

# **How do Romanian universities promote their educational offer and what mechanisms are used to attract international students?**

Thematic 1: Furthering the internationalization of higher education:  
particular challenges in the EHEA

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- **Aim of the article**
- **Methodology**
- **Romania context and status quo**
- **Analysis of Romanian higher education institutions**
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# Aim of the article

- identifying how Romanian universities promote their educational offer, if there is a link between their internationalization of higher education strategies and their actual actions
- contribute to the improvement of internationalization of higher education policies by understanding universities perceptions regarding strategies, actions and mechanisms they use in order to develop mobility and contribute to a better quality of higher education

# Questions

Is there any correlation between the institutional internationalization strategy, the strategic plan for institutional development and the main activities actually performed to promote their educational offer?

How do universities promote their educational offer and what mechanism do they use to attract international students?

Which mechanisms are most efficient in attracting international students?.

# Methodology

a mix of qualitative and quantitative data analysis:

**document analysis**

**a perception questionnaire**



Research limitation: low number of universities that contributed to the questionnaire. However, Romanian universities are rather similar, which is why I considered the institutions that contributed to this study representative at national level.

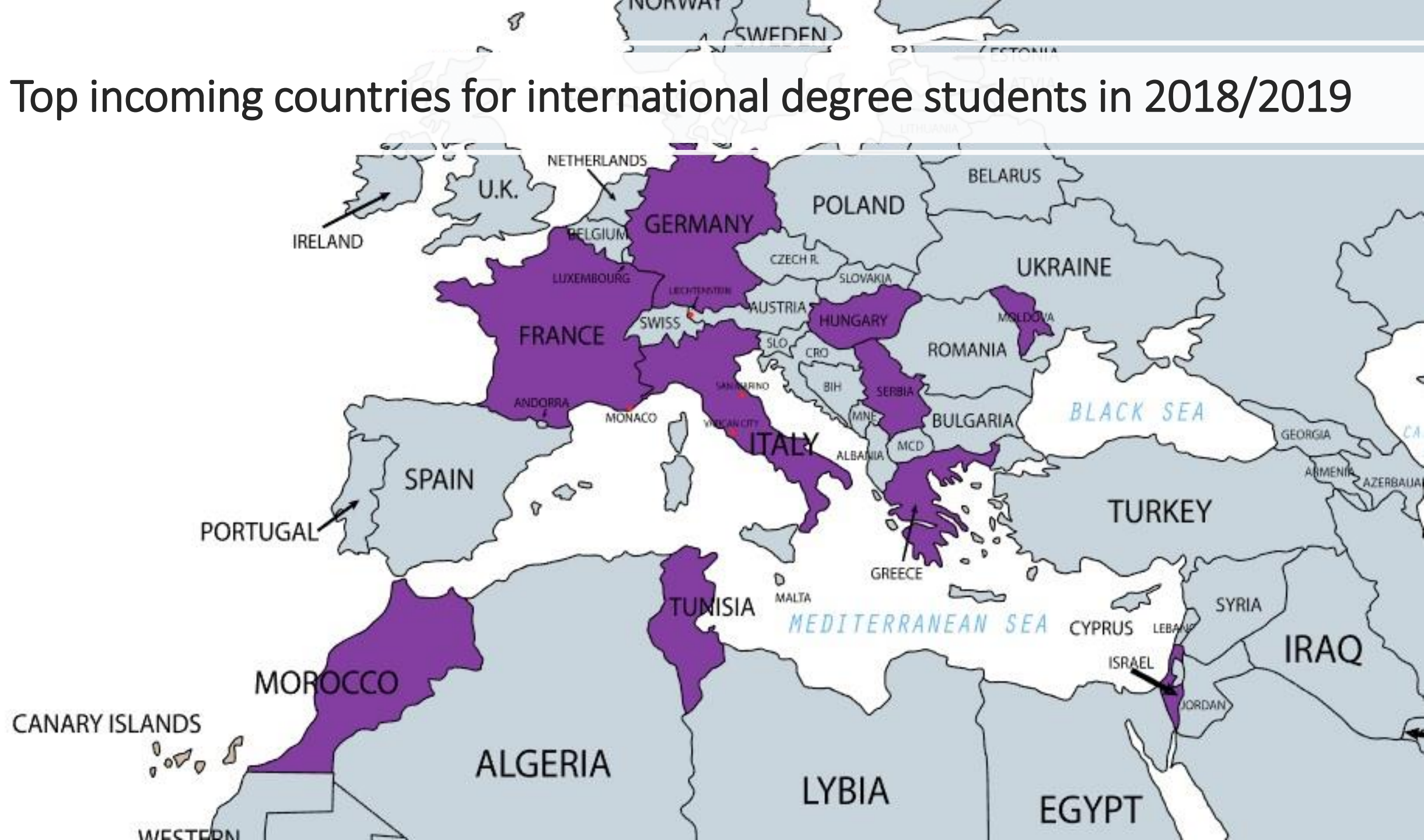
# Romania context and status quo

In 10 years the number of students dropped by 26%

In the last 10 years in Romania there was a 74% increase from 15,538 international students in 2009/2010 (together with Romanian ethnics) to 27,048 in 2018/2019.

In 2018/2019 the percentage of international degree students out of the total student population was 5.8%.

