ten students chose to write something, and the contributions can roughly be divided into study issues and social issues.

Among study related points that several students mentioned were less attention from staff than at home/than expected, that they felt left to themselves, that courses were cancelled, and that they were delayed in their studies at home:

*The host univeristy did not facilitate any kind of tutor activities so everything had to be figured out on your own. The tutor activity should be encouraged in all universities, especially for foreign students.*

*My host university cancelled courses during my stay, which of course affected my preapproved learning agreement. This has caused that my study has been prolonged and in turn financial problems. Lack of communication between home and host university, shows that student exchange at master level should have been avoided. The outcome seems solely to be of a social kind, not academic improvements.*

Study related mobility problems such as those experienced by these students might be reduced through a closer follow-up and quality assurance by host as well as home institutions.

Regarding social issues, many students wrote about lack of socialisation with local students, resulting in loneliness or in getting to know only other international students. Some told about adjustment problems, both abroad and after returning home. Also mentioned was language difficulties, related either to communicating in the local language, or to a lack of English skills among teaching staff and other international students. Finally, several students wrote that the culture among exchange students, and the social activities organised for them, were not ‘serious’ enough, but too party-oriented.

*The Erasmus program is a good program, but sometimes they make it too easy to not be a part of the local society and you live in a bubble. The result is that the exchange students hang out with the exchange students and have a hard time getting to know other local students.*

*Social activities organized through Erasmus has got a focus depending on an Erasmus-myth of students only interested in a year of party. Most fellow students and me would like more cultural activities focusing on learning the culture, people of the host country and maybe a closer relations with the university.*

The fact that some Nordic students miss more interaction with local students when they go abroad for studies should be kept in mind by governments as well as institutions when they make policies for mobility and for internationalisation more broadly. Institutions could, for instance, be more selective in their exchange agreements, based on research collaboration or feedback from students who have engaged in them. In terms of internationalisation at home, it seems crucial that international students should not only ‘live in a bubble’ with other inter-

national students. This must be taken into account regarding, for instance, housing, the organisation of courses, and social activities. Some students’ expressed opinion that integration activities could be less about partying and more about culture is something that should also be taken seriously by institutions, and maybe also by students’ organisations.

Students’ answers about bad experiences are useful inputs to improving the framework around exchange mobility. Nevertheless, only about one in ten of the respondents chose to report such experiences, and most of these reports are rather undramatic. The main picture is largely positive. Some of the students wrote that there were indeed some problems, but that they nevertheless found their stay abroad worthwhile. And, as one student pointed out, bad experiences can also be valuable experiences.

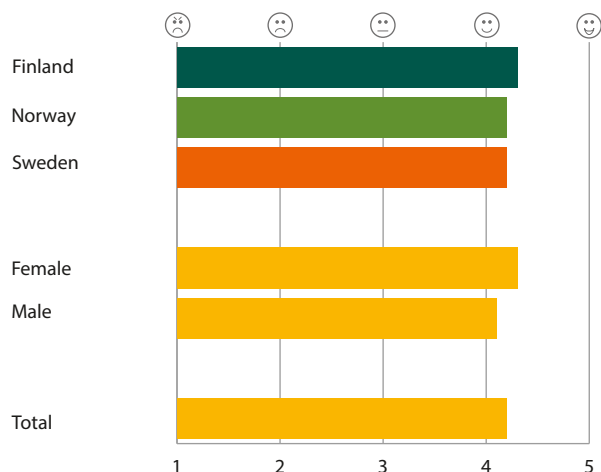
*Even though there have been some difficulties, I don’t mean them as a ‘bad experience’ because I think all experience is good. I would recommend to everyone to go abroad, it will be one of the best things you have done.*

## ALL STUDENTS’ EVALUATION OF EXCHANGE STUDIES ABROAD

In this section, we look at how all the students in the survey, and not only those with mobility experience, assess the value of going abroad.

