

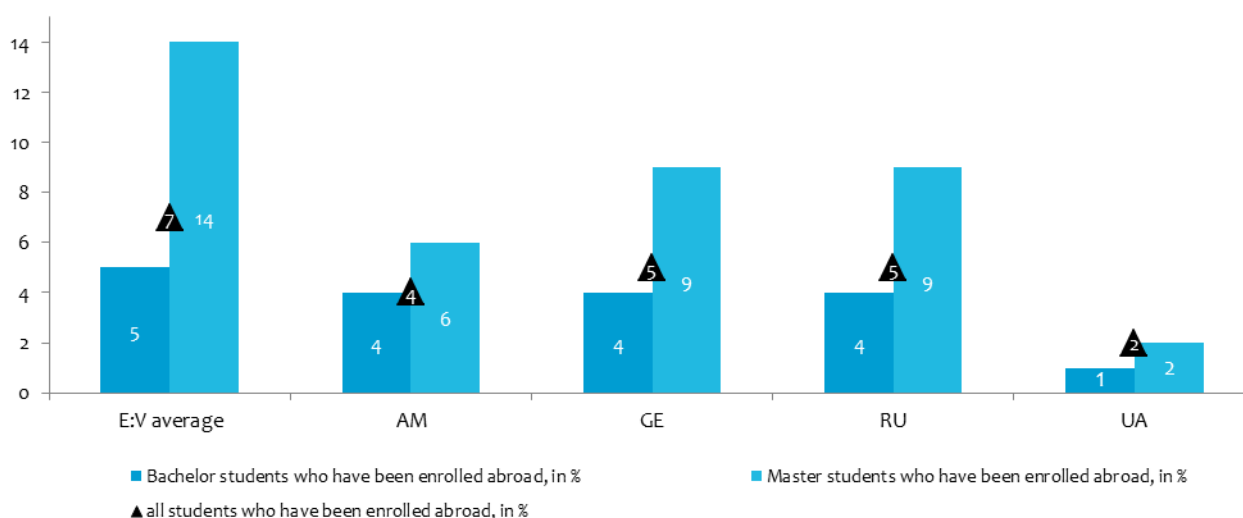
# INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY IN ARMENIA, GEORGIA, RUSSIA, AND UKRAINE<sup>1</sup>

The EUROSTUDENT project collates comparable student survey data on the social dimension of European higher education, collecting data on a wide range of topics, e.g. the socio-economic background, living conditions, and temporary international mobility of students. The project strives to provide reliable and insightful cross-country comparisons. The data presented below stem from the fifth round of the EUROSTUDENT project and were collected between the years 2012 and 2014. The fifth round marks the first participation in the project for Armenia, Georgia, Russia, and Ukraine (referred to as NIS countries – *Newly Independent States* – in the following).

## International mobility of NIS students: plans vs. action

The desire for international mobility among NIS students is indisputably strong: on average, almost half of students (47%) in Armenia, Georgia, Russia, and Ukraine have plans to undertake a period of temporary study abroad. Among their peers in all EUROSTUDENT countries, this applies to roughly a third of students (35%). When looking only at realised enrolments, however (Fig. 1), the picture is different: students from the NIS countries are considerably less mobile than their European peers. The share of students who have realised an enrolment abroad is particularly low in Ukraine, where only 2% of students report ever having been enrolled abroad. NIS students apparently less often manage to make their plans for studying abroad a reality: While the EUROSTUDENT average ratio of realised vs. planned enrolment abroad is 1:4 (7% of all students who have been enrolled abroad against 28% of those with plans), the same ratio in Armenia is 1:14 (4% versus 56%), in Georgia 1:11 (5% versus 56%), in Russia 1:6 (5% versus 29%) and in Ukraine 1:15 (2% versus 29%).

**Figure 1: Students' temporary international enrolment experience by level of study program (in %)**



Data source: EUROSTUDENT V, [K.1](#)

EUROSTUDENT question(s): 4.1 Have you ever been enrolled abroad as a student in higher education?

See chapter 10 in the [EUROSTUDENT Synopsis of Indicators](#) (pp. 185-208) for methodological notes and notes on national surveys.

Figure 1 also depicts data for the mobility experience of students in different levels of study programs. In general, experience of short-term studies abroad is much more widespread among students pursuing their degrees at Masters level: the number of students who have been internationally mobile almost triples for these advanced-stage learners. On EUROSTUDENT average, 14% of students have experience of enrolment abroad among Masters students, while only 5% of Bachelor students do. Among NIS countries, Master-level students from Georgia and Russia have the highest rate of foreign enrolment experience (9%, respectively).

