

WISE

Well-being Innovations for Students in Europe

Quantitative study about well-being

European WISE Survey Report

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Table of contents

I. The project and the framework of the report.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Aims of the study.....	7
Methods.....	7
Participants.....	7
Measures for the Student survey.....	8
II. Results.....	10
Well-being levels.....	10
The importance of various activities for student well-being.....	13
How much were the following aspects were impacted by the pandemic?.....	22
The importance of connections for student well-being.....	28
Belongingness to the university and well-being.....	31
The extent to which well-being is taken into account.....	33
According to you, how can you best act on these topics?.....	37
III. Survey for University Staff.....	40
Methods.....	40
Participants	40
Measures for the University survey	40
Results for the university survey.....	41
The approach to well-being.....	41
According to you, how important are the following activities for a student's well-being?.....	43
Strategy and process.....	48
Operational action, activities, and facilities.....	49
Evaluation.....	52
Best practices.....	53
IV. Conclusions and implications:.....	54
References.....	57

I. The project and the framework of the report

How can we contribute to student's well-being in Europe? In the current context where the health crisis has a strong impact on students' life, some groups of students are particularly vulnerable to issues of well-being due to the discrimination they already face (e.g. refugees, people with disabilities). In addition, new forms of malaise are emerging such as eco-anxiety which affects 15% of young people (2016 IPSOS survey). The well-being of students, therefore, represents a huge challenge for HEI and student organisations.

Since September 2021, the French student organisations network Animafac has been coordinating the Erasmus+ project called **WISE "Well-being Innovations for Students in Europe"**. This project is carried out in cooperation with six partners : the European Student Union (ESU), the European University Foundation (EUF), the Charles University of Prague (Czech Republic), the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Greece), the Polytechnic Institute of Coimbra (Portugal) and the Transilvania University of Brasov (Romania).

The WISE European project focuses on identifying what are the causes of student's malaise and how to prevent it. It will provide an overview of practices in HEIs regarding students' mental health. In the long term, the project aims to raise awareness about students' well-being and highlight what can be done to improve it in Europe.

In order to carry out the project, the consortium is leading a major study on student well-being in two steps:

1. The first step consists of a **quantitative survey "Student well-being initiatives in European higher education"**. The survey is divided in 3 parts: one for students, the other for HEIs and the last one for student associations. Here is the **report concerning two of the three surveys** (the one addressed to students and HEIs), it aims to identify what's at stake for students and HEIs and other institutions across Europe.
2. The second step is a qualitative report based on focus groups and interviews of students, teaching and administrative staff in European HEIs to acquire a precise knowledge of actions for students' well-being in Europe. The objective is to document and deepen the knowledge about a series of interesting practices in favour of student well-being. The following report is referring to these focus groups, although a specific report will analyse deeper these interviews.

Partners of the project

7 partners in the consortium:

3 student networks: [Animafac](#) (a network of student associations in France); [the European University Foundation](#) (EUF, a university network based in Luxembourg); [the European Students' Union](#) (ESU, a network of student associations, based in Belgium) ;

4 universities across Europe: [Polytechnic Institute of Coimbra](#) in Portugal; [Aristotle University of Thessaloniki](#) in Greece; [Transilvania University of Braşov](#) in Romania; [Charles University of Prague](#) in Czech Republic.



Universitatea
Transilvania
din Braşov



ARISTOTLE
UNIVERSITY
OF THESSALONIKI



CHARLES
UNIVERSITY



Moreover 6 associated partners are involved in the project to ensure the dissemination of the project and its results: the Erasmus Student Network, the European Youth Parliament, the Nightline association, the National Federation of Polytechnic Higher Education Student Associations (FNAESP), the UBUNTU Leaders Academy and Toute l'Europe (French media).

Introduction

In conformity with Diener's point of view (2000, p. 34), subjective well-being represents "people's cognitive and affective evaluations of their lives."

Veenhoven (1997, p. 34) defines it furthermore: "how good [life] feels, how well it meets expectations, how desirable it is deemed to be, etc."

According to Kashdan (2004), the well-being concept involves two broad elements:

- *'Cognitive appraisal' describes how we consider our global (overall) life satisfaction and our satisfaction with specific domains (e.g., family life, career, and so forth).*
- *'Affective appraisal' concerns our emotional experience. High SWB is the experience of frequent and intense positive states (e.g., joy, hope, and pride) and the general absence of negative ones (e.g., anger, jealousy, and disappointment).*

Subjective well-being encloses a huge number of patterns with distinctive concepts, from ephemeral experiences from our everyday lives to much broader global reasonings that we make about our lives altogether (Kim-Prieto, Diener, Tamir, Scollon, & Diener, 2005). It is generally expressed as a hedonic as opposed to a eudaimonic concept (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Huta & Waterman, 2014).

Student well-being has lately come up as a critical to the educational agenda given its positive effects on school and academic adjustment and also as adults. With the development of student well-being as a priority field in educational policy and system (Hossain et al., 2022). Students' subjective well-being represents an important condition for positive evolution and an expected conclusion of education.

As shown by numerous studies and research, many students suffer from problems of malaise. Malaise can be defined as a general feeling of discomfort, illness, or unease whose exact cause is difficult to identify.

Many European universities try to offer their students the necessary support to achieve their academic potential and gain the most from their time. Student well-being is a priority for many people's schedules in the domain of higher education. The most recent mental health statistics from the Insight Network detect that 42.8% of the students that answered characterised themselves as generally or repeatedly distressed. Nevertheless, more students have stated that they make efforts in their struggle with anxiety.

In order to cut down these feelings among students and stimulate happiness, one needs to apply creative well-being actions. Inside Government (2012) points out some suggestions to start with:

1. Start a Mentor Programme
2. Free Yoga Classes
3. Walking Groups
4. Outdoor Film Nights
5. Celebrate Mental Health Awareness Week
6. Coffee, Cake and a Chat
7. 'How to Adult' Sessions
8. Fundraising Events
9. Smartphone Film Festival

10. Open and Anonymous Discussions
11. Confidence and Communication Workshops
12. World Food Day

Student Health and well-being Services from Newcastle University are committed to exploring new avenues in which our students' well-being can be nurtured and enhanced. Our current and ongoing well-being initiatives can be found below:

- Pianos on Campus for everyone to play whatever their musical ability.
- Meditation and mindfulness sessions
- Borrow Bessie dog to help students and staff improve their mental and physical health.

Even so, student well-being domain is widely explored, while at the same time it remains a poorly defined concept.

The structure of the study should be mentioned here.

The consortium quickly understood it wasn't easy to come up with a common definition of well-being. Regarding the different definitions, we accept a broad definition of well-being which covers social, economic, physical and psychological aspects. It is the balance between different factors contributing to well-being or malaise. **Well-being** is not just the absence of disease or illness. It's a complex combination of a person's physical, mental, emotional and social health factors. well-being is strongly linked to happiness and life satisfaction. In short, well-being could be described as how you feel about yourself and your life.

Aims of the study

The main aim of the study is to identify practices implemented in universities that sustain student well-being. More specifically, we aimed to:

- Measure student well-being in different countries and compare their level of well-being.
- Identify their opinions about the importance of well-being in daily life, by analysing several aspects of student life, such as activities for the development of well-being, and connections inside and outside the university.
- Analyse the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on student well-being.
- Analyse the role of belongings to university and attachment to university on well-being.
- Identify possible worries and anxiety generated by macrosocial events which could affect student well-being.

Methods

Participants

The participants were 2697 students, the sample being diverse and different categories well represented concerning gender, age, marital status, country of origin, type of student, employment status, or living situation.

<i>N</i> = 2697 students	
Gender	70.1% (<i>N</i> = 1906) female, 27.5% (<i>N</i> = 741) male, 1.9% (<i>N</i> = 50) identify with another gender, while 2.2% (<i>N</i> = 58) do not identify with the gender assigned to them at birth.
Age	Average age is 23.43 (<i>SD</i> = 6.157), ranging from 17 to 62 years of age.
Marital status	83.8% (<i>N</i> = 2260) single, 15.1% (<i>N</i> = 408) married or cohabiting and 1.1% (<i>N</i> = 29) divorced, separated, or widowed.
Country of origin	Czech Republic (47.2%, <i>N</i> = 1273), Greece (18.4%, <i>N</i> = 497), Portugal (13.5%, <i>N</i> = 363), Romania (5.5%, <i>N</i> = 147), Slovenia (3.6%, <i>N</i> = 97), etc.
Type of students	62.1% (<i>N</i> = 1676) undergraduate students, 30.1% (<i>N</i> = 813) graduate students and 7.7% (<i>N</i> = 208) PhD students, while 1.1% (<i>N</i> = 29) are Erasmus students and 9.3% (<i>N</i> = 252) domestic international students.
Disability status	8.3% (<i>N</i> = 224) have a disability, of whom 4.6% (<i>N</i> = 123) a hearing or visual disability, 0.9% (<i>N</i> = 23) a mobility disability, 1.2% (<i>N</i> = 32) a cognitive disability and 3% (<i>N</i> = 82) specifying the disability.
Employment status	6.1% (<i>N</i> = 1512) unemployed, 31.0% (<i>N</i> = 835) have a part-time job and 13.0% (<i>N</i> = 350) have a full-time job.
Living situation	38.8% (<i>N</i> = 1046) live in their home with family, 24.0% (<i>N</i> = 646) live in a shared flat, 22.4% (<i>N</i> = 605) live in their own flat and 14.8% (<i>N</i> = 1046) live in a student dorm.

Measures for the Student survey

In order to analyse specific aspects related to student well-being, we developed a questionnaire, including two main parts: (1) a demographical section and (2) a survey about well-being and several dimensions related to student life.

- (1) **The socio-demographic questionnaire** included questions related to: gender, marital status, nationality, type of student (undergraduate, graduate, PhD student), faculty and university, employment status, living situation, and health status.

(2) **The Well-being survey** included two subsections:

- a. **The PERMA Profiler** (Butler & Kern, 2016) was used to measure student well-being. The PERMA profiler is a brief multidimensional measure of well-being. The questionnaire includes 24 items measured on an 11-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 = not at all, 10 = completely or 0 = never, 10 = always. The 24 items are grouped in several dimensions, as follows: three items per each of the following dimensions:
 - **Positive emotions** (e.g., In general, how often do you feel positive?, Cronbach's Alpha = .90),
 - **Engagement** (e.g., In general, to what extent do you feel excited and interested in things?, Cronbach's Alpha = .62),
 - **Relationships** (e.g., To what extent do you receive help and support from others when you need it?, Cronbach's Alpha = .80),
 - **Meaning** (e.g., In general, to what extent do you feel that what you do in your life is valuable and worthwhile?, Cronbach's Alpha = .87), and
 - **Accomplishment** (e.g., How much of the time do you feel you are making progress towards accomplishing your goals?, Cronbach's Alpha = .76). Cronbach's Alpha for the PERMA Profiler, measuring the five elements of PERMA was alpha = .92.
 - In addition, PERMA Profiler also includes three questions measuring **Negative emotions** (e.g., In general, how often do you feel anxious?, Cronbach's Alpha = .70), three questions on **Physical health** (e.g., In general, how would you say your health is? , Cronbach's Alpha = .86), a **Loneliness** question (How lonely do you feel in your daily life?), and a **Happiness** question (Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?).
- b. **The Attitudes and opinions survey** was developed by the WISE project team and includes items measuring the following aspects:
 - **Importance of several types of activities for your well-being** (15 items, e.g. studying in class/ online, doing an internship, meeting students, eating at the cafeteria, going to the library, practicing a sport on campus/ outside the campus, participating in cultural activities, going abroad) measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = not important to 5 = very important.
 - **Importance of connections for well-being** (6 items, e.g. teachers, non-academic staff, other students, student associations, family, friends) measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = not at all important to 5 = extremely important.
 - **Negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student life** (15 items, e.g. studying in class/ online, doing an internship, meeting students, eating at the cafeteria, going to the library, practicing a sport on campus/ outside the campus, participating in cultural activities, going abroad) measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = not at all to 5 = extremely.
 - **Belongingness to the university and well-being** (three items: For your well-being, how important is it to go on campus?, How important is belonging to

your university for you?, Being a student at this university is part of my identity, measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = not important to 5 = very important.

- ***Use of university services*** (10 items, e.g. Student Health Center, Student Life Office, Student Housing organization, Medical Centers/Professionals, Career Counseling Center, Counseling , Academic help services, Student union, Social services/finance office/scholarship/fees, Disability services). The items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (regularly).
- ***Worries and anxiety generated by macrosocial events*** (8 items, How do you feel about the following topics: e.g. climate change, war and conflict, terrorism, poverty, human rights and migration, gender inequalities, health, democracy). The items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all anxious) to 5 (extremely anxious) and ***Possible actions for the mentioned topics*** (multiple choice item, e.g. Attend a general meeting or vote for a student representative, Help another person with a personal issue, Volunteer in a student association or a union etc).
- Additionally, the students were asked about the ***Extent to which well-being is taken into account*** at different levels (e.g. country, university, Europe). The items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (absolutely not) to 5 (very much).

All the participants gave their written consent to participate in their study. The data was anonymized, and they were informed that the participation is voluntary and non-mandatory, the possibility to drop out of the study being ensured at any moment.

II. Results

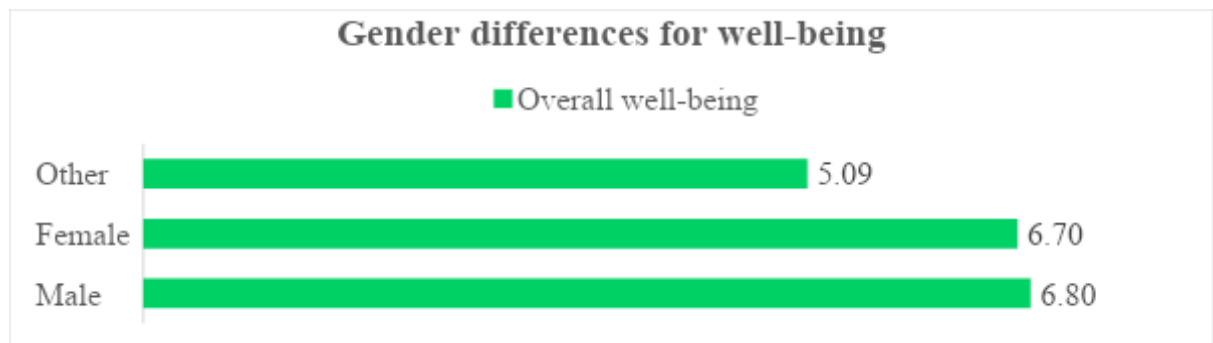
Well-being levels

Well-being is the main dimension investigated in our study.

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the well-being dimensions. The results showed that the mean is higher than the theoretical mean, for all the well-being dimensions, relationships being the highest and positive emotions the lowest, the minimum value is 0, the maximum 10.

Well-being dimensions	Mean	Standard Deviation
Positive emotions	6.242	1.909
Engagement	6.856	1.588
Relationships	7.028	1.959

Meaning	6.604	2.111
Accomplishment	6.649	1.648
Negative emotions	6.856	1.588
Health	6.820	1.962
OVERALL	6.697	1.469

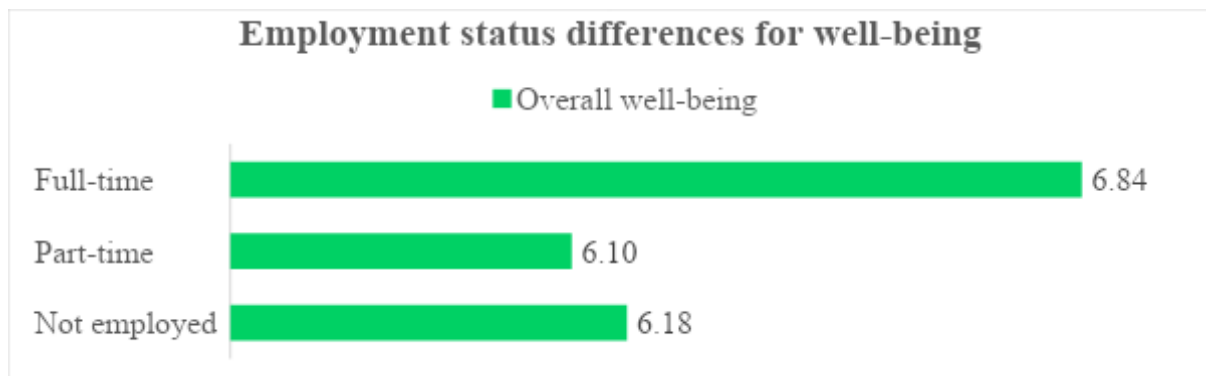


Gender differences showed some group differences, statistically significant. Regarding gender differences on well-being, a one-way ANOVA was performed and statistically significant differences have been identified. While male and female participants are mostly on the same level for all well-being dimensions, the ones who identify with another gender have significantly lower levels of well-being. However, the number of participants identifying with other genders is too low compared to the other gender groups for this to be a valid conclusion.

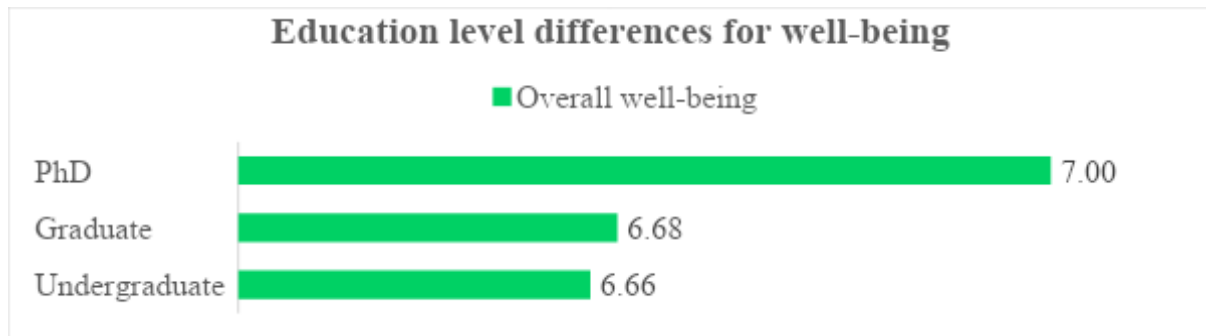
The female respondents report lower levels of overall well-being than the male respondents (Fig. 1). These results should be further explored as previous research on subjective well-being has produced mixed findings regarding gender differences. Some studies have reported that men tend to have significantly higher levels of well-being, while others have found that women exhibit significantly higher levels of well-being (Rothman et al., 2003). However, a recent study showed that gender disparities in adolescents' subjective well-being are more pronounced in countries with greater gender equality, the results indicating that gender equality enhances the well-being of boys, suggesting that increased gender equality may facilitate social comparisons between genders. Consequently, girls may become more aware of existing discrimination against females, which can negatively impact their well-being (Guo et al., 2022).

	Gender	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Positive emotions	Male	741	6.37	1.98	22.466	<.001
	Female	1906	6.24	1.85		
	Other	50	4.51	2.12		
Engagement	Male	741	7.08	1.54	14.058	<.001
	Female	1906	6.79	1.59		
	Other	50	6.18	1.84		

Relationships	Male	741	6.76	2.10	33.502	<.001
	Female	1906	7.18	1.86		
	Other	50	5.27	2.11		
Meaning	Male	741	6.79	2.20	30.187	<.001
	Female	1906	6.59	2.04		
	Other	50	4.43	2.33		
Accomplishment	Male	741	6.85	1.67	28.311	<.001
	Female	1906	6.61	1.61		
	Other	50	5.11	1.85		
Negative emotions	Male	741	7.08	1.54	14.058	<.001
	Female	1906	6.79	1.59		
	Other	50	6.18	1.84		
Health	Male	741	6.98	1.99	21.413	<.001
	Female	1906	6.80	1.93		
	Other	50	5.13	2.07		
Overall well-being	Male	741	6.80	1.50	32.248	<.001
	Female	1906	6.70	1.43		
	Other	50	5.09	1.63		

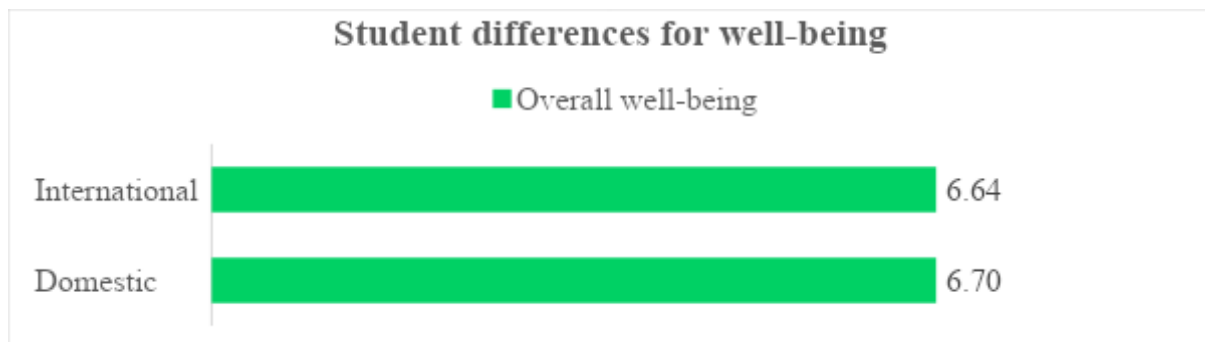


Concerning the employment status, the most satisfied with the overall level of well-being are the full-time employed students, part-time employed students being less satisfied. (Fig. 2). The full-time employment status offers certain financial benefits and supports the motivation for achievement among students, which could explain the higher level of well-being compared to part-time employed students or those who are not working.



The PhD students are statistically significantly more satisfied with their well-being than the two other categories of students, graduates and undergraduates (Fig. 3).

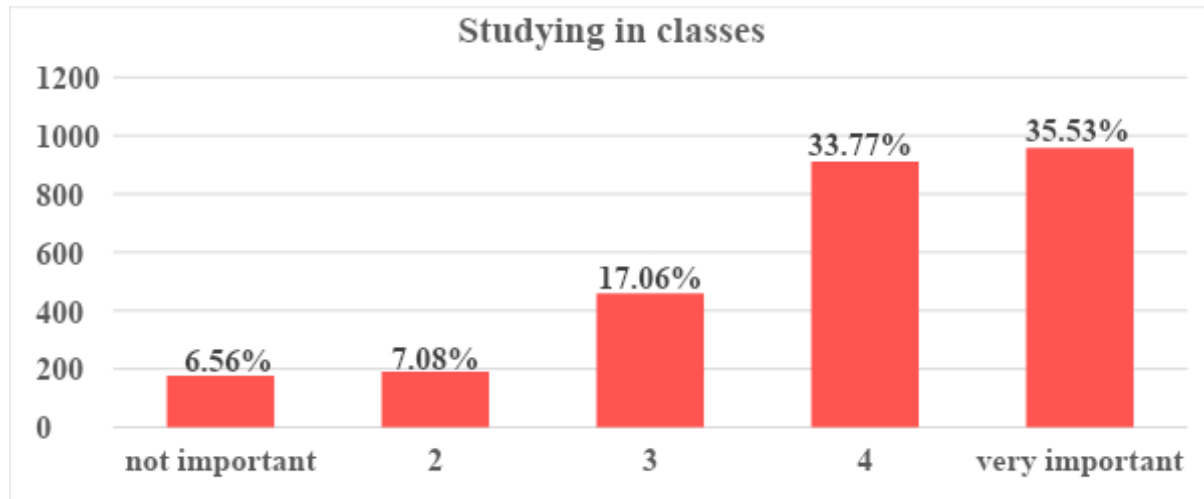
Previous research investigated well-being of higher education students (Cvetkovski, Reavley, & Jorm, 2012; Eisenberg, Hunt, & Speer, 2013), the majority of research conducted on university students' well-being has predominantly focused on undergraduate students despite the fact that PhD students often report difficulties such as social isolation, lack of motivation, and challenges related to supervisors and the academic environment. However, our results are not convergent with those reported in the literature, in our sample the level of well-being of PhD students being higher than for undergrads.



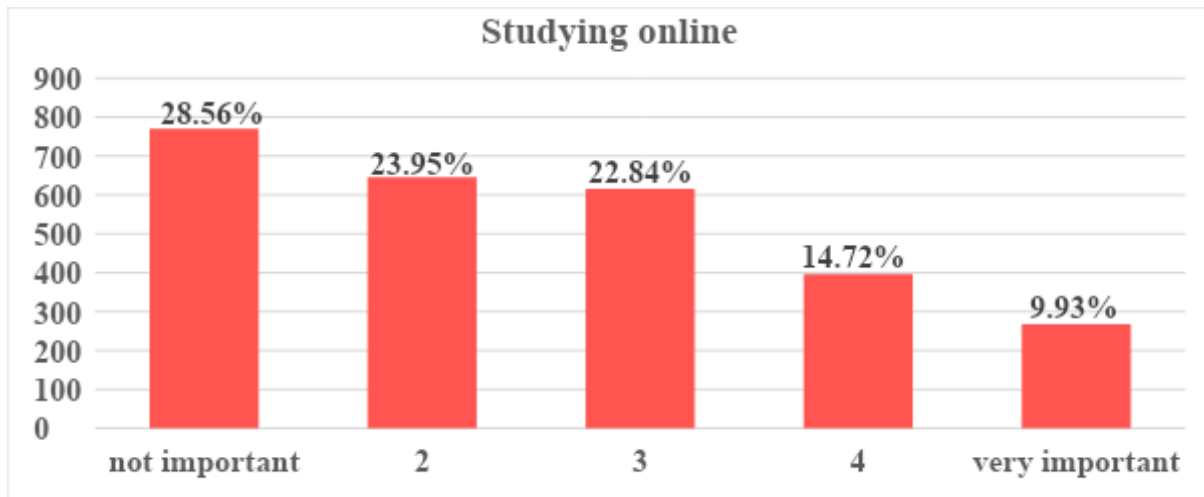
There are no significant differences between the international and domestic students regarding their well-being level (Fig. 4). There are not many previous studies on this topic. In general, however, there is a link between relocating from home for study or work purposes and adverse mental health outcomes, including depression and homesickness (Andrade, 2006), international students have been found to experience negative physical health effects as a result of being away from their home environment. These negative psychological and physical outcomes are often associated with difficulties in adjusting to the new environment, coping with challenges, and losing access to crucial social support networks.

