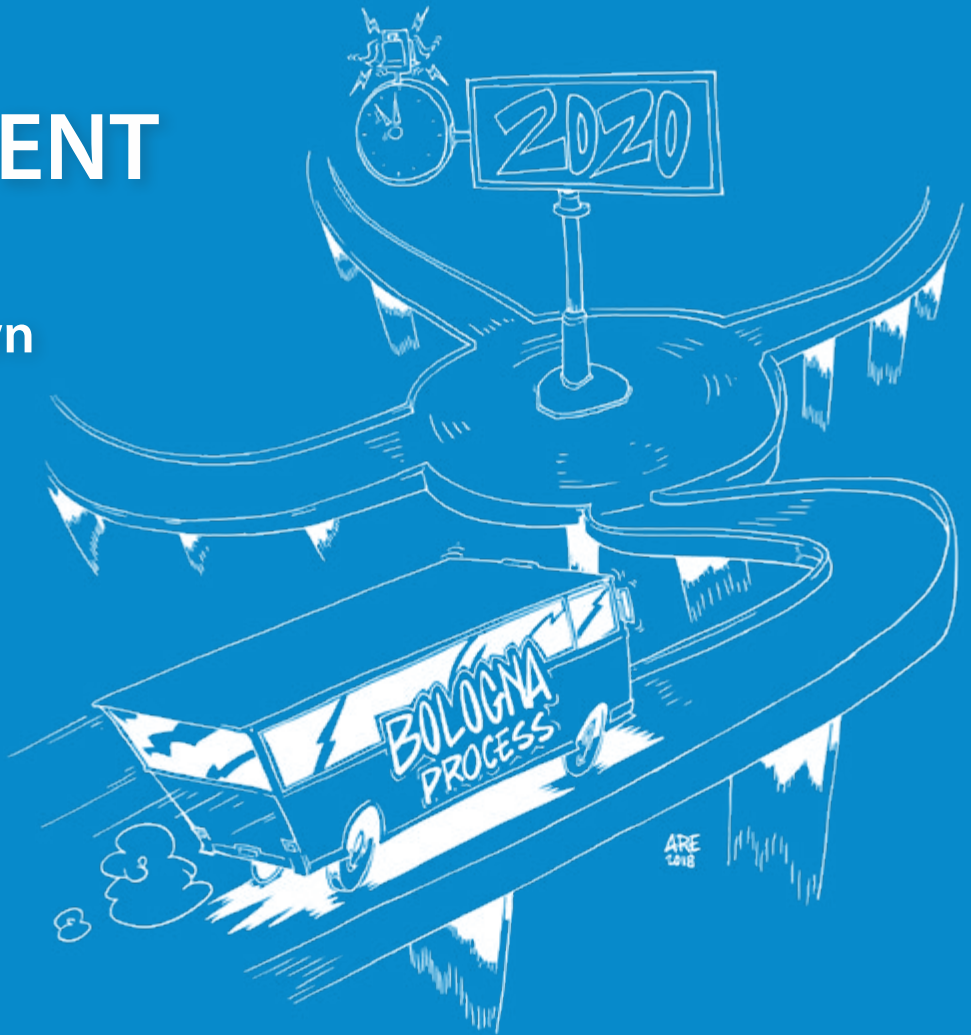


BOLOGNA WITH STUDENT EYES 2018

The Final Countdown



IMPRINT

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1 INTRODUCTORY WORDS

The tall metal fences upraised in 2015, marking the borders & dividing regions, illustrated the unspoken division of populations; “us” and “them”. A frightening sight. Frightening since it opposed the previous concept of a region in peace. Through these fences the future of Europe was changed. Three years have passed, fences have become walls, politics further became inward looking and cross border collaboration weakened. The alternative narrative of division has grown stronger and stronger everyday spreading fear in our societies.



We are convinced that education plays a crucial role in counteracting the fear, segregation and alternative narratives by the international nature of it. We recognise the Bologna Process as a tool fostering collaboration, trust and understanding. Although more has to be done. More in terms of enactment of the foundation endorsed in 1999 by the adoption of the Bologna communique and the subsequent communiqués. More in terms of bringing knowledge into our societies. More in terms as active citizens. More in terms of the democratic right of expressing ourselves, regardless of the national governments’ preferences. More in terms of independent Student Unions. More in terms of students as co drivers of the future of the Bologna Process.

Amongst many others, we predicted the end of the Bologna Process in 2010 whilst hoping for a continuation. We claim once again that the end is near, nevertheless we anticipate a forthcoming. Forthcoming with a strong emphasis on implementation of the agreed commitments, the social dimension and respect of fundamental values of the Bologna Process. The process might be taking its last breath, but the Area has a great future ahead. Bologna with Student Eyes 2018 - the final countdown is our view on what we wish for to be addressed at the Paris Ministerial Conference and followed up on in Italy 2020. We understand that all the challenges our societies face cannot be conquered by the Bologna Process, but we hope that the will to co-create, build trust and recognition across borders can inspire the deconstruction of the walls dividing Europe.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Caroline Sundberg'.

Caroline Sundberg, ESU Vice President



2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the process most commonly known as the Bologna Process is a voluntary process building an area with the use of common tools shaped as higher education reforms in order to foster mobility and employability. The European Students Union (ESU) reviews the implementation since 2003 with the Bologna with Student Eyes publication in order to bring the Students' voice to the Ministerial tables; both European Higher Education Areas and the National governments.

The student's perception of implementation of commonly agreed Bologna reforms differs from the one of the ministry's. Sometimes because of lack of student involvement in the implementation process. Sometimes because of different perceptions due to power imbalance. Sometimes because of the will to not have a bad review internationally. Regardless of the root in different perceptions of implementation the students' voices gained more and more audience during the past 15 years of the publication. A welcomed audience in regards to the supposed purpose; making higher education better for the future generations of Students.

Furthermore, implementation according to the members of ESU operating in EHEA countries, does not always comply with satisfaction. Reforms might be implemented, but the low quality and poor implementation generates dissatisfaction and mistrust of the National Unions of Students. The articles that follow disseminate the concept of implementation of agreed Bologna commitments in 38 EHEA countries and provides recommendations on how to overcome the identified obstacles.

2.1 THE FINAL COUNTDOWN

The Bologna Process is at its end. At least that is one of the conclusions drawn by the authors based on the data collected contrasted with external research. What if the period 2018-2020 is the last? What needs to be done?

Reciprocally for all reforms analysed in this publication; financial means need to be allocated. Finances that were re-allocated or removed as a solution to the 2008 financial crises need to be re-invested in order for change to take place. In order for a more heterogeneous group of students to access and complete a higher education, greater financial supports have to be made available. Support systems financial and structural need to be invested to allow more students to be mobile. In order for the paradigm shift from traditional- to Student centred learning to take place, investment in the teacher's pedagogical development and learning environments needs to be made. The lack of finances or the method of funding student Unions is also part of what needs to be rethought in order to have a strong student voice. A strong loud voice in the Institutional governance, quality assurance process and national advocacy work.

In the 2015 edition of Bologna with Student Eyes a call for “a restructuring to ensure proper implementation” was issued. The call still stands. The lack or poor implementation harms the core development of an Area based on trust complicates for the students to get their credits recognised cross the borders. Regardless of the forthcoming period(s) of the Bologna Process, the issue of trust needs to be addressed.

2.2 INCREASE, DECREASE OR NEUTRAL - MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION

Lone standing articles disseminate the perception of implementation of commitments from the ministers who signed the Bologna and subsequent communiques. Within some (minor) areas positive development since the last BWSE edition has been detected, but overall, challenges remain.

STUDENT PARTICIPATION *By Helge Schwitters*

The Bologna Process no longer has any felt impact on student representation in the EHEA countries. Most countries have laws that regulate student participation by setting minimum standards. However, the required minimum is rarely surpassed. How and where students are involved and participating differs a lot. Some countries have democratic representation in the highest decision making bodies whereas others limit influence to the preparatory phase. Regardless of this, attention has to be drawn to the transparency in the selection of students and to demand democratic procedures. A surprise finding, and also a matter of concern, are the challenges on student representation further down the governmental levels. Independence of student unions is under pressure due to a lack of funding and structural support, on top of that students feel intimidated by their more experienced peers.

SOCIAL DIMENSION *By Chiara Patricolo*

The social dimension of higher education is seen a high priority only in very few national contexts. Across all Europe, there has been a little improvement in the general acknowledgement of the importance of working on social dimension measures, but no substantial step forward has been taken. For instance, financial support, the most common way of supporting students, especially those with a low socio-economic background, that are still the biggest underrepresented group among students, is still far from being accessible for all, or at least for all that really need it to complete their education. Moreover, the students are particularly concerned about the lack of services for disabled student and mental health support.

QUALITY ASSURANCE *By Adam Gajek & Gohar Hovhannisyan*

Quality assurance has been recognised as an important policy goal and the students' needs are much better embedded in the policy than ever before, a lack of genuine implementation does not allow reforms to make a real change.

In spite of the lack of tangible results, what is perceived as one of main discouraging factors for students' involvement in the QA, there is still a belief in the improvement of learning conditions and an increasing hope in trust-building as one of the QA purposes.

The vast majority of students' unions across the continent reported access to participation in QA for students at each level of HE governance. But the quality of this involvement is a problem. Even though students are part of governance bodies or are involved in all procedures, are not given an equal status or their opinions are not taken into account during decision making. This marks a considerable frustration for students.

Furthermore, struggles with access to information and lack of transparency continue to be perceived as huge obstacles for students, who often feel to be about of a loop.

The study states that no significant change in students' role in QA caused by the revision of the ESG has been reported by far.

RECOGNITION *By Aleksandar Šušnjar*

In general, the biggest perceived obstacle for recognition is excessive complexity of recognition procedures, while the least impactful obstacle is possibly the discriminatory character of these procedures. It is encouraging that transparency in this field has risen according to the perception of national student unions. Among different types of recognition, the situation is the best with credit recognition within mobility programs, while it is the worst in credit recognition outside such programs.

Automatic recognition as an ambitious Bologna process goal is to a very high extent supported by the student unions, with almost all of them fully supporting it. However, this goal is far from being achieved, as automatic recognition is still rarely available to students. According to national student unions, the biggest barriers for automatic recognition is the fact that not all EHEA countries have consistently implemented all the Bologna tools and the lack of trust between EHEA countries.

Recognition of prior learning is another goal which demands stronger commitment since a high number of student unions reports that there are none or insufficient opportunities for recognition of prior learning in their countries. The biggest barriers to this process are the lack of trust in validation procedures and the lack of trust among the main stakeholders.

MOBILITY AND INTERNATIONALISATION *By Katrina Koppel*

Mobility and internationalisation seems to have entered a period of minimal progress in Europe. A large part of the issues students face in International mobility have remained the same since 2015, in some cases even since 2012. The most prevalent obstacle to outgoing mobility is students' financial situation. Although several initiatives to increase incoming and outgoing mobility in European countries exist, balance has not been achieved. This calls to question the strategic nature of internationalisation in Europe. Since 2012 there has been little development in implementing

internationalisation strategies. Mobility and internationalisation in Europe must stop treading in shallow waters. Internationalisation must be a prioritised topic in Europe to achieve set goals.

STRUCTURAL REFORMS *By Caroline Sundberg & Katrina Koppel*

EQFs, ECTS and three cycle systems must be seen as a unified system, as all the parts of this whole cannot be dependable without each other. Since 2003, the majority of the EHEA countries have developed NQFs. However, students are still facing difficulties getting their qualification recognised in other countries, and student unions are not satisfied with the implementation. Similarly, ECTS remains an unevenly implemented system with a significant part of students dissatisfied with the situation. Several countries report inconsistencies between the workload and allocation of ECTS to courses and programmes. The three cycle system is also lacking in development – in several countries, it has decreased flexibility within the learning path, not increased it.

FINANCING OF HIGHER EDUCATION *By Filip Příklad, Katrina Koppel & Helge Schwitters*

After cuts to student support systems after the 2008 financial crisis, the first signs of progress and increase in funding are visible. A worrying trend of increasing or establishing tuition fees is still present. Despite repeated commitments to affordable and sufficiently funded, problems regarding accessibility continue. The students' financial support systems do not keep up with increasing living costs, which has resulted in students seeking part- or full-time employment to support themselves. Linking education solely to the labour market's current needs is on rise, and severely harms the multiple purposes of education for individuals and for the entire society.

STUDENT CENTRED LEARNING *By Aleksandar Šušnjar*

Initiatives and efforts to implement student-centred learning seem to be very sporadic and unevenly distributed across higher education systems. As a result, the learning process in European higher education is still far from being student-centred while progress is extremely slow, if even present. Problems with implementation of student-centred learning might stem from all the preconditions that such a shift demands, like, for example, proper implementation of basic Bologna tools that is sadly still missing. Furthermore, study programs are usually still rigid and do not allow sufficient flexibility for making individualised learning a reality. In the scope of quality assurance, national unions of students perceive that student-centred learning is very often not being treated as an equally important standard of quality.

FUTURE OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS *By Caroline Sundberg*

The Bologna Process should proceed after the Paris ministerial Conference 2018 according to ESU's members. But, changes need to be made as long as the Bologna Process is ongoing with an emphasis on as long as the process is ongoing since this might be the last period (2018-2020) for the process that is 8 years past its first announced expiration. The top three priorities to be tackled should be; Implementation, Student centred learning and Social Dimension of Higher Education. Everything in order for the EHEA to have a solid ground even after the end of the Bologna Process.

2.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

If the prediction of the period between 2018-2020 being the last can only the future tell. With or without the Bologna Process, the European Higher Education Area might still stand and in order to do so, the following recommendations has to be considered.

o Student participation

Democratic procedures for electing and/or selecting student representation has to be safeguarded and stated as an absolute must by governments in the EHEA countries. Laws have to be put in place to secure participation in decision making, and these have to guarantee a proportion that makes actual influence on end outcomes possible. Students' right to self-organise and create unions and other structures to impact decision making should be fostered through supporting systems and recognition. EHEA countries must uphold representation as an absolute fundamental value and not accept any deviations by other member states.

o Social Dimension

Social Dimension needs to become a real policy priority, concrete measures need to be taken and implemented to mirror the diversity of the European population in its higher education system. Particularly, student tracking measures need to be implemented to define underrepresented groups and better understand how to foster their inclusion. The development of national access plans is crucial to ensure full participation of all members of society to higher education, as well as concrete and effective dropout prevention measures are needed to assure everyone's right not only to access education, but also to fully participate in it and take the most out of the learning experience.

o Quality assurance

To counter a long-lasting problem of lack of implementation, the main focus needs to be given to institutional implementation, while a diversity of approaches should be ensured. Trust-building, access to information and transparency are being perceived as more and more important purposes of QA, so a focus should be given to these issues to ensure equal opportunities in QA. Students want to be a part of governance, decision-making, improvements, but their roles have to be meaningful. Reforms have to target students' place in the system to ensure partnership and possibilities for real involvement. QA tends to be introduced just for the sake of procedures, while its impact is crucial, students want to see real results of the QA and of their involvement. Students' participation in HE is one of the fundamental values of the EHEA, so any QA reforms have to be based on this approach.

o Recognition

In general, there is a need to simplify recognition procedures, especially those dealing with recognizing credits outside of mobility programs. In order to achieve the goal of automatic recognition, all Bologna tools need to be fully and consistently implemented, with quality assurance processes being equally reliable across countries. Recognition of informal and non-formal learning and its connection with formal learning must be developed, especially focusing on finding new ways of fostering trust between all stakeholders by creating and promoting reliable ways of assessing students' competences resulting from different experiences.

- **Mobility and Internationalisation**

Mobility and internationalisation must finally be a prioritised topic in Europe to achieve set goals – this includes sufficient financing. Special attention must be paid to widening access to mobility for students from marginalised groups. Balanced mobility must be a clear goal.

- **Structural reforms**

The quality of the National Qualifications Frameworks must be reviewed to ensure full compliance with EQF. ECTS must be implemented reliably and according to the ECTS Users' Guide across EHEA. Flexibility within three cycle systems should be enabled, not reduced – students should have the possibility to study part-time.

- **Financing of Higher Education**

Europe should see free higher education as a long-term goal. Students must be given adequate support through grant systems, which must be preferred over re-payable support systems. Governments and HEIs must discontinue discriminatory practices regarding study fees. Support systems must be reviewed to ensure access to higher education, and acceptable living conditions during studies. Education restrictions based on national economic policies must be stopped.

- **Student Centred Learning**

Implementation of student-centred learning can be facilitated by other improvement of the learning and teaching process, including the implementation of basic Bologna tools, such as learning outcomes and the ECTS system. At the same time, students need to become co-creators of their educational experience, both through formal inclusion in governance at all levels and through informal interaction and planning. Both internal and external quality assurance systems need to effectively assess learning and teaching and encourage innovation.

- **Future of the Bologna Process**

The future of the process is depending on the past. If implementation of agreed commitments does not function, finances are clearly not allocated leaving the implementation at a low level and of not satisfactory quality. Students call on allocating the resources needed to implement and make sure that the implementation is of high quality. and treat all commitments as equally important for a sustainable EHEA even after the end of the Bologna Process.



3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 BOLOGNA WITH STUDENT EYES – PAST AND PRESENT

ESU has been reviewing the implementation of the Bologna Process since 2003, using a range of methodological approaches through the Bologna with Student Eyes (BWSE) publication, launched prior to each ministerial conference.

Bologna with Student Eyes explores the perception of implementation amongst ESU's members operating in EHEA countries and seeks to bring attention to the students' priorities and recommendations for the future of the Bologna Process.

Comparisons over time have been more and more developed over the years facilitated by online survey tools that are available now but were not at the beginning of the publication's history. The 2018 edition is not exclusively constructed on the data collected through its survey but draws on data collected from a tailor-made ESU Questionnaire feeding into the Bologna Implementation report 2018.

3.2 METHOD

SELECTION OF METHOD

Bologna with Student Eyes follows the common EHEA trend of a stock-taking report in order to commend and critique policy. Stocktaking that has been captured via an online survey for the most recent years of the publication's history. The 2018 edition is exclusively based on quantitative material with a few cases of follow up discussions with NUSes presenting perceptions of significant nature to them. The selected method enables for future publications to compare the development and attitudes of the National Unions of Students over time, in the same manner as this publication.

ONLINE SURVEY

The Survey of 2018 has been based on the survey of 2015, with some questions being replaced; added, deleted. Some questions remained untouched, in order to ensure comparability over time. The questions that were added came about by following new developments within a certain field and our thirst to learn more. Those questions that were replaced were based on the changing nature of the Bologna Process. Those questions that were deleted had already been covered by questions posed to national unions as part of the ESU questionnaire for the Bologna Implementation Report survey. Questions were likewise deleted if it was assumed to be outdated or not in accordance with ESU priorities.

The Survey was developed through Survey Monkey between October-December 2017 in ten different stand alone sections; these were General questions about the Bologna Process, Student Participation in Higher Education Governance, Social Dimension, Quality Assurance, Recognition, Mobility & Internationalisation, Structural reforms and the Financing of Higher Education.

Replies were collected between December 2017- February 2018. At the point of closure of the Survey, those answers only containing contact details and/or lacking a grand majority of answers were deleted and the NUS was asked to fill out the survey once more. After the cleaning there are now between 43 to 44 NUSes answering each part, from 38 EHEA countries from Iceland to Armenia covering all EHEA countries where ESU members are operating. For further reference to the NUSes contributing, see annex BWSE 2018 data collection.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Access to the original dataset of 2015 and 2018 was given to the authors in February 2018. Furthermore, the authors were given access to the data collected through the tailor-made part of the 2018 Bologna Implementation Report (for further reading, see below) in order to complement the data of 2018. The Authors were made aware of the differences in questions in the Survey on 2015 and 2018 and deviations in reply rates. Analysis of the dataset has been carried out separately by each author(s).

The findings in BWSE have been compared with both EUROSTUDENT VI 2016-2018 and the Bologna Implementation Report 2018. In addition, some chapters have used the findings and trends from ESU projects such as ESPAQ and EQUIP.

3.3 PROCESS

PREPARATION

In June 2017 ESU together with Eurydice issued a tailor-made part of the Bologna Implementation Report survey “ESU questionnaire¹” to its members, the survey that was open for a month. In July 2017, one of the presidency members of the 2017-18 tea was mandated to carry out the coordination and editorial role of the BWSE publication. In parallel with the answers from the tailor-made implementation report, the BWSE survey was designed in order to not ask the same question(s) twice by the same respondents and a project structure was built up. A project structure with different teams with different purposes; coordination, political, analytical and research, alumni, and communication was created. The coordination team, consisting of the coordinating presidency member and the ESU Director (involved from January 2018 and onwards) were jointly in charge of editing and making sure that the project would be complete by the deadline. The political team consisting of the ESU Executive committee of 2017-18 was in charge of setting the goals (see below), approving the recommendations of this publication and appointing the analytical research team. The research team drew on Executive Committee members with particular expertise within the fields covered by this publication. For support and continuity, a team of three alumni with experience of working with the previous editions of the publication was established in order for the coordination team not having to reinvent the wheel. Lastly, the team in charge of communication consisted of the coordination team, the ESU communication manager and some external partner where relevant.

¹The “ESU Questionnaire” was based on 4 parts; Student participation in governance structures, Implementation of the ECTS system, student participation in quality assurance and Social Dimension. The survey collected replies from 36 NUSes from 34 different EHEA countries.

GOALS

At the ESU Executive Committee meeting on the 10th of October 2017 the following goals for the publication were agreed:

- [the publication shall] Shed light on the implementation of the fundamental principles of the Bologna Process also known as the “fundamental values” of higher education at the pan-European level.
- [the publication shall] Map the consistent, thorough and comprehensive implementation of Bologna tools
- [the publication shall] Emphasise the importance of the student perspective in the process through our research and provide evidence-based policy recommendations to the ministerial in Paris as well throughout the next Bologna cycle.

The goals have acted as the guide for the design of the survey, data analysis and the drafting of recommendations.

MEMBERSHIP CAPACITY BUILDING - GETTING READY FOR THE SURVEY

That the publication should be based on an online survey was assumed from the beginning. But the design of the survey and the appropriateness of other methods which could be used to complement the dataset was discussed further on in the process. A training event to ensure both the survey and the publication were as user-friendly as possible was the first step taken. Hence, two sessions during the European Students Convention 11-12th of October 2017 was dedicated to discuss the survey and the publication between the members and the coordination team, one session at the European Students’ Unions Board meeting seminar 28-29th of November 2017 to discuss the survey tool and one session at the European Students Convention 14-17th of March 2018 presenting the first results and major recommendations of the publication.

To ensure support for the NUSes to answer the survey, every NUS member of ESU operating in an EHEA country was provided with a “BWSE Buddie” from the Hacks team of 2017-18 with regional or national expertise specifically helpful for the NUS. In addition, consultations of the survey with the NUSes were made available for greater understanding of overarching concepts and questions.

AUTHORS

The following chapters should be understood as thematic articles based on the same dataset with a common outline written by one or various authors. The authors were appointed by the Project coordination team on basis of their policy expertise within ESU. The authors are responsible for their material and the conclusions are drawn from the trends they have captured.

3.3 CLOSING REMARKS

The result of this publication will make a change. No country wishes to have a bad review from the majority population at their Higher Education Institutions; the students. The Bologna Implementation report 2018 includes data from ESUs members, this publication aims to clarify the position taken and showcasing where more student’s eyes are needed in order for a change. With the ambition of enabling replication of the study and measure positive development in the future, the Bologna with Student eyes survey will be sent out again in 2020 prior the Ministerial Conference.



4 STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning, the Bologna Process has recognised students as crucial stakeholders, that should take part in shaping their own education. The Prague Communiqué declared that students are to be considered full members of the higher education community. (Prague Communiqué 2001).

As members of this community, it is sensible from a democratic perspective that this should translate into having the same involvement in decision making at their universities. (Wolff 1969) This approach has been championed by ESU over many years through the concept of Modern Collegiality:

“Academic collegiality in the 21st century involves recognising that students and academic staff are united in a common purpose and should partake equally in the management of higher education institutions.” (European Students’ Union 2016)

Students’ participation in decision making would also contribute positively to policies as they provide the perspective of those “using the services” and feeling the impact of the decisions being made. Changing structures and the content of higher education cannot be done in a way that is fit for purpose if it does not involve the stakeholders. Therefore, in Prague:

“Ministers stressed that the involvement of (...)students as competent, active and constructive partners in the establishment and shaping of a European Higher Education Area are needed and welcomed. ...Ministers affirmed that students should participate in and influence the organisation and content of education at universities and other higher education institutions.” (Prague Communiqué 2001)

Fast forwarding to today, we can see an overall decrease in student participation in the formal decision-making bodies. This has taken place in two different forms; first there has been a reduction in the number of students present in boardrooms and around the negotiation and brainstorming tables, and the second has been to transfer the student voice into more informal arrangements. Often amicable arguments are being used, for example “Increasing the actual influence.”, “Establishing new bodies that are deemed more relevant.”, and to “Trade them for higher representation in other decision-making boards.”

4.2 MAIN FINDINGS

A DECLINING BOLOGNA EFFECT

With the fundamental values high on the agenda of the Bologna Process, looking at the effect it has on student representation today is a useful exercise. Over the last two versions of Bologna with Student Eyes, we can see a decline in students' unions reporting that the Bologna Process has a positive impact on student participation in their countries. This trend is prevalent again this year. Only two respondents declare the Bologna Process to be an essential driving force for student involvement in their national contexts. 16 unions say that there has been some influence, and 19 claim that there is very little or no effect to be seen. Back in 2015, 10 unions said they could see a significant positive impact on student participation, and in 2012 it was even higher with 14. (European Students' Union 2012, 2015) On a positive note, no unions state that the Bologna Process has had any negative impact on student participation. This has been a concern in previous publications, where Denmark and Germany were reported to misuse the process as an argument for other reforms that played out negatively for students.

Fig. 4.1: Legislated student participation in EHEA countries.

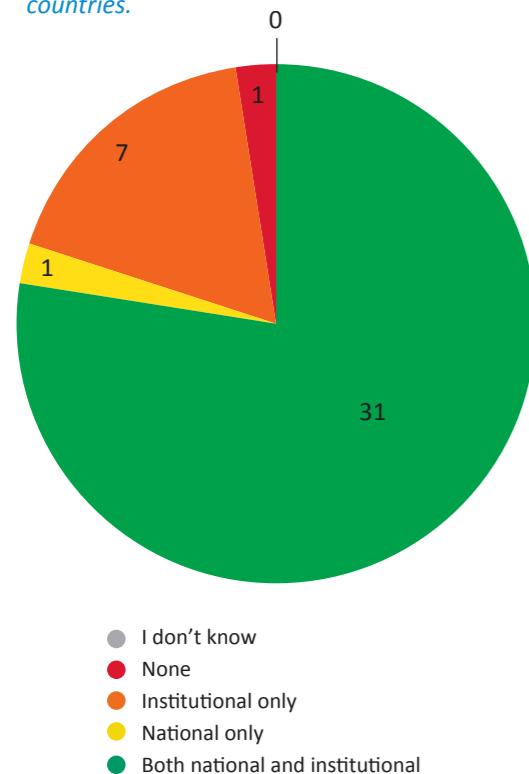
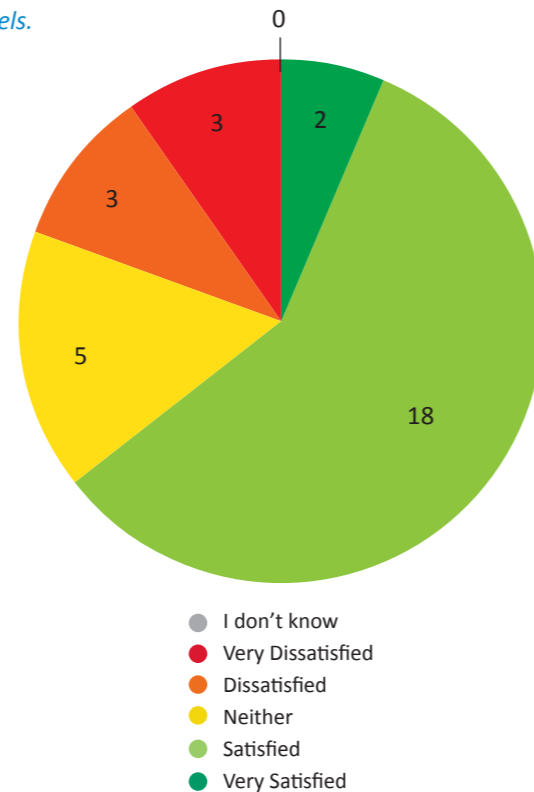


Fig. 4.2: Satisfaction with the enactment of legislation in countries that have it on both national and institutional levels.



LEGISLATION

In the London Communiqué it was underlined that in many EHEA countries, legal measures were being put in place to ensure student participation. (London Communiqué 2007) This corresponds well with our findings, and all but one country has a minimum level of participation enshrined in law. In 31 nations our unions benefit from legislation that demands participation both on a national and at an institutional level. Most countries that do not guarantee participation at both levels have laws concerning the institutions, overall 7 nations fall into this category.

Just one country, Switzerland, reports only having legislation on the national level, where the legal competence of the institutions lies at the cantons. Northern Ireland does not have any statutory provisions but students feel well represented. However, the difference in organisational structures is considerable between higher education institutions.

Some countries, including Latvia, have written down the necessity of a national students' union in the law for higher education.

ENACTMENT

Student participation seems well embedded in EHEA, but enactment is unanimously celebrated. In the "top-ranked" countries, that have a legal provision on both national and institutional levels, 20 out of 31 are satisfied, of whom only 2 unions are very satisfied. As expected, satisfaction is lower in countries that only cover institutions in their legislation, with 3 out of 7 satisfied with the enactment in this group.

This indicates that what defines student participation, and how it should be accommodated for, is often understood differently amongst students and the governmental and institutional leadership. Our unions recognise two threats to democratic student participation:

- Students are not able to pick their own representatives, or the procedure is lacking transparency
- Participation is constrained to minor decisions, or no "real" influence is provided
- Student representatives make up a tiny minority in decision making

LACK OF TRANSPARENCY IN THE SELECTION

One can formally claim to involve students, by listening to a student or to have a student represented on a board, an advisory group, an expert's meeting or other relevant fora. However, this can hardly be called real, democratic student representation. For democratic students' unions, it is essential that those chosen to represent the opinion, the expertise and votes of students are (s)lected by their peers, through democratic and transparent selection procedures. This is the only way to ensure that the student's representatives can be held accountable to the many that they represent. As students differ vastly in backgrounds, interests, preferred learning styles, and thereby also opinions, every student needs to be able to feel that their voice and opinion can be influential.

Therefore, it is highly concerning that many respondents call out a lack of transparency and describe what can be identified as wholly closed procedures, where the government, administration and/or academic staff are “free to pick their preferred candidate” (Belarus). Choosing students that are likely to represent the same opinions as those in charge is a defining element of “tokenism”. Without granting them rights nor influence, the windows are dressed to give an impression that an entire group is being represented. (Arnstein 1969)

Others report that there is a selection procedure where every student can formally put forward their candidacy, but the processes are not adequately informed about or announced (France). Even when there are legislation and rules put in place they can sometimes be bypassed and thereby undermine democratic procedures (Germany). Good practice is to be found, for example, Scotland assigns that students’ unions by law have the right to sit on governing bodies.

NO INFLUENCE WHERE IT MATTERS

New policies are constructed in multiple steps and procedures, but the process can roughly be grouped into two main phases: preparatory work and decision making.

Student participation is interpreted differently in European countries and our scale ranges from no participation at all, to taking part in both preparatory work and decision making on all levels. In Italy student representatives hold seats on boards and senates but are restricted to specific points on the agenda, while in Luxembourg only speaking rights are granted, reducing participation to observer status. Having different provisions in institutions is practised in some countries. Finland ensures student participation in decision making only for the public institutions, while those run by foundations can choose themselves whether they want to comply with this standard. In Estonia the highest decision making at some universities is closed, and instead students are placed in the Senate, that deals only with educational matters. This case is highly problematic as it, like Italy, leaves it to the other power holders to define what students should care about.

Most surprising is that some unions report to be part of decision making, but not in the preparatory work. For example, the Norwegian students’ union is well satisfied with their representation in decision-making bodies but works to improve participation in the preparatory ones.

Unions that are included only in preparatory work do not seem to be significantly less satisfied with their situation than those represented in decision making only. Although the latter clearly gives more *de jure* power and can be more easily recognised as delivering on the values and goals of Bologna, being involved in outcomes before a final agreement is made can at times outweigh this by granting more *de facto* power. As policy-making in higher education deals with complex matters and has high levels of detail, board decisions are sometimes little more than rubber stamping.

TOO FEW SEATS PROVIDED

Influencing and changing decisions requires a stakeholder to be listened to, in order to convince others. When many individuals are gathered around a table, a room or partaking in a discussion together, it is easier to be heard when you are not thoroughly outnumbered by a more prominent majority group. Hence, for students to be able to use the posi-

tions and rights they are given, the portion of seats and votes is highly relevant. Therefore, the vast majority of legislation on student participation sets a minimum standard of representation. In many countries, students’ unions find their share to be too small for it to be a capable platform for making change. Ukraine’s minimum quota is as low as 10%, and our member unions feel they are easily overlooked. Our German member union reports that legislation is below 15%. However, both unions indicate that these standards are being enacted.

