

BOLOGNA WITH STUDENT EYES 2015

Time to meet the expectations
from 1999



IMPRINT

Bologna with Student Eyes 2015
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INTRODUCTORY WORDS

It is my pleasure to write these introductory words for the 2015 edition of Bologna with Student Eyes. Bologna with Student Eyes or BWSE as it has come to be known has been a seminal piece of work from the European Students' Union since its inception.



This year as you can already tell we decided to take a slightly different approach to the publication. Compared to previous years where every aspect of the Bologna process was analysed from a student perspective we have chosen to highlight some key issues for the future that are important for students. Some of the key areas for the the European Students' Union in this edition are student-centred learning, the social dimension, recognition and the future of the Process as a whole.

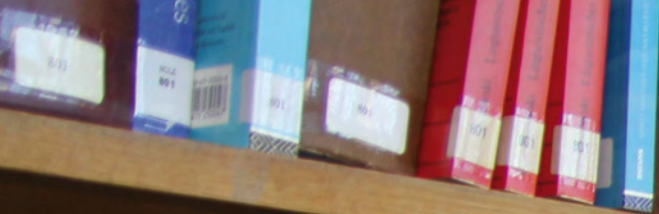
We are in a crucial time for the Bologna process. There are many questions hanging in the air. Is the Process still relevant? Has it died? How do we get countries to implement all the reforms they committed to? Will the countries who did implement the reforms stay interested? It is doubtful that the Ministerial Conference in Yerevan will answer all of these questions. However, at the very least we hope that we can set out a path for the future that will lead to the results that students need.

It is not reasonable that the Bologna Process has been in place since 1999, yet still basic recognition of degrees and qualifications is not yet a reality. There is no doubt that something must be done or in 2020 the Bologna Process will be obsolete at best. Considering how successful the Bologna Process has been on the whole despite its current challenges, it would be a shame to lose what has been a successful tool for reforming our education systems. The key debate that ministers need to have in Yerevan is how we will move forward together, not to rehash old debates that have already been settled.

Bologna with Students Eyes 2015 is our view on some of the key issues that will be discussed in Yerevan and followed up after.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Elisabeth Gehrke'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Elisabeth Gehrke, ESU Chairperson



1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bologna With Student Eyes (BWSE) presents a reality-check of what has been agreed upon by national governments within the Bologna Process and what the actual reality is for students. Reforms discussed and recommended in an intergovernmental process on European level are not simply implemented overnight at the national and institutional level. Nevertheless, European Students' Union's (ESU) concern has been that the information provided for the reporting on the implementation of Bologna reforms has been detached from the reality at the grassroots level, sometimes even with factual errors (either by mistake or consciously). The aim is to highlight the current status, successes and future challenges that students see in the implementation of reforms and the Process as a whole from the students' point of view, as the main stakeholder in higher education, thus complementing the views presented in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) implementation reports and reports by other stakeholders.

The data for this edition was collected by surveying ESU's national unions of students on the following areas: student participation in governance, social dimension, quality assurance, recognition, mobility and internationalisation, structural reforms and financing of higher education. The questionnaire also included general questions about the Bologna Process and its future. In total, over 38 national unions of students responded the questionnaire, from Norway to Malta and Ireland to Armenia.

The authors of the chapters have integrated the analysis of the BWSE questionnaire together with other relevant reports and documents into the main findings. The combination of the qualitative and quantitative approach allow for presenting a full picture of how students perceive the Bologna Process and the implementation of Bologna reforms. This served as the basis for suggesting considerations for the future and recommendations that should be taken into account when ministers meet at the 2015 Ministerial Meeting to discuss and agree upon future commitments, as well as in discussions related to the structure of the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) for the upcoming period.

The results in this publication have shown that the original commitments of the Bologna Process are far from being evenly implemented within all participatory countries. It is clear that the main obstacle for reaching the goals of the EHEA is the lack of a minimum level of implementation of the Bologna reforms. This lack of implementation raises extreme concerns and fosters a lack of confidence in the Process among students, as after more than 15 years, the goals of the Bologna Declaration remain largely unfulfilled.

1.1 TIME TO MEET THE EXPECTATIONS FROM 1999

The Bologna Process has a great influence on higher education in Europe, as many European countries are reforming or have already reformed their higher education systems in light of the Bologna Declaration and the following communiqués. However, Europe is still far from achieving a fully functioning EHEA.

Since the very beginning of the Bologna Process, it has aimed to initiate a change of paradigm in the role of the students in higher education. The policy debate on learning and teaching in Europe is intensifying, much more now than even three years ago. This presents a key moment in time to address these issues head-on at a European policy level. There appears to be a momentum promoting a real paradigm shift toward a student-centred approach to learning and teaching, where the focus is on the goals of the learning process from the student's perspective.

However, because of the lack of full implementation of the structural reforms despite the continuous commitments from the ministers in EHEA, automatic recognition is yet to become reality. Moreover, the diploma supplement is still not granted for free and automatically in every EHEA country, and the recognition procedures remain complicated and time consuming and therefore inaccessible. Recognition of prior learning (RPL) appears to be at an early stage of implementation, with rather limited impact. Recognition procedures must be accessible, clear and transparent to all applicants, without red-tape. Following the Lisbon Recognition Convention, there should be automatic recognition of degrees between the EHEA countries that have already fully implemented the Bologna structural reforms, as there would then not be any substantial differences with similar qualifications in any other EHEA country.

Higher education has multiple purposes, and when focusing on employability as one of them, higher education should always be defined in a broad sense, and never used in a way that instrumentalises education to suit narrow or short-term needs of the labour market.

Even if some progress has been made in certain areas, the prevention of discrimination of underrepresented groups in higher education must be addressed more holistically, and the groups possibly affected must be considered carefully and according to their specific needs. Not only sufficient funding, but also the further implementation of national access plans, is crucial.

After more than 15 years of the Bologna Process, many challenges exist and there is a need for rethinking the Process. Many challenges have yet to be tackled in the implementation of the reforms ministers have committed to: a lack of funding, lack of interest and lack of knowledge are just some. Rethinking the Bologna Process must entail a full reassessment of its structures, and a possible two-speed process should be evaluated. Countries must take on the responsibility to fund the reforms that they have (or should have) implemented. Involving students, academics and institutions in all discussions and decision-making regarding the Bologna Process and its implementation is key.

1.2 PROGRESS AND PROCRASTINATION IN THE BOLOGNA PROCESS SINCE 2012

Many challenges have yet to be tackled in the implementation of the reforms ministers have committed to: a lack of funding, lack of interest and lack of knowledge are just some. With the discussions on the future of the Bologna Process up for debate at the Ministerial Conference, students have weighed in on what they believe is crucial the continued success of the Process; the top priority: a restructuring to ensure proper implementation.

Student participation in higher education governance has advanced slightly in recent years with the enactment of legislation but many barriers are still in place, preventing or limiting the involvement of students at all levels. It is clear that other stakeholders have an important role in addressing the perception that students are *seen but not heard* and not considered equal partners. The Bologna process has not contributed to the improvement of student participation in most countries. Effective inductions and trainings for student representatives participating in decision making structures along with continuous supports can advance the involvement of students in higher education governance.

According to National Students' Unions (NUS) the **social dimension** is seldom a priority on national or institutional level. The lack of clear measures taken shows the need for further action in order to prevent discrimination and to support underrepresented groups. In order to intensify the efforts to reach the goal of reflecting the diversity of society in the higher education student population, the pressing lack of funding for student support services must be addressed. Data collection may serve as a first step, but must be followed up by the implementation of concrete measures which should be supported by national access plans, among other tools.

The primary purposes of **quality assurance** (QA) systems are generally perceived as for enhancing the study conditions and providing transparent information. There are a considerable amount of countries where external QA systems are a combination of institutional and study-programme accreditations. Meaningful participation of students in QA at all levels has slightly increased and several countries had or have developed specific experts' pool where students are included. However, there is a lack of information about QA among the student body and students generally believe that these processes are not useful because there are not any visible consequences perceived by them.

Student-centred learning has been one of the key commitments of the Bologna Process since 2009, and is closely linked with the concept of *learning to learn*. Much progress has been made in implementing student-centred learning, however the results of the Peer-Assessment for Student-Centred Learning study have shown that much of this has been done piecemeal, and lacks a holistic change from national to classroom level. Putting students in the centre of the learning process requires providing them with choice in curricula, assessment methods and study paths. It also means that students must be viewed as equal partners and co-producers of knowledge. Therefore, it is of utmost importance is ensuring students have a real voice in decision-making structures, affecting their daily lives.

Structural Reforms have been core elements of the Bologna Process, essential for fulfilling the basic aims of facilitating recognition and mobility through ensuring comparability and compatibility, as well as transparent, quality higher education. Despite their importance, it is clear that structural reforms have not been fully implemented. National unions of students report that there is a considerable lack of political will in the development and implementation of reforms. Even for the countries that have the reforms on paper, they have been superficial at best in a majority of countries, simply translating and not transforming the higher education system.

Recognition has been analysed in terms of four aspects: the Diploma Supplement, recognition procedures, automatic recognition and recognition of prior learning (RPL). Because of the lack of full implementation of the structural reforms despite continuous commitments from EHEA ministers, automatic recognition is yet to become a reality. Recognition procedures remain complicated and time consuming and therefore inaccessible. The Diploma Supplement is not granted for free and automatically in every EHEA country and recognition of prior learning appears to be at an early stage of implementation with rather limited impact.

Student mobility has been at the core of the Bologna Process. Important aspects have been brought to the attention and over the years, documents have been adopted with the aim of removing obstacles to mobility programmes in order to enhance quality and widen access. Actions taken on European level, as well as the aims and goals have been met only on paper rather and not in reality, leaving student mobility still a privilege for the few. The 20% target of mobile students by 2020 has also pressured countries to prioritise quantity often at the expense of quality.

Internationalisation strategies are yet to become common in EHEA countries. There is a noticeable lack of involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the drafting, implementation and evaluation process, and there is not enough consistency in the efforts taken to adjust the higher education systems to live up to the challenges of a global reality.

Higher education has changed during recent years with the Bologna implementation, but now, a key factor enters the game: discussions on employability and **employment**. While higher education must help graduates prepare for the labour market, the multiple purposes of higher education must never be forgotten. Focusing on lifelong learning, critical thinking, transversal skills and the interest of students should be the main focus in discussions on employability, not the short-term and narrow needs of the labour market today. Tools to facilitate employability, such as automatic recognition of prior learning, of general skills or of learning outcomes are still not in place. On the other hand, the social dimension can be strengthened by opening and improving access to higher education for students and learners coming from underrepresented groups which would then have better opportunities when entering the labour market.

Financing of higher education and student support systems have been disproportionately hit by austerity measures and budget cuts in recent years. The cuts to student support systems and the growing trend of converting grants into loans is creating incredible financial burdens on families and students and risk squeezing more students out of higher education. The underfunding of HEIs is leading to reductions in student services, growing tuition fees, ultimately damaging education quality. Where education budgets have not been cut but remain static, growing demand and inflation calls for greater investment.

The Future of the Bologna Process: After more than 15 years of the Bologna Process, many challenges exist and there is a need for rethinking the Process. Many challenges have yet to be tackled in the implementation of the reforms ministers have committed to: a lack of funding, lack of interest and lack of knowledge are just some. With the discussions on the future of the Bologna Process up for debate at the Ministerial Conference, students have weighed in on what they believe is crucial the continued success of the Process; the top priority: a restructuring to ensure proper implementation.

1.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Rethinking the Bologna Process must entail a full reassessment of its structures, and a possible two-speed process should be evaluated. Countries must take on the responsibility to fund the reforms that they have (or should have) implemented. Peer-learning between countries, as well as trainings for teachers and staff will also assist in the challenges of implementation. Data collection must also be enhanced, establishing objective indicators and taking into account the views of stakeholders in reporting. Finally, involving students, academics and institutions in all discussions and decision-making regarding the Bologna Process and its implementation is key.

- **Student Participation:** ESU calls for immediate action to address the legislative and cultural barriers preventing or limiting meaningful student participation in higher education governance. All stakeholders have a role in ensuring student representatives are considered equal partners and are included and supported in all decision-making structures.
- ESU calls for the treatment of the **social dimension** as a major policy priority. Adequate data collection, the identification and support of underrepresented groups and sufficient student support services must be provided to reach the goal of reflecting the diversity of populations among higher education students. To achieve these goals, not only sufficient funding, but also the further implementation of national access plans, is crucial.
- **Quality Assurance** systems should be based on the principles and values of trust, participation and ownership of stakeholders and a drive for real improvement. It is essential that the revised version of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) in the EHEA are rapidly implemented in cooperation with national stakeholders. There should be further development of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) providing information about quality-assured higher education provision in EHEA, for instance by establishing a database of official degrees and study programmes offered within EHEA.
- In order to properly implement **student-centred learning**, adequate funding and resources must be secured, ensuring that higher education institutions provide students with a conducive learning environment. Students must also be in the driver's seat, and here countries and institutions have the responsibility to ensure student representation in all decision-making processes. Staff must also receive continuous pedagogical training. Providing flexible learning paths where students are provided with real choice in curriculum and assessment methods is a key component of SCL. Holistic strategies, frameworks and procedures for the implementation of SCL and assessing its success should be a guiding tool in this process.
- **Structural reforms** Full implementation of the structural reforms requires an understanding of the interdependence of the reforms. Countries cannot choose in an 'à la carte' manner which reforms they prefer, but must develop and implement them from a holistic perspective. Incentives such as automatic recognition for those countries that have implemented the reforms may function as an incentive for improved implementation. In order to ensure the transformation of the structures, the development of reforms must involve the academic community and cannot be a top-down, forced process.

- ◉ There should be procedures for **recognition**, which must be accessible, clear and transparent to all applicants, but must not serve as a bureaucratic burden. Following the Lisbon Recognition Convention, there should be automatic recognition of degrees between EHEA countries that have already fully implemented the Bologna structural reforms, as there would then not be any substantial differences with similar qualifications in any other EHEA country. The Diploma Supplement should be fully implemented and automatically granted upon graduation or before graduation upon request. RPL should be available for the purpose of enrollment in higher education as well as available for the purpose of replacement of parts of the curriculum. RPL mechanisms must be flexible and student-friendly.
- ◉ Making **mobility** a reality is still a challenge. Mobility must not be perceived as a goal in itself, but as a tool for internationalisation. Countries must follow up on all commitments made to ensure sufficient conditions on the institutional, national and international level for mobility across and beyond Europe. The 20% mobility target must be reviewed, and efforts must be taken to ensure accessibility by removing all obstacles and guaranteeing support through full portability of grants and loans, adequate information provision and automatic recognition.
- ◉ On the institutional and national level, **internationalisation** strategies must be designed, implemented and monitored with the engagement of all relevant stakeholders, embracing both quantitative and qualitative targets, language policies and internationalisation at home.
- ◉ Countries must make efforts to define and differentiate employment and **employability**, as they constitute two entirely different concepts. Employability must be understood as ability to learn and gain valuable employment, whereas employment is the actual acquisition of a job. Higher education systems must not be designed to match the labour market needs, but should rather be tailored according to the needs of the society as a whole and recognise the complexity and diversity of educational programmes, disciplines and professions when discussing enhancement of employability of graduates. Policies designed on national levels should clearly reflect this approach and ensure that it is followed in decision-making processes within higher education systems.
- ◉ **Financing of Higher Education:** ESU urges ministers to recommit to treating higher education as a public good and public responsibility by securing public funding and protecting education from austerity, understanding that higher education is an investment for the future.
- ◉ **Future of the Bologna Process:** The Bologna process must be restructured to ensure proper implementation. Rethinking the Bologna Process must entail a full reassessment of its structures, and a possible two-speed process should be evaluated. Countries must take on the responsibility to fund the reforms that they have (or should have) implemented. Peer-learning between countries, as well as trainings for teachers and staff will also assist in the challenges of implementation. Data collection must also be enhanced, establishing objective indicators and taking into account the views of stakeholders in reporting. Finally, involving students, academics and institutions in all discussions and decision-making regarding the Bologna Process and its implementation is key.
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2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 BOLOGNA WITH STUDENT EYES—FROM 2003 TO TODAY

The European Students' Union (ESU) has been contributing to the review of the implementation of the Bologna Process since 2003, when it published the first *Bologna With Student Eyes* (BWSE). Over the course of more than a decade the authors of these publications have presented the state of play of the Bologna-initiated reforms from the perspective of our member unions.

In 2012 the authors changed their angle, and BWSE became not only a reflection of student views on the implementation of the Process itself. It has rather taken a more holistic approach to the Bologna Process, looking closer at its impact on European integration, benefit to wider society, contribution to lifelong learning and, more importantly, the future of European higher education. This edition BWSE has similar aims, and this is reflected by the methods used to collect and analyse data, write and review the content and finally publish BWSE 2015.

The aim of each of the publications has been and continues to highlight the current status, successes and future challenges that students see in the implementation of reforms and the Process as a whole. It aims to complement the views presented by other stakeholders and the governments themselves, for instance represented in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) implementation reports.

2.2 SELECTION OF METHODS

IDENTIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEMS

The contributors have started their work in summer 2014 with ESU elected representatives having an in-depth analysis of the relevant background followed by a broad discussion about the approach that should be taken to this year's publication, as well as the topics most relevant for this stage of the Bologna Process and this year's Ministerial Conference. This facilitated the formulation of main focuses and the impact of the publication within four areas of ESU's work, i.e. social dimension, quality assurance, public responsibility and mobility and internationalisation. Within these four areas, student-centred learning, recognition, financing and governance are key topics that have guided the Bologna Process for many years. Subsequently, ESU has been a key player in discussions on the future of the Bologna Process, which will also be one of the key debates up for discussion at the Ministerial Conference for 2015. This is a new feature of this edition, which ESU hopes will provide food for thought in these discussions.

FOCUS GROUPS

At an event held in January 2015, many of ESU's member unions met to discuss the Bologna Process, the implementation of reforms and key priorities for both BWSE and the 2015 Ministerial Meeting. Unions were divided into groups for each of ESU's four areas of work, and were invited to share and discuss their views on the status of implementation of Bologna reforms in their countries within these areas. This assisted in guiding the development of the questionnaire, and some of the discussions have also been highlighted in this publication.

DESIGNING THE QUESTIONNAIRE AND DATA COLLECTION

This year's questionnaire took a new approach, aiming for a more holistic view on the topics and implementation of reforms. The questionnaire was much shorter than in previous years, which has also served to ensure a high response rate, while still maintaining a substantial quality in responses. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected, using closed questions of dichotomous, ordinal and semantic differential form, complemented by open-ended questions to allow for respondents to provide detailed responses highlighting the specificities of their countries.

The data were collected in the following areas: student participation, social dimension, quality assurance, recognition, mobility and internationalisation, structural reforms, financing as well as there was a set of general questions about the Bologna Process.

Over the course of three weeks, over 38 National Unions of Students (NUS) responded, reaching from Norway to Malta and Ireland to Armenia. This has contributed to a high degree of representativity that captures the diversity of perspectives between ESU's member unions.

ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING THE DATA

Having collected qualitative and quantitative data, they were analysed and interpreted by the authors of the chapters and included in the main findings of respective chapters of this publication. The crosscutting approach has been taken, therefore the analysis took place not only in the context of specific chapters, but also took into consideration the inter-dimensional context of certain issues.

The data collected from the questionnaire was complemented by findings from other studies and reports produced by, among others, Eurostudent, the European Commission and other stakeholders, as well as the findings from research publications prepared by ESU itself, from projects such as Peer Assessment of Student-Centred Learning (PASCL) and Student Advancement on Graduates Employability (SAGE).

REPORTING AND DRAFTING CONCLUSIONS

Trends found in the analysis provided the basis for drawing the conclusions in the content areas. They were used to support the main messages of each chapter and the overall publication. Therefore, it was important to discuss the main conclusions and recommendations in the context of the different chapters to prove the multilayered and inter-dimensional character of the content areas to ensure the holistic approach to the Bologna Process.

In the process of drafting the publication, the main outcomes were shared and discussed with the respondents and other representatives from NUSes during various meetings and events, which served as a peer-learning exercise. The publication was first presented in online version at the website bwse2015.esu-online.org and it was further compiled into one cohesive publication.

The authors continued working on the final version with the feedback received. The final outcomes were then presented to the higher education experts and the relevant stakeholders on the European and national level.

2.3 CLOSING REMARKS

The results of this publication intend to provide an overview and in-depth analysis of the student perspective on the implementation of Bologna-initiated reforms and developments within the higher education systems in their respective countries. In this way, it seeks to complement the perspectives seen in other reports, such as the 2015 EHEA implementation report. Additionally, it aims to present the challenges, students believe, must be addressed at the 2015 Ministerial Meeting in Yerevan and the goals for the next period up to another Ministerial Conference.

Students have always been a driver of change in society, and by providing a critical analysis of the current state of play, BWSE aims to trigger that change by contributing to the discussion on European and national level. In the spirit of the evidence-based policy-making, the research results provide a foundation for creating a clear political statement and recommendations for further actions to be taken.



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3 STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The importance of involving students as partners in higher education decision making has been widely accepted for more than ten years, yet in practise we are far from reaching this goal. The 2001 Prague Communiqué stated, “Ministers affirmed that students should participate in and influence the organisation and content of education at universities and other higher education institutions,” and this was followed up in the Berlin Communiqué of 2003 with the statement “Students are full partners in higher education governance” and issued the call on “institutions and student organisations to identify ways of increasing actual student involvement in higher education governance.”

In reflecting on student participation in 2003, the Council of Europe’s Head of Division for Higher Education and Research, Sjur Bergan, reminded us that: “... higher education governance is at the heart of the Bologna Process and will be a key feature of the European Higher Education Area to be set up by 2010.” Though most countries have enshrined student participation in legislation, in practise the spectrum of involvement runs from ‘full/equal partners’ to ‘completely excluded’.

In recent years, discussion of the role of higher education institutions has been brought up at many different levels. Ideology and high levels of youth unemployment have contributed to trends commercialising higher education allowing HEIs to drift from their original mission and purpose. With information more accessible than ever and technology developing at incredible rates, the purpose of HEIs may have changed slightly, but the mission should be as relevant today as it was when such establishments were born. The role of students in achieving such missions is central. After all a university without any students is just a bunch of buildings. ESU firmly believes that “Students should be treated as members of the higher education community, sharing the responsibility and rights to govern this central institution of our civilisation” (ESU 2013).

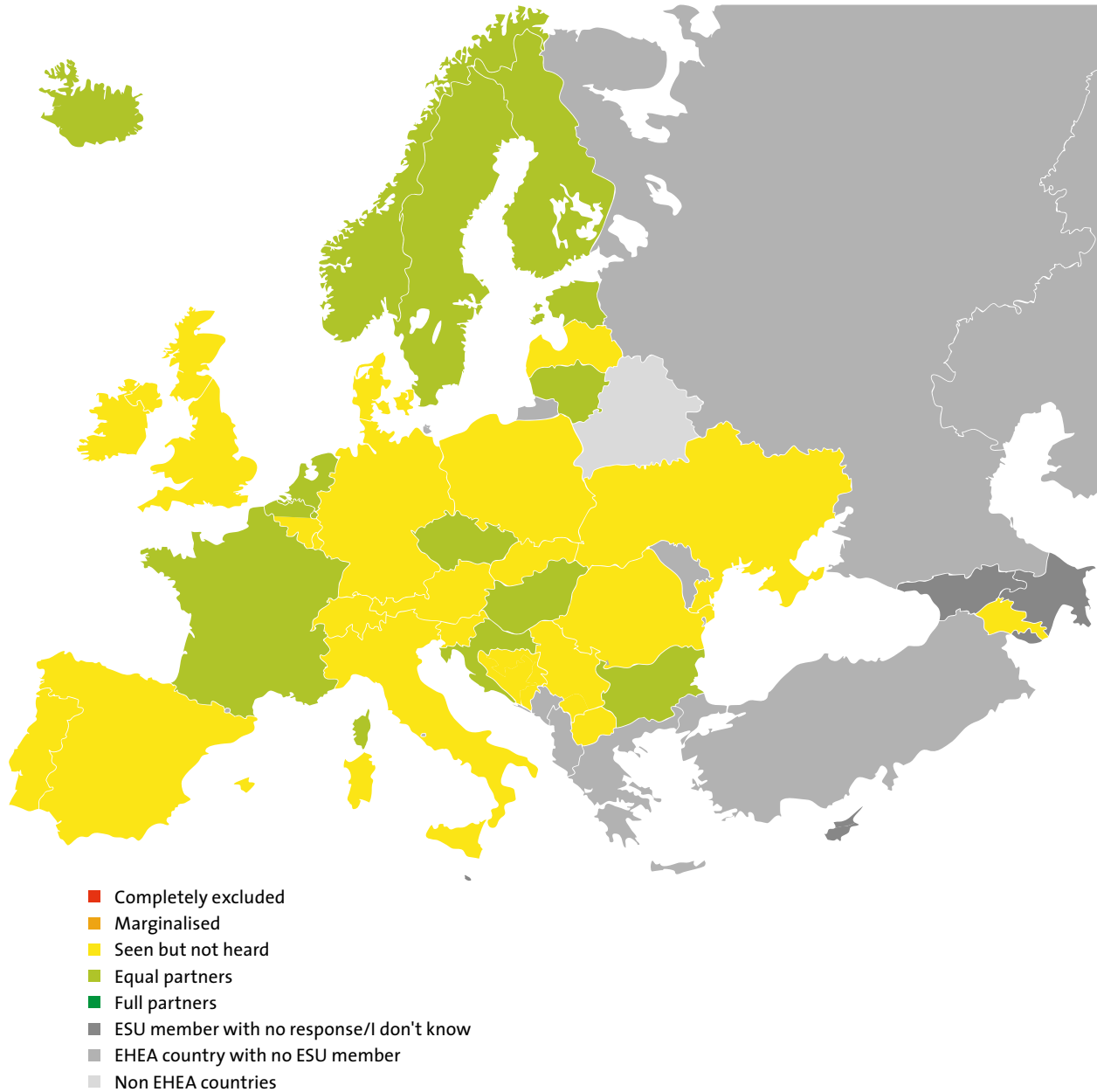
In this chapter we will explore the recent trends around student participation in higher education governance, discuss how meaningful student involvement can be and examine some good practises we can draw recommendations from.

