

The Economic Impact of International Students in Spain

2024

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Executive Summary

This study focuses on students from abroad who choose Spain as their educational destination, investing their resources in the completion of a specific program and planning to return to their home countries at the conclusion of their studies. We include six types of programs meeting the following requirements: they have a positive economic impact on the Spanish economy, they are part of a clearly defined educational sector, and there are public and or private actors that collect reliable data on that sector. The categories included are Study Abroad (US), Erasmus+, Language and Culture, Undergraduates, Graduates and participants in NALCAP (Auxiliares de Conversación)¹.

While this research allows for some comparison with previous studies, it is important to note that not all indicators are equivalent to those in our study for the 2018-2019 academic year². This edition focuses on internationals who travel to Spain for the purpose of completing an educational program here. Thus, it does not include students who attend centers of the Instituto Cervantes abroad; nor does it account for immigrants who have arrived in Spain and must learn the language to be able to access jobs and or their children, all of whom will eventually become citizens.

Our aim is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the economic environment where educational institutions of these types operate and interact. To achieve this, we approach this work from an Economic Intelligence (EI) perspective, completing the processes of gathering, analyzing and interpreting data to support informed decision-making and the development of effective strategies³ for the export of education sector.

The research maintains its initial purpose to serve as an information piece to advocate with Spanish authorities and stakeholders for the removal of barriers that negatively impact enrollments, and to inform the greater public on the benefits of this economic activity. The analysis herein not only measures expenditures made by international students in Spain but also accounts for the considerable multiplier effect of those expenditures.

Our findings show that 602,662 internationals enrolled, within our six categories, in the 2022-2023 academic year. We determine that their overall economic impact on the Spanish economy amounts to 6,345,053,146 euros and that the multiplier effect for student spend is 2.28. This indicates that for each euro spent on their academic program, these students disburse an additional 1.28 euros on a broad range of sectors of the Spanish economy.

Our findings indicate that the economic impact of international students in Spain increased by 67% in the past four academic years. The average per-student spending increased by 190%, from 3,633 euros (2018-2019) to 10,528 euros (2022-2023). This exponential growth is an outcome of the positive correlation between length of stay and impact, where the longer academic year programs (e.g., graduate, undergraduate and NALCAP) have greater indirect effects than other shorter options.

¹ The North American Language and Culture Assistants Program (NALCAP) is a joint venture of Spain's Ministry of Education and the 17 autonomous states.

² See *The Economic Impact of International Students In Spain 2020*, at: https://b3a0bdbe-54e2-4cdb-8357-65dd8719383e.filesusr.com/ugd/bedbcb_046f87784449423faac4cae59c89247b.pdf

³ The Role of Economic Intelligence in Market Analysis. Retrieved September 2, 2024, from: <https://www.scip.org/news/676195/The-Role-of-Economic-Intelligence-in-Market-Analysis-.htm>

The number of internationals enrolled in Spanish language schools is the most numerous, accounting for 48.16% of the total. The second largest group is that of students completing master's programs of all types, accounting for 18.84%, followed by undergraduates (12.92%) and study abroad participants (10.65%). Erasmus+ incoming contribute with 8.24% of the overall figure, and NALCAP makes a strong initial entry with 1.19%.

Master's programs are the category with the largest impact, followed by Undergraduates, Spanish Language and Culture, US Study Abroad, Erasmus+, and NALCAP. Graduate programs enroll 18.84% of all internationals in this study, and account for 46% of the overall impact. The combination of Master's and Undergraduates constitutes 32% of the enrollment and generates 72% of the overall economic impact from the export of education. These two categories also account for the highest per-student spending.

The multiplier effect of 2.28 for the year 2022-2023 is a useful indicator to assess the investment that students are making in extra-academic items and services vs. their academic expenditures. Indirect effects are greater than direct effects in all categories except for master's students, a finding that highlights opportunities for the growth of quality affordable options in other economic sectors serving the student population.

International students and the academic providers that recruit them contribute to the financing of the Spanish taxation system in, at least, two ways. First, the indirect spending (3,567,115,126 euros) is subject to a value added tax ranging from 4% to 21%. Second, two categories (i.e., Study Abroad, and Language & Culture) hire faculty and staff for whom they make payments to the social security administration⁴. Study Abroad programs hired a total of 856 staff, and Spanish Language and Culture schools employed 5,805 teachers and administrators. Thus, the number of professionals holding positions in these international education groups combined amount to no less than 6,661.

While the focus of this study is on the economic impact of this sector on the Spanish economy, we highlight the need for the recognition of all added social benefits of the export of education as a pending subject with the broader public in Spain. This comprises the constructive social outcomes that derive from the presence of international students, including: the modernization of educational institutions⁵, the internationalization of host communities, the development of the socio-cultural environment, the potential to attract global businesses seeking well-prepared workers and eventually the enhancement of the policies and politics that will shape Spain's international relations. The carbon footprint estimates for these categories⁶ should also be considered to become a component of future studies.

⁴ We consider that Erasmus+, undergraduate, and masters' programs do not require hiring additional personnel to host international students.

⁵ Dr. Alvaro Escribano, Director of the Carlos III International School at Universidad Carlos III de Madrid. Personal communication, March 2, 2017.

⁶ Wiedmann, T. (2009). A review of recent multi-region input-output models used for consumption-based emission and resource accounting, *Ecological Economics*, Volume 69, Issue 2 (pp. 211-222).

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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to deliver research-based findings that will allow advocates of international education in Spain to shape more effective institutional policies and legislation, support the elimination of administrative roadblocks, and ultimately further international exchange and cooperation. Our objective is to provide readily available information that can be easily communicated, making research useful through a partnership between researchers and advocates⁷.

To achieve this, we seek to estimate the overall economic impact on the Spanish economy of international students engaged in various types of educational programs during the 2022-2023 academic year, including the multiplier effect for other industries. The categories included in this research are Study Abroad (US), Erasmus+, Language and Culture, Undergraduates, Graduates and participants in NALCAP (Auxiliares de Conversación)⁸.

Scope of the Study and Expected Outcomes

We approach this study from the perspective of economic interdependence⁹ between different sectors of the Spanish economy, that results from international students buying or hiring goods or services. Leontief's input-output model serves as our conceptual framework applied broadly to the export of international education to assess its impact on various industries in the economy¹⁰.

To assess the overall economic impact of international students in Spain, including the multiplier effect for other industries, we seek responses to the following questions:

1. Which are the most relevant indicators of the economic impact of these international students in the Spanish context?
2. How should the direct and indirect effects generated by students attending each of these programs be quantified?

As in previous editions, the outcomes of this analysis enable us to reach conclusions and make recommendations that should help make informed decisions and design effective strategies across the sector with the goal of improving the numbers, diversity, and quality of students for the various categories. This will improve both the economics of our export of education sector and the host communities' opportunities to interact in a global, multicultural, multilingual environment.

⁷ Tabak, R. G., Eyler, A. A., Dodson, E. A., & Brownson, R. C. (2015). Accessing evidence to inform public health policy: a study to enhance advocacy. *Public health*, 129(6), 698–704. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2015.02.016>

⁸ The North American Language and Culture Assistants Program (NALCAP) is a joint venture of Spain's Ministry of Education and the 17 autonomous states.

⁹ Miernyk, William H., "The Elements of Input-Output Analysis" (2020). Web Book of Regional Science. 6. <https://researchrepository.wvu.edu/rri-web-book/6> (p. vi)

¹⁰ Miller and Blair (2009), *Input-output studies: foundations and extensions*, Second Edition (p. 2). Cambridge University Press

Methodology and methods

This is a mixed methods study that requires identifying trusted sources, using various collection methods (see Table 1), and deciding how to analyze each set of data. We make use of quantitative public data from government agencies and associations, and complete a member check process for data collection, rationales, and analysis with experts in each of the fields; using the qualitative data they provide to inform our quantitative findings and triangulate our conclusions.

