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Survey of the Socio-Economic Background of ERASMUS Students DG EAC 01/05

Manuel Souto Otero and Andrew McCoshan

Final report



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

In October 2005 ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd. was commissioned by the European Commission (DG Education and Culture) to undertake a “**Survey of the socio-economic background of ERASMUS students**”. The **overall objective** of this contract was to update a similar survey originally carried out by the European Commission in 1998¹ and published in 2000. Its **overall aim** was to give an overview of the socio-economic situation of students who participated in the ERASMUS programme during the academic year 2004/05.

Methodology

Data from ERASMUS students for the year 2004/05 was gathered by means of an online survey. The link to the online survey was provided to all participant universities in the programme, who distributed the links amongst the students participating in the programme in the year of reference. Overall, 15,513 valid answers from 30 countries were received. This large sample exceeds the sample collected in the 1998 survey by around 6,000 responses and provides a **representative sample for analysis with low margins of error**².

The survey gathered data on the **profile of respondents to the survey, their assessment of the ERASMUS period, their socio-economic background and their financial situation**. The report also presented data on the ERASMUS programme in the year of reference and offered a **comparison** between the survey results in 2006, the 2000 survey of the socio-economic background of ERASMUS students (which covered 17 countries) and EUROSTUDENT, which gathered data on a number of variables of relevance to this study for Higher Education (HE) students in general in 11 European countries. Comparisons between surveys, however, should be treated with caution given their methodological differences.

In general the report examines findings for the entire **15,000 responses**, but does also provide data on individual Member States where these are helpful in showing the range of responses for a given question. However, there are many interesting differences between countries which could not be explored within the confines of this particular study and Member States and universities will probably find it highly informative to examine the data for their own particular countries in some detail.

¹ European Commission, DG Education and Culture (2000) “Survey into the socio-economic background of ERASMUS students” Brussels.

² The margin of error expresses the amount of the random variation underlying a survey's results. This can be thought of as a measure of the variation one would see in reported percentages if the same poll were taken multiple times. The larger the margin of error, the less confidence one has that the poll's reported percentages are close to the "true" percentages, that is the percentages in the whole population.

Findings

ERASMUS programme

Administrative data reports that in 2004/05 144,058 students took part in the ERASMUS programme in 31 countries, the average duration of the ERASMUS study period being 6.5 months. The average grant per month per student during our year of reference was €140.

Profile of respondents to the survey

Over 60% of ERASMUS students in our sample were between 21 and 23 years of age. Two thirds were studying for Higher Education degrees which would take between four and five years to complete and two thirds were also in their third or fourth year of study. Over 40% of respondents had undertaken an ERASMUS study period of between 5 and 6 months in length.

Just over 95% of students in our sample had enjoyed an ERASMUS grant. Around 60% of respondents were female, 40% male, a slight over-representation compared to the average HE population. The large majority of students (93%) were single. Over 99% of students had no dependent children at the time of their ERASMUS period, above the average for HE students. **Respondents were highly competent in foreign languages.** 82% per cent of our respondents were the first in their families to study abroad.

Socio-economic background

Almost two thirds of respondents had at least one parent who held an occupation as an executive, professional or technician. As mentioned in the 2000 survey this proportion is higher than that found in the population in general, where less than 40% of people in employment aged 45 and over have such jobs. Moreover, **around 58% of students in our survey had at least one parent who had experienced Higher Education.**

A large majority of ERASMUS students reported **the income status of their parents as being on or above the average income in their country.** Only 14% of students reported their parents' income status as being lower or considerably lower than average. However, there seems to have been some progress in attracting people from less well-off backgrounds in the last five years –see section on comparison between surveys below.

Financial situation during the ERASMUS period

Overall, 37% of the students considered their financial situation during the ERASMUS period good or very good, 44% considered it fair and 19% considered it poor or very poor. However, **fifty five percent of students reported that the ERASMUS grant financial contribution was insufficient for their mobility period abroad.** This was by far the most common financial problem they faced during their period abroad. Other financial problems (such as “unable to retain a national grant or loan”, “parents’ contribution was insufficient”, “unable to continue paid work”, or “other”) were reported only by 15% or less of students in each case.

The financial problems experienced by ERASMUS students are notably affected by the cost of living in their host country.

The average ERASMUS grant for the year of reference according to administrative sources was €140 per month. This increased to €200 in our survey, probably due students counting other financial support (regional, national or institutional) as part of the ERASMUS grant, even though this is not correct. According to our survey the **additional expense of ERASMUS students during their ERASMUS period varies strongly depending on whether the student lived with his/her parents/ family or not in their home country**. The additional expense per month for an ERASMUS student who had lived at home the previous year of study would be €82 (or around €538 for an academic year of 9 months). If we discount the average value of an ERASMUS grant (€140 per month) for an academic year of the same duration (€1260) the net expense of the student is €278, which would need to be covered by alternative means (mainly family, work, loans or additional financial support for the ERASMUS period from institutions other than the Commission). For students living at home during their academic studies, therefore, the ERASMUS grant covers just under 50% of their additional expense –although other institutional help is often available to them. For students *not* living with their parents/ family in their home country the difference in expense between home and host country is around €122. This difference would be covered by the average ERASMUS grant.

The amount of ERASMUS grant received was found to reflect to a certain extent the socio-economic background of students. At one end of the spectrum, students reporting a parental income considerably higher than average reported an average monthly ERASMUS grant of €191, whilst those reporting an income considerably below average reported a grant of €245.

There is a clear relationship between the economic situation of parents and the financial situation of students during their ERASMUS period. The proportion of students from considerably lower than average income families are disproportionately represented amongst the students who considered their financial situation poor during their ERASMUS period.

