

BOLOGNA WITH STUDENT EYES

2007 EDITION

ESIB - The National Unions of Students in Europe

IMPRINT

Editing: Bologna Process Committee 2005 - 2007 (Anne Mikkola, Bruno Carapinha, Colin Tück, Daithí Mac Síthigh, Nina Gustafsson Åberg, Sanja Brus)

Content: Bologna Process Committee 2005 - 2007

Layout & Design: Bea Uhart

Cover Illustration: Juliana Uhart

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FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

Bologna With Student Eyes 2007 seems to bring good news: All European students are affected by the Bologna Process. Students are already studying in new degree structures, counting their workload in ECTS and becoming more active in quality assurance mechanisms. From a ministerial point of view, this means that essential steps have been taken. However, the question that has concerned this survey was to assess the effects of the reforms on different groups of students. How much has student life really changed through the Bologna reforms? What are the effects of reforms officially not part of the Bologna framework, but still affecting the Bologna aims? I believe that this perspective makes our survey unique: it sheds light on how the people studying in the system perceive the Bologna Process.

The survey addresses a major concern students have about the future of the Bologna Process. Often, structures are debated for the sake of structures, rather than facilitating the noble goals that were set out in 1999. It remains to be seen whether ECTS, the new degree structures and structures take the social dimension and mobility of students to a higher level. What is mentioned in our Berlin declaration seems to be confirmed: a future vision, a rekindling of the Bologna aims, is urgently needed.

I would also like to give particular importance to the results we have found regarding the situation of young researchers. This dimension, which was given great importance in Bergen, has led to a debate on the representation of doctoral students and the borders of ESIB membership. The survey clearly answers some of the existing open questions: more than half of our members actively represent doctoral students. By working continuously to improve the third cycle, ESIB can now claim to represent students at all levels, from the bachelor to doctorate.

For all their efforts, I would like to warmly thank Anne, Bruno, Colin, Daithí, Nina and Sanja, who have made this survey happen. Their greatest compliment is that 'Bologna With Student Eyes' itself shows that their work truly affects all students in Europe.



Koen Geven,
ESIB Chairperson

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For the third time, ESIB is presenting an analysis on the progress of the Bologna Process at European and national level to the Ministerial Summit. “Bologna With Student Eyes” portrays the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) as seen by students and the involvement of students in shaping the EHEA. National unions of students from 36 countries have contributed to this survey with their views, policies and experiences. As compared to the 2005 edition of “Bologna With Student Eyes”, a couple of additional countries are covered in this report. However, some countries covered before could unfortunately not be included in this edition.

One of the key findings of “Bologna With Student Eyes” 2005 is still completely valid two years after. There is a worrying “à la carte” approach to implementing the Bologna Process in a significant amount of countries. Besides most Nordic countries, few others can claim satisfactory overall progress in all action lines. Looking at most parties to the Bologna Process the findings suggest that specific action lines are implemented with a higher motivation and passion than others. The Bologna Process is not a pick-and-choose supermarket, but a comprehensive package. Each action line is in some way interlinked with and builds upon several others. Ignoring this, the chances and opportunities of the Bologna Process will not be fully reached in the national implementation. Even more worrying, it seems that the social dimension is still the most neglected action line at national level.

Within the EHEA there seems to be a gap in pace emerging. Whereas some countries are already “reforming the reforms”, as for instance the debate about a reform of external quality assurance in some countries, others are still in the process of implementing the two-cycle Bachelor and Master structure. This might lead to more diverging views in the future, for instance in the Bologna follow-up structure, on what are the issues of utmost importance. Interestingly, this gap in pace is not (only) connected to “old” and “new” signatories. Countries being signatories since 1999 in some cases clearly lag behind as compared to countries that joined the process rather recently, in 2003 or 2005.

The survey further reveals that in many countries reforms are only implemented superficially. Quite often a look at the surface suggests that reforms have been done, and only a closer look discloses that many problems are still to be solved. The implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is a very prominent example of this phenomenon.

The Social Dimension has not yet received the same attention at national levels as at the European level. Only very few national unions of students reported that the social conditions of students have improved, and the vast majority reports that no progress has been made since 2005. Quite worrying, in a couple of countries the social situation of students has worsened due to a lack of adopting financial support schemes to cover increased living costs or due to the introduction of tuition fees.

Adequate data on the social and economic conditions of students is available only in some countries. Although some other countries are currently undertaking to establish such data, in a clear majority of countries no data exists. This underlines the urgent need for reliable data on social and economic conditions of students as a basis to identify problems and for better policy-making regarding the Social Dimension.

With regard to mobile students, financial obstacles are still the biggest hindrance to student mobility in Europe. The portability of loans and grants for studies abroad has improved since 2005, but mostly for short-term mobility for up to one year. When studying a complete cycle abroad, the portability of loans and grants still involves major obstacles in most countries, or is not possible at all in quite some countries. Furthermore, only in some cases, students are eligible for top-ups to cover higher living costs, travel expenses or (higher) tuition fees when studying abroad. Sometimes national grant and loan schemes are portable but simply not sufficient to meet the costs of studying abroad.

Foreign students are rarely treated equally to domestic students in their host countries, with the exception of EU citizens within the European Union. Often foreign students have to pay higher tuition fees than domestic students and experience significant problems in receiving residence and work permits. In a worryingly large group of countries that do not charge foreign students (higher) fees yet, such ideas are currently being debated.

Joint and double degree programmes are increasingly offered throughout the EHEA, but they are still targeting only a rather small proportion of students. It is obvious that such programmes are not a means to allow mobility for the masses, and often joint/double degree programmes bear the risk of being even more socially exclusive than traditional programmes, as far as additional fees and other top-up costs are concerned. The European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance are a driver of reform of national quality assurance systems. They are broadly known amongst students' unions throughout Europe. However, there is still a need to further promote them and spread in-depth information about the guidelines. The European Register for Quality Assurance Agencies is widely supported by the national unions of students, as a means to create transparency and reliability in quality assurance.

Some progress has been made regarding the involvement of students in quality assurance during the past two years. Yet students are not involved in quality assurance activities at all levels in most countries of the EHEA, and they are not always recognised as full and equal partners.

Although there has been some progress regarding the student involvement in quality assurance, the participation of students in shaping the EHEA and in higher education governance in more general terms is still far from being sufficient and well-established in most Bologna countries. The findings reveal that since 2005 there has hardly been any improvement on the involvement of students. In some cases, the situation even worsened as compared to 2005. Management approaches to higher education governance are seen as a threat to student participation.

In terms of independence of students' unions the faculty level has proven to be rather problematic. More than that, in some countries student representatives are not regarded and treated as equal partners by governments, institutions and other stakeholders. Some actors even principally regard students as troublemakers, no matter what they actually say or do. Only in few countries, a sustainable partnership culture exists.

The Bologna three-cycle system is widely in place throughout Europe, if one just looks at the surface. Most countries have put in place the necessary legal provisions, and a significant amount of students is enrolled in Bachelor, Master or doctorate programmes. However, there is a substantial lack of real curricular reform throughout the EHEA. An alarming number of national unions of students report that the old, long programmes in their country have been simply "cut" into two, with the new first cycle qualification having an

unclear value to students and to the labour market.

In many countries, the accessibility of a Master programme for graduates holding a first-cycle qualification presents a major problem. Only in few countries, all Bachelor graduates who wish to study a Master programme have that opportunity. Often Bachelor graduates from the same institution are favoured regarding admission to Master programmes, putting students from other institutions or countries in a worse position. There seems to be a risk that limited access to Master programmes lead to increased gender inequality. At Master level, the proportion of women amongst students is significantly lower than at Bachelor level in most countries.

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is formally in place in the vast majority of Bologna signatory countries. However, its key features are not properly implemented and used yet. No country uses ECTS for accumulation and transfer, with a full implementation of the learning outcomes approach and ECTS credits being linked to properly measured student workload. Few countries have only minor problems still to be solved, but the dominant majority of countries still have significant problems which need to be addressed.

The recognition of prior learning is a rather new concept in the Bologna Process, introduced at the Bergen summit 2005. It is fully and widely used only in a few countries. Most countries in the EHEA recognise prior learning for the purpose of credit within higher education and/or for access to higher education, but usually only in some institutions or in particular sectors, and not as a national policy or approach. Only in very few countries full awards are available through the recognition of prior learning. Some countries still do not recognise prior learning in any way.

National qualifications frameworks (NQF) have been setup in very few countries so far, and even fewer countries have implemented an overarching NQF that embraces not only higher education but also vocational education and training (VET), for instance. In most cases the national union of students has been involved, or is currently involved, in the implementation of a NQF for higher education, in line with the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). However, with regard to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF-LLL) as proposed by the European Commission, students are hardly involved in setting up an overarching NQF. There is hardly any interlinkage of recognition of prior learning and the debates on qualifications frameworks, although this is commonly seen as a prerequisite for full success of qualifications frameworks.

Most of ESIB's members also represent doctoral students in their country and deal with the reform of the third cycle in their day-to-day work. However there remains a need for further capacity building on third-cycle reforms. The methods of organising the third cycle still vary strongly across Europe. Whereas some countries treat doctoral students the same way as other students, some regard them as somewhere in between a student and an employee. In yet other countries, doctoral students are always employed by the institution to carry out research. In the latter case their social status is rather secure and stable, whereas in other cases the social situation of doctoral students is often difficult.

The European dimension of higher education is mostly understood in a very narrow sense. Provision of language courses and offering study programmes in foreign languages (mostly English) are widely considered as the "European dimension", whereas the introduction of a European perspective into curricula is rarely on

any agenda.

The external dimension of the EHEA is often understood as an agenda for world-wide marketing of European higher education. The relation of European higher education to other parts of the world is seen from an economic rather than a cooperative perspective. This leads to the situation that the social and economic conditions of non-European students have not been improved so far. In some cases, for instance with regard to stricter visa regulations, conditions have even worsened. It seems that most countries want European higher education to be attractive only to a small share of students who can afford to study in Europe.

A brain drain to Europe (and mostly to Western Europe) is accepted and often even facilitated by many countries, ignoring the risks such a brain drain bears for less developed countries. Only two Nordic countries have put measures in place to actively counter-balance a brain drain from less developed countries through some financial incentives.

A birds-eye view across all action lines suggests that there is some correlation between student involvement and good progress in the national implementation. Those countries which in general have significant student participation in governance of higher education usually also show better progress in the implementation of most action lines. This correlation underlines the importance of the Bologna Process' partnership approach, one of its hallmarks. Only if this cooperative approach is taken seriously also at national level, a successful implementation and broad agreement on reforms might be reached.

INTRODUCTION

For the third time, ESIB has carried out a survey on the implementation of the Bologna Process. The first survey was in 2003 and the second was in 2005. Between the first two surveys the methodology developed substantially and this survey builds on the principles of the 2005 “Bologna With Student Eyes” report. This new report portrays the implementation of the Bologna Process from a student point of view. Through this, it is possible to get an understanding of how students, the main target group of the reforms in the framework of the Bologna Process, experience their situation. This view does not always seem to be a perspective taken into account in the reform process despite the declared rationale of being student-centred.

We are slowly approaching 2010 and there is a need for correct implementation of all action lines. In general, implementation is speeding up, (at least in certain areas), but at the same time, malimplementation is for students as harmful - or even more so - than no reforms at all. Hence, the aim of this report is to analyse how the implementation and the progress towards 2010 is proceeding. There is a great need for comparing promises made and actions decided upon at the European level with what happens in reality at the national and local level, and in particular how students understand and perceive these debates.

The report is divided into 9 chapters in which selected parts of Bologna Process reforms are discussed, also the transversal issue of the social dimension of the Bologna Process is discussed in detail in the 1st chapter.

The primary source of data is a detailed web-based questionnaire, which included a range of qualitative and quantitative questions. The questions were designed by ESIB (based on a thorough review of past surveys and a consideration of active action lines and projects within the Bologna Process), and subjected to a pilot process in 2006. Data collection took place from October 2006 and onwards. Respondents were the organisations (national unions of students) that are current members of ESIB, although in the case of Georgia, Moldova, Turkey and Ukraine, other organisations were invited to respond, as no national organisation was a member of ESIB. In a number of cases, questions reflected themes or results of the 2005 report, although a number of new themes were included in this survey. Significant information was gathered from follow-up interviews and written questioning, and clarification was sought on unclear or contradictory responses. Secondary sources of data included national reports (stocktaking), the Eurostudent report of 2005, information from ENQA and EUA, and other general resources on higher education in Europe. The report was written in March/April 2007 and reflects available information at that time.

36 countries have been surveyed and are covered in this report¹. Limited data is available from Denmark.

We hope that this report sheds some light on the situation regarding the process of implementing the agreed reforms as students are experiencing it every day. A further wish is that the results of the report can help in implementing the Bologna Process reforms in a coherent and qualitative way so that present and future students will benefit fully from this pan-European reform process.

Enjoy the reading and welcome to reality!

ESIB’s Bologna Process Committee 2005-2007

¹ The countries covered in this survey are: Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Republika Srpska), Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Georgia, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Moldova, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia (not including Kosovo), Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine and the UK (not including Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales).

I. SOCIAL DIMENSION

Social dimension was introduced into the Bologna Process in Prague 2001. Nowadays social dimension is considered a transversal action line that has an impact on all other action lines. The impacts of the reform should be considered also from a socio-economical point of view. Higher Education and the reforms should help to create more social cohesion. This means that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education should reflect the diversity of European societies and that all students should have the possibility to study in Higher Education no matter what their background is. In Bergen in 2005 the ministers charged the Bologna Follow-Up Group with presenting comparable data on mobility of students and staff and on social and economic situation of students in the participating countries to serve as a basis for future stocktaking.

The survey was designed considering the transversal nature of social dimension as an action line. Therefore, most of the data gathered on social dimension has been reported in other chapters, such as *Student participation* and *Recognition of prior learning*. This chapter deals with changes in Higher Education legislation, funding or policies that have improved life and study conditions of students, the level of national discussions on social dimension as part of the Bologna Process, the availability of data on students' socio-economic situation and on the composition of the student body.

Conclusions

According to the data collected, the debates at the national level don't highlight the importance of social dimension as it is done at the European level. Only a few national unions of students reported improvements in the financial situation of students. However, most often any positive changes focused primarily in the development of student loans, rather than on the improvement of grants available. At the same time the expenses of living and studying have increased, especially in the countries that have introduced tuition fees. Only a few countries such as Czech Republic, Georgia, Slovenia and the UK report having introduced special funding schemes for students from less privileged background.

The social dimension of the Bologna Process has not been discussed at the national level. More than half of the countries reported that there is less discussion on the social dimension than on other Bologna action lines. *Bologna With Student Eyes 2005* presented very similar results, meaning that developments at the national level are still missing.

There is a need for adequate data on the social conditions of students, the composition of the student body and the level of participation in higher education. Seventeen countries report that there is inadequate data and ten state that there are efforts to collect adequate data. Many improvements on data collection are still required to move further in social dimension inside the Bologna countries.

Recommendations

- Discussion on the social dimension in the Bologna Process at the national level should be enhanced and include the stakeholders
- Assessment on the socio-economical impacts of the Bologna Process reform must be carried out

- Efforts for the collection of adequate data on the socio-economic composition of the student body and on students' financial situation should be made at the national level
- Governments should provide for financial incentives to widen access to Higher Education from socially disadvantaged groups
- The student financing system should be balanced and must always cater for all the expenses related to Higher Education
- Students' grants and loans must be available and its amount must cover the expenses of studying

1.1 - Progress in the Social Dimension

The map on the following page (fig.1) illustrates progress made in social dimension as reported by the national unions of students. Only 8 countries (Czech Republic, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Moldova, Poland, Portugal and Serbia) have improved the situation for students by measures such as improving the financial situation of the students and introducing anti-discriminative legislation for HE. In the majority of the countries (26), there was been no change in the social dimension or the changes have been contradicting. In 3 countries (Germany, Hungary and the United Kingdom) social conditions of students have actually worsened by measures such as the introduction of tuition fees or increasing the level of tuition fees.

In the UK the government introduced a so called top-up fee policy, which meant the substitution of state regulation on tuition fees by the simple definition of limits. Higher education institutions themselves can now decide the amount of tuition fees to charge students with, being the maximum limited to 3.000 pounds per academic year. This new policy only affects students enrolled for the first time in 2006-2007. However, before this change, tuition fees varied from nothing and up to 1.250 pounds per academic year being indexed to household income. Currently, the majority of the universities charge the maximum fee per academic year. Scotland, although not having tuition fees for full-time undergraduate programmes, also introduced them for non-Scottish UK students because of the top-up fee policy.

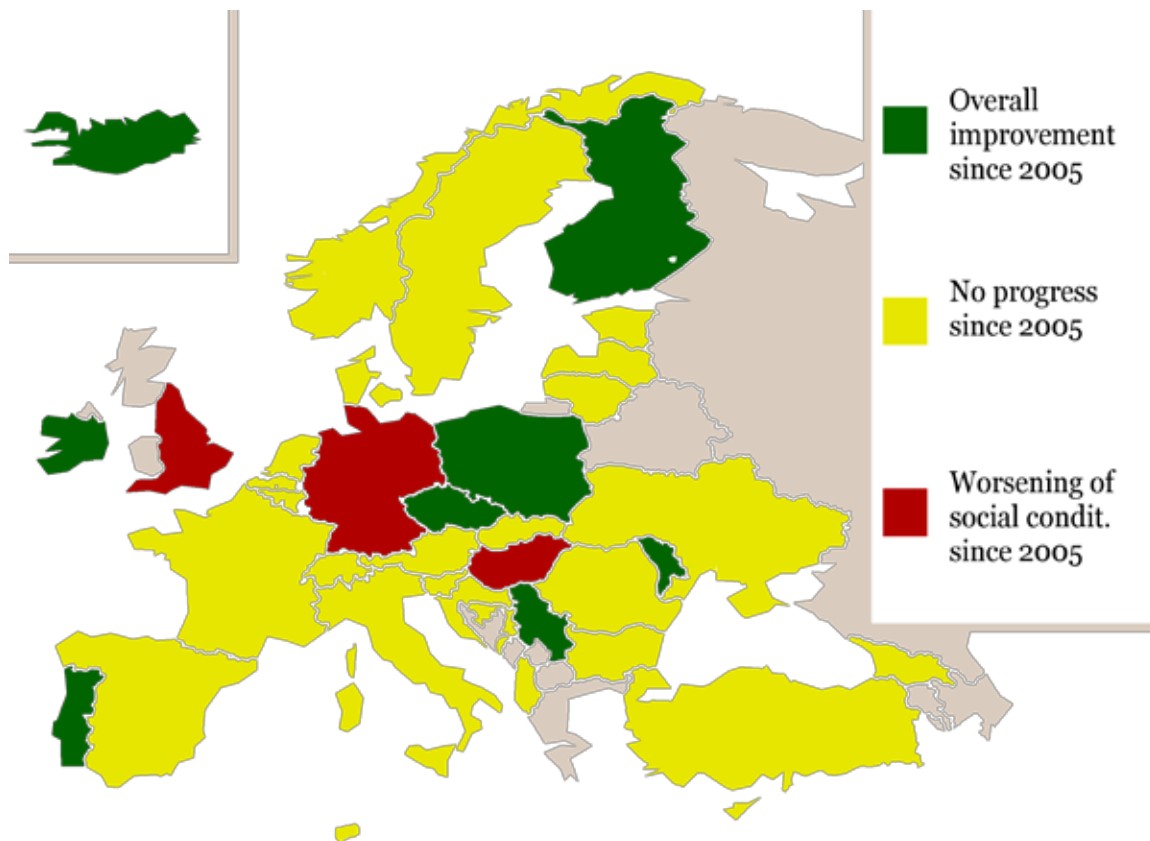
1.1.1 – Financial Situation of the Students

The financial situation of the students has a great impact on the student's ability to study. Student loans and grants systems ensure possibilities for those who come from lower income families. The level of loans and grants also affect the possibilities to study. Few countries improved the financial situation of the students such as Finland and Iceland raising the amount of student loans. In Finland the amount of student housing grant was also raised. In the Czech Republic the government introduced social scholarship to students who come from the lowest family income groups. In Latvia some higher education institutions have organised grants for students who come from disadvantaged background. The money for the grants is provided by the private sector. Some countries have been able to increase the number of government funded, tuition-free study places, such as Ukraine and Moldova. A number of countries have been introducing student funding schemes, such as Portugal, where the grant system has been expanded so that master level students can apply.

