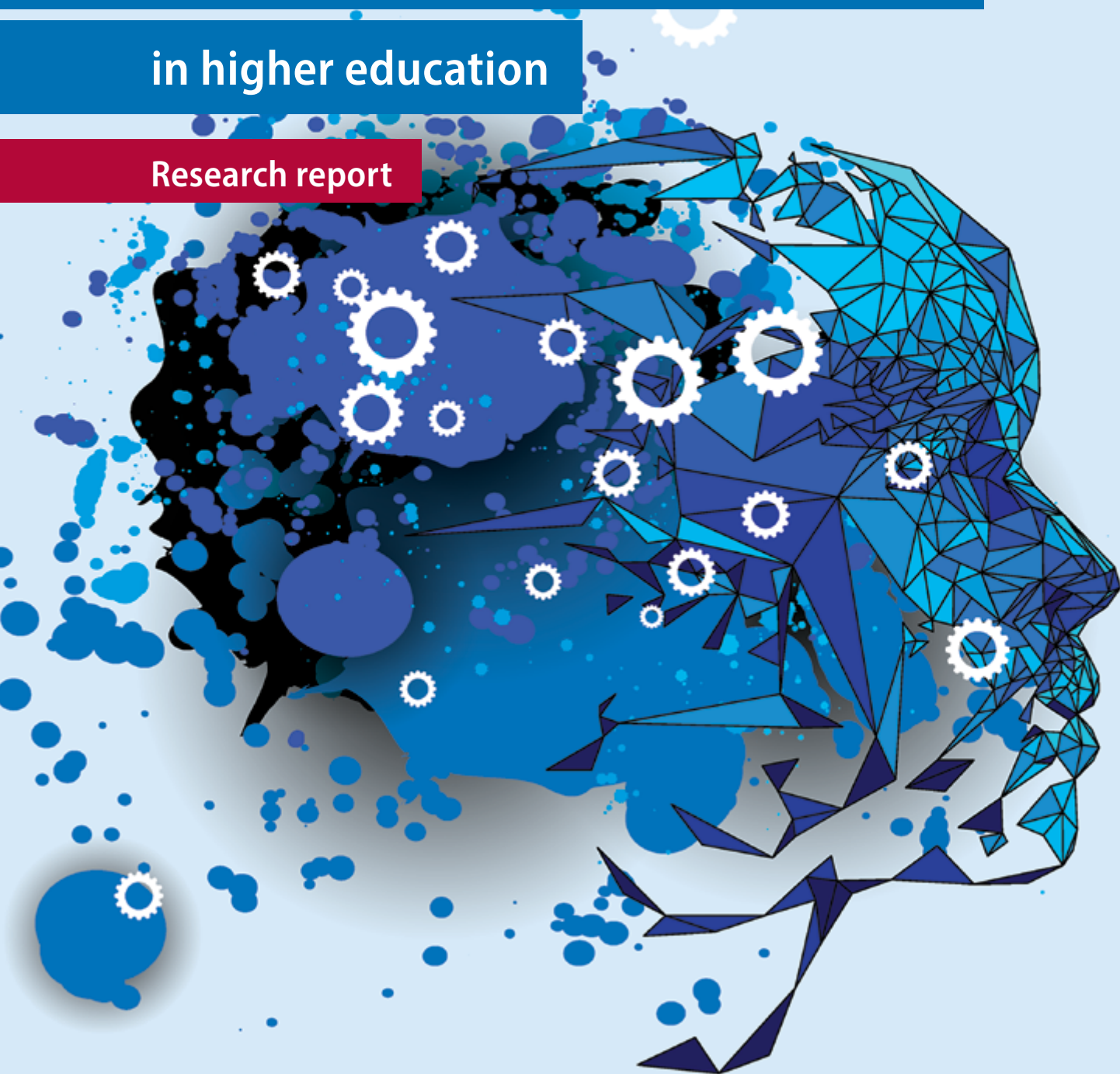


International trends of lifelong learning

in higher education

Research report



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The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), located in Hamburg, Germany, is a specialized UNESCO institute and is the only organizational unit in the United Nations family that holds a global mandate for lifelong learning. UIL promotes and supports lifelong learning with a focus on adult learning, continuing education, literacy and non-formal basic education.

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This report is published as part of a wider research project on the contribution of higher education institutions to lifelong learning, which was conducted by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning and Shanghai Open University from 2020 to 2022. Key components of the project include an extensive literature review, an international survey on higher education institutions' (HEIs) engagement in lifelong learning (LLL), and case studies on institutional approaches to LLL. These activities are complemented by three thematic studies, on (1) the role of universities in building learning cities, (2) universities addressing the needs of older learners, and (3) universities' social responsibility and community engagement. Based on the comprehensive sets of quantitative and qualitative data collected across all world regions, this research constitutes a major step forward in building an international knowledge base on the role of HEIs in establishing LLL opportunities for all.

The research project was overseen by UIL's Director, Mr David Atchoarena, coordinated by Team Leader Mr Raúl Valdés-Cotera, and conducted by Ms Edith Hammer, Ms Mo Wang and Ms Nora Lorenz, with support from Mr Nicolas Jonas and Mr Alex Howells.

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Foreword

In the context of fast-paced technological developments, the climate crisis, persistent social inequalities and demographic shifts, there is a need to rethink learning for people of all ages and to transform education systems. With increasingly unpredictable labour markets, reskilling and upskilling throughout life becomes an essential part of people's professional pathways. In addition to digitalization, robotics and automation, the shift towards low-carbon economies is expected to reshape labour markets, resulting in a growing demand for skills to support this green transition. These changes will also deepen the inequalities between population groups, disproportionately impacting those who are already at a disadvantage.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) have a vital role to play in building the knowledge and skills that are needed to ensure healthy, prosperous and inclusive societies. Nevertheless, responding to the world's challenges requires HEIs to evolve into lifelong learning institutions, reflecting a strong commitment to flexibility and responsiveness to meet the needs of diverse cohorts of learners. To address this diversity, HEIs need to undergo a transformation. First, by offering more flexible learning provision and assessment for adult learners. Second, by cultivating innovative pedagogies that recognize and make use of learners' prior work and life experiences. And, third, by establishing flexible learning pathways, which includes the strengthening of information and guidance services. To ensure the relevance of skills development and employability and respond to pressing local challenges, partnerships with the private sector and community organizations are equally vital.

It is important to note that the role of higher education extends far beyond work skills. We need to ensure that all people, in particular vulnerable groups, can benefit equally from learning opportunities. Making higher education more inclusive and equitable requires commitment from governments (whose job it is to establish policy environments and funding mechanisms that are conducive to lifelong learning) and HEI leaders (who are responsible for mainstreaming lifelong learning into universities' everyday operations). Building strong ties between the higher education sector and schools, technical and vocational education and training institutions, employers and communities is also essential for ensuring lifelong and life-wide learning provision.

Against the background of a global education crisis and a growing recognition of the importance of lifelong learning, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) conducted a comprehensive research project that included, among other components, an international survey on the contribution of higher education institutions to lifelong learning, the results of which are presented in this report.

These novel data, including responses from 399 higher education institutions worldwide, offer important insights into the ways in which lifelong learning is integrated into the structures and practices of higher education. Selected survey findings were presented at several international and regional events throughout 2022, including the UNESCO World Higher Education Conference in Barcelona. The results of the study were received with great interest from the audience, reflecting the importance of the topic in the higher education sector.

Within the current global debate on transforming education, the idea of recognizing a universal entitlement to lifelong learning is gaining traction. The call to establish a right for lifelong learning was made in the UN Secretary-General's report, *Our Common Agenda* (United Nations, 2021), and further echoed at the Seventh International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VII) in June 2022 and in the UN Transforming Education Summit in autumn 2022. Universities and other HEIs are essential stakeholders for lifelong learning. In its report, *Reimagining Our Futures Together*, the International Commission on the Futures of Education argued that higher education institutions 'must be active in every aspect of building a new social contract for education' (International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2021, p. 5) and were destined to become 'more involved in adult education practices' (*ibid.*, p. 156).

Within the broader framework of these international developments and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, UIL will continue to promote research and capacity-building in lifelong learning, including in the higher education sector. This report provides salient evidence and thorough reflections on the contributions that higher education institutions can and already do make to lifelong learning. I hope that it provides readers with inspiration and impetus for further research and practical advancements in the field.

