Environmental sustainability in Erasmus+ student mobility: SET survey analysis

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Sustainable Erasmus+ Travel

Sustainable Erasmus+ Travel project   101133927

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Sustainable Erasmus+ Travel

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Abbreviations

CU	Charles University
EC	European Commission
ESN	European Student Network
EUF	European University Foundation
HEI	Higher Education Institution
SET	Sustainable Erasmus+ Travel (project)
U.Porto	University of Porto
UZH	University of Zurich

1. Introduction

While environmental consciousness among the younger generation has steadily increased in recent years (European Commission, 2024), a significant gap remains between their values and actions, particularly when it comes to sustainable travel choices. Research consistently highlights that **although students express concern for climate change and support for sustainable practices, these intentions often do not translate into behaviour when planning international mobility** (Erasmus Student Network, 2022). Financial, infrastructural, and sociocultural barriers — primarily higher train costs, longer travel times, and a lack of clear incentives — discourage a majority of mobile students from opting for greener transportation alternatives. This misalignment undermines the Erasmus+ programme's ambitions to promote environmental sustainability, as laid out in the 2021–2027 priorities (European Commission, n.d.). Bridging this awareness-habit gap is, therefore, critical for the programme to remain aligned with broader EU climate objectives and to foster a generation of climate-conscious global citizens.

Against this backdrop, the Sustainable Erasmus+ Travel project (SET) was designed to enhance students' opportunities for adopting more environmentally sustainable practices during their mobility experience and to reframe their journey to the host destination as a transformative experience in its own right. Coordinated by the European University Foundation (EUF), the project is implemented in collaboration with three partner universities—Charles University (CU), the University of Porto (U.Porto), and the University of Zurich (UZH)—and the Erasmus Student Network (ESN). The initiative is also supported by two associate partners, Erasmus by Train and Generation Climate Europe.

In the context of Work Package (WP) 2 - Connecting students' environmental awareness with action, led by CU, the consortium launched a European-level student survey to research the **main barriers and measures to support students' sustainable transportation choices.** Based on the findings of previous Green Erasmus and Erasmus Goes Green projects funded by KA2, this exercise provided insightful lessons and validated some of the initial assumptions about student behaviour and needs.

The findings from this survey will directly inform future project activities, namely the preparation of a student campaign and contest to promote and normalise green travel, and support drafting the final policy recommendations.

The document at hand consists of several chapters, opening with the **Introduction** and the **Methodology**, outlining research design and data collection methods. The third section, **Survey Results**, presents our research insights per topic. The fourth chapter, **Conclusions**, recaps key takeaways and messages to guide our upcoming activities. Lastly, Annex 1 enumerates the student survey questions and visualises the respective answers.

2. Methodology

The principal objective of this survey was to gain deeper insights into current **trends, priorities, challenges, and recommendations regarding the relationship between Erasmus+ mobility and sustainable travel.** Even more so, we sought to evaluate the implementation of support measures across European universities and to identify key actions needed to bridge the gap between environmental awareness and practical engagement.

The survey targeted students who have participated in an Erasmus+ mobility abroad since 2021 or were preparing for an upcoming exchange. It welcomed responses from students of diverse ages, nationalities, socioeconomic backgrounds, academic disciplines, study levels, and enrollment types. The survey was anonymous, except for those students who could opt to leave their email addresses to be informed about future project activities.

The questionnaire was structured into **five sections**: a) Identification, b) University and study-related data, c) Daily habits and civic engagement, d) Transport data, and e) Final remarks. It utilised five question types: Dropdowns (selecting one answer), Multiple choice, Scale (1 being "Not important at all" and 5 "The most important"), Open text, and Branching (skip to further questions). The survey was administered in English (see Annex 1). Although the completion time was originally estimated to be approximately 10–20 minutes, the average time ultimately was closer to 25 minutes.

Following several rounds of internal discussion and validation in the summer of 2024, the last set of questions was uploaded on Microsoft Forms in early October of the same year. During the three months that the Form was open, we received a total of 2,304 answers.

In terms of the **participants' profile**, nearly half were German, followed by Czech and Portuguese nationalities. The gender distribution revealed that 63.5% identified as female, indicating potential gender-based preferences in (sustainable) travel choices and highlighting female overrepresentation in our sample. Nearly two-thirds of respondents were single and living in cities with over 100,000 inhabitants, with 31% residing in cities exceeding one million, highlighting a clear urban concentration and greater access to sustainable transportation alternatives. 93% reported no disability, while 5% identified with some form of impairment.

To conclude, it is important to acknowledge some **limitations**: a) sample bias, i.e., lacking a fuller representation of the student population, b) language barriers that could lead to misunderstandings or incomplete answers, c) survey fatigue leading to lower response rates and general disengagement, and d) the complexity and misinterpretation of questions undermining the reliability of the results. Nevertheless, our survey findings offer valuable insights that can inform future research and policy development on this topic.

3. Survey results

a. University/study data

Participants were asked to provide more details on their academic paths. Inquiring about students' home universities provides us with information about their background, while also allowing us to understand the degree of participation in sustainable initiatives from different HEIs. Interestingly, the university with the highest representation is CU, a partner to the SET project, with 316 respondents.

Depending on their age and level of study, students may exhibit varying levels of sensitivity to sustainability issues, including those related to travel and transportation. Around 47% of respondents were pursuing a Master's degree, compared to 35% who were attending a Bachelor's degree programme. Phd students represented the smallest sample (6%).

The selection of an academic field may serve as an indicator of an individual's engagement with sustainability-related issues. Within the context of this survey, examining this dimension can facilitate the development of intersectoral dialogue and foster a more integrated understanding of sustainable practices across disciplines. The field with the highest representation was "Humanities and Social Sciences," with 26% of respondents, followed by "Natural Sciences" and "Economics and Business" (both with approximately 15%).

b. Daily habits and civic engagement

The second round of survey questions aimed to provide insights into the motivations of respondents regarding environmental sustainability as a lifestyle, while also helping us identify those who have demonstrated a commitment to ecological principles. When asked about their involvement with organisations related to the environment, climate change or sustainable development, the overwhelming majority of respondents (83%) did not participate in any kind of initiative, signalling the potential for HEIs to increase their effort in raising awareness about environmental issues.

The link between eating habits and sustainability is often overlooked; nevertheless, those who choose a particular diet with a lower environmental impact (i.e., vegan or vegetarian) may be more inclined to seek sustainable alternatives when travelling. In this light, using the question of diet preferences could also help us understand how dietary choices influence transportation decisions. 63% of respondents stated that they were not following any particular diet, compared to 32% who were either vegan or vegetarian. Therefore, our analysis cannot provide a concrete link between eating and transportation habits, and further investigation could better inform this association.

