



RULES OF PROCEDURE 2021-2024¹

BOLOGNA FOLLOW UP GROUP (BFUG)

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This document outlines how the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) will operate for the 2021-2024 period, in terms of governance, structure, meeting management and communication. The provisions set out in this document are to be considered as guidelines for the BFUG Rules of Procedure and its sub-structures (the Board, Working Groups, Coordination Group, Task Forces, other *ad hoc* groups and BFUG Secretariat).

With regard to prior periods, Annexes to this document provide a historical overview of the BFUG proceedings, since its establishment, for reference, as well as information purpose.

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¹ BFUG Working period was decided at the LXXI BFUG meeting in [Split](#) on 25 June 2020 (online)



I. The Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG)

a. Role

The BFUG is the executive structure overseeing the Bologna Process. It has been in place since autumn 1999. The BFUG is entrusted with preparing the Ministerial Conferences, policy forums and with overseeing the Bologna Process between these, including taking forward matters that do not need to be decided by the Ministers or that have been delegated by the Ministers. The BFUG meetings play an important role in overseeing the implementation of the Ministerial Communiqués, as well as in developing the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

The BFUG has the possibility to set up various types of groups, related to the decisions taken by the EHEA Ministers, normally through the Ministerial Communiqués, in order to deal with specific topics in more detail. It may also decide to establish task forces, ad-hoc groups or other sub-structures to fulfil its tasks and reach the goals set out in the Ministerial Communiqués.

The BFUG members are invited to express their interest in participating in one or more BFUG groups or any other sub-structures, by submitting an Expression of Interest. A Call for Expression of Interest is opened by the BFUG Secretariat. All BFUG groups foresee the participation of the BFUG members and consultative members. The groups can invite international experts on specific topics, if necessary. The groups should be organized in compliance with their Terms of Reference (ToR) adopted by the BFUG and related to the decisions taken by the EHEA Ministers in the Ministerial Conference preceding the mentioned BFUG working period. They should be of a reasonable size and reflect the diversity of EHEA, both in the co-chairing positions and membership.

The 2021-2024 BFUG Work Plan is structured on the basis of the 2020 Rome Communiqué (for more details, see Annex I). The BFUG decides on the ToR of the different BFUG sub-structures, and it decides which of their recommendations are to be proposed to the EHEA Ministers for the 2024 Ministerial Conference. The BFUG provides an opportunity for all members and consultative members to express their views on the recommendations and reports.

According to the mandate by the EHEA Ministers in Paris in 2018, the BFUG has set up the Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (BICG) in order to implement, coordinate and monitor the three Thematic Peer Groups (TPGs), possibly organized in sub-groups, focused on the three key commitments of the EHEA (for more details, see Annex I (i)). As mentioned on the 2020 Rome Communiqué the work of the BICG and the TPGs should continue also in the 2021-2024 work period.



EHEA Bologna Process cannot be seen as an isolated process, with no effect as well as cooperation with other parts of the world. In 2018 Paris Communiqué, the EHEA Ministers delegated to the Coordination Group (CG1) the task of working towards the Global Policy Forum, which has until now been organized back-to-back with the Ministerial Conference and which is intended to be a connecting bridge and ensure cooperation of EHEA in a global context. This mandate was strengthened in the 2020 Rome Communiqué, and the work of CG1 should continue also for the 2021-2024 period. As previously, one of the Co-chairs of the CG1 on Global Policy Dialogue (GPD) in principle should be the country hosting the Ministerial Conference, currently Albania, for the 2021-2024 BFUG Work Period.

b. BFUG Membership: the current three categories

BFUG membership is based on the membership of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The EHEA currently has three categories:

- **EHEA/BFUG Members** are the 49 countries and the European Commission (listed in Annex III). To become a member of the EHEA, countries have to be party to the European Cultural Convention and to declare their willingness to pursue and implement the objectives of the Bologna Process in their own systems of higher education. Annex IV details the updated procedures to become an EHEA member. Only country members and the European Commission have the right to vote within the BFUG and to approve and adopt the final documents.
- **Consultative Members** are relevant stakeholder organizations and other institutions that have a European scope to their work in higher education policy and are instrumental in the development and implementation of the Bologna Process. The current eight EHEA consultative members are: Council of Europe (CoE), UNESCO, European University Association (EUA), European Association of Institutions of Higher Education (EURASHE), European Students' Union (ESU), European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), Education International (EI) and BUSINESS EUROPE. The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) was founded in 2008 from an initiative of the Bologna Process. EQAR has a similar status to the consultative members (non-voting member of BFUG).
- **Partners** are organizations that wish to be associated with the Bologna Process/ the BFUG but are not included in the Consultative member category. At present, the following five organizations are partners: the Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de



