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To:	Mr Jeppe TRANHOLM-MIKKELSEN, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union

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Subject:	COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT The situation of young people in the European Union Accompanying the document Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2021
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Delegations will find attached document SWD(2021) 287 final.

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PART 4/10

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

The situation of young people in the European Union

Accompanying the document

**Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European
Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions**

on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2021

{COM(2021) 636 final} - {SWD(2021) 286 final}

4. Youth on the move

Taking part in a learning experience abroad gives young people the opportunity to develop a wide range of skills and competences, strengthening both subject-specific knowledge and transversal skills such as critical thinking, communication and problem-solving. They may also learn a foreign language or improve their language skills. Moreover, youth mobility promotes intercultural understanding and contributes to broadening young people's perspectives of Europe and the world, so that they are better equipped to face the challenges of an increasingly diverse society ⁽¹⁾.

Erasmus+ is the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe. It aims to support participating countries to use the potential talent and social assets in a lifelong learning perspective and promote opportunities for cooperation and mobility between them. Participants in the Erasmus+ programme usually report feeling more ready to take on new challenges, having better career prospects and being more aware of the benefits that the EU brings to their daily lives ⁽²⁾.

The European Solidarity Corps (ESC) is the EU's new programme providing opportunities for young people (aged 18–30 years) to carry out volunteering activities, gain experience in traineeships and jobs, and run their own solidarity projects. Young volunteers who have taken part in ESC activities report developing additional skills and knowledge that will be useful in their future careers ⁽³⁾.

However, not all young people have equal access to these opportunities. According to Eurostudent data, students with lower socio-economic status – measured by the education level or profession of their parents – are less likely to participate in student mobility schemes ⁽⁴⁾. Further studies have confirmed this trend based on extensive graduate data from specific countries ⁽⁵⁾. Moreover, the mobility uptake varies significantly across universities and fields of study, and preliminary research shows that those with a low mobility uptake have larger proportions of disadvantaged students, which could further limit their access to mobility schemes ⁽⁶⁾. They would have fewer chances to be in contact with other young people having enjoyed such an experience and to receive information about existing opportunities. They could also face more difficulties to go through the procedures and to get the necessary financial means.

This chapter provides an overview of young people's participation in learning experiences abroad, including volunteering. The first part of the chapter looks at youth mobility in a broad sense. Section 4.1 shows the proportions of young people who have considered going abroad or who have been abroad for study, training, work, exchanges or volunteering, according to the Eurobarometer youth surveys. Section 4.2 examines why some of them considered it but did not go, while Section 4.3 analyses why some people have never considered such an opportunity. The second part of the chapter focuses on youth participation in two specific activities, namely the Erasmus+ learning mobility activities (Section 4.4) and the ESC (Section 4.5).

⁽¹⁾ European Commission, 2018c.

⁽²⁾ European Commission, 2020c.

⁽³⁾ European Commission, 2020d.

⁽⁴⁾ Hauschildt et al., 2015.

⁽⁵⁾ Schnepf et al., 2020; Wiers-Jenssen, 2011; Munk, 2009.

⁽⁶⁾ Schnepf and Colagrossi, 2020.

4.1. Going on a learning experience abroad

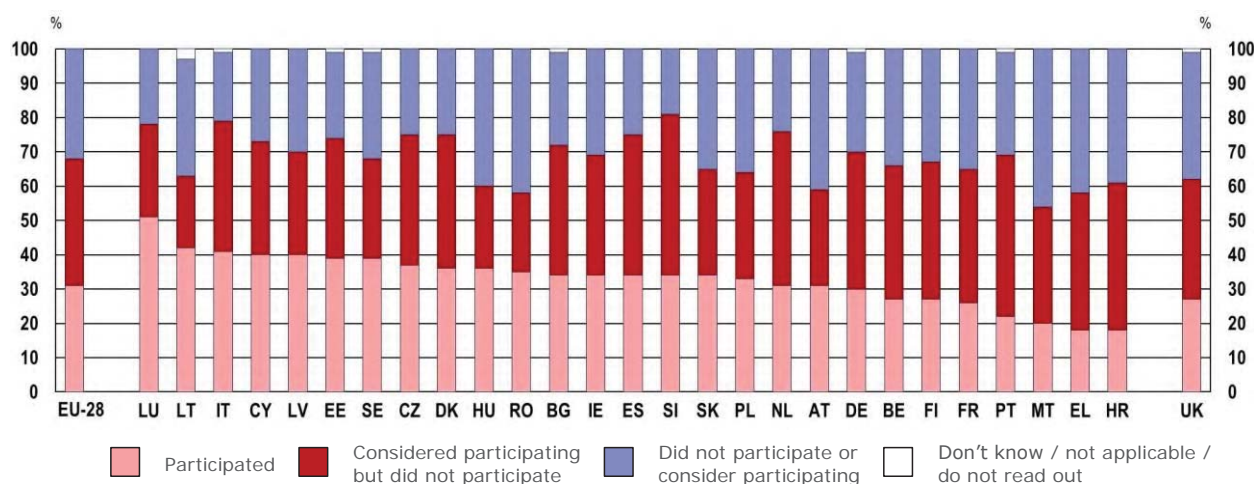
In the 2019 Eurobarometer youth survey *How do we build a stronger, more united Europe? The views of young people*, young people in EU Member States were asked whether they had gone abroad for at least 2 weeks for study, training, work, exchanges or volunteering (i.e. excluding travel for tourism or living with one's family abroad). On average, one in three had taken part in such experiences.

As illustrated in Figure 4.1, more than half of the respondents in Luxembourg reported having gone abroad for such a purpose. Youth mobility was also high in the three Baltic states, Italy, Cyprus and Sweden, where around 40 % of the interviewees reported having participated in a learning experience abroad for at least 2 weeks.

This mobility includes, among other things, the completion of part or all of a university degree in a foreign country. According to the Bologna process implementation report, Cyprus and Luxembourg have the largest proportions of graduates earning a university degree abroad ⁽⁷⁾. In Luxembourg, it is a requirement for all university students to complete part of their degree programme in another country. The proportion of students getting their degree or taking a number of credits of their study programme abroad is relatively high in Italy, Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden.

In the Eurobarometer youth survey, the proportion of young people who had gone abroad for study, training, work, exchanges or volunteering was also above the EU-28 average (of 31 %) in Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Ireland, Spain, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia.

Figure 4.1: Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) having participated or not in a learning experience abroad by country, 2019



Source: Flash Eurobarometer 478. Volume A. Question D7Q (1 and 2): 'Excluding travel for tourism or living with one's family abroad, have you ever stayed abroad for at least two weeks? For example, for studies, training, work, exchanges or volunteering'.

Notes: EU Member States are displayed in descending order of proportion of respondents having participated in a learning experience abroad.

