

# **SURVEY ON THE INCENTIVES AND ISSUES TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERGENERATIONAL AND INTERCULTURAL HOMESHARING**

**In Europe**



**WESHARE  
WECARE**

WeShareWeCare Project – January 2022

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# I. THE PROJECT

## 1. INTERGENERATIONAL HOMESHARING

Intergenerational homesharing originated in the United States. In 1972, Maggie Kuhn, founder of the Gray Panthers, a seniors' rights movement, criticised the housing arrangements for the elderly which, while keeping them in a certain degree of health security, isolated them from life in society. During her years of activism, she lived in her own home in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, sharing with young adults who received a discount on the rent in exchange for their company and help with household chores.

In Europe, it was in Great Britain where intergenerational homesharing was imported to in the 1980s by Nan Maitland. The first official structures working in the field established in London in 1993. Moreover, in Spain the first structures aimed at developing intergenerational homesharing were developed: in Granada in 1991.

The Spanish experience inspired new structures in France (2004) and Belgium (2009). Homeshare International is an international organisation that supports a network of professionals around the world who run home-sharing programmes. It was founded in 1999.

## 2. THE WESHAREWECARE PROJECT

Bringing generations and cultures together is the objective of a European network formed by: CNAV (France), Cohabilis (France), 1Toit2Ages (Belgium), Solidarios (Spain), EUF (Luxembourg), and ESN France.

Together, we built WeShareWeCare around the common idea that seniors and international students can enrich each other through better mutual knowledge and sharing of experiences.

After a two-year pilot phase (the Toit+Moi initiative), the WeShareWeCare project was born with the aim of connecting seniors and international students through intercultural activities and home sharing.

The project is based on a 3-year work programme to achieve the following objectives:

- To improve the reception and integration of mobile students with an accessible and supportive home-sharing service, and intergenerational and intercultural activities.
- Strengthen local collaboration between higher education institutions, international student host organisations and intergenerational home-sharing associations.

The objective of this study is to carry out a survey on the individual incentives and issues encountered by seniors and students in the decision to engage in intergenerational homesharing or activities. In a second step, we will look at the skills acquired through these intergenerational exchanges.

## II. METHODOLOGY

1Toit2Ages, in charge of the study, worked with the help of its teams on the issues and incentives for the development of intergenerational homesharing that emerged most frequently in the interviews we conducted with seniors and students. This resulted in 4 surveys targeting respectively the seniors who have carried out an intergenerational homesharing, those who have not, the students who have carried out a cohabitation and those who have not.

After amendment of the surveys by the project partners, they were tested in Belgium with a sample of seniors and students for final validation.

Four surveys in three languages were then created online (Google Form). For the seniors, the surveys were mostly conducted by phone, because of the difficulty for most of them to fill in a survey online. The students completed the survey online. In total, 340 responses were obtained.

These surveys were relayed by:

### PROJECT PARTNERS

- **Cohabilis** in France (seniors and students)
- **Solidarios** in Spain (seniors and students)
- **1Toit2Ages** in Belgium (seniors and students)
- **Erasmus Student Network France** (students at European level)

### OTHER ASSOCIATIONS

- **Wohnbuddy** in Austria
- **Shared Lives Plus** and **The Homeshare** in the UK
- **Vivocon** and **Meglio** in Italy
- **Wohnen für Hilfe** in Germany
- **Beliving** in Sweden
- **Intergeneration** in Switzerland.

These associations are also working in the field of intergenerational homesharing and are members of Homeshare International.

The response rate was relatively low, as these associations did not necessarily have the time to participate in the interviews with the seniors.

The idea is to go into the details of the answers, always keeping in mind the differences between the answers of people who have practised this type of exchange and those who have not, and thus to be able to identify the differences in behaviour or judgement that may result from this experience.

### « INTERGENERATIONAL HOMESHARING »

This term will be used frequently. It refers to all cohabitations, whether intercultural or not. A number of questions will focus on this notion of interculturality, but the main thread remains the exchange between generations.

The survey focuses on the issues and incentives to intergenerational homesharing for both seniors and students. In order to identify the main trends, the questions have been grouped by theme: contacts, security, self-image, financial aspects, generational differences, legal framework, fears, privacy and culture.

The aim is not to go into the details of each question but to analyse the trends and the answers where there is a significant difference depending on whether or not intergenerational cohabitation has been experienced.





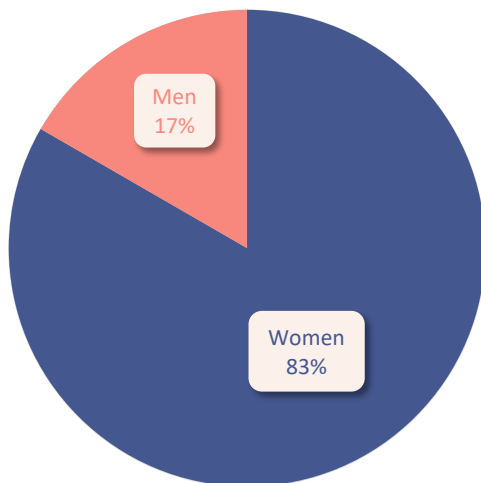
# III. RESULTS

## 1. PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

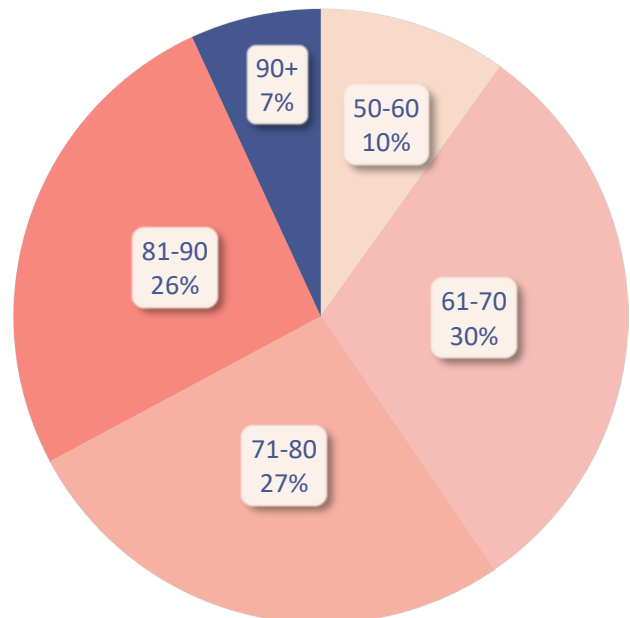
The 340 answers are distributed as follows:

- Seniors with experience of living together: 71 answers in 8 countries (28 cities)
- Seniors without experience: 63 answers in 5 countries (22 cities)

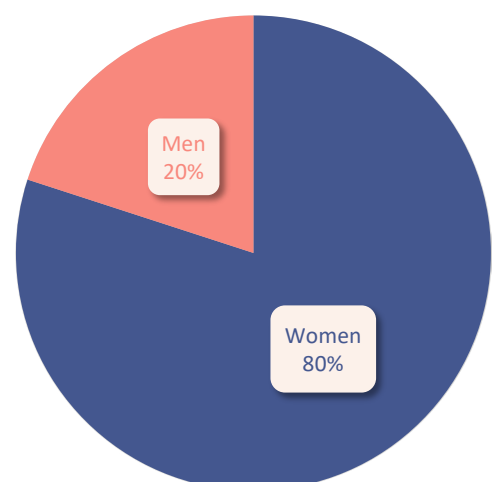
### Seniors gender



### Seniors age



### Students gender



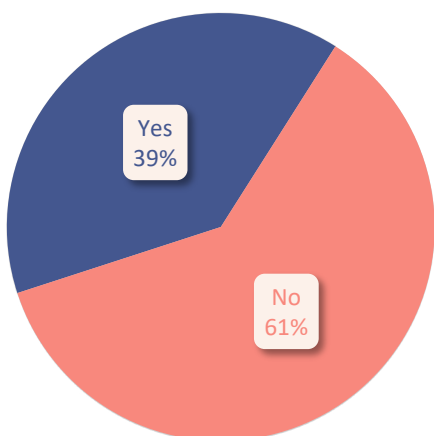
- Students with homesharing experience: 85 answers in 11 countries
- Students with no experience: 121 answers in 10 countries



We note a strong majority of women among the seniors and students who answered to the survey. This **80%-20%** distribution is identical to that found in the intergenerational matches formed by the project's partner associations, but it is interesting to note the same distribution among people with no experience of living together.

All age groups are represented, with of course a strong presence of people over 70: **60%**.

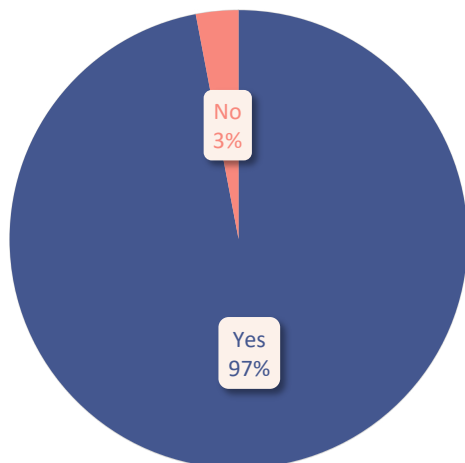
### Was it a cultural exchange with an international student ?



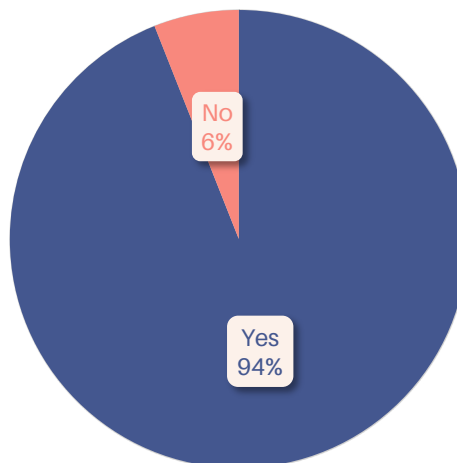
It should be noted that for a significant part (**39%**) of the seniors who have practised intergenerational homesharing, it was at the same time an intercultural exchange, which means that international students are an important audience for organisations working on intergenerational homesharing.

Finally, it is very interesting to note that this experience of hosting a student is judged to be overwhelmingly positive and that it has been overwhelmingly continued.

### Were you satisfied with this cohabitation ?



### Did you repeat this experience ?



For each theme, two graphs will be presented: the first with seniors or students who have had an experience of intergenerational homesharing, and the second with seniors or students who have not had this experience.



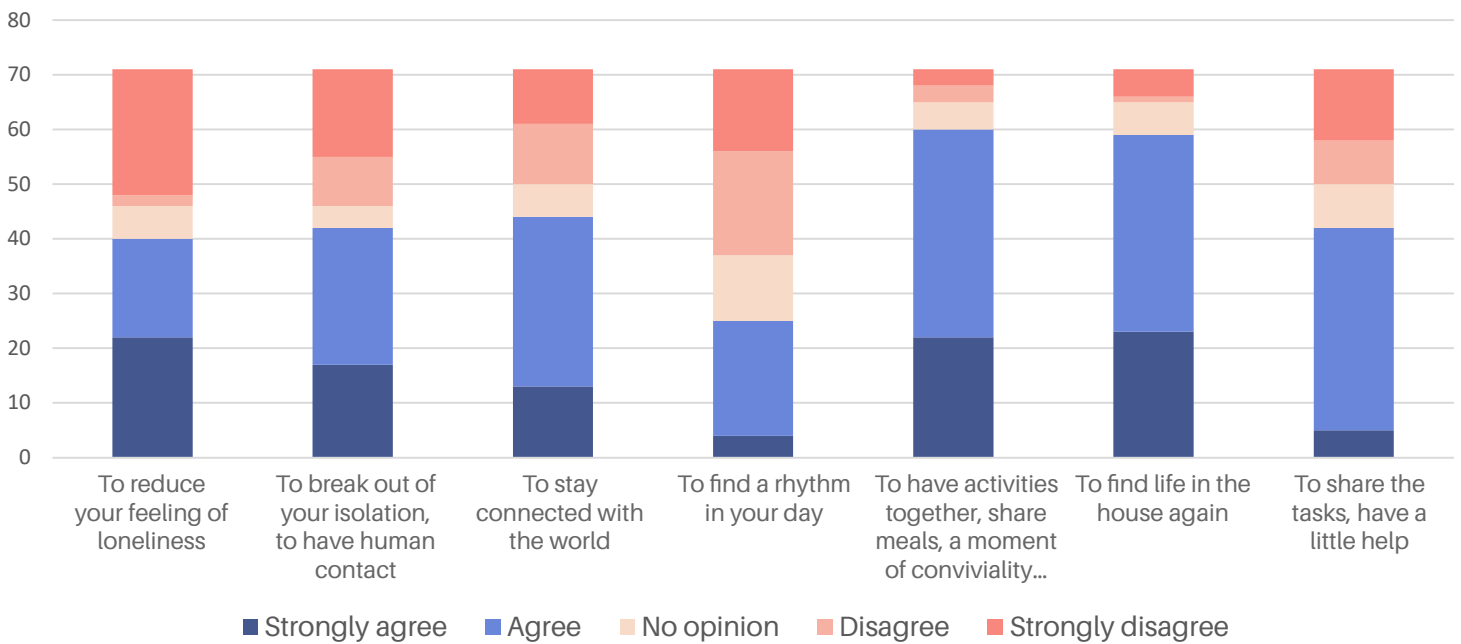
## 2. SENIORS

### a. INCENTIVES

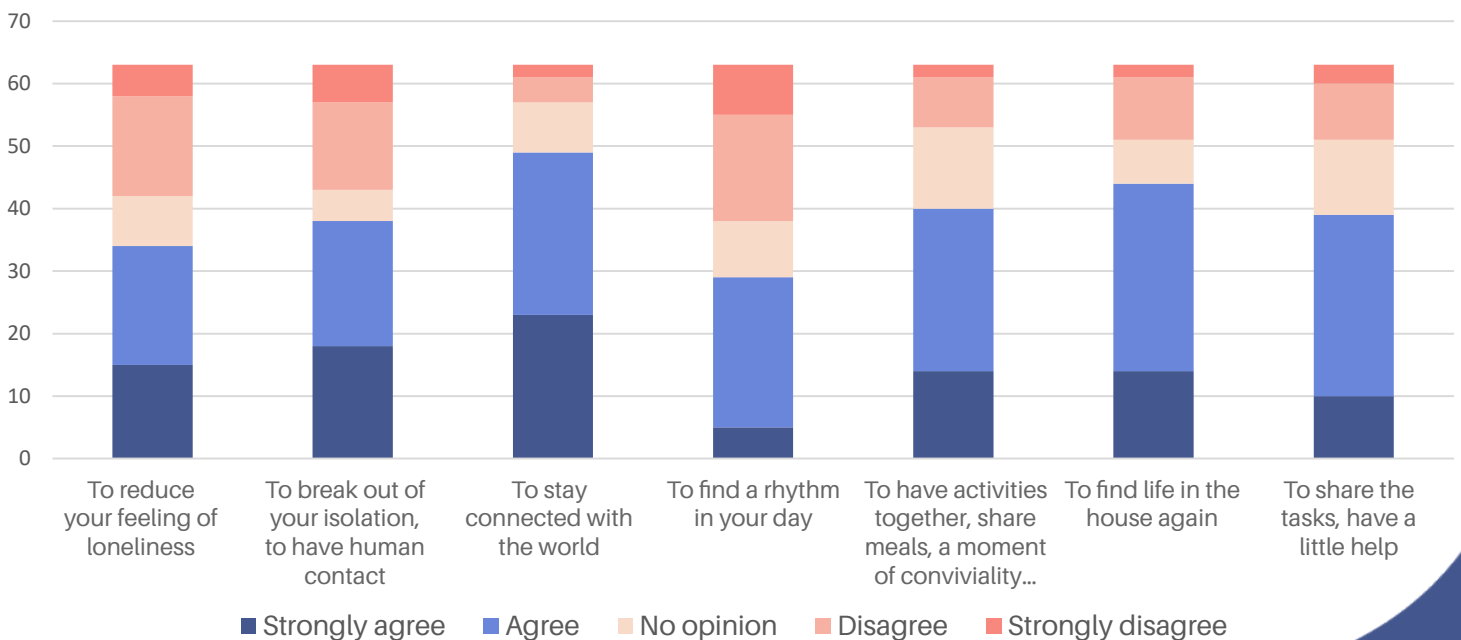
#### Contact

By contact we mean all the interactions that seniors can have with the outside world and thus remain integrated in society.

#### Contact - Seniors with experience



#### Contact - Seniors without experience







For half of the seniors concerned, reducing the feeling of loneliness and having social contacts is an important point, which underlines the lack of social contacts for many seniors. Some seniors may also have a very active life but suffer from loneliness when they are alone in the evening. Returning to life in the home is a strong motivation for **73%** to **80%** of respondents.

Staying connected with the world is a very important motivation which shows that seniors do not reject modernity but, on the contrary, they want to understand the world which is constantly changing. This point underlines in a positive way their desire to reach out to others, whereas for the previous question, they rather suffer from this solitude. Seniors without experience of living together put forward this explanation more: **78%** against **62%**. This means that hosting a student is in itself an opening to the world.

The fact of having activities together is favoured by seniors with experience (**85%** against **63%**). The significant difference underlines the fact that once a young person has settled in, exchanges multiply in a natural way and allow for more exchanges than initially envisaged.

The sharing of tasks is mentioned by **60%** of the seniors. From our experience, we know that expectations are very diverse and that the approach must be individualised so that the demands for service and the abilities of the students are matched. In practice, two pitfalls must be avoided: seniors who ask for too much and those who do not dare. This is why the structure accompanying the cohabitation (association, company or other) must make sure that things are clear and formalised from the start.



