

6<sup>th</sup> IAU GLOBAL  
SURVEY REPORT

# Internationalization of Higher Education: Current Trends and Future Scenarios

[EXECUTIVE SUMMARY]

Giorgio Marinoni  
Siro Bartolome Pina Cardona

“The IAU 6<sup>th</sup> Global Survey on HE Internationalization represents a significant achievement at a time where the world and the notion of internationalization are increasingly fragmented. The report makes evident the contrasts and similarities across regions and therefore constitutes a significant instrument for university leaders to situate their own practices, approaches and assumptions about internationalization in a global context.”

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# INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

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# Introduction and methodology

In 2023, five years after the 5<sup>th</sup> edition, the International Association of Universities (IAU) conducted the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of the Global Survey on the internationalization of higher education. Five years is a sufficient period to follow changes taking place and to allow for meaningful comparisons over time; waiting any longer and changes may have been too great to allow for any insightful comparison.

The aim of the 6<sup>th</sup> IAU Global Survey is to draw a holistic picture of the internationalization of higher education around the world at a moment in time, and the report presents the analysis of data collected from HEIs around the world via an online questionnaire.

The report follows the same structure as the questionnaire, and after an overview of the statistical data and the profile of the responding institutions each of the eight sections covers a specific aspect of internationalization, as listed below:

- A. Importance, benefits and challenges to internationalization
- B. Internationalization governance
- C. Internationalization of teaching and learning: activities
- D. Internationalization of teaching and learning: internationalization of the curriculum at home
- E. Internationalization of research
- F. Internationalization and societal/community engagement
- G. Emerging issues and the future of internationalization

The 6<sup>th</sup> IAU Global Survey is a collaborative effort undertaken by the IAU and partners.

Sponsoring partners:

- Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF)
- Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU)
- Council of Europe (CoE)
- German Rectors' Conference (HRK)
- NAFSA: Association of International Educators
- Qatar Foundation (QF)
- UNIMED - Mediterranean Universities Union
- Unión de Universidades de América Latina y el Caribe (UDUAL)

Partners with in-kind contribution:

- Academy for research and higher education (ARES)
- Association of African Universities (AAU)
- Erasmus Student Network (ESN)
- European University Association (EUA)
- German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies (DZHW)

- Global Student Forum (GSF)
- Inter-American Organization for Higher Education (OUI-IOHE)
- National Interuniversity Council of Argentina (CIN))

In addition, the Center for International Higher Education (CIHE) at Boston College, and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto were partners in the survey in the framework of the Future of Internationalization Partnership (FIP) Project, a three-year project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and which began in May 2021.

The 6<sup>th</sup> IAU Global Survey was an online survey in three languages (English, French and Spanish). The questionnaire was created thanks to the support of an Advisory Committee of experts and partners representatives and was tested by a pilot group of institutions. It was used to collect data between 16 January and 16 June 2023.

HEIs were asked to provide data related to the academic year that started in 2021. HEIs were also asked to carry out internal consultation before submitting only one reply. This was to ensure that replies to the IAU Global Survey represented an institutional perspective and not a personal point of view.

After the completion of the data collection phase, the survey underwent a cleansing process to remove counterfeit responses (replies not originating from genuine HEIs), incomplete responses, and double/multiple replies. The results were then analysed and compiled in a full report and in the present Executive Summary.

Multiple rounds of consultation with the Advisory Committee contributed to the improvement and the development of the final version of the full report and the Executive Summary.

## Statistical data and profile of the responding institutions

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This part summarises the characteristics of the samples, such as the number and regional distribution of replies, the language in which respondents replied, their position within the institution and the units and/or individuals in the institution they consulted in order to reply to the questionnaire. The main data are reported below.

### *Number and regional distribution of replies*

- 722 HEIs from 110 countries and territories replied to the survey.
- In terms of percentage of replies, Europe and Latin America & the Caribbean are clearly overrepresented, North Africa & the Middle East is slightly overrepresented, while North America and especially Asia & Pacific are underrepresented. Sub-Saharan Africa is in line with the distribution of its HEIs in the WHED.

### *Language distribution of replies*

- The majority of HEIs (65%) replied to the survey in English, but the percentage of HEIs that replied in Spanish is also significant (26%). In comparison to the 5<sup>th</sup> IAU Global Survey, the percentage of HEIs that replied in French (9%) has substantially decreased. Translation of the survey into Spanish clearly helped with data collection from Latin America & the Caribbean.

### *Position of the respondents*

- More than 50% of respondents are administrators in the international office and 25% form part of the academic leadership.

### *Units/individuals inside the institution consulted to reply to the questionnaire*

- The consultation process inside institutions around the world is diverse. However, it is clear that it happened mainly between the international office and the academic leadership (heads and deputy heads of institutions) and that rarely it included other units/individuals. This result is symptomatic of a top-down approach to internationalization, which bears some risks of involvement and ownership by the whole academic community.

