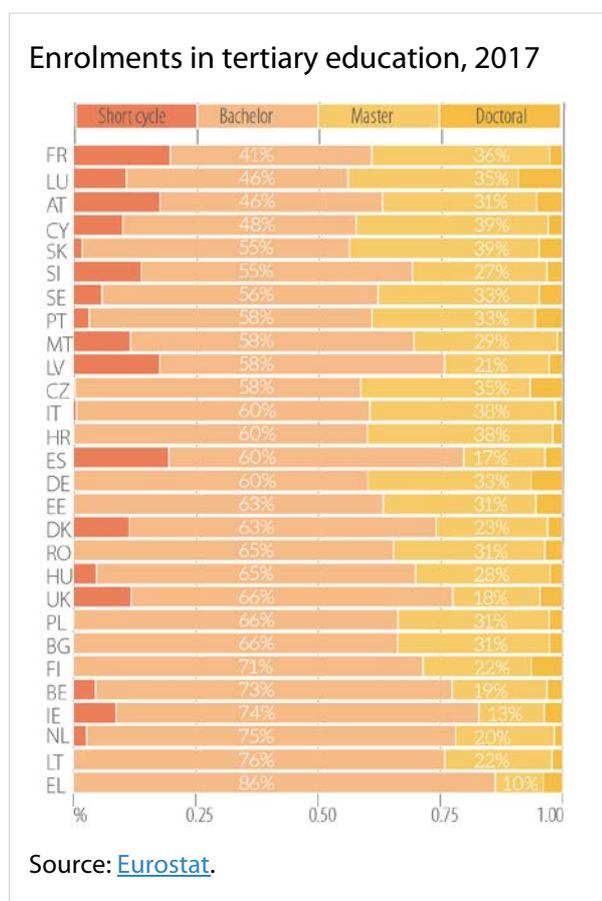


Implementing the Bologna Process: The follow-up

The Bologna Declaration marked the launch of the Bologna Process, which led to the formation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in 2010. The process now brings together 48 European countries in a common effort to achieve compatible and comparable higher education systems. Participants face the challenge of making different systems more easily recognisable whilst respecting academic freedom and autonomy, as well as cultural and linguistic diversity.



Equivalence and recognition

In [1999](#), Ministers declared their ambition to reinvigorate European higher education to make it more competitive and attractive globally. This goal was to be achieved by facilitating student and staff [mobility](#), aiming at increasing contacts between higher education institutions and opening up to the [world](#). The European Commission and [education ministers](#), together with stakeholders, began a [process](#) to establish common structures that help institutions and individuals understand each other's methods and structures. However, this proved [controversial](#), as critics feared that standards would fall and market concerns would be prioritised.

A common degree structure, initially a [two-cycle model](#), was chosen to distinguish between undergraduate and graduate degrees. This was extended to a third level, the doctorate, to [link education with research](#). In 2018, the overarching framework for qualifications was revised to recognise [short cycles](#), professional study programmes that last one or two academic years, aiming to improve the intake of under-represented groups and completion rates, and increase relevance to labour-market needs. Each country will decide whether and how to incorporate short cycles in their national framework.

Figure 1 shows that in all the Member States, far more

students follow a Bachelors' degree than any other level. Bachelors' and Masters' degrees together account for almost all higher education enrolments.

The [European Qualifications Framework](#) was developed using Unesco's International Standard Classification of Education ([ISCED](#)). In recent years, more countries have put [National Qualifications Frameworks](#) in place, and their role in increasing transparency and promoting common recognition is growing. Most universities now issue the [Diploma Supplement](#), in a widely used European language, with their diplomas. This document provides a detailed description of the study components and the learning outcomes achieved by the graduate. However, in some countries the diploma supplement is not issued automatically or free of charge.

Another important development was the introduction of a standardised system of credits, known as [ECTS](#) (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System). This system defines credits in terms of learning

outcomes and a workload quantified in hours. Credits add up to meet the requirements of a degree and are transferable to other institutions in the EHEA. A parallel system was set up for vocational education and training, the [ECVET](#), in the meantime the European Commission is running an [evaluation exercise](#) to check for progress on the possibility to obtain qualifications for learning that took place in [non-formal](#) (evening classes, clubs) and informal (voluntary work) settings.

Remaining concerns

Since **recognition of qualifications** or study credits is the prerogative of universities, quality assurance is needed to create transparency. The [agreed model](#) is rigorous internal quality assurance verified by [external agencies](#). Implementation of this model is developing rapidly. The [latest report](#) published ahead of the EHEA Ministerial Conference in Paris in May 2018, for instance, claims that quality assurance checks on higher education institutions have become more transparent as institutions publish their quality assurance strategies and evaluation reports. However, students are not yet equal partners in the evaluation process while obstacles to the recognition of their studies persist.

Unemployment rates among graduates fell in most EHEA countries between 2013 and 2016, but recent graduates are still more likely to be unemployed than experienced ones, and in some countries the graduate unemployment rate has increased, even significantly. Ministerial [declarations](#) propose a number of policies to enhance **employability**, including improvements to career guidance services, the implementation of Bologna [tools](#) such as the diploma supplement and promoting student mobility.

Most countries have adopted targets for outward and inward **mobility**. However, comparison of mobility flows between countries is difficult as each country adopts its own definition of 'mobility'. Setting targets is important, as some administrative and financial obstacles to mobility remain. For instance, mobility is facilitated when students can maintain their [grants](#) and staff their statutory rights (related to working conditions). Only a third of higher education systems allow students to maintain their grants.

Another related social issue is access for **under-represented groups**. Research indicates that individuals from these groups tend to follow [indirect educational paths](#). The [Council of the European Union](#) recognised the need for the Bologna Process to pursue efforts to provide equal opportunities irrespective of background, however the latest report on the state of the EHEA points out that this area remains largely neglected, and only a few countries have introduced long-term objectives and monitoring tools.

The [20th anniversary](#) of the Bologna Process was celebrated in the city of Bologna in June 2019. In the meantime, a number of [groups](#) continue to work on the remaining challenges ahead of the next Ministerial Conference, which will be held in [Rome](#) in 2020. On that occasion, the Global Policy Forum will pursue dialogue beyond the EHEA.

Apart from Member State involvement at national level, the EU contributes to the Bologna priorities by supporting the work of the secretariat and in providing mobility opportunities for students and academics through [Erasmus+](#). Every year more than 300 000 students study or train abroad under this programme. Two thirds of universities have [claimed](#) that participating in an Erasmus+ project improved social inclusion and decreases discrimination – a key priority of the Bologna Process.

European Parliament position

During its eighth parliamentary term (2014-2019), the European Parliament adopted two resolutions on the issue. The first [resolution](#) was adopted in 2015 ahead of the Ministerial Conference in Yerevan and points to the links between the Bologna Process, the revision of the [Europe 2020 Strategy](#) and the implementation of the [Juncker Investment Plan](#). The second [resolution](#) was adopted in 2018, in the run-up to the Paris Ministerial Conference. In this resolution, the European Parliament stressed the importance of the social dimension of higher education. It underlined the issue of inclusion, pointing out the need for accessible and equitable mechanisms to allocate mobility funds and allowances. The resolution also sought consistency in the implementation of key commitments across the area.

This is an updated edition of an 'at a glance' note published in April 2015.

