

SPIN-OFF
REPORT

EAIE BAROMETER

INTERNATIONALISATION IN EUROPE

Third edition

PERCEPTIONS OF IMPACT

By Laura E. Rumbley & Jody Hoekstra-Selten



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We achieve this mission through a combination of training, conferences, and knowledge acquisition and sharing. 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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EAIE BAROMETER: INTERNATIONALISATION IN EUROPE (THIRD EDITION)
Perceptions of impact

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INTRODUCTION

Although there is no universally agreed upon definition for internationalisation and many different ways to approach this work and motivations for doing so, there does seem to be common understanding that internationalisation has the potential to effect desirable change, on a variety of levels. For example, the EAIE is guided by the notion that international higher education has the power to create a better world through its ability to connect diverse perspectives and foster greater understanding, and a widely cited definition for internationalisation asserts that the express purpose of the phenomenon is to “enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society” (de Wit *et al*, 2015, p. 29)¹. Yet, for all the time, energy and resources that higher education institutions and policy actors have invested in internationalisation, ostensibly to achieve certain goals, many questions and uncertainties continue to surround the question of its ‘impact’, whether at the level of individuals, organisations and/or societies more broadly.

In seeking to provide meaningful indications of how international higher education professionals across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) view key topics linked to their roles and their institutions, the *2024 EAIE Barometer, third edition* purposefully included several questions about the matter of ‘impact’. Notably, the survey did not define the precise nature of ‘impact’ for respondents. Instead, the questions addressed how these individuals perceive the conversation about impact at their institutions and organisations.

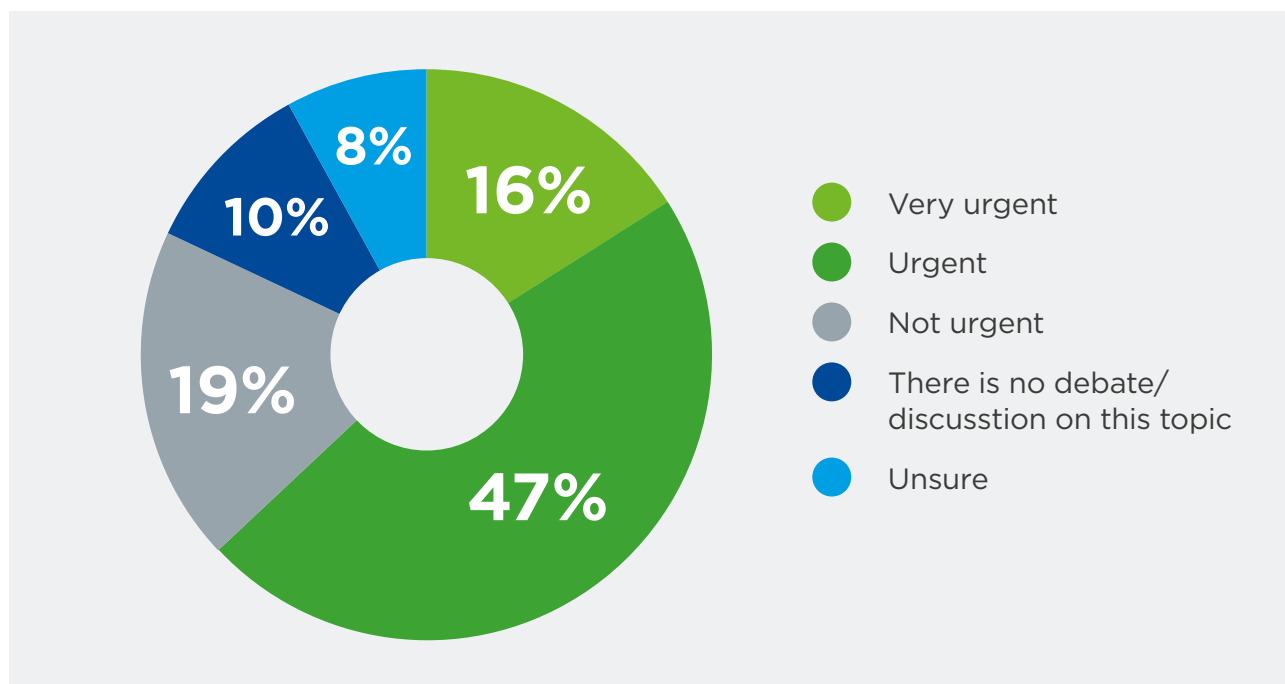
This EAIE Barometer spin-off report, therefore, takes a detailed look at the responses provided by survey respondents to the following queries: How is the debate/discussion about the impact of internationalisation characterised, and how much pressure is felt by individuals to produce evidence of impact? Where does this pressure come from, and in what areas are higher education institutions most concerned with delivering impact? Each section of this report provides a compact overview of the data linked to these core questions, offering some general insights as well as data by country or region, respondent role, and organisation/institution type. Ultimately, understanding more about how frontline professionals working in the field of international higher education perceive the debate around ‘impact’ can open the door on much-needed conversations about this topic. To support such dialogue, a short set of discussion questions concludes the report.