David Atchoarena
Director of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning

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This survey report is the result of the efforts of many individuals and institutions from around the world. Above all, UIL would like to thank the staff of the 399 higher education institutions who took the time to complete the online questionnaire, thus informing this report with comprehensive data and insights.

The report was developed within the broader framework of UIL's research on the contribution of higher education institutions to lifelong learning, which has been made possible as a result of funding from Shanghai Open University (SOU), People's Republic of China. We would like to thank Mr Wei Jia, President of SOU, and Ms Wen Yuan, former President of SOU, as well as our colleagues, Ms Zhuhua Weng, Ms Yu Han and Ms Xiaojie Xue, for their continuous support and tireless collaboration over the past three years.

The International Association of Universities (IAU) assisted the Institute with the development, administration and processing of the survey. It is because of IAU's global network and engagement that the survey could be conducted with success. Thanks go especially to Ms Hilligje van't Land, Secretary-General of IAU, who led the process. The project benefitted immensely from her outstanding expertise in the field of higher education. UIL also thanks Ms Lianne Guerra, who provided great support during the development and implementation of the survey.

In the spring of 2020, the questionnaire was piloted among 18 higher education institutions from all UNESCO regions, namely the Universidad del Salvador (Argentina), the University of Abomey-Calavi (Benin), the University of Turku (Finland), FernUniversität in Hagen (Germany), the University of Pécs (Hungary), Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna (Italy), the University of the West Indies (Jamaica), Tokai University (Japan), the University of Duhok (Iraq), East China Normal University (People's Republic of China), Qatar University (Qatar), Ajou University (Republic of Korea), the University of Rwanda (Rwanda), the University of South Africa (South Africa), the Open University of Catalonia (Spain), Gulu University and Makerere University (Uganda) and Swansea University (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland). The pilot was key to the development of the survey tool and we would like to thank those respondents for completing the questionnaire and providing comments.

The research project also benefitted from collaborations with several partners who helped to widely promote the survey, including the Association of African Universities (AAU), the Continuing Education Network of Latin America and Europe (RECLA), the European University Association (UA), the European University Continuing Education Network (eucen), the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP–UNESCO), and the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO–IESALC).

Throughout its different phases, the project was accompanied by an advisory group that contributed to the development and implementation of the survey, namely: Mr Uwe Elsholz, Mr Etienne Ehouan Ehile, Ms Nadia Gamal el-Din, Ms Margarita Guarello de Toro, Ms Michaela Martin, Mr Balázs Németh, Mr Michael Osborne, Mr Séamus Ó Tuama, Mr Francesc Pedró, Mr Johnny Sung, Ms Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić, Ms Hilligje van't Land, Mr Peter Wells, Mr Lizhong Yu and Ms Thérèse Zhang Pulkowski.

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In addition to the survey findings, the chapters of the report are informed by a set of thematic background papers, which were prepared by Mr Sergio Cardenas, Ms Nora Lorenz and Ms Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić. In addition, the initial drafting process was supported by Ms Ashley Stepanek Lockhart and UIL interns Ms Kirstin Sonne, Ms Pauline Crepy, Ms Nilakshi Das and Ms Marta Borg-Rodriguez.

Executive summary

The research report, *International Trends of Lifelong Learning in Higher Education*, provides a comprehensive overview of the development of lifelong learning (LLL) in the higher education sector worldwide. It examines how higher education institutions (HEIs) have contributed to LLL and shows the levels of advancement in different areas of implementation. The report is based on the results of an international survey conducted in 2020, which was led by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) in cooperation with the International Association of Universities (IAU) and Shanghai Open University (SOU).

Valid responses to the survey were submitted by 399 institutions from 96 countries in all regions of the world. The report considers three main aspects of lifelong learning institutionalization in higher education. These are supportive policy environments to promote LLL in higher education; institutional governance and implementation; and how and to what extent HEIs are widening access through diversification and flexibility.

Key findings

Policy environments

- National legislation and frameworks reflect political support, and incentivize institutional implementation and resource allocation for LLL. Roughly two-thirds of the HEIs surveyed reported that their country has national legislation pertaining to LLL in place, indicating strong national commitments to widening LLL opportunities in higher education.
- For many of the HEIs surveyed, lifelong learning is a priority, which is reflected in their mission statements. This suggests that institutions take LLL seriously as a responsibility of HEIs.
- At the institutional level, strategies and policies are drivers for LLL development, and demonstrate commitment and purpose. A clear majority of HEIs have an LLL strategy in place, with the largest proportion responding that this strategy is at an institutional level. Moreover, the majority of HEIs indicated a strong intention to put policy into action.
- There is a positive relationship between supportive national legislation and the existence of institutional strategies for LLL, highlighting the importance of national policy environments and the promotion of LLL within HEIs.

Institutional governance and implementation

- Institution-wide approaches to implementing LLL require organizational structures, sufficient resource allocation and stakeholder management. These institutional practices determine how LLL is organized and delivered, and what learning opportunities are ultimately available to learners.
- The establishment of a central coordinating LLL unit can be helpful to streamline implementation. Around half of the HEIs reported having an LLL unit, with varying functions.
- Against the backdrop of a general decline in public funding for higher education, HEIs reported that tuition fees, along with on-demand services, are the most relevant institutional funding sources for LLL activities. Nevertheless, lifelong learners most often rely on personal resources to participate in LLL. While these results are in line with general trends, they are important to note in relation to the widening of access that should go hand in hand with LLL.
- Another key aspect of LLL implementation, quality assurance (QA), shows a promising degree of institutionalization, even if QA mechanisms for LLL are not yet comparable to what they are for regular study programmes in HEIs. Roughly half of the institutions surveyed reported having systematic QA procedures for LLL in place. There is a positive relationship between quality assurance procedures and institutional strategies, underlining the importance of a conducive policy environment.

Widening access through diversification and flexibility

- Making lifelong learning a core mission of HEIs means opening up to a wider target group and incorporating more innovative and flexible forms of learning provision to meet the diverse educational needs of non-traditional learners.
- In terms of access and inclusivity, the two most important groups targeted for LLL activities by HEIs are (1) working people requiring upskilling and reskilling and (2) individuals working in public and private organizations. These results indicate a focus on professional development, with relatively less attention given to vulnerable groups and non-traditional learners.
- To address the diverse needs of lifelong learners, more flexible learning times, places and modalities, as well as shorter non-degree programmes and alternative credentials to certify learning outcomes, are needed. While traditional learning formats prevail over their more flexible counterparts in the HEIs surveyed, flexible formats are gaining traction. Online and other forms of technology-enhanced learning in particular are used extensively by the majority of HEIs in the sample, with just over half offering at least one form of alternative digital and non-digital credentials beyond traditional degrees, diplomas and certificates.
- Flexible learning pathways (FLPs) enhance access to higher education and encourage transfer options between institutions and programmes. Around two-thirds of the participating HEIs indicated that they have policies in place to support FLPs.
- Admission seems to be a major obstacle to expanding LLL in HEIs. Most institutions in the sample are still restrictive, requiring applicants to have a general secondary school certificate in order to access to higher education.
- Institutions show a high commitment towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with 270 HEIs stating that their LLL provision aims to contribute to the achievement of the agenda. Out of these HEIs, nearly all also indicated that their LLL provision contributes either 'strongly' or 'to some extent' to achieving inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities, which encapsulates Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.
- Essential to widening access and diversifying learning opportunities is engaging with the wider community. The HEIs in the sample do this to a considerable extent, primarily by hosting public lectures and workshops and by collaborating with other universities and HEIs. There is also high engagement with the private sector, suggesting that reaching out to wider society is a key priority for HEIs.

Outlook

Overall, the survey results show that, in many HEIs around the world, important steps and initiatives have been taken towards implementing lifelong learning within the field of higher education. Nevertheless, more holistic and institution-wide approaches are needed to fully transform HEIs into LLL institutions.

1 Introduction

There is growing recognition of the centrality of lifelong learning (LLL) to future skills development and the transition to a more sustainable world. Nevertheless, making lifelong learning a reality for all requires the concerted efforts of a wide range of stakeholders, including national and local governments, formal and non-formal education sectors, and enterprises and civil society organizations, among others.

