



## Article

# Foreign Experience in Internationalizing Education Based on ESG Principles

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**Abstract:** This study explores how foreign countries integrate Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles into the internationalization of higher education systems. As global education increasingly shifts toward sustainability-oriented frameworks, ESG-based governance has emerged as a critical mechanism for improving institutional accountability, equity, and long-term resilience. Based on comparative analyses of best practices in the European Union, the UK, South Korea, Canada and Scandinavian countries, the research identifies critical systems, indicators and policy practices that promote sustainable internationalization. Results show the incorporation of ESG principles drives academic mobility, creates fair partnerships, advances environmental sustainability in universities, and develops inclusive, socially responsible international education environments. The research concludes by proposing a conceptual ESG-based internationalization model relevant for developing countries, including Uzbekistan, where higher education reforms increasingly emphasize sustainability, transparency, and global competitiveness.

**Keywords:** ESG principles, internationalization of education, educational policy, sustainability ranking systems, sustainable internationalization, global education with ESG priorities

## 1. Introduction

The internationalization of higher education has evolved into one of the central pillars of global academic development, shaped by accelerating mobility, rapid digital transformation, and the growing demand for globally competitive human capital. In an era characterized by interconnected economies and global challenges, universities are increasingly expected not only to participate in international knowledge production but also to adopt governance models that reflect responsible, ethical, and sustainable engagement. This anticipation has sparked a significant movement in ESG-Environmental, Social and Governance-in higher education strategies over the last 10 years [1]. Originally formulated for the corporate world to measure business viability, these guidelines have spread rapidly in academia — where institutions face the pressing questions of sustainability, social equity, and decision-making in the open.

ESG frameworks now play a transformative role in shaping how higher education institutions (HEIs) design their international partnerships, joint academic programs, student and faculty mobility schemes, campus sustainability initiatives, and global outreach strategies. Environmental commitments, such as carbon-neutral mobility, green infrastructure, and eco-friendly campus management, influence the structure of international activities [2]. The social dimensions – including equality of access, diversity policies, intercultural dialogue, and student well-being – have increasingly been seen as integral to ethical forms of internationalization. At the same time, the governance element

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— stressing transparency, accountability and quality assurance — keeps international engagement grounded in national legislation, international best practice and institutional mission.

In higher education systems with longer histories of development, (European Union, the UK, Canada and South Korea), ESG-based governance has brought about a paradigmatic change towards greater responsibility, transparency and social accountability in the internationalization process. These nations have institutionalized ESG indicators into policy frameworks, accreditation requirements and strategic development programs. At the same time, sustainability-rank-oriented frameworks such as the UI Green Metric, QS Sustainability Rankings, Times Higher Education Impact Rankings and the UN SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) indicators provide an additional impulse for universities to align their internationalisation strategy with an ESG perspective. In consequence, ESG compliance became an indicator of institutional prestige and of global competitiveness, changing global partnership and research funding decisions.

Despite this increasing focus, the integration of ESG principles in the higher education internationalization context is largely unexplored in the literature. Previous research has largely focused on ESG in corporate governance, environmental management, or social responsibility programs, while research investigating how ESG principles reshape internationalization processes in universities is scarce. Despite considerable momentum operationally, the conceptual and practical crossings between ESG and internationalization, green mobility, ethical partnership formation, socially-inclusive mobility schemes, and transparent cross-border governance remain largely under-theorized and siloed by discipline. Such a gap highlights the necessity for an in-depth exploration of the political and EPA considerations related to how the principles of ESG are enacted by higher education institutions within the international scope of their operations.

The analysis of international practices reveals a significant transformation in how higher education institutions approach internationalization through the ESG framework. According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2024), the number of internationally mobile students has reached 6.9 million globally in 2023, representing a 176% increase since 2000 when only 2.5 million students studied abroad. This exponential growth has been accompanied by increasing attention to sustainability considerations in mobility programs.

