ACHIEVING SDG4: FLEXIBLE LEARNING PATHWAYS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Research Findings from the IIEP-UNESCO International Survey

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This report was prepared for the IIEP-UNESCO research project 'SDG4: Planning for flexible learning pathways in higher education'. The project aims to produce knowledge and provide evidence-based policy advice in different development contexts to ministries of (higher) education that are considering building or strengthening flexible learning pathways as an area of reform. It comprises a stocktaking exercise, an international survey, eight in-depth country case studies (Chile, Finland, India, Jamaica, Malaysia, Morocco, South Africa and the UK) and thematic studies. This report is an unpublished work presenting the results and analyses of the findings from the aforementioned International Survey

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1. Introduction

Higher education systems across the world have undergone profound transformations in recent decades. Global enrolment in higher education doubled from 100 million in 2000 to 221 million in 2017 and this number is expected to reach 590 million by 2040 (Calderon, 2018). This expansion has led to increasingly diverse higher education systems, comprising public and private university and non-university institutions, with an academic, vocational or professional orientation, providing degree- and non-degree education through face-to-face, online or blended learning modalities. The higher education landscape is changing continuously with new types of provisions, such as MOOCs and other technology-based provisions.

Diversification is also seen in the types of learners entering higher education, including, along more traditional groups, young people without the traditional secondary school leaving qualification, adults and working professionals, returnees to higher education, migrants and refugees, and individuals with special needs. As recognised in the International Education 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goal 4, the expansion and diversification of higher education has created the need for better-integrated higher education systems equipped to provide diverse and flexible learning pathways to support equity and lifelong learning.

The Education 2030 Agenda defines flexible learning pathways as "entry points and re-entry points at all ages and all educational levels, strengthened links between formal and non-formal structures, and recognition, validation and accreditation of the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through non-formal and informal education" (UNESCO, 2015, p. 33). Drawing on this definition, flexible learning pathways are concerned with the entire learning cycle, from (re-)entry to completion, acquired not only in formal but also non-formal and informal settings.

Acknowledging the growing importance of this topic, UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (UNESCO-IIEP) launched an international research project, titled *"SDG4: Planning for Flexible Learning Pathways in Higher Education"*, to identify how higher education systems across the world support flexible learning pathways for different types of students with diverse learning needs. The main objective of this research is to produce knowledge and provide evidence-based policy advice to ministries of (higher) education in different development contexts who are considering building or strengthening flexible learning pathways as an area of reform. This research project will draw on findings from a series of in-depth case studies and *an international survey*. The following introductory section will discuss the main objectives and structure of the international survey, its methodology as well as the key characteristics of the survey respondents.

1.1. Survey objectives

This report presents the findings of the *International Survey on Policies, Instruments and Practices for Developing Flexible Learning Pathways in Higher Education*. The main objective of the survey is to **document evidence and highlight good examples of existing measures that support the development of flexible learning pathways (FLP) in higher education systems and institutions**. The survey was administered to ministries of (higher) education of UNESCO member countries in order to collect baseline information from existing country realities. The survey was organised in five key sections[1]:

1.   The Higher Education Provision in the Country;
2.   Instruments and Practices Supporting Flexible Learning Pathways in Higher Education;
3.   Policies for Implementing Flexible Learning Pathways in Higher Education;
4.   Monitoring and Evaluation of Policy Implementation;
5.   Respondents' Identity.

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[1] These key sections follow the structure of the survey questionnaire.

The survey included questions pertaining to the existing FLP policies, instruments and practices, relating to alternative admission pathways, opportunities for transfer, national qualifications frameworks, quality assurance, credit accumulation and transfer systems, as well as information and guidance systems. The survey contained questions pertaining to the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies. Lastly, a question was asked about key enablers and factors lacking for an effective implementation of flexible learning pathways.

The survey reflects a broad international coverage and aims to close a research gap, particularly in the context of developing countries, where the literature on flexible learning pathways is quite scarce and where existing policies and practices are less documented than in developed countries.

1.2. Methodology and characteristics of respondents

The survey was developed by UNESCO-IIEP with inputs from an external consultant with expertise on the topic. The design of the instrument, including the key concepts addressed, was informed by an in-depth literature review. The research proposal developed as part of the *"SDG4: Planning for Flexible Learning Pathways in Higher Education"* project helped to structure the question items.

The questionnaire comprised 25 closed- and open-ended questions, 14 of which were compulsory (pertaining to sections 1, 2 and 3) and 11 were optional (sections 4 and 5). The open-ended questions asked respondents to list relevant measures and good practices that they use in the area.

The mix of compulsory and optional questions was necessary to maintain a balance between a desirable response rate and a common set of data that can be compared across regions. The instrument was initially developed in English and then translated into French and Spanish[2].

The three language versions were piloted for comprehensibility in the respective language in 15 countries and amended according to the feedback received from the pilot respondents. The modifications were also necessary to improve the relevance and applicability of the survey to the diversity of higher education systems, operating in different contexts.

The final version of the survey was administered online, using a designated survey platform (Survey Monkey). The survey was sent out in January 2019, to the Secretary Generals of UNESCO National Commissions in 201 countries[3]. They were asked to forward the survey to an appropriate person(s) in the ministry of (higher) education or in another relevant higher education buffer body. Only one response was requested and recorded for each country.

A total of 87 responses were received between January and March 2019, 75 (86%) of which were exploitable[4]. Of the 75 exploitable responses, 53 (71%) were in English, 12 (16%) were in French and 10 (13%) were in Spanish.

Responding countries were classified according to the UNESCO qualification of regions. A total of 23 responses (31%) were received from Africa; 21 (28%) from Europe; 13 (17%) from Asia and the Pacific; 12 (16%) from Latin America and the Caribbean; and 6 (8%) from Arab states. All regions were relatively well represented, with response rates per region varying between 28% for Asia and the Pacific, and 43% for Africa (see Table 1).

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[2] The choice to prepare the questionnaire in these three languages was mainly conditioned by the language competency of the research team.

[3] They represent the 193 UNESCO member states and 11 associate member states. For more information on these countries, please consult: https://en.unesco.org/countries/member-states

[4] To note, an exploitable survey implies that a country responded in full to 14 out of 25 questions.

Table 1. Response rates per region

1) Region	2) Number of countries in the region	3) Number of complete responses per region	4) Response rate per region
Africa	53	23	43%
Europe	52	21	40%
Asia and the Pacific	46	13	28%
Latin America and the Caribbean	37	12	32%
Arab States	21	6	29%

A full list of countries that responded to the survey by region can be found in Annex 2: List of respondents by region.

A statistical software *STATA* was used to organise the data into global and regional tables (please see Annex 3: Global and regional data). These tables are the basis for the descriptive statistics and graphical illustrations presented in this report.

In addition to predefined questions, the survey contained open-ended questions to give respondents an opportunity to elaborate on relevant measures and provide concrete examples that support flexible learning pathways in their higher education systems. When referring to the experience of specific countries, the following report draws on the information and explanations provided in the open-ended questions.

Absolute numbers instead of percentages have been used in the data analysis. This choice is more appropriate considering that the units of analysis are higher education systems (rather than institutions) and the data is often disaggregated and presented by region. This choice was also made because of the fact that a majority of questions allowed for multiple choices to be made as well as non-answers. This methodological choice made the presentation of data in terms of percentages of answers difficult.

2. Overview of higher education provision in responding countries

The organization of higher education provision plays an important role in the facilitation of flexible learning pathways, particularly it can have impact on access and progression of students through the system. The survey attempted to take stock of the differences that exist between countries in terms of types of higher education provision (i.e., binary, unitary and other) and modes of educational delivery (i.e., face-to-face full-time, distance and online, and face-to-face part time).

2.1. Types of higher education systems

The organisation of higher education systems into subsectors can affect access and progression pathways. Countries that have a strong binary divide – i.e. they operate on a dual system of higher education with a traditional university subsector and a separate and distinct non-university subsector – often have legally defined differences in missions and orientations and are in many cases governed by distinct legislations. This can be an obstacle to the transferability of recognized learning across subsectors, making it challenging for students to transfer from, for instance, a vocational to an academic pathway. In a unitary system, on the other hand, higher education is typically delivered in one type of institution, consisting of universities or university-like establishments. They may be however of a comprehensive or a specialized nature (for instance pedagogical or technological universities).

Evidence suggests that unitary systems can minimise horizontal differences and reduce inefficiencies and fragmentation (OECD, 2019). Therefore, it is important to contextualise the development of flexible learning pathways in relation to the structure of the higher education systems and the functions, missions and roles of each of their subsectors.

Among the countries that responded to the survey, both unitary and binary systems are equally represented (see Figure 1). 35 countries indicated having *unitary* higher education systems and another 35 described their systems as *binary*[5]. However, in some of them, this distinction is not unequivocal as more than one type of institutions belongs to the same subsector.

Figure 1. Types of higher education systems

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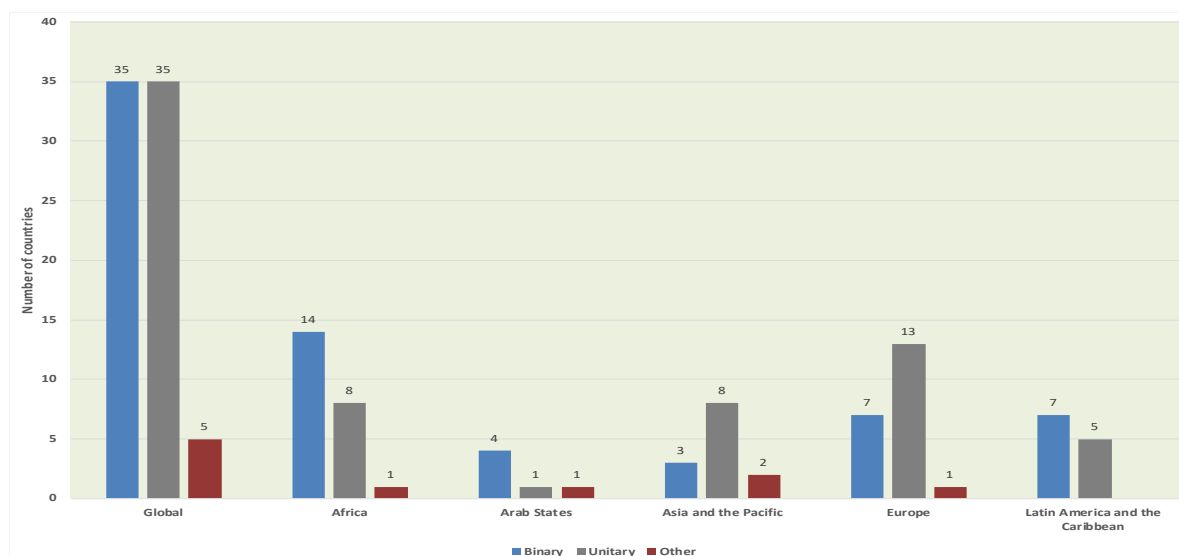
[5] For the purpose of this survey, a binary system was defined as a dual system of higher education with a traditional university subsector and a separate and distinct non-university subsector (UNESCO-CEPES, 2002). The former mainly provides academically oriented programmes and the latter generally offers professionally oriented programmes. In a unitary system on the other hand, higher education is offered in one type of institution, consisting of universities or university-like establishments.

When comparing higher education systems across regions, binary systems are relatively more common among African, Arab and Latin American and the Caribbean countries, while unitary systems tend to be somewhat more prevalent in Europe, and Asia and the Pacific. Some countries, such as Afghanistan, India, Madagascar, Poland and United Arab Emirates use a categorisation that falls outside the binary/unitary divide. In India, for example, higher education is to a large extent delivered by universities and their affiliated colleges, but which belong to the university sector. And in Poland, *the 2018 Law on Higher Education and Science* divides institutions based on their orientation, into academic and professional.

2.2. Modes of delivery

During a time of rapid expansion of student numbers, where higher education institutions are expected to serve a wider range of learning needs, diversification of delivery modes has become increasingly important. To enable higher education institutions to accommodate students with non-traditional qualifications, mature students, working professionals, students from remote areas, and individuals with disabilities, in addition to students entering with the conventional entry requirements, there is an increasing need to organise study programmes in a more flexible manner, including part-time or in the evenings, online or through blended learning.

Findings from the international survey suggest that a vast majority of countries have introduced more flexible modes of delivery in their higher education systems. Higher education continues to be delivered most commonly through *face-to-face full-time* provision (available in 69 systems)[6]; however, *distance and online provision* (56) and *face-to-face part time* delivery (61) have also become very widespread (see Figure 2).

These patterns apply to all regions, except for Africa, where distance/online provision is slightly more prominent among the responding countries than face-to-face part time education. The stronger development of distance/online provision may be due to the difficulties of providing access for a fast growing pool of secondary school leavers within a context of scarce resources, and the need to find cost-effective solutions for access and participation.

Figure 2. Modes of delivery of higher education

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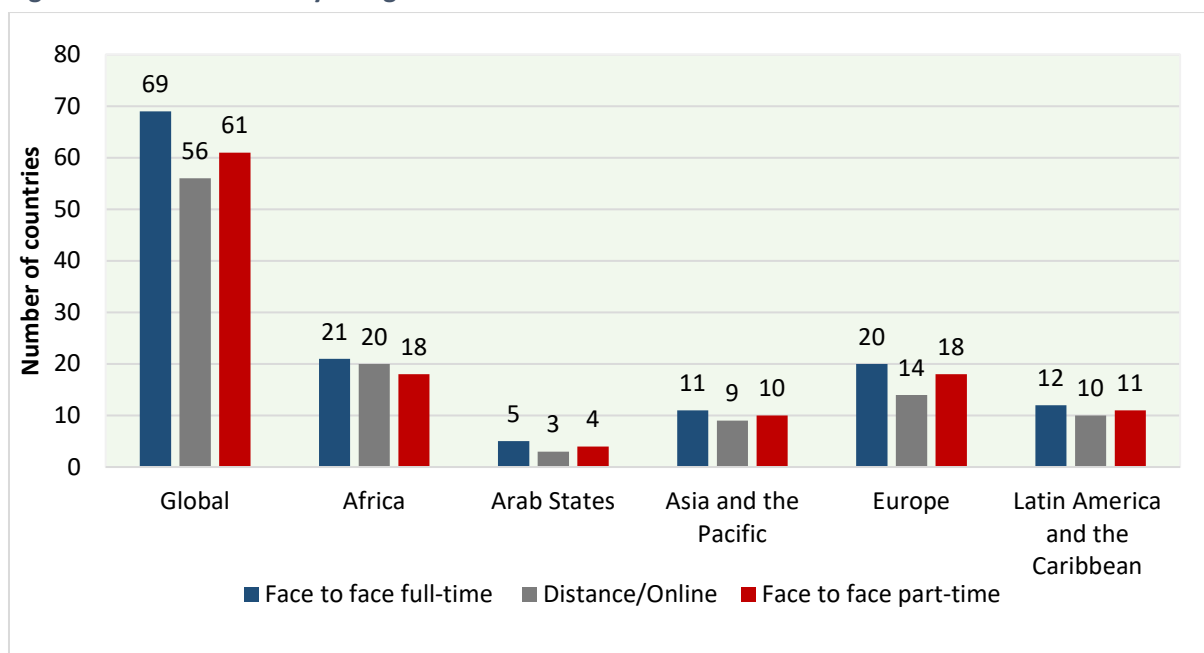
[6] Some countries did not provide answers to this question, since it was not among the required questions.

By combining face-to-face provision with elements of distance and online learning, higher education institutions can be better equipped to provide flexible learning pathways to a wider range of learners, whose time may be restricted by work or other commitments. Bolivia and Peru, for example, apply semi-present delivery modes (*forma semi-presencial*), where part of the credits can be earned from face-to-face learning and another part from distance education.

Distance learning can also be used to strengthen the role of higher education in supporting lifelong learning. For instance, some countries, such as Kiribati and Madagascar, use distance learning for continuing education and professional development.

While flexible learning pathways can be strengthened through online and distance learning, it is also important to ensure that this form of provision remains of high quality and can be recognised alongside face-to-face education. Concerns with the quality of distance and online learning are witnessed in a number of countries, including India, Peru and Poland, who apply ceilings on the number of credits that students can earn through this form of provision for a full qualification.

3. Instruments and practices that support flexible learning pathways in higher education

Flexible learning pathways require an enabling *policy environment* with an adequate mix of *instruments* and *practice*s to facilitate policy implementation and ensure its effectiveness. Examples of well-known instruments that support flexible learning in higher education are national qualifications frameworks, quality assurance and accreditation, credit accumulation and transfer systems, and information and guidance services.

There are also a number of practices, which higher education institutions can devise to make their study programmes more flexible and easily accessible to different categories of learners. For example, institutions can provide multiple ways of entering and progressing through the higher education system. These can be facilitated for example, through bridges between institutions and study programmes, recognition, validation and accreditation of formal, non-formal and informal learning, or through inter-institutional transfer arrangements. The role of the aforementioned instruments and practices in the context of the surveyed countries will be discussed in the following sections.

3.1. Pathways to access higher education

Access to higher education is generally granted upon completion of a secondary education qualification. Depending on the type of institution or study programme, candidates for higher education may also be required to take an additional entrance examination or undergo an interview.

Meanwhile, higher education is increasingly expected to be accessible to a wider range of learners, who do not necessarily meet conventional entry requirements. This creates the need for alternative ways of accessing higher education, which consider candidates' backgrounds and special circumstances. For instance, access can be facilitated through special admissions, aptitude or university entrance test; recognition, validation and accreditation of prior learning; preparatory programmes for higher education, or through bridges that enable progression to higher learning.

Most commonly, individuals that enter higher education for the first time do so at the level of a short-cycle (ISCED 5) or bachelor's (ISCED 6) programme. Some countries also have integrated first-degree programmes where new entrants can access higher education at the master's level (ISCED 7); however, first time entry into such programmes tends to be less common (OECD, 2019).

Countries that responded to the survey were therefore asked to list the pathways that they have in place to allow access to higher education, and namely to ISCED level 5 (e.g. short-cycle degrees) and ISCED level 6 (e.g. bachelor's degrees) programmes.

Overall, a more diverse range of pathways are available to facilitate entry to a short-cycle programme (ISCED level 5) compared to a bachelor's or equivalent programme (ISCED level 6). This is not surprising given that short-cycle qualifications generally provide entry to the labour market as well as sometimes progression to more advanced learning. They often serve a more diverse group of learners that require different entry pathways. Short-cycle programmes therefore have a stronger potential to bring students who did not follow a traditional pathway into higher education (Slantcheva-Durst, 2010).

Survey findings show (see Figure 3) that most commonly, a short-cycle degree programme (or an equivalent ISCED level 5 programme) can be accessed through a general secondary leaving certificate (available in 59 countries), a vocational secondary certificate (43 countries), or a vocational formal qualification (43 countries).

On the other hand, a Bachelor's degree programme (or an equivalent ISCED level 6 programme) is more difficult to access through non-conventional entry requirements. Entry at this level takes place most frequently through a general secondary leaving certificate (available in 44 countries), followed

by a vocational secondary leaving certificate (30 countries) and a general formal qualification at ISCED level 4 (29 countries). This finding may suggest that admission to higher education at the bachelor's level is frequently more rigid compared to that at the short-cycle level.

Furthermore, survey findings reveal that recognition and validation of prior learning (RPL), particularly acquired in informal settings, is not yet a common practice across higher education systems. In systems that do have RPL practices, they are more frequently used to facilitate entry to short-cycle than to bachelor's or equivalent programmes. This suggests once again that entry to higher education at the level of short-cycle programmes is somewhat more flexible compared to access to bachelor's level provision. However, recognition of prior learning based on non-formal education is already a pathway for entry to Bachelor's level higher education in a number of European countries, including Austria, Belarus, Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland and Sweden.

An issue of growing relevance to improving access to higher education refers to the permeability between technical and vocational education and academically oriented provision at the higher education level. Permeability between the two subsectors can be enhanced through formal tools reinforced by legislation or more informal measures offered by higher education institutions themselves, such as inter- or intra-institutional agreements, memoranda of understanding, and the like.

Survey data shows that nearly one-third of responding countries (24) have formally regulated bridging programmes that enable progression from vocational short-cycle programmes (ISCED level 5) to academically oriented Bachelor's programmes (ISCED level 6). This complements the existing research, which suggests that **short-cycle programmes do not only serve the purpose of facilitating entry to the labour market but also progression to higher-level studies** (CEDEFOP, 2014).

Finally, 22 systems provide access from vocational ISCED level 3 and 4 to ISCED level 5 programmes through informal bridges that are not regulated by national policy but offered in practice at institutional level. In some countries, such as Sweden, entry to higher education is also facilitated through formally regulated bridging programmes at ISCED level 3 and 4 programmes.

Figure 3. Entry pathways to higher education, global
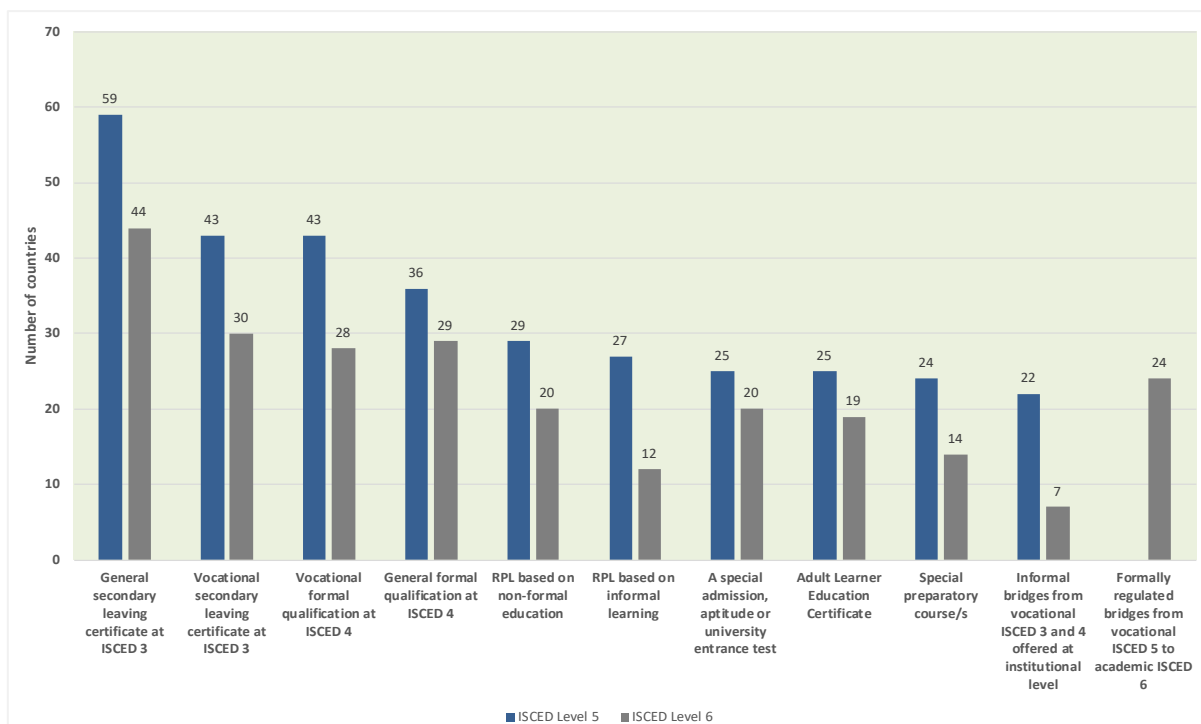
Similar to global trends, the regional distribution of data shows that the most common pathways to access ISCED Level 5 programmes comprise a general secondary leaving certificate (blue circle), a vocational secondary certificate (light red circle) and a vocational formal qualification (light green circle) (see Figure 4). An exception is Latin America and the Caribbean, where the second most prevalent entry pathway (after a general secondary leaving certificate) to short-cycle higher education is via an adult learner education certificate.

