

FACTS.

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express

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND OPEN-MINDEDNESS

Higher education students' experiences of Erasmus+ mobility

BACKGROUND

Erasmus+ is the EU's education, training, youth and sports programme that supports cooperation in Europe. The programme's activities targeted at higher education institutions are aimed at enhancing the internationalisation and quality of higher education.

The Erasmus+ programme is a central promoter of internationalisation in higher education in Finland; more than half of students' mobility periods take place through the programme. Over the years, more than 90,000 higher education students and 13,000 trainees from Finland have completed a mobility period in Europe and almost 120,000 higher education students have come to study in Finland.

The mobility activities in the programme enable higher education students to study a part of their degree in a foreign institution or to complete a training period abroad. The programme offers staff in higher education institutions opportunities to participate in teaching exchanges and to cooperate with foreign institutions.

The new Erasmus+ programme period will start in 2021. The activities supporting international mobility will largely continue in their current form, but the objective is to increase funding and the number of participants. Efforts will be made to facilitate participation in the programme for the groups that are currently under-represented and more advantage will be taken of digital opportunities.

In this Facts Express we focus on how Finnish students who have gone to study abroad see the programme and the study exchange period and, on the other hand, how foreign students rate their exchange periods in Finland. In addition, we look at Finnish higher education institutions as parties implementing the programme.

The discussion is based on the feedback forms submitted in the EUSurvey by students who have completed a study exchange period abroad. EUSurvey measures students' satisfaction with the content of their studies and the functioning of the exchange arrangements in the sending and the receiving institution. In addition, students evaluate the benefits of the exchange period in the feedback form.

In this publication, we look at the feedback given by students who were on student exchange in the Programme Countries in Europe during the academic year 2017-2018. Mobility to Partner Countries outside Europe, international traineeship and staff mobility are excluded from this discussion.

The responses have been retrieved from the Clickview service maintained by the Commission. The service enables comparisons of the responses of outgoing and incoming students in Finland with the European average. During the academic year 2017-2018, the form was submitted by 4,423 outgoing and 7,230 incoming students in Finland, which is 96% of both groups.



FINNISH NATIONAL
AGENCY FOR EDUCATION



Erasmus+

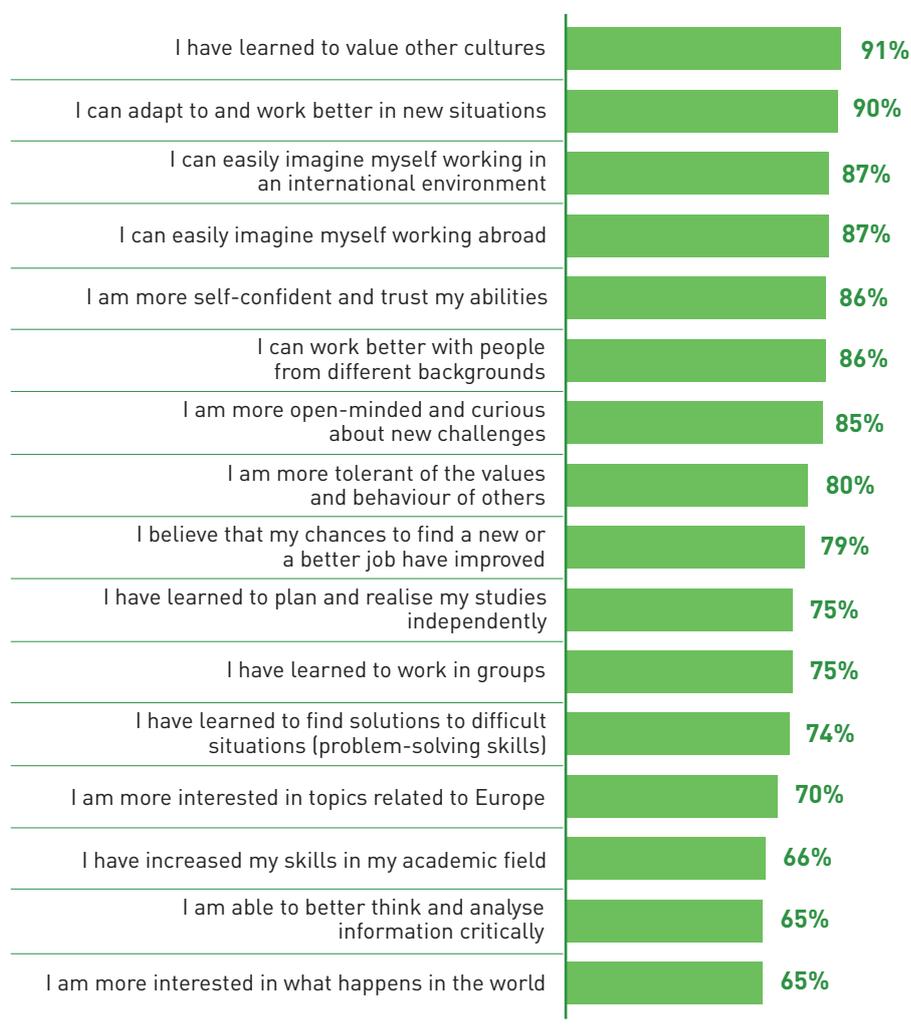
INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY PERIODS IMPROVE GENERAL WORKING LIFE SKILLS

