

Erasmus+ during the COVID-19 pandemic – the experiences of Erasmus students in Poland

Ewa Krzaklewska (Jagiellonian University), project coordinator

Team: Karolina Podgórska, Jan Fazlagić, Monika Kwiecińska-Zdrenka,
Karolina Messyasz, Paula Pustułka, Justyna Sarnowska, Dorota Szaban,
Maria Zielińska

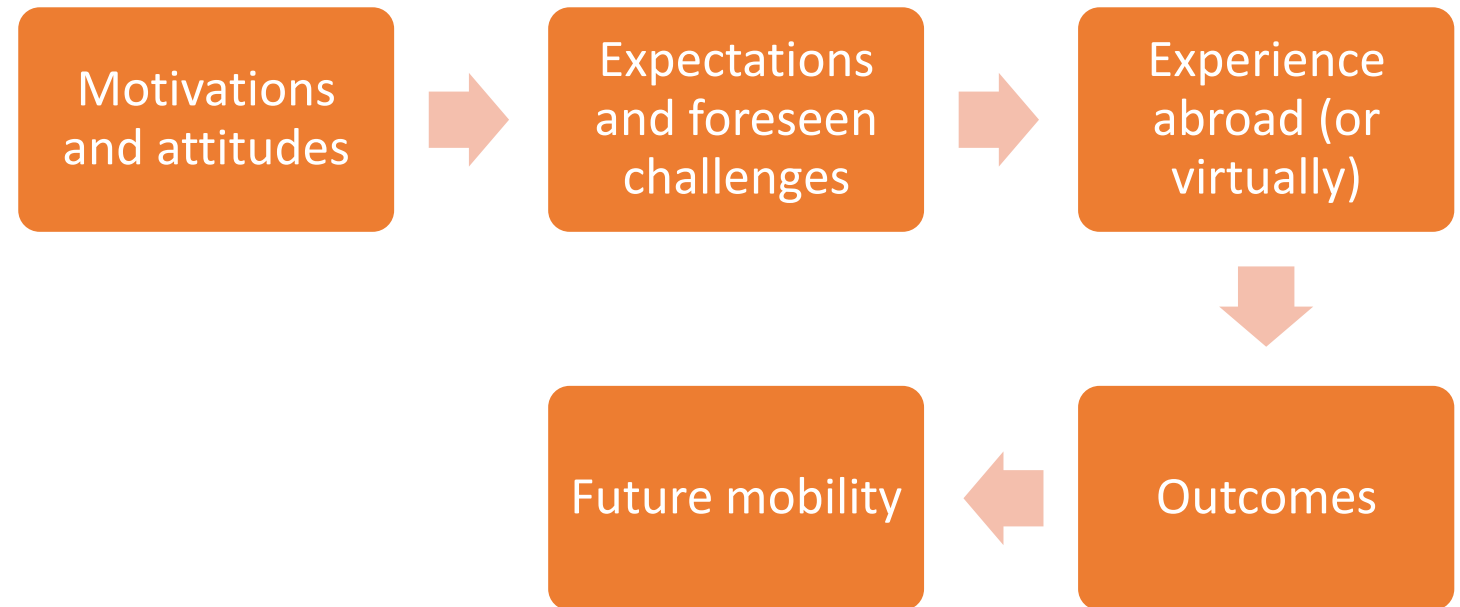
Seminar “Evidence-based approach in Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps. Research in the time of a pandemic” 27th of October 2021, Warsaw

Research aims „mimo wszystko”

CONTEXT – second cohort of pandemic-mobility students

- September 2020: hopes for hybrid learning at universities
- September/October 2020: Erasmus students arrive in Poland
- Mid October 2020: second wave of pandemic in Poland, new restrictions

*Lower number of incoming students (15,000=> 7000)



