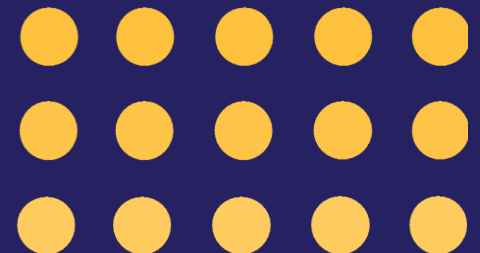# Unisafe final conference Brussels

Student mobility in an era of crisis: what role for student organisations supporting mobile students during emergencies?

Juan Rayón González

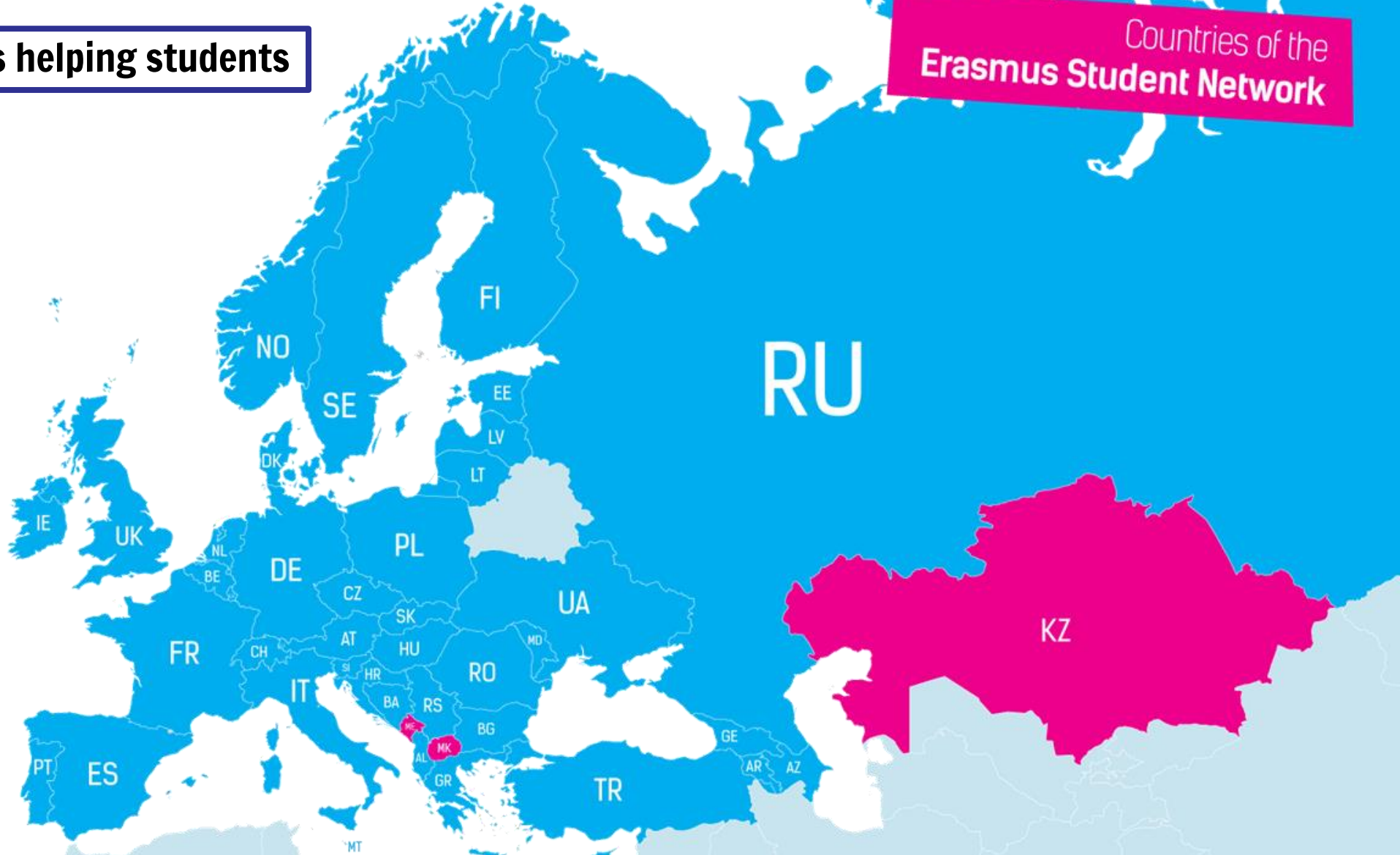**President of the Erasmus Student Network**

