

## CHAPTER 4: SOCIAL DIMENSION

### The 2020 Rome Communiqué

The 2020 Rome Communiqué, adopted by Ministers of Higher Education of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in the Rome Ministerial Conference in November 2020, envisions ‘an inclusive, innovative and interconnected EHEA by 2030’ <sup>(1)</sup>. According to this vision, ‘every learner will have equitable access to higher education and will be fully supported in completing their studies and training’ <sup>(2)</sup>. In this Communiqué, Ministers committed to reinforcing social inclusion in higher education, most importantly by adopting the *Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA* – henceforth referred to as the Principles and Guidelines (P&Gs) – developed by the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) <sup>(3)</sup>.

The Principles and Guidelines build on the definition of the social dimension of higher education provided in the 2007 London Communiqué, which emphasised that ‘the composition of the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations’ <sup>(4)</sup>. In 2020, the BFUG Advisory Group 1 on Social Dimension enlarged this definition, stressing that the social dimension ‘also encompasses the creation of an inclusive environment in higher education that fosters equity, diversity, and is responsive to the needs of local communities’ <sup>(5)</sup>. The P&Gs were developed having this broader understanding in mind.

The document includes principles and guidelines in ten areas to be followed by national education authorities in order to ‘interconnect the principles of accessibility, equity, diversity and inclusion into all laws, policies and practices concerning higher education in such a way that access, participation, progress and completion of higher education depend primarily on students’ abilities, not on their personal characteristics or circumstances beyond their direct influence’ <sup>(6)</sup>. This essentially means the mainstreaming of social inclusion and equity principles, where all higher education policies serve the purpose of ‘leaving no one behind’ <sup>(7)</sup>. As such, most P&Gs point towards measures creating the necessary conditions for an accessible, equitable, diverse and inclusive higher education.

### Chapter outline

This chapter follows the structure of the Principles and Guidelines, focusing on the ten areas addressed by the document: higher education strategies addressing the social dimension; flexible study modes enabling widening access to, participation in and completion of higher education studies; the inclusiveness of the entire education system throughout lifelong learning; collecting reliable data for an evidence-based improvement of the social dimension of higher education; effective counselling and guidance for potential and enrolled students; sufficient and sustainable funding and financial autonomy to higher education institutions; inclusive learning environments and inclusive institutional cultures; fostering the participation of students and staff from vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented backgrounds in international mobility programs; community engagement in higher

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

<sup>(2)</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>(3)</sup> [Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA](#), Annex II of the Rome Ministerial Communiqué, 19 November 2020.

<sup>(4)</sup> London Communiqué: Towards the European Higher Education Area: responding to challenges in a globalised world, 18 May 2007, p. 5.

<sup>(5)</sup> [Final Report of the Bologna Follow-up Group \(BFUG\) Advisory Group 1 on Social Dimension](#), p. 23.

<sup>(6)</sup> [Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA](#), Annex II of the Rome Ministerial Communiqué, 19 November 2020, p. 3.

<sup>(7)</sup> *Ibid.*

education promoting diversity, equity and inclusion; and policy dialogue with higher education institutions and other relevant stakeholders about implementing these principles and guidelines.

These areas will be discussed in turn. Each section starts by a reference to the principles and guidelines as they feature in the strategic BFUG document. Then the sections discuss the indicators that were chosen to be monitored in this report. Based on these indicators, composite scorecard indicators have been developed for each area separately.

## 4.1. Strategies addressing diversity, equity and inclusion in higher education

### Principle:

The social dimension should be central to higher education strategies at system and institutional level, as well as at the EHEA and the EU level. Strengthening the social dimension of higher education and fostering equity and inclusion to reflect the diversity of society is the responsibility of a higher education system as a whole and should be regarded as a continuous commitment.

### Guidelines:

Strategic commitment to the social dimension of higher education should be aligned with concrete targets that can either be integrated within existing higher education policies or developed in parallel. These targets should aim at widening access, supporting participation in and completion of studies for all current and future students.

In the process of creating strategies there should be a broad-based dialogue between public authorities, higher education institutions, student and staff representatives and other key stakeholders, including social partners, nongovernmental organisations and people from vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups. This broad-based dialogue is to ensure the creation of inclusive higher education strategies that foster equity and diversity, and are responsive to the needs of the wider community.

The first area addresses the need for a strategic commitment of educational authorities towards the social dimension of higher education, including setting concrete, measurable targets through which progress can be assessed. According to the guidelines, the preconditions of creating an inclusive higher education strategy include a broad-based dialogue between public authorities, higher education institutions, student and staff representatives and other key stakeholders.

In order to monitor the strategic commitment of educational authorities, the following indicators were selected:

- 1) Existence of a national strategy, or a similar major policy plan, adopted following a social dialogue, on the social dimension of higher education, which strengthens diversity, equity and inclusion of **students**.
- 2) Existence of a national strategy, or a similar major policy plan, adopted following a social dialogue, on the social dimension of higher education, which strengthens diversity, equity and inclusion of **staff**.
- 3) Inclusion of specific and measurable targets that are assessed and monitored by responsible bodies within concrete timeframes within the existing national strategy on the social dimension of higher education.
- 4) Existing requirements for quality assurance agencies to monitor whether higher education institutions have social dimension strategies and policies.

National strategies addressing the situation of higher education students and staff were chosen to be monitored due to this first principle's explicit focus on strategies. It has to be noted, however, that the

existence of a strategy does not guarantee that the social dimension in higher education is addressed in full or that all equity problems are resolved. Similarly, it does not mean that countries having no recent strategies are indifferent to equity and inclusion in higher education or are inactive. They might have chosen other means to arrive at similar outcomes, for example by developing, coordinating and funding projects and inclusion measures<sup>(8)</sup>. Nevertheless, having a national strategy concerning students and staff is a clear signal that the top-level education authority regards equity as a policy priority that they are willing to act upon. For this reason, the scorecard indicator monitors whether strategies exist across the EHEA concerning equity, diversity and inclusion among students on the one hand, and among academic staff on the other. The fact whether such strategies have been adopted following a social dialogue is also taken into account in accordance with the guidelines.

The guidelines also stress the need of including concrete, measurable targets on the social dimension within higher education strategies. Hence, the third element to be monitored in this section is whether the mentioned strategies contain such measurable targets or quantitative objectives to be achieved within a clearly defined timeframe.

Finally, the strategic commitment of higher education institutions is measured indirectly by asking if quality assurance agencies need to monitor what higher education institutions do for promoting equity and inclusion. This indicator certainly does not grasp when higher education institutions take steps on their own initiative without being monitored by quality assurance agencies. For the EUA Trends 2024 survey, out of the 475 higher education institutions answering this question across the EHEA, 88% reported having strategies and policies addressing inclusion, equity and diversity<sup>(9)</sup>.

Before presenting all these elements together in a scorecard indicator, Figure 4.1 depicts education systems with higher education strategies addressing the social dimension, either for students only, or for both students and staff. The figure includes all reported strategies, irrespective whether a social dialogue has taken place (see also Table 4.1 in the Annex). The figure also shows the education systems where quality assurance agencies are required to monitor whether higher education institutions have social dimension strategies and policies.

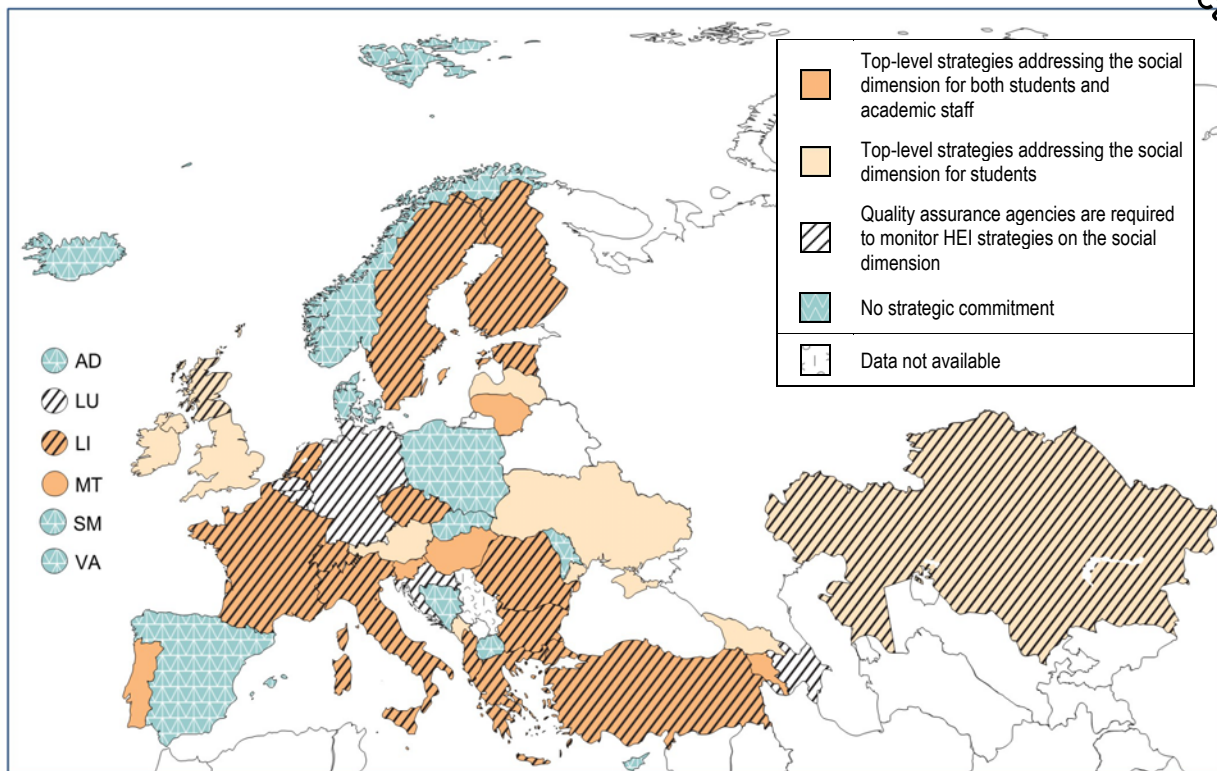
The majority of education systems with available data have strategies currently in place on the social dimension of higher education. Two thirds of these strategies target both students and academic staff, while one third of them address the situation of students only. Inclusion, diversity and equity in higher education may be included in strategies concerning the education system as a whole (as in Albania, Armenia, Estonia, Georgia, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Montenegro, Romania and Türkiye), or in general higher education strategies or policy plans (as in Bulgaria, Czechia, France, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Malta and Slovenia). Specific strategies or policy plans on the social dimension of higher education have been adopted in Austria, Finland, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Finally, in four education systems (Liechtenstein, Portugal, Sweden and Ukraine), general inclusion strategies also include provisions for higher education. Almost all countries reported having implemented a social dialogue before the adoption of their strategy, except for Kazakhstan and the United Kingdom.

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<sup>(8)</sup> See the example of [The Support Centre Inclusive Higher Education \(SIHO\)](#) in Belgium (Flemish Community); see more in Section 4.7.

<sup>(9)</sup> Data refers to Question 37 in the EUA Trends 2024 survey: 'How does your institution address inclusion, equity and diversity? Please select one option per line.' The data is based on the percentage of 'yes' answers given for the option 'The institution has strategies and policies addressing this' (n=475).

Figure 4.1: Strategic commitment to the social dimension of higher education: top-level strategies and monitoring by quality assurance agencies, 2022/2023



Source: BFUG data collection.

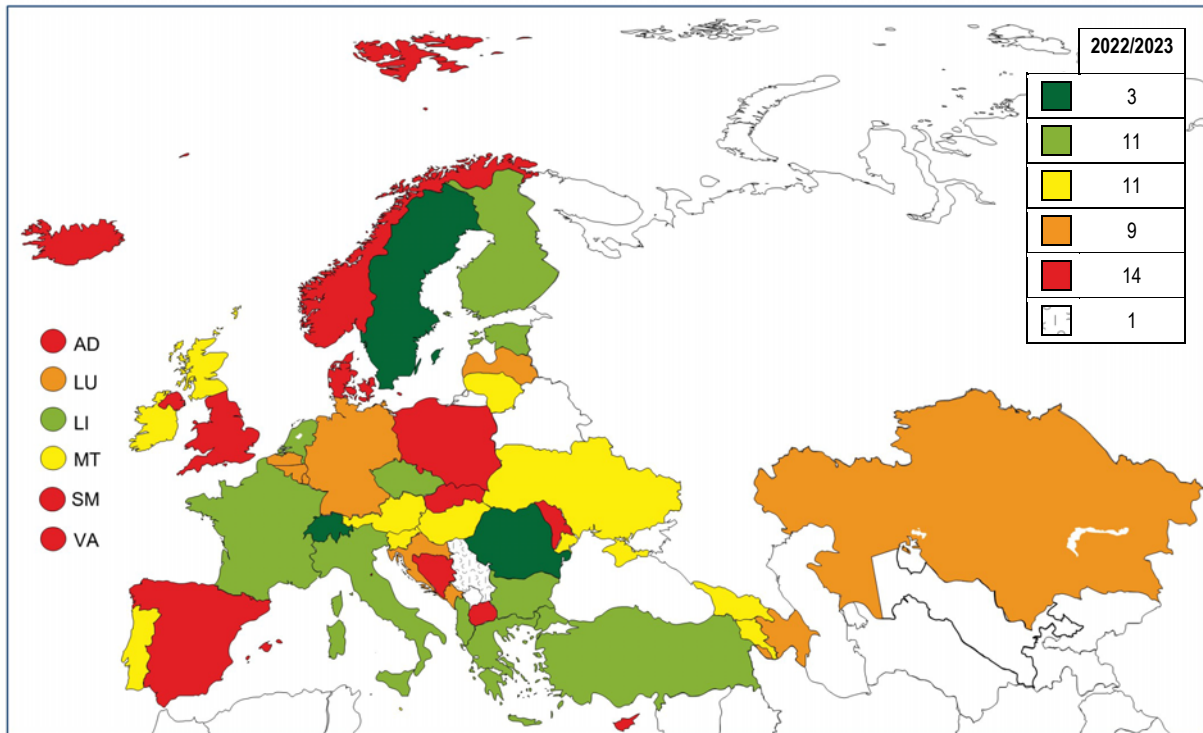
Only a small minority of these strategies include concrete, measurable targets on the social dimension of higher education (see Table 4.2 in the Annex). Most of them concern the percentage of disadvantaged students entering or attending higher education programmes, where disadvantage is defined in terms of the educational background of parents (Austria), migrant status (Austria), ethnic minority status (Georgia and Ireland), disability or special educational needs (Georgia, Ireland and Ukraine), and socio-economic status, including living in disadvantaged areas (Ireland and United Kingdom – Scotland). Romania has a target on attributing a share of new and upgraded infrastructure to disadvantaged learners (those receiving social scholarships). Only Austria is addressing gender disparities between higher education programmes with a specific target. At the same time, the two education systems having targets on academic staff both address the proportion of women among academic staff (Sweden and Switzerland; see Table 4.2 in the Annex for more details).

Figure 4.1 also shows education systems where quality assurance agencies are required to monitor how higher education institutions address the social dimension. This requirement exists in less than half of the education systems analysed in this report. This means that in 22 EHEA systems, it is likely that higher education institutions promote diversity, equity and inclusion, and more precise information should be available in the reports from the quality assurance agencies. However, such information is not available in the remaining 27 education systems. It is nevertheless conceivable that some higher education institutions take steps on their own initiative to promote equity in their midst, even if there is no expectation by the quality assurance agency or the top-level authorities to do so.

Figure 4.2 summarises all this information in the form of a scorecard indicator. As the figure shows, only three education systems have in place all the four elements identified in this section: Romania, Sweden and Switzerland. Eleven education systems nevertheless show a strong commitment towards the social dimension of higher education both through top-level strategies and requiring quality

assurance agencies to monitor higher education institutions in this respect. These education systems lack measurable targets in the social dimension of higher education.

Figure 4.2: Scorecard indicator n°x: P & G 1: Strategic commitment to the social dimension of higher education, 2022/2023



Source: BFUG data collection.