Assessment of the ERASMUS period and its effects

ERASMUS students assessed their ERASMUS period abroad very positively. Around 87% of students considered their overall experience abroad positive/ very positive. They also assessed facilities (IT, libraries), accommodation and social integration in their host institution positively. Students' already high levels of language competence were boosted by ERASMUS with the proportion of students saying they had at least some proficiency in a third language increasing by eight percentage points during their mobility period, and by 14 points for a fourth language. The ERASMUS period **also shaped the attitudes and values of ERASMUS students substantially**, particularly in personal values but also in career aspirations or educational competences, with between 65% and 95% of students reporting large changes or changes to some extent in their career-related attitudes and aspirations, the broadening of their general education, their personal values and their understanding of people from another cultural or ethnic background.

Comparison between surveys

In terms of the demographic characteristics of respondents we see a high degree of consistency between the 2000 and the 2006 surveys. In terms of results, the proportion of students **being the first in their families to study abroad** was similar for both surveys, as was the positive assessment of the ERASMUS period abroad.

It is important to highlight, however, that **there seems to have been some progress in attracting people from less well-off backgrounds in the last five years**. The proportion of students reporting their parental income as average or below average was 53% in the 2000 survey and 63% in 2006. In 2000 32% of students reported not having any parent working in executive, professional or technical occupations as opposed to 39% in 2006. However, such **trends are less well reflected in parental background by level of education**: in the 2000 survey 60% of the surveyed students indicated that they had at least one parent who had completed a degree or other Higher Education qualification; in 2006 this proportion was 58%. These figures are higher than those for Higher Education students in general, according to data from the EUROSTUDENT survey, and much higher than those from the general population.

In terms of the **financial situation of ERASMUS students**, the 2000 ERASMUS survey report concluded that the **ERASMUS grant** (€120 in the year 1997/98, only €20 less than in the year 2004/05 on average) **was a necessary financial supplement for mobility that did to some extent cover the extra costs of studying abroad**. These results are confirmed by our survey, although there are differences between both surveys. In the 2000 survey, for students living with their parents in their home country, ERASMUS covered only 40% of their additional costs, whereas in our survey the proportion is closer to 50%. Whilst in 2000 the average ERASMUS grant covered nearly 80% of the additional expense of students living away from the parental home, it covered over 100% of the additional costs for these students in our survey.

Our survey also showed that almost half of students (around 40%) lived with their parents when studying in their home institution. This is a 10% increase on the 2000 survey in the group of students which suffers higher additional expenses during the ERASMUS period.

On the issue of whether **some students are deterred from participation in ERASMUS altogether for financial reasons**, the survey found that over half of the students (53%) had friends who had looked into participating in the programme but had not done so mainly for financial reasons. Students from the more affluent countries, with a greater tradition of mobility and high levels of education tend to have fewer friends who are unable to participate in ERASMUS due to financial reasons.

Conclusions

ERASMUS students value their experience abroad highly. They are normally the first in their families to study abroad and assess their period positively in terms of overall experience, learning infrastructure and social integration. They improve their language skills in the

languages they already speak and often learn new languages. The period also has a profound impact on their values towards other people, and towards learning and work.

Some **demographic groups**, however, are more likely to take up the opportunities to enjoy these benefits than others. Males and students with children are taking up ERASMUS periods to a lesser extent than would be predicted taking into account their profile within the overall composition of HE students.

There are **still important socio-economic barriers in relation to take-up of the programme**. A large proportion of students reported their parents to have an **economic status** above the average in their country, although a change in the profile of programme participants can be observed from the 2000 survey, with more students from average and below-average economic background participating in the programme than before.

ERASMUS students also exhibit a higher proportion of parents **working at the executive, professional and technician** groups than would be expected for HE students in general, although there is great variation amongst countries, and few have economically inactive or unemployed parents.

Yet the occupational background of parents is not as important as their **educational background** in determining the participation of students in the programme. A very large proportion of ERASMUS students have parents with HE. Parents with HE may be more aware of the ERASMUS programme and its benefits, may be more encouraging in relation to the education of their offspring or may be willing to ensure that their children do “something more” than they did when they studied for their degrees.

There are, still, however, **many students that cannot participate in the programme due to financial reasons**. Over half of the ERASMUS students that participated in the programme in 2004/05 knew other students who had been deterred from participating in the programme mainly due to financial reasons. A significant proportion of them knew many other students who had not participated in the programme for those reasons.

The ERASMUS grant, on average, covers the additional expense of studying abroad. Yet there are differences in the degree to which additional expenses are covered depending on the country of origin and host country (or indeed city), on the economic and social background of students and on where they normally live during their studies. In this respect, **about half of the students who participated in the survey reported the ERASMUS grant as being insufficient**.

In view of the above it could be argued that **greater emphasis should be put into the financing of the programme so as to enable the participation** in the programme of people **who now cannot take part in it due to financial reasons**. This should be measured against the administrative costs of setting up schemes that take into account the economic background of students. A **more nuanced allocation** of funds by home and host country would also benefit the participation of a wider set of students in the programme since these aspects still

have an impact on the financial situation of students due to differences in the cost of living that is not fully offset by the current distribution of grants.

In this respect, however, our study has also found that **barriers to take-up of the programme are not only economic but truly socio-economic**. Actions to address these may entail therefore not only increasing or better targeting the ERASMUS grant, but also undertaking further dissemination of the programme and its benefits amongst the student population. This may not require great investment from EU institutions, but could entail, for instance, information and feedback sessions from previous ERASMUS students still at university.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In October 2005 ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd. was commissioned by the European Commission (DG Education and Culture) to undertake a “Survey of the socio-economic background of ERASMUS students”. The overall objective of this contract was to update a similar survey originally carried out by the European Commission in 1998³ and published in 2000. It aimed to give an overview of the socio-economic situation of students who participated in the ERASMUS programme during the academic year 2004/05.

The survey was undertaken between January and April 2006. All Universities that participated in the programme in 2004/05 were invited to take part in the survey⁴. The survey was made available online (www.ecotec.com/ERASMUS) in 24 European languages. Replies were received from a representative sample of over 15,500 students across all participating countries except Luxembourg.