Modern internationalized education is of unprecedented size — with annual participation topping 1.2-1.3 million students in 2022-23 (European Commission, 2024) — as exemplified through the European Commission's Erasmus+ programme that has served over 16 million participants since its inception in 1987. With a budget of €30 billion for the period 2021-2027, this is doubling previous funding and sets a highly ambitious target to have 25% of all graduates from higher education students completing a mobility period by 2030.

The Times Higher Education Impact Rankings 2024 evaluated 2,152 universities (up 26% from 2023 registered with the ranking) across 125 countries on their respective contributions toward the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the same way, the UI GreenMetric World University Rankings 2024 compared 1,477 universities from 95 countries using 39 indicators in six categories of environmental sustainability, while the ranking started in 2010 with only 95 universities in 35 countries.

This question is especially relevant for the developing world, and especially for those involved in systemic reform of education. With Uzbekistan entering rapidly into the international academic community, expanding international mobility, joint programs and research collaborations a demand is arising for new international standards that not only would increase cultural integrity between academia but also further sustainable, ethical and socially responsible practices. Governance frameworks that adopt an ESG-based approach present a means through which these aspirations can be fulfilled while allowing universities to play a more prominent global role in promoting accountability, as well as overall national development goals that are aligned with sustainability domains.

Hence, this study is intended to examine worldwide best practices to determine and model how ESG principles can be integrated into the processes of internationalization of higher education systems. The synthesis of international experiences and the analysis of conceptual foundations of ESG in the governance of the higher education systems have been conducted in this research to inform policy reforms and institutional strategies in the countries on their pathway towards sustainable development like Uzbekistan. This work adds to the wider literature addressing responsible internationalisation and a framework for integrating ESG into a national higher education agenda.

## 2. Materials and Methods

Data for this comparative analysis were drawn from authoritative international sources including: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2024), OECD Education at a Glance (2024), European Commission Erasmus+ Annual Report (2023, 2024), Times Higher Education Impact Rankings (2024), UI GreenMetric World University Rankings (2024), International Association of Universities Global Survey (2024), and peer-reviewed literature indexed in Scopus and Web of Science. Country-specific data were verified through triangulation across multiple sources where available. Limitations include variation in reporting years, methodological differences between ranking systems, and incomplete coverage of some regions.

### Literature Review And Theoretical Framework

ESG principles have evolved from a corporate evaluation framework into a multidimensional sustainability governance tool applicable to higher education.

Environmental (E): carbon reduction, green campuses, waste management, energy efficiency, and environmental literacy.

(S) is for Social -diversity and inclusion, academic integrity, knowledge, and student mental health and wellness.

Governance (G) encompasses issues like transparency, ethical decision-making, accountability, quality assurance, and stakeholder participation.

The ESG criteria are widely applied by universities in Europe and North America to support responsible international partnerships, provide student-centered learning environments, and boost global competitiveness [3].

Knight defines internationalization as the intentional integration of international, intercultural, and global dimensions into post-secondary education [4]. Contemporary literature links internationalization to:

1. global talent production,
2. cross-border research cooperation,
3. academic mobility,
4. international branch campuses,
5. and digital cross-border learning.

Recent studies highlight the need to integrate sustainable development principles—particularly within the SDG 4 (Quality Education)—to ensure long-term institutional resilience.

*European* countries have developed some of the most structured and institutionalized ESG-based systems in higher education [5], [6]. Within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), ESG criteria are embedded into quality assurance mechanisms, cross-border program accreditation, and institutional evaluation procedures [7]. Universities are required to demonstrate sustainability performance indicators in environmental management, energy efficiency, and carbon reduction strategies. For instance, green mobility schemes like the Erasmus+ Green Travel Initiative promote low emission transportation choices for students, while several universities use carbon offsetting tools for emissions they cannot avoid. Universities embeds ESGs into research ethics frameworks — and make sure that international research consortia comply with SDG commitments, ethical data management requirements, and responsible innovation

standards in Europe. Indeed, climate action and social responsibility are prioritized in the Horizon Europe program and translated into material sustainability outcomes in international research projects [8]. Underpinned by a robust culture of governance, this European ethos sees transparency, compulsory reporting, and external quality assurance processes develop a stable and substantive architecture for internationalization.