By setting minimum levels, most systems provide institutions with the choice to go above the baseline and become national best practice on student participation, but this is rarely the case. Multiple unions say that the minimum standards are being interpreted as a set provision. This is the case in Ukraine and in Italy. The Hungarian system provides institutions with two available fractions of a ¼th or 1/3rd share for students, also here the latter is rarely used.

“The minimum quota for students is only 10%, and it is rarely exceeded, the norm is implemented consistently ... With a clear majority, the students’ positions might easily get overlooked” (UAS Ukraine). Sometimes institutions do not even respect the minimum requirement, as claimed by our Croatian member, and one of the French unions UNEF, reports that institutional autonomy is often used as an excuse for not acting on the legal minimum standards.

Two respondents are reporting that the minimum level is decreasing. Serbia’s new law lowers the standards, and in Armenia, there are plans to follow suit. Today students enjoy 25% representation in decision making, but a new proposed law will push this down to a meagre 10%.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE NATIONAL AND THE LOCAL LEVELS

Some severe cases aside, independence of students’ unions is pretty well secured on national levels, but in the institutions, and even more so on faculty and programme levels independence and freely run students’ unions are often not a reality. Chart 03.03 shows that the further down the hierarchy of governance one gets, the more precarious the situation becomes. Only two of our members claim that national students’ unions cannot run independently, these cases are in Belarus and in Hungary. All others argue that some level of independence is ensured in their countries, amongst whom the majority benefit from fully independent student participation.

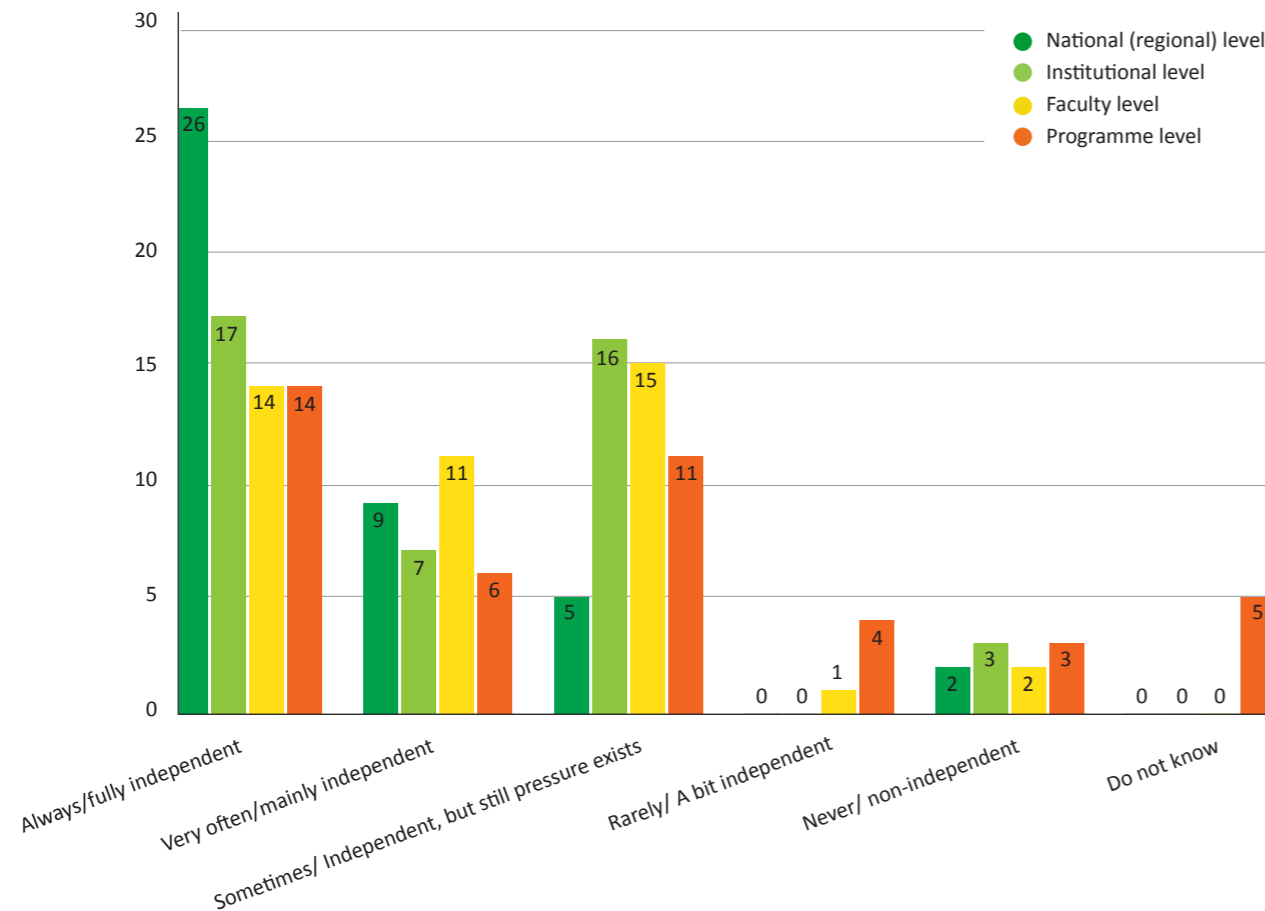
Most of the decisions that directly affect individual students, albeit smaller than changing financial provisions, are made at the lower levels. Curricula design, capacity and opening hours of libraries, programme evaluations and learning environments are just some examples of typical local issues. DSF in Denmark emphasises that their good representation on the programme levels is highly appreciated for these reasons.

Though it would seem logical to expect that student participation would be more functional where daily interactions with academic staff and administration are more prominent, it is anything but the truth. In the open answers, we can find some common trends:

- Information disparities between students and staff.
- Financial and administrative dependency on the institutional administration.
- Lack of culture for student participation

Students stay at their university for a limited time which leads to high turnover rates among their representatives. Even in cases where someone would study for five years at the same institution pursuing a master's degree, it is highly unlikely that throughout all of those years an individual would represent students in one decision-making body. This often causes students to join a preparatory or decision making body mid-mandate, or from a position of not knowing the other participants. When getting (s)elected more time has to be spent preparing for meetings, and/or information is hard to access. Hence, there is a higher risk of representatives becoming overwhelmed by the knowledge required, know-how and information held by others in the academic community or external representatives. Having to argue with your own teachers, that already are in a power relation to you, does not make it more accessible.

Fig. 4.3: Can students' unions/representatives operate independently?



VVS in Belgium says that this can become somewhat intimidating and according to our German member, students sometimes get bullied and pressured.

Organised students' unions can balance out some of the information disparities on the local levels by offering handovers, structuralising peer support and developing an institutional memory. However, they find it harder to operate further down the system. The Moldovan arrangement does not have a legal framework for unions to formally register. Hence they become dependent on the administration to sustain themselves. Relying on being part of the institution's legal entity is also the case in Croatia. This has a financial impact as well, with the union becoming financially dependent on their administrations. Swedish, Estonian and Serbian students are also concerned that the financial situation of local students' unions is challenging their independence. In Norway, unions are currently working to improve their financial security, but concerns about receiving more funding from the administrations are less prevalent.

Local cultures and attitudes towards student participation are different and account for significant intra-national differences. "Much depends on relationships with higher education institutions' administrations", says LSA from Latvia. Representation at the programme level is not universal in EHEA countries. Both in Armenia and Croatia, it does not exist at all, according to the national students' unions. Irish class representatives are often excluded from real decision making, whereas nationally USI is satisfied with how they are included in the system. As mentioned in an earlier subchapter, public and private institutions do not have the same provisions in some EHEA countries, often to the detriment of students at the private entities.

4.3 CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

We do not have the data to draw any conclusions on whether or not the Bologna Process has less effect on student participation today than before. Contrafactual theorising is a risky exercise, so we should not hypothesise on whether or not it is the fundamental values that ensure today's student participation in place. It might very well be that most countries have stretched themselves as far as they are willing to go to ensure the involvement of students, based on the government's own interpretation of Bologna's expectations and therefore new developments are not grounded in the process.

From a legal point of view, EHEA countries are doing well in ensuring some level of student participation, but often the portion of seats and votes are too low to provide students with any de facto influence of significance in the eyes of students. Ideally, student participation is to involve independent and democratic students' unions at all levels of decision making. Figure 04.4 summarises this by combining the scores on the independence of students' unions with the extent of involvement.¹ As we can see, student participation varies vastly between EHEA countries, and often neighbouring countries differ substantially. Too many countries find themselves in the lowest bracket, but students' unions do not always see the situation as equally harmful. For example, Hungarian students are mostly positive about their national

¹ Scores range from 0-5 and are based on the average independence of student union independence on different governance levels added with scores on what kind of involvement is provided.

Independence on each level is assigned a score between 1 and 3, and then averaged. 3= Always/ fully independent, 2= Very Often/ Mainly independent, 1= Sometimes / Independent, but still pressure exists. As not all countries have decision making on a programme level, the scores have been averaged with the faculty level in the countries that have both.

arrangements even though they are amongst the lowest performers on students' union independence. Cultural differences and nuances in what constitutes independence can possibly play a role.

Students in Belarus are by far the most critical of their role in decision making, both in scores provided and responses to open questions. Here, participation is either non-existent or characterised by non-transparent selections and bans on students' unions. Whether this can be improved by the country's newly found membership in EHEA can serve as a litmus test on whether or not the Bologna Process plays a role in ensuring student participation.

4.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Appointment and selection procedures for students to sit in preparatory and decision bodies at national, institutional, faculty and programme levels must be transparent and democratic. Students should be able to elect or select their own representatives, either by open elections or selection by independent student bodies that are being held accountable by the whole student mass.
- Students' self-organising in unions and organisations to partake in decision making, should be fostered and supported at all levels. This includes providing the opportunity for the organisations to be legally independent.
- Member countries need to make sure national laws secure a minimum representation of students in all decision-making bodies within higher education. The minimum should be no less than 20% to grant the students a realistic influence on decisions. States should make the legal requirement universal to all higher education institutions and in dialogues with HEIs making sure that they are enacted.
- Support structures should be put in place for student representatives to enable them to adequately perform their job and duties on behalf of their peers. This includes trainings of high quality on the work of the forum they enter and the structures, rules and culture in decision making. Students' unions should be seen as a partner in providing this and get support for doing so.
- Respect for students' right to self-organise and advocate their opinions on higher education should be an absolute requirement put on any EHEA country. Member states and potential members who fail to do so must commit to, and show substantial improvement on, student representation within the timeline of two ministerial conferences. If not their status as an EHEA member should be revoked.

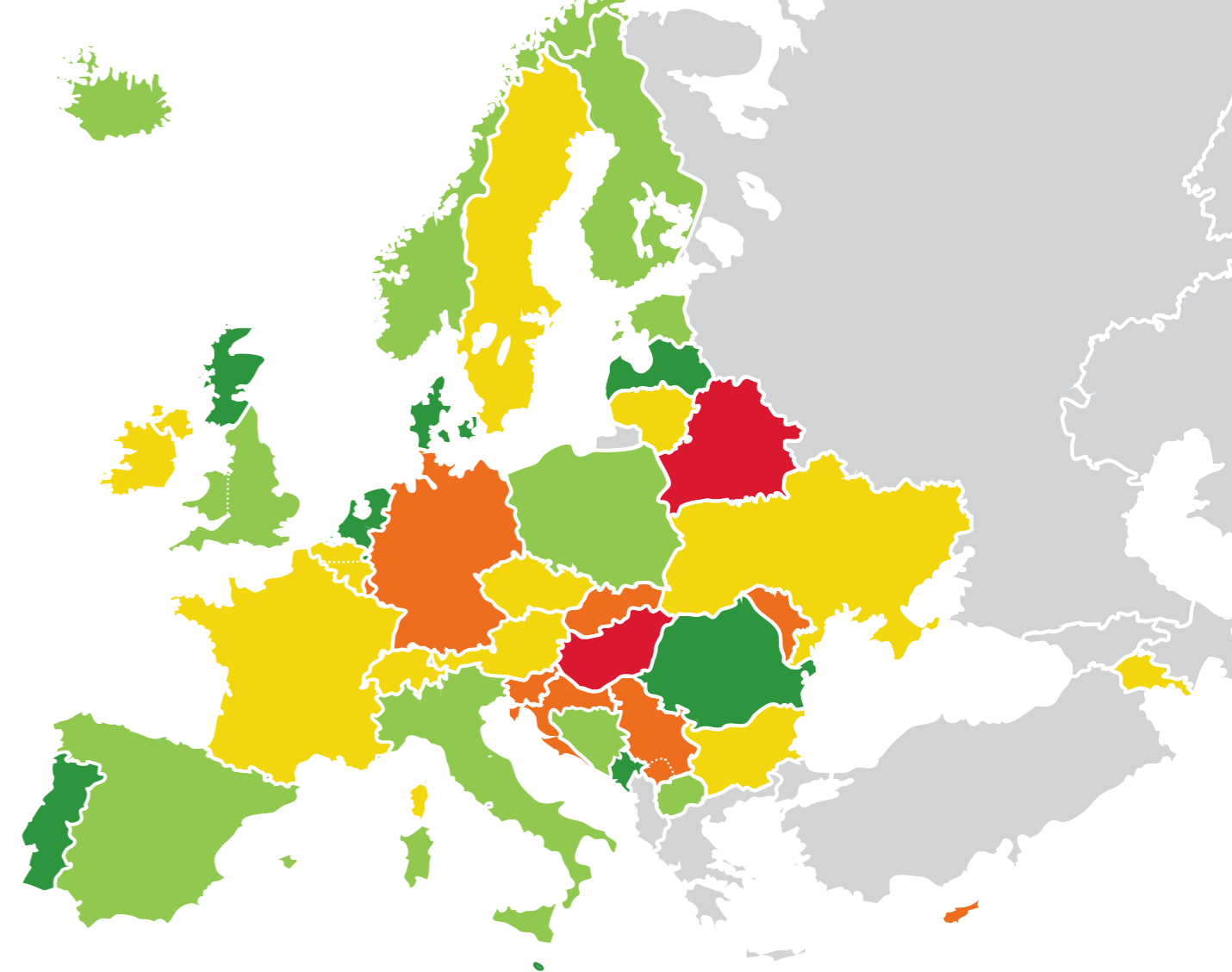


Fig. 4.4: Democratic student representation in the EHEA.

- EHEA country with no ESU member
- No information available
- No democratic representation
- Lack of democratic representation
- Some democratic representation
- Mostly democratic representation
- Democratic representation

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5 SOCIAL DIMENSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

“Social dimension is the means by which we widen access to higher education, ensure it is representative of the diverse society in which it exists, fulfils its responsibility to extend social equality, and that those who enter higher education are supported to achieve and succeed. The social dimension is certainly not limited to or achieved by solely allocating and distributing financial support, but needs to be understood as all parameters that define an inclusive environment in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and as a consequence in the society at large. These parameters include a big variety of incentives that foster the Higher Education’s responsibility to cultural, political, scientific and human development, which must be considered simultaneously as the whole breadth of the social dimension.” (ESU, Policy Paper on Social Dimension, 2015)

“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).” ESU-Bologna With Student Eyes 2015

In 2015, the importance of widening access and participation in higher education to mirror the rich complexity of societies was acknowledged and underlined:

“Making our systems more inclusive is an essential aim for the EHEA as our populations become more and more diversified, also due to immigration and demographic changes. We undertake to widen participation in higher education and support institutions that provide relevant learning activities in appropriate contexts for different types of learners, including lifelong learning. We will improve permeability and articulation between different education sectors. We will enhance the social dimension of higher education, improve gender balance and widen opportunities for access and completion, including international mobility, for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. We will provide mobility opportunities for students and staff from conflict areas, while working to make it possible for them to return home once conditions allow. We also wish to promote the mobility of teacher education students in view of the important role they will play in educating future generations of Europeans.” (Yerevan Ministerial Conference 2015).

But has this all been translated into reality?

5.2 MAIN FINDINGS

THE SOCIAL DIMENSION AS A POLICY PRIORITY

In 2015, according to our National Unions of Students, only 8 out of 36 countries considered the Social Dimension a high priority. In 2018 the Social Dimension is viewed as more or less a high priority by 15 Governments out of 43 (and only for 3 of them as “essential”); in 15 countries out of 43 it is a priority for Higher Education Institutions, in 7 for the Rectors’ Conference (or equivalent institution) and in 11 for the teachers’ trade unions. The data doesn’t look encouraging, and it is even less encouraging that the social dimension is considered as either a low priority or not on the agenda at all 1 in 13 countries. The map (Fig 05-01) shows how much governments consider the social dimension as a priority as seen with student eyes.

According to our National Unions of Students there seems to have been an improvement in the perception of the importance of the social dimension in higher education among governments and higher education’s stakeholders, especially thanks to the efforts of the unions themselves, but a lot of work still needs to be done.

When asked if progress has been made in their countries regarding the social dimension since 2015, the answers of student representatives varied widely. From the depressive “nothing has changed” stated by 7 countries where the Social Dimension has been reported either as a low priority or not a priority (Poland, Iceland, Switzerland, Belgium, Belarus^{1*}, Hungary and Ukraine), to “it got worse” stated by Denmark, to the encouraging data on higher public awareness in 16 countries and the existence of discussion on social dimension strategies in 18 countries. However, even the most positive data does not constitute enough progress from the student perspective.

For example, already in 2015 in Estonia, Serbia, Malta, the United Kingdom, Armenia, Ireland and France, national targets were reported to have been put in place, while in seven more countries developments were underway. Three years later national targets are reported to have been suggested only in 9 additional countries (Portugal, Luxembourg, Romania, Austria, Norway, Moldova, Croatia, Spain and Sweden), which indicates that 27 Countries still lack national targets and even preliminary discussion towards developing them.

In conclusion, there is some indicative trend of improvement in acknowledging the importance of working on the social dimension across Europe, especially thanks to the work of the NUSes that have been fighting for it in various ways, but the overall situation is still absolutely insufficient and this will be further expanded later in this chapter.

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Student Support Services are the concrete means through which the participation and the success of students in higher education is, can and should be ensured. Ideally, students support services should vary from monetary allowances provided to students for their maintenance during their period of study, to the concrete supply of all the services they require from housing to transport from access, to materials, to study facilities (libraries, common areas, etc.); from food

¹ *only by one of the two unions; the other agrees on the lack of important changes, but states that the social dimension is somewhat of a priority in the country.

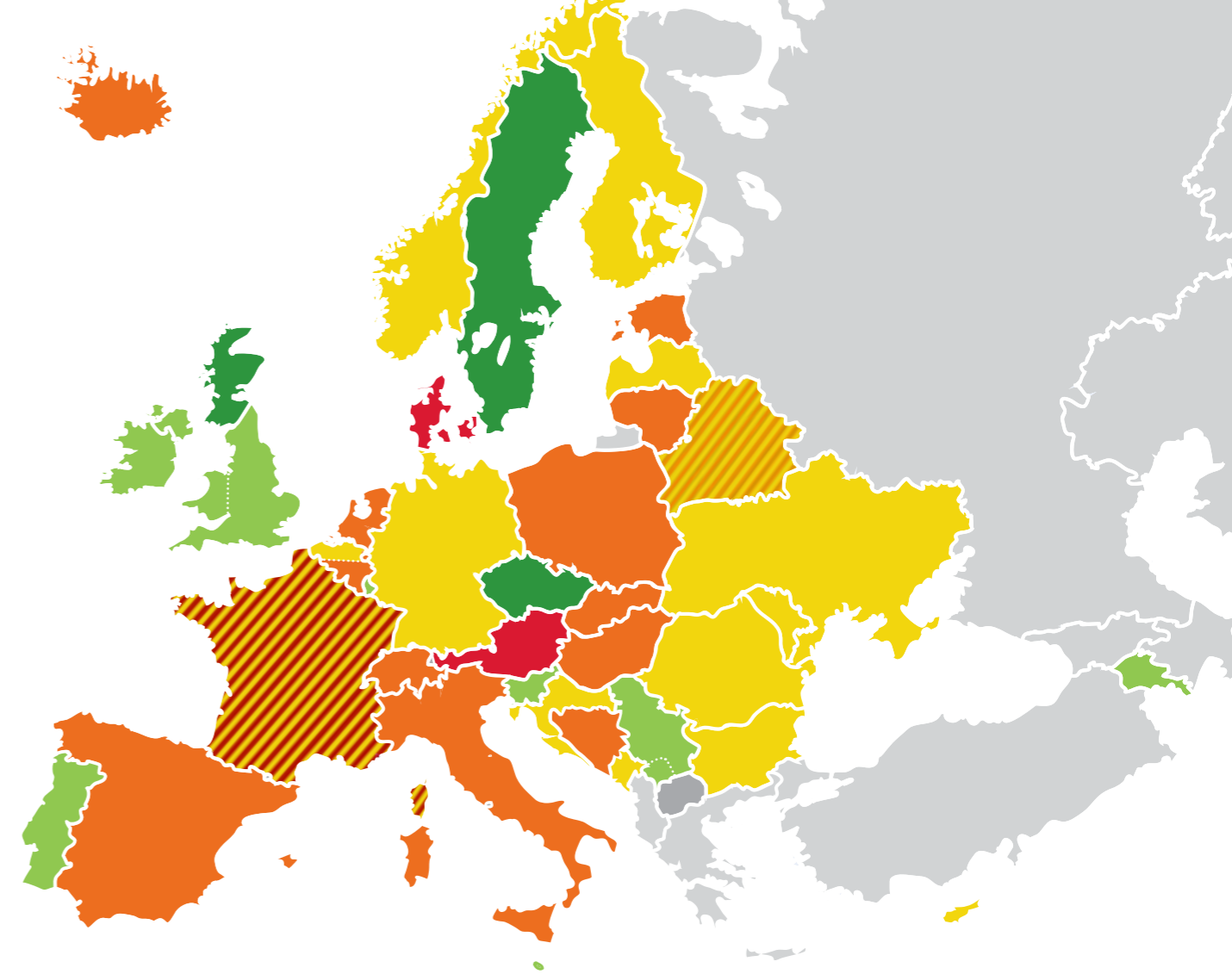


Fig. 5.1: Social Dimension as a policy priority for Governments

- EHEA country with no ESU member
- No information available
- Not a priority
- Low priority
- Somewhat a priority
- High priority
- Essential priority

and catering, to counselling services and more. To ensure that higher education is accessible and inclusive, student support services should be publicly funded and available for all. Investing in public financing of student support services has proven to be a great tool for countries, as the availability of the services diversifies the student body and eventually eliminates inequalities in society, as those students who can access all these services are reported to succeed with better results in their educational path and satisfactory careers, regardless of their initial economic condition.

The reality shows that in the majority of European countries only some of the above mentioned services are taken into account and suffer from underfunding and neglect. The students of ESU's National Students' Unions were asked to identify the support services that lack resources the most, with the three most underfunded reported to be financial support, housing, and mental health/disability support.

Financial support

Student grants and scholarships are still the most common way to support students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. In fact, in the majority of the countries students are only eligible for financial support if their (or, in almost the totality of cases, their families') financial situation meets certain criteria, usually combined with other criteria that relates to the student's individual context. This model is not enough to ensure access and participation in higher education for students of all backgrounds, while the financial support to students is also neglected with the result that it cannot cover the needs of students that they are entitled to on paper, therefore huge numbers of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are excluded from education due to the lack of funding that students have continually denounced.

Italy references a prevailing example of such a situation: in the academic year 2016-2017 students that were eligible for a grant, according to criteria that had been highly criticised by the students, numbered 173601 in the whole country. However, only 166160 received their grant often after consistent delays, leaving 7441 students without the financial support they deserved and needed. What is peculiar of the Italian situation, however, is that the student support system is regionally based, with an inefficient contribution from the Government. This creates a situation where in the poorest regions the proportion of students entitled to grants is smaller because the criteria are adjusted to the economic context of the region. As a result of less people enrolling at universities in a given region, they instead opt to study in a different region, where they have more chance to get the support they need.

However there remains a huge gap between those who should receive financial assistance and those who actually benefit, for example, in the academic year 2016-2017, Sicily only managed to pay out 12984 grants out of the 15984 it was supposed to finance. In more affluent regions, like Emilia Romagna or Lombardia, the number of students is much higher, especially as they attract students from other regions due to more access to financial support. These regions also manage to pay out almost all of these grants (Emilia Romagna paying 19023 out of 19023 in 2016-2017 and Lombardia 18394 out of 18436). This does not just have a negative effect on the lives of students, but is also nurturing an ineffective model of unbalanced forced mobility within the country, which is depressing the overall growth of Italy, creating even more inequalities and problems.

Housing

In 2015 housing was specified by students as the number one problem, while in 2018 it remains one of the most problematic access needs of students. The right to housing for students can be ensured in many different ways, from building more quality student dorms to ensuring access to private sector contracts. "Apartments in cities with universities are virtually unaffordable to students" was denoted in 2015, and the situation hasn't changed since then, especially in capital cities. The right to housing with good conditions is a fundamental right of students, especially in higher education, when they are no longer minors and are seeking space not only to study but also to focus on their own academic and personal growth. Too often, instead, students are forced to continue living with their parents while studying, while being falsely accused of being "too attached" to their families, especially in the Mediterranean countries, when in reality they really cannot afford other housing solutions. This is also evidenced by the latest EUROSTUDENT 2018 publication.

Mental Health Support and Disability Services

Mental Health issues are often ignored or stigmatised by society, therefore it comes as no surprise to discover that mental health support is among those services that most often lack resources in higher education. Students demand more attention on this issue and for services to be supported in identifying, understanding, and taking care of students who suffer from mental health difficulties, so that they are able to fulfill their studies in good conditions and with all the support required.

Similarly, students with disabilities and students with chronic illnesses are left out of the higher education system, which will be explored in more depth later, due to the lack of resources to meet all individual needs.

In general, although 13 countries are increasing student support services, which may seem like a good sign, our member National Unions report that additional investments are still not enough to cover the needs of the students concerned, especially as in many cases small increases are outweighed by much bigger cuts to other services. Moreover, the student support services needed by students are still more than those recognised and funded by Governments and responsible institutions. ESU would like to emphasize that what is lacking in the majority of countries is the recognition of the students' social status, therefore students are not treated as individuals entitled to certain rights related to their personal choice of enrolling in higher education, but instead they are counted as part of their family or household unit and viewed as a burden on society.

STUDENT RETENTION

As explained previously, the right to education is not only the right to access education, but the right to successfully progress through the educational experience, being equipped with all necessary means to succeed. This means as well that student dropout needs to be prevented with concrete and proactive measures.

Sadly, only 14 countries out of 43 have dropouts prevention measures in place at the national level, 21 have something at the institutional or faculty level and only 16 have measures at the program level.

Just like in 2015, the most popular measure appears to be counselling (in 22 cases out of 29 National Unions reporting on measures in their countries), followed by additional financial support (17 cases), social support groups (16) and flexible learning paths. But the students' unions claim that in most cases those measures are not enough or are effective only in theory.

Half of the unions (20 out of 41 respondents) say that they are dissatisfied and 7 are very dissatisfied with the dropout prevention measures and only 4 are satisfied with them. The map below (fig 04 - 02) visualises the high level of dissatisfaction throughout Europe.

As already stated in 2015, it is of utmost importance to understand the reasons behind student dropout, therefore the lack of data on this problem creates an obstacle to creating solutions and putting in place effective measures. "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 nonexistent data collection [...] 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." (ESU, Bologna With Student Eyes 2015)

In the past three years nothing has changed in terms of the tracking of students to prevent their dropout, with answers from students indicating that, even more than before, especially after years of widespread economic crisis, the students that are left out of education and more likely to drop out, are those from poor socio-economic backgrounds; yet, as shown denoted previously, there is no substantial incremental change in the measures to support their inclusion and success.

Many unions underlined how the difficult economic situation has ultimately led to a necessity for finding a job while studying, which is dramatically affecting the quality of their studies, which can result in the drop out from education. This happens because in the majority of the countries there is no real possibility of studying part-time to better combine employment with studying. In Croatia, the part-time admission option exists on paper but not in reality as the individual flexibility required is not guaranteed, while the problem is made worse by the fact that enrolling on a part-time basis has a tuition fee implication, while enrolling full time has not, so that students with lower socio-economic background who failed the test for their preferred course enroll part-time as a second option and their situation worsens.

ESU stresses that having the opportunity to enroll in part-time study is a right for every student which should ideally be a free choice and not an obligation due to other pressurising factors.

UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS

When questioned on how underrepresented groups of students are defined in their countries, in 2015 a majority of the responding unions (28 out of 39 respondents from 36 countries) mentioned students from a low socio-economic background; in 2018, 26 out of 43 respondents still consider students from a low socio-economic background as the biggest underrepresented group in higher education, together with students with physical disabilities (same rate: 26 out of 43). Students with psychosocial disabilities and/or mental health issues are considered underrepresented by 19 unions, followed by students with children (18), students from different ethnic groups (18), students with chronic

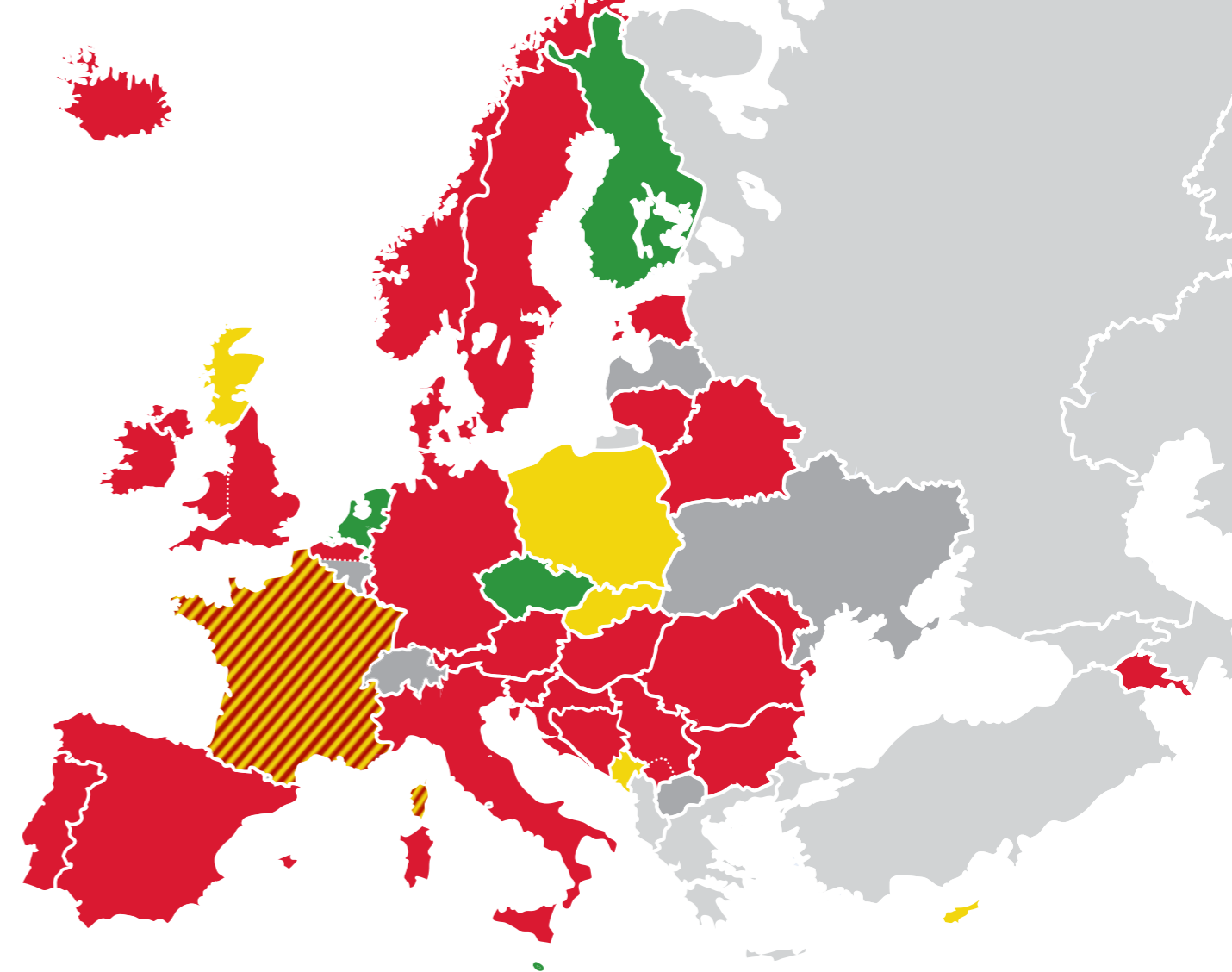


Fig. 5.2: Level of students' satisfaction with dropout prevention measures

- EHEA country with no ESU member
- No information available
- Dissatisfied
- Neither
- Satisfied

health issues (18), mature students - who started their education older than 25 (16). Twenty unions stated that students from an immigrant background are underrepresented, however it is important to highlight the lack of available data: 11 unions, in fact, state that there is no data. The same applies to LGBTQ* students: 27 unions claim they have no data and 10 state that they are an underrepresented group.