# Top incoming countries for international degree students in 2018/2019



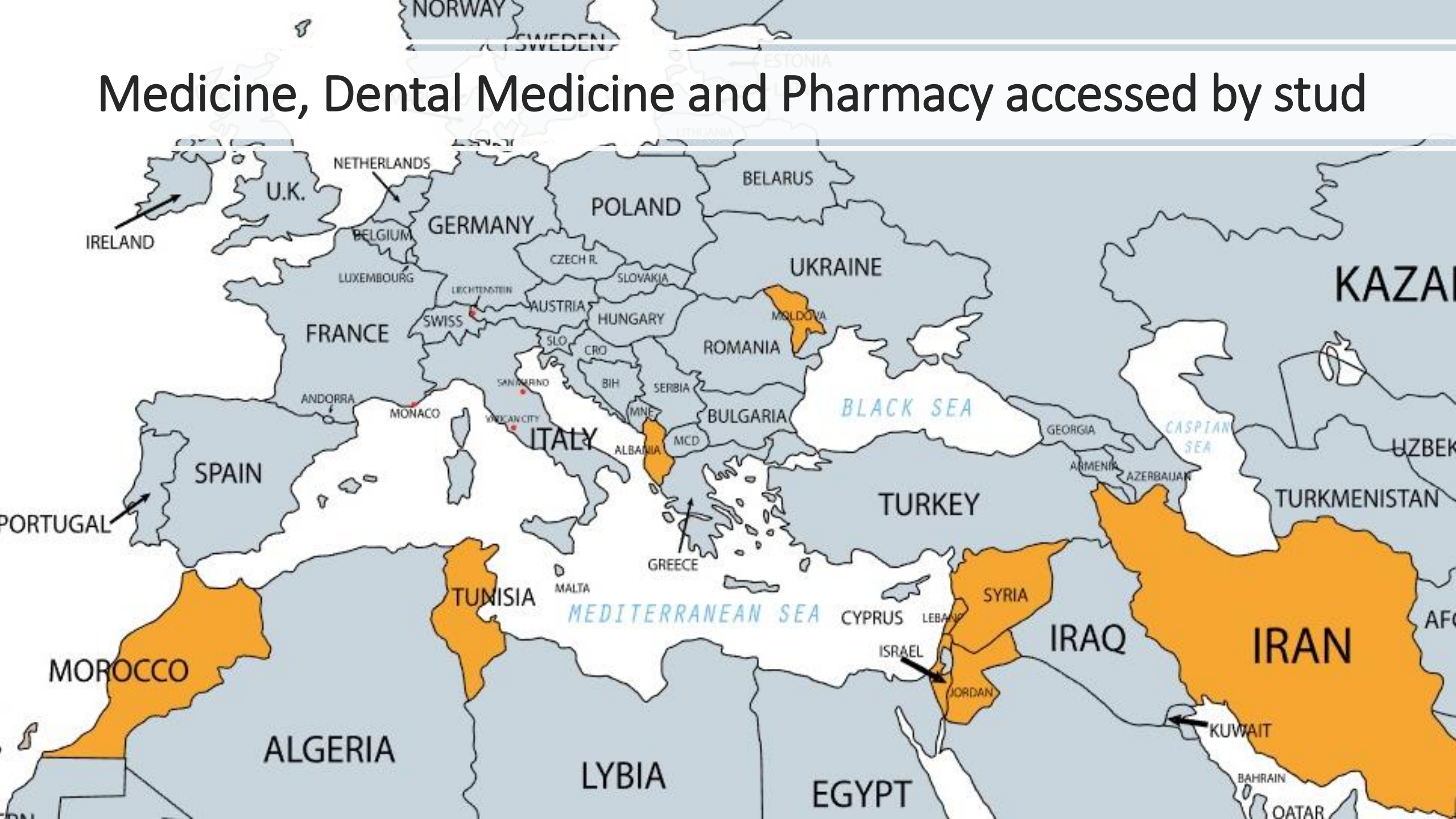
## Romania context and status quo

From the 2017 analyzed data, most populated academic programs with foreign students are taught in French.

Most of the international students study a **bachelor's degree** and more than one third of the **non-EU students in Romania** study mostly Medicine, Dental Medicine and Pharmacy.



# Medicine, Dental Medicine and Pharmacy accessed by stud



# Romania context and status quo

No internationalization national strategy formally acknowledged by the Ministry of Education and with a dedicated budget.

No institution dedicated to managing the internationalization of higher education.

No marketing strategy, policies or projects.

# Romania context and status quo

- In 2014/2015, The National Council of Rectors (NCR) started in a more informal way to manage one of the aspects of internationalization, namely promotional activities. By the end of 2019, **there are no clear objectives, a strategic approach or joint requests to the Ministry of Education for support in the development of internationalization.**
- In 2015 [www.studyinromania.gov.ro](http://www.studyinromania.gov.ro) was launched. At the end of 2019 there were **45 universities that submitted at least one study program**, which is a total of 3,677 study programs in 15 languages.

# Romania context and status quo

In 2016, The Ministry of Education started **The Internationalization Development Fund (FDI) program** to incentive HEIs that want to enhance their internationalization activities.

Presently, there are 235 programs in English, 95 programs in French, and 88 programs in German offered by Romanian universities.

After analyzing 19 of the HEIs that developed an internationalization strategy during the IEMU project, **all HEIs have the same strategy they developed in 2014/2015, but some of the institutions made a few updates.**

