

**SURVEY OF NATIONAL RECTORS' CONFERENCES –
AUTUMN/WINTER SEMESTER 2021/22**

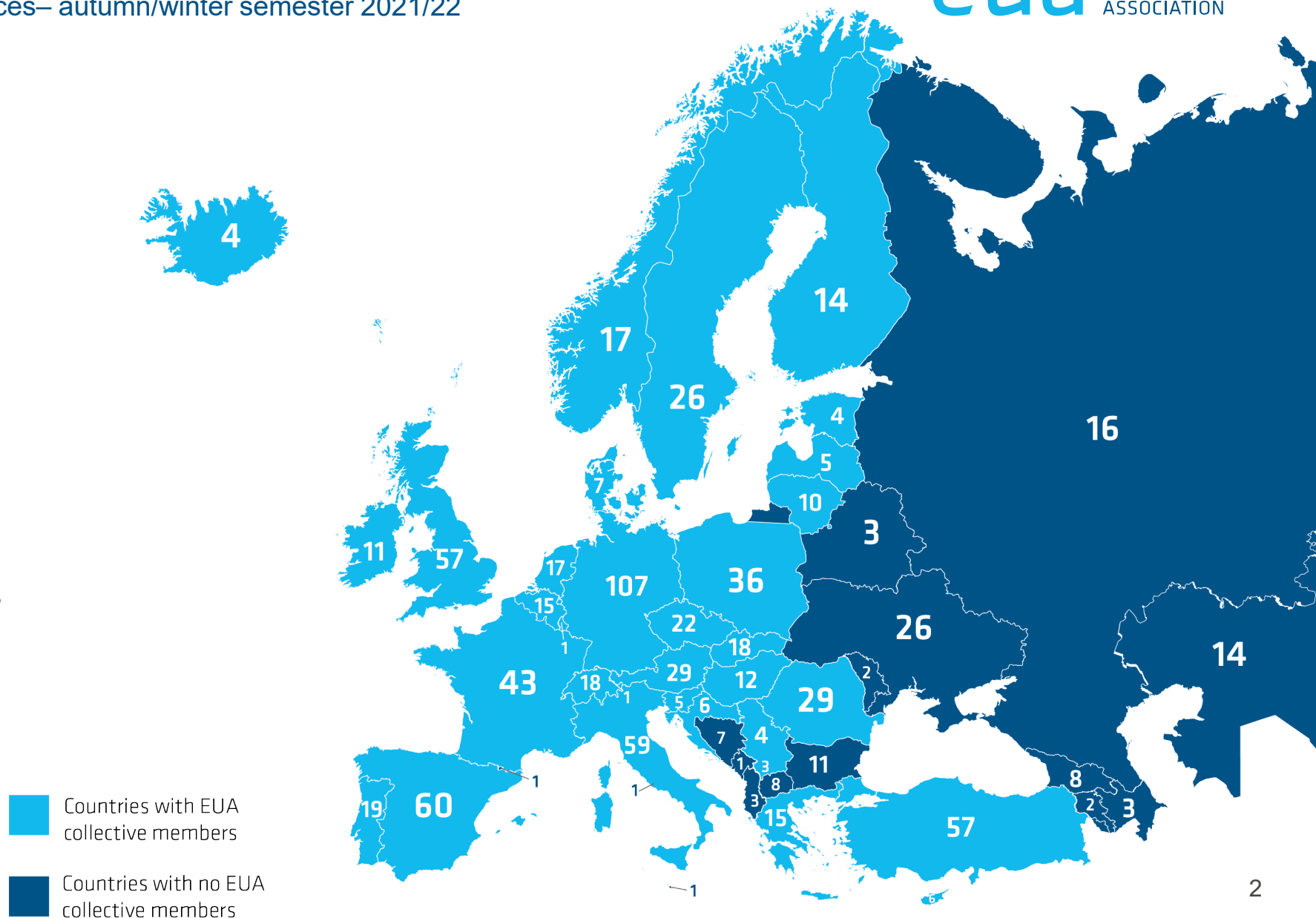
The impact of Covid-19 on European higher education

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November 2021

The European University Association

EUA brings together more than 800 members in the higher education systems of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), including the national university associations from 33 higher education systems.



Survey background

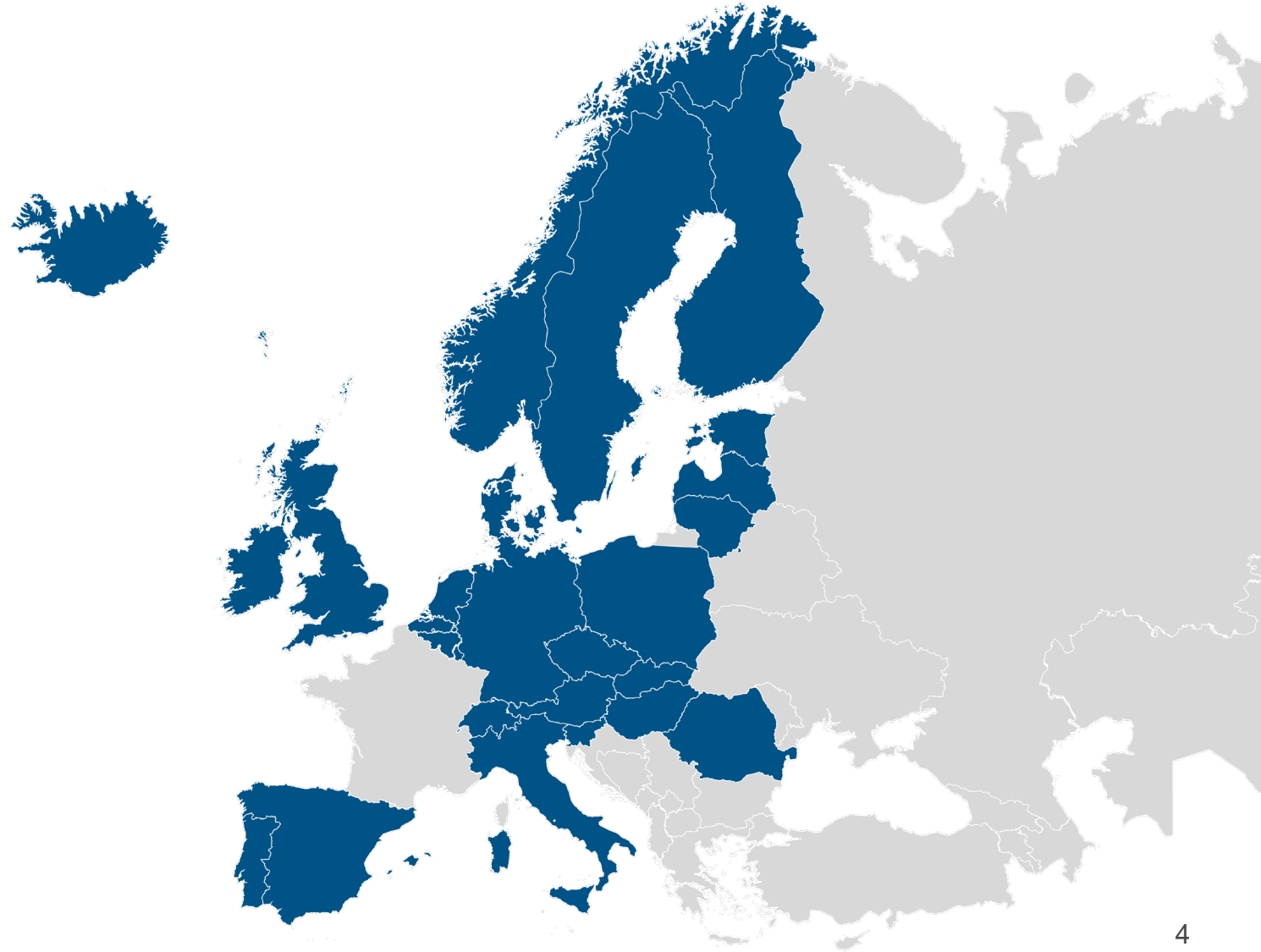
As elsewhere in the world, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, universities in the EHEA have had to adjust to the sanitary measures.

