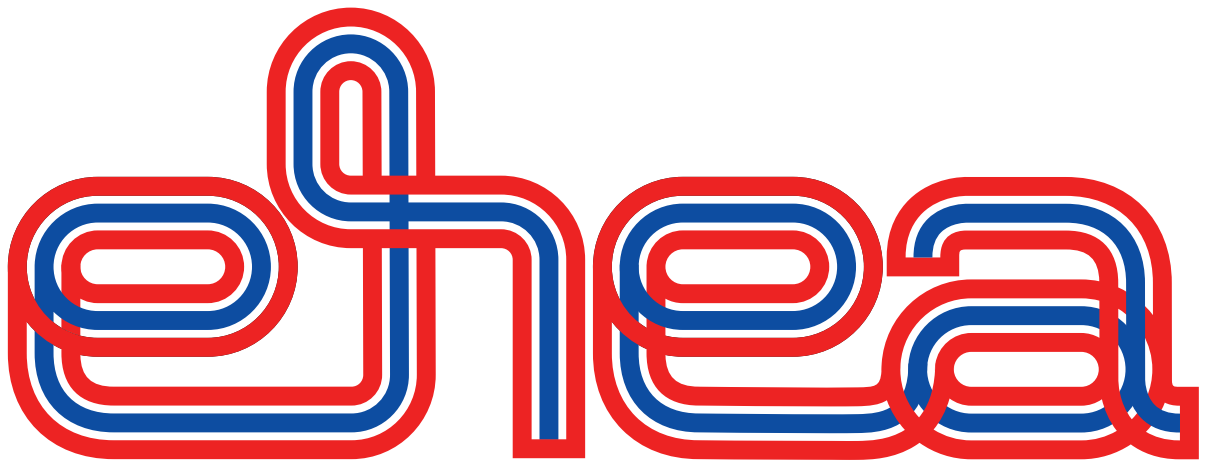




European  
Commission

# The European Higher Education Area in 2024

*Bologna Process  
Implementation Report*



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# CHAPTER 2: KEY COMMITMENTS: DEGREE STRUCTURES, RECOGNITION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

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## The 2020 Rome Communiqué

The 2020 Rome Communiqué, adopted by ministers of higher education of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in the Rome Ministerial Conference in November 2020, re-confirmed the determination to see the three Bologna key commitments (degree structures, quality assurance and recognition) fully implemented <sup>(1)</sup>.

The ministers committed to completing and further developing 'the National Qualifications Frameworks compatible with Overarching Framework of Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA)' and asked the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) 'to update the criteria for self-certification to include a stronger element of peer review of national reports'. The ministers also mandated the Network of Qualification Frameworks (QF) correspondents to continue its work <sup>(2)</sup>.

Furthermore, the governments agreed to strengthen the implementation of the Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisbon Recognition Convention and apply its principles to qualifications and periods of study outside the EHEA. They committed to 'reviewing their legislation, regulations, and practice to ensure fair recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons, and persons in refugee-like situations, in accordance with Article VII of the Lisbon Recognition Convention' <sup>(3)</sup>. They also agreed to further broadening the use of the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR).

Moreover, the governments agreed to 'make the necessary legislative changes to guarantee automatic recognition at system level of academic qualifications delivered in EHEA countries where quality assurance operates in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) <sup>(4)</sup> and where a fully operational national qualifications framework has been established' <sup>(5)</sup>.

For the further development of quality assurance systems, the ministers committed: 1) to remove the remaining obstacles, including those related to the cross-border operation of the agencies registered in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) <sup>(6)</sup> and 2) to apply the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

Referring to student-centred learning, the ministers evoked the importance of creating flexible and open learning pathways (including microcredentials). They also recognised a growing demand and supply of smaller and flexible units of learning leading to microcredentials and asked the BFUG to explore how and to what extent such units can be defined, developed, implemented and recognised by the institutions using EHEA tools.

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<sup>(1)</sup> [Rome Ministerial Communiqué](#), 19 November 2020.

<sup>(2)</sup> Ibid. p. 7.

<sup>(3)</sup> Ibid. p. 7.

<sup>(4)</sup> [ESG](https://www.eqar.eu/kb/esg/) <https://www.eqar.eu/kb/esg/>

<sup>(5)</sup> [Rome Ministerial Communiqué](#), 19 November 2020, p. 7.

<sup>(6)</sup> [EQAR](https://www.eqar.eu/) <https://www.eqar.eu/>

## Chapter outline

This chapter reviews progress made against the main commitments made by national governments to achieve the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). It starts by examining the development of the degree structure and the state of implementation of three Bologna tools: the Diploma supplement (DS), the European credit Transfer and Accumulation system (ECTS) and national qualification frameworks (NQF) (2.1).

Section 2.2 gives the latest state of play regarding policy commitments linked to the recognition of qualifications. It also explores the use of the tools for recognition of refugees' qualifications such as the Council of Europe qualification passport for refugees (EQPR) as well as the toolkit for the recognition developed by the ENIC-NARIC centres within an Erasmus + project <sup>(7)</sup>.

Section 2.3 addresses developments in the implementation of quality assurance related commitments since the Rome Communiqué. It provides an update of the main qualitative indicators and gives empirical evidence on the stage of development of external Quality Assurance systems. Much of the information for this section is provided by the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).

## 2.1. Development of the degree structure and state of implementation of three Bologna tools

The adoption of a higher education system based on a common degree structure is one of the key commitments agreed within the Bologna Process, and arguably its most notable achievement. First agreed through the 1999 Bologna Declaration <sup>(8)</sup> where the framework for two-cycle degree systems was set, the ministers decided to include the doctoral level as the third cycle in the Bologna Process in 2003 <sup>(9)</sup>. Hence, the Bologna Process has been promoting a three-cycle higher education structure including undergraduate (first-cycle), graduate (second-cycle) and doctoral (third-cycle) programmes, with the possibility of intermediate (short-cycle) qualifications linked to the first cycle. In the 2018 Paris Communiqué, ministers added short-cycle qualifications 'as a stand-alone qualification within the overarching framework of qualifications of the EHEA (QF-EHEA)' specifying that 'each country can decide whether and how to integrate short cycle qualifications within its own national framework' <sup>(10)</sup>.

This section starts by examining the implementation of degree structure commitments and looks at the existence of the programmes that do not conform with the Bologna Process models (integrated/long programmes and other programmes outside the Bologna-degree structure). A new composite indicator summarises the progress that countries have made in the implementation of the common degree structure. Then, the section depicts the countries where legal framework allows higher education institutions to provide courses leading to microcredentials. This is the first attempt within the Bologna Process Implementation Report to identify how countries are integrating microcredentials within their higher education systems.

This section also evaluates the progress made towards the implementation of three Bologna transparency tools: the Diploma Supplement (DS), the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation system (ECTS) and national qualification frameworks (NQFs) aligned to a European framework. These 'instruments' were adopted or developed to support the implementation of political commitments aimed at establishing the European Higher Education Area. Both DS and ECTS pre-date the Bologna Process and were taken as key instruments to underpin its development. In the early years of the Bologna

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<sup>(7)</sup> Refugees and Recognition – An Erasmus + Project: <https://www.nokut.no/en/Refugees-and-Recognition/toolkit>

<sup>(8)</sup> [The Bologna Declaration](#) of 19 June 1999.

<sup>(9)</sup> [Realising the European Higher Education Area. Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education](#), Berlin, 19 September 2003.

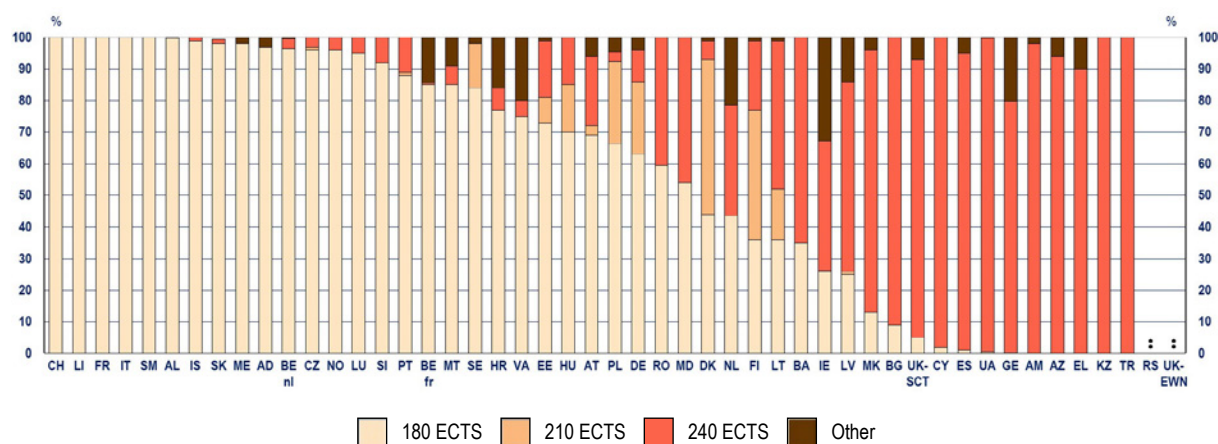
<sup>(10)</sup> [Paris Ministerial Communiqué](#), 25 May 2018.

process NQFs were present only in some national systems. However, aligned to a European framework, they become an important objective to support structural reforms through the Bologna process.

### 2.1.1. Workload of first-cycle programmes

Figure 2.1 depicts the workload of first-cycle programmes expressed in ECTS credits. It reveals the coexistence of different credit models of first-cycle programmes and therefore confirms the statement of the 2020 Bologna Process Implementation reports (see European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2020, p. 46).

**Figure 2.1: Share of first-cycle programmes with a workload of 180, 210, 240 or another number of ECTS credits, 2022/2023**



Source: BFUG data collection.

#### Notes:

Table 2.1 in Annex provides details on the share of first-cycle-programmes displayed in the figure.

The 180 ECTS workload remains the most widespread in the first cycle, characterising most programmes in more than half of all EHEA countries. In Albania, France, Italy, Liechtenstein, San Marino and Switzerland, this model applies to all first-cycle programmes, and in a further nine systems, 90% or more programmes are concerned.

The second most widespread model of 240 credits applies to most first-cycle programmes in around one-third of EHEA countries, mainly in south-eastern Europe. While in Kazakhstan and Türkiye, all first-cycle programmes are concerned, in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Spain and Ukraine, 90% or more programmes have a workload of 240 ECTS.

The 210 ECTS first-cycle programme model remains rather rare in Europe. It exists in less than a quarter of all EHEA countries and concerns more than 20% of programmes only in Denmark, Finland, Germany, and Poland. In Finland, for example, the number of first-cycle programmes with 210 ECTS workload has slightly increased compared to the previous reporting. This is due to the increase of the programmes in the field of health care and social services in response to labour-market needs.

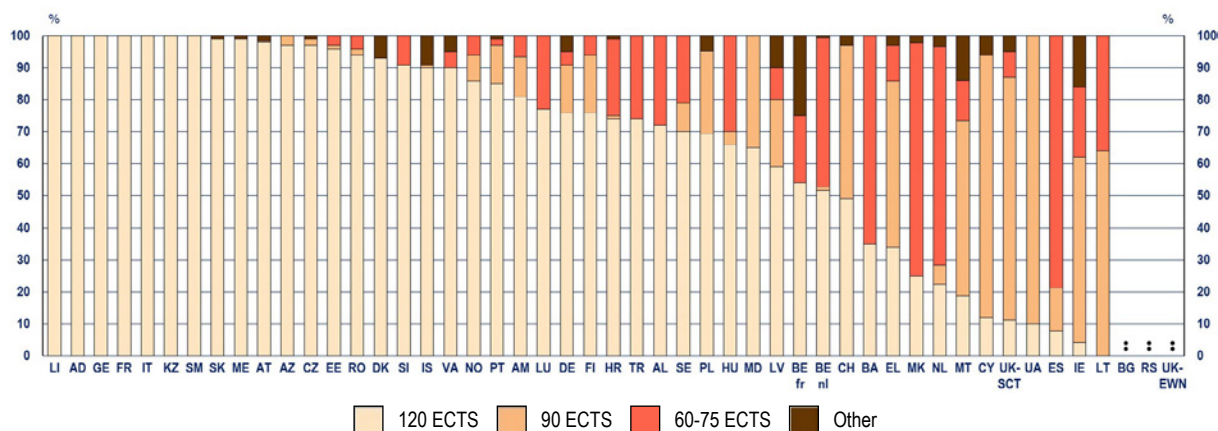
Other workload models were reported by around half of the countries. Nevertheless, in most of them, less than 10% of first-cycle programmes are concerned. In nine education systems the proportion is 10% or higher: Ireland (33%), the Netherlands (21%), Georgia (20%), the Holy See (20%), Croatia (16%), the French Community of Belgium (14.5%), Latvia (14%) and Greece (10%).

Compared to the 2020 Bologna Progress Implementation report (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2020, p. 46), no substantial reforms or changes in the use of different models of first-cycle programmes can be observed.

## 2.1.2. Workload of second cycle programmes

Figure 2.2 depicts the workload of second-cycle programmes expressed in ECTS credits.

**Figure 2.2: Share of second-cycle programmes with a workload of 60-75, 90, 120 or another number of ECTS credits, 2022/2023**



Source: BFUG data collection.

### Notes:

The figure does not take into account integrated/long programmes, i.e. programmes leading directly to a second-cycle degree. For more details on these programmes, see Section 2.1.5.

Table 2.2 in Annex provides details on the share of second-cycle-programmes displayed in the figure.

In the second cycle, the 120 ECTS model is by far the most widespread, being present in virtually all EHEA systems. It is the sole second-cycle model in Andorra, France, Georgia, Italy, Kazakhstan, Liechtenstein and San Marino and it applies to most second-cycle programmes in around three-quarters of all EHEA countries.

The 60-75 ECTS model and 90 ECTS model are present in around a half of all EHEA countries. While the 90 ECTS model is predominant in Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Ukraine and the United Kingdom (Scotland), the 60-75 ECTS model applies to most second cycle programmes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Netherlands, North Macedonia and Spain.

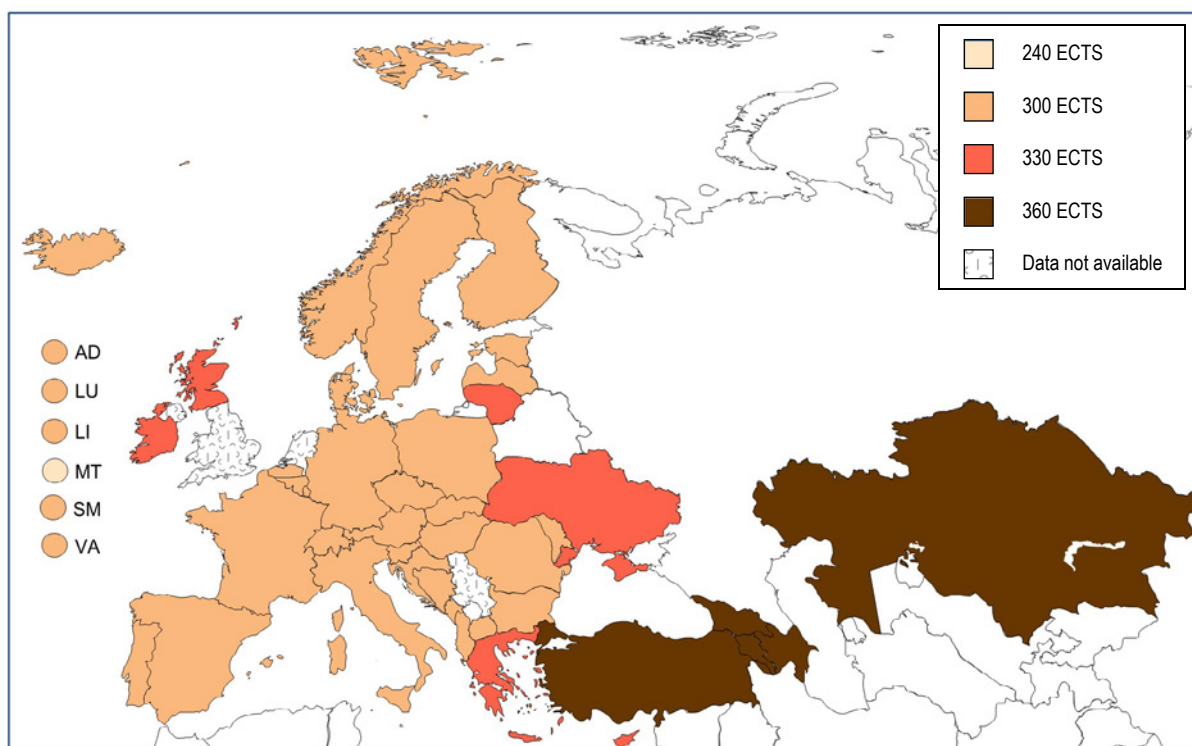
Second-cycle programmes with a workload outside the 60-120 ECTS interval were reported by less than half of the EHEA countries and generally, when such programmes exist, their share in the total does not exceed 10%. Only the French Community of Belgium, Ireland and Malta reported a higher proportion of programmes: 25%, 16% and 14% respectively. In the French Community of Belgium, 180 ECTS are required for specialised master programmes, a system feature that has not been reformed in line with Bologna commitments.

Compared to the 2020 Bologna Progress Implementation report (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2020, p. 47) no substantial changes in the workload of the second-cycle programmes can be observed. The most common workload remains 120 ECTS.

## 2.1.3. Combined workload of first- and second-cycle programmes

Building on the data depicted in the two previous figures, Figure 2.3 looks at the most common combined (first and second cycle) workload. Although no Bologna process commitments have been made regarding convergence of the first-and second- cycle programmes considered together, it may have been an implicit assumption for ministers that efforts to make the first two cycles more convergent would also result in greater similarity in the overall workload of the first and second cycles combined.

**Figure 2.3: Most common total workload of first- and second-cycle programmes, 2022/2023**



Source: BFUG data collection.

Figure 2.3 shows that in most EHEA countries, the most common total workload of first-and second-cycle programmes is set at 300 ECTS. Indeed, this is linked to the fact that the most common workload of first-cycle programmes is 180 ECTS and second-cycle programmes is 120 ECTS (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2).

In the eastern part of the EHEA, the most common workload is higher. It corresponds to 360 ECTS credits in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Türkiye, which is mainly explained by a higher workload of first-cycle programmes (see Figure 2.1). In a further six education systems (Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Ukraine and the United Kingdom – Scotland) the most common workload is 330 ECTS credits. In Malta, the most common workload is 240 ECTS.

It is important to highlight that in some higher education systems, the most common workload can be followed closely by another widespread workload pattern. For example, in the Flemish Community of Belgium, Switzerland and Denmark, the 300 ECTS pattern is only slightly more common than other workload arrangements: 240, 270 and 330 ECTS in the three systems respectively.

