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INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY OF STUDENTS: GOOD PRACTICES FROM OTHER UNIVERSITIES

This article highlights the results of research carried out by partner universities as part of the Erasmus+ project “International mobility – opportunity and problem. Proper preparation of the university for international students” in 2019. This article provides data on the intensity and character of the process of international mobility of students in various European countries and the results of the classification of these countries by a set of indicators. Desk research analyses on problems in various universities in EU countries mainly in terms of searching for good practices was applied. Information from study portals, webpages of universities in 24 European countries was collected and analysed. A list of good practices used by European universities to assist international students by choice of university, majors and courses of study, provision of accommodation, adapting to the new cultural and language environment and by other organizational and educational situations was compiled. Existing experience and insights of European universities were used during the preparation of the project document “Manual for the university. How to prepare for the reception of international students”.

Introduction

The current market for educational services is becoming both more and more competitive and globalised (Altbach, 2006). “Globalization is now the most important contextual factor shaping the internationalization of higher education [...]. Irrespective of contextual differences within and between countries, nearly all higher education institutions worldwide are engaged in international activities and are seeking to expand them” (International Association of Universities, 2012). The internationalisation of universities and other educational institutions nowadays provides them with a new competitive characteristic (Baumgratz – Gangl, 1996). One of the key ways of internationalization of universities is the international mobility of all educational process participants – students, faculty and administrative staff. International student mobility has been consistently on the rise since the 1970s (Fonseca et al., 2016), reaching a significant scale in the 21st century. In the early stages, the intensity of mobility of students was low and limited to their movement within continents and countries. Later it became global and in 2004 reached a figure of two million students (Altbach, 2004). Findings of the empirical study, which was conducted by researchers from Lithuania, reveal that Erasmus studies is the most popular means of partial mobility among the young people of Europe (Vaicekauska et al., 2013). Researchers have identified a whole list of factors that motivate students to study abroad. These include gaining international experience, improving knowledge of a foreign language, exposure to a new cultural environment, recommendations from relatives, friends, university professors, better employment opportunities after graduation and others. Research conducted

in Slovenia found that the possibility of gaining international study experience was the main motivator for studying in Germany and Norway (Novak et al., 2013).

Most countries are declaring education hub aspiration with the ambition of signalling the excellence of their education systems to international students (Ilieva et al., 2017). Good practices in universities correlate with the national educational policy regarding internationalization of higher education. The following are necessary within this policy: a strategy of internationalization; creation of a corresponding national body and foreign representation; bilateral agreements; monitoring of internationalization processes; removal of visa restrictions and simplification of visa procedures; creation of a favourable living and working environment; exemption from various fees which foreign students are obliged to pay.

The phenomenon of international student mobility has gradually become an important factor that necessitated changes in the organisational, legal and financial resource frameworks for the functioning of universities and other institutions of higher education. Consistently the university, national and regional approaches to the extent, depth and intensity, scale of these changes were formed. Therefore, today the universities of different countries use different practices regarding organizational, legal and regulatory, informational support, promotion and implementation of international mobility of students. In view of this, it is valuable and useful to study the experience of universities and institutes in the European countries in terms of good management practices of international mobility of students. That is why the aim of our research was to assess the readiness of European universities to accept international students and to find good practices in this regard.

Material and Methods

In our study we applied desk research analyses on problems in various universities in the EU countries mainly in terms of searching for good practices. We analysed information collected from study portals, webpages of universities in 24 European countries (Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, Cyprus, Malta, Hungary, Slovenia, Serbia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia). During the information collection process, particular attention was paid to the simplicity and ease of searching the web-site of the university; the ease of browsing the website for tabs of the departments of international relations or international cooperation; the availability of data on the number of international students in the university (including the number of students, who study within the framework of exchange programmes); information on the number of signed bilateral and multilateral international cooperation agreements; the number of Erasmus partners among universities in different countries; the integration of the university into international networks and the association of educational institutions. Particular attention was paid to the availability and completeness of information about the documents submission; the academic calendar; courses schedule; the content and structure of training courses; tuition fees; time and the content of Orientation Days (Week); language courses; access to accommodation in the residence halls; instructions for students before and after arrival at the host university; details of visa procedures; availability

