

### **A target on incoming mobility of students from outside the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) into the EHEA**

The Mobility Strategy 2020 “Mobility for better learning” sets out the following task:

“In addition to our quantitative target for the outward mobility of graduates in the EHEA, we now also want to draw attention to mobility into the EHEA such as the number of students enrolled in the EHEA who have obtained their prior qualification outside the EHEA as one possible indicator of its international attractiveness.”

On the basis of the above mentioned indicator, the working group on mobility and internationalisation lays down arguments in this paper **in favour of and against a target for incoming mobility into the EHEA**. On this basis, the BFuG is asked to **decide if such a target is desirable or not** to improve the international attractiveness of the EHEA.

The following notions must be taken into account when discussing the subject: While **increasing the international attractiveness** of the EHEA is an **important and desirable aim**, setting a target for incoming mobility may not be an **adequate indicator** for reaching it. It should be borne in mind that Europe’s higher education systems benefit from incoming mobility and the inter-cultural exchange it includes just as much as the sending countries do. Short-term interests of some countries, i.e. countries with high unemployment rates of academics must be taken into account as well as the long-term benefits of attracting international students in the global competition for highly qualified people.

Arguments **in favour of** such a target are:

- A target for incoming mobility is a strong policy commitment which indicates that the EHEA is open to the world and that international students are welcome in the EHEA.
- Due to demographic changes, international students will become even more important in the near future. Europe’s higher education system must be successful in the global competition for the brightest and most skilled prospective students as they will enable us to realise our potential for innovation and to feed and further develop our knowledge societies. Setting a target for incoming mobility may lead to increased efforts in the EHEA to attract more international students from outside the EHEA.
- Setting a target for incoming mobility into the EHEA allows assessing and evaluating the performance of the EHEA in attracting international students.

Arguments **against such a target** are:

- There are external factors which influence mobility and which cannot be controlled through EHEA policies (e.g. global migration phenomena, demography, greater participation in higher education, growing number of students). So, maintaining the current share of international students from outside the EHEA would already be a success.
- A target for incoming mobility may not be meaningful to prove the attractiveness of the EHEA for international students. The reasons why international students choose one higher education institution to study at are manifold and may depend on aspects such as the tuition fees in specific countries and the economic and social conditions in the home country.

- At the moment, some countries in the EHEA may have less interest in attracting more international students as the unemployment rates in some countries are high. So, the interest in setting such a target may differ from country to country.
- At the moment, only a few countries receive the majority of international students from outside the EHEA. As a consequence, such a target may only allow assessing how attractive the higher education system of those countries is, not the whole of the EHEA. Therefore, a common target may not be representative.
- At the moment, the lack of data makes it difficult to decide on a realistic target for incoming mobility. Apart from data on incoming degree mobility which refers only for half of the countries in the EHEA to prior qualification and for the rest to foreign citizenship/nationality, data on incoming credit mobility is almost entirely missing.
- Setting an additional target on incoming student mobility may divert attention from a broader understanding of internationalisation and from targets to which countries previously committed, e.g. the outward mobility target that in 2020, at least 20% of those graduating in the EHEA should have had a study or training period abroad corresponding to at least 15 ECTS credit points or three months within any of the three cycles (credit mobility) as well as stays in which a degree is obtained abroad (degree mobility).

**The working group proposes to the BFuG:**

- To call upon all EHEA countries to consider making an increase in incoming student mobility from outside the EHEA an objective in their internationalisation strategies.
- To call upon Eurostat and the relevant national data collectors to collect and report on data on credit and degree mobility into the EHEA

A section in the Yerevan Communiqué could read as follows:

“Acknowledging the attractiveness of the EHEA as a diverse but single area of Higher Education and willing to share those benefits with students from the rest of the world while appreciating the exchange of knowledge as well as the contact with other cultures, we aim to increase the number of students enrolled in the EHEA who have obtained their prior qualification outside the EHEA. To this end we call on all EHEA countries to consider making an increase in such incoming student mobility an objective in their internationalisation strategies.

We ask Eurostat, in cooperation with the relevant national data collectors, to regularly collect and report on data on incoming student mobility for degree as well as credit purpose from outside the EHEA.”