SNAPSHOT REPORT ON EXCHANGE MOBILITY 2020/2021

Part 1: Mobility with European Higher Education Area partners

JANUARY 2021

EAIE
European Association for International Education

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We partner with key stakeholder organisations and institutions to promote our membership's interests and advance international higher education in Europe and the rest of the world.

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INTRODUCTION

The onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic in early 2020 set in motion an unprecedented series of events that – one year later – is still actively unfolding. For international higher education in Europe, as elsewhere, the effects of the pandemic have been multifaceted in nature, significant in impact and persistent in duration. From the beginning of this crisis through the present moment in early 2021, one of the most affected activities in our field has been that of international student mobility. International travel restrictions, national and local lockdowns, as well as shifting perceptions and uncertainties around the risks and realities of undertaking study experiences abroad over the last year have upended what had been, for several decades, one of the most robust and highly visible dimensions – one might even say the 'hallmark' – of internationalisation in European higher education.

As part of its longstanding agenda to support the international higher education community in Europe, and in light of the profound challenges facing the sector, the EAIE undertook a survey in the autumn of 2020 to gain insight into what was happening with international student exchange within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). This report, part one in a series of three, provides indications of the extent and ways in which (particularly the volume of) student exchange was being affected across the EHEA at the start of the 2020-2021 academic year. It also sheds light on the perceptions of prospects for international student exchange in the second half of the academic year.

The snapshots offered by this data help us to understand more about this very complicated moment for international higher education in Europe. They also open up interesting new avenues for investigation in terms of how and why particular regions, countries or institutional types have indicated greater or lesser disruption to date, or express different levels of optimism for the second half of the academic year, when it comes to international student exchange.

SURVEY AND RESPONDENTS

Between 09 October and 09 November 2020, the EAIE invited individuals working in higher education institutions across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and with access to the most current information about their institutions' student exchange programmes[1] to complete an online survey of approximately 50 questions. The survey covered three main areas of interest: inbound and outbound student exchange mobility with partners in other EHEA countries, student exchange with partners in non-EHEA countries and compulsory or required mobility.

424
completed surveys representing 'whole institution' perspectives

69
completed surveys representing institutional sub-units (schools, colleges, faculties *etc*)

486
unique HEIs across the whole institution and sub-unit respondents

Institutional types
included research universities, universities of applied sciences, specialised higher education institutions and others

41
EHEA countries represented

The number of different countries represented in the data (41) is similar to both the *EAIE Barometer, 2nd edition* (2018) and *Coping with COVID-19* (2020) reports, which received responses from 45 and 38 countries, respectively. Similarly, the breakdowns of institutional types represented in the data are fairly consistent when compared to the *EAIE Barometer, 2nd edition* (2018) responses, while the top six countries providing the largest number of responses to the mobility survey is nearly identical to that of the *Coping with COVID-19* (2020) report. However, in the current mobility survey, Western Europe is overrepresented in the findings, with nearly 40% of responses coming from institutions in that specific region.

Finally, the vast majority of survey respondents (*ie* 424 or 86%) provided data from the perspective of the "whole institution," rather than for a particular sub-unit (such as a college, faculty or department). This report focuses on the information provided by those "whole institution" respondents.

1 The study focused specifically on exchange mobility, as opposed to international degree-seeking mobility or "study abroad" activities unconnected to exchange programmes.

Figure 1

Survey respondents by country *(n=424)*

Country	Percentage of total respondents	Country	Percentage of total respondents
Albania	1.2%	Kazakhstan	0.5%
Andorra	0.2%	Latvia	0.7%
Armenia	0.2%	Liechtenstein	0.2%
Austria	3.1%	Lithuania	2.1%
Belgium (Flemish Community)	1.9%	Malta	0.5%
Belgium (French Community)	0.9%	Netherlands	5.9%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.7%	North Macedonia	0.2%
Bulgaria	0.2%	Norway	1.9%
Croatia	0.7%	Poland	2.8%
Czech Republic	1.9%	Portugal	2.4%
Denmark	2.8%	Romania	2.8%
Estonia	0.2%	Russian Federation	1.9%
Finland	4.5%	Slovak Republic	0.7%
France	10.6%	Slovenia	0.7%
Georgia	0.7%	Spain	5.7%
Germany	11.1%	Sweden	2.4%
Greece	1.2%	Switzerland	4.7%
Hungary	1.2%	Turkey	4.5%
Iceland	0.5%	Ukraine	0.9%
Ireland	1.9%	United Kingdom	8.0%
Italy	4.7%		

Figure 2: Survey respondents

By institutional types *(n=424)*

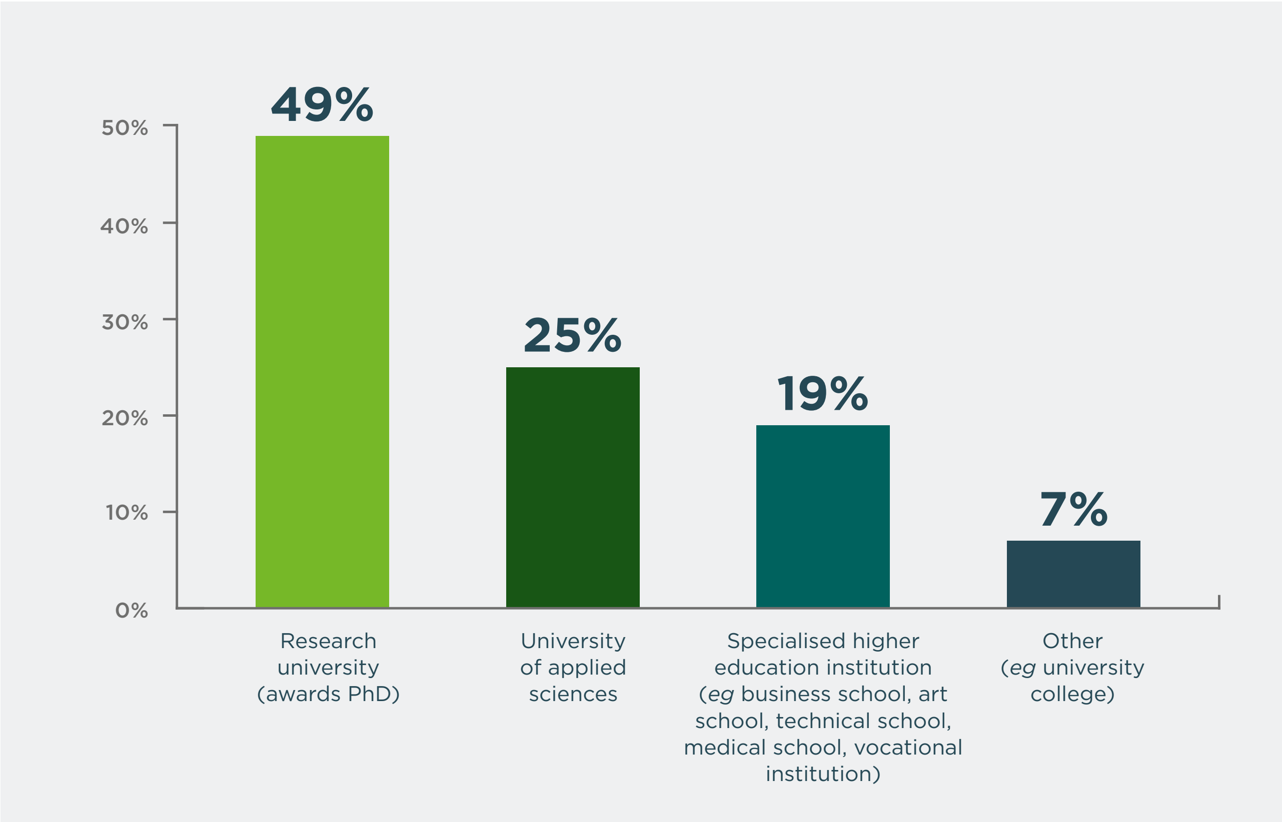
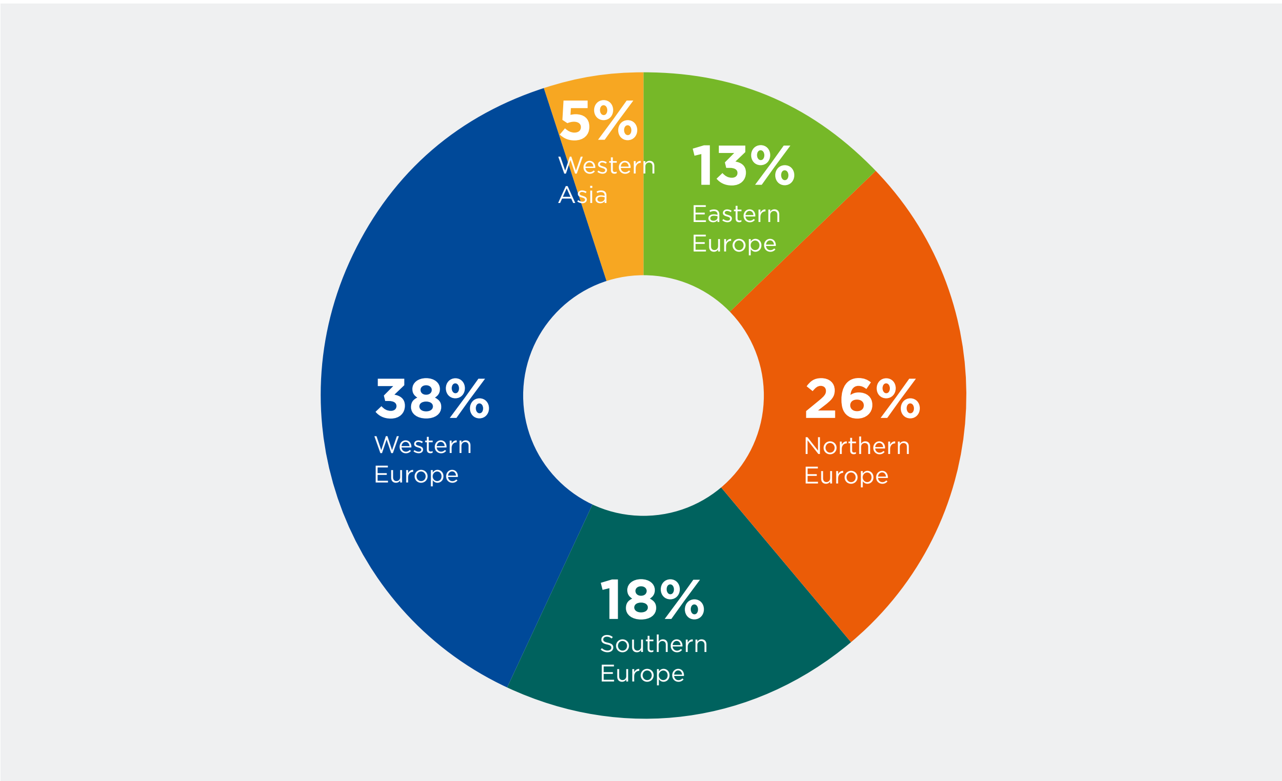


