

Higher Education in Europe 2009: Developments in the Bologna Process





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PREFACE



In my opinion the Bologna Process has been driving forward the most important reforms in higher education in the modern era. The European Commission remains a committed member of the Bologna Process, as we see this unique form of European inter-governmental and inter-institutional cooperation as essential to the underpinning of the dynamic knowledge societies and economies in which our citizens can achieve personal fulfillment and prosper.

This publication presents an objective overview of the progress made in the ten years since the Bologna Declaration was signed and is a valuable contribution to the understanding of the Bologna Process the year before its official culmination. Like previous Eurydice publications, it is concise, based on authoritative evidence from each country, and provides a clear comparative view of how issues have been addressed at national level.

I am also glad to see that Eurydice has once again been able to extend its coverage beyond the 31 member countries of the network to cover all 46 signatory countries of the Bologna Process.

This report clearly shows that we are on track to achieve the central objective of creating the European Higher Education Area by 2010. Greater compatibility of the different national European education degree structures has been achieved through significant reforms, and now the challenge is to work on quality, namely the content and profile of qualifications to ensure that they are meaningful and relevant within and beyond national boundaries. The main Bologna tools – ECTS, Diploma Supplement, and National Qualifications Frameworks – that the European Commission is proud to have helped to develop – are also now becoming well established features of the European higher education landscape. Nevertheless the message is also that we have progress to make in using these tools well, and that we will have to step up our efforts considerably if we are to ensure more widespread mobility in the European Higher Education Area.

The Bologna decade is also drawing to a close as Europe, like the rest of the world, faces unprecedented challenges in confronting the global financial crisis. Whatever measures are taken to tackle the financial sector, the long-term solution for ensuring dynamic and prosperous societies depends on the quality of our education systems. The Lisbon strategy is therefore more necessary than ever to ensure sustainable economic and social development, and this is a key period to reinforce our commitment to and investment in high quality education at all levels.

I have no doubt that we will become increasingly grateful that collectively we have laid strong foundations for the European Higher Education Area, as this is the space that will provide lifelong educational opportunities needed by citizens to renew, innovate and develop our societies and economies in the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ján Figel'". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke above the name.

Ján Figel'

Commissioner responsible for
Education, Training, Culture and Youth

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INTRODUCTION

This report takes a partial look at the emerging European Higher Education Area (EHEA). It is partial in two ways – the selection of topics for consideration, and the type of information gathered for analysis. Rather than attempting to cover the full range of issues and challenges that need to be addressed to ensure the success of the EHEA, the choice has been taken to focus on a few priority topics identified by the previous Eurydice Bologna report, *Focus on the Structure of Higher Education in Europe 2006/07*, as issues in need of improvement. These priorities have been examined from the point of view of national policy and implementation measures, as it is beyond the scope of this report to assess particular institutional approaches to the issues at stake.

Information for the report has been gathered through the Eurydice National units for the 31 countries that are members of the Eurydice network. For the other 15 countries that are participating in the Bologna process, information has been collected through the national representatives in the Bologna Follow-Up Group. Indeed, the exercise of gathering information has been coordinated with the BFUG Secretariat and the Stocktaking Working Group, and the report aims to complement the work and findings of the official Bologna Stocktaking process.

The comparative overview is preceded by a short historical overview of the Bologna Process mapping the main decisions and achievements from the bi-annual meetings of European education ministers accompanying the Bologna Process. A Glossary of country codes and abbreviations, as well as definitions of frequently used terms can be found at the end of the publication.

The findings in this report will also provide the basis for a more comprehensive analysis of national policy developments towards the European Higher Education Area that will be the object of study for the *Focus on Higher Education* report that Eurydice is planning for 2010. This report will aim to assess the impact of developments in the Bologna decade and identify the main challenges for the European Higher Education Area in the future.

Eurydice is extremely grateful to the many people who dedicated their time, expertise and effort to produce this report, and a full list of contributions can be found in the Acknowledgements at the end of the volume.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The overall picture in 2009 reveals that substantial progress has been made in all the areas that have been examined, and the benefits of enhanced European cooperation brought about through the Bologna process are evident. Yet as European higher education is dynamic and evolving in a fast-changing context, the reform process itself is continually creating new challenges as a consequence of the ways in which implementation has been addressed in each country. **Thus the need to intensify cooperation at European level is becoming ever more acute, with improved monitoring mechanisms being essential to assess the impact of reforms.** While much progress has been made in structural reform, the focus of attention and cooperation must now seek to combine national policy-making and system development with the content and reality of implementation in higher education institutions.

Bachelor-Master Structure

At this stage of the Bologna process, **the new three-cycle structure is theoretically fully in place** or has at least been extensively introduced in all countries in most institutions and programmes. However, several study fields, such as medical studies, architecture and engineering remain outside these new structures in some countries.

Convergence in the models for the first two cycles is clearly taking place. **In the first cycle bachelor programmes, the 180 ECTS credit (3 years) model dominates** in 19 countries whereas 11 countries have privileged its alternative, the 240 ECTS credits (4 years) model. Meanwhile **in the second cycle master programmes the 120 ECTS credit (2 years) model** appears to have gained far more ground than other designs, and **now dominates in 29 of the countries/regions analysed.**

Looking at the combination of first and second cycle programmes, **the 180 + 120 ECTS credit (3+2 years) two-cycle structure is the most commonly adopted model.** It is the most prominent model in 17 countries and also used in a further 22 countries where no unique model is established.

It is also noteworthy that **the articulation between vocational education at ISCED 5B level and the first cycle of higher education is a matter of significant divergence of approach across the European region.** Indeed, while higher education has continued to expand and diversify during the Bologna decade, countries where vocational education at ISCED 5B is organised as a separate system outside the university sector have tended to ignore the Bologna approach. Only 10 countries have consciously adapted the Bologna structures (particularly the bachelor concept) to include this level of education. Other countries have either taken steps to ensure links between the ISCED 5B level and the newly organised Bologna bachelor programmes, or have pursued vocational and higher education developments in parallel.

While it is clear that the reform and convergence of degree structures called for by the Bologna Declaration has moved at a dramatic speed over the past decade, **it is certainly not the case that convergence is leading inevitably to uniformity in European higher education systems, even in terms of degree structures.** The main patterns of qualification structure have now been established, and **the key challenge ahead is to work on the profile of different qualifications,** so that the learning outcomes of different Bologna qualifications are better understood, and the European Higher Education Area is able to develop as an open, flexible and inclusive space.

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)

In the great majority of countries the introduction of ECTS has been based on legislation and regulation. At present such legal frameworks have been established in almost all countries, and thus **at this formal level the speed of development of a common European credit accumulation and transfer system has been spectacular.**

Countries and institutions are now concentrating on the actual implementation of the ECTS system. In this respect **substantial progress still needs to be made if the full potential of the ECTS system is to be realised.** A limited number of countries have reached the point where the vast majority of institutions and programmes are using ECTS to its full capacity with credits based on learning outcomes and student workload. In most cases, **learning outcomes are not yet widely understood and used, while notional student workload is also a difficult concept to deal with.** Thus credits continue to be defined in a variety of different ways on the basis of contact hours or various combinations including contact hours and notional student workload.

Support and incentives to institutions therefore need to be sustained to enable the ECTS system to be properly embedded and implemented on the basis of learning outcomes and student workload. The new ECTS User Guide, and the continued exchange of institutional good practice can play a significant role in **further developing ECTS as a powerful tool for the European Higher Education Area.**

Diploma Supplement (DS)

Whereas the DS has been made mandatory in the very large majority of Bologna countries and globally complies with the general recommendations in terms of provision (automatically and free of charge in a widely used European language), **the actual implementation still varies considerably and poses a number of questions.**

Ministers agreed in Berlin (September 2003) that the Diploma Supplement would be fully in place by 2005. In this respect, however, **commitments have not been met, and many countries are lagging behind** in implementing what is essentially a simple and practical measure, albeit one with organisational and financial implications. **Even in countries where the DS has been widely introduced, only a limited number have undertaken monitoring exercises to find out how the DS is actually used** by higher education institutions and employers, and the outcomes are rather mixed, with employers, institutions and graduates often not yet gaining the full benefit from the tool.

National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF)

The commitment to develop national qualifications frameworks to be compatible with the overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area was made by Ministers at the 2005 Bergen Conference. At this time only a few countries already had a national qualifications framework and these countries had significant years of developmental work behind them. **Now the vast majority of Bologna countries have launched the process to define and implement a qualification framework at national level.** Five of them have completed the whole process including self certification of its compatibility with the European framework and re-design of programmes within the higher education institutions. The other countries have started the process, some of them very recently, and most of them do not expect to finalise it before 2012.

In contrast to the introduction of the Diploma Supplement – a relatively straightforward, technical process – the design and development of national qualifications frameworks has proved to be far from a simple task. Indeed the complexity of this work has undoubtedly been underestimated in many countries, and the need for widespread consultation and public debate to ensure understanding of the frameworks and their purposes is essential. Thus **although only few countries are likely to have achieved the goal of having a fully functioning national qualifications framework in place by 2010, the progress that has been made in this area is nevertheless very significant.**

Mobility and Portability of Financial Support

After nearly ten years of developing the European Higher Education Area with the hope that many more citizens will benefit from higher educational experiences outside their home country, **it is perhaps surprising to discover that so little is known and understood about the reality of student mobility**, nor of the real incentives and disincentives to mobility. **Many countries still gather data only on nationality of students rather than tracking movement between countries for the purpose of study.** With the current information deficit it is also difficult to assess the impact of the introduction of the Bologna three cycles.

The relationship between mobility and portability of student support is equally difficult to determine. Some countries have made their national grants and loans fully portable, others have introduced specific grants and loans for mobile students, and others still combine both elements. Yet as any individual' students decision to study abroad will be complex and based on a wide range of factors, it is difficult to ascertain the impact of specific financial support measures.

The issue of public financial support for mobility also has to be seen in the context of increasing societal demands on the public purse, including for example the demand to widen participation in higher education. At a time of financial uncertainty and growing demand, and with a tendency in many countries to shift a greater share of costs to individual learners, **care will need to be taken to ensure that developing equitable opportunities for mobility in the European Higher Education Area remains a priority.**

OVERVIEW OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

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

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

Sorbonne Declaration (1998)

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

The Sorbonne Declaration focused on:

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

Bologna Declaration (1999)

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

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

In the Bologna Declaration, ministers affirmed their intention to:

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

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

Prague Communiqué (2001)

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

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

The Prague Communiqué emphasised three elements of the Bologna Process:

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

Berlin Communiqué (2003)

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

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

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

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

Bergen Communiqué (2005)

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

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

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

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

London Communiqué (2007)

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

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

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

Timeline of the Bologna Process

Mobility of students and teachers	Mobility of researchers		Closer links between education and research	Flexible learning paths in higher education		
		Lifelong learning				
		Social Dimension	Inclusion of doctoral level as third cycle	Reinforcement of the social dimension	Commitment to produce national action plans with effective monitoring of the social dimension	
	A system of credits (ECTS)		European Qualifications Frameworks	National Qualifications Frameworks		
A common two-cycle degree system	Easily readable and comparable degrees	Involvement of higher education institutions and students	Recognition of degrees and periods of studies (Diploma Supplement)	Award and recognition of joint degrees		
	European dimension in higher education	Promotion of the European Higher Education Area			Strategy to improve the global dimension of the Bologna process	
	European cooperation in quality assurance		Quality assurance at institutional, national and European level	Standards and guidelines for quality assurance	Creation of a European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR)	
1998	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009
Sorbonne Declaration	Bologna Declaration	Prague Communiqué	Berlin Communiqué	Bergen Communiqué	London Conference	Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Conference

SECTION A: THE BACHELOR-MASTER STRUCTURE

At the heart of the Bologna Declaration lies the commitment of the signatory countries to create the European Higher Education Area by 2010 through adapting higher education systems so that they are more uniformly structured and their qualifications more understandable.

It is a common misconception of the Bologna process that the duration of each of the three cycles has been rigidly prescribed. In reality, the Bologna Declaration (1999) states only that first cycle studies should last a 'minimum of three years' while subsequent Bologna discussions on the second cycle have concluded that a master qualification may range between 60-120 ECTS. Meanwhile developments in the third cycle have, to a large extent, been left in the hands of universities, with no attempt to introduce further regulation within the Bologna process. These positions are also reflected in the overarching Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA), as defined in Bergen (2005), which comprises the three cycles (including within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications), generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences and credit ranges in the first and second cycles. Typically, first cycle qualifications should comprise 180-240 ECTS credits and second cycle qualifications 90-120 ECTS credits with a minimum of 60 credits.

A three-cycle structure was already in place (at least in certain fields) in a number of countries before the signing of the Bologna Declaration in 1999, and the challenge was to widen this practice and increase the convergence among the different models in place.

Since then, the remaining countries have introduced the new structure and at the beginning of 2009, the new Bologna three cycle structure has been extensively introduced in most institutions and programmes in all countries. Medical studies and related fields, architecture and engineering, are examples of study fields where long study programmes are often still on offer.

In many countries the implementation of the three-cycle structure has generated lively debates on how to take into account the national specificities of the labour market and certain types of institutions, programmes, disciplines and qualifications. At this stage of the process, it is nevertheless possible to make an attempt to identify the level of convergence among the different practices notably in terms of workload/duration at Bachelor and Master levels, whereas at Doctoral level, many developments are at an early stage, and dominant national patterns are difficult to discern and compare.

The analysis below focuses on the structures which have been most commonly implemented in the different countries. In many countries practices are necessarily diverse as particular institutions, programmes or disciplines respond to their mission in different ways, but in the majority of countries there is clearly a reference model that is applied to the majority of programmes.

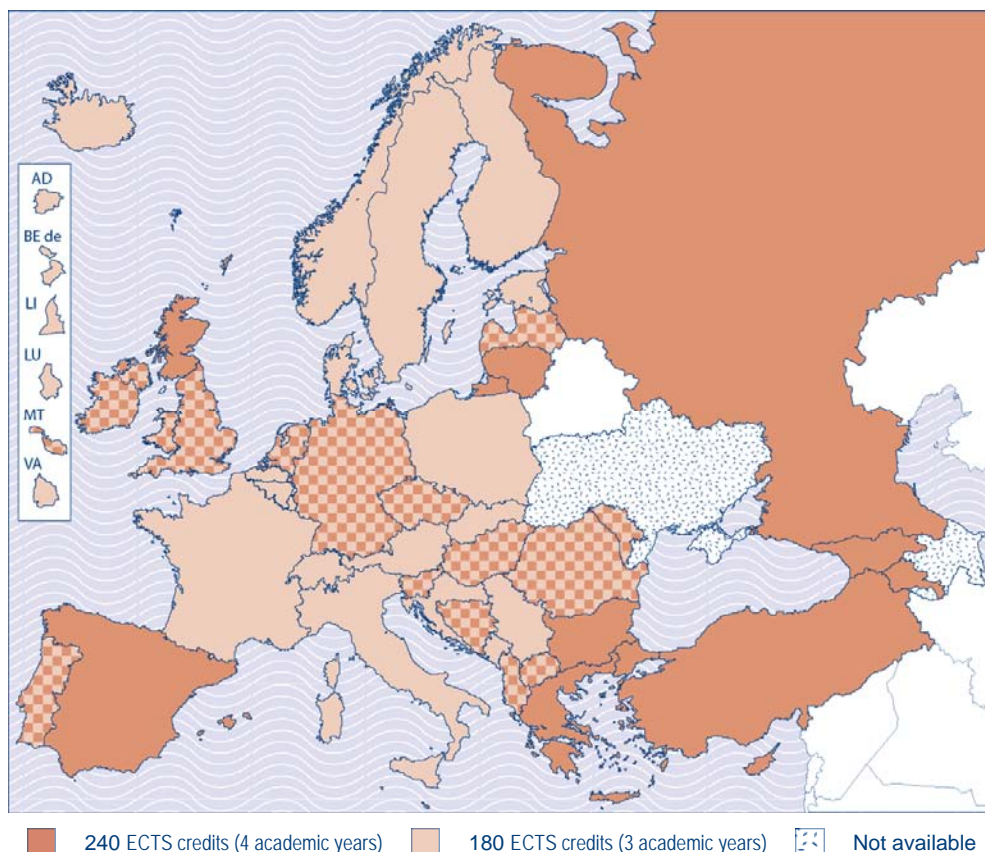
The 180+120 ECTS credit (3+2 academic years) cycle structure is the most commonly adopted model

With regard to the Bachelor programmes, two main structural models have been adopted:

- In 19 countries (Figure A1), Bachelor programmes have been commonly designed on the basis of 180 ECTS credits (3 years). This is the case for Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, the Holy See, Iceland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Sweden and Switzerland.
- In 11 countries the most commonly designed Bachelor programmes last 240 ECTS credits (4 years) as in Armenia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Georgia, Greece, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Spain, Turkey and the United Kingdom (Scotland).

