
Analysis of Academic Recognition for higher education students studying abroad with the Erasmus+ programme

Key findings of the study

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What is the problem?

The European Recognition Manual for Higher Education Institutions identified two main barriers to academic recognition:

- Sending institutions failing to recognise courses successfully completed abroad (either at central, faculty/school or departmental level)
- Persisting insistence on the necessity of the courses completed abroad being identical to those which would have been taken at the sending institution, i.e. when equivalence is confused with comparability of learning outcomes

Study questions

- What individual (student related) issues create barriers for recognition?
- What institutional issues create barriers for recognition?
- What Erasmus+ operational issues create barriers for recognition?
- What time related issues create barriers for recognition?
- What issue is the largest barrier for recognition?

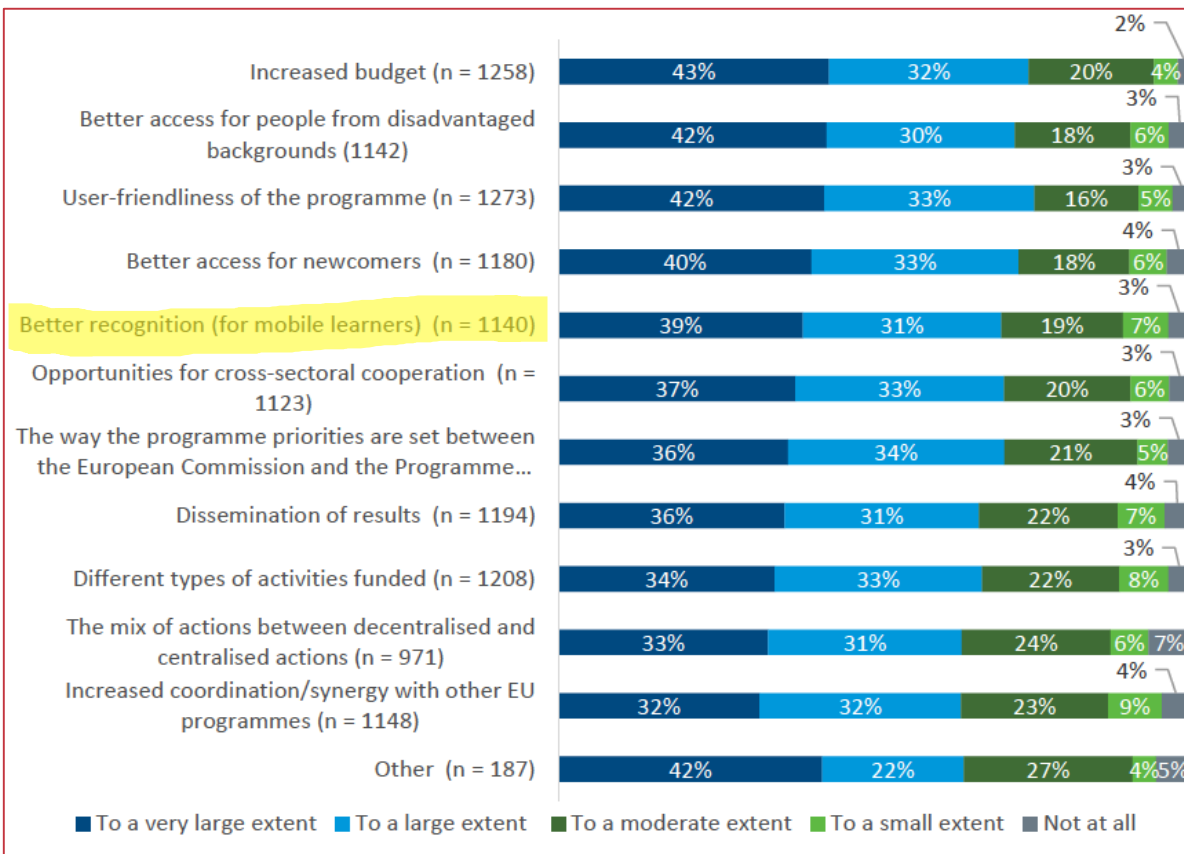
Methodology, scope and data content

- Five countries: Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Sweden
- Three years: 2014, 2015 and 2016
- Quantitative analysis of Participant Reports and institutional reporting, and qualitative country case studies
- 58,980 mobility data points analysed in total
- 67 interviews made with representatives for HEIs, National Agencies and other authorities

Limitations to the quantitative analysis

- Missing blocks of data and/or missing information -> 2014 in general showed more errors across the countries than the other years
- Data are based on students' self-reporting (e.g. number of ECTS awarded vs. recognised)
- The lists of the institutions contain some that are further education colleges although many of them are providing education at ISCED 6 (especially Denmark)
- The databases include a small number of institutions that are not educational institutions at all, e.g. McDonald's, which suggests that traineeships were included

A brief flashback to the mid-term evaluation of Erasmus+



- Signature of a Learning Agreement is a strong predictor for recognition.
- The absence of a Learning Agreement is associated with a higher rate of non-recognition). More than 50% of learners without a learning agreement stated that they did not receive recognition.
- Across the whole Erasmus+ programme, the level of expected full recognition is at 80% on average (2016).

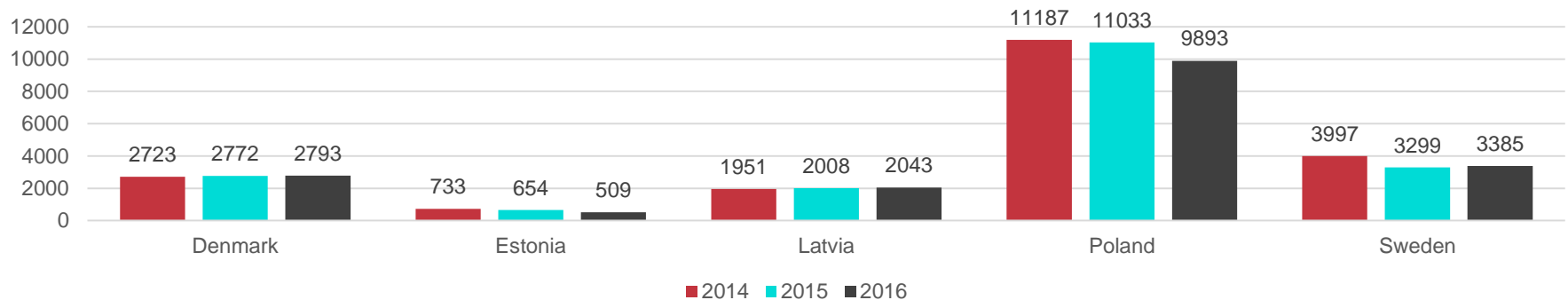
Source: ICF and Technopolis (2018) Combined evaluation of Erasmus+ and predecessor programmes: *Main Evaluation Report*

Question: To what extent do you think the following topics need to be addressed to maximize the impact of any successor to the Erasmus+ programme?

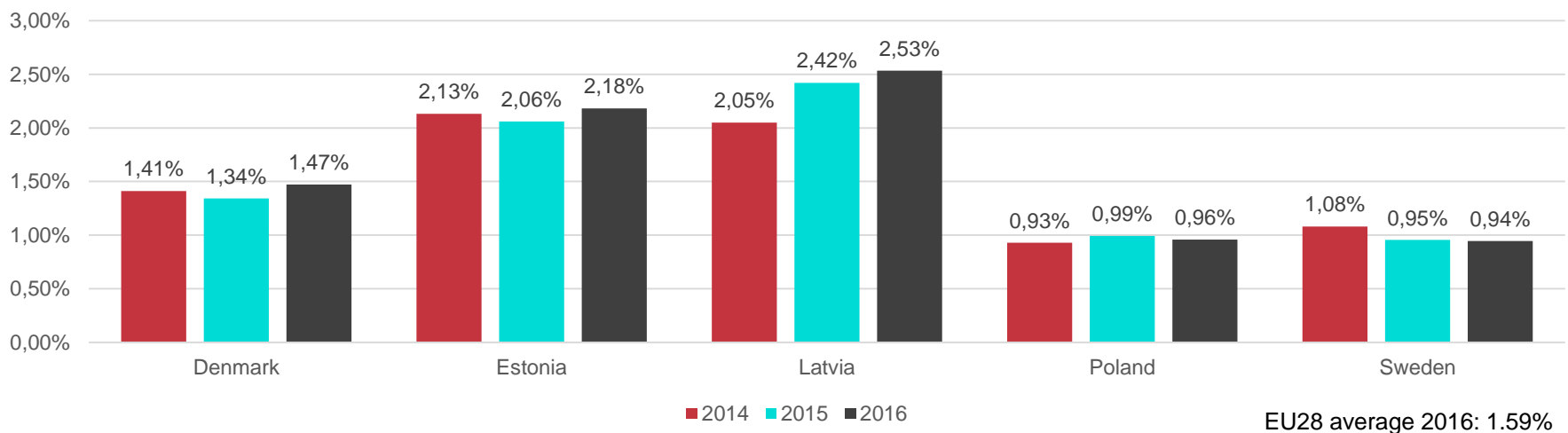
Source: ICF and Technopolis (2018) Combined evaluation of Erasmus+ and predecessor programmes: *Synopsis report of the results of the Open Public Consultation on the Erasmus+ and predecessor programmes (Volume 5)*