EUA conducted a snapshot survey of its national rectors' conference members in order to create an overview of the continued impact of the pandemic on higher education institutions at the beginning of the academic year 2021/22. The survey focussed on education provision and practices regarding vaccination and testing.

All data is dated 14 October 2021. However, it must be stressed that the situation in many countries is reported to be changing quickly, in adaptation to the general course of the pandemic, and respective national or regional regulations. Several rectors' conferences mentioned this when submitting the data. There has been at least one case (Latvia) where shortly after the survey deadline a national lockdown required universities to close campuses.

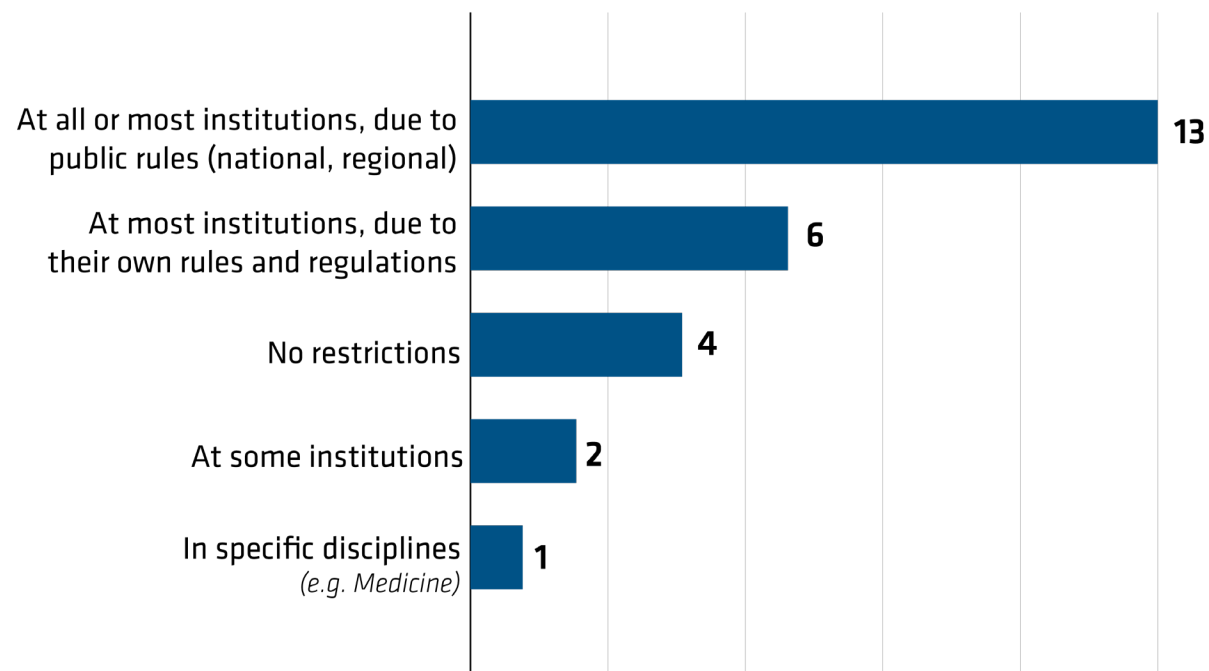
Survey sample

National rectors' conferences from 26 higher education systems participated in the survey.



Restrictions to on-campus, face-to-face teaching

In the autumn of 2021, institutions in most systems still faced at least partial restrictions to face-to-face teaching. Only four systems reported none.



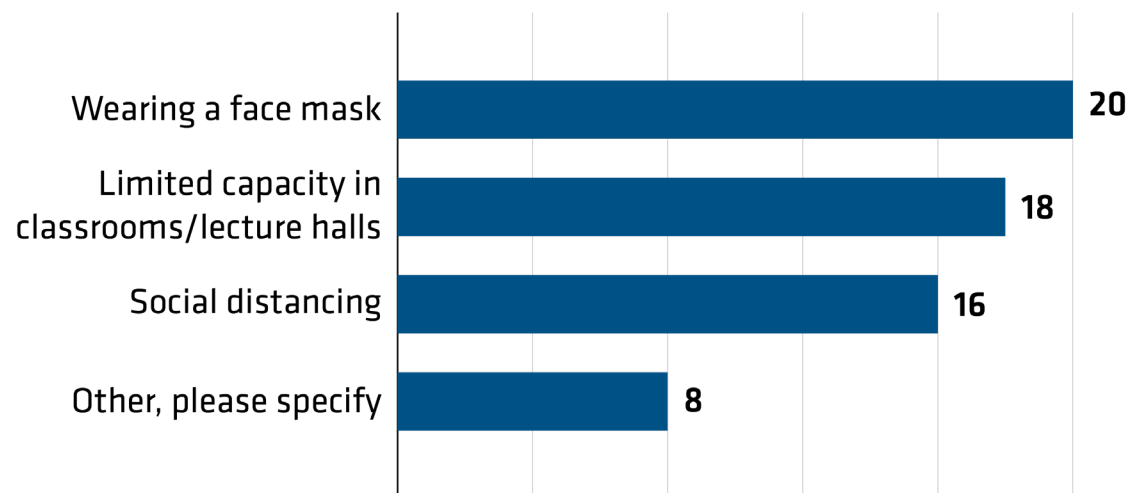
Q1. Are there any restrictions to on-campus, face-to-face teaching this autumn in place or planned? N=26

Examples of restrictions

Mask wearing and social distancing, including restricting room capacities, are very common.

