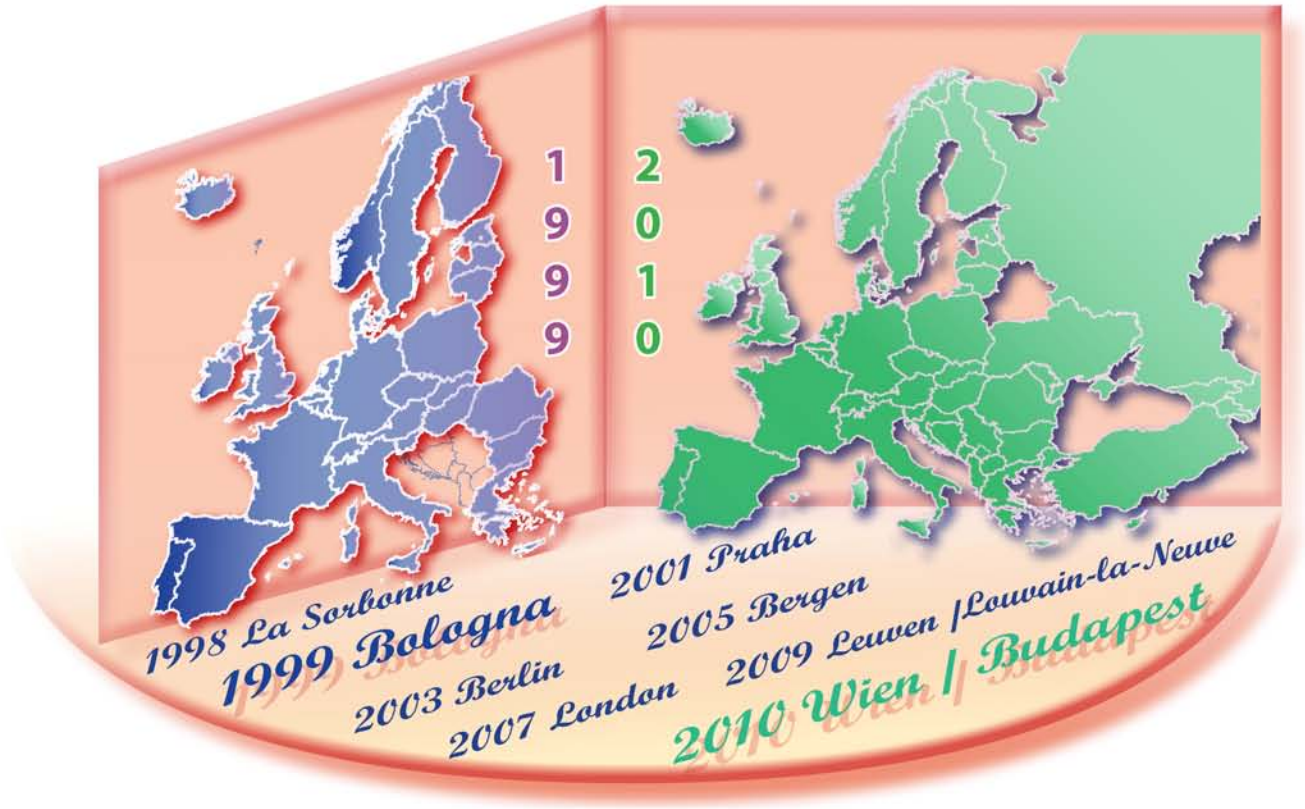
EURYDICE

Focus on Higher Education in Europe 2010

The Impact of the Bologna Process



European Commission

OVERVIEW OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

The Bologna Process is the product of a series of meetings of Ministers responsible for higher education at which policy decisions have been taken with the goal to establish a European Higher Education Area by 2010. The process also includes the European Commission as a full member. The Council of Europe and UNESCO – CEPES, along with a range of stakeholder organisations are also involved as consultative members. There is thus full and active partnership with higher education institutions, represented by the European University Association (EUA) and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), students, represented by the European Students' Union (ESU), academics represented by Education International (EI) as well as the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and Business Europe representing employer organisations.

Since 1998, six ministerial conferences devoted to mapping out the Bologna Process have been held in different European cities, namely Paris (at the Sorbonne University), Bologna, Prague, Berlin, Bergen, London and Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve.

Sorbonne Declaration (1998)

The basic precepts of the Bologna Process date back to the Sorbonne Joint Declaration on Harmonisation of the Architecture of the European Higher Education System, signed on May 25 1998 by the education ministers of four countries: France, Germany, Italy and United Kingdom.

The Sorbonne Declaration focused on:

- Improving the international transparency of programmes and the recognition of qualifications by means of **gradual convergence towards a common framework of qualifications and cycles of study**;
- Facilitating the **mobility of students and teachers** in the European area and their integration into the European labour market;
- Designing **a common degree level system** for undergraduates (bachelor degree) and graduates (master and doctoral degrees).

Bologna Declaration (1999)

The Bologna Declaration on the European Higher Education Area, largely inspired by the Sorbonne Declaration, was signed in June 1999 by ministers responsible for higher education in 29 European countries. This declaration became the primary document used by the signatory countries to establish the general framework for the modernisation and reform of European higher education. The process of reform came to be called the Bologna Process.

In 1999, the signatory countries included the then 15 EU Member States, three EFTA countries (Iceland, Norway and Switzerland) and 11 EU candidate countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia). International institutions such as the European Commission, the Council of Europe and associations of universities, rectors and European students also participated in drafting the declaration.

The Bologna Declaration also formulates the objective of increasing the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education and stresses the need to ensure that this system attracts significant attention from around the world.

In the Bologna Declaration, ministers affirmed their intention to:

- Adopt a system of **easily readable and comparable degrees**;
- Implement a system based essentially on **two main cycles**;
- Establish a **system of credits** (such as ECTS);
- Support the **mobility of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff**;
- Promote **European cooperation in quality assurance**;
- Promote the **European dimensions in higher education** (in terms of curricular development and inter-institutional cooperation).

Prague Communiqué (2001)

In May 2001, the meeting in Prague was convened to assess the progress accomplished to date (particularly as indicated in the respective national reports) and identify the main priorities that should drive the Bologna Process in the years ahead. 33 countries participated, with Croatia, Cyprus and Turkey accepted as new members. Liechtenstein was also included, having committed to the Process between the Bologna and Prague conferences, and the European Commission also became a member.

The education ministers also decided to establish a Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) responsible for the continuing development of the Process. The BFUG is composed of representatives of all signatory countries and the European Commission and is chaired by the rotating EU Presidency. The Council of Europe, the European University Association (EUA), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) and the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB), later renamed the European Students Union (ESU), take part as consultative members in the work of the BFUG.

The Prague Communiqué emphasised three elements of the Bologna Process:

- Development of **lifelong learning**;
- Involvement of **higher education institutions and students**;
- Promotion of the **attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area**.

Berlin Communiqué (2003)

Held in September 2003, the Berlin Conference was an important stage in the follow up to the Bologna Process. With the inclusion of seven new signatory countries (Albania, Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Holy See, Russia, Serbia and Montenegro), 40 countries were then involved.

In the Berlin Communiqué, ministers charged the BFUG with preparing detailed reports on the progress and implementation of the intermediate priorities and organising a stocktaking process before the following ministerial conference in 2005. The Unesco European Centre for Higher Education (Unesco-CEPES) joined the work of the BFUG as a consultative member.

With the Berlin Communiqué, the Bologna Process gained additional momentum by setting certain priorities for the next two years:

- Development of **quality assurance at institutional, national and European levels**;
- Implementation of the **two-cycle system**;
- **Recognition of degrees and periods of studies**, including the provision of the Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge for all graduates as of 2005;
- Elaboration of an overarching **framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area**;
- Inclusion of the **doctoral level as the third cycle** in the Process;
- Promotion of closer **links between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area**.

Bergen Communiqué (2005)

By May 2005, the Bologna Process extended to 45 signatory countries with the inclusion of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The ministers responsible for higher education met in Bergen to discuss the mid-term achievements of the Bologna Process. The commissioned Stocktaking Report was submitted by the BFUG for the occasion. The Bergen Conference also marked the adoption of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), and the Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA).

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the Education International Pan-European Structure and the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE, later to become Business Europe) joined the BFUG as consultative members.

In the Bergen Communiqué, ministers enlarged their priorities for 2007, which now also include:

- **Reinforcing the social dimension** and removing obstacles to mobility;
- Implementing the **standards and guidelines for quality assurance** as proposed in the ENQA report;
- Developing **national frameworks of qualifications in compatibility with the adopted Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area**;
- Creating opportunities for **flexible learning paths in higher education**, including procedures for recognition of prior learning.

London Communiqué (2007)

The London Ministerial meeting, held on 17 and 18 May 2007, provided a landmark in establishing the first legal body to be created through the Bologna process – the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR). This is to become a register of quality assurance agencies that comply with the standards and guidelines for quality assurance European Standards and Guidelines, and are therefore legitimate to work in the European Higher Education Area.

London also saw developments in two key areas – the social dimension, where Ministers agreed to develop national action plans and to monitor their impact, and the global dimension, where Ministers agreed on a strategy to develop the global dimension of European higher education.

The country membership expanded to 46 with the recognition of the Republic of Montenegro as an independent State in the European Higher Education Area.

Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué (2009)

The Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Ministerial meeting, held on 28 and 29 April 2009, took stock of the achievements of the Bologna process and laid out the priorities for the European Higher Education Area for the next decade.

Looking back to ten years of European higher education reform Ministers emphasised the achievements of the Bologna process, highlighting in particular, the increased compatibility and comparability of European education systems through the implementation of structural changes and the use of ECTS and the Diploma Supplement. Acknowledging that the European Higher Education Area is not yet a reality, the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve communiqué also established the priorities for the decade until 2020.

The organisational structures of the Bologna Process were endorsed as being fit for purpose, and ministers decided that in the future the Bologna Process would be co-chaired by the country holding the EU presidency and a non-EU country.

In the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué, ministers agreed that:

- each country should set **measurable targets for widening overall participation and increasing the participation of under-represented social groups** in higher education by the end of the next decade.
- **by 2020 at least 20% of those graduating in the EHEA should have had a study or training period abroad**.
- **lifelong learning and employability** are important missions of higher education.
- **Student-centred learning** should be the goal of ongoing curriculum reform

Timeline of the Bologna Process

	1998	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009
	Sorbonne Declaration	Bologna Declaration	Prague Communiqué	Berlin Communiqué	Bergen Communiqué	London Communiqué	Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué
Mobility of students and teachers		Mobility of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff	Social dimension of mobility	Portability of loans and grants Improvement of mobility data	Attention to visa and work permits	Challenges of visa and work permits, pension systems and recognition	**Benchmark of 20% by 2020 for student mobility**
A common two-cycle degree system		Easily readable and comparable degrees	Fair recognition Development of recognised Joint degrees	Inclusion of doctoral level as third cycle Recognition of degrees and periods of studies Joint degrees	FQ –EHEA adopted National Qualifications Frameworks launched	National Qualifications Frameworks by 2010	**National Qualifications Frameworks by 2012**
			Social dimension	Equal access	Reinforcement of the social dimension	Commitment to produce national action plans with effective monitoring	**National targets for the social dimension to be measured by 2020**
			Lifelong learning (LLL)	Alignment of national LLL policies Recogniton of Prior Learning (RPL)	Flexible learning paths in higher education	Work towards a common understanding of the role of higher education in LLL Partnerships to improve employability	**LLL as a public responsibility requiring strong partnerships** **Call to work on employability**
Use of credits		A system of credits (ECTS)	ECTS and Diploma Supplement (DS)	ECTS for credit accumulation		Need for coherent use of tools and recognition practices	**Continuing implementation of Bologna tools.**
		European cooperation in quality assurance	Cooperation between quality assurance and recognition professionals	Quality assurance at institutional, national and European level	European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance adopted	Creation of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR)	**Quality as an overarching focus for EHEA**
Europe of Knowledge		European dimensions in higher education	Attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area	Links between higher education and research areas	International cooperation on the basis of values and sustainable development	Strategy to improve the global dimension of the Bologna process adopted	**Enhance global policy dialogue through Bologna Policy Fora**

SECTION 1: BOLOGNA STRUCTURES AND TOOLS

Main messages

- The Bologna process has brought about fundamental and dramatic change in higher education structures across the European Higher Education Area.
- The Bologna reforms have been implemented at a time of unprecedented and rapid expansion in higher education systems.
- Access to higher education, mobility and funding have been consistent priorities throughout the last decade.

Context: Expanding higher education systems and evolving policy priorities

Since the beginning of the Bologna process, higher education systems in the European Higher Education Area have grown significantly. Although the trend towards mass higher education began before the launch of the Bologna process, the speed of transition has certainly accelerated during the last decade. The student populations in Armenia, Lithuania, Montenegro and Romania have practically doubled in size. In another 20 countries, student participation has increased by more than 20 percent. Only in Spain has the number of students decreased. Overall, this picture across the European Higher Education Area fits well with acknowledged global massification trends in higher education, and indeed the rapid speed of European change in higher education demography is being out-paced by other world regions (cf. Teichler/Bürger 2008 in OECD HE 2030 volume 1: Demography).

