

## Working Group on Monitoring the Implementation of the Bologna Process

Sixth Meeting, Online

24 April 2023

Minutes of meeting

### List of participants

Country/Organization	First Name	Last Name
Albania	Entela	Haloçi
Austria	Helga	Posset
AGILIS	Anais	Santourian
EI - ETUCE	Andreas	Keller
EQAR	Melinda	Szabo
European University Association (EUA)	Gohar	Hovhannisyan
European Commission/ Eurydice (Co-Chair)	David	Crosier
EACEA	Olga	Davydovskaia
EACEA	Daniela	Kocanova
ESU	Katrina	Sproge
France	Mathieu	Musquin
Germany (BMBF)	Maria	Höchstädter
Malta	Valerie	Attard
Malta	Mallia	Gabriella
The Netherlands	Robert	Wagenaar
Norway (Co-Chair)	Tone Flood	Strøm
Romania	Camelia	Mircea-Sturza
EUROSTUDENT	Kristina	Hauschildt
BFUG Secretariat (Head)	Edlira Adi	Kahani Subashi
BFUG Secretariat	Aida	Myrto
BFUG Secretariat	Oltion	Rrumbullaku

Cyprus and United Kingdom did not participate.

### 1. Welcome remarks and approval of the agenda

The Co-Chairs welcomed everybody to the sixth meeting of the 2021-2024 work period. An outline of the agenda was provided, which was adopted without any changes. David Crosier (Co-Chair) underlined the purpose of this meeting to have the proposal for the Bologna Process Implementation Report (BPIR) in place, to be presented at the upcoming BFUG Meeting LXXXIV.<sup>1</sup>

For more information, please see: [WG SE BA 6 Agenda of the meeting](#)

### 2. Updates on meetings

#### 2.1 BFUG Meeting LXXXII (7 – 8 November 2022)

David Crosier (Co-Chair) provided updates of the BFUG Meeting, where the state of play of the questionnaire and the methodology for disseminating it were presented. There were questions about the scorecard

<sup>1</sup> Eighty-fourth Bologna Follow-Up Group meeting, hosted by Sweden (Stockholm), 11-12 May 2023.



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indicators in general, and for the Social Dimension chapter in particular. It was explained that the Social Dimension scorecard indicators reflect what has been requested by the WG on Social Dimension (WG on SD), based on the proposals from the feasibility study by Eurydice. It was also emphasized that existing scorecard indicators would be re-considered with the aim of every policy commitment having a scorecard indicator (if possible). Some countries expressed interest to comment on the draft questionnaires before sending them out, to which the Co-Chairs had responded by explaining that data collection advancement was a priority, and therefore this request was not feasible. It was reported that the intention with the scorecard indicators on quality assurance is to use data which is not collected directly through the BFUG questionnaire, but rather to use EQAR as the main source. Finally, it was emphasized that the BFUG views on scorecard indicators could be provided in parallel to the data collection through the questionnaire.

## 2.2 BFUG Board Meeting LXXXIII (31 March 2023)

Tone Floor Strøm (Co-Chair) highlighted that although many of the presentations and updates were similar, progress was made in distributing the questionnaire, and the WG is utilizing various sources, including Eurostat data. She emphasized the importance of meeting the deadline for gathering statistical data, which will be collected and analyzed by AGILIS. Ms. Strøm emphasized to the Board that the WG is on track and informed them about the upcoming meeting. The Board provided a few minor comments, and there was a query regarding the content to be presented at the BFUG. In response, Ms. Strøm emphasized that this decision rests with the WG and is not within the purview of the Board.

## 2.3 Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (BICG)

Helga Posset (BICG Co-Chair, Austria) presented the latest updates from the BICG meeting, held online on March 28, 2023, which focused on the progress of the Thematic Peer Groups (TPGs). Ms. Posset shared important information regarding funding received by most TPGs from the European Commission for their projects. She also highlighted that several TPGs had already conducted Peer Learning Activities (PLAs). Additionally, it was announced that TPG A would convene in Vienna for an upcoming meeting, during which a PLA on Learning Outcomes would be organized. All TPGs had established subgroups to explore various topics of interest. The challenge of active participation in implementing the key commitments was acknowledged, and the need for enhanced communication among TPGs to address overlapping topics, such as micro-credentials, was emphasized.