3.2 MAIN FINDINGS

LEGISLATING FOR STUDENT PARTICIPATION

The importance of including students and their representatives in legislation, setting rules and regulations for higher education governance, both nationally and institutionally, has been highlighted for many years (ESU 2009, 2012). When asked about the current situation, unions from 29 countries indicated that legislation exists, however seven reported there is currently no existing legislation, while two unions explain they are actively working with the authorities to draft or finalise it.

fig. 1 How is student input treated at the institutional level?



Though none of the respondents reported that they are very satisfied with the enactment and implementation of existing legislation, 83% reported to be much or somewhat satisfied. There were issues raised with existing legislation related to limitations in certain areas. Some were concerned about the limitations of the legislation as it does not cover some HEI types, such as non-public HEIs, or the scope of the legislation is limited to institutional levels of decision-making excluding regional or national bodies. Others limit the involvement of students, preventing them from participation in activities including quality assurance, senior management elections and financial discussions.

LEVELS OF STUDENT PARTICIPATION

Though many countries have legislation on student involvement, in practise the limitations vary and have a powerful impact. Over half of the NUSES reported limitations on participation in decision-making processes, some excluded students from the preparatory phases, such as planning and development activities or discussions, while others are excluded from the final decision-making phase, with only 45% reporting involvement in all stages.

HOW DO STUDENTS PERCEIVE THE WAY THEIR INPUT IS CONSIDERED?

Rates of student involvement remain very worrying with only 15 unions indicating students make up more than 20% of decision making bodies in HEIs, though this shows a slight improvement from 2012 when only 11 unions did. Nearly 75% of unions responded that students make up less than 20% of the decision making bodies which is a long way from being considered equal partners. Though the actual number of students at the table is just one factor, it has a clear effect on how student perceive how their input is being considered. Figure 04.01 shows us how students are considered in governance at the institutional level.

Alarmingly, over half of respondents indicated that student representatives are generally 'seen but not heard' at institutional and faculty level decision-making. Additionally, at the national level over 17% and at programme level over 20% of unions reported that they feel marginalised or completely excluded.

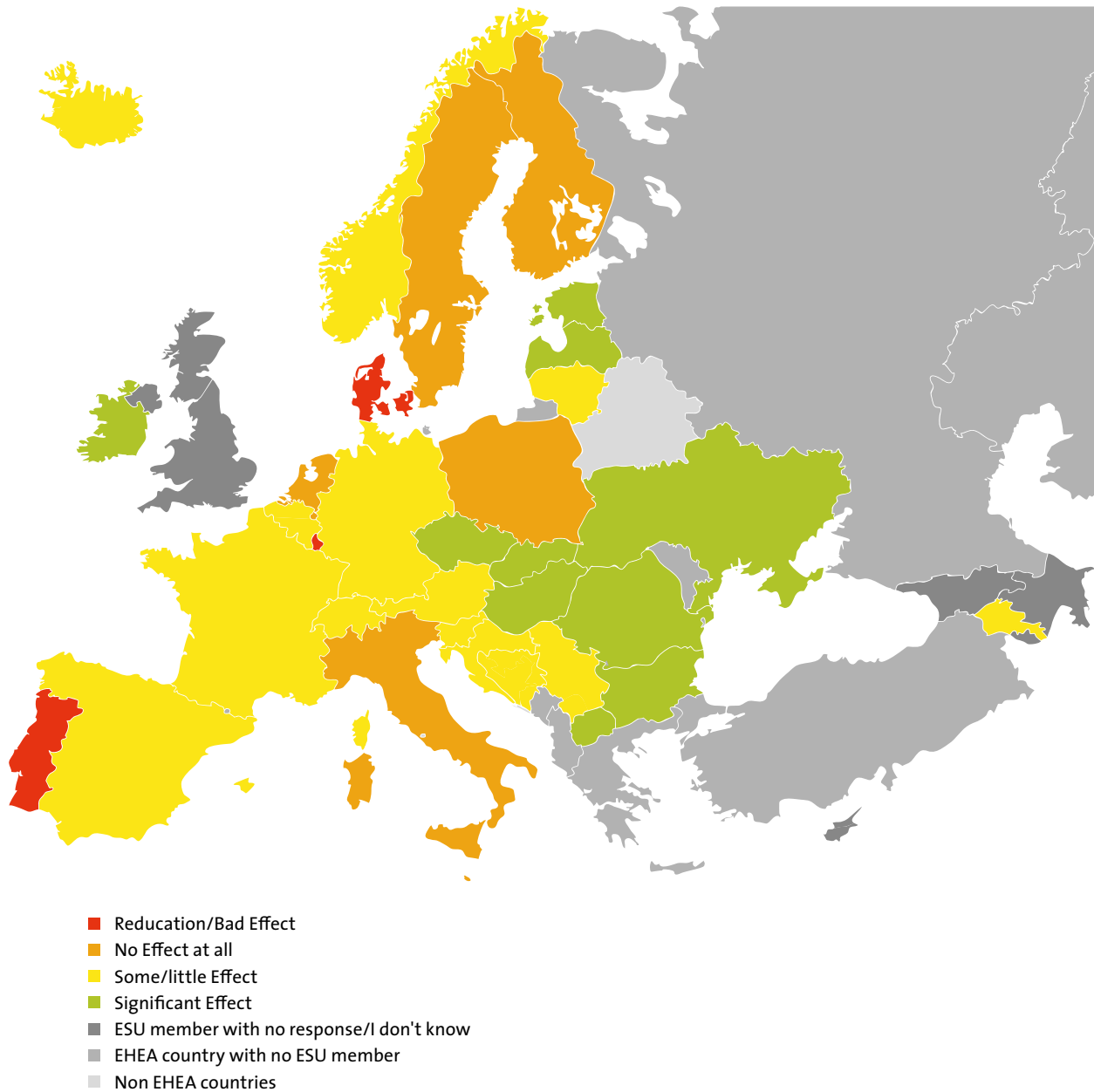
IS BOLOGNA A DRIVING FORCE/INVOLVEMENT IN STUDENT PARTICIPATION?

As the future of the Bologna Process is being discussed, it is important to reflect on the role it has played in national and institutional reforms. When asked if the Bologna Process has been a driving force toward increased and better student involvement, the responses were less than positive. Only ten unions believe the Bologna Process has had a significant effect on student participation. 24 reported little or no effect, and three others explained that it has had a negative effect. DSF, the National Union of Students in Denmark, reported that the Bologna Process is often used as an excuse for unrelated national reforms, and in many other cases it is used to seek limitations in student participation in higher education governance. When comparing the data with the 2012 Bologna With Student Eyes survey, a reduction is seen in the group reporting that Bologna has had a significant effect, an increase in those reporting little or no effect and three unions, including DSF (Denmark) and FAIRE (Portugal) again, report negative effects.

WHAT IS NEEDED TO ACHIEVE VALUABLE AND MEANINGFUL STUDENT PARTICIPATION?

In a set of focus groups held with unions in January 2015, participants were asked to discuss what is needed to achieve valuable and meaningful student involvement. The discussions were very positive and comprehensive, revolving around three pillars: representative and diverse student representatives, training and support, inclusive and accessible systems.

fig. 2 How do students perceive the way their input is considered?



REPRESENTATIVE AND DIVERSE STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

The group agreed that representative representation means that the views of different students must be included at all levels. They listed the importance of including diverse perspectives including the diversity in genders, nationalities, backgrounds, ages and learning needs as some of the groups which must be reflected in representation structures. An example of ensuring balance in representation structures can be found in the selection process for the ESU Executive Committee which has gender quotas ensuring that each gender is represented by at least 40%.

Additionally, concerns were raised about the limitations students from certain faculties or levels of study face in being included in structures. The heavy workload of some professional courses such as medicine can be a barrier to involvement, as can the research or teaching responsibilities of Masters and PhD students.

TRAINING AND SUPPORT

With most student representatives completing 12 month mandates and many degrees lasting 3 to 4 years, the turnover of student representatives is extremely high. Training and orientation is an essential part of the handover process and excellent examples can be found across the NUSES. Each July USI, the Union of Students in Ireland, hold a one-week training for elected student representatives covering topics including public speaking, time management, engaging with higher education authorities and campaigning, as well as specific areas such as quality assurance and mental health.

HEIs and national bodies are essential in the induction of local and national representatives. Students who will hold seats on boards and councils should receive the appropriate practical information before their first meeting and have access to support throughout their mandate to ensure that they can participate fully without practical or administrative barriers.

INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE SYSTEMS

With so many student representatives being 'seen but not heard' (fig. 2), it is vital that student unions are accessible and foster inclusive atmospheres. There are numerous examples of student unions at local, national and international levels offering support and solidarity to each other as they face a number of common issues and share many successes. Within student unions and the HEI structures, natural groupings and networks are continuously repopulated and offer student activists support and stability. These networks tend to focus on common interests such as field or study but often cross over especially in the class or faculty representation structures.

When asked about the trends in such structures participants identified current practises that were important in achieving this in their country. LSA, the Student Union of Latvia, provides support including training and assistance in negotiations with officials for local students' unions who face resistance or suppression at HEIs regarding their participation in decision-making processes and violations of legislation.

INDEPENDENCE OF STUDENT UNIONS

Overall, student unions appear to operate independently at national levels with 85% reporting that they are fully or mainly independent. This independence drops off considerably when we look at the institutional level, with closer to half of respondents indicating that they are fully or mainly independent and nearly a third stating some or little independence. At faculty level, over 40% indicate only some or little independence.

3.3 CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Legislation for student involvement has slightly improved since 2012, but there are still countries without legislation, and there are many limitations impacting student participation in countries with legislation, but it is poorly implemented or has a limited scope.

In practise, students are still not considered equal partners in decision-making, and the situation at institutional level in most countries needs attention. The lack of support systems, orientation, mentorship, guidance and handovers for new student representatives inhibit meaningful participation. Those responsible for decision-making bodies, at all levels, have a duty to ensure that new student representatives are represented and supported in the established structures.

Student bodies naturally reorder themselves and select leaders, but greater involvement from other stakeholders is needed to ensure that they can participate fully and independently in governance structures. Student representation is in jeopardy if commodifying factors continue, which contribute to the view of students as customers or consumers of higher education or products of higher education, rather than equal partners.



3.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Legislation should be revised to ensure that student representation is guaranteed. Where legislation is limited in scope it should be revised, in consultation with NUSES, to ensure that student representation is guaranteed in all HEIs and at regional and national levels. The poor or improper enactment of legislation needs immediate attention to ensure an inclusive culture is fostered in decision making structures.
- Support structures and activities are needed for new student representatives. Decision-making structures must include students as active participants and representatives in the entire process of decision-making. Orientation and induction activities for new student representatives will contribute to improving this. Other barriers, particularly those arising from improper Bologna implementation, should be identified and addressed at all levels to ensure students are treated as the equal partners they are.
- NUSES and students' unions must be supported in providing training for student representatives. To ensure NUSES and students' unions can continue to provide high quality and inclusive training and support for student representatives they need to be supported with resources and expertise. As student representatives are limited in the time they spend in higher education and the student movement it is imperative that the training and supports available to them are suitable, accessible and high quality.
- A platform for best practise exchange will be a valuable resource. With so many excellent initiatives and successful practises for greater and meaningful student participation ongoing in many countries and HEIs, a coordinated project looking at these practises and the challenges some face would be very useful. A platform for sharing and peer learning between students' unions and youth groups may be valuable and should be considered in consultation with students' unions, youth groups and education stakeholders.

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4 SOCIAL DIMENSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The European Students' Union (ESU) believes that the social dimension is a crucial aspect of the Bologna Process for ensuring that the student body mirrors the diversity of the population. This action line shall not only benefit individual students, but society as a whole through preparing students from diverse backgrounds for active citizenship while providing the competence and skills for their future lives and enabling social mobility. (ESU 2012: 73)

The social dimension was first mentioned in the Bologna Process in 2001, when on the initiative of ESU, “the need [...] to take account of the social dimension” (Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education 2001: 3) was acknowledged. A clearer commitment was made at the Bergen Ministerial Conference in 2005 with the promise to take measures to widen access to higher education (ESU 2012). Today's aspiration, “that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations” (Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education 2007: 5) dates back to 2007. It can be used as the definition of the social dimension in the Bologna Process and serves as the basic assumption of this article.

In 2012, the Bucharest Communiqué (ibid. 2012) unfortunately focused mainly on the relationship between the social dimension and the labour market. However, the ministers agreed to adopt national measures to widen participation in higher education as well as to reduce inequalities. (Kaiser et al. 2015) This goal should be reached by the establishment of National Access plans (ibid.), which ESU strongly encourages to be drafted and implemented.

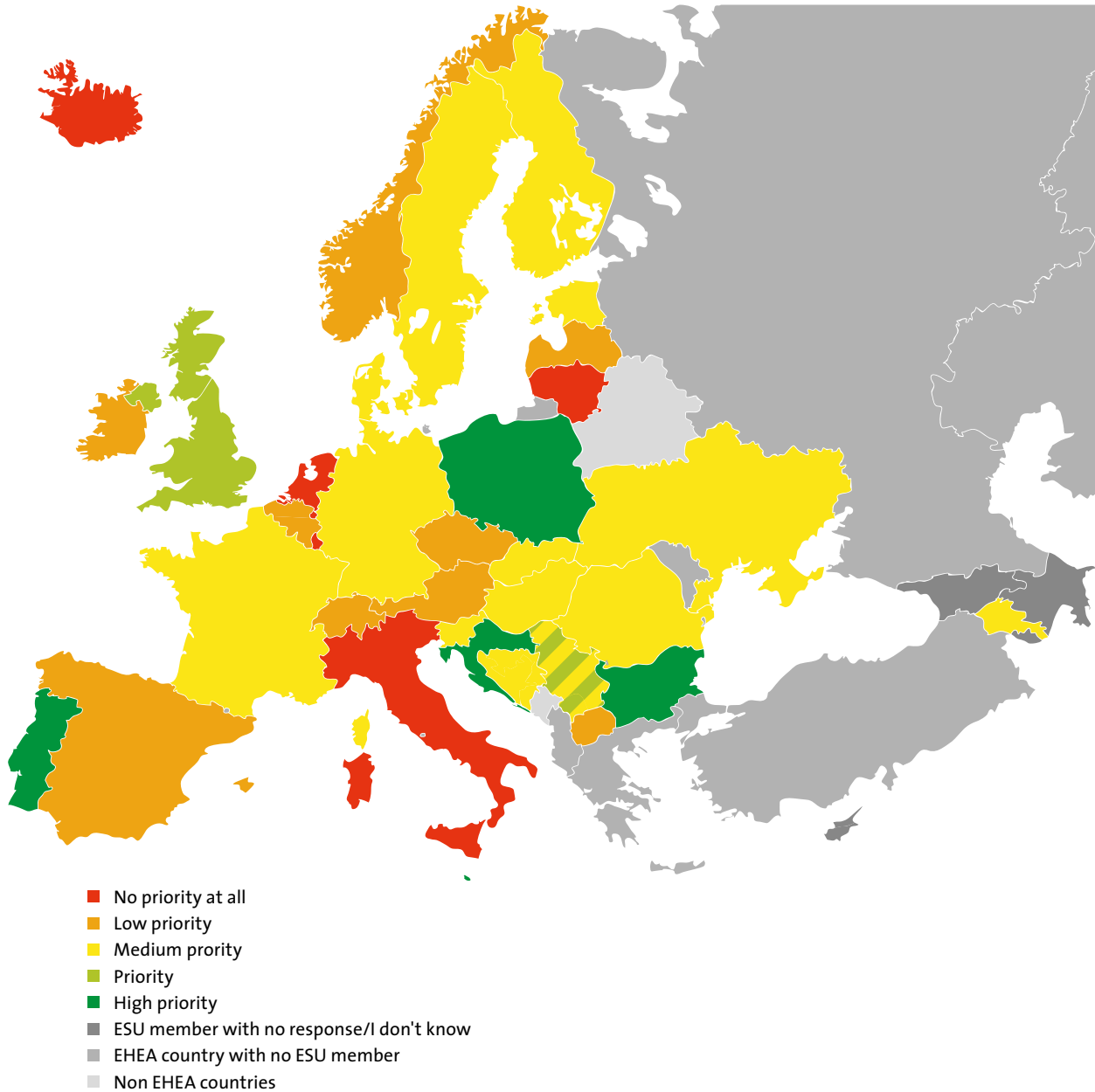
4.2 MAIN FINDINGS

THE SOCIAL DIMENSION AS A POLICY PRIORITY?

According to the National Unions of Students, higher education institutions consider the social dimension as more or less a high priority in only eight out of 36 countries: Hungary, Malta, Portugal, Croatia, Bulgaria, Estonia, the United Kingdom and Slovenia. This poor figure is only outdone by the unions' opinions of how important the social dimension is for their governments, where only seven unions reported positively: Malta, Portugal, Poland, Croatia, Bulgaria, Serbia (one of two unions) and the United Kingdom.

When the National Unions of Students were asked if progress has been made on the social dimension since 2012, the answers varied widely, with the majority answering that the social dimension has not been a priority, and therefore no progress has been made whatsoever. Some unions reported that steps are underway at the present time, but no results could be demonstrated yet, while others reported that very significant progress has been made. A surprisingly large number of the unions reported that

fig. 3 Is the social dimension a priority for you national governments?



they feel as though they are the only stakeholder with any interest in the social dimension, and that neither governments nor institutions show interest in taking action.

National targets are in place in Estonia, Serbia, Malta, the United Kingdom, Armenia, Ireland and France, and new legislation was developed in seven further countries. Whereas some unions note that while the data collected may show improvement, it was not due to any coordinated action on the national level.

DISCRIMINATION

In many countries measures against discrimination are not a national prerogative, and the institutions are responsible for most of these measures, regrettably leading to a wide diversity of uncoordinated measures and implementations.

When asked, unions from ten out of 36 countries reported that there are no clear procedures in place at institutions to prevent discrimination. Perhaps more concerning is that from nine countries, unions reported that such procedures exist, but only on paper, or are not functioning. The geographic spread of these two categories was broad.

In the majority of cases (27), students with physical disabilities are protected from discrimination, which is very encouraging to note. On the other end of the spectrum, unions reported that only seven countries provide protection for mature students (those over the age of 25 at entry to higher education). Similarly low numbers report protective measures for students from immigrant backgrounds (10) or for students with children or other dependants (12), or protection from discrimination based on the gender of students (11).

Regarding the measures in place to prevent discrimination based on the gender of students, one union observed that the measures protect only one gender, which may be appropriate in certain cases (admission to certain fields of study dominated by one gender etc.), but not in all, and in fact may ultimately be damaging in a long-term perspective. The typical example here is humanities and engineering studies, where men are often underrepresented in one area, and women the other. (Gwosć et al 2015: 65)

Measures to prevent discrimination based on students' religious affiliation are in place in twelve countries. Here, one union mentioned their own surprise about the level of discrimination reported for one particular religious group. Though regrettable that only one religious group is provided protection, this anecdote exemplifies the use of data collection, as it is significantly better to note the existence of a problem in order to develop measures to tackle it, than to assume that everything is fine.

DATA COLLECTION AND DEFINITION OF UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS

When asked about how underrepresented groups of students are defined in their countries, a majority of the responding unions mentioned students from a low socio-economic background (28 out of 39 respondents from 36 countries), students with physical disabilities (26) and students with psychosocial disabilities/mental health issues (24). Assumed to be problematic for nearly half of the respondents is the representation of LGBTQ* students (18), students with children/dependants (22), students from immigrant background (20), students from different ethnic groups (22), specific gender of students (16), students with chronic health issues (22) and mature students (21). Underrepresentation in the context of religious affiliation of students was only reported by seven respondents. Three respondents reported no underrepresented groups whatsoever.

Individual countries' unions report other groups that the unions identify as being severely underrepresented. In Lithuania, students who grew up in state foster homes, also commonly referred to as state orphans, are highly underrepresented. In Ireland the same applies for members of the Irish Traveller Community. The status of LGBTQ* students could not be reported in Macedonia, since the government does not officially recognise them.

Although these answers point to the fact that there is a long way to go until the student body mirrors the countries' populations, only eleven unions from ten countries specify that steps are taken to define underrepresented groups in any official document that feeds into or is the basis of national education policy. These definitions were made in a variety of ways, ranging from access plans (UK, Ireland), to general legislation (Finland, Estonia, Belgium, Iceland), to legislation and programmes tackling the underrepresentation of specific groups: Slovakia and Switzerland have legislation concerning students with physical disabilities; Hungary is conducting a special program for Roma students; and in Germany there are some lists of underrepresented groups, but they are incomplete.

The far reaching lack of definitions of underrepresented groups correlates with the lack of adequate data provided. Not a single respondent reported that adequate data is available for all different groups, while twelve respondents found adequate data for some groups. Some data is available according to ten member unions, while 15 reported that no adequate or no data at all is available.

As this situation needs to be improved in order to address the issue of underrepresentation in higher education, ESU advocates for further efforts in data collection. Such efforts have been taking place in twelve countries, while some engagement is visible in another twelve countries. Little to no effort is made in 11 countries. These countries are mostly those currently having difficulties providing adequate data, which in turn prevents their ability to gain further insight into underrepresented groups.

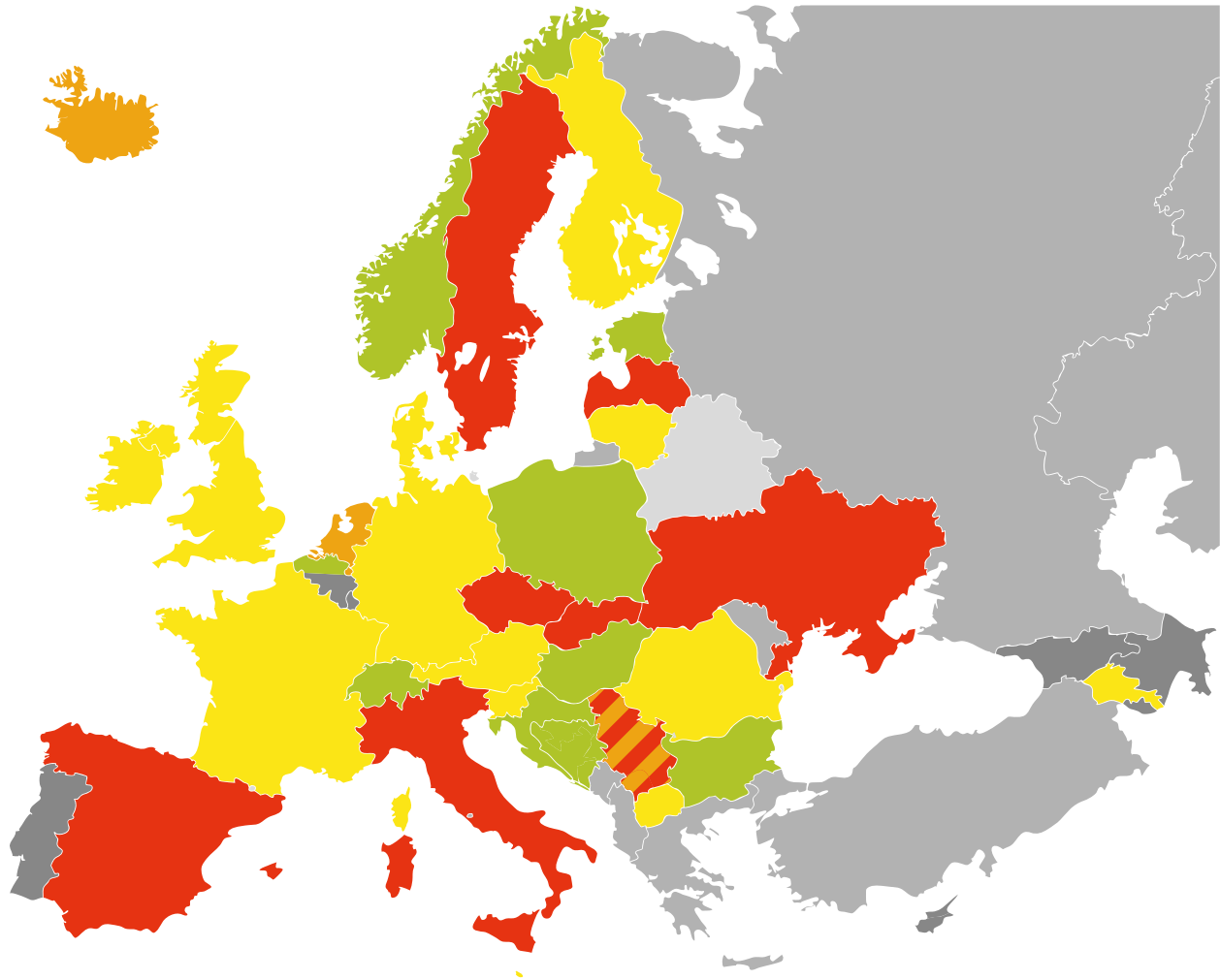
Besides data collection, action needs to be taken to increase the participation of underrepresented groups. For roughly half of the participating countries, some or little financial resources are allocated for this purpose, while only five countries have national targets for the participation of underrepresented groups in higher education which are actually followed up. Despite the prioritisation of widening the participation of underrepresented groups in the Bucharest Communiqué (Communiqué 2012), action in this regard is only taken in a minority of countries, which leads to the conclusion that there is a definite need of further, stronger efforts to be taken in the near future to meet the commitments that countries have made for themselves.

NATIONAL ACCESS PLANS

National access plans have been encouraged by the Bucharest Communiqué (We agree to adopt national measures for widening overall access to quality higher education. (Communiqué 2012:1)) and further developed by the Bologna Follow-Up Group Working Group on Social dimension and Lifelong Learning. Out of 35 countries reporting, access plans were reported to be successfully implemented only in the United Kingdom and in Bulgaria, while six more countries are still struggling the proper implementation of their action plans according to ESU's member unions. Estonia is currently developing its action plan and ten additional countries are debating the implementation of such.

Nevertheless, there are still 13 countries lacking any debate about action plans, and three countries for which ESU's member unions do not know if actions are taken or not. ESU is aware of the fact that access plans demand a large effort, and that their implementation takes a considerable amount of time. While hopefully the discussions about access plans will lead to the drafting and implementation of them in the near future, the number of countries not even considering establishing an access plan

fig. 4 Is there any funding reserved for measures to increase participation of under-represented groups?