### *Institutional profiles*

- Typical profile of institutions from which replies were received: medium-small public institutions, more or less focused equally on both teaching and research and offering all three-degree types (Bachelor, Master, Doctorate).

### *Language usage as a medium of instruction across institutions*

- The overall majority of respondents (81%) report one official language as the primary medium of instruction at their respective institutions. Only in some cases did they report two or even three.

## **A. Importance, benefits and challenges to internationalization**

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Part A investigates the importance attributed to internationalization by academic leadership; the internal and external drivers, the benefits, the risks and challenges/obstacles to internationalization. This part is also present in previous editions of the survey and allows for comparison of the results and to study evolution over time of the above-mentioned aspects of internationalization. The main results are reported below.

### *Importance of internationalization*

- The level of importance of internationalization is high at the majority of HEIs (77%) and it has increased over the last five years across all types of HEIs, including those where the

level of importance was and still is low. Contrary to what was shown in the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the survey, this trend might help reduce inequalities between HEIs as internationalization may become important at all HEIs, even at those where it was not previously.

- The primary driver for the increase in the importance of internationalization at the global level is clearly the “Increased need to strategically connect with other HEIs globally”, underlying the strategic nature of internationalization as an intentional process undertaken by HEIs.

### *Drivers of internationalization*

- Institutional leadership and the international office are identified as the main internal drivers for internationalization.
- At the global level, it is difficult to identify the most important external drivers for internationalization as several were selected by similar percentages of HEIs (“Demand from foreign higher education institutions”, “National and international rankings”, “Global policies/agenda (including the UN Agenda)”, “Government policy (national/state/province/municipal)” and “Business and industry demand”). However, at the regional level there are interesting findings: “Demand from foreign higher education institutions” is the most important driver in Europe and Latin America & the Caribbean, even if by small margins, while “National and international rankings” is the most common driver, clearly in North Africa & the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa, and also in Asia & Pacific, but by a small margin. Finally, “Business and industry demand” is the top driver in North America.

### *Benefits of internationalization*

- “Enhanced international cooperation and capacity building” remains the most important benefit of internationalization at global level and in all regions except North America, as was the case in the 5<sup>th</sup> Global Survey. “Increased global, international and intercultural knowledge, skills and competences for both students and staff” is the second most important benefit at global level and the first in North America.

### *Risks of internationalization*

- There is no common institutional risk for HEIs at global level, but a variety of risks (e.g. “Increased workload for academic and administrative staff”, “Difficulty to combine/integrate it with other institutional priorities (e.g. diversity, equity, and inclusion and sustainable development)”), do have differing levels of importance at distinct HEIs. Europe and North America are the only two regions where one clear institutional risk (Increased workload for academic and administrative staff) emerges as the most important.
- Likewise for societal risks, no overall risk emerged as being common to the majority of HEIs, depicting a very diverse landscape of societal risks around the world. However, regional analysis reveals that “Brain drain” is clearly the most important risk in Sub-Saharan Africa, where it was selected by three quarters of HEIs.

### *Obstacles/challenges to internationalization*

- “Insufficient financial resources” is clearly the main internal obstacle to internationalization at global level and in all regions but North America, where it is second to “Competing priorities at institutional level”.



- “Limited funding to support internationalization efforts/to promote our institution internationally” is the most common external obstacle/challenge to internationalization at global level and in all regions but North America, where it is still common to the majority of HEIs and second to “Visa restrictions imposed by our country on foreign students, researchers and academics”.

## B. Internationalization governance

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This section investigates internationalization governance, putting emphasis on the strategic approach to internationalization. It also investigates internationalization activities and other aspects of internationalization such as geographic priorities, funding sources, recruitment and promotion policies of both academic and administrative staff and international partnerships. For some of these aspects (e.g. international partnerships) it also investigates the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. The main results are reported below.

### *Policy/strategy for internationalization*

- Over three-quarters of respondents (77%) have elaborated a strategy for internationalization.
- Europe has the highest percentage of HEIs indicating the presence of a policy/strategy (85%), and results for Europe are in line with earlier ones from the EUA Trends reports. Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest percentage of HEIs indicating the presence of a policy/strategy (61%), with a substantial portion of HEIs in the latter (28%) in the process of preparing it.

### *Status of the policy/strategy*

- 42% of respondents recently revised or issued their policy/strategy for internationalization, with an additional 29% currently undergoing revision, 19% stated that the policy/strategy is scheduled for future revisions, while only 10% reported no recent or anticipated changes.

### *COVID-19 crisis impact on the policy/strategy revision*

- The vast majority (71%) of HEIs indicated that the revision of their internationalization strategy was not due to the COVID-19 crisis.
- There are some interesting regional differences: 46% of HEIs in Asia & Pacific reported that the policy/strategy revision was due to COVID-19 but only 15% did so in North America.

