University of Freiburg
Internationalisation Strategy 2030

universität freiburg

Key Facts

18 %
international students

28 %
international doctoral candidates

19 %
international staff

13 %
international professors

22
English-language programmes

349
Erasmus+ Partnerships

91
Global Exchange Partners

4
Enhanced Partners (Adelaide U., U. of Ghana, Nagoya U., Penn State)

Introduction

Situated at the crossroads of Germany, France, and Switzerland, internationalisation and international exchange are a fundamental part of university life. University of Freiburg (UFR) researchers collaborate with partners worldwide, our programmes attract students globally, and our partnerships operate at regional, European, and global scales. Together with our partners worldwide, we further develop our capacity to tackle grand challenges and to offer internationally attractive programmes.

Internationalisation means recognising and keeping pace with an increasingly international research landscape and global academic careers. For us, this involves welcoming and supporting international researchers, staff and students, and expanding mobility opportunities for all UFR members. By fostering multilingual and intercultural competencies, internationalisation underscores global interconnectedness. It cultivates exceptional international research and teaching and will prepare our students to become responsible global citizens.

At a time when barriers to the free movement of ideas, talent, and cooperation are increasing in many parts of the world, our strategy provides an institutional framework to further promote a global, interconnected vision of our world. It is grounded in the university's commitment to quality, responsibility, and openness, and translates what is already international in practice into an institution that is international by design.

Our internationalisation vision

From cross-border by geography to international by design: The university is committed to becoming a global leader within its Key Research Areas[1], anchored in European and global research networks. By 2030, international researchers at UFR will be able to pursue clearly defined career paths that are compatible with international standards. Students will encounter international and intercultural perspectives as a matter of course, in the classroom and around campus. Administrative processes will be fully accessible in English, and key services will accommodate the multilingual reality of the university community. Partnerships will be selected for thematic alignment and shared challenges. The university's position at the crossroads of three countries is both a strategic advantage and a starting point for building global partnerships that further strengthen Europe's contribution to innovation.

Our strategy is built on two convictions: that working across borders should be an institutional condition as well as an individual achievement, and that a university which embeds openness in its structures sends a clear signal at a time when others are retreating from international engagement. The three chapters that follow translate these convictions into action. **Research, studies and teaching**, and **administration** each set out where the university aims to adapt its structures and processes. Embedded within the research chapter and setting the stage for the remainder of the strategy, partnerships provide the framework through which those changes take effect internationally. Transfer runs through the strategy as a cross-cutting theme, reflecting its role in the university's institutional strategy. Each chapter begins with where the university stands, identifies what needs to change, and sets out what the university will do.

1 The University of Freiburg's three Key Research Areas are: Languages of Knowledge, Pathways to Sustainability and Signals of Life. In the future, UFR plans to develop these Key Research Areas into Research Sections.

Measures and actions across the four chapters

Research at the individual level

Aligning career structures and coordination with European standards to attract and retain international talent

Research 1.
Early career researcher pathways
International career pathways and hiring criteria

Research 2.
Onboarding and infrastructure access
Uniformly coordinated processes and tailored onboarding services so incoming researchers have the necessary tools to carry out their work from their first week

Research 3.
Monitoring and coordination
Faculty-level fact sheets and Key Research Area facilitators to make international activity visible

Research through Partnerships

Directing institutional coordination and resources where they generate the most return

Research 4.
Cross-cutting partnership coordination
Four-year review of partnership portfolio with streamlined coordination across relevant units; Year of Internationalisation 2027

Research 5.
Partnership diversification
New partnerships selected by thematic research alignment; strengthening the thematic focus of existing partnerships

Studies & Teaching

Making international perspectives a standard feature of a Freiburg education

Teaching 1.
Visibility and breadth of international teaching
Central landing page, broader English-language offerings at Bachelor level

Teaching 2.
Teaching exchange within partnerships
Teaching Days, fellowships, and joint formats as standard components of Enhanced Partnerships

Teaching 3.
International teaching engagement and easier student credit recognition
Teaching load credit and ECTS recognition for international teaching engagement; systematic use of diploma supplements

Administration

Ensuring processes enable the university's international commitments

Administration 1.
Streamlined entry points for international arrivals
Increased digitalisation, central onboarding database, coordination points with cross-unit knowledge, clear service pathways

Administration 2.
Multilingualism and language policy
German and English as working languages, French for cross-border activities; more accessible language courses

Administration 3.
Housing
Multi-stakeholder advisory board with the city and student services to address a structural bottleneck

Administration 4.
Staff exchange as standard activity
At least one exchange per challenge area within each Enhanced Partnership per year, building on Erasmus Staff Weeks

Research

Research thrives in environments that promote a diversity of people and perspectives and attract excellent, creative minds. Across Europe, countries that have reformed career structures and created pathways for international researchers are setting the pace. UFR will align its structures with this philosophy so that researchers at all career stages can come, contribute, and stay. UFR's own researchers will continue to build the international networks and experience that strengthen research at home. Out in the world, partnerships are the framework through which the commitments in research, as well as in teaching and administration, take effect internationally. UFR's partnership architecture operates at regional, European, and global scales, and each level serves a distinct function. The university will coordinate more systematically across these levels, aligning new partnerships with its research priorities, and ensuring that partnerships contribute to addressing global knowledge asymmetries.