Table 1: sources and expenses used to quantify and inform direct and indirect impacts

	SOURCE/S	DATA BASIS
Study Abroad	APUNE program directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Academic program delivery → Extra-academic items and services → Student/personnel ratio
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → APUNE survey on salaries → Instituto Nacional de Estadística → Régimen General de la Seguridad Social 	Personnel costs: salaries plus social security fees
	APUNE students	SA living and leisure expenses
NALCAP	→ Ministerio de Educación y FP	(Funding for NALCAP participants)
Erasmus+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → The European Commission → SEPIE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → (Spanish funding for outgoing participants) → Average length of stay
Language and Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → FEDELE → EDUESPAÑA → Instituto Cervantes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Direct and indirect individual student expenditures → Personnel positions → Number of schools
Undergraduate Degrees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Sistema Integrado de Información Universitaria (SIIU) → Online sources 	→ Tuition
Graduate Degrees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → SIIU → AEDEE → AEEN → Online sources 	Academic program delivery
NALCAP, Erasmus+, Undergraduates, and Graduates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → CBRE Insights and Research (Madrid) → Public (online) sources 	Living and leisure expenses

In response to Research Question 1: Which are the most relevant indicators of the economic impact of international students in the Spanish context? (see Table 2)

Table 2: conceptually clustered matrix displaying the direct and indirect effects of international students

CATEGORY	DIRECT EFFECTS	INDIRECT EFFECTS
US Study Abroad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Academic program delivery ▪ Personnel: leadership and staff, plus Seguridad Social benefits 	<p><u>Paid for by programs:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Housing ▪ Orientation and welcome ▪ Local cultural activities ▪ End of semester workshops, receptions, and other activities ▪ Medical insurance ▪ Excursions <p><u>Paid for by individual students:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local transportation ▪ Cell phone ▪ Travel ▪ Leisure activities ▪ Shopping and others
NALCAP	(Spanish government funding)	
Erasmus+	(Spanish government funding for outgoing students)	
Undergrad. Degrees	Academic program delivery	Living and leisure
Master’s Degrees	Academic program delivery	
Language and Culture	Language program delivery	

In response to Research Question 2: How should the direct and indirect effects generated by students attending each of these programs be quantified?

The data gathering and analysis processes for each category will produce the direct and indirect effects for each student cohort¹¹.

¹¹ Miller and Blair distinguish between Type I or *simple multipliers*, when only direct and indirect effects are considered; and Type II multipliers, considering also induced effects, which we are unable to assess for the present study.

Data Gathering and Analysis

The direct and indirect effects and the impact they generate are described for each of the program categories in the following sections.

US STUDY ABROAD (SA)

As in previous editions of this study, we continue to assess the total numbers of SA students in Spain using the percentages of participation in programs by duration in the Open Doors reports, and the number of student visas issued in the US provided by the Spanish Ministry of Migrations. Exceptionally, we exclude academic years greatly affected by the pandemic to avoid outliers which would differ from the data majority.

The delay in release of public data for duration of stays and visas issued imposes the use of previous trends triangulated with other sources of data to make reasonable inferences to fill the voids.

According to Open Doors data, the duration of stay for US Study Abroad participants remained around the same percentages from 2016-2017 through 2018-2019. We compare those pre-pandemic terms with the last year published in the Open Doors report (2021-2022). For the four years used, percentages of students by program duration remain very similar. Thus, we infer that as the field returns to its previous status, duration will remain at similar levels and adopt the average of the previous four terms to produce 2022-2023 figures (see Table 3).

Table 3: percentages of students by duration of their stay abroad

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2021/22	AVERAGE (2022-2023)
Summer & others <13 weeks	66.6	66.9	66.6	66.8	66.7
Semester/2 Quarters	30.9	30.5	31	30.7	30.8
Academic Year	2.5	2.6	2.4	2.5	2.5

Participants in semester, two quarters, and academic year programs, all longer than 90 days, would have been required to apply for a student visa. To infer the number of visas that are likely to have been awarded in 2022-2023 we adopt a continued growth trend in line with that of the pre-pandemic years' average growth (+5.1%)¹².

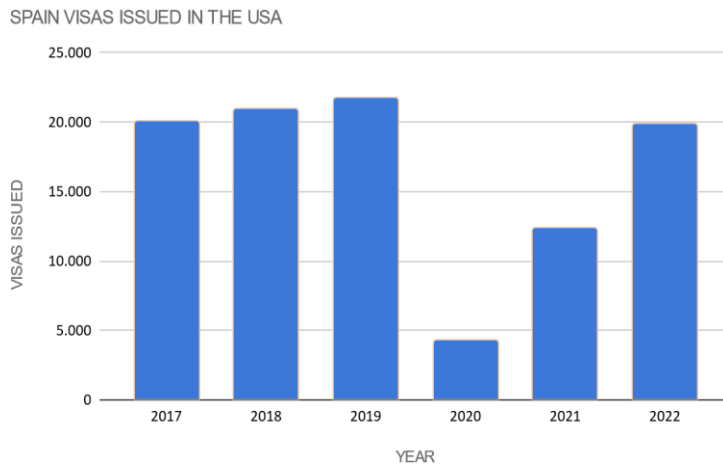
Table 4: student visas inferred for 2023

YEAR	VISAS	GROWTH PERCENTAGE
2016	18,742	
2017	20,092	7.20%
2018	20,916	4.10%
2019	21,743	3.95%
2023	22,852	5.1%

¹² For this average, we exclude 2022 to avoid the excessive growth in comparison with 2021 which was deeply impacted by the lack of Study Abroad during the pandemic.

Several sources of data support the growth trend. According to the office of the Secretary of State for Migrations, the number of long-term (+90 days) visas for studies issued by Spanish Consulates in the US shows a strong recovery after the global pandemic (see Chart 1).

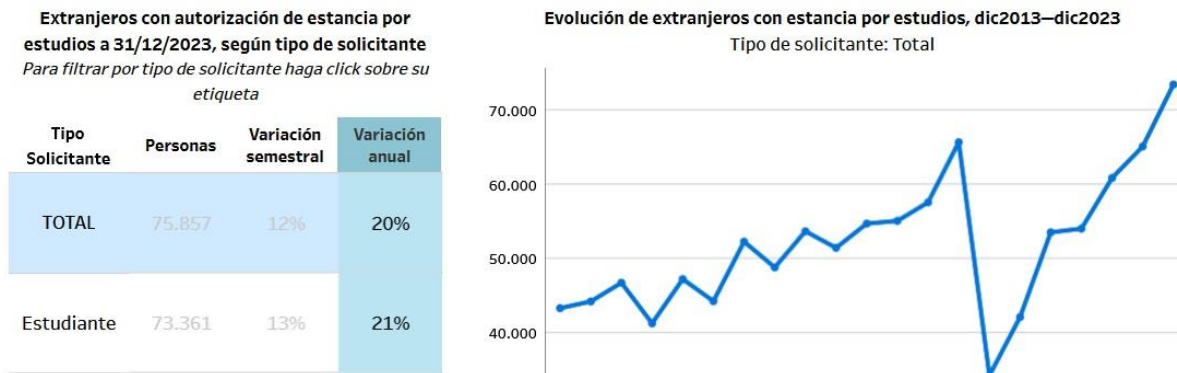
Chart 1: Spain student visas issued in the USA



Adapted from <https://www.inclusion.gob.es/web/opi/estadisticas/catalogo/visados?tab=ultimos-datos>

Institutions operating in the Study Abroad field argue that there has been a great recovery in numbers for the 2022-2023 academic year in Spain, raising figures well above the pre-pandemic levels. Sources sharing this perspective include the leaderships of the Association of North American Programs in Spain (APUNE) and the Carlos III International School (C3IS). The Spanish Ministry of Migrations’ data is also aligned with that growth trend, showing overall increases in numbers of internationals with a student visa in Spain, amounting to +21% from December 31, 2022, to December 31, 2023 (see Chart 2); and, +127% from June 30, 2022, to June 30, 2023.

Chart 2: 73,361 international students accounted for, as holding a long-term visa, by the Ministry of Migrations



Adapted from https://www.inclusion.gob.es/en/web/opi/estadisticas/catalogo/extranjeros_estudios

We find the total number of Study Abroad students in Spain based on calculations for duration of stay and visas awarded.

Table 5: number of SA students by program length

PROGRAM LENGTH	PROJECTED NUMBER OF VISAS IN 2022-2023	PERCENTAGE BY LENGTH OF STAY	NUMBER OF STUDENTS
Summer & others, less than 13 weeks		66.7%	42,800
Semester or 2 quarters		30.8%	19,764
Academic year		2.5%	1,604
Total¹³	21,368	100%	64,168

Quantifying the direct effects of SA students

The surveys completed by APUNE program directors helped us define the costs of academic program delivery¹⁴, personnel, and student services¹⁵. Most of the items returned clear quantitative values from which we can produce average per student per term amounts. Personnel costs required collecting additional data and making some qualitative decisions prior to quantifying their impact.

With student to staff ratios from the APUNE surveys, we determine how many personnel would be hired to work for these programs which we round to 75 students per employee. We use Spain's standard –employees receive 12 months of compensation for 11 months of work– to turn months of employment into full-time equivalents (FTEs) (see Table 6).

To determine personnel expenditures, we look at data in the June 2023 APUNE survey and add Social Security costs to produce the total expenditures. We presume that most staff would fall under Group 2 for *Ingenieros Técnicos, Peritos y Ayudantes Titulados* category, who contribute a minimum of 15,120 euros per year¹⁶. For leadership positions, in Group 1, (under: *Ingenieros y Licenciados, Personal de Alta Dirección*), the average social security adds up to 21,114 euros per year. The resulting personnel costs for the SA cohort, including wages and mandatory social security benefits, are 46,692 euros per staff member and 83,751 euros per leadership position.

