

International mobility of students

Study visits to other countries by German students.

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Summary of findings

International mobility of students. Study visits to other countries by German students.

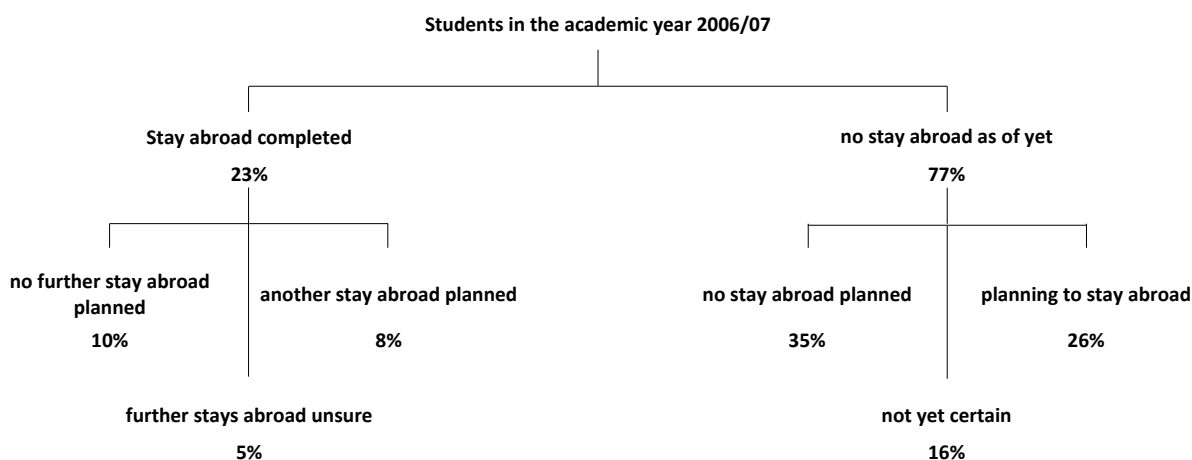
The study “The international mobility of students” deals with the interests, motives and experiences of German students in relation to their study visits abroad. In January 2007, over 5,000 students were interviewed about this subject in a representative internet-based nationwide survey.

In the process, many of the structural characteristics of this type of mobility and the attitudes of the students themselves could be ascertained for the first time. The arrangement of the study and its newly developed methodology may complicate the process of comparison with existing data on the mobility of students; at the same time, however, they guarantee a deeper view of the problems associated with the study visit abroad.

An outline of study-related visits abroad

The question of a study visit abroad arises for a large majority of German students during their first course of studies. In the winter semester of 2006/07, 23% of all students undertook a study visit abroad, and 8% undertook several such visits. Significantly higher, however, was the number of those still planning or considering a phase abroad. It accounted for 42% of all students. Only 35% completely reject the idea of a visit abroad during their studies. However, the value of such trips is not questioned by most of these students, rather they give arguments that indicate a serious concern with the possibility of a study visit abroad.

1 Study-related visits abroad by German students



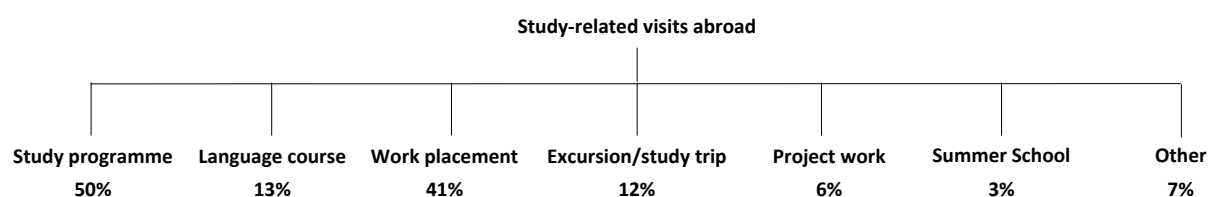
In any case, the difference between study visits abroad that are put into practice and those that are just considered suggests that the realization of international activities during a course of studies is not unproblematic. This is also revealed by the 9% share of all students, who attempted to undertake a study visit abroad, but had to abandon their plans.