## 2.4 WG on Social Dimension

Gohar Hovhannisyanyan (EUA) provided an update on the recent meeting of the WG on SD held in Ghent, Belgium from 7th to 8th February 2023. The WG engaged in extensive discussions regarding Quality Assurance (QA) matters, specifically focusing on how external QA systems evaluate the social dimension, the extent to which they do so, and their competence in monitoring it. During the meeting, Ms. Hovhannisyanyan mentioned that presentations were given by ENQA, and the WG SD reached an agreement on certain changes, which would be further deliberated later that day in Brussels, Belgium (during the WG SD meeting on 24th to 25th April). Ms. Hovhannisyanyan highlighted the need to rephrase the guidelines of the indicators produced by the WG on SD in a descriptive manner, as they were currently presented as bullet points. This adjustment aimed to prevent any confusion arising from interpreting the previous bullet points as criteria or indicators.

The discussion at the meeting also touched upon the QA Fit survey results, which included inquiries regarding the social dimension. Specifically, it addressed the extent to which the social dimension is taken into account and which areas are considered by government agencies. These questions were seen as valuable inputs for a broader discussion on revising ESG practices. However, it was pointed out that the WG on Monitoring had limited flexibility for amendments since the survey had already been distributed, and they were unable to gather information not included in the questionnaire. Ms. Strøm reported that the WG on SD presented a comprehensive document on indicators during the Board meeting, suggesting that these indicators be included as an Annex to the Communiqué. In response, the Board expressed that the indicators should be viewed as a toolkit, implying that it is not within the Ministers' purview to adopt a specific set of indicators.



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### 2.5 WG on Learning and Teaching

Mr. Crosier mentioned there had not been any communication with the WG on Learning and Teaching recently, therefore there were no updates to report from the group.

### 2.6 WG on Fundamental Values

Ms. Strøm reported that the WG on Fundamental Values (WG on FV) had several meetings, and that they were working on draft statements for the Ministers to adopt the remaining fundamental values. It was noted that there was repetition in the statements, therefore it was decided that the statements would be combined into one document with a common introduction and presented to the Ministers. The statements of the remaining fundamental values were at different stages (with the statement on academic integrity lagging). It was reported that the WG on FV agreed on the last meeting (16 – 17 March 2023, Berlin, Germany) that the statement on public responsibility and institutional autonomy were in a finished draft stage. Finally, Ms. Strøm mentioned that the WG on FV was on a transitional phase for the development of the future indicators. It was agreed that external indicators would be used for monitoring the fundamental values.

It was agreed that the group's intention is to prioritize the selection of the best available data during a transitional phase, where a comprehensive monitoring framework and definitive indicators are yet to be established. This particularly pertains to de facto monitoring values that are commonly defined, but lack a formal monitoring mechanism. It was highlighted that there are ongoing developments in the monitoring of values, such as the European Parliament's examination of academic freedom and the European Commission's efforts to harmonize the monitoring of values with the work of the BFUG. Furthermore, it was stressed that the various advancements in the field of fundamental values should be mutually supportive and complementary to one another.

## **3. Preparation of the BPIR 2024 – Information on questionnaire/data collection**

Mr. Crosier commenced the presentation on statistical data collection by mentioning that there was a contract with the subcontractors AGILIS, that had previously prepared the monitoring report in 2020 as well.

### 3.1 Presentation on statistical data collection, Anais Santorian, AGILIS

Anais Santorian (AGILIS) presented the process of statistical data collection, by mentioning that the contract with AGILIS, a medium sized statistics company located in Athens, Greece, began a month ago. The responsibilities of AGILIS were outlined:

- The content of the statistical indicators in the BPIR 2024.
- Gathering data and producing indicators that were included in the 2020 and 2018 reports:
  - o Collecting data directly – on the judicial systems and from household surveys – from public sources for countries that are part of Eurostat (currently, there are indicators only from the European Labour Force Survey).
  - o Collecting data directly for countries that are not part of Eurostat. The questionnaire was delivered, asking for the provision of data and some metadata information, accompanying the provided statistics, to tackle issues concerning comparability or divergences over time.
- Following data gathering, the results would be organized, and the required statistics would be calculated. Data from European Social Survey (ESS) and non-ESS countries would be combined, key issues would be identified, followed by accompanying narrative.
- Analyzing and reflecting the current state, as well as short-term trends. This is new, compared to the



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2020, where the impetus was to provide longer trends.

