

Introduction

The Erasmus+ Mobility Programme (EMP) was established in 1987. It aims to promote both intercultural cooperation and communication, and the development of higher education at a European level⁽¹⁾. The programme has had over 4 million participants⁽²⁾, but the rates of participation by Portuguese students are low⁽⁴⁾. This is also the case for STEM students across the EU member states⁽³⁾. Therefore, it is pertinent to analyse the profile of these students.

The first EMP for Orthoptics and Vision Sciences (OVS) students at the Lisbon School of Health Technology (ESTeSL) took place in 2003. The Países de Língua Oficial Portuguesa Mobility Programme (PMP), a mobility between ESTeSL and Portuguese-speaking African countries, began in 2016.

Objectives

- To characterise the participants in the EMP and PMP mobility programmes between 2009/10 and 2019/20
- To identify participants' preferred fields of study
- To emphasise the advantages of EMP and PMP for OVS students at ESTeSL according to students
- To understand the students motivations for selecting ESTeSL as their destination university
- To determine the student's satisfaction

Methods

Target population: students who participated in the EMP and PMP at ESTeSL between 2009 and 2019.

Sample: 66 students aged between 20-28, from Portugal, Cape Verde and Italy, who participated in mobility programmes to ESTeSL (incoming) and from ESTeSL (outgoing).

The population was characterised using a retrospective quantitative and descriptive study. The sample information was obtained from the ESTeSL Department of International Relations database and a questionnaire with open and closed questions and questions using the likert scale. Sections included: motivations for choosing ESTeSL; the quality of the support services; teaching and facilities; module teaching methods; and general satisfaction with both personal and academic experience.

Google forms was used to produce the questionnaire. GNU SPSS statistics[®] and Microsoft Excel[®] were used for statistical analysis. This study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by the ESTeSL Ethics Board.

Population Characteristics

Population: Between 2009-2019 66 students participated in EMP and PMP, constituting the total sample in this study.

Age range: 20-28 years (mean: 22.33 ± 1.56).

