Determinants and Impacts of Student Mobility: A Literature Review

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1. Introduction

“Mobility is important for personal development and employability, it fosters respect for diversity and a capacity to deal with other cultures. It encourages linguistic pluralism, thus underpinning the multilingual tradition of the European Higher Education Area and it increases cooperation and competition between higher education institutions. Therefore, mobility shall be the hallmark of the European Higher Education Area. We call upon each country to increase mobility, to ensure its high quality and to diversify its types and scope.”

Communique of the conference Leuven and Louvain-la-neuve (April 2009)

In the last decades to study abroad has become an important phenomenon worldwide and the number of mobile students has increased dramatically. The number of students enrolled in tertiary education programmes in a foreign country rose from 0.8 million in 1975 to 3.7 million in 2009 (OECD, 2011). The figures for short-term mobility are also impressive: the participation in the European Erasmus programme has grown annually by an average of 5.4% since 2000 (DG EAC) and more than 2 million students have participated since the beginning of the programme.

In general, stakeholders in higher education consider a period of study abroad as an advantage per se and therefore encourage it. Student mobility is seen as an instrument for individual development useful to the economy and to the society: it is believed to contribute to personal development and to enhance competences in fields like languages and intercultural understanding, consequently contributing to employability in an increasingly international labour market. These are the rationales on which the existence of extensive programmes supporting student mobility is based.

In view of the increasing interest in and support to student mobility during higher education, this report summarizes two strands of the literature: first, the literature on the determinants of student mobility; and second, the existent evidence of the impact of student mobility. The evidence presented refers to Europe and to student mobility in higher education. Moreover, the emphasis is in the determinants and impacts at the individual level. Nonetheless, the impacts of student mobility at other levels are discussed in a non-exhaustive way.

As it will become clear in the following sections, the majority of the existent evidence is based on surveys to mobile students, therefore failing to compare them with non-mobile students. Even though this is not the best approach to measure the impact of student mobility, some overall trends and findings can be established.
The rest of the report is organized as follows. In the next section it is presented a brief history of the European Union (EU) support to student mobility, to point the main rationales under which the discourse and actions of support are based on. Next, an overview of the trends in student mobility is presented. In section 4, the definition of student mobility is discussed and a conceptual framework to analyse mobility is suggested. Sections 5 and 6 present the determinants and impacts of students mobility, respectively. Finally, last section concludes.

2. European Union support to student mobility

Student mobility in higher education has been supported by the European Union (EU) since 1976, through the Joint Studies Programmes. After a pilot programme of student exchange between 1981 and 1986, the Erasmus Programme was launched in 1987. In 1995 it was included in the Socrates programme and is currently part of the EU's Lifelong Learning Programme. The participation of the EU in the Bologna Process, an agreement between 47 countries to create a European Higher Education Area, is also a clear sign of the importance attributed to student mobility. “The promotion of mobility is one of the most concrete and uncontroversial aim of the Bologna process” (Papatsiba, 2006). In November 2011, the European Council adopted conclusions on a learning mobility benchmark: “By 2020, an EU average of at least 20 % of higher education graduates should have had a period of higher education-related study or training (including work placements) abroad, representing a minimum of 15 ECTS credits or lasting a minimum of three months.”

The long-lasting support of student mobility by European institutions has been based on different rationales. Mobility is believed to promote personal development as well as future job opportunities, through the improvement of academic and language skills. This economic discourse overlaps with a socio-cultural one about European integration and shared cultural values, which highlight the relevance of student mobility as a mechanism to promote European identity and citizenship.

Accordingly, two rationales of the Erasmus student mobility can be highlighted (Papatsibas, 2006):

- An economic and professional rationale: student mobility is seen as a means to promote individual employability and the development of the European single
labour market, as it would increase the individuals’ predisposition to cross borders during their professional lives.

- A civic rationale: student mobility would encourage international understanding, European consciousness and identity.

Section 6 is inspired by these rationales in the sense that the impacts of mobility will be analysed in three angles: labour market outcomes, personal/social outcomes and EU identity. Even though the objective of this report is not to evaluate the Erasmus programme, it is an enlightening exercise to understand to what extent these domains are indeed affected.

3. Trends in mobility

Along with the increase in the number of students in higher education, the number of mobile students has been rising continuously during the past decades. Even though mobile students have constituted a constant share of students in higher education, around 2.3%, the figures involved are impressive: according to OECD (2011), the number of students enrolled in tertiary education outside their country of citizenship more than quadrupled between 1975 and 2009, from 0.8 million to 3.7 million students. Figure 1 presents the evolution of international students between 2000 and 2009: since 2000 the students enrolled in a foreign country increased by 77%, corresponding to an average annual growth rate of 6.6% (OECD, 2011).

