

Bologna Process impact and future trends: Policy commitments, implementation gaps and priorities for the next decade

First Draft

Key messages

The role of the study

The immediate policy driver of the study is the mandate given by the Ministers responsible for higher education at the Tirana Ministerial Conference (29–30 May 2024). In the Outlook section of the Tirana Communiqué, Ministers mandated the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) to ensure that *“the policy commitments aiming at creating by 2030 an inclusive, innovative, and interconnected EHEA, mindful of the fundamental values, are properly monitored, including through a Bologna Process Implementation Report that assesses key developments”*, and asked the BFUG *“to submit to us in 2027 proposals for the main priorities for the next decade, in close cooperation with higher education institutions, staff and students”* (Bologna Process, 2024, p. 6).

The 2027 EHEA Ministerial Conference and Global Policy Forum, to be co-hosted by Romania and the Republic of Moldova in Iași and Chișinău in May 2027, will therefore be a double-horizon event: it should both take stock of the implementation of the 2030 vision agreed at the Rome Ministerial Conference (Bologna Process, 2020), and open the work on the policy agenda for the decade beyond 2030.

Within the BFUG Work Programme 2024–2027, this mandate has been operationalised through dedicated working structures, including the Task Force on the Future of the Bologna Process, which has been producing thematic background papers to structure the BFUG-level debate.

In preparation for the 2027 Ministerial Conference, the EHEA Secretariat organises a Conference on Bologna Process implementation and future trends in September 2026, in a dual-track format with the Bologna Process Researchers’ Conference (BPRC) and bringing together Europe-wide stakeholders. A meeting of the Task Force on the Future of Bologna follows in Bucharest on the day after the Conference.

The study is designed as an evidence-based analytical input, consolidating the existing literature and institutional perspectives on the future of the Bologna Process, as well as global trends. The study serves both as a background for the Conference and as evidence-based support for the Task Force on the Future of Bologna and the Drafting Committee of the Iași-Chisinau Communiqué.

The document is in a draft format, which will be revised after the discussions at the Conference and the Task Force on the Future of Bologna meeting. The document does not aim to propose final recommendations but rather motivate debate and reflections, offer a guide for the discussions and evidenced-backed proposals to be considered within the BFUG bodies.

The ‘Key messages’ document contains a summary of the study focusing on the possible priorities, conclusions and potential recommendations. For the references and the analytical dimension, please consult the full study.

Possible priorities for the next decade

This section provides concrete suggestions outlining potential priority areas for the next decade, based on the diagnosis developed in the study. Each priority is deliberately structured in the same four steps: *why it matters now*; *what Bologna has already done*; *what the gap is*, and *what intergovernmental action could realistically achieve*.

6.1. AI, digitalisation and the transformation of learning (cross-cutting priority)

Why it matters now

Artificial intelligence is the single cross-cutting challenge with the widest system-level implications for the EHEA: it redefines simultaneously what learning is, what assessment measures, what a credential attests and what quality assurance must examine - that is, touching upon all Bologna key commitments and tools. The urgency is regulatory, as well as pedagogical: from 2 December 2027, AI systems used for admission, for evaluating learning outcomes and for exam supervision will be subject to binding high-risk obligations under the EU AI Act in the EU subset of the EHEA — a deadline deferred from August 2026 by the Digital Omnibus on AI precisely because institutional and standards readiness lagged behind (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2024, 2026). AI is also the top emerging interest of stakeholders beyond the EHEA, making it a natural backbone of the 2027 Global Policy Forum agenda (IN-GLOBAL & BFUG Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue, 2024).

