Bologna
Implementation
Coordination Group 2021-2024

PRE-FINAL DRAFT

CONTENT

1. Executive Summary

The Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (BICG) and the three Thematic Peer Groups it coordinates (TPGs A, B, and C), were formed according to the mandate of the **Paris 2018 Ministerial Communiqué**, reconfirmed in the **Rome Communiqué in 2020**.

The motivation behind the creation of the BICG was the realization that, at the distance of many years since the Bologna Declaration, the EHEA's potential for connecting the higher education systems of its members was not fully realised. Many of the very **basic agreements** designed to enable easy transparent mobility have become unquestioned parts of the higher education systems of many member countries, but **not all of them and not everywhere**. Furthermore, those agreements and tools are not always well understood by the higher education community and implemented correctly, knowledgeably and in a way compatible with the practices of other EHEA countries.

After **six years** of experience, a careful examination of what has been achieved, and what not, is both necessary and possible.

The Key Commitments

Among the many commitments of countries belonging to the EHEA, those chosen in Paris as "crucial to reinforcing and supporting quality and cooperation inside the EHEA" were:

- "a three-cycle system compatible with the overarching framework of qualifications of the EHEA and first and second cycle degrees scaled by ECTS
- compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention,
- quality assurance in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area." (Paris Communiqué, p. 2)

In the **Paris Communiqué**[1], the Key Commitments were described more fully in other parts of the text. The Ministers committed to "ensure the full implementation of ECTS, following the guidelines laid down in the 2015 ECTS Users Guide" (Paris Communiqué, p. 2) while the full implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention's transparent recognition procedures for prior learning were 'urged'. The revised Diploma Supplement was to be adopted; a 'short-cycle' qualification was to be implemented if and where in the QF-EHEA a country might want to do so.

The 2021-2024 work period

In the **Rome Communiqué**[2] the results obtained by the BICG and the TPGs by 2020 were judged positively. The Ministers reaffirmed their "determination to see the Key Commitments

[1] The Paris Communiqué 2018 can be accessed here:
https://www.ehea.info/Upload/document/ministerial_declarations/EHEAParis2018_Communique_final_952771.pdf

[2] The Rome Communiqué can be accessed here:
https://www.ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique.pdf

fully implemented" (Rome Communiqué, p 7). They asked "the BFUG to continue to employ the peer support method to achieve this" (Rome Communiqué, p 7). They declared, "We commit to the continued participation in and contribution to this effort" (Rome Communiqué, p 7). Indeed, in the 2021-2024 work period all countries agreed to participate in at least one TPG and many in two or even all three, whether in the role of those requiring or desiring support or those willing to provide it, and often in both.

In the current work period the BICG has continued to coordinate the work of the Thematic Peer Groups in the effort to complete, using peer support methodology, the thorough and compatible implementation of the 'Key Commitments' at the policy, normative and practical levels. The TPGs, building on their achievements in the previous work period, have been active and productive, addressing not only the key commitments themselves, but also a number of connected and emerging themes. They have met numerous times according to well-established modalities: working meetings of the TPGs themselves have been accompanied by panels focussed on specific themes and Peer Learning Activities (PLA) involving numerous stakeholders in various countries. The TPGs have been facilitated and their range of action broadened thanks to 'umbrella' and other specific projects funded by the European Commission through Erasmus+.

The volume of work carried out by the Co-chairs and by many of TPG members is great. Each can boast of relevant activities and achievements:

- **TPG A** focussed on topics, which the members judged helpful for achieving full compliance with the EHEA Qualifications Framework and ECTS. It prepared Guidelines as support for countries needing to prepare Self-Certification reports on their NQFs. It organised Peer Learning activities on learning outcomes, as necessary for the correct implementation of ECTS. It also elaborated an overview and recommendations on implementing the short cycle. It has explored the implications of micro-credentials with regard to the Qualifications Frameworks and ECTS.
- **TPG B** has worked toward the complete establishment of the necessary legal framework to implement the Lisbon Recognition Convention. It has emphasized the necessity of distributing tasks within countries in such a way that recognition can be carried out by competent institutions. TPG B too has explored how recognition can be carried out in the case of flexible learning paths and with regard to the increasing use of micro-credentials. Secure interoperable digital communication of academic credentials and achievement has been seen as an imperative.
- **TPG C**'s objectives include obtaining the necessary legal changes to enable to full realization of the ESG, while also stimulating the development of internal quality culture higher education institutions. Special emerging topics are a shared approach to Joint degrees and in general, cross border quality assurance and enhancement.

Overall, the BICG continues to register the positive results of the Peer support method and notes the importance of the PLA activities in involving broader groups of stakeholders and raising awareness about the importance of the Bologna Process and its tools.

Challenges and evaluation of progress

During the 2018-2020 work period, we recognised the risk that the TPGs might proceed independently although the sectors they were working on actually were in practice closely connected. As an example, we can mention the interdependence of 'recognition', responsibility of the TPG B, and 'quality', responsibility of the TPG C – recognition can only be smooth where there is trust, based on valid quality norms, practices and procedures - as well as the dependence of both on the work of TPG A, which addresses the correct use of the QF-EHEA and of ECTS**. During the present work period, the BICG registers with satisfaction a greater degree of coordination among the TPGs**, which have collaborated on specific themes, often supported by specific Erasmus+ projects, such as the joint preparation of guidelines for micro-credentials.

Nonetheless, the BICG underlines that the **central objective** of each TPG is to assist members in the implementation of the Key Commitments. The findings of the 2024 edition of the BPIR[3] show that there has been progress in several countries since 2020, although further work is still needed to achieve full implementation in all countries. It should also be mentioned that it is not possible to measure what part of the progress is a result of the work of the TPGs.

With regard to TPG A: direct comparison with previous years is not possible using the BPIR 'degree structures' indicator, because it has now been included in the BPIR for the first time. It shows 33 systems in dark green and 13 systems in light green. 6 systems (in yellow and orange) need to make further changes in order to be completely or substantially compliant. Response from 8 systems is unavailable. 25 systems in 2024 are considered dark green with respect to the implementation of ECTS. This is the same number achieved in 2020, although it shows an improvement since 2018, when only 16 systems achieved the 'dark green' status. Improvement in the 2021-2024 work period can be seen in the light green category, where there are now 14 systems, with respect to the 9 that were present in 2020. Still, 9 systems are in the yellow, orange and red categories: thus work remains to be done. 32 systems have obtained dark green with regard to their NQF. This shows progress from 2020, when 30 systems were dark green, and from 2018, when only 28 had achieved this level. The light green category is quantitatively stable (11 in 2018; 12 in 2020 and in 2024). Progress can be seen, nonetheless, in that there are now no systems in the orange and red categories, whereas there were 6 in both 2018 and in 2020. Here 48 systems are in the dark and light green categories (they were respectively 49 and 50 in 2020 and 2018, where, however, the countries currently suspended were taken into consideration).

[3] Note: still in draft version, to be modified if necessary

With regard to TPG B: there is also measurable progress. All principles of the LRC are adopted by 31 countries, whereas this was only true of 23 countries in 2020 and 18 countries in 2018. Four principles are applied by 12 countries, whereas this was the situation of 21 countries in 2020 and 2018. A further specification is whether Article VII of the LRC is recognised by law. Here too there has been progress: in 2024 29 systems have implemented it in law (there were 21 in 2020 and 16 in 2018), whereas those implementing it not in law but in procedures are 14 in 2024, and those neither in law nor in procedures are now 5 (one n/a): this unsatisfactory situation was that of 10 countries in 2020 and 20 countries in 2018. Automatic recognition also shows some progress: At present 18 systems are in the light and dark green category, whereas these were 17 in 2020 and 13 in 2018. There has also been, however, an increase in the number of systems that have received a 'red' scorecard: 14 in 2024, whereas there were 3 and 6 respectively in 2020 and 2028. In the TPG B area we also have the DS scorecard; 48 systems in the green categories, substantially unchanged with respect to 2018 and 2020. Here attention should be given to the remaining 10 systems in light green.

With regard to TPG C the picture is less clear: the 'Alignment with the ESG' scorecard shows 32 systems in the dark and light green categories, whereas there were 36 in 2020, and 34 in 2018. The 'international involvement' scorecard also yields an ambiguous result: in 2024 there are 35 systems in the green categories, whereas these were 37 in 2020 and 28 in 2018. ***The data are incomplete****, however*, as 44 systems are scored, plus one n/a, whereas 50 systems were scored in 2020 and 2018. As to openness to cross border QA, there is progress: the dark green systems are now 23, where they were 21 in 2020 and only 12 in 2018. Nonetheless, this positive trend is limited; there are 14 countries in all three BPIRs in the red category, and in the yellow and orange there are now 11, whereas there were 7 in 2020 and in 2018.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

To sum up: **change, as regards the Key Commitments themselves, has proved positive but slow**. We have attempted to understand why, and to propose how to strengthen the work of the BICG.

We note that countries that have not implemented the Key Commitments completely are not always assiduous partners in the TPG activities. Some countries have asked to participate but have not sent their representatives to the TPG meetings. In other cases, the delegates have participated with enthusiasm and dedication, but their work has not led to legal, normative or practical change. If the members – the countries – themselves are not committed to making the necessary changes, the mandate of the BICG cannot be carried out.

For these reasons, **the BICG recommends** that in the future the Minister of each EHEA country commits:

- to reviewing the **legal and normative actions** made in their country to ensure full implementation, to verify that they are appropriately **updated**, suitable to the current state of affairs and **operational**, and **well known** to the higher education institutions;

- to nominating participants in the Thematic Peer Groups who have the **necessary expertise** in the field, and full knowledge of the current situation at policy level and also in their country's universities;
- to ensuring that their nominees **communicate and collaborate** closely among themselves and with the BFUG members;
- to developing, after each Ministerial Conference, a **publishable implementation plan**, around which to coordinate ministerial actions and those of the working groups.

We note that **the higher education world is evolving rapidly**. In our view, the increasing presence of flexible learning pathways, of personal approaches to learning, of micro-credentials, European University Alliances and other emerging phenomena, make the work of the BICG even more urgent. These changes can be accommodated by the EHEA, thanks to its agreed tools. Their correct and complete implementation, however, is urgent.

The BICG posits that **only through clear convinced and well organized support**, based on the definition of concrete roadmaps – persons responsible, steps to be carried out and deadlines for doing so – will satisfactory progress be made in implementing the Key and other EHEA commitments.

2. Activities and structures of the BICG and the TPGs

2.1 Introduction

At the Ministerial Conference held in Paris in 2018, the ministers of higher education of the EHEA[4] agreed, that full implementation of **three Key Commitments** is crucial for the success of the Bologna Process. The three Key Commitments identified are a three-cycle system compatible with the overarching framework of qualifications of the EHEA having its first and second cycle degrees scaled by ECTS, compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and utilization of the Diploma Supplement, and quality assurance in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.
Moreover, the ministers adopted a structured **Peer Support Approach** based on solidarity, cooperation, and mutual learning to promote the implementation of the three Key Commitments. Consequently, the **Bologna Implementation and Coordination Group (BICG)** was established with the objective of assisting the BFUG in implementing, coordinating and monitoring the peer support approach. The Peer Support Approach was to be facilitated by the establishment of three **Thematic Peer Groups** (TPGs), each dealing with one of the three Key Commitments.