The importance of various activities for student well-being

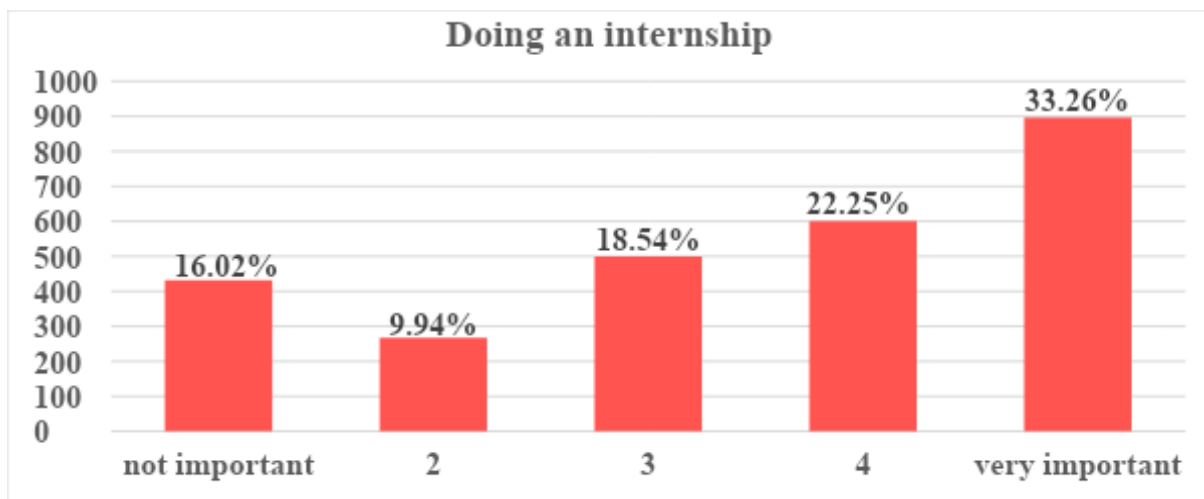
In your student life, how important are these activities for your well-being?



Almost 70 % of the respondents consider that studying in class is important and very important (Fig. 5). Well-being and studying and academic achievement are related, as previous studies showed. Some studies suggest a positive association between well-being and academic achievement, while others indicate a negative relationship. In a meta-analysis conducted by Kaya and Erdem (2021) the results showed that overall well-being had a positive impact on academic achievement, the relationship depending on the age of the students. As students' age increased, the effect of well-being on academic achievement tended to decrease. Amholt and his colleagues (2020) found a relationship between well-being and academic achievement, however, for older students, no significant relationship was found. The cited researchers considered age a moderator in the relationship between well-being and academic achievement. While younger students rely more on factors that influence their well-being, such as manageable school activities and positive social relationships both within and outside of school, to perform well academically, older students perform well in school independently of their social relationships with parents, teachers, and peers (Amholt et al., 2020).

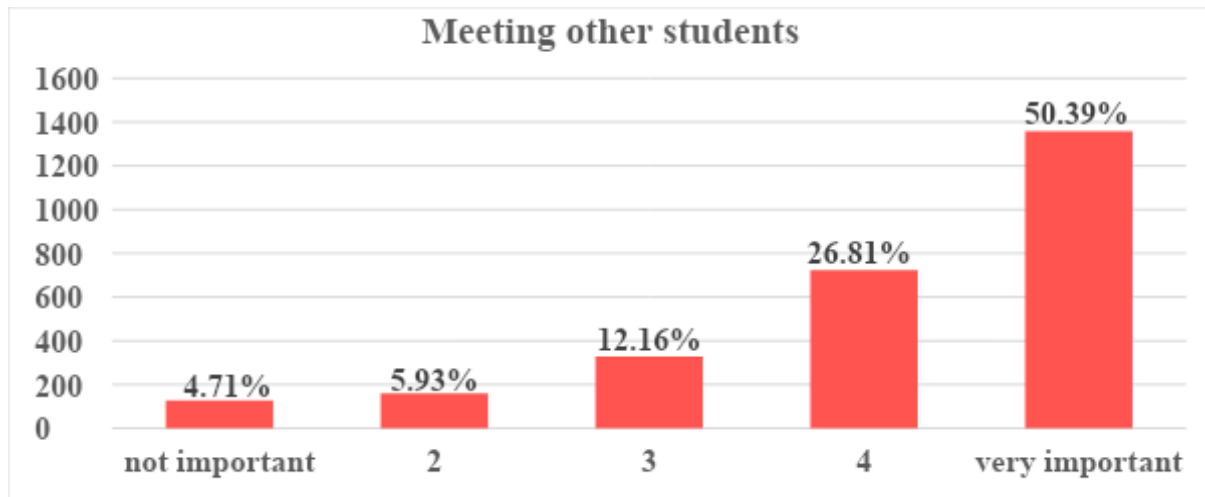


The effect of studying online on well-being was also investigated in our study. The results showed that studying online is not considered a desirable way to enhance well-being, according to Figure 6. Only 25% of respondents consider studying online as part of their well-being. Although learning from home would offer a more comfortable and relaxed experience, recent studies confirmed our results, showing that most of the students found online learning to be more stressful than in-person learning. Maintaining concentration at home, limited privacy and frequent interruptions from family members or assisting siblings with their work can be major distractions and factors affecting students' well-being. Additionally, issues such as unreliable internet connectivity, the intrusion of technology into daily lives further hinder the learning experience (Nikos-Rose, 2022).

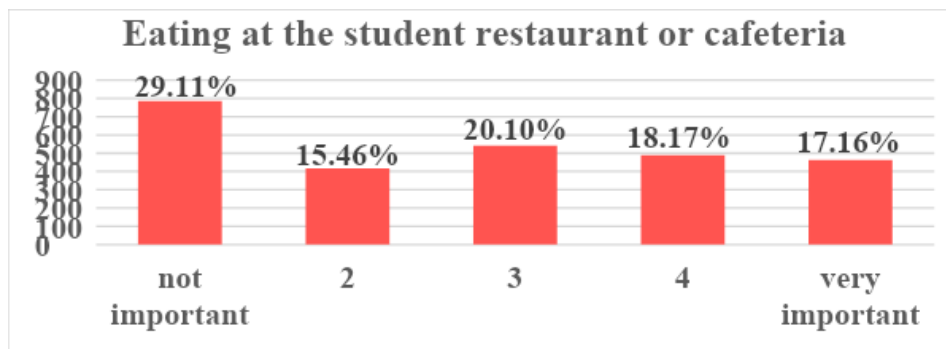


Doing an internship contributes to the well-being of more than half of the respondents (Figure 7), likely because it allows them to prepare for their careers. Work-related learning and practical training such as internship programs are crucial for students as they provide opportunities for personal and professional development and help in establishing strong connections with organisations. During the pandemic, many students were forced to postpone or cancel their internship programs due to restrictions, as a result, it is now possible for these activities to be more valued and appreciated. Previous studies showed that students who had

their internships cancelled due to the pandemic experienced severe anxiety, depression, and psychological health risks (Ryan et al., 2021). Internships have numerous benefits such as, improved interpersonal skills in the workplace, personal growth and maturity, the application of classroom knowledge to real work situations, and increased confidence in the job search process (Marks, Haug, & Hu, 2018), there is also a positive relationship between college student internship experiences and subsequent employment after graduation (Knouse & Fontenot, 2008), therefore, maintaining a positive attitude towards internships could be an important aspect of student's well-being.

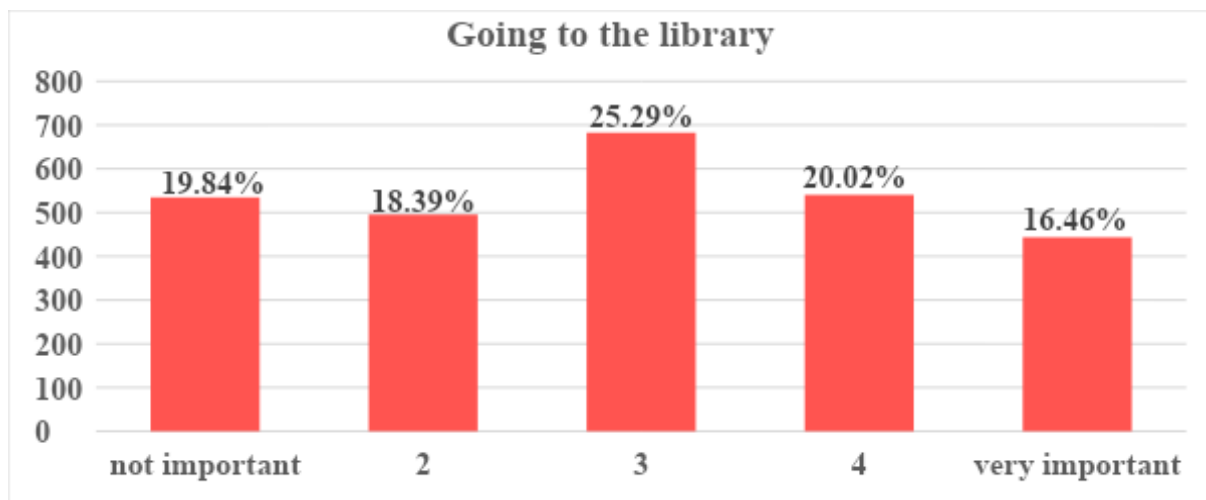


Meeting other students is one of the strongest dimensions of well-being for 3/4 of the students. This is understandable given that the need for socialisation is crucial for students (Figure 8).

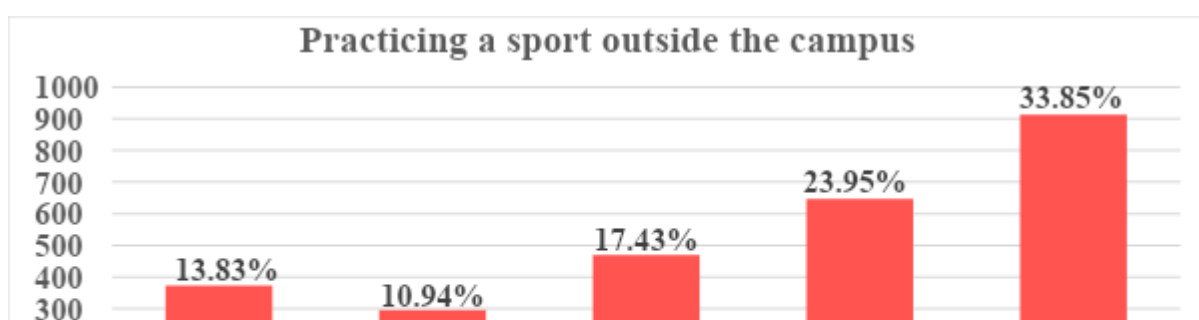
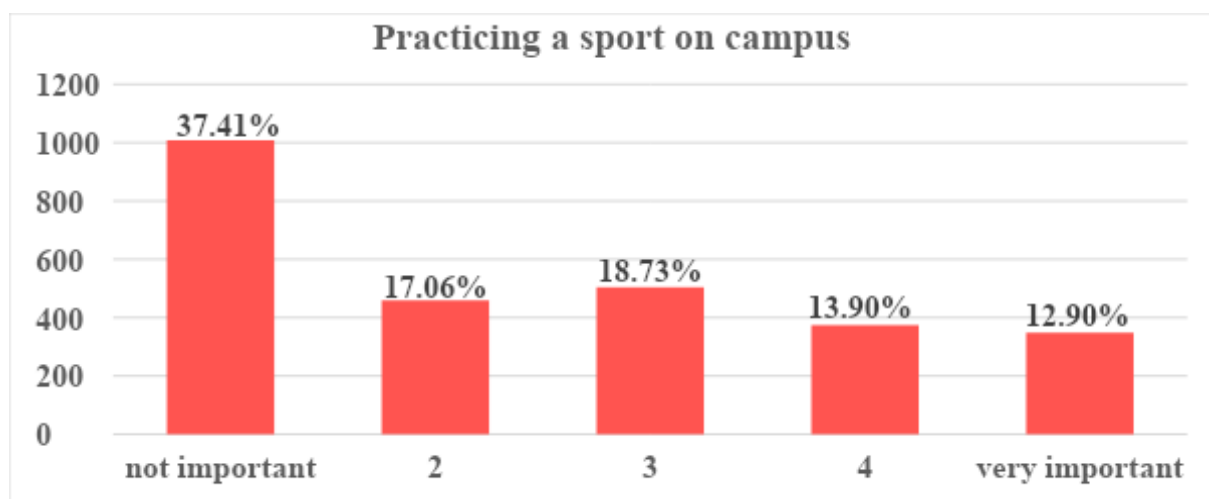


Other activities such as eating at the student restaurant or cafeteria do not have an important contribution to well-being, the percentages regarding the importance of this activity being relatively equal (Fig. 9). Although student well-being often focuses on subjective perceptions, and mental health, researchers started to take into consideration the importance of physical well-being linked to behaviours such as eating and drinking (Wooten et al., 2018). Research showed that access to food in workplaces can offer short-term emotional comforts (Hartwell et al., 2013), and it can shape work-based relations (Lugosi, 2017). Limited information exists in the literature regarding the specific practices and elements that contribute to positive

experiences in on-campus foodservice outlets within a university setting, despite their recognized role in enhancing the overall student experience (Lugosi, 2019).

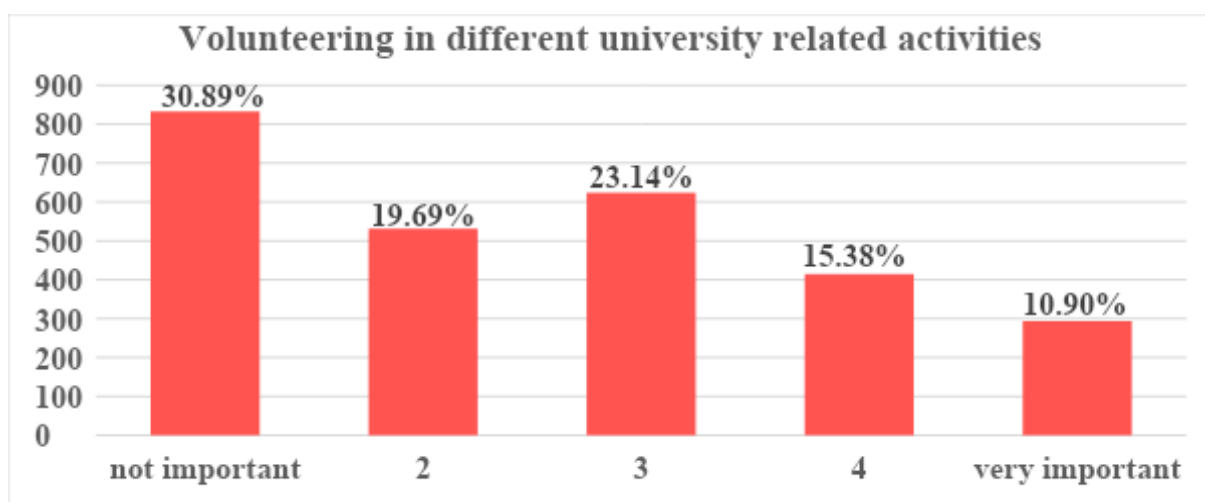


Going to the library is considered approximately equally important (36%) and unimportant for well-being (Fig. 10). It may be surprising that students do not consider Going to the library as a significant contributor to their well-being. It is possible that many students are replacing Going to the library with the use of online research through electronic platforms, which is widely used by European universities. Worldwide, libraries have increasingly been prioritising student well-being, by proposing wellness initiatives and well-being programs, the importance of libraries' role in supporting campus well-being being discussed in the literature on this field, research discussing the role of libraries in adopting a holistic approach to the student experience, actively seeking partnerships and collaborations both within and beyond the institution (Bladeck, 2021).

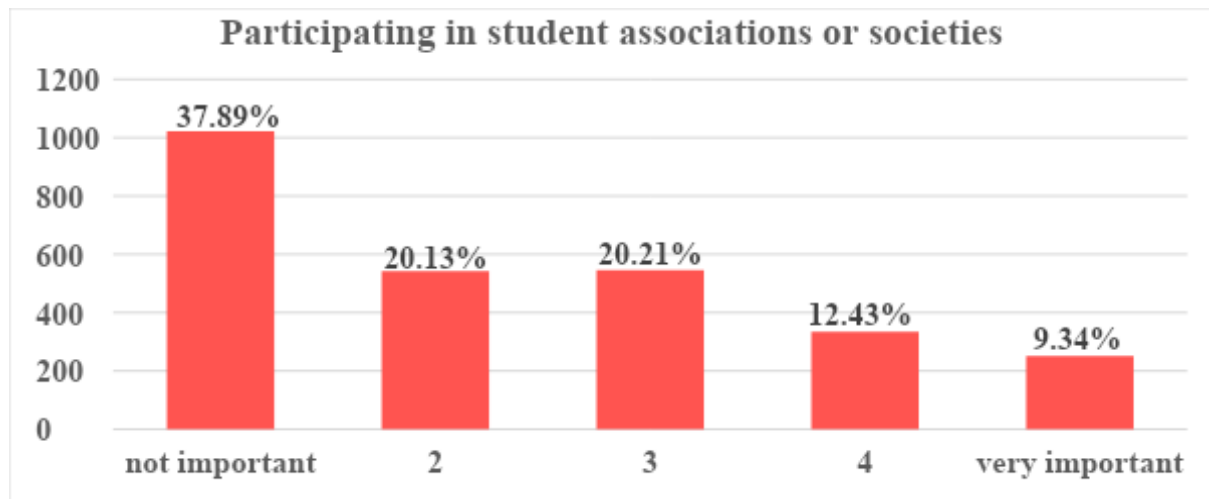


Fifty percent of students consider practising a sport on campus to be unimportant (Fig. 11). This may be explained by the fact that more than half of them consider practising a sport outside the campus to be important (Fig. 12). Engaging in physical activity has been linked to various benefits for emotional well-being, including a decrease in depressive, anxiety, and stress disorders, as well as improvements in self-esteem and cognitive functioning, research showing that practising sport more than the recommended 7 h per week is supposed to increase well-being (Merglen et al, 2014). Well-being could be predicted by sports participation, physical activity levels combined with levels of optimism and pessimism (Pietsch, Linder, & Jansen, 2022).

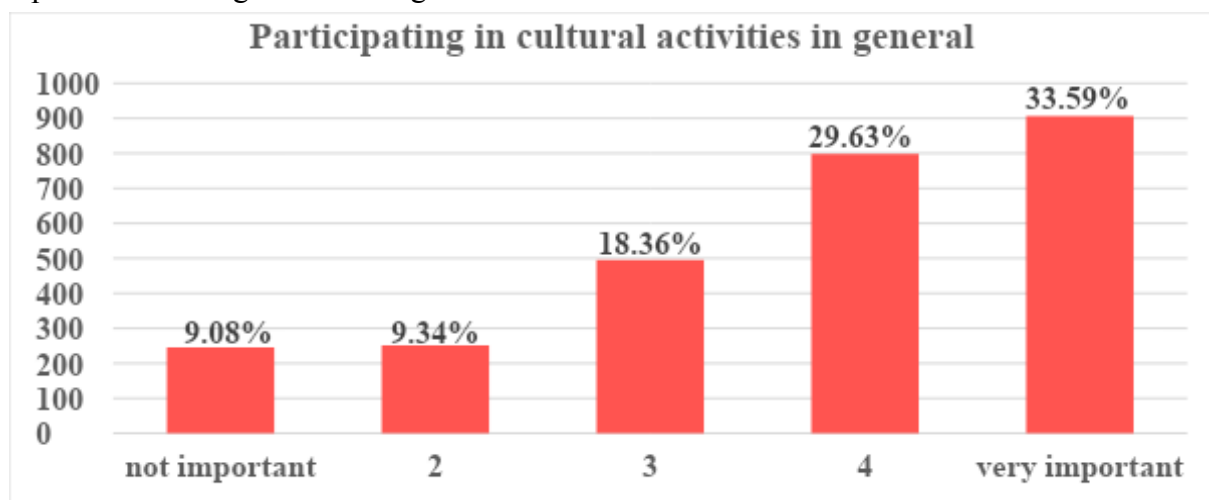
Only a quarter of respondents believe that volunteering in different university-related activities contributes to well-being. Considering that research shows that volunteering enhances well-being, it would be appropriate for universities to attract students to engage in this type of activity (McGarvey et al., 2019). Research highlighted the positive effects of volunteer activities and charitable donations on psychological well-being (Appau & Churchill, 2019), individuals involved in volunteering activities tend to report higher life satisfaction, fewer depressive symptoms, and improved overall psychological well-being (Choi & Kim, 2011). Engaging in volunteering activities provides a sense of purpose, meaning, fosters interpersonal trust between volunteers and those receiving help, creates a sense of security and acceptance, promotes social interactions that provide emotional warmth. Furthermore, benevolent acts allow individuals to take pride in their skills and strengths, enhancing their sense of self (Musick & Wilson, 2003).



Only 22% of students believe that participating in student associations or societies contributes to well-being (Fig. 13). It would be useful to investigate the cause of this situation: either student associations or societies do not have activities that benefit students, or students are unaware of which services offered to them are the result of the activities carried out by these associations.

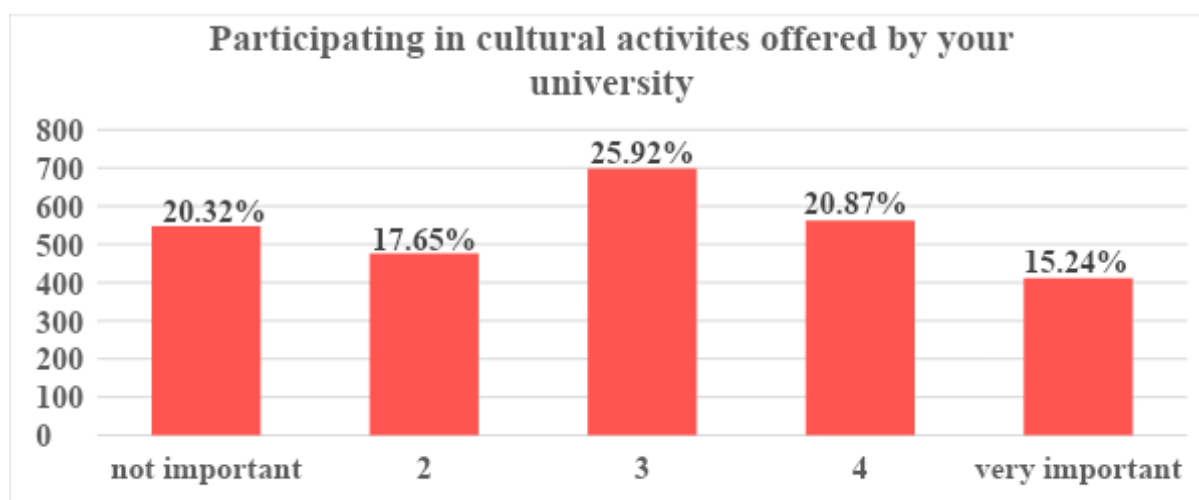


Participating in cultural activities in general, or offered by the university is another important aspect contributing to well-being.

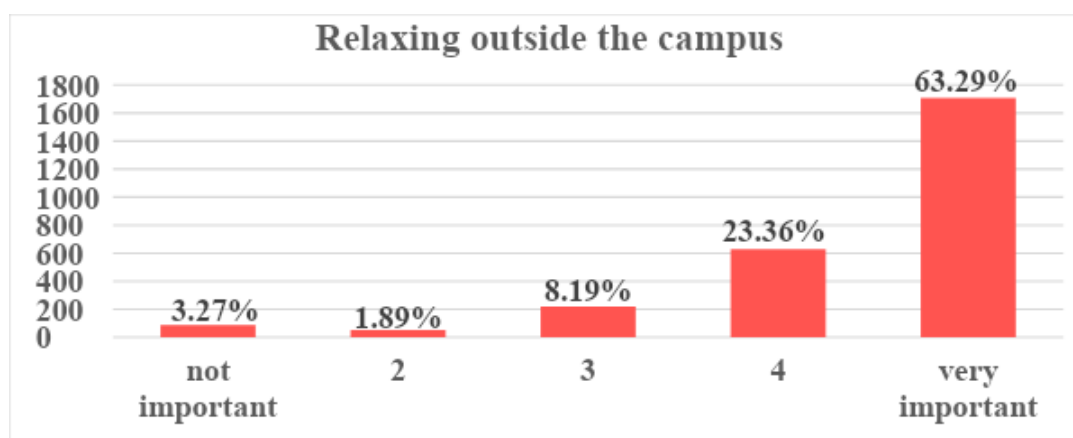
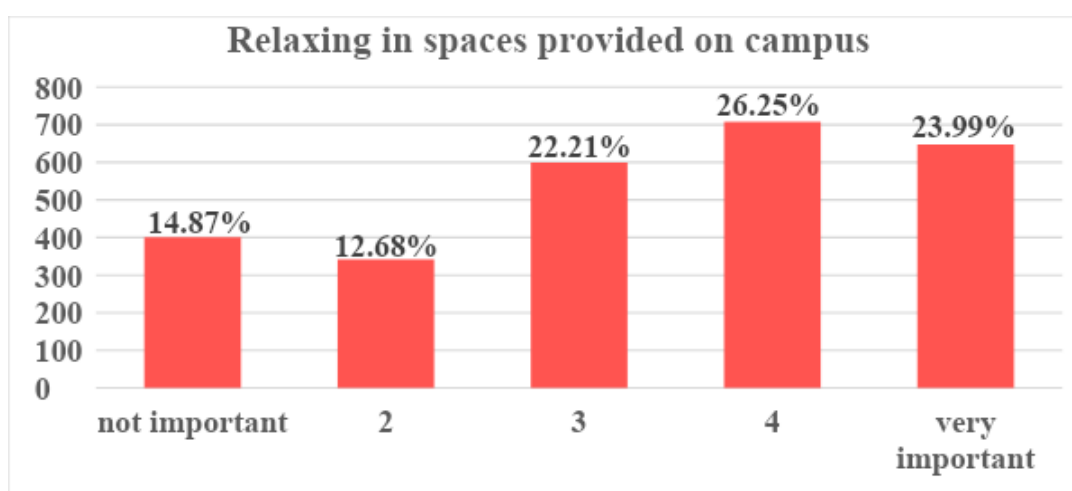


It is encouraging that a large number of students perceive the contribution of participating in cultural activities to well-being (Fig. 14). However, the activities offered by the university are not highly appreciated (Fig. 15), either because they do not exist or because they do not meet the expectations of the students. Various extracurricular activities have been examined in relation to well-being and anxiety, including music, art and cultural activities in general. Music, in particular, has garnered significant interest due to its historical role in supporting humanity during pandemics (Bassler, 2020).

