



# The importance of mobility

Why live and study abroad?



## Introduction

Hello!

So the time has come where you find yourself faced with a big decision: Should I stay or should I go?

Going abroad will undoubtedly change your life, as it has for many young people before. There are numerous aspects to consider and a period abroad should be well thought through and planned. It is not always easy to leave the familiar and comfortable life behind, but this document aims to help you make an informed decision and explains why Erasmus can change your life - for the better!

Going to live and learn abroad really is worth it – you will never regret the experience as this document will disclose! People have different reasons for setting out for this amazing adventure, and it is impossible to collect all of them (unless we want to make you fall asleep). However, it is possible to choose the most common ones and add some personal stories and comments – and this is exactly what you will find here. Mobility offers an opportunity for a different way of living, new experiences and new horizons, different cultures, new friends and much more. Mobility is an inherent phenomenon in today's education and it changes the lives of millions of students. Being mobile doesn't only describe the physical movement but also the movement (exchange) of thoughts, experiences, and viewpoints. Since 1987, more than 2 million European students have already mobilised thanks to the Erasmus programme and you are hopefully about to join this journey.

In Europe, many student mobility programmes exist – the most important and well-known being the Erasmus programme. However, this is not the only way to go and study abroad. Many universities establish bilateral cooperation and exchange programmes for their students; there are regional and national mobility programmes in which you can participate. The doors to mobility are wide open – all it needs is for you to take the courage to walk through them and start your new journey! Ready? Sitting comfortably? Great – so let us begin and tell you why the next thing you should do is to sign up and get ready to go abroad! :)

Enjoy the reading and don't forget: "Be mobile!"

## New discoveries – it's fun!

So why is it so much fun to take part in an exchange program like Erasmus? It is only possible through the eyes, the memories and the experiences of international students who experienced and enjoyed it themselves.



Every day becomes a new, thrilling adventure. New places, interesting people and amazing experiences wait for you. So it's time for you to embrace them! Imagine, you wake up in the morning and you realize that you suddenly have many new friends

from different places all over the world. You know different cultures and traditions and other ways to enjoy life. Isn't this wonderful and inspiring? It's not only fun because you learn different languages but also because you can discover many customs and traditions from foreign students coming from diverse backgrounds. Exploring all the different facets of a country is what makes the experience unforgettable. Traveling to different places in your host country, you may realize that even within a country customs and traditions differ widely. There is always something new to discover and little by little you make your new country your own.

This is the informal side of your exchange experience and among other things, it helps you become a truly European citizen and improve your multicultural knowledge. Many experiences and adventures are only possible during studying abroad, a chance you might only have once in life. The time is special, hard to experience in other situations or contexts. This is why many who have lived through it would say: "it's fun". Of course, now it's up to you to create your own unique experience and write your own story. So what are you waiting for? Discover the Erasmus lifestyle and find out why it's so much fun!

## Network relations and friendship – growing as a person!

Moving to a new city and to a new country not only allows you, but rather forces you to establish new contacts and relationships. You will need to ask people for information about local habits, local life, bureaucratic issues, events going on and not only that! You will need also someone just to chat with, to exchange your own experiences. Probably, at the beginning you will also have the necessity to complain about the local rules and habits which are so different from yours.

But, you will not be alone! You will be surrounded by other students in the same situation. Probably the first days are going to be tough and, maybe, some of you will consider going back home as soon as possible. However, only a few days later you will forget that you have ever thought about going back. You can meet dozens of people in only one day and you can make friends for life.

You will have the chance to live together with people coming from different countries with diverse backgrounds, and thus learn to appreciate different (you might initially find them even strange) social and cultural habits and taste astonishing food and drinks.

When it comes to networking, you will bring back among others two basic lessons. Firstly, you will realise that friendships, relations and networks are dynamic. They evolve through time and space and there is always the possibility to create new ones, according to our needs and feelings. Secondly, you will greatly improve your interpersonal skills. On the one hand, you will learn how to use different networks for different purposes and how to establish new relations in an unfamiliar foreign environment. On the other hand, you will learn how to keep long distance relationships and how it is nice to be familiar with the name of a little city in Greece, Finland or France just because you have an “Erasmus” friend coming from there. Shy people transform themselves; they lose the fear to face new, unknown people and environments. They learn how to establish a network of friends and locals in order to feel rapidly at home in different, unknown situations.

“A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.” – Lao Tzu

Lao Tzu was a philosopher, who lived in Tibet in the 6th century BCE. Even then the value and benefits of travel and knowing different cultures were all too clear. Not much has changed today.