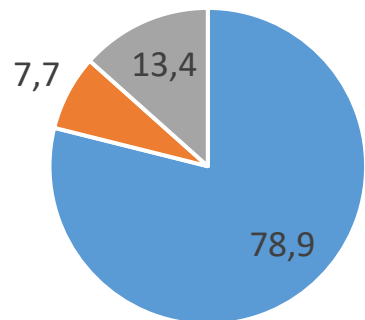
Research methods

Online survey with Erasmus students End of March-April 2021	Focus groups with Erasmus students (online) April-May 2021	Interviews with academic teachers (online) February 2021
<p>Conducted among students from the winter semester (population of 3846 students)</p> <p>Database: 960 questionnaires (25% response rate)</p> <p>56% female, 43% male, 1% other/no answer</p> <p>70% EU countries, 30% non-EU (<i>Spain, Turkey, France, Italy</i>)</p> <p>Mostly BA students</p> <p>60% studied in metropolises</p>	<p>5 focus group interviews with students from 6 universities (in large and middle-size cities)</p> <p>28 participants in total</p> <p>1,5-2 hours, in English</p> <p>18 female/10 male</p> <p>European (16) and non-European countries (12)</p> <p>Diverse faculties</p>	<p>12 interviews with academics who teach classes for Erasmus+ Programme students from 3 universities</p> <p>The respondents mainly represent social sciences and humanities, business studies, but also law and chemistry.</p>

Erasmus in pandemic

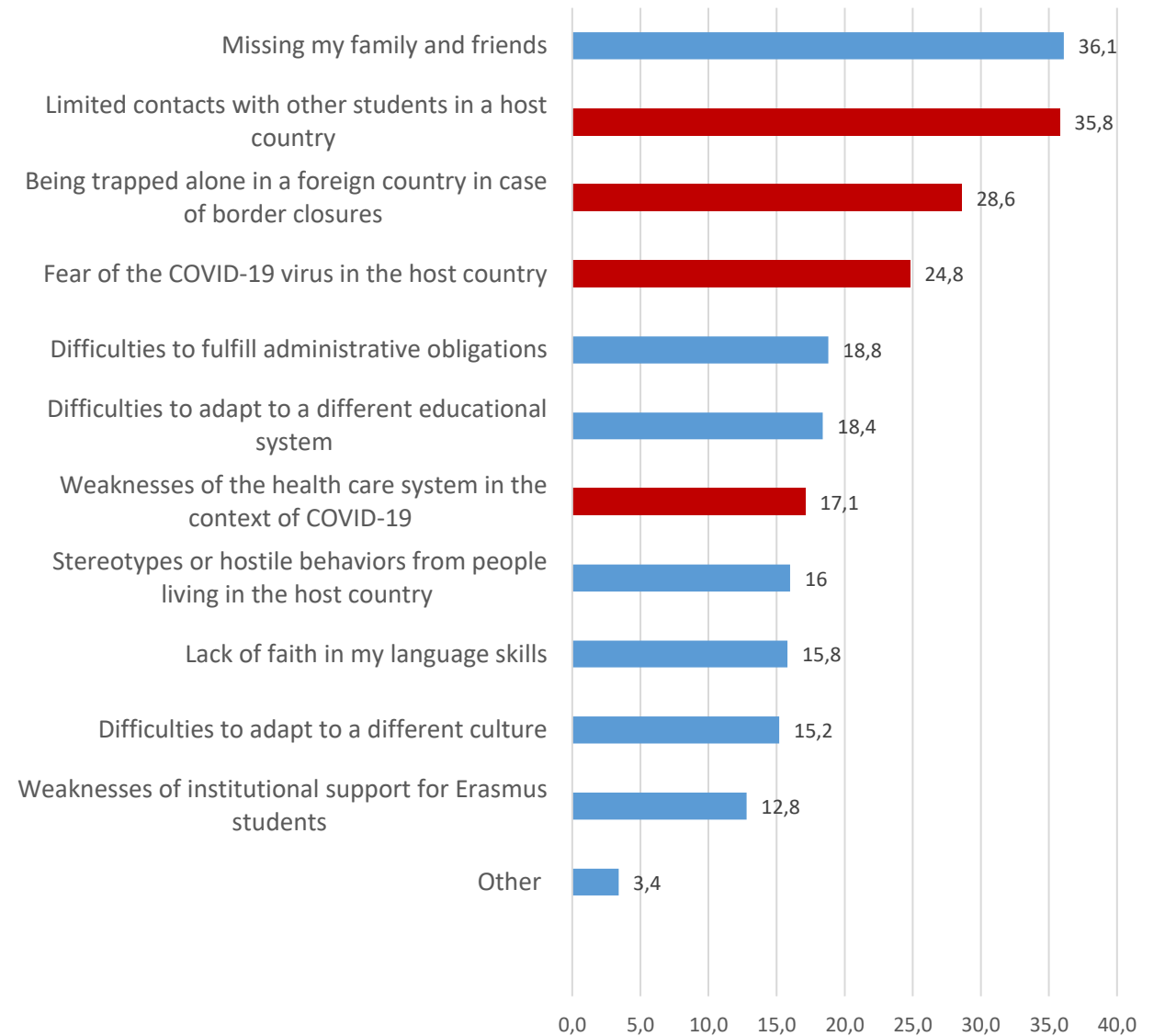
- Availability of ,virtual Erasmus'
- Perceived challenges
- Plans modifications

