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U.S. Study Abroad: The View from Europe

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Abstract in English

Europe has long been the top destination for U.S. study abroad, yet the voices of European on-site professionals have often been overlooked in the field. Recent shifts toward inclusive and reciprocal practices with U.S. partners have led to Europe-specific conferences and this special issue, which amplifies the perspectives of those delivering study abroad in Europe. This introduction highlights the distinct history and scale of study abroad and the significant setback that COVID-19 caused to it. The Guest Editors present diverse articles addressing structural, pedagogical, cultural, and historical gaps in transatlantic collaboration. Key topics include student services, mental health, diversity, equity, inclusion, climate change awareness, and the impact of U.S. educational expectations on local staff. These pressures can challenge the core goal of study abroad: cultural immersion. Effective collaboration and open dialogue are essential to bridging these divides, ensuring local expertise is valued and shared objectives are met.

Abstract in French

L'Europe est depuis longtemps la première destination des études à l'étranger pour les étudiant·e·s américain·e·s, mais la voix des professionnels sur place en Europe a souvent été négligée dans le secteur. L'évolution récente vers des pratiques inclusives et réciproques avec les partenaires américains a conduit à des colloques spécifiques à l'Europe et à ce numéro spécial, visant à donner la parole à ceux et celles impliqué·e·s dans la mise en œuvre des programmes universitaires des U.S. en Europe. Cette introduction met en lumière l'histoire distincte, l'ampleur et les revers significatifs causés par Covid-19. Les éditeurs et éditrices invité·e·s présentent divers articles traitant des lacunes structurelles, pédagogiques, culturelles et historiques dans la collaboration transatlantique. Les principaux sujets abordés sont les services aux étudiants, la santé mentale,

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la diversité, l'équité, l'inclusion, la sensibilisation au changement climatique et l'impact des attentes des États-Unis en matière d'éducation sur le personnel local. Ces pressions peuvent remettre en cause l'objectif principal de la mobilité internationale : l'immersion culturelle. Une collaboration efficace et un dialogue ouvert sont essentiels pour combler ces fossés et pour s'assurer que l'expertise locale est valorisée et les objectifs communs sont atteints.

Abstract in Spanish

Durante mucho tiempo, Europa ha sido el principal destino para el study abroad de Estados Unidos. Sin embargo, la perspectiva del personal in situ a menudo se ha solido pasar por alto en este ámbito. Los recientes avances hacia prácticas más inclusivas y recíprocas con los socios en Estados Unidos han dado lugar a congresos específicos sobre el contexto europeo y a este número especial, que amplifica la visión de quienes gestionan los programas de study abroad en Europa. Esta introducción destaca la historia particular, la magnitud de este sector y los importantes retrocesos causados por la pandemia del COVID-19. El equipo de edición invitado presenta diversos artículos que abordan las brechas estructurales, pedagógicas, culturales e históricas en la colaboración transatlántica. Los temas principales incluyen la atención al alumnado, la salud mental, la diversidad, la equidad y la inclusión, la concienciación sobre el cambio climático y el impacto de las expectativas educativas estadounidenses en el personal local. Estas presiones pueden dificultar el objetivo central de study abroad: la inmersión cultural. La colaboración efectiva y el diálogo abierto son imprescindibles para superar estas divisiones, asegurando que se valore la experiencia local y se alcancen los objetivos compartidos.

Keywords

Advocacy; climate action; DEI; Europe; language learning abroad; local staff; mental health; practitioners; research-to-practice; student services; study abroad

1. Introduction: Why the Special Issue on European Perspectives on U.S. Study Abroad?

The First European Institute, held in Strasbourg, France, in November 2023, was a conference jointly planned and presented by The Forum on Education Abroad and the European Association of Study Abroad (EUASA)[1] bringing together 120 predominantly European on-site staff to discuss issues

[1] The European Association of Study Abroad (EUASA) is an umbrella group representing on-site study abroad in Europe. Its members are the various country associations in Europe, for example AACUPI (Italy), APUNE (Spain), APUAF (France), and ASAPI (Ireland). This not-for-profit and volunteer-run organisation seeks to give visibility and advocacy to U.S. study abroad programs operating in Europe, to facilitate student mobility Europe, to foster international understanding and to improve communication, standards of best practice, training, and share key information useful to all members of the association.

relevant to their programs and the field. Sessions on Mental Health, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), and Sustainability and Climate Action in Study Abroad were featured, all focusing on European/EU[2] on-site perspectives. The Institute culminated in a robust panel discussion and lively open forum. There was a palpable energy in the room and a feeling that the voices of on-site staff facilitating student experiences were collectively being heard; their contributions were recognized and celebrated. As common challenges, successes, developments, and contributions were shared with others in similar situations across European countries, a strong camaraderie was established, rooted in the recognition that we have developed distinct skills as on-site experts in the unique interdisciplinary, administrative, and academic fields of international higher education. We reaffirmed that we do what we do because we are dedicated to our students' learning. We take great pride in facilitating their adaptation, as well as teaching and immersing them in our respective corners of Europe.

Perhaps the most profound takeaway was that, due to our professional, academic, and legal obligations locally, we constantly engage—and at times must defend—cross-cultural perspectives. Yet, we collectively recognize how our sector is still uniquely dominated by U.S. ways of thinking and operating. Understandably, our U.S. colleagues' expertise and training are grounded in their local context and culture and shaped by national identity politics, conversations, and educational styles. On-site staff in Europe, who manage daily operations while facilitating U.S. students' experiences, combine their understanding of the U.S. public with their own local expertise, shaped by the unique national and continental context in which they work. Therefore, we must continue to develop training, knowledge, and research within our local context and share these insights with our U.S. counterparts to strengthen the sector, enhance student experiences, and foster collaboration on pan-European issues.