By contrast, only around 20 % of the respondents in Greece, Croatia and Malta reported having taken part in a learning experience abroad. In these countries, around 40 % reported that they had not even considered such a possibility. Although youth mobility was higher in Hungary, Austria and Romania, 40 % of the respondents in these three countries also had not considered going abroad for study or volunteering. Many of these young people were just not interested in such an experience, whereas others felt that it would not be possible because

⁽⁷⁾ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020a, p. 136.

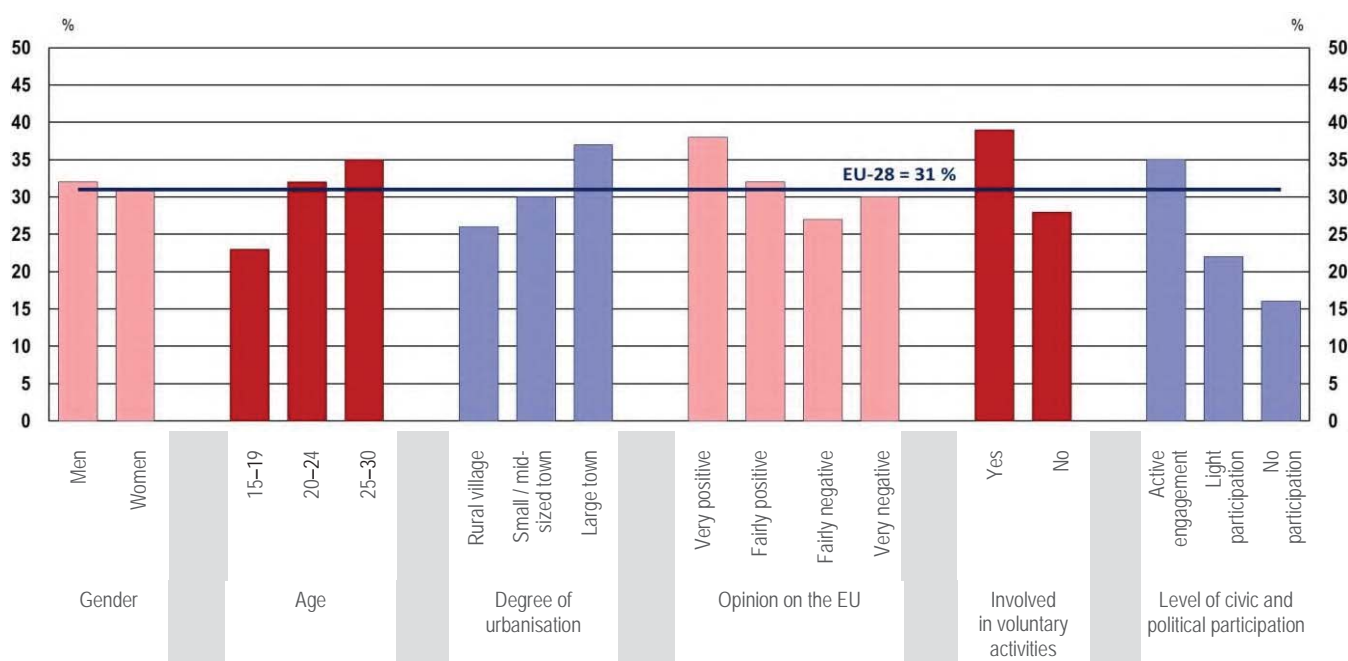
of family-, work- or study-related issues (see Section 4.3). On average, 32 % of young people in the EU-28 had not ever considered taking part in a learning experience abroad.

A larger proportion (37 %) had considered the possibility of taking part in such an experience but had never participated in one. This was the case for 40 % or more of the respondents in Germany, Greece, Spain, Croatia, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia and Finland, and for 39 % in Belgium, Denmark and France.

In all these countries, the ratio of the young people who considered participating in a learning experience abroad but did not participate to all young people who considered participating (including those who took part) was particularly high. Despite their interest, these young people could not go for financial or other reasons (see Section 4.2). In Greece, Croatia and Portugal, more than two in three of the respondents who had considered it did not take part in a learning experience abroad. This was the case for more than one in two of the respondents in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Spain, France, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Finland.

Figure 4.2 shows the EU-28 averages for the proportions of young people who went abroad for at least 2 weeks for learning or volunteering, by gender, age, degree of urbanisation, opinion on the EU, involvement in voluntary activities and level of civic and political participation. The averages for young men and young women are very similar. The differences are larger between age groups, with the outbound mobility increasing with age. On average, only 23 % of the respondents aged under 20 had taken part in a learning experience abroad, compared with 32 % of those aged 20–24, and 35 % of those aged 25–30.

Figure 4.2: Proportions of young people (aged 15-30) reporting having gone abroad for a learning experience of at least 2 weeks by characteristic, 2019



Source: Flash Eurobarometer 478. Volume B. Question D7Q: 'Excluding travel for tourism or living with one's family abroad, have you ever stayed abroad for at least two weeks? For example, for studies, training, work, exchanges or volunteering'.

The outbound mobility among young people living in rural areas was lower than that among young people living in urban areas. While, on average, only 26 % of young people living in a rural area had gone abroad for at least 2 weeks for learning or volunteering, this percentage increased to 30 % for those living in a small or mid-sized town and 37 % for young people living in a large town.

The proportion of young people who had participated in a learning experience abroad was higher among those who had a positive opinion of the EU, were involved in voluntary activities and were more engaged in society by voting or through other forms of participation (see Chapter 2). Recent literature also suggest that better-off students could be participating in larger proportions than young people with a lower socio-economic status. Next sections will provide further insight on the matter by examining the reasons given by young people for not participating in such an experience.

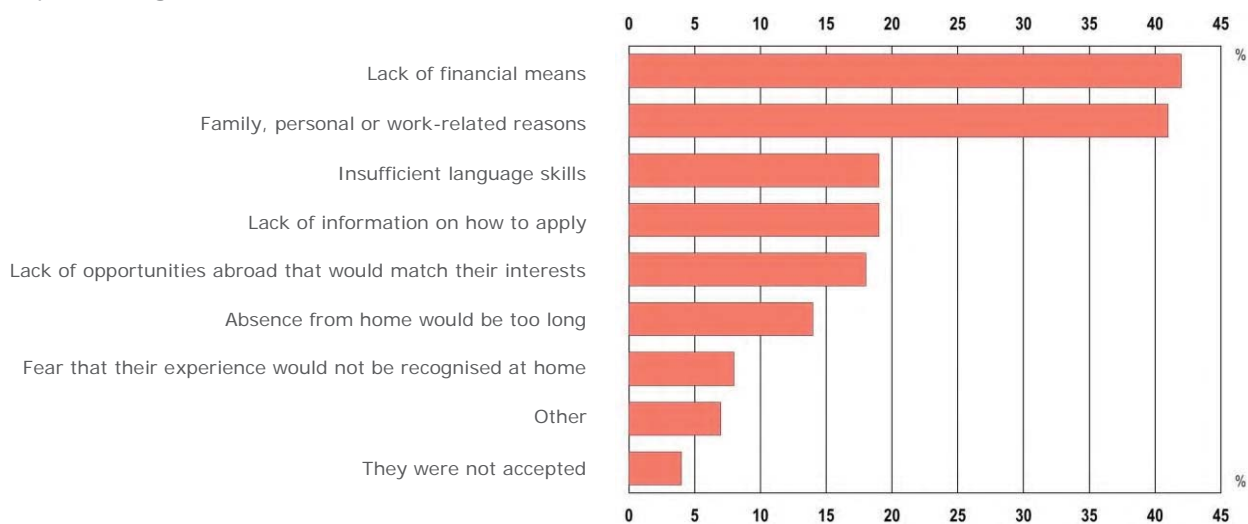
4.2. Reasons for considering but not participating in a learning experience abroad

This section examines the reasons why more than one third of the respondents to the Eurobarometer youth survey considered taking part in a learning experience abroad but did not participate. Considering a learning experience abroad may not have the same meaning for all the respondents. Some may have taken active steps or even applied, while others may have just thought about it.