Finnish students find the Erasmus+ exchange useful. According to the feedback survey, the benefit most commonly named by students is related to personal growth and development. They have learned to value different cultures during their stay abroad, can adapt to new situations better, their self-confidence and tolerance have increased, and they have become more open-minded and more curious about new things. More than 80% of the respondents felt this way.

Slightly fewer, but still a clear majority of the students, feel that while abroad, they also learned to advance their studies independently, work in groups and solve problems. These are central working life skills that are required in all work tasks and they are also valued by employers.

Students also find that the exchange contributed to their future career. A period of study abroad increased their interest in international tasks and working abroad in an international environment became a realistic idea.

THE MOST COMMON BENEFITS OF THE EXCHANGE PERIOD FOR THE STUDENT (agree or completely agree, %)



ABROAD, STUDENTS GAIN KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS THAT THEIR HOME INSTITUTIONS CANNOT PROVIDE

Two in three students (66%) agreed or completely agreed that their field-specific competence had increased during the exchange period. In addition, the exchange offered an opportunity to get to know their academic field from a new perspective: when asked whether the studies abroad provided them with knowledge and skills that would not have been provided by their home institution, 78% of the students responded "yes".

Increasing the sense of solidarity in Europe is one of the objectives behind the Erasmus+ programme. Based on the responses given in the feedback, going on

exchange somewhat increases students' sense of being European and their interest in Europe, even though the impact is not quite as strong as in the case of general working life skills and personal growth: a total of 70% of the students found they were more interested in topics related to Europe after the exchange and 61% felt more European. University students find these impacts somewhat stronger than students of universities of applied sciences.

Although Finnish students find the study exchange period useful, they systematically estimate the benefits to be

Thanks to the exchange, working abroad in an international environment becomes a realistic idea.

slightly less significant than Erasmus+ students in Europe do on average. The difference can be seen most clearly in the development of problem-solving skills and independent studying. It is possible

that, for Finnish students, who are already used to living independently, going abroad is not as big a growth process as it is for students from Central and Southern Europe. There may also be cultural differences in the way of responding to surveys: Finns assess the impacts cautiously.

Evaluations of impacts by students who have just returned from abroad should be treated with some reservation, as the way the questions are posed in the survey easily increases the significance of the impacts. It is difficult to say to what extent students are able to assess the actual impacts of the exchange and to what extent the response is due to the enthusiasm resulting from a successful experience. On the other hand, the responses give us a clear idea of students' experiences and this information is valuable as such.

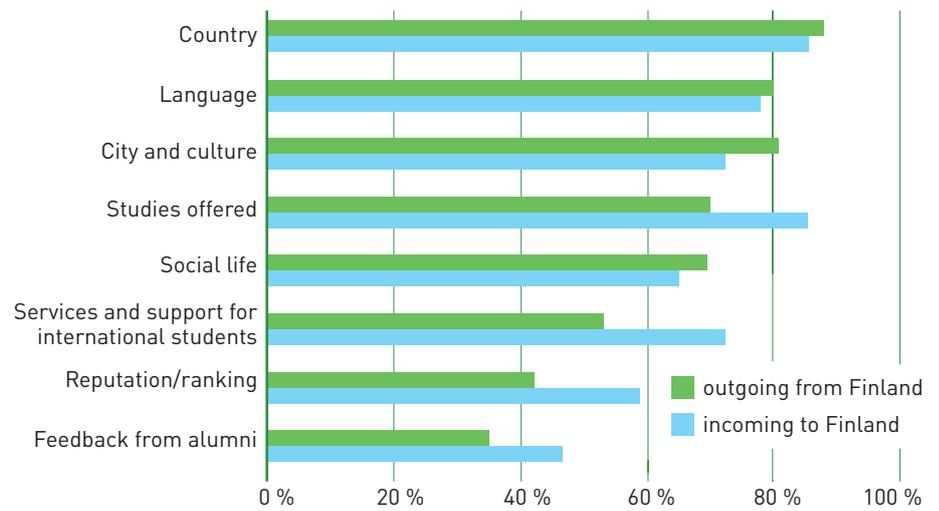
DESIRE TO LIVE ABROAD AND MEET NEW PEOPLE MOTIVATES TO GO