Form of participation in studies



- I stayed in Poland for the whole winter semester
- I participated in courses online without coming to Poland (Erasmus online)
- I spent part of the semester in Poland and a part in my home country

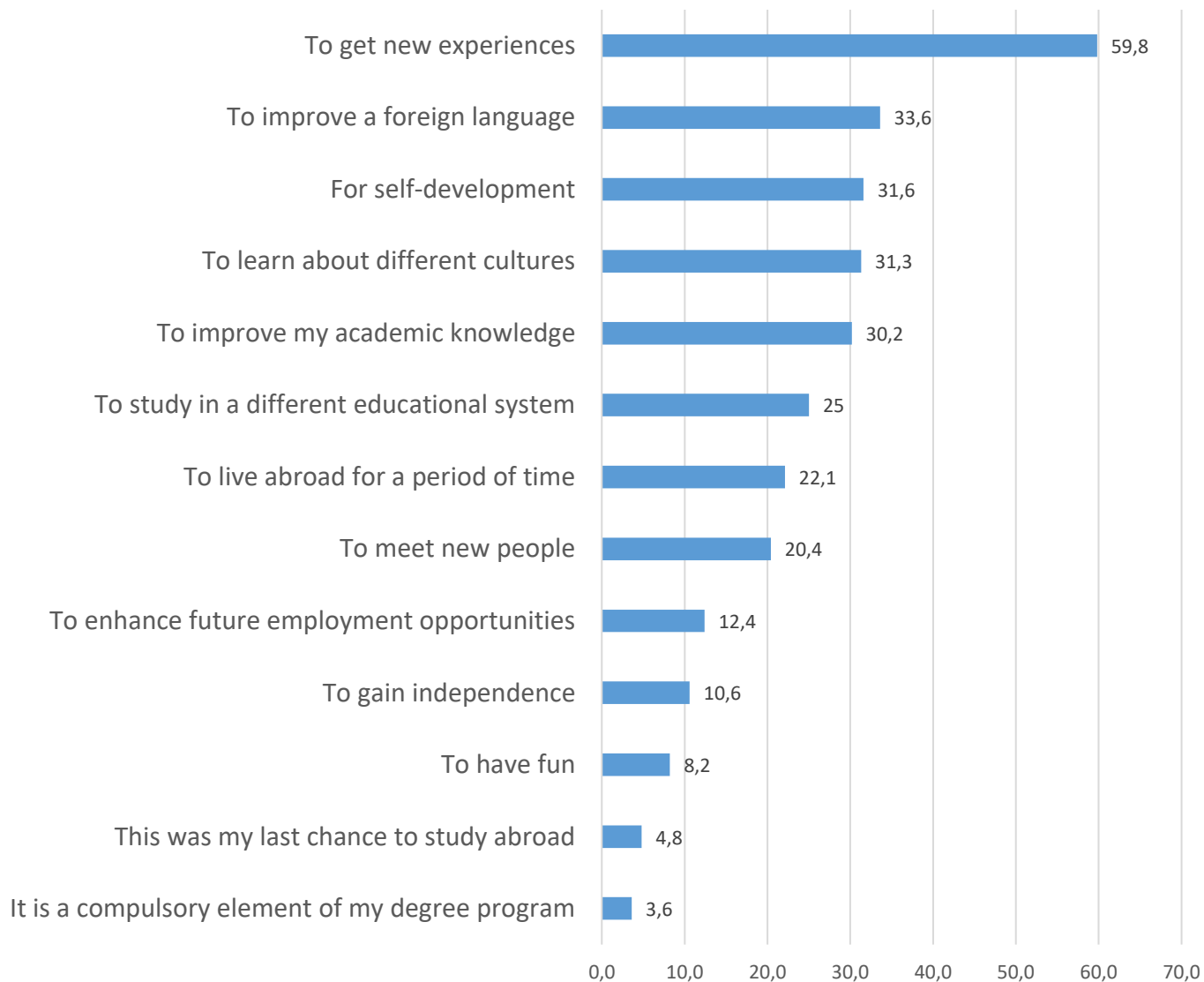
Did you have any concerns about your Erasmus stay in Poland before the departure?