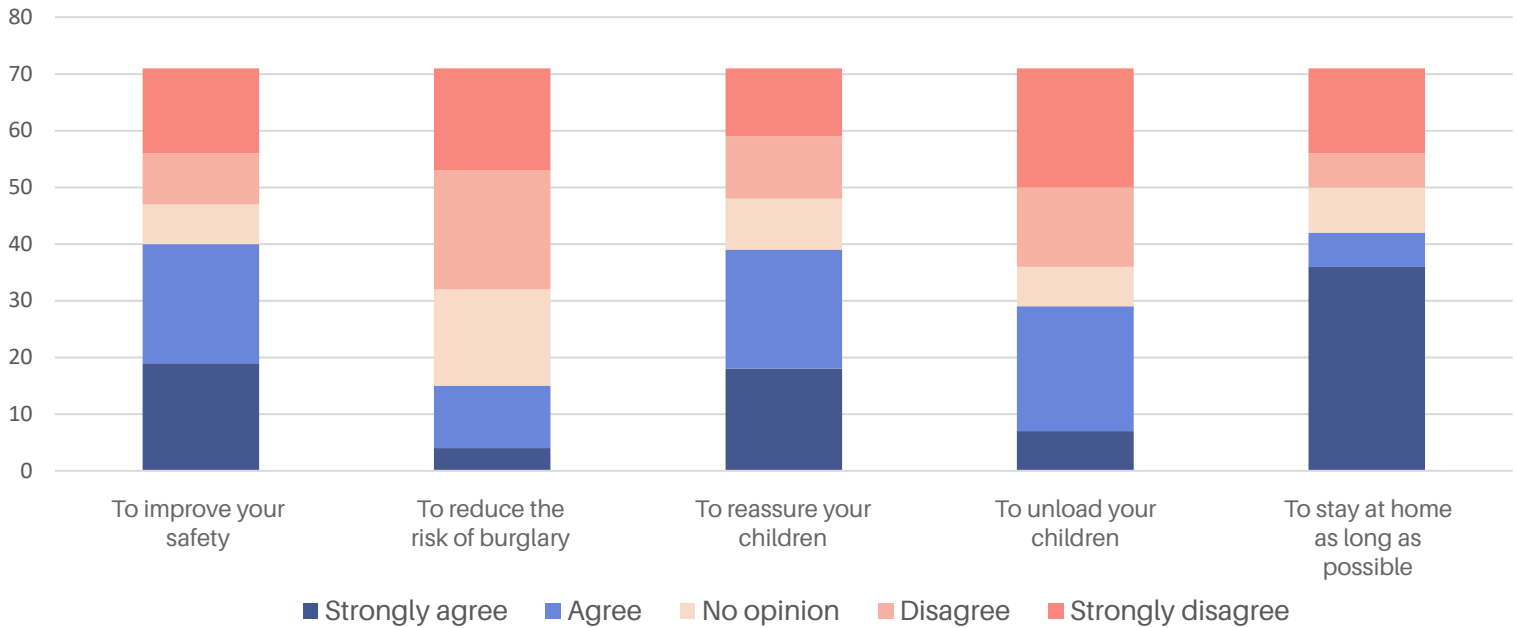
# CONTACT



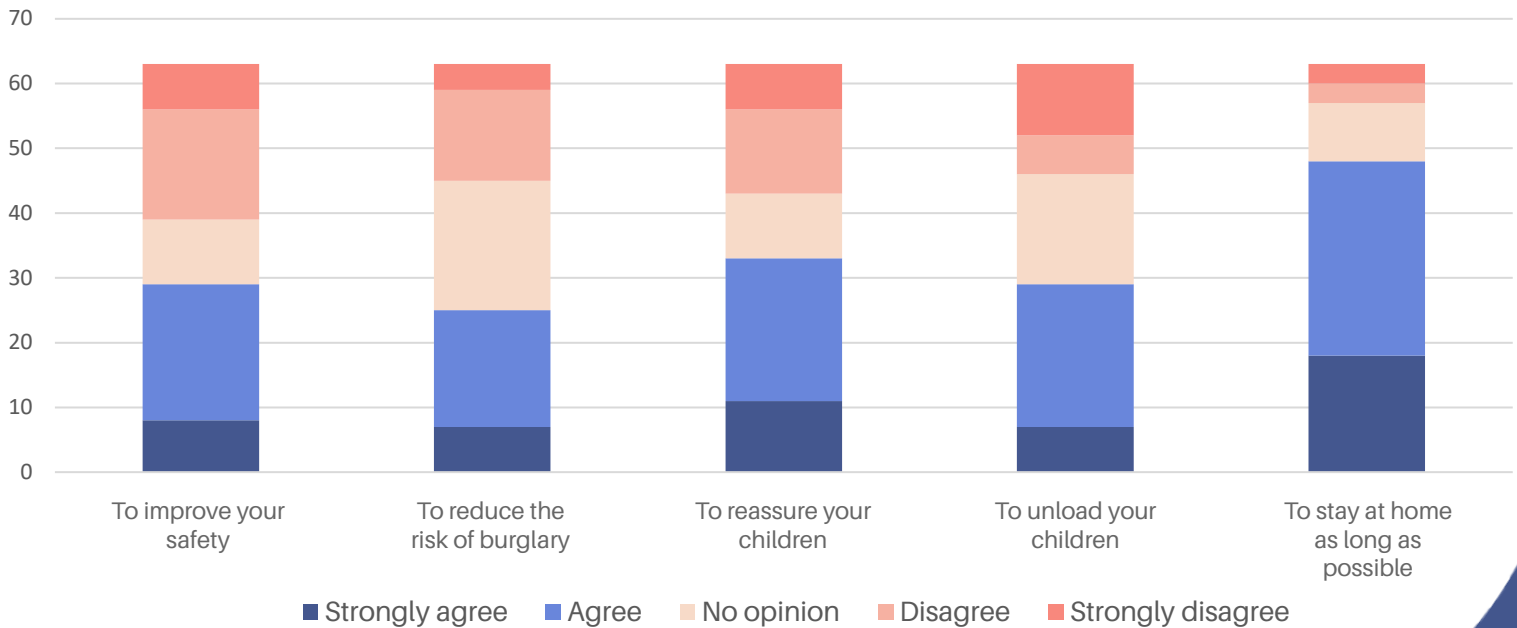
Safety

In this section on safety we look at physical safety but also at the impact of safety on informal carers. A carer is a person (family, neighbour or friend) who spends part of their time helping someone who needs support.

Safety - Seniors with experience



Safety - Seniors without experience





A majority of experienced seniors see the improvement of security and an even larger share see it as a way to be able to stay at home longer. It is worth noting that for seniors without experience (**76%** vs. **59%**) this last reason is the most important.

Seniors with experience of intergenerational homesharing are probably more realistic and know that a student is a presence but certainly not a helper.

The reduction of the risk of burglary is not a motivation.

For half of the seniors, the purpose of living together is to reassure their family. The other half of the seniors probably consider themselves too healthy to be necessary.

As for the relief of the tasks of the caregivers, the positive answers drop to **40%**. The question is whether the seniors are aware of the work they are "imposing" on their relatives or whether it seems natural to them?

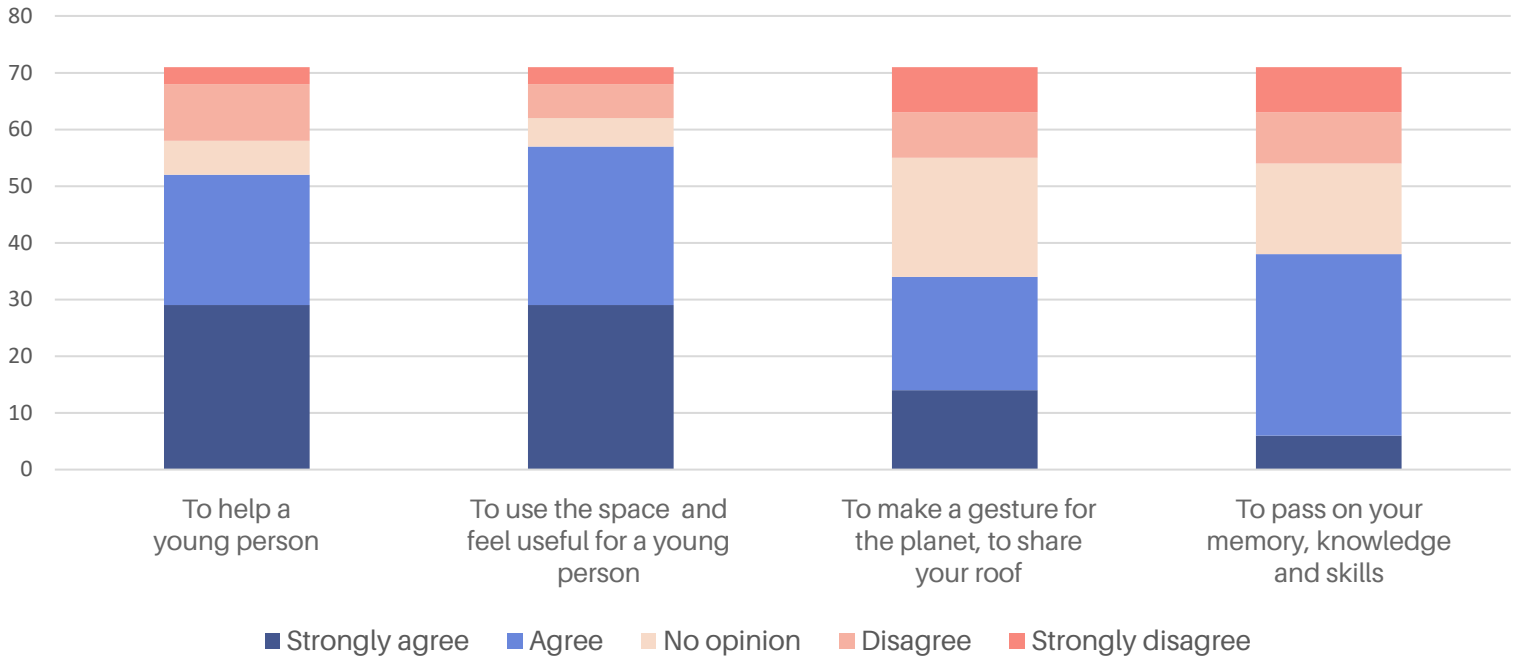
# SAFETY



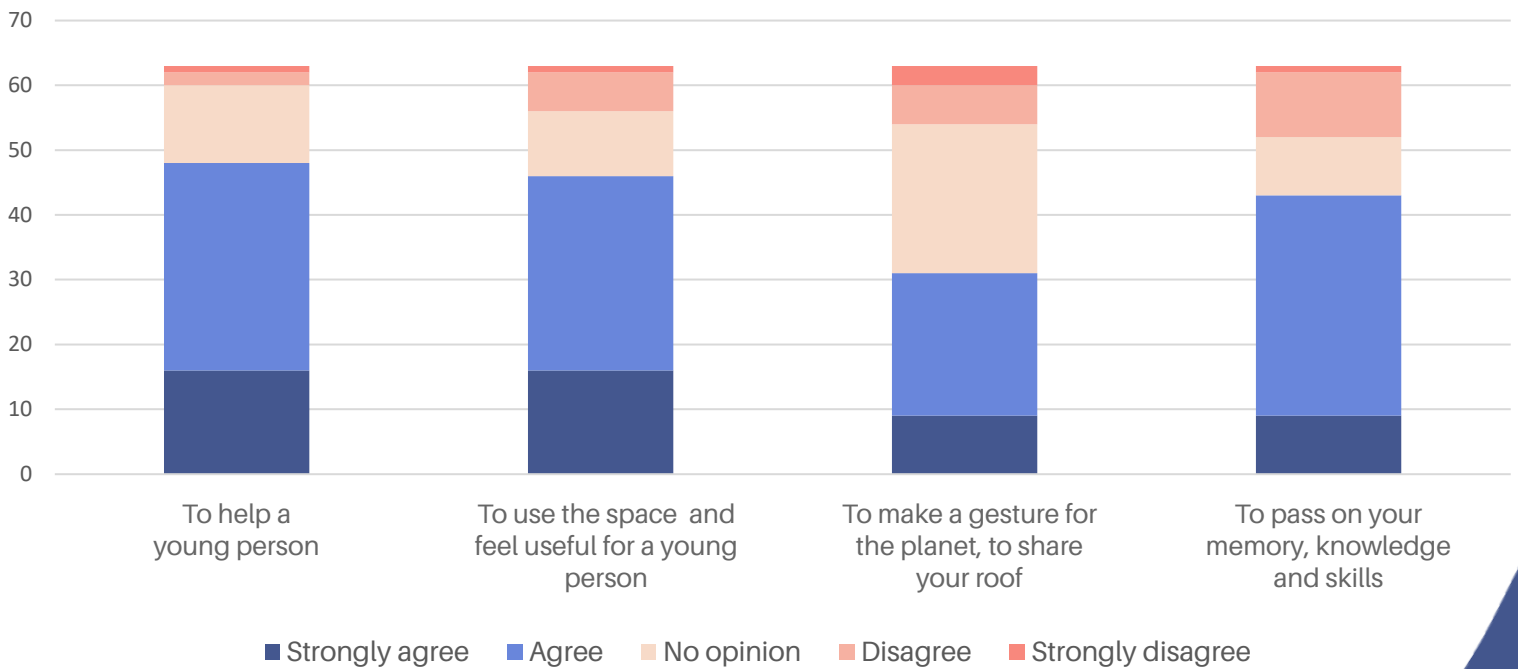
### Self-esteem

In this section we find the altruistic motivations of the seniors.

#### Self image - Seniors with experience



#### Self image - Seniors without experience





The notion of helping younger people is favoured by more than **70%** of the seniors, while the environmental motivation (use of an existing but under-used space) is only put forward by a small half of the respondents.

The willingness to share knowledge or skills is more emphasised by older people with no experience (**68%** vs. **54%**). The most likely reason is that this transmission would be seen as an exchange in both directions by experienced people: they give to young people as much as they receive from them.



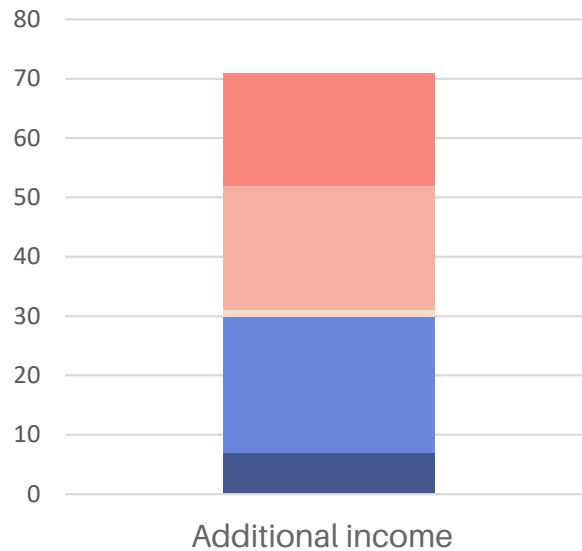
# SELF-ESTEEM



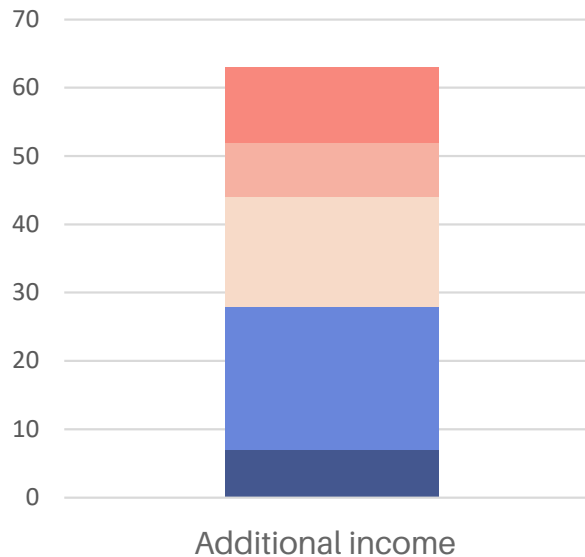
## Money

Money is the financial compensation that seniors can receive in exchange for the provision of a room.

### Money - Seniors with experience



### Money - Seniors without experience



■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ No opinion ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree

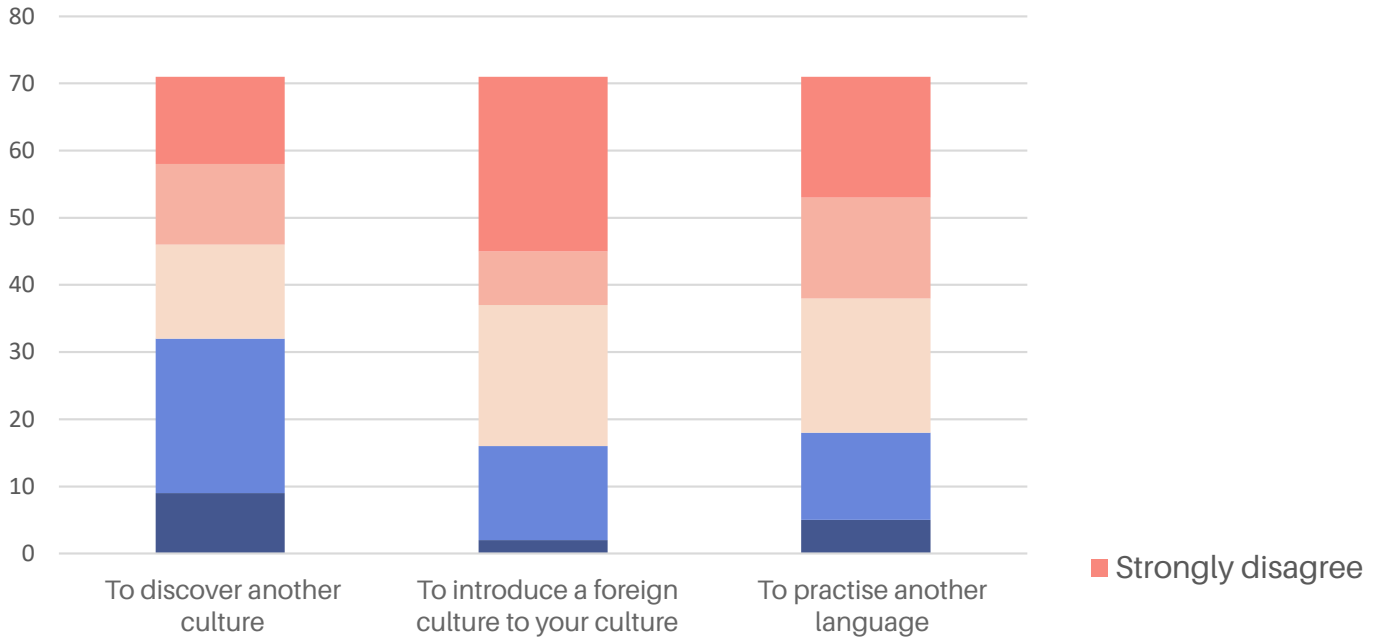
Only **40%** of the seniors (with or without experience) put forward this point. There is no significant difference between countries. Based on our experience (in Belgium), this point seems to be very underestimated and there might be a bias on this issue. It should be noted that with **80%** of seniors being single women, pension amounts are not very high and for many people this small supplement allows them to stay in their home.



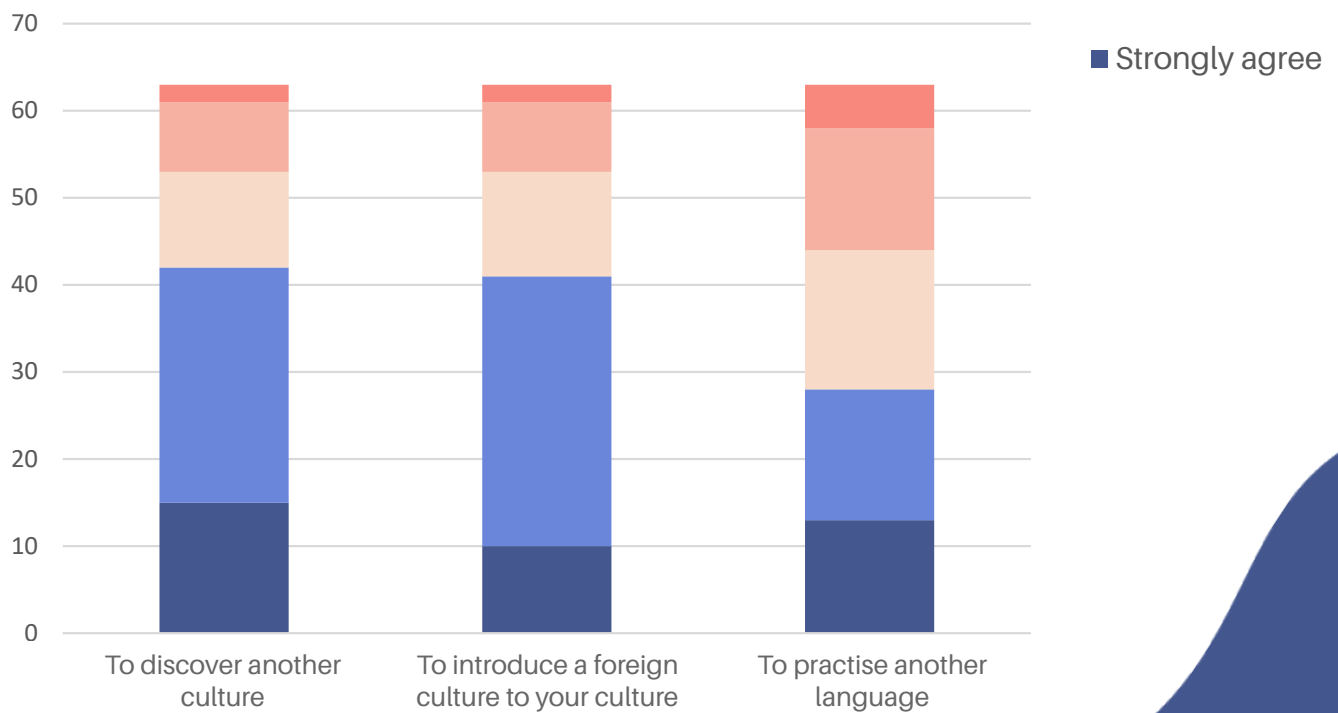
*Interculturality*

Finally, we specifically address here the notion of openness to the world.