### *Internationalization policy/strategy and activities*

- The policy/strategy for internationalization is institution wide in almost all HEIs that indicated having elaborated such a policy/strategy.
- A significant majority of HEIs (92%) have established dedicated offices or teams to oversee effective implementation of the policy/strategy.

- An international dimension is included in other institutional policies/strategies/plans at 83% of HEIs.
- 79% of the HEIs have defined clear targets and benchmarks to guide their progress within the policy/strategy.
- The policy/strategy/plan is in line with the national internationalization strategy (if one exists) at 77% of HEIs. Considering that the remaining 23% might not have a national internationalization strategy, this results in a very good alignment.
- A monitoring and evaluation framework to assess progress is present at 74% of HEIs.
- Slightly more than half of HEIs (54%) have allocated specific budgetary provisions for the implementation of their policy/strategy.
- The active involvement of students (student organisations and/or student representatives) is present at almost half of HEIs (48%).
- Only 36% of faculties/schools/departments have developed their own internationalization policies/strategies.
- At regional level, results are similar to those at global level, but with some variations, for instance, in Europe where involvement of students (student organisations and/or student representatives) in the design, evaluation, and implementation of the policy/strategy/plan is common (at 63% of HEIs), while in all other regions and particularly in North Africa & the Middle East (37%) and Latin America & the Caribbean (30%) it is not.
- Comparison with previous survey results reveals an increasing trend in the presence of a policy/strategy and dedicated offices or teams to oversee effective implementation of the policy/strategy, a stabilising trend for the presence of a monitoring framework and a decreasing trend for the presence of a dedicated budget.

### *Geographic priorities for internationalization*

- Globally, the majority of HEIs (59%) have geographic priorities for internationalization.
- At regional level there are some differences: in Sub-Saharan Africa, less than half of HEIs have geographic priorities (44%), in Asia & Pacific half of HEIs have them, while in all other regions the majority of HEIs have them with the highest percentage in North America (65%).
- Europe stands out as the most important region for internationalization, with 75% of respondents considering it “very important”.
- A clear regionalization trend emerges in Asia & Pacific, Latin America & the Caribbean and especially Europe where 90% of HEIs consider their own region “very important”. Regionalization is important also in Sub-Saharan Africa where HEIs consider their own region second in importance only to Europe.
- With the exception of intra-regional collaboration, Latin America & the Caribbean, North Africa & the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa are always considered the least important by all other regions and particularly by each other. All these regions are considered part of the “Global South” and the results show how inter-regional “South-South” collaboration is definitely not considered a priority.

### *Importance of funding sources for international activities*

- The general institutional budget is the main funding source in all regions, chosen by more than 60% of HEIs in all regions and as much as 74% of HEIs in Latin America & the Caribbean.
- Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region where other two sources (“International organisations (World Bank, European Union, ASEAN, etc.)” and “Foreign governments (bilateral cooperation and aid and development)”) are considered “very important” by the majority of HEIs (56% and 51% respectively).

## *Recruitment and promotion policies*

- At the majority of HEIs, international experience is either considered an asset or not at all both for academic (57%) and administrative staff (68%). It is a requirement only for a tiny minority.
- Almost half of HEIs indicated that knowledge of at least one foreign language is at least partly required for recruitment and promotion of academic staff. This percentage is much lower for administrative staff.
- The regional analysis reveals interesting differences among regions, both for international experience and knowledge of at least one foreign language, and for academic and administrative staff.
- North Africa & the Middle East, followed by Europe and Asia & Pacific, are the regions valuing most both international experience and knowledge of at least one foreign language for both academic and administrative staff. On the contrary, North America is the region that values these categories the least, both for academic and administrative staff.

## *Priority of internationalization activities*

- No one stood out as being chosen by a majority of HEIs, showing that there is no overall common priority activity around the world; activities that are prioritised may be determined by differing contexts.
- Among these activities, “Outgoing credit-seeking student mobility (student exchanges)” was identified as the most common internationalization activity, with 44% of HEIs selecting it as one of their priorities. Following closely, “International research collaboration and outputs (e.g., international co-publications)” was considered a priority by 39% of HEIs.
- Comparison with previous global survey results reveals that these two activities have remained the most important over time.
- In some regions there is clearly one activity which is chosen by the majority of respondents as the most important. This is the case in North America, where “Incoming degree-seeking student mobility (recruitment of international students)” is chosen as the most important activity by a striking 74% of HEIs. It is also the case in Latin America & the Caribbean where 65% of HEIs chose “Outgoing credit-seeking student mobility (student exchanges)” as the most important, and in Sub-Saharan Africa where 65% of HEIs choose “International research collaboration and outputs” as the most important.