Graph 1

Distribution of gender by incoming/outgoing mobility

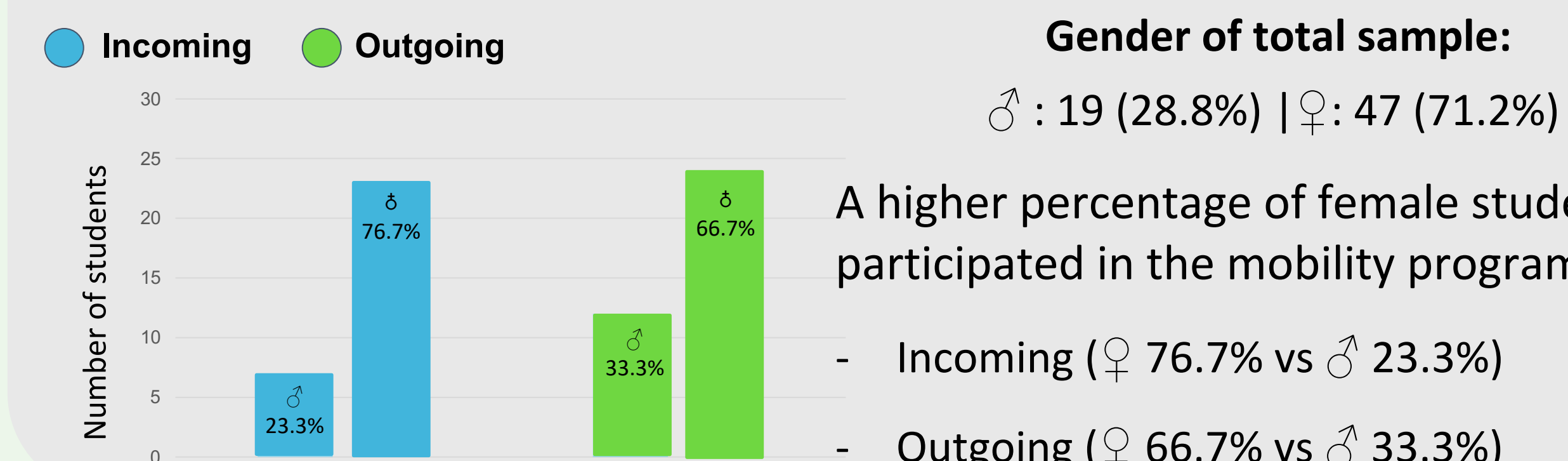


Figure 1

Home and destination countries of the incoming and outgoing students

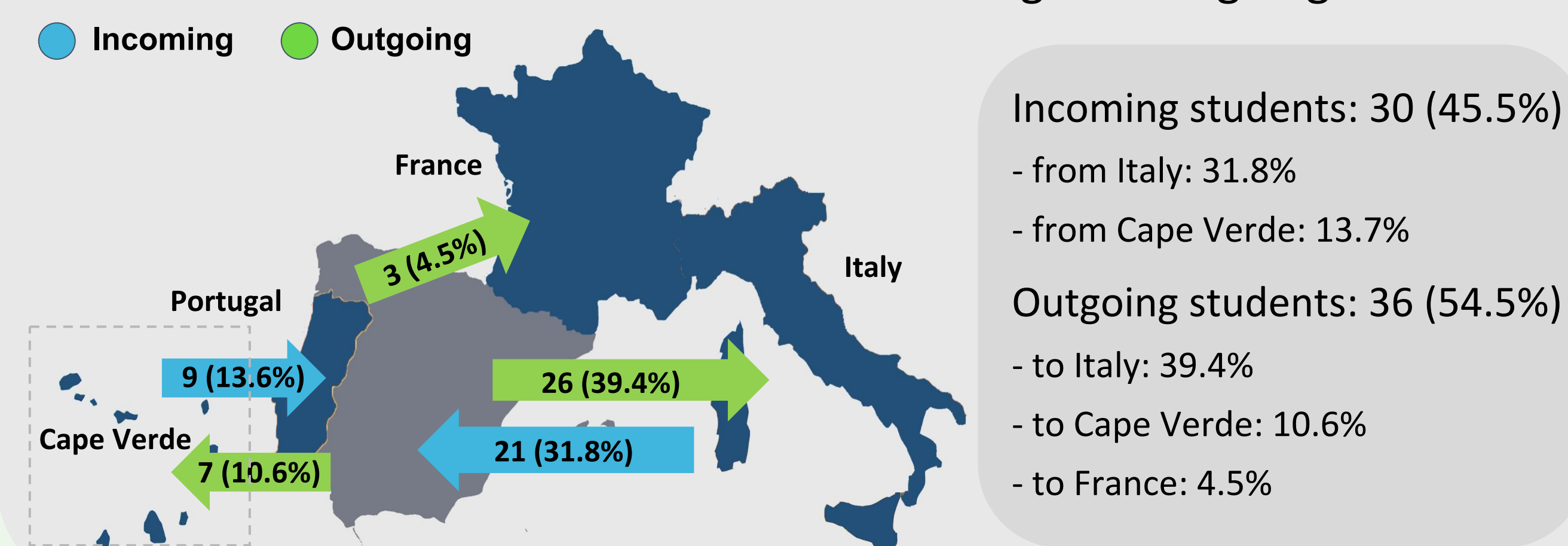
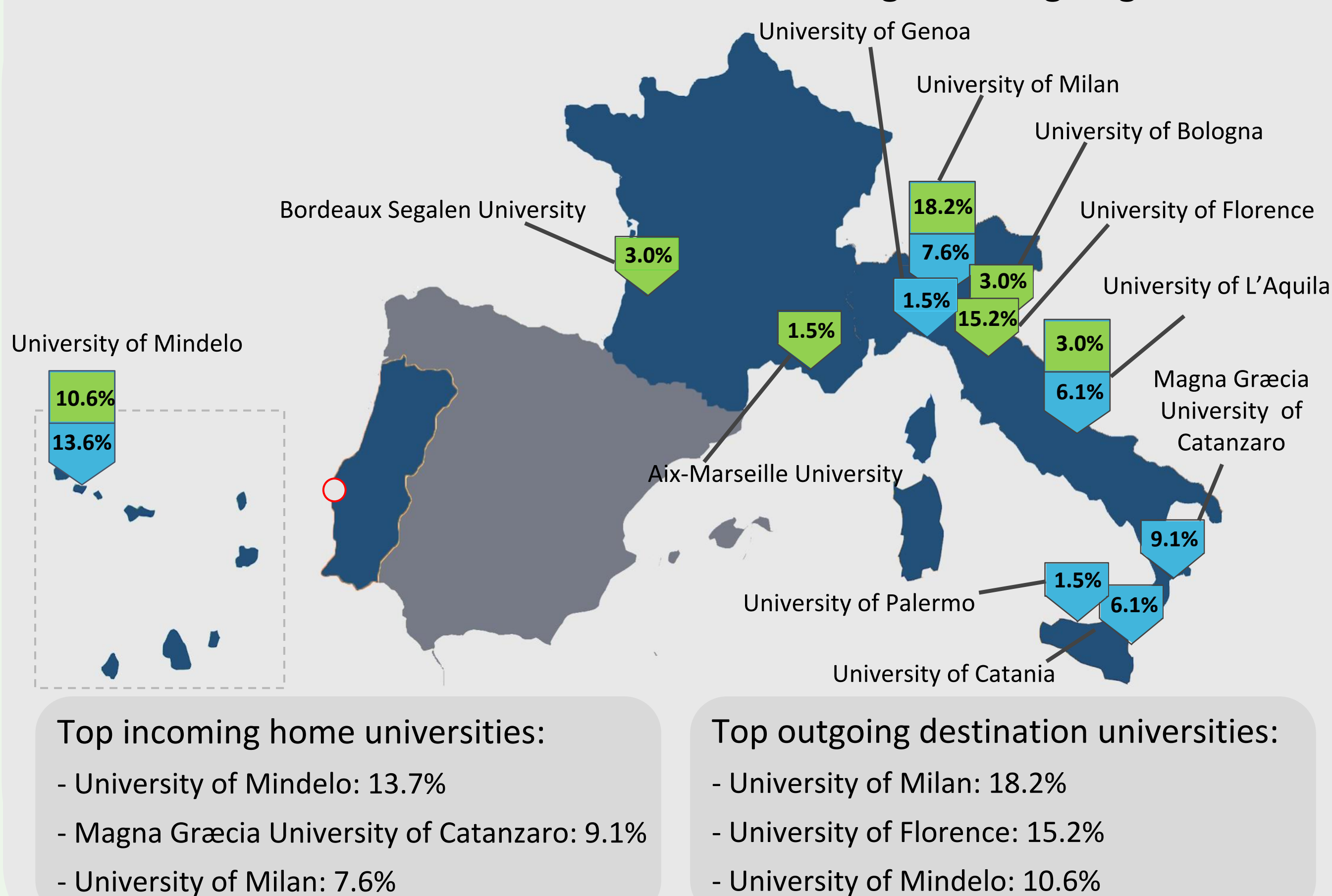