1. de Wit, H, Hunter, F, Howard, L., Egron-Polak, E. (2015). *Internationalisation of higher education*. European Parliament. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/540370/IPOL_STU\(2015\)540370_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/540370/IPOL_STU(2015)540370_EN.pdf)

THE DEBATE OR DISCUSSION ABOUT IMPACT

Figure 1

How would you characterise the debate or discussion about the impact of internationalisation at your institution/organisation? (n=2159)



GENERAL INSIGHTS

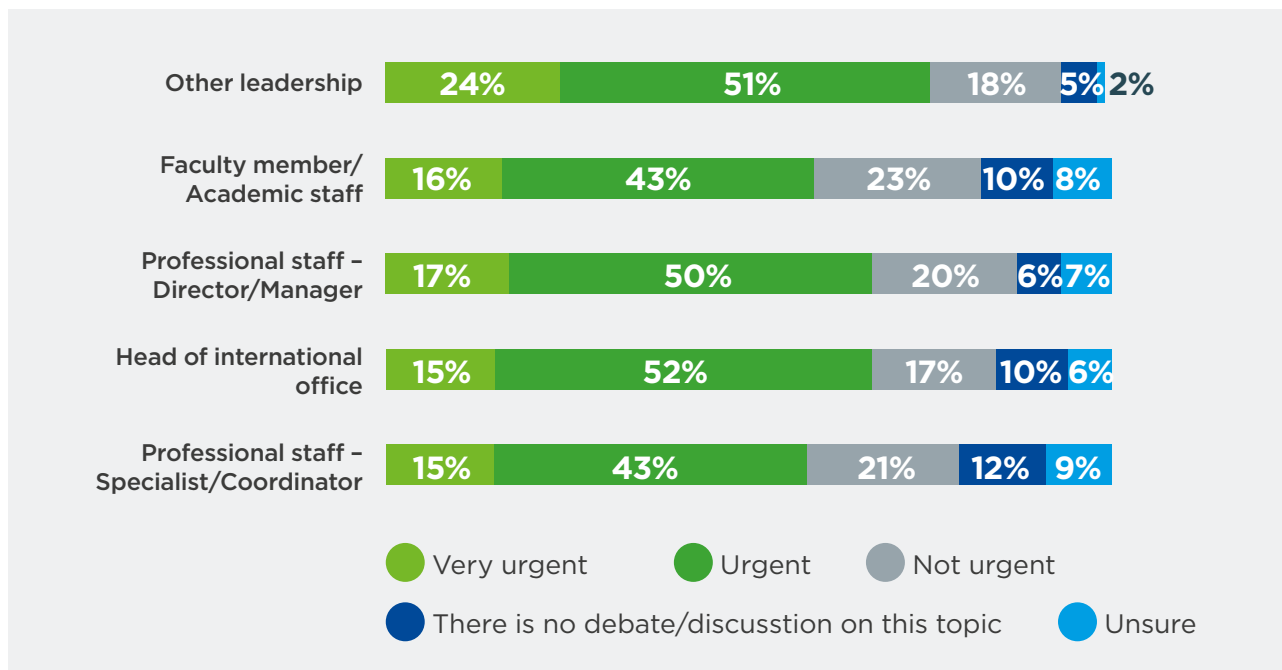
A solid 63% of respondents indicated some level of urgency around ‘the debate or discussion about the impact of internationalisation’ at their institution or organisation (see **Figure 1**). At the same time, it is notable that a sizable 37% of respondents perceived that there is no such debate or discussion, no urgency in relation to it or are simply unsure about the nature of the discussion about impact in their institutional context.

BY LOCATION

Individual countries where the debate is most often characterised as (very) urgent are Portugal (82%), Azerbaijan (79%), Spain (74%), and Armenia (73%). Respondents based in countries in Northern and Western Europe are much more likely to indicate that the debate is not urgent or non-existent, as seen in Sweden (45%) and Norway (39%).