While planning this monumental first gathering for our growing professional community, the EUASA organizers aimed to create a lasting outcome of the Institute that would actively bridge our transatlantic knowledge gap. We decided that a permanent record of the gathering would amplify the voices and highlight distinct contributions of on-site professionals in European study abroad, those of us who make the magic happen on the ground. We followed in the footsteps of study abroad researchers who challenged U.S.-student-centric models that may be "yielding instantiation of the very

[2] We use the terms 'European' and 'Europe' in this special issue in the geographical sense to indicate the entire continent. We use the terms 'European Union' or 'EU' where we specifically refer to that political and economic union (e.g., Borio et al., 2025; Williamson, 2025).

ethnocentrism we are attempting to reduce" (Kinginger, 2019, p. 265) and Brandauer et al.'s (2022) promotion of "listening and learning" from marginalized host communities. We also partnered with *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* on this special issue titled U.S Study Abroad: The View from Europe, whose objective is to forge a deeper European coalition while extending our collective understandings to U.S. counterparts and peers. This special issue represents some of our perspectives, successes, challenges, pain points, specific frameworks, policy, and best practice suggestions and recommendations for U.S.–European collaboration.

By its nature, this special issue is not exhaustive; it does not capture all topics that deserve exploration. Instead, it serves as a platform for ongoing research, offering an opportunity to foster dialogue and collaboration across the Atlantic Ocean. Given the geographical, historical, linguistic, legal, and cultural differences between our contexts, we cannot adopt a one-size-fits-all approach to ensuring our shared success. Our collective efforts aim to construct knowledge building in our field, which, too often, has overlooked the importance of local expertise. This special issue seeks to create a genuinely cross-cultural space, with a focus on our common objective of advancing U.S. study abroad while acknowledging the distinct realities on either side of the ocean. The differences between our approaches are not necessarily better or worse—merely different—and we all stand to benefit from more precise data and meaningful conversation to address these disparities comprehensively.

2. U.S. Study Abroad in Europe: A Century-Long Expansion of Programs and Professional Practice Hit by a Global Shutdown

U.S. study abroad in Europe has a long and successful history, with early programs bringing students to France, Switzerland, England, Germany, and Italy for "summer tramps" in the late 1800s (Indiana University, 2024). More widespread "Junior Year Abroad (JYA)" programs started in the 1920s, including those by Smith College and The University of Delaware, both in France (Hoffa, 2007). Hoffa (2007, p. 83) reports that "because American language study was largely limited to the major Western European languages (French, Spanish, German, Italian), almost all early JYA programs took place only in European countries where these languages were native." A logical conclusion to theoretical language learning was immersive language practice on-site, where students would be welcomed in by native speakers.

Despite its popularity, research has found that such junior-year study in Europe was initially constructed as an addition to the regular academic

curriculum, drawing participants predominantly from white, female student populations (Gore, 2005; Hurst, 2018). At its height, JYA widely served as a social class marker, creating ideal outcomes in the cosmopolitan spouse (embodied by Jacqueline Kennedy, among others) rather than a viable, core curricular component to the undergraduate degree.

Albeit in a marginalized way, U.S. study abroad maintained momentum following a hiatus during World War II. As is the case with all major countries involved in study abroad, the mobility patterns often follow international geopolitical trends and national strategic priorities (Atkinson, 2010; Mok & Ong, 2013). Post-World War II diplomacy was at the forefront. This was sustained by a renewed desire for international and intercultural understanding coupled with a need for concrete avenues to reinforce trust between nations. Beyond foreign language proficiency, there emerged a need to train diplomats. As a result, academic goals were combined with clear prerogatives to further U.S. security concerns, thereby increasing soft power (Dietrich, 2018; Williamson, 2025). President Obama's "100,000-strong" scholarship initiatives for U.S. student exchange with China and the Americas are recent examples of a strategic national-interest-driven study abroad focus (U.S. Department of State, 2011).

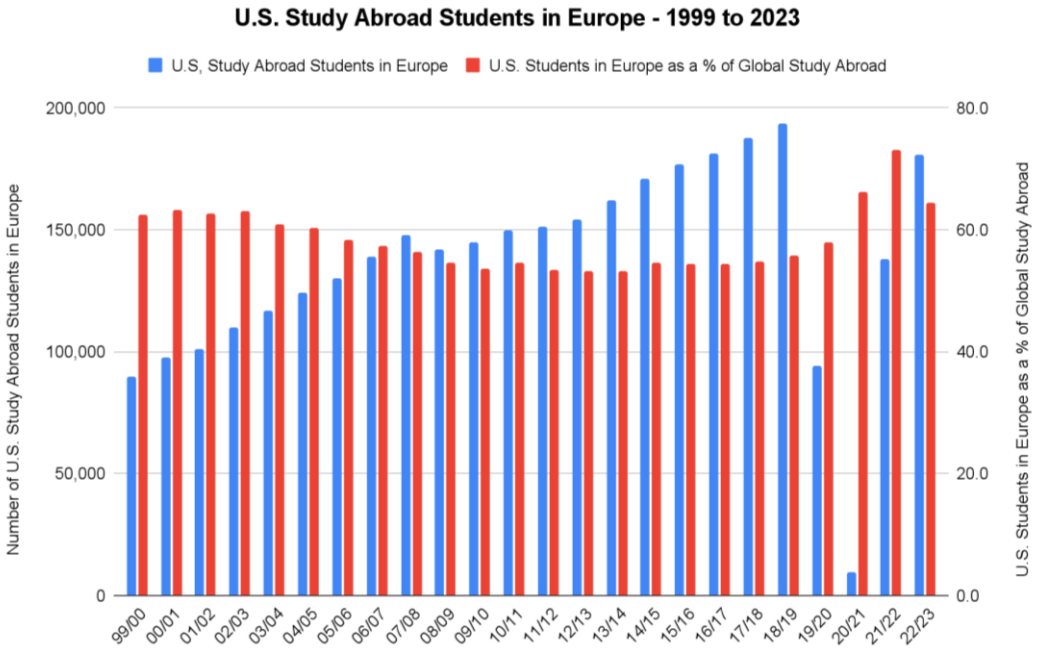
Subsequently, U.S. study abroad in Europe experienced significant growth and diversification from the 1960s onward (Dietrich, 2018). Short-term faculty-led programs grew in popularity during this post-war period, but soon, more and more U.S. institutions started on-site programs of their own, often with a permanent local base and staff in a diversity of sites stretching beyond the classic European capital cities (Hoffa, 2007). Third-party providers developed their own "island," or study center, programs, often tailoring programs for a wide range of academic and professional interests or facilitating direct enrolments in host institutions. By the 1980s, the expansion of air travel and increasing financial aid opportunities made studying abroad significantly more accessible. Programs began emphasizing experiential learning via engagement with host communities through internships, volunteer work, and homestays.