Within a country, the situation often differs across institutions: for example in IE, some institutions are operating close to full capacity, others with limitations on class size; in RO, some continue to work entirely online, others function in a hybrid mode.

In addition, some systems require a proof of vaccination or recovery, or a negative test result (DE, IT, LV, and at some institutions in CZ) for on campus, face-to-face teaching.



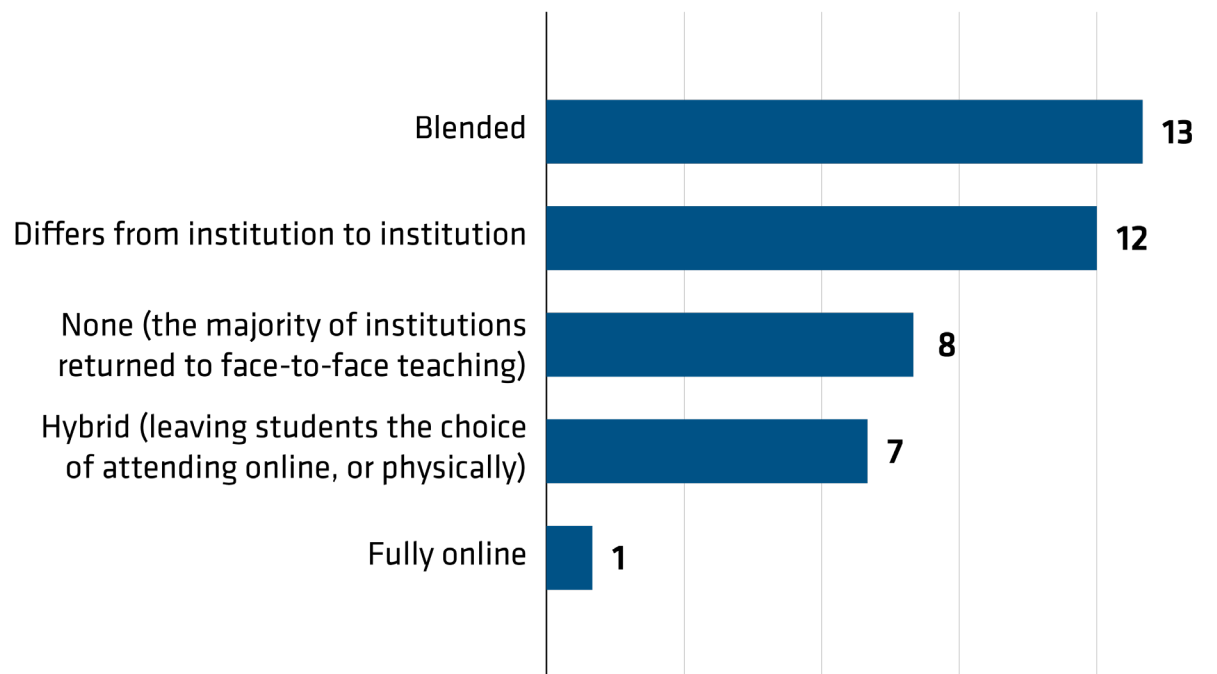
Q2. If possible, please provide examples of what restrictions are in place. Please select all that apply. N=26

Online teaching implemented due to the pandemic

At the beginning of the autumn/winter semester of 2021/22, only eight systems have returned to physical presence and full face-to-face teaching (BE(fr), CZ, DE, EE, HU, NL, PT, SI), and only one remains fully online (FI).

Institutions in all other systems are largely using blended (13) and/or hybrid approaches (7).

Very often, there is no system-wide approach, and the mode of teaching is handled differently by the institutions in the respective systems (12).

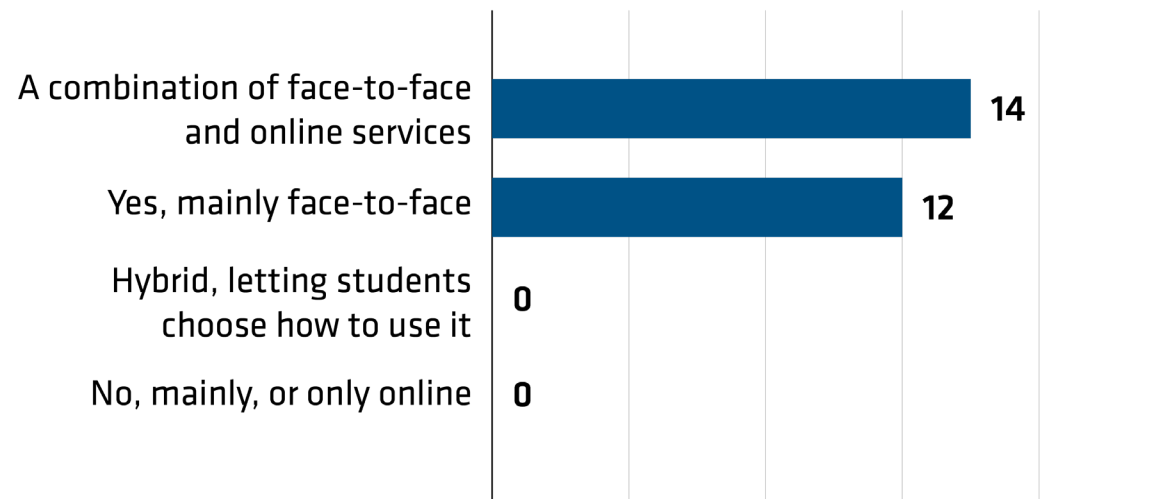


Q3. Due to the impact of the pandemic, what online delivery modes are your universities offering to students this autumn? (Please select all that apply. If it differs a lot between institutions - please describe what is most common.) N=26

Support services

Depending on the system, student support services are provided either face-to-face, or – slightly more common - in a combination with online support.

Fully hybrid or online student services are not in use.