[4] See ANNEX I of the Paris Communiqué, passage on Peer Support

In the Rome communiqué it reads:
"In the 2018 Paris Ministerial Conference we decided to devote special effort to completing implementation of three "Key Commitments" essential for the functioning of the EHEA: the Qualifications Frameworks and ECTS, the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the Diploma Supplement, and Quality Assurance according to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). We reconfirm our determination to see the Key Commitments fully implemented. We ask the BFUG to continue to employ the peer support method to achieve this. We commit to the continued participation in and contribution to this effort." (Rome Communiqué, p. 7)

In preparation for the 2024 Tirana Ministerial Conference and the Communiqué, the BICG herewith analyses the second round of peer support in order to report, through the BFUG, to the ministers and suggest the direction that the Peer Support Approach should take in the future.
This *Final Report on Implementing the Bologna Key Commitments through Peer Support* provides information on the activities implemented and the outcomes of the Peer Support Approach with the objective of informing the discussion of the BFUG on continuation of the peer support after the Tirana Ministerial Conference. In addition to that, this Report brings an assessment of what worked well and what could be improved in the future on the basis of a feedback of the TPG members captured from the meetings and TPG reports.

2.2 BICG activities

The second working period of the Bologna Implementation Working Group from 2021 to 2024 with which the BICG was tasked based on the Rome Communiqué, saw the following activities based on the Terms of Reference (ToR)[5].

"The purpose of the BICG is to facilitate a coordinated implementation of the three Key Commitments. To achieve that, the BICG coordinates the work of the TPGs, and facilitates an exchange of experience and best practice between the TPGs' co-chairs. The BICG follows the peer support activities and reports to the BFUG on overall progress and any necessary revision of the peer support approach or methodology.
The activities should build upon the work and the results/achievements of the BICG in the period 2018-2020 and the outcomes and recommendations of the work of the TPGs presented in the BICG Report. […]

- *Coordinate the work of the TPGs;*

[5] See Annex II for the Terms of Reference for the Bologna Implementation Coordination Group. They can also be downloaded here: https://www.ehea.info/Upload/BICG_PT_AD_ToRs.pdf

- *Follow-up peer support activities by keeping an overview of the composition and activities of the different groups;*
- *Seek to improve the Peer Support Approach for the implementation of the Key Commitments, including possible adjustments;*
- *Identify synergies in the work of the Thematic Peer Groups;*
- *Give the BFUG regular updates and an overview on the progress and effectiveness of the Peer Support Approach for the implementation of the Key Commitments, based on the activities of the TPGs;*
- *Prepare analytical reports to the BFUG on the activities of the different TPGs and the support for the implementation of Key Commitments as a whole, including operation (what works, what doesn't work), impact and usefulness;*
- *Prepare recommendations for further actions to improve the implementation for consideration by the BFUG;*
- *Provide an assessment of the usefulness of thematic peer groups as a working method, including whether they should be extended to other policy areas within the competence of the BFUG."* (ToR, p. 1f.)

With the Covid-19 pandemic still restricting travel seven BICG's meetings, were held online because members of the small group felt the format was appropriate. The 8th meeting was held in presence on 22 January in Rome with the option to take part online for those who were unable to attend in presence.

The first meeting of the BICG was held on 10 May 2021 and focused on the work programme for the BICG 2021-2024; ToRs of the BICG were discussed and confirmed. The Guidelines of the work in the TPGs were introduced by the BICG Co-Chairs, discussed in the group and confirmed with no amendments.
It was agreed that the TPGs develop work plans and ask member countries of the respective TPGs to provide individual country work plans. TPG action plans should be delivered by the end of October 2021 and individual country work plans by the end of January 2022. EC support for implementation of Bologna Key Commitments via TPGs. Since the EC support for the work of the TPGs has proved to be very valuable, the EC envisaged further support through the Erasmus+ EHEA call (Erasmus+ KA3 projects). The call had not been issued at the time of the first BICG meeting but was said to be issued by June 2022.
For Guidelines for the BFUG-Peer Support, 2021-2024 please see Annex III.
It was also decided at this meeting, that the BICG Co-chairs should contact countries, which have not committed to taking part in any of the TPGs to nominate delegates into the TPGs.
The BICG has held eight meetings from 2021 to 2024[6] so far. The first three meetings focused on establishment of the TPGs, setting up working structures and reminding the TPGs to focus

[6] 10 May 2021, 1 October 2021, 21 January 2022, 29 March 2022, 25 October 2022, 28 March 2023, 25 September 2023, 22 January 2024.

on the core of the Key Commitments and not to be carried away by “other”, “new” topics the members of the TPGs also wanted to be worked upon.

The second BICG meeting held on 1 October 2021 was dedicated to an update on the work done so far. Only one country had not declared participation in any of the TPGs and all three TPGs had held their first meetings and had applied for the Erasmus+ KA3 project support. Each TPG had also sent out a survey on status quo, achievements, challenges and implementation plans as well as themes to be worked on regarding the KCs to the members.

By the 3rd BICG meeting on 21 January 2022 all TPGs had delivered their work plans and had received country work plans from their members (with different response rates from the countries). According to the European Commission, the applications for the umbrella projects (EHEA-call) had been evaluated, but results have not been published and contract signing was foreseen for end of March, beginning of April 2022.
The issue that countries which are part of EHEA, but not ERASMUS + partner countries are unable to apply was noted by the Commission and will be taken into consideration for the next call after the Tirana Ministerial.
The 3 TPGs presented their work plans, topics and the structures they wanted to work with. Beside WG meetings (at least two per year), PLAs, staff mobility schemes (proved to be a successful feature in the period 2018 to 2020) and work in smaller groups was envisaged, provided the projects would receive funding through the Erasmus+ projects.
The BICG co-chairs reminded the TPGs to focus on the Key Commitments and to ask for active participation from the countries.

The 4th meeting shortly after on 29 March 2022 was held because the results from the EHEA call had been shared by the EC and contracts were to be finalized. TPG A’s QUATRA, TPG B’s TPG-LRC CoRE and TPG C’s IMINQA project applications were approved and projects would last 2022 to 2025 (until after the Tirana Ministerial Conference).
TPG Co-chairs shared their work plans of the umbrella projects with the topics in focus, time lines, work packages and topics for peer learning activities, sub-working groups and staff mobility schemes.
It was stressed in the discussion that active participation and commitment to factual implementation of Key Commitments should be at the centre. It was also acknowledged that additional important topics arose within the TPGs and topics like Micro-Credentials were transversal and therefore coordination among TPGs and exchange of the work done was necessary.

The 5th meeting of the BICG prior to the BFUG in Brno (November 2022) focused on the work in the TPGs that had started after the approval of the projects, all TPGs had held physical meetings and/or PLAs and work of the sub-groups had begun. There, a mix of online and physical meetings was applied. All three TPGs not only provided regular update to the BICG,

but also made sure that information regarding their TPG is available on the website www.ehea.info.

In the 6th BICG meeting on 26 March 2023, the draft structure of the BICG final report was discussed, since a final draft of the report would have to be delivered for the BFUG Board in Tblisi (October 2023) and the Madrid BFUG (mid November 2023). The BICG thought that this was very early, because the working period of the umbrella projects had only just begun, and it would be too early to come up with concrete results. It was felt that the structure of the report would probably be the same as for the Rome Ministerial. TPG Co-chairs were asked to send their draft reports to the BICG until 26 September 2023.
During the 6th meeting the first input of the BICG for the Tirana Communiqué needed to be discussed and a first draft, very much along the same lines as for the Rome Communiqué, was sent to the Drafting committee after the meeting.
TPG updates were received and discussed as well.

The 7th BICG meeting was dedicated to updates from all members of the BICG, esp. TPGs as well as to the discussion on BICG and TPG recommendations for the Tirana Communiqué and the content of the BICG report.
At the Board meeting on 2 October 2023 in Tblisi the BICG update was presented and the Drafting Committee raised a few questions to be answered by the BICG, but also by the TPGs. These questions have been communicated to the TPGs by the BICG Co-chairs; answers have been communicated to the DC in preparation of the Madrid BFUG.
It was planned to send a draft BICG report to the secretariat by end of October 2023. Due to unforeseen circumstances a draft report could not be sent, BICG provided a work progress update for the BUFG meeting in Madrid in November 2023 and a BICG input for the Communiqué.
The BICG Co-chairs envisaged to discuss BICG (and TPG) – input for Madrid in an ad-hoc meeting on 2 or 3 November 2023. Due to members not having time, this meeting could not take place.

2.3 Composition of the BICG and the TPGs

COMPOSITION OF THE BICG

Co-chairs:	Austria, Bulgaria, Italy
Members:	Co-chairs of TPG A on QF (Austria, Georgia, Latvia), Co-chairs of TPG B on LRC (Albania, France, Italy), Co-chairs of TPG C on QA (Belgium-Flemish Community, Kazakhstan, Romania), Co-chair of WG1 (Eurydice), EUA, EURASHE, European Commission, Georgia, Romania

COMPOSITION OF THE TPG A ON THE QF-EHEA

Co-chairs: Austria, Georgia, Latvia

Members: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium Flemish Community, Bulgaria, Council of Europe, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, EI-ETUCE, Estonia, ESU – European Students' Union, EURASHE, European Commission, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Malta, Montenegro, The Netherlands, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, San Marino, Slovak Republic, Spain, Türkiye, United Kingdom (Scotland)

COMPOSITION OF THE TPG B ON LRC

Co-chairs: Albania, France, Italy

Members: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium Flemish Community, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Council of Europe, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, EI-ETUCE, EQAR, Estonia, ESU – European Students' Association, EUA – European University Association, EURASHE, European Commission, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Holy See, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, The Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, UNESCO, United Kingdom

COMPOSITION OF THE TPG C ON QA

Co-chairs: Belgium-Flemish Community, Kazakhstan, Romania

Members: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Flemish Community, Bulgaria, Council of Europe, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, EI-ETUCE, EQAR, Estonia, ESU – European Students' Union, EUA – European University Association, EURASHE, European Commission, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Holy See, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, The Netherlands, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, UNESCO, United Kingdom

A record of attendance for all meetings is provided in Annex IV.