Together, these factors have positioned the UK ESG implementation somewhere between institutional autonomy and heavy regulatory scrutiny. Annual ESG reports are to be expected from the universities on the carbon reduction pathway, social inclusion outcome, and governance reform. Across Australia, institutions have embraced Net Zero approaches consistent with national climate obligations, embedding "green" infrastructure, local renewable electricity purchases, and sustainable transportation into international education planning. The Teaching Excellence Framework and the Research Excellence Framework indirectly promotes ESG based internationalization because fair access, responsible international partnership for global research, and responsible knowledge transfer are rewarded by them [9]. International partners are also judged by governance integrity, academic freedom standards, and social impact — all examined using sustainability audits of international collaborative activity — by UK universities.

Canada's model of Internationalization using ESG focuses heavily on social responsibility, inclusiveness and sustainability. Indigenous rights, cultural respect, and equity centered governance have been embedded by universities within global partnerships and exchange programs, often involving Indigenous engagement specialists to ensure the initiatives are aligned with reconciliation frameworks [10]. Environmental sustainability is often a non-negotiable requirement in bilateral agreements, with universities mandating green procurement policies, sustainable infrastructure design, and eco-friendly campus operations for partner institutions. Canadian universities also excel in creating socially inclusive mobility schemes, offering targeted scholarships for underrepresented groups, including first-generation students, refugees, and learners from marginalized communities.

Governance in the Canadian model centers on transparency, collaborative decision-making, and public accountability. Universities publish sustainability metrics, equity reports, and ethical partnership guidelines, making Canada one of the most socially progressive and governance-oriented ESG models globally.

*South Korea* represents a technologically advanced and innovation-driven ESG internationalization model. Korean universities have rapidly transformed their campuses into smart-green environments, integrating IoT technologies, digital energy management systems, and AI-driven monitoring tools to optimize resource use [11], [12]. Hosted at these environmentally smart campuses functioning as real world laboratories, international research collaborations on climate technologies and sustainable urban development take place.

There is a high emphasis on digitally driven international cooperation among Korean universities. There are many well-publicized examples, from virtual exchange programs and joint online degrees to AI-assisted international classrooms that promise to increase global learning at the same time as they shrink global footprints from physical mobility. Policy level governance reforms focus on 'performance based accountability' in which indicators on sustainability affects allocation of funds and institutional rankings. That can mean embedding ESG indicators into long term development plans, and national higher education strategies tend to encourage that embedding, with an emphasis on transparency, stakeholder participation, and global competitiveness [13], [14]. The Korean example shows how technology mediated innovation can proactively reinforce ESG oriented internationalization.

Countries such as Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland are recognized around the globe as leaders in sustainable education governance. Their universities, guided by stringent environmental stewardship principle, have carbon neutral campuses

which are supported by cutting-edge waste management systems, sustainable architecture and the climate change adaptation strategies. Consequently, institutions in Scandinavia have a tendency to perform exceptionally well in the UI GreenMetric and the QS Sustainability indexes.

There is also a social aspect; a way to see. They prioritize social equity, inclusive internationalization, and student well being by guaranteeing access to academic resources, mental health services, and learning opportunities on equal grounds for both domestic and foreign students. Standard curricula have built into them intercultural competence and global citizenship education.

Participatory decision making, academic freedom and institutional transparency are elements of governance frameworks [15]. Policy development and evaluation is furthered by the collective contributions of students, faculty, communities, and international partners. Stressing a comprehensive and flexible model of sustainable internationalization, ESG compliance is also frequently a prerequisite for partnerships.