Gaining insight into the participants' priorities is critical for understanding their perspective on sustainability, which in turn can influence the way they approach their travel options. Furthermore, such data can inform the development of targeted communication strategies aligned with participants' primary values and concerns. Students chiefly associate "sustainability" with "a lifestyle with minimal impact on the environment" and "reducing total consumption and waste production," which garnered 29% and 28% of preferences, respectively. Notably, the low prioritisation of "Eco-friendly travelling and transportation" (4%) underlines a key area for improvement in the context of the SET project.

On a scale from "very" to "not at all," respondents defined their sustainability habits at home. This question can indicate their degree of commitment to sustainable practices in their everyday lives and influence their decisions concerning travel options as adults. 62% of respondents stated that their household is "eco-friendly" to a certain degree, followed by 19% who stated that they make some effort occasionally and 16% of respondents who defined their household as "Very eco-friendly".
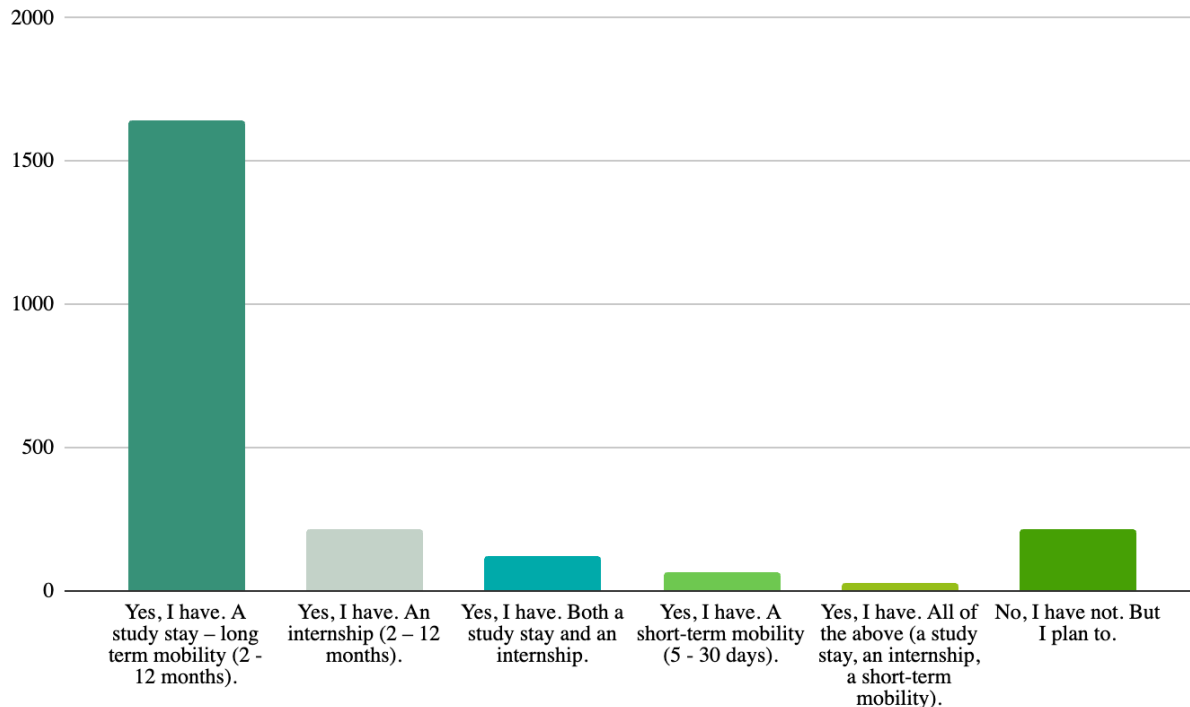
In sum, the data acquired suggest that most respondents do not actively engage with sustainable practices, leading to the assumption that environmental principles are not driving their travel decisions.

c. Transport data

This section of the survey aims to gain insight into students' transportation habits. We examined the influence that their family habits have had on them by asking about the means of transportation used during vacations. Then, we inquired about their own preferences when they are at home or during their mobility period (if they have experienced one). This segment concluded by asking students if they were aware of the existence of green top-ups, which currently represent the main incentive in favour of green travel.

Another question addressed family travel habits, in which 57% of respondents indicated the car as the predominant mode of transport during family vacations, followed by air travel (19%) and bus travel (3%). In contrast, current travel behaviours related to university commute reveal a more sustainable trend, with 45% of participants regularly using public transportation and 20% relying on trains. However, the relatively low usage of bicycles and electric vehicles (25% combined) indicates potential for advancement in the adoption of greener alternatives among students.
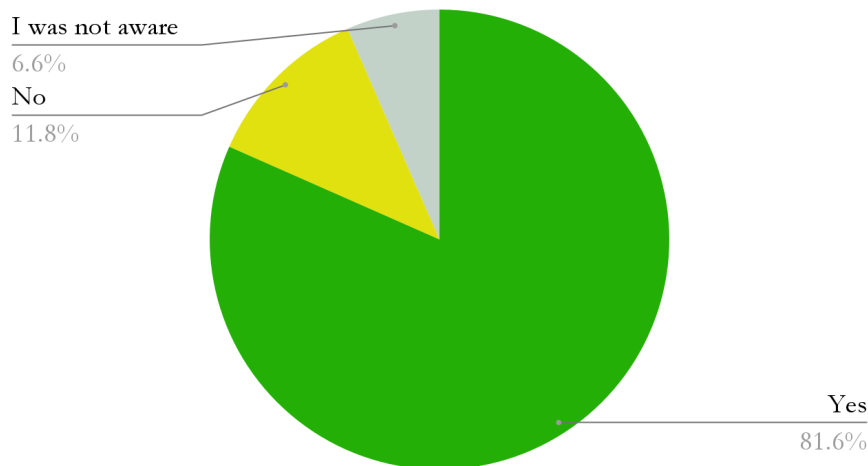
Considering the nature of the SET project, it is essential to determine whether the respondents have participated in any form of mobility or are at least planning to do so. Indeed, **71% stated that they had taken part in a long-term mobility programme**, either for a study stay, an internship, or both, as shown in the Graph below.

Graph 1: Have you participated in any Erasmus+ mobility?