In a number of countries the financial situation has been worsened due to the introduction of tuition fees or raising the amounts without increasing the availability of loans and grants. In Germany, legislation allows now to introduce tuition fees in Higher Education and seven federal states have already done it. In the UK, due to the introduction of the so called top-up fee legislation, tuition fees raised since most of the

universities charge now the maximum fee of 3,000 pounds per academic year. Also, Hungary has introduced tuition fees.

Fig.1: Improvement on the Social Dimension



Some countries have significant problems in their student financing system. In Italy, every year around 30% of students who are legally entitled to a government grant will not get it because of State budget problems. In Belgium (Flemish community) even the students below poverty line do not get the full student grant, because the income limits have not been checked for years. In a number of countries, student loans and grants don't cover all the expenses. For example, in Latvia loans available for tuition fees are smaller than the actual tuition fee.

1.1.2 – Access to HE

Initiatives regarding widening access to Higher Education are very limited. Although there are some campaigns or projects to promote access for underrepresented groups, only a few countries have introduced legislative or funding incentives to improve the composition of the student body. In Belgium (Flemish community) there is a Government proposal to provide higher education institutions with targeted funding for special groups, such as students from low income family background and students with disabilities. In Ireland, all higher education institutions publicly funded are employing disability officers. In Serbia the Law on Higher education was adopted in 2005, which prohibits all kind of discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic, national or social background, language, religion, political or other viewpoint, disability or financial background. These examples are good examples of policy change.

1.1.3 – National Unions of Students' Campaigns

In many of the answers, the national student unions reported on campaigns on issues related to social dimension. For example in Belgium (French community) students' unions have been promoting gender law in Higher Education and in Spain students proposed a Student Charter to Government. Some of the campaigns are against official policies, such as in Slovenia, where the Government proposed a package of reforms that have a negative effect in students' wellbeing (introduction of tuition fees, limitation of the students' right to work and decreasing access to student meals). After Slovenian students' campaigns, the proposals on tuition fees and access to student meals were taken out of the package of reforms. These are some of the examples of the commitment of students to social dimension and how active the student unions are when it comes to this issue.

1.2 – Is Social Dimension an issue in the Bologna reforms?

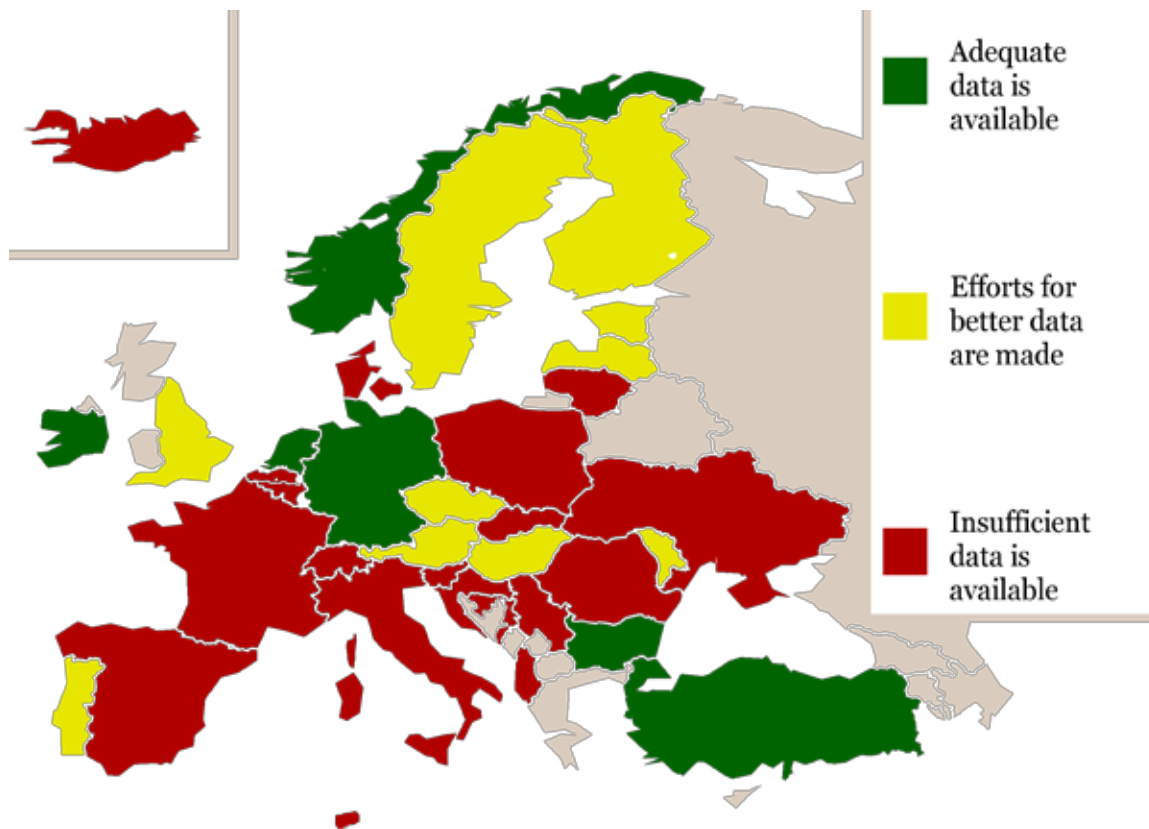
The level of discussion about the social dimension in the national debate concerning the Bologna Process is very limited. Only Slovenia and Bulgaria reported to have more discussion on social dimension than on other Bologna issues. A part of the countries surveyed feel that there is as much discussion on social dimension as on other subjects (Albania, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Iceland, Ireland, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, Romania, Sweden and Turkey). Nevertheless, in the majority of the countries (21) there is less discussion on social dimension than on other topics related to Bologna Process.

The data provided by the respondents show that even though social dimension has been part of the Bologna Process for quite some time now, it hasn't been tackled on the national level as much as other issues in the Bologna Process. As social dimension is a transversal action line, in the sense that every action line in Bologna Process should consider its social implications, this area needs urgent visibility and importance of the issue must be underlined in the national debate.

1.3 – Data on Students

One of the key elements when it comes to the recognition of the problems and also when measuring the impact of reforms is collecting data on the situation of students. Only 6 countries say that there is adequate data available on the social conditions of students and on the participation of the different groups in Higher Education. An additional group of 10 respondents report that efforts to collect adequate data are being made. Still, again a majority of 17 national unions of students reported that there's insufficient data without any plan to improve the collection of data in their countries. Therefore, lack of adequate data on social dimension in EHEA is still an issue needing to be tackled.

Fig. 2: Available data on students



II. QUALITY ASSURANCE

During the past two years, quality assurance of higher education has gained importance in both European and national debates and reforms under the umbrella of the Bologna Process. Although being mentioned in the official declarations and communiqués of the Process since its beginning in 1999, only since the Berlin Summit quality assurance has developed into a central action line of the process.

Conclusions

The findings of the survey suggest that there have been significant changes and developments of quality assurance systems across Europe, including steps forward with regard to the involvement of students in quality assurance activities. However, the involvement of students is still far from being broadly well established throughout the whole EHEA.

Whilst many countries have a coherent system of external quality assurance in place, there seems to be a lack of coherent frameworks for internal quality assurance mechanisms, which are often completely left in the responsibility of institution.

The European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance have had a significant impact on the implementation and design of national quality assurance systems. They are known amongst student unions in Europe. There is, however, a lack of in-depth knowledge of them.

In some countries, fundamental changes to the existing quality assurance systems are discussed. Student unions are unanimously critical towards the idea of replacing programme-level external quality assurance by a mere institutional approach, as they fear a lack of sound quality assurance if too much responsibility is left with the institutions themselves.

The concept of a European Register for Quality Assurance Agencies has broad support amongst student unions throughout Europe. National student unions expect an increase of transparency and trust in quality assurance from a Register which lists those agencies who comply with the European Standards and Guidelines.

Recommendations

In the area of quality assurance, the following recommendations and necessities for further action arise from the findings:

- The involvement of students in quality assurance activities requires more attention. In particular, involvement needs to be ensured at all levels of quality assurance, and there is a need to clearly define the students' role as equal partners in quality assurance.
- There is a need for further discussion on how external quality assurance can both effectively and reliably ensure the quality of each study programme and, at the same time, can be efficient and prevent unnecessary bureaucracy.
- The European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance need to be further promoted at the national level. Measures should be taken to raise the awareness of European student unions about the Standards and Guidelines.

- The European Register for Quality Assurance should promote more transparency and trust in quality assurance. During the phase of implementation, more and better information on the European Register is necessary to improve knowledge and raise awareness about it.

2.1 – Trends and changes in quality assurance of higher education

Whilst some countries in the European Higher Education Area have sound and developed quality assurance mechanisms in place at national and institutional level, others have only recently setup or are just establishing systematic procedures for quality assurance of higher education. A lot of countries reported significant changes in their national quality assurance setups during the past two years, namely Finland, France, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Moldova, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Slovenia. These changes range from fine-tuning existing quality assurance systems to establishing (systematic) quality assurance for the first time.

Whilst most countries have a coherent system for external quality assurance in place, the findings suggest that internal quality assurance is sometimes left up to individual institutions, without a coherent overarching framework. Although internal quality assurance is commonly considered to be the responsibility of individual higher education institutions, this might lead to a lack of a clear picture on the state of internal quality assurance.

In a couple of countries which already have a well-developed system of external quality assurance in place, namely Belgium (Flemish community), Germany and the Netherlands, first discussions about a fundamental reform of the external quality assurance system are emerging. Those three countries have in common that external quality assurance takes place at the programme level at present, which is sometimes considered to be a too extensive process and a too high burden, in particular by institutions.

National student unions in these countries are unanimously critical towards a shift to institutional approaches to external quality assurance. They are primarily concerned that from the students' point of view, the quality of single study programmes is much more crucial than the quality of the institution as a whole. Furthermore, it is pointed out by student unions that sound internal quality assurance procedures will not cost less than the present system of external quality assurance at programme level. Student unions are currently exploring the possibility of making programme-level quality assurance more light-weight through an additional institutional evaluation or accreditation, rather than to replace it completely.

2.2 – European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance

At their last summit in Bergen 2005, European ministers adopted the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance¹ as prepared by ENQA, ESIB, EUA and EURASHE (E4 Group) jointly. Two years after their adoption, it can be concluded that they had a significant impact on the design of national quality assurance systems. From some countries, namely Estonia, Germany, Portugal and Sweden, it has been reported that their national systems for quality assurance have been reviewed during the past two years with particular regard on compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines.

¹ ENQA: Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, Helsinki, 2005, http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050221_ENQA_report.pdf [2007-04-05]

Amongst the respondents to the survey, about one third states that they are aware about the European Standards and Guidelines in detail. Whilst only one respondent states that it is not aware of them at all, the remaining 63% of respondents state that they are aware of them a little. Asked for their support of the principles laid down in the Standards and Guidelines, more than half of the respondents express their support (35%) or strong support (19%). Another 38% state that they have a neutral opinion. Some 8% express their opposition to them, whereas no respondent expressed strong opposition. Those figures suggest that the Standards and Guidelines are broadly known and supported by student unions in Europe. However, there seems to be a need for better information and promotion amongst student unions, suggested by the low extent of detailed awareness and the high amount of neutral opinions.

It has been surveyed whether national student unions have the perception that the implementation of the European Standards and Guidelines is taken seriously by national authorities, higher education institutions and quality assurance bodies. It can be concluded that the vast majority of respondents have the perception that the Standards and Guidelines are taken seriously. However, the responses suggest that quality assurance bodies take them most seriously, whilst institutions take them less seriously. Furthermore, only few respondents state that they are taken very seriously by all actors.

2.3 – Student participation in quality assurance

The participation of students in quality assurance activities has always been a key concern and demand both of ESIB and national student unions. The findings (outlined in the map on the following page, fig.3) suggest that there has been significant improvement in the participation of students in quality assurance. However, students still do not participate in quality assurance at all levels throughout the European Higher Education Area.

An overview of the situation across Europe is given by Fig.3. In 15 surveyed countries, students participate in quality assurance activities at national, institutional and faculty/programme/departmental level. In 3 countries, students participate at only 2 levels and in 12 countries student participation is in place at only one level, respectively. Yet, in 4 countries there is no participation of students in quality assurance activities at all. There is no clear tendency which level is the most problematic one.

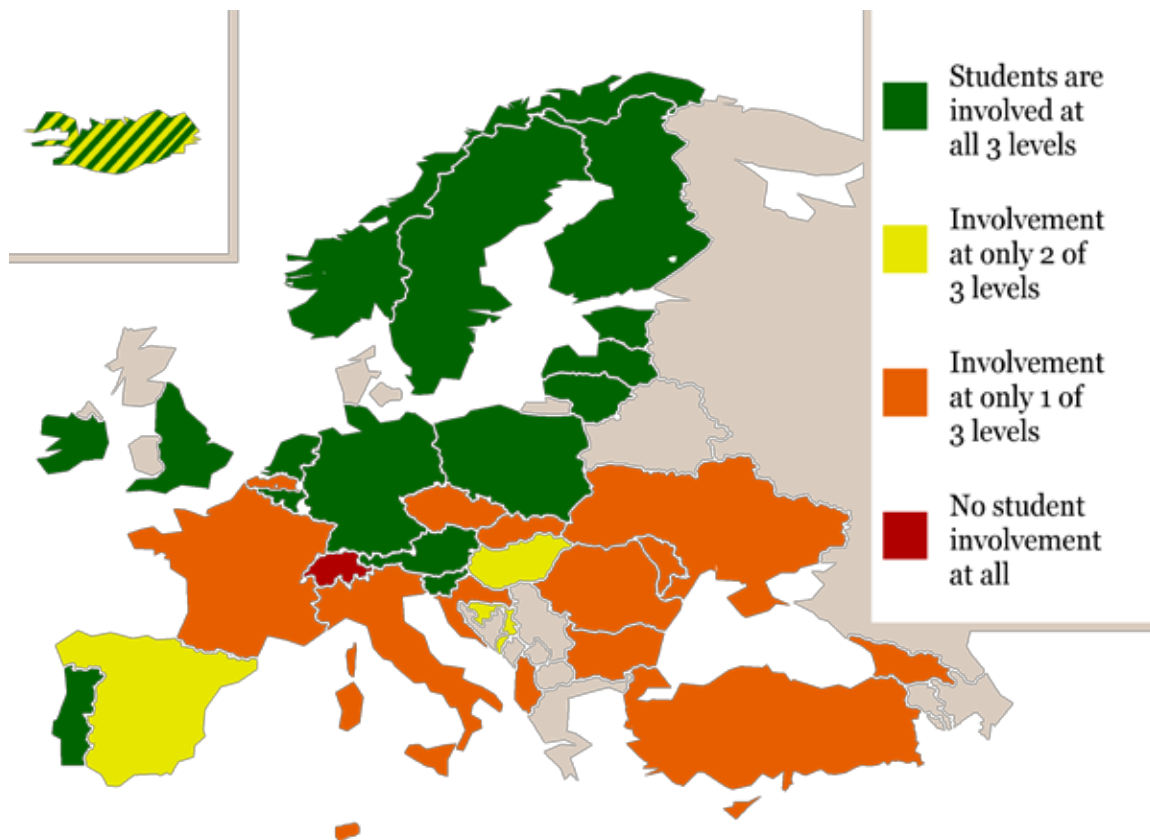
The analysis at which levels students participate in quality assurance activities gives only a broad overview, however. There are several different ways, roles and modes in which students are participating in quality assurance throughout Europe. At the programme level, involvement of students takes place only through student questionnaires for all students and by the involvement of student representatives in respective bodies, committees or internal review teams. However, not in all cases both ways of student involvement are in place. Regarding student questionnaires, there have been quite some reports that students often do not see that those have any impact or value. This happens in cases where those questionnaires are not properly and systematically followed up.

Drawing on the results of a survey² recently carried out and published by ENQA allows some further conclusions regarding student involvement in external quality assurance. In line with the findings of this survey, ENQA's report suggests an overall improvement of student involvement: 27 out of the 31 surveyed agencies (87%) reported that students are in some ways involved in their quality assurance processes³.

2 Hanna Alaniska, Esteve Arboix Codina, Janet Bohrer, Rachel Dearlove, Sivi Eriksson, Emmi Helle, Lene Karin Wiberg: Student involvement in the processes of quality assurance agencies, ENQA, Helsinki, 2006, <http://www.enqa.eu/files/Student%20involvement.pdf> [2007-04-05]

3 ENQA 2006, page 32, Table 1

Fig.3: map student participation in QA



Almost half of the agencies surveyed state that students are involved in evaluation or accreditation teams (expert panels) which carry out site-visits. However, a significant number of agencies states that students are involved in other forms, which might (only) refer to interviews of (local) students during site-visits or a rather consultative involvement⁴. These findings suggest that the involvement of students as full members of external review teams is not “state of the art” yet in all countries. Regarding the decision-making bodies of quality assurance agencies, only 17 (55%) of the agencies surveyed by ENQA state that students are involved in those⁵.

Regarding the selection procedures of students as review team members, the ENQA survey concludes that most agencies either draw students from a pool of students, usually established by the national student union and other actors jointly, or rely upon individual nomination either by the national student union or student members of an agency’s board or decision-making body⁶. Good examples of well-established recruiting procedures for student members of review teams have been presented at the first European Forum for Quality Assurance, covering both a student pool (Germany) and a individual selection approach (Belgium – Flemish Community)⁷. From Switzerland it has been reported that the setup of a student pool has been dealt with as an integral part of the debate on establishing student involvement in quality assurance.