Host countries and duration

The most important form of study-related visit abroad is the semester abroad. Every second student who spent time abroad for the purposes of their studies was registered with a foreign university. Work placement abroad is not less important, and was completed by two fifths of this group of students. Furthermore, 13% of those studying abroad were in language courses, 12% took part in field trips abroad and 6% were working on a study project in another country. Summer schools now play an almost negligible role; only 3% of the students participated in this type of course or discussion meeting¹.

2 Types of study-related visits abroad

Multiple entries



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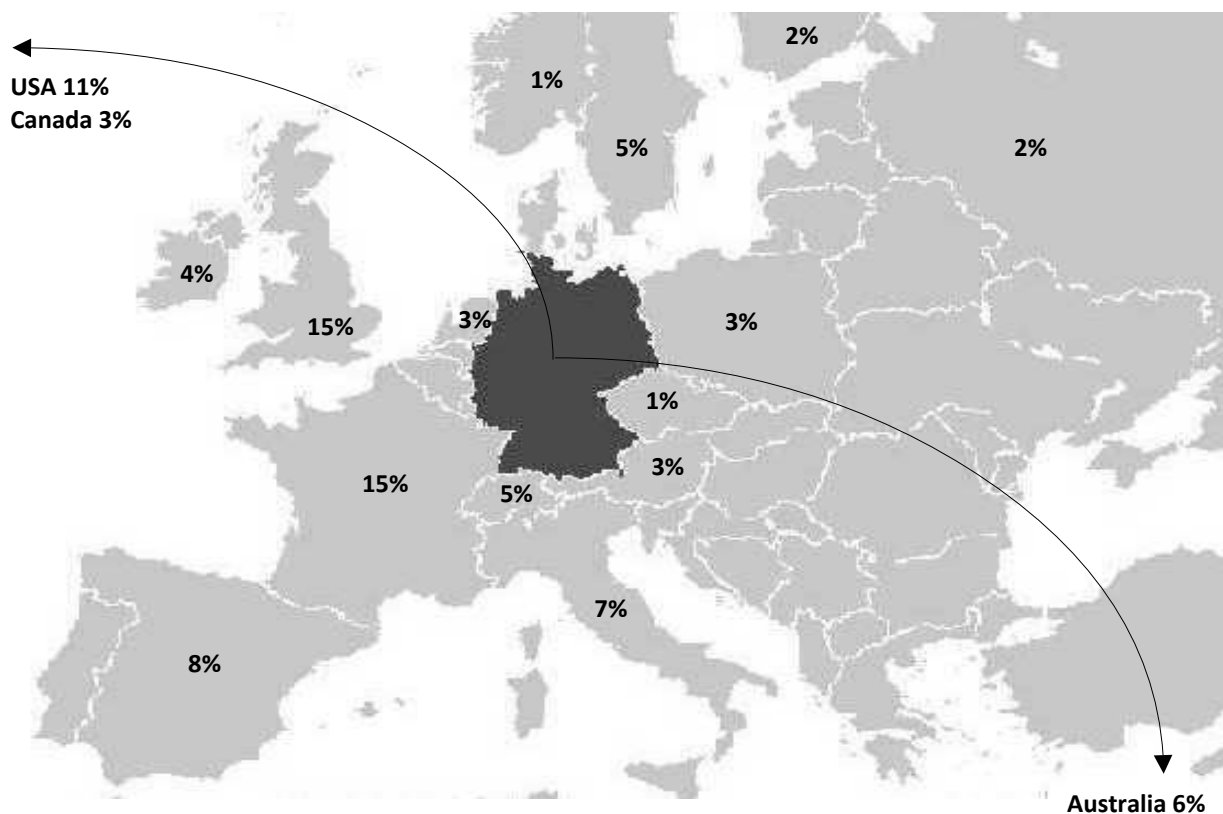
Western Europe is by far the most popular host region for study visits abroad by German students. This region was the destination for about two thirds of all these visits. In the list of Western European host countries, France and the United Kingdom are joint first, followed by Spain, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland and Ireland. 13% of this group of students stayed in the USA or Canada and only 10% stayed in Eastern Europe. The most important of these countries are Poland and Russia.

