





**ESC
ACADEMY
PRO**

**ESC ACADEMY PRO : RESEARCH
REPORT ON EUROPEAN STUDENT
CARD AWARENESS AND**



**Funded by
the European Union**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	3
<u>1. INTRODUCTION.....</u>	5
BACKGROUND	5
OBJECTIVES	6
METHODOLOGY	6
<u>MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS (ESU/ISIC)</u>	7
SURVEY	7
FOCUS GROUP.....	12
<u>HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS</u>	14
FOCUS GROUP	22
<u>STUDENTS</u>	24
FOCUS GROUP	31
<u>CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</u>	33
CONCLUSIONS	33
RECOMMENDATIONS	35

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The conclusions drawn from the study highlight several key points:

1. **ISIC/ESU Member Familiarity and Importance of ESCI:** ISIC/ESU members, who are actively involved in the education sector, demonstrate a relatively high level of familiarity with the European Student Card Initiative (ESCI). They also recognize the importance of ESCI for their own activities, indicating its potential value in the educational landscape.
2. **Confidence in Promotion and Implementation:** These members express confidence in their ability to introduce ESCI to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in their respective countries.
3. **Potential for ESCI as a Tool for HEIs:** The study reveals a significant gap in the technical knowledge of HEI representatives regarding their own student cards, despite the majority of HEIs being engaged in mobility programs. This highlights the untapped potential of ESCI as a valuable tool for HEIs, provided they receive the necessary guidance, support and the engagement of management and all other services involved (IT, IR, scholarship).
4. **Student Demand for an All-in-One Solution:** Students express a strong interest in having in having the possibility to benefit from a project like ESCI, which consolidates various services and benefits. This opens an opportunity for effective promotion of ESCI functionalities. However, it is essential to collaborate with HEIs, as they remain the primary channels of communication with students.
5. **Complex Implementation Process:** Implementing ESCI is acknowledged as a complex process. Still, the study emphasizes that with careful planning, effective communication, and collaboration among stakeholders, ESCI has the potential to significantly benefit both students and higher education institutions.



1. INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The European Commission launched the European Student Card Initiative (ESCI) with the aim of enhancing student mobility across Europe by promoting the digitalization of administrative procedures and facilitating information exchange between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and their students. Additionally, this initiative seeks to streamline and make the management of student mobility more efficient and environmentally friendly. The ESCI comprises three essential components: the Erasmus+ App, Erasmus Without Paper, and the European Student Card (ESC).

The European Student Card project commenced in 2016, initially as an EU-funded initiative. Its primary objective was to provide students with seamless access to services in an integrated manner, eliminating the need to issue a new student card. Over time, the European Student Card has gained recognition as a vital tool for promoting student mobility, aligning with the goals of the European Education Area by 2025 and the Digital Education Action Plan for the period 2021-2027.

At the heart of the project lies the development of a digital platform. This exchange platform is designed to facilitate communication between the information systems of higher education institutions across Europe and ensure the universal recognition of a student's status and identity. Through the recognition of their status, mobile students will enjoy convenient access to services without the need to request a new card or visit a physical office. The main services on which the project focuses are:

- Promoting student mobility and participation in educational and cultural activities
- Making the management of mobility easier, more efficient and greener
- Promoting a strong European Student Identity

Under the Erasmus+ Programme 2021-2027, the European Student Card Initiative (ESCI) is expected to contribute significantly to the priorities of the new Erasmus+ Programme, particularly within "Key Action 2: Cooperation Among Organizations and Institutions." It serves as a facilitator of learning mobility.

In 2022, ESCI received robust institutional endorsement and recognition as one of the four flagship initiatives within the Communication on a European Strategy for Universities, aimed at enhancing the European dimension in higher education and research. Furthermore, the Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European Higher Education Cooperation urges Member States to adopt and actively support the development and dissemination of ESCI.

OBJECTIVES

The aim of this research is to offer a comprehensive overview of various topics related to implementation of European Student Card throughout Europe, through the analysis of the latest trend surveys conducted among ESU/ISIC members, higher education institutions' representatives, and students.

As a continuation of these activities, the project output should be a collection of best practices and tools, along with a guide for conducting needs analysis. This valuable resource will be compiled into a freely accessible repository of materials, serving as a foundational resource for the project's future endeavours.

METHODOLOGY

The study was designed as a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, that should jointly picture the landscape of implementing European Student Card and challenges in this process. Quantitative method was based on the Computer-Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) survey and using "nonprobability" or "opt-in" sample. The second stage of the study was designed as primarily online single-moderator focus groups.

In order to better understand all parties, the survey was implemented in May/July 2023.

The survey was sent to all three crucial groups:

Group	Countries:	No of surveys filled
ISIC and ESU members	31	43
Higher education institutions	25	475
Students	58	3043

The survey data was analyzed using the descriptive statistics. It is important to emphasize that collected sample reflects dependency from the distributions channels and it is not representative for Europe. There were no predefined quotas and distribution was implemented through the partners communication channels.

Additionally, in the period from August to October 2023, three separate focus groups were conducted, comprising students, HEI representatives and ESU/ISIC members from Italy, Germany, Austria, Bulgaria, Romania, and the Czech Republic.

Finally, ISIC member in France has implemented *Roadshow ISIC France*, as a dynamic and engaging approach to reaching out to students on the campuses of 50 HEIs that implement ISIC. During interactive presentations, they create a direct connection with the student community. This extensive outreach effort results in the team meeting and interacting with over 30,000 students. Through introducing students to the ISIC card, they showcase the functionality of the ISIC France App, emphasizing its digital map and how it integrates with the internal aspects of the campus.

Spanning from August to November, this concerted effort encompasses approximately 50 Roadshows, taking place in over 15 major cities across France. Throughout these interactions, the team engages in meaningful conversations with students. The discussions often revolve around the various discounts and perks associated with the ISIC card, particularly how these benefits can improve the daily lives of students in France. Importantly, these conversations extend to foreign students who have recently arrived on French campuses. The team goes beyond the standard presentations of discounts and card applications and delves into the students' experiences and challenges, both before their arrival in France and since their arrival. These exchanges provide valuable insights into the needs and concerns of international students and help inform further improvements and support initiatives in the future. Having a rich material collected from the students, we have decided to include it to this report as it is very instrumental in understanding students needs and present proposals they made.

MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS (ESU/ISIC)

SURVEY

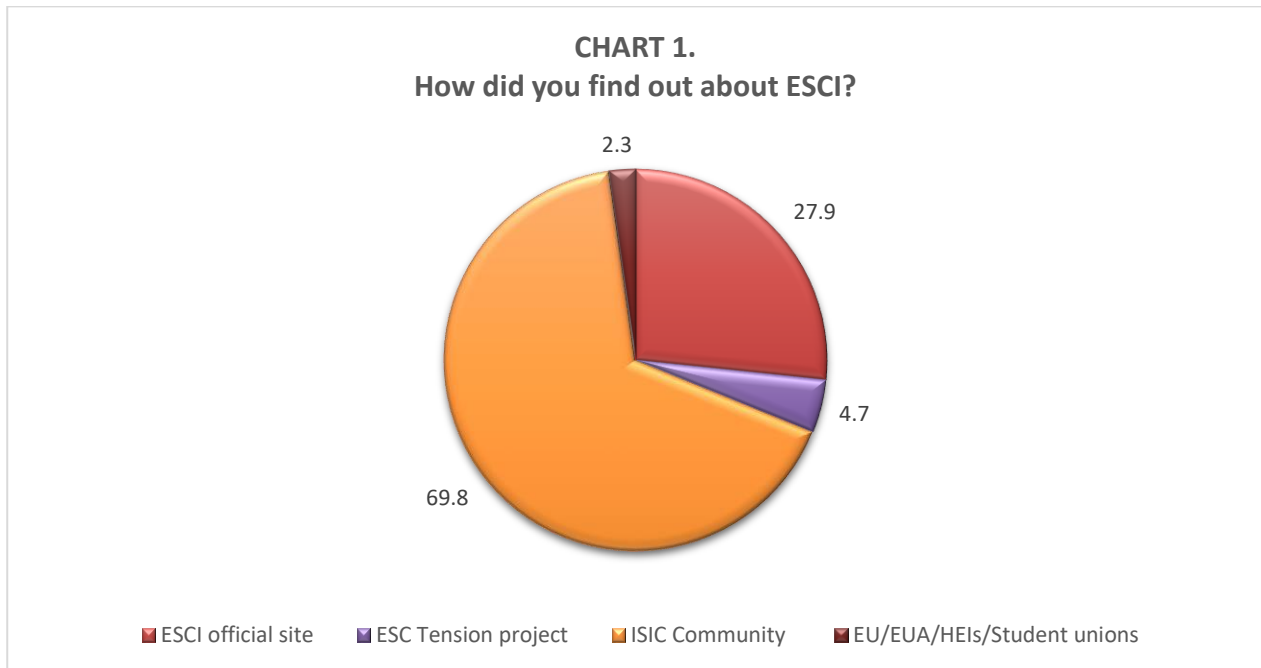
This study involved total of 43 participants, consisting of members from ESU/ISIC and ESC. Among the 31 countries represented, the majority had only one questionnaire completed per country. Notable exceptions were Poland, Sweden, and Slovakia, each with three questionnaires, followed by Belgium, Croatia, Czechia, Greece, Malta, and Romania, which had two questionnaires completed per country.

The distribution of questionnaire completion was as follows:

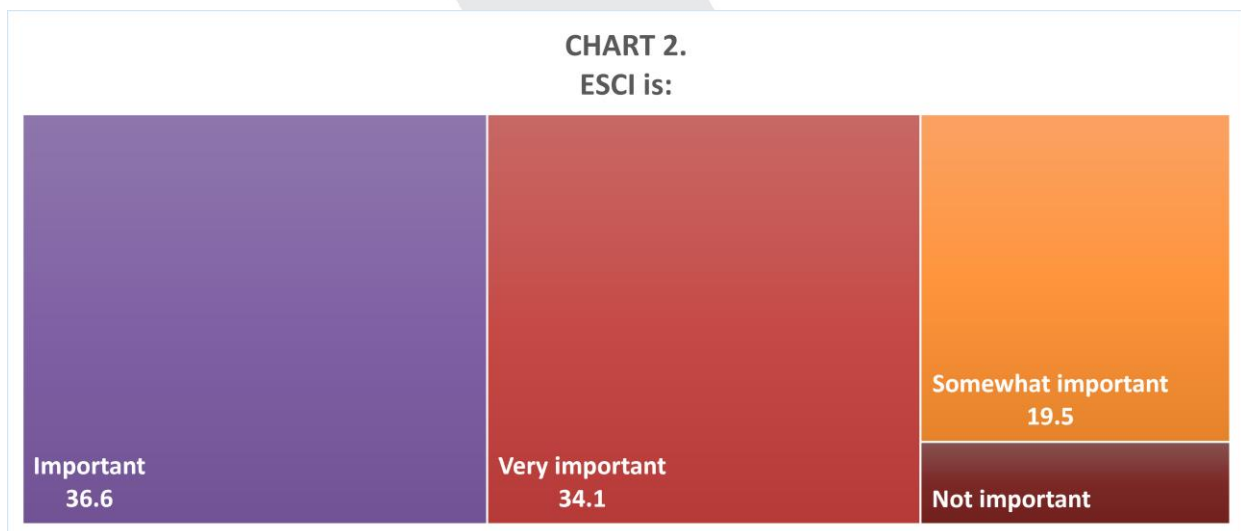
- ⇒ Managing directors filled out 25.6% of the questionnaires after their respective member institutions.
- ⇒ Presidents or chairpersons completed 11.6% of the questionnaires.
- ⇒ Owners of member companies accounted for 9.3% of the responses.
- ⇒ Project managers contributed 7% of the completed questionnaires.
- ⇒ Marketing directors represented 4.7% of the respondents.
- ⇒ Vice presidents were responsible for 2.3% of the questionnaires.
- ⇒ The remaining 39.5% of responses fell into the "other" category, which included participants such as assistants, heads of ESU/ISIC student services, board members, leaders of various student and youth programs, and office registrars.

