

Draft Statement of the EHEA Global Policy Forum

Tirana, May 2024

We, the Ministers responsible for higher education, heads of delegation, representatives of students, organizations and institutions participating in the EHEA Global Policy Forum, express our firm conviction that higher education has a vital role to play in addressing present and future challenges to peace and the wellbeing of the world's peoples.

The aspiration of Higher Education systems to offer quality education for all is founded on a basic human right, also recognized as one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Our shared vision, as well as the ever greater connectedness of our higher education institutions, provide a robust basis for dialogue and inter-regional and global cooperation on higher education

Multilateral cooperation can facilitate a return to peace, respect for fundamental values, including academic freedom, and the quality, relevance and inclusiveness of higher education.

Higher Education in the world context

Continuing and emerging global challenges, including climate change, pandemics, conflict and forced migration, underline the responsibilities of higher education and research. Our ability to address such challenges relies on scientific research and effective development, transfer and use of the knowledge gained. Flexible, responsive higher education systems are needed to underpin sustainable, peaceful and inclusive societies.

We aspire to a world in which human beings enjoy the "freedom to pursue knowledge and freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas regardless of frontiers", in line with SDG4.

We welcome the Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue's exploration, region by region, of opportunities for exchange of views and information on topics of common interest. Conversations, colloquiums, seminars and conferences have allowed us to share information about the challenges, similarities and differences of our higher education systems and to identify the added value of global dialogue between regions.

To remove obstacles to mobility and to strengthen our cooperation in practice, we invite all participants to continue to promote global policy dialogue identifying, region by region, the themes where synergies can be found, on the one hand with global organizations such as UNESCO and OECD, and, on the other, *with intergovernmental processes such as the ASEM Process, the Turkestan Process the Union for the Mediterranean, Euro-Latin American and Caribbean space [to be discussed and completed]* for higher education, science, technology and innovation. Recognizing that each region will have its own priorities we see that such diversity strengthens and enriches our dialogue.

Moving forward:

To strengthen our cooperation, transparency is vital. We must support mobility and recognition of foreign qualifications and learning periods, consolidate trust, and cooperate to utilize or develop the necessary tools and improve their compatibility.

To achieve 'inclusion' we must ensure not only equitable access, but also higher rates of admission and retention for students from diverse backgrounds, including refugees and migrants. Providing "equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university" (SDG 4.3), for example, means providing support for potential learners in all countries, while perfecting and making available flexible learning paths.

Developing the social dimension of higher education means making our systems better able to serve a student body representative of the socio-demographic structure of our countries, and also ensuring the inclusiveness of our academic staff. Our institutions' capacity to retain learners and equip them with the competences they will need for employment and for their personal and civic lives, as well as an awareness of and commitment to the principles of sustainability (SDG 4.7) must be strengthened.

Physical international mobility, of both students and staff, is irreplaceable for fostering intercultural and international understanding. Innovative blended mobility experiences and virtual international learning environments must be strengthened, without creating or deepening social inequalities.

¹***Following our discussions during the EHEA Global Policy Forum and the dialogue conducted in preparing for it***, we recognize the positive potential for all our countries to:

- Make learning credits comparable and transferable, and digitalize data on qualifications and learning achievement according to compatible standards, ensuring transparency and security at global level.
- Foster innovation in learning and teaching, opening up to new skills and ensuring their link to employability.
- Ensure respect and recognition for teaching as well as research for our academic staff, and the attractiveness of teaching as a career.
- Recognize the need for higher education institutions to stay engaged with their communities, stakeholders and the labor market.
- Increase shared awareness of the importance of student-centered learning taking place in a research-rich learning and teaching environment, and the implications of this for the flexibility of study programs and learning paths in a lifelong learning perspective.
- Explore innovative digital ways of learning and teaching more intensely and in a lifelong learning context, while addressing the issue of unequal access and retention which continue to subsist.
- Further develop all forms of mobility of people and knowledge, as one of the most important keys to global understanding and to excellence in higher education; reciprocity and balanced incoming and outgoing mobility should be pursued as an objective.
- Open up higher education to underrepresented groups, facilitating migrants and strengthening the links between higher education and other systems such as VET to reach untapped talent.

We will work towards a shared understanding and, where possible, comparability between the Qualifications Frameworks, Qualifications Reference Frameworks, and Quality Assurance systems and mechanisms developed in different world regions.

The entry into force on 5 March 2023² of the UNESCO *Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education* is a landmark achievement. Building on pre-existing regional agreements, it is an important step towards reaching the goals of the *Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning”*.

Continuing Dialogue

We take up our responsibilities towards our countries and peoples, in order to release the potential of higher education to find shared solutions to the world’s challenges. We must support present and future generations in learning to think and act ethically, creatively and critically, enabling them to address and resolve the challenges of the future. Increased cooperation within and among regions will strengthen our ability to elaborate and implement innovative and inclusive solutions.

[Next stepsto be added as appropriate. Suggested in Rome: We will strengthen the dialogue between the working structures of the EHEA and those of our countries and macro-regions]

We reiterate the imperative of contributing on multiple levels to achieving quality higher education for all, and commit to working more closely together in the coming years to that effect

The next EHEA Global Policy Forum will be held in [still to be decided].

¹ This and other points to be completed on the basis of the discussions that precede and take place during the Forum

² To be updated as appropriate.