As traditional ‘hubs’ of knowledge production, higher education institutions (HEIs) are well positioned to develop and provide LLL opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds. HEIs’ conventional mission to improve skills and generate knowledge qualifies them to take a leading role in promoting learning, beyond their customary study modalities and target group. And while teaching traditional programmes of study – defined by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2011) as bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degrees or International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) levels 6 to 8 – and research will continue to form their core mission, HEIs also have a mandate to promote LLL in order to address the many challenges of our time.¹

Based on the results of an international survey and a literature review, this report examines how HEIs are responding to this mandate and examines the levels of advancement in different areas of lifelong learning implementation.

¹ Throughout this report, two closely related concepts, ‘lifelong learning’ and ‘continuing education’, are mentioned. While they are often used interchangeably in the context of higher education, they differ in terms of scope. *Lifelong learning* is an all-encompassing concept that includes learning activities for people of all ages (children, young people, adults, older people, girls and boys, women and men), in all life-wide contexts (family, school, the community, the workplace, and so on) and through a variety of modalities (formal, non-formal and informal), which, together, meet a wide range of learning needs and demands (UIL, 2022a). Within higher education, LLL refers to a range of activities, such as continuing education, the recognition of prior learning, interdisciplinary research on lifelong learning, community research and services, and knowledge transfer activities, among others (UIE, 1997). In many HEIs, *continuing education* forms a vital part of lifelong learning engagement. It involves learning opportunities for adult learners to either prepare them for traditional study, provide a more flexible alternative to traditional study (e.g. evening classes or online learning), or it may be subsequent to traditional study programmes (Teichler, 1999; Teichler & Hanft, 2009), the latter being the most common option (including, for example, postgraduate and non-degree courses and workforce training).

1.1 Global trends and the changing mandates of higher education

Technological advancements, climate change and globalization, among other trends, have driven unprecedented socio-economic transformation around the world. During the last decades, the emergence of the knowledge society has also reshaped the world of work, which will continue to change at a rapid pace due to digitalization, automation and artificial intelligence. In *The Future of Jobs Report 2020*, ‘active learning and learning strategies’ is listed as one of the top-rated skills employers will look for in the future (World Economic Forum, 2020).

Prompted by these developments and considering the shortage of skilled workers in particular sectors in countries around the world, a wide range of professions will require new skill sets, which, in turn, will lead to an increasing demand for continuous training and skills development. As people’s active labour market involvement continues to increase over the next decades amid demographic changes, reskilling and upskilling will become an inherent part of professional life. HEIs, given their capacity to build knowledge and competences, are vital to future-oriented skills development. Nevertheless, in order to fulfil their role as lifelong partners for skills development, and to support equitable access to LLL, HEIs must adapt their teaching practices to better respond to the diverse needs of adult learners (Li, 2022; World Economic Forum, 2020).

The contribution of higher education institutions to lifelong learning goes beyond economic benefits however: HEIs are also in a position to promote holistic learning overall. More specifically, in addition to providing opportunities to develop skills for the workplace, HEIs can also broadcast to the wider public the concept of ‘learning as a continuum’ by identifying themselves as places that individuals can come to refresh their skills throughout their lives.

‘Learning to learn’ is not only relevant for professional skills development but also for pursuing personal interests outside of work. Learning has value in itself, as reflected in the notion of learning as a human right, which is not limited to professions but extends to a wide range of interests, skills, competences and creative endeavours that are relevant, for example, to communities, families and interpersonal relationships.

Moreover, lifelong learning is essential for sustainable development. By fostering the development of transversal skill sets, such as green skills and civic competences, within society, HEIs can also make an important contribution to social change. In light of major collective challenges, including climate change, demographic shifts, global migration and more, they are critical in leading the transformation towards a lifelong learning society. Considering demographic ageing, it becomes increasingly important for HEIs to address the needs of older learners who wish to broaden their knowledge and acquire new skills in fields of interest to them, enabling them to stay active members of society. HEIs can further have a positive impact on the development of their local and regional environments by connecting to relevant public stakeholders, other educational institutions and the private sector. Engaging with local communities – through service-learning, engaged research, policy advice, advocacy, student-led initiatives and volunteering – is another powerful way to create a more vibrant and sustainable society.

While HEIs were historically elitist institutions tasked primarily with educating young cohorts of often privileged students, their scope has massively expanded in the last decades, with a larger share of society participating in higher education. Today, HEIs are expected to respond to the needs of wider society and to use their resources and expertise to address common challenges – what is being increasingly described as their ‘third mission’. This has led to HEIs opening up to larger and more diverse student populations and establishing links with their local communities.

To provide individuals with access to education throughout their lives alongside work, family and other commitments, flexible course formats and delivery models are needed. This includes shorter, more tailored learning opportunities; for example, through weekend, evening and part-time study, guided online courses, self-directed learning and practical training sessions. Digital learning opportunities grew significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, with many institutions having to shift learning provision online within just a few weeks. And despite the many challenges that came with this, particularly in the early days of the pandemic, online learning delivery becomes more proficient every day. The flexibility to alternate between online and face-to-face learning is, not surprisingly, welcomed by a majority of students and staff and should be sustained in the long run. Moreover, online and mobile learning, including formats such as massive open online courses (MOOCs), increases the potential for new target groups to engage in LLL.

Also critical to the promotion of LLL in HEIs is the recognition and validation of prior learning. Skills are acquired not only in formal education but also in non-formal settings, including the workplace, at home and in the community, and through volunteering and self-study project. Mechanisms therefore need to be established to

recognize these skills as people progress in their careers and learning pathways. Bridging arrangements and support services are also essential to enable continuous learning across one’s lifespan, because they allow learners to progress across education levels and professional fields, vertically and horizontally, thereby enabling learners without traditional school-leaving qualifications to access study at the tertiary level. The increasing demand for shorter courses also calls for new forms of recognition. In recent years, ‘micro-credentials’, which supplement traditional degrees, have been promoted as a new and more flexible way of recognizing skills and knowledge (Council of the European Union, 2021).

Together, these different issues illustrate the profundity of modifications that transforming from an HEI to a lifelong learning institution entails. In order to start on this transformation, the higher education sector needs input from all levels of governance, which are responsible for promoting LLL as a mission of HEIs through international and regional frameworks, promoting conducive national policy environments defining LLL as a mission of the higher education sector, and institutional strategies for LLL, including strong leadership and governance structures for LLL implementation.

The need for a transformation of the higher education sector to address global trends and challenges is reflected in a range of global commitments, the intentions of which are to raise awareness and provide guidance. Over the past 15 years, several international and regional frameworks and recommendations, which highlight the importance of HEIs for promoting LLL and outline areas for transformation, have been developed. They also facilitate the development of conducive policy environments at the national level. For example, the *Mumbai Statement on Lifelong Learning, Active Citizenship and the Reform of Higher Education* (UIE, 1998), developed within the context of the fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V), held in 1997 in Hamburg, Germany, lays out holistic directions for HEIs to transform into LLL institutions and states that HEIs have ‘a special responsibility and competency for the production and dissemination of knowledge’, also pointing to the decolonization and democratization of different forms of knowledge (ibid., p. 4).

Building on this, *The Cape Town Statement on the Characteristic Elements of a Lifelong Learning Higher Education Institution* (University of the Western Cape and UIE, 2001) provided a more operational tool, proposing six characteristic elements for implementing and monitoring LLL in higher education, namely (1) overarching frameworks, (2) strategic partnerships and linkages, (3) research, (4) teaching and learning processes, (5) administration policies and mechanisms, and (6) student support systems and services (ibid., p. 4).

Within Europe, the European University Continuing Education Network (eucen) has been a strong promoter of lifelong learning in the higher education sector since

the early 2000s. Within the context of its BeFlex and BeFlex+ projects (Benchmarking Flexibility in the Bologna reforms), it generated knowledge on the progress that was being made by universities in promoting LLL in light of the Bologna Process, which seeks to bring more coherence to higher education systems across Europe in order to increase learner mobility and facilitate employability. This was followed by a set of recommendations and a training pack for transforming universities into lifelong learning institutions (eucen, 2007; eucen, 2009).

In 2008, the European University Association (EUA) issued the *European Universities' Charter on Lifelong Learning* (EUA, 2008), which enjoined universities to make 10 clear commitments to LLL. Recognizing that universities would be unable to accomplish these commitments without support, the charter also asks governments and regional partners to fulfil an equal number of commitments. By emphasizing the importance of national frameworks and support mechanisms, the charter advocates for concerted actions among all relevant actors. Governments are called upon to ensure that 'a suitable environment is created for universities to develop their contribution to lifelong learning' (ibid., p. 8).