Figure 2

How would you characterise the debate or discussion about the impact of internationalisation at your institution/organisation? (by role) (n=2159)



BY RESPONDENT ROLE

Urgency in the discussion/debate about internationalisation is clearly felt by individuals across all of the professional role types explored by the Barometer survey. However, respondents with some type of leadership role most often characterise the debate about the impact of internationalisation as (very) urgent: ‘Other leadership’ (75%), ‘Head of international office’ (67%) and ‘Professional staff - Director/Manager’ (67%) (see **Figure 2**). Also noteworthy is that respondents describing their general focus of work as ‘Social Responsibility’ and ‘Research on Internationalisation’ most often indicate the debate on the impact of internationalisation as (very) urgent (68% for both groups). Those working within ‘Teaching, Learning and Curriculum’ and ‘Student and Alumni Services’ most often indicate the debate as not urgent or non-existent (31%).

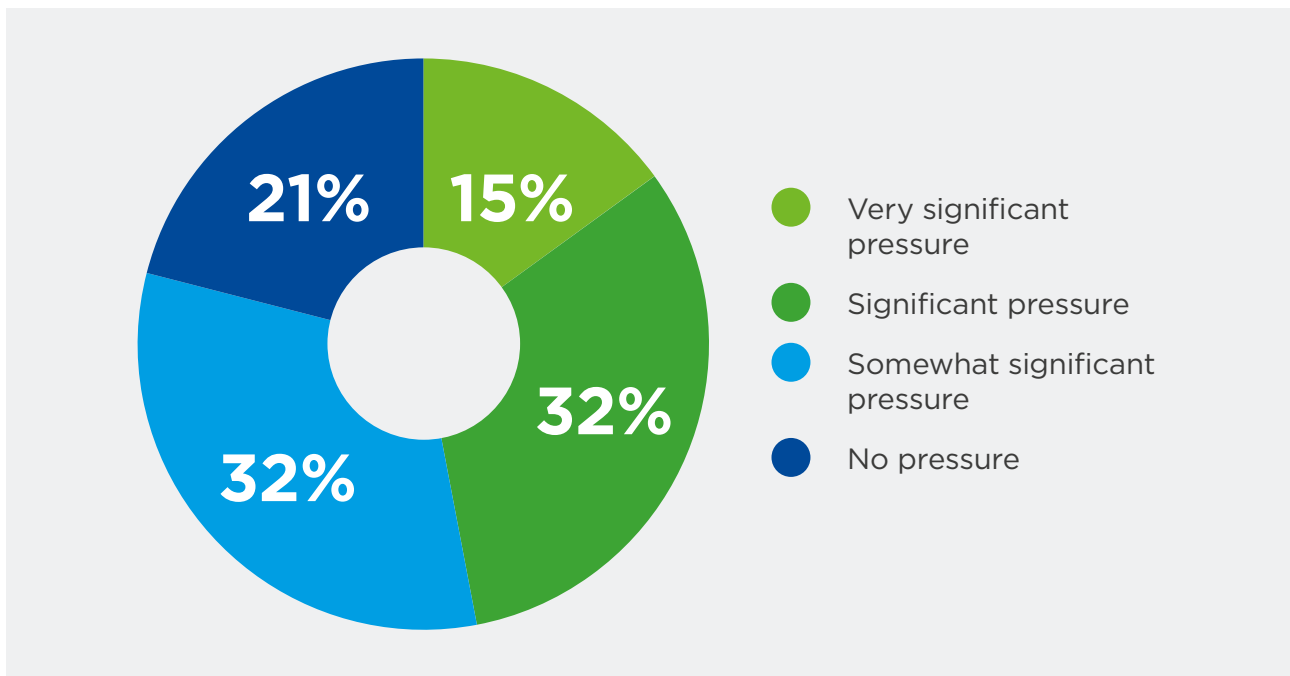
BY ORGANISATION/INSTITUTION TYPE

Respondents working for NGOs (73%), ministries or government agencies (69%), or private enterprise/company/service providers (67%), most often characterise the debate within their organisations as (very) urgent. Respondents at specialised institutions seem more immune to this pressure and most often indicate the debate is not urgent (25%).