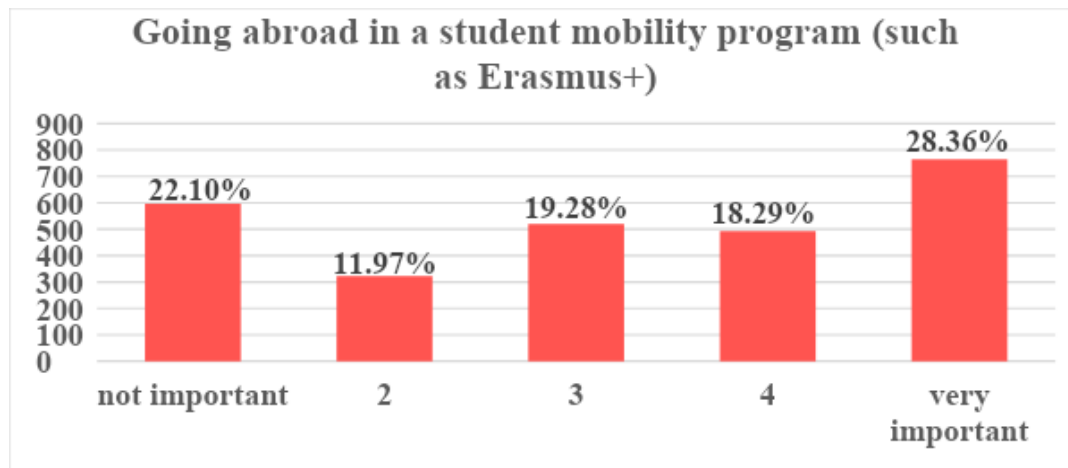
Participating in meetings or training sessions within organisations or clubs, as well as being an audience at sports events, showed positive associations with various health outcomes such as self-perceived health, life satisfaction, self-esteem, and levels of anxiety and depression. These findings suggest that attending cultural events like sports and social gatherings could be important for health and well-being. These results align with Turpin's interpretation of how cultural activities and art can be utilised to achieve broader social objectives. However, further research is needed to determine whether these associations are driven by physical activity itself or by the subjective positive experiences derived from cultural participation (Hansen et al., 2015).



Relaxing in spaces provided on campus is less appreciated (50%) compared to relaxing outside the campus (86%) as a source of well-being (Fig. 16 and 17).



Going abroad for student mobility moderately contributes to well-being (Fig. 17). The barrier of language or lack of experience as an outgoing student could be potential factors responsible for this finding. This aspect deserves further investigation, given the fact that the opportunity to study abroad can offer significant academic, personal, and professional rewards, providing a chance to know a new culture, expand horizons, and undergo personal growth. However, being in a foreign country away from familiar support systems can also present challenges. The process of adapting to a new culture requires flexibility in embracing different customs, beliefs, and living conditions.



Other results:

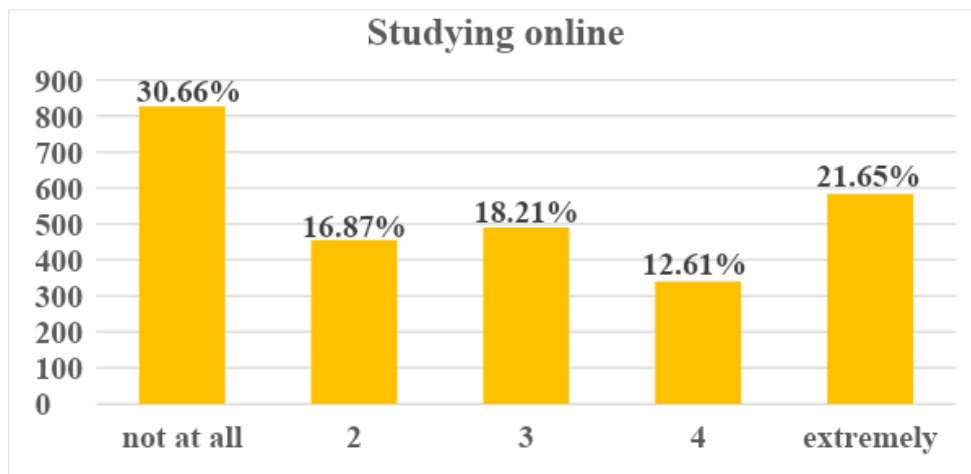
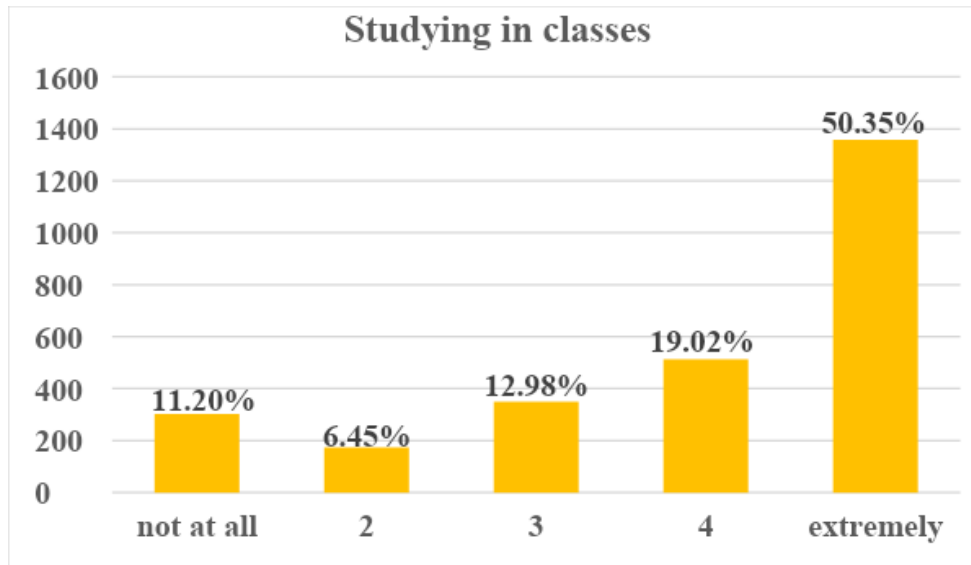
Undergraduate students value more studying in classes, doing an internship, meeting other students, practising sport on campus, volunteering in various university activities and relaxing on spaces provided on campus than PhD students.

Unemployed students find studying in classes and going to campus more important for their well-being, than do full-time employed students.

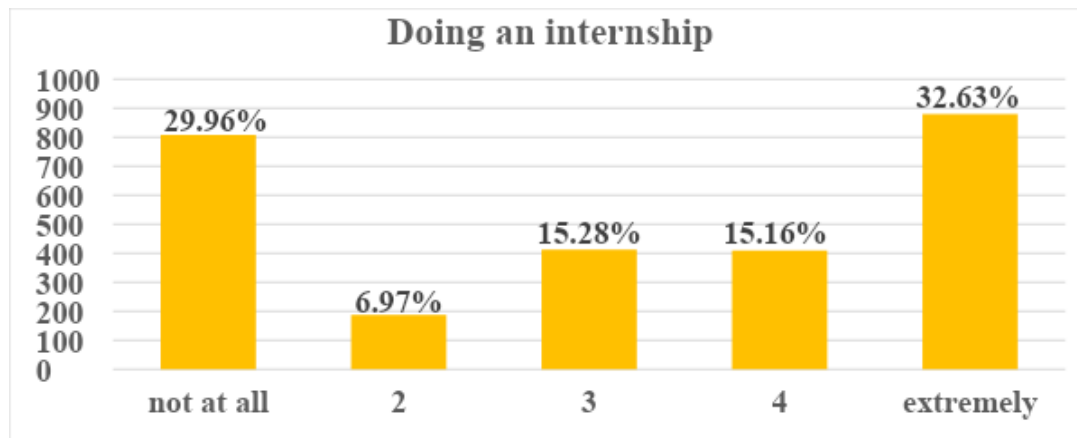
How much were the following aspects were impacted by the pandemic?

An important section of the report is dedicated to the impact that the pandemic had on several domains related to student life.

Studying in class was the first dimension analysed. A total of 1104 students believe that studying in classrooms has been greatly and significantly affected by the pandemic. This result aligns with the number of students who stated that studying in classrooms significantly contributes to well-being (830).

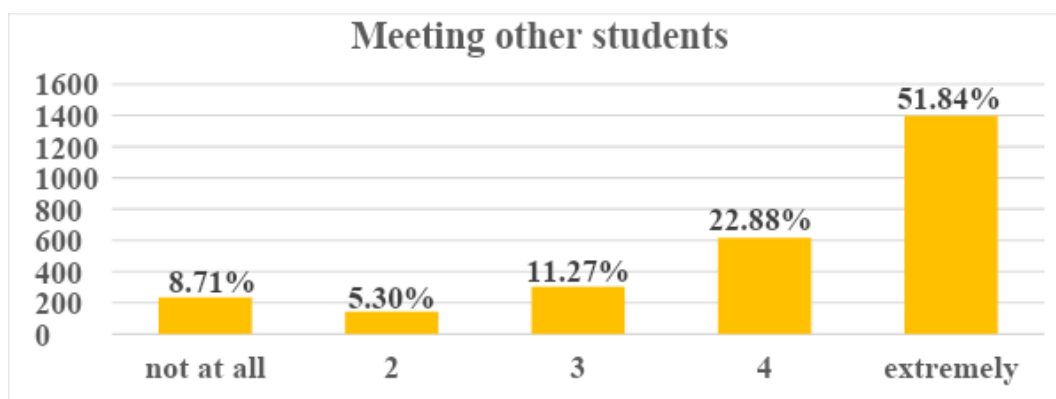


The proportion of students who do not believe that the pandemic has impacted studying online is greater than those who feel affected. The conclusion drawn is that studying online, in general, is a less preferred method of studying among students. The adoption of online learning was a crisis response to the COVID 19 pandemic, as a consequence, face-to-face classes were significantly affected (the participants' responses confirming this aspect). Given the multiple disruption due to slow internet connections, computer glitches, power outages, and difficulties in managing errors that affected both teaching and learning, student engagement in virtual courses was a subject of debate. Despite these limitations, universities' transition to virtual learning was the only viable solution during the pandemic (Assi & Rashtchi, 2022).

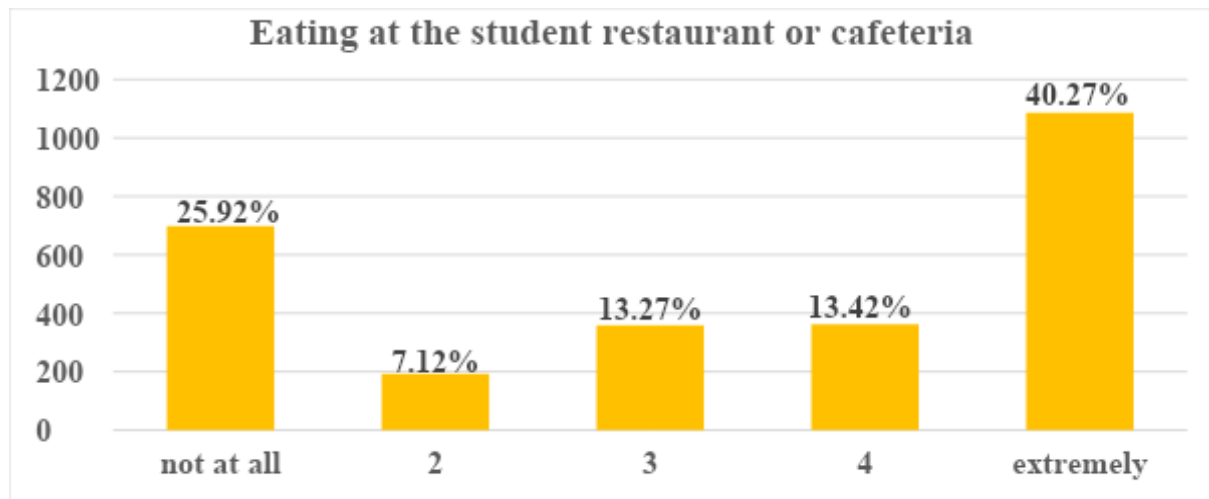


Concerning the impact that the pandemic had on the activity of doing an internship, the results were surprising, an approximately equal number of participants declared the pandemics did not impact at all or extremely impacted this activity. Given the fact that during the pandemics half of all internship opportunities had been cancelled, it is likely that the extreme responses, which represent approximately equal proportions and together account for two-thirds of the total, belong to students who: a) did not participate in internships at all before the pandemic; b) participated in internships frequently before the pandemic. Previous studies showed that postgraduate students who had their internships cancelled due to the pandemic experienced anxiety, depression, and psychological health risks, they faced reduced employment competitiveness (Zhang, 2022).

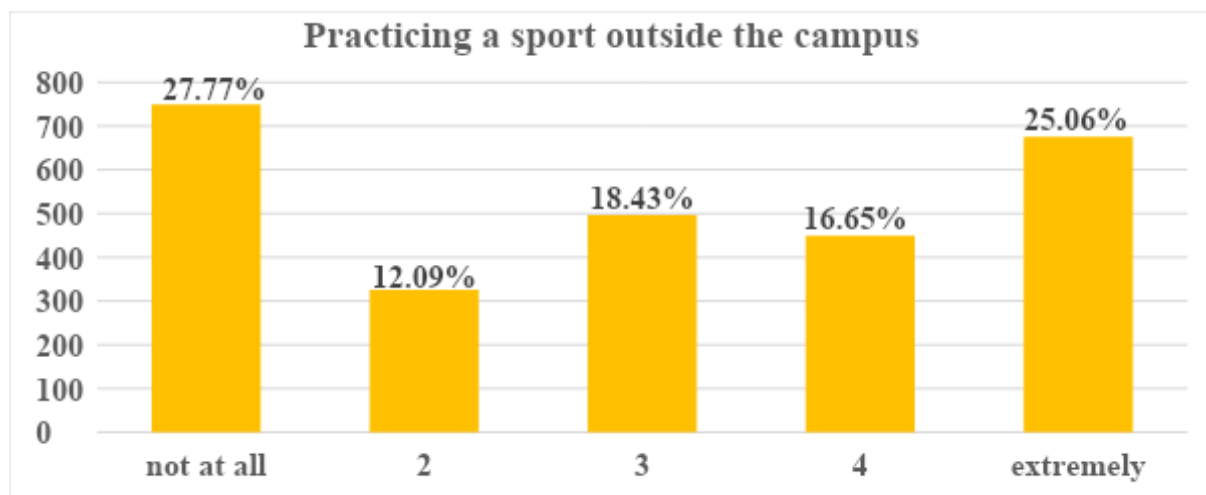
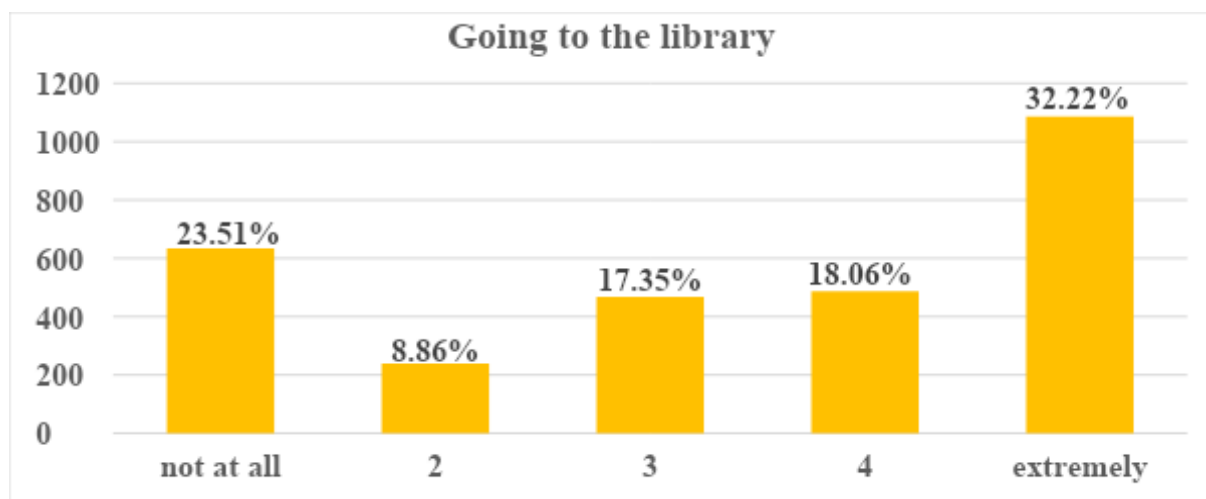
Social activities and contacts were severely affected by the pandemic, as the students' answers showed. Almost three-quarters of respondents state that they were greatly and very much affected by the absence of meeting other students, which is in agreement with the statement regarding sources of well-being. Several aspects of their lives were affected, such as meeting other people (51.84% were extremely affected), with the highest values reported.



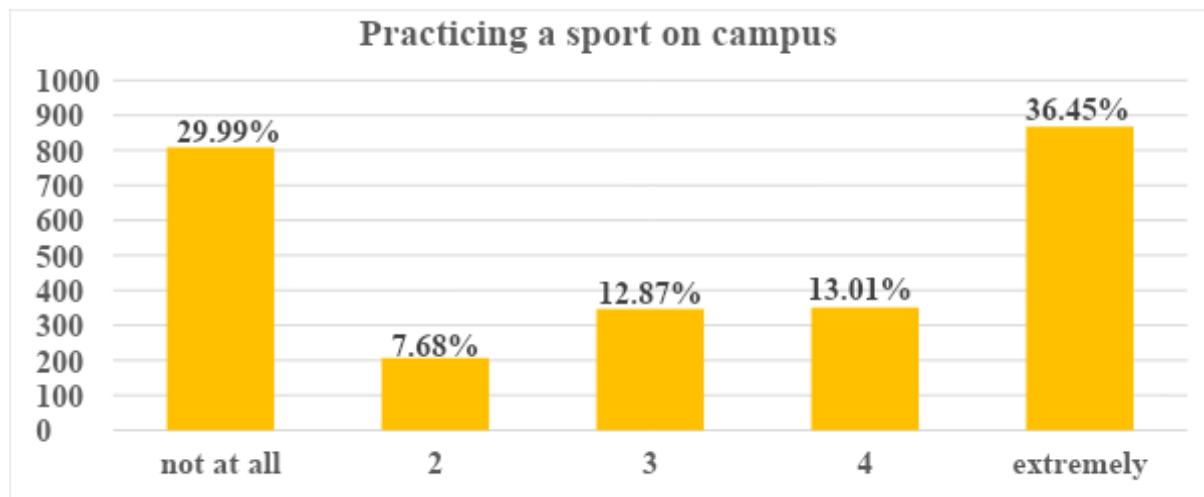
More than half of the respondents felt the absence of eating at the student restaurant greatly. The proportion of those who consider eating at the student restaurant a source of well-being is approximately equal to the number of students who did not feel its absence during the pandemic. However, the proportion of those who do feel its absence has significantly increased.



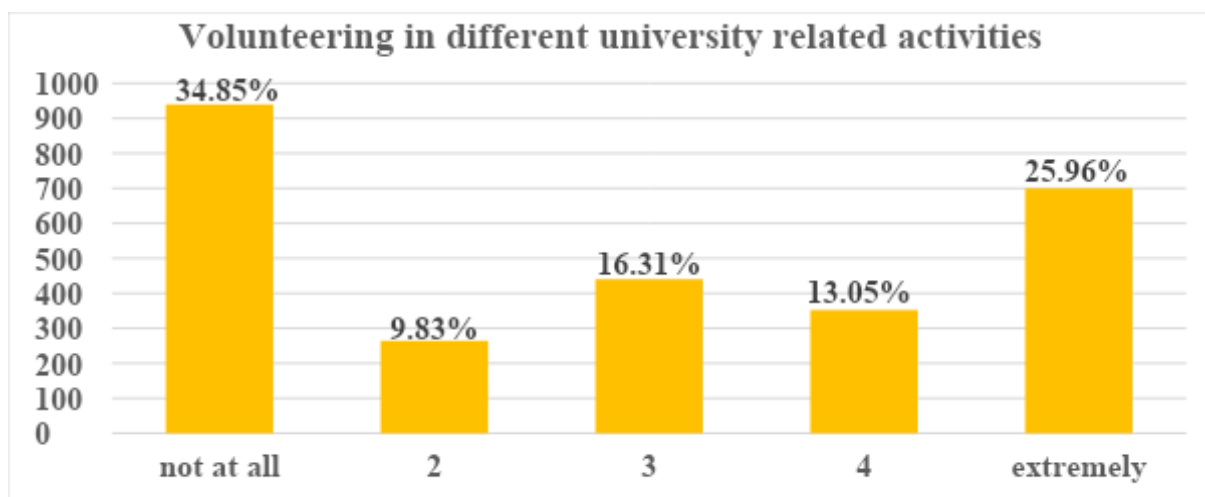
Half of the respondents felt the absence of going to the library. The proportion of students who miss going to the library during the pandemic is similar to those who stated it is an important component of their well-being.

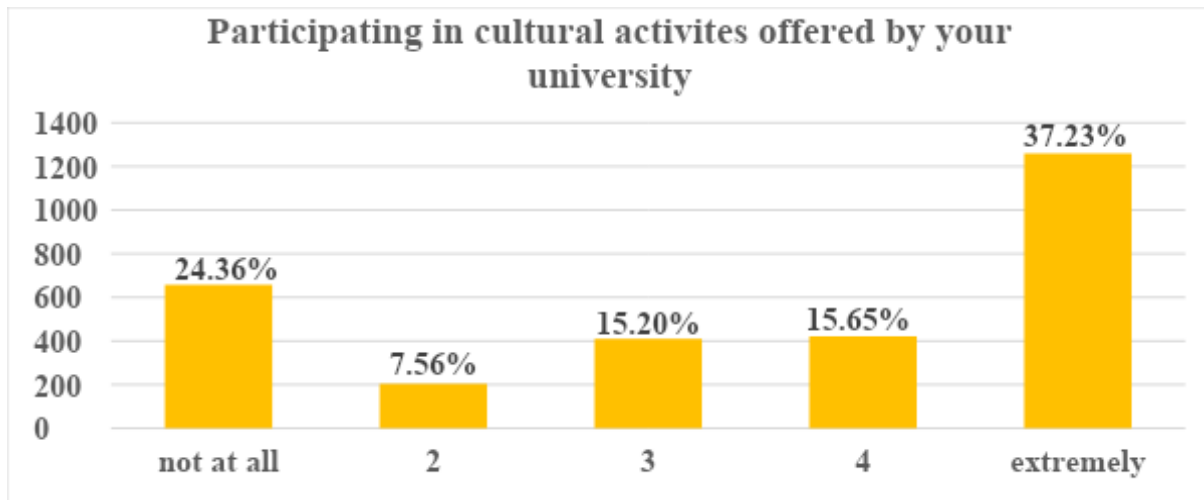


As for practising a sport on campus or outside the campus, the absence of the possibility to practise a sport on and off campus is equally upsetting for students: it is disturbing that more than a quarter of respondents miss practising a sport during the pandemic, but for 34% of them, practising a sport does not contribute to their well-being.