Whereas the students who stayed in a Western European country most often completed a semester abroad, those who stayed in Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa or in South and Southwest Asia tended to do so in order to complete a work placement.

¹ As some of the students had already several times stayed abroad on study visits, these values are based on multiple entries.

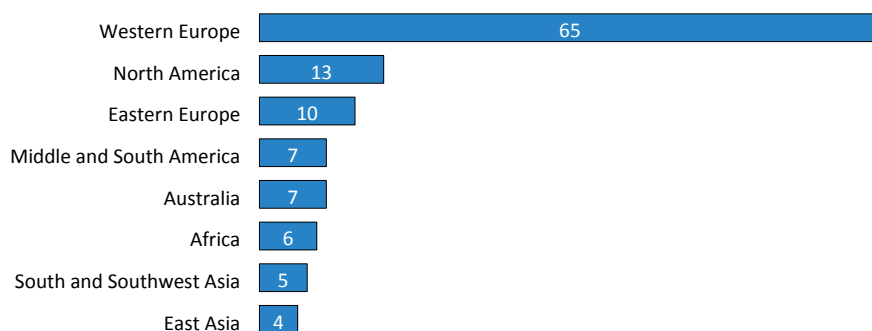
3 Important host countries for study-related visits abroad

Multiple entries



Destination regions for study-related visits abroad

Multiple entries, figures in %

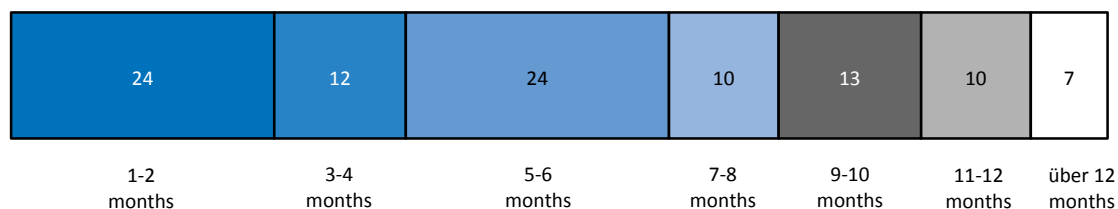


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The average duration of all study-related visits abroad was six months. However, this number also includes, where applicable, several stays abroad. In relation to individual study trips abroad, the average duration was four months. One half of all stays abroad lasted not longer than four months, while less than one fifth lasted over six months. This last mentioned value applies above all to the semester abroad, which lasted on average six months, whereas the work placement abroad lasted only three months on average.

4 Total duration of student's stays abroad

Figures in %



Average duration of the different types of visit abroad

Median figures given

Study programme	→	6 months
Language course	→	1 month
Work placement	→	3 months
Excursion/study trip	→	1 month
Project work	→	1 month
Summer School	→	1 month

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Subject groups and types of course

Students doing bachelor's degrees at universities or universities of applied science go abroad comparatively seldom for purposes of their studies. Between 15% and 9% of these students undertake study trips abroad. Their stays abroad are also shorter on average than those of other students.

However, it should not be forgotten that the majority of bachelor's students are registered in the first or second year of studies. The most suitable time for a study trip abroad from the students' point of view, which starts with the third year and peaks during the fourth and fifth years of study, actually only pertains to these students if they follow up the bachelor's with a master's degree. This finding corresponds with the tendency for those bachelor's degree students who are interested in a study trip abroad to accept the necessity of prolonging their studies. In the future bachelor's degree, which has already gone past the sixth semester, the proportion of students who have completed study trips abroad is particularly high. But it would take repeated studies to clarify whether this tendency continues or whether the students manage to shift the study trip abroad to an earlier phase, to the fifth semester for example.

