

Draft Statement of the EHEA Global Policy Forum

Tirana, May 2024

We, the Ministers responsible for higher education, heads of delegation, representatives of students, organizations and institutions participating in the EHEA Global Policy Forum and preparation for it, reaffirm our certitude that higher education must expand its ability to address present and future challenges to global peace and wellbeing.

Quality education for all is a basic human right, and is also recognized as a United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). We aspire to a world in which human beings enjoy the "freedom to pursue knowledge and freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas regardless of frontiers", in line with SDG4.

We aim, through multilateral cooperation, to foster mobility, strengthen respect for fundamental values such as academic freedom, improve the quality, relevance and inclusiveness of higher education, and contribute to a return to peace. Our shared objectives and the ever greater connectedness of our higher education institutions, provide a strong foundation for dialogue and inter-regional and global cooperation.

To strengthen cooperation and transparency between macro regions we must develop and share the necessary tools to support mobility and recognition of foreign qualifications and learning periods, in ways that consolidate trust and improve compatibility.

To achieve 'inclusion' we must ensure not only equitable access, but also higher rates of admission and retention for students from diverse backgrounds, including refugees and migrants. Providing "equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university" (SDG 4.3), for example, means providing support for potential learners in all countries, while supporting the continuous expansion and improvement of flexible lifelong learning pathways.

To develop the social dimension of higher education we can adapt our systems to serve a student body representative of the socio-demographic structure of our countries and enhance the inclusiveness of our academic staff. We must improve our institutions' capacity to retain learners and equip them with the competences they will need for employment and for their personal and civic lives, as well as an awareness of and commitment to the principles of sustainability (SDG 4.7).

Physical international mobility, of both students and staff, fosters intercultural and international understanding. Innovative blended mobility experiences and virtual international learning environments are increasingly important, and can open up new opportunities.

Moving forward:

In the lead up to the Forum we have welcomed the Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue's exploration, region by region, of opportunities for exchange of views and information on topics of common interest. Conversations, colloquiums, seminars and conferences have allowed us to share information about the challenges, similarities and differences of our higher education systems and to identify the added value of global dialogue between regions.

On this basis we see positive potential for all our countries in working together to:

- Further develop all forms of reciprocal mobility of people and knowledge, as one of the most important keys to global understanding and to excellence in higher education, balancing incoming and outgoing mobility.
- Reach a common understanding of the ethical principles and values of international academic cooperation by sharing, on an equal footing, our experiences, practices and lessons learned on global issues such as access to quality education, effective quality assurance practices and principles, and attractive academic careers, as well as adapting to artificial intelligence and challenging disinformation.
- Make learning credits comparable and transferable, and digitalize data on qualifications and learning achievement according to compatible standards, building transparency and security at global level.

- Foster innovation in learning and teaching, opening up to new skills and ensuring their link to employability.
- Promote the importance of student-centered learning taking place in a research-rich learning and teaching environment, and the implications of this for the flexibility of study programs and lifelong learning pathways
- Open up higher education to underrepresented groups, facilitating access to education to migrants and strengthening the links between higher education and other systems such as VET to reach untapped talent.
- Ensure equal respect and recognition for the teaching and research of our academic staff, and the attractiveness of teaching as a career.
- Support higher education institutions to deepen their engagement with their communities, stakeholders and the labor market.
- Explore innovative digital ways of learning and teaching more intensely, especially for lifelong learning, while addressing the ongoing issues of unequal access and retention.

We mark the entry into force on 5 March 2023¹ of the UNESCO *Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education*, a landmark achievement. Building on pre-existing regional agreements, it is an important step towards reaching Sustainable Development Goal 4: “*Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning*”. To benefit fully from this achievement, we commit to working towards a shared understanding and, where possible, comparability between the Qualifications Frameworks, Qualifications Reference Frameworks, and Quality Assurance systems and mechanisms developed in different world regions.

Continuing Dialogue

We take up our responsibilities towards our countries and peoples, in order to release the potential of higher education to find shared solutions to the world’s challenges. We must support present and future generations in learning to think and act ethically, creatively and critically, enabling them to address and resolve the challenges of the future. Increased cooperation within and among regions will strengthen our ability to elaborate and implement innovative and inclusive solutions.

In this regard, we invite all participants to continue to promote global policy dialogue identifying, region by region, the themes where synergies can be found between EHEA and, on the one hand with global organizations such as UNESCO and OECD, and, on the other, *with intergovernmental processes such as the* such as the Berlin Process, the ASEM Process, the Turkestan Process *the Union for the Mediterranean, Euro-Latin American and Caribbean space [to be discussed and completed]* as well as ongoing transnational projects regarding recognition, quality assurance and qualification frameworks.

We recognize that each region has its own priorities and see that such diversity enriches our dialogue. We encourage the Coordination Group on Global Policy dialogue to create bridges between EHEA working structures² and parties interested in deepening dialogue (through seminars, conversations, events, ...) on (but not limited to) the above mentioned topics.

The next EHEA Global Policy Forum will be held in ??? [still to be decided].

¹ To be updated as appropriate.

² <https://www.ehea.info/page-work-plan-2018-2020>