## *Change in importance of internationalization activities in the last five years*

- “International development and capacity building projects” saw the most substantial increase in importance, noted by 63% of respondents. This is interesting, as respondents to the 6<sup>th</sup> Global Survey identify “Enhanced international cooperation and capacity building” as the top expected benefit of internationalization. “International development and capacity building projects” is not one of the priority activities, but it is the one that has increased the most in importance over the last five years. This means that even if at present there is still a discrepancy between prioritised activities and expected benefits, there is a movement towards convergence.
- There is a degree of subjectivity when it comes to the position of respondents but the differences are not huge and overall “International development and capacity building projects”, “International research collaboration and outputs (e.g. international co-publications)” and “Outgoing mobility opportunities/learning experiences for students (study abroad, international internships and placements, etc.)” are the activities that have increased in importance the most.

- “International development and capacity building projects” is the activity that has increased the most in importance at private HEIs and regionally in North Africa & the Middle East and Asia & Pacific.
- “International research collaboration and outputs (e.g. international co-publications)” is the activity that has increased the most in importance at public HEIs and regionally in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- “Outgoing mobility opportunities/learning experiences for students (study abroad, international internships and placements, etc.)” is the activity that has grown in importance the most in Europe, Latin America & the Caribbean and North America.

### *Changes in international partnerships in the last five years*

- The number of international partnerships in the last five years has increased at the majority of HEIs in all regions of the world, from 62% of HEIs in Latin America & the Caribbean to 79% in Asia & Pacific.

### *The impact of COVID-19 on international partnerships*

- Globally, half the respondents (50%) indicated that changes in international partnerships were not primarily a result of the COVID-19 crisis. On the other hand, 34% believed that the crisis had influenced changes to some extent, 11% perceived a large extent of influence stemming from the crisis, while only 5% asserted that the changes were definitely a consequence of the crisis.
- Private HEIs have been affected more than public HEIs by the COVID-19 crisis when it comes to the change in the number of international partnerships, as 56% of them report that changes in international partnerships were due to COVID-19 while only 46% of public report this.
- Latin America & the Caribbean is the region reporting the greatest impact of COVID-19, with 67% of HEIs reporting that the changes in the number of international partnerships were due to COVID-19, although the majority of them (43%) reported that changes were due to COVID-19 only to some extent. In Sub-Saharan Africa, 56% of respondents indicated that changes in international partnerships were a result of the COVID-19 crisis and it is in this region that the highest percentage of HEIs reported that the changes were definitely a consequence of the crisis (13%).

## **C. Internationalization of teaching and learning: activities**

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The present part is the first part that investigates internationalization of teaching and learning and it focuses on internationalization activities such as collaborative degree programmes, Trans-National Education (TNE) and virtual internationalization. For some of these aspects (e.g. TNE), it also investigates the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. The main results are reported below.

### *Collaborative degree programmes*

- The majority of HEIs at global level (63%) offer either joint degree programmes, or dual/double and multiple degree programmes, or both types of programmes with international partners. Collaborative degrees are more common at public than at

private HEIs (67% vs. 57%). However, at regional level there are substantial differences with 88% of HEIs offering them in North America but only 49% of HEIs in Latin America & the Caribbean.

- The majority of HEIs offer dual/double and multiple degree programmes (56%), while almost half (49%) offer joint degree programmes.
- More public than private HEIs offer both joint degrees (52% vs. 45% of all respondents) and dual/double and multiple degrees (60% vs. 49% of all respondents).

### *Changes in collaborative degree programmes in the last five years*

- For both types of collaborative degrees, half or slightly more than half of HEIs reported an increase in numbers, while the others reported stability. Very few HEIs reported a decline in numbers.
- Higher percentages of public HEIs are reporting an increase in the number of collaborative degrees.
- Asia & Pacific distinguish itself as the only region where the majority of HEIs reported stability in collaborative degrees, both for joint and dual/double and multiple degree programmes. In all other regions dual/double and multiple degree programmes increased in numbers at the biggest group of HEIs, while for joint degree programmes this is true only in North Africa & the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe.

### *Impact of online collaboration on collaborative degree programmes*

- About half of respondents offering collaborative degrees indicated that the introduction or increase of online collaboration has influenced collaborative degrees.
- Online collaboration had an impact on collaborative degrees at the majority of private HEIs (57%) but not at public ones (46%).
- At regional level, two groups of regions emerge: in the first group, composed of Europe and North America, the majority of respondents reported no significant impact from online collaboration on collaborative degree; in the second group, composed of all other regions, the opposite is true.

### *Consequences of the increase in online collaboration on collaborative degree programmes*

- Globally, the increase in online collaboration has introduced several challenges and changes for academic institutions, with the most common being that this increase has presented challenges for academic staff in adopting new teaching methods.
- At regional level, the above-mentioned conclusion is true in all regions except North America. In North America the majority of HEIs indicated that the increase in online collaboration has led to the inclusion of a new online component to existing joint degree programmes with international partners, this is true also in Asia & Pacific, North Africa & the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa, but not in Europe and Latin America & the Caribbean.