What Bologna has already done

The acquis is more substantial than often assumed. Ministers committed to digitally enabled education with appropriate quality assurance in Paris (2018), made the first ministerial reference to AI in Rome (2020), and in Tirana (2024) committed to supporting the “*ethical, trustworthy, responsible, and rights-based use of AI*” and mandated the BFUG to consider the longer-term impact of the digital transition “*in particular with regard to the key commitments and the use of Bologna Process tools*” (Bologna Process, 2018, 2020, 2024). During the 2020–2024 cycle, the Working Group on Learning and Teaching developed recommendations on the ethical use of digital tools and AI (ESU, 2024a). Most concretely, two revisions are already scheduled to reach the 2027 conference: the revised ESG, which mainstreams AI across the standards, requiring institutional policy to address AI in learning, teaching and quality assurance and any use of AI in assessment to be human-centred and subject to human oversight (E4 Group et al., 2026); and the revised ECTS Users’ Guide (Advisory Group on the ECTS Users’ Guide Revision, 2026). Beyond the tools under revision, the quality-assurance community has already moved on practice: ENQA’s *Guidelines for the Responsible Use of AI in External Quality Assurance* — establishing that AI supports but does not replace human judgement, in line with the ESG’s peer-review principle — together with early agency pilots, make AI-supported quality assurance the one dimension of the digital transition where the comparative evidence places the EHEA at the global frontier (ENQA, 2025).

What the gap is

Three gaps remain between the Tirana mandate and an operational response. First, there is no EHEA-wide position on AI in higher education comparable in status to the positions the Process holds on other technical or political commitments. Second, the qualifications architecture has not been touched: the QF-EHEA, last revised in 2018 with the inclusion of short-cycle qualifications, and never touched upon the key aspects decided in 2005, does not articulate AI literacy as a graduate competence, and does not accommodate micro-credentials explicitly. The building blocks for closing this gap already exist within the EHEA's regulatory environment — Article 4 of the AI Act makes AI literacy a binding obligation for providers and deployers of AI systems, and DigComp 3.0 integrates AI competence transversally — so that the task is one of articulation through the QF-EHEA descriptors rather than of invention (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2024; Cosgrove & Cachia, 2025). Third, digital credentialing arrangements remain fragmented across the EHEA, and the capacity divide between institutions able to invest in AI and those not, the digital Matthew effect documented globally, is reproducing itself inside the EHEA.

What intergovernmental action could realistically achieve

The realistic ambition is convergence of standards and tools, not regulation. . Nor is this a second-best: the comparative evidence finds that the governance model towards which every region examined is converging for AI in higher education — voluntary, interdisciplinary, multi-stakeholder coordination — is precisely the Bologna. Concretely, the 2027 conference could: (i) mandate the preparation of a concise EHEA statement of principles on AI in higher education, anchored in the fundamental values *acquis* and consistent with the AI Act and CETS No. 225, giving all 47 systems, including the 20 outside the EU, a common reference (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2024; Council of Europe, 2024); (ii) mandate a structured review of the QF-EHEA for the 2024–2030 horizon, addressing AI-era learning outcomes and the positioning of micro-credentials (see Priority 6.2); (iii) designate AI in higher education as the standing theme of the Global Policy Forum dialogue, where demand from partners is explicit and (iv) mandate the development of a small set of digitalisation and AI indicators for the BPIR 2030. Each of these actions uses a framework that already exists; none requires new instruments.

6.2. Lifelong learning as a system, not a commitment

Why it matters now

25% of EHEA institutions already report declining bachelor's enrolment, 18 EHEA countries report system-level enrolment decline, the EU population peaks in 2026, and employers expect roughly two fifths of workers' core skills to change by 2030 (Gaebel et al., 2024; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2024; Eurostat, 2026; World Economic Forum, 2025). The lifelong learner is no longer a marginal category and became, over the decade, a core constituency. This converts recognition of prior learning, micro-credentials, flexible pathways

and VET–HE permeability from desirable extensions into structural necessities for the sustainability of institutions.

What Bologna has already done

The commitment genealogy is one of the longest in the Process: lifelong learning has been on the agenda since Prague (2001), which framed it as necessary for competitiveness, social cohesion and quality of life; London (2007) recorded flexible learning as being “at an early stage”; Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve (2009) specified that qualifications may be obtained through flexible paths including part-time study and work-based routes, and linked lifelong learning to recognition of prior learning based on learning outcomes; Bucharest (2012) and Yerevan (2015) reiterated this, and Tirana (2024) committed to fostering flexible learning paths “*in all higher education programmes*”, expressly including recognition of prior learning and micro-credentials (BFUG Task Force on the Future of Bologna, 2025; Bologna Process, 2024). On the EU side, the 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning and the 2022 Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials provide reference frameworks, and the MICROBOL project developed a common framework for micro-credentials specifically for the EHEA context (Council of the European Union, 2012, 2022).