Basic descriptors of higher education student mobility I

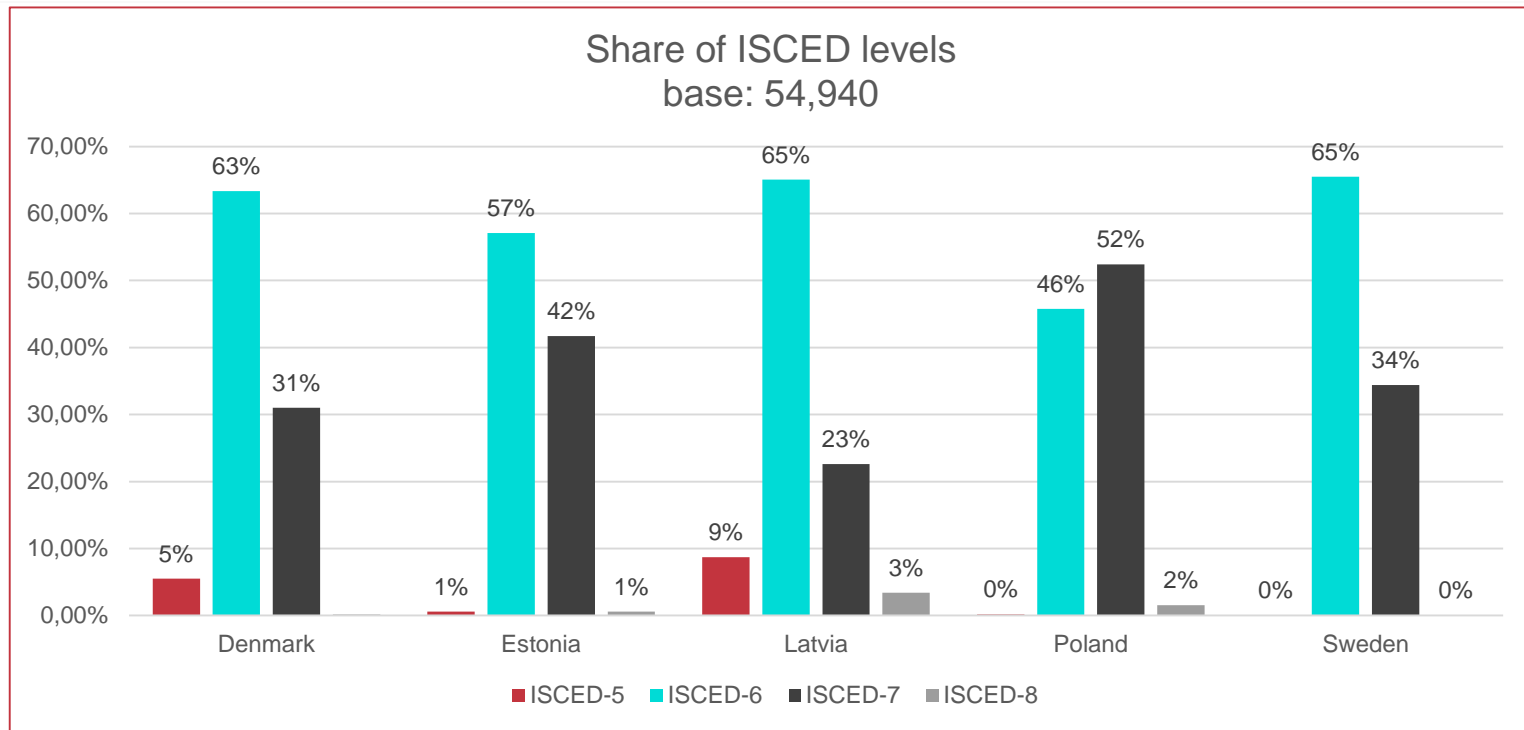
Number of analysed mobility stays
base: 58,980



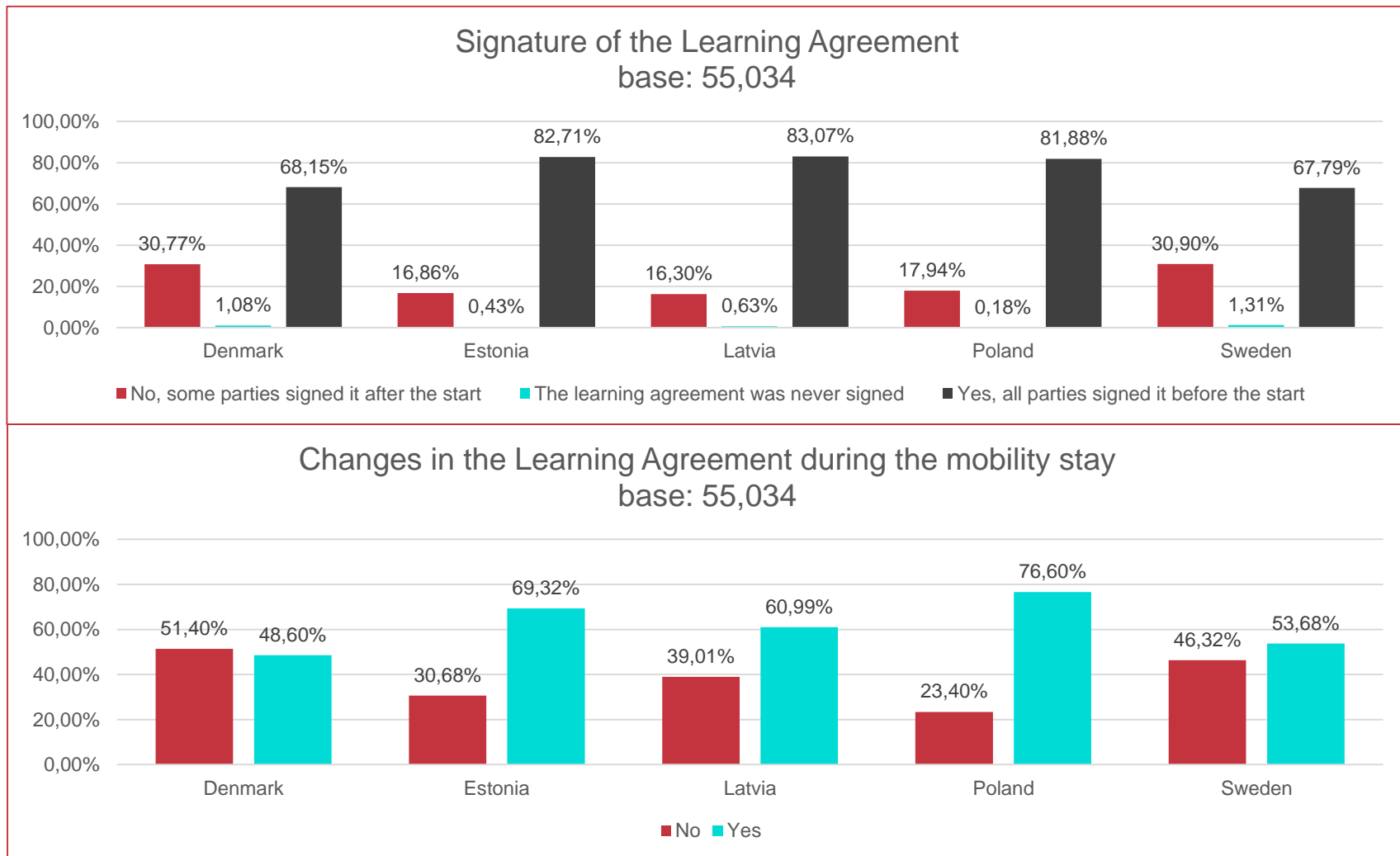
Higher education student mobility intensity