- NO, there is no budget allocated for that
- NO, but in the past there has been budget allocated for that purpose
- Somewhat
- Yes, there is some budget allocated
- ESU member with no response/I don't know
- EHEA country with no ESU member
- Non EHEA countries

is alarming. Further encouragement is therefore needed to enhance the efforts of the countries to step up to this commitment. The endorsement of the strategy “Widening Participation for Equity and Growth” drafted by the Bologna Follow-Up Group Working Group on Social dimension and Lifelong Learning would be a big step in this direction.

DROPOUT

Completion rates have been an increasingly important topic for governments to address in the last few years, and for 16 out of 35 countries, unions report that policies are in place to prevent dropout. Seven countries report that measures are in place, but they are either only formal, or do not function in practise. For twelve countries no measures at all are reported.

The most popular measures to combat dropout are counselling (23), additional financing (14) and social support groups (13). Unions from eleven countries report that tracking is being used. We are disappointed to note that only seven countries report that student-centred learning (see chapter 8) is being used to combat dropout. For example the NESET-report on Dropout and Completion in Higher Education in Europe highlights that the SCL-approach and tools are crucial in reducing not only dropout rates but also improving grades (NESET 2013: 80).

We emphasise the fact that many measures which help to prevent dropout are not necessarily initiated with specifically this in mind. Social support groups are particularly identified by the unions as one of the measures which are not specifically targeted against dropout in all cases, but can play a significant role in this work.

The low number of countries utilising tracking of students is a particular concern. In some cases it is reported that no reasons for dropout are identified, as the capacity of the authorities to identify the causes is limited by very poor, or because of non-existent data collection. Another challenge identified is that the categorisation of students as “dropped-out” is problematic—some may simply have changed their course of study, or taken a semester's break, for example, but are still included in this rather large category with no further explanation. Other countries report that while the government tracks dropout rates, it has taken no counter-measures.

We stress again that incomplete or insufficient data can exaggerate certain problems, or hide other issues that may be the very basis of the problem.

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

In the vast majority of countries, the unions consider their pure, traditional student supports (grants/loans) to be entirely insufficient. Many unions report that this support, though theoretically available to many, is in fact only accessible by a very few (as low as 3% in Latvia), or where the support is available to larger numbers of students, the support available is extremely limited. For instance, the accommodation allowance for students in Czech Republic is as low as 10 to 20 € per month. In the Netherlands, a complete redesign of the student support mechanisms has eliminated the student grant entirely and replaced it with a loan.

There is great diversity between countries which focus on need-based grants for students from low socio-economic backgrounds, and academic scholarships without any other criteria. It should be made quite clear that academic scholarships awarded based solely on academic results are not considered relevant to the social dimension, unless balancing mechanisms exist to ensure that the socio-economic background or status of these award winners adequately reflects the diversity of the society.

Direct financial support for students is not only an important factor for the social dimension, but is as well a crucial part of financing higher education. Therefore, further information about the grant and loan systems in Europe can be found in the chapter about Financing of Higher Education.

When asked which other forms of student support was the most under-resourced in their country, the unions overwhelmingly cited housing as being the number one problem area. DSF, the National Union of Students in Denmark, reported that the student grant system is meant to support students so that they can focus exclusively on their studies, but numerous studies have contradicted this aim, which is further compounded by the lack of affordable student housing. VSS-UNES-USU (Switzerland) experiences much the same as their Danish colleagues; “apartments in cities with universities are virtually unaffordable by students.” LSA (Latvia) report that both the volume and standard of student housing are at a critically low level. Housing was also highlighted as one of the single largest problems for students by the unions of Macedonia, Poland, Germany, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Romania (particularly for students with physical disabilities) and France. Other services identified by several unions as severely lacking were psychological support services, career support services, and health services.

Unions from 16 out of 36 countries reported that student support services have been cut since 2012. In the United Kingdom (England/Wales/Northern Ireland), the union reports that the Access to Learning Fund has nearly been completely eliminated, disability support funding is due to be cut significantly next year, and overall any funding to support the widening of participation has been significantly reduced. For England and Wales it should be noted that the responsibility for ensuring the social dimension in higher education was reverted back to the institutions from the national government in the recent past, in what seems to be a backwards step. However, the situation in Scotland and Northern Ireland is somewhat better.

The federalised system in Germany shows widely varied implementation of national directives. Fzs, the German union, reported that in some of the states (Länder) student support services have been cut by up to 50%, similar reports have come from Italy where the regional funding bodies have elected to cut their support for students.

In Finland, cuts have been more directed against personnel, leading to certain instances of hundreds of support staff being laid off. Similar to many others, the Austrian union reported that the governmental support for student housing has been reduced. Three unions (France, Spain, Switzerland) reported that either subsidies for food have been cut, or prices in the cafeterias have increased. In isolation, this may seem like a small issue, but should be seen as yet another challenge being placed on students' already stretched wallets.

Many unions report that singling out one single area where students are most pressured is challenging. The unions of Denmark, the Czech Republic, Ireland and Slovenia reported that almost every support mechanism has been cut.

4.3 CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Despite the fact that the social dimension is a central action line of the Bologna process, it has not been prioritised in the majority of countries, according to the National Unions of Students participating in our survey. While ESU appreciates the efforts taken, more emphasis on the social dimension is needed in order to fulfill the commitments made and meet the targets set.

Even if some progress has been made in some areas, the prevention of discrimination of underrepresented groups in higher education must be addressed more holistically, and the possibly affected groups need to be considered carefully and according to their specific needs. This can be supported by defining underrepresented groups according to a national access plan setting clear targets.

To enable increased access to higher education, substantial funds must be allocated in order to not only define and describe underrepresentation with the help of data collection, but also to be able to implement concrete measures. It is crucial that not only access, but also progression and completion of higher education are taken into account.

The area of student support services has seen an era of stagnation and even cuts since 2012; in none of the countries were the services either described as sufficient or that the problems could be defined as only more or less pressing. To ameliorate the rather desolate situation in student support services, which especially affects underrepresented groups, these must be prioritised in public budgets. The support and well-being of students and especially vulnerable groups is a public responsibility, and a sufficiently supported student community in its increasing diversity will contribute immensely to society as a whole.

4.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◉ Despite numerous commitments to treat the social dimension as a priority, it was never treated as such in the majority of European countries. To be able to de facto reach the representation of the diversity of European populations in higher education, the action line of the social dimension must be transformed from paper to reality and more concrete measures must be implemented.
- ◉ The introduction and further implementation of access plans must be significantly pushed forward as access plans are excellent tools to set clear targets to improve equal representation in higher education.
- ◉ To further support access, progression and completion of higher education for underrepresented groups, efforts in collecting fit-for-purpose data need to be intensified; a vital prerequisite in, amongst others, developing adequate support measures.
- ◉ The consequences of data collection and its analysis must lead to clearly defined plans and implemented measures. Proper implementation of such measures is highly dependent of sufficient funding which must be allocated from public sources.

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5 QUALITY ASSURANCE

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Quality is a multidimensional concept that touches not only upon quality assurance (QA) procedures, but also accessibility, employability, academic freedom, public responsibility for higher education (HE) and mobility (Galán Palomares et al. 2013). QA itself serves multiple purposes, enhancing learning and teaching, building trust among stakeholders throughout the HE systems and increasing harmonisation and comparability in EHEA (ESU 2014).

The development of European QA was laid as a foundation for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) from its very establishment (Bologna Declaration 1999) and remains a key action line for the development of EHEA (Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education 2001). The subsequent Communiqués have set guidelines for positive developments in terms of QA frameworks, also with regard to student participation (Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education 2003).

Adopted in Bergen in 2005, the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) have become a basis for the European reference for quality assurance on national levels (Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education 2005). Following the commitments from Bucharest in 2012, the ESGs have been revised by the E4 group (ESU, ENQA, EUA and EURASHE, in cooperation with EI, BUSINESSEUROPE and EQAR) and endorsed by the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) (Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education 2012). Since their adoption, the ESGs have been a powerful driver for change in QA (Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education 2007), and the revised version proposed is clearer and addresses the more recent changes and current challenges within the EHEA.

5.2 MAIN FINDINGS

THE PURPOSE OF QA

By surveying ESU's National Unions of Students, the authors wanted to identify what students identify as the purpose of QA on the national level as a starting point for the analysis of quality-related issues within HE. Out of 39 unions, 28 stated that to them, QA means enhancing study conditions, and 27 responded that QA should provide transparency and better information provision. More than half of the unions also recognised QA as a tool either for holding HEIs accountable (23 of 39 unions) or a tool for public control of HE (22 of 39 respondents). The latter purpose was equally popular to the QA's aim as a tool to improve recognition processes (22 of 39 member unions). Some NUSes also emphasised the purpose of building trust within the HE systems (17 of 39), boosting employability (11 of 39) and promoting mobility (11 of 39).

There are also clearly negative purposes of QA, and one was identified by the NUS from Switzerland (VSS-UNES-USU): "We feel that it is often, but not always, used as a tool to promote commodification, and [...] it should definitely not be like that."

QA PROCEDURES

QA procedures vary across the EHEA with the clear majority of countries (21 of 38) conducting programme and institutional accreditation in any combination. Six unions from five countries (Belgium, French Community, Finland, Luxembourg, Macedonia and Malta) stated that for them, the institutional evaluation is the main focus whereas in only three countries (Denmark, Armenia, Slovenia), QA procedures are centred on institutional accreditation. Another three countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Spain) are examples that conduct programme accreditation only.

The results of the survey show that some of the QA procedures do not follow standardised models. The United Kingdom developed a system of institutional assurance and enhancement that may be a good example of procedures designed to improve the quality of HEIs. In Switzerland only certain programmes must be accredited alongside the institutional accreditation, and there are some countries that have no focus on QA procedures at all (Iceland).

However, what is more important is the influence of Bologna Process reforms on QA and the changes that have been made throughout the years in the countries. According to the majority of our respondents, no changes have occurred in the focus of QA procedures in their countries (22 of 39 respondents). Sixteen of thirty-nine respondents have declared various transformations made in their respective countries over the past five years, but only five claim to be satisfied with them. The Swiss National Union of Students described new procedures of external institutional accreditation as more efficient and trustworthy, and the Ukrainian union stated that they warmly welcomed the new system as they have played a significant role in its design.

Both unions from the Netherlands stated that the institutional accreditation was introduced in 2011. A shift from programme accreditation towards institutional and programme accreditation has started in Italy in 2013 and in Belgium (Flemish Community) in 2015. In Germany and Slovenia on the other hand, there has been a switch to focus on institutional accreditation.

Unions seem to be rather concerned about the changing situation. The Dutch unions stated that it will lead to the prospective abolishment of programme accreditation, and Italian representatives commented that, “the system’s goal is (...) to evaluate the universities to divide them in ‘good ones’ (to award) and ‘bad ones’ (to punish).” The Belgian NUS (Flemish Community) pointed out that, “The transparency will suffer.” Both the German and Slovenian unions have drawn attention to the financial aspects of the institutional accreditation having faced austerity measures.

STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN QA

INTERNAL QA PROCESSES

Only one out of thirty-nine respondents that students in their country do not take part in the internal QA processes, this being Belarus. The rest of the respondents (38) stated that they are involved, though in different ways. The majority (29 of 38 respondents) stated that they are involved in providing information and feedback (filling in the questionnaires, being part of focus groups, etc.), but only one-third (10 out of 38) of NUSes take an active part in the follow-up process; very few are actually involved in drafting and implementing the recommendations. However, a significant number of unions (26 out of 38) are formally involved as full members in the bodies of internal assessment processes.

EXTERNAL QA PROCESSES

In external quality assurance the situation slightly differs. Four out of thirty-eight respondents stated that students in their country do not take part in the external QA processes, this being Belarus, Luxembourg, Malta and Italy. Thirty-three unions responded that they are involved in several different ways. The majority (29 of 34 unions) are involved as full members in external review panels. However, only in the case of three countries, Lithuania, the United Kingdom and Armenia, is it possible for a student to act as chair/secretary of the external panel review. Additionally, 23 out of 34 NUSes stated that students are mainly used as an information source (participating in interviews during external reviews, etc.).

QA GOVERNANCE

According to the survey, Belarus, Bulgaria, Latvia and Luxembourg have no QA agency. In the rest of the countries, 28 out of 34 NUSes stated that they take an active role in the governance of the QA agencies, whereas six out thirty-four respondents are not involved. Again, in the majority of unions' (22 of 28) respective countries, students act as full members within the governance (decision-making) bodies of the QA agencies, while 11 of the respondents (28) are included only as members of consultative bodies. Only five unions (of 28) also play a role in the planning of the evaluation/accreditation programmes (Austria, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland and Spain).

Our study shows that governments consult the majority of student unions on QA issues across the EHEA (22 of 38 unions). For nine out of twenty-two NUSes, formal involvement in QA committees or groups on Ministerial level allows the authorities to consult them (e.g. Finland, France and Croatia). Three other unions stated that they participate in various meetings with their respective ministries of education to discuss current issues and express their opinions (Sweden, Belgium-Flemish Community and Poland). However, there are still 11 unions that are not consulted by their governments about the QA related issues (Serbia, Macedonia, Malta, Lithuania, Armenia, Iceland, Slovenia, Italy, France (FAGE—one of two French NUSes), Spain).

QA EXPERTS' POOLS

In 21 countries there are specific QA experts' pools where students are included. In eight cases it is independently operated by the NUSes (e.g. Ireland, Switzerland and Romania), in eight countries it is operated by the QA agencies (e.g. Croatia, Iceland and the United Kingdom), and in five countries, both the QA agency and the NUS has governance over the pool (e.g. Armenia, Poland and Slovenia). In the vast majority of the countries (20 out of 21), the experts' pools are widely used by QA agencies, HEIs and other institutions for the purposes of QA evaluations and beyond. According to ESU's members, France constitutes the only exception.

OBSTACLES TO STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN QA

Another aim for the survey was to learn about students' perceptions on the obstacles they face in their involvement in QA-related issues in the national context. Unfortunately, unions defined a significant amount of barriers that exclude students from getting involved, especially on the grassroots or local levels. The three main obstacles include insufficient information provision and training, extended bureaucracy and not treating students as equal partners in the processes. Out of 38 respondents, 26 stated that there is a lack of information about QA among the student body. NUS-UK pointed out that, "The processes are bureaucratic and require advanced level of knowledge about QA. This means that only students who are in the know, or can access the right support are really able to fully involved."

Consequently, more than half of the unions (17) emphasised the need for further training for student representatives, so they feel confident and can fully participate in the QA processes. Twenty-two out of thirty-eight unions stated that students regard QA as useless due to the lack of consequences as a result of the evaluations. The NUSES from Austria and Croatia emphasised the lack of transparency in the processes and poor follow up and monitoring processes. More than one-third of the unions (14) see the QA processes are not transparent enough in their countries, and the reports are not published in a clear and accessible way. Over half of the respondents (21 of 38) stated that students are still not treated as equal partners and members within the QA structures. Respondents also pointed out that the selection and nomination procedures are often not transparent (8 out of 38 NUSES), and furthermore, student involvement is often limited to participation through very basic feedback instead of meaningful participation (three out of thirty-eight respondents).

REVISED ESG FOR QA

The ESGs have become a basis for the European dimension of QA. They set up, promote and advance a set of principles universally applicable, regardless the national context and method of delivery. However, the level of engagement in using the ESGs in QA differs throughout the EHEA. For the majority of governments and QA agencies, the ESGs are known and mostly or somewhat taken into account in terms of developing and reforming national QA frameworks and influencing the work of QA agencies (26 of 38 on the national level, 34 of 38 within the QA agencies). However, there are still examples of the countries (e.g. Armenia, Switzerland, Italy) where respondents stated that despite being aware of the document, there is reluctance in applying them on national or QA agency level.

The situation on the institutional level looks quite similar. Twenty-six respondents stated that the ESGs are known and mostly or somewhat taken into account, however four NUSES from Armenia, Germany, France and Serbia stated that the ESGs are not known at all and therefore cannot be taken into account.

The majority of the NUSES are aware of the existence of the ESGs, and they are using the document in their QA work in more than two-thirds of the unions (29 out of 35 respondents). However, the majority of NUSES responded that the local student unions have quite limited knowledge about the ESGs. Eighteen out of thirty-four respondents stated that local student unions are unfamiliar with the ESGs, and therefore they are not taken into account in their work.

That the revised version of the ESGs to be endorsed at the 2015 EHEA Ministerial Conference is very well or well known for more than a half of our respondents (seven and fourteen of thirty-eight, respectively). None of the respondents stated that they have negative opinions about the revised ESG. Most of the NUSES see the proposed changes in a positive or very positive way (23 out of 38 respondents).

EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE REGISTER (EQAR)

Most of ESU's member unions that responded either fully or partially agree with the concept of having a European Register of the QA Agencies operating according to the ESGs (29 out of 37 respondents). Almost half of the respondents agree with foreign QA agencies operating in their countries under the condition of the decision being recognised by the national agency (17 out of 38 respondents), while six of the unions have stated that the decision should be automatically recognised. Four unions stated that foreign agencies should be allowed to operate only if there is no QA agency in the country, and an additional four would set additional requirements. Unions from Denmark, Hungary, Luxembourg and the UK do not see any need or desire for foreign QA agencies operating in their countries.

From the point of its establishment, the impact EQAR has taken multiple directions. The BWSE survey aimed at discovering how the ESU's member unions perceive this impact. The majority of the unions identify EQAR with enforcing the ESGs (19 out of 31 respondents) and increased the transparency of the quality of higher education for students (13 out of 31). Additionally, unions stated that the Register has opened national QA systems for agencies from abroad (10 out of 31 respondents). Nine unions believe that it has given the opportunity for the HEIS to choose any agency from EQAR that would review the institutions or/and programmes, and three unions identified a concerning trend that EQAR has enabled the creation of a QA market.

The majority of NUSES see the possibility for the development of EQAR by supporting a database of the official study programmes offered across the EHEA (28 out of 38 unions), for instance. It would increase the transparency by providing information about quality-assured higher education provision.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

As quality itself is a multidimensional concept, QA serves multiple purposes in the eyes of students. The primary purposes are generally perceived as enhancing study conditions and providing transparent information. Additionally, unions identified QA as a tool to hold HEIS accountable, for public control, to improve recognition processes, which in turn results in building trust within and between the HE systems and promoting mobility.

The focus of QA procedures varies across the EHEA. In the majority of countries, a combination of programme and institutional accreditation have been used, but also there are examples of institutional or programme accreditation or institutional evaluation only. Some of the unions have stated that the procedures used in their countries do not follow standardised models, such as accreditation of only selected programmes is performed (Switzerland) or the system of institutional assurance and enhancement is used (the UK).

In less than one-third of the responding countries QA reforms have been introduced over the past 5 years, however most of the unions have stated that they are concerned about the direction of the changes. According to the results of the survey, countries have been sometimes misusing the reforms to justify the budget cuts or limit the transparency. This situation is unacceptable and can ultimately lead to an increased resistance toward QA from students and academics, a problem that QA has faced since the very beginning.

Meaningful participation of students in QA at all levels has slightly increased and several countries had or have developed specific experts' pool where students are included. However, there is a lack of information about QA among the student body and students generally believe that these processes are not useful because there are not any visible consequences perceived by them. Additionally, according to the respondents, the largest obstacles to student involvement in QA is not treating students as equal and competent partners and not providing enough training for the student bodies. Closing the feedback cycle and communicating the efforts and results of QA is essential in building trust and ensuring meaningful participation in QA from students. Student representation, a core component of the Bologna Process, as well as specific training in QA, must be provided to ensure meaningful student participation, which in turn may also contribute to building trust, but also simply guarantees the largest stakeholder group in the universities their voice.

The purpose of the ESGs is rather well known across the countries and the revised version of the document ESG received a warm welcome from the students, especially due to the proposed student-centred learning standard. However, special attention must now be drawn to the implementation of the revised ESGs and their usage in the countries across the EHEA.

The NUSes are rather familiar with the concept and impact of EQAR, and most of them would support its further development, for instance by creating an online tool for providing information about quality-assured higher education provision in EHEA. There is still the question of how far the integration within the EHEA should go to allow the foreign QA agencies to operate in the countries with the same rights as the national agencies.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

QA must continue to be a priority for higher education systems in order to remove obstacles to take up, pursue with and successfully complete degrees. It has to ensure academic freedom, integration of teaching, learning and research as well as prepare students for being active citizens in the future without excluding any of the groups within the society. Therefore the following recommendations have must be realised in the future of the EHEA towards the next Ministerial Conference in 2018.

- QA must be based on trust, participation and ownership
QA systems should be based on the principles and values of trust, participation and ownership of stakeholders and a drive for real improvement.
- Students should be included in all QA related processes, meetings and/or trips)
Internal QA (within the HEIs themselves) should embrace evaluating and monitoring all of education activities within a HEI. The reports from the evaluation have to be accessible for students, other stakeholders and wider public and include the recommendations that should serve for the action plans for future improvement. HEIs need to make sure that the progress is monitored.
- Independent QA agencies must be established immediately
Independent QA agencies have to be established in every country across the EHEA to provide the complementary reviews and support HEIs in enhancing quality on institutional and programme level. The autonomous responsibility for their operations should ensure non-political character of the conclusions and recommendations. These reports should also be made transparent and readable.
- Students must be considered equal members of the HE system and/or HEI and represent students in decision-making processes
Meaningful student representation is a must in the QA. Students must be recognised as competent and equal partners and act as full members in the decision-making bodies of internal and external QA.
- The revised ESGs must be implemented
It is essential that the revised version of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (2015) are rapidly implemented in cooperation with national stakeholders. The student-centred learning standard is of an utmost importance, and countries across the EHEA should strive for full transformation of the national provisions to execute this standard in practice while carrying out the reviews with full and meaningful engagement of students.
- Possibilities from further development of EQAR should be considered
The possibilities for further development of EQAR should be explored in order to provide information about quality-assured higher education provision in EHEA. This could be achieved, for instance, by establishing a database of official degrees and study programmes offered within the EHEA.

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6 STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Student-centred learning (SCL) has a long and inspirational history, starting with the massive student protests against the elitism of universities in 1968 and the need for universities to open their doors to all parts of society. This continued with the rise of critical pedagogy, which aimed at empowering students, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds, to build upon their experiences and perspectives and provide them with knowledge to challenge the common knowledge, perceptions and myths in society. This also based itself on the idea that students are not empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge.

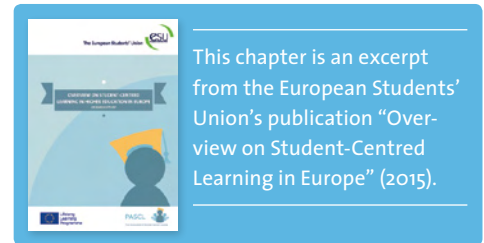
The ineffectiveness of teaching through the transmission of knowledge has also been confirmed through years of pedagogical research. The massive protests, the rise of critical pedagogy and the research done on the teaching and learning process spawned the concept of student-centred learning; putting students in the driver's seat of their learning experience and facilitating the process of learning to learn.

The increasing student population and its growing diversity presents challenges to the traditional methods of teaching and learning, making it necessary to adapt the classroom to focus on the diversity of students' experiences, engage with many different types of learners and inspire students through a mutual learning experience.

Over the past years, the concept of SCL has made its way into the policy discourse on higher education. Student-centred learning was introduced as an action line in the Bologna Process at the Ministerial Meeting in LEUven/Louvain-la-NEUVE in 2009. Further commitments can also be found in national plans for higher education and institutional strategies, and it has long been a prominent topic in higher education research.

6.2 MAIN FINDINGS

The concept of SCL has a positive connotation among all educational stakeholders, regardless of the definition and understanding. At the same time, there is one area where all parties are conflicted and uncertain, and that is the final implementation at the classroom level. Given the fact that the main focus group here is students, the ones most affected by this paradigm shift, we turned to them to explain to us how everyday students see implementation of the SCL-concept possible in the classroom. Therefore, we conducted a survey of the student population through their representatives, as part of Peer Assessment of Student-Centred Learning (PASCL), a project co-funded with the support of the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme.



Started in October 2013, PASCL aims to re-evaluate the progress of implementation of SCL, highlight best practices and establish peer assessment procedures for the implementation of the concept in European higher education institutions. The SCL questionnaire was sent to student representatives from ESU's 47 member organisations in 39 different countries. Each of the student representatives are currently enrolled in European higher education institutions and members of either the democratic student councils of those institutions or student organisations active at those universities. Being active students gives them good insight into current classroom activities, and their experience as student representatives enables them to analyse and give rational conclusions about the overall state of implementation of SCL concept in a given higher education institution or country.

We received 39 answers from 20 different countries: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Israel, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and UK. More information can be found in PASCL's "Overview on Student-Centred Learning in Higher Education in Europe" (PASCL.EU).

STUDENT AWARENESS OF SCL

The questionnaire focused first on the term of SCL and familiarity of the concept. Results proved a poor level of general awareness among students on the topic, as 74% of the respondents stated that everyday students in their country are not familiar with the concept of SCL. Contrary to that, the answers from student representatives show a near perfectly opposite picture, as 77% of them are familiar with the concept of SCL.

These provocative results could lead to many various assumptions, so a closer analysis of the reasoning behind this was necessary. Over 80% of student representatives learned about SCL through their involvement in the student movement, during engagement, conferences, seminars or projects of local students' unions, national students' unions and ESU. Only four answers referred to teachers and educational studies or individual research conducted online. This leads to the conclusion that there is an alarmingly low awareness of SCL amongst everyday students. The responsibility for improving this situation lies on both student representatives and organisations to better disseminate projects and information, but at the same time on the higher education institutions who should take additional steps in developing and communicating a clear SCL strategy to students and informing them about possibilities for greater involvement and ownership of their learning experience.

When asked to define SCL in their own terms, respecting national and institutional contexts, almost all respondents referred to a part of ESU's definition of SCL, and eight respondents quoted ESU's definition as their own understanding of the concept. Five respondents could not provide a definition or clear understanding of the term. When analysing the content of the definitions all respondents touched up to students being active participants and the ones responsible for their own learning experience. This feeds up to the focus on the needs of students, their learning styles and learning environment. Three respondents emphasised active participation and interaction in their definition. Every fifth respondent made a direct connection of SCL to the experience based knowledge. Modern technologies and teaching support systems were also mentioned in only a few definitions. Focus of three definitions was clearly teacher student communication and mutual respect.