As seen in Figure 1, by the early 2000s, well over 100,000 U.S. students were studying abroad in Europe annually (Institute of International Education (IIE), 2024). Since its inception, Europe has been, by far, the most popular destination for U.S. study-abroad students, consistently attracting >50% of U.S. students studying abroad globally (Figure 1). These students were spending their academic time enrolled directly in European institutions, study centers run by U.S. institutions, consortia, third-party providers, or on shorter-term programs run by faculty from their home institution. These numbers continued

to increase to a peak of 193,422 students in the 2018-19 academic year (Institute of International Education (IIE), 2024; see Figure 1).

FIGURE (1)

NUMBERS OF U.S. STUDENTS STUDYING ABROAD IN EUROPE FROM 1999-2023 (IIE, 2024).



The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic delivered a sharp and unforeseen shock to the global study-abroad sector, particularly in Europe, where U.S. enrollment had peaked. In late February 2020, on-site professionals in Europe began receiving reports from our Italian colleagues of program closures, students being sent home, and the implementation of lockdown measures. This fueled a concern about international travel that culminated on March 12, 2020, when U.S. President Donald Trump instituted a travel ban from Europe, except for returning citizens and permanent residents (CNN, 2020). European countries also began imposing travel restrictions, socializing restrictions, lockdowns, and university closures, signaling an alarm to the U.S. study abroad community in Europe; U.S. students needed to return lest they be trapped on-site. What followed was arguably the largest repatriation of Americans from Europe since World War II.

The next phase of that volatile period demanded unprecedented crisis management, as study abroad staff jumped into action, supporting students' emergency return, shutting down programs, and, in some cases, continuing academic programs remotely, all the while tending to the needs of their own families and communities. Despite the sector's characteristic forward-looking nature, shaped by its reliance on the U.S. student population, it faced significant challenges and uncertainty. U.S. institutions themselves were subsumed by the

pandemic, confronting their own campus closures and/or online learning pivots. Subsequent border closures for the rest of 2020 halted our work; jobs were lost or put on furlough, and some programs were permanently shut down. As the pandemic rollercoaster ravaged Europe and the U.S. through early 2021, vaccine roll-out offered real glimmers of hope by mid-year. Finally, many surviving programs were able to reopen in the Fall of 2021, with some even opening Spring 2021 and Summer 2021 programs (The Forum on Education Abroad, 2022). While this pandemic was the most significant blow ever dealt to the U.S. study-abroad sector in Europe, it also spurred innovation, including virtual exchanges and hybrid models. As travel resumed, there was a renewed emphasis on the transformative potential of international education.

Owing to COVID-19, the student numbers for the 2019-2020 academic year—including the interrupted Spring semester but lacking summer programs—had plummeted by more than 50% to 94,230 students from its peak in 2018-19 (IIE, 2024). As seen in Figure 1, in 2020-21, only 9,647 students were hosted in Europe. With post-COVID recovery underway globally by the Fall of 2021, many believed a pent-up demand would fuel a rapid rebound to pre-COVID numbers in Europe. Unfortunately, student numbers for studying abroad in Europe in 2021-22, while significantly improved, leveled out at 138,007 U.S. students, or only slightly more than 70% of the peak 2018-19 numbers. The 2022-23 academic year saw 180,778 U.S. students studying abroad in Europe (IIE, 2024), still below the peak 2018-19 year.

While not a focus of the articles in this special issue, the impact of COVID-19 has indelibly shaped our sector. Layoffs, restructuring, program closures, significant financial losses, and a slower-than-expected rebound have recently and incontrovertibly left their mark on U.S. study abroad in Europe. Indeed, the pandemic represented an opportunity for the European study-abroad community to come together to share in our grief and loss, but it also allowed time for strategic collaboration, planning, critical reimagining, and resource sharing. In many cases, this took the form of engaging with country associations or EUASA. It was an opportunity for shifting practices and transformation of our field as we continue to explore alternatives and seek improvements in all that we do (Dietrich, 2020). Our on-site sector in Europe has come together stronger than ever through COVID-19 and beyond, communicating on best practices, sharing information, providing our input, and stepping up on the stage of study abroad influence.

3. U.S. Study Abroad in Europe: Recent Trends and Distinguishing Factors

Today, the landscape of U.S. study abroad in Europe is diverse and well-established, with several hundred U.S. institutions and organizations represented on the ground (Borio et al., 2025, present an estimate of 500 programs operating in Europe; however, no accurate inventory has been completed). As stated above, Europe has always been, and remains, the top destination for U.S. university students who seek a global academic experience, with the continent hosting 64% of the global total in 2022-23 (IIE, 2024; see Figure 1). Notably, seven European countries dominate the top ten study-abroad destinations (IIE, 2024; see Table 1), although recovery from COVID-19 seems slower in some countries (e.g., UK, Ireland, and Germany) compared to others (e.g., Italy, Greece, and Denmark).

TABLE (1)

TOP 10 EUROPEAN HOST COUNTRIES FOR U.S. STUDY ABROAD (IIE, 2024)

Country and Global Rank in 2022-23	2022-23 Student Numbers	2018-19 Student Numbers (pre-COVID-19) and Global Rank
Italy (1)	41,840	39,358 (2)
United Kingdom (2)	35,018	39,043 (1)
Spain (3)	32,648	33,849 (3)
France (4)	17,096	18,465 (4)
Ireland (5)	9,780	11,777 (6)
Germany (7)	9,324	12,029 (5)
Greece (10)	6,006	5,834 (12)
Denmark (12)	5,074	4,846 (15)
Netherlands (14)	3,915	4,182 (18)
Czech Republic (15)	3,610	5,480 (13)
Total for Europe	**180,778**	**193,422**

The U.S. study abroad landscape in Europe is highly diverse, encompassing various delivery models (Robinson, 2022). Many programs, particularly in Italy, France, Spain, and the UK, are operated by U.S. universities, colleges, or consortia, often as self-contained "study centers" responsible for academics, housing, student life, and extracurricular activities,

with minimal ties to local institutions. These centers typically offer more comprehensive student services than European universities, which often focus solely on academics. Additionally, many third-party providers operate hybrid models, combining student support services with academics handled by local host institutions. In contrast, others follow a full-service approach, offering academics and support.

