

Well-being of students enrolled in the field of education: a predictor for student drop-out?

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Global teacher shortages and teacher attrition are a widely acknowledged and studied phenomenon (Dadvand et al., 2024; Leijen et al., 2024; Mills et al., 2024; Shanks et al., 2022; White et al., 2024). Key factors identified in research as contributing to teacher shortages and attrition include demographic changes (Leijen et al., 2024); poor attractiveness and working conditions in the profession (Dadvand et al., 2024; Leijen et al., 2024; Mills et al., 2024); and isolation experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic (Dadvand et al., 2024; Leijen et al., 2024). In view of these challenges, attracting individuals to the teaching profession and retaining them is crucial. Research so far has focused on policy analyses of the framework conditions in the education sector (Mills et al., 2024), newly qualified teachers (Shanks et al., 2022), career change teachers (Dadvand et al., 2024; White et al., 2024), and multi-dimensional analyses of various actors in the educational system (Leijen et al., 2024) to identify factors that could address teacher attrition or attract individuals into the profession.

An important stepping stone to attract individuals into the profession is attracting them into teacher trainee programmes. However, this is insufficient. It is also necessary to understand the factors that may be contributing to student drop-out. In this regard, research has suggested a link between student well-being and drop-out (Brewer et al., 2019). This intelligence brief, therefore, investigates the well-being of students enrolled in programmes in the field of education, whether low levels of well-being can serve as predictors for drop-out intentions and whether this link can be confirmed across countries. This intelligence brief investigates these aspects based on a cross-country analysis using EUROSTUDENT 8 micro data.

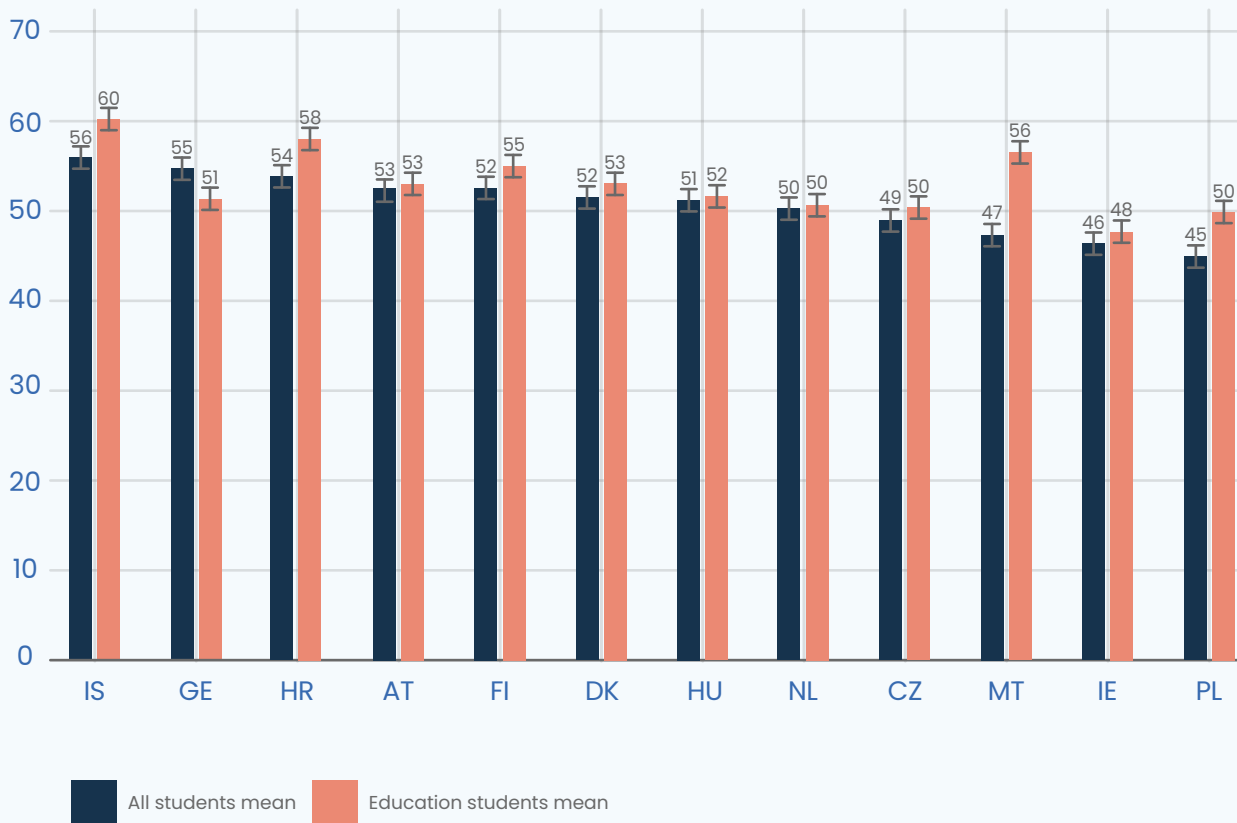
Well-being of students enrolled in the field of education

