

Moderator: Horia Onița, vice-president, ESU

Rapporteur: Ulf Hedbjörk, Sweden

(Internal and External) Quality Assurance to support the social dimension of HE

Brief for the parallel session (Room C1.2.360, 2nd floor)

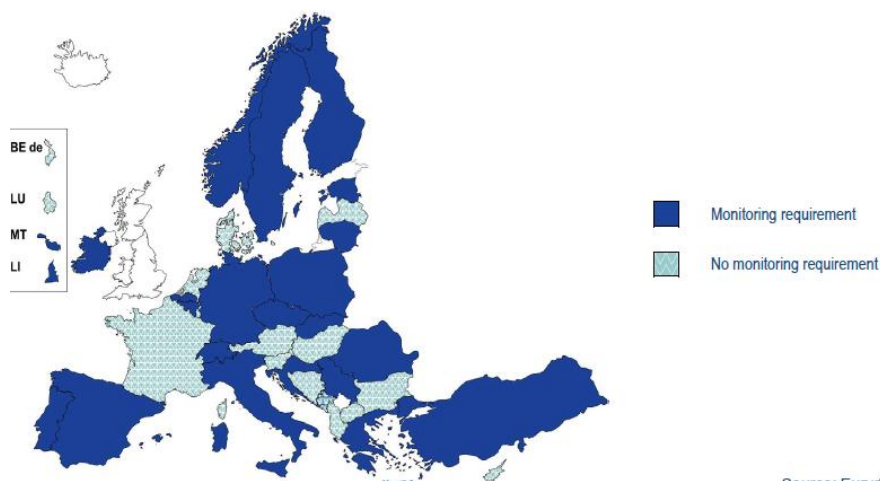
TPG C on QA meeting, 1st of June 2023, Astana

In different policy forums, a conversation has emerged in recent years regarding whether quality assurance frameworks, either European or national, are suited to answer new challenges and trends. One major topic of discussion in the Bologna Follow-up Group structures and beyond is how and to what degree quality assurance could support a more inclusive higher education system.

In 2020, the ministers of higher education in the Bologna Process countries adopted the [“Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the European Higher Education Area”](#) as an annexe to the Rome Communiqué. The document states, *‘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.’*

Based on the *“Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the European Higher Education Area”*, Eurydice has mapped the development of social dimension policies in the European Higher Education Area in the study [“Towards equity and inclusion in higher education in Europe”](#), which shows that *‘in 23 education systems top-level regulations require quality assurance agencies to monitor if higher education institutions have any policies for improving social dimension, equity, inclusion or diversity, and in 15 education systems there is no such top-level requirement’*.

Figure 1 - Quality assurance agencies being required to monitor higher education institution policies on equity, 2020/2021, Eurydice



Source: Eurydice.

In the current cycle of the Bologna Process (2020-2024), the [Working Group on Social Dimension](#) have elaborated indicators to monitor the implementation of the *Principles and Guidelines*. The draft version of indicators can be found [here](#) and include references towards quality assurance being one monitoring tool that could be used in several instances: for social dimension policies in general, for embedding inclusivity in institutional mission and strategies and for recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning.

All these processes have been intertwined with the [QA FIT](#) project, coordinated by ENQA, which aims to map the state of play regarding the European Higher Education Area quality assurance framework, the implementation of the [European Standards and Guidelines on Quality Assurance](#) and new trends in QA, as well as to initiate the discussions regarding the future of ESGs. The QA FIT project included sending surveys towards QA agencies, higher education institutions, ministries and national unions of students to find out current realities and perceptions on the revision of the ESGs. Most stakeholders considered that social dimension should be covered in more detail in an iteration of the ESGs.

Figure 2 – Covering in more detail social dimension in ESG Part I, QA FIT project, unpublished

Social dimension of higher education

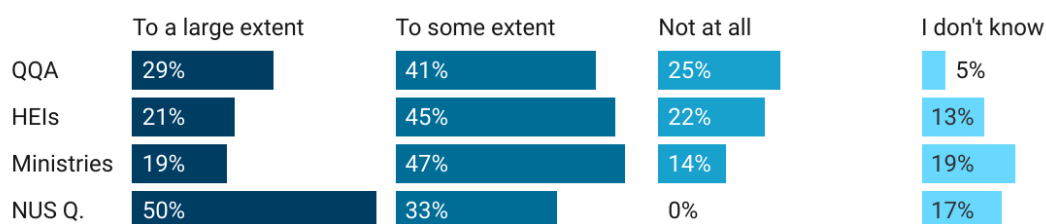


Chart: Q10. If the scope of the ESG Part 1 were to be expanded what should it cover in more detail? • Created with Datawrapper

The project also offers valuable data from the stakeholders on what indicators related to the social dimension of higher education are already in use in internal and external QA processes.

The objective of today's discussion is to:

- **reflect** upon the state of play and results from the QA FIT survey on how social dimension and quality assurance can reinforce each other;
- **present** the extent to which social dimension issues are explicitly or implicitly addressed by other bodies/mechanisms, and whether there is any link to QA;
- **present** best practices on supporting inclusivity of higher education through QA, either transversally or through social dimension indicators;
- **discuss** possible scenarios for development.