2.5 Thematic orientations of the TPGs

	Thematic Peer Group A (QFs)	Thematic Peer Group B (LRC)	Thematic Peer Group (QA)
Thematic orientations:	• Self-certification of the national qualification frameworks to the overarching Qualifications Framework of the EHEA; • Complete implementation of the ECTS User's Guide; • Short cycle higher education; • Multiple purposes and use of the qualifications frameworks by the stakeholders; • Study programmes outside of the Bologna three-cycle structure; • Relationship between the qualifications frameworks and quality assurance.	• Establishing the legal framework to allow the implementation of the LRC; • Establishing the distribution of work and responsibilities among the competent institutions that have the right knowledge and capacity to carry out recognition procedures; • Achieving automatic recognition; • Recognition of alternative pathways; • Qualifications held by refugees; • Optimising the potential of digital technology for the recognition agenda and the Diploma Supplement.	• Legislative framework in line with the ESG • Internal quality assurance • Enhancement-oriented use of the ESG • The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes • Cross-border Quality Assurance • Quality assurance of micro-credentials • Quality assurance of European Universities • Digitalisation of quality assurance processes

3. Implementation of the Key Commitments

3.1 The Thematic Peer Group A on Qualification Frameworks

The Thematic Peer Group A focuses on the Key Commitment 1: a three-cycle system compatible with the overarching frameworks of the EHEA and first and second cycle degrees scaled by ECTS.

3.1.1 Meetings and activities

Dates of TPG A, peer learning activities (PLA) and Working Group meetings.
The following meetings and peer learning activities have taken place so far.

Meetings:	7 June2021, online
	4 November 2021, online
	15 March 2022, online
	21 October 2022, Riga, Latvia
	26 April 2023, Vienna, Austria
	29 September 2023, Tbilisi, Georgia
Peer learning activities:	20 October 2022, Riga, Latvia
	25 April 2023, Vienna, Austria
	28 September 2023, Tbilisi, Georgia

Parallel to the peer learning activities and TPG A meetings several meetings for three working groups (Micro-credentials, Self-certification and Short-cycle HE) were organised to discuss the issues related to Qualification Frameworks and to produce recommendations on those topics.

WG on Self-Certification meetings	29 September 2022, online
	21 October 2022, Riga, Latvia
	23 February 2023, online
	26 April 2023, Vienna, Austria
	29 August 2023, Tbilisi, Georgia
WG on Micro-Credentials meetings	22 September 2022, online
	20 October 2022, Riga, Latvia
	9 March 2023, online
	25 April 2023, Vienna, Austria
	24 August 2023, online
	28 September 2023, Tbilisi, Georgia

WG on Short-Cycle HE meetings	7 September 2022, online 21 October 2022, Riga, Latvia 15 March 2023, online 26 April 2023, Vienna, Austria 31 August 2023, online 29 September 2023, Tbilisi, Georgia

In the last WG meetings the draft recommendations were discussed and improved; the work of producing final document is still in the process.

3.1.2 Summary of TPG A meetings

The 1st TPG A meeting online (7 June 2021)

In the first meeting, TPG A members discussed ideas and proposals from the existing materials/documents to determine the starting point of the work of TPG A in the new period. A draft survey was introduced to serve as a guide for drafting the work plan for the 2021-2024 period.

The 2nd TPG A meeting online (4 November 2021)

During the meeting, an overview of the survey results was presented, highlighting the purpose of the survey to identify the priorities of the members for the work period 2021-2024 and determine where each country member stands in terms of their priorities. The key priorities identified included micro-credentials, the use of the QFs by stakeholders, the relationship between QA and the QFs, the implementation of the ECTS Users' Guide, short-cycle qualifications, and self-certification. The members decided to establish three working groups on QF-related topics – self-certification, micro-credentials and short-cycle in HE.

The 3rd TPG A meeting online (15 March 2022)

During the meeting, a summary of the Country Action Plans was presented, stating that 18 plans had been received so far and remaining countries were encouraged to deliver their Action Plans as soon as feasible. The representative from Albania provided an outline of the Albanian Qualifications Framework as referenced to the European Qualifications Framework and self-certification of compatibility with self-referencing to the Qualifications Framework of EHEA. There is a growing interest in the self-certification process, and acquiring feedback and experience from the countries that have already gone through this process is extremely valuable for this group's work. Sharing experiences is expected to expand among new members in the working groups, as well as through participation in the upcoming PLA formats.

The 4th TPG A meeting in Riga, Latvia (21 October 2022)

An outline of the umbrella project QUARTA – TPG A (Qualification Frameworks for trust, transparency and diversity – TPG A) in support of the work of TPG A was presented to the members of the group, focusing on specific thematic directions and core priorities. Some of

the TPG A activities overlap with TPG B and TPG C in tackling rather complex questions and topics from different angles. There were presentations from TPG B and TPG C describing the composition, thematic orientations, and the main activities of their groups. The members of TPG A were informed about the activities in three working groups: micro-credentials, self-certification and short-cycle HE. All the working groups made presentations on their related topics and discussed the survey methodology.
Discussion on latest developments on Qualification Frameworks was carried out in small groups. The countries shared their experience regarding validation of informal and non-formal learning, recognition of foreign qualifications and discussed the tools developed at national level.

The 5th TPG A meeting in Vienna, Austria (26 April 2023)

The meeting started with updates from the working groups on Micro-Credentials, Self-Certification and Short-Cycle HE. All the working groups were in the process of drafting recommendations after having completed surveys and analysed the results.
A panel discussion on policy priorities in the context of learning outcomes followed where such questions as the necessity of having a common strategic framework among HEIs, the importance of students being involved in defining learning outcomes, the importance of incorporating democratic values and competences in the development of learning outcomes were discussed.
Reflection on countries' Action Plans was organised regarding the implementation of their Action Plan and the latest updates as well as the necessary support for the countries in meeting their needs related to Action Plan implementation. The discussion groups pointed out the need for further discussions on micro-credentials and learning outcomes and emphasised the importance of practical advice and guidance, particularly in terms of initiating the development of learning outcomes and navigating the self-certification process.

The 6th TPG A meeting in Tbilisi, Georgia (29 September 2023)

The updates from the working groups on Micro-Credentials, Self-Certification and Short-Cycle HE informed about the process of finalising recommendations. The structure of recommendations on micro-credentials was explained emphasising the principles guiding the recommendations: conducting the work in line with all TPGs; drafting recommendations on a case-by-case basis; avoiding overregulation of micro-credentials; and ensuring flexibility. The structure of recommendation on short-cycle qualifications HE was presented, emphasising seven elements – access to short-cycle studies, the duration and volume of the studies (90-120 ECTS); access to pathways to further higher education studies; SCQ QF level (EQF level 5); the level should be specified in the diploma; QA principles should comply with ESG principles. Discussion in small groups followed where such questions as automatic recognition, self-certification and transparency of micro-credentials were discussed.
An update from TPG B group was provided, emphasising the work in TPG B meetings, peer-learning activities, designing two surveys and discussing such topics as digitalization,

recognition of qualifications of refugees from Ukraine, distribution of tasks and responsibilities, and the legal framework.

3.1.3 Summary of TPG A peer learning activities

Peer learning activity "The Place of Micro-Credentials in Qualifications Frameworks for Higher Education" in Riga, Latvia (20 October 2022)

The PLA on micro-credentials was organised to provide TPG A members with the opportunity to share their experiences and opinions on inclusion of micro-credentials in NQFs providing the necessary support for the countries, which have not yet determined their legal procedures on defining and developing micro-credentials in their countries.

The PLA was attended by the TPG A on QF members and national authorities responsible for the development of higher education qualifications in Latvia including the representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia, Academic Information Centre also higher education experts and other key stakeholders. As part of the PLA agenda, the topic of micro-credentials was examined from the global point of view, following the experiences of countries such as Ireland, Malta and Canada. Further information on the results of the study "Micro-credentials in Latvia" was presented, exploring such aspects as the concept of micro-credentials, recognition and quality assurance of micro-credentials in Latvia.

The PLA agenda also included discussion in groups on issues related to micro-credentials: quality assurance, inclusion in the NQF, recognition and validation.

More information about PLA:
https://aic.lv/en/paraic/project/quatra-tpg-a/pla-in-riga

Peer learning activity "How are learning outcomes perceived, transmitted, and implemented in the daily practice of Higher Education Institutions?" in Vienna, Austria (25 April 2023)

Both the full implementation of the QF-EHEA as well as ECTS require that learning outcomes be used in a systematic manner across higher education systems on the programme level as well as on the level of individual courses. Apart from TPG A members, the PLA was attended by Austrian stakeholders (representatives of higher education institutions, the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research and Universities Austria).

The programme consisted of a keynote speaker Declan Kennedy, University College Cork, Ireland, who elaborated on how learning outcomes describe student learning and how they are connected to the "big picture" of qualification frameworks, ECTS and quality assurance. This was complemented by an international case study from the University of Zadar and two national case studies from Austria, the University of Applied Sciences Technikum Wien (our

host institution) and the University of Vienna. Moreover, there was an update on the NEXUS project of the German Rectors' Conference.

Following this, discussions addressed the diverse interests and backgrounds of participants:

- Topic 1: Writing and using learning outcomes – everything you need to know
- Topic 2: External quality assurance of learning outcomes and their implementation
- Topic 3: Learning outcomes and NQFs: what is at stake?

The PLA in Vienna was designed as an opportunity for TPG A members to share experiences among themselves and gain new insights from external experts. It was intended to foster the general understanding of learning outcomes and provide practical advice on specific aspects and applications. It was complemented by the Tallinn PLA held early the next year, which focussed specifically on learning outcomes on the programme level.

More information about the PLA:
https://aic.lv/en/par-aic/projects/quatra-t-a/pla-in-vienna

Peer learning activity "Self-Certification of National Qualifications Frameworks to the Overarching Qualifications Framework of the EHEA" in Tbilisi, Georgia (28 October 2022)
The PLA was attended by the TPG A on QF members and national authorities responsible for the development of higher education qualifications in Georgia including the representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement, and also other higher education experts and key stakeholders. The PLA participants were warmly welcomed by the deputy minister of Education and Science of Georgia and the director of the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement. As a central part of the PLA agenda, the TPG A on QF presented its draft guidelines, observations and recommendations on preparation of self-certification reports within the Bologna Process. The document is based on the TPG A survey key findings and intensive in person and online discussions, which took place within the working group on Self-Certification. The recommendations presented touched on the following main topics:

- Updated verification and process criteria;
- Self-certification steps for EHEA member states;
- Involvement of international/external experts;
- A proposed procedure of submission of the self-certification report with involvement of National Correspondents Network;
- Preparing EQF and QF-EHEA reports as one report, if applicable;
- Interval between self-certification processes (5-7 years);
- The structure of the self-certification report.

The PLA agenda also included a panel discussion by four international experts, who have practical experience in self-certification process in several countries in the role of invited

international experts. Despite the countries' national context and differences, the international experts pointed out the common key challenges for many countries in self-certification process and they proposed recommendations for effective self-certification report development, stakeholder engagement and collaboration with international experts. The PLA participants learnt from the experiences of two countries (Kazakhstan and Latvia) on the self-certification process through comprehensive presentations, which were followed by discussions in small groups.

After the PLA, the TPG A on QF incorporated the feedback from the PLA discussions into the draft document on guidelines, observations and recommendations on the preparation of self-certification reports within the Bologna Process. Afterwards, the document was circulated within the TPG A group for final comments and suggestions.