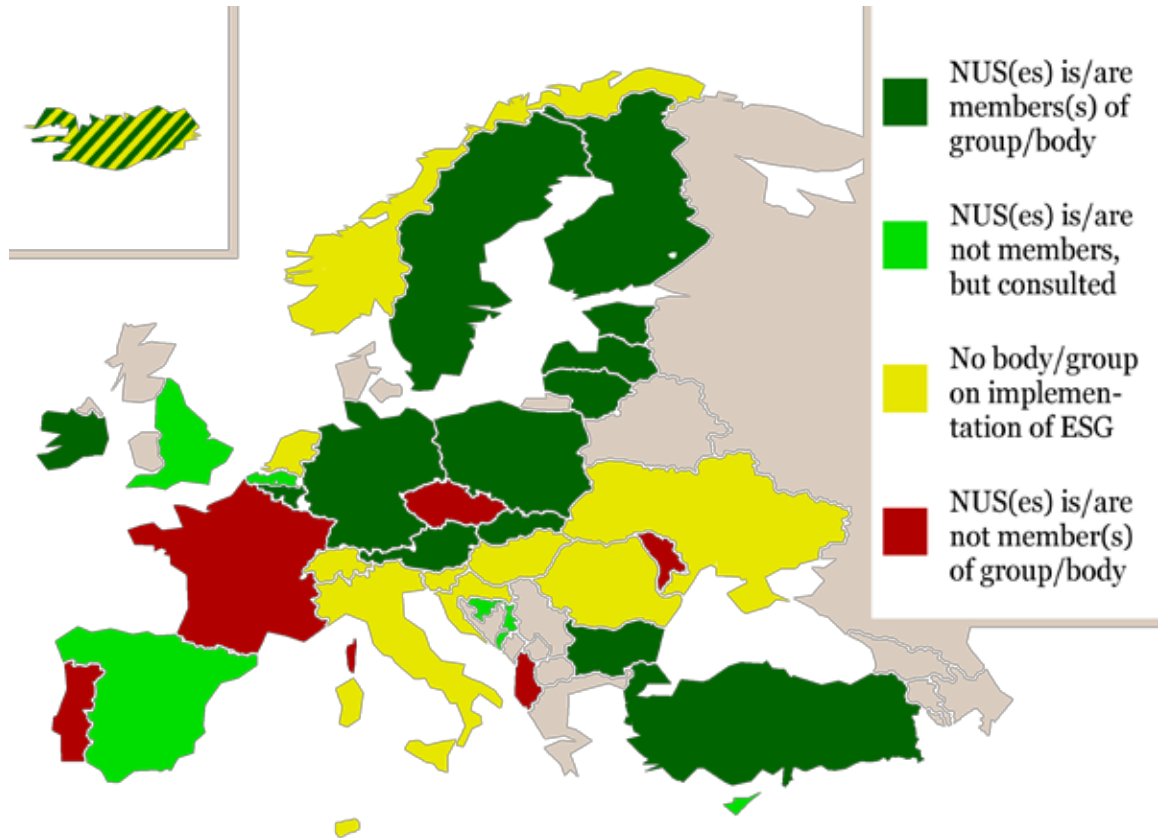
4 ENQA 2006, page 33, Table 2

5 ENQA 2006, page 37, Table 7

6 ENQA 2006, pages 33-34

7 Student participation in QA: strengths and challenges, by Sanja Brus, Janja Komljenovič, Daithí Mac Sithigh, Geert Noope and Colin Tück, in: Embedding Quality Culture in Higher Education. A selection of papers from the 1st European Forum for Quality Assurance, EUA, Brussels, 2007, http://www.eua.be/fileadmin/user_upload/files/Publications/EUA_QA_Forum_publication.pdf [2007-04-05]

Fig.4: involvement in ESG implementation



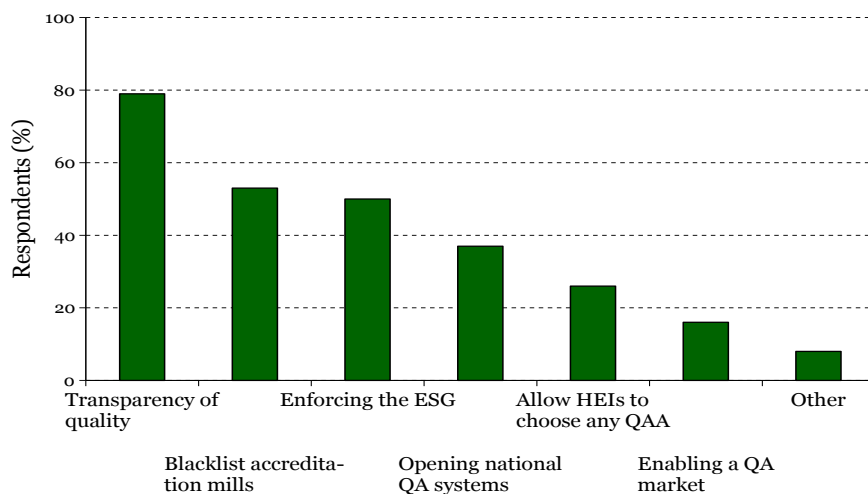
The reports given by national student unions suggest that in a lot of countries, a designated body or committee has been setup to oversee the implementation of the European Standards and Guidelines at national level or to evaluate compliance with them, respectively. However, not in all countries where such a committee has been established, the national student union(s) is/are represented or consulted in the work. Fig.4 gives an overview on the level of involvement of student unions in such activities.

2.4 – Towards a European Register for Quality Assurance Agencies

The Bergen Communiqué welcomed “the principle of a European register of quality assurance agencies based on national review”⁸ and asked the E4 Group to elaborate on the practicalities of its implementation. The E4 Group convened several times since to discuss those practicalities and regularly reported back to the signatory countries through the Bologna Follow-Up Group.

The findings of the survey clearly show that the broad majority of national student unions in Europe support the concept of a European Register. It has been indicated by 41% of the respondents that they fully agree with the European Register, with additional 25% stating that they support it partly or with some concerns. Just 5% expressed opposition to a European Register, whereas the remaining 29% does not hold any opinion or a neutral view on the matter. This figure indicates a need for additional clear information on the concept of the European Register and its rationale. The concerns express include the fear that a freedom of choice for higher education institutions on which agency to choose might undermine national quality standards or the fear of the establishment of a quality assurance market leading to lower standards due to competition between quality assurance agencies.

Fig.5: Possible impacts of a European Register



⁸ The European Higher Education Area – Achieving the Goals. Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Bergen, May 2005, http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050520_Bergen_Communique.pdf [2006-04-05]

The most widely anticipated impacts of a European Register are “Transparency of quality of higher education for students” (79% of respondents), “Blacklist accreditation mills (illegitimate agencies)” (53% of respondents) and “Enforcing the European Standards and Guidelines” (50% of respondents). Fig.5 gives an overview over all anticipated impacts of a European Register.

III. STUDENT PARTICIPATION

The importance of student participation has been continuously underlined by the ministers in the Bologna Process since the Prague Ministerial Summit. The need for student participation in order to successfully implement the Bologna Process was readily recognised and, on the European level, turned into practice by ESIB taking part in the Bologna Follow-up group, its working groups and many Bologna Seminars. Most governments and the other consultative members support and try to facilitate for ESIB to be an active partner in the Process. This chapter is rather about how student participation is functioning at the national and institutional level, where the implementation of the Bologna Process actually takes place and where the majority of the students have their daily activities. The picture emerging from the national and institutional levels is more diverse and less positive than that from the European level.

Conclusions

There seems to be no real improvement of the overall situation regarding student participation since 2005. There is a small group of countries that reported a fairly good situation already in 2005, mainly the Baltic countries, Finland, France, Norway and Sweden, but at the same time there are countries where the situation seem to get worse, as in Austria and Denmark, and a large group of countries where nothing much seems to happen in this regard as in Croatia, Hungary, Italy or Spain. This lack in substantial improvement is true regarding everything, apart from the student participation in quality Assurance procedures; in this area there is improvement in student participation. This is discussed more extensively in the chapter on Quality Assurance, similarly, student participation in the work with Qualifications Frameworks is discussed in the chapter on qualifications frameworks.

In general students want to increase the participation at the level or in the groups they understand as most important for the student body. In which groups or at which level this need for improvement is the greatest, varies across the countries. In general it seems as if the students are best represented at the highest level in the HEI, with less possibilities both at the national level and the programme, course or faculty level. Furthermore national student unions express that student representatives are most independent on the national level and least independent on the faculty, programme or course level. At the level of the HEI there is a clear East-West-divide, where the Eastern European national student unions report less independence on the HEI level than the Western European unions.

Furthermore the issues concerning legislation and attitudes of other stakeholders, teachers and administrative staff in the HEIs, reported on already in 2005, should have been overcome by now. Student participation has been a topic in the Bologna Process since 2001; it is not acceptable that we see problems with legislation and the attitude of governments and professors toward student participation still in the year 2007.

Due to the above reported state of the art the recommendations in this area are very similar to the once from 2005.

Recommendations:

- The lack of legal regulations for real student participation needs to be overcome.
- Student involvement in informal bodies that prepare decisions needs to be improved.
- Students must be allowed to take part also in topics related to finances, hiring of staff and working conditions.
- The mentality of other stakeholders, who are not used or willing to consider students as equal partners whose opinions do not count or even principally see them as troublemakers, has to change.
- Governments and/or HEIs must value the opinion of students even if they are different from their own.
- The lack of financial and human resources of student unions and representatives needs to be solved.
- The used “management models” of HEI governance bear the risk to endanger a proper involvement of academic staff and students and should therefore not be introduced.

3.1 – Student participation on the national level

A large number of unions state that they are consulted or involved in processes at the national level in some way or the other. But they are in most cases not full members of the groups and boards they are in. An exception can be seen in the Baltic states, Finland, France, Ireland, Norway and Sweden, where students are members of almost all committees, working groups and boards that exist on national level, within the ministry of education or in bodies like the QA agency.

In some other European countries the student unions are only full members in some of the decision making bodies, but still consulted in most other bodies working with HE. This is the situation in Austria, Belgium (Flemish Community), Croatia, Czech Republic, Switzerland and Turkey.

There is an important difference between formal involvement of students and true influence and equal participation. This can be clearly seen in the chapter on qualifications frameworks, where it has been surveyed how the student unions took part in the consultation on the matter. Clearly formal involvement does not always guarantee student participation and this is something that is reported on from many of the national student unions. This problem needs to be addressed and the HEI and governments need to take their responsibility in realising true student participation.

At the same time the situation in many European countries is still that that involvement of students on the national level is limited to a solely consultative role. This is the case in for example Georgia, Hungary, Italy, Serbia and the Netherlands. Some national unions report that even the consultative role is very limited or that they are not consulted at all, as is the case in Albania and Spain. In addition to this a couple of unions also points out the importance of being consulted in the preparatory phase of decision making and asks for more involvement in the early stages of discussions.

When introducing a reform of the HE system, it is important to also make sure that good features from the old system are kept. The Bologna Process should not worsen the possibilities for true and efficient student participation. In Germany the national student union is worried about that the change of the study programmes into a three-cycle system leads to more rigid programmes which gives less possibility for student participation. This kind of development should be avoided, at the same time as the Bologna three-

cycle system is implemented.

In 7 countries (Finland, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, Norway Slovenia and Sweden) the national student union or other students (for example Bologna Promoters) have been asked to contribute to the National Report sent to Bologna Follow-up group before the London summit. For the national report to be national in the usual sense of the Bologna Process, it is important that all the partners in the process had a chance to contribute to the report. In some cases (Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Austria and Switzerland), it seems as if the rectors conference has gotten the possibility to comment on the report, but the students not.

3.2 – Student participation within the HEIs

Most European countries have some kind of student representation at the highest level of the HEI. It varies if the students are full members of bodies, how many and which bodies they are part of and if it is regulated by law that students have to be represented or not.

At the department/faculty/programme level the situation for student representation is more difficult. It seems to be the case in several countries that students have to be represented at the highest level of the HEI, but not at the lower levels in the HEI, Austria and Hungary are examples of this.

There are some differences in representation according to the matter discussed. In several cases, students are not allowed to take part in decisions concerning staff or budget matters, or the students can only take part on issues concerning student matters in a very limited sense. In some countries the representation is different according to type of institution (public/private, university/polytechnic), but there are also examples of difference according to regions in some countries. In Iceland and Portugal, students are represented differently according to if the university is private or public and the representation in the public sector is significantly better than in the private one. Moreover in Germany the representation differs according to state, in Switzerland universities and polytechnics have different rules for student participation, and this is also the case in Finland and Iceland, even if the differences in these countries are becoming smaller and smaller.

3.3 – Perception of students by other stakeholders in higher education

The perception of students by other stakeholders in higher education is important since this will determine how the students participating in working groups, senates, seminars and other activities will be judged and treated.

Some countries (Cyprus, Finland, Lithuania, Slovakia, Sweden, and Norway) report that they do not have any big problems with the perception of the other stakeholders. They report being treated with respect and do not feel questioned in their competence or as representatives for the student body. In the “Bologna with Student Eyes” from 2005, Finland, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden, reported the same situation as this time. This could indicate that the partnership approach in higher education is consolidated in these countries.

In Hungary, Iceland, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia, and the rest of the Baltic countries there seem to be no big problems with legislation regarding student participation, but the attitude of the rest of the academic and administrative community in the HEI makes it difficult to have true student influence in these countries. This, once again, underlines the importance of the perception of students by other stakeholder as

a prerequisite for true student participation. The description given by a respondent from the Netherlands illustrates this problem very nicely: “... *At some institutions, the student councils play an important role, since the institutions consider their opinions as valuable. Other institutions however really keep everything at the letter of the law and they only listen to students because they have to.*”

In addition there are also reports of students being treated as observers, clients or customers. In one case (Latvia) they are even reported as being treated as minors or as obstacles.

3.4 – Independence of student unions/representatives

For genuine student involvement in all parts of HEI and in issues regarding students on the national level, it is a prerequisite that student representatives can work independent of the state, the HEI, political parties and other policy makers. In most countries in the EHEA student representatives can work independently at the national level, but it is more difficult at the level of the HEI and even more so at faculty or programme level, the maps also indicate this. One reason for this could be that at the lower levels (programme, course, and faculty) students are working in the same academic community in which they are pursuing their studies. This means that students are working with the academic staff that has direct influence over their studies. In 2005 we got reports about students facing pressure and in some cases even blackmail from professors and administrative staff. Due to the way the questionnaire was built for this report we do not have any records of practices like this time. This should however not lead to the conclusion that practices of pressurising students are eliminated by now.

Fig.6: National level

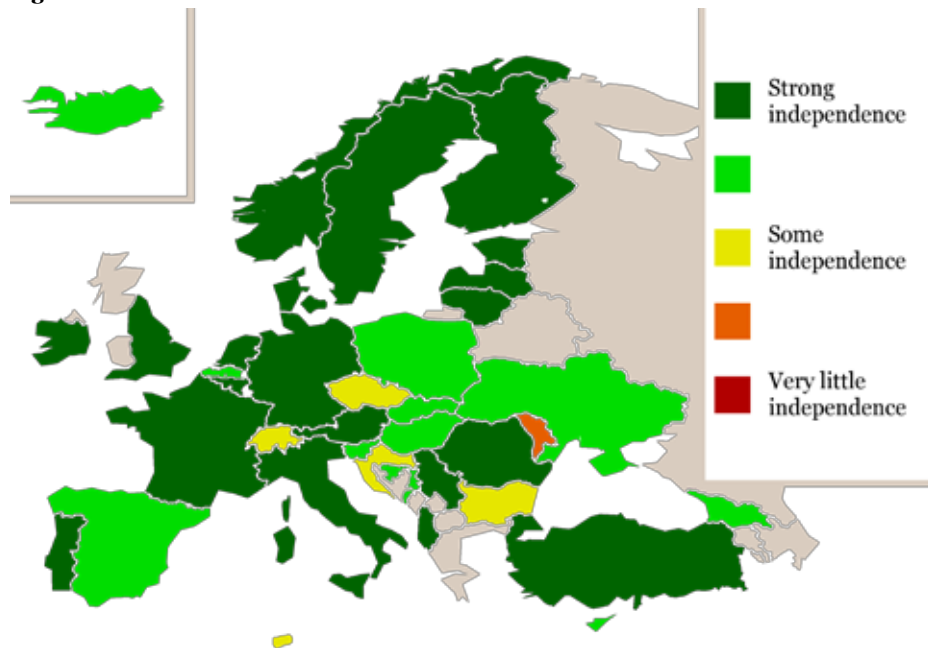


Fig. 7: HEI level

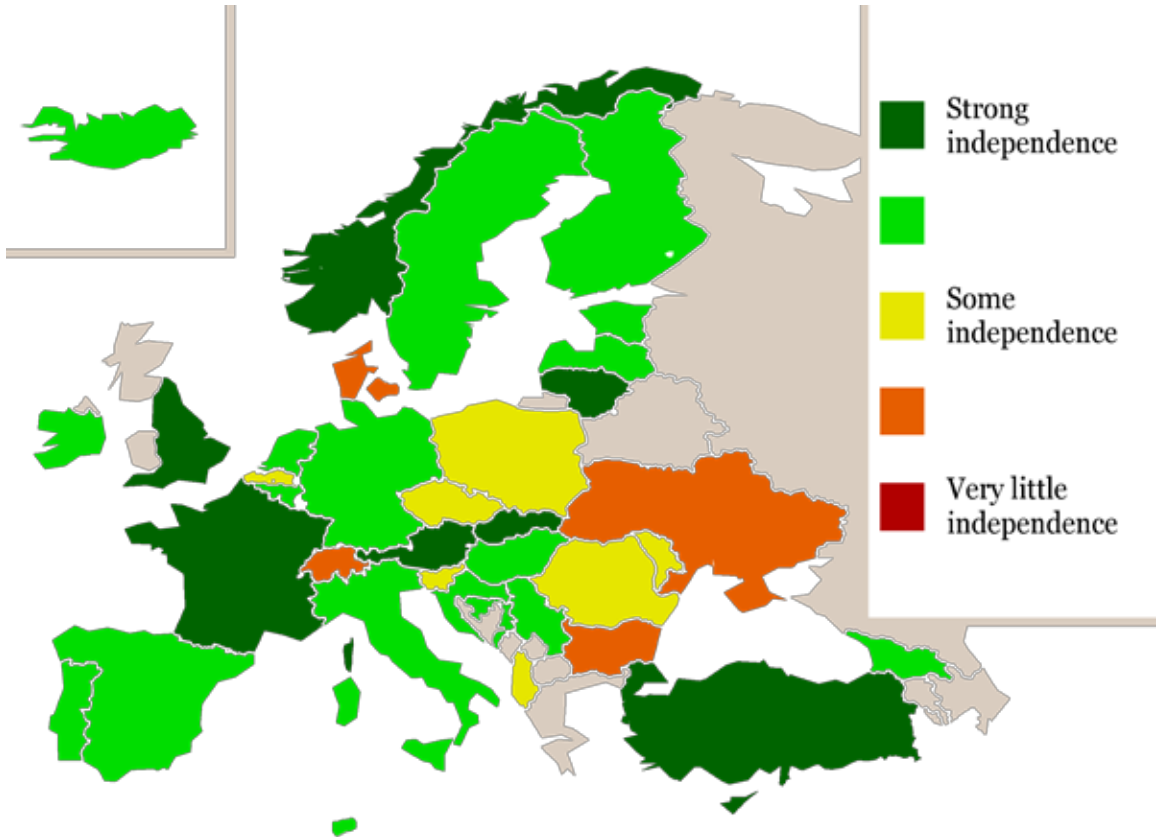
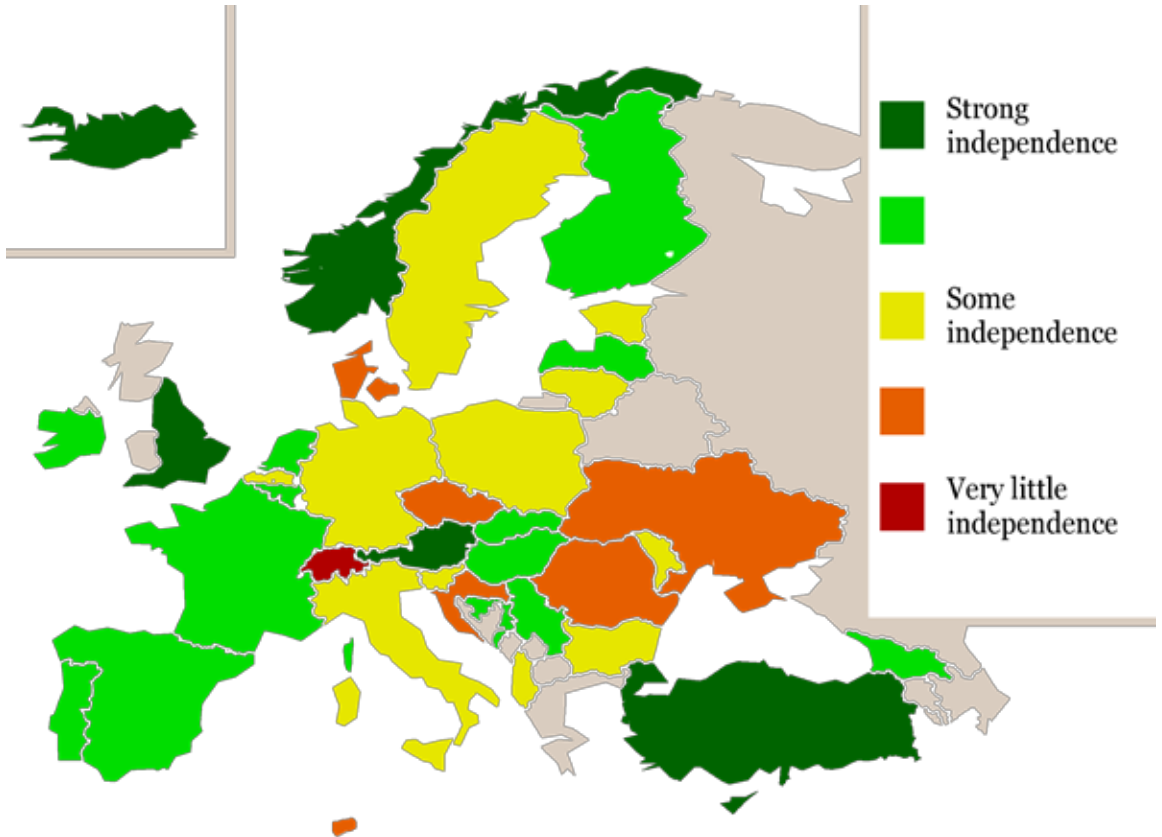


