EHEA Roadmap for international cooperation to 2030 and beyond

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Overview and aim of the document

Commented [A1]: The introduction will be further refined once the document has been finalised.

The European Higher Education Area Roadmap for international cooperation to 2030 and beyond is conceived as a policy document to further strengthen effective cooperation across global macro-regions in higher education. Drawing on the work of the Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue (CGGPD) between 2024 and 2027, it identifies a set of **policy areas** and **future trajectories** for advancing global cooperation in higher education over the medium to long term. These principles and their articulation into future trajectories have been informed by policy discussions and meetings with global higher education stakeholders, as well as by the work undertaken on the Global Policy Statement (GPS). In the spirit of an inclusive and consultative process, the Roadmap was shared and discussed during two *ad hoc* meetings with representatives from all macro-regions to identify guiding questions and future trajectories derived from the guiding principles set out in the Global Policy Statement[1].

The Roadmap stems from a consultative process and is underpinned by the principle that there is no "one size fits all" approach. Macro-regions that contributed to developing this strategy are diverse, and asymmetries in science, technology, and knowledge production persist both within and across regions. At the same time, progress achieved in all macro-regions towards quality, transparent, and internationally connected higher education systems offers a unique opportunity to advance this shared agenda through greater solidarity, stronger institutional cooperation, and enhanced interregional exchange.

The first strategy for the "external dimension" of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) was issued in London in 2007, titled "European Higher Education in a Global Setting: A Strategy for the External Dimension of the Bologna Process". Although this document represents a major step towards improved cooperation across world macro-regions, the initial approach to the external dimension focused primarily on enhancing the attractiveness of higher education systems and strengthening international competitiveness. After 25 years of the EHEA and two decades since the first strategy on its external dimension, the profound changes that have reshaped higher education worldwide call for renewed reflection.

Over the past two decades, the global higher education landscape has changed significantly, and cooperation between the EHEA and other macro-regions has evolved into more structured and mature partnerships. Efforts to enhance the comparability and compatibility of higher education systems have advanced both within the EHEA and across other macro-regions through the establishment of intergovernmental cooperation areas[2], regional quality assurance frameworks[3], and the implementation of regional and global recognition conventions. While these processes were experimented with within the EHEA, they have since developed across all macro-regions, creating the conditions for renewed reflection on future pathways for global policy dialogue in higher education. This reflection is even more urgent, given that economic instability, digital transformation, geopolitical tensions, and demographic changes are creating new pressures on higher education systems and on governments in supporting higher education institutions in addressing contemporary challenges.

[1] This Roadmap builds on the collaborative work undertaken with representatives from across the world's macro-regions, who participated in open sessions of the CGGPD meetings and were directly involved in dedicated consultations. Two rounds of consultations saw the participation of representatives of regional and international frameworks, including Presidents of the Regional Recognition Conventions, representatives of Quality Assurance (QA) regional frameworks, regional university associations, and intergovernmental agencies (first meeting held on 13 May 2026, and the second meeting on 22 October 2026).

[2] Central Asia Higher Education Area (CAHEA), East Africa Higher Education Area (EAHEA), European Higher Education Area (EHEA), Espacio Latinoamericano y Caribeño de Educación Superior (ENLACES), Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO RIHED).

[3] African Quality Assurance Network (AfriQAN), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), Red Iberoamericana para el Aseguramiento de la Calidad en la Educación Superior (RIACES).

The document is divided into three main sections. The first is a contextual section that sets the scene in which this roadmap has been developed, drawing on the evolution of the EHEA's global dimension. The second section presents the main objectives identified in the Global Policy statements as they constitute the basis for projecting the reflection on a long-term horizon. The third and last section consolidates the main insights collected through consultations with macro-regional stakeholders, including their recommendations and forward-looking perspectives on cooperation across macro-regions. This final section brings together key recommendations and priority actions for future cooperation, outlining a forward-looking strategic orientation for EHEA international cooperation to 2030 and beyond.

