

EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY

EAIE BAROMETER

INTERNATIONALISATION IN EUROPE

Third edition

BY LAURA E. RUMBLEY & JODY HOEKSTRA-SELTEN



European Association for
International Education

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**EAIE BAROMETER: INTERNATIONALISATION IN EUROPE
(THIRD EDITION)**

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The EAIE Barometer (third edition) offers up a remarkably comprehensive set of insights into the state of internationalisation in European higher education today, specifically through the eyes of the professionals directly involved in carrying out this work across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). In doing so, it provides important indications of the health and vitality of the sector at a moment of significant challenge, opportunity and change. As the third iteration in an ongoing series since 2015, it also offers insight into how perspectives on some issues have evolved over the last decade and presents indications of emerging priorities or concerns.

The full EAIE Barometer (third edition) report provides detailed insight into these issues, through respondents' perceptions in 5 key areas:

1. Their own professional roles in international higher education
2. Their institution's or organisation's structure and strategy for internationalisation, goals and stakeholder influences
3. Budgets for internationalisation
4. The impact of internationalisation
5. How their institutions are performing in relation to specific topics of current interest in the field

WHO RESPONDED TO THE EAIE BAROMETER SURVEY?

The EAIE Barometer (third edition) survey was available for completion from 28 September to 28 November 2023. It was open to anyone working in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) whose work at the time of survey completion was focused on internationalisation in higher education, as either a main or partial aspect of their work.

The survey generated a total of 2817 individual respondents from 46 EHEA countries – slightly more than both the 2015 and 2018 iterations of the survey. Responses were received from all regions of Europe, with Western Europe the most represented in the data and Western Asia the least. This is consistent with the past Barometer exercises, although in the current iteration there was a noticeable drop in representation from Northern Europe and small increases in survey participation in Eastern and Western Europe.

The majority (68%) of respondents are individuals for whom internationalisation is a main (rather than a partial) focus of their work. The respondents are based at institutions of various types and sizes, however most (55%) report working at a research university and 77% indicate that their employer is a public institution or organisation. They hold a variety of distinct professional positions across nearly a dozen different functional areas and represent the full range of career tenure, from fewer than two years of experience in the sector to 15 or more years in the field.

Notably, at a time of high interest in matters of diversity and inclusion in internationalisation activities and programmes, fewer than one fifth (17%) identify as belonging to an ‘underrepresented group’¹. While there is no previous Barometer data against which to compare this data, it does establish a baseline of information and opens the door on potentially important conversations about the participation of underrepresented populations in a field that overtly values international and intercultural engagement.

Perhaps not surprisingly, a solid majority of respondents report having had a study or a professional experience abroad of more than one to two months. Even still, more than a quarter (26%) have not studied outside their home country and 29% have not worked outside their home country for these indicative periods of time; this points to the idea that international education careers can be accessible to individuals who have not had prior physical mobility experiences of significant duration.

Employment changes are another notable finding in the data. That is, whilst 28% of respondents has worked in the *sector* for five years or less, a much larger group (42%) has only been in their *current role* for five years or less. This means a notable proportion of respondents have made job or role changes in the last several years. It is unclear if this is the result of some particular characteristic of the last several years – including, for example, the tumult brought about by the global COVID-19 pandemic – as comparable data from past EAIE Barometer exercises is not available. However, it does raise interesting questions about the recent flux in employment experienced by many of the current respondents.

The professional or functional areas that the largest percentages of respondents indicate their work is focused on include student and staff mobility, partnerships, and European-funded programmes. The smallest proportion of participants (3%) indicated focusing on social responsibility in their work.

1. This question was specifically worded as, “Do you identify as belonging to an underrepresented group based on language, religion, gender, sexuality, ability, age, or other criteria? No specific criteria for ‘underrepresented’ are provided here; we simply would like to know how you identify.”

HOW DO RESPONDENTS PERCEIVE THEIR ROLES?

Overall, respondents report a high level of satisfaction with the jobs they hold and the sense of purpose their work provides. This is less so amongst those who identify as faculty members, and amongst those with three to five years of experience in the field.

