

SPIN-OFF
REPORT

EAIE BAROMETER

INTERNATIONALISATION IN EUROPE

Third edition

NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN-LEVEL INFLUENCES

By Laura E. Rumbley & Jody Hoekstra-Selten



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EAIE BAROMETER: INTERNATIONALISATION IN EUROPE (THIRD EDITION)
National and European-level influences

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INTRODUCTION

The 2024 EAIE Barometer, third edition provides important indications of how international higher education professionals across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) view various topics linked to their roles and their institutions. One of the specific focal points of this research project was how respondents see the influence of both national and European-level authorities, programmes, and instruments on the internationalisation agendas of their institutions. A key finding was that, across the EHEA, 41% of respondents perceive a positive effect from national policies, programmes and/or initiatives on their institution's internationalisation activities. Additionally, data collected on respondent perceptions of various European Commission efforts – such as the encouragement of Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs) and the rollout of the European Universities Initiative – resulted in perceptions of tangible influence in these areas. For example, just over half (51%) of all Barometer respondents indicated (strong) agreement with the notion that their institution encourages its staff to create BIPs with partners and a solid 43% of respondents perceived that the European Universities Initiative has had positive effects on their institution, with just a miniscule proportion (1%) noting negative effects.

Indeed, overall, the 2024 Barometer data indicates that a majority of respondents see national and European-level 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. Understanding more about how stakeholders working in the field of international higher education perceive the influence of these actors can open the door on important conversations about the intersection – or disconnects – between policy and practice. This report takes a detailed look at the data provided by survey respondents that relates specifically to the perceived influence of national and European authorities. How 'influential' are these actors considered to be and what does this say about the state of internationalisation across the European Higher Education Area today?

HIGHLY INFLUENTIAL & INFLUENTIAL

The 2024 EAIE Barometer data shows that a majority of all EHEA respondents currently see national authorities (58%) and European-level authorities (53%) as either ‘highly influential’ or ‘influential’ when it comes to being drivers of their institution’s goals for internationalisation. Yet, these percentages are slightly lower than the results collected in a parallel line of inquiry for the 2015 Barometer report, as seen in **Figure 1** (unfortunately, no similar type of question was included in the 2018 version of the Barometer survey).

Figure 1

Influence of national and European-level policies or authorities,
2015 versus 2024

Highly influential + influential	
Barometer 2015 (first edition)	
Influence of national policy level on your institution’s internationalisation policy	68%
Influence of European policy level on your institution’s internationalisation policy	66%
Barometer 2024 (third edition)	
Influence of national authorities in driving your institution’s internationalisation goals	58%
Influence of European-level authorities in driving your institution’s internationalisation goals	53%

REGIONAL VARIATIONS

While there may be indications that the influence of national and European-level authorities is decreasing at a broad level across the EHEA, there are notable differences in perceptions in distinct national and regional contexts. For example, the influence of national authorities is most often considered influential or highly influential in Northern Europe (as seen in such countries as Norway – 76%, Finland – 71%, Denmark – 70%) and Western Asia (64% overall). When it comes to perceiving European-level authorities as either influential or highly influential, Western Asia stands out once again (see Türkiye – 79%, Armenia – 63%), followed by Eastern Europe (64% overall), with the results from Ukraine (73%) serving as an especially convincing example of this trend. **Figure 2** provides a fuller picture of these regional findings.

Figure 2

Influence of national and European-level authorities in driving institutions' internationalisation goals, by region (highly influential & influential) (n=1116, national; n=1020, European-level)

Highly influential + influential		
Region	National authorities	European-level authorities
Eastern Europe	58%	64%
Northern Europe	61%	44%
Southern Europe	53%	58%
Western Europe	57%	48%
Western Asia	64%	70%

Interestingly, there are also countries where both national and European-level authorities are considered (highly) influential, such as Czechia, Romania, and Portugal.

DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES BY ROLE AND EXPERIENCE

Looking more closely at different respondent groups, it is interesting to note that level of professional experience seems to correlate somewhat with perceptions of greater influence by these key actors. Specifically, respondents with more than 15 years of experience in their current role or in the field of international higher education more broadly are most likely (at 63% and 61%, respectively) to consider national authorities as (highly) influential. A similar trend is discernible when looking at European-level authority influence: this is most often considered as (highly) influential in driving institutions' internationalisation goals by those with more than 15 years of experience in their current role (60%) or in the field of international higher education (56%).