Where we stand

UFR boasts a robust foundation for international research. The Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies (FRIAS) provides cross-faculty infrastructure for visiting scholars at all career stages. The university attracts significant international talent, as evidenced by its regular receipt of Alexander von Humboldt fellows and its offer of structured programmes for early career researchers, such as the Freiburg Postdoctoral Academy (FPA)[2], the Rising Stars Academy and International Research Training Groups (IRTG)[3] for doctoral students. Our researchers are active in countless international joint research projects and are in close dialogue with their peers abroad, through individual collaborations, faculty-level partnerships, and university-level strategic partnerships.

UFR's partnership architecture is layered and well established. Eucor[4] operates across the full range of university activities in the Upper Rhine region, from joint research projects and research infrastructure cooperation to free student

2 The FPA is a newly established structure at UFR that aims to promote national and international postdocs active in the university's three Key Research Areas. It brings together exceptional young scientists to foster cross-disciplinary and multidisciplinary dialogue and cooperation and to provide career opportunities. FPA members are allocated a group budget, which they manage independently, without external influence.

3 UFR currently has two IRTGs: "Analysis of Nonlinear PDE: Conformal Energies, Optimal Shapes, and Continuum Mechanics" and "Scale effects in the forest adaptation to climate change (FORSCALE)."

4 Members: University of Basel, University Haute-Alsace, Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT), University of Strasbourg

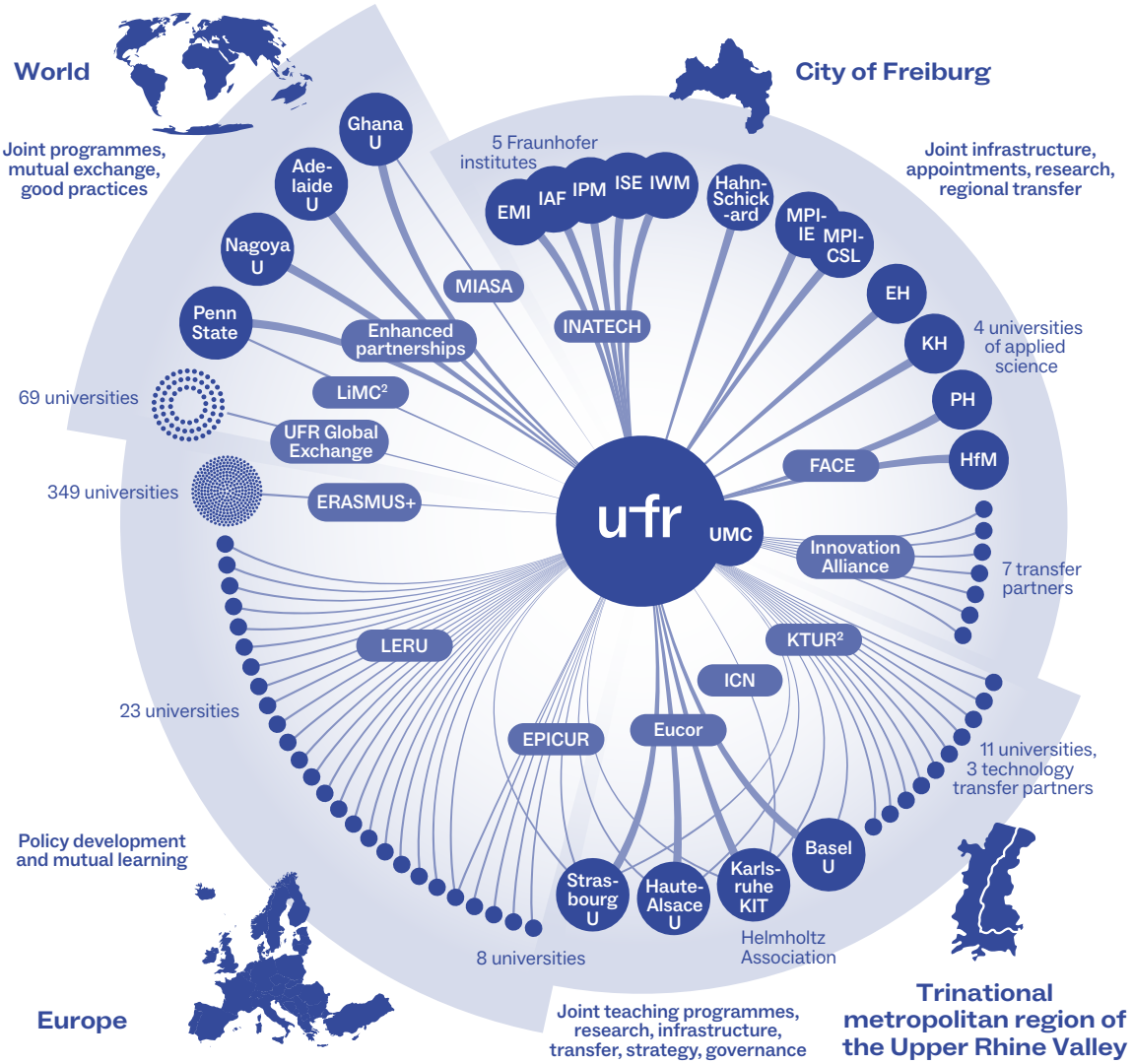
mobility, double degrees and cross-border professorships. EPICUR builds upon the Eucor experience connecting nine European partner institutions: Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT), University of Strasbourg, University of Haute-Alsace, BOKU University (University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna), Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, University of Southern Denmark (SDU), Adam Mickiewicz University (AMU), University of Amsterdam (UvA)[5]. The alliance focuses on flexible learning, through the EPICUR Centre for International Teaching and Learning (EPiC TLC), and research opportunities, through EPICUR Hubs and seed money instruments. LERU membership, secured as Germany's third member, places UFR in a network of leading European research universities.