Figure 3: Survey respondents

By regions *(n=424)*



OUTBOUND MOBILITY
EHEA PARTNERS

OUTBOUND MOBILITY TO EHEA PARTNERS: FULL YEAR AND SEMESTER 1

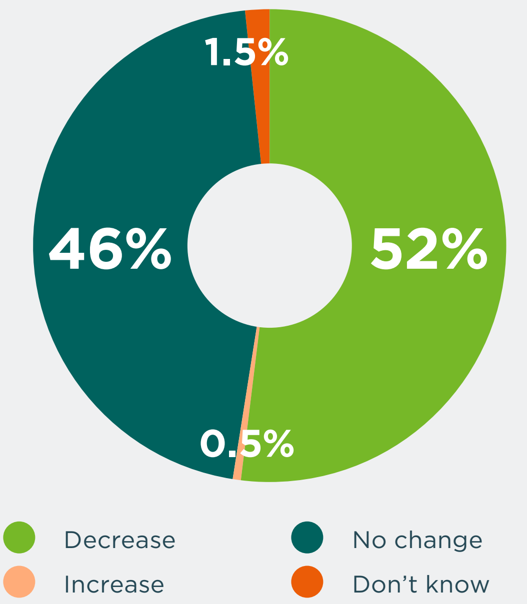
Selected highlights

- Overall, just over half of respondents reported decreases in full academic year exchanges and semester 1 exchanges, as compared to a typical year.
- Most respondents indicated their decrease in outbound student numbers with EHEA partners was in the range of 1 to 50 students.
- A majority of respondents in all regions apart from Western Asia indicated decreases in their outbound EHEA exchange numbers for semester 1; Southern European respondents most frequently reported decreases in outbound student exchange numbers for both the full year and semester 1.
- Specialised higher education institutions reported no change in their outbound mobility numbers for semester 1 much more frequently than respondents from other institutional types.
- Postponement of mobility to a later date was indicated as the most common option selected by students facing travel restrictions, followed by change of mobility destination, and then accessing the host institution's online content.

Figure 4: Outbound mobility to EHEA partners, full academic year

Overview

Change in outbound mobility to EHEA partners compared to a typical year (full academic year) *(n=345)*



Decreases in outbound mobility student numbers to EHEA partners compared to a typical year (full academic year) *(n=176)*

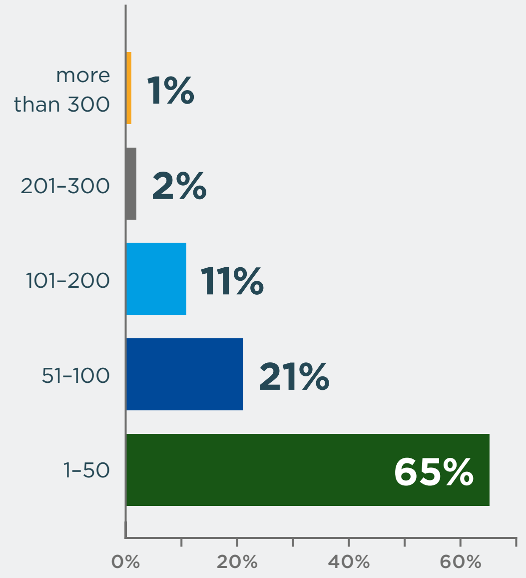
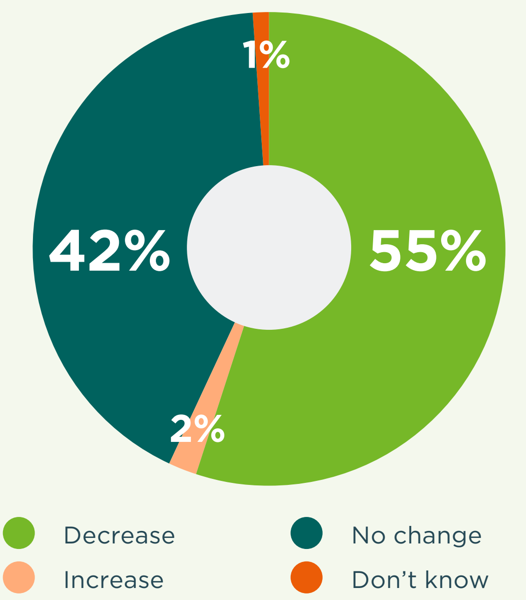


Figure 5: Outbound mobility to EHEA partners, semester 1

Overview

Change in outbound mobility to EHEA partners compared to a typical year (semester 1) *(n=402)*



Decreases in outbound mobility student numbers to EHEA partners compared to a typical year (semester 1) *(n=223)*