More information about the PLA:
https://aic.lv/en/par-aic/projects/quatra-tpg-a/pla-in-tbilisi

3.1.4 Summary of the assignments of the TPG A Working Groups

The aim of the working groups is to provide a platform for more intensive discussions in order to provide specific recommendations on QF-related topics at the end of the project.

Working Group on Self-Certification

The working group on Self-Certification consists of eight members (Andorra, Armenia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Greece and Kazakhstan, Latvia) and started its work in September 2022.

The purpose of the working group on self-certification is to review the existing self-certification mechanism and provide support to the countries that undertake the self-certification process, and eventually to develop recommendations on NQF self-certification. For this reason, a questionnaire on self-certification of NQF against the QF-EHEA was created by working group members and sent to TPG A members in December 2022.

The results of the survey were gathered and analysed to be used as input for the recommendations. Draft guidelines, observations and recommendations on preparation of self-certification reports within the Bologna Process have been formulated.

WG members drafted recommendations on the following aspects:

- Updating criteria and procedures for verifying the compatibility of national qualifications frameworks with the QF-EHEA;
- Updating the self-certification reports;

- Development guidance material for international experts providing support in self-certification process, which includes their review of the self-certification report and statement;
- Recommendations for EHEA member states on the steps within the self-certification process;
- Recommendations for EHEA member states on the involvement of international experts;
- Recommendations on the structure of the self-certification report.

Recommendation and guidelines on self-certification are being prepared.

Working Group on Micro-Credentials

The working group on Micro-Credentials consists of 16 countries (Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belgium Flanders, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Latvia, The Netherlands, Poland, Romania, UK - Scotland) and one organisation (European Students' Organisation), and started its work in September 2022.

The purpose of the working group on micro-credentials is to explore the existence of smaller units of learning possibly leading to micro-credentials available in the HE sector (EQF level 5-8) and provide recommendations on the inclusion of micro-credentials in the QF. Therefore, a questionnaire on micro-credentials in QFs based on SWOT analysis results was designed and sent to TPG A members to be completed in January 2023.

Based on the survey results, recommendation and guidelines for the design and implementation of small units of learning leading to micro-credentials were prepared. The draft document includes:

- Recommendations for system-level policies and/or legislation for national authorities in the countries of the European Higher Education Area;
- Recommendations and guidelines for practical use by higher education institutions in the European Higher Education Area;
- Recommendations for quality assurance agencies for developing standards, principles, procedures or approaches to quality assurance of MCs.

Recommendations and guidelines (for each of the stakeholders) cover the following topics: involvement of stakeholders, inclusion in the NQF, learning outcomes, assessment, recognition of prior learning, level, workload, quality, supplement to micro-credentials, transparency, learning pathways etc.

Recommendation and guidelines on micro-credentials are being prepared.

Working Group on Short-Cycle HE

The working group on Short-Cycle HE consists of five members (Albania, Azerbaijan, Belgium Flanders, Bulgaria, Latvia) and started its work in September 2022.

The purpose of the working group is to exchange the best practices on short cycle solutions to reach recognition by learners and labour market. In order to explore the situation regarding short-cycle qualifications in higher education in TPG A member countries, a questionnaire was created in December 2022 with separate sets of questions for the countries which have short-cycle HE programmes and for those which do not.

The questionnaire was sent to TPG A members for completion, the results of the survey were analysed and draft recommendations on short-cycle qualifications in higher education were prepared.

The main recommendations regarding short-cycle qualifications in HE include:

- Access to short-cycle studies;
- Duration and/or volume of study programmes (90-120 ECTS credits);
- Access to further studies (i.e., existing bridges to Bachelor's studies);
- EQF or QF-EHEA level (EQF level 5/short-cycle within the QF-EHEA)
- Quality assurance according to the principles of ESG;
- Differentiation between short-cycle qualifications and micro-credentials;
- Recognition of the short-cycle qualifications;
- Automatic recognition of the short-cycle qualifications.

Recommendation and guidelines on short-cycle HE are being prepared.

3.1.5 Main outcomes, conclusions and recommendations

The TPG A group has been active since 2021, as is evidenced by good participation in TPG A meetings, PLAs, as well as in the working groups. The TPG A believes that it is useful to continue the work in the next period as well, because the development of the qualifications framework is pivotal for the realization of the European Higher Education Area.

Recommendations for the implementation of the QF-EHEA are focused on short-cycle qualifications in HE, micro-credentials and self-certification.

Recommendation on self-certification

TPG A stresses the lack of clear guideline on procedural issues and self-certification criteria. Countries shared that there is lack of expertise and knowledge on how to put into practice the self-certification process. There are no guidelines from the Council of Europe and the European Commission describing the criteria and procedure whether for the self-certification process to the QF-EHEA or for the referencing process to the EQF. Also, there is uncertainty on determining the exact content of the information the national report should contain and how it should be structured, and there is lack of information how to plan and proceed the actual NQF referencing/self-certification process. The TPG A elaborated recommendations to

help EHEA countries to organise the self-certification process, composing and submitting their self-certification report. The recommendations elaborated include the following topics:

- Updating criteria and procedures for verifying the compatibility of qualifications frameworks with the QF-EHEA;
- Development of a publication of procedure for the self-certification process;
- Updating the self-certification reports;
- Development of guidance material for international experts providing support in self-certification process, which includes their review of the self-certification report and statement;
- Recommendations for EHEA member states on the steps to be taken within the self-certification process;
- Recommendations for EHEA member states on the involvement of international experts;
- Recommendations on the structure of the self-certification report.

Recommendation on micro-credentials

TPG A Working Group on Micro-Credentials explored the existence of smaller units of learning possibly leading to micro-credentials available in in higher education sector (EQF level 5-8) of the TPG A countries, including adult continuing learning. General consensus could be observed that including micro-credentials in the National Qualifications Framework would be beneficial for both individuals and employers. The majority of TPG A members believed that micro-credentials provide a valuable means of developing specific knowledge, skills and competences, and, furthermore, if micro-credentials were included in the NQF, a more standardised and transparent system of credentials could be established promoting the quality of qualifications.

In conclusion, the results of the survey highlight both the opportunities and challenges associated with the implementation of micro-credentials in higher education. On the one hand, significant interest and willingness among HEIs to introduce micro-credentials was noted, driven by factors such as the demand for more flexible and targeted learning pathways, and the specific nature of micro-credentials. On the other hand, a number of internal and external factors can hinder the development and implementation of micro-credentials, including the lack of clear quality assurance criteria, poor understanding by stakeholders of the concept of micro-credentials, and the need for practical provisions and funding to support their implementation.

The TPG A working group elaborated recommendations for the main stakeholders of micro-credentials:

- Recommendations for system-level policies and/or legislation for national authorities in the countries of the European Higher Education Area;

- Recommendations and guidelines for practical use by higher education institutions in the European Higher Education Area;
- Recommendations for quality assurance agencies developing standards, principles, procedures or approaches to quality assurance.

The recommendations and guidelines cover the following topics from the perspective of above-mentioned stakeholders:
involvement of stakeholders, inclusion in the NQF, learning outcomes, assessment, recognition of prior learning, level, workload, quality, a possible supplement to micro-credentials, transparency, learning pathways.

Recommendation on short-cycle qualifications

At policy level, the short-cycle qualifications were initially described as a stand-alone qualification within the QF-EHEA by the Paris Communiqué (25.05.2018), which is the latest Communiqué focusing on the short cycle. The Communiqué noted that in "many of our systems, ECTS-based short-cycle qualifications play an increasingly important role in preparing students for employment and further studies, as well as in improving social cohesion by facilitating access for many who would otherwise not have considered higher education" (p. 2). As a part of Working Group on Short-Cycle HE activities, a survey was designed to explore the situation regarding short-cycle qualifications in higher education in TPG A member countries. The results of the survey provided foundation for developing this recommendation for any country that decide to include or develop short-cycle qualifications in their QFs of higher education.

The countries considering the introduction of short-cycle qualifications need to set appropriate entry requirements, i.e., secondary education qualifications that provide access to higher education in the country in question.

The volume of short-cycle study programmes should be expressed in ECTS expressing workload and learning outcomes. Countries, introducing or developing the short-cycle qualifications should follow the Paris Communiqué suggestions that the short-cycle qualifications include 90-120 ECTS credits.

The countries planning to introduce short-cycle qualifications should ensure strong pathways to further higher education, especially to first-cycle studies, including validation practices, exemptions and credit transfers.

The QF level of short-cycle qualifications should correspond to EQF level 5 or QF-EHEA short-cycle to ensure their comparability and international recognition.

Higher education quality assurance procedures and ESG principles should apply to short-cycle qualifications.

When introducing short-cycle qualifications, the country should clearly define short-cycle qualifications to distinguish them from micro-credentials and smaller learning experiences.

Countries should comply with the Lisbon Recognition Convention (1997) and its subsidiary texts to ensure fair recognition of short-cycle qualifications.
The possibility of applying automatic recognition for short cycle qualifications should be further explored.

3.2 The Thematic Peer Group B on Recognition

The Thematic Peer Group B focuses on the Key Commitment 2: national legislation and procedures compliant with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the Diploma Supplement.

3.2.1 Meetings and activities

A selection of such examples coming together after consulting all BFUG members and asking them to submit their inspiring practices was made.

Meetings:	14 September 2021, online 18 January 2022, online 9-10 June 2022, Sèvres, France 24 January 2023, online 27 April 2023, Tirana, Albania 1 February 2024, online
Events:	9 June 2022, Sèvres, France: Seminar on recognition of alternative pathways 28 April 2023, Tirana, Albania: Seminar on automatic recognition

The composition of the TPG, with a mix of representatives of the Ministries and ENIC-NARIC centres (39 countries, 7 consultative members, European Commission)[7] proved to provide a good balance of policy makers and professionals involved in recognition that facilitated discussion and exchange of practices. The TPG B on LRC was co-chaired by Albania, France, and Italy, who were responsible for coordinating the group activity and facilitating the discussion among its members. They were also in charge of reporting on the progress of the group to the BICG/BFUG.

3.2.2 Work of the Thematic Peer Group B

With the re-confirmation of the three TPGs for the 2021-2024 period by the BFUG in April 2021, it was specified in the BFUG Work Plan that the TPGs were to be built on the work implemented during the previous mandate to provide a forum to support countries toward the implementation of the three key commitments. In line with these indications, the TPG B

[7] Starting with 36 countries, TPG B comprises now a total of 39 country members, with the participation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Slovak Republic.

was expected to be active **from May 2021 to May 2024** focusing its action on the implementation of the Key Commitment 2. Among these indications, particular emphasis was given to the ones **prioritised by the TPG B** on the basis of the results of the **survey sent to the TPG B members in June 2021.**[8]

The thematic indications are listed below in the order of preference expressed by the TPG B members:

- Optimising the potential of digital technology for the recognition agenda and the Diploma Supplement;
- Recognition of alternative pathways;
- Achieving automatic recognition;
- Establishing the distribution of work and responsibilities among the competent institutions that have the right knowledge and capacity to carry out recognition procedures;
- Ensuring the fair recognition of qualifications held by refugees;
- Establishing the legal framework to allow the implementation of the LRC.