In the remaining countries, no single model emerges as a reference, and institutional practice tends to draw upon both the two preceding models.

Figure A1: Student workload/duration for the most common Bachelor programmes 2008/09



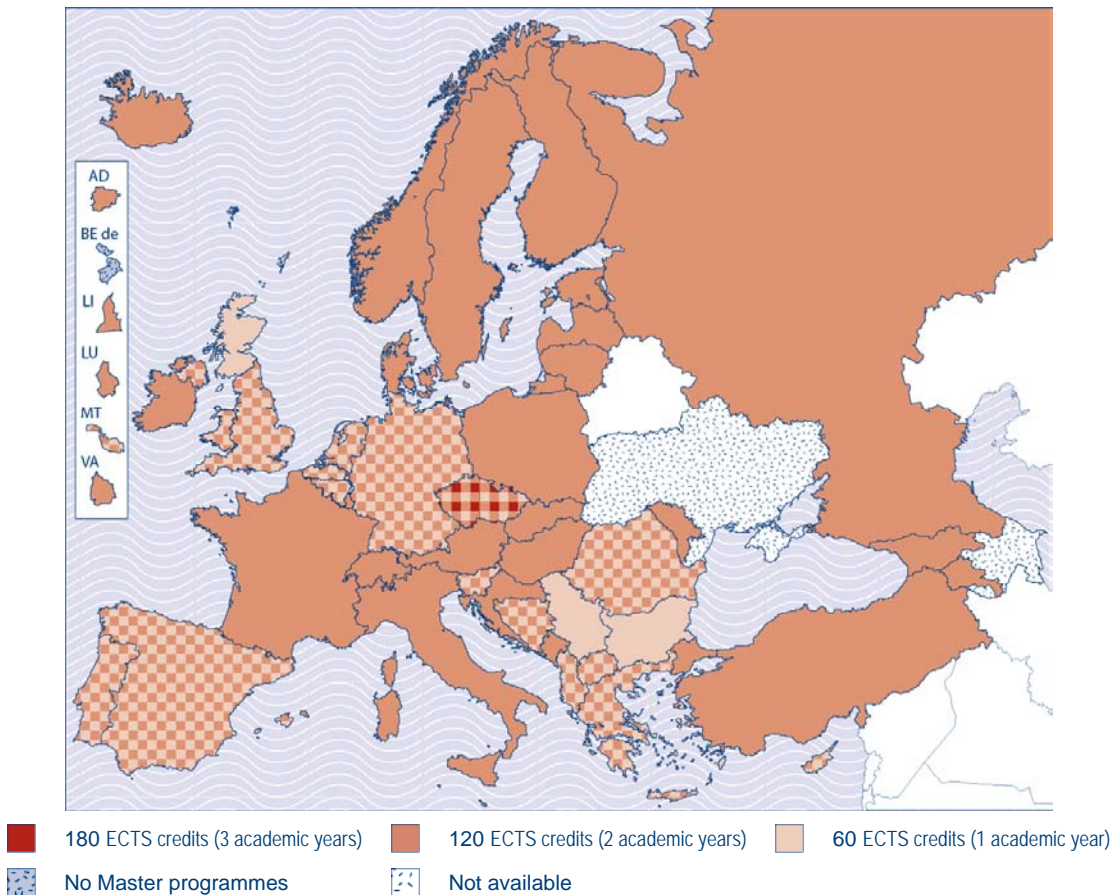
Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory note

Countries have adapted the Bologna principles to their own situation and may have implemented them in a flexible way to take into account specificities of the labour market, of institutions and study fields or disciplines. Therefore, a unique model has not necessarily been designed and applied in each country, and institutions may have been given space to adapt. Nevertheless, in most countries a common approach or 'reference model' stands out in practice. This figure tries to capture this situation.

For Master programmes (Figure A2), the 120 ECTS credit (2 years) model is used in the large majority of Bologna signatory countries. In 29 countries/regions analysed this model is the most commonly used reference to design programmes, even though some master programmes may be developed with fewer credits (90 ECTS master programmes can be found in several countries). Bulgaria, Serbia and the United Kingdom (Scotland) are exceptions to the general trend as the master programmes usually last 60 to 90 credits (1 year). In the remaining countries (Albania, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)), the student workload at master level may vary from 60 to 120 credits, although in the Flemish Community of Belgium master programmes have been developed in veterinary science and medicine that extend to 180 and 240 credits respectively. In the Czech Republic, some Master programmes also require 180 credits (3 years).

Figure A2: Student workload/duration for the most common Master programmes, 2008/09



Source: Eurydice.

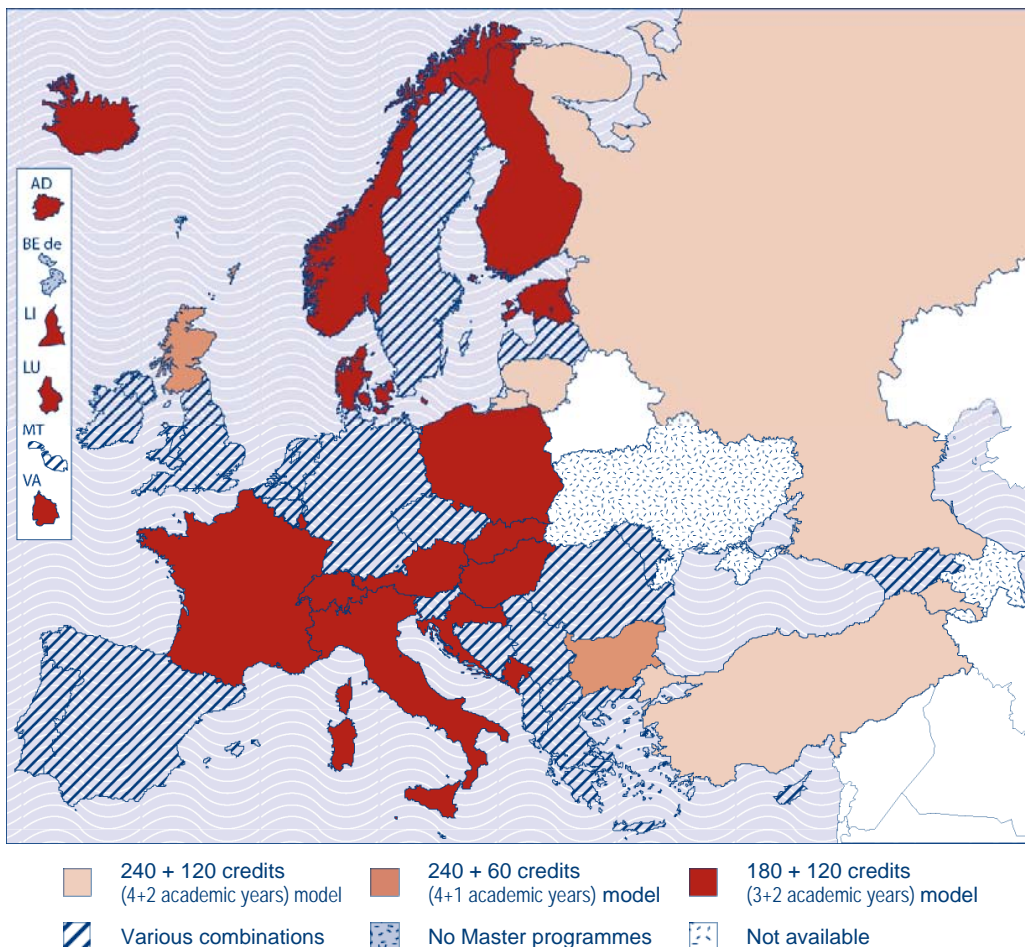
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Overall, combining the Bachelor and Master levels, it is possible to identify three models to describe the cycle structure as implemented in the Bologna signatory countries (Figure A3).

- The 180 + 120 credit (3+2 academic years) model dominates in 17 countries: Andorra, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Holy See, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Norway, Poland, Slovakia and Switzerland.
- The 240 + 60 credit (4+1 academic years) model predominates in Bulgaria, and a 240 + 90 credit model is the norm in the United Kingdom (Scotland).

Figure A3: Two-cycle structure models most commonly implemented, 2008/09



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory note

Countries have adapted the Bologna principles to their own situation and may have implemented them in a flexible way to take into account specificities of the labour market, of institutions and study fields or disciplines. Therefore, a unique model has not necessarily been designed and applied in each country, and institutions may have been given space to adapt. Nevertheless, in most countries a common approach or 'reference model' stands out in practice. This figure tries to capture this situation.

These two models can be seen as an evolution away from the 4 or 5-year long programmes traditionally implemented in the continental countries before the Bologna reforms.

- The 240 + 120 credit (4+2 academic years) model is commonly used in five countries: Armenia, Georgia, Lithuania, Russia and Turkey.

In the remaining countries and regions – approximately half of the countries of the Bologna process – no unique major model seems to dominate. In the Flemish Community of Belgium, for example, all first cycle programmes are 180 ECTS, but the second cycle credit load may vary. Thus, programme structures depend largely upon the institutions and study fields concerned.

The Bologna model has not encompassed vocational education and training programmes in most countries

While the Bologna process has clearly brought a convergence of models of degree structure, it is important to consider the extent and impact of national variations in the emerging European Higher Education Area. Some of these variations apply to specific disciplines and fields of study, while others are a continuation of differentiation between academic and professional qualifications in the newly established Bologna degrees. Whatever their practice, all countries face serious challenges in adapting to fast-changing societal demands, and ensuring that qualifications – in particular those of the first cycle – give access to the labour market.

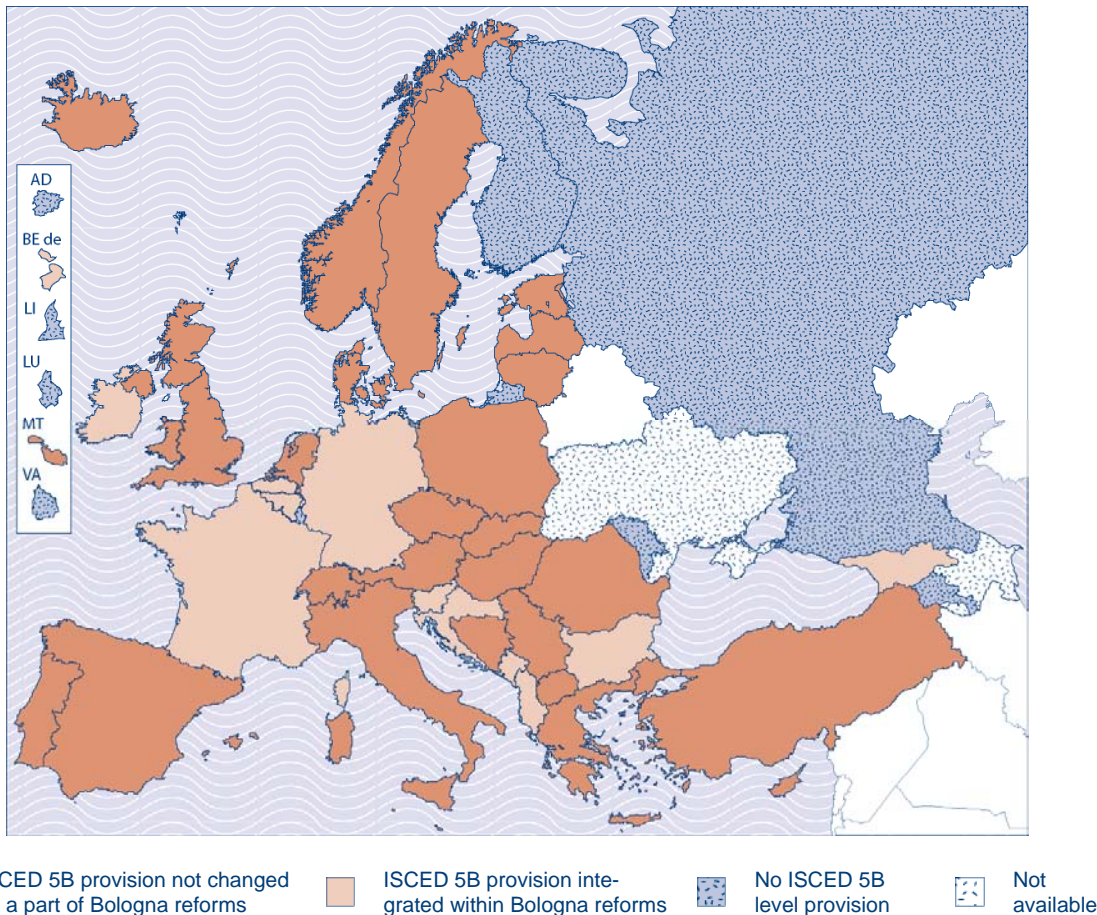
The ISCED 5B education level corresponds to programmes with a clear vocational orientation preparing students for direct entry into the labour market. They are typically shorter than ISCED 5A type programmes and therefore may not necessarily conform to the Bologna structures. However, the question of how learners are able to further develop their knowledge, skills and competences, and thus how these programmes articulate with the Bologna cycles, is a matter of significant policy importance in a globalised world where all individuals need to continue to learn throughout their lifetime.

A significant number of countries have not yet taken all the steps to modernise their vocational education system in line with the Bologna reforms – despite the fact that these reforms are conceived, at least in theory, as part of a coherent response to the rapidly changing society and labour market. However, a number of countries consider that short-cycle programmes at ISCED 5B level do not require any adaptation, and the issue is rather to be seen in terms of the articulation of programmes and qualifications within the overall system.

In several countries (Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Slovenia and Turkey), the ISCED 5B level represents a significant aspect of the tertiary education system with more than 25 % of students participating in this type of education (see *Key Data on Higher Education 2007*, Figure B2). Ten countries (Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Georgia, Germany, Ireland, Montenegro and Slovenia) with ISCED 5B provision use or have adapted the Bologna structure, particularly the Bachelor concept, to this level of education. However, more than two-thirds of countries have not found it necessary to modernise vocational education at ISCED 5B level as a part of the Bologna reforms. In most countries, however, the issue of developing bridges between the ISCED 5B level and the newly Bologna organised ISCED 5A level programmes is a matter of concern and attention.

In addition to the distinction between ISCED 5A and 5B programmes, some countries make a significant differentiation between the academic and professional profile of qualifications. In Croatia, France, Latvia, Lithuania and Montenegro, differentiation between professional and academic profiles is made at both bachelor and master levels. France distinguishes its first cycle qualifications between the *licence* and the *licence professionnelle*, the latter belonging to ISCED 5B level and being specifically designed to give access to the labour market, but with restricted possibilities to reach the Master level. The second cycle then offers both a *master professionnel* and the *master recherche* at ISCED 5A level (university studies). Nevertheless, universities are encouraged to offer master programmes whose outcomes are both academically and professionally oriented.

Figure A4: Application of the Bologna structure to ISCED 5B level programmes, 2008/09



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory note

ISCED 5B level corresponds to programmes with a clear vocational orientation that are typically shorter than ISCED 5A programmes. They do not necessarily conform to the Bologna structure/principles but some countries have nevertheless taken this opportunity to revise their programmes to ensure links and flexibility between vocational and academic programmes. In particular, the Bachelor concept may have been adapted/applied to ISCED 5B level programmes.

As in France, Lithuania distinguishes the *profesinis bakalauras* in colleges (ISCED 5B) and the *bakalauras* in universities (ISCED 5A), and the *magistras* and the *profesiné kvalifikacija* in universities (ISCED 5A). Luxembourg offers bachelor and master level degrees that are either *professionnel* or *académique*. In Latvia, the *profesionālais bakalauras* and *profesionālais maģistrs* and the *bakalauras/maģistrs* degrees all belong to ISCED 5A level. Croatia has established a dual system that separates university studies (ISCED 5A) with the *prvostupnik* and *magistar* degrees from vocational studies (ISCED 5B) with the *strucni prvostupnik* and *specijalist struke* degrees. However, both types of education programme were adapted together as part of the Bologna reforms, and both use the first cycle, ECTS and the concept of learning outcomes. A similar situation also occurs in Montenegro with the 'diploma of applied undergraduate studies' and the 'diploma of postgraduate master applied studies' at ISCED 5B level and the 'diploma of academic undergraduate studies' and the 'diploma of postgraduate master academic studies' at ISCED 5A.