Among the respondents, 85% were already aware of the European Student Card (ESC) initiative, while 15% needed to become acquainted with it. Those members who were familiar with the ESC initiative discovered it through various channels presented in a Chart 1. It is very important to underline that almost 70% (69,8%) of

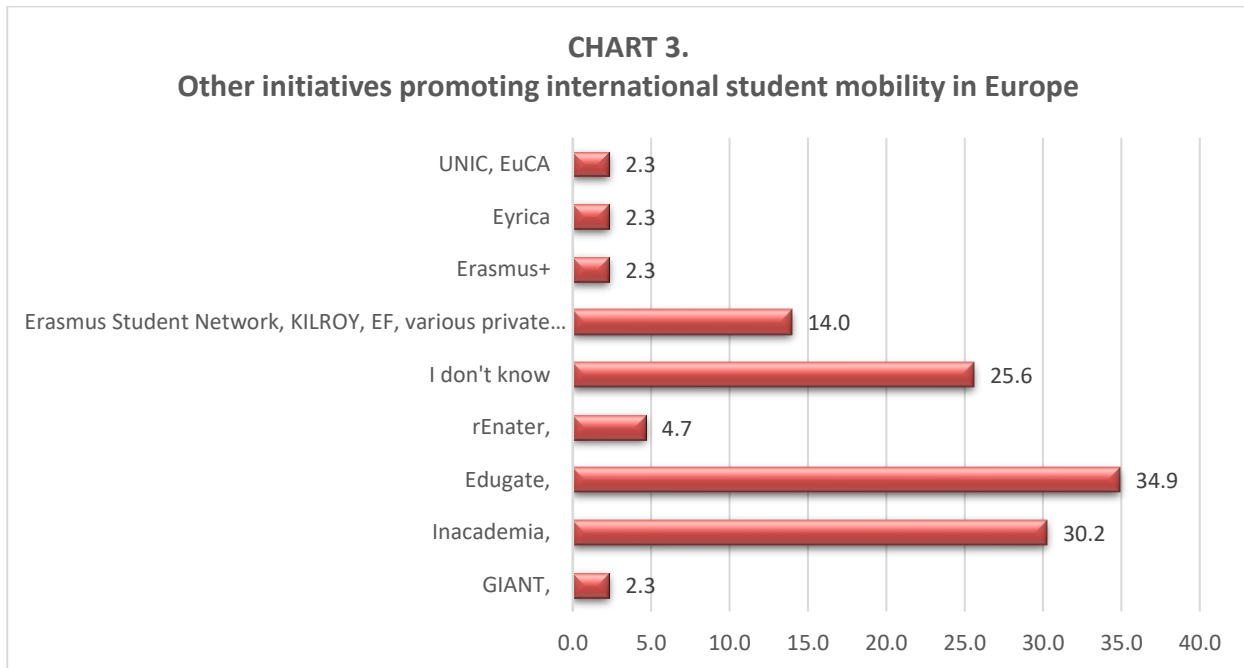
members already get information about ESCI through ISIC community organization, which demonstrates a solid engagement of members on that initiative. It is indicative that very few of them (2.3%) learned about it through direct contact with other stakeholders, European Commission, European university foundation, higher education institutions and partners, university student unions or by individual interest.



ESU/ISIC members acknowledge the significance of the European Student Card Initiative (ESCI) and appreciate its value. The majority of members see ESCI as important (36.6%), while 34.1% of members consider ESCI as very important. ESCI is considered somewhat important by 19.5% of members. However, 4.9% of members still need to recognize such an initiative as necessary.

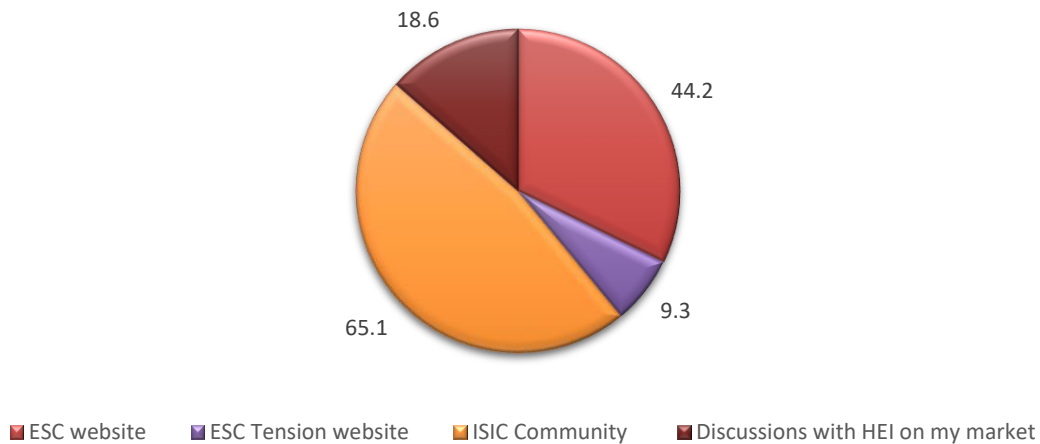


ESU/ISIC members exhibit varying levels of familiarity with other initiatives promoting international student mobility in Europe. A majority of members, constituting 55%, are able to identify and specify other initiatives. However, a significant portion, accounting for 45% of members, express the need to become more familiar with such initiatives.



Nearly all members are already acquainted with the European Student Card (ESC), with only 15% of members requiring further information about it. The ISIC community has proven to be the most effective channel for spreading awareness about ESC, as a substantial majority, 65.1% of those familiar with the card, learned about it through the ISIC community. Additionally, 44.2% of members acquired knowledge about ESC from the official ESC website and 9.3%, from the ESC Tension website. Furthermore, 18.6% of members gained insight through discussions with local higher education institutions. Other sources of information include the European Commission, the European University Foundation, NTT Data, workshops with the European Commissioner leading the project, and discussions with local student unions.

CHART 4.
How did you find out about European Student Card?



15.8% of members have successfully integrated ESC with their existing ISIC card. The following countries have already completed the implementation of both ESC and ISIC cards: Bulgaria, Czechia, France, Italy, Romania, Spain and Sweden.

TABLE 1.

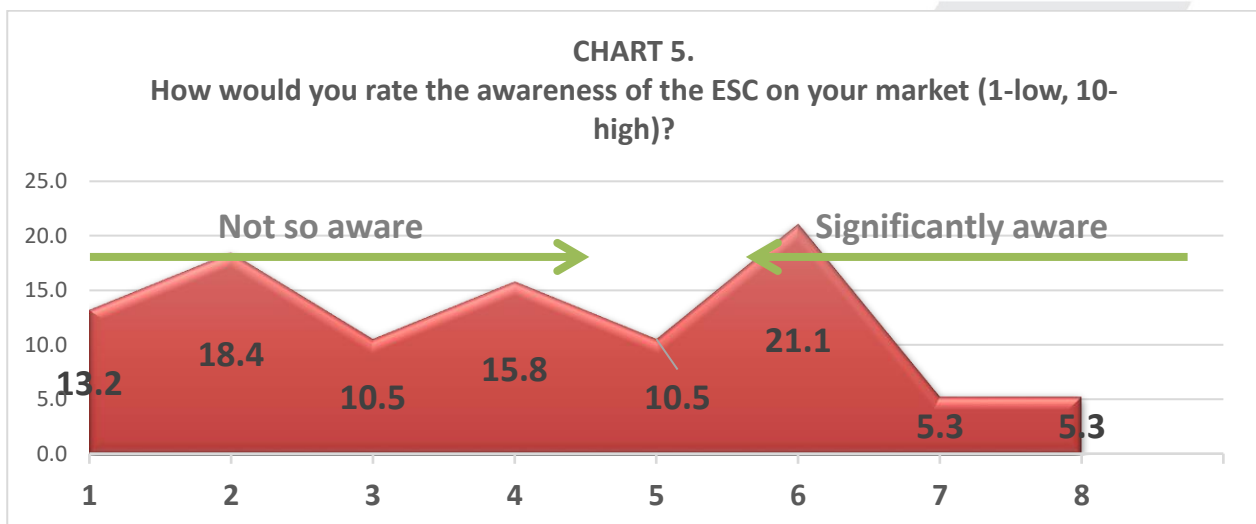
Number of the cards issued by ISIC association in respective countries where ESC is already implemented and number of cobranded ESC/ISIC cards.

Country	ISIC ESC CARDS 2021	ISIC CARDS 2021	ISIC ESC CARDS 2022	ISIC CARDS 2022	ISIC ESC CARDS 2023	ISIC CARDS 2023
Bulgaria	5238	51430	4322	33129	6574	36585
Czech Republic	16889	569417	25726	592761	41356	563717
France	57269	319952	85257	316829	83832	265936
Romania	0	107888	12473	121287	22286	164799
Spain	540	83917	465	88583	466	74644

TOTAL	79936	1132604	128243	1152589	154514	1105681
-------	--------------	---------	---------------	---------	---------------	---------

Only 28.9% of all higher education institutions have proactively reached out to ESU/ISIC members with the intention of merging the two cards. These higher education institutions have approached ESU/ISIC members in the following countries, which expressed the desire to combine both cards: Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, France, Italy, Germany, Lithuania, Romania, and Sweden.

According to the statement made by members, even though 21.1% rated their awareness on a scale from 1 to 10 as relatively high (with 10 being the maximum), it is clear that the cumulative awareness of the topic remains low. This suggests that while members are considering well informed about ESCI, it more complicated when it comes to help HEI to implement ESC. There is still existing a strong disparity between the different members regarding ESC implementation.



21.1% of higher education institutions in member countries have implemented the European Student Card (ESC) on their student cards, leaving majority of higher education institutions with this implementation task in the future. Those institutions that have already implemented ESC have done so by either creating a co-brand with ISIC or developing their own solutions. Some members still require information about the implementation process.

One effective solution for ESC implementation involves a virtual format¹.

"Starting with the academic year 2021-2022, this HEI adopted the European Student Card (ESC), issuing it in a virtual format and allowing every student to identify and register electronically, easily and securely, without the

¹ <https://europeanstudentcard.eu/the-european-student-card-in-2022/>



need to complete procedures and paperwork. All ESCs contain the unique ESI the HEIs also issues." (Romania, ESU/ISIC member)

Regarding awareness of other initiatives, members are relatively familiar with Erasmus+App and Erasmus without Paper Solution (EWR). Erasmus+App is more widely recognized, with 62.2% of members having knowledge of it, compared to 51.4% who are familiar with Erasmus without a paper solution.

FOCUS GROUP

A focus group was held on August 24th, involving representatives from the following member countries: Italy, Germany, Austria, Bulgaria, Romania, and the Czech Republic.

In terms of partnerships with universities, the Czech Republic and Romania have well-established collaborations with universities. Austria has established partnerships covering approximately 30% of the market in cooperation with a bank. Bulgaria, on the other hand, has initiated cooperation with Higher Education Institutions (HEI) and one bank. In contrast, the other countries have only recently entered the market and are in the process of developing partnerships with HEIs.

Another challenge lies in the insufficient communication about ESCI at the European level with HEIs. Currently, most cooperation with institutions is carried out on an individual basis by HEIs themselves. National authorities do not appear to provide much assistance in this regard. This participation in broader educational programs can help raise awareness and promote the successful implementation of ESCI within HEIs.

"First of all, the universities should understand and should be informed about the necessity." (Romania, ESU/ISIC member)

There appears to be a need for greater clarity and understanding among HEIs regarding the benefits that the European Student Card (ESC) offers to both students and institutions, which clearly limited the capacity of the members to promote effectively the ESCI to HEI. However, members seem to have better knowledge about existing student cards at the local level, and some have already initiated discussions with organizations issuing their own student cards for potential cooperation. Notably, Germany has achieved quite a success in this regard.