Fig.8: Faculty level

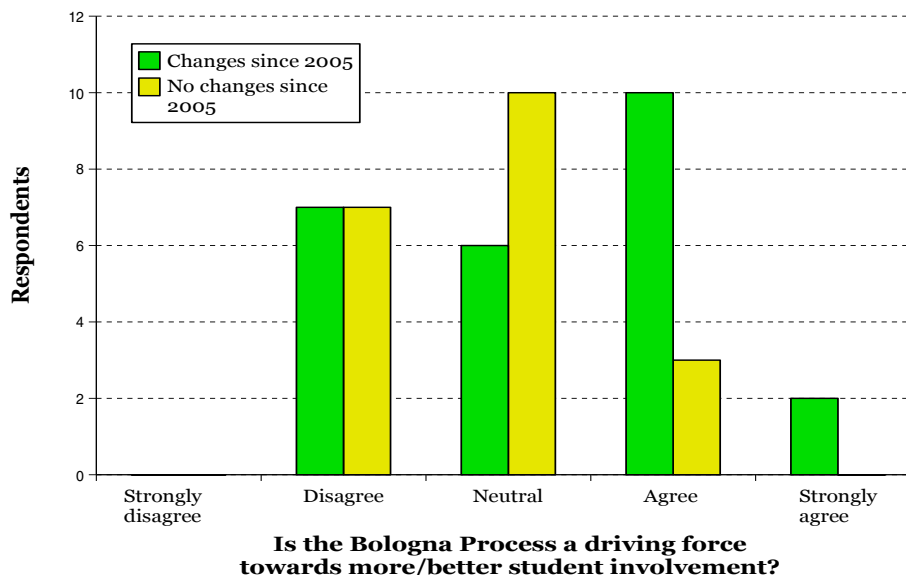


3.5 – Changes in student participation

25 unions state that there have been changes in the student participation since 2005 and 20 unions state that there have been no changes. 7 of the unions who states that there have been changes also states that the Bologna Process is not a driving force towards more or better student involvement in their country, this is the case in Albania, Czech Republic, Germany, Latvia, the Netherlands, Romania and the United Kingdom. This number is worrying since it might imply that the changes that occurred are negative and caused by the Bologna Process. On the other hand 12 unions stated that the Bologna Process is a strong or very strong driving force towards more or better student involvement in their country. This is especially positive in cases like Georgia, Serbia and Turkey. Also SAMOK (Finland) and BÍSN (Iceland) stated that there have been changes and they see the Bologna Process as a driving force towards more or better student involvement. This is positive since Finland and Iceland are countries where possibilities for student participation have been different according to type of HEI. Both SAMOK and BÍSN represent students from Polytechnics and this might point towards an improved situation for these students.

Most unions who stated that there have been no changes in the student participation, also indicate that they see the Bologna Process as a neutral force in this matter, it is neither a force towards more or better participation nor in the opposite direction. But at the same time there are 7 unions who say that they disagree with the statement that the Bologna Process is a driving force towards more/better student involvement. In the cases of Denmark and Switzerland this could be explained with that they saw a worsening situation already before 2005, and no great improvements since. In other cases, as in Croatia, Hungary or Ukraine it could indicate that the students want to see changes but this has not happened yet.

Fig.9: Changes since 2005



The situation was already before 2005 getting worse in Austria and Denmark and from these countries there are still no changes to the better. The “management model” that is used to steer higher education institutions in these countries makes it very difficult to have student participation. This model seems to be difficult to combine with democratically governed HEI and should not be looked at as a good model for HE governance.

From the Czech Republic there are also reports about a worsened situation for student participation. Due to a modification in the Higher Education Act that came into force in January 2006, students have lost much of their possibilities to influence the wording of the study and examination rules at each faculty. In the Academic Senates the rules changed so that the senates can only approve internal regulations in case they are presented by the rector or the dean. This also diminished the possibilities for students to influence the study and examination rules. On top of this there are calls for strengthening the power of the rectors and the deans even more and the students face pressure from individual rectors to seriously limit student participation in the Academic Senate.

From the Czech Republic and Portugal there are indications that recommendations from the OECD has lead to, or might lead to, less student participation. This is a worrying development and governments should take care that HEIs continues to be governed in a democratic spirit.

The picture is very diverse all over Europe with no clear indication of where the problems are the greatest, but what becomes clear is that the Bologna Process is not everywhere seen as a good process for the sake of student participation and this is alarming since student participation has been at the heart of the process since 2001.

IV. MOBILITY

Mobility is stated as one of the core issues of the Bologna Process and is seen as a cornerstone for establishing the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Although mobility is one of the key issues of the Bologna Process it is still far from being accessible to all students and staff. In Bergen (2005) the ministers confirmed their commitment to facilitate the portability of loans and grants. Furthermore facilitation of visa and work permits and full recognition of study periods abroad was emphasised as one of the basic prerequisite for mobility. As financial and administrative problems are the major obstacle to mobility in the EHEA presently, this chapter particularly focuses on the portability of loans and grants, other financial support for mobile students and on the removal of administrative obstacles for student mobility.

Conclusions

From the results of the survey we can conclude that the situation in the EHEA is changing slowly. Although a lot of time and effort has been put into discussion on overcoming the obstacles, little action has been taken. Despite the fact that portability of loans and grants was identified as a goal in 2003 in the Berlin communiqué, there are still countries in the EHEA in which portability of loans and grants is not possible and in the cases where it is possible student unions report numerous obstacles.

Portability of loans and grants has not only proven to still be a problematic issue but it also in many cases does not meet the costs of living in host countries. It reduces the financial burden mobile students have to cope with when studying abroad, but it only presents a very limited support which mainly benefits western and northern European students. Portability of loans and grants, although being valuable financial support system, is however not solving the problem of financial obstacles mobile students face. Additional financial support such as European Mobility Fund or different financial support system similar to CEEPUS system is necessary for dealing with the financial issue comprehensively. In mean time some countries are taking the initiative and offering additional financial support to mobile students for covering travel costs, (higher) tuition fees and other extra costs (such as differences in living standards). However when available, there are often restrictions either regarding to the amount of money available or it is restricted to only a certain group of students.

Mobile students, in the majority of cases, face different treatment from home students and find themselves in situations where living and studying is more difficult than in their home country. In addition, they don't receive the support students living in the host country receive. From the survey it is also clear that in the majority of countries this situation will not improve but will more likely get even worse.

Despite the fact that mobility is considered to be one of the core goals of the Bologna Process it is still far from being reached. Too often politicians and stakeholders bring discussions only to a declarative level while consensus on concrete action is rarely made and action is taken even more rarely.

Recommendations

In order to overcome the discussed obstacles following issues need special attention:

- full portability of loans and grants to all EHEA countries for short periods of study and for full degrees
- additional financial support to cover the difference in living standards between home and host country. ESIB proposes to use either a system similar to CEEPUS or to create a European Mobility Fund.
- mobile students must not to be treated differently from other students in the host country

4.1 – Portability of loans and grants

Despite the fact that Ministers responsible for higher education made a clear commitment to facilitate the portability of grants and loans in the Berlin communiqué in 2003 and confirmed their commitment in the Bergen communiqué in 2005, there are still many restrictions to the portability of loans and grants. The results of the survey show that loans and grants are not portable to all EU countries and in the cases where there is portability there are more restrictions for portability of loans and grants to non-EU and to non-Bologna countries than within EU countries. Even when there are no obstacles to portability of loans and grants, it is more difficult to receive them for a full cycle than for a shorter study period (see Fig.10 & 11 on the following pages). Despite the constant commitments and the expressed will to increase the number of mobile students significantly, only in Finland, Iceland and Norway the grants/loans are now fully portable without any obstacles. On the other hand, in a number of countries, there are major obstacles for portability of loans and grants. The situation is particularly concerning in Romania and Croatia where loans and grants are not available to anyone and in Albania, Georgia and Serbia where portability is not possible at all.

Although portability of loans and grants is a very welcome support to mobile students, it often does not suffice. This is particularly true in countries where loans and grants are not high, compared to other EHEA countries. In these cases, despite having a loan or a grant fully portable it does not cover the living costs in the host country. It is clear that other measures need to be taken to remove one of the biggest obstacles to mobility. According to the Eurostudent 2005 study only around 5% of the student population is mobile, with the majority of them being so called free movers, i.e. students not taking part in an organised mobility programme or any kind of agreements between institutions and therefore not receiving any financial support.

In order to achieve the goal of accessible mobility to all students and staff, more financial support is required. ESIB has been proposing a couple possible solutions. A system similar to the CEEPUS could be established. CEEPUS is a system where funds are not transferred; instead an internal currency of “1 scholarship month” is used. Each country pays its incoming students and teachers and has to pledge at least 100 scholarship months per academic year. The CEEPUS agreement specifies that these grants are comprehensive grants linked to the local cost of living. Experience so far has shown that this system works very well.

Another proposal is to create a European Mobility Fund where all Bologna countries would support mobility. Grants from the Mobility Fund would differ between host countries and would be linked to the living costs in the country. The proposal has become well-known and is gaining support from more and more stakeholders.

Fig.10: Portability of Loans and Grants for up to a Year

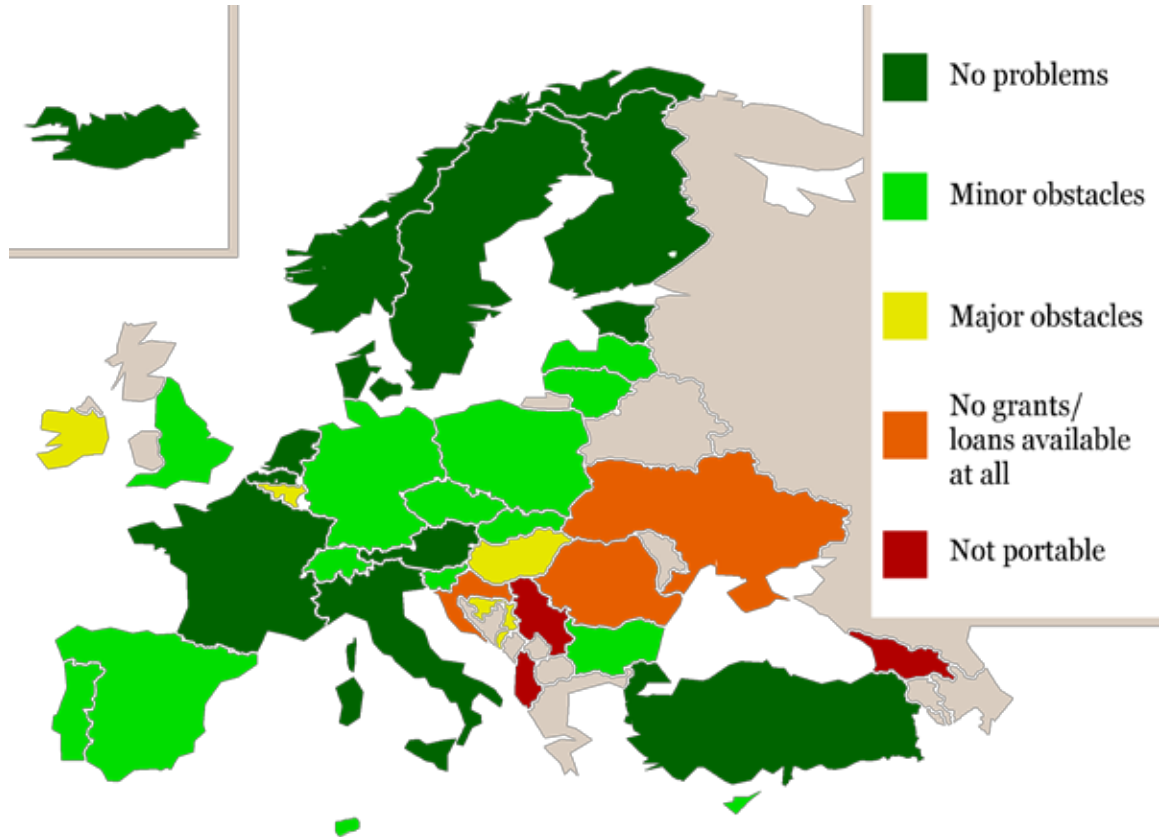
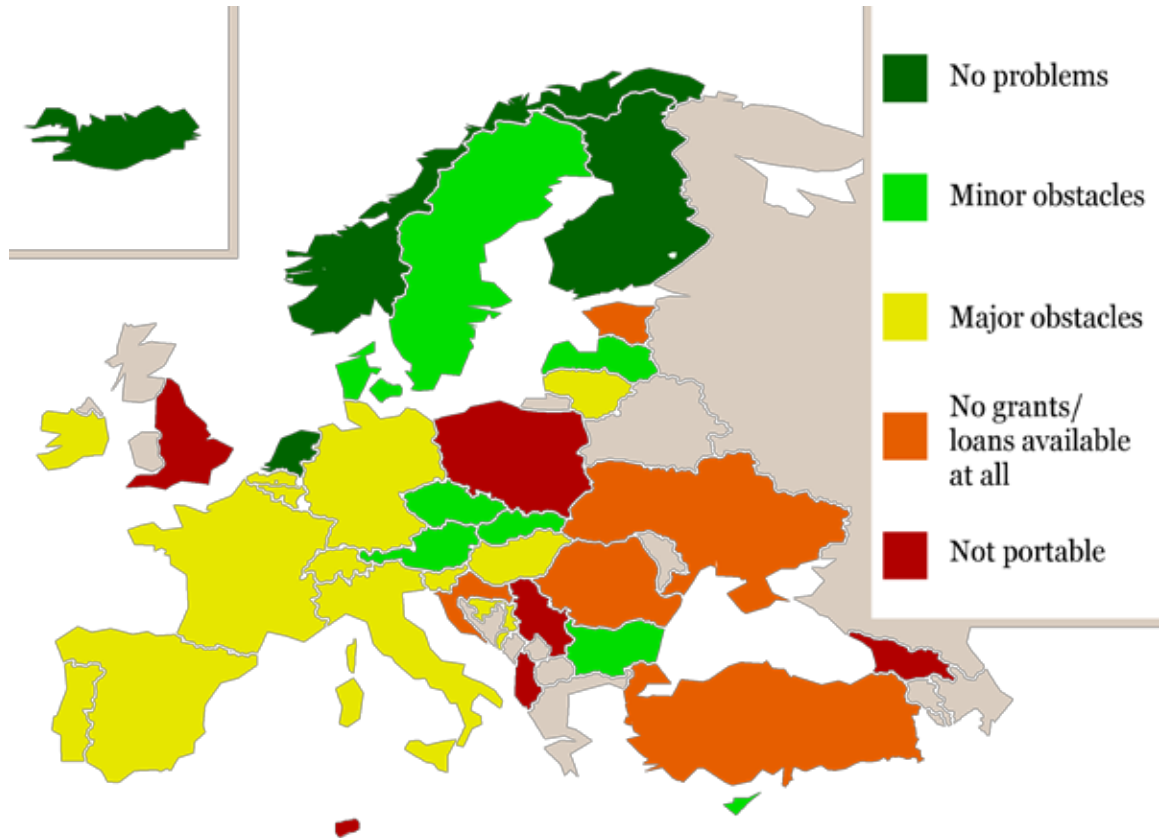


Fig.11: Portability of Loans and Grants for a Full Cycle

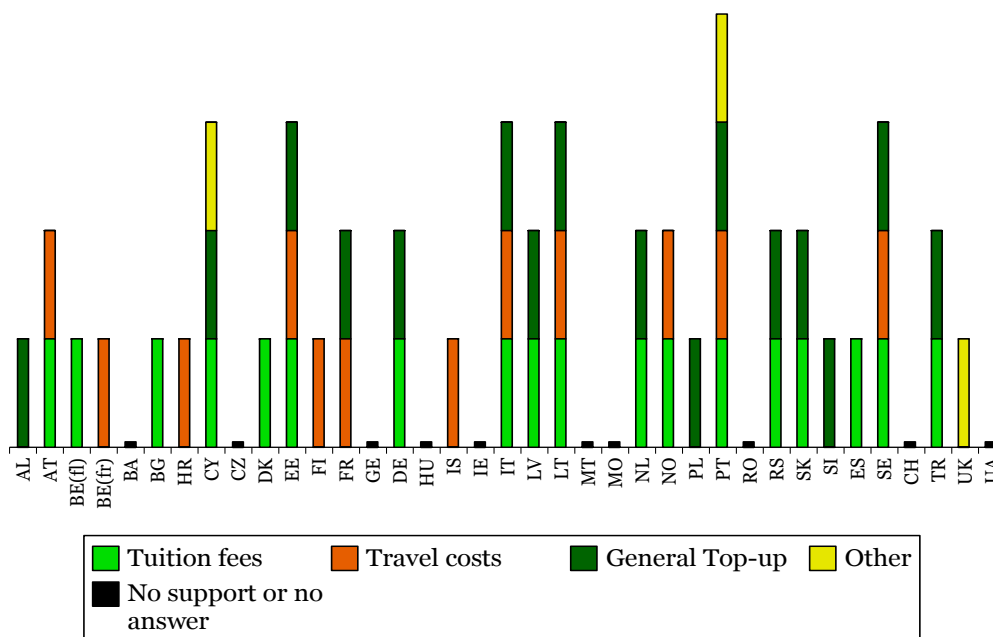


4.2 – Additional financial support for mobile students

Even when loans and grants are portable they rarely suffice to cover all the costs a student is faced with during the mobility period. Students may be faced with a tuition fee which does not exist in their country or is higher than in the home country, unless they are exempted from paying fees through arrangements such as the ERASMUS programmes. Every mobile student faces travelling costs and one must keep in mind the difference of living standards between the Bologna countries. This is especially relevant for students from Eastern and South-Eastern European countries studying in Western and Northern European countries, as the deviation between living standards is especially great among these countries.