The World Health Organisation Well-being Index (WHO-5)¹ has been shown to be an effective self-reporting tool to identify individuals suffering from poor well-being (Topp et al., 2015). The same research (Topp et al., 2015) concluded that a cut-off point of 50 served to screen for poor well-being and risk of depression.



¹ World Health Organisation Well-being Index (WHO-5) is based on 5 Statements (Over past 2 weeks: I have felt cheerful and in good spirits, Over past 2 weeks: I have felt calm and relaxed, Over past 2 weeks: I have felt active and vigorous, Over past 2 weeks: I woke up feeling fresh and rested, Over past 2 weeks: My daily life has been filled with things that interest me) which are rated by the individual on a 5-point Likert Scale. The ratings are added and multiplied by 4 in order to obtain a value out of 100.

Figure 1. **Students’ Mean Level of Well-being** (WHO-5 Scale 0-100)



Data source: EUROSTUDENT 8 SUF (micro data; weighted for national representative samples).

Data collection: Spring 2022 – summer 2022 except AT (spring 2023 – summer 2023).

EUROSTUDENT question(s): M1.6. Please indicate for each of the 5 statements which is closest to how you have been feeling over the past 2 weeks. a) I have felt cheerful and in good spirits b) I have felt calm and relaxed c) I have felt active and vigorous d) I woke up feeling fresh and rested e) my daily life has been filled with things that interest me.

Source: World Health Organization. Regional Office for Europe. (1998). Well-being measures in primary health care/the DEPCARE Project. report on a WHO meeting: Stockholm, Sweden, 12–13 February 1998. World Health Organization. Regional Office for Europe.

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT standard target group: IE, NL.

Micro data from EUROSTUDENT 8 (Cuppen et al., 2024) as shown in Figure 1 indicates that across all 12 countries, for which data was available, students in Poland, Ireland, Malta and Czech Republic reported lower levels of well-being compared to other countries and levels below the cut-off point of 50. Students enrolled in programmes in the field of education reported higher levels of well-being compared to their peers and their level of well-being is significantly higher in Poland, Malta, Finland, Croatia and Iceland. The only exception

appears to be Georgia, where students enrolled in programmes in the field of education report significantly lower levels of well-being compared to all students.