Alternatively, many European institutions also host U.S. study-abroad students through exchange programs or direct enrollment arrangements (Williamson, 2025). In some cases, European institutions, especially those teaching in the English language, have become very good at understanding the market and providing their own in-house programs for U.S. students studying abroad (e.g., Williamson, 2025), thus eliminating the need for intermediaries.

The rise of faculty-led programs and shorter-term summer programming have led to a decrease in semester-length study abroad as a proportion of total study abroad numbers (IIE, 2024). Faculty-led and short-term programs cater to students who may have family, job, or athletic commitments that prevent a longer term abroad. Some programs focus on language acquisition, while others teach in English. Programs vary in size from fewer than 10 students on the ground at any one time to more than 400 (Robinson et al., 2020). Some programs accommodate students in their own residences or in facilities rented specifically for the program, while homestays, particularly in Spain and France, remain a prominent feature (Robinson et al., 2020). In short, there are many ways a student can study abroad in Europe. With hundreds of different programs operating in Europe, run by U.S. institutions, European institutions, and third-party providers, the combinations of program types are vast, and the complexities are substantial.

In addition to this scaling up of programs and student numbers over the past few decades, a distinct professional field of U.S. study abroad has emerged in Europe alongside the growth in programs and student numbers. This professionalization was driven by several factors: increasing regulatory requirements, growing student support needs, and recognition that on-site program management requires specialized expertise spanning academic, administrative, and cultural domains. The Forum on Education Abroad, established in 2001, developed the *Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad* (The Forum on Education Abroad, 2023). These standards serve as a comprehensive framework for education abroad, providing tools for program development, staff training, quality assurance, and continuous improvement. While the Standards of Good Practice are not specifically aimed at training on-site staff in Europe, the template for program success and professionalizing the

on-site field is there. In fact, their recent translations into Spanish and French demonstrate this point.

Overall, the Standards of Good Practice have had tangible impacts on European operations, from standardizing emergency protocols to establishing frameworks for assessing student learning outcomes. However, these U.S.-developed standards required adaptation to European contexts, where different legal frameworks, educational traditions, and cultural expectations shape program delivery. For many years, the on-site professionals hosting students and running programs have felt excluded from the overall conversation surrounding the U.S. study abroad sector (Robinson et al., 2020). Engagement, training, and professional development were generally centered on the home institution, often U.S.-based and without an in-depth understanding of the nuances of operating on-site. This disparity between U.S. models and European realities helped catalyze the development of country-specific professional associations. On-site staff began to collaborate in-country, exchanging knowledge, sharing best practices, and creating professional development opportunities on-site tailored to their local contexts. Associations representing the on-site component of U.S. study abroad emerged, including AACUPI in Italy, APUNE in Spain, APUAF in France, and ASAPI in Ireland, among others. These organizations provide workshops, training sessions, support, best practices, lobbying to governments, and a more robust on-site study abroad community. In 2016, the major European country associations formed EUASA—The European Association of Study Abroad—facilitating greater collaboration and professional development across Europe. A real sense of community is now at hand in Europe, with in-person and virtual conferences, training sessions, and networking.

This is not to say that we in Europe have done it all ourselves. There are fruitful and engaging collaborations with organizations such as The Forum on Education Abroad for professionalization and scholarship, notably the biennial EMEA Conference, the European Institute, and the publication of *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*.

As the field continues to evolve, European study abroad professionals face new challenges requiring ongoing development of expertise. These include managing programs' environmental impact, supporting increasingly diverse student populations, and navigating changing immigration policies and legal issues. The professional community that has emerged through these networks and associations positions European study-abroad staff to address these challenges while maintaining educational quality and cultural authenticity in their programs.

4. Key Results: Connections and Disconnections

While the editors did not intentionally curate these papers around a specific theme, the concept of "disconnect" emerged across multiple manuscripts, providing a thread that unites the collection. This unintentional coherence highlights the disconnects between on-site European practices and the broader U.S. study abroad sector. Several authors reveal numerous ways in which long-standing inequities, identified as “colonial” or ethnocentric by decades-old research (Brewer & Ogden, 2019; Ogden, 2007; Reilly & Senders, 2009), remain unresolved. These disconnects bring us to face a series of critical questions: How far have we come in creating more equitable terms? Are we effectively acknowledging and accounting for differences? How are we incorporating the perspectives and solutions of various stakeholders in our complex international work? As we consider the contributions in this special issue, these questions—conceptual, practical, and deeply ethical—demand careful reflection. The articles in this issue use novel, Europe-based field research with small-scale samples to build a foundation for further collaborative investigation.

In recent years, the discourse around U.S. study abroad has expanded to address a range of important issues including diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) (Ferro et al., 2025), mental health (Barneche et al., 2025), sustainability and climate action (Robinson, Barneche, et al., 2025), and the evolving role of social media, as well as differing understandings between staff and students (Bohan et al., 2025; Boyington et al., 2025; Ficarra, 2025). Other topics under increasing scrutiny are the marginalized status of language learning (Carnine & Pérez Calleja, 2025) and the professionalization of the field alongside growing attention to the roles of on-site staff (Robinson, Doughty, et al., 2025). Legal and immigration issues around study abroad in Europe remain challenging (Borio et al., 2025) owing to a lack of legal recognition for U.S. study abroad in most countries. The contributions in this special issue explore many of these themes, offering further insights into the disconnects between U.S. study-abroad practices and the realities on the ground in Europe. The following sections summarize some of the major findings from this work.

4.1. Climate Action and Sustainability

Robinson, Barneche, et al. (2025) examine opportunities for climate action within on-site study abroad programs, noting that the overwhelming component of a program’s carbon footprint is related to air travel, both to and from the host country, and significant student air travel and hypermobility while on-site. A significant disconnect is identified with the students, as survey results show that while they favor climate action outcomes and programming

to be a part of their on-site program, most students view their abroad semester as a care-free time to be hypermobile without consideration to climate. Students who expressed concern over climate change and their role in it engaged in hypermobility to the same extent as those who were not concerned (Robinson, Barneche, et al., 2025). A clear plan for making programs more sustainable is presented, including 1) calculating program-related carbon footprints, 2) reducing emissions where possible, 3) offsetting any remaining emissions, and 4) embedding climate and sustainability education into our programs. Surveys of on-site professionals show that many programs have started on the path toward more sustainable programs, but significant improvements still need to be made. A student's time abroad also represents an ideal time for embedding education on climate and sustainability themes, as they will often be living a lower-carbon lifestyle while in Europe (except for the independent travel!).

