

SPIN-OFF
REPORT ③

EAIE BAROMETER

INTERNATIONALISATION IN EUROPE

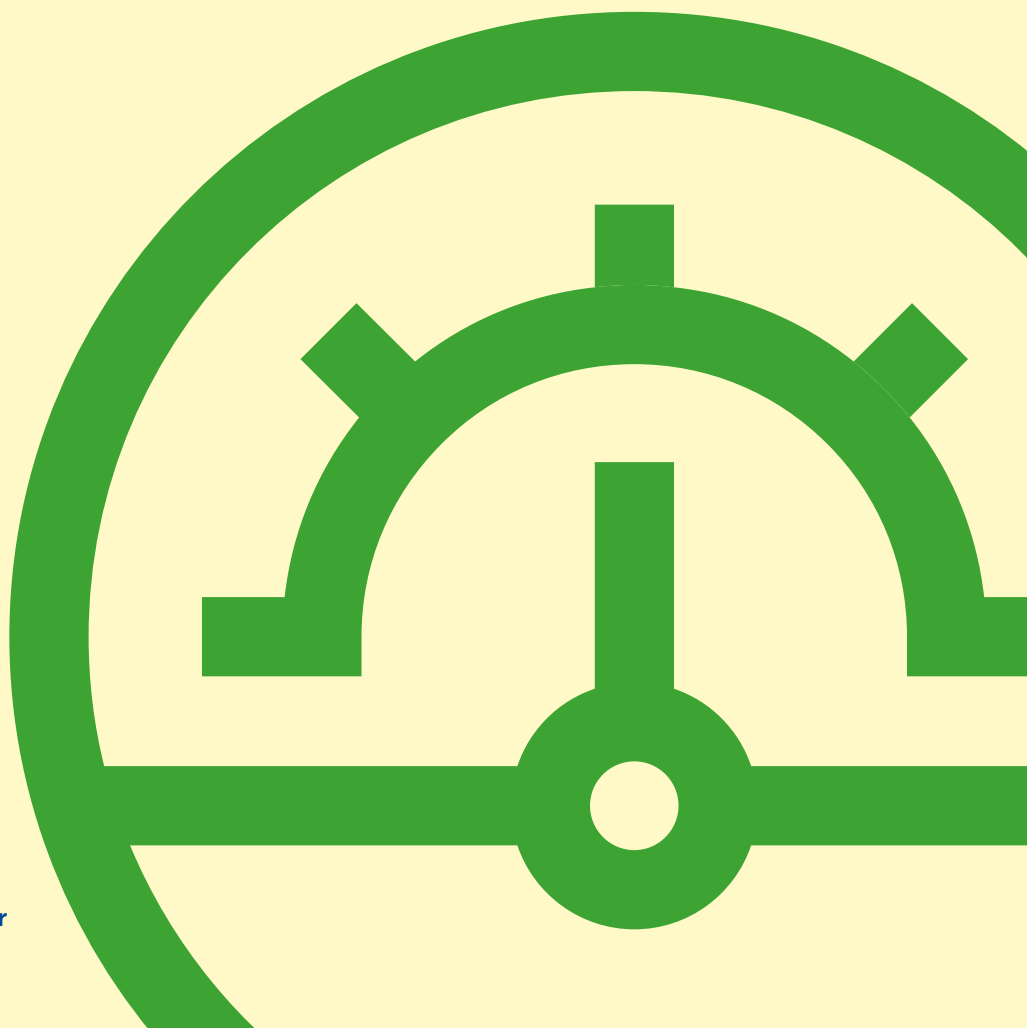
Third edition

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE ACTION

By Laura E. Rumbley, Jody Hoekstra-Selten,
Gemma Morrison and Ailsa Lamont



European Association for
International Education



ABOUT THE EAIE

Founded in 1989, the **European Association for International Education (EAIE)** is the European centre for knowledge, expertise and networking in the internationalisation of higher education. As a member-led association of over 3000 members from more than 95 countries, our mission is to enable the international higher education sector, demonstrate the impact of internationalisation, and influence and engage policymakers and the public in support of our vision.

ABOUT IESG

IESG was formed in 2023 with a distinct mission: to make it easier for higher education institutions to adopt climate-friendly policies and practices relating to internationalisation. This work is done primarily through the Climate Action Barometer (CAB), a global benchmarking study of climate action practices and emissions across the full range of internationalisation functions. CAB partners measure their environmental sustainability and climate action, receiving recommendations on how to improve, and match global good practice.

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EAIE BAROMETER: INTERNATIONALISATION IN EUROPE (THIRD EDITION)
Environmental sustainability and climate action

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the international higher education sector has grown increasingly aware of the intersections between its interests and activities and the profoundly disruptive challenges and realities of global climate change. The emergence of organised efforts to address these concerns — for example, through the establishment of the Climate Action Network for International Educators (CANIE), the student-led Erasmus by Train initiative, and the consortium-driven Green Erasmus Project, as well as the official prioritisation by the European Commission of the “environment and fight against climate change” in the 2021–2027 Erasmus+ Programme (European Commission, nd, np) — is testament to the sector’s rising sense of urgency and responsibility in this area.