As the size of the student population has grown, so too has the number of higher education institutions – at least in most countries. Indeed in Armenia, Austria, the Czech Republic, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Italy, Malta, Montenegro and Slovenia, the number of higher education institutions has expanded by more than 100 %. A large part of this growth has been in vocational and professional higher education programmes, and the sector has also seen growth in private, government-recognised higher education institutions. However, trends regarding higher education institutions are not universal. While some countries have seen significant increases in numbers of institutions, 13 countries have reported reductions in their number, usually as a result of another trend : the merging higher education institutions to create greater critical mass.

Over this same period, changes in policy priorities reflect developments in the emphasis laid on different action lines in the ministerial communiqués. In 1999, just after the Bologna declaration, implementing Bologna degree structures or acceding to the Bologna process itself were among the main policy goals for thirteen countries. This 'first generation' Bologna priority was, however, much less prominent in 2008/09 (although still relevant for five countries), when the focus had shifted to other Bologna priorities, particularly quality assurance and the development of National Qualification Frameworks. Questions of mobility, access, participation and funding remain consistently important over time for the totality of countries. The general shift in national higher education priorities also indicates that countries have already begun to look forward to giving reality to the European Higher Education Area in the next decade.

The Bologna three-cycle-structure

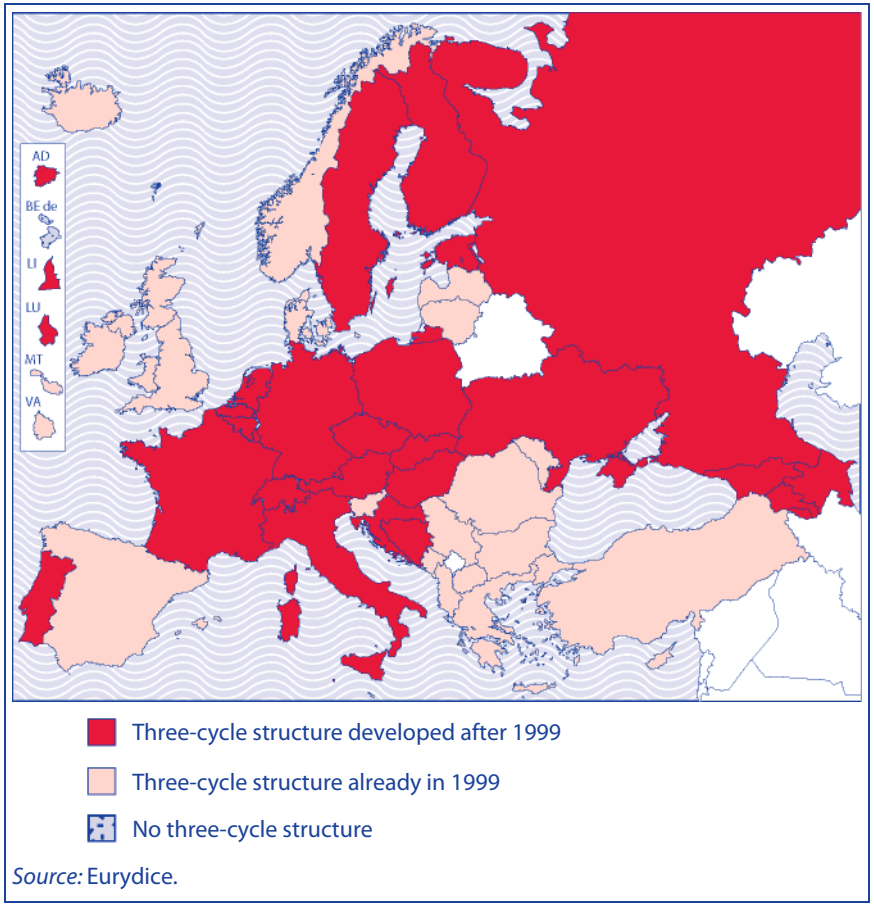
Central to the Bologna process is the commitment of signatory states to establish a three-cycle degree structure in higher education. Contrary to persisting misconceptions, neither the Bologna Declaration nor subsequent ministerial communiqués rigidly prescribe the length of these cycles. They merely state that first cycle qualifications should last a 'minimum of three years', while Master degrees should range between 60-120 ECTS credits.

The Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA), adopted by the Ministers in Bergen in May 2005, reflects this focus on the three-cycle structure. Typically, first cycle qualifications comprise 180-240 ECTS credits while second cycle qualifications comprise 60-120 ECTS credits.

The three-cycle structure has been overwhelmingly introduced in most institutions and programmes in the signatory states. However, most countries report that they still have long programmes in specific disciplines that are not in line with the typical Bologna cycle structures. This applies most often to medicine and related fields, and sometimes to other regulated professions, theology, music and fine arts. Nevertheless, as far as medicine is concerned, Belgium (both Flemish and French Communities), the Netherlands and Switzerland have introduced the three-cycle structure.

Despite these exceptions, the current situation is a fundamental and dramatic change, as in 1999/2000 the majority of institutions and programmes across the European Higher Education Area were not organised according to the three-cycle structure. Figure 1 shows that the introduction of the three-cycle structure has had the most significant impact on the higher education systems in central continental Europe, while most countries in south-east and north-west Europe already had some form of a three-cycle structure in place in 1999.

Figure 1: Three-cycle structure in 1999 and 2009



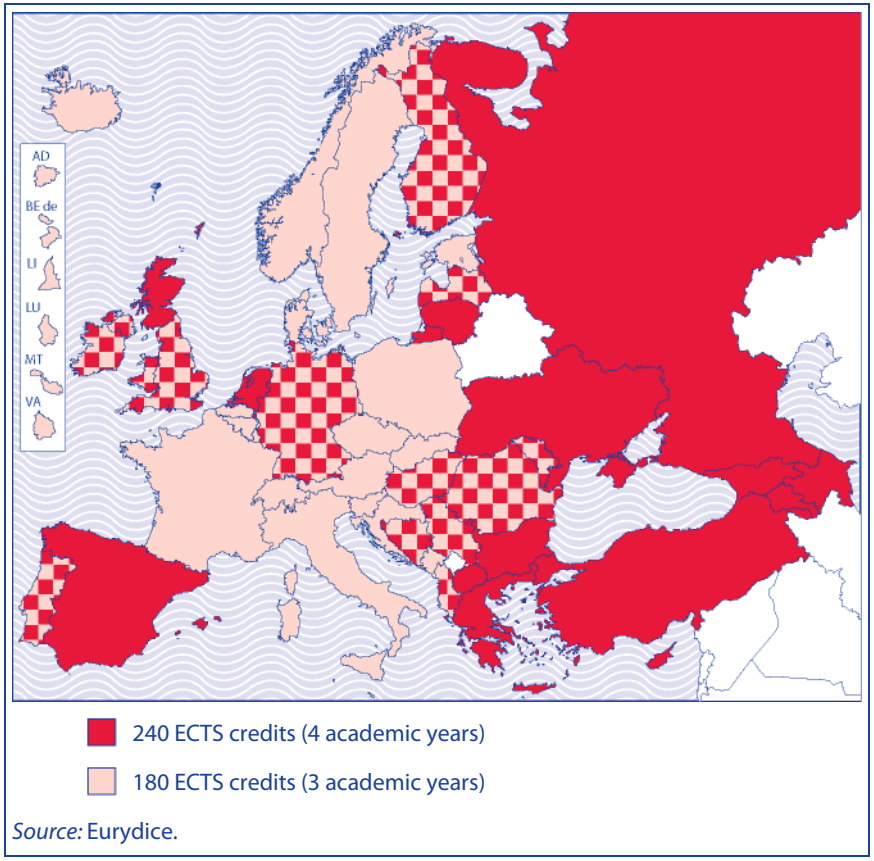
Source: Eurydice.

Despite ongoing debate about the implementation of these fundamental reforms, it is possible at this stage to identify commonalities between higher education systems concerning the workload/duration of the majority of programmes at Bachelor and Master Level. While the doctoral level has been a focus of increasing attention since 2005, developments remain at a relatively early stage, and, as they are largely being driven from within autonomous universities, dominant national patterns are quite difficult to discern. Nevertheless, most third-cycle degrees last officially between three and four years (with a slight official preference for the three-year model) and only five countries report the use of ECTS within doctoral programmes – presumably for taught elements of third-cycle programmes. Most countries also emphasise that in reality most doctoral candidates take longer than the foreseen time to complete their doctoral degree.

The following analysis of the first two cycles focuses on the most common national patterns, considering the situation where more than 65 % of programmes follow one structural model. Such a presentation does not give a comprehensive picture of institutional and programme variety, but rather aims to identify – where it exists – a reference model that is applied to the majority of programmes. In some countries, this picture may hide significant aspects of the reality. For example typical length of a degree cycle may be consistent within a type of institution, but differ between types of institution. If one institutional type occurs more frequently in the higher education landscape, this presentation will hide the reality of degree structures in the numerically smaller higher education institutions. Nevertheless, for most countries, the picture shows the changing reality that has been brought about through the implementation of Bologna reforms.

Figure 2 shows that the structure of Bachelor programmes can be differentiated into two models: 180 ECTS credits in 23 countries and 240 ECTS credits in 13 countries. In the remaining countries no single model dominates, but institutions and programmes draw upon both preceding models.

Figure 2: Workload/duration for the most common Bachelor programmes in the Bologna countries, 2009/10

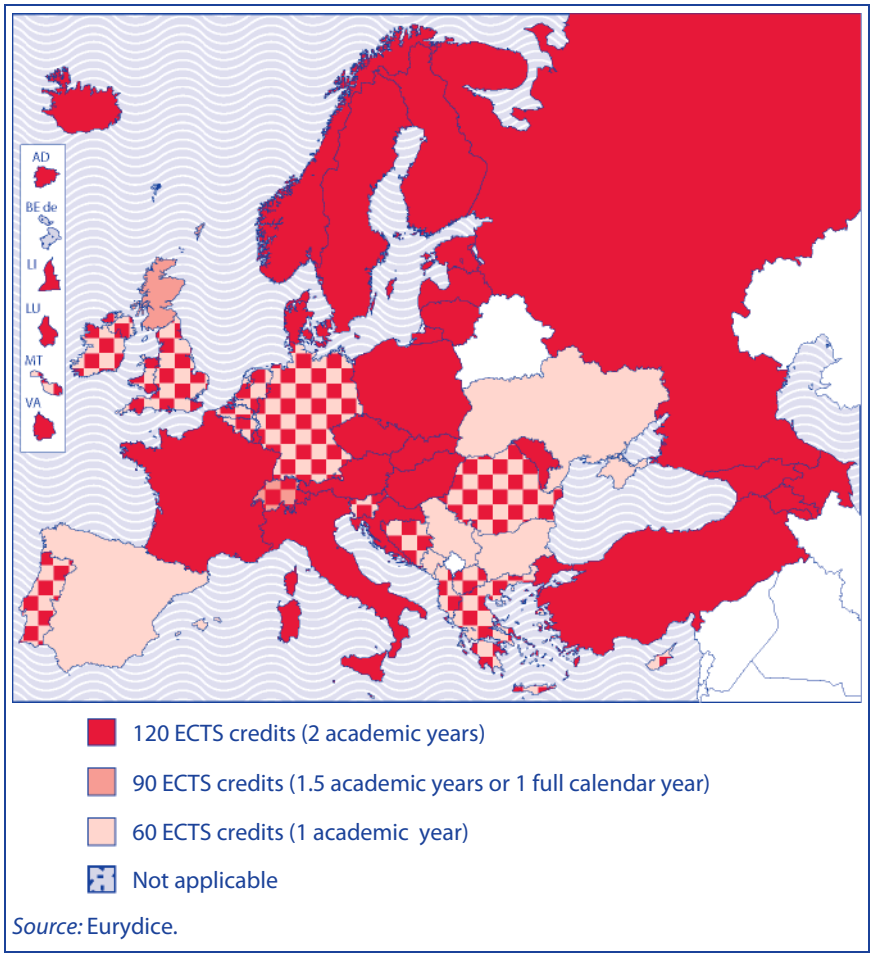


Source: Eurydice.

Many countries also offer some Bachelor programmes of lengths other than 180 or 240 ECTS, but their occurrence is generally rather rare, and such programmes therefore do not play a significant role. The national exceptions in this respect are Hungary with 34 % of programmes with a different length, Andorra with 20 % and Sweden with 12 %. In Sweden, these programmes are all professionally oriented qualifications.