# Romania context and status quo

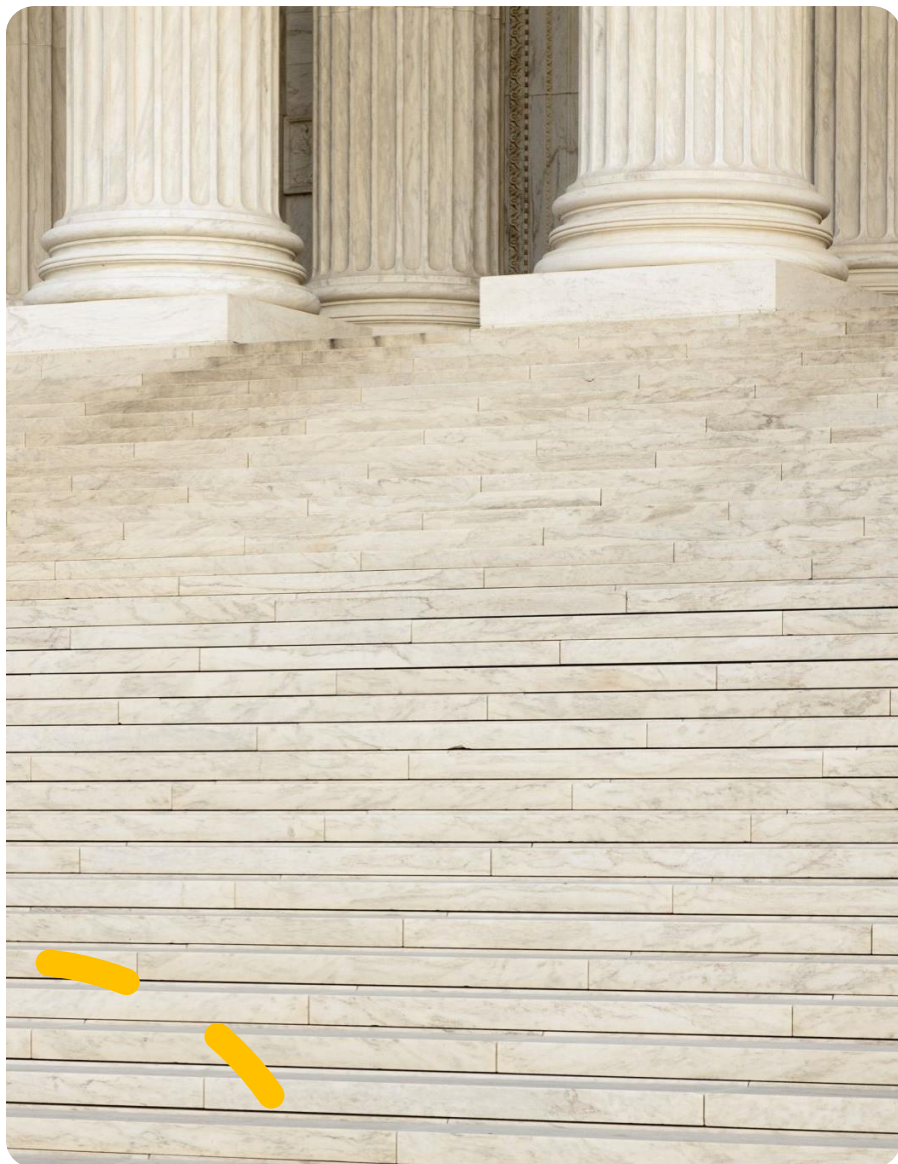
13 out of 19 universities mentioned in their internationalization strategy that they want to raise the visibility of their educational offer or to develop a marketing strategy.

17 have a website in English with information for international students and 18 of them have a dedicated page for international students with at least basic information, such as admission process and educational offer.

**In terms of mechanisms to promote their educational offer or to communicate with enrolled and prospective students, all analyzed HEIs have a Facebook page** on which universities communicate, but not always in English or in a foreign language.

12 HEIs have an Instagram account





## Type of institutions & details about the questionnaire

- HEIs were chosen based
  - on the number of students (small or big),
  - geographical position (covering most areas in Romania),
  - type of institution (public or private),
  - institution's mission, comprehensive or technical.

# Analysis of Romanian higher education institutions

- University 1 (U1), big public university, in the technical field, situated in North-East Romania
- University 2 (U2), big public university, with comprehensive mission, situated in West part of Romania and
- University 3 (U3), small private university, comprehensive mission, situated in South Romania.
- All case study universities have developed their most recent internationalization of education strategy during 2014/2015 in the IEMU project. Most of the HEIs made an update of the previous strategies, but in few areas.

# Analysis of Romanian higher education institutions

## Internationalization strategy vs HEIs strategic plan analysis

Quality of educational provision	Research	Mobility	Services for international students	Internal organization matters	Internationalization at home	Marketing	Partnerships	
3	3	3			3	3	3	Internationalization
		3				3		Branding and international communication/mkt
			3					Partnership with students and Student servicees
	3							Research and Innovation
3				3	3			University management and Quality Assurance
							3	Entrepreneurship & bridge with economic stakeholders/market place