The distance between the home and the host institution represents one of the main concerns students take into account when planning their mobility experience. Hence, we also requested that participants indicate the kilometric interval using the official Erasmus+ distance calculator, so as to consider geographic variables as a possible barrier that could make a sustainable travel option less feasible. The highest distance recorded was 1301,09 km, from a German student of natural science who moved to Latvia for her mobility experience, whereas the shortest one was around 90 km, from a German Phd student who moved to Zurich.
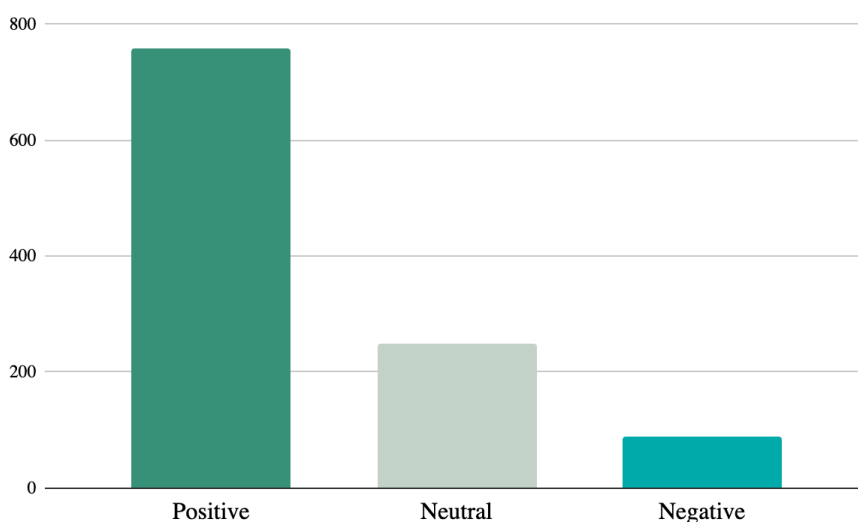
The travel grant could represent one of the vital incentives for students to pursue sustainable forms of mobility, which is why their universities need to provide them with all the necessary information to take advantage of this opportunity. As depicted in the pie chart below, more than half of the respondents were properly informed of the travel grant's existence, while only 7% were unaware of its presence. This demonstrates the successful work put in by HEIs in spreading awareness about this topic, as well as the students' interest and openness when it comes to choosing different travel options. As shown in the graph below, the HEIs' efforts can have a positive impact on the percentage of students who choose to adopt green travel, provided that relevant information is provided in due time.

Graph 2: Were you informed in advance by your sending institution about the green top-up allowance or travel grant?
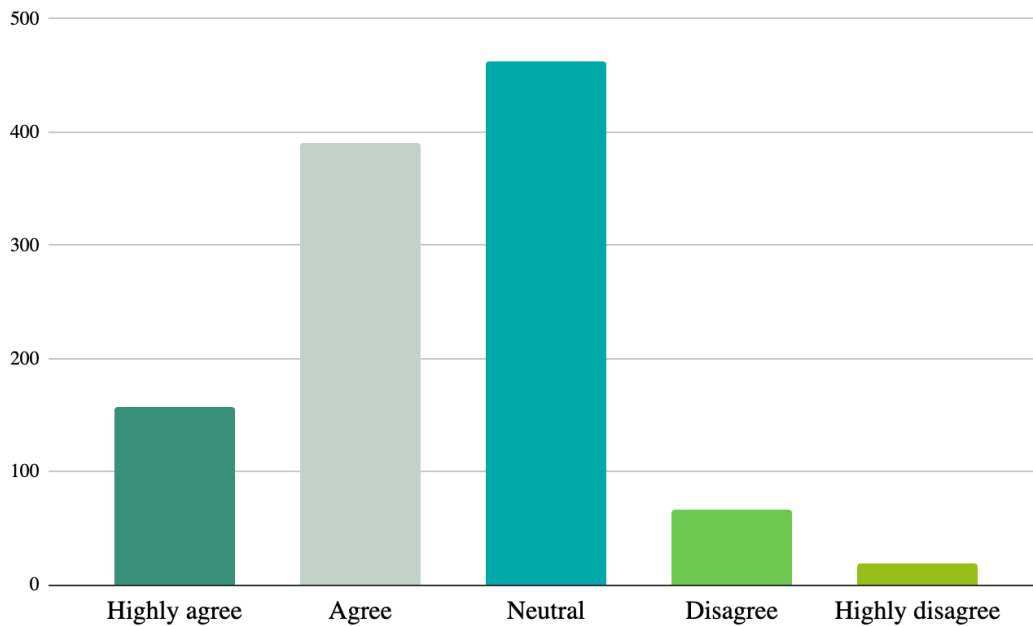
The use of sustainable transport represents the essence of the SET project, which aims to change the narrative on sustainable mobility. **52% of participants stated they used a sustainable travel option**. Although they represent a narrow majority, our aim is to increase this share even further. This result, albeit positive, is not in line with the European average of students travelling sustainably, and can partly be attributed to either the majority of respondents coming from or residing in Germany or to the short distances. According to the latest ESN survey, which reached 22,000 mobile students across the continent, approximately 26% of students used green means of transportation to reach their exchange destination. This set of data can be considered closer to the reality of students' mobility.

70% of those students described their experience with green mobility as "positive", with only 8% defining it as "negative". Considering that more than half of the respondents used a sustainable means of transport, it is encouraging to note that the vast majority had a positive experience. By celebrating and sharing these real-life experiences, we can have a greater impact on changing the narrative and trends on sustainable travel.

Graph 3: How would you describe the overall experience of this mode of transport as?

Another point for reflection was the influence of choosing a green mode of transport on the future traveller's behaviour. Exactly half of the respondents answered this inquiry positively by selecting either "Agree" or "Highly agree".
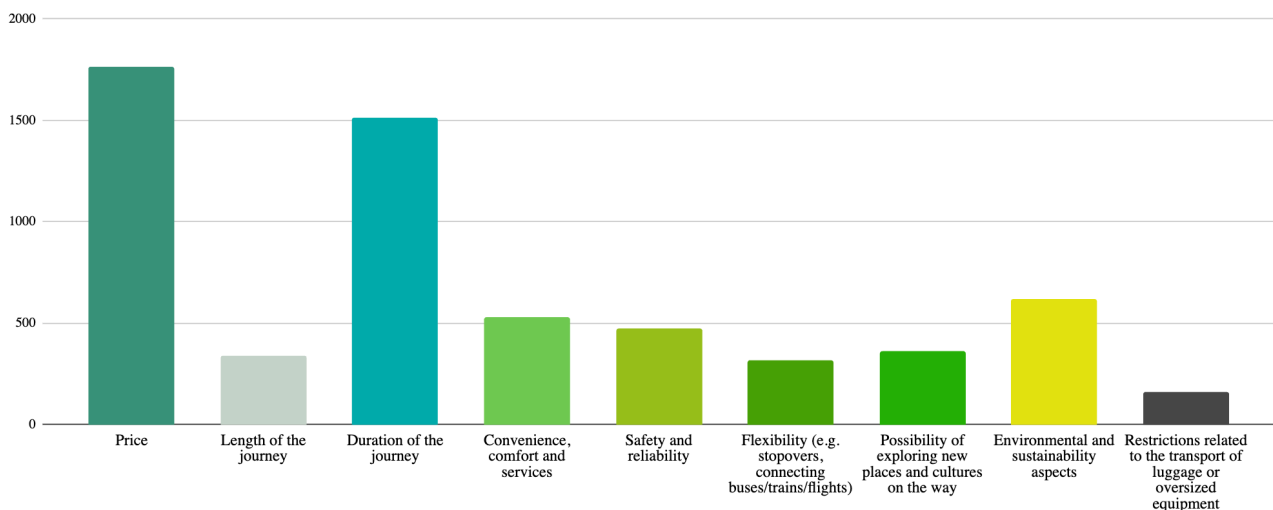