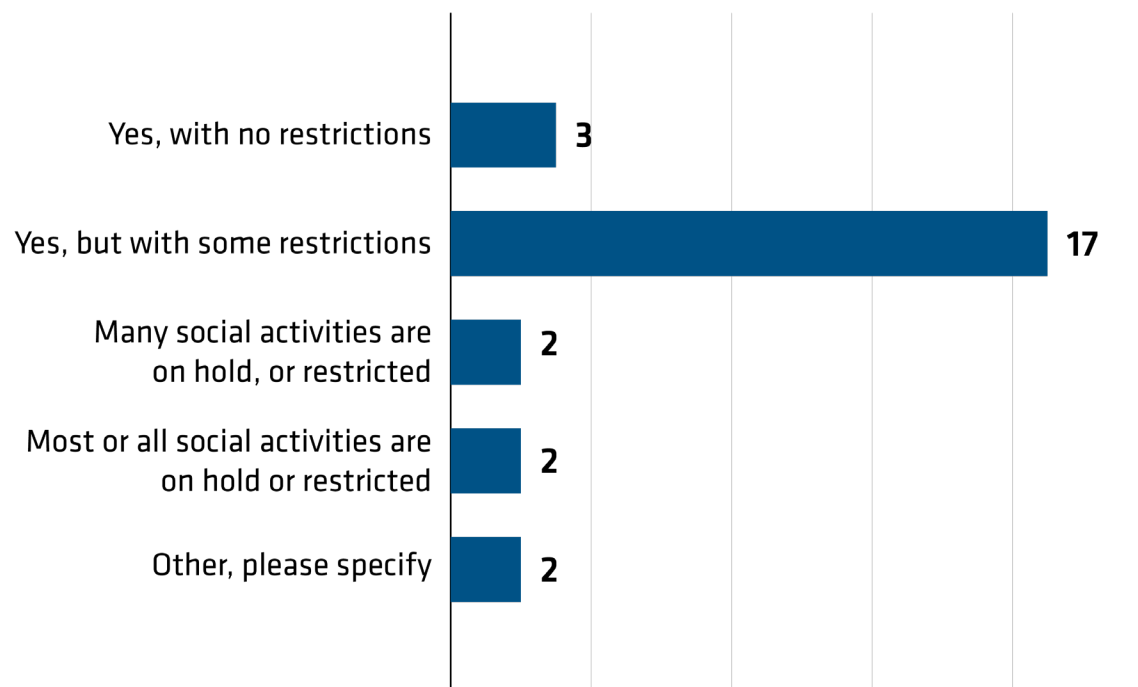


Q4. Are support services being offered to students face-to-face again? (e.g. study support, libraries, careers guidance etc). Please select one option. N=26

Social activities

At the beginning of the autumn/winter semester 2021/22, in most systems (20), universities are again able to offer social activities for students, however, largely with at least partial restrictions (17). Only in three systems, social activities can go ahead without any restrictions (BE(nl), NO).

Four systems report that many or most of the institutions' social activities are still on hold (DE, IT, RO,SL).

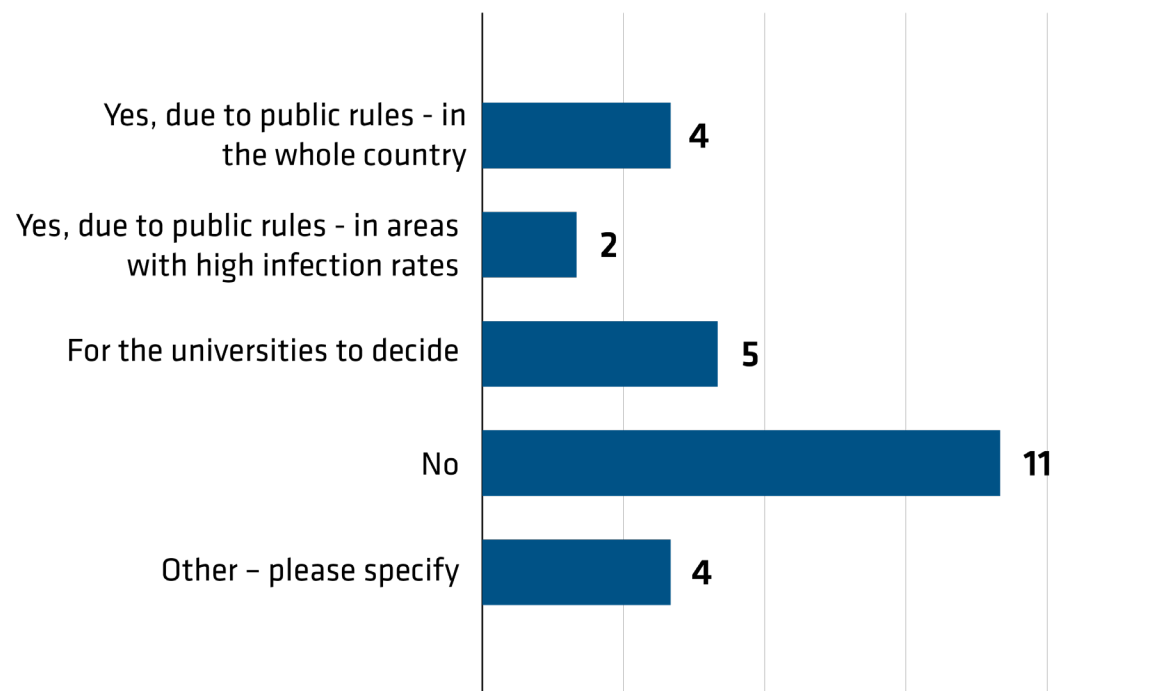


Q5. Are your universities organising or allowing social activities (student societies, sports, on-campus bars/cafes)? Please select one option. N=26

Proof of vaccination and testing requirements for students and staff

In most systems, there is no requirement for staff and students to get vaccinated or tested.

Only six report this as a condition due to public rules (DE, IT, LT, PT, SI, SK), and four as an issue for the universities to decide (AT, CH, CZ, RO). While some universities may not require proof of vaccination or testing for general presence on campus, it can be a requirement for participation in social activities offered by the institution (e.g. in EE).



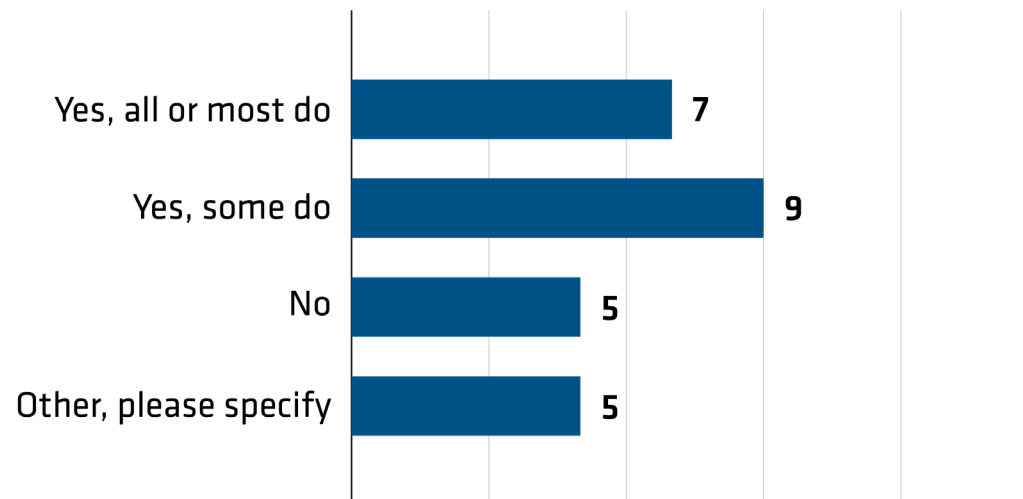
Q6. Are students and staff required to be tested or to provide evidence that they are vaccinated or recovered from Covid-19? (Please select one option.) N=26

Testing at institutions

In 16 systems, some or all of the universities continue to offer Covid-19 testing to students and staff. In two systems (EE, NO), testing has been discontinued.