In addition, it is not always possible to derive the most common workload simply by mechanically combining the most common data displayed on Figures 2.1 and 2.2. This applies, in particular, to binary higher education systems, i.e. systems with two main types of higher education institutions. For example, in Finland, the first-cycle workload generally corresponds to 180 in universities, but 210 or 240 ECTS in universities of applied sciences. Those graduates who decide to enter a second-cycle programme may enter a 90 or 60 ECTS programme offered by a university of applied sciences, or a 120 ECTS programme offered at a university. The Netherlands – another binary higher education system – reports a comparable situation.

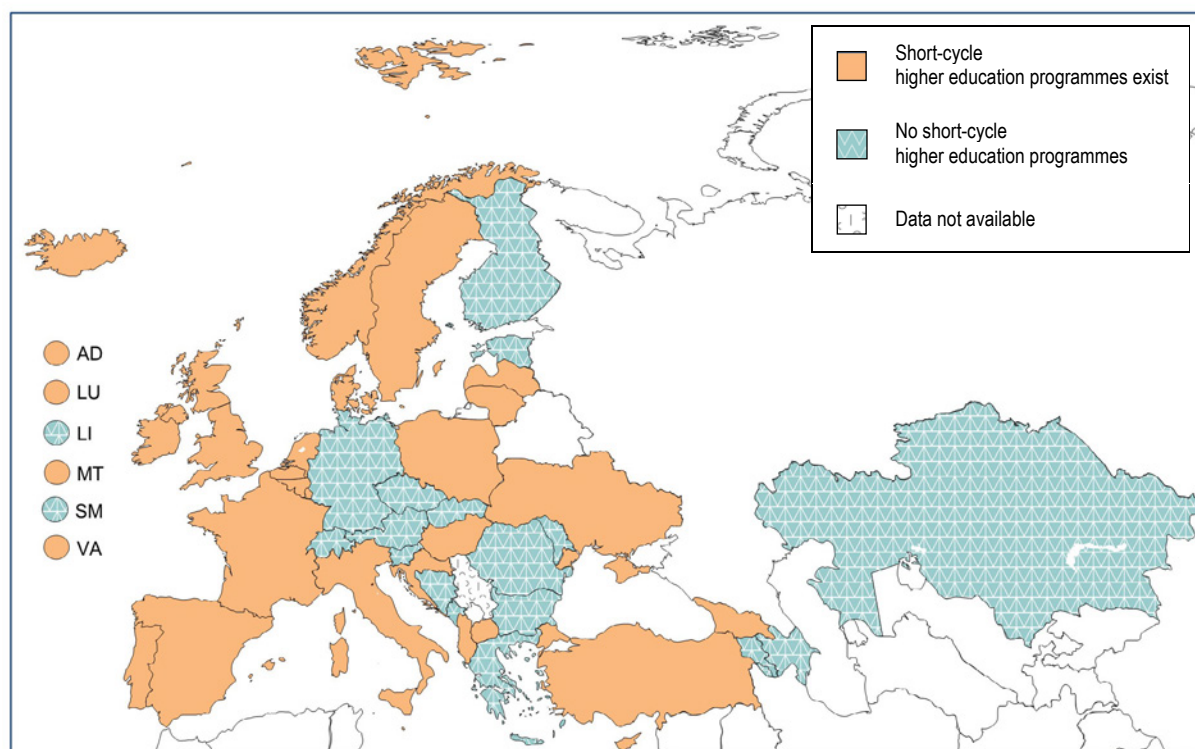
### 2.1.4. Short-cycle programmes

After many years of discussion about the place of short-cycle higher education programmes in the EHEA, the governments eventually agreed in the 2018 Paris Communiqué <sup>(11)</sup> to integrate the short cycle programmes into the overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). Nevertheless, countries in the EHEA are still far from reaching a common understanding of short-cycle higher education that is comparable to the situation of the other three cycles.

In this report, short-cycle programmes are understood as higher education programmes of less than 180 ECTS (or lasting less than 3 years), leading to a qualification that is recognised at a lower level than a qualification at the end of the first cycle. Higher education systems are responsible for deciding whether credits obtained from short-cycle programmes may be recognised within first-cycle higher education programmes. Since the adoption of the Paris Communiqué in 2018, short-cycle qualifications are recognised as level 5 in the overarching framework of qualifications for the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) and also at level 5 in the ISCED classification <sup>(12)</sup>.

Figure 2.4 shows the presence of short-cycle programmes considered as part of the national higher education system – in line with the Paris Communiqué decision.

**Figure 2.4: Presence of short-cycle programmes considered as part of higher education, 2022/2023**



Source: BFUG data collection.

#### Notes:

The presence of short-cycle programmes considered as part of higher education refers to situations where national qualifications frameworks and/or top-level steering documents recognise the short cycle (or short-cycle qualifications) as part of the higher education system.

<sup>(11)</sup> [Paris Ministerial Communiqué](#), 25 May 2018.

<sup>(12)</sup> ISCED 2011: <https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf>



More than half of all EHEA countries report the existence of short-cycle programmes that are considered as part of the national higher education system. In other EHEA systems, the short-cycle is either not offered, or short-cycle programmes (ISCED 5) are not recognised within the higher education system. When not recognised as 'higher education', short-cycle programmes are usually categorised as being part of a vocational education system. Indeed, some countries that do not report the existence of short-cycle higher education programmes have students enrolled in ISCED 5 programmes (see Chapter 1, Figure 1.1).

Since the previous mapping (see European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2020, p. 49), one more country has reported changes in this area. In Lithuania, after the adoption of a legal framework which introduces this type of provision, the first short-cycle study programmes were evaluated and accredited in 2022.

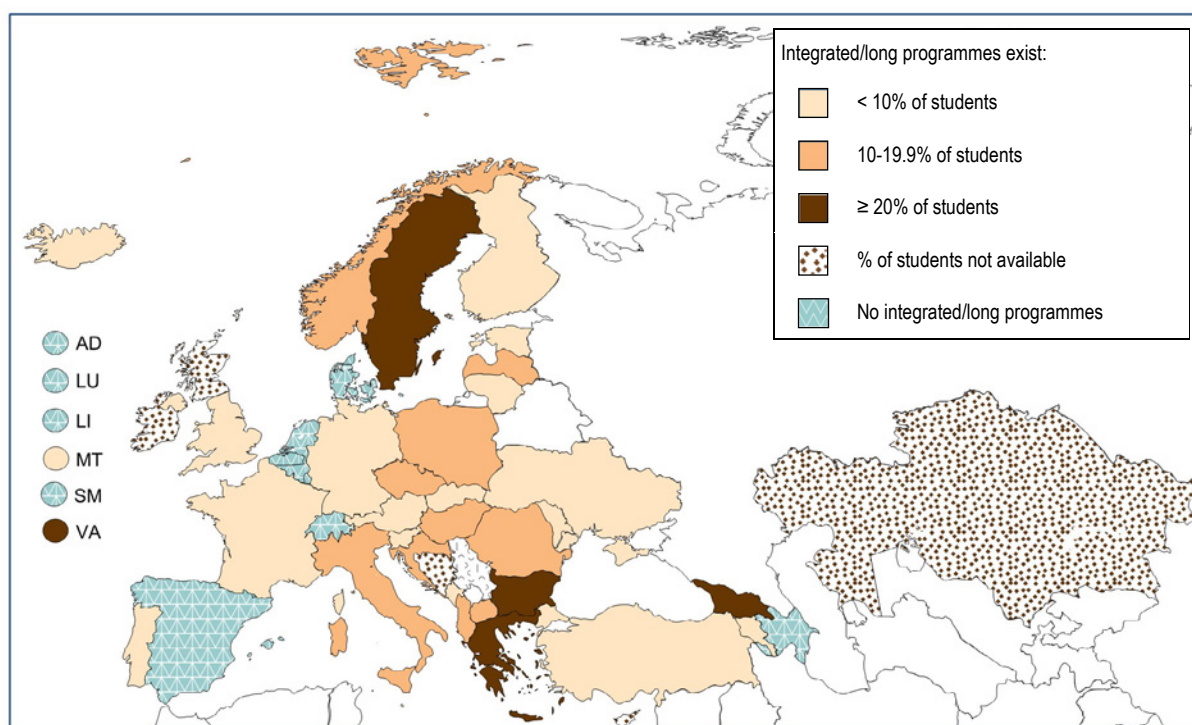
Georgia and North Macedonia reported that although their legal framework provides the possibility for short-cycle programmes to exist, there are currently no short-cycle programmes in practice.

Overall, the short cycle remains a complex field covering a range of programmes that differ at national level in terms of content, orientation and purpose, and where a common European vision is yet to be fully developed and realised.

### 2.1.5. Integrated/long programmes leading to a second cycle degree

As shown in the previous sections, a three-cycle higher education structure with the possibility of short-cycle provision has been implemented across all the EHEA countries. However, the programmes and degrees that comply with the Bologna-degree structure often co-exist with other higher education programmes that are structured differently. This section looks at programmes comprising both the first and the second cycle and leading to a second-cycle qualification that are commonly referred to as integrated (long) programmes.

**Figure 2.5: Presence of integrated/long programmes leading to a second-cycle degree and the percentage of students in these programmes, 2022/2023**



Source: BFUG data collection.

**Note:**

Integrated/long programmes refer to programmes including both the first and the second cycle and leading to a second-cycle qualification.

Figure 2.5 shows that integrated (long) programmes exist in around two-thirds of EHEA systems. However, they involve different proportions of students. In 17 systems, only up to 10% of all first- and second-cycle students are enrolled in such programmes. In 10 systems, the proportion is situated between 10% and 19.9%. Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, the Holy See and Sweden report the highest proportion of students in integrated programmes with 20% and above. In the remaining education systems, either there is no data on the proportion of students involved in integrated (long) programmes, or such programmes do not exist.

Compared to the 2020 Bologna Process Implementation report, in Armenia, Germany, Italy and Portugal, the number of students enrolled in integrated (long) programmes has decreased. In all of them, except Italy, less than 10% of students are now involved in integrated (long) programmes. While Germany has recently decreased the number of integrated (long) programmes, Portugal has limited the number of fields of study that can be organised as integrated programmes. In Armenia, the decrease is mainly due to the reorganisation of some integrated (long) programmes into the Bologna-degree structure.

Albania, Bulgaria and Georgia reported a higher number of students enrolled in integrated (long) programmes compared to the previous reporting exercise. In Albania and Georgia, this is mainly due to an increase in the number of integrated (long) programmes that are offered. Moreover, in Georgia, two more study areas – veterinary medicine and teacher training have been restructured into integrated/long programmes.

As reported in the 2020 Bologna Process Implementation report (see European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2020, p. 51), the most common fields for integrated programmes are medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, architecture, pharmacy, teacher training, engineering, law and theology. Several of these specialisations overlap with studies related to regulated professions. These are occupations with specific legal requirements and standards that are enforced by government to ensure public safety, protect consumers, and maintain professional standards. In the case of European Union countries, the presence of long or integrated/long programmes is most commonly justified by the Directive on regulated professions 2005/36/EC<sup>(13)</sup> that defines qualification requirements for specific professions (medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, pharmacy and architecture), including the duration of training. While the Directive stipulates the total length of a qualification that gives access to the European labour market, it does not comment on the organisation of studies. Hence the decision to organise programmes in one or two cycles remains with Member States.

Top-level authorities also explain the existence of certain integrated programmes on the grounds that there is student demand, as well as cultural traditions (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2018, p. 111).

### 2.1.6. Programmes outside the Bologna-degree structure

This section discusses higher education programmes other than integrated(long) programmes which do not fully fall under the main Bologna-degree scheme. When considering the entry requirements and qualifications awarded upon completion, these programmes can be clustered into three categories:

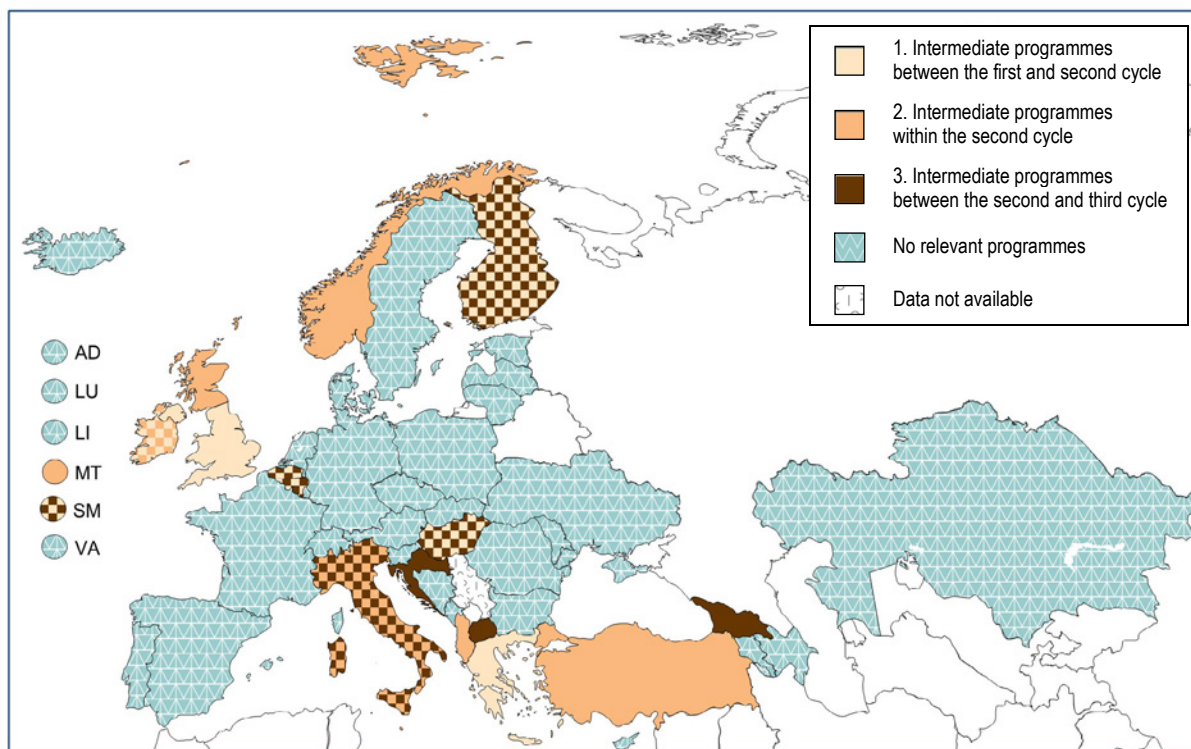
1. Intermediate programmes between first- and second-cycle studies, i.e. programmes requiring a first-cycle degree for entry, but not leading to a second-cycle qualification.
2. Intermediate programmes within the second cycle, i.e. programmes requiring a first-cycle degree for entry, leading to a second-cycle qualification, which, however, generally<sup>(14)</sup> do not open access to the third cycle.

<sup>(13)</sup> Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications. OJ L 255, 30.9.2005.

<sup>(14)</sup> In some countries, based on the recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning (RPL), there might be possibilities for

- Intermediate programmes between second- and third-cycle studies, i.e. programmes requiring a second-cycle degree for entry, but not leading to a third-cycle qualification.

**Figure 2.6: Programmes outside the Bologna-degree structure (other than integrated/long programmes), 2022/2023**



Source: BFUG data collection.

#### Notes:

Within the Bologna Process, ministers committed themselves to implementing the three-cycle degree system, where first-cycle degrees (awarded after completion of higher education programmes lasting a minimum of three years) should give access, in the sense of the Lisbon Recognition Convention <sup>(15)</sup>, to second-cycle programmes. Second-cycle degrees should give access to doctoral studies (the third cycle). Within the three-cycle degree system, ministers recognised the possibility of intermediate qualifications (the short cycle) linked to the first cycle, and through the Paris Communiqué added the short cycle as a stand-alone qualification within the overall qualifications framework of the EHEA (QF-EHEA).

When referring to programmes outside the Bologna-degree structure, the figure refers to programmes that do not fully comply with the above ministerial engagements. Integrated/long programmes, which can also be seen as programmes outside the Bologna-degree structure, are excluded from the scope of the figure (they are covered by Figure 2.5).

As Figure 2.6 shows, programmes relevant for the scope of this analysis exist in around one third of the EHEA countries.

Programmes falling under the first category usually include various short specialisations after first-cycle studies. For example, in French and Flemish Communities of Belgium, there are specialised bachelors (or 'bachelor after bachelor') of 60 ECTS building on the first cycle. Ireland offers intermediate programmes, which are qualifications building on a bachelor's degree, to increase access to medicine and, in particular, radiography studies. Further programmes falling under this category exist in Finland, Greece, Hungary, San Marino and the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland).

The second category is programmes that lead to a second-cycle qualification, but do not open access to the third cycle. These programmes exist in Albania, Iceland, Italy, Ireland, Norway, Türkiye and the United Kingdom (Scotland). They are usually professional or labour market oriented masters' programmes that do not open access to the third cycle. In Italy, first level master's programmes (*Master universitario di primo livello*) comprise 60 ECTS and aim at providing students with advanced knowledge

graduates of these programmes to integrate third-cycle studies. However, the programmes in question are not conceived to prepare for doctoral studies. Thus, possibilities for the RPL are not considered here.

<sup>(15)</sup> Council of Europe Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, ETS No. 165.

in specific fields or further professional training relevant for the labour market. Albania offers professional master's programmes (60-120 ECTS) giving graduates the opportunity to enter the public or private labour market, but not giving access to third-cycle programmes, while Türkiye reports similar programmes called 'non-thesis master'. In the United Kingdom (Scotland), postgraduate certificates (30 ECTS) require a first-cycle degree for entry and target those already in a career.

Programmes in the third category are comparable to those reported under the first one, the only difference being that they concern specialisations building on second-cycle studies. In the French and Flemish Communities of Belgium, for instance, there are not only specialised bachelors (see above), but also specialised master's (or 'master after master') that are intended to develop the skills oriented towards the needs of the labour market. To provide masters' graduates with advanced knowledge for better occupational opportunities, Italy offers second level masters' programmes (*Master universitaria di secondo livello*), while Croatia has created around 342 'university specialist programmes' with 60-120 ECTS workload. Further examples of intermediate programmes building on second-cycle studies can be found in Finland, Georgia, Hungary and North Macedonia.

Higher education programmes in the first and third categories have many similarities with programmes leading to microcredentials (see 2.1.8). All these programmes usually aim at developing specific skills, knowledge or expertise in a particular area and therefore may be considered as part of a continuing professional development and lifelong learning system.

Regardless of the category to which they belong, these programmes all raise the question of their compatibility with the Bologna Process. On the one hand, they appear as a 'deviation' from the agreed qualification structure. On the other hand, they claim to respond to specific needs, concerning professional development and lifelong learning. While it is debatable whether or not such provision could be incorporated within the agreed overall degree structure framework, as long as they continue to exist, it is important to ensure and optimise cross-country readability.

### 2.1.7. Progress in the implementation of the commitments related to the degrees structure

To remove barriers and ease mobility and cooperation in higher education, as well as to ensure international recognition of degrees, one of the key commitments agreed between the ministers withing the Bologna process was the implementation of the common degree structure.