### Scorecard categories

	Strategic commitment to the social dimension of higher education through the following four elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A national strategy, or a similar major policy plan, adopted following a social dialogue, on the social dimension of higher education, which strengthens diversity, equity and inclusion of students.</li> <li>A national strategy, or a similar major policy plan, adopted following a social dialogue, on the social dimension of higher education, which strengthens diversity, equity and inclusion of staff.</li> <li>Specific and measurable targets that are assessed and monitored by responsible bodies within concrete timeframes within the existing national strategy on the social dimension of higher education.</li> <li>Quality assurance agencies are required to monitor whether higher education institutions have social dimension strategies and policies.</li> </ul>
	Strategic commitment to the social dimension of higher education through three of the four mentioned elements.
	Strategic commitment to the social dimension of higher education through two of the four mentioned elements.
	Strategic commitment to the social dimension of higher education through one of the four mentioned elements.
	No strategic commitment to the social dimension of higher education through the four mentioned elements.
	Data not available

The large majority of education systems analysed in this report have implemented at least one of the strategic measures identified by the scorecard indicator. However, 14 education systems have neither top-level strategies addressing diversity, equity and inclusion in higher education that was adopted following a social dialogue, nor do they require quality assurance agencies to monitor whether higher education institutions have social dimension strategies and policies. There is a need for more strategic commitment in these education systems to raise awareness about the strategic importance of diversity, equity and inclusion in higher education.

## 4.2. Flexibility

**Principle:**

Legal regulations or policy documents should allow and enable higher education institutions to develop their own strategies to fulfil their public responsibility towards widening access to, participation in and completion of higher education studies.

**Guidelines:**

Legal regulations and administrative rules should allow sufficient flexibility in the design, organisation and delivery of study programmes to reflect the diversity of students' needs. Higher education institutions should be enabled to organise full-time and part-time studies, flexible study modes, blended and distance learning as well as to recognise prior learning (RPL), in order to accommodate the needs of the diverse student population.

Public authorities should promote recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning (RPL) in higher education, because it has a positive impact on widening access, transition and completion, equity and inclusion, mobility and employability. RPL enables flexible modes of lifelong learning in the entire education sector, including higher education. Implementing RPL will require effective cooperation amongst the higher education system, employers and the wider community and to enable this, national qualifications frameworks should facilitate transparent recognition of learning outcomes and reliable quality assurance procedures.

The second principle and the related guidelines stress the need for creating conditions for higher education institutions to widen 'access to, participation in and completion of higher education studies'. This is envisaged to be achieved in two important ways: first, by enabling flexible study modes such as part-time studies, blended and distance learning; and second, by recognising prior non-formal and informal learning experiences, both for accessing and for the fulfilment of higher education programmes.

The guidelines emphasise that higher education systems have to adapt to different categories of learners, providing adequate learning opportunities for as many as possible. Enabling flexible study modes is essential for those students who cannot allocate all their time for their studies, but have to reconcile several engagements: for instance, higher education studies and employment. One way to achieve this, for example, is through part-time studies. Other alternative, flexible modes of study include blended and distance learning. Blended learning is a mode of learning that combines online teaching with classroom-based learning, while distance learning refers to the education of students who are not present at an institution. This may be through online education or correspondence courses.

The importance of the recognition of knowledge and skills gained through non-formal and informal learning has been stressed by communiqués of ministerial conferences for years. With the Bucharest Communiqué ministers explicitly agreed to 'step up [their] efforts towards under-represented groups to develop the social dimension of higher education, reduce inequalities and provide [...] alternative access routes, including recognition of prior learning' <sup>(10)</sup>. For countries of the European Union, the recognition of prior learning has been encouraged through a Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning <sup>(11)</sup>.

RPL enables flexible modes of lifelong learning in two important respects: first, it facilitates access to higher education for 'non-traditional' learners: students without formal entry qualifications to access higher education programmes. Second, it eases the completion of higher education programmes, as students' previous non-formal and informal learning experiences can contribute to the completion of their studies.

<sup>(10)</sup> Bucharest Communiqué: Making the Most of Our Potential: Consolidating the European Higher Education Area, 26-27 April 2012, pp. 1-2.

<sup>(11)</sup> [Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning](#), 20 December 2012 (2012/C 398/01).

On this basis, the following indicators were selected to be monitored in this policy area:

- 1) Existence of top-level regulations allowing higher education institutions to offer flexible pathways like part-time studies, blended or distance learning programmes.
- 2) Existence of regulatory frameworks allowing candidates to enter higher education based on recognition of prior non-formal and/or informal learning in all higher education institutions.
- 3) Existence of regulatory frameworks enabling the contribution of prior non-formal and informal learning towards the fulfilment of a higher education study programme.
- 4) Existing requirements for quality assurance agencies to address the recognition of prior non-formal and/or informal learning in higher education in their external evaluation procedures.

This last point is important, as higher education institutions play a crucial role in implementing recognition procedures, and quality assurance agencies can monitor whether the implementation goes smoothly and in accordance with the legal framework.

Regarding the first indicator, flexible study modes (part-time studies, blended and distant learning), they are all prevalent across the EHEA. The large majority of education systems report that organising study programmes in flexible ways is legally possible for all higher education institutions (see Table 4.3 in the Annex for details). In most countries, institutions can make use of all three possibilities; and the only education system where none of the three modes of study are legally possible in higher education is Albania. Nevertheless, a few education systems only allow one or two flexible modes of organising higher education studies, or limit such flexibility to certain institutions. For example, in Cyprus, only private higher education institutions can provide these flexible study modes in the first cycle. In Moldova, it is not possible to study medicine and pharmacy through part-time studies. In addition, other legal restrictions may apply, regarding the number or share of credits that can be gained through distance or blended learning, for example. More information on these restrictions is presented in Chapter 5, section 5.3.3.

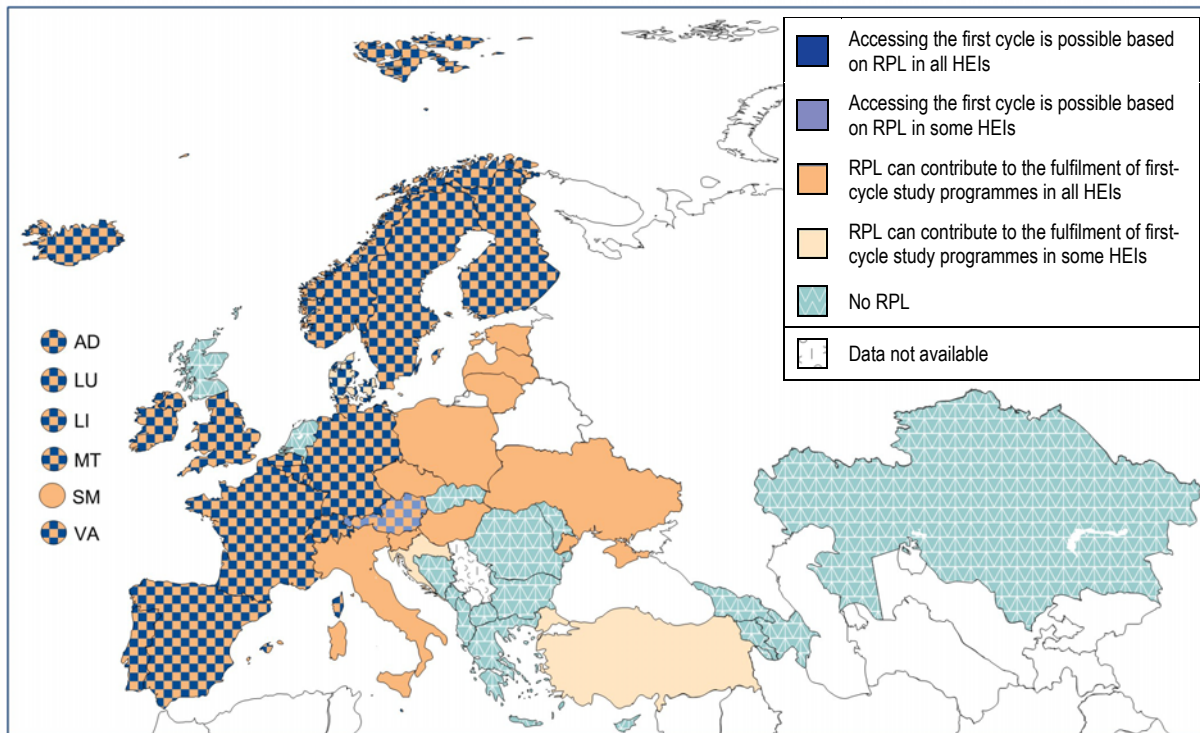
Figure 4.3 depicts legal frameworks for the recognition of prior learning in accessing first-cycle higher education and for the fulfilment of first-cycle study programmes. As the figure illustrates, accessing first-cycle higher education based on the recognition of prior learning – and thus without the standard entry qualifications – is much less widespread than allowing prior experiences to be recognised for the fulfilment of higher education studies. Accessing the first cycle based on RPL is only possible in 20 education systems, mostly situated in western Europe. Out of these 20 education systems, Austria only allows such access in the case of Universities of Applied Sciences. In addition, not all education systems recognise all types of learning experiences: only 10 systems report doing so. While most education systems with RPL recognise learning experiences resulting from work/professional activity, non-formal education and training courses or in-company training, only around half of them allow access to higher education based on experiences resulting from daily activities related to family or leisure.

Many of the education systems making it possible for non-traditional learners to access higher education through RPL also offer other alternative ways to do so. For entrants without formal entry qualifications, some countries offer the possibility of taking an entrance exam or admission test. This is not to be confused with special aptitude tests offered to the most talented, most prevalent in the field of arts: these examinations should be open to a wider group of learners (e.g. all applicants or applicants over a certain age). Such special entrance examinations exist for example in Andorra, Belgium, Germany (in combination with RPL), Spain, Portugal and Sweden. These entrance exams are often offered to mature learners (or 'delayed transition students'), above a certain pre-defined age

(in Andorra, Spain and Sweden). This type of entrance exam is also available to mature students in the Netherlands, where accessing higher education through RPL is not possible.

Some education systems organise preparatory or trial higher education programmes, or programmes leading to alternative entry qualifications. Such programmes exist for example in Belgium (Flemish Community), Denmark, France, Germany, Iceland, Luxembourg, Malta, Spain and Switzerland. Upon their successful completion, students can gain access to higher education degree programmes, with or without gaining a special qualification or certificate in addition. As another alternative, online ‘open universities’ offer degree programmes to all learners in Finland and the United Kingdom (England).

**Figure 4.3: Recognition of prior learning in accessing and for the fulfilment of first-cycle higher education study programmes, 2022/2023**



Source: BFUG data collection.

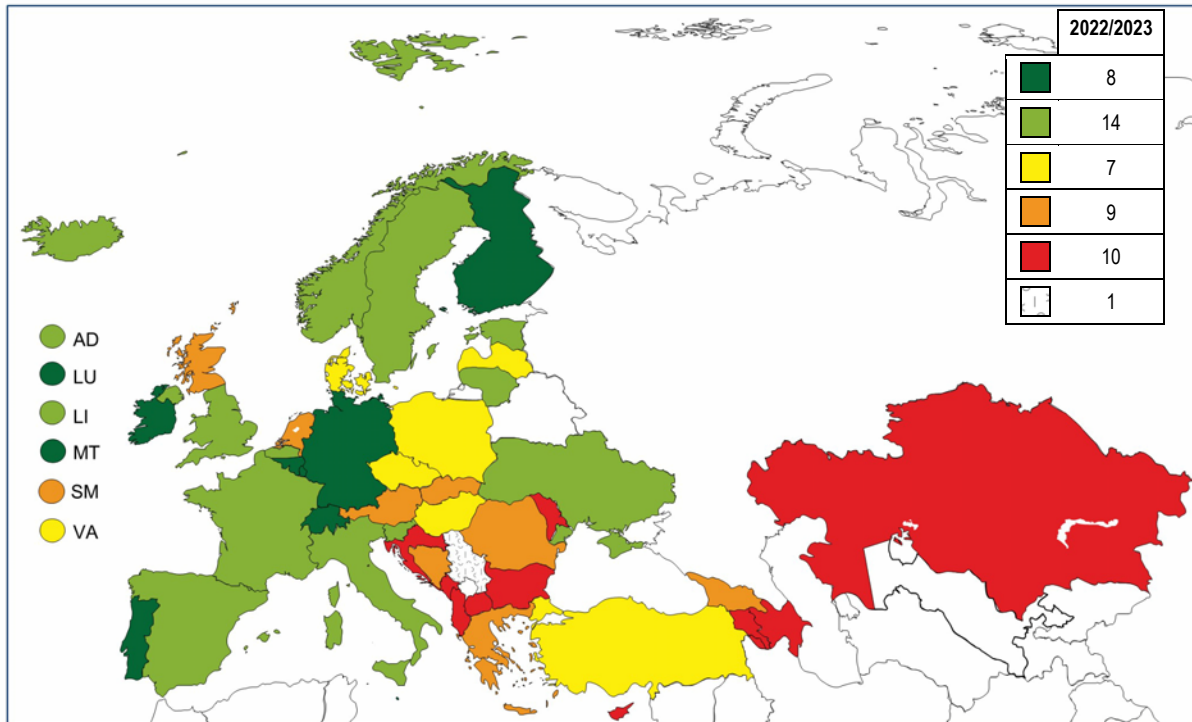
RPL can contribute to the fulfilment of first-cycle higher education study programmes in 32 education systems, so more than half of the countries analysed in this report. As such, allowing previous experiences to count towards the fulfilment of a study programme is more widespread than allowing ‘non-traditional’ candidates enter higher education this way. Nevertheless, education systems often define some limits to such recognition, either in terms of the types of higher education institution that can make use of it, or concerning the workload/number of credits that can be recognised or validated (see Chapter 5, section 5.3.3 for more information). In addition, similarly to recognition procedures providing access to higher education, only few education systems allow all types of non-formal and informal experiences to be recognised, with experiences resulting from daily activities related to family or leisure being the least likely to be accepted.

Finally, quality assurance agencies are only required to address the implementation of the recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning in higher education in their external evaluation process in less than half of the education systems where RPL is legally possible (see Table 4.4 in the Annex for details). This leaves the question whether higher education institutions really implement recognition procedures the way the law requires, or whether they really make use of it, facilitating higher education access and completion.



Figure 4.4 shows the summary indicator for this policy area related to flexibility. Eight education systems (the French Community of Belgium, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal and Switzerland) fulfil all the conditions identified by this scorecard indicator: they allow all flexible study modes and the recognition of prior learning (in access to and the fulfilment of study programmes) for all higher education institutions. Moreover, quality assurance agencies are also required to monitor higher education institutions in their implementation of RPL. Nevertheless, legal restrictions and limitations on such flexible study modes and the recognition of prior learning may apply also in these cases (see Chapter 5, section 5.3.3).

**Figure 4.4: Scorecard indicator n°x: P & G 2: Enabling flexible modes of lifelong learning in higher education, 2022/2023**



Source: BFUG data collection.

**Scorecard categories**

	Enabling flexible modes of lifelong learning in higher education through the following four elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Top-level regulations allow higher education institutions to offer flexible pathways like part-time studies, blended and distance learning programmes.</li> <li>• Candidates are allowed to enter first-cycle higher education based on recognition of prior non-formal and/or informal learning in all higher education institutions.</li> <li>• Prior non-formal and informal learning counts towards the fulfilment of a higher education study programme in the first cycle.</li> <li>• Quality assurance agencies are required to address the recognition of prior non-formal and/or informal learning in higher education in their external evaluation procedures.</li> </ul>
	Enabling flexible modes of lifelong learning in higher education through three of the four mentioned elements.
	Enabling flexible modes of lifelong learning in higher education through two of the four mentioned elements.
	Enabling flexible modes of lifelong learning in higher education through one of the four mentioned elements.
	No possibility for flexible modes of learning in higher education through the four mentioned elements.
	Data not available

A further 14 education systems still do fairly well when it comes to the flexibility of higher education studies, most often either only missing the quality assurance requirement, or not allowing access to

first-cycle studies on the basis of recognition of prior learning. Seven education systems are in the yellow category, and nine in orange, providing the necessary legal framework in two or only one area respectively. Finally, 10 education systems do not fulfil their public responsibility towards widening access to, participation in and completion of higher education studies.

### 4.3. Synergies and lifelong learning

**Principle:**

The inclusiveness of the entire education system should be improved by developing coherent policies from early childhood education, through schooling to higher education and throughout lifelong learning.