# Priority countries to attract international students

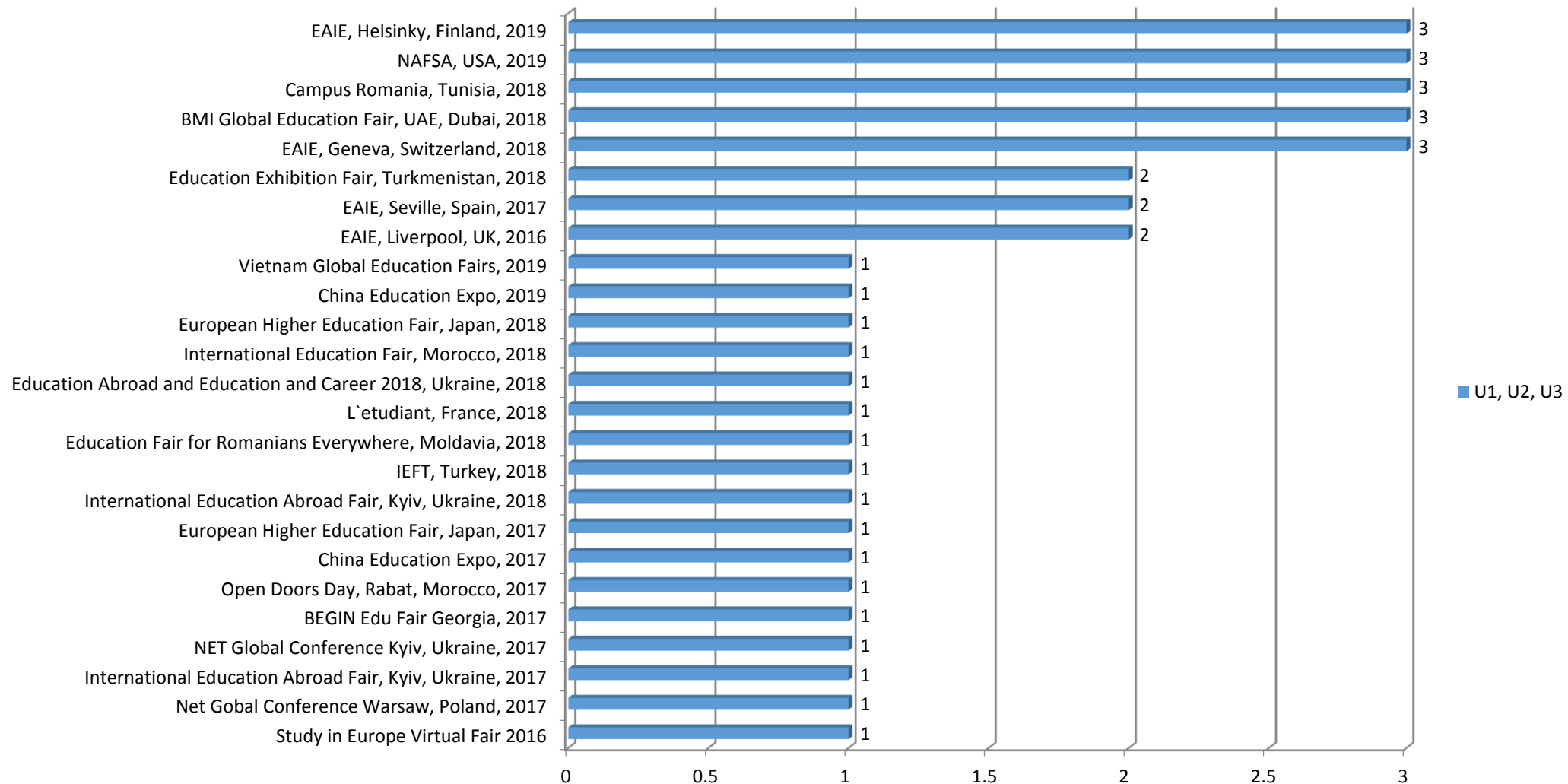
- **In 2017/2018**, top three regions for international degree seeking students were
  - Eastern Partnership (ENI EAST) – most of the students were from Moldavia, Romanian ethnics,
  - South-Mediterranean (ENI SOUTH) – Israel, Tunisia, Morocco or Palestine and
  - Western Balkans IPA – Serbia, Albania.