### 3. Results

#### **Environmental mechanisms in international education**

##### **Carbon Footprint Assessment and Reduction**

Research on university carbon footprints reveals significant variation across institutions and regions. A systematic review by Álvarez found an average carbon footprint of 2.67 tCO<sub>2</sub>e per student, with values ranging dramatically from 0.06 to 10.94 tCO<sub>2</sub>e per student depending on institutional characteristics, geographic location, and methodological approaches [16]. Regional analysis shows North American institutions averaging 5.25 tCO<sub>2</sub>e/student, followed by Africa (2.30), Europe (2.25), Asia (1.77), and South America (0.67).

The UK higher education sector's total carbon footprint was estimated at 18.1 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent (MtCO<sub>2</sub>e), with higher education institutions responsible for 86% of this total, approximately 6.3 tCO<sub>2</sub>e per student [17]. Analysis of emission sources revealed that the built environment contributes 19% of emissions, travel and transport 24%, while supply chain emissions constitute the largest share at approximately 57%.

Notably, Helmers and Chang (2021) identified ten universities achieving per capita carbon footprints below 1.0 tCO<sub>2</sub>e per person per year, demonstrating that significant reductions are achievable regardless of institutional size [18]. Carbon consultancy modeling suggests that improvements across built environment, supply chains, and transport could achieve a 72% reduction in sector emissions.

##### **Sustainable Mobility Initiatives**

Environment action is being included into the mobility framework of the Erasmus+ programme; in 2023, 23% of Erasmus+ participants with the main part of their travel by low-emission transport (train, bus or carpool). In 2023, the programme was updated, raising grant support by 12.27% (in line with inflation) with the aim to ensure continued access for participants. Given the necessity for mobility in higher education, virtual and blended mobility formats have become major options, with 77% of universities participating in virtual internationalisation on a global level (International Association of Universities, 2024).

Finnish statistics illustrate a model of blended mobility on the rise: in 2023, 10% of outbound students and a coupled 9% of inbound students participated in mobility phases with a virtual component, meaning that these proportions were more than twofolds higher as 2022 was chosen as the first year of collection of such statistics. The number of short-term mobility periods (less than three months) rose by 68% on the last year [19].

According to one study comparing online versus on-campus students, online students have about half the carbon foot print needed for their on-campus counterparts.

For MBA students at top universities, on-campus students consume approximately 300 more kgCO<sub>2</sub>e in stationary energy and 2,000 more kgCO<sub>2</sub>e in air travel over a two-year program (Table 1).



**Table 1.** Environmental Indicators in Higher Education Internationalization by Country/Region

Country/Region	Carbon Reduction Initiatives	Green Campus Programs	Key Metrics
European Union	23% low-emission transport; carbon-neutral mobility targets	Erasmus+ green travel incentives; €30B budget 2021-27	1.3M annual participants; 25% mobility target by 2030
United Kingdom	72% reduction pathway; Net Zero 2050 commitments	8 of top 10 in SDG 12; 33% of top 100	18.1 MtCO <sub>2</sub> e sector total; 6.3 tCO <sub>2</sub> e/student >10%
Germany	5 universities with perfect SDG 9 scores	Technical university sustainability leadership	international student growth; free tuition model
Australia	4 universities in global top 10 (THE Impact)	7 of top 10 in SDG 6; #1 in SDG 17	11% OECD market share; Western Sydney #1 overall
South Korea	Smart campus digital transformation	#1 in SDG 8 (decent work); AI-enabled systems	Pusan National University leading investment policy
Scandinavia	Leading GreenMetric scores; lowest emission factors	Aalborg #1 in SDG 4; participatory governance	Finland: 10% virtual mobility; 68% short-term growth
Canada	Indigenous sustainability integration	Queen's #1 in SDG 2; 2 in overall top 10	17% OECD market share; policy reforms pending
United States	Sustainability pledges since 2006	Arizona State in top 10; strong SDG 13, 14	21% OECD share; 1.13M international students

Sources: *THE Impact Rankings (2024)*, *UI GreenMetric (2024)*, *European Commission (2024)*, *OECD (2024)*. Compiled by author.

