Coping with COVID-19: International higher education in Europe

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INTRODUCTION

At the time of publication of this report, the COVID-19 outbreak is upending daily life across Europe and around the world. As of 22 March 2020, confirmed cases worldwide totaled over 294,000, and deaths from the disease had nearly reached 13,000. More than 185 countries, areas or territories had been affected by the outbreak (World Health Organization, 2020a). The rapid spread of the disease across a wide geographic area prompted the World Health Organization to declare COVID-19 a pandemic on 11 March 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020b).

The social, political, economic and educational impacts of this situation have been widespread and are unprecedented in the modern era. In response, the EAIE, as the voice of the European international higher education community, has undertaken an initiative in recent weeks to gather preliminary data on the effects of this public health crisis on the sector. The goal of this exercise is to help shape our collective understanding of how the international education enterprise in Europe is being affected by these developments.

This effort to foster clearer understanding is extremely important. Insights into both the responses that institutions are taking to address these emerging circumstances, and the gaps in information and support they are experiencing, may serve to inform and inspire peer learning, foster innovations in policy and practice, and stimulate momentum to create or demand needed change. At a minimum, the data and analysis provided by this report can serve as a particular moment-in-time (*ie* early 2020) record of the realities faced by the international education community in Europe in relation to this serious and multi-faceted phenomenon, against which future benchmarking and reflection may be undertaken.

There are clearly limitations to the analysis offered here. Perhaps most fundamental is the difficulty of aligning data collected even just two weeks ago with the fast-moving nature of this situation today. Indeed, realities, regulations and responses have been evolving daily, if not hourly in some cases, over the past several weeks. Even still, the knowledge gained from this exercise can help us make sense of how our community is experiencing this highly disruptive and unsettling public health event. Ideally, this baseline of understanding will provide us with meaningful indications of how we can support one another through these difficult moments and leverage the lessons learned in this situation in ways that substantively improve our ability to face similar crises in the future.

THE EAIE COVID-19 SURVEY

During the period 19 February to 6 March 2020, the EAIE administered an online survey containing a total of 15 closed and open-ended questions focused on various aspects of institutional experience with the COVID-19 outbreak. The target group for the survey was individuals working in higher education institutions (HEIs) in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Participation in the survey was promoted through emails to the EAIE database, the EAIE member and leadership newsletters, as well as via social media.

A total of 805 complete and usable surveys were received from individuals working in HEIs across the EHEA. These completed survey responses came from 38 different countries (see Figure 1).
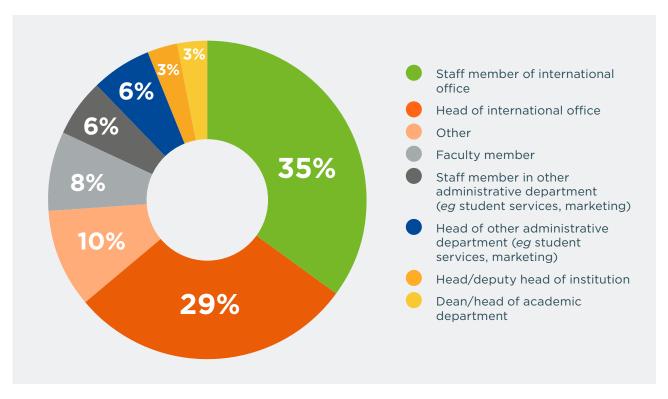
Figure 1

Percentage of respondents per country

Country	Percentage of total respondents	Country	Percentage of total respondents
Albania	0.1%	Kazakhstan	0.4%
Austria	3.9%	Latvia	0.1%
Belgium (Flemish Community)	3.0%	Liechtenstein	0.1%
Belgium (French Community)	0.9%	Lithuania	1.2%
Bulgaria	0.2%	Luxembourg	0.1%
Croatia	0.4%	Netherlands	13.3%
Cyprus	0.2%	Norway	2.9%
Czech Republic	3.5%	Poland	2.5%
Denmark	2.4%	Portugal	1.5%
Estonia	0.1%	Romania	1.9%
Finland	3.6%	Russian Federation	1.1%
France	9.9%	Serbia	0.1%
Georgia	0.1%	Slovak Republic	0.4%
Germany	12.0%	Slovenia	0.5%
Greece	0.4%	Spain	6.6%
Hungary	1.9%	Sweden	3.7%
Iceland	0.1%	Switzerland	3.7%
Ireland	2.0%	Turkey	3.2%
Italy	6.7%	United Kingdom	5.2%