Other entry pathways to short-cycle higher education that are relatively common at the regional level are special preparatory courses (Africa); special admission, aptitude or university entrance tests (Europe), and general formal qualifications at ISCED level 4 (Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Europe).

Figure 4. Entry pathways to ISCED Level 5, by regionn
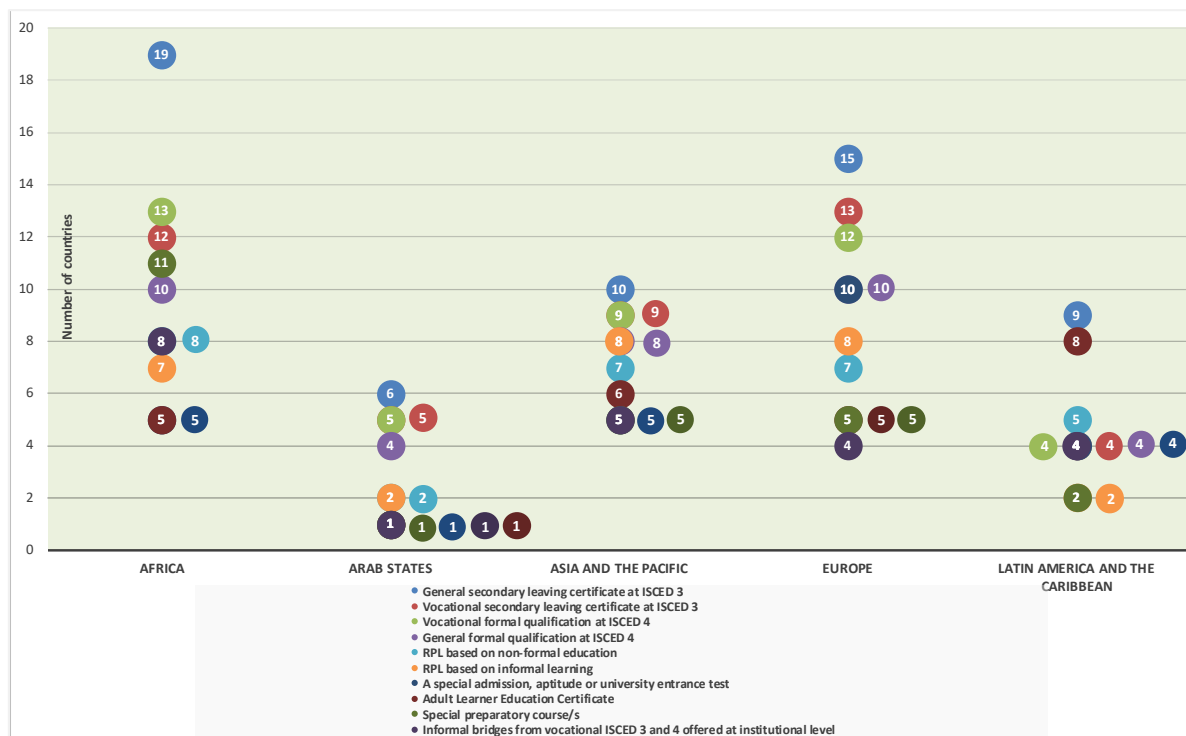
A general secondary leaving certificate is the most prevalent pathway to enter a Bachelor's (or an equivalent ISCED Level 6) programme across all regions, except in Asia and the Pacific, where entry takes place most commonly through a vocational formal qualification (see Figure 5). This is not surprising given the prevalence of unitary higher education systems in the region with integrated academic and vocational/professional provision under the same type of higher education institution.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, a second most common route to a Bachelor's level education is through informal bridges from vocational ISCED level 3 and 4 programmes offered at the institutional level. This may be explained by a high level of autonomy at the level of higher education institutions, which have the power to establish their own entry requirements, sometimes informal in nature.

Figure 5. Entry pathways to ISCED Level 6, by region
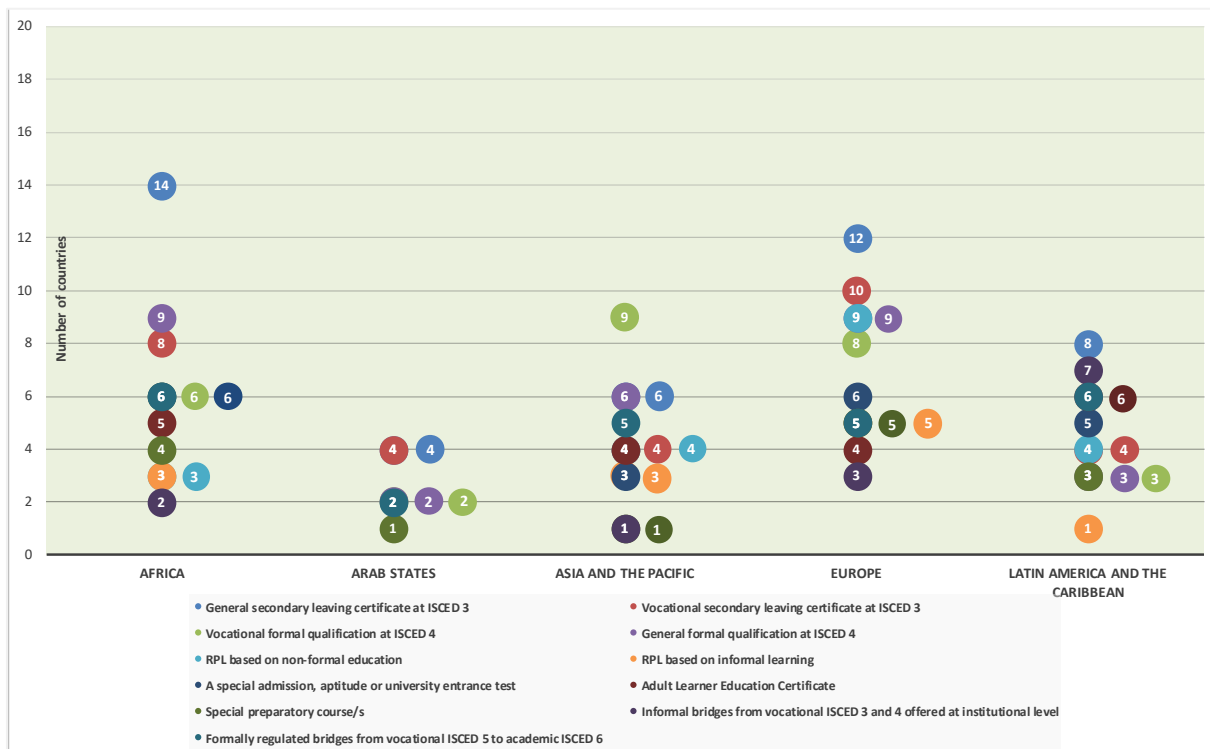
More detailed illustrations of entry pathways to higher education drawn from country examples are provided in

Box 1 below.

Box 1. Entry pathways to higher education

France, through its 2002 Social Modernisation Act, facilitates access to higher education through validation of prior learning and acquired experience (VAE). VAE can also be used in the progression from a short-cycle to a Bachelor's level programme. For instance, the credits accumulated upon completion of an ISCED Level 5 programme can give access to the 3rd year of a Bachelor's programme. All national diplomas in France are registered in the National Directory of Professional Certifications (*Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles*), which supports VAE in access and progression in higher education.

In **Peru**, admission to programmes delivered by Institutes of Higher Technical Education *(Institutos de educación superior tecnológica - IEST)*, Schools of Higher Technical Education (*Escuelas de educación superior tecnológica - EEST*) and universities, requires the completion of basic education, which includes an alternative basic education strand targeted to mature learners. Validation of prior learning can be used on some occasions to grant access to higher education.

In **Ukraine**, a special admission process is designed for internally displaced individuals from the occupied territories of the country. Admission to higher education for these groups is facilitated through designated educational centres (Crimea-Ukraine and Donbas-Ukraine), and supported by national regulations and decrees that ensure fair access to educational opportunities for internally displaced persons.

Generally, access to higher education (both ISCED 5 and ISCED 6) is granted upon completion of a secondary education qualification. A more diverse range of pathways are available to facilitate entry to a short-cycle programme (ISCED level 5) compared to a bachelor's or equivalent programme (ISCED

level 6). A Bachelor's degree programme is more difficult to access through non-conventional entry requirement. Permeability between the two subsectors can be enhanced through formal tools reinforced by legislation or more informal measures offered by higher education institutions themselves.

3.2. Pathways for transfer within higher education

Flexible learning pathways are important both at the point of entry to higher education but also throughout the study cycle to enable students to progress and successfully complete a degree or qualification. This may be particularly important when students decide to live in another location, when they want to change their study programmes or transfer at higher levels into new study fields.

Pathways throughout higher education can facilitate transferability between levels, programmes and institutions. They can also support student-centred learning, giving students more flexibility if they wish to switch to a different study programme or institution (OECD, 2019). Opportunities for transfer can therefore reduce dead-ends to learning and inefficiencies associated with dropout and non-completion.

Transfer pathways can facilitate *horizontal mobility* – i.e. allowing students to switch to a different study programme within the same level of education, or *vertical mobility* – enabling their progression to higher levels of education. For instance, institutions may have special arrangements in place to facilitate the transfer from a vocational to an academic-oriented programme, from a programme offered in a private institution to one provided by a public institution or from a bachelor's in a given field to a master's level programme in another area.

Governments can adopt several measures to support transferability in higher education systems. Transfers can be reinforced by *national regulations* supporting student transfers, or *policies* for student transfer and mobility, and recognition of prior learning. Furthermore, *credit accumulation and transfer systems (CATS)* provide a framework whereby learning acquired in different settings can be recognised and transferred in the form of credits. Credit transfer systems are also important in facilitating regional and global mobility, particularly during a time of intensive internationalisation of higher education.

As a result, a number of *regional and sub-regional credit transfer systems* have emerged in recent decades, such as the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), the University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific Credit Transfer Scheme (UMAP-UCTS), or the Latin American Reference Credit (CLAR). In other sub-regions such as the Southern African Development Community, such a credit system is under construction.

National qualifications frameworks (NQFs) are also known to facilitate transferability and progression in higher education, enabling students to move between institutions, levels and programmes based on the attainment of comparable learning outcomes. NQFs set standards for qualifications at a given study level (level descriptors) and for specializations (subject matter descriptors). These descriptors allow establishing comparability and transparency of study programmes and therefore facilitating student transfers.

Quality assurance (QA) supports comparability and transparency, and equally helps to establish trust and facilitate recognition. It can facilitate transferability by strengthening the coherence between academically-oriented education, and vocational education and training, through, for instance a common framework of assessment for VET and HE. QA can also be used to raise the value of non-formal and informal learning and facilitate its recognition in students' progression in higher education.

And finally, student transfers can also be supported by *inter- or intra-institutional partnerships or agreements*, particularly in highly decentralised systems where higher education institutions have a high level of autonomy, and where decision-making (including on aspects of transferability and recognition) is largely devolved to them.

Transfer within the same field of study

Findings from the international survey suggest (see Figure 6) that **opportunities to transfer within the same field of study are more common within the same institution than across institutions. Transfers that take place within the same institution are facilitated most frequently by a national regulation** (available in 43 countries) **followed by an intra-institutional agreement** (in 30 countries). This can be in the form of a national law (e.g. Law on Institutions of Higher Education in Latvia), an education act (e.g. The Ladderized Education Act in the Philippines), or through accreditation and quality assurance that promote different aspects of flexibility (e.g. credit transferability supported by quality assurance in Jamaica). In 30 of the responding countries, transfers within institutions are enabled by an internal institutional agreement.

Transfers between higher education institutions of the same type (e.g. from a university to another university) are, on average, more common than transfers between different types of higher education institutions (e.g. from a polytechnic to a university). As noted earlier, a binary divide between the university and non-university subsector may act as an obstacle in some countries for transfers, as subsectors are often governed by different legislative frameworks and follow separate rules and regulations.

Transfers between institutions of the same type are enabled most frequently by a national regulation (present in 38 countries) **or an inter-institutional agreement** (in 27 countries). The latter is partly due to the absence of national regulatory frameworks and the high levels of institutional autonomy in some countries, where rules and processes related to student transfers are left at the discretion of higher education institutions. Such a decentralised elaboration of transfer rules can be observed in a number of European countries, including Denmark, Latvia, Luxembourg, Norway and United Kingdom but also in other parts of the world, including Honduras, Lesotho, Madagascar, Namibia and Zambia.

Transfers between different types of higher education institutions are, however, supported most commonly by a national regulation (available in 30 countries) **followed by a national credit transfer system** (in 22 countries). In some countries, such as Botswana and Malawi, national credit transfer systems have been established only recently and are yet to be implemented by higher education institutions. In many countries, particularly in Europe and Africa, transferability of credits in higher education has been supported by a regional (cross-national) credit accumulation and transfer policy. In the European region, the Bologna process is one of the elements that countries and HEI have to put in place. The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation Scheme (ECTS) has become the reference point in the area.

Figure 6. Opportunities for transfer within the same field of study, global
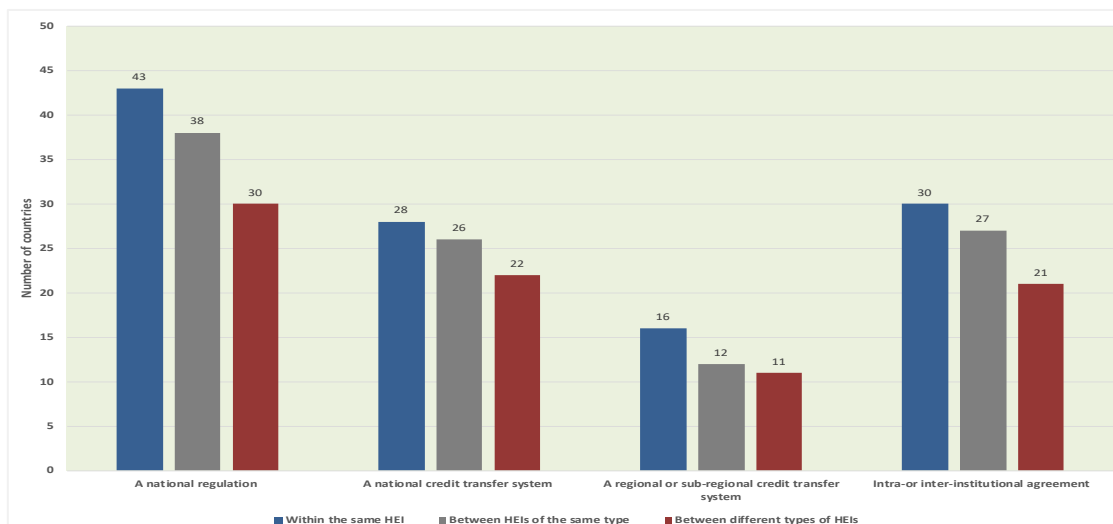
At the regional level, transfers within the same field of study are facilitated most commonly through a national regulation (both within and between institutions), with two exceptions (see Figure 7).

In Africa, transfers within the same institution are more frequently enabled by intra- or inter-institutional agreement. Institutional agreements are also relatively more prevalent in facilitating transfers between institutions of the same type in Latin America and the Caribbean, a region with highly decentralised higher education systems.

Figure 7. Opportunities for transfer within the same field of study, by region
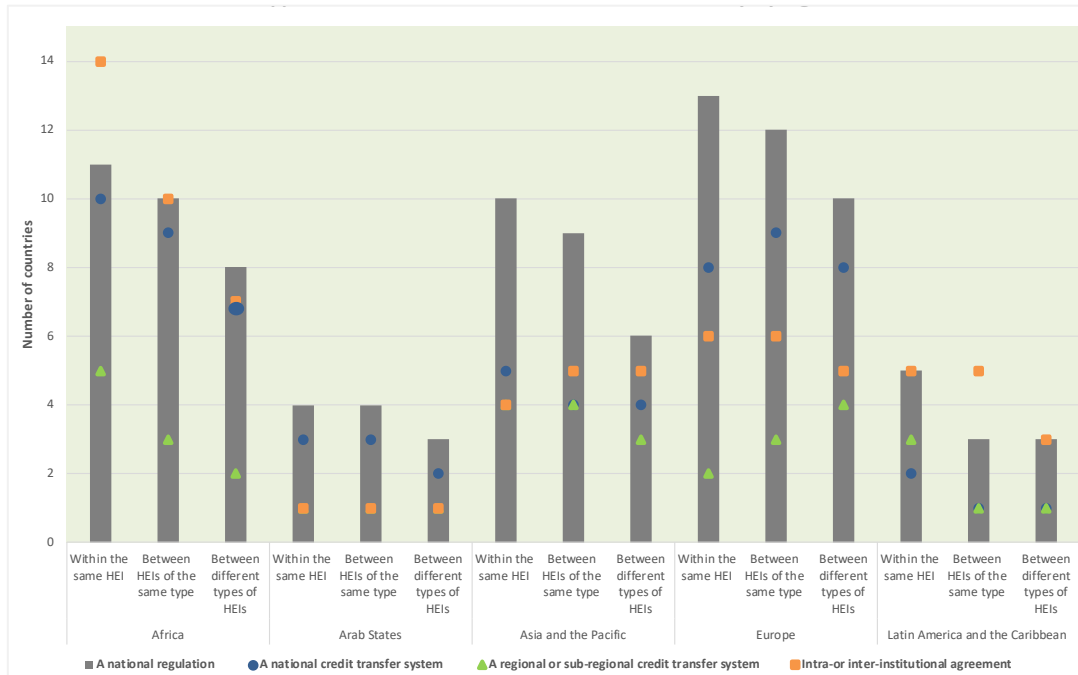
Transfer across different fields of study

Opportunities for students to transfer across different fields of study are overall less common among the surveyed countries. In systems that do apply cross-disciplinary transfers, they take place more frequently *within the same institution* than *across institutions,* and are supported by **national regulations** (present in 37 systems) and **national credit transfer systems** (27) (see Figure 8).

Opportunities to transfer credits and validate the content of prior learning depend on the level and field of study. In France, partial validation can be provided when transferring from one field of study to another, depending on the prerequisites of a particular discipline. In Ukraine, entry to a Master's level programme based on a Bachelor's degree obtained in another subject area is possible, subject to successful completion of additional entrance examinations, and attainment of a certain grade point average in a formerly completed Bachelor's or Master's degree. Furthermore, recognition of credits for courses already taken is regulated by the provisions on the educational process and the curriculum of higher education institutions. Such opportunities for vertical progression are important as it gives students who want to pursue a study path in a different field the opportunity to do so without having to retake an entire programme of study.

Figure 8. Opportunities for transfer across different fields of study, global
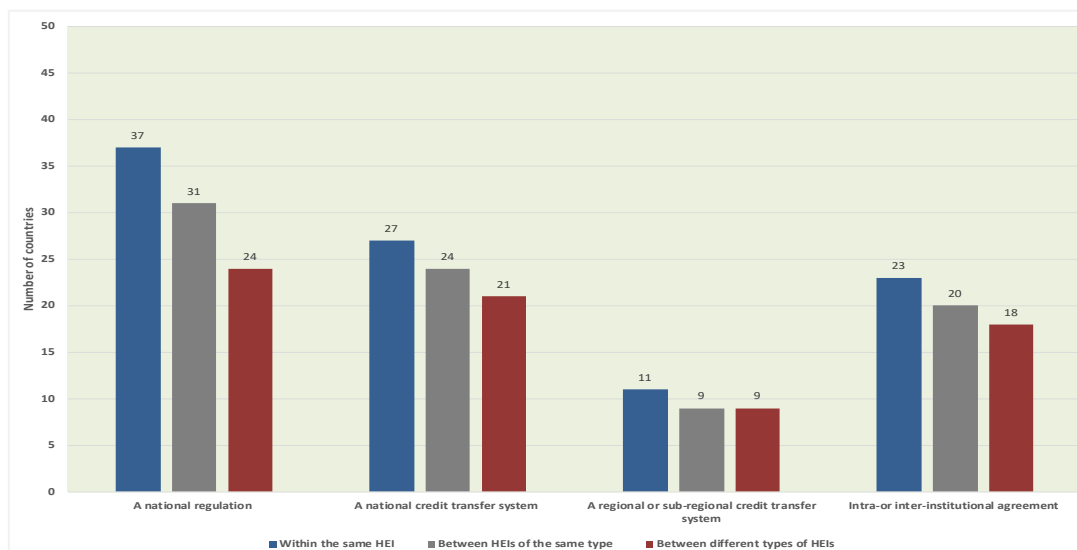
Regional trends are in line with global ones, where cross-disciplinary transfers are facilitated most commonly by national regulations and national credit transfer systems (see Figure 9). An exception is Africa, where transfers across different study fields are most commonly enabled through intra- or inter-institutional agreements, both internally within the same institution and across institutions. In Côte d'Ivoire, for instance, transfers across different fields of study are only possible in the context of a partnership agreement inside an institution or between institutions.

In Latvia, the recognition of partial studies carried out in other higher education institutions or in other countries falls under the responsibility of higher education institutions, as stated in the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

In Peru, credit validation and transferability is backed up by national regulations. Here, the so-called General Academic Guidelines (*Lineamientos Académicos Generales*) for Institutes and Schools of Higher Technical Education facilitate the validation of credits between study programmes of authorised or licensed institutions. The guidelines also enable the use of inter-institutional agreements between secondary education and licensed Institutes or Schools of Higher Technical Education.

Figure 9. Opportunities for transfer across different fields of study, by region
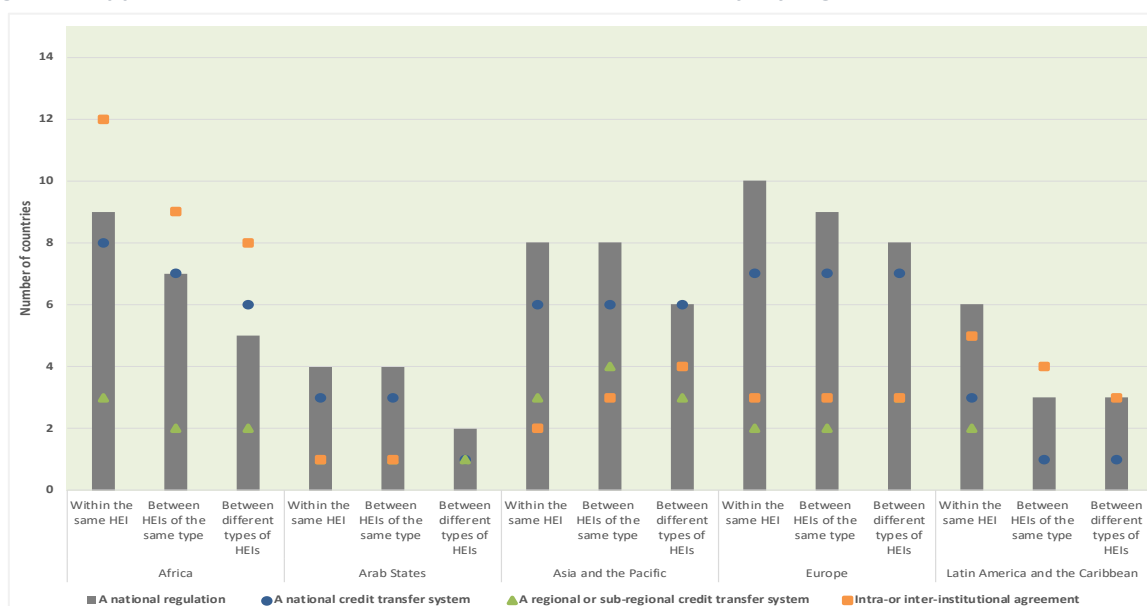
Generally, opportunities to transfer within the same field of study are more common within the same institution than across institutions and are mainly facilitated through a national regulation and intra-institutional agreement. Transfers between higher education institutions of the same type are, on average, more common than transfers between different types of higher education institutions. They are enabled most frequently by a national regulation or an inter-institutional agreement. Finally, transfers between different types of higher education institutions are least common and are often supported by a national regulation and a national credit transfer system. Opportunities for students to transfer across different fields of study are overall less common. Such transfers are more frequently facilitated by the same institution than across institutions, and are supported by national regulations and national credit transfer systems.