PRESSURE TO PRODUCE IMPACT

Figure 3

How much pressure do you feel in your role to produce evidence of the impact of internationalisation? (n=2134)



GENERAL INSIGHTS

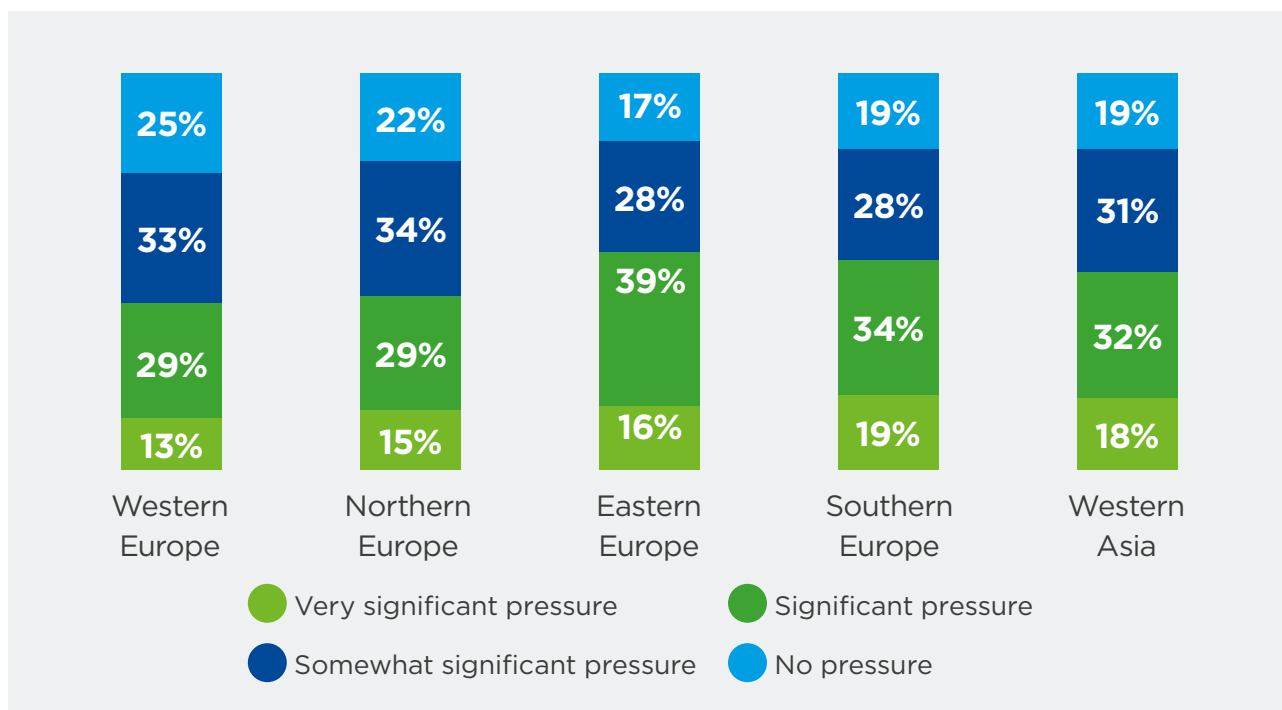
Nearly half of all respondents (47%) reported feeling 'significant' or 'very significant' pressure in their roles when it comes to demonstrating the impact of internationalisation. A full 79% of respondents feel some level of such pressure (see **Figure 3**).

BY LOCATION

(Very) significant pressure is felt most often by respondents in Lithuania (69%), Portugal (65%), Latvia (64%), Slovakia (60%), and Hungary (59%). 'No pressure' is most frequently indicated by respondents based in Serbia (42%) and Scandinavian countries such as Sweden (37%). Looking at regions, Eastern and Southern Europe are the places where respondents most often report feeling significant pressure (see **Figure 4**).

Figure 4

How much pressure do you feel in your role to produce evidence of the impact of internationalisation? (by location) (n=2134)



BY RESPONDENT ROLE

Individuals with leadership roles appear to feel the pressure to produce evidence of impact more acutely: 'Head of international office' (62%) and 'Other leadership' (61%). Faculty member/Academic staff are more immune to this pressure/urgency, it seems, with roughly one-third (30%) indicating they feel no pressure at all. Respondents responsible for budget also more often report feeling (very) significant pressure than those with no budget responsibilities. Respondents describing their general focus of work as 'Marketing and Admissions' (20%) most often indicate they feel very significant pressure to produce evidence of the impact of internationalisation. Individuals working within 'Teaching, Learning and Curriculum' (26%) most often indicated feeling no pressure.