As illustrated in Figure 4.3, an average of 42 % of these young people reported that they did not have the necessary financial means. A similar proportion (41 %) did not go for family, personal or work-related reasons. These data suggest that many of the young people who considered a learning experience abroad but eventually could not participate could be coming from a low socio-economic background. The 2011 Eurostudent report showed that finances and separation from family is particularly problematic for disadvantaged students ⁽⁸⁾.

Almost 20 % of the respondents said that they did not know the language sufficiently or how to apply. This could also concern to a greater extent young people with a low socio-economic status.

Figure 4.3: Reasons given by young people (aged 15-30) for not taking part in a learning experience abroad despite having considered it (%), EU-28, 2019



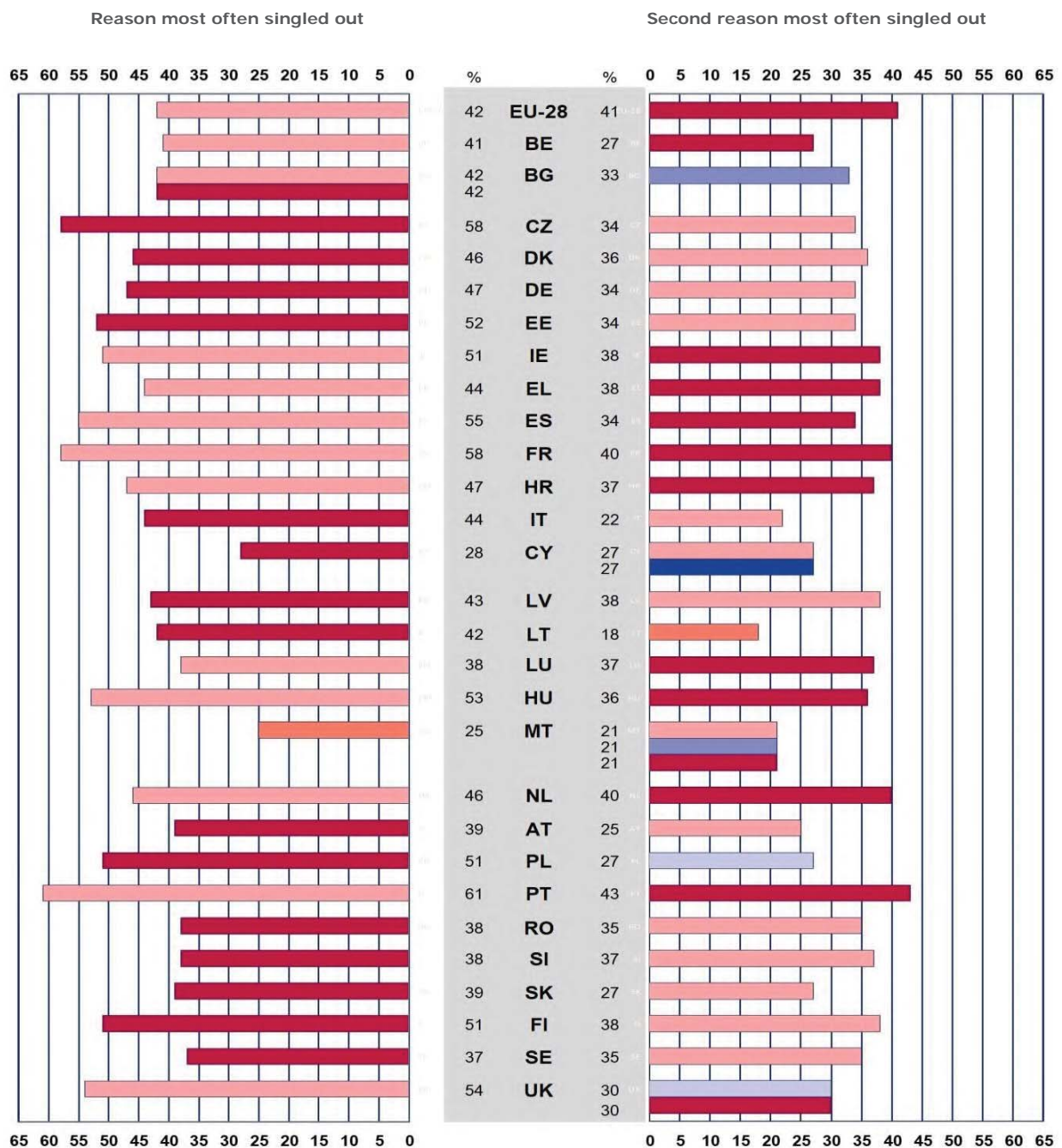
Source: Flash Eurobarometer 478. Volume B. Q3a: 'For which of these reasons did you not take part in a learning experience abroad even though you considered it? (Max. 3 answers)'.

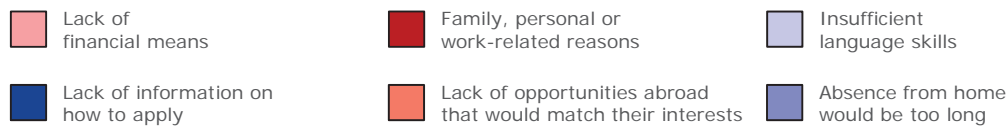
⁽⁸⁾ Orr et al., 2011.

Finally, 18 % of the respondents could not find any opportunities that matched their interests, 14 % felt that their absence from home would be too long, 8 % feared that their experience would not be recognised on their return, and 4 % could not go because their application was not accepted.

Figure 4.4 shows which of these reasons for not taking part in a learning experience abroad were most frequently given by young people in each country. The lack of financial means and family, personal or work-related issues were the main obstacles preventing young people from participating in a learning experience abroad in almost all countries.

Figure 4.4: Reasons given by young people (aged 15-30) for not taking part in a learning experience abroad despite having considered it (%) by country, 2019





Source: Flash Eurobarometer 478. Volume A. Q3a: 'For which of these reasons did you not take part in a learning experience abroad even though you considered it? (Max. 3 answers)'.