3.3. Role of National Qualifications Frameworks

National qualifications frameworks (NQFs) have been cornerstones of recent education reforms in countries across the world. Often, NQFs have been prompted by the development of regional qualifications frameworks, examples being the European Qualifications Framework in Europe, the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework in Asia, the Pacific Qualifications Framework and the sub-regional qualifications framework of the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

UNESCO defines a Qualifications Framework as "a comprehensive policy framework, defining all nationally recognized qualifications in higher education in terms of workload, level, quality, learning outcomes and profiles. It should be designed to be comprehensible with specific descriptors for each qualification covering both its breadth (competencies associated with learning outcomes) and its depth (level). It is structured horizontally in order to cover all qualifications awarded in a system, and vertically, by level. Its purpose is to facilitate: (i) curriculum development and design of study programmes; (ii) student and graduate mobility; and (iii) recognition of periods of study and credentials" (UNESCO, 2007, pp. 67–68).

Therefore, NQFs are recognised to provide a framework for the classification and recognition of study programmes based on level and subject matter descriptors and they serve as reference points for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning (CEDEFOP, 2017). NQFs support entry and progression to advanced studies, enabling learners to enter, exit and switch between institutions, levels or programmes based on the recognition of comparable learning outcomes and competencies. Integrated national qualifications frameworks covering several or all education levels under a single NQF can be particularly important for the development of flexible learning pathways as they generally cover all types of provision at all educational levels and show the linkages between different types of qualifications.

Countries that responded to the international survey were asked to indicate the types of education that are recognised in their national qualifications frameworks. **A vast majority of countries have a national qualifications framework that includes higher education (54) and vocational education (54); and in 51 countries NQFs cover general basic education** (see Figure 10).

Figure 10. Types of education included in the National Qualifications Framework, global
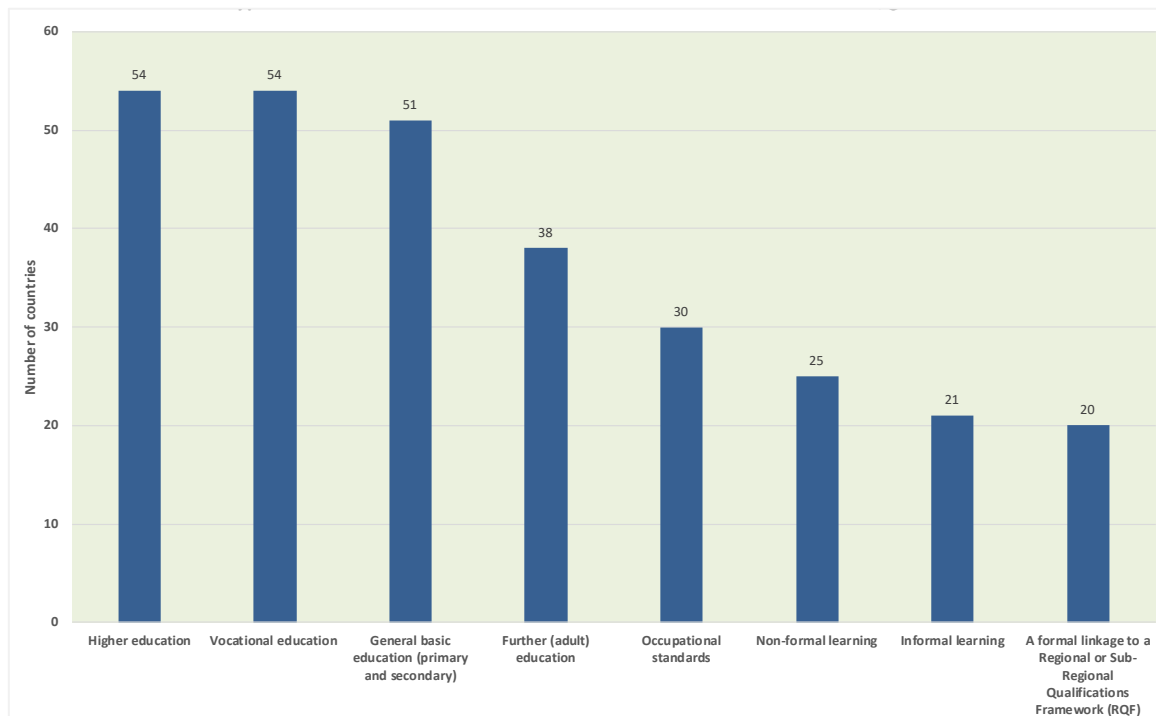
Despite the growing importance of lifelong learning in policy agendas across the world, the integration of adult education into national qualifications frameworks is not yet as widespread. Around half (38) of responding countries indicated having NQFs that include further (adult) education, the largest number being in Europe (15) and Africa (11) (see Figure 11). National qualifications frameworks cover occupational standards in 30 countries, almost half of which are based in Africa.

NQFs that recognise non-formal education and training and informal learning are less prevalent on the global level; however, they are somewhat more prominent in Africa. This may be explained by the prominence of informal labour markets and related training opportunities in the region where informal learning is a dominant feature, and where the needs to recognize it are particularly important (Savadogo and Walther, 2013).

In addition, **regional integration processes drive the development of NQFs in Europe, Africa and the Arab region**, but less so in Asia and the Pacific and in Latin America and the Caribbean region, where they are less prominent and where the focus on regional student mobility is minor.

Finally, countries are in different stages of NQF development. Some countries have not yet implemented a national qualifications framework, and others, such as Mongolia, Morocco and Malawi are in the process of developing it. In Côte d'Ivoire and Peru, for instance, a national qualifications framework is in the planning stage.

Figure 11. Types of education included in the National Qualifications Framework, by region
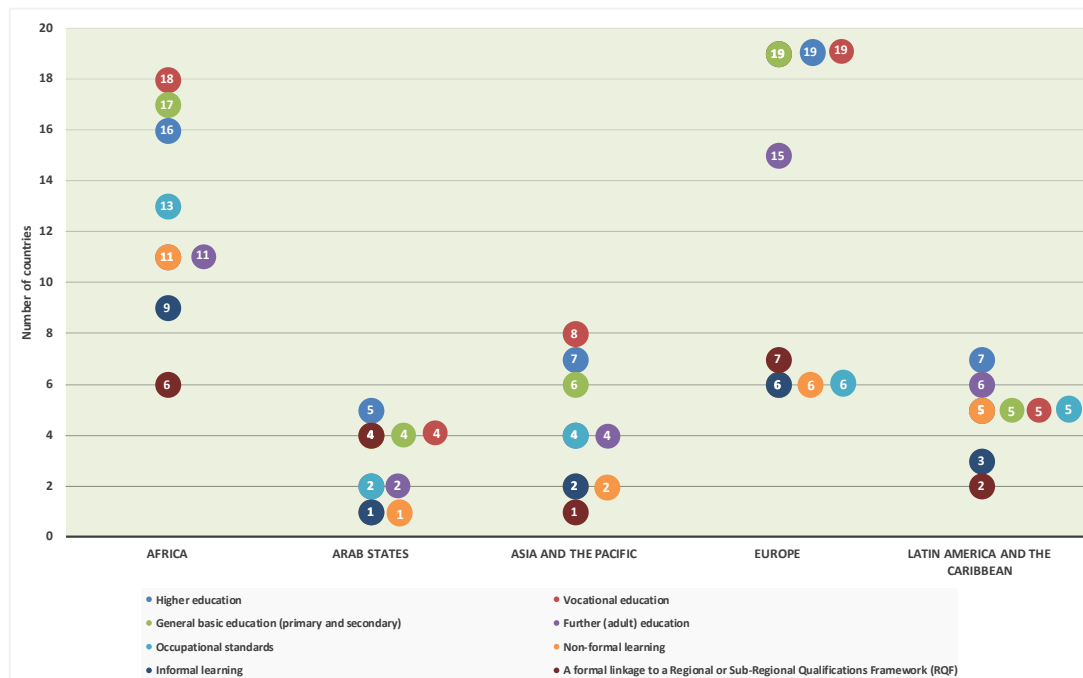
Overall, in most of the surveyed countries there is a national qualifications framework that includes higher education and vocational education and general basic education. However, the NQFs that recognise integration of adult education, non-formal and informal learning are not yet as widespread.

3.4. Role of Quality Assurance Systems

Quality assurance and accreditation systems (QA), if designed in an appropriate manner, can facilitate the development of flexible learning pathways in higher education. For example, QA systems that follow a standard-based approach, generally evaluate institutions and programmes based on a predefined set of requirements, which express desirable learning achievements (or intended learning outcomes) as objectives. A standard-based approach to QA has enabled the development of subject benchmarks in some systems. Such benchmarks can be used to reduce disparities in the content of study programmes and their quality across institutions and programmes, which can in turn facilitate the recognition of learning and the transfer of students. QA can also facilitate flexible learning pathways through an alignment between programme standards and NQF programme and level descriptors, and therefore facilitate both horizontal and vertical student transfers. Finally, it can support flexible learning pathways by recognising the value of non-formal and informal learning and encouraging its use in access and progression in higher education.

Over the past 30 years, quality assurance systems have been established in many countries as a global higher education reform. Among the surveyed countries, quality assurance is also a rather common practice. **65 countries conduct quality assurance at the programme level and 63 do so at the institutional level**. Most countries also use a combination of programme and institutional QA procedure. The French Community of Belgium (Wallonia-Brussels) is an example of a country that is in the process of adopting a mixed approach, combining programme-based and institutional quality assurance with a focus of auditing internal quality assurance of HEIs. Denmark is in the process of moving from programme-level to institutional quality assurance.

Forty-seven countries mentioned that the NQF level descriptors and programme quality assurance standards are aligned and another 44 noted that NQF programme descriptors and programme QA standards are aligned (see Figure 12). Norway is an example of a country where higher education institutions are required to write descriptors for every programme, and they have to be aligned to the

national qualifications framework. Likewise, the National Accreditation Commission in Madagascar examines the alignment of study programmes to the NQF before granting accreditation. Chile is in the initial stage of implementing a National Qualifications Framework for the professional/technical higher education sector, which will be linked to the quality assurance standards for professional/technical programmes.

Ensuring coherence between study programmes and qualifications is important as it reinforces the level of trust, transparency and credibility in the quality of the education provision and the resulting qualifications. Having a framework whereby QA standards and NQF descriptors are linked can in turn facilitate the portability of credits and recognition of learning, enabling students to move more flexibly through the higher education system.

Findings from the survey indicate that in 45 countries, programme QA focusing on learning outcomes is a prerequisite for accreditation or registration of a programme on the NQF. An example is Malawi, where the National Council for Higher Education registers and accredits programmes based on programme quality assurance standards and learning outcomes. In some countries, such as India, the harmonisation of NQF level descriptors with programme QA standards is in the planning stage. In Swaziland, a NQF was adopted recently and qualifications are yet to be registered on the framework. However, the NQF is already used to guide the design, review and alignment of programmes.

Figure 12. NQF Linkages to Programme Quality Assurance, global
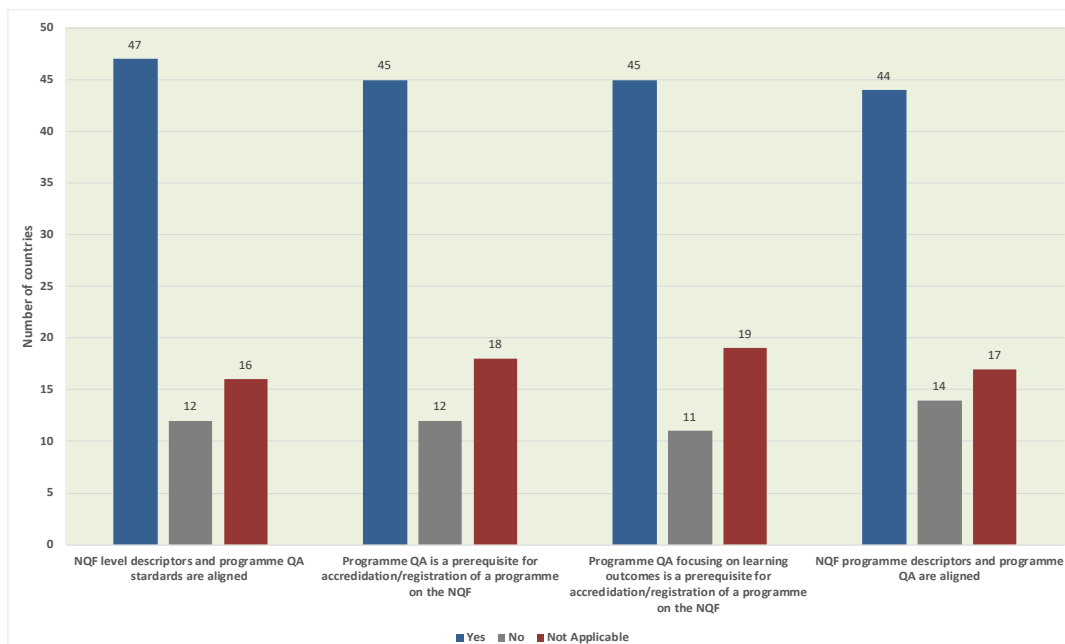
The regional figures (see Figure 13) are reflective of the global trends.

Figure 13. NQF Linkages to Programme Quality Assurance, regional
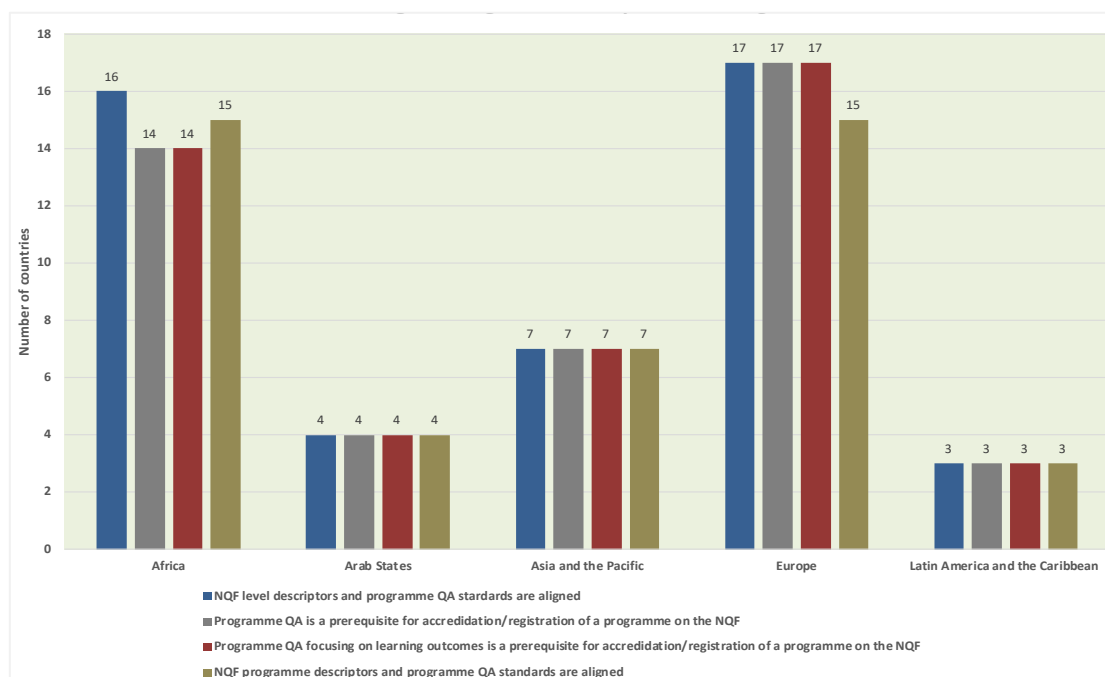
3.5. Role of Information, Advice and Guidance Services

The mere availability of flexible and diverse pathways to enter and progress through higher education is not enough if students are not aware of them or do not know how to use them. Therefore, **flexible learning pathways need to be supported by appropriate information and guidance services that can advise learners on the learning paths that best meet their learning requirements and aspirations.** Student support systems can be particularly beneficial for groups that are under-represented in higher education, who may need additional guidance to help them progress and complete their studies. Therefore, student guidance services can help reduce dropout and improve retention in higher education, particularly for those that are at high risk of non-completing (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2014).

Approaches to the provision of student support services vary by country. Some countries use a comprehensive approach in the form of a national information and guidance system, typically to be accessed online, while others provide such services at the level of higher education institutions, either most frequently in-house or outsourced to an external provider. Other countries rely on a combined approach, including national and institutional structures and information sources for student support.

While the availability of information, advice and guidance services is becoming increasingly important particularly in a context of a diverse higher education provision, no comparable international data has been collected so far on the prevalence and effectiveness of student support services in higher education (OECD, 2019).

To address this knowledge gap, the UNESCO-IIEP international survey asked responding countries to indicate whether they have support services that provide information, advice and guidance to students and if they do, at what level these services are provided.

Survey findings suggest that information and guidance services are delivered most commonly at the level of higher education institutions, rather than systems (see Figure 14). Overall, 57 countries indicated that such services are provided *in-house, by higher education institutions*, generally through guidance and counselling offices or similar entities. In some cases, central services that are involved in student recruitment are also the ones that offer information and guidance to students. In the higher

education system of Peru, for example, information and guidance is commonly delivered by the admission offices of universities, who are also in charge of recognising entrants' prior learning.

Institutional arrangements *outsourced to external guidance services* are somewhat less common – 21 countries indicated having such systems in place, the majority being from Europe (10) and Africa (7) (see Figure 15).

Furthermore, 40 countries use a system-wide approach, making student support and guidance available through *national systems for information and guidance*. In Jamaica, for example, the Human Employment and Resource Training Trust of the National Training Agency (HEART Trust/NTA) has designated centres for career guidance and development. In Madagascar, the national information and guidance system is provided by the University Communication House (*Maison de la Communication des Universités*), an organisation affiliated to the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. Mongolia operates a national information and guidance system under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, which focuses mainly on the technical and vocational sector. In Swaziland, the Ministry of Education and Training has a designated department that provides guidance and counselling services. South Africa provides information on studies and careers through a national online portal known as *Khetha*. Morocco is currently working on setting up an integrated national information and guidance system encompassing all levels of education and training, including primary, secondary, vocational and higher education.

Figure 14. Availability of information and guidance services, global
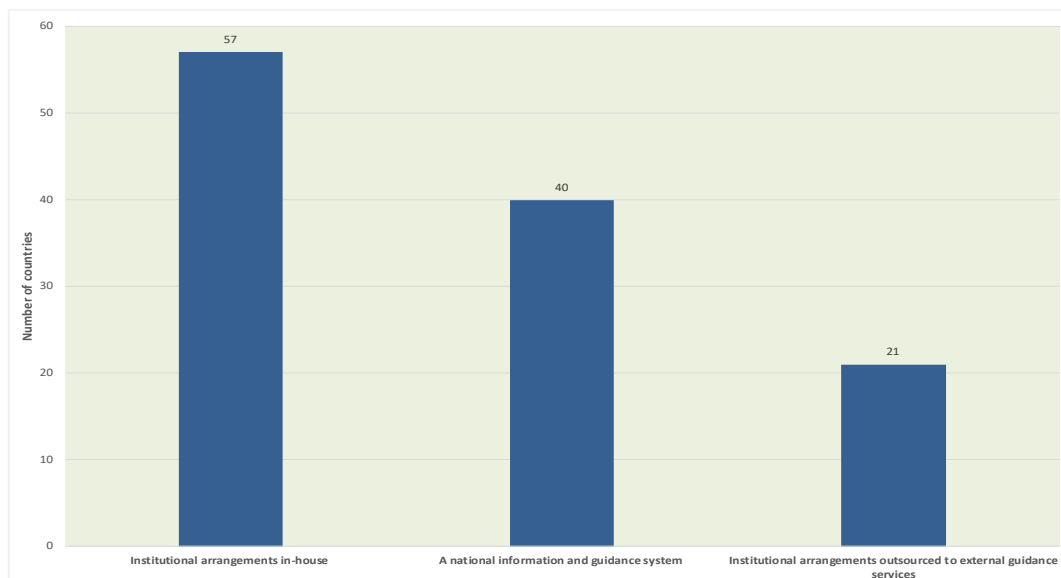
Figure 15. Availability of information and guidance services, by region
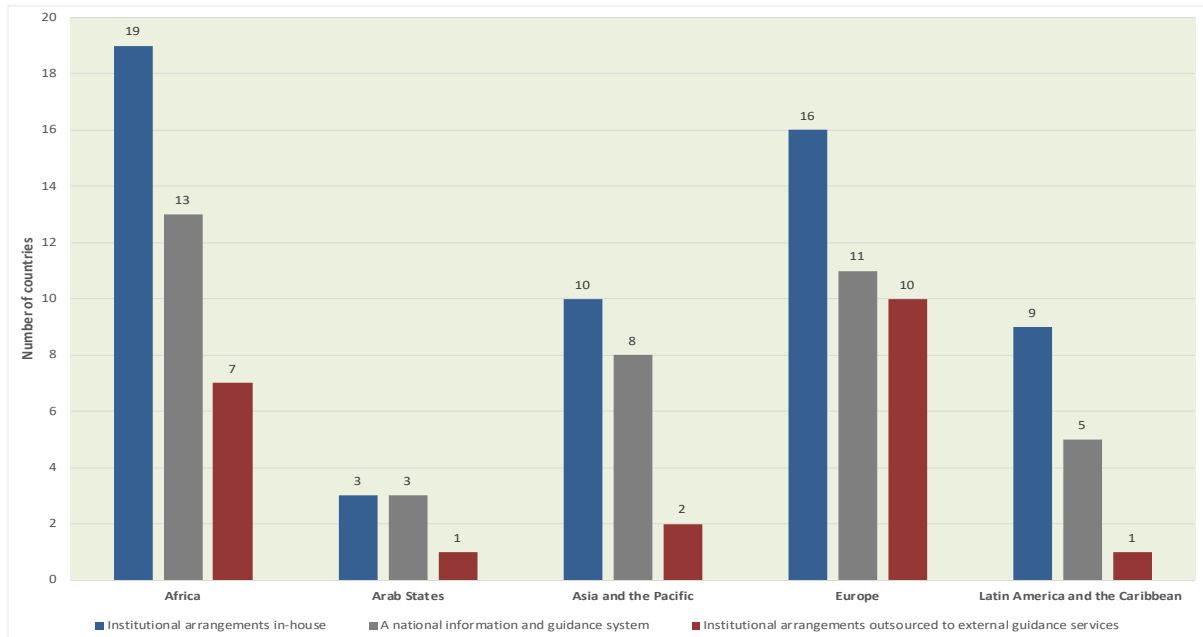
National systems for information and guidance generally have more complete information on available system-wide entry and progression pathways, while institutional structures are in a better position to provide a more targeted support due to their proximity to the learner. To ensure a wider outreach while leaving room for targeted and individual interventions, higher education would ideally rely on both national and institutional measures for student support, which can also be used by students in a combined manner.

4. Policies for implementing flexible learning pathways in higher education

Regulatory, legislative and policy frameworks for flexible learning pathways can ensure the provision of a well-integrated higher education system with coherent entry and progression pathways. Such frameworks are instrumental in ensuring that opportunities for flexible learning pathways are accessible across the entire higher education sector, and in allowing permeability between subsectors. The following section will mainly discuss the findings regarding the role of flexible learning pathways in national policy agendas of higher education systems; types of higher education covered by policies for flexible learning pathways (i.e. private and public); and other types of policies supporting flexible learning pathways.