For the first cycle, a differentiation has been introduced in Denmark – where the 'professions bachelor' is taught in university colleges and the 'bachelor' in universities, both at ISCED 5A level. Ireland distinguishes also between 'ordinary bachelor degrees' at ISCED 5B level offered alongside ISCED 5A courses in the institutes of technology and the third level colleges, and the 'honours bachelor degrees' (ISCED 5A) in the university system.

It is also worth noting that in some countries where no formal distinctions exist between degrees, differentiation may nevertheless occur on the basis of the type of institutions delivering the programmes. This is the case for instance in Belgium (universities and *hautes écoles/hogeschool/hochschule*), Finland (universities and polytechnics/*ammattikorkeakoulut*), Germany (universities and *Fachhochschulen*), Greece (universities and TEIs – Technological Educational Institutions), the Netherlands (universities and universities of applied sciences), Portugal (Universities and *instituto politécnico*) and Switzerland (universities and *Fachhochschulen/haute école spécialisée/scuola universitaria professionale*).

SECTION B: THE EUROPEAN CREDIT TRANSFER AND ACCUMULATION SYSTEM (ECTS)

Through the lifetime of the Bologna Process, the ECTS system has clearly established itself as a central element in the process of making European higher education more transparent and understandable. The system was developed at the end of the 1980s to be used essentially for credit transfer to facilitate student mobility within the Erasmus Programme. The aspiration to create a European Higher Education Area was agreed a decade later, and since then ECTS has gradually developed to become a core instrument supporting its implementation. Under the system credits are awarded to individual students upon successful completion of the learning activities required by a formal period of study. The number of credits ascribed to a period of study is based on its weight in terms of the workload students need in order to achieve learning outcomes in a formal context (for further details see ECTS Users Guide 2009).

The importance of ECTS with regard to student mobility has often been stated, and the Communiqués of the conferences of ministers responsible for higher education in Berlin (September 2003), Bergen (May 2005) and London (May 2007) indicate significant development in the system. In the Berlin Communiqué, the signatory countries were encouraged to apply ECTS no longer just as a credit transfer system but also as a credit accumulation system. In the Bergen Communiqué, attention was drawn to the use of ECTS in the first and second study cycles, with special emphasis on its importance in the overarching Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA), which was adopted at the conference. Meanwhile the London Communiqué concentrated on the implementation of ECTS based on workload and learning outcomes.

This report focuses not only on whether or not ECTS is used – it is apparent from the collection of national information that it is a strong feature of European higher education systems – but also on the main national understandings of the system. Thus, in addition to considering whether and how ECTS is integrated in national systems, information has also been gathered on what basis ECTS credits are awarded. The idea of uniform development of ECTS as a credit system for the European Higher Education Area is shown by the variety of responses to this topic to be mistaken, as the reality is more complex. Indeed there is considerable diversity in national interpretations of ECTS, and no doubt this diversity would be increased when examining implementation at institutional level.

No formal obstacles prevent the implementation of ECTS

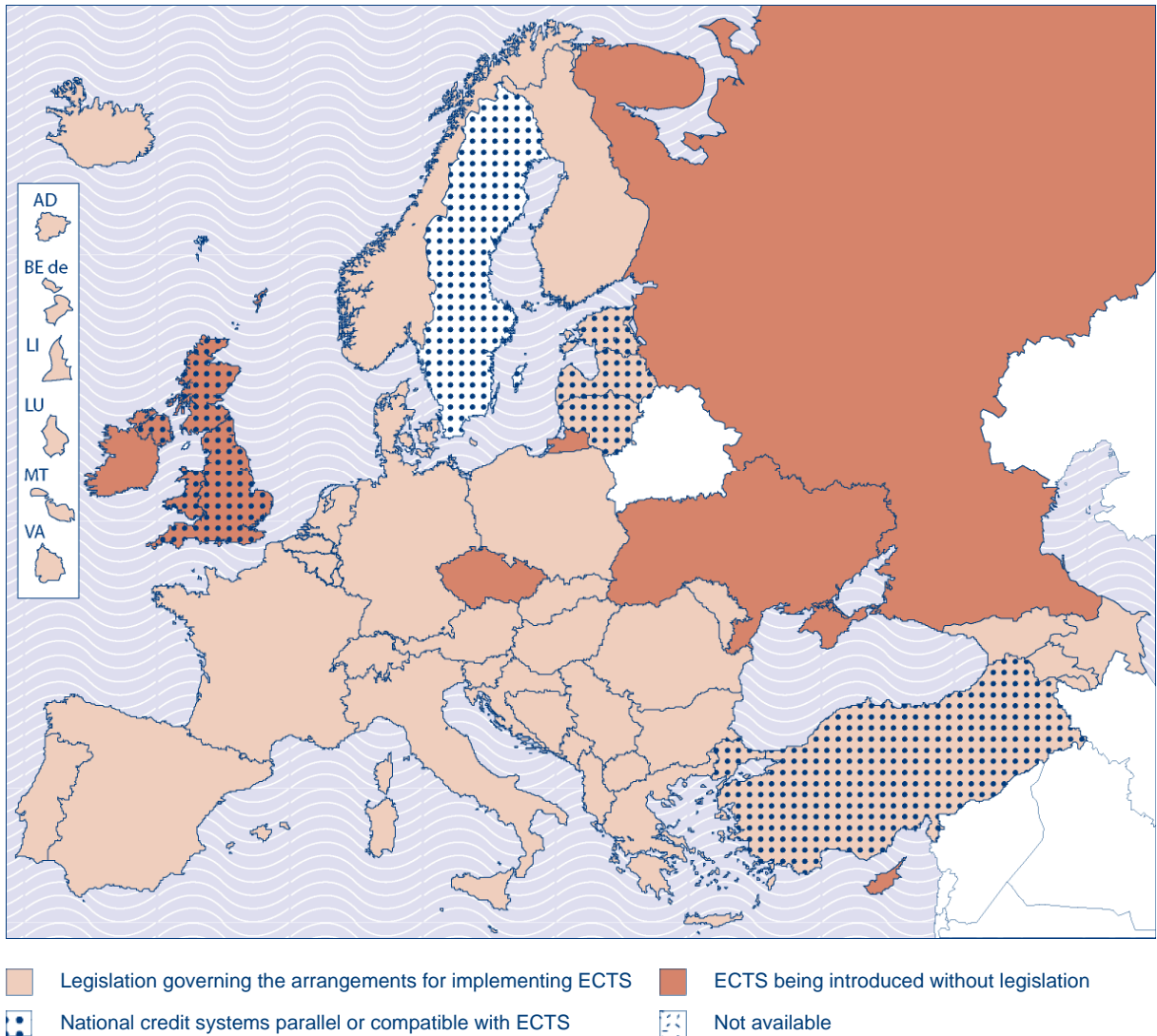
Although not a requirement, the introduction of ECTS is usually underpinned by legislation, and this is clearly illustrated in Figure B1. This process of embedding ECTS in national legislation started before 2000 in a few countries such as Austria, the Flemish Community of Belgium and Romania, gathered pace between 2000 and 2005, and is now completed in almost all countries.

There are also several countries where ECTS has been introduced without legislation. In the Czech Republic, ECTS is not stipulated in legislation yet all public higher education institutions have introduced ECTS or an ECTS-compatible credit system. In Ireland, ECTS is not mandatory either but is widely used by Irish universities, and has also been incorporated into the national awards system of the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) that is responsible for accrediting higher education programmes delivered outside the university sector. In Cyprus, an amendment to current legislation on higher education institutions, which calls for mandatory adoption of ECTS, is currently under discussion but all study programmes offered by the public and private universities are in any case already using ECTS. Meanwhile, in Russia, the ECTS-based national credit system has been implemented on a voluntary basis since 2002. Guidelines have been developed and distributed by the Ministry to all Russian higher education institutions. In Ukraine, ECTS has been introduced without legislation since 2007 and the Ministry for Education has prepared guidelines for its implementation.

In Azerbaijan, a pilot introduction of ECTS began in 2006 and the system is now being extended and phased in gradually. The first cohort of bachelor students under ECTS will graduate in 2009/10. ECTS will then be applied for master programmes from 2010 onwards. Similarly in Spain new legislation adopted in 2008 makes ECTS mandatory from 2010/11.

The United Kingdom has a non-regulatory approach to the use of ECTS. Higher education institutions are independent, self-governing bodies empowered to develop their own degrees. Institutional autonomy means that there are no significant legal obstacles to introducing the Bologna reforms, including ECTS, and organisations have responded positively to the developments arising from the Bologna Process. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have credit transfer and accumulation systems in place, and a national higher education credit framework for England was published in 2008. These systems are compatible with ECTS. Indeed in Scotland all higher education institutions use ECTS for both credit transfer and accumulation, and the system coexists happily with the national Scottish Curriculum and Qualifications Framework credits that are used for lifelong learning. The United Kingdom higher education sector continues to be active in promoting attention to, and emphasis on, the outcomes of periods of study in preference to reliance on measurements of student workload.

**Figure B1: Legislation concerning ECTS,
2008/09**



Source: Eurydice.

Significant variations in the way ECTS is implemented

For this report, ECTS is regarded as implemented when it applies to almost all programmes offered by almost all higher education institutions for the purposes of both credit transfer and accumulation, and when it satisfies the requirements of credit points based on learning outcomes and student workload.

Figure B2 reveals a variety of practices confirming that a full and harmonised implementation of ECTS is far from being the current reality, and that there is still a long process of development and adjustment ahead. On the basis of information provided at national level, five different categories of countries may be distinguished.

A first group of countries (Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Georgia, Iceland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Moldova, the Netherlands, Norway, Serbia and Switzerland) covers those where more than 75 % of institutions **and** programmes are using ECTS for both transfer and accumulation purposes. In addition, the concepts of learning outcomes and student workload are jointly used and have replaced other approaches.

In a second group of countries (Austria, Finland, France, Hungary, Malta, Portugal and Ukraine) more than 75 % of institutions **and** programmes are using ECTS for both transfer and accumulation purposes. Contact hours are no longer the reference to define the credits and have been replaced by student workload. Nevertheless, in contrast to the previous group, learning outcomes have not yet become the usual reference for the system.

In the third group, contact hours or a combination of contact hours and student workload are still used as a reference to define the credits, and more than 75 % of institutions **and** programmes are using ECTS for both transfer and accumulation purposes. Azerbaijan, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Ireland, Montenegro and Poland belong to this group.

In addition to these three groups, a further 18 countries still have to make progress to implement fully the ECTS concept. They can be separated into two other categories.

In 11 countries ECTS is implemented 75 % or less of institutions **and/or** 75 % or less of programmes using various references to define the credits. This is the case of Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain, where the challenge is still to spread the ECTS practice among institutions and programmes and to implement properly the concept.

Finally, 6 countries (the three Baltic countries, Sweden, Turkey and the United Kingdom) have maintained national credit systems in parallel with ECTS, although in the Baltic countries the trend appears to be towards the future full implementation of ECTS. In Latvia, ECTS is currently used only for international transfer, but the forthcoming law on Higher Education will enable full implementation of ECTS. In Estonia, the national credit system, which is fully compatible with ECTS, will be replaced by ECTS from 1 September 2009 onwards. In Lithuania, all components of all higher education programmes are allocated credits that are demonstrably linked to learning outcomes and, although ECTS is currently used solely for European mobility programmes, the national system is considered to be fully compatible with ECTS. However, in Turkey, the national system is not fully compatible with ECTS which is only used for credit transfer in the context of EU student mobility programmes. In the United Kingdom, the new national credit system for England (August 2008) includes detailed guidance on articulation with ECTS. Scotland retains its national system (SCQF) for the purpose of flexible learning and transfer between different sectors contributing to the provision of lifelong learning, and the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) embraces all post-16 year old education.

In most countries, **guidance and information mechanisms** have been set up to support the proper implementation of ECTS. 37 countries explicitly mention such mechanisms. They cover information campaigns, training activities, handbooks (e.g. in Azerbaijan, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Russia, Spain, Switzerland and Ukraine); the activities of the Bologna Experts who are stakeholder experts organised at national level and supported through projects run by the European Commission (Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom); the support/monitoring provided by national agencies (the National Agency for Life Long Learning in Cyprus, the State Accreditation Committee in Poland, the International Programme Office for Education and Training in Sweden, and the National Agency and the Higher Education Council in Turkey), and EU funded projects (in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia).

However, although 37 countries mention guidance and information mechanisms, only nine of these countries actually mobilise financial support for these activities. These include the Czech Republic and Greece (development/modernisation programmes), Lithuania (using EU Structural Funds), and Switzerland (budgetary support). In Andorra financial support is part of the contracting process with the State, and in Croatia the National Foundation for Science supports the implementation of ECTS, and the Ministry has also provided overall financial support for the Bologna reforms.

SECTION C: THE DIPLOMA SUPPLEMENT

The Diploma Supplement (DS) was developed by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES. It is a document produced in a standardised template that is attached to a higher education diploma and provides a description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies that were successfully completed by the individual named on the original qualification. A description of the national higher education system within which the individual named on the original qualification graduated also has to be attached to the DS.

The purpose of the Diploma Supplement (DS) is to improve understanding of the knowledge, skills and competences acquired by the learner and thus to facilitate mobility and to aid employers. The relevance and importance of the DS has been seen to increase through the Bologna decade particularly following the commitment of the Ministers of Education in the Berlin Communiqué 2003 that, as of 2005, all graduating students should receive this document automatically, free of charge and in a widely used European language.

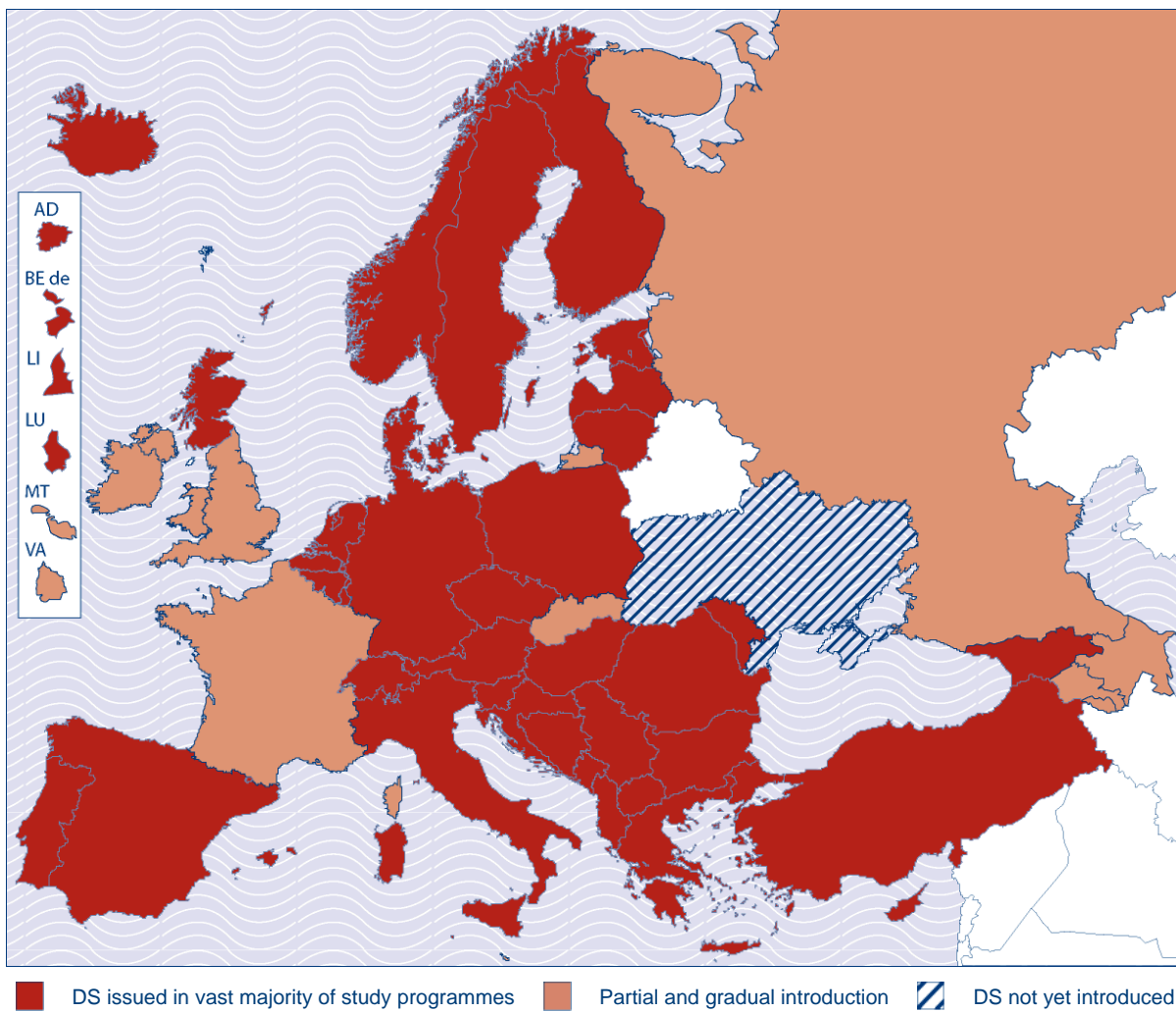
A new phase: from introduction to effective implementation and monitoring

The DS was initially introduced without legislation in several countries, and has since been made mandatory in the very large majority of countries (Figure C1). Ukraine is now the only country in the European Higher Education Area that has not yet introduced the DS.