The Enhanced Partnerships span four continents: Pennsylvania State University (USA) brings collaboration in materials science and collaborative online teaching through the Convergence Centre for Living Multifunctional Material Systems (LiMC2); Nagoya University (Japan) has a joint doctoral programme in medicine and a Global Campus initiative with an office at UFR; the University of Ghana is connected through the Merian Institute for Advanced Studies in Africa (MIASA); and the partnership with Adelaide University (Australia) places a thematic focus on biomedicine and sustainability and also offers a joint doctoral programme in medicine.

Faculty engagement in internationalisation is very strong and well established. To fully harness the potential of these activities, we need greater visibility between and beyond faculties. To realise the full potential of the existing partnership architecture beyond individual engagement, the strategy focuses on cross-cutting coordination between FRIAS, the International Office, and central university management, embedding staff exchange as a standard partnership activity, and diversifying the partnership portfolio in alignment with the university's research priority areas.

To bring institutional structures in line with the foundation laid by our global networks, a coordinated approach to onboarding and a consolidated overview of international research activity across faculties is needed. The following chapter outlines what we plan to do to foster research at the individual researcher level, as well as at the partnership level.

5 In a possible +2 funding phase, UvA will no longer be a part of the alliance. Roma Tre and Universidad Pablo de Olavide, Sevilla, will be joining as new partners, with the University of Basel incorporated as an associated partner.



UFR is at the centre of a rich regional ecosystem with European integration and global reach

How we define our partnerships

Individual researcher collaborations form the basis for all partnerships at UFR. They are driven by research interests and personal fit, and they remain the foundation from which formalised partnerships develop. The university recognises two levels of formalised partnership, with three types at the university level. The partnership architecture below reflects the current state and foundation. Its categories will be assessed during implementation of this strategy to determine whether they remain fit for purpose.

University-level, strategic partnerships

Associations/ Alliances

- Transnational, long-term partnerships between European higher education institutions for structural cooperation across research, teaching, mobility, and administration.
- Supported by European funding frameworks.

Eucor,
EPICUR,
LERU

Enhanced Partnerships

- University-wide partnerships with reciprocal special status, shared research foci, and comparable profiles.
- Require collaboration across at least three faculties to attain this status.
- Deliberately selected for their transformative potential, they draw on an established level of academic engagement.
- Through targeted joint initiatives, they strategically align with and reinforce our Key Research Areas as well as advance emerging fields.
- Formalised through an extensive Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with a four-year resource plan and regular evaluation.

Adelaide University,
University of Ghana,
Nagoya University,
Penn State University

Global Exchange Partnerships

- Formalised educational partnerships on the basis of student exchange agreements.
- Open to students from all UFR-faculties.

91 universities on all continents (except Europe)

Faculty-level partnerships

- Formalised collaborations at institute or faculty level through MOUs, Student Exchange Agreements (SEAs), as well as through IRTGs.
- Selected for alignment with the faculty's strategic orientation and academic profile.

Examples:
e.g., Universidade de São Paulo, Gadjah Mada University, University of British Columbia, Università di Pisa

349 Erasmus+ Partnerships (2024/2025)

What we will do at the individual researcher level

Research 1. Focus on early career researchers as the future of international research

The university will invest more in attracting early and mid-career researchers from abroad. Structural pathways from initial recruitment to long-term positions are continuously being re-evaluated to accommodate the realities of the current job market. While the primary focus of this measure is on early and mid-career researchers, several of these structural changes benefit researchers at all career stages.

To align career structures and coordination with European standards to attract and retain international talent, we will:

- **Action 1.1** Optimize our hiring processes to actively seek international candidates, creating bridging positions, and career structures that reflect international standards.
- **Action 1.2** Internationalise career paths by opening doctoral examination committees to international scholars, and relaxing hiring requirements that currently hinder international candidates. Such barriers include language requirements and degree requirements that focus on a specific, narrow discipline and disregard potential international and interdisciplinary study paths.
- **Action 1.3** Foster international career trajectories through bi- and trinational doctoral programmes and joint fellowships with partner universities, while strengthening the visibility of existing structured programmes for early career researchers such as the Rising Stars Academy and the Freiburg Postdoctoral Academy. We will also continue to support endangered scholars through networks like Scholars at Risk.