4.1. Regulatory, legislative and policy frameworks for flexible learning pathways

State governance plays a critical role in the implementation of public policies. Governments identify objectives for development or reform, use a range of mechanisms to direct change and steer their higher education systems towards desired outcomes.

Regulation and legislation are examples of steering mechanisms used to set requirements for higher education institutions that have a legal enforcement. For instance, states can regulate their higher education systems by adopting or making amendments to legislation, enacting decrees, regulating admissions or enrolment, setting entry requirements or quotas on certain programmes of study or exercising control over the types of degrees that institutions can award. In many contexts, regulatory tools tend to be rather *substantive*, meaning that governments exercise direct influence over what institutions can or cannot do.

Policies, on the other hand, tend to be more *procedural* in nature. They set priorities and objectives for higher education that are used to inform and provide an orientation for education planning and management at the institutional level. Based on their scope of intervention, policies can be classified into *comprehensive*, *content-oriented* and *targeted* (OECD, 2015). Comprehensive policies refer to overarching general measures aiming for systemic change. They can be in the form of a national strategy, or relate to a structural reform, such as merging universities and non-university institutions into an integrated sector to improve efficiency and provide more cohesive learning pathways. Content policies can be used to steer the content of knowledge of a specific area in education, such as a reform in the education curriculum or a content change in the national qualifications framework. Targeted policies are more specific in scope and are usually devised to improve a particular outcome of education, such as widening access or improving completion rates.

Policy success depends on the features of the policy itself but also on the complexity of the policy environment, particularly at the phase where implementation strategies are being designed and when planning for implementation takes place (OECD, 2018).

To understand better the role that flexible learning pathways play in national policy agendas of higher education systems, the international survey asked responding countries to indicate whether flexible learning pathways are an element of their regulations, legislations and policies. For the purpose of the survey, policies include strategies, usually of a medium term duration (three to five years), and action plans, which are yearly implementation plans of either policies or strategies.

Global and regional trends suggest that flexible learning pathways are more commonly part of a national policy (available in 55 countries) **than of legislation or regulation** (both available in 45 countries) (see Figure 16 and Figure 17). This trend may be explained by increased levels of institutional autonomy, where guiding policy frameworks and related incentive structures are used more commonly than legal or regulatory requirements to steer higher education towards national policy goals (OECD, 2019).

Figure 16. Inclusion of flexible learning pathways in national policy frameworks, global
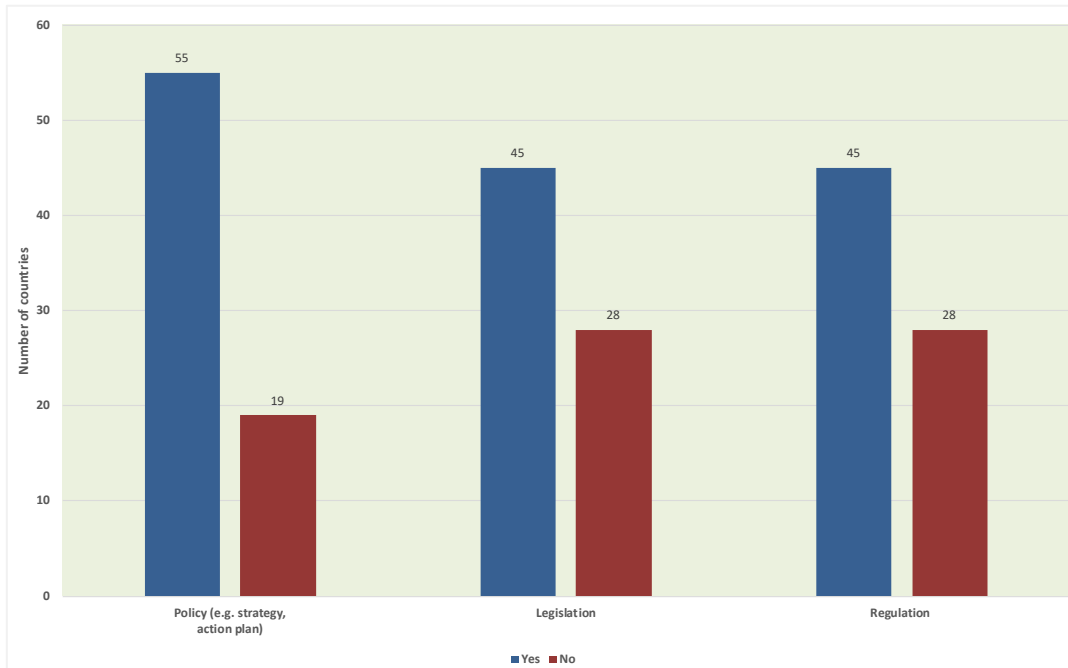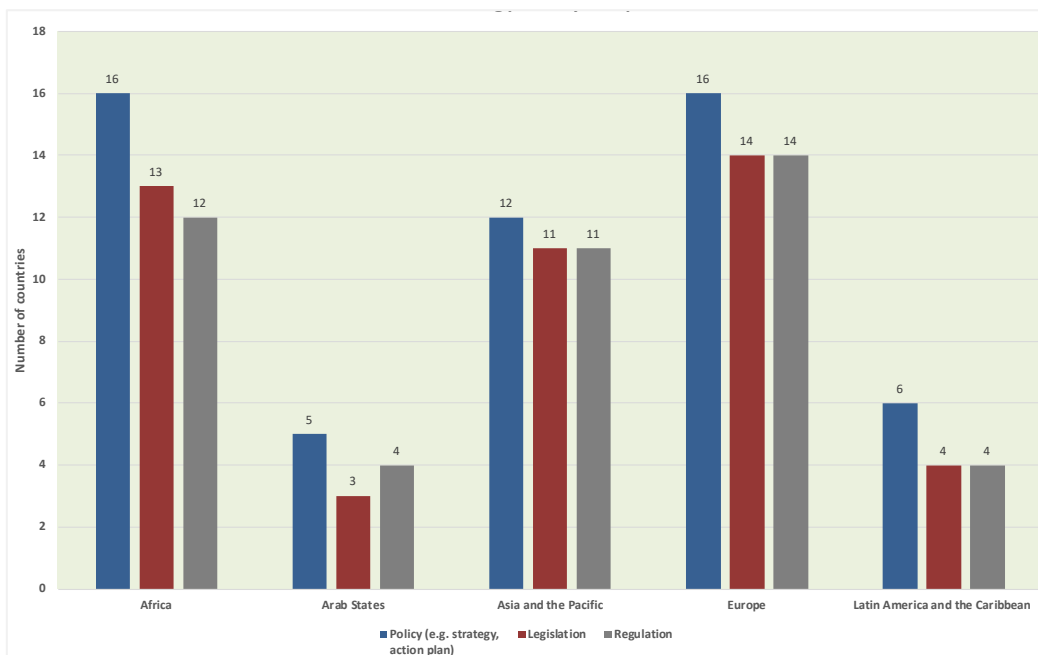

Figure 17. Inclusion of flexible learning pathways in national policy frameworks, by region

Countries that responded to the international survey use a range of regulatory, legislative and policy levers to support different aspects of flexible learning in their higher education systems. They are illustrated in Box 2

Box 2. Regulatory, legislative and policy levers supporting FLP in higher education

Latvia and Zambia are examples of countries that support the development of flexible learning pathways through **higher education legislation**. In Latvia, validation of knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired outside the formal education sector or through professional experience can be recognised at the level of higher education in line with the amendments to the *Law on Institutions of Higher Education*. In Zambia, flexible learning pathways are supported through the *2011 Zambia Qualifications Authority Act*, which sets provisions for the development of national guidelines for recognition of prior learning and a credit accumulation and transfer system.

Other countries, such as Austria, Jamaica, Malawi and Zambia, support flexible learning through **a national strategic** or **development plan for the education sector**. In Austria, for example, flexible learning pathways are backed up by its *National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education – Towards a More Inclusive Access and Wider Participation.* Among the key actions of the strategy is to facilitate entry pathways to higher education through the provision of relevant preparatory and bridging courses, the development of a sector-wide approach for the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal competencies, and strengthening the provision of guidance and information about academic career profiles in schools and higher education institutions. In Jamaica, the *Vision 2030 National Development Plan* and the *National Education Strategic Plan* recognise the need for alternative methods of accessing higher education and better alignment between the education provision and labour market requirements. In Malawi, flexible learning is supported by the *National Education Policy* and the *National Education Sector Plan*. The former emphasises equitable access to higher education and the latter makes reference to open and distance learning as a modality to promote flexible learning in the system.

Types of higher education covered by policies for flexible learning pathways

A regulatory, legislative and policy environment that covers all types of higher education provision, including public and private, offers a better framework for a well-integrated higher education system that provides coherent entry and progression pathways. This is important in ensuring that opportunities for flexible learning pathways are accessible across the entire higher education sector and in allowing permeability between subsectors.

Results from the international survey indicate that a vast majority of responding countries (49) have regulatory, legislative and policy frameworks for flexible learning pathways that apply to both public and private providers. Only in 12 responding countries, such steering mechanisms apply to public higher education institutions only (see Figure 18). Luxembourg is an example of a country where the regulatory framework applies largely to public higher education institutions; however, foreign private higher education providers that are in the process of accreditation, are also eligible for an evaluation of their opportunity to recognise prior learning and experience.

Figure 18. Types of HE covered by regulatory, legislative and policy frameworks for FLP, global
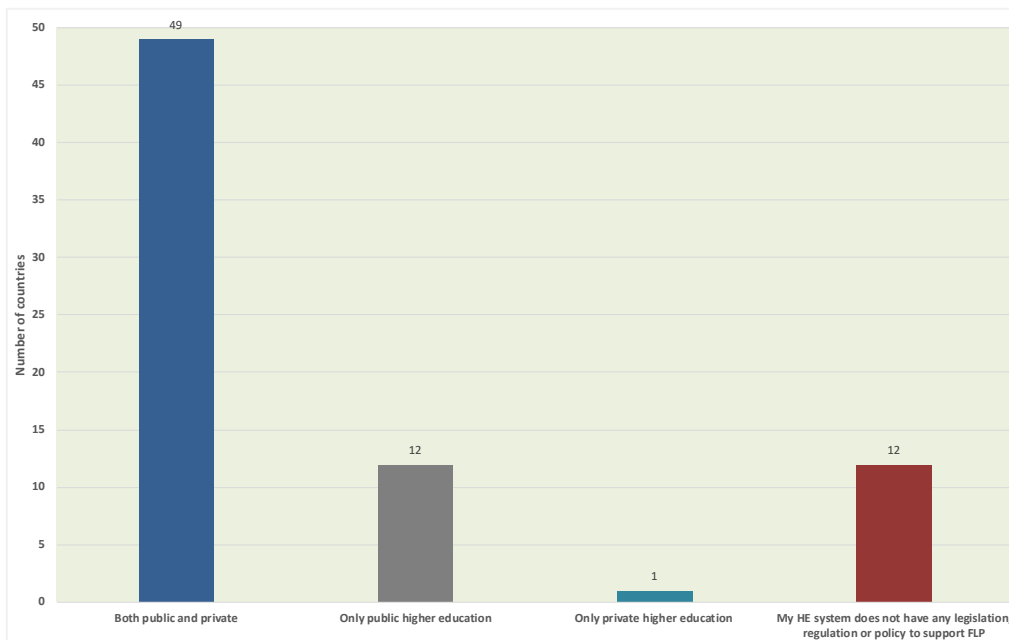
Furthermore, 12 responding countries – notably from Latin America and the Caribbean (6), and Africa (4) – indicated that their higher education systems do not have any legislation, regulation or policies to support flexible learning pathways (see Figure 19). This may suggest that flexible learning pathways are not yet an explicit priority on higher education policy agendas in the respective countries.

Figure 19. Types of HE covered by regulatory, legislative and policy frameworks for FLP, by region
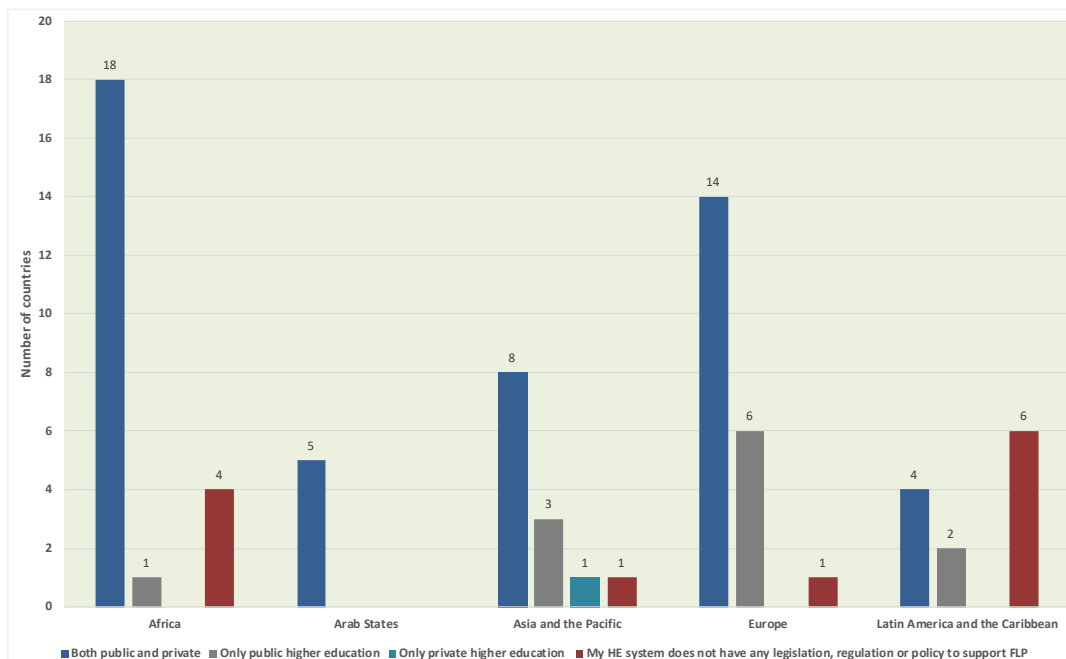
Levels of higher education covered by policies for flexible learning pathways

The effectiveness of flexible learning pathways has to do with the capacity of the education system to enable progression to higher learning. This requires regulatory, legislative and policy tools that support learners to progress to higher education levels to attain a desired (higher) degree or qualification.

Countries that responded to the survey were asked to indicate the levels in their higher education systems that are covered by regulatory, legislative and policy frameworks for flexible learning pathways. **Findings show that regulatory, legislative and policy frameworks support flexible learning pathways more often at lower levels of higher education** (ISCED Level 5 and 6, applicable in 52 and 53 countries respectively) **compared to higher levels** (ISCED 7, applicable in only 43 countries) (see Figure 20). This may suggest that such steering mechanisms are used more commonly to support flexible pathways at the point of *entry* to higher education than in students' *progression* to higher levels of learning. In 35 countries, regulatory, legislative and policy frameworks for flexible learning pathways cover post-secondary non-tertiary (i.e. ISCED Level 4) programmes.

Figure 20. ISCED Levels covered by regulatory, legislative and policy frameworks for FLP, global
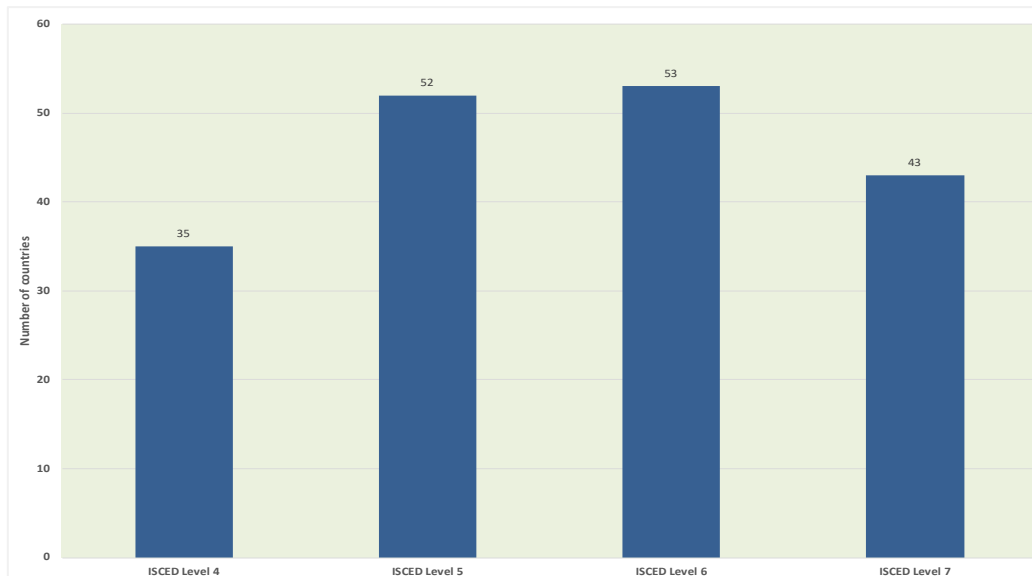
Similar patterns can be observed at the regional level. However, in Arab States and European countries, regulatory, legislative and policy frameworks also apply commonly to Master's level programmes, which suggests that *progression* to higher learning through flexible learning pathways is considered as important as *access* to higher education through such pathways in these regions (see Figure 21).

Figure 21. ISCED Levels covered by regulatory, legislative and policy frameworks for FLP, by region
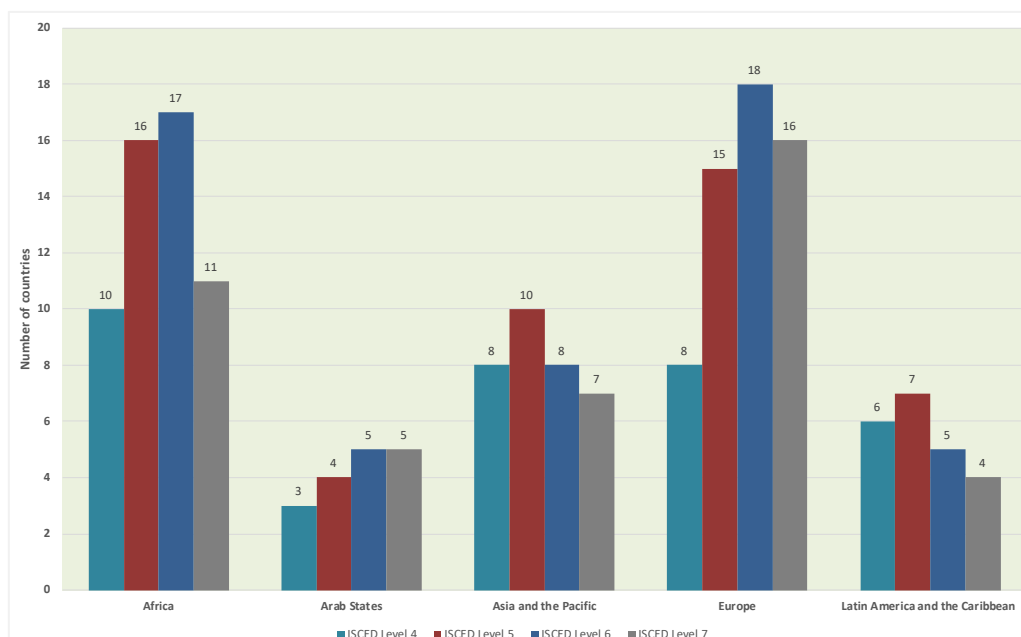
Outcomes supported by policies for flexible learning pathways

As already noted above, policy levers that target the development of flexible learning pathways can help governments steer their higher education system closer towards desired outcomes. Such outcomes cover diverse aspects, such as access, quality, as well as internal and external efficiency. They may refer to improved access to and progression in higher education, lowered non-completion and dropout rates, strengthened student-centred learning environments, or smoother transition to the labour market or further studies.

Countries that responded to the international survey were asked to specify the specific outcomes that their regulatory, legislative and policy frameworks for flexible learning pathways are trying to achieve. They were not constrained to indicating only one priority outcome, but could choose multiple options. Results illustrate that in a majority of countries**, policy levers support a variety of outcomes**. **Among the most frequently mentioned ones are widened participation in higher education** (noted by 55 countries), **better responsiveness to diverse student needs** (54) **and improved general level of education and qualifications in society** (52). But other policy rationales, such as facilitated labour market (re)entry and career progression (48), strengthened equity in progression of studies (48) and reduced dropout rates/increased completion of studies (45) are also quite frequent (see Figure 22). Overall, the results indicate that policy rationales are multiple and diverse, when it comes to flexible learning pathways in higher education.

Figure 22. Outcomes supported by regulatory, legislative and policy frameworks for FLP, global
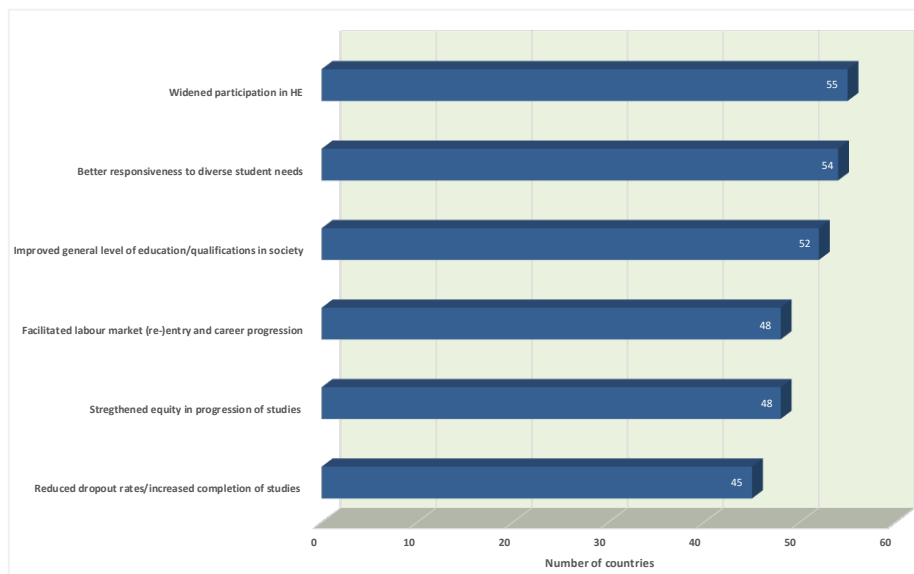
Similar patterns are observed at the regional level (see Figure 23). In particular, in Arab countries, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean, all outcomes seem to be comparable. In Africa, policy rationales dealing with widening participation and better responsiveness to diverse student needs are somewhat prevalent. This is somewhat similar to Europe, where an improved general level of education of the population is also among the top rationales.