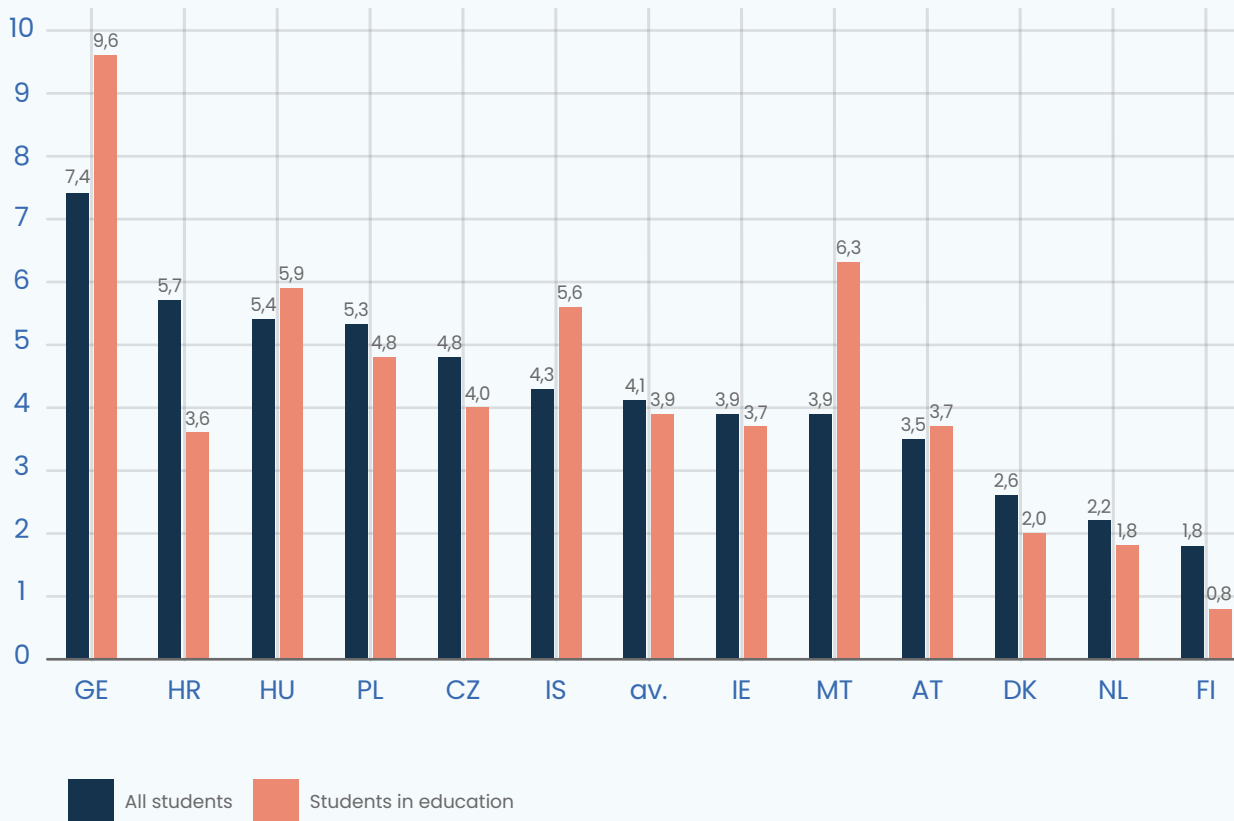
Higher levels of well-being are associated with the ability to effectively respond to challenging circumstances (Peixoto et al., 2018). Thus, students with low levels of well-being may be more likely to consider abandoning their studies.

Plans of students enrolled in programmes in the field of education to drop-out of their studies

Indeed, EUROSTUDENT 8 micro data (Cuppen et al., 2024) indicates that there is a mild, but significant positive correlation between students’ well-being and their intention not to drop-out of their studies

and this is true across countries and across fields of study, except for Malta. That means that improved well-being contributes to reducing the risk of students dropping out of their studies.

Figure 2. **Students Strongly Agreeing to Seriously Thinking About Abandoning Their Studies** (in %)



Data source: EUROSTUDENT 8 SUF (micro data; weighted for national representative samples).

Data collection: Spring 2022 – summer 2022 except AT (spring 2023 – summer 2023).

EUROSTUDENT question(s): 3.1 Generally, to what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding your studies? I am seriously thinking of completely abandoning my higher education studies. Source: Trautwein et.al. (2007). 5-point scale; only answer options „strongly agree“ are displayed here.

Deviations from EUROSTUDENT standard target group: IE, NL.

Further analysis of EUROSTUDENT 8 micro data (Cuppen et al., 2024) for the 12 countries under study on the factors that influence the drop-out intentions of students enrolled in programmes in the field of education as shown in Table 1 show that financial difficulties and work alongside studies impact students’ drop-out intentions. Students enrolled in programmes in the field of education, who do not have financial difficulties are 41 % less likely to be seriously considering dropping out

of their studies. At the same time, students who work 1-20 hours per week or more than 20 hours per week alongside their studies are 75 % or 83 % more likely respectively to strongly consider dropping out of their studies. Financial constraints and working alongside studies among students enrolled in programmes in the field of education are, therefore, serious concerns in terms of student retention. In this regard, it is curious to see that labour market demand does not appear to

serve as a pull factor with students judging their labour market prospects as very poor being more than twice as likely to be seriously considering dropping out of their studies.