In keeping with the objective of the [EAIE Barometer \(third edition\)](#) to shed light on key issues that international higher education professionals are grappling with today, one section of the Barometer survey offered respondents the opportunity to select two topics of particular personal or professional interest, from a list of seven current ‘hot topics.’ The respondents who chose ‘environmental sustainability and climate action’ as one such topic were then invited to answer a series of additional questions that sought to tease out indications of how they perceive the performance and commitments of their respective institution or organisation in this area. The data from these questions provides the foundation for the bulk of this report.

Numbers are not everything, of course. There is also much to learn from the qualitative experiences of institutions. This report, therefore, also includes examples of good practice emerging from the work of the [International Education Sustainability Group \(IESG\)](#), through its [Climate Action Barometer \(CAB\)](#), a global benchmarking study of climate action practices and emissions across the full range of internationalisation functions.

Taken together, the two sections of this report aim to provide a wide-angle perspective on this issue from across the European Higher Education Area and beyond, as well as present views at the level of individual institutions taking direct aim at the climate crisis. With this information, the EAIE and IESG hope to support greater understanding of where the international higher education community in Europe and elsewhere stands in relation to environmental sustainability and climate action, and foster strong commitment to actions that will make a difference.

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EAIE BAROMETER

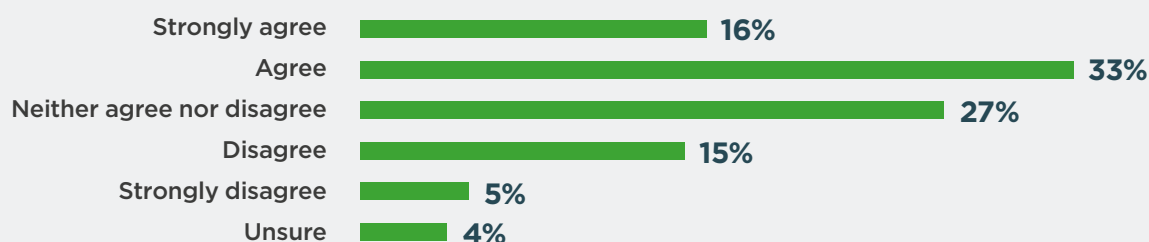
QUANTITATIVE INSIGHTS

Just over 500 (ie some 18%) of the 2817 individuals who participated in the EAIE Barometer (third edition) survey chose 'environmental sustainability and climate action' as a topic of particular personal or professional interest. This group of respondents represents 39 of the 49 European Higher Education Area countries, with the majority (41%) being based in Western Europe. Nearly 80% of these respondents works at a higher education institution (ie a research university or university of applied sciences as opposed to a national agency or ministry), and when looking at the roles they hold, mainly 'Professional Staff - Specialist/Coordinator' (36%) and 'Head of International Office' (23%) chose this topic as being of particular interest. This section presents key insights from these respondents in relation to nine core considerations, including planning, resourcing, commitment from leadership, assessment activity, and more.

PLANNING

Figure 1

My institution/organisation has a clear plan for the environmental sustainability and climate action activities it is pursuing (n=511)



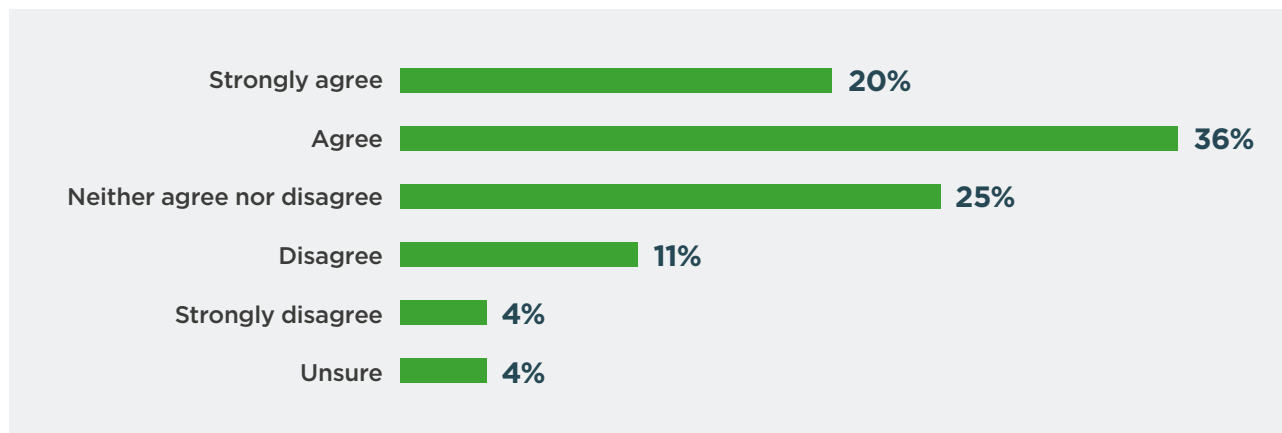
Who's feeling optimistic? (ie inclined to agree or strongly agree)	Who's feeling pessimistic? (ie inclined to disagree or strongly disagree)	Who's not sure? (ie inclined to be unsure or ambivalent)
<p>Respondents from specialised institutions (58%) and those with more than 15 years of experience (61%).</p> <p>Top countries*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ukraine (67%) United Kingdom (66%) Sweden (62%) 	<p>Respondents with 6-10 years of experience (26%) alongside those from smaller institutions and those from Western Europe (23%).</p> <p>Top countries*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Germany (31%) France (25%) Belgium (25%) 	<p>Respondents identifying as 'Faculty' (37%) and those from Eastern Europe (37%).</p> <p>Top countries*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Norway (59%) The Netherlands (40%) Belgium (33%)

*'Top country' status is only presented for countries from which there were at least 15 responses.