Setting the scene

Higher education and inter-regional cooperation

The EHEA perspective

Between 2005 and 2006, the concept of the "external dimension" of the EHEA gained prominence in discussions within the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG). The term had already been used shortly after the Prague Ministerial summit in 2001, with roots even further back. Indeed, both the Sorbonne and the Bologna Declaration already referred to the "attractive potential" of national systems and the need to enhance the "international competitiveness" of the European education system.[4] However, it was the Bergen Communiqué (2005) that marked the first time Ministries called for a more structured strategy for the external dimension of the EHEA, which led to the development of the "European Higher Education in a Global Setting: A Strategy for the External Dimension of the Bologna Process", issued in 2007 (London).

The EHEA's initial approach to the external dimension focused primarily on promoting the Bologna model globally and ensuring that Europe was an attractive destination for mobile students. The adoption of the 2007 Strategy for the External Dimension of the Bologna Process marked a turning point, laying the foundations for a more comprehensive and structured approach. This included a stronger emphasis on dialogue with macro-regional stakeholders, improved information sharing, and the exchange of good practices, moving beyond a unidirectional model towards a more reciprocal and collaborative framework.

In this sense, the 2012 Bucharest Communiqué and its addendum, "Mobility for Better Learning. Mobility strategy 2020 for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)" marked an important step in strengthening the international dimension of the EHEA. The strategy undertaken underlined the importance of embedding internationalisation and mobility opportunities across higher education systems and institutions as an integral element of the development of the EHEA.

Over time, the EHEA's engagement in global partnerships has evolved in both scope and approach. Its priorities have progressively shifted towards fostering stronger global dialogue and promoting inclusive, multi-level cooperation involving a broad range of stakeholders. This approach is based on the mutual exchange of experiences and good practices, aiming to support shared developments and strengthen regional frameworks while contributing to the overall advancement of higher education systems at both regional and global levels. The shift towards reciprocal, continuous cooperation was crystallised in the 2018 Paris Ministerial Communiqué, when the ad hoc "Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue" was established. The Group was created with two objectives: developing regular dialogue with other regions and organising the Global Policy Forum(s).

In terms of priorities and commitments, while the first strategy focused on providing information on the EHEA, promoting its attractiveness, and fostering recognition of qualifications, the latest Ministerial Communiqué and Global Policy Statements – Paris, Rome, Tirana – place stronger emphasis on three main thematic areas. First, **higher education institutions as drivers of international cooperation and inclusion**. Institutions are called upon to ensure social inclusion, widen access to higher education, and equip students with the values, skills, and competences needed for civic participation, sustainability, employability, and global citizenship. An emerging theme is the role of governments and institutions in ensuring inclusive, quality education for all, in line with SDG 4, including by safeguarding academic integrity and countering education fraud. Second, the **centrality of mobility** of staff, students, teachers and researchers. Mobility remains a key tool for fostering global understanding and quality in higher education, supported by the

[4] Find more information about the EHEA Ministerial Conferences and Declaration at the following webpage: https://ehea.info/ministerial-conferences-and-communiques/.

growing engagement of the world's macro-regions in adopting transparency and comparability tools – qualifications frameworks, credit transfer systems, and quality assurance frameworks. Third, **technological advancement and more flexible learning systems** to enable innovation in higher education, as well as greater transparency and inclusivity.[5]

The Global perspective

The importance of international cooperation in higher education is receiving increased attention globally. This can be seen in in the strong interest in inter-regional cooperation that is manifested in the work of the BFUG Coordinating Group on Global Policy Dialogue, as well as in the increasing pace of ratifications of UNESCO's Global Convention on Higher Education. UNESCO's recent 2026 road map publication *Transforming higher education: Global collaboration on visioning and action*, which grows out of the World Higher Education Conference dynamic and processes, presents collaboration and solidarity as one of the guiding principles for higher education globally. UNESCO identifies strong commitments to international cooperation as one of the ways that higher education can safeguard and advance its core social mission and elements central to that mission such as academic freedom, institutional autonomy, academic mobility and scientific collaboration across borders. International cooperation is critical for enabling the seamless recognition of studies and qualifications, as well as essential to address global inequalities and asymmetries, particularly when it comes to the marginalization and barriers faced by those affected by crises, disaster and armed conflict, and/or in situations of displacement.