In total, 29 out of 42 respondents stated that there is no national policy or plan for defining underrepresented groups. Only the unions from Portugal, Ireland, United Kingdom and Croatia, have been able to provide some good examples of measures put in place, and they all rely on the analysis of society and the student body to identify the target groups and implement tailored strategies for their support. Almost 50% of the respondents (20 out of 43) state that there is no adequate data available on the social conditions of students and the participation of different groups, with 13 of them also adding that there has been no effort in collecting such data since 2015.

Similarly to the above described issues with national access plans and dropout prevention, there is no student tracking system and therefore the much needed data to understand who is being excluded from higher education and how to ensure their inclusion and success. Worryingly, with this data not available, it also appears that there is no interest in collecting or exploring the need for it further.

As already stated in 2015, besides data collection, action needs to be taken to increase the participation of underrepresented groups. The student body and the academic community as a whole are very far from mirroring the rich and complex composition of our societies. On the contrary, cut to funds for education and the lack of resources and attention given to it results in a more elitist higher education, contributing to the growing inequalities of society, while losing a huge human capital that is crucial for peer learning.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

We need to acknowledge that the situation hasn't changed much from 2015. Despite the social dimension becoming recognised as an issue of crucial importance and one that is a core action point for Bologna. Then it must be clearly stated when there has not been prioritisation or relevant steps taken.

From the students' answers it can be observed that there has been a small increment of public attention to the topic of the social dimension but no substantial measures put in place. After years of cuts to student support services and economic stagnation in EHEA countries, there is an increasing number of students who require financial help to succeed in their studies, and it is crucial that countries begin or reinstate substantial investment in student support services, in accordance with the views of students' unions. Student representatives are the very people who can lead the way to effective and much-needed measures that meet the needs and expectations of students themselves, whose opinion is, after all, the most important one when seeking to make positive change.

It is also very important that Governments and higher education institutions start collecting data on underrepresented groups in order to tackle their inclusion.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Similarly to what has already been outlined three years ago in the previous edition of this publication, despite numerous commitments to treat the social dimension as a policy priority, this is still far from reality in the majority of the European Countries. Concrete measures need to be put in place in order to mirror the diversity of the European population in its Higher Education system.
- What is required to reach full representation of the diversity in our society is a holistic approach towards inclusion in higher education, with the multitude of barriers towards active participation in Higher education identified and removed.
- A concrete measure that urgently needs to be put in place in order to define underrepresented groups, and better understand how to foster their inclusion, is student tracking.
- National Access Plans are needed to ensure full participation of all members of society in the Higher education system.
- As the right to education is not only the right to access it but the right to fully participate in it, and get the most out of it to fulfill one's personal growth within society, tailored dropout prevention measures are urgently needed to be put in place.

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6 QUALITY ASSURANCE

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Quality assurance has been one of the fundamental priorities of the Bologna Process since its very beginning. The Berlin Communique stated in 2003 that *the quality of higher education has proven to be at the heart of the setting up of a European Higher Education Area*. Currently, the Bologna process refers to the quality assurance, that is based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), as of one of three basic commitments of the EHEA. Certainly, the quality assurance has been given increased focus and importance, rewarded with high priority amongst policies and setting more and more ambitious goals. Over the years EHEA acknowledged students' priorities and needs comparatively more. A considerable milestone was the adoption of the revised ESG, which underlines that quality assurance *responding to diversity and growing expectations for higher education requires a fundamental shift in its provision*. And the list of the tools to achieve the shift enumerates *more student-centred approach to learning and teaching, embracing flexible learning paths and recognising competencies gained outside formal curricula*. From the students' perspective, the above-mentioned policy acknowledgments are certainly an extremely significant step towards a better higher education in Europe, however as this study reports, it has not been enough.

Setting the policy goals does not cause an automatic change. The observations of ESU, which are signified by essential findings in this study, clearly state that there is a gap between ambitious policy goals and the very mediocre implementation of the agreed commitments.

This chapter aims to take the reader through the many barriers faced by students across Europe to become full and equal parties of QA activities, and through the hopes and demands they put on QA to have a real positive impact on education. Hopefully, this will allow a reader to perceive the direction and amount of effort still required to achieve the committed goals.

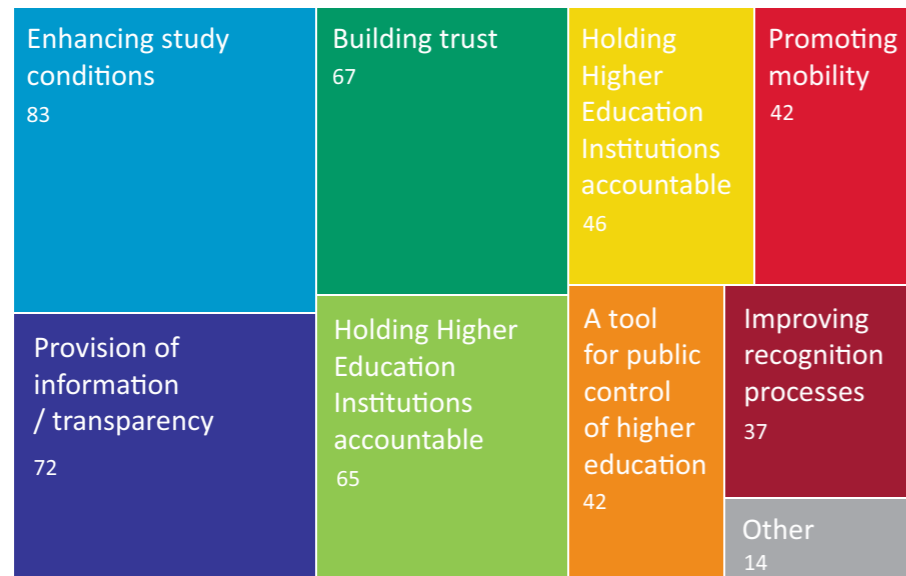
6.2 MAIN FINDINGS

MULTIPURPOSE QUALITY ASSURANCE - MORE ACCOUNTABLE HIGHER EDUCATION

ESU believes that *Quality assurance should have multiple purposes*, therefore the authors wish to indicate what the main aims of QA have been in the recent years according to the students' unions. The role the QA plays as a policy and improvement tool has changed significantly in recent years. The Yerevan communique empowered a multipurpose QA by underlining its roles in learning and teaching. The revision of the ESG's triggered a debate about their implementation in countries, which resulted in reforms of QA systems in Europe, that also influenced the national purposes of QA. The Revised ESG's say: *At the heart of all quality assurance activities are the twin purposes of accountability and enhancement. Taken together, these create trust in the higher education institution's performance*. There has been a shift in the perception of the roles of QA amongst students' unions. QA has come a long way from being perceived purely as an evaluation system to becoming the main tool for building trust between institutions and countries.

According to 83% of respondents, the enhancing of study conditions has been indicated as the main purpose of QA, this was also the most popular answer to this question in the BWSE 2015. This proves that there is a belief in a constant improvement of programmes amongst students. More than half of unions stated that provision of information and transparency (72%) and holding higher education institutions accountable (67%) are important purposes of QA. Both answers are very much in line with the purposes of the revised ESG, which aims to make higher education more transparent and accountable. The next indicated purpose was building trust (65%). Interestingly, there is a great increase in popularity of this answer in comparison to the BWSE 2015 (then 43%). Less than half of the unions reported the importance of the following purposes, boosting employability (46%), promoting mobility (42%), serving as a tool for public control of higher education (42%) and improving recognition processes (37%). In comparison with BWSE 2015 the distribution of responses is more equal, which means that there was an empowerment of some, previously less recognisable, purposes of QA.

Fig. 6.1: What is the purpose of Quality Assurance according to the NUSes (Multiple Choice)?



ESU's position is that *the external quality assurance systems should focus on a combination of institutional evaluation and programme accreditation, where the latter might operate in a more flexible way if institutions are able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance.* Indeed the combined approach was indicated as most commonly applied according to 65% of responding unions, which is even more than was reported in BWSE 2015. The increasing tendency shows that the application of both, mutually complementary approaches, is the most common and popular solution and the number of countries applying only one of the approaches is slowly decreasing.

NO SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS IN STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN QA

In the Yerevan Communique ministers committed themselves to *support and protect students (...) to ensure their representation as full partners in the governance of autonomous higher education institutions.* This goal is still a long way from being achieved, and as an aim which was already acknowledged by the ministers of the EHEA, the national governments should focus on genuine implementation of this commitment. ESU's policy states that *students have been recognized as partners in some cases, but the work towards being full and equal partners needs to be further developed.* This message is supported by the study, which draws attention to a demand for improved actions to ensure equal and full partnership of students in QA universally applied in every system at any level.

Internal QA processes

86% of unions stated that students are engaged in internal quality assurance in their countries, by contrast 12% do not know if that is the case. Out of 38 responding unions, one (Belarus BOSS) stated that students are not involved in the internal quality assurance at all. The same statement was made in BWSE 2015 as well, which shows the process to be stalled. Being one of the fundamental values of EHEA, the participation of students is a part of the Roadmap for HE reforms in Belarus, which was the focus of one of the Advisory Groups in the recent BFUG working period. The above mentioned statement by BOSS, as well as the report of the Advisory Group, signifies that progress is not being made and support for the inclusion of Belarusian students has to be continued.

In the vast majority of countries, the role and engagement of students significantly differs. According to 60% of unions students are full members of their bodies of internal assessment. But still, 26% of responding unions reported that students' engagement remains limited to only being a source of information. Some unions elaborated additionally that the level of involvement differs vastly between institutions and it is hard to unanimously state the overall role of students in systems.

External QA processes

The level of student' involvement in external QA has changed little from previous publications and it differs slightly from internal QA. A majority (79%) reported that students are included in external QA, the remaining answers indicate less committed ways of students' participation. Three unions reported lack of participation what so ever, specifically these are the member unions from Belarus and the union from Ukraine. For the case of Belarus, as stated in the final report of the BFUG Advisory Group, the lack of improvement in students participation in the legal system remains as the main obstacle. In Ukraine the QA Agency is currently being re-established and students are engaged in this process. Meanwhile there is another accreditation body acting at the moment for which students' engagement is not a mandatory requirement.

According to those unions who reported that students are involved in HE, 71% tell us that students are full-members within the external review panels. According to the rest of the responses this involvement is limited to either being an observer (3 unions) or a source of information (3 unions). In some countries students are able to take the position of a chair or a secretary in external review panels.

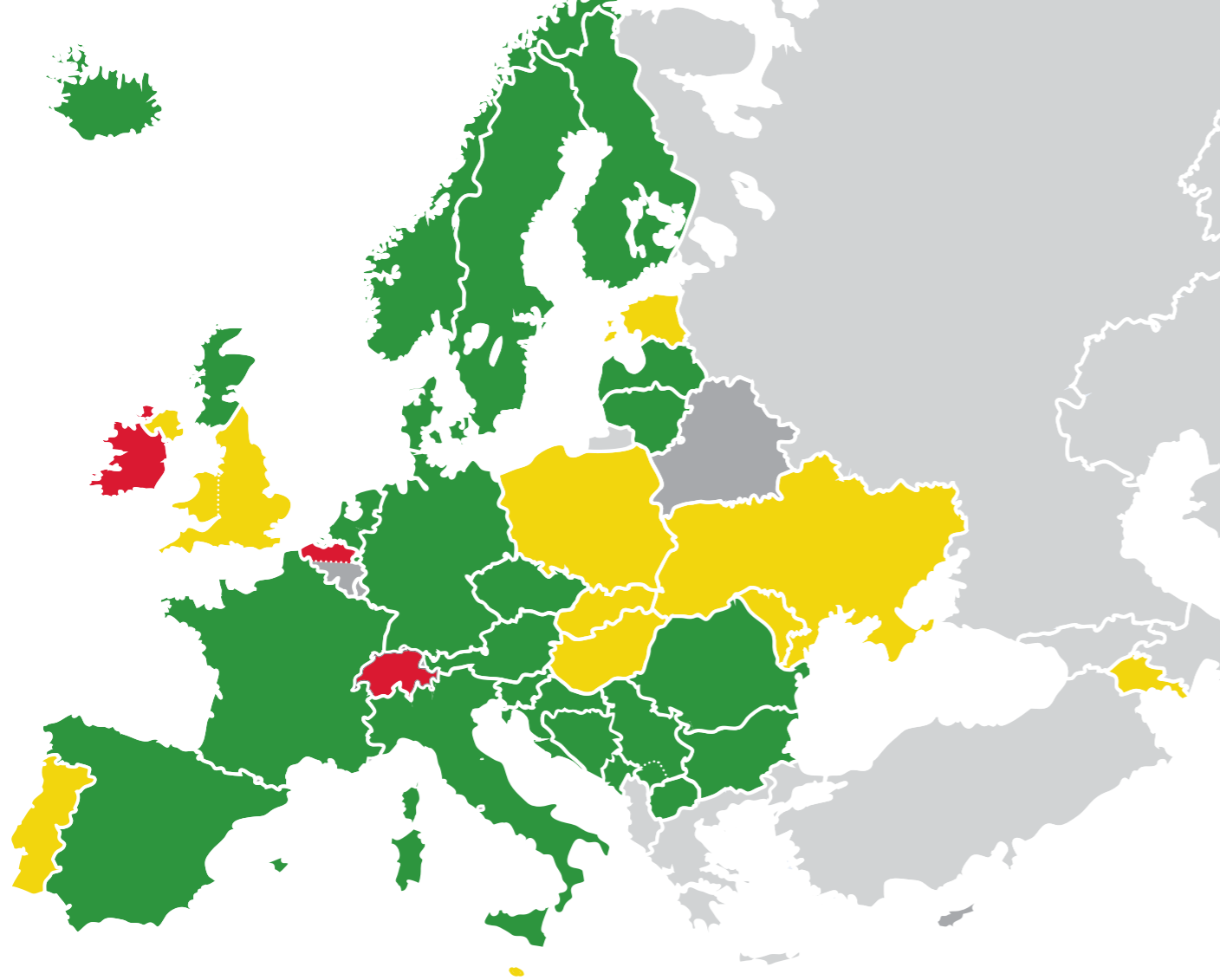


Fig. 6.2: How are students involved in the internal QA processes?

- EHEA country with no ESU member
- No information available
- As full-members (voting rights) within the bodies of internal assessment processes
- As an information source (filling out questionnaires, focus groups, etc)
- Other

Governance of QA agencies

According to the answers provided, 70% unions reported that students are involved in the governance of QA agencies. This percentage is slightly smaller in comparison with the previous study results (74%). According to seven unions, students are not yet involved in governance (these are Serbia, France, Montenegro, Slovakia, Germany, Belarus, Belgium), two of the following unions reported that there is no QA agency in their country yet (Belarus and Ukraine). While there are fewer countries with no QA agency compared to the results of BWSE 2015, the involvement of students in governance has not progressed since the adoption of the revised ESG and a gap remains in many countries. 24 out of 28 unions, who reported involvement of students in the governance of QA agencies, see students as the full-members of decision making bodies, while four unions stated that in their countries students are members of consultative bodies only. It is concerning that no union indicated students were involved as planners of evaluation/accreditation programmes, which means that full trust and recognition towards students as full members of the process is not achieved yet.

Responses to the question about students being consulted on QA issues by government raise a big concern. 58% of respondents affirmed that they were consulted, which is almost the same number as BWSE 2015 (58%). But the number of unions who reported not being consulted has increased (from 11 to 14). The ways of consulting students differ between countries. Usually students are members of consultative bodies (through QA agencies or led by a ministry), and they provide a direct feedback as national unions of students, attend consultation meetings for the sector etc. Some unions reported that there is no regular consultative process applied. Instead, the students are consulted only at those times when governments change laws and are obliged to get stakeholders' opinion. As in other cases, here again, unions indicated that even while being consulted, the students' voice is not being heard or valued, usually the consultation is being conducted at a late stage of lawmaking when negotiation around the major changes is no longer possible. Therefore, as well as ensuring the application of formal processes, more work should be dedicated to the empowerment of meaningful participation of students.

QA experts' pools

19 unions reported the inclusion of students in QA experts pools, while 13 stated that they do not exist/do not include students. The study also confirms the usefulness of pools, as according to all those 19 unions they are also involved in evaluations and other reported QA activities. In comparison to the previous study more unions now report that pools are being operated solely by QA agencies (from 32% in 2015 to 50% currently), whilst pools being operated independently by an NUS remains the case for more than 30% of respondents. The pools which are operated jointly by an NUS and a QA agency were reported in two countries namely Ireland and Poland. In Armenia the pool was established recently in a result of cooperation between ESU and national stakeholders as an outcome of a Tempus project.

Obstacles to student involvement in QA

There are many obstacles that have a negative impact on the enhancement of students' involvement in QA. For all levels and structures, thorough and consistent work should be dedicated to ensuring equal, fair and meaningful engagement of students. The first standard of revised the ESG states that internal stakeholders should develop and implement quality assurance policies, while the guideline states that this policy should support '...students to take on their responsibilities

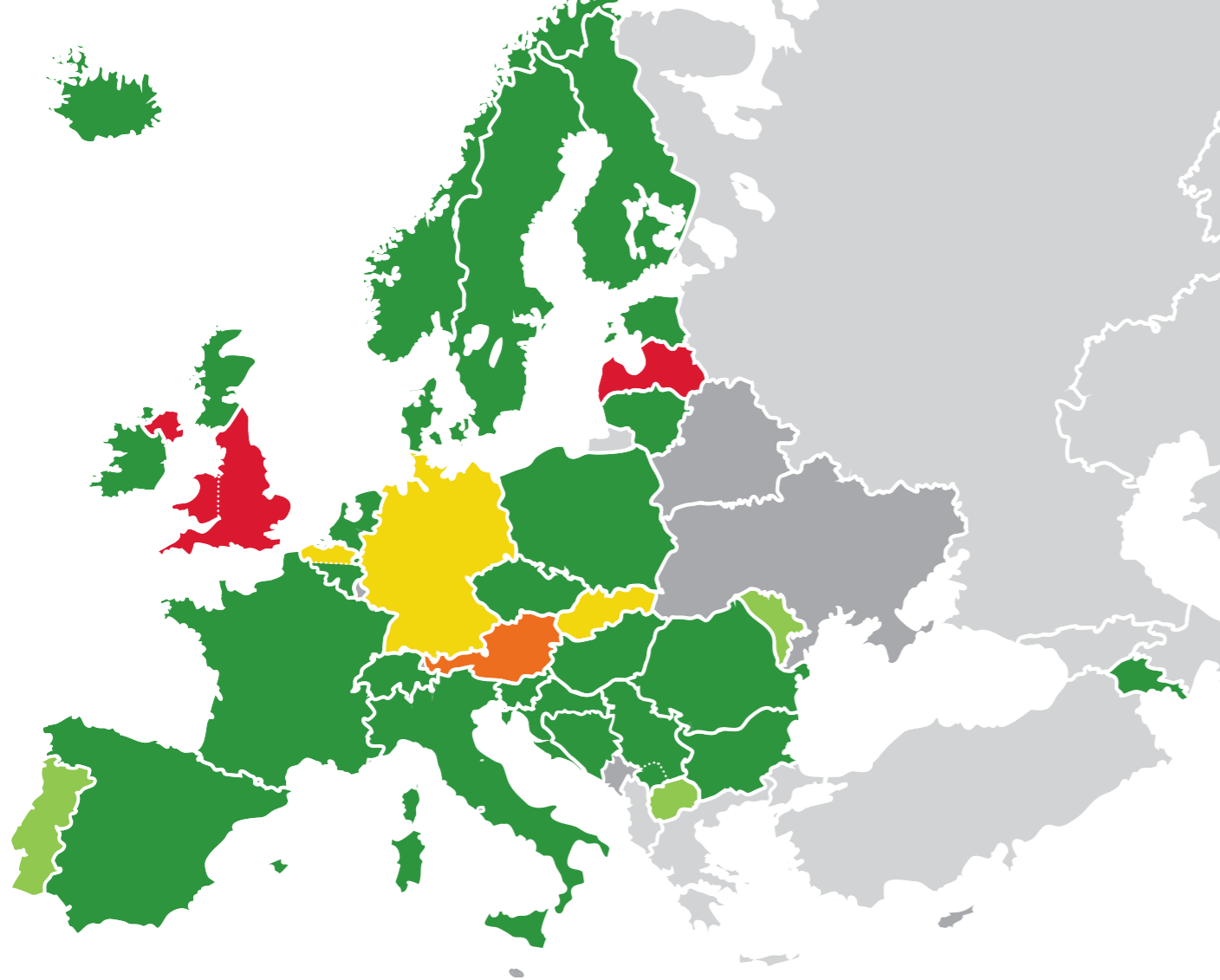


Fig. 6.3: How are students involved in the external QA processes?

- EHEA country with no ESU member
- Not applicable
- As full-members within the external review panel
- As an information source (as in interview during external reviews, etc)
- As observers within the external review panel
- Students can take the position chair/secretary of the external review panel
- Other

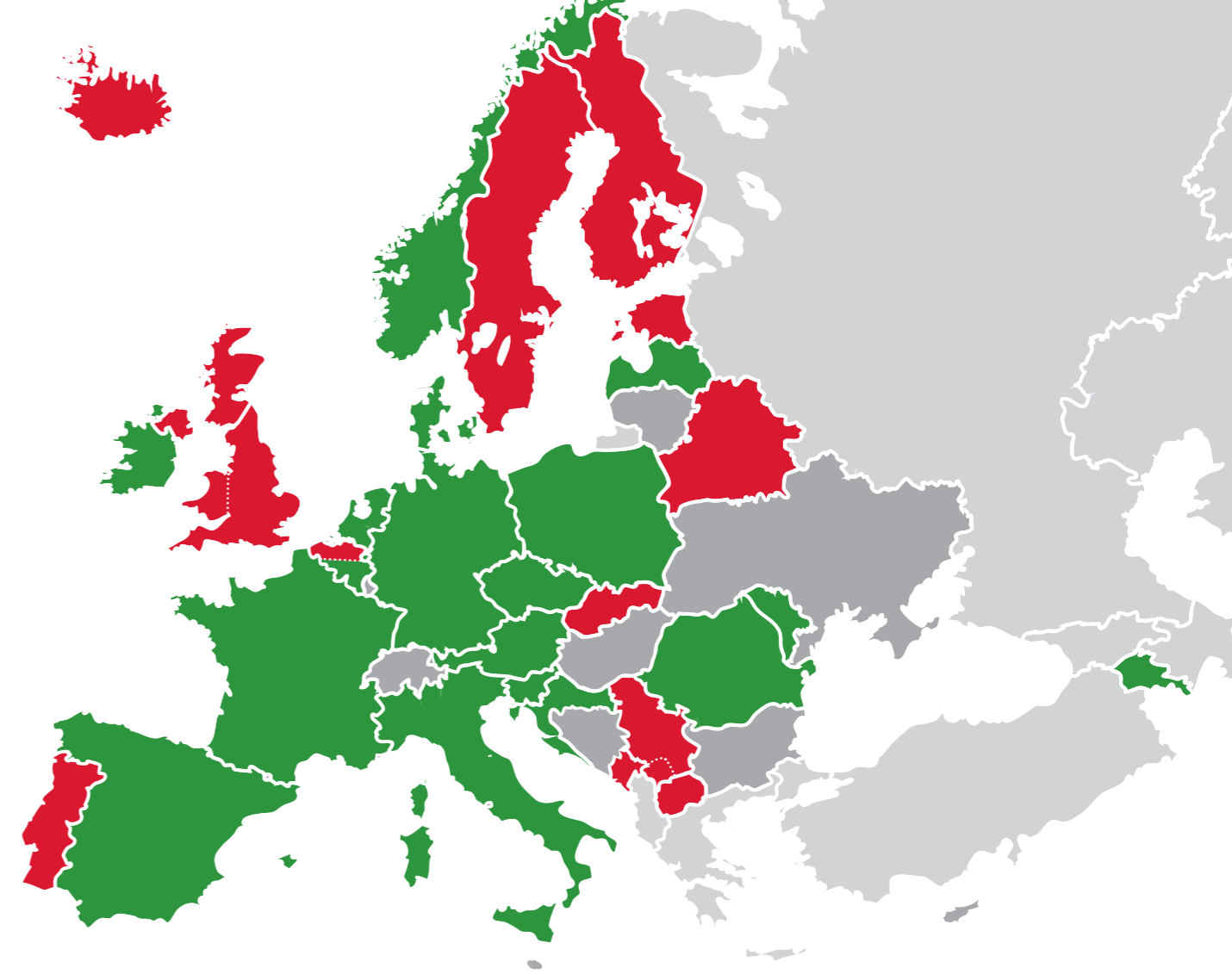


Fig. 6.4: In your country, is there a specific QA experts' pool where students are included?

- EHEA country with no ESU member
- Not applicable
- No
- Yes

in quality assurance...'. Another standard from the 2nd part of ESG specifies the requirement of (a) student member(s) to be expert for peer-review and the guideline elaborates on the need of appropriate support with training/briefing for experts, including the student(s). The position of students has been empowered on the policy level, but the real involvement is not yet a reality. The maintenance of standards from the ESG has been mainly achieved, but is not supported yet by the accomplishment of the guidelines.

Similarly to the previous publication results, the majority of respondents (67%) stated again that the lack of information on QA amongst the students' representatives is the main obstacle to their involvement. The provision of information plays a crucial role in quality assurance progressing. The lack of relevant information causes either the exclusion of students or diminishes meaningful participation. Moreover, it harms the involvement of any stakeholder group causing inequalities in information held. When students lack information about procedures, programmes or are not supported enough to be involved in the decision making process, they are left out of having any ownership and enthusiasm and consequently are not able to ensure any meaningful students' perspective in the QA. The more QA is explicitly administration-driven, the weaker the motivation of students and their involvement becomes. Although the revised ESG had addressed this issue already in 2015, a transparent QA system is far from being achieved.

The next significant obstacle is the visible and tangible impact from the QA process from the students' perspective. Almost 56% of respondents reported that students see QA processes being counterproductive because they do not attract any consequences. A lack of tangible results harms the belief, confidence and trust in a QA process and this results in resistance from students to be meaningfully active in the QA, as they are convinced that their engagement will be fruitless. Closing the feedback loop to ensure that students see their contribution to the QA is followed up on and relevant actions are undertaken for improvements is one of the solutions that will ensure some real impact and will prove in the eyes of students that QA can really bring positive change. Currently, students do not feel able to contribute to the process, they are not regarded as an active participants in it, and therefore the motivation for active involvement itself is compromised.

50% of students' unions reported that students do not feel that they are seen as a full members of their academic communities. Aligning the responses to all the above mentioned questions it may be observed that lack of equal position of students is experienced at all levels of quality assurance, from institutional involvement to the participation in review panels. Students struggle with being perceived as less important, less knowledgeable or less meaningful stakeholders. A lack of an equal treatment is a significant obstacle since it results in making students uncomfortable and unwelcome not only in the QA, but within the whole academic community.

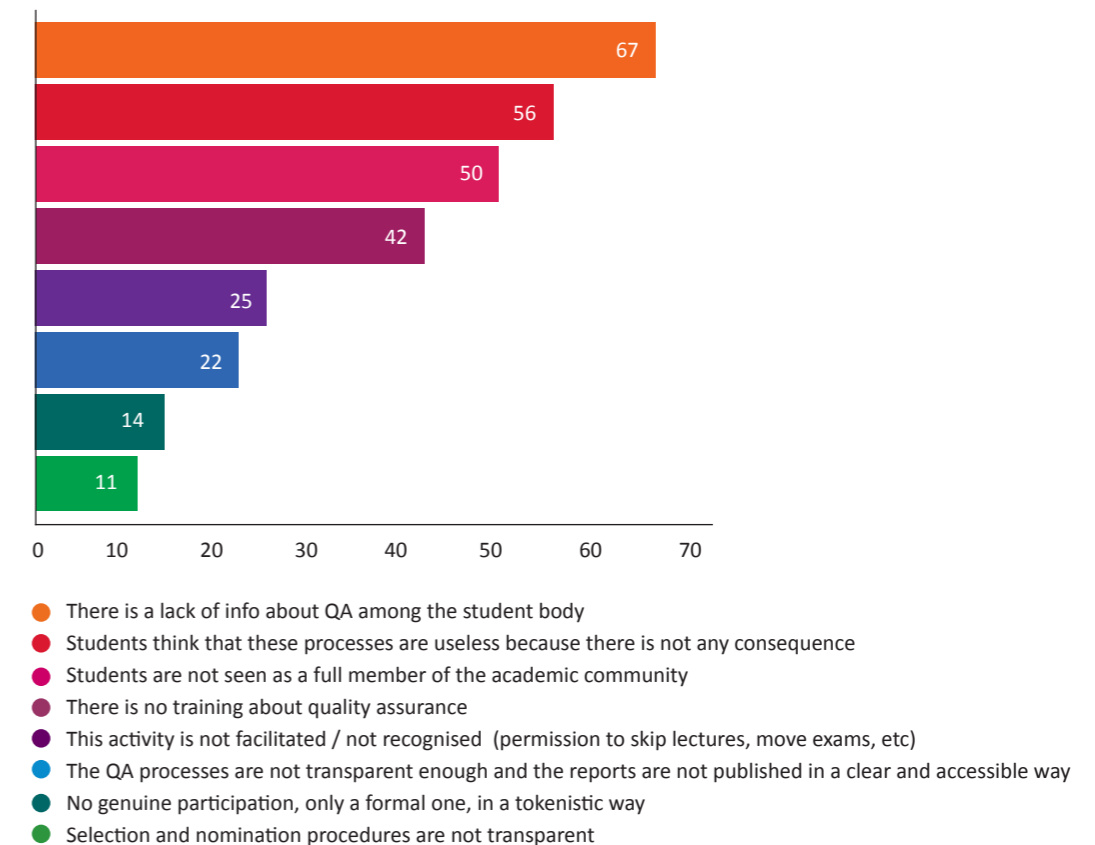
The fourth significant obstacle mentioned by respondents is the shortage of trainings on QA (42%). The lack of development and investment in the expertise of student representatives, a gap in knowledge of procedures and lack of awareness on the outcomes of a meaningful involvement of stakeholders, all result in both students and teachers being less confident about their participation in QA, which in turn results in being unable to initiate the necessary measures required for improvement. Further obstacles reported by respondents are: QA activities not being facilitated or recognised (25%), the procedures not being transparent enough and the reports not being clear and accessible (22%), formal, tokenistic participation rather than genuine engagement (14%) and a lack of transparent nomination/selection procedures (11%).

REVISED ESG DO NOT YET HAVE MEANINGFUL IMPACT FOR STUDENTS PARTICIPATION IN QA

One of the main outcomes concerning quality assurance that was achieved as a result of the last Ministerial Conference in Yerevan was the revision of the Standards and Guidelines for QA, ten years after they were firstly adopted in 2005. The revision was relatively profound and set some ambitious goals for the quality assurance systems across Europe. One of the goals of revision was to make them more clear and easier to apply thereby enabling their genuine implementation.

The impactfulness of ESG was examined by the EQUIP project and according to its findings the expectations of the ESG are very similar among higher education stakeholders and national representatives. The final publication reports that

Fig. 6.5: What are the main barriers that students find in their involvement in QA (Multiple Choice)?



although the ESG were not usually a direct cause for QA reforms in countries, they were used as a framework of requirements and boundaries for policy makers. The project also observed a number of obstacles for implementing the theory into practice. The implementation of QA based on ESG in practice is still a challenge for some institutions, and it is not clear how to introduce the new approaches whilst having some boundaries in the existing system. The QA is perceived mainly as a bureaucratic burden, rather than as an incentive for boosting a quality culture. Student-centred learning is a well-recognised concept within the policy agenda but there is insufficient focus on real implementation.

In the BWSE 2018 survey the member unions were asked about their satisfaction with the changes to their national evaluation criteria as a result of the revised ESG. Satisfaction was expressed by 32% of unions, while 7,5% reported being dissatisfied with the changes made. It is an important message to learn that as much as 22,5% of respondents stated that they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and further 27% unions were unable to answer this question. That means that although 1/3 of members see improvements due to the ESG, there are still a lot of unknowns which are probably a result of insufficient national reforms in quality assurance which would recognise the real spirit of the ESG.

EQAR EXPECTED TO BRING MORE TRANSPARENCY

In March 2018 EQAR celebrated its 10th anniversary. Within the last three years EQAR has worked on the newly revised ESG and has monitored the compliance of previously registered agencies with new standards and guidelines. At the same time new agencies that comply with the revised ESG were registered. The Promotion of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes also formed part of the focus of EQAR's activities, for which the registration process played a vital role. The latest project related to EQAR is called DEQAR and aims to create a Database of External QA Results (DEQAR) by these registered agencies in order to improve information provision and transparency. ESU has been a member of many of the above mentioned initiatives and considers all these steps to be essential for making improvements in the European HE.