Students without mobility experience were asked questions about obstacles and barriers (see chapter 2), but we also wanted to explore their opinion on the value of going abroad. The following question was therefore asked to all students, regardless of their mobility plans or experience: ‘What is your overall

**Figure 4.5.** Students’ overall opinion on exchange studies abroad, by country and gender (N=6432)

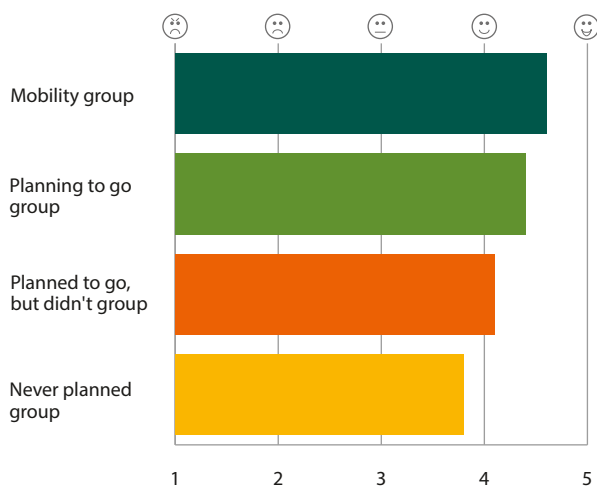


opinion on exchange studies abroad?’ The answer alternatives offered were graphic ‘mood faces’ (figure 4.5).

There are only minor differences between Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish students in their answers. The averages are clearly on the positive side, somewhere between the smiling and the laughing face. We also see that female students are a bit more positive than male students.

It would be surprising if the overall opinion on mobility was not positively related to mobility experience: those going on an exchange will, presumably, be more positively inclined in the first place than those not going, and it would take a lot of negative experience to reverse this. As figure 4.6 shows, there is indeed a strong positive relationship between mobility experience/plans to go abroad and the overall opinion on exchange studies. But even most of the students who never went abroad and never planned to go, either, express a positive view on exchange studies.

**Figure 4.6.** Students’ overall opinion on exchange studies abroad, by mobility group (N=6432)



After the ‘mood faces’ question, the respondents were invited to write more in depth about their general opinion on exchange studies abroad: ‘Please feel free to elaborate’. About one in four students chose to do so – mostly those with mobility experience, but also many of those without. Confirming what we saw earlier in the chapter from the questions on benefits, students with mobility experience are more concerned with personal growth, improved language skills and/or a general ‘widening of the horizon’ than with more explicit academic quality. Quite a few nevertheless also wrote about academic outcome, as exemplified in the second quote below.

*Academically it would probably have been better to stay at home. It seems my friends who have studied the equivalent courses here have a broader knowledge and understanding of the subject. Personally it was great to go on an exchange. To learn more about another culture, to improve my language skills, to make new friends and all of those things.*

*The academic level of the university was high. The courses were demanding and required active participation, which also allowed for getting direct feedback on your thoughts from the professors as well as your fellow students. This way they improved my academic confidence significantly and gave me a chance to also realise that my studies until then (mostly consisting of book exams and passive lecture courses) had actually given me knowledge and tools to work with.*

The comments from the ‘planning to go’ group give a similar picture as those from the mobility group, but the expectations are a bit more about the academic outcome. This probably reflects the home institution discourse about exchange, as seems expressed in the following quote:

*It would be a great experience in many ways. It would improve the versatility of my degree, I could study things I can't study in my home country. It would most likely be a great adventure, to learn how to cope in a new international environment and ‘live your life’ in a new culture and through a foreign language. It is eye-opening to study and function in a new country and you experience things you will benefit from in the future. The benefits can be seen in personality and private life, as well as in the professional life, as many employers appreciate exchange-studies or internships abroad.*

Among the relatively few ‘planned but didn’t go’ and the ‘never planned’ students who answered this question, a common concern was having their studies prolonged. Some connected their fear of being delayed to the idea that exchange is more about ‘having fun’ than about improving the education, and that they therefore could not justify the extra spent time (and money).

*I do not see exchange years (that prolong the time it takes to get my degree) granting me enough of an edge in the job market, to justify the extra time they take. I also strive for competence, and everyone I know who has been an exchange student has told me that it is*

not so much of a learning experience, it is more about having fun abroad and making new friends.