Uncertainty of outcomes

I do think that with the situation being that unstable, every Erasmus student thought “do I really want to go? Should I go? Is it going to be good or bad?”. So, I think that the thoughts are there. And I think for me the fears were the lack of interaction with people and social aspect, because people want to do Erasmus to get to know people, to be with different cultures, and to just be together as a group with such a horizon of different people, and I knew that this aspect will be lacking, so this was the fear that made me hesitant. [W1, Poznań]

Why did you decide to study abroad as an exchange student?



„The Erasmus stay abroad was an escape from the COVID-19 restrictions in my country” – 1/3 rather and strongly agreed

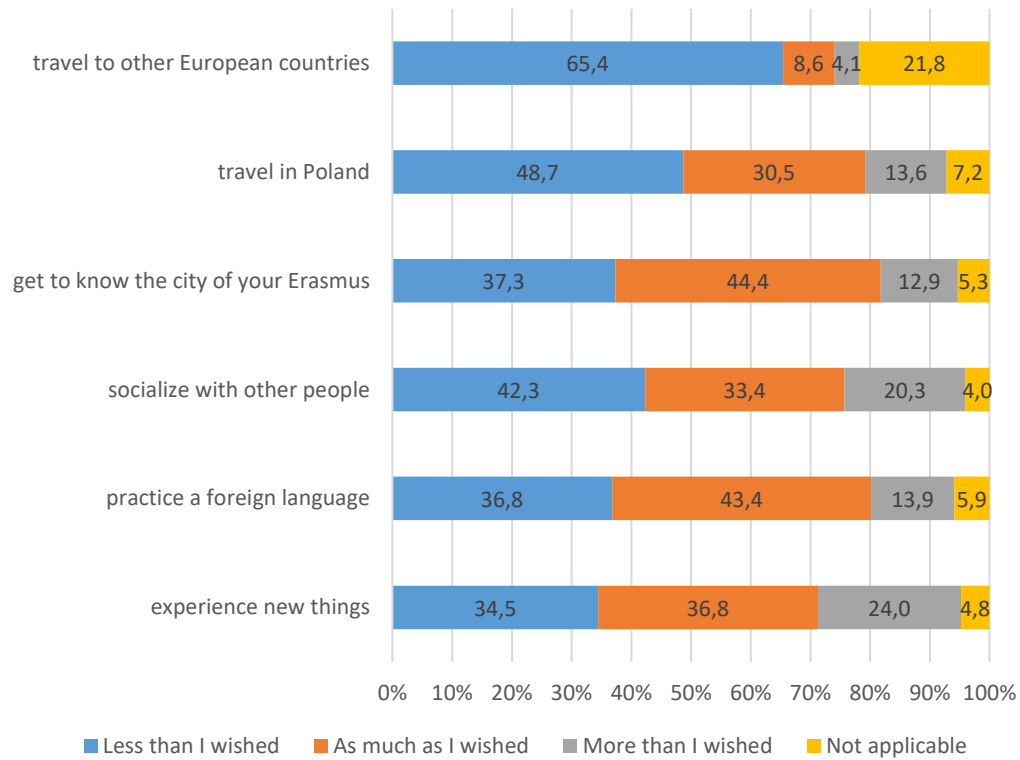
Considering COVID in decision making

In Poland there were very few infections, and in Germany, we had a lockdown. (...) So, I hoped that maybe because of that it will be fine in Poland, but then in autumn it became much worse. [M1, Kraków]

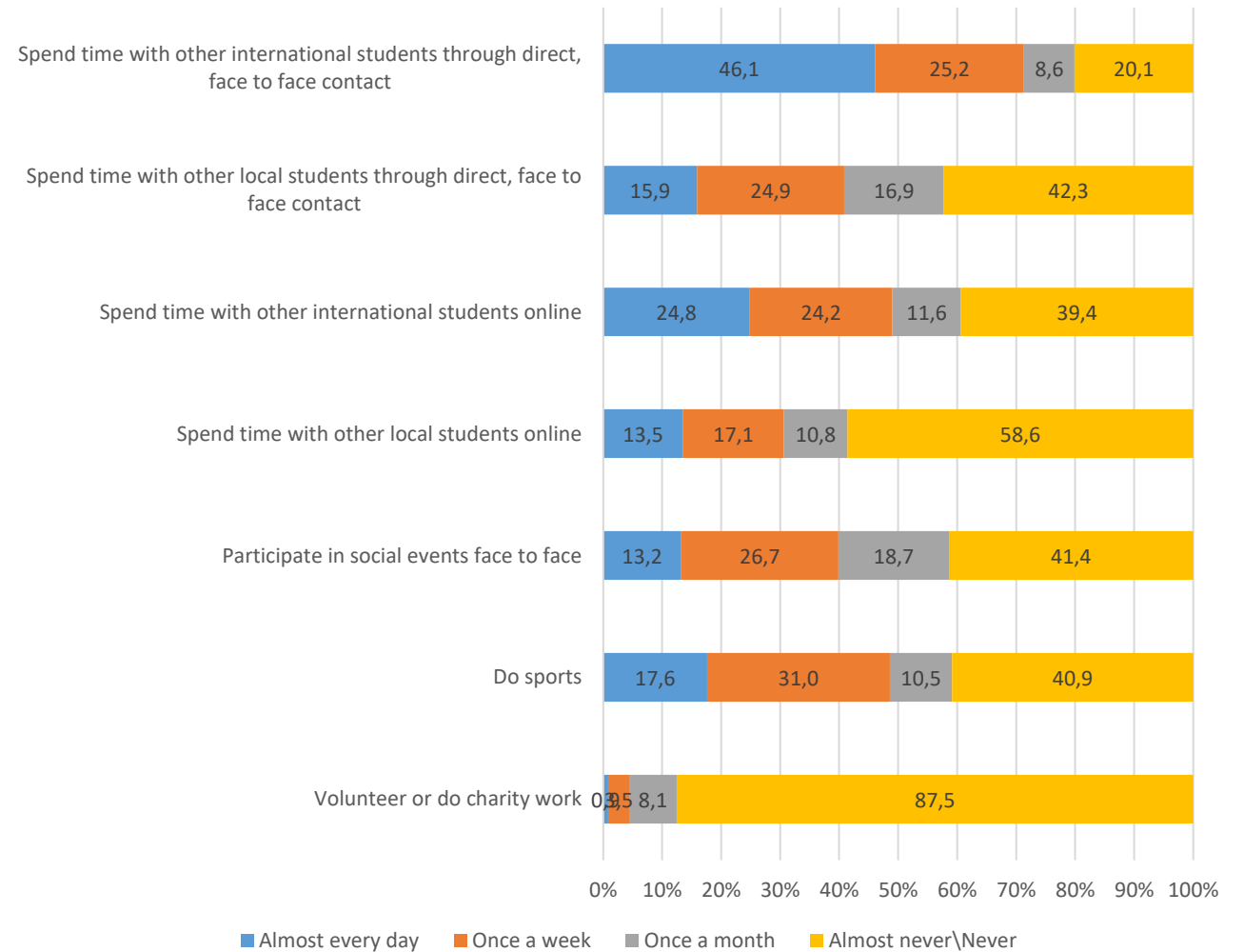
Living one’s life despite COVID impacts
I just thought that I only have one chance in life to do this. At least now, and I wanted to do it despite COVID. Like I do not want my life to stop because of the pandemic. I will try to fix it as best I can. [W2, Lublin]