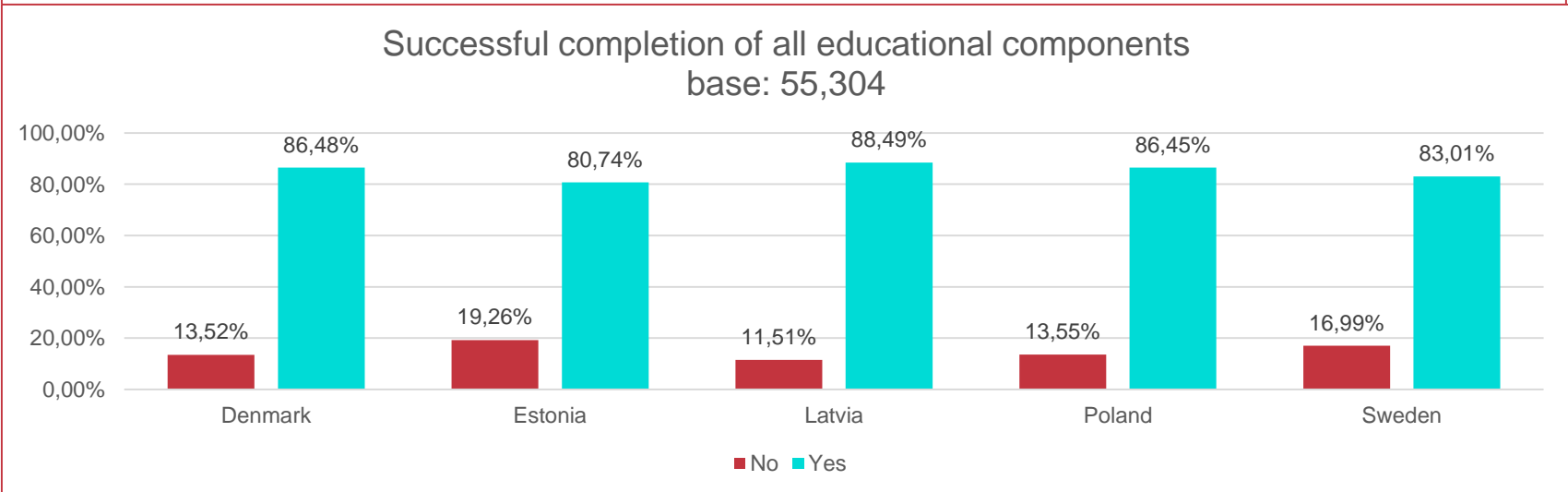
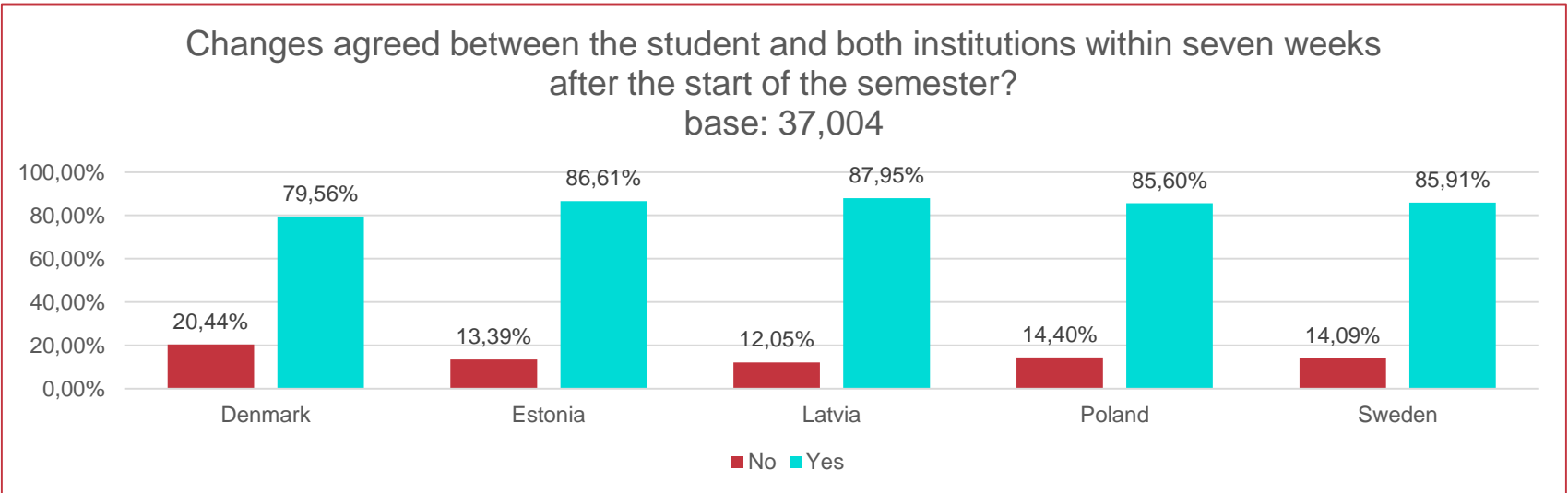
Basic descriptors of higher education student mobility II



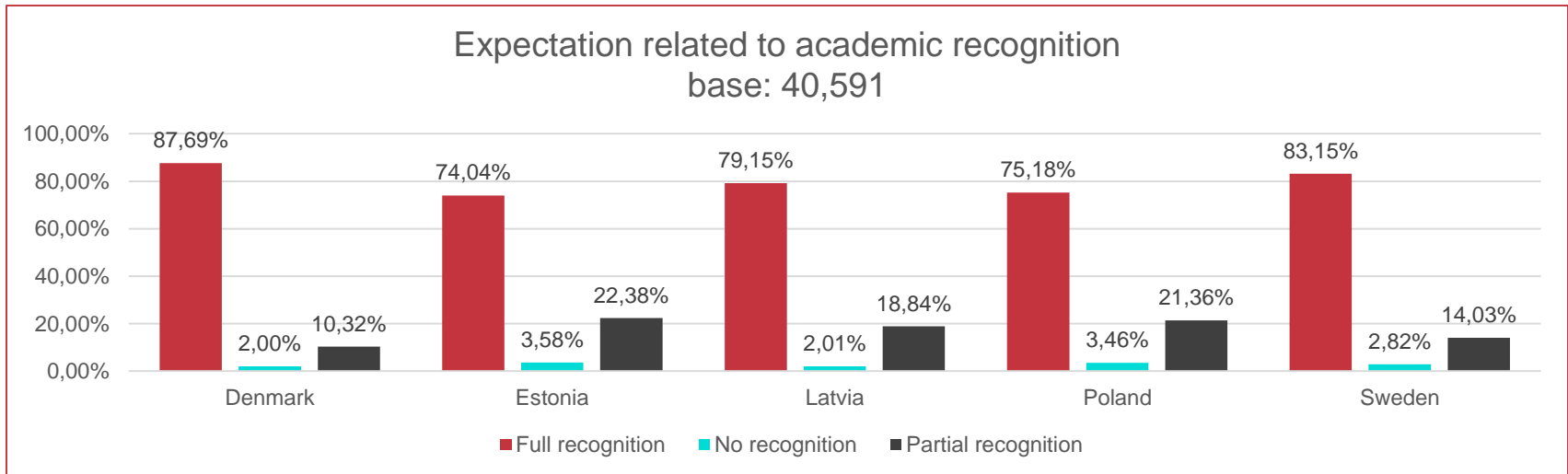
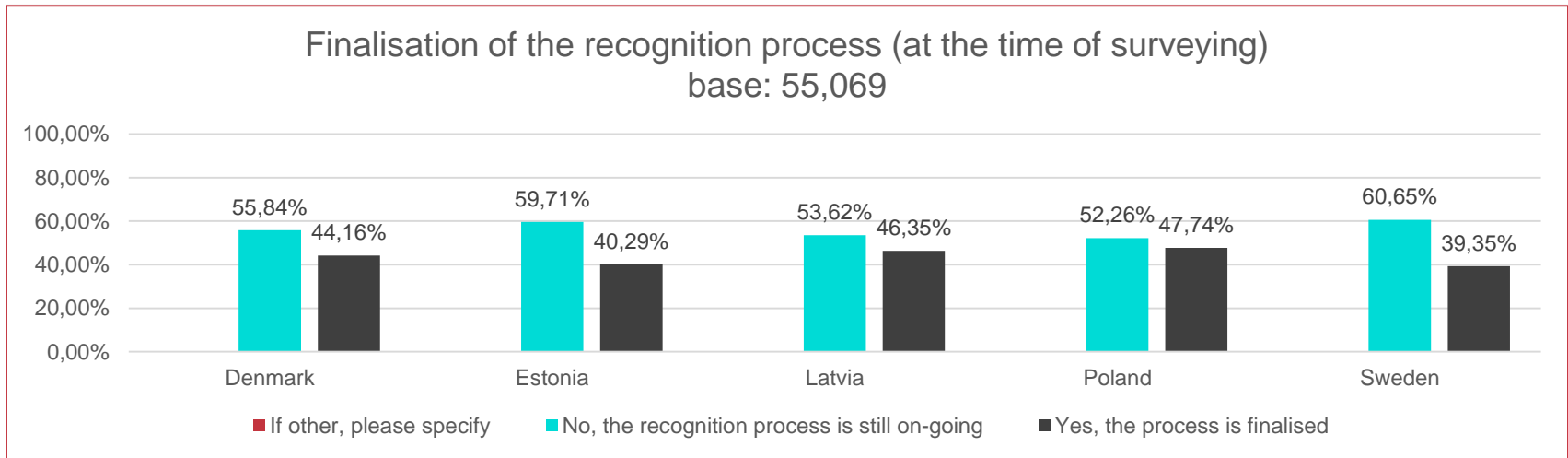
Learning Agreement