**Figure 1 – Number of students enrolled outside their country of citizenship by region of destination, from 2000 to 2009**

![Graph showing the evolution of international students](image-url)

**Source:** OECD, Education at a Glance (2011)
As discussed in OECD (2011), these data are collected based on counts in a specific day or period of the year, which can underestimate the number of mobile students. In particular, short-term mobile students may not be counted if they are enrolled for less than one academic year or if the exchange programme does not require enrolment.

To make the point that short-term mobility has been also increasing, the evolution of outgoing students under the Erasmus programme is presented in Figure 2. The graph shows a sharp increase in the number of participating students since the beginning of the programme in 1987, with an average annual growth rate of almost 20%. Since the academic year 2000/2001 the number of participating students grew at an average growth rate of approximately 5.4%. Even though these figures are for a specific programme in Europe, they provide clear evidence that short-term student mobility is increasing dramatically.

Figure 2 – Outgoing Erasmus students, from 1997/98 to 2009/10

As the result of the striking increase in the number of mobile students in the past decades and of the large number of students currently undergoing on a study period abroad, the need to understand this phenomenon is more than justified. This is exactly the purpose of this report: to review what is known so far about the determinants and impacts of student mobility.
4. Definition of student mobility and conceptual framework

“Most policy and analytical documents do not present any detailed definition of student mobility, because it can be taken for granted that there is a conventional wisdom of what students mobility means: an internationally mobile student is a student having crossed a national border to study or to undertake other study-related activities for at least a certain unit of study programme or a certain period of time in the country he or she has moved to.” (Kelo et al., 2006).

In general, a mobile student is defined as a student that has crossed a national border for the purpose of study or in the context of study. Even though it may seem straightforward, the definition of student mobility depends on the type of mobility and on the criterion used to identify mobile students.

As far as the type of mobility is concerned, a student may undertake:

- **Degree/diploma mobility**, if the entire study programme is done abroad.
- **Credit/short-term mobility**, if only a part of the programme is done abroad.

In this paper both the degree and credit mobility are analysed. In the text it will be clarified which type of mobility is considered in the referred paper/report.

There are two alternative criteria to identify a mobile student:

- **On the basis of the citizenship.** This corresponds to the definition of foreign student, which is a student enrolled in education in a country other than the one of his/her nationality/citizenship.
- **On the basis of the country of prior education.** The student is considered mobile if he/she is enrolled in education in a different country than the one where the previous level of education was completed.

The second is the preferred criterion as it captures students that crossed countries for educational purposes. On the contrary, in the first criterion, students that moved to that country during childhood but never became citizens are also captured. Even though there has been an attempt to homogenise the criteria to identify a mobile student, this is still not a reality in the currently available data. The criteria differ from country to country which limits the interpretation of the data collected internationally (for example the UNESCO, OECD and EUROSTAT (UOE) data).
A further difference has to do with the level of education in which the mobility experience takes place: undergraduate, postgraduate, doctorate or other qualification. The majority of the evidence to be presented below refers to undergraduate mobility, but some papers discuss postgraduate mobility as well.

In general, this report analyses both the credit and degree mobility undertaken at the undergraduate level of education, whatever the criterion used to identify mobile students in the papers/reports mentioned.

**Conceptual framework**

Figure 3 presents the conceptual framework used in the following analysis.

![Conceptual framework](image)

The framework emphasises that, in order to understand the phenomenon of student mobility, one should analyse its determinants, i.e. the factors affecting the choice to become mobile. The focus is in determinants at the individual level. Other aspects may also affect the decision to become mobile, such as obstacles, incentives and the existence of organized programmes. It is assumed that the mobility experience has
impacts at the individual level, namely on labour market outcomes, personal/cultural and social outcomes and international identity. This is inspired in the above mentioned EU rationales to support student mobility.

The framework highlights that the individual characteristics that eventually lead to the decision of being mobile affect directly the outcomes mentioned above, apart from the effect on mobility. This has implications in the interpretation of the impacts of student mobility to be presented, as will be discussed below.

Finally, even though the aim of this report is to summarize the impacts at the individual level, the framework acknowledges that other levels may also be affected by student mobility, namely higher education institutions, as well as the society and the nation in general.

5. Determinants of student mobility

In order to interpret the impacts of student mobility it is important, in the first place, to understand the factors leading to the decision of being mobile. Are the mobile students different from their non-mobile peers? This section reviews the existent evidence answering this question. In general, the evidence points to two main factors: socio-economic background, as measured by parental education level, and international exposure. In order to provide a broader picture of the decision to go or not to go abroad the main motivations and obstacles to mobility are also discussed.