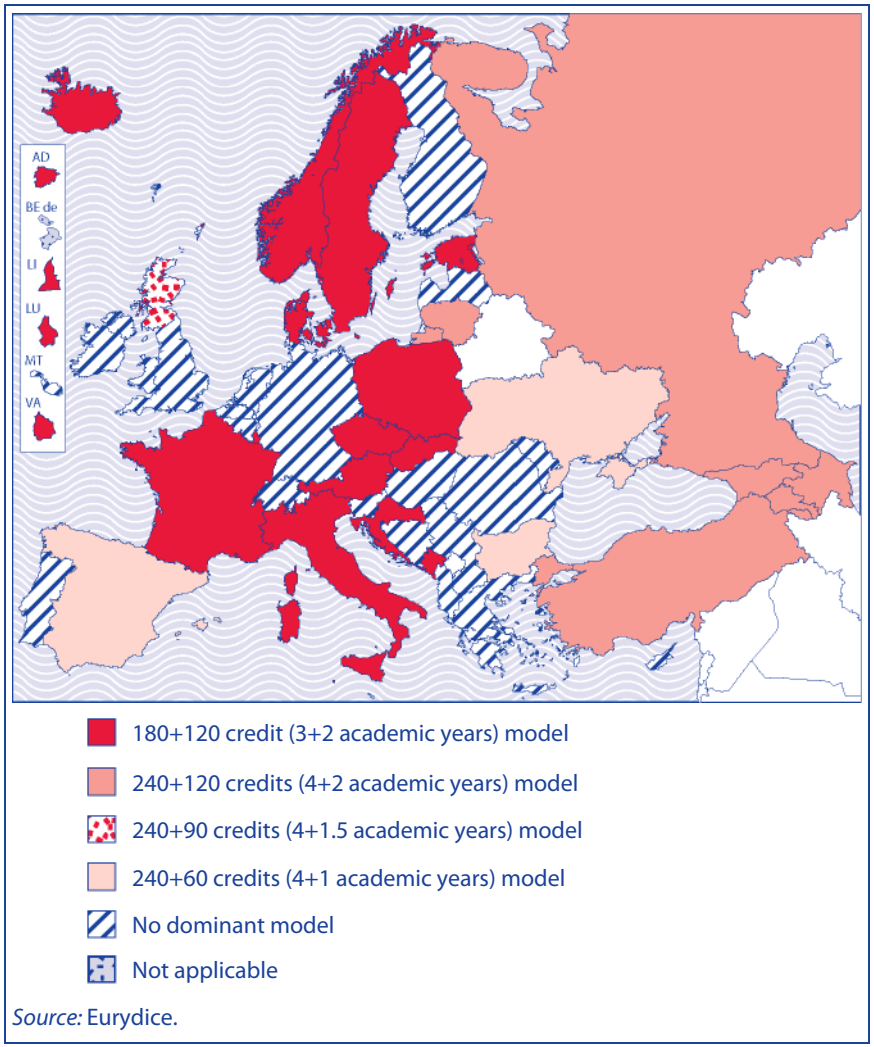
At the Master level in 27 Bologna signatory countries, the 120 ECTS credits model is most common, although most countries also offer second cycle programmes of a different length. In Bulgaria, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Ukraine the dominant Master degree model has 60 ECTS credits. Malta, Switzerland and the United Kingdom fall between these groups as most of their Master degrees are assigned 90 ECTS. In the remaining countries, a mix of different lengths is offered with no dominant model emerging.

Figure 3: Workload/duration for the most common Master programmes in the Bologna countries 2009/10



Source: Eurydice.

Figure 4: Overall Bologna structure model implemented in the most common programmes in the Bologna countries, 2009/10



Source: Eurydice.

In combining the two cycles, three models can be identified to show how the Bologna process has been implemented in the signatory states:

1. The 180+120 ECTS (3+2 academic years) has been implemented in 16 countries.

2. The 240+120 ECTS (4+2 academic years) model has been implemented in five countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Lithuania, Russia and Turkey).

3. The 240+60/90 ECTS (4+1/1.5 academic years) model has been implemented in four countries (Bulgaria, Spain, Ukraine and the United Kingdom (Scotland)).

In the remaining countries/regions, no unique dominant model can be identified. In some of these countries, the Bachelor programmes have a fixed length, while the length of Master programmes vary. In others, there is variation in both cycles. Where there is variation in programme structures, responsibility rests largely with the institutions and study fields concerned.

Professional and vocational programmes in the Bologna model

Depending on the country in question, professional and vocational programmes may or may not be considered as part of the higher education system. Their inclusion in the Bologna structures has been equally variable and not always transparently managed. The reasons for this lie in the many different national understandings of 'professional' or 'vocational' programmes, and the blurring of distinctions between academic and professional programmes in some

countries, as the entire higher education sector focuses more consciously on employability concerns and on providing relevant education for the labour market.

Several countries have specifically identified problems in linking vocationally-oriented programmes to their Bologna model. The most common problem articulated is that many vocational and professional qualifications are offered in short-cycle programmes that require less than 180 ECTS. However, as long as the qualifications resulting from these programmes can be recognised within a Bologna first-cycle programme, there should be no problem of integration within the Bologna cycle system. The problems therefore arise in countries where such progression routes are not a part of the system architecture.

There are, however, a number of countries/regions that can be said to have successfully integrated their professional programmes into the Bologna structures. In Denmark, for example, all short-cycle programmes (of 120 ECTS duration) are part of the first cycle. A transfer into a second-cycle programme, however, will require additional credits. Other countries, such as Latvia, have integrated their professional higher education programmes into the Bologna degree-cycle structure and allow their graduates access to academically-oriented second-cycle programmes. The situation is equally positive for those countries which have explicitly referenced their professional programmes to their National Qualifications Framework – illustrating the importance of this tool.

The Bologna tools: ECTS, Diploma Supplement and National Qualification Frameworks

On the structural level, the Bologna process has led to greater convergence in the architecture of national systems. The overall broadness of the guidelines expressed in communiqués and related texts, however, allows countries and institutions to maintain specific characteristics for most programmes. In order to help the development of comparable and understandable degrees and systems, a number of pre-existing 'tools' were introduced in the Bologna process to foster transparency and mutual recognition. These aim to make education systems and programmes more transparent and render them understandable for all.

As the full picture on these topics could only be gained from an in-depth study of higher education institutions, this overview, although simplified, can be seen as the best possible information available through national-level reporting.

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System and the Diploma Supplement: two tools brought to work for the Bologna process

Two long established elements of the 'Bologna toolkit' are the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and the Diploma Supplement (DS). ECTS was developed at the end of the 1980s to facilitate credit transfer in the Erasmus programme and thus to foster student mobility. The decision to establish a European Higher Education Area came a decade later and, since then, ECTS has become a core element in its implementation. In the Berlin Communiqué (2003), ministers stressed that ECTS should not only be

used for credit transfer, but also for credit accumulation, and in Bergen in 2005, they agreed on indicative credit ranges for the first two cycles. These were the last steps to establish ECTS as a cornerstone in the implementation of the Bologna reforms. In 2007 and 2009 the ministers noted that 'there has been progress in the implementation' to 'increase transparency and recognition'.

This report, however, looks beyond the primary question of whether or not ECTS is used in higher education institutions and programmes, as such information would merely confirm that all countries make use of ECTS or a compatible national credit system. Rather, the report emphasises the extent to which the system is used in institutions and programmes and its purposes (accreditation and/or transfer). Based on the commitments made by the ministers in the various communiqués, ECTS is regarded as fully implemented when more than 75 % of institutions and programmes use ECTS for credit accumulation and transfer, and when it satisfies the requirements of credits being awared on the basis of defined learning outcomes and/or student workload.

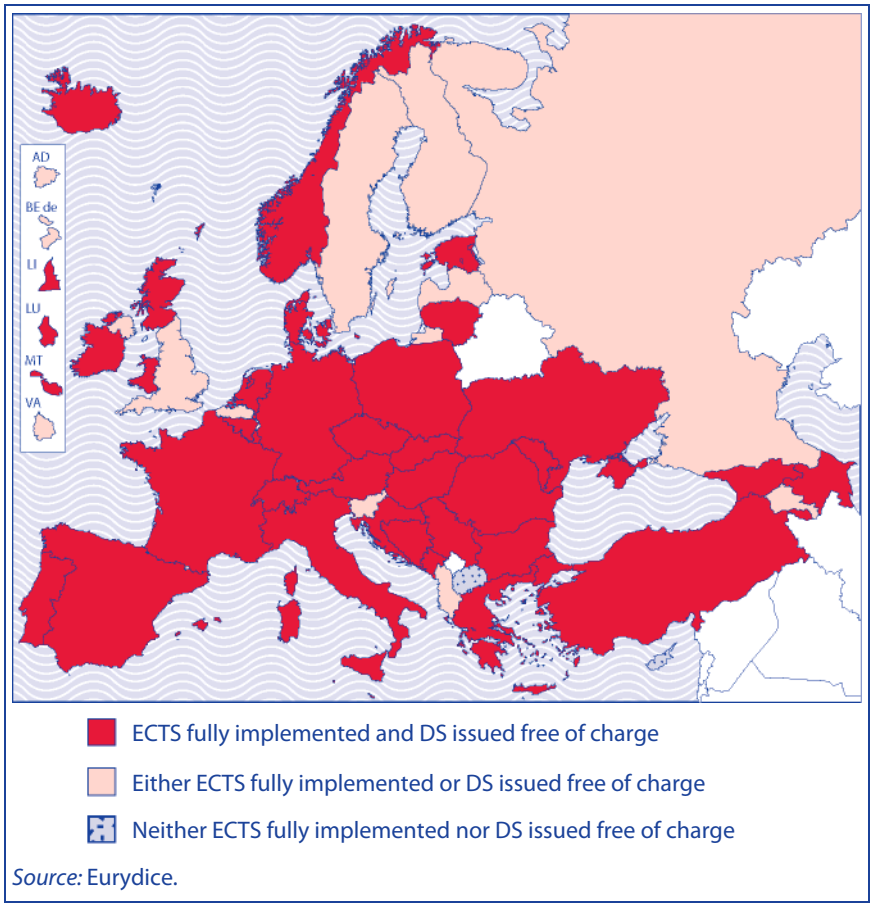
In 1999/2000, 31 countries reported they did not use ECTS for either credit accumulation or transfer. Even for transfer (which was at that time the only recognised function of the ECTS) only Belgium (Flemish Community), Iceland, Latvia, Spain and Sweden reported a significant use by higher education institutions, with use in higher education programmes even weaker.

This situation has now changed radically. Today, 24 countries report using ECTS as a credit accumulation and transfer tool in more than 75 % of higher education institutions, while 29 report this for programmes. In the majority of countries/regions, ECTS has been introduced through national legislation – although in many systems this is only the first step towards implementation in reality. However, at this level, ECTS can be shown to be a strong feature of education systems. It is also gradually replacing more and more national credit systems, even those that are fully compatible with ECTS (Estonia and Latvia).

The Diploma Supplement, the second important Bologna 'tool', was developed by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES in the 1990s. It is a standardised template containing a description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies completed by the individual noted on the original diploma. The goal of the Diploma Supplement is to increase transparency of education acquired for the purposes of securing employment and facilitating academic recognition for further studies (Berlin Communiqué, 2003). The intention is thus to improve understanding of the knowledge, skills and competences acquired by the learner. The Diploma Supplement should be attached to the original national diploma, together with a description of the national higher education system within which the diploma was awarded.

In Berlin, in 2003, the ministers agreed that from 2005 all graduates should receive the Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge. The Eurydice 2009 report on higher education showed that it has been implemented in most signatory states (Eurydice, 2009, p. 32) and that it is being issued in English and/or the language of instruction (Eurydice, 2009, p. 37). In 2005, eight countries (Belgium - Flemish Community, Estonia, Finland, France, Latvia, Liechtenstien, Luxembourg and Slovenia) issued it to all students. By 2009 this number had grown to 25.

Figure 5: Implementation of ECTS and the Diploma Supplement, 2009/10



Source: Eurydice.

The remaining countries either did not provide data or do not issue it to *all* graduates. The use of the Diploma Supplement is, however, clearly growing. Twenty-two countries monitor the extent to which it is being issued. Most often the relevant ministries are responsible for data collection, but in many countries also the National Europass Centre (NEC) is strongly involved. Monitoring may take the form of one-off surveys among universities and higher education institutions, while other countries collect information annually.

Most relevant for students, however, is whether the Diploma Supplement is issued free of charge. The map in Figure 5 therefore considers the DS to be implemented when it has been introduced in the vast majority of study programmes and is issued free of charge.

Figure 5 shows that a large majority (34 signatory states) fully implement the two instruments in their higher education systems. Among the 12 countries which have fully implemented only one of the two tools, all but Turkey have implemented the Diploma Supplement whereas ECTS implementation still lags behind. Only Cyprus and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia admit to having considerable progress to make in implementing both tools. Overall this widespread use indicates that these two instruments have played an important role in embedding aspects of the Bologna reforms and facilitating the understanding of national higher education systems.

