

Executive Summary, 19 January 2023

Mobility Rates and Internationalisation Index of Swiss Higher Education Institutions

Taking part in an exchange programme in the course of their studies brings students significant added value. It helps them develop important intercultural, professional and personal skills and increases their employability on the labour market.¹ The promotion of student mobility is supported by two policies at national and at international level. The first policy is the *Swiss exchange and mobility strategy of the Confederation and the cantons* (November 2017). It aims to ensure that ‘all young people will participate in an exchange and mobility activity lasting for an extended period of time at least once in the course of their education’. The second policy is the Bologna Process for the Implementation of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA), whose objective is that at least 20% of graduates in the European Higher Education Area study or acquire practical experience abroad. Switzerland, together with the other EHEA member states, has renewed its explicit commitment to this 20% target in 2020.

Lucas Haldimann, an affiliated researcher at the University of Lausanne’s Institute of geography and sustainability, was commissioned by the national agency Movetia to investigate the international mobility rates of Swiss higher education institutions and to develop an internationalisation index for Swiss higher education institutions, a first in Switzerland. The aim of the index is to identify internationalisation factors that help increase student mobility. The mobility data were provided by the Federal Statistical Office (FSO) and give information on the pre-pandemic mobility behaviour of 2020 graduates.

Swiss mobility rate below 20%

The average mobility rate for Swiss higher education institutions is 15.7%.² This means that approx. 8,300 of a total of 53,000 students who graduated in 2020 spent a semester abroad or completed an international internship during their Bachelor or Master degree, with the stay lasting at least 3 months and/or earning them at least 15 ECTS.

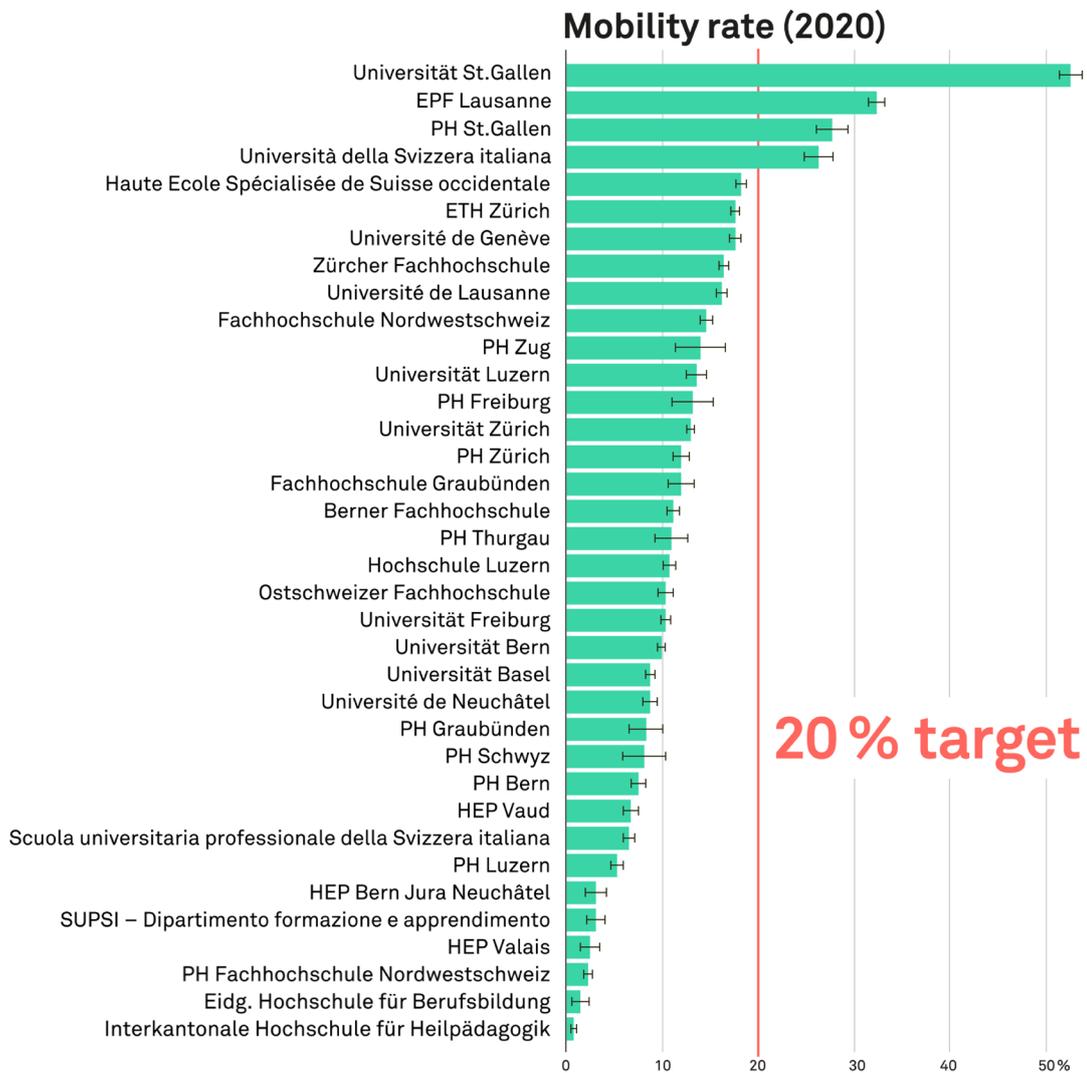
The data provided by the FSO do not allow to position Switzerland precisely with regard to the EHEA target, but they presently offer the best possible comparison. Although the EHEA calculation also includes degree programmes completed entirely abroad and temporary mobility of doctoral students, the data are considered per study cycle. This means that, for example, a Master’s graduate who has been mobile only during her Bachelor’s degree is entered into the calculation as a Master’s graduate without any experience abroad. In the FSO calculation, she would appear as a Master’s graduate with mobility experience abroad. If the stricter EHEA calculation was applied, the Swiss mobility rate would probably be below 15.7%.