The organization of the report is different, compared to previous reports. The statistical data would be presented in Chapter One (Key Data), and Chapter Six (Mobility and Internationalization). Ms. Santorian noted that the latest available year for data collection is 2020 for Educational Statistics and Expenditure Statistics, and 2021 for the European Labour Force Survey. The report trends would be presented in country zones, indicating patterns and trends.

Regarding the status of data gathering, Ms. Santorian announced that they were currently communicating with ESS and non-ESS countries to ask for data, noting that in the previous report, the states had been responsive and cooperative. It was emphasized that there were extra fields for countries to include country specific data and metadata. The collected data was saved in a repository that was already developed from previous projects.

Ms. Santorian noted that they had first contacted with non-ESS countries on the previous week, asking them to appoint a contact person, and that six countries had replied so far. It was announced that mid-May was intended time to dispatch the survey to the countries, with the aim of collecting data by mid-August. Then, the quality control, and feedback on specific key figures could be finished by the end of August. The final indicators would be provided in September, followed by the process of writing comments to the report. It was noted that the graphics and data would be straightforward and easy to understand for everyone, even people who were not experts in the field as well. Finally, Ms. Santorian concluded by mentioning that, should there be more recent data valid (after 2021), they could be provided in the survey, in order to have comparability with the ESS countries.

### 3.2 Discussion

The discussion was opened by noting that in the WG, there were many members of non-ESS countries, and it is important for everyone to understand the process. Largely, the survey would be based on Eurostat data, and the survey asks the same questions (as Eurostat) to non-ESS countries. It was mentioned that, while AGILIS would ask Eurostat's responsible statistical unit for more recent data, there was a time lag between Eurostat's data collection and their publication, data validation notwithstanding. There was a suggestion to use OrgReg and DEQAR data, which have up-to-date data (from 2022) on higher education institutions (HEI) and QA agencies. In response, it was noted that the number of institutions in the country is a question asked in the survey to the BFUG countries (and not gathered from Eurostat). It was emphasized that the list of indicators is quite comprehensive, some of which were already included in the 2018 and 2020 reports, and that the familiarity with the data collection process would help create a good collection of statistical data.

## **4. Proposals for new or revised Scorecard indicators (working document 1)**

Mr. Crosier opened the subject of Scorecard Indicators by mentioning the underlying logic of the scorecard indicator: where there is a clear policy commitment, there would be a scorecard indicator to reflect it. While the significant increase in the number of scorecard indicators was remarked, it was emphasized that some indicators would take time to develop (for example, the indicators related to fundamental values would take time, since they are in a transitional phase). For the WG SD, it was agreed that the path forward would be to provide a scorecard indicator for each of the 10 principles and guidelines, to measure a country's progress, meaning there would be 10 new scorecard indicators. The Eurydice Mobility Scoreboard had provided a general direction for the indicators. However, it was agreed that they would not be discussed presently, as the indicators are in the process of being drafted.

Additionally, there would not be any indicators on Learning and Teaching, as the WGs on Monitoring and Learning & Teaching agreed that it makes sense not to provide prescriptive indicators, as they cannot measure the myriad of ways in which governments promote institutional autonomy. Therefore, it was agreed that the path forward (for the WG on Learning and Teaching) would be mapping policy approaches.





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#### 4.1 Degree Structures

Some of the proposals for the new scorecard indicators include degree structures indicators, as follows:

1. Share of first-cycle programmes with a workload of 180, 210, 240 or another number of ECTS (most recent year available)
  - a. Proposed: >90% of programmes comply with agreed ECTS workload for the first cycle.
2. Share of second-cycle programmes with a workload of 60-75, 90, 120 or another number of ECTS
  - a. >90% of programmes comply with agreed ECTS workload for the second cycle.
3. Presence of short-cycle programmes recognised as part of higher education.
  - a. ISCED 5 short-cycle programmes are recognised as part of higher education.
4. Presence of integrated/long programmes leading to a second-cycle degree, plus the percentage of students in these programmes
  - a. <10% of students are enrolled in integrated/long programmes.
5. Programmes outside the Bologna degree structure (other than integrated/long programmes)
  - a. There are no programmes, other than integrated programmes, outside the Bologna degree structure.