The call for universities to promote LLL was repeated the following year, during the 2009 UNESCO World Higher Education Conference (WHEC). The outcome document specifies that 'the knowledge society needs diversity in higher education systems' and emphasizes the need for 'programmes for lifelong learning' (UNESCO, 2009, p. 3). The subsequent WHEC, held in 2022, further promoted LLL in higher education, listing flexible learning provision, flexible pathways with opportunities for multiple entry and re-entry, as well as micro-credentials as important ways 'to tackle the educational needs of adults at different stages of their personal and professional lives' (UNESCO, 2022a, p. 30).

In addition to these frameworks focusing on higher education, the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and specifically Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, called on the world to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all', further specifying in SDG target 4.3 the need to 'ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university' (United Nations, 2015, p. 17).

Such overarching global and regional frameworks are only effective when they are translated into national policies and institutional strategies. While acknowledging the importance of national policy environments, the focus of this report is nevertheless on the institutional level, exploring internal and external drivers of LLL in the higher education sector, institutional governance and support mechanisms for LLL, as well as specific approaches to widening access.

1.2 Methodology

This report is primarily informed by the results of an international survey on the contribution of higher education institutions to lifelong learning, conducted in autumn 2020. To provide background information on the various thematic strands included in the survey and to allow for contextual analysis, the survey data are complemented with academic literature and examples from selected institutions and countries.

Survey design and data collection

The international survey on HEIs' contribution to LLL was collaboratively developed with the International Association of Universities (IAU) and Shanghai Open University (SOU) and was supported by the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) and the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC). The design of the survey, in particular with regard to the key elements and specific items included, was informed by a comprehensive literature review. The questionnaire comprised 44 closed-ended questions, many of which were designed as multiple choice.

The draft questionnaire was circulated among the research project's advisory group, which was made up of international experts from universities and regional university associations. After integrating the experts' feedback, the survey was piloted among 18 HEIs, covering all UNESCO regions, between April and May 2020. This period was strongly marked by the first wave of the COVID-19 crisis, which was an extremely difficult situation for HEIs worldwide and, consequently, in which to pilot the study. The full survey was then launched by UIL and IAU in October 2020 in five languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French and Spanish) using a designated online platform (SurveyMonkey). Over a period of three months, the questionnaire² was distributed through the IAU World Higher Education Database and further promoted via a range of partner networks.

The survey primarily addressed senior leadership in HEIs and aimed for a consolidated institutional answer, instructing respondents to consult with relevant units before submitting the completed questionnaire. To foster a common understanding of expressions and concepts used in the survey, a glossary³ was included. By January 2021, 452 out of 2,191 participating institutions submitted responses to the questionnaire, which amounts to a completion rate of 18 per cent. After eliminating duplicate and invalid submissions, 399 valid responses remained, of which 268 (67.17%) were in English, 78 (19.44%) in Spanish, 23 (5.76%) in Chinese, 16 (4.01%) in Arabic, and 14 (3.51%) in French.

² The survey questionnaire can be accessed via the following link: bit.ly/UIL_HEI-LLL_questionnaire

³ The glossary can be accessed via the following link: bit.ly/UIL_HEI-LLL_glossary

Characteristics of responding institutions

In total, 96 countries from all five UNESCO regions are represented in the final results of the survey. As indicated, sampling techniques were not used when conducting the survey; rather, the questionnaire was widely distributed via the involved partners' networks in an effort to reach as many HEIs as possible. Consequently, the results are not statistically representative of HEIs more broadly (see **Table 1**) or of different types and modes of institutions (see **Table 2**). Moreover, the share of responses in the sample vary widely according to region, with 39.9 per cent of responses coming from institutions located in Asia and the Pacific and only 10.5 per cent of responses coming from institutions in Africa. Some countries are overrepresented in the sample, including the People's Republic of China,, Colombia, Ecuador, India,

Japan, Mexico, Pakistan, the Philippines and Spain, which, together, account for 47.6 per cent of survey responses. This was taken into consideration during the data analysis by contrasting the results of the overall survey with those of the overrepresented countries, where needed.

Regarding the mode of operation, the majority of participating HEIs (81.3%) are campus-based, 10.2 per cent of participating HEIs are mixed-mode, 6.7 per cent are distance HEIs, and a small share of responding institutions are open higher education institutions (2.4%). When it comes to funding, 62.9 per cent of HEIs in the sample are public institutions (with varying shares of private funds) and 33.4 per cent are private institutions (combining for-profit and not-for-profit HEIs). The largest share of HEIs in the sample (45.9%) are campus-based institutions that are at least 80 per cent publicly funded.

TABLE 1 HEIs participating in the survey by region

UNESCO region	Number of HEIs participating in the survey	Percentage of all responses
Africa	42	10.5%
Arab States	24	6%
Asia and the Pacific	159	39.9%
Europe and North America	99	24.8%
Latin America and the Caribbean	75	18.8%
Total	399	100%

UIL StatLink: bit.ly/UIL_HEI-LLL_table1

TABLE 2 Distribution of different types and modes of HEIs represented in the survey⁴

Type of institution	Mode of institution				Total
	Campus-based with at least 80% of content delivered on campus	Distance HEIs (including online and blended education)	Mixed-mode with at least 25% of content delivered as distance education	Open HEIs	
Public (<20% private funds)	45.9%	1.8%	4.5%	1.5%	53.6%
Public (>20% private funds)	6.5%	0.8%	1.8%	0.3%	9.3%
Private, not for profit	20.8%	2.8%	2.8%	0.3%	26.6%
Private, for profit	5.3%	0.5%	0.8%	0.3%	6.8%
Other	2.8%	0.8%	0.3%	0%	3.8%
Total	81.3%	6.7%	10.2%	2.4%	

UIL StatLink: bit.ly/UIL_HEI-LLL_table2

The sample comprises HEIs with a long history as well as recently established institutions. The oldest institution participating in the research is the University of Oxford, where there is evidence of teaching as early as 1096. By contrast, the youngest institution featured is the Mapúa Malayan Colleges Mindanao, which began operating in 2018. Half of the HEIs were established before 1976 and the other half from 1977 onwards. With regard to size, most institutions in the sample (37.3%) recorded having a student population between 5,001 and 20,000, 31.3 per cent stated having less than 5,000 students, and 21.6 per cent of responding HEIs reported having between 20,001 and 50,000 students. A relatively small share of participating institutions recorded large student populations, with 7 per cent saying they have between 50,001 and 100,000 students and 2.8 per cent having over 100,000.

Scope and limitations of the research

Owing to its international scope and comprehensiveness, the survey on the contribution of HEIs to LLL is unique. Although not statistically representative, the results offer a broad overview of the situation of lifelong learning in higher education institutions worldwide. By providing valuable insights into relevant conditions for LLL, support systems, common challenges, established mechanisms and practical approaches for LLL provision, the results constitute an important database and starting point for further research on this topic. In addition, the findings can potentially be used to support the development of institutional and national strategies to promote LLL in higher education and to contribute to a better understanding of the state of affairs concerning SDG 4 and SDG target 4.3 more specifically, the aim of which is to ensure that everyone has access to quality tertiary education.

As the data presented in this report are based on the responses given by the HEIs participating in the survey, it is important to acknowledge a certain degree of subjectivity in the information received. Even though the respondents were asked to consult with relevant departments and units within their institutions to enhance the accuracy of the data they provided in the survey, there is a risk that some questions were answered without this having been done. The respondents, depending on the positions they hold, will naturally have varying degrees of comprehension when it comes to the LLL policies, strategies and implementation methods exercised by their institutions. As previously mentioned, a glossary was provided to respondents in an effort to foster a common understanding of the expressions and concepts that were used in the survey. Nevertheless,

terms and concepts may still be interpreted quite differently, particularly for those respondents whose mother tongue differed from the languages in which the survey was available. In short, taking into consideration the global scope of the survey, which covers different national education systems involving different cultures and languages, a certain variance in the understanding of LLL and related topics is unavoidable and needs to be accepted within the international scope of this project.

Cross-tabulation techniques were used to seek out levels of association and potential relationships in the survey data. Quantitative data were obtained through closed-ended questions that either sought out binary responses (i.e. 'yes'/'no'/'do not know') or a range of responses through a Likert scale. Although the results provide important indications of baseline information, they do not allow for a comprehensive analysis of underlying dynamics, processes, mechanisms and relationships. These more complex issues, which support a deeper understanding of the HEIs' contribution to LLL, are explored in more detail in the accompanying case study research of six institutions from different UNESCO regions (UIL and SOU, forthcoming).

