

Focus on Higher Education in Europe 2010: New report on the impact of the Bologna process

A new report, produced for the European Commission by the Eurydice network presents an overview of the progress on higher education reform made in the 46 countries in the Bologna process. It is based on authoritative evidence from each country and provides a clear comparative view of how the issues have been addressed at national level.

At the official launch of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in 2010 the overall picture reveals that the Bologna process has brought about fundamental and dramatic change in higher education structures across Europe. The growth of external quality assurance in higher education has been one of the most notable features of the past decade.

Yet, as European higher education is dynamic and evolving in a fast-changing context, new challenges are inevitably emerging. In particular, the combination of an expanding participation in higher education, today at historically unprecedented levels, the implementation of system reforms and the stagnation of public funding is creating enormous pressure on the higher education sector. The need to intensify co-operation at European level is becoming ever more acute, with improved monitoring mechanisms being essential to assess the societal impact of ongoing reforms.

What is Eurydice?

The Eurydice Network provides information on and analyses of European education systems and policies. It consists of 35 national units based in all 31 countries participating in the EU's Lifelong Learning programme (EU Member States, EEA countries and Turkey) and is coordinated and managed by the EU Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) in Brussels, which drafts its publications and databases.

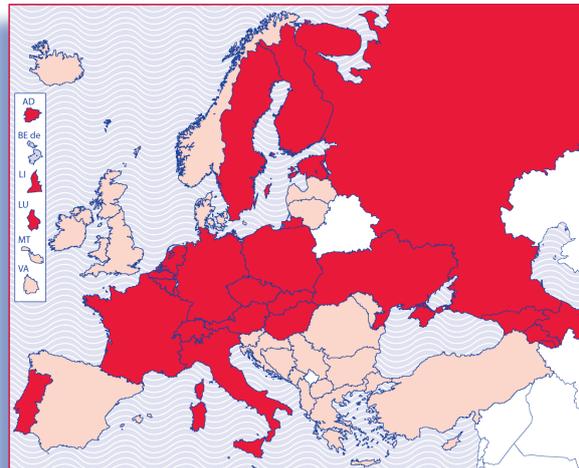
All Eurydice publications are available free of charge at <http://www.eurydice.org>

Widespread implementation of the Bachelor-Master structure

At this stage of the Bologna process, the new three-cycle structure is theoretically fully in place or has at least been extensively introduced in all countries in most institutions

and programmes. However, several study fields, particularly regulated professions such as medicine and related fields, remain outside these new structures in nearly all countries.

Three-cycle structure in 1999 and 2009



- Three-cycle structure developed after 1999
- Three-cycle structure already in 1999
- No three-cycle structure

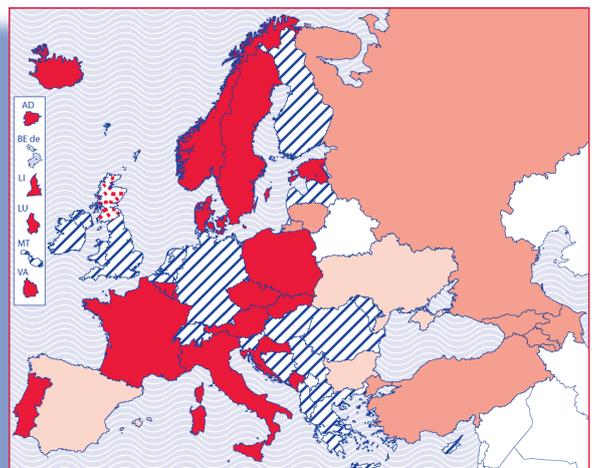
Source: Eurydice.

Looking at the combination of first and second cycle programmes, the 180 + 120 ECTS credit (for information on ECTS, see Bologna Tools below) two-cycle structure is

the most commonly adopted model. It is the most prominent model in 16 countries and is also used in a further 21 countries where no unique model is established.

Overall Bologna structure model implemented in the most common programmes in the Bologna countries, 2009/10

- 180 + 120 credits (3 + 2 academic years) model ■
- 240 + 120 credits (4 + 2 academic years) model ■
- 240 + 90 credits (4 + 1.5 academic years) model ■
- 240 + 60 credits (4 + 1 academic years) model ■
- No dominant model ▨
- Not applicable ■



Source: Eurydice.

Vocational and professional higher education in the Bologna process

The inclusion of vocational and professional education in the Bologna process is a source of significant divergence and some confusion across the European region. The reasons for this lie in the many different national understandings of 'professional' or 'vocational' programmes, and the blurring of distinctions between academic and professional programmes in some countries, as the entire sector focuses more consciously on employability concerns and on providing relevant education for the labour market.