The countries that provided the largest numbers of responses – France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom – together accounted for just over 53% of the total responses, but more than 10 responses were received per country from an additional 15 countries.[1]

Furthermore, the perspectives of individuals working at 628 different HEIs are represented in the responses. A majority of these – nearly two thirds of respondents, as seen in Figure 2 – identified as staff members or heads of international offices. An additional 36% represent different institutional roles, ranging from head or deputy head of institution, to faculty members, deans or heads of academic units and other administrative unit staff members, among others.

Figure 2

Respondents' institutional roles *(n=805)*

The broad geographic reach of the survey and the wide array of institutions, roles and profiles represented among respondents bring diversity of experience and insight to this report, which focuses on the following areas of interest:
• Response plans and information dissemination efforts
• Inbound and outbound mobility effects
• Campus realities and dynamics
• Mid- to longer-term considerations and overarching considerations
• Key takeaways

1 The 15 additional countries from which 10 or more responses were received are Austria, Belgium (Flemish Community), Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey.
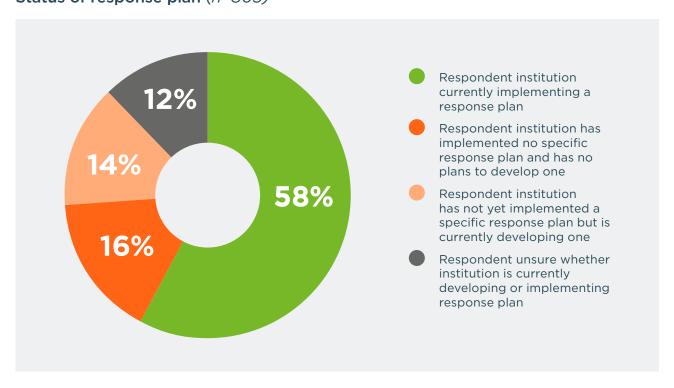
RESPONSE PLANS AND INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

Public health crises, particularly in relation to communicable conditions like COVID-19, require stakeholders to take specific kinds of action to contain the spread of the disease. Key aspects of this work typically involve determining how best to organise the response, as well as what kinds of information to share and with whom. To understand how these dynamics are playing out at European HEIs, the EAIE survey asked respondents to indicate where they felt their institution fell along a continuum of response plan development and implementation. The survey also asked respondents to explain (in an open-ended format) what measures, if any, their institution was currently taking to inform stakeholders (students, administrative and academic staff, the local community *etc*) of the institution's position on the COVID-19 outbreak.

RESPONSE PLANS

As indicated in Figure 3, nearly 60% of survey respondents report that their institutions are **currently implementing a COVID-19 response plan.**

Figure 3

Status of response plan *(n=805)*

- **58%** Respondent institution currently implementing a response plan
- **16%** Respondent institution has implemented no specific response plan and has no plans to develop one
- **14%** Respondent institution has not yet implemented a specific response plan but is currently developing one
- **12%** Respondent unsure whether institution is currently developing or implementing response plan

The spread of countries reporting response plan implementation is quite wide, 31 countries in total, as is the case of the country spread across the other categories of response plan status:

- Respondents from 24 countries report being **unsure** if their institution is currently developing or implementing a COVID-19 response plan.
- Respondents from 27 countries indicate that their institution has **no plans to develop a response plan.**
- Respondents from 29 countries indicate their institution is **currently developing** such a plan.

From this perspective, the realities of response planning or response plan implementation are not necessarily clustered along particular geographic lines, but are quite disperse.

INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

The survey also asked respondents – in an open-ended format – to indicate what measures, if any, their institution has been taking to inform stakeholders of the institution's position on the COVID-19 outbreak. This question yielded 701 usable responses, which revealed insights not only into *how* institutions are working to inform their constituents about the current situation, but also *what kinds* of information they are sharing and *whom* they are targeting for information provision.