5 Study-related stays abroad by German students according to degree type

Figures in %

	Stay abroad completed			No stay abroad completed		
	total	only once	more than once	total	tried	never tried
Students in general	23	15	8	77	9	68
Diploma at university	24	16	8	76	8	68
Diploma at university of applied sciences	21	15	6	79	9	70
Magister	34	22	12	66	7	59
Bachelor's at university	15	11	4	85	9	76
Bachelor's at university of applied science	9	6	3	91	10	81
Magister	30	14	16	70	12	58
State examinations	23	14	9	77	9	68

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In contrast to the bachelor's degree, those students doing a master's degree stayed abroad for purposes of their studies with higher-than-average frequency. Once again, this confirms the influence which the phase of studies has on study trips abroad.

There is also increased international activity among those students doing a Magister. However, this is connected with the subject groups which are mostly highly represented in this study programme, languages and cultural sciences. An above-average frequency of study-related visits abroad has been ascertained for the students in these subject groups. This also applies to medical students. In contrast, study programmes for teachers, as well as agriculture, forestry, food sciences and the engineering sciences all have a relatively small proportion of students who have experience of studying abroad.

6 Study-related stays abroad by German students according to subject group

Figures in %

	Stay abroad completed			No stay abroad completed		
	total	only once	more than once	total	tried	never tried
Students in general	23	15	8	77	9	68
Languages/cultural sciences/sport	29	17	12	71	10	61
Legal studies	23	13	10	77	10	67
Social sciences	22	15	7	78	10	68
Economics	25	16	9	75	9	66
Mathematics/natural sciences	23	17	6	77	8	69
Medicine	30	16	14	70	10	60
Agriculture/forestry/food sciences	18	11	7	82	16	66
Engineering sciences	16	13	3	84	6	78
Teaching	20	13	7	80	9	71

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There are considerable differences between the international activities of students at universities and those at universities of applied science. Whereas 30% of the students at universities have study-related international experience, this can be said of only 18% of their fellow students at the universities of applied science. These differences are also apparent in bachelor's degree programmes. In universities, 15% of the students in this type of study programme have made study visits abroad, compared to 9% of the bachelor's students at universities of applied science