**Interculturality - Seniors with experience**



**Interculturality - Seniors without experience**





The notion of hosting a foreign student to discover a culture or to share one's own is clearly not emphasised by the seniors who have had experience of living together. On the other hand, for more than **65%** of the seniors without experience, this is an important point.

It is interesting to compare this with the proportion of foreign students (from **30%** to **50%** depending on the country). It seems that this is more an effect of the demand than a desired mix.



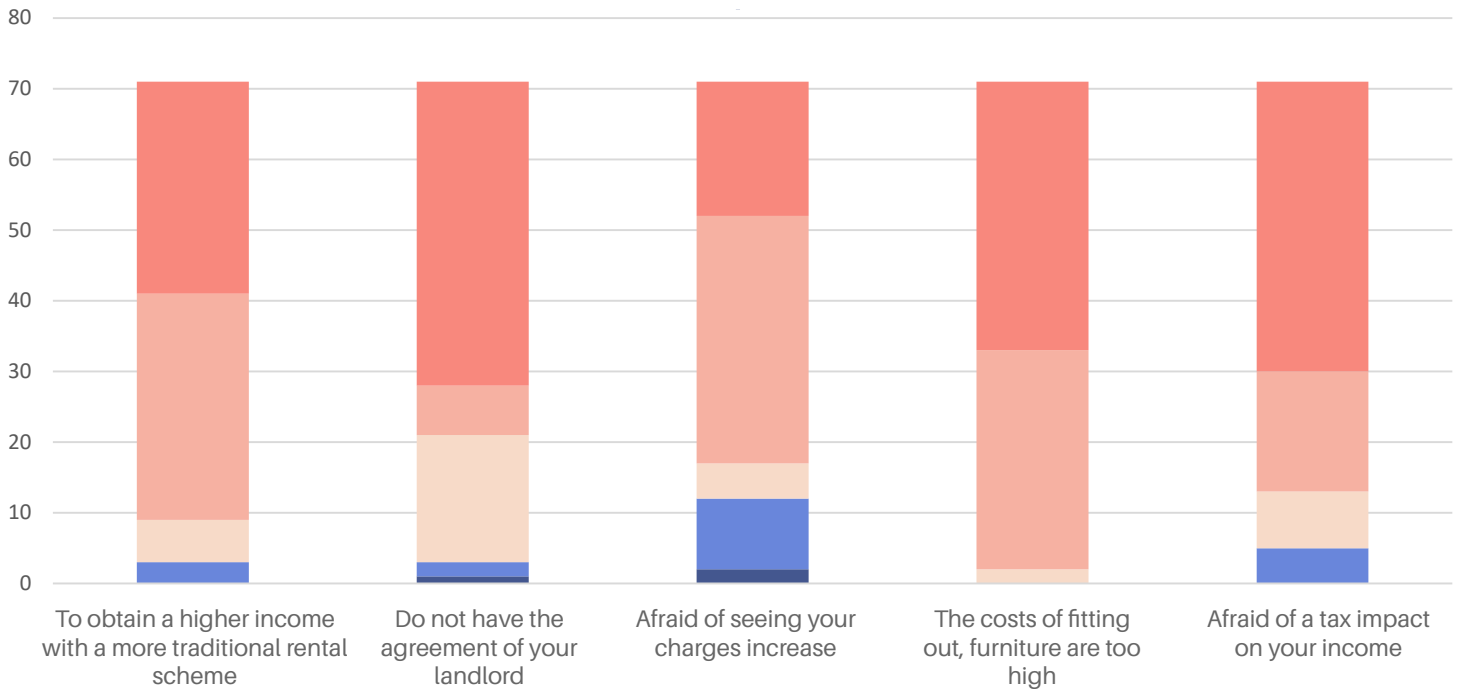


**b. ISSUES**

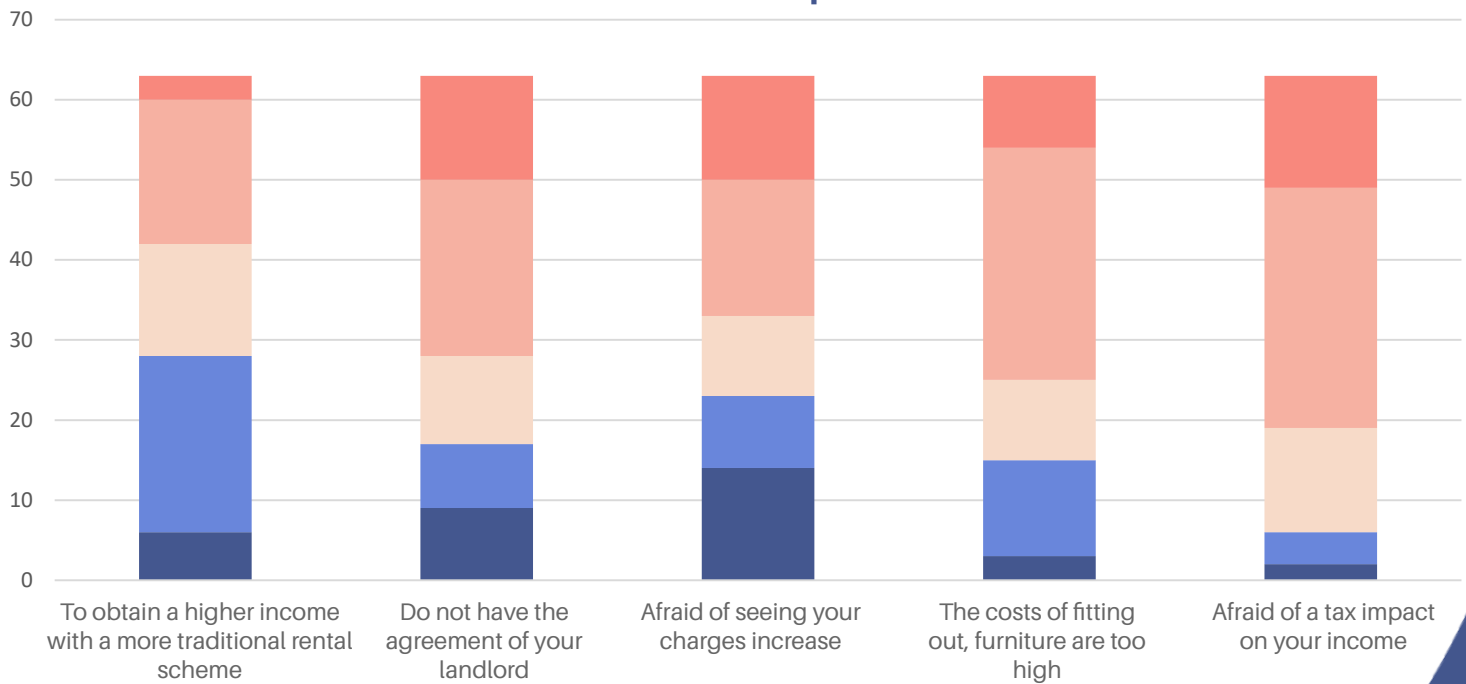
*Legal and financial*

In this category are all the financial aspects linked to intergenerational homesharing.

**Legal and financial -  
Seniors with experience**



**Legal and financial -  
Seniors without experience**



■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ No opinion ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree



Whether or not the seniors have lived together, various aspects are considered to be of secondary importance, e.g. a lower income than on the market, the increase in charges, the cost of furnishing or the impact on taxable income.

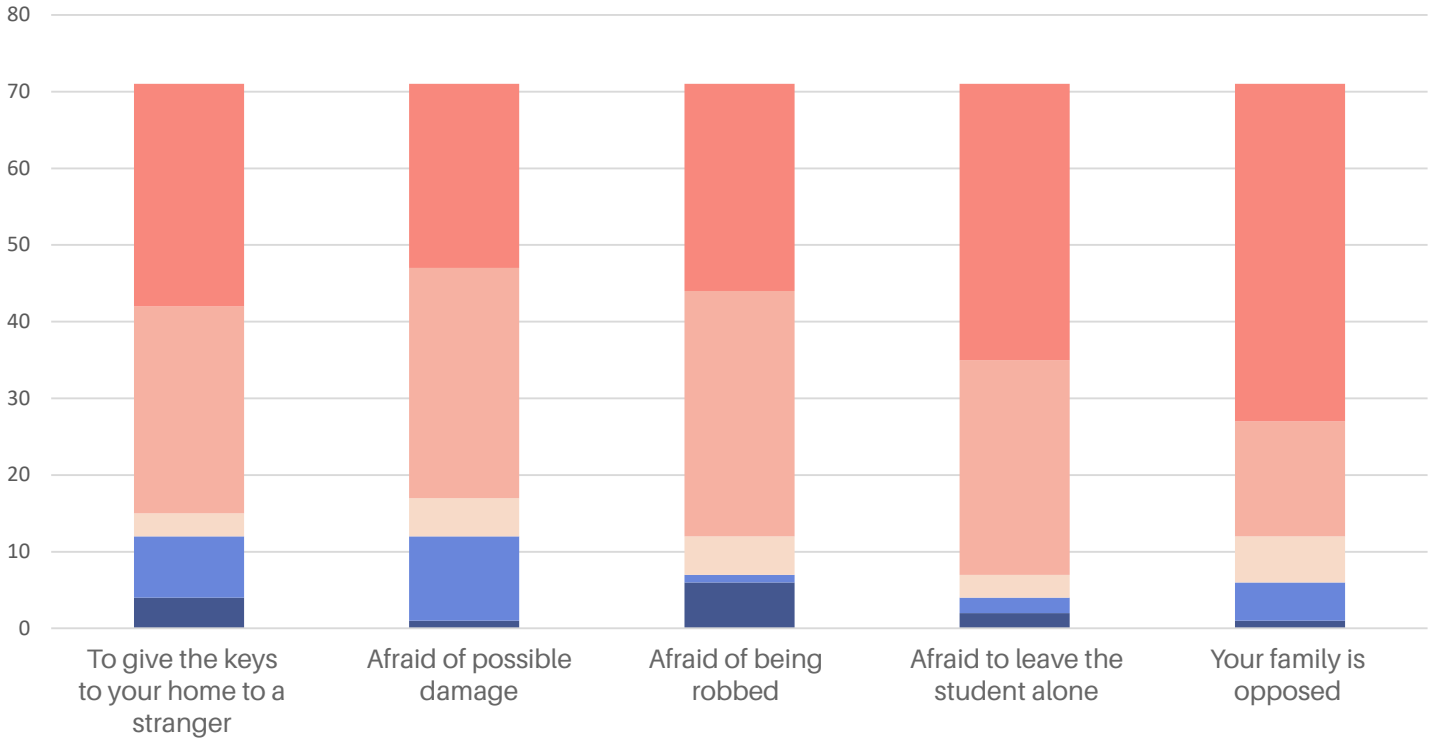
It should be noted that, apart from France, there is no legal framework for intergenerational homesharing in Europe. For other countries, even if this is not considered a priority by foster carers, it is essential that local structures ensure that this homesharing does not have undesirable fiscal or legal effects.



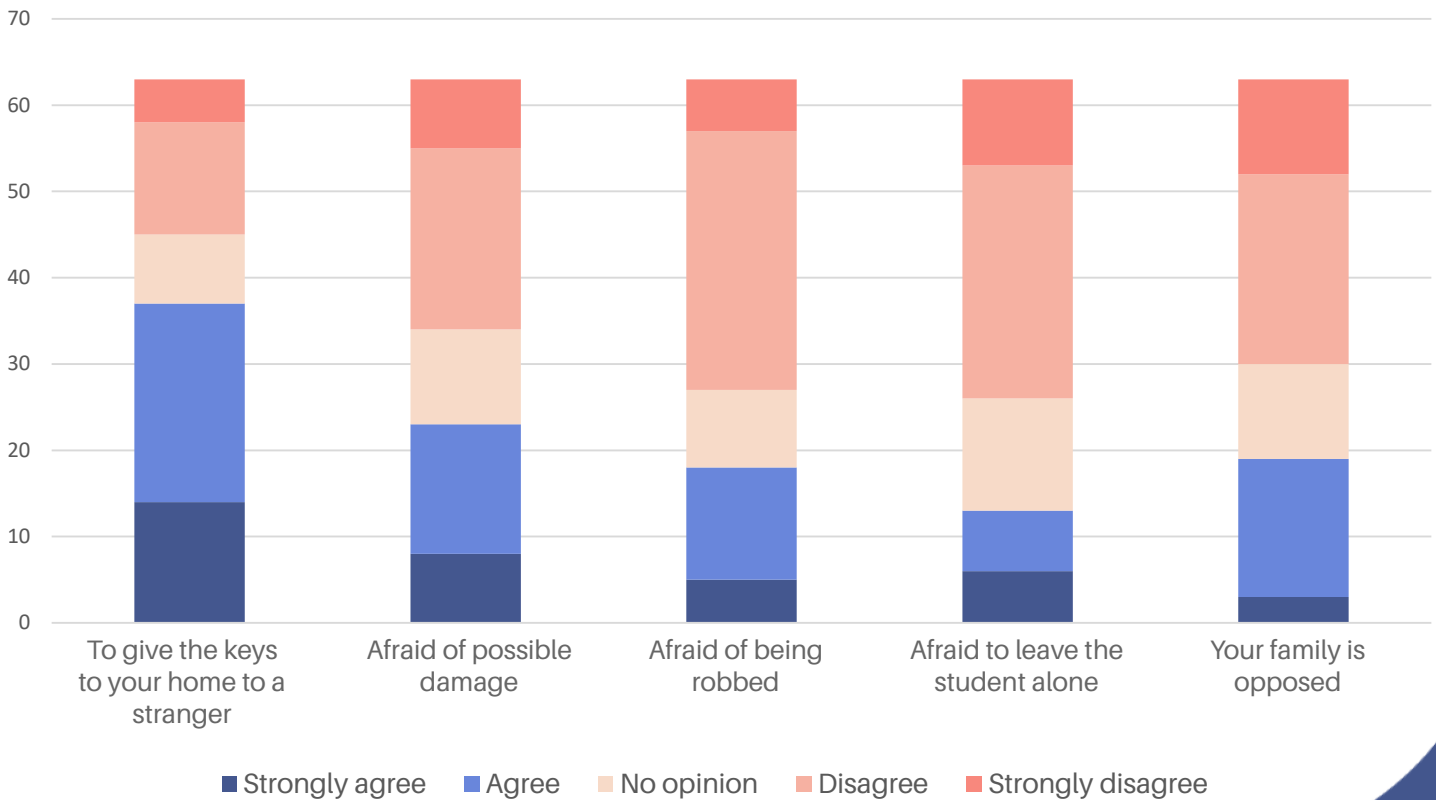
Safety

This point concerns the aspects of security and trust towards the student.

Safety - Seniors with experience



Safety - Seniors without experience



Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree



It is interesting to note that overall, seniors have complete confidence in the students they host or could host. However, **59%** of seniors with no experience of living together are reluctant to entrust their keys.

The selection of candidates by a structure that is committed to monitoring the relationship is certainly an element that encourages trust.