THE PARADIGM SHIFT IN PRACTICE

Almost 80% of respondents believe that there has been a shift in the degree to which students have a control over their educational process within the past years. 82% of surveyed students believe that there has been a positive change. Student representation is getting stronger allowing students to voice their opinions on their programmes, as a result of which course evaluations are taken more seriously, both by staff and students. At the same time, most of them see the gap between discourse and reality, stating that students tend to be more involved in the governance structures at all the levels, however they're still not considered as an equal partner in the process. Four respondents see negative change, where there have been new sets of rules imposed, making the learning experience harder for students. 21% of students involved in research have not noticed any kind of change.

When it comes to the implementation of SCL in higher education institutions, there has clearly been some progress in the past years, and 90% of our respondents agree with this statement. Half of them view progress as slow, but see indications of efforts by either national authorities or higher education institutions. In some of these cases, the only indication of progress is on the initiative of individual teachers. The other half see concrete actions taking place, but are still not convinced that SCL has been made a clear priority in higher education, and observe that SCL has still not been presented to students with all its characteristics and opportunities. 38% of student representative respondents have had direct influence in promoting the SCL concept through their respective organisations..

TEACHING METHODS

Despite new trends and signs of a shift, lectures remain absolutely the most typical way of teaching at the university, appearing in 100% of responses from our respondents. Noticeably, seminars and projects are also a part of respondents' learning experience, respectfully 69% and 51%. Labs are used in teaching according to 41% of respondents, while only one in five students report having debates, fieldwork, tutorials and workshops as a part of their learning experience.

When asked about project-based learning, the type of learning in which students work in teams to produce concrete outcomes with full support from higher education institutions, 72% of students confirmed having knowledge about such approaches of teaching and learning in their country. How common this approach is varies greatly.

Students perceive a considerable distinction between bachelor's degree (BA) and master's degree (MA) curricula. While BA curricula are often based on teacher-centered lectures, MA curricula are often more student-centred and cater to students' research interests. Most students agree that it depends on the course, institution and programme, some fields focus more on project-based learning than others, depending on the subject: technical subjects tend to use this approach more than humanities and arts. It can also depend on teachers, their age, personality and experience abroad. Students in general welcome this approach, with respect to limitations and characteristics of a course and subject, show more interest and engagement in this type of learning and rate it as an overall highly positive and useful learning experience.

TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

SCL focuses on empowering students, but does not by any means neglect the importance and need for constant professional development of teachers. Teacher support and training programmes must be an integral part of SCL-implementation in all higher education institutions. We asked students whether they were aware of teacher training programmes at their universities that focus on developing innovative teaching methods and if teachers are asked to take part in teaching quality enhancement programmes, i.e. in modules focusing on pedagogical enhancement. Nearly half of them were aware of the existence of these teacher support services.

44% of our respondents said that teacher training programmes are provided, either within the modules of higher education institutions or within traineeship programmes of different organisations.

TEACHER AND COURSE EVALUATIONS

Teacher and course evaluations can assist in measuring student-centeredness and for putting students in the drivers' seat of their educational experience. In order to achieve those goals, evaluations need to be designed to allow students to express themselves in the best possible way, giving them the freedom to comment on and shape their learning paths. Results should be transparent, having direct and clear influence, empowering students to engage by seeing how their input can contribute to change.

At the time of our research, 13% of students claimed that there are no procedures in place for teacher evaluation set up by students. 50% of students believe that teacher evaluation systems are only partially set up by students.

The frequency of conducting these evaluations varies greatly. One in two students responded that evaluations are conducted at the end of each semester, while 5% of respondents said they are conducted only at the end of the academic year. Only 18% of respondents said that constant feedback throughout the year is the norm, while 15% experienced that feedback is collected only occasionally and with no particular order.

According to 93% of respondents teacher evaluations are conducted by way of questionnaire. The majority of those surveys are online, distributed through university emails or special online systems and platforms established at universities. Questions are mainly quantitative, where students respond by using a numerical scale, and are given the possibility of providing written comments. There are cases where evaluations are conducted orally, in the form of open questions to the entire class at the last session, and may also be conducted through interaction in smaller focus groups. Methods vary between universities, courses and teachers, but in some cases, like in Sweden, course evaluations are mandatory and conducted at the end of each course. There are often possibilities to comment about the teaching or make general remarks, however there are no evaluations directly dedicated to evaluate the teacher.

Generally speaking, students are satisfied with teacher evaluation systems at their universities. 67% of respondents expressed their satisfaction. Interestingly, not one respondent said they are very satisfied, while 23% were not satisfied at all with the teacher evaluation systems in place. Needless to say, there is still room for improvement, and the most mentioned reproach refers to the transparency of evaluation results and how they are used, giving students clear insight to the impact their input had. Closing the feedback cycle by informing students about the results and follow-up of evaluations are essential for ensuring valuable student feedback and a true student-centred approach.

Teachers and administrative staff are often concerned about whether students take teaching evaluations seriously, about the low response rates, and with how representative and honest results are. We therefore asked student representatives for their reflections on the general mood amongst everyday students and whether they take teacher evaluations seriously. 46% of respondents are not convinced that students take these evaluations seriously. Reasons cited were a lack of proper follow-up and the feeling that the evaluations are not read, there are neither positive nor negative consequences due to results, a lack of incentives for filling them out, poor design of the evaluation. Additionally, evaluations may be too long and complicated to be adequately answered, real issues are not being addressed, and students sometimes feel that universities themselves do not take them seriously when results are not followed-up with concrete actions. Those who do not take evaluations seriously, also believe that when students have a severe complaint about the teacher, they will use systems such as an ombudsperson in order to be heard.

Most students agree that putting evaluations online helped a lot in getting better responses, as it improves accessibility and students can complete them in a comfortable environment, which in turn improves the quality of answers. 33% believe that students take these evaluations seriously only to a certain extent, stating that those who do answer take it seriously, but when evaluations are not mandatory, those who do not care do not provide any feedback. 21% of respondents strongly believe students take evaluations seriously, the reason being that they can see results and are satisfied with the evaluation systems in place.

PROCEDURES, GUIDELINES AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS FOR SCL

We explored institutional procedures and guidelines focusing on promoting SCL and only 24% of respondents were familiar with such practices in their respective country. Another 24% are not aware at all of existing procedures, nor did they know where to search for them, while 52% state that there are no such procedures established in their universities. Some respondents were aware of higher education regulations on national level, but could not identify concrete, comprehensive institutional guidelines and procedures.

When asked if a SCL definition is included in any legislative/normative framework at the national or institutional level, only 14% of respondents were familiar with some frameworks, but were not able to identify them. 52% students have never heard about those frameworks in their country or higher education institution.

STUDENTS IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

Over 96% of respondents stated that students are involved in institutional decision-making structures (institutional level, faculty level, programme level). Students are guaranteed representation in decision-making structures either by law or internal policies of the institution. They are involved through student organisations, student parliaments, student boards, academic senates, quality assessment and other decision-making bodies within universities. The percentage of student representation varies between 20-25% mandatory student involvement in decision-making bodies. However the quality of involvement varies. While students from some countries are extremely satisfied with the impact and relevance they have in decision-making bodies, students from other countries lack a feeling of being an equal in the decision-making structures of the academic community. Students in Spain, are not satisfied with their involvement and claim that while in most of the higher education institutions, students are present in decision-making bodies, student perspective is often disregarded and not regarded with the proper importance. At the same time, these institutions do not provide adequate training to student representatives to have sufficient knowledge to be able to participate actively in these bodies, which in turn perpetuates the basal situation.

FLEXIBLE CURRICULA AND INDIVIDUAL LEARNING PATHS

Flexible curricula and individual learning paths are some of the main components of SCL implementation. At the same time, their implementation varies greatly from institution to institution and programme to programme. We asked student representatives to explain to us briefly to what extent there is centrally decided curricula for study programs at their university and how curricula are designed in general in their countries. The answers ranged all the way from very flexible with the possibility of choosing subjects in nearly every programme at the University College of Oslo and Akershus, to students not being able to shape their curricula, where professors decide curricula for them at the University of Zagreb. Again, it is a common perception that a master's degree comes with greater freedom, more choices and respect to personal preferences. This differs from one field of study to another; most students in humanities, arts and social sciences can combine majors and choose subjects, while students from medical studies and science have rather rigid curricula. Freedom in shaping curricula is limited to choosing a minor of 30 ECTS according to majority of respondents, but completely free, independently chosen credit makes up maximum 10% of study programme, while in some cases, with the example of the University of Miskolc, students can take an additional 10% of the credits without paying any extra fee. At Óbuda University a subject plan is always provided to students in the first semester. Flexibility comes later when students can choose between different teachers and different times for the lectures and labs. Centralised curricula can also be found at the West University of Timișoara where even electives are limited and students have the impression that they are somehow forced to choose one or the other subject.

A detailed example of how curricula are designed comes from the Polytechnique University of Valencia. The faculty board decides on the curricula based on subjects and materials, then the departments decide which courses fit with the materials proposed. Once the curriculum is defined, it is brought to the university board which sends it to the academic committee for reviewal and back to the board with a report. Once approved by the board, it is sent to the National or Autonomic University Council which sends it to National or Autonomic Quality Assurance Agency and returns it to the Council with a report and then approves it. Students can typically choose certain components of their degree, such as a field of specialisation or within from a specified block of courses. Occasionally there are many subject choices, but courses can later be cancelled due to funding issues, while other times courses are presented as optional but are not as they become mandatory upon selection of a specific specialisation.

When asked to quantify the percentage of subjects in curricula chosen freely by students, one in two students responded that it is less than 20%. Detailed answers are as follows:

STUDENT CONSULTATION IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

79% of student representatives stated that students are in some way consulted with regards to curriculum development. 18% of them believe that it is only formally, while 21% of students are not consulted at all.

Of the 79% consulted students, 59% report that they are consulted by the higher education institutions. Other stakeholders consulting students are the students' unions (44% of respondents), and finally teachers (38%). Students feel they are least consulted by the national government when discussing student involvement in curriculum design.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The concept of learning outcomes (LOs) forms the core conceptual basis for a student-centred higher education system. A description in terms of expected or desired learning outcomes should be a statement of what a learner is expected to know, understand, and be able to do at the end of a learning process. It should not refer to input criteria, such as what exactly is taught or the mode of teaching. ESU believes that learning outcomes should accommodate the multiple purposes of higher education; including preparing students for active citizenship, creating a broad, advanced knowledge base and stimulating research and innovation. All study programmes should be designed with an intention to achieve certain learning outcomes.

Expected LOs should be customly written for every course and programme and written before the learning activity begins and evolve through dialogue between teacher and student throughout the learning activity. They are a shifting category, depending on the expectations and satisfaction of both students and teachers involved in the learning activity. Describing minimum requirements ensures a common experience for all students and focuses on the concrete goals of the learning activity. At the same time, there is room for additional knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes to be acquired during the learning activity, dependent upon the individual students' experiences. Since these are individual and not mandatory for passing, such learning outcomes should be listed in the Diploma Supplement to be given to the student upon completion of the programme.

At the beginning of the learning activity, learning outcomes are formulated as intended. During the learning activity, the student acquires those learning outcomes with the teacher acting as a facilitator of the learning process, "enabling" not "telling". Assessment at the end of the learning activity should be bidirectional. Through transparent feedback, students assess whether intended learning outcomes were achieved and actively participate in defining and re-defining them for the same learning activity in the future. Teachers assess if the student has acquired those minimum requirements, but also any additional learning outcomes to be presented in the Diploma Supplement. Students should be involved in the process of designing the study programmes and defining its learning outcomes. Where relevant, other educational stakeholders should be consulted in the process of designing learning outcomes. The learning outcomes should be formulated in clear and understandable way, transparent and accessible for students and other interested parties.

51% of students confirmed having results of study programmes defined in terms of learning outcomes. 11% of respondents have not encountered learning outcomes in their universities, while 28% believe that study programmes are only sometimes defined in terms of learning outcomes, depending on field of study and higher education institution.

Following this, 59% of respondents said that at least in some cases, students are evaluated in terms of those learning outcomes. 28% strongly believe that learning outcomes are not correlated with the assessment of students, while 26% support the statement that learning outcomes are a crucial factor in the assessment of students' achievements.

33% of student representative respondents pointed out that students are neither properly informed nor consulted with regards to outcomes of programmes and teaching and learning methods used at their higher education institution. According to 44% of respondents, students are only informed about these determinants of their higher education experience, but not properly consulted or having their input valued and recognised.

STUDENTS AS CHANGE-MAKERS

In the end, all of our respondents agreed that the main carriers and leaders of the change and implementation of this paradigm shift are students themselves. The efforts of ESU on European level the National Unions of Students and students' unions on institutional level, have been essential, however there are numerous success stories of cooperations and joint efforts of all higher education stakeholders to use in exploring and better defining this concept, and work together on its implementation for the benefit of all included parties. On this joint mission students have been and should remain at the steering wheel, with all the support and full engagement of all other educational stakeholders.

6.3 CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Through the research done in this publication on the grassroots level by surveying students and higher education institutions and gathering the different policies of essential European stakeholders, there are clear signs of progress in the implementation of SCL. We have also identified a plethora of different perspectives on what SCL is and where to go from here.

Students need to be consulted, to have real choices in their study paths and curricula—giving them more responsibility for their learning processes. Learning process should be described in terms of learning outcomes, which should be developed and monitored with constant evaluation and consultancy of students.

Even though the SCL concept involves putting students in the focus, that does not by any means diminish the role and importance of teachers. There is great need for further development of teaching methods, teacher support and professional training, as quality teaching is essential for a quality learning experience for all students. The enhancement of teaching should find its base in the needs of students, which are best assessed through teacher and course evaluation. Student feedback must be used actively in the development of curricula, learning outcomes and assessment procedures, closing the feedback cycle and taking action as a result.

In order to ensure mutual understanding and devotion, SCL should be embedded in institutional strategies, procedures and frameworks. The involvement and representation of students in governance, viewing students as equal partners, as a part of the academic community and co-producers of knowledge, is essential for giving students ownership and responsibility for their learning.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◉ Provide necessary resources and secure funding for implementation

The learning process must be two-ways, based on a continuous dialogue between students and academics and recognising students as co-producers of knowledge. This involves understanding students as a part of the academic community, not paying customers subject to fees and academics as providers of “customer service”. Adequate funding is therefore a top priority for the implementation of student-centred learning. Resources must also be provided for supplying proper infrastructure and continuous teacher training and development.

- Ensure that students are a central part of university life and decision-making within all parts of the higher education system

Giving students autonomy, independence and choice means also incorporating them in decision-making structures that ultimately impact their daily lives. Students are the largest group within the university, and the higher education system, both on a national, institutional, faculty and classroom level must guarantee that they are treated as equal partners and that their voice is heard in decision-making and curriculum design and evaluation.

Student feedback must be taken seriously and continuously used in all parts of the learning process. This should result in action, which is then communicated to students, closing the feedback cycle. Expected learning outcomes should be designed by both academic staff and students, and communicated clearly to students prior to the start of the learning activity. Unintended learning outcomes must also be accounted for throughout the students' learning process, and used in evaluation of programmes and courses.

- Provide students with autonomy and choice

In order to accommodate the increasingly diverse student population, students must be afforded with choice throughout their entire studies. This involves allowing for flexible learning paths, allowing students to choose between different courses within or outside of the faculty, enabling student mobility and offering part-time studies. A multitude of choices in their learning and assessment methods must also be provided, allowing for a student to choose different types of course literature and ensuring that students can choose between assessment methods that they believe will give them the opportunity to best demonstrate their achievement of learning outcomes.

- Staff must receive continuous pedagogical training

Both countries and institutions must guarantee that teachers receive mandatory pedagogical training, and institutions must offer continuous training and development for staff. Teacher training should focus on how to accommodate to the different learning styles and needs of a diverse group of students and how to ensure the constructive alignment of expected learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities and assessment methods. Efforts must be made to enable the development of new methods of teaching and assessment.

- Develop strategies, procedures and frameworks for SCL

Strategies on student-centred learning should be designed on national and all institutional levels, and the implementation of student-centred learning should be continuously evaluated. Students should be represented in each of those processes.

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7 STRUCTURAL REFORMS—BACK TO BASICS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Structural reforms provide the tools to enable comparability, compatibility and trust between countries in order to ensure that students can move freely within Europe by facilitating the recognition of their qualifications. Additionally, they aim to improve the quality of higher education by providing the transparency necessary to communicate the qualifications and learning outcomes students are expected to achieve or have achieved.

This chapter reviews the major developments and students' perspectives on the implementation of three core components of the structural reforms: qualifications frameworks, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and the three-cycle degree system. The three components must be considered holistically however, as without the proper implementation of ECTS, a true three-cycle system cannot be established and without a three-cycle system, qualifications obtained within the higher education system cannot be referenced properly within a qualifications framework. Successful implementation demands an understanding of each of the reforms interdependence.

EVEN WORSE, ONLY FIVE UNIONS STATED THAT THEY ARE VERY SATISFIED WITH THE DEVELOPMENT AND INTRODUCTION OF IT IN THEIR COUNTRY

7.2 MAIN FINDINGS

The implementation of structural reforms in EHEA is clearly visible and recognised by students. While some tools have been fully implemented in a few countries, many countries struggle with the full implementation and the transition required for some of the most central reforms of the Bologna Process. The implementation of a functioning national qualifications framework (NQF) remains a major challenge for a vast majority of countries. ECTS has been implemented in many countries, but often only superficially, without using workload and learning outcomes as the basis for awarding ECTS. The three-cycle system has also been implemented in a majority of EHEA countries, however there are large variations in understandings of what constitutes a bachelors, masters or doctoral degree. Students identified a lack of political will and consistency while implementing these structural reforms in their respective countries and continue to demand greater involvement in their development and implementation on national and institutional level.

QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) have the aim of facilitating the compatibility and comparability of degrees, essential for mobility and recognition, both cornerstones of the Bologna Process. Considering their importance, alarmingly only 13 out of 38 unions responded that there is an national qualifications framework in their country and it is always being used. Eighteen unions reported that even though a qualifications framework has been established in their country, they see little to no usage of it.

fig. 5 Is there a functioning National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in your country?

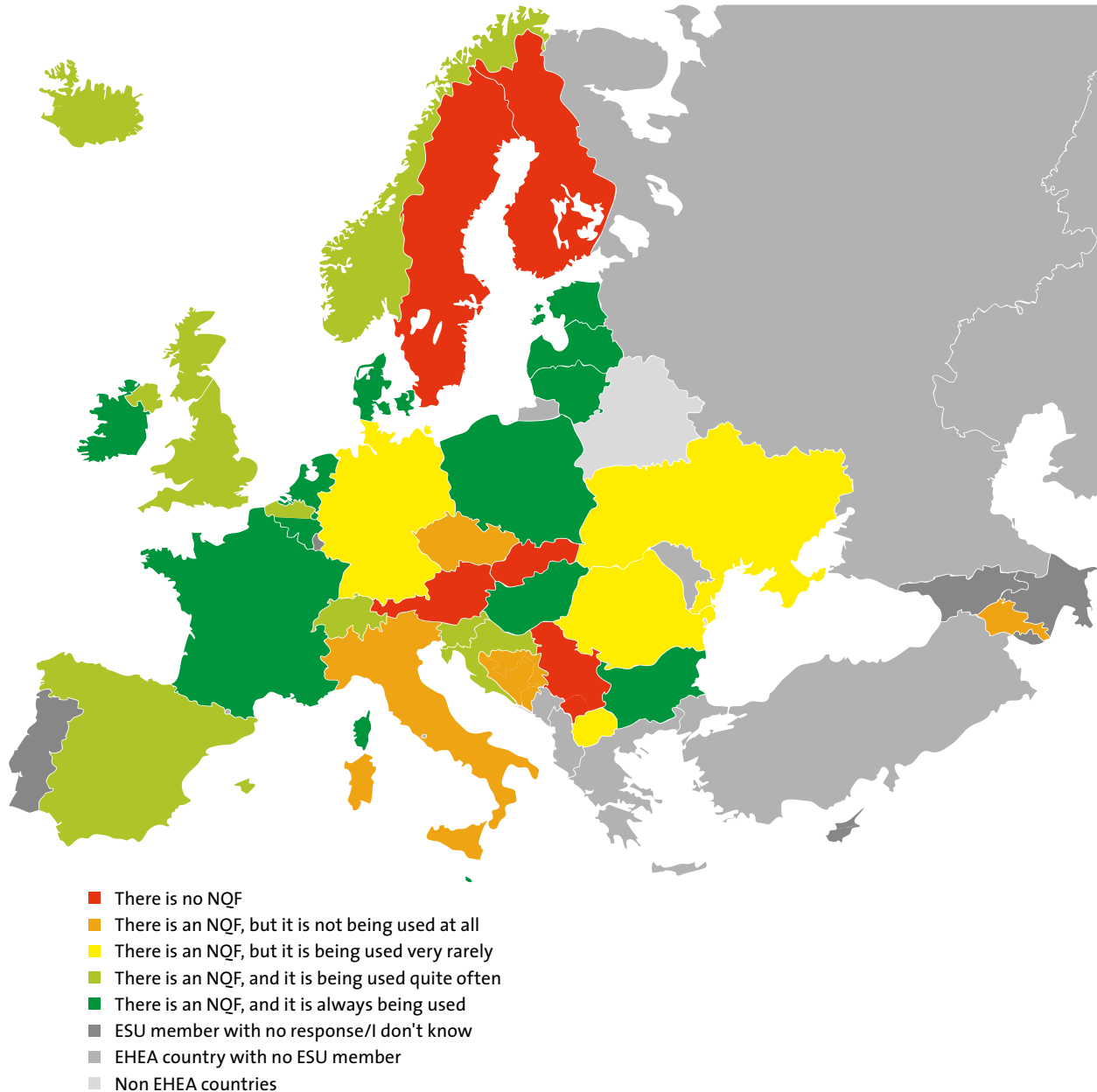
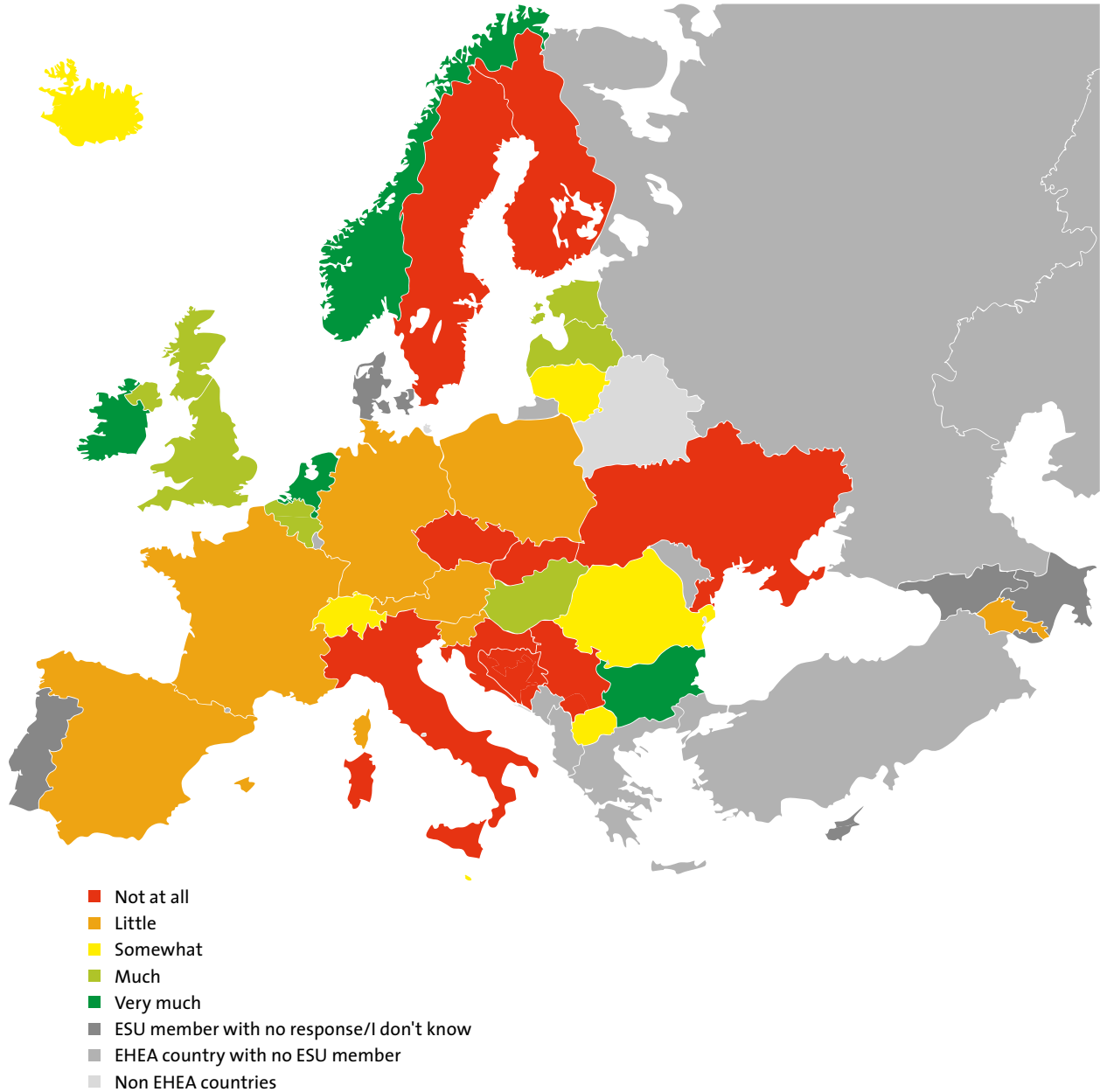


fig. 6 How satisfied are you with the development and introduction of the NQF in your country?



Reasons for that vary but it is mostly due to the lack of political will for its implementation and carrying out of the process. Most of the respondents pointed out that the process has been rather slow, and NQF were artificially created and often copied from other countries. Some of the problems arose when referencing to the EHEA Qualifications Framework (EHEA QF), when differences between national contexts have been a major concern, sometimes inhibiting further development and proper implementation. The EHEA QF awards levels according to the learning outcomes achieved and the workload, and as we will see with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, learning outcomes and workload are disregarded or calculated or developed incorrectly in a number of countries.

