



R O A M I N G

ROAMING PROJECT IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS

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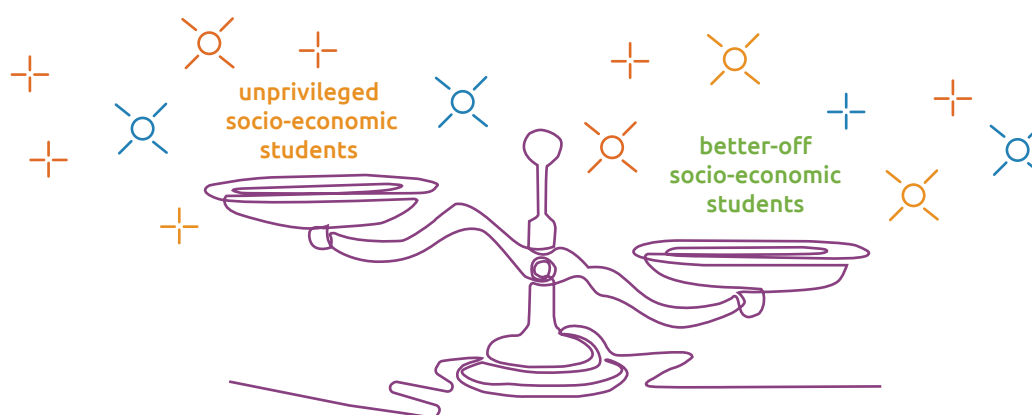


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Introduction and Rationale

ROAMING PROJECT IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS

The **ROAMING** project (*Strengthening International Staff & Student Mobility Offices in the West Balkans*) was conceived in response to the European Commission's commitment to reinforce **ERASMUS+** programme "in particular by reaching out to increasing numbers of people with fewer opportunities²" (European Commission 22.10.2021). It was grounded in the realization that, while cross-border student and staff mobility are key **peace-building** (Gérard & Sanna 2017), and **democratic development** instrument among European and non-European countries (Chankseliani 2018), as well as driver for the **circulation of ideas**, **innovation** and **graduates**, its growth partially as a result of mobility promotion and funding instruments as **ERASMUS+** was shown to be **unbalanced**.



¹ This reflection was compiled based on data produced by all project partners, consolidated by the partners in charge of each of the project's Work Packages.

² "People with fewer opportunities means people who, for economic, social, cultural, geographical or health reasons, a migrant background, or for reasons such as disability and educational difficulties or for any other reasons, including those that can give rise to discrimination under article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental rights of the European Union, face obstacles that prevent them from having effective access to opportunities under the programme" (European Commission. N.d.).



The most worrying is that students from unprivileged socio-economic backgrounds are less inclined to student mobility than students from better-off socio-economic backgrounds (Schnepf & Colagrossi 2020), thereby turning **ERASMUS+** to some sort of social selection mechanism. Other studies suggest that the social and geographical segregation of certain Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) contributed to the unbalanced mobility pattern (cf., Di Pietro 2023; Perkins & Neumayer 2014) and call for more equal mobility uptakes across universities through tailored incentives. Empirical research among the project's partners indicated that reduced mobility uptake in remote and socially segregated HEIs also corresponds with lesser capacities of International Relations Offices (IROs).

YEAR Up to	LOGOS		POLIS		IBC-M		RIT-K		UNIMED		UOWN		IUST	
	COO	BE	COO	BE	COO	BE	COO	BE	COO	BE	COO	BE	COO	BE
2023	0	0	2	2	3	3	0	1	0	6	3	7	0	0
2025	3	3	3	18	5	18	2	4	1	15	34	16	1	1

Table 1: Table recording the number of international projects per partner upon the ROAMING project's start and at its end.

Project Implementation and Key Activities

In the context, the **ROAMING** project aimed at reducing the unbalanced international mobility uptake of remote and less privileged HEIs in the West Balkans by strengthening the capacity of their IROs, thereby enhancing their internationalization profile. To this end, we established a consortium with a mix of experienced and inexperienced HEIs from the West Balkans in matters related to international mobility from Albania, Kosovo³ and Montenegro, willing to cooperate with an experienced university from an **ERASMUS** member country and another university from an associated country to the **ERASMUS+** programme, North Macedonia. The consortium was composed by seven partner HEIs. The table above and its associated clustered column chart visualizing it is indicative of the partners' success. It should also be noted that in many post-2023 projects selected for CBHE funding many of the **ROAMING** project's partners agreed to join forces, thereby pointing to a sustained networking benefit, on which this project's partners capitalized.