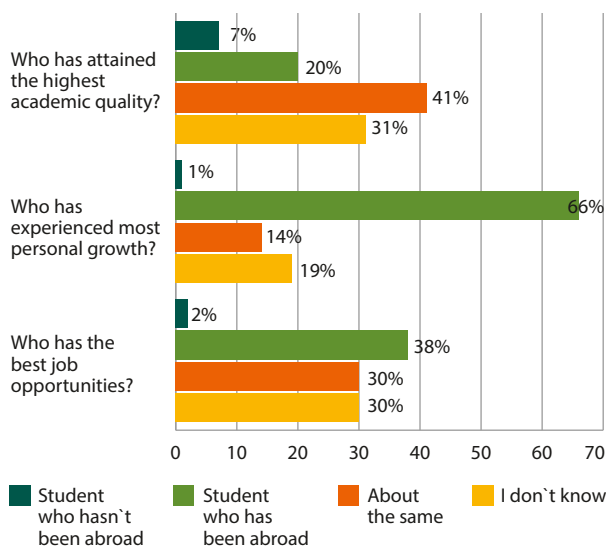
*It feels like many students do not take it seriously. It is rather looked at as a kind of vacation and an opportunity for students with higher grades to spend half a year on having fun. Quite often they come back without having any new credits, leaving them half a year behind in their studies.*

Many of the internationally non-mobile students also mentioned practical issues, regarding family, work and housing (see chapter 2). These are factors that cannot easily be dealt with from a policy perspective, unless one is willing to put a lot of extra money into mobility schemes.

### COMPARING STUDENTS WHO HAVE/HAVE NOT BEEN ABROAD

The value of studying abroad should also be seen in relation to the value of studying ‘at home’, which, for many students, is not actually the place where they grew up and/or lived prior to their studies. In another set of questions, all respondents were therefore asked to compare students who have/have not been abroad according to academic quality, personal growth and job opportunities. Again, it should be stressed that what is measured here is the perceptions and subjective evaluations of the students, not actual quality, personal growth or job opportunities (figure 4.7).

**Figure 4.7.** When comparing students who have and haven’t been abroad, what do you think? (N=6400)

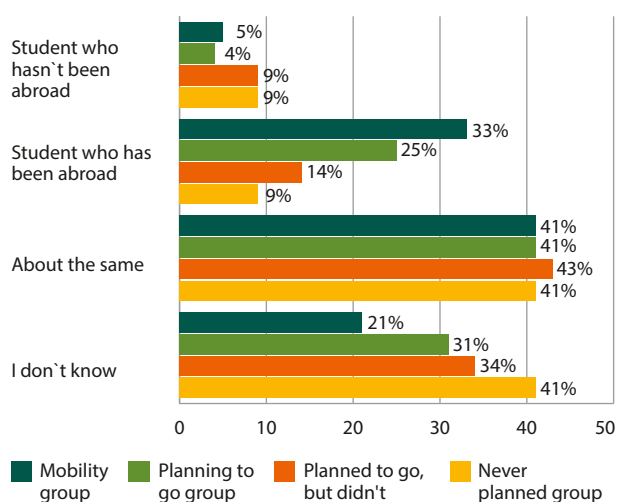


All respondents lumped together assess the personal growth benefits of going abroad to be very high. Many also believe that students who go abroad have better job opportunities than those who do not, but here many also answer that it does not matter, or that they do not know. Belief in the value of going abroad is lowest regarding academic quality: here only about one in five thinks that students who go abroad have an advantage.

On this comparison there are no or only insignificant differences between the three countries and between female and male students. If we divide between the mobility groups, however, we see that mobile students assess the value of exchange as higher than students who are planning to go (figure 4.8–4.10). In other words, it seems that the perceived benefits of exchange exceed the expectations.

We also see, unsurprisingly, that students with mobility experience and those who have/had at some point plans value mobility higher than those who neither went abroad nor at any point planned to go abroad. These differences are well in line with the fact that few non-mobile students regret not going abroad during their studies (see chapter 2). It should be taken into account, in measures aiming to increase international student mobility, that many students doubt the benefits of studying abroad, especially regarding academic quality and job prospects. If they are wrong about this, the benefits of studying abroad should be articulated more clearly to students. If they are right,

**Figure 4.8.** Comparing who has attained the highest academic quality, by mobility group



however, there is a need to rethink the structural framework around student mobility, and make it more academically and work relevant. Presuming that the truth lies somewhere in between, it would seem sensible to work along both these tracks.