LEADERSHIP

Figure 2

My institution/organisation has leaders who are committed to the environmental sustainability and climate action activities it is pursuing (n=511)



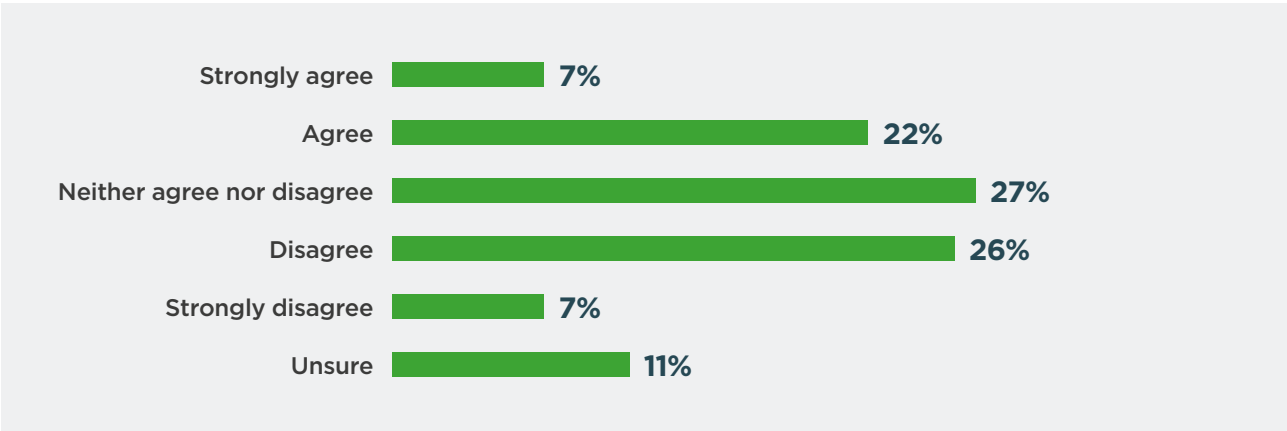
Who's feeling optimistic? (ie inclined to agree or strongly agree)	Who's feeling pessimistic? (ie inclined to disagree or strongly disagree)	Who's not sure? (ie inclined to be unsure or ambivalent)
<p>'Professional staff – Director/ Manager' (65%) and 'Other leadership' (66%).</p> <p>Respondents from specialised institutions (43%).</p> <p>Respondents working within 'Social Responsibility' (74%), followed by 'Research on Internationalisation' (69%), and those with more than 15 years of experience (64%).</p> <p>Top countries*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukraine (72%) • Türkiye (63%) • France (63%) 	<p>Respondents with 6-10 years of experience (22%) alongside those from smaller institutions and those from Southern Europe (23%).</p> <p>Top countries*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Italy (28%) • France (19%) • Germany (18%) 	<p>Respondents working at research universities (30%) and those working within 'Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum' (37%).</p> <p>Top countries*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Norway (57%) • Belgium (42%) • Switzerland (38%)

*'Top country' status is only presented for countries from which there were at least 15 responses.

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Figure 3

My institution/organisation is investing sufficient financial resources in the environmental sustainability and climate action activities it is pursuing (n=511)



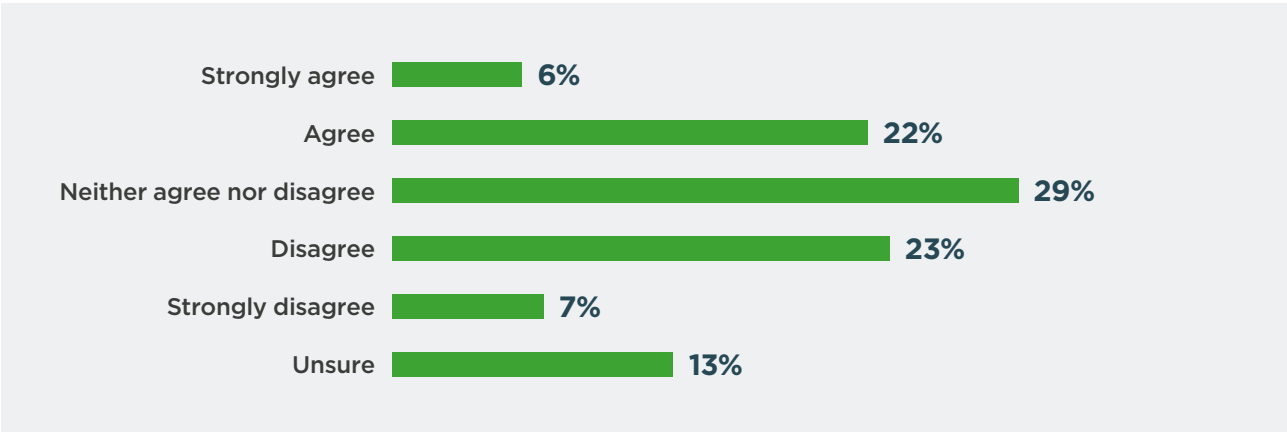
Who's feeling optimistic? (ie inclined to agree or strongly agree)	Who's feeling pessimistic? (ie inclined to disagree or strongly disagree)	Who's not sure? (ie inclined to be unsure or ambivalent)
<p>Respondents with more responsibility for budget for their institution (35%) and those with 0-2 years' experience working within the sector (42%).</p> <p>Top countries*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Türkiye (58%) • The Netherlands (42%) • Italy (42%) 	<p>Respondents identifying as 'Heads of international offices' (41%).</p> <p>Those working at specialised institutions (45%) and those with 11-15 years of experience (42%).</p> <p>Top countries*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belgium (50%) • France (47%) • Ukraine (44%) 	<p>Respondents working at universities of applied sciences (40%) and those based in Northern Europe (44%).</p> <p>Top countries*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Norway (59%) • Switzerland (56%) • Sweden (48%)

*'Top country' status is only presented for countries from which there were at least 15 responses.