Within this study the member unions were asked if they agreed with the idea of having a European Register of QA Agencies operating in compliance with the ESG. Amongst respondents, 55% supported this idea fully and a further 21% agreed with some reservations. The remaining unions are either not sure - 7%, or they do not know - 17%. These answers are probably a result of limited awareness of the EQAR's role in quality assurance, which means that the visibility and understanding of the institution should be enhanced. Since one of the aims for creation of EQAR was facilitation of trust within the QA, the unions were asked if they agreed with foreign QA Agencies registered by EQAR to be allowed to operate in their country. 20% of respondents answered that they should be allowed and the results should be automatically recognised in the home country of the agency. A further 42,5% of respondents indicated that foreign agencies should be allowed to be involved in cross-border activities but their decisions should require recognition by national agencies. 2,5% stated that foreign agencies should be permitted only if there is no agency operating in the receiving country and a further 10% stated that they would be in favour of foreign agencies operating in their country but only if some additional criteria were met. 10% of unions stated that they are totally against the cross-border activity of agencies. 22,5% unions were hesitant enough to not provide an answer. All the numbers indicate that students are rather positive towards cross border agencies but resistance is still there and this is caused by the lack of trust in foreign institutions, therefore most unions see a need for some national regulations which introduce additional criteria.

The majority of the respondents (40%) identified the main impact of EQAR was the achievement of increased transparency in QA processes for students. Other outcomes such as ESG enforcement (9%), the possibility to choose an agency in a different country (9%), opening a national QA system to foreign agencies (6%) or to enable a QA market (3%) seem to have had much less impact for the respondents. One interesting remark about QA systems suggested that they were profoundly improved in accordance with the new ESG even before joining EQAR, therefore the Register has not had much space to practice its impact on reforms in these countries. One point which asked if member unions would support a further development of EQAR towards increasing transparency was answered affirmatively by 64% of respondents.

6.3 CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The QA should remain a priority for improvements to be introduced at the policy level as well as thoroughly supported on the level of genuine application. The above highlighted lack of training and resources for implementation measures or resistance to the application of real tools for improvements harm the potential impact to be achieved with the QA mechanisms.

An improvement in study programmes still remains to be seen by students as the main purpose of quality assurance, but it is not the only important goal. Increased interest and demand for building trust and transparency through QA is also observed. At the same time recent developments in transforming the QA into something more than mere procedures and policies seems to be successful. Therefore our commitment should be to facilitate further and better fulfillment for the aims of QA and continue fostering cooperation between European countries and institutions that are built upon the trust.

The application of both institutional and programme-based approaches to external quality assurance remains the most common and more popular solution for external QA, meanwhile the single-based approach is decreasing in numbers. Nevertheless neither of the approaches should replace the other.

The stagnation of progress in the QA may be perceived as a disappointment. The vast majority of students' unions reported the participation of students in both internal and external QA, but the essence should be sought in the quality of this involvement. For internal QA students seek empowerment, meaningful participation and real engagement, this kind of participation remains somewhat formal and tokenistic. Students are not involved as equal decision makers and they often struggle to make their role recognized in decision making. They remain a source of information but lack enough of training and support, all of which hinders their potential to be game changers. The situation does not seem to have improved in recent years. Students' participation is recognised as an important policy goal, but has still not been fully achieved through the implementation process. The study reports that one of the main obstacles for students' involvement is the lack of information, the absence of relevant training and a lack of transparency. These issues should be given particular attention. We should aim for tangible and impactful consequences of QA to restore the belief and trust of students in the quality assurance processes.

The overall perspective of the involvement of students in QA governance is of concern. A genuine inclusion of students as full and equal members has not been strengthened yet by the revised ESG and there is no positive progress within the last three years. Based on the data collected being included in decision making does not certainly mean being an equal partner. A relevantly low percentage of unions are being consulted by governments on QA matters, as highlighted in the study, and this means that policy-making should be improved to achieve the desired equal partnership and prevent situations where students are left-out or have limited access to information.

The revision of the ESG strived for facilitation of their application and making them a user-friendly tool to boost implementation, but as for now they are seen as a key policy goal for both the sector and national governments, but they have not been fully implemented yet. Furthermore, achievements at the policy level are not reflected in the practice of institutions. Genuine implementation especially at the institutional level has to be a key target, otherwise the use of ESG will remain on the mere level of policy goals and a tokenistic exercise.

Considering the progress in the development of trust and transparency as key functions of QA, the importance of the work of EQAR has to be emphasized. However its role still has to be better conveyed in order to raise awareness about its role amongst student communities. According to students, EQAR should remain a driving force for achieving increased transparency among stakeholders.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Quality culture

In general, the quality assurance needs to be treated as a quality culture tool rather than a set of tokenistic, formal procedures which are completed for their own sake. In order to achieve a stronger quality culture the main focus needs to be given to institutional implementation. The individualised approach to implementation should be observed and applied at each institution since there is no one-size-fits-all solution in QA.

Trust building

There is an increased awareness of the significance of trust building as an important purpose of QA among students. This purpose should be widely promoted as it serves to ensure that quality assurance is based on credible, transparent, and relevant sources of information and explainable decision-making procedures.

Mixed approaches to external QA

Institutional and programme-based approaches to external quality assurance should be complementary towards each other as both examine different sides of education and institution.

Implementation of students' participation in QA

An important policy focus backed up by significant resources for implementation should be allocated for the improvement of quality of participation of students in QA. The conditions for students' participation should empower wide and meaningful participation at international and external levels. Equal and unrestricted membership of students in any decision-making/consultative body should be a key part of any QA process. Students should be seen as a crucial part of feedback loops within the internal QA, particularly when considering the improvement of study programmes.

Students at the heart of policy reforms

The position of students in policy-making at national level has to be enhanced and supported. At present it remains insufficient, and any national policy reforms on QA should target students' needs. Students are crucial stakeholders and those directly affected should be actively present from the early initial stages of any policy reforms and their place in any lawmaking process should be ensured by the development of relevant structures.

Students participation as a fundamental value of EHEA

Meaningful students' participation should remain in focus of the Bologna process as one of the fundamental values of the European Higher Educational Area and should be granted more attention in the future work of the Bologna Follow-Up Group.

Transparency and information provision

In order to overcome the lack of information on QA, relevant training for students, academic staff and administration staff should be mandatorily organised and the provision of information needs to be improved to ensure an equal access to information and procedures.

Impactful QA

QA processes should be followed by relevant actions and the consequences should be constantly demonstrated to ensure the visibility of improvements that are the result of the participation of all stakeholders. These actions should be targeted to enhance effective and impactful procedures, as well as increasing motivation and enthusiasm of stakeholders to contribute with their meaningful participation.

Genuine implementation of the ESG

The implementation of the ESG should be followed both at the level of policy and practice and should be adopted both at national and institutional levels. They should be prevented from remaining a mere policy goal and address the lack of will/resources for genuine implementation.

EQAR as a transparency driver

EQAR should continue its work on transparency enhancement but its role should be also communicated in a comprehensible way and through wider channels for national stakeholders. As a tool EQAR should facilitate bringing a positive impact for increased transparency and trust.

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7 RECOGNITION

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Recognition of qualifications and diplomas has been closely related to the Bologna process since its beginning (Bologna Declaration 1999). However, work on recognition already started long before the Bologna process, culminating with the *Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region* or, as it is usually known, *Lisbon Recognition Convention*, in 1997. Lisbon recognition convention was later affirmed as the foundation for the work on recognition of qualifications within the Bologna process (Berlin Communiqué 2003).

Recognition of credits achieved through study periods abroad was of course another clearly accepted goal since the beginning of the Bologna process, contributing to its emphasis on international mobility.

However, recognition also developed into other directions within the Bologna process policies. In Bergen Communiqué in 2005, ministers for the first time explicitly mentioned recognition of prior learning as a goal (Bergen Communiqué 2005). This goal was set in the context of lifelong learning, but recognition of prior (informal or non-formal) learning also has positive connection to the later Bologna process goals, such as student-centred learning and flexible learning paths (Leuven Communiqué 2009).

7.2 MAIN FINDINGS

Bologna With Student Eyes surveyed the national unions of students on the state of recognition procedures in their national contexts with 16 questions about recognition of foreign qualifications and credits, automatic recognition, diploma supplement and recognition of prior learning. Below are some of the main findings.

RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS AND CREDITS

Assessment of foreign credits or qualifications is primarily being done by higher education institutions with 63% (27 out of 43) of the unions reporting they are responsible for this process, as opposed to recognition authorities and centres (for example: ENIC/NARIC offices) with 37%, or national governments with 23%. With regard to who is responsible for making the final decision about recognition, data shows the same picture as with assessment, except that only 14% of the unions (6 out of 43) report recognition authorities or centres as responsible for making the final decision. This suggests that even when these authorities have a role in the process, it usually consists of providing assessment expertise, while final decisions are made either by higher education institutions (more often) or national government (less often).

Foreign diplomas on the other hand are assessed by these three entities in almost equal share across countries – each of the entities was reported as responsible by around 40% of the unions. Final decisions are less often made by recognition authorities or centres (25%), but still this is significantly more often than in the case of credits and qualifications.

When it comes to transparency, simplicity and non-discriminatory character of the recognition procedures, their excessive complexity appears to be the biggest barrier, with around 43% of the unions (18 out of 42) reporting that they do not perceive the recognition procedures as simple, as opposed to only around 26% of the unions (11 out of 43) that do. The situation is somewhat better with transparency, where around 37% of the unions agree that procedures are transparent and 32% believe they are not, and with non-discriminatory character, where 42% of the unions perceive recognition procedures as non-discriminatory, while around 16% do not. It is also encouraging that the number of students' unions that believe that recognition procedures are transparent has risen from 9 (24%) in 2015 to 16 (37%) in 2018.

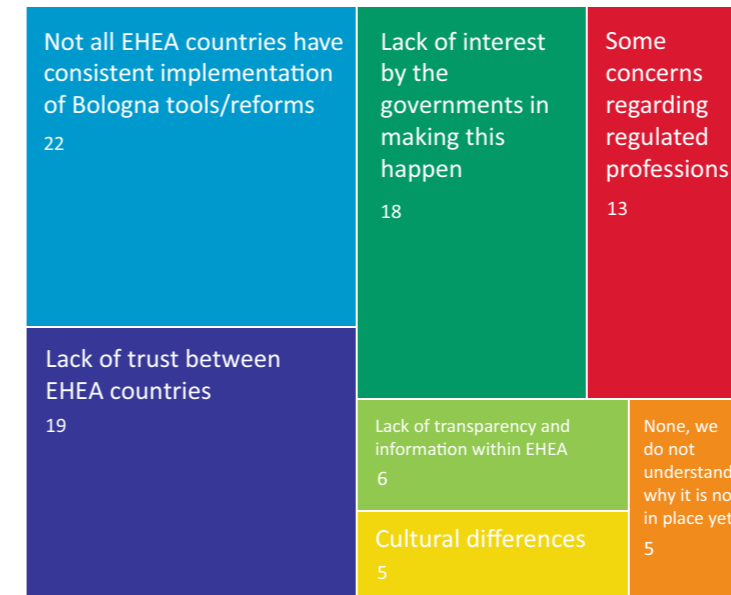
Concerning the question of how demanding the recognition procedure is, the situation is best in credit recognition within a mobility programme (like Erasmus) where the unions' responses were overall mildly positive, even though around one third of the unions (13 out of 43) still perceived problems in accessibility of these recognition procedures. Recognition of degrees seemed to produce mixed responses, with the opinion about the onerousness of the procedure being split almost evenly along the middle. Finally, the situation is expectedly the worst in the area of credit recognition outside a mobility programme where more than half of the students' unions (53% or 23 out of 43) disagree that going through such a procedure is easy. Examining developments over the years, it is important to note that even though the situation is still clearly unsatisfactory, it has slightly improved since the last Bologna With Student Eyes in all three mentioned areas.

AUTOMATIC RECOGNITION

Automatic recognition of qualifications has been a goal of the Bologna process for at least six years (since the Bucharest Communiqué in 2012), and the students' unions across Europe have been supportive of this goal ever since. Data from the questionnaire for 2018 confirms this; almost all (93%) of the students' unions support automatic recognition fully or with only some concerns. In addition, around 47% (20 out of 43) of the unions consider automatic recognition a high or essential priority of the Bologna process.

When asked what is the most significant barrier to automatic recognition in their countries, students' unions report that it is mostly the fact that not all EHEA countries have consistently implemented all the Bologna tools, which is an answer chosen by over half of the respondents (54% or 22 out of 41). This barrier is closely followed by the lack of trust between EHEA countries, which was detected as a barrier by 46% (19) of the unions, and lack of government interest in automatic recognition, which 44% (18) of the unions see as a barrier. The situation has somewhat improved since 2015 in some other regards, for example the percentage of unions who perceive a lack of transparency as one of the main barriers has lowered from 38% (14) to 15% (6). Unfortunately, when it comes to the most widely perceived barriers listed above, the situation has remained more or less the same. This is especially worrisome as two significant tendencies emerge. The first one are national government's lack of interest which seems to persist through time, and the Bologna process, as a members-driven process, cannot fulfil its function if governments do not take responsibility for the implementation of agreed reforms. Secondly, two of the most widely perceived barriers are actually interconnected. Without consistent and thorough implementation of all the Bologna tools and reforms in all the EHEA countries, it is extremely difficult to achieve high levels of trust between them, and this a necessary precondition for automatic recognition.

Fig. 7.1: Main barriers to automatic recognition



RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

Recognition of prior, or informal and non-formal, learning has been the goal of the Bologna process since 2005 (Bergen Communiqué 2005) and is one of the commitments set in the most recent Yerevan Communiqué (Yerevan Communiqué 2015).

That informal and non-formal learning needs to be recognized has been the position of the European Students' Union for a long time, but it was always also stressed that such recognition can be used not only for access to higher education or the labour market, but also in complementarity with formal higher education. Judging by responses of the national students' unions, accomplished results in this area are completely unsatisfactory. Only 63% (27 out of 43) of the respondents reported having established procedures for recognition of prior learning or that such procedures are in a mature stage of development. This means that such procedures are effectively non-existent in almost 40% of the higher education systems, and this is utterly disappointing for a process for which all the stakeholders agree is very beneficial and much needed in contemporary societies. It is even more worrisome that according to the perspective of students' unions, the situation has not changed at all since 2015 when this commitment was clearly stated in the Yerevan Communiqué. This signals that there is a serious problem in getting procedures for recognition of prior learning implemented at the institutional level of our educational systems.

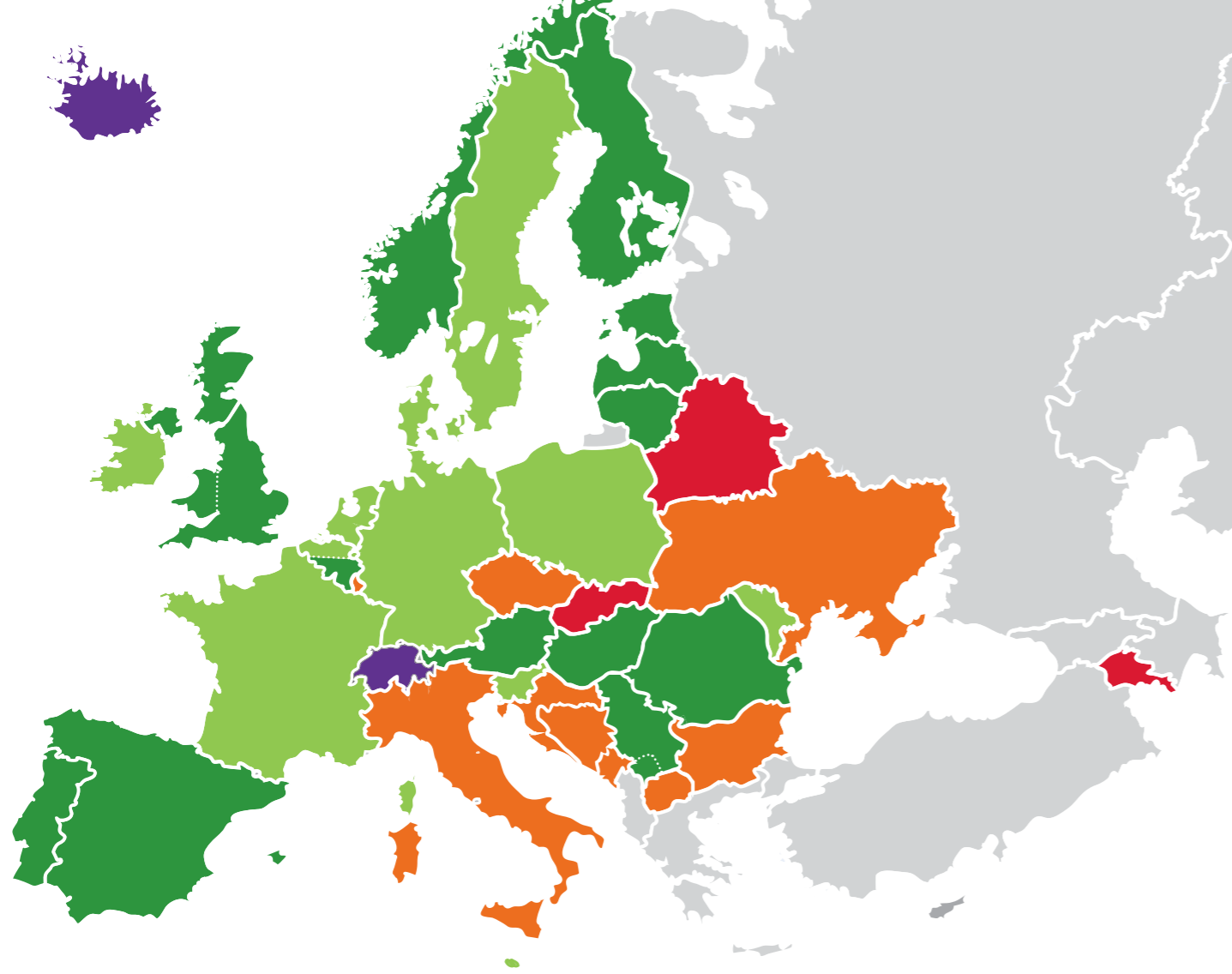


Fig. 7.2: Is Recognition of Prior Learning possible in your country?

- EHEA country with no ESU member
- Not applicable
- No, no work has been done in order to enable RPL
- No, not yet, but some initiatives are being developed
- Other
- Yes, there are some initiatives
- Yes, there are established systems

In contexts where recognition of prior learning is possible and connected with formal education, it is primarily being used for covering part of the studies (being recognised and evaluated through ECTS) (86% of the respondents) or accessing higher education (65% of the respondents).

It is also interesting to note what the students' unions perceive as the biggest barriers to the recognition of prior learning. The most significant barrier appears to be a lack of trust in the validation of qualifications, as this answer was provided by two-thirds of the unions (25 out of 38). This echoes practical problems which stem from finding flexible and yet reliable procedures of assessing the learning outcomes of the less structured forms of learning (this is especially pertinent in the case of informal learning). Even more problematically, academic staff of the institutions seem to have low levels of confidence in such procedures (or their future development) or even think that this is outside of the scope of responsibilities of their higher education institutions. Very much connected to this problem is the second most often perceived barrier which is limited information and a lack of trust among main stakeholders (58% of the unions or 22 out of 38 see this as a strong barrier). From the combination of these two answers it is clear that the lack of trust is currently by far the biggest obstacle to recognition of prior learning.

Other significant barriers are the lack of resources or the cost of recognition of prior learning (around 40% of the answers), which is also probably related to the underdeveloped standardised methods of assessment, and the lack of governmental interest and legislative limitations (both were signalled out by around 30% of the respondents), both of which can be grouped in national-level barriers to the recognition of prior learning.

Figure 7.3: Main barriers to recognition of prior learning



RECOGNITION OF MOBILITY PERIODS

As outlined at the beginning of this section, recognition is most easily accessible to students when it is a part of a mobility period. However, taking into account the reach and declarative importance of the biggest of such programs - Erasmus+, as well as very ambitious mobility goals, the state of recognition of credits achieved through a mobility period is still extremely disappointing. Almost 30% of the students' unions who participated in this survey listed students' fear of non-recognition of their credits after mobility as one of the biggest barriers to outgoing mobility. In practice, learning agreements are often being modified during the mobility period itself, often resulting in serious problems for the student when returning to their home institution. Additionally, study programs are too often not flexible enough (unwilling to accept credits gained at other institutions) and therefore even in advance present a barrier for their students to go on a mobility period. If this situation is to be changed and mobility to become a reality for a higher number of students, recognition of credits gained through mobility needs to be urgently improved.

7.3 CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

As is to be expected, effectiveness and accessibility of recognition procedures varies depending on the kind of recognition. The situation has slightly improved in the last few years in terms of accessibility of recognition of qualifications and credits, especially regarding transparency of the procedures, which the students' unions also perceive as an improving aspect of automatic recognition. Other than transparency however, in the last three years, students' unions do not perceive a significant change for the better. Even more worryingly, within this kind of recognition further subdivisions are visible. In credit recognition there is a huge difference between credits achieved as a part of the mobility period and those achieved outside of it. Even though the situation with recognizing credits gained through mobility periods is still far from satisfactory, it nonetheless demonstrates that mobility programmes (usually Erasmus+) have had a positive effect on recognition since they provided institutions with a framework and streamlined procedures which are non-existent in other forms of recognition. Characteristics such as transparency and simplicity of procedures are to be taken into account while developing new ways to improve recognition in those areas where it is currently lacking.

This is particularly clear in the case of recognition of prior learning. In the large number of national contexts such recognition is still not available to students and there seems to be no improvement since the previous Ministerial Communiqué. Lack of trust in validation procedures being seen as the main barrier to development of recognition of prior learning is probably a signal that detailed, reliable and transparent procedures need to be developed and promoted in order to stimulate recognition authorities to improve their recognition of prior learning. Another interesting point for future exploration and development is how recognition of informal and non-formal learning can help achieve flexibilisation of study programs with the goal of individualising learning paths as much as possible.

Finally, when it comes to automatic recognition, which is one of the main goals of the Bologna process, it is a very important finding that the students' unions perceive the fact that not all EHEA countries have consistently implemented all the Bologna tools as the biggest barrier to automatic recognition. With the second biggest barrier being a lack of

trust between EHEA countries, it is likely that the second is a consequence of the first. These results are not surprising; uneven and superficial implementation is something that ESU has been warning about for a very long time, as the students' unions clearly see that Bologna reforms have not been carried out at a similar level across countries. Looking to the future, besides Bologna working bodies, European-level quality assurance also has a crucial role in ensuring that degrees in different EHEA countries fulfill the basic criteria of quality, which is impossible without proper implementation of Bologna tools. Only this can truly foster trust between the countries which is a necessity for automatic recognition.

7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recognition procedures need to be simplified in order to be more accessible to all students. This especially goes for credit recognition outside of mobility programs.
- Implementation of all Bologna tools in a proper, systematic and thorough manner needs to finally be ensured through the Bologna working bodies as well as more reliable and comparable quality assurance processes at national levels.
- National legislation should prescribe awarding the diploma supplement free of charge.
- Diploma supplement should be further developed in order to be used to foster recognition of informal and non-formal learning.
- Recognition of prior learning should be included in national strategies which deal with higher education in order to promote at all levels (national, institutional) an understanding of RPL as complementary to formal education.
- Recognition of prior learning should be developed in close connection to the shift towards student-centred learning and flexibilisation of study programs.
- Expertise on ways of assessing and validating the outcomes of informal and non-formal learning needs to be further developed in all the national contexts and disseminated to the higher education institutions staff.

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8 MOBILITY AND INTERNATIONALISATION

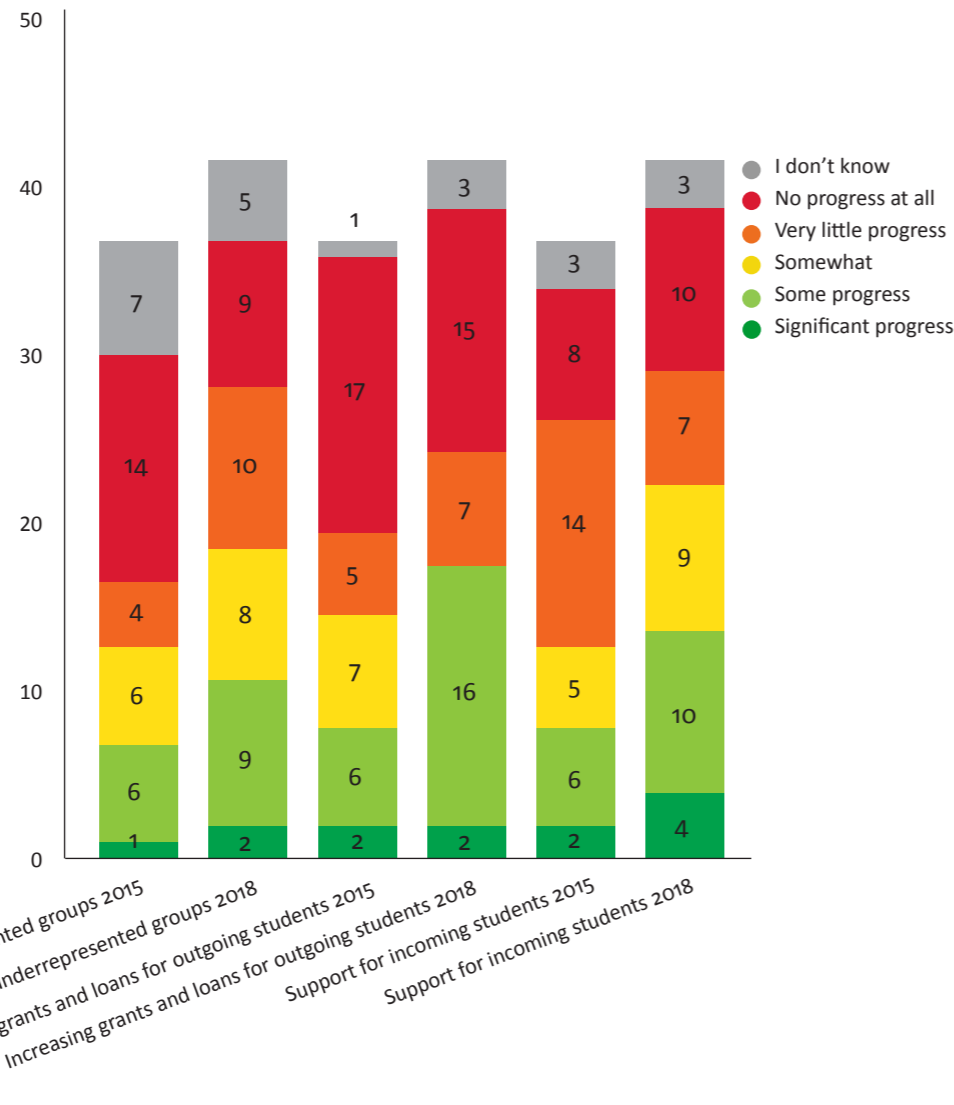
8.1 INTRODUCTION

Throughout past “Bologna With Student Eyes” publications, the lack of financing for internationalisation and mobility has continuously remained a key issue. However, students do not suffer from the underfunding of mobility equally - by far the most left behind in this area are students from marginalized groups, e.g. students with disabilities or lower socio-economic background. The inequality of accessibility to mobility periods and activities related to internationalisation worsen a phenomenon frequently highlighted by a plethora of stakeholders - the lack of balanced mobility within Europe. These problems are repeated year after year, while the amount of students in Erasmus mobility schemes has grown over the last decade. Based on available sources, there were at least 1.6 million international students completing their tertiary education within the EU in 2015, and at least 365,000 international students who graduated in the EU during 2015 (EUROSTAT, 2017). Internationalisation overall seems to have taken a back seat in Europe. Lack of progress in legislation and institutional development has been consistent, pointing to a worrying trend - a continuous status quo of stagnation during a time when mobility and internationalisation is experiencing exponential growth. For example, mobility and internationalisation has not been mentioned in the context of the European Semester for any EU country for the past two years, despite other aspects of education meriting some attention.

The Erasmus programme has been a source of funding for the mobility of up to 4.3 million young people between 2007 and 2016 (European Commission, 2018). With the upcoming re-establishment of a Multiannual Financial Framework for Europe, including the long-serving Erasmus programme, a lot of attention must be paid to those left behind by the internationalization of higher education before now.

Since 2015, little progress has been made in regard to widening access, support for outgoing students, and support for incoming students. A particularly large problem in this field is the portability of grants. Between 2012 and 2018, little progress has been made overall. This is despite several commitments made by various governments and European projects. This issue is illustrated further in a graph below.

Fig. 8.1: Has there been progress on the development of mobility in your country on the following aspects since 2015?/Has there been progress on the development of mobility in your country on the following aspects since 2012?



This chapter will elaborate on several issues and pitfalls regarding mobility and internationalisation that have become apparent throughout research and data collection.

8.2 MAIN FINDINGS

FINANCING MOBILITY AND INTERNATIONALISATION

By far, the most prevalent obstacle to outgoing mobility is students' financial situation. Financing has continuously been a major and known barrier to mobility for over a decade, and yet remains unsolved. Students who engage with Erasmus+ mobility still tend to come from higher socioeconomic groups. This has been apparent in both statistical data collections and several research papers, e.g. Ballatore & Ferde (2013), focus on the elitist nature of mobility programmes and the effect that produces. Students who have participated in international mobility tend to have higher income and access to job opportunities, which gives the impression that international mobility is related to privilege among students (Ballatore & Fredere, 2013). This is further corroborated by research done in Germany, which empirically shows that in the current situations, mobility programmes tend to deepen the divide between students from lower and higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Netz & Grüttner, 2018). This deepening of the divide is not in concurrence with the goals and values of European mobility programmes, and requires immediate attention. This lasting situation is in direct contradiction with commitments made in the Yerevan communique of 2015, which states that EHEA will "enhance the social dimension of higher education, improve gender balance and widen opportunities for access and completion, including international mobility, for students from disadvantaged backgrounds." (Yerevan Communique, 2015) Mobility can be a tool for enhancing the learning and skills of all learners, but cannot reach its full potential until the inherent inequalities that exist within the current system(s) have been addressed.

Internationalisation in general includes several obstacles that are caused by lower income, the number of dependants and other economic factors. This has been proven and re-proven in several publications, such as EUROSTUDENT VI (DZHW, 2018), the Erasmus Student Network's yearly surveys on mobility, and previous "Bologna With Student Eyes" publications. In 2016, only 10.2% of students in international mobility considered that 80% or more of their expenses were covered [during mobility] (Erasmus Student Network, 2016). A further problem is the students' need to cover the costs of their travel and mobility themselves in advance, because the grants are paid out too late to account for costs when necessary. 46% of students in mobility schemes encountered this problem according to ESN Survey 2015 (Erasmus Student Network, 2015).

Since 2015, little progress has been made in regard to financial and social support for both incoming and outgoing students - a field that has been stagnating for over a decade now. In the "Bologna With Student Eyes" publication of 2015, a significant part of the chapter concerning internationalisation and mobility focused on this same lack of progress and pointed out the need to move forward in this area. A similar sentiment was expressed in the Yerevan communique (Yerevan Communique, 2015).

This is not to say, that no progress has been made at all; two good examples are Hungary and Malta, who have launched new initiatives regarding students engagement in mobility. Progress has also been made in regard to the creation of concrete internationalisation strategies, which is elaborated on below. However, this progress remains marginal compared with an overwhelming situation of stagnation across the EHEA.

If the current situation continues, Europe will be experiencing a decline in internationalisation and mobility instead of growth. Considering that financial issues are by far the most prevalent barrier to mobility, immediate attention needs to be paid to the socio-economic side of internationalisation. According to the ICEF monitor, between 2012 and 2015, based on global population, the number of outbound students decreased from 6% to 5%, and this is projected to continue unless significant changes are made. The most significant factors in stagnation of mobility according to the monitor stem from local i.e. national causes (ICEF, 2018), such as a lack of flexibility in curricula, lack of encouragement for students to engage in outgoing mobility etc.

BALANCED MOBILITY

The situation of measures aimed at addressing balanced mobility flows is highly varied in Europe. Only six national unions of students are aware of initiatives to balance the mobility in their country. However, some of these unions still consider these initiatives to be too low, e.g. French and Romanian students highlighted that while statistics regarding mobility are collected, these results are not used to produce strategic solutions to existing problems. In many cases, measures aim at encouraging students from underrepresented groups to apply for mobility programmes, but do not include more substantial measures to enable their mobility.

An exception here is Denmark - unfortunately not in a positive sense. In Denmark, HEIs are financially 'punished' if they fail to keep the mobility flows balanced. The regulation regarding funding universities states that within a 3-year period, there must be a balance between incoming and outgoing students in Denmark. If the balance does not exist, in particular if the number of incoming students is higher than that of outgoing students, the difference in funding will not be covered by the state. (Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet, 2017) The National Union of Students in Denmark (DSF) is of the opinion that it is the state's responsibility to finance the cost that higher education institutions have relating to students. While balance in mobility is important, it is problematic that universities are economically pressed to send students abroad or take in less incoming students. The balance of mobility should be based on academic motivations, not on economic ones.

Some countries have endeavoured to improve the balance by creating projects aimed at counselling students not engaged in mobility to see it as a realistic option. These programmes have had varying effects. While in some countries the popularisation of mobility has yielded some positive results and an increase in interest towards mobility, it is not a sustainable or permanent solution to unreached target goals in internationalisation. These programmes can be very inefficient and highly inconsistent with other developments and activities taking place within higher education. The overall, lack of effective measures and inconsistencies between existing measures is perceived as key problems with reaching internationalisation targets. Inconsistency and inefficiency are key issues in France. According to research by Cnajep (Comité pour les relations nationales et internationales des associations de jeunesse et d'éducation populaire), 50% of French youth find public communication and information about mobility opportunities complicated, and 31% regard them as completely invisible. 20% stated that they had never seen communication and information regarding mobility. Only 6% of respondents found the available information useful for themselves. (Cnajep, 2018: 26) This illustrates a lack of strategic and useful communication by the French education sector regarding mobility and internationalisation opportunities. French students see the programs created to tackle mobility obstacles as very inefficient.