What the gap is

The widest gap in the Process is relative to the age of the commitment. The London-era “early stage” diagnosis remains broadly valid, with unresolved questions of cost-sharing, governance, quality and inclusivity, including the Matthew-effect risk in adult learning. The institutional evidence quantifies it: recognition of prior learning is used by only a minority of institutions and most organise lifelong learning separately, while between half and two thirds of institutions report structural obstacles. Finally, the Tirana commitment is not yet backed by any agreed EHEA tool.

What intergovernmental action could realistically achieve

The realistic programme is to make the existing tools carry lifelong learning, rather than to restate the commitment another time. Concretely: (i) embedding micro-credentials in the qualifications architecture — the QF-EHEA review proposed under Priority 6.1 should define how micro-credentials relate to the cycle descriptors, building on the MICROBOL framework and compatible with the 2022 EU Recommendation, so that the EHEA-wide instrument leads rather than trails behind; (ii) operationalise recognition of prior learning as a monitorable commitment — a defined BPIR indicator (share of institutions applying RPL for progress), and RPL included as a standard item in the national implementation plans agreed in Tirana; (iii) institutionalise VET–HE permeability through the Copenhagen–Bologna interface, using the two concrete alignment areas identified by the BFUG background paper — ESG–EQAVET quality assurance alignment, where several countries already operate single agencies for both sectors, and ECTS–higher VET credit-system alignment, for which the revised ECTS Users’ Guide is the available vehicle (BFUG, 2025; Advisory Group on the ECTS Users’ Guide Revision, 2026); and (iv) address the institutional “change of mentality” through peer support by

supporting dedicated peer-learning strands on funding models, learner status and the mainstreaming of flexible provision.

6.3. Social dimension: from aspiration to accountability

Why it matters now

The urgency to act on social dimension has been sharpened from two directions. Demographic decline makes widening participation an existential matter for systems losing their traditional cohorts, and the cost-of-living crisis has widened inequality in real time. A lifelong-learning agenda pursued without a social dimension correction would, through the Matthew effect, actively worsen the problem it is meant to solve.

What Bologna has already done

The *acquis* is, at least technically, complete. Bergen (2005) committed governments to report on national strategies for the social dimension; London (2007) supplied the canonical goal — that *“the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations”*; Leuven (2009) committed members to *“set measurable targets for widening overall participation and increasing participation of underrepresented groups”* by 2020; Yerevan (2015) adopted the strategy *Widening Participation for Equity and Growth*; Rome (2020) annexed the Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension (PAGs) — the first comprehensive and coherent set of commitments in this field, developed by the BFUG Working Group on Social Dimension; and Tirana (2024) adopted the Indicators and Descriptors for the PAGs, creating for the first time an agreed measurement grid (ESU, 2024a; Bologna Process, 2020, 2024).

What the gap is

The gap is not normative but consequential: each layer of the *acquis* has been adopted and then, at least in the initial years, not truly enforced. The Bergen reporting commitment *“translated into little effective practice”*; the Leuven measurable-targets commitment for 2020 passed unmet and unremarked. However, the first post-PAGs stocktaking exercise observed noticeable implementation progress. Structural features explain the slow-time progress: the social dimension initially developed as a transversal action line without defined means, most national action in this field occurs independently of the Bologna Process, and — as the 2010 assessment already concluded — under-representation is nationally specific, so that elaborate one-size-fits-all measures cannot be defined at European level (Westerheijden et al., 2010a, 2010b). Adding to this is a persistent data problem: key equity indicators (notably socio-economic background) are unavailable or unrecorded in many systems, partly for legitimate ethical reasons, which structurally weakens comparative monitoring (Westerheijden et al., 2010a).

What intergovernmental action could realistically achieve

A clear evidence-based suggestion is to focus on a small number of monitorable commitments. Concretely: (i) convert the Leuven logic into the Tirana architecture each member state defines, within its national implementation plan (Priority 6.5), two to three

quantified national equity targets, self-chosen to fit its own under-represented groups, with a 2030 horizon; the EHEA does not set the targets, it requires that targets exist and are published, respecting the 2010 finding that the content must be national; (ii) commit to a defined minimum equity data set, developed with Eurostudent and Eurostat, acknowledging and working within national data-protection constraints.