Students helping students

Countries of the Erasmus Student Network

ESN member
as of GA Brussels 2021

Candidate country
as of GA Zagreb 2022

41 National Organisations

500+ local sections

esn.org

**ESN** is the key international student and alumni volunteering organisation in Europe.
We work for the enrichment of society through international students, focusing on access to, and impact of, learning mobility opportunities

Student support in times of crisis

1. Evidence of the main problems faced by students

2. ESN´s response to large scale emergencies and lessons learned from it

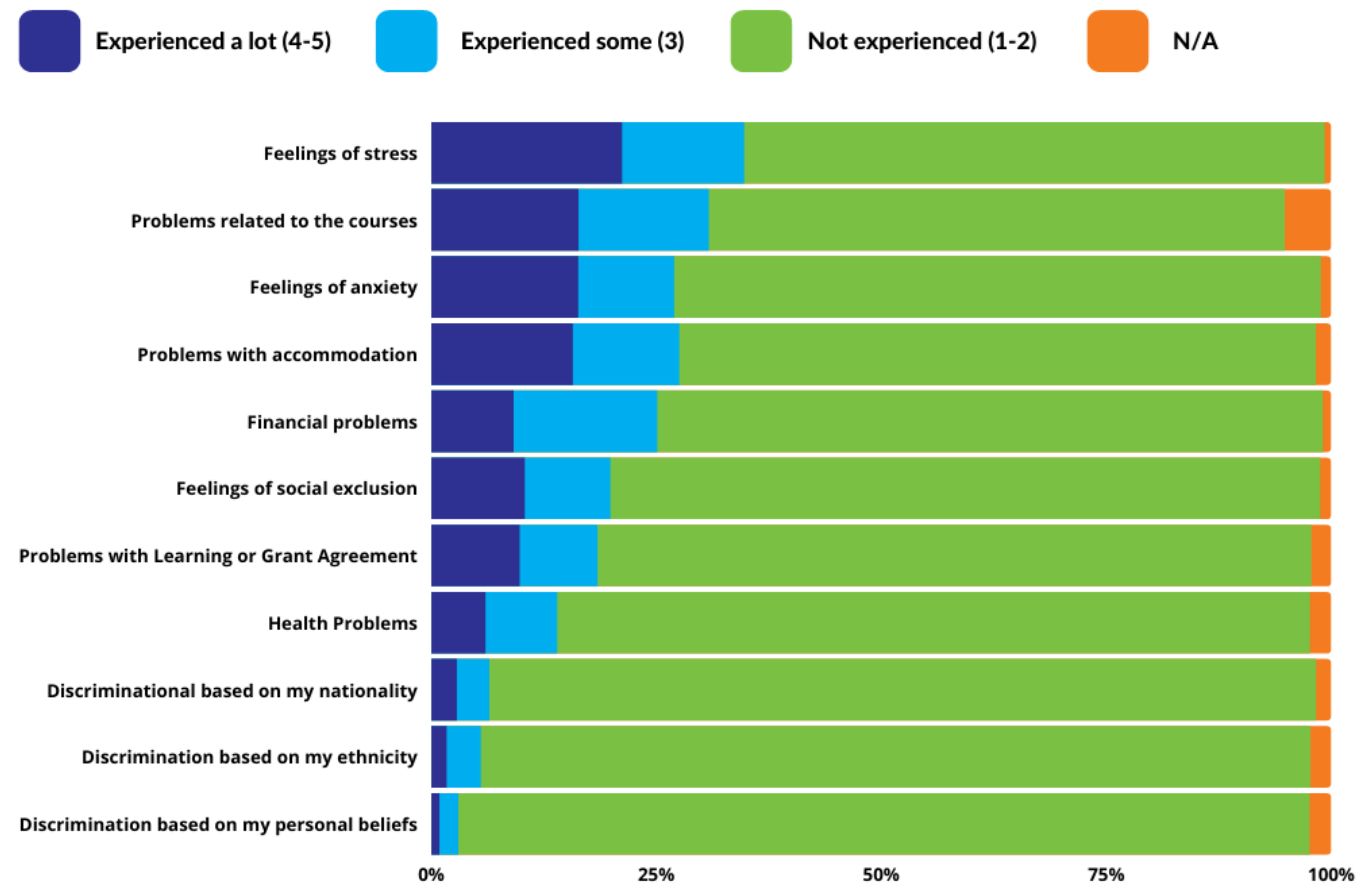3. HEI - student organisation collaboration at the local level
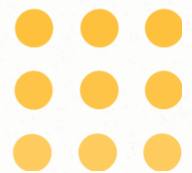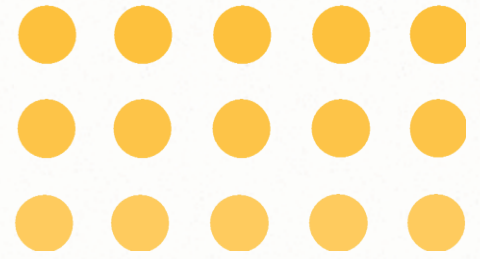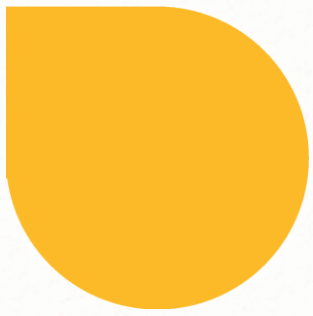
What do we know about the main fears and problems faced by mobile students?