Figure 2

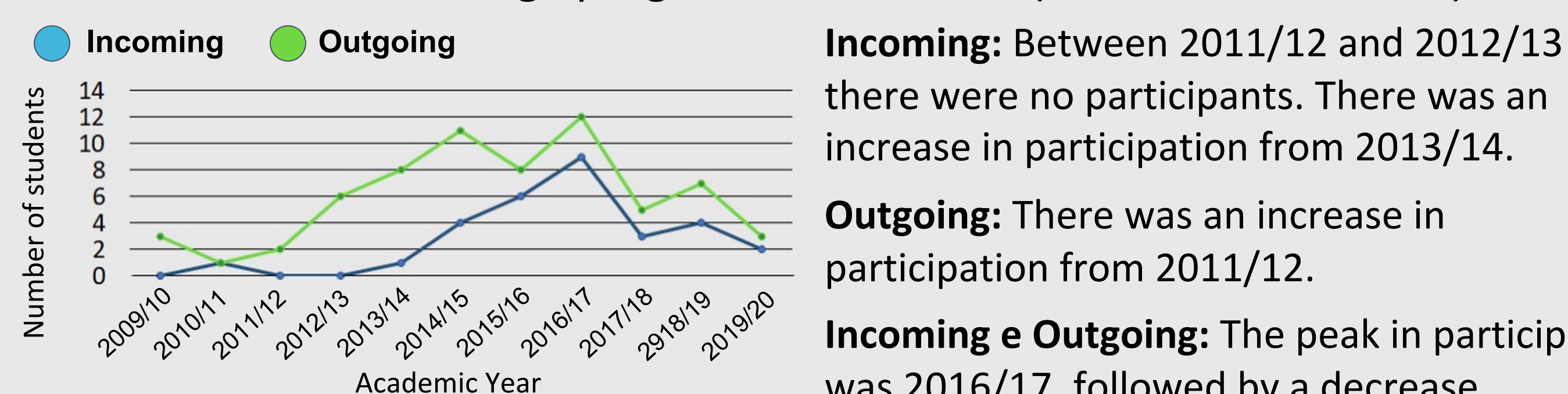
Home and destination universities of the incoming and outgoing students