The desire to live abroad and meet new people is clearly the most important reason for Finnish students to go abroad: 84% selected it when asked about their main reason for going to study abroad. Other reasons that were often selected were the desire to improve one's language skills (73%) and the desire to learn about the culture of another country (63%).

For Finnish students, the desire to live abroad and meet new people and the opportunity to improve one's prospects in the world of work were more common reasons to go abroad than for European students on average. Correspondingly, Finnish students go abroad to experience new teaching contents or methods less often than their European peers.

Seventeen per cent of Finnish students said studying abroad was a compulsory part of their studies. An exchange is compulsory for students of universities of applied sciences (20%) more often than for university students (14%). In a comparison at an international level, an

THE CRITERIA FOR CHOOSING THE DESTINATION INSTITUTION (important or very important, %)



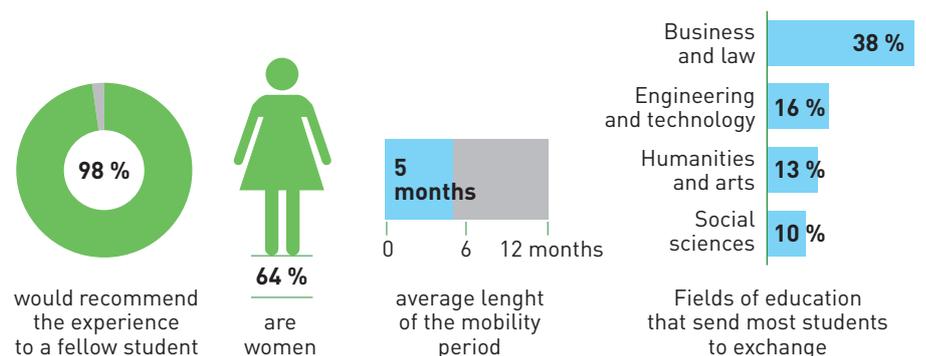
exchange is less often compulsory in Finland as 29% of all Erasmus+ students said the exchange had been a compulsory part of their studies. On the one hand, the comparison reveals that Finnish higher education institutions rarely make compulsory international mobility periods part of their degree programmes. On the other hand, it shows that Finnish students are also motivated to go abroad voluntarily.

Outgoing Erasmus+ students from Finland have slightly different criteria for their choice of destination institution than the Erasmus+ students who come to study in Finland. For outgoing Finnish students, the destination country, the language and the destination city are the most important criteria for going to study abroad. The studies offered by the higher education institution and its reputation play a smaller role in their choice.

Studying abroad provides students with additional competences when they graduate with a Finnish degree.

Students coming to Finland stress the importance of the choice of the studies offered, the student services, the reputation of the institutions and the feedback from alumni when choosing their destination institution.

FINNISH ERASMUS+ STUDENTS GOING ON STUDENT EXCHANGE 2017-18



FINNISH HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS INVEST IN EXCHANGE ARRANGEMENTS

In a comparison at a European level, Finnish higher education institutions play a strong role in the communication of information on the Erasmus+ programme and the opportunity to go on exchange. When asked how the students found out about the opportunity to go on exchange, outgoing Finnish students found information sources related to their home institution more important than students in Europe did on average, regardless of whether the questions concerned teaching staff, administrative staff, the website of the institution or the info sessions.

When the support services offered by Finnish higher education institutions are compared with the other Erasmus+ Programme Countries, Finnish institutions support outgoing students well. Eighty-four per cent of outgoing Finnish students were satisfied or very satisfied with the support provided by their home institution in administrative arrangements, 68% with the assistance provided

Finnish higher education institutions communicate information on exchange opportunities well, support the student in administrative arrangements and pay the Erasmus+ grant to the student on time.

in personal problem situations and 65% with academic mentoring. In all these matters, Finnish students give their home institution a grade that is about ten percentage points higher than the grade given to their own home institutions by European students on average.