### WHAT MAKES INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY VALUABLE?

When asked about benefits of their study abroad, students with mobility experience rank making new friends, learning languages, gaining cultural understanding and improving personal skills higher than academic and career benefits. Younger students tend to see more benefits than older ones, except when it comes to the quality of education and new perspectives on studies. The cultural and social value of mobility thus seems to decrease somewhat with age. There is also a tendency for those who go to English speaking countries to report more benefits overall, than those who go to other destinations.

There is thus, as we have seen also from the open questions, a widespread conception among students, regardless of mobility experience, that going abroad for studies does not importantly improve one's education or enhance one's future job prospects. How do we interpret the fact that students seem less enthusiastic about educational and work-related outcomes of mobility, than with making friends, developing personal skills and learning language? Should we see it as problematic, given that student mobility is

chiefly meant to increase the quality and relevance of education (beyond learning languages)?

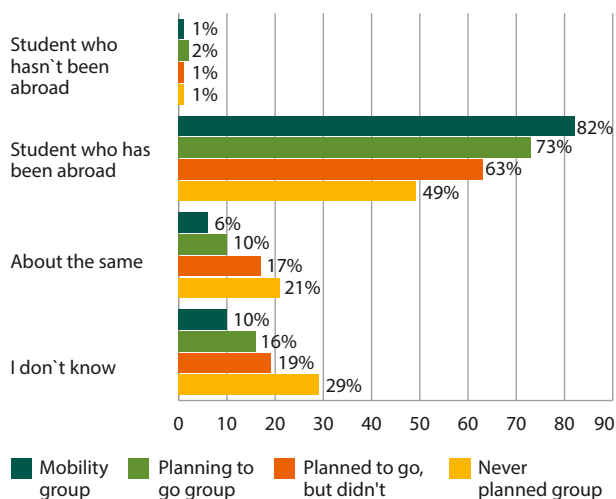
**“We could also say that, if getting an education is primarily about qualifying for income-generating activities further ahead in life, networks and personal skills are as crucial as degrees and grades.”**

Arguably, personal growth, language skills and cultural understanding should all be part of higher education in a broader sense. We could also say that, if getting an education is primarily about qualifying for income-generating activities further ahead in life, networks and personal skills are as crucial as degrees and grades. Some of the students also seem to think of their studies abroad in these broader ways:

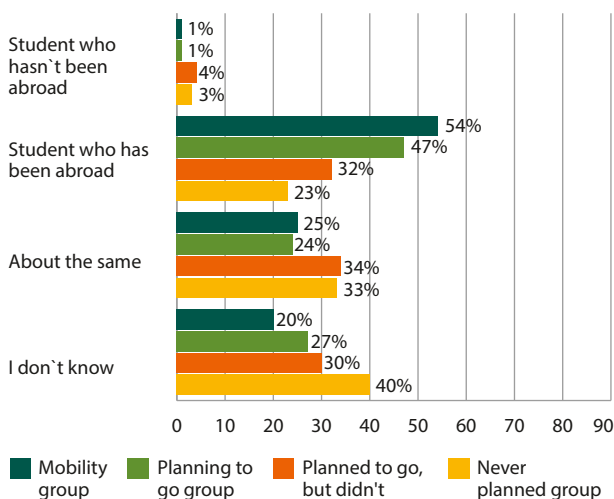
*It was a really fun, unique and educational experience. I learned a lot from my student exchange on so many levels: language skills, social skills, cultural things, perspectives and study methods I would never have encountered on my home university's courses - or anywhere else in my home country for that matter... I also learned a lot about myself. It was extremely maturing and liberating, both at the same time.*

It is an explicit political ambition in all three countries that internationalisation should increase the

**Figure 4.9.** Comparing who has experienced most personal growth, by mobility group



**Figure 4.10.** Comparing who has the best job opportunities, by mobility group



quality of education. Less than one out of twenty mobile students assesses the academic quality of going abroad as *lower* than of not going. On the other hand, just one in three sees it as higher. Even if quality is difficult to assess, and the students' subjective evaluations of it, abroad versus at home, do not give us the whole truth, these results can hardly be seen as fully satisfactory. There is no reason to believe that these students, who are largely positive about their mobility experiences, should underrate their academic value.

Still, there is a larger picture here, since international students may impact positively regarding the educational quality of the host institutions. Our respondents may affect their Nordic institutions in this way, by bringing home new impulses from their host environments. The amount of such academic value for the home institutions will depend on their use of the mobile students' experiences. Additionally, as there is at least to some degree reciprocity in student mobility, Nordic institutions may also benefit from the impulses of incoming international students. Again, to what extent this happens will depend on the extent to which the international students interact with local students. Based on the answers from Nordic students going abroad, there is reason to believe that in many cases integration of local and international students could function better.