Main problems faced by students (ESNsurvey -XIV edition)

Stress, anxiety and accommodation (scams in many cases) can be tackled with better student support systems

Looking at the qualitative data:

- **Accommodation scams** seem to be the most frequent problem reported by students.
- **Financial aspects** are closely correlated with other issues.
- Aspects related to **discrimination may not be prevalent in absolute terms**, but they affect students from fewer opportunities disproportionately.
- **Communication and pre-departure preparation** are key.
- **Peer to peer support makes a difference:** students who did not get it report they would have needed it, and those who got it expressed their satisfaction.
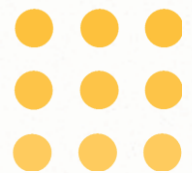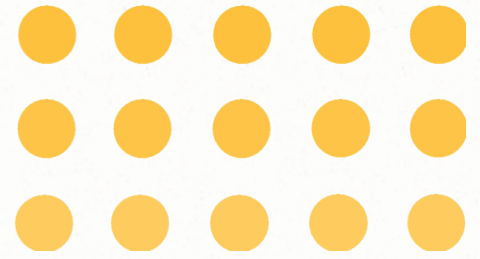
Background matters

Students with fewer opportunities are more likely to suffer discrimination and face problems while abroad

Student impressions: Inclusion & Equality
of exchange students from fewer opportunities backgrounds

76%

had **positive** experiences while abroad.

34%
of students felt that they were treated differently or unfairly at their host university

15%

felt that they did not have equal access to resources and opportunities compared to home students.

I was ill several times and started having problems with my mental health.

it's incredibly hard when you don't have people you can lean on.

- student quote

Health concerns raised by students

Student impression: treatment by members of the host society among students from fewer opportunities backgrounds

34% felt treated unfairly or negatively at some point during their exchange

66% never felt treated unfairly or negatively during their exchange

	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Not applicable
Students from host university	1%	2%	10%	21%	62%	4%
Professors from host university	4%	3%	9%	18%	67%	3%
Staff from host university	1%	2%	7%	15%	71%	4%
Colleagues in workplace	1%	1%	4%	8%	51%	36%
Managers in workplace	1%	1%	3%	7%	50%	38%

Legend: Very often · Often · Sometimes · Rarely · Never · Not applicable

Student impression: discrimination on exchange

76% did **not** experience any form of discrimination during their exchange

24% did experience discrimination during their exchange

16%	Nationality
6%	Race/Ethnicity
5%	Gender
2%	Social status
2%	Sexual orientation
2%	Religion
2%	Other
2%	Age
1%	Gender Identity
1%	Disability

Students from an ethnic minority group

10x

Students from with lgbtqi+ background

15x

More likely to be discriminated on exchange then their peers

Student impression:
discrimination on exchange

Reassurance about the support while abroad

> "There are so many options, but how to choose the best one for me and what if at the end I choose but I don't like it there.