Similar to the findings based on years in role or in the field, the data also shows tendencies for those with leadership roles or budget responsibilities to perceive greater influence by national and European-level authorities. For example, those respondents identifying as 'Professional Staff – Director/Manager' (63%) and 'Other Leadership' (62%), more often see national authorities as (highly) influential than, for example, 'Faculty member/academic staff' (53%) or 'Professional Staff - Specialist/Coordinator' (56%). This is even more apparent when looking at European-level authority influence, where almost three quarters (72%) of those within 'Other Leadership' roles consider European-level actors as (highly) influential, followed somewhat at a distance by those respondents identifying as 'Head of International Office' (57%). Meanwhile, a robust 67% of respondents with responsibility for the budget of an entire institution consider European-level authorities as (highly) influential. This is followed by those responsible for budget linked to individual projects/programmes (55%), which is most likely explained by the fact that many such individual projects and programmes are funded by the European Commission or other European-level actors.

INSTITUTIONAL SIZE MATTERS, TO AN EXTENT

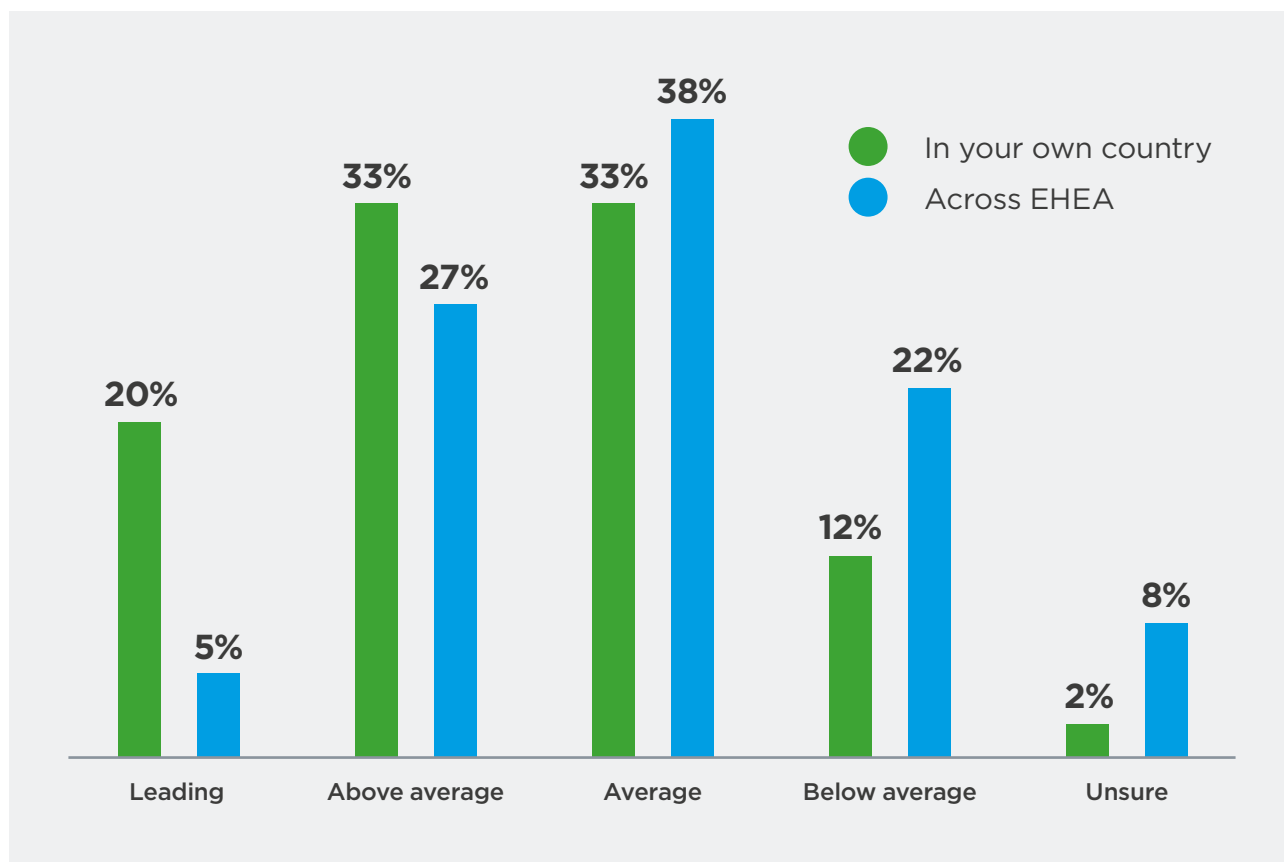
In addition to the indications that respondents with higher levels of experience and responsibility most often consider national and European-level authorities as (highly) influential, the size of respondents' institutions seems to play a role in their perceptions in this area, as well – at least in terms of the influence of national actors. 63% of institutions with over 10,000 FTE students, and 61% of those with more than 20,000 FTE students, consider national-level authorities to be (highly) influential. Interestingly, size of institution does not seem to correlate in any particular way with respondents' perceptions of the influence of European-level authorities.