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Musique et Musikhochschulen (AEC), the European Association for International Education (EAIE), the Council of European professional and managerial staff (Eurocadres), Eurodoc, the European Association for Promotion of Science and Technology (Euroscience). They can, upon approval of prior request in writing to the BFUG Co-chairs, attend BFUG meetings and events and may be invited, upon approval of a written request, by a BFUG group to send an expert in the status of observer, who will participate in some part of the work. During BFUG meetings where they are invited, they can express their comments only relating to identified topics and after other Members and Consultative Members have spoken².

Further technical experts, such as Eurostat, Eurostudent or Eurydice, may be associated to the BFUG and invited to events upon specific request.

For any new application from countries wishing to join the EHEA, an ad hoc BFUG group should be established, to guide the country in the entire admission process, as well as recommend its findings to the BFUG. The group should be composed by the BFUG troika of the specific BFUG work period in which the application is received, the Vice chair, as well as other members including BFUG Secretariat, CoE and two other BFUG members. Since 2015, new countries³ have been admitted with a roadmap, followed up in the first period after their admission to the EHEA by a Roadmap group for the country in question.

c. Chairmanship: BFUG Co-chairs and BFUG Vice-chair

The current chairing arrangements foresee that the Bologna Process will be co-chaired by the country holding the EU presidency and a non-EU member country (see the document in Annex V) designated by the English alphabetical order⁴ and the Vice-chair from the host country of the next Ministerial Conference (referred as Chairs in the document). The following chairing arrangement is due to be applied in the period 2021-2025:

² As discussed at the LXVII BFUG meeting in [Helsinki](#) on 12-13 November 2019.

³ So far, Belarus (2015) and San Marino (2020).

⁴ It was, however, agreed by the BFUG at its Berlin meeting in September 2020 that since Albania will be Vice Chair in the 2021 – 24 work program, it would only take its place as Co-Chair in the following work program.



Semester	Co-chair from EU-Presidency	Co-chair from non-EU country	Vice-chair
1 January – 30 June 2021	Portugal	Andorra	Albania
1 July – 31 December 2021	Slovenia	Armenia	
1 January – 30 June 2022	France	Azerbaijan	
1 July – 31 December 2022	Czech Republic	Kazakhstan ⁵	
1 January – 30 June 2023	Sweden	Bosnia & Herzegovina	
1 July – 31 December 2023	Spain	Georgia	
1 January – 30 June 2024	Belgium	Holy See	
1 July – 31 December 2024	Hungary	Iceland	Country hosting the next Ministerial Conference and BFUG Secretariat
1 January – 30 June 2025	Poland	Albania	

Each co-chairing country is responsible for appointing one person who will be in charge of fulfilling the tasks of the chairmanship for the mentioned semester. The Co-chairs, in close cooperation with the Vice-chair and supported by the BFUG Secretariat, chair the BFUG and the BFUG Board. In the decision-making process, the Chairs assume the responsibility for leading the way towards compromise in order to move the Bologna Process forward. The Vice-chair, in close cooperation with the BFUG Secretariat, ensures continuity between the rotating chairmanships. Both the Co-chairs and the Vice-chair can speak representing their country, but in that case need to announce explicitly that their intervention reflects their country's position and that they are not speaking as chair at that specific moment. The Co-chairs and the Vice-chair, although they can also represent their country, must exercise their chairing tasks with the necessary neutrality. The Vice-chair is responsible in particular for the host country's preparations for the Ministerial Conference and the Global Policy Forum.

⁵ This was resolved by decision of the BFUG at its meeting on December 1 – 2, 2021.



d. BFUG Board

Role and composition

The BFUG Board is an advisory committee established in order to support the BFUG in its activities and to provide efficiency in the management of the EHEA, at the same time assuring its continuity. As such, the responsibilities of the Board consist of coordinating and monitoring the effective implementation of the work programme. The responsibilities of the Board were defined by the BFUG during its meeting in Rome in 2003 and they remain exactly the same (see Annex VII).