[5] Find more information about the EHEA Ministerial Conferences and Declaration at the following webpage: https://ehea.info/ministerial-conferences-and-communiques/.

Defining joint vision and priorities

As a policy document informing an intergovernmental process, this Roadmap recognises that implementation may proceed at different paces across EHEA member countries, taking into account their respective national contexts. Accordingly, this chapter outlines the **vision**, **key policy areas** and possible **future trajectories** of global cooperation in higher education to support governments and higher education stakeholders in advancing towards shared priorities in governance, cooperation, and thematic areas.

Insert a table to summarise the main points (vision, key policy areas, future trajectories).

Commented [A2]: This section will be further revised following the second round of consultations on the Roadmap, scheduled for October 2026, and the CG GPD meeting on the right to education, to be held in Paris in December 2026. This will ensure that all input is duly incorporated into the document.

Co-creation and community-building

A transition towards a more **structured and co-creative approach** is envisaged as a cornerstone of a shared long-term strategy for international cooperation in higher education. This highlights the need to evolve the cooperation model itself: from consultation towards genuine co-creation, shared agenda-setting, and structured implementation mechanisms capable of supporting more balanced, inclusive, and sustainable higher education cooperation.

Strengthening mutual understanding and trust is pivotal across higher education systems. Progress worldwide in adopting transparency and comparability tools at the national and regional levels creates a unique opportunity to foster international, balanced mobility as a key driver of international cooperation.

Equity and resilience in **higher education is a human right, a public good, and a lever for social transformation**. In a world where sustainable development, spanning economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection, is a global priority, international cooperation among higher education institutions is essential to identify innovative solutions and prepare learners to build resilient societies.

In contexts of crisis and fragility, international cooperation has an important part to play in ensuring the protection and resilience of higher education institutions and systems. This includes ensuring continuity of learning, safeguarding academic freedom, and preserving institutional resilience under extreme conditions.

Governments and higher education institutions are called upon to support the inclusion of all learners, ensuring not only access to higher education but also the capacity to retain and equip them with the skills and competences needed for employment and their personal and civic lives. International cooperation has a pivotal role to play in removing barriers facing refugees and displaced learners.

Policy area 1: Models and mechanisms of cooperation

Future trajectories

- Strengthen inclusive and ethical internationalisation strategies at the global level toward more balanced, reciprocal models of cooperation.
- Foster structured cooperation mechanisms tailored to each macro-region's specific context in terms of comparability, transparency and quality in higher education, as well as its future priorities.
- Institutionalise cooperation and shared agenda-setting across macro-regions through a structured governance body with balanced representation from all the macro-regions.

- Promote the global dimension as a transversal topic in implementing key commitments within the EHEA.

Policy area 2: Trust, recognition and comparability

Future trajectories

- Use recognition conventions and quality assurance networks as a concrete, near-term entry point for deepening structured collaboration across macro-regions, building on the practical value this cooperation has already demonstrated for mobility and trust-building.
- Foster the interconnection and comparability of regional qualifications frameworks and systems of credits, capitalising on each macro-region's distinct priorities.
- Enhance and expand cooperation and information-sharing between National Information Centres and Regional Recognition Networks, supporting mechanisms that allow for co-designing common priorities.
- Foster structured interregional dialogue on quality assurance frameworks, at a pace calibrated to each macro-region's own priorities.
- Encourage the sharing of knowledge and expertise across macro-regions to strengthen quality assurance and recognition for transnational education (TNE).
- Support regular, structured mutual learning exercises between macro-regions so that comparability efforts build on existing regional progress.
- Promote the global dimension as a transversal topic in implementing key commitments within the EHEA.