In Azerbaijan, France, Ireland, Montenegro, Russia, Slovakia and the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) the DS is still being gradually introduced. Ireland reports that approximately 75 % of all higher education institutions issue the document, and all students graduating from 2009 are expected to receive it, whereas in the United Kingdom a recent survey gathering information from 60 % of all the United Kingdom higher education institutions estimates the implementation rate to have reached 60 % of the institutions in this sample. In France, the DS is organised centrally through the *Répertoire National des Certifications* (RNCP).

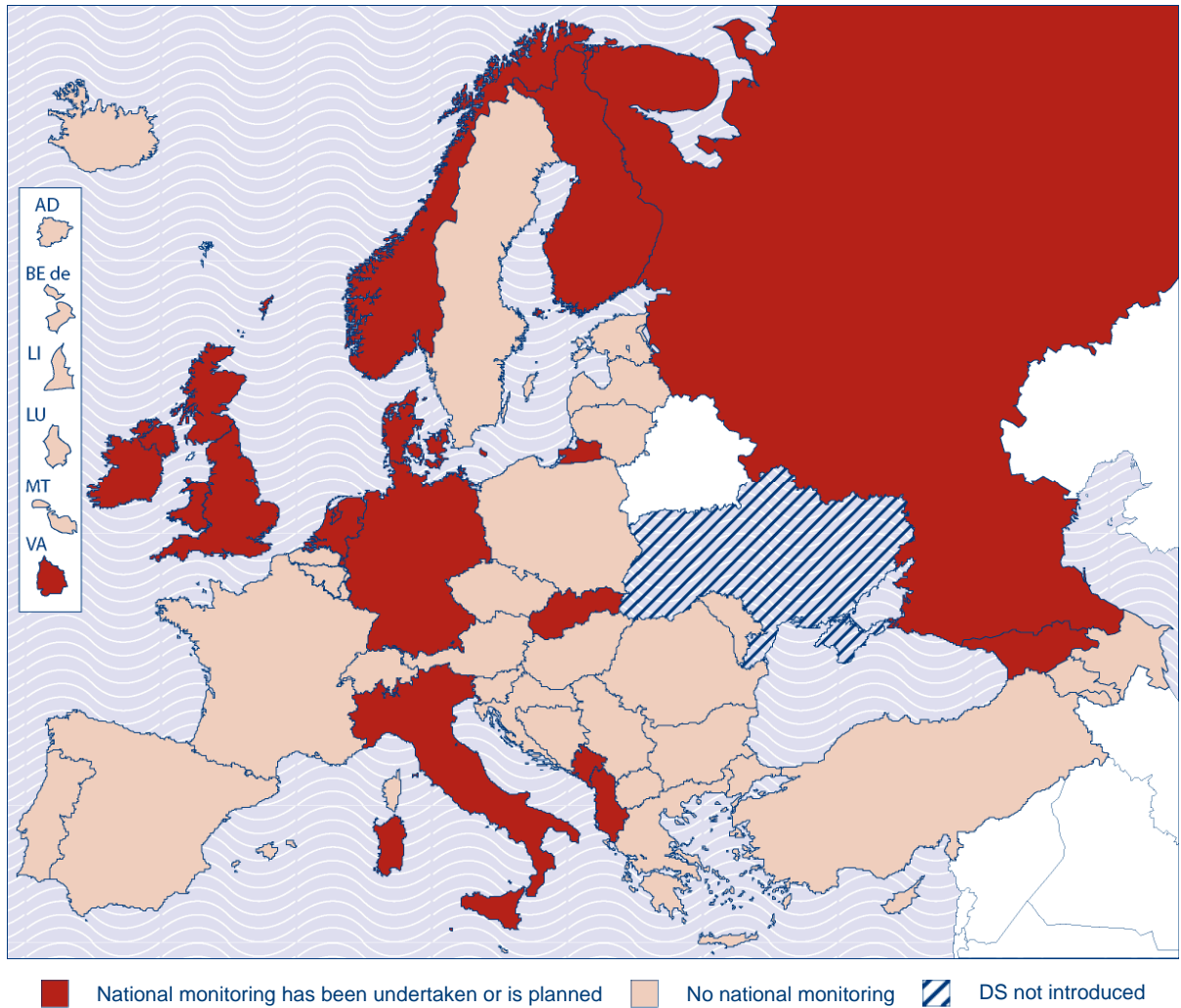
Most countries mention national incentive and support mechanisms for implementation, and more than 34 countries focus on guidance and information provided to higher education institutions. This covers information campaigns, training activities, handbooks (e.g. in Croatia, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary and Latvia), the activities of the Bologna experts (mentioned specifically by Cyprus, Czech Republic, France, Georgia, Italy, the Netherlands and Poland), the support provided by national agencies (CIRIUS in Denmark, National Qualifications Authority in Ireland, National Board of Education in Finland, the United Kingdom Higher Education Europe Unit, the National Agency and the Higher Education Council in Turkey), EU funded projects (Bosnia and Herzegovina), and on line support (Switzerland). A limited number of countries have also mobilised financial support via 'development/modernisation programmes' (Czech Republic and Greece) or have provided additional ad hoc funding (Lithuania and Malta). In Hungary, the Ministry of Education has developed specific software to help higher education institutions issue the DS, and other countries are also considering issuing the document electronically.

Figure C1: Level of implementation of the Diploma Supplement, 2008/09



Source: Eurydice.

Figure C2: National monitoring of the usage of the Diploma Supplement, 2008/09



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory note

The figure indicates if any national monitoring has been undertaken to find out how the Diploma Supplement is used by employers and/or higher education institutions.

Surprisingly, in view of the considerable action being reported to support the implementation of the DS, only a limited number of countries have actually undertaken any national monitoring to find out how the DS is actually used by higher education institutions and employers (Figure C2). 14 countries report such initiatives, some of them being very recent and therefore yet to produce any information, as in Finland (Finnish National Board of Education) and Hungary where the National Europass Center has just started to work on the development of national monitoring. In Cyprus, the National Europass Center has undertaken monitoring to find out which institutions are issuing the DS, but has not yet monitored the utility of the document for employers and institutions. Similarly, in the Flemish Community of Belgium monitoring has been undertaken of the content of the Diploma Supplement, but not with regard to its utility. In Norway the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) has undertaken extensive monitoring of the views of all higher education institutions, but the potential impact of the DS on employers in Norway recruiting graduates from Norwegian higher education institutions has not been considered, and no employer feedback has been sought. In Ireland the National Diploma Supplement Steering Group (operating under the auspices of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland) will work in conjunction with the National Europass Centre on this topic. The United Kingdom Higher Education Europe Unit conducts a survey every two years and in 2008, the Higher Education Funding Council for England has included questions on the DS in the annual monitoring statement to all English higher education institutions that it funds.

In Denmark, Europass has established contact and dialogue with companies and trade unions. In the Netherlands, the Dutch inspectorate of education (*Inspectie van het Onderwijs* www.onderwijsinspectie.nl) monitors all aspects of national legislation and the Bologna experts are also contributing to monitor the implementation of the DS.

The overall outcome of the monitoring that has been undertaken is a mixed picture, and confirms the need for further analysis. In particular it seems that the DS is not yet really known and valued by the private sector. Denmark, Georgia, Italy and the Netherlands report that the DS is not yet widely used by employers or higher education institutions. However, four countries send a more positive signal. Germany reports that the DS is used by a majority of public employers but not yet in the private sector. Albania also considers that the DS is used by a majority of higher education institutions and public employers but not yet by private ones. Montenegro mentions that the DS is used by a majority of public and private employers and higher education institutions, and Slovakia reports that the DS is widely used for student recruitment in higher education institutions.

Diploma Supplement mostly issued automatically and free of charge

Following the commitment made by Education Ministers in the Berlin Communiqué, the Diploma Supplement should be issued automatically and free of charge to graduates at the end of their study programme (Figure C3). However, this is not yet the case in all countries, and considerable variations in implementation are still reported. Azerbaijan, Spain and Turkey issue it only on request, and in Poland, although the Polish language version is issued automatically, the English language version of the document is only issued on request. In Andorra, it is also provided only on request in languages other than Catalan. In Austria, although generally issued automatically, for graduates of teacher training institutions the DS is now only issued on request. In Estonia, first cycle graduates only receive the DS on request. In Hungary, the DS is issued automatically in Hungarian and English, and on request in the case of study programmes undertaken in a minority language. In Italy, while the majority of graduates receive the DS automatically, a small number of institutions only issue it on request. In the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland), the DS is issued automatically in some institutions but only on request in others. In Russia, various situations can be observed: some institutions issue the DS automatically and free of charge whereas others issue it in return for payment to those students who request it.

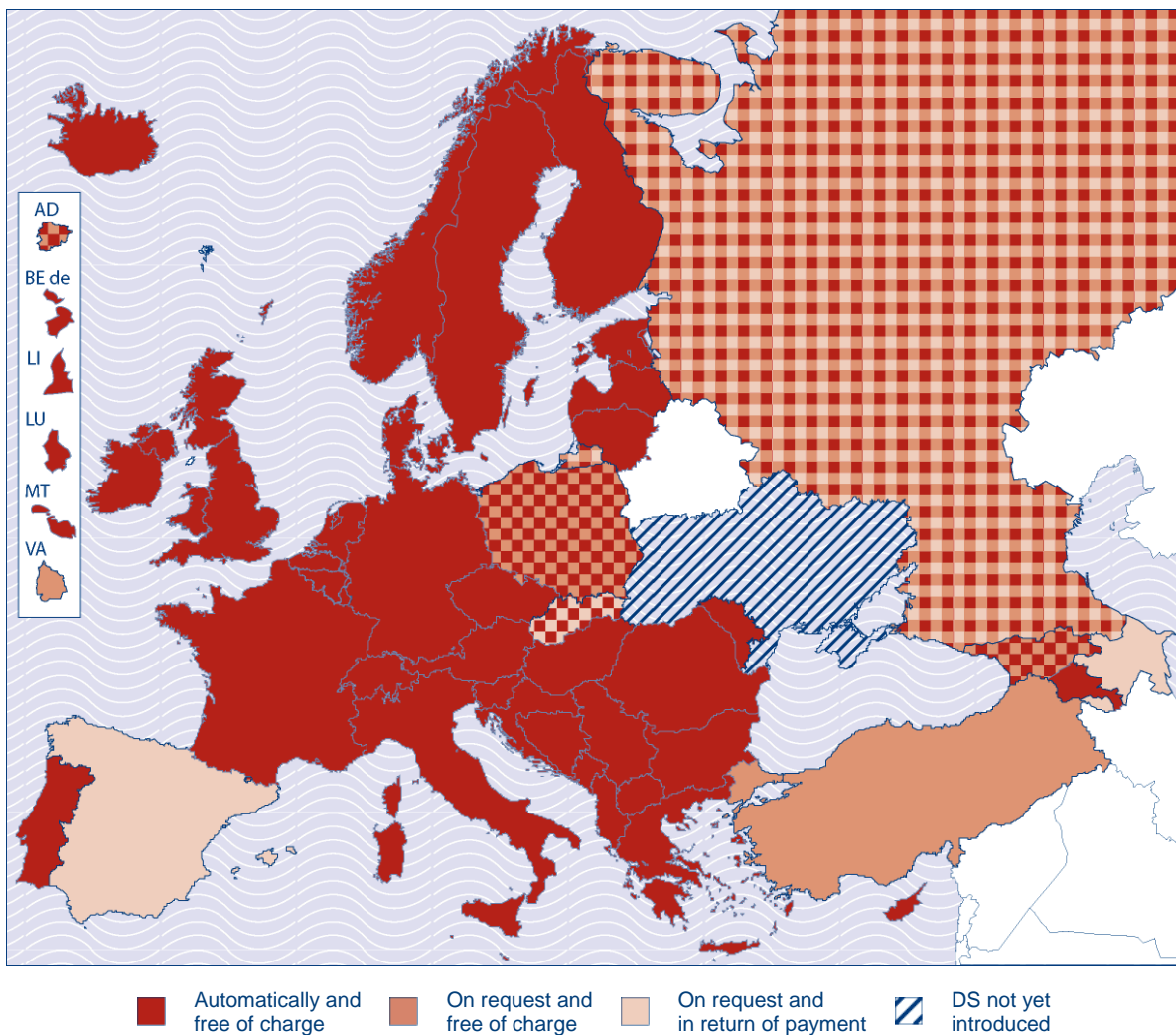
As far as cost is concerned, the Diploma Supplement is issued free of charge almost everywhere and the situation appears to have improved since 2006. The reported exceptions are Slovakia (where the English language version is issued only on request and in return for payment), Spain (irrespective of the language) and Russia, where some institutions request payment.

As regards the language used, Cyprus, Ireland, Malta, the Nordic countries and the United Kingdom issue the DS solely in English (although in Wales some institutions issue the DS in English and Welsh). Otherwise, the majority of the signatory countries issue it in the language of instruction and in English (Figure C4).

In Hungary, Montenegro and Serbia, the DS is issued in the national language and English, as well as in the language of instruction in cases where a different language is used (e.g. minority languages). In the Netherlands, the DS is issued in either the national language or in English. In Belgium (German-speaking Community) it is issued in German and French, and in the Flemish Community of Belgium it is issued to all students in Dutch and English, while students taught entirely in another language than Dutch are issued their degree and DS both in the teaching language and in Dutch. In the Czech Republic, higher education institutions may decide in which language to issue the document, and in general it is issued in Czech and English.

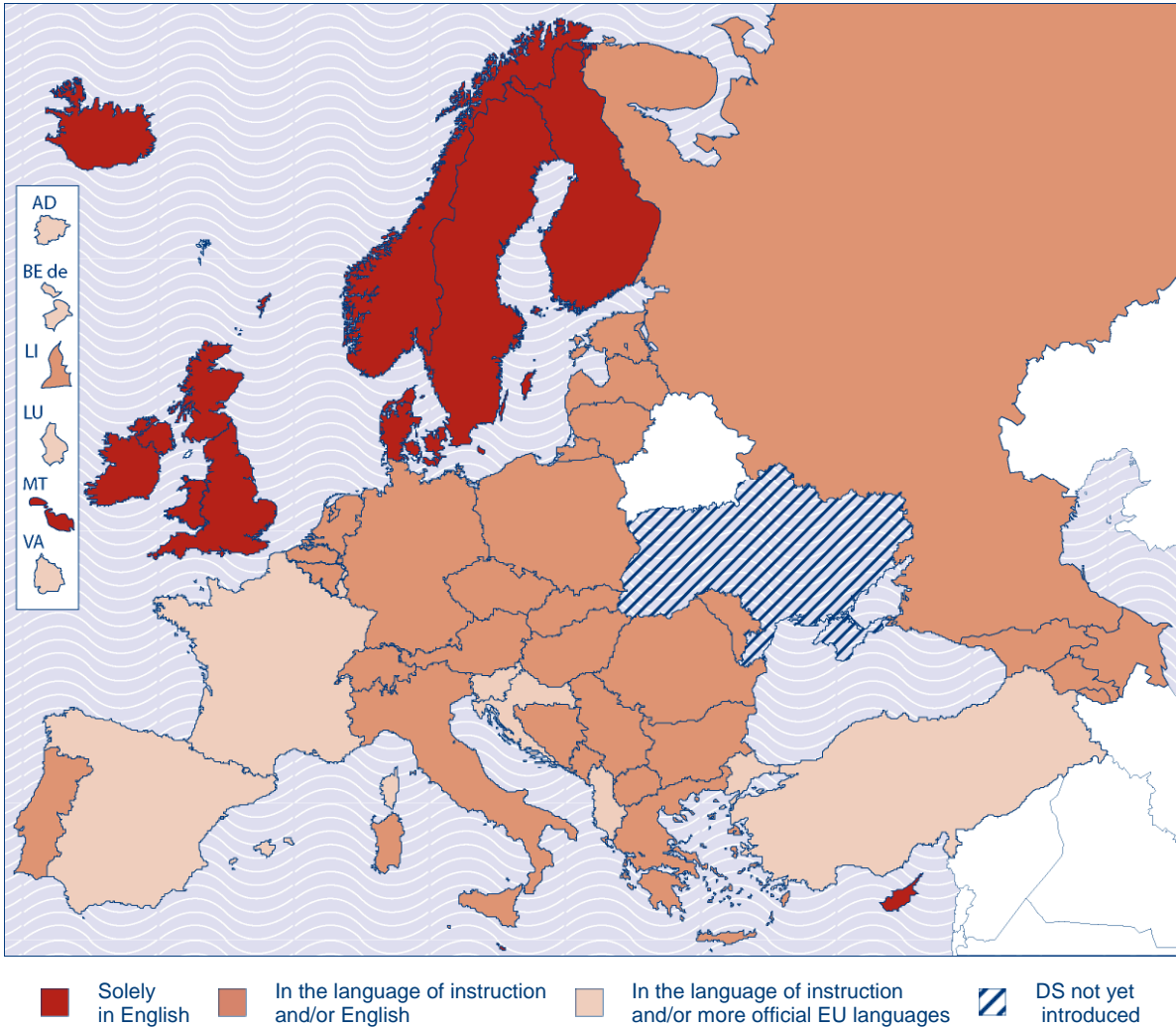
In five countries (Andorra, France, Slovenia, Spain and Turkey) the DS is available in the language of instruction and when required in other official languages of the European Union depending on the wishes of the student and the choices offered by the institution.