5.1 Socio-economic background

It is clearly established that mobile students are a selected group as far as parental education is concerned. This evidence shows up in data with different geographical scope.

In a five country survey to students that went abroad in the academic year 1984/85 (Opper et al., 1990), around 50% (32%) of students have fathers (mothers) with higher education. These values are higher than those of the overall student population (Opper et al., 1990). In the survey to the former Erasmus students of the academic year 1988/89 this was slightly lower: around 38% of the mobile students had at least one parent with higher education (Mainworm and Teichler, 1996).

In more comprehensive surveys, the proportion of students with high educated parents is clearly higher. The report ‘The socio-economic background of Erasmus students’,
shows that 59% of Erasmus students have at least one parent with higher education, which is significantly higher than the 30% observed in the total student population (European Commission, 2000). In the follow up survey in 2004/05, this figure has marginally decreased to 58% (Souto Otero and McCoshan, 2006). Around the same figure was found in Krupnik and Krzaklewska (2006): 60% of Erasmus students had at least one parent with higher education. For short-term non-Erasmus students this proportion was even higher, 70%.

The Eurostudent data also confirmed that students from low educated parents tend to have lower rates of foreign enrolment compared with high educated parents (Orr et al. (2008) and Orr et al. (2011)). Furthermore it is interesting to notice that this difference is already detected in the planning stage of the international period (Orr et al., 2011).

In general, the role played by the family economic background is not as important as the one of parental education: the proportion of Erasmus students reporting their parental income to be average or below average was 53% in 2000 and 63% in 2006 (European Commission (2000) and Souto Otero and McCoshan (2006)). However, it is worthwhile mentioning the relationships between the socio-economic background of students and the level of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of countries pointed out by Souto Otero (2008). The proportion of students reporting to have parents with higher than average income level is more pronounced in high GDP countries. By contrast, in the poorer countries a lower proportion of students reported that their parents had such high income levels. As the author discusses, this may highlight different motivations to undergo in short-term mobility in different groups of countries. “Whereas in some high-income countries mobility may be mainly a consumption item for the better-off, it may be an investment for less well-off people from poorer countries.” (Souto-Otero, 2008).

All this evidence suggests that the bias towards students from advantaged backgrounds seems to be based not on economic grounds, but on a cultural and educational one. This may be due to the fact that high educated parents acknowledge better the possible future benefits resulting from a study period abroad.
Studies made at country or regional level tend to agree with the above presented finding. The same pattern was found in a survey to four Nordic countries focusing in degree mobility (Saarikallio-Torp and Wiers-Jenssen, 2010): a higher proportion of degree-mobile students had parents with higher education compared with non-mobile students. In Italy, it was found that parental education is a selective factor in short-term mobility participation: “The differences in the likelihood of accessing Erasmus mobility and other foreign study are more a function of the cultural background (education) of the families of origin than of their socio-economic background (money).” (Cammelli et al., 2008). Evidence from Norway shows that mobile students, either in short-term or degree mobility, are a selected group, in the sense that they are more likely to have parents with higher education (Wiers-Jenssen (2008) and Wiers-Jenseen (2011)).

5.2 Language skills and international exposure

In general, mobile students consider having relative high proficiency in foreign languages even prior to the study period abroad (Opper et al. (1990), Souto Otero and McCoshan (2006)). According to Eurostudent 2005-2008 findings, on average, countries where students report to have more language competences in second or third languages have higher mobility rates than those with low foreign languages abilities (Orr et al., 2008).

It is also common for mobile students to have been exposed to international environments prior to the study period abroad. Opper et al. (1990) found that participants in short-term mobility had substantial international exposure, either themselves or through their families. In fact, two thirds of the students had spent at least one month abroad, for whatever reasons, since they were fifteen years old. This figure is even higher in the 1994 survey: more than 80% had spent some time abroad prior to the Erasmus period since they were fifteen years old (Maiworm and Teichler, 1996). More than half of the students even spent some period in the host country prior to the Erasmus visit. Souto Otero and McCoshan (2006) state that 82% of the Erasmus students in the academic year 2004/05 were the first in their families to go on a study period abroad, but it is not clear whether these students had already been exposed to international environments through other ways.
At country or regional level, this pattern is also verified. In the Nordic countries survey, degree mobile students are far more likely to have parents who lived abroad. The difference is higher than 10 percentage points and is common in all the four participating countries (Saarikallio-Torp and Wiers-Jenssen, 2010). The same conclusion is found for both short-term and degree Norwegian students (Wiers-Jenssen (2008) and Wiers-Jenssen (2011)). The mobile students themselves had prior lived in a foreign country: about twice as many mobile students have this kind of experience (Saarikallio-Torp and Wiers-Jenssen, 2010).