Methods of communication

In terms of methods of communication and outreach, **email** was the most commonly mentioned, with some 38% of responses specifically pointing to this communication tool. The use of **websites** was also mentioned by a quarter of respondents, often with specific reference to the posting of frequently asked questions (FAQs) and other key information.

Though small as percentages of the 701 total responses to this question, 52 respondents mentioned **intranet communications** as a communication tool being leveraged at their institution, while 31 respondents noted the positioning of physical **posters, signage** *etc* in key spaces on their campus (for example, near toilets and in common areas) as a part of their information dissemination efforts.

Interestingly, **social media** was mentioned by just 30 respondents (4.3% of the total) as a main method of information dissemination, while 33 respondents (4.7% of the total) mentioned more traditional or potentially more formal communication channels, such as **press releases, public statements, media pieces, or official communiqués from top institutional leadership.** Smaller numbers of respondents (*ie* under 20) mentioned convening **individual meetings** or group encounters, such as **seminars or workshops;** 13 respondents indicated they used **telephone** communications (including SMS messaging); and just two suggested that their institution had either implemented **webinars** for their information dissemination efforts or had made **in-class announcements** of some sort.

A mere seven respondents referred to their efforts specifically as a **"campaign"** and just five respondents made specific reference to the use of **bilingual or multilingual messaging.**

Messaging targets

In responding to the question about what measures are being taken to inform stakeholders about the institution's position on the COVID-19 outbreak, many respondents offered insights into the target groups that are the subject of that messaging. Not surprisingly, 38.5% of respondents specifically mentioned **students** as a key target audience for their information dissemination efforts. **Academic and administrative staff** were specifically referenced as key recipients for COVID-19-related information by 29.2% and 28.1% of respondents, respectively. Directing information at or engaging with **"partners"** – often specifically referenced as partner institutions in highly affected areas such as China and Italy – was included in the responses of some 33 respondents (or just 4.7% of the total responses to this question). Similarly, 31 respondents (4.4% of the total) referred to directing communications to key **internal actors** or units within their own institution, such as the rectorate, the board, faculties, deans *etc*.

Notably, references to **parents or families,** as well as the **local community or "the public",** as key targets of information dissemination, was made in just 4 and 3 instances, respectively.

Messaging content

In conjunction with deciding to whom to communicate information about the COVID-19 outbreak and through what channels, the question of the content of such messaging is fundamental. The respondents to this survey clustered very obviously around two key areas: **travel/mobility**-related information and advice and **health and safety**-related information and advice. Roughly 30% of respondents indicated the priority of both of these types of information.

In synergy with the emphasis on health and safety, some 23.8% of respondents pointed specifically to their effort to align their content – including duplicating information and/or sharing direct links – with that of a host of relevant authorities. The **advice of national public health authorities** in relation to the COVID-19 outbreak was regularly referenced by respondents as a key content element of messaging, along with the information and guidelines published by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Much smaller numbers of respondents (*ie* 33 in total or just 4.7%) mentioned focusing on issues having to do with offering **practical advice,** for example in reference to managing working and/or studying from home, financial matters and/or housing concerns associated mostly with interrupted mobility experiences or quarantine requirements.

Matters of organisation and frequency

Although not explicitly requested, the answers provided by some gave insight into how institutions are approaching their response efforts in terms of **organisation** and **regularity of engagement.** Specifically, some 30 respondents (or 4.3% of the 701 respondents to this question) specifically noted that their institution had either developed for this situation or was otherwise leveraging something along the lines of a **working group, task force** or **crisis plan.** Just under 50 respondents (6.8% of the total) mentioned a degree of **frequency or regularity in their response efforts,** whether this related to internal consultations or pushing information out to key stakeholders. Examples here ranged from the more general confirmation of "regular updates" being made to relevant websites, to "a weekly newsletter", "weekly meetings" and "daily email updates" or "daily update about situation worldwide".

IMPACTS ON MOBILITY

COVID-19's rapid global spread has highlighted the role that international travel can play in the broad dissemination of some communicable diseases. For this reason, the outbreak's impact on academic mobility has been a subject of extensive conversation within the international education community in Europe and elsewhere. The EAIE survey dedicated several questions to the subject of mobility in an effort to gather evidence of the ways and extents to which the public health crisis is affecting international mobility in relation to European higher education. Inbound and outbound dimensions, as well as mobility among both students and staff (academic and administrative) were considered in this exercise.