The members of the Board are:

- the BFUG Co-chairs double Troika (the outgoing, present and incoming Co-chairs of the BFUG)
- the BFUG Vice-chair;
- the European Commission;
- Council of Europe, EUA, ESU, EURASHE;
- one of the Co-chairs of each of the BFUG -groups of the respective period (Working Groups, Coordination Group, Task Forces, BICG)

Functioning of the BFUG Board meetings

The Board usually meets at least one month (preferably six weeks) before each BFUG meeting. The host of the Board is normally one of the EHEA Co-chairs. The minutes of the Board meetings are taken by the BFUG Secretariat.

Before each Board meeting, the Chairs and the Secretariat will hold a preparatory meeting in order to finalize organizational aspects, to check all the documents, to divide competences and tasks, and to check the agenda of the upcoming Board meeting.

e. BFUG Secretariat

The Bologna Follow-Up Group Secretariat (BFUG Secretariat) provides neutral, administrative and operational support to the BFUG, the BFUG Board, Chairs, BFUG groups and other established sub-structures (task forces, *ad hoc* groups, etc.). It acts as an external and internal contact point for the EHEA, and also presents the BFUG in a variety of settings in agreement with the Chairs; it supports the preparation of the EHEA Ministerial Conference and the Bologna Global Policy Forum and maintains the EHEA website (<http://www.ehea.info>) with regular updates.



The Terms of Reference related to the Albanian BFUG Secretariat (Annex II) outline more specifically the tasks of the BFUG Secretariat for the 2021-2024 period.

The tasks of the BFUG Secretariat were first defined by the BFUG during its meeting in Rome in November 2003 (see Annex VII).

f. Functioning of the BFUG meetings

BFUG meetings are in principle hosted by one of the EHEA Co-chairs and are usually convened at least once every six months. The working language of the BFUG is English (see Annex VI for more details).

All BFUG members should attend each BFUG meeting. Each EHEA member or consultative member has the authority to designate its BFUG representatives. Each EHEA member or consultative member usually sends a maximum of 2 representatives to the BFUG meetings. **In the cases when members and consultative members have more than one representative designated in the BFUG, they communicate to the BFUG Secretariat which is the Head of Delegation (the countries with a federal system may have maximum 2 Heads of Delegation).** On every agenda point, each BFUG delegation is invited to express the position of its country, institution or organization with respect to the matter in question. The BFUG Co-Chairs, in consultation with the Board, have the authority to invite experts/individuals to contribute to BFUG meetings under specific points for which they have the required expertise. BFUG representatives have the duty to notify the BFUG Secretariat about any changes on the respective BFUG representation and update the country's contact details and information as required.

The BFUG Co-chairs, supported by the BFUG Secretariat, lead the discussions on all points of the agenda, as well as declare the meeting open or closed. The decision-making procedure within the BFUG is based on a consensual understanding that the Co-chairs of the BFUG summarize the discussions and decisions at the end of each agenda point. When Co-Chairs speak and act in their capacity as BFUG delegates, they must make clear that their intervention reflects their country's position.

While the BFUG seeks to reach decisions by consensus, when this proves impossible, in exceptional circumstances, the BFUG chairs may decide to take a decision through vote. Its voting rules foresee two votes per BFUG Member delegation only, to take account of the fact that some countries have a federal system. **The BFUG representative responsible to cast the vote/votes is the Head of Delegation or another member of delegation appointed by the Head of Delegation. Voting procedures and arrangements are coordinated** by the BFUG Secretariat, according to its neutral role.



These decisions are valid if, at least; an absolute majority⁶, of all BFUG members vote in favor of one of the alternatives presented. Voting may be in person, online or via an electronic procedure. Normally the voting is an open ballot but a secret ballot shall be organized if at least one delegation requests it.

As a general rule, the BFUG meeting documents should be circulated by the BFUG Secretariat **15 days** prior to the meeting, after being discussed in the BFUG Board once prepared by the Chairs of the BFUG and by the BFUG Working Groups or other sub-structures. During the discussions in the BFUG, a delegation/organization can propose changes, however, delegations wishing to propose major changes to a document should be encouraged to submit those at least **5 days** prior to the meeting.

