

# **Institutional Diversity and Student Mobility Trends in Europe, a Longitudinal Approach**

Agata A. Lambrechts, Pinar Eldemir, Benedetto Lepori  
Institute of Communication and Public Policy, Università della Svizzera italiana, Lugano, Switzerland

## **Research Domains**

International contexts and perspectives (ICP)

## **Abstract**

The move or trend towards more internationality in European higher education has been a prominent feature in the literature and policy discourse particularly since the 1990s. The most emphasised dimension of internationalisation remains to be the physical mobility—in particular, that of students—across countries, which has been recently reiterated as a priority in the European strategy for universities. While national level analysis are now aplenty, studies exploring the nuances of student mobility trends at the institutional level are scarce. In this study, we aim to explore institutional-level effects on the student degree mobility to and within Europe. Specifically, we will conduct a cross-sectional analysis (descriptive analysis and multilevel regression with random country intercept) of internationalisation by institutional characteristics, and will employ a panel model, to analyse changes in the share of mobile students over the observed period of time (2011-2019).

## **Full paper**

## **Introduction**

‘Internationalisation’, that is the trend (Teichler, 1999; Jiang, 2010), move or process (Knight, 1997; Cremonini & Antonowicz, 2009) towards more ‘internationality’ became prominent in the policy

discourse on European higher education (HE) in the early 1990s (Teichler, 2015). As a phenomenon, internationalisation encompasses several different dimensions. Yet, the physical mobility across countries—in particular, that of students—continues to be emphasised the most (Teichler, 2017), as it is considered both a mechanism and a new form of identity capital driving the creation of the global knowledge economy and the fulfilment of personal aspirations (Morley et al., 2018).

Stimulating mobility of students has been recently reiterated as a priority in the European strategy for universities (European Commission, 2022), implemented through the European Universities initiative, in combination with Horizon Europe and other EU and national instruments. Two distinct areas of focus of European policies in relation to student mobility include:

1. intra-European internationalisation (or Europeanisation) that is increased mobility of European students (degree and credit), facilitated by the Bologna Process, programmes including Erasmus+ and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, and key initiatives, including the planned delivery of joint European degree through transborder institutional Alliances, as well as transparency tools including the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System and the European Qualifications Framework;
2. making the EU more competitive globally, including attracting and retaining talented international students, supported or facilitated, for example, through Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Degrees, the Study in Europe portal and a network of academic recognition centres.

De Wit et al. (2015) note that internationalisation strategies are contextualised by national policies, the type of institution, specific institutional context, and further at the level of education and programme (pp. 6-7). However, while the data on student mobility at a country level is published and analysed periodically by Eurostat, Eurydice and Eurostudent and HE researchers, publications exploring the nuances of student mobility trends—in particular, degree mobility—at the institutional level are scarce. This is due to historical limitations of widely available, disaggregated, comparable data. Since 2011, however, such data on students, including mobility

status, has been available through the European Tertiary Education Register (ETER), a register of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Europe. ETER currently covers 41 countries (with 3,439 HEIs), with nine years of data—with some exceptions—up to the academic year of 2019/2020. We are aware of and refer in our analysis to only one, albeit in-depth study carried out in relation to the EU context (Sánchez Barrioluengo & Flisi, 2017), with authors using ETER data from 2011 to 2014 combined with QS rankings and other data to assess the impact of institutional factors (teaching and research activities of HEIs and their reputation) on student mobility.

In this current-ongoing-longitudinal study, we extend the findings reported by Sánchez Barrioluengo & Flisi, using (expanded) ETER data, in combination with other public data sources, to analyse the patterns in the changing levels of internationality, including the pace of change, as part of the evolution of degree student mobility into and between European countries. We focus on the variation between and within countries, exploring the nuances of the student mobility landscape in relation to the HE institutional diversity.

## **Research Questions**

R.Q.1. Are certain types of HEIs more attractive to international students?

R.Q.2. Are certain types of HEIs more attractive to EU vs non-EU students?

R.Q.3. Do we observe different patterns over time depending on institutional type and characteristics?

## **Data and Methods**

To address the above questions, we will examine the 2011-2019 institutional-level ETER data, extended with additional data relating to EU vs non-EU status of international students, and combined with other datasets (e.g., Shanghai rankings, Leiden rankings, urbanisation and Point of Interest data). Countries selected for analysis will include EU Member States and EFTA-4 countries for which complete data on incoming degree mobile students and other essential characteristics are available. We will compare and validate

the institutional-level data with the UNESCO-UIS/OECD/Eurostat national-level data.

## **Analysis**

a) Cross-sectional analysis of internationalisation (measured by the share of international degree mobile students who have physically crossed a national border and moved to another country with the objective of studying, in the total student population) by institutional characteristics including:

- Size, research intensity, subject specialisation
- Geographical position (using dummy variables for border institutions)
- Country

We intend to conduct a descriptive analysis and multilevel regression with random country intercept (fractional logistics).

b) To analyse changes in the share of mobile students over the observed period of time, we will use a panel model.

## **References**

Cremonini, L., & Antonowicz, D. (2009). In the Eye of the Beholder? European Education, 4110.2753/EUE1056-4934410203

de Wit, H., & Hunter, F. (2015). The Future of Internationalization of Higher Education in Europe.85(Special Issue), 2-3.

European Commission (2022). Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a European strategy for universities (18.01.2022), COM(2022) 16 final.

Jiang, X. (2010). A Probe into the Internationalisation of Higher Education in the New Zealand Context.42(8), 881-897.

Knight, J. (1997). A Shared Vision? Stakeholders' Perspectives on the Internationalization of Higher Education in Canada. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 1(1), 27-44.

10.1177/102831539700100105

Sánchez Barrioluengo, M., & Flisi, S. (2017). Student mobility in tertiary education: institutional factors and regional attractiveness.

Publications Office of the European Union. Eur 28867 EN. Doi:

10.2760/675338

Teichler, U. (1999). Research on the relationships between higher education and the world of work: Past achievements, problems and new challenges. *Higher Education*, 38(2), 169-190.

10.1023/A:1003761214250

Teichler, U. (2015). Changing Perspectives: The Professional Relevance of Higher Education on the Way Towards the Highly-Educated Society. *50(4)*, 461-477.

Teichler, U. (2017). Internationalisation Trends in Higher Education and the Changing Role of International Student Mobility. *Journal of international Mobility*, 5(1), 177-216. doi:10.3917/jim.005.0179  
Retrieved from <https://www.cairn.info/revue-journal-of-international-mobility-2017-1-page-177.htm>