Figure C3: Compliance with the conditions that the Diploma Supplement be issued automatically and free of charge, 2008/09



Source: Eurydice.

Figure C4: Languages in which the Diploma Supplement is issued, 2008/09



Source: Eurydice.

SECTION D: NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

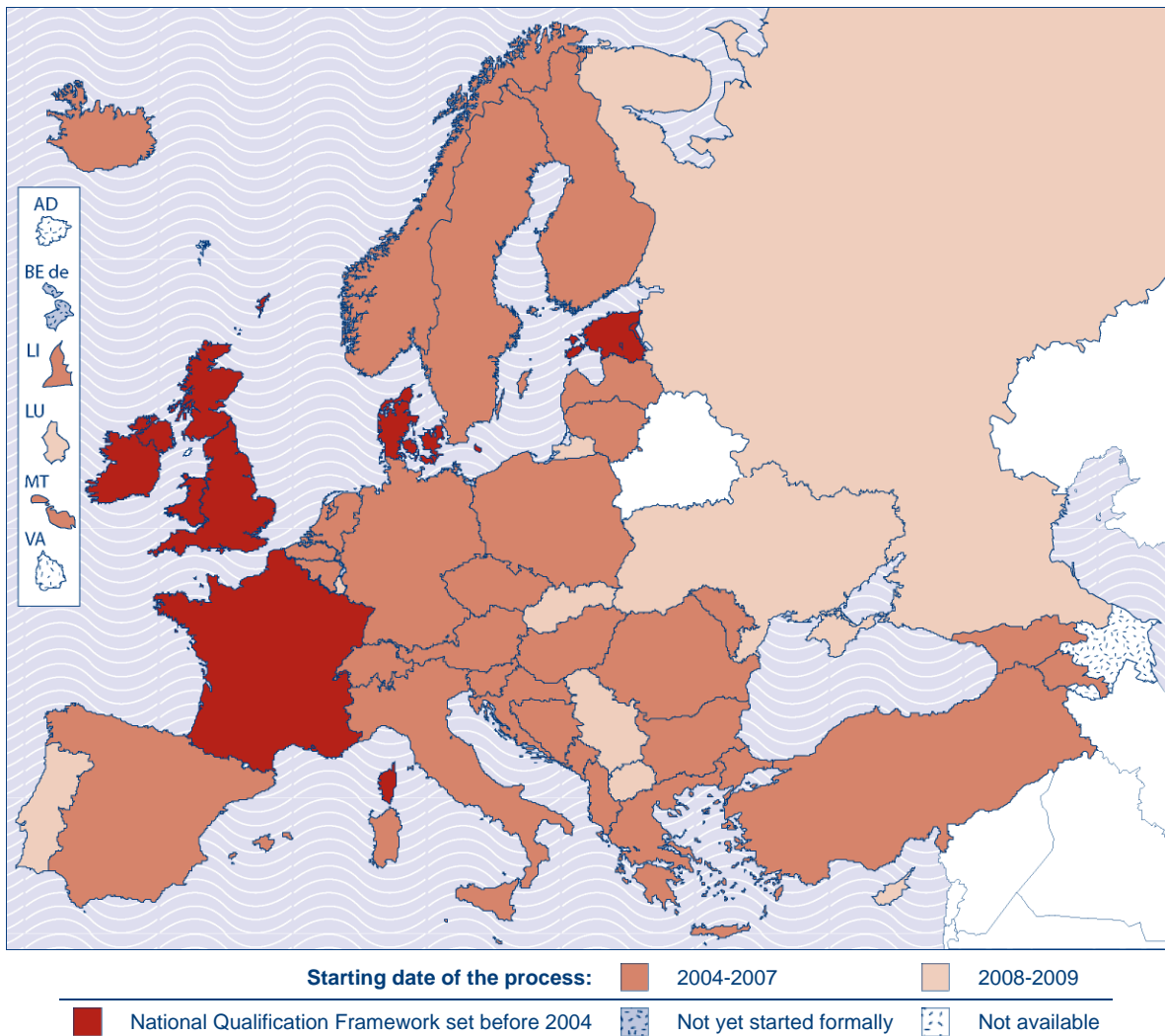
Qualifications frameworks are tools for describing and clearly expressing the differences between qualifications in all cycles and levels of education. Development of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) has been encouraged in recent years by a range of initiatives and processes, with the aim of understanding similarity and difference between qualifications issued in different education systems in Europe. In the context of the Bologna process, European Ministers of Education in Bergen (May 2005) adopted the overarching Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA) and also agreed that National Qualifications Frameworks should be set up by 2007 and implemented by 2010 in all Bologna signatory countries. These National Qualifications Frameworks for higher education would include reference to the three-cycle study structure and the use of generic descriptors based on learning outcomes, competences and credits for the first and second cycles.

While this may have seemed an ambitious but feasible objective to the Ministers in Bergen, the complexity of the challenge was perhaps underestimated, especially as the ongoing dynamics of other European processes added further constraints. Indeed, no sooner had the Ministers of Education adopted the FQ-EHEA than a new overarching European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (the EQF), covering all aspects of education provision, began to be developed for the EU member countries in the context of the Lisbon strategy. The EQF was adopted on 23 April 2008 by the European Council and Parliament. While care was taken during the development of the EQF to ensure that the two overarching frameworks would be compatible, nevertheless the approach in developing descriptors was different. Thus the task for countries when developing or adapting their national qualifications frameworks is far from simple: not only should these new national instruments reflect the shift from traditional input-based approaches of categorising qualifications to a focus on learning outcomes, credits and the profile of qualifications, but care should also be taken to ensure that national developments are compatible with the two overarching European frameworks.

Prior to the adoption in Bergen of the European Qualifications Framework for higher education, few countries had experience of developing frameworks based on learning outcomes, level/cycle descriptors and credits. Estonia and the United Kingdom (Scotland) (1997), the United Kingdom (2001), France (2002), Denmark (2003) and Ireland (2003) were the only countries to have adopted a national qualification framework before 2005. In the post 2005 context, the challenge for these countries has therefore been twofold: adapting the national qualifications framework to the overarching European Frameworks, and also ensuring that the national framework functions well for the purposes for which it was designed, meeting the needs of employers and higher education institutions, as well as other organisations, stakeholders and individuals.

Apart from these countries, all the others started the overall process of developing NQFs after 2005, except Finland, Latvia, Slovenia that had already taken steps in 2004 (see Figure D1). The main wave of development started in 2005 and within 3 years (2005-2007) more than 27 countries had launched the process. Cyprus, Portugal (2009), Russia, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine (2008) are the countries that have only started very recently. Due to the limited higher education provision (two qualifications at ISCED 5B level), the German-speaking Community of Belgium saw no need to develop a formal national framework.

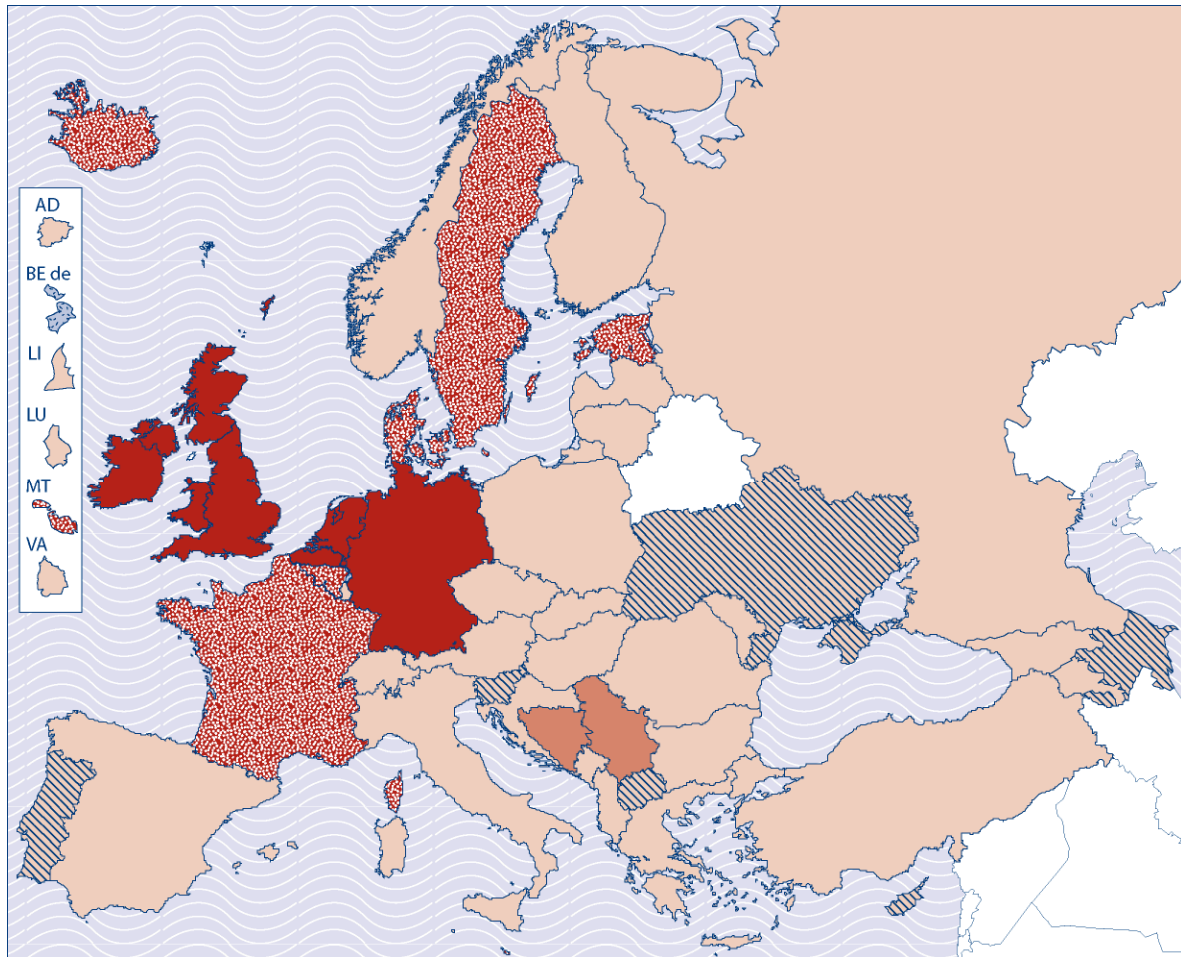
Figure D1: Starting date of the process towards establishing a National Qualification Framework



Source: Eurydice.

In order to clarify the different situations of countries in their processes of NQF development and in particular to clearly differentiate the formal adoption of the framework from its implementation, five main steps towards establishing a National Qualification Framework compatible with the two overarching European Qualifications Frameworks have been defined (Figure D2). These steps are defined on the basis of the recommended ten steps scale proposed by the BFUG Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks led by the Council of Europe, the reference year being 2008/09.

Figure D2: Stage towards establishing a National Qualification Framework, 2008/09



- Step 5: Overall process fully completed including self-certified compatibility with the FQ-EHEA.
- Step 4: Redesigning the study programmes is on-going and the process is close to completion.
- Step 3: The NQF has been adopted formally and the implementation has started.
- Step 2: The purpose of the NQF has been agreed and the process is under way including discussions and consultations. Various committees have been established.
- Step 1: Decision taken. Process just started.
- Not yet started formally.

Source: Eurydice.

Currently, around one third of the Bologna signatory countries have formally adopted a national qualifications framework for higher education. Among them 5 countries, comprising 6 higher education systems (Belgium – Flemish Community, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom – with a NQF for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and a separate framework in Scotland) may be considered to have fully completed the process including the self certification of its compatibility with the European framework (FQ-EHEA). 7 countries (Belgium – French Community, Denmark, Estonia, France, Iceland, Malta and Sweden) are well underway and are using the NQF in re-designing study programmes. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, the NQF has been adopted formally and the process of implementation has started recently.

The remaining countries are either at a very early stage after having taken the decision to launch the process (Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Portugal, Slovenia and Ukraine) or have already fully committed to the task but the NQF has not yet been formally adopted in legislation or in any other high level policy fora. These countries are actively working on their national frameworks in special committees, working groups and through public consultation. For many of them the final completion of the process is not expected before 2011-2012, meaning that the overall implementation of the qualification frameworks at European level must now be envisaged in a mid term perspective.

SECTION E: MOBILITY AND PORTABILITY OF STUDENT SUPPORT

Student mobility in the European Higher Education Area

Despite the high profile of mobility issues in the Bologna Ministerial meetings, and the sustained growth of European programmes promoting and funding different forms of mobility – including exchange programmes and work placements through Erasmus, and mobility in joint degree programmes in Erasmus Mundus – there is still little collated information on mobility in the European Higher Education Area. Information on the reality of student mobility is incomplete, and the factors affecting mobility flows are also difficult to gauge with certainty.

The Bologna Process has brought issues of mobility and internationalisation to the centre of European higher education policy discussion, and indeed the Bologna Declaration set this agenda by emphasising a common commitment to overcome *obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement with particular attention to... access to study and training opportunities and to related services*. The two maps below (Figures E1) focus on incoming and outgoing student mobility, but are not based on 'pure' mobility statistics. They use Eurostat data from 2006 showing, in the case of incoming mobility the number of students of foreign nationality studying in a given country as a percentage of total enrolment, and for outgoing mobility the number of students from a given country studying abroad as a percentage of the total enrolment.

However, foreign nationality of students is not a measure of mobility nor a reliable proxy for mobility. Research in this field ⁽¹⁾ reveals that up to 40 % of all foreign students have already been resident in the country prior to taking up higher education studies, thus creating significant distortions to the picture painted by such 'mobility' data. As well as mixing genuinely mobile students with students of foreign nationality that are settled in a given country, and thus over-estimating the number of mobile students, such data are also unable to provide information about the different higher education stages at which mobility may occur. Thus, the impact of the reform of degree structures through the Bologna process on student mobility flows between the first and second cycle, or between the second and third cycle, remains to a large extent unknown.