Activities and networks

Activities during the Erasmus stay in Poland



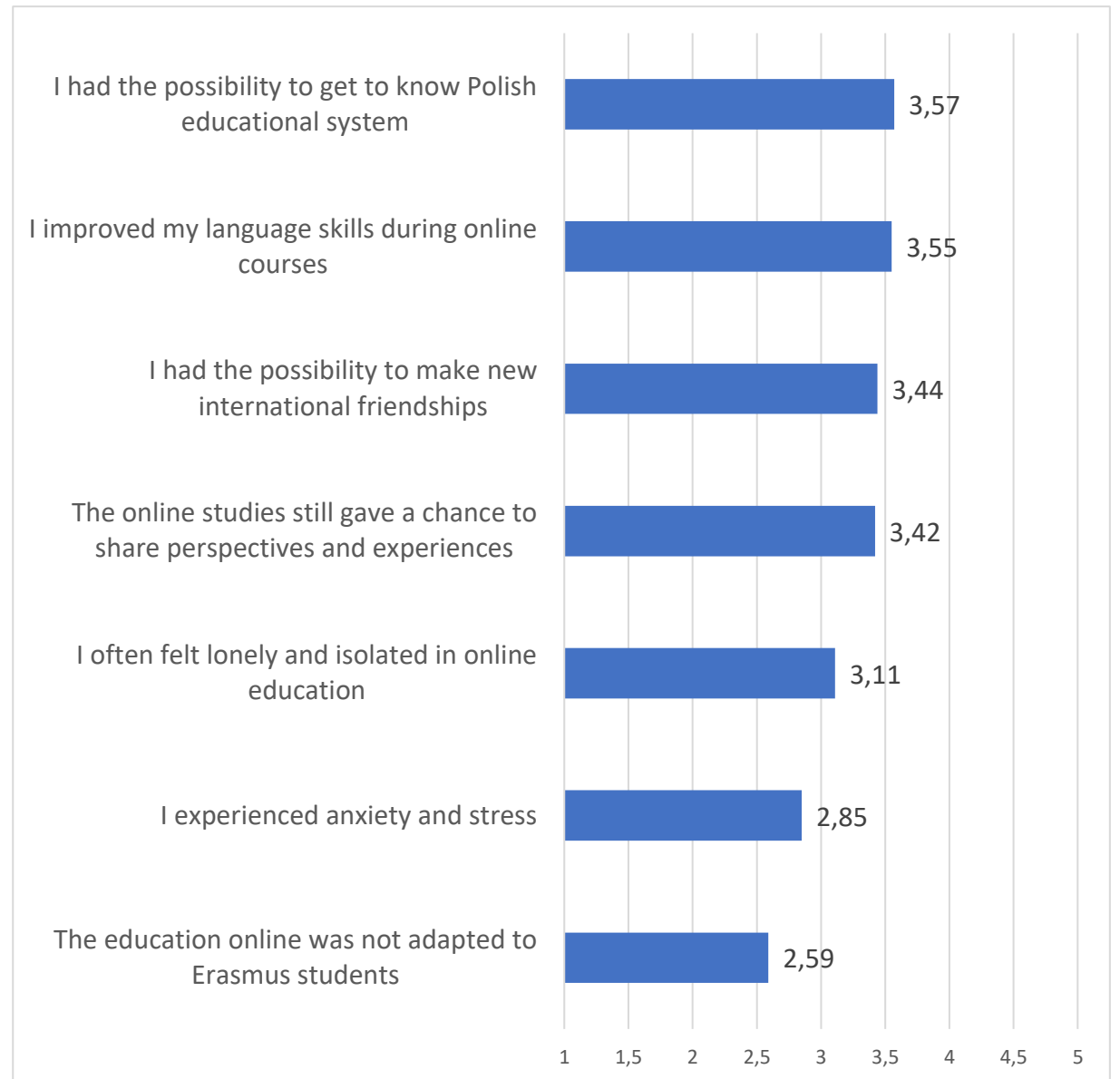
Forms of spending free time in Poland



Educational aspects

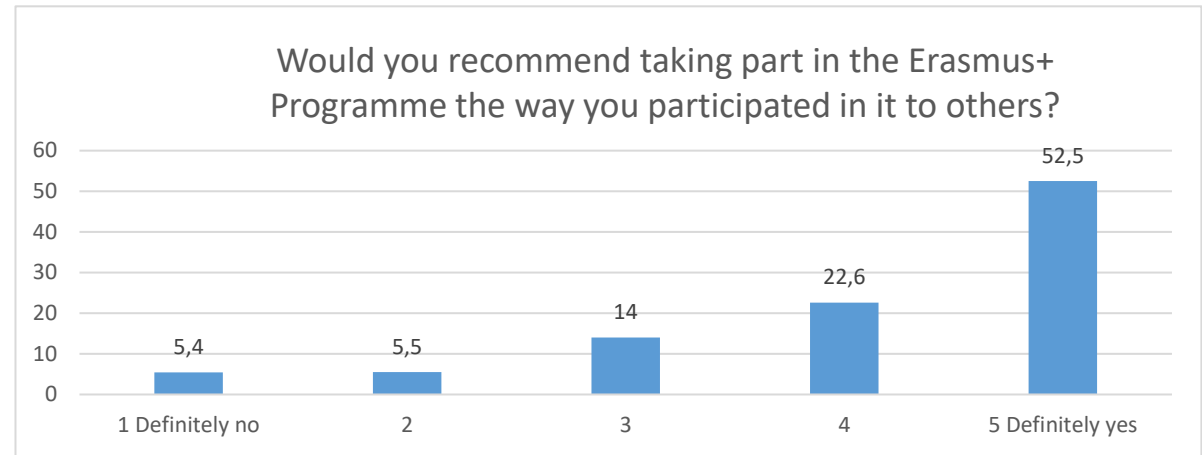
Teacher perspective:

- Virtual mobility could only be seen as add-on, blended or ,emergency' solution
- Experienced increased workload and pressure, mentor role
- Decrease in quality and difficulty to motivate students, with some positive learning points



1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

Evaluation



3 most mentioned

I gained knowledge of another country.
I improved my intercultural skills.
I experienced different learning environments.

I have distanced myself from my life in my home country.
I built up a personal network.
I enhanced my future employability in my home country.

