

The online survey was sent to students and graduates from the six Western Balkan (WB) countries who spent part of their studies outside the region, mostly on an Erasmus exchange programme. The aim was to identify effective approaches for improvements in the higher education system based on the experiences of students and alumni. The study was initiated by the Western Balkans Alumni Association (WBAA) research team, supported by the European Union and carried out by the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS) in Vienna. The field phase took place in 2021/2022 and 1.320 questionnaires were analysed.


**Funded by  
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## KEY RESULTS



# MONTENEGRO

### Montenegrins who study abroad...

- ... most often go to **Eastern EU countries**, with Slovenia being the favourite country.
- ... to obtain a full degree, are more likely to study in a traditional degree programme than in a joint degree programme.

### Motivations to study abroad

Personal development is the most frequently stated motive for Montenegrin respondents to study abroad, followed by the opportunity to live and study in another country. Among the three most important motives for studying abroad is also the prospect of deepening their knowledge in their field of study.

### Difficulties

Only 5% of respondents from Montenegro doubt that their prior theoretical knowledge was insufficient for studies outside the Western Balkans. In contrast, four times as many (21%) rate their previous methodological skills as (rather) insufficient and more than seven times as many respondents (36%) say that **their practical skills were insufficient to study outside the WB**. Montenegrins experienced difficulties before and during their study abroad, most often due to an additional financial burden or problems with access requirements (e.g. obtaining a visa or residence permit). Slightly fewer experienced difficulties in finding accommodation abroad or complain about a lack of information from their higher

education institution. However, mostly Montenegrin respondents found it difficult to **return to their previous life in their home country** after the study period abroad.

### Impact on personality and skills

**(Oral) communication skills** is the number one skill from the respondents' perspective that has improved due to the study experience abroad, followed by team-working skills. Planning and organisational skills as well as the ability to think critically have also improved due to the study abroad experience for half of all respondents from Montenegro. The greatest effect was found in personality and intercultural competence. It also fits that almost all respondents from Montenegro can identify a (very) strongly improved ability to be **more open and curious towards new challenges** or an increased awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses. Similarly, eight out of ten respondents from Montenegro note an improvement in their self-confidence, their tolerance of other values or their commitment to stand up to discrimination.

### Where to live in the future?

Half of the Montenegrin respondents would like to live in an EU country (53%). But they also choose relatively often their own country as an attractive future place to live compared to the other respondents in the WB countries (40%). This fits in with the fact that they are the

most likely to say they want to live in more than two countries, at one third.

The most mentioned motivations which would convince Montenegrins to live in the WB (again) are:

1. A salary level that enables a standard of living that meets their expectations,
2. Better quality of life, good living conditions,
3. Financial and social security, a stable political system.

### Impact of the study experience abroad on the job situation

It is noteworthy that across all employed respondents\*) from all WB countries, almost two-thirds indicate that they use the knowledge and skills they acquired during their study abroad in their current job (61%). Moreover, half of the employed graduates from the Western Balkans state they **hold their current job because of the skills acquired during their studies abroad** (48%).

### Evaluation of study conditions in Montenegro

Overall, the majority (81%) rate the **quality of teaching** at the host university as (much) better than at their university in Montenegro. In contrast, only 12% consider the quality of teaching at their Montenegrin university to be better, and even slightly fewer (7%) as equally good as what they experienced outside the Western Balkans. Even though six out of ten Montenegrin respondents assess the **didactic competencies** of Montenegrin teachers as (very) good, almost all have experienced (very)

\*) For most calculations on the effects of the stay abroad on the employment situation, there are too few cases of employed graduates (excluding students) for Montenegro (n < 30), which is why a detailed analysis is not possible.

good teaching competence outside the Western Balkans (61% vs. 85%). A slightly larger difference can be seen in the **field-specific knowledge**, in which the teachers from Montenegro are also less often rated well, while the large majority of respondents experienced the knowledge of the teachers abroad as (very) good (60% vs. 89%).

Similarly, there are major differences in the assessment of the **pedagogical attitude** of home and host lecturers. For example, less than half of the respondents from Montenegro say that Montenegrin teachers encouraged critical thinking (45%) or motivated students to do their best (40%), while the majority (84%) say this about their host lecturers. Likewise, almost all respondents experienced respectful treatment by teachers at their higher education institution outside the Western Balkans, but only two-thirds of respondents experienced this in Montenegro (61% vs. 93%).

Furthermore, more than half of the Montenegrin respondents are dissatisfied about five out of seven aspects of the **study organisation and curriculum** in their home country: For example, two-thirds are of the opinion that there were too many exams in too short a time, too few external lecturers and they criticise that they were not able to choose enough courses according to their interests at the university in Montenegro.

Another major difference between the study experiences in Montenegro and outside the WB is evident in the assessment of the state of the **physical and digital infrastructure**: only 18% rate the physical infrastructure at home (compared to 89% abroad) and only 18% rate the digital infrastructure (compared to 82% abroad) as (very) satisfying.