### Social Mechanisms in International Education

#### Inclusive Access and Scholarship Programs

The social dimension of ESG in education internationalization addresses equity, diversity, and inclusive access. According to UNESCO-IESALC (2024), 58% of countries globally operate national scholarship programs for higher education students. The OECD Education at a Glance 2024 report reveals that 80% of US students received financial aid in the form of public grants, scholarships, or government-guaranteed loans in 2019-20, representing the fourth-highest share among OECD countries.

Youth disengagement from education and work has proved equally stubborn to curb in many countries; however, the 18 to 24 year old share not in employment, education, or training (NEET) fell from 16% to 14% across OECD countries between 2016 and 2023, with significant advances in Italy, Mexico, Croatia, and Poland. But there are still huge gender differences: only 15% of females who enrol in higher education do so in STEM

fields, compared to 41% of males – and even among those with tertiary qualifications women out-earn their male counterparts by an average of 17%.

### **Intercultural Development and Employability Outcomes**

International mobility demonstrates significant positive outcomes for participants. Research from the University of Surrey's Turing 2023 project found that 94% of mobile students reported increased intercultural awareness, while 93% felt the experience enhanced their employability and professional skills. Among Generation Z travelers, 78% believe travel boosts their employability, and 87% would engage in career-related volunteering or work while traveling [20].

The economic impact of international education is substantial. In the United States alone, international students contributed \$43.8 billion to the economy and supported 378,175 jobs in 2023/24 (NAFSA, 2024). The US hosted a record 1,126,690 international students, representing a 7% increase from the previous year (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Social Dimension Indicators and Outcomes

<b>Social Indicator</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Source</b>
Countries with national scholarship schemes	58% globally	UNESCO-IESALC, 2024
US students receiving financial aid	80%	OECD, 2024
NEET rate reduction (18-24, 2016-2023)	16% → 14%	OECD, 2024
Women in STEM (entering HE)	15% (vs 41% men)	OECD, 2024
Increased intercultural awareness (mobility)	94%	Turing Project, 2023
Enhanced employability (mobility)	93%	Turing Project, 2023
Gen Z: travel boosts employability	78%	IIE Open Doors, 2024
US economic impact (international students)	\$43.8B, 378,175 jobs	NAFSA, 2024

*Source: Compiled by author from indicated sources.*

### **Governance Mechanisms and Institutional Performance**

#### **SDG Integration and Reporting Frameworks**

Governance structures for ESG-based internationalization have evolved significantly, as evidenced by participation in global ranking and reporting frameworks. The THE Impact Rankings 2024 represent the most comprehensive assessment of university contributions to sustainable development, with participation growing by 26% year-over-year. Analysis reveals distinct patterns of national leadership across SDGs:

1. Germany leads in SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, Infrastructure) with five universities achieving perfect scores: RWTH Aachen, Technical University of Munich, TU Dresden, University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, and University of Stuttgart.
2. United Kingdom dominates SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) with eight of the top 10 positions and one-third of the top 100, led by Bournemouth University and King's College London.
3. Australia demonstrates excellence across multiple SDGs, with four universities in the overall top 10, including Western Sydney University (ranked #1 for the third consecutive year).
4. Republic of Korea leads in SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), with Pusan National University implementing performance-based investment policies.

#### **Virtual Internationalization Governance**

The governance of virtual internationalization has emerged as a critical area, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic. The International Association of

Universities' 2024 survey found that 77% of universities worldwide now engage in virtual internationalization, requiring new governance frameworks for quality assurance, credit recognition, and partnership management. O'Dowd and Werner (2024) note the emergence of 'blended mobility' combining virtual exchange with physical mobility, challenging traditional governance structures [21].