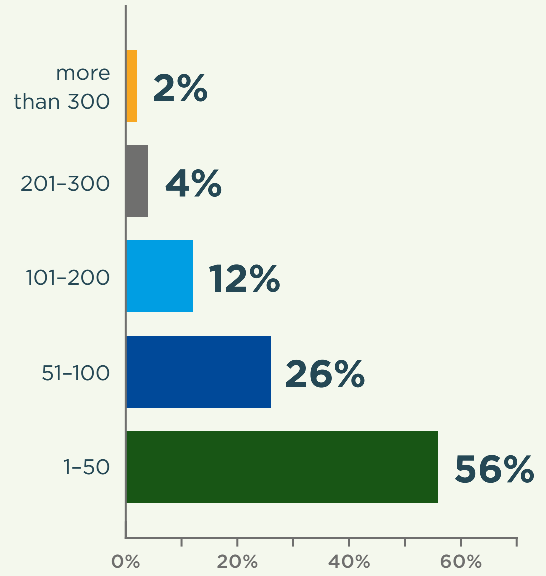


Figure 6: Outbound mobility to EHEA partners, full academic year

Institutional types *(n=340)*

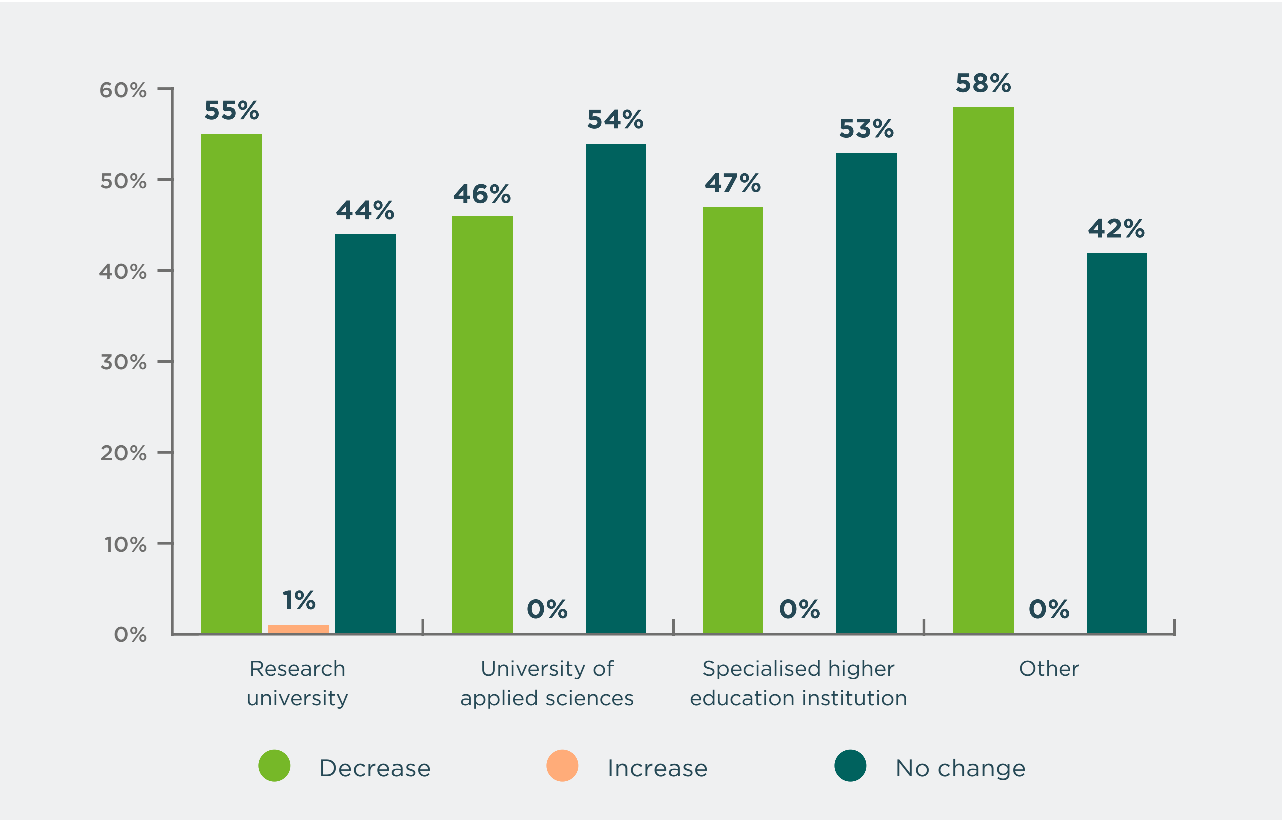


Figure 7: Outbound mobility to EHEA partners, semester 1

Institutional types *(n=398)*

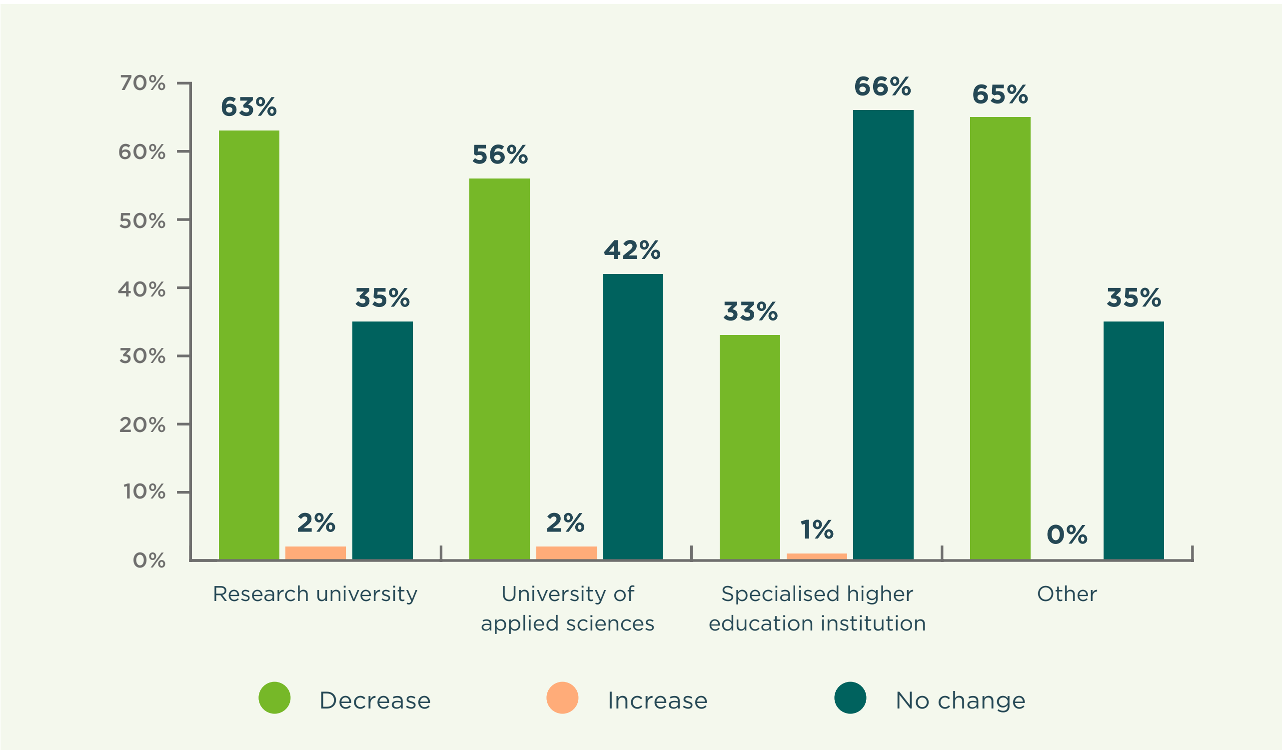


Figure 8: Outbound mobility to EHEA partners, full academic year

Regions *(n=340)*

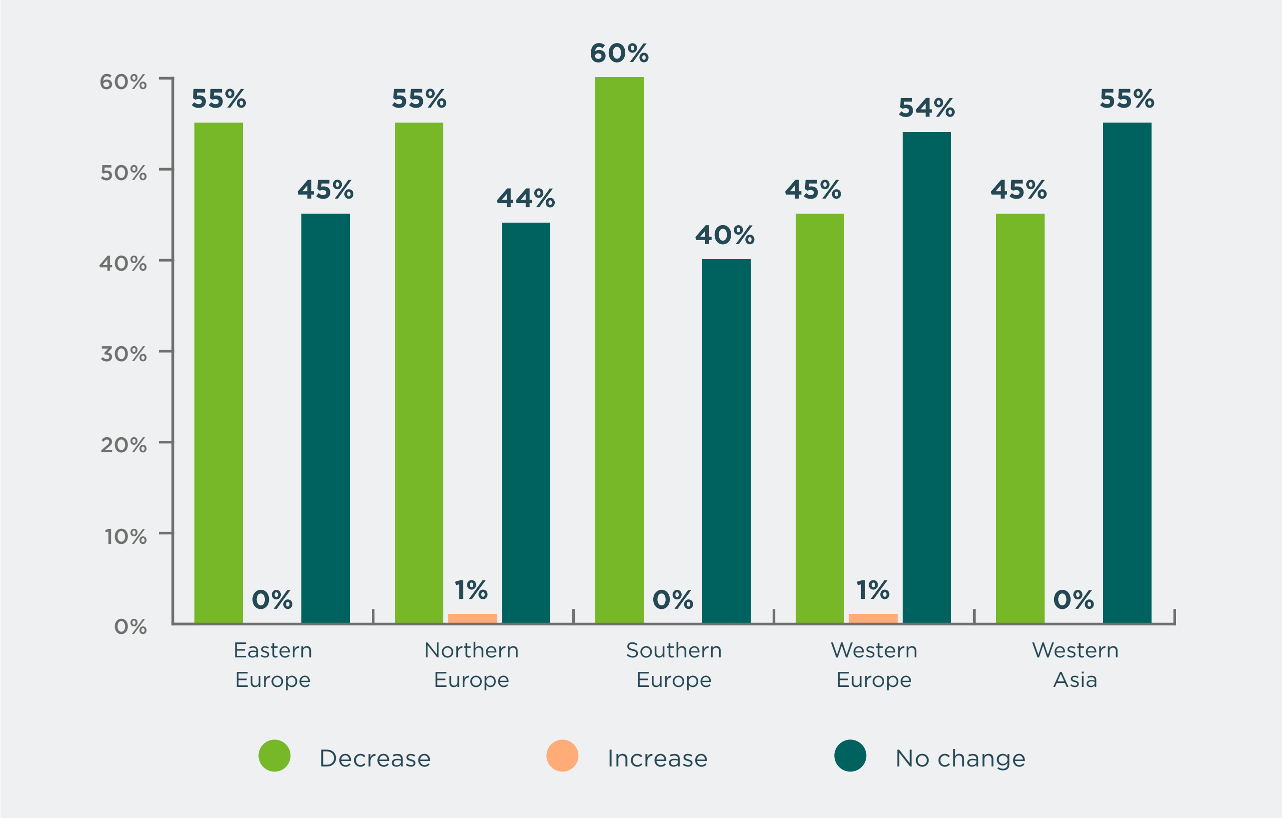
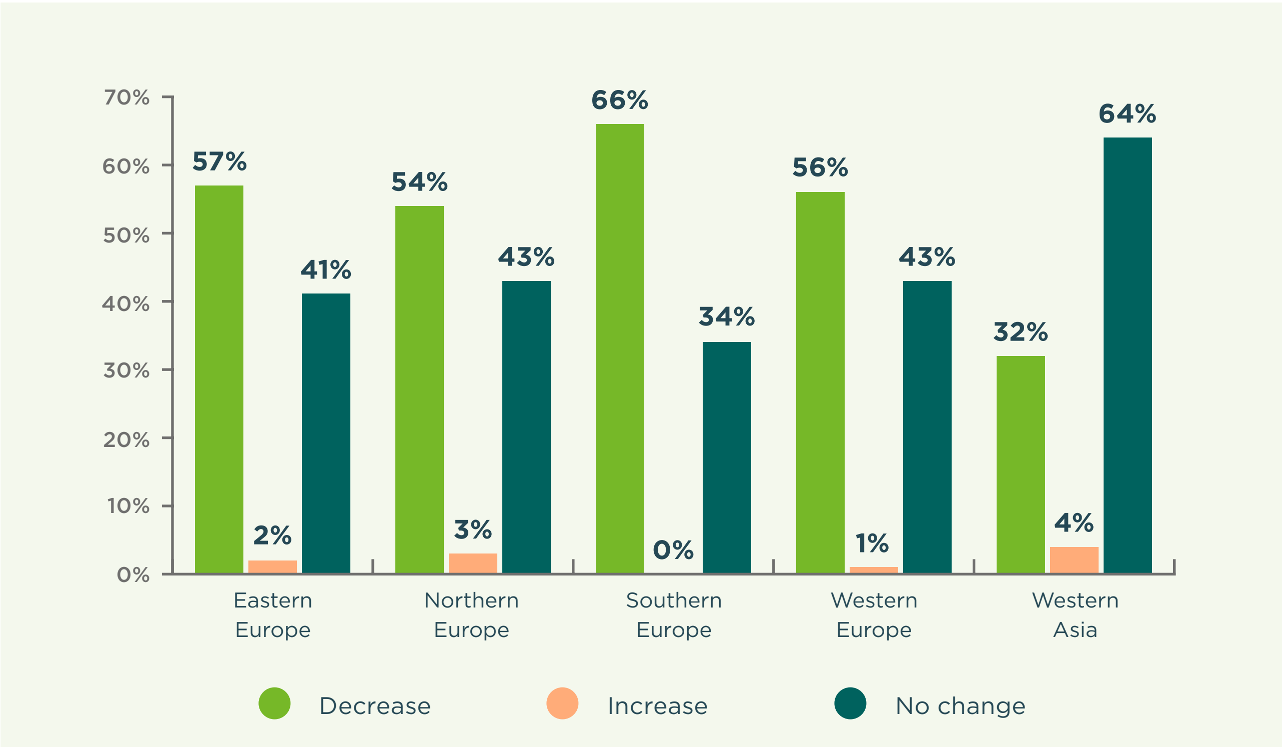