**Guidelines:**

It is important to create synergies with all education levels and related policy areas (such as finance, employment, health and social welfare, housing, migration etc.) in order to develop policy measures that create an inclusive environment throughout the entire education sector that fosters equity, diversity, and inclusion, and is responsive to the needs of the wider community.

The social dimension policies should not only support current students, but also potential students in their preparation and transition into higher education. Participation in higher education has to be a lifelong option, including for adults who decide to return to or enter higher education at later stages in their lives. An inclusive approach needs to involve wider communities, higher education institutions and other stakeholder groups to co-create pathways to higher education.

Equity, diversity and inclusion should play a key role in the training of pre-higher education teachers.

The third principle focuses on the education system as a whole, situating higher education studies within a lifelong learning perspective. This principle and its guidelines stress that the inclusiveness of the entire education system is important, and policies fostering equity, diversity and inclusion in higher education should be developed in synergy with policies concerning other educational levels and even other policy sectors. In addition, following up on the lifelong learning approach, the guidelines highlight that social dimension policies in higher education should also support and target potential students, especially adult learners returning to education later in life. Finally, the last guideline addresses how higher education can contribute to equity and inclusion at lower educational levels: through teacher training. The guidelines stress the importance of training future teachers in matters of equity, diversity and inclusion.

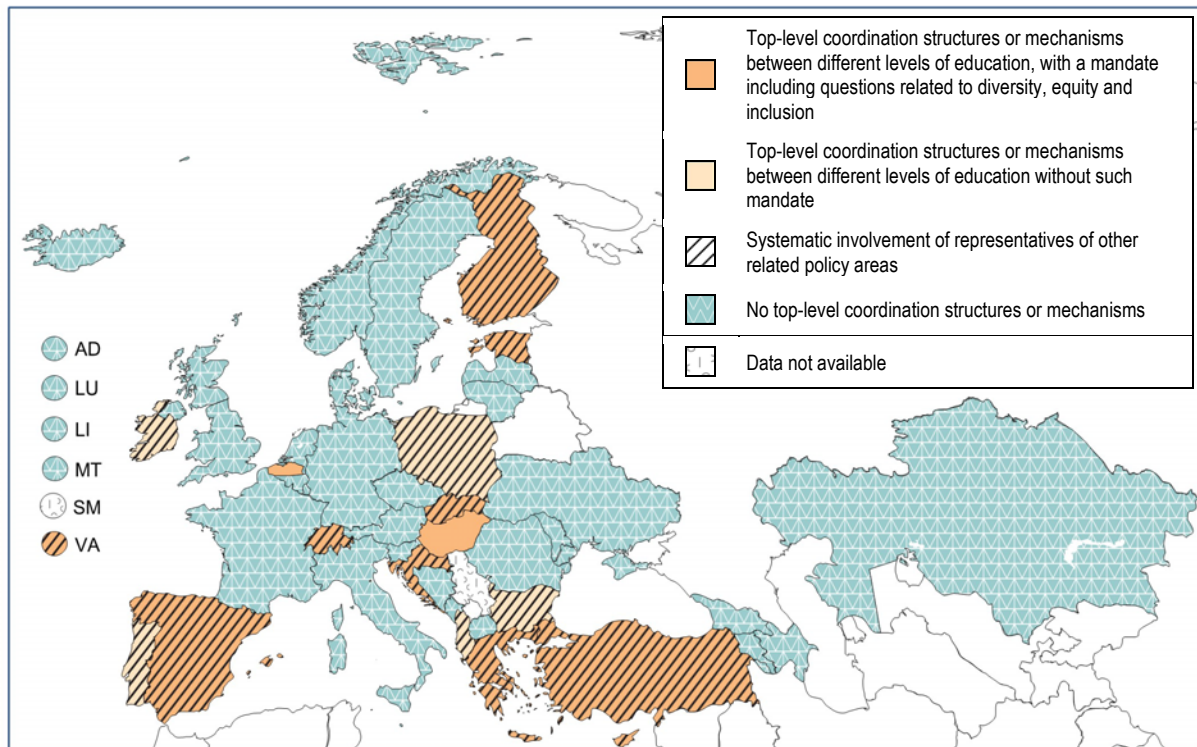
These guidelines are translated into the following indicators to be monitored in this report:

- 1) Existence of top-level coordination structures and/or mechanisms between different levels of education with a mandate including questions related to diversity, equity and inclusion in education.
- 2) The systematic involvement of representatives of other related policy areas, such as finance, employment, housing, or other social services in policy discussions on diversity, equity and inclusion in education.
- 3) Existence of top-level measures aiming to support those who wish to access higher education during adulthood (delayed transition students).
- 4) Existence of top-level requirements specifying the development of competencies related to diversity, equity and inclusion within initial teacher education (ITE) programmes.

Figure 4.5 depicts existing coordination structures or mechanisms between different levels of education reported by EHEA systems. The figure details whether such coordination structures or mechanisms have been established; whether they include questions related to diversity, equity and

inclusion in education in their mandate; and whether representatives of other related policy areas, such as finance, employment, health, housing, or other social services are systematically involved in policy discussions on diversity, equity and inclusion in education.

**Figure 4.5: Top-level coordination structures and mechanisms between different levels of education, 2022/2023**



Source: BFUG data collection.

Around one third of EHEA systems report having established top-level coordination structures and/or mechanisms between different levels of education. There are two main types of such structure or mechanism. First, some education systems have established separate bodies responsible for coordinating policies across education levels. This is, for example, the Flemish Education Council (*Vlaamse Onderwijsraad, 'Vlor'*) in the Flemish Community of Belgium<sup>(12)</sup>, the National Skills Council in Ireland<sup>(13)</sup>, the Stakeholder Council in Poland<sup>(14)</sup>, the National Educational Council (*Conselho Nacional de Educação*) in Portugal<sup>(15)</sup>, or the State School Council (*Consejo Escolar del Estado*) in Spain<sup>(16)</sup>. While most of these bodies include questions related to diversity, equity and inclusion in their mandate, some of them have been established primarily for this purpose. This is the case, for example, of the National Group for Enhancing Social Dimension in Higher Education in Croatia, which consists of representatives of higher education, pre-tertiary education, vocational and adult education, experts, students, chamber of commerce, etc. Second, other education systems designated specific top-level committees or other bodies/secretariats for the implementation of cross-sectoral or lifelong learning strategies. This is the case for example in Cyprus (National Committee of Lifelong Learning) and Estonia (Education and Youth Board).

The large majority of these coordination structures also systematically include representatives of other policy areas in their discussions, most often employment, but also stakeholders from areas such as social welfare, health, or budget planning.

<sup>(12)</sup> <https://www.vlor.be/about-the-vlor>

<sup>(13)</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/7637e6-national-skills-council/>

<sup>(14)</sup> <https://kwalifikacje.gov.pl/o-zsk/rada-interesariuszy>

<sup>(15)</sup> <https://www.cnedu.pt/pt/>

<sup>(16)</sup> <https://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/mc/cee/portada.html>

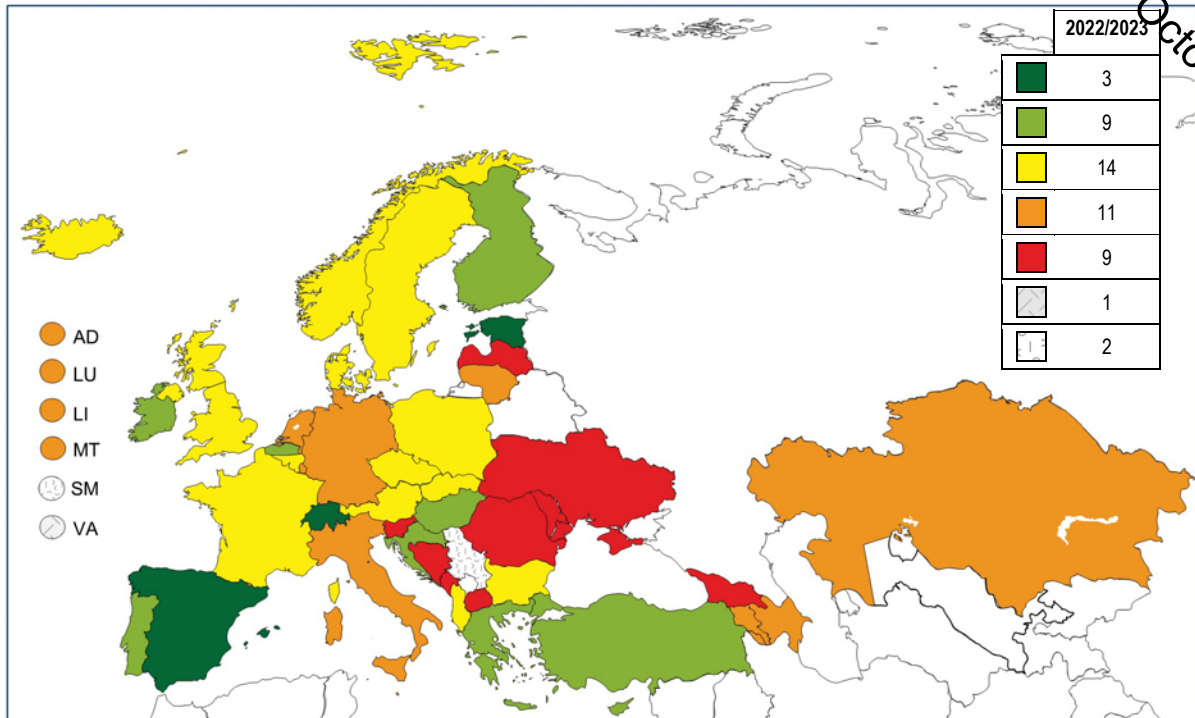
The second topic within this area concerns support provided to adult learners, often referred to as ‘delayed transition students’. This support is strongly related to alternative access routes discussed in the previous section: many alternative access measures explicitly target mature students – that is, students above a pre-defined age threshold. For this reason, not surprisingly, all education systems allowing candidates to access higher education programmes based on the recognition of prior learning or other alternative routes report having measures supporting delayed transition students.

In addition, education systems list other ways of supporting adult learners: through financial support that is accessible with a high upper age limit, or no age limit at all (e.g. in Cyprus, Germany, Hungary, Norway, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom – Scotland), financial support that is accessible specifically to students combining work and studies (e.g. in Austria, Belgium (Flemish Community), Finland and Luxembourg), support for the development of micro-credentials (e.g. in Czechia, Hungary and Spain), or the preferential treatment of adult learners (e.g. in Cyprus and Türkiye). All in all, the majority of education systems provide support to adult learners (see Table 4.5 in the Annex for details).

Finally, the last indicator in this section concerns whether top-level authorities require the development of competencies related to diversity, equity and inclusion within initial teacher training programmes. Less than half of the education systems (23) report having such requirements concerning initial teacher education programmes. A further nine education systems state that there are top-level recommendations on the development of competencies related to diversity, equity and inclusion within ITE programmes (see Table 4.6 in the Annex for details). At the same time, practicing teachers can gain such skills and competences through continuous professional development (CPD) activities in the large majority of EHEA systems.

Figure 4.6 shows the scorecard indicator developed on synergies within the education system and lifelong learning. Based on the four indicators described above, only three education systems are placed in the highest, green category: Estonia, Spain and Switzerland. Nevertheless, the majority of EHEA countries create some of the conditions that could facilitate synergies within the education system as a whole for an inclusive lifelong learning, most often through supporting delayed transition students and requiring ITE programmes to focus on questions of diversity, equity and inclusion when training future teachers. However, education systems often lack top-level coordination structures or mechanisms between different levels of education with a mandate linked to the social dimension of education; and in nine education systems, none of the conditions identified in this section are present.

Figure 4.6: Scorecard indicator n°x: P & G 3: Facilitating synergies for an inclusive lifelong learning, 2022/2023



Source: BFUG data collection.

**Scorecard categories**

	Facilitating synergies for an inclusive lifelong learning through the following four elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Top-level coordination structures and mechanisms between different levels of education with a mandate including questions related to diversity, equity and inclusion in education.</li> <li>• Representatives of other related policy areas, such as finance, employment, housing, or other social services are systematically involved in policy discussions on diversity, equity and inclusion in education.</li> <li>• Top-level measures aiming to support those who wish to access higher education during adulthood (delayed transition students).</li> <li>• Initial teacher education programmes are required to develop competencies on diversity, equity and inclusion in education.</li> </ul>
	Facilitating synergies for an inclusive lifelong learning through three of the four mentioned elements.
	Facilitating synergies for an inclusive lifelong learning through two of the four mentioned elements.
	Facilitating synergies for an inclusive lifelong learning through one of the four mentioned elements.
	No synergies for an inclusive lifelong learning through the four mentioned elements.
	Not applicable
	Data not available

## 4.4. Monitoring and data collection

### Principle:

Reliable data is a necessary precondition for an evidence-based improvement of the social dimension of higher education. Higher education systems should define the purpose and goals of collecting certain types of data, taking into account the particularities of the national legal frameworks. Adequate capacities to collect, process and use such data to inform and support the social dimension of higher education should be developed.

### Guidelines:

In order to develop effective policies, continuous national data collection is necessary. Within the limits of national legal frameworks, such data collection should provide information on the composition of the student body, access and participation, drop-out and completion of higher education, including the transition to the labour market after completion of studies, and allow for the identification of vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups.

In order to make such data collection comparable internationally, work on categories for administrative data collection that are relevant for the social dimension should be developed at the EHEA level through Eurostudent or similar surveys. With the aim to rationalize the process and avoid administrative burden on public administration and higher education institutions, this development should take account of existing national practices and relevant data collection processes.

Such national data collection exercises could, where relevant and necessary, be complemented by higher education institutions undertaking additional surveys, research and analysis to better understand vulnerability, disadvantages, and underrepresentation in education, as well as transitions of students across the education system.

This principle and its guidelines focus on monitoring systems that are an essential aspect of policy-making and development. The first step towards widening participation is actually collecting information on the existing situation regarding the participation of under-represented or disadvantaged groups in higher education. Such information collected through systematic monitoring can provide evidence to education authorities also on the effectiveness of measures aiming to improve the inclusiveness of higher education. The principle highlights that data should be relevant to the goals that have been set. In addition, if data is collected but not used to support the further development of social dimension policies, then this is also insufficient.

The guidelines outline the kind of national processes that are required within a successful equity policy. First, it is important to collect relevant information on the composition of the student body, access and participation, as well as drop-out and the completion of higher education and the transition into the labour market. While there may be some limits to the nature of data on personal characteristics that are collected in some systems (e.g. legislation may forbid collecting data on ethnicity), wherever there are vulnerable, disadvantaged and under-represented groups, it is important that they can be identified through the data collected. The guidelines also encourage national authorities to participate in the Eurostudent and similar surveys – as this allows following progress at European level from a comparative perspective.

The composition of the student/graduate body can be monitored at four different stages: at entry, during higher education studies, at graduation and after graduation. Monitoring entrants can provide information on the inclusiveness of admission systems; monitoring students during higher education can give an insight into differences in drop-out rates based on students' specific characteristics; monitoring graduates can reveal the chances of specific groups of students to complete higher education; and finally, monitoring graduates some years after graduation is typically used to analyse employment patterns of graduates as a whole, as well as that of specific groups of young people.