Finnish higher education institutions also pay the Erasmus+ grant smoothly. Almost all outgoing Finnish students (98%) said they received their grant in time and as agreed. However, based on the responses, the grant is somewhat less important for a Finnish student than for outgoing students from many other countries: in a comparison at a European level, more Finnish students than on average estimated that the grant covered only a small part of their expenses during the period of study abroad. A total of 30% of Finnish students believed that they would have gone on the exchange even without the Erasmus+ grant. In addition, 48% indi-

cated that they possibly would have gone without the grant.

In the academic year 2017-2018, the grant awarded to Finnish students going on exchange was on average 253 euros per month, depending on the higher education institution. Students with families get an increase and additional support is available for students with special needs, such as a disability or a learning difficulty.

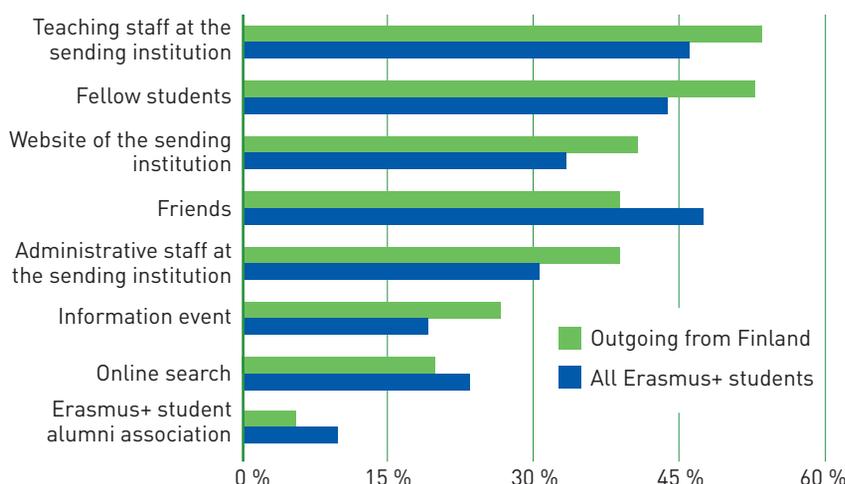
GREAT MAJORITY STUDIES ABROAD ACCORDING TO A PLAN

The objective is that the period of study abroad does not prolong the time used for the studies. It is therefore important that the studies progress abroad and that the courses completed abroad are accepted as part of the degree. The Erasmus+ programme applies the Learning Agreement, in which the student and the sending and the receiving institution together agree on the studies to be completed during the exchange.

The majority (77%) of outgoing Finnish students said they had successfully completed all of the studies recorded in the Learning Agreement. The corresponding average proportion in Europe is higher, 86%. The most common reasons for not managing to complete the studies were the following: the student did not pass the exam or did not take all of the exams, the course was not relevant for the degree or the student did not feel sufficiently prepared for completing it.

The studies completed abroad are recognised as part of the degree in the student's home institution relatively well in Finland. The majority (86%) of stu-

HOW DID YOU FIND OUT ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY TO STUDY ABROAD WITH THE ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME? (selected the source of information, %)



dents who had returned to Finland said the studies they had completed abroad had been fully recognised by their home institution. Twelve per cent had had their studies partly recognised and a couple of per cent not at all. Finnish students are slightly more successful in having studies completed abroad recognised than students in Europe on average.

The most common reason for a student to report that the studies were not fully recognised was the student's own decision not to apply for the recognition of all of the courses.

FINNISH HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS PRAISED BY INCOMING STUDENTS

Incoming Erasmus+ students give a good grade to Finnish higher education institutions both for the practical arrangements and for the teaching. In many questions, Finnish institutions get a

better grade than European institutions on average. The difference is especially clear in questions related to the support and guidance provided to students, such as support in administrative arrangements, dealing with matters occurring during the exchange and mentoring.

Students coming to Finland are also on average more satisfied with the content of the courses and the teaching methods, although the difference is not quite as big in this context. Students studying at Finnish universities are also somewhat more satisfied with the content of the courses and the teaching methods than students studying at universities of applied sciences.