Figure 9: Outbound mobility to EHEA partners, semester 1

Regions *(n=398)*



OUTBOUND MOBILITY TO EHEA PARTNERS: SEMESTER 2 EXPECTATIONS

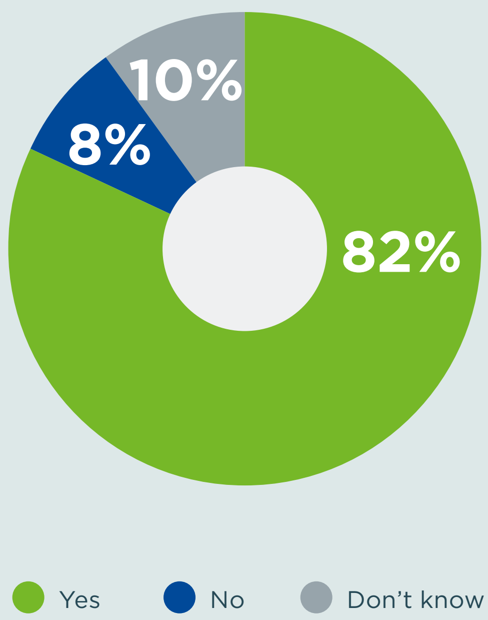
Selected highlights

- 82% of respondents expected to send students to EHEA partners in semester 2.
- Of these, 60% expected no change in semester 2 outbound numbers as compared to a typical year, but 25% expected a decline in these numbers in comparison to a typical year.
- Eastern European respondents more frequently indicated an expectation of "no change" in their outbound EHEA student exchange numbers.
- Respondents from universities of applied sciences most frequently indicated an expectation of increasing outbound student numbers to EHEA partners in semester 2, as compared to other institutional types.

Figure 10: Outbound mobility to EHEA partners, semester 2 expectations

Overview

Expected outbound mobility to EHEA partners (semester 2) *(n=393)*



Expected participation trends in outbound mobility to EHEA partners compared to a typical year (semester 2) *(n=326)*