There also seems to be a strong sense of commitment to continue working in the field, as 80% of respondents expects to still be working in international higher education in the next three years, and just 3% feel they will definitely transition out of the field within that timeframe.

Respondents report less positivity with regard to their salary/compensation (40% unsatisfied), work-life balance (one third unsatisfied) and feeling valued by their employer (25% unsatisfied).

Change has been a reality in the daily working lives of respondents over the last several years. In addition to the indications of actual changes in position noted above, 80% of respondents who have been working within the same role over the last three years indicate that this role has changed in some way. Amongst the specific new or different skills required in their work, a notable 40% referenced in some way digital skills, including AI (artificial intelligence).

When asked about the clarity of career development opportunities “from entry level to advanced level” at their institutions or organisations, just one third of EAIE Barometer respondents indicated agreement that a clear career trajectory exists. A larger percentage (40%) indicated that such a career trajectory is not visible to them at their employing institution/organisation, whilst a notable 28% were ambivalent on this question.

WHAT DO RESPONDENTS THINK ABOUT THEIR INSTITUTIONS/ ORGANISATIONS?

The organisation of responsibility for internationalisation in a single central office or with a single centralised team has decreased notably and consistently since the first iteration of the EAIE Barometer in 2015. Just 24% of respondents reported this type of configuration in 2023, as compared to 35% in 2018 and 51% in 2015. Half of all respondents indicated that responsibility for internationalisation is currently structured instead around “coordinated central and decentral teams”.

Respondents provided some conflicting signals around leadership and goal achievement. On the one hand, more than one third of Barometer respondents indicated being

(very) unsatisfied with how responsibilities for internationalisation are organised at their institution/organisation and had limited confidence in their leadership. At the same time, a solid majority (56%) of respondents believed the internationalisation goals set by their institution/organisation were clearly defined and a convincing majority of 79% felt these goals were achievable.

A clear strategy, inspiring and effective institutional leadership, and strong support amongst administrative and academic staff were considered the main drivers to successfully establishing a clearly defined set of goals for internationalisation.

When asked which topics required specifically ‘more attention’ for institutions to achieve their internationalisation goals over the next three to five years, the three topics most frequently chosen were: strengthening international/intercultural content of the curriculum (65%), virtual internationalisation activities (58%), and student/staff well-being (57%). However, there are strong indications that an overwhelming majority of respondents feel that all of the key topics included in this analysis need ‘more’ or ‘continued’ levels of attention.

WHAT DO RESPONDENTS THINK ABOUT THEIR BUDGETS FOR INTERNATIONALISATION?

Concerns about insufficient funding for internationalisation were clearly registered in the findings from the 2015 and 2018 iterations of the EAIE Barometer. To shed more light on this topic, the current Barometer edition sought input on several key questions about the size and stability of budgets dedicated to internationalisation, but this time specifically from individuals with budget responsibilities.

Just under 1500 Barometer respondents indicated having some type of budget or spending responsibilities in the context of their work.

Overall, the data from these individuals produced a relatively positive picture: more than 70% indicated being ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with the size of the budget they work with. A similar percentage perceived the source(s) of the budget they are responsible for as either ‘very’ or ‘somewhat stable/predictable’. However, those working with the largest budgets (ie €5 million or more) were much more likely (at 26%) to indicate being ‘very satisfied’ with their budgets than those working with smaller budget amounts, only 10% to 15% of whom selected the ‘very satisfied’ option for budget size.

When it comes to dissatisfaction with budget sizes by place of employment, respondents working at research universities were more likely (at 26%) to express this position than respondents from other institutional or organisational types.

In terms of perceptions regarding the (in)stability of budgets, some variation across regions was in evidence. Somewhat higher percentages of respondents in Northern Europe (29%) and Eastern and Southern Europe (28%) noted unstable/unpredictable funding sources than in Western Europe (23%) and Western Asia (22%).