Several countries have specifically identified problems in linking vocationally-oriented programmes to their Bologna model. The most common problem is that many vocational and professional qualifications

are offered in short-cycle programmes that require less than 180 ECTS. However, as long as the qualifications resulting from these programmes can be recognised within a Bologna first-cycle programme, there should be no problem of integration within the Bologna cycle system. The problems arise in countries where such progression routes are not a part of the system architecture.

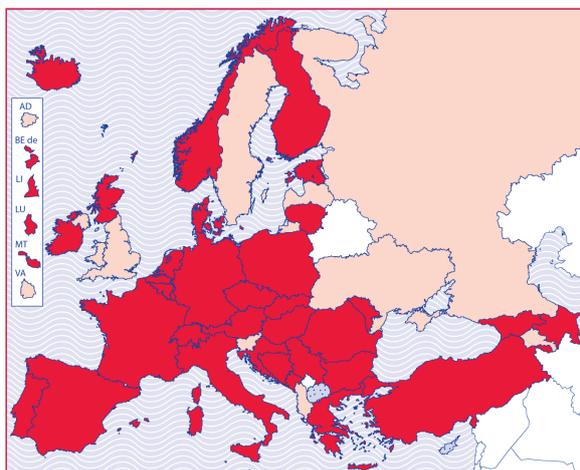
A number of countries have, however, successfully integrated their professional programmes into the Bologna structures. These countries have almost always explicitly referenced their professional programmes to their National Qualifications Framework – illustrating the importance of this tool.

The Bologna Tools: European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and Diploma Supplement (DS)

Two long established elements of the 'Bologna toolkit' are the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and the Diploma Supplement (DS). ECTS is a student-centred credit system, initially developed to facilitate mobility in the Erasmus programme, and is based on the student workload required to achieve defined learning outcomes. The Diploma Supplement is a document attached to a higher education diploma that describes the nature, level, content and status of the studies successfully completed.

A large majority (36 higher education systems) fully implements the two instruments. Among the 11 countries that have fully implemented only one of the two tools, it is ECTS implementation that still lags behind. Overall this widespread use indicates that these two instruments have played an important role in embedding aspects of the Bologna reforms and facilitating the understanding of national higher education systems.

Implementation of ECTS and the Diploma Supplement, 2009/10



-  ECTS fully implemented and DS issued free of charge
-  Either ECTS fully implemented or DS issued free of charge
-  Neither ECTS fully implemented nor DS issued free of charge

Source: Eurydice.

National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF)

The third tool to have been introduced and developed in the Bologna process is the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). It is a tool for describing and clearly expressing the differences between qualifications in all cycles and levels of education. Eight higher education systems now have a fully self-certified NQF, while 11 are well advanced in the process of implementation. The other

countries/regions are still in the preparatory stages of defining purposes and structures. On first sight this picture may not seem too promising, but since the Ministerial Conference in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve in 2009, Denmark and Malta have self-certified their NQF and several countries have all made significant progress towards establishing their own NQF.

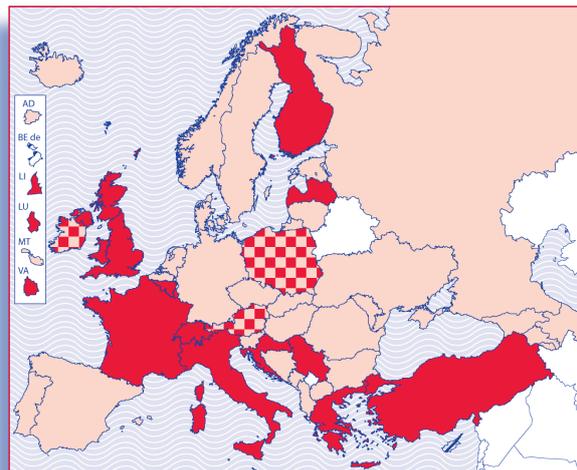


Quality Assurance

The growth of external quality assurance in higher education has been one of the most notable features of the Bologna decade, with 22 countries establishing new quality assurance agencies. European cooperation in quality assurance is exemplified by the development of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), agreement on European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area and the creation of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) now including 17 agencies.

Although practically all Bologna countries have established some form of external quality assurance system, there are significant differences in the philosophy and approach behind systems. In the majority of EHEA countries, quality assurance is concerned with granting permission to higher education institutions or programmes to operate on the basis of threshold quality standards. Only a minority of countries exclusively follows an improvement-oriented approach.