The results of the survey show that only Estonia, Italy, Lithuania and Sweden provide the possibility for financial support to mobile students on all of the above mentioned issues (tuition fees, travel costs, higher living costs). In Switzerland all the financial support that exists is available almost only for Erasmus students who are entitled to a grant up to a maximum total amount of 120 Euro per month. Additional financial support is available almost only for students in mobility programmes in Lithuania, Finland and Italy. Serbia is a similar case where students may receive only specific scholarships based on bilateral agreements. In Iceland, for instance, additional financial support is available only to master and doctorate students, but not to bachelor students. This decreases the possibilities for students to be mobile while being in the first cycle of studies.

Fig.12: Types of additional support for mobile students



Mobility has many positive effects on the mobile individual, higher education institutions and on society. It brings a valuable experience of academic, cultural and social diversity, it eases networking and cooperation between higher education institutions necessary for development of the quality higher education and research and it contributes to development and maintenance of a democratic culture. Restrictions which make the financial support available only to certain groups of students greatly reduce the positive effects of mobility especially on institutions and on society.

Most students' unions point out that despite the portability of loans and grants and some additional financial support there is still not enough money to cover the expenses of a mobility period abroad. Some students' unions report that students need to work, sometimes even illegally, in order to support themselves while abroad.

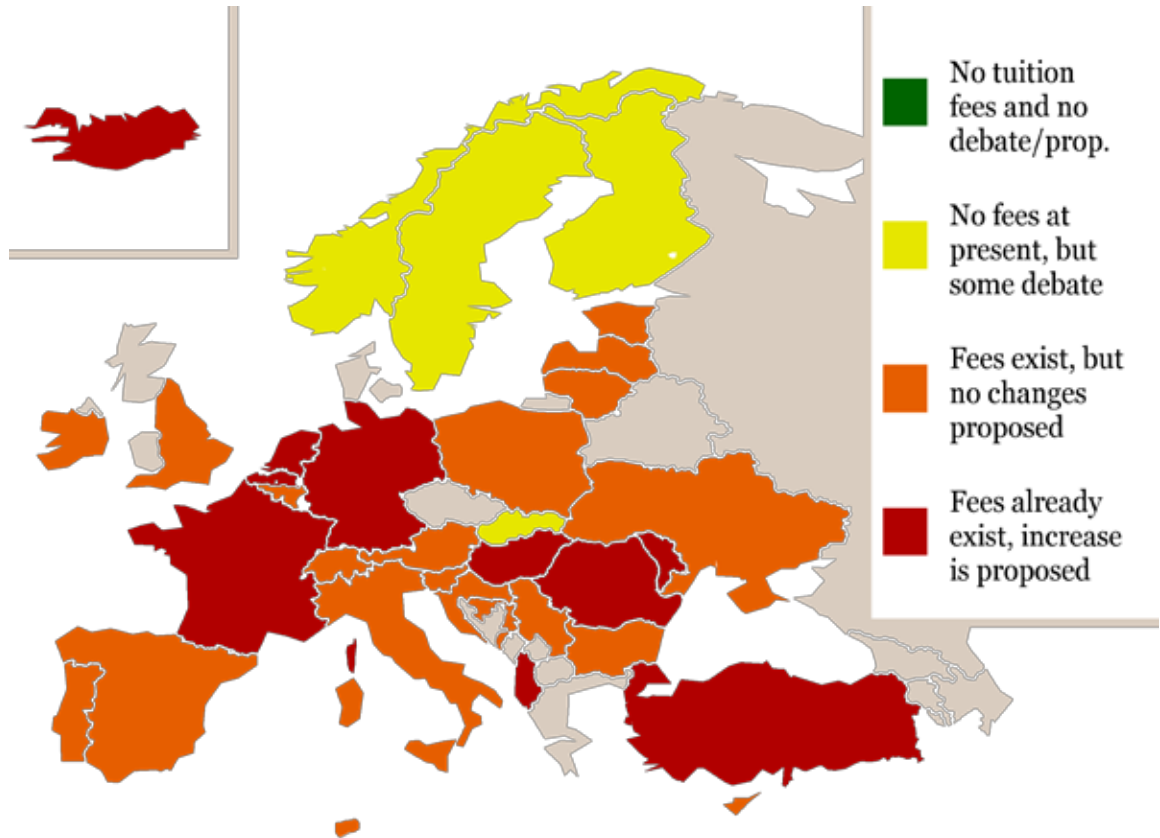
However there are some efforts made in some countries to make mobility throughout Europe available to their students. In Cyprus it is possible to obtain financial support for learning a foreign language. Proficiency of a foreign language strongly influences one's decision to be mobile and which country to go to.

4.3 – Discrimination of students

In the survey we looked at how mobile students are treated in their host countries. We asked whether students coming to study in a country are treated the same as the local students regarding paying tuition fees, receiving financial support, rights to work, social benefits and to housing. The results were discouraging; only in Albania, Slovakia and Turkey incoming students are treated equally with local students. On the other hand students coming to Germany, Hungary or Poland are treated differently in all 5 areas asked about in the survey. However when interpreting this data one must again keep in mind different living standards between countries. In countries where home students do not receive any support from the government it is not surprising that foreign students are treated the same way as domestic students. Discrimination is possible only in countries where systems of support are available to students. From the results it is still clear that in all countries, with only a few exceptions, foreign students are treated differently in regards to at least 2 out of the 5 issues and are therefore discriminated. This is yet another obstacle to mobility that should be addressed in a coherent manner.

It was also surveyed how the above mentioned situation will most likely change in the future. The current situation and discussions regarding implementation of (higher) tuition fees for incoming students were analysed. Again the results are revealing change for the worse despite all the discussions going on European level in order to reduce obstacles to mobility. In Albania, Belgium (Flemish Community), Germany, Hungary, Moldova, the Netherlands, Romania and Turkey fees for foreign students already exist and increases are being proposed independently from the general fee debate.

Fig. 13: proposed changes regarding the introduction of (higher) tuition fees for foreign students



V. CYCLES AND CREDITS

Although the three cycle system and the implementation of ECTS are among the earliest action lines agreed upon in the Bologna Process, our findings reveal that these two areas require particular attention, in order to ensure satisfactory implementation. In both cases, the findings reveal that these actions are implemented in a superficial fashion thus far, but huge problems are observed if one looks at the details.

Conclusions

Access to second cycle (Master) programmes for first cycle (Bachelor) graduates remains a major problem in many countries, with consequent unclear employment opportunities for Bachelor graduates. A particular problem is positive discrimination by institutions in favour of Bachelor graduates coming from the same institution. Enrolment statistics also suggest that the three cycle structure risks increasing gender disparities between women and men: female participation in second and third cycle studies appears to be low, indicating significant gender inequality. However, respective data is not available yet for the whole EHEA.

In many countries, no real curricular reform is taking place while the three-cycle structure is being introduced. This causes doubts regarding the employability of Bachelor graduates, placing them in a difficult position with unclear perspectives. Furthermore, the fitness of study programmes to cater for personal development of students and to enable students to become active and critical citizens is not proven.

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is far from being properly implemented in all institutions throughout the EHEA. A correct measuring of student workload, being a core principle of ECTS, has proven to be the most significant problem in the implementation of ECTS.

Although the Diploma Supplement is widely in place throughout Europe, there seems to be an enormous lack of awareness about this instrument, in particular amongst employers and even more amongst the wider public.

Recommendations

The following are among the most important issues requiring future attention:

- Positive discrimination in favour of Bachelor graduates from the same institution in admissions to Master programmes needs to be avoided.
- The low participation of women in the second and third cycles, as compared to the first cycle, requires particular attention. Detailed data on enrolment by gender and cycle is needed throughout the EHEA.
- The need for curricular reform, leading to meaningful qualifications, requires increased attention.
- The coexistence of 'old' and 'new' structure degrees in many countries requires closer attention. Smoother opportunities for transition of individual students need to be put in place.
- The correct measuring of student workload in the implementation of ECTS needs more attention. The principle of student workload must not be neglected.

- Further promote the Diploma Supplement and its benefits amongst students, employers and the general public.

5.1 – The three cycle system

The reform of the degree system towards the agreed three cycles, as described in the Bologna communiqués and the Qualifications Framework for the EHEA, continues to be one of the major aspects of reforms at national level. The vast majority of survey respondents state that the reform of the degree structure is an important part of the national debate (65%); however, very few regard it as the most important one. Only 12% of respondents state that a change of the degree system is not an issue at all.

It can further be concluded that the three cycle degree system has been formally implemented in most countries. More than half of the respondents report that all three cycles have been reformed accordingly, with an additional 22% reporting that at least first and second cycle reform has been concluded. However, also 22% report that the first and second cycle reform is still underway.

Those numbers seem to suggest the overwhelming success of degree structure reforms. A closer analysis reveals that this is not the case: out of the 56% of respondents reporting three cycles to be fully in place, more than half report that major problems are still to be solved. The following qualitative findings reveal that in many cases degree structure reforms have only taken place formally on the surface, but not in a sound way, leading to meaningful study programmes and more opportunities for students.

5.1.1 – Lack of curricular reform and employability

Most countries in the EHEA which are now implementing a three cycle system traditionally had a system consisting of a long first cycle and an optional doctorate degree. Within these systems, the Bachelor is a genuinely new award, often not directly comparable with any existing award in the country. It presents a major challenge to create Bachelor degrees which are relevant to the labour market and relevant for students as meaningful qualifications.

However, the findings of the survey reveal that real curricular reform, leading to a meaningful Bachelor qualification, often does not take place. Rather than that, old 'long' first cycles are often simply 'cut' into two degrees, Bachelor and Master. This leads to significant problems in terms of the value of the Bachelor qualification, its relevance and recognition in the labour market and its ability to allow students to become active and critical citizens, as well as catering for personal development. Such problems have been reported from Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Romania and Slovenia. This also has to be seen in connection with the fact that both employers and employees are still very rarely involved in quality assurance activities, and hence there is rarely a systematic dialogue between the labour market and higher education.

5.1.2 – Obstacles in access between cycles

The lack of sound curricular reform turns into a major obstacle in connection with limited access to the second cycle. Whereas on the one hand there are widespread doubts about the employability of Bachelor graduates in many countries, there is on the other hand no free access to Master study programmes for them. Hence, there is a lack of attractive perspectives for Bachelor students after graduation.

As “access” is referred to herein, it refers not only to the right of being considered for admission, but rather to the real opportunity of students to be admitted and enrolled in a study programme. From a huge number of countries, namely Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland⁹, France¹⁰, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Iceland¹¹, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Serbia and Turkey, it has been reported that the accessibility of a Master programme is a major obstacle for students. Also in countries where Master programmes have not yet been established, such as in Sweden, there are concerns that the accessibility might turn into a major problem for students.

The ways in which access to the Master level is limited are manifold: In some countries, higher education institutions may impose a *numerus clausus*, entrance exams or interviews for Master programmes (for instance in Germany). In other cases, state funding is not available to the extent that a sufficient amount of study places at Master level to meet the demand can be financed (for instance in Serbia). In addition, governments are abusing the Bologna degree structure to impose fees only on Master students or to impose higher fees on them in comparison to Bachelor students (for instance in Romania).

A further worrying development is that many respondents report positive discrimination by institutions in favour of Bachelor graduates from the same institutions in access to Master programmes. This has been reported from Belgium (Flemish community), Hungary, Italy, Latvia¹² and Poland. The survey has also revealed that studying a Master programme in another discipline than the Bachelor degree is quite rare and often connected to further obstacles. In particular it has been reported from Belgium (Flemish community), Estonia, Latvia and Switzerland that access to Master programmes is straightforward only in the same field of study.

5.1.3 – Negative impact on gender equality

As laid out in the 2005 edition of this report, evidence suggests that the Bologna three cycle structure has a negative impact on the participation of women in higher education, and thus bears the risk of threatening gender equality. Enrolment figures (see fig.14 on the following page) analysed by gender from various countries suggest that at Master level there is frequently a significantly lower proportion of women enrolled, as expressed in terms of the total number of students.

There is an urgent need for closer exploration of this issue both at national and European level. To be able to better identify the reasons behind those figures, and to be able to have respective figures available in all EHEA countries, more efforts on data collection and comparable data are crucial.

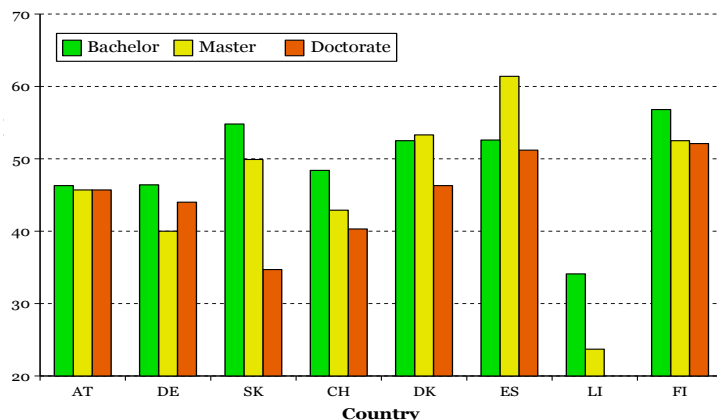
9 The problems in access to Master programmes applies only to the Finnish polytechnic sector.

10 Although there is no official access limitation for Master programmes, a de facto limitation takes place through a selection after the 1st year of study in a Master programme.

11 Problems reported from Iceland concerning access to the second cycle concern the university sector.

12 In Latvia, such problems primarily exist for short-cycle graduates wishing to continue a Bachelor programme..

Fig.14: Students by Gender



However, those who either want to change into the new structure, or those who do not succeed in finishing their studies within the granted timeframe for whatever reason, often experience major obstacles in getting their achievements recognised in a “new” programme. This has been reported in particular from Belgium (Flemish community) and Hungary.

Furthermore, even if no admissions take place anymore for “old” degree programmes, “old” degrees will still exist for a long time in every country. In some countries the officially described relation of “old” degrees with the new degrees are seen very critically by the national students’ union. For instance, old (long-cycle) qualifications in Serbia are sometimes only considered as being equivalent to a Bachelor degree, but less in value than a Master degree. Hence, graduates experience problems in accessing programmes leading to a Doctorate degree, which traditionally was much easier for them.

5.2 – ECTS – In place on the surface

The use of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) has been agreed upon since the early days of the Bologna Process. As long as one looks on the surface (cf. Fig.15 on following page), the implementation of ECTS appears to be a success story: About two thirds of the survey respondents state that ECTS has been implemented in their country, with additional 27% reporting that a national credit system is in place, which is compatible with ECTS. Only 7% report having a non-ECTS-compatible national credit system.

Although those figures appear promising, they do not guarantee that ECTS is in fact applied and fully used in every single study programme. Moreover, a closer look at ECTS implementation throughout Europe reveals that several principles of ECTS are not taken seriously. In Fig.16 (ECTS-Ground), the countries covered by

this report are rated according to their use of ECTS core features: those countries having implemented a learning outcomes approach fully, properly measuring student workload and basing ECTS credits on it and using ECTS not only for transfer, but also for accumulation, are marked green. Those complying at least with one of the three criteria fully and with the two remaining to some extent are highlighted in light green. Yellow colour has been assigned to countries complying with one criterion fully and with another at least to some extent. Orange has been assigned to those complying to only one criterion fully or complying to two at least partly. The remaining countries are displayed in red.

Fig. 15: ECTS implementation in the surface

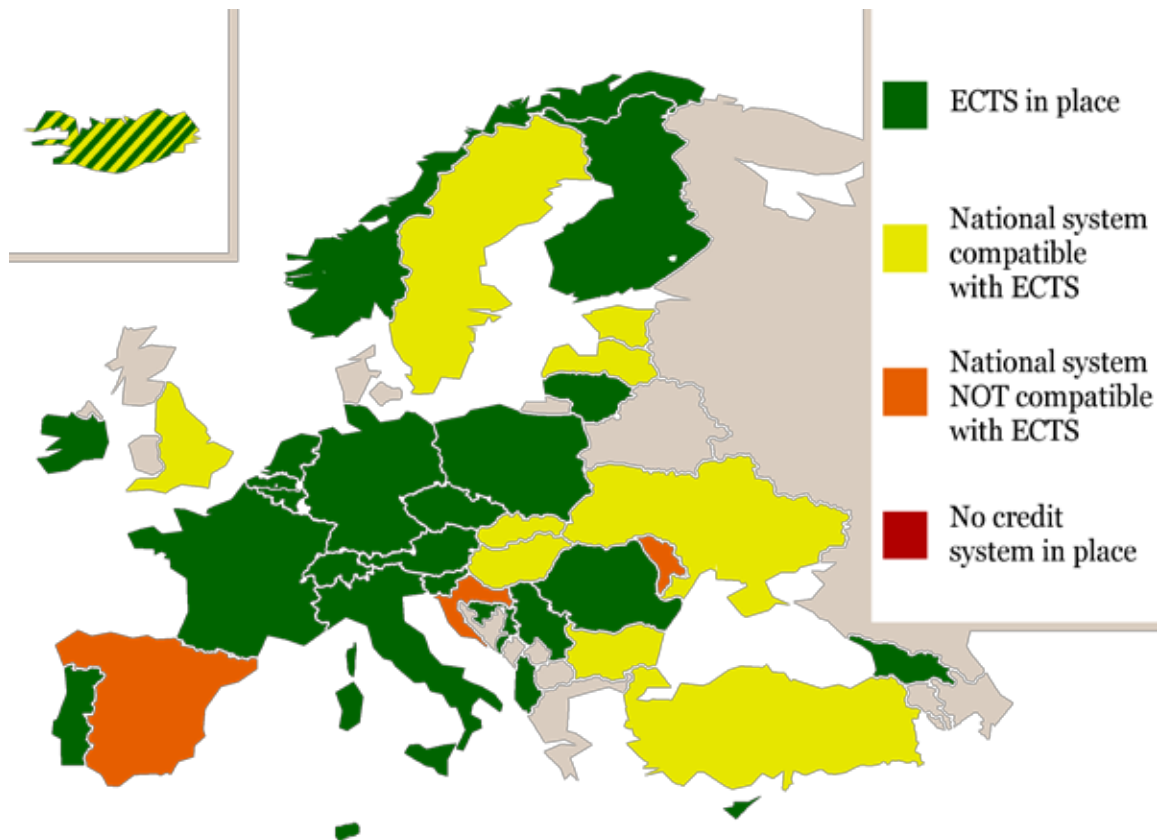
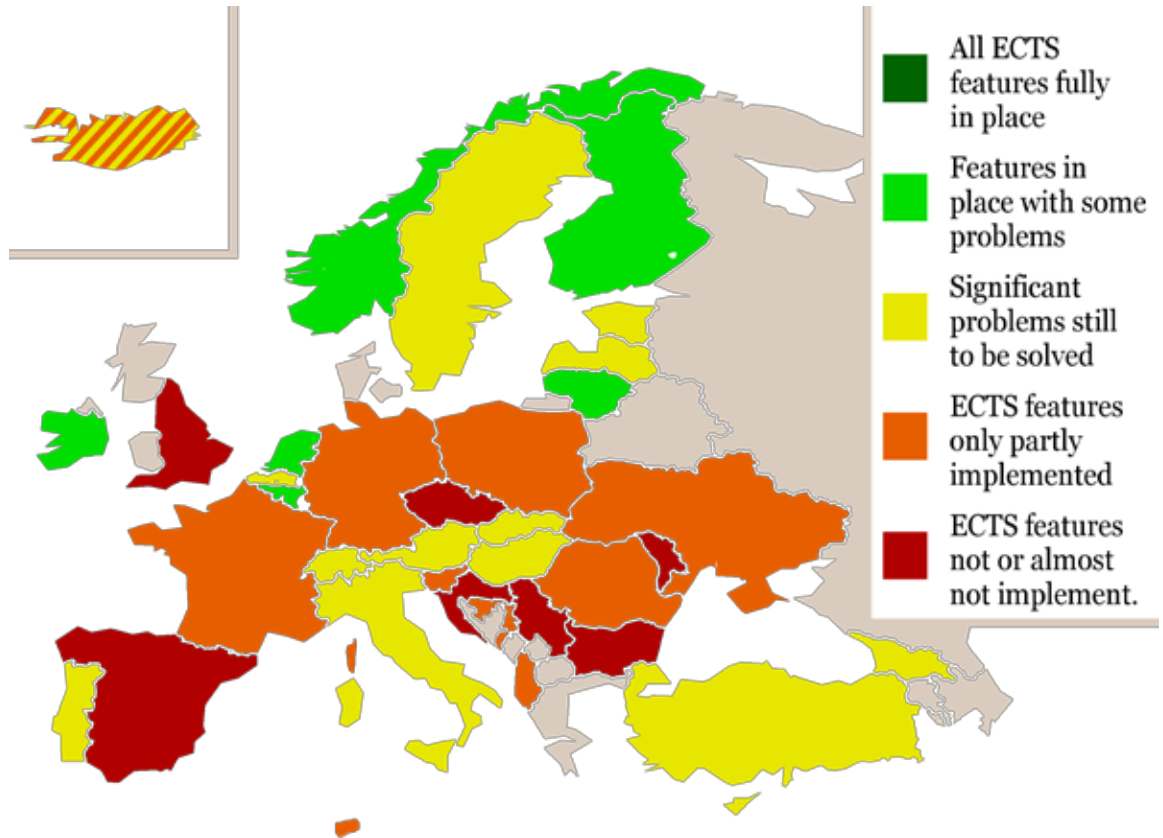


Fig.16: ECTS implementation in the ground



The map “ECTS on the ground” shows a significantly different picture of Europe and underlines the need for much more attention to full and proper implementation of ECTS. Also the findings of the survey reveal clearly that the issue of student workload is the most neglected principle of ECTS. From only three countries it has been reported that student workload is properly measured and credits are adequately linked to student workload. In all other countries, workload is either measured but not properly linked to credit, not adequately or not at all measured.