Figure 2.7 is a composite indicator that assesses where countries are now situated in the development of such a common degree structure. It is based on two main aspects: 1) programmes' compliance with the agreed workload for the first and the second cycles; and 2) limitation of number of programmes outside the Bologna degree structure.

The indicator is based on the four indicators presented in Figures 2.1, 2.2, 2.5 and 2.6, and considers the following criteria as the norms for agreed degree structures:

- More than 90% of first-cycle programmes comply with agreed ECTS workload for the first cycle (at least 180 ECTS).
- More than 90% of second-cycle programmes comply with agreed ECTS workload for the second cycle (between 60-120 ECTS).
- Less than 20% of students are enrolled in integrated/long programmes.
- There are no programmes outside the Bologna degree structure, other than integrated/long programmes.

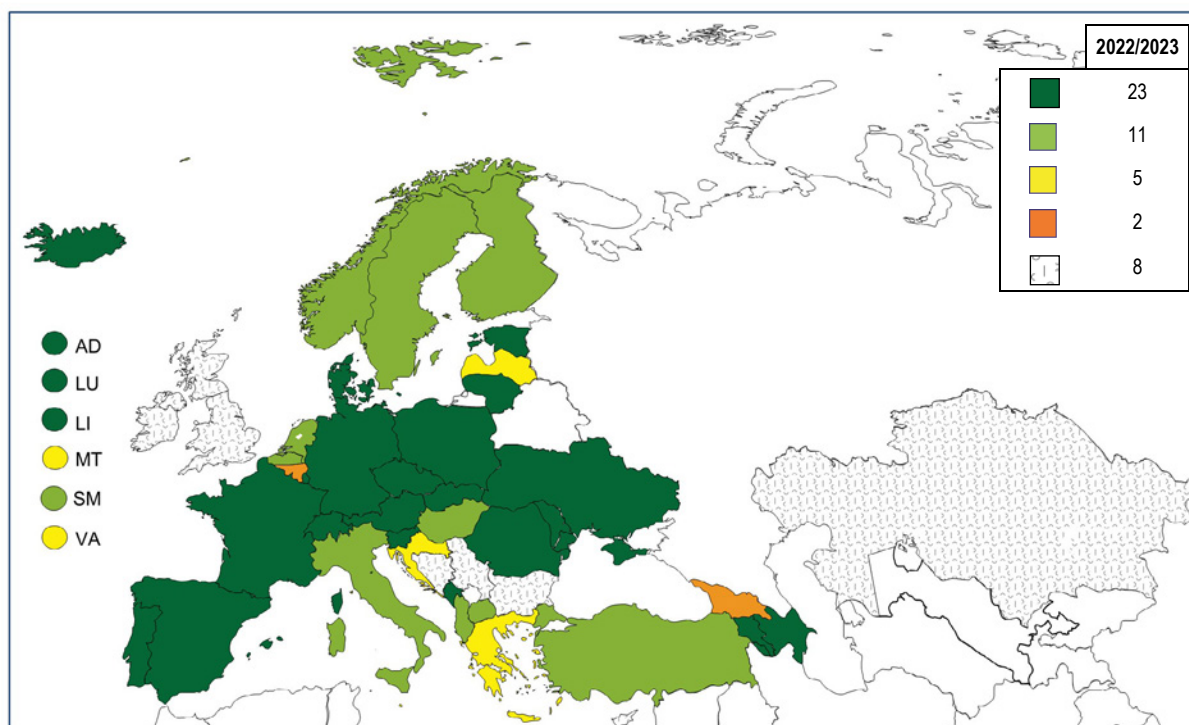
The first two criteria conform to commitments made in the early years of the Bologna process. The requirement for first-cycle programmes of at least 180 ECTS is taken in the Bologna Declaration <sup>(16)</sup>,

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<sup>(16)</sup> [The Bologna Declaration](#), 19 June 1999.

while the credit range for second-cycle programmes was set at a 2002 official Bologna seminar held in Helsinki. For the third criterion, the spirit of the Bologna Process commitments was that a small number of integrated/long programmes, particularly those leading to qualifications for regulated professions, could co-exist with the three-cycle degree structure. However, this spirit was not translated into concrete decisions fixing limits on the number of programmes, or the number of students studying in programmes, that would be considered compatible. The choice of 20% was taken after discussion in the BFUG. The fourth criterion also aligns with the spirit of the Bologna process which aimed to converge all programmes, with the exception of those integrated programmes previously mentioned, into the three-cycle degree structure.

**Figure 2.7: Scorecard indicator n°1: Implementation of agreed Bologna degree structures, 2022/2023**



Source: BFUG data collection.

### Scorecard categories

	All the following elements are fulfilled: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt;90% of first-cycle programmes comply with agreed ECTS workload for the first cycle (at least 180 ECTS);</li> <li>&gt;90% of second-cycle programmes comply with agreed ECTS workload for the second cycle (between 60-120 ECTS);</li> <li>&lt;20% of students are enrolled in integrated/long programmes;</li> <li>There are no programmes outside the Bologna degree structure, other than integrated programmes.</li> </ul>				
	3 out of 4 commitments are fulfilled		2 out of 4 commitments are fulfilled		1 out of 4 commitments are fulfilled
	None of the commitments are fulfilled		Data not available		

### Note:

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Ireland, Kazakhstan and the United Kingdom are reported in the category 'data not available', as the data for some elements that compose the scorecard indicator is missing.

Countries where more than 90% of higher education programmes comply with the workload agreed for the first and the second cycles, where the share of students enrolled in integrated (long) programmes is less than 20%, and where there are no other programmes outside the Bologna degree structure are found in the dark green category. The other categories reflect a diminishing number of commitments being fulfilled.

As Figure 2.7 shows, slightly more than half of the education systems with available data fully comply with the four criteria and are in dark green category.

About a quarter of the systems are in the light green category, they comply with 3 out of the 4 criteria and are close to being fully aligned with commitments taken with regard to convergent degree structures. Five education systems fulfilled two criteria and are in the yellow category and two systems are in the orange category fulfilling only one criteria.

The findings for this indicator reflect the fact that revamping degree structures in line with the credit ranges set through the Bologna process has been very successfully accomplished. However, while many systems have taken a thorough approach to transforming all programmes, in some countries the heritage of previous structures remains. While this may be a relatively minor issue in terms of the numbers of programmes and students concerned, it is still worthy of reflection within the countries concerned as to whether further reforms to ensure full alignment with Bologna degree structure commitments might be beneficial.

### 2.1.8. Microcredentials

In the last decade, short and focused learning modules that differ from traditional degree programmes and that are now often referred as to microcredentials have gained popularity among learners and education providers. Until recently there was an absence of common definition, although the characteristics of such modules could be recognised: they tend to be short, skill-focused and usually labour market oriented. Microcredentials are typically designed to develop specific skills or knowledge in a particular subject area and may be targeted at professionals seeking to enhance their expertise, individuals looking to upskill or reskill, or anyone interested in gaining knowledge in a specific domain.

At the EU level, reflection on the place of microcredentials in the higher education landscape resulted in the Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability, adopted on 16 June 2022 <sup>(17)</sup>. This Recommendation defines microcredentials as ‘the record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning. These learning outcomes will have been assessed against transparent and clearly defined criteria. Learning experiences leading to micro-credentials are designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills and competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs. Micro-credentials are owned by the learner, can be shared and are portable. They may be stand-alone or combined into larger credentials. They are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards in the relevant sector or area of activity’ <sup>(18)</sup>. The Council Recommendation encourages the EU countries to include microcredentials in national qualification frameworks and systems where relevant and in line with national priorities and decisions to ensure the quality and transparency <sup>(19)</sup>. The European approach to microcredentials therefore suggests that the full potential of microcredentials can be reached only with common standards ensuring their quality, transparency, cross-border comparability, recognition and portability.

In the context of the Bologna process, the concept of microcredentials has been discussed, and questions have been raised about their integration in the higher education landscape, their transparency, and relationship to quality assurance and qualification systems. The potential benefits of microcredentials such as making education more reactive to labour market needs and individual interests, supporting lifelong learning and learning among under-represented groups, as well as its flexibility, have all been acknowledged.

The Rome Ministerial Communiqué also acknowledges the potential benefits of microcredentials for student-centred learning and considers them as an element of flexible and open learning pathways. It

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<sup>(17)</sup> Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability, adopted on 16 June 2022; p. 13. Link: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9237-2022-INIT/en/pdf>

<sup>(18)</sup> Ibid. p. 13.

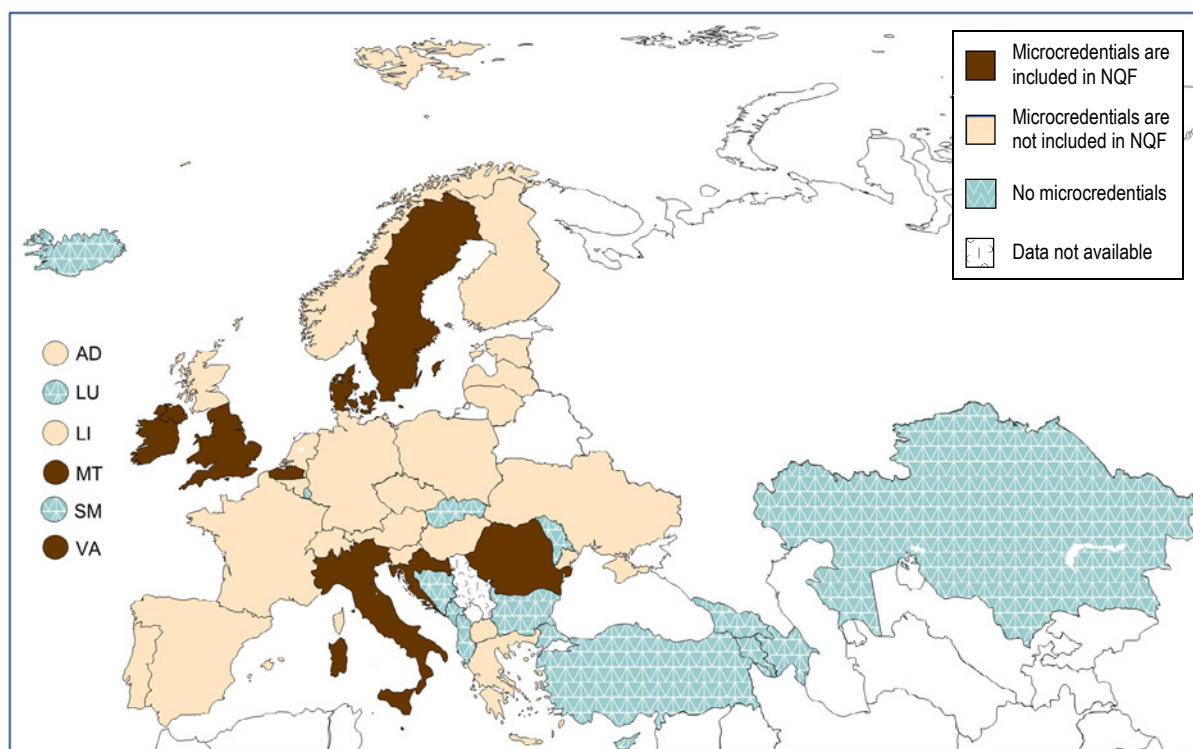
<sup>(19)</sup> Ibid. p. 18.

asks the BFUG to explore ‘how and to what extent these smaller, flexible units, including those leading to microcredentials, can be defined, developed, implemented and recognised by the institutions using EHEA tools’ <sup>(20)</sup>.

To follow up to the Rome Communiqué request, this section first aims to identify the education systems where legal framework offers possibility to higher education institutions to develop learning modules leading to microcredentials. It also seeks to demonstrate whether such learning programmes are included in NQFs and expressed in the ECTS credits.

Figure 2.8 shows education systems where there are modules leading to microcredentials and those where microcredentials are not a common feature. Within the first category the distinction is made between education systems that include microcredentials in NQFs and those that do not include them in NQFs.

**Figure 2.8: Inclusion of microcredentials in national qualifications frameworks, 2022/2023**



Source: BFUG data collection.

As Figure 2.8 shows, in around two-thirds of the education systems, mainly in the northern and western part of Europe, there are learning modules within higher education considered as, or comparable to, microcredentials. Ten education systems (Belgium-Flemish Community, Croatia, Denmark, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Romania, Sweden, the Holy See and the United Kingdom – England, Wales and Northern Ireland), have taken the important step of including microcredentials in their NQF. Moreover, in almost all of them, except for Italy and the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) <sup>(21)</sup>, learning modules leading to microcredentials are expressed in ECTS. These systems are therefore the most advanced in ensuring transparency and readability of microcredentials. Although microcredentials are not yet integrated in their NQFs, Austria, Estonia, Greece and Spain use ECTS to measure workload and thus facilitate the portability of these qualifications.

<sup>(20)</sup> [Rome Ministerial Communiqué, Annex III](#), 19 November 2020, p. 4.

<sup>(21)</sup> The United Kingdom use a national credit system which allows to convert national credits into ECTS.

In 16 other education systems <sup>(22)</sup>, the legal frameworks provide for the possibility for higher education institutions to develop modules leading to microcredentials although such programmes are not included in NQFs. In almost all of them, this possibility is stated in the national legislation such as Education Law, Higher Education Law or Higher Education Act, while Czechia, Greece and Lithuania offer the possibility to develop microcredentials within the lifelong learning framework. For example, the Greek legislation on higher education and recognition makes provisions for the award of micro-credentials by lifelong learning centres located in the Greek higher education institutions.

Other education systems, have neither incorporated microcredentials in NQF, nor in the legislation. However, higher education institutions are able to develop learning modules leading to microcredentials under their own autonomy. This is the case in the French Community of Belgium, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Switzerland.

Finally, in 15 EHEA education systems, short courses leading to microcredentials are not yet a common feature. In some of them, however, the concept of microcredentials and the possible establishment of an appropriate legal framework have been discussed at policy level (Armenia, Luxembourg and Moldova).

### 2.1.9. Monitoring the implementation of the ECTS system

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is one of the main instruments that was adopted and further developed through the establishment of the European Higher Education Area. ECTS has become the cornerstone of the implementation of curriculum reforms, focusing on workload and learning outcomes. The crucial importance of reinforcing the Bologna tools and especially ECTS, to indicate achieved learning outcomes and their associated workload has been again underlined in the Rome Communiqué, 2020 <sup>(23)</sup>.

The correct understanding and consistent implementation of ECTS is the key challenge to ensure that ECTS delivers maximal benefits. The reference point for correct implementation is the 2015 edition of the ECTS Users Guide, adopted throughout the EHEA in the Yerevan Ministerial Conference.

The scorecard indicator presented in Figure 2.9 has been developed to reflect national measures to ensure correct implementation of the system in higher education institutions. It focuses on the role of external quality assurance agencies in monitoring ECTS. External quality assurance is the best available mechanism to provide information on the level of ECTS implementation in higher education institutions, while respecting institutional autonomy. In higher education systems where external quality assurance is required to monitor ECTS implementation, national authorities and stakeholders will have access to sufficiently reliable data on the state of play of ECTS implementation, challenges and good practice.

The indicator applies equally to the different types of quality assurance systems in European higher education – whether they focus on institutional or programme-level quality assurance or combine the two. Institutional quality assurance processes tend to assess the extent to which higher education institutions' internal quality assurance system monitor key policy areas, while programme-level evaluation tends to check more directly defined quality aspects of individual higher education programmes and their delivery within higher education institutions.

In systems with an institutional focus, it is expected that agencies would check that institutions' internal quality assurance mechanisms take full account of the 2015 ECTS Users' Guide. External quality assurance would thus not monitor ECTS implementation directly, but would check that the institution's internal quality assurance framework is sufficiently robust to ensure coherent implementation. However,

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<sup>(22)</sup> Andorra, Austria, Czechia, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Ukraine and the United Kingdom (Scotland).

<sup>(23)</sup> [Rome Ministerial Communiqué, Annex III](#), 19 November 2020, p. 3.

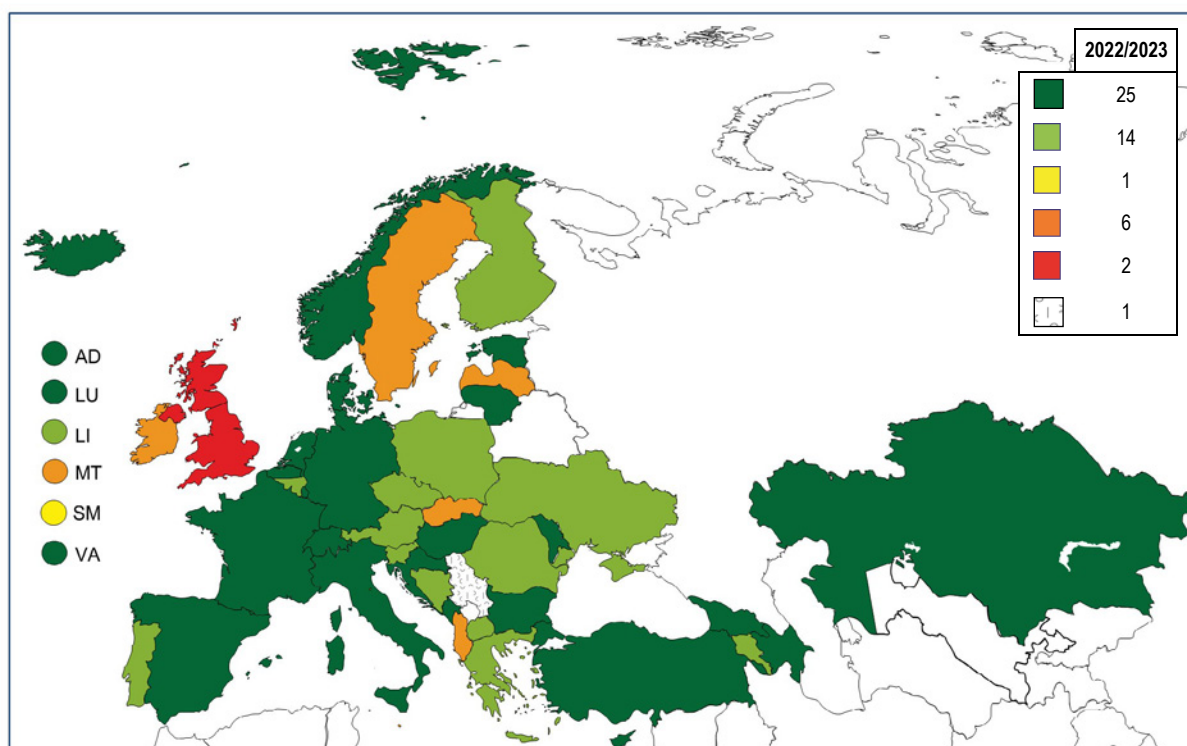


in systems based on programme evaluation, external quality assurance would have a more direct role in monitoring the use of ECTS.