Furthermore, the following transversal sub-topics emerged as priorities to be tackled by the TPG B:

- Cooperation with higher education institutions;
- Synergies with relevant initiatives (EU-funded projects, Bologna Process activities);
- Cooperation with the other TPGs.

Pursuant to the principles embedded in the *Rome Communiqué*, **peer support** is the approach underpinning the activity of the TPG B. The working methods combine a mix of **panel meetings** to share information and **smaller group activities** to facilitate the exchange of practices through peer support activities.

In line with the guidelines of the BICG, the TPG B has so far organised 6 meetings out of a total of 7. The 6th meeting was scheduled online on 1 February 2024 and the last meeting is planned to take place in April 2024. The meetings offer the opportunity to share experiences and practices to foster the implementation of the key commitment 2 at national level, as well as to plan and monitor the group action.

Furthermore, the EU funded umbrella project *TPG-LRC Constructing Recognition in the EHEA* (*TPG-LRC CoRE*), is supporting the organization of 3 **public seminars**, a **staff mobility** activity, a series of **Peer Learning Activities** and **research and publications** on micro-credentials, digital technology for the recognition agenda, and quality of recognition (as detailed below).

[8] The questionnaires (one for countries and one for consultative members and institutions) were sent to the TPG B members on 24th June 2021, the first deadline to submit it was on 23rd July 2021 and then extended until 3rd September 2021. The survey was aimed at gaining a picture of the state of play of the implementation of the Bologna key commitment 2 and capturing the main interests, challenges, and good practices of the members of the group. 30 responses have been collected (26 countries and 4 Consultative members).

The results reached by the group are shared during the TPG B meetings and **monitored** against the outcomes inserted in the Group's Work Plan. To this end, the TPG B members are expected to fill in two questionnaires (interim and final monitoring questionnaire). The questionnaire on the mid-term monitoring of the Action Plan of the TPG B was distributed with the purpose of measuring the extent to which the work within TPG B has contributed to the implementation of the Bologna Key Commitment 2 at national level. In addition to this, results of the mid-term questionnaire contributed to better attuning the activity of the Peer Group with the indications provided by its members. The questionnaire was distributed in fall 2022 and results presented during the TPG B meeting held on 24 January 2023. The final monitoring will be sent to the TPG B members at the end of the working period.

3.2.3 Summary of TPG B meetings

The 1st TPG B meeting online (14 September 2021)

The first meeting, was attended by 47 members (28 countries, 5 consultative members, EC). The meeting was aimed at **defining the work plan of the group** starting from an overview of the implementation of the LRC in the EHEA countries from different perspectives starting from a presentation of the implementation of the Bologna key commitment 2 from different angles. Moreover, the results of the survey circulated among the TPG B members in June 2021 were presented. At that stage, the methodology to be employed by the group was also pointed out and resulted in the sharing of good practices, the peer approach.

Finally, the members of TPG B were divided into 3 working groups to discuss the selected thematic priorities included in the questionnaires (for countries, as well as consultative members and institutions) in the order of preference expressed by the respondents of the questionnaire.

The 2nd TPB B meeting online (18 January 2022)

The second meeting was attended by 55 Participants (27 countries, 4 consultative members, EC). It focused on sharing experiences on digital technology and the Diploma Supplement for the recognition agenda. It offered an opportunity to gain knowledge about initiatives and practices carried out at international level as well as to share practices implemented at national level in smaller working groups. The first part of the meeting addressed the developments and practices in the three dimensions of digitalization that emerged from the survey distributed to TPG B members in June 2021, namely: secure, trusted, and transparent data provision; platforms for credential sharing; criteria and principles of the LRC applied to the digitization of the recognition process.

The 3rd TPB B meeting in Sèvres, France (9-10 June 2022)

The third meeting was attended by 33 members (22 countries and 5 consultative members). It combined a **mix of panel discussions** to convey relevant/up-to-date information and a **peer-support activity** to give the possibility to share national experiences, practices and perspectives to fulfil the LRC implementation.

The first part, held in the afternoon of June 9, started with the presentation of the Erasmus+ umbrella project TPG-LRC CoRE and was followed by an overview on the cooperation with the other Thematic Peer Groups, with inputs from the TPG A and TPG C. Secondly, a section was devoted to the presentation of practices, tools and normative instruments to support recognition of qualifications held by refugees. A particular focus was devoted to support recognition of qualifications from Ukraine.
The second part of the meeting, which took place on June 10, was centered on **Peer support activities**, respectively on digitalization for the recognition agenda and recognition of alternative pathways.
The TPG B meeting was preceded by a **public seminar on alternative pathways** that was conceived to supplement the activity of the group.

The 4th TPG B meeting online (24 January 2023)
The fourth meeting was attended by 46 participants (26 countries, 4 consultative members, EC). It was focused on the specific thematic indication for TPG B **"**establishing the distribution of work and responsibilities among the competent institutions that have the right knowledge and capacity to carry out recognition procedure**s".** Furthermore, the meeting offered an opportunity to share information on the state of art of the activities linked to the TPG B on LRC and to present documents developed in the framework of the TPG-LRC CoRE project.
The last part of the meeting was devoted to a peer-support activity on the three specific priorities, which are also addressed in the TPG-LRC CoRE project: micro-credentials, digital technology for the recognition agenda, and quality of recognition. Participants were divided into three breakout rooms to work together and exchange ideas.

The 5th meeting in Tirana, Albania (27 April 2023)
The fifth meeting was attended by 39 participants (22 countries and 6 consultative members). The meeting focused on the specific thematic indications for TPG B: "establishing the legal framework to allow the implementation of the LRC". After a preliminary presentation on the 2022 Monitoring report on the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the first part of the meeting was characterised by an open discussion on the report abovementioned. Participants were split into groups for focused discussions on each of the five topics covered in the LRC 2022 monitoring report. The aim was to explore the priorities outlined in the report for each topic and determine the initial steps necessary to ensure the complete implementation of the relevant aspects of the LRC. A matchmaking activity on the 6 specific thematic indication for TPG B then followed, with the aim of setting up the staff mobility for TPG B members to organise within the TPG-LRC CoRE project.
The second part of the meeting was devoted to a peer-support activity on the specific thematic indication for TPG B: "distribution of work and responsibilities among the competent authorities that carry out recognition procedures" (see Annex III).
The TPG B meeting was followed by a **public seminar on automatic recognition** that was conceived to supplement the activity of the group.

3.2.4 Peer support activities and staff mobility

After the 2018 Paris Ministerial Conference, the 2020 Rome Ministerial Communiqué reconfirmed the determination to see the Key Commitments fully implemented and the use of the peer support method to achieve this. Consequently, the peer support is the approach underpinning the activity of the TPG B.

The first set of peer support activities took place in Sevres on 10 June 2022, in concomitance with the Third TPG B meeting. It focused on the specific thematic indications for TPG B: "Optimising the potential of digital technology for the recognition agenda and the Diploma Supplement" and "Recognition of alternative pathways" (see Annex III). Both sessions began with presentations on national experiences on the two thematic indications, followed by a structured discussion among TPG B members on specific areas correlated.

The second peer support activity took place in Tirana on 27 April 2023, in concomitance with the Fifth TPG B meeting. It focused on the specific thematic indications for TPG B: "Distribution of work and responsibilities among the competent authorities that carry out recognition procedures" (see Annex III). The session started with presentations of national experiences of Italy, Norway and Sweden on the topic. Thereafter, a structured discussion among TPG B members on the specific thematic indication took place.

3.2.5 Summary of TPG B peer learning activities

Additionally, in the framework of the TPG-LRC CoRE project, **a series of three Peer Learning Activities (PLAs) on digital solutions for the recognition agenda** were scheduled respectively on 19 September 2023, 19 October 2023, and 21 November 2023. The PLAs served a twofold objective: first, to offer TPG B members an opportunity for exchange and dialogue on experiences developed at national level, in the spirit of underpinning peer support that characterises the Peer Group's work. Second, to gather useful input for a publication on digitalisation to be developed within the project, intended as a blueprint of TPG B members' experiences towards the use of digital solutions to support the recognition process in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

The three PLAs will be organised addressing the three phases of the credential evaluation process: input (submission of data from applicants), throughput (process data received by applicants), and output (delivery of the outcome of the assessment).

All PLAs will follow a common structure, starting with an overview on different benefits and challenges to consider when digitising the recognition process to set the scene on the experience developed in this field. A presentation of some case studies at national level follows, with the aim of sharing experiences and common challenges/solutions to implement digital solutions. A second part is devoted to open discussion among the participants, creating space for TPG B members to ask questions and exchange advice.

Staff mobility activity

In the framework of the TPG-LRC CoRE project a staff mobility activity has been organized, conceived as a peer learning activity on the full implementation of the LRC.

The main aim of the staff mobility is to provide the TPG B on LRC members with the opportunity to offer or receive **peer support** on the topic of **recognition** and **implementation of the LRC**, starting from the 6 specific thematic indications for TPG B.

The mobility period planned was July 2023 - January 2024.

In order to create a preliminary pairing among TPG B members, the **matchmaking activity** was organised during the **5th TPG B on LRC meeting** of 27 April 2023, in Tirana. Starting from the 6 specific thematic indications for TPG B, the aim of the activity was to involve TPG B members in identifying specific topics on which they were willing to receive or to offer peer support. This has been functional to have a first idea on how to pair institutions based on their needs, for the organisation of the staff mobility.

The call for applications was launched in May 2023, while the official deadline for applications has been set on the 31 May 2023 and extended until the 15 June 2023. A total of sixteen requests were submitted. Ten institutions applied to send mobile staff members to deepen specific topics related to the LRC implementation, while six institutions applied to host colleagues and provide them with peer counselling.

On 16 June 2023, the matchmaking committee composed by the three co-chairs of the TPG B reviewed the applications and finalized the matching of staff members on the basis of the thematic interest and geographical spread.

To give TPG B members more time to apply, a second extension of the call for application was agreed upon, setting the final deadline to the 15 September 2023.

Here you can find the final country pairings. Each country organized its mobility in autonomy with the matched institution, keeping the TPG-LRC CoRE coordinators informed of the organization process. At the end of the mobility, each country was requested to write a report on the main outcomes of the peer learning activity.

Country	**Sending/hosting request**	**Matched Country chosen**
Ireland	Sending	Sweden
Romania	Sending	Lithuania
Lithuania	Sending	Italy
Georgia	Sending	Italy
Armenia	Sending	Italy
France	Sending	Italy
Italy	Sending	France
San Marino	Sending	Greece
Albania	Sending	Norway
Azerbaijan	Sending	Norway

Austria	Sending	To be organised
Croatia	Sending	To be organised

Research and Publications

To support the TPG B activity, within the framework of the Erasmus+ umbrella project TPG LRC CoRE, four working groups have been established to produce documents and publications on the topics linked to three of the "6 specific thematic indications" and on the topic of the European degrees.