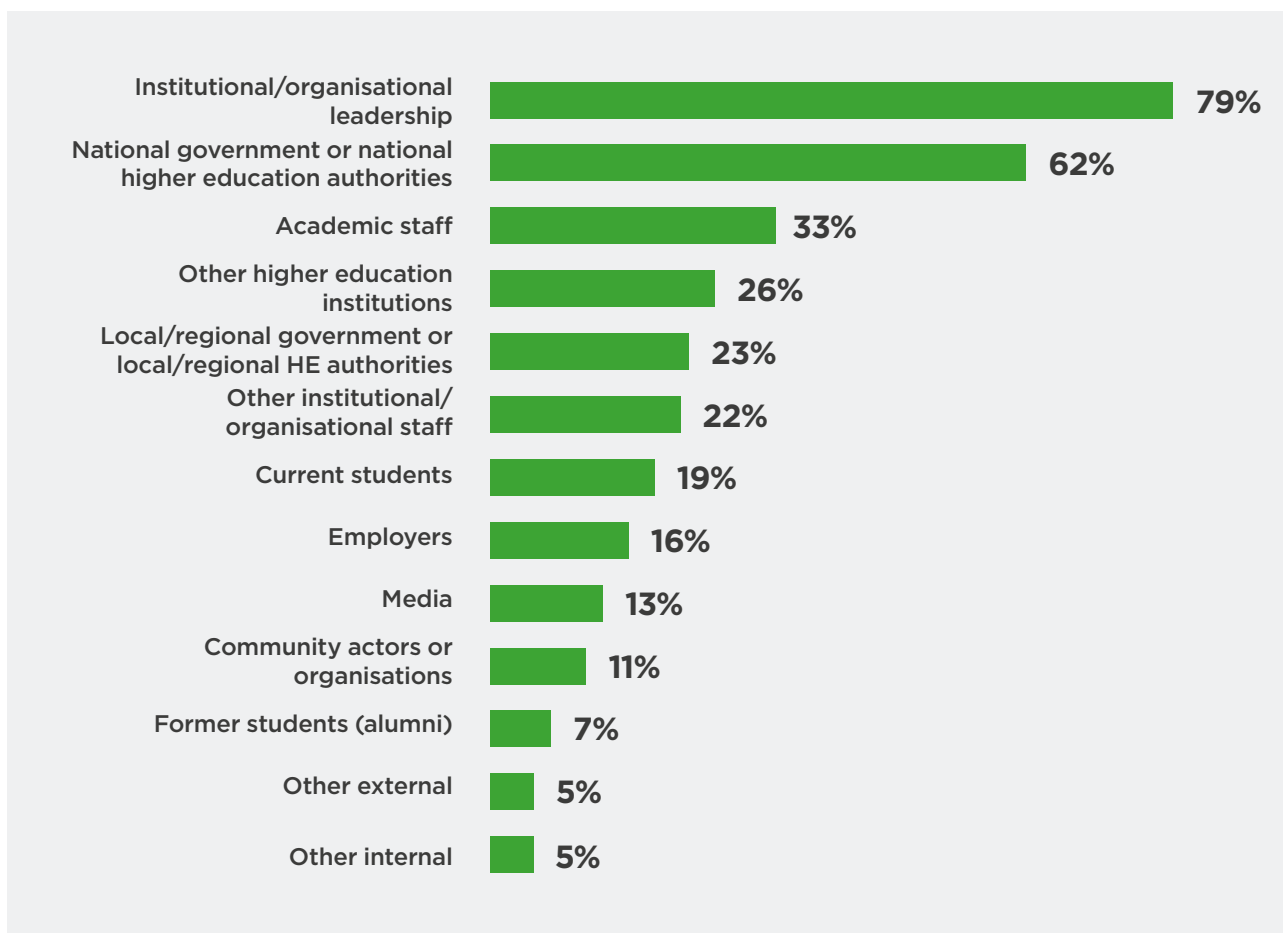
BY ORGANISATION/INSTITUTION TYPE

Respondents working for NGOs (55%) most often feel (very) significant pressure in their role to produce evidence of the impact of internationalisation. Curiously, although respondents at private enterprise/company/service providers are amongst those who more frequently perceive the discussion about internationalisation at their organisations to be (very) urgent, they also most often indicate they feel no pressure (29%) to produce evidence of impact in their individual roles.