While the EUROSTUDENT data describe short-term enrolments abroad (“credit mobility”), the UNESCO Institute for Statistics provides data on students pursuing an entire degree in a foreign country (“degree mobility”). The outbound degree mobility rates (reference year: 2013) are broadly in line with the credit mobility as measured by

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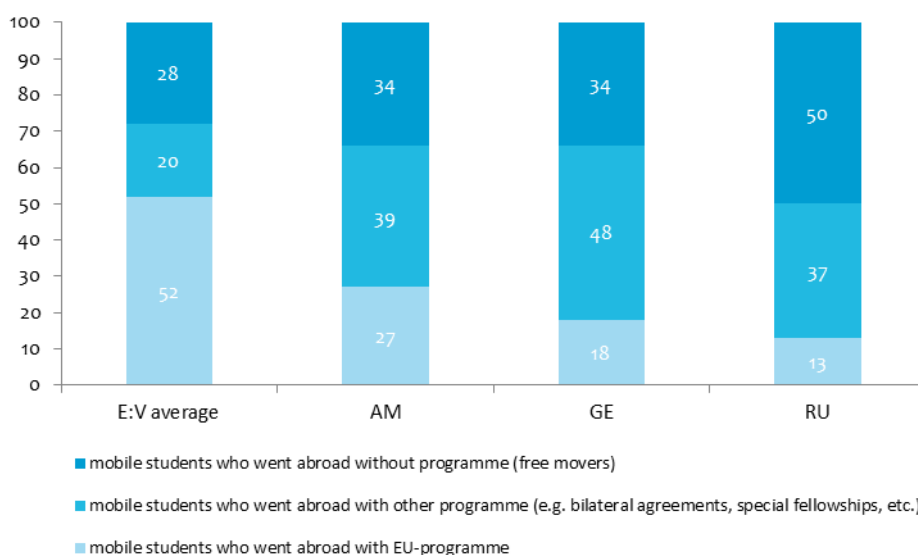
EUROSTUDENT in Armenia (5.6%), Georgia (8.8%), and Ukraine (1.8%) (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016). In Russia, however, the degree mobility rate (0.7%) is much lower than the short-term mobility (5%), indicating a preference of Russian students for the latter.

**What are the major channels for international mobility of NIS students?**

To organise their temporary studies abroad, students may participate in various exchange programs, or make private arrangements on their own. Figure 2 summarises the most common modes of student mobility. Across all EUROSTUDENT countries, the most popular channel for educational stays abroad are EU-funded programs, e.g. the Erasmus+ programme and similar initiatives. On EUROSTUDENT average, 52% of all mobile students went abroad with of such an initiative. NIS students however, make use of such programmes to a much lesser degree than students in other EUROSTUDENT countries - unsurprisingly, considering that the NIS countries were not programme countries in the Erasmus programme at the time of the survey (European Commission, 2015).

Private arrangements, in contrast, are used by larger shares of students in the NIS countries. In Russia, this is in fact the single most widespread channel, being chosen by 50% of respondents. In Georgia and Armenia the largest shares of students organise their mobility in the framework of non-EU programs, such as bilateral inter-university exchange schemes, intergovernmental programs, or fellowship programs.

**Figure 2: Organisation of (most recent) enrolment abroad (in %)**



Data source: EUROSTUDENT V, K.9 Too few cases: UA.

EUROSTUDENT question(s): 4.5 Within which of the following organisational frameworks was your study abroad organised?

See chapter 10 in the [EUROSTUDENT Synopsis of Indicators](#) (pp. 185-208) for methodological notes and notes on national surveys.