Main approach to Quality Assurance, 2009/10



-  Advisory: improvement oriented
-  Supervisory: granting permission to higher education institutions and/or programmes
-  Quality Assurance agency established, but not yet operating
-  No Quality Assurance agency

Source: Eurydice.

This suggests that the development of external quality assurance systems has been a central feature of evolving governance structures in higher education. Whereas institutions were previously 'supervised' directly by the state, the steering mechanisms now are much more likely to involve quality assurance agencies. Moreover, just as there has been increasing

convergence towards particular models of degree structures, so too there appears to have been convergence towards a particular model of external quality assurance. No doubt this has been facilitated by the increased communication between governments, agencies and other quality assurance actors throughout the Bologna period.

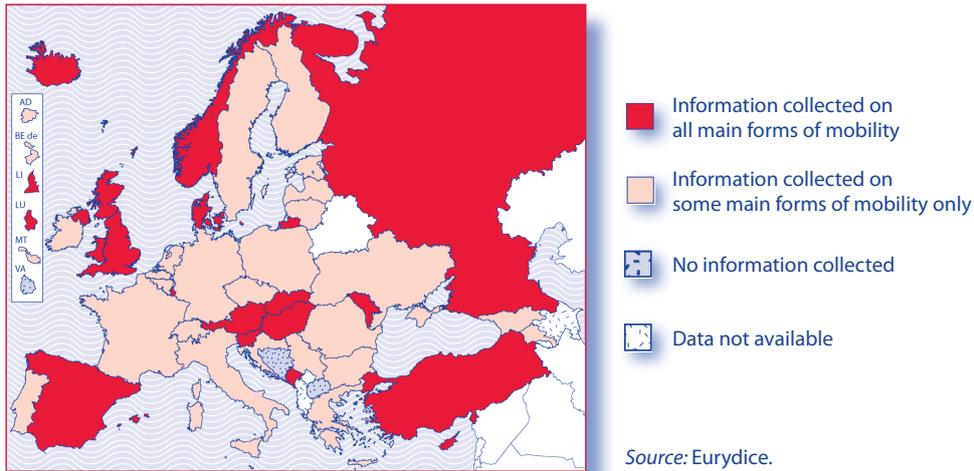


Student mobility

Student mobility has been an over-arching goal of the Bologna process since its inception, and the drive to promote mobility has been consistent throughout the last decade. However, despite its importance in the European Higher Education Area, student mobility is rarely a topic that is addressed

comprehensively at national level and, as the map below illustrates, information on the reality of student mobility is rarely complete. I

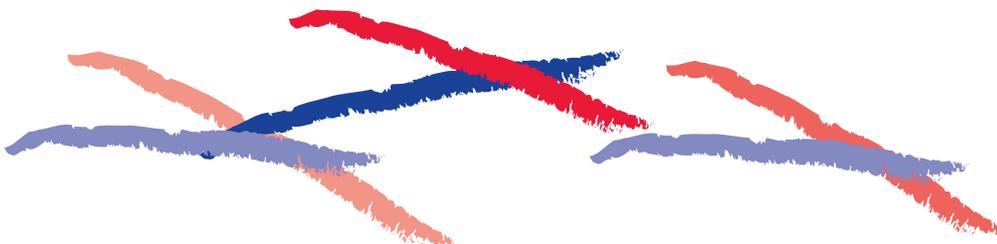
Information on mobility,
2009/10



European policy and programme developments have been an extremely important catalyst for national action on student mobility. While most countries have some financial measures in place to support student mobility, the economic disparity between countries in the European Higher Education Area creates major problems for the less wealthy countries and citizens. Moreover, while countries have a considerable number of measures in place to encourage different forms of mobility, it is rare to find these measures brought together in the form of comprehensive mobility policy.

Despite the ministerial agreement of a target that 20 % of graduates should have experienced a study or training period abroad by 2020, few countries have so far adopted this goal as a part of a national higher education strategy.

These findings suggest that the commitment made for the EHEA to develop mobility opportunities extensively and aiming at the goal of 20 % of students benefitting from mobility during her/his studies (however this goal is eventually measured) requires a major push in policy making and implementation of measures if the European Higher Education Area is to meet the aspirations for an open and inclusive space for mobility.