Figure 23. Outcomes supported by regulatory, legislative and policy frameworks for FLP, by region
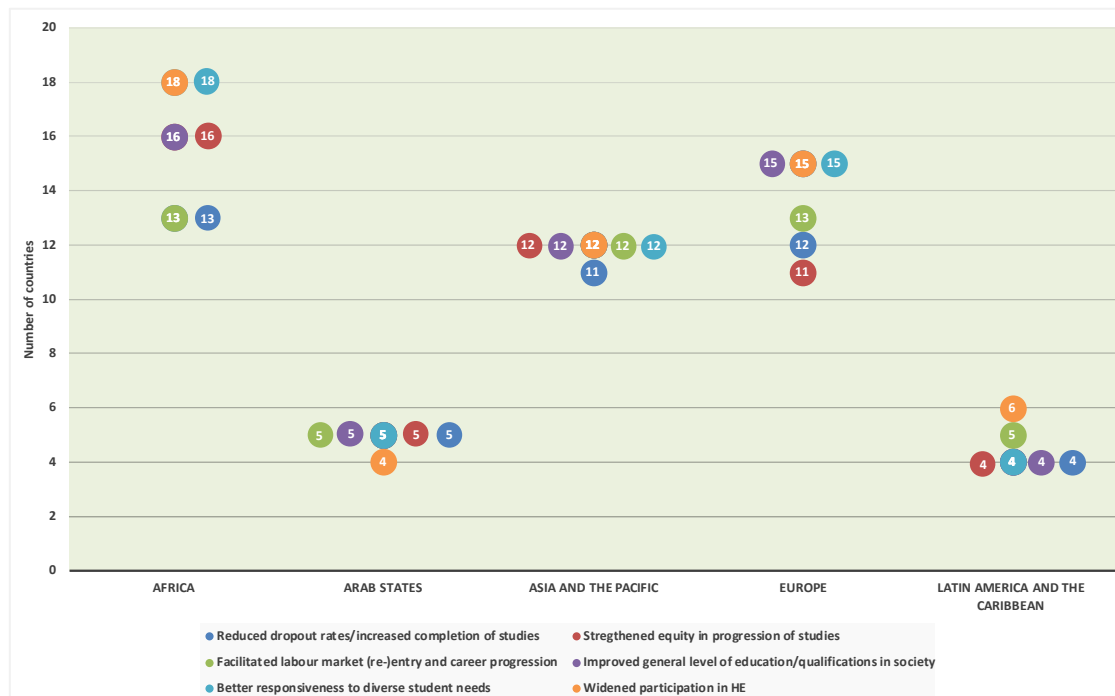
Generally, global and regional trends suggest that flexible learning pathways are more commonly part of a national policy than of legislation or regulation. Many countries have regulatory, legislative and policy frameworks for flexible learning pathways that apply to both public and private providers. Regulatory, legislative and policy frameworks support flexible learning pathways more often at lower levels of higher education compared to higher levels. Overall, findings from the survey point to the multiplicity of rationales when it comes to flexible learning pathways in higher education, but in particular wide recognition of the role of flexible learning pathways in supporting participation in higher education, building student-centred learning environments, and contributing to the development of a highly skilled society.

4.2. Other types of policies supporting flexible learning pathways

Governments can set forth a number of policies to support the development of flexible learning pathways in their higher education systems. In fact, flexible learning pathways can be operationalised in different ways, and policies that support flexible learning pathways are also diverse. There may be specific policies relating to flexible learning pathways, but more commonly other policies can cover specific aspects of it.

Lifelong learning policies, for example, can support higher education institutions in adapting their education provision to diverse learning goals, including for professional development, knowledge advancement, or personal interest. *Policies for validation and recognition of prior learning* can reinforce the idea that the acquisition of competencies, knowledge and skills also takes place outside the boundaries of formal education, including in the work environment and that it deserves to be recognised and accounted for in an individual's learning path to allow for career progression. Governments can also develop *policies for credit accumulation and transfer*, to facilitate mobility and portability of credits across study fields, institutions and levels of education. Or they can make use of policies to support the development of *an integrated national qualifications framework*, which can in turn strengthen linkages between study programmes, qualifications and learning outcomes more widely across the education system. Finally, states can develop policies or strategies to develop or strengthen *student support and guidance systems*, both at the national and institutional level.

In more than two-thirds of the countries that responded to the international survey, flexible learning pathways are supported by policies that relate to information and guidance for students (49), those concerning national qualifications frameworks (48) and policies for lifelong learning (46) (see Figure 24). For instance, the guidance and career unit of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information of Jamaica operates on the basis of a regulatory and policy framework that is concerned with the provision of information to prospective students entering higher education. In addition, the Human Employment and Resource Training Trust, National Training Agency (HEART Trust/NTA) is currently developing a Career and Lifelong Learning Policy to promote continuous learning in response to a rapidly changing labour market. In Saint Lucia, a small island state in the Caribbean, the Ministry of Education, Innovation, Gender Relations and Sustainable Development has a Human Resource Development Unit, which provides information and guidance to prospective and current students in higher education. These country examples suggest that **it is important not only to provide individuals with continuous learning opportunities but also to support them in using and succeeding in these opportunities**.

Somewhat less prevalent yet still present in more than half of the systems are policies on validation and recognition of prior learning (41) and policies referring to credit accumulation and transfer (40). For example, in Botswana, recognition of prior learning is being implemented with a particular focus on certificates acquired locally in the country and those from other countries with credible qualification regulatory bodies. In India, a student entering a higher education study programme in a university can transfer up to 20 per cent of credits from relevant online courses completed on the Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM) platform, which provides one-stop access to MOOCs and other e-learning content developed by various education providers.

Less than half (32) of the responding countries indicated having a specific national policy for flexible learning pathways. Some countries (e.g. Jamaica) indicated that while there are no specific national policies on flexible learning pathways, the principles are enshrined in various plans, projects and programmes of national agencies.

Figure 24. Policies that support flexible learning pathways in higher education, global
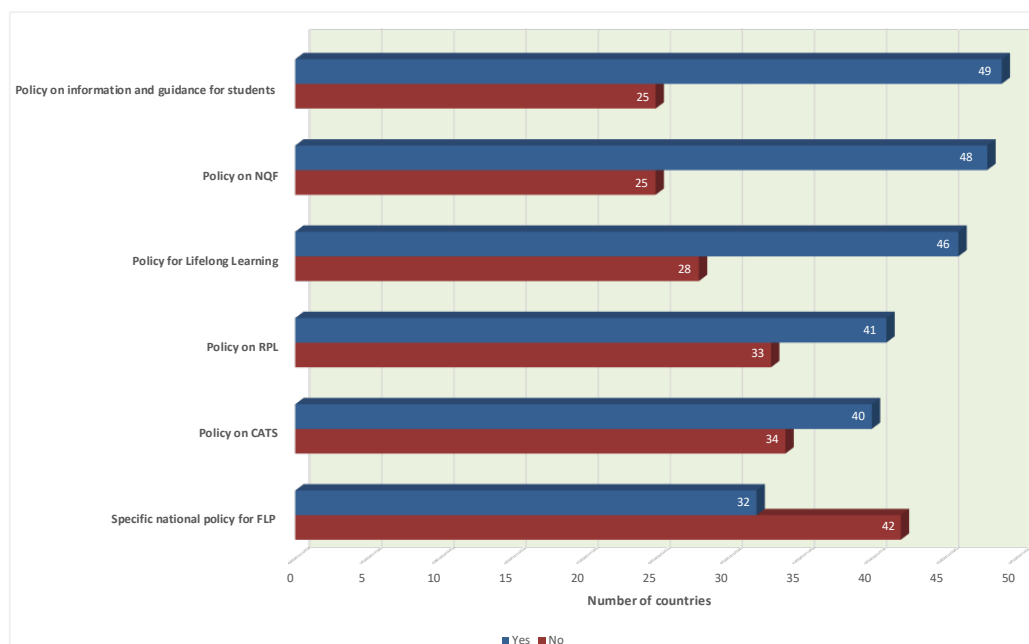
At the regional level, patterns reflect the national distribution (see Figure 25). Both national policies on information and guidance and national polices on NQF are at the top in all regions. Specific national policies on RPL also exist in all regions, but are less prevalent, similar to specific policies on FLP. It is interesting to note that no country in Latin America and the Caribbean has a policy on credit

accumulation and transfer, while such policies are relatively frequent in all other regions. This can be partially explained by the lower importance of regional integration processes in this region, which is a factor that drives the development of credit transfer systems.

Figure 25. Policies that support flexible learning pathways in higher education, by region
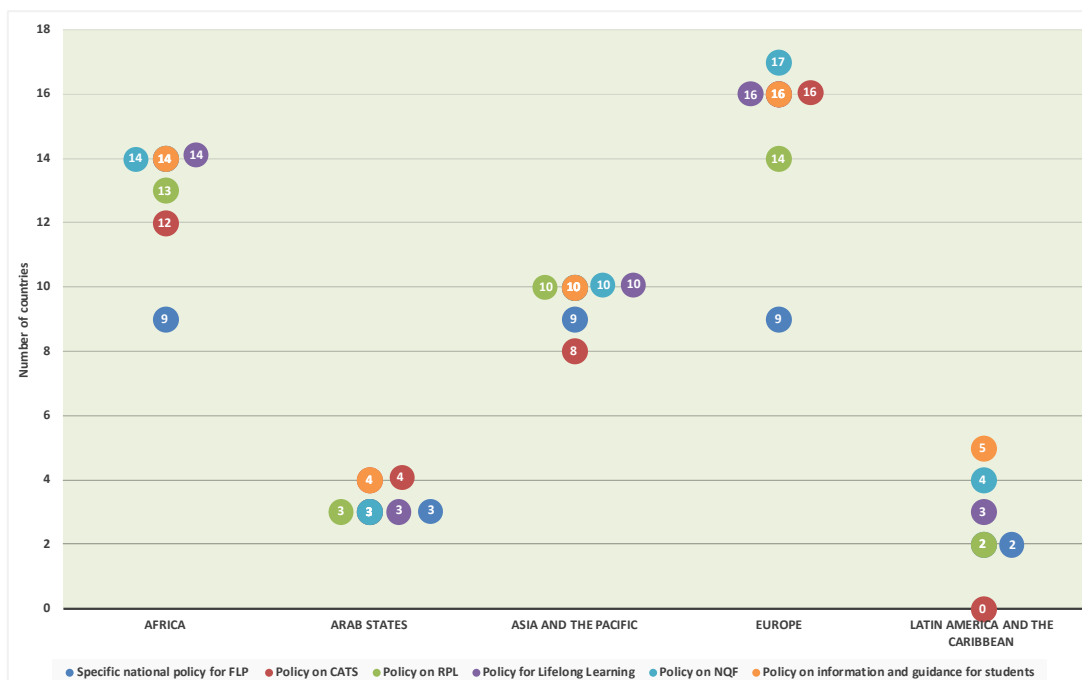
Overall, in many of countries flexible learning pathways are supported by policies that relate to information and guidance for students, those concerning national qualifications frameworks and policies for lifelong learning. In more than half of the higher education systems the policies on validation and recognition of prior learning and policies referring to credit accumulation and transfer are widespread. Less than half of the systems stated to have a specific national policy for flexible learning pathways.

5. Implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies

The following section will report on the findings pertaining to the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies that support flexible learning pathways. In particular, the survey will report on the degree of *implementation of FLP policies*; *the availability of resources* (e.g., human resources and financial resources) for the implementation of such policies; *use of data for monitoring policy implementation* that comprises systematic collection and analysis of information that can be used to track progress; *evaluation of policy implementation* that entails the assessment of policy effectiveness in achieving policy objectives and targets; and lastly, *the key enablers and factors lacking for effective policy implementation* (e.g., co-ordination issues and lack of clarity over roles and responsibilities, inadequacy of organisational resources, and stakeholders' reactions against reforms).

5.1. Implementation of policies supporting flexible learning pathways

Implementation of education policies is a complex process, involving many stakeholders and can result in failure if it is not planned, carried out and evaluated and monitored appropriately (Viennet and Pont, 2017). An effective policy process comprises *a design, implementation and evaluation* phase (European Commission, 2016).

At the stage of *policy design*, governments, in consultation with relevant actors, identify areas in need of development, set priorities and objectives for reform, and identify policy instruments that are necessary to fulfil these priorities and objectives.

At the *implementation* phase, policy objectives are turned into concrete actions, supported generally by an implementation or action plan that defines responsibilities, measurable achievements, and the timeframe for implementation. A shared responsibility between governments and higher education institutions over policy implementation is particularly important, given the relatively high level of autonomy of HEIs in some contexts. A success factor is flexibility to allow room for solutions that fit the institutional context while ensuring that they are aligned with the broader policy objectives. Policy implementation generally comprises several stages, each of which require adequate monitoring, feedback and reporting measures.

The *evaluation* phase – the last stage in the policy making process – is fundamental for the assessment of policy effectiveness. However, it is the stage that is often overlooked in higher education systems (European Commission, 2016; OECD, 2015). Policy evaluation involves the comparison of envisaged and resulting outcomes to understand whether there is an 'implementation gap' between what was planned initially and what was realised at the end (Newton, 2002; OECD, 2008).

Responding countries were asked a number of questions related to the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies for flexible learning pathways, including the key enablers and factors lacking to successfully turn policy objectives into well-functioning institutional practices[7].

Countries were asked to indicate the degree of implementation of policies that support flexible learning pathways, having the option of choosing between three phases – "in planning", "partially implemented" and "fully implemented". **Results illustrate that among all policy areas, countries are most advanced in implementing policies concerning national qualifications frameworks and information and guidance for students,** with 38 countries mentioning to have partially or fully implemented such a policy in their systems (see Figure 26).

Furthermore, 30 countries have implemented (partially or fully) a policy on validation/recognition of prior learning and on credit accumulation and transfer. Interestingly, **although lifelong learning policies are relatively present in our sample of responding countries and considered strong enablers**

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[7] Since the questions in this section apply only to countries that have policies for flexible learning pathways, the sample of exploitable answers decreased to 55. Therefore, the analysis in section 5 is for the most part based on a sample of 55 respondents (as opposed to 75, as applicable in the previous sections).

of flexible learning pathways by a majority of them (46), only 25 of them have actually implemented (partially or fully) such a policy in their systems.

Figure 26. Degree of implementation of policies that support flexible learning pathways
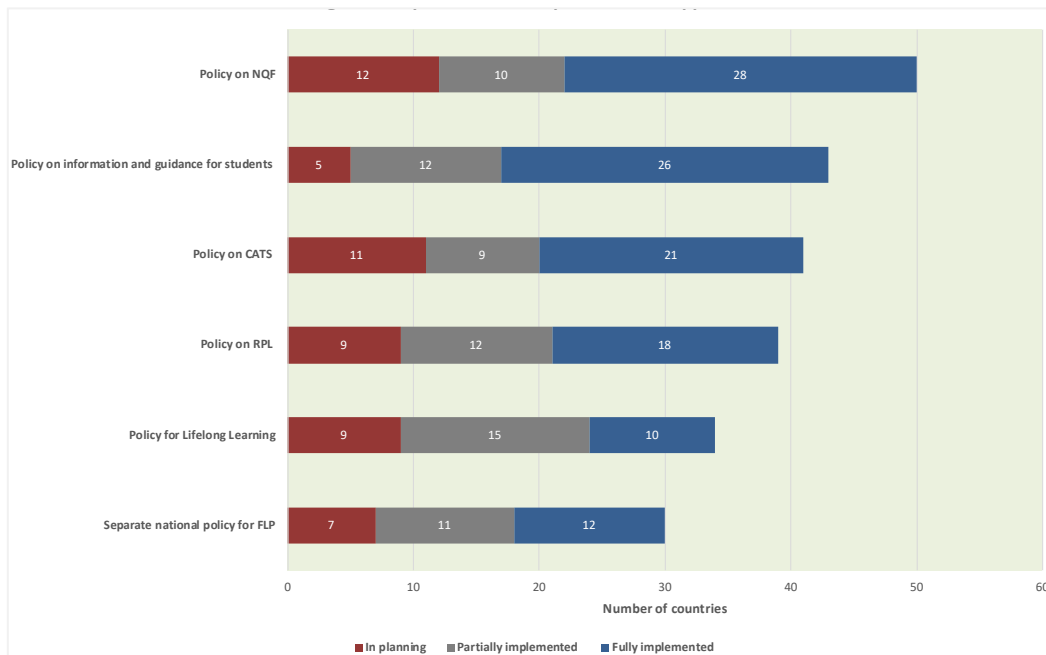
Generally, with regard to all policy areas on that support FLPs, countries are most advanced in implementing policies concerning national qualifications frameworks and information and guidance for students. Also, a number of countries have implemented (partially or fully) a policy on validation/recognition of prior learning and on credit accumulation and transfer. Fewer countries have implemented policies on lifelong learning in their systems.

5.2. Resources for the implementation of flexible learning pathways

One of the well-known obstacles to effective policy implementation is the lack of sufficient resources to support it. Governments need to allocate financial and human resources to the implementation, for instance, of an integrated national qualifications framework or the establishment of student support units, at the national level or inside higher education institutions. They need to provide resources to develop institutional capacity for recognition of non-formal and informal learning or pedagogical approaches tailored to enable flexible learning. The availability of financial and human resources therefore conditions the implementation of policies. Turning policy objectives into institutional practices becomes challenging in the absence of adequate funding and competent staff to carry out the implementation.

Responding countries were asked to indicate whether designated financial and human resources are available for the implementation of policies for flexible learning pathways in their higher education systems. Global trends show that overall **there are tentatively more financial resources available for the implementation of policies for flexible learning pathways compared to human resources** (see Figure 27 and Figure 28).

Comparatively more countries offer financial resources and staff development opportunities for the implementation of NQFs. Information and guidance policies are also well supported, but RPL and CATS policies somewhat less.

In a number of countries, including Denmark and France, a financial budget is available for overall implementation of higher education policies, but not of a specific policy for flexible learning pathways. In France, higher education institutions receive an overall budget and are fully responsible for its

distribution. Occasionally, through calls for projects, the French Ministry of National Education and Youth provides additional resources to institutions to support various forms of flexibility in teaching and learning.

Figure 27. Availability of financial resources for policy implementation, global
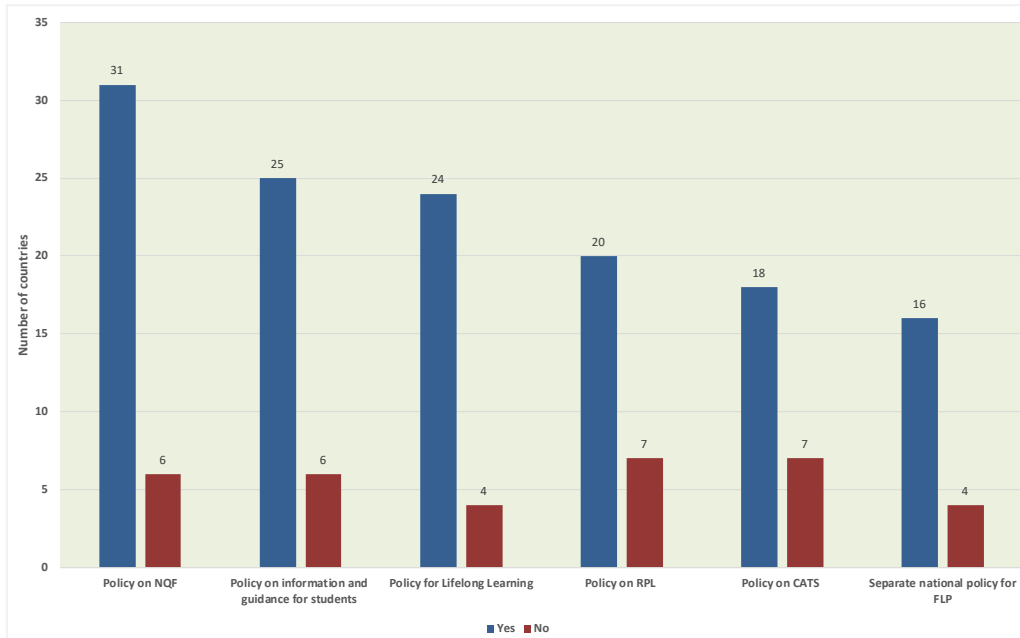
Figure 28. Staff development opportunities for policy implementation, global
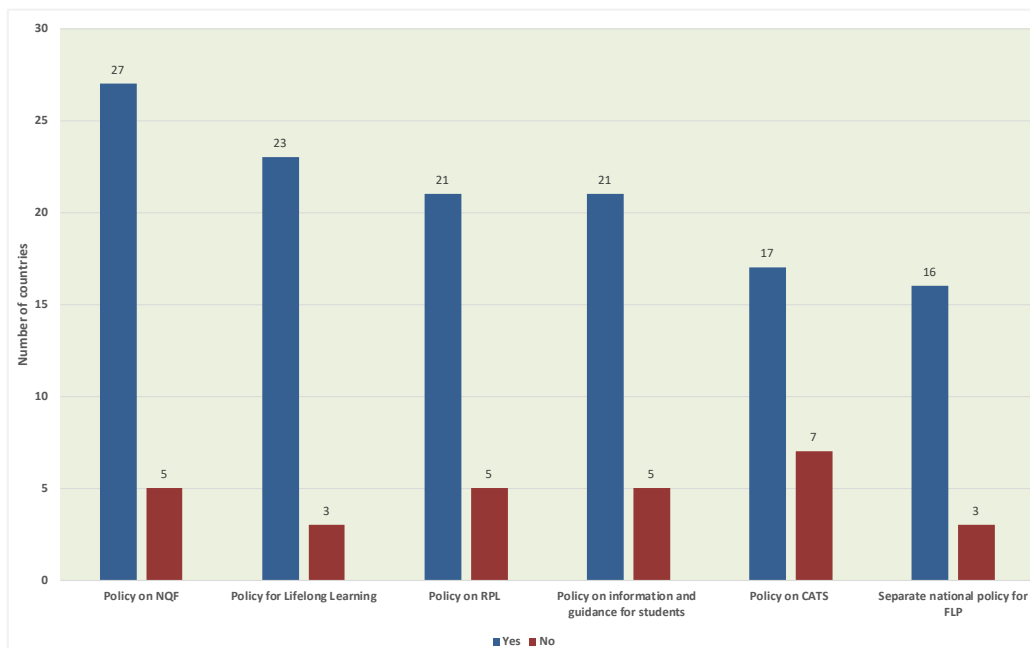
A designated financial budget for the implementation of policies referring to national qualifications frameworks exists in 31 countries, half of which are from Africa and another fourth from Europe (see Figure 29). In Lesotho, for instance, the Council on Higher Education receives a budget for the implementation of higher education policies, which includes the development of a national qualifications framework and capacity building activities for higher education institutions.

Around 25 countries have a financial budget for the implementation of policies concerning information and guidance for students, and lifelong learning policies; and 20 have financial resources for the

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implementation of policies for validation and recognition of prior learning, and credit accumulation and transfer. In Jamaica, for example, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information has designated funding to strengthen information and guidance for students in higher education. In some Latin American countries (for instance in Honduras), higher education institutions themselves finance the provision of guidance services.

The priorities for financial support vary across the region. In Africa and Europe, many countries support NQFs financially. In African, Asian and European countries, LLL policies are financially supported as well.

Figure 29. Availability of financial resources for policy implementation, by region
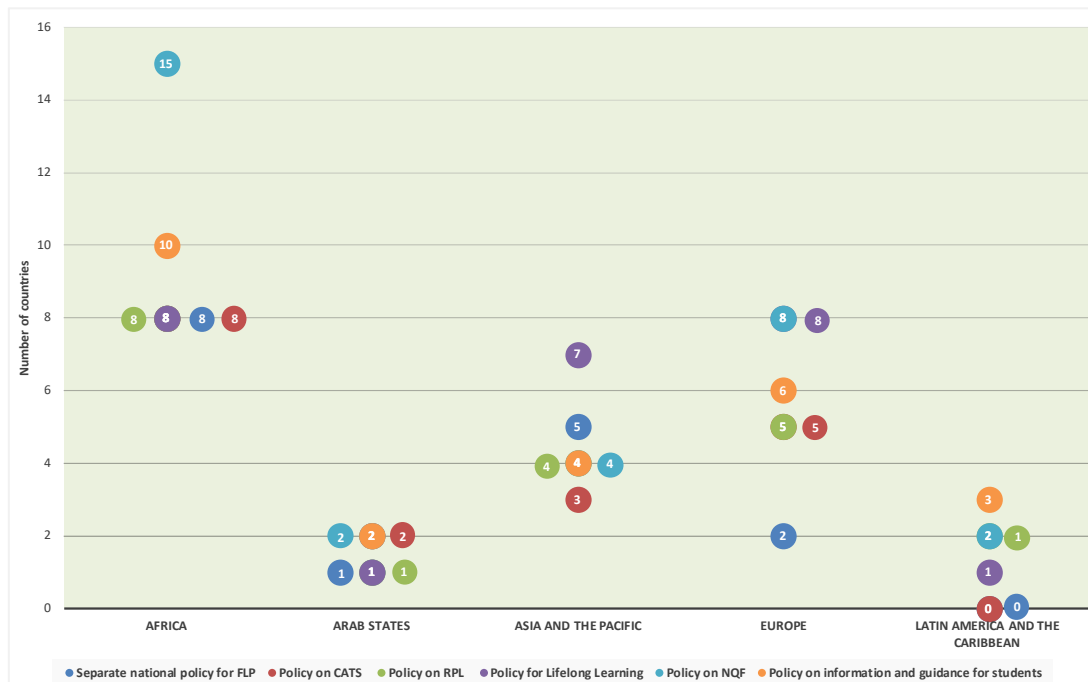
Patterns of opportunities for staff development vary also across regions (see Figure 30). They are offered to support NQF policies in many African, Arab and European countries. LLL policies stand also out as being relatively well supported in terms of opportunities for staff development. In general, countries from Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) seem to lag behind the countries of other regions in this area.