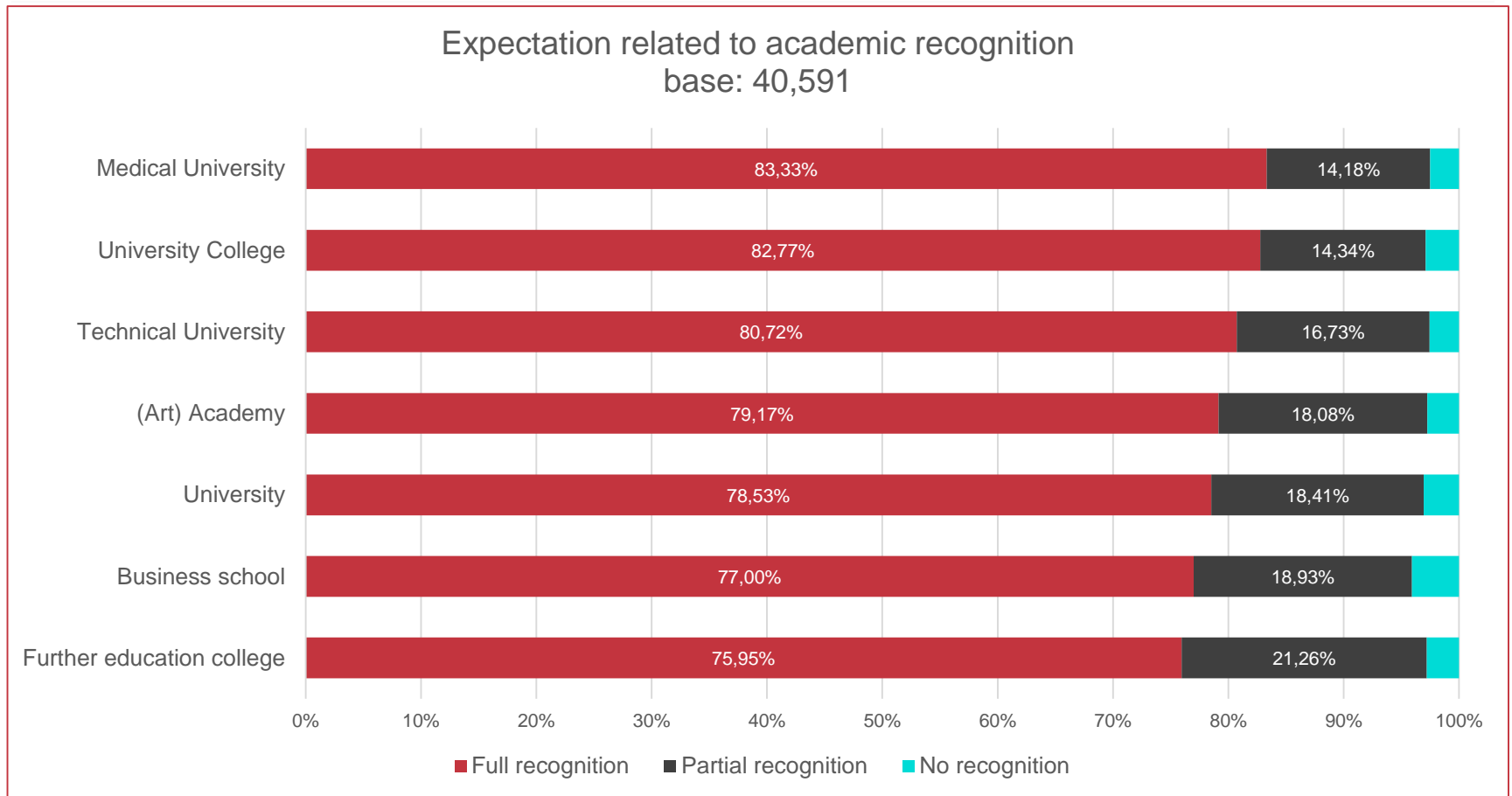
Changes to the content of the mobility and completion



Recognition process I

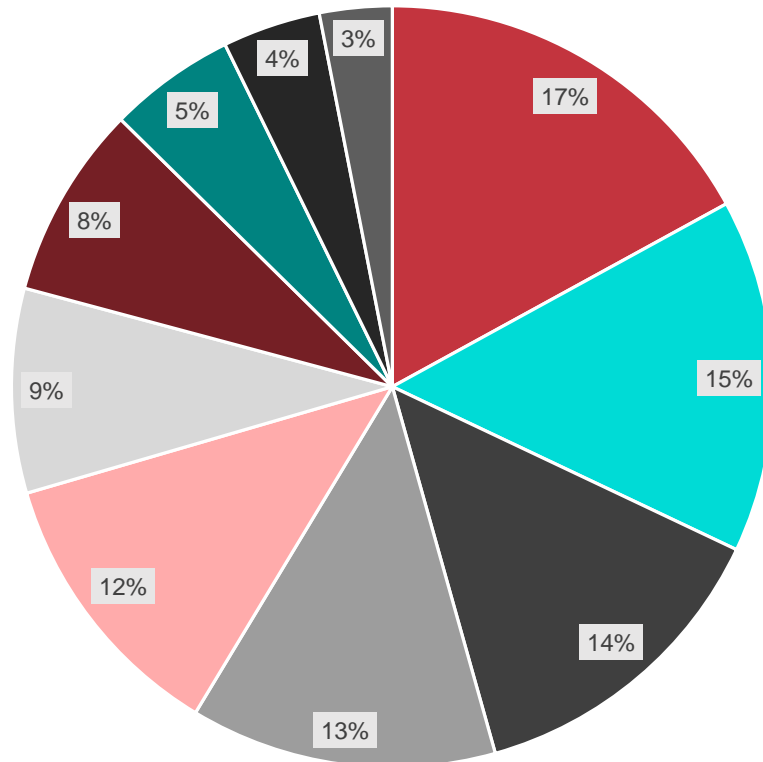


Recognition process II



Main obstacles to full recognition I

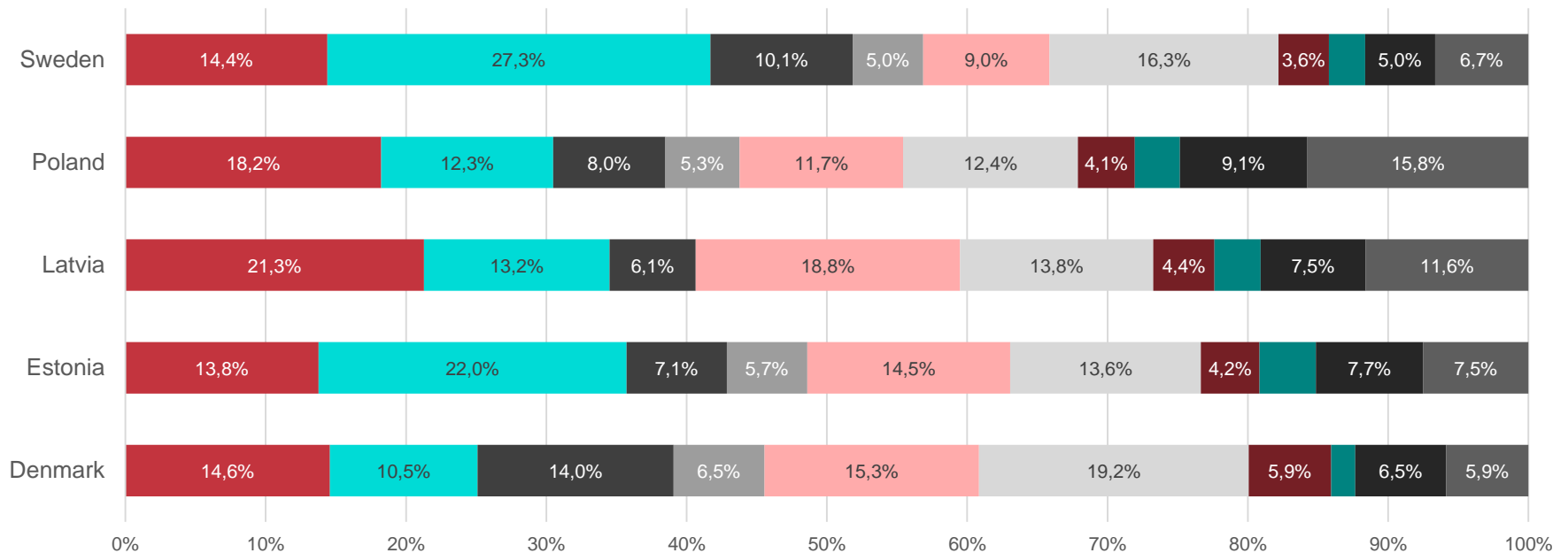
Main obstacles to full recognition
base: 12,663



