

The 2027 Bologna Process Implementation Report

Introduction

This paper outlines a proposal for the 2027 Bologna Process Implementation Report. It is the outcome of a reflection that has been taking place since early 2024, initially within the previous WG on Monitoring and the BFUG, and now taken forward by the newly established Working Group on Monitoring.

This reflection has been essential to address the challenges that can be anticipated for future reporting, and is primarily based on the challenges experienced during the production of the 2024 Bologna Process Implementation Report.

The document is structured in four sections. The first section recalls challenges related to the 2024 Bologna Process Implementation Report. The second section outlines outcomes of discussions that have already taken place. The third section outlines the process of developing the proposal and the basis on which it has been developed, while the final fourth section sets out a first skeleton proposal.

1. Challenges related to the 2024 Bologna Process Implementation Report

Within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), each Ministerial Communiqué establishes new policy commitments that are added to those already existing. Those that are already existing generally remain important, as to date none can be declared as having been fully implemented across all countries according to the criteria agreed to assess implementation. While it is essential not to lose sight of different commitments, it is equally important to recognise that not every commitment can be monitored within a single monitoring report.

The Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) has already agreed that it is not feasible to monitor an expanding agenda of policy commitments during each round of the monitoring process. The BFUG has also acknowledged difficulties related to the production of the 2024 Bologna Process Implementation Report, both for BFUG data providers and for the data collectors. The key difficulties regarding the 2024 report can be summarised as follows:

- The scope of the reporting exercise was too broad.
- Many BFUG data providers were unable to provide high quality, evidence-supported answers to the extensive number of questions, and were not able to meet the report's production deadlines.
- Data collectors, in turn, faced difficulties to prepare a very extensive data collection and, once data had been collected, to process and analyse very extensive information. Moreover, they faced the additional administrative burden of following up countries and ensuring the considerable checking required.

All the above issues compromised quality of information presented in the 2024 report.

2. Outcomes of BFUG and Working Group on Monitoring discussions

During 2024, the Working Group on Monitoring started addressing the above challenges. In this context, the group proposed different potential options for future reports, namely:

1. An option consisting of moving from reports mapping many topics to thematic reports focusing on one main thematic topic.
2. An option focusing on a small number of key indicators across different policy areas.
3. An option alternating the two above approaches.

After discussing these options with the BFUG, the agreed way forward is to develop a proposal around the second option. This option has been evaluated as the most appropriate, since it responds best to the need for regular implementation monitoring of the main policy commitments.

3. Developing the 2027 Bologna Process Implementation Report

Following the above, the Working Group on Monitoring has started discussing how to operationalise the chosen option, i.e. provide an overview of different thematic areas within a reporting exercise that is lighter both for BFUG members and for the data collectors. Several principles have been identified by the Working Group to guide this exercise.

Limit the number of BFUG indicators in each part of the report

While all policy commitments are important, this does not imply that it is necessary to monitor everything in every Bologna Process Implementation Report. To limit the extent of the BFUG data collection and to assure the quality of information collected, this proposal is based on the following guidelines:

- A chapter of 'simple indicators' (as opposed to composite 'scorecard indicators', which commonly monitor up to five dimensions), should include around ten indicators.
- A chapter constructed from composite 'scorecard indicators' should not include more than five indicators.
- A chapter with a mix of 'simple and scorecard indicators' should be situated between seven and eight indicators.

While indicative, the aim is to demonstrate that a chapter presenting 20 indicators, including 10 scorecard indicators and 10 simple indicators (e.g. Chapter 4 in the 2024 report) would need to be significantly re-constructed for the 2027 reporting. Moreover, these indicative numbers also signal that the 2024 chapter on Key Commitments might

require a division into several chapters. At the same time, the total number of chapters should remain reasonably consistent with previous editions.

Use the principle of indicator rotation

Future editions of the report could present indicators on a different frequency. This would mean that rather being updated and published in reports in 2027, 2030, 2032 and 2035 some indicators may only be updated in 2027 and 2032, and others only in 2030 and 2035. Through introducing a rotation concept, different editions of the report could put an accent on different aspects of a specific thematic area.

Potentially include relevant work undertaken by BFUG working groups/European stakeholder organisations/projects.

A description of the work and findings of BFUG working groups and projects conducted by other European organisations active in the field of higher education could potentially complement and enrich the report. This could be done in different ways (eg by including information from working group reports in the implementation report, or by experts producing text within a harmonised approach designed for the implementation report). There may be some risks in introducing such narrative sections into the implementation report, but the option may be considered appropriate in some chapters.

Eliminate or reduce statistical indicators

The 2027 Bologna report could substantially reduce statistical indicators based on the UOE data collection (see Chapters 1 and 6 in the 2024 report). The provision of these indicators requires substantial resources to be invested on the side of data collectors, especially due to organising and managing an extra data collection (through a separate project) for countries not covered by the UOE data collection.

The need for statistical data to be included in the Implementation report may be lessened by the establishment of the European Higher Education Sector Observatory (EHESO). Indeed, the EHESO, which has been conceived as a centralised platform integrating diverse higher education data from Erasmus+ programme countries could function as a source of quantitative information complementing or feeding into the 2027 Bologna Process Implementation Report. Currently the geographical coverage of the EHESO includes the majority of EHEA countries but not all of them, and this could be a matter for policy discussion on the future development of the EHESO.

4. Proposal

The Working Group proposes the following outline structure. It aims to align with the adopted working group structures for this period, and is intended as a skeleton which would need to be fleshed out and developed in the coming months:

- o) Introduction & executive summary
- 1) Degree structures

This chapter would include Scorecard indicators on Degree Structures, ECTS and NQF. It would also potentially include information on work being undertaken by other relevant European level projects.

2) Recognition

This chapter would include Scorecard indicators on the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and on Automatic Recognition. Indicators related to recognition of prior non formal and informal learning could also be considered. information on work undertaken by relevant European level projects could also be considered.

3) Quality assurance

This chapter would include Scorecard indicators on compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines, and on student and international representation in external quality assurance. It would also include information on the implementation of the European Approach to quality assurance of joint programmes, as well as on cross-border quality assurance. It would also potentially include information on work in relevant projects at European level. The source for the majority of indicators would be EQAR, and TPG C will be consulted on the specific content.

4) Fundamental Values

The content of this chapter will require discussion with the Fundamental Values Working Group (which is responsible for developing and trialling indicators on fundamental values). Potentially the chapter can provide a state of the art description and analysis of respect and implementation of EHEA fundamental values. It may also include information on relevant European projects on fundamental values. The data collection to the BFUG would be limited to questions related to de jure implementation.

5) Social Dimension

The content of this chapter will require discussion with the Thematic Peer Group on the Social Dimension. It could include up to 5 of the scorecard indicators used in the 2024 report (with data for the other scorecard indicators to be collected in the period leading up to the 2030 report). It would also potentially include information on work being undertaken by other relevant European level projects.

6) Internationalisation and mobility

The content of this chapter will require discussion with the Working Group on mobility and internationalisation, particularly to identify relevant qualitative indicators. Some quantitative data may be extracted from the EHESO, although not every EHEA system would be included. The chapter would also potentially include information on work being undertaken in different European-level projects.