NON-FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Figure 4

My institution/organisation is providing stakeholders with sufficient non-financial resources (eg time, training, etc) to support the environmental sustainability and climate action activities it is pursuing (n=511)



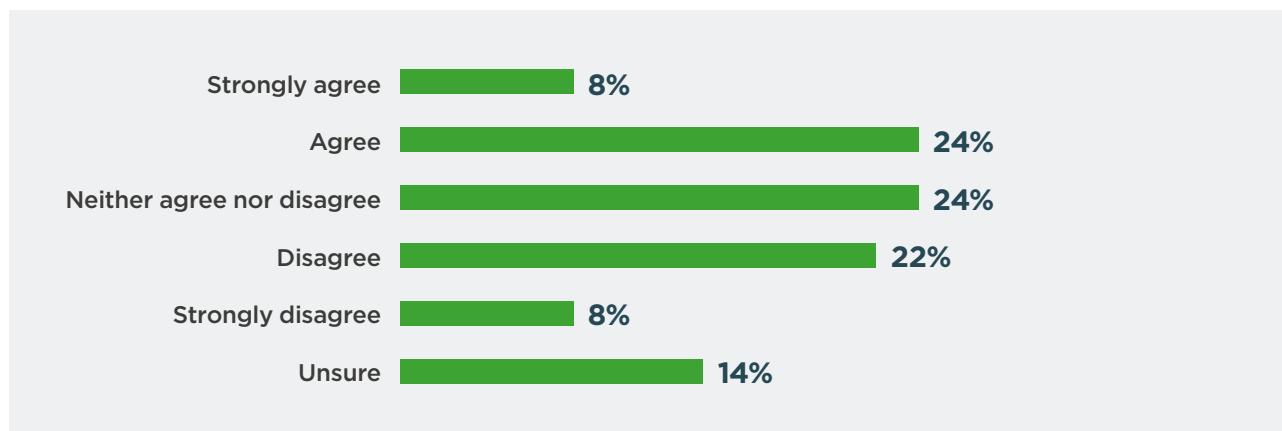
Who's feeling optimistic? (ie inclined to agree or strongly agree)	Who's feeling pessimistic? (ie inclined to disagree or strongly disagree)	Who's not sure? (ie inclined to be unsure or ambivalent)
<p>Respondents identifying as 'Other Leadership' (48%) and 'Professional staff – Director/Manager' (35%), and those with 0–2 years' experience working within the sector (38%).</p> <p>Respondents with more responsibility for budget for their institution (35%).</p> <p>Top countries*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ukraine (56%) Türkiye (53%) France (32%) 	<p>Respondents working within 'Social Responsibility' (37%) and those working at universities of applied sciences (33%).</p> <p>Respondents with 3–5 years of experience (34%).</p> <p>Top countries*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Belgium (42%) Norway (41%) Switzerland (38%) 	<p>Overall high levels of uncertainty/ambivalence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 42% of all respondents 44% of respondents working at research universities or universities of applied sciences. <p>Respondents based in Northern and Western Europe (45%).</p> <p>Top countries*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Norway (55%) Sweden (52%) Germany (51%)

*'Top country' status is only presented for countries from which there were at least 15 responses.

MEASUREMENT OF EFFECTS

Figure 5

My institution/organisation has a clear plan to measure the effects of the environmental sustainability and climate action activities it is pursuing (n=511)



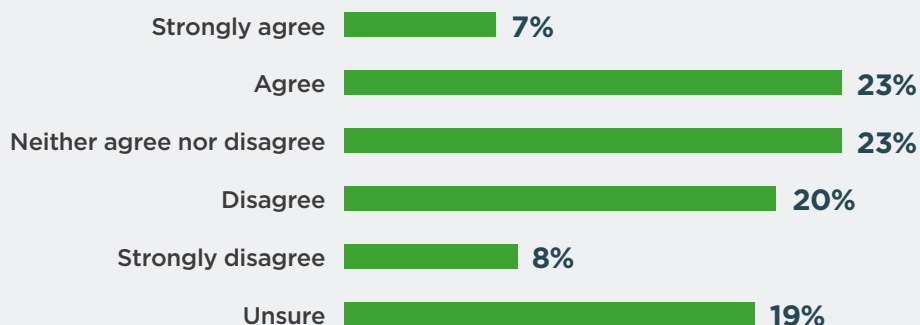
Who's feeling optimistic? (ie inclined to agree or strongly agree)	Who's feeling pessimistic? (ie inclined to disagree or strongly disagree)	Who's not sure? (ie inclined to be unsure or ambivalent)
<p>Respondents working at specialised institutions (42%), and those with up to 2 years' experience working within the sector (39%).</p> <p>Respondents identifying as 'Other leadership' (45%) and respondents who identify as working within 'Research on Internationalisation' (53%).</p> <p>Top countries*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Türkiye (58%) • Ukraine (56%) • Italy (47%) 	<p>Respondents with 3–5 years' experience working within the sector (40%), and those working at research universities (30%).</p> <p>Top countries*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Germany (36%) • Sweden (33%) • Norway (32%) 	<p>Respondents working at universities of applied sciences (48%), or respondents identifying as 'Faculty' (43%).</p> <p>Respondents working within 'Teaching, Learning and Curriculum' (45%).</p> <p>Respondents based in Western Europe (45%).</p> <p>Top countries*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Netherlands (57%) • Switzerland (56%) • Belgium (54%)




*'Top country' status is only presented for countries from which there were at least 15 responses.