# Priority countries to attract international students



# International Education Fairs

Participation at International Education Fairs 2015/2016 - 2018/2019



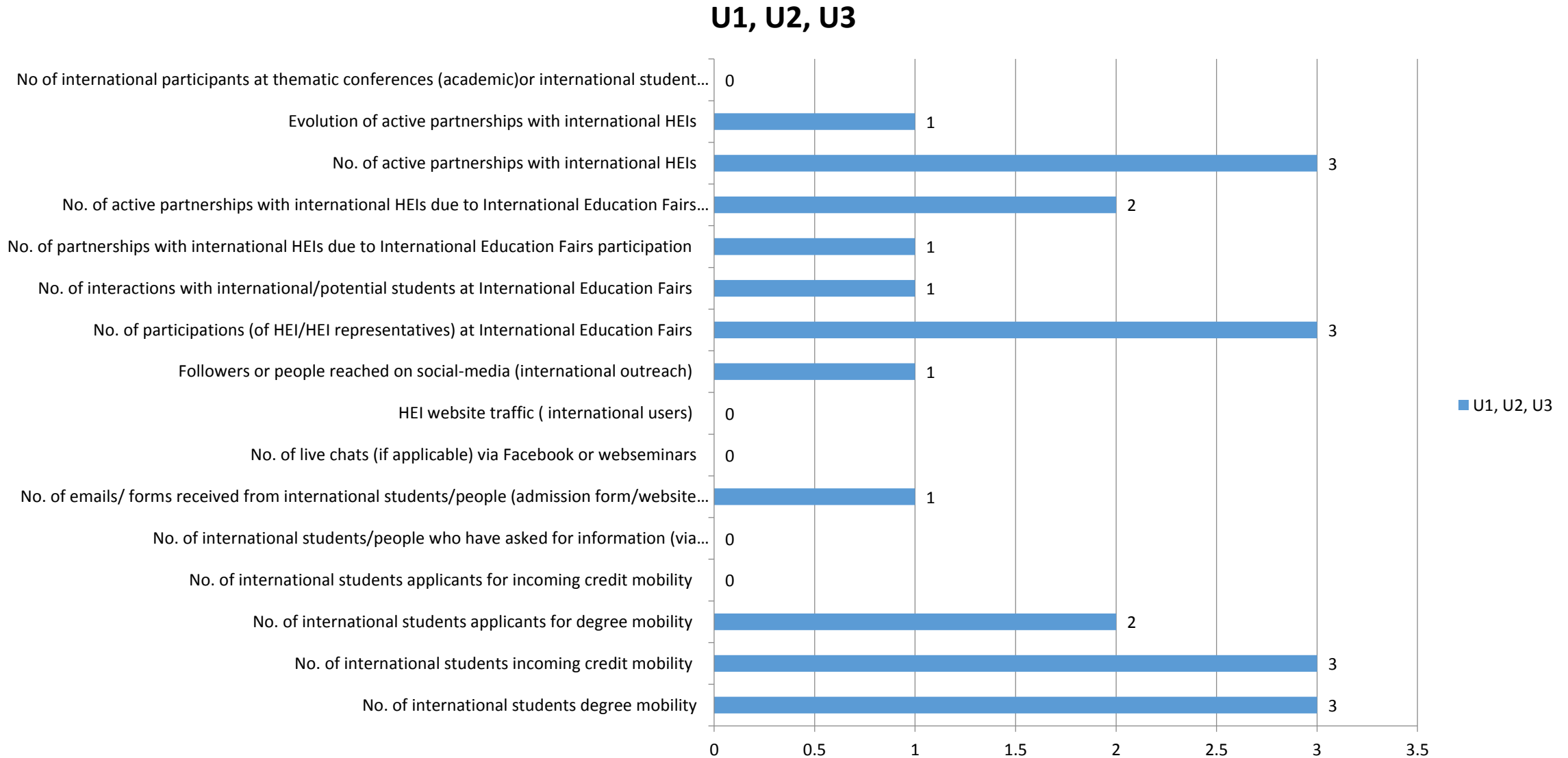
# Marketing and promotion

One HEI confirmed to have developed a marketing strategy

All HEIs have an allocated **budget of more than 10,000 Euro per year.**

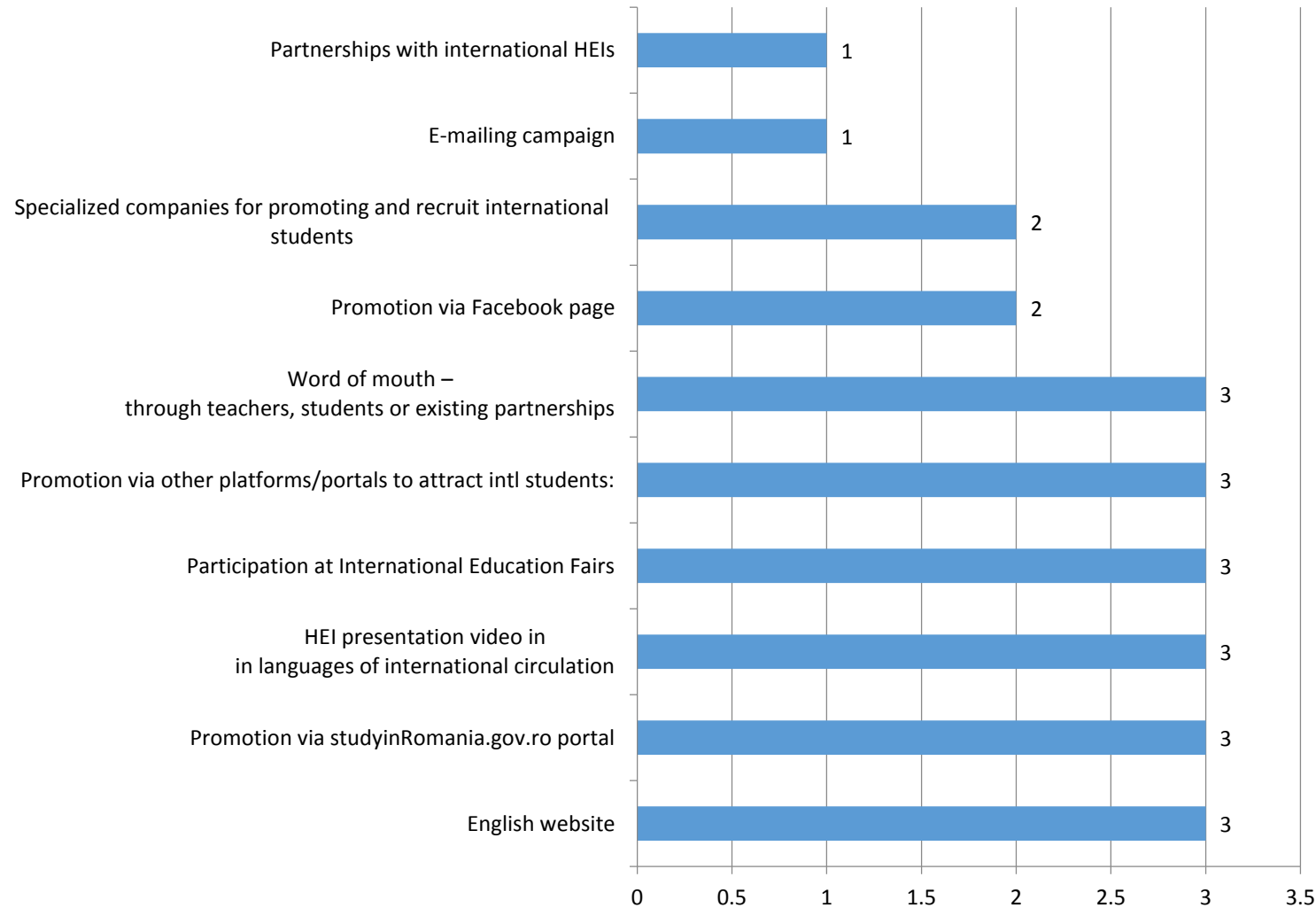
A hypothesis is that most of the allocated budget is used for international education fairs.