Graph 4: Did the sustainable travel experience have a positive impact on your subsequent travelling behaviour?

Inquiring about students' host institutions provides additional context to their background. Overall, we can separate them into three groups:

a) Students who show higher sensitivity towards sustainability issues (they are usually involved in associations related to environmental topics, they may be on specific diets, and they are actively looking at green travel options, making sustainability their main priority when travelling);

b) Students who are moderately interested in those topics (they tend to make a few sustainable choices in their everyday life, regarding sustainable travel, their priorities shift towards other elements such as price or duration of the journey; however, they don't exclude green options altogether);

c) Students who show less concern for the environmental component of their decisions (they usually don't include sustainable practices in their daily life, don't take into account green options when travelling and show little to no participation in initiatives concerning these themes).

By defining these different profiles, we can tailor our initiatives to reach those who have yet to incorporate environmental awareness into their daily lives.
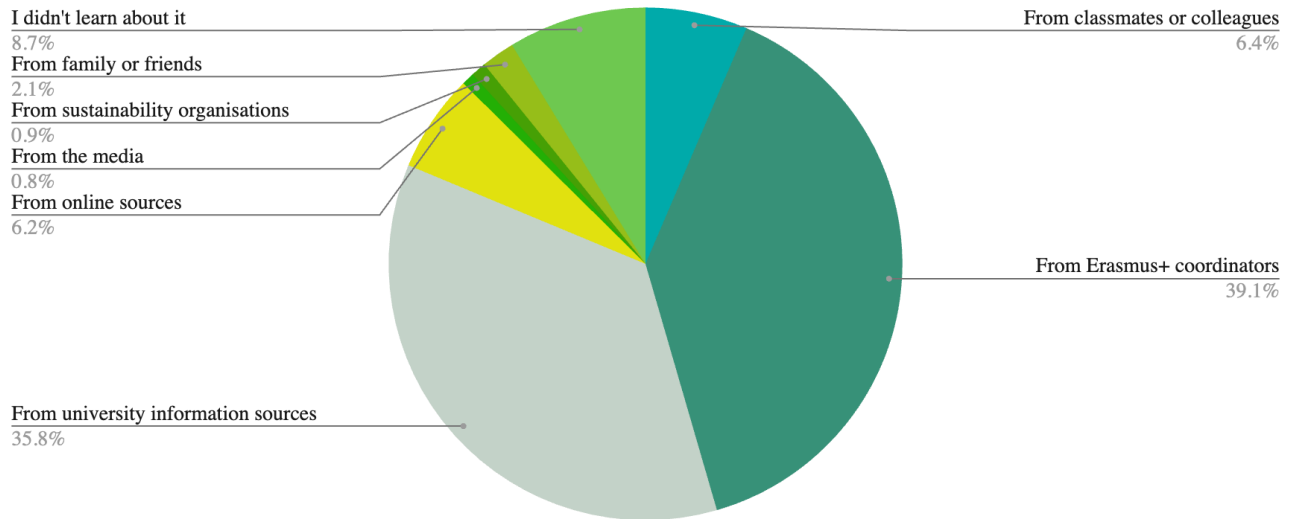
Understanding students' priorities when choosing travel options is essential to creating a communication strategy that resonates with them. The survey reveals that the primary elements influencing students' choices are "Price" (29% of preferences) and "Duration of the Journey" (25% of preferences), with "Environmental and Sustainability Aspects" (10% of preferences) as a distant third. These results are in line with the Green Erasmus Report (2022), here a general analysis of consumers behaviour shown that the relevance attached to the "price" increases when the students are on mobility compared to when they are a home (59% of consumers consider price a priority while on mobility while just 44% consider it as such at home). In the context of the present survey analysis, this trend involves travelling choices indeed, while on mobility, 42% of students consider "price" as the main reason behind their daily transportation choice. Additionally, 50% of respondents consider "time taken to complete the journey" a priority as well.

Graph 5: What criteria are important for you when deciding on the means of transport that you will use to reach/return from your Erasmus+ destination?

The survey explored barriers to sustainable travel for Erasmus+ mobility, thereby giving students the opportunity to prioritise different challenges on a scale from "Not important at all" to "The most important". Similar to previous questions, the price and duration (in hours) of the journey are reconfirmed as highly influential aspects in the choice of travel options. On the other hand, when asked to choose a preferred mode of transport irrespective of duration, 71% of students selected trains, followed by electric cars (10%), indicating strong support for low-impact options.