According to OECD, the imbalance of mobility between Western and Eastern Europe remains severe. While more than 24 000 students moved from the east to the west to engage in student mobility, less than a third of that went into international mobility from west to east. Roughly, for every two students from Eastern Europe in student mobility programmes in Western Europe there is one student from Western Europe engaging in international mobility programmes in Eastern Europe (OECD, 2013). This data does show some improvement since 2008, but is still far from a balance of mobility within Europe. While mobility is a great tool for integrating an international, intercultural, and a global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of education (De Wit & Hunter, 2015: 45), it cannot be left to balance itself out in a 'free market'. Constant imbalance of mobility will inevitably lead to institutionalised facilitation of brain drain in countries with higher outgoing than incoming mobility rates.

THE TREATMENT AND SITUATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

This research has identified various initiatives that aim to increase the incoming flow of international students. These exist on governmental and institutional level, but the role of student unions' initiatives in this regard cannot be understated. According to the collected data, the majority of initiatives regarding the social integration of students are managed and run by local and national Student Unions. In contrast, initiatives by governments are vastly in the minority, especially in regard to students in short-term mobility programmes. At the same time, the majority of attention overall seems to be paid to students in short-term mobility programmes, leaving international degree students to fend largely for themselves. Much more attention is directed at attracting students to engage in international mobility than in supporting them once they are there.

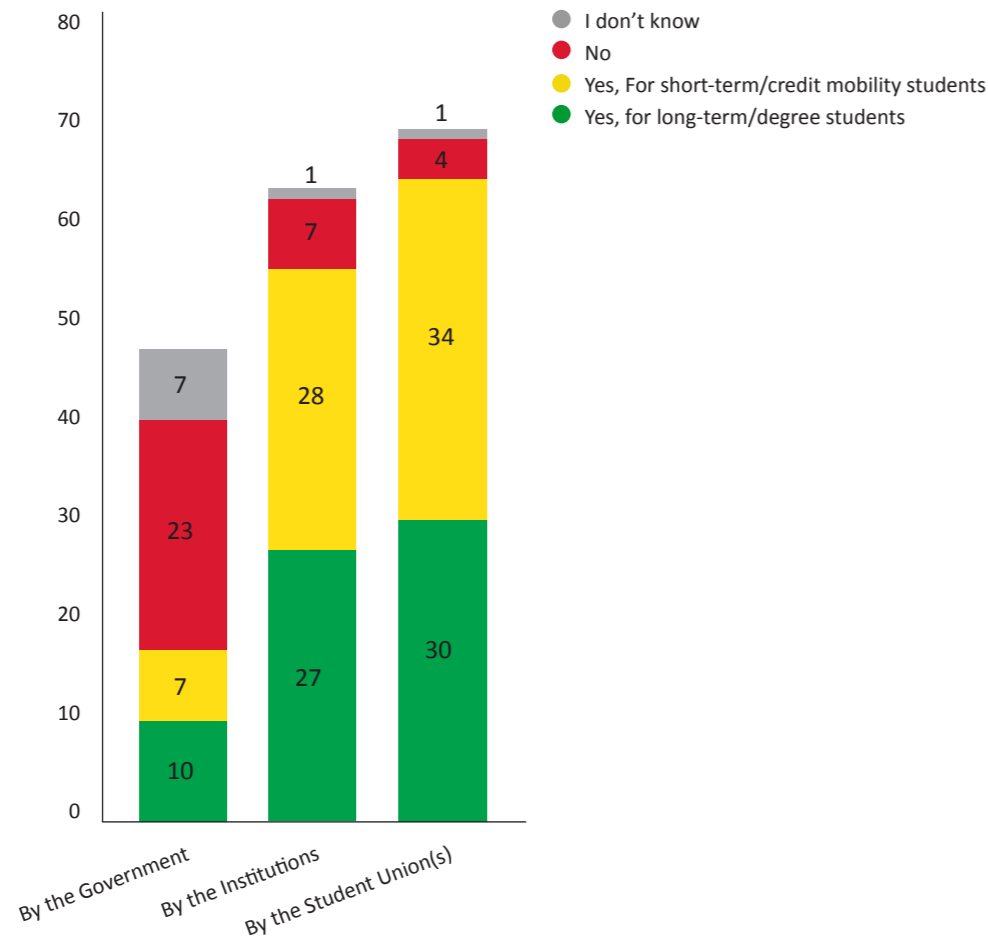
The focus on increasing the influx of students seems to only partially be paired with a focus on increasing governments' and institutions' capacity to really address international students' study and living conditions. Administrative staff, e.g. counsellors, coordinators etc, are often not prepared to answer the questions and needs of international students. According to ESU member unions, 1 non-academic staff receive training for this in only six countries according to our members. In 17 countries, the administrative staff only receive specialized training to be able to respond to the needs of increased internationalisation in some of the institutions. These results show some improvement since 2015 - unfortunately, it seems that exponential growth in the needs of international students has not been met with a similar fast development in staff training to fulfil the needs of the new student population.

Attention for international students' needs is lacking on several levels across Europe. In the majority of countries, students are either badly addressed or only receive partial attention in regard to their overall needs, apart from the situations that need immediate action (such as emergencies, deportation etc). The majority of student unions see international students' needs as badly addressed.

In particular, there is a worrying trend that international and local students get 'treated equally' without a chance for real and practical equality. This seems to stem from the perception of local and international students as having similar needs, which is mostly not the case. There must be no discrimination between a local student and a student from another (EHEA) country, but accounting for differences in access to services is also essential. When comparing the number of initiatives aimed at integrating short-term mobility students to those aimed at degree students, there also seems to be a significant gap. Furthermore, while access to study facilities is often equal for all students, access to health care, student

grants and internships is highly dissimilar. In several countries, health care is only freely and/or easily accessible to EU students, but not international students from non-EU countries. In addition, international students are often forced to pay for additional health insurance, which is not a cost local students have to deal with - this is the case in the UK, among other countries.

Fig. 8.2: Are there any initiatives that aim to enhance social integration of incoming students?



STRATEGIC INTERNATIONALISATION - A STORY OF REGRESSION

The utilisation of internationalisation strategies seems to have stagnated completely in Europe. Since 2012 there has been very little development in creating and implementing internationalisation strategies in general, despite growing internationalisation. This is in direct contradiction to several commitments made by the EHEA.

Only nine student unions out of 43 stated that their country has a national internationalisation strategy that is well implemented and has clear target goals. Furthermore, only nine unions said they had been included in the process of the creation of these strategies. Remarkably, a large part of the unions who said the target goals are clear and the unions who were included in creating the internationalisation strategies overlapped. Most worryingly, comparing “Bologna With Student Eyes” survey results from 2018 with those of 2015 shows that students experience with internationalisation strategies has become more negative over time.

Compared with 6 NUSes who said that their country has a well-implemented internationalisation strategy in 2015, only 3 NUSes expressed the same opinion in 2018. More thorough analysis of the data shows that progress seems to have been made in regard to discussing the need for strategic internationalisation, but a lack of real steps in that direction is apparent. The map below illustrates the students' satisfaction with the content and implementation of said strategies.

INTERNATIONALISATION AT HOME

Internationalisation at home can be a useful tool for an increased interest in mobility and a greater understanding of the value of internationalisation. However, it is important to state that internationalisation at home should never be seen as a means to reduce demands regarding the number and/or accessibility of outgoing mobility programmes. The need for equitable access to mobility has been acknowledged for a while now, but the barriers remain largely unsolved. The degree to which the concept of internationalisation at home is utilised varies, but in practise it mostly relies on courses taught in English or other foreign languages and/or the mobility of lecturers, professors etc. The integration of international and local students for internationalisation experiences is worryingly uncommon. The amount, subjects and quality of courses in other languages offered by HEIs varies greatly. For this great variation in conditions, local students can be reluctant to engage in them, which further reduces contact between local and international students. While in some countries the variety of programmes and courses offered to international students is quite wide, other countries have a minimal amount of quality courses available for international students.

Free language courses in higher education seem to follow a trend of disappearance. One of key skills international students often have to acquire is the local language. Access to (free) language courses has, however, declined over the past three years. In seven European countries, language courses are provided free of all charges to all students in the country. In a further 23 countries, language courses are provided for international students in some, but not all of the institutions and programmes. In Montenegro, Armenia and Macedonia, international students have access to neither paid nor free language courses. However, in three countries international students do not have any access to language courses within higher education as a part of their mobility, and in five countries, these courses are provided for a fee. In 2015, only 32% of students had access to language preparation, but one third of those students had to pay for it themselves (Erasmus Student Network, 2015).

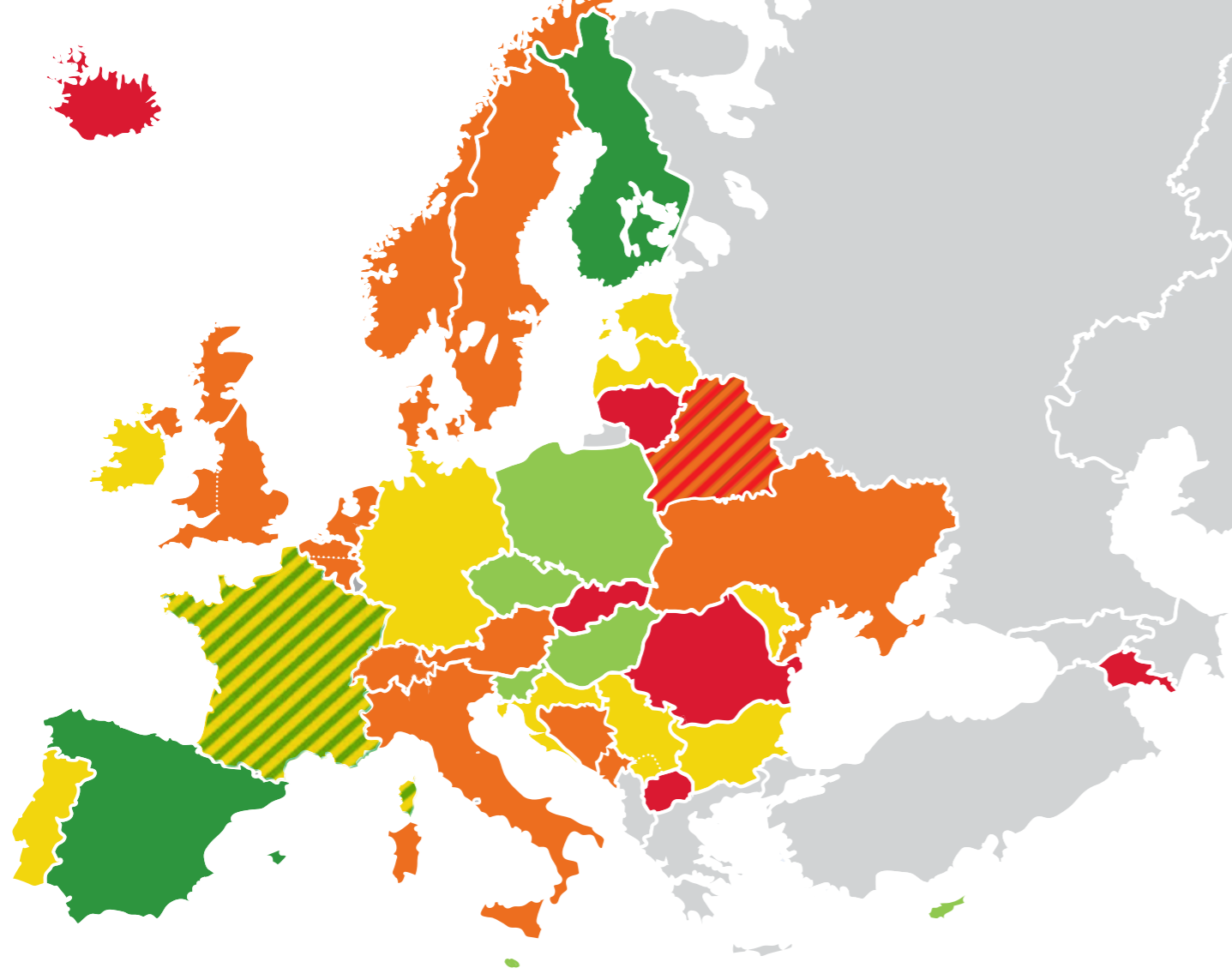


Fig. 8.3: In my country, there is a national, well implemented strategy for internationalisation with target goals.

- EHEA country with no ESU member
- Not applicable
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Undecided
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

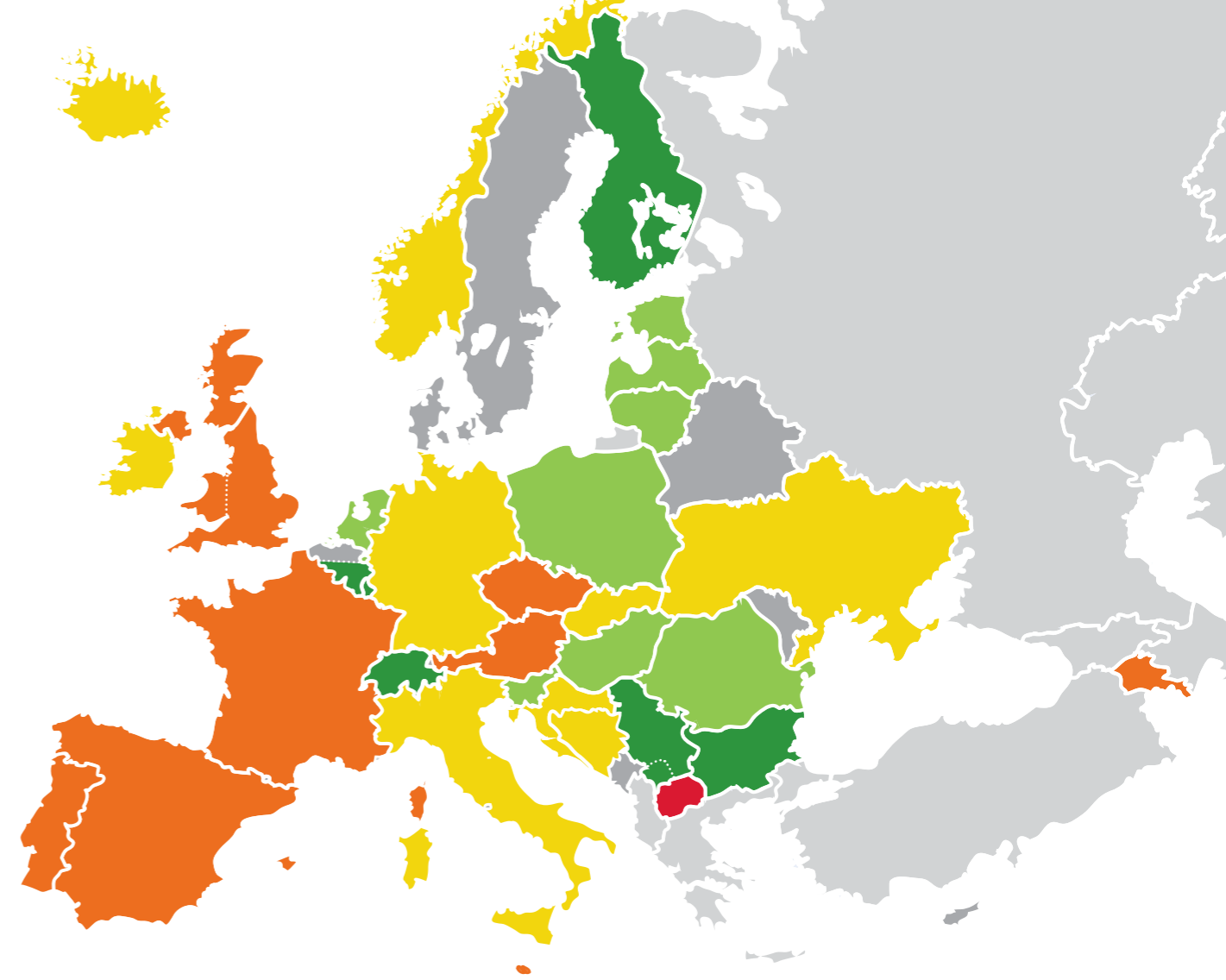


Fig. 8.4: Is free language training provided by the Higher Education institutions in your country? Comparison between 2018 and 2015.

- EHEA country with no ESU member
- Not applicable
- No, no language training is offered at all
- Yes, additional fees are charged
- Yes, it's free for some programmes and institutions
- Yes, it's free for most programmes and institutions
- Yes, it's free for all programmes and institutions

Worryingly, international students are not treated equally amongst themselves - the availability and cost (or lack thereof) of language courses can depend on the length of the mobility period. While a large part of degree students seem to have access to at least some form of courses, students in Erasmus-mobility programmes do not always receive the same treatment (Erasmus Student Network, 2015).

STUDENTS FROM MARGINALIZED GROUPS IN MOBILITY

Students from marginalized groups remain a topic often discussed but the situation is seldom directly improved upon. The phrase “marginalized group” can apply to an incredibly large range of people and groups, everyone from learners from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds to racial and national minorities to students with disabilities. It is clear that as higher education becomes more and more of an universally expected level of education for all, not all access to higher education is equal.

Students with disabilities remain a group that are minimally represented in mobility programmes; this is mainly due to difficulties with accessibility, both in a financial and a physical sense. In a world of increasing diversity, universal design has become a vital value and should be regarded as a matter of principle. Every service, facility, study material and event targeted to students should be accessible to all students.

TACKLING (KNOWN) OBSTACLES

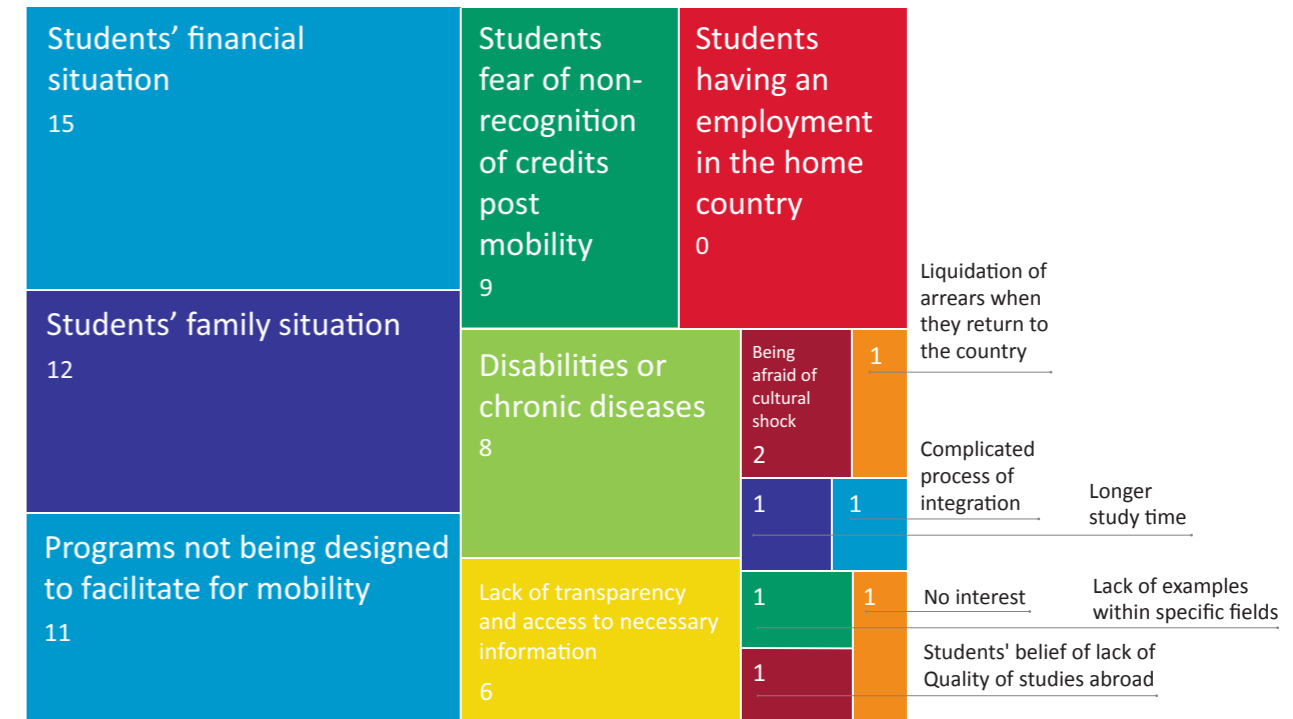
As with most policy areas, there are certain well-known and long-standing obstacles for mobility and internationalisation. The following part will take a look at if and how these are being targeted.

Several new national and institutional programmes have been put in place since 2015 to tackle mobility obstacles. Worryingly, very few of these programmes seem to have had any noticeable effect on these well-known obstacles. The most common tool in regard to mobility and counselling remains offering advice and information to students who could engage in mobility. However, this counselling seldom goes beyond essentially marketing mobility, and looks at practical issues students face when considering mobility.

In France, for example, the programmes looking to increase mobility flows have been found to be very ineffective. According to one of the, national unions of students in France, the problems stem from several factors. These include poor communication of available opportunities, the regionality of different programs, which creates significant divides across the country and complicates an already complex system. Another barrier is the fact, that French students are largely monolingual, but most international mobility programmes require a working knowledge of English. However, a major reason for the inefficiency of French programmes is their inability to solve the most prevalent barrier to international mobility - financial difficulties and great socio-economic divides.

Worryingly, the trend of continuing and unchanging issues in mobility and internationalisation overall is also a prevailing issue here. Below is a word cloud illustrating the major obstacles to outgoing mobility in Europe according to 2015 and 2018 Bologna With Student Eyes survey results.

Fig. 8.05: Obstacles preventing outgoing mobility



Difficulties with visas will likely be an issue that European higher education will increasingly have to tackle in the future as the amount of international students from outside of Europe/EU increases. Currently, China and India account for roughly half of the worlds tertiary-education-aged population, the two countries accounting for about 40% of all students in outbound mobility between 2012 and 2015. (ICEF, 2018). These numbers have likely increased since latest data has been made available for analysis. The British council expects that by 2017, the students of China and India will account for 60% of all students in mobility programmes globally (ibid).

Considering the impending Brexit, special attention needs to be paid to updating, modernising and equalising visa policies in Europe, especially in regard to non-European international students, who currently face significant difficulties and costs when applying for visas. A known barrier is the length of student visas. It is troubling that some students who are matriculated to attain a full degree as an international student in Europe must still re-apply for visas annually resulting in a realistic risk of deportation in the middle of completing a degree.

NUS-UK, USI AND THE STUDENTS OF UK AND IRELAND POST-BREXIT

The National Union of Students in the United Kingdom (NUS-UK) and ESU are extremely concerned about the impact Brexit will have on student and academic mobility, and internationalisation. Any agreement between the UK and EU is currently likely to have a negative impact on both EU students studying in the UK as well as UK students studying in the EU. The current uncertain situation regarding negotiations has left students, graduates and researchers with a great deal of uncertainty about their future. International cooperation and collaboration has come under threat, which is likely to compromise the quality of education for students in the UK in the long run. Education is enriched by the participation of international students, but internationalisation cannot thrive in situations of unclear future prospects. Particularly worrying is the trend of flatlining inward mobility in the UK at a time when, higher education is becoming more and more international. This development is likely to either leave UK behind in development or reverse some progress completely.

NUS-UK is endeavouring to play its part in creating a more welcoming and inclusive environment that would attract international students to the UK. NUS-UK see the value in developing a student experience that develops the international literacy of students graduating in the UK. This can be achieved by both inward and outward mobility. However, there is a danger that both will become prohibitively expensive, thereby restricting the numbers of students able and willing to take up the opportunity. This both diminishes the overall student experience, and creates a new level of inequity in the higher education system. NUS-UK is calling for a simplification of the visa systems that may be established post-Brexit and develop a national strategy that “sets increased targets for both inward and outward student mobility”. These steps cannot be fully successful without the inclusion of student representatives by the UK government. However, this seems unlikely to happen. At present, the UK government is looking to review the extremely high tuition fees that apply to both local and international students. Sadly, not all of the committees that will be reviewing the situation even include student representatives - instead, the focus seems to be on the profit and financial security of higher education institutions.

The national Union of Students in Ireland (USI) and the regional Union of students’ of Northern Ireland (NUS-USI) have significant concerns on how Brexit may affect Further and Higher Education across the island of Ireland. Cross-border mobility is a specific concern, as many students frequently move between the North and the South. The impact of Brexit on both sides of the Irish border continues to be entirely unclear, and negotiations to date have excluded issues of education. The rights of citizens on the island have not been secured, creating uncertainty on the ability to travel freely and to continue to access supports currently in place. Specific issues of recognition of qualifications, cross border research collaboration, academic and student cohesion, student fee status, apprentices, workers rights, and the rights of international students, have not been agreed or sufficiently discussed.

USI is particularly concerned that a lack of fee regulation for non-EU students could result in further commodification of international education. International student applications to HEIs in the South are increasing in the wake of Brexit, placing greater responsibility on Government and institutions to ensure greater funding is provided. The imposition of any change to the status, rights, or implementation of the Good Friday Agreement will have a detrimental effect on the students of USI and NUS-USI. Students’ rights need to be protected during Brexit.

8.3 CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The current stagnation of strategic planning during a time of exponential growth in internationalisation is fundamentally unacceptable and irresponsible. Students have not seen much progress in mobility since 2012, and the prevailing obstacles to engaging in mobility largely remain the same. Financing has been and remains a key issue in mobility and internationalisation, and a barrier to solving many of the known obstacles. These long-lasting obstacles have created an Europe with unbalanced mobility, both in a geographical and social sense. Constant imbalances in mobility are likely to have a long-lasting negative effect and increase the brain-drain from certain European areas.

Students from marginalized groups, in all the meanings of that phrase, are less likely to engage in and benefit from mobility - our research has highlighted several issues relating to this. Special attention must be paid to those who have so far been left behind by the internationalisation in higher education. In future research, special attention should be paid in regards to collecting data relating to marginalized students and students with disabilities - this includes the upcoming ‘Bologna With Student Eyes’ surveys.

Internationalisation, although a key feature in the development of higher education in Europe, seems to also have taken a back seat. Language learning opportunities for both international and local students has declined since 2015. Similarly, insufficient attention has been paid to the language skills of both academic and non-academic staff at HEIs. Despite the growing number of international students in Europe, taking their needs into account has not kept up with the quantitative progress. International students must be seen as an opportunity, not as potential cash-cows for European HEIs. This means, that the needs of students in or looking to engage in international mobility must be seen as important.

With the growing number of students from non-European countries, notably India and China, increasing in Europe, creating a reliable and student-friendly visa system in Europe is likely to become an important issue within the next period of the Bologna process. The Visa Directive and Schengen visa processes must take into account learners’ needs. To ensure increasing internationalisation, the global perspective must be taken into account.

The issue of Brexit is likely to change much about the conversations of increasing mobility and global internationalisation. Both NUS-UK and USI are extremely concerned about the effects of Brexit on the students of UK and Ireland. Students’ rights and education will need to be protected during Brexit negotiations.

8.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Mobility and internationalisation in Europe must stop treading water. Internationalisation must finally be a prioritised topic in Europe to achieve set goals.
- Special attention needs to be paid to internationalisation strategies. Students as a crucial part of internationalisation must be included in the creation and implementation of said strategies.
- Language learning must be made available to both international and local students in Europe as language skills are crucial for quality internationalisation. Attention must also be paid to developing the language skills of both academic and non-academic staff in higher education institutions.
- Integration of international students in the the local student body is imperative. Furthermore, continuing obstacles international students face when in mobility does not encourage further internationalisation. Negative experiences and unresolved long-lasting problems will deter students from engaging in mobility in the future, thus compromising the longstanding efforts in this area.
- The EU Visa Directive must be implemented efficiently. Visa periods that last the entirety of a degree students stay in a country, sufficient opportunities to work are essential. Students must be included as important stakeholders when creating and updating visa regulations, both nationally and internationally.
- Initiatives regarding marginalised groups in mobility must be priorities over the next Bologna cycle. The integration of students from lower socioeconomic background, students with disabilities, and refugees into higher education is a must.
- Students' rights and access to education need to be protected during Brexit negotiations.

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9 STRUCTURAL REFORMS

9.1 INTRODUCTION

“By 2020 we are determined to achieve an EHEA where our common goals are implemented in all member countries to ensure trust in each other’s higher education systems; where automatic recognition of qualifications has become a reality so that students and graduates can move easily through out it; where higher education is contributing effectively to build inclusive societies, founded on democratic values and human rights; and where educational opportunities provide the competences and skills required for European citizenship, innovation and employment.”
(Yerevan 2015)

By 2018 all common goals quotes here have not been implemented in all member countries hence The Bologna Follow up Group (BFUG) suggestion to intensify implementation within the following three key commitments; *A Three-Cycle system compatible with the QF-EHEA and scaled by ECTS; Compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention; Quality Assurance in Conformity with ESG*. In in order to ensure trust in one another’s Higher Education systems.

The three key commitments, henceforth referred to as structural reforms, whilst interdependent of one another all serve to achieve the greater initial ambitions of the Bologna Process; a unified system of readable and comparable degrees, a system based on two cycles; a credit system; the promotion of mobility; cooperation in the field of quality assurance; the promotion on a European dimension of Education (Sin et al. 2016:83). The 2018 Bologna Process Implementation Report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2018:17) acknowledges the national advancement of implementing the structural reforms, as do the National Unions of Students (NUSes) nevertheless, they are critical about the implementation.

The following chapter deals with the perceptions of the implementation of the National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs), the European Credits Transfer System (ECTS) and the Three-cycle system by the National Unions of Students. For further reading about implementation in the field of Quality Assurance, see chapter 6.

9.2 MAIN FINDINGS

QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS – COMPARABILITY ACROSS EHEA

Through the adoption of the Berlin Communiqué in 2003 (Berlin, 2003) Qualification Frameworks (QF) have been on the Bologna Process (BP) agenda. QFs have been described as a tool to create a workforce with comparable degrees as an outcome from “the European market of higher education” (Haukland 2017:265). For the past 15 years, the majority of the EHEA countries have developed NQFs in compliance with the European Qualifications Framework. Despite the implementation of NQFs in the majority of the EHEA countries, students are still facing difficulties getting their qualification recognised.

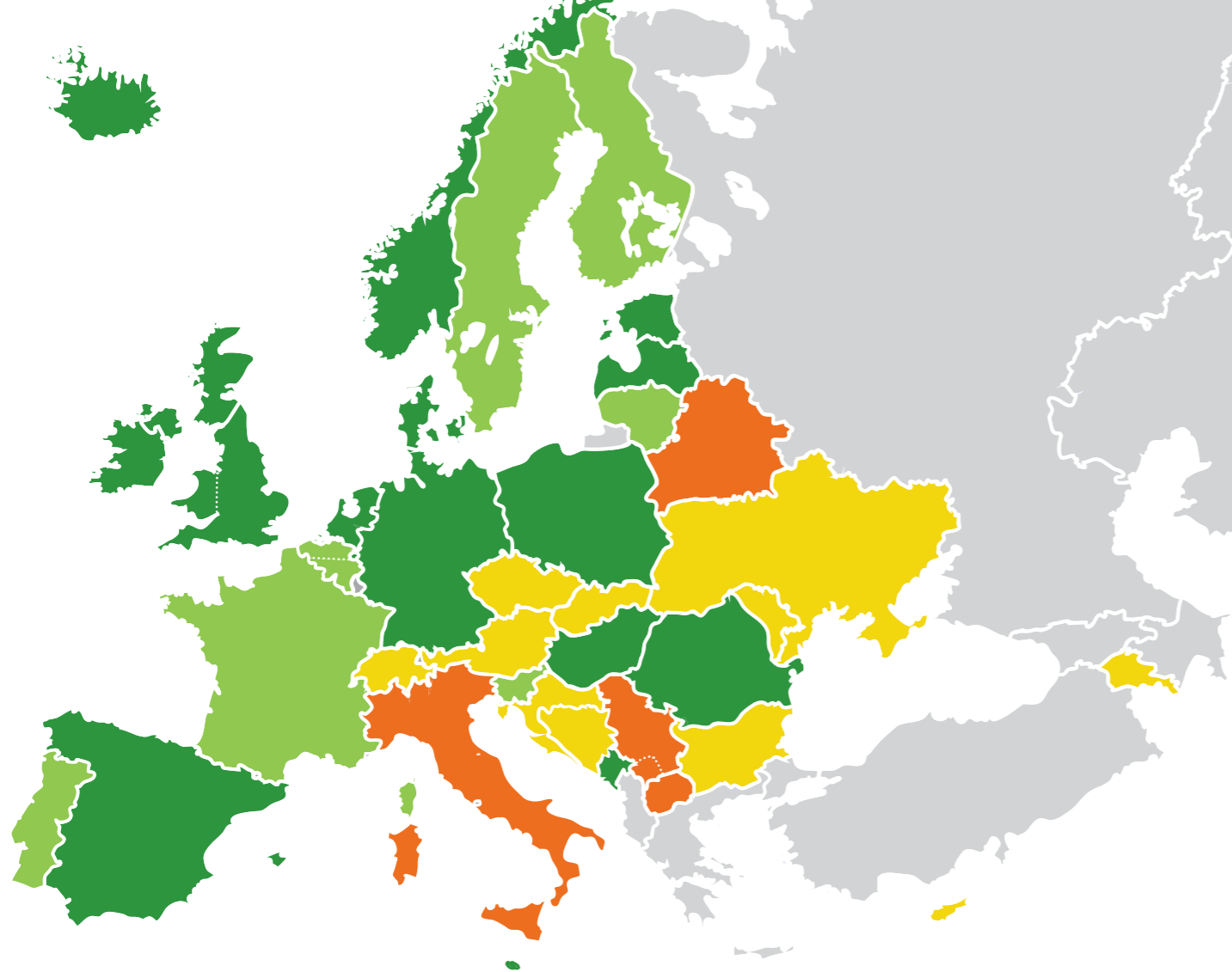


Fig. 9.1: Is there a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in your country, and if so, how often is it being used?