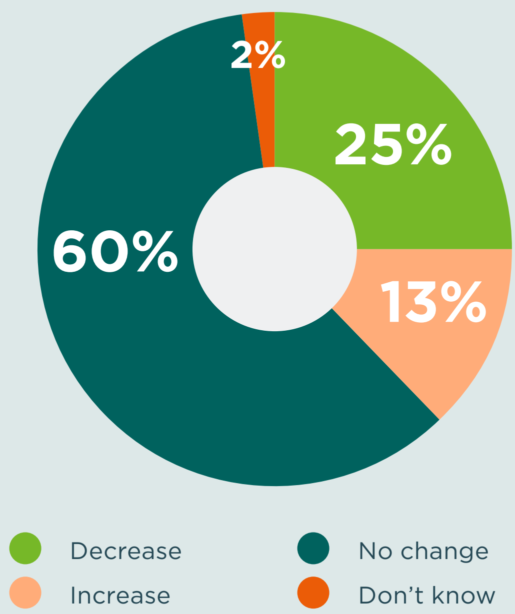


Figure 11: Outbound mobility to EHEA partners, semester 2 expectations

Institutional types *(n=319)*

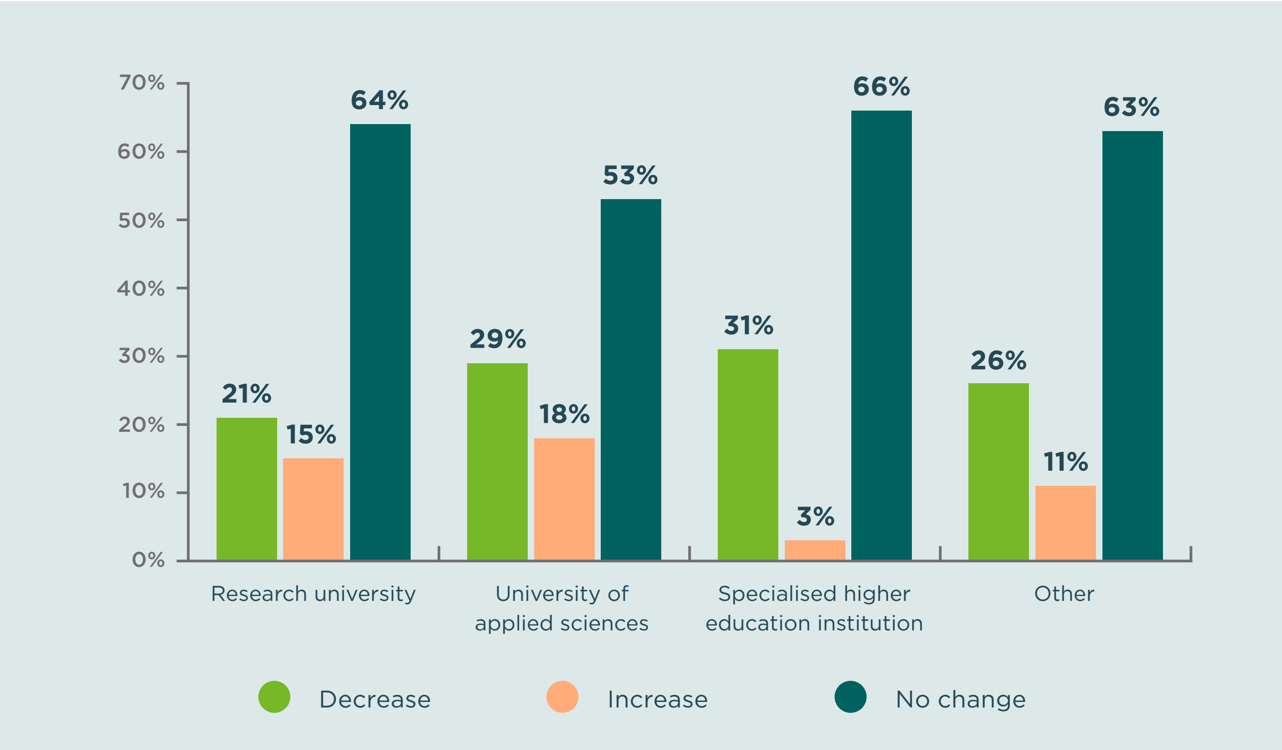
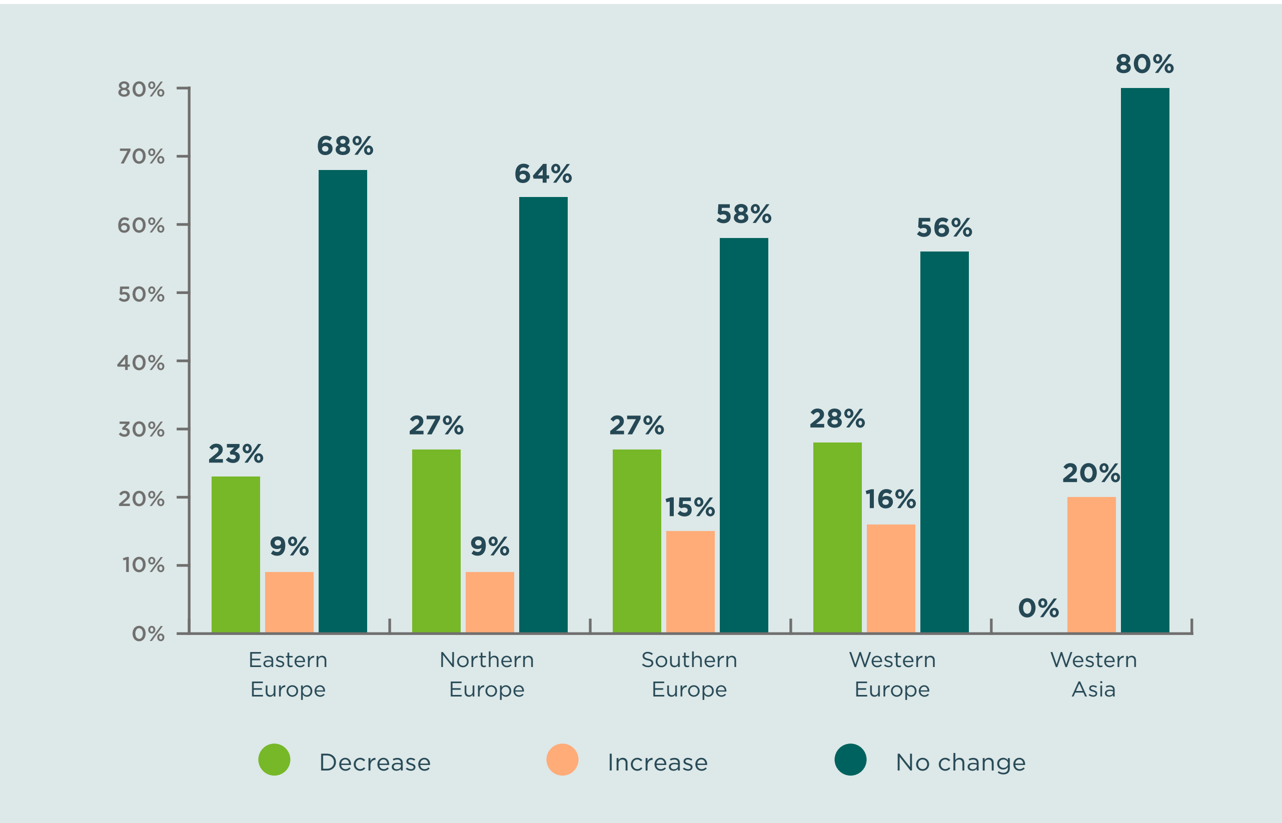


Figure 12: Outbound mobility to EHEA partners, semester 2 expectations

Regions *(n=319)*



INBOUND MOBILITY
EHEA PARTNERS

INBOUND MOBILITY FROM EHEA PARTNERS:
FULL YEAR AND SEMESTER 1

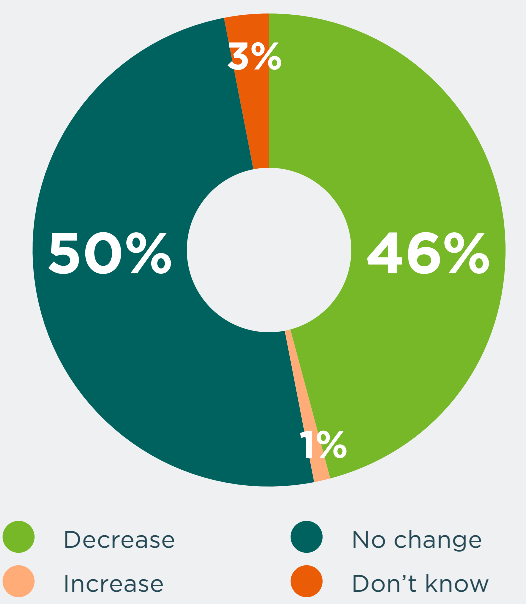
Selected highlights

- 46% of all respondents saw a decrease in inbound student numbers from EHEA partners for full year exchanges; 57% saw inbound drops for semester 1.
- A quarter of respondents reported receiving 51-100 fewer students for semester 1 exchanges with EHEA partners; 64% reported 1-50 fewer students.
- Research universities reported decreases in full-year and semester 1 inbound exchange student numbers significantly more frequently than respondents from other institutional types.
- Northern Europe reported decreases in full-year inbound exchange student numbers more frequently than other EHEA regions; Southern European respondents reported semester 1 number drops more frequently.
- Respondents in Western Europe and Western Asia reported no change in their full year inbound numbers at significantly higher rates than respondents in other regions. Western Asian respondents also reported no change in their semester 1 student exchange numbers most frequently, as compared to the other regions.

Figure 13: Inbound mobility from EHEA partners, full academic year

Overview

Change in inbound mobility from EHEA partners compared to a typical year (full academic year) *(n=364)*



Decreases in inbound mobility student numbers from EHEA partners compared to a typical year (full academic year) *(n=169)*

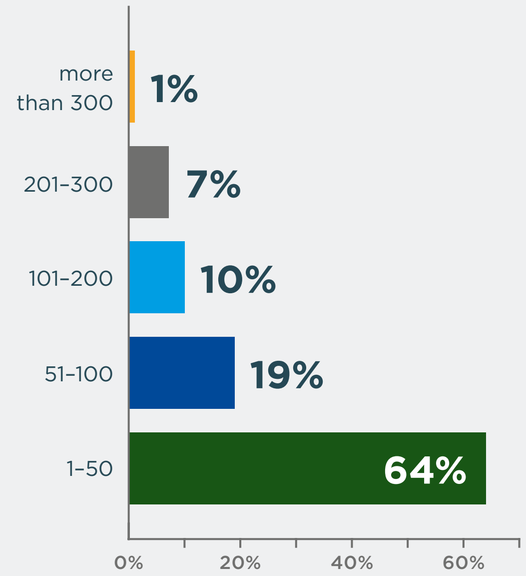
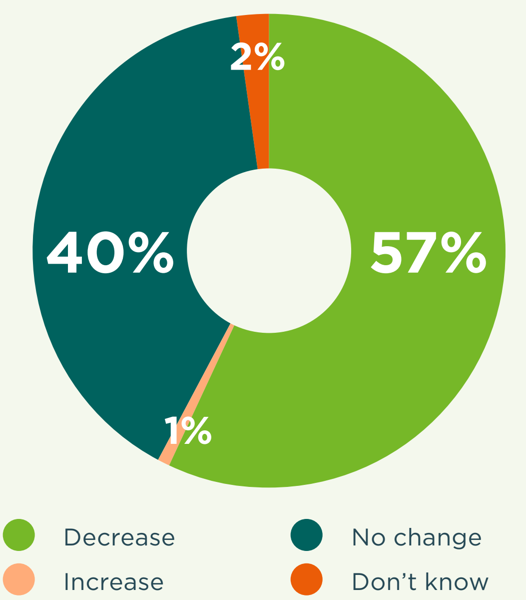


Figure 14: Inbound mobility from EHEA partners, semester 1

Overview

Change in inbound mobility from EHEA partners compared to a typical year (semester 1) *(n=393)*



Decreases in inbound mobility student numbers from EHEA partners compared to a typical year (semester 1) *(n=223)*

