

## **Interview: On the 2020 Alumni Survey of European Master in Global Studies**

The European Master in Global Studies (EMGS) program is an advanced degree program offered by a consortium of six European universities (Leipzig University, Ghent University, London School of Economics, Roskilde University, University of Vienna, and University of Wroclaw). Over the course of their study, students spend one year each at two of these universities. This transnational and interdisciplinary program, which includes elements of global history, area studies, economics, and international politics, seeks to provide students with a framework for navigating and critically engaging with global developments. Since its inception in 2005, the EMGS Consortium has educated over 800 students from around the world.

As the consortium's coordinating organization, the Global and European Studies Institute (GESI) at Leipzig University has conducted several surveys among the program's alumni in order to learn about their post-graduation career trajectories. The institute conducted its most recent survey in the fall of 2020, five years after the previous survey, and it has just published a report on the results. The Head of Science Communication at Leipzig Research Centre Global Dynamics, Roman Krawielicki, spoke to the researcher who led the study, Therese Mager—herself a graduate of the EMGS master's program—about the survey's most interesting findings.

**Roman: Therese, you and your colleagues put a lot of effort into conducting a survey among EMGS alumni. What did you want to find out?**

Therese: Our team—which included coordinators and professors at the GESI as well as two student assistants, Milan Procyk and Paul Bomhard—wanted to learn about EMGS graduates' employment prospects and opportunities, following the survey model created ten years ago by the EMGS program manager, Konstanze Klemm. We asked participants about their careers, but we also wanted to find out which knowledge, skills, and experience-related features of the program have been most useful to them. Basically, we set out to see if the program has been successful in meeting its goals.

**Roman: So, what did you find out? What were the most important results?**

Therese: For starters, the results showed very encouraging employment numbers. We know that many alumni were directly impacted by the economic changes brought on by Covid-19, but only 7% of our respondents reported being unemployed in the fall of 2020. We were also happy to learn that most of the respondents were able to find work relatively quickly. Nearly half of them reported finding a position directly after graduation, for example, and another fifth found work within three months.

In terms of the types of jobs EMGS alumni have, it was interesting to see a large variety of positions and fields of work. 43% of respondents replied that they worked in fields that are obviously related to global studies, like development cooperation, higher education, policy advice, public administration, and diplomacy. Many respondents reported working in less expected fields; however, a closer look at their positions showed that their work certainly had a strong connection to global studies. For instance, half of the 9% of graduates who reported working in communications or technology were employed in international organizations, NGOs, and universities. Most of those who chose "other" as their field—17% of respondents—were working in humanitarian aid or social impact organizations. All in all, it was a fascinating picture of the numerous fields that are available to EMGS graduates.

**Roman: How many graduates participated in the survey? Would you say that your respondents were representative of the EMGS alumni body as a whole?**

Therese: A total of 150 respondents filled out the entire questionnaire, representing about 21% of the 720 alumni we were able to contact. I'm happy to report that we had representatives from every cohort, from the graduating class of 2007 to the class of 2019. And I would say that they were representative, yes! We broke down the respondents' demographic data—namely, their gender and place of origin (EU versus non-EU countries)—and we compared the alumni's chosen study places with those of the respondents. I was honestly very surprised when I first crunched the numbers. The gender breakdown was almost exactly the same, as was the participation rate per study place. We noticed a bit more of a divergence in terms of place of origin; we saw a higher rate of participation from alumni from EU countries (59% of the respondents, versus 45% of total alumni) than from those from non-EU countries (41% of the respondents, versus 55% of total alumni). Overall, though, we had an impressive response from a diverse group of participants!

**Roman: This was not the first survey of its kind. How did your survey design differ from previous ones?**

Therese: That's right—the GESI also conducted surveys in 2011 and 2015. In 2020, we expanded the survey to include more questions about previous employment as well as skills learned through the EMGS program. We also thought that the particular circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic offered us a unique opportunity to learn about its impacts, so we asked the alumni questions about their changed working habits and travel plans. Finally, we used the opportunity to ask them about what they considered to be the greatest global challenges at the time—a very global studies question!—and to inquire about their mobility and intercultural contact since graduation.

**Roman: Did you observe any differences in the results, compared to 2015?**

Therese: Compared with 2015, the 2020 survey results showed alumni to be working in an even greater diversity of positions and fields, and moving “up the ladder” as their careers progressed. For example, there was a drop in the number of alumni in PhD candidate or research fellow positions—from 20% in 2015 to 14% in 2020—but an increase in the number of alumni in researcher or analyst positions (from 3% in 2015 to 10% in 2020). Meanwhile, the percentage of alumni in head or director positions increased from 3% in 2015 to 5% in 2020.