National Qualification Frameworks: moving forward, albeit slightly behind schedule

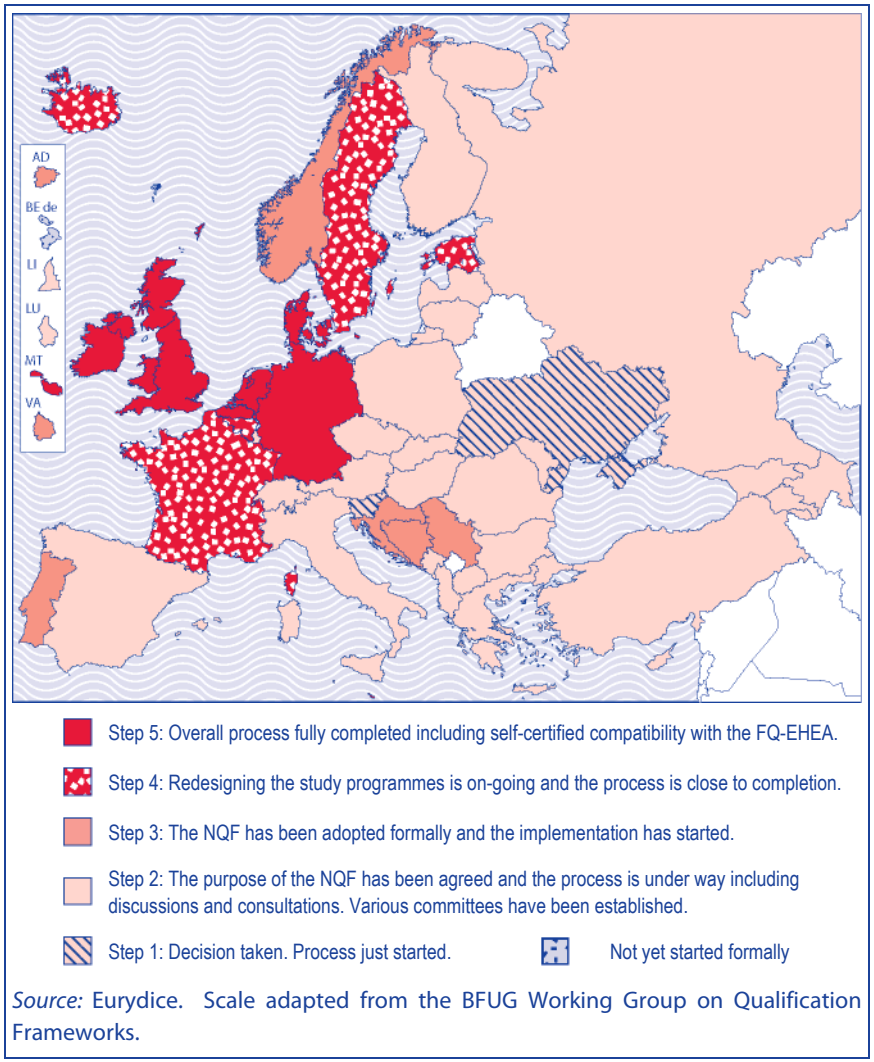
The third tool to have been introduced and developed in the Bologna process is the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). It is a tool for describing and clearly expressing the differences between qualifications in all cycles and levels of education. Ideally NQFs work in close conjunction with the aforementioned ECTS and Diploma Supplement. The development of National Qualifications Frameworks has been encouraged in recent years by a range of initiatives and processes. In Bergen, in May 2005, European ministers of education

adopted the overarching Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA) and committed to the development of National Qualification Frameworks. National Qualification Frameworks should include a reference to the three-cycle structure and the use of generic descriptors based on learning outcomes, competences and credits for the first and second cycle.

This task was made more challenging by the later adoption in the context of the EU Lisbon strategy of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF), which is structurally compatible to the FQ-EHEA, but has different descriptors. Thus the task for countries when developing or adapting their national qualifications frameworks is far from simple: not only should these new national instruments reflect the shift from traditional input-based approaches of categorising qualifications to a focus on learning outcomes, credits and the profile of qualifications, but care should also be taken to ensure that national developments are compatible with both overarching European frameworks.

Initially, the ministers foresaw the implementation of NQFs in all countries/regions by 2010. But even the 2009 Stocktaking report called this deadline 'too ambitious' (Bologna Process Stocktaking Report 2009, p. 41) and identified the establishment of NQFs in all countries/regions as one of the biggest challenges for the coming years. Eurydice data supports this assessment. Using a model adapted from the BFUG working group on Qualifications Frameworks, Figure 6 shows that eight higher education systems now have a fully self-certified NQF, while 11 are well advanced in the process of implementation. The other countries/regions are still in the preparatory stages of defining purposes and structures. While at first

Figure 6: Stage towards establishing a National Qualification Framework compatible with the FQ-EHEA, 2009/10



Source: Eurydice. Scale adapted from the BFUG Working Group on Qualification Frameworks.

sight this picture may not seem too rosy, developments over time are promising. Indeed since the Ministerial Conference in Leuven/ Louvain-la-Neuve in 2009, Denmark and Malta have self-certified their NQF (Malta is the first country to self certify against the FQ-EHEA and reference against the EQF in the same operation) and Albania, Cyprus, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Holy See, Norway and Portugal have all made progress towards establishing their NQF.

SECTION 2: QUALITY ASSURANCE

Main messages

- The growth of external quality assurance in higher education has been one of the most notable features of the Bologna decade.
- European cooperation in quality assurance is exemplified by agreement on European Standards and Guidelines and the creation of a European Quality Assurance Register.
- In the majority of EHEA countries, quality assurance is concerned with granting permission to higher education institutions or programmes to operate on the basis of threshold quality standards. Only a minority of countries exclusively follow an improvement-oriented approach.

Introduction

This section of the report gives an overview of the rapid rise of external quality assurance in Europe. As already reported in the introduction to Section 1, ensuring and improving quality of higher education and establishing quality assurance systems remains a high priority for many countries/regions. However, measures taken to strengthen quality within institutions (i.e. internal quality assurance) are beyond the scope of the national level sources that inform this report.

While it is a moot question whether quality in higher education has improved during the past Bologna decade, there is no doubt whatsoever that quality assurance has seen dramatic developments. In higher education, quality assurance can be understood as policies, procedures and practices that are designed to achieve, maintain or enhance quality as it is understood in a specific context. During the Bologna period, quality assurance in higher education has been clearly linked to establishing stakeholder confidence. Indeed the following principles outlined in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) adopted in May 2005 stress stakeholder interest, institutional autonomy and minimum burden on higher education institutions. Thus Quality Assurance should focus on:

- the interests of students as well as employers and the society more generally in good quality higher education;
- the central importance of institutional autonomy, tempered by a recognition that this brings with it heavy responsibilities;
- the need for external quality assurance to be fit for its purpose and to place only an appropriate and necessary burden on institutions for the achievement of its objectives.

Creation of Quality Assurance Agencies in the last decade

Although nearly all Bologna countries now have a system of external quality assurance in place, usually with one or more independent agencies charged with prime responsibility, a quick glance through the dates of establishment of these bodies shows that this is a recent and fast-developing phenomenon. Indeed only a handful of countries had already established clear external quality assurance systems prior to the Bologna process.

During the Bologna decade, 22 countries have established national agencies for quality assurance, with half of these being set up since 2005. In a few countries, such as Denmark and France, new agencies have replaced or built on existing agencies.

Few countries have stayed outside this quality assurance revolution. Countries with a small higher education sector such as Cyprus, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Malta have not established agencies, although Liechtenstein has developed strong cooperation with Switzerland to ensure that external quality assurance is fully implemented.

Development of ENQA and creation of EQAR

Developments at national level have also been accompanied by major changes at European level. The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) was established in 2004 after four years as a more informal network. It works to promote European co-operation in the field of quality assurance.

The launch of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) in March 2008 represents the culmination of efforts to promote European cooperation in quality assurance through the Bologna process. EQAR aims at enhancing trust and confidence in European higher education by listing quality assurance agencies that operate in Europe and have proven their credibility and reliability in a review against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG). After less than two years of existence, EQAR includes 17 quality assurance agencies based in ten European countries.

EQAR is also notable for its governance structures, as it is governed and supported by an international non-profit association that comprises all major European higher education stakeholders and European governments. This inclusive approach to governance is a strong symbol of the close partnership that has developed through the Bologna process and a model for other world regions.

Independence of Quality Assurance agencies

The European debate on quality assurance during the last decade has emphasised the importance of establishing agencies that are able to perform their work in an independent manner. In most cases, this has led to the development of agencies that are legally and operationally independent from governments as well as from higher education institutions. Only six countries – Azerbaijan, Moldova, Poland, Slovakia, Turkey and Ukraine – have maintained a system of central management for quality by ministries. Meanwhile the situation for two countries – Bosnia and Herzegovina and Italy- is currently in a process of transition. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, an agency was established in law in 2006 but is not yet operational. In Italy, following

legislation in 2008, considerable action has been undertaken to ensure that a new improvement-oriented quality assurance agency should soon be fully functioning. Notwithstanding these exceptions, it is clear that the European Higher Education Area is now largely full of national external quality assurance systems with independent agencies.

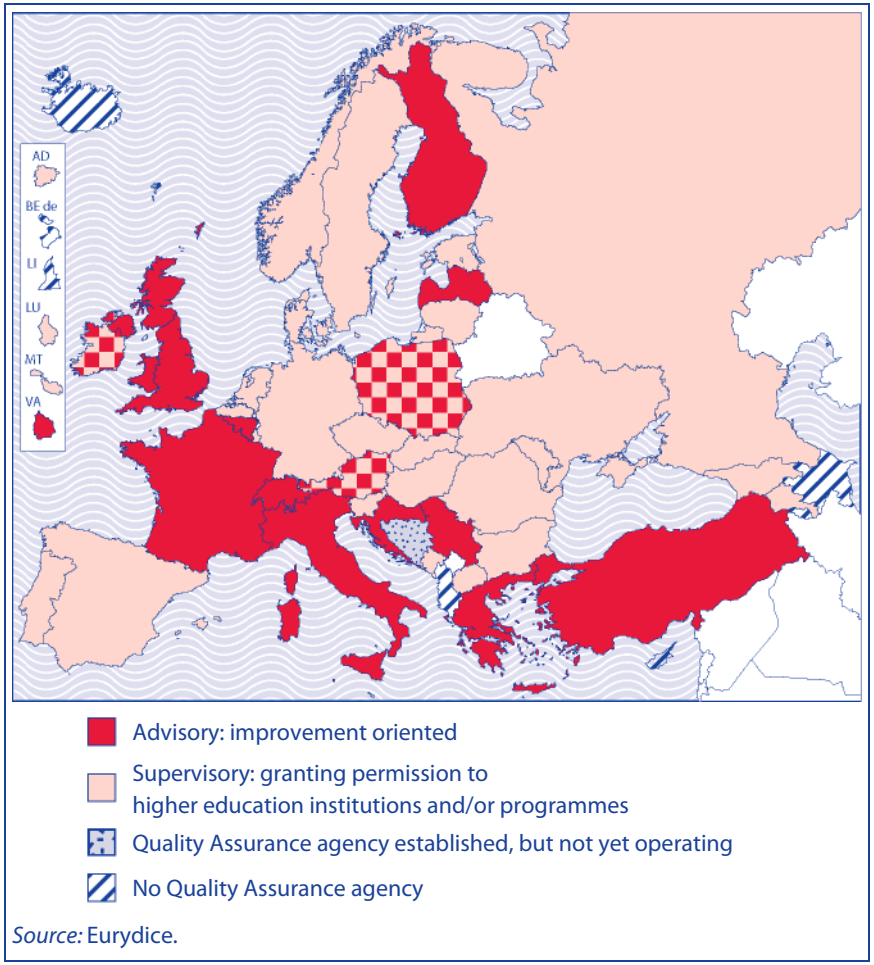
Orientation of Quality Assurance systems

Although practically all Bologna countries have established some form of external quality assurance system, there are significant differences in the philosophy and approach behind systems. Common Standards and Guidelines have been agreed for the EHEA, yet systems are still quite diverse in their orientation. Two main distinctions are drawn in this overview and can be seen in Figure 7.

The main element that distinguishes the orientation of systems in this representation is whether or not the QA agency or national body is invested with the power to grant permission for institutions or programmes to operate. Although certain national system features make this reality more complex (for example, whether or not governments retain the power to issue degrees at central level), these orientations give a good sense of the approach to quality assurance.

In systems where responsible QA bodies/agencies have the power to permit or refuse programmes and/or institutions to operate, quality assurance can, in broad terms, be perceived as supervisory in character, and generally aims to ensure that minimum quality thresholds are met. Agencies may of course play other roles – including giving advice on the enhancement of quality. This is indeed specifically mentioned in a number of countries, but all these additional roles are likely to be subordinate to the decision of permitting programmes and/or institutions to operate.