³ Name after UN Resolution 1407 (2002).

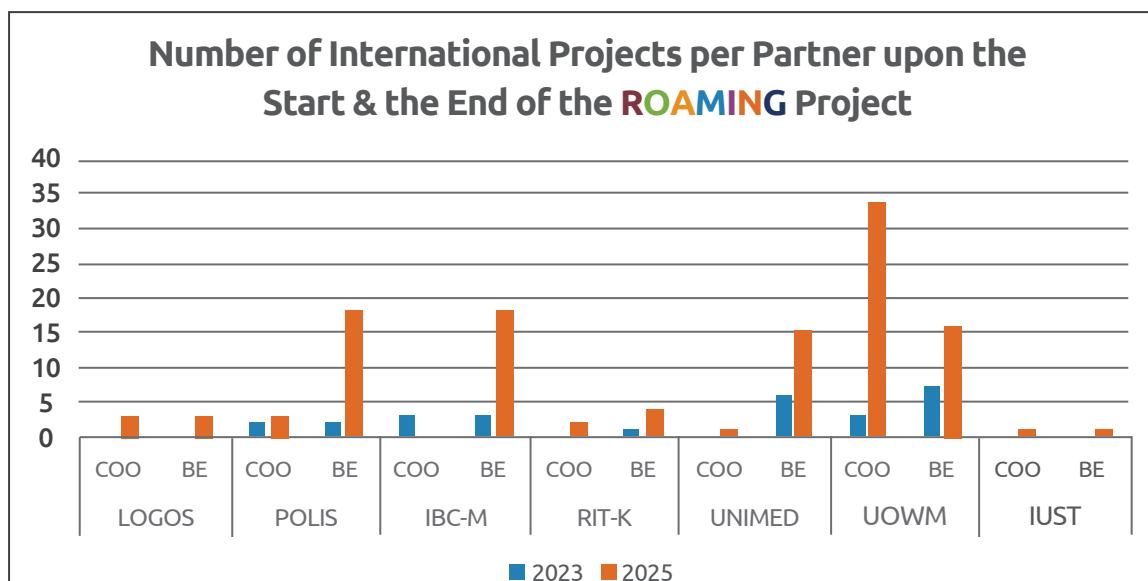


Chart 1: Clustered column chart of the number of international projects per Partner upon the Start & the End of the ROAMING Project

Measurable Impact and Achievements

The apparent success is certainly not to be exclusively attributed to the ROAMING project. Its contribution, however, can be tracked upon consideration of the project's specific objectives. Two were set to be the project's specific objectives. First, a more efficient integration of participating HEIs' Internationalization Strategy with their International Credit Mobility (ICM) policy and university credit transfer pursuant ICM. Second, the very strengthening of the capacity of the participating HEIs' IROs.

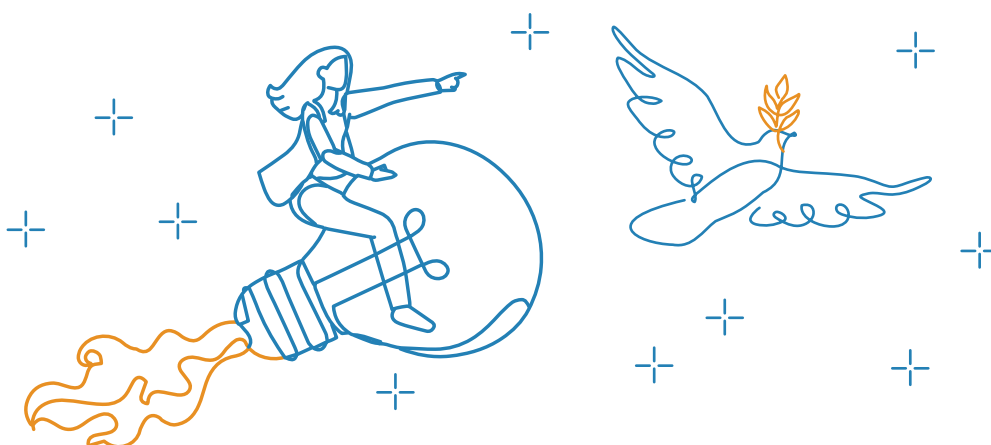
The first objective was pursued by way of two study visits (Deliverable D-2.1), one to the EU-country participating HEI (UOWM) and the other to the participating HEI from North Macedonia (IUS) to study best models and practices in situ, as well as to engage in critical and reflective exchanges with the more experienced of the partners and each other. The aim was to help partners from the West Balkans (WB) to develop or enhance their own comprehensive internationalization strategic documents with elaborate ICM policy documents and protocols. Fourteen students, faculty and administrative staff with fewer opportunities from third countries not associated to the ERASMUS+ programme participated in these study visits and a total of



fourteen people with fewer opportunities were reached, including those from our **EU** partners and the partner from North Macedonia, a country associated to the programme. All five WB partners developed, institutionally validated and operationalized **ICM** protocols (D-2.3) integrated within institutional strategic documents, incorporating special provisions to allow for equal and equitable access by students and staff.