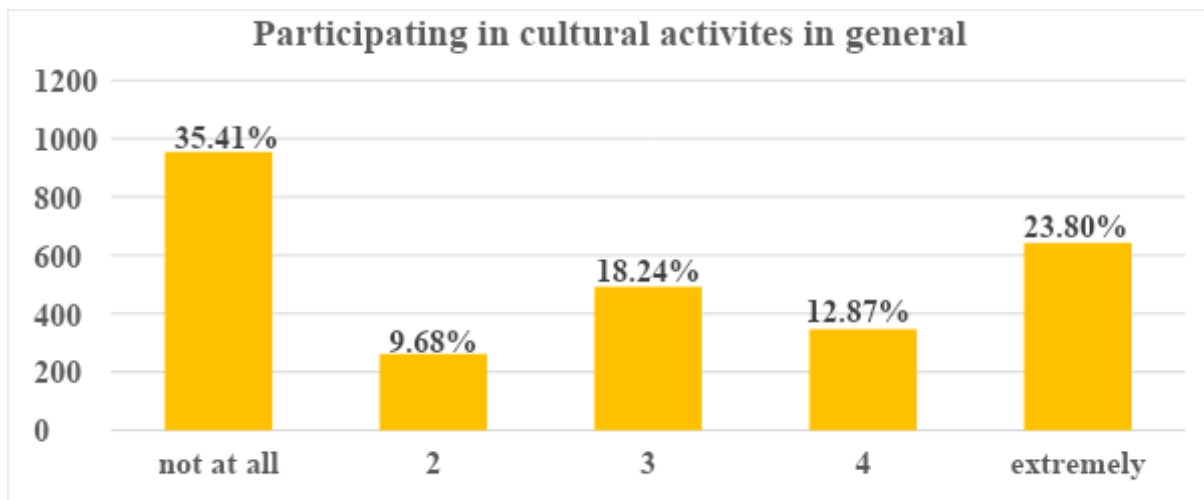


The proportion of students who did not miss volunteering in different university-related activities is roughly equal to those who do not consider this activity as a source of well-being. Even though only 25% of respondents considered volunteering in different university-related activities as a component of well-being, this activity was impacted by the pandemic (35%). On the other hand, it seems that Participating in student associations was not disrupted by the pandemic, the students did not feel they miss this activity, 35.41% declaring that this activity was affected by the pandemic. Even though only 22% responded that participating in student associations contributes to well-being, during the pandemic 36% say they missed it greatly or very much.



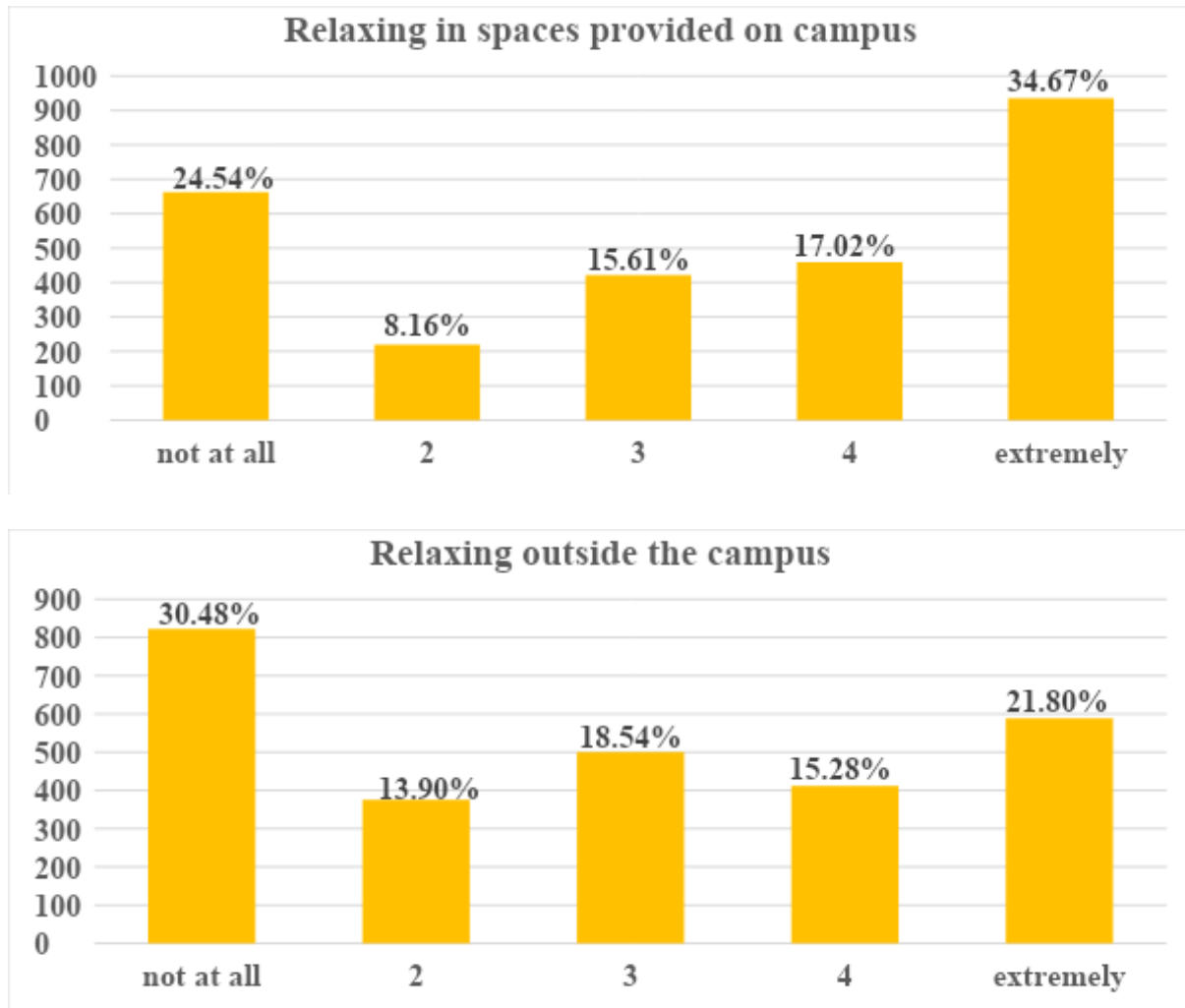


The participation in cultural activities was also affected by the pandemic, most of the students declaring that this participation was extremely affected at their universities, however a high number of participants, nearly equal, declared that participation in cultural activities in general was not affected.

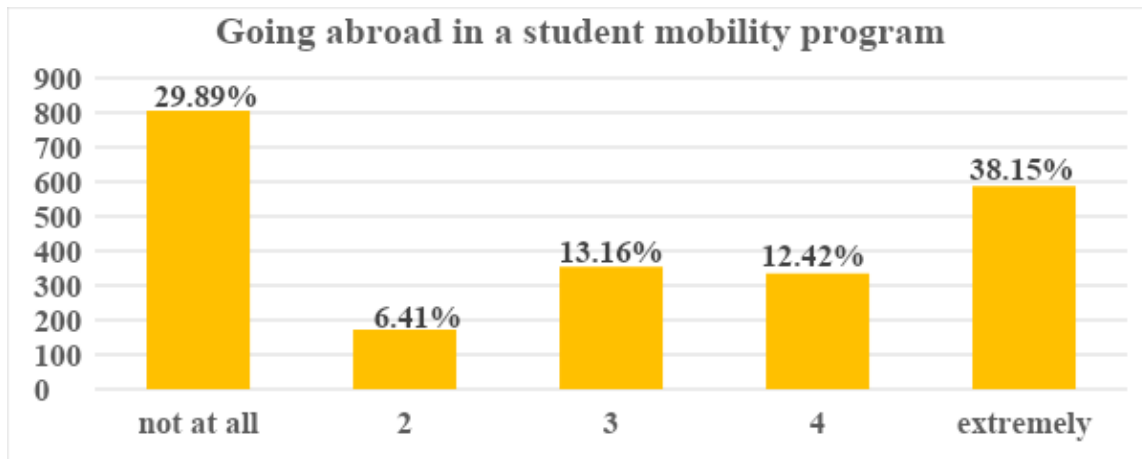


Another dimension referred to relaxing activities on campus and outside the campus. Students missed relaxing in spaces provided on campus (51%) more than relaxing outside the campus (37%). An important result was that the same number of students who reported that relaxing in spaces provided on campus contributes to their well-being also stated that they missed this activity during the pandemic. The presence of in-person activities creates a sense of community that was lost during online activities. Classroom settings and relaxing spaces allow students to establish personal connections which are difficult to establish online environments where students rarely engage in meaningful conversations, the sense of friendship or relationship between students being affected. Being on campus contributes to positive educational and social experience, both the campus environment and relaxing activities outside campus offers a distinction between university and home, while during

pandemic students experienced a more ambiguous space. The campus in particular offers the common ground for establishing connections.

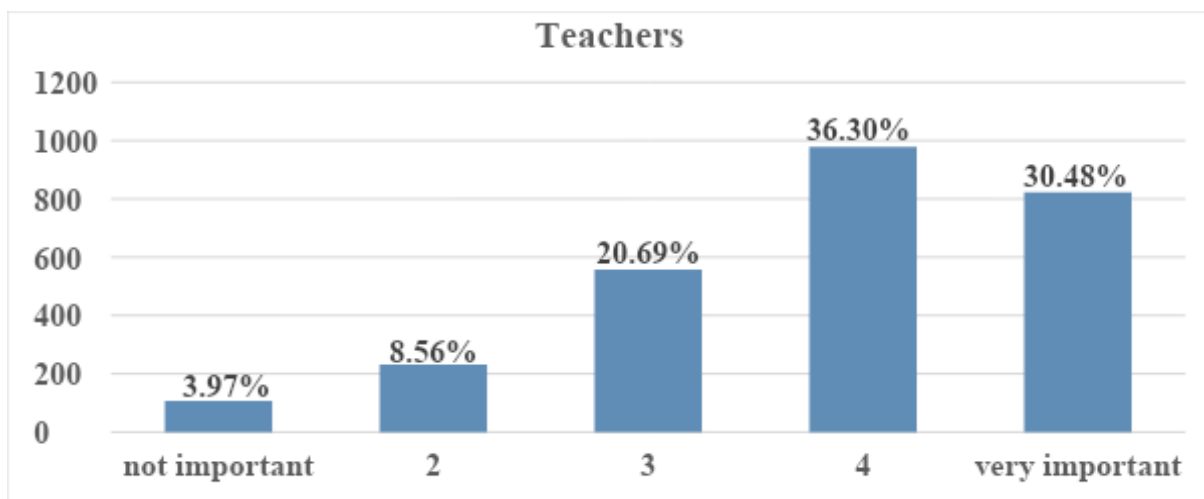


Concerning going abroad in a student mobility program, students declared in fairly similar proportions that the pandemic did not affect this activity, and, on the contrary, that it was greatly impacted. This result can be explained by the relatively low involvement of students in activities of this kind, a trend that was further accentuated by the pandemic. Recent research on this topic showed that the main factors could be the pressure to graduate quickly, inflexible degree structures, and the absence of planned international studies within degree programs (Finnish Agency for Education, 2022). Worldwide, higher education institutions reported a decrease in the number of students participating in mobility programs not only due to limited financial student aid months and other economic factors, but also due to the pandemic, when student mobility has been lower than usual.



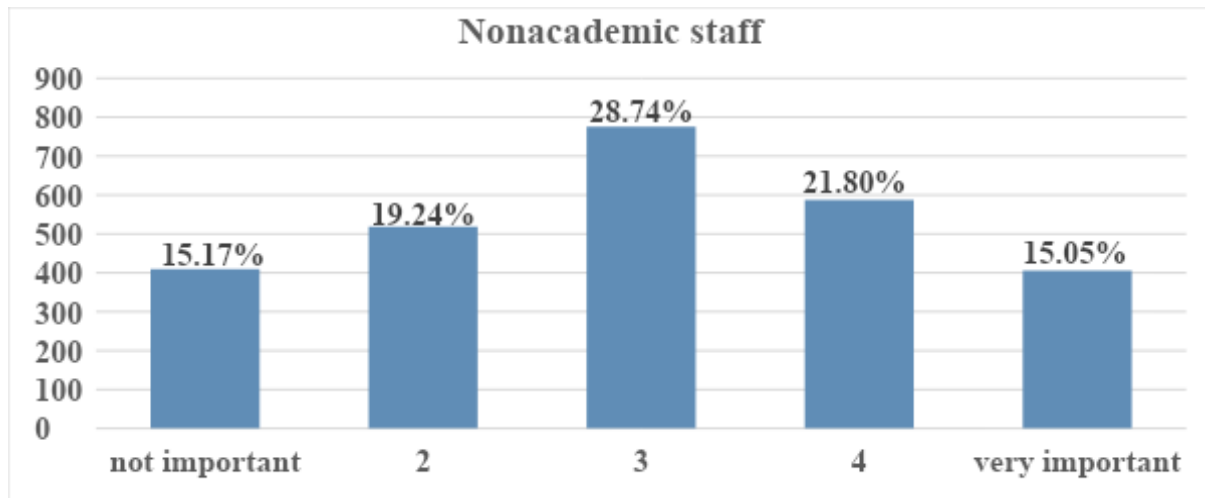
The importance of connections for student well-being

An important aspect of the student well-being is represented by the connections they establish during their university life. Two-thirds of the students consider the connection with faculty members to be important or very important. Only 12% of the students do not consider the connection with faculty members to be important.

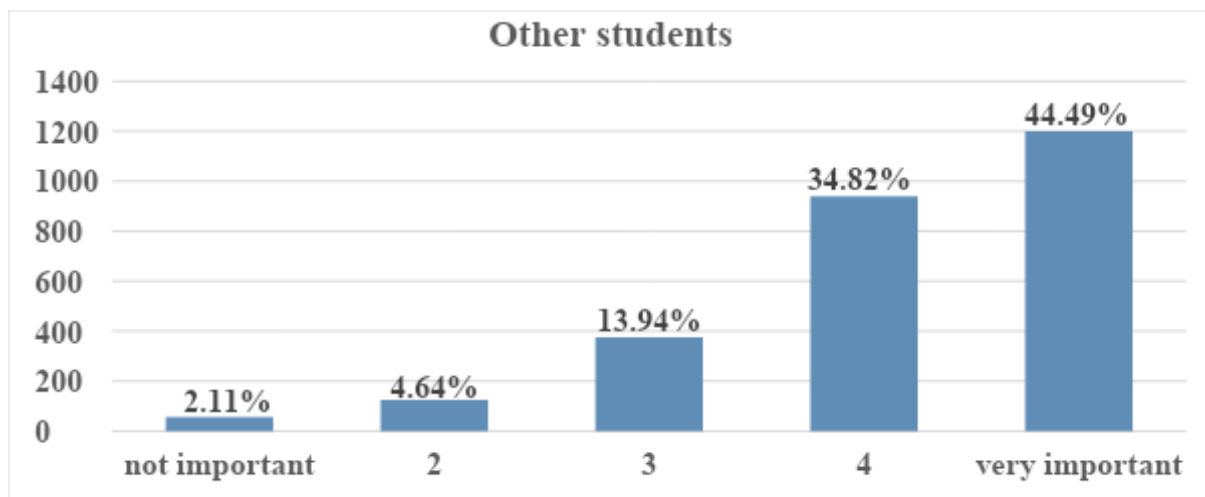


The connection with non-academic staff is considered both important and less important by students. The connection with colleagues is highly valued for well-being, with 80% of students considering it to be very important. This is not surprising, given that the need for affiliation, as proposed by McClelland's motivation model, is prominent during adolescence. The connection with non-academic staff seems to be not very prominent, the perceptions of students being equally distributed. Comparing teachers, staff and others, the results showed

that in descending order, the partners with whom the connection is important are: fellow students, teachers, and non-academic staff.

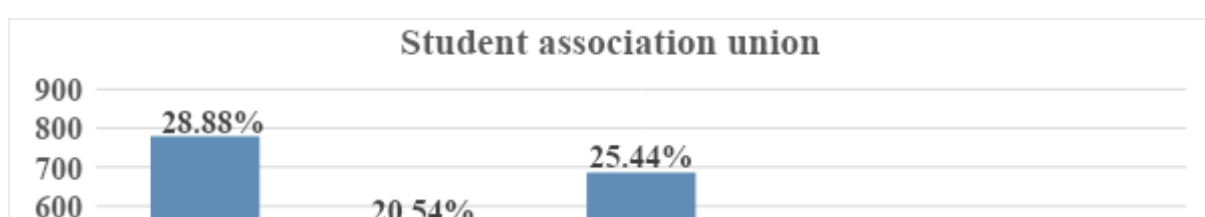


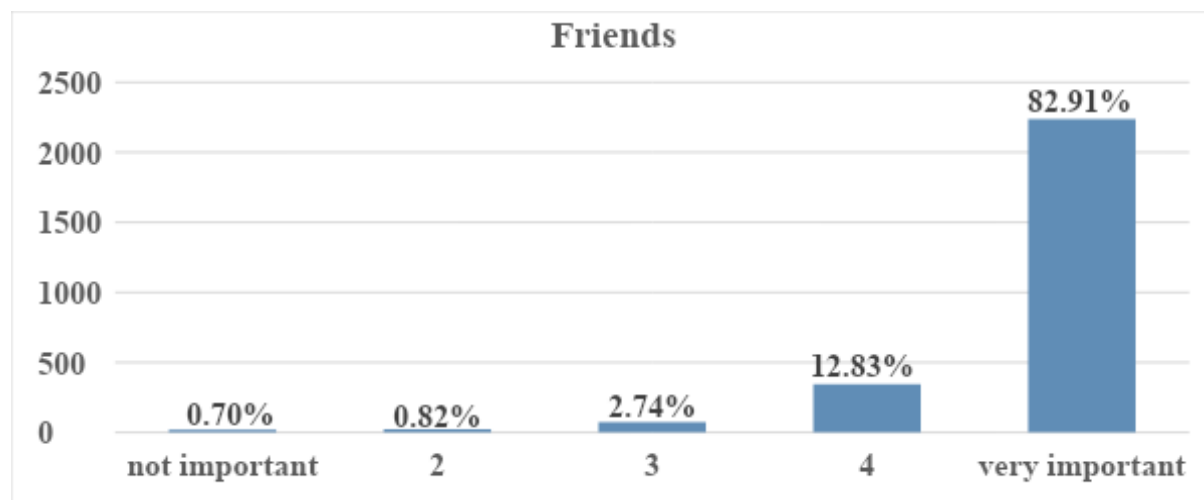
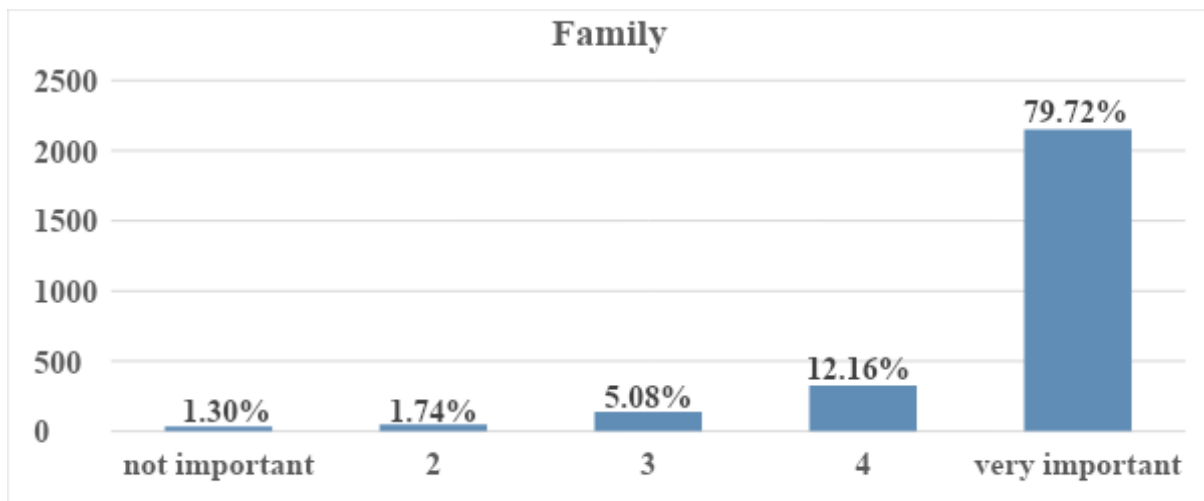
As expected, the connection with other students is considered the most important by students. Friendships and peer support are important factors sustaining academic adjustment, students who struggle with their peer relationships at university may encounter difficulties in adjusting and a higher risk of academic dropout, research indicating that feelings of isolation, loneliness, and poor social integration are commonly cited reasons for student attrition (Stan et al., 2022).



Student associations are not considered very important (10.6%), while most of the students considered that student associations are not important (28.88%).

In descending order, the partners with whom the connection is important are: friends (95%), family (92%), other students (80%), teachers (66%), non-academic staff (36%), and the student association union (25%).





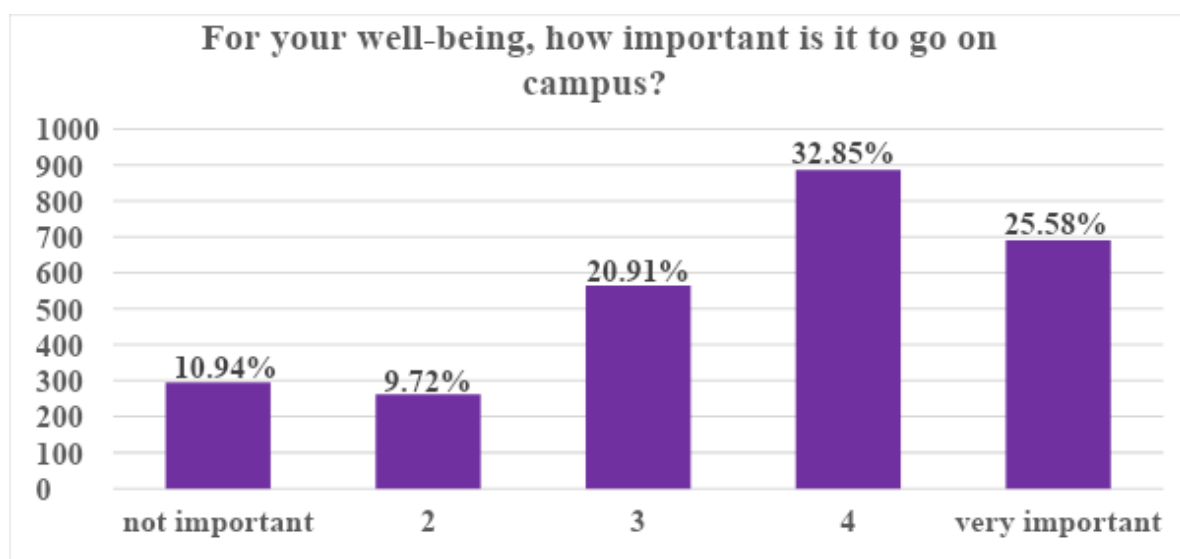
Other results:

PhD students value connections to teachers more than Undergraduate and Graduate students. Graduate students value connections to other students more than any other student type.

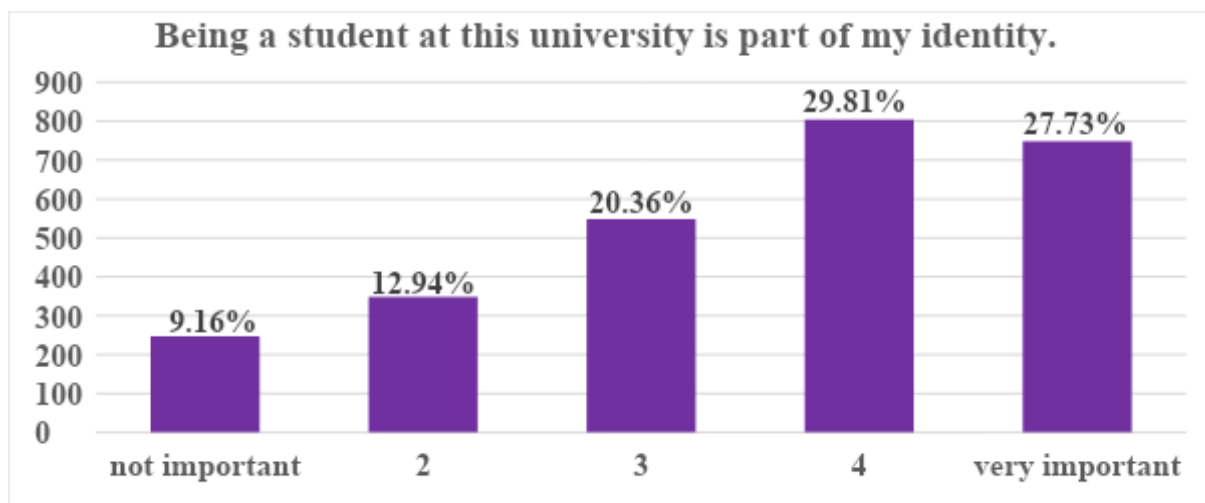
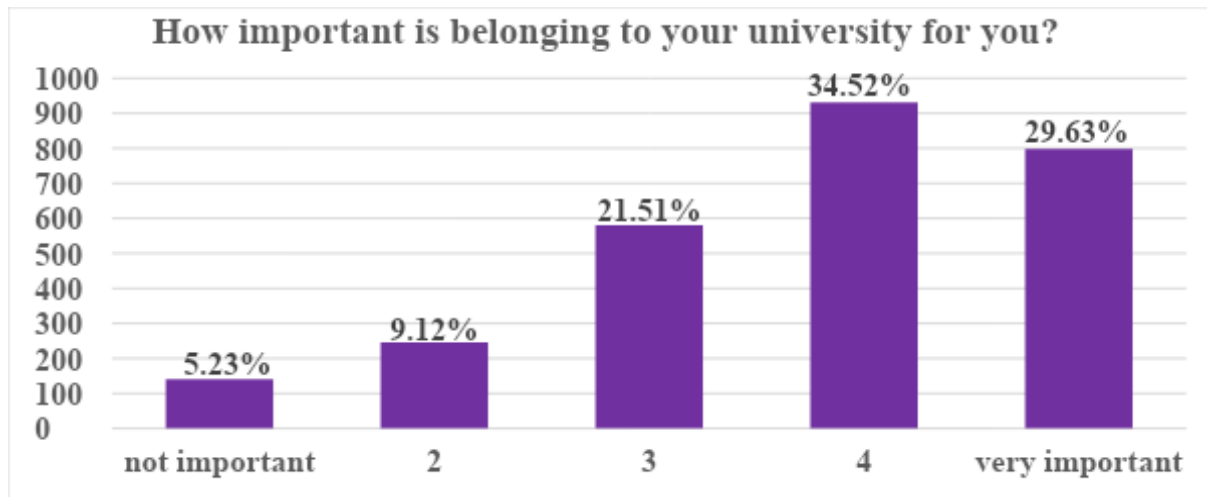
Belongingness to the university and well-being

The concept of “belonging” refers to how much students feel valued, accepted, and included, fostered through social, academic, and professional interactions (Parkes 2014). The sense of belonging is crucial for positive educational experiences and academic adjustment, being associated with well-being, motivation, and achievement (France, Finney, and Swerdzewski 2010). The need to belong and identify with others is pressing and anxiety-inducing for new students, and making initial social contacts is crucial for them to feel a part of university life (Maunder et al. 2013). Meaningful social involvement offers students valuable social and emotional support during their adjustment to university (Tinto 1993). Previous studies found significant relationships between the adjustment to university and the level of attachment

students had to their university and peers. Students who had stronger connections and relationships with their peers at the university exhibited higher levels of adjustment, whereas those who experienced problematic relationships reported lower adjustment. The attachment to the university itself was also associated with adjustment, with students who had a stronger sense of attachment to the institution demonstrating higher levels of adjustment; the most influential factor in predicting university adjustment was the level of attachment students had to their university friends. Although university attachment also played a role in adjustment, its impact was relatively smaller compared to peer attachment (Maunder, 2018). The results of our study confirm that aspects such as going on to campus, belonging to the university or being part of the university are considered very important by the students, which confirms their high attachment to the university and the high sense of belonging.