About one in ten students who have studied abroad writes about bad experiences, and this input may in turn be useful when trying to improve the framework around exchange mobility and internationalisation policies more broadly. On the other hand, only about one in ten of the students chose to write about bad experiences, and the main picture is still that the overwhelming majority of the students find their stay abroad very valuable. A frequently expressed view is that it was the best thing they ever did.

*Studying abroad to me has been the most exciting experience of my life. Not only has it broadened my knowledge within the field of my interest medicine it has also broadened my view of the world and contributed to my independence. This, in my opinion, is priceless.*



## CONCLUSIONS

What makes some students go abroad for exchange studies while others remain at their home institutions for the whole study period? This is the main question discussed in this report. Who are the mobile students? Do they have any particular characteristics compared with their non-mobile fellow students? What are the driving forces leading to international student mobility, and what prevents students from becoming exchange students abroad?

Looking at different background factors of our respondents, we find that mobile students differ a little from the non-mobile. Female students are somewhat more mobile than male students, and older students more sceptical of mobility than the younger ones. In line with other studies, we find that parents of mobile students have a slightly higher educational level than those of non-mobile students. Students with exchange experience more often than non-mobile students have some experience of international mobility prior to their studies. Interestingly, students who have moved within their own country for study purposes are significantly more mobile than those who are students in their home location. Finally, there is a connection between the students' self-evaluation and their propensity for international exchange mobility. Non-mobile students estimate their own academic level slightly more modestly than mobile students.

While there are some patterns concerning background factors to be found, we would maintain that their implications are relatively limited. For an understanding of different mobility patterns it is more relevant to focus on the students' motives, attitudes and experienced barriers, and to ask whether or not different experiences as students can help explain the different choices made by mobile and non-mobile students.

In many countries and parts of the world language and economy are major obstacles for international student mobility. This is not the case in Finland, Norway and Sweden. Generally, students in these three countries have good opportunities for financial support. While there are some differences between the countries in this respect – respondents from Finland are somewhat more concerned about financial constraints – economy and language are not perceived to be the most important obstacles. Having asked students to identify the barriers to mobility and their reasons for not going abroad for exchange stud-

ies, it is difficult to point to any single, major obstacle. Indeed, it is tempting to conclude that students in the three countries only to a limited degree experience obstacles in a definitive sense.

Among the number of possible reasons for not going abroad for studies, placement or internship, family, (boy-/girl)friends is the one mostly agreed to. Such relations can, but do not necessarily represent objective barriers. We know that mobile students have such relations too, but still choose to become exchange students. Moreover, such relations can even play a positive role for mobility. According to our survey, friends and family cannot only be a major reason for not studying abroad, but also an important source of encouragement for exchange studies.

Next on the list among most agreed-to reasons for non-mobility we find more academic concerns, such as the fear of being delayed in studies or missing parts of the studies at home. These are barriers or obstacles that can be dealt with at higher education institutions by improving the organisation of studies abroad. It should be emphasised, however, that the significance students contribute to these academic barriers is only marginally above 'neutral' from unimportant to important. Again, students do not appear to perceive any major barriers to exchange mobility, while they give a number of reasons for not going.

An interesting approach to the comparison of the mobile and non-mobile students is the general opinion of international student mobility. The main picture is that student mobility has a high standing among mobile as well as non-mobile students. Mobile students in particular are very positive to mobility, but even students who do not go abroad value exchange mobility positively.

More striking differences between mobile and non-mobile students are found in terms of experienced encouragement to study abroad. Students who have been or who plan to go abroad as exchange students report a much higher level of encouragement from various sources. There appears to be a clear correlation between encouragement of students and the students' propensity to opt for a study abroad period. At least to some extent, the difference between a mobile and a non-mobile student is that the former has been encouraged and motivated, and the latter not. At the same time, it may well be the case that students who are already motivated for a study abroad period are more likely to remember and report experienced encouragement. Among the three countries in the project, systematic encouragement

seems to be more developed in Finland than in the two other countries, and there is evidently a potential for improvement for institutions.