Students' sense of belonging in higher education and satisfaction with the study programme are further factors that influence drop-out intentions. Students not agreeing at all that they would recommend their study programme are nearly 4.4 times more likely to strongly consider dropping out. At the same time, dissatisfaction with lecturers' ability to explain things appears not to increase drop-out intentions but decrease them by half. Moreover, the stronger students' sense of belonging is in higher education, the lower is their likelihood to harbour intentions of dropping out of their studies. However, knowing some fellow

students with whom students can discuss study related issues appears to be sufficient to decreasing drop-out intentions. It appears, therefore, that lecturing quality and satisfaction with the study programme as well as sense of belonging in higher education and close relationships with fellow students are not necessarily linked.

Besides that, students' sense of isolation influences drop-out intentions. While a moderate sense of isolation in general or from family or partner appears to reduce drop-out intentions, moderate isolation from friends nearly doubles students' drop-out intentions. Isolation is, therefore, not always a factor contributing to attrition, but it depends on the specific groups students feel isolated from.

Table 1. Logistic Regression of Factors Influencing Students' Drop-Out Intention – All Students Enrolled in Programmes in the Field of Education

Variables in the Equation	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Age – up to 21 years			2.346	3	0.504	
Age – 22 – < 25 years	-0.009	0.189	0.002	1	0.960	0.991
Age – 25 – < 30 years	-0.023	0.235	0.010	1	0.921	0.977
Age – over 30 years	-0.466	0.331	1.979	1	0.159	0.627
Study intensity – low intensity			2.689	2	0.261	
Study intensity – medium intensity	-0.303	0.185	2.689	1	0.101	0.739
Study intensity – high intensity	-0.209	0.223	0.878	1	0.349	0.812
Number of hours students working from time to time OR during the whole lecture period including non-working students – 0h			9.707	2	0.008	
Number of hours students working from time to time OR during the whole lecture period including non-working students – 1-20h	0.558	0.196	8.109	1	0.004	1.747
Number of hours students working from time to time OR during the whole lecture period including non-working students – > 20h	0.602	0.222	7.371	1	0.007	1.825
Students with/without financial difficulties – with financial difficulties			8.248	2	0.016	

Table continues on the next page

Students with/without financial difficulties – middle category not for analysis	-0.229	0.188	1.490	1	0.222	0.795
Students with/without financial difficulties – without financial difficulties	-0.528	0.184	8.247	1	0.004	0.590
Teaching scale: lecturers give helpful feedback – Strongly agree			5.511	4	0.239	
Teaching scale: lecturers give helpful feedback – 2	-0.342	0.315	1.172	1	0.279	0.711
Teaching scale: lecturers give helpful feedback – 3	-0.331	0.331	1.001	1	0.317	0.718
Teaching scale: lecturers give helpful feedback – 4	0.032	0.357	0.008	1	0.929	1.032
Teaching scale: lecturers give helpful feedback – Do not agree at all	0.225	0.405	0.310	1	0.578	1.253
Teaching scale: lecturers motivate to do best work – Strongly agree			5.140	4	0.273	
Teaching scale: lecturers motivate to do best work – 2	-0.262	0.330	0.629	1	0.428	0.770
Teaching scale: lecturers motivate to do best work – 3	0.145	0.338	0.185	1	0.667	1.156
Teaching scale: lecturers motivate to do best work – 4	-0.228	0.375	0.372	1	0.542	0.796
Teaching scale: lecturers motivate to do best work – Do not agree at all	0.176	0.417	0.179	1	0.672	1.193
Teaching scale: lecturers extremely good at explaining things – Strongly agree			6.777	4	0.148	
Teaching scale: lecturers extremely good at explaining things – 2	-0.394	0.279	2.003	1	0.157	0.674
Teaching scale: lecturers extremely good at explaining things – 3	-0.732	0.303	5.838	1	0.016	0.481
Teaching scale: lecturers extremely good at explaining things – 4	-0.669	0.335	3.987	1	0.046	0.512
Teaching scale: lecturers extremely good at explaining things – Do not agree at all	-0.778	0.392	3.931	1	0.047	0.459
SAIC scale: knows a lot of fellow students to discuss subject-related questions – Strongly agree			10.007	4	0.040	
SAIC scale: knows a lot of fellow students to discuss subject-related questions – 2	-0.462	0.226	4.161	1	0.041	0.630