The latter objective was envisaged to be accomplished through **policy interventions** (cf. D-2.3), **physical and technical infrastructural enhancement** (D-2.5) and **human capacity building** through six training workshops (D-3.2 – D-3.6). Beyond the five ICM protocols developed, the technical infrastructure capacity of their IROs was enhanced. The specification of training content and the training materials of these workshops were **collaboratively** crafted in advance (D-2.4 & D-3.1). 232 students, faculty and administrative staff with fewer opportunities from third countries not associated with the **ERASMUS+** programme participated in these study visits.



The five IRO Chairs of WB partners were among the most targeted groups of trainees for the purpose of utilizing enhanced capacity to the benefit of relevant stakeholders. To this end, two International Mobility Weeks (IMWs) were held in 2023 and 2024. The first of these was provisioned in the project's activities, while the latter was included in the project's sustained benefits. Their dates were set on the **ERASMUS Days**, thereby denoting participation in the set of annual events celebrating the **ERASMUS+** program.



While international mobility promotional events had been regularly organized by every partner HEI individually, it was thought that, beyond standard and HEI-specific presentations (partnerships, mobility numbers, procedures of selection, mobility conduct and recognition of credits) that continued to be held individually, the addition of a joint online component of events involving all partners,

especially international, would strengthen the international visibility and experience of such events, thereby enhancing the appeal of what is celebrated. The content of this joint component was designed collaboratively and included not only presentations of standard international mobility procedures (e.g., application, the emotional flows of international mobility, support structures, testimonials, etc.), but also presentations of the means to enable international mobility for groups with fewer opportunities (Ms Mimika Dobroshi, Head of Kosovo **ERASMUS+** Office, 2023) and how these groups can be effectively supported to engage in a successful international mobility experience (Ms Brikena Avdyli, RIT-K, 2023 and Prof. Marita Flagler-Nika, Shippensburg University, 2024). The success of both IMWs, as evidenced by their total reach of 2232 people, 328 of whom from target-inclusive WB countries, convinced the ROAMING project partners to commit to sustain this event even beyond the project's life cycle.

International Mobility Weeks were not the sole means of reaching target groups for international mobility under the **ERASMUS+** instruments. The **ROAMING** project’s mass communication media outlets proved to be conducive to the project’s aim and objectives. Throughout the project’s lifecycle, the **ROAMING** website (**ROAMING** 2025-Web) reached 954 unique users, to which a score of 2.2 was set Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) is likely to have contributed, although we do not know the actual number of people in need of website accessibility accommodations who accessed the project’s webpage. The project’s Facebook profile (**ROAMING** 2025-FB) proved to be a successful tool of promoting the project’s outputs, as evidenced by table 2, below:

Reach	Likes & Reactions	Comment	Shares	Impressions	Interactions	Link Clicks
47189	2127	10	104	54025	2035	56

Table 2: **ROAMING** Project’s Facebook Profile Reach, 2023-2025

The segmentation of the Facebook profile’s followers in terms of gender and age (Graph 1) is indicative of a satisfactory reach of the project’s principal groups.

Audience

Lifetime

Followers ⓘ

172

Age and gender

Men 39.40%

Women 60.60%

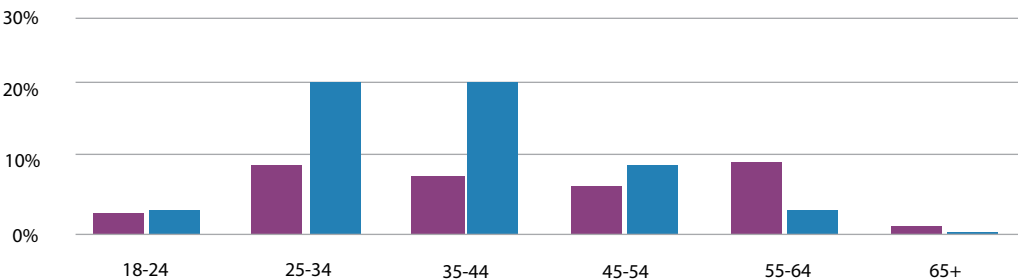


Chart 2: Clustered Column Chart of the **ROAMING** project’s Facebook page followers’ gender and age

The project's Instagram and LinkedIn sites (Tables 3-4) were also conducive to the project's visibility.