SOURCES OF PRESSURE TO PRODUCE IMPACT

Figure 5

Where does the pressure to produce evidence of impact come from? (select all that apply) (n=1690)



GENERAL INSIGHTS

Across the EHEA, institutional/organisational leadership as well as national governments or national higher education authorities are overwhelmingly seen as the key sources of the pressure felt by individuals working in the field to produce evidence of the impact of internationalisation (see **Figure 5**). And while one in three respondents perceives academic staff as a source of pressure to deliver impact, the role of students, current or former, in exerting such pressure is notably limited, as is that of social actors such as employers or the media.

BY LOCATION

A full 50% of respondents from Western Asia perceive academic staff as sources of pressure to produce evidence of impact; this figure stands at just 29% to 36% for other regions. Respondents from Western Europe are more inclined to see local/regional government or local/regional higher education authorities as sources of pressure than respondents from elsewhere across the EHEA.

BY RESPONDENT ROLE

'Faculty member/Academic staff' (72%) and 'Other leadership' (73%) respondents are noticeably less inclined to see that institutional/organisational leadership is a primary source of pressure to produce evidence of impact from internationalisation than are respondents who hold other types of roles (80%-83%). Meanwhile, 'Other leadership' respondents seem more likely than all other respondent groups to see sources of pressure from a range of other actors, including other higher education institutions, local/regional governments and higher education authorities, community actors or organisations, current and former students (alumni) and the media.

BY ORGANISATION/INSTITUTION TYPE

Interestingly, although students are the subject of a great deal of internationalisation activity undertaken by higher education institutions, the Barometer exercise found that current students were most often perceived as sources of pressure to produce evidence of impact by NGOs and private enterprises/companies (see **Figure 6**). Respondents from ministries or government agencies were least likely to see students as key sources of pressure, and NGOs were least likely to see employers in this light. Meanwhile, ministries or government agency respondents were notably more likely to see the media as a top source of pressure.

Figure 6

Where does the pressure to produce evidence of impact come from? (select all that apply) (by organisation/institution type) (n=1690)