- Course content (or part of it) as agreed in the final version of the Learning Agreement was not accepted by the sending institution upon return
- I decided NOT to have some courses recognised
- Other
- Professor(s) at my sending institution did not give the approval
- Number of credits recognised is different from the one agreed in the final version of the Learning Agreement
- I did not pass some or all exams
- Problems with receiving the Transcript of Records from the receiving institution
- I did not take some or all exams

Main obstacles to full recognition II

Main obstacles to recognition
base: variable per country



■ Course content not accepted by the sending institution

■ I did not pass some or all exams

■ Number of credits recognised is different

■ Problems with grade conversion

■ Problems with the Transcript of Records

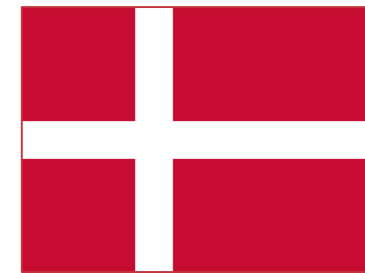
■ I decided NOT to have some courses recognised

■ I did not take some or all exams

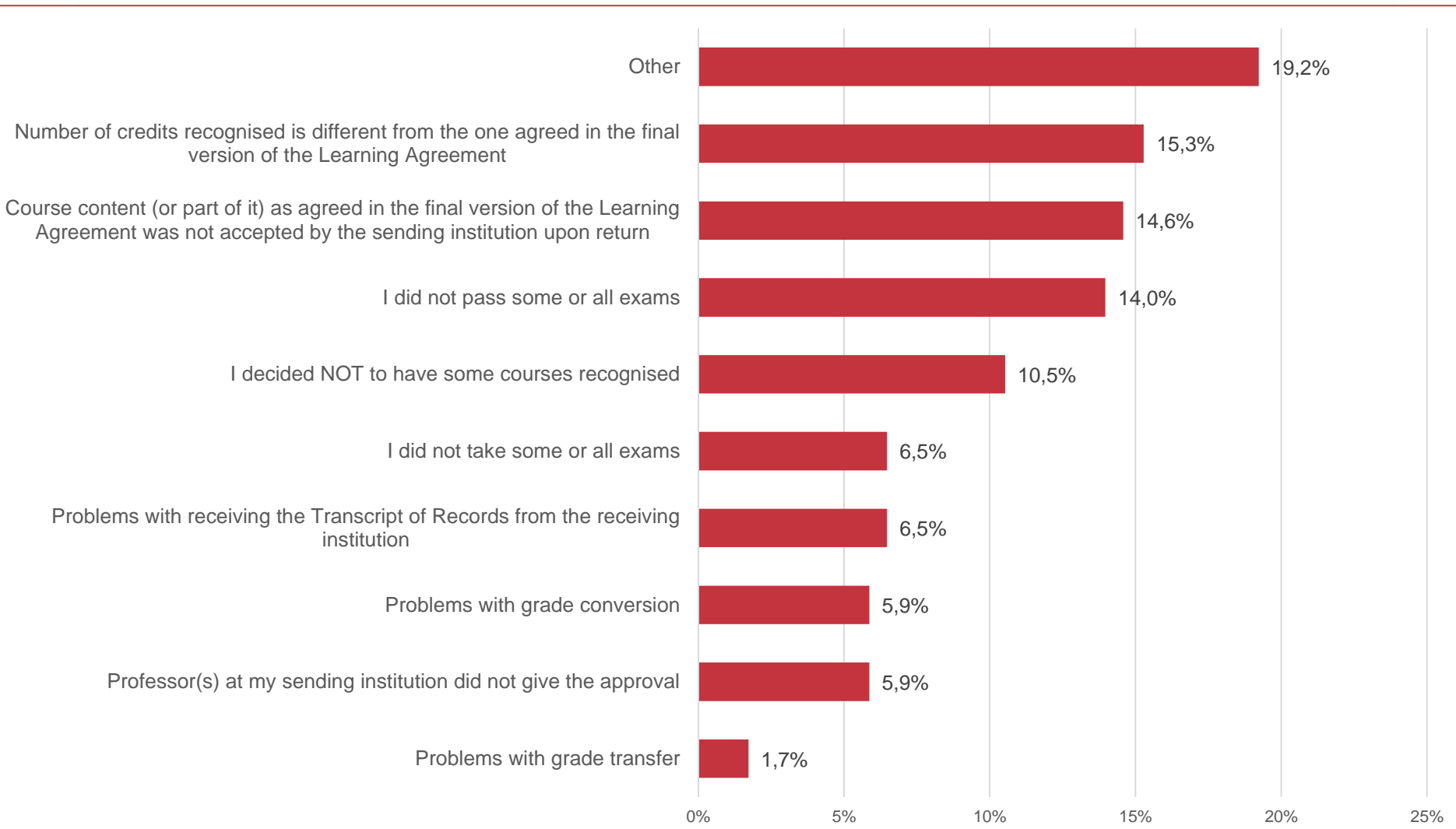
■ Other

■ Problems with grade transfer

■ Professor(s) at my sending institution did not give the approval

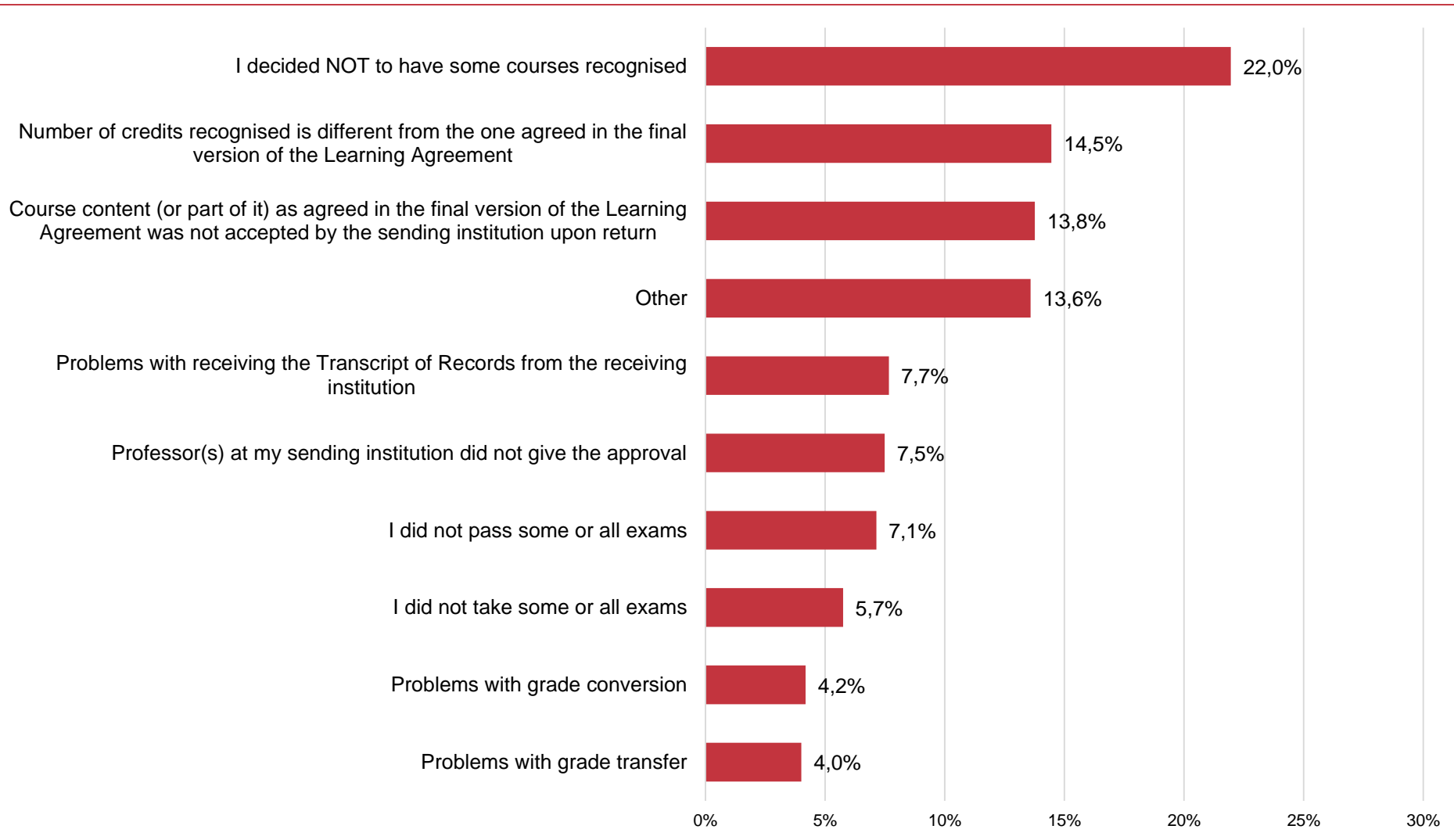


Main obstacles to full recognition: Denmark



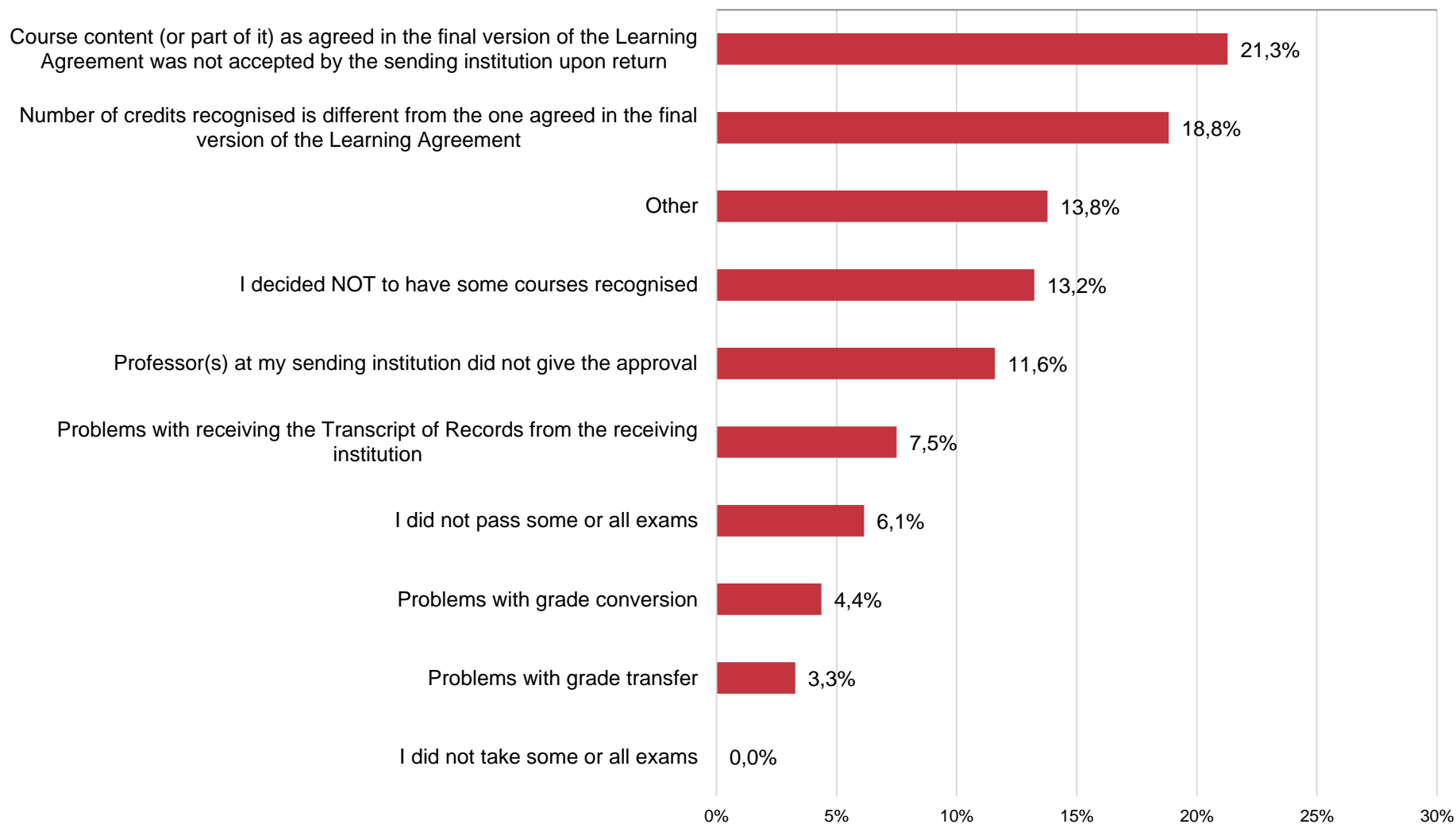


Main obstacles to full recognition: Estonia



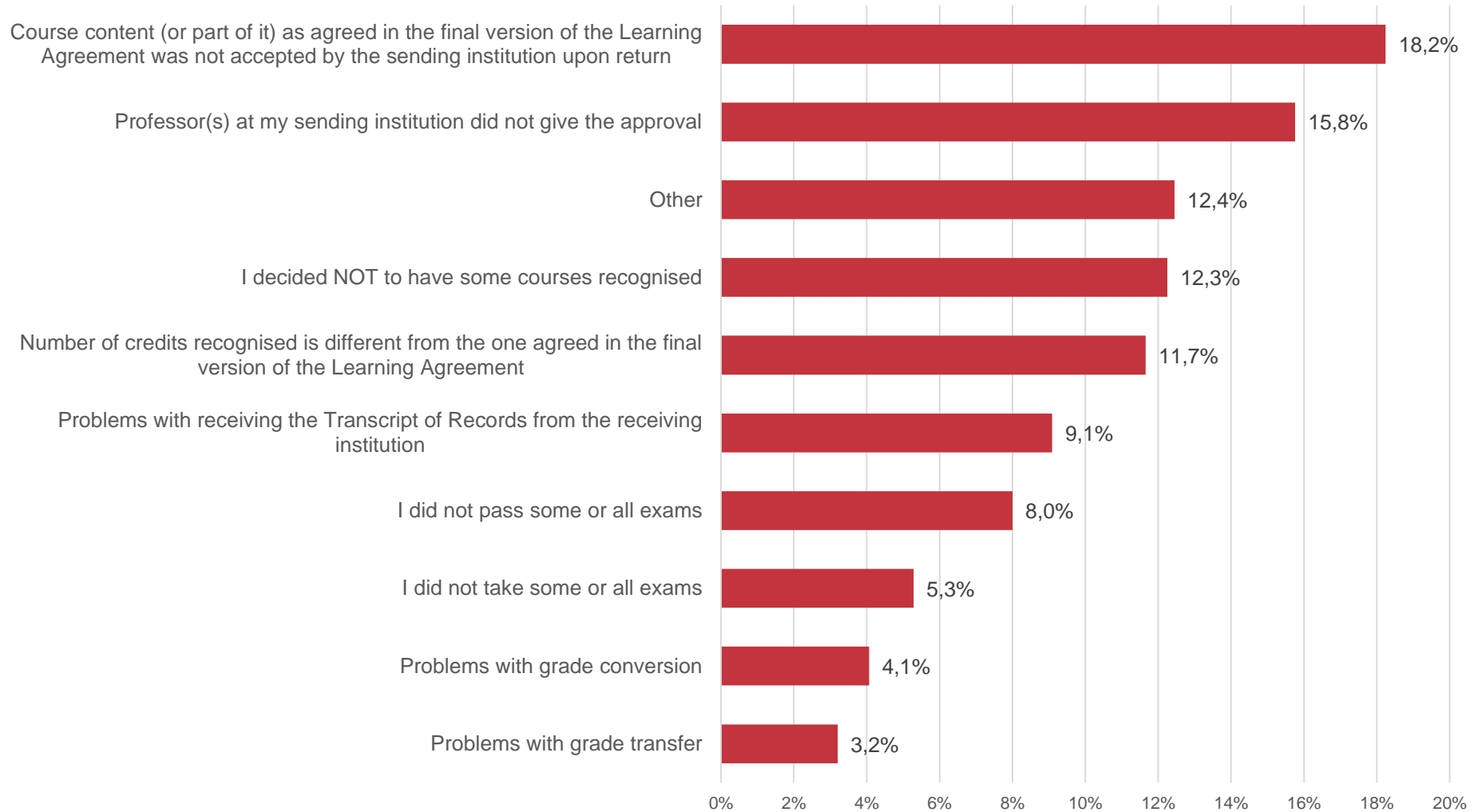


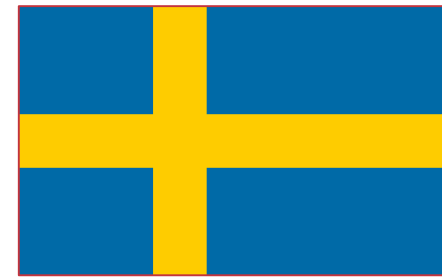
Main obstacles to full recognition: Latvia