Results

Graph 2

Evolution of the exchange programme with time (2009/10 to 2019/20)



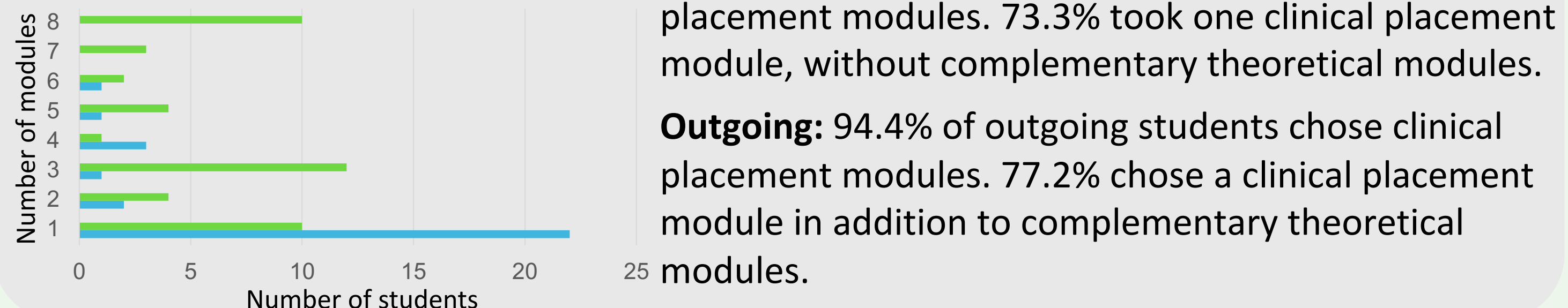
Incoming: Between 2011/12 and 2012/13 there were no participants. There was an increase in participation from 2013/14.

Outgoing: There was an increase in participation from 2011/12.

Incoming e Outgoing: The peak in participation was 2016/17, followed by a decrease.

Figure 4

Modules taken



Incoming: 93.3% of incoming students chose clinical placement modules. 73.3% took one clinical placement module, without complementary theoretical modules.

Outgoing: 94.4% of outgoing students chose clinical placement modules. 77.2% chose a clinical placement module in addition to complementary theoretical modules.

Questionnaire for incoming students

Respondents: 17 out of 30 incoming students

Age range: 20-28 years (mean: 22.33 ± 1.56)

Gender : ♂ : 2 (11,8%) | ♀ : 15 (88.2%)

Home country: Italy: 13 (76.5%) | Cape Verde: 4 (23.5%)