4.2. Legal and Structural Considerations

Borio et al. (2025) note that U.S. study abroad does not enjoy any legal recognition within Europe, with the exception of Italy's Barile and Borio Laws. This is completely disconnected from the European Union's own Erasmus programs and the UK Turing Scheme (Williamson, 2025), both government-supported to facilitate and promote student mobility on the continent. The lack of legal recognition in study-abroad host countries, using the case studies presented for Ireland and Spain as examples, has led to challenges with accreditation and the issuance of student visas. As a way to solve this and to connect U.S. study abroad to its host region legally, Borio et al. (2025) propose wording for legislation to be put to the EU for adoption, thus aiming to enshrine U.S. study abroad in legislation EU-wide.

Ficarra (2025) notes that adjunct lecturers in Florence often face a tenuous employment situation when teaching in U.S. programs, quite different from the employment conditions they would have in an Italian institution. They point to a need for reciprocal dialogue and increased understanding between lecturers and their US institutions, notably concerning ongoing training, academic accommodations, grading, and accountability regarding student social identities (Carnine & Pérez Calleja, 2025; Ficarra, 2025). When discussing language lecturers, Carnine and Pérez Calleja (2025) explain this disconnect by stating that "[t]heir hiring and teaching happen locally, yet the frameworks for learning are imported. It is at this crossroads where several crucial issues of jurisdiction emerged" (p. 261).

Resident directors (RD) interviewed by Robinson, Doughty, et al. (2025) highlighted the extensive scope of their responsibilities on-site, including

managing legal, HR, finance and budgeting, academics, student support services, and, in many instances, property management. These RDs take on roles that, in a U.S. institution, would typically be divided among numerous individuals with expertise on the subject across multiple departments. However, on-site in Europe, these duties often fall to one person. In many cases, key legal compliance issues—such as Title IX, GDPR, and local HR and corporate compliance laws—are navigated by the on-site staff under RD guidance. In addition to these challenges, RDs are also tasked with translating these local contexts and realities for their U.S. colleagues. There are often clear differences between U.S. and European labor laws, such as the more employee-protective nature of labor regulations in Europe, and it is up to the RDs to reconcile U.S. expectations with local realities and regulations.

Williamson (2025) provides unique insight into U.S. study abroad programs being run by European institutions, a distinct delivery model that is not U.S. bound or controlled, even though it is unabashedly developed for that market.

4.3. On-site Staff Roles and Responsibilities

Robinson et al. (2020), in a survey of 218 European resident directors (RD), noted that many felt they had a poor work-life balance owing to the multi-faceted and often 24/7 demands of the role. These on-site leaders are often at the interface of complex demands and expectations from their home institution, students, and host country norms and practices. While the role has many positives, many resident directors felt stressed, poorly understood, often underappreciated and disconnected, and not a valued or listened-to part of the study abroad sector.

In a follow-up phenomenological study examining the lived experiences of RDs in this special issue, Robinson, Doughty, et al. (2025) highlight the many roles that resident directors must play, often daily, seemingly running “a university in a microcosm.” There is no set training route for these roles, and many RDs learn their highly complex roles on the job. The positives include playing a positive role in a young person’s life, the variety of work and education outside of the classroom, and being there for that “light bulb moment” when a student recognizes a profound insight. While the feelings of being overburdened, stressed, and not listened to are still very much present, Robinson, Doughty, et al. (2025) indicate a shift towards recognition and empowerment. Country-based (e.g., APUNE, APUAF, AACUPI, etc.) and regional international education associations (e.g., EUASA) and the global Forum on Education Abroad have emerged as vital platforms that amplify the voice of RDs and on-site staff, foster community, and contribute to training and to

knowledge and skill development. The on-site community in Europe has worked hard to create its own connectedness and to professionalize the on-site community. On-site study abroad staff and faculty dedicate significant time and effort to ensure that programs are run safely, effectively, and with strong academic outcomes, often in trying circumstances (Robinson, Doughty, et al., 2025). Even though professional training for on-site staff is not as structured as it may be for many U.S.-based roles, the time has come to trust these study abroad practitioners for their on-site perspectives, respect their distinctive knowledge and skillset, and involve them in decision-making beyond what is currently done. Professional development for on-site staff and faculty matters when striving for sound educational practice.

While Robinson, Doughty, et al. (2025) and Barneche et al. (2025) indicate that although the field of education abroad prioritizes student wellness, the wellness of international educators is often overlooked. Barneche et al. (2025) state that while the education abroad experience is typically inspiring and intellectually stimulating for both the students engaged in it and the staff facilitating it, it can also be a weighty emotional experience. In a survey of European on-site study abroad staff, 70% think about the potential of death or serious injury for their students at least some of the time, and 64% believe their job “makes them anxious”. Collected data suggests that a significant portion of international educators self-report significant levels of stress and anxiety beyond normative levels (Barneche et al., 2025). Although the authors do not draw a definitive correlation between the presence of elevated levels of stress or anxiety in international educators’ work, existing literature and the survey results indicate their jobs are characterized by diverse, high-pressure responsibilities, increasing student support demands, exposure to difficult and sometimes dangerous critical incidents, they are often “on call,” and sometimes are required to defend themselves in official grievance proceedings. Given these stressors, Barneche et al. (2025) suggest that a holistic notion of mental health and well-being for university programs abroad must include a concern for and scholarly attention to international educators themselves.

While data presented in papers in this special issue by Robinson, Doughty, et al. (2025) and Barneche et al. (2025) is derived mainly from senior on-site staff, we know little about the perspectives and challenges faced by more junior staff working on-site and recommend research on these perspectives.

4.4. Staff vs. Student Perspectives

The Bohan et al. (2025) and Boyington et al.'s (2025) studies both reveal other areas in which perceptions and priorities amongst U.S. staff, local staff, and students can diverge. Boyington et al. (2025) highlight a significant disconnect in perceptions of student preparedness. U.S. staff and students generally report feeling confident about the adequacy of preparation of students they are sending, while on-site staff receiving students in Europe often observe lower levels of readiness, particularly in the area of navigating identity and cultural differences. They question the prioritization of practical information (academics, housing, visas) in pre-departure resources at the expense of topics related to historical and cultural information, and they call for increased collaboration with local staff in developing effective pre-departure resources.