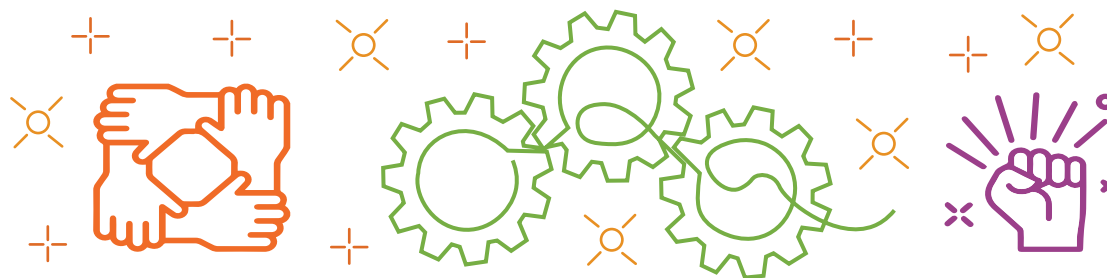
Reach (unique account views)	Views/ Impressions	Reactions/ Engagement	Shares
14008	16622	2658	79

Table 3: **ROAMING** Project's Instagram Profile Reach, 2023-2025`

Reactions	Shares/ Reposts	Interactions/ Engagements	Views/ Impressions
347	9	1187	8658

Table 4: Project's LinkedIn Profile Reach, 2023-2025

Several performance indicators measured before the start and since the start of the **ROAMING** project portrayed clear trends of increase in international mobility (Table 5). Such parameters were measured as: the number of **ERASMUS+** Partnerships between WB HEIs with HEIs from EU the EU, to determine whether there was an increase in the international mobility opportunities during the project's lifetime; the number of **capacity-building** trainings on **ERASMUS+** mobility projects conducted before and after the project's start date, to investigate the extent to which skills built in international mobility projects are disseminated through **skills-sharing events**; 3. the overall numbers of incoming and outgoing **international mobilities** (for students, academic and administrative staff), as well as the number of international events aimed at enhancing **cross-cultural** understanding and fostering collaboration. The moderated survey results are portrayed in Table 5 and are also visualized individually in Chart 3 and as a group in Chart 4.



#	Indicator (in numbers)	LOGOS		POLIS		IBC-M		RIT-K		UNIMED	
		To Feb. '23	To Feb. '23	To Feb. '23	To Feb. '23	To Feb. '23	To Feb. '23	To Feb. '23	To Feb. '23	To Feb. '23	To Feb. '23
1	ERASMUS Partnerships between HEI & other HEI's from WBs & EU	8	13	35	80	70	75	3	5	52	60
2	Capacity-building training/workshops/seminars in Erasmus+ mobility projects	8	14	7	15	7	15	2	10	1	4
3	Staff members participating in professional development activities at EU HEIs	0	1	21	42	0	3	120	288	40	72
4	Outgoing LOGOS students and staff to EU partners	47	64	125	188	207	240	120	168	60	38
5	Incoming Erasmus+ students and staff from EU partners	16	42	55	70	73	95	12	72	3	5
6	WB-EU HEIs intercultural events for cross-cultural understanding & collaboration	4	6	3	15	3	6	24	72	2	8

Table 5: ROAMING Project's Impact Indicators measured from the period until the start of the project up to its end (01.02.2023 – 31.01.2025)