- EHEA country with no ESU member
- Not applicable
- There is no NQF
- There is a NQF, but it is not being used at all
- There is a NQF, but it is being used very rarely
- There is a NQF, and it is being used quite often
- There is a NQF, and it is always being used

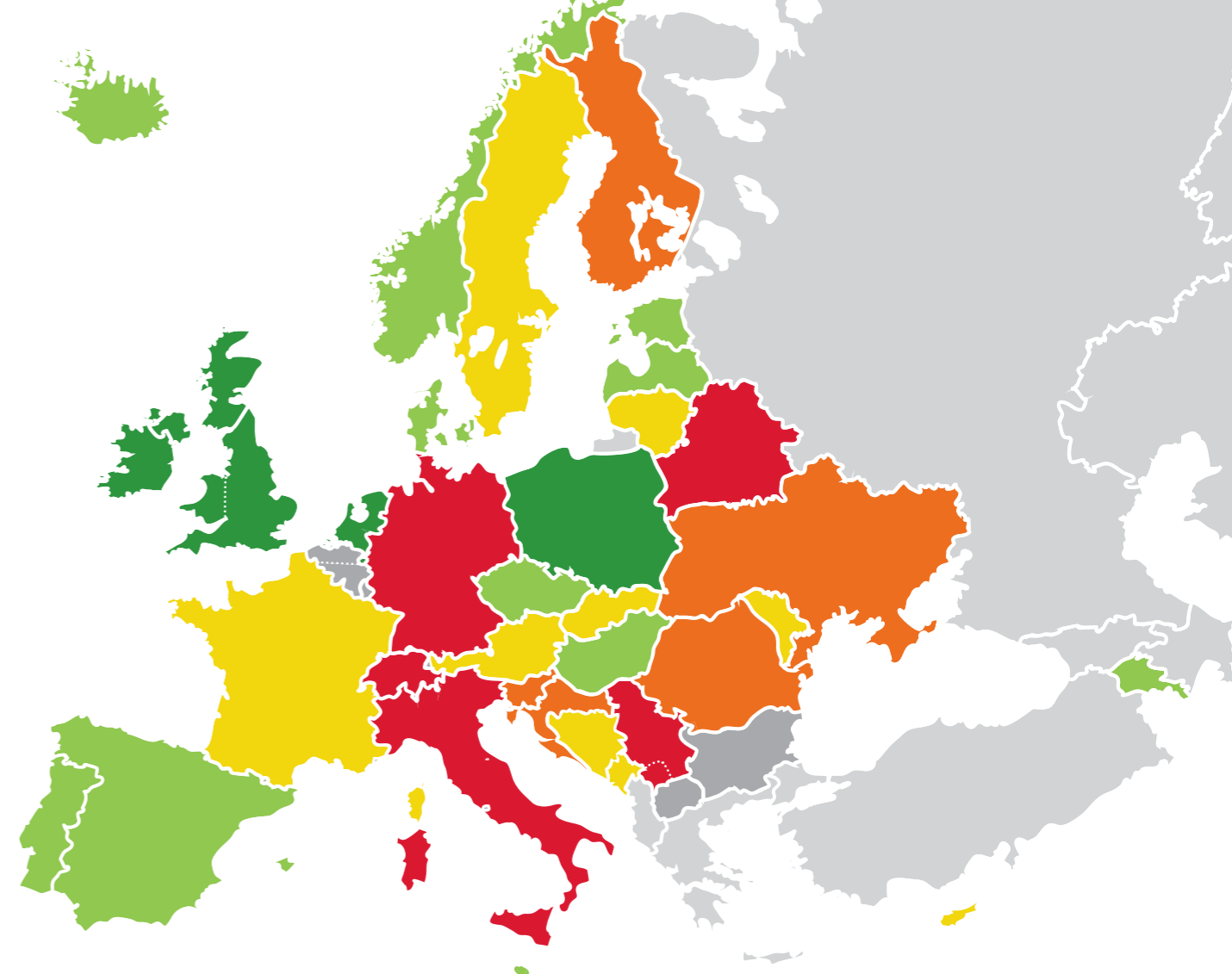


Fig. 9.2: How satisfied or dissatisfied is your NUS with the development and introduction of the NQF in your country?

- EHEA country with no ESU member
- Not applicable
- There is no NQF
- There is a NQF, but it is not being used at all
- There is a NQF, but it is being used very rarely
- There is a NQF, and it is being used quite often
- There is a NQF, and it is always being used

As shown in figure 08.01 and 08.02 the existence and frequency of NQFs being used and satisfaction/dissatisfaction of NQFs are not always coherent. Analysing closely the cases of Slovenia, Germany and Romania the difference between pure existence and actual satisfaction is embodied.

According to the Slovenian NUS, SSU, the translation of degrees' in compliance with EQF is not satisfactory in their country. Degrees that are coherent with a BA- degree in the Bologna structure have been translated to a MA-degree when moving from the former system into the current system, SSU explains. They add that they are concerned about the development and conclude that the MA degrees have been generated by a (mis)translation resulting in not being coherent with the standards of EQF.

Fzs, the German NUS are of the opinion that their NQF is stagnating. Stagnation or lack of interest in further development of NQFs can be found in other countries as well leading to a lack of positivity from the NUSes towards the development and introduction on NQFs.

In Romania, according to their NUS, ANOSR, the NQF is always being used, yet, they are dissatisfied. The cause of the dissatisfaction is due to the way in which the National Register of Qualifications in Higher Education was carried out; without a profound and continuous consultation of students and employers. The lack of consultation leads to the faulty implementation by the Higher Education Institutions, ANOSR adds.

The most satisfied NUSes with both the implementation and the frequency it is being used are the NUSes in Scotland and Ireland. Both Ireland and Scotland had already developed NQFs preceding the development of the European Qualifications Framework. According to the NUS in Ireland, USI, their NQF was quickly moved to ensure comparability with the EQF once it was developed. USI adds that the NQF is well recognised by the students and the Higher Education Institutions.

NQFs that are in compliance with the EQF celebrates 15 years on the BP agenda, nonetheless, governments still have work to do. NQFs should not only be used "quite often" and the National Unions of Students should not be dissatisfied or very dissatisfied about the implementation and applicability of the tool. If the ambitious goal of a shared educated workforce is to be achieved.

EUROPEAN CREDIT TRANSFER AND ACCUMULATION SYSTEM (ECTS)

The ECTS is an integral part of the Bologna system, acting as a cornerstone for recognition in and out of mobility, a tool for a transparent qualification frameworks, distributing students' workload across semesters, and accounting for both contact learning and individual work done by students. However, the proper implementation of the ECTS is often the main obstacle to the efficient and transparent creation and development of curricula in higher education institutions.

Out of 43 NUSes, 28 stated that the ECTS system is always used, while nine stated that it is used "very often". Two NUSes – LSA, Latvia and HÖÖK, Hungary, said that the ECTS is only rarely used in their higher education system. LSA, who has been critical of the low prioritisation of the implementation of ECTS commented that "implementation of ECTS in Latvian Higher education system has not been a priority", and has not really occurred. The situation is further

complicated by two concurrently existing systems in Latvia, in which 2 Latvian credit points (KP) equal 3 ECTS, which makes recognition of prior learning both in a national and international context very complicated. Furthermore, when students are looking to get 2 ECTS recognized in the Latvian system, the systems are not compatible and credits cannot be fully transferred. This situation has been addressed by both LSA and ESU for a long time, including in the 2015 publication of Bologna with Student Eyes. The unevenness of the system was also previously addressed in the "Bologna with Student Eyes 2012". Yet, the problem persists and the Latvian government has not prioritised the proper implementation of ECTS according to the ECTS Users' Guide. A similar problem exists in Hungary, where most of the HEIs adhere to their old system instead of adapting to the ECTS.

Sadly, in Belarus, the ECTS is used unreliably and is causing doubts among students. The students of Belarus are not certain that the amount of ECTS given for passing a course is calculated in an accurate and correct way. The current system exists in parallel to the previous system of credits in Belarus. This results in an uncertainty among students whether the ECTS receiver in Belarusian HEIs can really be recognized by other European HEIs.

The Swedish National Union of students (SFS) also have significant grievances with the improper implementation of the ECTS in their Higher Education system. Even though the Swedish government claims to have reformed their education system completely to reflect the Bologna process, the reforms have not remained true to the purpose of the Bologna process. The Swedish National Union of Students (SFS) wants the Bologna reforms to remain true to their original purpose. They see reforms that deviate from that goals as counterproductive and misleading to the students.

26 of the 43 respondents stated that the number of ECTS in their country is always based on an estimation of the students' workload; according to 7 of the respondents, the amount of ECTS is always based on the formulation of Learning Outcomes (LO). The most common variable used for calculating the amount of ECTS related to courses and programmes is an estimation of the students' workload, with LO's as a way of allocating ECTS in second place. This is confirmed both by the 2018 Bologna Process Implementation Report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, upcoming), as well as the surveys completed for this publication. Teacher/student contact hours are used as a basis for calculating ECTS in half of the EHEA countries, and only in Cyprus and in Bulgaria as the only factor to base the calculation on (ibid).

Overall, the satisfaction with the implementation of ECTS is very varied across Europe. Out of 43 respondents, 19 NUSes were either satisfied or very satisfied with the implementation in their country. Meanwhile, 12 NUSes stated that they are either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the implementation. Eleven unions stated that they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the situation of ECTS in their country. This illustrates that even though all EHEA countries use ECTS as a way to organise the national credits system on some level, it is not well-organised across Europe. The students' reasons for dissatisfaction with the system are of a wide range. Compared to 2015, the level of students' satisfaction with the ECTS has risen somewhat.

A common issue regarding the "calculation" of ECTS based on workload is the underestimation of students' individual work. This is the case in both Belgium and Serbia, for example. Several more countries report general inconsistencies between the workload of students and the allocation of ECTS to given courses - this is an issue in Croatia, Iceland, Romania, Armenia, Italy, Switzerland, and several other countries. Another issue with consistency relates to inter-

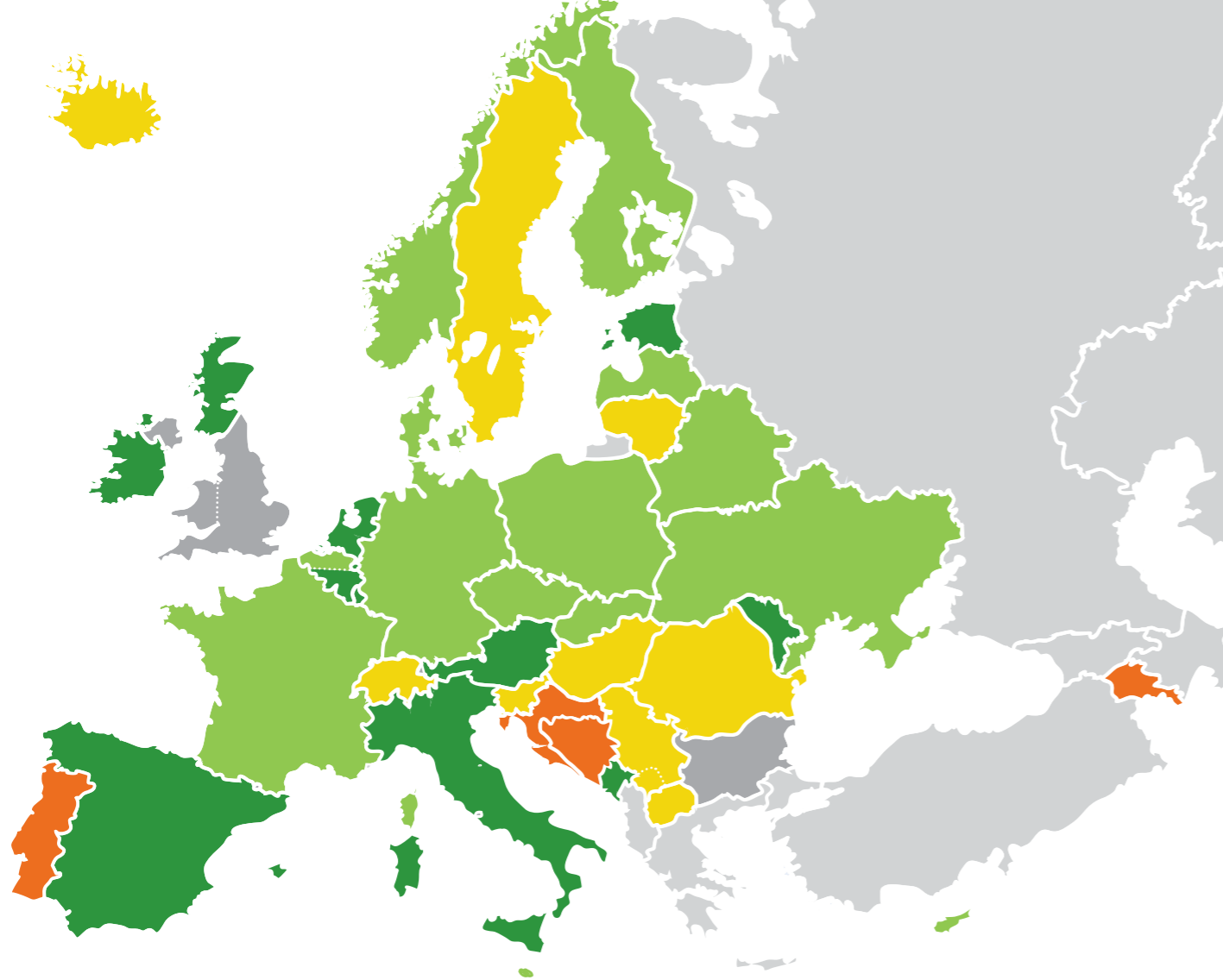


Fig. 9.3: In my country, the allocation of ECTS does happen on the basis of an estimation of the workload

- EHEA country with no ESU member
- Not applicable
- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Very Often
- Always

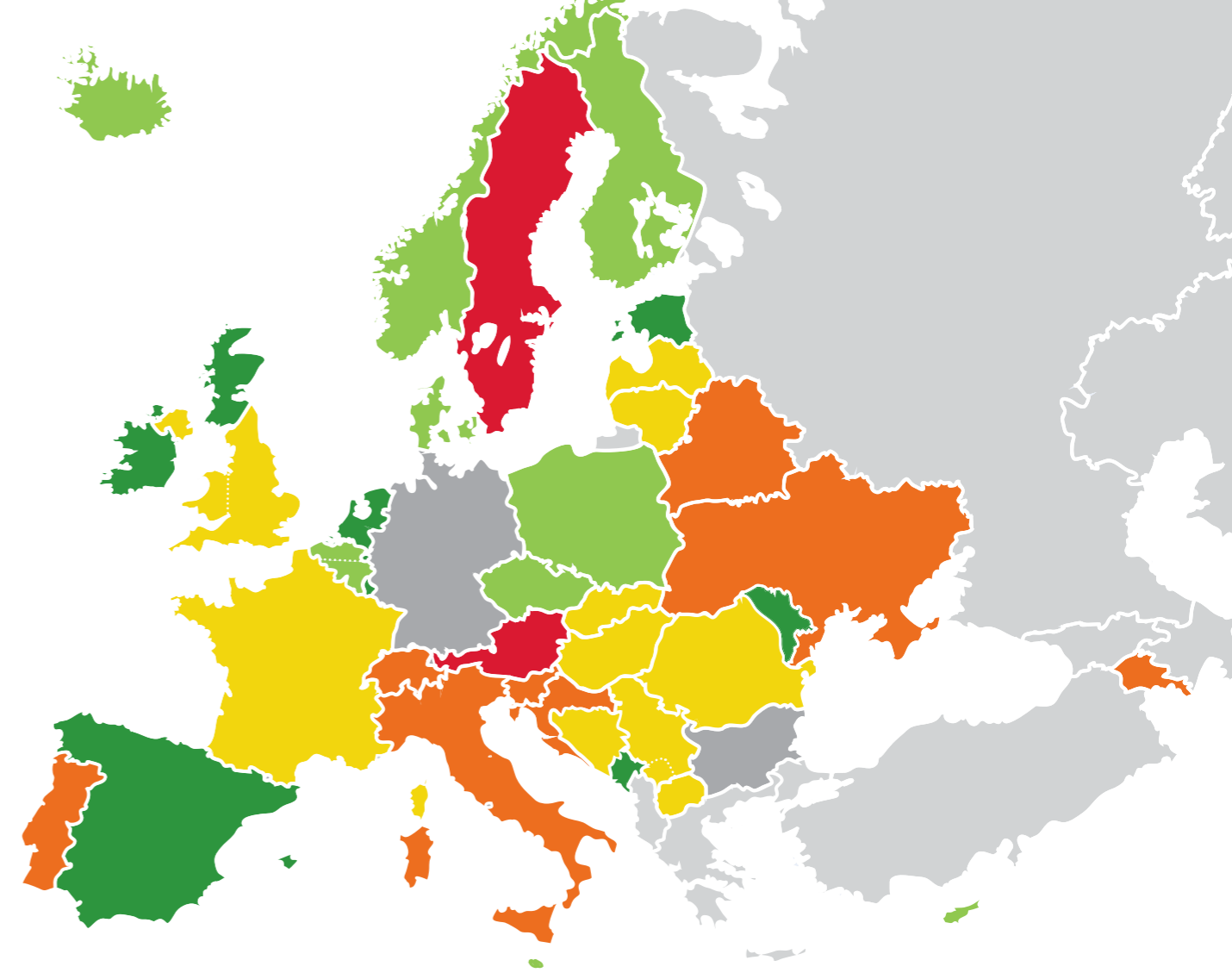


Fig. 9.4: In my country, the allocation of ECTS does happen on the basis of the formulation of Learning Outcomes

- EHEA country with no ESU member
- Not applicable
- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Very Often
- Always

national mobility and the recognition of those credits - the perception of workload differs between countries, which leads to unequal study experiences and great differences in workload for students both in and out of mobility. These problems are not new and have already been highlighted in previous research regarding the implementation of ECTS, including in previous “Bologna with Student Eyes” publications.

The inequalities between systems are rooted in the fact that the estimations of students' workload can be arbitrary and based on “guesstimations” of the lecturers and professors responsible for the courses, instead of being a result of accurate calculations and estimations of the perceived difficulty of the course. A correctly implemented ECTS should take into account that students' learning needs are different, and the ECTS has to account for that to achieve every students' mastering of the LOs.

THREE-CYCLE SYSTEM

The three cycle system is the system harmonizing the amount of credits a student should obtain for a Bachelor-, Masters-, and Phd degree across EHEA. Initially only BA and MA degrees were considered but in 2003 the 3rd cycle, Phd level was absorbed and the three cycle system was constituted in its current form.

According to ESUs members, there has not been any significant development in the implementation of the three cycle system since 2015, however, there has been an increase in criticisms on how “old” degrees have been poorly translated into the 3 cycle system with issues ranging from leaving students with more work but with less time, whether or not Phd students are considered to be students or not, to leaving Phd students out from Student benefits in, for example, Germany; and finally the cheeky move of the labour market demanding a MA degree from the students in order to be considered employable.

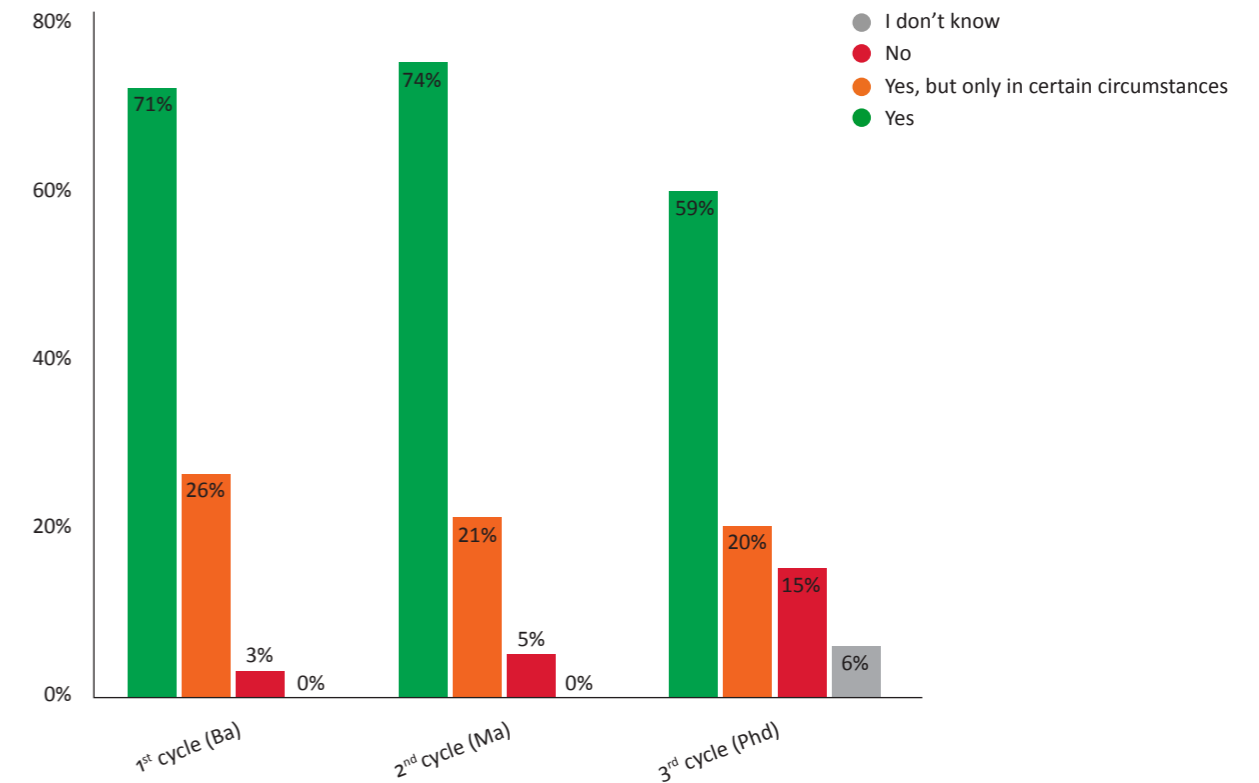
The last example, more common in 2018 than in 2015, challenges the initial intention of the BP by the labour market demanding higher level of qualification for a job that might require less (Sin et al 2016:83). This trend is not solely detected by the NUSes; the 2018 Bologna Implementation report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2018:17) announces the same worrying trend.

Part-time/ full-time dilemma

The mode of study, whether full- or part-time, has been put forward as a tool for either an increase or decrease in widening participation to higher education. Flexible learning paths and part time studies enables education mainly for adult learners, students with children and working students due to the need of an income to cover their living costs and tuition fees.

As figure 09.05 illustrates; in the majority of the countries, it is possible to study part-time. Even if it might be possible to study part-time, with or without certain circumstances, one or all cycles it does not always fulfil the goal of enabling non-traditional learners to enrol and graduate from HE. In Denmark for example, HE is tuition free; if studied full time. According to the Danish NUS, DSF, some BA- and MA programmes are available part-time but in exchange for payment of a tuition fee. In Croatia, to study part-time is rather a concept in theory rather than in practice since students are

Fig. 9.5: Is it possible to study part-time any of the cycles?

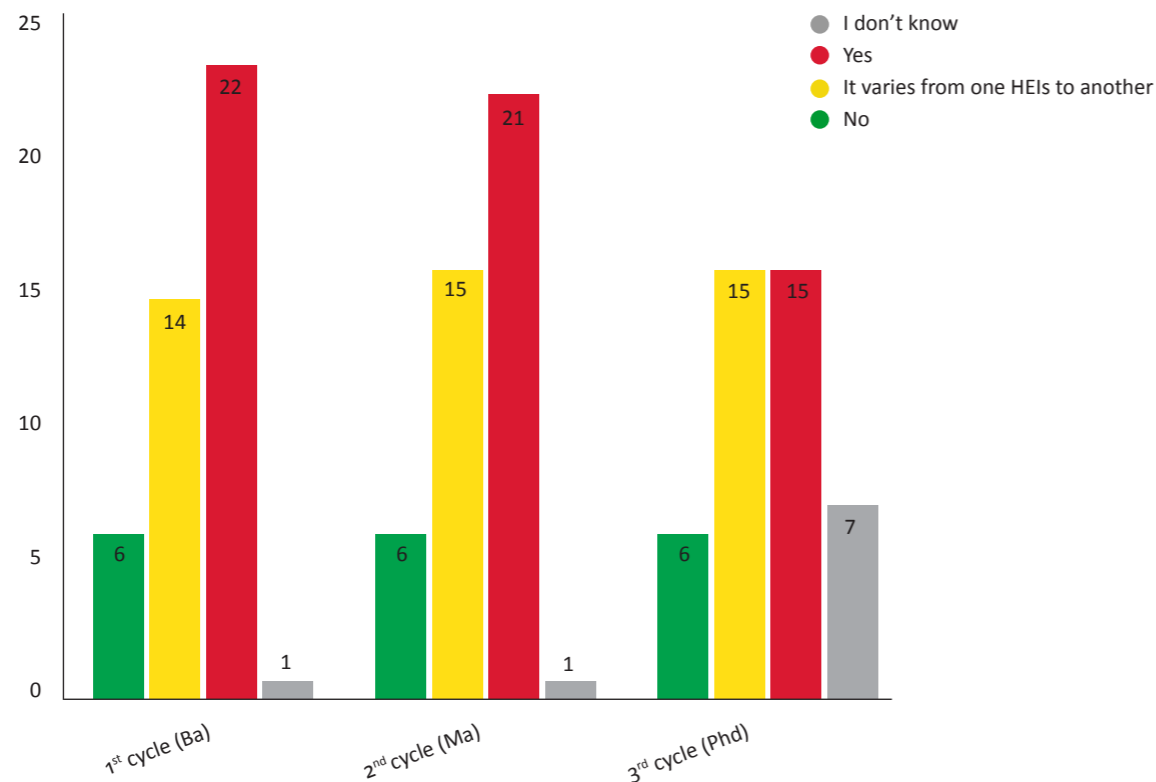


asked to complete 60 ECTS during the academic year regardless of studying part time. Shifting from theories of part time studies, to the cases part time only being available if the student can call on mitigating circumstances, medical reasons and disabilities are the most common denominator allowing part time study paths. Less accepted is employment, regardless of the purpose of the employment; paying the tuition fee or career development.

As demonstrated in figure 09.06, in the majority of countries and cycles, there are time restrictions in place for students to complete a cycle, leaving less flexibility to the study path for the student. In the cases of restrictions, the two most common consequences, in 18 out of 35, are that the students cannot complete their studies or they are even expelled and in 17 out of 35 cases there are financial sanctions with regards to student support measures. Adding on the restrictions, that can be perceived as penalties, in Serbia, students have to retake the entry exam and in Iceland, students exceeding the time restriction have to re-enrol and re-do all the courses. The restriction does though have exceptions in many countries which have exceptions allowing students to “exceed the time restriction”. The main is-

sues are, sickness (27 out of 40) and Parental leave (22 out of 24) and in 13 of 40 cases a mandate in the students' union allows "delays" in a course programme a sabbatical year). In regards to flexible study paths, both in Belarus and Serbia, the exception of student's not able to pay their tuition fee are used as excuses for delays. ESU argues for tuition-free education (ESU 2016) on the basis of that no one should be excluded from enrolling or graduate on the basis of lack of financial means. The system in place in Serbia and Belarus can be understood as a solution to the problem of tuition fees, but in line with ESU policy, the problem should be solved in other ways rather than used as the exception of delayed completion. Leaving our comments of the time restrictions on a positive note, in four EHEA countries there is no time restrictions to complete any of the cycles, according to the NUSes in Luxembourg, Austria, Armenia and Slovenia.

Fig. 9.6: Are there any restrictions on how many semesters/terms a student can take to complete each cycle?



Fast completion

Why should students graduate faster? In almost half of the countries, on either institutional and/or national level (Inst. 21 out of 43 and Nat 16 out of 22) there are measures such as limited financial support in place to accelerate the students' completion. Through the article Employability deconstructed: the perceptions of Bologna stakeholders (2016) Cristina Sin and Guy Neave analyse the perception of employability and how it has been debated in the Bologna Process. One of the initial purposes of the Bologna Process was de facto increased employability within the EHEA, facilitated by recognisable degrees. Delayed completion both delays the transition to the labour market and increases the costs for the HEIs, even if this may be the case, students should not be pushed through the system. Students are not a factory made product where instruments for faster learning can be used. A proposal to make students graduate faster is being discussed in the UK, with the creation of a fast track where students are guided through the curricula intended to take three years in two (McKee & Siddique 2017). Following the ECTS users guide, there should be a balance between the amount of LO and time dedicated in order to complete for the credits.

9.3 CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Since 2015 no major developments have been noted. The problems highlighted in the 2015 edition of Bologna with Student Eyes remain. Some problems have increased, others decreased. The conclusions can yet, once more, be drawn; that there is not a full and proper implementation of the mentioned structural reforms, the Bologna Process cannot be shown to be a full success story where students and graduates fully can move between the countries. The ECTS remains an unevenly and unreliably implemented system that creates mistrust in students, many of whom are not confident in the system on the whole.

9.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Review the quality of the National Qualifications Frameworks to ensure full compliance with EQF.
- Implement the whole of ECTS reliably across Europe. The implementation must be according to the ECTS Users' Guide. This includes basing ECTS on workload and LOs, not other characteristics.
- The three cycle system should enable flexibility, not constrain it. Enable students on an individual basis decide when the next cycle should be started.
- Develop more flexible cycles for students to be able to study part-time without certain circumstances for exceptions.
- Abandon time restrictions on the time for completing one or all cycles.

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10 FINANCING OF HIGHER EDUCATION

10.1 INTRODUCTION

ESU continues to advocate for sustainably and publicly funded higher education according to the notion of education as a public good and responsibility:

“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.” (European Students’ Union, 2016)

After years of negative trends, ESU finds that the cuts in higher education, seen in the aftermath of the financial crisis in 2008 have been slowing down. More unions report an improvement in the financial situation of students over the last three years compared to earlier Bologna With Students Eyes publications, specifically ‘Bologna With Student Eyes 2015’, which had 31 out of 38 responding unions reporting that the financial situation of students had been deteriorating. Three years later, in 2018, 26 out of 44 unions disagree with the statement that the financial situation of students has improved since 2015. More than half of the respondents report deterioration of the students’ financial situation and less than 25% have seen improvements. In fact, some countries have decreased or frozen their investment in higher education. In Moldova, the government has used the shrinking number of students as an argument for limiting the allocation resources for this field.

Only 16 national unions report that they have seen an increase in public funding of financial student aid. Our members also report that some countries are also increasing their funding, which is backed up by the Eurostudent report (DZHW, 2018).

10.2 MAIN FINDINGS

STUDENTS’ FINANCIAL SITUATION

Through the adoption of the Berlin Communiqué in 2003 (Berlin, 2003) Qualification Frameworks (QF) have been on the Bologna Process (BP) agenda. QFs have been described as a tool to create a workforce with comparable degrees as an outcome from “the European market of higher education” (Haukland 2017:265). For the past 15 years, the majority of the EHEA countries have developed NQFs in compliance with the European Qualifications Framework. Despite the implementation of NQFs in the majority of the EHEA countries, students are still facing difficulties getting their qualification recognised.

Studying is still expensive in Europe. Study fees still make up a significant part of students' key expenses, being especially prevalent in Ireland and UK (Eurostudent). Investments seldom go to increase financial support, and are spent elsewhere instead. 60% of the student unions report that the financial situation of students has been deteriorating over the last 3 years. In many countries the scholarships have increased, but this has often been paired with a rise in tuition fees. More commonly, there has been a trend in shifting the model of student support from a scholarship and grants based system into one that relies more heavily on loans. Many of the Southern European countries report the smallest amount of grants-based financing. These findings are mirrored by the Eurostudent report, that finds that many European students rely heavily upon their part time jobs and their parents (DZHW, 2018).

As with most matters in higher education, finances and the financial situation is an underdog. Students' financial situation has taken a turn for the worse over the past three years. Across Europe, students are in a situation, where grants are insufficient to fulfil their basic needs, which leads to an increase in both loans and the necessity for part- or full-time work next to full-time studies. The effects of working during studies will be discussed below.