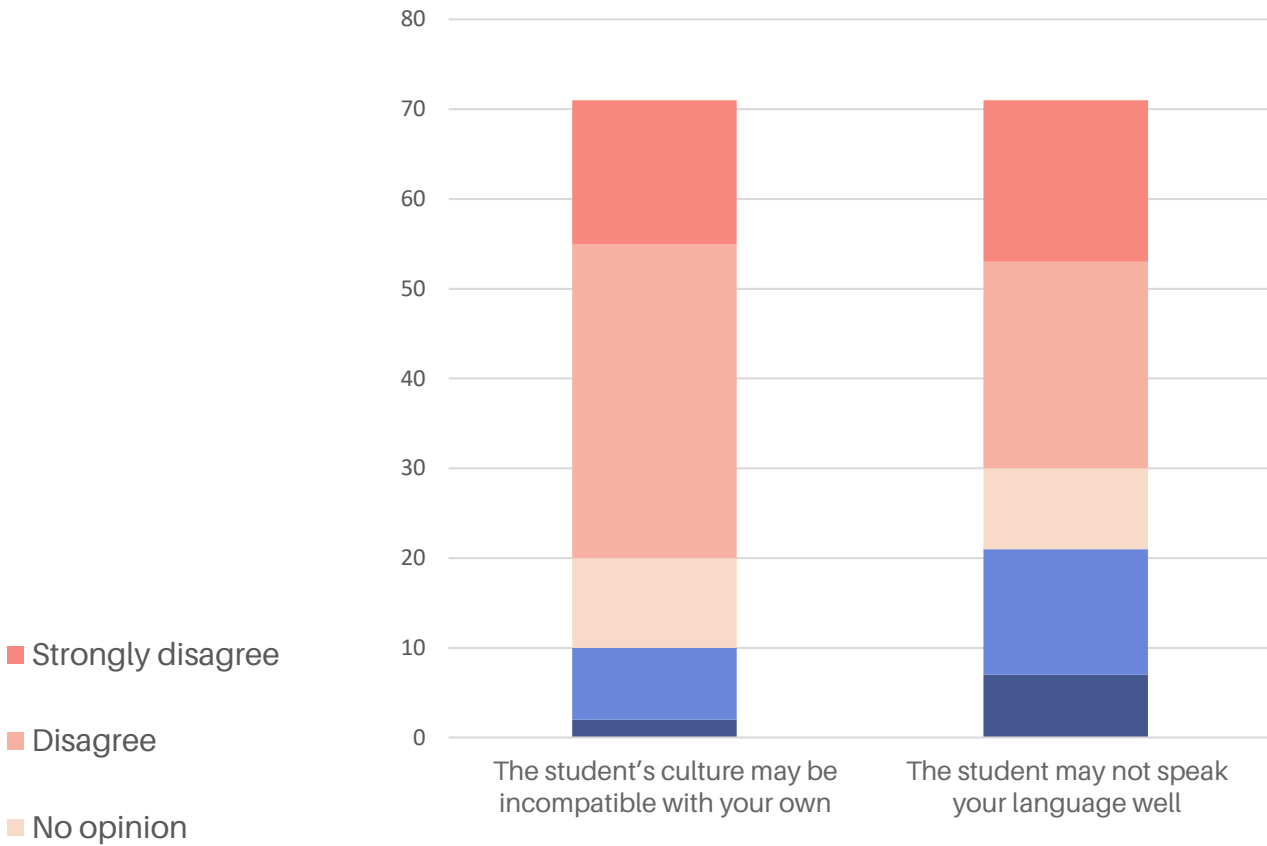
# SAFETY



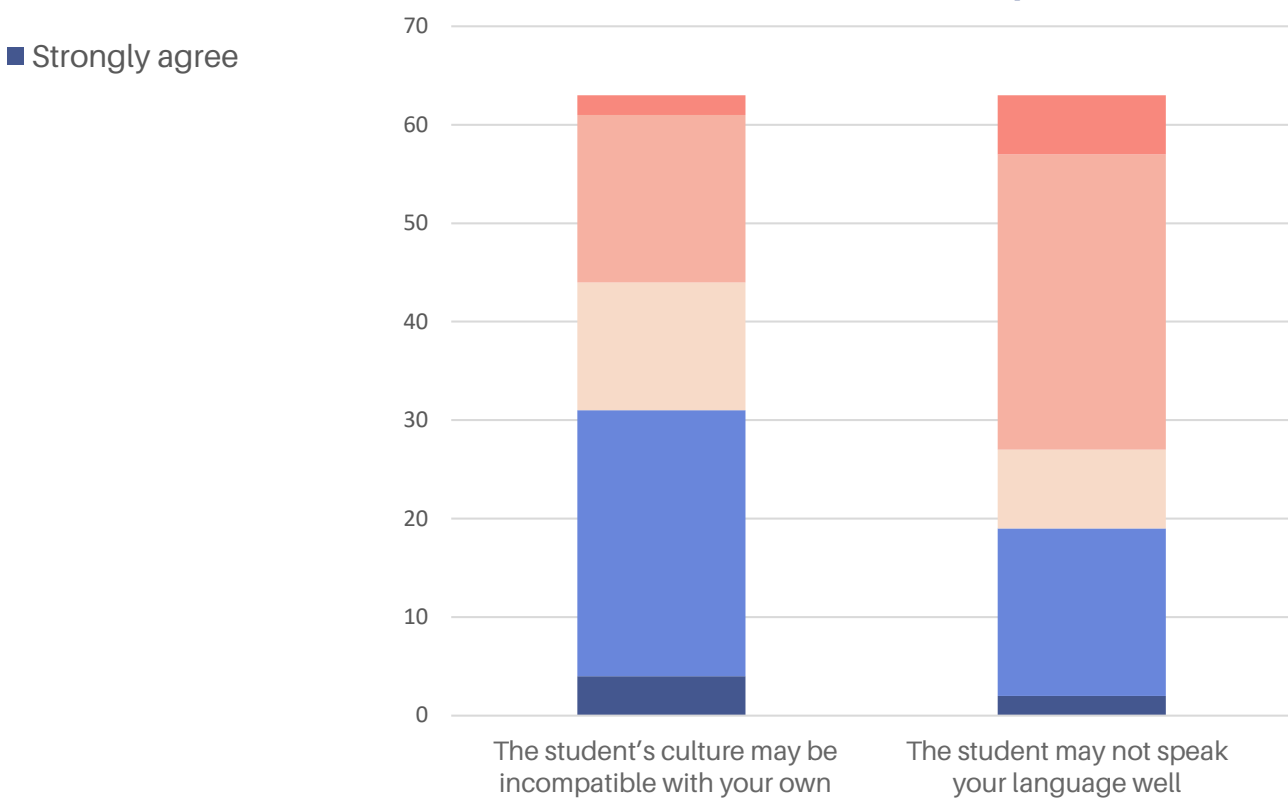
Culture

This section deals with intercultural aspects.

Culture - Seniors with experience



Culture - Seniors without experience





Once again, we can see a difference between experienced and inexperienced seniors: cultural differences are not a hindrance for **72%** of experienced seniors while only **30%** of inexperienced seniors think it is not a problem. This is probably due to the fact that the former have already had to deal with this type of intercultural cohabitation, while the latter have an image of foreigners that is not necessarily positive, as conveyed by the media.

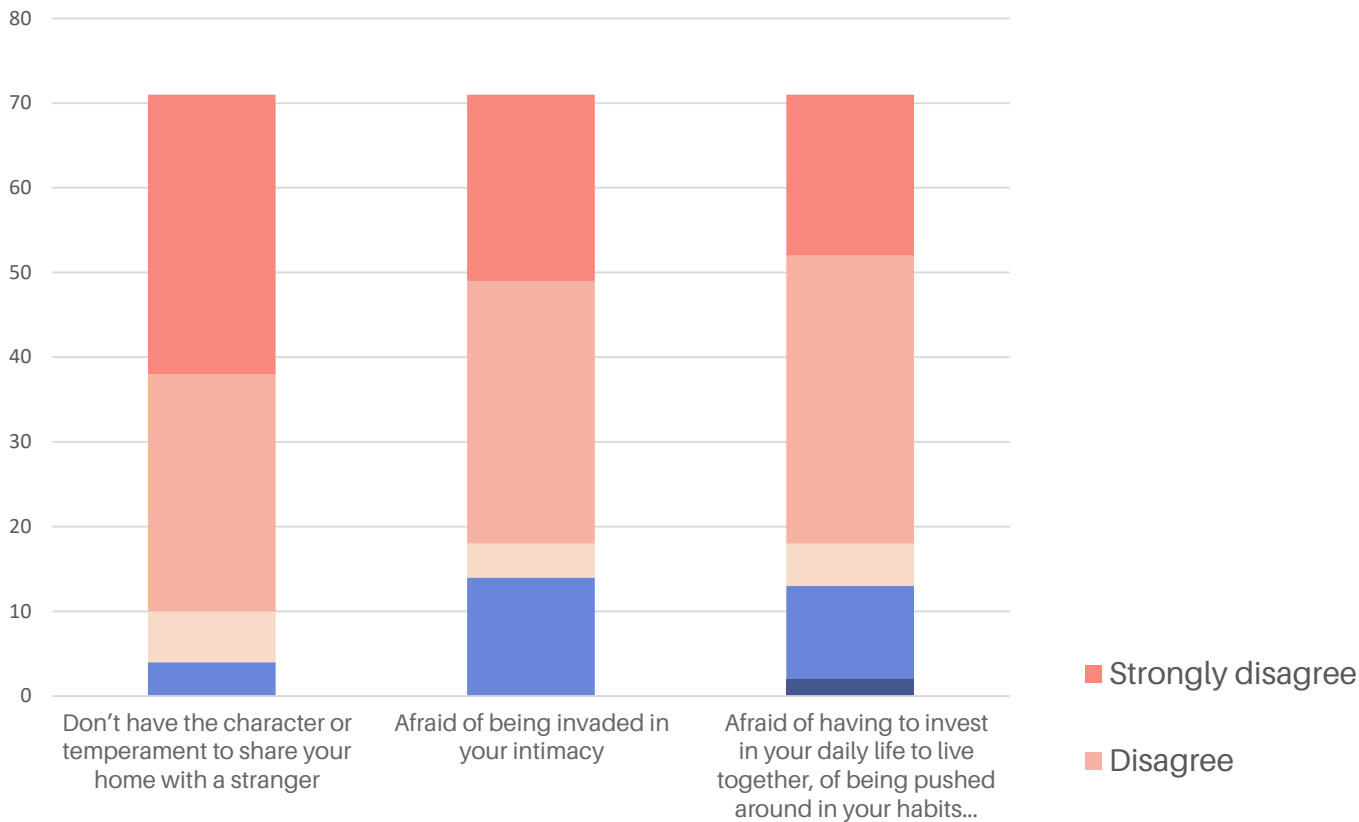
Regarding language and communication difficulties, **30%** of the seniors think that this can be a problem.



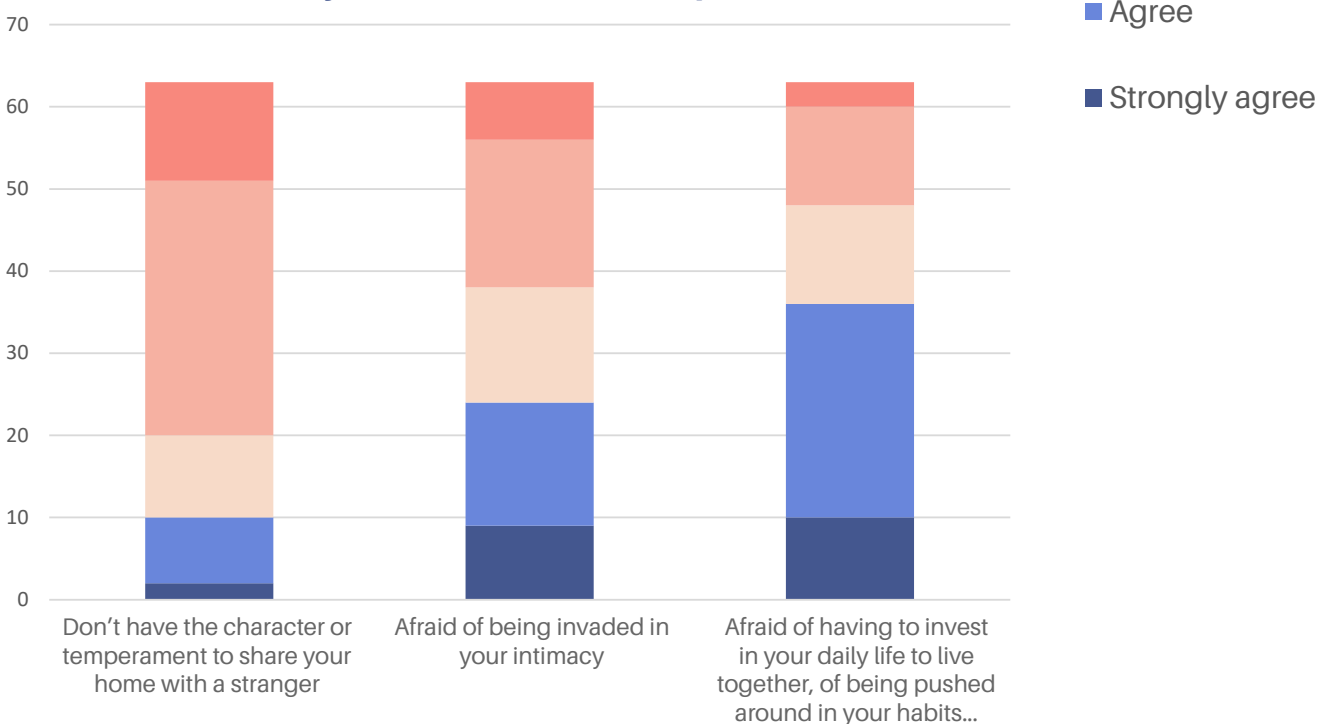
Privacy

This point takes into account the impact of living together on the private life of the carer.

Privacy - Seniors with experience



Privacy - Seniors without experience



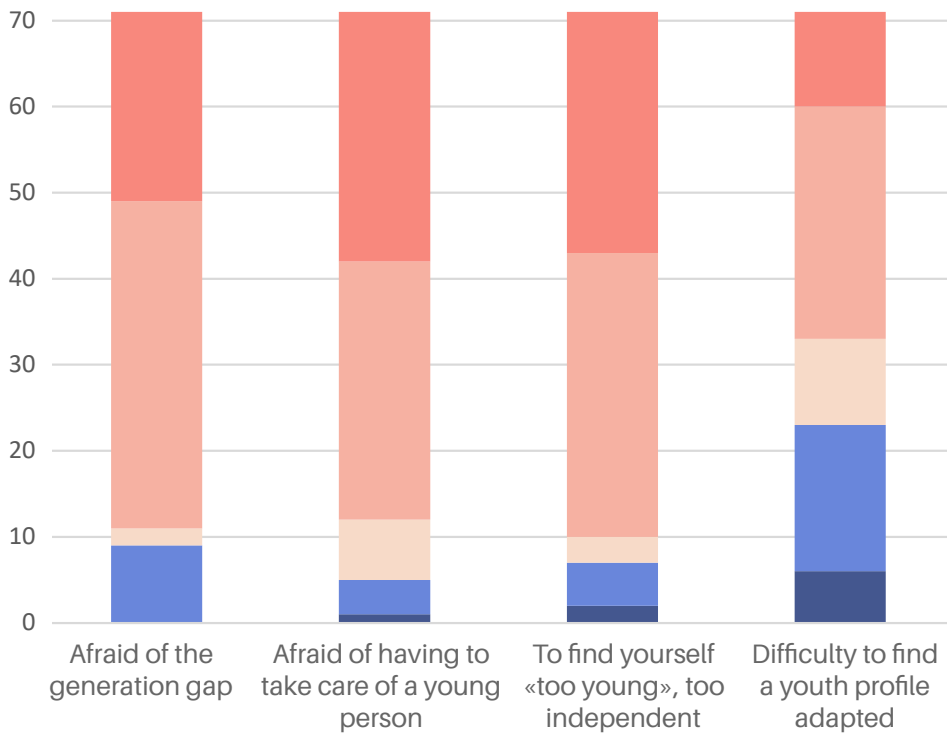
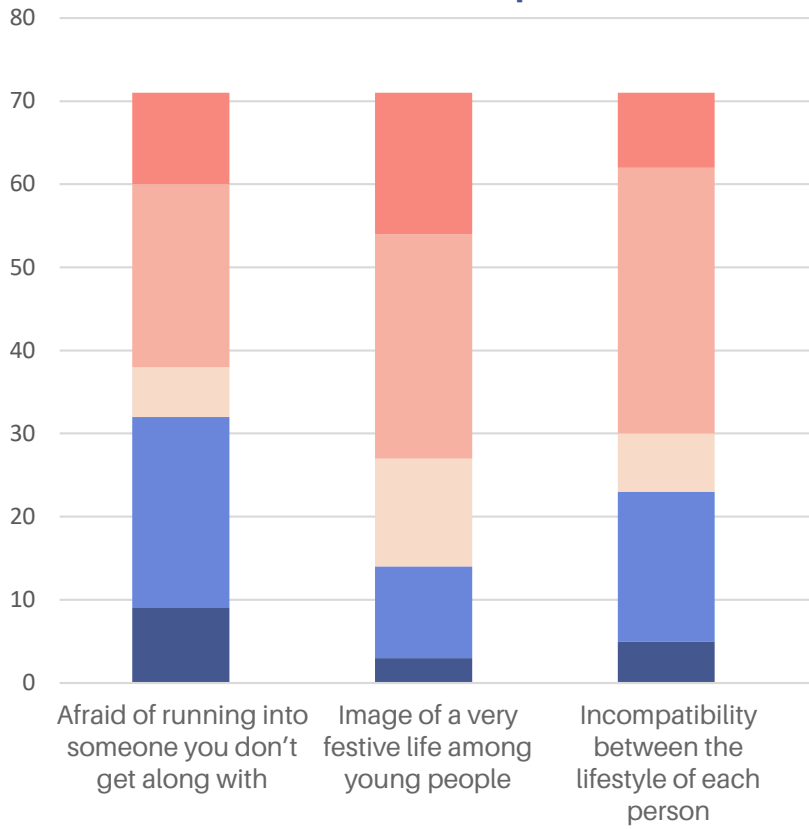
The results are relatively similar for all the seniors, with a fear of having their private life disrupted for 57% of the seniors without experience. However, on the whole, this is not a blocking point for the implementation of intergenerational homesharing.



Generation gap

The aim is to measure the impact of youth-related prejudices.

Generation gap - Seniors with experience



Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree

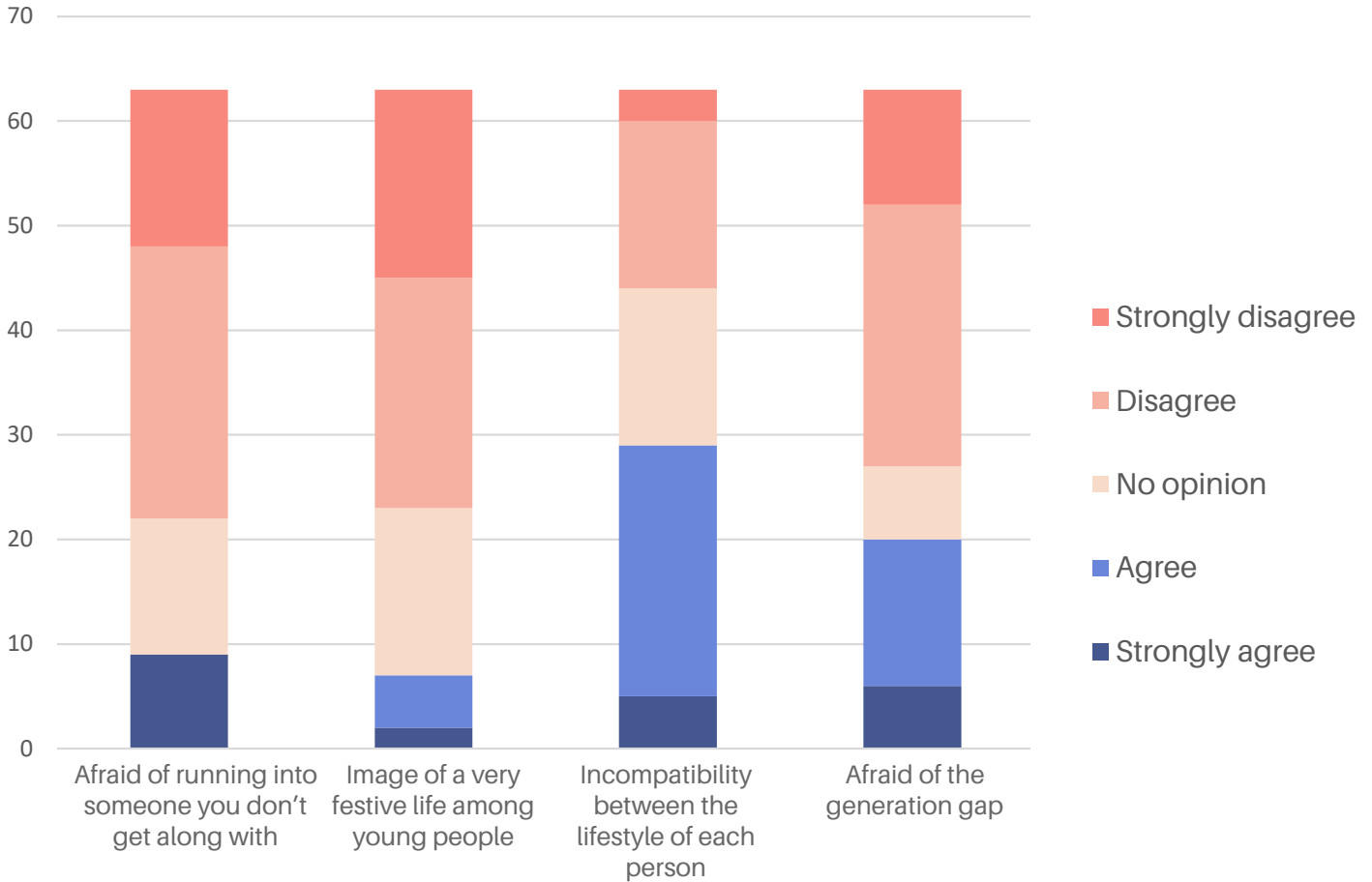




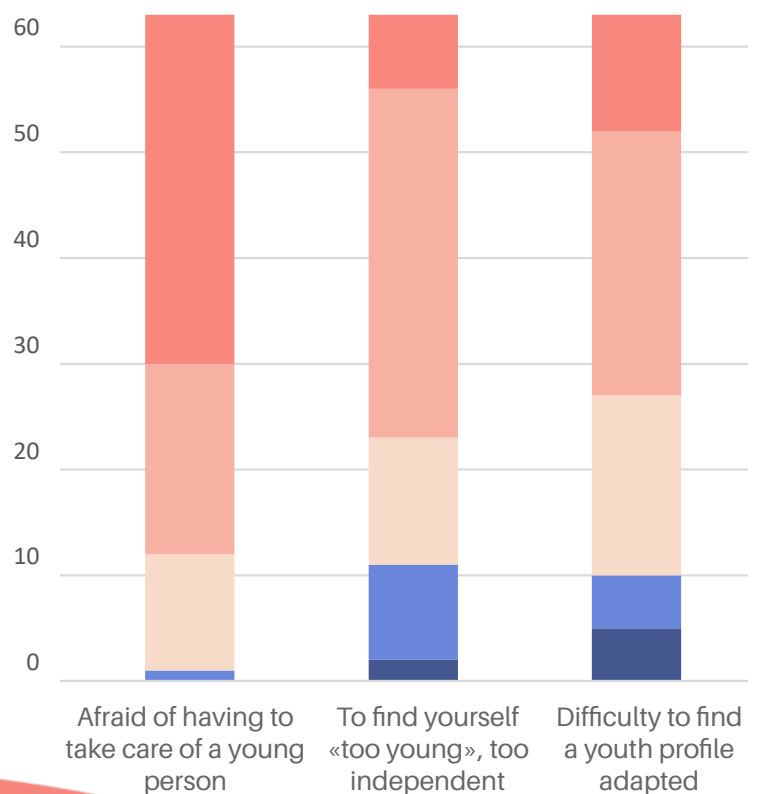
### Generation gap

The aim is to measure the impact of youth-related prejudices.