USE OF DATA TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE

Figure 6

My institution/organisation has a clear plan for using the data it collects on environmental sustainability and climate action activities to improve its performance (n=511)



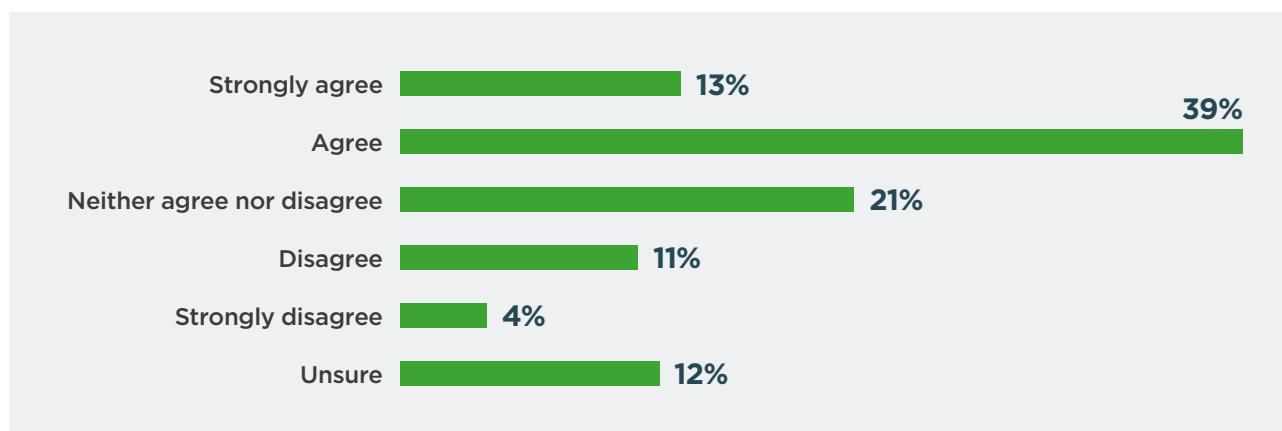
Who's feeling optimistic? <i>(ie inclined to agree or strongly agree)</i> 	Who's feeling pessimistic? <i>(ie inclined to disagree or strongly disagree)</i> 	Who's not sure? <i>(ie inclined to be unsure or ambivalent)</i> 
<p>Respondents identifying as 'Other leadership' (45%) and 'Professional staff – Director/Manager' (38%).</p> <p>Respondents based at institutions with the highest number of international students (36%).</p> <p>Respondents with 0–2 years' experience (39%), closely followed by those with more than 15 years' experience (34%).</p> <p>Top countries*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukraine (56%) • Türkiye (56%) • Italy (47%) 	<p>Respondents with 6–10 years' experience working within the sector (35%), and those working at smaller institutions (less than 5000 students) (31%).</p> <p>Respondents based in Eastern Europe (36%).</p> <p>Top countries*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Norway (38%) • Germany (36%) • Belgium (35%) 	<p>Respondents working at universities of applied sciences (50%).</p> <p>Respondents with 3–5 years' experience working within the sector (48%), or those identifying as 'Faculty' (46%).</p> <p>Those working at bigger institutions (more than 20,000 students) (49%).</p> <p>Top countries*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Switzerland (69%) • The Netherlands (52%) • Belgium (52%)




*'Top country' status is only presented for countries from which there were at least 15 responses.

RECENT PROGRESS

Figure 7

My institution/organisation has made progress with respect to environmental sustainability and climate action in the last 12 months (n=511)