'LEADING' AND 'ABOVE AVERAGE' VERSUS 'BELOW AVERAGE' INSTITUTIONS

The 2024 Barometer survey also included a question on how respondents compare their institution's level of internationalisation to other institutions in their own country and across the EHEA (see **Figure 3**).

Figure 3

How would you compare your institution's level of internationalisation to other institutions? (n=1963)



Looking at the question of national and European-level influence through the lens of this 'self-ranking' variable provides some notable insights. Respondents that consider their institutions as leading/above average within their own country more often see national authorities as (highly) influential (63%) than those that consider themselves as 'below average' (54%). A similar finding is apparent at the EHEA level: respondents that consider their institutions as leading/above average within the EHEA more often see European-level authorities as (highly) influential (62%). However, that percentage drops considerably for those respondents that score their institutions as below average at the EHEA level; of those, only 44% consider European-level authorities as (highly) influential.

NOT AT ALL INFLUENTIAL

When considering the bigger picture of how the field of (international) higher education in the EHEA is largely structured, positioned, and funded, it is perhaps not surprising that relatively low numbers of the 2024 Barometer survey respondents indicated national and EU-level authorities as being ‘not at all influential.’ After all, 77% of Barometer respondents report working for ‘public’ institutions or organisations, whose resources and priorities would naturally be linked to the interests of public authorities in a variety of ways. Additionally, the influence of the European Union on matters of internationalisation in higher education is longstanding. Yet, there are important distinctions and variations to highlight.

Reflecting on findings from the first edition of the EAIE Barometer in 2015 once again provides an interesting comparative perspective over time. Whilst in 2015 just 2% of respondents felt that the national policy level had no influence, this number has increased to 8% in 2024. Similarly, 3% felt EU-level policy had no influence in 2015, as compared to 9% in 2024. These are, of course, quite low percentages of respondents who see a complete lack of influence from these key actors. However, these statistical increases are worth noting, as well as continuing to track and attempting to better understand.

REGIONAL VARIATIONS

When considering the data from a geographical point of view, we see that national authorities are most often considered ‘not at all influential’ in Southern Europe (10%) (see **Figure 4**). Individual countries that stand out here are Serbia (23%), Croatia (20%) and Slovakia (18%). EU-level authorities are most often seen as ‘not at all influential’ in a different part of Europe, namely Western Europe (11%). Two countries for which we understandably see relatively high percentages linked to this topic are the United Kingdom (31%) and Switzerland (27%), both of which are not EU member states.

Figure 4

Influence of national and European-level authorities in driving institutions' internationalisation goals, by region (not at all influential)

(n=154, national; n=173, European-level).