Research 2. Streamline onboarding and infrastructure access for incoming researchers

Incoming researchers still encounter administrative and bureaucratic processes that complicate their start at UFR and their arrival in Germany. UFR offers onboarding support to help incoming researchers tackle these hurdles. However, access to labs, IT systems, and office space depends on steps that are distributed across units and would benefit from greater coordination. To optimise onboarding and infrastructure access, we will:

- **Action 2.1** Create uniformly coordinated processes, tailored to different faculties and departments and aligned with existing and developing measures (e.g., Welcome Services and onboarding services within the Academic Personnel Development unit) so that incoming researchers have easy and full access to the infrastructure they need from their first week.
- **Action 2.2** Tailor onboarding services increasingly to international arrivals (e.g., through comprehensive onboarding modules for new international hires, expanded buddy/mentoring system pairing experienced international staff with new arrivals).

This complements the administrative streamlining described in the Administration pillar by ensuring that research-specific infrastructure is equally ready.

Research 3. Connect internationalisation to research strategy through monitoring and coordination

Individual faculties, FRIAS, the International Office, and project-based initiatives each hold parts of the picture. The goal is to make the many functioning decentralised activities more visible so that the university can support what works, learn from best practices and adjust what could work better. To optimise monitoring and coordination through greater visibility, we will:

- **Action 3.1** Embed internationalisation in the development of our Key Research Areas, with designated facilitators at that level to coordinate across the faculties and units involved.
- **Action 3.2** Regularly collect data through concise, faculty-level fact sheets on internationalisation status, including information on international transfer projects and engagement with societal partners.

What we will do at the partnership/ institutional level

Research 4. Establish cross-cutting partnership coordination across all relevant units

The university's Enhanced Partnerships offer opportunities in research, teaching, mobility, and administrative exchange that extend well beyond the research contacts from which they originated. Realising that potential requires greater internal visibility: faculties and staff need to know what each partnership offers and how to engage with it. To ensure partnership visibility and greater coordination across units, we will:

- **Action 4.1** Conduct a four-year portfolio review of all partnerships, covering the full pipeline from individual researcher contacts to institutional agreements, building off ongoing evaluation processes within the Enhanced Partnerships in 2026.
- **Action 4.2** Create the conditions for internal visibility by making thematic focuses more widely known to faculties and communicating opportunities (e.g., through formats like Research Days, a university-wide "Year of Internationalisation 2027," and discipline-based networking events).

Partnership coordination will also cover joint activities with local businesses, organisations, and institutes in a more consolidated form, building on the university's commitment to interdisciplinary engagement and transdisciplinary innovation.

Research 5. Diversify the partnership portfolio in alignment with Key Research Areas

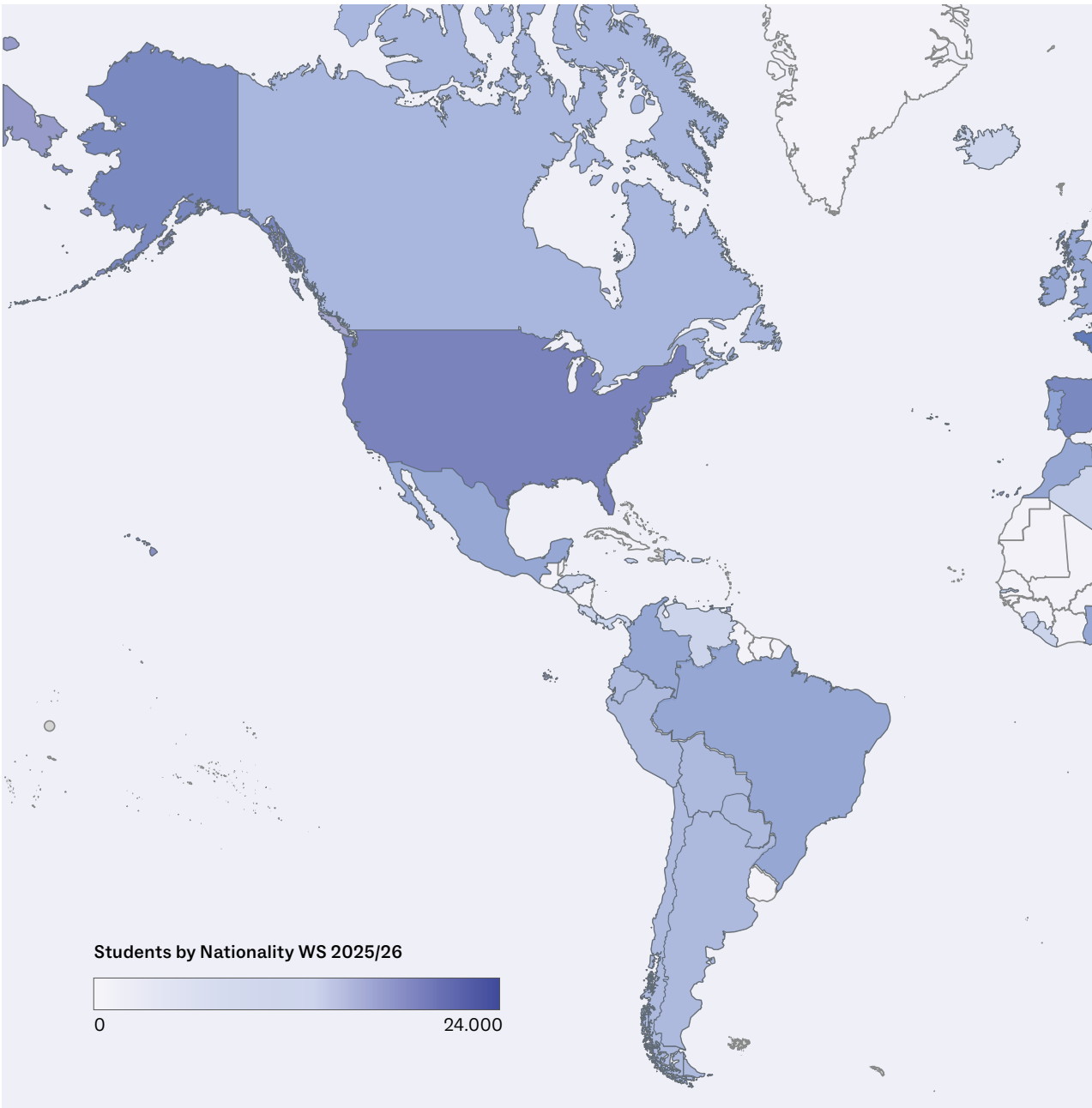
Thematic alignment produces more fruitful partnerships than prestige or history alone. Partnerships that connect to the university's emerging fields generate joint projects, shared doctoral supervision, and collaborative funding applications. To enhance thematic alignment within our partnerships, we will:

- **Action 5.1** Explore new partnerships selected for alignment with Key Research Areas and emerging fields, while strengthening the thematic focus of existing partnerships through joint regular review, particularly with our Enhanced Partners.
- **Action 5.2** Expand the synergies in research among our partners, to make the most of each partnership for everyone involved.
- **Action 5.3** Regularly assess new and existing partnerships for their potential to address shared societal challenges, based on mutual benefit and respect for different forms of knowledge, in ongoing dialogue with our Enhanced Partners and other partners, focusing on shared goals, including joint transfer activities. We apply our guidelines for partnerships under complex framework conditions and adhere to the principles of the Africa Charter for Transformative Research Collaborations.[6]

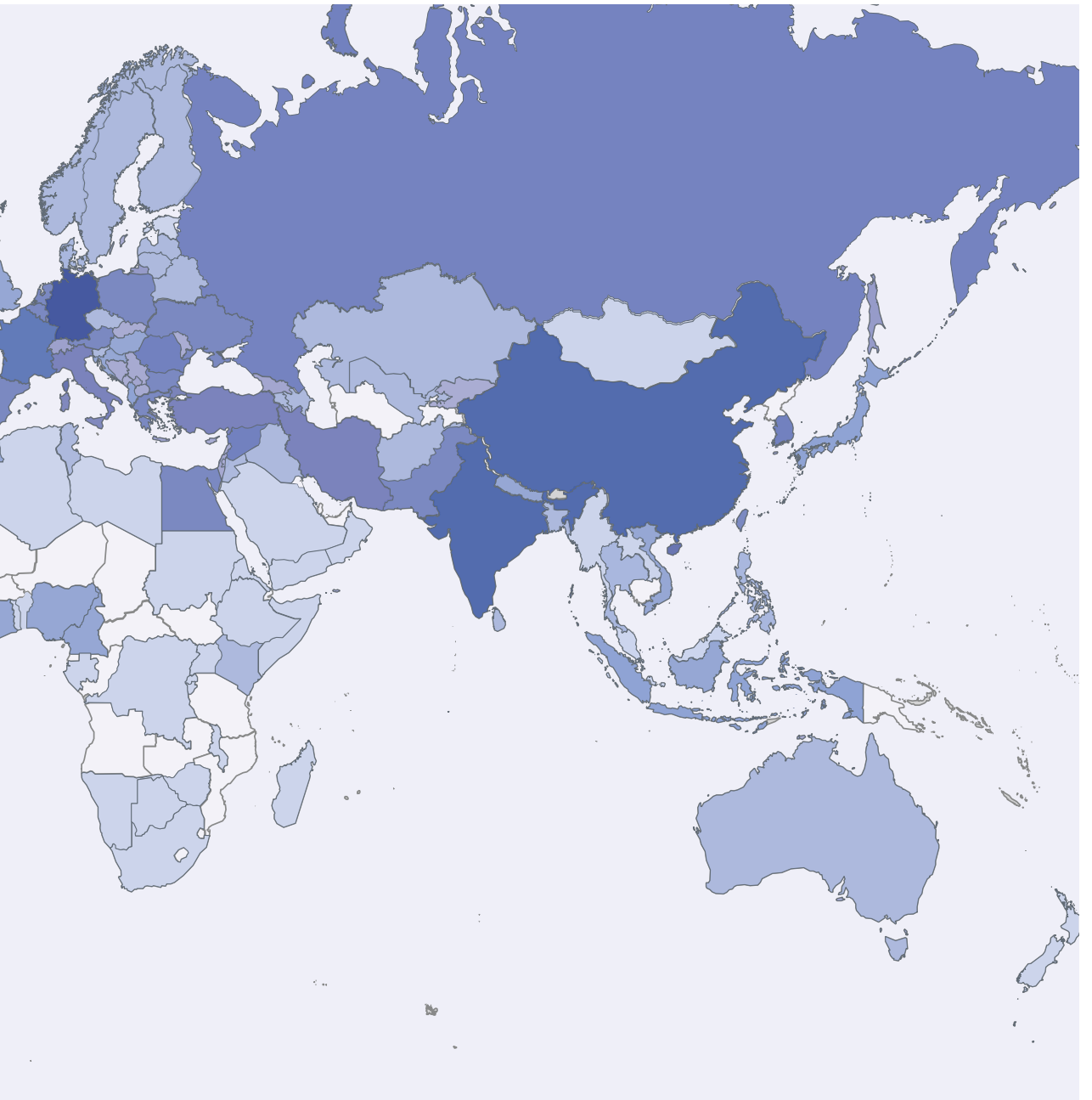
6 UFR is the first singular German university to sign the Africa Charter. The Charter sets out "10 principles on how research collaborations need to be configured to redress the multi-layered power imbalances in the global-Africa production of scientific knowledge" (Perivoli Africa Research Centre, University of Bristol).