¹³ The average from 2022 and 2023 is 21,368 visas awarded in 2022-2023

¹⁴ For this study Academic Program Delivery includes the financial costs incurred by the Study Abroad program to deliver courses, rent offices and or classrooms required to ensure the successful delivery of these courses, hire local faculty, and pay fees to local host institutions for their academic services.

¹⁵ USD amounts were converted to Euros using the European Central Bank exchange rate of June 30, 2023, where 1 Euro was \$1.0866. Retrieved on June 30, 2023, from ECB/Eurosystem https://www.ecb.europa.eu/stats/policy_and_exchange_rates/euro_reference_exchange_rates/html/eurofxref-graph-usd.en.html

¹⁶ Retrieved October 15, 2023 from *Régimen General de la Seguridad Social: Bases de cotización contingencias comunes*, at <https://www.seg-social.es/wps/portal/wss/internet/Trabajadores/CotizacionRecaudacionTrabajadores/36537#36538>

Table 6: SA personnel costs

STUDENTS	STUDENT / PERSONNEL RATIO	TYPE OF EMPLOYEE	PERSONNEL HIRED	MONTHS WORKED	FTEs (11 months)	SALARY	TOTAL PERSONNEL EXPENSE IN €
Summer: 2 months							
42,800	1/34 staff	Staff	1,259	2,518	229	46,692	10,692,468
	1/49 leadership	Leadership	873	1,747	159	83,751	13,316,409
Semester: 4.5 months							
19,764	1/34 staff	Staff	581	2,616	238	46,692	11,112,696
	1/49 leadership	Leadership	403	1,815	165	83,751	13,818,915
Academic Year: 9 months							
1,604	1/34 staff	Staff	47	425	39	46,692	1,820,988
	1/49 leadership	Leadership	33	295	27	83,751	2,261,277
TOTALS				9,416	856		53,022,753

The direct impact of SA students results from adding academic program delivery and personnel costs (see Table 7).

Table 7: direct impact of SA students (in Euros)

		ACAD./ YEAR	SEMESTER	SUMMER	TOTAL IN €
Number of Students		1,604	19,764	42,800	
Acad. Program delivery	Per student	8,000	4,000.00	1,333	
	All students	12,832,000	79,056,000	57,066,667	148,954,667
Personnel FTEs	Staff	39	238	229	23,626,152
	Leadership	27	165	159	29,396,601
Total Direct Impact SA students					201,977,420

Quantifying the indirect effects of SA students

We survey both directors and students at US university programs to identify the main items and services on which institutions and participants made expenditures during a term in Spain. Results are displayed in Table 8.

Table 8: indirect impact of SA students (in Euros)

ITEM/SERVICE		ACAD. YR. STUDENTS	SEMESTER STUDENTS	SUMMER STUDENTS
Number of Students		1,604	19,764	42,800
EXPENSES PAID BY PROGRAMS				
Housing (monthly)	Per student	7,400	3,700	925
	All students	11,869,600	73,126,800	39,590,000
Orientation & welcome	Per student	974.48	487	121.81
	All students	1,563,065.92	9,625,068.00	5,213,468.00
Cultural and local activities	Per student	1,639.28	819.64	204.91
	All students	2,629,405.12	16,199,364.96	8,770,148.00
End of semester activities	Per student	1,488	744	186
	All students	2,386,752.00	14,704,416.00	7,960,800.00
Medical insurance	Per student	485	242.5	121.25
	All students	777,940.00	4,792,770.00	5,189,500.00
Excursions	Per student	2,754.08	1,377.04	344.26
	All students	4,417,544.32	27,215,818.56	14,734,328.00
Sum of Exp. paid by Programs	All students	23,644,307	145,664,238	81,458,244
EXPENSES PAID BY STUDENTS				
Local transportation	Per student	492.4	246.2	61.55
	All students	789,809.60	4,865,896.80	2,634,340.00
Cell phone	Per student	452.48	226.24	56.56
	All students	725,777.92	4,471,407.36	2,420,768.00
Travel	Per student	4,723.28	2,361.64	590.41
	All students	7,576,141.12	46,675,452.96	25,269,548.00
Leisure	Per student	1,964.80	982.4	245.6
	All students	3,151,539.20	19,416,153.60	10,511,680.00
Other expenditures	Per student	784	392	98
	All students	1,257,536.00	7,747,488.00	4,194,400.00
Sum of Exp. paid by Students	All students	13,500,803.84	83,176,398.72	45,030,736.00
Sum of Exp. (programs and students)		37,145,111	228,840,636	126,488,980
TOTAL INDIRECT SA IMPACT				392,474,727

NALCAP

The figures for NALCAP (Asistentes de Conversación) participants, their length of stay, and their salaries were drawn from data published by the Ministry of Universities.

The North American Language and Culture Assistants Program (NALCAP) is an educational outreach initiative of the Ministry of Education of Spain. The program provides U.S. and Canadian college students and graduates, majoring in any subject, with the opportunity of becoming language teaching assistants to teachers in Spain while at the same time being immersed in the Spanish language, culture, and society¹⁷

NALCAP participants receive a base salary of 800 euros per month for the duration of the academic year including holidays (10 months). In the 2022-2023 academic year the number of internationals in this program was 7,187¹⁸. Their direct impact would have been the (negative) amount of their salaries, while their indirect (positive) impact would have been their living and leisure expenses for the duration of their stay.

We assign NALCAP students the same living expenses as those of Erasmus+ students (see Living and Leisure expenditures in P. 16, at the Erasmus+ section).

The direct and indirect effects of NALCAP students are displayed in Tables 9 and 10.

Table 9: direct impact of NALCAP (SA) students

7,187 participants	Monthly Salary	Yearly Salary	Total Amount
Direct Impact	-800	-8,000	-57,496,000

Table 10: indirect impact of NALCAP (SA) students

7,187 participants	Monthly Spending	Yearly Spending	Total Amount
Indirect Impact	1,509.50	15,095	108,487,765

ERASMUS+

All data sources consulted acknowledge that both the overall numbers of participants in Erasmus/Erasmus+ programs and the funding awarded by the European Commission have regularly increased for the past 30 years, with Spain remaining the top destination since 2001.

The Higher Education Unit of the Servicio Español para la Internacionalización de la Educación (SEPIE) provided data on incoming and outgoing students for the 2022-2023 academic year (Fatima Terol, Deputy Director,

¹⁷ Retrieved June 7, 2024, from: <https://www.educacionfpydeportes.gob.es/eeuu/dam/jcr:4becf3df-34c8-4583-b3d6-2ba918dac564/2024-25-nalcap-fags-2.pdf> (p.3 par. 1) <https://www.educacionfpydeportes.gob.es/eeuu/convocatorias-programas/convocatorias-eeuu/nalcap/applying-program.html>

¹⁸ Estadísticas de la Acción Educativa Exterior. Curso 2023-2024. Ministerio de Educación, Formación Profesional y Deportes (p. 7)

Internationalisation of Higher Education Unit at SEPIE, personal communication, July 3, 2024) as displayed in Table 11.

Table 11: outgoing and incoming Erasmus+ students

	NUMBER OF STUDENTS
From Spain (AKA outgoing)	46,590
To Spain (AKA incoming)	49,661

Quantifying the direct effects of ERASMUS+ students

Erasmus+ participants pay tuition at their home institutions and join official degree programs already offered at their destination, thus do not have a direct economic impact on the host country. However, outgoing students do have a negative direct economic impact, which is the disbursement made by Spanish administrations to finance this international exchange.

In the Spanish scenario the funding to promote mobility within the EHEA comes mainly from the European Commission and is supplemented by the national agencies. “Students may receive an individual support grant as a contribution to their additional costs for travel and subsistence related to their period of study or traineeship abroad”¹⁹.

A total of 162,508,856 euros have been awarded (2024) toward the mobility of higher education students and staff in Spain. Of that amount 113,082,736 euros (70%) are provided by the European Commission, while the Spanish national administrations contribute 49,426,120 (30%)²⁰. These figures serve as a reference to determine the amount of negative economic impact of outgoing students.

Quantifying the indirect effects of ERASMUS+ students

We gather data from the *2022 Erasmus+ Report*, by the European Commission, to find an average length of stay abroad for higher education programs of 5.5 months²¹. We apply this value to Erasmus+ incoming students to produce both their indirect impacts (see Table 12).

We adopt student housing data provided by the CBRE Insights and Research Team (Nicolas Atorrasagasti, Senior Research Analyst, CBRE España, personal communication, July 18, 2024), as follow,

¹⁹ Retrieved July 15, 2024, from: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-b/key-action-1/mobility-projects-for-higher-education-students-and-staff> (The Erasmus Program Guide, 2023: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-programme-guide>)

²⁰ ERASMUS+ CONVOCATORIA 2024 INFORMACIÓN SOBRE FINANCIACIÓN DE LOS PROYECTOS GESTIONADOS POR SEPIE, (2024). Retrieved on July 15, 2024, from: http://sepie.es/doc/convocatoria/2024/HE/informacion_financiacion_sepie_2024.pdf

²¹ Drawn from calculations based on data found at: https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/resources-and-tools/factsheets-statistics-evaluations/statistics/for-researchers?facets_permanent%7Cfield_eac_topics=1998

- The average monthly expense for an individual room in a student residence in downtown Madrid is 1,300 euros.
- The average monthly expense for a 50 square meter studio apartment in Spain is 670 euros; in Madrid the same type of unit would cost 990 euros; and Barcelona tops the cost list at 1,105 euros.
- The latest Build to Rent (BTR) index drawn by CBRE using data from various projects in Madrid shows monthly rental for a 50 square-meter studio at 1,215 euros.