The disconnect between students' average monthly income and monthly expenses is tangible. When looking at average student expenses compared to income for students dependant on public student support, a large number of countries do not offer students enough support to cover necessary expenses. The difference between income and expenses is especially severe in Estonia (366,8€ vs 761,8€), Latvia (309,5€ vs 635€), Portugal (476,6€ vs 761,4€), Slovenia (288,7 € vs 511,7€) and Slovakia (222,9€ vs 426,5€)¹. (Eurostudent)

Scandinavian countries, for the most part, have historically had more generous student financing arrangements, often provided on a universal basis as opposed to needs- or merit-based systems. However, this support is coupled with the highest expenses on housing (Eurostudent). Norwegian and Swedish students enjoy a steady rise in their students support, but their peers are experiencing a far less generous reality. Finland has seen dramatic cuts in the financial support for students, the government has like in many other countries (UK, for example) bundled this together with increasing the loans accessible to students.

The students of Iceland do not have any grants at all, relying instead on a fully loan-based system. The loan fund of Iceland is an outdated system that does not take into account the real situation of students in relation to financial needs and living conditions. When calculating the amount of loan granted, the fund assumes the housing cost based on rent in student housing, but only 9% of students live in student apartments. This results in those students living elsewhere not having enough income for rent. Many students in Iceland decide to work along with their studies instead of taking loans or along with taking the loans. Even though the loans do not cover the real costs of living and learning in Iceland, the amount of granted loan is still cut if the yearly salary of the student is over a limit the fund has.

Luxembourg has increased funding for students who study abroad by 22% from the basic public student aid granted at 1.000 € per semester, whilst the funding rate for inland students remained the same. However, students often end up taking loans due to the high cost of living in the country.

¹ Calculations compared monthly income of students dependant on public student support to students' total monthly costs.

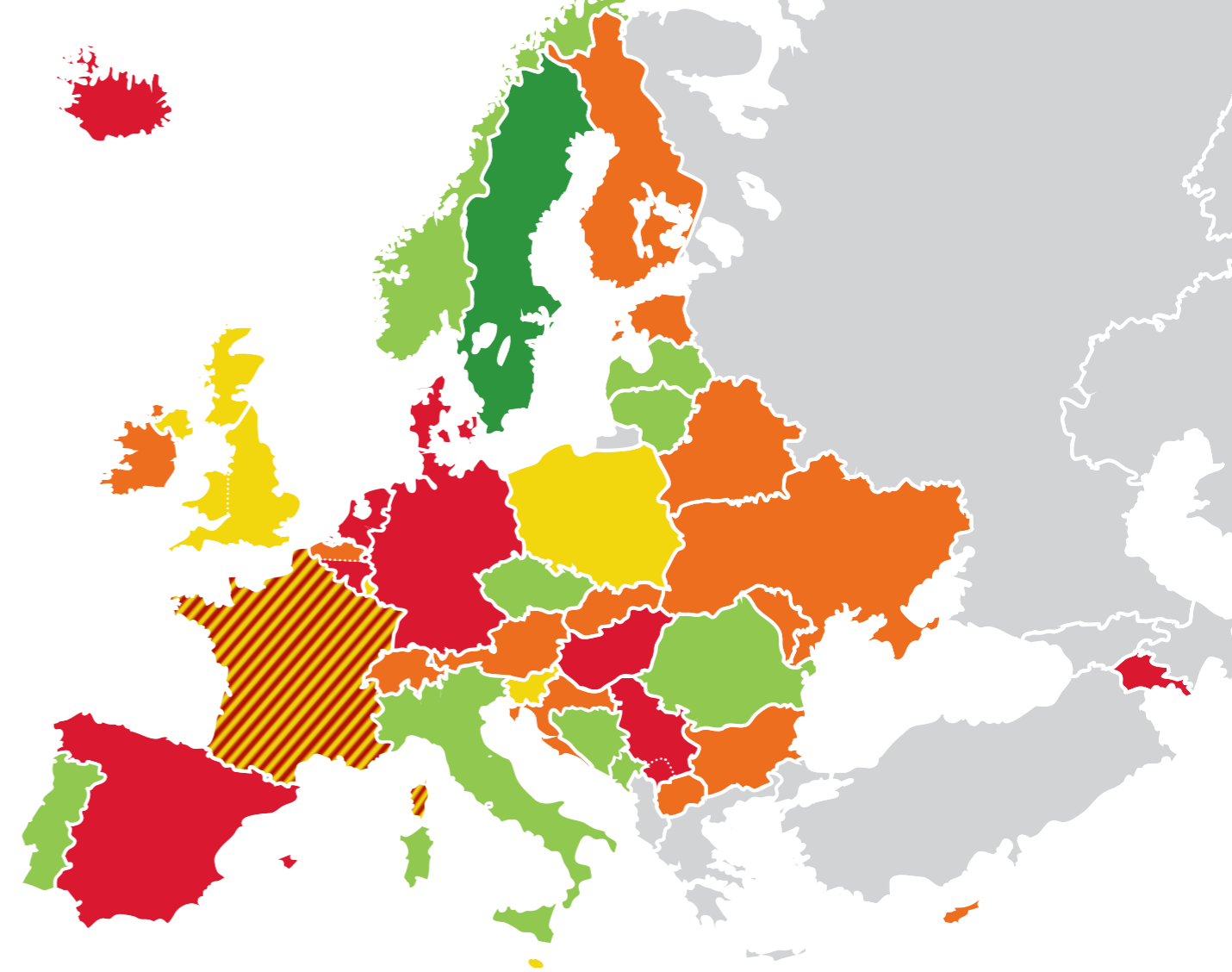


Fig. 10.1: Over the last three years, the students financial situation has improved.

- EHEA country with no ESU member
- Not applicable
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Undecided
- Agree
- Strongly agree

In Wales, students receive a mixture of grants and loans, which allow them to achieve the National Living Wage. A similar approach is seen in the rest of the United Kingdom, widening the availability of student loans, which in fact hits the poorest students hardest.

Italy has increased the volume of budget available for students grants, but there is an enormous need to increase this budget more than three times to satisfy all the grants. The situation is very similar in Germany, where even less students have access to grants. These situations often lead to student protests, and in Latvia, successful students protests have taken place to maintain and even increase investment in Higher Education, although students still must look for jobs to cover their expenses.

Meanwhile, in Southern Europe, Spain is still seeing the effect of being hit heavily by the financial crisis. Spanish students still see negative developments, which is a continuing trend based on previous 'Bologna With Student Eyes' publications, notably 2012 and 2015. Students in Armenia are also facing the decrease of public funding alongside with increasing tuition fees at the same time. In Austria, some deteriorations were imposed on part time students. A decrease is also seen in Serbia, as well as the Lucerne and Valais cantons in Switzerland.

The Netherlands, a mix of repayable and non-repayable grant systems is now completely replaced with an exclusively loan-based system. At the same time, tuition fees in Netherlands have been increasing. Finland has seen similar tendencies - however, the non-repayable grants haven't been scrapped entirely. What is impacting the students considerably, is a steep rise in housing costs. In many countries, the students are facing the same reality - grants and loans are kept on the same numerical level, whereas students' living costs, and in some cases tuition, have been increasing steadily.

Not all countries have seen a decline in the students' self-reported financial situation. Some Eastern European countries have seen considerable rises of grants and scholarships. One example is Romania, where students are now supported throughout the entire calendar year, including holidays and vacations. This was achieved through negotiations by The National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania (ANOSR), who achieved the increase of grants to a minimum level of income based on basic needs, as well as a review of eligibility criteria related to gaining access to grants. Romania has tripled the total allocation of public funding of student aid. In fact, that means that the minimum grant was more than doubled to 124€ per month. Lithuania and Bulgaria have seen an increase of students grants by 25 % and 30 % respectively, too.

France has developed grants for students and graduates. After graduation, grants continue for four months to ensure the social standard for fresh graduates looking for new opportunities.

In some cases, however, the students' financial burden is still shifted to their families and/or partners. This is most prevalent in Serbia (96% of students are dependent on family income), Portugal (71,9%), Romania (63,4%) and Slovakia (61,4%) (Eurostudent). This is a lasting tendency, that affects students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and marginalised groups especially. The prevailing acceptability of this is contrary to commitments made by EHEA across previous communiqués relating to the Bologna process, which make and reaffirm promises relating to the social dimension and improving access to education (Leuven Communiqué, 2009; Budapest-Vienna Declaration, 2010; Bucharest Communiqué, 2012; Yerevan Communiqué, 2015). The impact of commitments targeting social dimension in higher

education on national level, which was made at Bucharest communiqué, is very limited according to most of the unions.

PART- AND FULL-TIME JOBS FILLING THE GAP

Many students work part-time or full-time jobs to finance their studies according to Eurostudent VI (DZHW, 2018). For some of the countries that report better financial situations for students our respondents point to an increase in job opportunities either due to an overall increase of the country's economy or due to a deregulation. Although it is positive that students are able to sustain themselves more easily through finding paid employment, such activity takes time away from the classes and their studies. The need for working full- or part-time impacts groups of students differently, and students with disabilities or with learning impairments such as dyslexia, are more negatively affected by restricted hours spent studying as a result from working obligations other than their educational requirements.

The amount of time students spend on paid jobs varies significantly across Europe. The "hardest working" students across Europe live in Poland (36,3h per week), Romania (35,8h per week), Portugal and Hungary (34,7h per week each), and Estonia and Latvia (34,3h per week) (Eurostudent). This illustrates, that students in these countries are not merely working part-time during their studies, but are likely engaging in both full-time employment and full-time studies at the same time. Although gaining work experience is listed high among the reasons students seek employment, the need for income to sustain themselves is a prevailing reason students work during their studies (DZHW, 2018). For one in 3 students in Belgium, their full- or part-time job is their only source of income. In Slovenia, where the income of students has increased, it has done so only through an increasing amount of students working while studying, since despite a growing GDP, the amount of grants students receive has remained the same.

DEVELOPMENTS OF STUDENTS' ELIGIBILITY AND ACCESS TO GRANTS

For the most part, eligibility criteria students have to fulfil in order to access grants, have remained the same since 2015. In countries, where the criteria have undergone change, the changes have been mostly regarding economic factors, such as other sources of income, and the amount of ECTS acquired over a certain period of time (such as semester or year).

As visible from the map above, most countries' national unions of students are either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the eligibility criteria students must meet to access grants. These criteria are often based on students' families income or income of the previous financial year, which do not take into account students as individuals and adults living separately from their families. This is a case in some countries, e.g. in France and Estonia. In Estonia, students are counted as part of their parents' families up until the age of 25 - this includes divorced parents and half- and step-siblings. Viewing the income of the entire family as a part of a student's income is highly inaccurate and as a result it does not reflect the students' actual need for support.

The progress regarding increased public funding of financial student aid exists, though decreasing or stagnating student aid prevails. Sixteen student unions report an increase of publicly funded financial aid since 2015, a further two report an increase of privately funded student aid. However, eight unions report a decrease of public student aid, with a further three reporting a decrease in private student aid. Fifteen unions stated that in their countries, there has been no change over the past three years.

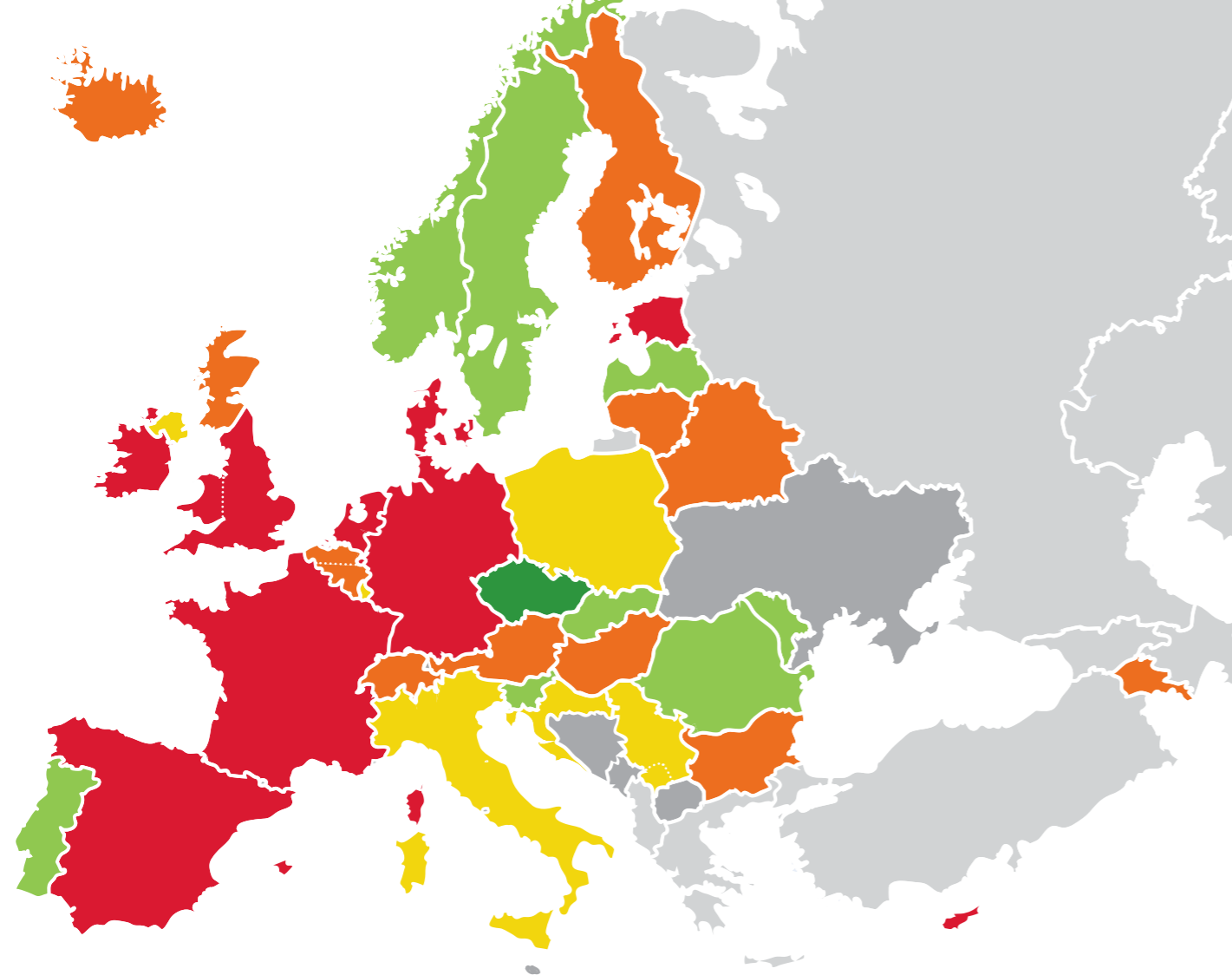


Fig. 10.2: NUSes' satisfaction with eligibility criteria across Europe

- EHEA country with no ESU member
- ESU member with no response / I do not know
- Very dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Neither
- Satisfied
- Very satisfied

The vast majority of unions from across Europe calls for more public funding to higher education. Prioritizing research is important too, but should not overshadow education funding, such as in Sweden. In some countries, such as the Czech Republic and Serbia, the private expenditure on higher education is even higher than the public support that students receive. (ESU, 2013; Eurostudent) These trends on shifting burden of study costs to students heavily affect students' resources and require more private funding, most often from students' parents, which is not always a solution for many students, making tertiary education not accessible and even causing drop-outs from studies due to serious financial difficulties.

EDUCATION AS A PUBLIC GOOD VS TUITION FEES

There is an apparent and worrying trend toward establishing and increasing tuition fees in Europe. In addition to information seen in the map below, some governments are contemplating establishing tuition fees, such as Estonia and Austria. In several countries, such as Belgium and Ireland, students face a constant battle against rising tuition fees and/or "student contributions". In Belarus, the information regarding the financing of higher education is not public. This makes the entire process of providing education as a public good not transparent. Because of this, although there have been rises in tuition fees, it is difficult to establish the amount. In general, the tertiary education in Belarus cannot be considered as tuition free, because students need to decide to either pay prescribed fees or work for the government for the period of two years after study completion.

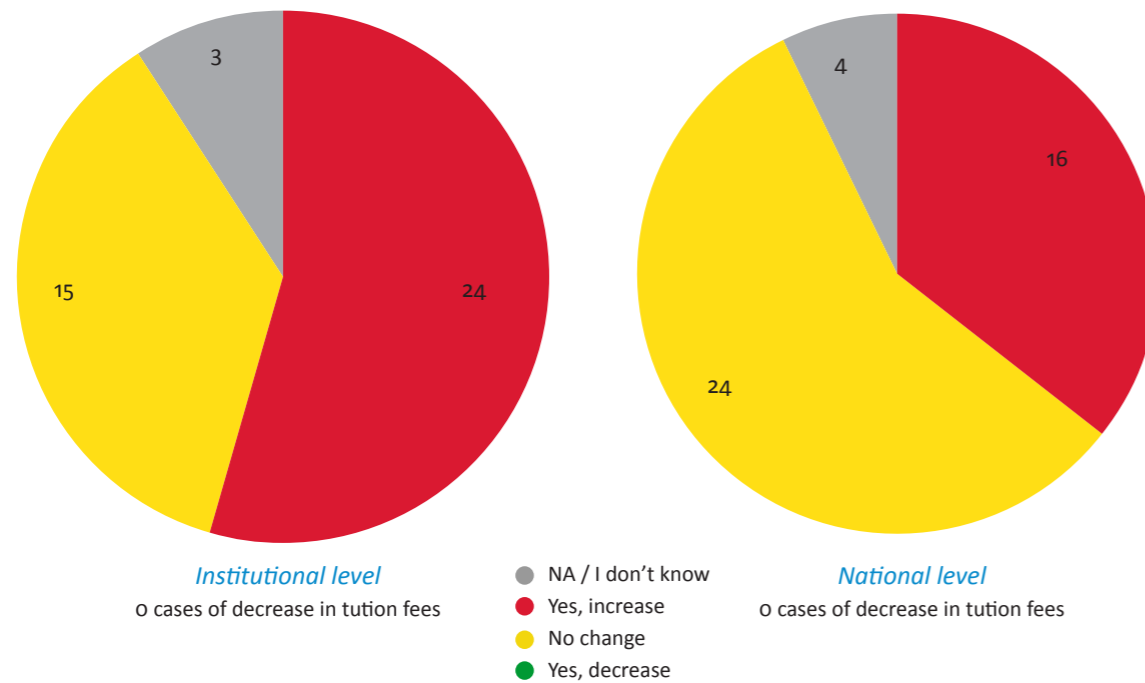
ESU has stood and continues to stand for free and inclusive education. ESU believes that tuition fees represent an obstacle to equal access to higher education and jeopardise the successful completion of the studies (European Students' Union, 2016). Despite commitments made by many governments' at several foras, such as the Louvain la Neuve communiqué and the Yerevan communiqué, education imposes a heavy financial burden on students. In several countries across Europe, tuition fees for international students are either higher than the fees for national students, or exist where none do for local students (European Students' Union, 2017). ESU stands against this practice - all students, despite their origin, should be treated equally in regard to student support and fees. This discriminatory practice is the case in Finland, for example, where the government implemented mandatory tuition fees to non-EU and EEA students starting in 2017.

COMMODIFICATION

Commodification tendencies across higher education systems trigger an alarm of independent education being threatened by the labour market and its current needs. This is why this subchapter was added to this 'Bologna with Student Eyes' edition to stress the importance of this topic.

"How education is seen in society, how it is funded and how it is governed are tightly interlinked areas. Addressing higher education as a commodity and students as consumers who purchase the service goes against the fundamental social values and norms attributed to higher education. This has led to a trend that ESU refers to as the commodification of higher education, defined as the changing perception of higher education from a public good and public responsibility to a private and limited commodity." (European Students' Union, 2016)

Fig. 10.3: Was there any increase or decrease of tuition fees in the years of 2015-2017 on a national level?



The high level of commodification practices and even tendency to raise tuition fees was reported by the majority of NUSes. They see two main directions in commodification practices across higher education systems.

Firstly, the discrepancy between students from non-EU/EEA countries and tuition fees being imposed on them. Of course, this is not the issue related to these students only, but also students in general are being exposed to a rise of tuition fees. This is creating an atmosphere which leads to the perception from HEIs and governments that education is a matter of business and that education can even make profit. The driving force of this perception is caused by a lack of public funding and a misunderstanding that the role of education is of benefit for all society. Another example is connected with understanding education as a commodity that can be sold to students abroad for the purpose of making profit, and in some countries, to create additional financial resources for covering the same study programmes in the country's official language, due to the lack of public funding and a guarantee of free studies by law. This approach is not an appropriate reaction to internationalization, nor increased competitiveness of higher education.

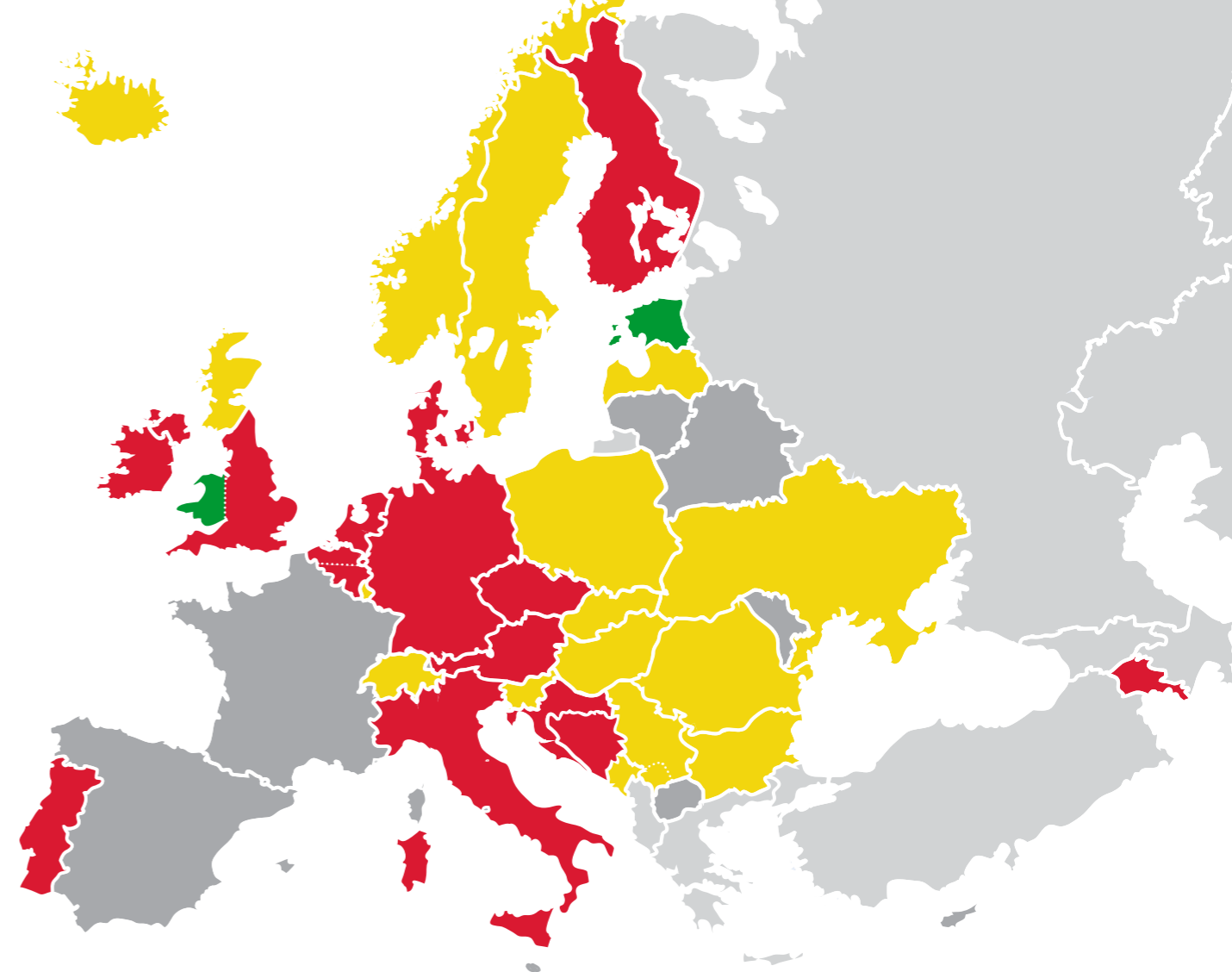
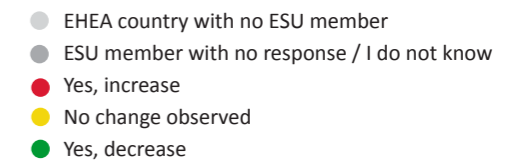


Fig. 10.4: Was there any increase or decrease of commodification policies in the HE sector since 2015?



Secondly, the sole linkage of education to labour market and at the same time, governments prioritising market-oriented demands to certain student profiles and study fields harm the multiple purposes that education brings. National economic policies limiting the number of places in study programmes are taking place in several countries. Students and graduates are often seen just as human capital serving the purposes of employers and the labour market, undermining the importance of free access to education and the value of education for individuals and the society. In some cases, there are certain procedures in HEIs public funding patterns connected with the number of graduates not being employed straight away after graduation. “The European Students’ Union is against the view of education as a commodity, the undemocratic and inequitable limitation of education by the market, and the instrumentalisation of research and teaching by private decision-makers to fit commercial interests.” (European Students’ Union, 2016)

10.3 CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

After severe cuts to student support systems after the 2008 financial crisis, the first signs of progress and increase in funding are visible. However, a worrying trend of increasing or establishing tuition fees is still haunting the students of Europe. Despite repeated commitments by governments’ to provide affordable and sufficiently funded education that truly serves as a public and accessible good, there are still gaps in accessibility across Europe. Most worryingly, the students’ financial support systems do not seem to keep up with increasing living costs. This has resulted in an increasing amount of students seeking part- or full-time employment to support themselves during studies - this is not a sustainable trend that would be conducive to concentrating on studies. Notably, in the Balkan region, learners are still largely dependant on their families’ support during their studies. Linking education solely to the labour market’s current needs is on the rise, and severely harms the multiple purposes of education for individuals and for the entire society.

10.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Free higher education must be seen as an investment in the future. As such, Europe should see free higher education as a long-term goal.
- Students must be given adequate support through publicly funded grant systems. Student support through grant systems must be preferred over re-payable support systems.
- Governments must review and adjust students support systems to ensure students’ access to higher education, and acceptable living conditions during higher education.
- Governments and HEIs must discontinue discriminatory practices regarding study fees, such as enforcing mandatory fees for international students. These practices are counterproductive in regard to internationalisation.
- Governments must stop producing more education restrictions based on national economic policies to ensure accessible higher education without labour market as the main player in higher education policies.

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11 STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Student-centred learning (SCL) is hardly a novel concept. While some would argue that it already appeared in pedagogy and educational science as far back as the beginning of the 20th century (Sullivan 2004), it certainly developed more strongly in the context of the constructionist paradigm since the 1980s (O'Neill and McMahon 2004). However, the European Students' Union (ESU) has always perceived student-centred learning as a broader concept which is to be applied to all elements of higher education and not only to pedagogy in a narrow sense (ESU 2012). Even though student-centred learning is notoriously difficult to define precisely, the following tentative definition was developed through two Europe-wide projects on SCL led by ESU (T4SCL and PASCL):

"Student-Centred Learning represents both a mindset and a culture within a given higher education institution and is a learning approach which is broadly related to, and supported by, constructivist theories of learning. It is characterised by innovative methods of teaching which aim to promote learning in communication with teachers and other learners and which take students seriously as active participants in their own learning, fostering transferable skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking and reflective thinking." (ESU 2015)

This definition clearly recognizes SCL as a concept on a high level of abstraction and generality (*"a mindset and a culture"*). Operationalizing this concept and assessing its implementation can therefore be challenging, but it is a necessity as student-centred learning necessarily has to be context-sensitive if it is to fulfil its role. Indeed, the fact that there is no one-size-fits-all solution is one of the most important recommendations of the two aforementioned projects. However, this statement needs to be clearly distinguished from a relativistic position, that it is impossible to determine whether a certain institutional culture is student-centred or not.

Finally, it is important to note that with its introduction in the revised ESGs in 2015, student-centred learning has also become recognized as an objective measure of quality of higher education institutions (ESG 2015). This helps establish that SCL is not about satisfying the immediate demands of the student body, but about truly empowering students to become competent and autonomous learners for their whole lives, benefiting their personal learning and the quality of education across their institution.

11.2 STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING AND THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

HISTORY

Student-centred learning has a relatively long history of presence within the Bologna process, starting with the London Communique in 2007 which predicted that one of the outcomes of the Bologna process *"will be a move towards student-centred higher education and away from teacher driven provision"* (Communique 2007). The term "student-centred

learning” was first explicitly used in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué of 2009 in which it was listed as one of the future goals (Communiqué 2009). This commitment has been reaffirmed in the Bucharest Communiqué (Communiqué 2012) and Yerevan Communiqué (Communiqué 2015).

Importantly, the Bologna process is a natural environment for implementing the paradigm shift that SCL demands. Firstly, the Bologna process has already resulted in a multitude of reforms and therefore provides a platform for further innovation. Secondly, there is a more substantive potential for SCL in the Bologna process which relates to the connection between student-centred learning and fundamental Bologna tools. As we have already stated in Bologna with Student Eyes in 2012:

“However, it is often the other set of Bologna tools and measures that help create and foster an environment conducive to SCL. The main reason behind this is that some of the policy measures encourage the use of learning outcomes and increasing flexibility and comparability for various procedures. Thus, the shift to outcomes-based educational policies is needed to fulfil several different Bologna commitments and also offers an excellent opportunity to promote SCL at institutional level.”

In the same version of Bologna with Student Eyes publication, ESU also made specific recommendations as to how these fundamental Bologna tools can be used to foster the culture of student-centred learning:

Where are we now?

Examining these examples of potential improvements six years after their publication, and nine years after SCL was first explicitly mentioned as a goal in the Communiqué, it is disappointingly clear that there is still a long way to go. Student-centred learning in many ways depends on a shift towards outcome-based education and the use of learning outcomes methodology in general, but to date, not enough progress has been made in the implementation of these basic tools of the Bologna process, nor in implementing student-centred learning, which is an even more ambitious goal.

While ECTS points seem to be thoroughly implemented across EHEA, the situation with learning outcomes is more worrying. As chapter 9 on structural reforms demonstrates, the majority of the systems use student workload as the basis of allocation of ECTS, but only seven of the respondents stated that amount of ECTS are always based on the formulation of learning outcomes. Satisfaction with implementation of ECTS points system very much varies between different national contexts.

Quality assurance has also only fulfilled its potential role as facilitator of student-centred learning to a certain extent. Chapter 4 shows that even though the vast majority of the student unions report that students are involved in internal quality assurance at their institutions, in over a quarter of countries students are only a source of information for quality assurance. This is in no way aligned with the ideal of student as co-creators of their education.

In the domain of recognition of prior learning, higher education still has not achieved desired flexibility of study programs. Indeed, as the data presented in chapter 7 indicates, in a very significant number of countries (around a third) there is no possibility for the students to get their learning outcomes which they achieved outside of formal education recognized.

Fig. 11.1: Bologna elements which can facilitate the development of SCL (BWSE 2012)

| Action line | Elements/opportunities that can foster SCL |
|---------------------|---|
| Learning outcomes | <p>Students can be consulted when learning outcomes are designed.</p> <p>Students’ needs and characteristics of the student population are taken into account when designing the learning outcomes.</p> <p>The student population’s characteristics can be analysed and taken into account upon drafting of learning outcomes.</p> |
| ECTS | ECTS correlated with defined learning outcomes in the various courses and modules. Credits are measured based on student workload, independent of contact hours. |
| QA | <p>Both staff and students can be consulted with regards to the institutional QA process.</p> <p>QA methodologies and guidelines can and should take into account elements of teaching/ learning.</p> <p>External evaluations can be reformed by also placing a focus on educational issues</p> |
| RPL and Recognition | <p>Prior learning should be recognised by institutions, if relevant to the expected study outcomes. If so, it needs to go beyond waiving entry conditions wherever possible. Outcomes-based education is truly understood by all actors when institutions no longer claim a monopoly to learning.</p> <p>Competences gained outside the formal system should be recognised by the institution. They should also feed into gaining recognition for qualifications.</p> <p>The recognition process should be facilitated so as to be automatic if major differences in study tracks are not present.</p> |
| Mobility | <p>Mobile students should benefit from support in coping with the different cultural/linguistic environments, so as to avoid reducing the degree to which they attain expected learning outcomes over a set period of studies and are at the same time able to cope with a different cultural and learning environment.</p> <p>Students who study abroad should get their studies recognised easily.</p> <p>Mobile students should use mobility experiences as a basis for sharing good practices across borders. Communities of practitioners are increasingly becoming a useful method of disseminating experiences and innovative approaches to teaching and learning.</p> |
| Social dimension | Special support measures should be taken to help students from disadvantaged backgrounds. learning paths should be made flexible enough so as to permit combining work and study, to better help students from non-traditional backgrounds integrate into higher education. Special counseling services need to be provided to students who are not used to an educational model in which they take control over their own education, as well as for those who have studied in poor quality secondary education institutions. |

Overall, it is clear that even though in some areas there is an improvement towards a more student-centred learning, as in, for example, the implementation of ECTS points, in general the fundamental Bologna tools are implemented superficially and without a serious commitment to make them instruments of achieving student-centred education.