Going on campus is important for two-thirds of the respondents. Equally important is belonging to their university. These beliefs largely form the basis of their identity, according to the same number of students. Student status is associated with well-being and personal identity for two-thirds of the respondents.

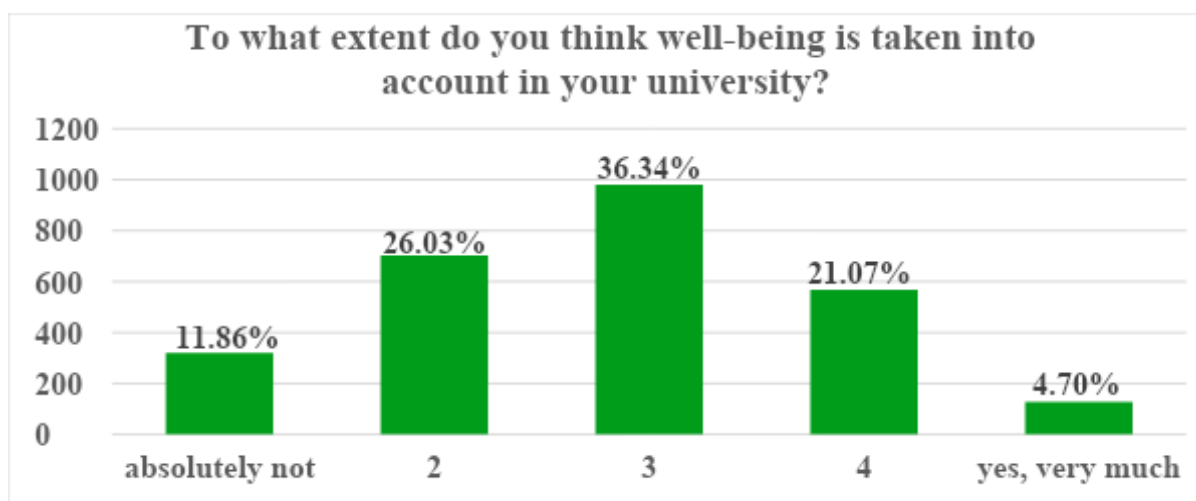


Other results:

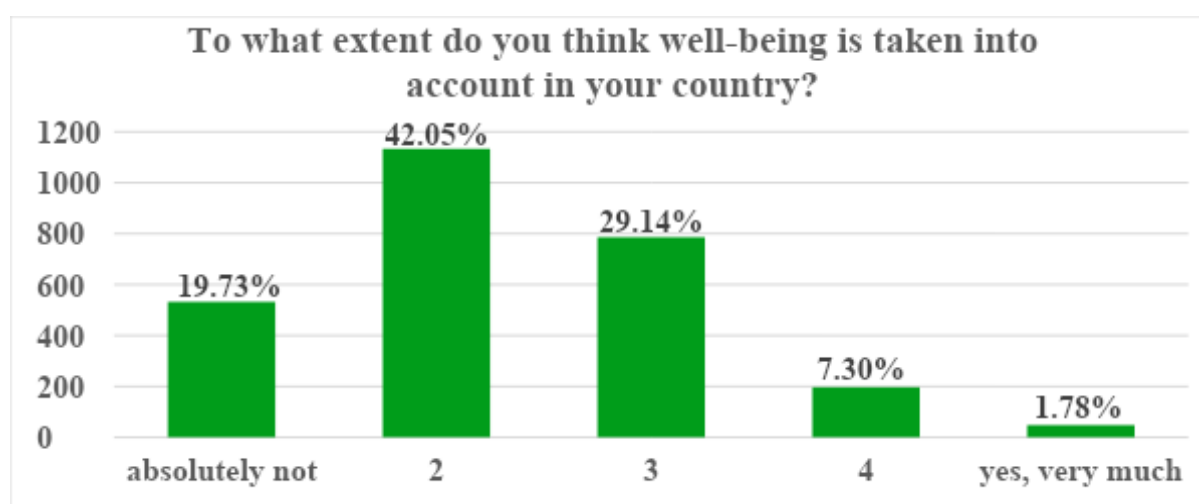
Undergraduate and Graduate students value going to campus more than PhD students, while Undergraduate and PhD students value belonging to the university most.

The extent to which well-being is taken into account

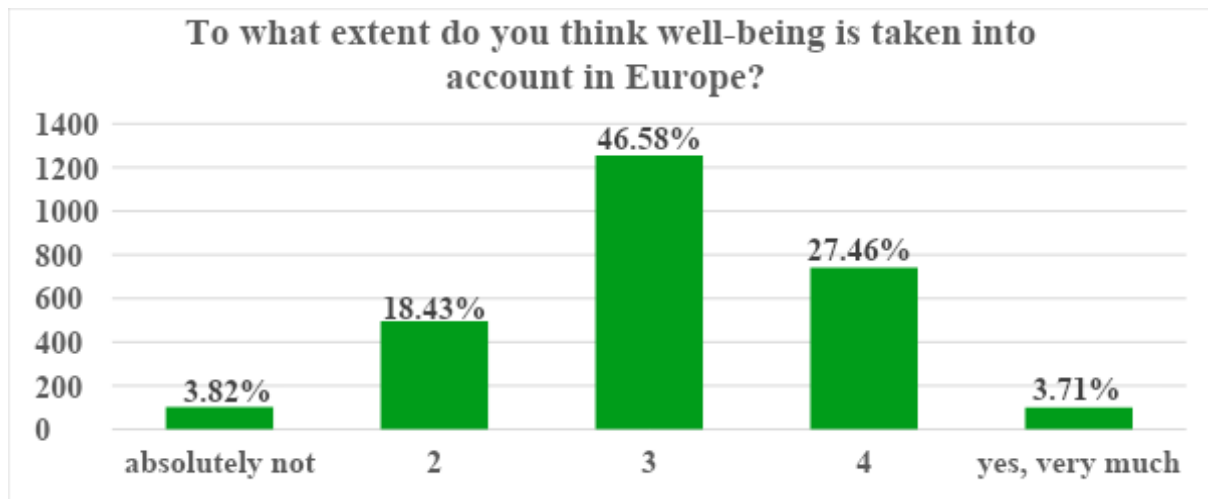
Another section of the student report is dedicated to the perceptions about the extent to which well-being is taken into account in their universities.



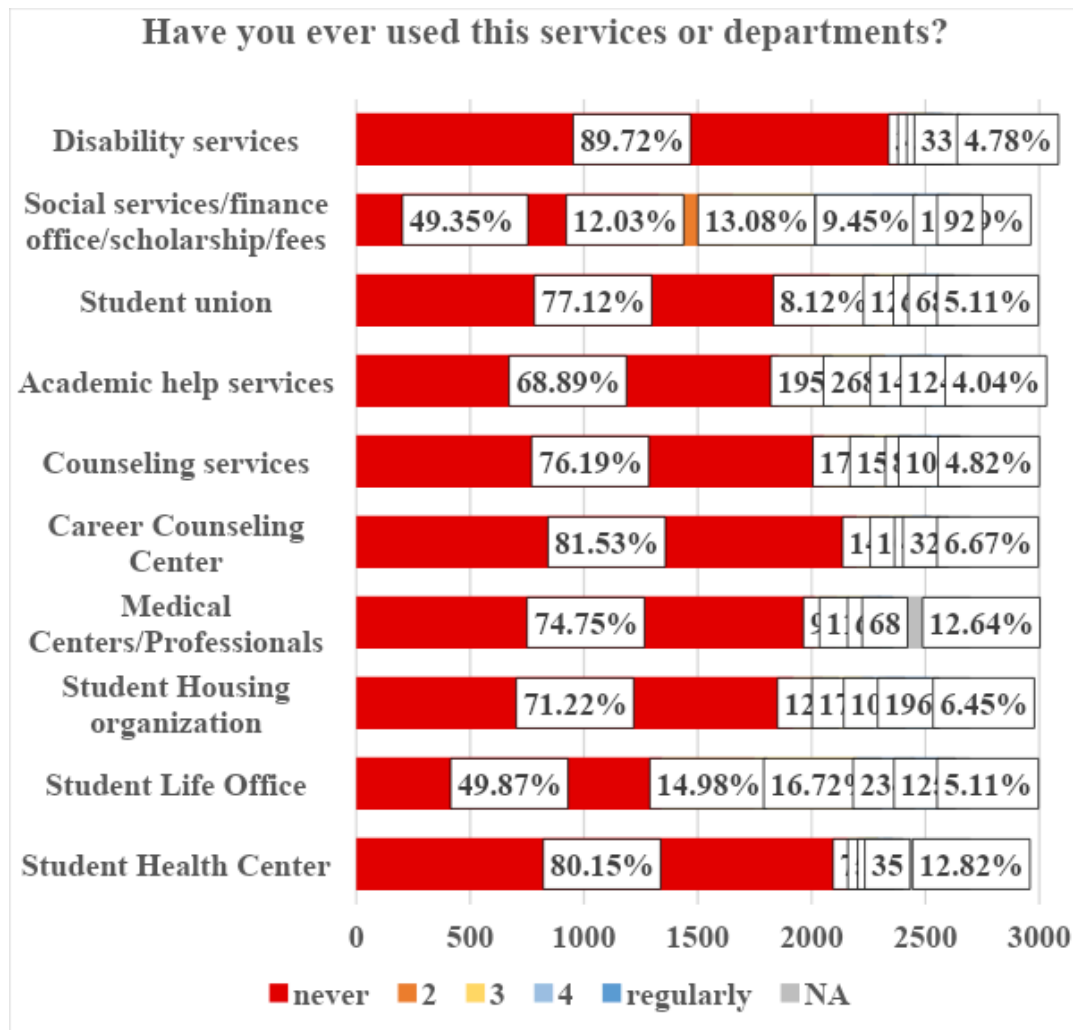
Only a small percentage of the respondents (25%) believe that their university takes their well-being into consideration or is sensitive to it. This result serves as an alarm signal for universities, urging them to either initiate initiatives to support student well-being or to make their existing initiatives known. Campuses should contribute to improving academic performance, retention, and graduation rates, in parallel to sustaining the well-being of students, by demonstrating improved cultural awareness, sharpened critical thinking abilities, active participation in community service, and a greater likelihood of being compassionate and involved citizens.



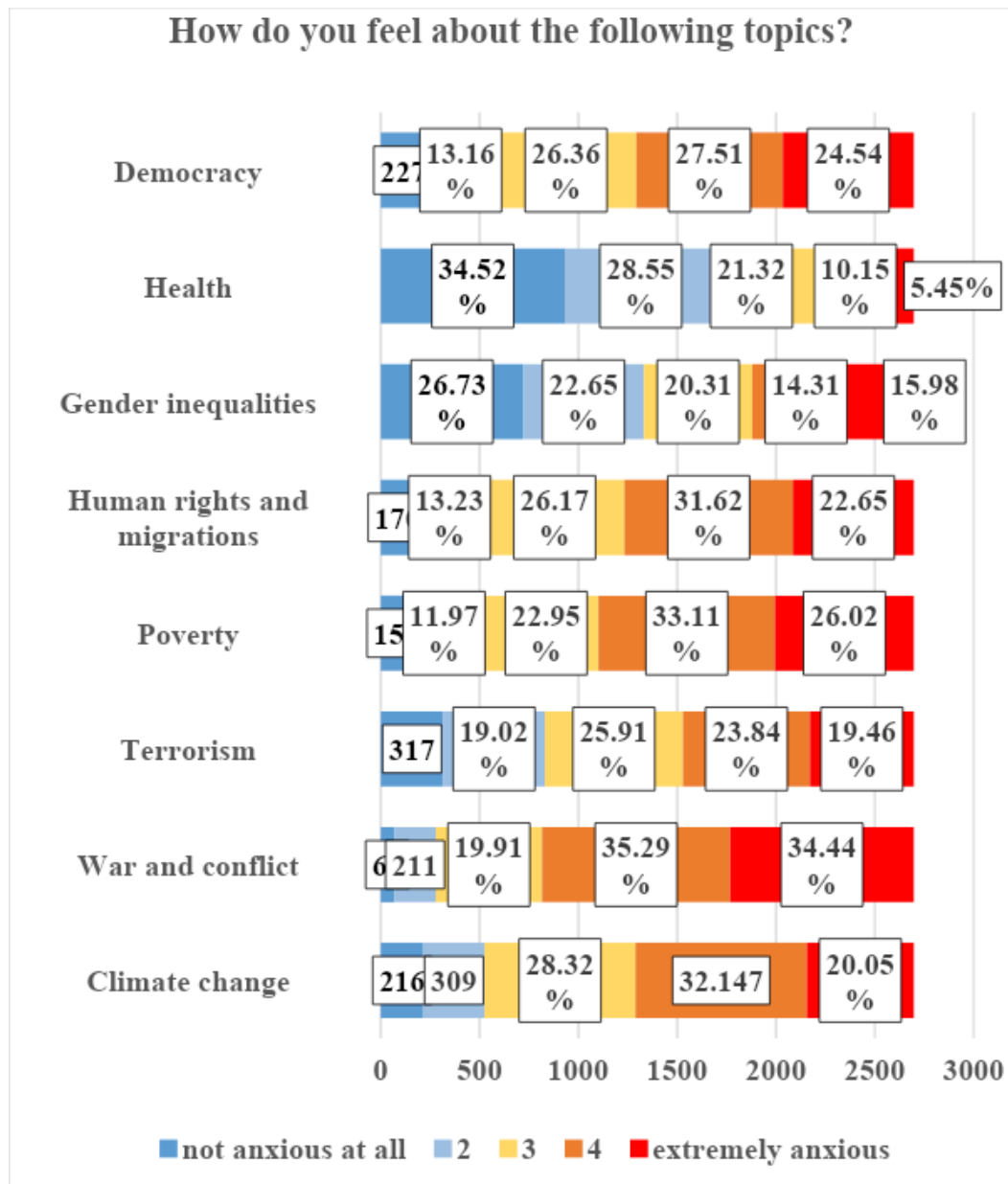
It is concerning that less than 10% of students believe that their well-being is taken into account by their countries. At the European level, the perception of concerns regarding well-being is 10% more intense than at the national level, indicating an unrealistic, embellished perception of European efforts towards well-being.



Concerning the use of several university services or departments, it can be seen that in most cases these services were not used. As a general observation, three-quarters of students did not benefit from the services provided by the university, except for social services, fees, financial services, and the student life office. However, the services with the highest percentages were social services/ financial offices and Student health centres, medical centres.



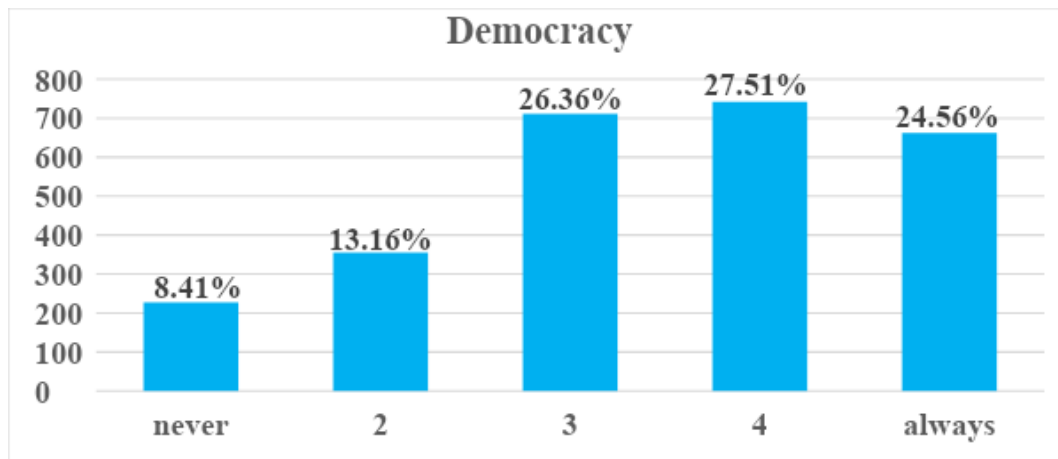
Student services play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of students' learning experience and promoting their academic success and well-being. Research indicates that not only the quality of teaching and learning but also the quality of service systems and support for students are major factors contributing to student adjustment (Hill et al., 2003).



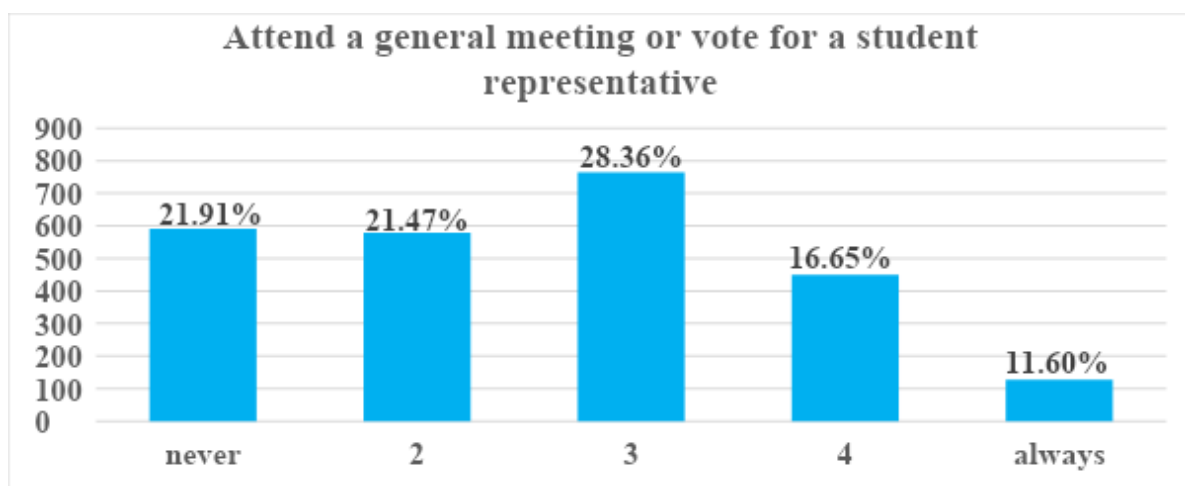
The main concerns and anxieties for students are (in descending order): war and conflict, poverty, human rights and migrations, the threat to democracy, climate change, and terrorism. They are less concerned about health, which is natural at a young age. The answers confirm that students have been significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian-Ukrainian War, these events resulting in disruptions to their academic journey. Students experienced interruptions in school calendars, the shift to online learning, changes in communication methods and workload expectations, as well as the unfortunate occurrences of infections and the loss of peers, faculty members, and family members etc. as a result, their levels of anxiety and stress increased. However, despite the recent pandemic, their concerns about health are low, those related to human poverty, migration and human rights being significantly higher.

According to you, how can you best act on these topics?

The attitudes of students towards aspects such as democracy, attending a general meeting or voting for a student representative, volunteering or helping others were also investigated. More than half of the respondents believe that they can take action in support of democracy. A quarter of them are in the middle of the scale, which raises hope that they could be helped to learn how to act in support of democracy.

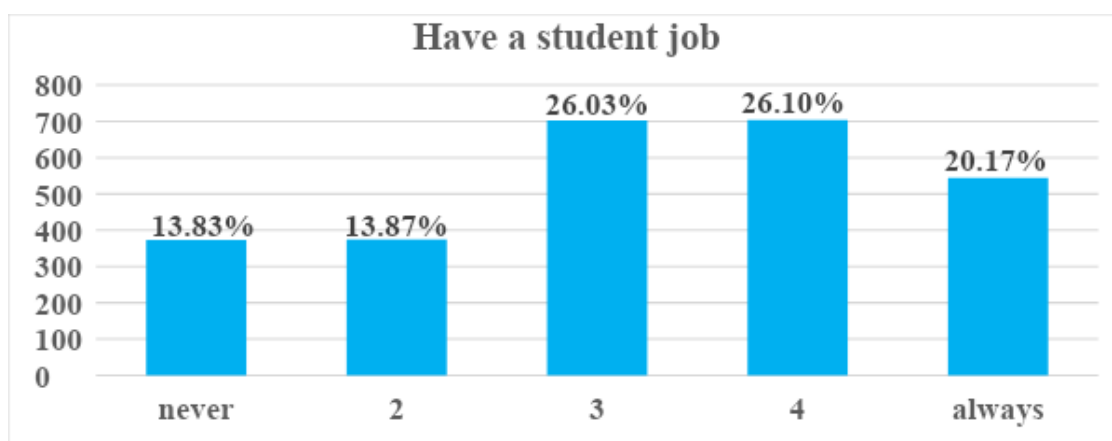
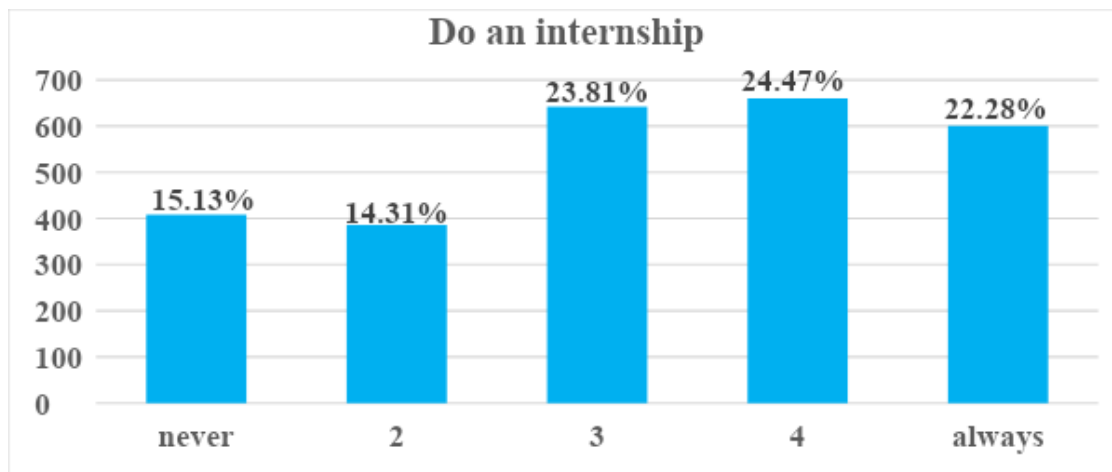
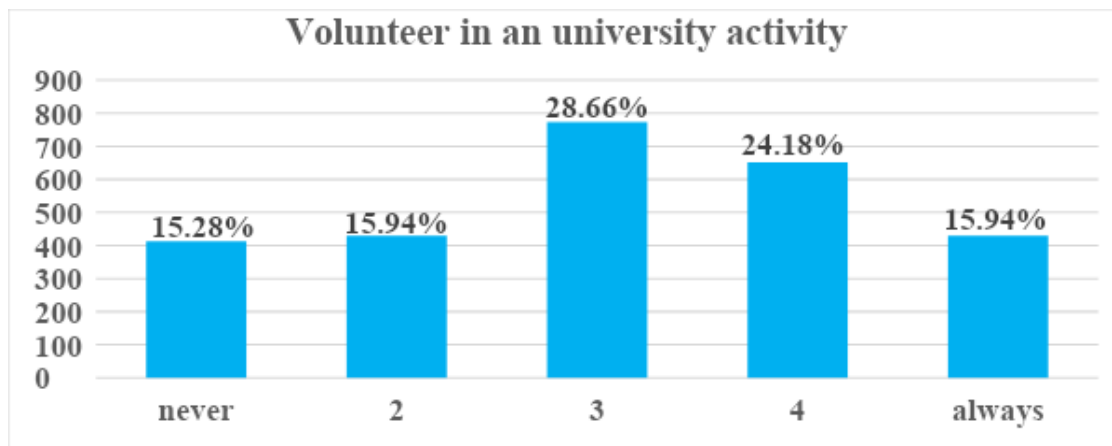


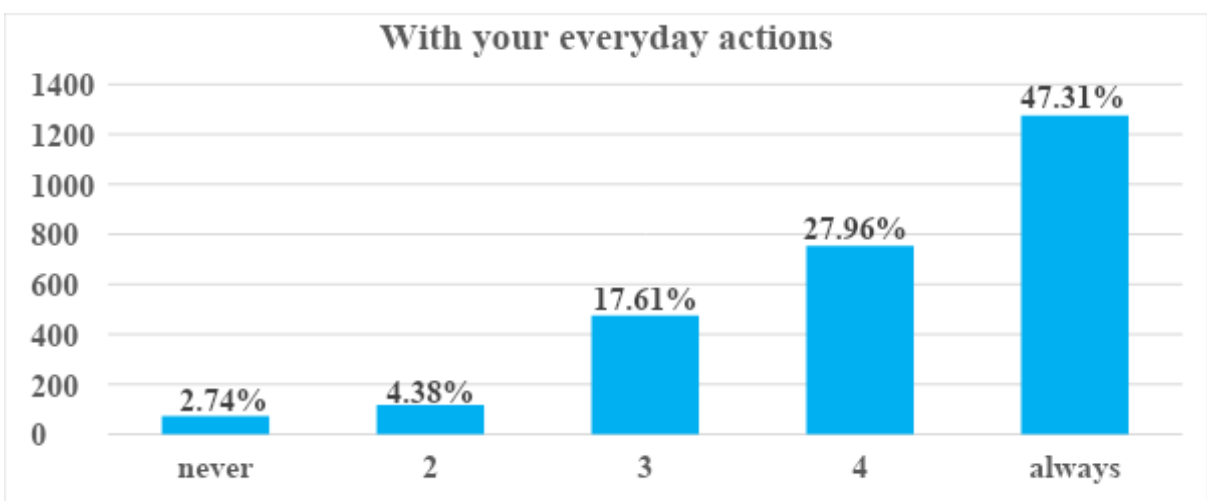
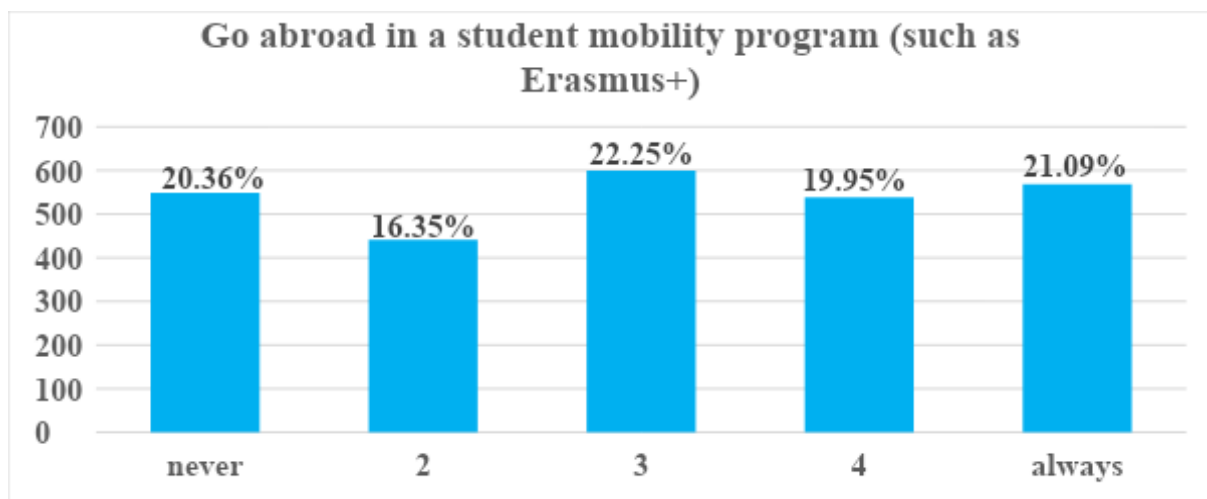
It is disheartening that only a quarter of students believe they can participate in a general meeting or vote for a student representative. This suggests that student associations should be more proactive in engaging and encouraging student participation in volunteering for student associations or unions. Over a quarter of students are in the ambivalent zone, indicating that they could be drawn towards such activities. The situation is similar when it comes to volunteering in university activities. Around 40% of students consider it possible to volunteer both in a student association or union and in a university activity, in addition to 25% who are potentially willing but currently express ambivalence towards these activities.