The introduction of the electronic version of ESC was relatively smooth in Romania, the Czech Republic, and Bulgaria. However, Germany encountered difficulties related to GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation), indicating the importance of complying with data privacy regulations during such implementations. It is of utmost importance to communicate solutions to GDPR challenges in order to continue with ESC advocacy. Addressing these challenges and improving communication about ESC's benefits could contribute to its wider adoption and acceptance among institutions and members in the future.

"The most important thing is to get the GDPR clarified. There are universities here; they're not sure if it's even legal in Germany. So, they're very, very careful." (Germany, ESU/ISIC member)

Besides the GDPR problem, one of the major obstacles seen is the decentralized computer system for HEI on the national level. In some countries, only a small number of HEIs have their own software, which is considered as a problem with establishing cooperation for a digital version of ESC.

The multiplicity of the numbers of IT infrastructure and systems within all the HEI across Europe is seen by members as a major difficulty to help them implemented ESC. In the meantime, we can consider that members, while they are well informed about ESCI, are not sufficiently well armed to answer to HEI's IT problematics. The ESC router is still a tool that need to be more highlighted to members and HEI in their understanding to promote ESC.

"I think three or four universities have some student systems software, something like that, and it's hard for them to connect it with the European Student Card system." (Bulgaria, ESU/ISIC member)

It's promising that member organizations feel confident in their ability to introduce the European Student Card to HEIs in their respective countries. The ESC site has an information page, but it isn't written in the language that most HEIs manage to understand and see the ESC program's benefit both for their institution and the students. There is still a gap between the official way to promote and present ESCI objectives, and the concrete reality of implementing it locally. Improving the communication and educational materials about ESC, member organizations can enhance their approach to universities and increase the likelihood of successful adoption.

Member organizations are interested in concrete examples of good practices that demonstrate the benefits of implementing the European Student Card (ESC) effectively. These examples can serve as compelling evidence for the positive impact of ESC and can be used to persuade HEIs of its value.

In France, an exemplary case of best practices is represented by an ISIC member who manages interactions with over 500 HEIs, producing a substantial 350,000 ISIC cards annually. Notably, approximately 84,000 of these cards incorporate both ISIC and ESC elements. This is a testament to the successful adoption of ISIC standards by these HEIs, as they strive to bolster their international academic exchange programs, encompassing both student incoming and outgoing initiatives. Simultaneously, this move enhances their brand image while providing considerable value to their students through the numerous benefits these cards offer.

The incorporation of the ESC standard into the pre-existing ISIC cards was made seamless, owing to the efficient student card issuance system provided by the ISIC member in France. This system also serves as a technical liaison for the implementation of multifunctional cards, encompassing access control, library services, canteen access, and international discounts, among others. This card issuance and management system is tightly integrated with the ESC Router, enabling instantaneous assignment of ESC student identification with each card issuance. These cards can be either physical or digital, and there is an ISIC France application available for students to display their ISIC/ESC cards in digital format.

The comprehensive solution provided satisfactorily meets the needs of French HEIs, further facilitating the proliferation of the ESC standard, which remains an ongoing effort.

Regarding collaboration with initiatives like the Erasmus+ app and Erasmus without Paper, it's important to recognize that different member organizations may have varying perspectives. Some may view them as competition, while others see the potential for partnership. Addressing concerns about software quality and functionality in these initiatives may involve further evaluation and discussions.

Recognizing that not all HEIs possess the necessary infrastructure for a digital ESC is a crucial insight. It underscores the importance of providing support and guidance to HEIs as they navigate the transition to digital platforms, and it may also necessitate additional efforts to improve digital infrastructure in some regions.

In summary, member organizations are looking for practical examples of successful ESC implementations, and there is an opportunity to explore partnerships with other initiatives while addressing concerns about software quality. The successful examples like France serve as the best guideline and can be of great value in promoting ESC on the national level. The idea of expanding ESC services and consolidating cards is promising but should be approached thoughtfully, taking into account the specific needs and capabilities of HEIs and students. Their ultimate added value of member organizations to the implementation process is the digital knowledge and experience with different benefits that complements services offered by HEIs.

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Out of 25 contact countries and 475 respondents, it is evident that France has demonstrated the highest level of interest in the questionnaire pertaining to the European Student Card Initiative (ESCI). Impressively, 54.7% of higher education institutions in France have actively participated by providing their responses. Germany also stands out with notable interest, boasting a response rate of 9.1%, followed by Spain at 6.7%, Latvia at 6.3%, Sweden at 4.6%, Bulgaria at 2.7%, and Czechia at 2.3%.

Among Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), there is a significant degree of familiarity with the European Student Card Initiative (ESCI), with 59.7% of institutions that completed the questionnaire reporting their awareness and understanding of it. However, it's worth noting that 40.3% of HEIs are still in need of becoming more acquainted with this initiative. This indicates the potential for heightened promotional efforts to raise awareness and understanding further. As we will showcase with this survey, the degree of ESCI implementation within HEIs is currently relatively limited.

HEIs that have already familiarized themselves with ESCI have gained this knowledge through diverse channels, with the primary sources being:

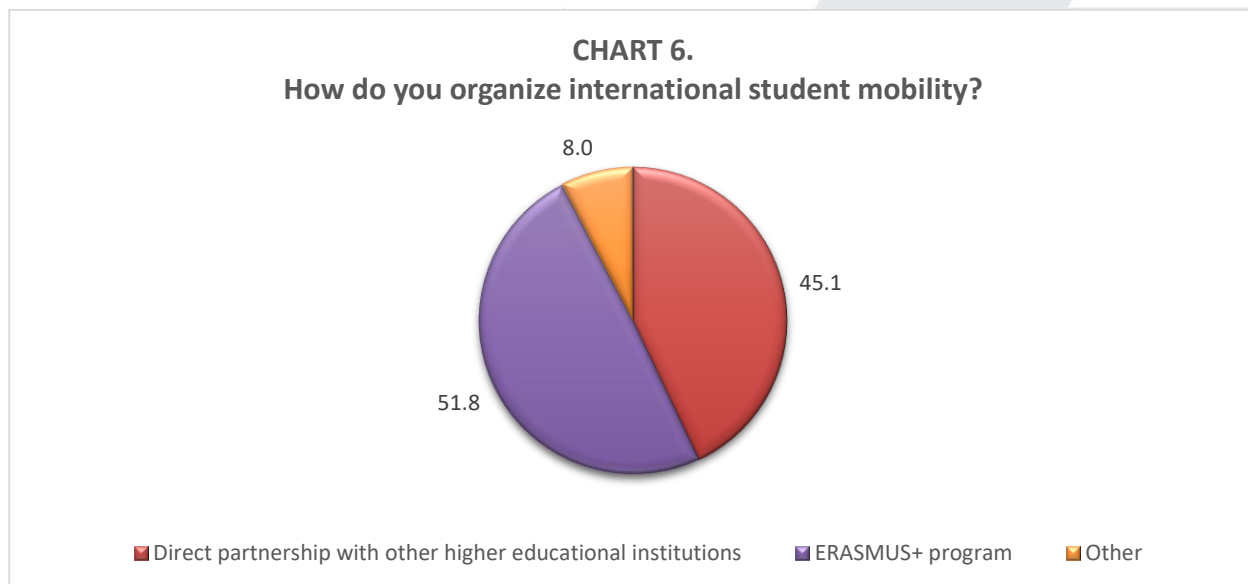
- ⇒ The official ESCI website, which accounted for 17.3% of their information.

- ⇒ The ESC Tension project, contributing to 1.5% of their awareness.
- ⇒ Other educational institutions, which played a significant role, making up 26.1% of their sources.
- ⇒ Various national agencies, Erasmus programs, and webinars/seminars conducted directly by ISIC, with information spread across different percentages.
- ⇒ Social media, although utilized sporadically.

Furthermore, it's noteworthy that a substantial majority of HEIs, totaling 93.5%, actively participate in international student mobility programs, underscoring their dedication to providing global educational opportunities. Among these institutions, 89.5% both welcome international students to their campuses and send their own students abroad. A smaller fraction, accounting for 5.1%, exclusively sends their students abroad, while an even smaller percentage, just 1.7%, exclusively receives international students.

Concerning administrative structures, a significant majority of HEIs, totaling 88.2%, have established dedicated student mobility departments, while a minority, comprising 11.8%, do not possess such a department within their educational institution.

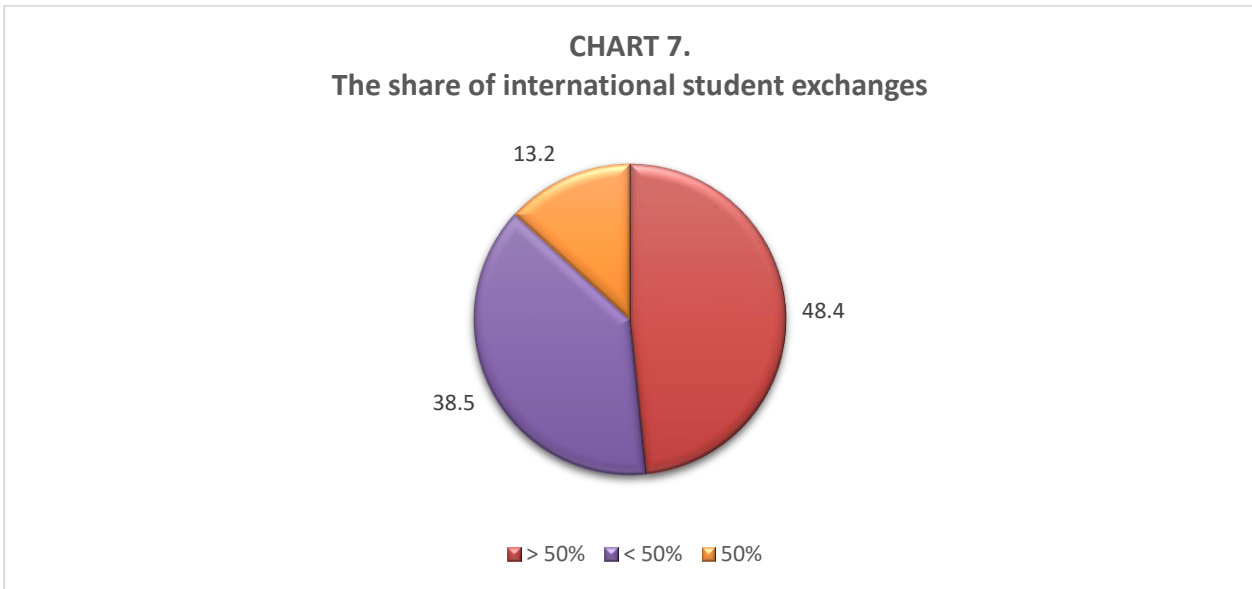
HEIs employ diverse methods to facilitate international student mobility, including establishing direct partnerships with other higher educational institutions, active participation in the Erasmus Plus program, and engaging in various other Erasmus, local, and international programs and partnerships.



These findings offer valuable insights into the awareness and commitment of HEIs regarding international student mobility. They also indicate that HEIs are well-positioned to embrace initiatives like ESCI, owing to their existing structures and engagement in international programs.