# Indicators considered by institutions when analyzing the impact of the internationalization strategy



# Mechanisms HEIs use to promote their educational offer

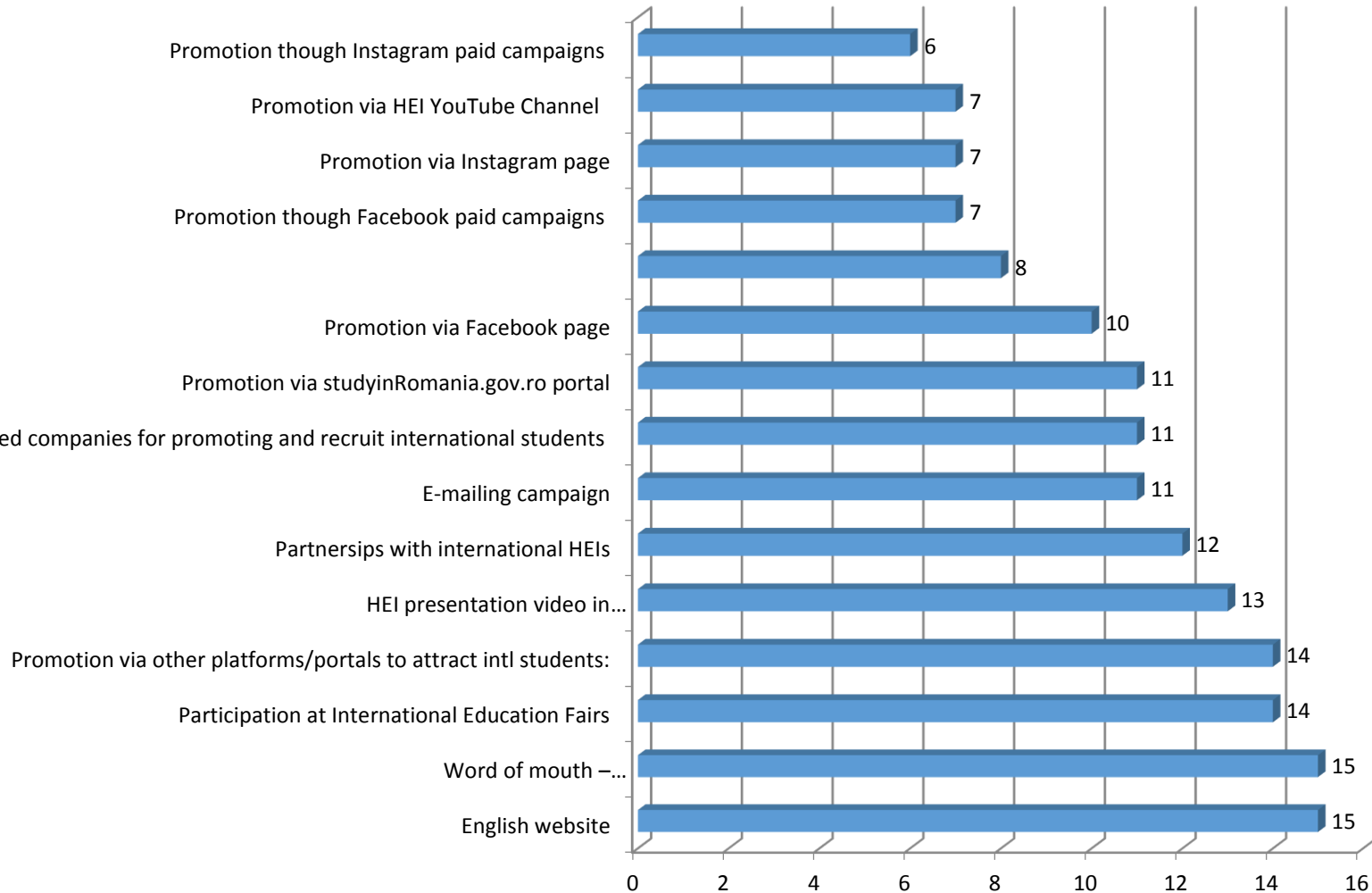
11. What are the mechanisms currently used by your institution to promote the educational offer and to attract international students for a degree mobility/full cycle? U1, U2, U3



■ 11. What are the mechanisms currently used by your institution to promote the educational offer and to attract international students for a degree mobility/full cycle? U1, U2, U3

# Perceived most important mechanisms and most efficient in attracting international degree seeking students

4.What do you think is the most efficient mechanisms currently used by your institution to promote the educational offer and to attract international students? U1, U2, U3