In addition, students felt there was a lack of information about the support provided while abroad. They did not know if they would have a contact abroad in case of emergency – students were worried about what to do if they encountered a crisis. Students also felt that the communications about mobility focused too much on the positives and did not clarify what to do if things were to 'go wrong'. This made students uneasy about how they would handle a crisis abroad.

The SIEM focus groups show how important pre-departure information and support mechanisms are for students from fewer opportunities backgrounds. Not being sure about aspects such as accommodation, crisis management or administration can act as barriers to mobility.

What happens if something goes wrong? Who should I contact?

Technical adjustments: interinstitutional agreement and Erasmus Student Charter (SIEM recommendations)

The documents should create a framework through which information is created clearly and support systems are explained.

Clear division of responsibilities between HEIs

ECHE and Erasmus Student Charter commitments should be clearly divided so students can know who to refer to.

More comprehensive IIA for better information sharing

The interinstitutional agreement should include a more comprehensive definition of support measures, either through the main document or complementary information sharing.
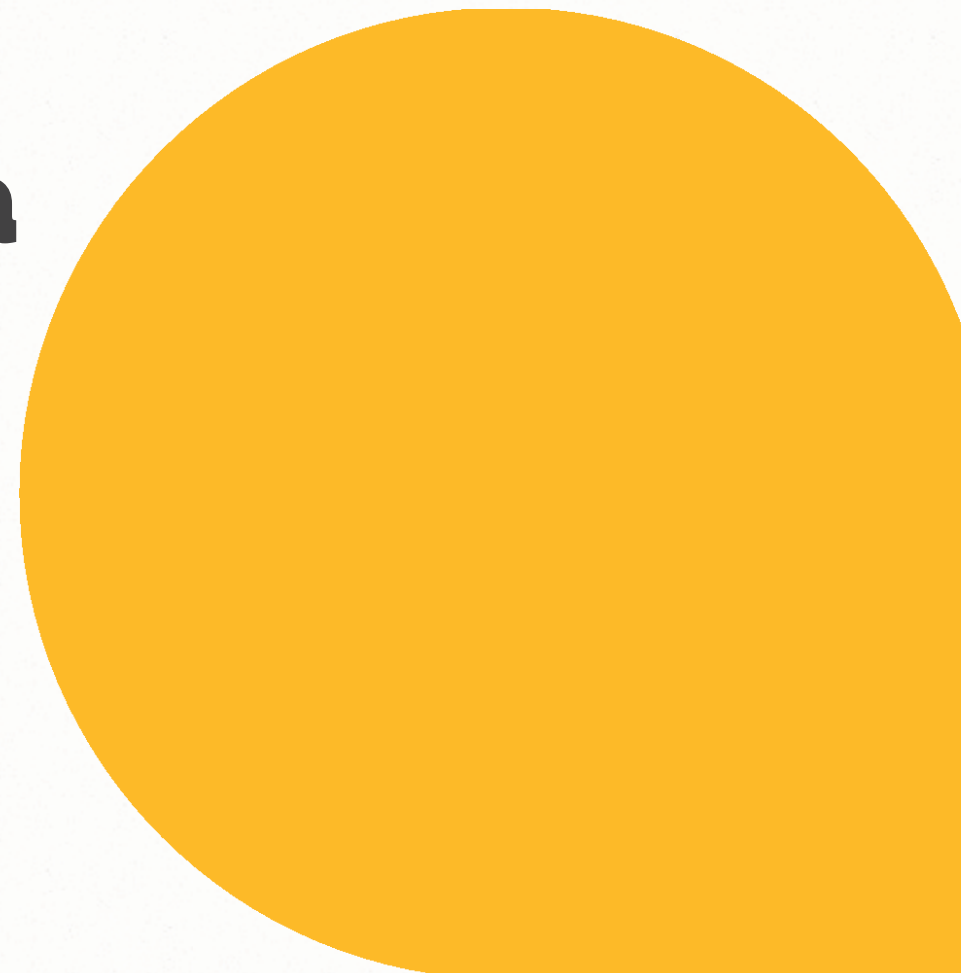
Complaints and issues collection

The Erasmus+ should also include a system to report issues on exchange so students can share their problems.
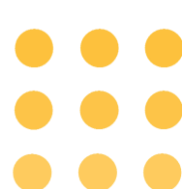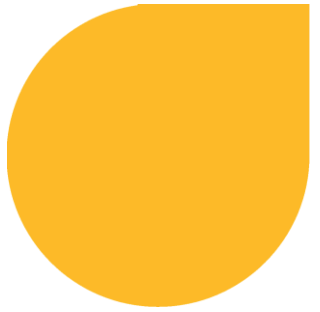
How have we fared the era of crisis and what have we learned from it?