**“At least to some extent, the difference between a mobile and a non-mobile student is that the former has been encouraged and motivated, and the latter not.”**

The institutional structures for the facilitation of exchange mobility differ between the countries, as well as between institutions within a given country. Teachers, student counsellors and international coordinators can all play important roles. Our survey suggests that there are significant differences as to the practice of encouragement to mobility by those involved, which has consequences. Lack of encouragement from teachers and staff appears to be connected with a greater fear of being delayed in studies. Teachers and other staff have a crucial role in assuring the students that they will benefit academically from going abroad.

Nevertheless, the most important source of encouragement is other students. From this perspective, higher education institutions aiming to increase mobility rates should focus more on students with mobility experience. This is all the more true as returned mobile students themselves are somewhat disappointed at the interest taken in them by their home institutions. They seem prepared to share their experiences to a greater extent than they are usually invited to do.

Increasing and more systematic encouragement at institutions, whether from teachers, staff or students, should focus more clearly on the academic and educational benefits of exchange. As stated, academic concerns are among the most frequently mentioned reasons given by non-mobile students for not going abroad. The picture is further developed when we look at the motives given by the mobile exchange students. Our respondents particularly emphasise what could be called reasons of ‘personal development’, such as getting to know another culture and learning languages (which for most students is not their field of study *per se*). Educational or academic aspects in a narrower sense are important motives, too, though much less emphasised by respondents than the more generic skills.

It is not always easy or even meaningful to distinguish between motives of ‘personal development’,

‘educational aspects’ or ‘career related’ motives. Learning about other cultures or cultural differences may have an educational dimension and certainly be relevant from a career perspective. However, given the political emphasis on quality in internationalisation, it is worth underlining that ‘improving quality of education’ follows further down the list of motives given by the respondents.

When asking mobile students about the experienced benefits, we see even more clearly that social experiences and generic personal skills are the most prominent ones. Improved quality of education is far from the top of the list. Altogether, however, mobile students value their study abroad experiences very highly. While students who have not been abroad have a positive view of exchange mobility in general, they do not believe that the educational or academic outcomes are very significant. To the extent that they believe they miss something by staying home, they focus almost entirely on the social aspects and personal skills. Among the mobile students, one in three believes that the mobile students have attained higher academic quality than the non-mobile students.

**“It may very well be the case that any significant increase in mobility rates in the three countries would presuppose more inclusion of stays abroad as integral parts of future study programmes.”**

An implication of these findings is that efforts should be made to put mobility and exchange studies within a framework of academic quality and educational outcome. Typically, non-mobile students do not regret that they have not been abroad, probably because they do not believe that they have missed out on anything important. Young people in the Nordic countries enjoy rich possibilities to experience the world in different ways. We cannot exclude that student mobility framed in a context of personal experience and adventure may be exposed to competition from other kinds of cross border activities and experience. Indeed, some of our respondents indicate that this is the case.

Different students have different reasons for not choosing mobility. Some are uncertain and need personal encouragement, some do not see the added academic value, while others are discouraged by the application process. Promoting exchange mobility,

one must be aware of and address the variety of experienced barriers.

At the same time, we must acknowledge that mobility in the three countries is well developed in an international perspective. The Eurostudent IV report uses the term 'mobility reserve', that is, the share of enrolled students who – more or less specifically – plan to go abroad during the remainder of their study period. The 'mobility reserve' is calculated by dividing the share of students who *plan to be* mobile with the share of students who *have been* mobile. The report concludes that: 'Countries where a lot of students' willingness to enroll abroad temporarily has been 'exploited' already are Norway, Denmark and Austria.' Sweden is not far behind Norway, while Finland from this perspective has a greater 'mobility reserve', according to Eurostudent IV.

This represents a relevant background for the present study. Definitive obstacles are relatively scarce and possibilities for mobility are good. One possible way forward would be to increase the 'mobility reserve' by strengthening encouragement, focusing more on the academic and educational values of exchange studies abroad. Given the relationship between obstacles and possibilities, it may very well be the case that any significant increase in mobility rates in the three countries would presuppose more inclusion of stays abroad as integral parts of future study programmes.