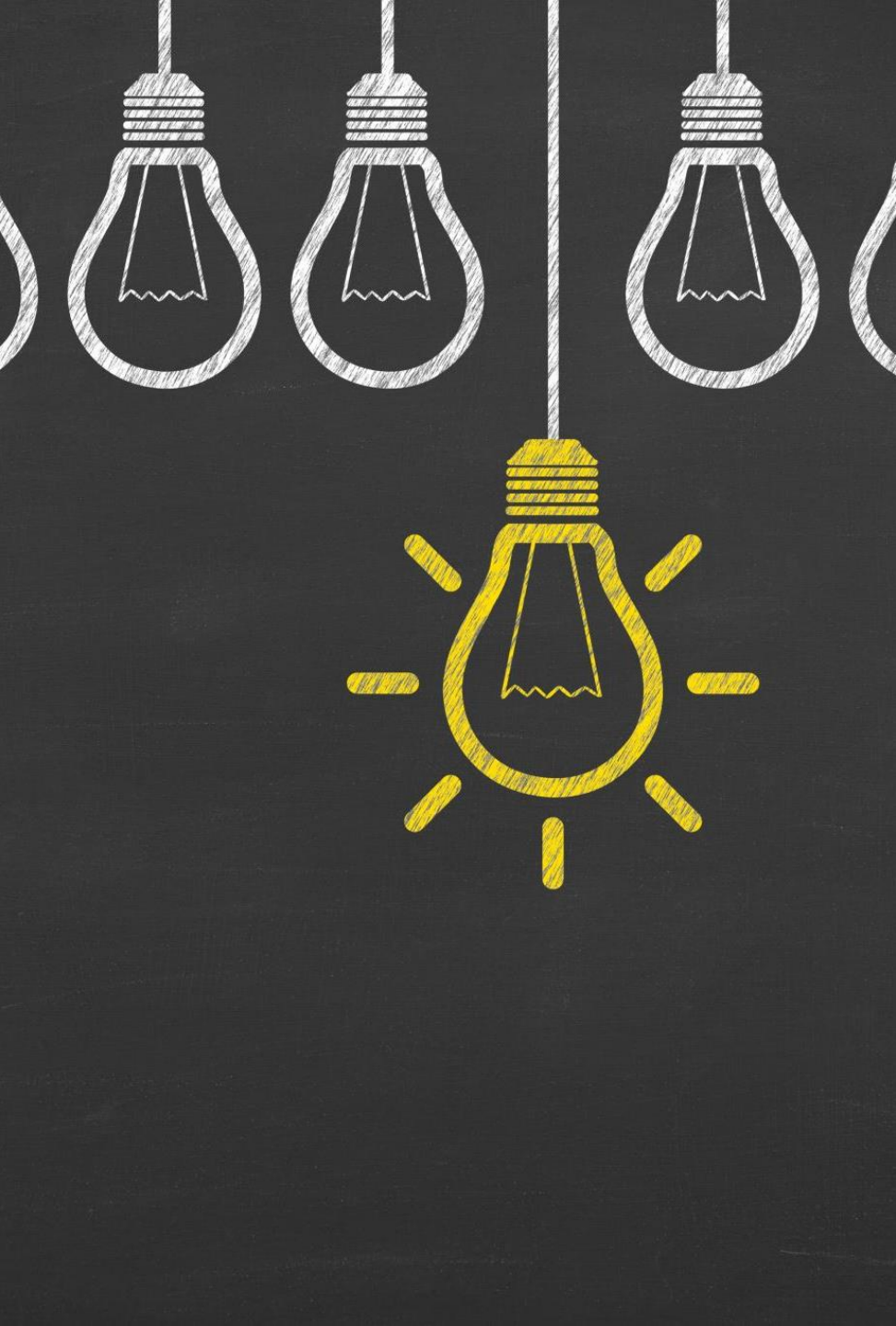


■ 4.What do you think is the most efficient mechanisms currently used by your institution to promote the educational offer and to attract international students? U1, U2, U3

# **HEIs perceptions: link between strategy vs actions and the impact internationalization has on the quality of higher education**

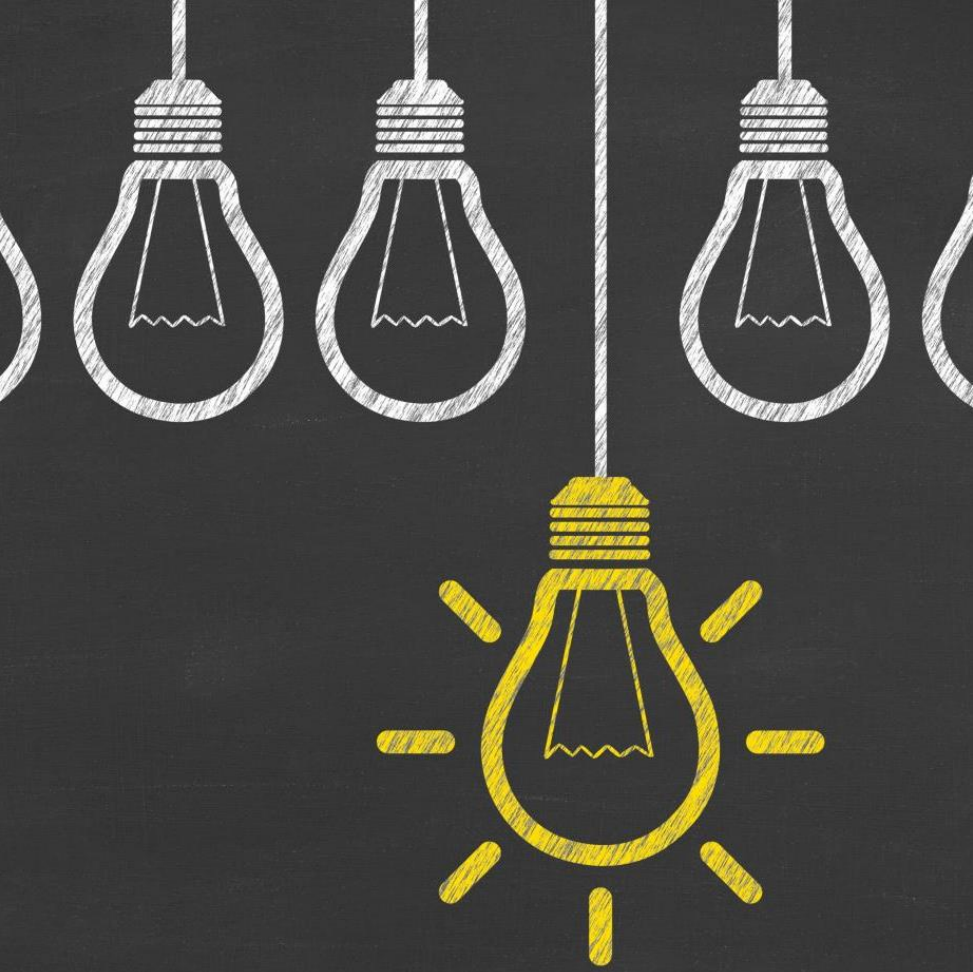
- Two universities (U1 public, technical and U3 private, comprehensive) consider that there is a **very high correlation (80% to 100%)** between the internationalization strategy and the actions they implement. The public comprehensive institution (U2) stated that there is a **relative correlation (around 20% to 40%)**.
- **Public universities consider that actions related to internationalization of higher education have a very high or high impact on the quality of education within the university.** The private institution perceives actions related to internationalization with relative impact (20% to 40%) on the quality of education in the institution.
- The **private university (U3)** considers that **the existence of an internationalized curricula has a very high impact on the quality of the program**, while the public universities perceive that the existence of an internationalized curricula has a high impact (U1) or a relative impact on the quality of the program (U2).





# Conclusions

- There is a relative **correlation between the institutional internationalization strategy, the strategic plan for institutional development and the main activities performed to promote their educational offer**. There are various correlations between objectives from both institutional documents (for each case study), but there is also a rift between objectives and actual actions.
- Participation at international educational fairs is only partially correlated (around 10% to 30%) with stated priority countries.



# Conclusions

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- **Prioritizing countries:** the private university seems to be more focused, choosing one priority area for attracting international degree seeking students.
- Perception between internationalization strategies versus actions, **most universities perceive** there is a **high correlation (80% to 100%)** between the internationalization strategy and the actions they implement.