Making friends and learning how to maintain relationships is part of a process we all go through: personal growth. Life is a journey and completely changing your environment makes it easier to grow as a person, share what you know, how you think and learn about new customs, habits and traditions etc.! Below are just some of the competencies you will have an opportunity to develop while being abroad:

- achieving autonomy and independence
- developing mature interpersonal relationships
- finding who you are and where you want to go in life
- taking responsibility for yourself

## Improving language skills

If you have ever met an international student or a former international student, you know that they can say “cheers” in at least seventeen languages, “I love you” in about ten, make themselves understood in three or four, and follow an academic lecture in at least two. This non-scientific fact is highly impressive, but even more impressive is the fact that students’ language skills actually do develop greatly during their stay abroad. According to the ESN Survey from 2008 ([http://www.esn.org/sites/default/files/ESNSurvey\\_2008\\_report\\_0.pdf](http://www.esn.org/sites/default/files/ESNSurvey_2008_report_0.pdf), page 33) the exchange students surveyed developed their skills in the host country’s local language with an average of about 1.5 points on a five-point scale and English as foreign language improved as well, albeit not as greatly. Acquiring new language skills is an important factor in higher education and mobilising offers you the opportunity to develop these skills. This is not surprising at all; as the world gets small-



er and contacts increase across borders, one must be extremely naïve to believe that it will be sufficient with just one language in the future. Yes, this includes English and French speakers as well! In ten years' time, when you will have an important meeting with your business partners (or equivalent) in another country, you will be very happy that you went on that exchange semester. And if you are really lucky, perhaps they have been on an exchange as well; it will definitely be easier to communicate if this is the case. And if nothing else, you will both be able to say "cheers" in each other's languages to break the ice.

## Interpersonal and soft skills development

A key advantage resulting from "being mobile" and taking part in student exchange is the possibility of developing your so-called interpersonal and soft skills. Such skills are crucial in today's working environment and will increase your employability. When living abroad people learn so much more than they do in their familiar environments. That way you improve your competences in many areas important for professional life. The following list provides aspects you might find yourself highly skilled in upon your return:

- Working in diverse, intercultural teams
- Negotiating, not least in different languages
- Making decisions
- Solving problems
- Self-awareness
- Proactive attitude
- Cultural flexibility

## Experiencing a different educational environment

Some of us might be dreaming of studying at prestigious universities such as Oxford, Cambridge and many others. But apart from these institutions, there are plenty of high quality higher education institutions across Europe and around the world which can also become a valuable entry into one's CV. The Bologna Process attempts to lower obstacles and encourage students to study abroad on exchange or for the entire period of study. Mobile students are usually divided into two groups: the so called free-movers, who travel entirely on their own initiative; and programme students who use exchange programmes at department, faculty, institution or national level (such as Erasmus, Nordplus or Fulbright). The exchange programmes are usually financed by different national and/or international institutions and co-financed by the University, e.g. Erasmus.

There is no doubt that studying abroad brings a range of new insights and understandings for the academic experience. Moreover, in many parts of the world, a foreign degree or a mobility period, especially if completed in certain countries, is considered an advantage for career prospects. And even if somebody travels just to advance specialized studies, a wide range of subjects are on offer for the international academic community. In addition, local professors at times pay more attention to foreign students if they show strong empathy, interest and a high level of commitment.

What is more, today's traditional Erasmus exchange has been complemented with Virtual Mobility, or Virtual Erasmus, in which students from different countries may study together without leaving their home. Whatever form it takes, mobility can definitely enrich your academic background and lead to a much more successful career path.

## Gain an international perspective

The idea and the goals of the Erasmus programme are not limited to academic and economic considerations. The programme has a much broader role in the process of European (if not daring to say global) integration.

The contact with the culture of the host country (the history, customs, food and drinks, people, weather, music, nature etc.), are vital for fostering mutual intercultural understanding. Only by personally experiencing and embracing the beauty of other cultures, will you truly understand, accept and hopefully appreciate diversity. Additionally, every former international student becomes a messenger for mutual understanding.

As part of an international study experience, you learn what it means to be a citizen of the world since you will encounter people from all over the world. Europe and the world will feel more like home. You will not forget this experience and by participating in an exchange programme, you will become part of something bigger; you can contribute to a better future of Europe and the world.

So take your first step to a lifelong experience and contact your international office or local Erasmus Student Network now.

Editing: Emanuel Alfranseder, Aisling Tiernan, Silvia Crocitta

Contributors: Carla Filetti, Marketa Tokowa, Jurgita Bataityté, Andrzej Sochacki, Igor Kalinic, Simone Dalle Nogare, Rasmus Åberg, Szymon Szmak, Adriana Pérez, Antonio del Sole, Tania Berman, the ESN International Education Committee.

Language Editing: Leo Smith

Design: ESN Graphics Team, Communication Committee.

Photographs: Central Audiovisual Library of the European Commission.



2012