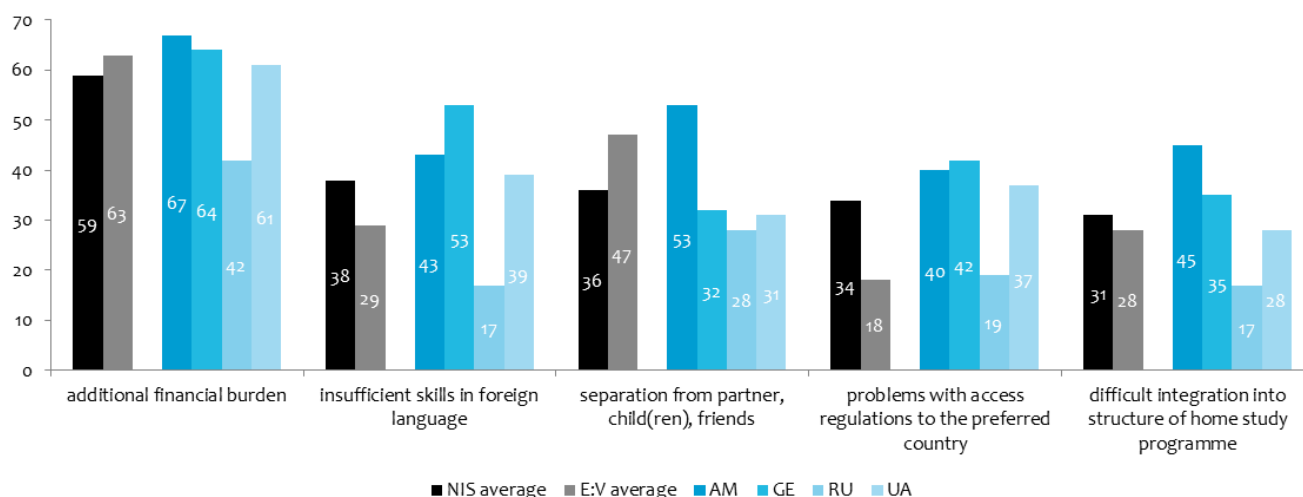
**Obstacles for international mobility of students**

What is behind the discrepancy between realised and planned mobility of NIS students? Some insight might be gained by analysing the self-reported obstacles to enrolling abroad by students who have not been enrolled abroad and have no plans to do so, i.e. students who have conclusively and finally decided against studying abroad. What are the obstacles that have deterred these students?

Figure 3 depicts the five obstacles which have, on average across NIS countries, been rated as (quite) big obstacles by the largest shares of students. The largest obstacle turns out to be the additional financial burden associated with a stay abroad, with on average 59% of students without experience abroad judging this to be a (quite) large obstacle in the NIS countries. Insufficient skills in a foreign language present an obstacle to 38% of NIS students. Roughly a third of students indicate that leaving behind their partner, children, or friends (36%), (expected) problems with access regulations to their preferred country (34%), or difficulties integrating the stay abroad into the structure of their home study programme keep them from pursuing studies abroad.

The assessment of obstacles by students in NIS countries is very similar to that of their peers in all EUROSTUDENT countries: four of the five “top” obstacles are shared between the two groups. However, problems with access regulations to the country of choice (e.g. visa regulations) are much less important to non-NIS students – concerns about job loss, on the other hand, more prevalent among non-NIS students.

**Figure 3: Top 5 obstacles to enrolment abroad for students who have not been enrolled abroad and do not plan to go, in NIS countries, in %**



Source: EUROSTUDENT V, K.15

**EUROSTUDENT question(s):** 4.9 To what extent are or were the following aspects an obstacle to studying abroad for you?

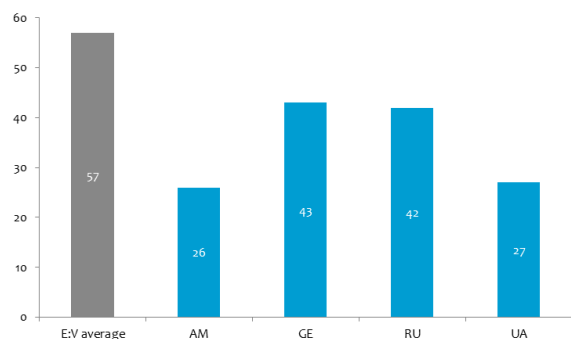
**Notes:** Students assessed possible obstacles to studying abroad on a five-point scale ranging from “no obstacle” to “big obstacle”. The figures show how large a share of students considered certain aspects to be either (4) “quite big” or (5) “big” obstacles.

See chapter 10 in the [EUROSTUDENT Synopsis of Indicators](#) (pp. 185-208) for methodological notes and notes on national surveys.