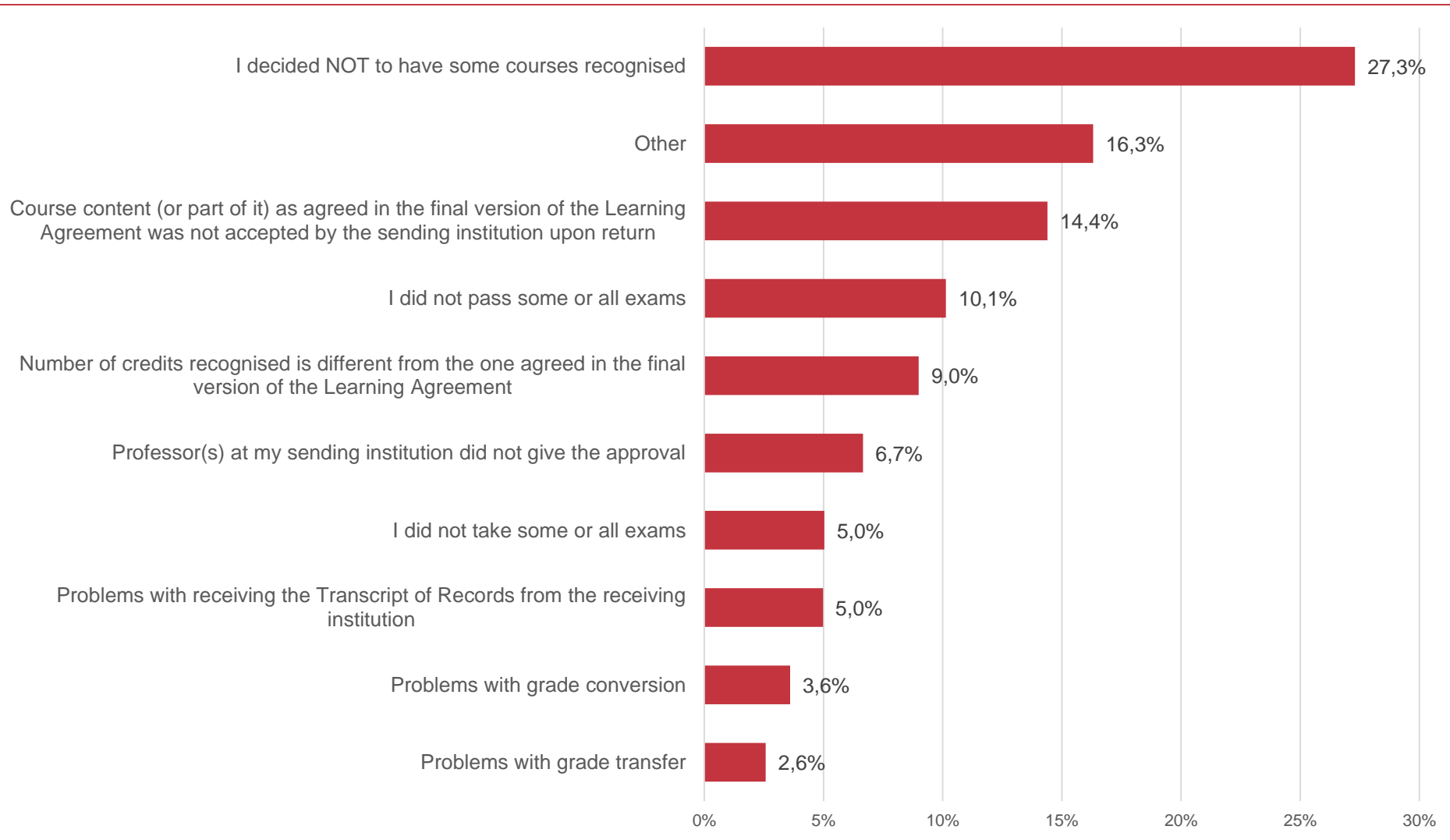


Main obstacles to full recognition: Poland

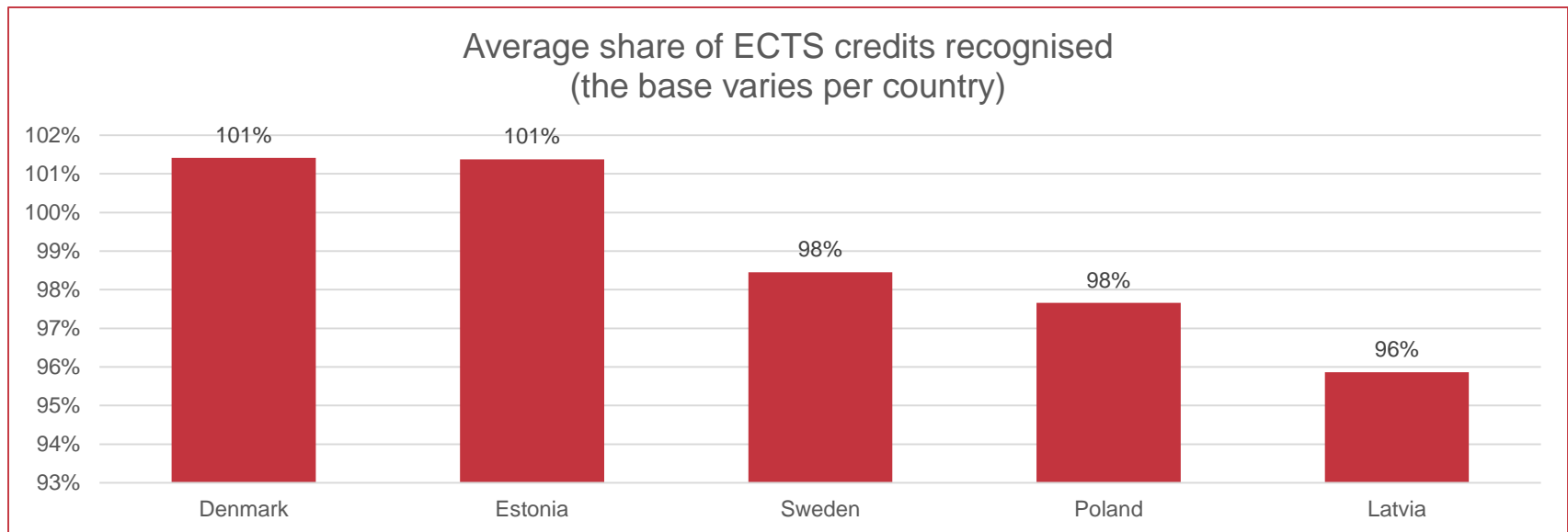




Main obstacles to full recognition: Sweden



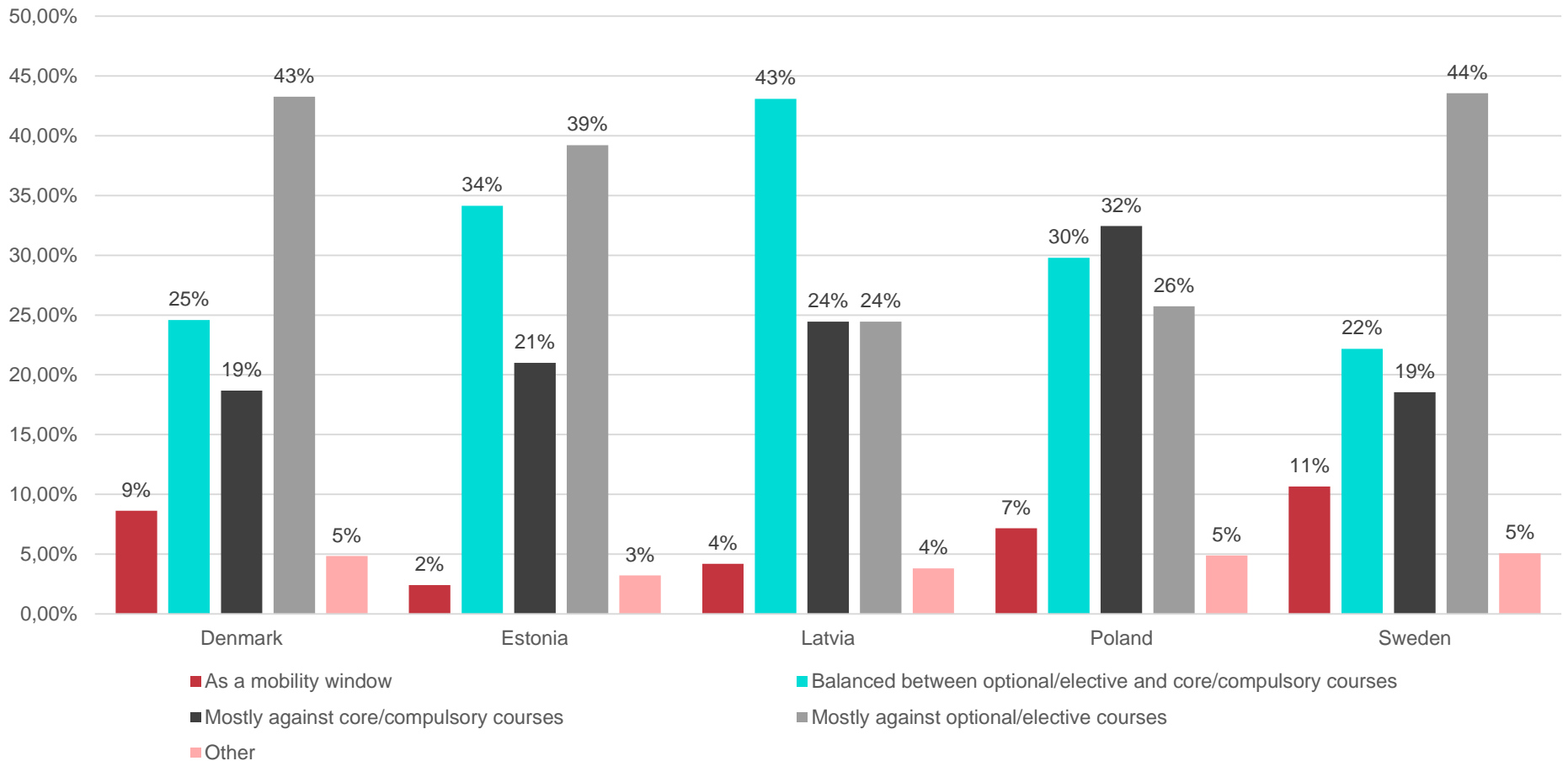
Average share of ECTS credits recognised upon return



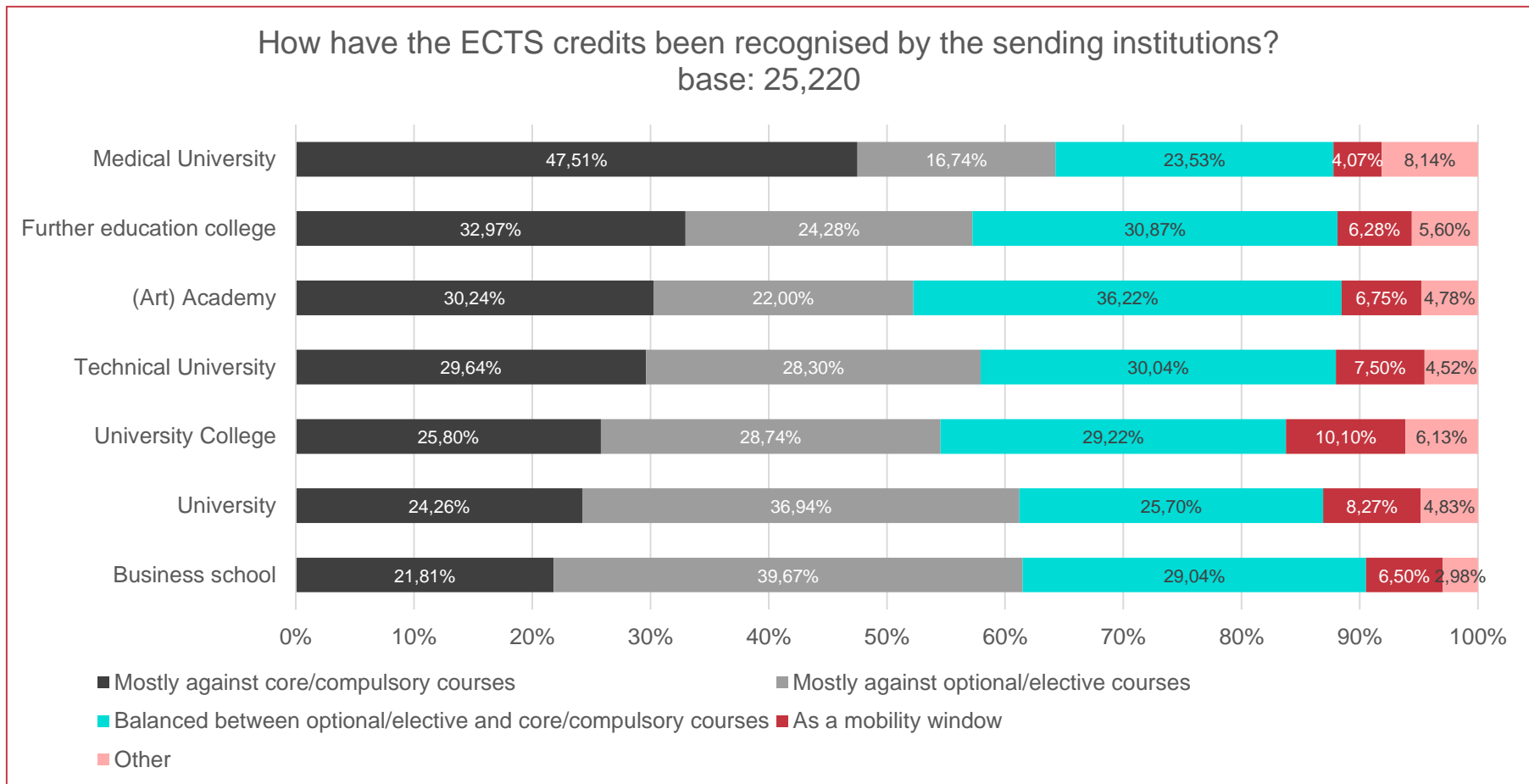
Note: This is calculated as the number of ECTS credits recognised by the sending institution (the question in the Participant Report: “Total number of ECTS credits finally recognised by the sending institution after the mobility”) divided by the number of ECTS awarded at the receiving institution (“the question in the Participant Report: “Total number of ECTS credits earned during the mobility period as stated in the transcript of records”)

How have the ECTS credits been recognised by the sending institutions? I

How have the ECTS credits been recognised by the sending institutions?
base: 25,220



How have the ECTS credits been recognised by the sending institutions? II



Key findings – summary

- Overall, recognition remains an issue, although students report high levels of recognition of credits earned
- Some issues still remain:
 - *The main obstacle relates to changed course content and cancelled courses*
 - *Students' choice not to have some courses recognised has been reported as the second largest obstacle across the five countries and three years, but is it an obstacle?*
- A delayed signature of the Learning Agreement or changes in it later do not correlate with the level of non-recognition
- HEIs in the different countries use a mixture of pre-emptive and proactive approaches to solve any issues

Key findings – summary (cont.)

- Individual HEI departments or faculties, and even individual teachers, may have different opinions on how flexible or strict the curriculum abroad needs to be to receive full recognition
- HEIs do not use the various reporting tools similarly. Thus, the content in the different data sources start to diverge and show different levels of recognition. It is not unusual that students are filling out their Participant Report earlier than the HEIs can finalise the recognition process