OUTBOUND MOBILITY

More than two thirds (73%) of the EAIE survey respondents indicated that **outbound mobility of students** had been affected as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, while 54% reported that **outbound mobility of staff** had been affected in some way, as well (see Figures 4 and 5).
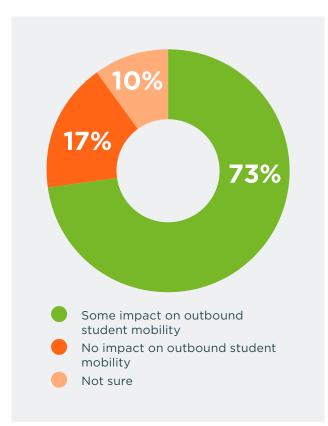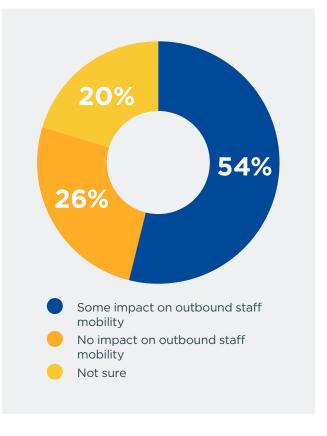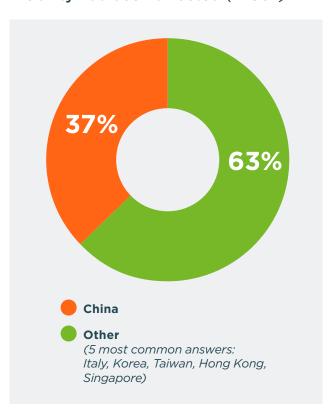
Figure 4

Effects on outbound student mobility
(n=805)

- Some impact on outbound student mobility
- No impact on outbound student mobility
- Not sure

Figure 5

Effects on outbound staff mobility
(n=805)

- Some impact on outbound staff mobility
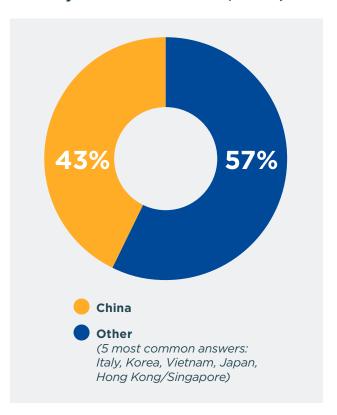- No impact on outbound staff mobility
- Not sure

In the cases of both students and staff, and logically so in light of the position of **China** as the global epicentre of the outbreak at the time of this survey, the mobility disruption was felt most obviously in relation to that country specifically, and **Asia more broadly.** Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Vietnam are variously mentioned with some frequency in this vein. Meanwhile, **Italy,** another hotbed of COVID-19 illness at the time of this survey, is the second most-frequently cited country in terms of respondents' understanding of disruption to outgoing mobility. Figures 6 and 7 provide snapshot indications of these dynamics.

Figure 6

Countries to which outbound student mobility has been affected *(n=587)*

- ● China
- ● **Other**
  (5 most common answers: Italy, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore)

Figure 7

Countries to which outbound staff mobility has been affected *(n=435)*

- ● China
- ● **Other**
  (5 most common answers: Italy, Korea, Vietnam, Japan, Hong Kong/Singapore)

While the numbers tell an important story, so too do the **perceptions** of these developments. As seen in Figure 8, more than half of respondents see the effects on outbound mobility as being "somewhat significant". Even still, quite a larger proportion of respondents are inclined to characterise these effects as "not so significant" as opposed to "very significant."
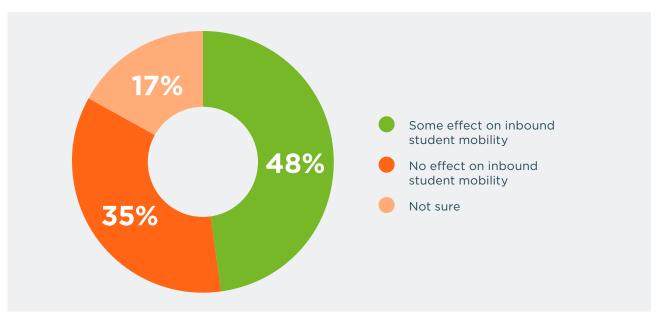
Significance of outbound mobility effects, students and staff