Beyond testing, universities may also encourage vaccination take up and offer vaccinations on campus (FI, HU, UK).

In LV, it is reported that students and staff are vaccinated at 86% and 90% respectively, so far higher than the general population.



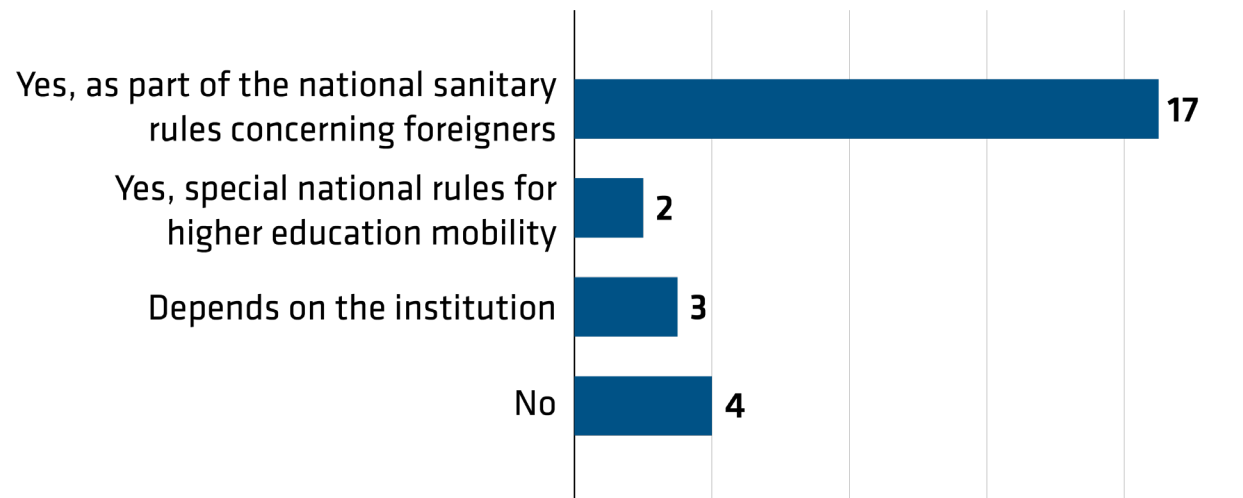
Q7. Do the universities offer testing to students and staff? N=26

Special rules for incoming international students

Most systems have special Covid-19 related rules for incoming international students, usually as part of the national general (17), or specific rules for the higher education sector (2).

Only four systems have no additional restrictions for this student group (BE(fr), IT, NO, SE), and in three they depend on the individual institution (AT, CH, PL).

For one country (IT), international students with vaccines recognised by the WHO, but not by the EU, were mentioned as an obstacle.



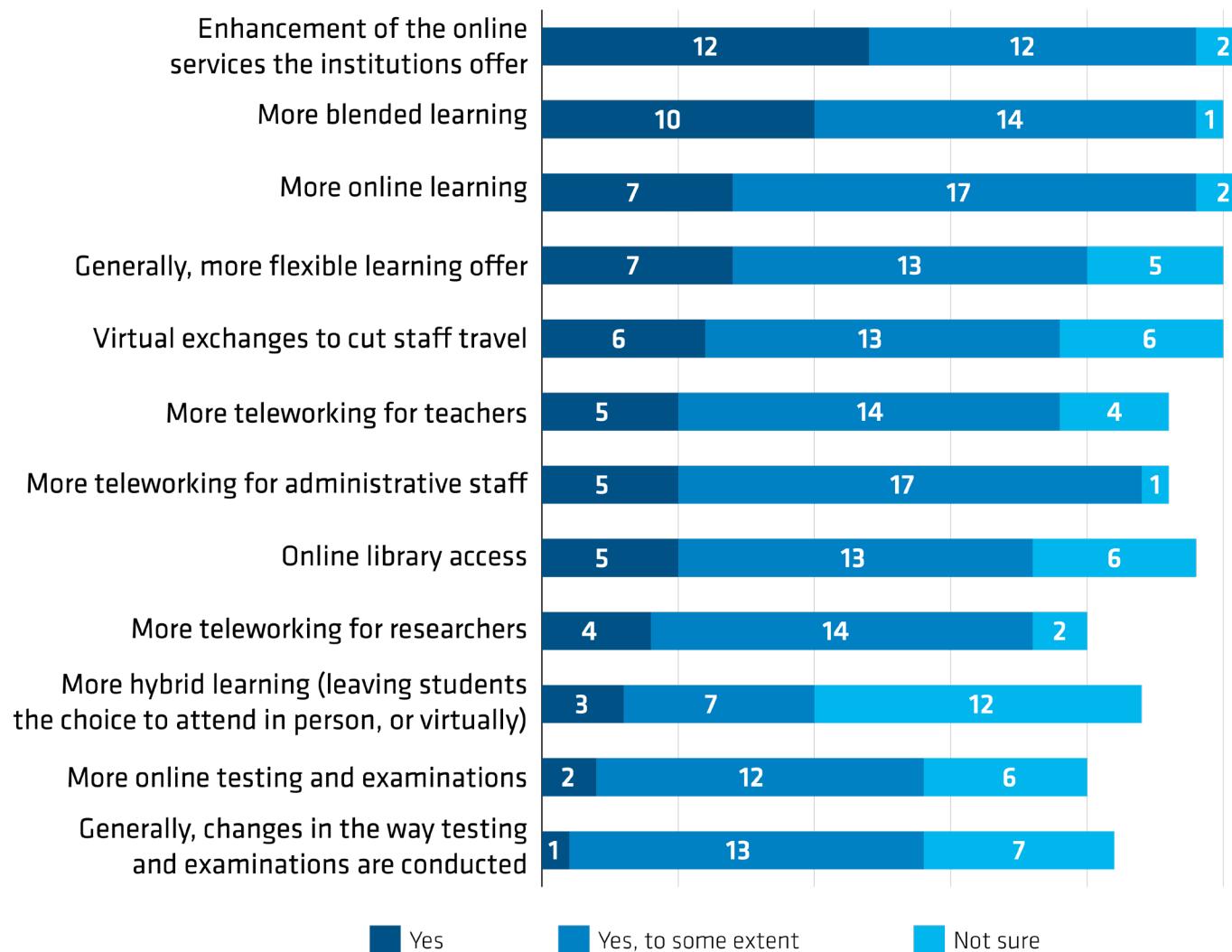
Q8. Are there any special rules for incoming international students? N=26

Change to stay

On changes evoked by the pandemic that are likely to stay in the future, responses are dominated by “yes, to some extent”, e.g. regarding the provision of learning and teaching (blended learning, online services and infrastructures), and concerning reducing staff travel.

