

Structural indicators for monitoring education and training systems in Europe 2022

Overview of
major reforms since 2015

Eurydice background report

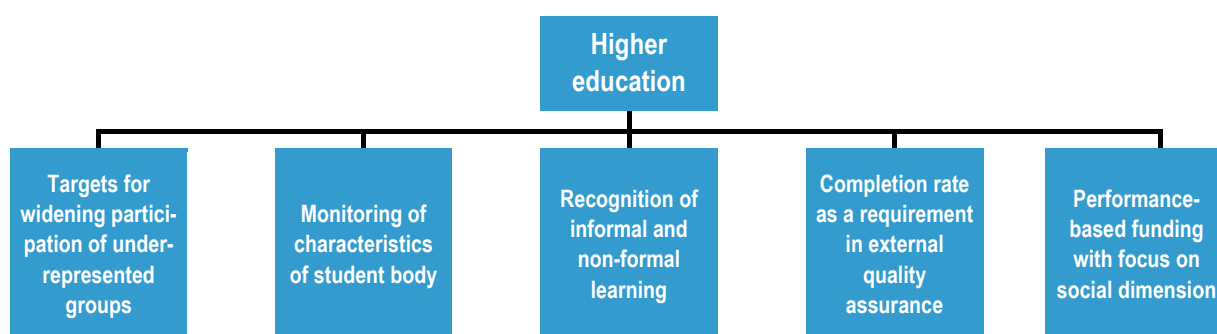
4. Higher education



4. HIGHER EDUCATION

In 2008, the Council adopted an EU-wide benchmark on tertiary education, stating that by 2020 at least 40 % of 30–34-year-olds should have a tertiary or equivalent-level qualification ⁽¹⁴⁾. This benchmark was part of the double headline target on education within the Europe 2020 growth strategy. According to Eurostat data, this target was reached in 2019 ⁽¹⁵⁾. To emphasise the need for further progress in this area, in 2021 the Council agreed a new EU-level target on tertiary-level attainment, which states that ‘The share of 25–34-year-olds with tertiary education attainment should be at least 45 %, by 2030’ ⁽¹⁶⁾.

The following five structural indicators were developed in relation to the EU-level priorities, and guided by the Commission’s communication, ‘Supporting growth and jobs: An agenda for the modernisation of Europe’s higher education systems’ ⁽¹⁷⁾. Among the Communication’s main objectives are two key interlinked policy goals: increasing and widening participation and improving the quality and relevance of higher education. To achieve these goals, the following indicators were chosen.



Related to these indicators, the Commission’s communication of 30 September 2020 on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 ⁽¹⁸⁾ defines inclusion – ensuring that higher education is accessible to diverse student populations – as one of its key objectives. Furthermore, the Council, in its resolution for setting out the targets for 2030, stated that ‘education and training systems should become more flexible, resilient, future-proof, and appealing, reaching out to a more diverse learner body and offering recognition and validation of prior learning, upskilling and reskilling training opportunities, including at higher qualification levels and throughout the working life... Moreover, to reinforce cooperation between education institutions and foster mobility, there is still work to be done in areas such as the automatic mutual recognition of qualifications and study periods abroad and quality assurance’ ⁽¹⁹⁾.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (‘ET 2020’), OJ C 119, 28.5.2009.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Eurostat press release of 22 April 2020 (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/10749941/3-22042020-BP-EN.pdf/04c88d0b-17af-cf7e-7e78-331a67f3cd5>).

⁽¹⁶⁾ Council Resolution of 19 February 2021 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021–2030). 2021/C 66/1.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Communication from the European Commission, 2011. ‘Supporting Growth and Jobs: An Agenda for the Modernisation of Europe’s Higher Education Systems’. COM (2011) 567 final. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on achieving the European Education Area by 2025. COM(2020) 625 final. Brussels.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Council Resolution of 19 February 2021 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021–2030). 2021/C 66/1.