Most international students in Spain attend universities in Madrid (19) or in Barcelona (7). In these two metropolitan areas and their suburban neighborhoods lodging is more expensive than the Spanish average. Using the CBRE data above and incorporating additional options for student residences in Madrid and Barcelona²². We adopt the CBRE figures, which we have supplemented with student residences in Madrid and Barcelona, resulting in an average of 1,109.50 euros per month.

In addition to housing costs, other living and leisure expenses for incoming Erasmus+ participants in Spain include local transportation, cultural events and travel, recreational activities, cell phones, shopping, etc. These imply a further average expenditure of no less than 400 euros per month. In sum, we estimate indirect living and leisure monthly costs for students enrolled in Erasmus+ programs to be 1,509.50 euros per month. The indirect effects for this cohort are displayed in Table 12.

Table 12: indirect expenditures of Erasmus+ students in Spain

	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	MONTHLY SPENDING	TOTAL SPENDING PER STUDENT	TOTAL FOR ALL STUDENTS
INCOMING ERASMUS+	49,661	1,509.50	8,302.25	412,298,037.25

SPANISH LANGUAGE SCHOOLS

There is not an official registry for all language schools operating in Spain recording how many students attend these, and there are several types of entities and associations operating in this market. Both facts complicate data gathering and analysis.

The FEDELE association has 103 member institutions of all sizes, throughout Spain, from which they have gathered and analyzed data to produce their 2023 report *El Español en España*. Based on the quality and specialization of the FEDELE analysis, we decide to use findings in their 2023 report²³, adopting the following average measures for all Spanish language and culture schools: enrollment for the year is 750 students²⁴; duration of stay is 4.15 weeks; overall spending is 730 euros/week; and the average number of teaching staff is 15.

²² Residences surveyed include: Kley Concept, Resa Hall, TSH, The Loft Town, NIDO, and RESA

²³ Figures adopted from *El Español en España* (FEDELE 2024), at: <https://fedele.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Informe-sectorial-2023-v4.pdf>

²⁴ According to FEDELE sources, “our member institutions go through accreditation, certification and investment processes” that are associated to higher enrollments. When employing figures to assess the economy value of this sector, for ICEX, the association places the average number of students at around 750.

We identify four types of institutions (see Table 13), as follow,

1. Instituto Cervantes' Accredited Schools
2. FEDELE schools
3. FECEI schools²⁵
4. Independent schools

Table 13: number of Spanish schools by type

ASSOCIATION / TYPE	N. OF SCHOOLS	N. OF STUDENTS
Accredited by Instituto Cervantes	48	36,000
FEDELE Members ²⁶	103	77,250
FECEI Members	81	60,750
Independent Schools	155	116,250
TOTAL	387	290,250

Quantifying the direct effects of students enrolled at language schools

Quantifying the direct impact of Spanish language and culture students requires identifying what part of the monthly spending we can attribute to tuition. Language schools embed personnel costs²⁷ in their weekly enrollment fees, so the direct effect of language schools is the class fee they charge.

According to FEDELE, there are different tuition amounts for courses offered depending on their focus and the number of class hours (see Table 14).

Table 14: average tuition for different programs at all language schools

TYPE OF COURSE	TUITION (in euros)
Seniors: 25 hrs/week	315.93
Summer Camps 35 hrs/week	444.92
Business Spanish	313.81
DELE preparation	228.03
Intensive Courses: 35 hrs/week	335.64
AVERAGE	327.67

The direct impact of this cohort results from 290,250 students paying 328 euros²⁸ in tuition, during an average stay of 4.15 weeks, which amounts to 395,088,300 euros.

²⁵ Among FECEI schools we included only those that teach Spanish as a foreign language and do not belong to FEDELE.

²⁶ All FEDELE schools hold Instituto Cervantes accreditation.

²⁷ The number of employees for this category is relevant to Spain's job market, with schools hiring these professionals and paying for their social security benefits. This will be discussed in the Conclusion section of this study.

²⁸ Results for Table 14 are rounded up to 328 euros.

Quantifying the indirect effects of students enrolled at language schools

We adopt a 328 euros per week average tuition, thus determine that living and leisure expenditures are 402 euros per week. Upon recommendation from FEDELE (Mr. Daniel Escalona, Responsable de Marketing en FEDELE, personal communication, September 10, 2024), we eliminate the living and leisure expenditures for 15% of students who are Spanish Language Learners (SLL) already residing permanently in Spain (see Table 15).

Table 15: indirect effects of students enrolled in language and culture schools²⁹

ASSOCIATION/ TYPE OF SCHOOL	N. OF SCHOOLS	NON-RESIDENT STUDENTS	TOTAL WEEKS (4.15 x student)	LIVING & LEISURE (402 € x week)
IC-ACCREDITED	48	30,600	126,990	51,049,980
FEDELE MEMBERS	103	65,662	272,497	109,543,915
FECEI SCHOOLS	81	51,638	214,298	86,147,675
INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS	155	98,813	410,072	164,848,894
TOTAL	387	246,713	1,023,857	411,590,464

UNDERGRADUATE DEGREES

The number of international students enrolling at Spanish universities to complete their undergraduate degrees has continuously increased since 2018-2019 (see Table 16)³⁰.

Table 16: trend of international undergraduates attending Spanish universities³¹

	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
UNDERGRADUATE ENROLLMENT	60,112	64,719	67,868	70,573	77,861 ³²
CHANGE		+7.7%	+4.9%	+4%	+10.3%

Quantifying the direct effects of international undergraduate students

Data published by the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities shows 48,595 internationals registered as undergraduates at on-site programs of public universities, of whom 17,749 are from the EU and 30,846 come from

²⁹ Figures rounded to closest whole number.

³⁰ Sistema Integrado de Información Universitaria (SIIU). Secretaría General de Universidades: *Matriculados por nivel académico, tipo y modalidad de la universidad, tipo de centro, sexo, zona de nacionalidad y rama de enseñanza*. Retrieved June 24, 2024, from: https://www.universidades.gob.es/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/SIIU_DatosCifras2024.pdf

³¹ Ibidem

³² Figures for the 2022-2023 academic year are provisional, as stated by the SIIU at https://www.universidades.gob.es/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/SIIU_DatosCifras2024.pdf

other world regions³³. From the same source, we gather that there are 29,266 international undergraduates registered at onsite programs of private universities.

For the 2022-2023 academic year, average tuition fees are as follow,

- EU candidates at public universities: 1,039.20 euros
- Non-EU candidates at public universities: 7,718.60 euros
- All internationals at private universities: 10,921.61 euros³⁴

We decide to leave out 11,402 international students enrolled in online programs at private and public universities, as we have been unable to determine an accurate tuition fee for that cohort. The direct effects of undergraduate students attending on site programs are displayed in Table 17.

Table 17: direct effects of international undergraduate students

STUDENT COHORT	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	TUITION PER AY	TOTAL TUITION IN EUROS
EU attending public universities	17,749	1,039.20	18,444,760.80
Other internationals (non-EU) attending public universities	30,846	7,718.60	238,087,935.60
All internationals attending private universities	29,266	10,921.61	319,631,838.26
SUM OF DIRECT EFFECTS OF INTERNATIONAL UNDERGRADS.			576,164,534.66

Quantifying the indirect effects of international undergraduate students

The indirect effects for international undergraduate students derive from their living and leisure expenses in Spain during an average 9-month stay. Our assumption is that students in this category spend the same monthly amount as internationals in the Erasmus+ cohort (i.e., 1,509.50 euros/month) (see Table 18).