Table continues on the next page

SAIC scale: knows a lot of fellow students to discuss subject-related questions – 3	-0.524	0.258	4.108	1	0.043	0.592
SAIC scale: knows a lot of fellow students to discuss subject-related questions – 4	0.049	0.235	0.044	1	0.834	1.050
SAIC scale: knows a lot of fellow students to discuss subject-related questions – Do not agree at all	-0.389	0.291	1.786	1	0.181	0.678
Assessment of study setting and content: I would recommend my current main study programme – Strongly agree			43.901	4	0.000	
Assessment of study setting and content: I would recommend my current main study programme – 2	-0.132	0.262	0.254	1	0.614	0.876
Assessment of study setting and content: I would recommend my current main study programme – 3	0.354	0.268	1.746	1	0.186	1.425
Assessment of study setting and content: I would recommend my current main study programme – 4	0.347	0.309	1.262	1	0.261	1.415
Assessment of study setting and content: I would recommend my current main study programme – Do not agree at all	1.481	0.283	27.487	1	0.000	4.399
Assessment of study setting and content: I often have the feeling that I don not really belong in higher education – Strongly agree			180.640	4	0.000	
Assessment of study setting and content: I often have the feeling that I don not really belong in higher education – 2	-1.178	0.209	31.713	1	0.000	0.308
Assessment of study setting and content: I often have the feeling that I don not really belong in higher education – 3	-1.759	0.226	60.705	1	0.000	0.172
Assessment of study setting and content: I often have the feeling that I don not really belong in higher education – 4	-2.205	0.249	78.547	1	0.000	0.110
Assessment of study setting and content: I often have the feeling that I don not really belong in higher education – Do not agree at all	-3.095	0.261	140.736	1	0.000	0.045
Assessment of study setting and content: It was always clear I would study in higher education one day – Strongly agree			0.852	4	0.931	
Assessment of study setting and content: It was always clear I would study in higher education one day – 2	0.017	0.208	0.006	1	0.937	1.017

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Assessment of study setting and content: It was always clear I would study in higher education one day – 3	0.006	0.234	0.001	1	0.980	1.006
Assessment of study setting and content: It was always clear I would study in higher education one day – 4	-0.238	0.300	0.631	1	0.427	0.788
Assessment of study setting and content: It was always clear I would study in higher education one day – Do not agree at all	-0.103	0.258	0.160	1	0.689	0.902
Rated chance of obtaining an adequate job on the national level after graduating from current study programme – Very good			14.697	5	0.012	
Rated chance of obtaining an adequate job on the national level after graduating from current study programme – 2	-0.099	0.217	0.209	1	0.647	0.906
Rated chance of obtaining an adequate job on the national level after graduating from current study programme – 3	0.041	0.239	0.029	1	0.864	1.042
Rated chance of obtaining an adequate job on the national level after graduating from current study programme – 4	0.385	0.284	1.828	1	0.176	1.469
Rated chance of obtaining an adequate job on the national level after graduating from current study programme – Very poor	0.768	0.260	8.717	1	0.003	2.154
Rated chance of obtaining an adequate job on the national level after graduating from current study programme – Unable to rate	0.544	0.318	2.930	1	0.087	1.724
What is your sex? – male	0.139	0.175	0.633	1	0.426	1.149
Do you have any children? – yes	0.077	0.310	0.061	1	0.804	1.080
How often do you feel isolated: from fellow students in your study programme – All of the time			2.716	4	0.606	
How often do you feel isolated: from fellow students in your study programme – 2	-0.196	0.241	0.662	1	0.416	0.822
How often do you feel isolated: from fellow students in your study programme – 3	0.093	0.256	0.133	1	0.716	1.098
How often do you feel isolated: from fellow students in your study programme – 4	-0.226	0.305	0.548	1	0.459	0.798