This report sets out the findings from the survey. The main focus is the socio-economic background of the 2004/05 students, but data was also gathered on a variety of other topics including the value of the ERASMUS student experience. Findings on these other topics are reported either in the main text of this report or in the annexes. Reference is made to individual countries within the main text where they are helpful to illustrate the range of a dataset. However, there are many interesting differences between countries which could not be explored within the confines of this particular study and Member States and universities will probably find it highly informative to examine the data provided in the Annex One for their own particular countries in some detail.

The report also presents a comparison with the Commission’s 2000 survey as well as with data from EUROSTUDENT 2005⁵, one of the very few sources of data on the socio-economic and family background of students available, and the OECD’s *Education at a Glance* series when applicable.

The next section provides additional information on the characteristics of the survey, the representativeness of its results and our findings. Section three provides our conclusions. A wider range of tables showing the results from the survey are presented in a set of separate technical annexes.

³ European Commission, DG Education and Culture (2000) “Survey into the socio-economic background of ERASMUS students” Brussels.

⁴ ECOTEC used a database of contacts provided by the European Commission with around 2,500 institutions. About 400 contacts were unsuitable, whereas 2,100 were suitable for the purposes of this survey.

⁵ HIS (2005) “EUROSTUDENT Report 2005. Social and Economic conditions of student life in Europe 2005.” Langenhagen.

2.0 SURVEY CHARACTERISTICS AND MAIN RESULTS

2.1 Introduction

This section provides a description of the characteristics of the survey of ERASMUS students, an outline of the representativeness of its results for Europe and each participating country in the survey and an analysis of the main findings. A more extensive summary of the data collected during the survey can be found in the tables provided in Technical Annex One, available separately. Comparisons are made with the results from the 2000 Commission survey, the EUROSTUDENT survey at the end of the chapter and references are made to *Education at a Glance*. However, it must be noted that the data presented may not always be comparable given differences in the countries covered by both the previous Commission and EUROSTUDENT surveys, the wording of questions and reply categories, and in the design of the surveys⁶.

2.2 Survey characteristics

Overall, 15,513 valid answers were received to the survey. This provides a representative sample for analysis with *very low margins of error*⁷ not only at the programme level – the most relevant level when trying to extract conclusions for the future of ERASMUS - but also for a very large number of individual participating countries. The overall programme sample for all the 30 countries included in the 2006 survey provides a margin of error of 0.74% at a confidence level of 95%⁸. Analysis at country level is also possible with the sample collected, and provides at the national level valid results at a 10% margin of error (95% confidence level) or better for 26 countries – over 80% of the participating countries in the programme. For 22 countries the margin or error is lower than 6% (Belgium, Germany, Spain, France, Italy, Austria, Portugal, Finland, Ireland, Sweden, Netherlands, UK, Bulgaria, Czech

⁶ It should be noted that the 1998 survey report does not provide information on the selection of the survey sample and representativity of the data.

⁷ The margin of error expresses the amount of the random variation underlying a survey's results. This can be thought of as a measure of the variation one would see in reported percentages if the same poll were taken multiple times. The larger the margin of error, the less confidence one has that the poll's reported percentages are close to the "true" percentages, that is the percentages in the whole population.

⁸ A confidence interval gives an estimated range of values which is likely to include an unknown population parameter, the estimated range being calculated from a given set of sample data. If independent samples are taken repeatedly from the same population, and a confidence interval calculated for each sample, then a certain percentage (confidence level) of the intervals will include the unknown population parameter. The width of the confidence interval gives some idea about how uncertain we are about the unknown parameter. A very wide interval may indicate that more data should be collected before anything very definite can be said about the parameter. In other words, the confidence level represents how often the true percentage of the population who would pick an answer to a survey lies within the confidence interval. The 95% confidence level means you can be 95% certain; the 99% confidence level means you can be 99% certain.

Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, and Turkey). The sample for four additional countries (Denmark, Greece, Iceland and Norway) provides a margin of error better than 11% at the 95% confidence level⁹.

2.3 Findings

This section presents a summary of key data regarding the ERASMUS programme obtained from the European Commission and selected findings from the survey.

2.3.1 The ERASMUS programme

In 2004/05 144,058 students took part in the ERASMUS programme in 31 countries, the **average duration** of the ERASMUS study period being 6.5 months. Of these students 137,166 **received an ERASMUS grant**, whereas 6,892 participated in the programme without a grant¹⁰.

The **top four subjects** of study for ERASMUS students in 2004/05 were business studies, language and philological sciences, social sciences and engineering/ technology.

The **average grant per month** per student during our year of reference was €140. The home country where the grant was greatest during that year was Cyprus (€198) with the lowest average grant being in the Czech Republic (€2).

2.3.2 Profile of respondents

Over 60% of the ERASMUS students in our sample were between 21 and 23 years of **age**. The highest proportions of students aged 27 or older were found in Iceland (25%) and Norway (25%) whereas these proportions were below 1% in France and Poland. Most students were studying for Higher Education degrees **which would take between four and five years to complete** (around 66% of the sample were studying for degrees of this length). Around 20% of the students were studying for three year degrees and 6% for degrees which would take more than five years to complete. Around 8% were studying for degrees that would take only two years to complete. Over 40% of respondents had undertaken an ERASMUS study period **between 5 and 6 months in length**, although some variations are apparent between countries¹¹. Whereas around a third of ERASMUS students from the UK, Spain and Germany spent 10 or more months as ERASMUS students, around a fifth of

⁹ Four countries did not reach the 10% confidence interval for their national analysis (Liechtenstein, Estonia, Malta and Cyprus). Responses for these countries are analysed within the programme sample. Separate data for these countries is not provided in the national breakdown tables. No responses were obtained for Luxembourg. Full details are provided in Table 1 in Annex One.