## What Montenegrin students want to see improved

Respondents were asked to select their **top 3 recommendations for improvement** from a range of suggestions on different aspects of higher education. Montenegrin respondents who have studied both in the Montenegrin higher education system and outside the WB region select the following aspects most frequently:

### Curricula

- More or stronger practice-orientated courses
- More courses to train soft skills
- More courses with an interdisciplinary approach

### Modes of teaching & learning

- Practical application of knowledge
- Student-teacher discussions
- Group/ project work with other students

### Student support

- Provide career support
- Facilitate internships abroad and study mobility
- Provide extra-curricular student activities

### Higher education system

- Modernise infrastructures at universities
- Improve research support
- Provide (more) study grants and scholarships

### Teaching system

- Implement modern teaching methods
- Teachers should encourage more critical thinking
- More, better and individual mentoring for students

### Study organisation

- More freedom in choice of courses
- Facilitate transition to labour market
- Facilitate student involvement in research projects

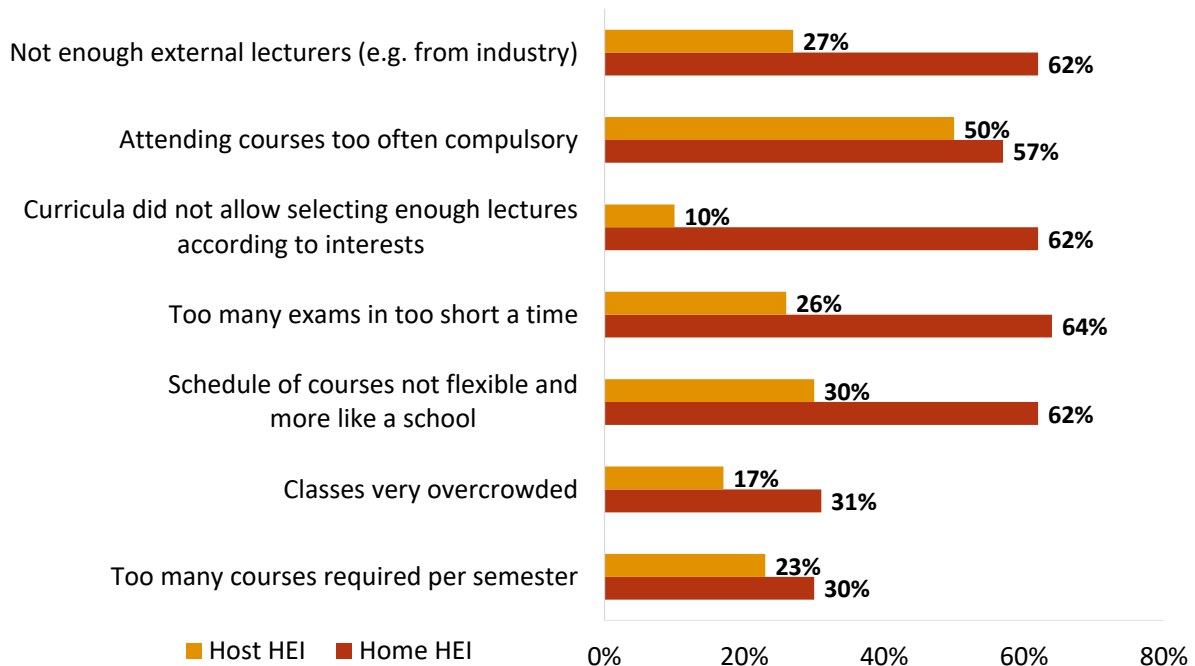
## Resulting proposals for improving the study conditions

Improvements with relatively little financial investment (as opposed to investment in infrastructure or more study grants) could therefore consist of improving the **quality of teaching** by promoting a more egalitarian pedagogical attitude among lecturers, offering regular training courses to improve lecturers' field-specific knowledge and their teaching skills. The **study organisation and the curricula** should also be reconsidered, with more freedom in the choice of courses and the number of exams at peak times should be reduced. Students and alumni want to expand their career opportunities and do internships or learn new

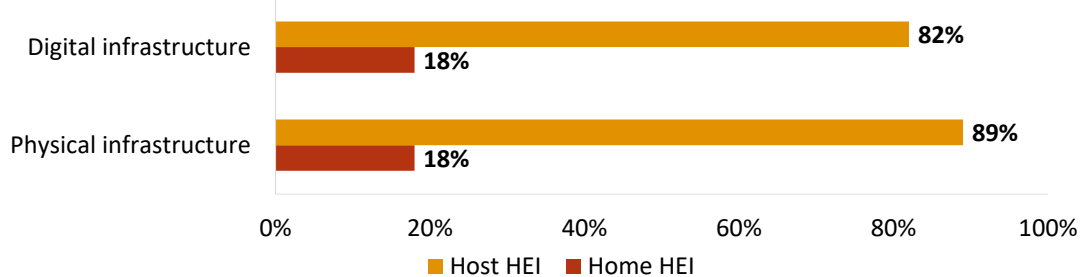
skills – practical skills seem to be in particular demand, but also soft-skill training. Inviting more external lecturers (also for professional networking) and facilitating participation in research projects are deemed helpful by the respondents.

For all respondents in the six WB countries and for all topics queried, the top three aspects include two that place a stronger emphasis on practical skills in the teaching. Additionally, all respondents see a great need to improve the **infrastructure** at universities in the Western Balkans.

## Curricula & study organisation: agreement with statements about home vs. host higher education institution



## Digital and physical infrastructure rating as (very) satisfying: home vs. host higher education institution



## Rating of the quality of teaching staff: home vs. host university