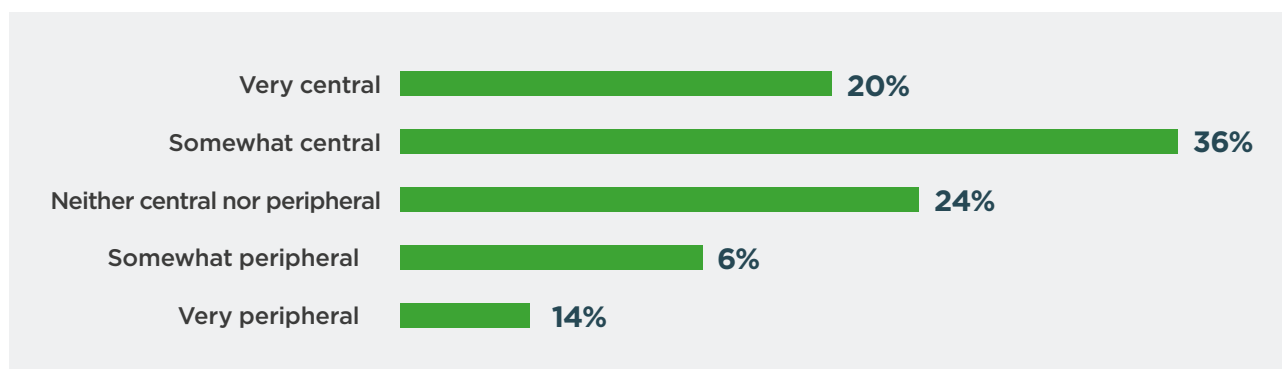
Who's feeling optimistic? <i>(ie inclined to agree or strongly agree)</i> 	Who's feeling pessimistic? <i>(ie inclined to disagree or strongly disagree)</i> 	Who's not sure? <i>(ie inclined to be unsure or ambivalent)</i> 
<p>Respondents working at research universities (54%), and those identifying as 'Other Leadership' (73%).</p> <p>Both those respondents with 0-2 years' experience (56%) and those with over 15 years' experience (55%).</p> <p>Top countries*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Italy (68%) Ukraine (67%) Türkiye (63%) 	<p>Respondents with 11-15 years' experience (22%).</p> <p>Respondents identifying as 'Professional Staff – Specialist/Coordinator' (21%).</p> <p>Respondents based in Northern Europe (19%).</p> <p>Top countries*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Norway (23%) United Kingdom (14%) Sweden (14%) 	<p>Respondents working at universities of applied sciences (36%).</p> <p>Respondents with 3-5 years' experience (38%).</p> <p>Respondents identifying as 'Faculty' (46%), or working within 'Teaching, Learning and Curriculum' (36%).</p> <p>Respondents based in Western Europe (36%).</p> <p>Top countries*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Switzerland (69%) Norway (50%) United Kingdom (49%)

*'Top country' status is only presented for countries from which there were at least 15 responses.

CONNECTION TO INTERNATIONALISATION STRATEGY/AGENDA

Figure 8

How central is environmental sustainability/climate action to your institution/organisation's internationalisation strategy or agenda? (n=500)



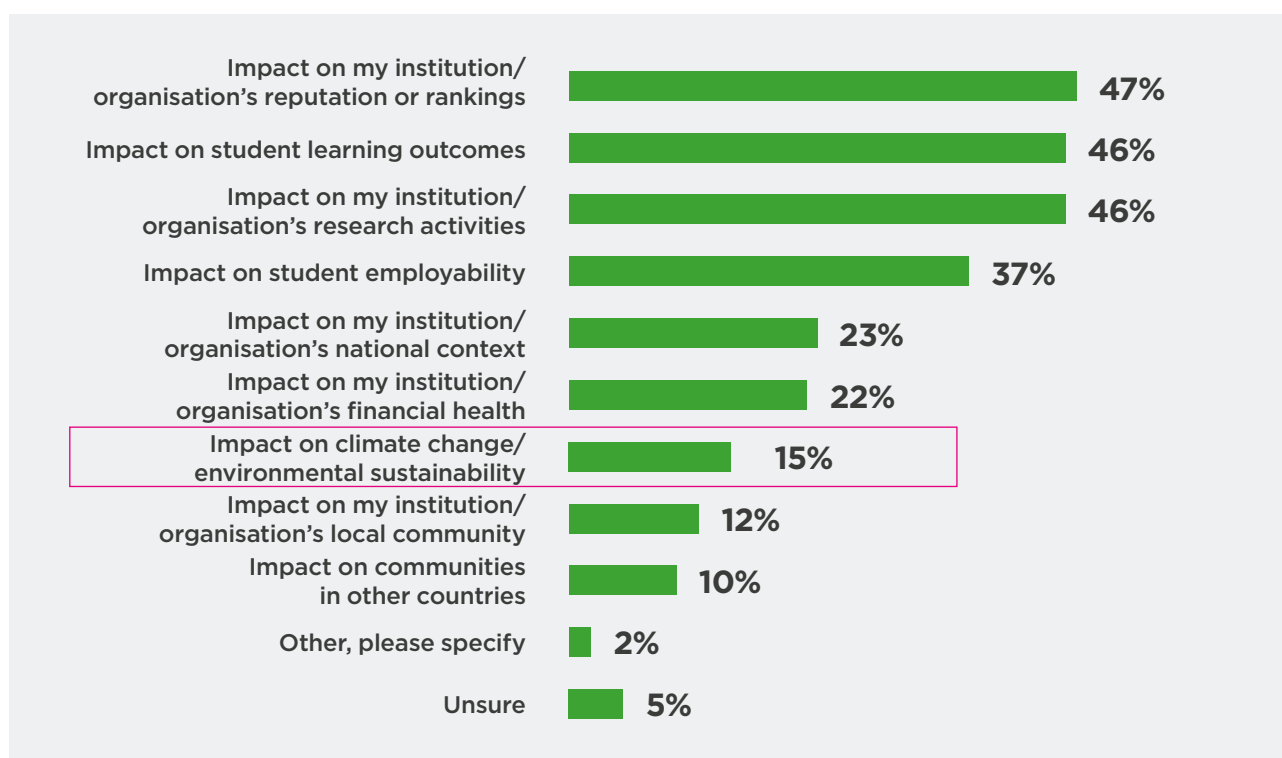
Who sees centrality? (ie inclined to select somewhat central or very central)	Who sees periphery? (ie inclined to select somewhat peripheral or very peripheral)	Who's not sure? (ie inclined to select neither central nor peripheral)
<p>Respondents working at specialised institutions (71%).</p> <p>Those with 0–2 years' experience in the field (65%) and those with more than 15 years of experience (61%), holding 'Other leadership' roles (64%) and with whole-of-institution budget responsibilities (61%).</p> <p>Top countries*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Netherlands (69%) • Switzerland (69%) • Türkiye (67%) • Ukraine (67%) 	<p>Respondents working at private for-profit institutions (24%).</p> <p>Respondents with 11–15 years of experience in the field (28%).</p> <p>Respondents who work as academic staff/faculty (32%) and those who are responsible for budgets at the level of individual projects or programmes (27%).</p> <p>Top countries*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • United Kingdom (34%) • France (23%) • Italy (22%) • Germany (22%) 	<p>Respondents working at universities of applied sciences (28%).</p> <p>Those with 3–5 years of experience in the field (35%), working in Professional Staff – Specialist/Coordinator roles (27%) and with no budget responsibilities (28%).</p> <p>Top countries*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Germany (35%) • Norway (33%) • Belgium (29%) • Switzerland (25%)