Figure 5

Motivations for choosing ESTeSL

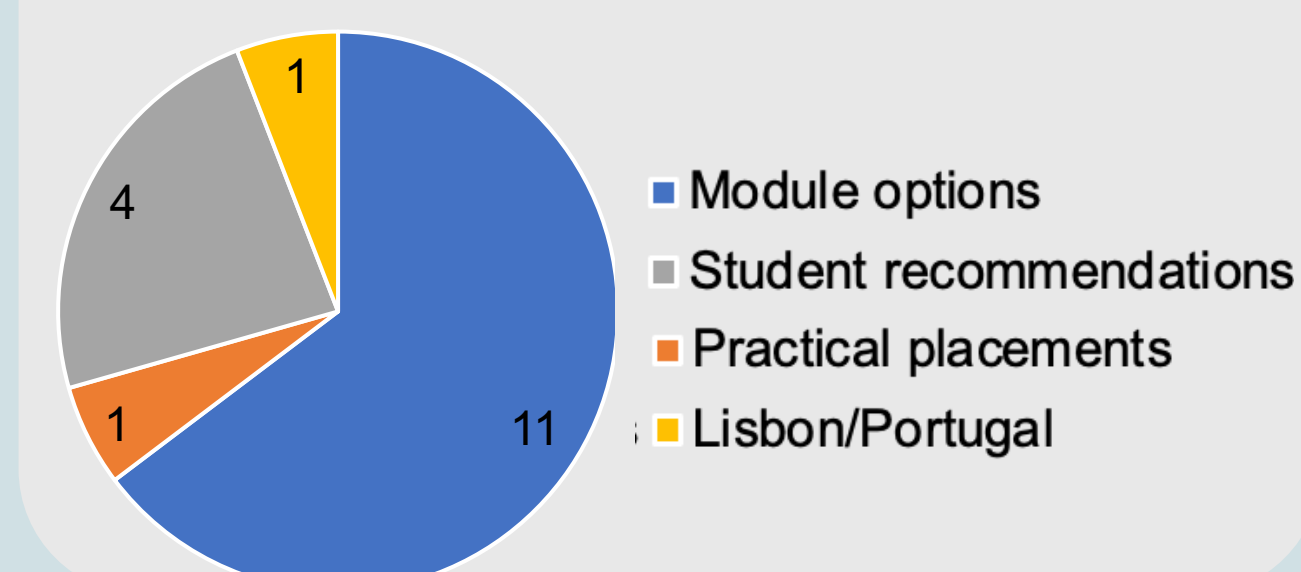


Figure 6

ESTeSL's support services before and during the mobility period

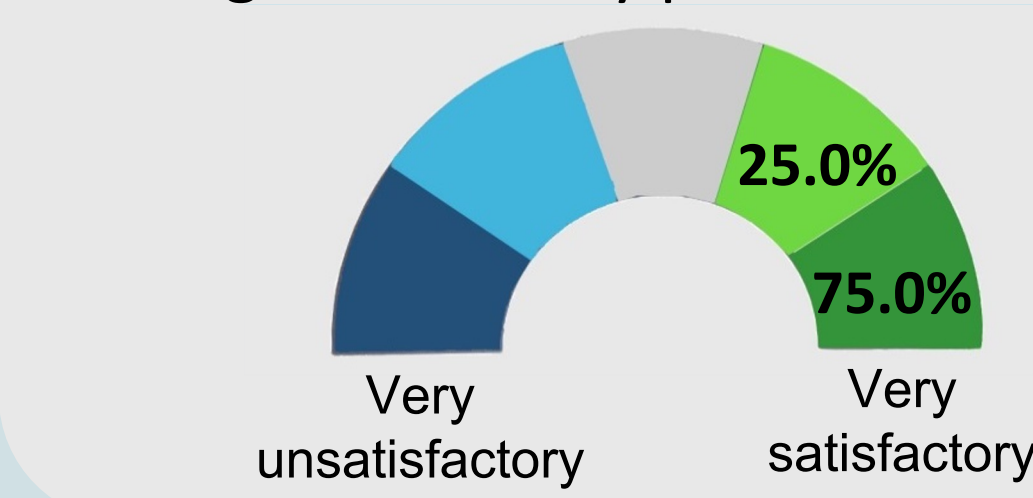


Figure 6

Communication with the mobility coordinator

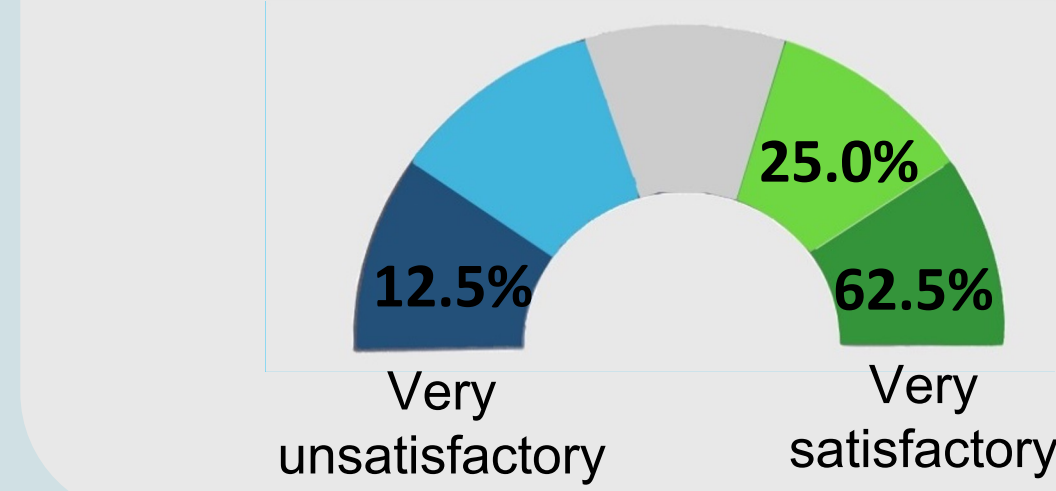


Figure 8

Quality of teaching at ESTeSL

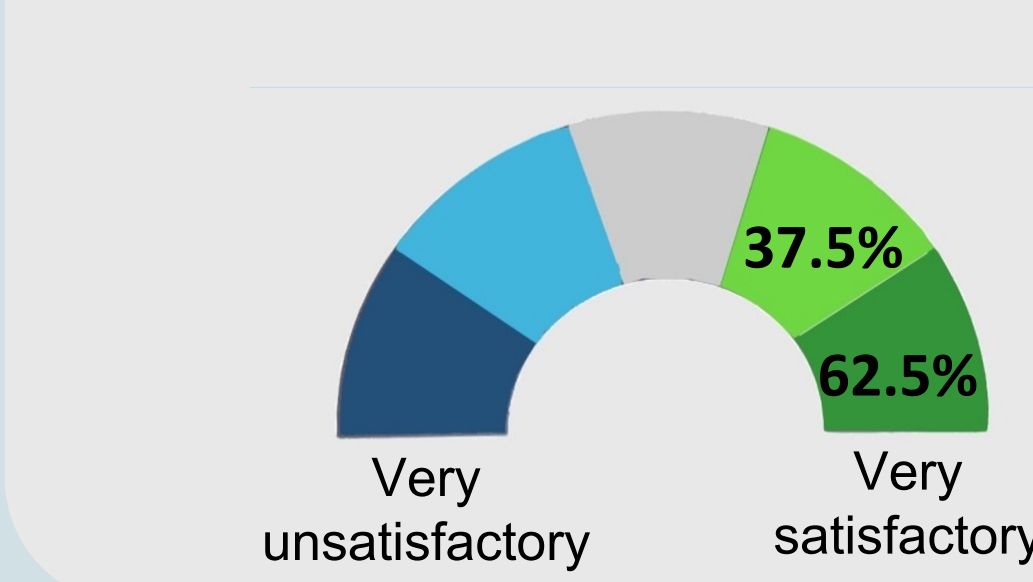


Figure 9

ESTeSL's facilities

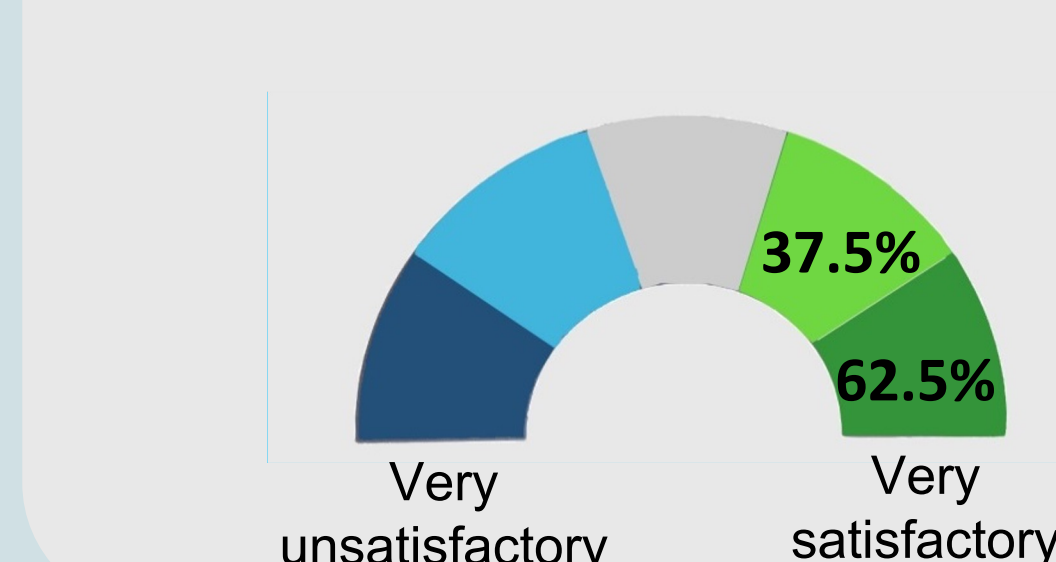
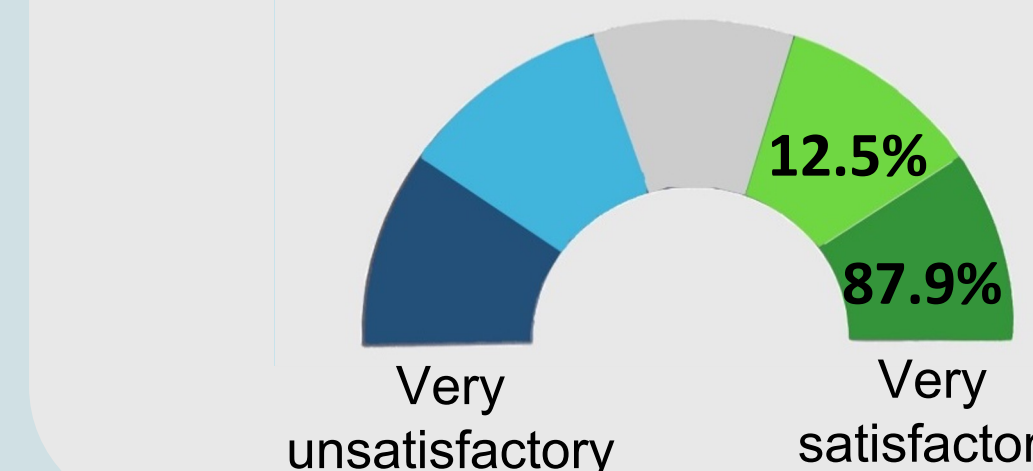


Figure 10

General satisfaction with the mobility experience at ESTeSL



Discussion/Conclusion

Mobility student profile:

Incoming: ♀, 22 years old from Italy (EMP) or Cape Verde (PMP). Preference for clinical placement modules, without complementary theoretical modules.