Regarding higher education completion and drop-out, research indicates that drop-out rates are the highest at the end of the first academic year. First-year students are in a particularly vulnerable situation, since their expectations might be very different from what they actually encounter. This might

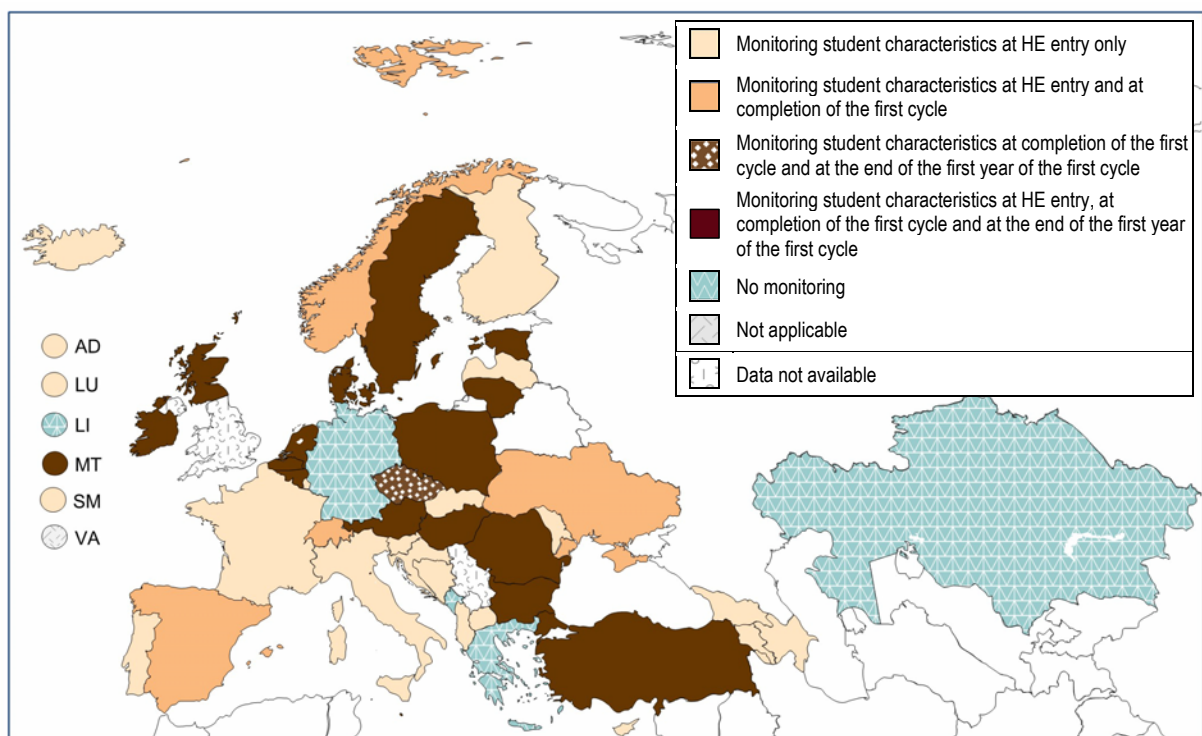
be even more the case for disadvantaged learners. Therefore, monitoring drop-out rates at the end of the first year is especially crucial.

For these reasons, the following indicators have been selected to be analysed in this section:

- 1) Monitoring student characteristics at entry to higher education based on administrative data.
- 2) Monitoring the completion rate of vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups of students.
- 3) Monitoring completion rates at the end of the first year of the first cycle, which can be broken down by student characteristics.
- 4) Participation in the Eurostudent survey.

Figure 4.7 shows whether education systems monitor student characteristics other than age and gender at entry to higher education, at the completion of the first cycle, and at the end of the first year of the first cycle. The criterion 'other than age and gender' has been added, as regular monitoring tends to include these two student characteristics in all cases.

**Figure 4.7: Monitoring student characteristics other than age and gender at higher education entry, at the completion of the first cycle, and at the end of the first year of the first cycle, 2022/2023**



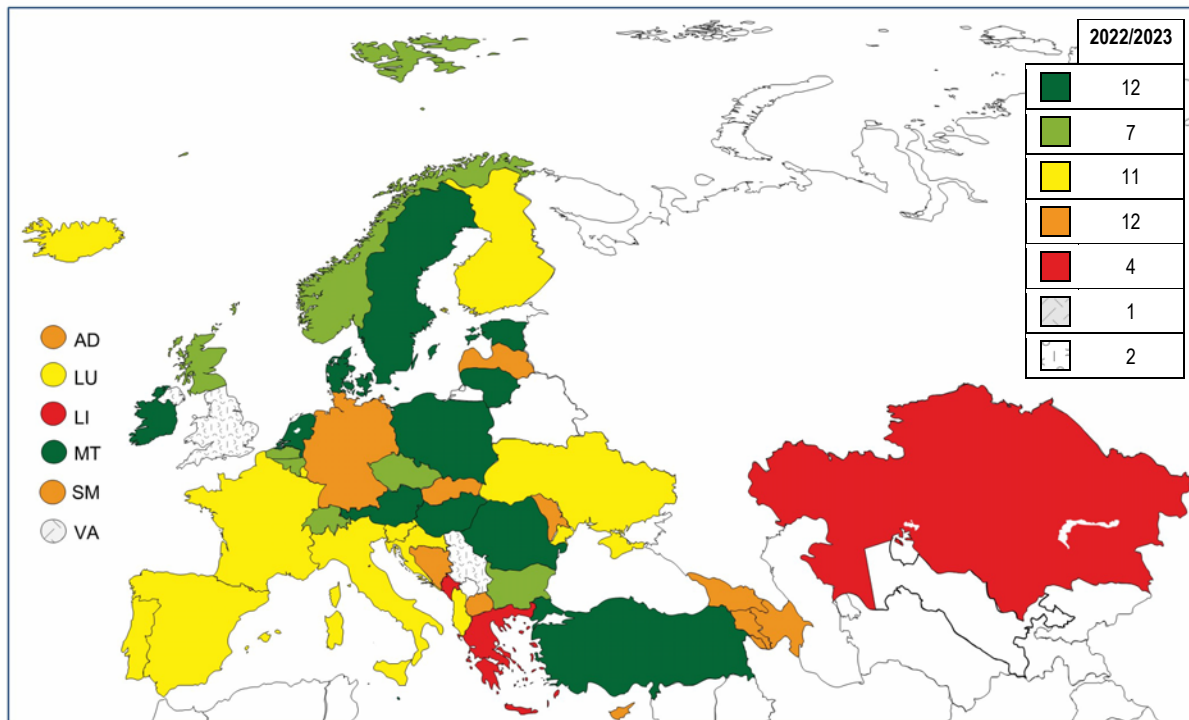
Source: BFUG data collection.

Monitoring student characteristics at higher education entry is reported to be a widespread practice across the EHEA. The large majority of education systems report collecting administrative data on students at this stage. Other than age and gender, monitoring most often includes disability or special educational needs, migrant or refugee status, and socio-economic status. Collecting data on completion rates at the end of the first cycle is less widespread, reported by less than half (21) of education systems. Seventeen education systems report systematically collecting data at the end of the first year that can be broken down by student characteristics other than age and gender.

Around half of the education systems covered in this report participate in the Eurostudent survey, which monitors the social and economic conditions of student life in Europe (see Table 4.7 in the Annex and the website of the Eurostudent survey for more details <sup>(17)</sup>).

The composite scorecard indicator is depicted on Figure 4.8. For this scorecard indicator, more than a quarter of education systems are in the top category, as they monitor higher education students at all stages and by all means identified in this section: at entry, at the end of the first year of the first cycle, at the end of the first cycle, and through the Eurostudent survey. Only four education systems report not having any of the defined monitoring mechanisms in place: Greece, Kazakhstan, Liechtenstein and Montenegro.

Figure 4.8: Scorecard indicator n°x: P & G 4: Monitoring and data collection, 2022/2023



Source: BFUG data collection.

### Scorecard categories

<span style="color: darkgreen;">■</span>	Monitoring and data collection in higher education by the following four means: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student characteristics other than age and gender are monitored at entry to higher education based on administrative data.</li> <li>• Completion rates of students are monitored at the end of the first cycle, and data can be broken down by (at least some) characteristics of students other than age and gender.</li> <li>• Completion rates of students are monitored at the end of the first year of the first cycle, and data can be broken down by (at least some) characteristics of students other than age and gender.</li> <li>• Participation in the Eurostudent survey.</li> </ul>
<span style="color: green;">■</span>	Monitoring and data collection in higher education by three of the four mentioned means.
<span style="color: yellow;">■</span>	Monitoring and data collection in higher education by two of the four mentioned means.
<span style="color: orange;">■</span>	Monitoring and data collection in higher education by one of the four mentioned means.
<span style="color: red;">■</span>	No monitoring and data collection in higher education.
<span style="background-color: lightgrey;">■</span>	Not applicable
<span style="border: 1px solid black;">■</span>	Data not available

<sup>(17)</sup> <https://www.eurostudent.eu/>



## 4.5. Policies to ensure effective academic and careers guidance, and psychological counselling

### Principle:

Public authorities should have policies that enable higher education institutions to ensure effective counselling and guidance for potential and enrolled students in order to widen their access to, participation in and completion of higher education studies. These services should be coherent across the entire education system, with special regard to transitions between different educational levels, educational institutions and into the labour market.

### Guidelines:

Public authorities should create conditions that enable collaboration between different public institutions that provide counselling and guidance services together with higher education institutions in order to create synergies and omit duplication of similar services. These services should uphold the principles of clarity and user-friendliness, because end users must be capable to understand them easily.

Within a diverse student body, special attention should be directed towards students with physical and psychological health challenges. These students should have access to professional support to secure their success in accessing and completing higher education studies. Special focus should be placed on prevention of psychological challenges caused by the organisation of study and students' living conditions.

Public authorities should also consider setting up ombudsperson-type institutions that will have the capacity and knowledge to mediate any conflicts, particularly related to equity issues that may arise during accessing or participating in higher education, or conflicts that hinder the completion of studies.

This principle and its guidelines focus on the capacity of guidance and counselling systems to support both potential and enrolled students to succeed to the best of their abilities. The principle draws attention to the need for coherence in service provision across the entire education system.

The first guideline points to the conditions that enable collaboration and notes the need for clarity and user-friendliness of services. The guidelines also emphasise support not only to enrolled students but also to potential students, stressing the need for flexibility in system design and for individuals to be able to move back into the education system at any time during their lives. Finally, the guidelines highlight the need for institutions to have the capacity to mediate conflicts, particularly related to equity issues.

On this basis, the following indicators were selected to monitor effective guidance and counselling services:

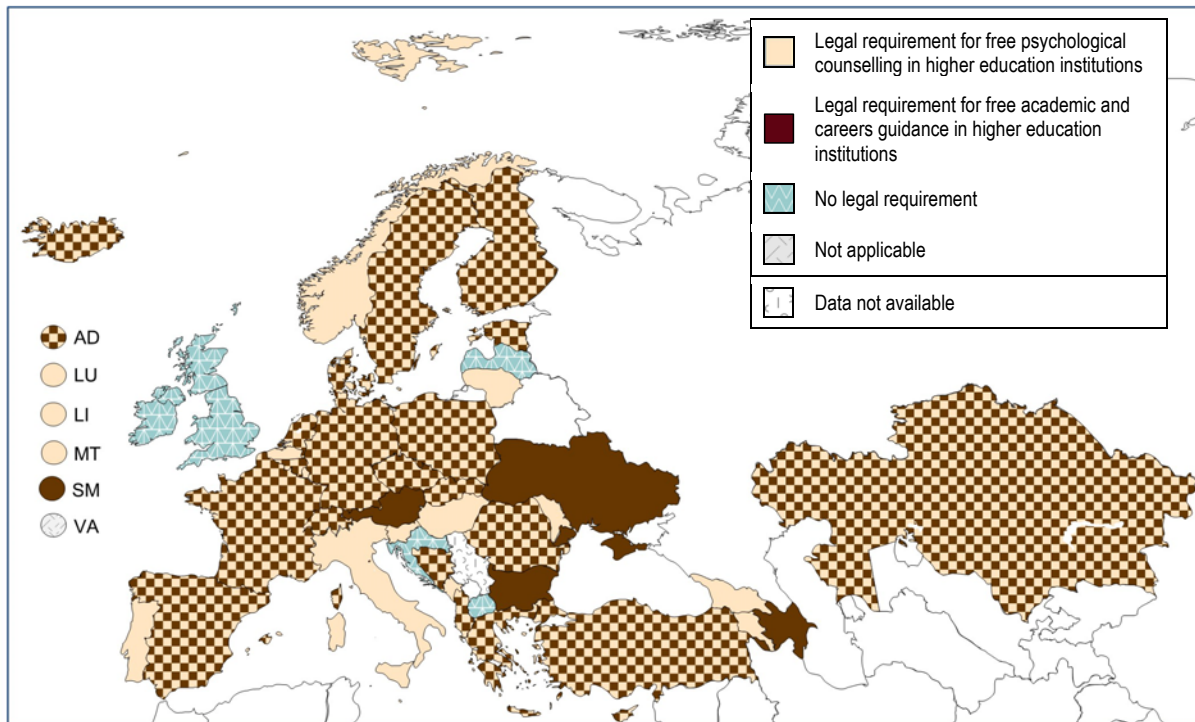
- 1) The existence of a top-level legal requirement and support to provide free, accessible, and timely academic and careers counselling and guidance services to potential and enrolled students in higher education.
- 2) The existence of a top-level legal requirement to provide free, accessible and timely psychological counselling and guidance services to potential and enrolled students in higher education.
- 3) Existing requirements for quality assurance agencies to monitor career, academic as well as psychological counselling and guidance services in higher education.
- 4) Existence of public institution(s) with a formal role in conflict resolution and in mediating conflicts related to social dimension in higher education.

The services under consideration can help actual and potential students in many different ways, including instilling confidence to achieve academic success; developing skills to improve organisation, study habits, and time management; working through personal problems that may affect capacity to study effectively and live well; identifying interests, strengths, and aptitudes, and preparing for future academic, career, and social challenges. Because of the many potential benefits, the principle and its

guidelines recommend that services are accessible to all actual and potential students and provided free of charge.

Figure 4.9 focuses on whether there is a top-level legal requirement to provide academic, careers and psychological counselling services to potential or actual students. The first criterion for the indicator is that the top-level legal requirement should specifically address at least one of the two categories – students already enrolled in higher education institutions or potential students (i.e., upper secondary school students or adults interested in entering higher education). The second criterion is that the services should be free of charge.

**Figure 4.9: Legal requirement for free guidance and counselling services for actual and/or potential students in higher education, 2022/2023**



Source: BFUG data collection.

Only six EHEA systems (Croatia, Ireland, Latvia, North Macedonia and the UK education systems) have no legal requirement for either academic, careers or psychological guidance services. Psychological counselling services are legally required in 35 systems while for academic and careers guidance services the requirement exists in 27 systems.

While this picture is rather positive – particularly given the fact that services may also be provided in the countries which do not have a legal requirement – the indicator is unable to assess whether in reality all students or potential students who need these services are actually able to benefit from them. This key question cannot be answered from the type of data received from ministry representatives. It would require qualitative research to be undertaken with potential and actual students and higher education institutions.

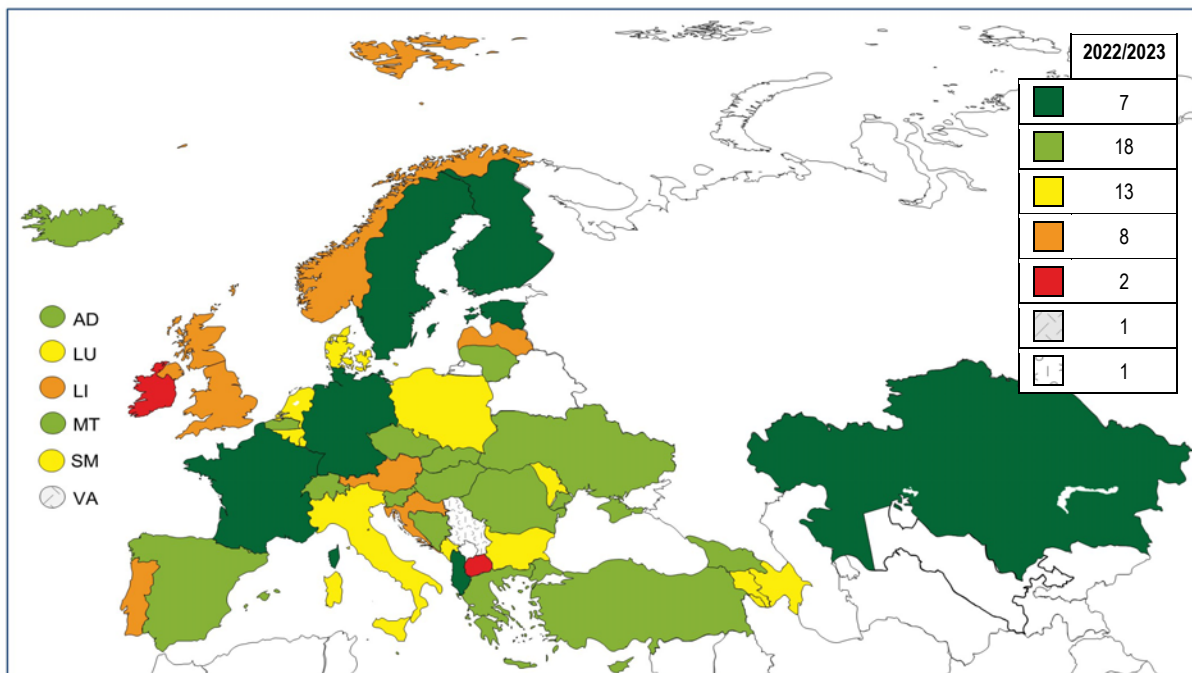
The next issue under consideration is the requirement for quality assurance of these support services. National respondents were asked whether quality assurance of these services is required by law. More specifically respondents were asked whether quality assurance agencies have standards and criteria to check in their external evaluations whether higher education students have access to academic, career and/or psychological counselling services? According to the responses, 33 EHEA

systems specify requirements for quality assurance of services within the mandate of quality assurance agencies (see Annex, Table 4.8).