¹⁰ Data provided by the European Commission. Throughout the report we exclude data for the European University Institute (EUI) which was the home institution for 5 students in 2004/05.

¹¹ In our comments on national variations we tend not to report results from countries with large margins of error. Information on those countries is provided for reference in the Annex One tables.

students from Bulgaria and Slovakia spent less than three months, reflecting some strong differences in the characteristics of the ERASMUS period abroad between participants from different countries. Just over 95% of students in our sample **had enjoyed an ERASMUS grant** (in line with the proportion of students with a grant participating in the programme). Most students were in their third and fourth **year of study** (around 66%), with a further 16% in their fifth year and 12% in their second year. 2% of the sample reported having been in their first year of study during their ERASMUS period; 3% were in their sixth year of study or over.

Around 60% of respondents were female, 40% male. This reflects to some extent higher participation rates of females in Higher Education, but exceeds the average difference for OECD countries¹² and may suggest a **gender gap** in terms of participation in the programme. The proportion of female respondents was particularly high (over 70%) in Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, the UK and Romania, whereas only in Poland the proportion of males was higher than the proportion of females.

The large majority of students were single (93%); around 5% were married/ living together and less than 2% were divorced/ separated or in other civil status. However, the pattern was less pronounced in the Nordic countries: Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden were the only countries where less than 75% of students were single. Over 99% of **students had no dependent children** at the time of their ERASMUS period, which could be expected given the profile of university students but could also reflect to some extent the additional difficulties that parents face in moving abroad to study (e.g. in terms of not having family support available to take care of their offspring during lectures and having to rely on childcare, etc.), particularly so since ERASMUS does not provide any additional funds for students who are parents. This argument would be supported by data from the EUROSTUDENT 2005 report, in which the proportion of HE students with children is 3.6% or higher for all countries – see also the section below that compares the 2000 and 2006 surveys and draws comparisons with the EUROSTUDENT surveys.

During their ERASMUS period abroad 75% of the students indicated that their **parents had one or more dependent children**. 87% of respondents had brothers or sisters, with 51% of respondents having only one brother or sister. ERASMUS students are **by and large the first in their families to study** abroad with 82% being the first to do so. This pattern was particularly strong in candidate countries and New Member States. In Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovenia over 85% of the 2004/05 ERASMUS students were the first in their families to study abroad. By contrast a larger proportion of students (over 25%) had family members who had studied abroad in the past in Sweden, Norway and Iceland.

Finally, ERASMUS students are **highly competent in foreign languages**. As would be expected, the vast majority of them speak at least two languages (97%), three quarters (75%) had some competence in at least three languages and around a third (31%) in four languages.

¹² See OECD (2002) “Education at a Glance” OECD Paris.

2.3.3 Socio-economic background

Results from the survey would appear to indicate that ERASMUS students are more likely to come from households with **parents in high level occupations** than the incidence of these occupations in the general population would predict. A large proportion (29%) of students had both parents who worked as executives, professionals or technicians. A further 23% had a father in those occupational groups, whereas 9% had his/her mother in that group. So overall, almost two thirds (around 61%) had at least one parent in these occupations¹³. As mentioned in the 2000 survey¹⁴ this proportion is rather higher than that found in the general population, where less than 40% of people in employment aged 45 and over occupy such jobs.

At the other end of the occupational classification, 14% of students had one parent either not seeking employment or unemployed, and 0.5% of them had both parents either not seeking employment or unemployed.

Inter-country variations are notable within these figures, with the proportion of students with both parents being in executive, professional or technical occupations being 38% or above in Bulgaria, Hungary, Norway, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden and the UK but only around 20% in Austria, Greece, Ireland and Italy.

Overall, around 58% of students had at least one **parent who had experienced Higher Education** (35% of students had both parents who had experienced Higher Education, an additional 13% had a father only with Higher Education and a further 10% a mother only). The **inter-country variation** in the proportion of students with both parents with HE experience ranged from more than 50% in Bulgaria, Denmark, Hungary and Norway to less than 25% in Austria, Ireland and Italy.

In light of these characteristics of the ERASMUS student body, it is perhaps not surprising to find that a large majority of ERASMUS students reported the **income status of their parents as being average or above average**. Almost half (48%) reported it as being average; just under a third (31%) considered it to be higher than average and a further 6% considered it to be considerably higher than average. Only 14% of students reported their parents' income status as being lower or considerably lower than average. Whilst ERASMUS is catering more for students from well-off backgrounds, however, there **seems to have been some progress in attracting people from less well-off backgrounds in the last five years** –see section on comparison between surveys below in this report.

At the level of the **individual participating countries**, students' own assessment of their parents' financial position would suggest that they are more likely to come from higher income families in some countries than others. Thus over 60% of respondents from the Netherlands and around 50% from the UK, Norway, France and Poland said that their parents

¹³ Comparisons with EUROSTUDENT data is not possible since EUROSTUDENT only reports on the proportion of fathers/ mothers of Higher Education with "working class" status.

¹⁴ European Commission (2000, p.14).

had an income status considerably higher than average or higher than average. By contrast, those countries with a higher proportion (around a quarter) of students reporting parents with income status lower than average or considerably lower than average were Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Latvia and the Czech Republic. Interestingly, these countries have a relatively low income per capita but a higher than average ERASMUS grant (except for the Czech Republic). Therefore the grant might constitute there a relatively large sum of money and might be having a positive effect on attracting students from less well-off backgrounds.

Students going to Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden exhibited the greatest proportions of parents (40% or over) with an income higher than average or considerably higher than average. ERASMUS students from Latvia, Romania, Slovenia and Turkey exhibited the lowest proportions of parents with an income higher or considerably higher than average.

Males are slightly overrepresented (around 5 percentage points above their overall representation in our sample) amongst those students from households with incomes higher than average or considerably higher than average.