### *Transnational education (TNE)*

- Only 27% respondents reported that their institution is involved in transnational education (TNE), adding that the adoption of such an internationalization practice at global level is not yet widespread.
- Overall, the adoption of TNE by region shows varying rates but, similar to the global context, remains relatively limited across all regions.

## *Types of transnational education (TNE)*

- Among institutions engaged in TNE, Articulation Programs and Joint Universities are the most common, while Franchise Programs and International Branch Campuses are the least common. Nonetheless, all types of TNE showed an increased importance at global level.
- Private and public HEIs show a similar pattern, with Articulation Programs and Joint Universities more common than Franchise Programs and International Branch Campus. However, for private HEIs all types of TNE have increased in importance at the majority of HEIs that have them, while for public HEIs only the importance of Articulation Programs and Joint Universities has grown over the past five years, while for Franchise Programs and International Branch Campus it has not changed.

## *The role of COVID-19 on the changes in different TNE types*

- Globally, respondents split in two, with almost half of HEIs reporting that changes in different TNE types were due to COVID-19.
- Private HEIs have been affected more by COVID-19 than public HEIs when it comes to TNE. The influence of the COVID-19 crisis on TNE involvement exhibits strong regional variations. Notably, North Africa & the Middle East and Latin America & the Caribbean have emerged as the regions most impacted by the crisis. Conversely, North America stands out as the region with the least impact, followed by Sub-Saharan Africa, and subsequently Europe.

## *Virtual internationalization*

- Globally, a substantial majority (77%) of respondents affirm their institutions' engagement with virtual internationalization opportunities.
- Globally, the majority of all HEIs that replied to the survey offer virtual exchanges (69%), COIL (60%) and online preparatory courses (56%), but not MOOCs (46%) and online degree programmes offered by institution to students in other countries (45%).
- At regional level, the majority of HEIs engage in virtual internationalization in all regions, but with some differences, from 58% in North Africa & the Middle East to almost all HEIs in Latin America & the Caribbean (91%).
- Virtual exchanges are the most common activity in all regions, offered by a minimum of 53% of HEIs in North America to a maximum of 84% of HEIs in Latin America & the Caribbean.

## *Change in importance of virtual internationalization opportunities over the past five years*

- At global level, all activities also increased in importance over the past five years with virtual exchanges being the activity that increased in importance at the highest percentage of HEIs (80%).
- At regional level, online preparatory courses (language training, etc.) offered by the institution to students in other countries, Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) and virtual exchanges have increased in importance at the majority of HEIs in all regions.

## *The role of COVID-19 on changes in importance of virtual internationalization opportunities*

- Globally, a substantial majority of participants (87%) indicated that changes in importance of virtual internationalization opportunities and COVID-19 are linked to different degrees.

- In all regions the majority of HEIs reported that changes in importance of virtual internationalization opportunities and COVID-19 are linked to different degrees, with Latin America & the Caribbean being the region with the highest percentage of HEIs reporting a link between COVID-19 and changes in importance of virtual internationalization opportunities, with 24% of HEIs indicating that changes were definitely due to COVID-19, and as many as 45% reporting that changes were due to COVID-19 to a large extent.

## D. Internationalization of teaching and learning: internationalization of the curriculum at home

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The present part focuses on internationalization of the curriculum at home investigating topics such as institution-wide international, intercultural or global learning outcomes or graduate capabilities, the change in importance over the past five years of internationalization of the curriculum at home, of ways to internationalize curriculum and of extra-curricular activities.

The main results are reported below.

### *Change in importance of internationalization of the curriculum at home over the past five years*

- 75% of respondents acknowledged a noticeable increase in the importance of internationalizing the curriculum at home within their institution over the past five years.
- Across all regions, a predominant majority of respondents indicated an increase in the importance of internationalizing the curriculum at home with a noticeable emphasis on somewhat increased significance.

### *Change in importance of ways to internationalize curriculum over the last five years*

- “Online activities that develop international perspectives of students at home” which encompassed practices such as virtual exchanges, COIL, online collaborative international projects, and virtual international internships, is the activity that increased in importance at most HEIs in all regions of the world.
- There are some interesting regional differences – while in North America the focus is mainly on “Online activities that develop international perspectives of students at home (e.g. virtual exchange, COIL, online collaborative international projects; virtual international internships, etc.)”, in all other regions there is a broader spectrum of activities that HEIs consider tools for internationalization of the curriculum at home.

### *Institution-wide international, intercultural or global learning outcomes or graduate capabilities*

- Slightly over half of respondents (51%) reported having defined international, intercultural or global learning outcomes or graduate capabilities.
- International, intercultural or global learning outcomes or graduate capabilities are more common at private HEIs (61%) than at public ones (44%) and the approach taken by private and public HEIs is different, more centralised at the institutional level for private HEIs and more devolved to faculty level for public ones.