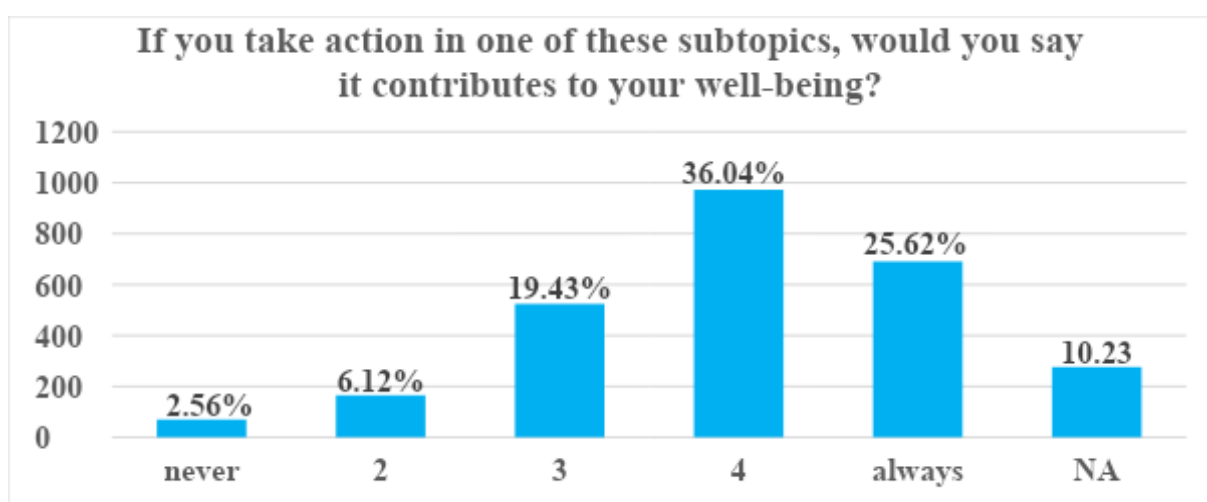
On the other hand, it is encouraging that nearly 80% of respondents feel capable of helping another person with a personal issue. The responses are relatively similar for "do an internship," "have a student job," and "go abroad in a student mobility program" (46% in

favour and 25% potentially willing). It is possible that the same students responded similarly to these items, indicating their desire to be actively engaged. The majority of students report that they are coping well or very well with the daily demands (76%).





Most of the students reported that they feel that their everyday actions could contribute to well-being, however they consider that actions in areas mentioned above contribute to a moderate extent to well-being.



III. Survey for University Staff

Methods

Participants

The sample of this study consists of 117 university staff working at various faculties around Europe. Of these, 38.5% ($N = 45$) are from Greece, 18.8% ($N = 22$) from Romania, 9.4 % ($N = 11$) from Portugal, 8.5% ($N = 10$) from France, 4.3% ($N = 5$) from the Czech Republic, etc. Regarding their position at faculty, they are administrators, pro-rectors, deans, department directors, researchers, professors, and more.

Data for the University survey

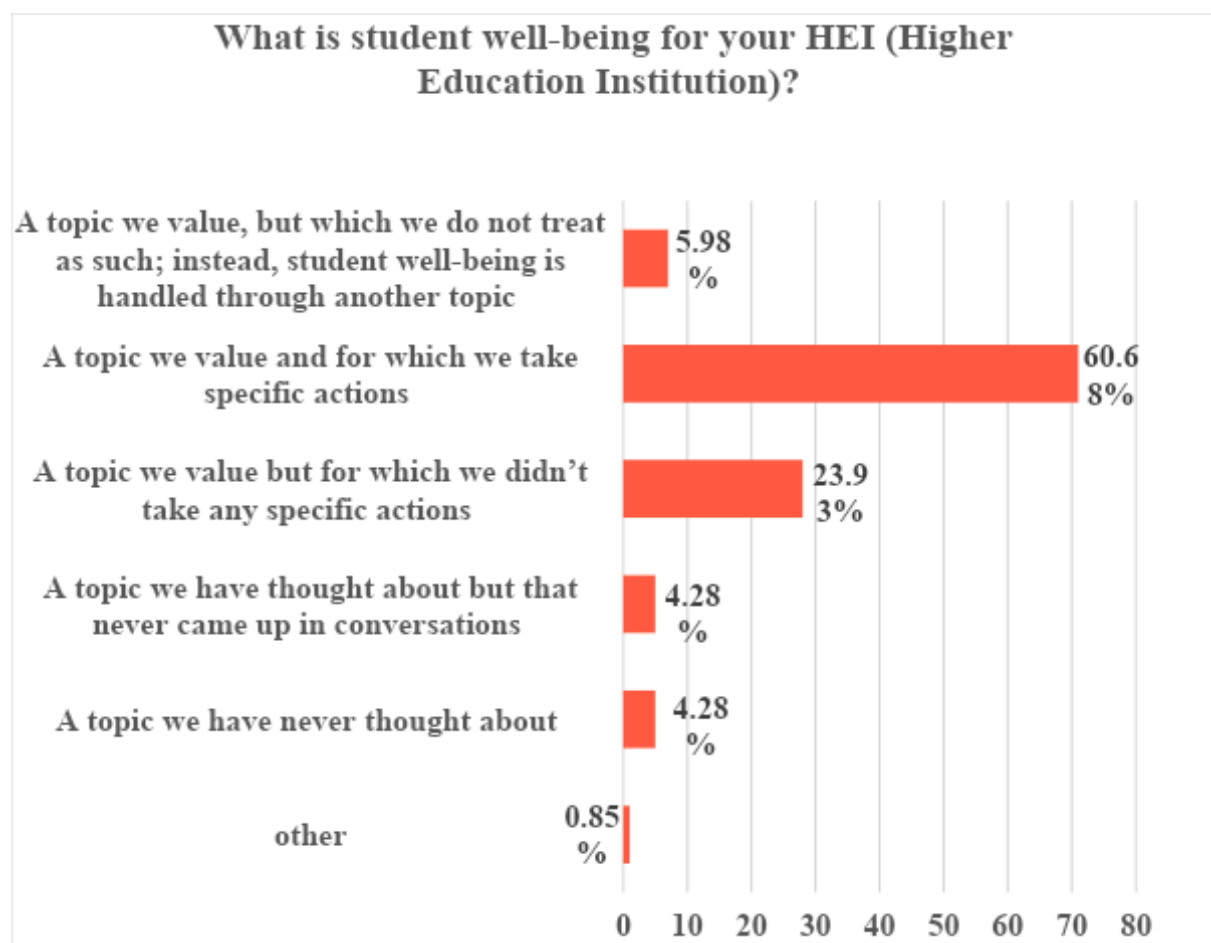
In order to analyse specific aspects related to student well-being, we developed a questionnaire, including two main parts: (1) a demographic section and (2) a survey about approaches of well-being and (3) strategy, process, operational action, activities and facilities, evaluation & best practices regarding well-being initiatives in universities. Most of the items required Yes/No answers, Likert scale answers or multiple choice items.

- (1) **The socio-demographic questionnaire** included questions related to university: name, location, position of the respondent.
- (2) **Approaches of Well-being survey** included questions related to perceptions about well-being:
 - What is student well-being for you? Does your HEI have an official definition of student well-being? How would you rate the degree of active discussion in your HEI about student well-being? Importance of several activities for student well-being (Studying in classes, Studying online, Doing an internship, Meeting other students etc).
- (3) **Strategy and process** – several multiple-choice items measured strategies and processes related to well-being initiatives: Who initiated the work on student well-being strategy? (Students and/or student organisations, Teachers and/or teaching staff, Higher education institution staff from the office of student life etc); Does your institution have specific processes regarding student well-being? Who contributed to the implementation of the process for student well-being within the HEI ?
- (4) **Operational action, activities and facilities** including items such as involvement of the following departments in helping students, evaluation of the cooperation between departments involved in offering help to students?,
- (5) **Evaluation** Does your institution evaluate student well-being processes?, How often?
- (6) **Good practices** including items referring to measures to improve student well-being at national, regional, university level.

All the participants gave their written consent to participate in their study. The data was anonymized, and they were informed that the participation is voluntary and non-mandatory, the possibility to drop out of the study being ensured at any moment.

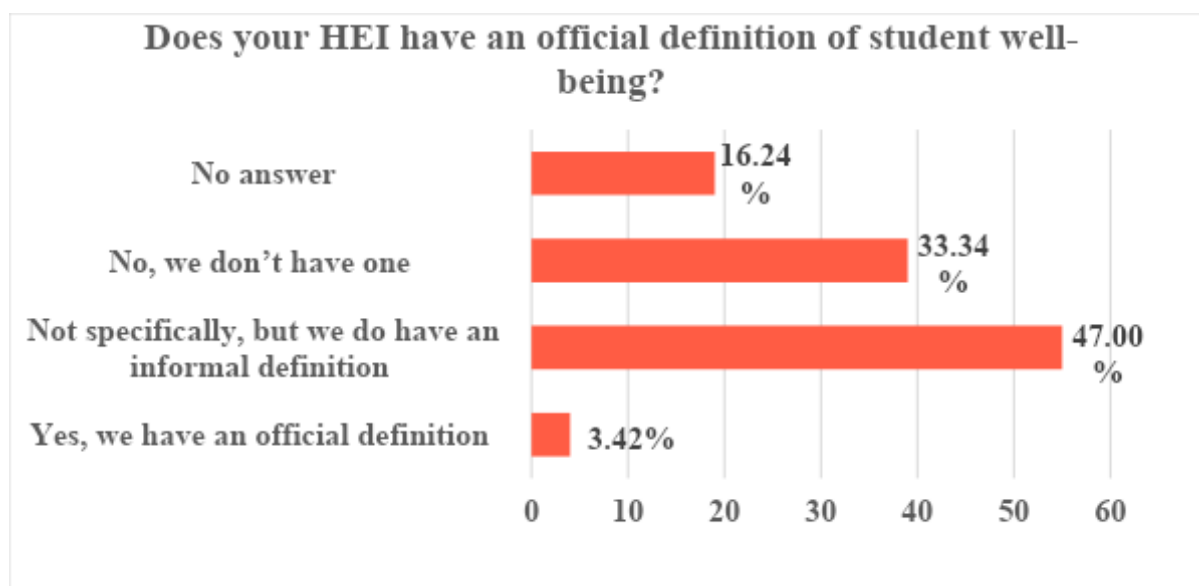
Results for the university survey

The approach to well-being

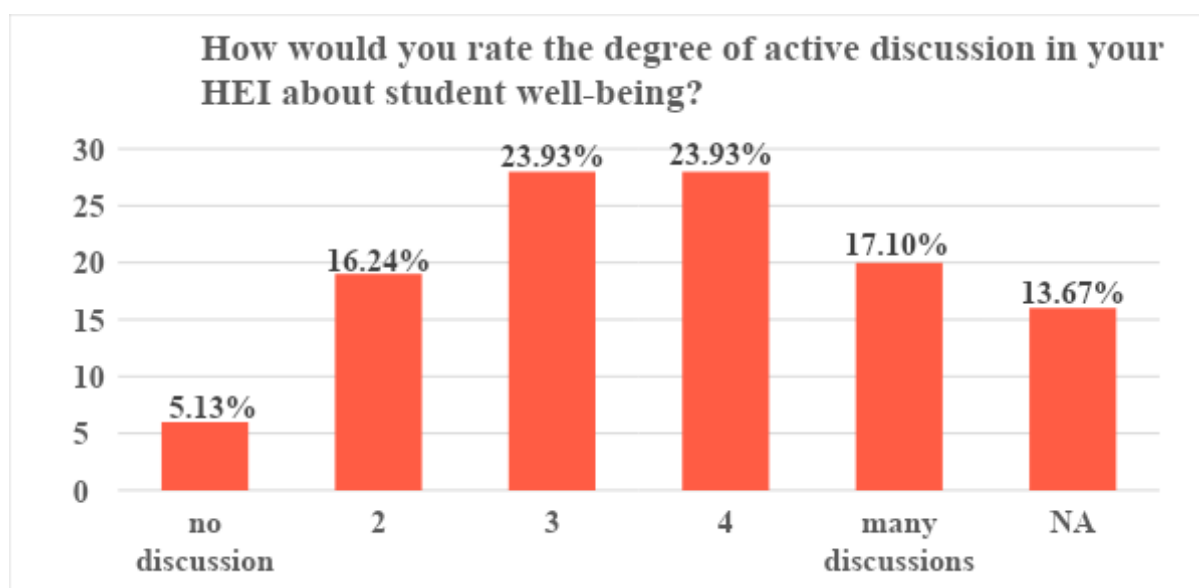


Note: OX represents the number of answers

Most of the Higher Education Institutions (HEI) included in the study view student well-being as a valuable topic for which they take specific actions. In second place, respondents view well-being as a topic they value, but have not taken any specific actions for improving it.



Almost half of HEI do not have an official definition for the concept of student well-being but are using an informal definition for addressing it. Half of the respondents either do not have a definition or have not answered. Even though an official definition could be relevant for designing specific interventions for improving student well-being, only 3.42% mentioned having one.

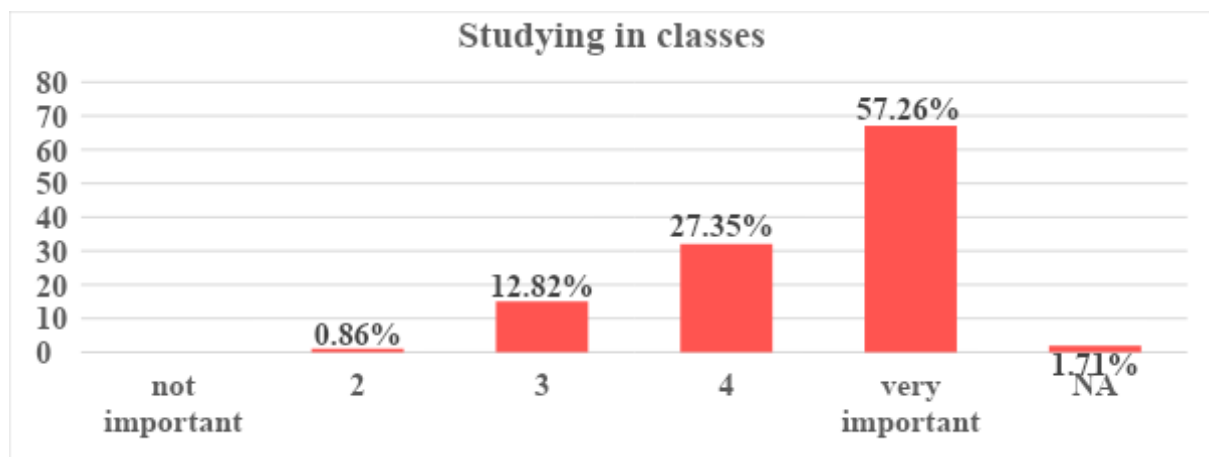


When asked about the degree of discussion on the topic of student well-being, most respondents representing HEIs in Europe mention having actively discussed it to a moderate degree. Only 5.13% mentioned having no active discussion on student well-being.

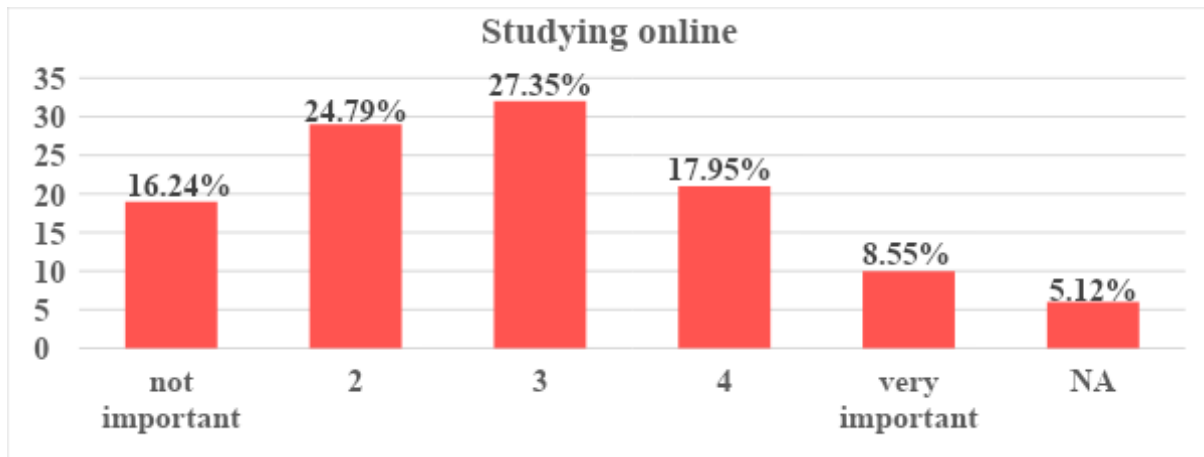
According to you, how important are the following activities for a student's well-being?

The results for this section are presented in graphs below, depicting the perspective of representatives for European Higher Education Institutions (HEI). Based on the recorded responses HEI attribute studying in classes as being relevant for maintaining student well-being. The majority of the representatives of HEI believe that studying in classes is very important for student well-being. In contrast, studying online seems to be a less relevant activity, according to the respondents for this study. Doing an internship is also regarded as being relevant for student well-being, with more than 75% of participants describing it as being important or very important. Fostering social interactions for students seems to be one of the priorities for HEI, with almost 85% of respondents describing meeting other students as being very important for their well-being. This activity seems to be regarded as one of the most important from the listed activities. Furthermore, following activities were also regarded as being important or very important: eating at the student restaurant or cafeteria, going to the library, practising a sport on campus, practising a sport on campus, volunteering in different university related activities, participating in student associations or societies, participating in cultural activities offered by your university, relaxing in spaces provided on campus and going abroad in student mobility programs (such as Erasmus+).

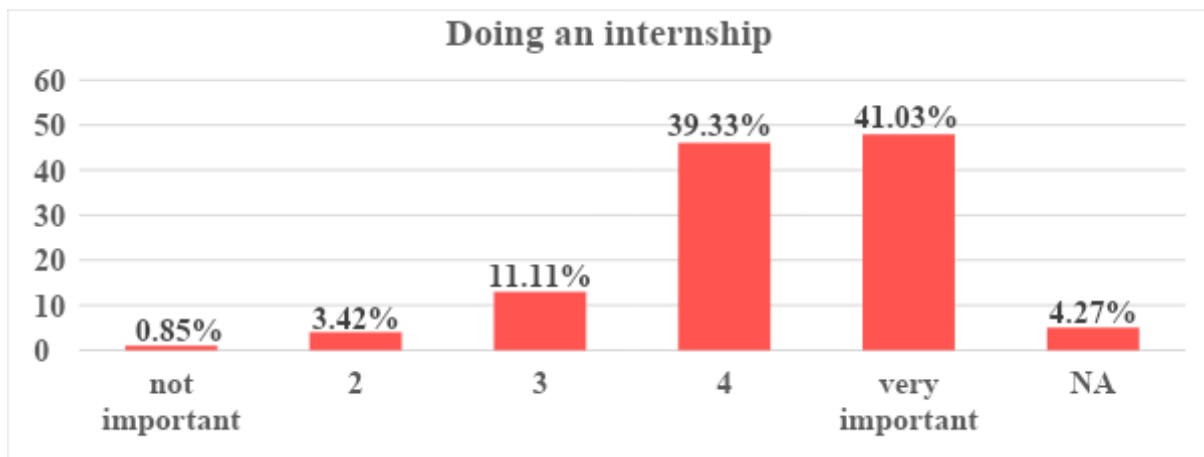
Compared to the results obtained for the Student Survey, it seems that representatives for HEI value almost all described activities more than students do. This finding can suggest that HEIs have not appropriately evaluated the needs of students for increasing well-being.



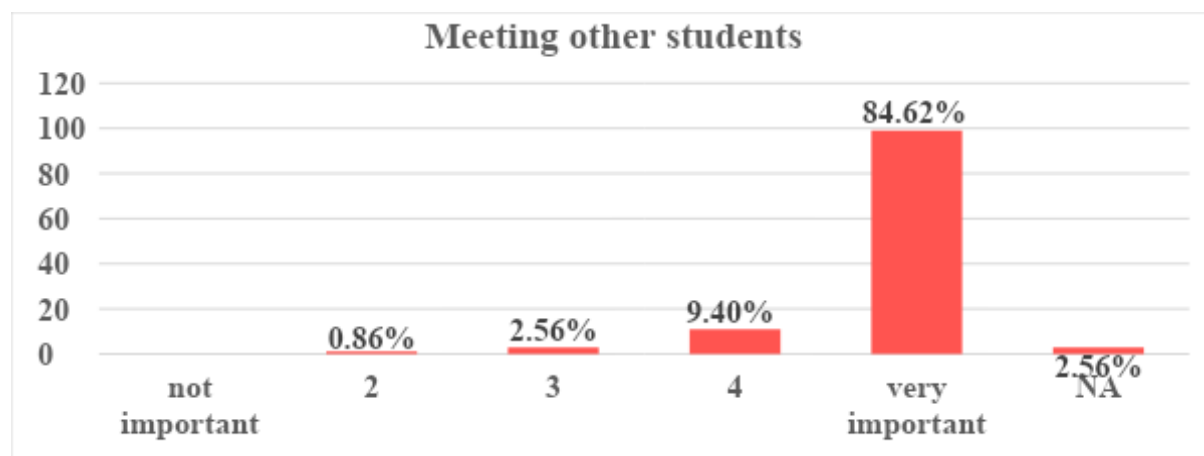
For university representatives, studying in classes is very important, the percentage of academics who considered this aspect relevant is high, more than 50%, while studying online is seen as less important.