¹ <https://www2.daad.de/der-daad/daad-aktuell/de/78993-karriere-booster-auslandsaufenthalt/>

² FSO data, net international mobility (studies and internships), graduation year 2020.

Significant differences between Swiss higher education institutions

The mobility rate at Swiss higher education institutions ranges from 1% to 50%. Among the top 5 with the highest mobility rates, all types of institutions and all linguistic regions are represented: the St. Gallen University of Teacher Education, the HES-SO University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland, as well as the University St. Gallen, EPFL the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne, and the Università della Svizzera italiana. This shows that despite very different contexts, it is possible for all types of higher education institutions to achieve high mobility rates.



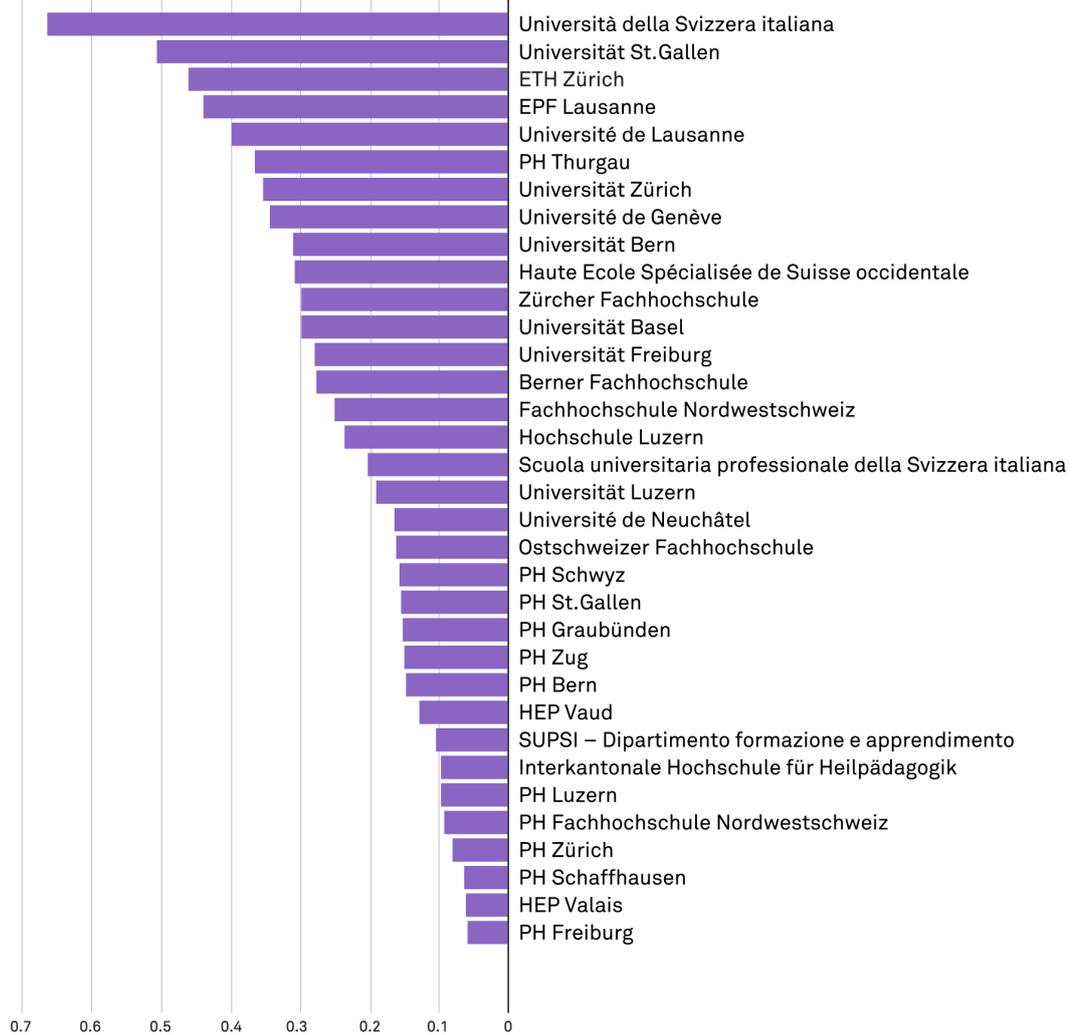
The internationalisation index contributes to explain differences between institutions

In order to identify some of the factors that may explain the significant differences in mobility rates, the study analysed four dimensions of the internationalisation of higher education institutions:

- Internationalisation of study programmes
- International collaboration in research
- Strategic decisions that enable and promote internationalisation
- Nationality of students and lecturers

The internationalisation index, which is based on the dimensions above, shows how internationalised a higher education institution is in comparison to others.

Internationalisation index 0–1



The most international higher education institutions have the highest mobility rates

There is a significant correlation between the mobility rate and the degree of internationalisation of a higher education institution: the more exposition students get to an international environment, the higher the institution's mobility rate. An in-depth analysis of the correlation between mobility rate and internationalisation index shows which internationalisation factors are catalysts for mobility. Three factors stand out:

- **Integrating international elements into study programmes:** Study programmes with an international orientation lead to a high mobility rate. These are study programmes that integrate a global or intercultural dimension, or that include English-language courses, or that are developed and implemented in cooperation with an international partner institution.
- **Fostering an international study environment:** Bringing together local and international students and lecturers exposes local students to an international environment. This has a decisive influence on the mobility rate: local students who are in contact with international students and lecturers more often decide to go on mobility.
- **Offering attractive conditions for incomings:** Incoming mobility is proving to be an important lever in promoting the mobility rate of students. It contributes to the international study environment mentioned above, and has a positive impact on outgoing mobility, as mobility is based on reciprocity between partner institutions. One practical measure for the promotion of incoming mobility could be to provide accommodation for visiting students and lecturers.

A comprehensive internationalisation is a plus for every higher education institution

International mobility increases graduates' employability by providing them with important professional and personal skills. Student mobility is also a central component of internationalisation for many higher education institutions in Switzerland and Europe. Investing in a comprehensive internationalisation is beneficial not only for the students and for the institution's mobility rate, as shown by the internationalisation index. It also acts as a means to develop the quality of teaching and research, to further innovation, and to increase the institution's visibility, competitiveness, and reputation in Switzerland and abroad. Movetia actively contributes to these goals with its programme offer for international educational mobility and cooperation: www.movetia.ch

The report 'Mobility Rates and Internationalisation Index of Swiss Higher Education Institutions' provides detailed results per higher education institution as well as additional information. www.movetia.ch/en/index