A designated budget for the implementation of a separate policy for flexible learning pathways exists only in 16 of the countries that provided answers to this question, half of which are based in Africa.

Figure 30. Staff development opportunities for policy implementation, by region
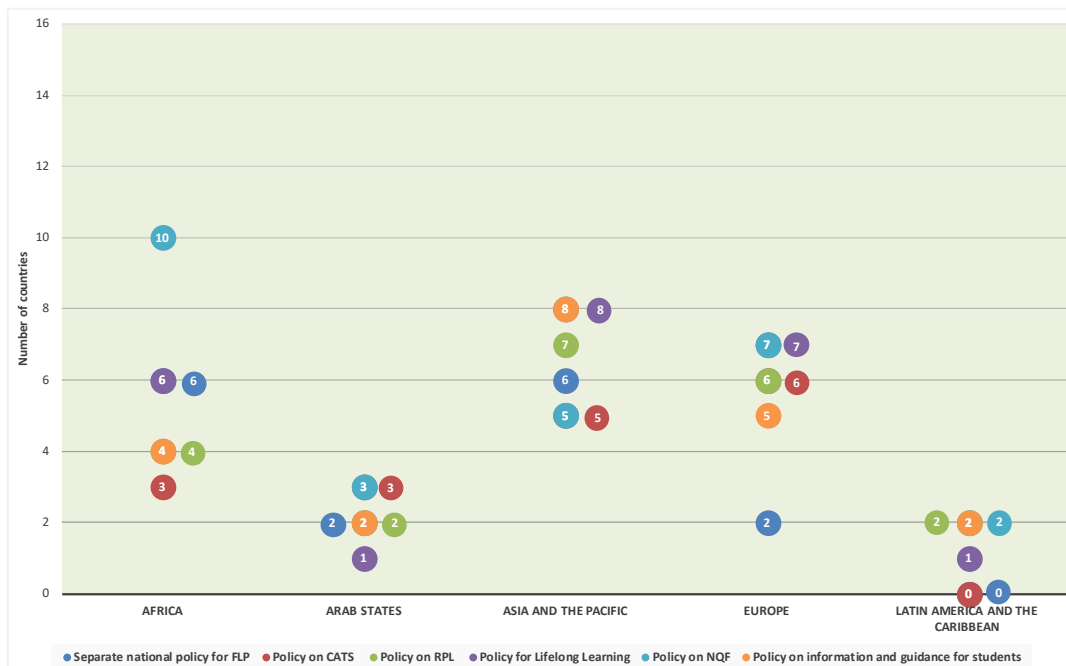
Generally, more financial resources are allocated for the implementation of policies for flexible learning pathways compared to human resources. Countries allocate more financial resources and staff development opportunities for the implementation of NQFs, as well as information and guidance policies. The policies on RPL and CATS are less supported. The majority of higher education systems that responded have a designated financial budget for the implementation of policies referring to national qualifications frameworks, followed by policies concerning information and guidance for students, and lifelong learning policies. Fewer countries have budgets for the implementation of policies for validation and recognition of prior learning, and credit accumulation and transfer. In terms of opportunities for staff development, many systems offer them to support NQF policies and LLL policies.

5.3. Use of data for monitoring policy implementation

Monitoring of policy implementation requires systematic collection and analysis of information that can be used to track progress. This can be facilitated by defining policy objectives, targets and adequate tools to collect information in line with the defined objectives and targets. Previous research suggests that evidence plays an important role in improving success in the implementation of reforms and policies (OECD, 2018).

Respondents of the international survey were asked to reflect on aspects related to the use of data for monitoring of the implementation of policies for flexible learning pathways. Findings illustrate that the collection of data to monitor policy implementation varies by policy area (see Figure 31). **Most commonly, countries collect data to follow up on the implementation of lifelong learning policies, and policies on information and guidance for students.** Of the former group, nearly two-thirds are countries from Europe (9), and from Asia and the Pacific (7). Although 38 countries indicated to have partially or fully implemented policies concerning national qualifications frameworks, but only 25 actually monitor their implementation.

Figure 31. Collection of data to monitor policy implementation, global
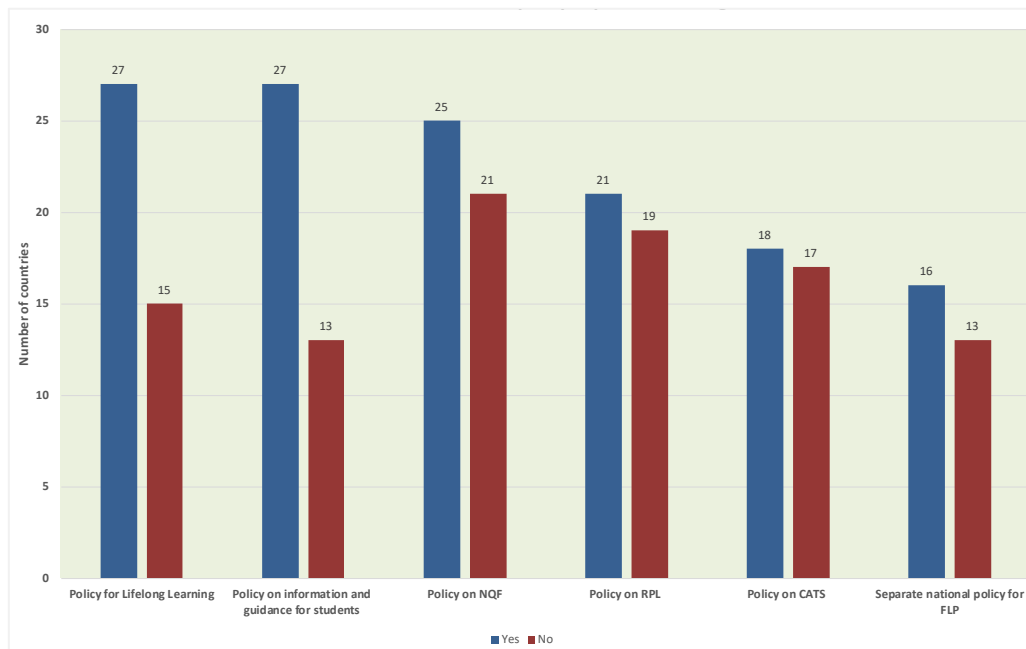
In terms of regional patterns, there is again variation (see Figure 32). Many African countries collect data on the NQF implementation and that of information and guidance services. Arab states tend to focus also on NQF policy, information and guidance but also CATS policy. Asian countries tend to collect data mostly on LLL policies, similar to Europe. In the LAC region, information and guidance services are the most frequently monitored.

Figure 32. Collection of data to monitor policy implementation, by region

Overall, most countries collect data to follow up on the implementation of lifelong learning policies, and policies on information and guidance for students. Findings from the survey point to a diversity of practices related to data collection for monitoring the implementation of flexible learning pathways. The Planning Institute of Jamaica, for instance, collects data on participation in lifelong learning activities. In addition, higher education institutions are required to report on the number of persons admitted via alternative pathways, such as through recognition of prior learning. In Latvia, a national

qualifications framework and a credit accumulation and transfer system are in full operation; however, they are not subject to monitoring on a yearly basis. In Sweden, a monitoring system for recognition of prior learning and credit accumulation and transfer is currently under development.

5.4. Evaluation of policy implementation

As noted earlier, the evaluation phase is critical for the assessment of policy effectiveness, but policy evaluation is also an area known to be less frequently conducted than desirable. Policy evaluation is particularly important in understanding whether the instruments used in the implementation phase are effective in achieving policy objectives and targets. Policy evaluation therefore requires appropriate evaluation tools and procedures for monitoring and reporting. They can provide summative and formative perspectives and can unveil factors that can promote success in policy implementation.

Findings from the international survey suggest that evaluation of policy implementation is not a common practice among the surveyed systems (see Figure 33). **They therefore confirm the general lack of policy evaluation indicated above**. In all policy areas, a majority of countries indicated that they do not perform evaluations of policy implementation. Some countries have noted that they are at the incipient stage of policy implementation (e.g. Lifelong Learning Policy in Botswana, National Skills Qualifications Framework in India, CATS in Zambia) and therefore, evaluation of their effectiveness is not yet possible.

In countries that do perform evaluations, they most commonly do so to monitor the implementation of policies concerning national qualifications frameworks (noted by 14 countries including Georgia, Latvia, Thailand and Ukraine), **lifelong learning policies** (14 countries including France, Latvia, Swaziland and Thailand), **and policies on information and guidance for students** (11 countries including Jamaica and Saint Lucia).

Figure 33. Evaluation of policy implementation, global
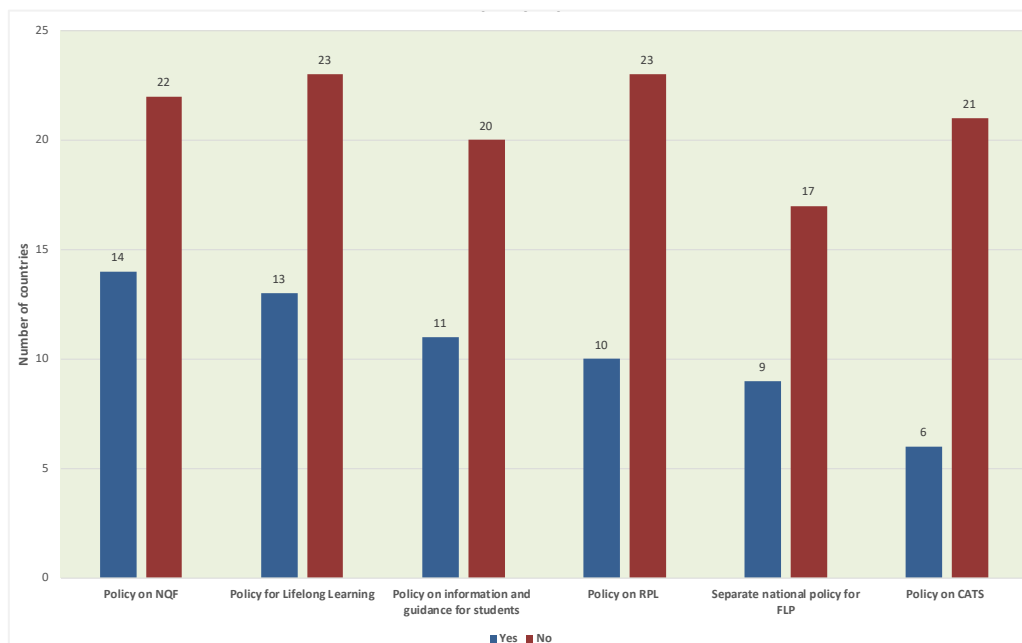
Regional patterns of policy evaluation vary widely. African countries tend to focus on the evaluation of their NQF policies; in Arab countries - FLP policies; in Asia and the Pacific and Europe - LLL policies and in the LAC region - information and guidance policies (see Figure 34).

It is worth noting that even though 21 countries indicated collecting data to monitor the implementation of policies for recognition of prior learning, less than half of them actually evaluate

such policies. This indicates that while data is available it is not systematically used for evaluation that could support the improvement of policies.

The need to evaluate more frequently the implementation of education policy is widely recognised, particularly since policies are not always implemented as planned or they do not necessarily lead to envisaged outcomes (Viennet and Pont, 2017).

Figure 34. Evaluation of policy implementation, by region
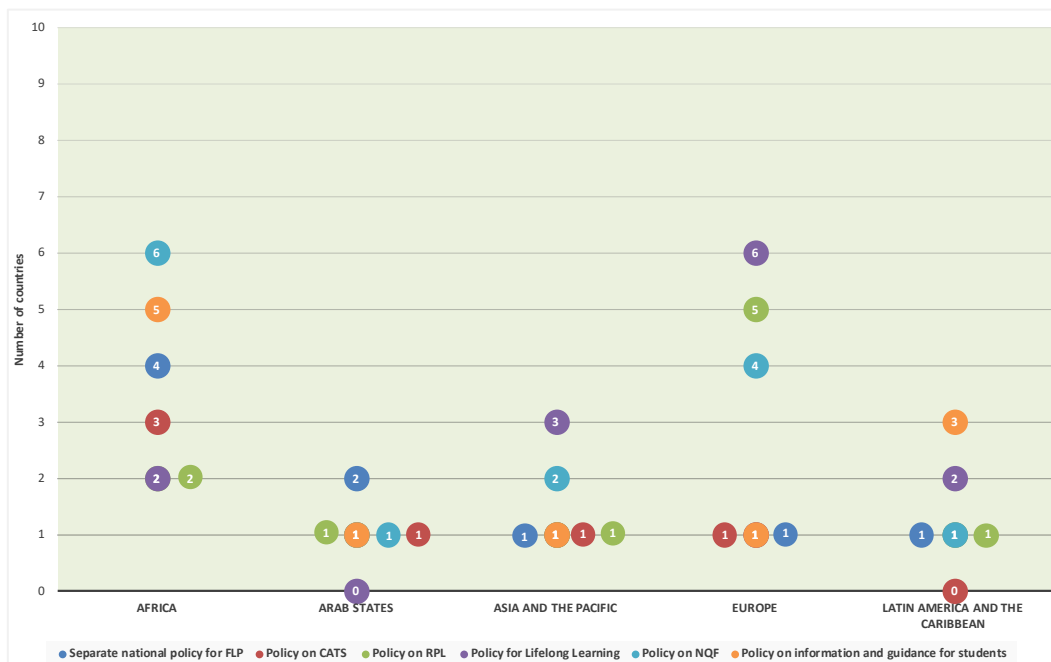
Overall, the evaluation of policy implementation is not a common practice among the surveyed systems. They countries that conduct evaluations, do them to monitor the implementation of policies concerning national qualifications frameworks, lifelong learning policies, and policies on information and guidance for students. In addition, data that is being collected to monitor the implementation of policies, is not used systematically for evaluation of policies.

5.5. Key enablers and factors lacking for effective policy implementation

As the higher education sector has become more diverse and complex in recent decades, the process of translating policy into the daily practice of academics, administrators, leadership and other relevant actors has also evolved to a different level of complexity. The literature on policy implementation refers to co-ordination issues and lack of clarity over roles and responsibilities, inadequacy of organisational resources, and stakeholders' reactions against reforms (Viennet and Pont, 2017). Furthermore, the lack of recognition of the need to adapt implementation frameworks to evolving governance structures and to engage all relevant stakeholders in the process may prevent policy implementation from achieving its goals.

For the purpose of this study, countries that responded to the international survey were asked to provide their views on the key enablers and factors lacking for an effective implementation of policies to support flexible learning pathways in their higher education systems.

The availability of clear targets, political will and leadership, and financial resources, together with an effective management and coordination capacity were among the most frequently mentioned enablers recognised to support the implementation of policies for flexible learning pathways (see Figure 35). These findings complement previous studies, which recognise the importance of having a

visionary leadership at the system level, able to devise an actionable plan with measurable targets and resources for advancing change in education systems (Viennet and Pont, 2017).

Despite it being identified as an enabler, financial resources were also commonly listed among the factors that are lacking most frequently for an effective implementation of policies, alongside an enabling culture and human resources. This suggests that financial and human resources are seen as fundamental to an effective policy implementation process, yet not always available. It also underlines the role of the context in which the implementation is carried out, and recognises the importance of having a favourable culture backed by political support and committed implementers to advance the desired change in the higher education system.

Figure 35. Enablers and factors lacking for implementation of policies for FLP, global
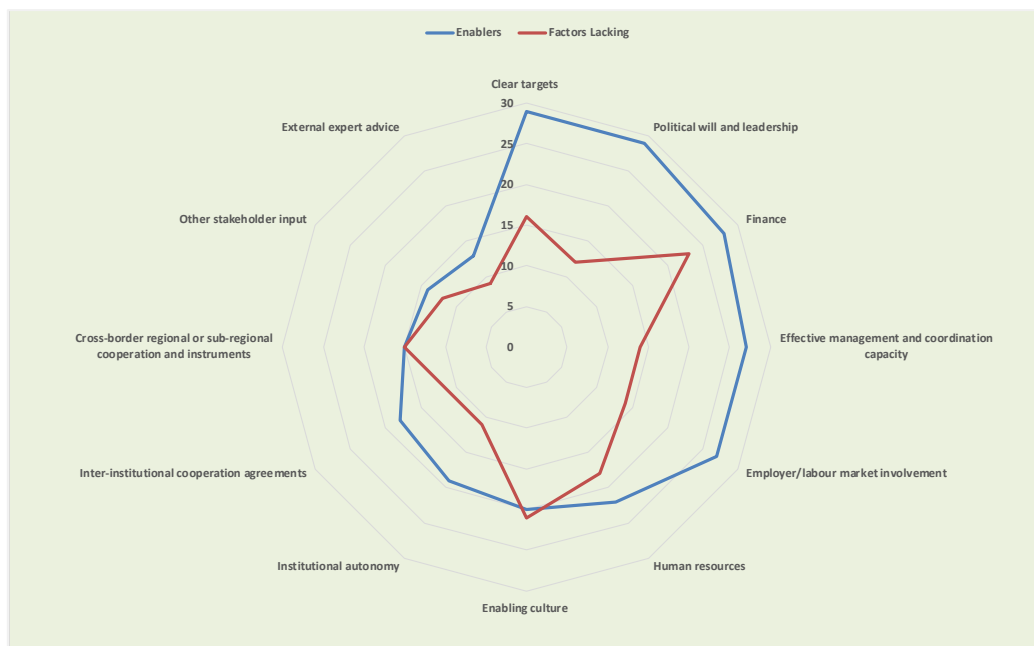
Among the most frequently reported key enablers for an effective implementation of policies to support flexible learning pathways were the availability of clear targets, political will and leadership, and financial resources and an effective management and coordination capacity. Lack of financial resources and an enabling culture and human resources were commonly reported as the factors lacking for an effective implementation of policies to support flexible learning pathways.

6.   Concluding remarks

Recognised as a strong contributor to the development of knowledge-based, cohesive societies, higher education has undergone rapid massification and diversification in recent decades. Global enrolment in higher education doubled since the turn of the millennium and numbers will continue to rise in the years to come. Along this rapid expansion, higher education has become more diverse, in terms of types of institutions and programmes, study orientations and qualifications, and delivery modalities. The profile of students entering higher education has also diversified, in response to the advancement of knowledge economies but also in response to a growing societal mission of higher education. Along traditional students, higher education has become progressively more accessible to other groups, including mature learners, working professionals, returnees to higher education, ethnic minorities and students with special learning needs.

To accommodate this diversity of learners, higher education can no longer be delivered in the same way as it used to a few decades ago. Candidates for higher education have multiple learning needs and aspirations, which require more adaptability and flexibility in the way higher education is organised and delivered, and support systems adapted to a more diverse student population. The International Education 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goal 4 call for better-integrated higher education systems with capacity to provide diverse and flexible learning pathways in order to support equity and lifelong learning.

In response to this requirement, UNESCO-IIEP launched an international research project, titled *"SDG4: Planning for Flexible Learning Pathways in Higher Education"*, with the aim to produce knowledge and provide evidence-based policy advice to ministries of (higher) education in different development contexts who are considering building or strengthening flexible learning pathways as an area of reform. An international survey was conducted as part of this research to collect baseline information on existing policies, instruments and practices that support the development of flexible learning pathways in higher education systems across the world.

Findings from the international survey suggest that for the most part, countries acknowledge the importance of developing flexible learning pathways in their higher education systems. There seems to be wide recognition of the role that flexible learning pathways play in supporting participation and choice in higher education, building student-centred learning environments, and contributing to the development of a highly-skilled society.

As far as access to higher education is concerned, evidence suggests that **countries use already a more diverse range of pathways to facilitate entry at the level of a short-cycle qualification compared to a bachelor's or equivalent qualification**. Therefore, one can expect short-cycle programmes to attract a more diverse student population who would otherwise not be able to access higher education. Apart from serving an equity objective, there is an indication that short-cycle programmes facilitate permeability between vocational and academic-oriented provision. This is fundamental in ensuring upward mobility and reducing dead-ends. Meanwhile, results also indicate that higher education systems and institutions could do more to flexibilise entry to ISCED level 6 (Bachelor's level) provision that traditionally has favoured rigid and conventional entry requirements.

A vast majority of responding countries have introduced more flexible modes of delivery in their higher education systems, many of them providing the opportunity to study part-time as well as at distance or online along more traditional face-to-face learning modalities. At the same time, evidence suggests that opportunities provided by distance and online education could be capitalised on further, by ensuring through regulation that it remains of high quality and it is validated and recognised alongside more traditional forms of learning.

Evidence from the survey suggests that **higher education systems provide opportunities for student transfer, but mostly within the same field of study and between institutions of the same type**. These

forms of transfers are facilitated most commonly through national regulations or internal or inter-institutional agreements depending on the level of decentralisation and institutional autonomy in the system. Transfers across different disciplines and between different types of institutions are less common, which may be a function of the hierarchical and fragmented nature of higher education in some contexts. Findings from the survey reveal that transferability across disciplines and between different types of institutions can be enabled through national regulations and systems for credit accumulation and transfer.

Survey results indicate that most frequently, governments make use of policies rather than regulatory or legislative levers to steer their higher education systems towards becoming more flexible in their entry and progression requirements, and delivery of education. This steering approach may be more appropriate for contexts with increased levels of institutional autonomy. But it also means that governments play a more policy oriented, rather than regulatory role in the development of flexible learning pathways in their systems.

Furthermore, findings suggest that **policy levers are used more commonly to support flexible pathways at the point of entry to higher education than in students' progression to higher learning**. This is indeed important for widening access to higher education but it also suggests that further efforts are needed to ensure that students can progress to higher levels of learning.

Findings show that a vast majority of countries **do not have in place a single policy on flexible learning pathways.** Nonetheless, different aspects of flexibility are supported through *a mix of policies*, particularly those that target the development of **information and guidance systems, national qualifications frameworks, and lifelong learning.** This suggests that at the policy level, there is wide recognition of the importance to provide individuals with continuous learning opportunities and to support them in making best use of these opportunities.

Less well developed are policies for recognition of prior learning and credit accumulation and transfer. To ensure that flexible learning pathways are effective in meeting diverse learning needs, there is a need for higher education systems to develop capacity for recognition of non-formal and informal learning, including that acquired at work and other settings that are conducive to knowledge development. To better support student-centred learning, higher education systems need a system-wide approach to the accumulation, portability and transferability of credits, such as a national credit transfer system. Both policy areas are becoming increasingly relevant, particularly in a context where higher education is called upon to recognise and transfer forms of learning that transcend the boundaries of formal education.

In addition, findings suggest that **policies that support flexible learning pathways and the instruments used for their implementation are not in full alignment with one another**. For example, although a majority of countries have national qualifications frameworks that include higher education and vocational education, further efforts are needed to integrate adult education and recognition of non-formal and informal learning into the respective frameworks.