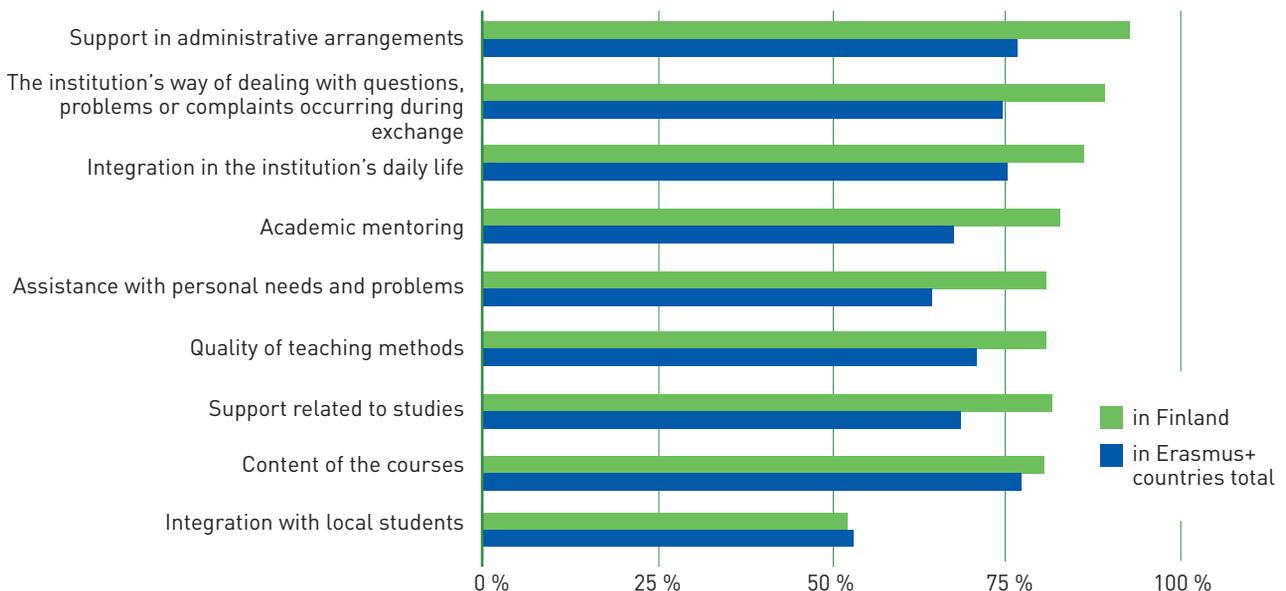
Matters that require improvement also emerge in the responses of incoming Erasmus+ students. Only 59% reported that the course catalogue of the Finnish destination institution was available on time and 37% reported it to be up-to-date, although receiving information on the offered courses is essential for planning the studies for the exchange and for their progress. The corresponding figures in the other Nordic countries are 69% and 53%.

An interesting observation was also made: although incoming students were very satisfied with their exchange period,

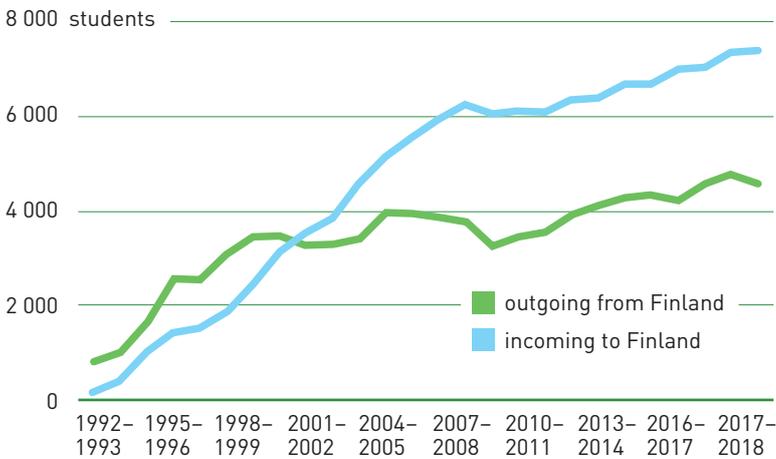
Half on incoming Erasmus+ students in Finland could imagine themselves working here in the future.

they did not see Finland as a particularly attractive country to work in in the future. Only about one half (53%) of those who studied in Finland could imagine themselves working here in the future, while the corresponding figure in Europe as a whole is 66%. When compared with outgoing Finnish students, the difference is clear as two out of three Finnish students (67%) could see themselves working in the country of the exchange.