Family, personal or work-related reasons was the main obstacle in 15 countries and the lack of financial means was the main obstacle in 11 countries. Each of these reasons was provided by similar proportions of respondents in Bulgaria. Only in Malta was the most common reason neither of these but that respondents could not find any opportunities abroad that matched their interests.

In countries with a high proportion of respondents who had considered participating but had not taken part in a learning experience abroad (see Figure 4.1), the lack of financial means appears to be an important hurdle. This was the case for more than half of these young people in Ireland, Spain, France, Portugal and the United Kingdom. The proportion was almost as high in Belgium, Greece, Croatia and the Netherlands. In all these countries, the second most common factor was work or other personal or family circumstances, which generally affected around one third of the respondents, but more in France, the Netherlands and Portugal.

In Czechia, Denmark, Germany and Finland, where a large proportion of young people had also not participated in a learning experience abroad despite their potential interest, around half or more of the respondents reported family, personal or work-related reasons for not participating, and more than one third reported a lack of financial means. Similarly, in Bulgaria and Slovenia, more than one third of respondents indicated that they did not participate because of a lack of financial means and family, personal or work-related reasons.

As shown in the right panel of Figure 4.4, the lack of financial means was the second most frequent response in 12 countries, and family, personal or work-related issues was the second most frequent response in another 11 countries, including the United Kingdom, where the same number of respondents also reported insufficient language skills as an obstacle. Insufficient language skills was also the second most frequent response in Poland. In Malta, several second reasons were reported by similar proportions of young people, namely the lack of financial means, family, personal or work-related issues and the fact that their absence from home would have been too long. The long absence from home was also the second most frequent response in Bulgaria, while in Cyprus it was the lack of information on how to apply and in Lithuania it was the lack of opportunities matching respondents' interests.

4.3. Reasons for not considering a learning experience abroad

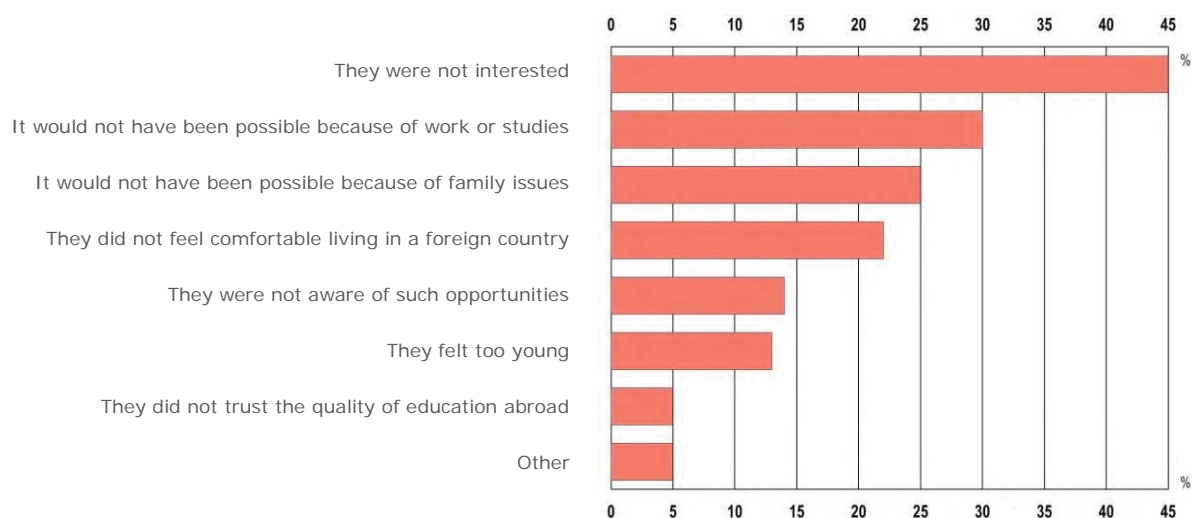
As shown in the previous section, family, personal and work-related issues prevented many young people who were interested in taking part in a learning experience abroad from doing so. Similar reasons prevented many other young people from even considering a learning experience abroad.

Figure 4.5 shows the main reasons given by young people for not considering taking part in a learning experience abroad. On average, 45 % were simply not interested. However, for a large proportion it would not have been possible because of their work or studies (30 %) or family circumstances (25 %). The family situation was a stronger explanatory factor for young women than for young men: 29 % of the female respondents reported family issues as a reason for not considering a learning experience abroad, compared

with 21 % of the male respondents. By contrast, work or studies seemed to be more often an obstacle for young men (32 %) than for young women (27 %).

Factors concerning young people's confidence to live abroad were the next most common reasons reported. An average of 22 % of these young people did not feel comfortable living in a foreign country, and 13 % felt too young for such an experience. A similar percentage (14 %) reported not being aware of such opportunities. Generally, young men (16 %) appeared to be less informed than young women (11 %). There could also be a relationship between the lack of information and young people's socio-economic status, which may be worth further investigation. Finally, only a small percentage of the respondents expressed concerns about the quality of education in the other country.

Figure 4.5: Reasons given by young people (aged 15-30) for not considering a learning experience abroad (%), EU-28, 2019



Source: Flash Eurobarometer 478. Volume B. Q3b: 'For which of these reasons did you not consider taking part in a learning experience abroad? (Max. 3 answers)'.

Figure 4.6 shows the reasons most often provided by young people in each country for not considering the possibility of travelling abroad for learning, working or volunteering. The largest proportion of respondents in all countries except France (where this was the third most common answer), Luxembourg and Hungary (where it was the second) reported a lack of interest.