3 least mentioned

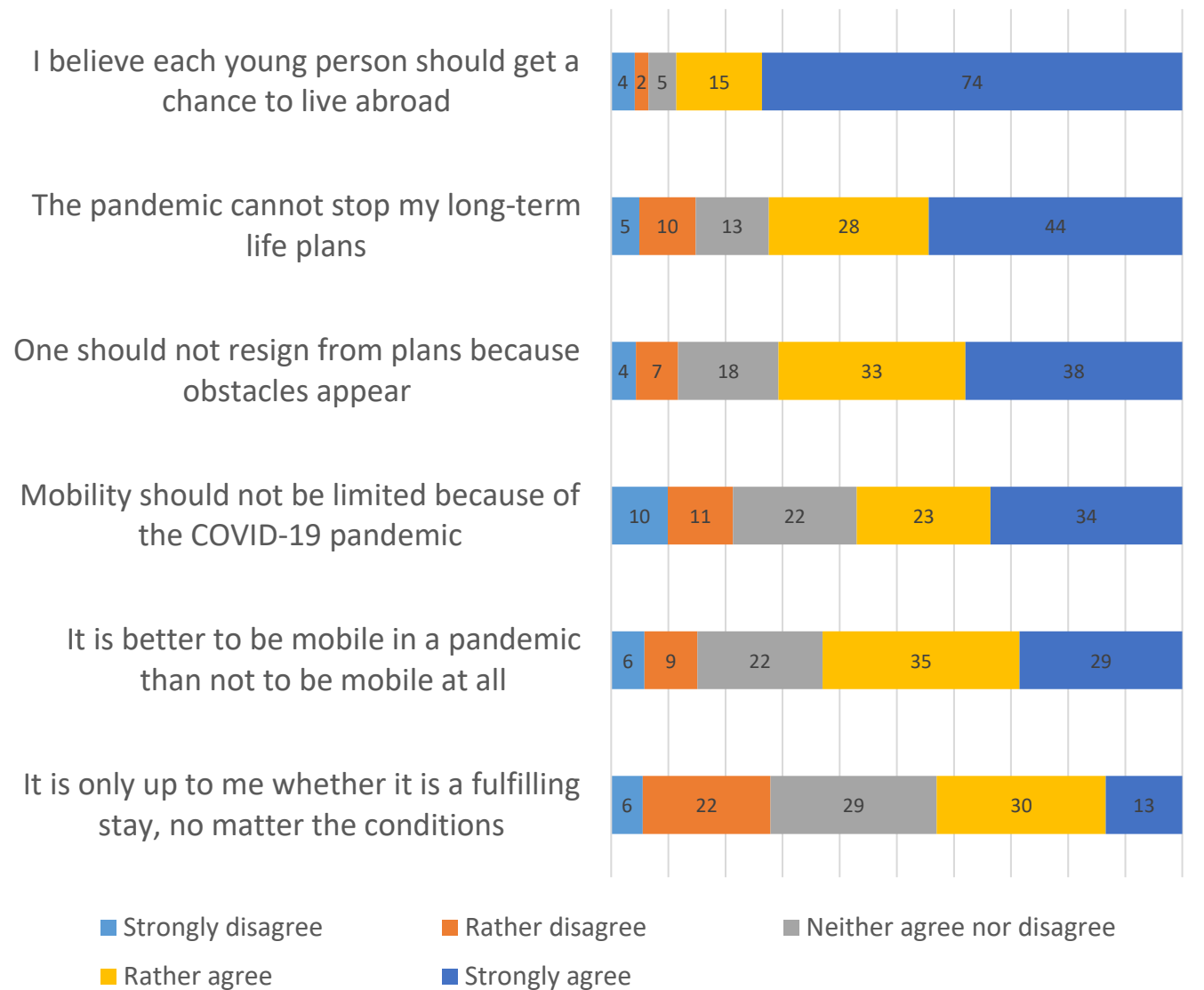
Future mobility

! the effect of the pandemic on future mobility is less significant than expected

I want to end up this Erasmus travelling and trying to live behind COVID. (...) I would like to go outside again and live more abroad and study. So I will wait until Master's maybe or try to find some scholarship. [W2, Lublin]

Well, for me, like I had the Erasmus experience in the pandemic. So now I am like more brave when it comes to another experience. Like I want to return from then. So that's why I applied for an Erasmus in the next semester in Lithuania. [W1, Lublin]

Attitudes towards mobility



Recommendations

- **Supporting physical mobility of students**
- **Highlighting social dimension of the Erasmus stay as a learning base**
- **Higher education institutions should implement solutions aimed at enhancing intercultural learning of Erasmus students**
- **Higher education institutions should continue to provide adequate administrative support**
- **Enhancing experiences of Erasmus students in smaller cities**
- **Continuing research in regard to Erasmus students experiences**

Thank you!

- Contact person: dr Ewa Krzaklewska, ewa.krzaklewska@uj.edu.pl
- Report is going to be published in November 2021.