#### Generation gap - Seniors without experience



The generation gap is often highlighted in our societies, but in view of the answers, the seniors do not seem to have any prejudices regarding the younger generation. There are some fears about the ability to get along or about lifestyle incompatibilities, but these remain marginal.





To conclude, we can see that, on the whole, older people are rather open to the idea of hosting a young person and that there are few blocking points. However, these results must be seen in the light of what we observe in the field. Indeed, if this win-win concept is attractive, we note that the decision to host a student is never easy to take and that the seniors need to receive this information and support by different means before finally diving into this adventure. The situation is not as rosy as this study might suggest. The altruistic motivation of the seniors is very important and should be better promoted in order to present intergenerational homesharing as a real exchange which is beneficial for both parts and in which everyone brings and receives.



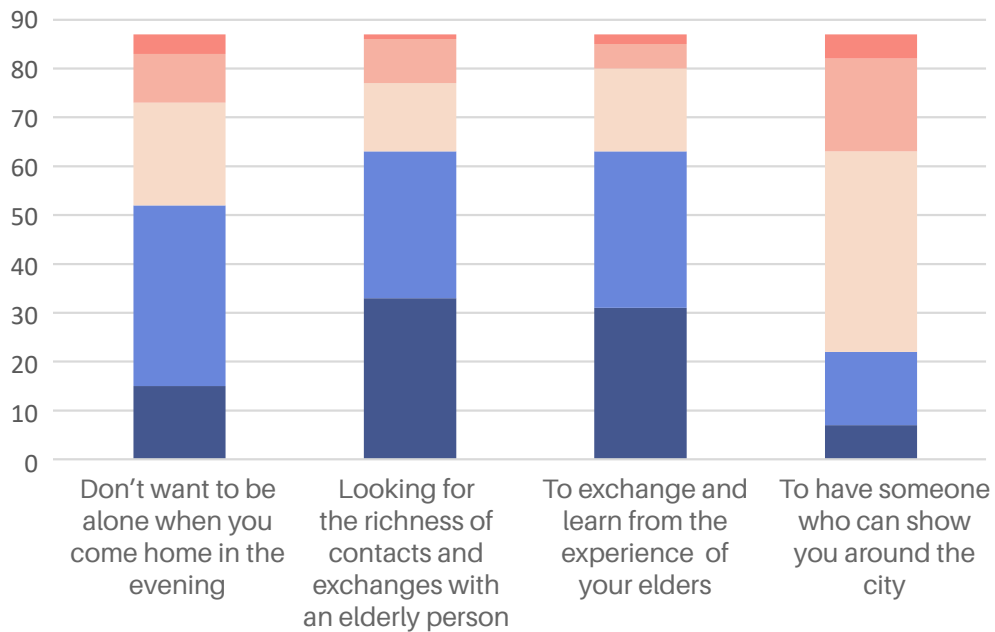
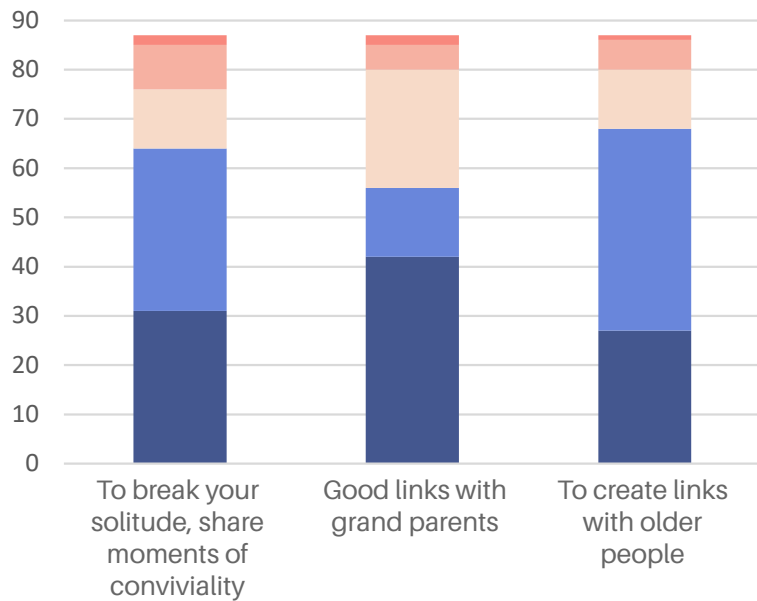
### 3. STUDENTS

#### a. INCENTIVES

##### Contact

By contact, we understand all the interactions that students can have with the outside world in order to integrate into society.

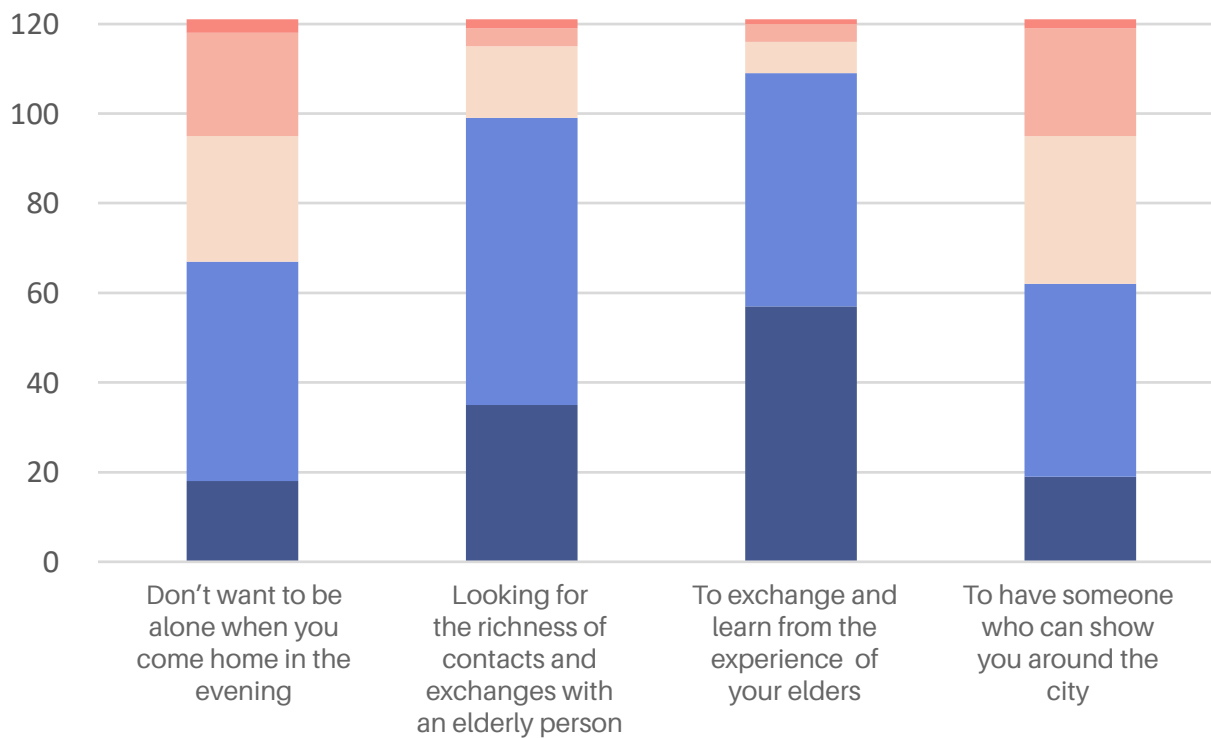
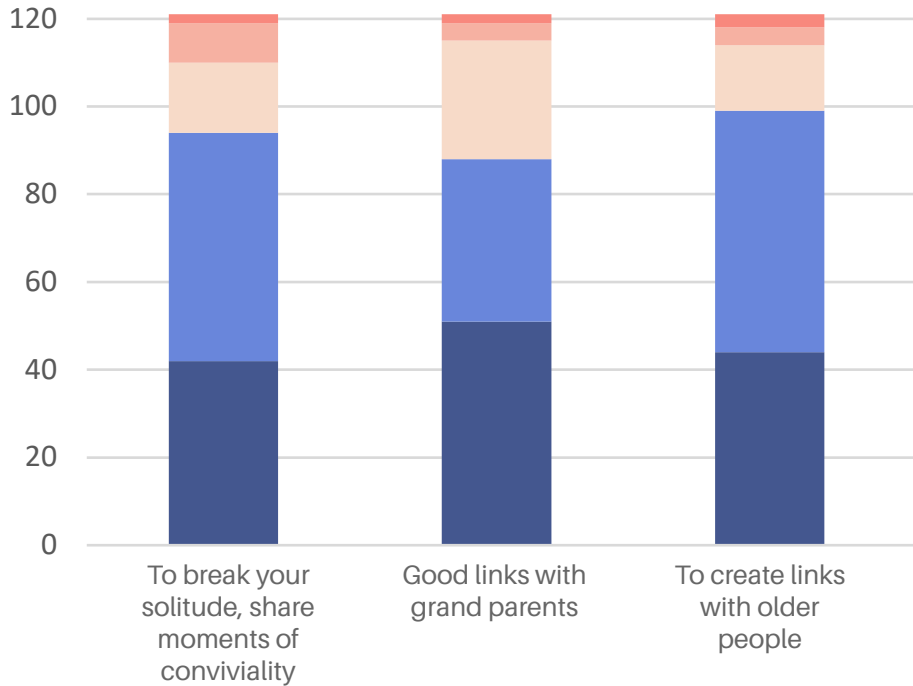
Contact - Students with experience



■ Strongly agree  
 ■ Agree  
 ■ No opinion  
 ■ Disagree  
 ■ Strongly disagree



### Contact - Students without experience



■ Strongly agree  
 ■ Agree  
 ■ No opinion  
 ■ Disagree  
 ■ Strongly disagree



There is no significant difference between students with and without experience of intergenerational homesharing. In all cases, the scores are high. It should be noted that, contrary to what one might think, both students and seniors can suffer from loneliness. The health crisis we have been experiencing since 2020 has shown this strongly. It is therefore a win-win situation. The students are also sensitive to the richness of the exchange with the seniors and to what they can learn from the more experienced generations. The discovery of the host city, on the other hand, does not receive the majority of votes. Intergenerational contacts therefore seem to be limited to the place where they live.

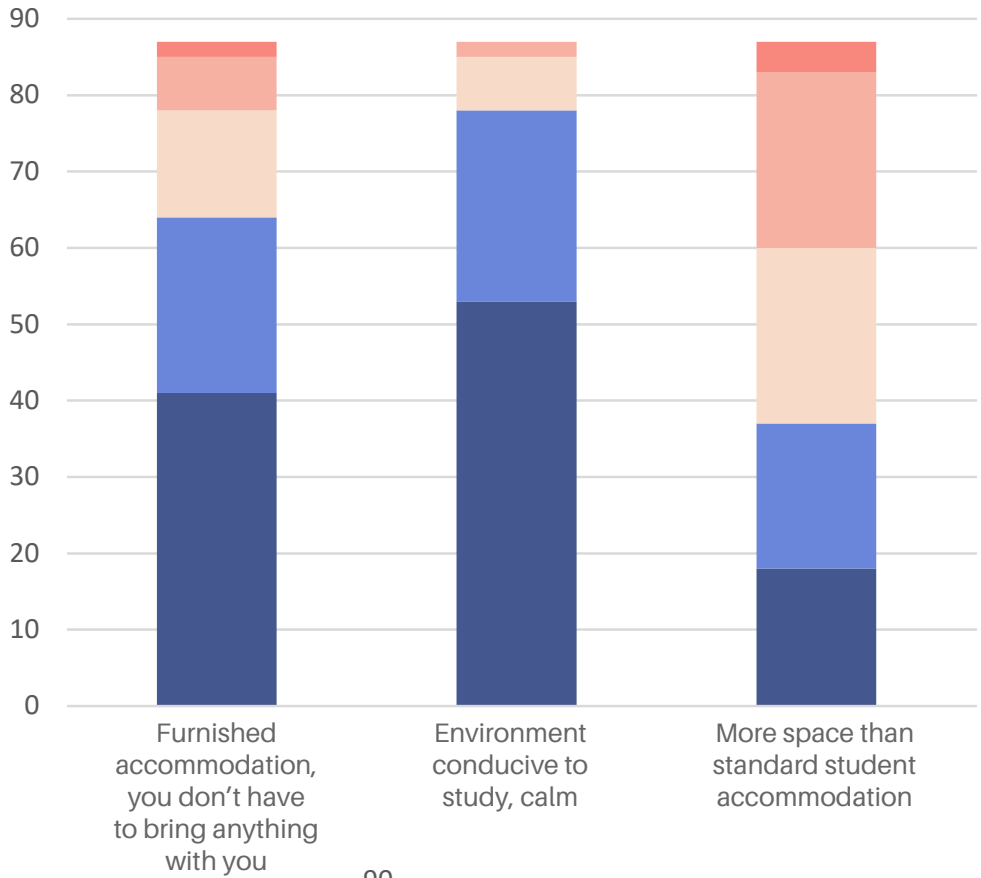
# CONTACT



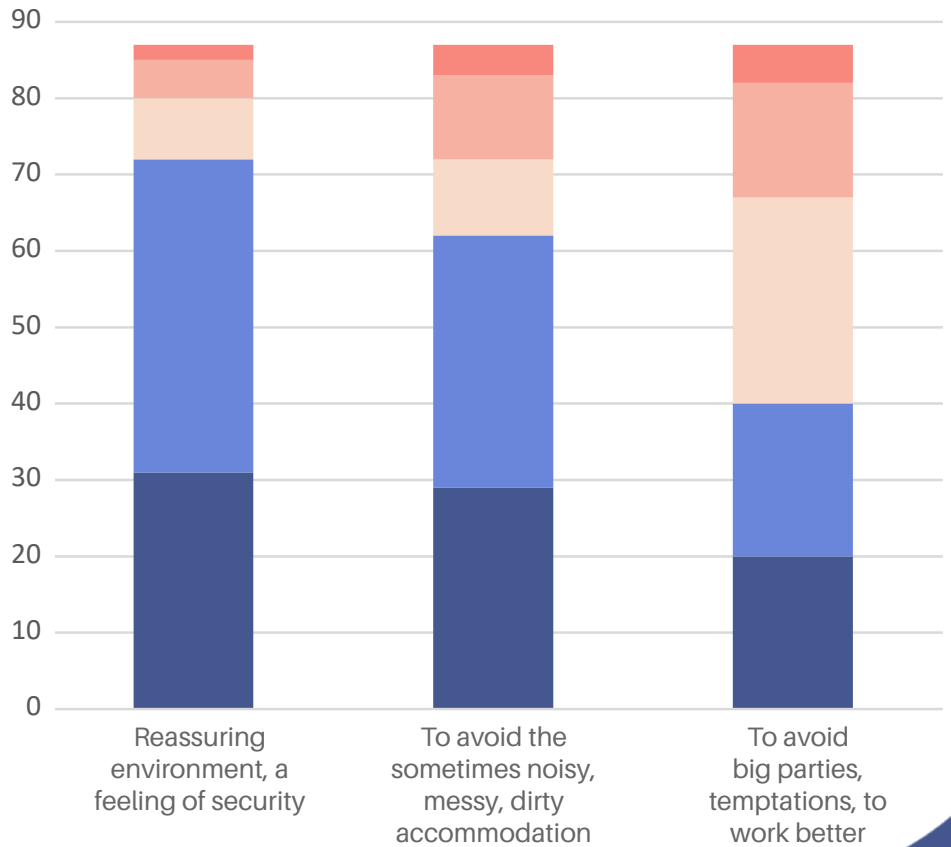
*Housing comfort*

Analysis of the benefit of intergenerational cohabitation on housing quality.

**Comfort - Students with experience**

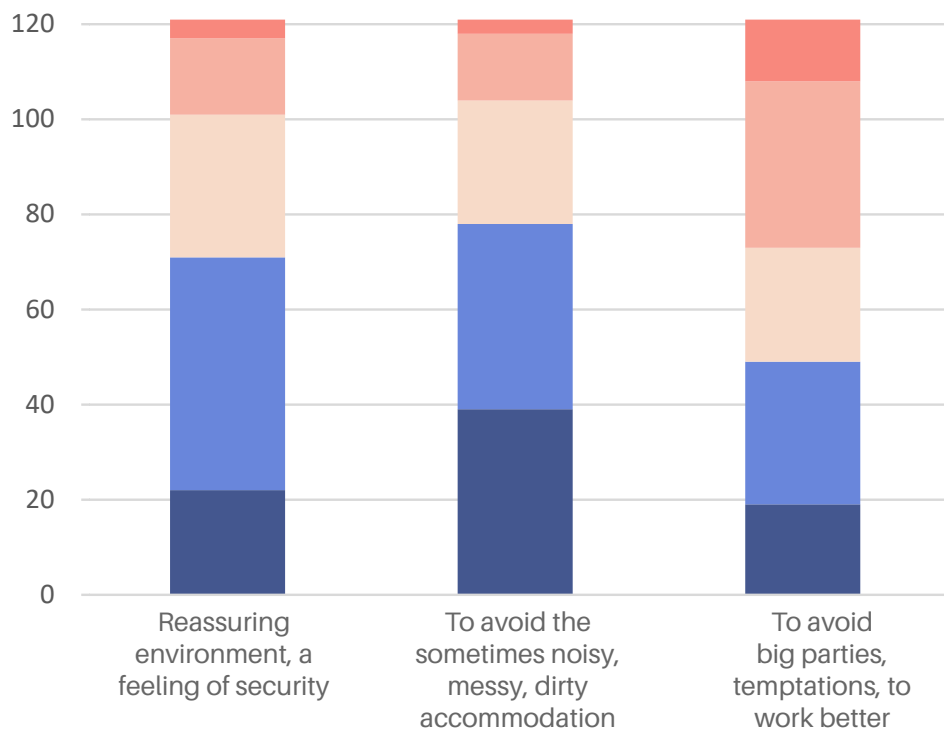
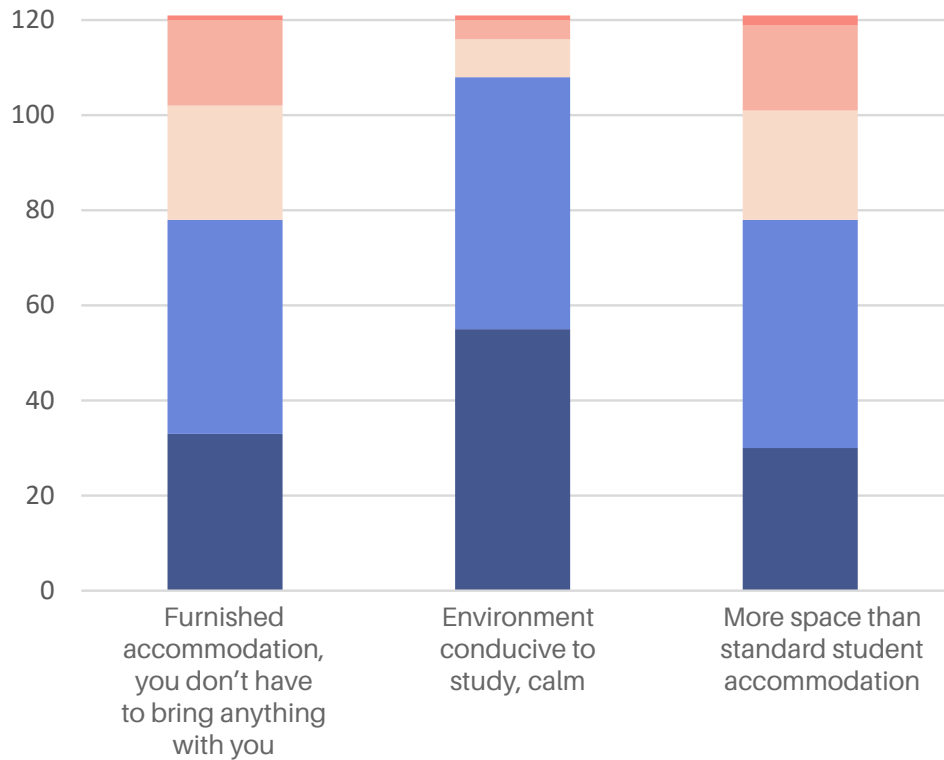


- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- No opinion
- Agree
- Strongly agree





### Comfort - Students without experience



■ Strongly agree  
 ■ Agree  
 ■ No opinion  
 ■ Disagree  
 ■ Strongly disagree



There is no significant difference between students with and without experience of intergenerational homesharing. In all cases, the scores are high. The differences concern the size of the accommodation: **64%** of the students without experience (i.e. **20%** more than those with experience) think that accommodation with a senior is bigger than a classic student accommodation. The reality and experiences of the organisations involved in WeShareWeCare may contradict this expectation of larger accommodation. **83%** of cohabiting students thought it was a safe and secure environment (only **59%** of others).