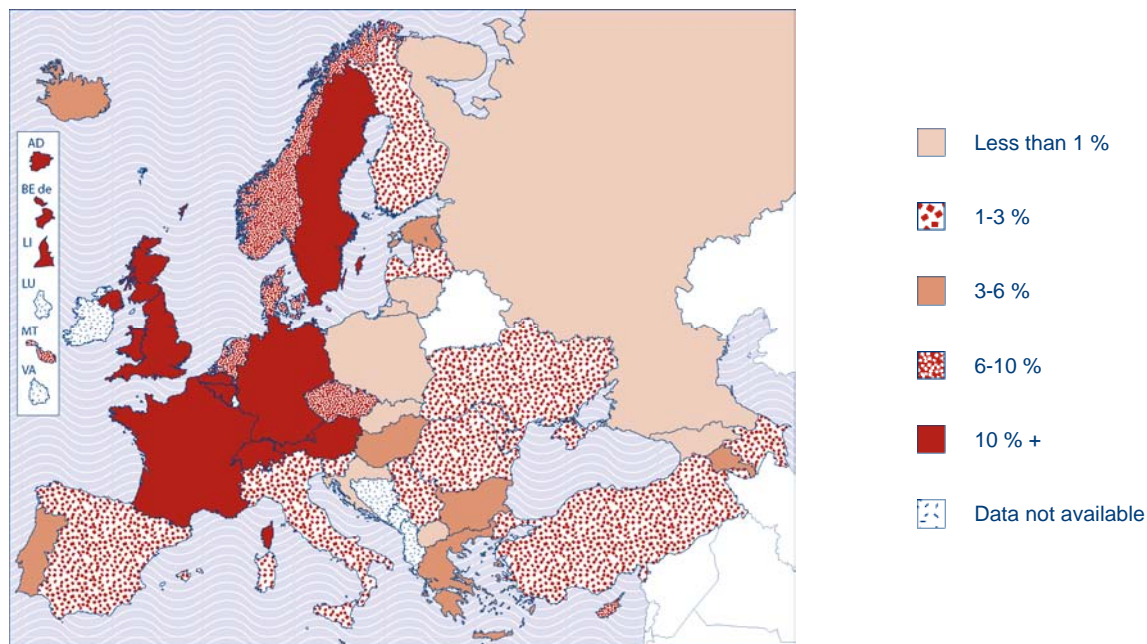
Nevertheless the available data, flawed as they are, reveal significant findings. Most importantly, there are extremely significant national differences within an overall picture of relatively low student mobility. Indeed in eighteen countries less than 3 % of students are enrolled abroad (outgoing mobility, see Figure E1), and Russia, Ukraine and the United Kingdom report the lowest outbound mobility rates with less than 1 % enrolment abroad. At the other extreme, there are ten countries – Albania, Andorra, Cyprus, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta and Slovakia – where more than 10 % of students are enrolled abroad.

For several countries, the incoming and outgoing mobility maps represent a clear mirror image: in three major countries – France, Germany and the United Kingdom – the apparent high levels of incoming mobility are combined with seemingly low levels of outgoing mobility, and these data should be a source for national policy discussion. The opposite situation – high rates of outgoing mobility

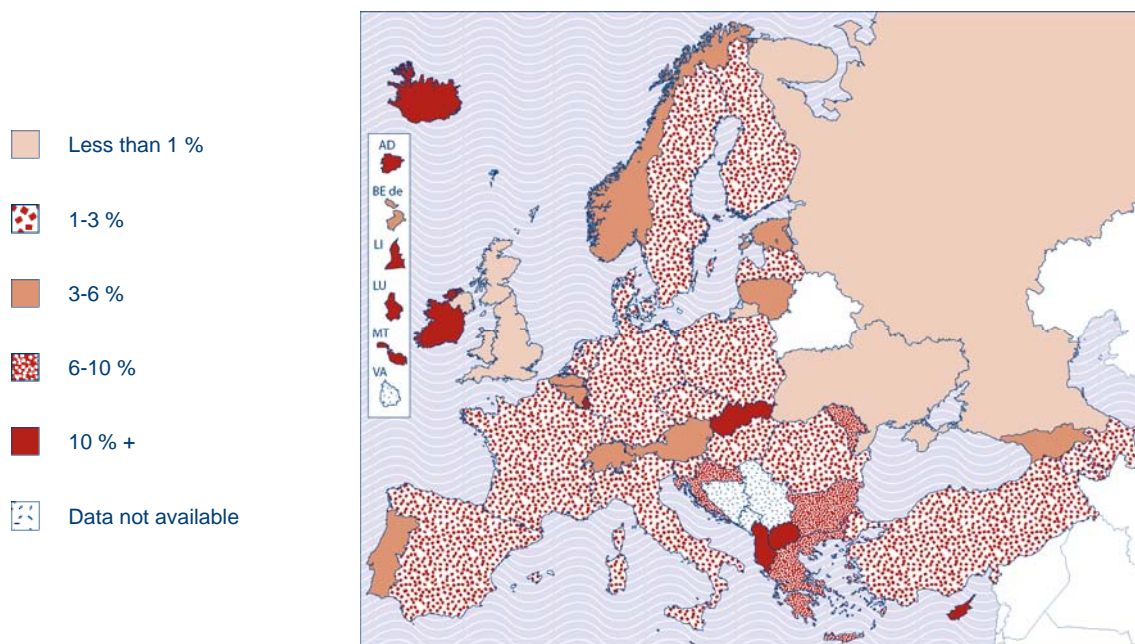
⁽¹⁾ Kelo, Teichler and Wächter, (eds) Eurodata: Student mobility in European higher education, 2006, Academic Cooperation Association.

Figure E1: Incoming and outgoing student mobility in the European Higher Education Area, 2008/09

Incoming student mobility



Outgoing student mobility



Source: Eurostat.

Explanatory note

These maps are based on Eurostat data 2006. In the case of **incoming student mobility**, the map shows the number of students of foreign nationality (from all countries) studying in a given country as a percentage of total enrolment. For **outgoing student mobility**, the map shows the number of students from a given country studying abroad as a percentage of the total enrolment.

combined with low rates of incoming mobility – can be observed in Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Georgia, Moldova and Slovakia, and again the reality behind these statistics requires further investigation, particularly given the geographical concentration of these countries in Central and Eastern Europe, and the question of brain drain that may be associated to these data. Of equal concern are the countries which have low rates of both incoming and outgoing mobility, and here Poland, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine are the prime examples. Many other countries, constituting the European norm, have fairly low levels of both incoming and outgoing mobility. Only four small countries – Andorra, Cyprus, Iceland and Liechtenstein – manage to combine high levels of incoming and outgoing mobility, but this finding is perhaps related to the small number of students concerned.

A diverse European landscape for portability of financial support

The Bologna process has given considerable attention to the importance of portable financial support to students in order to encourage mobility. However, in order to analyse and interpret information about portability of student support it is first necessary to establish some information about the nature of the costs charged to students and the student support systems that are in place to assist some or all students with all or a part of their costs.

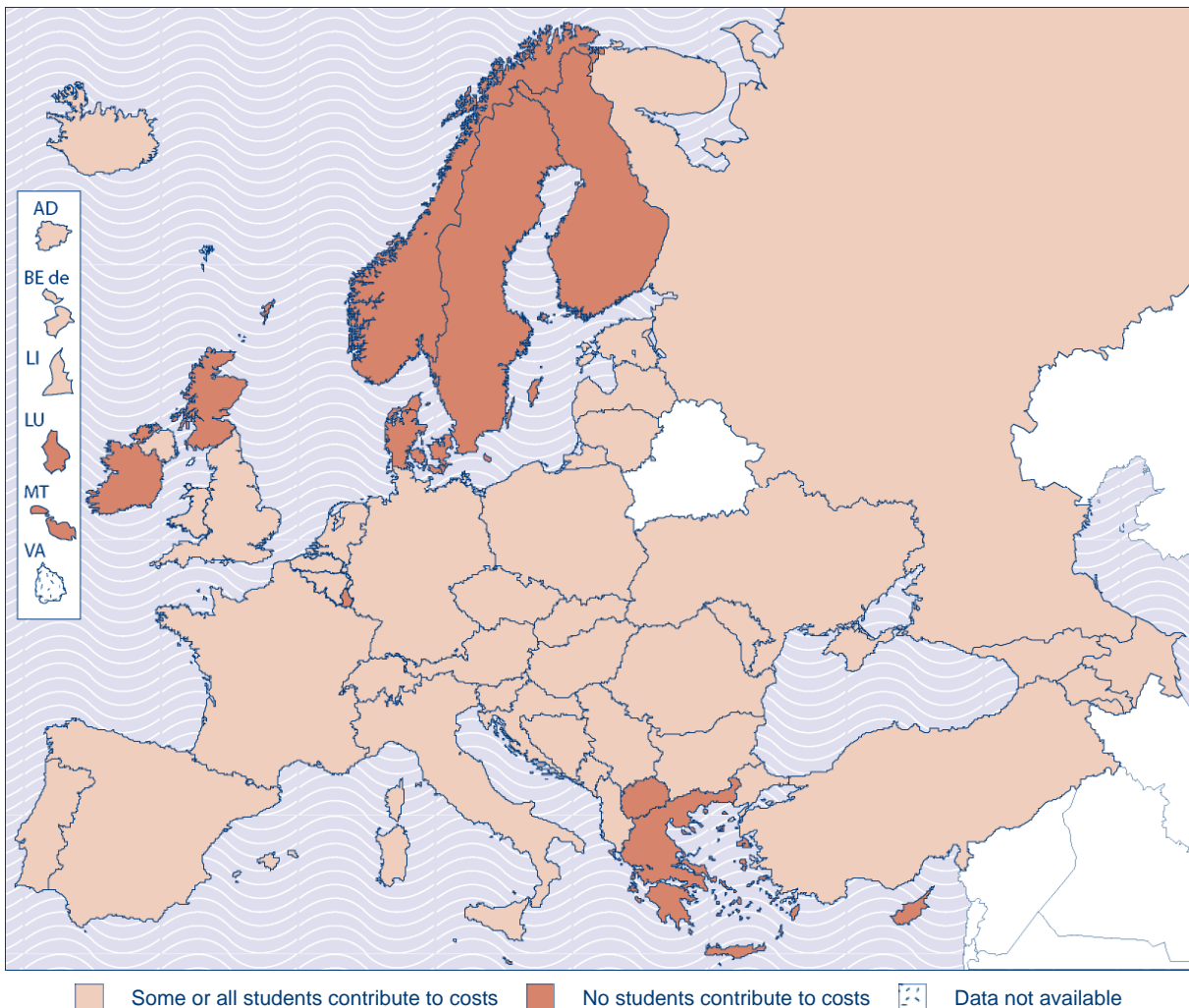
It is possible to differentiate countries on the basis of whether or not contributions to costs from individual students are levied. However, although this may seem like a clear-cut and simple distinction, in reality it is a complex matter, and a number of caveats need to be made. Firstly, the language used to describe costs may colour perceptions. A 'tuition fee' may have a different connotation to an 'administrative charge', although the effect on those who pay the cost may be the same. Secondly, costs have to be seen in a broader social context, as a cost may seem trivial to some but may be very significant to others, and therefore information on the wider socio-economic context is essential. Thirdly, costs cannot be seen in isolation of the support system in the country. It is essential to understand whether and how costs are levied differently from different students: for example students from low income families, or those studying part-time or in continuing education programmes may be subject to different costs to other students, as may international or overseas students. Thus, without information on all of these issues, the real comparative value of distinguishing countries that charge costs and those that do not is limited (see *Key Data on Higher Education*, 2007 edition).

Nevertheless, despite these caveats, it is important to examine trends in charging costs to students. Within the European Higher Education Area, the United Kingdom (England and Northern Ireland from 2006 and Wales from 2007) has taken the strongest step in changing its system by giving institutions the possibility to set variable fee levels for national and EU students – initially with an annual maximum amount of £3 000 and then increasing in line with forecast inflation. Students are not required to pay the fee before or whilst studying, but only upon graduation and when a certain income threshold is reached. Fees for students coming from outside the European Union are, however, not subject to the annual maximum, and in some programmes and universities can be set at very high levels. Fee income generated can be used to bolster institutional investment but some has to be used to provide finances to support students in the greatest financial difficulty and to support outreach work. In Wales there is currently a national grant system in place, although student finance arrangements are currently under review.

Since 2006/07 German *Länder* have also been empowered to levy tuition fees, and seven of the sixteen have done so. Lithuania has recently introduced fees, and joins the growing number of

countries within the European Higher Education Area that charge costs to some or all students. However, in other countries, moves to introduce fees have been rejected. In Hungary, for example, a government proposal to introduce general tuition fees was rejected by referendum, although higher education institutions may still charge fees to students who are not subsidised by the State. Figure E2 illustrates that 34 out of the 46 countries in the European Higher Education Area now charge costs to some or all students, but even this picture contains some ambiguity. For example, although no fees are charged for public undergraduate-level higher education in Cyprus, second and third cycle students are required to contribute to the costs of higher education.

Figure E2: Full-time national student contributions to the costs of higher education, 2008/09



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory note

This map shows the countries in the European Higher Education Area where some or all full-time national students are required to contribute to costs of higher education. For students from another European Union member country studying within the EU the same conditions apply as for national students. The map makes no distinction between costs charged to students as administrative fees or as tuition fees. Contributions to student organisations are also ignored.

The impact of costs charged to students – both on individuals and at a wider societal level – depends to a great extent on national socio-economic conditions and the framework of student support. As far as student support systems are concerned, the first important observation to make is that every European country takes some measures to support some or all students. Two radically different approaches can be distinguished in the European Higher Education Area. Firstly, there are a number of countries where students are considered as financially independent adults, and where there is also a universal entitlement to student support. This is the situation of all the Nordic countries, and these countries also tend not to charge tuition fees or other administrative costs to students, and to have a high level of public investment in higher education.

All other countries find some means to target support to a section of the student population, and take into account students' financial situation within their family. The expectation is for families or individual students themselves to support at least a part of the costs to participate in higher education, with the state's role being to support those families with particular needs – through instruments such as family allowance and tax relief – and/or to target support to specific categories of students on the basis of defined criteria (for further information, see *Key Data on Higher Education*, 2007 edition, Chapter D, Financial Support).

This second group of countries can be further differentiated according to the main criteria used to allocate public funding to students. Here a clear distinction can be drawn between Western European countries and those from Central and Eastern Europe. In Western European countries financial need is clearly the most significant criterion for allocating resources. However, for countries from Central and Eastern Europe, although provision is often made to support students from low-income families, the most important factor for allocating funding is academic performance – whether in secondary school leaving or higher education entry examinations, or throughout the higher education study programme.

Indeed Central and Eastern European countries still show signs of their common heritage in the way in which their student support systems are conceived and structured, and these common characteristics are most evident in countries which are not currently members of the European Union. Direct aid to students dominates over indirect aid to families in all these countries, and the main form of administering aid is through grants and fee waivers. Some students are required to pay fees in Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Montenegro, Russia and Serbia, and in all these countries a percentage of students are exempted from fees. The percentage of students exempted from fees or benefitting from grants/scholarships varies considerably from country to country, with Serbia for example awarding grants to less than 30 % of students, and Russia more than 50 %. Grants tend to be awarded primarily on the basis of academic achievement, but nearly all countries make some support available for students in financial need. It is also noticeable that specific funding mechanisms for the third cycle are largely yet to be established in these countries.

National support for mobility

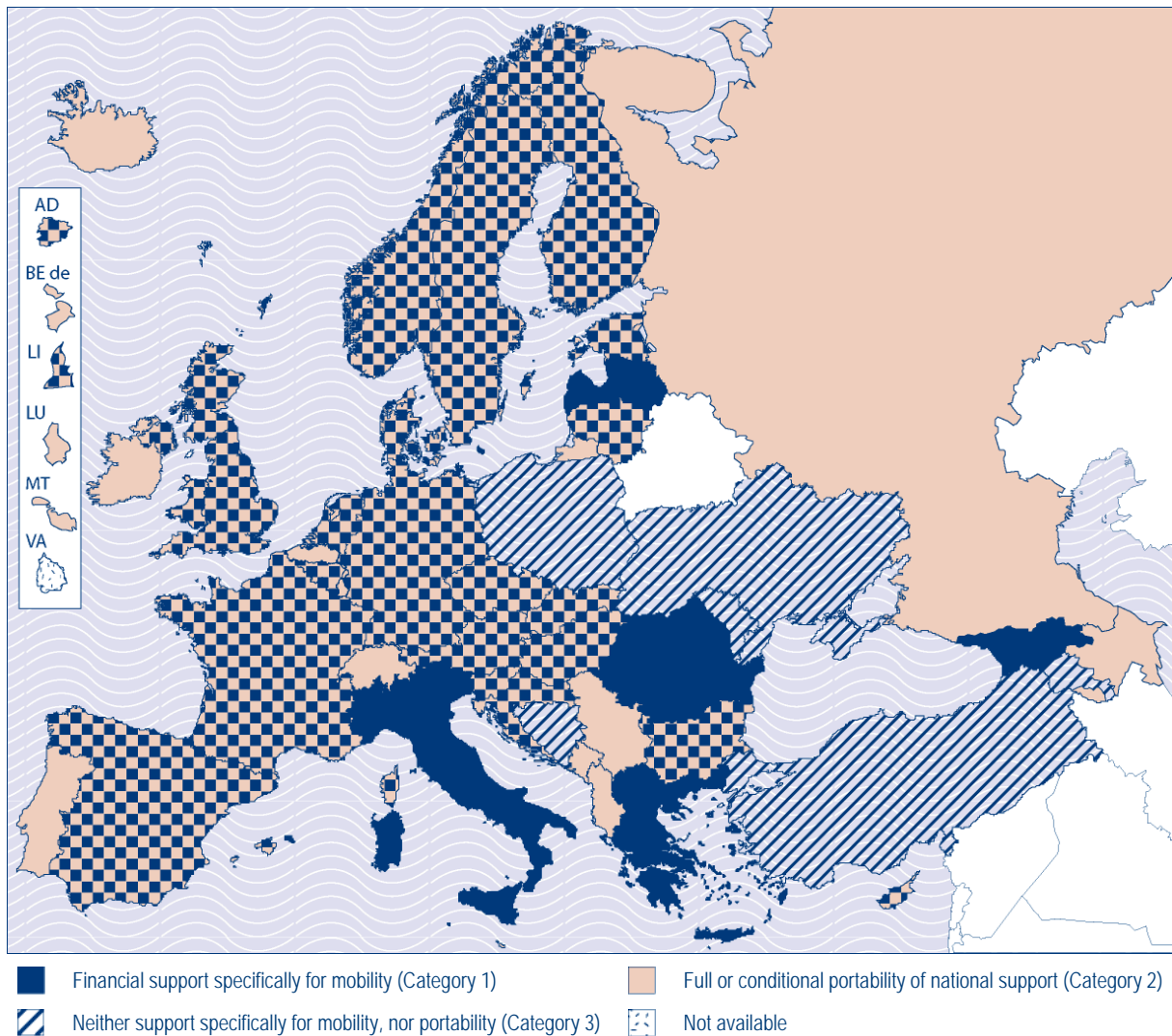
While the map (Figure E3) reveals a picture of considerable diversity in the European Higher Education Area, it is interesting to note that the majority of countries have some provision to support mobility, either through ensuring portability of national support, or through developing specific support measures for mobility. Indeed the only countries where there is an absence of any financial support for mobility are Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Poland, Turkey and Ukraine.