This international exposure that distinguish mobile from non-mobile students is labelled by Murphy-Lejeune (2002) as mobility capital. This concept is used to describe the fact that people with mobility experiences develop a ‘taste for living abroad’, and that this form of human capital may affect individual future decisions, such as migration and working abroad.

5.3 General motivations and choice of host country

Opper et al. (1990) conducted a survey to students prior to go abroad asking the weight attached to potential benefits of going abroad. The most important motivation was to experience an international setting, for instance acquiring foreign language and live in another country, whereas academic motives were secondarily mentioned. In the Nordic study survey the ranking of motivations is exactly the same: first, experience international setting and improve foreign language, and second academic/career driven motives (Saarikallio-Torp and Wiers-Jenssen, 2010). Krupnik and Krzaklewksa (2006) identified similar results: 80% of Erasmus students mentioned having new experiences and to practice a foreign language has the most important drivers for going abroad. The least mentioned reasons were independence, academic and employment motivations. Comparing Erasmus with other mobile students the authors found that the latter were more academically-orientated. Interestingly some motivations were different for different group of Erasmus students: female students, students coming from less advantaged families and from Central and Eastern Europe were more career oriented than their peers.
Gonzalez, Mesanza and Mariel (2011) analysed the main determinants of the host country’s choice. They found that this choice is influenced by economic variables, such as the price levels, by the geographical distance to the home country and also by the perceived benefit of the study period abroad, measured by the quality of the high education institutions in the host country. Furthermore, they observed a tendency to choose countries with warm climate, which suggests that student mobility may be seen as a leisure activity. These factors were more significant in the group of countries that have a long history of student mobility, while ‘students from the new countries (Central and East European) seem to take the opportunity to go abroad whatever the conditions’.

5.4 Main obstacles to mobility

It is important to analyse the main obstacles pointed by non-mobile students to not undergo in mobility. This can inform stakeholders on possible actions (e.g. change incentives and institutional support) if mobility is to be promoted. Among other obstacles mentioned, the literature points two factors as the main barriers to mobility: financial problems and lack of language skills.

In the Eurobarometer dedicated to higher education reforms, the following obstacles are considered very big or big by the non-mobile students: lack of funds (61%), language barriers (38%), difficulty to get recognition (36%), and lack of information (35%) (European Commission, 2009). In the Eurobarometer dedicated to the ‘Youth on the move’ action, one third of the students who have not stayed abroad answered that they had no access to funding or that it would have been too expensive, and a quarter mentioned family commitments (European Commission, 2011).

Similar obstacles were reported in the Eurostudent surveys. In the 2005-2008 report, financial insecurity was the most mentioned obstacle in all countries (57% of the students), followed by insufficient support in the home country (49%) and lack of individual motivation (48%) (Orr et al., 2008). In the follow up report, obstacles of social nature were also mentioned (separation from family and friends), as well as expected delay in the progress of studies, insufficient languages skills. In general, students from low socio-economic background see both financial issues and language skills as more important obstacles than the high ones (Orr et al., 2011).
A proportion of the students simply do not plan or are not interested in studying abroad: 41% of students in higher education have never planned to study abroad (European Commission, 2009) and 37% of the non-mobile students are not interested (European Commission, 2011).

Several of the obstacles mentioned have already been addressed, at least partly, by the Erasmus setting, such as funding and recognition issues (ECTS). Furthermore, more efforts are being made to support students both in the home and host countries.

6. The impacts of student mobility

In view of the common referred rationales to support student mobility (see section 2), this section reviews the existent literature on the impacts of student mobility in three areas: labour market performance, personal and cultural aspects and EU identity. The emphasis is on impacts at the individual level, but impacts at other levels are lightly discussed.

6.1 - Labour market related outcomes

The impacts of studying abroad, either for the entire programme or for a part of it, in labour market outcomes do not uniquely depend on the skills and competencies that graduates have to offer, but also on how these competences are perceived in the labour market by the employers and recruiters. Hence, this section starts by resuming the value attributed by employers to student mobility. Subsequently a summary of the evidence on the impacts of student mobility on several labour market outcomes is presented. Four type of outcomes will be analysed: transition from education to employment, the probability of working abroad, the probability of carrying out international tasks at work and wages levels. In each of the subsections the evidence at European level is presented first, followed by the evidence at country or regional level.