Alternative pathways: WG1 on micro-credentials

- *Deliverable – Document on micro-credential and recognition targeted to HEIs.*
  The document is developed in cooperation with the TPG A on Qualifications Framework and ECTS, the TPG C on Quality assurance and the Working Group on Learning and Teaching.

1. Digital technology for the recognition agenda and the Diploma Supplement: WG2 on digitalization

- *Deliverable – Document focused on digital technology for the recognition agenda and the Diploma Supplement.*
  The document will be the joint result from the insights gathered during three Peer Learning activities on digitalisation (organised during the framework of the project) and desk research.

2. Automatic recognition: WG3 on quality of recognition

- *Deliverable – Report identifying potential gaps and containing recommendations for higher education institutions to improve the quality of their recognition processes.*
  The document will be the joint result from the results collected through a survey circulated among HEIs established in the TPG B member countries and desk research.

3. WG4 on European Degree

- *Deliverable – Document on the European degree from the recognition perspective.*
  The working group started working during the second phase of the project.

3.2.6 Main outcomes, conclusions and recommendations

Some of the elements that proved to be effective during the previous mandate of the TPG B have been further deepened, contributing to the implementation of work of the group.

The **peer support approach** was reconfirmed to be very effective in supporting the exchange of good practices to solve common challenges to be addressed in different countries. The Peer Learning activities, together with the *ad hoc* peer support sessions organised in conjunction with the TPG B meeting, benefitted from the different background of the TPG B members giving Ministries and ENIC-NARIC centres opportunities to cooperate. Furthermore, the fact that results of the peer learning activities are meant to complement the research carried out

within the umbrella project helps synthesise main outcomes in a structured format and share them with a wider audience.

The **synergies with EU funded projects** in the field of recognition is another element that has been valorised taking into consideration both its added value during the previous mandate and the interest shown in it by the TPG B members in the survey distributed in 2021. Outcomes of closed and ongoing projects have been shared during the TPG B meetings constituting a common ground to build upon in the field of recognition. This synergy represents an added value for the work of the entire group and could be strengthened in the future if the activity of the TPGs continues.

Cooperation among the 3 TPGs, which has been relevant in the previous mandate, has been further fostered. The three TPGs have continuously shared information and updates (also during the TPG B meetings) and, as an additional element, they are working together on the topic of micro-credentials on which a common document will be produced within the Erasmus+ TPG-LRC CoRE project.

Cooperation with stakeholders and consultative members has been strengthen thanks to the common work in the TPG B. ESU, EUA, EQAR contributed to the development of seminars and publications enriching contents with their perspectives. Furthermore, they can play a crucial role in raising awareness on recognition.

In addition to this, the implementation of activities, such as seminars and publications that are focused on and targeted to contribute to strengthen cooperation and to address from different perspectives topics related to recognition.

Great attention has been paid to **Higher Education Institutions** both in gathering and addressing their needs and in fostering cooperation with them. For the purposes of developing documents on micro-credentials and on quality of recognition, two surveys were distributed among higher education institutions. Furthermore, some of them were interviewed on the topic of micro-credentials. This, together with the seminars organised in Sèvres and in Tirana contributed to reinforce both **cooperation** and **sharing of knowledge with higher education institutions**. On this point, the two aforementioned documents, which also target higher education institutions, will provide them with tools based on their perspective to address micro-credentials and on quality of recognition.

The **six thematic indications** for the TPG B have been addressed using different methods and in accordance with the priority indicated by the Group members. TPG B meetings gave the opportunity to share new developments and practices, the seminars to deepen topics with experts in the field and with higher education institutions, peer support activities to share experiences and find possible solutions to common challenges in smaller groups and guided by structured format. Finally, research and publications contribute to reflecting in a more structured way on the topics prioritised by the TPG B members.

Some key words in the discussion of the TPG B are digital solutions, alternative pathways, automatic recognition, quality of recognition.

Digital solutions are clearly identified as a support to the recognition process, automatic recognition and to share academic qualifications in a secure way. The focus was also on how

to identify the most suitable digital solutions to support the recognition process at national level in line with the LRC. Experiences at national level, as well as results from EU funded projects were presented in order to create a common ground and to help knowledge sharing. This also addressed the need for improving awareness on existing experiences and practices raised by the group members. Furthermore, it was discussed the digitalisation of the Diploma supplement.

Alternative pathways, with a focus on **micro-credentials**, are gaining momentum. Although short learning pathways have existed in different forms for many years, the work done within the TPG B, in cooperation with the other TPGs, was aimed at supporting the definition of common standards also applying the Bologna tools to micro-credentials to improve their quality and to make them recognisable. In this light, the involvement of higher education institutions represented an added value.

Automatic recognition was discussed in a multi-faceted way, including input from the 2022 Monitoring Report on the implementation of the LRC, the 2018 Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition and the 2023 Report on its implementation. During the seminar held in Tirana, different models of automatic recognition and the tools available to support its implementation were also presented.

The following **recommendations** were made based on the feedback from participants at the peer group meetings and from the monitoring questionnaire:

- Encourage compliance with the recommendations of the 2022 Monitoring report on the implementation of the Lisbon recognition Convention.
- Support the use of digital solutions to sustain academic integrity, also in line with the Council of Europe Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on countering education fraud, developed within the ETINED platform.
- Strengthen the dialogue with competent authorities and cooperation with the ENIC-NARIC centres and the LRC Committee Bureau.
- Support practice sharing and networking.
- Enhance cooperation with countries from other regions and their National Information Centres.
- Foster cooperation at national level between the ENIC-NARIC centres and Higher Education Institutions, which are autonomous and responsible for implementing LRC compliant recognition procedures in most EHEA countries.
- Strengthen the cooperation among the three TPGs, since the three key commitments are strictly intertwined.

Further information can be found at http://ehea.info/page-peer-group-B-LRC.

3.3 The Thematic Peer Group C on Quality Assurance

Note: This section will be completed for the final version.

3.3.1 Meetings and activities

Meetings:	30 June 2021, online 17-18 May 2022, Leuven, Belgium (FL) 30 November 2022, online 1-2 June, Kazakhstan 5 December 2023, online 13-14 June 2023, Romania
Events:	1 September 2022, Belgium (FL): Aligning the legal framework with the ESG 21 March 2023, Romania: Cross-border QA and QA of transnational education 13 September 2023, Belgium (FL) European Approach to the QA of joint programmes

All the respective information is available on the Bologna Process webpage:
https://www.ehea.info/page-peer-group-C-QA

The Thematic Peer Group on Quality Assurance (TPG C) established the following three thematic working groups (WGs):

1. **QA of Micro-credentials** – two meetings of the WG were held and the main activities were:
   - Composition of subgroups working on desk research, guiding documents for HEIs and QAA;
   - Inclusion MC providers in DEQAR, feasibility quality label, harmonised data standard;
   - Finished the MC report.
2. **QA of European Universities** – two meetings of the WG were held and the main activities were:
   - Analysis of legal and regulatory obstacles;
   - Feasibility study in 5 selected EHEA countries, including 2 small PLAs (selection ongoing)
3. **Digitalisation of QA processes** – the main activities were:
   - Documentation, survey based mapping: launched March 2023, preliminary results were received in December 2023;

- Identification of good practices, interviews with some QAA representatives, reflection group, thematic workshop. The outcomes are planned to be discussed in November 2024.

Another big activity prepared and implemented by TPG C was the Staff mobility. There were two calls organised as follows:

Staff mobility – timing call 1:

June 2022	Launch of the call for applications
31 July 2022	Deadline for applications
31 August 2022	Matchmaking committee meeting
September 2022	Selection results
October 2022 - March 2023	Staff mobilities
May 2022	Review observation reports

Staff mobility – timing call 2:

25 January 2023	Launch of the call for applications
31 March 2023	Deadline for applications
30 May 2023	Matchmaking committee meeting
June 2023	Selection results
June 2023 - February 2024	Staff mobilities
May 2024	Review observation reports

ANNEX I – Excerpt from the Rome Communiqué

The Rome Communiqué states:

"We take note of the results described in the Bologna Process Implementation Report on the progress made over the past two decades. The achievements are impressive. Nevertheless more work is required to ensure that the EHEA is built on strong foundations, capable of supporting interconnected, innovative and inclusive higher education in the coming decade.
[…]
In the 2018 Paris Ministerial Conference we decided to devote special effort to completing implementation of three "Key Commitments" essential for the functioning of the EHEA: the Qualifications Frameworks and ECTS, the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the Diploma Supplement, and Quality Assurance according to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

We reconfirm our determination to see the Key Commitments fully implemented. We ask the BFUG to continue to employ the peer support method to achieve this. We commit to the continued participation in and contribution to this effort.

We commit to completing and further developing the National Qualifications Frameworks compatible with the Overarching Framework of Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) and ask the BFUG to update the criteria for self-certification to include a stronger element of peer review of national reports. We mandate the Network of QF correspondents to continue its work, contributing to the further development of the QF-EHEA and the self-certification of national qualifications frameworks against it.

We will 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, using common assessment criteria and reports, in collaboration with the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee and the ENIC and NARIC Networks.

We will ensure automatic recognition of academic qualifications and periods of study within the EHEA so that students, staff and graduates are able to move freely to study, teach and do research. We will make the necessary legislative changes to guarantee automatic recognition at system level for qualifications delivered in EHEA countries where quality assurance operates in compliance with the ESG and where a fully operational national qualifications framework has been established. We also encourage the application of agreed and secure systems of digital certification and communication such as block chain, as well as the further development of the Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR) to facilitate automatic recognition.

We commit to reviewing our own legislation, regulations, and practice to ensure fair recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in refugee-like situations, even when they cannot be fully documented, in accordance with Article VII of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. We welcome the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees and will support further broadening its use in our systems.

We acknowledge the progress made in the development of quality assurance systems aligned with the ESG, and we commit to removing the remaining obstacles, including those related to the cross-border operation of EQAR-registered agencies and the application of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. We commit to ensuring that our external quality assurance arrangements cover transnational higher education in the EHEA with equal standards as for domestic provision. In view of the need for increased flexibility and openness of learning paths, smaller units of learning and greater synergies among higher education institutions, we encourage an enhancement-oriented use of the ESG to support innovation in higher education and its quality assurance." (p. 7)

ANNEX II – Terms of reference for the BICG

Terms of Reference for the Bologna Implementation Coordination Group, 2021 to 2024

NAME OF THE COORDINATION GROUP
Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (BICG)

Contact Persons (Co-Chairs)
Ivana Radonova – Bulgaria
Helga Posset – Austria
Ann Katherine Isaacs – Italy

COMPOSITION
The Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (BICG) is a small coordination group composed of representatives nominated by members and consultative members of the BFUG and the co-chairs of each of the Thematic Peer Groups (TPGs). A representative of the WG on Monitoring is invited to participate in the group as an observer.

The group is composed of the following members: Albania, Austria, Belgium Flemish Community, Bulgaria, Georgia, Italy, Romania, EUA, EURASHE, EC and the TPGs' co-chairs.