Another major challenge unions reported in the implementation of NQF is that while an NQF has been developed and in certain cases also referenced to the EHEA QF, there is very little knowledge about it, what purpose it serves and any recent developments of it. In Romania, ANOSR reported that, “We have a NQF adopted, we participated in its elaboration, but almost no one knows about it and it is not used by HEI.” As we also see from the previous answer, this leads to situations like the one in the Czech Republic, where SK RVŠ stated that, “NQF is not used at all at any HEIs. It’s only on paper.”

ECTS

Another cornerstone of the Bologna Process is the ECTS, which also contributes to facilitating mobility and recognition through improving comparability and compatibility. The idea is also to ensure transparency and readability for students and other stakeholders through using learning outcomes and workload as the basis for allocating ECTS credits. Through this students and other stakeholders can understand what students will learn or have learned and how much time is or has been required of them.

Over two-thirds of the unions (27 of 38) stated that ECTS has been implemented and is in use in their respective countries, although only four agreed that they are very satisfied with its implementation. Out of those, only 11 unions reported that ECTS credits are allocated based on the formulation of learning outcomes, and only one-fourth (9 out of 35 unions) stated that workload is used as the basis for determining ECTS credits throughout the entire higher education system.

In many cases, objections to the current implementation and usage of ECTS are related to an arbitrary system for allocating ECTS credits. Unions reported that the implementation was often superficial, where countries had simply translated the number of credits from their previous system to ECTS credits, sometimes by simply using a mathematical formula. This is the case for Lithuania, for instance. “When Lithuania switched to ECTS credits the national credits were simply calculated on a mathematical principle ($x1.5$) which had nothing to do with workload and LO’s.”

Significant problems were also identified where countries continue to have parallel national credit systems, causing mismatch in attempts to translate between the two systems and creating issues with recognition not only on the European Level, but also within students’ own countries. According to the Student Union of Latvia (LSA), which stated that, “As we still have our own credits system parallel to ECTS, some institutions do not accumulate ECTS correctly (1 national credit point is 1,5 ECTS).”

The allocation of ECTS credits should be based on learning outcomes and workload, where the learning outcomes of study programmes are designed to describe the learning activities and the workload is an estimation of the total time students will need in order to achieve the intended learning outcomes (European Commission 2009). However, in the cases where workload is used as the basis for allocating ECTS credits, it is often estimated incorrectly and unrealistically. For many countries, learning outcomes continue to be disregarded, their purpose is misunderstood, or they are developed incorrectly or half-heartedly, by

fig. 7 ECTS and Learning outcomes: In my country, the allocation of ECTS takes place on the basis of learning outcomes

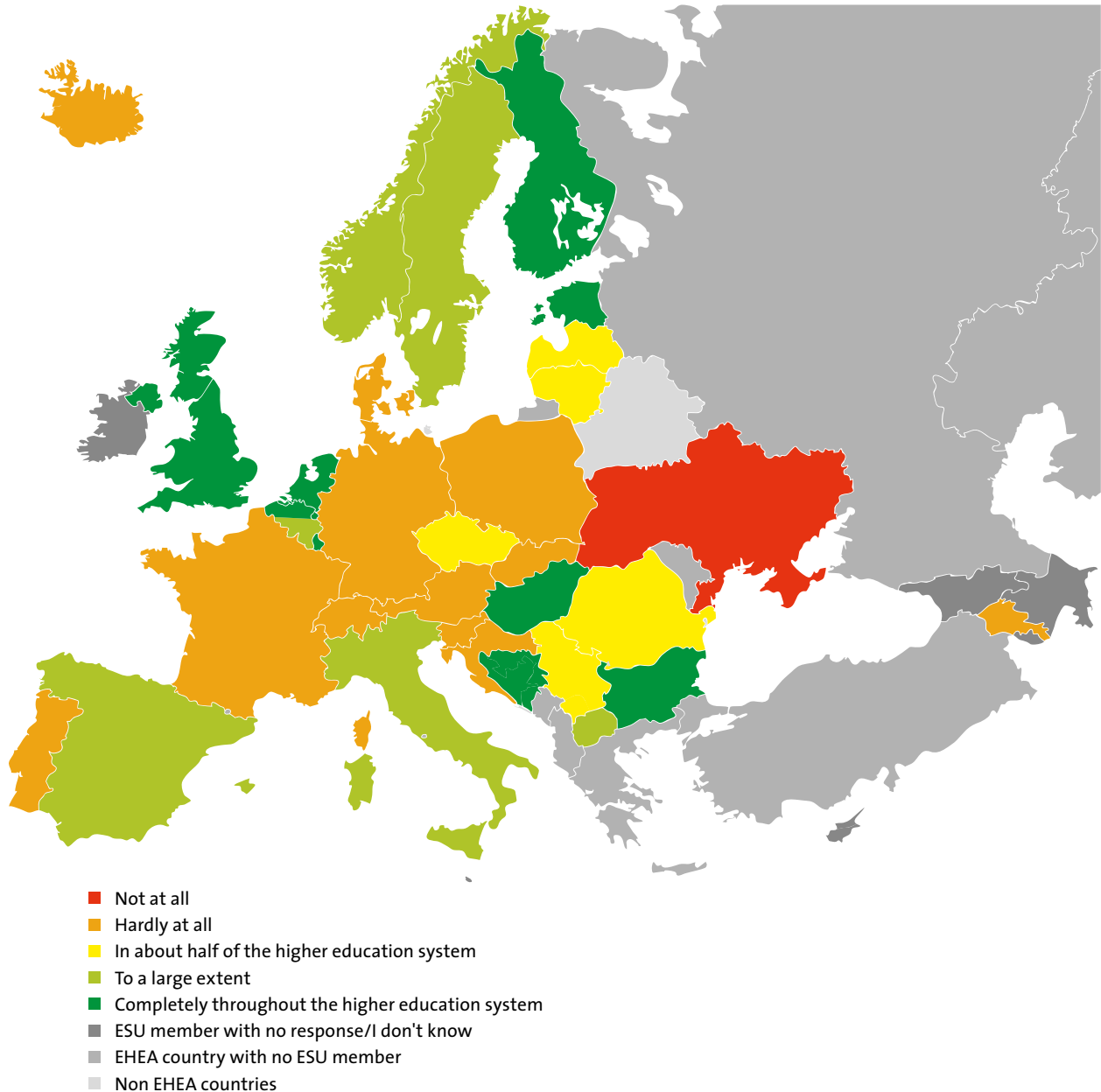
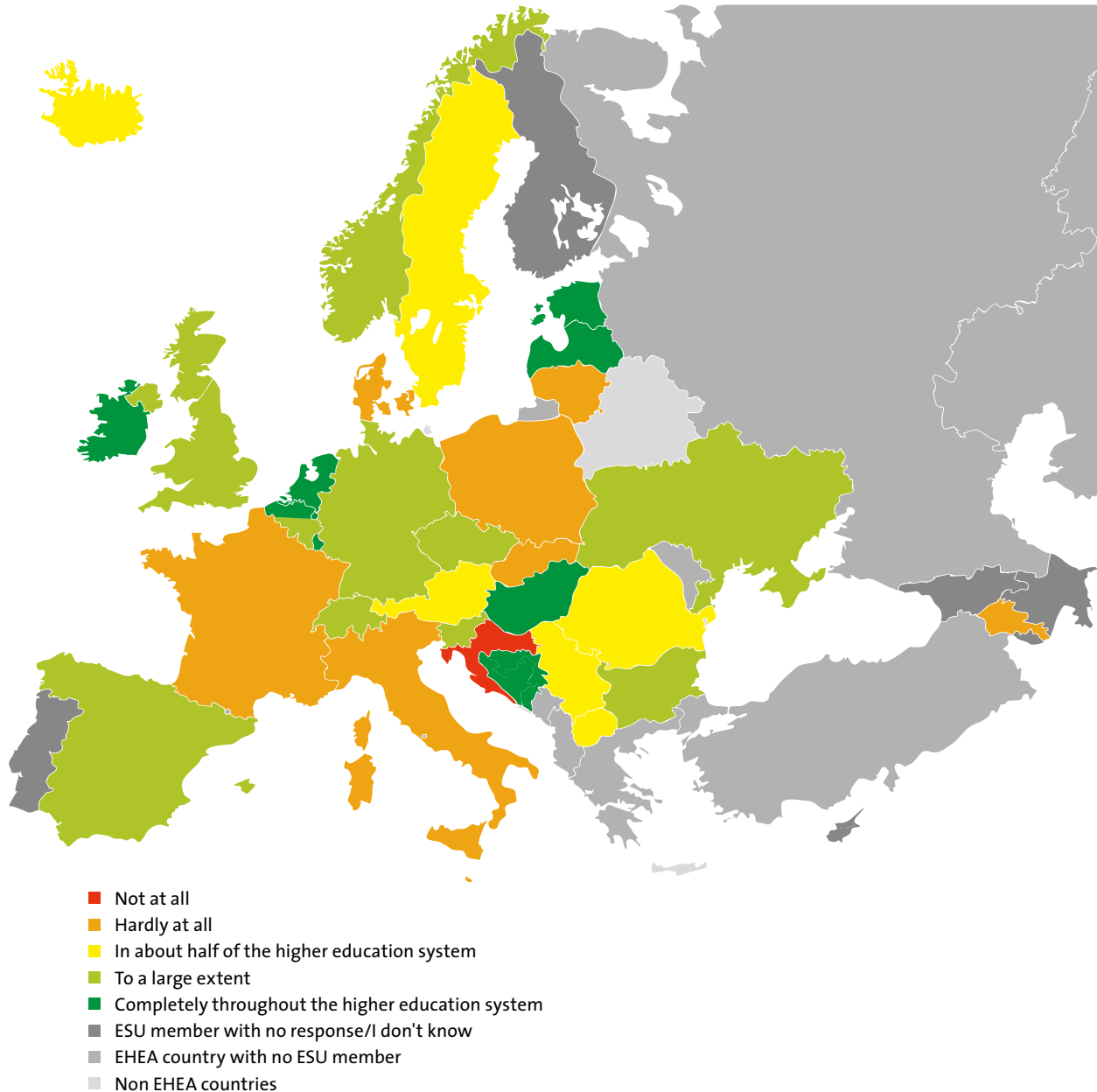


fig. 8 ECTS and workload: In my country, the allocation of ECTS takes place on the basis of workload



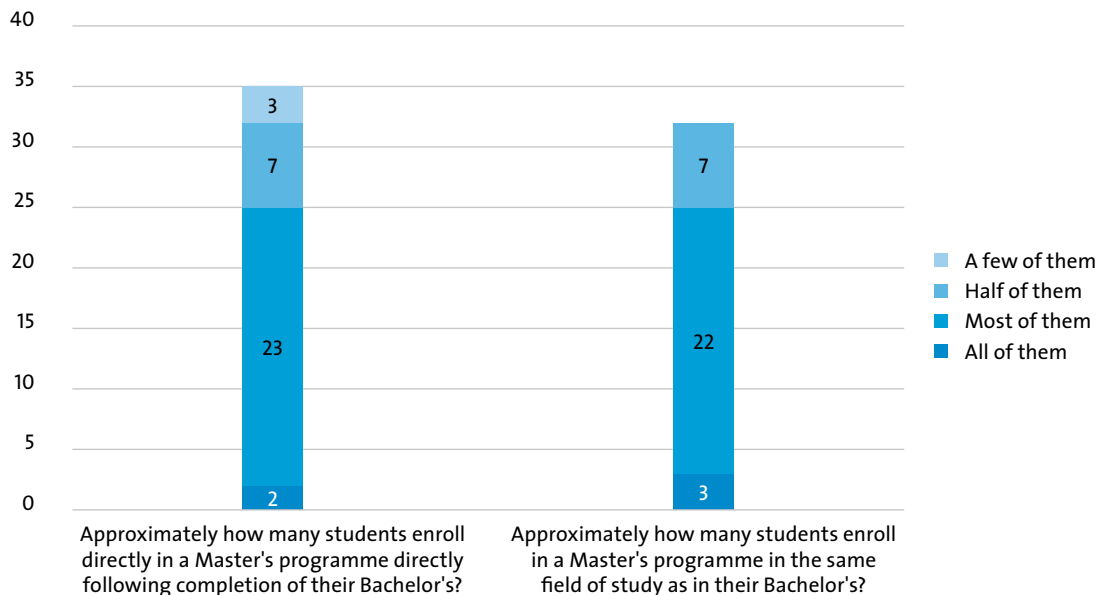
either describing them too generally and/or without the representation and views of students. This is echoed by CREUP, the National Union of Students in Spain, which reported, “The estimation of the workload was not realistic and it is much higher than the hours related with the ECTS. Aside from this, the learning outcomes and the allocation of ECTS are not related as for you can have small courses with not many ECTS with many learning outcomes.” UASS, the National Union of Students in Ukraine, confirmed this as well, “The formulation of LOS in Ukraine is not adequate. Students have too much heavy workload,” and VSS-UNES-USU, the National Union of Students in Switzerland stated similar concerns, “There is so much inconsistency regarding the estimation of the workload in between HEIs, even between different study subjects in the same HEI.”

THREE-CYCLE SYSTEM

An additional core Bologna reform is the three-cycle system, which forms the basis for the division of the degrees between bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degrees. The term 3+2 explains the system of the bachelor’s degree, which is to consist of 3 years and 180 ECTS credits, while the master’s degree consists of 2 years and 120 credits (in some cases, 4+1 where the bachelor’s is 240 ECTS credits and a master’s degree is 60 ECTS credits).

24 of 38 unions stated that the three-cycle system has been implemented and is being used consistently, although only nine responded that they are very satisfied with the implementation of the system. Many countries have chosen to retain an integrated 5-year system, combining the bachelor’s and master’s degrees in certain fields. Superficial implementation is again identified as the major challenge by a large number of respondents, where there is no clear differentiation between the bachelor’s and master’s degrees and countries have reportedly simply divided their previous degree systems to fit the technical specifications of

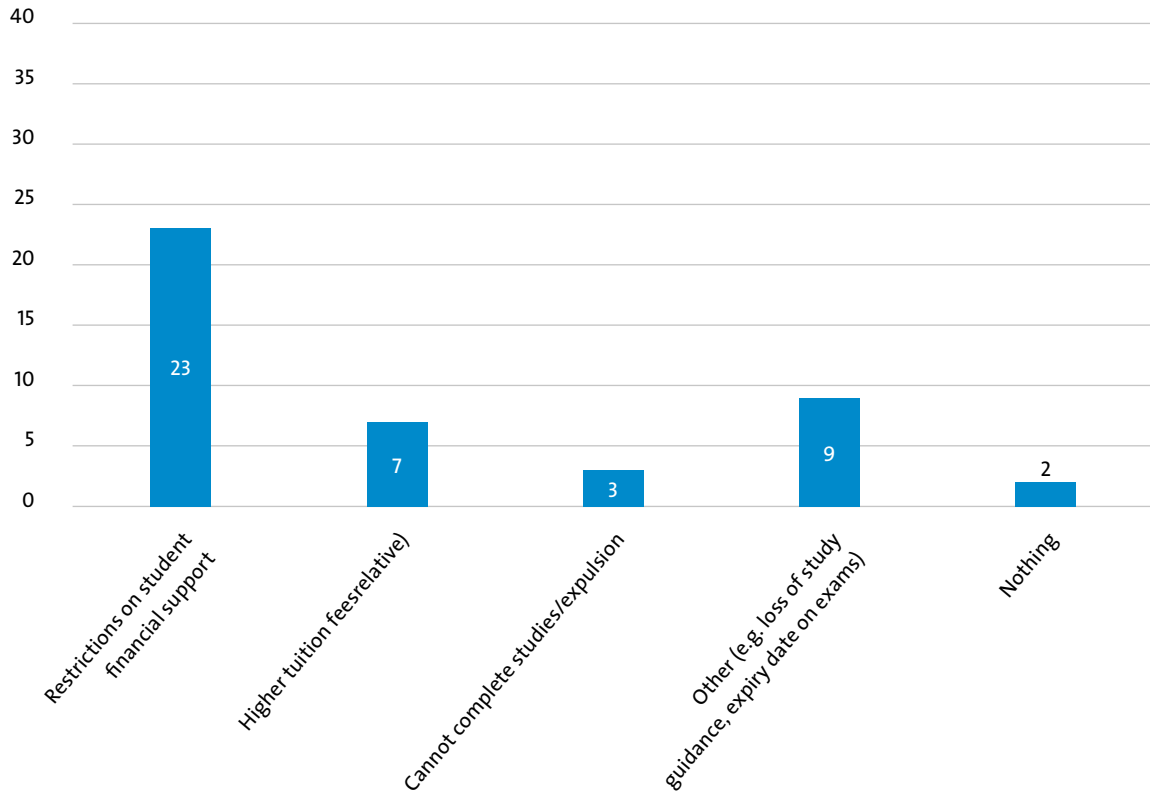
fig. 9 How do undergraduates pursue with their academic degrees?



the three-cycle system. This was identified in countries such as Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, Croatia and Estonia. This has led to a devaluation of the bachelor's degree, making many students feel forced to complete a master's degree in order to have a sufficient qualification. Over two-thirds of the respondents (25 out of 38) stated that either all or most students enroll in a master's programme directly following the completion of their bachelor's degree. Problems with access to master's programmes were also identified as a result of the large demand for entering the second cycle.

Another major challenge is a lack of consistency in the length and/or number of ECTS credits for each cycle. For instance, some master's degrees are 60 credits, some 90 and some 120, which creates a major challenge for mobility and recognition of foreign qualifications. Therefore, a number of unions called for a universal model to be established. ssu in Slovenia stated that, "It changed nominally, the structure remained the same. Furthermore, some subjects that used to last two semester were just reduced, and part of content is neglected."

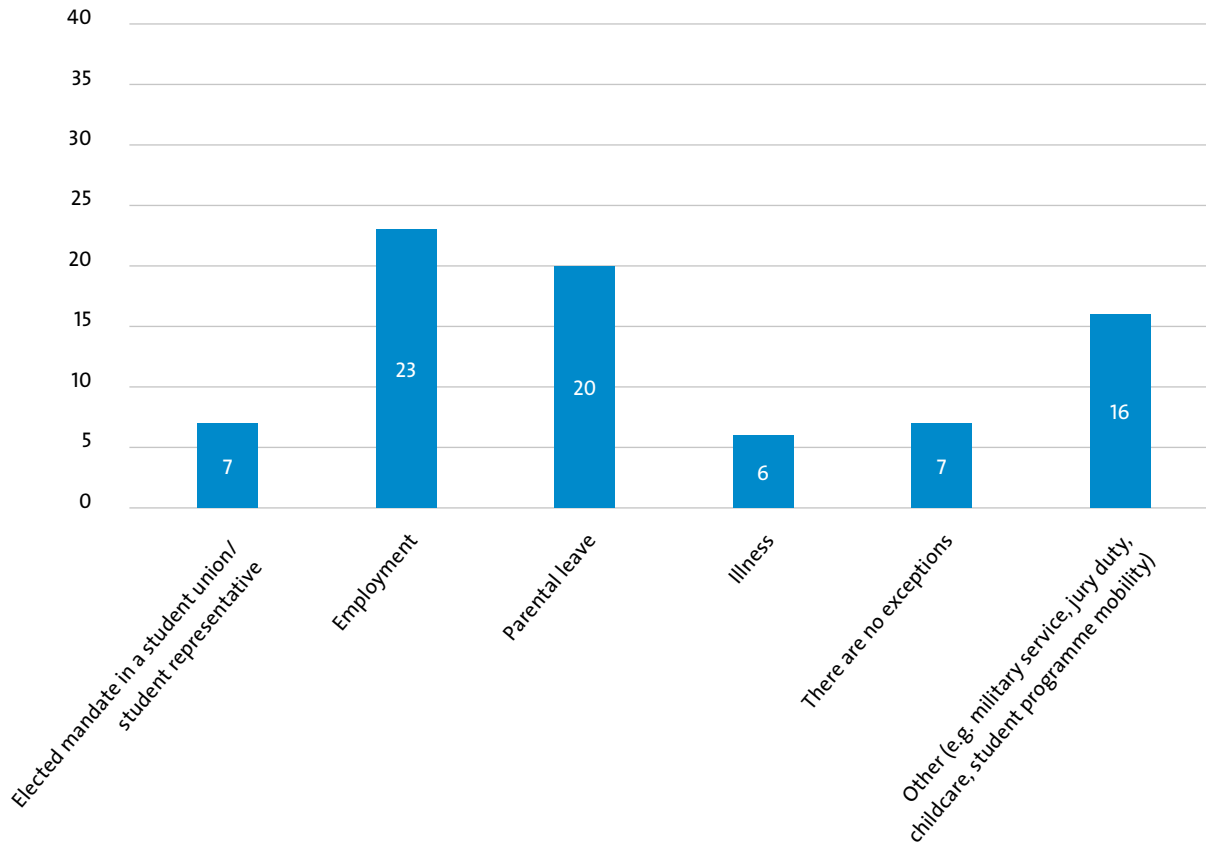
fig. 10 What are the consequences for students to exceed the limit for completing a study period?



Nearly half of the unions (17 of 38) reported that their countries also restrict access to part-time studies, an essential component in promoting the social dimension, increasing access to higher education, enabling lifelong learning and the implementation of student-centred learning; each core commitments of the Bologna Process. The flexibility that the three-cycle system provides should accommodate for the flexibility in study paths necessary for creating functioning and inclusive part-time studies. Many students face an ad-hoc structure of part-time studies, where part-time students are enrolled in an “external form of studies” (Slovakia) or students can take as many ECTS credits as they wish, but there are no formally recognised part-time studies (Iceland). In many countries, students also face major financial problems for part-time studies, where students do not have access to student financial support or they are required to pay fees, even in countries, which claim to have tuition-fee free higher education (Denmark).

Additionally, over two-thirds (27 of 38) of the unions reported that their countries place restrictions on how many terms (semesters) a student can take to complete each cycle, and an additional seven state that it varies from one higher education in-

fig. 11 What are the exceptions for delays in completing a period of study?



stitution to another. 21 of 35 unions report financial consequences for not completing the cycle within the expected number of terms (semesters), 25 face expulsion and seven face higher tuition fees. In Sweden, students face the consequence of being no longer provided with guidance and support, entirely counterproductive when students struggle with completing their studies and may also be failing courses.

Twenty three of thirty seven unions responded that their countries allow exceptions for delays in students' studies for illness. Twenty stated that exceptions are made for parental leave and six for employment. Others referred to exceptions made for jury duty or military service. Absolutely no exceptions are made according to seven unions. Providing as much flexibility with exceptions for special circumstances is essential for ensuring that students can pass between the cycles, thus improving the social dimension of higher education, which ministers have committed to in many Ministerial Communiqués (Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education 2001, 2005, 2009, 2012). For instance, parental leave should be ensured, together with supplementary grants for this time, must be provided for all students, and students should be provided flexible leave schemes for illness and/or disability, covering both physical and psychological illness and any other non-visible disability and allowing for part-time and full-time leave. Lastly, considering the importance of student governance and representation in decision-making structures, shockingly only seven out of 37 respondents report that there are exceptions for delays due to mandates in student unions.

7.3 CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Based on the results, we can clearly see that there is a lack of sufficient implementation of the very core Bologna Process reforms. Students are dissatisfied with the lack of political will for full implementation, and countries appear not to have understood the need for a holistic approach to each of the reforms. In many countries, student unions have reported that the transition from their previous systems has been superficial.

The allocation of ECTS credits has been based simply on a mathematical calculation from the countries previous credit systems, and in some cases there is even a parallel system, neither reflecting the requirements of the ECTS basing ECTS credits on the learning outcomes and workload. The three-cycle degree structure has also in many cases been implemented in a superficial manner, where there is no clear differentiation between the different cycles and countries have retained their former degree structure simply dividing it to fit the 3+2 (4+1) model.

Countries also continue to lack an understanding of the importance of flexibility within the three cycles and the commitments ministers have made in regards to the social dimension improving access to education. This involves ensuring part-time studies, granting exceptions for delays in students' studies for parental leave, employment, student representation and governance, illness and disabilities, etc., and providing the guidance and support students need in case of delays in their studies. There is also a lack of both the development and implementation of NQFs, where the process is stalled or the purpose is unclear for higher education institutions and those responsible for the actual implementation.

Considering the importance of the structural reforms as a method of building trust between countries, improving the quality of higher education, ensuring transparency and better information provision for students and other stakeholders, it is shocking that countries continue to fail in the implementation of core Bologna commitments. Without proper implementation, we cannot reach the main aims of the Bologna Process, such as recognition and the freedom for students and staff to move freely throughout the EHEA.

7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Countries must make a holistic effort in full implementation of all structural reforms
Qualifications frameworks, the ECTS and the three-cycle degree structure are interdependent reforms, in which successful implementation requires an understanding of their interdependence. For instance, the three-cycle degree structure, a part of qualifications frameworks, is dependent on correct ECTS credit allocation, based on learning outcomes and the workload expected to achieve the intended learning outcomes. Countries cannot select the reforms in an “à la carte” manner, but must dedicate time and resources to even implementation of all reforms.
- Establish incentives such as automatic recognition for those who have implemented the core structural reforms
Uneven implementation of the structural reforms defeats the purpose of the Bologna Process. In order to build trust between countries in order to meet the core goals of the Process, mobility and recognition, countries must have all structural reforms in place. Having agreed to the implementation of NQFs, including the necessary ECTS (endorsed in 1999) and three-cycle structure reforms, already in 2005 and to be fully implemented by 2010, countries can reasonably be expected to have completed the implementation process by 2015. As this is not the case, incentives should be established to boost efforts in implementing each of the reforms. A good tool could be automatic recognition for the countries that have achieved full implementation of the structural reforms.
- Implementation must be a transformation, not simply a translation from their previous structures
Successful implementation of the structural reforms requires a full transformation of the structures of countries’ higher education systems. Many countries have implemented a superficial system of mathematical calculations and copy-paste reforms without a clear differentiation from their previous systems. Countries cannot simply translate their previous credit allocation systems into ECTS credits or divide their previous degree structure into three cycles, but must redesign their systems to match the content of the structural reforms.
- ECTS must be based on learning outcomes and workload, in line with the ECTS Users’ Guide
Countries must use the ECTS Users’ Guide in ECTS credit allocation, basing ECTS credits on learning outcomes that clearly describe the learning activities and the workload expected by students to complete all of the learning activities and achieve the intended learning outcomes. Workload should be estimated reasonably and accurately, not based on the subjective importance and difficulty of the course. According to the revised ECTS Users’ Guide to be endorsed by ministers at the 2015 EHEA Ministerial Conference in Yerevan, “workload ranges from 1,500 to 1,800 hours for an academic year, which means that one credit corresponds to 25 to 30 hours of work” (European Higher Education Area Bologna Follow-Up Group 2015, 4). However, this should also take into account that students have different learning needs and styles, and therefore this is purely an estimation and individual students actual time to achieve the intended learning outcomes may vary (ibid.)
- A unified three-cycle degree structure must be established with a clear differentiation between the cycles
Problems in recognition arise when a student originating from a country with a 180 ECTS credit bachelor’s degree apply for a master’s degree in a country that requires a 240 ECTS credit bachelors for entrance into the second cycle. Likewise, when applying for recognition of the second cycle with 120 credits, students can be denied recognition of foreign qualifications from countries with 60 or 90 ECTS credit master’s degrees. To facilitate recognition and implementation that will benefit students, countries should consider unifying the three-cycle degree structure, but also ensure that there is a clear differentiation between the first, second and third cycles, so as to allow for new learning experiences, interdisciplinarity and the devaluation of the second cycle.