A vast majority of countries make use of information and guidance systems to support students in their study paths; however, this function is encountered most frequently at the level of higher education institutions than systems. Indeed, institutional structures may be in a better position to provide a more targeted support due to their proximity to the learner; however, a national information and support system may also be beneficial to ensure a more systematic and comprehensive approach to guidance and a wider outreach.

Survey data suggests that the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies are stages in the policy process that require particular improvement. In a majority of responding countries, the implementation of policies is not well supported by adequate financial and human resources. Furthermore, the practice of collecting and using data and information for monitoring the progress of policy implementation is not widespread across all policy areas that were identified to support flexible

learning pathways, and in particular those referring to national qualifications frameworks. Finally, findings reveal that evaluation of policy implementation is even less frequent among the surveyed systems than their monitoring, which makes policy effectiveness difficult to assess.

The availability of clear targets, political will and leadership, and financial resources, were among the most frequently mentioned enablers recognised to support the implementation of policies for flexible learning pathways. At the same time, **lack of financial resources was also identified as one of the barriers** lacking for an effective implementation of policies, alongside an **enabling culture and human resources**.

These findings reiterate the complex nature of the policy-making process and the difficulty to translate policy objectives into effective practices leading to desired outcomes. This process requires a visionary leadership and management capacity at the system level, adequate resources for policy implementation, and committed stakeholders able to translate policy objectives into well-functioning institutional practices.

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8. Annexes

Annex 1: International Questionnaire

International Survey on Policies, Instruments and Practices for Developing Flexible Learning Pathways into and throughout Higher Education

1. INSTRUCTIONS TO COMPLETE THE SURVEY

Dear Respondent,

Below you will find important instructions that will help you to fill in the survey.

You may access the survey through the provided link an unlimited amount of times. Provided answers will be saved automatically as long as the link is accessed through the same computer from which it was first opened. Please note that only one response per country should be submitted. You may also refer to the PDF file attached to the e-mail message for this survey to get an overview of the questions.

Terms and concepts marked in colour are explained in the definitions sheet attached to the e-mail message that you received concerning the survey. Please make sure that you have read the definitions attached before you move on to complete the survey. Such a pre-reading will facilitate a shared understanding of concepts used in the survey and thereby ensure comparability of your answers.

To note, certain questions will have to be answered before you are allowed to move on to the next question. These are marked by an asterisk.

There are comment sections throughout the survey. Please tick/fill in the reply categories as far as possible and use comment boxes mainly for additional, explanatory remarks. The comments sections may be used flexibly both for general remarks and for further explanations of pre-selected reply categories ticked. For the latter, please indicate the letter that corresponds to the reply category (e.g. a; b; c, etc.) when providing further explanations. This will facilitate the analysis of open-ended responses.

If you have a decentralised system with varying levels of regulations and policies, please respond as far as possible on the national level and specify in the comment boxes when your answers rather pertain to the regional, local or institutional level.

Should there be any problem understanding the survey questions, you may contact the research team at the following e-mail address: flp.survey@iiep.unesco.org.

Have you read the definitions and are ready to start? Then please proceed to the next section.

1

International Survey on Policies, Instruments and Practices for Developing Flexible Learning Pathways into and throughout Higher Education

2. YOUR COUNTRY'S HIGHER EDUCATION PROVISION

Please reply as indicated in each question. Questions marked with an asterisk are required.

* 1. Please select your country from the dropdown menu below:

Comments:

2. Does your **higher education** system provide the following modes of delivery?

(Please tick Yes or No in each row)

	Yes	No
Face to face full-time education	○	○
If yes, please indicate the number of students enrolled and the year of the data in parentheses, if available:		
Face to face part-time study (e.g. evening/week-end/summer/extension programmes)	○	○
If yes, please indicate the number of students enrolled and the year of the data in parentheses, if available:		
Distance/Online education	○	○
If yes, please indicate the number of students enrolled and the year of the data in parentheses, if available:		
Other mode of delivery (please specify which below)	○	○
If yes, please indicate the number of students enrolled and the year of the data in parentheses, if available:		

2

* 3. Would you define your higher education system as a predominantly binary or unitary system?

(Please tick the relevant circle, only one)

◯ Unitary

◯ Binary

◯ Other (please specify in the comments box below)

Comments:

3

International Survey on Policies, Instruments and Practices for Developing
Flexible Learning Pathways into and throughout Higher Education

3. INSTRUMENTS AND PRACTICES SUPPORTING FLEXIBLE LEARNING PATHWAYS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

* 4. Which of the following pathways toISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) levels 5 and 6 respectively does your education system offer?

(Please tick all relevant options. Please leave blank if not applicable)

	To ISCED level 5	To ISCED level 6
a. General secondary leaving certificate at ISCED level 3	☐	☐
b. Vocational secondary leaving certificate at ISCED level 3	☐	☐
c. General formal qualification at ISCED level 4	☐	☐
d. Vocational formal qualification at ISCED level 4	☐	☐
e. Special preparatory course/s	☐	☐
f. A special admission, aptitude or university entrance test (without requirement of formal secondary school leaving certificate)	☐	☐
g. Adult Learner Education Certificate giving access to higher education	☐	☐
h. Validation/Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) based on informal learning	☐	☐
i. Validation/Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) based on non-formal education and training	☐	☐

4

	To ISCED level 5	To ISCED level 6
j. Formally regulated bridging programmes at vocational ISCED level 5 enabling progression to academically oriented programmes at ISCED level 6 (option applies only to second column, i.e. to ISCED level 6)	☐	☐
k. Informal bridges from vocational ISCED level 3 and 4 not regulated by national policy but offered in practice at institutional level	☐	☐
l. Other (please specify in the comments box below)	☐	☐

Comments:

5. *Does your higher education system offer opportunities for students to transfer (credits)within the same field of study in higher education?

(Please select Yes or No from the dropdown menu. If some categories do not exist in your system please select Not Applicable (N/A))

Note: The term HEI/s stands for Higher Education Institution/s

	Within the same HEI	Between HEIs of the same type (e.g. between vocational/technical HEIs or between universities)	Between different types of HEIs (e.g. between vocational/technical HEIs and universities)	N/A
a. Through national regulation (credit exemption from courses already taken)	⬍	⬍	⬍	⬍
b. Through a national credit transfer system	⬍	⬍	⬍	⬍
c. Through a regional or sub-regional credit transfer system (cross-national)	⬍	⬍	⬍	⬍
d. Through intra- or inter-institutional agreement	⬍	⬍	⬍	⬍
e. Other (please specify in the comments box below)	⬍	⬍	⬍	⬍

Comments:

6

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6. *Does your higher education system offer opportunities for students to transfer (credits)across different fields of study?

(Please select Yes or No from the dropdown menu. If some categories do not exist in your system please select Not Applicable (N/A))

	Within the same HEI	Between HEIs of the same type (e.g. between vocational/technical HEIs or between universities)	Between different types of HEIs (e.g. between vocational/technical HEIs and universities)	N/A
a. Through national regulation (credit exemption from courses already taken)	⇕	⇕	⇕	⇕
b. Through a national credit transfer system	⇕	⇕	⇕	⇕
c. Through a regional or sub-regional credit transfer system (cross-national)	⇕	⇕	⇕	⇕
d. Through intra- or inter-institutional agreement	⇕	⇕	⇕	⇕
e. Other (please specify in the comments box below)	⇕	⇕	⇕	⇕

Comments:

* 7. Tick relevant circle/s if your education system has a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) including:

	No	No, but in planning	Yes, partially implemented	Yes, fully implemented
a. Higher education	○	○	○	○

Comments:

	No	No, but in planning	Yes, partially implemented	Yes, fully implemented
b. General basic education (primary and secondary)	○	○	○	○

Comments:

	No	No, but in planning	Yes, partially implemented	Yes, fully implemented
c. Vocational education	○	○	○	○

7

	No	No, but in planning	Yes, partially implemented	Yes, fully implemented
Comments:				

Comments:

d. Further (adult) education	◯	◯	◯	◯

Comments:

e. Non-formal learning	◯	◯	◯	◯

Comments:

f. Informal learning	◯	◯	◯	◯

Comments:

g. Occupational Standards	◯	◯	◯	◯

Comments:

h. A formal linkage to a regional or sub-regional (cross-national) qualifications framework (RQF); please specify which in the comments box below.	◯	◯	◯	◯

Comments:

i. Other (please specify in the comments box below)	◯	◯	◯	◯

Comments:

8

* 8. Tick the relevant circle if your higher education system provides:

	No	No, but in planning	Yes, partially implemented	Yes, fully implemented
a. Quality Assurance at the programme level	○	○	○	○
b. Quality Assurance at the institutional level	○	○	○	○
c. Other (please specify in the comments box below)	○	○	○	○

Comments:

9

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* 9. Does your education system have a National Qualifications Framework with any of the following linkages to programme quality assurance?

(Please tick the relevant circle in each row. If your education system does not have a NQF or a Quality Assurance system, please tick Not Applicable (N/A))

	Yes	No	N/A
a. NQF level descriptors and Programme Quality Assurance standards are aligned	◯	◯	◯
b. NQF programme descriptors and Programme Quality Assurance standards are aligned	◯	◯	◯
c. Programme Quality Assurance is a prerequisite for accreditation/registration of a programme on the NQF	◯	◯	◯
d. Programme Quality Assurance focusing on learning outcomes is a prerequisite for accreditation/registration of a programme on the NQF	◯	◯	◯
e. Other (please specify in the comments box below)	◯	◯	◯

Comments:

10

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* 10. Does your education system provide information, advice and guidance to current and prospective students on available **flexible learning pathways (FLP)** (e.g. alternative admission pathways and opportunities for credit accumulation and transfer)?

(Please tick the relevant circle in each row)

	Yes	No	No, but in planning
a. A national information and guidance system	○	○	○
b. Institutional arrangements in-house, e.g. guidance/counselling offices	○	○	○
c. Institutional arrangements outsourced to external guidance/counselling services	○	○	○
d. Other (please specify in the comments box below)	○	○	○

Comments:

11

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4. POLICIES FOR IMPLEMENTING FLEXIBLE LEARNING PATHWAYS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

* 11. Are flexible learning pathways (FLP) part of your country's regulatory or legislative framework and/or explicit national policy pertaining to higher education?

The term 'policy' here indicates a normative, guiding, written prescription, e.g. a statement of principles, a strategy or an action plan.

(Please tick the relevant circle in each row)

FLP are part of:

	Yes	No
a. Legislation	○	○
b. Regulation	○	○
c. Policy (e.g. strategy, action plan or other)	○	○
d. Other (please specify in the comments box below)	○	○

Comments:

12

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* 12. Do/es the legislation, regulation or policy to support flexible learning pathways in your national higher education system indicate any particular outcome?

(Please tick the relevant circle in each row)

	Yes	No
a. Widened participation in higher education	○	○
b. Better responsiveness to diverse student needs	○	○
c. Reduced dropout rates/increased completion of studies	○	○
d. Strengthened equity in progression of studies	○	○
e. Facilitated labour market (re-)entry and career progression	○	○
f. Improved general level of education/qualifications in society	○	○
g. Other (please specify in the comments box below)	○	○
h. My higher education system does not have any legislation, regulation or policy to support flexible learning pathways	○	○

Comments:

13

* 13. The legislation, regulation or policy to support flexible learning pathways in higher education in your country cover the following types of higher education:

(Please tick the relevant circle, only one)

○ a. *Both* public *and* private higher education

○ b. *Only* public higher education

○ c. *Only* private higher education

○ d. My higher education system does not have any legislation, regulation or policy to support flexible learning pathways

Comments:

* 14. The legislation, regulation or policy to support flexible learning pathways in higher education in your country cover/s the following ISCED levels:

(Please tick the relevant box/es)

☐ a. ISCED level 4   ☐ d. ISCED level 7

☐ b. ISCED level 5   ☐ e. My higher education system does not have any legislation, regulation or policy to support flexible learning pathways

☐ c. ISCED level 6

Comments:

14

60

* 15. In your country, flexible learning pathways in higher education are supported by the following policies:

(Please tick the relevant circle in each row)

	Yes	No
a. Specific national policy for flexible learning pathways	○	○
b. Policy for Lifelong Learning	○	○
c. Policy on National Qualifications Framework	○	○
d. Policy on Validation/Recognition of Prior Learning (based on work experience, non-formal learning and/or informal learning)	○	○
e. Policy on Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS)	○	○
f. Policy on information and guidance to prospective and current students in your (higher) education system	○	○
g. Other (please specify in the comments box below)	○	○

Comments:

If in your country there are none of the above-mentioned policies to support flexible learning pathways (e.g. Policy on National Qualifications Framework, Lifelong Learning, Validation/Recognition of Prior Learning, Credit Accumulation and Transfer System or Information and Guidance for Students), please skip directly to question 23 to respond to some final, important questions before submitting your answer.

15

16. To what degree has/have the policy/ies to support flexible learning pathways in higher education been implemented?

(Please tick the relevant circle in each row. Tick N/A only if you answered no in question 15 meaning there is no corresponding policy)

	In planning	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	N/A
a. Separate national policy for flexible learning pathways	○	○	○	○
b. Policy for Lifelong Learning	○	○	○	○
c. Policy on National Qualifications Framework	○	○	○	○
d. Policy on Validation/Recognition of Prior Learning (based on work experience, non-formal learning and/or informal learning)	○	○	○	○
e. Policy on Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS)	○	○	○	○
f. Policy on information and guidance to prospective and current students in your (higher) education system	○	○	○	○
g. Other (please specify in the comments box below)	○	○	○	○

Comments:

16

17. Are there resources allocated specifically to the implementation of this/these policy/ies?

(Please select Yes or No from the dropdown menu. Tick N/A only if you answered no in question 15 meaning there is no corresponding policy)

	A Financial Budget	Staff Development opportunities (e.g. training)	N/A
a. Separate national policy for flexible learning pathways	▲▼	▲▼	▲▼
b. Policy for Lifelong Learning	▲▼	▲▼	▲▼
c. Policy on National Qualifications Framework	▲▼	▲▼	▲▼
d. Policy on Validation/Recognition of Prior Learning (based on work experience, non-formal learning and/or informal learning)	▲▼	▲▼	▲▼
e. Policy on Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS)	▲▼	▲▼	▲▼
f. Policy on information and guidance to prospective and current students in your (higher) education system	▲▼	▲▼	▲▼
g. Other (please specify in the comments box below)	▲▼	▲▼	▲▼

Comments:

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5. MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

18. Are there any data collected to monitor policy implementation on a regular basis (i.e. at least once a year)?

(Please tick the relevant circle in each row. Tick N/A only if you answered no in question 15 meaning there is no corresponding policy)

Data collected on:

	Yes	No	N/A
a. Separate national policy for flexible learning pathways	○	○	○
b. Policy on Lifelong Learning	○	○	○
c. Policy on National Qualifications Framework	○	○	○
d. Policy on Validation/Recognition of Prior Learning (based on work experience, non-formal learning and/or informal learning)	○	○	○
e. Policy on Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS)	○	○	○
f. Policy on information and guidance to prospective and current students in your (higher) education system	○	○	○
g. Other (please specify in the comments box below)	○	○	○

Comments:

18

19. Has there been any evaluation of the policy implementation?

(Please tick the relevant circle in each row. Tick N/A only if you answered no in question 15 meaning there is no corresponding policy)

	Yes	No	N/A
a. Separate national policy for flexible learning pathways	○	○	○
If yes, please indicate the year of evaluation:			
b. Policy on Lifelong Learning	○	○	○
If yes, please indicate the year of evaluation:			
c. Policy on National Qualifications Framework	○	○	○
If yes, please indicate the year of evaluation:			
d. Policy on Validation/Recognition of Prior Learning (based on work experience, non-formal learning and/or informal learning)	○	○	○
If yes, please indicate the year of evaluation:			
e. Policy on Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS)	○	○	○
If yes, please indicate the year of evaluation:			
f. Policy on information, advice and guidance to prospective and current students in your (higher) education system	○	○	○
If yes, please indicate the year of evaluation:			
g. Other (please specify in the comments box below)	○	○	○
If yes, please indicate the year of evaluation:			

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20. In your opinion, what are the three most important enablers and the three most important factors lacking for implementation of the policy/ies to support flexible learning pathways in higher education in your country?

(Please skip this question if you answered no in all rows (a-g) in question 15)

	Rank the 3 most important enablers in order 1,2,3, where 1 is most important	Rank the 3 most important factors lacking in order 1,2,3, where 1 is most important
a. Clear targets	⬍	⬍
b. Effective management and coordination capacity	⬍	⬍
c. Employers/labour market involvement	⬍	⬍
d. External expert advice	⬍	⬍
e. Other stakeholder input	⬍	⬍
f. Institutional autonomy	⬍	⬍
g. Inter-institutional cooperation agreements	⬍	⬍
h. Cross-border regional or sub-regional cooperation and instruments	⬍	⬍
i. Finance	⬍	⬍
j. Human resources	⬍	⬍
k. Political will and leadership	⬍	⬍
l. Enabling culture (e.g. organisational values, attitudes, professional norms)	⬍	⬍

m. Other, not covered by categories in the table above (please specify and indicate in what position - i.e. 1,2,3 you would rank it):

21. Please provide links to all relevant legislative, regulatory, policy and planning documents on flexible learning pathways as defined in this survey, as well as any evaluation reports available online.

(Please skip this question if you answered no in all rows (a-g) in question 15)

Please note: If any important policy documents are not available online, you may send them to the following e-mail address: flp.survey@iiep.unesco.org. Please specify your country and FLP survey in the subject line.

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22. Please name the Ministries and governmental agencies in charge of developing flexible learning pathways in your country's higher education system:

(Please skip this question if you answered no in all rows (a-g) in question 15)

23. Final comments:

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6. YOUR IDENTITY

24. Please indicate your function/role/position and your institutional affiliation:

25. Please give your name and e-mail address if you are willing to be contacted about this questionnaire:

Note: Your name and e-mail address will not be shared beyond the research team.

Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire. Your feedback is very valuable to our research project. If you have any questions regarding this survey, please contact us at flp.survey@iiep.unesco.org

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Annex 2: List of respondents by region

Africa

1.	BF - Burkina Faso
2.	BW - Botswana
3.	CD - Congo, Democratic Republic of the
4.	CF - Central African Republic
5.	CG - Congo, Republic of the
6.	CI - Cote d'Ivoire
7.	CM - Cameroon
8.	GM - Gambia, The
9.	KM - Comoros
10.	LS - Lesotho
11.	MG - Madagascar
12.	MU - Mauritius
13.	MW - Malawi
14.	NA - Namibia
15.	NG - Nigeria
16.	SD - Sudan
17.	SN - Senegal
18.	ST - Sao Tome and Principe
19.	SZ - Swaziland
20.	TD - Chad
21.	TO - Tonga
22.	ZA - South Africa
23.	ZM - Zambia

Arab States

1.	AE - United Arab Emirates
2.	BH - Bahrain
3.	JO - Jordan
4.	OM - Oman
5.	MA - Morocco
6.	YE - Yemen

Asia and the Pacific

1.	CN - China
2.	IN - India
3.	KH - Cambodia
4.	LA - Laos
5.	LK - Sri Lanka
6.	MN - Mongolia
7.	MY - Malaysia
8.	PH - Philippines
9.	PW - Palau
10.	TH - Thailand

11. AF - Afghanistan
12. KI - Kiribati
13. UZ - Uzbekistan

Europe

1. AD - Andorra
2. AT - Austria
3. BA - Bosnia and Herzegovina
4. BE - Belgium
5. BG - Bulgaria
6. BY - Belarus
7. DK - Denmark
8. FR - France
9. GB - United Kingdom
10. GE - Georgia
11. HU - Hungary
12. IE - Ireland
13. LU - Luxembourg
14. LV - Latvia
15. NO - Norway
16. PL - Poland
17. PT - Portugal
18. RO - Romania
19. RS - Serbia
20. SE - Sweden
21. UA - Ukraine

Latin America and the Caribbean

1. BO - Bolivia
2. BZ - Belize
3. CL - Chile
4. CU - Cuba
5. GT - Guatemala
6. GY - Guyana
7. HN - Honduras
8. JM - Jamaica
9. LC - Saint Lucia
10. PE - Peru
11. PY - Paraguay
12. SV - El Salvador

Annex 3: Global and regional data

Q2. DOES YOUR EDCUATION SYSTEM PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING MODES OF DELIVERY?

Modes of Delivery	Yes	No	Total of those reporting figures

Face to face full-time	69	3	77,777,073
Distance/Online	65	14	12,241,522
Face to face part-time	61	6	7,519,630

Modes of Delivery	Global	No	Africa	Arab States	Asia and the Pacific	Europe	Latin America and the Caribbean
Face to face full-time	69	3	21	5	11	20	12
Distance/Online	56	14	20	3	9	14	10
Face to face part-time	61	6	18	4	10	18	11

Q3. WOULD YOU DEFINE YOUR HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM AS BINARY OR UNITARY?

Type of HE System	Percentage	Frequency
Binary	47%	35
Unitary	47%	35
Other	7%	5

Type of HE System	Global	Africa	Arab States	Asia and the Pacific	Europe	Latin America and the Caribbean
Binary	35	14	4	3	7	7
Unitary	35	8	1	8	13	5
Other	5	1	1	2	1	0

Q4: WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING PATHWAYS TO ISCED LEVELS 5/6 DOES YOUR EDUCATION SYSTEM OFFER?

Entry Pathway	ISCED Level 5	ISCED Level 6
General secondary leaving certificate at ISCED 3	59	44
Vocational secondary leaving certificate at ISCED 3	43	30
Vocational formal qualification at ISCED 4	43	28
General formal qualification at ISCED 4	36	29
RPL based on non-formal education	29	20
RPL based on informal learning	27	12
A special admission, aptitude or university entrance test	25	20
Adult Learner Education Certificate	25	19
Special preparatory course/s	24	14
Informal bridges from vocational ISCED 3 and 4 offered at institutional level	22	7
Formally regulated bridges from vocational ISCED 5 to academic ISCED 6		24

Entry Pathway	ISCED Level 5					
	Global	Africa	Arab States	Asia and the Pacific	Europe	Latin America and the Caribbean
General secondary leaving certificate at ISCED 3	59	19	6	10	15	9
Vocational secondary leaving certificate at ISCED 3	43	12	5	9	13	4
Vocational formal qualification at ISCED 4	43	13	5	9	12	4
General formal qualification at ISCED 4	36	10	4	8	10	4
RPL based on non-formal education	29	8	2	7	7	5
RPL based on informal learning	27	7	2	8	8	2
A special admission, aptitude or university entrance test	25	5	1	5	10	4
Adult Learner Education Certificate	25	5	1	6	5	8
Special preparatory course/s	24	11	1	5	5	2
Informal bridges from vocational ISCED 3 and 4 offered at institutional level	22	8	1	5	4	4
Formally regulated bridges from vocational ISCED 5 to academic ISCED 6	0	4	1	1	5	1

Entry Pathway	ISCED Level 6

	Global	Africa	Arab States	Asia and the Pacific	Europe	Latin America and the Caribbean
General secondary leaving certificate at ISCED 3	44	14	4	6	12	8
Vocational secondary leaving certificate at ISCED 3	30	8	4	4	10	4
Vocational formal qualification at ISCED 4	28	6	2	9	8	3
General formal qualification at ISCED 4	29	9	2	6	9	3
RPL based on non-formal education	20	3		4	9	4
RPL based on informal learning	12	3		3	5	1
A special admission, aptitude or university entrance test	20	6		3	6	5
Adult Learner Education Certificate	19	5		4	4	6
Special preparatory course/s	14	4	1	1	5	3
Informal bridges from vocational ISCED 3 and 4 offered at institutional level	7	2		1	3	7
Formally regulated bridges from vocational ISCED 5 to academic ISCED 6	24	6	2	5	5	6

Q5. Does your higher education system offer opportunities for students to transfer (credits) within the same field of study in higher education?