of information leaflets; details of health insurance; contact details of Institutional Erasmus+ Coordinators at the university; information on the mentor programme; the Erasmus Student Network; student benefits on public transport; preventing sexual violence and discrimination. However, the main focus was on identifying good practices in universities in welcoming international students and sending local students abroad.

Data on the number of international students enrolled in European countries both in long-term and short-term studies, Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral degrees was used to assess the level of international mobility of students in different countries. In addition, the values of low specific indicators – net flow of mobile students, inbound mobility rate, outbound mobility ratio – were analysed.

According to the definition of UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the net flow of mobile students is the number of tertiary students from abroad (inbound students) studying in a given country minus the number of students at the same level from a given country studying abroad (outbound students). Inbound mobility rate is the number of international students in a given country in percentage of total tertiary enrolment in that country. Outbound mobility ratio is a number of students from a given country studying abroad in percentage of total tertiary enrolment in that country.

The classification analysis was carried out using the STATISTICA package of applied statistical programs.

Results

The European educational space dates back to the early middle ages. Nowadays it is represented by a wide range of universities and institutes. According to the uniRank database in Europe in 2020 there were currently 2,725 higher-education institutions with over 20 million local and international students.

Currently we are witnessing a worldwide increasing trend in the number of students (about three million per year) and host universities involved the international mobility process. Similar trends are intrinsic to the European educational landscape. According to Eurostat, a total of 1.8 million international students studied in the European Union countries in 2018, most of them in Germany, the UK and Austria (Table 1). Also, several other countries – the Netherlands, Italy, France and Poland – are attractive for foreign students. Table 2 gives a detailed illustration of the directions and intensity of international student mobility in the European countries. We can see that 22 countries out of 35 are characterized by a positive net flow of mobile students, with the highest values of this indicator in the United Kingdom, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Turkey and Austria.

The highest absolute value of negative balance of inbound and outbound students is attributed to such countries as Slovakia, Cyprus and Greece. As for relative indicators (a percentage of the number of students in national institutions of higher education), the highest degree of internationalization of the universities is in Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Cyprus, the UK, Switzerland, Austria and the Czech Republic. The highest intensity of outbound student mobility ratio is identified for Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Cyprus, Slovakia, Ireland and Bulgaria.

The results of the cluster analysis (Figure 1) show that European countries can be classified into three groups, each of which in turn is divided into a number of sub-groups based on a set of indicators of international mobility of students. A separate cluster is formed by Luxembourg and Liechtenstein. The second cluster comprises several European countries - the United Kingdom, Turkey, the Netherlands, France and Germany. The third cluster is the largest in terms of the number of members and is divided into four sub-groups. The first subgroup is represented by countries with relatively high positive values of net flow of mobile students, the second one with medium and low values of this indicator, and the third one with high values of net flow of mobile students. The fourth sub-cluster includes only Cyprus, which stands out among others by a high degree of internationalization of local universities, and on the other hand by a large number of outbound students.

Country	Short-cycle tertiary education	Bachelor's or equivalent level	Master's or equivalent level	Doctoral or equivalent level	Tertiary education level 5-8
Belgium	1154	14253	7984	1169	24560
Bulgaria	n.a.	4070	9157	368	13595
Czechia	44	19099	14770	3078	36991
Denmark	4100	10140	11057	2034	27331
Germany	0	53019	61962	14700	129681
Estonia	n.a.	1441	1060	243	2743
Ireland	209	2902	1456	1005	5572
Greece	n.a.	18444	284	282	19010
Spain	1586	10113	12076	3919	27694
France	2345	12923	19908	6326	41502
Croatia	0	2372	1924	300	4596
Italy	522	28801	16870	1636	47829
Cyprus	123	2453	1592	175	4343
Latvia	63	1117	2526	158	3864
Lithuania	n.a.	1612	1210	45	2867
Luxembourg	75	653	1526	398	2652
Hungary	106	9267	7550	662	17585
Malta	76	241	482	21	820
Netherlands	0	40695	17116	3315	61126
Austria	668	33237	25521	5178	64603
Poland	0	25234	16373	528	42135
Portugal	34	1380	2732	803	4949