11.3 INDIVIDUAL LEARNING PATH AND STUDENT OWNERSHIP

One of the most important principles of student-centred learning is that the learning and teaching process should be as individualized as possible and therefore offered to each student in the best way to achieve intended learning outcomes. Although this research does not engage in in-depth analysis of the learning and teaching process and methods it uses, as it surveyed national-level student representatives, several potential contributing elements can be explored.

Firstly, as already stated in chapter 7 on Recognition, the European Students' Union has always viewed recognition of prior (informal and non-formal) learning as complementary to formal higher education. This is primarily due to RPL's potentially very beneficial role toward enabling students to create their own learning paths. If learning outcomes methodology is applied to the fullest extent, then it shouldn't matter how students achieved certain competences (through formal, non-formal or informal learning) provided there are reliable methods of assessment. In this way, RPL could simultaneously bring about several benefits: individual learning paths, fostering lifelong learning, facilitating practice-oriented learning and boosting employability. However, in order to fulfil this positive role, it needs to be recognized by higher education decision makers as valuable and potentially extremely beneficial.

Unfortunately, as chapter 7 on Recognition demonstrates, higher education is still too closed towards the idea of complementarity between formal and informal/non-formal learning. In a large number of EHEA countries, students do not have available procedures for the recognition of prior learning, which certainly significantly diminishes their capacity to create their own learning paths.

Another, probably uncontroversial, operationalization of the SCL concept states that students should be co-creators of their curricula. However, the problem is visible when we assess this ideal against the quantitative data relating to the level of student participation in governance.

The students' unions were asked to assess the state of their representation within bodies of various levels of education (national, institutional, faculty, programme). The disturbing finding is that the situation is by far the worst at programme level where students are supposed to participate in co-creating the curriculum - only 36% of the students' unions (15 out of 43) reported that their students are equal partners at this level. This is thoroughly disappointing both in relative terms, considering that representation improves at higher levels of governance (Chapter 4), and in absolute terms of ensuring an equal student partnership in modern higher education as the current state is not even close to where we would want to be in 2018.

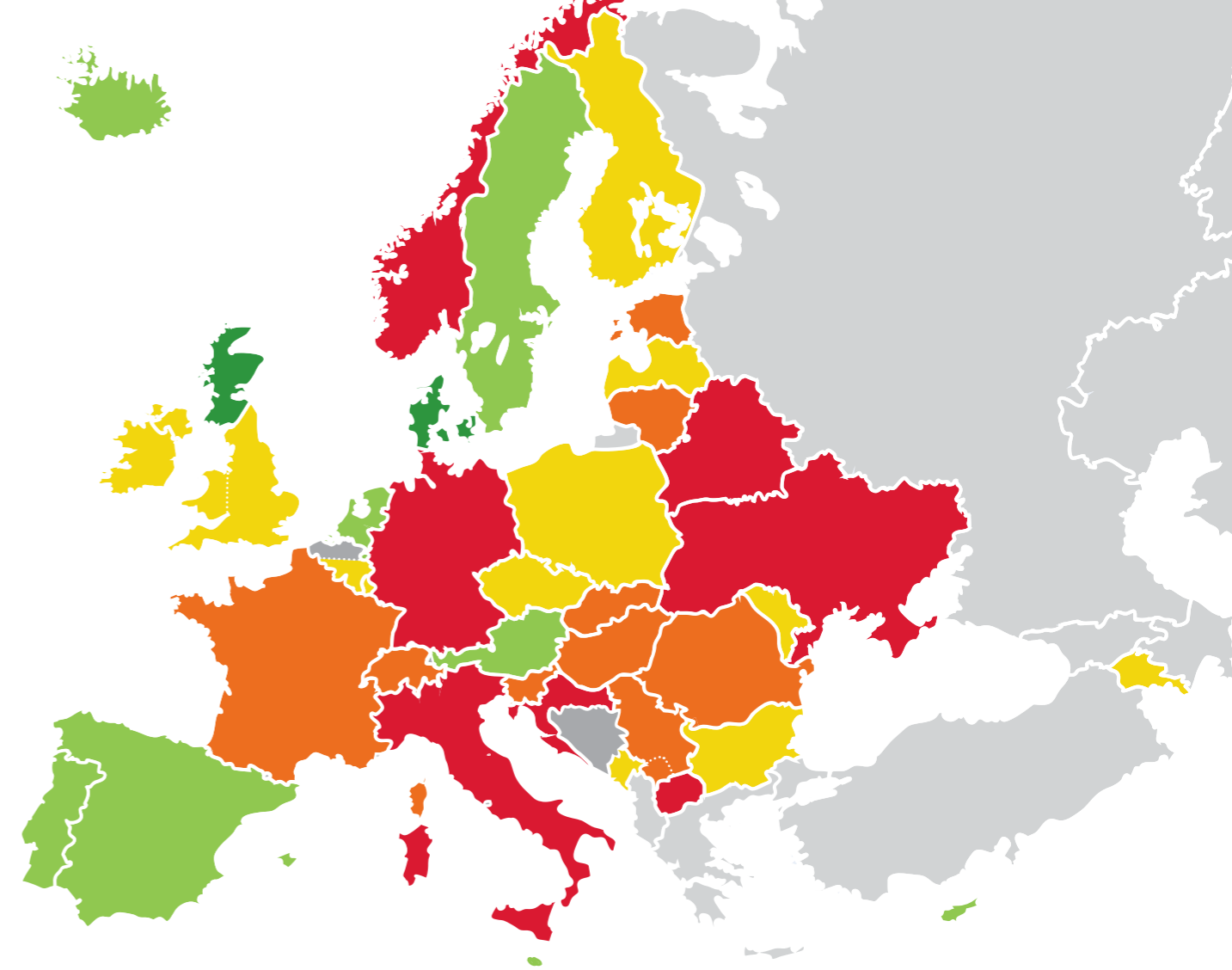


Fig. 11.2: To what extent is SCL present in the internal QA in your country?

- EHEA country with no ESU member
- ESU member with no response / I do not know
- Very low/not at all
- Below average
- Average
- Above average
- Very high

11.4 STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING AND QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Since the revision of the ESGs in 2015, student-centred learning has become one of the recognized standards of quality. Revision of the ESGs also ensured revision of the national quality criteria and, hopefully, change at the level of internal quality assurance. As already mentioned, research like Bologna with Student Eyes is somewhat limited in collecting reliable data from the institutional level because our respondents are national unions of students. However, most of these unions have reliable methods of gathering perspectives and opinions from their local students' unions and individual unions, through their own surveys, research, and through official representation channels. This has ensured that Bologna with Student Eyes has collected representative input. Unfortunately, the results are far from encouraging. As it seems to generally be the case with SCL, implementation of these changes has been very slow, unsatisfactory and uneven - as many as one fifth of the unions (8 out of 40) finds that SCL is present in internal quality assurance to a very low extent or not at all, and further 22,5% (9 out of 40) finds its presence is below average. Only one quarter of the unions (10 out of 40) believe that the presence of SCL is above average or very high.

When asked to elaborate in more detail about the presence of SCL in the internal quality assurance of higher education institutions, students' unions often echoed the usual challenges to a move towards student-centred learning. Rigidity and traditional mentality, especially in some regions of Europe, are still the biggest barriers. On the other hand, in those instances where respondents were positive about the presence of SCL at the institutional level, they usually cited examples in which students and teachers together create and manage the learning and teaching process.

These responses show that despite inclusion in the Bologna process goals for so many years, SCL still hasn't been systematically implemented at the grassroots level. Part of the reason for this could be that the nature of SCL makes it difficult to implement top-down, in the way that many other Bologna process tools were embedded. However, this doesn't change the fact that while it cannot be imposed top-down (including from the European level), this paradigm shift towards SCL can be facilitated and enhanced through European level cooperation and national level incentives and resources. To instead produce such a weak effect over a considerable period of time is surely a reason to worry.

When exploring national level incentives and resources, external quality assurance is of high importance. Here, the national students' unions were asked to assess how important the standard of SCL was considered to be when doing quality reviews. Responses showed that only 17,5% of the unions (7 out of 40) believed the standard about SCL was treated as very important and with the same emphasis as other standards, but a further 30% (12 out of 40) believed that it is still perceived as important. Only 10% (4 unions) thought that this standard is treated as not important or only slightly important. These responses suggest that the situation with external quality assurance is somewhat better than with internal quality assurance in higher education institutions, but further improvement is still needed. Furthermore, such a mismatch between various levels needs to be addressed as innovative concepts such as SCL need to be accepted and promoted at the grassroots level or the implementation will certainly be unsuccessful.

Some possible causes of this problem of (non)implementation of SCL can perhaps be drawn from the findings of the EQUIP (Enhancing Quality through Innovative Policy & Practice) project. This project addressed the implementation of the revised ESGs and examined various stakeholders' experience. According to the final project publication among the biggest challenges for stakeholders were *"ensuring the link between QA and the academic quality of learning and teaching (design and approval of programmes and SCL)"* and *"assessing and measuring the extent to which a programme/an institution has adopted a SCL approach to teaching and learning"*. These answers show that a clear path from policy to practise is still not realised, and even policies and procedures which nominally support SCL are not able to ensure effective improvement of the learning and teaching process. One of the important obstacles the publication reports is that SCL usually remains undefined in the institutional context which creates a lack of understanding.

11.5 CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Overall, the situation with the implementation of SCL seems to match the progress of the majority of Bologna process goals. This progress is happening, but it is extremely slow, uneven across EHEA and the issue of misimplementation presents a significant danger. This is especially worrisome since SCL cannot be advanced in separation from other Bologna tools which exhibit the same deficiencies. Learning outcomes methodology is an example of a shift towards the learner's competences as the basis of constructing the learning process. This shift, which has often been taken for granted, is in reality far from being the standard and therefore needs to be further developed and implemented more consistently. Indeed, the unevenness of implementation of SCL is problematic to such a degree that it makes questionable whether EHEA level policies even influence national levels to any significant extent.

When it comes to the ideal of students as creators of their own learning process, this is another ideal that is unfortunately still far from fulfilled. Firstly, students are still to a large extent excluded from deciding about the course content, learning and teaching methods, and assessment methods. What makes the situation even more paradoxical is that students are more represented at higher organisational levels (institutional, national) than at the level at which they can decide about these elements of the learning process. Secondly, recognition of informal and non-formal learning, which, if taken as complementary factors to formal education, could result in a much higher flexibilization and individualisation of the learning process, is still far from being a reality for all students in Europe.

Finally, the role of student-centred learning as an element of quality of higher education needs to be further developed and explicated. As a relatively recent addition to the ESGs, it seems SCL still hasn't achieved full recognition and equal importance. Despite the fact that the ESGs adopt a more narrow definition of SCL than the one ESU is advocating, there is still a high chance that this problem is due to difficulties with operationalizing the concept and then applying it during quality assessment, which, of course, tends to focus on more easily verifiable factors. One important challenge for the near future will be finding ways in which student-centred learning can be reliably operationalised and made more easily measurable or at least verifiable without losing sensitivity for institutional contexts and diversity of students.

11.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◊ As a prerequisite for SCL, fundamental Bologna tools (especially the learning outcome methodology) need to be implemented fully and systematically
- ◊ Students need to become full partners at all levels of their HEI, especially when it comes to decision-making about learning and teaching process
- ◊ National-level policies should support and facilitate implementation of SCL through securing resources and knowledge and experience sharing
- ◊ Teacher's competencies must be constantly developed as a part of the learning and teaching improvement initiatives
- ◊ Learning and teaching needs to be prioritized both in quality assurance and in national level policies
- ◊ Internal and external quality assurance systems should value, promote and reward pedagogical innovation

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12 THE FUTURE OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

12.1 INTRODUCTION

The Bologna Process (BP) was supposed to end 8 years ago, yet, it is still ongoing. With no fixed end, the future is still mapped with ambitious goals, with repetition of goals not yet in place and new areas of work to cover. The following chapter discusses the level of priority that the BP is perceived to be given, implementation of the BP commitments, and the road forward.

12.2 MAIN FINDINGS

8 YEARS PAST THE FIRST EXPIRATION DATE, STILL A PRIORITY

Comparing the BWSE datasets of 2015 and 2018, there is a clear understanding of the Bologna Process being of higher priority for many governments, National Unions of Students' (NUSes), and Higher Education Institutions in 2018 than in 2015.

An increased level of priority can be understood with the background of a greater stress on implementation and the absence of a secure future of the process post-2020. The communique of Yerevan (Yerevan 2015) emphasised the importance of joint effort of implementation and set out the goal-directed to be fulfilled by 2020. Whether the perception of the increased level of priority has any other explanation or possible conclusion cannot be drawn from the datasets of 2015 nor 2018. However, it can be analysed in the context of the European Commission's strategies in 2017: 'Towards a European Education Area 2025'. The European Commission aims to build on the best practices from The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) more *solid* structures for the *European Knowledge* area. Analysing the historical and present relationship between the BP and the European Commission, the Commission has gained an increased influence of the national competence; higher education through the Bologna Process (C. Sin et al 2016). With the soft power governance of the EHEA, and the lack of "rights" of the Commission in the field of Higher Education, the support provided from the Commission¹, to proceed even with the lack of strong instruments to implement might be decreasing, thus creating a perception of greater interest from the government's, National Unions of Students' and the Higher Education Institutions to proceed with the Bologna Process legitimising its future, post 2020.

Fig. 12.1: In your county, the Bologna process is a educational priority for the Government

- The government (2018)
- The government (2015)

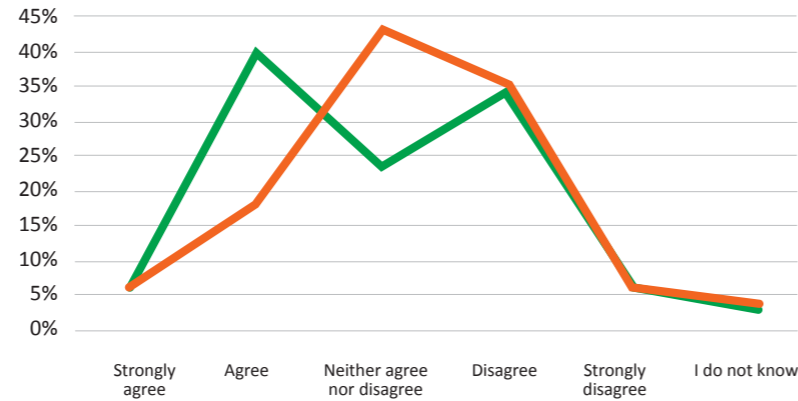


Fig. 12.2: In your county, the Bologna process is a educational priority for the National Union of Students

- The NUS (2018)
- The NUS (2015)

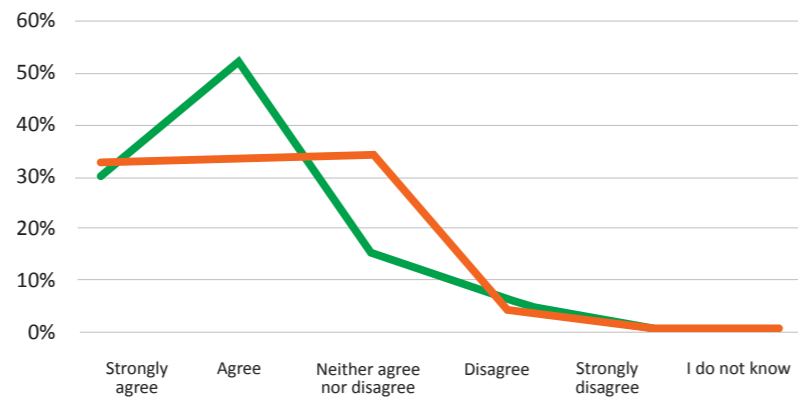
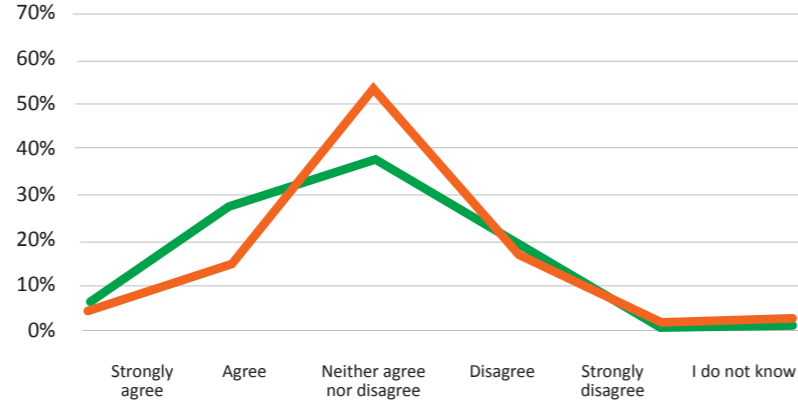


Fig. 12.3: In your county, the Bologna process is a educational priority for the Higher Education Institutions

- Higher Education Institutions (2018)
- Higher Education Institutions (2015)



IMPLEMENTATION - OF QUALITY?

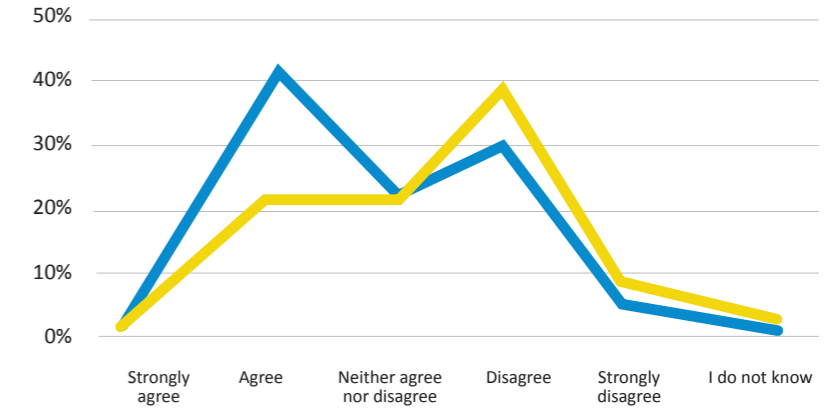
Only in Finland, the NUSes SYL and SAMOK are agreeing strongly on the two given statements of “All the Bologna reforms have been implemented in my country” and “All implemented reforms in my country have been of high quality”. Descending from the Finnish satisfaction the NUSes in: Denmark, the Netherlands, Scotland, Estonia, Norway, the republic of Ireland and Malta, agree on both of the statements. Together the group of NUSes that can be perceived as *satisfied* with the quality of the implementation only makes up 25% (11 out of 43) of all responding NUSes.

According to Dennis Soltys article “Similarities, divergence, and incapacity in the Bologna Process reform implementation by the former-socialist countries: the self-defeat of state Regulations”, former socialist countries face greater difficulties implementing the Bologna process reforms. A statement that can both be seen in the historical context of the countries’ higher education systems and the “late” entrance² in the Process (D. Soltys 2015). Slotys thesis is rather proven wrong by the perception of implementation by the NUSes in former socialist countries. The majority NUSes operation in those countries is rather positive towards implementation but critical towards the quality of the implementation. Deviant, is the Belarusian example. Both NUSes in Belarus (BSA and BOSS) strongly disagree on both of the statements. Understandable since Belarus has only been a member of the Process since 2015 and according to the final report for the Advisory Group supporting the implementation of the Roadmap given in 2015, not much progress has been made since Yerevan (Draft final report: AG2 Support for Belarus roadmap). The Belarusian case does support the thesis of Slotys thesis but it is only one case out of forty-three.

The group of 32 NUSes that are dissatisfied³, not only operating in former socialist countries, are NUSes both operating in the Sorbonne Declaration signatory countries and Bologna Process signatories such as Sweden, Spain, and Switzerland. Clearly, the amount of years a country has been part of the Process and its history of being socialist does not naturally correlate.

Fig. 12.4: Implementation of quality?

- All the Bologna reforms have been implemented in my country
- All implemented Bologna reforms in my country have been of high quality



¹ financial support and technical expertise

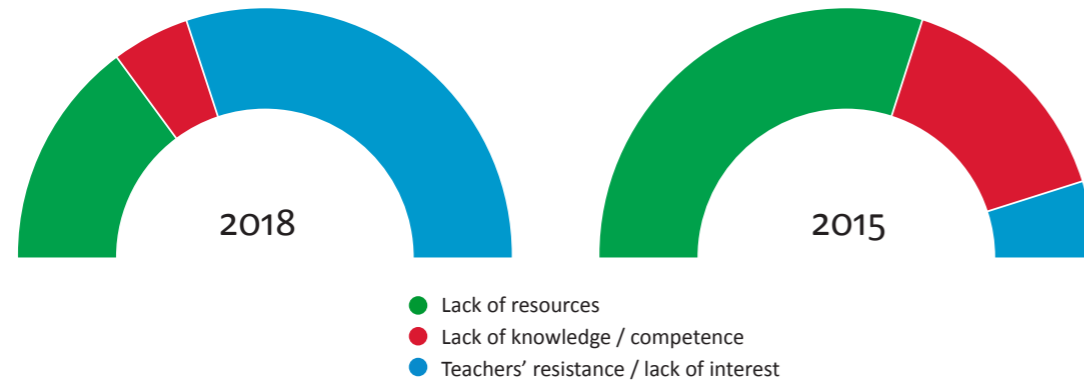
² For more information, see www.ehea.info

³ NUSes that either disagreed/strongly disagreed on one or both of the statements.

MAIN CHALLENGES

The same challenges for implementation of Bologna reforms can be found in both the data from 2015 and 2018 though, what is assumed to be the biggest challenge for implementation has changed.

Fig. 12.5: Main challenges for implementing the Bologna Process



Throughout the previous chapters, the incoherent implementation of previously agreed commitments has been stated. An incoherency that can be explained from the perspective of a coin. Lack of resources on one side and lack of interest in full implementation on the other. Without interest in full implementation, solid public funding will not be allocated. Even if commitments are jointly agreed upon at the Ministerial Conferences, the implementation remains voluntary. Creating a smorgasbord of commitments, a government can decide what to implement. This cherry picking option slows down coherent implementation and resource allocation.

THE ROAD FORWARD

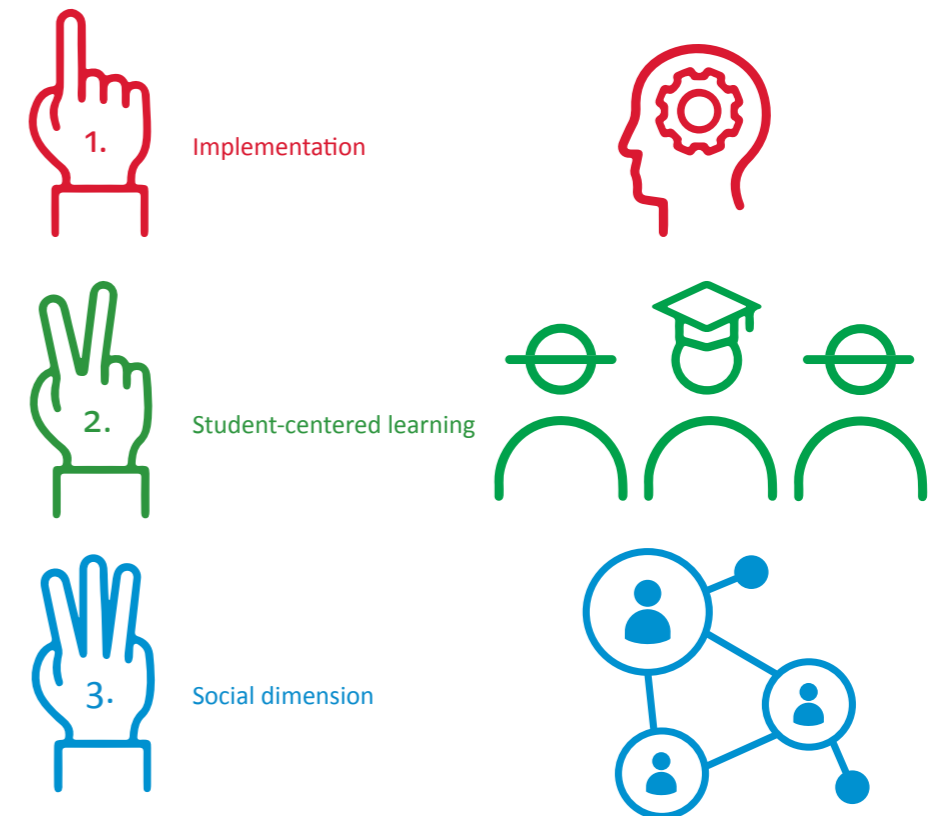
A clear majority consisting of 41 out of 43 of the National Unions want the Bologna Process to proceed after the Paris Ministerial conference 2018. The two having a deviant opinion would rather see the Bologna Process move into the EU structures. An opinion that is shared by 7 other NUSes. Hence, it can be understood as none of the NUSes hope for the process to fully stop existing. Moving back to the satisfied NUSes with the amount and quality of implementation (see Implementation of quality in this chapter) none of them argue for the Processes to end nor that it should move into the EU structures. They rather believe that the BP should continue, but, with countries being forced to leave, or leaving on a voluntary basis due to lack of engagement and implementation.

The NUSes welcome the Bologna Process to proceed after the ministerial meeting in Paris, May 2018 but only 7 out of 43 NUSes would like the BP to continue business as usual. Both structural and policy improvements are needed.

On a structural level, 18 out of 43, would like the BP to proceed as a peer learning forum between governments (knowledge sharing), 14 out of 43 would like a differentiation between the EHEA and BP in the form of a several steps process with an added value, and 15 out of 43 would like countries to leave the process or be forced to leave the process due to lack of implementation or interest for the process. Regardless of the structural form of the process, implementation and knowledge sharing is the most commonly agreed basis on which the BP should proceed after the 2018 ministerial conference according to ESU's members.

Policy improvements or the wish list of priorities in the period of 2018 -2020 is interestingly the same as for the current period (2015-2018); Implementation, Student Centred Learning and the Social Dimension of higher education.

Fig. 12.6: Political priorities of the Bologna Process during 2018-2020



Implementation. Can something ever be fully implemented? Or can something not be implemented at all? The wish of greater implementation can be found in the Yerevan communique (Yerevan 2015), and a conclusion of not all reforms being implemented can be drawn from the Bologna Implementation Report 2018 (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2018) and the answers collected from ESU member unions. ESU calls for full implementation of the adopted measures that should be taken in EHEA according to the Communiqués (Introduction ESUs policies in Higher Education). Implementation is needed to foster trust and recognition that facilitates students to freely move and learn within EHEA. The other two top three priorities follow naturally the pattern of lack of an/or mis-implementation.

Student Centred Learning has been on the agenda of the Bologna Process since 2009. The so-called paradigm shift has not taken place yet, therefore, once more ESU calls for support for it. More about the implementation and developments in the field can be found in the chapter 12. The third priority for the BP Work Program 2018-2020 according to the NUSes should be the Social Dimension of Higher Education (further developed in chapter 5 of this publication). The Social Dimension has been discussed since 2001 and the Prague communique, even if the discussions have been ongoing for more than 15 years, both *EUROSTUDENT VI* and Bologna Implementation report 2018 visualises that there is more to be done. ESU calls for ministers to re-invest in all the fields above mentioned, in order for a sustainable future of the EHEA.

12.3 CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

In a process craving new goals and commitments rather than implementation of already agreed ones, this chapter has presented the future of the Bologna process where more attention is given to implementation rather than new goals and commitments. The chapter demonstrates an understanding of the Bologna Process given a higher rate of priority for the EHEA members governments, the NUSes and the HEIs. That implementation and the quality of the implementation does not only correlate with the number of years a country has been a member of the EHEA nor if it is a former socialist state. The main challenges remain and more public finances are needed in order for implementation to happen. The implementation needs to be is of highest priority for the next period (2018-2020) followed by student centred learning (SCL) and social dimension of higher education.

The National Unions of Students contributing to this part of the publication would like the process to proceed in one form or another after the Ministerial Conference 2018. Proceeding leaves the question of for how long the Bologna Process could or even should continue. No one has openly declared the new expiration date, the only conclusion to be drawn is that the upcoming period of 2018-2020 can be the last.

12.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Bologna Process as a priority. In order for the implementation of the reforms to take place, it needs to be a priority both for the government and the Higher Education Institutions. It is not the responsibility of the NUS to push for the Bologna Process, but, the NUS should be involved as an equal partner for greater implementation of quality.
- Implementation of high quality. Review of the implementation and map the dissatisfaction in the national context. Without high satisfaction and implementation, trust cannot grow, endangering the future of the BP.
- Public funding. Greater funds are needed in order for the implementation to take place. On a governmental level, it cannot be acceptable to sign a communiqué, hence committing to implementation without allocation of the means for the HEI to develop the tools that have been called for.
- The Social Dimension of Higher Education. ESU call on the creation of a structure supporting the implementation of the 2020 Strategy for Lifelong learning and Social Dimension.

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14 LIST OF COMMONLY USED ABBREVIATIONS

| Abbreviation | Meaning |
|--------------|---|
| BA | Bachelor’s degree |
| BFUG | Bologna Follow-Up Group |
| BWSE | Bologna With Student Eyes |
| ECTS | European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System |
| EHEA | European Higher Education Area |
| EHEA QF | European Higher Education Area Qualifications Framework |
| EI | Education International |
| ENIC | European Network of National Information Centres on academic recognition and mobility |
| ENQA | European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education |
| EQAR | European Quality Assurance Register for higher education |
| EQUIP | Enhancing Quality through Innovative Policy & Practice |
| 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 |
| E4 | Stakeholders’ group integrated by institutions: EUA and EURASHE; ESU; ENQA. |
| HE | Higher Education |
| HEI | Higher Education Institution |
| LLL | Lifelong Learning |
| LO | Learning Outcomes |
| MA | Master’s degree |
| MOOC | Massive open online course |
| NARIC | National Academic Recognition Information Centres |
| NQF | National Qualification Framework |
| NUS | National Union of Students |
| OECD | The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| PASCL | Peer Assessment of Student Centred Learning |
| PLA | Peer learning activity |
| QA | Quality Assurance |
| QF | Qualification Framework |
| RPL | Prior Learning Recognition |
| SCL | Student-Centred Learning |
| T4SCL | Time for a New Paradigm in Education: Student Centred Learning |

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16 LIST OF BWSE 2018 DATA COLLECTION

The dataset of BWSE 2018 is based on answers from NUSes marked with “x” for the respective chapter. Unions marked with “o” did not provide data to the referred chapter.

In total, the answers cover the perception of implementation in 38 member countries of The European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

NB. For all chapters, more than one NUS is providing country data (see Belarus, Belgium, France and the Netherlands) by answering the survey separately from another.

* SYL and SAMOK answers all parts of the survey together

** NUS-Wales answers were jointly submitted with NUS for all part but the 10th Chapter

| Country | NUS | Chapter 4 | Chapter 5 | Chapter 6 | Chapter 7 | Chapter 8 | Chapter 9 | Chapter 10 | Chapter 12 |
|----------------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|
| Armenia | ANSA | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Austria | ÖH | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Belarus | BSA | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Belarus | BOSS | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Belgium-WAL | FEF | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Belgium-VLG | VVS | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Bosnia&Herz | SURS | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Bulgaria | NASC | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Croatia | CSC | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Cyprus | POFEN | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Czech Republic | SKRVS | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Denmark | DSF | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Estonia | EUL | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Finland | SYL&SAMOK* | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| France | FAGE | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| France | UNEF | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Germany | fzs | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Hungary | HOOK | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Iceland | LÍS | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Ireland | USI | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Italy | UDU | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Latvia | LSA | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Lithuania | LSS | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Luxembourg | UNEL | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Macedonia | NSUM | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Malta | KSU | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Montenegro | SPUM | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Moldova | ASM | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Netherlands | ISO | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Netherlands | LSVb | o | o | o | o | o | o | o | x |
| Norway | NSO | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Poland | PSRP | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Portugal | FAIRE | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Romania | ANOSR | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Serbia | SKONUS | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Slovakia | SRVS SR | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Slovenia | SSU | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Spain | CREUP | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Sweden | SFS | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Switzerland | VSS/UNES/USU | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Ukraine | UAS | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| UK- Northern Ireland | NUS-USI | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| UK- Scotland | NUS-Scotland | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| UK- England | NUS | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| UK-Wales | NUS-Wales** | o | o | o | o | o | o | x | o |
| TOT | | 43 | 43 | 43 | 43 | 43 | 43 | 44 | 44 |

“Bologna with Student Eyes is a reality-check of what has been agreed upon by national governments within the Bologna Process and what the actual situation is for students. The data for this edition was collected by surveying the European Students’ Union’s national unions of students in the following areas: student participation in governance, social dimension, quality assurance, recognition, mobility and internationalisation, structural reforms, student-centred learning and financing of higher education. The questionnaire also included general questions about the Bologna Process and its future. In total, over 43 national unions of students from 38 countries responded the questionnaire, from Norway to Malta and Ireland to Armenia.

The European Students’ Union(ESU) promotes students’ interests at European level towards all relevant bodies and in particular the European Union, Bologna Follow-up Group, Council of Europe and UNESCO. Through its members, ESU represents almost 20 million students in Europe”