The key issues which this indicator picks out from the ECTS Users' Guide for consideration in external quality assurance are:

- ECTS credits are allocated on the basis of learning outcomes & student workload;
- ECTS credit allocation is regularly monitored and followed up by appropriate revision if necessary;
- ECTS is used as a credit system for the accumulation of credits acquired within higher education institutions;
- ECTS is used as a credit system for the transfer of credits for student learning outcomes acquired in another institution in the country;
- ECTS is used as a credit system for the transfer of credits for periods of study abroad.
- The higher education institution has an appropriate appeals procedure to deal with problems of credit recognition.






**Figure 2.9: Scorecard indicator n°2: Monitoring the implementation of the ECTS system by external quality assurance, 2022/2023**



Source: BFUG data collection.

### Scorecard categories

- The ECTS Users' Guide 2015 principles are required to be used by external quality assurance as a basis to assess the implementation of ECTS in all higher education institutions.
- All the following issues are monitored specifically:
- ECTS credits are allocated on the basis of learning outcomes & student workload;
  - ECTS credit allocation is regularly monitored and followed up by appropriate revision if necessary;
  - ECTS is used as a credit system for the accumulation of credits acquired within higher education institutions;
  - ECTS is used as a credit system for the transfer of credits for student learning outcomes acquired in another institution in the country;
  - ECTS is used as a credit system for the transfer of credits for periods of study abroad;
  - The higher education institution has an appropriate appeals procedure to deal with problems of credit recognition.

	The ECTS Users' Guide 2015 principles are required to be used by external quality assurance as a basis to assess the implementation of ECTS in all higher education institutions. <b>Four or five</b> of the above issues are monitored specifically.
	The ECTS Users' Guide 2015 principles are required to be used by external quality assurance agencies as a basis to assess the implementation of ECTS in all higher education institutions. <b>One to three</b> of the above issues are monitored specifically.
	The ECTS Users' Guide 2015 principles are NOT required to be used by external quality assurance as a basis to assess the implementation of ECTS, BUT they are generally used in practice.
	The ECTS Users' Guide 2015 principles are NOT required to be used by external quality assurance as a basis to assess the implementation of ECTS, AND they are generally NOT used in practice.
	Data not available

On the evidence provided for this indicator, external quality assurance processes seem to pay a great deal of attention to the correct use of ECTS in respect of the Users' Guide. 25 education systems out of 48 (dark green) require external quality assurance agencies to monitor all key aspects of the implementation of ECTS during their regular evaluation processes. In a further 14 systems (light green), there are requirements for a number of these key issues to be considered. In San Marino, one to three of the above issues are required to be monitored.

In six systems, the ECTS Users' Guide principles are not required to be used by external quality assurance, but they are generally used in practice (orange category). Finally, there are two systems where there is no requirement to consider the 2015 ECTS Users Guide.

Compared to the data from the 2020 Bologna Implementation report (see European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2020, p. 55), some progress can be observed. Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary and Lithuania, have moved into dark green category. Armenia, Czechia, Liechtenstein and Slovenia, have made recent progress, but still need to step up action to ensure that external quality assurance agencies monitor all key aspects of the implementation of ECTS during their regular evaluation processes. It can be observed that external quality assurance agencies are less often required to monitor the existence of an appropriate appeals procedure to deal with problems of credit recognition compared to other key principles set in the ECTS Users' Guide 2015.

### 2.1.10. Diploma Supplement (DS)

The Diploma Supplement is a document attached to a higher education diploma, providing a detailed description of study components and learning outcomes achieved by its holder. The aim is to help higher education institutions, employers, recognition centres as well as other stakeholders to easily understand graduates' skills and competences. The Diploma Supplement is an integral part of several initiatives in the field of higher education internationalisation and recognition of qualifications. The first of them – the 1997 Lisbon Recognition Convention <sup>(24)</sup> – calls upon signatory countries to promote the Diploma Supplement or any equivalent document through national information centres or otherwise. The Diploma Supplement is also one of the five Europass transparency tools promoted by the European Commission <sup>(25)</sup>.

The Bologna Process made the first reference to the Diploma Supplement already in 1999, when higher education ministers agreed to adopt a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement <sup>(26)</sup>. In 2003, the ministers agreed that every student

<sup>(24)</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/higher-education-and-research/lisbon-recognition-convention>

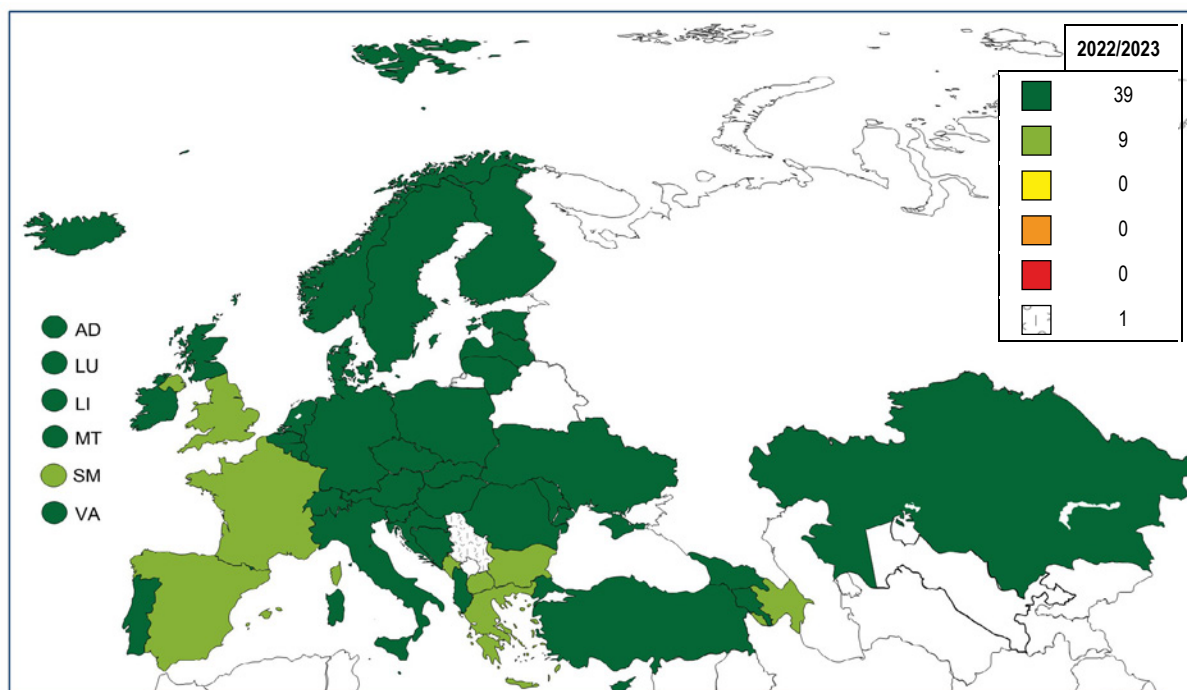
<sup>(25)</sup> Decision No 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2004 on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass).

<sup>(26)</sup> [The Bologna Declaration of 19 June 1999.](#)

graduating as from 2005 should receive the Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge, and that the document should be issued in a widely spoken European language (27).







These four main ministerial engagements are brought together in Scorecard indicator n°3 on the implementation of the Diploma Supplement in relation to first and second cycle (see Figure 2.10).

**Figure 2.10: Scorecard indicator n°3: Stage of implementation of the Diploma Supplement, 2022/2023**



Source: BFUG data collection.

### Scorecard categories

	Diploma Supplement in the EU/CoE/UNESCO Diploma Supplement format is issued to first- and second-cycle graduates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ to every graduate;</li> <li>○ automatically;</li> <li>○ in a widely spoken European language;</li> <li>○ free of charge.</li> </ul>				
	Three of the above criteria are met.		Two of the above criteria are met.		Only one criterion is met.
	None of the above criteria is met.		Data not available		

The indicator shows that all EHEA countries have introduced the Diploma Supplement and that most of them (39 out of 48 systems with available data) now comply with all ministerial engagements, i.e. the Diploma Supplement is issued to all first- and second-cycle graduates, automatically, in a widely spoken European language and free of charge (dark green). Ten education systems do not comply with one of these aspects (light green).

In almost all EHEA countries all first- and second-cycle graduates receive the Diploma Supplement. In the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland), some institutions issue the Diploma Supplement, others deliver the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) – which is based upon and virtually reflects the Diploma Supplement, whilst remaining distinctly British –, while some others provide graduates only with a transcript. In France, the 2014 regulatory framework requires higher education institutions to deliver the Diploma Supplement to all first- and second-cycle graduates, but practice is not yet fully aligned with this obligation.

(27) [Realising the European Higher Education Area. Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education, Berlin](#), 19 September 2003.

In almost all countries Diploma Supplement is issued automatically. However, in Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Greece, North Macedonia and Spain <sup>(28)</sup>, it is delivered upon request. To reduce the administrative burden, in Norway the Diploma Supplement template has been successfully digitalised, and is now integrated in the software used by all public higher education institutions for the registration of student results.

The Diploma Supplement is generally issued free of charge. However, in Montenegro, graduates are routinely expected to pay a fee for a printed Diploma including Diploma Supplement. When the Diploma Supplement is issued free of charge, fees may still apply in some countries to services going beyond the standard provision. For example, in Slovenia, the Diploma Supplement is issued for free in Slovenian language and in one of the official EU languages, but for a fee in a second official EU language or a non-EU language. In Slovakia, it is issued in the official language and English free of charge, whereas a foreign-language version other than English is issued for a fee. In Ireland, Diploma Supplements requiring an additional administrative workload may be linked to fees, while in Hungary, the duplicate is always issued for a fee.

In all EHEA systems, except for San Marino, the Diploma Supplement is issued in a widely spoken European language <sup>(29)</sup>. In most cases, it is issued directly in the country language and in English. In some countries, however, the version in a widely spoken language is issued only upon request (Estonia, North Macedonia, Poland and Slovakia).

### 2.1.11. National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF)

National qualifications frameworks promote the readability and comparability of qualifications – both within and across countries. They are used for describing and clearly expressing the differences between qualifications in all cycles and levels of education. Qualifications frameworks are able to link many of the structural elements promoted and developed by the Bologna Process – three-cycle degree structures, ECTS credits, learning outcomes and quality assurance. This plays an important role in increasing the transparency of qualifications systems.

The implementation of QF-EHEA compatible national qualifications frameworks was agreed as one of the Bologna Process key commitments in the Paris Communiqué <sup>(30)</sup>. In the 2020 Rome Communiqué <sup>(31)</sup>, ministers reconfirmed their determinations to complete and further develop the National Qualifications Frameworks compatible with the Overarching Framework of Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA).

Scorecard indicator n°4 (see Figure 2.11) summarises the state of play of the development and implementation of national qualifications framework for higher education. It is based upon eleven steps to develop and implement a national qualification framework to be compatible with the QF-EHEA.

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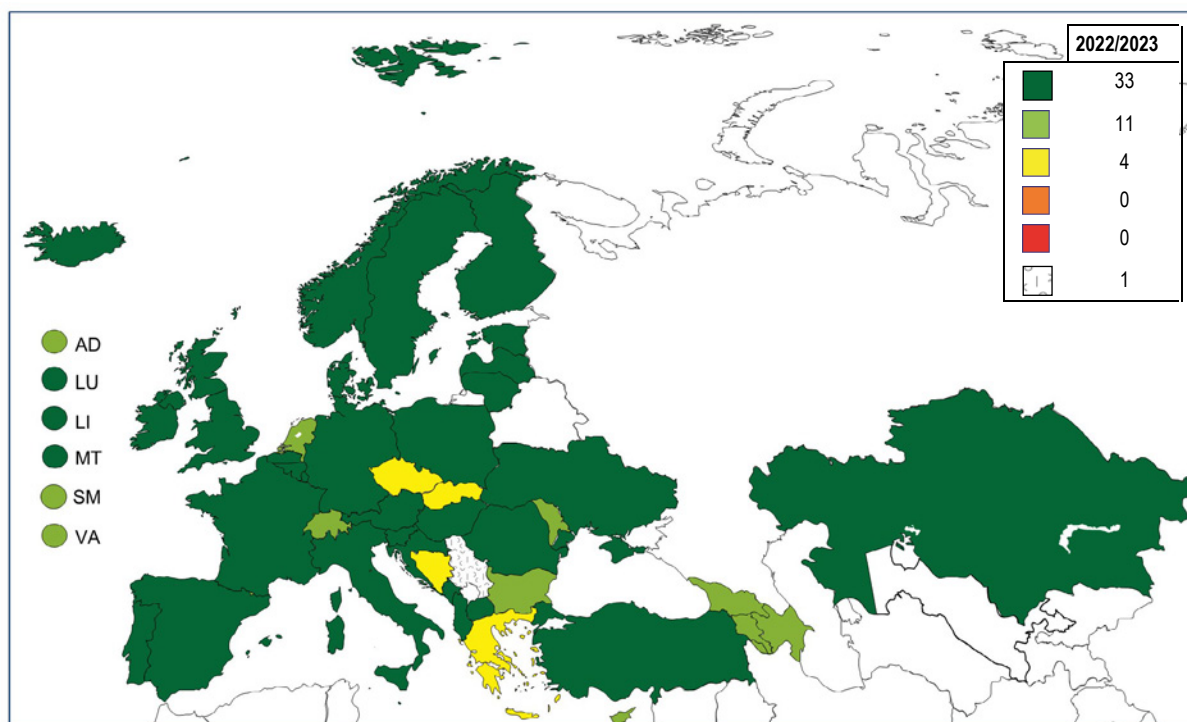
<sup>(28)</sup> In Spain, the diploma is delivered upon request and the DS is automatically delivered with the diploma.

<sup>(29)</sup> The 2003 Berlin Communiqué does not provide a definition of the concept of 'a widely spoken European language'. However, according to the Eurobarometer survey (European Commission, 2012), when the mother tongue is considered, German is the most widely spoken language, with 16% of Europeans saying it is their first language, followed by Italian and English (13% each), French (12%), then Spanish and Polish (8% each). Regarding foreign languages, the five most widely spoken foreign languages are English (38%), French (12%), German (11%), Spanish (7%) and Russian (5%). These languages can therefore be seen as 'widely spoken European languages'.

<sup>(30)</sup> [Paris Ministerial Communiqué](#), 25 May 2018.

<sup>(31)</sup> [Rome Ministerial Communiqué](#), 19 November 2020.

Figure 2.11: Scorecard indicator n°4: Implementation of national qualifications frameworks, 2022/2023



Source: BFUG data collection.

The colours in the figure indicate that the country has completed all steps related to a specific colour and all preceding steps. The red colour is an exception, countries having completed step 1 or step 2 also obtain this colour.

### Scorecard categories







	<p>Steps 10-11:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 11. The final NQF and the self-certification report can be consulted on a public website.</li> <li>○ 10. The NQF has self-certified its compatibility with the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area.</li> </ul>
	<p>Steps 7-9:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 9. Qualifications have been included in the NQF.</li> <li>○ 8. Study programmes have been re-designed on the basis of the learning outcomes included in the NQF.</li> <li>○ 7. Implementation of the NQF has started with agreement on the roles and responsibilities of higher education institutions, quality assurance agency(ies) and other bodies.</li> </ul>
	<p>Steps 5-6:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 6. The NQF has been adopted in legislation or in other high level policy fora.</li> <li>○ 5. Consultation/national discussion has taken place and the design of the NQF has been agreed by stakeholders.</li> </ul>
	<p>Step 4: The level structure, level descriptors (learning outcomes), and credit ranges have been agreed.</p>
	<p>Steps 1-3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 3. The process of developing the NQF has been set up, with stakeholders identified and committee(s) established.</li> <li>○ 2. The purpose(s) of the NQF have been agreed and outlined.</li> <li>○ 1. Decision to start developing the NQF has been taken by the national body responsible for higher education and/or the minister.</li> </ul>
	<p>Data not available</p>

Figure 2.11 shows that most countries have fulfilled their commitment to establish and use a national qualifications framework. The 33 systems in dark green have established their national qualifications frameworks for higher education and self-certified them to the QF-EHEA. In addition, in these countries, the final NQF and the self-certification report can be consulted on a public website and is used by

national authorities for at least one of the agreed purposes <sup>(32)</sup>. Albania, Kazakhstan and Ukraine have now moved into this category having completed this process. In Ukraine, the NQF recently certified its compatibility with the QF-EHEA. In 2021, the board of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine approved the self-certification report that was further made available on a public website <sup>(33)</sup>.

In the 11 systems in the light green category, the NQF is in place. However, there are still processes to finalise in relation to self-certification. Andorra and Azerbaijan have both made recent progress and moved into this category. Both reported establishing the NQF in legislation and undertaking the work of re-designing study programmes and including their qualifications in the NQF. To achieve the policy goals that national authorities together with stakeholders set for the national qualifications framework, NQFs need to be better integrated into public policy also in these countries.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czechia and Slovakia are still at the mid-way stage of the indicator having not made progress since adopting the NQF in legislation. They therefore now need to step up action to ensure that the work so far undertaken is meaningful. Greece has made recent improvements adopting the NQF in higher education legislation and has thus joined the yellow category.

## 2.2. Recognition

Fair and reliable recognition of foreign qualifications is an essential condition for the EHEA to be open, inclusive and attractive space for students. This is why recognition of qualification has been high priority for the participating countries through the Bologna process.

Various instruments aiming at facilitating fair recognition of foreign qualifications and/or study periods abroad have been developed and adopted at the European, national, regional and institutional level. From the start of the Bologna process, the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC)) <sup>(34)</sup> has been providing a common and binding legal framework for recognition policies across countries in Europe. The LRC sets out principles for recognition and implementation mechanisms. As for any international treaty, the countries that ratified the LRC have an obligation to review and amend their own national legislation to remove any contradiction. Throughout the Bologna Process there have been various calls to member states to review their legislation and implement the LRC correctly. In the Berlin Communiqué (2003) <sup>(35)</sup>, Ministers set themselves the short-term objective 'to improve the recognition system of degrees and periods of studies'. They also 'underline the importance of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, which should be ratified by all countries participating in the Bologna Process'. The 2020 Bologna Process Implementation report highlighted that although almost all countries ratified the LRC by 2020, not all of them embedded all its principles into national legislation (European Commission /EACEA / Eurydice, 2020, p. 83). The report also states that a majority of EHEA countries do not fully implement the article VII of the LRC that frames the recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee like situation. Following this observation, in the 2020 Rome Communiqué, ministries commit to 'strengthen the implementation of the LRC and apply its principles to qualifications and periods of study outside the EHEA using common assessment criteria and reports' <sup>(36)</sup>.

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<sup>(32)</sup> The agreed purposes are: communication with employers/skills forecasting; qualification recognition policies; policy coordination across levels and sectors of education.