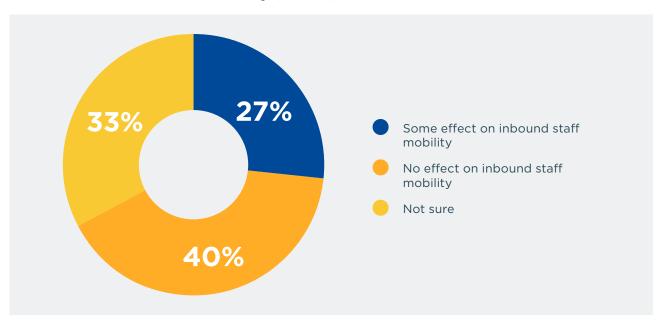|	Effects on student mobility *(n=587)*	Effects on administrative or academic staff mobility *(n=435)*
Not so significant	25%	28%
Somewhat significant	57%	53%
Very significant	15%	15%
Not sure	3%	4%
Totals	**100%**	**100%**

INBOUND MOBILITY

In a notable contrast to the outbound mobility picture, where 73% of respondents indicated that outbound mobility of students had been affected in some fashion as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, a comparatively modest 48% reported that **inbound mobility** had been affected in some way (see Figure 9). Perhaps this is attributable to the timeline of events, whereby incoming students (and potentially visiting scholars or other mobile staff) had already arrived on European campuses in early 2020, well before the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic in mid-March.

Effects on inbound student mobility *(n=805)*

- Some effect on inbound student mobility — 48%
- No effect on inbound student mobility — 35%
- Not sure — 17%

Inbound staff mobility has been less affected than student mobility, according to survey respondents, with slightly over one quarter (27%) indicating having seen such effects (see Figure 10).

Effects on inbound staff mobility *(n=805)*

- **27%** Some effect on inbound staff mobility
- **40%** No effect on inbound staff mobility
- **33%** Not sure

Meanwhile, respondents were more likely to single out **China** as the major geographic area of concern in relation to inbound mobility as compared to outbound mobility. However, as with the outbound mobility picture, **Italy** was cited most frequently after China as the country most affected by inbound mobility disruptions. Other countries in **Asia** were similarly prominent in this discussion. Figures 11 and 12 provide further indications of the geography of disruptions to inbound student and staff mobility as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Figure 11

Countries from which inbound student mobility has been affected *(n=387)*
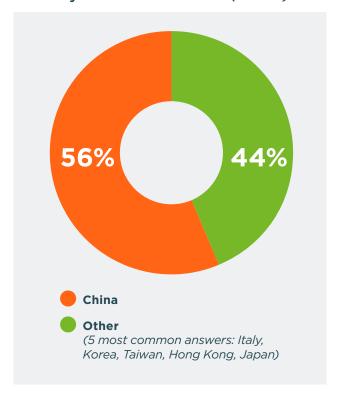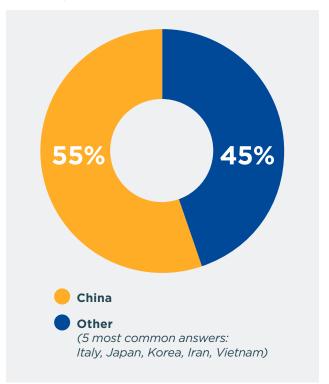

56% China
44% Other

● China
● Other
(5 most common answers: Italy, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan)

Figure 12

Countries from which inbound staff mobility has been affected *(n=216)*

55% China
45% Other

● China
● Other
(5 most common answers: Italy, Japan, Korea, Iran, Vietnam)