*'Top country' status is only presented for countries from which there were at least 15 responses.

INTEREST IN DELIVERING IMPACT

Figure 9

From your perspective, in which areas is your institution/organisation most concerned with delivering impact from its internationalisation activities (select up to three) (n=2135)



Who sees institutional/organisational focus on impact?

Respondents with budget responsibilities for their entire institutions (20%).

Respondents working at larger institutions; i.e. those with more than 20,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) students (18% versus 12% at the smallest), more than 2000 FTE international students (19% versus 10% at the smallest) and more than 250 outgoing mobility students (18% versus 7% at the smallest).

Respondents based in Western Europe (22%) more so than in other regions, such as Southern and Eastern Europe (10%) and Western Asia (9%).

Top countries:

- Netherlands (26%)
- France (25%)
- Austria (25%)
- Finland (24%)

Least represented countries

- Azerbaijan (4%)
- Croatia (4%)
- Czechia (2%)
- Slovenia (0%)

CLIMATE ACTION BAROMETER

GOOD PRACTICE INSIGHTS

Though with just two rounds of data collection to date, the Climate Action Barometer (CAB) is already revealing inspiring examples of good practice that are guiding the sector towards accelerated climate action. In 2023, the pilot round of the CAB captured climate action data at nine Australian and New Zealand (ANZ) institutions. By 2024, the CAB Global Wave expanded to a group of 21, including 12 European and UK institutions and nine ANZ institutions. Beyond the data collection aspects of the CAB, Good Practice Exchange (GPX) sessions draw on the experience and expertise in the CAB cohort, allowing participating institutions to share their initiatives, discuss challenges faced, and support others who may be interested in implementing similar initiatives. This section includes highlights from four of the nine categories of internationalisation covered in the CAB Global Wave. Importantly, it represents just a fraction of the good practice underway in the sector.

COMMITMENT TO CLIMATE ACTION

International strategies can play a key role in advancing climate action within higher education. However, the alignment between these strategies and institutions' sustainability efforts is currently underdeveloped. Two questions in the CAB Global Wave underscore this inconsistency:

- When asked, “What level of importance is given to climate action in your international strategy?” ANZ respondents collectively rated climate action as ‘neutral’ to ‘moderately important’, while the collective EU/UK response to this question reflected that climate action is only ‘slightly important’ for institutions in these locations.
- And when asked, “To what extent does your international strategy directly link to or refer to the university sustainability strategy”, both regional groups indicated that their international strategy is only ‘slightly’ or ‘moderately’ linked to climate action.

ENABLING CLIMATE ACTION

In terms of enabling climate action, CAB results mirror a key finding from the EAIE's Barometer survey: there is a disconnect between institutional commitment to sustainability and the availability of non-financial resources for implementation. For the 21 participants in the Global Wave, lack of staff time/resources was identified as the top challenge faced when tackling climate action at an operational level (see **Figure 10**).

Figure 10

Do you face any of these challenges embedding climate action in international operations? (select all that apply) (n=21)



Despite these challenges, CAB data indicates that in the past three years:

- 38% of institutions provided guidance for staff on how to reduce the climate impact of their travel.
- 33% provided climate literacy training or professional development for staff.
- 29% conducted or supported research into the intersection between international education and climate action.

Good practice: Promoting climate literacy	
<p>The University of Edinburgh →</p> <p>All Edinburgh Global staff take annual, mandatory, assessed training in climate literacy.</p> <p>All inbound and outbound students are also offered climate literacy training.</p> <p>For both groups, the trainings are opportunities to increase climate literacy. For the institution, the training assessments provide data on climate literacy rates and training programme success.</p>	<p>University of Tasmania</p> <p>The University of Tasmania has developed a voluntary sustainability survey covering general, environmental, socio-cultural and economic concepts. This survey is a first step to assessing climate literacy amongst all undergrad students. Assessing students' climate literacy allows the institution to measure progress toward effective climate education.</p>

Meanwhile, CAB data indicates that limited financial resources can be a drag on climate action, but some higher education institutions are making strides:

- 19% have a dedicated budget for climate-related initiatives.
- 28% offer scholarships to students using climate-conscious travel methods.
- 33% support staff to offer sustainability-themed education abroad programs education and climate action.