Figure 7: Main approach to Quality Assurance, 2009/10



Source: Eurydice.

In other systems, QA agencies report on institutions' management of quality, and although having 'only' an advisory role, aim to support quality enhancement. In such a construction, the primary emphasis is thus on empowering higher education institutions with responsibility for quality improvement. These are systems that will be more likely to use 'light touch' external quality assurance processes, aiming to ensure that necessary measures to improve quality have been established within institutions, and interfering less in the decision-making processes at institutional level.

It is interesting to note that, despite the growing emphasis on autonomy for higher education institutions in European-level discourse on higher education, 26 countries – including those that have most recently established their external quality assurance system – have constructed their QA systems in the logic of supervision and ensuring minimum standards, while only 11 systems currently follow an improvement-oriented approach, placing the primary responsibility for improving quality at institutional level.

This finding suggests that the development of external quality assurance systems has been a central feature of evolving governance structures in higher education. Whereas institutions were previously 'supervised' directly by the state, the steering mechanisms now are much more likely to involve quality assurance agencies. Moreover, just as there has been increasing convergence towards particular models of degree structures, so too there appears to have been convergence towards a particular model of external quality assurance. No doubt this has been facilitated by the increased communication between governments, agencies and other quality assurance actors throughout the Bologna period.

SECTION 3: THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION`

Main messages

- The social dimension of higher education presents the most significant challenge to European cooperation as it is understood so differently from one country to another.
- Very few countries have linked their policy on the social dimension to the Bologna commitment of raising the participation of under-represented groups to the point where the higher education population mirrors the overall societal distribution.
- Very few countries have set specific targets to improve the participation of under-represented groups in higher education, and only about half of the Bologna countries systematically monitor their participation.
- The most common national measures to widen participation are the provision of targeted financial support and the development of alternative access routes and/or admission procedures.

Introduction

Although not mentioned in the 1999 Bologna Declaration, the social dimension has been an integral part of the Bologna Process since the first ministerial follow-up meeting in Prague in 2001. In the subsequent communiqués, the importance of the social dimension has increased, although clarity about the nature of the concept was only brought about in 2007, when the London Communiqué defined the objective of the social dimension as the "societal aspiration that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher

education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations". In order to move towards this objective, countries agreed that the social dimension should be understood as "an evolutionary process leading to the objective that requires the ongoing commitment and effort from all relevant stakeholders." (Report from the Bologna Process Working Group on Social Dimension, 2007). On this basis, each country pledged to develop its own strategy and action plan for the social dimension, which would initially call for the identification of possible under-represented groups.

Following this rationale, countries were asked to report whether and how the participation of particular societal groups is monitored, as well as about the understanding of the reasons for under-representation. Countries were then asked about policies and actions that have been developed with the specific aim of increasing the representation of under-represented groups, and how the impact of these policies and actions is measured.

Definitions of under-represented social groups

Although national definitions of under-represented societal groups vary from country to country, there are important points of convergence in priorities and approaches. In most cases, national authorities identify several categories of under-represented groups. Georgia, Germany and the United Kingdom routinely use more than five distinct categories for monitoring student participation. Greece also uses more than five categories to collect information about students upon registration, but none of these categories of students – including students from weaker socio-economic background and people with disabilities – have been identified as under-represented. However, they are groups that are eligible for special support measures that are in place to ensure social equity in Greek higher education.

At the other end of the spectrum are Austria, France, Luxembourg and Sweden that consider as potential under-represented groups only students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (although Luxembourg draws an explicit link between low socio-economic status and immigrant background).

Across the Bologna countries, under-representation is most often linked to socio-economic background or parents' educational attainment, minority status or disability. Other categories like gender (with targeted groups being either men or women depending on the country and field of studies), mature age, insufficient formal educational qualifications for entry into higher education and geographical region (particularly isolated rural areas) are also relatively common. In addition, several countries focus also on particular situations, for instance students with children or war veterans (Bosnia and Herzegovina and Georgia). In a few countries (including Germany and Switzerland), foreign students are defined as a specific group whose participation rates need to improve, and this concern may sometimes be addressed under the heading of mobility rather than social policy.

The differences in approach to identifying under-represented groups illustrate that this can be a highly sensitive area, making pan-European comparison impossible in practice. For example, interpretations of the concept of ethnicity vary greatly both between and even within countries, and the term 'ethnic group' is therefore not fixed in the same way as, for example, gender. Instead, the concept is historically contingent and national perceptions, categories and approaches may be formed in relation to, for example, changes to

national territories after the two world wars, colonial and post-colonial history or recent conflicts. It is therefore no surprise to find that a considerable number of countries in Europe make no attempt to identify the ethnic status of students (and indeed, this may be prohibited by national data protection legislation) while other countries consider such a categorisation as a necessary tool to understand societal development. Sensitivities and potential risks of stigmatising effects can be also be encountered in relation to other under-represented groups – including people with disabilities.

Depending on the purpose, public authorities and higher education institutions use various methods to attribute individuals to particular groups. Many countries base their information on 'subjective' self-declaration (especially for personal characteristics such as ethnicity, gender and disability). However, some countries make their category decisions in these areas on the basis of other 'objective' administrative sources. For example, in the Netherlands, ethnicity status for all individuals is determined by the place of birth of parents rather than by self declaration.

Benchmarks and targets for social dimension objectives

It is clear that defining and identifying under-represented groups is a topic that needs to be examined and understood in relation to each country's specific socio-economic and cultural context. However, beyond this are also the higher level policy questions regarding the purposes for identifying under-represented groups in the first place, and the measures being taken to improve their participation in and completion of higher education.

Although most countries express a general policy concern to improve the social dimension of higher education, very few appear to have actually linked this concern to the Bologna commitment of raising the participation of under-represented groups to the point where the higher education population mirrors the overall societal distribution. Indeed, it is more common for countries to take measures to increase overall participation in higher education and to hope that in so doing the numbers of students from under-represented groups will also rise.

Where specific targets or benchmarks have been formulated they tend to relate to the increase of participation of students with lower socio-economic status and/or students whose parents have relatively low educational attainment levels. Belgium (Flemish Community) France, Ireland and the United Kingdom (Scotland) are all good examples in this respect. Especially with regard to science and technology disciplines, issues of gender balance are often mentioned.

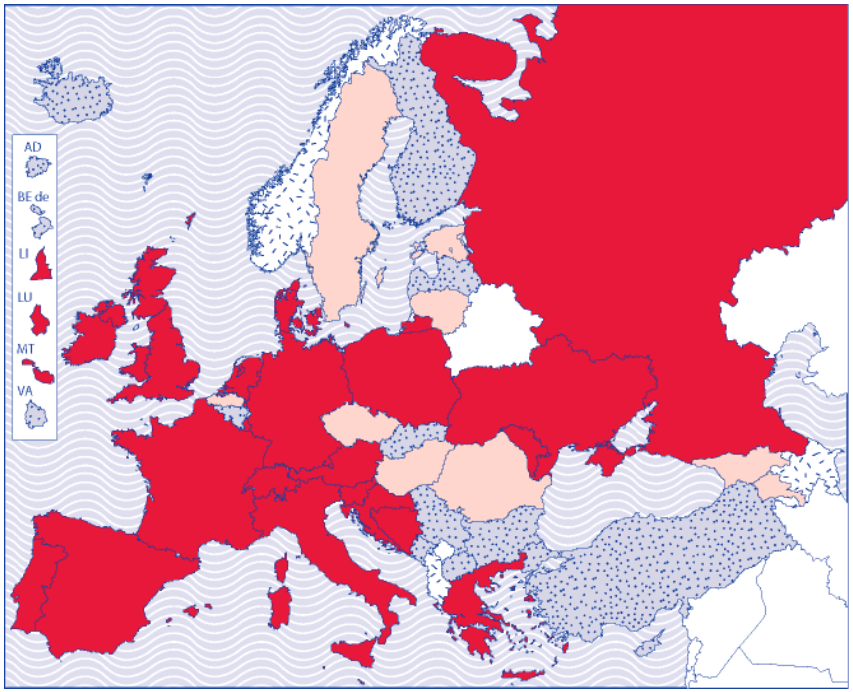
In Belgium (Flemish Community), the 'Pact 2020 Flanders' has defined 20 goals and one of them is to reach 60 % participation in higher education among students whose parents do not hold a higher education qualification. In the United Kingdom (Scotland), specific goals have been set for 2008-2010 to increase the level of applications and participation from the most deprived 20 % of the population and also from men. Scottish higher education also aims to increase the proportion and successful completion of higher education for students from 'non-traditional' backgrounds during the same period.

In France, the government has set a target for the percentage of young people (20/21 years of age) with parents of low occupational status *(ouvrier/employé)* enrolled in higher education to rise to 46 %

of this group in 2009 and then to 50 % in 2012. While these targets concern all higher education institutions, additional targets have been set for the more selective higher education institutions *(Grandes Écoles)* where the objective is for 30 % of students in the preparatory programmes for these institutions *(classes préparatoires des Grandes Écoles)* to be recicients of social scholarships. In addition, the number of students enrolled in courses leading to a qualification that gives access to university studies should also double by 2012. By focusing targets and measures on the admission routes and continuing to increase overall participation in higher education, the expectation is that the numbers of students under-represented for reasons of socio-economic status will diminish.

In Ireland, targets for several groups are set out in the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013. The overall objective is for all socio-economic groups to have entry rates of at least 54 % by 2020. This objective means that for certain groups large rises must be made. For example, the participation of 'non-manual workers' has to double to reach this target. Ireland has also set targets for other societal groups – in particular for students with sensory, physical and multiple disabilities (participation to double by 2013) and for mature students (participation to rise to at least 20 % of total full-time entrants by 2013).

Figure 8: Monitoring of participation of societal groups, 2009/10



Source: Eurydice.

Monitoring of participation of particular societal groups in higher education

If benchmarks and targets are to be effective in helping to address social dimension challenges, it is essential that specific measures are also taken and that their impact is carefully monitored. At the same time, monitoring can itself reveal previously hidden or ignored aspects of under-representation, and bringing this to light can be the source of new action to stimulate participation.

As Figure 8 illustrates, 30 of the 46 Bologna countries answered that they do monitor the participation of under-represented groups. However, this group of countries can be sub-divided into those that systematically and routinely gather data related to under-represented groups (21 countries) and those whose data comes from more occasional sources of information – such as survey data (9 countries). Taking this into account, the European Higher Education Area currently appears to be fairly evenly split between those that have the necessary information at their disposal to develop appropriate measures addressing social dimension challenges and those who, for whatever reason, lack this basic information.

Monitoring is not, however, synonymous with, or restricted to, gathering information. If information were to be routinely gathered and routinely ignored, it would hardly constitute an effective monitoring instrument. Thus it is also important to see how public authorities use the information that they capture. The impact of policies to overcome under-representation is usually monitored by the Ministry of Education or an equivalent institution. Impact assessment, however, is not undertaken in every country. Nevertheless, a number of governments have put in place a range of direct and indirect steering mechanisms. The UK government, for instance, compares the performance of institutions in widening participation through general indicators and individual benchmarks for each institution. The central authorities in the Flemish Community of Belgium have established management agreements with higher education institutions on diversity targets and entrust the institutions to take appropriate actions to meet these targets.

The systematic collection of data on the number of students of each under-represented group and their completion rates has started only recently and currently takes place only in a minority of countries. In Ireland, for instance, progress has been made over recent years in the development of a student record system within the Higher Education Authority and, in 2007, higher-education institutions began to collect access-relevant data for the first time using a common template. This 'equal access' student data initiative will provide comparable information on the social, economic and cultural background of entrants to higher education as well as information relating to disabilities. This will underpin future funding allocations for access and will allow target setting to be undertaken. It also aims to improve the understanding of the impact of existing strategies.

In Belgium (French Community) a Higher Education Observatory was created in law in 2008 and has been operational since 1 January 2009. It is responsible for collecting data, statistics and information related to all aspects of higher education and the student population, and should provide systematic data on the social dimension that facilitates the implementation of specific policies. A number of other measures – particularly targeted at supporting first generation higher education students – were also brought into effect through the same legislation.

Ukraine is also worthy of mention, as it is one of the few countries where the participation of students from rural areas is monitored.

Even though there are great differences in approach between systems that have developed policy, measures, monitoring and steering mechanisms to widen participation and those that have not, it is not possible to conclude from this that one set of countries is addressing social dimension challenges more effectively than another. While some may consider that the wide-ranging challenges presented by the social dimension agenda can only be addressed coherently on the basis of relevant information, the relative lack of transparency in the 14 countries that do not monitor the participation of particular groups may also conceal system features and measures that have a significant impact on widening participation.

Countries such as Finland, for example, aim to ensure equity of opportunity through the general measures and support services that are provided, and these may benefit groups that in other countries would be identified as under-represented. In other countries the situation may be similar.