Bohan et al. (2025) identified a notable misalignment between student and staff priorities regarding study abroad goals. While students prioritize personal growth, travel, independence, and self-confidence, they place little emphasis on academics. They view their day-to-day experiences and travel as the most impactful learning opportunities, more so than academic settings or cultural and social interactions. Some students specifically highlight the disconnect in a survey response, mentioning that the "study" aspect of studying abroad is not their main priority. Another example of this misalignment arises on the subject of personal travel. On-site staff often express concerns about the environmental impact of travel (Robinson, Barneche, et al., 2025) and its disruption of cultural and, when applicable, linguistic immersion that students could gain from spending more time in their host country. In contrast, students view their travel across Europe as a key contributor to their self-confidence, independence, and cultural discovery, highlighting differing perspectives on the value of travel in the study abroad experience.

4.5. Social Media's Influence

Bohan et al. (2025) and Boyington et al. (2025) also discussed how the pervasive use of digital and social media deepens the intergenerational gap as methods and modes of communication and self-representation are reshaped. These shifts are particularly evident in study-abroad contexts. The ways in which social media influences expectations and experiences pre-departure and on-site are explored to better understand, situate, and perhaps leverage the functionality and presence of these forms of media that can foster both connections and disconnections in the study abroad experience.

In this special issue, Bohan et al. (2025) examine how students use social media to gather information about their study destinations. Their findings

reveal that social media serves as a competing source of pre-departure preparation, often rivaling official program resources and orientations. This influence extends beyond the pre-departure phase, shaping both students' initial expectations and their on-site cultural experiences. The vast and varied nature of social media means it can offer some valuable content for students to explore, but this content has to be sought out intentionally, as most students admit that social media creates unrealistic expectations. Boyington et al. (2025) analyzed students' pre-departure preparation, including social media as a resource, and found that popular content often features influencers showcasing viral activities and attractions rather than delving into cultural or historical complexities.

Carnine and Pérez Calleja (2025) note how the immediacy and frequency of student social media use further complicates any potential version of a local "immersion" learning context. With extensive wifi and mobile data available across Europe, student life is heavily influenced by virtual modes of communication. Further, English as a *lingua franca* continues to supplant the local language in Western Europe, renewing the importance of the L2-only classroom as a sort of "island of learning." In these authors' view, the language classroom remains a key space for local contact and immersion where social media is turned off.

With the pervasive presence of social media and algorithms that often promote aesthetic, tourism-focused material over content tailored to cultural learning, this content can act as background noise that complicates student learning and immersion and interferes with the efforts of on-site staff to provide impactful and effective resources, orientations and programming that prioritize authentic engagement with the host culture.

4.6. Academic Considerations

Several contributors discuss the pedagogical implications of what we term 'study' abroad. Ficarra (2025), in a study of locally-hired adjunct faculty teaching on U.S. programs in Florence, Italy, notes that many of them have precarious faculty appointments, have challenges with teaching "the American Way" in the classroom, and are being asked to "bend" to the U.S. educational system. This bending takes the form of "actively altering their teaching methods in order to increase students' feeling of comfort, and safety, and attempting to make their classroom feel less foreign and unnerving" (Ficarra, 2025, p. 101). Ficarra also suggests that while most faculty members have significant academic autonomy in the classroom, this autonomy is limited when there is an expectation, or an instinct, to cater to U.S. students by bending

to the U.S. academic system. In many ways, the local faculty are "disconnected" by being "guests in the system," even though they are in their home country.

To overcome or somehow mediate this, Ficarra (2025) suggests a dual-bending approach where collaboration and accommodation come from both parties and are not simply top-down. In this view, local faculty could be involved in program evaluations while programs concurrently support local faculty's professional and academic network development, creating pathways for instruction alongside local students.

Carnine and Pérez Calleja (2025) relate how Spanish and French lecturers teaching U.S. study abroad students exist in a multi-faceted professional world where teaching methods are often "imported" from the U.S. Nevertheless, their classes are multilingual teaching contexts imbued with complicated history where instructors adhere to U.S.-defined methods while facing highly individuated students learning abroad. While teaching U.S. students in Spain and France, this professional group confronts divided views on high-stakes practices such as academic accommodations and grading.

Despite their traditional isolation between four walls—although many also teach place-based courses outside the classroom, these often overlooked professionals possess significant expertise in navigating national understandings of higher educational missions, institutional differences, and curricular politics, as well as valuable current critiques of U.S. education abroad. Hybrids themselves, half the sample cases have past U.S. higher educational training, allowing the authors to explore how familiarity with the U.S. systems may or may not affect their work. Ultimately, while strongly coded culturally, grading practice appears to be guided by U.S. institutional practice over personal regard (Carnine & Pérez Calleja, 2025). Similar to Ficarra's (2025) finding, concerted dialogue with these key players in learning regarding methods and assessment is too often missing.

Williamson (2025) points out the differences in academic structure between U.S. and European institutions. European students tend to specialize earlier in their degree and do not have room for electives in their programs; in contrast, U.S. students tend to have broader programs and more electives, providing space for study abroad opportunities. Williamson (2025) also notes that U.S. education abroad is focused on attaining objectives: earning credits, traveling to multiple places, and gaining on-site experience. Students often assume and want an á la carte approach to choosing their classes precisely because their home degree requires versatility in components, incorporating, at the very minimum, a major, minor, and general education requirement. This approach contrasts strongly with local European students' single-department

affiliation and explains why U.S. students can feel lost in European institutions. The European institution support systems do not expect students to take electives across multiple departments and curriculum levels.

4.7. Navigating U.S. and European Norms, Expectations, and Support

The intersection of U.S. and European approaches to student support creates unique challenges in study-abroad contexts. While U.S. students arrive with expectations shaped by their home institutions' frameworks for diversity, mental health support, and academic accommodations, they encounter European systems that conceptualize and address these needs quite differently. This disconnect stems not only from cultural differences in how identity, inclusion, and student well-being are understood and prioritized but also from structural disparities in resources and institutional capacities (Barneche et al., 2025; Boyington et al., 2025; Ferro et al., 2025; Robinson, Doughty, et al., 2025).