6.1.1 - Employers’ perspectives

There is some evidence, at country level, that higher education from abroad is not automatically valued by employers. A Finnish study concludes that employers prefer
graduates with a home degree to an equivalent degree from another country (Saarikallio-Torp and Wiers-Jenssen, 2010). Similarly, in a Swedish study employers value more a graduate with an education from Sweden and abroad, rather than all-Swedish or all foreign studies (Saarikallio-Torp and Wiers-Jenssen, 2010). This somewhat less positive evaluation of student mobility could be due to the fact that employers have less knowledge of foreign education systems or programmes, or are not interested in the specific skills acquired during this period.

A more positive perspective was found in the employers’ survey presented by Bracht et al. (2006). This is the best evidence, at European level, of the employers’ perspective of student mobility. The survey was undertaken with the goal of considering the best possible source concerning recruiting criteria and to better understand the transition from education to employment. The employers’ surveyed were expected to have international exposure and to have hired mobile students. When asked about the most important general recruitment criteria, the employers answering to this survey mentioned computer skills and foreign language proficiency. One third of the employers also considered international experience as an important recruitment criterion. It was particularly valued the language spoken during the study period abroad, the length of the study period abroad, the specific host country and the reputation of the host higher education institution. The surveyed employers clearly stated that graduates with internationally experience are given more international assignments than the non-mobile ones. These assignments may involve use of foreign languages, work with colleagues/clients from other countries, use information from other countries or to travel abroad. The difference in the proportions at which these tasks are given to mobile and non-mobile students are of at least 30 percentage points, resulting from the fact that employers rate graduates with internationally experience as being superior to those without international experience, as far as international competences are concerned. However, this is not the only dimension which employers rate mobile students higher. Graduates with international experience, when compared to their non-mobile peers, are considered to have higher levels of adaptability, initiative, assertiveness, persistence, written communication skills, analytical competences, problem solving ability, planning, co-ordinating and organising skills. Even though the differences in these general competences between mobile and
non-mobile students are not as outstanding as the ones found for international competences, they are of at least 10 percentage points. These findings suggest that mobile students may have an advantage in the transition process from education to employment, in particular in jobs for which international experience is an important criterion. As far as long-term career is concerned, the employers surveyed believe that internationally experienced students will be more successful than non-mobile: 21% believe that mobile graduates will attain a higher salary and 42% consider that they will work more often in positions with high responsibilities.

As the authors acknowledge, employers appreciating internationally experienced students might more likely have returned the survey, might have answered more positively to the survey and might have taken those dimensions in the recruitment process. Nevertheless this is the most comprehensive and direct evidence of the employers’ perspective of student mobility.

The findings of the Eurobarometer dedicated to the employers’ perspectives on graduate are aligned to those presented above (European Commission, 2010). The main skills valued are team-working, sector-specific skills, communication skills, computer skills and being able to adapt to new situations. Even though language literacy was not mentioned as one of the most important skills, these were the only skills that were ranked high as a requirement for future graduates. Furthermore, graduate recruiters with international relations were, as expected, more likely to value international mobility than those without international contacts (32% versus 17%).

6.1.2 - The impact of being mobile on individual labour market outcomes

In general, studies investigating the impacts of studying abroad on labour market outcomes can be divided in three types of methodologies:

- Studies analysing only mobile students, without comparing them with domestically-educated students. Among others, this is the case of several Erasmus evaluation reports that only survey former Erasmus students. The evidence is based on self-perceived benefits of the study period abroad and on self-comparison with those who were not mobile.
• Studies that do compare the labour market outcomes of mobile and non-mobile students, but do not take into account the pre-existing differences between mobile and non-mobile students.

• Studies that do consider these differences, controlling for them through regression analysis. Even in this cases it is not possible to interpret the effect of mobility as causal because not all characteristics are taken into account.

As argued in section 5, mobile and non-mobile students are different with respect to several characteristics, being the most important ones the parental level of education and international exposure. Therefore, in order to measure the labour market impacts of studying abroad, one should be aware that mobile and non-mobile students are different, even before taking the decision to go abroad. Among all types of studies, the third one provides the best piece of evidence of the impact of a study period abroad since other differences between students are taken into account, being consequently more reliable to interpret the difference in labour market outcomes as a result of the study abroad period. Because the majority of the evidence comes from either the first or second types of studies, these are also presented.