Table continues on the next page

How often do you feel isolated: from fellow students in your study programme – Never	0.017	0.320	0.003	1	0.959	1.017
How often do you feel isolated: from your family/partner – All of the time			13.357	4	0.010	
How often do you feel isolated: from your family/partner – 2	-0.115	0.364	0.100	1	0.752	0.891
How often do you feel isolated: from your family/partner – 3	-0.935	0.373	6.267	1	0.012	0.393
How often do you feel isolated: from your family/partner – 4	-0.482	0.366	1.731	1	0.188	0.618
How often do you feel isolated: from your family/partner – Never	-0.695	0.378	3.383	1	0.066	0.499
How often do you feel isolated: from your friends – All of the time			4.246	4	0.374	
How often do you feel isolated: from your friends – 2	0.434	0.325	1.779	1	0.182	1.543
How often do you feel isolated: from your friends – 3	0.680	0.340	4.007	1	0.045	1.974
How often do you feel isolated: from your friends – 4	0.482	0.361	1.788	1	0.181	1.620
How often do you feel isolated: from your friends – Never	0.598	0.391	2.338	1	0.126	1.819
How often do you feel isolated: from others in general – All of the time			12.444	4	0.014	
How often do you feel isolated: from others in general – 2	-0.291	0.276	1.112	1	0.292	0.747
How often do you feel isolated: from others in general – 3	-0.671	0.295	5.185	1	0.023	0.511
How often do you feel isolated: from others in general – 4	-1.087	0.352	9.517	1	0.002	0.337
How often do you feel isolated: from others in general – Never	-0.390	0.349	1.245	1	0.265	0.677
WHO-5– 51 or higher	-0.169	0.178	0.909	1	0.341	0.844
Constant	-0.346	0.480	0.521	1	0.470	0.707

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Age, Study intensity, Number of hours students working from time to time OR during the whole lecture period including non-working students (0h), Students with/without financial difficulties, Teaching scale: lecturers give helpful feedback, Teaching scale: lecturers motivate to do best work, Teaching scale: lecturers extremely good at explaining things, SAIC scale: knows a lot of fellow students to discuss subject-related questions, Assessment of study setting and content: I would recommend my current main study programme, Assessment of study setting and content: I often have the feeling that I do not really belong in higher education, Assessment of study setting and content: It was always clear I would study in higher education one day, Rated chance of obtaining an adequate job on the national level after graduating from current study programme, What is your sex?, Do you have any children?, How often do you feel isolated: from fellow students in your study programme?, How often do you feel isolated: from your family/partner?, How often do you feel isolated: from your friends?, How often do you feel isolated: from others in general?, WHO-5.

Conclusions

EUROSTUDENT 8 micro data (Cuppen et al., 2024) shows that well-being is not significantly associated with dropout of students enrolled in programmes in the field of education on the multivariate level. However, other indicators are. These include students' finances, work as well as students' social and academic integration. While these aspects are related to student well-being, the findings have shown that it is not well-being as such that contributes to drop-out intentions. Besides that, student well-being is related to various aspects of life in the context of the studies as well as outside the context of the studies, which make it hard to address the problem. At the same time finances, work or academic and social integration are issues where policy-makers and HEI can take action at the national or institutional level to improve student life.

The data indicated financial difficulties and work engagements alongside studies as factors influencing drop-out intentions. In view of concerns regarding teacher shortages and teacher attrition, policy-makers should, therefore, consider providing financial support or financial incentives for students enrolled in programmes in the field of

education. This could contribute to increasing the attractiveness of teacher trainee programmes and reduce the reliance on paid jobs during studies, which could help to decrease drop-out intentions of students enrolled in programmes in the field of education.

Higher education institutions offering teacher trainee programmes should investigate the profile of their students and work proactively to mitigate student drop-out. EUROSTUDENT 8 data indicated that students' sense of belonging and satisfaction with the study programme appear to significantly influence drop-out intentions. This will enable higher education institutions to provide targeted support to students at higher risk of considering dropping out of their studies. Considering that drop-out intentions are also linked to work commitments and financial difficulties, initiatives by higher education institutions to support students could include reviewing the workload or modality of study programmes offered, a more flexible study modality that allows for combining studies with work commitments, the recognition of prior learning or work integrated learning initiatives.

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About EUROSTUDENT

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 here stem from the eighth round of the EUROSTUDENT project (2021–2024).

Countries participating in EUROSTUDENT

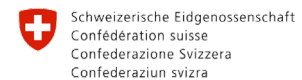
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