5.3 – The Diploma Supplement

In the Bologna Joint Declaration (1999) it has been firstly stated that the Diploma Supplement should be used to make degrees easily readable and comparable in the emerging EHEA. In their Berlin Communiqué (2003), European ministers of higher education set the goal that every student graduating from 2005 should receive a Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge.

Whereas few national unions of students report that the Diploma Supplement is not yet introduced in their country yet or is currently in the phase of implementation, in the clear majority of countries the Diploma Supplement is issued automatically. However, in a significant number of countries the Diploma Supplement is not issued automatically to all students, but only in certain groups of institutions or for certain programmes. Sometimes, for instance, a Diploma Supplement is only issued to graduates of Bologna-type degrees, but not to graduates of traditional national study programmes.

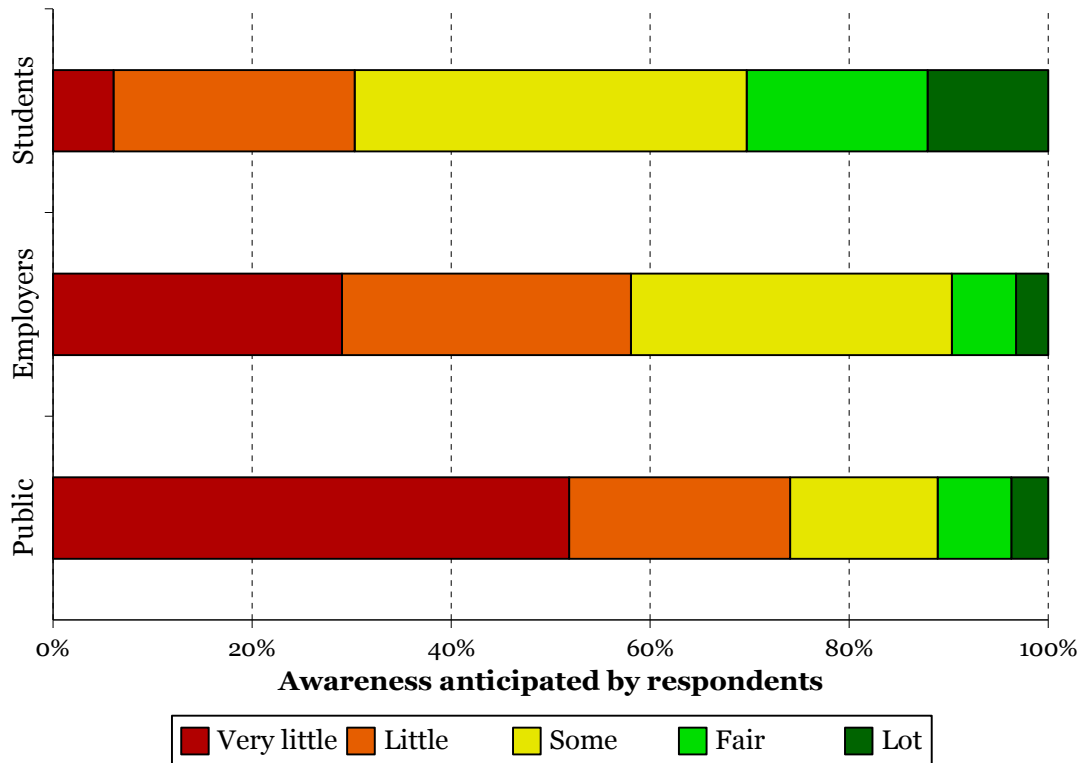
Normally the Diploma Supplement is issued free of charge. However, in Croatia, Lithuania, Poland, Serbia and Slovakia students are sometimes charged a fee for issuing a Diploma Supplement. In almost every country the Diploma Supplement is issued in a widely-spoken European language, which is English in most cases and French in a few others. Only in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Republika Srpska), Turkey and Ukraine¹³ the Diploma Supplement is only issued in the local language.

The awareness of different groups about the Diploma Supplement seems to be a major problem in all countries, as one can see from Figure 17. Whereas the national unions of students usually anticipate that amongst students there is at least some awareness about the Diploma Supplement, a clear majority of respondents anticipate that the general public is almost not aware at all about the Diploma Supplement. The awareness of employers is usually seen a bit higher as compared to the general public. However, it is seen much lower than the awareness of students and most respondents see only little or some awareness of employers.

13

Ukrainian students going abroad can receive an English translation upon request.

Fig. 17: Awareness about the Diploma Supplement as anticipated by NUSes



VI. RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) made its first official entry into the Bologna Process in the Berlin Declaration, as an instrument to further promote the concept of lifelong learning. However, it was only in 2005, in the Bergen Declaration that recognition of prior learning, including non-formal and informal learning, became a priority subject to the stocktaking exercise and was linked to the development of qualifications frameworks. Although a late priority in the Bologna Process, procedures for some kind of recognition of prior learning have already been developed in some countries and in some sectors for a number of years, specifically in the cases of formal and some non-formal education and training. However, the challenges set forth by the Bologna Process in this field require a much more determined and wide-ranging action from countries in order to fully ensure the implementation of accessible and comprehensible procedures for the validation and recognition of learning achieved in different settings.

Conclusions

The findings of the survey indicate that the situation regarding the availability of RPL is diverse. In the large majority of the countries surveyed, there are no national policies designed for all institutions. Even when there are provisions for RPL at the national level, national bodies are absent or almost irrelevant. Higher education institutions are considered the main holders of responsibility for the promotion of RPL, spreading information and carrying the necessary procedures. However, in the absence of a solid implementation of these mechanisms at national level, institutions develop their own initiatives and policies, operating without any given guidelines. Consequently, the purpose for RPL also differs from country to country and even within the countries. The most common use of RPL is for entering a study program, closely followed by the allocation of some credits within traditional higher education programmes. However, there is a clear predominance of recognition of formal (national and foreign) and non-formal education. Universities still seem reluctant to validate informal learning.

A regional area needing urgent development on procedures for the recognition of prior learning was found by the respondents' answers. The total lack of provision for RPL in countries from the Balkans to Eastern Europe is a matter of concern, and further action should be taken. A further concern is that among those countries with developed RPL systems, a number are charging additional fees. These fees quite often vary depending on the status of the applicants and the type of study program or institution (public or private). Furthermore, the amounts can also vary between different higher education institutions and regions.

Evidence gathered indicates that there is no clear link between recognition of prior learning and the introduction of qualifications frameworks in the majority of the countries. Moreover, RPL is far from being a well-known mechanism among the wider public for assessing knowledge, skills and competences. These two findings combined illustrate how superficial the discussion and implementation of recognition of prior learning still is in the European Higher Education Area. This is also a sign of the difficulties HEIs are facing when taking the great and sole responsibility for the promotion of RPL in many countries.

Recommendations

- European guidelines for the recognition of prior learning should be introduced. These

guidelines could assist countries in the establishment of their own national system

- Creation of a comprehensive national RPL system in all countries, ensuring and promoting the provision for RPL in the entire national higher education systems
- Promotion of an approach based on competences and learning outcomes at all levels of education
- Development of national qualifications frameworks that cater for flexible entry routes and learning paths
- Ensuring further support to HEIs in order to fully implement RPL procedures
- Involving students and stakeholders in the process of reform and introduction of RPL
- Removal of any financial barriers and constraints to the full use of RPL for the purpose of entry and credit within a programme

6.1 – Availability of Recognition of Prior Learning

Fig. 1 show a variety of national positions regarding the introduction of recognition of prior learning, including non-formal and informal learning. It is quite obvious that a number of countries were unable to implement national-based RPL systems, covering all regions, educational sectors and institutions. There is a significant group of countries where RPL is actually just a local policy, depending on the will of some of the institutions that took the initiative. That is clearly the status in Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Republika Srpska), Denmark, Germany, Latvia, Moldova, Slovakia and Switzerland. In some cases, this is due to a broader organisational framework that promotes some kind of decentralisation.

Sweden on the other hand is currently reforming an old system of recognition, while Estonia, although having national legislation, is facing problems at the institutional level with the actual implementation of RPL. Other countries have national provisions for RPL but are establishing restrictions on its use, such as limiting it to those aged over 23 years old in Malta or setting a limit of 60 credits for allocation at the Bachelor level in Italy. In spite of this, it is the Balkans and the East European areas that should raise greater concern, since this is a wide area where recognition of prior learning is so far completely unavailable.

The countries that have a functioning system for RPL practise very different types of recognition. In Estonia, for example, recognition is facilitated only to students who move to different study programmes but inside the same institution. This kind of institutional conservatism is not reported from any other country but we can identify a main trend in the universities to only recognise formal qualifications, obtained either in national or in foreign institutions.

Alternatively, recognition of non-formal learning is also expanding in some of the countries surveyed. This trend is, however, bound to an existing formal link between the education and the training systems, or dependent on direct agreements between higher education institutions and entities operating in the broad training system (post secondary education, language courses, etc.) or providing for professional training in the context of the workplace (continuous labour training such as ICT courses designed for specific tasks, trainings delivered by professional associations, etc.). However, there is a growing number of countries that are actually debating or implementing systems for the validation of former professional and life experience for the purpose of credit within formal qualifications.

Fig.18: Availability of Recognition of Prior Learning

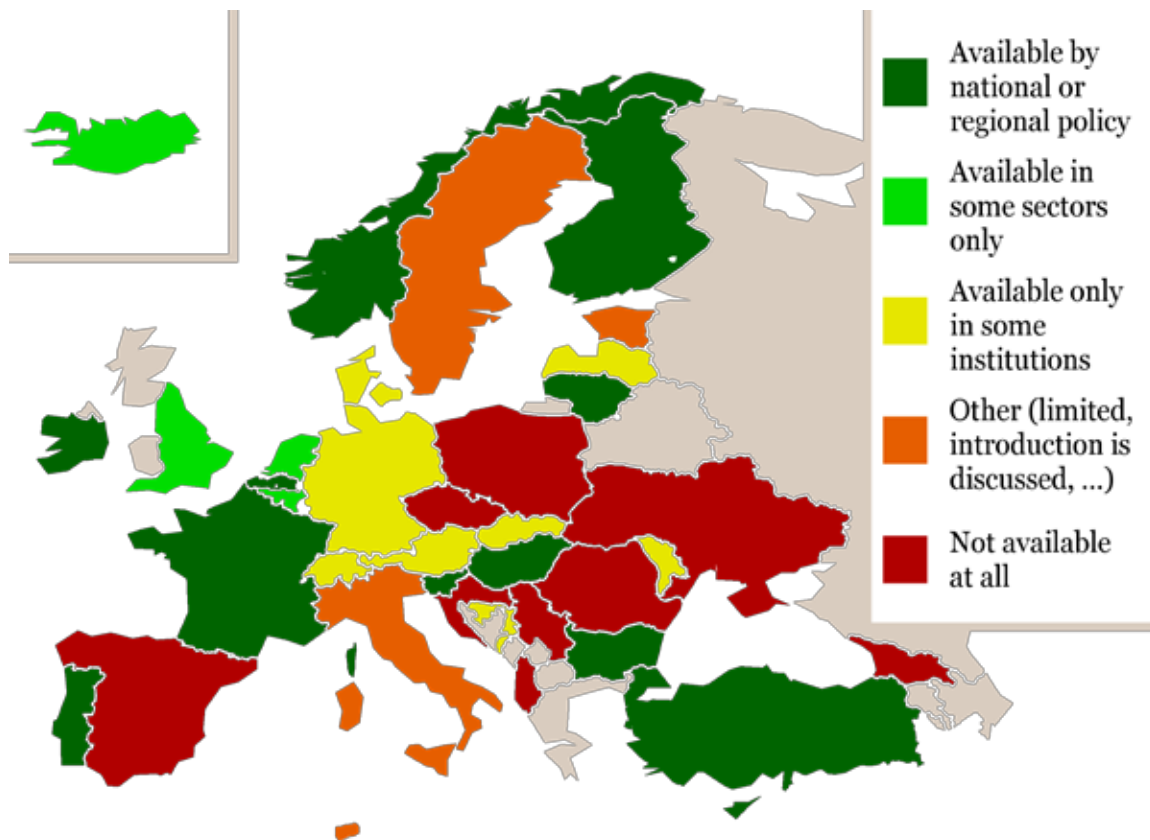
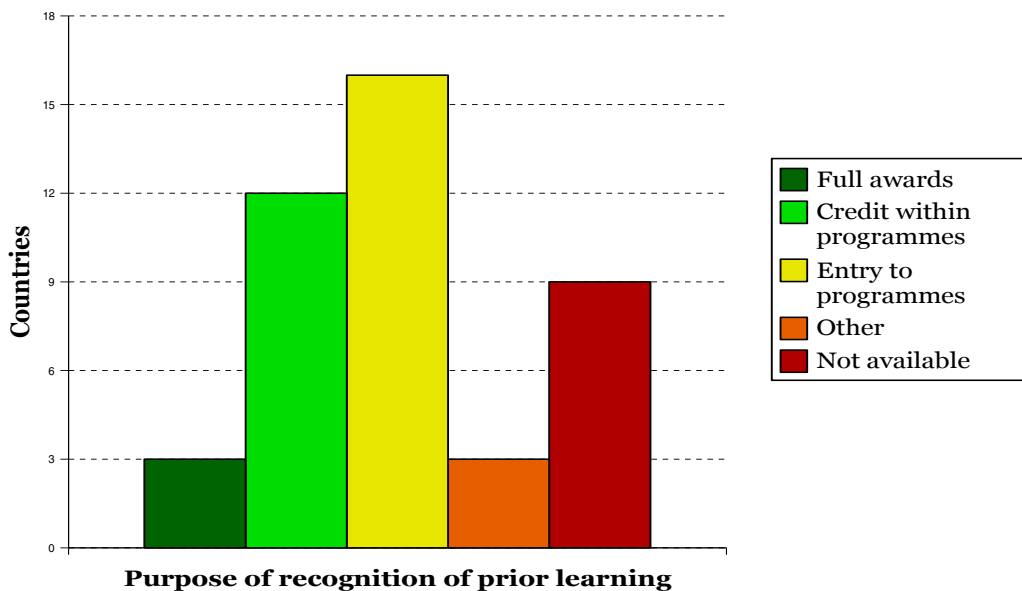


Fig.19: To what extent is RPL available?



RPL is available for very different purposes within the traditional higher education system. Whilst Belgium (French community), France and Ireland provide for full awards based on prior learning, the large majority of European countries set more modest aims for such a system, as we can see in Fig. 19. Most commonly, RPL is used as a means for widening access and substituting formal requirements (which are otherwise compulsory) for entry to a programme. Another common development is the use of RPL for credit within traditional higher education programmes, shortening study periods and releasing these students from traditional methods of formal, summative assessment. In some cases, there are references to the use of RPL both for the purposes of credit and entry. Switzerland and Estonia are again exceptions, since the system is highly dependent on institutional policy (and on canton provisions in the Swiss case).

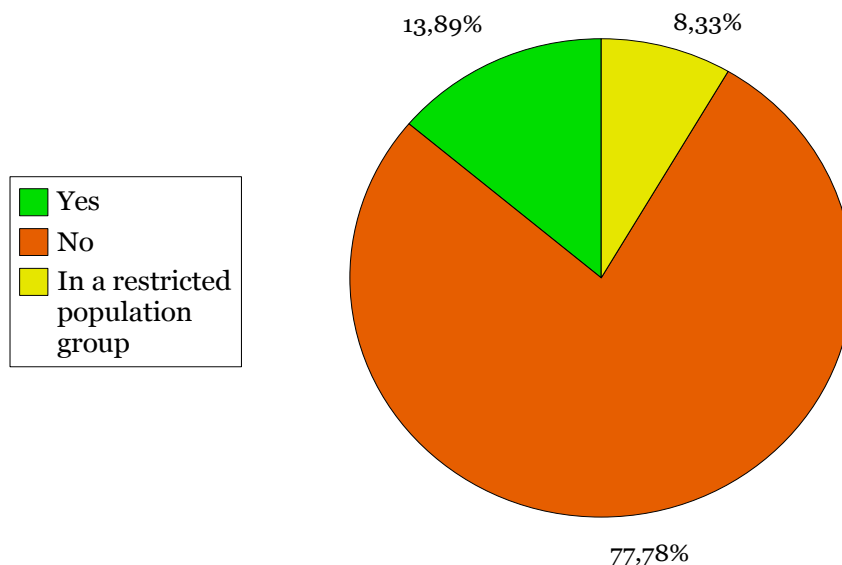
It is also possible to identify differences in the purpose given of RPL in binary systems, in which the professionally-oriented institutions make a more generous use of this instrument. RPL is not yet an issue viewed as a university duty by some of the most traditional sectors. In the absence of national provisions for the area, the differences of procedures and purposes given are even higher. It is quite obvious the need for national level guidelines to create a country coherent system. HEI also need support and assistance to develop their RPL procedures in such cases.

6.2 – Knowledge and involvement of stakeholders and the wider public

Regardless of having national provisions or not, higher education institutions play a very important role in the promotion of RPL. Even if there is any regional, sector or national organisation or centre devoted to the validation of knowledge, skills and competences achieved in different and alternative settings, 75% of the respondents state that HEIs hold the ultimate responsibility for the recognition of prior learning of their students and applicants under these procedures.

Some of these institutions are actually leading the introduction of these procedures and their work is not framed in any way by national discussion. That can explain the significant variety that one can find, especially when the country includes separate communities (linguistic, regional etc) or binary systems. It is also clear that many HEIs are facing some difficulties in establishing such a system, in many cases due to discussion, practice and expertise. That has also an impact on the knowledge that the wider society has about RPL.