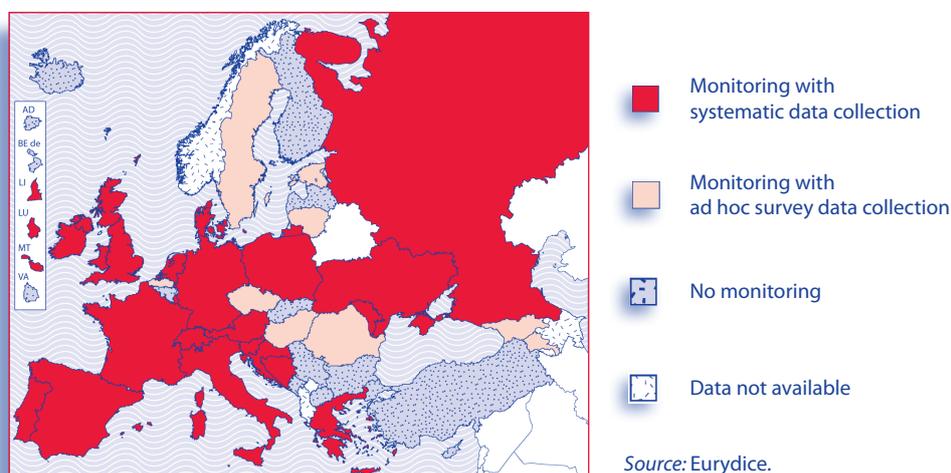


The social dimension and lifelong learning in higher education

The social dimension of higher education presents a significant challenge to European cooperation as it is understood so differently from one country to another. At this stage, very few countries have linked their policy

on the social dimension to the Bologna commitment of raising the participation of under-represented groups to the point where the higher education population mirrors the overall societal distribution.

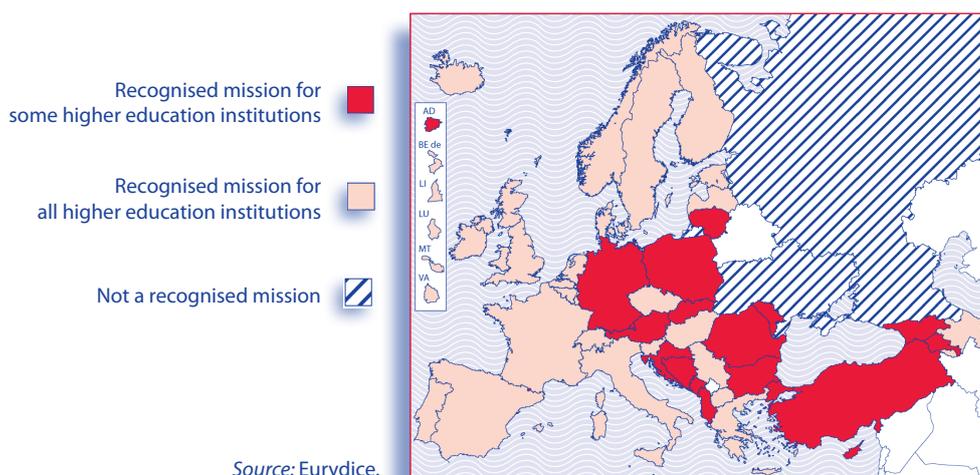
Monitoring of participation of societal groups, 2009/10



Very few countries have linked their set specific targets to improve the participation of under-represented groups in higher education. In addition, only about half of the Bologna countries systematically monitor participation. Monitoring in this field can be highly sensitive in some countries. Yet if benchmarks and targets are to be effective

in helping to address social dimension challenges, it is essential that specific measures are also taken and that their impact is carefully monitored. At the same time, monitoring can itself reveal previously hidden or ignored aspects of under-representation, and bringing this to light can be the source of new action to stimulate participation.

Lifelong learning as a mission for higher education institutions, 2009/10



The term 'lifelong learning' is also still understood in many different ways across the European Higher Education Area. Lifelong learning has become a recognised mission of higher education institutions during the Bologna decade, but nevertheless remains a peripheral concern in many countries.

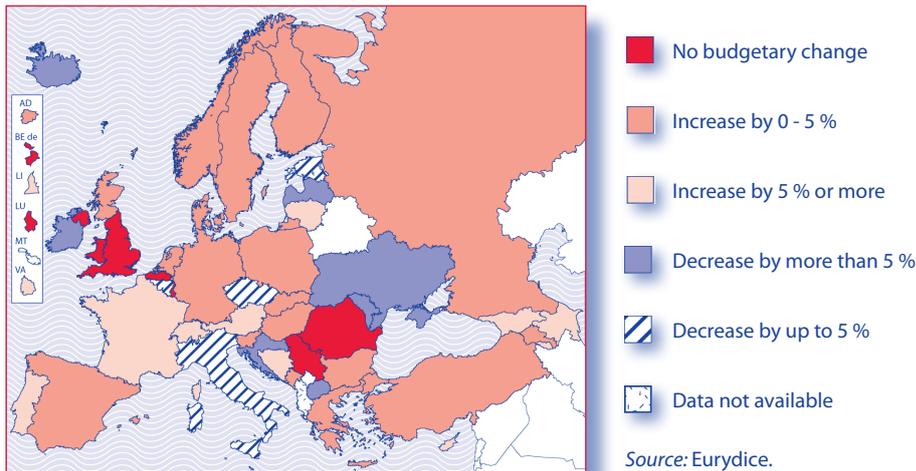
Information on the funding of lifelong learning is difficult to obtain, partly as a result of lack of conceptual clarity and partly because diverse funding sources are involved. Where information on public funding is available, investment in lifelong learning appears to be relatively low.