Transition from education to work
The former Erasmus students report their international study experience to be helpful in obtaining the first job (Opper et al. (1990), Maiworm and Teichler (1996) and Bracht et al. (2006)). The majority of the students consider that the study abroad period and the knowledge of language skills enhance the chances of being viewed as interesting candidates by recruiters. However, this perceived advantage seems to be declining over time. The proportion of former mobile students believing that mobility is an advantage in finding the first job was: 71% in the 1988/89 cohort Erasmus students, 66% of those graduating in 1994/95 and 54% of the 2000/2001 Erasmus students (Bracht et al., 2006).

Comparing mobile and non-mobile students, Teichler (2002) founds that the former had a smoother transition to employment than the latter.

At country and regional levels the findings are diverse. Based on a representative sample of Italian students, it was found that being mobile, especially being an Erasmus
student, decreased the time to find a job after graduation (Cammelli et al., 2008). For the Nordic countries instead, the transition from education to employment is longer for students that undertook a degree abroad, compared to those who graduated domestically (Saarikallio-Torp and Wiers-Jenssen, 2010). However this effect is small and transitory.

This latter negative result is also found in Norway, even when controlling for students characteristics. Even though students graduating from abroad put more effort in the job searching process than non-mobile, they are more likely to face unemployment than other groups (Wiers-Jenssen (2008a) and Wiers-Jenssen 2011). This is particularly the case for those graduating from non-Nordic countries (Wiers-Jenssen and Try 2005). Again, this effect is just transitory and is not found for short-term mobile students.

Notice that, based on the papers and reports analysed, the transition seems to be faster for credit students (e.g. Erasmus) and longer for Nordic degree students. These findings are aligned with the different employers’ perspectives presented in the previous section.

Work in a foreign country/ Mobility in the labour market
Murphy-Lejeune (2002) uses the concept of mobility capital to describe that people with mobility experiences develop a taste for living abroad, being therefore expected to present a higher proportion of mobile students working/living abroad after the mobility experience. This idea is also support by European Commission (2010a): experience abroad, either for work or study, increases the likelihood of considering moving abroad for work in the future.

All surveys on mobile students find that a considerable proportion of mobile students show the intention to work abroad, have worked at least for some time in a foreign country or actually work abroad at the time of the survey (Maiworm and Teichler (1996), Teichler (2002), Bracht et al. (2006)). Maiworm and Teichler (1996) find that 38% of mobile graduates applied for a job in a foreign country and that, five years after the international experience, 19% were actually working abroad, among which almost half in the Erasmus host country. The proportion of those having worked abroad (at least for some time) 5 years after the graduation is similar in the Bracht et al. (2006) survey: 18%. Available statistics suggest that this figure is several times as high as among non-mobile graduates (Bracht et al., 2006).
The findings at the country or regional levels are similar. A study with both mobile and non-mobile Italian students, shows that a higher proportion of the former group of students worked abroad five years after graduation: 17% of mobile Erasmus students versus 3.5% of the non-mobile students (Cammelli et al., 2008). In Wiers-Jenssen (2008a) the proportion of Norwegian students reporting to have worked abroad at some stage after graduation was higher for mobile students, especially for those graduated abroad: 40% for degree mobile students, 25% for exchange mobile students and 6% for non-mobile students. Between 3 to 5 years after the graduation these proportions have decreased to 20%, 6% and 2%, respectively, but it was still high in particular for degree students.

Parey and Waldinger (2010) and Oosterbeek and Webbink (2009) are exceptional papers in the sense that both use econometric methods to find the causal relation between a study period abroad and the probability of working in a foreign country. This effect is found to be considerably positive in both studies. While the former study focus in german Erasmus students, the latter analyses Dutch post-graduate students. Parey and Waldinger (2010) find that studying abroad increases an individual’s probability of working in a foreign country by about 15 percentage points. The correspondent figure in Oosterbeek and Webbink (2009) is of 110 percentage points. Furthermore, the authors find that the higher the number of months studied abroad the more likely it is to live abroad.

International tasks
Another well established conclusion from the Erasmus surveys is that a high proportion of the mobile students, even if working in the home country, have an international job, roughly defined as a job in an international firm, that requires travelling abroad or frequent usage of a foreign language. According to Bracht et al. (2006), 69% of former Erasmus students are communicating in a foreign language during work and 50% are working in an international organization. However, comparing to previous Erasmus surveys, the author highlights that the number of Erasmus students reporting international dimensions at work declined somewhat during the years. In the cohort of 1988/89 Erasmus students, 71% of respondents reported contacts with other countries, and 49% with the Erasmus host country.
Comparing mobile with non-mobile students it can indeed be concluded that the former are more likely to have an international job and international tasks (see Teichler (2002) and Teichler (2007 or 2011)).