Good practice: Funding climate action

The University of Sydney

Sustainable program development funding

The University of Sydney's Sustainable program development funding is designed to support the creation and delivery of global programmes which focus on sustainability and/or are delivered in a sustainable way. In 2024, AUD \$10,000 is available for up to three programmes.

[Newcastle University](#) →

Sustainable travel grant

Newcastle University offers the Sustainable travel grant to encourage eco-friendly travel for students participating in short-term global opportunities. This grant, amounting to £350, is available to undergraduate students who receive the GO Global Scholarship and opt to travel to European destinations using climate-conscious transportation methods.

CLIMATE ACTION IN MARKETING, RECRUITMENT AND WORK WITH AGENTS

Climate commitments can be leveraged in recruitment and marketing materials to attract students and build value-aligned partnerships. In this vein, the 2024 Global Wave survey found that:

- 62% of CAB participants leverage their climate action work in their recruitment and marketing materials.
- 57% of respondents communicate their climate action commitments to their recruitment agent network, although only 10% apply a sustainability requirement when choosing recruitment agents.
- More ANZ international offices (44%) support their recruitment agent network to adopt more climate-friendly operating models, as compared to Europe and the UK (25%).

Good practice: Working with climate-conscious recruitment agents

IDP: The world's largest student recruitment organisation, demonstrates several types of climate and sustainability commitments. For institutions exploring how to evaluate prospective agents, and organisations looking to make concrete strides in their environmental responsibility, this example acts as a transparent and climate-conscious operating model for recruitment agents.

Setting a sustainability strategy

Three pillars: Opportunity for all, Trusted partner, and Environmental action, guide IDP's sustainability strategy. Emissions reduction is central to the environmental action pillar.

Committing to climate action

As a CANIE Accord signatory, IDP committed to, and tracks, 30 climate action strategies. In their tracking system: 13 are considered 'Completed' and a part of 'Business as usual,' 13 are 'On Track,' and four are 'Not yet started.' None are identified as 'Roadblock.'

Measuring greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions

Annual GHG emissions accounting allows IDP to assess its progress towards its target to 'reduce our carbon footprint by decreasing carbon emissions.'

CLIMATE ACTION IN EDUCATION ABROAD

There is a significant opportunity to harness the global perspectives developed through education abroad, enabling students to gain a deeper understanding of the complex challenges posed by climate change. Here, CAB data indicates that:

- 72% of responding institutions offer outward mobility programmes designed specifically for education on climate action or sustainability, while 44% incentivise or encourage these programmes.
- A smaller portion have made commitments to increase virtual exchange (28%), with an eye on the environmental benefits of such activities.
- ANZ respondents (50%) more frequently consider the physical climate risk to participants at overseas locations when approving education abroad programmes compared to European/UK respondents (30%).

Good practice: Climate action in education abroad programme design	
<p>University of Auckland →</p> <p><i>Carbon conscious programming</i></p> <p>Generation Changemaker is the university's co-curricular programme for incoming study abroad and exchange students with a focus on sustainable innovation and entrepreneurship. Students engage in workshops to spark innovative solutions for global challenges based on the UN SDGs. Students are involved in climate action training, ideation and tree planting.</p>	<p>Lancaster University →</p> <p><i>Global classrooms</i></p> <p>Virtual classrooms connect international partner universities and Lancaster campuses via live-streaming technology. This low-carbon model fosters global collaboration, allowing students to tackle global challenges through interactive learning and group projects co-designed by faculty across campuses. The first full credit-bearing module in 2023/2024 spanned five countries: China, Germany, Ghana, Malaysia and the UK.</p>

The good practices highlighted here demonstrate that, despite challenges, tangible steps are being taken in the international education sector to advance climate action. Indeed, data from repeat CAB participants (although admittedly a small group) show growth in their commitment to climate change and staff engagement by forming working groups focused on climate action. While in 2023, 20% indicated their institution had an internal working group focused on climate action, in 2024 this percentage has already increased to 60%. If the early results for those CAB partners now taking part in their second round of the study are a good indication, then the very act of starting to track and measure their own practices can lead to improvement.

CONCLUSION

The international higher education sector is currently breaking new ground in relation to the urgent matter of environmental sustainability and climate action. In 2023, the *Journal of Studies in International Education* produced a special issue on this topic, in which the editors noted that while “the task of working to make the world a better place” has long been an explicit aspiration of the sector, “only relatively recently has the specific matter of environmental sustainability been widely foregrounded in the field” (Proctor & Rumbley, p. 560, 2023).

The data and insights from Europe and from Australia/New Zealand, provided by both the EAIE Barometer and the Climate Action Barometer (CAB), suggest that there is indeed room for significant improvement in the attention and resources dedicated to this issue at present. However, there is real cause for optimism, as well, particularly when it comes to perceptions about recent progress being made in relation to this work and evidence of new organisational structures being established to attend explicitly to it.

In the coming months and years, tracking the arc of the sector’s efforts in relation to climate action and environmental sustainability will likely grow in urgency and importance. The baseline statistical information gathered today helps to sharpen our collective understanding of the current situation across Europe and beyond, and strengthens our ability to plan for the future. In that evolutionary process, there is also enormous value to be gained from examples of good practice from higher education institutions, which provide clear indications of immediate action that can be taken to advance this vital agenda.

Ultimately, navigating this new space of global climate change will undoubtedly require ingenuity, stamina, commitment and collaboration. Sharing good data widely on our efforts in this area will surely help to light this way forward.

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