

**Projektbericht**  
**Research Report**

**Student mobility  
in the EHEA**  
**Underrepresentation in  
student credit mobility and  
imbalances in degree mobility**

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## Executive Summary

The present report was commissioned by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research as an input for the BFUG Working group “Mobility and Internationalisation” regarding differences and inequalities in student mobility in the EHEA. The authors chose two different perspectives on student mobility, focussing on underrepresented groups in temporary credit mobility in chapter 2 and on imbalances in long-term degree mobility flows between countries in chapter 3.

### **Credit Mobility: which groups are underrepresented and why?**

The identification of underrepresented groups and the analysis of reasons for underrepresentation is based on data from the EUROSTUDENT database<sup>1</sup> of 25 countries. 17 of those countries delivered additional data for the present analysis. The survey data covers 5A students who have a permanent residency and finished prior education in the country of survey.

**Across Europe, there are primarily three groups underrepresented in temporary enrolment: students from low education background, students with delayed transition into higher education and older students.**

These three groups are often intersectional: Older students have often started a working career after graduating from secondary school and found their way into higher education more than two years after graduation from secondary school. As students from lower education background are more likely to choose a non-traditional education track or to enter higher education at a higher age and with a delay between secondary school and tertiary education.

**Financial issues are the most obstructing ones for students across Europe, for older students it is more their living conditions (family/ partner/ children) that are hindering a temporary enrolment abroad.**

Especially Students from Southern and Eastern European countries, in comparison with Northern European countries, rate financial and also structural obstacles higher than other obstacles. In Northern European countries students stated personal reasons more often than other obstacles, in relation to other countries. Therefore financial and structural barriers are smaller in Northern European countries. This is also reflected by the generally high affinity towards enrolment abroad in Northern countries.

**In-depth analysis of Austrian data yielded advanced results explaining the underrepresentation of certain groups of students.**

Apart from older students and those with delayed transition or lower social background also students with impairments prove to be underrepresented to enrolment abroad. Also students from different fields of study are very different regarding their affinity towards enrolment

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<sup>1</sup> <https://eurostudent.his.de/eiv/report/index.jsp?x=30&y=24>

abroad. Detailed data about destination, duration and cost of the stay corroborate the trend that financial issues are crucial for students with lower social background: they choose shorter stays (internships) and stay in Europe more often than students from high social background. Differences by social background take more effect for younger students, who are more dependent from family and state support. The effect of social background is weaker among older students. For them, obstacles regarding their living conditions are more critical than financial issues.

### **Degree Mobility: Imbalanced Student mobility in Europe**

The secondary statistical analysis, based on data from the UNESCO – Institute for Statistics on (long-term) degree mobility of students in tertiary education (ISCED 97 level 5 & 6) outlines the presence and distribution of mobile students in the EHEA. It analyses imbalanced mobility flows across EHEA countries from a national, bilateral and a regional perspective.

#### **The identification of imbalanced mobility flows is based on two approaches: absolute and relative imbalances**

Absolute imbalances occur if the net difference of mobile students exchanged by two countries exceeds 1.000 students. In contrast, relative imbalances take the sizes of the national student populations into account and are represented by the share of incoming mobile students of a certain country among all students in the host country being >1%. Even though the two concepts approach imbalanced mobility differently, both show imbalances especially between neighbouring countries, in case the absolute number of students in one country is significantly smaller than in the other.

#### **Mobility flows from Eastern and Southern EHEA to Western and Northern EHEA but also between countries of North-Western EHEA are imbalanced.**

Generally speaking, imbalanced mobility flows between larger regions in the EHEA mostly occur from Eastern, Southern and Non-European EHEA countries to Western and Northern Europe. Imbalances often occur between countries in Western and Northern Europe. Similar imbalances can be observed within Eastern Europe, but due to missing data the list of detected imbalances in this region might not be exhaustive.

#### **English-speaking countries show highly imbalanced incoming mobility flows.**

EHEA countries with English as their official language receive a highly imbalanced number of mobile students from Non-English speaking countries. This is especially the case for the UK.

#### **Imbalanced mobility flows can also be detected looking at national GDPs per capita.**

In absolute numbers, considerably more mobile students from countries with lower GDPs per capita are studying in countries with higher GDPs than vice versa. Referring to the size of the destination country, only mobility flows from countries with GDPs per capita between 30.000 and 39.000 US\$ to countries with GDPs per capita over 39.000 US\$ can be considered imbalanced. In terms of relative imbalance, students from countries with lower GDPs are not overrepresented in High-GDP-countries.