6.4. Interconnecting the knowledge ecosystem (EHEA-ERA-VET)

Why it matters now

Interconnectedness is the one pillar of the Rome 2030 vision with no operational roadmap or guidelines comparable to the PAGs for inclusiveness or the learning-and-teaching recommendations for innovation. The nearest counterpart to the PAGs on this pillar is the developing Action Plan on Internationalisation and Mobility prepared by the dedicated Working Group in the 2024–2027 cycle, which addresses the mobility and internationalisation dimension of interconnectedness directly and in operational terms. The gap analysed in this section is therefore narrower than the pillar as a whole: it concerns the links to research and to vocational education and training, where no comparable instrument exists. Furthermore, the IN-GLOBAL survey found it to be the most internally consolidated of the three Rome pillars yet the least externally shared (IN-GLOBAL & BFUG Task Force on Enhancing Knowledge Sharing in the EHEA Community, 2024). The trends analysed in the study give the pillar new urgency from three directions. Lifelong learning requires functioning bridges between VET and higher education. Furthermore, the ERA Policy Agenda 2025–2027 includes among its expected outcomes a “roadmap adopted for ERA/EEA (higher education-related) strategic alignment” - a roadmap without a Bologna reference despite the longstanding search for engagement (Council of the European Union, 2025b; European Research Area Platform, 2025).

What Bologna has already done

The commitments exist but are thin. VET-HE permeability was mentioned in the communiqués only once, in Bergen (2005), before returning to the agenda through the 2025 BFUG background paper on interconnectedness and the ECTS Users’ Guide revision (BFUG, 2025). On the research side, Paris (2018) and Rome (2020) committed to synergies between the EHEA, the EEA and the ERA, Rome specifically committing to strengthen cooperation with the ERA and calling on the BFUG to work closely with the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) on research-based learning, academic and scientific freedom, and the SDGs (BFUG, 2025). A 2021 ad hoc task force produced a background note and a proposal to the BFUG on increasing synergies, and Tirana (2024) recommitted to the goals towards 2030 (BFUG, 2025). The counterpart landscape has meanwhile matured: the ERA now runs on a policy agenda with eleven structural policies — including research careers, building on the December 2023 Council Recommendation and the new European Charter for Researchers — and the Commission has proposed a Council Recommendation on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education (COM(2024) 145) explicitly designed to bridge the teaching and research strands of academic work (Council of the European Union, 2025b; European Commission, 2024b).

What the gap is

The BFUG's own December 2025 background paper records little progress since the 2021 task force on identifying a tangible process for EHEA–ERA cooperation (BFUG, 2025;). No standing BFUG–ERAC coordination mechanism was ever established; the three operational questions posed in 2021 — which EHEA body links to the ERA, through what coordination method, and on which concrete fields — remain unanswered four years later. On the VET side, the same paper identifies real but scattered assets (single quality assurance agencies covering both sectors in some countries; shared qualifications frameworks via the EQF) and two unexploited alignment areas: ESG–EQAVET quality assurance guidance and ECTS–VET credit-system alignment (BFUG, 2025). Meanwhile academic careers — the single issue that most concretely spans EHEA (teaching), ERA (research) and national policy — are being addressed in parallel silos: the ERA careers framework, the EU higher education careers recommendation, and the EHEA's learning-and-teaching strand, with EUA explicitly calling for synergies across all three and for the EHEA to be included in careers reform (EUA, 2024).

What intergovernmental action could realistically achieve

This is the priority where modest institutional changes would not suffice, because the obstacle has been process, not substance. Concretely: (i) ensure a standing EHEA–ERA liaison arrangement through a named BFUG working structure with a mandate to interface with the ERA Forum (the successor governance to ERAC) and a defined joint work plan on the three Rome fields: research-based learning, academic freedom, and the SDGs; the 2027 communiqué should name the counterpart body and the reporting rhythm, since the 2021 experience shows that unaddressed process questions stall for years; (ii) use the revised ECTS Users' Guide as a concrete Copenhagen–Bologna bridge identified by the BFUG's own analysis, with peer learning drawing on the countries that already operate integrated ECTS and quality assurance across VET and higher education (BFUG, 2025); (iii) connect the careers files by inviting the alignment of the EHEA's learning-and-teaching work with the ERA research-careers structural policy and the EU higher education careers recommendation, so that parity of esteem between teaching and research is pursued once, at 47-system scale, rather than three times in overlapping circles (EUA, 2024; European Commission, 2024b).