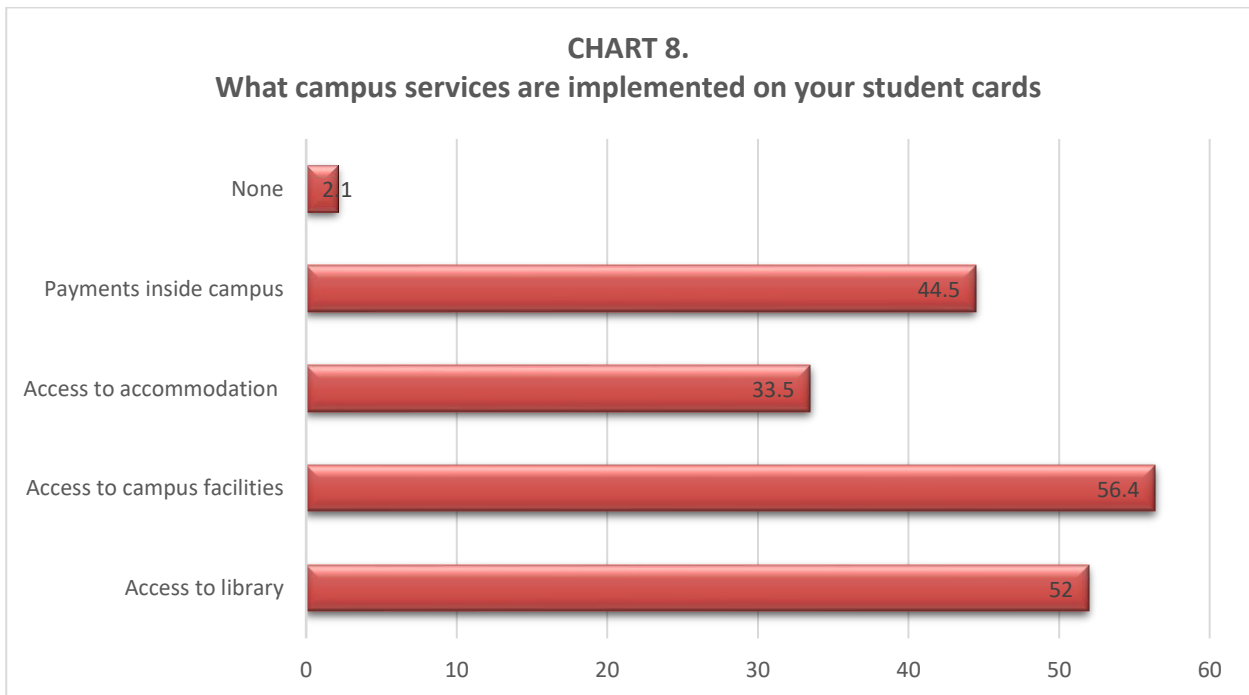
It's clear that a significant majority of Higher Education Institutions aim to maintain a majority of local students within their student population. The distribution of international students among HEIs varies. Most of the HEIs

(48.4%) have less than 50% of their student body composed of international students, while more than third of them have more than 50% international students share in own population.



The variation in the presence of international students across HEIs reflects the diverse institutional priorities and strategies related to internationalization and the capacity of HEI to develop international partnerships to promote diversity within student body.

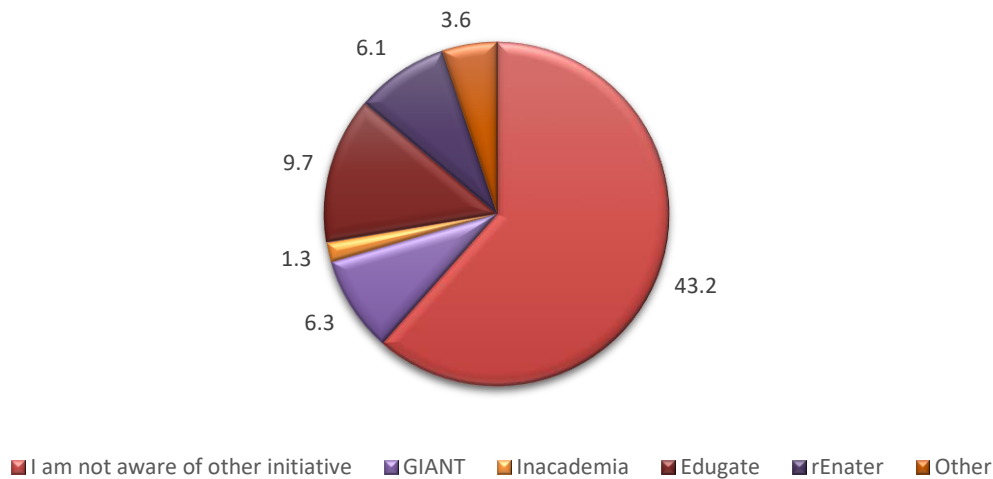
Among students participating in international mobility programs, a majority of international students, totalling 56.4%, have access to campus facilities, while 52% also enjoy the convenience of accessing libraries and accommodations. Additionally, 33.5% of international students have access to on-campus commodities, and 44.5% can conveniently make payments within the campus. In some cases, international students may also benefit from additional amenities such as participation in student sports, access to security shuttle services, entry to laboratories, or the availability of various digital applications.



In a vast majority of higher education institutions (93.4%), the same set of services is accessible to both international and local students. Only a small proportion, constituting 6.6% of institutions, offer distinct services for international students that differ from those available to local students.

Furthermore, it's worth noting that there is an opportunity to increase awareness about other initiatives aimed at promoting international student mobility in Europe among higher education institutions. Specifically, 43.2% of institutions that participated in this questionnaire expressed a need for greater awareness of these initiatives. Among institutions already familiar with other programs, 9.7% mentioned Edugate, 6.3% referred to GIANT, 1.3% noted Inacademia, and 6.1% highlighted rEnater. Additionally, several other initiatives were mentioned, albeit less frequently, including CEEPUS, AKTON, EEA Grants, EduRoam, ESN, DAAD, PAD, Horizon International Conferences, OFAJ, SIEM, and UFA within various national programs.

CHART 9.
The other initiatives promoting international student mobility in Europe



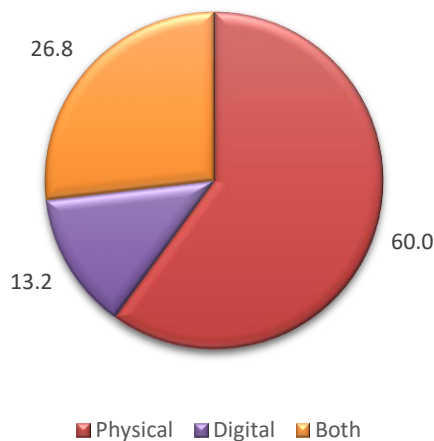
Approximately 59.5% of higher education institutions recognize the European student card. When it comes to sources of information about the European student card:

- ⇒ The ESCI website plays a significant role, with 17.9% of institutions relying on it for information.
- ⇒ Higher education institutions themselves are another important source, with 17.7% of respondents obtaining information from their own institutions.
- ⇒ Student card providers contribute to awareness, though to a lesser extent, at 8.2%.

The ESC Tension website, however, has limited visibility in higher education institutions, at just 0.6%. Various sources, including Erasmus programs, networks, organizations, agencies, European Commission channels, ISIC, DAAD, ECHE, EGC, and other institutions, as well as word of mouth, webinars, and social media on the internet, occasionally serve as sources of information for 14.5% of respondents.

Student cards are considered standard in 76.8% of higher education institutions. The majority of institutions (60%) prefer physical student cards, with a smaller fraction (13.2%) choosing to have only a digital form of student card.

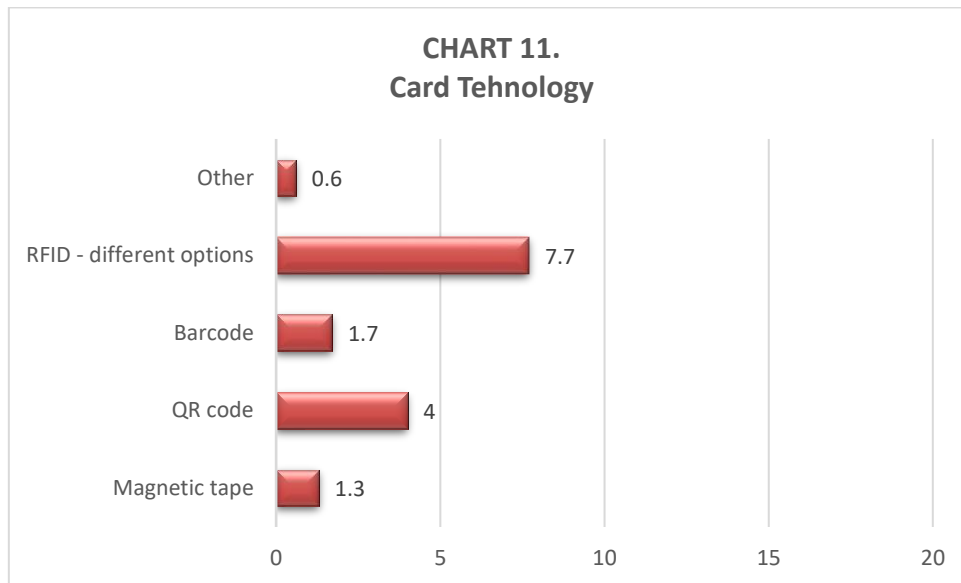
**CHART 10.
Format of student card available**



Integrating the European Student Card (ESC) into the existing student card systems was generally a straightforward process for most institutions. However, occasional challenges did arise, such as difficulties in printing the hologram, which affected a very small percentage (0.2%) of institutions. It's also worth noting that some institutions do not see the necessity of implementing the ESC onto their current student cards due to a lack of information on the objectives and the finality of the project.

In terms of the services provided through the current student card, this mostly refers to access to the library (19.4%), campus facility access such as classroom or parking (18.5%) campus payments (16,4%) and access to accommodation, i.e. dormitories (6.1%). However, 11.6% of institutions do not offer any services through their student cards. There are also some institutions whose cards provide benefits such as access to public transportation (1.7%), various discounts (0.4%), or access to on-campus shops, among other perks. All other services are extremely rare and do not match more than 0.2% of cases.

When it comes to the technology used in physical student cards, various methods are employed such RFID Technologies mainly. Otherwise QR codes are prevalent, while barcodes and magnetic tape technology are the least used.



In cases where RFID systems are in use, RFID: Mifare Desfire is the most common, utilized by 2.7% of institutions. RFID: Mifare Classic is employed by 1.9% of institutions, RFID: EM 4200/4102 is used by 0.6% of institutions, while some other version of RFID is employed by 0.2% of institutions. A small percentage, 2.1%, is unfamiliar with the RFID technology they use. Moreover, a significant portion of institutions, totalling 19.4%, expressed a need to become more familiar generally with the technology they apply to their physical cards.