<sup>(33)</sup> <https://mon.gov.ua/ua/tag/natsionalna-ramka-kvalifikatsiy>

<sup>(34)</sup> Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region. ETS No.165. [https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/recognition/lrc\\_en.asp](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/recognition/lrc_en.asp)

<sup>(35)</sup> [Berlin Ministerial Communiqué](https://ehea.info/Upload/document/ministerial_declarations/2003_Berlin_Communique_English_577284.pdf), 19 September 2003. [https://ehea.info/Upload/document/ministerial\\_declarations/2003\\_Berlin\\_Communique\\_English\\_577284.pdf](https://ehea.info/Upload/document/ministerial_declarations/2003_Berlin_Communique_English_577284.pdf)

<sup>(36)</sup> [Rome Ministerial Communiqué](https://ehea.info/Upload/document/ministerial_declarations/2020_Rome_Communique_English_577284.pdf), 19 November 2020, p. 7.

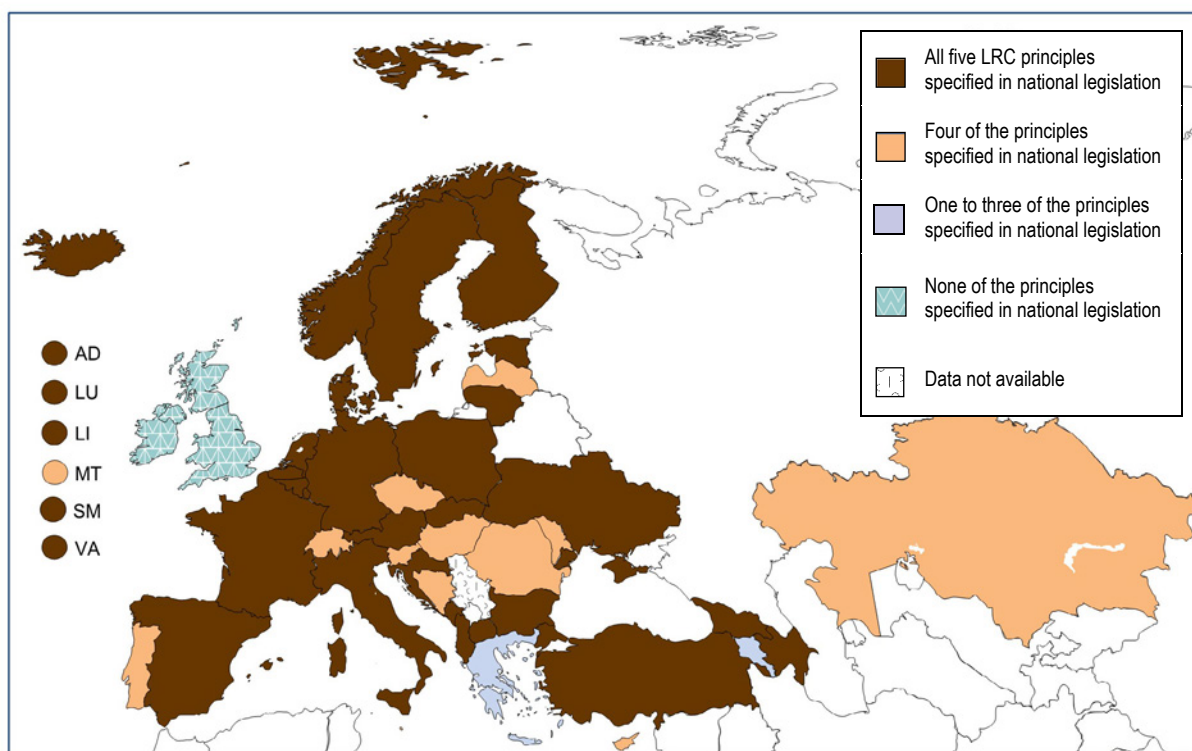
The section first takes stock of the implementation of the principles laid out in the Lisbon Recognition Convention (2.2.1) and addresses whether procedures are in place for the recognition of refugee qualification (i.e. implementation of the Article VII of the LRC) at national level (2.2.2). Then, it shows whether and how often the European tools for recognition of qualification held by refugees are used at national level (2.2.3).

For many years EHEA cooperation has focused on improving and simplifying recognition practices. In the second decade of the Bologna Process, when countries made great progress in implementation of trust building tools such as the three-cycle system, an overarching qualification framework, the ECTS and quality assurance, the narrative around recognition of qualifications has shifted to the notion of ‘automatic recognition’. The progress towards the automatic recognition of qualification for academic purposes is monitored in part 2.2.4 of this section.

### 2.2.1. Principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) in national Legislation

Figure 2.12 shows the extent to which the main principles of the LRC are specified in national legislation.

**Figure 2.12: Principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention in national legislation, 2022/2023**



Source: BFUG data collection.

The principles highlighted in the indicator are:

1) applicants have right to fair assessment; 2) there is recognition if no substantial differences can be proven; 3) legislation or guidelines encourage comparing of learning outcomes rather than programme contents; 4) in cases of negative decisions the competent recognition authority demonstrates the existence of substantial difference; 5) applicant's right to appeal of the recognition decision. Implementation of these principles was identified by the Pathfinder Group <sup>(37)</sup> as an important step towards automatic recognition.

<sup>(37)</sup> The 2012 Budapest Communiqué called for the establishment of ‘pathfinder group of countries exploring ways to achieve the automatic academic recognition of comparable degrees’. [http://www.ehea.info/media/ehea.info/file/2015\\_Yerevan/72/3/EHEA\\_Pathfinder\\_Group\\_on\\_Automatic\\_Recognition\\_January\\_2015\\_613723.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/media/ehea.info/file/2015_Yerevan/72/3/EHEA_Pathfinder_Group_on_Automatic_Recognition_January_2015_613723.pdf).

Although the ratification of the Lisbon Recognition Convention has long been completed by almost all EHEA countries, several countries have not embedded all principles into national legislation.

Progress has been made since the publication of the 2020 Bologna Implementation report (see European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2020, p. 84). The Figure 2.12 shows that the number of education systems where all of these main principles are specified in national legislation has risen to 31. Eight additional countries (Albania, Andorra, Austria, Croatia, Poland, Spain, Sweden and Ukraine) have now embedded all principles in national legislations. Poland and Sweden have recently added the 5<sup>th</sup> principle, namely the right of applicants to appeal of the recognition decision, to legislation, while in Austria the Universities Act 2002, amended in 2021 <sup>(38)</sup>, promotes the comparison of learning outcomes rather than programme contents for recognition purposes.

The number of systems where four of the principles are embedded in legislation is now 12. A further two systems specify one to three principles. Ireland and the United Kingdom (England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland) does not legislate in this area as institutions have full autonomy over their admissions, and for principles to be specified in national legislation would be considered a violation of autonomy. Nevertheless, the governments and higher education institutions in these countries claim to be strongly committed to open, fair and transparent admissions processes.

### 2.2.2. Implementation of Article VII of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC)

In recent years, large numbers of individuals of all ages have been fleeing conflict zones and relocating in other countries. Most recently, the number of refugees in Europe has dramatically increased with the arrival of around 4 million non-EU citizens who fled Ukraine because of the Russian invasion in 2022 <sup>(39)</sup> (see 6.3, Chapter 6).

Forced to interrupt studies or professional activity, many people bring with them competences and skills acquired in their country of origin that can be further developed in the host country through further studies, sometimes in higher education.

With requests from refugees, institutions responsible for the recognition of foreign qualifications may face particular challenges in the recognition process. These are often associated with the lack of established recognition procedures and policies for qualifications with insufficient or entirely lost documentation, as well as a lack of information on legal obligations. In such cases, article VII of the LRC serves as a framework for developing good practice. It states that: 'Each Party shall take all feasible and reasonable steps within the framework of its education system and in conformity with its constitutional, legal, and regulatory provisions to develop procedures designed to assess fairly and expeditiously whether refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education, to further higher education programmes or to employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications obtained in one of the Parties cannot be proven through documentary evidence' <sup>(40)</sup>.

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<sup>(38)</sup> <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20002128>

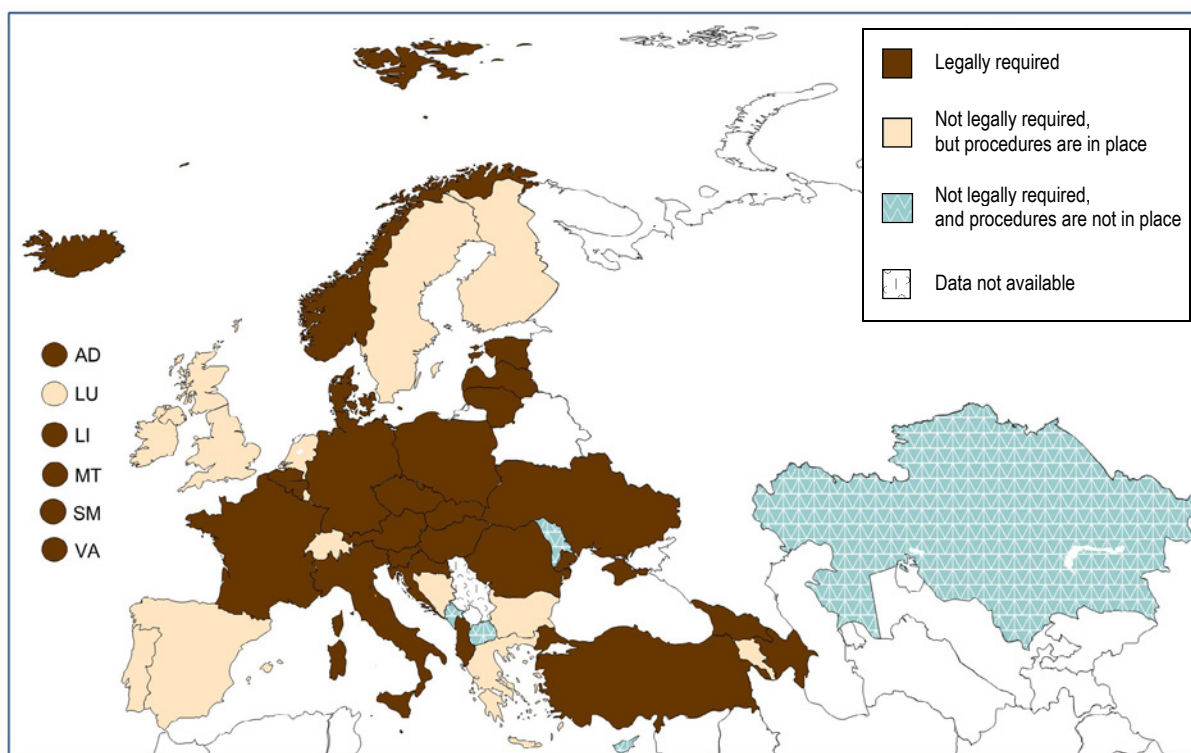
<sup>(39)</sup> According to Eurostat data, on 31 May 2023: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?oldid=605154>

<sup>(40)</sup> LRC, Art. VII (p.9): <https://rm.coe.int/168007f2c7>



Figure 2.13 shows the state of current implementation of Article VII of the LRC at national level.

**Figure 2.13: Implementation of Article VII of the LRC at national level, 2022/2023**



Source: BFUG data collection.

The analysed data reveal that despite the widespread ratification of the LRC, only slightly more than a half of the education systems with available data (29 out of 48) have requirements in national legislation for special recognition procedures to be in place for refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation. More positively, clear legislation and procedures for refugees and displaced persons with qualifications exist in the countries that are an important entry point to Europe from the conflict zones in Africa (Italy and Malta), from Middle East (Türkiye) and from Ukraine (Czechia, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Romania).

Seven countries (Albania, Andorra, Austria, Azerbaijan, Croatia, Latvia, and Portugal) have recently introduced a legal requirement for procedures to be followed. This can be considered as very significant progress since the 2020 Bologna Implementation report (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2020, p. 84).

14 other systems claim that procedures are in place even if there is no legal requirement for them.

Five countries (Cyprus, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Montenegro and North Macedonia) have no requirement for specific recognition procedures to be in place for refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation. This represents a serious contradiction with the international legal commitment undertaken by countries that have both signed and ratified the LRC.

### 2.2.3. Use of tools for recognition of qualifications of refugees

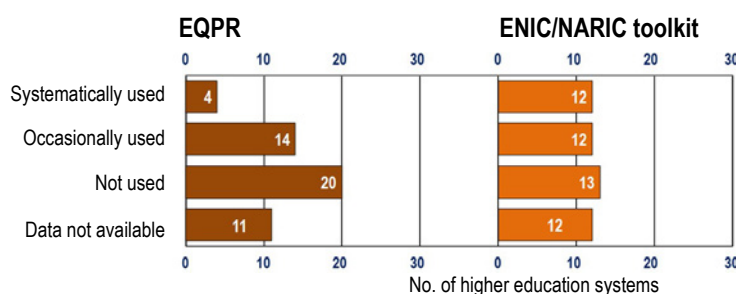
There are two main European tools developed to facilitate recognition of qualifications held by refugees even in cases of missing documentation or where the qualifications are scarcely documented: the European Qualification Passport for Refugees (EQPR) <sup>(41)</sup> and the ENIC-NARIC toolkit.

<sup>(41)</sup> For more details, see: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/recognition-of-refugees-qualifications>

The EQPR has been created by the Council of Europe and project partners, and consists of two parts: an assessment section and an explanatory section. The methodology for the evaluation is a combination of an assessment of available documentation and the use of a structured interview with a team of two qualified credential evaluators. Through a standardised format, it explains the qualifications a refugee is likely to have based on the available evidence. Although this document does not constitute a formal recognition act, it summarises and presents available information on the applicant’s educational level, work experience and language proficiency. Thus, the document provides credible information that can be relevant in connection with applications for employment, internships, qualification courses and admission to studies. The European Qualifications Passport for Refugees was welcomed by ministers in the 2020 Rome Communiqué <sup>(42)</sup> and its use and future development were promoted.

The second tool for the recognition of refugees’ qualifications has been developed by the ENIC-NARIC centres of several countries within a Refugees and Recognition – Erasmus+ project <sup>(43)</sup>, which built upon a previous project lead by Norway’s national recognition agency, NOKUT <sup>(44)</sup>. The toolkit is a joint effort to assist ENIC-NARIC centres in the development of practical approaches to credential evaluation and recognition of the qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation. The toolkit consists of three parts – principles, tools and approaches.

**Figure 2.14: Use of tools for recognition of refugees’ qualifications: the Council of Europe Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR) and ENIC/NARIC’s toolkit for recognition of refugees’ qualifications, 2022/2023**



Source: BFUG data collection.

Figure 2.14 shows that despite the potential advantages of using the tools for recognition of refugees’ qualifications, their use is not widespread in the EHEA countries. According to the data provided, around half of the education systems with available data use (occasionally or systematically) the EQPR (18 out of 38), while two-third of the systems make use of the ENIC/NARIC toolkit (24 out of 37).

Albania, Italy and the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) are the three counties that systematically use both tools in dealing with applications from refugees. Six education systems (Armenia, Belgium – Flemish Community, Croatia, the Holy See, Slovenia and Türkiye) use both tools, but occasionally rather than systematically. Some education systems report using a national tool equivalent to the EQPR. For example, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, the Netherlands and Sweden are issuing a national format of the qualification passport to record the available information on the applicant’s educational level, qualifications, work experience and language proficiency. This document is commonly called ‘background paper’, while Bulgaria labelled it ‘information card for acquired educational degree’.

In around a quarter of the systems there is no data collection on the use of the above-mentioned tools.

<sup>(42)</sup> [Rome Ministerial Communiqué](#), 19 November 2020.

<sup>(43)</sup> <https://www.nokut.no/en/Refugees-and-Recognition/toolkit>

<sup>(44)</sup> For further information, see: <https://www.nokut.no/om-nokut/internasjonalt-samarbeid/qualifications-passport-for-refugees/>

## 2.2.4. System-level automatic recognition of degrees for academic purposes

The Lisbon Recognition Convention, addressed in section 2.2.1., has provided a clear legal framework under which recognition policy operates at national and institutional level. However, in 2010, the EHEA ministers of higher education recognised that procedures for the academic recognition of qualifications continued to be often lengthy and burdensome. For this reason, in 2012 in Bucharest, the Ministers of higher education across the EHEA committed themselves to the long-term objective of 'automatic recognition' of comparable academic degrees <sup>(45)</sup>.

While there has been much discussion and confusion about the notion of automatic recognition, several texts have specified an understanding of the concept.

Within the Bologna Process, the first reference text was the report produced by the Pathfinder Group on automatic recognition, which states: 'Automatic recognition of a degree leads to the automatic right of an applicant holding a qualification of a certain level to be considered for entry to a programme of further study in the next level in any other EHEA-country (access)' (EHEA Pathfinder Group on Automatic Recognition, 2015, p. 10). This definition makes it clear that automatic recognition does not imply automatic admission to any specific programme, but rather that holders of a qualification giving access to a programme of study at the next level have the right to be considered for entry. The Pathfinder Group reached the conclusion that automatic recognition is a necessary pre-condition for large-scale academic mobility, and proposed a number of recommendations to improve the situation. The Pathfinder Group recommended that a qualification based on the EHEA three-cycle structure from one EHEA country should be recognised at the same level anywhere else in the EHEA. The principle under examination is whether students who hold qualifications from other EHEA countries have the level of their qualification recognised in the same way as holders of qualifications issued within the home country. As the Pathfinder Group specified, the objective is that a bachelor is a bachelor across the EHEA.

Meanwhile, in the Yerevan Communiqué in May 2015, ministers made the commitment 'to ensure that qualifications from other EHEA countries are automatically recognised at the same level as relevant domestic qualifications' <sup>(46)</sup>. In the 2020 Rome Communiqué, ministers confirmed their determination to make the necessary legislative changes to guarantee automatic recognition at systems level for qualifications delivered in EHEA countries where quality assurance operates in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and where a fully operational national qualifications framework has been established <sup>(47)</sup>.

Within the European Union, the Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 took a further step in promoting the automatic mutual recognition of qualifications as well as the recognition of learning outcomes during study periods abroad <sup>(48)</sup>, thus strengthening the 2012 commitment and increasing the speed of implementation. Indeed, the Recommendation envisages achieving the automatic recognition of qualifications by 2025 throughout the EU, providing further impetus to all participating countries in the Bologna process to follow suit.

Scorecard indicator n°5 (see Figure 2.15) monitors progress towards the automatic recognition of qualifications. A distinction is made between the higher education systems based on whether they have implemented system-level automatic recognition of qualifications, and if they have, whether such automatic recognition covers all EHEA countries.

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<sup>(45)</sup> [Bucharest Communiqué](#), 26-27 April 2012.

<sup>(46)</sup> [Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers responsible for Higher Education, Yerevan, 14-15 May 2015](#), p. 3

<sup>(47)</sup> [Rome Ministerial Communiqué](#), 19 November 2020.