Importantly, the primary sources of information on sustainable mobility were identified as Erasmus+ coordinators and university communication channels (as depicted in the graph below), highlighting the **central role of higher education institutions in promoting sustainable travel awareness**.
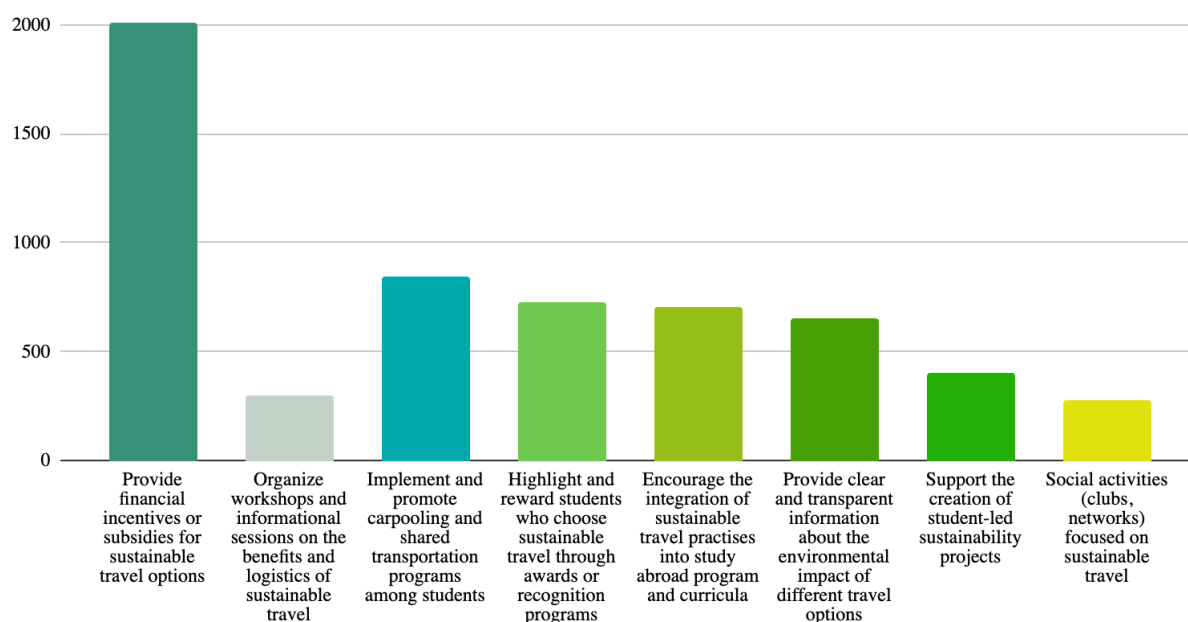
I didn't learn about it
8.7%
From family or friends
2.1%
From sustainability organisations
0.9%
From the media
0.8%
From online sources
6.2%

From classmates or colleagues
6.4%

From Erasmus+ coordinators
39.1%

From university information sources
35.8%

Graph 6: How did you learn about the sustainable mobility travel options regarding your Erasmus+ mobility?

Considering that for many students, travelling by plane represents the go-to choice when it comes to international mobility, it might be interesting to understand the motivation behind this choice. **The three most commonly chosen justifications by students were "Speed, shorter travel time," "Cheaper flights when booked in time," and "Availability of direct flights to the destination"**. Although their choices seem reasonable, the reality is more nuanced. Indeed, when considering the duration of a flight, in many cases, we do not take into account the waiting time at the airport, which, overall, could make a plane trip as long as a medium-length train ride. There is also the additional strain of having to travel a longer distance to reach the airport, often situated outside the urban centre, and arrive early enough for the required procedures. On the other hand, it is true that many countries lack the necessary infrastructure for direct rail connections, making train connections quite complicated. Besides trains, there are other viable and often cheaper alternatives for green transportation, such as buses or carpooling, which students should consider.

d. Final

Respondents were asked about **what universities should do to better support mobility students to travel sustainably**. A range of eight actions was presented, encompassing, for example, financial support measures, information sharing, shared transportation programmes and support to student-led sustainability projects. Students could select multiple answers. Additionally, they were given the chance to add other suggestions for actions.

Graph 7: What should universities do to better support students who go on mobility to travel sustainably?

The most selected action was the provision of "… financial incentives or subsidies for sustainable travel options (e.g. tickets, passes)," with approximately 87% of respondents selecting it. This underlines a common trend throughout the survey, highlighting **the need to provide students with higher financial support so that they can truly consider the chance to travel sustainably**. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that the provision of financial support shouldn't be limited to HEIs - this could potentially create a tiered system where only more affluent universities could further support their students. **This support should come from the Erasmus+ programme, levelling the sustainable travel playing field and ensuring that all students have the chance to travel green**. A concrete step in this direction was the awarding of a travel grant to all students, which should be standardised in the upcoming years. However, the meagre difference between regular and green travel might not send strong enough signals for students to opt for green travel modes.

The second most selected option, chosen by around 36% of respondents, refers to the implementation and promotion of **carpooling and shared transportation options among students**. Travelling together to a mobility destination can help students in various ways, such as sharing the costs, enhancing their sense of safety, or making friends along the way. While universities can play an important role in connecting students who are heading to the same destination, there are also other initiatives, such as Go2Rail, that encourage this type of travel.

Universities looking to support their students better can also improve the **recognition of those who travelled sustainably through awards or recognition schemes,** selected by around 30% of respondents. There are no specific mechanisms to ensure this recognition; however, the SET project will explore this possibility and collaborate with universities to understand what can be done in this regard.

Respondents highly value the conveying of information by HEIs, both formally and informally. As described above, HEIs are one of the sources of information about sustainable travel for mobility, which may explain why around one third of participants highlighted the integration of sustainable travel practices into study abroad programmes and curricula. In order to promote green travel, there should be clear and transparent information about the environmental impact of different travel options.

The support for student-led sustainability projects and the creation of social activities focused on sustainable travel were the least chosen options. However, they might still reflect students' interest in fostering a culture of sustainability within the campus.

Students used the "Other" option to present different perspectives and recognise the challenges that still need to be overcome. Several of the answers emphasised the need for increased financial support, which aligns well with the most frequently selected action. Additionally, the reduction of bureaucracy was mentioned as something that would help students have more time to plan their trips ("*Reduce the amount of paperwork/hundreds of pages of not useful/helpful information. That would leave more time for things like travel-planning and applying for grants supporting green transport*"). One of the respondents mentioned the need for a more differentiated approach towards the topic, as not all destinations are suitable for sustainable travel to the same degree. Finally, some students underlined that the issue is bigger than Higher Education - it is up to transport companies and governments to improve the conditions and accessibility of sustainable travel.

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked if they had any other advice for making sustainable travel more accessible to students. The qualitative answers provide a relevant perspective into the views of students on how to tackle two of this study's research questions:

- What is necessary to close the gap between the environmental awareness of students and their actions?
- How is the implementation of the green top-up/travel grant, and what are its benefits and areas of improvement?

Particularly when it comes to the second question, this analysis will focus solely on the implementation of the green top-up, as the collection of survey replies was undertaken when the new travel grant was still in its early stages of implementation. Additionally, as analysed before, Germany was overrepresented in the overall sample. Given that the German Erasmus+ National Agency has decided to postpone the implementation of the new travel grant, it is likely that most respondents had not had any contact with this new funding mechanism to and from their Erasmus+ mobility.