SATISFACTION WITH SUPPORT, TEACHING AND ARRANGEMENTS OFFERED BY RECEIVING INSTITUTION (satisfied or very satisfied, %)

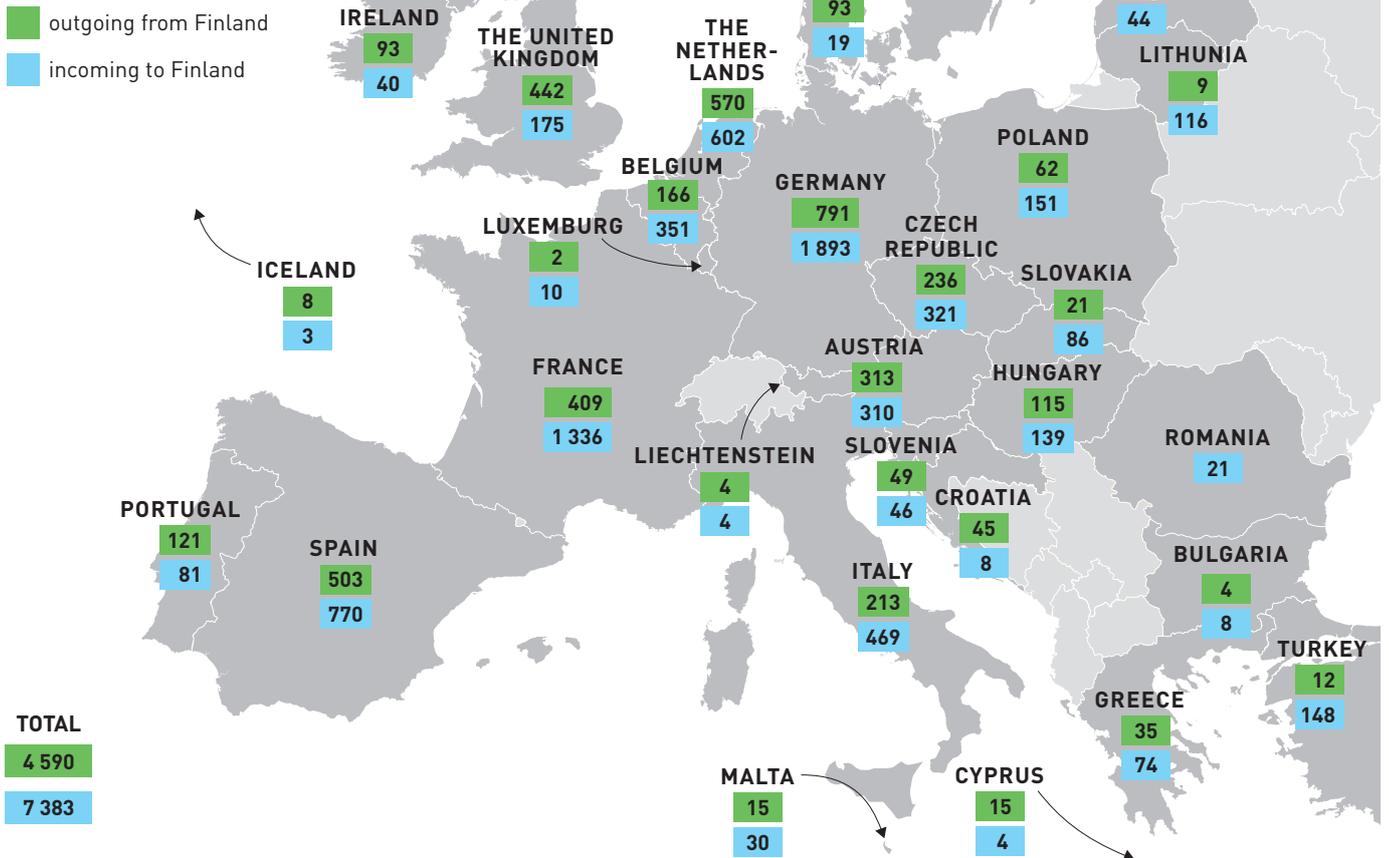


EUROPEAN ERASMUS+ STUDENT MOBILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS 1992-93 – 2017-18



DESTINATION COUNTRIES AND COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN 2017-18

■ outgoing from Finland
■ incoming to Finland



The Finnish National Agency for Education is an agency operating in the administrative branch of the Ministry of Education and Culture. It is responsible for the development of education, early childhood education and care, and lifelong learning as well as for the promotion of internationalisation.