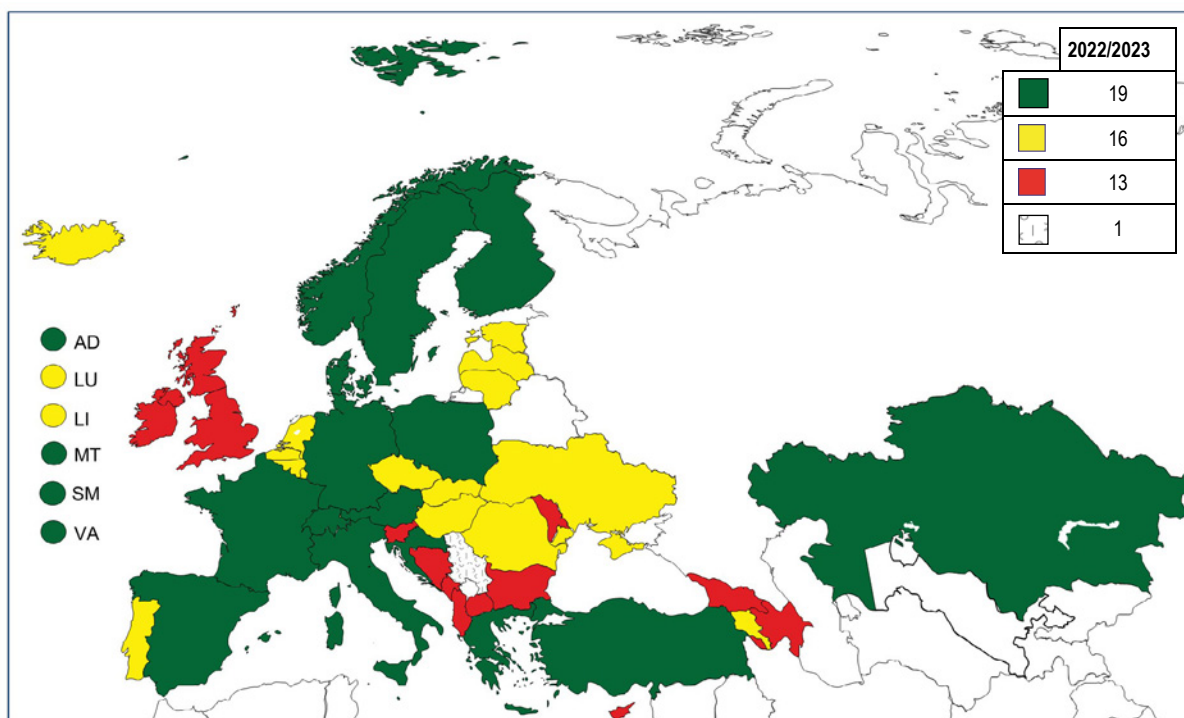
<sup>(48)</sup> [Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018](#) on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad, OJ C444/01 10.12.2018.

Thus, for the dark green category, all higher education qualifications issued in other EHEA countries are recognised on an equal level with qualifications in the home country without any additional procedures in higher education institutions. Nevertheless, automatic recognition does not equate to immediate recognition. A normal procedure would be to check that qualification is genuine and classified at the correct level.

In the yellow category are all higher education systems where automatic recognition at system level takes place with a subset of EHEA countries based on bilateral or multilateral agreements. For other countries a separate recognition procedure is in place.





The red category groups education systems that do not apply the concept of automatic recognition, so that separate recognition procedures are in place for all education qualifications issued in all other countries.

**Figure 2.15: Scorecard indicator n°5: System level (automatic) recognition for academic purposes, 2022/2023**



Source: BFUG data collection.

**Scorecard categories**

	Automatic recognition is in place, meaning that all higher education qualifications issued in other EHEA countries are recognised at system level on an equal level with comparable <sup>(49)</sup> academic qualifications in the home country and give the right to be considered for entry to a programme of further study at the next level.
	Automatic recognition at system level takes place with a subset of European countries.
	There is no automatic recognition.
	Data not available

<sup>(49)</sup> The term 'comparable' implies that foreign qualifications are treated in the same way as national degrees (e.g. a first-cycle degree from an EHEA country vs. a national first-cycle degree) for the purpose of further study at the next level without additional recognition procedures.

Figure 2.15 reveals that the European Higher Education Area is still far from achieving widespread automatic recognition. The distribution of education systems along the main categories is as follows.

There are 19 systems that practise automatic recognition for all EHEA countries, and that are shown in dark green. The number of systems in this category has slightly increased since the 2020 edition of the Bologna Process Implementation Report (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2020, p. 87). Andorra, Austria, Croatia, Greece, the Holy See, Kazakhstan, Spain and Switzerland have seen recent developments, and as a consequence have joined the dark green category.

While not yet having full system-level recognition for all EHEA countries, a further 16 systems report that automatic recognition applies to some EHEA countries. This is usually based on regional, bilateral or multilateral agreements on the mutual automatic recognition of qualifications. As a member of the Eurasian Economic Union, Armenia has recently signed a mutual recognition agreement regarding recognition of higher education qualifications both for academic and professional purposes with other members of the Union. As this agreement includes automatic recognition of qualifications from Kazakhstan, Armenia is now in the yellow category.

In 13 systems, there is no system-level automatic recognition as additional recognition procedures apply for recognition of higher education qualifications issued in all other EHEA countries.

There is a relationship between degree structures, and in particular the workload of first-cycle programmes, and automatic recognition of qualification for academic purposes. The education systems where most of the first-cycle programmes comprise 180 ECTS (see Figure 2.1) usually apply automatic recognition of qualification for academic purposes. Conversely, and with very few exceptions, education systems where the workload of most first-cycle programmes is higher (240 ECTS) additional recognition procedures for academic qualifications and degrees are in place. While this pattern can be observed from the data gathered, more research would be required to understand this apparent relationship. Is there a reason why countries with a high workload in first-cycle programmes appear to be more reluctant to implement a system of automatic recognition of qualification and degrees for further academic studies?

## 2.3. Quality Assurance

Quality assurance is one of the key commitments underpinning the EHEA. It ensures that higher education institutions and programmes meet the standards of quality outlined in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). This helps in building trust in the value and outcomes of higher education among stakeholders and society both within and beyond the EHEA.

This section addresses developments in the implementation of quality assurance commitments since the Rome Communique. Section 2.3.1 discusses the stage of development of the external quality assurance systems and in particular the share of higher education institutions reviewed by a quality assurance agency registered on the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).

The following sections consider the level of student and international participation in quality assurance, which are two longstanding commitments dating back to the early years of the Bologna Process. Finally, the section explores the level of openness of systems for higher education institutions to choose any suitable EQAR-registered agency for their external quality assurance (in line with national requirements), as well as the possibility of employing the European Approach for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

Several sources of data have been used in this section. Some of the information was gathered directly from EHEA member countries as part of the BFUG data collection exercise. Countries also provided information through the QA FIT survey <sup>(50)</sup> and a third source is EQAR's Knowledge Base <sup>(51)</sup>. Further information was extracted from the data uploaded by EQAR-registered agencies into the Database for External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR). This facilitated assessment of the extent of higher education institutions' compliance with the ESG as reviewed by an EQAR-registered agency, as well as the methods used for undertaking external quality assurance of joint programmes. For the data related to the level of student and international participation in quality assurance, information collected through the BFUG data collection was cross-checked with that provided by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), by national regulations and legal frameworks as well as with external review reports of quality assurance agencies.

### 2.3.1. Stage of development of the external Quality Assurance systems

The key commitment on quality assurance is for external quality assurance to be conducted in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The first appendix to the 2018 Paris Communiqué explained this key commitment, as follows:

'External quality assurance (be it at programme or institutional level) is performed by Agencies that have demonstrably complied with the standards and guidelines stipulated in the current ESG. This is best ensured where only those agencies registered on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) are allowed to operate in the country <sup>(52)</sup>'.

Guided by this Paris Communiqué text, EQAR registration is the EHEA measure that best demonstrates that quality assurance agencies operate in substantial compliance with the ESG. EQAR registration also provides legitimacy to quality assurance agencies that operate outside their national jurisdiction (whilst complying with national requirements) as per the Bucharest Communiqué (2012), reinforcing trust throughout the EHEA and beyond.

EQAR was established in 2008 following an agreement of Ministers responsible for higher education in the London Communiqué (2007) with a commitment that 'the register will be voluntary, self-financing, independent and transparent'. To date it is the only body established through the Bologna Process. It provides the public with clear and reliable information on quality assurance agencies operating in Europe, and it is web-based and freely accessible. The primary condition for an agency to be listed in the EQAR is that it 'should be evaluated on the basis of substantial compliance with the ESG, evidenced through an independent review process'.

Quality assurance agencies that are members of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) but not registered in EQAR also operate in compliance with the ESG, as this is the criteria to become ENQA members. ENQA was established as a network of quality assurance agencies in 2000 and subsequently as an association in 2004. It is the designated stakeholder organisation for quality assurance agencies within the EHEA, and its mission involves representing the interests of these agencies internationally, supporting them nationally, and offering comprehensive services and networking opportunities. Under ENQA's umbrella, the community of agencies collaborates to drive innovation in quality assurance processes.

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<sup>(50)</sup> The Quality Assurance fit for the future (QA FIT) survey for ministries was carried out by EQAR and addressed all 47 governmental members of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Responses were collected between 7 November 2022 and 24 January 2023. 36 valid responses were received. See more here: <https://www.eqar.eu/about/projects/qa-fit/>

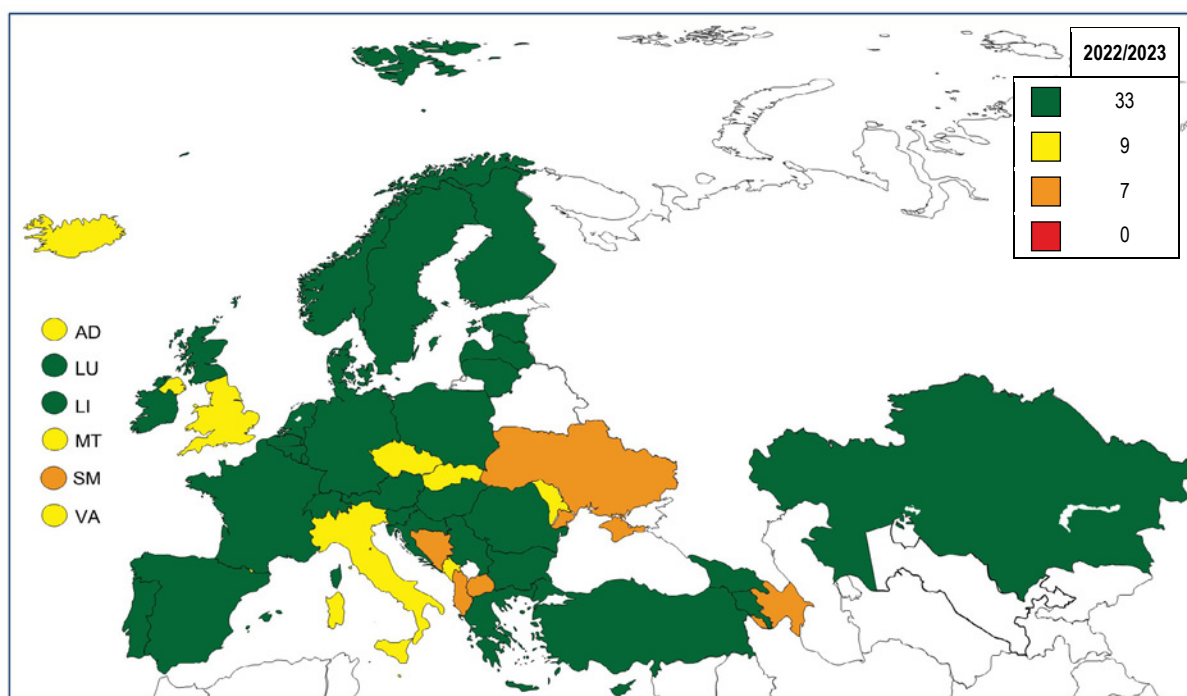
<sup>(51)</sup> EQAR's Knowledge Base is available at: <https://www.eqar.eu/kb/country-information/>

<sup>(52)</sup> Paris Ministerial Communiqué, 25 May 2018, Appendix I.

While the same external review reports may be used to apply for ENQA membership or EQAR registration, the decision-making processes on ESG compliance differ between the two organisations. The decision on ESG compliance in EQAR is taken by a Register Committee, with members nominated from different stakeholder groups who serve in their personal capacity. The decision-making in ENQA is under the responsibility of the ENQA Board. In practice, the ENQA Board normally uses EQAR registration as de facto confirmation of ESG compliance, except in a small number of cases where it only uses the external review report as the basis for its decision.





Figure 2.16 shows the extent to which national quality assurance systems are aligned with the Bologna commitment of having a fully functioning quality assurance system where all higher education institutions are subject to regular external quality assurance by an agency that has successfully demonstrated compliance with the ESG. For the purposes of the EHEA monitoring this is measured through EQAR registration. Dark green signifies that national systems are working with quality assurance agencies verified to be compliant with the ESG, as evidenced by their EQAR registration. Yellow denotes countries where only certain higher education institutions or programmes follow regular ESG-compliant quality assurance processes. Orange represents countries where external quality assurance agencies have not been externally assessed for ESG compliance, although some steps have been taken to address this (i.e. quality assurance agencies are currently seeking EQAR registration). Red indicates countries without an external quality assurance system.

**Figure 2.16: Scorecard indicator n° 6: Stage of development of external quality assurance system, 2022/2023**



Source: EQAR.

### Scorecard categories

	A fully functioning quality assurance system is in operation nationwide, in which all higher education institutions are subject to regular external quality assurance by an agency that has successfully demonstrated compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG) through registration on EQAR.
	A fully functioning quality assurance system is in operation nationwide, but only some higher education institutions are subject to regular external quality assurance by an agency that has successfully demonstrated compliance with the ESG through registration on EQAR.
	A quality assurance system is in operation nationwide, but has not yet been fully aligned to the ESG.
	No quality assurance system is in operation.

Currently 33 of the 49 EHEA higher education systems meet the requirement for the dark green category (see Figure 2.16). Compared to the previous implementation report, progress can be noted for Greece and Türkiye, following the positive decision from the EQAR Register Committee on the substantial compliance with the ESG of the national quality assurance bodies.

For the nine countries in yellow, external quality assurance is not always carried out by an EQAR-registered agency. Within this group, some national quality assurance agencies (Italy, Malta, Moldova and Slovakia) have nevertheless taken concrete steps, initiating their applications for EQAR-registration. In the case of Italy, the agency is a member of ENQA and is currently undergoing a new external review in order to apply for listing on EQAR.

In the case of the United Kingdom (England), following a change in legal framework, institutions are no longer subject to regular and systematic external quality assurance by an EQAR-registered agency, although some quality assurance agencies registered in the UK carry out reviews in higher education institutions in the country. The key commitment is therefore not fully met. The situation is however different for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland where the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is commissioned to carry institutional quality assurance for all higher education providers. The map shows only a distinction between UK (Scotland) and a combined picture of the remaining three higher education systems. However, the higher education system in Wales and Northern Ireland meets the criteria for the dark green category while the higher education system in England currently only meets the criteria for the yellow category within the scorecard.

In the remaining countries shown in orange, a quality assurance system is in operation nationwide but further work is required to fully align the higher education system with the ESG. This can be achieved through either the registration in EQAR of a national quality assurance body or by allowing the possibility for higher education institutions within the country to choose an existing registered EQAR-registered quality assurance agency to conduct their external quality assurance. This category includes the Holy See where the quality assurance agency is a member of ENQA, and has therefore been externally reviewed to demonstrate compliance with ESG. In this case, the agency has not requested registration on EQAR.

The BFUG Thematic Peer Group for quality assurance has been supporting higher education systems through a range of activities including submission of action plans, peer learning activities and staff mobility activities. In addition, the involvement of six countries in an EU co-funded project (SEQA-ESG)<sup>(53)</sup> led by ENQA to support national quality assurance agencies and national authorities in creating an ESG-compliant quality assurance system has led to visible progress in three countries – Malta, Moldova and Slovakia. These countries have made changes in their legal framework to enable their national quality assurance agency to become compliant with the ESG.

There remains work to continue in the process of defining frameworks and methodologies for quality assurance, in developing and consolidating standards for accreditation or revising such standards to ensure their fitness for purpose and to be aligned with the expectations set out in the ESG.

The share of higher education institutions that have been reviewed by an EQAR-registered agency (at programme and/or institutional level) provides additional information on the extent to which a country has realised the key commitment on quality assurance. Data provided by almost all (see note below) registered quality assurance agencies uploading their reports into the Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR)<sup>(54)</sup> illustrate the coverage of higher education institutions subject to

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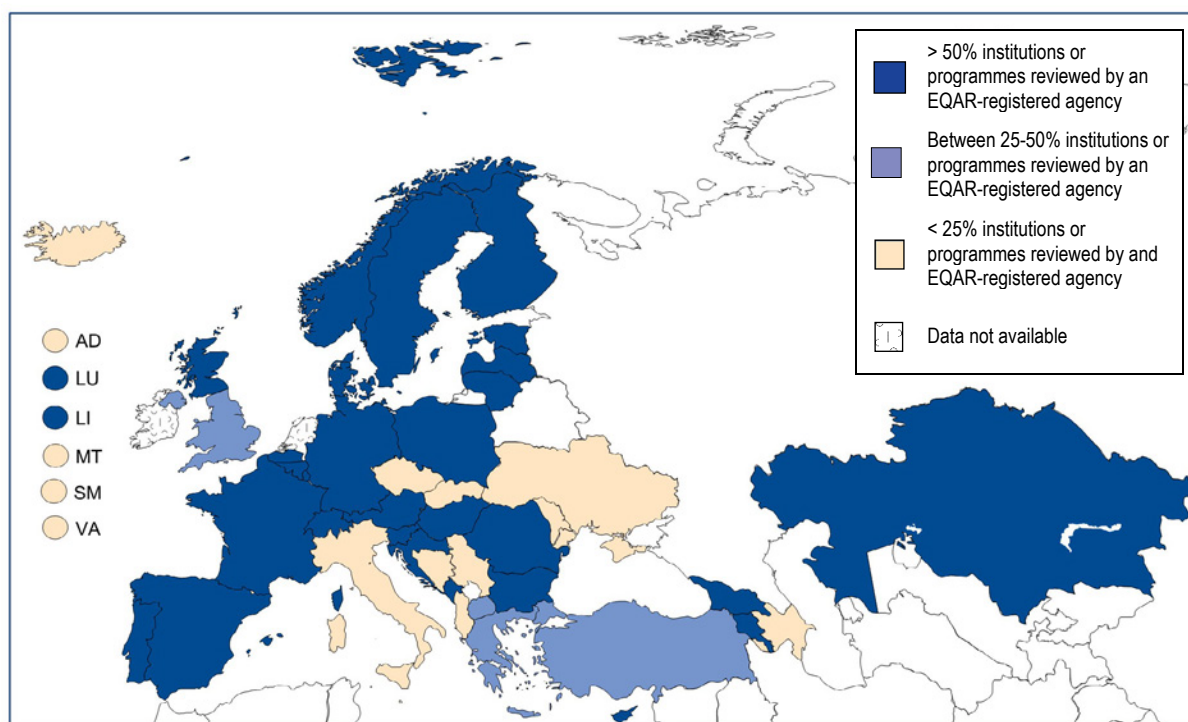
<sup>(53)</sup> The ENQA led SEQA-ESG project carried out between 2020 and 2023 supported quality assurance agencies and national authorities in meeting the expectations of the ESG. The participating countries were Albania, Czechia, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro and Slovakia.