However, it is also equally possible that lack of information and data covers up the negative reality of under-representation of some groups in some countries. It is also curious to note that Cyprus and Turkey indicate that improving access is an important higher education priority, but also state that they do not monitor under-represented groups. This would indicate that, at least in these countries, monitoring is an undervalued policy instrument. Similarly, in a number of countries, (Andorra, Bulgaria, The former Yugoslav Republic of Maceonia, the Holy See, Latvia, Montenegro, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia), the measures that have been implemented to stimulate participation have not been accompanied by the establishment of monitoring mechanisms.

Targeted measures

The majority of countries that monitor participation of under-represented groups systematically, as well as some of the countries that do not, have developed specific actions to widen access. Two of these measures are clearly far more widespread than the others: the use of special admission procedures and targeted scholarships and grants for members of under-represented groups. Other measures that are frequently mentioned include outreach programmes, the provision of guidance and counselling services, and undertaking information campaigns directed at members of under-represented groups. The Romanian Ministry of Education, for example, has permanent contact with Roma associations.

In many countries, the responsibility for the organisation and implementation of many of these measures is delegated to higher education institutions, and as a consequence, collation of information and reports at national level is often lacking.

Overall, the use of financial or other incentives for higher education institutions to increase participation of particular groups is not very common. However, four countries report that they aim to link some of the public funding for higher education institutions to the number of students from under-represented groups that are enrolled in each institution. In Belgium (Flemish Community), when determining the operational budget of higher education institutions, extra weight is given to students with low socio-economic background and disabilities. In addition, extra funding is available for projects that establish structural provisions for diversity within higher education institutions.

Several other countries provide extra funding to help higher education institutions meet the additional needs of disabled students. In Ireland ,a new policy of 'access weighting' will result in a shift of resources towards institutions that have achieved greater equality within their student bodies. In the United Kingdom, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) Outreach Allocation is intended to meet some of the additional cost incurred by institutions for outreach activity to raise aspirations and attainment among potential students from under-represented groups. In the academic year 2009/10, this allocation is worth £141 million. In the Netherlands, some higher education institutions also receive additional funding for activities to improve the academic success of ethnic minority students.

Reasons for under-representation

Countries identify a variety of reasons for the under-representation of particular societal groups – but there may be others. For students with socio-economic disadvantages often-cited reasons for under-representation are poor performance at school, lack of motivation to complete secondary level education or to attend university and lack of family experience of the benefits of higher education. Thus, the main explanations for under-representation lie in educational and societal failure prior to higher education. Research in the United Kingdom also suggests that the main factors for under-representation of students from a low socio-economic status background are a combination of lack of aspiration and poor prior educational attainment. Therefore the government regards prior educational attainment as a key to narrowing the gap in participation between socio-economic classes.

Some countries (including Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland and Switzerland) specifically mention features of their educational systems that have a negative impact on equal opportunity and widening participation. The most commonly mentioned features relate to the early streaming of children, and selection policies in secondary schools. In systems that tend towards early educational stratification, students from lower socio-economic status backgrounds are statistically more likely to 'opt for' (or to have no option but) a vocational training route, from where it is more difficult to continue to higher education. As a consequence, some countries (including Finland, Ireland and Sweden) have focused on diversifying the entry routes to higher education. Policy measures in this area include easing access for mature students and people with vocational and other non-traditional educational qualifications, as well as developing part-time and flexible learning options (see Section 4 on Lifelong Learning).

Several countries mention the combination of factors that may lead to under-representation. For example, when socio-economic disadvantage is combined with minority or immigrant status, the resulting barriers can be very strong. Moreover, countries often mention that attention is lacking to stereotyping and ethnically biased perspectives in school curricula.

Selection and/or admissions procedures to higher education are mentioned by some countries as leading to bias against representatives of some groups. In the United Kingdom (Scotland) this issue is consciously addressed by a range of measures under the heading of 'fair admission initiatives'. Other institutional factors are also perceived as constituting significant barriers for widening access to particular societal groups. France, for example, points out that students from disadvantaged backgrounds may be more affected by academic failure during the first cycle which can be in part due to insufficient knowledge of the range of study options. This has led

France to develop policies of active guidance to potential students. Thus some of the efforts in widening participation aim also at developing awareness among prospective and current students of available support in terms of financial aid and guidance.

It is interesting to note that, although countries most commonly perceive problems of participation related to low socio-economic status, the costs of higher education are rarely explicitly mentioned as a potential reason for under-representation.

For people with disabilities the most common reasons cited by countries for under-representation are insufficiently adapted infrastructure, lack of appropriate teaching and learning materials, and funding problems. The same issues are also perceived in compulsory education with several countries, including Estonia and Hungary, mentioning the negative impact of segregated education. Interestingly, very few countries mentioned psychological barriers created by perceived negative attitudes towards disability. The exceptions are Belgium (Flemish Community), the United Kingdom (Scotland), and Liechtenstein that mention the lack of a 'disability acceptance culture' within higher education institutions and the negative impact of stereotyping. These countries' statements chime with empirical qualitative research findings with students with disabilities that stress that creating an inclusive higher education environment is at least as significant as adapting physical infrastructure.

SECTION 4: LIFELONG LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Main Messages

- The term "lifelong learning" is still understood in many different ways across the European Higher Education Area.
- Lifelong learning has become a recognised mission of higher education institutions in nearly all countries during the Bologna decade, but nevertheless remains a peripheral concern in many countries.
- Information on the funding of lifelong learning is difficult to obtain, partly as a result of lack of conceptual clarity, and partly because diverse funding sources are involved. Where information on public funding is available, investment in lifelong learning appears to be relatively low.
- Approximately half of the Bologna countries have taken measures to stimulate cooperation between higher education institutions and business/industry in the field of lifelong learning.

Introduction

Lifelong learning has recently re-emerged at the forefront of the Bologna process agenda. In 2009, the ministers emphasised that *widening participation shall also be achieved through lifelong learning as an integral part of our education systems*. This section looks at the efforts made by governments and institutions to integrate lifelong learning into the mission of higher education providers, to increase the offer of services and to promote participation in lifelong learning through higher education. Countries have been asked to report on the

key aspects of national responsibility for lifelong learning as outlined in the European University Association's Charter for Lifelong Learning. Actions that are considered include creating favourable legislative and regulatory frameworks, provision of financial and other incentives to higher education institutions, as well as measures to encourage participation and to stimulate cooperation with the private sector.

Understanding lifelong learning

Although discussion on lifelong learning has grown rapidly in frequency and importance in recent years, the range of national responses to this topic suggest that there is still no widely accepted European or international definition of the concept in the context of higher education. Indeed the term 'lifelong learning' can be very wide-reaching, may often be understood in different ways in different countries, and may evolve as contextual factors change. Depending on the national context, it can refer to adult learning (Malta), or more broadly to 'non-traditional' students whether in a formal or informal environment (the Netherlands and the United Kigdom (Scotland)). It can also be limited to 'supplementary (non-degree) study programmes' (Czech Republic and Slovakia). In some countries, a wide range of activities and services can be included under this concept, including part-time, distance, 'mixed-mode', adult, e-learning, open learning, evening/weekend learning, community/outreach learning and more. In other countries, the scope of lifelong learning study options is more limited, with evening or distance learning being the more common modalities. The term 'part-time' student may also be variously defined with very different consequences for the potential student population from one country to another.

There is no doubt that economic reality has driven the recent push for attention to lifelong learning, as national policy discussions focus on the development of an effective and sustainable workforce for the knowledge society. This is reflected, for example, in Armenia, where lifelong learning programmes aim at professional upskilling. This lifelong learning agenda challenges countries and institutions to reorient provision to enable a broader range of individuals to fulfil their potential. The lack of a common definition of lifelong learning in higher education also hinders the identification of coherent policies on this issue.

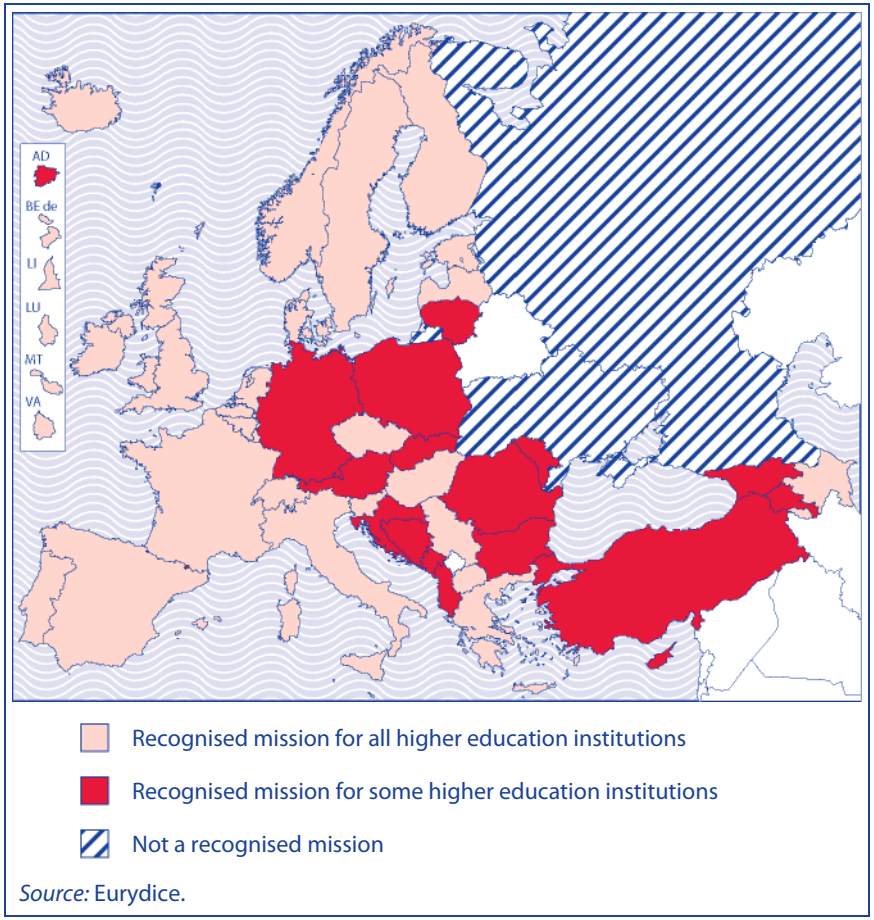
Lifelong learning as a recognised mission of institutions

The growing preoccupation of governments and stakeholders with the lifelong learning perspective has led to concrete developments in most Bologna countries. Figure 9 shows that, almost everywhere, lifelong learning is currently a recognised mission of either all or some higher education institutions. Where lifelong learning is a mission of some institutions, this is often related to questions of institutional autonomy, with some institutions choosing to focus on the mission of lifelong learning, and others to avoid it. Consequently, the extent to which programmes and courses are oriented to potential lifelong learners can vary considerably, but the mission is acknowledged almost everywhere.

Furthermore, in 24 countries at least some higher education institutions are legally required to offer lifelong learning services. The earliest such legal act was adopted in France in 1968 – with further modernising legislation in 2002 creating the current comprehensive system of Recognition of Prior Learning. By 1990 only two other

countries, Malta (1988) and Italy (1990), had adopted similar legislation to encourage the development of lifelong learning in higher education.

Figure 9: Lifelong Learning as a mission for higher education institutions, 2009/10



Source: Eurydice.

However, a significant number of countries have adopted legislation related to the higher education responsibility for lifelong learning during the current decade. These laws either generically define lifelong learning as a mission for higher education institutions or compel institutions to offer special access routes, provide certain types of programmes or engage in activities aimed at the general and working population.

Funding lifelong learning

Data on funding of lifelong learning activities remains scattered and is often unavailable at national level. In most cases, public budgets for higher education do not contain specifically earmarked funding for lifelong learning. As institutions have become more autonomous they now more often receive lump sum funding and it is up to them to decide on the allocation of funds in line with the legal requirements in place. As a consequence, data on overall spending on lifelong learning is available in only nine countries. Andora, Armenia, Belgium (French Community), Croatia, Cyprus, France, Moldova, Romania and Serbia report that between 0.1 and 2.5 percent of their respective total higher education budgets are dedicated for specific lifelong learning activities. In the United Kingdom (Scotland) this percentage is higher – between 2.6 and 5 percent.

Another reason for the lack of overall data is the great diversity of funding sources for lifelong learning activities. Apart from direct public funding for institutions, lifelong leaning activities are financed through public funds, municipal budgets, and private sources that can be contributions from business/industry, but also from individuals through tuition and variously named fees. The Czech Republic, the Netherlands and Spain are among countries where higher education institu-

tions are free to set fees for lifelong learning programmes. Denmark emphasises that employers often pay for employee participation in lifelong learning programmes offered by higher education institutions, thus confirming the relevance of the programme offer in the sector. Finally, as in the Netherlands, expenses incurred through participation in lifelong learning programmes may be tax deductible or otherwise indirectly supported by the state.