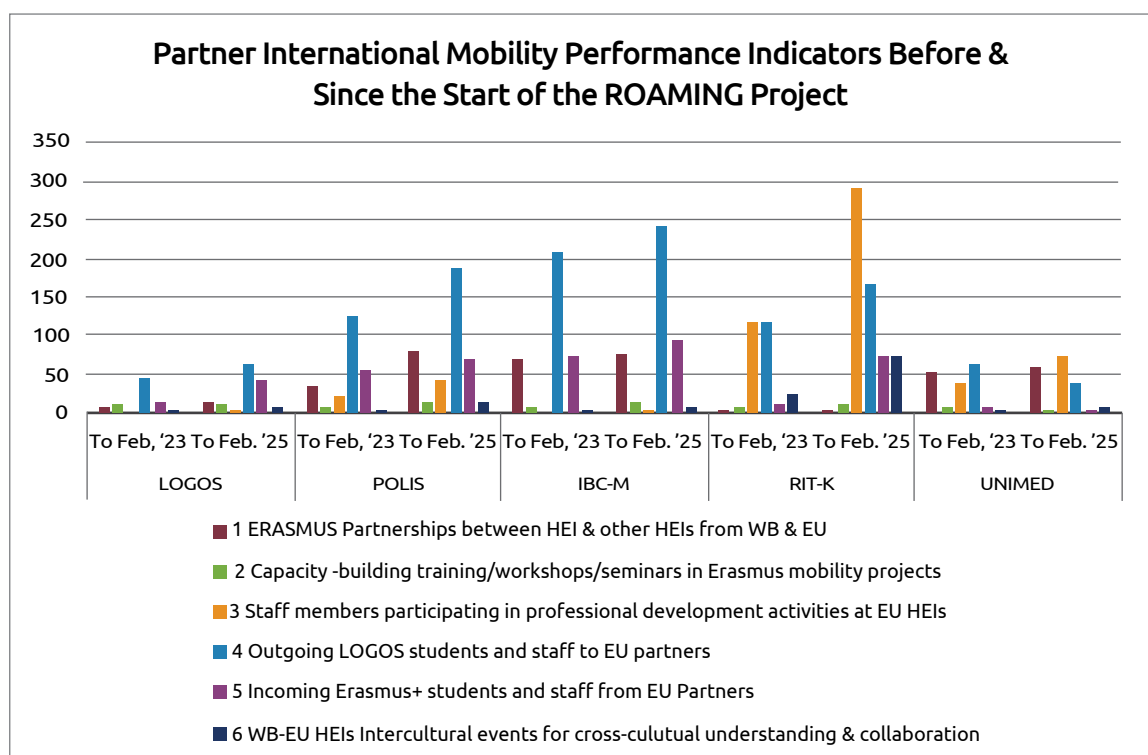


Chart 3: Clustered Column Chart of the ROAMING project's Impact Indicators measured on a partner level at two points: 1. up to 01.02.2023; 2. and up to 31.01.2025.

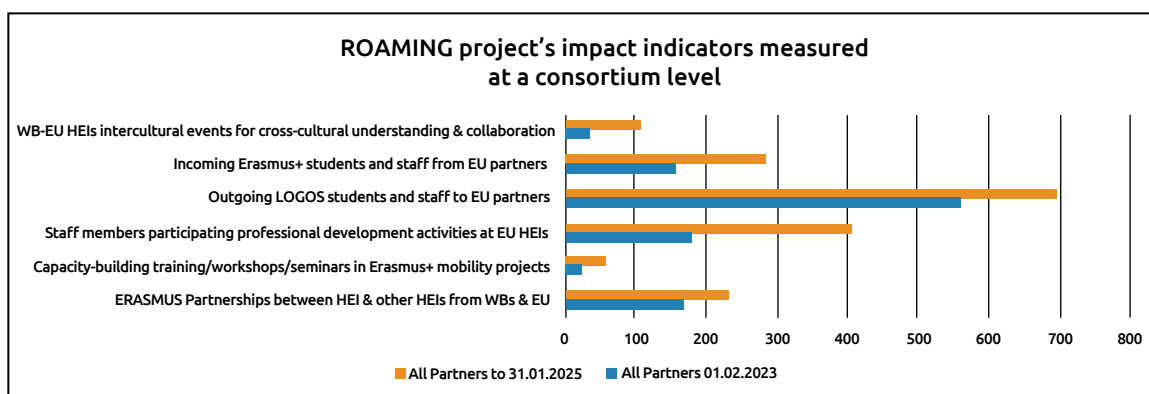


Chart 4: Clustered bar chart visualizing the measurements of key impact indicators of the ROAMING project