1.3 Overview of the chapters

The report comprises three sections, which are modelled on the three sections that made up the survey questionnaire. **Section 1** provides a summary of policy environments that are conducive to the promotion of LLL in higher education, starting with national legislation, policies and frameworks. This is followed by an exploration of strategic institutional approaches and internal drivers for LLL. **Section 2** focuses on institutional governance and implementation, including organizational structures for LLL in HEIs, mechanisms for funding and quality assurance, and an examination of strengths and weaknesses HEIs face when implementing LLL.

Section 3 examines ways to widen access to LLL in HEIs, for example through diversification of learning opportunities and flexibility to meet the needs of a wider range of learners. It looks at the ways in which HEIs enhance access to and participation in LLL, with an emphasis on enabling flexible pathways and mechanisms for the recognition of prior learning, and providing flexible, modular study programmes and technology-enhanced learning. It also considers the responsibility of higher education in light of the SDGs and includes data on community engagement and links with the private sector. Main findings of the survey and an overarching analysis of the results are captured in the conclusion.

4 In the interest of good readability of the report, the data have been rounded up one decimal, where necessary. The total sums of the individual figures may therefore not always add up to 100 per cent.

2 Policy environments to promote lifelong learning in higher education

The effective promotion of lifelong learning in the higher education sector is dependent on conducive policy environments at the national level. Given that LLL is integral to helping people adjust to new employment patterns and societal changes, it is prudent for governments and policy-makers to make it more available through existing structures such as HEIs (UNESCO, 2015; GUNi, 2022a) and to connect higher education to other formal as well as non-formal educational institutions, thereby fostering a coherent vision of LLL that is unbounded by different education levels (GUNi, 2022a; Ossiannilsson, 2019; Šmídová et al., 2017).

Stand-alone national strategies on LLL in HEIs are uncommon, however; LLL is more likely to be integrated into higher education legislation and strategies or it may be part of wider education policies at the national level. National legislation and frameworks provide an important basis for resource allocation for LLL implementation and ensure that governments as well as HEIs remain accountable for the proper disbursement and mobilization of funds. Higher education and research policy goals at the national level may also inform performance agreements between HEIs and governments. Such agreements set out the goals to be achieved by HEIs, which may, for example, be related to the quality of academic offerings, student services, and internationalization and LLL, within a given time period. By offering dedicated budgets and incentives, governments have a strong lever to encourage HEIs to become active in the promotion of LLL and widen access to higher education. Moreover, national policies and strategies on higher education can generally contribute to raising awareness and setting the stage for sustainable, systematic and coordinated development processes (Gaebel and Zhang, 2018).

However, while government policies and their associated funding may incentivize HEIs to act in a certain way, it is important to acknowledge that most HEIs are characterized by a high degree of autonomy (Carlsen et al., 2016). There is therefore a risk that national policies, combined with increased bureaucracy and accountability, will have a restrictive effect on institutional and academic freedoms (Gaebel and Zhang, 2018; UPP Foundation, 2018). Moreover, national policies by themselves are ineffective if they do not extend to the institutional level. The development of appropriate institutional strategies and the prioritization of LLL within mission statements is therefore key to moving from policy to practice (Meacham and Gaff, 2006).

An HEI's mission statement defines its priorities in terms of its overall operations and provides the guiding principles for the development of educational programmes for specific target groups. Embedding and mainstreaming LLL within institutional strategies and mission statements allows for a coordinated, whole-institution approach (Milic, 2013) and helps to foster an institutional culture that regards LLL beyond adult and continuing education and reaches out and responds to the needs of all types of learners (Smidt and Sursock, 2011; Hessler, 2016). Institutional strategies also support the coherent implementation of lifelong learning across different departments, faculties and administrative units, adjoining it to various core operations of HEIs, including teaching, research and third-mission activities.

The following sections explore the extent to which national policies and institutional strategies have been established to promote LLL in higher education based on the results from the international survey. **Section 2.1** focuses on overarching policy commitments, as reflected in the national legislation that defines LLL as a mission of HEIs. **Section 2.2** examines institutional strategies which guide the implementation of LLL in HEIs and considers the links between conducive national policy environments and the existence of institutional instruments for LLL promotion. The final section presents data on the main internal and external institutional drivers for LLL provision in HEIs.

2.1 National legislation, policies and frameworks

The development of LLL policies at the national level may be motivated by a need to reskill and upskill individuals in response to changing demographics or deindustrialization. It is important to note that national policies and legislation not only drive the development of LLL strategies at institutional level but are themselves shaped by the needs and demands of HEIs. National policies need to reflect institutional contexts and challenges, allowing HEIs to develop respective institutional structures and systems that support the effective implementation of LLL in all its different forms (Carlsen et al., 2016). Consequently, national policies must find a balance between remaining open enough to allow for a variety of approaches to LLL while being precise enough to provide guidance to HEIs (Abukari, 2005; Eurydice, 2020); otherwise, policies, legislation and strategies can end up being restrictive or ineffective,

making it difficult for HEIs to respond adequately to the changing and growing needs of learners in their respective local environments (Gaebel and Zhang, 2018; UPP Foundation, 2018).

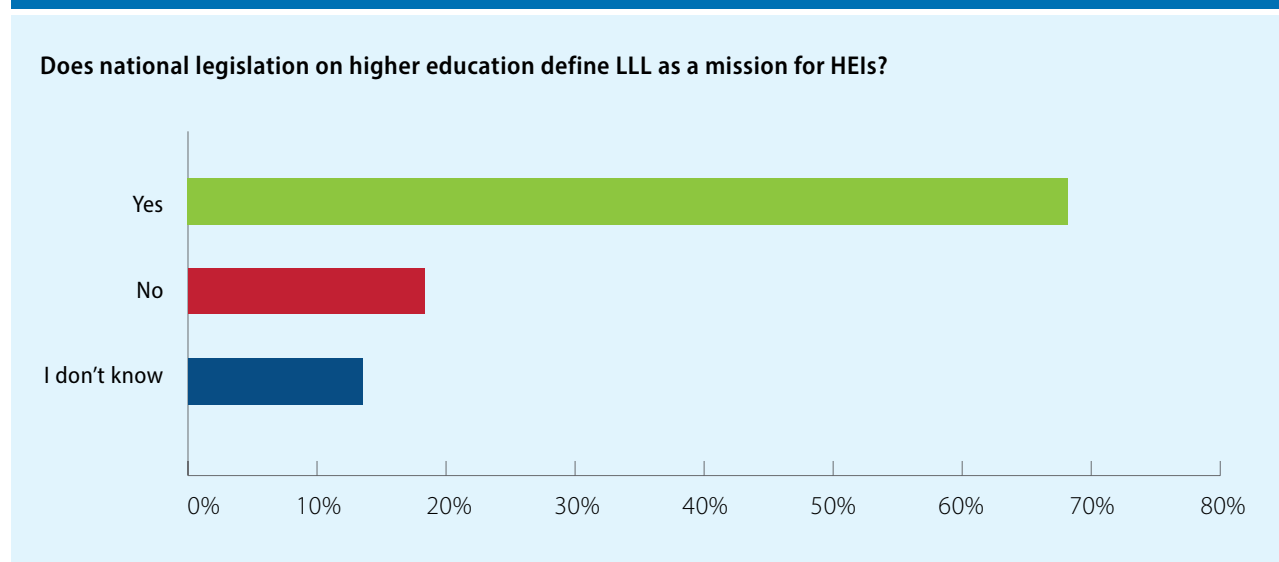
The potential for establishing favourable policy environments for LLL at the national level is impacted by a series of contextual factors (historical, educational, political, societal) and broader development and socio-economic conditions (Rasmussen, 2014; Foster and McLendon, 2012; Farrugia, 2012).

The survey data presented in **Figure 1** illustrates the influence national legislation has on HEIs' prioritization of lifelong learning. The majority of HEIs responding to the survey – 272 out of 399 participating institutions, or 68.2 per cent of those surveyed, located in 77 countries – affirmed the existence of national legislation defining lifelong learning as a mission at the higher education level in their country. While this proportion is relatively high, it is also important to note that 18.3 per cent of participating institutions said there was no relevant law in their countries, and 13.5 per cent did not know whether there was a law or not.