In principle, the BICG Co-chairs should not be chairs of a Thematic Peer Group.

The BICG should represent the diversity of the EHEA and ensure a balance of expertise across all key commitments. To ensure continuity and diversity, there should be a maximum turnover of two thirds of the BICG members from one work period to the other.

PURPOSE AND/OR OUTCOME
The purpose of the BICG is to facilitate a coordinated implementation of the three Key Commitments. To achieve that, the BICG coordinates the work of the TPGs, and facilitates an exchange of experience and best practice between the TPGs. The BICG follows the peer support activities and reports to the BFUG on overall progress and any necessary revision of the peer support approach or methodology.

The activities should build upon the work and the results/achievements of the BICG in the period 2018-2020 and the outcomes of and recommendations for the work of the TPGs presented in the BICG Report.

REFERENCE TO THE ROME COMMUNIQUÉ
From the Rome Communiqué:

In the 2018 Paris Ministerial Conference we decided to devote special effort to completing implementation of three "Key Commitments" essential for the functioning of the EHEA: the Qualifications Frameworks and ECTS, the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the Diploma Supplement, and Quality Assurance according to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

We reconfirm our determination to see the Key Commitments fully implemented. We ask the BFUG to continue to employ the peer support method to achieve this. We commit to the continued participation in and contribution to this effort.

SPECIFIC TASKS

- Coordinate the work of the TPGs;
- Follow-up peer support activities by keeping an overview of the composition and activities of the different groups;
- Seek to improve the Peer Support Approach for the implementation of the Key Commitments, including possible adjustments;
- Identify synergies in the work of the Thematic Peer Groups;
- Give the BFUG regular updates and an overview on the progress and effectiveness of the Peer Support Approach for the implementation of the Key Commitments, based on the activities of the TPGs;
- Prepare analytical reports to the BFUG on the activities of the different TPGs and the support for the implementation of Key Commitments as a whole, including operation (what works, what doesn't work), impact and usefulness;
- Prepare recommendations for further actions to improve the implementation for consideration by the BFUG;
- Provide an assessment of the usefulness of thematic peer groups as a working method, including whether they should be extended to other policy areas within the competence of the BFUG

REPORTING

Minimum of yearly reporting to the BFUG.

MEETING SCHEDULE:

Two meetings per year should be held, ideally three weeks prior to the BFUG Board meetings. Meetings can be physical or online, taking into account the availability of the BICG members. Physical meetings can be one or one and a half day and could also be held in combination with other meetings (BFUG or TPG).

LIAISON WITH OTHER WGS' AND/OR ADVISORY GROUPS' ACTIVITIES

- WG on Monitoring and any other relevant BFUG structures

ADDITIONAL REMARKS ON THE THEMATIC PEER GROUPS (TPGs)

The objective of the TPGs is to provide a forum to support countries in working together to implement the Key Commitments. The TPGs should continue using the Peer Support Approach and build on the work accomplished during the previous work period.

Each TPG should follow up and update its overall Action Plan to reflect countries' progress and developments. Each participating country should prepare, update and follow their own Country Work Plan, coordinated with the TPG's Action Plan and objectives.

The countries and organisations should nominate representatives of authorities and stakeholders with relevant responsibility and expertise in the topic for the duration of the entire work period.

The co-chairs of the TPGs should be appointed by the BFUG and are responsible for planning, coordinating and reporting on the activities of the TPGs.

There should be up to three co-chairs per TPG, respecting also a principle that one country representative should not co-chair more than one TPG or the BICG.

The TPGs' co-chairs:
TPG A: Austria, Georgia, Latvia
TPG B: Albania, France, Italy
TPG C: Belgium Flemish Community, Romania, Kazakhstan

ANNEX III – Guidelines for BFUG Peer Support, 2021-2024

Background and objectives

With the Paris Communiqué, "a structured peer support approach based on solidarity, cooperation and mutual learning" was adopted. In the work programme of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) for 2021-2024, structured peer support will continue to focus on completing the implementation of three key commitments.

The Rome Communiqué states:
*In the 2018 Paris Ministerial Conference we decided to devote special effort to completing implementation of three **"Key Commitments"** essential for the functioning of the EHEA: the Qualifications Frameworks and ECTS, the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the Diploma Supplement, and Quality Assurance according to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).*
*We reconfirm our determination to see the Key Commitments fully implemented. We ask the BFUG to continue to employ the **peer support method** to achieve this. We commit to the continued participation in and contribution to this effort.*

To this end, the BFUG established a coordinating body, the Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (BICG), to organise and give guidance to the work of three Thematic Peer Groups (TPGs), one for each key commitment.
The Thematic Peer Groups themselves will agree on further actions aimed at encouraging, improving, accelerating and completing implementation in the participating countries and report to the Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (BICG). In line with its mandate, the BICG will follow the peer support activities and will report on overall progress and any necessary review of the peer support approach or methodology on a regular basis and in particular prior to the next Ministerial Conference. Furthermore, the BICG is tasked with preparing analytical reports to the BFUG on the activities of the different TPGs and the support for the implementation of Key Commitments as a whole, including operation (what works, what doesn't work), impact and usefulness.

Working methods

At its April 2021 meeting, the BFUG confirmed the three Thematic Peer Groups (TPGs) for the 2021-2024 period.
Each TPG will have up to three Co-chairs, who will be responsible for planning and coordinating the Groups' activities, with the support of the BFUG Secretariat. The TPG Co-chairs facilitate and steer the discussion and encourage members to share their national and other contextual viewpoints ensuring that the discussions are aimed at supporting further implementation of the key commitments in the participating countries. The Co-chairs are also responsible for reporting to the BICG. The BFUG Secretariat takes minutes of all meetings and liaises with the meeting hosts and group members about meeting logistics.

The Groups are free to organise their work as they find most useful. However, the BICG recommends the following:

Each Group should organise preferably at least two meetings per year (physical meetings, if possible, as well as online meetings) that gather all the group members together. In addition, each group may choose to organise further joint meetings of the whole group, separate meetings on specific sub-themes and/or combinations of the two depending on the topics to be tackled. The specific themes or interests of a smaller range of countries might be addressed by specially established sub-groups, supported by specific projects (see below). Working methods that engage members and enable support for those needing to implement changes through the sharing of practices and/or policies are particularly welcome, and small group exercises are encouraged where appropriate.

The Co-chairs should prepare the first meeting of the Group taking into account the needs of the member countries based on the existing scorecard and subsequent progress. At its first meeting, each TPG should prepare a general work plan (i.e. TPG Action Plan) that indicates in general terms the topics, the working methods, the timeline and the outcomes to be achieved by each country by the end of the working period. This Action Plan is to be updated with more detailed information about each country's needs and targeted outcomes as soon as possible, and kept updated during the work period.

The Co-chairs are encouraged to prepare for meetings well in advance, in collaboration with the BFUG Secretariat, in order to provide the group members with a structured format for discussions that will lead to the expected outcomes of each meeting and, eventually, to the success of the peer support activities as a whole. Documents should be sent at least 10 working days in advance and the first draft of the minutes, with the agreed action points, should be available within 10 working days after the meeting.

Special attention should also be paid to sharing information outside the meetings. The BFUG Secretariat will provide each TPG with a dedicated webpage under www.ehea.info that will allow the TPG to communicate about its activities and results. Within one month after each peer support activity (involving either the entire Thematic Peer Group or part of it) a short summary will be published on the Group's website.

To ensure efficiency, the members should preferably send one key person to each meeting. However, other arrangements can be made in agreement with the Co-chairs. It is expected that further project activities organised to support the work will allow for broader participation. In addition, where this has not already been done, countries are encouraged to establish national teams to ensure follow up and implementation.

Recommendations from the past working period

In its November 2020 Report, the BICG described the organizational solutions adopted by the TPGs in the 2018-2020 work period, and made suggestions for the future. The BICG recommends that each TPG consider and discuss these suggestions (and in general the Report) in order to take into account past experience in designing their Action Plans for the 2021-2024 work period. In particular, the TPGs should take careful note of the final

recommendations and devise ways to ensure greater **synergy within and between countries through better national coordination**.

The BICG report states[9]:
*In terms of organisation, all Thematic Peer Groups used a combination of **Thematic Peer Group meetings with public seminars.** This solution worked well and has been positively assessed. In the future it is felt particularly important to keep a mix of larger panel meetings to facilitate a broad discussion, and **smaller group activities having a thematic focus** (for example, staff exchange or workshops). This combination has proved to be very effective in facilitating the sharing of good practices. Moreover, Thematic Peer Group activities should continue to be grouped under the umbrella projects to ensure consistent organisation and communication.*
In particular, the countries' contributions to the Thematic Peer Groups' Action Plans (i.e. countries' Work Plans), which countries were asked to propose and keep updated for each Key Commitment, have helped to improve the coordination of relevant national stakeholders. This way of working also encouraged self-reflection on their own practices. Continuation of countries' participation in the Thematic Peer Groups will make it possible for them to reflect further on their Work Plans and their contributions to the Thematic Peer Groups Action Plans and revise and update them in the next period.

*While there has been a very positive assessment of this first phase of work, the survey respondents proposed a number of **recommendations for the future**.*
In particular:

- *the methodology could be further developed in order to enable **more intensive work in smaller groups**;*
- *more **digital meetings** could be held to facilitate and broaden participation;*
- *more **practical sessions** could be offered with examples presented by each participant;*
- *improved synergy within and between countries could be brought about by more efficient **national coordination**. Public authorities should cooperate systematically with stakeholders in discussing and introducing necessary changes in legislation and regulations.*

Support through European Commission projects
The European Commission is preparing an "invitation to submit project proposals" to support the work of the Thematic Peer Groups. Applicants can be National Authorities for Education in the Erasmus+ ("Programme") countries and consultative members of the Bologna Process, including EQAR. The "Programme Countries" can make proposals for projects including any member country of the EHEA. The BICG encourages the Erasmus+

[9] https://ehea.info/Upload/BICG_Final_Report.pdf

"Programme Countries" to consider this opportunity creatively and proactively, and to build meaningful projects with all EHEA countries to address common implementation concerns. The European Commission will inform the BFUG about the publication of the "invitation to submit project proposals" and the application deadline. The Co-chairs of the Peer Groups will facilitate exchange of information about participation of the members in the different peer projects. Ideally, all Peer Group members should be involved in at least one project for targeted peer support.

Timeline, outcomes and reporting

The TPGs are expected to be active from May 2021 to May 2024. Their work will be based on their **Action Plans, to be sent to the BICG by 31 October 2021** (date to be decided)

The main focus of the Groups' work will be ensuring further implementation of the key commitments as outlined in the Paris and Rome Communiqué. To monitor progress in this regard, each group is expected to send to the BICG **an interim report by the fall BFUG 2022 and a draft final report by 15 February 2024**, respectively. The reports should outline the key changes carried out by participating countries with the aim of implementing the key commitments and describe the key challenges encountered.