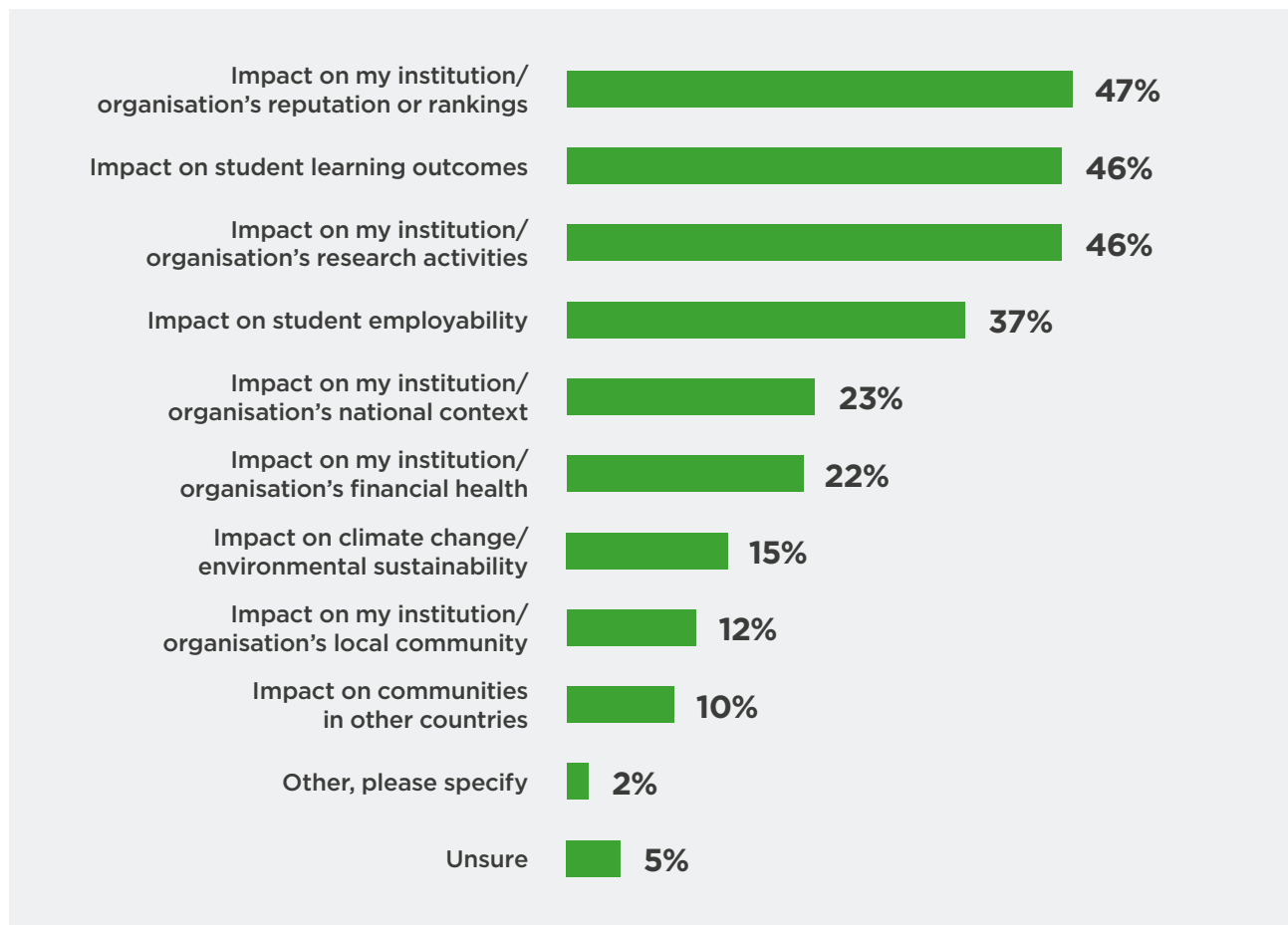
	Research University	University of Applied Sciences	Specialised institution	Ministry or government agency	NGO	Private enterprise/ company/ service provider
Institutional/ organisational leadership	82%	76%	76%	79%	68%	72%
National government or national higher education authorities	65%	60%	55%	79%	62%	39%
Academic staff	35%	37%	33%	17%	27%	17%
Other higher education institutions	23%	23%	26%	37%	41%	42%
Local/regional government or local/ regional higher education authorities	22%	24%	17%	21%	35%	27%
Other institutional/ organisational staff	23%	21%	17%	17%	22%	31%
Current students	19%	17%	23%	8%	30%	27%
Employers	16%	18%	16%	12%	5%	20%
Media	13%	11%	11%	24%	14%	13%
Community actors or organisations	10%	11%	5%	21%	22%	16%
Former students (alumni)	5%	6%	10%	7%	14%	9%
Other external	4%	6%	5%	3%	5%	9%
Other internal	4%	5%	4%	14%	0%	8%

 most common choices
 less common choices  least common choices

PRIORITIES FOR DELIVERING IMPACT

Figure 7

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)



GENERAL INSIGHTS

Respondents most frequently perceive that their institutions are concerned with delivering impact from internationalisation in three key areas—reputation/rankings, student learning outcomes and research activities — although student employability is also somewhat on the radar (see **Figure 7**). Financial benefits are less frequently perceived as a top focus for institutions. However, the fact that 22% of respondents

referenced this area is still noteworthy when compared to data from the second edition of the EAIE Barometer (2018). That report found that just 12% of respondents identified 'financial benefits' as a main goal of internationalisation for their institution.

BY LOCATION

Respondents from Western Asia most frequently (63%) indicated that reputation or rankings was a top concern when it comes to delivering impact from internationalisation. Northern Europe stands out when it comes to the question of prioritising financial health (33%). And regional differences are also apparent in regard to the matter of impact on climate change/environmental sustainability, with Northern European (22%) and Western European (17%) respondents more frequently indicating they felt this was a top three priority area for their institution to demonstrate the impact of internationalisation.

BY RESPONDENT ROLE

Individuals who identified as 'Professional staff - Directors/Managers' but not specifically as heads of international offices were notably more inclined (at 31%) to consider that their institution sees financial health as a top priority when it comes to demonstrating impact from internationalisation. Just 21%-23% of respondents in other roles shared this perspective. In contrast, these same 'Professional staff - Directors/Managers' (32%) were least likely to see demonstrating impact on student employability as a priority of their institution, while 'Heads of International Offices' (41%) were most likely to do so.

BY ORGANISATION/INSTITUTION TYPE

As indicated in **Figure 8**, respondents from research universities and specialised institutions were much more likely to perceive that their institutions are interested in demonstrating the impact of internationalisation by way of reputation or rankings, as compared to universities of applied sciences. Student learning outcomes were also perceived differently across institutional types, as was the matter of student employability. Making an impact on the national context was vastly more apparent as a priority area for respondents from ministries and government agencies as well as NGOs, as compared to academic institutions and private enterprises/companies.