A regional analysis of responses shows that close to half or more of participating institutions from each world region reported having national legislation that defines LLL as part of HEIs' mission. The Asia–Pacific region had the highest proportion of HEIs reporting this, at 78.6 per cent, whereas Latin America and the Caribbean had the lowest proportion, at 48 per cent. The regions that were higher than the overall proportion of 68 per cent were Africa (75%) and Europe and North America (68.7%). It is important to note that almost a third of participating institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean (28%) said they did not know if there was relevant national legislation or not, which is relatively high compared to other regions.

An important caveat is that, within some countries, several participating institutions provided contradictory information regarding the existence of an LLL mandate for HEIs in national legislation. This inconsistency was evident in eight countries – Cyprus, the Arab Republic of Egypt, Georgia, Hungary, Ireland, the Sultanate of Oman, the United States of America and the Republic of Uzbekistan – and concerns 29 HEIs, or 7 per cent of total respondents. Data analysis suggests this divergence may be linked to the position held by the person that responded to the survey and a resulting lack of awareness of some respondents. Other relevant factors could be the different policy regimes that are applicable to various types of HEIs, as well as subjective interpretation of what is considered national legislation.

FIGURE 1 Lifelong learning defined as a mission of HEIs in national legislation⁵



UIL StatLink: bit.ly/UIL_HEI-LLL_fig1

⁵ All data presented in the figures and tables in this report are based on the results of the international survey on the contribution of HEIs to LLL and refers to the total number of respondents (n=399), unless otherwise stated.

BOX 1 Examples of policies promoting LLL as a mandate of higher education

Following Malaysia's *Blueprint on Enculturation of Lifelong Learning for Malaysia 2011–2020* (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2011), which already outlined continuing education as a field of action for universities, the **Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025 (Higher Education)** (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015) was published, promoting a culture of LLL with strong references to higher education. The strategic lines set out in the blueprint include increasing public awareness of the benefits of LLL through HEIs, and the development and enhancement of innovative LLL programmes such as work-based learning and executive education. The blueprint also stipulates that LLL programmes must meet learners' needs and comply with the Malaysian Qualifications Framework, thereby enabling alternative pathways towards formal education and qualification. To increase participation, the Ministry of Education has made grants more accessible to learners.

In **Austria, the Universities Act 2002** defines the mission and duties of public universities, which explicitly includes continuing education (Republic of Austria, 2002). In 2021, a comprehensive reform process was started with an aim to harmonize regulations for continuing education studies for all HEIs (i.e. public and private universities, universities of applied sciences, and university colleges of teacher education). The reform also enforces common standards of quality assurance for all continuing education programmes offered by higher education institutions by integrating them into existing institutional quality assurance systems (ibid.).

India's National Education Policy 2020 (Indian Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020) does not explicitly define LLL as a mandate of higher education; yet, it makes important references to LLL in the higher education sector. First, it defines the purpose of higher education beyond individuals' employability, considering it 'the key to more vibrant, socially engaged, cooperative communities' (ibid., p. 33). In line with that, community engagement and service are listed as crucial responsibilities of HEIs. Open distance learning (ODL) and online programmes are considered a good opportunity for HEIs to 'provide opportunities for lifelong learning (SDG 4)' (ibid., p. 35). The policy also advises that 'imaginative and flexible curricular structures [...] would offer multiple entry and exit points, thus, removing currently prevalent rigid boundaries and creating new possibilities for lifelong learning' (ibid., p. 37).

In addition to academic research and education, **Finland's Universities Act 2009** establishes that HEIs, 'in carrying out their mission [...] shall promote lifelong learning, interact with the surrounding society and promote the social impact of university research findings and artistic activities' (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, 2009). A parliamentary policy for reforming continuous learning further foresees that higher education shall provide a platform for learners and continuous learning, enabling learners with different status to study flexibly, selecting courses from all Finnish HEIs, irrespective of organizational boundaries or geographical location (Government of Finland, 2022).

2.2 Strategic institutional approaches to promote lifelong learning

In addition to national frameworks, institutional strategies are key enablers for implementing LLL in higher education. These tools are important given the barriers to LLL that can exist at the institutional level, such as bureaucratic hurdles, a lack of support mechanisms for students and staff, inadequate resources, and rigid systems of governance or stakeholders resistant to change (Asian Development Bank, 2011;

De Viron and Davies, 2015; Brimble and Doner, 2007). LLL can be embedded in HEIs in a variety of ways. The commitment to LLL may be expressed in HEIs' mission statements, which can provide a key reference point for strategy development and implementation and signal institutional commitments and goals. As such, they are an important lever for the ultimate aims of LLL in HEIs, such as democratizing learning and widening access to quality education through LLL opportunities, including greater flexibility in learning provision, digital and online learning, and community engagement (Atchoarena, 2021).

In line with mission statements, LLL strategies may be established at the institutional level and mainstreamed within the HEI and its various departments. They may also be formulated by particular departments or faculties and reflect specific strategic priorities. Or, most comprehensively, there may be strategies at different levels that are intertwined and aligned with each other (Ranki et al., 2021). A holistic approach to LLL, involving the HEI leadership and all relevant departments, may be particularly useful in widening access to equitable educational and training opportunities, enabling LLL to 'be managed as a cross-cutting entity, with an approach based on systematic thinking' (ibid., p. 5). Ultimately, favourable mission statements and LLL strategies at the institutional level demonstrate the level of prioritization that an HEI affords to LLL and helps to mainstream LLL opportunities throughout institutional operations. The survey results in **Table 3** reveal the extent to which LLL has been established as a mission of the participating HEIs, as reflected in their strategies and mission statements.

Relevance of LLL in institutional strategies and mission statements

Survey data on the extent to which participating HEIs have established LLL strategies show that 68.2 per cent of HEIs have a strategy in place, with the largest proportion indicating to have a strategy at the *institutional level* (41.8%). Nearly one-fifth (19.1%) reported having strategies at *both the institutional and faculty and/or department levels*. Both of these categories express a whole-institution approach to LLL, which is coordinated at the institutional level. A much lower percentage (7.3%) responded that they have a strategy only at faculty and/or department levels. Almost a quarter of HEIs (27.3%) reported not having a strategy for LLL in place; however, 19 per cent of those said that they are in the process of developing one.

Looking at the regional distribution, Europe and North America, at 73.7 per cent, has the highest proportion of participating HEIs claiming to have an LLL strategy embedded in their institution at some level. This is followed by Asia and the Pacific (69.8%), the Arab States (64.7%), and Latin America and the Caribbean (66.7%). Among the HEIs from Africa, 50 per cent of institutions said they have a strategy in place and 21.9 per cent stated that they are in the process of developing one.

Another indicator of HEIs' commitment to LLL is the extent to which it is referenced in their mission statements. According to the survey, a large percentage of HEIs show a medium to high commitment to lifelong learning in their mission statements. More specifically, 44.4 per cent stated that LLL is a *high priority* and 38.1 per cent considered it a *medium priority*. A substantially smaller share of HEIs (12.3%) said that LLL is a *low priority* and only 5.3 per cent of institutions responded that there is *no reference* to LLL in their mission statements.

As regards regional variations, there are no significant differences statistically in priority given to LLL in mission statements; however, as **Figure 2** indicates, there is a relationship between HEIs reporting relevant national legislation and prioritizing LLL in their mission statements. Among those reporting that LLL is defined as a mandate of HEIs in national legislation (68.1%), the majority responded that LLL is referenced either with a *high* (54.4%) or *medium* (8.5%) priority in their institutional mission statements. Conversely, the percentage of HEIs prioritizing LLL in their mission statements is far lower when no relevant national legislation exists, with only 20.6 per cent noting a *high priority* given to LLL and 12.3 per cent reporting *no reference* to LLL in their mission statements.