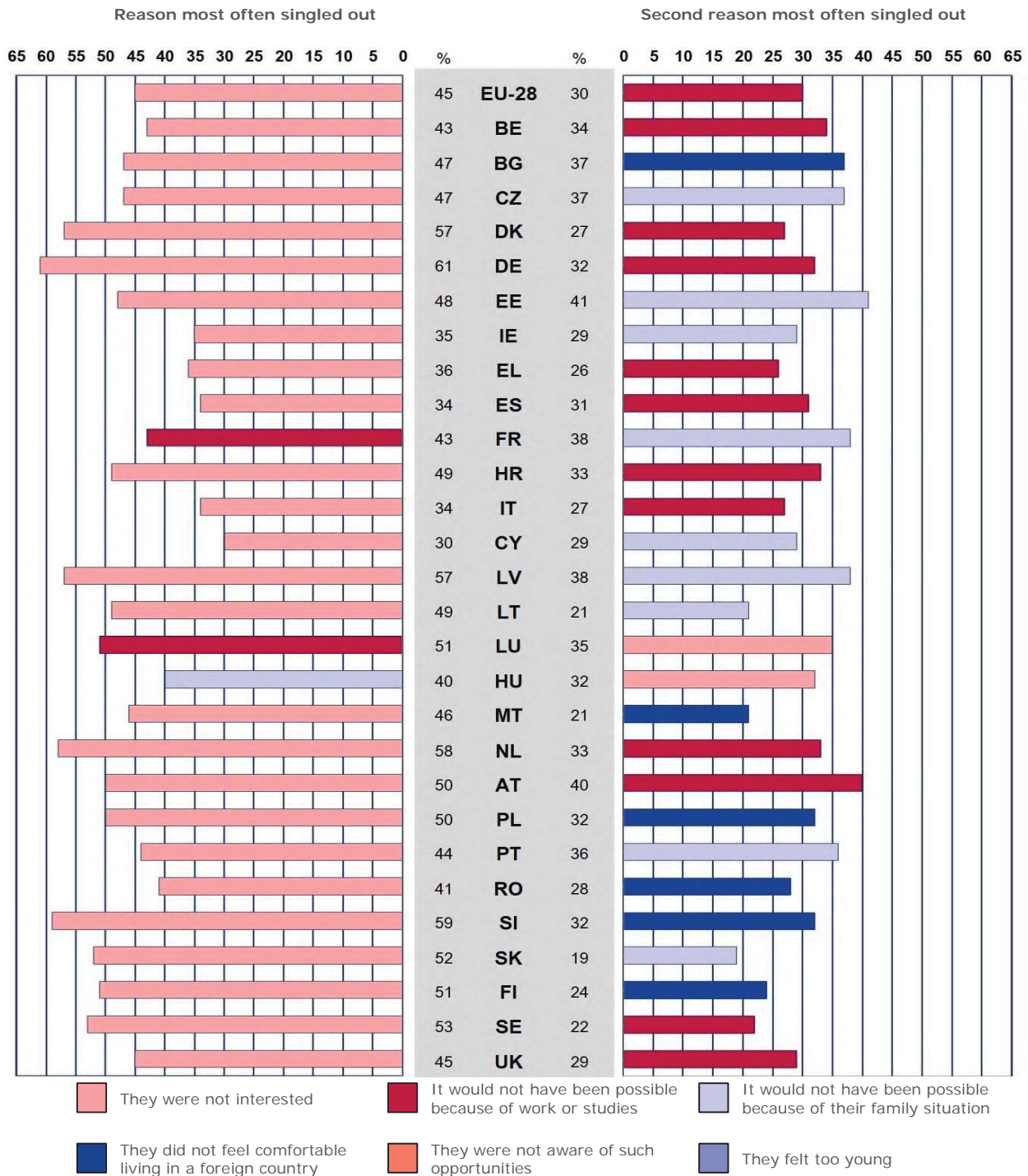
The lack of interest was an explanatory factor for half or more of the respondents in 10 countries (Denmark, Germany, Latvia, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland and Sweden). The proportion was almost as high in another 10 countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Croatia, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, Romania and the United Kingdom).

In France and Luxembourg, the largest proportions of these young people (43 % and 51 %, respectively) reported that a learning experience abroad would not have been possible because of their work or studies. This was the second most reported reason in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

In Hungary, the most common reason reported by young people who had not considered going abroad on a learning experience (40 %) was family circumstances. This was the second most reported reason in Czechia, Estonia, Ireland, France, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal and Slovakia.

In Bulgaria, Poland and Slovenia, more than 30 % of the respondents said that they would not feel comfortable living in a foreign country. In Malta, Romania and Finland, this was also the second most common response.

Figure 4.6: Reasons given by young people (aged 15-30) for not considering a learning experience abroad (%) by country, 2019



Source: Flash Eurobarometer 478. Volume A. Q3b: 'For which of these reasons did you not consider taking part in a learning experience abroad? (Max. 3 answers)'.

4.4. Participation in Erasmus+ learning mobility actions

The 2014–2020 Erasmus+ programme included five actions. Key action 1 aimed to support the mobility of individuals (learners and staff) to allow them to undertake a learning or professional experience in another country ⁽⁹⁾.

For learners (i.e. students, trainees, apprentices and young people), the main aim was to improve their learning, employability and career prospects, their sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, their self-empowerment and self-esteem, their foreign language competences and their motivation to pursue further education or training after the mobility period abroad. The aim was also to promote active participation in society, intercultural understanding, and awareness of the European project and EU values ⁽¹⁰⁾.

This section looks at the participation of learners in Erasmus+ mobility actions of at least 1 month in the fields of higher education (HE) and vocational education and training (VET) ⁽¹¹⁾. The reference years (2015, 2019 and 2020) refer to the starting year of the learning experience abroad ⁽¹²⁾. Many other students from these countries may have studied abroad outside the Erasmus+ programme. The Bologna implementation reports cover in detail the overall credit and degree mobility in higher education ⁽¹³⁾. In addition, the mobility scoreboard includes information on credit mobility by type of mobility scheme ⁽¹⁴⁾.

Figure 4.7 shows the numbers of learners from Erasmus+ countries per 10 000 young people (aged 15–29) who took part in Erasmus+ mobility actions in HE and VET starting in 2019. The table beneath the figure displays the total numbers of learners per country who took part.

Liechtenstein and the Baltic states recorded the highest participation rates. Compared with the sizes of their young populations, engagement in these Erasmus+ mobility actions was also relevant in other small countries such as Slovenia, Malta and Luxembourg. The participation rate was smaller in Cyprus, where a small proportion of graduates go abroad to study some credits only, but around one third study their complete programme abroad ⁽¹⁵⁾.

Medium-sized countries such as the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal and Finland also had high participation rates in Erasmus+ mobility learning actions in the field of HE and VET. Almost 18 800 participants came from the Netherlands, more than twice the number who came from countries with similar populations such as Romania. There were also twice as many participants from Portugal (almost 11 800) as from Greece, Hungary and Sweden. The number of participants from Finland (around 6 500) was also significantly higher than the numbers of participants from other countries with similar populations such as Bulgaria and Slovakia.

⁽⁹⁾ The other four actions were cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices, support for policy reform, Jean Monnet activities and sport.

⁽¹⁰⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about_en

⁽¹¹⁾ The other field of actions were school education, adult education and youth. Youth exchanges have not been included because they usually last up to 21 days, while youth volunteering will be examined in the next section.