Table 18: indirect impact of international undergraduates at Spanish universities

TOTAL UNDERGRAD. STUDENTS	MONTHLY LIVING & LEISURE EXPENSES	TOTAL FOR ALL STUDENTS (9 MONTHS)
77,861	1,509.50	1,057,780,615.50

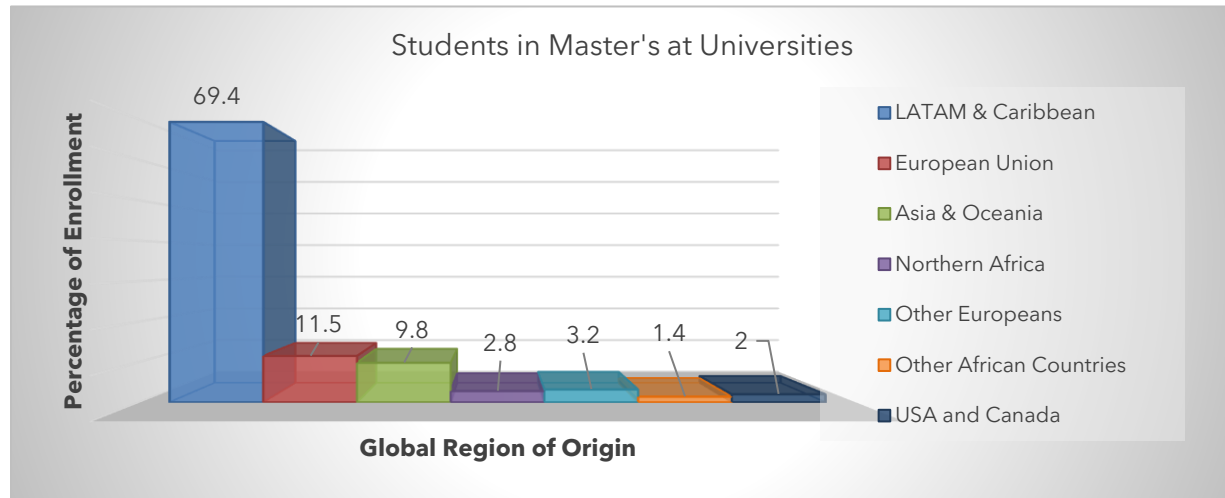
³³ Figures for the 2022-2023 academic year are provisional, as stated by the SIIU at https://www.universidades.gob.es/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/SIIU_DatosCifras2024.pdf

³⁴ There are 39 private universities in Spain, which typically charge the same tuition to local and international students from all world regions. We gathered data from 188 majors at 14 private institutions of higher education and came up with an average tuition of 10,921.61 euros per academic year. The sample includes universities which make their fees public, displaying them in their institutional web site.

MASTER’S PROGRAMS

Both private and public institutions of higher education in Spain have been successful in attracting candidates from other countries and world regions³⁵, especially from Latin America (see Chart 5).

Chart 5: percentages of masters’ students enrolled in university programs, by their global region of origin



Adapted from: Datos y cifras del Sistema Universitario Español Publicación 2023-2024, at https://www.universidades.gob.es/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/SIUU_DatosCifras2024.pdf (p. 111).

In addition to graduate degrees at public and private universities, Spain has specialized institutions offering Master’s in areas related to business administration, leadership, and other executive fields. Within this group, some graduate schools have formed associations that have served as sources of data and have helped perform member check processes for this study.

In 1989 the major business schools in Spain founded the Spanish Association of Representatives of Business Schools (AEEDE). The aim of this organization is to provide a forum for sharing quality values and best practices, defending the social activity of its members. AEEDE represents the interests of public and private institutions, as a significant sector of executive education, highlighting its prestige and international appeal in Spain³⁶.

The Asociación Española de Escuelas de Negocios (AEEN) is an organization, with 79 members (68 of them based in Spain), that promotes professional masters as fundamental to the education and training of business leaders; addressing the characteristics of their degrees from a conceptual perspective geared to the requirement and acceptance of quality standards for these programs, the credentials of their faculty, and the teaching methodology employed³⁷.

³⁵ For a better understanding of the characteristics of different master’s degrees in Spain please refer to Luque (2019), at <https://www.universidadesi.es/apuntes-para-reflexionar-sobre-los-masteres-oficiales/>

³⁶ Retrieved, May 30, 2024, from: <https://aeede.es/en/>

³⁷ Retrieved, June 2, 2024, from: <https://www.aeen.org/que-es-aeen/>

There is not a reliable source of data listing independent graduate professional schools that are not members of AEEN or AEEDE, thus we are unable to assess how many programs they offer, in what format, their international enrollment and tuition figures.

Quantifying the direct effects of international students attending master’s programs (see Table 19)

A total of 68,439 internationals enrolled in online and onsite master’s programs at Spanish institutions of higher education³⁸ in 2022-2023. Of these, 26,983 opted to enroll in online degrees: 439 at public universities, and 26,544 at private institutions. The rest attended onsite programs, 22,540 at public universities and 14,179 at private universities. Internationals account for 24.8% of all students enrolled in graduate degrees at Spanish universities³⁹.

On average, at public institutions EU citizens pay 30.8 euros per credit hour (ECTS) and citizens from outside the EU pay 151.18 euros, per credit hour. Students attending private universities pay, on average, 262.50 euros per credit hour. The typical workload for a master's degree in Spain is 60 ECTS per academic year.

We forwarded a survey to collect data on international enrollment figures and tuition to AEEDE, which they sent out to their member institutions. We added data gathered from institutional websites to reach an average international enrollment of 1,880. From a review of the schools’ websites, we found the average cost per year for onsite programs to be 38,078.80 euros. We are unable to retrieve enough data on their online degrees’ student numbers and the cost for those programs.

Analyzing data for a random sample of AEEN schools, we find that 38.3% of their degrees are offered on site while the remainder 61.7% use a blended or online format. Of the 77,248 AEEN students, we assume 19,156 (i.e., 24.8%)⁴⁰ are internationals: 7,336 attending onsite and 11,820 attending online programs. The average tuition for onsite programs is 13,488 euros per academic year. With limited access to a reasonable sample of fees charged by AEEN’s online and blended programs, we assume their average cost is the same as that at public and private universities.

Table 19: types of master’s, average tuition, and number of students

TYPES OF MASTER’S	AVERAGE TUITION	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	TOTAL TUITION
Onsite at Public Universities / EU students	1,848	4,356	8,049,888
Onsite at Public Universities / Non-EU students	9,070.62	22,540	204,451,775
Online at Public Universities	4,500	439	1,975,500
Onsite at Private Universities	15,750	14,179	223,319,250
Online at Private Universities	4,500	26,544	119,448,000
AEEDE Business Schools Onsite	38,078.80	26,320	1,002,234,016
AEEN Professional Degrees Onsite	13,488	7,337	98,961,456
AEEN Professional Degrees Online	4,500	11,820	53,190,000
SUM OF MASTER’S TUITION		113,535	1,711,629,885

³⁸ *Estadística de Internacionalización* (p. 4). Retrieved, May 28, 2024, from: https://www.universidades.gob.es/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/EI-Principales-resultados_2021.pdf

³⁹ See https://www.universidades.gob.es/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/SIIU_DatosCifras2024.pdf (p. 111)

⁴⁰ Ibidem

Quantifying the indirect effects of international students attending master’s programs

Analyzing the average length of a random sample of master’s programs, we find that internationals remain in Spain for an average of 10.5 months within the academic year. We apply the same monthly expenditure as that for other categories (except SA), of 1,509.50 euros per month (see Table 20).

Table 20: indirect impact of international enrolled in master’s programs

	N. OF STUDENTS	LIVING & LEISURE 10.5 MONTHS
Public Universities	26,896	426,294,876
Private Universities	14,179	224,733,605
AEED Business Degrees	26,320	417,165,420
AEEN Professional Degrees	7,337	116,289,616
TOTAL	74,732	1,184,483,517

Conclusion

The overall economic impact of international students in Spain is the addition of all direct and indirect effects (Type I Indicators) for the six categories in this study (see Table 21).

Table 21: overall impact of international students in Spain

CATEGORY	DIRECT IMPACT	INDIRECT IMPACT	TOTAL
US Study Abroad	201,977,420	392,474,727	594,452,147
NALCAP	-57,496,000	108,487,765	50,991,765
ERASMUS+	-49,426,120	412,298,037	362,871,917
Language & Culture	395,088,300	411,590,464	806,678,764
Undergraduates	576,164,535	1,057,780,616	1,633,945,151
Master's programs	1,711,629,885	1,184,483,517	2,896,113,402
SUM	2,777,938,020	3,567,115,126	6,345,053,146
Multiplier Effect			2.28

Our research supports that 602,662 internationals enrolled at Spanish institutions in the 2022-2023 academic year in Study Abroad, NALCAP, Erasmus+, Language and Culture, Undergraduate degrees, and Master’s programs. We determine that their overall economic impact on the Spanish economy amounts to 6,345,053,146 euros and that the multiplier effect for students’ spending is 2.28.