Not at all influential		
Region	National authorities	European-level authorities
Eastern Europe	8%	6%
Northern Europe	5%	9%
Southern Europe	10%	7%
Western Europe	8%	11%
Western Asia	7%	4%

PERSPECTIVES BY ROLE, EXPERIENCE AND INSTITUTIONAL SIZE

When taking a more thorough look at those respondent groups that most often indicated national and/or European-level authorities being 'not at all influential', no convincing majorities jump out but there are some thoughtful observations to share. When it comes to type of institution, respondents from private and specialised institutions more often chose the 'not at all influential' option for both national and European-level influence, as compared to public institutions (which of course includes research universities and universities of applied sciences). It can also be said that the smaller the institution, the higher the percentage of respondents stating that these authorities are not of particular influence.

Meanwhile, looking at the different roles of respondents, 'Faculty member/academic staff' most often report that national authorities (10%) and European-level authorities (12%) are 'not at all influential.' Those between 11 - 15 years of experience within the IHE sector most often consider EU-level authorities as 'not at all influential' (12%), while those with 0-2 years of experience most often consider national authorities as lacking influence (10%).

LEADING' AND 'ABOVE AVERAGE' VERSUS 'BELOW AVERAGE' INSTITUTIONS

The available data on how respondents compare their institution's level of internationalisation to other institutions in their own country and across the EHEA also shows a bit of interesting detail. Respondents that believe their institution is leading/above average

within their own country less often state national authorities are ‘not at all influential’ (6%) than those that are linked to institutions that respondents consider to be below average (10%). Similarly, respondents perceiving their institution is below average compared to other institutions across the EHEA indicated twice as often that EU-level authorities are ‘not at all influential’ (14%) than those that consider their institution leading/above average (7%).

SOMEWHAT INFLUENTIAL/UNSURE

In addition to analysing the convincing majorities and stand-out answers in this data collection, it can also be useful to take a closer look at those respondents that registered neutral answers or seemed unsure about how to answer particular questions. These answer options might reflect a knowledge gap to be addressed, an opportunity to involve more stakeholders in certain processes or form the starting point for broader conversations.

PERSPECTIVES BY ROLE AND EXPERIENCE

Perhaps unsurprisingly, but nevertheless worth mentioning, the ‘unsure’ option for these particular questions was most often chosen by respondents that have been working in the field of international higher education for less than 5 years: 14% of those with 0 to 2 years of experience are ‘unsure’ about the influence of national authorities. Somewhat counterintuitively, another 19% of those with 3 to 5 years of experience are ‘unsure’ about European-level authority influence. Most respondents choosing the ‘unsure’ option are also not responsible for a budget. Regarding different roles of respondents, it is interesting to see that ‘Faculty member/academic staff’ most often picked the ‘unsure’ answer option for both national-level authority influence (14%) as well as European-level (16%). Interestingly, 16% of respondents describing themselves as ‘Professional Staff – Specialist/Coordinator’ also indicated they are ‘unsure’ about the influence of European-level actors. Perhaps these ‘specialists’ or ‘coordinators’ happen to work only on institution-specific or national-level topics, and therefore are unsure about the possible influence of European actors on their institution’s internationalisation goals.

REGIONAL VARIATIONS

The highest levels of uncertainty regarding national-level authority influence are linked to Sweden (16%), Croatia (16%) and Hungary (15%), while for the European-level authority influence this is (understandably) Switzerland (26%) and the UK (25%), followed by Latvia (24%) and, once again, Sweden (20%).

Next to the ‘unsure’ answer possibility, the survey also included a more neutral ‘somewhat influential’ option. When combining these percentages, which both show a certain level of uncertainty/neutrality, we can see an interesting variation between regions. Almost half of respondents from Northern Europe (46%) picked one of these answer options linked to the influence of European-level authorities (see **Figure 5**). This was significantly less the case for Western Asia (26%), where we see the lowest percentages of respondents registering ambivalence or uncertainty. In terms of individual countries, the ones that saw the highest percentages for that combination of ‘somewhat influential’ and ‘unsure’ in relation to national authorities are Slovenia (50%), Poland (49%), and Ukraine (44%). For EU-level authorities, both the UK and Switzerland pop up again, as expected, alongside several other countries, notably Denmark (57%), Sweden (48%) and Croatia (48%).