Overview of reforms and policy developments since 2015

In the area of higher education, there were some reforms since 2015. Indicators with new policies were quantitative targets in terms of widening participation and attainment of under-represented groups, completion as a required criterion in external quality assurance, and performance-based funding with a focus on the social dimension.

For the indicator on widening participation of under-represented groups, quantitative targets have been issued in the gender equality strategy for 2021–2030 in Czechia ⁽²⁰⁾.

For the indicator on recognition of informal and non-formal learning, in Austria, paragraph 56 of the 2002 Universities Act was amended in 2021. A new undergraduate admission procedure for people with non-formal or informal qualifications wishing to continue their education will be recognised by universities. With this new procedure, universities will deliver professional Bachelor degrees (BA prof) in collaboration with non-university educational institutions'. Informal qualification means qualified work experience of several years.

Regarding performance-based funding with a focus on the social dimension, in Hungary, the Ministry for Innovation and Technology has entered into a framework agreement with 21 model exchange institutions in 2021. This agreement includes a set of conditions for the financing of public tasks directly performed by the foundation which owns and maintains the higher education institution. The agreement specifies, among other things, the indicators for social-dimension-based funding, such as the number of disabled students actively enrolled in the higher education institution; the number of students actively enrolled in the higher education institution from specific territories that have been categorised as 'to develop'; and the number of students actively enrolled in the higher education institution who are raising a child.

Two countries (Romania and Finland) ceased to set quantitative targets for widening participation and attainment of under-represented groups between 2015 and 2021.

When looking at the five indicators for the 2021/2022 reference year, in more than two thirds of the education systems, monitoring of socioeconomic characteristics of the student body was the most widely implemented policy. Also, recognition of prior informal or non-formal learning and the requirement of completion rates was implemented in more than half of the education systems.

The two remaining policies (Indicators 4.1 and 4.5), which focus the most on the social dimension and widening participation in higher education, were implemented in less than half of the education systems, even if there were developments in this area during the 2021/2022 academic year in some countries ⁽²¹⁾. This suggests that while indicators related to the quality and relevance of higher education are implemented in the majority of education systems, there is more work to be done related to the two indicators on widening participation and the social dimension of higher education.

⁽²⁰⁾ <https://www.vlada.cz/cz/ppov/rovne-prilezitosti-zen-a-muzu/aktuality/vlada-dnes-schvalila-strategii-rovnosti-zen-a-muzu-na-leta-2021–2030-187164/>

⁽²¹⁾ For more information on current policies for improving equity and inclusion in higher education, see European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2022. *Towards Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education in Europe*.

Summary table on higher education, 2021/2022

	1. Quantitative targets for widening participation and/or attainment of under-represented groups	2. Monitoring of socioeconomic background of students	3. Recognition of informal or non-formal learning in entry to higher education	4. Completion rates as a required criterion in external quality assurance	5. Performance-based funding mechanisms with a social dimension focus
Belgium BE fr		●	●	●	
Belgium BE de				●	
Belgium BE nl		●	●		●
Bulgaria		●		●	
Czechia	●	●			
Denmark		●	●		
Germany		●	●	●	
Estonia			●	●	
Ireland	●	●	●	●	●
Greece	●			●	
Spain		●	●	●	●
France	●	●	●	●	●
Croatia		●		●	●
Italy		●	●	●	●
Cyprus	●	●		●	
Latvia					
Lithuania		●	●	●	
Luxembourg			●		
Hungary		●	●	●	●
Malta	●	●	●	●	
Netherlands		●			
Austria	●	●	●	●	●
Poland	●	●	●	●	●
Portugal			●	●	●
Romania		●		●	●
Slovenia				●	
Slovakia		●		●	
Finland		●	●		
Sweden		●	●		
Bosnia and Herzegovina					
Iceland			●	●	
Liechtenstein		●	●		
Montenegro			●	●	
North Macedonia		●		●	
Norway		●	●		
Serbia	●	●		●	
Türkiye		●	●		