Studies and teaching

University of Freiburg students hail from all over



Internationalised teaching at UFR means more than offering courses in English. UFR will draw on its tri-national location, and the Freiburg Education Model to ensure that internationalised teaching and learning is a standard feature of a UFR education, preparing students to work across linguistic, cultural, and disciplinary borders and allowing international students to participate on equal terms.



Where we stand

UFR has an established portfolio of English-language postgraduate programmes. It is home to the University College Freiburg (UCF), which is a driving force for innovative, interdisciplinary teaching and offers Germany's first Liberal Arts and Sciences Bachelor's programme. The university participates in mobility programmes, such as Erasmus+, Eucor free mobility, and EPICUR teaching and learning offerings. It also runs joint and double degree programmes, COIL projects, and summer schools with Enhanced Partner universities and within European Alliances and networks. Many of these offerings are accessible online or through blended learning formats.

However, credit recognition, curriculum internationalisation, and access to mobility vary across faculties. Studying abroad often requires students and teachers to navigate administrative barriers. The measures below address these gaps directly.

What we will do

Teaching 1. Build on and make visible UFR's international teaching

UFR has a plethora of international teaching offerings, but these do not always reach the students and teachers who could most benefit from them. English-language options are concentrated at the Master level. In an era where barriers to movement are increasing and openness is retreating in other parts of the world, preparing our students to become global citizens has become an increasingly urgent task. There is therefore a prime opportunity to increase the number of English-language and international offerings at the Bachelor level. To harness this opportunity and increase the visibility of existing offerings, we will:

- **Action 1.1** Make existing international teaching easier to find through a central landing page, regular communications, and better internal visibility so that current offerings – including from Eucor and our European Alliance EPICUR – reach the students and staff who can benefit from them.
- **Action 1.2** Build on this base by broadening English-language offerings at the Bachelor level, with the initial goal of ensuring each programme provides at least two English-taught offerings, in the form of electives, and the longer-term goal of creating additional Bachelor programmes, as well as offering a selection of existing programmes in English in addition to German.

By integrating domestic and international students in the same courses, these offerings bring international perspectives into the regular curriculum for all students, including those who do not go abroad.

Teaching 2. Activate teaching and learning exchange with strategic partner universities

The teaching dimension of UFR's partnerships has room to grow. Teaching exchange requires coordination, recognition, and planning. If the university wants partnerships that extend beyond bilateral research contacts, teaching is what makes them felt across the institution. To extend the reach of our partnerships in teaching, we will:

- **Action 2.1** Establish concrete teaching activities as a standard component of each Enhanced Partnership (e.g., Teaching Days, short teaching fellowships, co-taught online modules, and collaborative student projects such as COIL modules or joint field courses).
- **Action 2.2** Define specific teaching goals within each partnership that allow students to engage with their peers and with teaching staff from partner institutions in fruitful formats.

Joint teaching formats will, where appropriate, involve societal challenges and non-academic partners, drawing on the university's transfer ecosystem.

Teaching 3. Boost international teaching engagement and ease credit recognition for students

Although there is a lot of student mobility and international teaching engagement at UFR, both students and teachers could benefit from further incentives, better recognition and fewer administrative hurdles. In order to further encourage student mobility and students seeking international opportunities after graduation, as well as international teaching engagement, we will:

- **Action 3.1** Explore teaching load credit and ECTS recognition for international teaching engagement to address the incentive gap.
- **Action 3.2** Commit to systematic use of diploma supplements to make UFR qualifications legible internationally and ease credit recognition.