The BFUG Secretariat is in charge of drafting the minutes of the meetings of the BFUG/WG/BICG/TPGs/CG/Board. All the BFUG/WG/BICG/TPGs/CG/Board meetings should be recorded for future reference. The draft minutes are agreed with the respective Chairs and are then circulated to the members (BFUG/WG/Board) within **15 days** after the meeting for feedback. The members have the possibility within **15 days** to send amendments to the minutes, which will be taken into consideration by the BFUG Secretariat in the process of finalizing the minutes. Minutes of the meetings of the BFUG and its established sub-structures (BFUG/AG/WG/BICG/TPGs/CG/Task Forces/ad-hoc groups/Board) should generally be adopted by electronic consultation after each meeting; only if there should be too many diverging comments, the adoption will be postponed until the next meeting of the BFUG. The same procedure is applied also for other documents produced that need to be approved by the BFUG in case there are too many diverging comments.

The BFUG can make decisions by electronic consultation, that ought to be presented and recorded in the next BFUG meeting accordingly.

Before each BFUG meeting, the Chairs and the Secretariat will hold a preparatory meeting in order to finalize organizational aspects, to check all the documents, to divide competences and tasks, and to check the agenda of the upcoming BFUG meeting. An additional meeting should be held after the BFUG meeting to summarize the decisions taken and plan future tasks.

II. Ministerial Conferences

The country hosting the upcoming Ministerial Conference acts as Vice-chair of the Bologna Process/European Higher Education Area. As agreed by the Ministers in the [Berlin Communiqué \(2003\)](#), the country organizing the upcoming Ministerial Conference also hosts the BFUG Secretariat

Commented [MOU1]: Option A is inserted in the text!
Option B would be as the following:
These decisions are valid if, at least, qualified majority of all the BFUG members vote in favor of one of the alternatives presented.

⁶ Absolute majority would be equivalent to a majority of the entire membership voting in favor or against a decision.



between two consecutive ministerial meetings. This applies to the governing period 2021-2024 in which Albania hosts the BFUG Secretariat. Within the governing period 2021-2024, the Ministerial Conference, hosted by Albania, will take place at the end of the first semester 2024.

In connection with the Ministerial Conference, since 2009, a Bologna Policy Forum (BPF) has been organized⁷, including countries and regional higher education organizations from around the world. Ministers decide at Ministerial Conferences about the central aspects of the EHEA, including its further developments and commitments by its member countries. The Ministerial Conference also decides on new applications for membership to the EHEA as well as any other main changes to the process. A Communiqué is adopted at each Ministerial Conference that outlines decisions taken by the Ministers. The Ministerial Conferences are prepared by the BFUG.

a. Drafting Committee

Drafting committee is a task force of the BFUG, entrusted with the task to prepare the draft communique for the upcoming ministerial conference. Drafting Committee is composed by the Co-Chairs of the last three semesters before the Ministerial Conference (Sweden, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Spain, Georgia, Belgium and Holy See) of the actual BFUG Work Plan, the Vice Chair and one consultative member. The consultative member is suggested by the consultative members and approved by the BFUG. The drafting committee agrees on the chairing arrangements during its first meeting. The current Drafting Committee is foreseen to start its work on first semester of 2023, as the year that precedes the Ministerial Conference. Drafting Committee meets every time after the Board and BFUG meeting, as well as in other times of necessity, as accordingly decided beforehand. Drafting Committee prepares a roadmap of its work, which is forwarded to the BFUG for its approval.

b. Selection of the next BFUG Secretariat and the Ministerial Conference host country

During the year 2023, the host for the next BFUG Secretariat and the Ministerial Conference will be selected. The BFUG will advise Ministers on the selection of the next Ministerial conference. The procedure for the Selection of the next BFUG Secretariat and the Ministerial Conference host can be found in Annex VIII. Each member country of the EHEA can apply to host the Ministerial Conference and is expected to provide the necessary logistical and financial support to ensure the successful organization of such an event.

⁷ From 2009 to 2018 it was called Bologna Policy Forum. On the Rome Communiqué 2020 it was stated that the COVID-19 pandemic made it impossible to hold the Global Policy Forum and Albania will host the next Global Policy Forum in 2024.



III. EHEA Communication: EHEA Website and Backoffice

As part of the EHEA communication efforts, with the launch of the European Higher Education Area, a EHEA website www.ehea.info was established. The website will be further developed and updated by the BFUG Secretariat with support from the BFUG and its sub-structures.