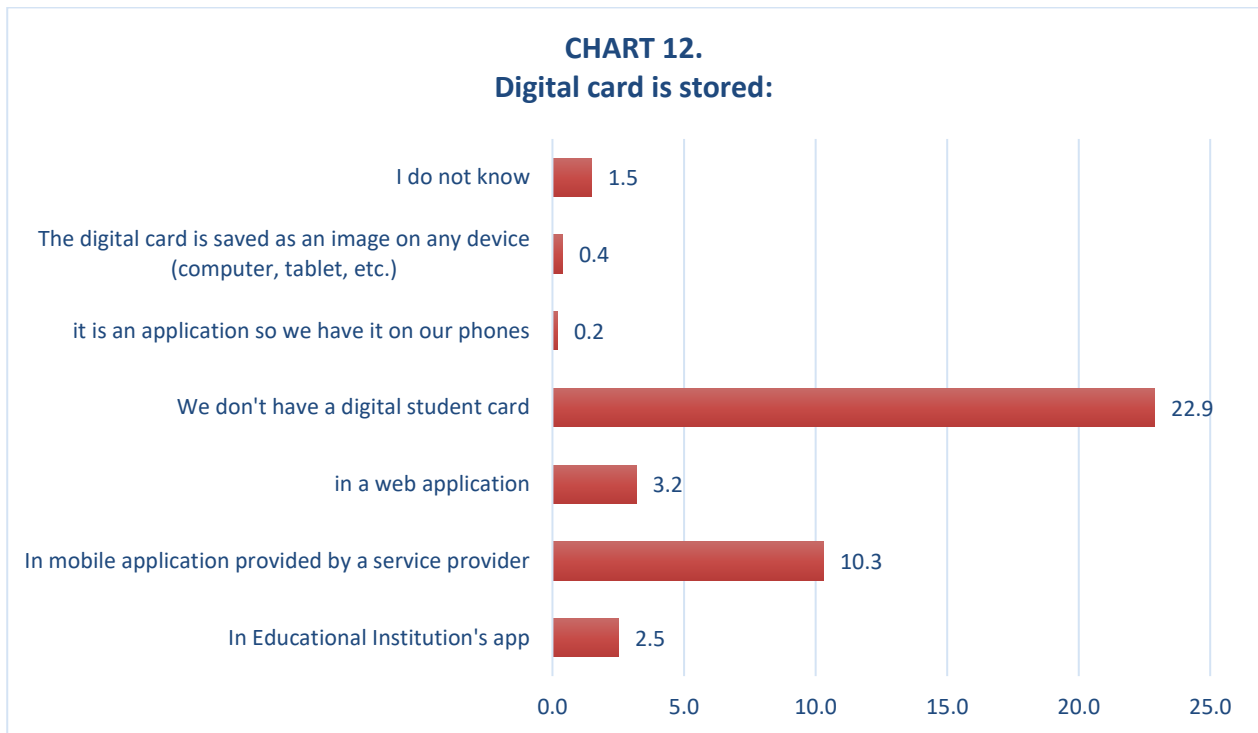
Access control and payment system providers are the most common sources that institutions turn to for their technological needs. Campus facilities or card management system (CMS) editors are also frequently used, with many institutions opting to outsource their technology requirements to specific partners.

Regarding digital student cards, there is some complexity in responses. A significant portion of respondents either did not know the answer or required assistance in understanding the question about digital cards.

However, for institutions that have adopted digital student cards, the technologies involved include:

- ⇒ QR codes, utilized by 11.4% of institutions.
- ⇒ Barcodes, used by 4% of institutions.
- ⇒ NFC, employed by 2.7% of institutions.
- ⇒ Bluetooth technology, utilized by 2.5% of institutions.

Remarkably, 22.7% of institutions do not have digital student cards. For those institutions that do possess the technology, digital student cards are primarily stored within a mobile application provided by a service provider (10.3%), with fewer institutions using web applications and educational institution-specific apps (2.5%). Among the remaining responses from the 184 respondents who answered, 1.5% did not know the specific method, 0.4% stored it as an image, and 0.2% were aware that it was an app for mobile phones.



Higher education institutions tend to favour the International Student Identity Card (ISIC) in conjunction with their student cards, with 20.4% using this combination. The Erasmus student card is used by 2.9% of institutions, while the European Youth Card is used by only 0.2%.

For student identification, ISIC cards are the primary choice, followed by the institutional email address (6.9%) and student certificates (8.6%). Remarkably, the institutional student card is only used for student identification in 0.2% of cases.

The Erasmus Plus app is not widely known among higher education institutions, as 61.2% are unfamiliar with it, leaving only 38.8% of institutions acquainted with the application. Consequently, the Erasmus+ app is not extensively utilized for disseminating information to international students.

On the other hand, the Erasmus without Paper solution (EWP) is more recognized, with 52.3% of institutions being familiar with it. Among those institutions familiar with EWP, a significant 84.3% have implemented it.

„Problematic due to platform inoperability, but it has improved in recent months.“ (Estonia)

„Very confusing, unclear and absorbing very much time.“ (Slovakia)

„Easy at first, but with subsequent interoperational problems.“ (Bulgaria)

„If an electronic system works, then it is fine to use it. But e.x Beneficiary Modul is not working properly. There is all the time some kind of issue with it. Otherwise systems are logical and not difficult to use.“ (Estonia)

„It is hard to completely implement it, if other institutions are using other providers.“ (Latvia)

„We have signed 80 digital agreements so far but are not exchanging OLA's because we still cannot assign ESIs.“ (Bulgaria)

However, the implementation of EWP is considered complex for the majority of institutions that are implementing it (84,2%), with challenges stemming from issues such as communication problems, system compatibility issues with other applications used by institutions, and overall confusion and time-consuming processes. Even institutions in the process of implementing EWP continue to encounter difficulties with its implementation.

FOCUS GROUP

A focus group was held on October 13th, involving representatives from Romania and Germany.

Implementing the student card is challenging from the IT perspective. Even with the Ministry of Education's support, infrastructure and know-how can present the problem.

Already issued physical cards may need some features available on the digital card. The transition from physical to digital cards has already started in Romania with the integration of student and EU cards.

Application for the digital version of the card is a challenge that needs support. In Romania, negotiations are held to create an Institution app that supports both cards. At the same time, Germany is still implementing the card via Erasmus without the paper app. One of the main challenges for Germany is the need for more information and explanation, and the second obstacle is the need to work with various services that are not necessarily connected.

Even with the help of national agencies, there is room for improvement and inclusion of the ministry and a need for a person with enough inferences to mediate between different agencies, international offices and universities.

Implementation of the ESC depends on each country's technical development of the universities. In Romania, only 2-3% of the universities have, to some degree, the technical capacity to implement ESC—the lack of providers in countries that can outsource the technical solution. One of the solutions can be providing an open-source app, but the digital capabilities of each institution are still a problem.

Even when the institution has an IT department, they have to have information forwarded, and they are not part of the communication process. There is a great necessity for information and training of existing personnel.

Lack of adequately educated personnel capable of implementation accompanied by costs of that personnel remains a problem. The only institution with the necessary personnel and technical development is the University of Romania.

"So mostly the biggest problem, it's human resources. If you have someone who can implement it, it is good, and if you don't, then you have to go through the loops of finding someone who can implement this solution and then cover the cost problem." (Romania)

ISIC can assist if asked, but they only offer assistance after or contact institutions to ask if help is needed. Not all countries receive available materials. Dissemination of information and examples is left at the discretion of each country, so the shared know-how is not equally and efficiently distributed.

"I was quite surprised that you got some of the best practical examples from your national agency because we are not getting something like that in the field of Erasmus without paper, but regarding anything. Yeah, because I never got that kind of information. The focus of our national agency may be on Erasmus without paper and not on the student card." (Germany)

For better implementation and knowledge on pushing the ESC forward, the best solution is the education of the IT sector in the institutions through training.

"And yeah, we cannot explain because we also do not know anything regarding that. So that's the main problem. Maybe if they have some good examples or some IT guy that can explain to the other IT guys." (Romania, IT)

The national agency needs to organize the meeting for the heads of the university. On the political level, this is an important initiative from the European Union. The European Student Card and Erasmus+ app are very technical, and HEIs must be provided with information on how to implement them. It has to have all instructions available for those working on this. So that would be helpful for you. Or for other universities who are just starting with this.

Unifying student identifiers are necessary for all students, local and those that are part of student exchange and mobility programs. That would also need at least partial unification of student cards on the local (national) level in countries where each HEI has their student card issued independently.

Better acceptance of the unified student card can be promoted through connecting with other perks like parking, libraries, museums, etc. Media promotion of the ESC, as well as a card that is not only aimed at students but at the HEI personnel as well, can go a long way in pushing the card.

Discussion with stakeholders from ISIC and European Union members is needed.

The most crucial part of pushing the ESC implementation is the help of the national agency. They need to provide more accurate and more direct, specific information for different parts of university services so they are all on the same page and aware of what to do.

STUDENTS

The questionnaire was distributed to students from 38 different countries, and it also reached international students from an additional 20 countries. Among the responses received, the highest participation came from students in France, comprising 27.3% of the respondents. They were followed by students from Portugal (10.53%), Czechia (7.2%), Latvia (6%), Greece (4.9%), Bulgaria (4.1%), and several other countries, each representing smaller percentages (ranging from 3.4% to 1.2%). Croatia and Finland both had participation rates of 1.3%.

It's noteworthy that students from additional international countries, beyond the initial 38, accounted for 6.3% of the total respondents. Among these additional international students, 11.5% were from Brazil, 18.2% from India, and 5.2% from Morocco.

It's not surprising minding the response rate in the country, that a significant proportion of students, 21.9%, are studying in France. This is followed by Portugal (12.2%), Romania (7.1%), Czechia (8.7%), Latvia (6%), Greece (4.6%), Bulgaria (4.4%), Germany (4.2%), Slovakia (4%), Ireland (3.9%), Spain (2.5%), Slovenia (2%), Estonia (1.5%), and Croatia and Finland (1.2%). Students from other countries, including those from Argentina, Singapore, Tunisia, Turkey, the United States, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Portugal, and Saudi Arabia, constitute a smaller percentage of the total respondents.

Regarding student mobility, the majority (80.1%) of students do not consider themselves mobility students. However, 8.9% have taken advantage of the Erasmus Plus study abroad opportunity, while 4.6% have participated in the international mobility program offered by Erasmus Plus. Another 2.7% have engaged in the Erasmus Plus traineeship for higher education students. The remaining 3.7% are not currently part of any mobility program but either have plans to join one in the future or have been part of one in the past.

In terms of higher education qualification programs, 51.5% of students are enrolled in bachelor's programs, followed by 31.3% in master's programs, and 6.4% in professional higher education certificate programs. The rest of the respondents are pursuing various other qualifications, including junior school, high school, college, licenses, apprenticeships, language courses, PhDs, postdocs, or postgraduate studies.

Students, in general, seem to require more awareness about the European Student Card Initiative (ESCI), as only 25.1% of students are familiar with it, leaving the majority, a substantial 74.9%, unaware of the opportunities it provides.

Among the students who are familiar with ESCI:

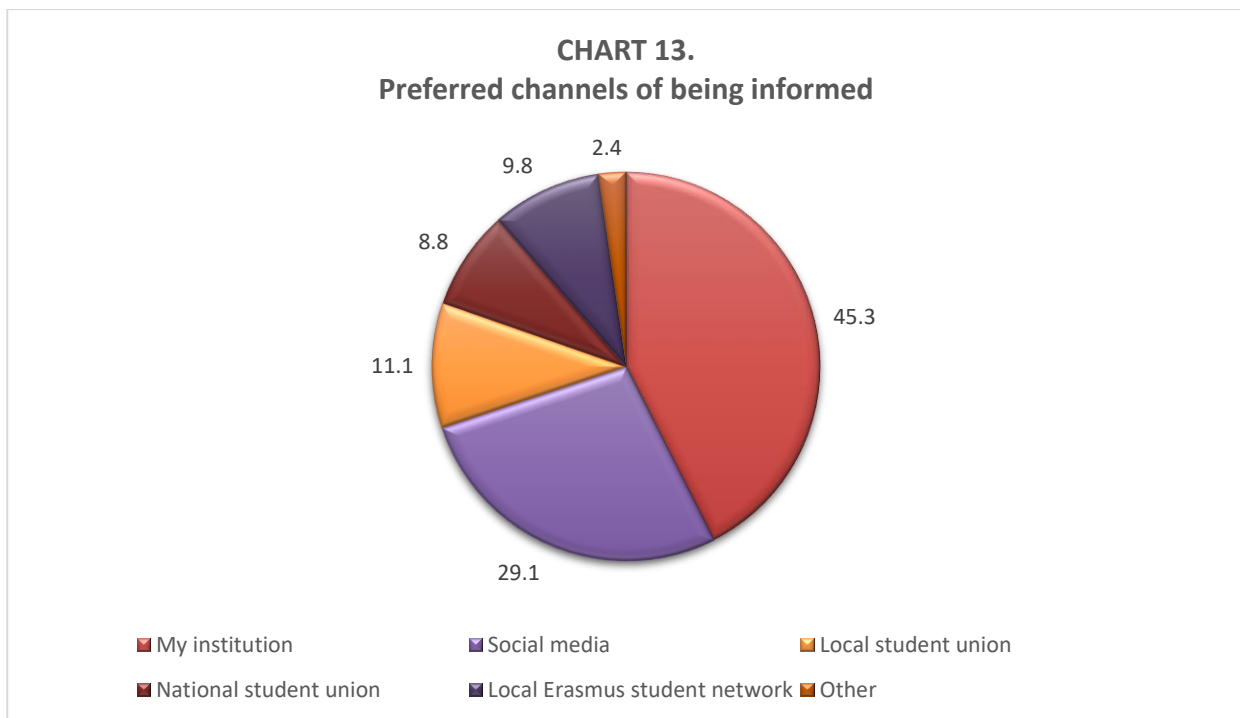
- ⇒ 11.3% learned about it through their university.
- ⇒ 5.1% became familiar with ESCI through their student card.
- ⇒ 4.9% were informed about the initiative by fellow students.