From the point of view of potential lifelong learning students, barriers to lifelong learning may exist through age restrictions for student support measures and social benefits. This issue is being specifically addressed in the Czech Republic, where the restriction of social benefits to students under the age of 26 is set to be removed.

From a policy perspective, however, the need for comprehensive and reliable data on the amounts and types of spending on lifelong learning cannot be overemphasised. Such information would permit improving the monitoring of lifelong learning activities. Knowledge about the way and the extent that lifelong learning is implemented in higher education institutions would provide a more coherent picture about the degree to which the goal set by the ministers has been achieved and would help further policy development.

Overall, it could be said that the progress that has been made in integrating lifelong learning as an aspect of the missions of institutions has not yet led everywhere to positioning it at the core of higher education learning.

Promoting lifelong learning

Various channels and actors are informing the public about lifelong learning opportunities. Some countries leave it to higher education institutions and local offices of labour agencies, other countries organise information campaigns centrally. A majority of the Bologna countries have dedicated websites providing information to interested parties.

About half of the governments in the Bologna countries have implemented some form of measures to stimulate cooperation between the private sector, i.e. business and industry, and higher education institutions. The form of this cooperation ranges from cooperation in developing the content of lifelong learning programmes (e.g. Hungary) via regular fora between employer representatives and education institutions (e.g. Czech Republic) to close cooperation between governmental institutions, higher education institutions and employers (e.g. the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)).

The promotion of lifelong learning is inextricably linked to the social dimension of higher education. Equal opportunity in higher education can only become a reality when study paths are more flexible and the world of higher education is more closely aligned to societal developments. In particular, higher education must be responsive to the demands of European knowledge society, and the challenges of demographic change. This requires sustained attention to increasing and widening participation in higher education.

SECTION 5: STUDENT MOBILITY

Main Messages

- Despite its importance in the European Higher Education Area, student mobility is rarely a topic that is addressed comprehensively at national level, and information on the reality of student mobility is rarely complete.
- European policy and programme developments have been an extremely important catalyst for national action on student mobility.
- While most countries have some financial measures in place to support student mobility, the economic disparity between countries in the European Higher Education Area creates major problems for the less wealthy countries and citizens.
- Relatively few countries have set targets for mobility as a part of their higher education development strategy.

Introduction

Student mobility has been an over-arching goal of the Bologna process since its inception, and the drive to promote mobility has been consistent throughout the last decade. Yet despite both the high profile of mobility issues in the Bologna Ministerial meetings and the sustained growth of European programmes (including Erasmus and Erasmus Mundus) promoting and funding mobility – there has been surprisingly little attempt made to analyse national policies and measures to promote mobility. This section of the report aims to address that gap.

Countries were asked whether they have explicit policies to promote both 'outbound' and 'incoming' mobility, and if so, whether such policies are targeted at all students or at a section of the student population. Countries were also invited to outline the main measures of their mobility policies, and to explain how the outcomes are monitored.

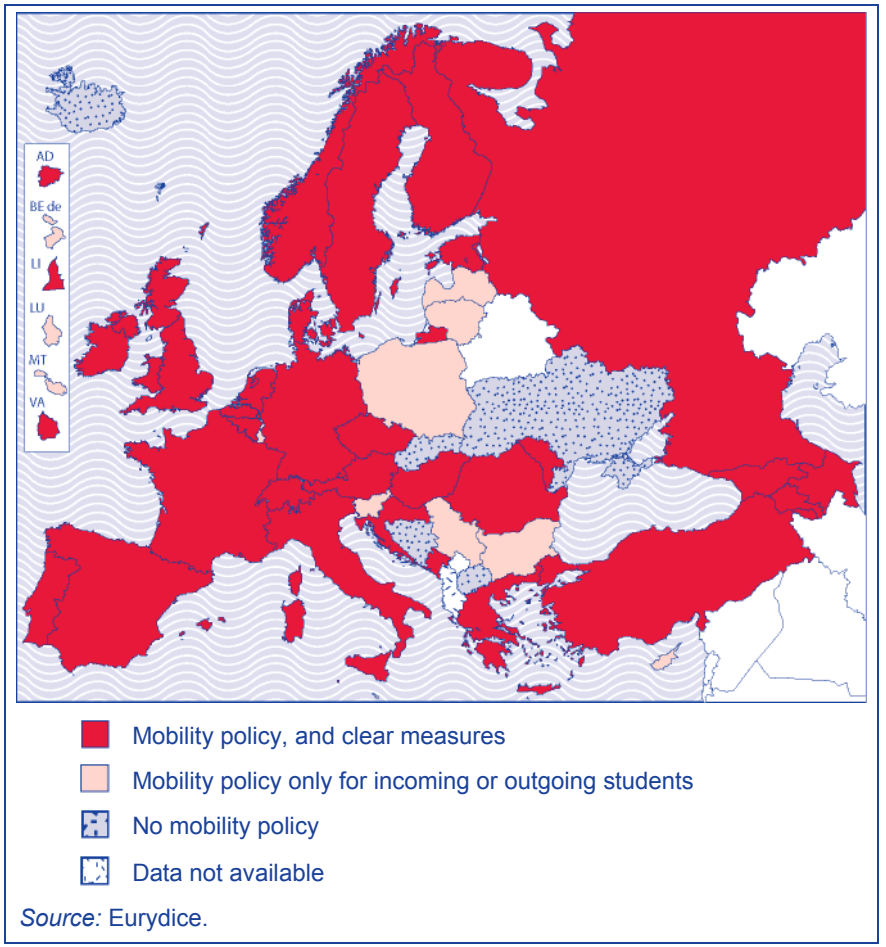
Relationship of policy, information and the reality of student mobility flows

Questions of policy and information are clearly related, and it is to be expected that information on mobility would be provided in support of policy objectives. However, many of the information gaps that have been highlighted at European level are also mirrored at national level. As Figures 10 and 11 show, even where countries claim to have mobility policies in place it is the exception rather than the rule that these policies are backed up by comprehensive and reliable information on the reality of student mobility. In fact, it is a very clear majority of countries (27) that only routinely gather information on some rather than all main forms of student mobility. Moreover, even among countries that gather information on all main forms of mobility, very little information can be captured about the reality of 'free movers' – those who leave a country and enrol in a higher education programme in another country without taking part in any organised mobility programme. Yet this phenomenon appears from European-level statistical information to be growing significantly. Hence the many factors affecting mobility flows remain difficult to gauge with certainty.

Given the complexity of individual decisions related to mobility choices, it would be a mistake to assume a direct causal relationship between the existence of national policy on mobility and the phenomenon of student mobility itself. However, it would be reasonable to assume that mobility will more likely be stimulated when actively encouraged through policy measures. In most countries, when comparing information with Eurostat statistical data on mobility (see Eurostat/Eurostudent Key indicators on the social dimension and mobility, 2009 section C1, p.99) there are positive correlations between the existence of policy and information and the growth of student mobility, and conversely between the lack of policy and information and relative lack of growth in student mobility.

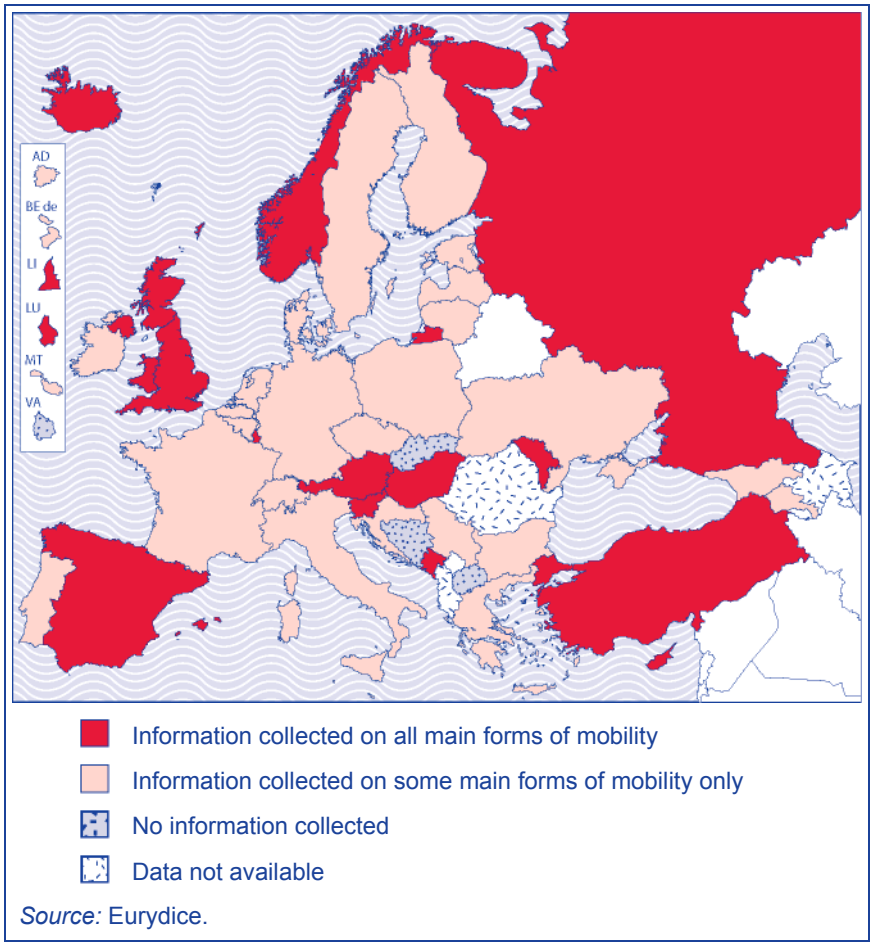
However, such relationships are not always the case. A few countries appear to have taken considerable policy initiatives, but with little evident impact on mobility patterns, while Iceland is an example of a country that has no overt policy in place but experiences considerable mobility flows. Likewise, while in general the countries that monitor mobility flows carefully do so within the framework of a defined mobility policy, there are also countries that gather considerable data on mobility even in the absence of explicit policy.

Figure 10: Policy on Student Mobility, 2009/10



Source: Eurydice.

Figure 11: Information on Mobility, 2009/10



Source: Eurydice.

Nature of mobility policy

For a country to be able to have a clear policy on mobility, it must have a sense of how it would like mobility phenomena to change, and therefore a vision of the situation that it considers desirable. While this is an obvious statement, it is nevertheless surprisingly rare for a country to express clear objectives related to student mobility, and it is more common to find general expressions of desires for more mobility – whether incoming or outgoing. It may also be mistaken to assume that countries all share the same basic objectives in this field, despite the fact that they may be able to reach common goals at the level of the EHEA. For example, some countries may focus on incoming mobility while putting in place few measures to encourage outgoing mobility (e.g. the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)). Other countries, such as Belgium (Flemish Community), may be more concerned to stimulate outgoing mobility, and others still may aim to encourage both incoming and outgoing mobility.

Certain forms of mobility may also be more favoured in some countries – for example, mobility within a degree cycle, mobility between degree cycles or mobility within joint programmes. Although no countries drew attention to such preferences in describing their policies, it is clear from the measures enacted that certain forms of mobility are favoured in certain countries. For example, it is common to see that students may be eligible for financial support in the form of loans or grants if studying a part of a degree cycle in another country, but not if studying an entire cycle abroad. This is no doubt a complex area for policy-makers, and comparison of national situations has to bear in mind the reality that desired outcomes may not be shared.

Policies in the area of mobility, even when given a high priority, tend not to be complete in the way that might be expected. A distinction can be drawn between the relatively small number of countries that have incorporated policy measures for student mobility within a wider internationalisation strategy (e.g. the United Kingdom (Scotland)) and those that have focused more specifically on mobility. Those that set policy for internationalisation tend to gather together a number of related elements of policy (such as degree structure, ECTS implementation and recognition procedures), but may be quite vague about benchmarks and targets. On the other hand, those that focus on policy to increase and/or improve mobility tend to be more likely to have set specific targets.

Overall, however, an analysis of all countries with a policy commitment to mobility reveals that there are many measures that can be brought into a mobility or internationalisation strategy. The following list gathers together the issues mentioned spontaneously by countries when invited to outline their mobility policy:

- amending immigration legislation to facilitate visa procedures for students/researchers;
- a panoply of financial measures, from scholarships, grants and fee waivers to ensuring the portability of student support;
- information campaigns, directed either at encouraging national students to study abroad or attracting international students to the country;
- bi-lateral or multi-lateral cooperation agreements;
- support to institutions in considering internationalisation in curriculum design;
- focus on fair and simple recognition procedures and on the good use of ECTS;
- strengthening implementation of the Bologna measures;
- support for language learning (both incoming and outgoing students);
- encouraging language learning among staff in higher education; provision of programmes in other languages (particularly English);
- supporting higher education institutions in their mobility strategies;
- attention to mobility in quality assurance procedures;
- promotion of joint and double degrees;
- adaptation of information and counselling services for mobile students;
- support for accommodation.