As a general rule, all relevant documents that are not explicitly excluded will be published on the website. Documents distributed for BFUG meetings will be published on the website at least 10 days in advance of the meetings unless the Co-Chairs have decided otherwise.

The country pages of each BFUG member will be edited by the BFUG Secretariat under the responsibility of the member. The pages concerning BFUG Working Groups and other sub-structures will be edited by the BFUG Secretariat, in close cooperation with the Co-chairs of the sub-structures concerned.

For the internal use of the BFUG members or that of WGs/AGs and other sub-structures, the Secretariat had created a password for a protected website area, generically called “the Backoffice”. This area allowed for document storage and exchange, registration for events, setting up the calendar. In September 2016, a new website was launched which offers public access to the full archive with exception of those documents which it has been decided to keep confidential. The Albanian BFUG Secretariat, will continue its work using the web site used by the Italian BFUG Secretariat and its platforms.

The EHEA website contains an open calendar of events, organized by the BFUG Working **structures**, and any other sub-structures as well as by the EHEA member countries and organizations. The EHEA website should be passed from one Secretariat to another with all the technical backgrounds in order to guarantee the transition between two Secretariats. For an external event to be published on the official EHEA website, it must be strictly related to the Bologna Process and should be organized and supported by one of the countries or organizations participating in the Bologna Process. Moreover, the event should in principle be open to participants from all Bologna countries and should be in line with the priorities of the BFUG work plan. Relevant invitations, presentations, reports and conclusions from BFUG members and consultative members can be published on the website and forwarded to the BFUG. In principle, this service could also consider similar requests from other parties.

For an event to be published on the EHEA website, the organizers have to fill in a template provided by the BFUG Secretariat (Annex IX). The final decision on whether or not an event is considered a part of the BFUG events is taken by the Co-chairs in consultation with the BFUG Secretariat.



IV. COVID-19

The global pandemic situation of COVID-19 and its aftermath has affected deeply the normal meeting method of BFUG and its working groups, which, until the pandemic breakout, were all carried out in presence.

The need to maintain normality as much as possible, foresaw a swift move to online meetings, which were carried out with the help of different online meeting platforms. However, it should be emphasized that online meetings should absolutely not replace the meetings in presence. All BFUG and Board meetings should be organized as in presence meetings, and where not possible, due to force majeure (i.e., COVID-19), the organizers should prepare the online or hybrid meeting, using the relevant platform, in concordance with the BFUG Secretariat. BFUG Members attend the meeting with maximum two members for each delegation.



BOLOGNA FOLLOW-UP GROUP (BFUG) RULES OF PROCEDURE 2021- 2024 - ANNEXES

List of Annexes:

ANNEX I: BFUG Work Plan 2021-2024

- (i) BICG – Bologna Implementation Coordination Group
- (ii) Working Groups on:
 - (ii.a) WG 1: On Monitoring the Implementation of the Bologna Process
 - (ii.c) WG 2: On Fundamental Values
 - (ii.d) WG 3: On Social Dimension
 - (ii.e) WG 4: On Learning and Teaching
- (iii) Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue (GPD)
- (iv) EHEA Network of National QF correspondents
- (v) Working Group to Support the Implementation of the Roadmap for San Marino's Accession to the EHEA ("San Marino Roadmap WG")
- (vi) Task Forces
 - (vi.a) Ad Hoc Task Force to Increase Synergies Between the European Higher Education Area, the Higher Education Dimension of the European Education Area and the European Research Area
 - (vi.b) Task Force on Enhancing Knowledge Sharing in the EHEA community

ANNEX II: Role of the Bologna Secretariat: Terms of Reference 2021-2024

ANNEX III: List of BFUG members, consultative members and partners as of 1 January 2021

ANNEX IV: Requirements and Procedures for Joining the European Higher Education Area

ANNEX V: BFUG Co-chairing and Vice-chairing arrangements

ANNEX VI: Language Regime for EHEA Ministerial Conferences

ANNEX VII: Responsibilities of the Board – Tasks of the Secretariat

ANNEX VIII: Procedure for the Selection of post 2020 Ministerial Conference and BFUG Secretariat Host

ANNEX IX: Template for events to be published on the EHEA

ANNEX X: Historical Overview - Information on the former BFUG Proceedings