- The regional analysis underscores the diverse approaches and priorities that institutions adopt in integrating international, intercultural or global competencies into their graduates' learning experiences. Asia & Pacific and North Africa & the Middle East come out as the most advanced regions in terms of defining learning outcomes, but with different approaches, at the institutional or national levels. On the contrary, North America is the region with the least development of such learning outcomes.
- The results of the 6<sup>th</sup> Global Survey indicate progress with respect to the definition of learning outcomes related to international, intercultural or global competencies of graduates, as the percentage of HEIs having defined them grew to 51% from 38% at the times of the 5<sup>th</sup> Global Survey.

### *Change in importance of extra-curricular activities over the last five years*

- “Interaction with students in other countries using virtual internationalization”, “Events that provide inter-cultural/international experiences on campus or in the local community” and “Intercultural skills-building workshops for staff and students” are the activities that have increased in importance over the last five years at the majority of HEIs in all regions of the world.

## **E. Internationalization of research**

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The present part investigates internationalization of research, focusing on aspects such as the teaching/research focus of institutions, involvement in international research, main sources of funding for international research and the effect of changes in political relations between countries on internationalization of research. The main results are reported below.

### *Teaching/research-focused institutions*

- The majority of respondents (65%) come from institutions that focus more or less equally on both teaching and research.
- Private HEIs that replied to the survey are more teaching-oriented than public HEIs.
- Despite the fact that the majority of respondents in all regions come from institutions that focus more or less equally on both teaching and research, there are regional differences when it comes to the percentage of predominantly teaching-oriented HEIs with Latin America & the Caribbean being the region with the highest percentage of predominantly teaching-focused institutions (42%) and Sub-Saharan Africa the one with the least (9%).

### *Involvement in international research*

- There are substantial differences in the approach to internationalization of research depending on the teaching/research focus of HEIs.
- Public HEIs are more involved in international research than private ones.
- HEIs involved in a range of disciplinary and/or multidisciplinary international research; projects and collaborations is the biggest group in all regions except Sub-Saharan Africa.
- In Sub-Saharan Africa more than half of HEIs (56%) have very little international research and it is mainly conducted by individual researchers.
- The current edition of the survey identifies a rise in institutions engaged in a wide spectrum of disciplinary and/or multidisciplinary international research projects and collaborations, with 31% reporting such involvement, compared to 24% in the 5<sup>th</sup> edition.



### *Main sources of funding for international research*

- The three main sources of funding for international research are: grants from international organisations and foreign funding governmental agencies, grants from national governmental agencies and the institution's own resources.
- The teaching/research focus of HEIs seems to impact mainly on the capacity to obtain grants from national or international agencies, with predominantly research-focused HEIs in a more favourable position than predominantly teaching-focused HEIs, which have to rely more on the use of the institution's own resources.
- Public HEIs have a higher capacity in attracting grants from national and international agencies compared to private HEIs, which are almost obliged to rely on their own resources to conduct international research.
- There are substantial differences between different world regions in terms of the main sources of funding for international research, varying from grants from national governmental agencies in Europe and North America, to institutional own resources in all other regions.
- The comparison with the results of the 5<sup>th</sup> Global Survey suggests that access to grants from international organisations and foreign funding governmental agencies has decreased, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa and as consequence HEIs have to rely more on their own institutional funding to conduct international research.

### *Effect of changes in political relations between countries on internationalization of research*

- Only in Europe (58%) and North America (60%) did the majority of HEIs report an effect from changes in political relations between countries on internationalization of research.
- Caution should be used in interpreting the results of this question as the analysis of replies reveals that, unfortunately, there is a level of inconsistency in the way HEIs have replied to the question.

## **F. Internationalization and societal/community engagement**

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The present part investigates the link between internationalization and societal/community engagement: if it exists, how it is implemented and the impact of internationalization on promoting intercultural understanding and fighting racism/xenophobia. The main results are reported below.

### *Link between internationalization and societal/community engagement*

- The majority of respondents (60%) indicated that there is an explicit link between internationalization and societal/community engagement at their institutions. However, only 22% conduct any assessment proving that activities are a means to benefit the local community.
- Asia & Pacific is the region where the highest percentage of HEIs (69%) indicated that there is an explicit link between internationalization and societal/community engagement. However, the highest percentage of HEIs that also conduct assessment proving this is found in Sub-Saharan Africa (30%).

### *Ways of linkage between internationalization and societal/community engagement*

- HEIs are using many ways to link internationalization and societal/community engagement, the most common ones being the organisation of events involving international speakers from other countries, the institution's commitment to regional and neighbouring areas, and the active development and promotion of international development cooperation.
- Overall, activities that are common are common in all regions, but there are some exceptions, for instance “Teachers and researchers are encouraged to provide services or carry out other community engagement activities with foreign partners” is the most common activity in Sub-Saharan Africa, but not so much in the other regions.

### *Internationalization impact on intercultural understanding and racism/xenophobia*

- The majority of respondents (84%) indicated that internationalization has played a positive role in promoting intercultural understanding and reducing racism and xenophobia not only within their institutions but also in the local community.
- Despite some minor differences, the regional results confirm the overall positive impact of internationalization on promoting intercultural understanding and reducing racism and xenophobia in all regions of the world.