- The exact wording and the timeline of the reporting required (Participant Reports) could be reconsidered to better reflect on the finalised recognition vs the expectations of students

Some good practices at play

- The Cracow University of Economics has taken the measure to send Erasmus+ mobility participants an e-mail with a clear explanation of the key terms used in the Erasmus+ feedback questionnaire. This includes an explanation for what ‘academic recognition’ means. This practice increased students’ understanding of the terms used when filling out the Erasmus+ survey
- The Stockholm School of Economics in Riga dedicates a semester in the 3rd year of studies when students can participate in mobility. All courses completed during this semester are recognised. This approach practically eliminates any issues with recognition
- The University of Tartu is currently working towards a similar arrangement (called Mobility Window)

Some good practices at play

- Several Danish institutions give permission to select more courses than the students need (i.e. going above the required ECTS credits per semester) when drafting their Learning Agreement. This allows students to have more flexibility during the recognition process since they have a larger ‘pool’ of credits and backup courses
 - *For example, at Aarhus University students can select up to twice the amount of ECTS required for a single semester*
- Similarly, Linnaeus University (SE) recommends their out-going students to keep some reserve courses. By staying flexible and by having a back-up plan, most students do not need to get in touch with the course administration at Linnaeus University to reconfirm new courses, and they thereby minimise the risk of not gaining full recognition upon return

technopolis_{|group|}

Thank you!

Adam, Anete, Göran, Jonatan, Kalle, Maciej, Olga, Reda, Vera, Zsuzsa

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