Figure 5

Influence of national and European-level authorities in driving institutions’ internationalisation goals, by region (somewhat influential & unsure)

(n=673, national; n=731, European-level)

Somewhat influential + Unsure		
Region	National authorities	European-level authorities
Eastern Europe	34%	29%
Northern Europe	34%	46%
Southern Europe	38%	35%
Western Europe	35%	41%
Western Asia	29%	26%

LEADING' AND 'ABOVE AVERAGE' VERSUS 'BELOW AVERAGE' INSTITUTIONS

The levels of uncertainty/neutrality also vary when comparing data from respondents that consider their institution as leading or above average on the national or EHEA level and those that consider their institution as below average. When it comes to perceptions of national authority influence, 31% of those at leading/above average institutions answered 'somewhat influential' and another 7% indicated being 'unsure'. Those at institutions that reported perceiving their institution as 'below average' more often picked these answer options, with 36% choosing 'somewhat influential' and 11% 'unsure'. In terms of European-level authority influence, we see roughly a similar picture for those at leading/above average institutions: 31% answered 'somewhat influential' and 9% 'unsure'. Yet, for those identifying their institution as 'below average' the percentages on European authority influence are somewhat higher: 41% picked 'somewhat influential' or 'unsure' (14%).

CONCLUSION

Overall, it seems that both national and European-level authorities are still considered as (highly) influential stakeholders when it comes to driving institutions' internationalisation goals, with national authorities more frequently viewed as influential than those at the European level. This viewpoint is more commonly supported by those with over 15 years of experience within the sector or in their current role, those holding leadership roles, those with responsibility for institutional budgets, those working at institutions with over 10,000 FTE students, and those that consider their institution as leading/above average within both a national and an EHEA context. Yet when looking back at past Barometer data, this influence seems to be slowly decreasing. It will be worthwhile to include a similar set of questions in the next edition of the EAIE Barometer to see how this trend may further develop in the years to come.

Whilst the percentages of respondents who see a complete lack of influence from national and/or European-level authorities are quite low, it is still worth noting these details and continuing to track and understand the source of these perceptions. It is also useful to take a closer look at those respondents that registered neutral answers or seemed unsure about how to answer questions about national or European-level influences on institutional goals or activities. Unsurprisingly, the 'unsure' option was most often chosen by respondents who have been working in the field of international higher education for a relatively short period of time (i.e. less than 5 years). It is, however, notable that almost half of the respondents from Northern Europe (46%) picked one of these answer options linked to the influence of European-level authorities, while this was significantly less the case for Western Asia (26%).

So, how can we attempt to explain these variations in perception over time and across countries/regions? Perhaps there is a certain maturing of internationalisation at the institutional level. Institutions might no longer need or look for guidance and support at the national level in the same ways they might have done so a decade ago. These variations could also be linked to changing national political landscapes whereby different priorities for higher education are now taking (or being perceived as taking) precedence over internationalisation, as we are seeing in various countries across the EHEA. In addition, limited availability of national funding or resources in some countries/regions may make European-level actors, for example, particularly valued and visible in different contexts.

Other issues worth reflecting on include how national and/or European-level initiatives for internationalisation can more effectively exert the influence they aspire to. Similarly, it may be important for policy actors to work in new and different ways to better ensure that stakeholders at institutional and organisational levels are more clearly aware of existing policies and what these policies are trying to achieve, as well as fostering feelings of closer connection to these efforts. In this particular data collection and analysis exercise, for example, academic staff and early career professionals stand out as two target groups that might benefit from being better informed about the links between their institutions' internationalisation activities and the aspirations of national and/or European-level authorities in this area.

Ultimately, there is relatively good news to report: policy efforts are largely considered to have a positive impact on internationalisation on the frontlines of higher education institutions and organisations across the EHEA. If and how this will continue to hold true into the future, however, remains an open question, especially in light of the quickly evolving and turbulent political contexts currently in evidence across Europe, and the indications that this influence may be less prominent today than it was a decade ago. As we consider the realities of the current moment and look toward the future, it is important to continue to note the variations in perception between countries and regions across the EHEA, as well as across the different profiles of Europe's community of international higher education professionals. Awareness of these distinctions and an ongoing commitment to exploring their source and effects can amplify our understanding of the crucial nexus between policy and practice in the internationalisation of European higher education.



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