Figure 8

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

	Research University	University of Applied Sciences	Specialised institution	Ministry or government agency	NGO	Private enterprise/ company/ service provider
Impact on my institution/ organisation's reputation or rankings	55%	36%	57%	26%	19%	28%
Impact on student learning outcomes	43%	56%	55%	35%	32%	37%
Impact on my institution/ organisation's research activities	56%	39%	33%	21%	28%	16%
Impact on student employability	33%	46%	45%	28%	26%	30%
Impact on my institution/ organisation's national context	21%	20%	16%	55%	49%	21%
Impact on my institution/ organisation's financial health	24%	20%	24%	15%	17%	36%
Impact on climate change/environmental sustainability	14%	16%	16%	14%	26%	21%
Impact on my institution/ organisation's local community	9%	18%	7%	15%	21%	19%
Impact on communities in other countries	6%	7%	7%	22%	34%	28%
Other, please specify	1%	2%	1%	7%	13%	6%
Unsure	5%	4%	2%	9%	4%	7%

 most common choices
 less common choices  least common choices

CONCLUSION

In 2015, the first iteration of the EAIE Barometer asked respondents to indicate the top five challenges they were dealing with in relation to internationalisation. Notably, the response ‘assessing the relevance and measuring impact of internationalisation activities’ did not emerge as a top five issue for any of the respondent countries. Roughly ten years later, the fact that nearly 50% of *EAIE Barometer (third edition)* respondents indicate experiencing (very) significant pressure to produce evidence of impact in their work establishes a thought-provoking baseline of understanding about this issue across the EHEA today: impact is clearly on the radar.

Of course, many gaps remain in our understanding about the matter of ‘impact’ in relation to internationalisation. For example, while 63% of respondents indicated seeing some level of urgency around the debate or discussion about the impact of internationalisation at their institution or organisation, a sizable 37% perceived no such debate or discussion, no urgency in relation to it, or are simply unsure about the nature of the discussion about internationalisation’s impact in their institutional context. Alignment about the urgency of achieving impact from internationalisation amongst actors within the same institutions appears to be elusive, which may have important implications for institutions’ ability to execute coordinated strategic action.

Also notable is the fact that respondents perceive that their institutions are as concerned with delivering impact from internationalisation in terms of reputation/rankings as they are the core academic activities of student learning outcomes and research activities. This raises a range of questions about institutions’ priorities and their commitments to aspirations of a competitive versus a collaborative/‘common good’ nature.

It is, of course, difficult to predict how perceptions against these questions and others related to impact will evolve over time. As the field is shaped by new challenges and opportunities in the coming years, however, it is likely that delivering impact from internationalisation will increasingly demand the attention of professionals and policymakers in international higher education across Europe, requiring further understanding of its nature and the ways key stakeholders engage with this vital work.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

THE DEBATE OR DISCUSSION ABOUT IMPACT

- Why is the debate on the impact of internationalisation most often characterised as (very) urgent at NGOs, ministries or government agencies and private enterprises? Could this be linked to funding issues or stakeholder dynamics?
- What may be driving the differences in the individual country results? What role do current national political and/or international/geopolitical circumstances play in relation to these findings?

PRESSURE TO PRODUCE IMPACT

- If you or others at your institution experience pressure to produce impact in your roles, how does this affect your work? Is this a motivating or demotivating (*ie*, positive or negative) influence on your work?
- It seems academic staff are more immune to the pressure/urgency regarding the debate on impact of internationalisation. Why do you think this is? If this finding holds at your institution, does it require attention in some way and if so, how?

SOURCES OF PRESSURE TO PRODUCE IMPACT

- Current and former students are not widely perceived as exerting pressure on institutions to demonstrate the impact of internationalisation. Is this your experience at your institution or in your country? In what ways does this matter, or not?
- What does it mean to you that stakeholders like the media, employers and community actors are infrequently viewed as sources of pressure for institutions or organisations to demonstrate impact from internationalisation?

PRIORITIES FOR DELIVERING IMPACT

- Is the perceived focus by many institutions on issues of reputation and rankings a positive or negative finding? Why?
- Does your institution undertake efforts to measure impact? If yes, what do those efforts consist of? If not, how could your institution do this?



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