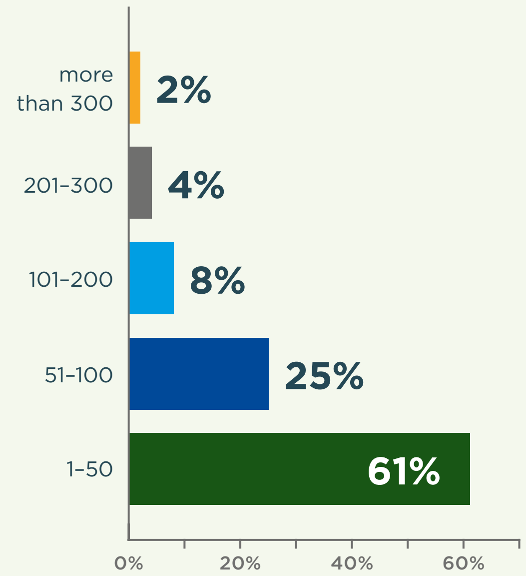


Figure 15: Inbound mobility from EHEA partners, full academic year

Institutional types *(n=356)*

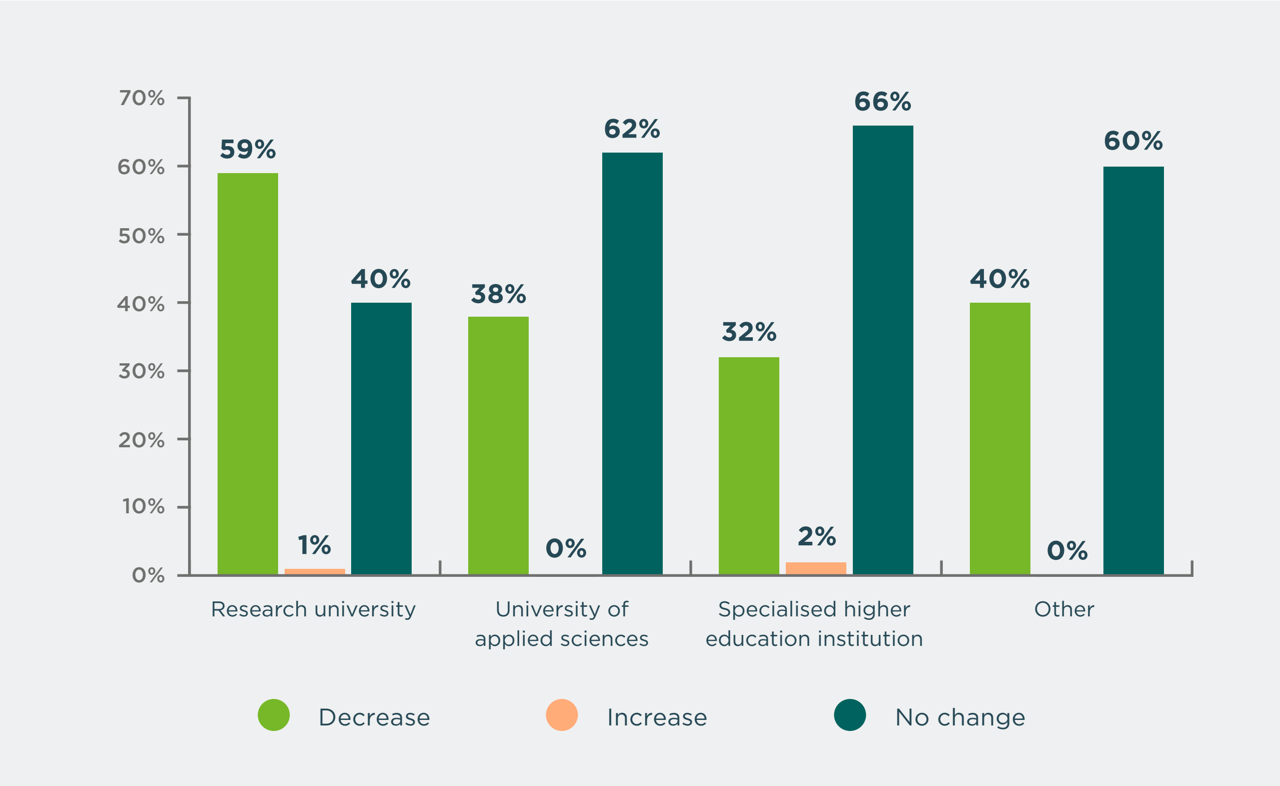


Figure 16: Inbound mobility from EHEA partners, semester 1

Institutional types *(n=393)*

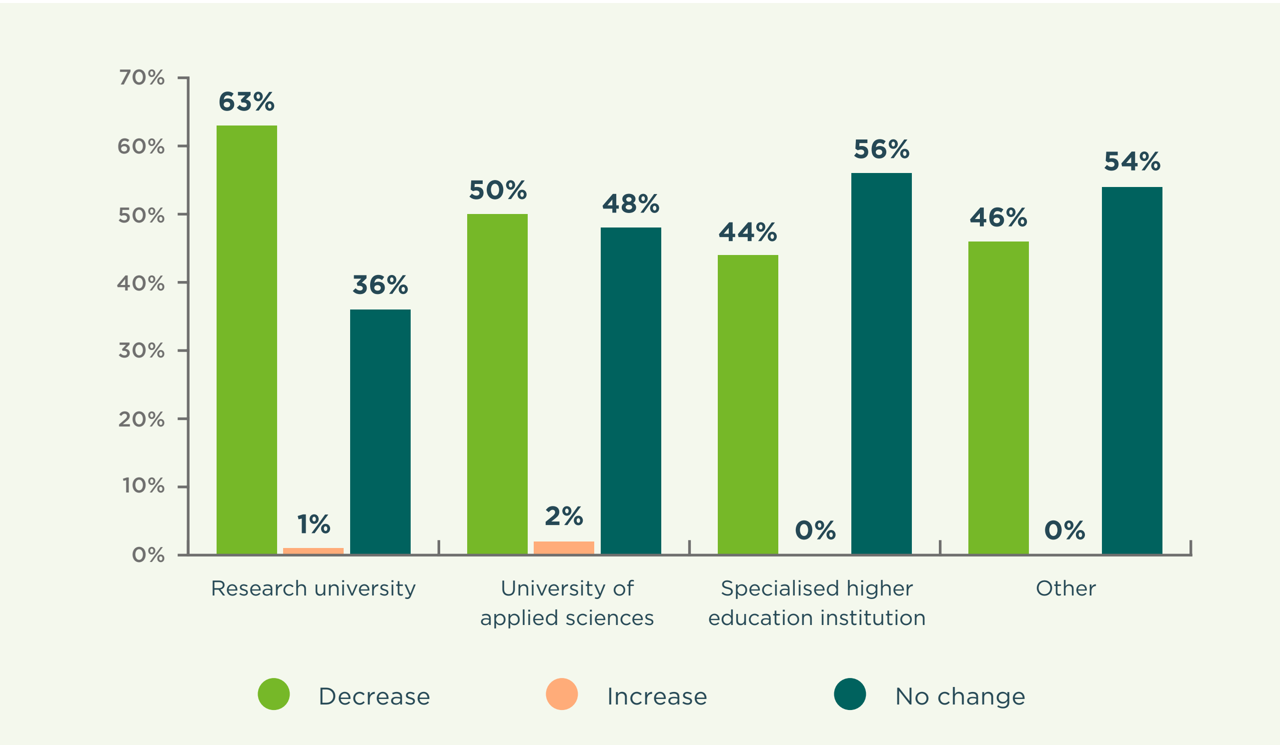


Figure 17: Inbound mobility from EHEA partners, full academic year

Regions *(n=356)*

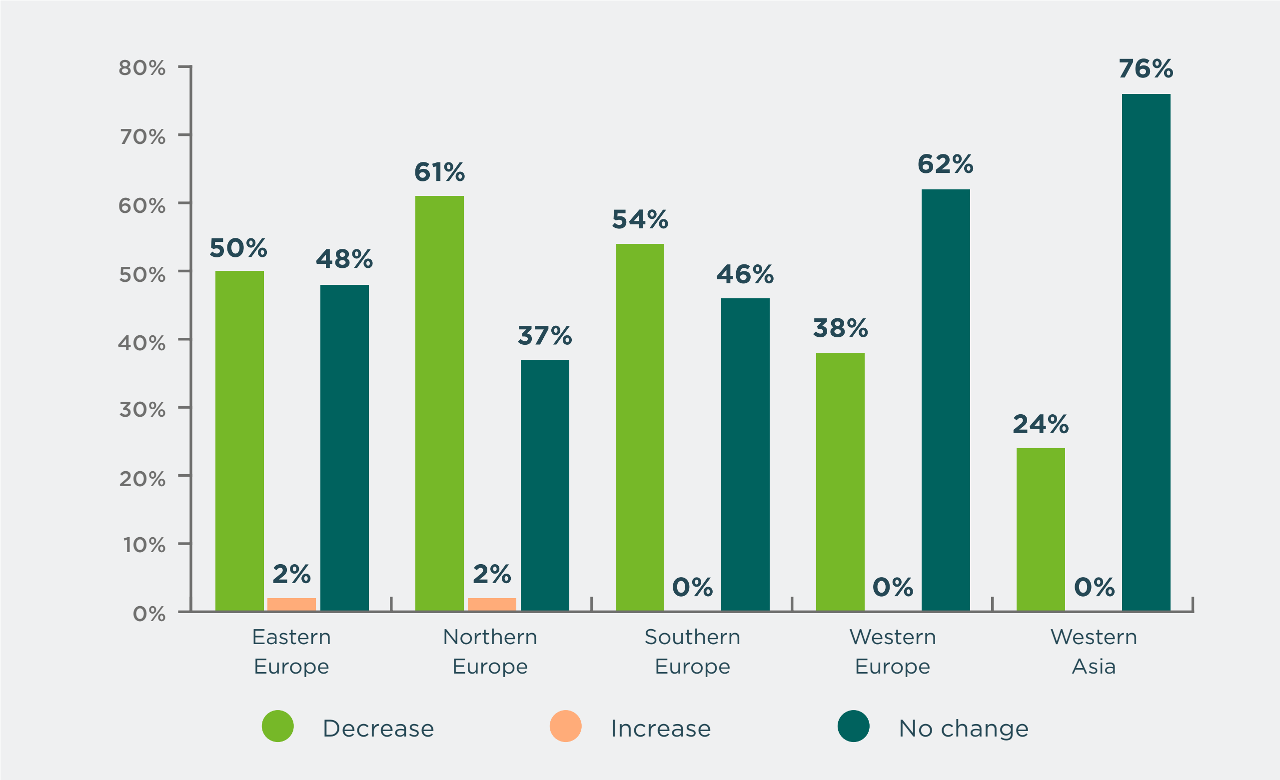
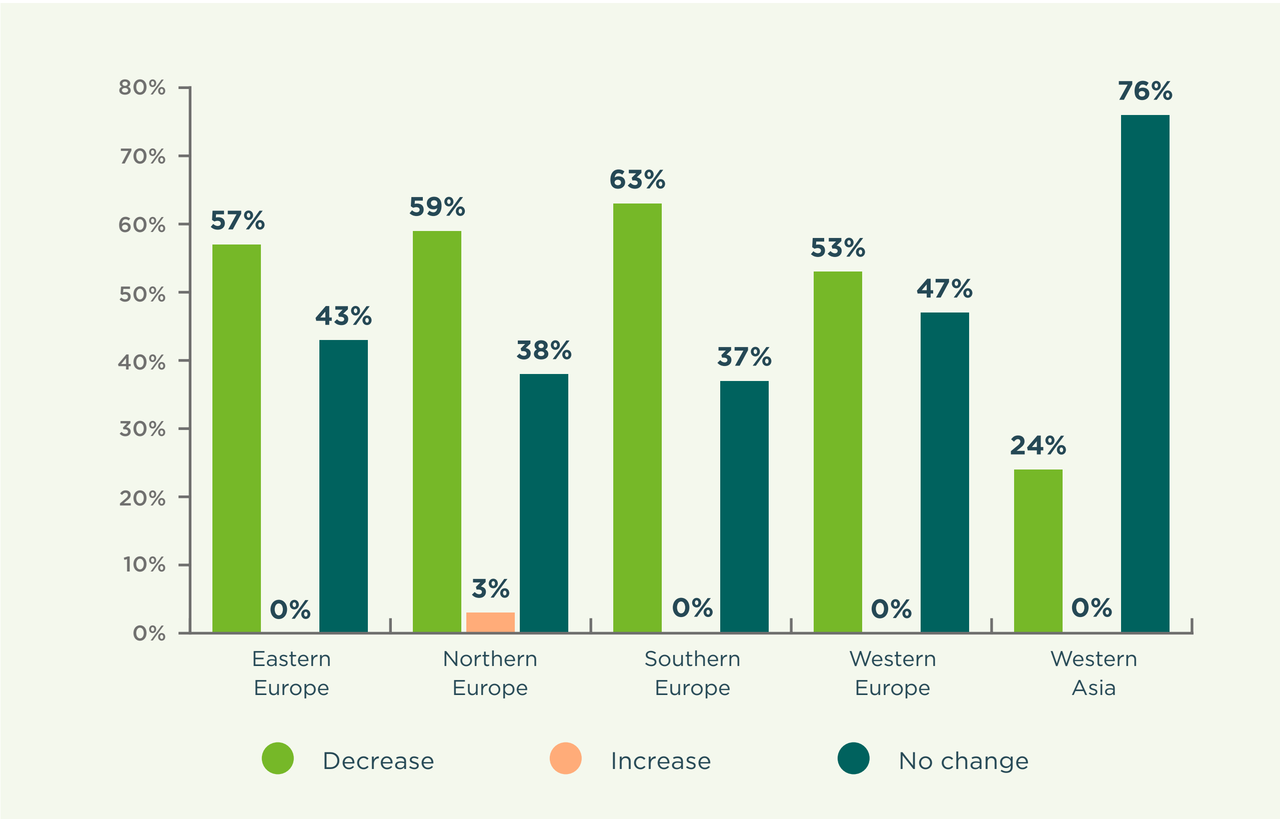


Figure 18: Inbound mobility from EHEA partners, semester 1

Regions *(n=393)*



INBOUND MOBILITY FROM EHEA PARTNERS: SEMESTER 2 EXPECTATIONS

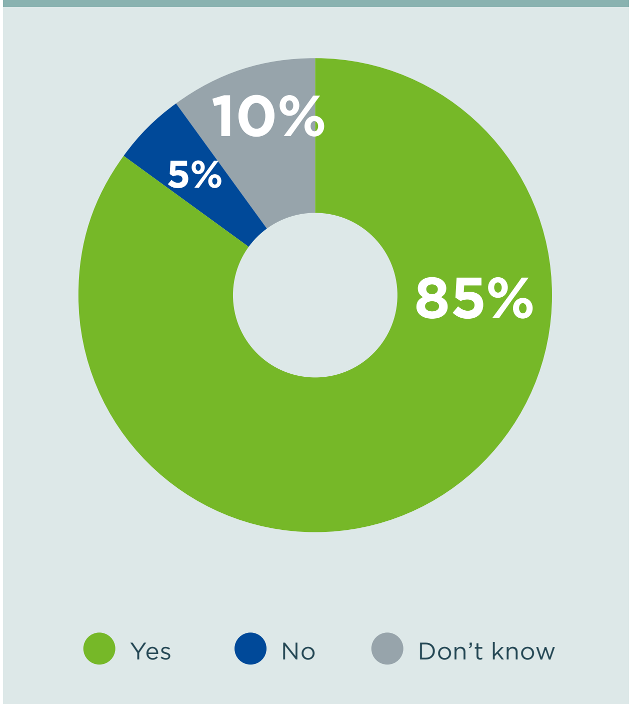
Selected highlights

- 85% of respondents expected to receive students from EHEA partners in semester 2.
- Of these, 61% expected no change in those numbers in comparison to a typical year but 26% anticipate decreases.
- A robust 80% of specialised institutions anticipated "no change" in their inbound EHEA student exchange numbers for semester 2.
- Just 7% of Western Asian respondents expected to see decreases in semester 2 inbound EHEA student exchange numbers, compared to 21% to 30% across the other EHEA regions; meanwhile, Western Asia is the only region that expects to see no increases in semester 2 inbound students.

Figure 19: Inbound mobility from EHEA partners, semester 2 expectations

Overview

Expected inbound mobility from EHEA partners (semester 2) *(n=375)*



Expected participation trends in inbound mobility from EHEA partners compared to a typical year (semester 2) *(n=321)*