When it comes to the perceived **significance** of the effects on inbound mobility, Figure 13 shows that the responses are quite parallel to those seen for outbound mobility (see Figure 8) – with one exception. A larger proportion of respondents (21%) is inclined to characterise as "very significant" the effects on inbound student mobility, whereas for inbound and outbound staff and outbound students, just 15%–17% of respondents see "very significant" effects.
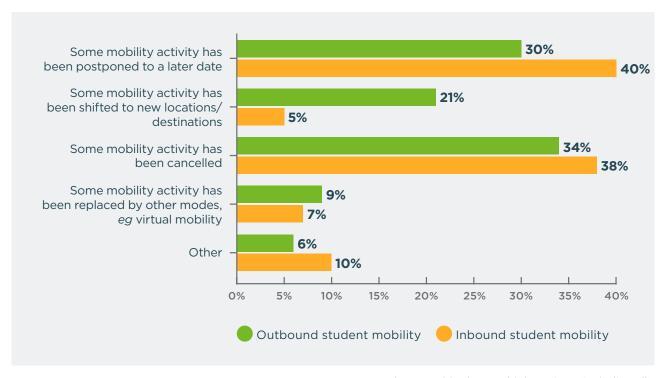
Figure 13

Significance of inbound mobility effects, students and staff

	Effects on student mobility *(n=387)*	Effects on administrative or academic staff mobility *(n=216)*
Not so significant	26%	25%
Somewhat significant	51%	56%
Very significant	21%	17%
Not sure	2%	2%
Totals	**100%**	**100%**

INBOUND AND OUTBOUND STUDENT MOBILITY ADJUSTMENTS

Finally, respondents were asked to specify exactly *how*, if at all, student mobility was affected or "adjusted" as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. Here, as seen in Figure 14, the adjustments most commonly cited were postponements and cancelations. Interestingly, adjustments by virtue of things like virtual mobility tools and digital technologies were cited by a relatively small proportion of respondents.

Figure 14

Adjustments to outbound and inbound mobility

(n=1168 outbound; n=601 inbound)*

Some mobility activity has been postponed to a later date — Outbound 30%, Inbound 40%
Some mobility activity has been shifted to new locations/destinations — Outbound 21%, Inbound 5%
Some mobility activity has been cancelled — Outbound 34%, Inbound 38%
Some mobility activity has been replaced by other modes, *eg* virtual mobility — Outbound 9%, Inbound 7%
Other — Outbound 6%, Inbound 10%

● Outbound student mobility ● Inbound student mobility

*Note: Respondents could select multiple options (including all).

CAMPUS REALITIES AND DYNAMICS

The EAIE survey also sought to generate insight into how the COVID-19 outbreak might be exerting effects on campus life and culture. Specifically, the survey sought to uncover whether any events sponsored or hosted by respondents' institutions had been cancelled and whether any reports of discriminatory treatment of individuals who are from (or are perceived to be from) areas most affected by public health crisis had been received.

On the **event cancelations** front, 20% of respondents in 25 different countries indicated that their institutions had indeed experienced this type of development, while a full 60.1% said this had not yet occurred. Of course, given the fast-moving nature of this situation, it is likely that these data from the survey administration period of 19 February to 6 March 2020 are no longer accurate.

In a reassuring trend, a full 70% of respondents reported that they had received no reports at their institution of **discriminatory behaviour** toward individuals from (or perceived to be from) countries affected by the COVID-19 outbreak. However, some 13% of respondents across 21 different countries did report they had received such reports. Of these, 65 individuals provided additional information in regard to the specific responses taken by their institutions when confronted with these situations. The most commonly reported (46.2%) method of responding was to double down on **awareness raising and information dissemination,** to inform the broader community about the realities of risk and promote factual accuracy in the wider conversation about the outbreak. The second-most commonly reported (27.7%) response was to publish or circulate some type of **public affirmation of support** for the affected population or an indication of **zero tolerance** for discriminatory behaviour in general. Just over one fifth (21.5%) of those who offered information about their response efforts mentioned **coordination with internal or external partners** (such as partner universities, campus security, local police, or a "team response" of some sort). Less frequently mentioned were **case-by-case responses** (16.9%), **supportive communications** directed specifically at the affected population or individuals (13.8%) or **disciplinary or legal action** (6.2%).