<sup>(54)</sup> DEQAR allows for a realtime tracking of almost all EHEA members country's alignment with the Key Commitment on quality assurance. The time period considered for the validity of external quality assurance is collected from each agency. From



external quality assurance in compliance with the ESG (see Figure 2.17). To date, DEQAR includes over 90.000 quality assurance reports <sup>(55)</sup> dated from 2008 to 2023 from 50 EQAR-registered agencies.

**Figure 2.17: Share of higher education institutions reviewed by an EQAR-registered quality assurance agency, 2022/2023**



Source: EQAR.

The data shows that 29 countries have had at least 50% of their higher education institutions reviewed at programme or institutional level by an EQAR-registered agency – and Ireland and the Netherlands would be added to this group if their reports had been uploaded in DEQAR. Four systems have between 26% and 49% of their higher education institutions or programmes reviewed by an EQAR-registered agency. This leaves 14 systems where less than 24% of institutions and programmes have been reviewed by an EQAR-registered agency.

The DEQAR data read together with the previous Scorecard Indicator (Figure 2.16 above) on the stage of development of quality assurance provides a few insights that may otherwise be hidden. In particular it reveals those countries where EQAR-registered quality assurance agencies have already covered a significant part of the higher education system, even though the country's main national quality assurance agency is not registered in EQAR. This is the case for Moldova and Montenegro. The DEQAR data further shows the extent of coverage for Liechtenstein and Luxembourg where quality assurance reviews are regularly carried out by foreign EQAR-registered agencies, and proves that sufficient coverage can be achieved even if a national agency is not in place.

2023 all except three (QQI – Ireland, NVAO-Netherlands and ANECA – Spain) EQAR-registered agencies have uploaded their reports into DEQAR.

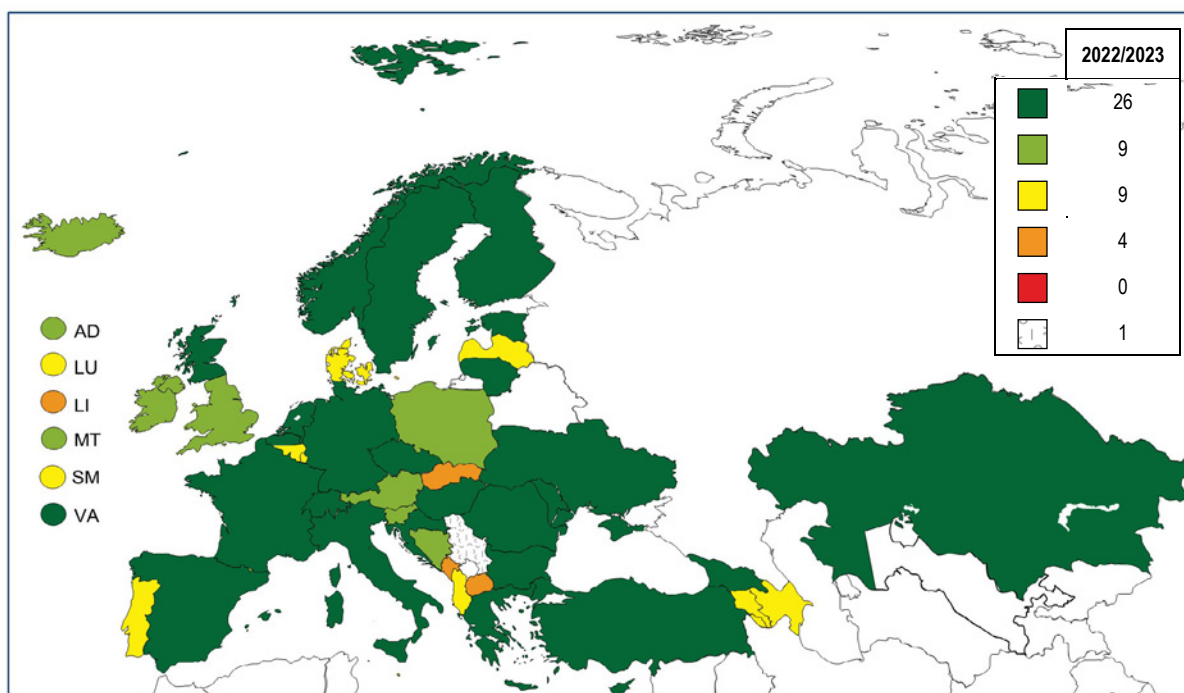
<sup>(55)</sup> <https://www.eqar.eu/ga-results/search/>

### 2.3.2. Student participation in external Quality Assurance

Students are not simply passive recipients of education but actively contribute to shaping their learning journey. Their participation is understood as a fundamental value of the EHEA, and is underscored in all areas of the Bologna process including quality assurance.







The scorecard indicator below (see Figure 2.18) provides insight into students' involvement in external quality assurance, and is based on responses to the BFUG questionnaire. The indicator evaluates student engagement in five key areas of external quality assurance, deeming it satisfactory only if their involvement is achieved in five different areas i.e., participation in governance structures of national quality assurance bodies, in external review teams, in the preparation of self-evaluation reports, in the decision-making process for external reviews and in follow-up procedures. A dark green rating confirms full student participation across all areas, whereas red indicates minimal to no guaranteed involvement.

Figure 2.18: Scorecard indicator n° 7: Level of student participation in external quality assurance, 2022/2023



Source: BFUG Data Collection .

#### Scorecard categories

	In all quality assurance reviews, students participate as full members at five levels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ in governance structures of national Quality Assurance agencies;</li> <li>○ in external review teams;</li> <li>○ in the preparation of self-evaluation reports;</li> <li>○ in the decision making process for external reviews;</li> <li>○ in follow-up procedures.</li> </ul>				
	Students participate at <b>four</b> of the five levels mentioned above.		Students participate at <b>three</b> of the five levels mentioned above.		
	Students participate at <b>two</b> of the five levels mentioned above.		Students cannot participate or participate at only one level mentioned above.		Data not available

Compared to the results of the 2020 implementation report, countries now indicate an increased achievement in the dark green category, with 26 systems (compared to 20) having achieved a dark green rating while 9 remain in light green. Thirteen others fall into the yellow or orange categories, indicating the need for more progress towards comprehensive student involvement in quality assurance processes.

Greece and Moldova report that new provisions have been established in law to ensure student representatives participate in the governance of their quality assurance agency. For Moldova and Spain new regulations also ensure student participation in external review panels. Croatia and Moldova now also specify requirements for participation in follow-up procedures. While Andorra, Finland and the United Kingdom (Scotland) do not legally mandate student involvement, many institutions and agencies have taken the initiative to ensure it, in particular in their involvement in the preparation of self-evaluation reports and in follow-up procedures. San Marino is in the process of making legislative changes that will enhance student engagement in quality assurance.

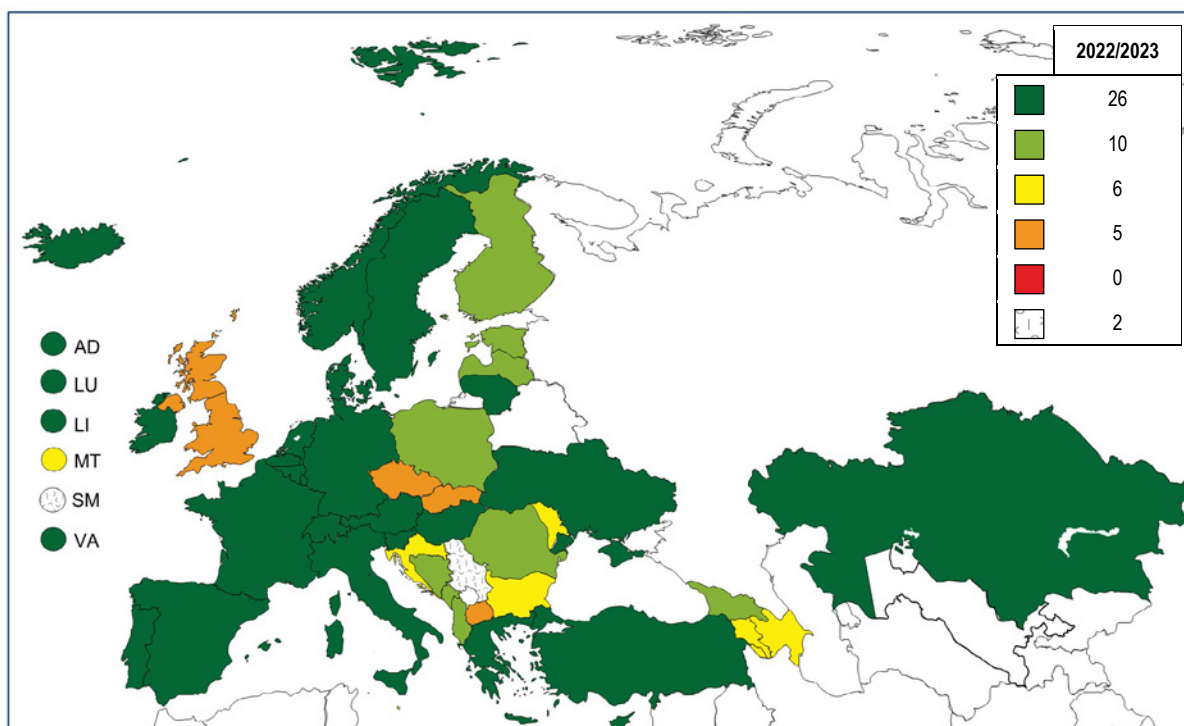
ESU's data for the 2024 edition of Bologna With Student Eyes sheds light on the reasons why student engagement in quality assurance remains challenging. Close to two-thirds of student unions report a lack of interest as a main barrier for students to become involved in external quality assurance processes. While it is understandable that many students lack interest in quality assurance procedures, over half of the student unions also explain that there is lack of information about quality assurance provided to students, as well as a lack of training opportunities.

### **2.3.3. International participation in national quality assurance systems**

Internationalisation has significantly influenced developments in quality assurance, evident in collaborations among nations and quality assurance agencies alike. In view of the importance attached to internationalisation in higher education, a scorecard indicator to monitor the engagement of international experts in external quality assurance was developed in the first decade of the Bologna Process, and has been used in all implementation reports.







The indicator measures the level of international participation in external quality assurance based on four elements. The first important aspect is membership or affiliation of quality assurance agencies with ENQA, which is considered as the most fruitful way to ensure international cooperation with other quality assurance bodies across the EHEA. The indicator also refers to the involvement of international experts in the governance structures of national quality assurance entities, the inclusion of international experts as members or observers within evaluation teams, and their active participation in follow-up evaluation procedures.

Figure 2.19: Scorecard indicator n° 8: Level of international participation in external quality assurance, 2022/2023



Source: BFUG Data Collection & ENQA list of members

### Scorecard categories

	In all cases the following four aspects are met:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ agencies are members or affiliates of ENQA;</li> <li>○ international peers/experts participate in governance of national quality assurance bodies;</li> <li>○ international peers/experts participate as members/observers in evaluation teams;</li> <li>○ international peers/experts participate in follow-up procedures.</li> </ul>
	Three of the four aspects are met.
	Two of the four aspects are met.
	One of the four aspects is met.
	No international participation.
	Data not available.

Overall, there is a high level of international participation in quality assurance across the EHEA, with 36 systems fulfilling either all four criteria or three of them. Despite the two years where the pandemic made a strong impact on internationalisation activities in higher education – reducing physical mobility in the short-to-medium term (see Chapter 6), there has nevertheless been progress in six higher education systems (Belgium – French Community, Cyprus, Greece, Portugal, Türkiye and Ukraine) in boosting international participation in external quality assurance.

The responses provided as part of the BFUG data collection exercise also reveal that five countries – Armenia, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, and Slovakia – are performing less well on this indicator than in the previous data collection.

In the context of internationalisation in quality assurance procedures, it is also relevant to note that the pandemic period brought a notable expansion in the use of digital tools. There has therefore been an increase in the implementation of online site-visits potentially facilitating inclusion of international experts through exploiting the possibility of remote working.

#### 2.3.4. Level of openness to cross border Quality Assurance of EQAR-registered agencies

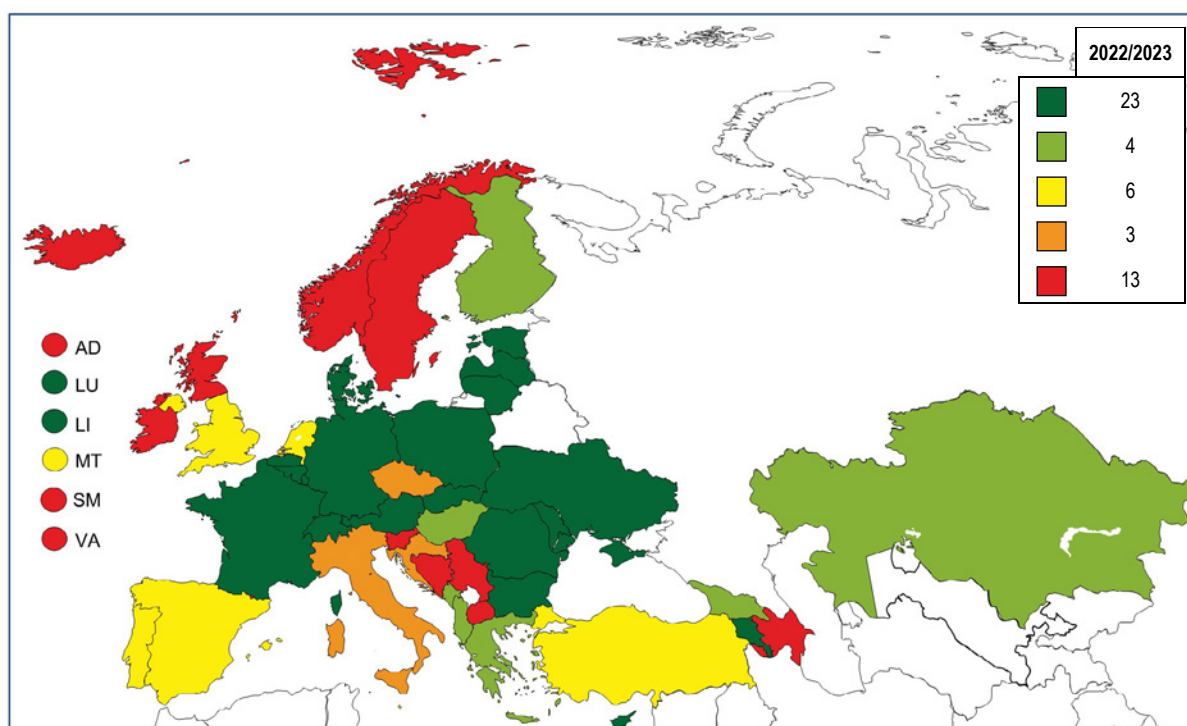
The Berlin Ministerial Communiqué (2003) recognised and underlined higher education institutions' responsibility for assuring the quality of education while the Communiques of Bucharest (2012), Yerevan

(2015) and Paris (2018) recognised higher education institutions' right to choose a suitable EQAR-registered quality assurance agency (in line with the national framework) for their compulsory external quality assurance.

EQAR has monitored system-level developments in creating legal frameworks compatible with the ESG and open to cross-border quality assurance. It also monitors the cross-border external quality assurance activities of EQAR-registered agencies.






Figure 2.20 (below) draws on EQAR data to show systems' level of openness to cross border higher education. In the most favourable scenario (represented by dark green), all higher education institutions and programmes have the liberty to opt for evaluation by an EQAR-registered agency outside their home country to fulfil their external quality assurance requirements.

**Figure 2.20: Scorecard indicator n° 9: Level of openness to cross border quality assurance of EQAR registered agencies, 2022/2023**



Source: EQAR.

### Scorecard categories

	<b>All institutions and programmes</b> can choose to be evaluated by a suitable quality assurance agency from outside the country to fulfil their obligations for external quality assurance, while complying with national requirements. EQAR registration always serves as a criterion for agencies to be allowed to carry out cross-border evaluation/accreditation/audit.
	<b>All institutions and programmes</b> can choose to be evaluated by a suitable quality assurance agency from outside the country to fulfil their obligations for external quality assurance, while complying with national requirements. EQAR registration does not always serve as a criterion for agencies to be allowed to carry out cross-border evaluation/accreditation/audit.
	<b>In some cases, institutions and/or programmes</b> can choose to be evaluated by a quality assurance agency from outside the country to fulfil their obligations for external quality assurance, while complying with national requirements. EQAR registration always serves as a criterion for agencies to be allowed to carry out cross-border evaluation/accreditation/audit.
	Discussions are on-going or plans have been made to establish a legal framework allowing EQAR-registered agencies to operate in the country.
	Institutions and programmes cannot be evaluated by quality assurance agencies from outside the country to fulfil their obligations for external quality assurance, and no plans are being discussed.

In the light green category, EQAR registration does not always serve as a criterion for agencies to be allowed to carry out cross-border external quality assurance, but all institutions and programmes may choose to be evaluated by a suitable quality assurance agency from outside the country while fulfilling their obligations for accreditation/evaluation/audit.

In the yellow category, only some institutions and/or programmes can choose to be evaluated by a quality assurance agency from outside the country to fulfil their obligations for external quality assurance, while complying with national requirements. In most of these countries quality assurance agencies are limited to a certain type of external quality assurance procedure and they further need to adapt their external quality assurance methodologies to specific national legislation.

Higher education systems in the orange category are in the process of planning the establishment of a legal framework allowing EQAR-registered agencies to operate in the country.

In the most restrictive scenario (signified by red), institutions and programmes lack the option to be evaluated by an external quality assurance agency from another country as part of their obligatory external quality assurance process.

Nearly half (23) of the EHEA higher education systems are in the dark green category, with all higher education institutions and programmes legally permitted to choose a suitable EQAR-registered agency to fulfil their obligations for external quality assurance, while also complying with national requirements.

Recent progress has been made in France, the United Kingdom – Wales (although not visible on the map) and Slovakia, where institutions have been enabled to opt for a suitable EQAR-registered agency as an integral component of their compulsory external quality assurance procedures, subject to the fulfilment of certain prerequisites. Notably, an agreement with the national quality assurance body or authority is necessitated prior to undergoing a review.

There are two notable changes in the light green category. Greece has recently introduced changes in its legal framework that allow higher education institutions in the country to be reviewed by a suitable quality assurance agency (moving the country from orange to light green), while Kazakhstan's decision in 2023 to remove EQAR registration as a necessary condition for operation within the country means a drop from the dark green to the light green category.