Fig. 20: Is RPL well-known to the public?



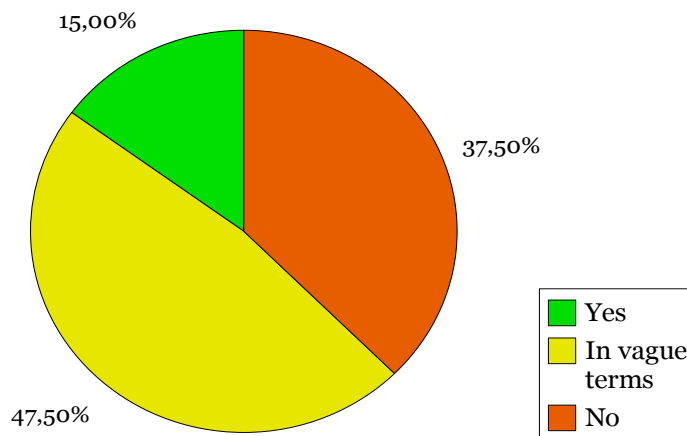
In fact, recognition of prior learning is not yet a common issue known by the public, even in the identified cases where recognition of formal and non-formal learning is present. The wider population outside the academic world is still unaware of the possibilities opened by RPL and ignores the procedures one must undertake to get its competences fully recognised. This has not become a topic of public discussion as of yet,

and even students are sometimes not conscious of this possibility. Institutions may have been given an area they are unable to cater for without greater assistance and involvement from public authorities.

It was possible to find some cases where RPL is known in a specific group of the population. Denmark points out that it is well-known in the area of teacher education and Latvia explains that students are informed by the HEI about this possibility. Signs of improvement in the knowledge about RPL are identified in Finland. Finally, Hungary, Iceland and Malta confirm that the existing procedures are quite well-known to the public.

National unions of students are also just entering into this debate, since only one third of the respondents declare that their organisation has a policy on the area of RPL. This is another indicator of the lack of discussion and awareness about this topic at the national level. These results reflect the fact that RPL has not yet become an issue or priority for the national HE system. The majority of the national unions of students that have policies are in favour of a large use of RPL in the traditional higher education system for the purpose of increasing the link between vocational and training systems with the traditional higher education system. RPL is also seen as an important element for the increase of social recognition of modes of learning achieved in other settings and also as a way to widen access and completion for students especially coming from non academic backgrounds.

Fig. 21: Is RPL part of the reform of qualifications frameworks?



Another interesting result relates to the link between RPL and the reform of qualifications frameworks (which are expected since 2005 in every member of the European Higher Education Area). A very large proportion of respondents do not see any significant integration of recognition of prior learning within the debate on qualifications frameworks. Such an overwhelming result can be explained on one hand by

the delay of the introduction of both reforms in many countries and even the lack of student involvement and consultation, namely for the national qualifications frameworks beyond the higher education levels and degrees (for further information, see chapter VII). On the other hand, this can also be looked at as a consequence of lack of public authorities' involvement in RPL (as previously identified) or the preference for an *a la carte* implementation of separate and unrelated reforms by Governments.

Regardless of what are the main causes for this, it is obvious that countries are either not progressing in their reforms; neither are they including students properly, nor addressing the public and promoting these reforms.

6.3 – Recognition of prior learning – available for whom?

The situation in many countries looks quite homogeneous with respect to awareness of students and the wider public about RPL and its link with the reforms on qualifications frameworks. But the map of Europe becomes again divided if we address the costs of RPL and who is charged with these. Many respondents did not answer this question, not being sure of the actual fee, since this is quite a new initiative lacking coherence, and provisions are hard to track. The fact that some universities establish their own system and charge as they see fit also makes it difficult to assess with accuracy the amount required to get the knowledge, skills and competences validated within the higher education system.

Nevertheless, it is possible to see that besides the Nordic and Baltic countries, only Austria, Hungary, Malta and Portugal do not establish in their national provisions any payment. Belgium (French community) and Estonia charge the same amount to every student, while Italy charges an amount per credit allocated which is much higher than the current tuition fees. The worst cases are Belgium (Flemish community), France, Ireland, the Netherlands and Switzerland, which charge for RPL differently according to the type and status of the institution, the type of study program and the status of the student or applicant.

VII. QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

The Bologna Process and the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) was primarily based on the development of a compatible and readable system of degree structures at the European level, able to facilitate mobility, transparency and recognition of higher education qualifications from country to country. The continuing discussion around this issue until Bergen led to the creation of an overarching European qualifications framework (the EHEA-QF) and to the commitment to the creation of compatible national qualifications frameworks for higher education by the Ministers.

Qualification frameworks (QF) have become more than a Bologna Process issue, since the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF-LLL) was also developed within the Lisbon Strategy of the European Union. The EQF-LLL covers all levels and areas of education and training systems, although some of its features do not show entire compatibility with the EHEA-QF. At the national level, the development of qualification frameworks, although facing different paces of implementation, is now producing the first results.

The reform of qualifications frameworks is a huge task, since these are not mere lists of degree structures. These are descriptors of the relationship between the degrees and between formal education and knowledge acquired in other learning settings. They also describe the aims of the degree and the competences it should provide, enhancing transparency for the learner, the society and the labour market.

Conclusions

The results of the survey clearly show very unbalanced implementation of qualifications frameworks, with a small number of countries having established national qualifications frameworks (whether for all levels, solely for higher education, or for other sectors of education but not yet for higher education). The large majority of countries are still currently discussing the shape of the reform to be undertaken.

A very good proportion of national unions of students were consulted regarding the implementation of EHEA-QF. However, students in a number of countries claim to be formally consulted but not taken seriously. Some unions point out the fact that also other stakeholders were not included or properly listen to and that the wider public is still excluded from the discussion taken so far.

A completely different attitude can be seen with regard to the alignment of the national qualifications frameworks with the EQF-LLL. The already identified deficit in the students' involvement and consultation in the European Union initiatives at the European level was further deepened at a national level, since many student unions were not consulted at all. Furthermore, back in 2005, a significant percentage of students' unions did not participate in the national consultations on the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, simply because they were not informed or asked to.

When exploring the link between the EHEA-QF and the EQF-LLL, the majority of the respondents expressed their preference for the development of a single and compatible overarching qualification framework at the European level, and admit being concerned about the compatibility of both frameworks.

Some countries clearly prefer the framework developed within the Bologna Process specifically because it saw the involvement of students from the beginning.

Nevertheless, there is a common positive opinion about the general principle of establishing a qualifications framework, viewed as a valuable instrument for transparency, recognition, being able to provide for more opportunities for learners and enhancing access to higher education from vocational and other forms of education. Statements declaring that qualifications framework are a part of a privatisation agenda or a threat for national diversity and autonomy were not supported by the respondents.

Recommendations

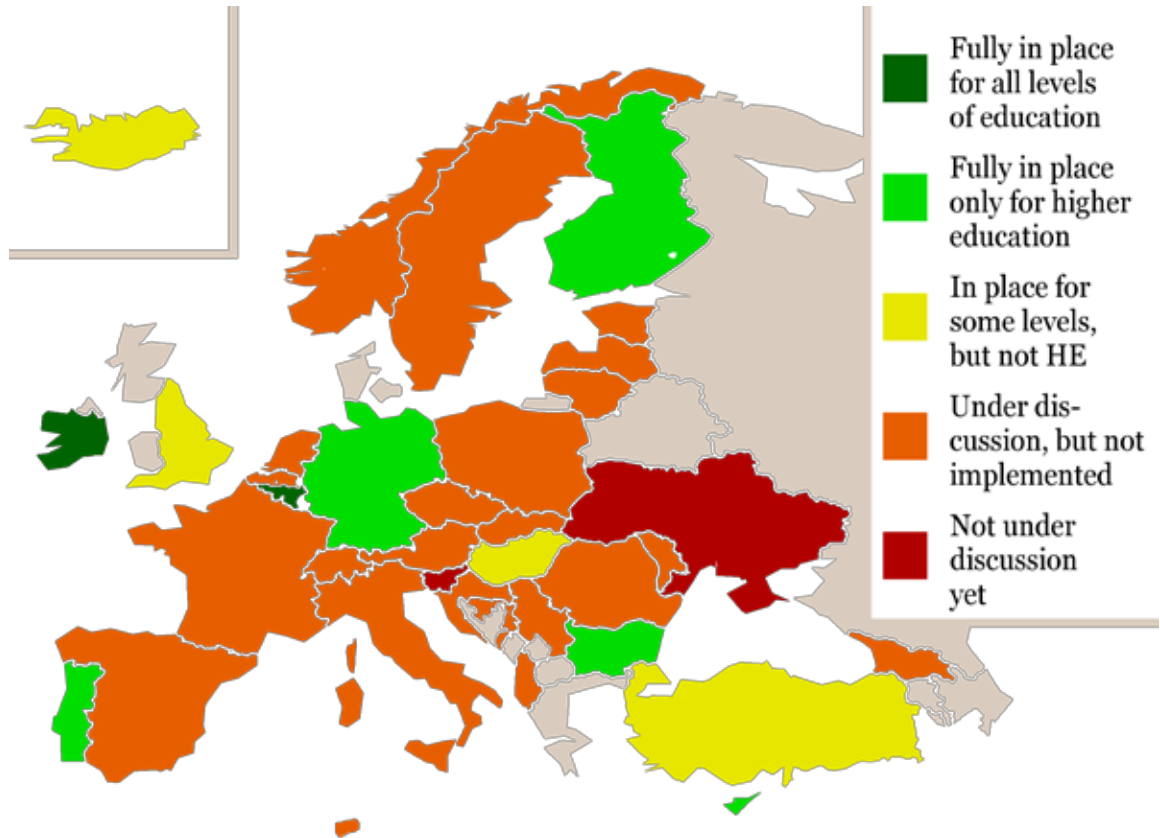
- Establishment of national working groups with the inclusion of relevant stakeholders providing for expertise and training about issues related to the design and concept of qualifications frameworks
- Development of national qualifications frameworks for all levels in close consultation with students, stakeholders and social partners
- Interlink the reform of qualifications frameworks with the introduction of national-based procedures and guidelines for recognition of prior learning
- Open the debates to the wider public
- Ensuring further support for HEIs during the transition period

7.1 – The status of development of a national qualifications framework

Fig. 21 (following page) pictures quite clearly the difficulties countries are still facing in the development and implementation of a national qualifications framework. Only eight countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Moldova, Portugal and Slovakia) and a sub-national structure (Belgium - French community) have already established some kind of qualifications framework that includes higher education degrees. However, the large majority of countries are still in the phase of studying and discussing a national model for their own QF.

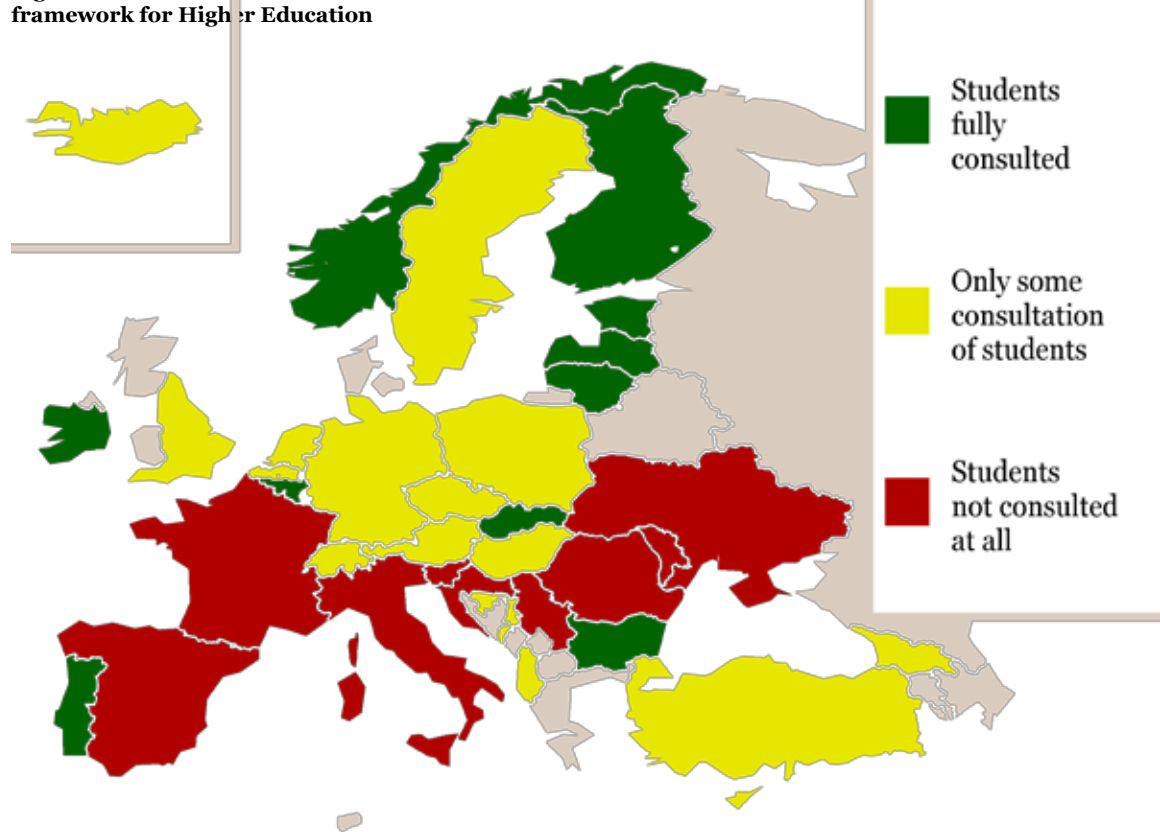
When asking for the biggest difficulties found in the implementation process, many student organisations say that there is not much to report about, since it's not being implemented yet. However, they also state that the delay in the process regards not only the implementation but also the actual discussion.

Fig.21: The status of development of a national qualifications framework



7.2 – Consultation and involvement of students

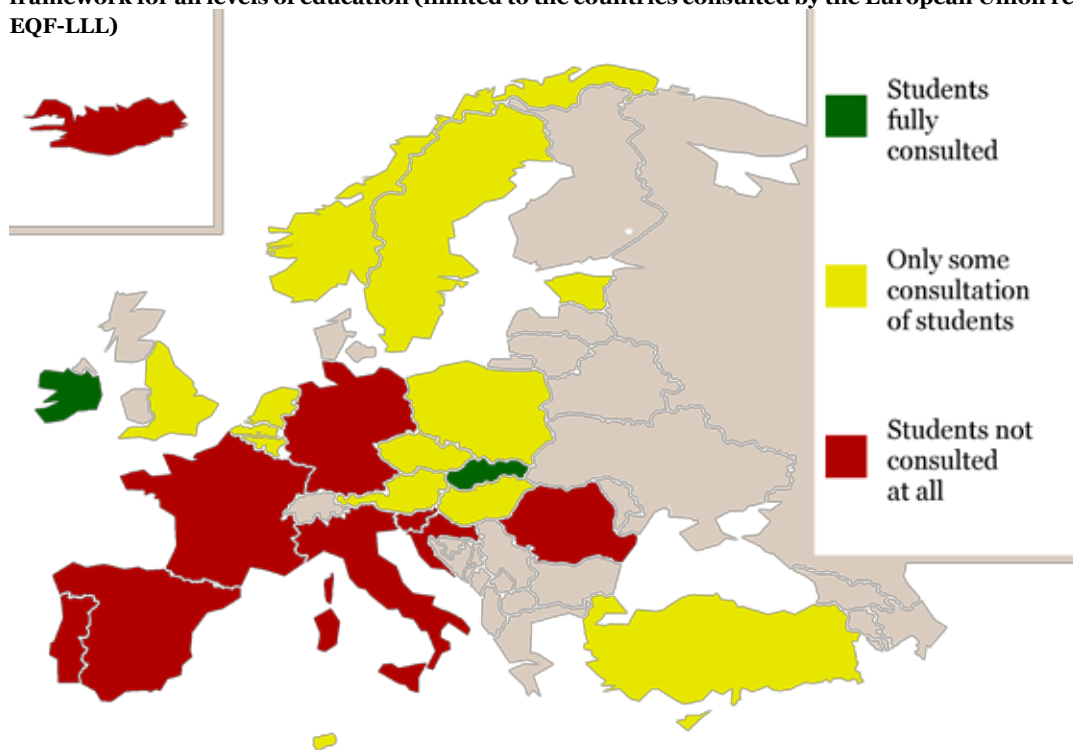
Fig. 22: Consultation of the national unions of students in the introduction of a national qualifications framework for Higher Education



As we look at Fig.22, we can see that a quite significant number of countries have consulted their national unions of students about the implementation of the national qualifications frameworks in what regards the level of higher education. However, in Croatia, France, Italy, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain and Ukraine there has been no consultation at all. When considering the results of Fig. 21 and Fig. 22 we can wonder if this consultation has not taken place yet because the process leading to the establishment of a qualifications framework is still in a very preliminary stage of discussion. Nevertheless, it will be imperative to undertake such a consultation while actually taking into consideration the students' views and opening the debate to the wider public and relevant stakeholders.

In Romania, for example, the discussion never reached the wider public and the process for the creation of a national qualification framework is said not to be transparent and inclusive. The Netherlands, on the other hand, is a good example of a country which involved the students formally but did not take any of their proposals or concerns into consideration. In Slovenia, not only the students were opposing some of the changes in the national qualifications framework, but also higher education institutions, experts and even a national level consultative body for higher education.

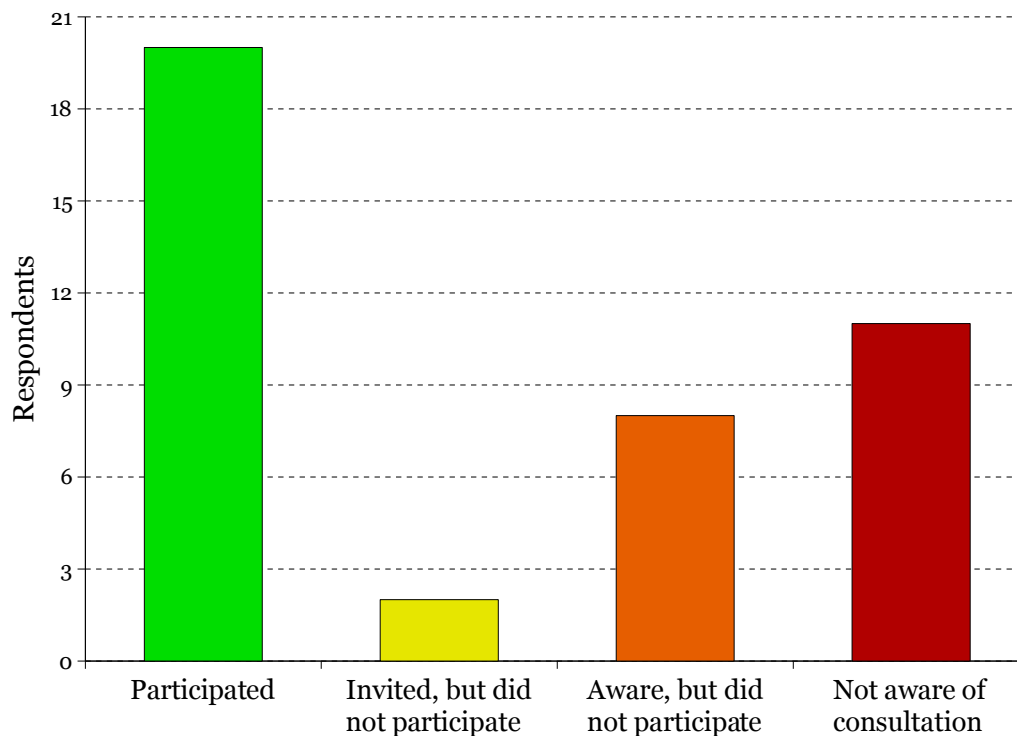
Fig. 23: Consultation of the national unions of students in the introduction of a national qualifications framework for all levels of education (limited to the countries consulted by the European Union regarding EQF-LLL)



When addressing the alignment of the national qualifications framework with the proposed European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning it is quite clear how students' participation is being neglected. This cannot be explained by the fact that it is in its early stages, since some of the fully consulted organisations regarding the level of higher education such as Portugal or were somehow involved, such as Germany, were now completely forgotten when it comes to the more comprehensive framework.