COVID-19 pandemic

- **Coordination** between ESN sections and HEIs to provide student support.
- **Fast data collection** to understand the needs of students and adjust support measures.
- **Targeted personal support and guidance** through buddy systems and informal connections between students and volunteers.
- **Recovery strategy and trust building** to boost mobility numbers and ensure joyful and safe experiences.

Collecting all online initiatives by ESN under
the umbrella *#ErasmusAtHome*

Erasmus Student Network

The power of a network: Erasmus Solidarity Mechanism in COVID times

Thanks to a collaboration with the University of Granada, the Spanish NA SEPIE and the shipping company DHL, ESN Spain **volunteers sent more than 600 packages with the belongings of Erasmus** students who had left Spain during the first COVID outbreak.

The packages were sent in less than 2 months, mobilidising hundreds of volunteers.

Difficulties to scale it across Europe due to lack of resources.

Russian invasion of Ukraine

Picture: last day of the Winter Welcome Week of ESN Kyiv, 22 of February 2022

First reaction to the emergency

When an emergency situation arises, we need to ask ourselves - what can we do? How can we help?

In a bottom-up network such as ours, common initiatives are always complemented with many grassroots activities

Emergency reaction and solidarity

We are offering our help to **all students** from Ukraine who come to Romania!

Write us on
support_ukraine@esn.ro

- Coordination with our members in Ukraine to understand the situation and their needs
- First solidarity emergency measures coming from neighbouring countries
- Spreading information and coordination on possible follow up actions

Emergency reaction and solidarity

1. Matching System ESN Ukraine

ESN Ukraine has created a **refugee-acceptor matching system**. If you can host young people from Ukraine that are escaping, fill out this form:

In case of a match, they will contact you and provide more information.

The organisation active on the ground has direct connection with young people and can inform the network about their needs and how we can help

Policy and advocacy - trying to adapt opportunities

Adapting Erasmus+ to support Ukrainian students and staff

Universities and students propose concrete measures to ensure support to Ukrainian students and University staff through the Erasmus+ programme

- Analysis: how can existing opportunities be adapted swiftly?
- Concrete changes in programmes that can be done fast and support as many students as possible
- Building on feedback given by Higher Education Institutions, young people from Ukraine
- Coalitions with more stakeholders to achieve a bigger impact

Adapting existing services

How to support Ukraine?
#StandWithUkraine
Medicine   AID
CHARITY
ESN
Erasmus Student Network
Poland

- ESN local associations are used to organise buddy-system schemes and support initial integration in local communities
- Considering the needs of refugee students to help them navigate the situations
- National chapters of ESN have a key role coordinating actions

ESN
Erasmus Student Network

Collecting data

WEBINAR | 28th July
Ukrainian Voices from Abroad

Survey report presentation by ESN Ukraine

- Large networks can collect useful data to understand the needs of a particular target group
- The findings help to build better proposals to support young people in need.
- ESN Ukraine: flash survey with +500 students

Lessons learned

- **Funding structures for pan European networks are not fit for a time of crisis.** Difficulties to properly respond mobilising our network from the top-down.
- **Students and alumni as partners:** work with student organisations in the matter without taking them for granted. Focus on the importance of their work and support their capacity (training, spaces, legal support, recognition).
- **International student collaboration:** support your student associations to increase their collaboration with peers from other countries.