⇒ 8.1% discovered ESCI through the Erasmus Plus mobility program.

⇒ A smaller percentage, 1.2%, learned about it from the local student union.

Secondary sources that contributed to students' awareness of the initiative include internet in general, banks and social media, transportation or touristic companies, ISIC, family, newspapers, local agencies and friends.

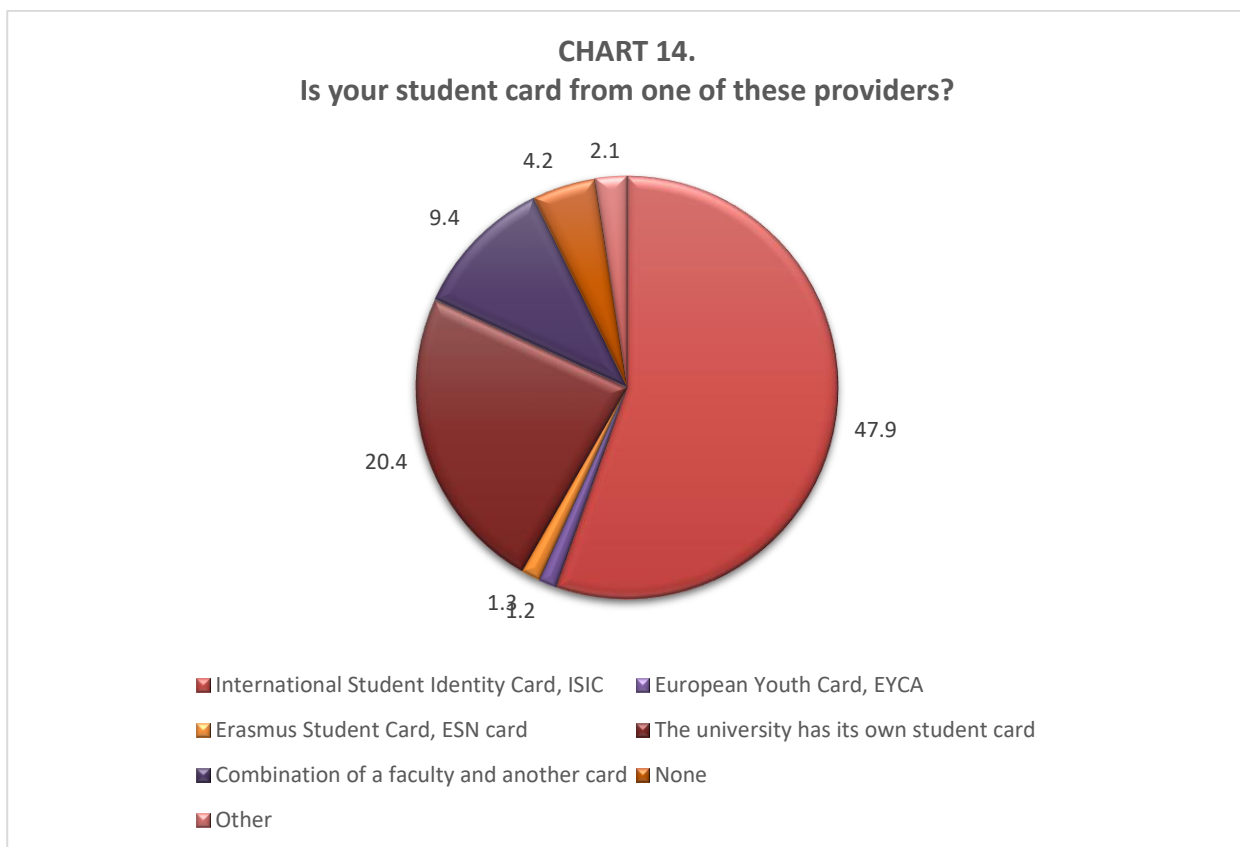
These findings suggest a need for more effective promotion and dissemination of information about ESCI to ensure that a greater number of students are aware of the opportunities it offers. Social media appears to be significantly underutilized as a channel for promoting ESCI, with only a mere 0.3% of students mentioning it as an actual source of information about the initiative. This underscores a missed opportunity for effective promotion and outreach, given the widespread use of social media among students as 29,1% prefer social media as a channel of information. It may be beneficial for authorities responsible for ESCI promotion to explore strategies to harness the power of social media for raising awareness and disseminating information about the initiative among students more effectively.



Institutions remain the most significant source of information for students, with 45.3% of students expressing their preference for being informed about Erasmus+ mobility and ESC through their Higher Education Institution (HEI). Local Erasmus student networks (9.8%) and both local (11.1%) and national (8.8%) student unions also play important roles as sources of information for students. Additionally, email is seen as a valuable source by 1.5% of students.

These preferences highlight the significance of institutional communication and the importance of leveraging social media to effectively reach and inform students about ESCI. Additionally, local and national student organizations play a vital role in disseminating information and supporting student initiatives.

The majority of students, accounting for 89.8%, possess student cards, while 9.5% of students do not have a student card. Among those with student cards, 87.6% use them to access various student services.



Regarding the acquisition of student cards, a significant proportion, 62.6%, received their student card from the university for free. About 21.7% of students state that the university provides the card, but they have to pay for it. The primary provider of student cards is ISIC, with 47.9% of respondents obtaining their cards from this source. Students who received their cards from the university represent 20.4% of respondents, and 9.4% of students have a combination of a faculty card and another card. The Erasmus student card (1.3%) and the European Youth Card (1.2%) are less commonly used.

Regarding the format of student cards, physical cards are the most common, with 54% of students using them. Digital cards are used by 13.8% of students, while a combination of both physical and digital formats is utilized by 32.1% of students.

Notably, the majority of students, 78.1%, express satisfaction with the services provided by their specific cards.

⇒ ESC is seen as a valuable tool for students that makes their life easier.

"The European Student Card simplifies administrative processes by providing a standardized identification system for students. It promotes mobility and cultural exchange by granting access to resources and services across European countries. The card also integrates student discounts and benefits, encouraging financial inclusivity and participation in various opportunities. Additionally, it supports digital education through online platforms and resources. Overall, the initiative creates a student-friendly and interconnected European educational landscape." (Turkey)

⇒ ESC is beneficial to students because of access to discounts.

"Amazing as it is the only card that can offer me student discounts with multiple partners even though I am a university student" (Greece)

„It's very helpful for student since most often we don't have income or have lowest income. It's really helpful for discount in a lot of stores (France)

„Discounts and other student benefits should be available to every student of the EU even if they are in another city or country of the EU." (Romania)

„I think students should benefit from discounts as studying is expensive enough, also one universal card is better." (Netherlands)

„In a cost of living crisis, it is very helpful to get support from student-friendly business and ISIC is widely know, so I never have to explain what this card is or does. It also works as a bank card, therefore you don't need to carry useless plastic around. I find the app very helpful too, as when I used to study years ago, this wasn't a thing, therefore I alas had to look up places before going or ask staff. Now I can just look it up via app." (Latvia)

⇒ ESC is beneficial to students as it is an international document.

"An international document to be accepted as a student." (Austria)

„Saves a lot of time and many places also acts as a proof of identity." (Czech Republic)

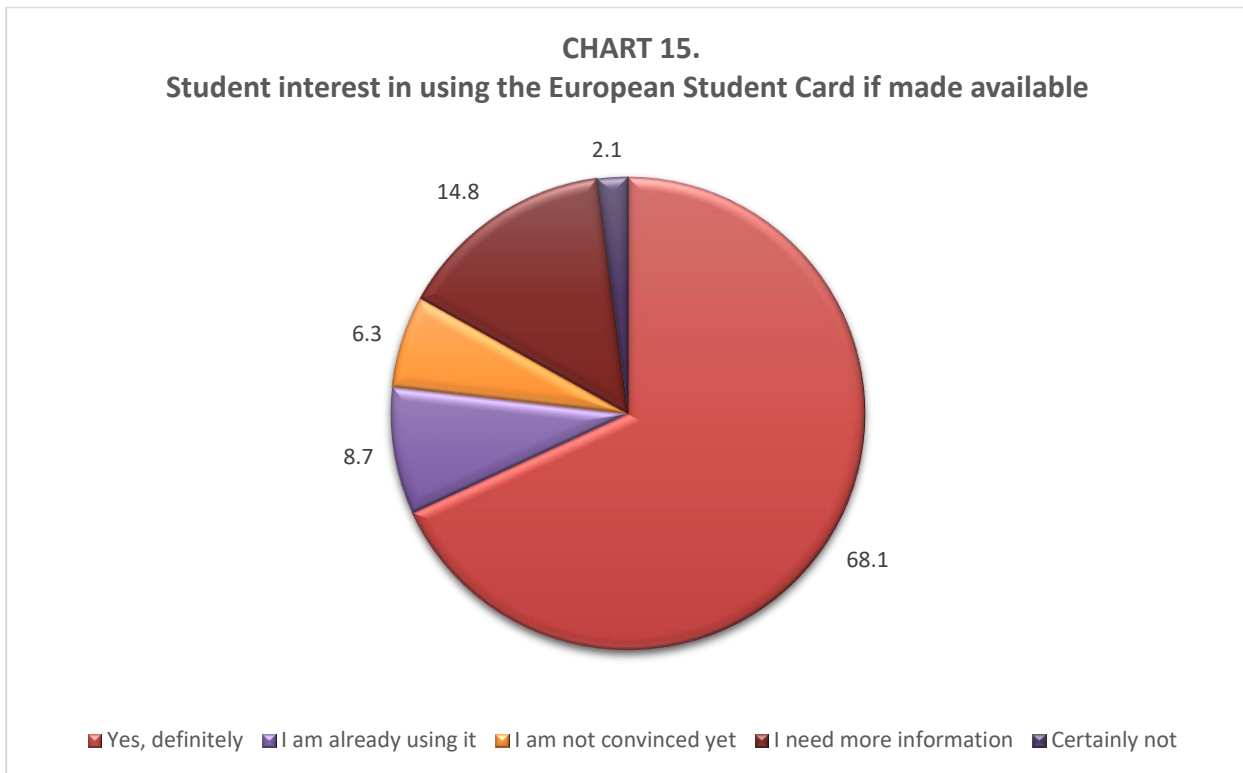
⇒ ESC is beneficial to students as a tool for greater inclusion and mobility.

„It's a good initiative because it puts all the students on the same stall, everybody don't have the same rights and it could erase some difference and could help the student when they go to another country" (France)

„L'initiative de la Carte Étudiante Européenne est extrêmement intéressante pour faciliter la participation des étudiants aux activités éducatives et culturelles, ainsi que simplifier les démarches administratives liées à leur mobilité." (France).

The European Student Card (ESC) initiative is widely viewed as an excellent and valuable opportunity by students. However, there are some important observations:

1. **Non-Mobile Students:** Some students who do not participate in mobility programs may not immediately perceive the benefit of the ESC, as they may feel it doesn't apply to them or that they don't have a need for it. These students may require more targeted communication to understand the potential advantages.
2. **Prior Limitations:** Students who have encountered limitations with their current cards, such as acceptance issues in specific locations, may have reservations or doubts about the practical benefits of the ESC.