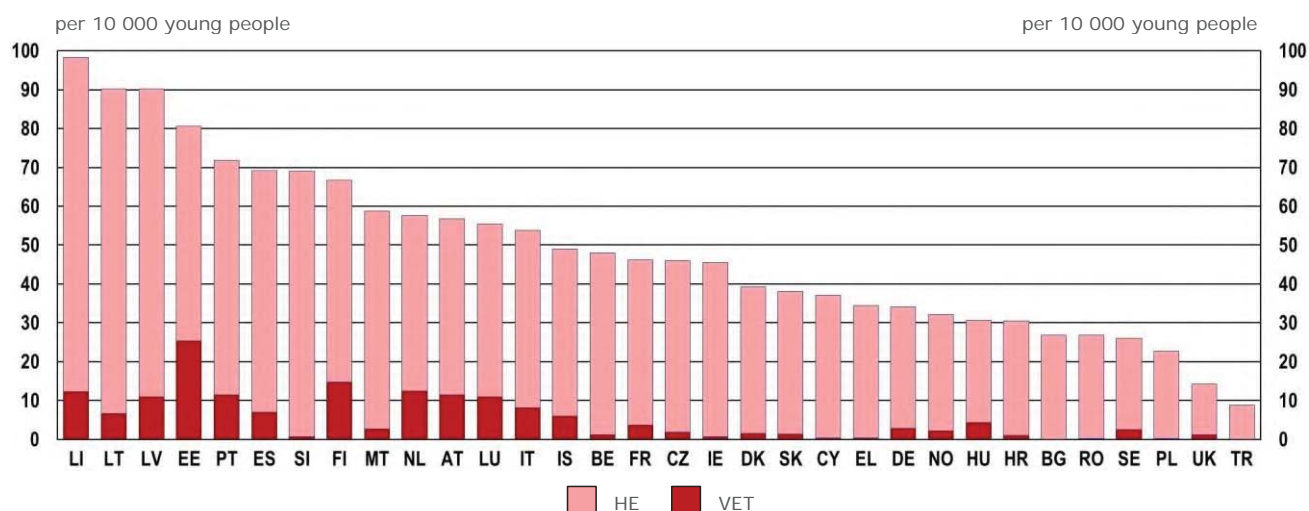
⁽¹²⁾ The data refer to contracted individual mobilities starting in the reference year. They may have been contracted under a previous year's Erasmus+ call or may have ended after the reference year.

⁽¹³⁾ The most recent Bologna implementation report covered the 2016/17 reference year. Data for 2019 are not yet available. See European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020a.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Data from the last mobility scoreboard refer to 2017. See European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020b.

⁽¹⁵⁾ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020b, pp. 98–100.

Figure 4.7: Numbers of learners per 10 000 young people (aged 15-29) who participated in Erasmus+ mobility actions in HE and VET (for at least 1 month) starting in 2019



Numbers of learners participating in Erasmus+ mobility actions in HE and VET (for at least 1 month) starting in 2019

	BE	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU	MT
HE	9 577	2 802	7 233	4 256	43 074	1 182	4 056	5 684	44 499	49 893	2 019	41 106	685	2 375	4 028	522	4 402	549
VET	250	0	301	166	3 944	543	64	54	4 978	4 263	68	7 386	7	330	323	128	728	26
	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE		UK		IS	LI	MK	NO	RS	TR
HE	14 694	7 147	14 625	9 902	8 482	2 111	3 480	5 040	4 452		16 174		333	56	361	3 094	889	16 938
VET	4 075	1 797	99	1 879	51	23	136	1 438	478		1 459		47	8	0	233	0	100

Source: Erasmus+ Dashboard, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (data extracted on 5 March 2021) and Eurostat [yth_demo_060].

Notes: Countries in the column chart are displayed in descending order of number of learners per 10 000 young people who participated in Erasmus+ mobility actions in HE and VET (for at least 1 month) starting in 2019.

In the case of Sweden, a large proportion of young people reported having taken part in an experience abroad in the Eurobarometer youth survey (see Figure 4.1). In fact, the outward mobility in this country is relatively high but most of the credit mobility takes place outside the Erasmus programme ⁽¹⁶⁾.

Among the large countries, young people from Spain and Italy were among those who benefited the most from the Erasmus+ programme, in both relative and absolute terms. Almost 50 000 participants came from each of these countries. More than 54 000 participants came from France, but the number of young people aged 15–29 is higher in this country. By contrast, less than 15 000 came from Poland.

More than 90 % of these learning experiences abroad were in the field of HE, usually consisting of a study period and/or traineeship at a partner higher education institution as part of the study programme to complete a university degree ⁽¹⁷⁾. VET mobility activities, which represented less than 10 % of these learning experiences abroad, usually took the form of a full work placement in a company or a combination of school-based learning and a strong work-based component organised by a VET provider.

In 12 countries, participation in a learning experience abroad in the field of VET was particularly significant. Estonia, Finland and the Netherlands had the highest participation rates per 10 000 young people. They also

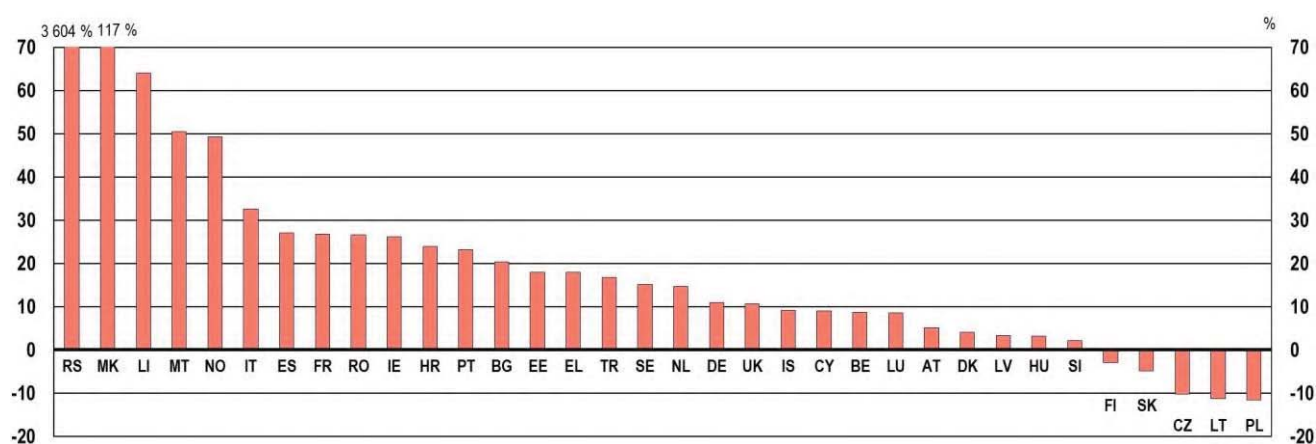
⁽¹⁶⁾ Ibid.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Other activities in the field of HE comprised cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices, support for policy reform, Jean Monnet activities and sport.

had the highest proportions of VET learners, amounting to around 22 % of all learners in the Netherlands and Finland and more than 30 % in Estonia. Participation in VET learning activities abroad relative to the size of the young population was also high in Spain, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Austria, Portugal, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

The total number of learners from these Erasmus+ countries who started a mobility action abroad in 2019 was nearly 17 % higher than in 2015. As shown in Figure 4.8, between 2015 and 2019 the number of participants increased in almost all countries. Only Finland, Slovakia, Czechia, Lithuania and Poland saw a decrease.

Figure 4.8: Percentage differences between 2015 and 2019 in the numbers of learners starting an Erasmus+ mobility action of at least 1 month in HE and VET



Source: Erasmus+ Dashboard, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. Data extracted on 5 March 2021.

Notes: Countries are displayed in descending order of percentage difference between 2015 and 2019 in the number of learners starting an Erasmus+ mobility action of at least 1 month in HE and VET.