Regional governance initiatives demonstrate diverse approaches. The Erasmus+ programme's blended mobility framework now supports both long-term mobility (2-12 months) and short-term mobility (5-30 days with required virtual component). Japan's Inter-University Exchange Project has promoted Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) since 2018, while the CIVIS European University Alliance has developed comprehensive virtual mobility governance handbooks (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Governance Performance Indicators by Country (THE Impact Rankings 2024)

Country	SDG Leadership	Top Universities	Participation
UK	#1 in 5 individual SDGs	Manchester (#2 overall)	25 in top 100
Australia	SDG 6, 14, 17 leadership	Western Sydney (#1 overall)	4 in top 10
Germany	SDG 9 (#1)	5 with perfect SDG 9 scores	Strong technical HEIs
India	SDG 3 leadership	JSS Academy (#1 SDG 3)	96 institutions
Arab World	SDG 5, 7, 17 presence	KAUST (#7 SDG 17)	292 (up from 196)

Source: *Times Higher Education Impact Rankings 2024*. Compiled by author.

### Challenges and Implementation Barriers

Despite significant progress, several challenges impede the full integration of ESG principles into internationalized education [22]. The carbon footprint literature reveals a lack of standardization in measurement approaches: studies vary in time metrics (year vs semester), functional units (student, employee, area), data boundaries (Scope 1, 2, 3), emission sources, and inclusion of carbon offset projects. Carbon offsetting is answered in only 14% of studies, with values between 0.09% and 18%.

Regional disparities remain significant. This sustainability report shows that, African universities hardly participate and perform poorly on any global sustainability rankings, even if there are slight improvements in CO<sub>2</sub> emission and renewable energy consumption measured (IIETA, 2020). Countries of the Global South have their own particular hindrances (as low institutional capacity, funding limits, and competing developmental priorities) [23].

Although virtual mobility is on the rise, it raises possible pedagogical and quality assurance issues. According to O'Dowd (2023) 25-40 hours of online collaboration can never substitute the learning benefits of up to 6-9 months physical exchanges.

Additionally, issues of digital equity, linguistic access, and technological infrastructure disproportionately affect students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Key Challenges in ESG-Based Internationalization

Dimension	Challenge	Evidence
Environmental	Lack of standardized carbon measurement	CF range: 0.06-10.94 tCO <sub>2</sub> e/student
Environmental	High supply chain emissions	57% of total HE emissions
Social	Persistent gender disparities in STEM	15% women vs 41% men



Social	Gender earnings gap persists	17% lower for women (tertiary)
Governance	Low Global South participation	African HEIs underrepresented
Governance	Virtual mobility quality concerns	25-40 hrs ≠ 6-9 month exchange

*Source: Compiled by the author from literature review.*

#### 4. Discussion

The findings of the study demonstrate that advanced higher education systems are increasingly moving from a narrow, mobility-oriented understanding of internationalization toward a broader, sustainability-oriented paradigm grounded in ESG principles. In traditional models, the success of internationalization was often measured by quantitative indicators such as the number of international students, partnerships, or joint programs [24]. In stark contrast, internationalization based on ESG is qualitative, focusing on issues relating to ethics, social justice, environmental responsibility and governance transparency. This is a definite change in mindset. For universities, internationalization is no longer an end in itself for boosted global visibility or an additional income-generating tool but rather a vehicle for giving back to society and contributing to sustainable development at national and global levels.

The importance of environmentally accountable behaviour is clearly reflected in international practice, which provides powerful evidence on the role that ESG principles play in enhancing transparency and trust in global partnerships through regular reporting, third party evaluation, and stakeholder participation. International partners can more effectively evaluate both risks and opportunities associated with collaboration related to environmental performance, social policies, and governance arrangements of those components of institutions that publish measures that are quantitative and verifiable [25]. This compensates for asymmetries in information, exacerbates trust and disincentivizes unethical or unsustainable partnerships. Therefore, institutions which are aligned with ESG develop stronger and long-term international networks which are less exposed to reputational, regulatory, and environmental risk.