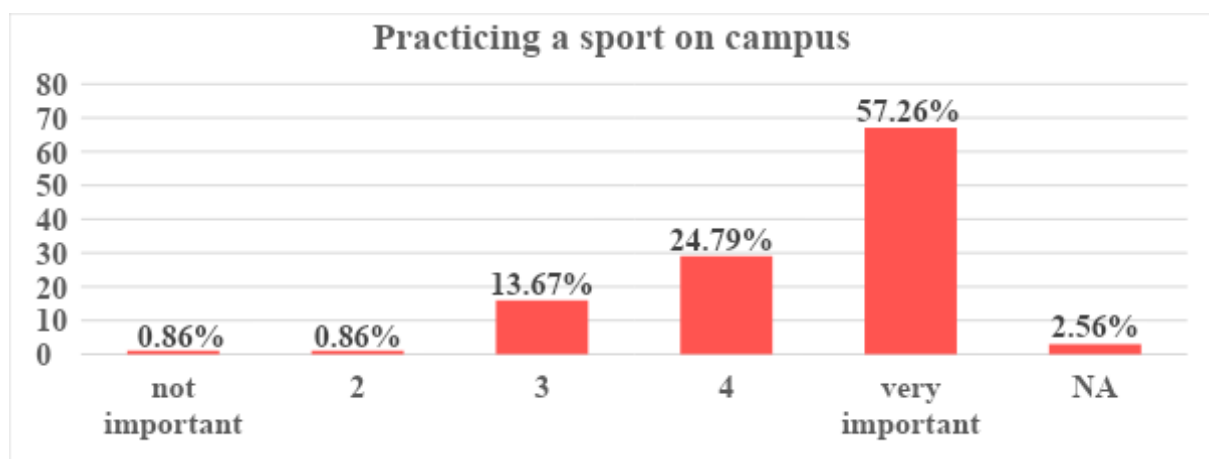
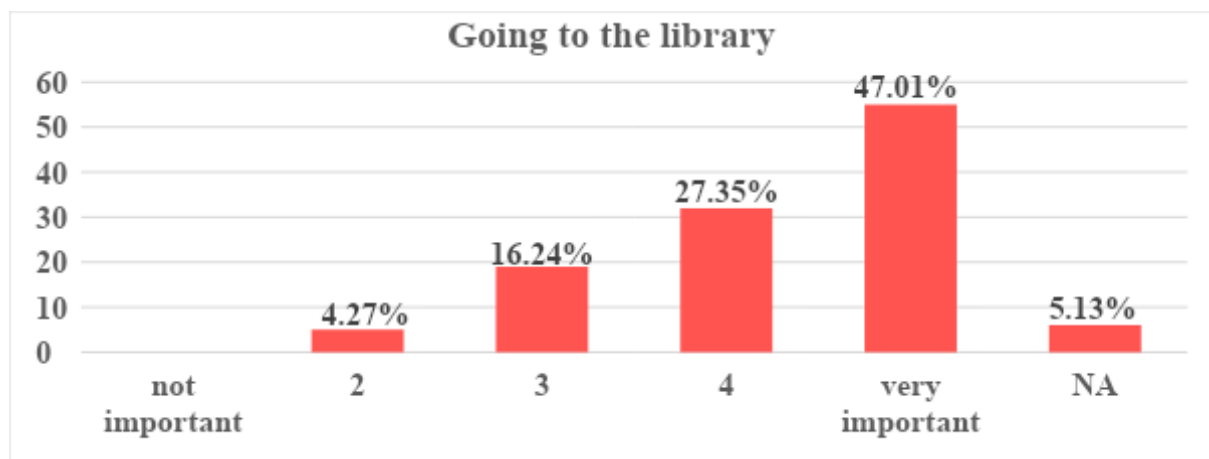
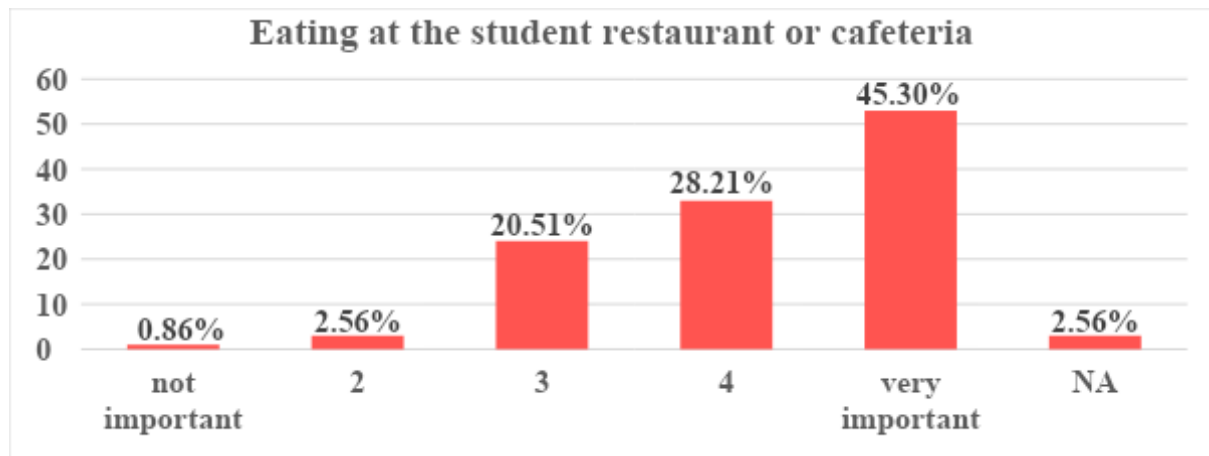


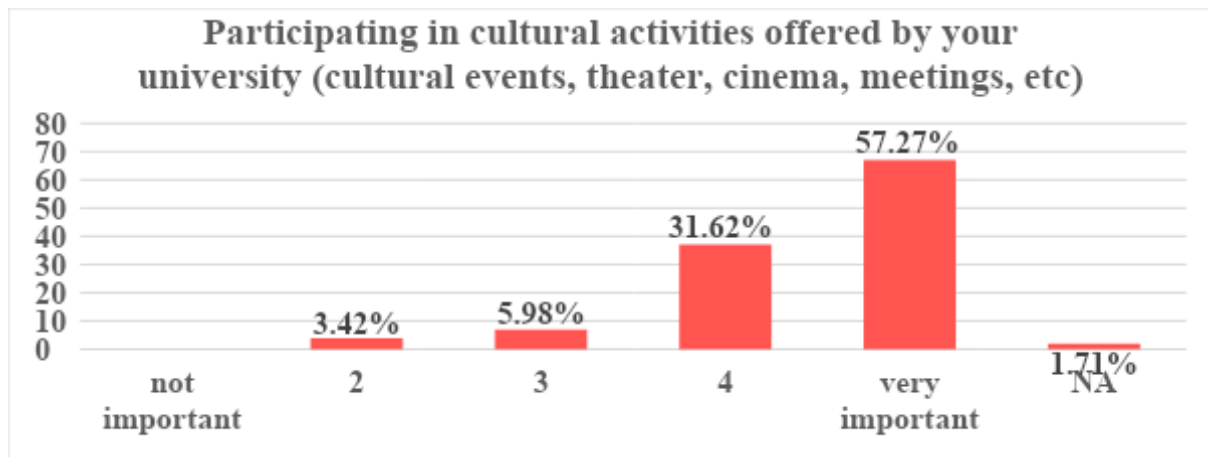
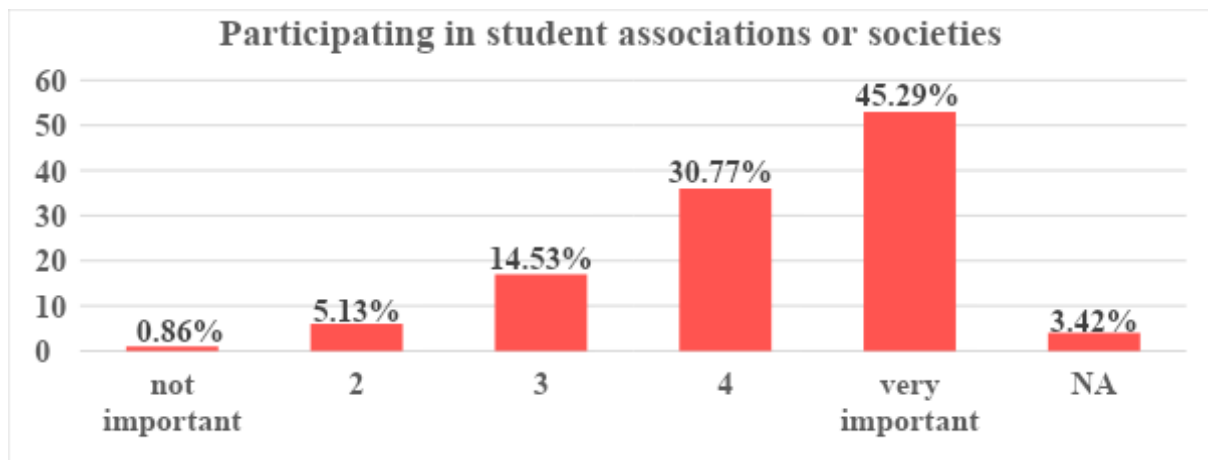
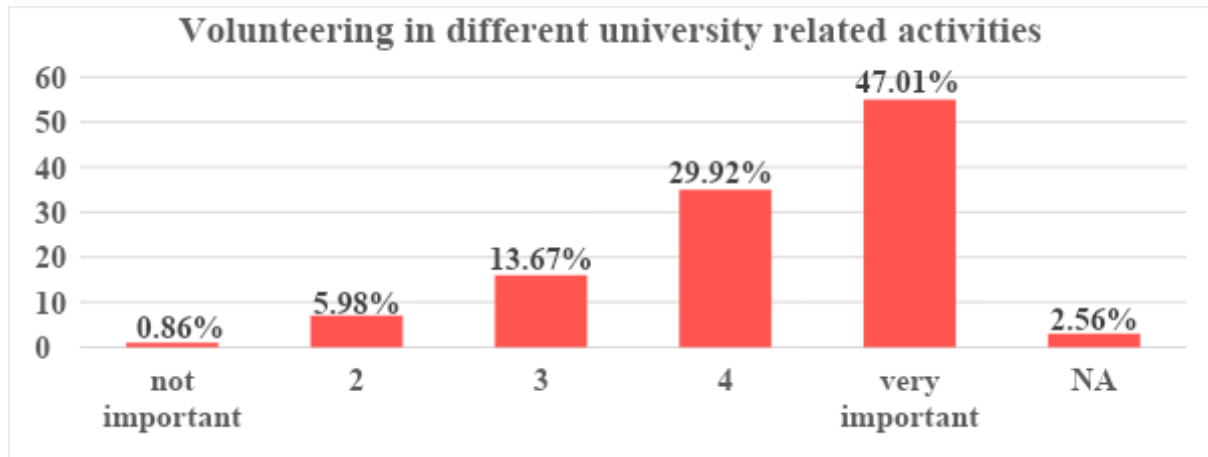
In comparison to students, the percentage of academics who consider doing an internship as important is significantly higher, nearly 80% of the academics considering this activity important or very important.



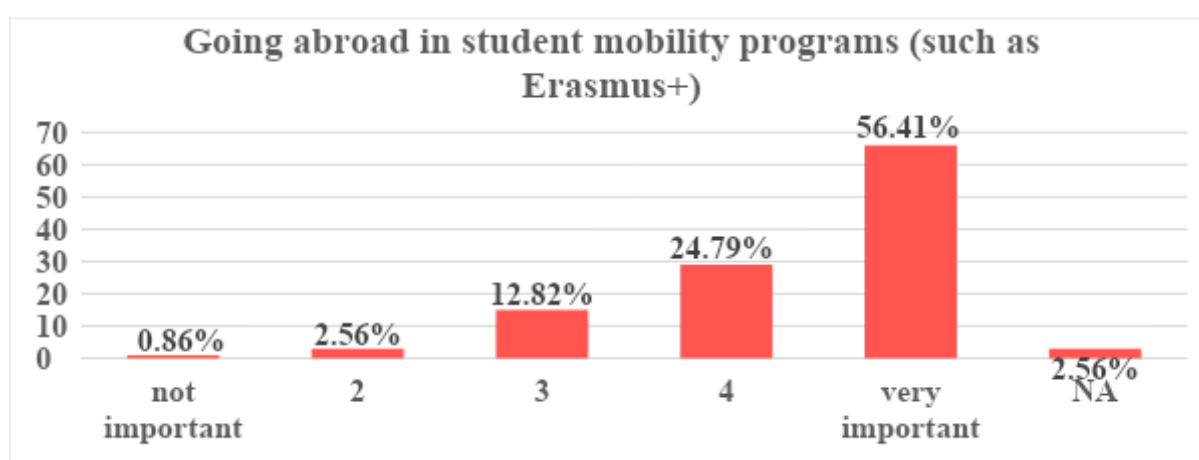
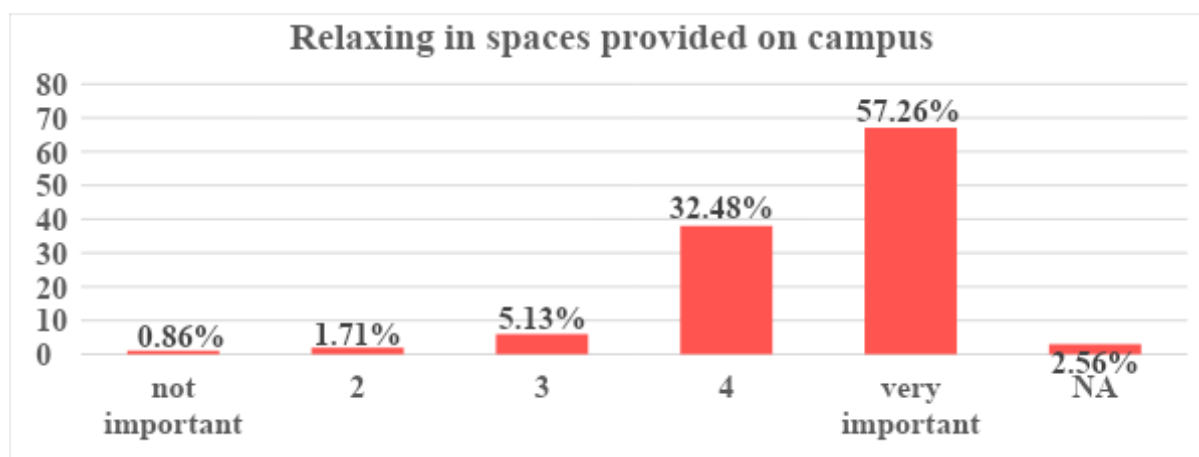
Meeting students is considered relevant also by academics, the highest percentage for very important being attained. Social activities are also considered important by academics: eating at the student restaurant, going to the library or practising a sport, participating in cultural activities, relaxing inside and outside the campus etc are considered very important, being highly rated (more 45-50%).





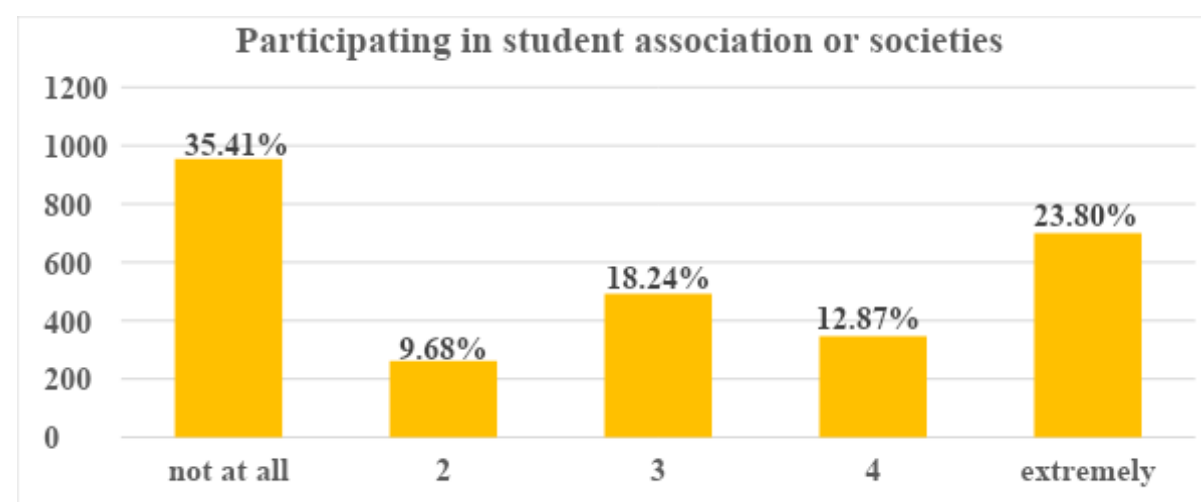
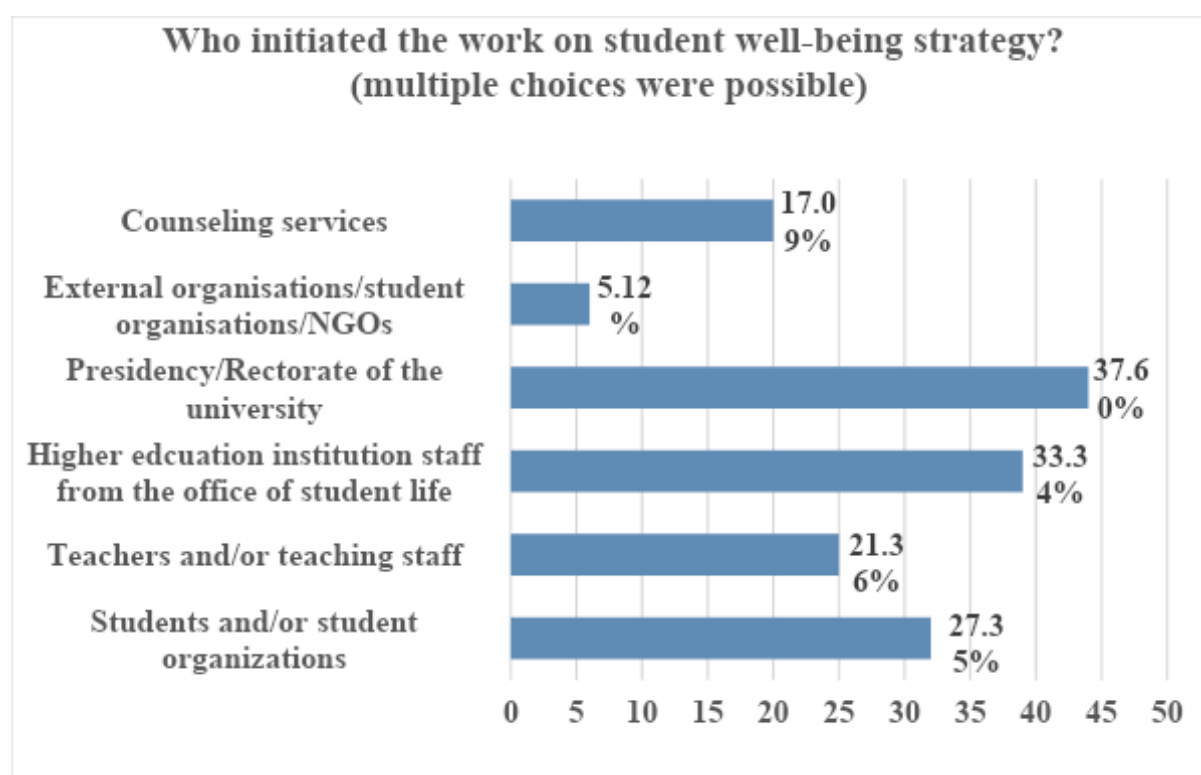
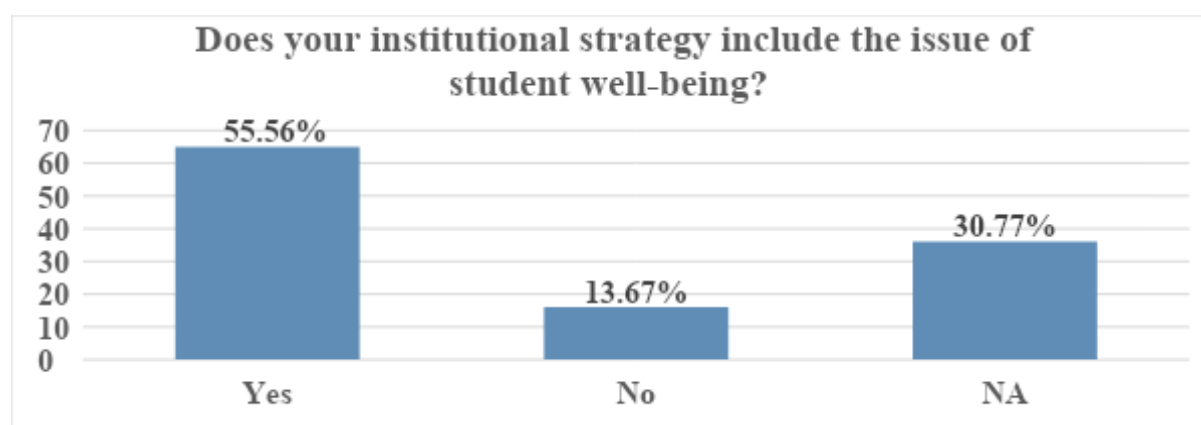


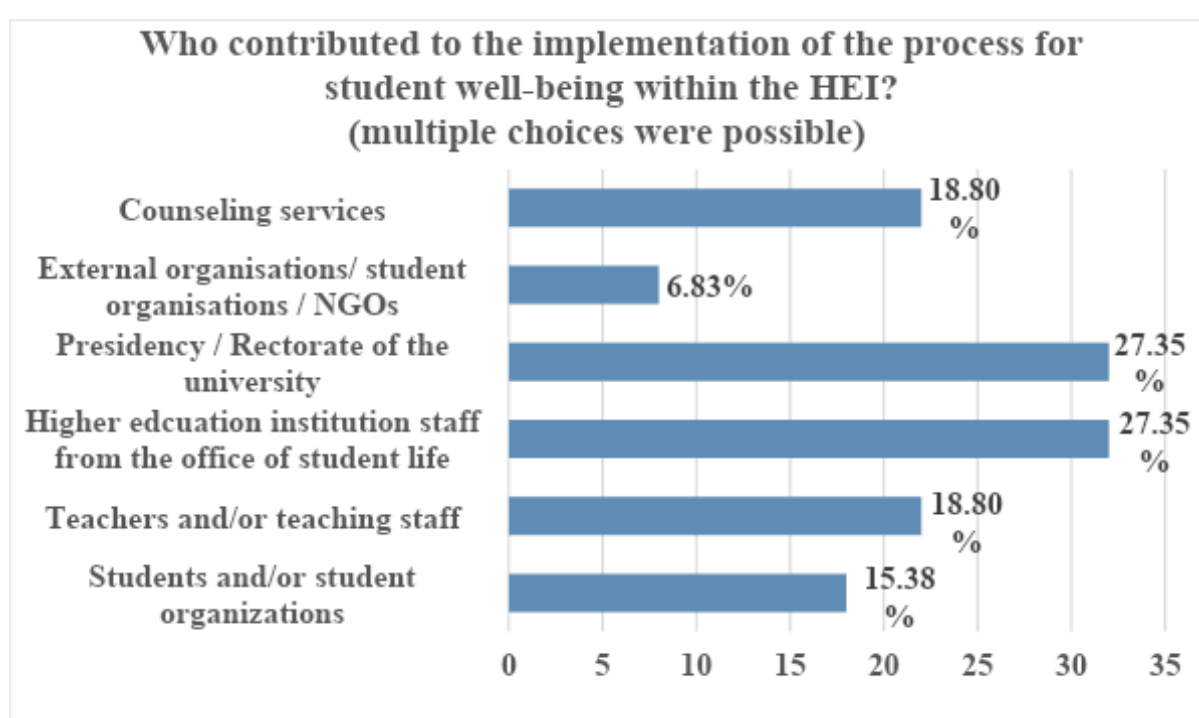
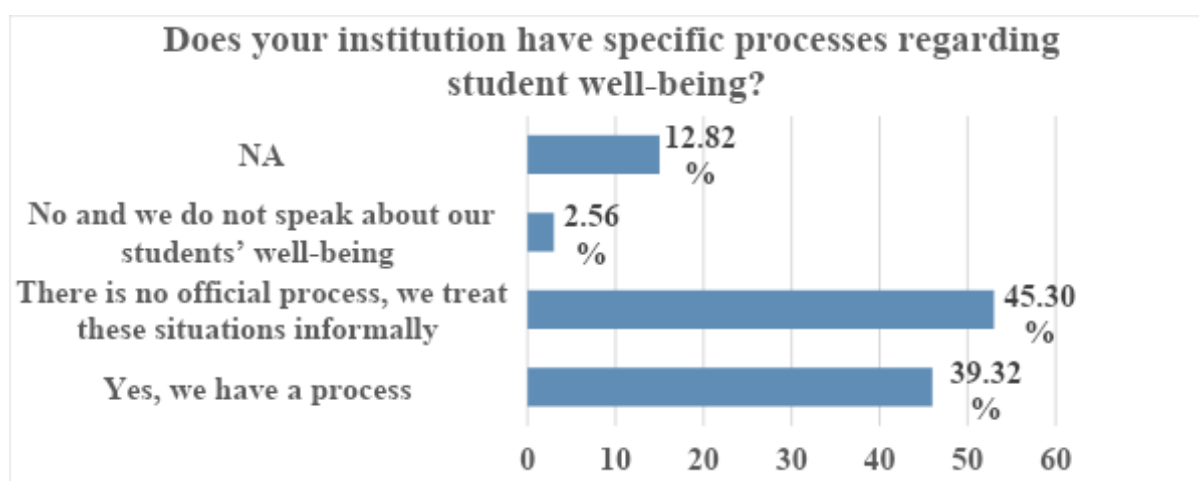
Volunteering in different university-related activities, participating in student associations or societies, and participating in cultural activities offered by the university are perceived as more important by academics than for students, as the previous section of this report showed.