In the Nordic countries the evidence is the same (Saarikallio-Torp and Wiers-Jenssen, 2010). Focusing in Norwegian students, this still holds after controlling for student characteristics. Furthermore, degree mobile students the probability of performing international tasks is particularly strong (Wiers-Jenssen (2008a) and Wiers-Jenssen (2011)).

**Wages**

In general, former Erasmus students do not perceive to have higher income levels than their non-mobile peers (Opper er al (1990), Maiworm and Teichler (1996), Bracht et al. (2006), Teichler and Janson (2007)).

In surveys to both mobile and non-mobile students the conclusion is not consensual: whereas in Teichler (2002) there was no income difference between the two groups of students, Teichler (2011) founds a 14% wage gain for former mobile students.

Mobility is also associated with higher income in Italy. Former Erasmus students have a wage gain of 11% compared with non-mobile peers, while for other types of mobility this gain is of 8% (Cammelli et al., 2008). For Norway, having been a degree or credit mobile student has a positive effect on wages, but the difference is almost all explained by the fact that more mobile students work in the private sector (Wiers-Jenssen 2011 and Wiers-Jenssen and Try 2005).

**6.1.3 – Discussion**

An overall judgement of the absolute value of student mobility is difficult to make. The majority of the evidence comes from studies that either do not compare former mobile with the non-mobile peers or that do not control for the differences between the two groups.

A common pattern can however be established: the evidence indicates that the effect of student mobility is stronger for the future career in horizontal dimensions (work abroad and international tasks) than in vertical dimensions (employment/unemployment and
In other words, it seems that being mobile does not have a significant effect on the success of the career but on the nature of the career, namely by making it more international or by increasing the probability to work abroad. This suggests that studying abroad is used by students as a signalling tool to indicate a preference for international subjects and tasks.

Overall, it seems that student mobility is more positively valued by employers than by students. Furthermore, it should be highlighted that the perceived professional value of a study period abroad seems to be modest for recent generations than for those having studied abroad some years before (Bracht et al., 2006). The authors conjecture that the value of studying abroad may decline as more students acquire international competences. This interpretation is aligned with the finding that in countries experiencing student mobility more recently (Central and East European countries) the value reported is higher than in Western countries (Bracht et al., 2006).

Finally, it should be kept in mind that the effects found cannot be totally attributable to the student mobility experience in the sense that participating students are a selective group of students and differentiating characteristics are present even before the study period abroad. For instance, Wiers-Jenssen (2008) refers to studies supporting the idea that mobile students constitute a select group also in respect to personality traits and motivation, being more outgoing and having more initiative. This goes along with the employers’ opinions that mobile students are more proactive, adaptable and problem-solvers (Bracht et al., 2006).

6.2 - Language, personal and cultural outcomes

The most clear and transversal finding of the surveys to Erasmus students is that an overwhelming majority of students consider personal development as the most relevant outcome of the international experience. Academic and career considerations are considered as secondary. As expressed by Orr et al. (2011): ‘this study confirms the finding of other surveys that foreign enrolment periods are primarily a means to broaden students’ cultural and social horizons’. In fact, learning a foreign language, maturity and personal development were the most positively rated (Maiworm and Teichler, 1996).
The Erasmus experience shapes the attitudes and the values of the students substantially. In the ‘Survey of the socio-economic background of Erasmus students’ (European Commission, 2000), 98% said the experience was positive or very positive from a cultural and social point of view. In the follow up study (Souto Otero and McCoshan, 2006), 95% of students reported improvements to a large extent in the understanding of people from another cultural or ethnic background and 80% mentioned changes in personal values. Even students more dissatisfied from an academic point of view, tend to have much more positive views as far as cultural and social aspects are concerned.

The majority of students also considered the improvement in foreign language proficiency as a very important consequence of the study period abroad (Teichler and Maiworm, 1997). Two thirds of the students surveyed for the Eurostudent 2008-2011 answered the same. Even though a high level of competences in foreign languages has been reported before the study period abroad, the students perceived a significant improvement (Orr et al., 2011). Opper et al. (1990) state that only 4% of students were still unable to follow lectures in the language of the host country after their return. Souto Otero and McCoshan (2006) indicate that 25% (15%) more students were fluent in their second (third) language at the end of their Erasmus period than at the start.

6.3 – EU identity

It is expected that increased interactions between Europeans, of which student mobility is an example, can lead to a common European identity. According to Fligstein (2008), interpersonal contact between people from different national and cultural backgrounds leads to share common interests, and this eventually, will ‘lead to seeing themselves more as Europeans and less as having merely a nationally identity’. This view is also shared by the European Commission through the Erasmus programme.