6.5. Governance, ownership and implementation culture

Why it matters now

The 2024 evidence documents both the persistence of the implementation gap and a deepening ownership problem: in the TF EKS stakeholder survey, student unions and academics reported feeling poorly consulted in the Bologna Process (BFUG, 2019a, 2019b; ESU, 2024a; IN-GLOBAL & BFUG Task Force on Enhancing Knowledge Sharing in the EHEA Community, 2024). The Task Force itself found that in many countries no coordinated national approach to implementing and communicating Bologna commitments exists at all (TF EKS, 2024). The trends analysed in the study raise the stakes: a Process that could afford a leisurely

implementation culture in a stable environment cannot afford one in a decade of AI-driven tool obsolescence, demographic contraction and geopolitical fragmentation.

What Bologna has already done

The Working Group on non-implementation (2015–2018) produced the first systematic non-implementation analysis and led to the creation of the Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (BICG) and the Thematic Peer Groups on the three key commitments — a peer-support model co-funded by the European Commission (BFUG Working Group 2 on Implementation, 2018). Peer-support practice has accumulated through projects such as the DAAD-managed Bologna Hub Peer Support and the EUA-managed SPHERE/HERE initiatives (TF EKS, 2024). The 2020–2024 Task Force on Enhancing Knowledge Sharing consolidated this experience into five formal recommendations adopted in 2024: national implementation plans reflecting national priorities; consultation with and use of national Bologna experts, including the establishment of Bologna hubs; identification of adequate, sustainable resources; a standing Coordination Group within the BFUG; and the pervasive use of contemporary communication tools (TF EKS, 2024). Tirana then took the decisive step: citing the BPIR's confirmation of “*still incomplete and uneven implementation*”, ministers committed to devising and publishing national action plans for addressing remaining implementation gaps within the 2024–2027 period — the first time implementation itself became the object of a named ministerial commitment.

What the gap is

Four weaknesses persist. First, the stocktaking and BPIR exercises describe non-implementation with increasing precision, but description does not necessarily trigger structured follow-up. Second, TPGs dominated by specialist communities other than ministries raises recurring questions about mandate and about how the wider academic community is engaged, while national-level consultation structures — “national BFUGs” bringing together BFUG delegates and national stakeholders — exist only in a minority of countries (ESU, 2024a). Third, the expert infrastructure has decayed: the national Bologna expert networks that once carried peer-to-peer implementation support have lapsed in many countries, and the TF EKS recommendation to reactivate them and build Bologna hubs is, so far, a recommendation without resourcing — the funding model remains dependent on Commission project cycles (TF EKS, 2024). Fourth, the new instruments are unfinished: the Tirana national action plans commitment has been successful yet requires strengthening, and the Coordination Group proposed by the TF EKS is subject to BFUG approval and definition.

What intergovernmental action could realistically achieve

Concretely, the next work programme could:

- (i) complete the national implementation plans instrument — a detailed template asking who was engaged and how; reporting on the link with BPIR and on the link with the previous national action plan; a mid-cycle BFUG review;

- (ii) institutionalise the Coordination Group recommended by the TF EKS with an explicit implementation-coordination mandate — liaison with stakeholders, support to Bologna experts and hubs, an international peer-exchange platform (TF EKS, 2024);
- (iii) revitalise the Bologna expert and hub model with a dedicated, multi-annual funding strand, drawing on the DAAD and SPHERE precedents, and with the explicit function of carrying Priorities 6.1–6.4 into institutions;
- (iv) set a minimum consultation standard, generalising the national-BFUG practice, and the BPIR monitors its existence, directly addressing the consultation deficit quantified in 2024;
- (v) make accountability follow-through automatic and supportive — a defined threshold on BPIR scorecard indicators triggers, by default, an offer of thematic peer support;
- (vi) undertake a consolidation review of the accumulated commitments, retiring or merging those that are superseded or dormant. This last step would be the clearest possible signal that the arithmetic of accumulation has been understood.