As Ferro et al. (2025) note, U.S. institutions often frame identity and inclusion through structured categories rooted in social justice contexts. These frameworks applied abroad can impose an ethnocentric lens on students and influence how they interpret their host culture. European approaches to diversity, such as France's universalist model or the UK's focus on colonial legacies, often differ significantly. Bohan et al. (2025) highlight the challenges students face in navigating their identities within these contrasting contexts. Pre-departure orientations are designed to prepare students to navigate these differences; however, Boyington et al. (2025) observed that these sessions tend to prioritize logistics over essential discussions on identity dynamics and cultural complexities.

Barneche et al. (2025) emphasize that U.S. institutions have developed robust mental health support systems prioritizing proactive disclosure, regular counseling, and medication management. However, European approaches to mental health often differ significantly in terms of treatment norms, support structures, and expectations around disclosure. Students may feel unsupported or misunderstood when encountering these differences, particularly in contexts where counseling services and prescription medication are less prevalent or culturally normalized.

Carnine and Pérez Calleja (2025) call for greater transatlantic collaboration, particularly in areas such as academic accommodations, grading practices, and ongoing training for educators. They stress the importance of dialogue between U.S. institutions and their European counterparts to enhance mutual understanding and effectively address the complexities of student support in international contexts.

Structural limitations compound these challenges. Many European institutions lack the financial resources and staffing capacity to mirror U.S.-style support systems, even if these did align with their cultural norms. Additionally, as Robinson, Doughty, et al. (2025) illustrate, even if meeting U.S. expectations to the letter was a desired objective, U.S. study abroad programs in Europe operate as micro-campuses with limited staff who manage multiple responsibilities and simply do not have the bandwidth, resources, or training to offer the same type of support expected, even if this was desired.

5. Calls to Action

Navigating U.S. and European norms requires balancing support with authentic cross-cultural engagement. In many contexts, European students are expected to approach their university years with a high degree of autonomy and resourcefulness—a concept akin to "débrouillardisme" in French—which emphasizes problem-solving and self-reliance. Providing extensive support to students may be seen as unnecessary or even counterproductive if it hinders the development of these critical skills. Instead of replicating U.S. campus experiences, programming should equip students with skills like curiosity, resilience, autonomy, and humility to engage meaningfully with other cultural contexts.

By embracing the framework of “intercultural wonderment” (Boyington et al., 2025; Engberg & Jourian, 2015) to prepare students for cultural engagement, encourage curiosity and acceptance of discomfort and cultural differences as core learning opportunities rather than obstacles, we can promote deeper engagement and meaningful collaboration with host communities (Savicki & Brewer, 2023). Programming that fosters curiosity, structured reflection, and culturally informed support requires ongoing, localized professional development for on-site staff. It also necessitates collaboration, understanding, and trust from U.S. counterparts to effectively guide students through cultural transitions while balancing support and independence. Success abroad should not be measured by how well familiar frameworks are replicated but by the depth of students’ cultural engagement and ability to adapt to and appreciate different cultural expectations.

This special issue presents several Calls to Action for the entire study-abroad community. While not exhaustive, given the broad range of topics and perspectives shared by the on-site community in Europe, the following highlights key action points for the sector to consider. Many of these points align with the standards set by The Forum on Education Abroad. Yet, we aim to emphasize specific, actionable steps that not only build on these standards but also complement the work of the editors and authors of this special issue.

1. Reframing Program Design and Delivery:

1.a. Developing learning goals around intentional internationalization,
1.b. Engage students in authentic European learning and assessment,
1.c. Create pathways for students to synthesize U.S. and European information,
1.d. Reduce U.S. exceptionalism through intentional program design; and
1.e. Build sustainable and climate-conscious program models.

2. Strengthening Professional Development and Support:

2.a. Seek, trust, and respect on-site practitioners' perspectives and distinctive knowledge and expertise,
2.b. Involve on-site staff in the decision-making process,
2.c. Establish structured professional training for on-site staff comparable to U.S.-based roles and considering cultural landscape differences,
2.d. Create integrated mental health support networks for both students and staff; and
2.e. Develop cross-cultural training frameworks that acknowledge different approaches to student support.

3. Building Reciprocal Relationships:

3.a. Center equitable practices where local communities benefit from collective work,
3.b. Refuse the *service model* created solely for U.S. student consumption,
3.c. Foster genuine partnerships with local institutions and communities,
3.d. Create opportunities for meaningful exchange of expertise between U.S. and European colleagues; and
3.e. Develop co-created pedagogical assessment tools that reflect both U.S. and European perspectives.

4. Establishing Sustainable Systems:

4.a. Consider local and U.S. legal frameworks for student mobility and hiring,
4.b. Create space for *dual bending* of systems that respects both U.S. and European approaches,
4.c. Develop assessment practices that effectively measure authentic cultural engagement,
4.d. Build sustainable support networks that bridge U.S. and European approaches; and
4.e. Implement climate-conscious program practices while maintaining educational quality.

6. Future Research on Study Abroad in Europe

While the 10 papers in this special issue tackle a wide variety of subjects related to on-site study abroad in Europe, there are many important research topics barely explored and so far relatively unmentioned.

A Europe-wide economic impact study: Study abroad country associations in Ireland, Spain, Italy, and the UK have at various times conducted studies into the economic impact of U.S. study abroad in their respective countries. Several of these studies were sponsored by government agencies, such as Education in Ireland (2018), IRPET (Duranti et al., 2024) in Italy, and EDUESPAÑA in Spain (2020), highlighting the importance of this sector to governments and economic development. However, the results are not easy to compare and extrapolate as each study used different methodologies and asked different questions about the study abroad sector.

A Europe-wide economic impact study using consistent methodology would allow the sector to show its contributions, not only in terms of economic impact but also jobs created and cultural exchange value. A sponsor for such an endeavor would be required and could be realized with funding from the European Union or from USA Study Abroad, for example.

The perspectives of early and mid-career professionals in Europe: Articles or reports such as those by Robinson, Doughty, et al. (2025), Robinson et al. (2020), and Lucas (2009) have tended to focus on the perspectives of senior-level study-abroad leaders in Europe. Similarly, many meetings of host country associations and conferences often involve the dominance of these senior staff members. The voices, impact, and perspectives of early- and mid-career professionals and on-site faculty are yet to be heard strongly in research. What motivates them to become involved in U.S. study abroad on-site? Do they have career aspirations in the field, and is there a clear path forward for them? A research project examining their roles and perspectives is needed.