Administration

Administration is the hidden filter in internationalisation. Administrative processes determine whether the university's international commitments work in practice. Many international researchers, students, and staff encounter the university first through its processes, services, and infrastructure. UFR will further define shared standards for services and language, and take a coordinating role on housing so that its processes enable the international commitments set out in this strategy.

Where we stand

Over 70 internal documents have been translated into English, 25 personnel forms redesigned as bilingual, and a multilingual chatbot introduced for the university's internal service directory. The Language Teaching Institute (SLI) offers tailored courses for students and staff, and staff weeks bring colleagues from partner universities to UFR for peer exchange. The Welcome Service has expanded to better support onboarding for international researchers.

However, some target groups, particularly non-academic staff, are reached unevenly and existing resources like Erasmus Staff Exchanges remain underutilised. The next step is to embed these services in a consistent institutional framework.

What we will do

Administration 1. Streamline services into an accessible entry point and reduce processing barriers

International arrivals encounter a range of services across multiple units and levels of administration. Peer universities that coordinate these processes more tightly set a benchmark UFR can meet. Key processes such as enrolment and transcript transmission remain predominantly paper-based, creating delays that compound the challenges faced by mobile students. To reduce processing barriers, we will:

- **Action 1.1** Digitise internationally relevant processes, starting with enrolment and transcript transfer within the Eucor network where dedicated funding supports this work.
- **Action 1.2** Consolidate information needed for onboarding of international arrivals through an exhaustive internal online database/guide (complemented by comprehensive onboarding modules and expanded buddy/mentoring system for new international hires, as mentioned in Research pillar).
- **Action 1.3** Establish coordination points with cross-unit knowledge to guide international arrivals to the right services (complementing uniformly coordinated processes in Research pillar, e.g., process management initiatives in central administration).
- **Action 1.4** Set turnaround commitments on key procedures and extend support (e.g., Welcome Services) to underserved groups, particularly non-academic staff.

Administration 2. Promote and encourage multilingualism across campus

Language is both an opportunity and a practical barrier. When a contract, a form, or a committee meeting is only available in German, the message to international members of the university is that they are guests in a system designed for others. When the same materials are available trilingually, the message is that they are welcome. The university has translated many key documents, has introduced a multilingual chatbot, and a multilingual university glossary.

The next step is formalising these efforts in institutional standards or policy. UFR's location in the tri-border region presents a distinctive opportunity. A language policy that reflects this position turns a geographic fact into a strategic asset. To promote and encourage multilingualism across campus, we will:

- **Action 2.1** Finalise the draft policy establishing German and English as working languages and as the default languages for external communications, with French recognised for cross-border activities given UFR's location. A UFR project focusing on 'digital multilingualism' will enhance our capabilities in this area and allow university members to communicate in their preferred language.

- **Action 2.2** Define which administrative processes must operate bilingually.
- **Action 2.3** Broaden access to language courses for all status groups, with a priority on German for international arrivals and English for university members in internationally facing roles.

Administration 3. Address housing as a structural barrier to internationalisation

Housing is where the university's international strategy meets a city-level constraint. Rising rents and a private market not oriented toward short-term or international tenants create a bottleneck no single institution can resolve. But the university can lead a multi-stakeholder approach. To address housing as a structural barrier, we will:

- **Action 3.1** Establish a housing advisory board bringing together the university, the city of Freiburg, the Student Services Organisation ("Studierendenwerk"), and other stakeholders to develop a housing concept that makes accommodation more accessible to international students, faculty, and staff.
- **Action 3.2** Exchange best practices, common challenges, and potential solutions to housing as a structural barrier with peer universities in the region.

Administration 4. Embed staff exchange as a standard partnership activity

Partnerships generate direct knowledge about how other universities handle the same operational challenges UFR faces. There is potential for administrative and technical staff to play a larger role in partnership activity and to benefit from peer exchange and best practices at other institutions. Erasmus Staff weeks form the basis for this engagement. Embedding staff exchanges as a standard partnership activity, building off the basis formed by Erasmus Staff Weeks, has the potential to diversify and enhance institutional and personal learning. To harness this potential, we will:

- **Action 4.1** Identify priority operational challenges (e.g., digitalisation and multilingualism) where peer learning from partner institutions can add value.
- **Action 4.2** Organise at least one staff exchange per challenge area, within each enhanced partnership, per year.
- **Action 4.3** Publish testimonials and best practices in internationalisation on the university's website to raise awareness of potential opportunities and the benefits of participating in them, to complement Actions 1 and 2.

Looking ahead

UFR has a longstanding international orientation, sustained by its researchers, students, staff, and partners across the world. Internationalisation is the connective tissue between the university's academic mission and its responsibility to contribute to public value. This strategy builds on what is already in place by giving it greater coherence, institutional backing, and strategic direction. The next steps must put these measures into action in a sustainable manner to ensure cumulative effects.

When career paths are open, researchers stay and build the groups and doctoral programmes that produce excellent research over decades. When administrative processes are accessible, the university retains the people it has invested in attracting. As partnerships become more systematic and internationalisation becomes the default in both teaching and research, the cumulative effect is an institution where internationalisation is a given, not an add-on.