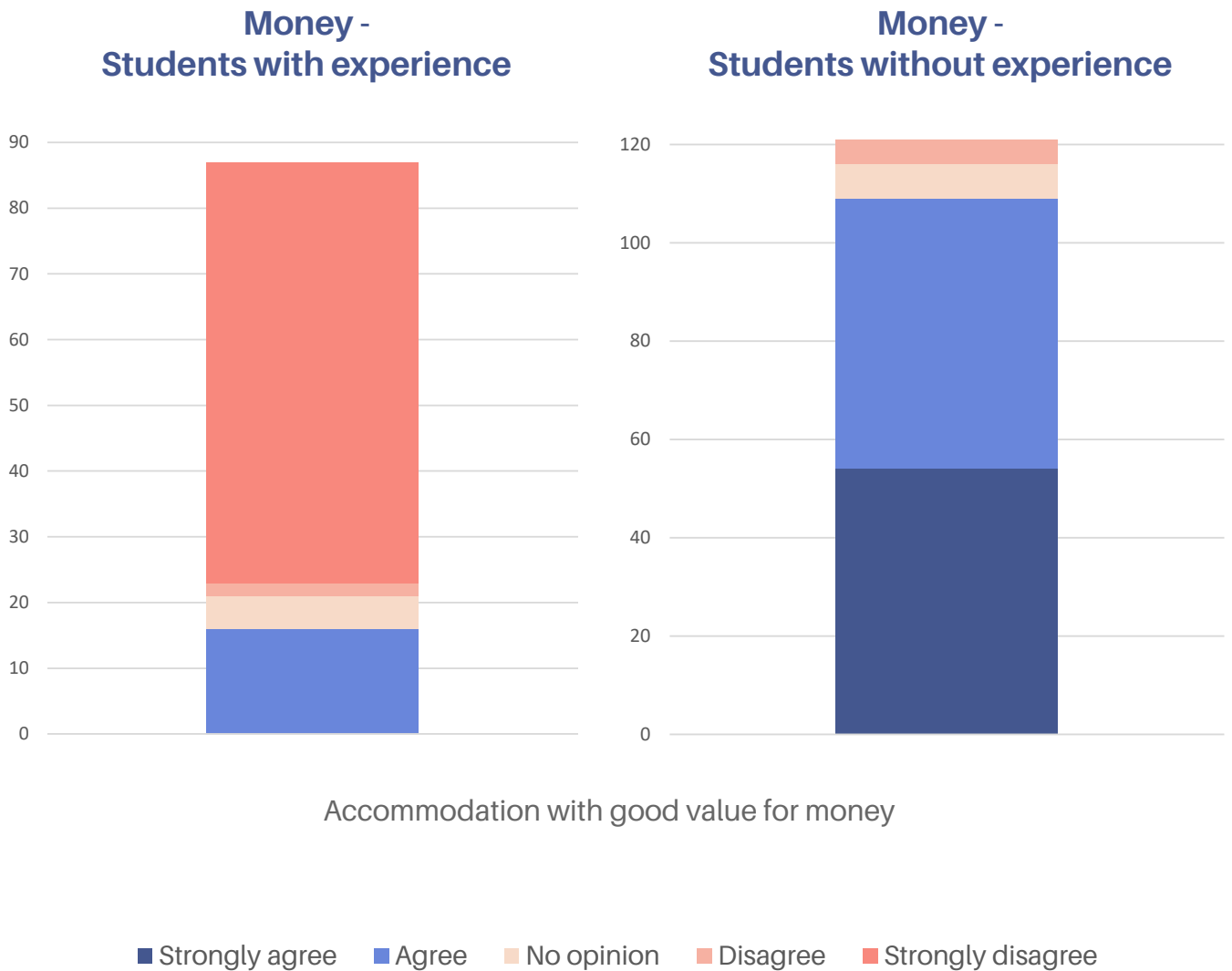
# COMFORT





Money

This section looks at the relationship of the student with the cost of accommodation.



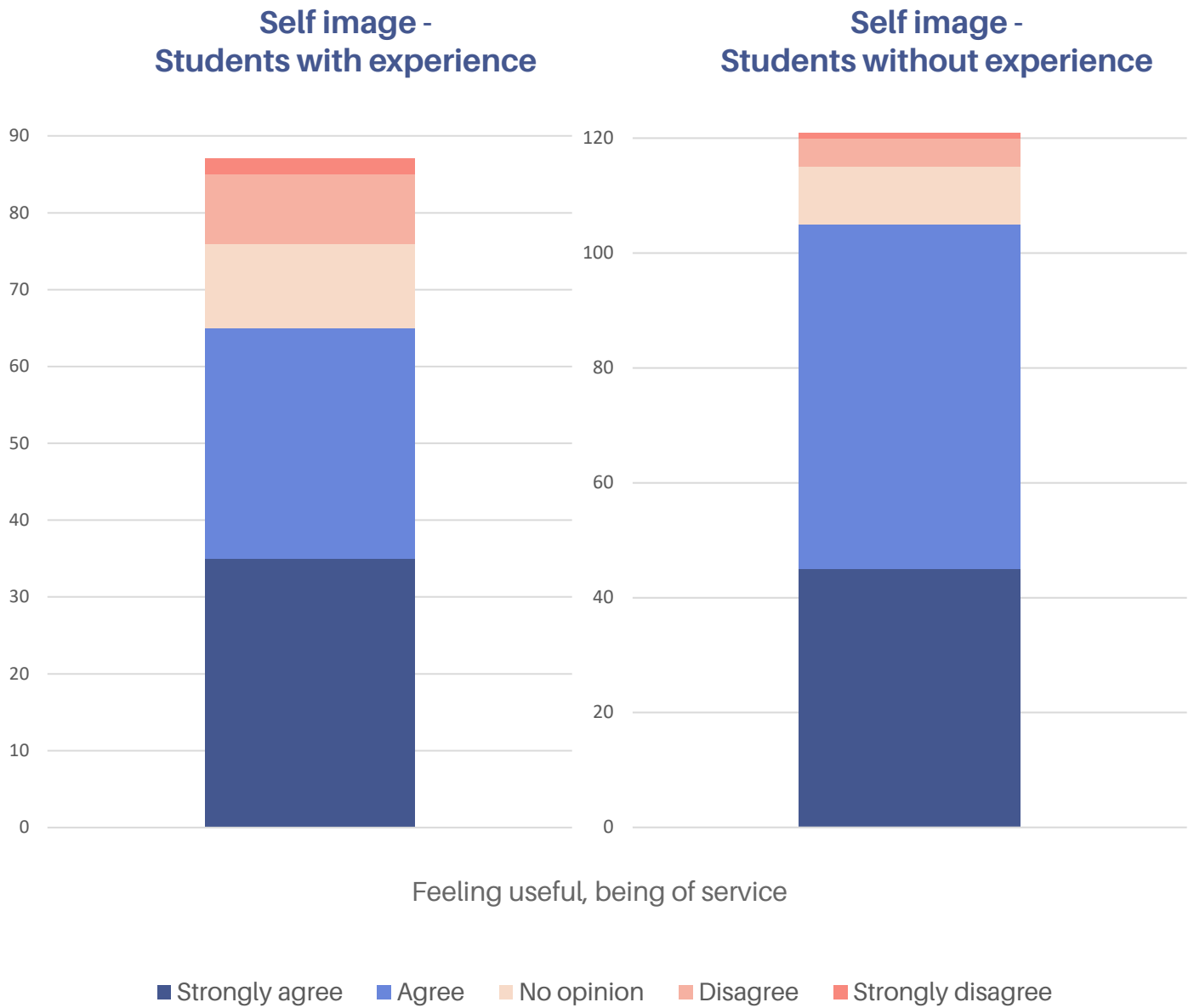
There is a clear difference between the two student profiles. **76%** of students with experience of living with others consider that they do not do so for financial reasons and that the attraction of accommodation below market cost is secondary in their choice. On the other hand, students with no experience of homesharing believe that it is this financial reason that makes them make this choice.

As with the seniors, we can ask ourselves whether there is not a bias in the answers, as experience leads us to believe that this financial aspect is also very important in the choice of this type of accommodation.



Self-esteem

In this section we find the altruistic motivations of the students.



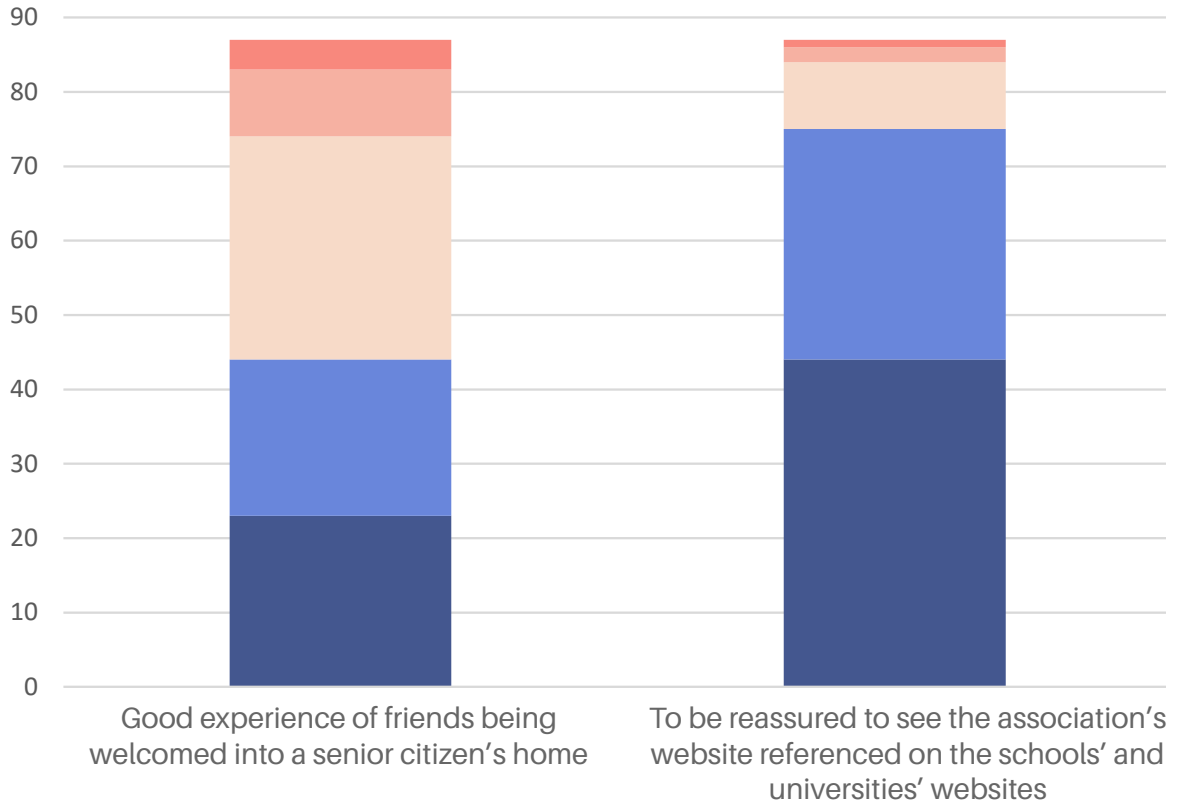
The desire to help and be of service is important for students who have clearly understood that this is not a classic housing solution but a shared habitat where everyone participates in the common life. Even more students with no experience of homesharing (**87%** against **75%**) put forward this incentive.



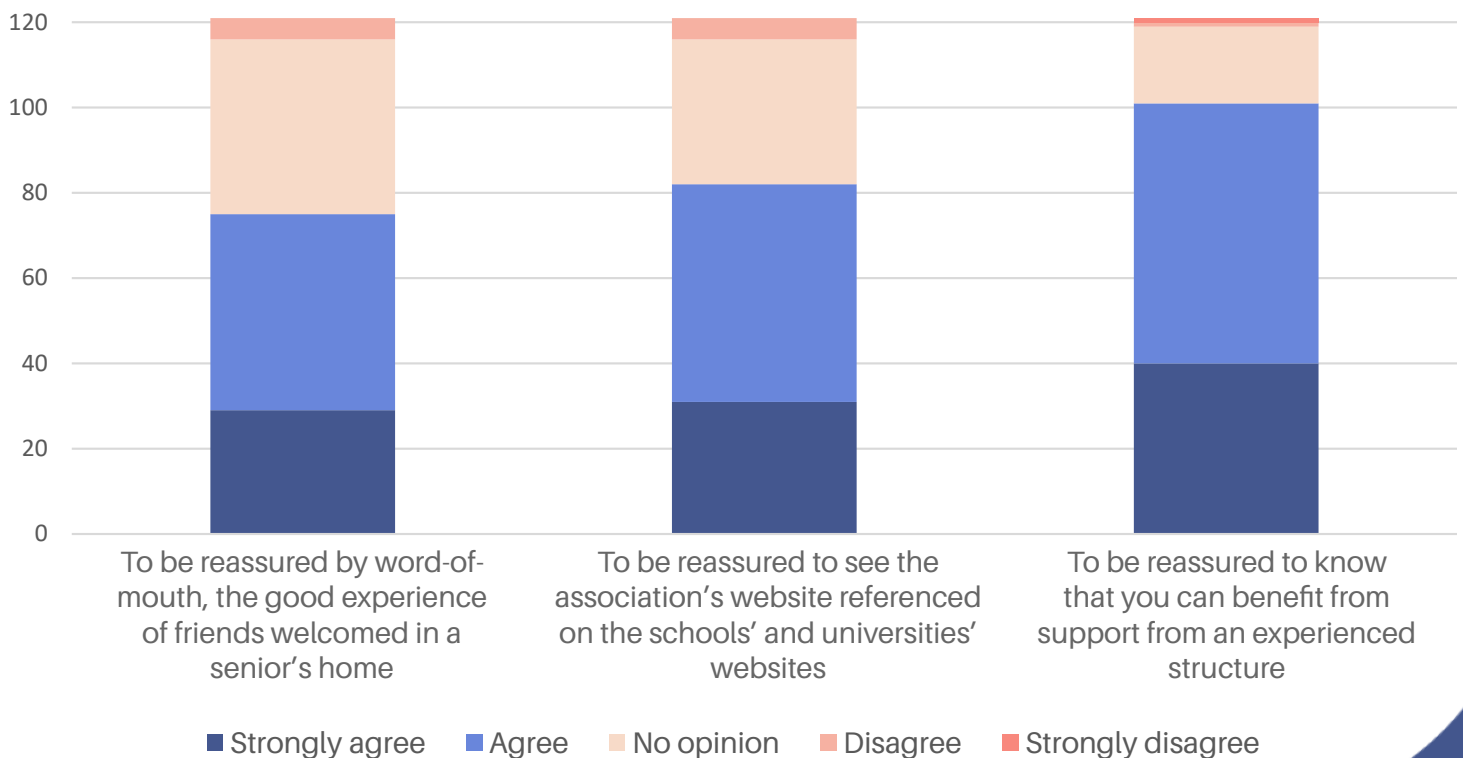
### Interaction with the intergenerational housing structures

This section evaluates the relationship of trust established between the students and the structures organising intergenerational homesharing as the first point of contact.

#### Confidence - Students with experience



#### Confidence - Students without experience



■ Strongly agree  
 ■ Agree  
 ■ No opinion  
 ■ Disagree  
 ■ Strongly disagree



Trust in intergenerational housing associations is high for all students thanks to word of mouth and partnerships with universities. This last point is very important for international students who do not have a local contact and therefore need to be sure of the seriousness of the partners.