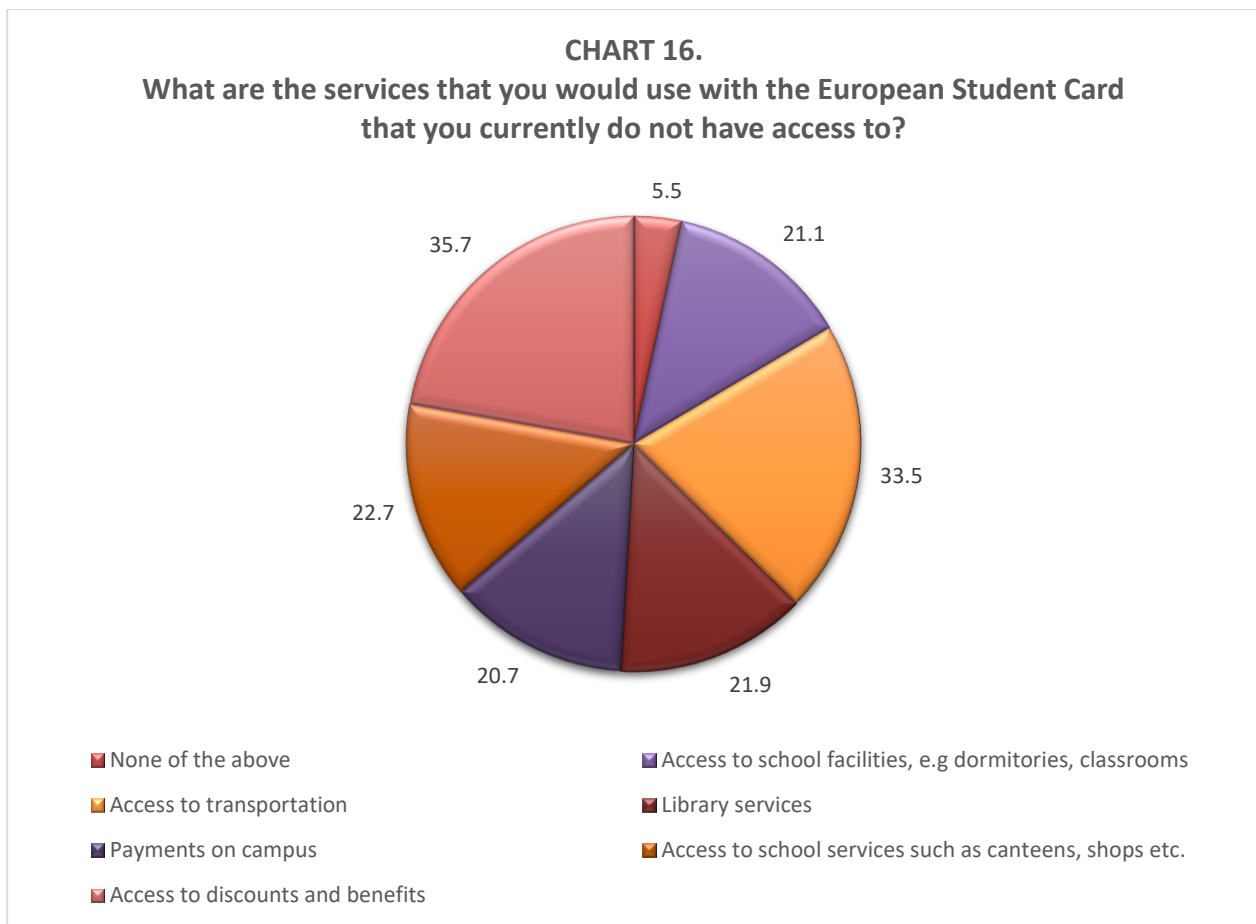
Based on responses from 1832 students, there is a high interest obtaining an ESC card if it were made available (68.1%). Approximately 14.8% of students state that they need more information about the ESC card, indicating a willingness to explore its benefits further. A smaller fraction (6.3%) of students may require more convincing about the benefits of the ESC. Only a minority of students (2.1%) do not see any benefits in the ESC, suggesting that most students recognize its potential advantages.

Students are motivated to show interest in the European Student Card (ESC) initiative for several reasons, including:

1. **Increased Access to Services:** A significant portion (33.6%) of students sees the potential for accessing more services during their studies as a compelling reason to be interested in the ESC.

2. **Single Point of Entry Services:** Nearly as important (32%) is the perception that the ESC could provide access to all services in one place, offering a convenient and consolidated experience.
3. **Paperless Mobility:** A considerable percentage (26.7%) of students values the idea of making the mobility process paperless, which can simplify administrative tasks and reduce paperwork.
4. **Discounts and Benefits:** Many students recognize the benefits of various discounts, making mobility easier, encouraging travel, and enhancing overall student life, especially for international and mobility students.

Given the opportunity to use ESC, student would like to benefit from different services that are obtained with discounted prices - 35.7% of ESC users claim to have access to discounts and benefits; 33.5% use it for accessing transportation; 22.7% utilize it for accessing school services like canteens and shops; 21.9% find it useful for library services; 21.1% use it for accessing school facilities and 20.7% use it for making payments on campus.



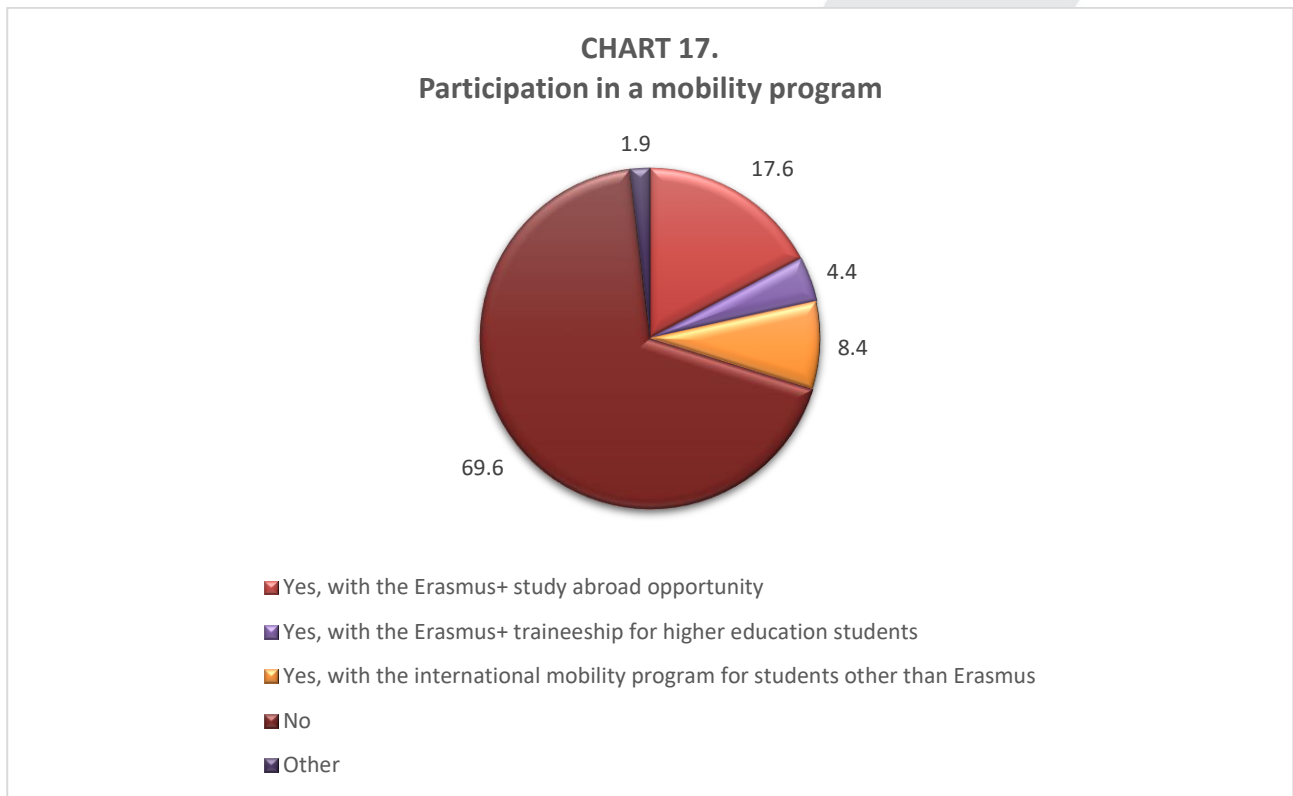
The perception of the European Student Card (ESC) as a single card that consolidates various services instead of requiring multiple different cards is indeed valuable to students. This approach streamlines administrative processes and enhances convenience, contributing to the overall appeal of the ESC. It's notable that students who are already using the ESC recognize and enjoy the benefits it provides. This suggests that the ESC has high value for those who have experienced it.

However, as we pointed out, the penetration of the ESC in the student population remains relatively low. To maximize its impact and the benefits it offers, there may be opportunities to increase awareness, improve accessibility, and expand the availability of ESC to a broader range of students. This could help unlock its full potential and make it a more widely adopted and appreciated resource for students across various educational institutions.

76.4% of students express a preference for the European Student Card (ESC) to be available in both digital and physical forms. This dual availability is seen as a way to accommodate the varying preferences and technical capabilities of students. Specifically, 17.6% of students are interested in having the ESC only in digital form, while only a small portion, 5.2%, still prefer the traditional physical card format.

Those students who express a desire for both digital and physical cards are considerate of their peers who may not have the technical capabilities for digital cards, reflecting a concern for inclusivity and accessibility (0.03%). There are also some suggestions for additional digital editions, including Google and Apple Wallet (0.2%), as well as email (0.03%).

Regarding student participation in mobility programs, the majority of students (69.6%) did not participate in any mobility programs. Among those who did, the most commonly used program was the Erasmus+ study abroad opportunity (17.6%). Other programs, such as the international mobility program for students other than Erasmus (8.4%) and the Erasmus plus traineeship for higher education students (4.4%), were also utilized.



Some students have plans to join mobility programs, either nationally or internationally, in the future. Among students who participated in mobility programs, a significant majority, 56.6%, used their student card during the mobility program. Their card was mostly issued by the country they moved to during the mobility program (60.2% of all who used the card), while 39.8% was able to use a card from their home country.

Regarding access, 72% of students had the same access as a student from the country where they were studying during their mobility program. However, 28% did not have the same access, suggesting disparities in access to certain services.

The Erasmus Plus application is mostly unfamiliar among the student population, with 93.7% of students expressing a need to learn about the Erasmus+ app. Among the 6.3% of students familiar with the app, less than a third actually use it. Additionally, 41.6% of these users are still determining if the app is useful, while 47.8% perceive the app as either very useful or reasonably useful.

These findings highlight the need for greater awareness and understanding of the Erasmus Plus app among students, as well as potential room for improvement in its perceived usefulness.

FOCUS GROUP

The student-focused focus group took place on October 25, 2023, with participants from the Czech Republic. The participants possessed firsthand experience with student mobility, along with exposure to both the Erasmus+ app and the Erasmus without paper system. The primary issue with the Erasmus+ app was its limited utility or the app's high demand on their mobile devices. Conversely, the Erasmus without paper system posed a more significant hurdle, as participants continued to be required to provide physical documentation bearing their signatures and stamps, or their destination country had not yet fully adopted the program.

"For my second mobility, that was in Zagreb. Actually, it was impossible to do everything online because the university wasn't ready. I had to bring back the learning agreement because they put a physical stamp and signature on it." (Czech Republic)

Despite these challenging experiences, the students still view Erasmus without paper as a remarkable initiative, particularly when it becomes fully integrated across all partnering countries and higher education institutions.

