

Overview of the Bologna Process

What is the Bologna Process?

The Bologna Process is a process of cooperation and reform in the field of higher education bringing together 48 countries. It established and seeks to consolidate the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) with comparable and compatible systems of higher education in order to facilitate mobility, increase employability, allow equitable student access and progression and strengthen Europe's attractiveness and competitiveness worldwide.



Source: Adapted from Global Higher Education. Created by University of Wisconsin-Madison Cartography Lab with the financial support of Worldwide Universities Network (WUN)

How is the Bologna Process structured?

The Bologna Process was launched in 1999 by Ministers responsible for Education from 29 European countries. Since then, Ministerial Conferences were organised every two years to monitor the progress on implementing the agreed reforms and set future priority areas. At the Ministerial Summit held in Budapest/Vienna in 2010, the European Higher Education Area was launched. To date, it brings together 48 out of the 49 countries that have ratified the European Cultural Convention of the Council of Europe and are eligible to form part of the European Higher Education Area.

The priority areas identified in the Declarations and Communiqués issued at each Ministerial Summit determine the work plan between one Ministerial Summit and the next one. These priority areas are dealt with by working groups made up of countries expressing an interest in that particular area. Cooperation on higher education in the Bologna Process is also supported through regular meetings of representatives from all countries forming part of the European Higher Education Area at the so-called Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG), which discusses and decides on the work carried out by the working groups. The work of this group is reinforced by the Bologna Secretariat, which is established and supported by the country organising the next Bologna Ministerial Summit.

Who is involved?

The main actors in the Bologna Process are the representatives of the 48 member countries that signed the Bologna Declaration as well as representatives of European universities (EUA), professional higher education institutions (EURASHE), students (ESU), quality assurance agencies (ENQA), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation - European Centre for Higher Education (UNESCO-CEPES), Education International (EI) and Business Europe. The Process is also supported by the European Commission and the Council of Europe.

What are the main priority areas?

The Bologna Process Declarations and Communiqués contain both structural or systemic reforms and more general policy dimensions.

Structural or systemic reforms

Diploma supplement: The Diploma Supplement is a document issued to each graduate in addition to the qualification and describes the education system of the country, the education institution attended, the programme followed along with the main areas studied as part of the programme.

ECTS: The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System is based on the student workload and learning outcomes of a programme. It aims at facilitating mobility through credit transfer across institutions and countries.

Degree structure: Countries agreed to establish a common three-tiered degree structure of Bachelor (first cycle), Master (second cycle) and Doctorate (third cycle) with the possibility of a short cycle qualification forming part of the first cycle.

Qualifications framework: Besides a common degree structure, countries committed themselves to establish National Qualifications Frameworks. These explain qualifications in an education system in terms of level descriptors based on the knowledge, skills and competences obtained upon completion. Moreover, they provide information on the level of qualifications and on the transition between them to allow for flexible learning pathways and to facilitate recognition of qualifications.

Quality Assurance: Cooperation on quality assurance in higher education at European level is aimed at developing common criteria and methodologies that will promote mutual trust and facilitate recognition of qualifications.

General policy dimensions

European dimension of higher education: The Bologna Process seeks to increase the transparency and attractiveness of European Higher Education Area globally to attract the most talented students to Europe.

Mobility: At the same time, the Bologna Process aims at promoting the mobility of students, academics and administrative staff within the European Higher Education Area. Student mobility is supported both for a short-term (e.g. a semester) as well as for a whole degree.

Employability: The Bologna Process aims at providing students with the knowledge, skills and competences required for the labour market. By being more responsive to the labour market needs, education can help avoid graduate unemployment and contribute to economic growth.

Social dimension: Members of the Bologna process have agreed that the student population in higher education should reflect the diversity of the total population. Thus, any obstacles to enter, participate in or complete higher education linked to socio-economic background, gender, age, nationality, religion or any other factor should be progressively removed.

Lifelong learning: Lifelong learning may contribute to meeting the needs of a changing labour market. Through flexible learning pathways and a smooth transition between education and work, lifelong learning can ensure continuous opportunities for developing knowledge, skills and competences. At the same time, it may provide more flexible access to higher education for underrepresented groups.

Involving higher education institutions, students and other stakeholders: In order to ensure ownership and a sound implementation of the reforms at European, national and institutional level, all stakeholders in higher education, including education institutions, students and social partners should be involved in the decision making and implementation.



How have these priority areas developed over the years?

Mobility of students and teachers	Mobility of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff	Social dimension of mobility	Portability of loans and grants Improvement of mobility data	Attention to visa and work permits	Challenges of visa and work permits, pension systems and recognition	Benchmark of 20 % by 2020 for student mobility	Explore ways to achieve automatic recognition of academic qualifications
A common two-cycle degree system	Easily readable and comparable degrees	Fair recognition Development of recognised Joint degrees	Inclusion of doctoral level as third cycle	QF-EHEA adopted National Qualifications Frameworks launched	National Qualifications Frameworks by 2010	National Qualifications Frameworks by 2012	New roadmaps for countries that have not established a national qualifications framework
		Social dimension	Equal access	Reinforcement of the social dimension	Commitment to produce national action plans with effective monitoring	National targets for the social dimension to be measured by 2020	Strengthen policies of widening access and raising completion rates
		Lifelong learning (LLL)	Alignment of national LLL policies Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)	Flexible learning paths in higher education	Role of higher education in LLL Partnerships to improve employability	LLL as a public responsibility requiring strong partnerships Call to work on employability	Enhance employability, lifelong learning and entrepreneurial skills through improved cooperation with employers
Use of credits	A system of credits (ECTS)	ECTS and Diploma Supplement (DS)	ECTS for credit accumulation		Need for coherent use of tools and recognition practices	Continuing implementation of Bologna tools	Ensure that Bologna tools are based on learning outcomes
	European cooperation in quality assurance	Cooperation between quality assurance and recognition professionals	Quality assurance at institutional, national and European level	European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance adopted	Creation of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR)	Quality as an overarching focus for EHEA	Allow EQAR registered agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA
Europe of Knowledge	European dimensions in higher education	Attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area	Links between higher education and research areas	International cooperation on the basis of values and sustainable development	Strategy to improve the global dimension of the Bologna process adopted	Enhance global policy dialogue through Bologna Policy Fora	Evaluate implementation of 2007 global dimension strategy with aim to provide guidelines for further developments
1998	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	2012
Sorbonne Declaration	Bologna Declaration	Prague Communiqué	Berlin Communiqué	Bergen Communiqué	London Communiqué	Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué	Bucharest Communiqué

Source: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015. *The European Higher Education Area in 2015: Bologna Process Implementation Report.*

Further information

The full texts of Bologna Process ministerial agreements can be found at <http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=43>

More information about the history of the Bologna process can be accessed through <http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=3>

The Bologna Process Implementation Report for the Yerevan Ministerial Summit in 2015 is available online at: <http://www.ehea.info/news-details.aspx?ArticleId=385>