In other countries mobility is supported by providing specific funding, and/or by ensuring that national support can be used outside the national context – sometimes at increased levels to take account of higher costs in other countries. However, the type of approach adopted would appear to be only one of several factors with a bearing on international student mobility. Indeed, information about the levels of support awarded and about the true extent of mobility is incomplete, and it is hard to establish any direct causal relationship between measures to support mobility and actual international student mobility in higher education, and more detailed research would be required as to whether overall support is adapted to the needs of mobile students.

There is, however, a clear correlation between the lack of financial support and low levels of mobility. However, even this correlation should be interpreted with caution. It is not necessarily the case, for example, that students from Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Poland, Turkey and Ukraine are less mobile than those from other countries solely as a result of receiving no financial support for mobility. Indeed, other factors – including the socio-economic conditions of the country, the difficulty of obtaining travel and residence documents, or concerns about the fair recognition of qualifications obtained – may be equally significant barriers to mobility as the lack of portable financial support.

Seventeen countries rely exclusively on one of the two main support mechanisms for mobility – portability of national financial support, or specific financial support for mobility. In the other countries where mobility is supported full or restricted portability of national financial support coexists with forms of financial support specifically for mobility.

Figure E3: Types of financial support for the international mobility of full-time students for a first or second cycle qualification, 2008/09



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory note

Financial support specifically for mobility comprises all forms of funding (with the exception of Erasmus-type European programme grants) by national public authorities solely and specifically to students undertaking higher education courses abroad. Typically this may take the form of an additional payment (supplementary support) to students studying abroad, an increase in the amount of support or the period over which it is awarded, or grants or loans for mobile students only.

Full portability of national support is defined as the situation in which **all kinds of support** available for students in their home country may also be claimed, in accordance with the same conditions of award and payment, by the student who undertakes all or part of his or her study abroad. In other words, the home country concerned does not place any restrictions on portability.

In the case of conditional portability, six major categories have been selected in this report: conditions linked to the period spent studying abroad; the host country; the host institution; the types of programme/course; students' progress, and language requirements.

Variety of forms of specific financial support for mobility

The European Higher Education Area can be divided quite clearly between those countries that do and do not provide specific forms of financial support for student mobility (Figure E4). While the picture is not one of a straightforward East-West divide, nevertheless many countries that have specific support measures for mobility are located in Western Europe, while many that do not are in Central and Eastern Europe. In addition, the high level of students from some Central and Eastern European countries studying abroad raises questions and concerns about the main drivers of mobility. The map also distinguishes between countries that offer further forms of support specifically for mobility, and those that increase the amount of 'mainstream' national financial support for mobile students.

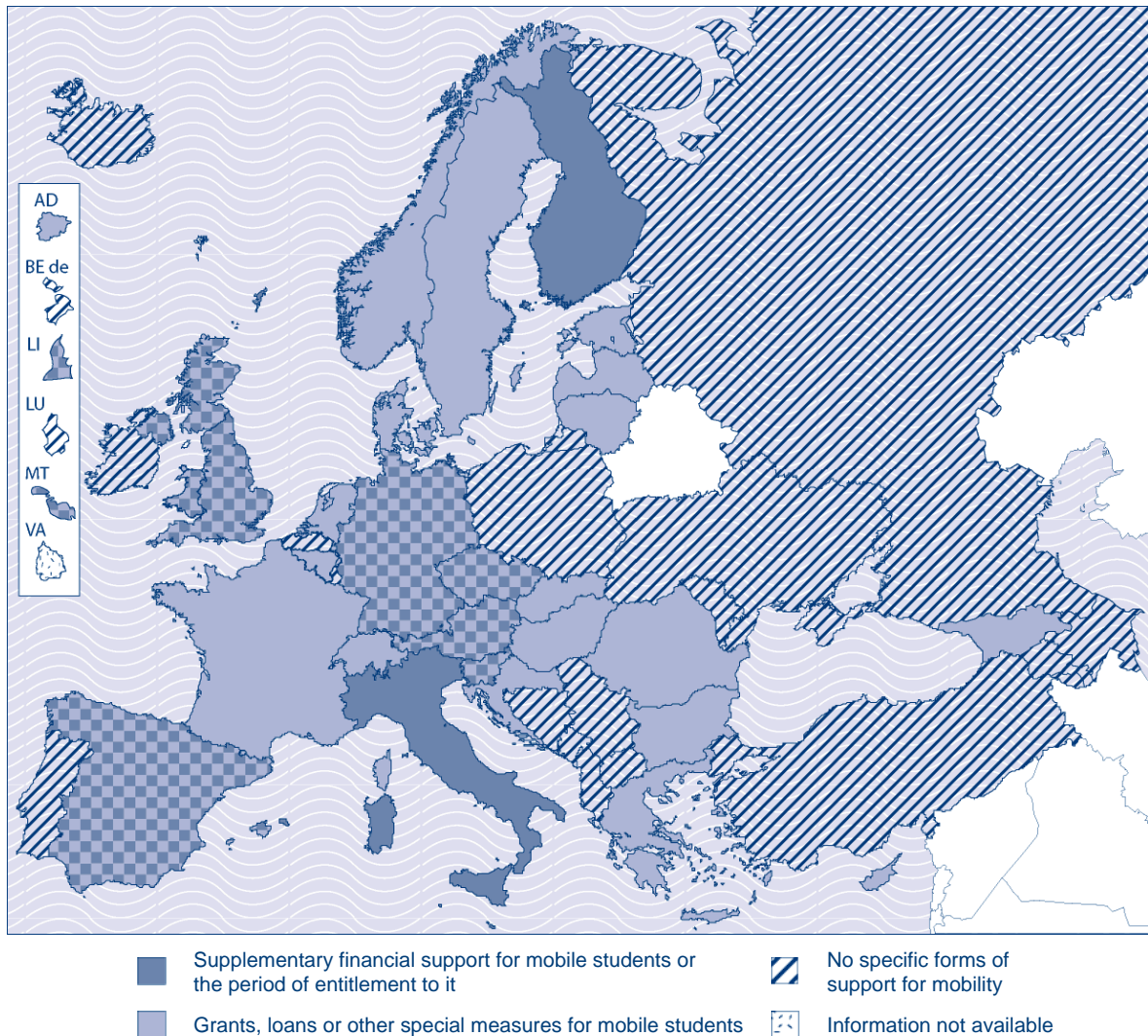
Andorra, Belgium (French Community), Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, France, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden and Switzerland all provide special forms of support usually in the form of special grants or loans. In some countries, including Bulgaria and Romania, this support is distributed on the basis of results from a specific competition. Latvia awards loans, with the recipients and amounts chosen on a case-by-case basis by a special committee in the Ministry of Education and Science. In Estonia, scholarships are also awarded on the basis of open competition, with the size of grant being determined centrally according to the cost of living in the country of destination. In this country, funding has recently been supplemented by European Social Fund resources, and the number of scholarships has effectively doubled. Short-term mobility funding is now administered directly by the higher education institutions. France awards grants specifically for mobility mainly on the basis of social criteria for a period of between three and nine months, and these grants may supplement the support normally received by student grant-holders. Belgium (French Community) introduced a specific mobility fund in 2004, with grants awarded depending on students' personal income. The fund was over € 1 000 000 in 2008/09.

Increasing the amounts of 'mainstream' national support is the dominant approach in Finland and Italy. In Finland, students going abroad are awarded a supplementary accommodation allowance unless the student concerned is going to a country in which rented accommodation is very cheap. Students also get a guaranteed loan of a higher amount than students staying in the country.

Other countries combine both measures. Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Malta, Slovenia, Spain and the United Kingdom award special support for mobility, as well as increasing the amount of national support already awarded to students (or the period during which it is paid). It is noteworthy that Austria has, since the winter term 2008/09, introduced mobility grants to enable students to study a complete cycle of university education (Bachelor or Master programme) in an approved higher education institution in another country. The Czech Republic awards financial support for mobility whose form – along with associated conditions and procedures – depends on bilateral agreements between the countries concerned. Germany's support measures enable students to study a full cycle of tertiary education within another EU country. While United Kingdom students are able to maintain national support and access additional support for mobility, it is only students who study abroad as part of their UK course that are entitled to such support. Those who participate in an entire programme abroad are not entitled to any national financial support from the United Kingdom.

The award, destination and amounts associated with support specifically for mobility are the subject of measures that vary from one country to the next. Such support may be awarded after attention is given to students' academic level (as in Cyprus, Latvia and Romania), their income (Cyprus) and/or their host country (Cyprus and the Czech Republic). Awards may also be intended for specific forms of student expenditure such as transport to the host country or institution, as in the case of Liechtenstein, Slovenia, Sweden and the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland), or accommodation abroad (Finland). The amount of support may depend on the cost of living in the host country, as in Austria, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Sweden and the United Kingdom (Scotland), or on the number or level of programmes in which students are enrolled abroad (Latvia and Norway respectively).

Figure E4: Forms of financial support specifically for the mobility of full-time students for a first or second cycle qualification, 2008/09



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory note

This map focuses on the forms of specific support to mobility (Category 1 from Figure E3) in the EHEA.

Restrictions to the portability of national financial support

While many countries encourage student mobility by enabling students who go abroad to receive the same support as those who remain in their home country, it is also important to examine any additional conditions for such support. The policy challenge is to balance the need for accountability and good use of public money with the need to ensure that additional restrictions on funds are not so off-putting to students who would be interested in benefitting from the experience of higher education in another country that they are dissuaded from applying.

Figure E5 shows that countries tend to be quite idiosyncratic with regard to the conditions for accessing 'portable' funding, and it is difficult to find discernible patterns in national behaviour. However, very few countries actually provide unconditional support to students studying abroad. Yet it is interesting to note that those that do – Belgium (German-speaking Community), Iceland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg and the Netherlands – are all small countries/regions with a very clear interest in ensuring that their students are able to benefit from higher education outside their territory. At the other extreme, there are nine countries where portability of national funding is not possible – Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy (with the exception of two autonomous regions), Latvia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Turkey and Ukraine.

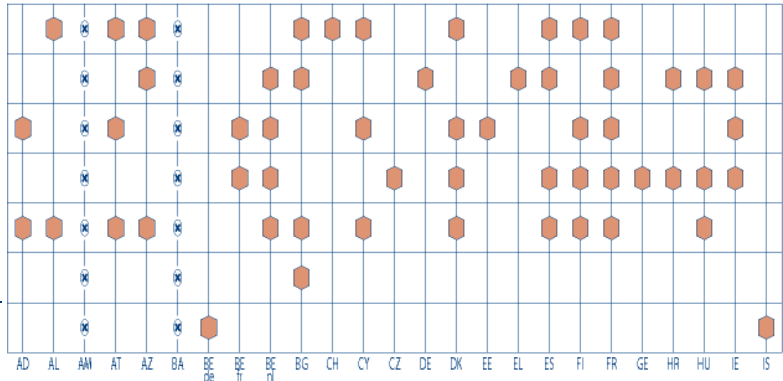
The majority of countries rest between these extremes, and provide support on the basis of certain conditions being fulfilled. These conditions may relate to the length of time spent studying abroad, the host country, types of institution, types of course, how students progress, or language – although only Bulgaria and Lithuania have any conditions regarding language. There are a significant number of countries – Austria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Montenegro, Norway, Slovakia and Switzerland – that have minimal conditions for accessing funding. In Germany, for example, support is portable throughout the entire period of study provided that this is spent in another EU country, or for one year outside the EU. Andorra, Belgium (French Community), Croatia and Slovenia also have few restrictions on access to funding.

Nevertheless a significant number of countries require several conditions to be fulfilled in order for students to access support, and it is this cumulation of restrictions that may prove an obstacle, and thus be a significant factor limiting mobility. 9 countries (Belgium – Flemish Community, Denmark, Finland, France, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, Romania and Sweden) require that four or more of the conditions specified above are met. In the case of Finland, it is students who wish to study an entire qualification abroad who encounter such restrictions, while support for shorter-term mobility is much more easily accessible. The most common restrictions are linked to the particular study programme (21 countries), the length of time abroad (19 countries), student progress (18 countries), the host country (15 countries), and the host institution (14 countries).

Figure E5: Conditions governing the portability of financial support for full-time students, 2008/09

Restrictions:

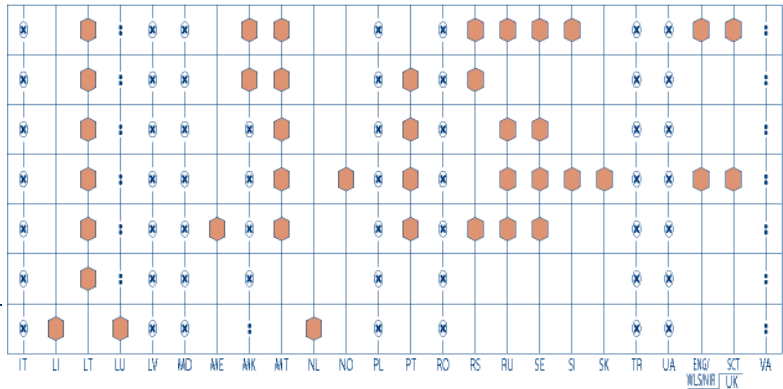
- Linked to the length of time spent abroad
- Linked to the host country
- Linked to the host institution
- Linked to the type of programme
- Linked to how courses/students progress
- Language-related



No restrictions

Restrictions:

- Linked to the length of time spent abroad
- Linked to the host country
- Linked to the host institution
- Linked to the type of programme
- Linked to how courses/students progress
- Language-related



Source: Eurydice.

⊗ No portability

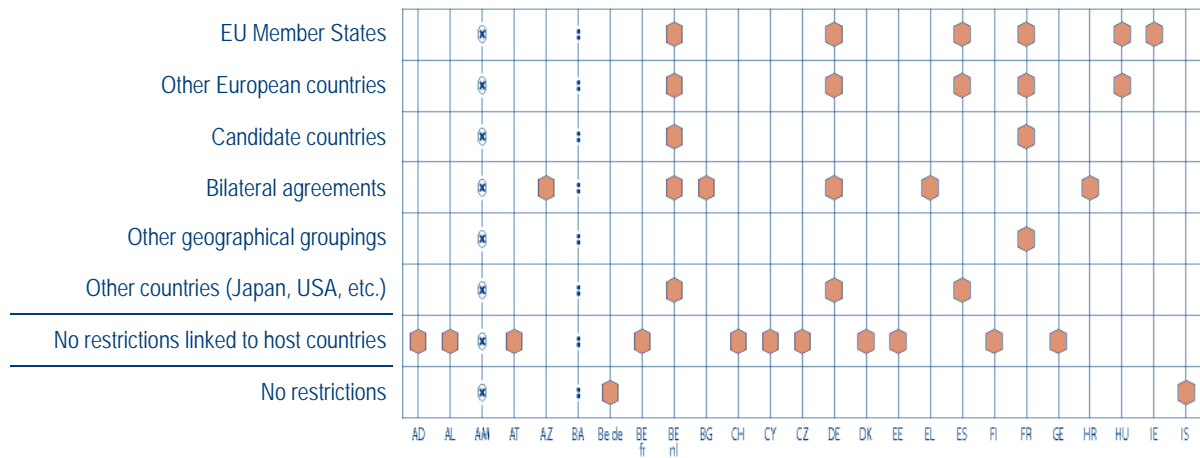
Geographical restrictions to portability

Among the countries where portability is possible, Figure E6 illustrates that for 20 countries, there are no restrictions to portability linked to geographical or country criteria. In addition another 5 countries have no restrictions to portability within the European Higher Education Area. However, this still leaves a considerable number of countries where either portability is not possible, or where geographical restrictions may be in place with regard to one or more of the countries in the European Higher Education Area. If the goal of an open and inclusive European Higher Education Area is really to be achieved by 2010, this implies that urgent action is required to move these geographical obstacles.