When queried as to what respondents would do if presented with a significant increase in budget, the largest percentage (34%) indicated that they would focus on adding additional staff or providing more opportunities for existing staff, including training, higher pay/compensation, and other activities geared towards retention and general “staff happiness”.

HOW DO RESPONDENTS PERCEIVE NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN-LEVEL DYNAMICS?

A majority of respondents sees national (58%) and European-level (53%) authorities as either ‘highly influential’ or ‘influential’ when it comes to being drivers of their institution’s goals for internationalisation. However, a look back at past EAIE Barometer data indicates that the influence of both national and European-level actors may be waning. For example, in 2015, 68% of respondents felt that the national policy level exerted a strong or relatively strong influence on their institution’s internationalisation policy, and 66% perceived the same regarding EU-level influence.

Even still, when asked about the effects from national policies, programmes or initiatives on their institution’s actual internationalisation activities (as opposed to influences on institutional policies or goals), a solid 41% of respondents indicated a positive effect.

When it comes to European Union-funded programmes, policies and initiatives, several specific priorities yielded clear indications of beneficial influence. For example, a solid percentage of respondents (43%) characterised the effect of the European Universities Initiative on their institution’s internationalisation activities as positive, with a miniscule proportion (1%) noting negative effects. Separately, 57% of respondents (strongly) agree that “Erasmus+ staff mobility has positively impacted my career.”

Importantly, there are very real differences apparent in the data when it comes to the influence of national and European-level policies and programmes, depending on national contexts, professional roles of respondents and other variables.

WHAT DO RESPONDENTS THINK ABOUT ‘IMPACT’?

Without necessarily defining the precise nature of impact for respondents, the EAIE Barometer (third edition) nonetheless sought to gain insight into how professionals working in international higher education across the European Higher Education Area perceive the conversation about impact at their institutions and organisations.

A solid 63% of respondents to the Barometer survey indicated some level of urgency around “the debate or discussion about the impact of internationalisation” at their institution or organisation. At the same time, it is notable that nearly one third of respondents perceived there is no such debate or discussion, or that there is no urgency in relation to it.

Just under half of all respondents (47%) reported feeling ‘significant’ or ‘very significant’ pressure in their roles when it comes to demonstrating the impact of internationalisation.

The most common sources of pressure to demonstrate impact reported by respondents were the leadership from within their own institutions or organisations, followed by national governments or national higher education authorities.

Respondents were asked to select up to three different areas in which they perceive that their institution/organisation is most concerned with delivering impact from its internationalisation activities. Here, it is notable that impact in relation to reputation or rankings was pointed to as a top concern as frequently (47%) as the core higher education interests of student learning outcomes (46%) and research activity (46%).

WHAT DO RESPONDENTS THINK OF CURRENT KEY TOPICS IN INTERNATIONALISATION?

Noting the focus in international higher education circles on a number of key topics in recent years, the Barometer survey also sought to zero in on specific issues of personal or professional interest to respondents. The aspiration here was to gain insight into these key topics from professionals who really care about them, and to understand how they perceive their institution’s/organisation’s engagement with and ‘performance’ with respect to these matters.

From a predetermined list that was generated from several wide-ranging environmental scanning exercises, respondents were asked to select up to two topics of particular interest to them personally or professionally. The topic options included:

- Crisis preparedness/management
- Data knowledge/security
- Digitalisation of administrative tasks
- Environmental sustainability and climate action
- Inclusion and diversity
- Student/staff wellbeing
- Virtual internationalisation activities (COIL, virtual exchange, *etc*)
- Other

The three topics most frequently selected by respondents were ‘student/staff wellbeing’, ‘digitalisation of administrative tasks’ and ‘inclusion and diversity’, with only slight variations amongst different respondent groups. Respondents from Northern and Western Europe picked ‘inclusion and diversity’ and ‘environmental sustainability and climate action’ considerably more often as a topic of interest than other EHEA regions.