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# APPENDIX 1 – ABOUT THE SURVEY, METHODOLOGY AND THE RESPONDENTS

For the purpose of our project an electronic survey was developed. The target group was identified as follows: students enrolled in the final year of the bachelor or master degree programme at higher education institutions in Finland, Norway, and Sweden. In Norway, all 45 member institutions of the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions were invited to participate in the project and to provide contact information to the mentioned groups of students. 20 institutions responded positively, and a total of 17,934 e-mail invitations to the survey were sent. In Sweden, the State Educational Loan Fund (CSN) provided a random sample of 15,000 individuals in the two relevant groups of students, enrolled at 44 different institutions. In Finland, altogether 10 higher education institutions were selected for the study. There were two ways to contact the Finnish respondents. Of the higher education institutions seven sent the addresses to CIMO, which then sent the questionnaire to the selected students. The remaining three sent the questionnaire to the selected students themselves. A total of 16,000 students received the invitation to the survey.

The survey addressed students enrolled as degree seeking with or without previous mobility experience or plans to become an exchange student. To the extent that incoming exchange students to the three countries are included in the survey, their response has been taken out in order not to disturb the picture.

The survey was open from 17 April to 6 May 2012, and two reminders were sent during this period.

In all three countries, the survey was sent to a total of 48,394 students. 6,531 students responded to the survey, which leaves us with a response rate of 13.5 per cent. The response rate was highest in Sweden (16.9 per cent) followed by Norway (14.3 per cent) and Finland (9.0 per cent).

The questionnaire was structured according to different student groups, based on the respondents' experiences with or plans about studying/placement/internship abroad, for at least three months.

1. **MOBILITY GROUP:** respondents who had previously been abroad studying or doing a placement/internship or who were abroad for such purposes at the time of the survey.

2. **PLANNING TO GO GROUP:** respondents without previous mobility experience but who had specific plans for this during the last part of their studies.

3. **PLANNED BUT DID NOT GO GROUP:** students who neither were nor had been studying abroad, but who at some point had planned to go abroad for studies/placement/internship.

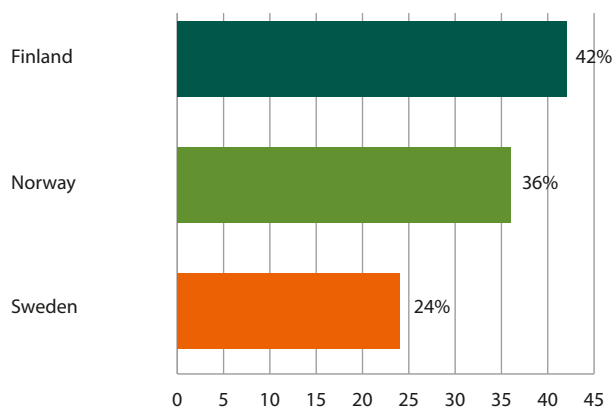
4. **NEVER PLANNED GROUP:** students who neither were nor had been studying abroad, nor at any point had planned to go abroad for studies/placement/internship.

Mobile students were strongly overrepresented among respondents (figure A1), but this does not affect the respondents representativeness of their respective mobility groups.

Some questions (such as background information, encouragement/discouragement and shorter term mobility) were put to all students. However, most questions were relevant only to one or several of these groups, and therefore only asked to them.

More women than men answered the survey. For Norway and Sweden, the percentages roughly correspond to the one in the total student population (cf. table 1.1 in Introduction and figure A2 below). Among the Finnish respondents, however, female students are significantly overrepresented. While 54 per cent of students enrolled in higher education

**Figure A1** Proportion of students that study abroad at the moment or had studied abroad previously (N=6432)



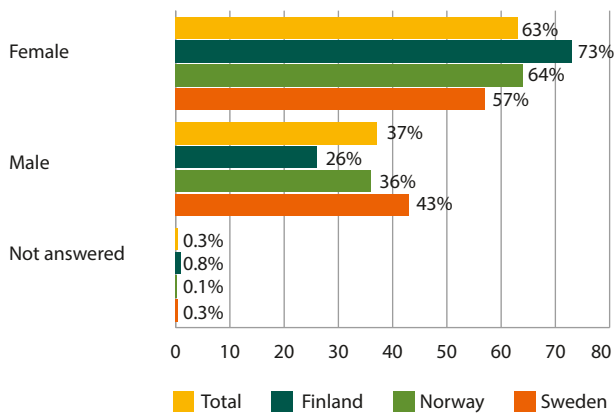
in Finland are female – the lowest number among the involved countries – female students constitute as much as 73 per cent of the respondents from Finland.