# CONFIDENCE



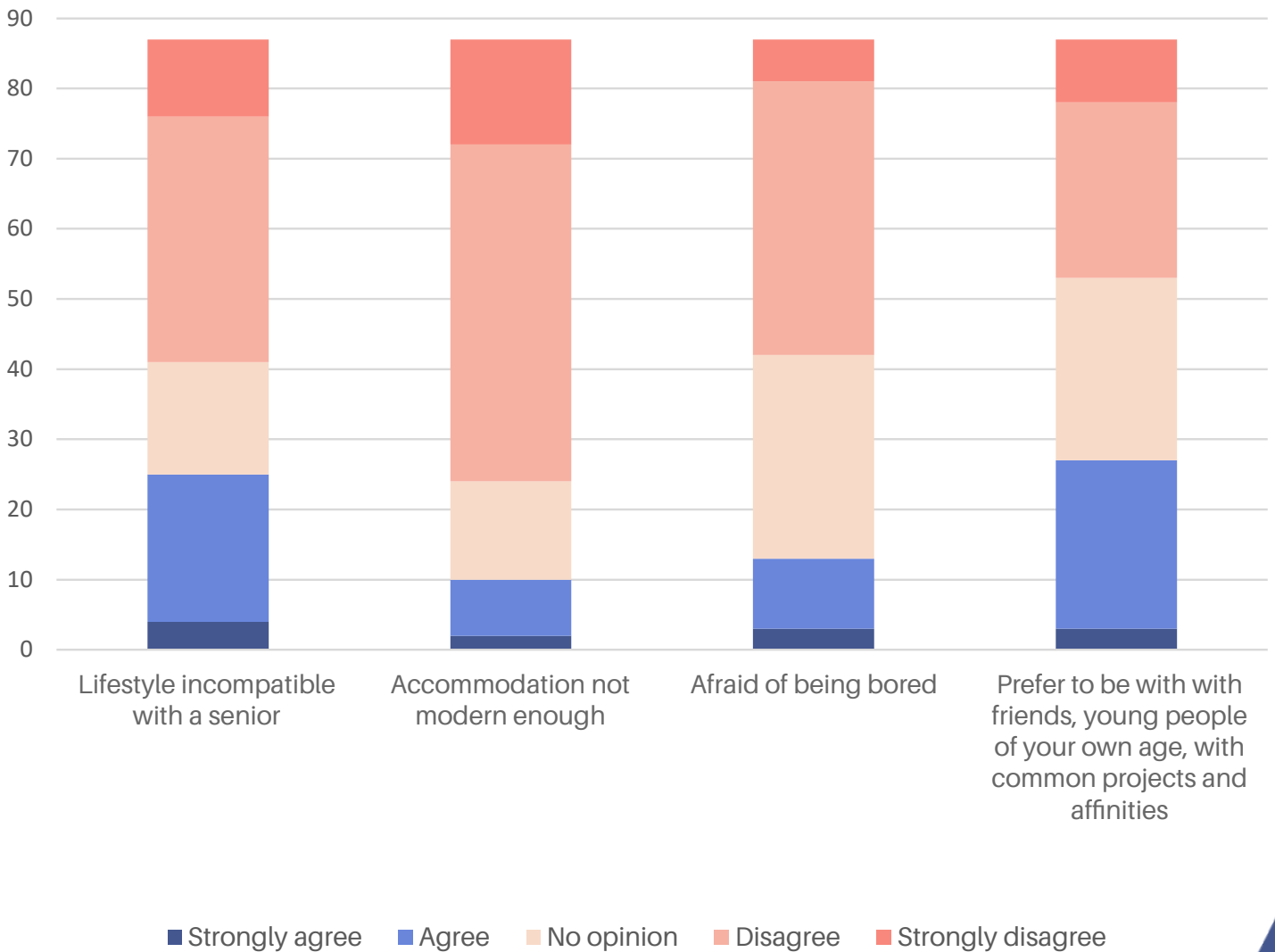
### 3. STUDENTS

#### b. ISSUES

##### *Generation gap*

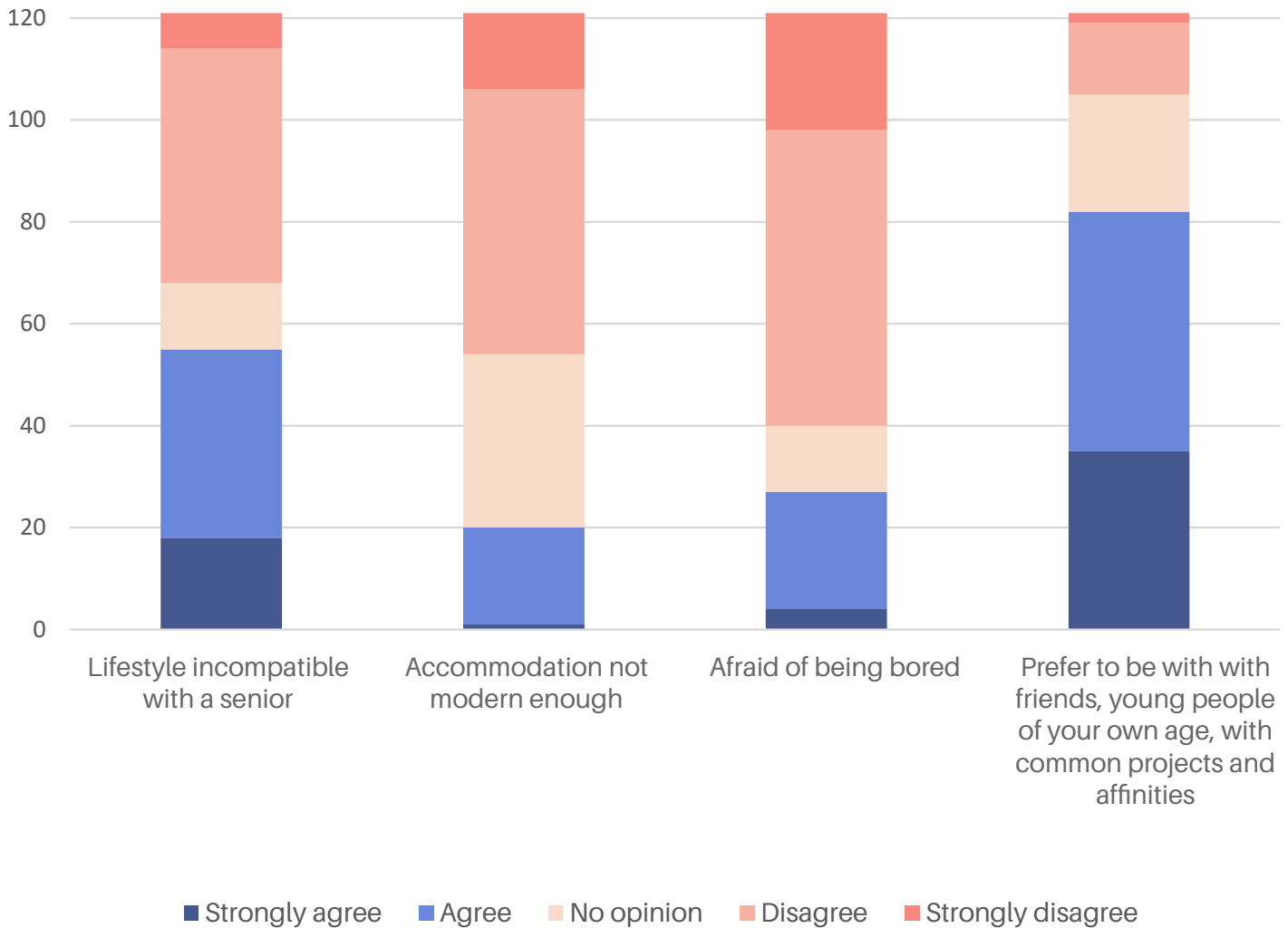
The objective is to measure the impact of prejudices related to old age.

**Generation gap -  
Students with experience**





### Generation gap - Students without experience



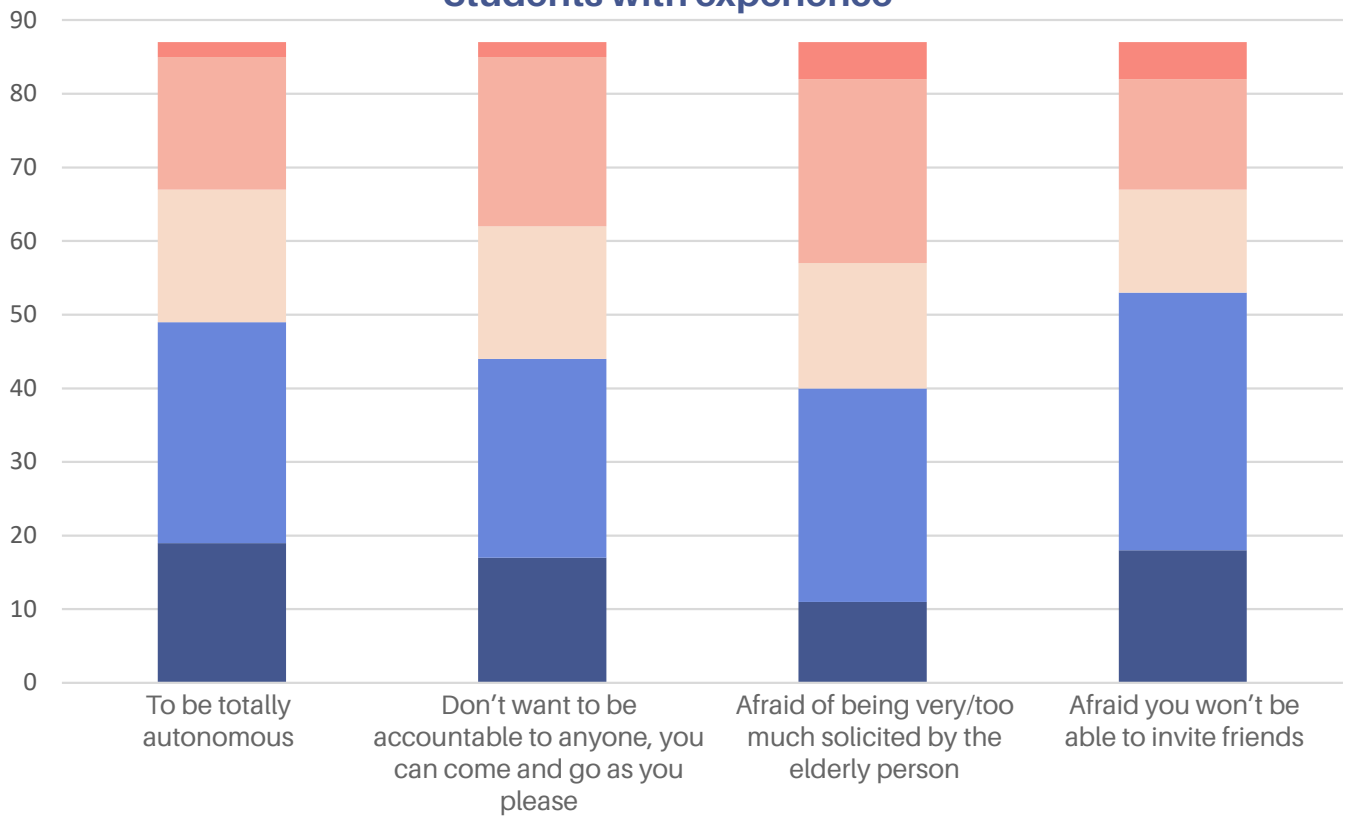
It is interesting to note that **29%** of cohabiting students consider their lifestyle incompatible with that of a senior. Among students with no experience, **45%** share this opinion. The preference for living with young people is **30%** for experienced students and **38%** for others. It is therefore interesting to observe that for **1/3** of students who practice homesharing, it seems to be only a default choice. This can be explained by a lack of available accommodation in big cities or by a budgetary concern, which is not consistent with the answer of **76%** of the students who declare not to practice this type of cohabitation for financial reasons.



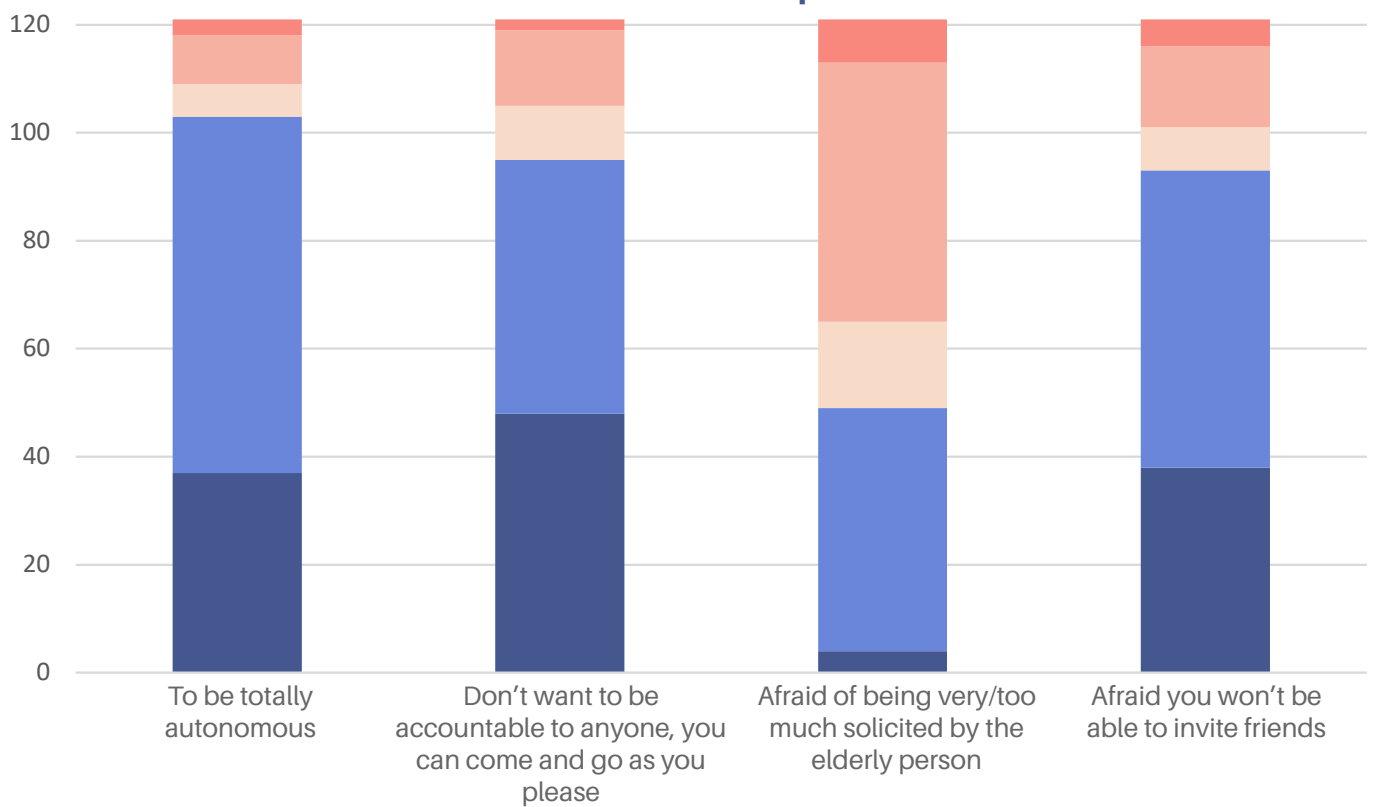
Independence

Impact of the need for independence on the choice of accommodation.

Independence - Students with experience



Independence - Students without experience



Strongly agree Agree No opinion Disagree Strongly disagree



Unsurprisingly, students with no experience of homesharing put more emphasis on the need for total autonomy (**85%** versus **56%**) as well as independence (**79%** versus **51%**). The high level for cohabiting students, however, underlines the fact that intergenerational homesharing does not seem to be a limit to independence and that living under the same roof does not force these people to stay together all the time. The fear of not being able to have friends over is also a blocking factor for a large majority of students, regardless of their status.

# INDÉPENDANCE

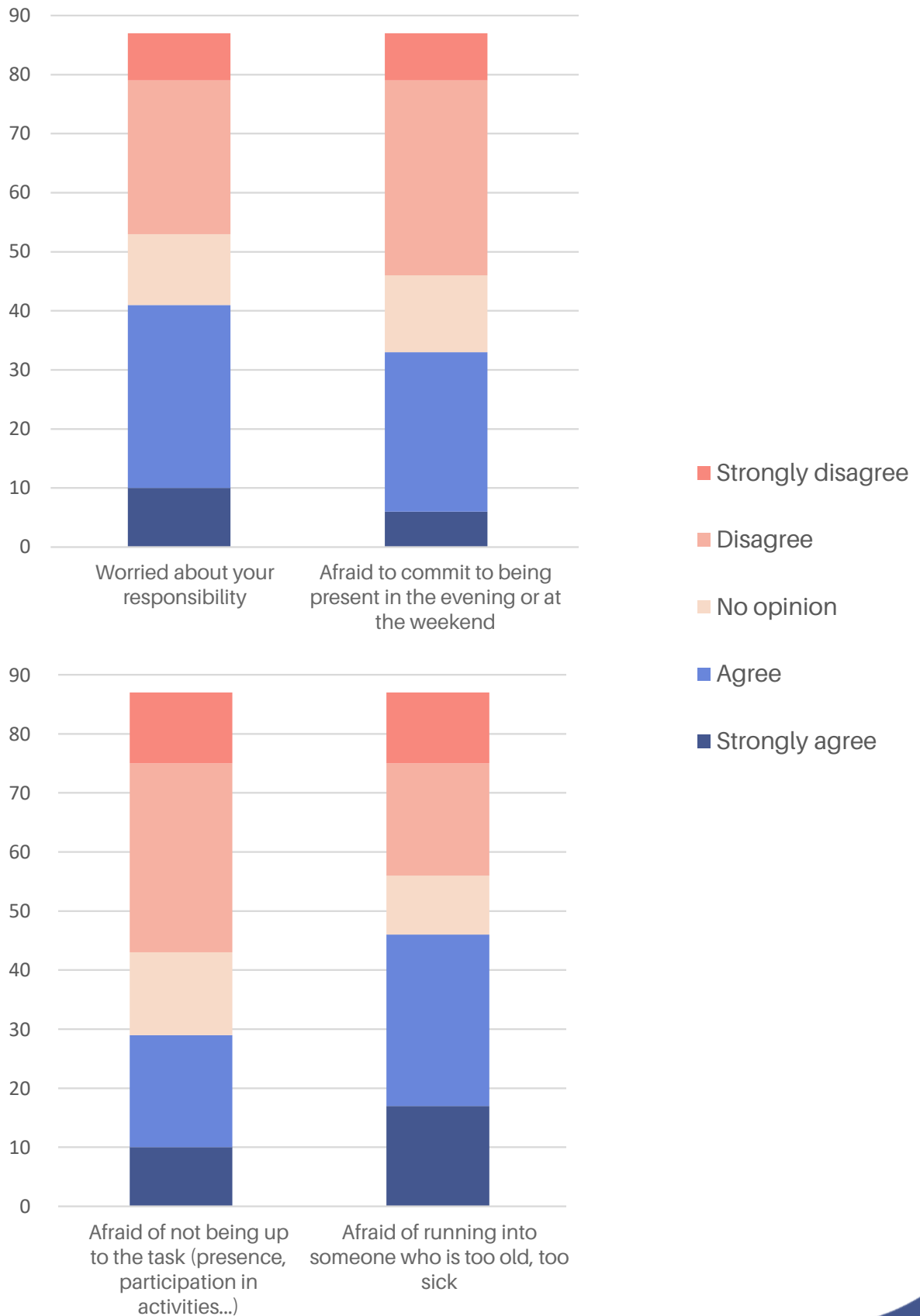




Responsibility

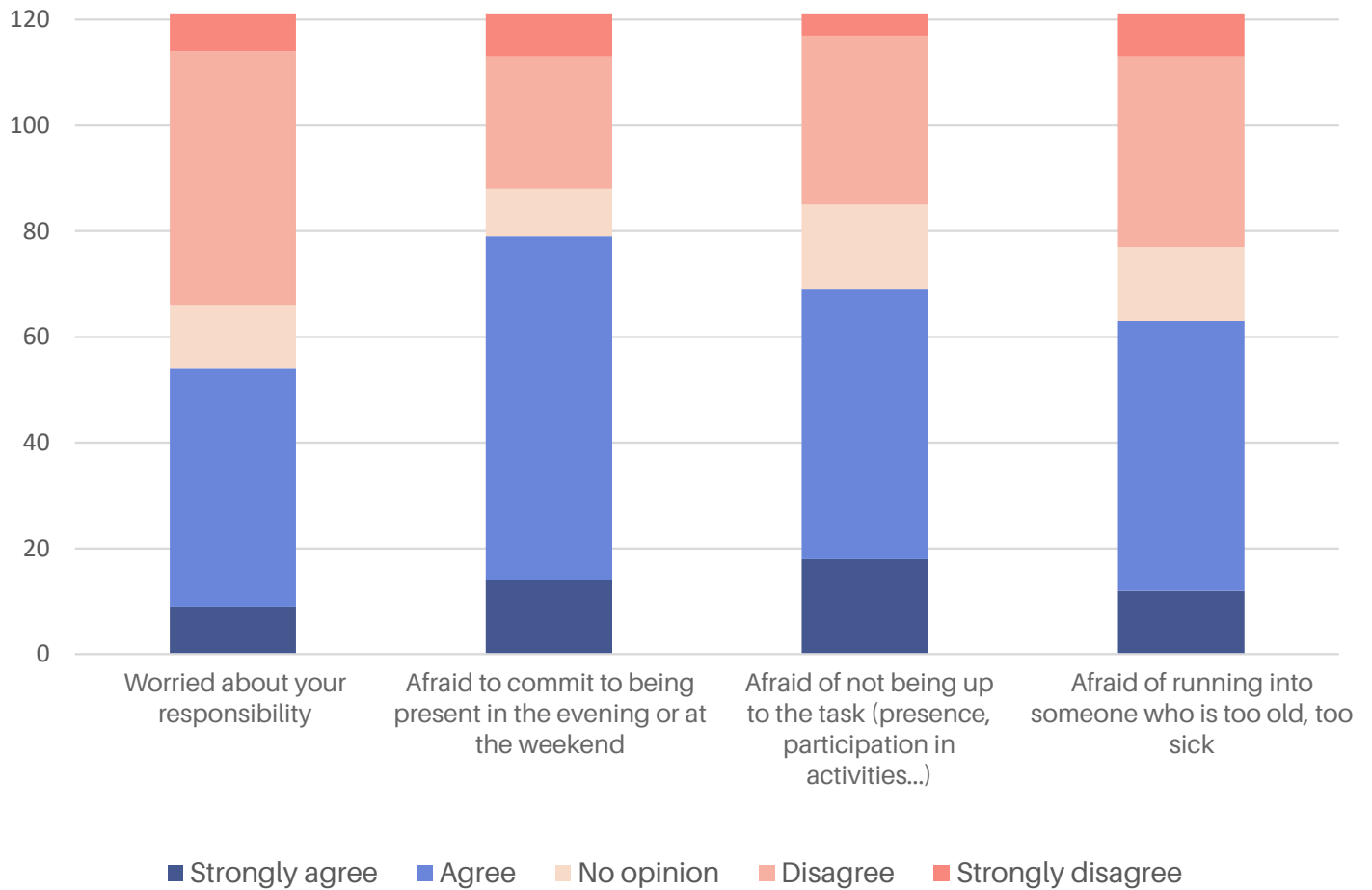
Impact of responsibility towards the senior citizen in the choice of a housing solution.