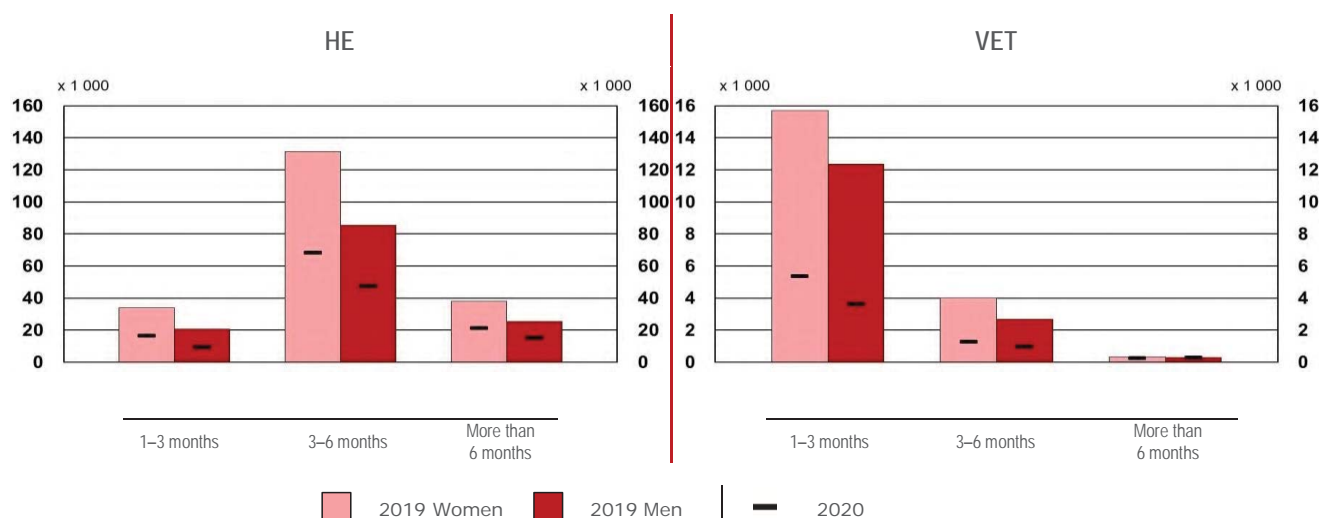
The highest increases took place in countries with the lowest number of participants in 2015, namely Serbia, Northern Macedonia, Liechtenstein and Malta. In 2015, only 24 learners came from Serbia, compared with almost 900 in 2019. There were twice as many participants from Northern Macedonia in 2019 as in 2015, and the numbers of learners increased by more than half in Liechtenstein and Malta.

Similarly, in Norway, the number of participants increased by nearly 50 % in 2019 compared with 2015. In Italy, Spain and France, which had had among the highest numbers of participants in 2015, the increase in 2019 was in the region of 30 %. Romania and Ireland also showed similar increases. In Croatia and Portugal, the numbers of participants increased by more than 20 %.

In terms of gender, around 60 % of the participants were women and 40 % were men. The proportion of male participants was slightly higher for VET than for HE.

Around 60 % of these learning experiences abroad lasted from 3 to 6 months, around 22 % lasted between 1 and 3 months, and around 17 % lasted for more than 6 months. As shown in Figure 4.9, while the learning experience for the great majority of HE students lasted for more than 3 months, for most VET students their experience abroad lasted for 1–3 months. In HE, the proportion of male participants increased with the duration of the learning experience abroad. In VET, activities lasting between 3 and 6 months registered the lowest proportion of male participants.

Figure 4.9: Numbers of learners starting an Erasmus+ mobility action in 2019 and 2020 by gender and duration



Source: Erasmus+ Dashboard, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. Data extracted on 5 March 2021.

Notes: The number of contracted mobility actions starting in 2020 refers to those reported by 5 March 2021. This number may increase with ongoing reporting.

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak had an impact on many of the Erasmus+ activities that started in 2019 and were to continue throughout 2020. A survey conducted by the Erasmus Student Network in March 2020 revealed that one quarter of the students taking part in Erasmus+ mobility actions had had to cancel their experience abroad and return home. This number continued to increase during 2020 ⁽¹⁸⁾. More than one third of respondents experienced problems with arranging transport to return home, with accommodation in the hosting country or with access to basic needs such as food and sanitary products. Half of the students who were able to continue their stay abroad moved to online learning, and another third had their lessons partly moved online or postponed.

The pandemic may also have affected the numbers of participants starting a learning experience in 2020. Although the reporting of these activities is still ongoing and the data available are not final, the provisional data can help to illustrate the effect of the pandemic.

In 2020, the number of learners (from the Erasmus+ programme countries) who started a mobility action of at least 1 month in HE or VET was half that in 2019. The decreases in the numbers of participants from Spain, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Liechtenstein, Norway, Serbia and Turkey were even higher.

The ratio of the number of learners starting in 2020 to the number of learners starting in 2019 increased with the duration of the experience abroad, that is, the shorter the duration, the larger the decrease in number of participants in 2020 in relative terms. This contrast was more remarkable in the field of VET, where the number of learners undertaking experiences of less than 6 months in 2020 was around one third that in 2019 – while the numbers undertaking experiences lasting more than 6 months were almost the same.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Gabriels and Benke-Aberg, 2020.

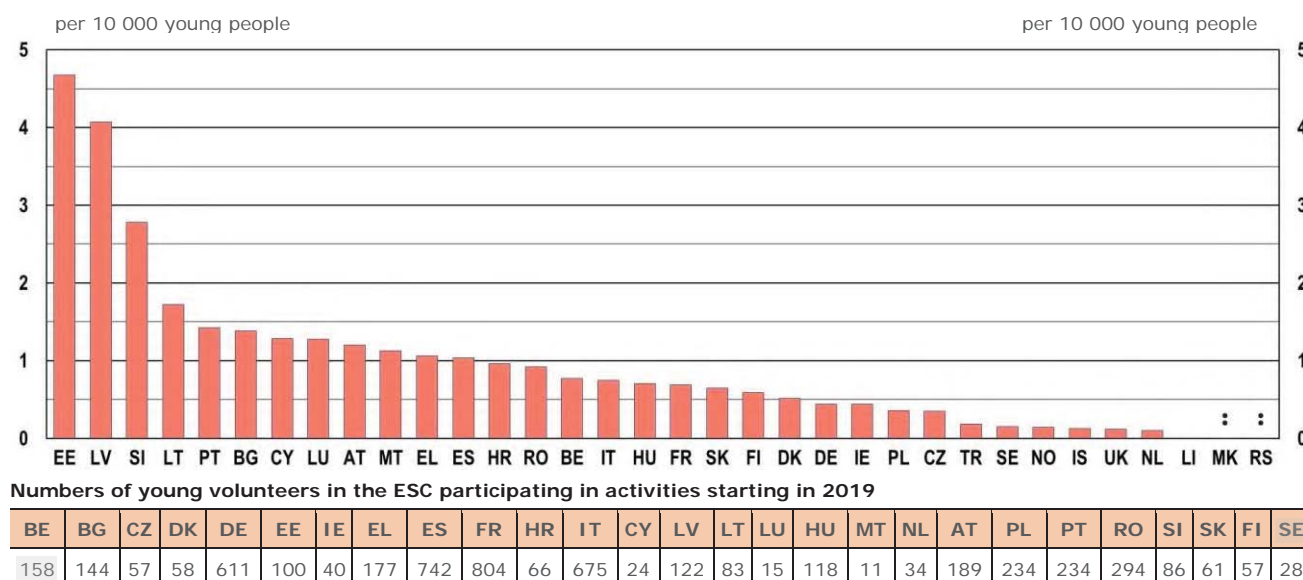
4.5. Participation in the European Solidarity Corps

The aim of the 2018–2020 ESC programme was to enhance the engagement of young people and organisations in accessible and high-quality solidarity activities, with a particular focus on promoting social inclusion ⁽¹⁹⁾.