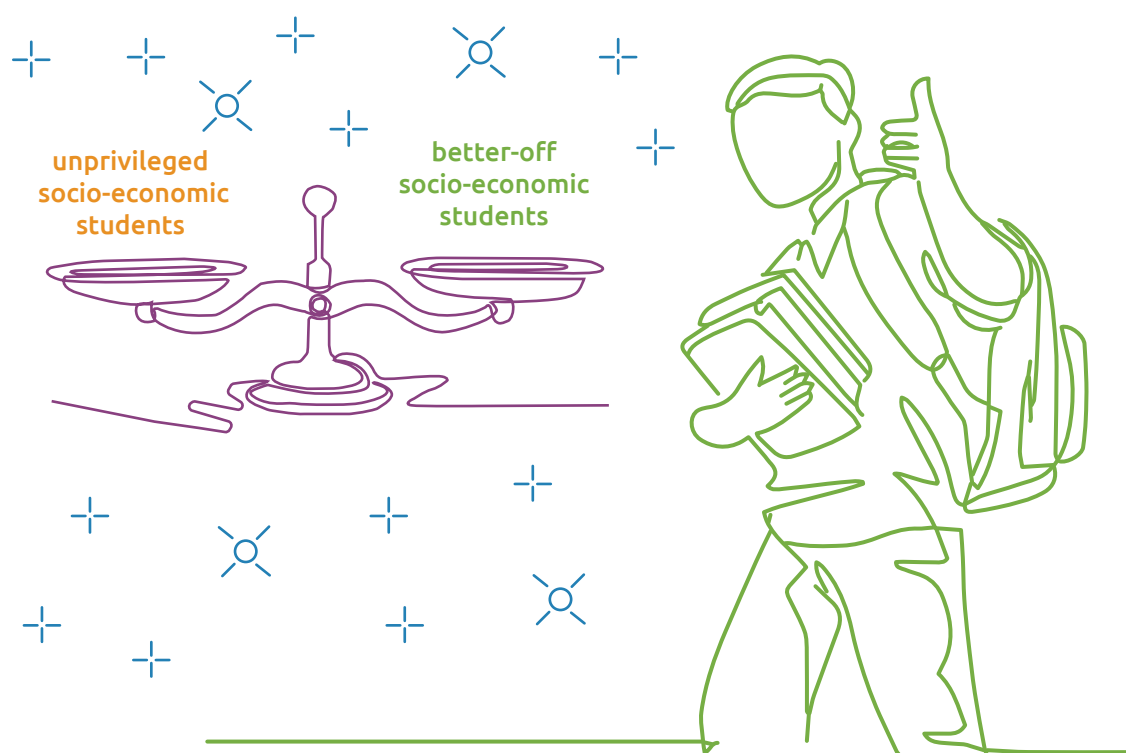
The data above, despite reasonable questions regarding the proper understanding of terms by all partners and the rigour of data collection and moderation, clearly point to a successfully implemented project.

Yet, it should be borne in mind that the relationship between the project's activities and the results presented above is not causal, but rather points to communication as "an asymmetric phenomenon involving causal notions" (López & Lombardi 2019). Back in 2023 the European Higher Education Area had just resurfaced from a prolonged period of precautionary lockouts on account of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which all in-person mobilities were frozen; hence, immediately thereafter there were accumulated funds available for mobilities. Be this as it may, there is no doubt that by the end of the project the International Staff and Student Mobilities Offices of all partner institutions were strengthened, not least in learning ways to accurately reflect student mobilities in Section 6.1 of their **Diploma Supplements**. This was virtually the aim of the project, as its title indicates.