It was proposed to integrate an overall degree structure indicator, which would evaluate countries as follows: dark green for the fulfilment of 5 elements, green for the fulfilment of 4 elements, yellow for 3, orange for 2, and red for the fulfilment of 0 or 1 elements. The question for the WG would be to discuss on whether it would be a good idea to have an overall indicator on degree structures, and if the proposal makes sense.

#### 4.2 Automatic Recognition and the Implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC)

The recognition scorecards underwent a reassessment, taking into account recent national policy reforms that propose the introduction of automatic recognition without necessarily requiring the prior implementation of LRC principles. The revised scoreboard indicator categories for evaluating a country were presented. The updated indicator would specifically focus on automatic recognition, distinct from the principles of the LRC. Another aspect of the revised indicator involves determining whether preference should be given to system-level bodies when making system-level decisions. Furthermore, assessing the implementation of LRC principles would remain relevant for countries lacking system-level recognition.

#### 4.3 Quality Assurance

The proposal for the scoreboard on external Quality Assurance systems' development stages was presented with the following color-coded categories:

- Dark green: Fully functioning nationwide quality assurance system where at least 70% of higher education institutions undergo valid external QA procedures, recognized by an agency compliant with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG) through registration on EQAR.
- Light green: Fully functioning nationwide quality assurance system where 50 to 70% of higher education institutions undergo valid external QA procedures, recognized by an agency compliant with the ESG through registration on EQAR.
- Yellow: Fully functioning nationwide quality assurance system where 10 to 50% of higher education institutions undergo valid external QA procedures, recognized by an agency compliant with the ESG through registration on EQAR.
- Orange: Quality assurance system not fully aligned with the ESG or fewer than 10% of higher education institutions undergo official or voluntary external QA procedures, recognized by an agency compliant with the ESG through registration on EQAR.
- Red: No operational quality assurance system.





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## 5. Discussion for Scorecard Indicators

### 5.1 Degree structures

The questions posed for discussion regarded the relevance of an overall scoreboard for degree structures, and if so, whether the proposed structure would work, whether short-cycle programmes are recognized as part of higher education (reflecting a policy commitment adopted in the Paris Communiqué), whether there should be a limit to long, integrated programmes (due to coherence issues with the Bologna structures), and the repercussions of prohibiting non-Bologna compliant programmes (i.e.: programmes that are recognized as first-cycle, but require a first cycle degree to access them).

The first question regarded the wording of indicator 2<sup>2</sup>. It was suggested that it should be aligned to Bologna documentation, and explicitly state that it would be *at least* 180, 210, 240 ECTS (the same would go for indicator 2, regarding Master cycle programmes).

It was emphasized again that the objective of the indicator<sup>3</sup> on short-cycle programmes is to consider short-cycle programmes as part of the higher education system, and more generally, to understand where countries stand at the moment on the matter, to later move towards coherency across Europe for short-cycle programmes. It was agreed that it is the responsibility of the BFUG to evaluate prior commitments. There was a suggestion to clarify the wording regarding “the presence” of short-cycle programmes, as there is no requirement from Member States to develop such programs. It was suggested that the wording should be generally along the lines of “decide whether and how to integrate short-cycle programmes within its own higher education framework”, to accommodate national decision-making regarding short-cycle programmes. On that note, it was agreed that, as long as short-cycle programmes are not a requirement, it would not be feasible to have it as an indicator that affects the overall score. Therefore, the indicator was removed.

Regarding indicator<sup>4</sup> of integrated programmes, a concern was raised on the benchmark value (less than 10 %) being unrealistic in some systems, because of the presence of professional programmes that lead to professional qualifications. It was clarified that this data would ask countries the percentage of students in programmes that go directly to the second cycle, and that there needed to be a benchmark value (either 10% or 20%).