We see that respondents from Finland were significantly younger than the Norwegian and Swedish respondents. However, age differences do not have any major impact on the results.

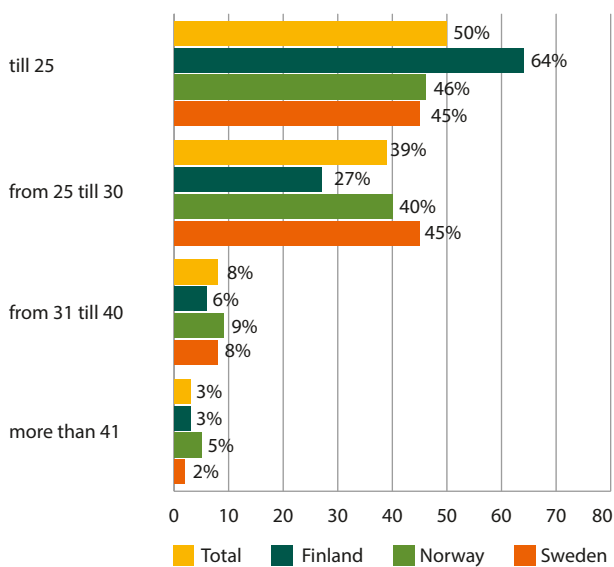
Figure A4 shows the distribution of respondents according to subject area.

For most subjects the country variations are relatively limited. The main exception is ‘engineering, manufacturing and construction’. For Finland and Norway less than 10 per cent of the respondents belong to these fields, while in the case of Sweden students in this group constitute 23 per cent of the respondents.

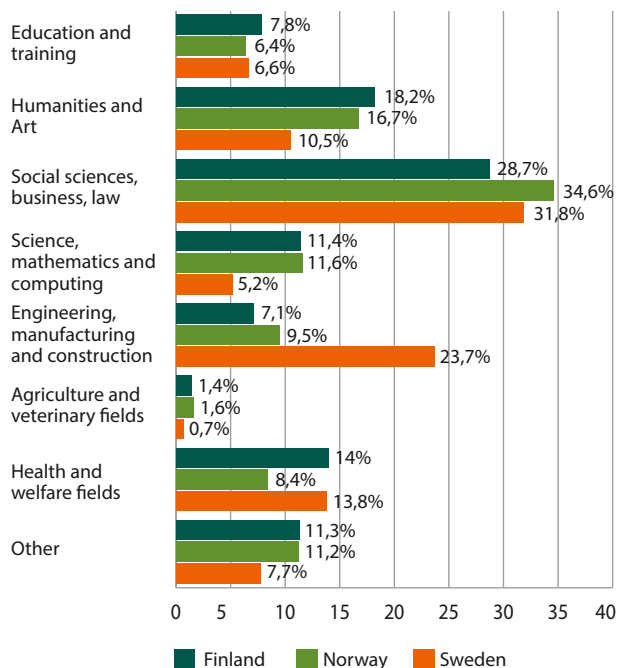
**Figure A2** Gender of respondents by country (N=6432)



**Figure A3** Respondents’ age group by country (N=6432)



**Figure A4** Distribution of respondents according to subject area (N=6432)





What makes some students go abroad for exchange studies while others remain at their home institutions for the whole study period? Who are the mobile students? Do they have any particular characteristics compared with their non-mobile fellow students? What are the driving forces leading to international student mobility, and what prevents students from becoming exchange students abroad? These are some of the main questions addressed in this Nordic study on student exchange mobility.

In the Nordic countries as well as in Europe as a whole, increased student mobility is a political priority. As members of the Bologna process, Finland, Norway, and Sweden share the target that at least 20 per cent of those graduating in Europe in 2020 should have been on a study or training period abroad.

The present report is the result of a cooperation project by the Centre for International Mobility (CIMO) in Finland, the Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Higher Education (SIU) and the Swedish Council for Higher Education. The three offices are national agencies for the Lifelong Learning Programme in their respective countries, and they have the common task of promoting internationalisation in education, including international student mobility. The cooperation project aims to provide comparable data from Finland, Norway and Sweden to increase our understanding of the driving forces of student mobility.