Outgoing: ♀, 22 years old from Portugal. Italy was the most popular destination country, and the University of Milan followed by the University of Florence were the most frequently destination universities. Preference for clinical placement modules with complementary theoretical modules.

Souto Otero e McCoshen (2006) found a slight majority of female students (60%) in a sample of EMP students⁽⁵⁾. Other studies indicate that the typical Erasmus student is under the age of 25⁽³⁾. In this study, the majority of students were female (71.2%) with a mean age of 22.33 ± 1.56.

Main motivations for choosing ESTeSL as a destination institution

The module choice at ESTeSL was the main motivation (62.5%). Previous studies found that personal development, language skills and the opportunity to live in another country were more important motivations for participating in Erasmus+ than academic or professional reasons^(5,6).

Overall satisfaction: 54.5% of all responses in the questionnaire relating to personal and academic experience were "very satisfactory". The responses reflect a positive overall experience, in line with what is reported by other authors^(1,6,7).

Advantages of mobility programs in the OCV degree at ESTeSL: both the overall satisfaction level of the students (87.9%) show that the mobility experience at ESTeSL is positive and beneficial, both academically and personally. These results are in line with other studies on EMP^(1,6,7).

Limitations of the Study

- A higher response rate to the questionnaire by incoming students would have provided a more comprehensive assessment of their experience at ESTeSL.

- Future studies could characterise the profile of incoming and outgoing orthoptics students at European level, determine the levels of satisfaction and barriers to participation in mobility programs.

References

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