Within the NIS-group of countries, a few differences become apparent. For Armenian and Ukrainian students, the top 5 obstacles are the same ones as the NIS average. Obstacles are perceived as especially high by Armenian students, whose ratings are above the average for all five obstacles. Besides financial problems, Ukrainian students perceive insufficient foreign language skills and problems with access regulations to be especially deterring. For Georgian students, the separation from partner, children and friends is not one of the top 5 obstacles, instead, insufficient marks for studying abroad (not shown) present an obstacle to 36% of students, making it the fourth most-highly rated obstacle in Georgia. Russian students’ rating of obstacles are overall relatively low, with lesser shares of students perceiving a given obstacle as (quite) large than on EUROSTUDENT average. In contrast to their fellow NIS students, a lack of language skills and problems integrating the stay into the structure of their home programme are less of an obstacle for Russian students. Rather, a perceived low benefit for their studies (26%) and a general lack of motivation to study abroad (21%) are among the top 5 obstacles for Russian students (values not shown).

### After mobility: recognition of gained ECTS

**Figure 4: Full recognition of credits gained during (most recent) enrolment abroad**



Source: EUROSTUDENT V, K.8

**EUROSTUDENT question(s):** 4.4 Were the credits (ECTS, certificates) you gained for your studies abroad recognised by your home institution?

**Notes:** Values indicate the share of students whose credits gained abroad were fully recognised. Students who did not earn credits abroad were excluded from the calculation.

See chapter 10 in the [EUROSTUDENT Synopsis of Indicators](#) (pp. 185-208) for methodological notes and notes on national surveys.

Attending one or several academic courses in another country is widely considered to be beneficial for the personal development of students and widening their knowledge horizons (e.g. Zimmermann & Neyer, 2013). Ideally, the experience abroad is also formally recognised by the home higher education institution towards fulfilment of degree requirements. Figure 4 shows that students from the four NIS countries are in a relatively disadvantageous position with regard to the full recognition of ECTS gained abroad in comparison with their European peers.

Only a quarter (Armenia, 26%, and Ukraine, 27%) to slightly more than 40% (Russia, 42%, and Georgia, 43%) of students having temporarily studied abroad from these countries report that their credits gained abroad were fully recognised at their institutions of origin. On E:V average, the credits gained abroad were fully recognised upon return to the home HE for more than half of students (57%).

## Supporting mobility in the NIS countries

Despite apparently high levels of interest in studying abroad among students in NIS countries, the NIS countries' shares of internationally mobile students are among the lowest among EUROSTUDENT countries. Several possible reasons may explain this pattern: The dominating channels for international mobility of students in these countries are private arrangements in Russia, and non-EU programs in Armenia and Georgia (e.g. bilateral inter-university, inter-regional or inter-governmental programs). The EU-funded mobility programs are used only by small shares of internationally mobile NIS students, although programs such as the former TEMPUS and the on-going extended ERASMUS+ program offer mobility opportunities for students from NIS-based universities. Financial concerns are named as the greatest obstacle to student mobility by non-mobile students in all four countries. A further obstacle especially pertinent to NIS students points at problems with access to the country of interest due to visa regulations or similar issues.

NIS students who have been mobile report rates of recognition of educational credits (ECTS points) gained abroad that are below the EUROSTUDENT average. NIS students are amongst the most disadvantaged EHEA countries in regard to this matter as compared with most of their European peers.

The following practical implications can be formulated based on the discussion of the issues of international student mobility in NIS countries. First, a strong focus on facilitating the internal recognition of educational credits (ECTS points) gained by mobile students in foreign higher education institutions could be beneficial for both students and higher education institutions in NIS countries. Higher rates of recognition would save students time otherwise spent on unnecessary repetitions of the same courses, while at the same time saving HEI resources for offering (redundant) training programs.

Second, there is obvious room for improvement with regard to the channels of international mobility available for students from NIS countries. The high share of private and non-institutionalised instances of academic mobility is not a bad thing per se, but this may indicate that students' international experiences are not a top priority for national authorities and HEI administrations.

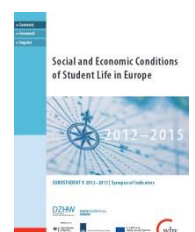
Measures encouraging and supporting NIS students' mobility that address the above-mentioned issues may help realise the large mobility potential of the NIS countries. The students appear to be ready and willing to fully take advantage of the European Higher Education Area.

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## EUROSTUDENT V Data set

The comparative report [“Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe”](#) (2015) provides insight into many other questions related to mobility as well as other aspects of student life in Europe. Furthermore, the [EUROSTUDENT database](#) allows users to explore country data by topic area and in comparison between countries. Also visit [www.eurostudent.eu](http://www.eurostudent.eu)

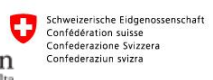


### Country abbreviations

AM = Armenia  
GE = Georgia

RU = Russia  
UA = Ukraine

EUROSTUDENT VI consortium members:



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