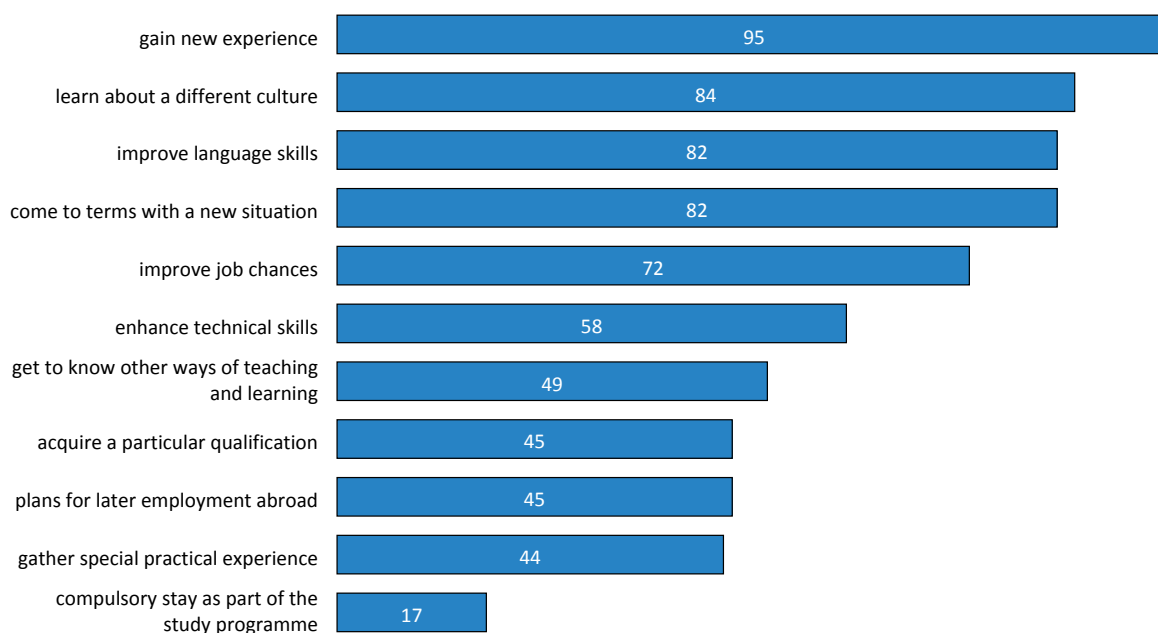
Reasons for study-related visits abroad

The main reason why students travel abroad for their studies is the acquisition of social and communication skills. Almost all of them hoped to gain new experiences, to get to know a different culture and to come to terms with a strange and unfamiliar situation. The improvement of foreign language skills also played a central role.

Another strong motivation for a study visit abroad was the expectation of better job chances. Three out of four students cited this as a motive. In comparison, students attached less importance to reasons connected with technical or professional qualifications. Only every second student was aspiring for technical skills, particular qualifications or specific practical experience.

7 Reasons for study-related visits abroad

Figures on a scale from 1 = "completely unimportant" to 5 = "very important," pos. 4+5, in %



Job prospects were a decisive factor for quite a few students. Almost every second student associates their study visit abroad with the chance of later employment in another country.

A relatively high proportion of the international activities of bachelor’s degree students are connected with a compulsory stay abroad. Although this factor is cited by 17% of students in general as the reason for their study visit abroad, 31% of the students in the future bachelor’s degree refer to the compulsory nature of this study phase.

The student’s experience abroad

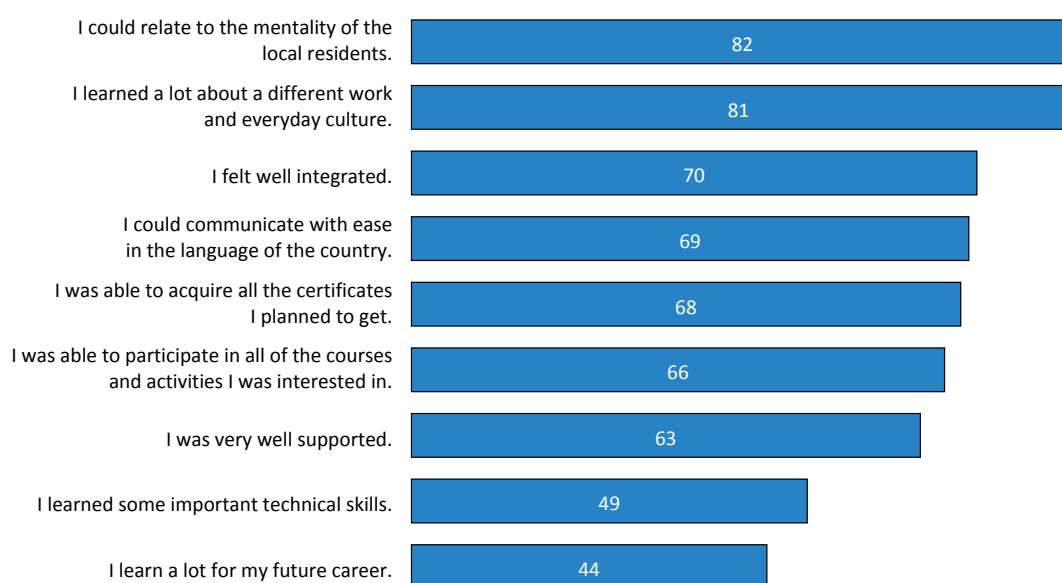
Most German students had a good experience in their host country during their study-related visit abroad. They felt well integrated in the universities or other institutions at which they were guests and could relate to the mentality of their new fellow students and other local residents. This is also due to the fact that a high proportion of the German students could communicate well in the language of the country.