Since the work period in this instance is of three years, and on the basis of the work already accomplished, it is reasonable to expect that by the 2024 Ministerial Conference notable progress can be made, bringing the goal of full implementation in all countries much closer. Not only will awareness of both challenges and solutions be enhanced through networking: The Thematic Peer Groups should aim to reach incisive results in a good number of cases.

Practicalities

The TPGs are free to decide on the venue, the exact length, and timing of their meetings. Meetings can also be held online.

Except in the case of TPG activities covered by a project (such as the above-mentioned Erasmus+ projects), the member countries and organisations cover their own travel and accommodation costs for the meetings. The hosts of meetings are expected to arrange the meeting venue and catering and provide logistical and practical information for the participants.

In order to ensure financial support for the meetings, EHEA Erasmus+ "Programme Countries" are highly encouraged to organise projects on the key commitments in response to the European Commission's call described above, and to include all EHEA countries in them.

Annex

The following are examples of some themes that might be considered. It will be up to the TPGs and their Co-Chairs to discuss these and other relevant topics, and to refine their Action Plans on the basis of a review of the present situation, keeping in mind that the **overarching purpose is the full implementation of the Key Commitments themselves**.

Peer Group A on Key Commitment 1 (a three-cycle system compatible with the overarching

Qualifications Framework of the EHEA and first and second cycle degrees scaled by ECTS)

Specific thematic indications included topics such as:

- Self-certification of the national qualification frameworks the overarching Qualifications Framework of the EHEA;
- Complete implementation of the ECTS User's Guide;
- Short cycle higher education;
- Multiple purposes and use of the qualifications frameworks by the stakeholders;
- Study programmes outside of the Bologna three-cycle structure;
- Relationship between the qualifications frameworks and quality assurance.

Peer Group B on Key Commitment 2 (national legislation and procedures compliant with the Lisbon Recognition Convention [LRC])

Specific thematic orientations indicated include the topics such as:

- Establishing the legal framework to allow the implementation of the LRC;
- Establishing the distribution of work and responsibilities among the competent institutions that have the right knowledge and capacity to carry out recognition procedures;
- Achieving automatic recognition;
- Recognition of alternative pathways;
- Qualifications held by refugees;
- Optimising the potential of digital technology for the recognition agenda and the Diploma Supplement.

Peer Group C on Key Commitment 3 (Quality Assurance in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area)

Specific thematic orientations include the topics such as:

- Legislative framework in line with the ESG (introducing changes);
- Ensuring effectiveness of internal quality assurance arrangements, including the use of QA results in the decision-making process and quality culture as well as links to learning and teaching;
- The role and engagement of stakeholders in internal and external QA (students, teachers, employers);
- Cross-border QA and European Approach to accreditation of joint programmes.

ANNEX IV – Attendance at BICG and TBG meetings

Attendance BICG meetings

	10 May 2021, online	1 October 2021, online	21 January 2022, online	29 March 2022, online	25 October 2022, online	28 March 2023, online	25 September 2023, online	22 January 2024, Rome, hybrid	26 March 2024, online
Country/ organisation	1st meeting	2nd meeting	3rd meeting	4th meeting	5th meeting	6th meeting	7th meeting	8th meeting	9th meeting
Albania (TPG B Co-Chair)	x	x	x						
Austria (BICG Co-Chair)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Austria (TPG A Co-Chair)			x			x			
Belgium Flemish Community (TPG C Co-Chair)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Bulgaria (BICG Co-Chair)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
EUA	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
EURASHE	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	
European Commission	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
France (TPB Co-Chair)	x		x					x	
Georgia (TPG A Co-Chair)	x			x				x	
Italy BICG-Co-Chair)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Kazakhstan (TPG C Co-chair)									
Latvia (TPG A Co-Chair)	x	x					x	x	
Romania	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	
Romania(TPG C Co-chair)								x	
EURYDICE	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	

Attendance TPG meetings

	TPG A on QF							TPG B on LRC							TPG C on QA						
	7 June 2021, online	4 November 2021, online	15 March 2022, online	21 October 2022, Latvia	26 April 2023, Austria	29 September 2023, Georgia	19 April 2024, Estonia	14 September 2021, Online	18 January 2022, online	9-10 June 2022, France	24 January 2023, online	27 April 2023, Albania	1 February 2024, online	23 April 2024, Italy	30 June 2021, online	17-18 May 2022, Belgium	30 November 2022, online	1-2 June 2023, Kazakhstan	5 December 2023, online	13/14 June 2024, Romania	November 2024, Belgium
Country/ organisation	1st meeting	2nd meeting	3rd meeting	4th meeting	5th meeting	6th meeting	7th meeting	1st meeting	2nd meeting	3rd meeting	4th meeting	5th meeting	6th meeting	7th meeting	1st meeting	2nd meeting	3rd meeting	4th meeting	5th meeting	6th meeting	7th meeting
Albania	x	x	x	x				x	x	x	x	x					x				
Andorra	x	x	x	x	x	x															
Armenia		x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x				x	x	x			
Austria	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x				x			x			
Azerbaijan		x	x	x	x	x		x							x	x	x	x			
Belarus									x												
Belgium Flemish Community	x	x	x	x	x			x	x		x				x	x	x	x			
Belgium French Community	x																				
Bosnia and Herzegovina																x	x	x			
Bulgaria		x	x	x				x		x	x	x						x			
Business Europe																					

	TPG A on QF							TPG B on LRC							TPG C on QA						
	7 June 2021, online	4 November 2021, online	15 March 2022, online	21 October 2022, Latvia	26 April 2023, Austria	29 September 2023, Georgia	19 April 2024, Estonia	14 September 2021, Online	18 January 2022, online	9-10 June 2022, France	24 January 2023, online	27 April 2023, Albania	1 February 2024, online	23 April 2024, Italy	30 June 2021, online	17-18 May 2022, Belgium	30 November 2022, online	1-2 June 2023, Kazakhstan	5 December 2023, online	13/14 June 2024, Romania	November 2024, Belgium
Country/ organisation	1st meeting	2nd meeting	3rd meeting	4th meeting	5th meeting	6th meeting	7th meeting	1st meeting	2nd meeting	3rd meeting	4th meeting	5th meeting	6th meeting	7th meeting	1st meeting	2nd meeting	3rd meeting	4th meeting	5th meeting	6th meeting	7th meeting
Council of Europe	x	x		x	x			x		x	x	x									
Croatia	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x			x		x				
Cyprus	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x				x	x	x				
Czech Republic	x		x			x		x	x						x	x	x	x			
Denmark								x	x	x	x	x									
EI/ETUCE															x		x				
ENQA											x				x	x	x	x			
EQAR								x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x			
Estonia			x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x									
ESU	x	x	x	x	x			x	x			x			x	x	x	x			
EUA								x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x			
EURASHE	x				x					x		x			x						
European Commission	x	x	x		x			x	x		x				x	x		x			

	TPG A on QF							TPG B on LRC							TPG C on QA						
	7 June 2021, online	4 November 2021, online	15 March 2022, online	21 October 2022, Latvia	26 April 2023, Austria	29 September 2023, Georgia	19 April 2024, Estonia	14 September 2021, Online	18 January 2022, online	9-10 June 2022, France	24 January 2023, online	27 April 2023, Albania	1 February 2024, online	23 April 2024, Italy	30 June 2021, online	17-18 May 2022, Belgium	30 November 2022, online	1-2 June 2023, Kazakhstan	5 December 2023, online	13/14 June 2024, Romania	November 2024, Belgium
Country/ organisation	1st meeting	2nd meeting	3rd meeting	4th meeting	5th meeting	6th meeting	7th meeting	1st meeting	2nd meeting	3rd meeting	4th meeting	5th meeting	6th meeting	7th meeting	1st meeting	2nd meeting	3rd meeting	4th meeting	5th meeting	6th meeting	7th meeting
Finland															x	x	x				
France								x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x			
Georgia	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x			x						
Germany		x			x			x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x				
Greece			x						x		x	x				x	x	x			
Holy See								x	x		x										
Hungary				x	x	x					x	x				x		x			
Iceland															x	x	x				
Ireland								x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x			
Italy	x	x		x		x		x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x			
Kazakhstan					x	x		x								x		x			
Latvia	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x			x		x	x			
Liechtenstein																					

	TPG A on QF							TPG B on LRC							TPG C on QA						
	7 June 2021, online	4 November 2021, online	15 March 2022, online	21 October 2022, Latvia	26 April 2023, Austria	29 September 2023, Georgia	19 April 2024, Estonia	14 September 2021, Online	18 January 2022, online	9-10 June 2022, France	24 January 2023, online	27 April 2023, Albania	1 February 2024, online	23 April 2024, Italy	30 June 2021, online	17-18 May 2022, Belgium	30 November 2022, online	1-2 June 2023, Kazakhstan	5 December 2023, online	13/14 June 2024, Romania	November 2024, Belgium
Country/ organisation	1st meeting	2nd meeting	3rd meeting	4th meeting	5th meeting	6th meeting	7th meeting	1st meeting	2nd meeting	3rd meeting	4th meeting	5th meeting	6th meeting	7th meeting	1st meeting	2nd meeting	3rd meeting	4th meeting	5th meeting	6th meeting	7th meeting
Lithuania								x	x	x		x					x	x			
Luxembourg															x	x	x				
Malta	x	x		x						x					x	x	x	x			
Moldova								x		x	x				x						
Montenegro																					
The Netherlands	x		x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x				x		x			
North Macedonia	x	x				x															
Norway									x	x	x	x			x						
Poland	x	x	x	x					x	x	x	x			x	x	x				
Portugal																					
Romania		x	x	x	x	x		x		x	x	x			x	x	x	x			
Russian Federation															x						
San Marino	x	x			x	x		x	x	x		x			x		x				

	TPG A on QF							TPG B on LRC							TPG C on QA						
	7 June 2021, online	4 November 2021, online	15 March 2022, online	21 October 2022, Latvia	26 April 2023, Austria	29 September 2023, Georgia	19 April 2024, Estonia	14 September 2021, Online	18 January 2022, online	9-10 June 2022, France	24 January 2023, online	27 April 2023, Albania	1 February 2024, online	23 April 2024, Italy	30 June 2021, online	17-18 May 2022, Belgium	30 November 2022, online	1-2 June 2023, Kazakhstan	5 December 2023, online	13/14 June 2024, Romania	November 2024, Belgium
Country/ organisation	1st meeting	2nd meeting	3rd meeting	4th meeting	5th meeting	6th meeting	7th meeting	1st meeting	2nd meeting	3rd meeting	4th meeting	5th meeting	6th meeting	7th meeting	1st meeting	2nd meeting	3rd meeting	4th meeting	5th meeting	6th meeting	7th meeting
Serbia																					
Slovak Republic			x		x	x				x					x	x					
Slovenia															x	x	x	x			
Spain	x																				
Sweden					x			x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x			
Switzerland								x							x		x				
Turkiye																					
Ukraine								x	x	x	x										
UNESCO								x	x	x	x	x									
United Kingdom (Scotland)	x		x		x			x	x		x	x					x				