- Countries must establish proper part-time study programmes

The flexibility that the three-cycle degree structure enables should ensure that students are provided with the option of studying part-time. Part-time studies require specially designed programmes and countries' and higher education institutions' dedication to solving any logistical challenges that may arise. Part-time students require additional guidance and support throughout their studies. Tuition fees and limitations in student financial support must not be imposed on part-time students. Rather, part-time studies should be viewed as a natural part of improving access to higher education and enabling lifelong learning.

- Countries must allow for flexible learning paths and provide guidance and support in case of delays

One of the aims of the three-cycle degree structure is to allow for flexibility, which also ensures the transformation to a student-centred approach and improving the social dimension. Students must be given a reasonable timeframe for completing their studies, while also allowing for both full- and part-time leave for parental leave and physical, psychological and non-visible illness and disabilities and providing additional financial support during these periods. Exceptions must also be granted for employment, extracurricular activities and participation in student governance and representation, military duties and other cases which naturally give reason for delays in studies. Students who experience delays in their studies must be offered guidance and support, rather than financial punishment such as limiting student financial support, imposing higher tuition fees, or expulsion.

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8 RECOGNITION

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Recognition has been declared the very heart of the Bologna Process by ministers (Bologna Declaration 1999). It was the key element paving the way to a united European Higher Education Area (EHEA), fostering mobility and internationalisation, lifelong learning and later on student-centred learning. It has been included in every ministerial communiqué since the establishment of the Bologna Process. As the first European-level document on recognition, the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region from 1997 initiated the process of creating transparent, simple and non-discriminatory recognition procedures that was further addressed in the Ministerial Communiqués of 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2012.

As early as in 2001, the Ministers also addressed the importance of recognition of prior learning (RPL) (Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education 2001). With the paradigm shift towards student-centered learning and in the spirit of lifelong learning, EHEA has also drawn more attention to recognition of prior learning by addressing it in the documents adopted by the ministers (Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education 2012). Now the time has come to review the commitments and take measures for further implementation and development.

8.2 MAIN FINDINGS

DIPLOMA SUPPLEMENT

Students have the right to receive a document that explains the qualifications gained, including learning outcomes and the context, level and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed. The Diploma Supplement should be issued automatically upon graduation or upon request before graduation, however it must always be free of charge and follow a standardised model clearly stating the learning outcomes achieved, including any additional credits and/or learning outcomes accumulated than the minimum requirement for obtaining a degree.

Thirty one out of thirty eight responding National Students' Unions (NUS) have reported that there is legislation on diploma supplements in their country. Despite the legislative basis, the number of NUSes reporting that diploma supplements are issued automatically upon graduation is lower (27 out of 38). According to our respondents, students still receive the diploma supplement only upon request in Estonia, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Italy, France, Macedonia. Another problematic issue concerning diploma supplements is the fact that eight unions, from Serbia, Luxembourg, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Macedonia, have responded that their graduates are obliged to pay an additional fee in order to receive a diploma supplement.

RECOGNITION PROCEDURES

From a student's view the responses are rather positive about the non-discriminatory nature of the process of recognition. However, respondents are considerably critical to the the transparency of the process; a majority of respondents reports difficulties in this area (27 out of 38 unions). Alarming, some countries continue to lack even simple recognition procedures, according to six unions. This is especially the case for recognition of credits awarded outside of a mobility programme. Here, 26 out of 38 respondents describe the procedures as difficult or very difficult. Additionally, students are increasingly charged for the recognition of their diplomas, which is an intolerable and worrying tendency.

Establishing a fixed period of time for the duration of the recognition process from application to final decision is crucial for ensuring that the procedure is simple and accessible. Unfortunately, in 14 of 38 unions' countries, there is no fixed period of time that the process has to be conducted in.

Three different entities responsible for the assessment of foreign diplomas and qualifications: national governments, recognition authorities/centres and higher education institutions. In the case of foreign diplomas, the recognition authorities are the most important assessor, taking part in the process according to the answers given from 26 out of 37 unions. Higher education institutions are somewhat less involved in the assessment (20 out of 37 respondents), followed by national governments (12). On the other hand, looking into the assessment process of foreign qualifications and credits, higher education institutions are the driving force for 30 out of 38 unions. Their leading position in comparison to recognition authorities (15 unions) and national governments (seven unions) can be explained by the increased supposed necessity of detailed, specific knowledge about the subject.

Regarding the final decision taken about the recognition of foreign diplomas and qualifications, the picture changes dramatically only in the case of the recognition authorities, who take final decisions according to 16 respondents for diplomas and 6 for qualifications and credits. The implication of the two other entities parallels their implication in the assessment.

There are also examples of the countries where the assessment procedure is more complex; namely, there is more than one entity assessing foreign diplomas and qualifications (e.g. the United Kingdom), or the assessment depends on the bilateral agreements (e.g. the Czech Republic).

AUTOMATIC RECOGNITION OF DEGREES WITHIN EHEA

A majority of respondents indicate the existence of specific forms of automatic recognition of degrees from the EHEA in their countries. The most popular is recognition based on bilateral agreements (14 out of 38 unions), closely followed by recognition based on the implementation of Bologna tools (11 out of 38 unions). Nevertheless, 11 NUSES responded that there is no form of automatic recognition whatsoever in their country. Among the reasons for the lack of automatic recognition were the various implementation levels of Bologna Process reforms and tools (23 out of 37 unions), an apparent lack of trust between the EHEA countries (22 out of 37 unions) and some concerns regarding regulated professions (20 out of 38 unions).

Although ministers committed to automatic recognition in Bucharest in 2012, it is clear that there is a considerably uneven implementation in regards to this. An overwhelming majority of unions responded that they support automatic recognition, and even 25 of 38 consider it a priority for EHEA.

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL)

According to 29 out of 38 respondents RPL takes place in their respective countries. Fourteen unions have been working with established systems, while in 15 of unions' countries some initiatives are in place. It is positive to see that only four unions have reported that no work has been done in order to enable RPL. In most countries, RPL is implemented in order to cover part of the curriculum (20 out of 27 unions) and to enable enrolment in higher education (16 out of 27 unions), while only in a few cases is it used as a tool to proceed to the next cycle (seven out of 27 unions). In some countries it has been used as an additional asset while evaluating students' work (Serbia).

The lack of trust in the validation of qualifications is still considered a major barrier for RPL by European Students' Union's member unions (24 out of 36), as well as the limited information and a lack of trust among main stakeholders (20 out of 36 unions). Further aspects hindering the advancement of RPL include the lack of National Qualification Frameworks (14 out of 36 unions), legislation limiting RPL (13 out of 36 unions) and the lack of resources (11 out of 36 unions).

8.3 CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Although the Lisbon Convention introduced the Diploma Supplement nearly two decades ago, the situation is still far from ideal. Many countries appear to issue the Diploma Supplement in accordance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention, nevertheless there is still a significant number of countries not fulfilling the criteria of automatically awarding diploma supplements free of charge.

Recognition procedures are complicated. Most countries do not follow the principles of transparent, simple and non-discriminatory recognition procedures described in Lisbon Convention. The duration of the recognition process is usually not fixed and the decision-making process is complex and in some cases non-transparent, and it is often complicated by administrative burdens. Sometimes more than one institution is responsible for conducting assessment of diplomas and qualifications with yet another institution taking the final decision. This may lead to confusion and complicates the entire process.

Automatic recognition is yet to be implemented. There are certain regions (Benelux countries, Nordic countries) that ensure automatic recognition, but this is limited only to the mutual recognition agreements in those particular regions. Among the reasons for automatic recognition not being reality, NUSes have stated that the largest obstacles are the lack of the implementation of structural reforms play a significant role in it, as well as the lack of trust among main stakeholders.

Countries have initiated some initiatives for the implementation of RPL. However, despite the developments it has not been a priority under recognition, which led to many inconsistencies in the actions on national and institutional levels. The usage of RPL differs throughout the countries and is often limited to only one purpose, either as an alternative to enrolment in higher education or covering a part of the curriculum. There are also a number of obstacles defined that prevent the recognition in formal and non-formal learning.

8.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- The issuance of a Diploma Supplement certifying qualifications gained, including the learning outcomes and the context must be guaranteed automatically after graduation or upon request before graduation and free of charge in every higher education institution across the EHEA. The document must follow a standardised model clearly stating the learning outcomes achieved, including any additional credits and/or learning outcomes accumulated than the minimum requirement for obtaining a degree.
- Countries must follow the recognition procedures according to the Lisbon Recognition Convention. The national legislation should be reviewed to create accessible, simple and transparent procedures that will be conducted in a fixed time without any bureaucratic burden. It is important to emphasise, that the recognition of qualifications can only be refused in cases where they significantly differ from the qualifications obtained in the home institution.
- It is essential that the automatic recognition within the EHEA becomes a reality with the usage of the tools developed by the Bologna Process. This means that the recognition of degrees has to be guaranteed and granted automatically in all countries across the EHEA that have already fully implemented the Bologna structural reforms.
- As one of the basis for the paradigm shift towards student-centered learning, RPL should give students the possibility for recognition of qualifications regardless of how they were achieved. It must be based on flexibility and trust allowing to recognise the qualifications achieved through formal and non-formal education as well as informal learning. The countries have to use the full potential designing the flexible process without creating bureaucratic burdens. RPL cannot only be used as an alternative to enrol in higher education, but also to integrate the qualifications achieved elsewhere into the curriculum or to proceed to another cycle.

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9 MOBILITY AND INTERNATIONALISATION

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Student mobility has always been of great importance for the Bologna Process as a tool for fostering mutual understanding and knowledge sharing within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) on grassroots, institutional and national level. Mobility promotes diversity, tolerance and peace, the development of intercultural and language competences and spreading democratic values across and beyond Europe. Over the past years, internationalisation “has become a must in every higher education institution across the globe” (ESU 2014), and at last it was included in the Bucharest Communiqué clearly stating that mobility should be regarded as a part of it, either as a tool or a result of the internationalisation process (Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education 2012).

With the EHEA Mobility Strategy adopted as an addendum to the 2012 Ministerial Communiqué in Bucharest, that quality assurance, wide access and financial support should be at the greater national focus (*ibid.*). There have been efforts taken by countries to meet the targets set in the document and many considerations on related topics have been made by the stakeholders in terms of portability of grants and loans, underrepresented groups and mobility flows (EHEA 2015).

Now, we are facing the evaluation of the commitments from the co-signing countries, among others, on mobility and internationalisation. The aim of this chapter is to analyse the current situation and progress that has been made since the previous Ministerial Conference of 2012 regarding social, economic, financial and cultural issues, each important for ensuring quality, accessible and balanced mobility, as well as internationalisation and internationalisation at home.

9.2 MAIN FINDINGS

Mobility and internationalisation serve multiple purposes. However, the methods of following these action lines has been interpreted differently by stakeholders and policy-makers. The analysis of existing documents and reports has shown that there is an agreement that mobility and internationalisation should pave the way to the creation of a society where everyone can live peacefully, and that mobility and internationalisation assist in promoting democratic values and meeting the challenges of the globalised labour market. However, what we still lack is a clear and feasible way to measure progress within those action lines. As a consequence, countries often strive for quantity at the expense of quality, which does not and will not pave the way for balanced and accessible mobility across and beyond Europe.

MOBILITY

In 2012, Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to mobility and emphasised its multiple aspects in the adopted documents. The Bucharest Ministerial Communiqué states that, “Learning mobility is essential to ensure the quality of higher education, enhance students’ employability and expand cross-border collaboration within the EHEA and beyond. We adopt the strategy ‘Mobility for Better Learning’ as an addendum, including its mobility target, as an integral part of our efforts to promote an ele-

ment of internationalisation in all of higher education” (Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education 2012). The Mobility Strategy for EHEA 2020 reaffirms and elaborates the targets stated in Communiqué from Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve, 2009 also setting additional goals. Moreover, it defines the measures for the implementation of aims and targets for quality, data collection for the social dimension of mobility, information policies and strategies, dismantling obstacles and balancing mobility flows (Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education 2012). Although mobility constitutes one of the key action lines of the Bologna Process, the progress made over the years appears to be slower than the development of the ministers’ commitments.

OBSTACLES

Increasing attention has been given to dismantling barriers to mobility on European level, which has encouraged countries to take efforts on national levels. Yet according to the Bologna With Student Eyes (BWSE) survey nearly half of the countries have not put measures and programmes in place to tackle barriers. Almost none of the respondents view them as effective, and more importantly, there was a general lack of monitoring of the actions taken.

Among the most critical obstacles to student mobility are financial reasons (34 out of 38 unions), family background (26 out of 38) and recognition (22 out of 38). Other frequently mentioned barriers are a lack of transparency and access to necessary information (15 out of 38 unions), lack of interest (15 out of 38), followed by disabilities and chronic diseases (11 out of 38) and quality of studies (11 out of 38). BWSE respondents’ perceptions are mirrored in the EUROSTUDENT report, which surveyed students who did not enrolled in study programmes abroad (2015). Further barriers to mobility that hinder students from being mobile included visa issues (4 out of 38).

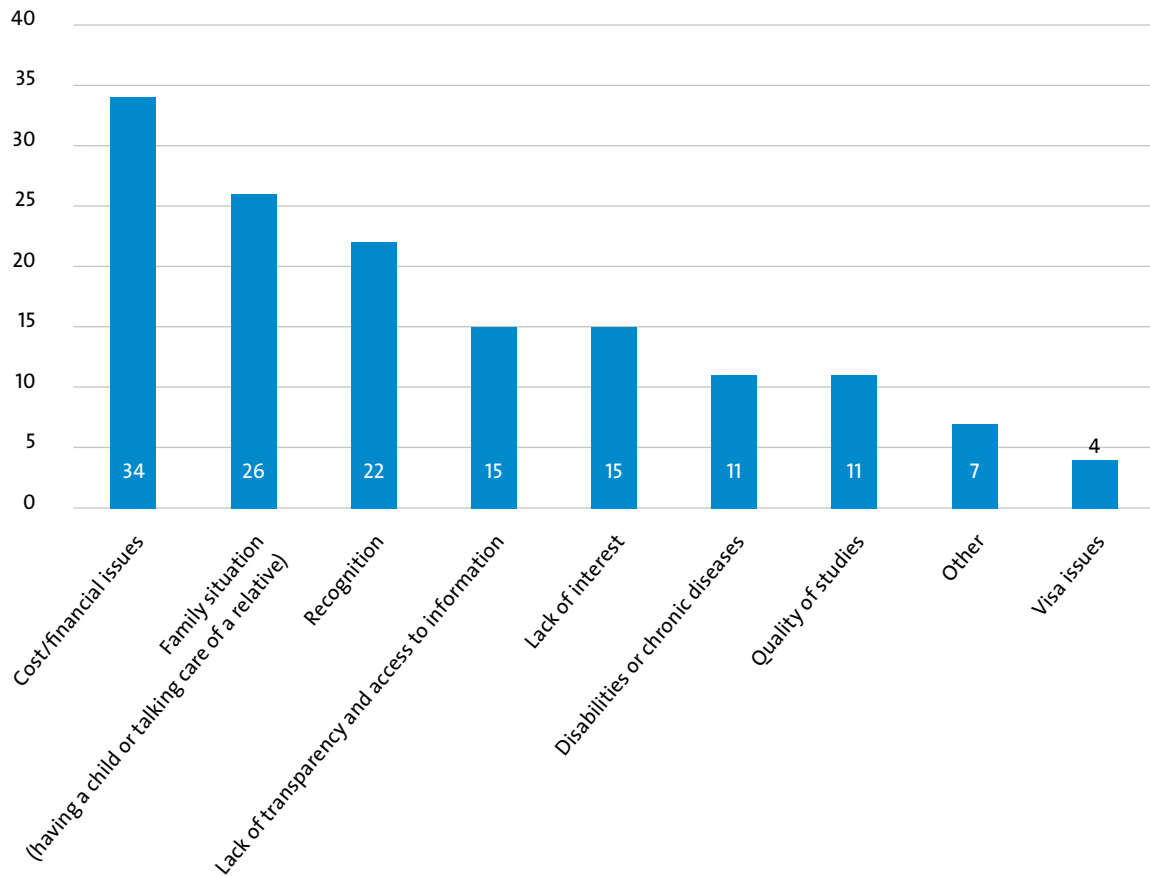
Other examples come from the countries’ representatives. The Finnish student unions commented that going abroad for a credit mobility programme may cause a prolongation of students’ study periods, which students would want to avoid, while Danish representatives stated that the Danish Study Progress Reform severely limits flexibility and opportunities for student mobility.

In comparison to 2012, little progress has been made, and the largest obstacles still remain the reality (ESU 2012). The past and current situation in the EHEA prove that there is still not a sufficient commitment from countries in terms of actions taken to overcome barriers to mobility, and further programmes must be put in place on the national and institutional level. The obstacles students face vary depending on their individual situation and/or country of origin. Therefore, it is important that national and institutional strategies include measures targeted at specific student groups (EUROSTUDENT 2015).

ACCESS AND SUPPORT

In the Bologna Declaration of 2001, member states emphasised the importance of social dimension of mobility reaffirming that “the objective of improving the mobility of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff as set out in the Bologna Declaration is of the utmost importance”. The need for data collection on mobility was addressed in Prague in 2009 (Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education 2009) and repeated in the Mobility Strategy 2020 for the European Higher Education Area in 2012 (ibid. 2012), together with the importance of improving the participation of diverse student groups in mobility, making these two aspects goals to be reached by 2020.

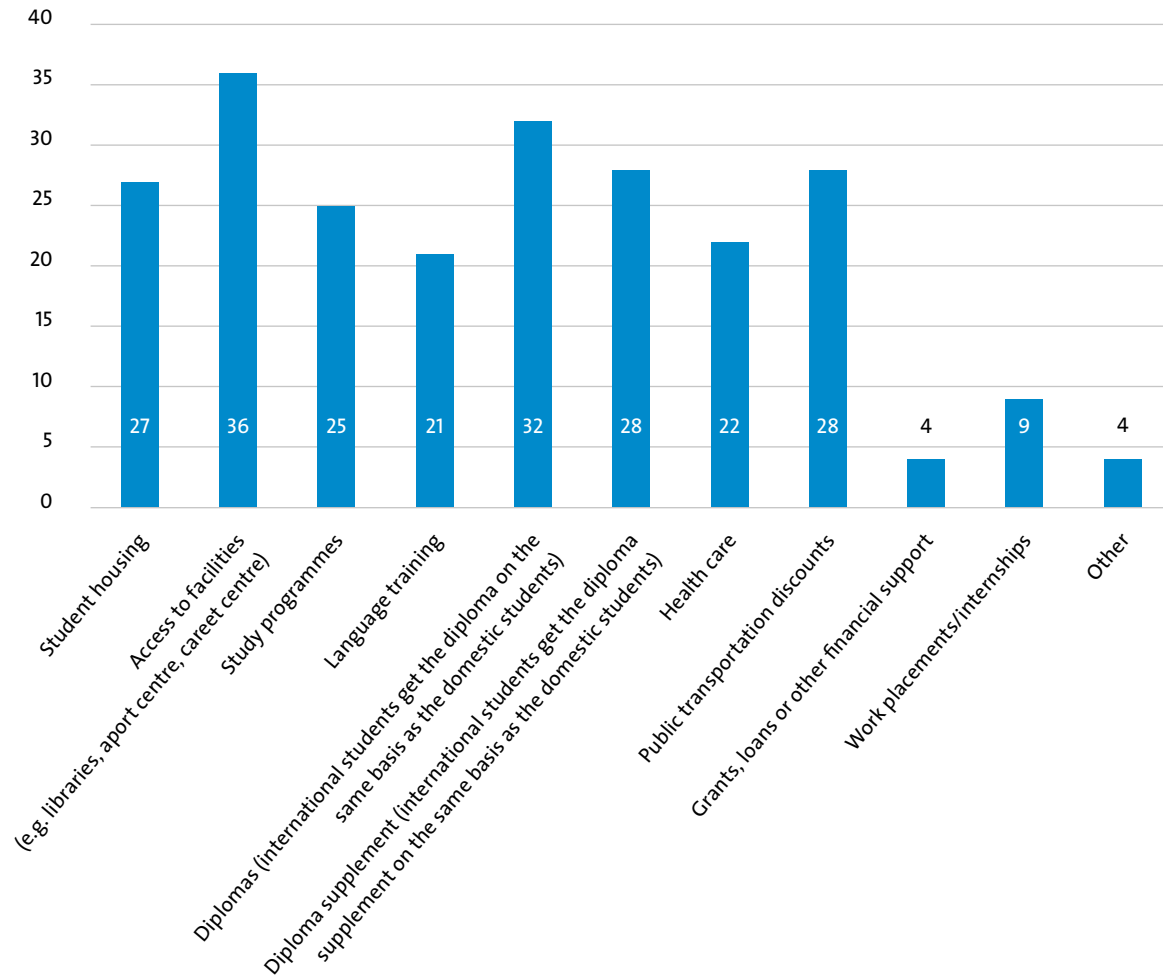
fig. 12 What do you perceive are the biggest barriers to mobility that hinder students from being mobile?



The key issue for accessibility is support, which means the availability of the student services for the international students should be on the same level as for domestic students. However, this is far from the reality in many countries where international students are often treated as cash cows, and they pay more for the housing (Poland) or have no access to free language courses (Czech Republic), for instance. The figure below presents the answers of 37 respondents from 33 countries about the availability of various student services for international students on the same level as for domestic students.

Category “other” included: language courses and student representation. Additionally, two national unions of students from Austria and Malta stated that the availability of certain services, e.g. access to grants and loans, depends on the student’s country of origin.

fig. 13 Are the following arrangements available for international students on the same level as for domestic students?

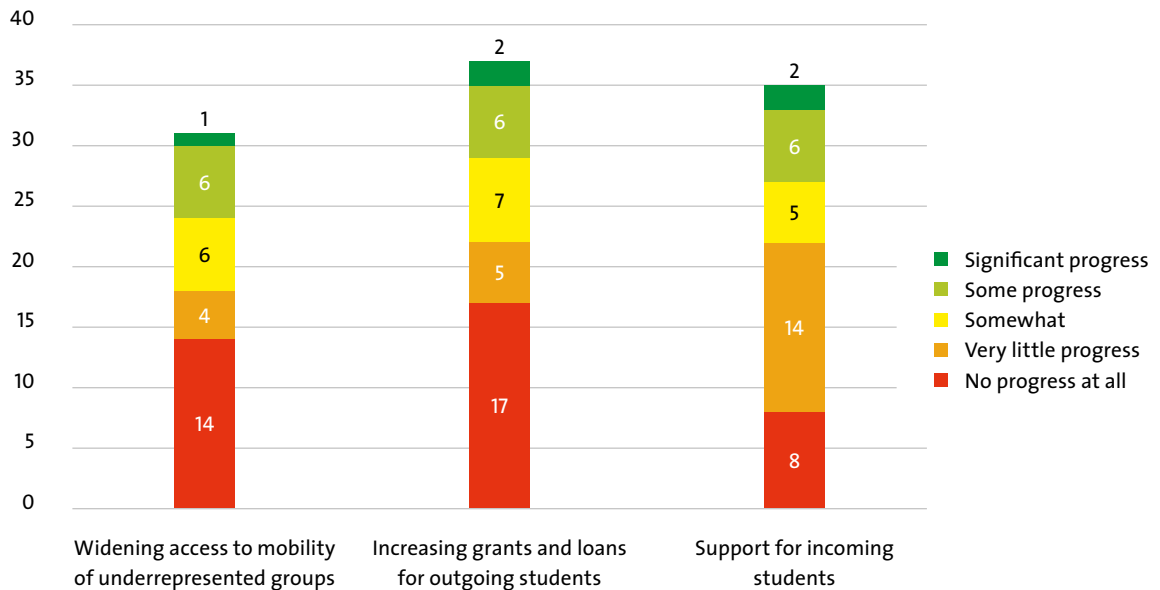


UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS

The Mobility and Internationalisation Working Group of the Bologna Follow-Up Group has concluded in its final report that mobility of the underrepresented groups is an added value. The report also included a clear recommendation that each country should define underrepresented groups taking after in-depth analysis of the national context (EHEA 2015). Additionally, the report carried out by the Institute for Advanced Studies state that the generally underrepresented groups do not necessarily match the underrepresented groups in the student mobility (Grabher et.al. 2014).