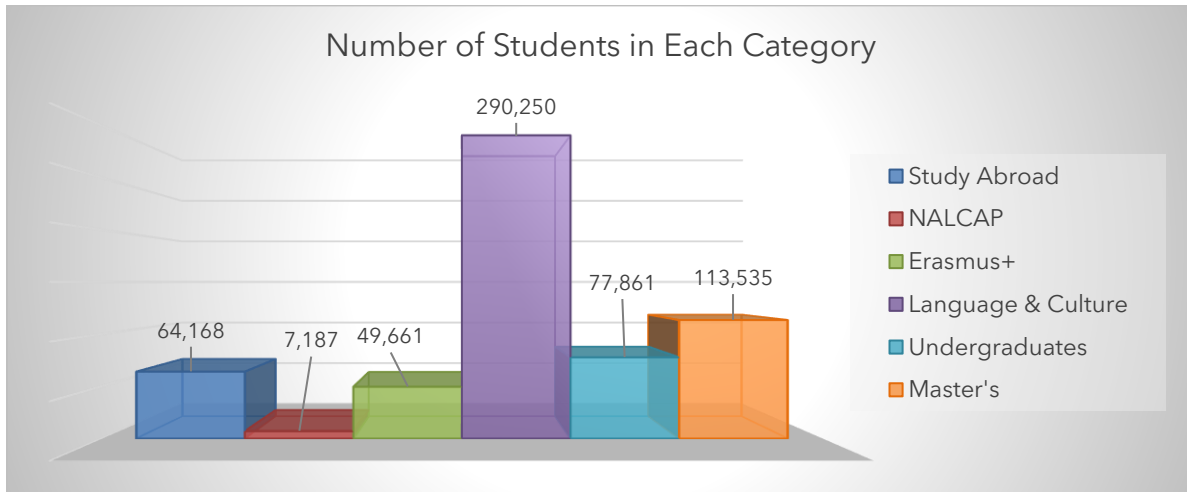
The multiplier is an indicator of the spillover effect that the international students' presence triggers on sectors of the Spanish economy other than education⁴¹. A multiplier effect of 2.28 indicates that for each euro spent on their academic program, these international students spend an additional 1.28 euros on a broad range of sectors of the Spanish economy.

Also on a positive note, the export of education in Spain has been able to improve the revenue generated by the flow of internationals arriving in the country, in the post-pandemic years, increasing the overall economic impact by 67% in four years (from 2018-219 to 2022-2023).

Enrollment by category

The number of internationals enrolled in Spanish language schools is the most numerous, accounting for 48.16% of the total. The second largest group is that of students completing master's programs of all types, accounting for 18.84%, followed by undergraduates (12.92%) and study abroad participants (10.65%). Erasmus+ (incoming) contribute with 8.24% of the overall figure, and NALCAP Auxiliares de Conversación makes a strong initial entry with 1.19%.

Chart 6: Number of students in each category



The lesser number of students, from our 2020 study⁴², is due to a change in the approach employed to determine this overall figure. While the Instituto Cervantes makes a vast contribution worldwide to the teaching of language and culture to SSL students, their students do not exactly fall under our current approach focused on Spain-based spending. In addition to that, the number of students enrolled in Spanish Language and Culture programs is lower than in 2018-2019 not because there are less students but rather due to a better understanding of that category and the access to more accurate data sources.

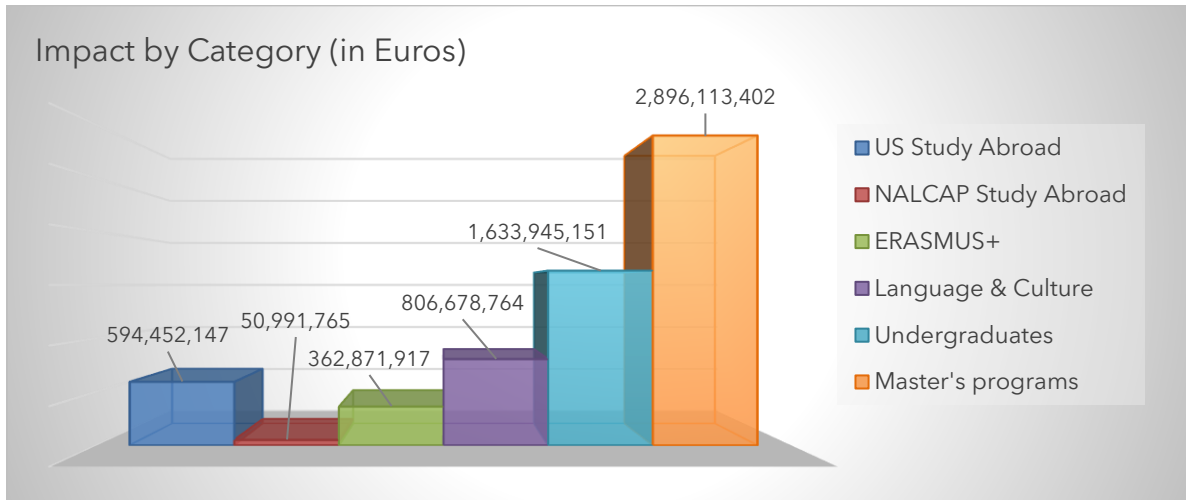
⁴¹ Miller, Ronald E.; Blair, Peter D. Input-Output Analysis: Foundations and Extensions. Cambridge, GBR: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Retrieved February 10, 2017, from: <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/mitlibraries/Doc?id=10329730&ppg=44>, (p. 244).

⁴² See The Economic Impact of International Students in Spain 2020, at: <https://www.eduespa.org/english/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Economic-Impact-of-International-Students-in-SPAIN-2020.pdf>

Impact by category

Master’s programs are the category with the largest impact, followed by Undergraduates, Spanish Language and Culture, US Study Abroad, Erasmus+, and NALCAP (see Chart 7). Graduate programs enroll 18.84% of all internationals in this study, and account for 46% of the overall impact. The combination of Master’s and Undergraduates constitutes 32% of the enrollment and generates 72% of the overall economic impact from the export of education.

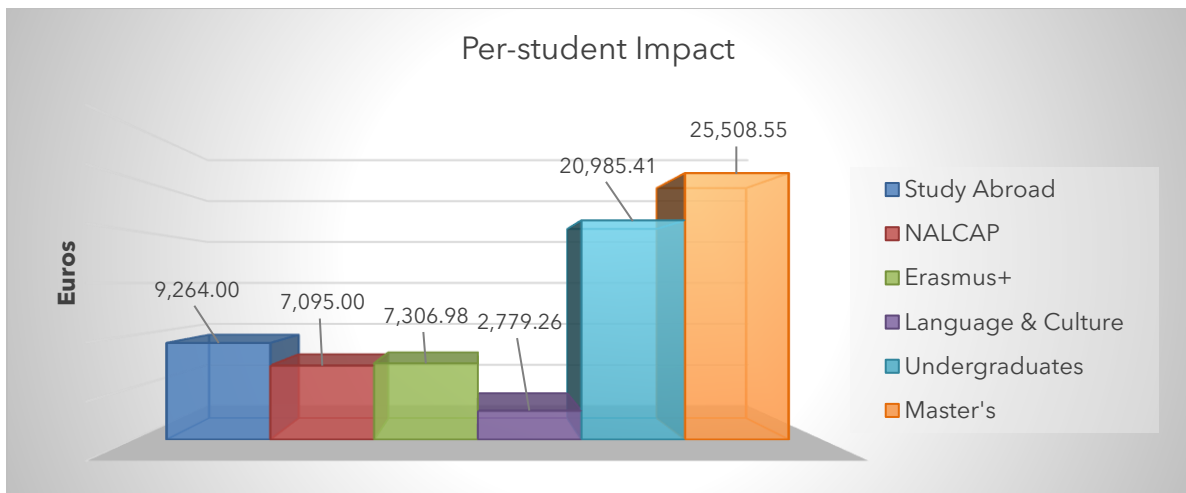
Chart 7: economic impact by category



Per-student impact

The highest per-student impact is also that of internationals enrolled in master’s degrees, estimated at 25,508 euros. Undergraduates follow, with 20,985 euros/student. Study Abroad participants contribute 9,264 euros/student, and Erasmus+ and NALCAP participants spend 7,306 and 7,095. Spanish language students ensue with 2,779 euros (see Chart 8).

Chart 8: average economic impact per individual student



These results are influenced by the positive correlation between impact and length of stay, where longer programs (e.g., graduate and undergraduate degrees, and NALCAP) have greater indirect effects than other shorter options. Figures place universities and graduate professional schools at the forefront of the industry, but all these categories are interconnected and contribute to the growth of the others. Students who have studied Spanish language and culture are more likely to pursue further education in Spain, and those who have studied abroad here are more likely to participate in NALCAP and or enroll in a graduate degree.