Challenges and Lessons Learned

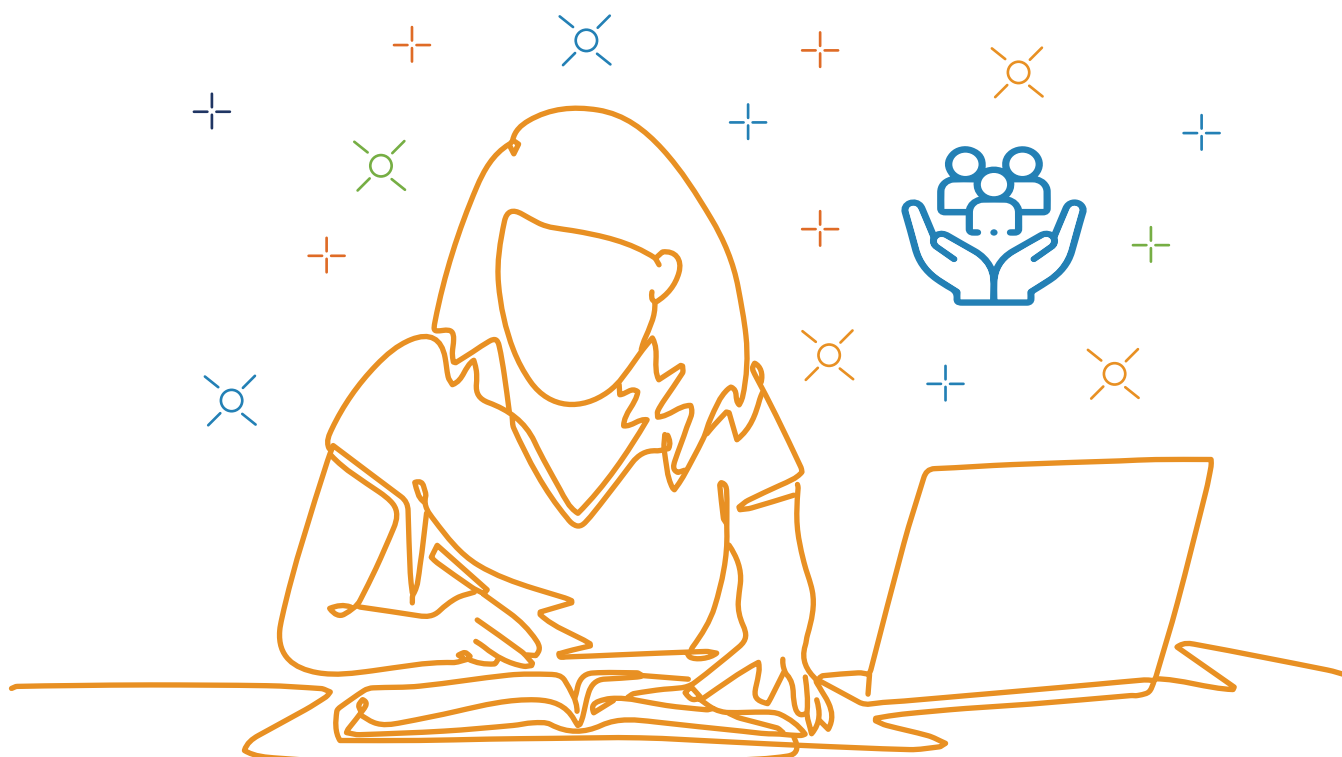
The success of the project notwithstanding, we ought to reflect on the limitations of our intervention, as well as on some practical challenges alongside the ways we addressed them, as they are valid and precious recommendations to policy-makers and HEI administrators. The project consisted of six private HEIs and only one public HEI (UOWM, Greece). Due to their higher tuition fee structures, private HEIs are overall not favourable for students with fewer opportunities, delimiting their number mostly to those who get admitted under some scheme of bursaries. Still, even with their existing numbers, it was observed that people with fewer opportunities, especially students, find it hard to identify as such on account of the personal character of their circumstances, which are usually not externalized and possible fear of social stigma associated with the 'fewer opportunities' label. The second challenge encountered was the major difficulty to convince students with fewer opportunities to engage in international mobility. Students with fewer opportunities are compelled to work at the same time as they study and stay close to or with family. Hence, their bonds of need with their place of study cannot be easily overcome for them to engage in international mobility.



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The project showed that the existence of a committed and dedicated student counselor to cater for the needs of students with fewer opportunities in conditions of intimacy and high level of trust, though not panacea, can be instrumental. We also found out that, in spite of the apparent deficits of a lesser length of mobility, short(er)-term international credit mobilities for students, especially when accompanied by their faculty members, are more likely to accommodate their needs in a way that would not deprive them from the advantages of mobility – an important lesson for **ERASMUS** policy makers and HEIs. Hence, appointing a dedicated and **specialized student counselor** to cater for the needs of students with fewer opportunities, and the utilization of short-term mobility opportunities to convince this type of students to engage in international mobility are two key recommendations the project has drawn for policy-makers and HEIs.