Figure 4.10 shows the numbers of young people (aged 15–29) per 10 000 who took part in a volunteering project or partnership (individually or in a team) funded by the ESC that started in 2019 ⁽²⁰⁾.

The three Baltic states and Slovenia had the highest numbers of participants per young population. Young people from Portugal, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Austria and Malta were also relatively more engaged than those from other European countries. The ESC participation rate was particularly low in Turkey, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Liechtenstein.

Figure 4.10: Numbers of young people per 10 000 population (aged 15–29) who took part in a volunteering project or partnership (individually or in a team) funded by the ESC starting in 2019



Source: ESC Dashboard, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. Data extracted on 15 February 2021.

Notes: Data refer to actual participants. Countries in the column chart are displayed in descending order of number of young people per 10 000 population (aged 15–29) who took part in a volunteering project or partnership (individually or in a team) funded by the ESC starting in 2019.

Overall, as was the case for Erasmus+ learning mobility activities, the largest number of participants came from France (more than 800), followed by Spain, Italy and Germany.

In terms of gender, around 60 % of the participants were women and 40 % were men – as was the case for Erasmus+.

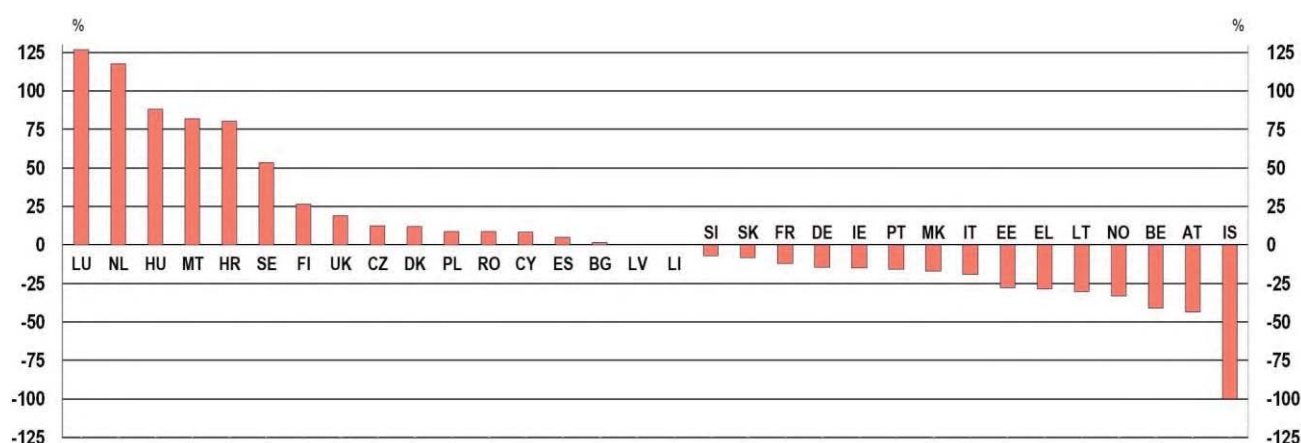
The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on participation in volunteering activities funded by the ESC may have been more limited than the impact on Erasmus+ mobility activities. There were 5 850 volunteers in 2019 compared with 5 709 in 2020, a decrease of only around 2 % (Figure 4.11). However, it is worth noting that, in 2019, there were still Erasmus+ activities involving more than 4 000 young volunteers, while in 2020 the number of these volunteers was below 600.

⁽¹⁹⁾ https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/european-solidarity-corps_en

⁽²⁰⁾ The other field of actions were traineeships and jobs, and solidarity projects.

In fact, ESC volunteering teams were a relevant and strategic instrument to bridge inter-generational and social divides exacerbated by the crisis. When physical cross-border participation was not possible, National Agencies could support volunteering teams with solely physical in-country participation and, where possible, a transnational dimension without or with limited physical mobility (e.g. virtual participation of young people from other countries).

Figure 4.11: Percentage differences between the number of young volunteers starting an activity in the ESC in 2019 and the number of young volunteers starting an activity in the ESC in 2020



Source: ESC Dashboard, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. Data extracted on 15 February 2021.

Notes: Data refer to actual participants. Countries are displayed in descending order of percentage difference between the number of young volunteers starting an activity in the ESC in 2019 and the number of young volunteers starting an activity in the ESC in 2020.

The numbers of volunteers decreased between 2019 and 2020 in around half of these countries. The decrease was particularly significant in Iceland, Austria, Belgium, Norway and Lithuania.

In the remaining countries, the numbers of young volunteers in the ESC increased. In Luxembourg and the Netherlands, more than twice as many volunteers started an ESC project or partnership in 2020 as in 2019. In Croatia, Malta and Hungary, the numbers of young volunteers increased by more than three quarters and in Sweden the number of volunteers increased by more than half.

Conclusions

Youth mobility contributes to the development of young people's skills and competences and to the promotion of intercultural understanding. Young people taking part in a learning experience abroad also tend to be more engaged in society.

According to Eurobarometer youth surveys, nearly one third of young people in Europe have participated in a learning experience abroad (for study, training, work, exchanges or volunteering), more than one third have considered the possibility but never participated, and nearly one third have never considered it.

The lack of financial means and family, personal or work-related issues were the main obstacles preventing young people that were interested from participating in a learning experience abroad. Insufficient language skills and the lack of information on how to apply were also important reasons, although they concerned fewer young people. A large proportion of young people never considered a learning experience abroad because of their work or studies or family circumstances.

The number of learners in Erasmus+ mobility actions in HE and VET increased substantially between 2015 and 2019, but decreased in 2020 as the result of the COVID-19 outbreak. By contrast, participation in the ESC remained stable despite the pandemic.

Young people from Spain and Italy are among those who benefitted the most from these Erasmus+ mobility actions in 2019, in both relative and absolute terms. Compared with the sizes of their young populations, the participation rate was particularly high in Liechtenstein, the Baltic states, Portugal, Slovenia and Finland. The three Baltic states, Portugal and Slovenia also had the highest numbers of volunteers in the ESC per 10 000 young people.