The fourth indicator with regard to this set of principles and guidelines concerns the existence of public institutions that provide formal mediation for conflicts. Where such an institution exists, the mediation role needs to include issues related to diversity, equity and inclusion in order to be considered here. Around a third of the EHEA systems (16) have such conflict mediation institutions (see Annex, Table 4.9).

Figure 4.10 shows the scorecard indicator developed on the basis of the four indicators outlined above.

**Figure 4.10: Scorecard indicator n°x: P & G 5: Effective guidance and counselling services, 2022/2023**



Source: BFUG data collection.

### Scorecard categories

	Effective guidance and counselling services are demonstrated through the following four elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal requirement to provide free academic and careers counselling services to potential and enrolled students in higher education.</li> <li>• Legal requirement to provide free psychological counselling services to potential and enrolled students in higher education.</li> <li>• Requirement for quality assurance of career, academic and psychological counselling, and guidance services in higher education.</li> <li>• Existence of public institution(s) with a formal role in conflict resolution and in mediating conflicts related to social dimension in higher education.</li> </ul>
	Three of the four mentioned elements are implemented.
	Two of the four mentioned elements are implemented.
	One of the four mentioned elements is implemented.
	None of the four mentioned elements are implemented.
	Not applicable
	Data not available

Overall, 37 systems are in the top three categories, with 7 in dark green and 17 in light green. Only two systems are in the red category. This indicates that in most higher education systems

requirements are in place for the type of services covered in this principle and its guidelines. Nevertheless, there remains room for improvement to extend the coverage and ensure the quality of such services.

## 4.6. Policies to ensure sustainable funding for equity, inclusion and diversity in higher education

### Principle:

Public authorities should provide sufficient and sustainable funding and financial autonomy to higher education institutions enabling them to build adequate capacity to embrace diversity and contribute to equity and inclusion in higher education.

### Guidelines:

Higher education funding systems should facilitate the attainment of strategic objectives related to the social dimension of higher education. Higher education institutions should be supported and rewarded for meeting agreed targets in widening access, increasing participation in and completion of higher education studies, in particular in relation to vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups. Mechanisms for achieving these targets should not have negative financial consequences for higher education institutions' core funding.

Financial support systems should aim to be universally applicable to all students, however, when this is not possible, the public student financial support systems should be primarily needs-based and should make higher education affordable for all students, foster access to and provide opportunities for success in higher education. They should mainly contribute to cover both the direct costs of study (fees and study materials) and the indirect costs (e.g. accommodation, which is becoming increasingly problematic for students across the EHEA due to the increased housing, living, and transportation costs, etc.).

This principle and its guidelines focus on two key objectives of higher education public funding: first, that it should be sufficient and sustainable, and second, that higher education institutions should have and use autonomy to embrace diversity and enhance equity and inclusion.

The first guideline proposes that higher education funding systems should be closely aligned to strategic objectives related to the social dimension. Higher education institutions should be supported and rewarded for meeting agreed targets, such as widening access, increasing participation in, and completion of, higher education studies, especially in relation to vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups. However, this should not be done at the expense of core funding.

The second guideline focuses on financial support systems to students. The aim should be for financial support to be universally applicable. However, where this is not possible, support should be primarily need-based, rather than rewarding academic performance. Support should also contribute to direct and indirect costs of study.

The following indicators were selected to monitor sufficient, sustainable and equitable funding:

- 1) Public funding for higher education institutions that meet targets in widening access, increasing participation or completing higher education, in particular in relation to underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.
- 2) Public provision of universal or need-based grants for first-cycle students that cover direct and indirect costs of study.
- 3) Public provision of top-level student financial support for indirect costs of study.
- 4) Eligibility of part-time students for the same direct or indirect financial support as full-time students.

The first element – attributing funding to higher education institutions that meet targets in widening access, increasing participation or completing higher education, in particular in relation to underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups – remains very much a minority feature of European higher education today (see Annex, Table 4.10).

Only eight systems report system-level funding that corresponds to this approach. The countries where funding is most directly used for targeting social dimension objectives are Austria and Romania. In Austria, the funding follows the objectives of the national social dimension strategy. Every public university has a performance agreement with the ministry which includes measures regarding the social dimension, and the foreseen budget is only transferred in full if these social dimension measures are implemented. Meanwhile in Romania, a part of higher education institutional financing is based on the share of the number of students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds in the total number of students.

Czechia, Estonia, Finland and Norway attribute additional funding to higher education institutions in relation to completion rates. While improving completion is an important objective, it has only an indirect impact on disadvantaged students, as they are not specifically targeted by the measure. In contrast, Italy uses a funding mechanism which targets completion of the first year of higher education studies. This is the year in which students, and especially vulnerable students, are most likely to drop out. Germany also has funding mechanisms that, particularly at state (*Land*) level, may target social dimension objectives such as attracting first-generation students.

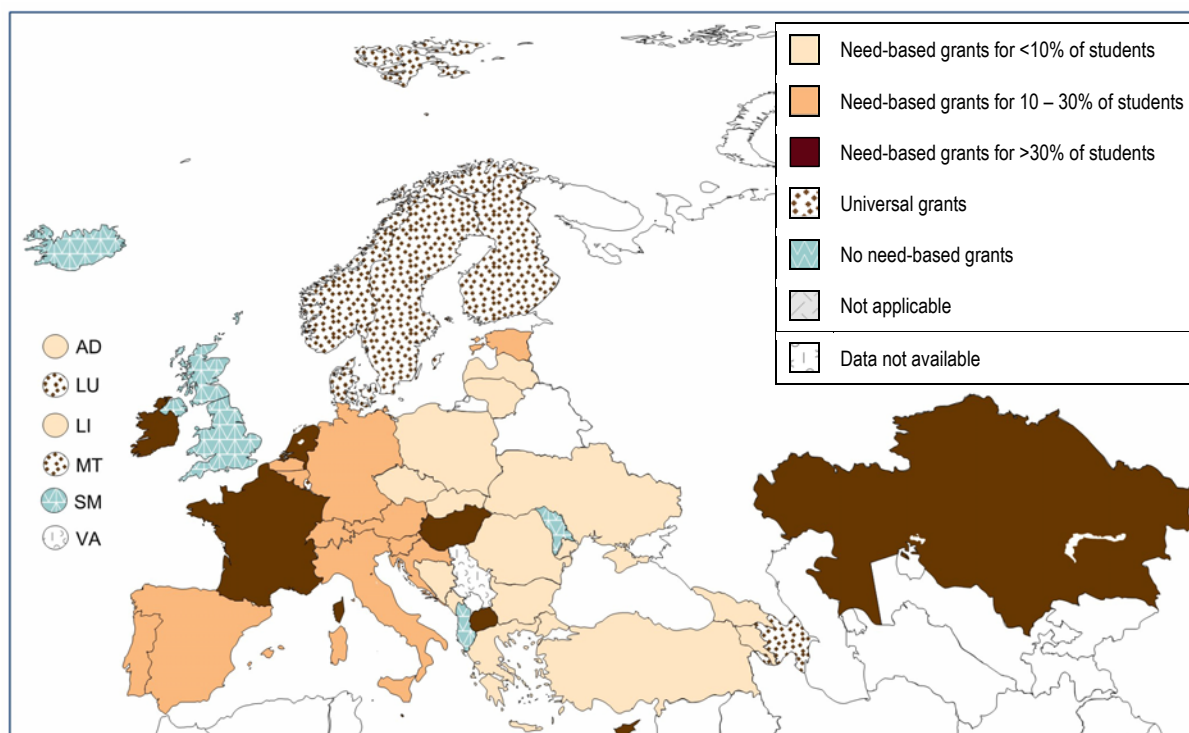
The second indicator focuses on grants. This is a form of public financial support that is provided directly to students and, in contrast with loans, does not need to be paid back. Government support through grants can contribute to promoting social mobility by providing equal opportunities for students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. By ensuring that financial constraints do not hinder access to higher education, governments can help to engender a more equitable society where individuals can achieve their full potential regardless of their economic circumstances.

When all students are eligible for grants with no other criterion than student status involved (such as academic performance or financial status), the type of grant system is understood as ‘universal’. This is the model which is seen as the gold standard in the principle and its guidelines. Disadvantaged students are not specifically targeted, but due to the universal approach, benefit from it. As all students are treated equally, there is no potential for any stigma in relation to receiving a grant.

In many systems, grants are awarded on the basis of assessed financial need. Eligibility is determined on the basis of a set of socio-economic criteria, the most frequent being family income. These systems intend grants to reach those students with the greatest financial need, and are therefore designed to support the participation of disadvantaged students.

Figure 4.11 depicts the use of universal and need-based grants in the EHEA. The first cycle is chosen as this cycle has the largest enrolment of students. Need-based grants are shown in relation to the percentage of recipients – under 10%, between 10 – 30% and over 30%.

Figure 4.11: Grants awarded in the first cycle of higher education, 2022/2023



Source: BFUG data collection.

Universal grants are provided in seven EHEA systems, with the Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Norway joined by Azerbaijan, Luxembourg and Malta. Need-based grants are far more widespread in the EHEA, with 34 systems providing them. In 16 systems they are provided for under 10% of the student population. This may indicate that there has been a decision to support only those students who have the greatest financial need, but it may also indicate a relatively low level of investment in student support. In 11 systems need-based grants reach between 10 – 30% of students, and in six systems they are attributed to over 30% of students. Six systems provide no need-based grants at all. In these systems the student support funding model is not aligned with the philosophy of the principle and guidelines.

The third indicator related to this principle and its guidelines is whether the public authority provides top-level student financial support for indirect costs of study. Indirect financial support means all other forms of public subsidy to students that are not received directly as are grants and loans. The main forms considered here are subsidies for student accommodation, transport and meals, but subsidies for study materials such as books and IT equipment are also very relevant.

Governments providing indirect financial support to higher education students can help higher education become more affordable and accessible for students from lower-income backgrounds. This allows students to focus more on their studies rather than worrying about related expenses. Indirect financial support can also enable students to access better educational resources and facilities, including research materials, laboratories, and library resources. This can contribute to improved educational outcomes and a higher quality of educational experience. Indirect financial support can therefore add to the incentives for students to pursue higher education.

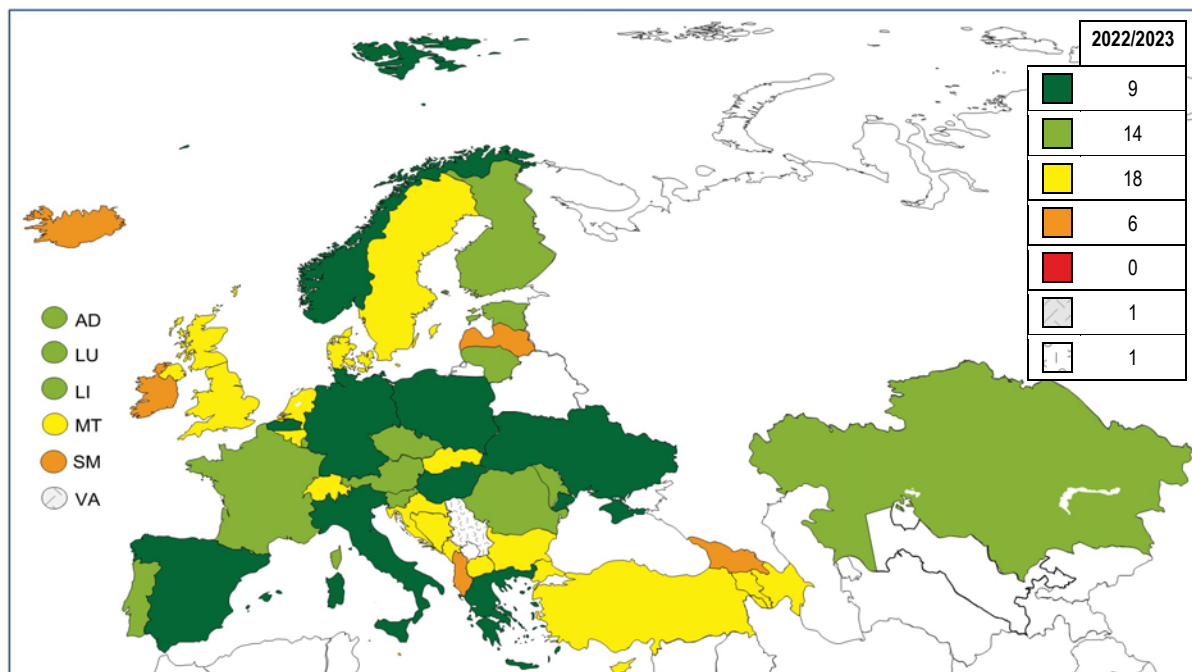
Some level of indirect financial support is provided by the majority of EHEA countries. Indeed it is only in eight systems that no indirect financial support is put in place for transport, meals or accommodation (see Annex, Table 4.11).

The fourth indicator in this section relates to part-time students and assesses whether or not the forms of student support that are in place for full-time students are also in place for part-time students. Providing financial support to part-time higher education students plays an essential role in ensuring equal access, encouraging lifelong learning, fostering social mobility and addressing skills gaps. The guidelines also aim to promote the idea that financial support should be provided for all students, whether studying full or part time.

With respect to this indicator, part-time students are far from being treated equitably across the EHEA (see Annex, Table 4.12). Indeed it is only in about one-third of countries that they are entitled to grants on the same basis, pro-rata, as their full-time counterparts. They are also unable to access indirect financial support in around two-thirds of countries. This evidence means that there is a clear equity policy issue to be tackled in many EHEA systems.

Figure 4.12 is the scorecard indicator encompassing the four indicators outlined above.

**Figure 4.12: Scorecard indicator n°x: P & G 6: Sustainable funding for equity, inclusion and diversity in higher education, 2022/2023**



Source: BFUG data collection.

### Scorecard categories

	Sustainable funding for equity, inclusion and diversity is demonstrated through the following four elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public funding is attributed to higher education institutions that meet targets in widening access, increasing participation or completing higher education, in particular in relation to underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.</li> <li>Public authority provides universal or need-based grants for first cycle students that cover direct and indirect costs of study.</li> <li>Public authority provides top-level student financial support for indirect costs of study.</li> <li>Part-time students are eligible for the same direct or indirect financial support as full-time students.</li> </ul>
	Three of the four mentioned elements are implemented.
	Two of the four mentioned elements are implemented.
	One of the four mentioned elements is implemented.
	None of the four mentioned elements are implemented.
	Not applicable.
	Data not available

Nine systems are in the dark green category, and therefore score positively on all four elements included. 14 systems are in light green, and 18 in yellow. In these cases the systems lack one or two of the elements. Five systems are in the orange category which means that only one of the four elements is adequately addressed. However, there are no countries that are in the red category, and this is a positive reality as it indicates that there is some attention to sustainable funding supporting equity, inclusion and diversity in all EHEA systems.

## 4.7. Policies to create inclusive learning environments and institutional cultures

### Principle:

Public authorities should help higher education institutions to strengthen their capacity in responding to the needs of a more diverse student and staff body and create inclusive learning environments and inclusive institutional cultures.

### Guidelines:

Public authorities should support and provide adequate means to higher education institutions to improve initial and continuing professional training for academic and administrative staff to enable them to work professionally and equitably with a diverse student body and staff.

Whenever possible, external quality assurance systems should address how the social dimension, diversity, accessibility, equity and inclusion are reflected within the institutional missions of higher education institutions, whilst respecting the principle of autonomy of higher education institutions.