Romania	n.a.	8792	10462	413	19667
Slovenia	223	1554	1191	204	3172
Slovakia	31	4917	4844	594	10386
Finland	n.a.	3393	2251	1544	7188
Sweden	24	3065	6401	2809	12299
United Kingdom	3759	100265	35294	16205	155523
Iceland	46	396	247	143	832
Liechtenstein	0	337	236	146	719
Norway	46	3161	1942	921	6070
Switzerland	0	16222	12853	10404	39479
North Macedonia	n.a.	2439	449	148	3036
Serbia	n.a.	7347	2620	628	10595
Turkey	1571	12399	3876	842	18688

Table 1 International mobile students enrolled in European countries in 2018 (Note: n.a. – data is not available)
Source: https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=educ_uoe_mobs02&lang=en

Country	Code	Net flow of mobile students	Inbound mobility rate	Outbound mobility ratio
Belgium	BE	30028	10,49	3,08
Bulgaria	BG	-9938	6,41	10,62
Czechia	CZ	32433	13,61	3,75
Denmark	DK	27353	10,71	1,91
Germany	DE	189200	9,97	3,92
Estonia	EE	725	9,59	8,01
Ireland	IE	7309	9,64	6,48
Greece	EL	-12771	3,43	5,10
Spain	ES	28878	3,46	2,05
France	FR	130135	8,77	3,80
Croatia	HR	-4740	3,04	5,92
Italy	IT	30657	5,62	4,01
Cyprus	CY	-15221	23,90	56,17
Latvia	LV	2453	9,27	6,26
Lithuania	LT	-4095	5,33	8,79
Luxembourg	LU	-8220	47,74	164,45

Hungary	HU	19467	11,41	4,54
Malta	MT	374	9,95	7,50
Netherlands	NL	86455	11,69	1,97
Austria	AT	53745	17,49	5,00
Poland	PL	28003	3,64	1,77
Portugal	PT	13048	7,89	4,23
Romania	RO	-8422	5,40	6,97
Slovenia	SL	255	4,47	4,17
Slovakia	SK	-19875	8,03	21,79
Finland	FI	12356	8,05	3,86
Sweden	SE	14939	7,17	3,71
United Kingdom	UK	413093	18,32	1,58
Iceland	IS	-1872	8,02	18,51
Liechtenstein	LI	-334	88,4	127,68
Norway	NO	-4999	4,23	5,96
Switzerland	CH	37809	17,70	5,37
North Macedonia	MK	-2608	5,15	9,49
Serbia	RS	-4388	4,61	6,15
Turkey	TR	77592	1,66	0,63

Table 2 Net flow and rates of international mobile students
in European countries in 2018
Source: <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>

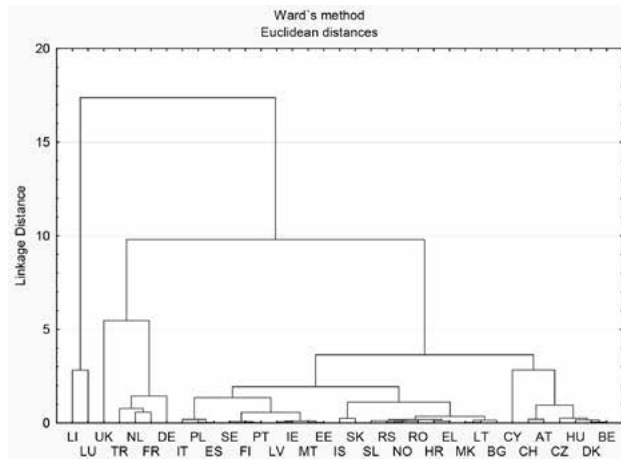


Figure 1 Dendrogram of a hierarchical agglomerative cluster analysis of European countries in terms of international student mobility