Responsibility -  
Students with experience





## Responsibility - Students without experience



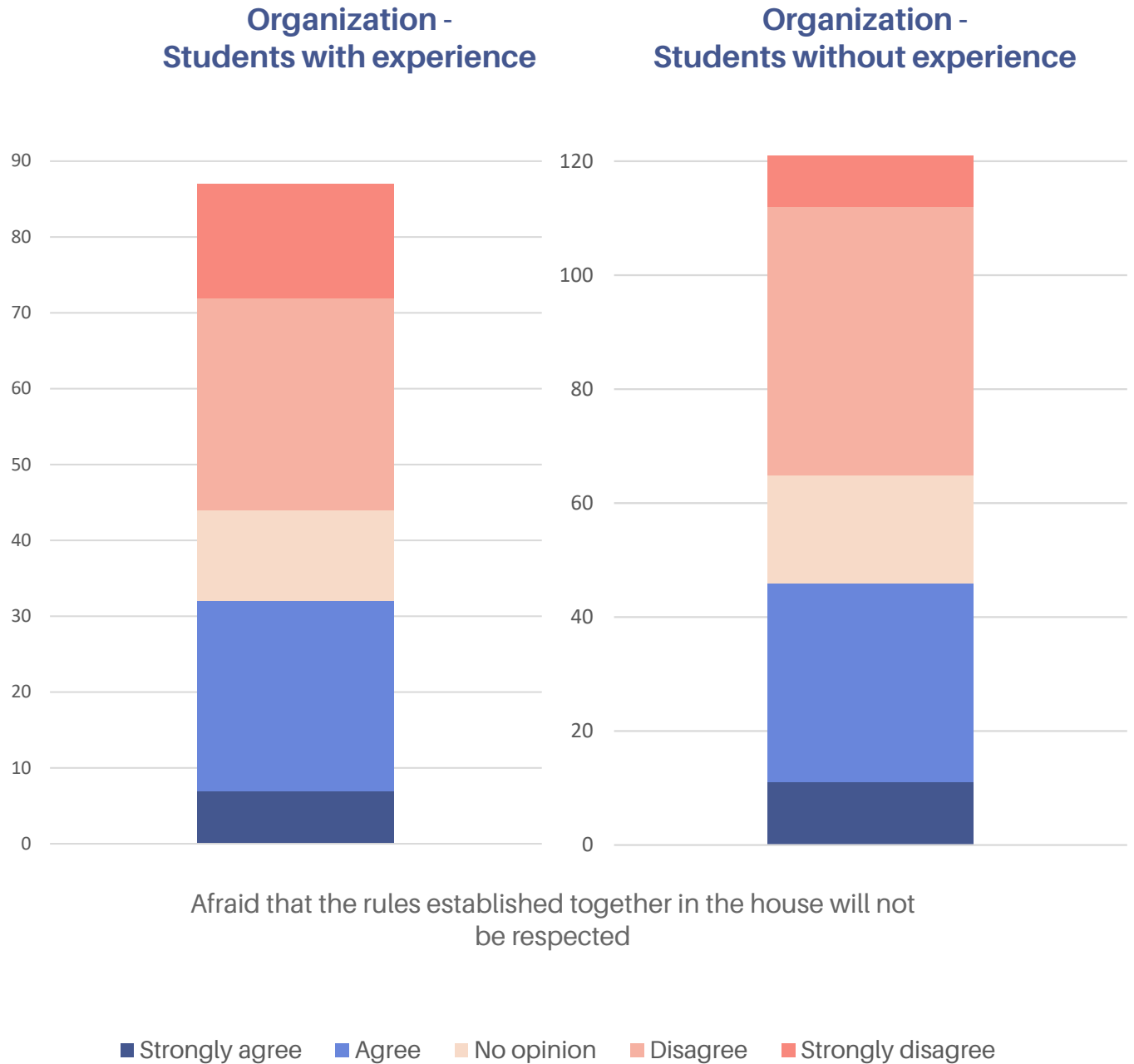
Students are aware of their responsibility and half of them are worried about it. The commitment to be present in the evenings or at weekends is a hindrance for **38%** of cohabitants and **65%** of non-cohabitants. We can observe the same proportions of students who fear not being able to meet the senior's expectations.

However, it should be noted that the commitments depend on each cohabiting couple: it is always a tailor-made solution agreed by both parts. Finally, **half** of the students fear having to deal with a senior who is too old or ill.



*Living arrangements*

These are concerns about the organisation and rules of everyday life.



Slightly more than a third of the students fear that the rules set up within the intergenerational cohabitation are not respected. The practice of living together does not influence this. This is why the existence of a third party to supervise the cohabitation is very important.

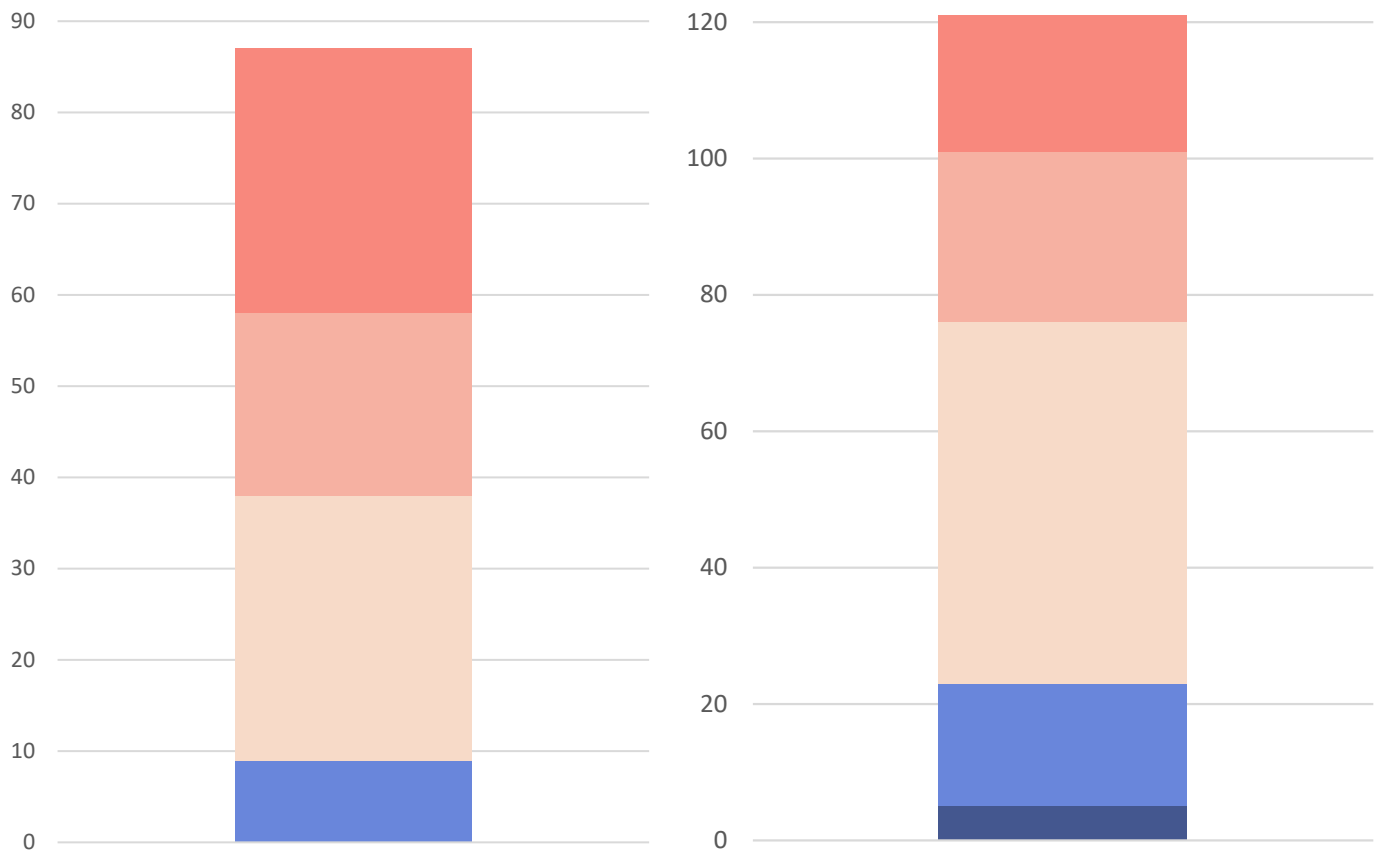


Language

Finally, we can see that from the students' point of view, the host's language is not a barrier.

Language - Students with experience

Language - Students without experience



Afraid that you do not speak the language of the host well enough

■ Strongly agree  
 ■ Agree  
 ■ No opinion  
 ■ Disagree  
 ■ Strongly disagree



To conclude, we can observe that students are open to intergenerational homesharing and that lifestyle or communication problems between generations are not an obstacle. It should be noted, however, that the choice to live with people of the same generation as well as independence are put forward by a significant percentage of respondents.

For students with experience, their motivation does not seem to be financial. Students emphasise the desire to help and to feel useful. The need for independence and the responsibilities that can be heavy to assume in the context of intergenerational homesharing are the two blocking points for a majority of the students who answered to the survey. The altruistic motivation of the students is very important and should be better promoted in order to present intergenerational homesharing as a real win-win exchange where everyone brings and receives.



## 4. FOCUS GROUPS

Senior-student focus groups were organised to identify, during an open discussion, led by a facilitator, what the different parts involved had gained from their experience of inter-generational and/or intercultural homesharing. This enrichment can take the form of “**soft skills**” or “**hard skills**”, i.e. behavioural skills or technical skills.

**Two groups** have been organised with different profiles in terms of duration of the home-sharing experience and nationality of the students:

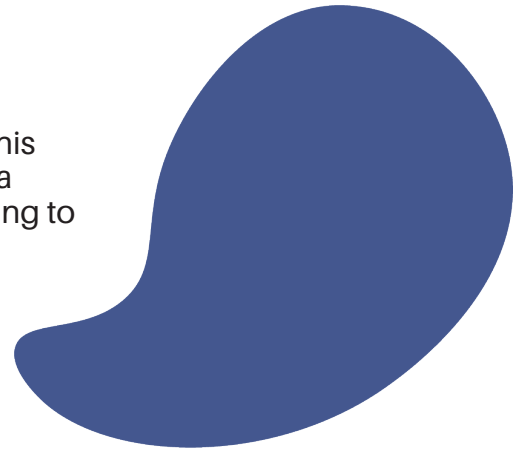
- In **Brussels** on 5 October 2021 with **6 seniors** and **6 students**. Some matches were present but also seniors without “their” student and vice versa.
- In **Madrid** on 11 december 2021 with **4 seniors** and **4 students**. They lived together and formed 4 matches.



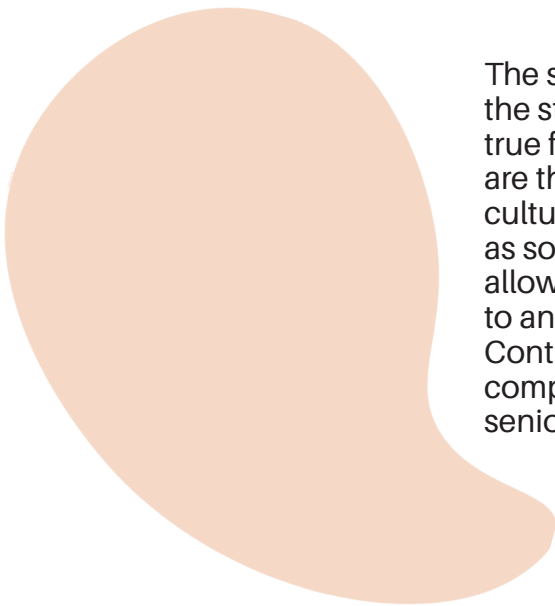


## 4. FOCUS GROUPS

The first point that emerges is that for all the participants, this experience of intergenerational homesharing is judged in a **positive way**. Of course, the answers are different according to the participants, but some major trends can be observed.



The seniors often express the idea that they bring more to the student than they learn from them. This is particularly true for seniors who host foreign students for whom they are the **first point of contact** for them to discover a new culture. However, this approach needs to be qualified, as some seniors stressed that the presence of a student allowed them to better structure their day, to open up to another culture, to be more attentive and tolerant. Contrary to what we might think, the aspect of discovering computers and new technologies is not favoured by the seniors.

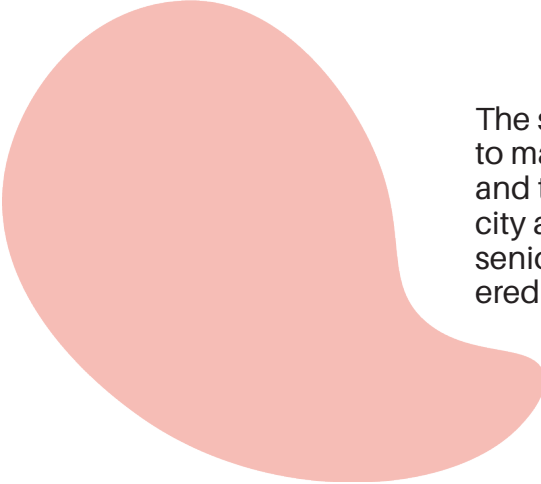


Overall, both the seniors and the students insisted on what they called the **"mirror effect"**. That is to say, a reciprocal and virtuous development of listening skills, adaptation, kindness and patience. They emphasise that a relationship is built patiently, with each pair choosing the means that suit them best: spending time together, cooking, playing, having outdoor activities, etc.



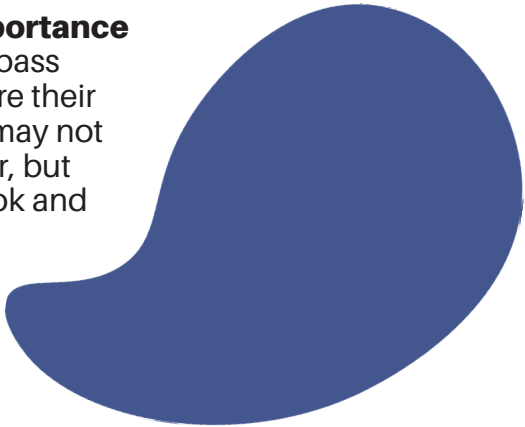


## 4. FOCUS GROUPS

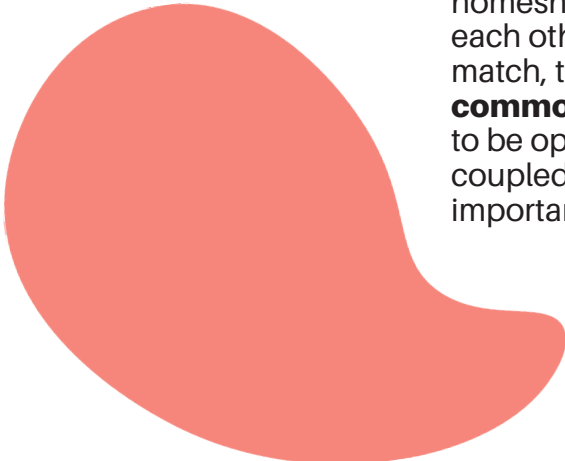


The students emphasise that this experience helps them to mature, to develop their critical spirit, their benevolence and their generosity. It is an **asset to integrate** in a new city and to learn to open up to strangers. Depending on the senior citizen who hosts them, the students have discovered gardening, reading, knitting, sewing...

What comes up again and again for everyone is the **importance of the kitchen**. It is both a place where people have to pass through (and therefore meet) and an opportunity to share their culture, their tastes and their experiences. They may or may not have meals together, they may or may not cook together, but they are all happy to show each other what they can cook and the flavours of their country.



In conclusion, we can say that through intergenerational homesharing, the **generations get closer and learn** from each other. This learning is very varied, depending on each match, their expectations and experiences. The **sharing of common activities** is the key for this mutual enrichment to be optimal. When this intergenerational exchange is coupled with an **intercultural exchange**, it is a very important factor in the integration of the young person.





## IV. CONCLUSION

At the end of this study, we have identified the **issues and incentives** that push or prevent seniors and young people to engage in intergenerational homesharing, whether intercultural or not. It is important to note that the clichés about individualism and irreconcilable generation gaps do not seem to be entirely true.

One of the main obstacles is, for both seniors and students, to lose some of their **habits or independence**. It is very interesting to note that with the practice of intergenerational homesharing, these fears decrease significantly.

We also note that, whatever the generation, a form of **altruism** is very present in the declarations of the people questioned (*73% of the seniors declare that they want to help a young person and 75% of the students want to feel useful*).

Within the framework of a win-win exchange, everyone finds advantages (*85% of seniors want to share activities, meals or convivial moments and 90% of students are looking for a calm environment to study in*).

In view of these results, it is legitimate to ask the question of the **diffusion of the practice** of intergenerational homesharing: why does this practice, which seems so attractive and appreciated, not develop further? Indeed, if the concept exists in many countries, the reality of the number of cohabitants is marginal compared to the number of isolated seniors and the number of students.

The potential for developing this type of cohabitation and its beneficial effects for the participants is therefore enormous.

From our experience, we know that the key to success is the participation of new seniors who are willing to host a young person (there are always more applicants for housing than there is supply).

The European cooperation that has been set up within the **WeShareWeCare** project is an excellent opportunity for the actors of intergenerational homesharing to join forces and work together to communicate and convince the different stakeholders of the interest of this type of exchange and of the societal added value it brings.

These stakeholders are the public authorities who can support this type of initiative by providing a framework or financial support, associations and universities who can support this type of initiative by communicating and the seniors who must be convinced that if intergenerational homesharing is a good idea in itself, it can be a good idea for them!

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