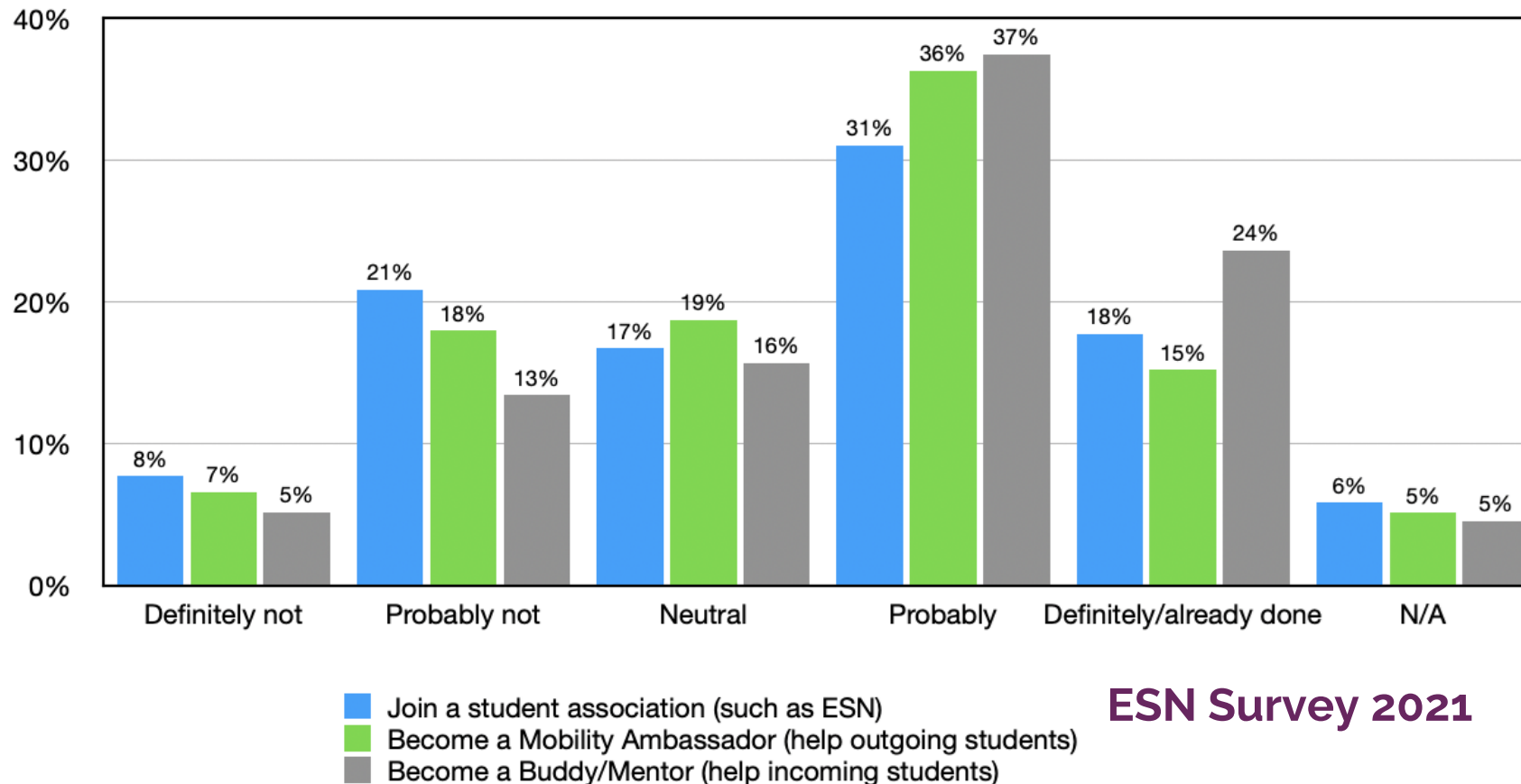# How can HEis and student associations work together to respond to difficult situations?
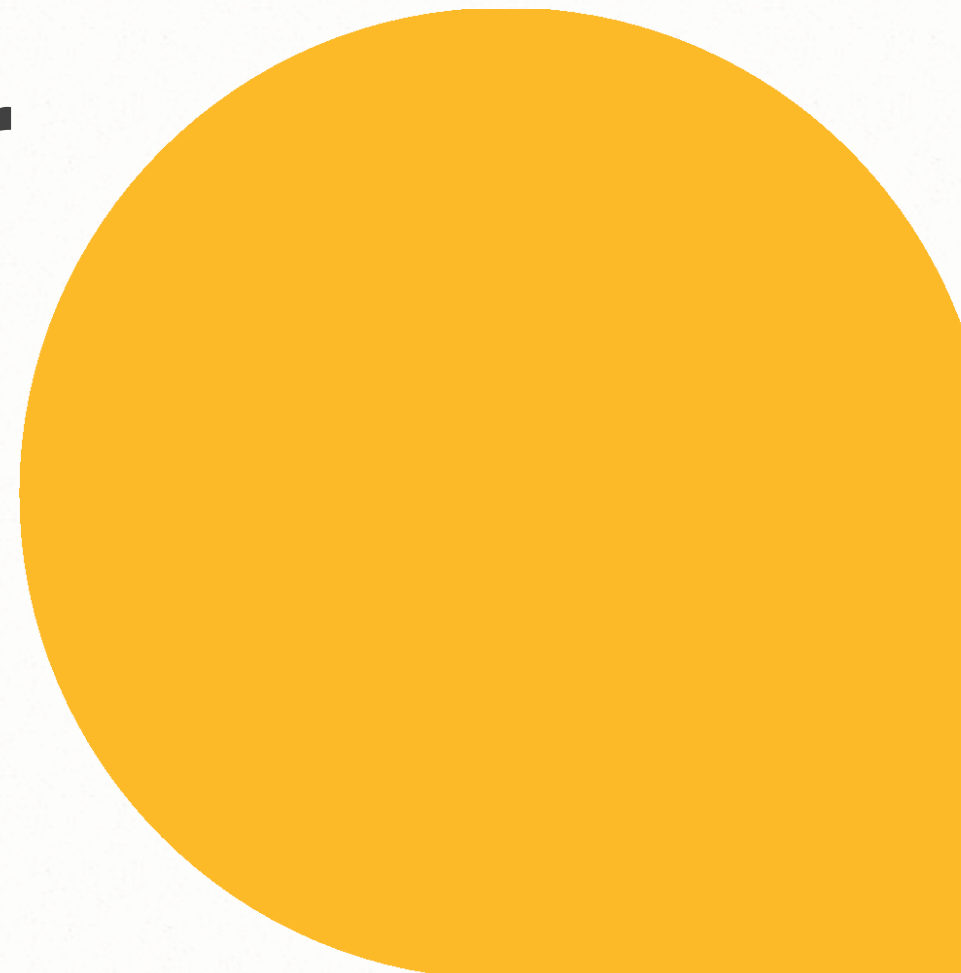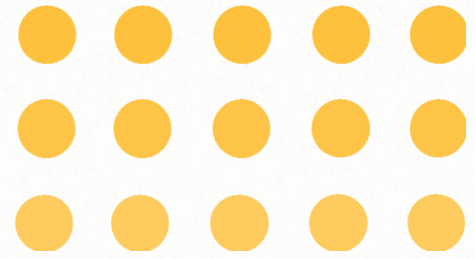
Satisfaction with the services provided by sending HEIs is considerably lower than with hosting HEIs (ESNsurvey - XIV edition)