The results of our cross-country analysis of the state of international student flows in Europe are taken into account in the desk search for good practice in facilitating international students' mobility. When looking for good practices of welcoming international students our attention was primarily focused on the universities in countries with a positive balance of the international student flow, and when identifying good practices of sending local students to study abroad, we paid attention to the countries with a negative balance of the international student flow.

The desk research has identified a variety of good practices in terms of purpose, scope and required resources that are used in European universities to facilitate international students' mobility. A small part of them is shown in Table 3.

Country	University	Good practices
1. Arrival of a student from abroad		
Austria	FH Vorarberg	“Film about experiences of foreign students”
Belgium	University Antwerp	“Ice Breaking Week”
Croatia	VERN University of Applied Sciences	Brochure “Welcome to Zagreb. Incoming Students’ Information Guide”
Germany	Georg-August University in Gottingen	“Virtual guide to the university”
Serbia	University of Belgrade	Online software platform “MobiOn”
2. Language adaptation within the university		
Lithuania	Vilnius University	“Lithuanian Language Summer Course”
Luxembourg	University of Luxembourg	“Learning in tandem”
Serbia	University of Kragujevac	“Centre for Serbian as a Foreign Language”
3. Integration in a new environment, well-being in the local community		
Croatia	Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek	“Internet Portal Study in Croatia”
Germany	Freie University in Berlin	“International Club”
Serbia	University of Kragujevac	“Buddy Network”
4. Student service process – organizational aspect		
Netherlands	Wittenborg University of Applied Sciences	“Open Doors’ system”
Sweden	Stockholm University	“Coordinator for special pedagogical support”
5. Preparation of students’ travel by the university		
Lithuania	Kaunas University of Technology	“Go Abroad Fair 2021”
Netherlands	University of Leiden	“Very intuitive and information equipped website”
6. Training and other forms of improving the competences of faculty and administrative staff		
United Kingdom	The university of Edinburgh	“Student Support Professional Development Framework”
Germany	Freie University in Berlin	“International Employees Week”
Serbia	UNION University	“Language Policy”

Table 3 Good practices at European universities, which facilitate the international student mobility

For example, Vorarberg High School (Austria) website features a ten-minute film about international students’ experiences which describes benefits of studying at this institution, pro-

vides some special features of life and culture of the new country. For the quick and smooth adaptation of students to the new learning environment, University Antwerp (Belgium) conducts the “Ice Breaking Week”, which aims to familiarize foreign students with the educational process, campus, university’s authorities and local students. During this week students can get to know student facilities, learn about life in Antwerp and Belgium and get the first basics of learning Dutch language. Georg-August University in Gottingen (Germany) has a virtual guide to the university in order to familiarise international students with the faculties before their arrival. The University of Belgrade (Serbia) created an online software platform “MobiOn” which aims to facilitate the application procedure for the international students. The foreign students must use this platform in order to apply for students exchange programmes.

For a quick integration into the new environment, better communication within the university and beyond, it is useful for international students to have a basic knowledge of the local language and to improve their skills of the taught language. The Vilnius University (Lithuania) offers Lithuanian Language Summer Course for this purpose for a period of two or four weeks. Most of the courses are offered in the old campus of Vilnius University thus allowing the students to enjoy medieval courtyards and get glimpses of the Vilnius old town life during the breaks between the lectures and seminars. The Foreign Language Centre at the University of Luxembourg offers learning language in tandem. Such initiatives allow students to improve language skills of both international and local students through communication in an informal environment. The University of Kragujevac has created the Centre for Serbian as a Foreign Language. It was founded with the aim of providing an opportunity for international students participating in Erasmus+ exchange programmes who come to Kragujevac to learn and perfect their Serbian skills.

Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek (Croatia) launched the Internet Portal *Study in Croatia* to provide international students with general information about their stay in Croatia. The portal offers interesting and useful information for foreign students under the headings: study in Croatia, about Croatia, peculiarities of living in Croatia, learning the Croatian language. Freie University in Berlin launched the International Club, which organises interesting events and meetings (movie nights, Christmas parties etc.) for foreign students and helps international students in their integration with local ones. A calendar of events and conventions is available at the university’s website. A very popular and often effective tool for assisting and supporting students in their studies abroad is the Buddy Network established by many European universities such as Technical University Wien (Austria), Aalborg University (Denmark) and University of Kragujevac (Serbia) etc.

Open Doors’ system was established at the Wittenborg University of Applied Sciences. It helps international students have easy access to the Lecture Rooms to conduct shorts talks with the faculty. Such system favours to create a very positive, open and friendly atmosphere of learning at the University. Good practice in the student service process at Stockholm University is providing various forms of special pedagogical support to students with long-term disabilities. Exchange students can contact the coordinator for special pedagogical support as soon as they have been accepted to the University.

Many European Universities have started interesting practices preparing students for their overseas travels. Kaunas University of Technology is organizing *Eighth Virtual Go*

Abroad Fair 2021. 41 universities from 22 countries and the companies will introduce on Zoom their opportunities and advantages. During the fair alumni exchange students can share their good practices and answer the questions. University of Leiden (Netherlands) created very informative and user-friendly website, which provides necessary information for student interested in international exchange programmes.

An electronic Student Support Professional Development Framework for staff delivering student support was developed at the University of Edinburgh by multi-disciplinary working groups. It was designed as a training suite for people working within professional services and academic roles delivering a student support function within the University. The training suite consists of both online resources and training (including face-to-face training opportunities).

Faculty from all over Europe each year take part in “International Employees Week” organized by Freie University of Berlin. During the convention current and future administrative issues (exchange of insights and good practices) are discussed. Union University (Serbia) adopted the Language Policy. The purpose of the document is to enhance language competences of both its students and faculty and administrative staff. The strategy emphasises that foreign language proficiency is a precondition for the exchange of ideas, students, faculty and researchers with partners across the globe, making it the focus of the Strategy for the Internationalization of the University.

Conclusion

Nowadays international students’ mobility is one of the most important tools for the internationalization of universities, which contributes to the development and strengthening of their competitive advantages. In recent years, the intensity of the international mobility of students has significantly increased both globally and in Europe in particular. A total of 1.8 million students from abroad studied in the European Union countries in 2018, most of them in Germany, the United Kingdom and Austria. Also, the universities of the Netherlands, Italy, France and Poland were attractive for international students.

With the help of cluster analysis European countries were classified into three groups based on a set of indicators of international students’ mobility (net flow of mobile students, inbound mobility rate, outbound mobility ratio) by the method of a hierarchical agglomerative cluster analysis. A separate cluster is formed by Luxembourg and Liechtenstein. The second cluster comprises the United Kingdom, Turkey, the Netherlands, France and Germany. The third cluster is the largest in terms of the number of members and is in turn divided into four subgroups. 22 European countries out of 35 are characterized by a positive net flow of mobile students.

On the basis of desk research analyses of European universities’ web pages, the list of good practices used by universities to assist international students by choice of university, direction and courses of study, provision of accommodations, adapting to the new cultural and language environment and by other organizational and educational situations was compiled. Existing experience and insights of European universities were used during the preparation of the project “Manual for the university. How to prepare for the reception of foreign students”.

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