DESIRED SUPPORTS, LONGER-TERM CONCERNS AND OVERARCHING CONSIDERATIONS

The EAIE survey included three open-ended questions that aimed to tease out additional issues, needs, concerns and considerations framing the current situation. Specifically, these questions provided respondents with opportunities to indicate what kinds of **additional supports or resources** would help improve their ability to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak, any **mid-term to longer-term** effects of the COVID-19 outbreak that their institution might be thinking about and attempting to plan for, and any **additional issues or developments** at their institution resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak that respondents wanted to share. The total numbers of respondents to these questions were significantly lower than the 805 received for the closed-ended questions. Still, the information and ideas shared here do provide a window into a wider array of issues and concerns on the minds of European international education professionals in relation to the current public health crisis.

DESIRED SUPPORTS

Just under 250 respondents opted to address the survey question asking for input on resources and supports they would find useful to improve their institution's response to the COVID-19 situation. Nearly two dozen different categories of supports were mentioned in some form in these open-ended responses, with no single type of support overwhelmingly dominating the landscape. The most frequently mentioned desired support, however, indicated by 19% of respondents, was the need for **better or faster coordination, guidance, or information from national, local or regional authorities.** These respondents often mentioned the hope for a clear(er) policy, strategy or set of guidelines to frame their institution's work to manage the situation. Smaller percentages of respondents sought this same kind of support at the **institutional level** (where just 8.5% mentioned this as a desired resource) or the **EU or "European"** level (which was cited by 5.2% of the 250 respondents to this question).

The second most frequently desired support or resource was access to **good practice ideas or inspiration from other HEIs,** which 13.7% of respondents to this question indicated would likely be helpful. Smaller groups of respondents (in the 5–6% response rate range) indicated that the following resources/supports would be useful in their efforts moving forward:

- Access to additional **health and hygiene goods and materials** (such as face masks and sanitisers)
- Better flow of information, or simply more current information, in the way of **statistics and situation updates,** at the local, national and international level
- Better or simply more **health-related and scientific information,** specifically in relation to COVID-19 prevention and patient care
- **Information and/or advice** on how best to support incoming students
- **Guidance** on how to communicate calm, manage communications in times of crisis, and address discrimination

Interestingly, the second-largest category of information registered in response to this open-ended question consisted essentially of respondents indicating that they could think of no additional resources required, as they felt **comfortable with the supports currently at their disposal.** Some 17% (*ie* 43 responses in absolute terms) of the 247 respondents to this question provided this type of input. Of course, these are small numbers and it is unclear how many other respondents might have felt the same way but simply did not offer this kind of perspective. Additionally, as the situation has changed across Europe in the period since this survey closed, it would be interesting to see if these individuals are still feeling this same level of satisfaction or confidence. All of this being said, moving forward it would be interesting to draw more details from this small group to gain a better understanding of why they felt relatively satisfied with the resources at their disposal at this particular moment in time, and to see if lessons from their experience could be translated to other contexts.

LONGER-TERM CONCERNS

When it comes to issues beyond the immediate or short-term, 291 respondents provided us with insights into how their thinking is evolving in relation to the longer haul. Unsurprisingly, the dominant considerations turn on how **mobility dynamics** will unfold over time: 45.2% of respondents mentioned concerns with the future of outbound mobility and 39.7% specifically spoke of a need to consider the inbound mobility effects of the current crisis. Often in conjunction with mobility (or student recruitment) matters, 18.3% mentioned **specific countries or regions** as being top of mind for mid- to longer-term contingency planning. Here, China specifically and Asia more generally were the overwhelming focal points, with much less frequent mention of other specific countries, such as Italy.

The next most commonly reflected themes in the discussion about mid- to longer-term considerations – though at much lower levels of frequency (around 13% each) – included issues such as:

- Dealing with expected **event cancelations** (such as graduations) or possible **campus closures**
- Responding to the knock-on effects of **interrupted studies** or **adjusted coursework requirements or delivery modalities**
- Leveraging **technology** as the bedrock resource for both academic and administrative operations during the COVID-19 crisis
- Developing strength and institutionalising learning in the areas of **crisis/risk planning, training, management and decision-making**

To a lesser extent, how **health and safety protocols and communication strategies** would be developed and delivered in the future were mentioned as an issue for 8.6% of respondents to this question. General **marketing and recruitment** concerns were raised by 6.6% of respondents, followed by the future of **partnerships** (5.5%), as well as the management of the **student and staff experience and well-being** (for example, in relation to discrimination concerns) and the **financial effects** of recent developments (factors that were highlighted by 4.8% of the 290 respondents to this question).