There is untapped potential in the support before and after mobility provided by sending institutions and their work preparing students and engaging them after their experiences.

Students are keen on becoming multipliers and support their peers in different ways

After your mobility would you consider to/did you… ?

- Join a student association (such as ESN)
- Become a Mobility Ambassador (help outgoing students)
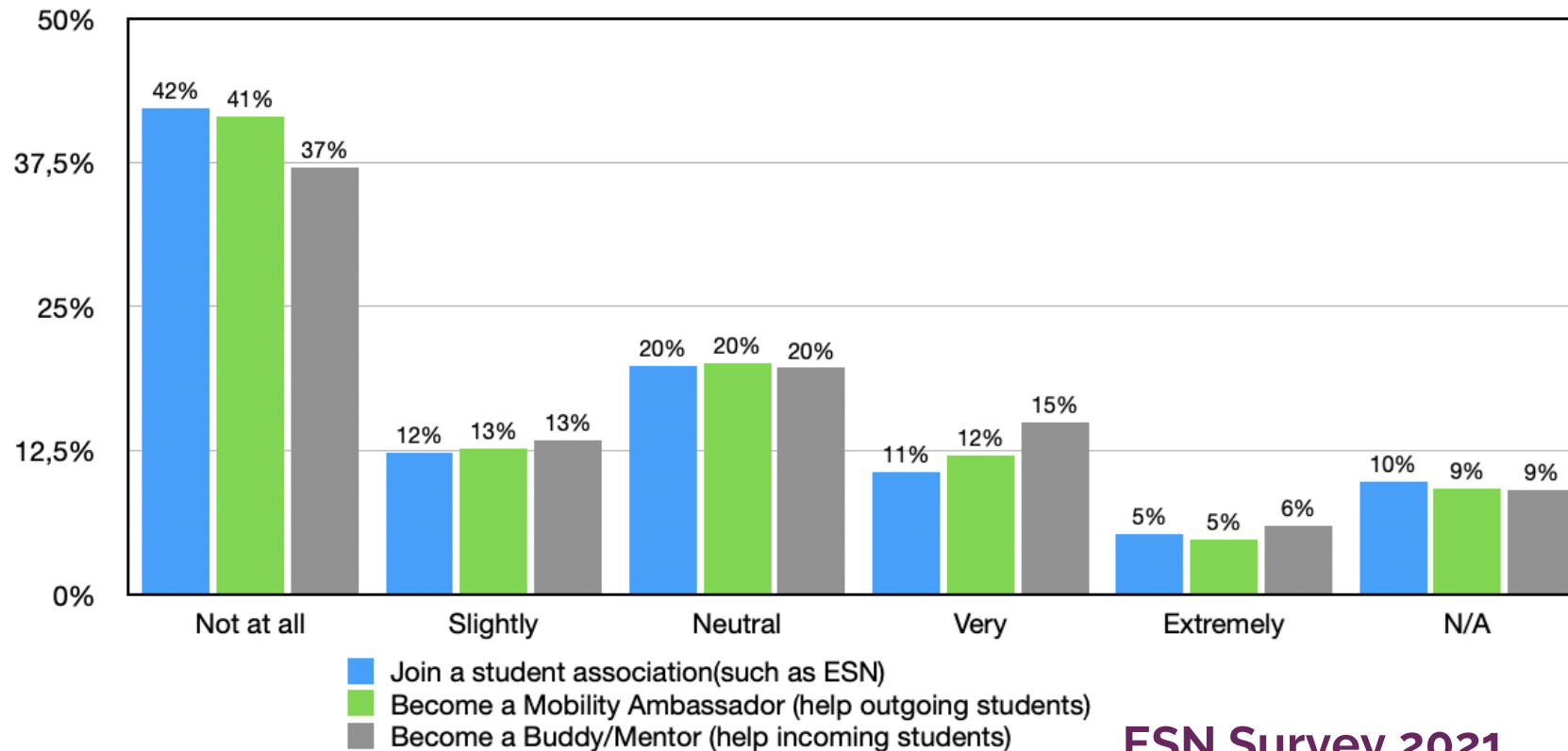- Become a Buddy/Mentor (help incoming students)

ESN Survey 2021

Mobility creates a desire to multiply your experience and support others - we should seize its potential!

But they don't always feel encouraged by HEIs

### To which extent were you encouraged by your HOME institution to…?

ESN Survey 2021

Reintegration and alumni engagement initiatives receive the lowest levels of satisfaction in the ESN Survey 2021 - showing there is room for improvement and innovation at the institutional and national levels
How about giving incentives through the organisational support?

Working together for better student support

- **Set up systems and structures**: A co-managed buddy system with training and recognition, housing services in which students support others checking the housing.
- **Prioritise pre-departure support and guidance:** involve student associations and incoming students in pre departure support. "Reverse" buddy systems and joint events with prospective and incoming students can play a role.
- **Collect problems in a qualitative way**: work with returned students to get qualitative feedback from their experiences. Involving student associations can help to make the students feel more comfortable.
- **Boost support, capacity building and recognition:** students should feel appreciated and supported, and their needs should be taken into account.
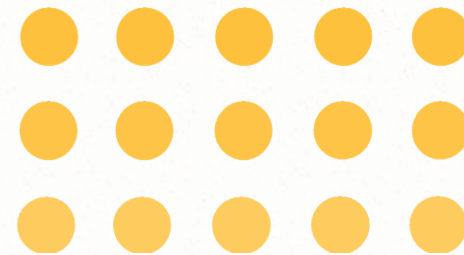
Thank you so much for your attention!

president@esn.org