Of the measures outlined above, financial measures are by far the most frequently mentioned. However, while this is significant, the widespread existence of financial measures needs to be considered in relation to the enormous socio-economic diversity within and especially between countries in the European Higher Education Area. The Internatioonal Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank rankings of countries by GDP per capita both include 6 of the EHEA countries in the top 10 world economies, while other EHEA countries rank as low as 114 out of the 166 countries included. This means that, even with the best political will to promote mobility and with some financial measures in place, less wealthy countries are simply unable to bridge the funding gaps that would be required for a substantial number of their citizens to be able to cover costs to study in some of the more wealthy countries. Thus it is primarily the sources of funding available

from host countries in the form of scholarships and grants that currently enable mobility in this direction to take place.

It is also interesting to note that very few countries appear to have mounted specific information campaigns to encourage students of the benefits of studying abroad. France and Germany are two major exceptions to this trend. In Germany, a campaign called 'Go Out' has been organised through the Federal Ministry of Education (BMBF) and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), putting together information on scholarship and cooperation programmes. Similar initiatives are undertaken regularly in France.

In no single country do all the measures outlined above come together in the form of comprehensive mobility policy – at least not in explicit terms. This suggests that the commitment made for the EHEA to develop mobility opportunities extensively and aiming at the goal of 20 % of students benefitting from mobility during her/his studies (however this goal is eventually measured) requires a major push in policy making and implementation of measures if the European Higher Education Area is to meet the aspirations for an open and inclusive space for mobility.

Link to other policy areas

Another feature that should be highlighted regarding 'policy' for mobility is that such policy cannot be made in a vacuum. While all areas of policy-making can be seen to be inter-related, this is particularly true with mobility and a number of areas of social welfare policy, and in particular with the relationship between mobility and immigration policy. Many countries that have developed policy to stimulate mobility in the higher education sector have also implemented policy to control and limit immigration – but few mention any tension or even the relationship between these policy areas. Indeed, despite the close relationship of mobility and immigration policy, only six countries (Estonia, Finland, Greece, Latvia, the Netherlands and Portugal) mention attention to immigration legislation to create a supportive legal environment favouring mobility.

Target setting

Relatively few countries have set targets as a part of their strategy for mobility, and of those that have, only Belgium (Flemish Community), France, Malta and Switzerland have specifically aligned themselves to the 20 % by 2020 benchmark set for the EHEA. However, some countries have set targets for their national systems that go beyond this 20 % overall ambition for the EHEA. This is the case for the Netherlands where an outbound mobility target of 25 % has been set for the year 2013, and for Austria, the Czech Republic and Germany which all aim for 50 % of their student population being able to spend at least a semester abroad by 2020.

However, there are also countries that appear content with a lower level of ambition. Estonia aims for 4-5°% participation in mobility programmes by 2015 and Finland for 6–8 % of both inward and outbound mobility. Ireland, Poland and the United Kingdom have no outbound mobility targets, but have set numerical targets for incoming mobility. Other countries have more vague targets, such as 'increasing mobility', and although it could be claimed that these non-numerical targets are not really targets at all, it is also possible to argue that countries are unable to determine all of the factors that would enable realistic numerical targets to be set at national level. Given the fluid nature of mobility and mobility policy, it may therefore

be perfectly coherent for a cumulative target for mobility to be set at the European level without these targets being replicated in national policy.

Impact of EU programmes

Whatever the state of policy on mobility, there can be no doubt that European programmes and action continue to have an extremely strong impact on national policy and action in this field. Indeed it would be fair to conclude that in some countries national policy does not extend very far beyond implementing particular European mobility programmes. Moreover hardly any countries failed to mention at least one European programme as a part of their national policy measures, with Erasmus, Erasmus Mundus and Tempus featuring very strongly.

European mobility programmes also appear to have an important impact on the availability of information on student mobility. Even if student numbers for certain forms of mobility extend far beyond the numbers participating in European programmes, in several countries the only data that is systematically collected is data required for participation in European programmes.

This suggests that European-level policy and programme developments as far as mobility is concerned are acting as extremely important catalysts in stimulating national action. And where countries have been taking serious initiatives to develop their own policy, they are constructing on to the already existing European programmes and actions.

SECTION 6: THE ECONOMIC CRISIS AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Main Messages

- Initial national responses to the economic crisis have taken radically different paths – from increased investment in higher education through stimulus packages, to severe cuts in expenditure. The likely impact of these different policy approaches on the European Higher Education Area is at this stage difficult to discern.
- Economic crisis has also had an impact on enrolment rates, staffing and infrastructure issues, and the continued development of lifelong learning. The nature of this impact has not been uniform across countries.
- Through their responses to the crisis, governments have in general demonstrated that they are aware of the social importance of higher education, and have neither reduced student support nor scaled back enrolment in the higher education system.
- Understanding the impact of economic changes on higher education requires more systematic monitoring.

This report has shown that advances in degree structures and quality assurance systems have been particularly remarkable over the past decade. Meanwhile the development of lifelong learning systems, with attention to social dimension issues and mobility will require continuous attention in the years ahead.

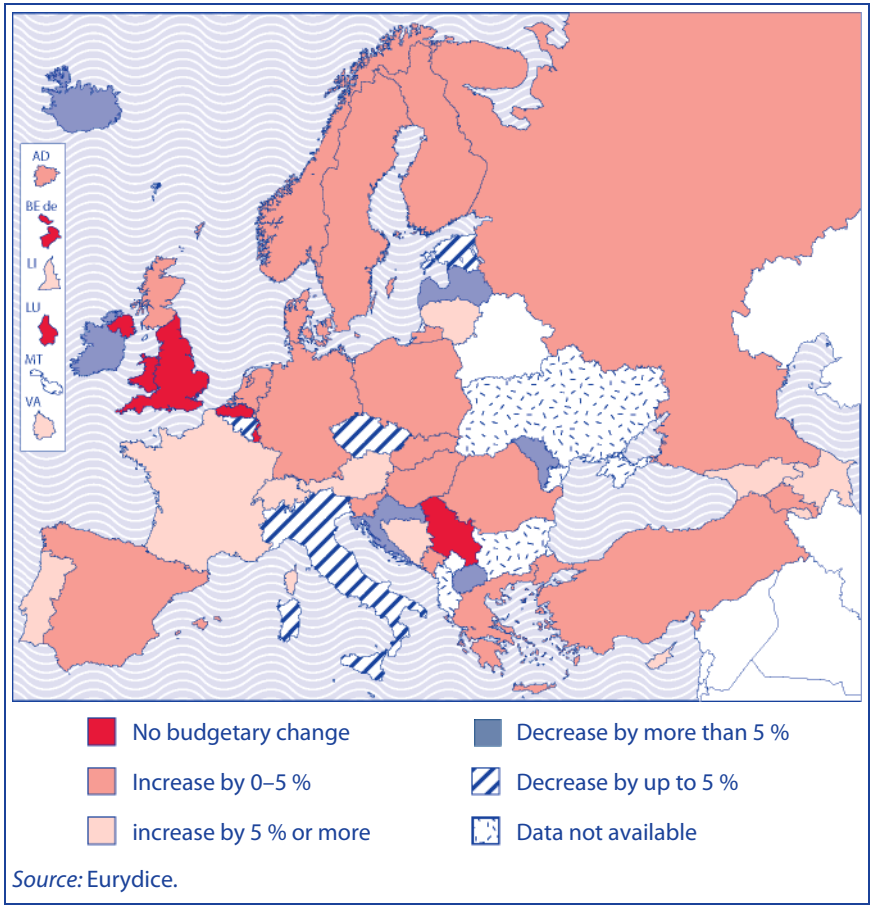
The global economic crisis of 2008 adds a further dimension to these challenges. In the last two years, public budgets have come under immense pressure, and the higher education sector is being, and will continue to be, affected by this new economic reality along with all

other areas of public responsibility. As the higher education sector can help societies adapt to a new and changing economic situation, there are important political choices for countries to make, particularly with regard to investment.

The most prominent impact of the crisis reported by most countries has been to changes in the higher education budget. However, as the map in Figure 12 illustrates, these changes do not all go in the same direction. Indeed a clear majority of countries report positive developments in their higher education budgets for 2009/10 compared to the academic year 2008/09, even though a number also hint that budgetary decreases can be expected in the coming years. Five higher education systems report no changes to their budget and ten countries report cuts in their budget. As a result of delays in adopting budgets, no data was available for Albania, Bulgaria, Malta, Russia, Slovakia and Ukraine.

For the higher education systems that report an increase in the budget allocated to higher education, the extent of these changes varies considerably. Eleven countries (Austria, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, France, Georgia, Holy See, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Portugal and Switzerland) report budgetary increases of 5 % or more – often indicating the inclusion of higher education in economic stimulus package measures – while 19 countries have increased their budget by less than 5 % over the last year. For those countries reporting a decreased budget, four report cuts of less than 5 %, while six countries (Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia and Moldova) report decreases that in some cases extend significantly beyond 5 %.

Figure 12: Budgetary changes from 2008/09 to 2009/10



Source: Eurydice.

These figures should, however, be seen as merely indicative, and there are two reasons for being particularly cautious about the number of countries where trends initially appear to be positive. Firstly, countries that report stable or increasing budgets tend to consider that there has been no immediate impact of the economic

crisis on higher education. In the longer term, however, many expect that the readjustment of public funding priorities will continue as demands for expenditure in education will have to compete with other big public spenders, such as age-related public health spending and climate change.

Secondly overall budget changes are only significant when related to demographic developments. Belgium (Flemish Community), Cyprus, Liechtenstein and the United Kingdom explicitly report a decrease in the per capita spending on students, despite reporting no change or an increase to the annual budget: thus either the number of enrolled students has increased while the budget has more or less stayed the same, or the budget has decreased while student numbers have remained stable. Other countries stretch out planned spending over a longer time period. Belgium (French Community), for example, reported that the investment of an additional €30 million in higher education initially planned over a period of 8 years would be extended to a period of 15 years as a result of the economic crisis – effectively halving the annual sum to be invested.

At this stage it is difficult to discern overall budgetary trends for the European Higher Education Area. However, if significant funding cuts are continued in some countries, the long-term sustainable development of these higher education systems could come under major stress.

The reported impact of the crisis extends beyond changes to national higher education budgets, and a number of countries draw attention to issues such as changes in enrolment rates, impact on staffing and infrastructure, and an increased focus on the social dimension and lifelong learning. It is clear that the reaction to the crisis has varied considerably, depending on the context, economic situation and political strategy in different countries.

A number of countries have focused attention on the role of higher education in re-skilling citizens for the challenges of a transforming labour market. Additional study places are being funded to upskill the unemployed in Ireland. Incentives for industry to transfer scientific staff to universities are a policy response in Denmark and the Netherlands. In Finland and the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland), new study places have also been funded in areas thought to be relevant for the future of the national economies. More negative trends in participation are reported in Estonia and Latvia, where lower numbers of fee-paying students and/or increases in the time students take to finish their degree have been noted due to economic constraints.

Some countries have experienced reductions in staffing as a result of the economic situation. In Estonia, Ireland and Latvia, budgetary cuts will reduce the numbers of people employed by higher education institutions. In Estonia, the crisis is perceived as providing an opportunity for higher education institutions to close down only those study programmes that may lack critical mass, and also to reduce the workload of some staff in order to improve efficiency. This contrasts with neighbouring Latvia, where severe cuts and consequent measures have been implemented. Indeed, a number of higher education institutions and/or faculties/departments have been or are expected to be closed. The freezing of funds despite increasing student numbers has also resulted in Serbia in the postponement of a foreseen increase in staff.

The crisis, however, is in practically no country explicitly taken as an excuse to reduce student support or to scale back enrolment in the higher education system. Indeed most countries reaffirm their determination to increase participation in higher education. In order to cushion the effects of the economic crisis, some countries are increasing the number of publicly funded places for students or increasing social support for students. This is clearly necessary, as several countries have reported increasing numbers of students that have problems paying fees for higher education, while Ireland reports increased demand for part-time programmes. The French Community of Belgium, Finland, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) will fund extra places for students at public universities (Cyprus is still in deliberation on this topic) with Ireland and Finland focusing in particular on professional and vocational training.

Belgium-French Community, Estonia, Georgia, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom (Scotland) have taken measures to improve the situation of students by extending direct and indirect student support. However, the Czech Republic, Liechtenstein and Moldova have reduced the relative number of supported students.

One cause for concern is that the effect of these crisis impacts are only monitored systematically in eight countries (Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Romania and the United Kingdom). This is a very low number and it raises some questions over how national action to support the higher education sector in responding to the economic crisis can be adequately assessed.

While raw budgetary numbers need to be considered with caution, they clearly show that attaining the objectives set for the decade up to 2020 will require increased dedication. In their immedicate reaction to the economic crisis with regard to the higher education sector, countries have demonstrated that they are aware of the social costs of the economic crisis. The focus on the social dimension and lifelong learning will be even more important through the next decade if the crucial goal to establish a Europe of knowledge is to be achieved.