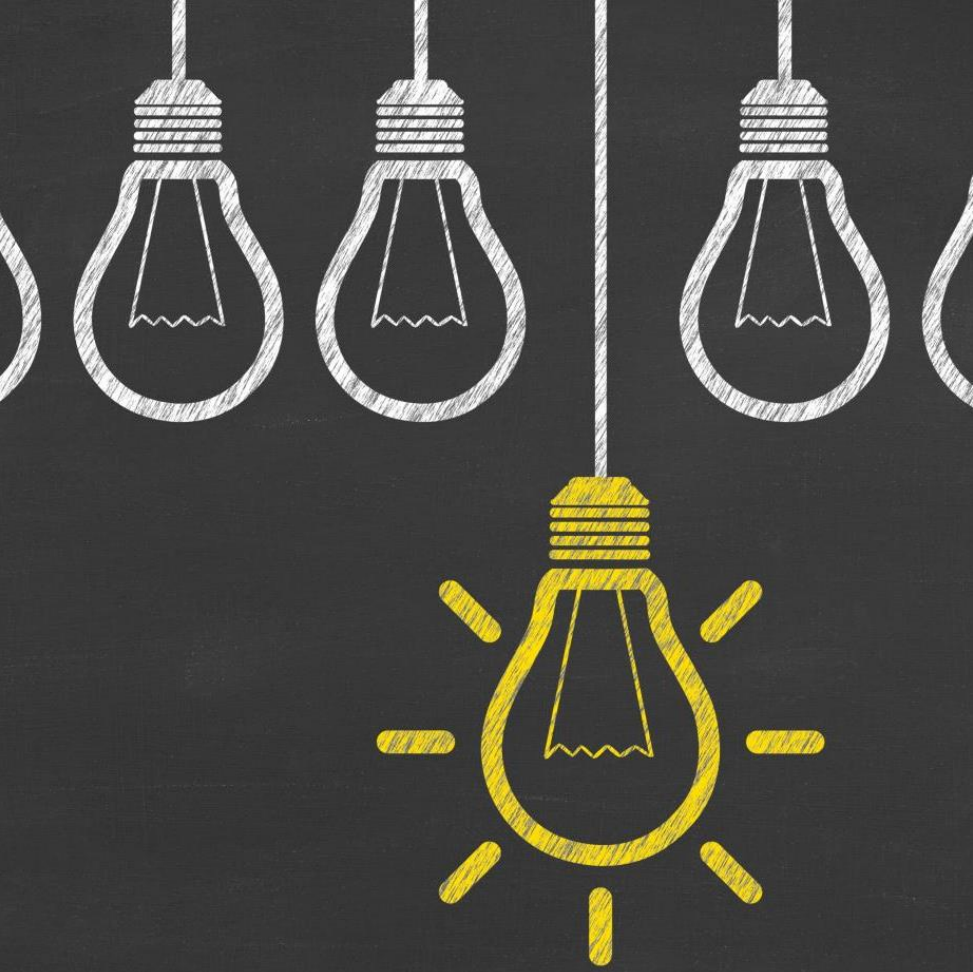


## Conclusions - How do universities promote their educational offer and what mechanisms do they use to attract international students?

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- HEIs do not have clear marketing objectives, specific targets and well-defined mechanisms that could help build their brand.
- HEIs promote themselves through the English website, presentation video, participation at International Education Fairs, promotion via the national portal [www.studyinromania.gov.ro](http://www.studyinromania.gov.ro), promotion via other platforms and through word of mouth (through teachers, students or existing partnerships).
- HEIs use these mechanisms to attract international students in an ad-hoc way and are not in line with trends in international education marketing or with the new generation, the so called the Generation C (the connected generation).






## Conclusions - How do universities promote their educational offer and what mechanisms do they use to attract international students?

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- Institutions do not yet perceive social media as an essential mechanism to advertise their educational offer or to attract international students.
- Most of HEIs use specialized companies for promoting activities and recruiting international students.
- HEIs fail to consider indicators that could show them relevant data & could give their actions a more focused approach on the objectives, such as the HEI website traffic (international users). There is no certainty that universities are aware of their target audience with its specifics and their main selling points.

A row of pencils is shown against a dark background. Most of the pencils are dark grey or black, but one pencil in the center is bright yellow, making it stand out. The pencils are arranged in a slightly curved line, and their tips are pointing upwards.

## Conclusions - Which mechanisms are most efficient in attracting international students?

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- The English version of the website is seen very effective, but when measuring the impact of the strategy or mechanisms used, none of the HEIs monitor HEI website traffic (international users).
- The perception questions revealed a limited understanding of the concepts of comprehensive internationalization, communication, branding and promotion.
- While **public universities consider that internationalization has a very high or high impact on the quality of education in the university**, the **private university that perceives internationalization with relative impact (20% to 40%)** on the quality of education in the institution.



## Recommendations

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- Universities should pay closer attention to the **correlation between objectives and actions**; otherwise they will most likely fail to achieve the stated goals.
- A **better planning** should be put in place in order to use the budget in a more strategic way rather than spending it on actions that are not in accordance with the declared objectives and do not help in fulfilling the strategy.
- An **exhaustive analysis** of all the actions in relations with the stated objectives. This could help to better monitor the process and the results & could make HEIs change or adapt their strategy.



## Recommendations

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- Defining USP for specific programs/institutions could help prospective students make more accurate choices based on concise points that differentiate universities.
- Consider developing a department or hire specialized human resource representatives in education marketing, to work closely with specialized personnel in recruiting and attracting international students.
- HEIs should dedicate more time and resources in creating their own academic brand.





## Recommendations

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- A better monitorization of the used mechanisms and analyze the data in order to have a certainty whether these are efficient or not.
- Adapt more to the most used social-media platforms, by communicating and promoting their educational offer, as well as branding themselves on these platforms.
- The most populated academic programs with foreign students were those taught in French. Therefore, HEIs have an opportunity to develop more Bachelor programs taught in French.





## Recommendations

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- To sum up, institutions miss in several aspects to connect their internationalization strategies with actions. For them to achieve their goals, they should have an action plan that follows each objective.
- Even though studies show that prospective students spend a highly large time on social media, from where they take their information, **Romanian institutions seem to ignore this aspect** and do not concentrate their efforts in better communicating on social media.
- It seems universities still do not understand what comprehensive internationalization is.



**Thank you!**



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