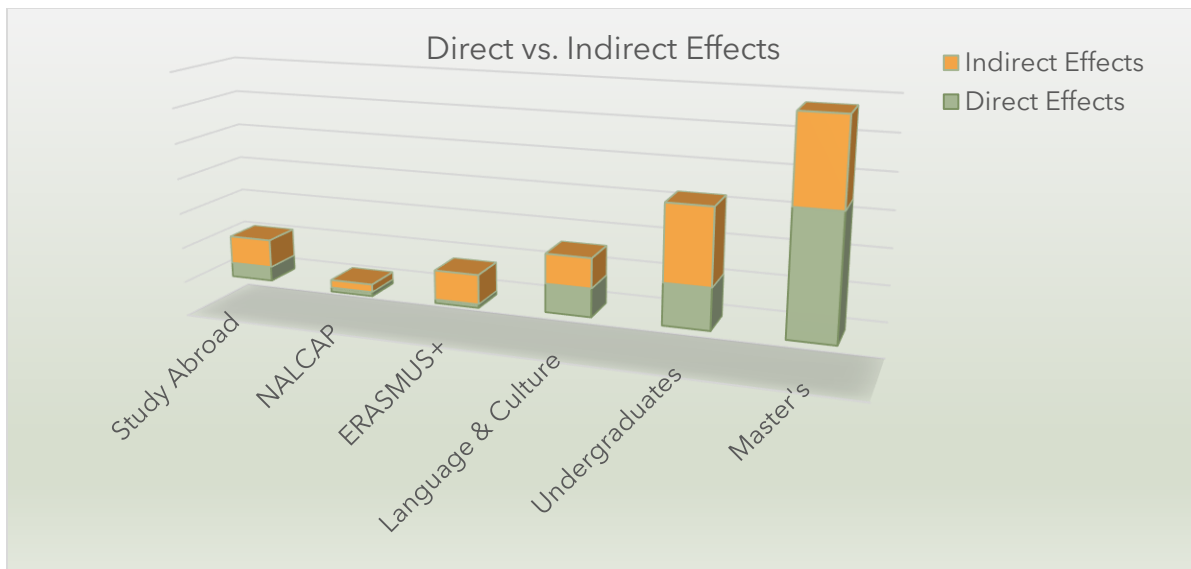
Data collection, analysis, and interpretation: economic intelligence (EI)

The sources of data we employ unlock vital information that should continue to be made available to researchers, legislators, actors, and all who advocate for International Education, and more detail and early data collection would contribute to better insights into the current global market trends. We would like for this to be an Economic Intelligence tool aiming to “provide a comprehensive understanding of the economic environment in which a business operates, enabling more accurate forecasting and strategic planning”⁴³. EI has become a key tool for any sector operating in the rapidly changing global market, such as the export of education.

Multiplier effect

The multiplier effect of 2.28 for the 2022-2023 year, is a useful indicator to assess the investment that students are making in extra-academic items and services vs. their academic expenditures (see Chart 9). Indirect effects are greater than direct effects in all categories except for master’s students, a finding that highlights opportunities for the growth of quality affordable options in other economic sectors serving the student population.

Chart 9: a comparison of direct and indirect impacts for the six categories



⁴³ The Role of Economic Intelligence in Market Analysis. Retrieved July 28, 2024, from: <https://www.scip.org/news/676195/The-Role-of-Economic-Intelligence-in-Market-Analysis-.htm>

We continue to emphasize on the importance of continuously improving and highlighting the quality of living and leisure items and services in Spain, as a competitive advantage over other destinations. This message is coupled with a reminder that the price tag for these services must make them comparable to those offered in other leading global hubs. Since 2018-2019, the average living and leisure expenses in Spanish cities receiving the largest numbers of internationals has risen from around 885 euros/month to 1,500 euros/per month.

Taxes & personnel working in the field of International Education (IE)

International students and the academic providers that recruit them contribute to the financing of the Spanish taxation system in, at least, two ways. First, the indirect spending (3,567,115,126 euros) is subject to a value added tax ranging from 4% to 21%. Second, two categories (i.e., Study Abroad, and Language & Culture) hire faculty and staff for whom they make payments to the social security administration⁴⁴.

Study Abroad programs hired a total of 856 staff, and Spanish Language and Culture schools employed 5,805 teachers and administrators. Thus, the number of professionals holding positions in these international education groups combined amount to no less than 6,661⁴⁵.

If it were not for the international education market, these highly qualified personnel would likely become part of the unemployed population, obliged to survive on public funding. To these we should add all jobs created as the result of the indirect spending of students in their host communities, including neighborhood cafés and restaurants, grocery stores, gyms, pharmacies, clothing stores, travel and transportation, hotels, etc.

Beyond 2024

The growth of International Education in Spain, in the findings of this study, should not lead us to believe that no further action is needed. There are ongoing challenges to be faced in a scenario of global competition for quality educational destinations, and those challenges will continue to change and grow at an even faster pace.

Actors in all the organizations of the six categories included in this study are making great efforts to self-evaluate their performance and to improve the competitiveness of their programs. Our perception is that public institutions are also committed to providing the means for continued growth both in figures and quality. All should be reminded that, to maximize the benefits of students in Spain, their educational experiences must be productive and positive.

They should all leave with stronger professional skills and intercultural competences that will eventually contribute to improving humanity. To have the opportunity to advance in this mission we must first remove the roadblocks that will impair our success in attracting and enrolling candidates. Student visas and access to degree-granting programs

⁴⁴ We consider that Erasmus+, undergraduate, and masters' programs do not require hiring additional personnel to host international students.

⁴⁵ In 2020 we determined an overall number of 7,791 positions for the SA, Language & Culture, and IC categories, but we are now accounting for a lower number of students.

must be available online and recognize the timelines and needs of internationals who will opt for the quality destinations offering less restrictive processes.

Our concern is that changes in policy, while well-intentioned, are not providing clear, reasonable, time-sensitive and flexible processes; thus, discouraging excellent students from choosing Spain as a destination. Effective access to these types of programs and the obtention of student visas are the two key challenges yet to be addressed in Spain.

Study Abroad Students

APUNE (the Association of North American Programs in Spain) continues to be very proactive in its efforts to sustain Spain as a preferred destination for SA students, in fulfilment of its mission,

Founded in 1968, APUNE is the oldest association in Europe dedicated to serving the needs of American programs in Spain. It is a non-profit cultural association that seeks to deepen and promote international exchange between Spain and the United States⁴⁶.

The Association not only advocates for programs in Spain but maintains ongoing communications with public offices of various Spanish Ministries to acquire and distribute updated information on regulations and to suggest potential solutions to upcoming challenges. In another line of work APUNE has devoted resources to developing collaborations between Spanish and US universities, celebrating events such as its Winter Assembly and XIII meeting between Spanish and North American universities (University of Alicante. Feb 27 & 28 - March 1, 2025). APUNE has served as an example for other educational associations in Spain and the rest of the EU.

As we wishfully predicted in 2020, US students regained their presence in Spain as soon as their home institutions and program providers allowed them to. But figures for 2022-2023 (64,168 participants) are yet to reach the level of 2018-2019 (65,226 participants).

The number of professionals working for SA programs has also decreased, by almost 19%. Where APUNE recorded one staff for every 64 students (2018-2019) the data now shows one staff for every 75 students (2022-2023). This is always a source of concern, and more so when dealing with a population used to having access to comprehensive student services at their home institutions.

Upon their return home, SA students will continue to promote Spain and its products in the USA. In the future, some will get to positions where they can strengthen international and commercial relations from leadership roles in corporations in the private sector, and from government posts or through a diplomatic assignment. This is a valuable long-term outcome for both countries and their citizens.

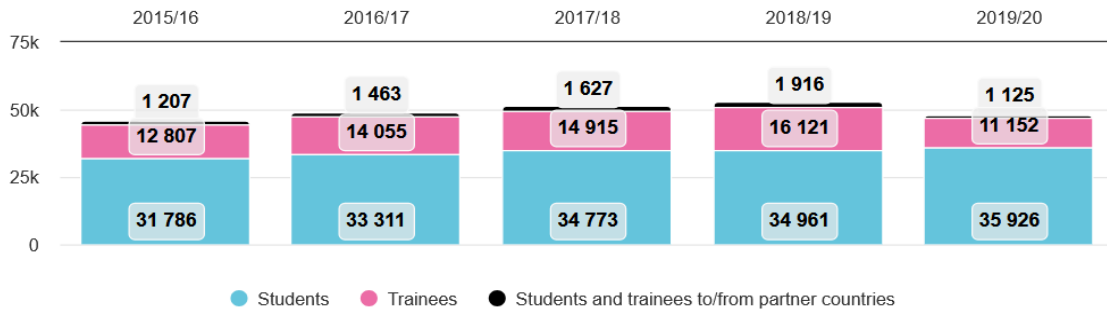
Erasmus+ Participants

We obtained Erasmus+ figures through our colleagues at SEPIE, as the European Commission (EUC) will not publish figures for 2022-2023 until probably 2025. With 49,661 incoming students there seems to be a sustained growing trend in the number of students, from the five years prior to the pandemic (see Chart 10) until 2022-2023.

⁴⁶ Retrieved September 10, 2024, from: <https://www.apune.org/en>

Chart 10: Erasmus+ Spain incoming students

INCOMING STUDENTS AND TRAINEES



Adapted from https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/factsheets/factsheet-es-2020_en.html

SEPIE's leadership and staff, as always, have been extremely helpful in providing us with data to assess the status of Erasmus+. The EUC accounts for students per calendar year, stating that Spain received 61,321 participants in 2022⁴⁷. Their delayed publishing times for periods different than an academic year would have made our research very difficult had it not been for SEPIE.