The study visit abroad has helped four out of five students to acquire valuable insights into a different work and everyday culture. Two thirds of them also managed to take part in all of the courses and other activities that they were interested in and to acquire the certificates they wanted.

The students were more ambivalent regarding the technical benefits of the international phase. Only every second student judged that they had been taught important technical skills and that they had learned a lot towards their future career. One quarter of the students who had completed international

8 Experiences during study-related stays abroad

Figures on a scale from 1 = “doesn’t apply at all” to 5 = “applies very well,” pos. 4+5, in %



activities expressed pronounced dissatisfaction. It is above-all summer schools which receive the student's criticism.

Those students who were temporarily registered with a foreign university found that they learnt much about everyday life in their host country. They evaluate their understanding of the language of the country as particularly good. Their assessment of their integration in the university is rather below average. Only 63% felt really well integrated; they are also more critical of the level of support they received than are the students who stayed abroad for other types of programme.

In comparison, students who had a work placement abroad frequently have the feeling of being integrated, 75% felt well integrated. These students had an above-average opinion of the benefits they received for their future career. However, it was more difficult for those with work placements to participate in all the activities which they were interested in.

It is characteristic of study-related visits to Eastern European countries that only a minority of the students can communicate well in the language of the country. There were also more problems here with participating in all of the desired courses and activities and to acquire the planned certificates. In addition, the proportion of students who felt that they had learnt valuable technical and professional skills is less than in other regions.

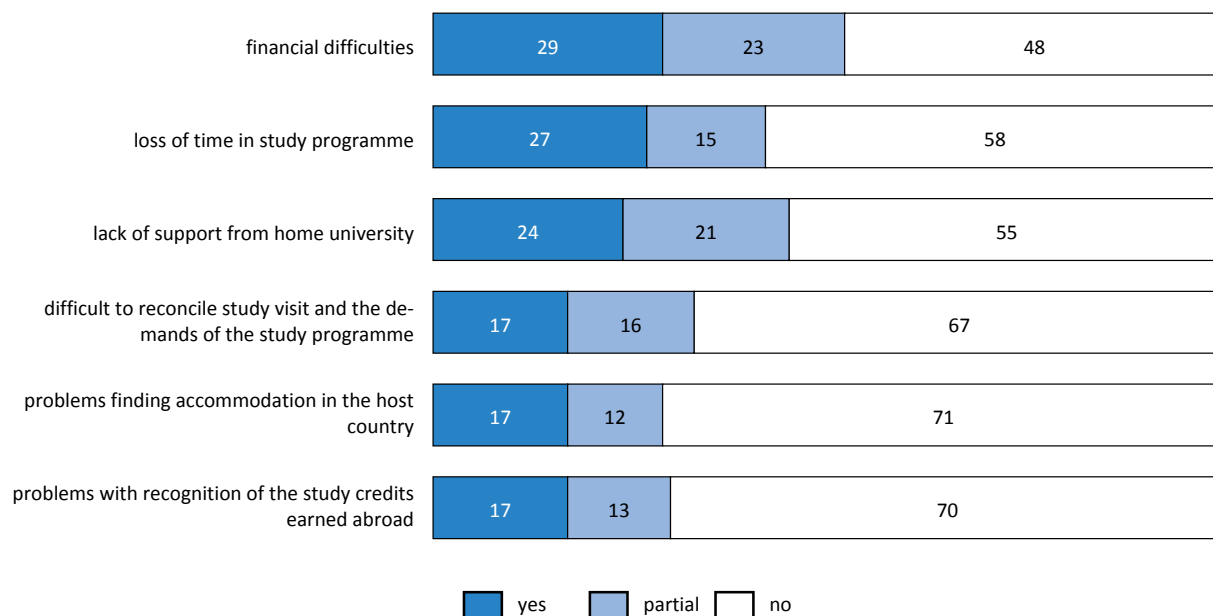
Problems with study-related visits abroad