Another difference was partly due to a change in the survey design. We asked those alumni currently in PhD programs to indicate their field of research, and in 2020, we added the category of “global studies” to the mix. This led to the strong emergence of global studies, with nearly a third of our PhD respondents (30%) indicating it as their field of study. We also saw an increase in the number of PhD candidates who selected “other” as their field of study; while this category was selected by 17% of the concerned respondents in 2015, it increased to 30% in 2020. This points to the wide variety of study paths available to alumni who pursue a career in academia.

**Roman: You mentioned that your survey asked alumni about knowledge and skills gained through the program. Which aspects of the program were the most valuable, according to your findings?**

Therese: Respondents rated many aspects of the program quite well, but if I were to tell a story with the data, I would point out that the most highly rated aspects had to do with their exposure to an international environment and critical thinking. For example, fully 83% of our respondents noted that “intercultural communication” had been useful for their careers “in many aspects” or “very much.” 78% said the same for both “understanding complex problems” and “critically examining arguments.”

Approaches such as “dealing with interdisciplinarity” and “dealing with global perspectives” were highly valued by the respondents. And an impressive 85% of them placed a strong emphasis on the importance of international experience gained through the program for their current careers.

**Roman: What were the most surprising findings you noted in your report?**

Therese: The most surprising finding, for me, was that a majority—62%—of the survey’s respondents lived or worked in the country of an EMGS Consortium university (that is, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Poland, and the United Kingdom). 35 of these respondents, or about 26% of those surveyed, stayed in or returned to one of the countries of their EMGS studies, and were also *not citizens* of those countries. I don’t have all of the pieces to explain this puzzle, but the results suggest that the EMGS program offers graduates an entry point for finding a job close to one of their study places. And that was the case for me, too, even though I didn’t respond to the survey myself! I’m originally from the United States, but I found a position here at Leipzig University after I finished my EMGS studies.

**Roman: You mentioned earlier that the survey asked about the participants’ experiences during the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic, and that you also asked questions about global developments and challenges. Can the results from these questions be found in the report?**

Therese: We decided not to include them in the report, as we wanted the 2020 survey report to be consistent with previous ones. However, I presented the results from that part of the survey during the virtual EMGS alumni conference in November 2020, and we have shared the video from that presentation, along with other videos from the conference, [on the EMGS website](#). (You can also view the survey results video [directly on YouTube](#).)

Highlights included the alumni’s responses for what they saw as the most important global challenges of our time; it turned out that environmental concerns, namely climate change and biodiversity loss, topped the list, having been mentioned by 83 respondents (about 55% of those surveyed). We also learned through the survey that more than half of our respondents (58%) carried out all or most of their work from home during the first wave of the pandemic. Finally, it was very rewarding to see that an overwhelming majority of respondents had regular contact with people from different countries, cultures, or linguistic backgrounds in their working lives. An impressive 63% noted that intercultural contact was an everyday occurrence for them, and an additional 31% responded that that they experienced such contact “often” or “sometimes” (on a weekly and monthly basis, respectively). Honestly, the results from this section were fascinating to see. It’s clear that alumni of global studies continue to be curious, open-minded, and analytical long after graduation!

**Roman: What lessons did the Global and European Studies Institute take away from the survey results? Does the consortium plan to make changes to the program based on the responses?**

Therese: First of all, I would say the results were very satisfying, and that we learned that the program is effective in meeting its aims and preparing students for a variety of career paths. That said, we did receive feedback which suggested that some students may need additional guidance or support as they enter the labor market. The Global and European Studies Institute is actually already responding to this. Following the shift to virtual events, the institute has started offering online workshops to help students connect with alumni and guest speakers, and the EMGS Consortium has also been experimenting with new skill-building activities at the program’s summer and winter schools (events during which all of the students in the entire consortium meet in one place). Finally, the survey results suggested that many graduates want to see global studies thrive as a discipline in its own right. Trying

to explain our field of study to people who are unfamiliar with it can be a challenge—it's interdisciplinary by definition! However, the EMGS program now has professors whose positions are specifically devoted to global studies, and we also see many graduates pursuing their academic careers in global studies. It's a relatively new field, but it's clearly taking root, and our survey results show that EMGS graduates can pursue a broad range of meaningful careers thanks to the knowledge and skills they gain from this program.

**Roman: Just as a reminder, where can readers find the 2020 EMGS Alumni Survey report?**

Therese: You can find it on the EMGS website, at <https://globalstudies-masters.eu>.

**Roman: Thank you very much for joining me today, and all the best to the EMGS program!**

Therese: My pleasure. Thank you!