Strategy and process

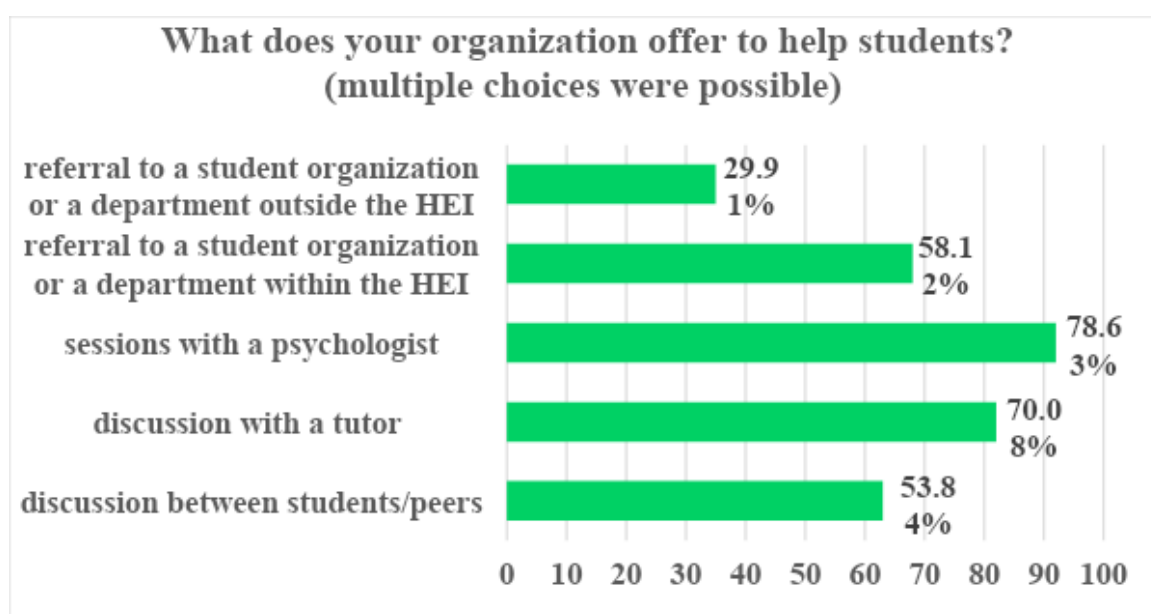
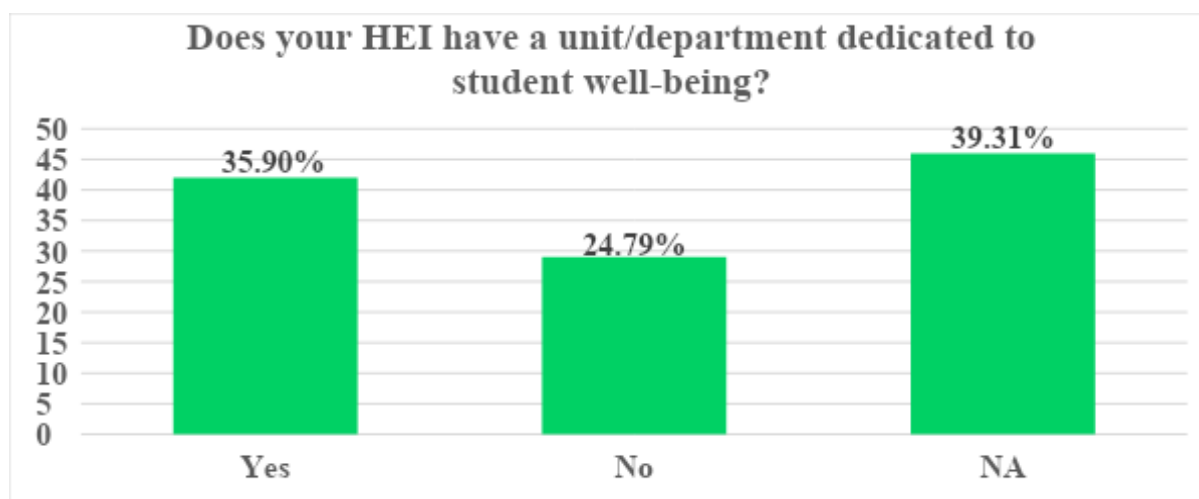
Most of the respondents stated that their institutional strategy includes the issue of student well-being (55.56%). Most questioned HEIs have no official process for addressing student well-being and treat such issues informally, while some have a process in place. When asked who initiated the work on student well-being strategy and processes, most respondents mentioned the presidency or rectorate of the HEI, staff from the office of student life and students and/or student organisations. External organisations, student organisations and NGOs seem to be less involved in designing interventions in HEI.

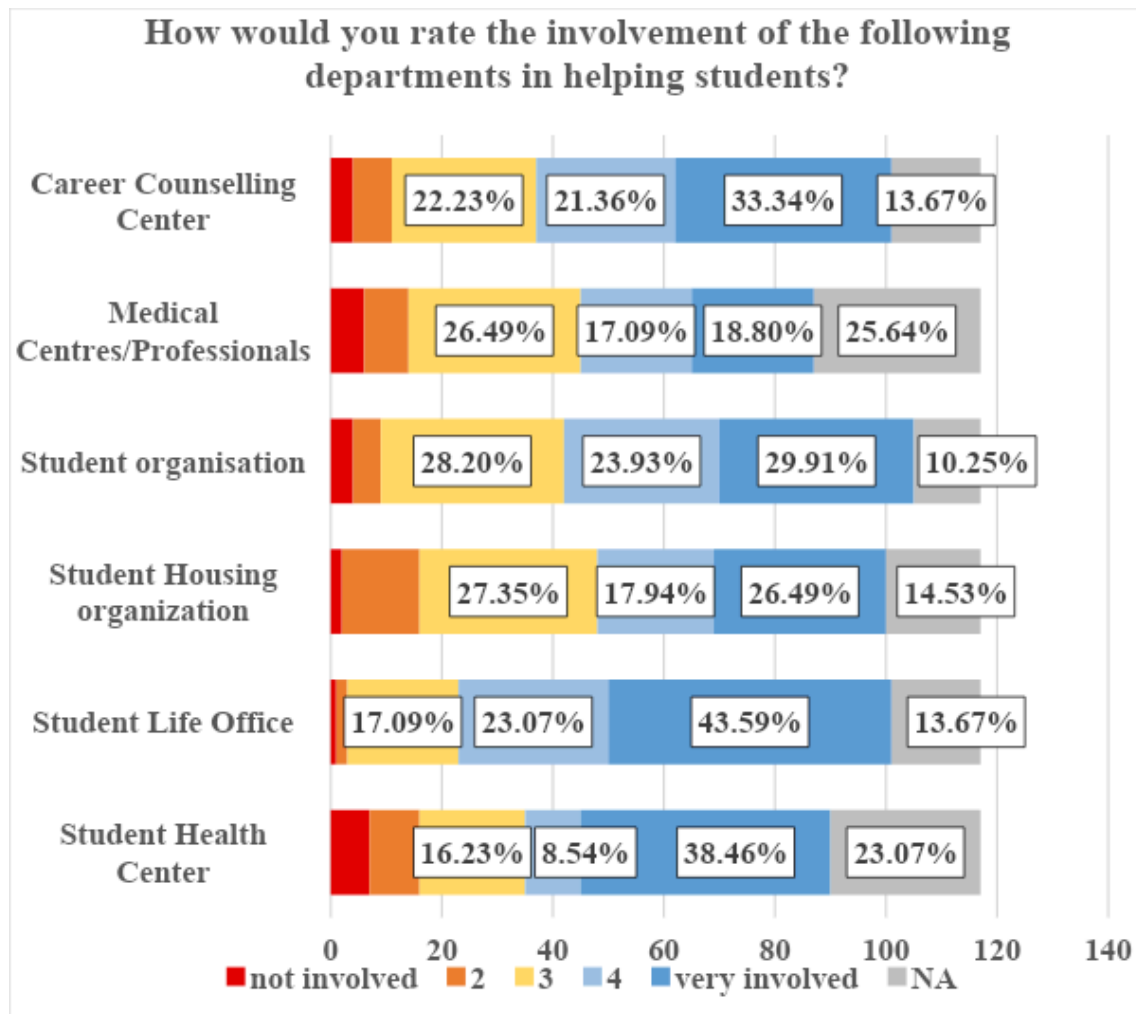




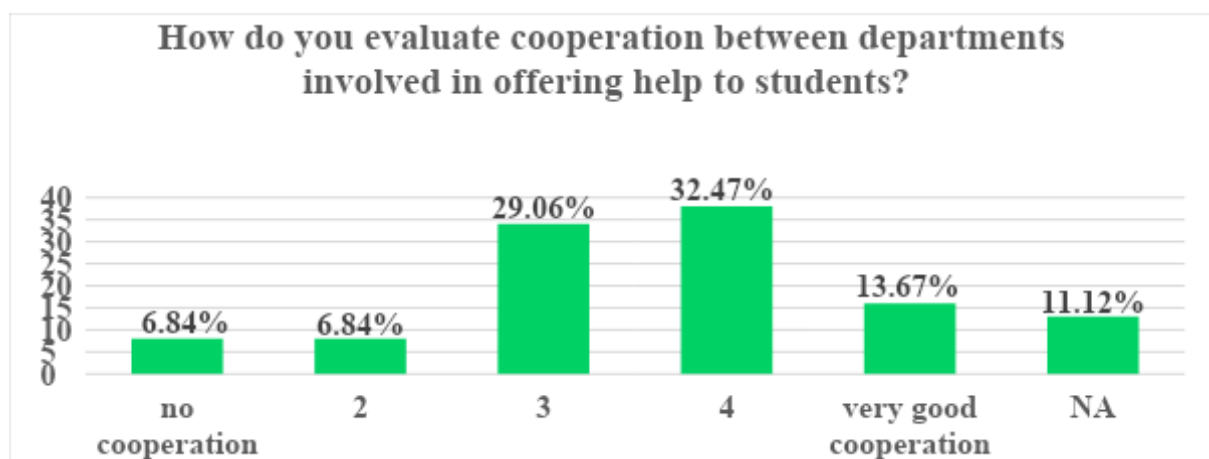
Operational action, activities, and facilities

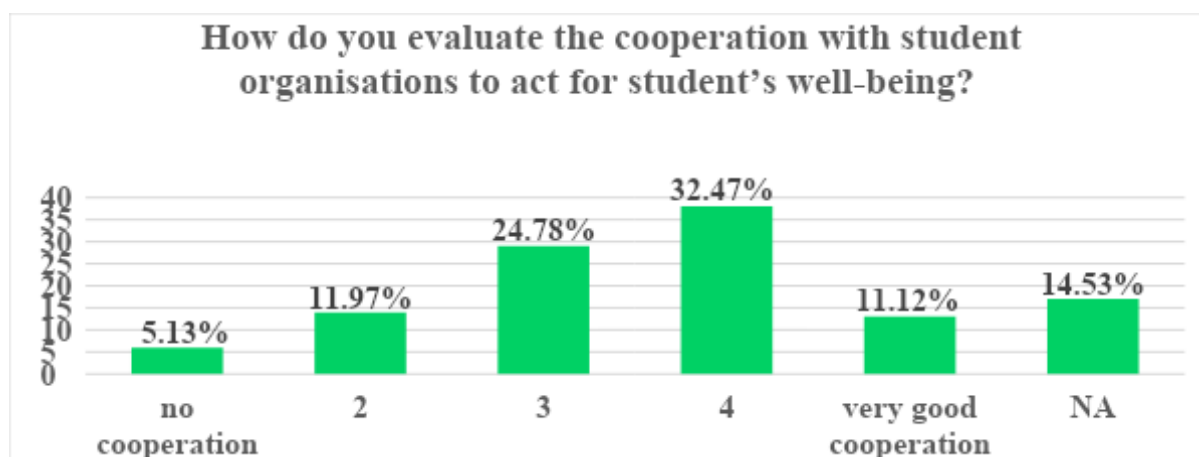
Most respondents chose not to answer the question whether their HEI has a unit or department dedicated to student well-being, followed by those who stated that their institution has such a structure, while almost 25% of respondents mention not having one. Most HEI offer students sessions with a psychologist and discussions with a tutor, while some organise referral to a student organisation or a department or discussion between peers. The least of respondents mention referring students to organisations or departments outside of their HEI.





Based on the perspective of representatives of various European HEIs, the Student Life Office, Student Health Centre and Career Counselling Centre are most involved in helping students to achieve higher levels of well-being. Medical Centres and Professionals seem to be least involved out of the listed departments. It is noteworthy that all the listed departments seem to be involved to a certain degree in helping students improve their well-being, with very few respondents stating that they are not involved.

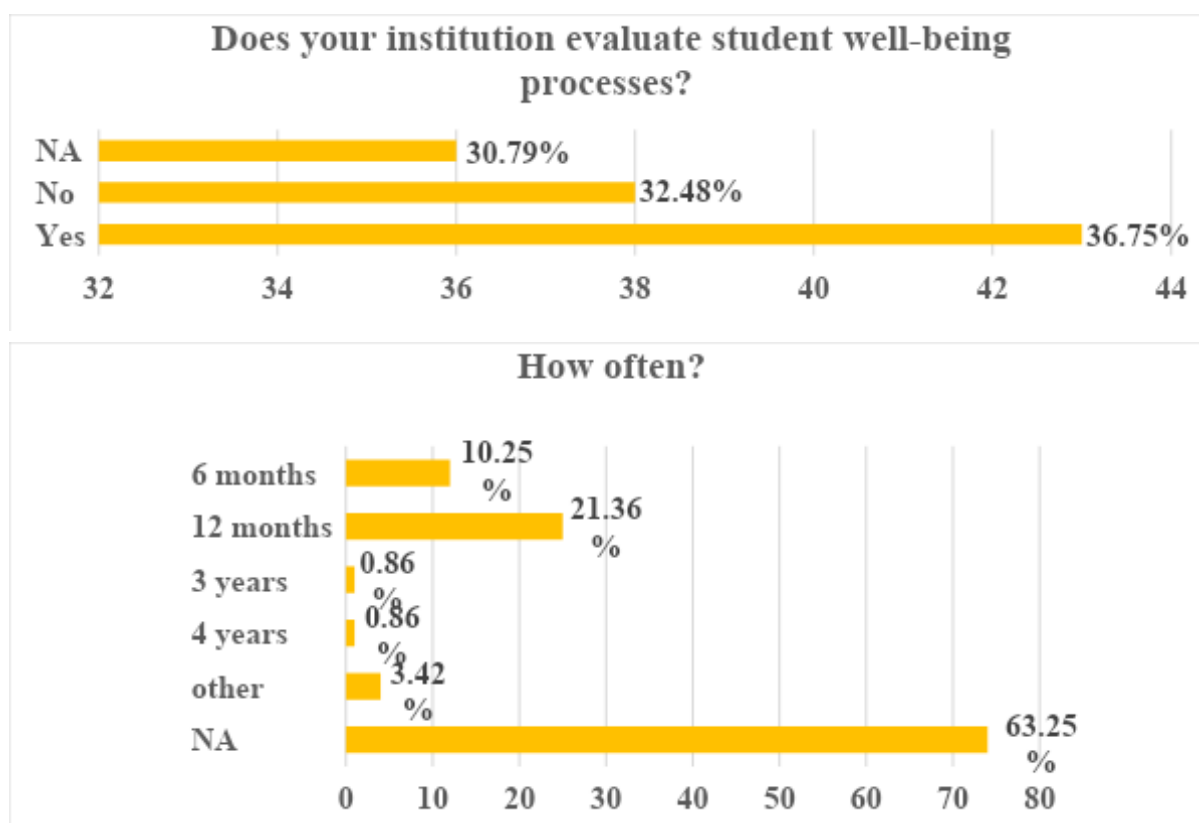


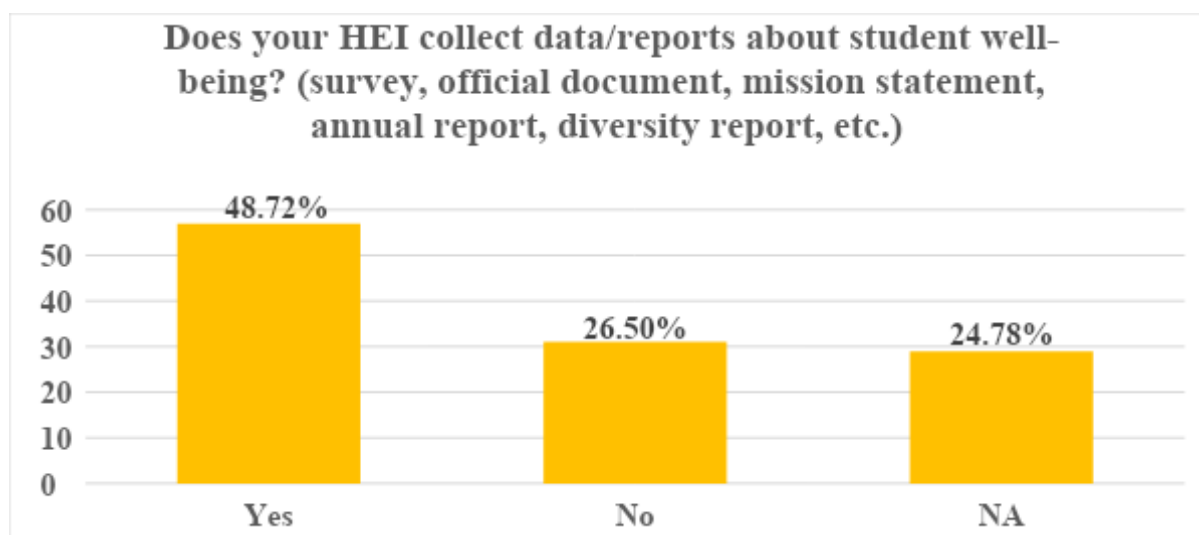


Most respondents describe cooperation between departments and with student organisations involved in issues regarding student well-being as being good, with fewer stating that it is very good. Very few respondents mentioned that there is no cooperation.

Evaluation

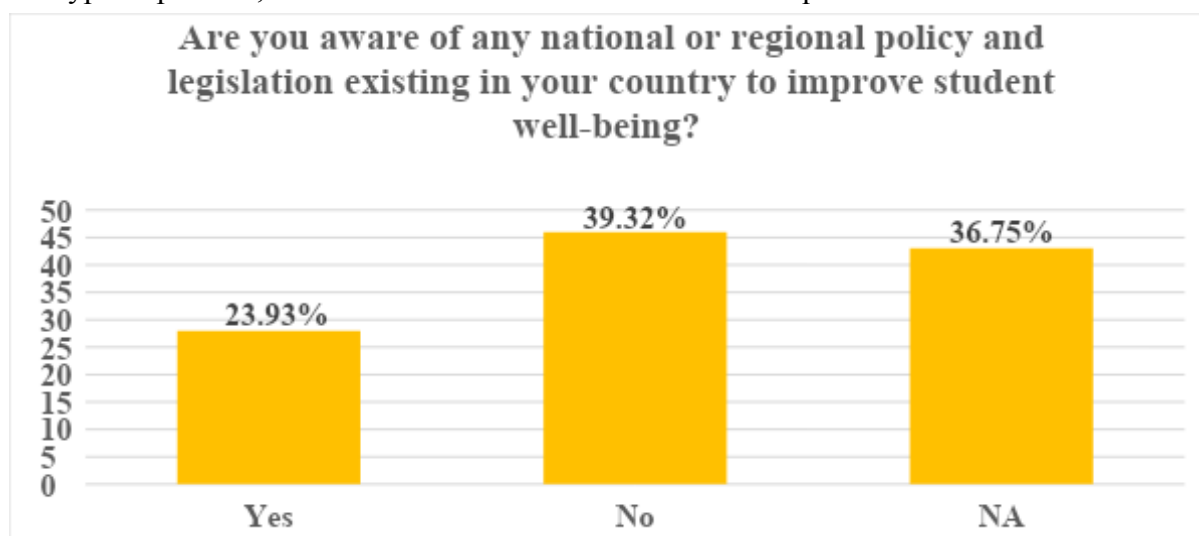
Most HEI evaluate student well-being processes and collect data or reports, even though more than half did not indicate the frequency of taking these actions. 21.36% state that they do it yearly and 10.25% every 6 months.





Best practices

A concerning alarming result relates to the relatively similar percentages of participants who declare awareness of the existence of national or regional policies and legislation in their country aimed at improving student well-being, only 23,93% of them declared that they know this type of policies, while 36.75% decided not to answer the question.



IV. Conclusions and implications:

Our results highlight specific needs for various student categories, which could be important for implementing well-being interventions. It seems that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted the well-being of students, given the fact that they were not able to fulfil some of their academic needs. Significant connections to family, teachers and other students are important factors for increasing well-being of university students, almost three-quarters of them were greatly or significantly affected by the absence of meeting other students, which is in line with the statement regarding sources of well-being. Comparing teachers, staff and others, the results showed that in descending order, the partners with whom the connection is important are: fellow students, teachers, and non-academic staff. Another important distinction refers to group differences in well-being: These categories tend to have slightly higher levels of well-being: male students, PhD students and full-time employed students.

The results confirmed that it is essential to explore different aspects of activities and types of courses and their impacts on various stakeholders involved in teaching and learning, including teachers, students, practitioners, and academics in general. The analysis of factors impacting well-being is crucial to examine the challenges of academic life since the possibility of future disruptions, similar to the pandemic or war that could affect students' well-being, always exists. Some problematic issues and inconsistencies regarding the answers were observed for questions related to internship programs and volunteering activities. Considering the significant number of internship programs that cannot proceed as planned due to the pandemic, universities and employers should explore innovative approaches to collaboration, offer more flexible internship methods, and support postgraduate students in successfully completing their requirements. The results of our study confirm that aspects such as going on to campus, belonging to the university or being part of the university are considered very important by the students, which confirms their high attachment to the university and the high sense of belonging. The high sense of belonging could be used as a valuable resource to enhance student well-being and academic adjustment.

This study highlights perspectives and approaches of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) around Europe on student well-being. Results show that well-being is taken into consideration in the strategy, processes and services HEI are implementing. Furthermore, results indicate certain discrepancies between the survey for students and the survey for universities regarding the approach and perspective to well-being. Students seem to value other activities linked to their well-being, compared to representatives from included HEI. This could suggest that universities should evaluate the needs of students before implementing well-being interventions to insure appropriate measures and processes. The importance of support activities for students is clear, but the management of these services can be challenging, given the increasing number of students and their diverse needs. These support services also have a crucial role in reducing university dropout rates and promoting a more inclusive and diverse student experience (Tinto, 1993). Without effective student services, individuals who lack academic, emotional, and social connections with the institution are more likely to discontinue their studies.

Institutions need to ensure that any MHL initiatives, including advertising resources and stigma-reduction programs, are not restricted to the start of the term. Institutions and instructors have the responsibility to offer clear guidance on the steps students can take to seek help, whether it's through on-campus resources or external support. It is crucial for educators to stay informed about current resources and procedures to ensure the accuracy of the information they provide.

Supporting instructors in integrating well-being into their courses is also very important. Institutions should establish committees or support positions dedicated to mental health in the context of teaching, learning and academic life in general. Workshops, resources, recommendations for promoting student mental health and well-being, and other forms of support for instructors should intensify at each university. Based on the results obtained, several types of strategies can be implemented by universities to integrate them into their programs with the aim of increasing student well-being.

- Strategies to promote student relationships and social relations, such as:
 - Peer Support Programs: Creating peer support networks and mentoring programs can help students feel connected and supported within the university community.
 - Developing common spaces on campus that students can use for academic purposes (working on projects) as well as for socialising (spending time between classes), which could significantly contribute to student well-being.
 - Offering support to student associations and integrating them in the tutoring and mentoring programs.
 - Promoting Work-Life Balance: Encouraging a healthy work-life balance by organising recreational activities, cultural events, and social gatherings can contribute to students' well-being.
- Strategies to promote mental health and wellness:
 - Wellness Programs: Implementing wellness programs that focus on physical activity, nutrition, and stress management.
 - Training for Faculty and Staff: Providing training for faculty and staff on recognizing signs of distress and mental health issues in students can ensure early intervention and appropriate support.
 - Awareness Campaigns on mental health issues, stress management, and available support resources could encourage help-seeking behaviour.
- Academic Support Services and Mental Health Services: Universities could increase the counseling and mental health support services, including access to psychologists, counselors, and support groups. These services can help students cope with stress, anxiety, and other mental health challenges. In addition, offering academic support services (tutoring and study skills workshops) can help reduce academic-related stress and improve students' overall well-being.
- Financial Aid and Assistance: Offering financial aid and assistance programs can ease financial burdens and reduce stress related to tuition fees and living expenses.
- Curriculum adjustment to promote well-being and increase awareness about mental health:

- o Integrating well-being topics into the curriculum and promoting discussions on mental health and self-care can help raise awareness and foster a supportive academic environment.
- o Flexible Learning Options, integrating both online and physical courses and part-time study, can help students manage their academic workload and balance other commitments effectively.
- o Promoting more internships and identifying solutions to offer academic recognition for the involvement in these types of programs.
- Support for International Students and a more active promotion of international mobility programs:
 - o Providing specialised support and orientation programs for international students can help them adapt to a new culture and education system, reducing feelings of isolation and homesickness.
 - o Orientation programs that address cultural differences and provide intercultural training to help international students cope with cultural differences and navigate cross-cultural interactions more efficiently.

These strategies could be efficient to enhance and sustain student well-being, by improved academic adjustment and academic success, reduced dropout rates and positive perceptions about the institution and increased sense of belongingness.

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