The insights outlined a set of obstacles described by respondents as essential to overcome for sustainable travel to be more accessible, with **price/cost** being the most common. Issues with the high cost of a sustainable transport journey were mentioned by around 33% of respondents, with answers ranging from requesting cheaper and/or discounted tickets to comparing the overall cost of train tickets with airplane ones ("*Costs are the most important criteria for students.*", "*Currently travelling sustainably is mostly a question of money. If a flight costs 1/10 or less and takes 1/4 or less the time it is very very hard to choose a train over a plane (...)*".

Affordability is thus a major concern, which dovetails with the second most common challenge mentioned - **issues with the green top-up**. The top-up for green travel is currently being discontinued; nevertheless, respondents' insights might provide food for thought on how students would like the support for green travel to Erasmus+ mobility to evolve. The majority focused on the increase in financial support as a condition for sustainable travel to and from mobility, mentioning that while they appreciated the intention, 50 euros was clearly not enough to face the exponentially higher costs of green modes of transport. Some of the recommendations are actually addressed in the new travel grant, such as the contribution to travelling per km instead of a fixed amount (currently, the travel grant offers a different amount depending on the distance band). Moreover, some students reported needing more flexibility in the process of assigning and allocating the green top-up, such as requiring HEIs to allow applications for green travel later in the process, indicating that this decision should be made when applying for the Erasmus+ grant, as it was not possible to change it later. An additional suggestion from students was to change the green top-up rules to include features such as enabling the starting point to differ from the home university and recognising boats and ferries as sustainable means of transport.

Another constraint within the price/cost topic was the fact that **flying is cheap**. This was mentioned by several students, both in relation with the top-up amount ("*50 Euros extra travel money is good, but still flights are so cheap that it is still cheaper to go by airplane*") and just as a suggestion for improvement ("*sustainable long distance travel NEEDS to be cheaper than flights or no one will ever prefer it over flying*").

The **train infrastructure across Europe** is a matter that affects a wide range of sectors. Respondents also highlighted it as one of the key factors in need of improvement to make sustainable travelling to mobility more accessible, especially when it comes to train connections and speed.

Luggage was also a factor mentioned by students. While the luggage allowance in more sustainable means of transport is usually more generous when compared with airplanes, a long-term move required to spend a semester

abroad demands a high number of items, which in turn makes it difficult for students to carry them through multiple train connections ("(…) *the luggage plays an incredible role, packing your whole life up, you don't want to make 30 connections, just to offset an amount of CO2 that in comparison to polluters is not relevant at all, this should not at all be the focus of sustainability*").

Several respondents expressed concern about the **reliability of sustainable travel**, which can be attributed to a wide range of factors, including a lack of train information in other languages besides the national one, difficulty understanding passenger rights, and difficulty rebooking the journey and finding new connections on the go.

("*One of the fears I heard most often in terms of sustainable travel options is the fear of missing a connection or a part of the journey getting canceled last minute.*"). Finally, the **perceived insecurity of sustainable travel and the need for safety** were mentioned by a few participants, especially female ones ("*Just make it safe. As a woman, I would not want to spend a night in a bus sitting next to some stranger…*").

In short, the abovementioned limitations, together with overall higher train costs, prevent students from travelling sustainably. ("*As long as taking the train will take 2x as long and costs 2x as much, most students will choose the plane. (…)*").

e. Recommendations

One of the last open-ended questions of the survey read, "Do you have any other recommendations for making sustainable travelling more accessible to students?". The top suggestion was to improve the European train infrastructure, including **increasing the high-speed connections and the reach and frequency of night trains** between more European cities ("*Building a high speed, highly connected train tracks across Europe", "If we had a more efficient train network EU-wide more people would be willing to be sustainable. That is better infrastructure such as inter-countries high-speed train/bullet train and at competitive prices. More work needs to be done in this regard. More investment. More political will. More reliability. Better policies. Then results will trickle down and students would see more incentive in travelling sustainably.*"). Additionally, it would be essential to **solve booking system issues and allow passengers to seamlessly book their international journey** ("*a Europe wide, actually usable platform to book train trips. Omio is not good enough and seat21.com is helpful, but you still have to book everything for yourself*").

Beyond this, some respondents expressed that, to broaden the access to sustainable travel, **all students should be given a sustainable travel ticket** similar to an Interrail pass, which would allow them to choose multiple green travel modes of transport for their journey ("*Yes, interrail pass to the students instead of budget to fly", "Well, I think that issuing a one-way ticket accepted on all sustainable means of transport for Erasmus travels would be a brilliant thing (such as a Eurail ticket incorporating trains and buses with EU oversight)*").

Furthermore, the cohort of students who answered the SET survey would like to see **the role of HEIs in promoting sustainable travel increased**. This could be tackled through different angles:

- Providing **more information about sustainable travelling**, logistics and clear conditions to receive the green top-up ("*Clear instructions, if ferries count as sustainable travelling.", "Make information about sustainable travel options available as early as possible for the students.*")
- **Supporting students in booking their sustainable journey** by advising them on the booking process and/or assisting in the booking directly ("*workshops and help with bookings, for example what website is the best (local or other train systems, bus etc.)", "Make information about sustainable travel options available as early as possible for the students.*");
- **Sharing previous students' green travel stories** as a way to encourage more students to follow the same path ("*List options (from previous Erasmus students) how they traveled there. Collect experience and a list of cheap/sustainable routes and connections", "Give examples of students who did so and can recommend it; specifically for the same destination (...)*").
- **Supporting the organisation of students who are going to the same destination** to travel together ("*connect students who travel in similar ways. It is much less terrifying to do a long bus or train travel when you're not on your own.", "Make it a journey - Organise communities*").

- **Strengthening cooperation with HEIs that are accessible by sustainable means of transport** ("*Maybe they could also make more cooperations with institutions that are more accessible: I appreciate the work and number of cooperation and possibilities of going here and there but to those who have to go abroad mandatorily, it is very hard to find places that are easy and financially manageable to travel to.", " make cooperations with Universities in accessible distances")*
- Ensuring students know the **academic calendar of the home and host institution** early on, so that they can better plan their journey ("*Clear and early overview of academic calendars of sending and hosting university")*

Some of these recommendations would require a substantial amount of effort from IRO staff members, making it challenging to balance the need to improve student support with the streamlining of processes for mobility. However, there are currently several tools available that could make these proposals slightly easier to implement. For example, when it comes to organising students who are going to the same destination, [Go2Rail](#) offers a platform that facilitates students to benefit from group discounts, making the sustainable journey less costly.

Lastly, the following quotes outline potential ideas to tackle the issues described above and give students extra incentives to travel sustainably. The slow travel suggestions are particularly aligned with the upcoming activities of the SET project, which aims to encourage students to view **sustainable travel as a means to enjoy the journey and explore more of Europe**.