This principle and its guidelines focus on the relationship between public authorities and higher education institutions regarding their capacity to respond to the diversity of the student and staff body. It considers the learning environment and the learning culture.

The first guideline focuses on the role of public authorities in supporting and providing adequate means to higher education institutions to improve initial and continuing professional training for academic and administrative staff in the area of diversity and inclusion. Working 'equitably and with a diverse student body and staff' is not necessarily easy or obvious. Therefore, appropriate training can help academic and administrative staff to respond better to the needs of a diverse student body and to work better with colleagues of different backgrounds and/or orientations.

The second guideline considers the topic from the perspective of quality assurance. It examines whether quality assurance systems focus on equity and inclusion, and also whether these issues are integrated into the institutional missions of higher education institutions and/or their study programmes. The second guideline, therefore, is about whether equity and inclusion inform the core values of the higher education institutions and/or of their study programmes.

The following indicators were selected to monitor this policy area:

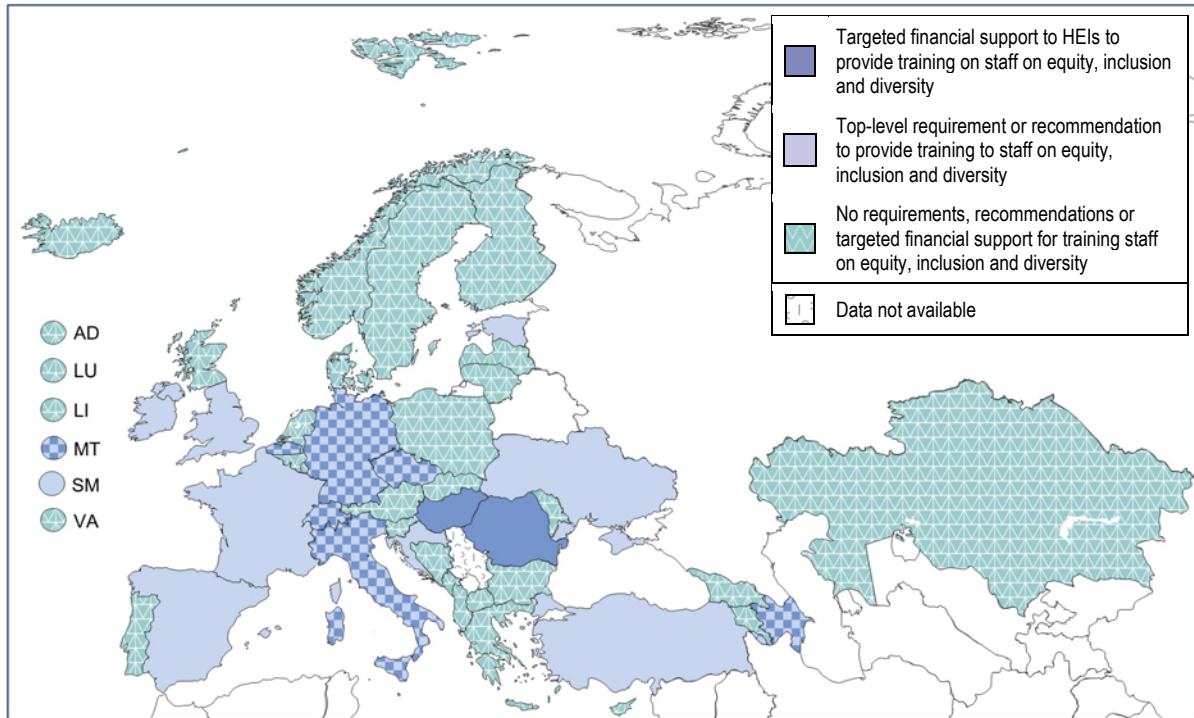
- 1) Existence of top-level requirements or recommendations for higher education institutions to offer training on diversity, equity or inclusion to academic and administrative staff.
- 2) Existence of support offered by top-level public authorities to higher education institutions to offer training on diversity, equity or inclusion to academic and administrative staff.
- 3) Existence of guidelines issued by public authorities to quality assurance agencies to consider whether social dimension is addressed in the mission and strategy of higher education institutions.



- 4) Public provision of financial means to higher education institutions to make their buildings and infrastructure easily accessible and adjusted to the needs of underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students and staff.

Figure 4.13 shows aspects of the first two indicators. It considers both whether top-level requirements or recommendations are in place for higher education institutions to provide training to staff on equity, inclusion and diversity, and whether targeted financial support is provided for such activity.

**Figure 4.13: Support to HEIs for staff training on equity, inclusion and diversity, 2022/2023**



Source: BFUG data collection.

The majority of systems (30) have no requirements or recommendations, and offer no specific financial support to higher education institutions to undertake staff training on equity, inclusion and diversity. There is therefore significant scope for future action, and the minority of systems that already take action can offer examples of practice to build upon.

The Flemish Community of Belgium has established an organisation called [the Support Centre Inclusive Higher Education \(SIHO, Steunpunt Inclusief Hoger Onderwijs\)](#) <sup>(18)</sup> to support inclusive higher education. Its primary objective is to ensure that students with disabilities or specific educational needs have equal opportunities and access to higher education. However, the concept of inclusion is also considered more broadly, so that in 2023, for example, financial support was given through SIHO to develop and organise training on student mental health issues.

In Germany, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) is funding the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) to develop an initiative called 'Diversity at German Universities' <sup>(19)</sup>. The initiative aims to promote diversity at universities through concrete projects and campaigns at individual institutions as well as through cross-project dialogue and exchange at national level.

<sup>(18)</sup> <https://www.siho.be/en>

<sup>(19)</sup> See <https://www.hrk.de/themen/hochschulsystem/diversitaet/initiative-vielfalt-an-deutschen-hochschulen/>

Finland develops work in this area through ministry-commissioned research projects. The idea is to provide new knowledge on the state of equality advancement in higher education institutions, as well as new tools and approaches which can be adopted by different institutions.

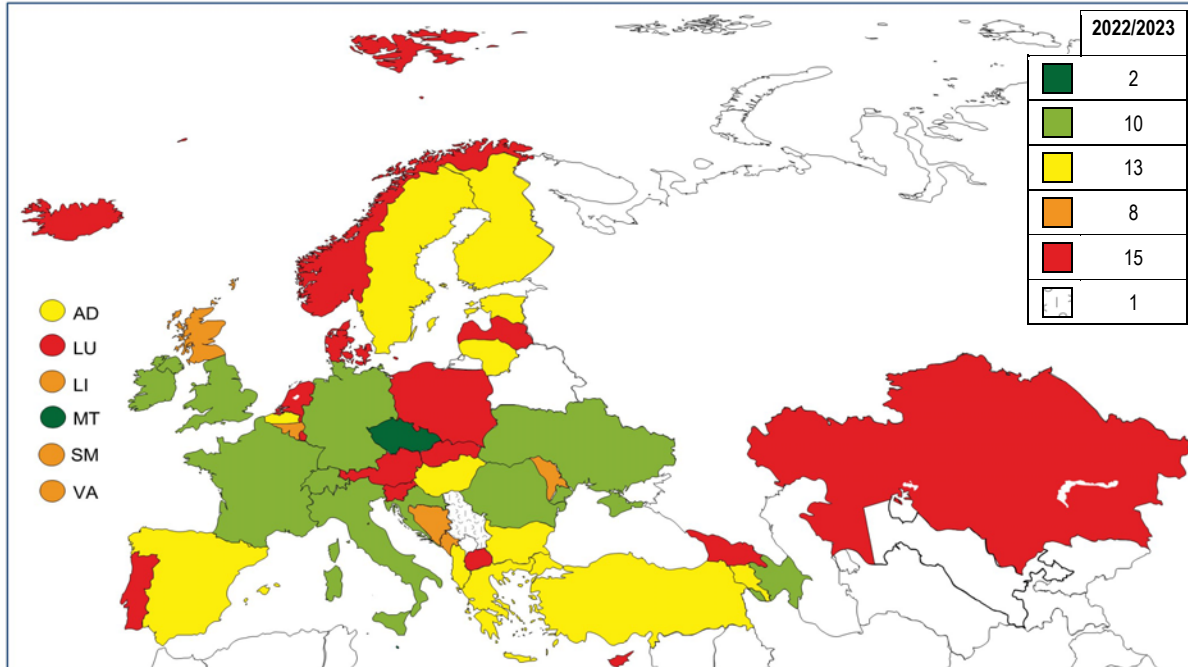
The third indicator concerns the role of quality assurance agencies, and more specifically illustrates whether public authorities issue guidelines requiring social dimension issues to be addressed in the mission and strategy of higher education institutions. Around half of the higher education systems (23) reported that such guidelines are issued to quality assurance agencies in their system (see Annex, Table 4.13).

The fourth indicator is about the role of public authorities in ensuring that higher education institutions are accessible and that the built infrastructure is adjusted to the needs of underrepresented, vulnerable and disadvantaged students and staff. It shows that only about a quarter of EHEA systems (12) provide support systematically to higher education institutions to make infrastructure improvements for the benefit of students and staff that have access issues (see Annex, Table 4.14).

In most of countries where such support is provided, it is within a broader framework of accessibility to buildings and infrastructure. For example in Lithuania, all new buildings must include the criteria of universal design, while all infrastructure renewal projects must fulfil criteria related to accessibility if public money is to be awarded.







Figure 4.14 presents the scorecard indicator that comprises the elements outlined above. Czechia is the only country that fulfils all criteria, while there are 15 systems in red that currently fulfil none of the criteria. It is clear from this picture that this is a topic where there is much work to be done in future years.

Figure 4.14: Scorecard indicator n°x: P & G 7: Inclusive learning environment and institutional culture, 2022/2023



Source: BFUG data collection.

### Scorecard categories

	Inclusive learning environment and institutional culture is demonstrated through the following four elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Top-level requirements or recommendations for higher education institutions to offer training on diversity, equity or inclusion to academic and administrative staff</li> <li>• Support offered by top-level public authorities to higher education institutions to offer training on diversity, equity or inclusion to academic and administrative staff</li> <li>• Public authority issues guidelines to quality assurance agencies to consider whether social dimension is addressed in the mission and strategy of higher education institutions</li> <li>• Public authority provides financial means to higher education institutions to make their buildings and infrastructure easily accessible and adjusted to the needs of underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students and staff.</li> </ul>
	Three of the four mentioned elements are implemented.
	Two of the four mentioned elements are implemented.
	One of the four mentioned elements is implemented.
	None of the four mentioned elements are implemented.
	Data not available

## 4.8. Mobility

### Principle:

International mobility programs in higher education should be structured and implemented in a way that foster diversity, equity and inclusion and should particularly foster participation of students and staff from vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented backgrounds.

### Guidelines:

International experiences through learning mobility improve the quality of learning outcomes in higher education. Public authorities and higher education institutions should ensure equal access for all to the learning opportunities offered by national and international learning and training mobility programmes and actively address obstacles to mobility for vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented groups of students and staff.

Besides further support to physical mobility, including full portability of grants and loans across the EHEA, public authorities and higher education institutions should facilitate the use of information and communications technology (ICT) to support blended mobility and to foster internationalisation at home by embedding international online cooperation into courses. Blended mobility is the combination of a period of physical mobility and a period of online learning. Such online cooperation can be used to extend the learning outcomes and enhance the impact of physical mobility, for example by bringing together a more diverse group of participants, or to offer a broader range of mobility options.

Not all students have equal access to learning mobility opportunities. Evidence shows that students from low socio-economic backgrounds and students with disabilities are less likely to participate in such programmes (Hauschildt et al., 2021; European Commission, 2019). Disadvantaged students therefore miss out on the benefits conferred by these experiences, further deepening the divide with their peers. Disadvantaged groups of staff – e.g. staff with special needs – may also face additional difficulties when going on international mobility.

The first guideline related to mobility therefore emphasises the need for public authorities and higher education institutions to ensure equal access for all students and staff to all opportunities offered by mobility programmes. This means that institutions need to address difficulties or impediments that might hinder or even completely prevent access to mobility programmes especially for students from vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented groups. In addition, the guideline also draws the attention to addressing obstacles to the mobility of vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented groups of staff.

The second guideline focuses on the support provided by public institutions in fostering student participation in both physical and blended mobility. This support extends from full portability of grants and loans across the EHEA, to the accessibility of information and communication technology programmes (ICT) for all students. The guideline particularly underlines the importance of new technologies in supporting blended mobility and promoting internationalisation at home. Integrating physical mobility with online learning would facilitate the bringing together of a more diverse group of participants as well as offering a broader range of mobility options.

On this basis, this section examines the following indicators related to supporting disadvantaged students and staff in international mobility programmes:

- 1) Existence of top-level measures supporting vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented students in international learning mobility.
- 2) Existence of a top-level mobility policy focused on vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented groups of staff.
- 3) Collecting data on and monitoring the participation and experiences of beneficiaries in all types of international mobility programmes, including their background characteristics (gender, age and at least one other student characteristic) based on a standardised methodology.
- 4) Existence of top-level support to higher education institutions to foster blended learning mobility and/or internationalisation at home.

Top-level measures supporting vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented students in international learning mobility can take the following three forms: 1) top-level measurable targets on the participation of disadvantaged learners, 2) targeted mobility grants, and 3) top-level recommendations or incentives provided to higher education institutions to introduce targeted measures encouraging the participation of disadvantaged learners. All these measures require a specific focus on disadvantaged learners. While general or mainstream policy measures may also enhance the participation of these groups of students in learning mobility, given the vulnerable position of students from under-represented groups, this indicator aims to capture the presence of targeted policies in the education systems under analysis.

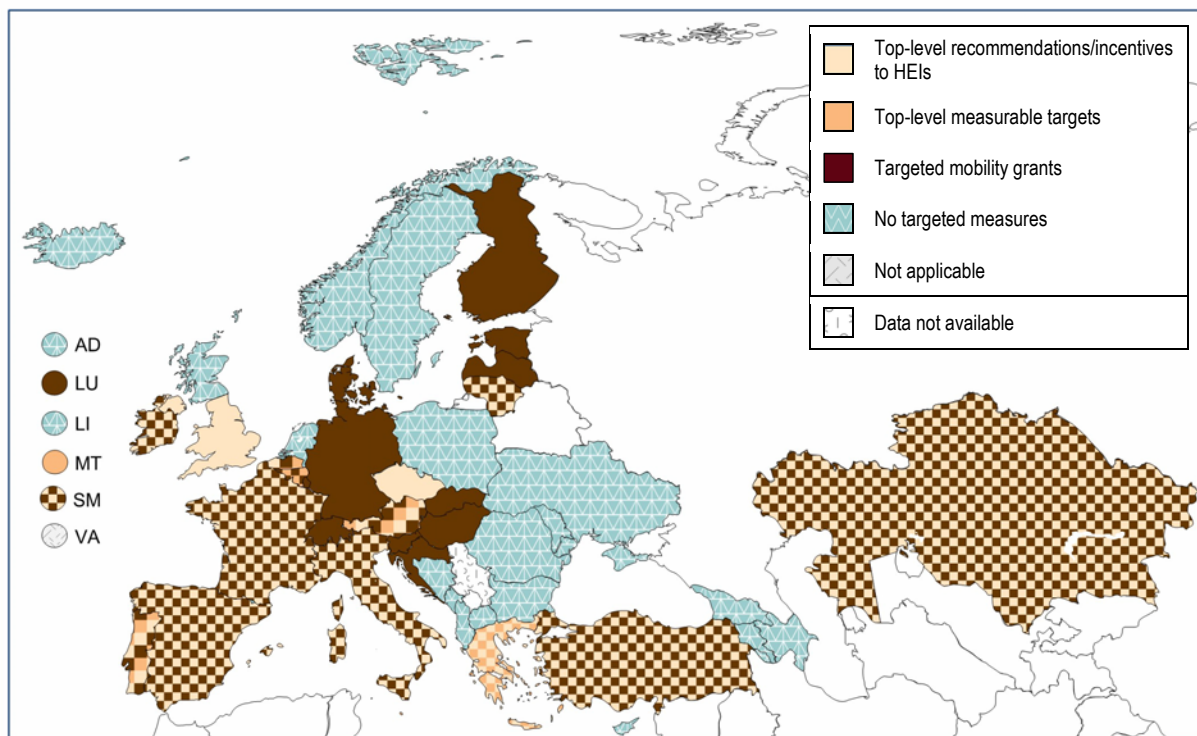
Figure 4.15 shows the presence of these targeted policy measures across the EHEA. The most widespread policy measures are targeted mobility grants, which exist in the majority of education systems with available data. It is important to note that in this category, only grants with a targeted focus are taken into account (e.g. need-based grants, or grants for students with special needs), which are either provided specifically for mobility purposes, or explicitly and purposefully designed to be used for studying both at home or abroad. This means that neither universal grants (provided to all, or almost all students), nor portable domestic grants are included on the figure. Regarding portability, more information is presented in Chapter 6, section 6.2.1.