Another possible explanation of this phenomenon is the fact that Governments and stakeholders in countries that have already established national qualifications for the higher education level may consider the consultation of national unions of students enrolled only in higher education to be inappropriate because the EQF-LLL encompasses all levels and types of studies. In fact, a few national unions of students (three of which were fully consulted about the creation or alignment of the national qualifications frameworks for higher education) state that consultation was not applicable because the EQF-LLL is not yet being discussed, but none stated their acceptance of such a divide.

Fig. 24: Participation in the national consultation on the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF-LLL) in 2005



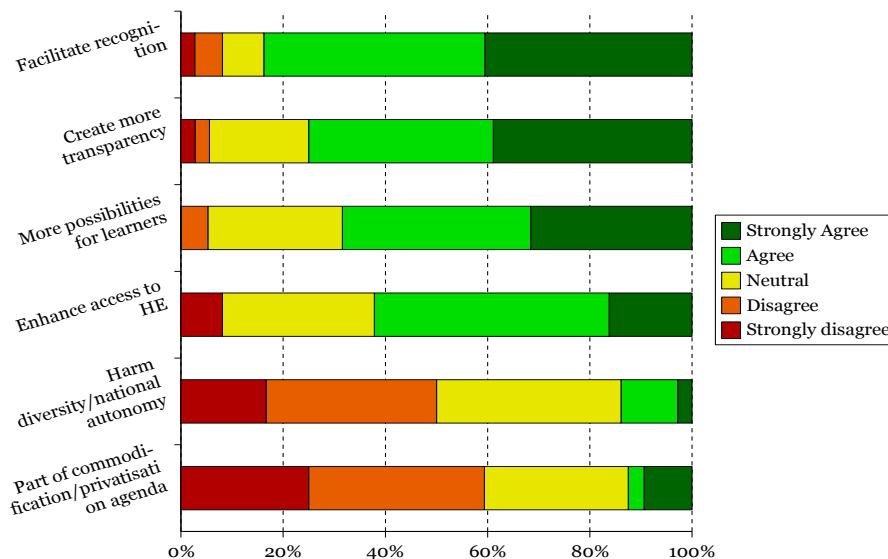
However, the lack of student involvement can be traced to 2005, when the national consultation on the EQF-LLL was carried out. Some national unions of students did not participate (while being aware of the existence of consultation processes) partially due to being unprepared by then to do so. However, eleven other unions were not asked to participate at all. This absence of student involvement regarding the broader qualification framework is unfortunately a continuing trend in some of the countries signalled in Fig. 23.

7.3 – Students’ Perceptions of Qualifications Frameworks

When asked about the relationship between the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and the European Higher Education Area Qualifications Framework, about 40% of the respondents coming from countries consulted on EQF-LLL by the European Commission were able to state an opinion. In general, the positions issued supported the need for a better link between formal higher education levels and degrees and a parallel and integrated system of lifelong learning and continuing education. Other positions coming from Nordic countries like Norway and Sweden stated a preference for the qualification framework developed within the Bologna Process. In these remarks the fact that EHEA-QF had student participation and input right from the beginning was especially valuable.

Another point raised by the student organisations is the concern that the existence of the two qualifications frameworks at the European level may allow for some contradictions and overlaps between them. There is a clear preference in a significant number of answers for the development of a common framework or for a more clear integration of the two set so far.

Fig. 25: Student Perceptions of Qualifications Frameworks



The perceptions that student organisations have of qualifications frameworks are generally positive. When asking if a QF creates more transparency, a solid group of 27 respondents out of 36 answered they agree or strongly agree. The figures are even higher when replying if a qualifications framework can also facilitate recognition, reaching 31 positive answers. Regarding providing for more opportunities for learners, the enthusiasm is not so clear. Finally, the mood turns to a much more neutral one, when considering if a qualification framework enhances access from different forms of education. A concrete long-term experience of the absence of links and permeability between professional and academic sectors of post-secondary and higher education systems in some of the countries may help to explain the disbelief that a QF could alone overcome the many established barriers.

The national unions also do not think of a European qualification framework as part of a privatisation agenda for higher education. The same refusal we can observe when talking about the threat a European QF can hold for national autonomy and diversity. However, it is also clear when comparing the results that the amount of neutral responses to these questions is higher.

VIII. DOCTORAL STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The third cycle has been included in the Bologna Process since 2003. Intensive discussions about the third cycle have taken place since then. Between 2005 and 2007 the European University Association (EUA) carried out a project on doctoral programmes, examining how doctoral programmes are organised and analysing some of the features of the doctoral programmes existing. Although discussions have taken place, and there is an increasing awareness that also the third cycle is part of the Bologna Process, much work remains to be done. In this work, national and local students' unions around Europe should take part and be allowed to take part, even if they, in some cases, do not directly represent participants in the third cycle. Students' unions have knowledge and opinions that are valid and important for the development of the third cycle, as well as for the evolution of first and second cycle programmes. ESIB has taken an active part in the work lead by EUA since 2005, and intends to continue to do so. Additionally, national students' unions are, through a variety of ways, active on third cycle issues.

Conclusions

One of the outcomes of the answers from the national student unions is that ESIB and its members must add to the body of knowledge about the third cycle, and continue to build capacity to work with issues related to research, doctoral students and early stage researchers. However, the survey results also indicate that, governments and HEIs need to take guidance on these matters from national unions of students more seriously and invite the unions much more to the work in these areas.

The third cycle is still one of the areas in the Bologna Process in which confusion and uncertainty about how things should be done is the greatest. This needs to be seriously addressed by all actors in the EHEA in the lead-up to 2010. The connection between the first, second and, third cycles, and research needs to be enhanced and deepened; all levels of higher education need some measure of research.

The analysis also show that a large number of doctoral students still have an insecure social situation, and bear too large a burden for the costs of the doctoral programmes and research in the EHEA. This situation has to change if Europe wants to make a reality of the expressed will to increase the number of doctoral students and expand the research capacity in the area.

Recommendations

Based in our results ESIB recommends:

- Increased attention to research in the first and second cycles.
- Governments and HEI should include student unions in their work on the third cycle, as a general principle in accordance with the Bologna Process commitment to student representation.
- Improving the social situation for doctoral students through scholarships or grants.
- Making more use of the "Salzburg Principles", the "European Charter for Researchers" and the "Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers".

8.1 – Representation of doctoral students

ESIB represents doctoral students: in a majority of those national unions surveyed (26) doctoral students are members, although in a number of those (6), doctoral students are not represented in the same way as other students or not very many doctoral students are represented. 14 of our unions do not represent any doctoral students and in 2 of these countries, Poland and Switzerland, the answers state that there is a different organisation dedicated to doctoral students. In Albania the third cycle is according to the union not implemented yet, and therefore they do not represent any third cycle students.

8.2 – Research elements in the first and second cycle

In the 2005 report, we asked our members about the amount of research there is in the first and second cycle of higher education. In all countries apart from Austria, Germany, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania and Slovakia there was research in the first and second cycle. In the first cycle it is typically part of thesis work and not included in other parts of curricula, but in the second cycle it is in some cases it forms part of other components of the curriculum. Research is mostly carried out as group work and can be both applied and fundamental research¹⁴.

In 2007 17 unions state that there has been very little change regarding research in the first and second cycle, the exceptions are Portugal, Slovakia and Moldova. In Portugal the amount of research in some of the new master programmes has increased. This is due to the fact that these master programmes are inter-linked with the doctoral programmes in a way that increases the amount of research in those programmes. Master students are involved in research projects in different ways, which was not previously the case. This reform is newly introduced, and further follow-up of which impact it will have on the general design of master programmes in Portugal is needed. In Austria, Germany and Hungary there has been very little change, which indicates that the situation regarding research in the first and second cycle is the same as in 2005. Hence the amount of research in the first and second cycle in these three countries is still very low.

8.3 – Funding and the structure of doctoral programmes

In the majority of the countries, there have been very small changes in the doctoral programmes, the funding for doctoral research and in the development and funding of postdoctoral positions. But at the same time a large number of our members indicate that they are not aware of any changes or are unsure about if changes have taken place; this might indicate that if changes have taken place they have not gotten a great amount of attention, or they have not been big enough to be able to attract attention.

In France and Slovakia there have been changes in the funding for doctoral research and in the development of postdoctoral positions. In order to increase the competitiveness of HEIs, clusters for higher education and research are being created in France. This process is just starting but is expected to have impact on the funding for doctoral research and the development of postdoctoral positions. In Bulgaria there has been radical changes in the doctoral programmes, which indicates intense work on the third cycle in this country.

8.4 – Status of doctoral students

The status of doctoral students differs a lot around Europe. In most countries doctoral students are in a

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ESIB, 2005, "Bologna with student eyes", p. 54

position “between” being a student and an employee. Doctoral students are often employed if they carry out research, and also often have some paid work in the institution as teaching assistant or similar. The latter, is the case for example in Germany, Iceland, Portugal, Serbia, Spain and the UK. In the Netherlands doctoral students are always employed if carrying out research and this is always the case in Norway.

In Turkey, Sweden, Norway, Croatia and Spain, doctoral students have a special legal status as neither students nor employees. This underlines the role of the doctoral student as being between higher education and research.

8.5 – Social conditions

The social conditions of the doctoral students are very much dependent on how the individual is financing his or her studies. In general it seems as if doctoral students who get scholarships have significant problems with different kinds of social security; this is the case for example in Portugal and Sweden. Doctoral students or early stage researchers that are employed by the institution during their studies seem to have the most secure social situation; this is the case in the Netherlands and Norway for all doctoral students.

In some countries, doctoral students have the same social security conditions as other students but pay a higher tuition fee; this is the case in Malta, Ireland and Bulgaria. In this case, the financial burden on the doctoral students is higher than the financial burden on the other students, due to higher tuition fees.

8.6 – The Salzburg Principles and the European Charter and Code

At the Official Bologna Seminar on “Doctoral Programmes for the European Knowledge Society” in February 2005, a set of 10 basic principles for doctoral programmes were agreed upon¹⁵. In March 2005 the European Commission published the “European Charter for Researchers” and the “Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers”¹⁶. These documents all set down principles for research and doctoral programmes and are an important part of the discussion about research and doctoral programmes on the European level. On the national level, according to student’s unions, they seem to play a minor role (if any) in the discussions about doctoral programmes and the treatment of doctoral students and early stage researchers. 16 unions state that they are aware of the name and the content of the Charter, although only 11 and 8 unions know the name and content of the “Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers” and the “Salzburg Principles” respectively. In particular the “Salzburg Principles” seem not to be widely known at all; 18 unions state that they are not aware of the principles at all.

Only Austria reports that most universities have adopted the Charter. In other countries, the adoption of these documents does not seem to be underway or only very slowly becoming part of the general discussion. The national union of students in Bulgaria report that they have been taking an active part in work with these documents; Bulgaria seems to be a good example in this case. The national student union in Romania, on the other hand report that they are not even viewed as potential partners in the work with adopting or implementing the principles in these documents, which seems to be a bad example of how national unions are (not) involved in work with the third cycle.

15 Bologna Seminar on Doctoral Programmes for the European Knowledge Society, 2005, “CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS”, www.bologna-bergen2005.no

16 European Commission, 2005, the “European Charter for Researchers” and the “Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers”, http://ec.europa.eu/eracareers/index_en.cfm?11=29&CFID=5063238&CFTOKEN=e90c1f0d82e3d998-2257FDED-CCA4-A800-D34270B74296CBFD

IX. EUROPEAN DIMENSION AND ATTRACTIVENESS OF EHEA

The European dimension has been part of the Bologna Process since its inception. Its goal is to promote European aspects of higher education especially within study modules and curricula more generally. The questions of mobility, language teaching and cooperation between HEI's within the EHEA are at the centre of the European dimension. One specific tool for promoting a European dimension is the development of joint and double degrees within the EHEA. The idea of an External dimension of the Bologna Process and a market-driven higher education has been gaining grounds in Europe. At the same time, a discussion about European values of HE has been taking place. The promotion of active citizenship, multiculturalism and higher education as a force for social cohesion are among the core values of the EHEA, and should therefore be reflected in discussions about the EHEA.

The idea of attracting Europeans and non-Europeans to study in the EHEA is included in what has been called the 'external dimension' of the Bologna Process. However, the concept of 'attractiveness' has been a part of the process since the beginning. In Bologna (1999), ministers decided on objectives which they considered to be "... of primary relevance in order to establish the European area of higher education and to promote the European system of higher education world-wide". The external dimension encompasses competitiveness. In Berlin (2003), ministers revisited the question of competition with the rest of the world, adding that "...the attractiveness and openness of the European higher education should be reinforced. They confirm their readiness to further develop scholarship programmes for students from third countries" and that "... transnational exchanges in higher education should be governed on the basis of academic quality and academic values, and agree to work in all appropriate fora to that end". In Bergen the idea of sustainable development, identifying partner regions and sharing of ideas and experiences was put in to the communiqué. The ministers also asked the Bologna Follow-Up Group "... to elaborate and agree on a strategy for the external dimension".

Conclusions

The responses from the national student unions indicate that the European dimension and joint degrees have not been an important issue in the national debates. European dimension is understood as promoting language studies, setting up programs and modules of study in English and the participation in the Bologna Process. Similar trends also emerged from the "Bologna with Student Eyes" (2005) report.

A broader understanding of the European dimension as including more than exchange programs and participation in the structural reforms should inform discussion on the national level. At the level of HEIs, there is an increasing interest in joining European networks. Joint and double degrees are not very well-known, because they usually have a very limited number of enrolments. Financial and administrative barriers exist, hindering students from participating in these programmes. The understanding of the attractiveness of the EHEA is closely linked to the idea of marketing of higher education, which is the same finding as in 2005.

In order to improve the attractiveness of the EHEA we need to tackle the immigration-related barriers, especially visa issues, the social dimension, and information about the EHEA. The national unions of students also expressed their concern regarding brain drain.

Recommendations

- The European dimension should be discussed more at a national level
- The HEIs should be encouraged to engage in European cooperation and to promote the European values such as multilingualism and multiculturalism
- Joint degrees should be available for a larger group of students and financial, administrative and legislative barriers should be removed
- Visa and other barriers of mobility need to be tackled in order to make the EHEA accessible for all
- Attractiveness and the external dimension should not be understood as only marketing the higher education to other parts of the world

9.1 – European Dimension

Ten of the surveyed organisations reported that there has not been much discussion of the European dimension, or that reforms have been implemented without discussions of European aspects. Only in Austria, Belgium (Flemish community), Norway and Poland are European topics mentioned in the curriculum as part of the European dimension. For example in Norway, StL has promoted the European dimension to be an integrated part of every study program.

The raising of awareness of internationalisation and European higher education policies is taking place in a number of countries. For example in Finland and Hungary, governments use European cooperation as a basis for argumentation for policies. In Spain the internationalisation argument is used also to promote commercialisation and marketing of universities. Finland, France and Portugal also mentioned the HEIs increased interest in cooperation with European universities and in joining European networks of institutions.

The idea of student and staff mobility and participation in exchange programs, such as Erasmus, were mentioned as a part of the European dimension in responses from Belgium (Flemish Community), Iceland, Lithuania, Latvia, Moldova, Poland, Portugal and Turkey.

10 countries see that the European dimension is synonymous to taking part in the Bologna reforms. For example, students in the United Kingdom, Georgia, Italy and Slovenia feel that the Bologna Process itself is the European dimension. This indicates that the European dimension may have not been properly discussed or implemented on the national level. The 2005 findings of the “Bologna with Student Eyes” show the same vagueness in understanding and lack of discussion of the European dimension at the national level.

The point of languages was raised only in 8 answers, most often referring to the availability of courses, study modules and programs taught in English. Those countries were Germany, Finland, France, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Norway and Netherlands.

9.2 – Joint and Double Degrees

According to the answers received, joint and double degrees are not that familiar to the national students' unions. 10 of them were unable to answer the question about joint and double degrees. Most of the others reported that they did not know exactly how many joint or double degree programs are offered by their HEIs. National unions of students reported that the legal framework for joint and double degrees is in place or the implementation of such a framework is under discussion. Overall, it seems that interest by HEIs and governments in joint and double degrees is growing.

In those countries where the legal framework exists and joint or double degree programs are offered, criticisms was expressed that they are highly selective and not widely available. Many barriers persist. Financial barriers include the absence of additional funding schemes for students to cover the costs of living in different countries and the failure of the student grants and loans scheme of the home country to permit the use of the money for tuition fees abroad (as in Austria). There are also issues with regard to recognition of study periods and diplomas. From the Netherlands, it is reported that one of the obstacles for joint or double degree is the too rigid curriculum at home institutions and the lack of full recognition of studies undertaken in the partner institution.

Joint and double degrees are usually available at master's level, which is a disadvantage to those institutions that offer mostly first cycle degrees, such as polytechnics in Finland.

One of the driving forces behind joint degrees is the Erasmus Mundus program. For example in Belgium (Flemish Community) the tendency in joint degrees is to follow the Erasmus Mundus model. The criticism from students' unions that joint and double degrees are only available for a select few, and the financial barriers of participation in joint or double degree programs are similar to those recorded in the 2005 report.

9.3 – Attractiveness of EHEA

Student representatives from the new Bologna countries and from eastern European countries commented that attractiveness comes from the possibility to be part of the Bologna Process reform, of removing barriers of mobility (such as visa problems) and having real choices to do parts of studies in a different country. The main problems with visa handling occur when non-EU students are entering EU countries. Some countries have taken steps to remove these problems; a good example of this is Malta, where the national union of students reported that Malta has introduced a "student visa" for foreign students, which is more flexible than a normal visa.

Additionally, the availability of programs and courses taught in English, and offering basic language courses in the language of the destination country were mentioned. It seems that even though English is the most popular language used in the Master's programs that are focusing on the non-national students, the idea of teaching national languages for foreigners is also taking form.

Quite a lot of national students' unions reported on the increased interest in marketing higher education to non-European countries, especially in Asia. Some Mediterranean countries are also focused on attracting students from South America and Africa. In a number of answers from national unions of students concerns about brain drain from developing countries to Western Europe was mentioned. Some countries have set up programs, which are based on the idea of co-development rather than brain drain.

Norway has a program in their Aid Scheme, where students coming from developing countries get student grants and loans to study for a degree in Norway. For the students who go back to their home country, the loan turns into a grant, and for those who decided to stay in Norway they have to pay the money back as student loan. In Finland there is the NorthSouthSouth-exchange program that aims to create academic networks between Finland and developing countries in the Sub-Saharan countries. The program includes temporary mobility for both students and staff of the universities of the developing countries.

As the EHEA has become more attractive, side effects that require governmental action are apparent. In Norway, Chinese students are recruited to Norway by “agents”, to attend programmes that don’t give them higher education qualifications, despite the promises of the agent. The Norwegian government is taking steps to prevent this kind of action.

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