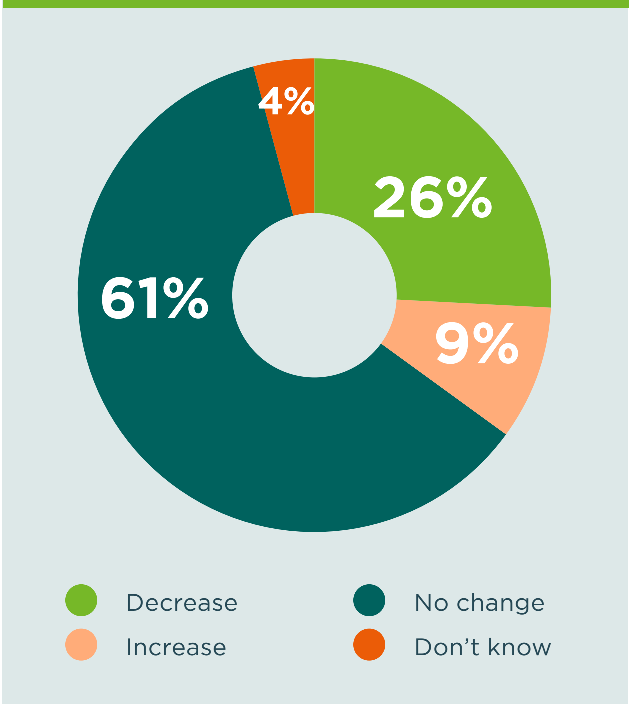


Figure 20: Inbound mobility from EHEA partners, semester 2 expectations

Institutional types *(n=310)*

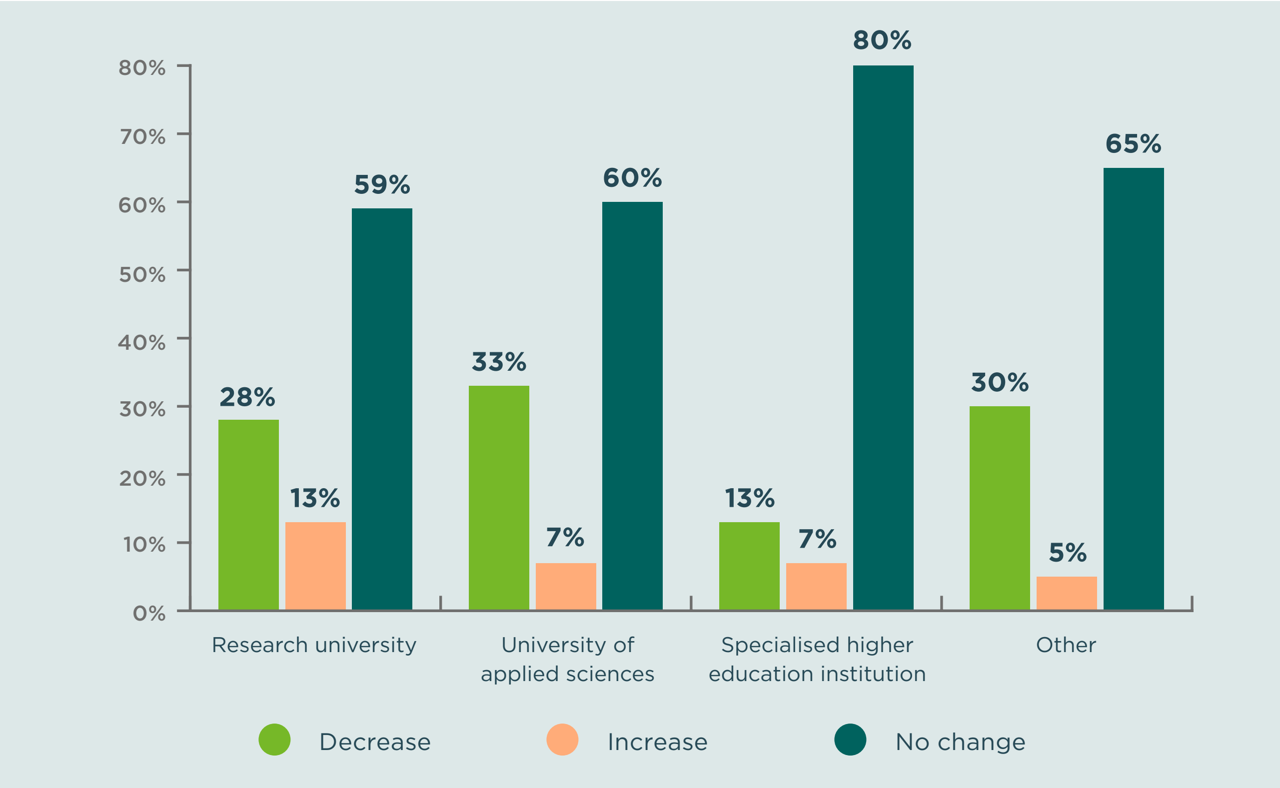
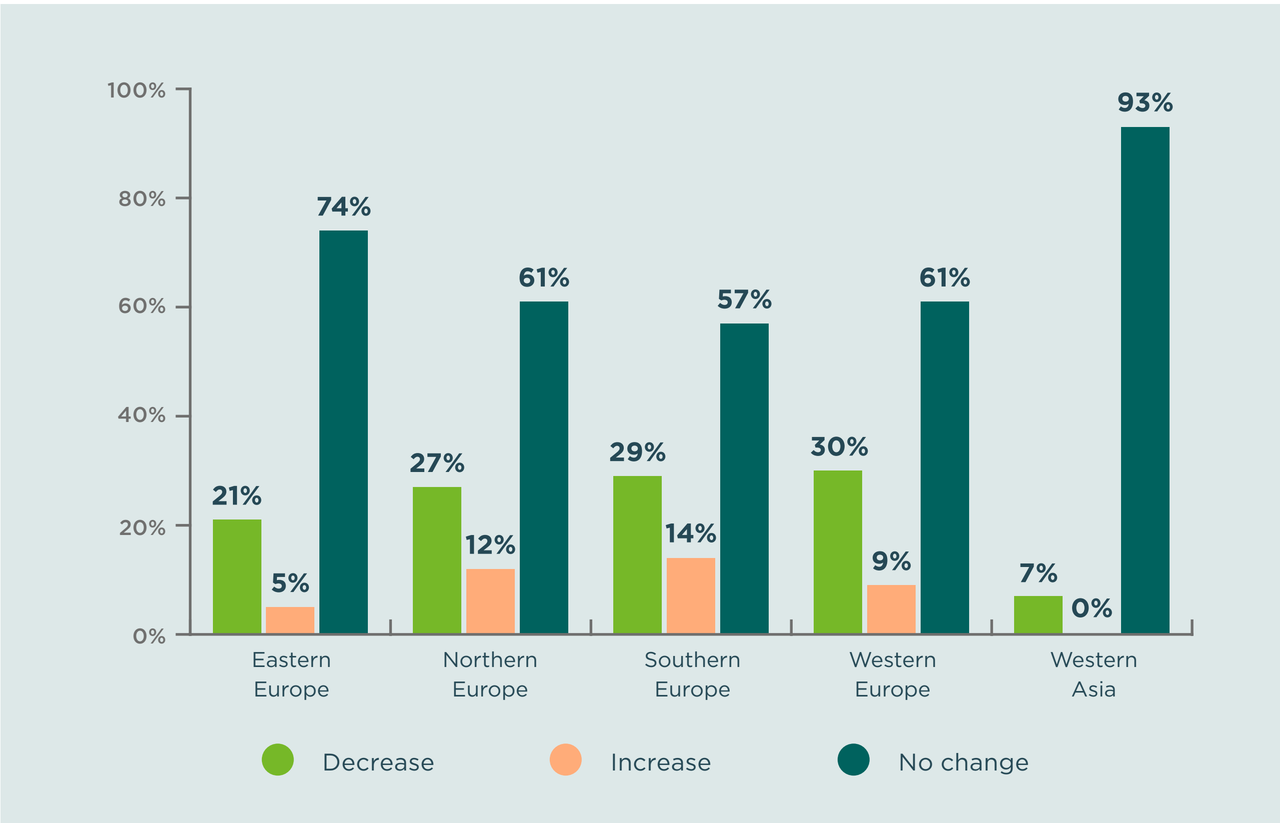


Figure 21: Inbound mobility from EHEA partners, semester 2 expectations

Regions *(n=310)*



KEY TAKEAWAYS

STUDENT EXCHANGES WITH EHEA PARTNERS

- The proportions of respondents reporting drops in their inbound and outbound exchange mobility student numbers, for full year and semester 1 programmes, ranged from 46% to 57%. This is notable given that the numbers of students participating in international student exchange programmes in Europe have grown steadily for years. The scope and seriousness of the COVID-19 crisis is clearly evident in this finding.
- Still, strong proportions of respondents – ranging from 40% to 50% – reported no change in their student exchange numbers for semester 1 or the full year, which may speak to firmly entrenched interest and commitments to this activity by students and institutions, as well as flexible or creative strategies for overcoming obstacles.
- Where decreases in student exchange numbers are reported in full year or semester 1 programmes, the majority of institutions (ranging from 56% to 65%) report drops totalling 1 to 50 students. It may be reassuring that the drops in students per institution are not higher, although of course these numbers mean something different to each institution, depending on their typical overall volume of exchange students.
- Less reassuring is the fact that, across inbound and outbound semester 1 and full year programmes, nearly one fifth (19%) to just over one quarter (26%) of respondents report drops in student numbers of 51–100 students. Given that this survey represents perhaps one tenth of all higher education institutions across the EHEA, these numbers are not negligible.
- At the time these survey data were collected (October–November 2020), there was significant optimism for a rebound in student exchange dynamics in semester 2. Strong majorities of respondents – 82% on the outbound side and 85% on the inbound side – expected to see exchange mobility take place with their EHEA partners in semester 2. Indeed, 60% of respondents expected that outbound semester 2 numbers would be on par with a typical year, while 13% expected outbound numbers to increase. On the inbound side, these perceptions were held by 61% and 9%, respectively.
- Some of this semester 2 optimism may hinge on the fact that respondents frequently indicated that students who were unable to go on exchange at the start of the academic year were most readily opting to postpone their mobility to a later date, rather than changing their mobility destination, pursuing online engagement with their host institutions, or abandoning the mobility opportunity altogether.
- Even still, a solid quarter of respondents (25% on the outbound side and 26% on the inbound side), expected so see decreases in semester 2 mobility in comparison to a typical year. Serious challenges, such as the finalised Brexit agreement and concerns about the ongoing spread of COVID-19, place these less optimistic perspectives in sharp relief. However, the launch of the new Erasmus+ 2021–2027 programme and the vaccination efforts currently underway across Europe offer real hope for a significant revival of international student mobility among EHEA partners in the coming period.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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