For each topic selected, respondents were also asked to agree or disagree with a series of statements designed to provide further indications of how they see their institution/organisation engaging with that topic. These statements covered such aspects as clear planning with respect to the key topic, committed leadership with respect to the topic, investment of sufficient financial and non-financial resources to address the topic, and more. Respondents were also asked to indicate if they thought their institution/organisation had “made progress with respect to” the topic over the last 12 months. Some notable findings from this data include the following:

- When looking at whether an institution/organisation has a **clear plan** for the activities it is pursuing, ‘inclusion and diversity’ came out on top with a large percentage of respondents agreeing with this statement.
- Across all of the key topics, respondents were most commonly inclined to indicate that their institution/organisation was underperforming in relation to providing **sufficient financial resources and non-financial resources**.
- Overall, respondents interested in ‘Virtual internationalisation’ were most negative about the way their institution/organisation deals with this topic, from planning to leadership to investment of financial resources.

- ‘Data knowledge/security’ scored highest against the question of **committed leadership**, with 61% of respondents agreeing with this statement. As a whole, the respondents choosing this topic were quite positive about how their institution/organisation is doing.
- When it comes to **having made progress in the last 12 months**, the results are quite positive. For most of the topics at least half of respondents felt progress was made, and especially in relation to ‘digitalisation of administrative tasks’ and ‘data/knowledge security’. Interestingly, ‘crisis preparedness/management’ scored lowest, with roughly one third agreeing that progress has been made over the last year, but also almost one third disagreeing.

Future Barometer reporting will focus in greater detail on these key topics.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED AND WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Overall, the current EAIE Barometer survey provides clear indications of positivity, change and important work ahead in a variety of areas.

At an individual level, professionals in international higher education across the EHEA appear to be largely satisfied with their work, although as a group they are less satisfied with the salary/compensation they receive than with the personal satisfaction they derive. For many, their roles and responsibilities have been changing over the last several years, with an appetite for training and professional development evident across the board.

At an institutional level, they are also fairly satisfied with the budgets they have responsibility for and are largely confident in the achievability of their institution’s or organisation’s internationalisation goals. However, there seem to be some concerns about how responsibilities for internationalisation are organised and confidence in leadership is lacking in some quarters. Meanwhile, the perceived influence of national and European-level actors remains significant but may have waned over the last decade.

The sense of urgency professionals feel around demonstrating the impact of internationalisation is widespread but not omnipresent. Interestingly, professionals in the field perceive that their institutions are as focused on demonstrating the impact of internationalisation via rankings performance as demonstrating student learning outcomes or achieving certain levels of research activity.

Institutions are, overall, perceived to be making progress over the last 12 months in regard

to a range of topics currently of high interest to respondents and the wider field, but additional attention to key activities and priority issues is still required. Indeed, the data highlights the ongoing need for the sector to attend simultaneously to a multitude of activities and considerations. It also raises important questions about the extent to which, and in what ways, different stakeholders and national and European-level initiatives will affect the different aspects of the work of international higher education professionals across the EHEA.

As seen through the lens of the current EAIE Barometer survey exercise, the community of international higher education professionals in Europe presents as essentially optimistic in spirit, measured in its sense of recent progress in key areas and hungry for opportunities to improve practice and deliver results. Hopefully, the insights gained from this work will feed usefully into discussions at national and institutional/organisational levels about how to respond to the interests and aspirations of this community, specifically with an eye on how to more fully leverage the energy and expertise of these frontline professionals whose work actively supports the many and varied internationalisation agendas in European higher education today.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

LAURA E. RUMBLEY is Director for Knowledge Development and Research at the EAIE. With more than 25 years of experience in the field of international higher education, she has held a variety of different roles, including international student, practitioner, assistant professor, researcher, editor and consultant. Laura holds a PhD from the Center for International Higher Education (CIHE) at Boston College (USA), where her dissertation focused on internationalisation in the universities of Spain. She is the former associate director at CIHE, a former deputy director of the Brussels-based Academic Cooperation Association (ACA), and a former US Foreign Service Officer. Since 2014, Laura has also been a co-editor of the *Journal of Studies in International Education*.

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