The five priorities as a single programme

Read together, the five priorities form one programme rather than five files. The first — AI and the transformation of learning — is cross-cutting because it forces the modernisation of the same tools and frameworks on which the second (lifelong learning) and fourth (interconnectedness) depend; the third (social dimension) supplies the equity condition without which the first two would amplify existing advantage; and the fifth (governance and implementation culture) is the delivery mechanism for all four.

Synthesis of the study

Twenty-five years of the Bologna Process show that each ministerial conference has added commitments, almost none have ever been formally retired, and the resulting volume has grown far faster than the political capital and monitoring capacity available to support it. Where this arithmetic operated on open ground — the three-cycle structure, ECTS, the ESG-EQAR-DEQAR quality assurance regime, recognition under the Lisbon Recognition Convention — it produced the most extensive voluntary convergence any regional higher education framework has ever achieved, an achievement now used as a reference well beyond the EHEA's own borders. Where it met occupied ground — the social dimension, lifelong learning, the EHEA-ERA linkage, and the wider practitioner disconnect— commitments accumulated language rather than concrete results delivered, reproducing across two further decades the pathology the 2010 Independent Assessment had already named: a process at risk of becoming administration without impact on the reality of higher education.

The BFUG membership and the wider stakeholder community have reached this perspective, with remarkable consistency, for eight years: the substantive agenda barely needs adding to — the seven 2019 themes and the Rome vision are confirmed at every subsequent checkpoint — but every consultation round splits on the instruments that would make the agenda real: quantified targets, monitoring stringency, and support infrastructure. The bottleneck is implementation governance, not vision — a finding stated in near-identical terms by the 2010 assessment's own interviews, fourteen years before the Task Force on Enhancing Knowledge Sharing reproduced it from the opposite end of the assessment timeline.

Trends bearing on the next decade, from AI's system-level disruption of assessment and credentials, the arrival of the lifelong learner as the EHEA's central rather than marginal constituency, the two-speed risk created by the EU's own higher education instruments, financial fragility, to the rise of micro-credentials outside the Bologna Process framework, reinforces the same conclusion from a different direction. None of these trends asks the Process to write a brand new vision. Each asks it to modernise the tools (ECTS, the ESG, the QF-EHEA, the Diploma Supplement) quickly enough to remain fully usable in an evolving environment.

The 2027 Iași-Chișinău Conference carries a double mandate that no previous ministerial meeting has combined in quite the same way. It must take stock of the Rome 2030 vision with several years still to run, and it must open, per the Tirana mandate, the priorities for the decade beyond 2030. The 2024–2027 cycle was deliberately designed as agenda-setting rather than programme design, leaving operationalisation to the following cycle; but agenda-setting is not costless, and what Ministers commit to in Iași and Chișinău will determine whether the 2027–2030 cycle inherits a mandate it can act on, or another restated aspiration.

The stakes are concrete rather than rhetorical, for three reasons documented in this study. First, several of the instruments the next decade will depend on are already scheduled to reach this conference — the revised ESG, the revised ECTS Users' Guide, the outcome of the Task Force on a long-term Secretariat, and the first EHEA-wide fundamental values monitoring data — so that 2027 is mainly a moment to decide, adopt, and resource ongoing and future work.

Second, the consultation record shows a membership that has converged on what needs to change and grown visibly impatient with communiqués that convert that convergence into another restatement rather than an instrument; a further cycle of recommitting the 20% mobility benchmark, the social dimension, or lifelong learning without a delivery mechanism would confirm, rather than answer, the skepticism the practitioner community has expressed for meaningful progress in these policy fields.

Third, the conference takes place in a geopolitical setting the Rome Communiqué did not anticipate — a Europe still absorbing the consequences of the war on Ukraine, co-hosted for the first time by countries directly affected by it, and operating in a values environment shown to be deteriorating even within long-standing democracies. Fundamental values monitoring

without a credible account of what follows a documented breach would leave the Process's most consequential innovation of the cycle unfinished at the point where it matters most.