OVERARCHING CONSIDERATIONS

Given one last opportunity to share "any additional issues or developments at your institution resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak," 82 respondents opted to offer final thoughts in relation to their institutional experience to date. Three areas were most frequently mentioned in these unstructured reflections, although with vastly different response rates.

Just over 17% of respondents chose to articulate their concerns or frustrations regarding **information or action gaps.** Some attributed responsibility for these problems to their national governments or regional authorities, some to European-level actors, and some to the size and complexity of their own institutions.

A larger grouping of responses (28%) was clustered around general expressions of **worry, uncertainty or inconvenience.** The fluidity of the situation at all levels, the shifting positions of actors ranging from governments to institutional partners, and the cascade of international event cancelations (including major international education conferences), have introduced a feeling that circumstances are highly tenuous. "Waiting day by day," as noted by one respondent, is a frustrating exercise, and shifting dynamics unquestionably introduce inconvenience.

Interestingly, some 40.2% of the respondents to this final question took the opportunity to reiterate some fundamental information about how their institutions are coping with this unprecedented situation. Mostly, these **pragmatic insights** focused on detailing the ways that institutions seem to be learning from and simply dealing with the crisis on a daily basis. Examples of these kinds of reflections can be seen in such respondent statements as "[We are] reducing meetings and planning to stop mobility," "We need to improve and adapt our existing crisis management concept," and "Though a horrible event, a good learning moment to see what you can improve in terms of risk management. More focus on student support and the absolute need for good insurance."

Much smaller numbers of respondents chose to focus their final words on the **need to prevent discrimination** against individuals stricken with the COVID-19 virus or those perceived as being ill. Others highlighted in their comments the fact that, as much as we may work to provide meaningful responses to this event, there are **limits to our agency** in the face of larger forces. Comments such as "We offer much practical advice and links to advice sites, but we require each member of the community to self-police their situation. This is complicated in relation to personal travel," reflect aspects of such positions.

Finally, **a call for sanity and optimism** could be seen in the final words of one hopeful respondent: "I hope there won't be any unnecessary panic, people will remain professional and reasonable and everything will get back to normal in each country affected by the virus."

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The COVID-19 outbreak is presenting major challenges to societies across Europe and around the world, with direct and complex impacts on higher education institutions and systems. Some of the key takeaways from our analysis of current dynamics and effects include the following:

- Nearly three-quarters of survey respondents characterise the effects on inbound student and staff mobility as either somewhat significant or very significant.
- The majority of European higher education institutions are currently implementing a response plan to the COVID-19 outbreak, or are actively working to develop one.
- Survey respondents express concern for meeting the needs of vulnerable international staff and students, but there are (so far) relatively few reports of discriminatory behaviour toward these populations.
- There is evidence of robust and multi-faceted communications efforts being undertaken by institutions across Europe, but there is surprisingly little (documented) use of social media as a key communication channel. There is also limited reference to engagement by our survey respondents with the local community or broader public as a key target of communications about the crisis. Of course, it may be that other actors within institutions are in fact undertaking this kind of local community engagement.
- There is little specific mention of data collection as a key strategic response. Although just a dozen respondents mentioned some aspect of data collection, surveying or systematic "mapping" of situations in relation to the COVID-19 outbreak, the possibilities for how this kind of activity could help institutions respond strategically to the ongoing dimensions of this event, or those similar to it, are intriguing for further consideration in relation to good practice.
- Survey respondents expressed a strong desire for better guidance at the national level as they work to navigate the many dimensions of this situation. They are also seeking access to good practices modelled by other HEIs. Crisis response, longer-term planning in the face of uncertainty, partnership management, technology solutions, and more effective communications processes with relevant authorities are among the key focal points for the future.

In the days and weeks ahead, gaining further clarity on this evolving situation will be crucial. Clearly, we are in the first stages of a situation with no obvious resolution in the near term. However, the 'early days' insights gleaned from this survey exercise hopefully help illuminate some of the gaps the international education community must address in its agenda for the future, and some of the strengths it can draw on to respond effectively to the challenges on the horizon.

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