2.3.4 Financial situation during the ERASMUS period

Having identified the key features of the ERASMUS student body in the preceding section, in this section we examine the important issue of their **financial situation**. In order to obtain data on this topic the survey had to rely on students making an assessment of various aspects of their financial position, and this approach naturally leads to a number of caveats as to the reliability of the data obtained. These are discussed at the outset before preceding to the findings.

Some caveats

As regards data reliability, it is clear that data on the financial situation of students could be expected to be less reliable than data for other survey questions. For instance, it is easier for students to judge in broad terms the socio-economic situation of their parents or their overall impression of their ERASMUS period than their average monthly income or their expenditure on books or food last year. Although care has been taken as far as possible to clean the database in order to remove any obvious anomalies in the responses received (see Annex Three), results should be treated with caution.

It should also be noted that, as a result of both the database cleaning process and non-responses to the relevant questions on finance, the number of responses available per country is lower than for other questions in the survey, increasing the margins of error in reported figures. This is more so when further breakdowns of the data are provided at national level, for instance between students living at or outside home. For some countries, indeed, reported figures are provided on a small number of observations – as detailed in Annex One. Data for each country is provided in the Annex for reference.

Income versus expenditure

Turning to the findings, according to our survey, the **average expenditure by each student during the ERASMUS period was €99. This compares to an average expenditure in a student's home country of €86.** According to our survey, the average difference in accommodation expense between home and host country for all students was around €90 per month more in the host country (although this is much higher for those students who lived at home in their home country as discussed below) and the increase would have been particularly acute for those spending their ERASMUS period in countries/cities with expensive housing markets. Food and travel costs also increased during the period of study abroad (by around €40 and €36 per month respectively). Other forms of expenditure did not on average vary significantly during the ERASMUS period.

The socio-economic background of students is reflected to some extent in the average ERASMUS grant they reported, although differences on average are not high for the programme as a whole. This is not surprising since some countries, like Belgium, take into account the socio-economic background of students in the distribution of ERASMUS grants – whereas others do not. Students reporting a parental income considerably higher than average reported an average ERASMUS grant of €191 whereas those reporting a parental income considerably below average reported an ERASMUS grant of €245 per month – around €50 per month above those with a parental income considerably higher than average.

Although the total expense for the average student during their ERASMUS period is higher than their expenditure whilst at home, it would be covered by the average ERASMUS grant of €140. **In terms of income, the averages obtained during the survey were €86 for the home country and €709 during the ERASMUS period** – an average increase of €24, which is below the average ERASMUS grant.

It is important to highlight that students in our sample reported an average ERASMUS grant that was greater than the average grant of €140 reported by administrative sources. The average grant reported in our survey for all countries was €200¹⁵. This difference may be due to students recording as part of their “ERASMUS grant” other financial support that they may have received from regional and national governments and universities – although differences could also be due to biases in the profile of respondents. If this is the case, ERASMUS students, after having pooled financial resources from different sources, would, on average, have their additional expenditure more than covered for their mobility periods abroad. As noted above, however, **the financial situation of students is markedly different between those who were living at home and those who were not living at home before starting their ERASMUS period,** and it is to this issue that we now turn.

For students who lived at home prior to ERASMUS (around 38% of the valid sample for income and expenditure questions), the average income in their home country was €196, with

¹⁵ The situation, however, varies by country, with some countries reporting an average ERASMUS grant in our survey above the average grant for that country according to administrative data, whereas other countries report it below that level.

an average expense of €493. During their ERASMUS period, however, their average expense increased by almost €200 (€191) to €685, accounted for mainly by increases in accommodation (from €68 to €247) and food (from €97 to €167), which is not surprising given they were living at home before starting ERASMUS. To cover such additional expenses, students' income needed to increase to €685 - again around €190 per month. Such an additional increase would not be covered by the average ERASMUS grant of €140 reported from administrative sources but would be covered by the average of €200 reported in our survey (which is likely to include support from complementary sources as detailed above).

At the same time, however, it would appear that in responding to this question students did not correctly take into account course fees, and allowing properly for these paints a worse picture for these students in terms of the shortfall between additional expenditure and the ERASMUS grant. The survey data shows that in responding to the survey, students registered a decrease in course fees (from €91 in the home country to €18 in the host country). Since ERASMUS students still have to pay fees in their home country, it seems that they registered mainly what they saw as additional costs in fees (e.g. perhaps including the cost of university cards, etc.) in the host country but not the expense incurred in fees in their home country during their ERASMUS year. If we factor that into our calculations, the additional expense per month for a student who had been living at home the year prior to ERASMUS would be €282 (€191 plus €91), or around €2538 for an academic year of 9 months. If we discount the average value of an ERASMUS grant (€140 per month) for an academic year of the same duration (€1260) the net expense of the student is €1278, which would need to be covered by alternative means (mainly family, work, loans or additional financial support for the ERASMUS period from institutions other than the Commission). **For students living at home during their academic studies, therefore, the ERASMUS grant covered just under 50% of their additional expense. The imbalance was even greater in some countries, such as Latvia, Spain or Austria, amongst others, and would have been more pronounced for students going to countries with higher costs of living.**

Students who lived away from home prior to ERASMUS, by contrast, had an average expense of €630 during their studies in their home university, the same amount as their average income. The registered average income of this type of student went up to €713 during the ERASMUS period. At the same time, their average expense increased by €67 to €697. If we factor in course fees in the same way as above (which adds up to €55 on average) the difference in expense between home and host country for this type of student is around €122 per month. This **difference would be covered by the average ERASMUS grant of €140 and by the average ERASMUS grant reported for this type of student in our survey (€200).**

Students' views on their financial situation

The previous section made use quantitative data to examine the financial position of students during their ERASMUS period. The survey also sought **students' views on their financial situation** in a number of other ways which are discussed in this section.