The organisation of study-related visits abroad presented significant problems for some students. It was the financing of the stay abroad, the loss of time from the study programme and the lack of support from their home university which raised the greatest problems. Around one quarter of the students were affected by these issues. Only one half of the students considered themselves to have been completely carefree. The relevant group of students found the compatibility of the stay abroad with the demands and requirements of their study programme to be less of a problem. They had a similarly favourable experience with regard to the recognition of the study credits that they earned abroad. The issue of accommodation was apparently also solved with ease.

Direct organizational problems were most frequently experienced by students who were registered at a foreign university. More than other students, they had to deal with delays to their study programme and with the difficulty of reconciling the demands of their studies with the international phase, including obstacles to the recognition of the study credits that they earned abroad. Students with work placements abroad were far less affected by these difficulties. However, they did complain more than average about lack of support from the home university.

9 Problems with study-related stays abroad

Figures on a scale from 1 = "not at all" to 5 = "to a great extent," pos. 1+2, 3, 4+5, in %



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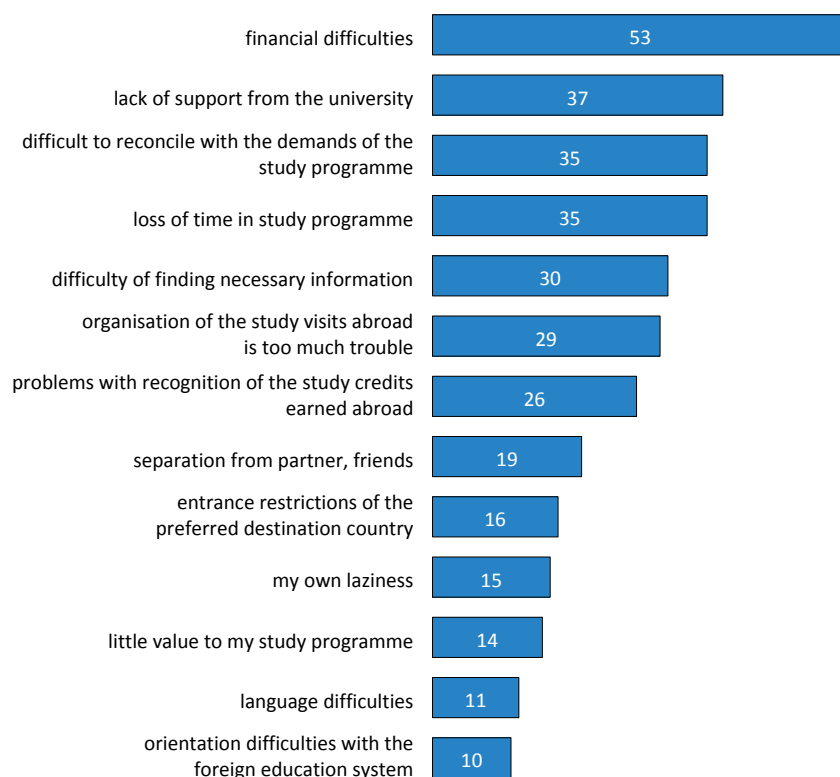
Reasons why the study visit abroad did not take place

The above mentioned problems not only create difficulties for study visits abroad, they can also prohibit them completely. One in ten students claim that they have at some point attempted to make a study-related trip abroad, without being able to realise their intention. Financial difficulties are again at the top of the list of reasons why study-related trips abroad failed to materialise. About one half of the relevant group of students point to this as a main reason. One third of this group cite incompatibility with the demands of their own study programme, foreseeable delays to their study programme and lack of support from the university for their intended project. Quite a few of these students who could not carry out their study visits abroad reckon that the organisation would have caused them too much trouble. They attribute this less to their own indolence as to the difficulty, for example, of getting the necessary information or to problems with recognition of the study credits earned abroad.