According to the Eurostat, in 2012 alone, there were 500 000 mobile students in Europe (European Commission 2012), and this number has been increasing ever since. It is crucial to ensure that this group of students reflects the diversity of student population. Yet, although the commitment to do so was made in the Mobility Strategy 2020 for the European Higher Education Area in 2012, it is yet to become a reality, according to ESU's member unions. Fourteen out of thirty eight unions have responded that no progress has been made in widening access to mobility for underrepresented groups, and only one has admitted significant progress.

fig. 14 The progress in mobility since 2012



Some countries have taken initiatives to improve the situation to widen access to mobility and improve student support by creating new programmes aiming to increase the number of incoming students and offer language courses, such as in Serbia. Another positive example is the case of Austria where, “the further step towards enhancing the international experience was the inclusion of mobility strategy elements in the performance agreements (“Leistungsvereinbarungen”) with the public universities. They are asked to build mobility windows into curricula, to offer more degree programs in a foreign language (preferably in English), to improve recognition procedures, to develop more joint study programs and more ‘internationalization at home’ features for curricular and extra-curricular activities.”

However, countries continue to lack a holistic approach to widening the participation of underrepresented groups by designing specific measures that are consistently implemented, monitored and revised.

INTERNATIONALISATION

“Internationalisation has become a must in every higher education institution across the globe” (ESU 2014). Although internationalisation has been a priority for European universities since their early establishment, it has regained importance and become a key issue in policy-making in the early 21st century (Bergan 2010). International competitiveness lied at the foundation of the EHEA (Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education 1999), and it was further addressed in the “European Higher Education Area in Global Setting” adopted by the Ministers at the EHEA Conference in London 2007. However, the notion of internationalisation itself was introduced in the EHEA documents only in LEUVEN/Louvain-la-NEUVE Communiqué in 2009, which stated that mobility “strengthens the academic and cultural internationalization of European higher education” (Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education 2009).

INTERNATIONALISATION STRATEGIES

The recommendation in these and further developed documents first and foremost included creating national and institutional internationalisation strategies that promote a holistic approach to the process and emphasise the values of internationalisation. It is of a great importance that these strategies, designed and implemented through a collaborative effort with students, academics and other stakeholders, set guidelines for the internationalisation of higher education systems, as this process involves all relevant stakeholders and may assist in avoiding inconsistencies among the actions and initiatives taken.

According to the Bologna With Student Eyes questionnaire, only six out of 38 unions from four countries, Belgium Flanders and the French Community of Belgium (VVS, FEF), Bulgaria (UBS), Finland (SAMOK, SYL) and Ireland (USI), admitted that their countries have implemented internationalisation strategies on the national level very well. More alarming is that 12 out of 38 ESU’s member unions admitted that despite having the strategies, they are poorly implemented. Although the minority of the countries (15 out of 34) have implemented internationalisation strategies, 16 unions admitted that the governments have either started developing (five unions) or debating them (11).

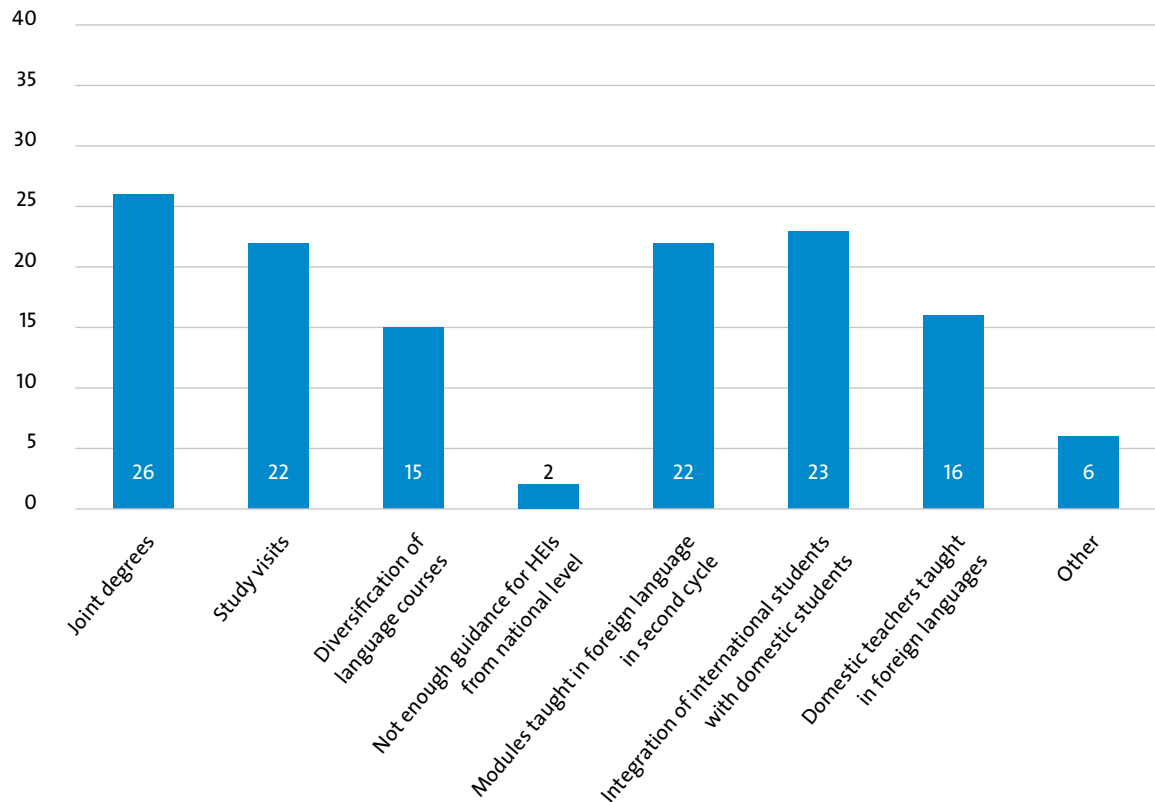
In terms of consultation and the student representation in the process of developing strategies, only three unions stated that they were very much involved. This answer was followed by five member unions responding that they were much involved, nine were somewhat involved and four were very little involved. Six unions stated that there were not involved whatsoever. This clearly shows that the level of involvement of student representatives was insufficient.

In order to ensure successful implementation, follow-up and the improvement of internationalisation strategies, a number of factors are important. Firstly, it is essential that sufficient funding is allocated in order to follow the targets and actions that strategies embrace. Only one out of thirty eight unions responded that there was a sufficient amount of financial resources allocated on the national and institutional level to fulfil the purposes of internationalisation strategies. Another crucial issue is the follow-up and monitoring the effect of implementation of the internationalisation strategies, and half of the national unions of students (12 out of 24) stated that the progress of reaching the targets has been monitored. With the recommendation from the previous Ministerial Conference of 2012 on setting up the measurable and realistic targets, improved monitoring tools, it is still far from the ideal situation (Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education 2012).

The above proves that although the commitments have been made on the European level, it still yet to have its effect on national levels. The unions have been addressed with the question what are the main challenges in following the commitments.

The largest obstacle (11 out of the 22 answers) is the issue of a lack of sufficient financial resources allocated for implementing and evaluating internationalisation strategies. Ten out of twenty two unions stated that there is not enough guidance from the national level that the higher education institutions could follow, and eight respondents admitted that there is a lack of interest from the stakeholders.

fig. 15 *What tools of internationalisation at home are being preferred by higher education institutions in your countries?*



INTERNATIONALISATION AT HOME

Internationalisation at home means internationalisation of the curriculum and the teaching and learning process (De Wit 2010). Internationalisation at home, like mobility, is only one aspect; a tool for internationalisation and not an aim itself. It is specific to each and every academic discipline and programme and, more importantly, not dependent only on incoming students. “Not everyone has the possibility to study abroad for a diverse number of reasons. In order to assure the international character of studies for everyone, as well as the general quality of teaching, learning and research, each university should pay careful attention to creating an international environment at their institution. Every student must have the chance to be part of internationalisation” (ESU 2014).

There is a wide range of subtools available to facilitate internationalisation at home, among others, using international course literature, conducting study visits, organising guest lectures, improving staff mobility, performing international research assignments or activities and integrating domestic students with local cultural groups. The figure below presents the answers of 38 of ESU’s member unions and maps the tools used by the institutions in different countries.

Among the category “other”, unions indicated courses, either separate or integrated in the programmes, taught in a foreign language or distance learning.

Student unions were also asked about the involvement of students returning from a period spent abroad in building up internationalisation at home, which is both beneficial and valuable for the process, but also essential for returning groups of students in order to reflect on their period abroad. Institutions must take measures to ensure the reintegration of students, including the provision of study guidance. The majority of responding unions (22 out of 34) stated that the most common way to involve returning students is by offering advice to students who would like to go abroad. This is a relatively simple way to engage both returning students and the students wishing to study abroad, as the process may be both formal and informal. However, more than half of the NUSES (16 out of 34) answered that returning students are involved in the process of giving feedback about the period spent abroad. Ideally, the approach that is applied should aim at using student feedback in order to improve the process of internationalisation at home.

9.3 CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Mobility has grown over the past decades, attracting an increasing number of students, but at the same time, it remains a privilege for the few rather than a real opportunity for the entire academic community. Students continue to struggle with substantial barriers hindering their access to mobility. The vast majority of students still report that funding, followed by family situation and problems with recognition are the foremost obstacles to overcome in order to become mobile, which brings the authors to the conclusion that since 2009, we can hardly speak of any progress.

As an issue that has been at the very core since the establishment of the European Higher Education Area, mobility has been tackled from different perspectives over the years. Different angles of discussions have shown countries that mobility is not only about adding up numbers representing incoming and outgoing students, but that we must also speak of mobility in connection with the social dimension, public responsibility and, last but not least, quality of higher education. Accessibility to mobility is yet to become a main priority. First and foremost mobility must become an opportunity for all and not a privilege for the few. Students should have the opportunity to participate in mobility regardless of which degree cycle they are in, in-

cluding the third cycle of studies, their socio-economic background, family background, visible and non-visible disabilities, chronic diseases or other.

It has been concluded that financing remains the largest obstacle preventing students from going abroad. Very few measures have been taken to improve the situation on national levels, despite the recommendations from the Mobility Strategy 2020 for the EHEA adopted in the Ministerial Conference in 2012. ESU has been advocating for full portability of grants and loans, ensuring that countries provide the same student financial support for both credit and degree mobility as provided for domestic students, which is also included in the Mobility and Internationalisation Working Group of the Bologna Follow-Up Group report and the guidelines put forward by the Group. However, the formulation states only that portability must ‘in principle’ be provided, despite previous commitments to unconditional, full portability (EHEA 2015). It must be considered in the future that countries commit themselves to full portability of grants and loans, as the lack of full commitment severely hinders student mobility. Additionally, although there have been changes in funding, the Multiannual Financial Frameworks must be increased. Not enough financial support for specific target underrepresented groups hinders the realisation of the goals that mobility should serve.

Although the countries have committed to devote more attention and take measures to widen the participation of the underrepresented groups in mobility, a little progress has been made since 2012. The first step forward has been taken by defining the underrepresented groups in the Mobility and Internationalisation Working Group final report with a clear recommendation for countries to define specific underrepresented groups in their contexts (ibid.), but only very few countries have followed up on that in their national strategies on setting up clear targets or measures designed for specific groups.

Internationalisation strategies, for the few that have been developed, have been rather poorly implemented and monitored. A positive development is that even if the strategies have not yet been implemented, they have begun to be debated and the governments’ are starting to work with stakeholders on the drafting process. The main obstacles to full implementation as well as monitoring and revision are a lack of sufficient budget allocation and guidance for institutions in terms of how the documents should be designed. Another problem that appears is the content of the strategies, often lacking clear targets and measures aiming to widen the access of mobility for underrepresented groups and balance mobility flows. For the upcoming period, it is essential to offer better assistance for the countries. The creation of tools should be considered, aiming at assisting in the process of design, implementation and improvement of internationalisation strategies for the countries on EHEA level within the BFUG structures.

Internationalisation at home is a topic that has been increasingly addressed, and despite the various tools that are used on institutional level, such as internationalising curricula, free language courses, study visits, guest lectures, international research cooperation, there is lack of a holistic approach to the topic. Internationalisation at home is one of the tools and means to internationalisation, not simply a goal in itself. Therefore internationalisation at home must be integrated in the internationalisation strategies on national levels that will serve as guidelines for the institutions on how to create an international environment. There should be more space for the countries to take part in peer-learning activities aiming at sharing experiences and practises to help them take necessary steps in their contexts.

9.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

For mobility, ESU proposes the following recommendations:

- ◉ Countries should follow the recommendation of the Mobility and Internationalisation Working Group of the Bologna Follow-Up Group, taking efforts to define underrepresented groups within mobility, while subsequently collecting data. In order to prove the commitment in mobility, not only should countries strive for the 20% target, but more importantly this should pave the way for balanced participation of all student groups in order to ensure that the mobile student population reflects the diversity of student population and avoid brain drain.
- ◉ As the student population is growing and increasing in its diversity, countries must create and implement strategies that will ensure wide and equal access to mobility with measures targeting underrepresented groups, which should be defined on the basis of collected data. Countries must not focus solely on the quantitative target, but look closely at the structure of the mobile student group and use qualitative methods. There is a clear need to widen participation in order to make mobility an opportunity for all and not simply a privilege for the few. Therefore countries should focus their efforts on dismantling barriers to mobility for all of the students.
- ◉ Funding continues to be the main obstacles for student mobility. Although the EHEA Ministers committed to full portability of grants and loans in 2005, very little progress has been made. Countries must show their true commitment to the implementation of full, unconditional portability of grants and loans in order to ensure wider participation of students in both credit- and degree mobility. Students must receive the same supporting grants as provided for domestic students, and the hosting institution should cover the costs of education without imposing tuition fees or any other additional fees for international students.
- ◉ Countries must strive for creating equal opportunities and grant equal rights for international and domestic students. It is crucial that institutions ensure equal access to all student support services, including financial support. Measures that are included in mobility and internationalisation strategies, must also be taken on the national level to avoid inconsistencies in initiatives taken by institutions.

For internationalisation, ESU proposes the following recommendations:

- ◉ Internationalisation strategies must be created on institutional and national level to ensure a holistic approach to mobility and that all efforts taken by higher education institutions and governments work together and are in line with each other. Every strategy must contain goals and measures to be taken to achieve them, and more importantly, the appropriate monitoring and evaluation methods must be included to ensure a proper follow-up with sufficient funding and resource allocation. Strategies should address, among others, the issues of the participation in mobility of underrepresented groups, imbalances in mobility flows, the internationalisation of curricula and obstacles to mobility.
- ◉ Internationalisation at home should be subject to quality assurance reviews, as it must be assessed and followed up on with specific recommendations to guide the improvement process. This will help to shift from the common quantitative approach towards a qualitative approach, positively influencing the further development of an international environment within HEIs. The internationalisation of curricula should use various and diverse sub-tools that ensure social and cultural inclusion as well as quality and international teaching and learning activities.

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10 FINANCING OF HIGHER EDUCATION

10.1 INTRODUCTION

As most higher education systems in Europe are publically funded, the rampant budget cuts in recent difficult economic times have impacted the higher education sector in many different ways, often having a much bigger impact than the cuts have had on other publicly funded sectors.

Trends such as the massification and internationalisation of Higher Education (HE) have increased the student population across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) with around 37.8 million tertiary student enrolled in 2011/2012 (EUROSTAT). In nearly one quarter of EHEA countries public funding for all aspects of HE fell even prior to the financial crisis, between 2005 and 2011 (EHEA 2015). The situation has seemingly deteriorated even more since then.

Though we see increasing student numbers in many countries, there are many barriers preventing students from completing or even beginning their programme. The financial burden on students and their families is a significant factor, compounded by the reduced funding to student financial support and the growing move from grants to loans.

If we are to enhance higher education quality and promote access and progression, sustainable and adequate funding for Higher Education Institutions (HEI) and support systems must be secured. European Students' Union (ESU) strongly believes that such sustainable funding must be allocated according to the notion of education as a public good and public responsibility, as outlined in the Unions' policy:

"Education is a public good, a public responsibility, and should be publicly steered and supported. Higher education is all too often presented as an expense. Higher education is a general interest of all people, as it contributes to the common good by increasing the general level of education in society. Higher education is a value that should not become subject to economic speculation and prey to the ideologies of privatisation and the shrinking of the state" (ESU 2013).

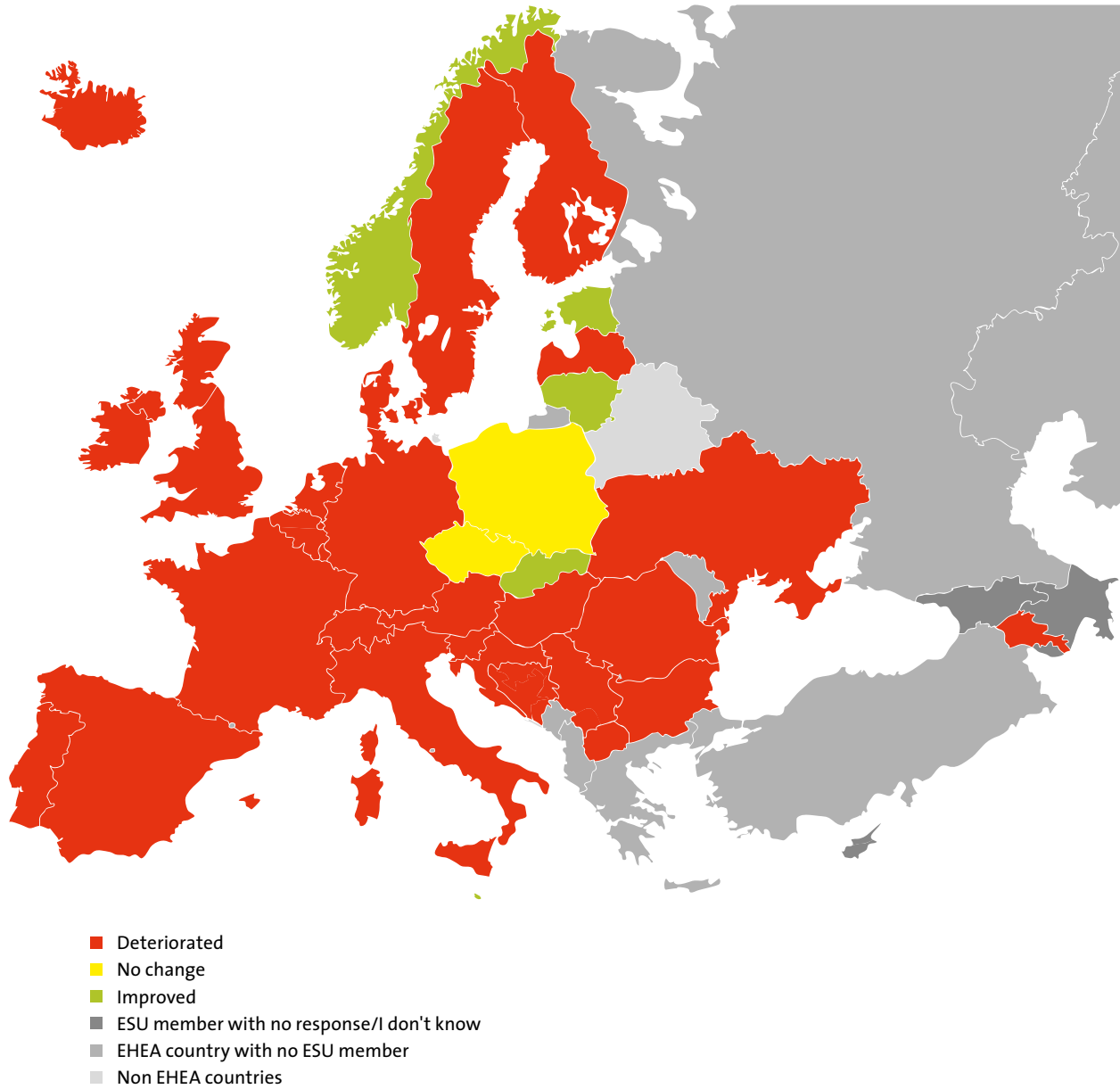
In this chapter we will examine the changing trends in the funding of HE and student finance systems, explore the impact of recent cuts and changes and draw conclusions and recommendations for the future.

10.2 MAIN FINDINGS

STUDENT FINANCE

The financial situation for many students has been turbulent in recent years as support systems have been negatively affected by budget cuts, families' income has decreased and with inflation, the cost of living has grown.

fig. 16 Financial situation of students



When asked how the financial situation for students in their country has changed since 2012, 31 of the 38 responding NUSes said the situation has deteriorated. Many respondents stated the economic crisis and austerity cuts have been the basis for the deteriorating state of students' financial situations. NSUM (Macedonia) and DSF (Denmark) explained that the barriers preventing students from working alongside their study is a significant factor making their financial situation worse.

A growing reliance on loans and less employment prospects following graduation leaves students and graduates with more debt and less working opportunities, a specific concern for ANSA (Armenia) and SFS (Sweden).

Cuts to support schemes, including accommodation support and aid for living costs, are affecting students greatly in Austria, the UK, Ireland and Iceland. USI (Ireland) has run a campaign to engage with government to tackle an accommodation crisis in its larger cities with housing shortages and soaring rents marginalising students. In countries where the student support schemes have not been reduced, the situation for students is still deteriorating as support is not increased in line with inflation and increased living costs.

TRENDS OF RISING FEES AND SHRINKING GRANTS WERE EVIDENT ACROSS EUROPE

Of the six countries which said the situation has improved for students, Estonia, Norway and Malta reported an increase in student grants as having a positive effect. The economic prosperity in Slovakia has led to a better situation for students, and Hungary has also seen slight improvements in the past three years. In Lithuania, LSS says the decrease in student numbers has not been matched by any decrease in funding, so the overall expenditure per student has increased.

When analysing the answers of ESU's member unions, the clear connection between cuts in students' financing and students' overall financial well-being has become obvious. On the other hand, where grants have been increased, the situation has been less tense. Additional pressure has been put on students through less possibilities to work beside their studies. These two factors in combination are especially aggravating the situation for students whose socio-economic background does not allow the compensation of those shortcomings. The representation of students with lower socio-economic background in higher education is increasingly endangered, as they are furthermore the students to be most affected by the increasing debts resulting of the ongoing shift from grants to loans.

HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING

Students are also experiencing difficulties due to their Universities facing cuts and budget decreases. The following is taken from the focus groups held in January 2015 in Jerusalem. Participants were invited to explain the main issues effecting the funding of Higher Education Institutions in their country. The effects from many years of austerity measures and budget cuts were particularly worrying for some countries. In Ireland nearly 80% of the higher education budget is ring fenced for staff pay, leaving front line services and important supports to take the most serious cuts and though the fees have risen to €3000 a year for domestic students the HEIs are still starved of funding. HEIs in Portugal, Latvia and Spain are also struggling with decreased funding due to austerity. In Romania the 6% target for GDP investment in HE is not being met with current levels less than 4%. Though the funding has not been cut as severely in Austria issues are arising as funding is not aligned to demand which is increasing. The sources of funding is an issue in Switzerland with private funding linked to commercial bodies contributing to negative commodification practices. Another problem is seen in Poland where funding is being targeted to certain disciplines, leaving subjects within the humanities grossly underfunded.

fig. 17 Impact of changes to criteria for grants and loans



When completing the BWSE survey NUSES were asked if the commitment of "securing the highest possible level of public funding for higher education and drawing on other appropriate sources, as an investment in our future" in Bucharest Communiqué 2012 had an impact on their higher education system. Of the 36 responding NUSES 31 said no, 3 did not know and 2 said yes, EUL (Estonia) and ANSA (Armenia). EUL linked this commitment to the recent abolishment of tuition fees and ANSA noted a new loan scheme is being proposed. Some of the other respondents, who indicated no impact, explained that public funding has been cut and discussions of Bologna in relation to funding do not happen.

10.3 CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

In 2012, the Bucharest Ministerial Conference committed to the idea of higher education as a public good and public responsibility (EHEA 2012). They have also committed to improving the social dimension and creating inclusive learning environments. These commitments demand a higher education system that provides students with a sufficient framework that enables them to thrive throughout their entire learning process. Unfortunately these commitments have not been followed up. We've witnessed a higher education system in Europe unfairly affected by austerity measures, grants have been cut or not adjusted to inflation and loans have been introduced in their place. The financial burden is often increasingly shifted to students' families, which especially affects those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and other underrepresented groups, contrary to commitments made in the social dimension on improving access specifically for these groups (EHEA 2009, 2010, 2012)

The system is grossly underfunded in many countries leading HEIs to seek private or commercial funding including tuition fees and other practises which are commodifying higher education.

10.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- In order to ensure accessibility and quality of education for all students' regardless of their background, higher education must be regarded as a public responsibility and public good. The financing of higher education and students must be prioritised as an area of investment with great impact to the progress in society.
- Students must be provided adequate support through publicly funded grants. These must be seen as an investment in the future by supporting students in their efforts to become active members not only of the labour market, but of society as a whole.
- Student support through grants must be preferred over loans. The consequences of the rising debt of graduates cannot yet be fully predicted but are highly likely to be exceptionally pressing for those from a lower socio-economic background.
- Adequate and comprehensive funding of HE systems as committed to by the Ministers in "securing the highest possible level of public funding for higher education and drawing on other appropriate sources, as an investment in our future" in Bucharest Communiqué 2012 without the burden falling on families.

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11 EMPLOYABILITY

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Employability was first mentioned in the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998 becoming one of the key ideas behind of a harmonised European higher education system (REF). The definition of employability has been changing ever since, gaining new forms and contexts. In the Bologna Declaration signed on 19 June, 1999, employability was referred to as “citizens employability” (3), while in Prague Communiqué signed 19 May, 2001, it was clarified as “graduate employability” (Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education: 2).

The urge to recover from the economic crisis, together with the unemployment rates in Europe, have brought employability back to the centre of attention. The understanding of employability largely depends on the national and institutional contexts. Thus, discussions on (un)employment rates have been increasingly linked to education, becoming one of the indicators of quality education provision at higher education institutions. This approach requires an immediate reaction to remind decision-makers of the multiple purposes of higher education. Higher education prepares students not only for employment, but for life as active citizens in democratic societies, as well as in their personal development and the development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base.

However, education and employability should not be seen as disconnected processes. Although the labour market must not steer higher education in any way, cooperation with stakeholders should provide a sufficient information flow between higher education institutions, employers, teachers, students and wider society in order to improve graduates’ chances in the labour market and in further learning. European students are in support of a curriculum reform that is combined with quality work placements, traineeships or internships through the European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships, support services for seeking employment and stakeholder consultation alongside adequate graduate tracking.