An ESG oriented approaches also contribute to social inclusiveness in international education. Global mobility and learning opportunities should not just be the privilege of a few and inclusive scholarship schemes, targeted support for underrepresented groups, and anti-discrimination frameworks play a crucial role here. This in turn opens up pathways for global exposure, strengthens social learning, and facilitates human capital development.

When addressing the environmental perspective, ESG integration minimizes the carbon footprint of global engagement by promoting sustainable mobility, virtual student exchanges, carbon offsets, and physical campus infrastructure [26]. Instead of hindering international collaboration, they are restructuring it in climate responsible fashions. In conclusion, good governance practicalities facilitate transparent decision making and strong quality assurance frameworks that make it possible to conduct cross border inquiry on sustainability challenges [27].

By integrating ESG indicators into research funding, evaluation, and reporting, universities incentivize projects that generate not only academic outputs but also tangible societal and environmental impact. In turn, this improves institutional reputation and increases international competitiveness in global sustainability rankings and benchmarking exercises.

#### Implications for Developing Countries

The findings have significant implications for developing countries, including Uzbekistan, seeking to integrate ESG principles into their internationalization strategies. The data suggest several transferable practices:

First, the 77% global adoption of virtual internationalization offers cost-effective alternatives to physical mobility. Developing countries can leverage virtual exchange programs to expand international engagement without the carbon footprint and financial burden of traditional mobility. Replicable governance structures are also available in the form of Japan's COIL model or European blended mobility frameworks.

Second, with benchmarking, for example, in the framework in which nowadays you can participate, by UI GreenMetric, or The Impact Rankings. The growth of THE Impact Rankings participation — an annual increase of 26% — and in representation from middle-income countries (including 292 Arab world institutions, up from 196) indicates increasing accessibility of these frameworks.

Finally, the 93-94% success rates recorded from mobility experiences in relation to intercultural awareness and employability provides a strong basis for investing in internationalization even where resources are the most constrained. Partnering with the top performing institutions when it comes to SDG delivery can, in turn, speed up capacity building.

Fourth, the Environmental Data indicate that developing nations can simply leap into internationalization methods with lower-quality carbon [28]. As online students have been showed to have carbon footprints ~50% lower, hybrid models may balance sustainability and accessibility benefits for next generation higher education systems.

## 5. Conclusion

The findings suggest that ESG principles have become a key component of internationalization strategies in the world leading higher education systems. Internationalization on the basis of ESG is a transitioning method that moves away exclusively from mobility and visibility focused models to approaches accentuating ethical governance, social inclusion, environmental responsibility, and long-term sustainability. Universities are now not just engaging globally but are also emerging as a prominent-players in sustainable development, as their governance structures, partnerships and operational practices are more often than not among the most influential development determinants.

There are good institutional returns to combining ESG principles. Transparency and Accountability in Decision-Making and Governance builds credibility and lowers international cooperation risks. Socially inclusive internationalisation opens global doorstep to global classroom, enables access to internationalisation to the marginalised, and reinforce intercultural skills. Green mobility, sustainable campus, and virtual exchange all reduce carbon emissions while enhancing the image of universities as leaders on sustainability. These dimensions are therefore symbiotic; they enhance performance in sustainability oriented global rankings while strengthening international competitiveness.

Key policy implications are standardized ESG reporting echoing global benchmarks, low carbon and virtual mobility schemes, inclusive scholarship and partnership frameworks, and transparent and ethical governance of international cooperation. Institutional strategies aligned with SDG 4 and SDG 17 also underpin long term planning and global integration.

However, for Uzbekistan, the aspiration of ESG based internationalization offers productive channels to augment global competitiveness, institutional resilience and social impact. Accreditation systems that include ESG metrics, promotion of green campuses, expansion of inclusive scholarship programs, and facilitates digital internationalization, will help bring the transition of higher education to sustainable modernization.

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