Focusing in UK students, King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003) indicate that those who stay a year abroad are more pro-European when compared to, first, a non-mobile control group and, second, to a group of students that are about to go on their year abroad. Concretely, the former group has more knowledge and interest in European affairs, are more favourable of European integration. The year abroad students show a greater tendency to express a European or partly European identity (79% against 61% of non-mobile students). This evidence suggests that student mobility may promote European identity.
However, two other papers support the opposite idea. Sigalas (2010) studied the change in European identity for outgoing English students and incoming students from Continental Europe to UK, by asking to identify themselves as European and/or nationals of their own country. Comparing responses before and after the study experience abroad, the author concludes that the European identity was not strengthened and it even decreased for incoming students. Moreover, the Erasmus experience promoted the interaction between Europeans, but contact with host country students remained limited. Relying also in pre and post questionnaires from a sample of mobile and non-mobile UK students, Wilson (2011) finds a similar result: Erasmus students considered themselves considerably more European than the non-mobile students, but this was already the case before the exchange period and there was no significant change in either groups’ position. There was no evidence of either convergence or divergence between the mobile and non-mobile students’ positions in the course of the study.

Notice that the evidence summarized does not necessarily mean that studying abroad does not affect European identity whatsoever. The samples in these studies are very small, therefore not representative of mobile students, refer only to short-term mobility and are focused in some UK universities. Furthermore, the studies undertaken so far do not give an idea of the long term impact of a study period abroad on European identity.

6.4 – Other considerations

Impact at the institutional and national level

Universities started to respond to the internationalisation in higher education due to different reasons. Not only international students became an important revenue source for faculties and universities, but some universities had the explicit goal to achieve an international status.

In answering to surveys, institutions mention that the internationalisation as a theme became more important in the universities’ agenda and led to changes in the organization and management of the university. Some of the mentioned internationalisation policies are: the creation of international offices and of joint degrees, the development of more international-oriented curricula and eventual adjustments in the language of instruction (CHEPS et al., 2008). Of course, EU policies
and actions (e.g. Erasmus programme) increasingly influenced the policies and planning of universities and educational systems in general (Teichler, 2001).

Finally, the growing internationalisation activities of both students and higher education institutions increased the awareness of governments regarding the importance of mobility (Brakel et al., 2004).

Impact at the societal level
The effects of student mobility at the societal level are not directly measured but may be discussed departing from the effects found at the individual level. For instance, in the economics literature, the social returns to education are higher than the private ones, justifying the provision of public education. Making the parallel to the education undertaken abroad, the society may also benefit from having citizens and workers with more international competences and therefore more capable of responding to the increasing challenges of internationalisation and globalisation.

Of course, this reasoning lies in the assumption that mobile students return to the home country. Those that end up working in a foreign country are a loss of talent and of international competences, referred usually as brain drain. From a country point of view, the returns of investing in student mobility depend on this return rate. This issue is particularly relevant for countries that have high imbalance between outgoing and incoming students.

7. Conclusion
The number of students that decide to study abroad, either for the entire programme or for a short period of time, has continuously increased during the last decades. The support given by stakeholders is justified by the believe that student mobility promotes future employability and mobility, as well as personal and civic development.

This report reviews the existent evidence on the factors that determine the decision to study abroad and the impacts of that decision at the individual level.

Three findings are well established. First, students with highly educated parents and having previous international exposure are more likely to study abroad, therefore constituting a selective group of students. Second, students consistently report personal development and improvement of language skills as the most important result of this international experience, and academic/career benefits are mentioned secondarily. Finally, while there is no evidence that the study period abroad lead to salary gains or
higher-level jobs, it significantly increases the probability of working abroad and of performing international tasks at work. However, there are signs that these professional returns are declining over time. The evidence and findings revised in this report should be interpreted with caution. The literature rarely compares mobile with non-mobile students and, if it does, the differences known to exist between these two groups of students are seldom taken into account. Therefore the impacts attributed to the study period abroad may be instead the result of pre-existent differences between the groups. The development and collection of comprehensive data and the use of proper methodologies is necessary to estimate the causal and true impact of study abroad.
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Abstract
This report reviews the existent evidence on the factors that determine the decision to study abroad and the impacts of that decision at the individual level. Three findings are well established in the literature: first, students with highly educated parents and having previous international exposure are more likely to study abroad; second, students consistently report personal development and improvement of language skills as the most important result of this international experience; third, while there is no evidence that the study period abroad lead to salary gains or higher-level jobs, it significantly increases the probability of working abroad and of performing international tasks at work. The need to collect comprehensive data and the need to use proper methodologies to estimate the causal impact of studying abroad are highlighted.

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