Students in Europe have created a unique definition of employability that embraces all of the different aspects on the concept:

“Employability is a broad concept, which includes subject-specific, methodological, social and individual competences, which enable graduates to successfully take up and pursue a profession/employment and empower their lifelong-learning. Employability is also about making graduates more likely to gain employment in their chosen field(s), being able to create/start new businesses, and being able to develop and succeed in their occupations.” (ESU 2014)

The following is a set of excerpts from “Student advancement of graduates employability: Student Handbook on Employability” and “Student advancement of graduates employability: Employability With Students’ Eyes” from the project “Student Advancement of Employability (Student Advancement of Graduates Employability—SAGE)”.

11.2 MAIN FINDINGS

The links between education and employment are numerous and multi-faceted:

INTERNSHIPS FOR PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

In some countries, internships are a mandatory part of study programmes, while in others, students must choose if they would like to participate in an internship. Alternatively, internships take place after studies have been completed in certain countries. Whether the internship is paid or not, depends on the specific higher education institution, study programme or field of study and even how the student manages to negotiate the terms and conditions of the internship. Likewise, the quality and level of responsibility differ from one internship to another. As the aim of internships is to challenge and provide students with extra knowledge and opportunities, internships should be well-planned and taken seriously by the hosting part of the internship. The role higher education institutions play in ensuring good quality internships should be debated within the institutions. Alarming, the practice of unpaid internships has become increasingly common, partly as a result of the economic crisis.

Students supposed lack of experience is now often used as a pretext to offer internships, as opposed to permanent employment contracts to graduates. Internships are of considerable value to employers: they enable a company to test potential recruits, they offer a way of circumventing rigid labour laws in certain countries, and they often mean reduced overhead costs related to the activities performed by interns. Meanwhile, the intern gains learning experience, in some cases irrelevant to the field of study, and may or may not have the opportunity to make sectorial contacts in the area in which he or she undertakes the internship. Such forms of activity provide little to no security and usually low levels of income, thus they become problematic if prolonged.

NEED FOR DATA COLLECTION

In 2007, there was an agreement on the need for data collection on employability, in order to have it included in the stocktaking report (Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education 2007). At the time, the Bologna Follow-Up Working Group on Employability identified a series of outstanding issues related to the employability of graduates, such as the over-supply in a few sectors. It also identified issues of access and the issue of cycle employability as important points to be raised in any comprehensive debate on education and employability (EHEA 2009). While discussing employability and the Bologna Process, one of the most interesting aspects to look at is that of current and potential links with various Bologna action lines and developments, as well as multiple European Union political initiatives. Employability in itself is both influenced by and influential for the way in which Bologna-inspired educational reforms are carried out.

Employability is also a prominent goal for most governments, especially since this is perceived as return on investment considering the high deficits that most Western European governments run. As a result, there has been an increased tendency for governments to look at higher education from an economic perspective. This has been considerably evident when budget cuts have been made during the recent financial crisis, especially the fields of humanities and social science have been disproportionately affected, now being perceived as less economically rewarding.

This increasing focus on the subject of employability by governments and political stakeholders has often met with strong, negative reactions from other educational stakeholders. This has been quite characteristic of the student movement, for ex-

ample, with most ESU debates on the topic emphasising the importance of keeping academic values at the core of education as opposed to transforming HEIs into agents for economic developments as such.

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT HIGHER THAN GENERAL UNEMPLOYMENT

On the issue of youth unemployment, It is also important to note that there are significant fluctuations in how this rate is calculated. However, the clear trend for most countries is a rate of youth unemployment at least twice that of the national average.

PART TIME JOBS INCREASED

In addition to the disparity between general and youth unemployment, the issue of quality of work must also be addressed. The total employment rate has fallen, and within the diminishing category of working people, the share of those that worked part-time increased. The share of part-time workers rose from 18,8% to 20,0% between 2008 and 2012, with steeper increases recorded in several central and eastern European countries (especially the Baltics), Ireland, Spain, Italy and Finland, all above EU-27 average. In many EU countries the share of people working part-time is now above 25%. This includes Germany and the United Kingdom; the countries that have had the best results in fighting unemployment, indicating that low unemployment often masks tricks that distribute work among more part-time employees.

EMPLOYABILITY WITHIN THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

Employability was one of the core objectives of the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998, with the creation of a European Higher Education Area being seen as a way of promoting the mobility and employability of citizens. In the Sorbonne Declaration, employability was also identified as one of the positive outcomes of having set comparable degrees across a European Area of education (1998). Employability has remained in the Bologna Process during the following years in several communiqués (Conference of Ministers Responsible for Education 2001, 2007, 2009, 2012), and implicitly through the use of the transparency tools created, also for enhancing a better employability (e.g. the Diploma Supplement).

QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

One major development that has the capacity to improve the graduate employability is the development of qualifications frameworks. By creating a set of comparable frameworks across Europe, employers can have a better and clearer image of higher education, but of course, it is vital that public administrations and higher education institutions inform the wider public on the importance of the frameworks and their potential use. In the long run, the use of newly developed Bologna transparency tools has the capacity to ensure that all learning outcomes students attain during their studies can be recognised for employment purposes. This will help stop situations in which the confusing name of a programme can hinder the employability prospects of a graduate, for instance.

National qualifications frameworks facilitate access from Vocational Education and Training and other forms of education to higher education and vice-versa creating a smoother permeability between both sectors. At the same time, students of Europe agree that further implementation and development of student learning outcomes, as well as assessment methods and criteria is vital for the enhancement of employability and the paradigm shift toward student-centred learning. In order to further implement and improve the student-centred system, it is crucial to look into the implementation of ECTS, estimation of workload and formulation of learning outcomes.

DIPLOMA SUPPLEMENT AND RECOGNITION

One of the most important Bologna tools in fostering greater employability, and especially transnational employability, is the recognition of qualifications and short-duration cross-border studies. This recognition extends the employment opportunities available to students and graduates by offering them access to a pan-European labour market. The Lisbon Recognition Convention set out the basic principles behind the process of recognition. Thus far, all the Bologna signatories except Greece ratified it.

There are numerous tools and political initiatives emerging from the Bologna Process that have been to a great degree, been oriented toward improving the communication with the wider society. The Diploma Supplement is aimed at better describing the exact learning achievements of students that undergo a certain program. Still, there is little evidence that the tool has been taken up by employers as a simpler method to evaluate students' learning experiences.

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR-LEARNING (RPL)

RPL, whether acquired through formal, informal or non-formal education, promotes flexible access routes and learning pathways in higher education. When it comes to the transition to working life, recognising the skills one has acquired outside of formal education, provides one with more experience to begin with and an ever more diverse set of competences. The right to have one's skills recognised, regardless of the context in which they were acquired, would likely affect students' choice and length of study, motivation to study, as well as completion rates of different learners.

SOCIAL DIMENSION—EDUCATION IMPROVES EMPLOYABILITY

This comparison seems to point to a result that vindicates the impact of a university education on the chances that a person has to gain an employment. In 2012, the then EU-27, less than six percent of people with a higher education degree were unemployed. The gap was quite wide when compared with graduates of secondary education and with those of primary education only, which had by far the highest rate of unemployment. The results appear clear-cut: the more educated a person is, the greater chances one has of being employed. Thus, access to higher education has been one of the best tools in terms of breaking cycles of poverty, and part of the reason for this is the fact that it offers still greater employment opportunities than lower levels of education (Attewell, et.al. 2007).

SKILLS

High unemployment levels have brought attention to the qualities higher education graduates have, or do not have. Furthermore, the forecast that by 2020, 20% more jobs will require higher level skills has turned attention also to concerns of skills mismatch, where the supply of graduates does not match the demands of the labour market, and employers are considering a number of graduates "overqualified".

RIGHT SET OF SKILLS AND NEEDS

The latest European-level document to discuss the topic of skills is in the European Commission communication "Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes". The communication states that, "Investment in education and training for skills development is essential to boost growth and competitiveness, skills determine Europe's capacity to

increase productivity and that, in the long-term skills can trigger innovation and growth, move production up the value chain, stimulate the concentration of higher level skills in the EU and shape the future labour market” (European Commission 2012).

MISMATCH

However, it is not always about the lack of demand. “In 2010 and 2011, high unemployment levels co-existed with increased difficulties in filling vacancies” (European Commission 2011). This situation was generated by the mismatches in the labour market, which can be due to inadequate skills, limited geographic mobility and inadequate wage conditions. Therefore it is important to note which factors influence the mismatches while discussing skills and the mismatch existing today.

Skills mismatch is created by a number of components. It is the outcome of the complex interplay between the supply and demand of skills within a market economy, both of which are constantly affected by adjustment lags and market failures and are shaped by the contextual conditions prevailing (e.g. demographics, technological progress, institutional settings) (European Commission 2012).

Mismatches can also be created by the lack of flexibility in education and training systems, for instance due to slowness or unwillingness of educational institutions to respond to labour market signals, inadequate student guidance, insufficient validation of non-formal and informal learning and inadequate continuing training at company and sector level. It is generally believed that the mismatch has increased as an outcome of the crisis, when in reality the mismatch has remained quite stable, at around 20% between 2000 and 2010, despite the growing participation rates and massification of higher education. This suggests that over-qualification rates are influenced more by labour market structures and the lack of innovation in business and industry than by the growing number of students.

Hence the forecasting of skills and reforming higher education according to the needs of the labour market and skills predictions should be carefully rethought. According to CEDEFOP, temporary, over-education is not necessarily a problem (2012). Better-qualified people have a better chance of keeping a job and, once in employment, they may be more innovative and change the nature of the job they are doing. Highly skilled people may also find it easier to transfer skills gained in one sector to a job in another. The OECD study in adults’ skills suggests that the higher the level of education is, the higher the level of skills is (2013). In return, this enhances one’s level of trust in others, political efficacy or the sense of influence on the political process, participation in associative, religious, political or charity activities (volunteering) and self-assessed health status.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that generally speaking, obtaining a higher education degree is to the benefit of the individual, society and labour market. Rather than looking at the exact numbers of graduates in each field, the focus should be on the type of skills, or competences, that enhance the opportunities for finding work, regardless of the study field or background.

The labour market is not static and the “right” skills change over time and in different places (CEDEFOP 2012). While the demand for a specific set of skills is linked closely to the changes that happen in the economy, the supply of skills is driven by different economic and social incentives and choices made by schools, students and even their parents. When there are highly skilled workers available, companies are encouraged and enabled to adopt new technologies and ways of working. The OECD notes that better cognitive and interpersonal skills are going to be required more in the future, but making more detailed projections at the occupational or industrial level are difficult. Projections can be used to provide additional information, but shouldn’t be used for detailed manpower planning (OECD 2012).

However, it is important to note when discussing developing labour markets that jobs that are good for national or regional development are not the same everywhere, as is noted by the World Bank (2012). For this reason, one cannot take for example, the European level skills forecasts as a given and apply them in every country. Although they provide a general picture of the direction Europe is heading, countries and regions in Europe are arguably in different situations when it comes to the structure of their economies and the needs of their labour markets.

STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE—PLANNING STUDIES

Personal study planning refers to long-term planning of the studies. Typically it includes planning of the content, extent and duration of the studies. It takes into account how and when the student plans on completing certain parts of the studies, whether they would like to participate in a mobility period, and what may affect the completion of their studies. The skills students gain are the same as the competences or learning outcomes, which is all a part of what one wishes to acquire over their study time. Hence personal study planning is needs to be taken into account when discussing how learning outcomes and students' aspirations can and will be met, as well as the acquisition of skills.

No uniform way of conducting study planning takes place, and it is understood in various ways. Whether one is required to plan for the whole duration of their studies or only at the time of choosing electives, are two very different matters. The link between the planning of one's own studies and the successful completion of studies should be researched in order to know the real effect such a method could have on the completion of studies. It could be assumed that when one has the option to choose and plan the conduct of their studies and is required to reflect on the choices they have, one's motivation increases as a result.

Being able to plan and choose one's own curricula, studies and in the end, learning outcomes will influence and improve the preparation of graduates towards employability as acquisition of skills can be enhanced.

COOPERATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

In order to grasp employability in all its meanings, it is necessary to be reminded about the diversity of the types of higher education institutions and programmes, complex and changing labour markets and diverse needs of graduates and employers, and hold on to them. The European Higher Education Area has been promoting cooperation and open discussion with different stakeholders on higher education reforms, in order to facilitate harmonisation of diverse educational systems. Cooperation between institutions, graduates, students, teachers, governments, employers, organisations and other sectors of education (i.e. primary, general secondary, VET, adult education) must take place when discussing and making decisions about the enhancement of employability. Employability is a dynamic process influenced by the versatility of factors that come from inside and outside of education, thus "if any of the stakeholders is [sic.] left out, the complexity of the issue will not be fully addressed and some problems may be overlooked (i.e. readability of qualifications by employers)" (Vukasović 2006).

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Entrepreneurship should be seen as an additional method to develop students' transversal skills, and not simply as a solution to graduate unemployment. ESU believes that entrepreneurship should not be a mandatory part of all curricula. However, entrepreneurial studies should be provided upon the student's request. Graduates should be provided with financial support and incentives in order to improve conditions for start-ups (ESU 2014).

11.3 CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Narrow definitions of employability that focus on short term goals, individual benefits and education as a private good undermine the key role that higher education plays in the democratic development of the society. Misconceptions of employability hinder the development of academic values in higher education and are a threat because they encourage increased commodification and privatisation within the system. These two concepts are quite similar and both of them refer to the instrumentalisation and the changing perception of education as purely an economic factor and a resource for prosperity.

The consequences of these threats are elitist approaches to higher education, reflecting in cuts to the national budgets for education, the introduction of tuition fees and limited access to higher education (Frederiksen & Vuksanović 2013). When budget cuts pressure higher education institutions to perform more with less, they must then justify the different purposes that they serve. Whether that is training people for active citizenship, facilitating social mobility, improving skills needed in the labour market or conducting high-quality research, these activities are weighted against one another in a competition for funds and in creating a more efficient education system (Moisander 2013). One cannot help but wonder about the true efficiency of such educational system, its sustainability and ability to serve multiple, concomitant purposes.

Employability is also about making graduates more likely to gain employment in their chosen field(s), facilitating their ability to create/start new businesses and their ability to develop and succeed in their occupations. Employability cannot be fixed in a one-time effort, but must be constantly enhanced and adapted to the needs of the society.

Employability does not mean matching educational and labour markets, companies defining contents and teaching methods, training in the routines of everyday work nor pure work experience. Employable higher education graduates have a qualification with knowledge of the theories and methods of their disciplines, the ability to apply their knowledge on the job in order to assess and solve problems and develop new qualifications, have acquired relevant soft skills and the ability to recognise their own training needs (ESU 2014).

11.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Higher education is about employability, not employment
Employability should always be defined in a broad sense, taking into account factors from inside and outside of higher education. The difference between employability, the ability to learn and ability to gain employment, and employment, the actual acquisition of a job, should always be kept in mind in decision-making processes.
- Higher education should not be designed to directly match labor market needs
Higher education should rather be tailored according to the needs of the society as a whole and recognise and keep in mind the complexity and diversity of educational programmes, disciplines and professions when discussing enhancement of employability of graduates.
- Access to higher education is essential for improving employability
The link between employability and social dimension should be strengthened by opening and improving access to higher education for students and learners coming from underrepresented groups.

- ◉ Automatic recognition must be implemented for countries that have the Bologna structural reforms in place. Automatic recognition of academic, comparable degrees should be fully endorsed, however, not at the expense of autonomy of higher education institutions. Also, recognition of Prior Learning and Student Portfolio System should be fully endorsed by the institutions which should also not abandon the development of general skills.
- ◉ Take into account students' expectations toward their studies. Countries must develop mechanisms that ask for students' expectations toward their studies in order to improve success and knowledge of the disciplines and programs of the studies for current and prospective students.
- ◉ Cooperation between higher education stakeholders and society in institutions can be useful for the enhancement of employability, but must be approached with care. Stakeholders can contribute with important knowledge and participate in discussions about the design and delivery of higher education programs, but the decision-making power must always rest with institutions.
- ◉ Educational quality or success of higher education institutions should not be measured in terms of employment. For the overarching policy targets on social dimension, lifelong learning, and employability, clear and concrete indicators should be developed and tied to the national targets. Data collection and analysis must be improved on the European level, including independent alternatives to the current stock-taking exercise, which is far too dependent on governments' own perceptions.
- ◉ Improve communication and guidance on higher education and the EHEA. While the structure of higher education systems is being reformed, little is being done to make it comprehensible to the wider public, especially students and employers. It is crucial for ministers to commit to establishing credible and easy to use guidance systems for different actors in higher education and to communicate what the EHEA is about.

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12 THE FUTURE OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

12.1 INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that the Bologna Process has changed since its beginning over 15 years ago. Gradually there have been more and more debates about what the future of the Bologna Process will hold. At the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) meeting in Athens in Spring of 2014, the issue of the future of the Bologna Process was brought to the table, and it's now slated to be one of the most key debates at the ministerial conference in Yerevan, May 2015. With each of the commitments made, reform and implementation has been slowing down. There is a growing perception that the Bologna Process is at a standstill, and not enough is being done to ensure the success of the set out commitments from the side of the countries or within the Process itself.

The following presents an overview of what students perceive as the path that the Bologna Process has taken and major challenges as it stands now, their views on how these challenges can be overcome and how they would like to see for the future.

12.2 MAIN FINDINGS

There were several main findings when National Unions of Students (NUS) were asked about the future of the Bologna Process and the general implementation process of Bologna reforms. They can be structured into the main challenges they believe require redress, followed by their perceptions on what should come for the future.

MAIN CHALLENGES

Students named a number of challenges of the Bologna Process and the implementation of the reforms necessary for fulfilling the commitments that have been made. Among other notable facts, only 4 out of 38 unions reported that they very much agree that all of the Bologna reforms have been implemented in their country, and there were no unions that agreed very much that all of the Bologna reforms implemented have been well implemented or of high quality. Other challenges mentioned are a lack of resources, lack of knowledge, lack of interest and an interest in only part of the reforms.

LACK OF RESOURCES

A general lack of funding is highlighted as the main barrier towards full implementation of the Bologna process reforms. Over two-thirds of the countries, a total of 26, cite funding as the main barrier towards full implementation of the aims and reforms set out in the Bologna process.

LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

The other main challenge that a majority of respondents highlighted was a lack of knowledge about the Bologna reforms. As the Bologna Process has existed since 1999, it is easy to imagine that there may have been large changes in personnel both within the governments and higher education institutions, which could mean both high turnover in the knowledge-base and changes in policy.

This couples with the fact that several countries highlight that there is a lack of a long-term vision from governments about how the higher education system should look like, and a lack of understanding about the entire idea about the Bologna Process.

LACK OF INTEREST

The lack of interest requires further analysis. Would there still be a lack of interest if the level of knowledge was higher and the amount of funding for such reforms were higher? One respondent highlighted the view of their government towards the Bologna process as “yesterday’s problem”. Others mentioned that there is a perception that they are “ahead” so it is not prioritised as much as it should be. Among the groups mentioned lacking interest, the highest percentage are the teachers, higher education institutions and students themselves. Having a top-down approach from governments into the classrooms, not involving the grassroots in the decision-making and implementation and not communicating the objectives of the Process and its reforms may be damaging the interest of both universities, teachers and students alike.

INTEREST IN ONLY PART OF THE REFORMS

Many of the countries were also shown only to be interested in implementing part of the Bologna reforms, in total 17 countries were shown to only be interested in partial reform. These are Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, Croatia, Sweden, France, Slovakia, Spain, Latvia, the United Kingdom, Belgium (French Community), Norway, Germany, Switzerland, Poland, Portugal, Malta and Macedonia. This raises a major issue for the future of the Bologna process. Will the reforms and commitments work if countries are not interested in implementing all reforms? What can be done to make countries more interested in implementing the full reforms?

WHAT DO THEY WANT?

RESTRUCTURING OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

Over half of the countries would like to see the Bologna Process revitalised, with a more clear distinction between the EHEA and the Bologna Process, and a several speeds process with an added value. The main challenge they see for the Bologna Process in upcoming years (2015-2018) remains the need to “ensure that all countries finish implementing the targets” (Finland) and “the differences in implementation in different countries” (Bosnia & Herzegovina), ensure “the proper implementation of the Bologna Process” (Slovakia) and “a real functioning of the Bologna Process” (Poland). LSA Latvia mentioned specifically the need for “rearranging the structures-making a two- or more-speed Bologna Process and defining stronger criteria to enter the EHEA”.

PEER-LEARNING

The need for more knowledge is an often-mentioned challenge, as already highlighted above. Twenty-five of the NUSES want to see the Bologna Process become more of a forum for peer-learning. We can see that those who wish to see these are also very much the same unions highlighting the lack of knowledge as the main challenge to full implementation of the Bologna process.

WORTH NOTING

A full seven National Unions' of Students want the European Union (EU) to take over the Bologna process. While far from the view of the majority it is worth noting that this view also exists. There have been several research articles that highlight the increased involvement of the EU in matters regarding higher education (Keeling 2006, Robertson 2010). The EU has also played a large role in commissioning a number of research studies and providing grants for projects that have fed into or been based on the Bologna Process. Will this development lead to increased disinterest of the EU countries to engage in the Bologna process? If a two-speed process is already developing, how do we ensure the participation of non-EU countries in common reforms to education?

12.3 CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

While there are many challenges towards the process we can still see that is a strong interest and hope for the future. Nearly all of our unions see the need to revitalise the process, as it has played a large role in improving the higher education systems in all of Europe, yet there are overarching issues, such as a general lack of implementation and a declining interest among some key stakeholders. With the upcoming discussions on the future of the Bologna Process at the Ministerial Meeting to be held this year, is clear that there are changes that need to be made, and a holistic view of how to tackle the challenges must be the guiding force for change.

Reviewing the structures of the Bologna Process and looking into ways to motivate and incentivise member countries to strengthen their efforts in implementation and ensure continued cooperation will be necessary in the revitalisation process. In strengthening cooperation and implementation, arranging peer-learning exercises and high-level trainings is a key factor that students mention. In both restructuring and providing trainings, countries must assume their responsibility in providing adequate funding to ensure that the structures are sustainable and the reforms are implemented properly; commitments which ministers have made, but many have not followed-up on.

12.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Restructure the Bologna process

Different countries have joined the process at different times, and there are differences in the extent to which different member countries have implemented the action lines. While some countries are still focusing on the implementation of the structural reforms, those who have already implemented them are willing to continue the further development of the cooperation within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). There is no doubt that there is a need for change, and a two-speed process should be considered for the future of the Bologna Process and the sustainability of cooperation in the EHEA.

Furthermore, European Students' Union (ESU) encourages the BFUG to explore possibilities for a permanent Bologna Secretariat that would be responsible for supporting other structures of the Bologna Process. The Bologna Secretariat should not be handed to any single European institution, country or organisation, but should rather rely on the collective support of the participating Bologna countries and organisations.

More attention also needs to be put on the governance of the Bologna process and the EHEA. The decisions on the steering of the process should be reserved for the Bologna ministerial meetings; however ESU believes that the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) should be given an even stronger voice during the entire process. The working groups should discuss the issues in-depth, prepare the background information and propose the issues to be discussed in the BFUG, while the visionary decisions are made at the ministerial conference (ESU, 2013)

- Promote training for teachers and academics about the Bologna process

Ensuring common knowledge, training and understanding of teachers themselves is one of the major challenges that remains for the Bologna process. Policy-makers and key players must also look into how reforms are implemented. Successful implementation and reform should ultimately result in changes in the classroom and in students' daily lives. If the implementation is an entirely top-down process without the involvement of those at the grassroots, reforms can be met with a lack of interest and understanding, or worse yet, resistance.

- Ensure adequate funding and take advantage of existing opportunities

The European Union funds several initiatives that are related to the Bologna process directly or indirectly. This is done through the Erasmus+ programme which has action lines directly related to Bologna. The Horizon2020 programme also has funds that can benefit Bologna reform initiatives. Education is also now included as an opportunity for funding through the structural funds. Far from all countries take advantage of these opportunities, and very few take advantage of them fully or consistently.

Countries themselves must also take responsibility for the process that they have agreed to be members of. The meetings, peer learning activities, the structures of the Bologna Process and its further development must be funded adequately. A fund should be established to support the permanent structures and common projects and events on relevant topics, allowing a more diverse group of countries to participate and take the lead in the follow-up activities. A serious evaluation of how to ensure the continuity and sustainability of the Process, as well as ensuring proper implementation of the reforms themselves cannot happen without the financial support of all member countries.

- Ensure quality national Bologna Follow-up groups

In order to achieve proper implementation on the national level, all member countries should establish (or continue) a structure with decision-making power that would include all stakeholders (akin the BFUG) that would be responsible for the implementation and follow-up of the reforms while respecting the autonomy of higher education institutions. Students, academic staff and institutional leadership and management bear the brunt of any change and thus should be part of any discussion and decision.

- Better data collection and analysis

While the current implementation and progress reports have contributed to accelerating the reform by exposing the countries' evolution, at present, it is largely only the governments of the countries themselves that do the reporting. ESU sees the need for an independent monitoring and reporting mechanism. Objective indicators, based on the values of the Bologna Process, should be developed. The BFUG should develop methodology to complement the current reports with better data gathering from different sources of information at the national level and not just ministerial officials. Together with improved data gathering and analysis, this would present the basis for further discussion and actions, however these indicators should not be used as a tool for incentive management of students or institutions.

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14 COMMONLY USED ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Meaning
BFUG	Bologna Follow-Up Group
BWSE	Bologna With Student Eyes
BA	Bachelor's degree
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EHEA QF	European Higher Education Area Qualifications Framework
EI	Education International
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
ESU	European Students' Union
EU	the European Union
EUA	European University Association
EURASHE	European Association of Institutions in Higher education
QF	Qualification Framework
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for higher education
E4	Stakeholders' group integrated by institutions, EUA and EURASHE; students, ESU; and quality assurance agencies, ENQA.
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
LLL	Lifelong Learning
LO	Learning Outcomes
MA	Master's degree
NESET	Network of Experts on Social Aspects of Education and Training
NESSIE	Network of Experts on Student Support in Europe
NUS	National Union of Students
NQF	National Qualification Framework
PASCL	Peer-Assessment of Student-Centered Learning
QA	Quality Assurance
RPL	Prior Learning Recognition
SAGE	Student Advancement of Graduates' Employability
SCL	Student-Centred Learning

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