## **G. Emerging issues and the future of internationalization**

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As the world becomes more interconnected, HEIs must grapple with a rapidly evolving landscape shaped by globalisation, sustainability imperatives, the rising importance of equity and inclusion, as well as shifting paradigms in internationalization. This final section of the 6<sup>th</sup> Global Survey examines how institutions are navigating these emerging challenges and reimagining their internationalization strategies in alignment with the pressing priorities of the future. The main results are reported below.

### *Institutional policies/measures for refugees and migrants*

- Just under half of HEIs (46%) indicated that they had implemented special policies or measures in the last five years to accommodate the increasing numbers of refugees and migrants seeking enrolment in higher education. Such measures are more common at public than private HEIs.
- Europe stands out as the region with the highest percentage of institutions that have adopted such measures/policies, followed by North Africa & the Middle East. These two are the only regions where the majority of HEIs have policies/measures in place for refugees and migrants.
- Only 30% of HEIs in Sub-Saharan Africa and 21% in Asia & Pacific have adopted measures to support refugees, even though, according to UNHCR, they are, respectively, the first and third host region by number of refugees.
- Two-thirds (63%) of HEIs that have special policies or measures in place to support refugees/migrants indicated taking direct action that support refugee/migrant students, academic, and administrative staff as a prominent policy or measure adopted by their institutions. The only other activity that is common at the majority of HEIs is the creation of scholarships/grants for refugee students, academic, and administrative staff (53%).

- The most common policies/measures adopted by public and private HEIs are different. Public HEIs are more oriented toward direct actions that support refugee/migrant students, academic, and administrative staff, offer specific support to refugees/migrants, and host academic, researchers, or administrative staff with a refugee background. Private HEIs are more oriented towards working with NGOs and civil society groups to facilitate refugee/migrant integration.
- The number of replies in some regions is low and therefore the regional analysis must be interpreted with care, but it does show some variability in terms of measures implemented between different regions.

### *Link between internationalization and sustainable development*

- The majority of HEIs (59%) link internationalization and sustainable development beyond climate action.
- More public HEIs are linking internationalization and sustainable development than private HEIs.
- Asia & Pacific is clearly the region where the link between internationalization and sustainable development is more advanced, as 52% of institutions in that region indicated that they have a policy or strategy in place to use internationalization as a means to support sustainable development.
- North America is the only region where the percentage of HEIs linking internationalization and sustainable development is less than 50%.

### *Internationalization and diversity, equity and inclusion*

- The overall majority of institutions (87%) confirmed that their internationalization policies and activities take into account diversity, equity and inclusion.
- The target group for equity and inclusion varies according to region: “People from low economic backgrounds” is the priority target group in Latin America & the Caribbean, Asia & Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa; “People with disabilities” in Europe and in North Africa & the Middle East and “Ethnic/cultural minorities” in North America.

### *Expected future challenges to recruit international degree-seeking students*

- Lack of financial support emerged as the most prominent challenge, the only one common to a majority of respondents (56%).
- Lack of financial support is the most important challenge identified by all regions except North Africa & the Middle East. In this region, along with Europe, there is no single common challenge identified by respondents, which depicts a very varied landscape of challenges faced.

### *Future priorities for internationalization*

- There is no common future priority at the global level.
- While in Asia & Pacific and Europe, there is no common future priority for the majority of HEIs, in all other regions there is at least one.
- “Academic staff training in international, intercultural and global competencies” is the most pressing future priority in Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa & the Middle East, and to a lesser extent also in Latin America & the Caribbean, where the majority of HEIs also identify another future priority as “Internationalization and interculturalization of the curriculum at home for all students”. In North America, “Increasing the number of incoming degree-seeking international students” is the most pressing future priority.

# CONCLUSION

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## Conclusion

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The 6<sup>th</sup> IAU Global Survey on the Internationalization of Higher Education sheds some light on the most important trends and evolutions in internationalization around the world and provides for some interesting comparisons between private and public HEIs and between HEIs across different regions. It also provides insights on the evolution of certain trends over time by comparing the results with previous editions of the survey whenever this is possible.

It is worth mentioning that there is an increasing level of importance paid to internationalization by academic leaders around the world, and especially so at institutions that previously considered internationalization of low importance. This result reverses a worrying trend of growing inequality among HEIs that was highlighted in the 5<sup>th</sup> edition. We should also mention that HEIs around the world see increased international cooperation and capacity building as the main benefit of internationalization, a trend already highlighted by the 5<sup>th</sup> global survey and confirmed by this 6<sup>th</sup> edition. Although in terms of priority there is still a focus on student mobility, international cooperation and capacity building are the activities that have increased the most over the last five years, showing a move towards a convergence between expected benefits and activities to achieve them. The survey also shows that the world is diverse and that for some aspects of internationalization, there is no common denominator at the global level, as exemplified for instance by the great variety of risks and challenges/obstacles. In some cases, the regional analysis helps explain this great variety, for instance with the clear identification of “Brain drain” as the most important risk in Sub-Saharan Africa, but in other cases diversity persists also at the regional level, demonstrating that multiple factors other than the geographic location of institutions are important in defining trends.