The impact of the economic crisis

The Bologna decade has seen no improvement in overall higher education funding. However, initial national responses to the economic crisis have taken radically different paths – from increased investment in higher education

through stimulus packages, to severe cuts in higher education expenditure. The likely impact of these different policy approaches on the European Higher Education Area is at this stage difficult to discern.

Budgetary changes from 2008/09 to 2009/10



Economic crisis has also had an impact on enrolment rates, staffing and infrastructure issues and the continued development of lifelong learning. The nature of this impact has not been uniform across countries.

One cause for concern is that the effect of economic crisis on the higher education sector is only monitored systematically in a small number of countries. This raises some serious questions over how national action to support higher education can be adequately assessed.

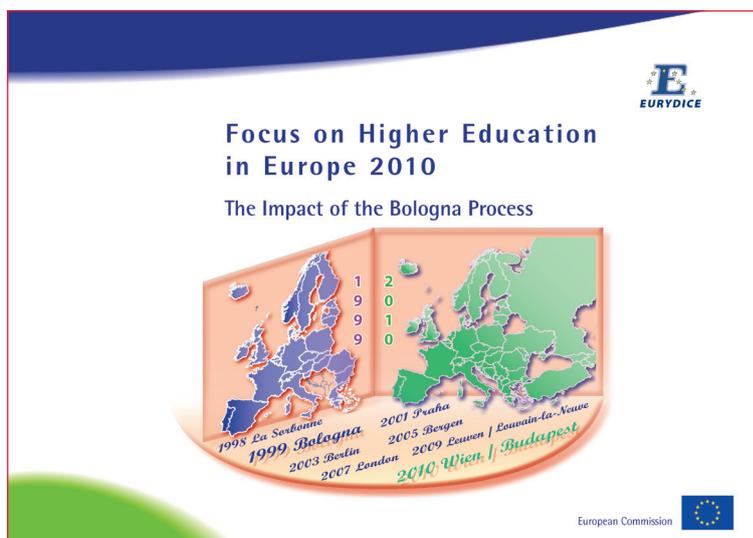
In their immediate reaction to the economic crisis, countries have demonstrated that they are aware of the social costs of the economic crisis and the positive role that the higher education sector can play.

Looking to the future, it is important to see the emerging European Higher Education Area in the context not only of ongoing implementation of Bologna reforms, but also of continued demographic change, and public funding constraints. While budgetary data with regard to higher education need to be considered with caution, it is already clear that attaining the European objectives set for the decade up to 2020 will require increased dedication. There is also a need for more and better data to inform policy and European cooperation in many other areas – notably mobility, lifelong learning and social dimension issues. Indeed the focus on the social dimension and lifelong learning will be even more important throughout the next decade if the crucial goal to establish a Europe of knowledge is to be achieved.



The full study

Focus on Higher Education in Europe 2010: The Impact of the Bologna Process



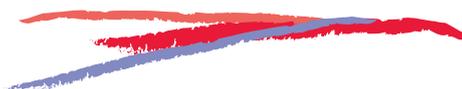
is available in English

on the Eurydice website: www.eurydice.org

on the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency website:

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/about/eurydice/index_en.htm

Printed copies of the study in English will be available from April 2010.
The French and German translations will be available shortly afterwards.



Other key documents of interest

- ◆ Key Data on Higher Education – 2007 edition
<http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/Eurydice/showPresentation?pubid=088EN>
- ◆ Focus on the structure of higher education in Europe. National trends in the Bologna Process – 2006/07 edition
<http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/Eurydice/showPresentation?pubid=086EN>
- ◆ Higher Education Governance in Europe. Policies, structures, funding and academic staff - 2008
<http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/Eurydice/showPresentation?pubid=091EN>
- ◆ Bologna secretariat website
<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/>
- ◆ DG EAC Higher education in Europe
http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc62_en.htm