To the question posed about the relevance of an indicator on integrated programmes, it was emphasized that it was important for the countries to adhere to and follow a degree structure they committed to (which does not include long-cycle programmes). Therefore, it was crucial to have an indicator that measured the presence of these programmes, as it would assess a country’s standing on the aim and commitment to minimize long-cycle programmes. While there was a suggestion to increase the benchmark to “less than 15%” (as “less than 10%” was seen as too low), the questionnaire that was sent out only measured values of 10% and 20%. Finally, it was agreed that this question would be posed to the BFUG.

On indicator 5<sup>5</sup>, a concern was raised about how prohibiting non-Bologna compliant programmes would infringe on the integration of micro credentials. It was agreed that there needed to be a way to exclude micro credentials from the prohibition of non-Bologna compliant programmes.

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<sup>2</sup> Indicator 1 and 2: “Share of first-cycle programmes with a workload of 180, 210, 240 or another number of ECTS (most recent year available)”.

<sup>3</sup> Indicator 3: Presence of short-cycle programmes recognised as part of higher education.

<sup>4</sup> Indicator 4: Presence of integrated/long programmes leading to a second-cycle degree, plus the percentage of students in these programmes.

<sup>5</sup> Indicator 5: Programmes outside the Bologna degree structure (other than integrated/long programmes).





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In conclusion, it was agreed that it would be beneficial to have an overall degree structure scoreboard, because the degree structure was one of the earliest key commitments adopted by the Ministers, and it would be interesting to see in one scorecard indicator.

## 5.2 Automatic Recognition and LRC

The proposed indicator would tackle geographical issues (whether automatic recognition is covering all qualifications throughout the European Higher Education Area, or a subset of qualifications), and assess whether the decision is taken from a top-level body or whether HEIs are competent. It was asserted that the main issue on decision-making level (whether it should be system- or HEI-level) was that there was currently no consensus on the issue. The distinction between recognition and admission was reminded once again (in that HEIs should have a decision on admission, but not on recognition). The rationale for encouraging a system-level decision is that there is a system-level legal competence for an existing system-level automatic recognition, and there should be one decisionmaker.

A concern was raised over countries that fully implemented the LRC: there's no decision taken at a system- or HEI-level, meaning if an applicant applies to a programme, they cannot be refused due to lack of degree recognition. It was later clarified that an appeal process was in place, if the applicant suggested the application rejection violated LRC. On that note, it was argued that there was no political agreement in favour of system-level decision, just a recommendation from the European Commission that there should be a system-level competence for automatic recognition. While it was accepted that there is no political agreement to base the indicator on, it was agreed that this proposal (having a system-level decision rather than institutional-level) was more logical.

Another argument in favour of having the proposed indicators was that it would define automatic recognition and the implications of its implementation, and there should be a clear distinction between recognition and admission. It was asserted that an indicator encouraging system-level decision was in line with the Rome Communiqué. Furthermore, it was agreed that the reporting exercise conducted by the WG on Monitoring was responsible for more than two years, and there should be some reflection on how many changes have been made during this period. There was one suggestion to not specify the decisionmaker, simply evaluate whether automatic recognition takes place (and specifically if it happens for all or just a subset of countries).

There were concerns about the approach to assessing automatic recognition — evaluating automatic recognition for all countries as dark green, and regional, or sub-set automatic recognition as less so (light green or yellow) — to which it was asserted that the aim of automatic recognition was to provide recognition for the entire EHEA. Nonetheless, it was asserted that important developments (like regional recognition agreements) would still be recognized.

