

# Eastern European students prioritise diversity and sustainability resoundingly

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The majority of Eastern European students would rule out a university or business school when equity, inclusion and sustainability are not prioritised, according to a new report by the Graduate Management Admissions Council (GMAC).

Specifically, 67% of prospective students from Poland, Bulgaria, Romania and 19 other Eastern European countries who considered equity and inclusion important or very important to their academic experience responded saying a lack of these topics would be a deal breaker for them, and 50% saying the same about sustainability as an integral part of their curriculum.

In comparison to non-European countries, on average, students from the United States (60%), Latin America (68%), and the Middle East (65%) all expressed that they would not consider a school that showed a lack of equity and inclusion initiatives.

Candidates from Africa and Asia were especially likely to say equity and inclusion are important to their academic experience, but they are typically less likely to say they will not consider a school based on these dimensions.

Globally, an average of 36% of candidates said they would rule out a school for a lack of equity and inclusion efforts, despite 68% saying that equity and inclusion were important or very important.

“Sustainability, equity, and inclusion are global issues in higher and business education, and we’re seeing that they resonate especially well with individuals from Eastern Europe who are aspiring for advanced business education,” says Sara Strafino, Director, Market Development for Europe.

“The region is witnessing profound geopolitical turmoil in their backyard and its permeating impact on people’s daily lives for the past years. It’s no wonder that for many of them it is critical to have an academic experience that helps contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals like reducing inequalities, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and developing sustainable cities and communities.”

Noteworthy is that 81% of female respondents highlighted the significance of equity and inclusion in their academic journey, greater than the 61% of male respondents who said the same. Female prospective students tended to be more socially conscious than male students when citing the importance of equity and inclusion, sustainability, and well-being. However, there was no significant difference between the men and women who prioritise these values when considering whether to reject a school for not adhering to them.

The GMAC annual Prospective Students Survey Report aims to investigate the needs and expectations of individuals seeking business education, and the 2024 report utilised the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals framework to assess equity, inclusion, sustainability, and well-being within business education.

This year, the survey collected responses from 4,105 participants spanning 132 countries. Among them, 42% were female, 61% were from Gen Z, and 29% were from underrepresented U.S. respondents.

These findings underscore that prospective university students are increasingly prioritising diversity, equity, and inclusion when selecting academic institutions. These values pose a critical challenge for universities that fail to embrace these principles, as they risk losing out on attracting a substantial portion of prospective students.

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Founded in 1953, GMAC is a global association of leading graduate business schools and provides valuable insights into the evolving trends and challenges shaping graduate management education globally.

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