Biggest uncertainties (not sure) are in the areas of hybrid learning, changes in student assessment, flexible learning offer, and virtual exchanges to cut staff travel.

Overall, whether changes remain or continue will depend on proven added value, technical feasibility, social acceptance, as well as system level rules and funding support.



Q9. In your system, do you see any of the following changes, which likely will remain in place beyond the crisis? Please select all that apply. N=26

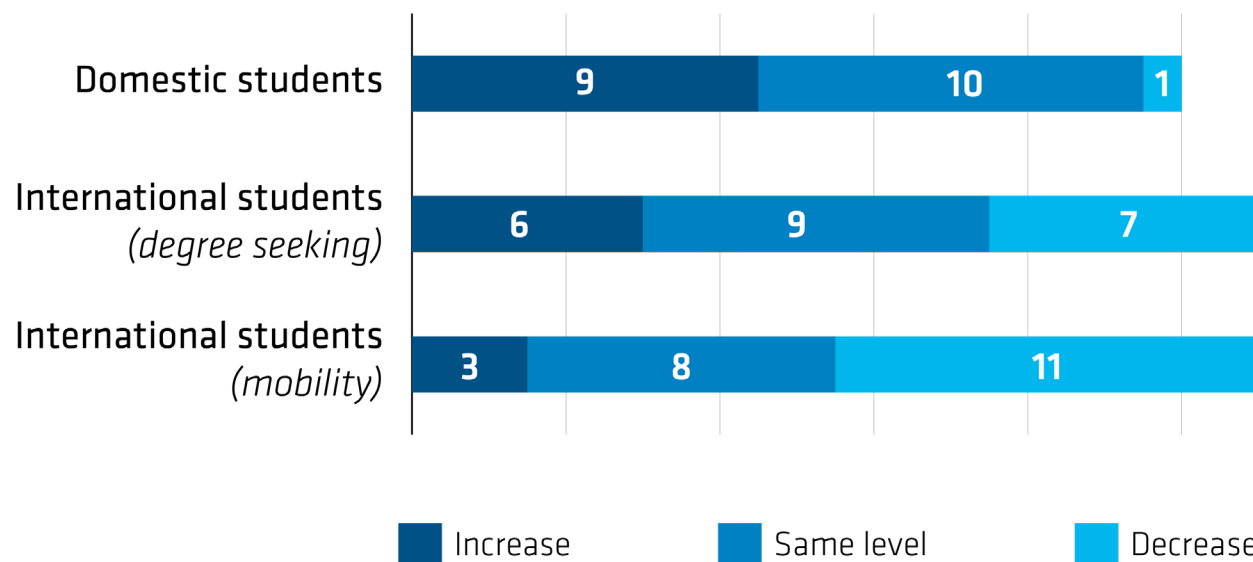
Enrolment

Where data is available, all but one system report that the pandemic had no impact (10), or a positive impact (9) on domestic student enrolment numbers in the autumn of 2021.

The situation is slightly less positive for international degree seeking students, with seven systems noting a decrease.

Half of the systems where data is available report continued lower than average figures for international credit mobility.

Please refer to the next page for country details.