An additional concern arose when considering the separation of indicators for the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) and automatic recognition. The question was raised regarding how countries that have already implemented automatic recognition would respond to the LRC-related questions. It was debated whether the LRC questions would be relevant or non-applicable to them. The absence of a dark green category for the LRC raised doubts about its significance when automatic recognition is already in place. Recognizing the potential for a political discussion, it was agreed to consult with the co-chairs of TPG B for their input on the indicators. One suggestion was to evaluate countries that have implemented all five principles of the LRC, including automatic recognition, and assign them a dark green rating. Other countries that solely implemented automatic recognition, such as Greece with its 2021 legislation, would be evaluated separately. It was also proposed that countries that have implemented automatic recognition may not need to address the LRC questions. Ultimately, this matter would be discussed further in the BFUG meeting. There were a few wording suggestions, as follows:



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- For automatic recognition, mention "all Bologna-compliant HE qualification are recognized". This suggestion was accepted.
- For light green evaluation, there was a suggestion to mention individual institutions sharing decisions, in the circumstances where there is a central platform where the decision is circulated, which would already improve the decision.
- It was suggested to consider the possibility of sectoral organizations as decision-makers, depending on different disciplines. It was asserted that during data collection, there were no reports of decisions taken by sectoral (or sectoral-level organizations), and the main distinction is using ENIC-NARICs, or HEIs (the majority of the situation now).

### 5.3 Quality Assurance

The discussion on QA began with a question about using DEQAR data to measure the indicator. DEQAR was announced to have over 90,000 reports, providing accurate data above 90% coverage of HEIs. Two out of the three missing agencies have expressed interest in joining DEQAR, and measures are in place for QA agencies to upload timely data. A concern was raised about DEQAR being the sole option for achieving a dark green rating since EQAR and DEQAR memberships are voluntary. The rationale behind benchmarking values, particularly 50% and 70%, was questioned. ESG alignment is a new consideration, differing from the previous report that only focused on joining the DEQAR register. England, where a national QAA operates but ESG alignment is not met, differs from Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland, which are all ESG-aligned. The actual status of QAAs was clarified, stating that an annual update process occurs where QAA confirms the updated information and the number of reviews conducted. The lowered benchmark of 70% was justified by emphasizing the importance of QAAs' compliance with ESGs and considering the diverse characteristics of institutions. This led to a broader discussion at the WG on Monitoring and BFUG regarding the varying responsibilities of external QA systems in different countries, such as their coverage of different education levels.

In the response to the suggestion to rephrase "are subject to" instead of have passed, it was suggested that the indicator should focus on what has already happened, not a possibility. Similarly, the former proposal (all HEI instead of 70%) was seen as a stronger commitment, as opposed the current proposal, which took into account situations for specific countries, instead of reporting on the principle as such. Finally, it was agreed that the original indicator would be kept (statement of principle) in the form of a four-level scorecard indicator, removing the light green, and there would be an additional indicator on the percentage of institutions, to show the empirical reality.

There was a suggestion on rewording: "A fully functioning quality assurance system is in operation nationwide, in which at least 70% of all higher education institutions have been subject to a currently valid external quality assurance procedure at institutional or programme level, recognised as part of the system's official external QA framework, by an agency that has successfully demonstrated compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG) through registration on EQAR." It was suggested that "have been subject" should be reworded into "have undergone", since many QA agencies have been registered in EQAR for a relatively long time, and the indicator could show the evolution of the stages of alignment for these institutions. To that end, it was noted that the data was available on DEQAR, and that there was potential to map the evolution.

A concern was raised about the empirical indicator, specifically countries changing the QA procedure, and what the valid procedure was in these instances, which was clarified by bringing attention to QA procedure validity, where reports are valid up to a certain date. Moreover, it was remarked that DEQAR also has







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information on changing systems of accreditation. Finally, it was noted that EQAR registration should be used as a proxy for ESG alignment and follows the Bologna Communique commitment.

#### **6. Next steps: Agreement for reporting to the BFUG LXXXIV**

It was agreed that the indicator report proposal would be presented to the BFUG, where the discussion on the relevance of the indicators would follow the explanation of indicator rationale and key topics/arguments. Namely, the question posed to the BFUG would concern the benchmarking value for the percentage of integrated programmes. The question on differentiation between LRC and automatic recognition would be posed as well, specifically how countries' developments on one or both topics would be evaluated. Finally, Ms. Strøm reminded everyone that the dedicated slot for the discussion would be 10 minutes.

The Co-Chairs thanked the guests and members for their contributions and input to the meeting, as well as on the organization of the work on the indicator development. No other business was brought forward, thus the sixth meeting of the WG on Monitoring was successfully concluded.



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