Transfer facilitated by:	Within the same HEI	Between HEIs of the same type	Between different types of HEIs	N/A
A national regulation	43	38	30	20

A national credit transfer system	28	26	22	29
A regional or sub-regional credit transfer system	16	12	11	36
Intra-or inter-institutional agreement	30	27	21	21

	Africa			Arab States			Asia and the Pacific		
	Within the same HEI	Between HEIs of the same type	Between different types of HEIs	Within the same HEI	Between HEIs of the same type	Between different types of HEIs	Within the same HEI	Between HEIs of the same type	Between different types of HEIs
A national regulation	11	10	8	4	4	3	10	9	6
A national credit transfer system	10	9	7	3	3	2	5	4	4
A regional or sub-regional credit transfer system	5	3	2	1	1	1	4	4	3
Intra-or inter-institutional agreement	14	10	7	1	1	1	4	5	5

Europe			Latin America and the Caribbean		
Within the same HEI	Between HEIs of the same type	Between different types of HEIs	Within the same HEI	Between HEIs of the same type	Between different types of HEIs
13	12	10	5	3	3
8	9	8	2	1	1
2	3	4	3	1	1
6	6	5	5	5	3

Q6. Does your higher education system offer opportunities for students to transfer (credits) across different fields of study?

Transfer facilitated by:	Within the same HEI	Between HEIs of the same type	Between different types of HEIs	N/A
A national regulation	37	31	24	21
A national credit transfer system	27	24	21	27
A regional or sub-regional credit transfer system	11	9	9	35
Intra-or inter-institutional agreement	23	20	18	25

	Africa			Arab States			Asia and the Pacific		
	Within the same HEI	Between HEIs of the same type	Between different types of HEIs	Within the same HEI	Between HEIs of the same type	Between different types of HEIs	Within the same HEI	Between HEIs of the same type	Between different types of HEIs
A national regulation	9	7	5	4	4	2	8	8	6
A national credit transfer system	8	7	6	3	3	1	6	6	6
A regional or sub-regional credit transfer system	3	2	2	1	1	1	3	4	3
Intra-or inter-institutional agreement	12	9	8	1	1		2	3	4

Europe			Latin America and the Caribbean		
Within the same HEI	Between HEIs of the same type	Between different types of HEIs	Within the same HEI	Between HEIs of the same type	Between different types of HEIs
10	9	8	6	3	3
7	7	7	3	1	1
2	2	3	2		
3	3	3	5	4	3

Q7. Tick relevant circle/s if your education system has a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) including:

NQF includes:	Yes	No
Higher education	54	31
Vocational education	54	21

General basic education (primary and secondary)	51	24
Further (adult) education	38	37
Occupational standards	30	44
Non-formal learning	25	50
Informal learning	21	54
A formal linkage to a Regional or Sub-Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF)	20	54

NQF includes:	Yes	No	Africa	Arab States	Asia and the Pacific	Europe	Latin America and the Caribbean
Higher education	54	31	16	5	7	19	7
Vocational education	54	21	18	4	8	19	5
General basic education (primary and secondary)	51	24	17	4	6	19	5
Further (adult) education	38	37	11	2	4	15	6
Occupational standards	30	44	13	2	4	6	5
Non-formal learning	25	50	11	1	2	6	5
Informal learning	21	54	9	1	2	6	3
A formal linkage to a Regional or Sub-Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF)	20	54	6	4	1	7	2

Q8. Tick the relevant circle if your higher education system provides:

The HE system provides Quality Assurance:	Yes	No
At programme level	65	10
At institutional level	63	12

The HE system provides Quality Assurance:	Yes	No	Africa	Arab States	Asia and the Pacific	Europe	Latin America and the Caribbean
At programme level	65	10	19	6	10	20	10
At institutional level	63	12	20	5	10	18	10

Q9. Does your education system have a National Qualifications Framework with any of the following linkages to programme quality assurance?

NQF linkages to programme quality assurance	Yes	No	Not Applicable
NQF level descriptors and programme QA stardards are aligned	47	12	16
Programme QA is a prerequisite for accreditation/registration of a programme on the NQF	45	12	18
Programme QA focusing on learning outcomes is a prerequisite for accreditation/registration of a programme on the NQF	45	11	19
NQF programme descriptors and programme QA are aligned	44	14	17

NQF linkages to programme quality assurance	Yes	No	N/A	Africa	Asia and the Pacific	Europe	Latin America and the Caribbean	Arab States
NQF level descriptors and programme QA stardards are aligned	47	12	16	16	7	17	3	4
Programme QA is a prerequisite for accredidation/registration of a programme on the NQF	45	12	18	14	7	17	3	4

Programme QA focusing on learning outcomes is a prerequisite for accedidation/registration of a programme on the NQF	45	11	19	14	7	17	3	4
NQF programme descriptors and programme QA standards are aligned	44	14	17	15	7	15	3	4

Q10. Does your education system provide information, advice and guidance to current and prospective students on available flexible learning pathways?

Availability of information and guidance services	Yes	No
Institutional arrangements in-house	57	18
A national information and guidance system	40	35
Institutional arrangements outsourced to external guidance services	21	53

Availability of information and guidance services	Yes	No	Africa	Arab States	Asia and the Pacific	Europe	Latin America and the Caribbean
Institutional arrangements in-house	57	18	19	3	10	16	9
A national information and guidance system	40	35	13	3	8	11	5
Institutional arrangements outsourced to external guidance services	21	53	7	1	2	10	1

Q11. Are FLP part of your country's regulatory or legislative framework and/or explicit national policy pertaining to higher education?

FLP are part of:	Yes	No
Policy (e.g. strategy, action plan)	55	19
Legislation	45	28
Regulation	45	28

FLP are part of:	Yes	No	Africa	Arab States	Asia and the Pacific	Europe	Latin America and the Caribbean
Policy (e.g. strategy, action plan)	55	19	16	5	12	16	6
Legislation	45	28	13	3	11	14	4
Regulation	45	28	12	4	11	14	4

Q12. Does the legislation, regulation or policy to support flexible learning pathways in your national higher education system indicate any particular outcome?

Outcomes supported through FLP	Yes	No
Reduced dropout rates/increased completion of studies	45	27
Stregthened equity in progression of studies	48	23
Facilitated labour market (re-)entry and career progression	48	24

Improved general level of education/qualifications in society	52	19
Better responsiveness to diverse student needs	54	18
Widened participation in HE	55	16

Outcomes supported through FLP	Yes	No	Africa	Arab States	Asia and the Pacific	Europe	Latin America and the Caribbean
Reduced dropout rates/increased completion of studies	45	27	13	5	11	12	4
Stregthened equity in progression of studies	48	23	16	5	12	11	4
Facilitated labour market (re-)entry and career progression	48	24	13	5	12	13	5
Improved general level of education/qualifications in society	52	19	16	5	12	15	4
Better responsiveness to diverse student needs	54	18	18	5	12	15	4
Widened participation in HE	55	16	18	4	12	15	6

Q13. The legislation, regulation or policy to support flexible learning pathways in higher education in your country cover the following types of higher education:

Types of HE covered by FLP policy	Number of countries
Both public and private	49
Only public higher education	12
Only private higher education	1
My HE system does not have any legislation, regulation or policy to support FLP	12

Types of HE covered by FLP policy	Number of countries	Africa	Arab States	Asia and the Pacific	Europe	Latin America and the Caribbean
Both public and private	49	18	5	8	14	4
Only public higher education	12	1	0	3	6	2
Only private higher education	1	0	0	1	0	0
My HE system does not have any legislation, regulation or policy to support FLP	12	4	0	1	1	6

Q14. The legislation, regulation or policy to support flexible learning pathways in higher education in your country cover/s the following ISCED levels:

ISCED Levels covered by FLP policy	Number of countries
ISCED Level 4	35
ISCED Level 5	52
ISCED Level 6	53
ISCED Level 7	43
My HE system does not have any legislation, regulation or policy to support FLP	11

ISCED Levels covered by FLP policy	Number of countries	Africa	Arab States	Asia and the Pacific	Europe	Latin America and the Caribbean
ISCED Level 4	35	10	3	8	8	6
ISCED Level 5	52	16	4	10	15	7
ISCED Level 6	53	17	5	8	18	5
ISCED Level 7	43	11	5	7	16	4
My HE system does not have any legislation, regulation or policy to support FLP	11	5	0	1	1	4

Q15. In your country, flexible learning pathways in higher education are supported by the following policies:

Policies supporting FLP	Yes	No
Specific national policy for FLP	32	42
Policy on CATS	40	34
Policy on RPL	41	33
Policy for Lifelong Learning	46	28
Policy on NQF	48	25
Policy on information and guidance for students	49	25

Policies supporting FLP	Yes	No	Africa	Arab States	Asia and the Pacific	Europe	Latin America and the Caribbean
Specific national policy for FLP	32	42	9	3	9	9	2
Policy on CATS	40	34	12	4	8	16	0
Policy on RPL	41	33	13	3	10	14	2
Policy for Lifelong Learning	46	28	14	3	10	16	3
Policy on NQF	48	25	14	3	10	17	4
Policy on information and guidance for students	49	25	14	4	10	16	5

Q16. To what degree has/have the policy/ies to support flexible learning pathways in higher education been implemented?

Degree of implementation of policies	In planning	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	N/A

Separate national policy for FLP	7	11	12	21
Policy for Lifelong Learning	9	15	10	10
Policy on RPL	9	12	18	14
Policy on CATS	11	9	21	12
Policy on information and guidance for students	5	12	26	7
Policy on NQF	12	10	28	5

Degree of implementation of policies that support FLP, Africa

Degree of implementation of policies that support FLP, Arab States

Degree of implementation of policies that support FLP, Asia and the Pacific

Degree of implementation of policies that support FLP, Europe

Degree of implementation of policies that support FLP, Latin America and the Caribbean
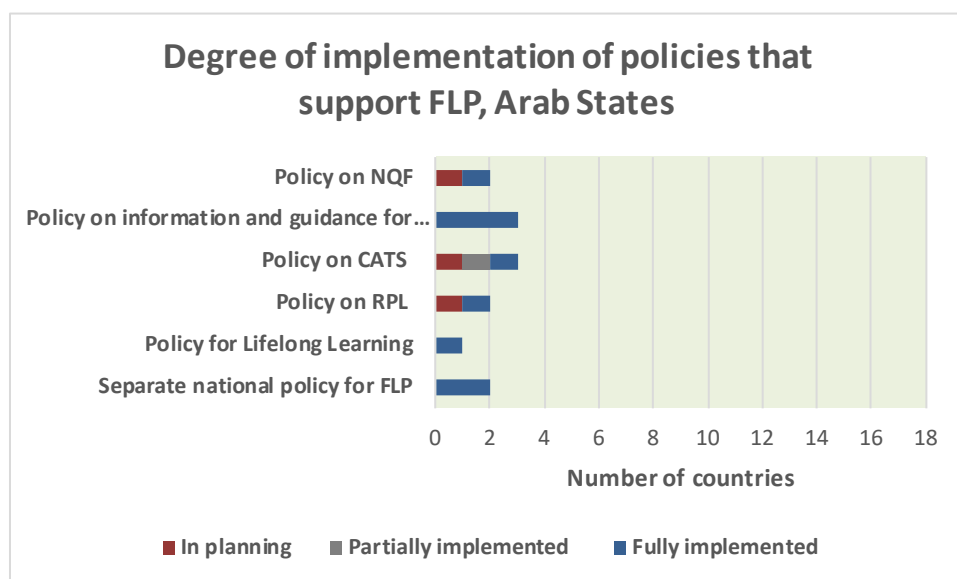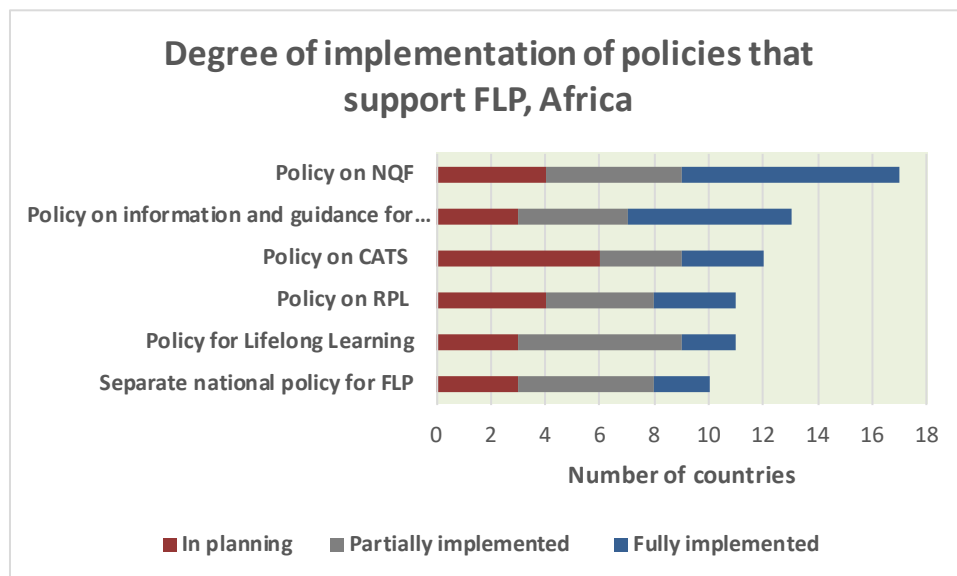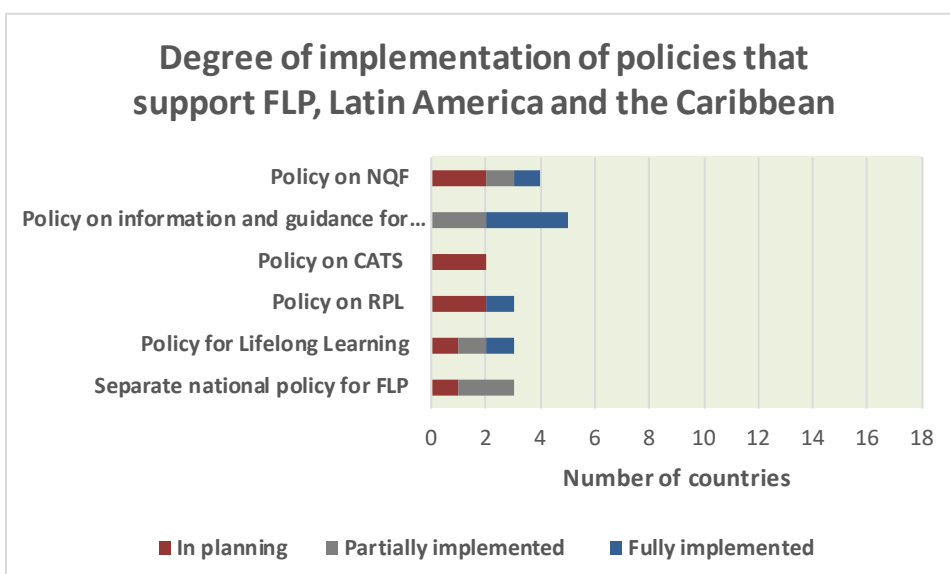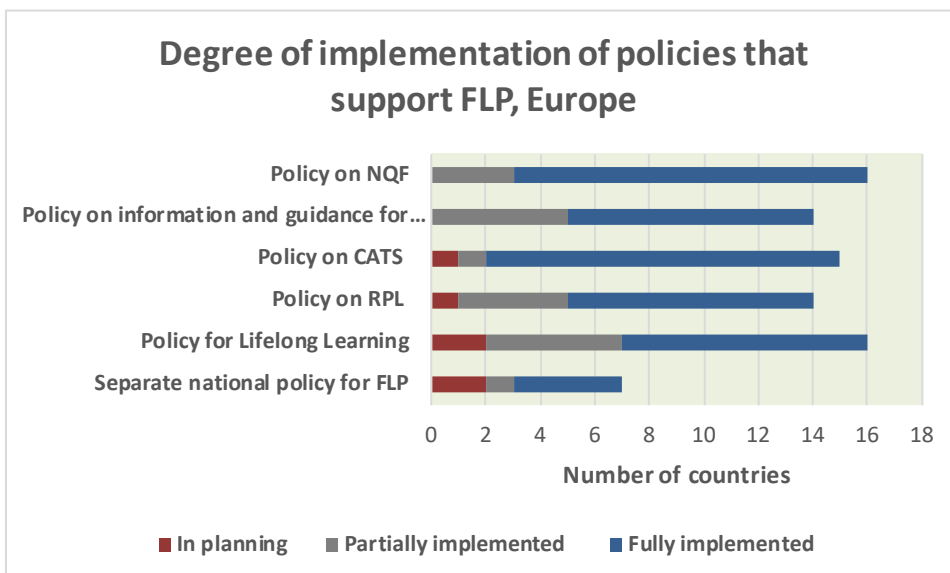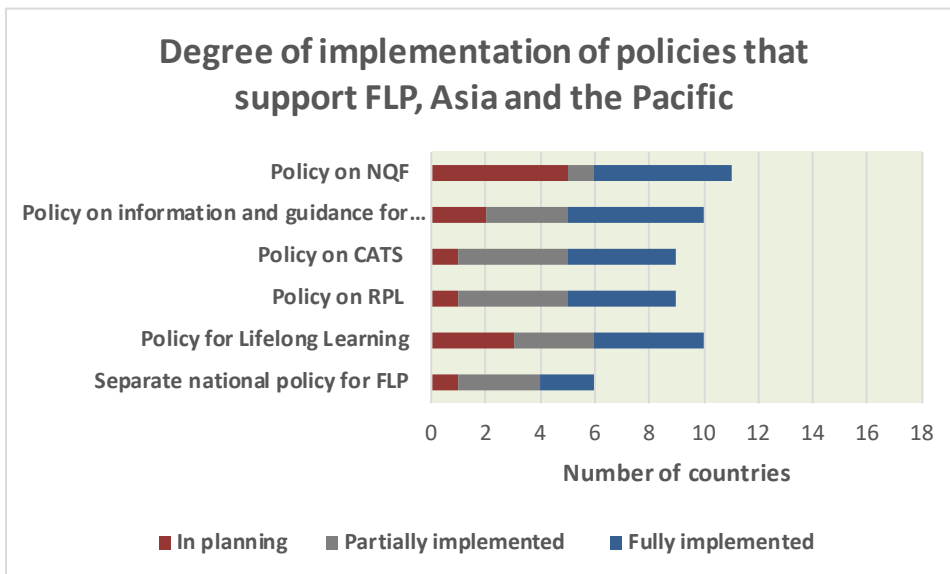
Q17. Are there resources allocated specifically to the implementation of this/these policy/ies?

A financial budget	Yes	No	N/A
Policy on NQF	31	6	9
Policy on information and guidance for students	25	6	13
Policy for Lifelong Learning	24	4	17
Policy on RPL	20	7	18
Policy on CATS	18	7	19
Separate national policy for FLP	16	4	29

Staff development opportunities	Yes	No	N/A
Policy on NQF	27	5	9
Policy for Lifelong Learning	23	3	17
Policy on RPL	21	5	18
Policy on information and guidance for students	21	5	13
Policy on CATS	17	7	19
Separate national policy for FLP	16	3	29

A financial budget	Yes	No	N/A	Africa	Arab States	Asia and the Pacific	Europe	Latin America and the Caribbean
Separate national policy for FLP	16	4	29	8	1	5	2	0
Policy on CATS	18	7	19	8	2	3	5	0
Policy on RPL	20	7	18	8	1	4	5	2
Policy for Lifelong Learning	24	4	17	8	1	7	8	1
Policy on NQF	31	6	9	15	2	4	8	2
Policy on information and guidance for students	25	6	13	10	2	4	6	3

Staff development opportunities	Yes	No	N/A	Africa	Arab States	Asia and the Pacific	Europe	Latin America and the Caribbean
Separate national policy for FLP	16	3	29	6	2	6	2	0
Policy on CATS	17	7	19	3	3	5	6	0
Policy on RPL	21	5	18	4	2	7	6	2
Policy for Lifelong Learning	23	3	17	6	1	8	7	1
Policy on NQF	27	5	9	10	3	5	7	2
Policy on information and guidance for students	21	5	13	4	2	8	5	2

Q18. Are there any data collected to monitor policy implementation on a regular basis (i.e. at least once a year)?

Data collected on:	Yes	No	N/A
Policy for Lifelong Learning	27	15	11
Policy on information and guidance for students	27	13	13
Policy on NQF	25	21	9
Policy on RPL	21	19	15
Policy on CATS	18	17	17
Separate national policy for FLP	16	13	24

Data collected on:	Yes	No	N/A	Africa	Arab States	Asia and the Pacific	Europe	Latin America and the Caribbean
Separate national	16	13	24	7	2	5	1	1

policy for FLP							
Policy on CATS	18	17	17	6	3	4	5	0
Policy on RPL	21	19	15	5	2	6	6	2
Policy for Lifelong Learning	27	15	11	7	2	7	9	2
Policy on NQF	25	21	9	9	3	4	7	2
Policy on information and guidance for students	27	13	13	9	3	5	7	3

Q19. Has there been any evaluation of the policy implementation?

Evaluation of:	Yes	No	N/A
Policy on NQF	14	22	14
Policy for Lifelong Learning	13	23	15
Policy on information and guidance for students	11	20	17
Policy on RPL	10	23	17
Separate national policy for FLP	9	17	25
Policy on CATS	6	21	21

Evaluation of:	Yes	No	N/A	Africa	Arab States	Asia and the Pacific	Europe	Latin America and the Caribbean
Separate national policy for FLP	9	17	25	4	2	1	1	1
Policy on CATS	6	21	21	3	1	1	1	0
Policy on RPL	10	23	17	2	1	1	5	1
Policy for Lifelong Learning	13	23	15	2	0	3	6	2
Policy on NQF	14	22	14	6	1	2	4	1
Policy on information and guidance for students	11	20	17	5	1	1	1	3

Q20. In your opinion, what are the three most important enablers and the three most important factors lacking for implementation of the policy/ies to support flexible learning pathways in higher education in your country?

Implementation of policies that support FLP	Enablers	Factors Lacking
Clear targets	29	16
Political will and leadership	29	12
Finance	28	23
Effective management and coordination capacity	27	14
Employer/labour market involvement	27	14
Human resources	22	18
Enabling culture	20	21
Institutional autonomy	19	11
Inter-institutional cooperation agreements	18	11
Cross-border regional or sub-regional cooperation and instruments	15	15
Other stakeholder input	14	12
External expert advice	13	9

Implementation of policies that support FLP	Enablers				
	Africa	Arab States	Asia and the Pacific	Europe	Latin America and

					the Caribbean
Clear targets	10	3	6	8	2
Political will and leadership	12	1	7	7	2
Finance	13	1	4	8	2
Effective management and coordination capacity	13	1	6	7	0
Employer/labour market involvement	9	2	5	9	2
Human resources	10	1	5	5	1
Enabling culture	7	1	5	6	1
Institutional autonomy	9	1	4	4	1
Inter-institutional cooperation agreements	10	1	3	3	1
Cross-border regional or sub-regional cooperation and instruments	8	0	3	4	0
Other stakeholder input	8	0	3	3	0
External expert advice	8	0	3	2	0

	Factors lacking				
Implementation of policies that support FLP	**Africa**	**Arab States**	**Asia and the Pacific**	**Europe**	**Latin America and the Caribbean**
Clear targets	7	1	4	3	1
Political will and leadership	6	0	3	3	1
Finance	6	2	4	8	3
Effective management and coordination capacity	5	1	2	4	2
Employer/labour market involvement	7	2	4	1	0
Human resources	6	1	3	7	1
Enabling culture	5	0	6	7	3
Institutional autonomy	6	0	3	1	1
Inter-institutional cooperation agreements	6	0	4	1	0
Cross-border regional or sub-regional cooperation and instruments	6	1	4	2	2
Other stakeholder input	5	2	3	2	0
External expert advice	5	1	3	2	0