Realising these effects requires a culture of equity, respect and belonging. UFR combats discrimination on campus and promotes a culture that recognises differences as strengths. This strategy stands together with UFR's comprehensive work in the field of equity, diversity & inclusion and ongoing further development of the diversity strategy.

Internationalisation is defined by dynamic processes and external factors, such as global politics. We strive to offer formats that accommodate this reality and the ever-changing nature of society. Short exchange and mobility programmes, coupled with increasing digitalisation, remain crucial for internationalisation.

This strategy was developed through a university-wide participatory process, informed by the HRK audit “Internationalisation of Universities” (2024) and findings from our internal Expert Panel on Internationalisation. The same commitment to broad engagement will guide its implementation. The university will establish an implementation committee building on the Expert Panel’s work. The committee’s first task will be to assign responsibility for each measure and coordinate across departments to avoid duplication. Progress will be measured through a biennial university-wide survey and centralised data collection including faculty internationalisation fact sheets. These instruments are how the university holds itself accountable to the commitments set out here.

Impressum

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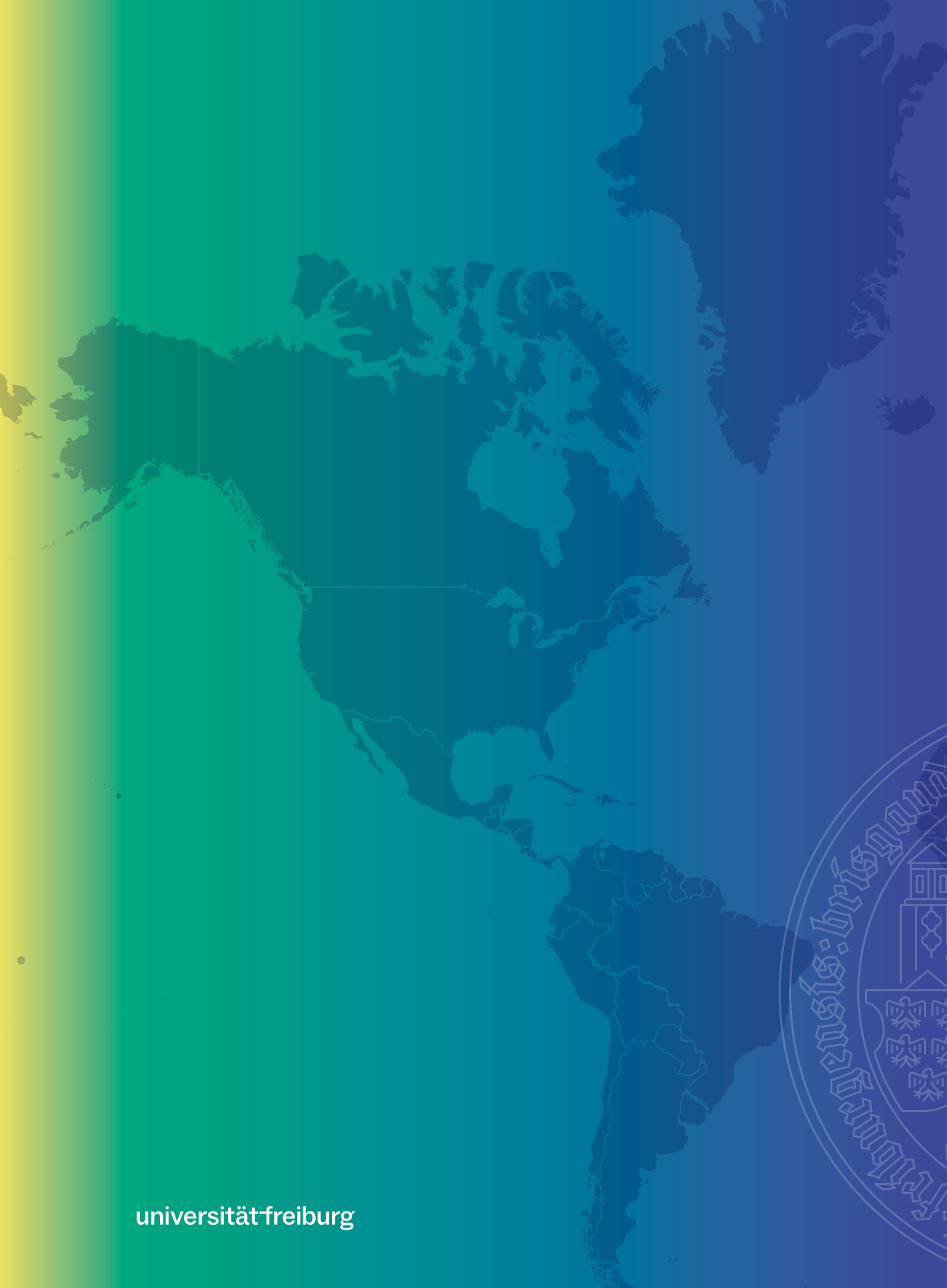

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