The rising dominance of short-term programs and its on-site impact: Data from IIE's Open Doors (Institute for International Education, 2024) reports show that short-term programs (less than one semester) continue to be the most popular form of studying abroad. Of the short-term programs, summer experiences are the most popular. But this must have a significant impact on-site, from housing availability, rapid turnover of programs, contributions to overtourism, overlap with traditional tourism seasons, staffing levels and burnout, and the ever-present need to be flexible. A study on the impacts of short-term programs on-site may shine a light on the challenges faced to deliver quality programs on-site under such a model.

What do the students think? The study abroad sector excels at bringing together professionals to solicit opinions and feedback, but are we truly capturing the voice of the students? Why are they coming to Europe? What are their thoughts upon arrival? Do they feel immersed? Do they feel safe? Are they here for educational or professional reasons, or is it simply a carefree travel semester? Do program objectives match their personal and academic objectives? While Bohan et al. (2025) and Merle (2024) have tackled these questions with varied samples, there is still a need for a large-scale, Europe-wide study that includes diverse program types. Such research would offer invaluable insights into student aims, perceptions, attitudes, and satisfaction, enabling on-site study abroad professionals to tailor their programs more effectively to meet the varied needs of students across different program formats.

The impact of housing cost and availability on study abroad in Europe: Many European countries are currently experiencing a housing crisis (Henley, 2024), marked by rising costs and limited availability. This situation has placed significant pressure on students and study-abroad programs, with the housing issue making headlines in countries such as Ireland (Keena, 2024), France (Graveleau, 2022), Spain (Fox, 2024), and Italy (University Living, 2023). Despite this, on-site program staff are still expected to secure quality housing for visiting students, often in desirable city-center locations and frequently under the challenge of fluctuating student numbers throughout the year. A study on the impact of the housing crisis on U.S. study abroad and how it compares with the context of U.S. college campus housing is needed to help all stakeholders better understand these challenges and set realistic expectations for students and staff.

The decline of language acquisition programs in Europe: English as lingua franca: Studying abroad in Europe originated with a focus on second language acquisition, but in recent years, it has strayed from this primary objective. The Modern Language Association 2023 study of U.S. domestic foreign language enrollments reports a decrease of 16.6 % between 2016 and 2021 (Lusin et al., 2023). Translation technology and English's role as a *lingua franca* surely contribute to this decline. Despite this trend, Kinginger and Zhuang (2023) have proven that language learning has a significant long-term impact, serving as a gateway to continuing Higher Education and the pursuit of additional foreign language study. Research into ways of growing enrollments in language programs is needed.

7. Conclusion

This project aims to highlight the unique contributions that European-based colleagues can bring to the conversation about internationalization. By fostering collaborative work, involving international colleagues in meaningful discussions, and recognizing their expertise, we can enrich the global dialogue. Similarly, it is essential for institutions to make the professional space inviting colleagues to engage in a scholarly way with our expertise. It is mutually beneficial to formally share knowledge and experiences in this growing field.

Therefore, as a starting point, we are proud to present these 10 papers to the wide readership of Frontiers on behalf of the on-site community in Europe and to engage in lively, important, sometimes challenging conversations about our growing profession. While the papers in this special issue tackle key topics such as innovations in second language learning and assessment, controversial social media use, perspectives of resident directors, dire mental health issues, challenges met with diversity, equity, and inclusion, the need for climate action, international legal mismatches, and the experiences of exclusion for adjunct faculty, they do not pretend to be a complete and final report on the state of U.S. study abroad in Europe. Rather, with this collection of critical perspectives on-site, we aim to build a more common understanding of the existing gaps and even the disconnects that we face daily.

Several disconnects running through the contributions are structural, pedagogical, cultural, and historical in nature, and they deserve more attention in future collaborative research with on-site professionals. This collection differentiates U.S. and European realities as they are demonstrated in areas such as student services, mental health, diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as climate change awareness and the impact of U.S. educational and pedagogical expectations on local faculty and staff, who may feel pressured to adapt to U.S. approaches despite their roles as custodians of local knowledge. Such pressures, however, can undermine the fundamental goals of study abroad, which are rooted in cultural immersion and an openness to local contexts. Effective transatlantic collaboration and open dialogue among colleagues across borders are essential to bridging these divides and ensuring that both local expertise and shared objectives are recognized and respected.

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Dedication

The Guest Editors dedicate this special issue to the memory of our friend and colleague Loren Ringer (1962-2024).

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Guest Editor Biography

Stephen Robinson, PhD, is Director and Professor with Champlain College's campus in Dublin, Ireland. Stephen is an environmental geoscientist with a PhD from McGill University in Montréal, Canada, and he previously held the Chapin Chair in Geology at St. Lawrence University in Canton, NY. He advocates for the perspectives of on-site study abroad staff in Europe, and for climate action in international education. He is the Chair of EUASA and board member of ASAPI.

Kelly Bohan, Program Coordinator at Brown University in Paris and Secretary of the EUASA Board, holds an M.A. in International Education Management from the Middlebury Institute. An American living in France for nearly 10 years, including two years as a language assistant and seven years in study abroad, she manages cultural programming, community engagement, and student life at Brown. Previously, she worked with Middlebury College in France.

Julia Carnine, PhD, is Academic Director of Dickinson en France program in Toulouse, France, contributing faculty in the French and Francophone studies department, Dickinson College (PA, USA). With 28 years of study abroad experience, including five years as LIU Global College Director in China. Dr. Carnine teaches and researches at the University of Toulouse on international student mobility. Member of LISST- CERS (CNRS-UMR 5193), APUAF (Association of American University Programs in France) and EUASA.

Ariadne Ferro is an intercultural education specialist with a PhD in Modern Languages from Universidad de Alcalá. Ariadne's leadership roles in international education include executive director of APUNE and positions at Syracuse University Madrid, Saint Louis University Madrid, and Davidson College in Madrid. She is faculty at IE University and CEA CAPA, where she teaches intercultural communication, cross-cultural management, and inclusive leadership. She also runs The Zunzún, a consultancy specializing in intercultural and neuroinclusion work.