

Physical Seminar

Paris

7-9 Mar 2025



Circle U.
Student Union

Position Paper.

On sustainable mobility.

CUSU stance on sustainable mobility

Intro

As an international university alliance, mobility is the cornerstone of our co-operations. Student mobility especially is a primary objective of CUSU, and we have stated our wishes, requirements and ideals about this topic in a previous [paper](#). With the threats of climate change and the rise of political extremes around the world however, we thought it necessary to highlight our demands for socially and environmentally sustainable mobility that shall ensure the process is green, inclusive and equitable for all students within Circle U., and eventually Europe and the world.

Green Mobility

Green mobility should be prioritized as a sustainable and eco-friendly alternative to other means of transportation. The emphasis should be on promoting options like trains, buses and carpooling as the primary modes of travel, with air travel being considered only when absolutely necessary, whereas buses and trains shall be considered the preferred transport. To encourage the use of these greener options, financial compensation should be provided, at a minimum matching the cost of flying, especially for routes typically served by airplanes. Additionally, incentives should be offered to students, rewarding them for choosing sustainable transportation to make it more appealing. Universities must provide sufficient information for students on such green means of transport, and publish the "green way" to get to a destination, to ensure easier access for students. This approach ensures a cleaner, more sustainable future while maintaining cost-effectiveness.

Online Mobility

Online mobility, while convenient, should not be used as an excuse to limit or eliminate physical mobility in order to achieve green mobility, as physical mobility plays a crucial role in cultural exchange and human development. Physical travel fosters personal, academic, and cultural enrichment that online alternatives simply cannot replicate. In many cases, digital mobility can be seen as a form of greenwashing—promoting sustainability without addressing the deeper benefits of in-person experiences, while not being completely CO₂

neutral either¹. A balance must be struck between green mobility and the irreplaceable value of face-to-face interactions. Online mobility should be reserved for niche subjects offered by specific universities, or for informative courses that prepare students for the physical mobility they will undertake. Ultimately, it should serve as a supplementary tool, not a replacement for the enriching experiences that come with real-world travel.

Inclusive mobility:

Inclusive mobility is another essential component of sustainable mobility, to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their background or personal circumstances, have access to the opportunities provided by mobility programs. The exchange process should recognize gender categories beyond the prevalent binary system, and gender balance among exchange students must be actively promoted, for example with initiatives such as Norway's "gender quota", which incentivize women to apply for fields traditionally dominated by men.

Special financial support should be available for individuals with disabilities and those with children, helping to ease the financial burden and make travel more accessible. It is also crucial to offer special support to students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, working families, and first-generation students to ensure equity. Stipends should be means-tested to offer increased financial support to those who need it most, ensuring that no one is left behind due to financial constraints.

Additionally, language courses—particularly local languages and English—should be readily available to ensure smooth integration and communication. Central information should be provided in English to ensure clarity for all participants. Housing agreements should be fair and supportive, and websites should be designed in English to maximize accessibility.

Social aspects affecting students, during and after mobility:

For mobility programs to be truly effective and sustainable, certain demands must be met to ensure students have the best possible experience while also maintaining their academic progression. First and foremost, there should be no delays in the education that students undertake at their home university—this

¹ See:

<https://en.reset.org/just-how-green-video-conferencing-new-study-explores-impact-large-zoom-meetings-03022021/#:~:text=Once%20all%20of%20this%20was,burning%20750%20kilograms%20of%20coal>. Or: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0921344920307072?via%3Dihub>

should be a baseline expectation. Additionally, we believe that all degree programs should offer one "free" semester, where students don't need to worry about compulsory courses, making mobility more achievable without the stress of academic conflicts.

It is also crucial that the hosting university provides an information pamphlet detailing essential local mobility options, such as city bikes, walking distances, and public transport routes, to encourage green mobility as a daily lifestyle choice and to promote a more eco-conscious experience during the program.

Furthermore, an introductory event for international students at the beginning of each semester would be highly beneficial. This event would provide all the practical information necessary for a smooth transition, ensuring students can engage with their new environment in a sustainable and informed way. This event should be co-organised with students from the hosting university, to incentivize cultural exchange from the beginning and ensure that international students have an immediate connection to the local students.

After completing a mobility program, it is essential that all experiences are properly recognized and accredited. This recognition should come in the form of diplomas, ECTS credits, or other official titles to ensure that the mobility experience is validated academically. In cases where students are unable to complete assessments during their time abroad, there should be viable solutions for re-taking exams online or in their home country, especially since that would reduce the environmental impact as opposed to having to travel back to the host university. This process should allow students to take exams in person in their country of origin and send their results back to the hosting university, with proper monitoring to prevent cheating. Additionally, universities should offer equivalent, standardized courses that allow students to retake subjects they failed, ensuring they can continue their studies without unnecessary delays.

Beyond awarding ECTS, universities must also consider the skills and knowledge gained during mobility programs when evaluating prerequisites for future courses. This is particularly crucial for more practical subjects, where students often face challenges if their mobility credits are not recognized as sufficient for progression. Addressing these issues would create a more seamless academic pathway for students engaging in mobility, fostering a more inclusive and flexible approach to international learning experiences.

BIPs

Another way mobility can be executed is through BIPs. BIP stands for Blended Intensive Programmes, and usually consist of a few weeks of online mobility, and a short period of physical mobility, and a BIP usually doesn't last longer than a handful of weeks. However, what CUSU believes is best is having a longer period of physical mobility, and a shorter period before or after online mobility. What is especially important to us is that all interactive parts of the BIP shall be in-person, be it discussions, workshops or practical exercises.

We believe the primary purpose of BIPs should be learning about topics that are special to a particular university, as they offer the incredible opportunity of integrating the Alliance's various areas into specific subjects and topics. Rather than flying in a guest lecturer, we would prefer to have the students and attendees of the BIP join the sessions in person. While we are aware that this is less environmentally friendly than just flying in the lecturer, we are convinced that it is crucial to let students and young people have this international experience. In-person events foster cultural exchange, livelier discussions and a more sustainable impact for the students' personal and academic forthcoming.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while acknowledging the environmental impact of physical mobility, we emphasize that it remains the preferred mode of mobility for fostering cultural and academic exchange. To mitigate the environmental footprint, we must incentivize environmentally-friendly travel, particularly by offering financial support to make sustainable transportation more accessible.

Priority should be given to young people—students and up-and-coming researchers—who are crucial to the continued academic progress of our universities. The subsidiarity of online mobility, therefore, should apply primarily in cases such as lecturers traveling for single lectures, where alternatives to physical presence can be considered. Ultimately, young people are the future, and it is vital that they are provided with opportunities to engage in international exchanges, as these interactions are essential for their academic, personal, and professional growth. By prioritizing physical mobility in a sustainable and supportive manner, we can help ensure a brighter, more interconnected future.