- "*Encourage slow travelling by providing discounts for hostels (...)*"
- "*Giving grades as incentives*"
- "*Giving extra time in the curriculum for making the sustainable travelling option possible*"
- "*Gamified Incentives: Introduce a reward system for students who consistently use sustainable travel modes, with incentives like discounts on campus services, etc.*"
- "*I would emphasise how it's also a great way of discovering new places during the journey and making stops.*"

4. Conclusions

The analysis of the survey responses has revealed a complex yet persistent pattern. While students are increasingly aware of the environmental impact of their travel choices, this awareness doesn't always translate into concrete actions. This is particularly visible in the context of travelling to an Erasmus+ mobility. The results highlight a **strong interest by students in sustainable travel options, especially trains, but also mention several structural, financial and logistical barriers that hinder green choices.**

The issue of affordability remains a fundamental barrier. Although more than half of the respondents were informed about the green top-up, and 52% stated they used sustainable modes of transport, cost continues to weigh heavily in decision-making. The €50 green top-up, which has already been phased out in some countries, is widely regarded as insufficient. Moving forward, financial support must be more significant, scaled to reflect actual travel costs, differentiated by distance, and inclusive of a wider range of green modes such as ferries. There is also a need to improve the flexibility and transparency of the allocation process to allow students to make better-informed choices throughout their mobility planning.

Parallel to financial support, infrastructure and logistics remain central challenges. Respondents expressed strong support for improved European train systems, increased frequency of high-speed and night trains, and simplified booking procedures. Many voiced frustration over the difficulty of booking a multicountry journey through sustainable means of transport and called for a Europe-wide booking tool that is user-friendly and reliable. While these are systemic issues that extend beyond the scope of individual universities, HEIs, and student organisations must continue to advocate for such improvements at the policy level.

In addition to financial and infrastructural aspects, a considerable number of students identified planning difficulties, luggage issues, and travel insecurity, especially during night journeys or when travelling alone, as factors that reduce the appeal of green travel. These concerns can be addressed in part by fostering peer networks and shared travel arrangements. Universities are encouraged to promote initiatives like Go2Rail and facilitate connections among students travelling to the same destination, reducing both cost and anxiety, and offering an opportunity to make the journey itself a social and transformative experience.

Information remains essential for sustainable travel uptake. While Erasmus+ coordinators and university platforms were cited as key sources of information, many students requested earlier, clearer, and more detailed guidance, particularly on eligibility for green funding, sustainable travel options, and practical booking tips. Institutions should consider developing comprehensive mobility toolkits, including example routes, cost comparisons, and step-by-step planning assistance. Further, sharing stories from previous students who travelled sustainably could play a decisive role in shifting perceptions and motivating future cohorts.

A recurring theme in the comments was the need to **view sustainable travel as an opportunity rather than as a burden.** Many respondents spoke about the richness of slow travel—discovering new places along the route, spending time in different cultures, and enjoying the journey as part of the experience. This will be encouraged through the SET campaign, which showcases the experience of students travelling sustainably and hopefully motivates more students to follow their example.

Still, a significant portion of respondents acknowledged that real transformation cannot be underpinned solely by students or universities. Broader systemic change is essential. The low costs of flying, insufficient cross-border train infrastructure, and lack of reform on European travel systems were all cited as critical barriers. HEIs and student organisations must therefore act not only as enablers within their own institutions but also as advocates for better public investment and policy alignment with EU climate goals.

In conclusion, sustainable travel for Erasmus+ students will only become the norm when awareness is matched by opportunity. **By enhancing financial support, improving planning resources, facilitating community connections, and advocating for systemic change, universities and student organisations can play a decisive role in closing the gap between environmental concern and action**. The SET project remains committed to supporting this transition, working closely with students, staff, and institutions to reimagine mobility as a sustainable, inclusive, and enriching experience.

5. References

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6. Annex - List of survey questions

Identification section

1) **What is your nationality?** *Open question*

2) **What is your gender?** *Dropdowns (one answer)*
- Female
- Male
- I do not wish to specify
- Others (please specify):

3) **What is your marital status?** *Dropdowns (one answer)*
- Single
- Married/in partnership
- Divorced
- Widow, widower
- I do not wish to specify

4) **How many inhabitants does the place where you currently live have?** *Dropdowns (one answer)*
- Less than 1.000
- 1.000-10.000
- 10.000-30.000
- 30.000-60.000
- 60.000-100.000
- 100.000-500.000
- 500.000-1.000.000
- Over 1.000.000

5) **How many inhabitants does your hometown have, if it is different from your current location?**
Dropdowns (one answer)

- Less than 1.000
- 1.000-10.000
- 10.000-30.000
- 30.000-60.000
- 60.000-100.000

- 100.000-500.000
- 500.000-1.000.000
- Over 1.000.000

6) **What is your disability status?** *Multiple choice*
- Physical impairments
- Mental impairments
- Intellectual impairments
- Sensory impairments
- None. I have no disability
- Other, please specify
- I do not wish to specify

University/study data section

7) **What is your home university?** *Open question*

8) **What degree are you studying right now?** *Dropdowns (one answer)*
- Bachelor
- Master
- Ph.D.

9) **What is your area of studies?** *Multiple choice*
- Humanities and Social Sciences
- Pedagogy
- History
- Law
- Economics
- Natural Sciences
- Technical Sciences
- IT
- Arts
- Medicine and Pharmacy
- Sport
- Architecture
- Agriculture
- Other, please specify

Daily habits and civic engagement section

10) **Are you volunteering in some organization or association related to the environment/climate change/sustainable development?** *Multiple choice*
- No
- Yes, ESN
- Yes, Scouts
- Yes, Greenpeace
- Yes, AIESEC
- Yes, World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF)
- Yes, Volunteers for Sustainable Development (VSD)
- Yes, United Nations Volunteers (UNV)
- Others, please, specify:

11) **Are you on a particular diet?** *Dropdowns (one answer)*
- No
- Yes, vegetarian
- Yes, vegan
- Yes, other (please specify)

12) **What is the most important aspect of sustainability for you?** *Dropdowns (one answer)*
- A lifestyle with minimal impact on the environment
- Preserving natural resources for future generations
- Use of renewable energy sources
- Reducing total consumption and waste production
- Eco-friendly travelling and transportation
- Supporting the local economy and sustainable businesses
- Other (please specify)

13) **How would you describe the household you are currently living in relation to sustainability?** *Dropdowns (one answer)*
- Very eco-friendly (our household followed most of the principles of eco-friendliness: recycling, saving energy and water, shopping ecologically, using renewable energy sources)
- Eco-friendly to a certain degree (our household tried to follow some principles of eco-friendliness, but not consistently)
- There were some efforts (occasional attempts of behaving eco-friendly, but they are not consistent nor systematic)
- Not eco-friendly at all