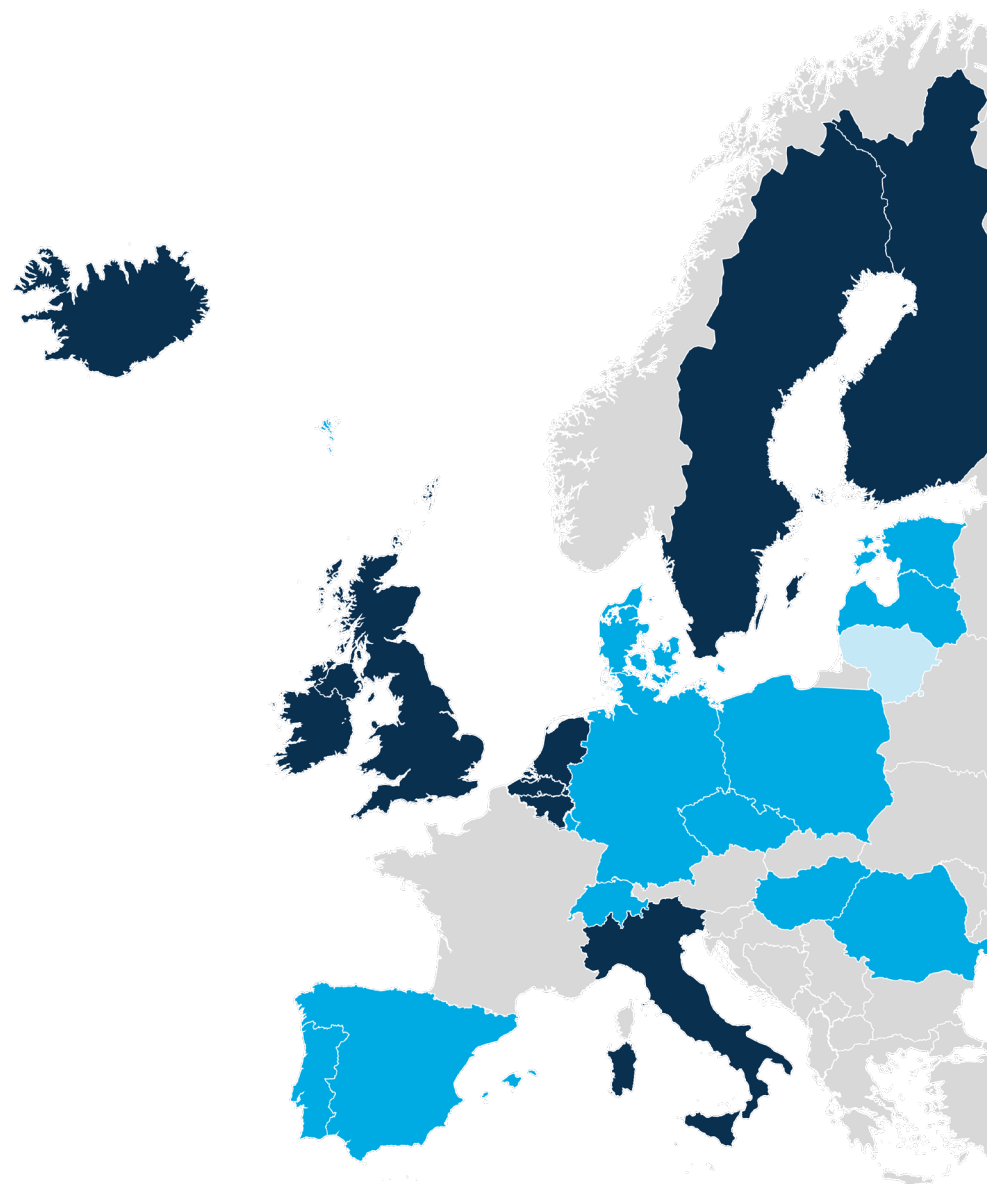


Q10. Do you think that the pandemic caused an impact on student enrolment this autumn compared to the pre-Covid-19 times (academic year 2019/20)? N=22

Enrolment – country details

Domestic students

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N=22

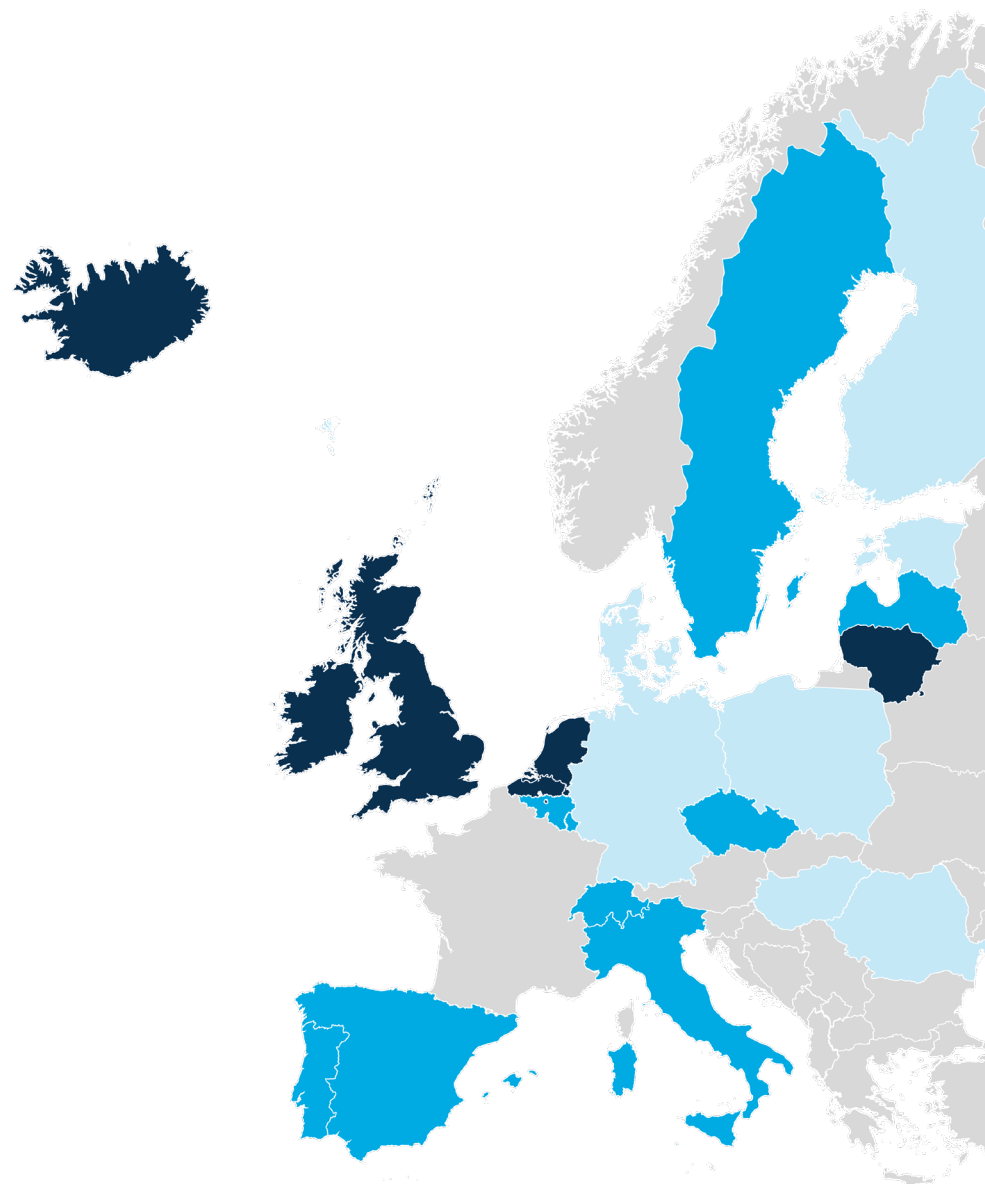


Enrolment

– country details

International students
(degree seeking)