Six higher education systems are in the yellow category, restricting cross border evaluation to specifically defined institutions or programmes. In the cases where cross border quality assurance is permitted, EQAR registration for the foreign agency is a requirement. The latest addition in this category (moving from red to yellow) is Spain. Higher education institutions within Catalunya may choose any suitable foreign EQAR-registered agency to meet their external quality assurance requirement, following the agreement of the regional quality assurance agency (Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency). In addition, within Spain any form of cross-border accreditation by an EQAR-registered agency of any joint programme is automatically recognised.

In the orange category, three countries (Croatia, Czechia and Italy) report that they are working to establish a legal framework that would allow EQAR-registered agencies to operate within their borders.

Institutions and programmes in 13 systems lack the option to be evaluated by an external quality assurance agency from another country as part of their obligatory external quality assurance process. These systems, which report no policy discussions aimed at changing this reality, are shown in red.

Overall the picture has not progressed significantly in recent years. Compared to the information published in the 2020 edition of the Implementation Report, the number of systems in the dark green category has slightly decreased as a result of Kazakhstan dropping down to light green, while the only system to move out of the red category is Spain. These findings show that this remains a commitment where countries are divided. The commitment to cross border quality assurance is fully realised in a significant number of systems, but apparently not being addressed in policy development in an important minority of systems.

This information is confirmed by data collected by EQAR in the QA-FIT ministry survey, and also largely corresponds to the information maintained by EQAR as part of its Knowledge Base <sup>(56)</sup>.

Some additional points can also be concluded from EQAR's data. Countries where cross-border quality assurance procedures are recognised as part of the regular external quality assurance framework also have a higher number of cross-border reviews actually taking place. It is notable that countries that permit foreign agencies to undertake quality assurance in their system are more likely to have an EQAR-registered agency that also carries out reviews across-borders. This clearly shows an openness of the whole higher education system (legal framework, quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions) towards cross-border quality assurance, and can be a new way of conceptualising the internationalisation of quality assurance within the EHEA framework.

The majority of cross-border quality assurance procedures (64% of the total cross-border external quality assurance activities) are carried out as voluntary/add-on activities, while mandatory external quality assurance procedures represent 36% of such reviews carried out within the EHEA <sup>(57)</sup>. While there may of course be considerable value for higher education institutions and programmes to undertake additional quality assurance procedures, this is arguably not the form of cross border quality assurance that is most desired within the EHEA.

An array of practical impediments may also constrain the full realisation of the cross-border quality assurance commitment. Stringent eligibility conditions may require institutions to seek approval from a competent national body and demonstrate the benefits of foreign expertise. System level limitations might restrict the scope of review to specific institutions or programmes. And recognition of reviews may depend on approval (of the report and/or the decision) from a competent national body or the national quality assurance agency.

### **2.3.5. The European Approach to the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA**

The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA, adopted by ministers in 2015, was developed to ease external quality assurance of these programmes. It seeks to remove the complexities stemming from the diversity of national standards and differing accreditation processes in European higher education. For joint programmes, different national quality assurance requirements may create heavy administrative processes, based on varying criteria in partner countries, and generating uncertainty. The European Approach is particularly relevant for higher education programmes that require accreditation. For systems where there is no need for external programme accreditation, the use the European Approach for joint programmes is still encouraged. The objective is for the European Approach to be applied directly, circumventing the need for a variety of fragmented quality assurance processes.

The European Approach is built on two foundational elements: a defined set of standards and a predetermined procedure. The standards – Part 1 of the ESG – have been integrated with EHEA tools, especially the EHEA's Qualifications Framework (QF-EHEA) and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

The predefined procedure is available for use by any eligible EQAR-registered quality assurance agency, if one or more of the higher education institutions involved in the delivery of the joint programme require external programme level accreditation. An online toolkit, available on the EQAR website, serves as a comprehensive guide, including written explanations and step-by-step video guidelines.

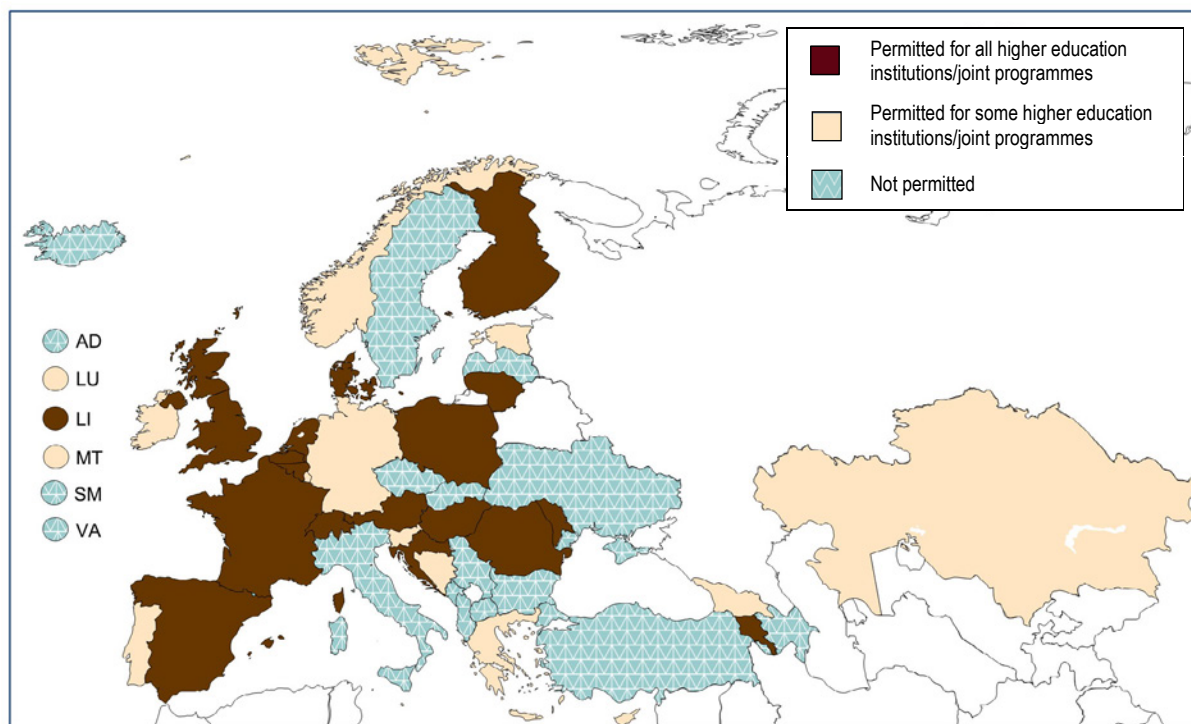
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<sup>(56)</sup> For more information, see EQAR's mapping of system openness to cross-border quality assurance <https://www.eqar.eu/kb/cross-border-qa/mapping-system-openness-to-cbqa/>

<sup>(57)</sup> Based on DEQAR data as of June 2023 provided by all except three EQAR-registered agencies. See also [Search - EQAR](#)

Despite the adoption of the European Approach by ministers in 2015, progress in implementation has been slow. Figure 2.21 shows in which countries legislation permits higher education institutions and programmes to make use of the European Approach.

**Figure 2.21: Countries allowing the European Approach for quality assurance of joint programmes, 2022/2023**



Source: EQAR.

In 2022/2023, seven years after the adoption of the European Approach at the EHEA ministerial conference in Yerevan, 20 out of the 49 EHEA systems had embraced the European Approach for all higher education institutions. This includes countries where quality assurance is largely conducted at the institutional level (Armenia, Finland, the United Kingdom, and Switzerland).

Eleven more systems allow the European Approach to be employed, albeit only for certain institutions or under specific conditions. For example, in Estonia, the use of the European Approach is possible if the joint programme has previously undergone an assessment by an EQAR registered agency and the other higher education partners have the right to provide instruction in the corresponding study programme group and academic cycle.

In Greece, joint programmes offered by Greek higher education institutions participating within a European University Alliance can make use of the European Approach, without any additional national criteria. However, institutions that are not members of a European University Alliance are required to undergo regular programme accreditation for any joint programmes they may offer.

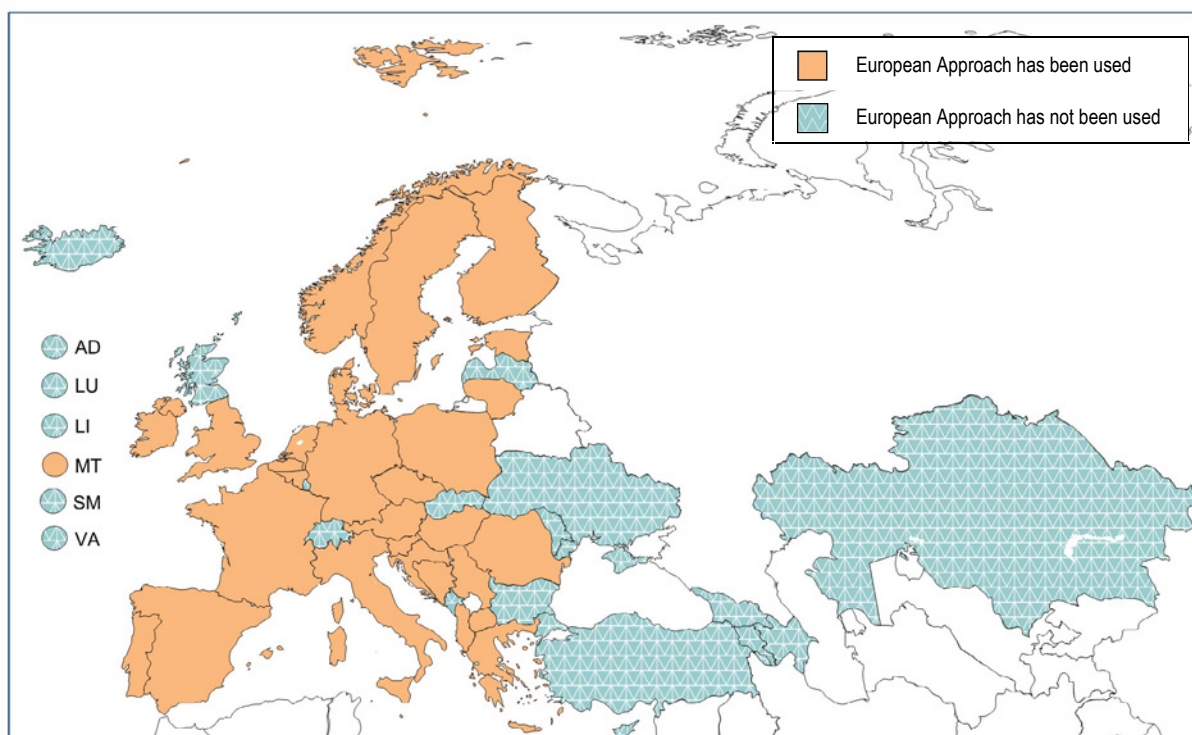
In Georgia, the draft agreement of institutions implementing the joint higher educational programme must be 'pre-approved' by the national quality assurance body, who will check the content and implementation of the joint programme, including whether the national rules for awarding a joint academic degree and enrolment regulations are met.

In the remaining countries, the use of the European Approach cannot be used to replace compulsory national or regional processes.



Figure 2.22 shows in which countries the European Approach has actually been used.

**Figure 2.22: Countries using the European Approach for quality assurance of joint programmes, 2022/2023**



Source: EQAR.

Institutions within 29 EHEA member countries have successfully implemented the European Approach. The highest number of institutions involved in European Approach evaluations can be found in France (13) followed by Germany (12), Spain (11) and the Netherlands (6). All of these countries have introduced a legal framework to facilitate the use of the European Approach for the external quality assurance of joint programmes.

The European Universities initiative <sup>(58)</sup> has put increased focus on joint programmes, and in particular by introducing and testing criteria for a European Degree Label with higher education institutions among the alliances. This may lead to an increased awareness and use of the European Approach.

A total of 32 procedures using the European Approach have been completed between 2016 and 2023 according to DEQAR data. Although this is a low number, there has been an uptake in recent years. This might be a sign that there is increasing familiarity with the procedure, and gives optimism that the trend will increase in the coming years.

<sup>(58)</sup> For more information, see [European Universities initiative | European Education Area \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-room/pages/press-room.aspx?pid=1024&tid=1024&cid=1024)

## 2.4. Conclusions

### 2.4.1. Degree Structures

This section looked at the progress made in the implementation of a common degree structure and the three transparency instruments (the Diploma Supplement, National Qualification Frameworks and the European Credit, Transfer and Accumulation Systems). It also took stock of the programmes outside the Bologna degree structure framework, and the percentage of students involved. Finally, it explored the existence of training modules within higher education institutions that lead to microcredentials.

The analysis shows that there continues to be no single model of degree programme either for the first or for the second cycle. In the majority of EHEA countries, the most common structures are those of 180 ECTS workload programmes for the first cycle and 120 ECTS credits for the second cycle. In the first cycle, the 180 ECTS workload characterises the majority of programmes in more than half of all EHEA countries. In the second cycle, the 120 ECTS model is present in virtually all EHEA systems. The most common combined (first and second cycle) workload corresponds to 300 ECTS credits in around three-quarters of all EHEA countries. In the eastern part of the EHEA, the most common workload is often more substantial, corresponding to 360 ECTS credits. This is mainly due to a higher workload of first-cycle programmes.

Slightly more than half of all EHEA systems offer short-cycle higher education programmes. In most EHEA systems, integrated/long programmes which lead directly to a second cycle degree exist, commonly justified by requirements of regulated professions.

Around one-third of EHEA systems also offer programmes outside the Bologna-degree structure, which cannot be associated easily with the three cycle-degree-structure. These programmes claim to respond to specific needs, often related to professional development and lifelong learning. They often aim to develop the skills oriented towards labour market needs, and have some similarities in this respect with programmes leading to microcredentials. Whether or not these programmes could be integrated into Bologna degree structures (as other countries have done) cross-country readability remains a key issue to ensure that these qualifications can be understood and used throughout the EHEA.

The results of the data analysis show that in more than half of the education systems with available data (29 out of 48), mainly in Western Europe, higher education institutions offer learning modules or courses that lead to microcredentials. Yet, only 10 of them place such courses in their NQFs, and even fewer express their workload in ECTS. Despite the growing popularity of microcredentials in the EHEA, few education systems have yet taken steps to ensure their transparency, cross-country readability and portability. Moreover, legal frameworks regulating microcredentials reveal that the concept is not yet understood in the same way across countries. In some education systems, microcredentials are closely associated with lifelong learning, continuing professional development and re-skilling. While the majority of countries have put in place enabling legal frameworks to ensure that higher education institutions have the possibility to develop flexible modules leading to microcredentials, seven systems that report the existence of microcredentials also report that legislation does not make provisions for them. Instead, higher education institutions have used their autonomy to pursue their development. Further research is needed to better understand the emerging role for microcredentials in the higher education landscape, and to monitor the implementation of key aspects of the European Approach outlined in the 2022 Council Recommendation.

With regard to key transparency tools, around a half of systems with available data (25 out of 48) require external quality assurance agencies to monitor all key aspects of the implementation of ECTS during their regular evaluation processes. All EHEA countries have introduced the Diploma Supplement, with a large majority (39 out of 48 of the education systems with available data) fully complying to all

ministerial engagements (issued automatically, to all first- and second-cycle graduates, in a widely spoken European language and free of charge). Most countries have fulfilled their commitment to establish and use a national qualifications framework compatible with the QF-EHEA. Most education systems (33 out of 48 the education systems with available data) have established their national qualifications framework for higher education, self-certified them to the QF-EHEA and made them available on public websites. In addition, in these countries, the NQF is used by national authorities for at least one of the agreed purposes. Although good progress can be observed in the implementation of national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) compatible with QF-EHEA, more actions are needed to fulfil this key commitment across the EHEA in the near future.

### **2.4.2. Recognition**

Formal compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) is well established across the EHEA. Significant progress can also be observed since the publication of the 2020 Bologna Implementation report, as eight countries have recently embedded all main principles in national legislation. However, despite the overarching legal framework established and the progress reported, many countries still need to take action to ensure that all aspects of the convention are properly implemented in national legislation.

Some countries report recent policy development in relation to the implementation of Article VII of the LRC that offers refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation the opportunity to have their qualifications recognised, including in cases where documents are missing. In total, 29 out of 48 education systems with available data now have a requirement in national legislation for specific recognition procedures to be in place. Other countries claim that procedures are in place even if there is no legal requirement for them. However, there are still five countries that have no requirement for specific recognition procedures to be in place for refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation, and this represents neglect to the implementation of an international legal commitment.

Despite the potential advantages of using the European Qualification Passport for Refugees and the toolkit developed by ENIC-NARIC for recognition of qualifications held by refugees in cases where documentary evidence may be lacking, few EHEA countries take advantage of these tools in practice. Only three countries use both tools systematically, while seven countries make use of them occasionally. In around a quarter of systems there is no information on the use of these tools.

System-level automatic recognition of qualifications and degrees for academic purposes applies in around one-third of the education systems (19 out of 48 systems with available data). In slightly more than one-third of the systems, automatic recognition applies to some EHEA countries, usually based on regional, bilateral or multilateral agreements. The remaining systems still need to up their game to allow qualified learners automatic access to higher education in other countries.

A possible relationship can be observed between the workload of first-cycle programmes and automatic recognition. Education systems where most of the first-degree programmes comprise 180 ECTS (see Figure 2.1) are likely to apply automatic recognition of qualifications for academic purposes. However, with few exceptions, education systems where the workload of most first-cycle programmes is 240 ECTS have not put in place a system to facilitate automatic recognition. More investigation would be needed, however, to find out whether the high workload of first-cycle programmes is an obstacle to the automatic recognition of qualifications.

### **2.4.3. Quality Assurance**

The quality assurance section provides an overview of the evolving landscape of quality assurance, with efforts being made to align national systems with Bologna commitments to further the trust and transparency of European higher education.

The implementation of the key commitment on external quality assurance is picking up some speed. Since the last implementation report, new countries have joined the green category, with efforts being made in Italy, Malta, Moldova, and Slovakia to develop their national quality assurance agencies and seek EQAR registration.

In some countries, student participation in quality assurance follows the agency's alignment with the key commitment, with several countries implementing measures to involve students in governance and review processes. ENQA is playing a crucial role in supporting these efforts, as well as the internationalisation goals of quality assurance agencies. This is particularly important at a time of challenges to internationalisation in the post pandemic context.

Cross-border quality assurance remains an area of considerable variation, notably in the eligibility conditions and requirements set in countries. While activities have increased in number, which is a sign of progress, many institutions lack the option for the cross-border external evaluation to be recognised in their own higher education system.

The use of European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes has increased in recent years, albeit from a very low starting point. However various national regulations continue to hinder its widespread adoption, with only 20 out of 49 EHEA systems fully embracing it.

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