Student counselor

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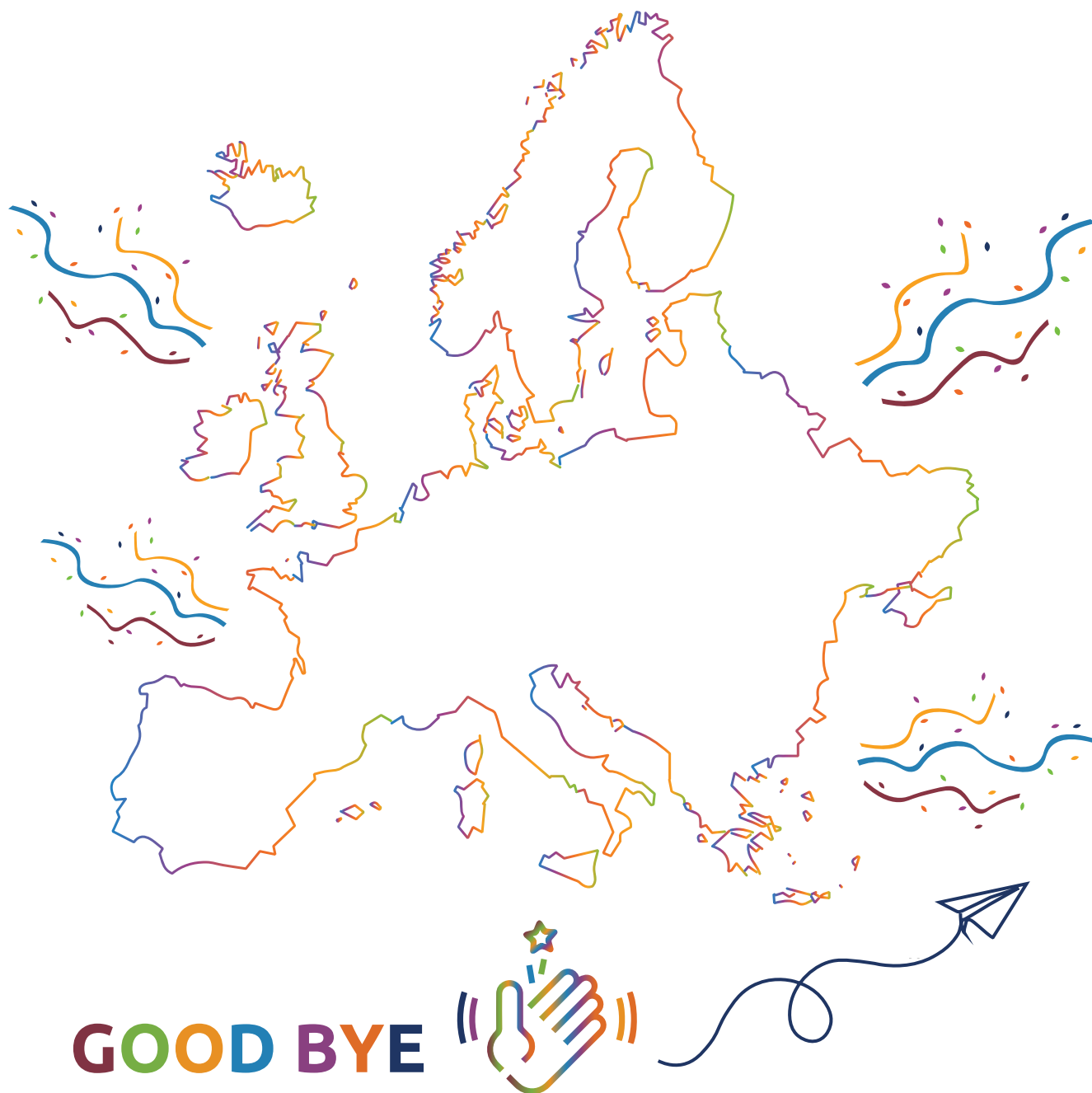
Reflecting on the **ROAMING** project's experience also draws many valuable lessons for the consortium members. Early relationship-building with project partners, establishing clear project management frameworks, and operationalizing these at the start of the project were invaluable. Additionally, while WhatsApp group communications can be intrusive, they proved essential for swift communication, reinforcing the importance of flexible communication methods. We also learned the benefits of balancing team dynamics by involving less experienced members alongside senior team members, allowing us to build internal capacity within each institution. Last but not least, team bonding activities were another key takeaway, helping us lay a foundation for effective collaboration, not only during the project but for future initiatives.



Conclusion and Future Perspectives

To conclude this appraisal, we ought to remember that the very name '**ROAMING**' given to the project evokes the essence of mobility—not just in a physical sense but also in a metaphorical one. It reminds us of our capacity to roam freely in pursuit of knowledge, to explore new ideas, cultures, and challenges. Over these last two years, this project has enabled many students and educators to bridge gaps between cultures, fostering mutual respect and understanding in the process. In doing so, it captured the very essence of what the **ERASMUS+** programme stands for—**openness**, **diversity**, and **innovation**. And as the to conclude this appraisal, we ought to remember that the very name **ROAMING** project came to a close, it reminds us of the endless possibilities that emerge when we step beyond our comfort zones and embrace the unknown.





GOOD BYE

This project has now come to an end, but its impact continues to resonate, promising a future of sustained partnerships and new collaborations capitalizing on the relationships, knowledge, and perspectives it has cultivated. These will continue to shape the way we think, the way we teach, and the way we interact with one another. In this sense, the project did not really have an end—it rather lives on in the shared experiences and the continued collaborations it has sparked, enjoining people to roam, to learn, and to grow. ★

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Pictures from the Project

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The consortium is composed of:



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