What would need to be committed is not a longer list of aspirations but the delivery architecture: named mandates for tool development and reporting, and, where the evidence supports it — quantified accountability, attached to a small number of instruments the Process already possesses.

Potential policy recommendations for the Iași-Chișinău Communiqué and beyond

Building directly on the priorities discussed above, the following eight potential recommendations are suggested for consideration:

- 1. Adopt an EHEA Statement of Principles on Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education** — covering human oversight of AI in assessment, academic integrity, equity of access and transparency towards learners, anchored in the fundamental values *acquis* and aligned with the EU AI Act and the Council of Europe's Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence (CETS No. 225), so that all 47 systems, EU and non-EU alike, share a common reference. Mandate the BFUG to review the QF-EHEA for AI-era learning outcomes and the positioning of micro-credentials within the 2027–2030 Work Programme.
- 2. Mandate the operationalisation of lifelong learning as a system**, not a restated commitment, by embedding micro-credentials in the QF-EHEA on the basis of the MICROBOL framework, establishing recognition of prior learning as a monitorable Bologna Process Implementation Report indicator against its documented baseline, and using the revised ECTS Users' Guide to align credit accumulation and quality-assurance practice between higher education and vocational education and training.
- 3. Convert the social dimension from principle to accountability** by requiring that every national action plan include two to three quantified, nationally self-chosen equity targets with a 2030 horizon; and committing to a minimum common equity data set developed with Eurostudent and Eurostat, within national data-protection constraints.
- 4. Establish a standing EHEA–European Research Area liaison mechanism**, naming the BFUG working structure responsible, its counterpart within the ERA Forum, a joint work plan on research-based learning, academic and scientific freedom and the Sustainable Development Goals, and a defined reporting rhythm to the BFUG — closing a gap that has been acknowledged but unaddressed since 2021.
- 5. Confirm and resource the long-term EHEA Secretariat on a stable, jointly financed, multi-annual footing**, formalising the direction agreed by the BFUG in March 2026 and ending the rotating national hosting model that has structured the Process's administration since 2003.
- 6. Institutionalise implementation governance and ownership**: adopt the Coordination Group recommended by the Task Force on Enhancing Knowledge Sharing with an explicit implementation-coordination mandate; set a minimum national consultation standard,

generalising the “national BFUG” model to every member; commit funding for Bologna expert networks and hubs; link defined Bologna Process Implementation Report scorecard thresholds automatically to an offer of thematic peer support; and mandate a consolidation review of the accumulated commitments, retiring or merging those that are superseded or dormant — the clearest possible signal that the arithmetic of accumulation traced in this study has been understood.

7. Define a structured Global Policy Forum cooperation offer for partners beyond the EHEA, built around the practitioner-level exchange they have explicitly requested — on AI, digital credentialing, recognition equity of digital access, and quality assurance — anchored to the UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications and existing inter-regional dialogue models such as HAQAA.

8. Match the declarative ambition regarding fundamental values in higher education with with a credible, published account of how the EHEA’s fundamental values monitoring translates into follow-up when breaches are found.

Taken together, these eight commitments would convert the 2024–2027 cycle’s agenda-setting mandate into a 2027–2030 Work Programme with named instruments, owners and reporting lines attached to each of the five priorities.

A final recommendation is worth mentioning, as provided by someone who was a key player in the launch of the European Higher Education Area, which will soon turn 30 years old. As with any longstanding intergovernmental cooperation, its political attractiveness fades with time. It might be the time to couple the new commitments with a political relaunch of the process. This political impetus may take the form of a joint meeting of EHEA Ministers responsible for higher education, research and VET or, depending on the main foci of the Iași – Chişinău Communiqué, perhaps even a joint meeting of EHEA ministers for higher education and ministers for finance, thus recognising the crucial role of higher education in the social and economic development of our societies.

Additionally, an enhanced dialogue could be designed between the EHEA, the EU and the Council of Europe, since many topics prioritised in the work plan of these organisations, in the field of higher education, either overlap or complement each other. In this sense, meetings between the BFUG and omologue structures would be beneficial, especially in assuring coherence and coverage of important topics lending themselves to intergovernmental cooperation, in line with the existing political mandates.