Overall, 37% of the students considered their financial situation during the ERASMUS period to be good or very good, 44% considered it fair and 19% considered it poor or very poor. Perhaps paradoxically, a higher proportion of ERASMUS students with a grant reported some type of financial difficulty (66%) than ERASMUS students without a grant (63%). This might be accounted for by the different economic profile of the families of both types of students (9% of the ERASMUS students without a grant reported their parental income as being considerably higher than average and almost 38% higher than average, whereas the equivalent figures for ERASMUS students with a grant were 5% and 32%). Overall, students from Denmark, Norway, Sweden and the UK were those reporting a better financial situation during the ERASMUS period (50% or more reporting this to have been good or very good), closely followed by students from Lithuania, Finland and Turkey (49%). On the other hand, over 20% of students from Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and over 30% of students from Hungary and Spain reported their financial situation to have been poor or very poor. Students from Hungary and Spain were also the students reporting the ERASMUS grant as insufficient in the highest proportion of cases.

Looking at the **financial problems students faced, the survey found that 55% of respondents considered the ERASMUS grant financial contribution to be insufficient for their mobility period abroad.** This was **by far the most common financial problem reported.** Other financial problems, such as “unable to retain a national grant or loan”, “parents’ contribution was insufficient”, “unable to continue paid work”, or “other”, were reported only by 15% or less of students in each case.

The financial problems experienced by ERASMUS students were notably affected by the cost of living in their host country. Over 60% of ERASMUS students going to Denmark, Iceland, Italy, Norway and the UK reported that the ERASMUS grant was insufficient. By contrast, 40% or over of students going to Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia reported that they had had no financial problems during their ERASMUS period abroad.

By home country over 65% students reported that the ERASMUS grant was insufficient in Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Romania, Turkey and, above all, Spain – where almost 90% of students reported that the grant was insufficient, perhaps due to the large number of students in this country living at home. Over a fifth of students in Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway and the UK reported problems due to being unable to continue paid work during the ERASMUS period. Students from Finland, Norway, Sweden and the UK – relatively affluent countries with a high cost of living compared to other participants in the programme - were those who reported having had financial problems to a smaller extent. Students going to Denmark, Iceland, Norway and UK were also those who more often reported the ERASMUS grant as being insufficient.

There is a **clear relationship between the economic situation of parents and the financial situation of students during their ERASMUS period.** Students from considerably lower than average income families are disproportionately represented amongst the students who considered their financial situation poor during their ERASMUS period (with an increase of around 168% in their representation in that category compared to their representation in the

survey sample) whereas students from families with considerably higher than average incomes were considerably overrepresented amongst the students who considered their financial situation as very good during their ERASMUS period (with an increase of 176% in terms of their representation in that category). **The income status of parents also affects the views of students as to whether the ERASMUS grant is sufficient or not**, with over 60% of students from average or below average income households reporting the ERASMUS grant to be insufficient, against only 40% of students from households with an income considerably higher than average holding the same view.

The survey also sought to obtain an indication of the extent to which students might be deterred altogether from participation in ERASMUS for financial reasons. It found that **over one half of the respondents (53%) had friends who had looked into participating in the programme but had not done so mainly for financial reasons** (46% knew some students and 6% many students who had not participated in the programme for these reasons). Students from affluent countries, with a greater tradition of mobility and high levels of education tended to have fewer friends who were unable to participate in ERASMUS due to financial reasons. The proportion of students who knew at least some students who had been unable to take part in the programme for these reasons was lowest (25% or below) in Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Netherlands, Sweden and, interestingly, Latvia. The proportion was highest (above 60%) in Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey and, above all, Portugal (where 90% of students knew other students who had not taken part in ERASMUS due to financial reasons).

2.3.5 Assessment of various aspects of the ERASMUS period and its effects

Along with an examination of the socio-economic background and financial situation of ERASMUS students, the survey also allows an examination of various aspects of the ERASMUS period i.e. students' overall assessment of their ERASMUS experience; its impact on their values and attitudes and linguistic competence; their experience of social integration; the effect on the duration of their studies; and students' views on the quality of IT and library facilities and their accommodation. To provide a reference point, students were asked to give their views not only on the ERASMUS period but about the same issues with respect to their home institution.

Overall assessment

ERASMUS students assessed their ERASMUS period abroad very positively. Around **87% of students considered their overall experience abroad to have been positive/ very positive.** Interestingly, more students gave a positive or very positive assessment to ERASMUS than to their home institution, where 71% gave such a rating. Only 2% considered their ERASMUS experience poor/ very poor. By country, the highest proportions of students (over 60%) reporting their ERASMUS student period as very good were from Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and the UK, whereas the highest proportions of students ranking their ERASMUS period as very poor, poor or fair (over 20%) were those from Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia and Sweden.

Effect on values and attitudes

The ERASMUS period has shaped the attitudes and values of ERASMUS students substantially, and more in personal values than in career aspirations or educational competences. Over 40% reported that their ERASMUS period had changed their career-related attitudes and aspirations (27% to some extent and only 30% not at all, very little or partly) and over 50% reported that it had involved broadening their general education to a large extent (over 30% to some extent and just over 15% not at all, very little or partly). As mentioned, results are even stronger in relation to changes in personal values: around 55% of students mentioned changes to a large extent in this area, 25% to some extent and 20% not at all, very little or partly. Students also reported a significant positive impact on their understanding of people from another cultural or ethnic background (another key goal of the EU), with just under 75% reporting improvements to a large extent in this area, and a further 20% of students reporting changes to some extent.

Effect on linguistic competence

As noted in section 2.3.2 ERASMUS students have a **high level of competence in foreign languages**, and the survey findings show that the **ERASMUS period further increased this competence**. The proportion of ERASMUS students with at least some level of proficiency in a third language was 8 percentage points higher after their ERASMUS period than at the start. For a fourth language the proportion was 14 percentage points higher. Additionally, the command of languages where students had some level of proficiency also increased substantially during the ERASMUS period. 25% more students were fluent in their second language at the end of their ERASMUS than at the start. Additionally, 15% more students were fluent in their third language at the end of their ERASMUS than before. This provides solid evidence of the significant contribution of ERASMUS to the achievement of European targets in language learning.