The responses also underline the widespread nature of internationalization as a strategic process, but at the same time they highlight a number of limitations, especially in terms of funding. They also show how internationalization is still a top-down approach mainly steered by academic leadership and the internationalization office, and call for reflection on the possible risks of lack of engagement from the rest of the academic community that such an approach implies. They also show that there is still a geographic imbalance at the global level, with regions in the Global North (Europe and North America) still attracting the most attention, while South-South cooperation, besides intra-regional, is still not considered a priority. The survey also confirms a tendency towards regionalisation in some regions but not in others, and the specificity of North America as a region, which more often than not, presents divergent results from other regions.

Another interesting result is that the role played by the COVID-19 pandemic in driving changes in internationalization has been much less important than expected. The pandemic has had a role in driving some changes, especially the development of virtual internationalization, but it has not been the only or the most deciding factor behind the evolution of internationalization over the last five years.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Global Survey also provides insights into more detailed aspects of internationalization in teaching and learning, research and society/community engagement, especially links between internationalization and important priorities such as sustainable development, diversity, equity and inclusion. Among these results, we see the positive role played by internationalization in fighting racism/xenophobia, promoting intercultural understanding, and achieving sustainable development.

In summing up, the 6<sup>th</sup> IAU Global Survey paints a picture of the current state of play of internationalization around the world, its recent evolution, and the possible ways it could evolve

in the future. The survey is by no means exhaustive and it no doubt asks more questions than it answers; for many aspects, the survey results provide a starting point for more research. Despite its limitations and possible need for improvement, the 6<sup>th</sup> IAU Global Survey remains the only comprehensive institutional survey on internationalization at the global level and provides invaluable information unavailable anywhere else. One worrying signal to emerge from the 6<sup>th</sup> IAU Global Survey is decreasing participation both at the global level and in specific regions of the world. For such an endeavour to be successful, participation is paramount. It is only with the contribution of HEIs themselves that the survey can become an important source of information. At the IAU, we hope that this worrying trend of decreasing participation will be reversed in future editions of the survey and we call upon HEIs around the world to join forces with us to help understand the evolution of internationalization.

As we conclude the report, it is worth saying that, differently from previous editions, the current version of the report is freely available in [electronic format](#). IAU took this decision to offer free access to the higher education community as the 6<sup>th</sup> IAU Global Survey Report is an invaluable resource, and should serve as a catalyst for research, practice, and policy evolution in the realm of global academic internationalization. It beckons researchers, practitioners and policymakers to engage with its insights, not only for deeper investigation but also to aid strategic policy transformation.

The 6<sup>th</sup> IAU Global Survey report is by no means an end point, but a starting point for more research and action. The IAU will continue its research endeavours to understand internationalization around the world and will use the survey results to improve its services and programmes for the benefit of the global academic community and for society at large.



“A reliable roadmap for learning and enhancing the internationalization process in higher education.”

**Inga Žalėnienė,**

Rector, Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania

“An invaluable and undeniable source for researchers and practitioners involved in the study or management of internationalization.”

**Jocelyne Gacel-Ávila,**

Professor and UNESCO Chair on Internationalization of Higher Education and Global Citizenship, University of Guadalajara, Mexico

In its Strategy 2030, the International Association of Universities (IAU) put renewed attention on the inclusive nature of the internationalization process, both in terms of people and ideas, and on its ultimate goal: societal benefit. To reach this ultimate goal, the IAU has established strategic objectives, the first of which is that HEIs and higher education stakeholders around the world have a clear understanding of internationalization and are aware of the latest trends and developments. Conducting research and the global surveys on internationalization are the main tools at IAU's disposal for achieving this objective.

The IAU 6<sup>th</sup> Global Survey on the Internationalization of Higher Education, conducted in 2023, received responses from 722 higher education institutions (HEIs) in 110 countries and territories. The resulting survey report published in 2024 analyses the findings in order to present both global and regional trends. Furthermore, the report compares current findings with data from the IAU's previous Global Surveys on Internationalization in order to explore long-term changes occurring in the internationalization field.

The study highlights interesting comparisons between private and public HEIs across different regions and looks for common understandings of the potential benefits, risks, and challenges facing internationalization at the global level. The report further provides insights into intersectional aspects of internationalization in teaching and learning, research and society/community engagement, and links between internationalization and societal priorities such as sustainable development, diversity, equity, and inclusion. In doing so, the 6<sup>th</sup> IAU Global Survey paints a picture of the current state of internationalization around the world, its recent transformations, and its possible evolutions moving forward.

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