Policy area 3: Lifelong learning and flexible pathways

Future trajectories

- Advance lifelong learning as a core principle of higher education systems, ensuring flexible entry, re-entry, and progression pathways that accommodate all forms of learners, including adult learners, refugees and displaced persons, working professionals, and those who followed non-traditional education pathways.
- Create enabling regulatory and funding frameworks for flexible learning pathways, recognising micro-credentials, prior learning and modular study within broader national, regional and inter-regional strategies for lifelong learning.
- Develop shared principles on flexible learning pathways that enhance innovation and inclusiveness in higher education, while safeguarding its fundamental mission to nurture engaged citizens and support the holistic development of the person.
- Encourage partnerships between higher education institutions, industry, and social actors, balancing funding incentives, performance metrics, and employer partnerships with the main mission of higher education institutions to nurture civic and citizenship education.

Policy area 4: Inclusion and sustainable social transformation

Future trajectories

- Explicitly recognise higher education's role in peacebuilding, human rights, environmental sustainability and social cohesion, embedding this role in institutional strategies and in the language of cooperation frameworks.

- Foster the role of higher education institutions as drivers of social transformation, as engines of innovation, pillars of human development in collaboration with other civil society stakeholders, particularly in regions with young or fast-growing populations.
- Encourage governance models that reinforce academic freedom and institutional autonomy as the outcome of institutional cooperation and community engagement.

Human-centred solidarity in the face of innovation and digital transformation

Digital transformation and artificial intelligence (AI) permeate all aspects of our lives and intersect with various dimensions of higher education.

Given AI's transformative potential to reshape higher education systems worldwide in the years ahead, higher education institutions have a key role to play as drivers of innovation and primary actors in shaping AI policy and practices. Against this backdrop, strengthening interregional cooperation in this area emerged as a strategic priority.

Primary emphasis should be placed on an ethical, human-centred approach to this transformation, encompassing education quality, academic integrity and the prevention and countering of academic fraud.

These developments intersect with various dimensions of higher education. While they offer significant opportunities to enhance transparency, comparability, and efficiency across higher education systems, equal capacity to access digital infrastructure and AI technologies shall be strongly supported.

Digital transformation and AI are recognised as powerful enablers of greater access, efficiency, and personalised learning pathways. At the same time, these developments must not overshadow the core mission of higher education: fostering critical thinking, ethical reasoning, empathy, creativity, and civic responsibility.

Policy area 1: Ethical, equitable digital transformation

Future trajectories

- Enhance the role of higher education in driving innovation, advancing research, and shaping policies and practices related to digital transformation and artificial intelligence.
- Foster the capacity of higher education institutions in shaping how AI is used in teaching and learning by funding the development of institutional AI-use policies based on regional and global norms and frameworks, investing in staff and student training in the conscious, critical and ethical use of AI tools, ensuring that national digital and AI strategies treat higher education institutions, researchers and students as active partners in setting standards.
- Support higher education institutions, learners and students, regardless of region or resource level, to have reliable access to the digital infrastructure and learning opportunities needed to participate fully in transformed higher education systems.
- Embed AI literacy as a core competency for students, teaching staff, and administrative personnel across higher education systems, ensuring that the ability to critically understand, use, and evaluate AI tools becomes as fundamental as traditional digital literacy, supported by shared curricula, training programs, and capacity development.

Policy area 2: Academic transparency and integrity

Future trajectories

- Strengthen inter-regional cooperation to advance academic freedom as a shared global principle, supported by joint monitoring mechanisms and international agreements that link funding and academic integrity to minimum safeguards for research, teaching and learning.

- Improve research into emerging forms of education fraud, including AI-enabled fraud, contract cheating, and diploma mills — to build an evidence base that keeps detection and prevention strategies ahead of evolving fraudulent practices.
- Strengthen joint national, regional, and international mechanisms to prevent and counter academic fraud (diploma mills, forged qualifications), treating this as a shared responsibility across recognition and quality assurance systems globally.