Social integration

In relation to **social integration at university, figures were marginally more positive for the ERASMUS period compared to the home institution** – 74% of students assessing their integration abroad as good/very good (7% poor/ very poor), the figure for their home institution being 72% (7% poor/very poor). However, there were inter-country variations. The students that found themselves particularly well integrated in their host country (over 50% of students reporting “very good” in this aspect) were from Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia, whereas students from Ireland and the UK found their integration in their host country more problematic (20% reporting their social integration at the host institution as “poor” or “very poor”).

Effect on duration of study

Just over a quarter of ERASMUS students who replied to the survey reported that their degree would take longer to complete given their ERASMUS period abroad, due to time

being added to their degree, problems adapting to the new system, problems of recognition or other factors. This percentage was particularly high (over 40%) for students from Germany, Austria, Estonia and Finland, and those going to Iceland, Italy, Norway, Slovenia and Spain (over 30%) and particularly low for students from Belgium and Lithuania (less than 10%) and those going to Slovakia and Romania (less than 15%).

IT and library facilities

Students assessed IT and library facilities in their host institution very positively, with 77% of students considering them to be good/very good (compared to 61% who gave such a ranking to their home institution) and only 7% considering them poor/ very poor (the figure for home institutions being 13%). **Yet students from some countries clearly thought they were missing out in the exchange in this respect** (65% of students from Finland and the UK ranked IT and libraries in their home country as very good whereas less than 20% of them ranked facilities in their host country at the same level), whereas others saw a clear improvement in their situation (Slovakia and Bulgaria moved from less than 20% assessing facilities as “very good” in their home country to over 75% in their host country).

Accommodation

ERASMUS students have to make an important investment in terms of accommodation.

Our survey shows that around 40% of them lived with their parents when studying in their home institution whereas less than 2% did so during their ERASMUS period. The proportion of students living in lodgings during the abroad period increased by 7 percentage points, from 13% to 20%, and those in university accommodation by around 30 percentage points, from 17% to 48%. Although ERASMUS students are in general satisfied with the quality of the accommodation they are able to get in their host countries (around 13% reported this to be of poor/ very poor quality, whereas over 60% reported it to be good/ very good and around 25% considered it fair), this is much lower than the results obtained in terms of satisfaction with accommodation reported by EUROSTUDENT.

2.4 Summary of comparisons between surveys

Comparisons between the Commission ERASMUS 2000 and the EUROSTUDENT surveys and the current ERASMUS survey are **difficult due to methodological, definitional and sample differences** – see Annex One for a list of countries covered by each of the surveys. This section, however, outlines the main trends observed in the different surveys in relation to the key issues covered by this piece of research. For further explanation about the methodology of these two other surveys and complete results, the reader is referred to the final report produced for each of them¹⁶.

¹⁶ HIS (2005) “EUROSTUDENT Report 2005. Social and Economic conditions of student life in Europe 2005.” Langenhagen.; European Commission, DG Education and Culture (2000) “Survey into the socio-economic background of ERASMUS students” Brussels.

In terms of **demographic characteristics of respondents** we see a **high degree of consistency** between the **2000 and the 2006** surveys. For instance, around 60% of respondents were female, 40% male in the 2006 survey, in line with the figures for the 2000 survey, which were 59% and 41% respectively. However, the two populations also differ in some aspects. Thus whilst 75% of students in the 2006 survey indicated that their parents had one or more dependent children, the proportion in the 2000 survey was 86%.

In 2000 a large proportion (32%) of ERASMUS students had both parents who worked as executives, professionals or technicians. A further 30% had a father in those occupational groups, whereas 6% had his/her mother in that group. Overall, over two thirds (68%) had at least one parent in these **occupations**. Direct comparisons with the 2000 survey are difficult, since the categories used in the two surveys were different. However findings also seem to reflect progress in opening up the programme from people less well-off social backgrounds¹⁷. In 2006 39% of students reported not having any parent working in executive, professional or technical occupations as opposed to 32% in 2000.

Similarly, there seems to have been **some progress in attracting people from less well-off backgrounds** in the last five years when measured by **parental income**. The proportion of students reporting their parental income as average or below average was 53% in the 2000 survey, whereas the result in the 2006 survey was 63%.

There has been a **less marked shift when parental background is considered in terms of level of education**. In the 2000 survey 60% of students had at least one parent who had completed a degree or other Higher Education qualification whereas in the 2006 survey the figure was 58%. The figures are higher than those for Higher Education students in general, according to data from the EUROSTUDENT survey¹⁸ and much higher than those from the general population. In the EUROSTUDENT survey, the country with the highest rate of fathers with Higher Education was Finland at 48% (28% for the general population), but most countries were in the bracket 25% to 35% (figures varying mostly between 10% and 20% for the total population). These trends were relatively similar for mothers, even if figures were somewhat lower for most countries for that group. Therefore, **data suggests that students in Higher Education have parents that are on average educated to a much higher level than the average in the population and ERASMUS students** (with an average of 49% -one percentage point above the leader of the EUROSTUDENT survey) **have even substantially more well-educated parents than those of Higher Education students**.

In terms of the financial situation of ERASMUS students, the 2000 ERASMUS survey report concluded that the ERASMUS period abroad implied an **additional expense for students**,

¹⁷ Comparisons with EUROSTUDENT data is not possible since EUROSTUDENT only reports on the proportion of fathers/ mothers of Higher Education with “working class” status.