TABLE 3 Existence of LLL strategies in HEIs

	Number	Percentage	Total
Yes, at both institutional and faculty/department level	76	19.1%	
Yes, at institutional level	167	41.8%	68.2%
Yes, at faculty/department level	29	7.3%	
No, but we are in the process of developing one	76	19%	27.3%
No	33	8.3%	
I don't know	18	4.5%	

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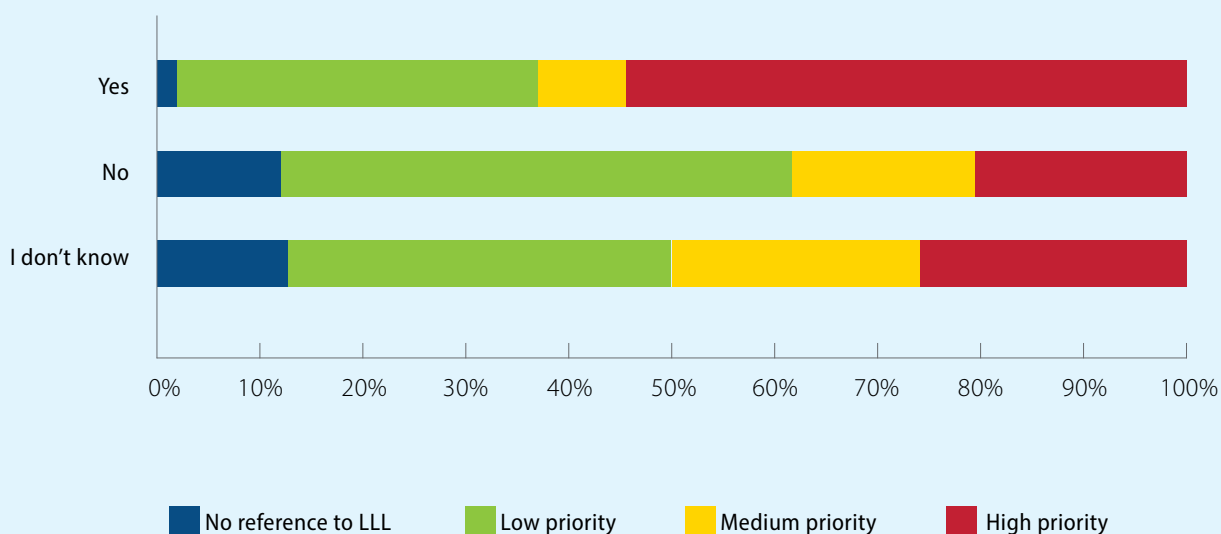
BOX 2 Examples of institutional approaches to LLL

An example for a whole-institution approach to lifelong learning can be found at **North-West University, South Africa**. Based on the Council of Higher Education’s directive requiring public universities to centralize continuing education (CE) products and services at institutional level, North-West University established the Unit for Continuing Education (UCE) (Kunene, 2019). The university’s engagement in lifelong learning is outlined in the Policy on Continuing Education, which states that NWU must support ‘life-long learning as enabler to disadvantaged individuals to become active role players in the economy and society at large’ (North-West University, 2018, p. 1). The policy defines the objectives and responsibilities of the UCE, as well as course management, quality assurance, certification and finances, among others. It further defines the role of the Continuing Education Advisory Committee, composed of the executive deans of all faculties, which advises the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Learning on the alignment of CE across faculties, campuses and delivery sites.

The **Shanghai Open University (SOU), People’s Republic of China**, provides another strong example for institutional commitment in implementing LLL. Missioned with ‘for all learners, all for learners’, SOU defines its mandate as serving the public by providing lifelong learning opportunities. SOU’s constitution stipulates a broad mission: The university plays an important role in Shanghai’s development into a learning society. It carries out various educational activities such as community education, vocational training, rural education, elderly education and education for people with disabilities. It further serves as a service and guidance centre for lifelong learners and takes the role of a Lifelong Learning Credit Bank Management Centre, responsible for the recognition and transfer of learning outcomes in higher education. In 2021, SOU released the 14th Five-Year Plan, which envisions that the university will further advance the development of high-quality open learning opportunities and develop into a first-class open university, supporting the lifelong development of every citizen (Shanghai Open University, 2021).

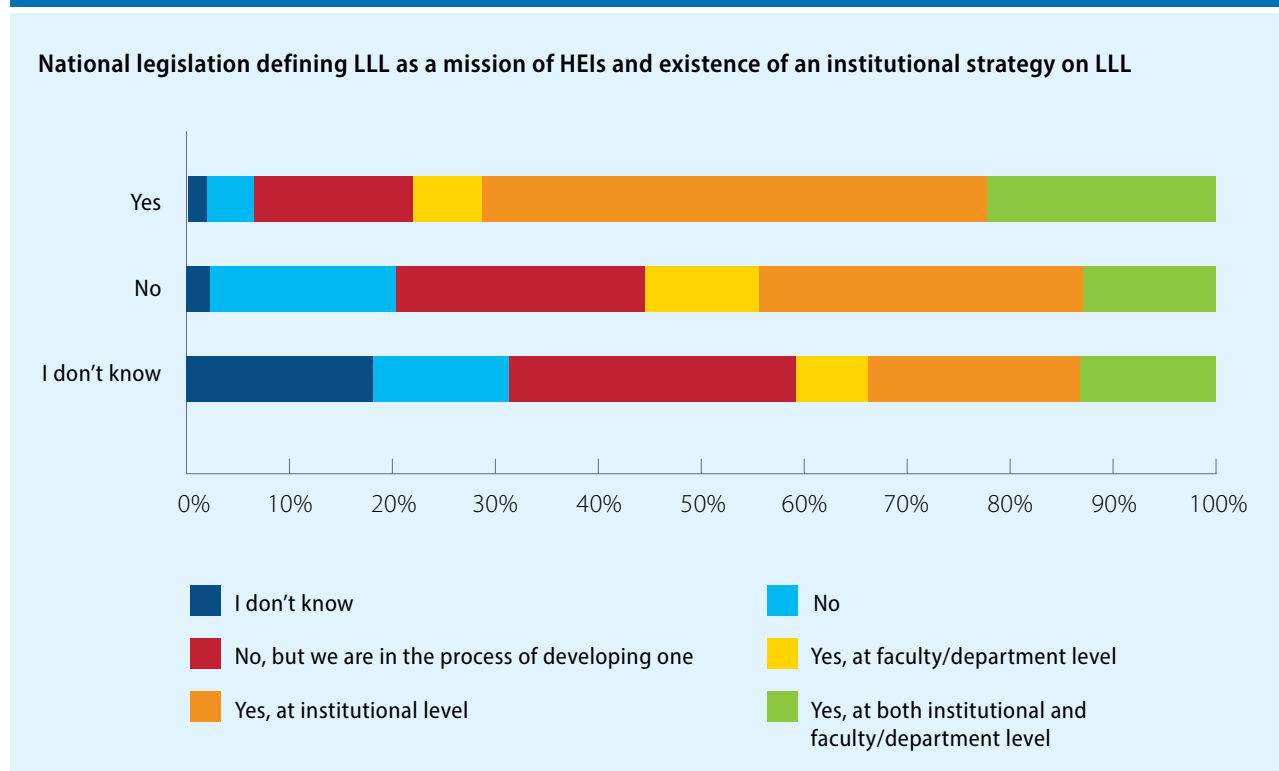
FIGURE 2 Link between national legislation and prioritization of LLL in HEIs’ mission statements

National legislation defining LLL as a mission of HEIs and priority of LLL in institutional mission statements



UIL StatLink: bit.ly/UIL_HEI-LLL_fig2

FIGURE 3 Link between national legislation and HEIs' strategies



UIL StatLink: bit.ly/UIL_HEI-LLL_fig3

A similar pattern of association is demonstrated in **Figure 3**, which indicates that 77.2 per cent of HEIs reporting that national legislation defines LLL as a mission of higher education also have institutional strategies for LLL in place at some level (institutional level, faculty/departmental level or both). That figure drops to 54.8 per cent for HEIs reporting no conducive legislation for HEIs' engagement in LLL and to 41.1 per cent for HEIs that did not know if such legislation exists or not.

Institutional strategies are only effective when translated into practice and understood by the relevant staff and stakeholders; doing so requires a set of actions to operationalize the strategic lines of work into manageable tasks and to promote them.