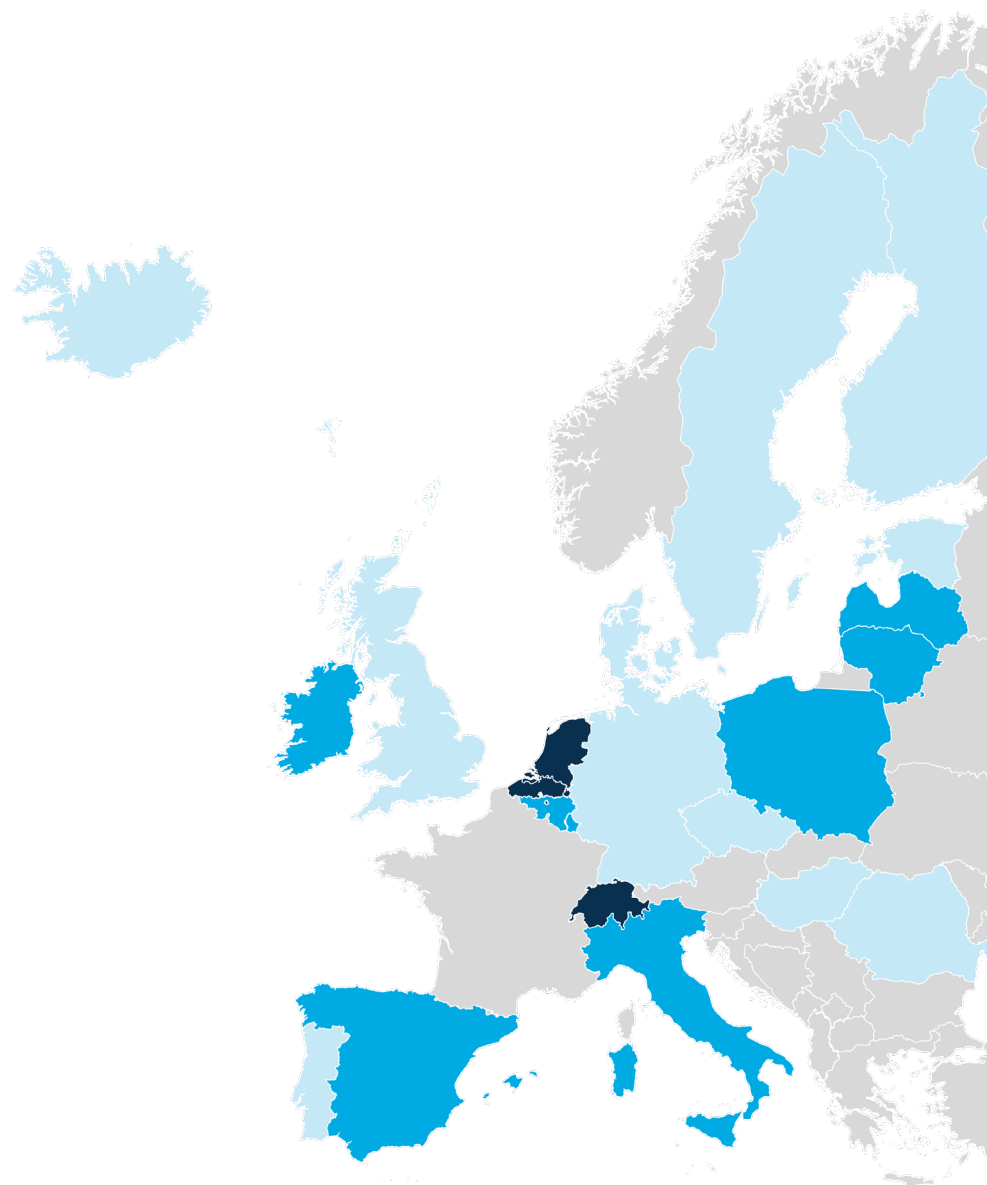
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Enrolment – country details

International students (mobility)

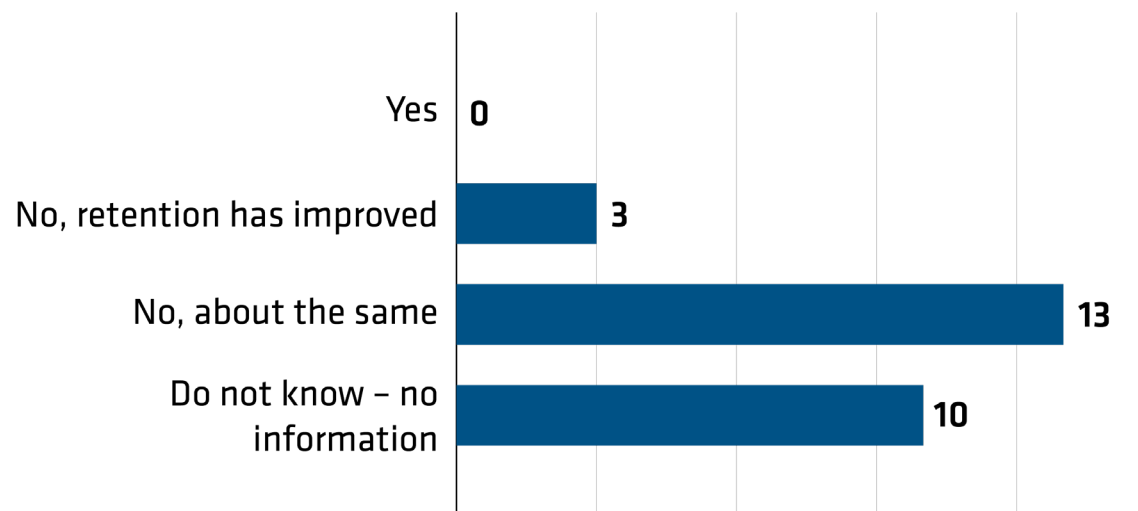
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N=22



Drop-out rates

Retention remained the same in 13 systems (BE(nl), DE, DK, ES, HU, IE, IS, IT, PT, RO, SE, SI, UK), and even improved in three (BE, LT, FI).

In the remaining 10 systems, there is no such data available.



Q11. During the 2020/2021 academic year, did student drop-out rates increase compared to the pre-Covid-19 times (academic year 2019/20)? N=26

Conclusion

The outbreak of the pandemic that impacted universities in the spring/summer semester of 2020 required immediate and ad hoc action. During the 2021/22 academic year - year two of the pandemic - higher education institutions seem to have been more adept to the situation, due to adjusted strategies, organisational structures and technological resources.

The partial reopening of campuses is, of course, a promising first step towards a full return. But going into the new academic year 2021/22, there still is little planning security, and the sanitary situation may require another round of full or partial campus closures. The national university association members participating in this survey were hesitant to provide information on the rules for this semester, often commenting that they were awaiting new decisions from their governments.

In most EHEA countries, institutions cannot require staff and students to be vaccinated and, at the time of writing, [only 17 of the 48 EHEA countries](#) have vaccinated 70% or more of their populations. Beyond the question of re-opening campuses, this is likely to result in continued challenges, likely less for degree mobility, but certainly for temporary mobility of students and staff. This concerns exchanges with global partners, as well as exchanges within the EHEA and possibly even within the European Union.

Beyond the ongoing pandemic, a key question is also how some of the changes that it evoked can be retained and enhanced, to benefit higher education. This is to be assessed and explored at the level of the institutions, but would also require system level support.

The European University Association (EUA) is the representative organisation of universities and national rectors' conferences in 48 European countries. EUA plays a crucial role in the Bologna Process and in influencing EU policies on higher education, research and innovation. Thanks to its interaction with a range of other European and international organisations, EUA ensures that the voice of European universities is heard wherever decisions are being taken that will impact their activities.

The Association provides unique expertise in higher education and research as well as a forum for exchange of ideas and good practice among universities. The results of EUA's work are made available to members and stakeholders through conferences, seminars, websites and publications.

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