Less than one third of EHEA systems report providing recommendations or incentives for higher education institutions to introduce targeted measures encouraging or enabling more disadvantaged learners to participate in international mobility. When they exist, such top-level policy incentives, guidelines or recommendations are often formulated in higher education or internationalisation strategies and action plans (e.g. in the Flemish Community of Belgium, Austria, Czechia, Greece, Ireland and Portugal). In Spain, national regulations establish that universities should promote the participation of students with disabilities in international mobility programmes, establishing the relevant quotas, guaranteeing sufficient funding in each case, as well as information and cooperation systems

between the units that cater for these students <sup>(20)</sup>. Financial incentives exist in Italy, where the proportion of disadvantaged students and students participating in learning mobility programmes are taken into account in the funding awarded to higher education institutions.

Top-level measurable targets are long- or short-term quantitative objectives set by top-level authorities for the proportion of disadvantaged students participating in learning mobility, signalling a strong political commitment towards increasing the participation of disadvantaged students in learning mobility programmes. However, these targets are rather rare, as they exist only in six education systems (Austria, Belgium – Flemish and French Communities, Greece, Malta and Portugal). Long-term objectives (over one year) on the participation of disadvantaged students in mobility programmes are usually set as part of top-level strategies on higher education or learning mobility, as in Austria and the Flemish Community of Belgium. Alternatively, year-on-year targets are typically defined by national Erasmus+ agencies, as in Greece, Malta and Portugal. For more details on top-level targets, see Table 4.15 in the Annex.

**Figure 4.15: Top-level measures supporting vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented students in international learning mobility, 2022/2023**



Source: BFUG data collection.

While top-level policy measures concerning the mobility participation of disadvantaged students exist in the majority of education systems, this is not the case for disadvantaged or underrepresented groups of staff. Only five education systems report providing targeted support for disadvantaged groups of staff for mobility purposes: Finland, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and Türkiye. In all five cases, extra financial support is provided for staff (academic and non-academic) with a disability or special needs.

Monitoring systematically the participation and experiences of beneficiaries in all types of international mobility programmes, where data can be broken down by students' background characteristics (other than age and gender) is also a rather rare practice, reported by 11 education systems only (Austria,

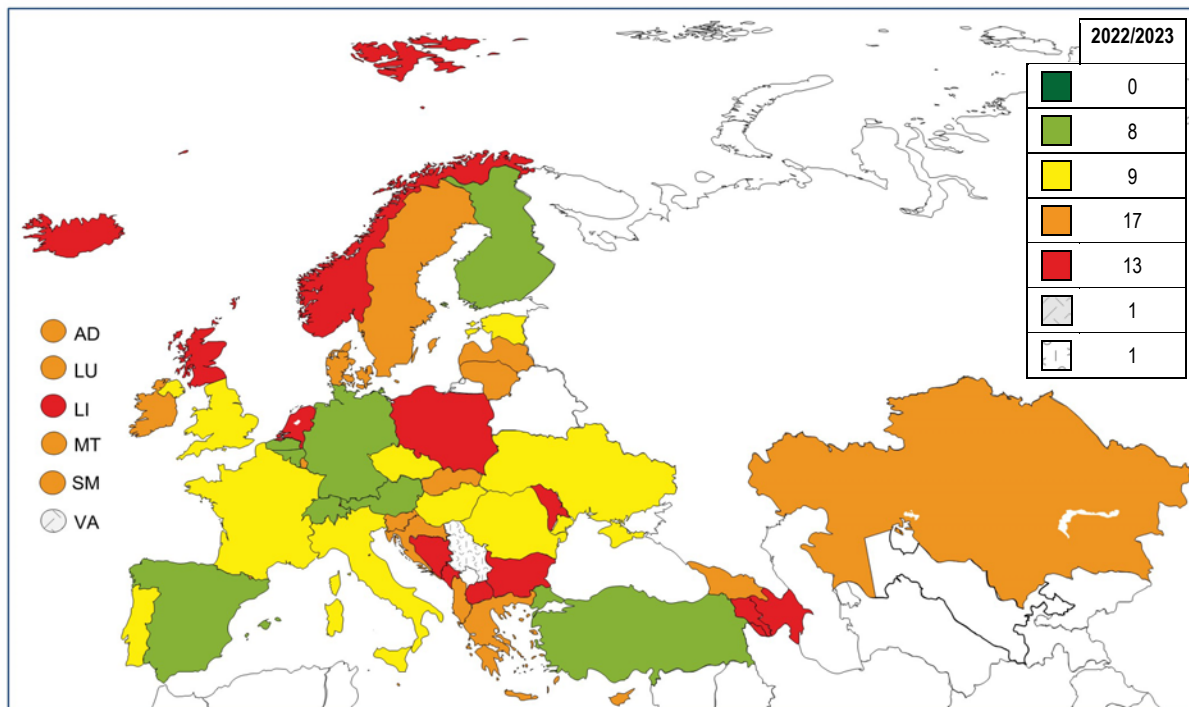
<sup>(20)</sup> Article 18 of the Royal Decree 1791/2010 of December 30, approving the Statute of the University Student, <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2010-20147#a18>

Belgium – Flemish and French Communities, Cyprus, France, Germany, Italy, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland and Ukraine). This means that while all countries participating in the Erasmus programme are required to monitor participation in this specific programme, this monitoring is seldom extended to all types of mobility experiences.

Finally, less than half of education systems across the EHEA report providing systematic support to higher education institutions to foster blended learning mobility and/or internationalisation at home (see Table 4.16 in the Annex). The use of new technologies, the organisation of blended learning and the implementation of internationalisation at home are supported by less than one third of EHEA systems each, often within the framework of the Erasmus+ programme.

Figure 4.16 depicts the composite scorecard indicator in the area of international mobility.

**Figure 4.16: Scorecard indicator n°8: P & G 8: Supporting vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented groups of students and staff in participating in international mobility, 2022/2023**



Source: BFUG data collection.

### Scorecard categories

0	Supporting the participation of disadvantaged learners and staff in international mobility by the following four means: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Top-level measures supporting vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented students in international learning mobility.</li> <li>• Top-level mobility policy focused on vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented groups of staff.</li> <li>• Monitoring the participation and experiences of beneficiaries in all types of international mobility programmes, including their background characteristics (gender, age and at least one other student characteristic) based on a standardised methodology.</li> <li>• Top-level support to higher education institutions to foster blended learning mobility and/or internationalisation at home.</li> </ul>
8	Supporting the participation of disadvantaged learners and staff in international mobility by three of the four mentioned means.
9	Supporting the participation of disadvantaged learners and staff in international mobility by two of the four mentioned means.
17	Supporting the participation of disadvantaged learners and staff in international mobility by one of the four mentioned means.
13	No targeted support provided for the participation of disadvantaged learners and staff in international mobility in higher education.
1	Not applicable
1	Data not available

There are no education systems that provide systematic support to vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented groups of students and staff by all the means outlined in this section. Eight education systems fulfil almost all conditions, most often lacking a top-level policy concerning disadvantaged groups of staff or a systematic monitoring practice. However, the majority of education systems are placed in the two bottom categories, orange and red. Thus, in most EHEA countries, there is still a lack of clear political commitment towards facilitating the participation of disadvantaged students and staff in learning mobility.

## 4.9. Community engagement

### **Principle:**

Higher education institutions should ensure that community engagement in higher education promotes diversity, equity and inclusion.

### **Guidelines:**

Community engagement should be considered as a process whereby higher education institutions engage with external community stakeholders to undertake joint activities that can be mutually beneficial. Like social dimension policies, community engagement should be embedded in core missions of higher education. It should engage with teaching and learning, research, service and knowledge exchange, students and staff and management of higher education institutions. Such engagement provides a holistic basis on which universities can address a broad range of societal needs, including those of vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups, while enriching their teaching, research and other core functions.

Community stakeholders (e.g. local authorities, cultural organisations, nongovernmental organisations, businesses, citizens) should be able to meaningfully engage with higher education actors through open dialogue. This will enable genuine university-community partnerships, which can effectively address social and democratic challenges.

This principle and its guidelines highlight the important role of higher education institutions in developing community engagement activities. Community engagement is understood as a process whereby higher education institutions engage with external community stakeholders to undertake joint activities that can be mutually beneficial. Such stakeholders can be local authorities, cultural organisations, non-governmental organisations, businesses and citizens or citizens' groups. Higher education institutions and external community stakeholders may collaborate on issues that concern the local or regional environment and the general wellbeing of citizens.

As the guidelines point out, community engagement can be developed and enhanced through the work of higher education institutions in teaching and learning, research, service and knowledge exchange. It can also be an important vehicle for developing supportive actions with and for vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups.

The following indicators were selected to monitor community engagement:

- 1) Financial support provided by top-level authorities to higher education institutions in developing community engagement activities focused on diversity, equity and inclusion.
- 2) Existing public support for higher education institutions to train their staff and students on how to increase their community engagement activities focused on diversity, equity and inclusion.
- 3) Existing networks initiated and supported by top-level authorities at the local, regional or national level for both staff and students in implementing community engagement activities, particularly those focused on diversity, equity and inclusion.

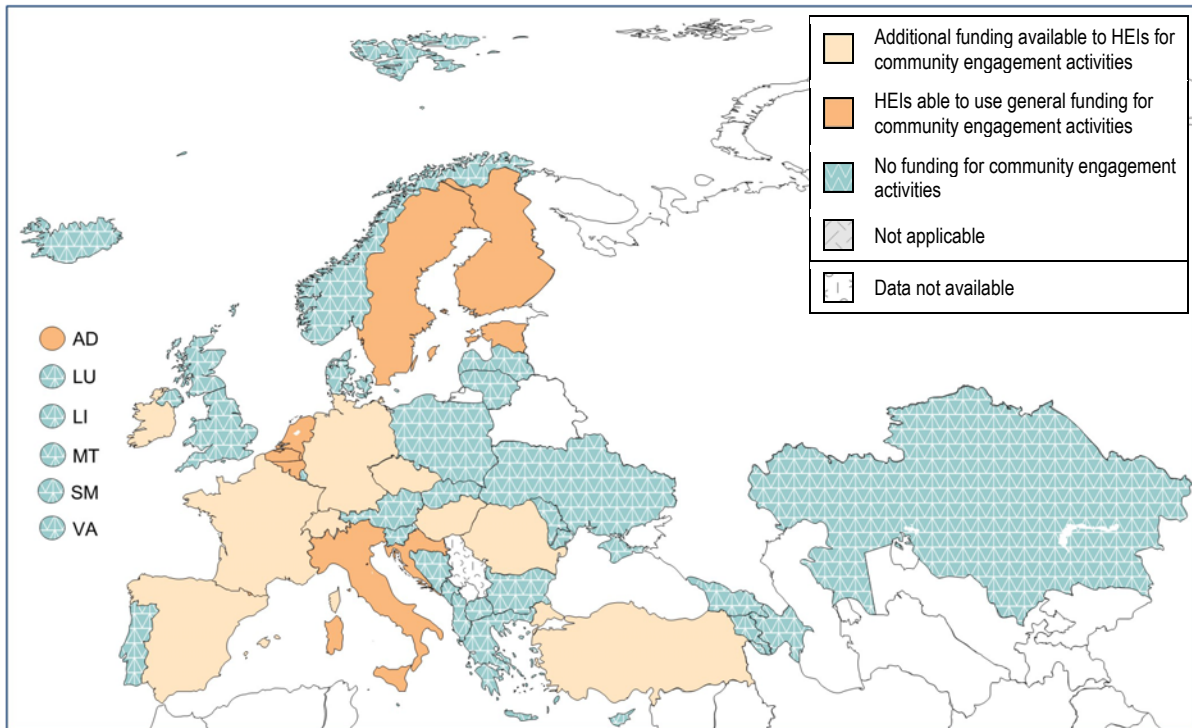
- 4) Existence of requirements for external quality assurance agencies to evaluate community engagement activities of higher education institutions focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

One of the difficulties in assessing the way in which community engagement action takes place is that it may be undertaken without the awareness of public authorities. Indeed, as many actions may focus on the local community, if public authorities wish to encourage higher education institutions they may need to clearly express their desire to support such action.

If additional financial support is provided, however, it is more likely that public authorities would establish a mechanism for higher education institutions to report systematically on their activities. For this reason the indicator valorises funding that is provided for community engagement activities.

Figure 4.17 shows that the most common EHEA reality is for no funding to be provided for community engagement activities. This implies a low level of interest and priority by public authorities. However, additional funding is provided in nine EHEA systems, and in the same number there are opportunities for higher education institutions to use general funding sources for community engagement activities.

**Figure 4.17: Top-level funding of HEIs for community engagement activities, 2022/2023**



Source: BFUG data collection.

While the data collected suggests that there is relatively little public funding from public authorities to higher education institutions for community engagement actions, other support is even less common. Only five EHEA systems (Switzerland, Italy, Lithuania, Türkiye and the Holy See) reported the provision of public support to organise training for students and staff on social dimension topics (equity, inclusion and diversity) within the remit of community engagement. And only five systems (Switzerland, Czechia, France, Türkiye and the Holy See) reported involvement of public authorities in initiating and supporting networks at the local, regional or national level for both staff and students in implementing community engagement activities.

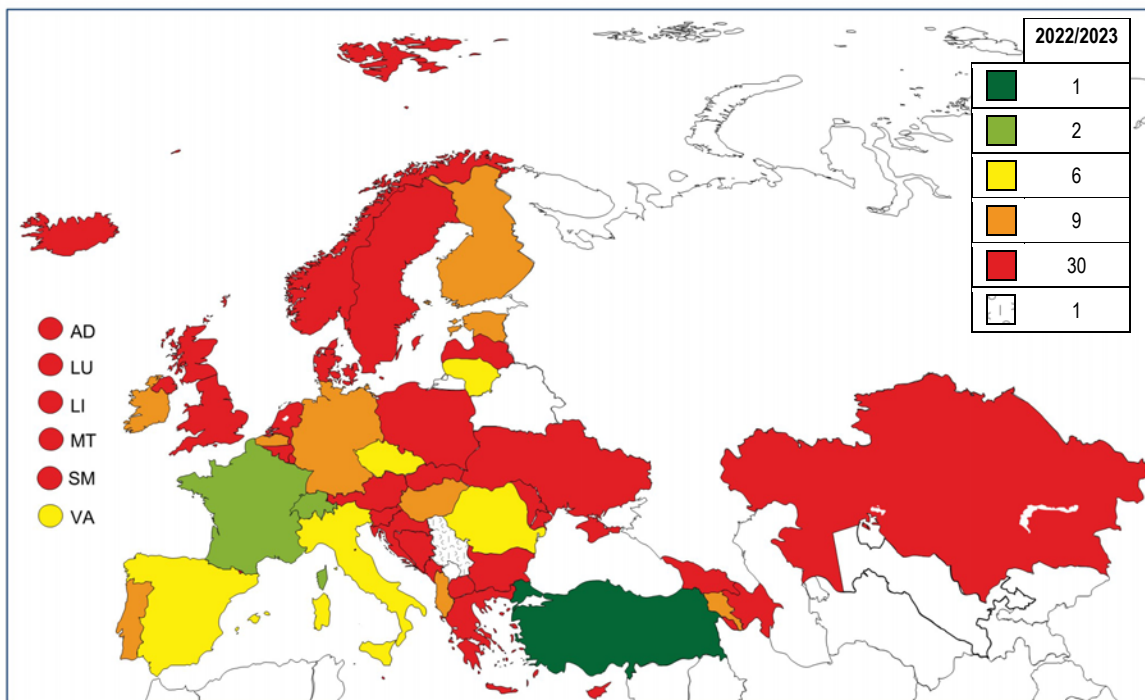
Quality assurance requirements for community engagement actions are in place in 13 EHEA systems (see Annex, Table 4.17). Curiously, in four countries (Albania, Armenia, Estonia and Portugal) quality



assurance agencies are required to assess community engagement activities even when there is no public funding or other support provided by top-level authorities. Thus it appears that public authorities may sometimes set requirements for quality assurance agencies that cover areas where they provide no funding or support.