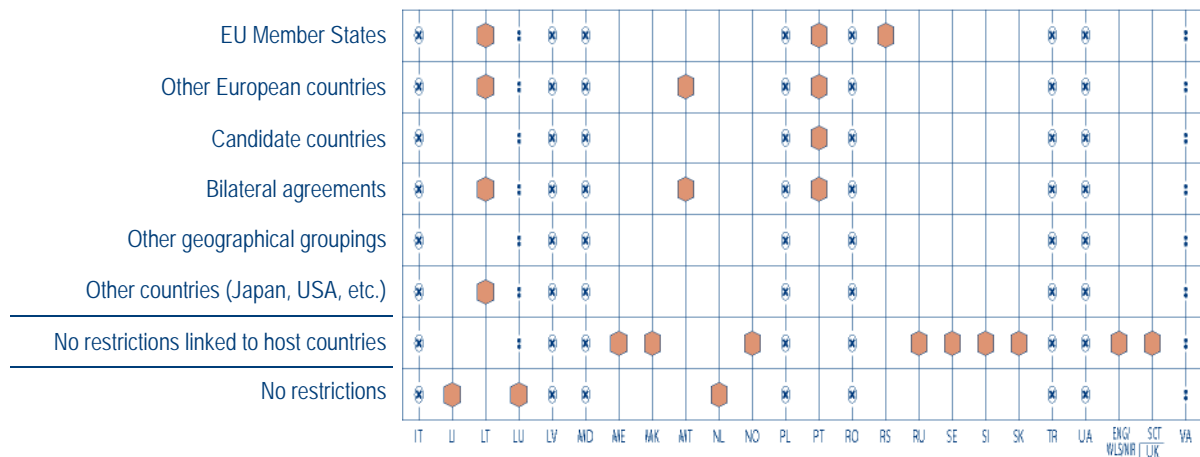
The countries where portability is possible, but geographical limitations are in place concerning some of the Bologna signatory countries are Belgium (Flemish Community), Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal and Serbia.

Figure E6: Conditions governing portability in the case of specific host countries, 2008/09

Portability possible in the case of:



Portability possible in the case of:



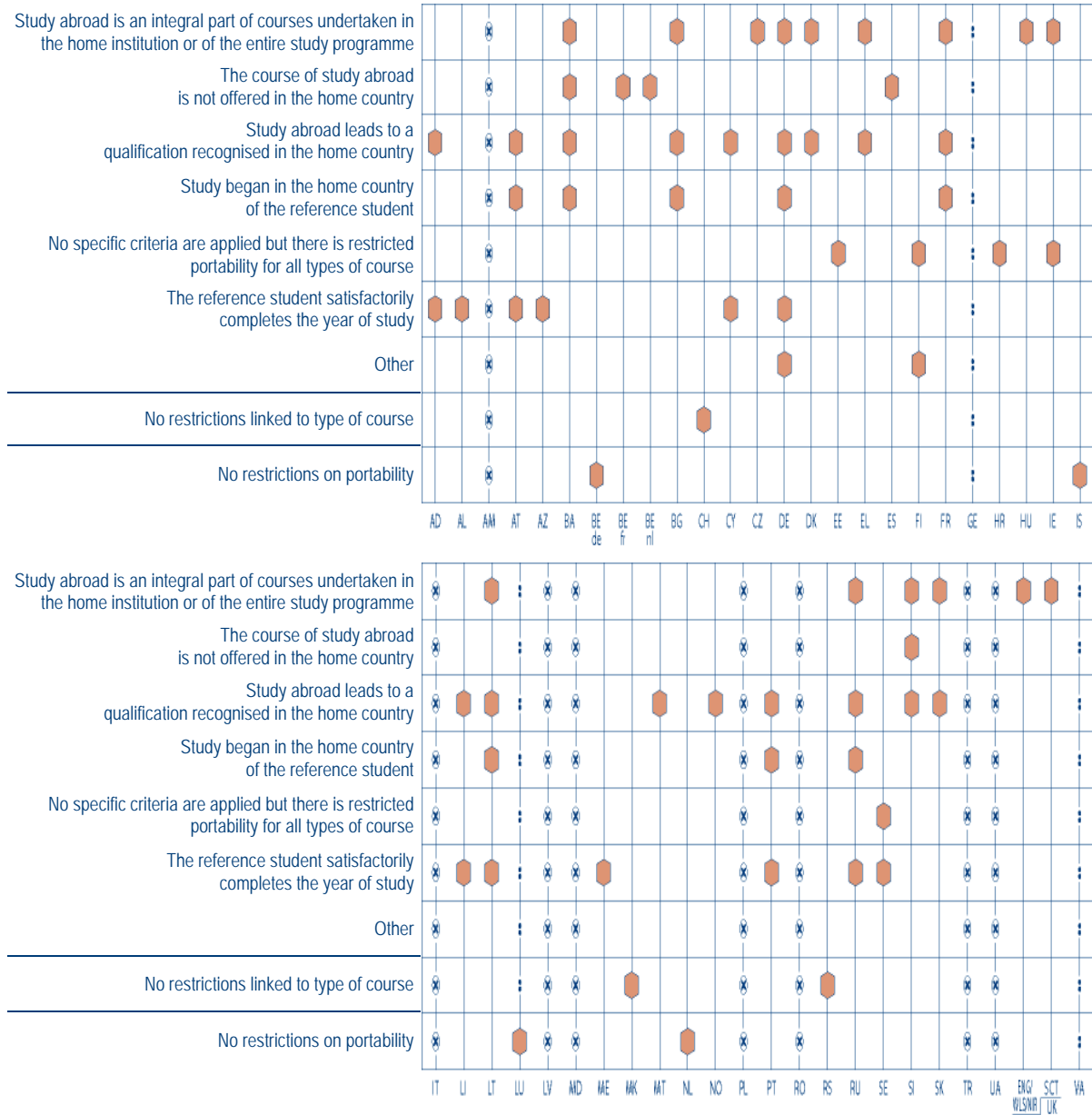
Source: Eurydice.

⊗ No portability

Restrictions linked to the type of programmes

Many countries report that portable funding is subject to conditions linked to the type of programmes, and it is therefore interesting to look in more detail at the nature of these conditions. In 17 countries, portability is conditioned by the requirement that the period of study abroad leads to a qualification recognised in the home country. Meanwhile in a further 15 countries portability is possible when the study abroad is an integral part of courses undertaken in the home institution or of the entire study programme. As the current number of programmes with this kind of joint institutional arrangement currently represents only a small fraction of the overall offer of higher education, this condition can be extremely limiting in practice. Other conditions include the requirement that study has begun in the home country in order for portability to be possible – which is the case in 5 countries – or that the student successfully completes the year of study, which is a condition in a further 12 countries.

Figure E7: Conditions governing portability related to the type of programme or academic performance, 2008/09



Source: Eurydice.

⊗ No portability

Several countries require several of these conditions to be met, and the cumulation of conditions can restrict portability. This is the case particularly for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Russia and Slovakia.

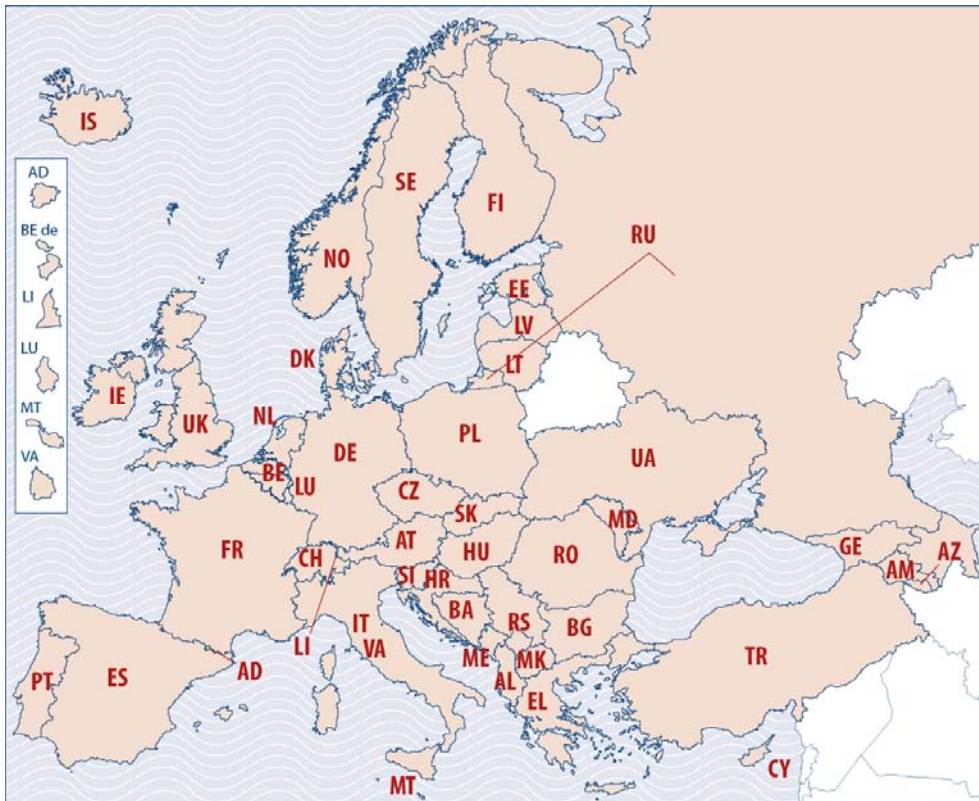
While it is understandable that portable funding may be subject to conditions linked to the nature of programmes, the fact that so many countries appear to define acceptable programmes for portable mobility funding quite narrowly raises some fundamental questions. It appears that mobility is only

considered positively in many countries when the programme of study is linked or integrated to a programme of study in the home country, or alternatively when a particular programme does not exist in the home country. While mobility in these situations may indeed provide clear added value both to the individual student and the wider society, the implicit message of restricting funding only to such programmes is that the experience of studying in another country in itself does not provide sufficient added value to merit public funding. Many countries also require that a programme is recognised at home, and while this may seem a perfectly reasonable condition, it is only reasonable if countries can guarantee that recognition fully complies with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

If the variety of issues and practices associated to portability are examined together, the question that they pose for the future is how open and inclusive can the European Higher Education Area be if the myriad national restrictions currently in place continue beyond 2010?

GLOSSARY

Country codes



AD	Andorra	ES	Spain	NL	Netherlands
AL	Albania	FI	Finland	NO	Norway
AM	Armenia	FR	France	PL	Poland
AT	Austria	GE	Georgia	PT	Portugal
AZ	Azerbaijan	HR	Croatia	RO	Romania
BA	Bosnia and Herzegovina	HU	Hungary	RS	Serbia
BE de	Belgium – German- speaking Community	IE	Ireland	RU	Russia
BE fr	Belgium – French Community	IS	Iceland	SE	Sweden
BE nl	Belgium – Flemish Community	IT	Italy	SI	Slovenia
BG	Bulgaria	LI	Liechtenstein	SK	Slovakia
CH	Switzerland	LT	Lithuania	TR	Turkey
CY	Cyprus	LU	Luxembourg	UA	Ukraine
CZ	Czech Republic	LV	Latvia	UK-ENG	United Kingdom – England
DE	Germany	MD	Moldova	UK-NIR	United Kingdom – Northern Ireland
DK	Denmark	ME	Montenegro	UK-SCT	United Kingdom – Scotland
EE	Estonia	MK*	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	UK-WLS	United Kingdom – Wales
EL	Greece	MT	Malta	VA	Holy See

* ISO code 3166. Provisional code which does not prejudice in any way the definitive nomenclature for this country, which will be agreed following the conclusion of negotiations currently taking place under the auspices of the United Nations (http://www.iso.org/iso/country_codes/iso_3166_code_lists.htm)

Definitions

Bologna experts

Professionals active in higher education who offer advice on a peer-to-peer basis on the implementation of the Bologna reforms. Experts include stakeholder representatives – such as academic and student representatives, international relations officers, higher education and quality assurance experts. Some also function as ECTS/DS counsellors whose task is to support the implementation of Bologna reforms in these areas. The European Commission funds several projects to support the European activities of national Bologna experts.

Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG)

The Bologna Follow-Up Group consists of ministerial representatives of all 46 Bologna signatory countries and the European Commission as full members. Consultative members include the Council of Europe, the European University Association (EUA), the European Students' Union (ESU), the European Association of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the UNESCO European Centre for Higher Education (UNESCO-CEPES), Business Europe (formerly known as UNICE) and Education International. The BFUG is convened at least twice a year and is chaired by the EU Presidency, with the host country of the next (biennial) conference of education ministers as vice-chair. The role of the BFUG is to follow up on the recommendations made at the ministerial conferences and on the general implementation of all issues covered in the Ministerial Communiqués. In addition, the BFUG produces a work programme which includes a series of conferences and other activities related to the Bologna process. A Board, also chaired by the EU Presidency with the next host country as vice-chair, prepares the agendas for the BFUG and monitors progress between BFUG meetings. Overall follow-up is supported by a Secretariat which is provided by the country/countries hosting the following ministerial conference.

Cycles

The three sequential levels identified by the Bologna Process (first cycle, second cycle and third cycle), at which the three main kinds of qualification (bachelor, master's, doctorate) associated with the Process are awarded.

Diploma Supplement (DS)

A document attached to a higher education diploma that aims to improve international transparency and facilitate academic and professional recognition of qualifications. Developed by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES, the DS consists of eight sections ⁽¹⁾ describing in a widely spoken European language the nature, level, context, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed. The DS provides additional information on the national higher education system concerned, so that the qualification is considered in relation to its own educational context.

⁽¹⁾ Specifically these sections cover information on the holder of the qualification, the identity of the qualification, its level, its function, the contents and results gained, additional information, the national higher education system concerned, and the certification of the DS.

ECTS – compatible credit systems

A national credit system is compatible with ECTS when it is based on student workload and learning outcomes and is suitable and used for both credit transfer and accumulation. Credits are allocated only after the learning has been successfully completed and assessed. Credit systems based on other concepts – such as contact hours for example – are not compatible with ECTS.

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)

A student-centred credit system based on the student workload required to achieve specified learning outcomes. ECTS was established initially for credit transfer to facilitate the recognition of periods of study abroad. More recently, it has been developing into an accumulation system to be implemented in all programmes at institutional, regional, national and European levels. Further information can be obtained from the ECTS Users Guide published by the European Commission.

Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA)

An 'overarching' framework for the entire European Higher Education Area that clarifies and explains the relationship between the national higher education frameworks of qualifications that are now being developed in the Bologna Process, and the qualifications that they cover. The FQ-EHEA has descriptors for each of the three cycles of qualifications, and includes ECTS credit ranges for the first two cycles.

International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 1997)

The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) was designed by UNESCO in the 1970s and aims to offer a set of criteria suitable for compiling statistics on education internationally. The current version is from 1997, and a new version will be developed for 2011.

ISCED 97 levels covered by the publication:

- **ISCED 5: Tertiary education (first stage)**

Entry to these programmes normally requires the successful completion of ISCED levels 3 or 4. ISCED level 5 includes tertiary programmes with an academic orientation which are largely theoretically based (ISCED 5A), and tertiary programmes with an occupational orientation which are typically shorter than the academic programmes and designed for entry to the employment market (ISCED 5B). Only ISCED 5A programmes give access to doctoral programmes at ISCED level 6.

- **ISCED 6: Tertiary education (second stage)**

This level is reserved for tertiary programmes that lead directly to the award of an advanced research qualification (e.g. a doctorate).

National qualifications framework (higher education)

The single description, at national level or a particular level of an education system, which clarifies and explains the relationship between higher education qualifications. National qualifications frameworks are internationally understood and clearly describe all qualifications and other learning achievements in higher education and relate them coherently to each other.

Peer review

Assessment procedure carried out by peer external experts.

Quality assurance

An all-embracing term referring to an ongoing, continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining, and improving) the quality of a higher education system, institution or programme.

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