The European student card is recognized for its substantial advantages. Students perceive it as a supplementary offering to their ISIC card. It stands out as a single, multifunctional card, which need not be confined to a physical form, that not only serves as proof of student status but also grants access to various student amenities and facilitates payments in canteens. Moreover, it extends its utility to encompass additional benefits, such as discounts for both in-person and online purchases. The card's potential advantages, in addition to the benefits

the card should cover, include discounts on transportation throughout the entire European Union, reduced admission fees for museums, theaters, concerts, festivals, cinema and fast food. However, this scenario only holds true if the card is effectively implemented and operational across all EU countries, which is currently not the case.

Responsibility for promoting the card, in their view, primarily rests with Higher Education Institutions and student offices. The prevailing consensus suggests that a broader outreach effort is needed to inform more students about the European Student Card and its associated benefits. The prevailing sentiment is that students would be inclined to opt for the European Student Card, even with a modest fee, provided that the card delivers on all its promises. In the long run, it may not even require active promotion, as word-of-mouth endorsements, akin to the ISIC card, are expected to suffice.

"To be ready for the students and if they (HEIs) have an incoming student from abroad and he has this card or he or she has this card then just give him. Give him the full experience at the university so that he doesn't recognize the fact that he's actually in different country." (Czech Republic)

Nonetheless, the effectiveness of word-of-mouth endorsements and promotional efforts hinges on the card's consistent and uniform benefits, ensuring a comparable experience across all partnering countries.

In a recent ISIC France Roadshow mapping, it was revealed that 65% of the students surveyed had not yet had the opportunity to participate in an international academic exchange program. This statistic underscores the pressing need to eliminate the various barriers that stand in the way of this invaluable form of educational mobility. These barriers can be categorized into three distinct but interconnected dimensions: information, administration, and finances.

First and foremost, there is the informative barrier. As a student, understanding the intricacies of embarking on an academic exchange can be a daunting task. Questions like "How can I best inform myself to succeed in my academic exchange?" and "Where do I begin?" can be overwhelming. This is where the European Student Card Initiative (ESCI) comes into play, providing essential guidance and resources to students, enabling them to navigate the complex landscape of international academic exchanges with confidence.

The administrative hurdle is the next challenge. As students contemplate studying abroad, they are faced with a myriad of administrative requirements, from obtaining the appropriate student or immigration status to securing a visa, setting up a local bank account, subscribing to local social security services, and acquiring insurance, among other tasks. ESCI, with its support, aims to streamline these administrative processes within the European Union through digitalization. By simplifying and harmonizing these administrative procedures, students can focus more on their academic journey and less on bureaucratic obstacles.

The third and perhaps most significant barrier is economic. Studying abroad entails substantial costs, including accommodation, health insurance, intra-European and local transport, daily living expenses, and more. ESCI's role in addressing this issue is vital. The initiative strives to make the European

identifier a recognized and widely adopted tool among all stakeholders in student life. This includes higher education institutions, public transport providers, local public services, administrative bodies related to immigration and visa processing, insurance providers, and even businesses offering student discounts. The overarching goal is to offer students access to the best conditions and prices, thereby making studying in different European countries more financially viable.

In addition to these practical measures, ESCI aims to promote awareness about the European educational opportunities offered by various higher education institutions throughout the continent. By disseminating information about these programs, students can make informed choices and seize the benefits of academic mobility, broadening their horizons, and contributing to a more connected and knowledgeable Europe.

The European Student Card Initiative is poised to be a transformative force in breaking down the barriers to international academic exchanges. By addressing the informative, administrative, and economic challenges that students face, ESCI seeks to empower the next generation of European scholars, facilitating their journeys of self-discovery and cross-cultural understanding, ultimately enriching the tapestry of Europe's diverse academic landscape.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

The European Student Card Initiative (ESCI) should be of paramount importance as it streamlines administrative processes, enhances student mobility, and promotes integration within European higher education. By offering a standardized, widely recognized student card, ESCI should simplify cross-border academic experiences, reduces administrative burdens on institutions, and improves access to essential services for international students. It encourages digitalization in higher education, supports sustainability efforts, and fosters a sense of inclusion and visibility among international students. Overall, ESCI has a tremendous potential to play a pivotal role in creating a more efficient, student-centric, and integrated higher education landscape in Europe.

Our study main objective was to assess the awareness, perceptions, and preferences of ESU/ISIC member organisations, students and higher education institutions regarding the European Student Card Initiative (ESCI). It aimed to gather data on how ESU/ISIC member organizations, students and institutions perceive ESCI, their familiarity with it, and their preferences for its implementation, including digital and physical formats.



Organizations that have the highest interest to pursue implementation of the ESCI, involved 43 participants from ESU/ISIC, representing 31 countries, shedding a light on several important aspects that need to be considered in further implementation. They were largely aware of ESC, with 85% already acquainted with it. They considered ESCI important (36.6% important, 34.1% very important) and recognized the need to become familiar with other initiatives promoting international student mobility in Europe. ESC implementation on existing student cards was low at 15.8%, with some countries having completed it. Challenges included limited collective awareness, GDPR concerns, and decentralized systems for Higher Education Institutions.

In conclusion, while ESCI is seen as important, raising awareness and addressing challenges related to implementation, digitalization, and communication with HEIs are crucial for its successful adoption. Concrete examples of ESC implementations and the potential for partnerships with other initiatives can further enhance ESCI's impact. Expanding ESC services should be explored thoughtfully, considering the specific needs of HEIs and students. Member organizations' digital expertise complements HEIs' efforts in ESC implementation.

In a part of a study involving 25 contact countries and 475 respondents coming from Higher Education Institutions, France exhibited the highest level of interest in the European Student Card Initiative (ESCI), with 54.7% participation from higher education institutions. 59.7% of HEIs were familiar with ESCI, with awareness gained primarily through the official ESCI website and various educational institutions. 93.5% of HEIs participate and organise in international student mobility programs. The majority aim to maintain a majority of local students (60%) but vary in the presence of international students. International students commonly have access to campus facilities, libraries, accommodations, and on-campus commodities. 43.2% of institutions express a need for greater awareness of initiatives promoting international student mobility in Europe. RFID technology is common in physical student cards, while QR codes dominate digital student cards. ISIC cards are favored (20.4%) alongside student cards, followed by the Erasmus student card (2.9%). The Erasmus Plus app and Erasmus without Paper solution are not used and have varying degrees of recognition and implementation, with challenges cited for both.

In a survey involving students from 38 countries, 80.1% of students don't consider themselves mobility students, only 8.9% have participated in Erasmus Plus study abroad programs. Only 25.1% of students are familiar with the European Student Card Initiative (ESCI), with various sources of awareness including universities, student cards, fellow students, Erasmus Plus, and student unions.

Students are motivated to show interest in ESCI due to increased access to services (33.6%), centralized access to services (32%), paperless mobility (26.7%), and discounts and benefits (20.7%).

Majority of students (76.4%) prefer ESCI in both digital and physical forms. Only 17.6% preferring digital-only and 5.2% preferring physical-only.

Regarding student participation in mobility programs, 69.6% haven't participated, but among those who did, the most popular was Erasmus+ (17.6%). Some students plan to join mobility programs in the future.

The Erasmus Plus app is largely unfamiliar (93.7%), with less than a third of those familiar using it.

In summary, the study underscores the importance of ESCI as a tool for enhancing student experiences and promoting mobility within the European educational landscape. It highlights the roles of ISIC/ESU members and HEIs in driving awareness and implementation, along with the need for support, infrastructure development, and collaboration to ensure the successful adoption of ESCI. Overall, ESCI has the potential to streamline processes, improve access to services, and contribute to the internationalization of education within Europe and globally.

ESCI is perceived by students as an intelligent idea but they lack knowledge on the subject and above all cruelly lack a vision of its usefulness. Unfortunately, this is also the case for HEI and our community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Enhance Awareness, Communication and Education:

- ⇒ Develop targeted awareness campaigns to educate Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) about the European Student Card Initiative (ESCI) and what added value it brings to the HEIs and students, especially those operating own cards.
- ⇒ Translate the information page on the ESCI website into the languages commonly used in Erasmus+ member countries. This will make it more accessible and understandable for HEIs (their IRO, IT and educational departments) and other decision makers whose involvement is required in all stages of ESCI implementation.
- ⇒ Organize workshops or webinars aimed at HEI representatives to demonstrate the practical benefits of ESC and guide them through the implementation process.

Highlight the concrete benefits of the ESCI program for both institutions and students:

- ⇒ ESCI should focus on further digitalizing administrative procedures for EU academic exchanges to simplify and enhance student mobility.
- ⇒ ESCI should actively promote the European identifier's recognition among all student life stakeholders, ensuring seamless experiences across HEIs, transport, services, and discounts.
- ⇒ ESCI should drive the recognition of the European identifier by intra-European transport providers, providing students with cost-effective options. Expanding its utility to all mobility areas will further benefit students.
- ⇒ ESCI should actively facilitate comprehensive information dissemination about European HEIs. Empowering students with knowledge about academic opportunities will enhance accessibility and informed decision-making for their academic journeys.

Strengthen ISIC/ESU Member Engagement and Offers:

- ⇒ Open the space for ISIC/ESU members to actively collaborate with HEIs in promoting ESCI and providing guidance on its implementation, utilizing its expertise.
- ⇒ Foster a community of practice among ISIC/ESU members to facilitate knowledge sharing and best practices for ESCI promotion and engagement with HEIs.
- ⇒ Harness the power of social media, considering students' preference, to reach a wider audience and generate interest in ESCI, which is a great added value of these networks.
- ⇒ Promote the continued expansion of student benefits and offerings, as they substantially enhance the perceived value of the European Student Card among students.

Support HEIs in Transition to Digital Platforms:

- ⇒ Offer technical support and guidance to HEIs lacking the necessary infrastructure for a digital ESC. Add additional technical implementation details to the website to cater to HEIs that have already established systems in place.
- ⇒ Provide HEIs with comprehensive resources and training materials to improve their understanding of ESCI's technical aspects and functionalities.
- ⇒ Explore partnerships and funding opportunities to help HEIs upgrade their digital capabilities, ensuring equitable access to ESCI.
- ⇒ Offer solutions for the GDPR issues and work towards having tailored solutions for each of the countries.

Facilitate Collaboration among Stakeholders:

- ⇒ The wide variety of academic exchanges show that mobility is not regional (European) than global phenomenon. The international focus of ISIC and its collaboration number of intergovernmental organisations (UNESCO, UNWTO, Organisation of American States, African Union, Gulf Cooperation and many others) can be an additional asset for the promotion of educational exchanges and Europe's global leadership.
- ⇒ Collaborate with key stakeholders in the education sector, such as national education ministries, to gain their support and assistance in promoting ESC to HEIs.
- ⇒ Establish platforms or working groups that bring together ISIC/ESU members, HEIs, and relevant authorities to facilitate communication, share insights, and streamline ESCI implementation efforts.
- ⇒ Encourage open dialogue and collaboration between HEIs and ISIC/ESU members to tailor ESCI initiatives to local needs and preferences.

Provide Continuous Support:

- ⇒ Create ongoing support mechanisms, such as helplines or dedicated contacts, to assist HEIs throughout the ESCI implementation process.

- ⇒ Share success stories and case studies from other HEIs that have already implemented ESC. Real-life examples can be compelling and demonstrate the program's feasibility and advantages.
- ⇒ Conduct regular assessments and evaluations to identify areas where HEIs may require additional assistance or resources.

Promote Sustainability and Inclusivity:

- ⇒ Consider sustainability and environmental concerns by offering both digital and physical ESC options, accommodating students with varying preferences and technical capabilities.
- ⇒ Ensure that ESCI initiatives prioritize inclusivity, aiming to serve the diverse needs of all students, including those with disabilities.

Monitor and Evaluate Progress:

- ⇒ Establish a system for collecting feedback from students and institutions to make continuous improvements.
- ⇒ Establish key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure the success of ESCI implementation, such as the number of HEIs onboarded, student adoption rates, and satisfaction levels.
- ⇒ Periodically review and assess the impact of ESCI to make data-driven decisions for further improvements.