The Erasmus+ program seems to be in good shape to maintain Spain's position as its leading destination. We are confident that figures for the following academic years (2023-2024 and 2024-2025) will confirm the continuous ongoing growth trend.

Spanish Language Students

FEDELE continues to play a key role in advancing this market and in devoting resources to their continuously improved state of the field reports. Their research sets the foundation to strengthen the sector in a highly competitive environment and helps advance the global relevance of the Spanish language.

Based on the FEDELE figures, we have come up with a much more precise picture of the Language and Culture school's category. We have narrowed the number of institutions, the enrollment figures, and the direct and indirect expenditures for students in this group which continues to make a great contribution to the overall impact.

Even with shorter stays than institutions in other categories, Language and Culture schools continue to be the third strongest group in terms of economic impact, only after Master's and Undergraduate programs. This highlights the potential and challenges of a sector where institutions must overcome lesser financial stability (vs. a university) and lack the support of important European entities that other programs profit from. In this scenario, associations such as FEDELE have much more power to steer growth than if its schools were acting independently.

Language and Culture schools depend on the evolution of the scenario and the mobility of their prospective students. They are making progress in collaborating with public institutions, through research that produces the economic

⁴⁷ European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Erasmus+ annual report 2022 – Annex*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/090374>

intelligence needed to improve recruitment strategies, and with increased presence in both online and onsite fairs and events.

Undergraduates

The number of internationals attending Spanish institutions of higher education to complete their undergraduate degrees has been on a steady growth path even during the pandemic years. In 2022-2023 this category experienced an increase of 10.3% over the previous academic year. In a recent article, Paul Krugman states that,

the 21st-century economy is driven by knowledge-intensive industries that flourish in metropolitan areas with highly educated work forces. This has led to a self-reinforcing process in which jobs migrate to places with lots of college graduates, and college graduates migrate to the same places⁴⁸ ...

This is exactly the current trend in some of Spain's cities, and there are opportunities for other locations to take advantage of the increasing numbers of candidates seeking global careers.

Worldwide, especially in international schools, students are questioning the return on investment of expensive undergraduate degrees. Candidates currently in high school are becoming increasingly aware that they can attend an institution of higher education abroad with additional benefits and a more reasonable price tag. We have evidence of this, from our recruitment trips to the US, aligned with Ogden and Cope's statement that, "The current upheavals in the United States higher education landscape appear to be driving greater numbers of US students to consider full degrees abroad"⁴⁹. The growth in Spain also seems to point in this direction. As more of our institutions of higher education offer degrees in English, they gain the potential to attract larger numbers of candidates from outside the country's borders.

In 2023 the authors of this study helped develop a web-based application that enables high school students from all global regions to identify which Spanish universities offer the major of their interest in a bilingual format. This initiative⁵⁰ was funded by Spain Education Programs and through EDUESPAÑA⁵¹. Since its recent launch, Spain College Degrees (SCD) has been rated as excellent by hundreds of college counselors and students worldwide. It is free of charge for users at both ends (students/parents/counselors and universities), and an increasing number of Spanish institutions of higher education are listing their bilingual undergraduate degrees within the app.

Attracting more of these candidates will require not only creative collaborative initiatives, such as SCD, but a feasible and rational access process that ponders the diverse high school backgrounds of the applicants. In a scenario where government-mandated international admissions policies are enforced, it will be extremely relevant to ensure that new regulations are aligned with international students' realities and timelines, and that steps of the process are clear, feasible, realistic, online, and user-oriented. Confusion over access could already be deterring potential candidates, encouraging them to apply to countries with less restrictive access.

⁴⁸ Krugman, P. (2024, September 3). What former industrial heartlands have in common. The New York Times.

⁴⁹ Ogden A. and Cope D. (2020). Is the US the next big market for outbound students? Retrieved October 3, 2020, from University World News, at: [Is the US the next big market for outbound students? \(universityworldnews.com\)](https://www.universityworldnews.com/2020/09/04/is-the-us-the-next-big-market-for-outbound-students/)

⁵⁰ See <https://spaincollegedegrees.com>

⁵¹ With funds for the digitalization of associations and federations recognized as collaborating agencies by the Secretary of State for Commerce.

Master's

In Spain, master's programs of diverse types continue to succeed in attracting international students from all world regions. This is the category with the strongest economic impact, the highest spending per individual student, and the only group where internationals make a stronger investment in tuition than in living and leisure items and services. We have analyzed data on master's at public and private universities and specialized schools, and each of these subgroups deserves a separate deeper analysis and specific recommendations.

Onsite candidates at public universities almost double the number of onsite candidates at private universities (26,896 vs. 14,179). In Spain 72% of higher education institutions are public and enroll 65% of international graduate students. The average onsite tuition at private universities is 15,750 euros per year, and at public universities it's 7,895 euros per year. This means that private universities (28% of higher ed. institutions) attract 35% of international students while charging almost double the tuition of their public counterparts (15,750 euros vs. 7,895 euros).

As for enrollment trends, numbers of internationals in master's grew (from 2018-2019 to 2022-2023) by 1.4% at public universities and by 37% at private universities. This could be because the latter are likely to invest more funds in recruitment campaigns, due to the student services they offer, having a more user-friendly admission process, or a mix of all the previous factors. In any case these data indicate that the cost of tuition is not the most important decision driver in this segment of the market, except possibly for applicants from LATAM and some northern African countries (Dr. Maria Teresa Fernandez, Coordinator of the MBEH at Universidad de Oviedo. Personal communication, December 3, 2020).

Overall, the number of graduate students increased by 26% from 2018-2019 to 2022-2023, the category's impact increased by 72%, and per-student spend was 36% higher. We attribute this success partly to the data from institutions that are members of AEEDE. These are some of the more prestigious specialized business schools, located in the main economic hubs, which continue investing resources to attain and maintain international accreditations and appear at the forefront of MBA global rankings⁵². In that, they must be recognized for their achievements and used as an example to attract internationals with strong economic backgrounds.

Another relevant group is that of AEEN schools granting graduate professional degrees, where enrollment figures and member institutions continue to grow. While most of their programs seem to be online, the direct effects of tuition for online and onsite programs plus the indirect impact of onsite international students provide an additional diverse perspective and economic contribution to this category⁵³.

LATAM students enroll in master's at Spanish universities in numbers larger than those of any other world region⁵⁴. The percentage of students coming from LATAM is at 69% (see Chart 5) of enrollment up from 31% in 2018-2019. While we lack country of origin data for internationals attending specialized schools, our guess is that LATAM is also well represented. For this cohort Spain offers a common language and a similar culture, within a European socio-economic context. The US and Canada have minimal representation in this category's enrollment, possibly due to the high number of very competitive graduate programs in north America.

⁵² Three Spain-based MBAs are ranked consistently among the 50 best in the world.

⁵³ We fail to identify the number of independent schools (neither a university nor a member of an association) but will continue to explore possibilities to include this group in future studies.

⁵⁴ Among graduate programs at universities, LATAM has the largest representation with 69% of the total enrollment.

Final Reflections

Two years ago, international educators in Spain had doubts about our ability to recover our place as a leading global destination after the pandemic. Our findings show impressive overall results which should encourage us to continue the current upward trend, aware that there are still many current and upcoming challenges to overcome. The export of education makes and should continue making a significant contribution to Spain's GDP. To achieve that, we will need innovative, quality, collaborative initiatives within and outside the sector.

We want to emphasize on the constructive social outcomes that derive from the presence of these international students, including: the modernization of educational institutions⁵⁵, the internationalization of host communities, the potential to attract global businesses seeking well-prepared workers, the development of Spain's socio-cultural environment, and eventually the enhancement of the policies and politics that will shape Spain's international relations. The carbon footprint estimates for these categories⁵⁶ should also become a component of future studies.

Our analysis, as in any other economic impact study, is an approximate process where "output numbers should be regarded as a 'best guess' rather than as being inviolably accurate"⁵⁷. Nonetheless, producing these measures of the economic impact of international students in Spain allows us to raise awareness on the benefits of this activity, helps advocate for favorable legislation, and provides economic intelligence that can help strengthen the quality of educational programs of all types. All of these fortify the country's assets as an excelling educational destination for all kinds of students.

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In Madrid. October 16, 2024

⁵⁵ Dr. Alvaro Escribano, Director of the Carlos III International School at Universidad Carlos III de Madrid. Personal communication, March 2, 2017

⁵⁶ Wiedmann, T. (2009). A review of recent multi-region input-output models used for consumption-based emission and resource accounting, *Ecological Economics*, Volume 69, Issue 2 (pp. 211-222)

⁵⁷ Journal of Travel Research, p. 81, A Guide for Undertaking Economic Impact Studies: The Springfest Example, retrieved June 20, 2016, from http://agrillife.org/cromptonrpts/files/2011/06/3_4_7.pdf