To a lesser degree, the students also blame issues such as their language skills, orientation problems in the foreign third-level education system or separation from their partner or friends for the failure of the activities abroad to take place. These students, who decided for a stay abroad but could not put it into practice, also have little doubt concerning the value that such a study visit would have for their study programme.

Reasons why the study-related stay abroad was not realised

Figures on a scale from 1 = "not at all" to 5 = "to a great extent," pos. 4+5, in %



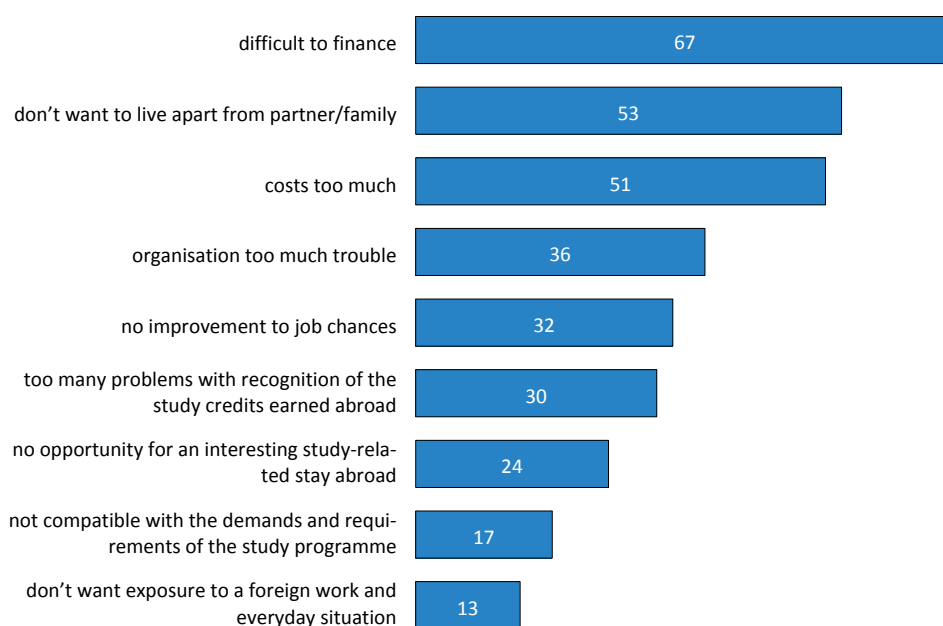
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Reasons for a general disinterest in study visits abroad

Somewhat different motives are in evidence for those students who have neither completed a stay abroad nor ever planned one. Apart from those factors already seen to affect or completely prevent the organisation of study activities abroad, the reasons that they hold responsible for their disinterest also include some which have only been of secondary importance up to now. Here it is primarily a question of the desire not to be separated from the partner or family. For every second student who does not harbour any ambition to study abroad, these personal circumstances are important enough for them to renounce any idea undertaking international activities. Only financial difficulties prove to be of more significance to this group. These difficulties are made responsible by two thirds of the affected students for their lack of interest in plans for studying abroad. Furthermore, time-related concerns have a significant influence on this lack of interest. Approximately half of the students with no plans to study abroad see a negative relation between the investment of time which this would require and the benefits to be expected from it. From their point of view, such activities cost too much time.

11 Reasons for a general disinterest in study visits abroad

Figures on a scale from 1 = "completely unimportant" to 5 = "very important," pos. 4+5, in %



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One third of this group of students see formidable organisational problems, also in relation to the recognition of the study credits that would be earned abroad. A comparable proportion question the sense of a study visit abroad: either they doubt that their job chances will be improved by means of a stay abroad or they see no opportunity for an interesting study-related activity in another country.