¹⁸ Direct comparisons between the two surveys, however, should be made with some precaution given the different definitions used in both surveys –since EUROSTUDENT reports on fathers and mothers with Higher Education whereas our survey also included other forms of participation in Higher Education that may not lead to graduation.

which varied depending on whether the student was living at home in his/her home country or not. The ERASMUS grant (€20 in the year 1997/98, only €20 less than in the year 2004/05 on average), moreover, was assessed as a necessary financial supplement for mobility that did to some extent cover the extra costs of studying abroad. These results are confirmed by our survey, although there are significant differences between the results. In the **2000 survey, for students living with their parents in their home country, the ERASMUS grant covered only 40% of their additional costs, whereas in our survey the proportion is closer to 50%. Whilst the 2000 report argued that for students living away from the parental home the average ERASMUS grant (administrative data) covered nearly 80% of their additional costs, it covered more than the additional costs for these students in our survey.**

However, the differences between the surveys would also imply that **more students incurred in greater expense during their ERASMUS period in 2004/05 on account of their variation in profile.** Our survey shows that almost half of the students (around 40%) lived with their parents when studying in their home institution. This represents an increase of nearly 10 percentage points over the 2000 survey in those students who suffer higher additional expenses during the ERASMUS period on account of living with their family in their home country.

In the 2006 survey, as reported above, 37% of the students considered their **financial situation** during the ERASMUS period good or very good, 44% considered it fair and 19% considered it poor or very poor. This is a slightly more optimistic assessment of their financial situation than students in HE in general, as reported by EUROSTUDENT. According to this source, in most countries around 30-40% of students rank their financial situation as good or very good –in line with the results from our survey- but **around a quarter of students rank it as bad or very bad in many countries, in contrast to a fifth on average in our survey.** Yet perhaps paradoxically, ERASMUS students (both living at home and away from home) reported relatively lower incomes than those students surveyed for EUROSTUDENT, although figures varied significantly depending on the country analysed. Such differences may be due to differences in survey questions or reference periods, amongst other possible reasons.

In terms of results, some comparisons are worth highlighting. 82% of the 2006 survey students were the first in their families to study abroad, which is the same proportion as in the 2000 survey. Therefore, in the period between the two surveys **there has been no decrease in the importance of ERASMUS as the first opportunity for many families to have a member who undertakes a period of study abroad.** Similarly, in 2006 ERASMUS students assessed their ERASMUS period abroad very positively, although slightly less so than in the 2000 survey.

3.0 CONCLUSIONS

ERASMUS students value their experience abroad highly. They are normally the first in their families to study abroad and assess their period positively in terms of overall experience, learning infrastructure and social integration. They improve their language skills in the languages they already speak and often learn new languages. The period also has a profound impact on their values towards other people, and towards learning and work.

Some **demographic groups**, however, are taking up more opportunities to enjoy these benefits than others. Males and students with children are taking up ERASMUS periods to a lesser extent than could be predicted taking into account their profile within the overall composition of HE students.

Further, there are **still important socio-economic barriers in relation to take-up of the programme**. A large proportion of students reported their parents to have an **economic status** above the average in their country, although a change in the profile of programme participants can be observed from the 2000 survey, with more students from average and below-average economic background participating in the programme than before.

ERASMUS students also exhibit a higher proportion of parents **working at executive, professional and technical levels** than would be expected for HE students in general, although there is great variation amongst countries, and few have economically inactive or unemployed parents.

Yet the occupational background of parents is not as important as their **educational background** in determining the participation of students in the programme. A very large proportion of ERASMUS students have parents with higher education and the proportion has not changed a great deal since the last student survey. The survey did not probe why this might be but likely factors are that parents with higher education may be more aware of the ERASMUS programme and its benefits, may be more encouraging in relation to the education of their offspring or may be willing to ensure that their children do “something more” than they did when they studied for their degrees. A period of study abroad can satisfy that requirement and therefore parents with higher education may be more receptive to ERASMUS than parents with similar occupational backgrounds or levels of income but lower educational levels. For students whose parents have had no experience of HE access to HE may be considered a sufficient achievement in itself.

There are, still, however, **many students that cannot participate in the programme due to financial reasons**. Over half of the ERASMUS students that participated in the programme in 2004/05 knew other students who had been deterred from participating in the programme mainly due to financial reasons. A significant proportion of them knew many other students who had not participated in the programme for those reasons.

In relation to the ERASMUS grant, we have found that, on average, it covers the additional expense of studying abroad. Yet there are differences in the degree to which additional expenses will be covered depending on the country of origin, the host country – or indeed

city¹⁹ - and the economic and social background of students, including –in particular- where they normally live during their studies. In this respect, **about half of the students who participated in the survey reported the ERASMUS grant as being insufficient.**

Although the ERASMUS programme is not a social policy measure and there are limitations in relation to what it can achieve in terms of equality of access by different groups of the population (e.g. the programme will in this regard be necessarily affected by national differences in the socio-economic background of HE students compared to the country's population), it could be argued that it is important for the programme to provide the same opportunity for participation to all HE students regardless of their socio-economic background, given the benefits the programme offers. In view of the above it could be argued that **greater emphasis should be put into the financing of the programme so as to enable the participation in the programme of people who now cannot take part due to financial reasons.** This should be measured against the administrative costs of setting up schemes that take into account the economic background of students. **A more nuanced allocation** of funds by home and host country would also benefit the participation of a wider set of students in the programme since these aspects still have an impact on the financial situation of students due to differences in the cost of living not being fully offset by the current distribution of grants.

In this respect, however, our study has also found that **barriers to take-up of the programme are not only economic but truly socio-economic.** Actions to address these may entail therefore not only increasing or better targeting the ERASMUS grant, but also undertaking further dissemination of the programme and its benefits amongst the student population. This may not require great investment from EU institutions, but could entail, for instance, information and feedback sessions from previous ERASMUS students still at university.

¹⁹ Data on differences in students' expenditure by region within different countries is provided in the EUROSTUDENT report.