Figure 4.18 shows the scorecard indicator that results from the cumulation of the indicators outlined above in relation to community engagement.

**Figure 4.18: Scorecard indicator n°x: P & G 9: Community engagement promoting diversity, equity and inclusion, 2022/2023**



Source: BFUG data collection.

### Scorecard categories

Dark Green	Inclusive learning environment and institutional culture is demonstrated through the following four elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Top-level authorities provide financial support to higher education institutions in developing community engagement activities focused on diversity, equity and inclusion.</li> <li>• Top-level authorities support higher education institutions to train their staff and students on how to increase their community engagement activities focused on diversity, equity and inclusion.</li> <li>• Top-level authorities initiate and support networks at the local, regional or national level for both staff and students in implementing community engagement activities, particularly those focused on diversity, equity and inclusion.</li> <li>• External quality assurance agencies are required to evaluate community engagement activities of higher education institutions focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion.</li> </ul>
Light Green	Three of the four mentioned elements are implemented.
Yellow	Two of the four mentioned elements are implemented.
Orange	One of the four mentioned elements is implemented.
Red	None of the four mentioned elements are implemented.
White	Data not available

It is a picture where the most dominant colour is red, indicating an absence of support or attention to community engagement activities by public authorities. This is the case for 29 systems. Only one system (Türkiye) is in the dark green category, while France and Switzerland are in light green. From

the information provided, there appears to be a high level of support to higher education institutions for community engagement activities focused on the social dimension in these systems. Nine systems identify the existence of one of the elements in their system, and are in the orange category, while six systems identify two of the elements and are depicted in yellow. In these cases there are some foundations in place that can be developed in the future.

## 4.10. Policy dialogue

### Principle:

Public authorities should engage in a policy dialogue with higher education institutions and other relevant stakeholders about how the above principles and guidelines can be translated and implemented both at national system and institutional level.

### Guidelines:

Such policy dialogue should allow to develop fit for purpose policy measures, which should respect institutional autonomy, avoid any unnecessary administrative burden, and thus enable concrete progress towards diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education.

Within the scope of the above principles and guidelines, peer support and exchange of good practices are crucial among EHEA countries in order to facilitate progress towards the inclusiveness of higher education systems.

This principle and its guidelines focus on the implementation of the overall set of Principles and Guidelines. It aims to ensure that dialogue between public authorities, higher education institutions and other relevant stakeholders is established to take forward the implementation of the different P&Gs.

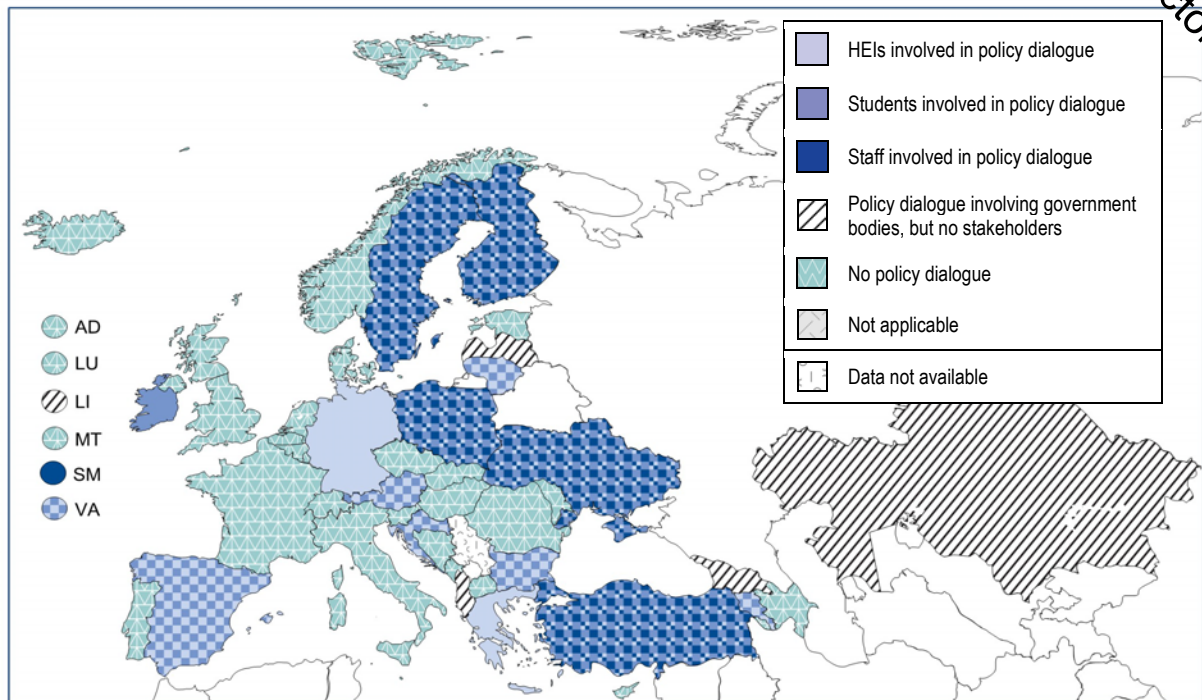
The following indicators were selected to monitor this policy dialogue:

- 1) Existence of a policy dialogue established by top-level authorities in a specific forum dedicated to the implementation of the Principles and Guidelines.
- 2) Representation of key stakeholders (higher education institutions, students and staff) in the established policy dialogue.
- 3) Existence of international peer learning activities and exchange of good practices on strengthening social dimension of higher education in which top-level authorities participate.
- 4) Existence of policy developments as a result of a policy dialogue.

Figure 4.19 covers the main aspects of the first two indicators. It shows whether or not a policy dialogue has been established to address the implementation of the principles and guidelines, and it also shows which stakeholders are represented in this dialogue.

The most significant observation is that, so far, more than half of the EHEA countries have not yet established a national policy dialogue focusing on the implementation of the principles and guidelines. While some may consider that only two years passed from the adoption of the commitment to implement principles and guidelines in 2020 and the data collection for this report, nevertheless it would be reasonable to expect that an issue that is a policy commitment would have stimulated action during this period.

Figure 4.19: Participants in policy dialogue to implement the principles and guidelines on the Social Dimension, 2022/2023



Source: BFUG data collection.

Among the 20 systems where policy dialogue has been established, considerable variety in stakeholder participation can be observed. Only five systems (Finland, Poland, Sweden, Türkiye and Ukraine) involve representatives of all the key stakeholders - higher education institutions, students and staff. Overall in the EHEA systems where policy dialogue has been established, higher education institutions tend to be the most widely represented (14 systems), while students are also commonly involved (13 systems). Representatives of staff are less likely to be included in this policy dialogue, as only six systems include them.

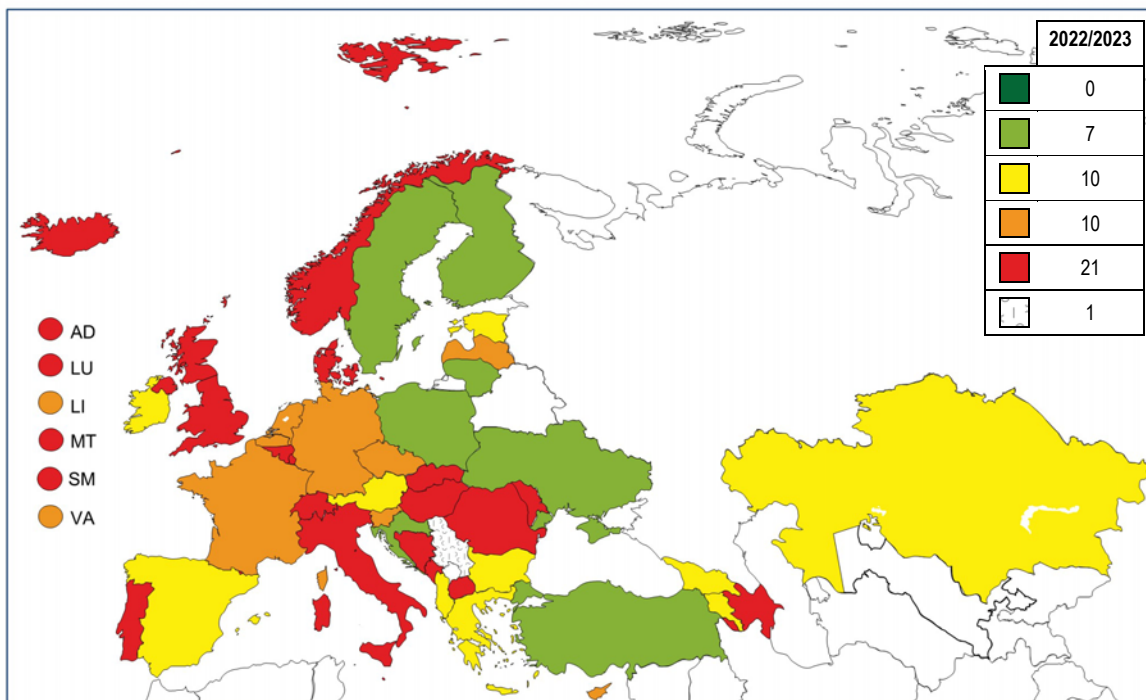
The third indicator concerns international peer learning activities related to the social dimension. Here countries that answered positively (see Annex, Table 4.18) tended to refer to activities established at European level, such as European projects or structures such as the Bologna process working group on the social dimension. Very few countries reported action that they had initiated at international level. One notable exception to this is the Flemish Community of Belgium which points to its role in initiating and coordinating several international projects on inclusion and mobility in cooperation with its specialised organisation dealing with issues of inclusion in higher education, SIHO (*Steunpunt Inclusief Hoger Onderwijs*).

The final indicator looks at the outcomes of policy dialogue, and addresses the question of whether dialogue has led to any concrete policy developments. Despite relatively little time since the policy dialogue has been established, 14 systems nevertheless claim that policy changes have already resulted from this dialogue (see Annex, Table 4.19). In many of these cases, the development builds on a process that was already established. For example, in Armenia the dialogue has provided input into draft legislation, in Estonia it has fed into the development of performance agreements with higher education institutions and in Georgia it has been considered with regard to updating institutional accreditation requirements. In other cases, policy is in the process of changing. Poland has reviewed its legislation in view of the principles and guidelines, Spain and Finland are in the process of ensuring that higher education institutions have fully developed accessibility plans and Croatia also has developed a draft plan of measures at national level. Ireland is developing two pathways into higher

education, the first based on universal design principles and the second focusing particularly on the needs of traveller and Roma communities.

Clearly, around Europe, there has been a response to the adoption of the principles and guidelines, and this is also visible in Figure 4.20, the scorecard indicator that brings together the indicators outlined above. While there is room for much progress, there are 20 systems in red indicating that no policy dialogue has yet begun with regard to the implementation of the principles and guidelines. Seven systems are far advanced and in light green, and as these systems are spread throughout several regions of the EHEA, this suggests that geographical factors have little influence in the decision to move on social dimension objectives. A further 10 countries are in yellow having taken some steps in this area, and 10 in orange which also indicates the first step in implementation has been taken.

Figure 4.20: Scorecard indicator n°x: P & G 10: Policy dialogue on implementation of principles and guidelines, 2022/2023



Source: BFUG data collection.

### Scorecard categories

	The establishment of policy dialogue is demonstrated through the following four elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Top-level authorities have established policy dialogue in a specific forum dedicated to the implementation of the Principles and Guidelines.</li> <li>• The key stakeholders (higher education institutions, students and staff) are represented in the established policy dialogue.</li> <li>• Top-level authorities support and participates in international peer learning activities and exchange of good practices on strengthening social dimension of higher education.</li> <li>• Policy dialogue has led to policy developments.</li> </ul>
	Three of the four mentioned elements are implemented.
	Two of the four mentioned elements are implemented.
	One of the four mentioned elements is implemented.
	None of the four mentioned elements are implemented.
	Data not available

## Conclusion

This chapter examined how and to what extent EHEA education systems have implemented policies aiming to strengthen the social dimension of higher education. The chapter followed the structure of the Principles and Guidelines developed by the BFUG <sup>(21)</sup>, focusing on the ten areas addressed by the document. In each of the ten areas, a scorecard indicator has been constructed to be able to monitor and evaluate the overall policy picture in relation to the P&Gs. The elements of the scorecard indicators were developed on the basis of the guidelines outlined in the Principles and Guidelines document.

Having scorecard indicators also enables the relative progress made by EHEA education systems in the different policy areas to be compared. Indeed, the scorecard indicators reveal considerable variance concerning the degree of implementation of the ten principles. While some scorecard indicators show a strong commitment towards social dimension principles in the EHEA, others uncover a relatively lower level of attention to certain policy areas.

The principles with the highest degree of implementation are related to sustainable funding for equity, inclusion and diversity in higher education, and to academic and career guidance and counselling provision. For these two scorecard indicators, around half of EHEA education systems with available data are in the top two categories. All EHEA education systems provide some form of financial support to higher education students, and there are only two countries with no academic or career guidance provision. When it comes to financial support, the large majority of countries provide both need-based grants and other forms of support covering the indirect costs of education to higher education students. At the same time, progress still needs to be made when it comes to targeted support provided to the institutions themselves. Regarding guidance, while most education system provide guidance and counselling services that are also monitored by quality assurance agencies, only a minority of them have established public institutions specialised in conflict resolution and mediating conflicts.

EHEA countries do relatively well in monitoring and data collection as well as in enabling flexible learning conditions. In these areas, there are still more education systems in the top two than in the bottom two categories, though there are more education systems in the red category than for the first two areas on funding and guidance. At the same time, it is the indicator on monitoring and data collection that has the highest number of education systems (12) in the top, dark green category. The weakest area within this scoreboard indicator is collecting data on the completion of first year students in the first cycle. The scorecard indicator on enabling flexible lifelong learning covers flexible learning modes (such as part-time, blended and distance learning) as well as the recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning for accessing and contributing towards the fulfilment of higher education programmes. Among these elements, most progress is needed in establishing legal frameworks allowing access to higher education through RPL, and requiring quality assurance agencies to monitor how this is implemented by higher education institutions.

The scorecard indicators that take middle position in terms of overall implementation levels relate to the principles on synergies and lifelong learning, strategic commitment towards the social dimension, and creating inclusive learning environments and institutional cultures. For these three indicators, close to half of EHEA education systems are in the bottom two categories, but still around a quarter of them are in the top two. This relative distribution shows that most education systems still lack significant elements when it comes to these policy areas. Most countries are yet to establish top-level coordination structures or mechanisms between different levels of education with a mandate linked to

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<sup>(21)</sup> [Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA](#), Annex II of the Rome Ministerial Communiqué, 19 November 2020.

the social dimension; only a small minority of them have a strong strategic commitment towards the social dimension of higher education through establishing clear, measurable targets; and most education systems could invest more in teacher training on diversity, equity and inclusion and in making existing infrastructure more accessible and inclusive.

Finally, the principles with the lowest level of implementation are the last three: the principles on international mobility, community engagement and policy dialogue. The scoreboard indicators on mobility and policy dialogue show two-thirds of EHEA education systems in the bottom two categories, and no country fulfils all the specified conditions. This result is particularly disappointing, as the need to support disadvantaged learners in mobility programmes has been on the EHEA policy agenda for more than a decade. For the scorecard indicator on community engagement, close to two thirds of education systems with available data are actually in the bottom, red category, implementing none of the policies defined by the guidelines. This should serve as a wake-up call for educational authorities and higher education institutions to re-envisage the role of higher education institutions in the wider community to strengthen equity, diversity and inclusion in a broader context.

The fact that many EHEA education systems have not yet established a policy dialogue between public authorities, higher education institutions and other stakeholders for the implementation of the Principles and Guidelines could be considered as more expected, given that this document was adopted in 2020. Nevertheless given the importance of the issues addressed by the Principles and Guidelines, the lack of apparent urgency in tackling implementation should be examined.