14) When going on family vacations, what means of transport did you use the most? *Multiple choice*

- Car
- Bus
- Train
- Airplane
- Trailer or recreational vehicle
- Boat, yacht, cruise
- We barely ever travelled
- Other (please specify)

Transport data section

15) What means of transport do you use the most to reach/return from your home university? *Dropdowns (one answer)*

- Car, Electric car
- Motorcycle, scooter
- Bike
- Public transport (bus, tram, metro)
- Train
- Walking
- Other (please specify)

16) Have you participated in any Erasmus+ mobility? *Dropdowns (one answer)*

- Yes, I have. A study stay – long term mobility (2 - 12 months).
- Yes, I have. An internship (2 – 12 months).
- Yes, I have. Both a study stay and an internship.
- Yes, I have. A short-term mobility (5 - 30 days).
- Yes, I have. All of the above (a study stay, an internship, a short-term mobility).
- No, I have not. But I plan to. BRANCHING to the question 22

17) Were you informed in advance by your sending institution about the green top-up allowance or travel grant?

- Yes
- No
- I was not aware

18) **State your Erasmus+ host institution.** *Open question (1,2, 3 options)*

19) **Indicate the distance between your home institution and host institution (kindly use the Erasmus+ distance calculator**
https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/resources-and-tools/distance-calculator *Open question (1,2,3 options)*

20) **To reach your host institution, did you use a sustainable means of transport (e.g. bus, train, carpooling, bike)?**
- Yes BRANCHING to 20
- No BRANCHING to 22

21) **How would you describe the overall experience of this mode of transport as?**
- Positive
- Negative
- Other

22) **Did the sustainable travel experience have a positive impact on your subsequent travelling behaviour?**
- Highly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Highly disagree

23) **What criteria are important for you when deciding on the means of transport that you will use to reach/return from your Erasmus+ destination?** *Dropdowns (up to three answers)*
- Price
- Length of the journey
- Duration of the journey
- Convenience, comfort and services
- Safety and reliability
- Flexibility (e.g. stopovers, connecting buses/trains/flights)
- Possibility of exploring new places and cultures on the way, the so-called slow travelling
- Environmental and sustainability aspects
- Restrictions related to the transport of luggage or oversized equipment
- Other reason (please specify)

24) **What would prevent you from travelling sustainably when reaching/returning from your Erasmus+ destination?** *Scale question*

- Higher costs for the sustainable means of transport
- Length of the journey
- Duration of the journey
- Difficulties in planning and organising the journey, lack of information
- Low frequency of connections, irregular connecting buses/trains
- Lack of comfort and convenience throughout the journey
- Safety at train/bus stations, night connections
- Carrying heavy or oversized luggage (e.g., sport, musical equipment)

25) **What means of transport to the Erasmus+ destination would be your favourite if you could disregard the duration?** *Dropdowns (one answer)*

- Car/Electric car
- Car sharing
- Train
- Bus/Coach
- Airplane
- Motorcycle, scooter
- Trailer or recreational vehicle
- Bike, Electric bike
- Boat, ferry

26) **How did you learn about the sustainable mobility travel options regarding your Erasmus+ mobility?** *Dropdowns (up to three answers)*

- From classmates or colleagues
- From Erasmus+ coordinators
- From university information sources (e.g. websites, brochures, Erasmus+ mobility seminars)
- From online sources (blogs, social media, websites)
- From the media (newspapers, TV, magazines, advertisements)
- From sustainability organisations (NGOs or environmental organisations)
- From family or friends
- I didn't learn about it
- Other (please specify)

27) **Which of the following do you find most impactful for making sustainable travelling more accessible to students?** *Order*
- Costs (reducing ticket prices, subsidies for train tickets, attractive discounts…)
- Frequency (bus/train connections, comfortable night connections, flexible schedules….)
- Services (campaigns for sustainable European train/bus networks, infrastructure development – charging stations, wheelchair accessibility, bike trails…)
- Booking system (more flexible and accessible)

28) **What are your main reasons for choosing to travel by plane?** *Pick up to three most important Dropdowns (up to three answers)*
- Speed, shorter travel time
- Convenience and comfort
- Safety and reliability
- Cheaper flight tickets when booking in time
- Availability of direct flights to the destination
- Lack of sustainable travel options to the destination
- Easier transport of luggage
- Flexibility of flight frequency
- Use of frequent flyer programmes and benefits
- Other reason (please specify)

Final section

29) **What should universities in general do to be more sustainable?** *Dropdowns (up to three answers)*
- Promote the use of renewable energy sources
- Reduce energy consumption by using efficient technology and eco-friendly buildings
- Promote research and projects focused on sustainability
- Introduce sustainable food options and reduce the usage of single-use plastics
- Create green spaces and gardens on campus (composting, beehives)
- Educate students and staff, promote sustainable mobility (reducing the carbon footprint)
- Financial support for sustainable mobility
- Other reason (please specify)

30) **What should universities do to better support students who go on mobility to travel sustainably?** *Multiple choice*
- Provide financial incentives or subsidies for sustainable travel options (e.g. tickets, passes)
- Organize workshops and informational sessions on the benefits and logistics of sustainable travel
- Implement and promote carpooling and shared transportation programs among students

- Highlight and reward students who choose sustainable travel through awards or recognition programs
- Encourage the integration of sustainable travel practises into study abroad program and curricula
- Provide clear and transparent information about the environmental impact of different travel options
- Support the creation of student-led sustainability projects
- Social activities (clubs, networks) focused on sustainable travel
- Others (please specify)

31) **What are your expectations for more sustainable mobility within the Erasmus+ programme?**
SCALE

- Monetary discounts for sustainable transport
- Increased frequency, flexibility, coordination and connectivity of means of transport
- Better awareness of sustainable transport options
- Promotion of the so-called carsharing (carpooling)
- Greater awareness of the environmental impact of travelling among students and staff
- Introduction of sustainable certificates for students who choose this way of travel
- Education and awareness campaigns
- Creation of clear booking systems for sustainable transport

32) **Do you have any other recommendations for making sustainable travelling more accessible to students?** *Open question*

33) **Would you like to stay involved in our follow-up activities, including a raffle to win Eurail tickets?** If so, kindly state your email. *Open question*

34) **If approached, would you take part in a seminar for future Erasmus+ students on sustainable travelling and recommend this way of travelling to them?** If so, kindly state your email. *Open question*