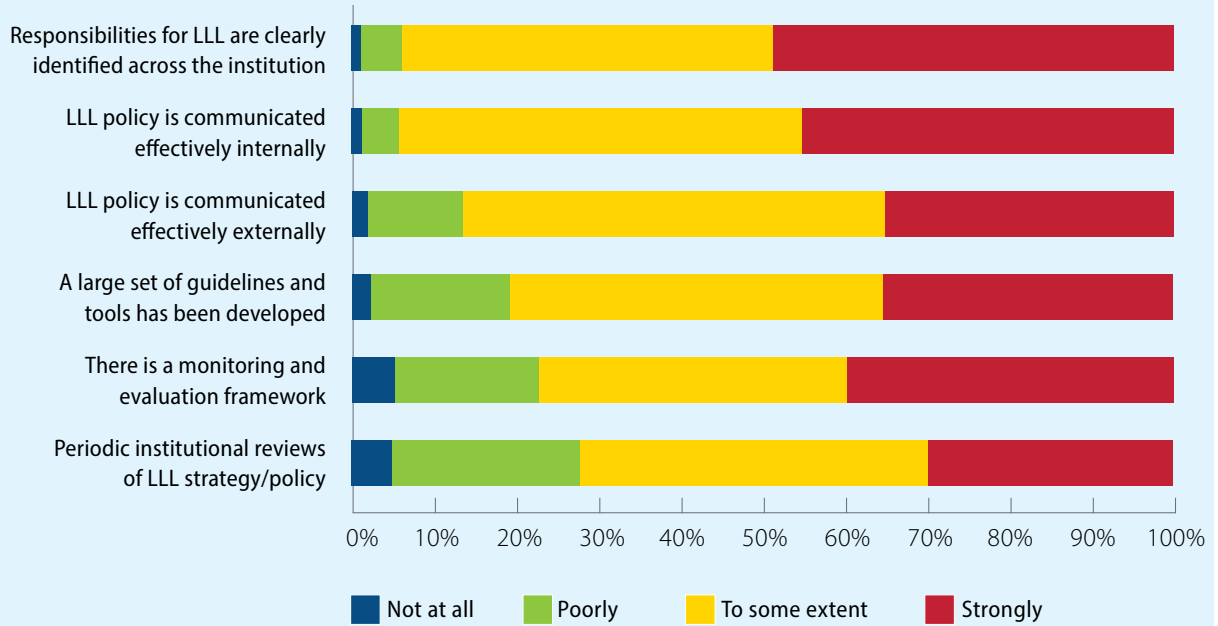
As part of the survey, the HEIs with a strategy in place were then asked to what extent those strategies were operationalized. In general, the results show a high level of operationalization, with 94.3 per cent of HEIs responding that, within their institution, *the LLL policy is communicated effectively internally* ('strongly' or 'to some extent'); a majority of those HEIs also reported that their LLL policies were *clearly identified across the institution* (93.9%). External communication of the strategy was not as well-established, at 86.4 per cent.

Concerning mechanisms and tools, a large percentage of HEIs said they had developed (at least to some extent) guidelines and tools (81%) and monitoring and evaluation frameworks (77.4%). The findings show that these HEIs have gone beyond strategic development and are operationalizing strategies, policies and mission statements in some form or another, with varying degrees of advancement (see **Figure 4**). Nevertheless, the data show that the more tangible and comprehensive forms of operationalization – that is, developing tools and frameworks – are less advanced.

Regarding the main drivers of HEIs' involvement in lifelong learning, **Figure 5** shows that *community engagement and social responsibility* (74.4%) as well as *mission statements* (73.2%) are the most relevant factors. Moreover, over half of the participating HEIs (54.39%) cited *business/industry demand* as a main driver, followed by *government policy* (52.1%). *Generating financial revenue* through LLL activities was reported to be an important motivation for 35.6 per cent of HEIs, followed by *widening access to minorities and underrepresented groups*, which was selected by 30.1 per cent of HEIs. The least relevant drivers for LLL involvement, according to the survey, were *gaining peer recognition* (24.1%) and *meeting national quotas of adult learners* (11.5%).

FIGURE 4 Operationalization of LLL strategies

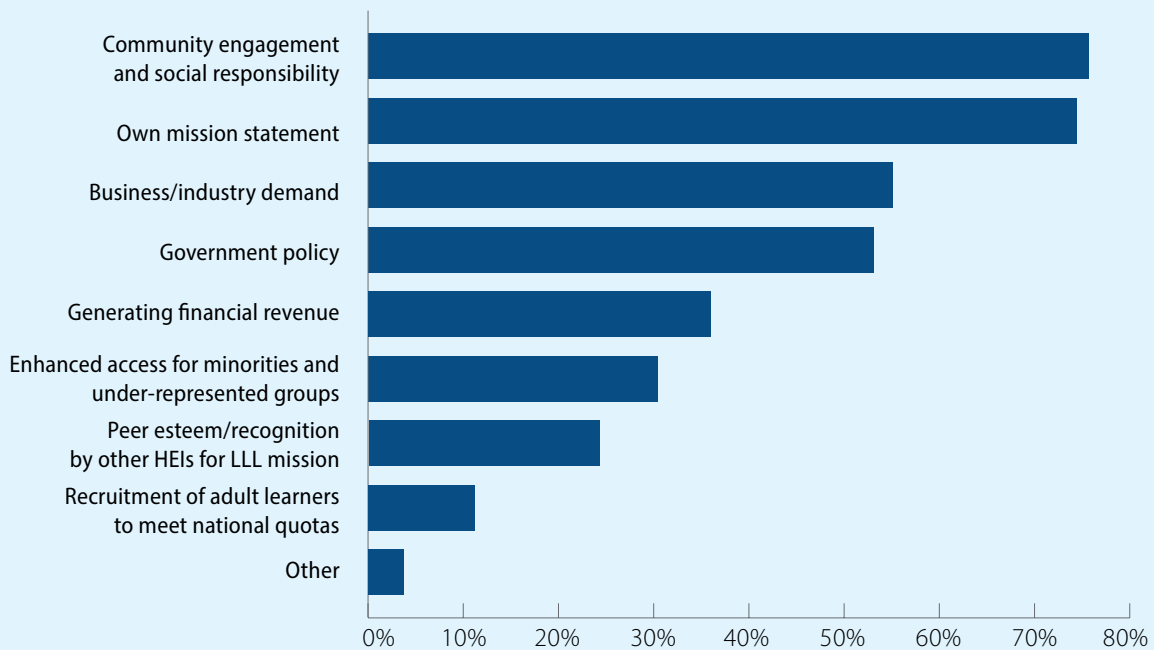
Extent to which institutional LLL strategies are operationalized (n=279)



UIL StatLink: bit.ly/UIL_HEI-LLL_fig4

FIGURE 5 Main internal and external drivers of lifelong learning in HEIs

What are the main drivers of your institution's involvement in LLL? (Multiple answers are possible)



UIL StatLink: bit.ly/UIL_HEI-LLL_fig5

Looking at the regional distribution of main drivers, the patterns are generally similar, although some differences can be found. For example, while *community engagement and social responsibility* is the most common driver in four regions (ranging from 73% to 82.7%), this is not the case for Africa, where only 50 per cent of HEIs selected this as a main driver. Interestingly, when it comes to specific community engagement activities (see **Figure 24**), African HEIs show very similar levels of engagement as HEIs in other regions. This means that the definition of 'main drivers of LLL involvement' does not necessarily comply with the level of involvement in a particular field. Similarly, the survey data show that only 37.5 per cent of African HEIs selected *business/industry demand* as a main driver, which is significantly lower than in other regions; yet, African HEIs actually have a rather high level of engagement with the private sector (see **Figure 25**). The most relevant driver for LLL engagement reported among African HEIs was their *own mission statement* (selected by 75% of respondents); however, this result does not correlate with the responses regarding how much priority is given to LLL in HEIs' mission statements, where only 35.7 per cent of African HEIs noted this as a high priority.

Regional differences can also be observed with regards to *government policy*, which is considered a main driver by 61.6 per cent of HEIs in Asia and the Pacific, 59.4 per cent in Africa, and 55.9 per cent in the Arab States. These rates are significantly lower for HEIs in Europe and North America (44.4%) and Latin America and the Caribbean (37.3%). These figures correlate with the survey data on conducive national legislation, wherein HEIs in Asia and the Pacific and Africa reported the highest rates of national legislation defining LLL as a mission for HEIs. Figures were lower in Latin America and the Caribbean, where 48 per cent of HEIs reported the existence of relevant national legislation. In the Arab States, 55.9 per cent reported the existence of relevant national legislation – the same percentage of HEIs that indicated government policy was a main driver of LLL involvement.

Interestingly, while 68.7 per cent of respondents from Europe and North America said that national legislation defines LLL as a mission of HEIs, only 44.4 per cent consider *government policy* a relevant driver for LLL involvement. In contrast, 72.7 per cent of HEIs in this region responded that their *own mission statements* are an important driver. Taking into consideration the fact that HEIs in this region showed the highest rate of institutional LLL strategies, a possible interpretation of these results is that government policies are a less relevant driver for HEIs involvement in LLL in Europe and North America because they have already been widely translated into respective institutional strategies and integrated into mission statements (which, in turn, are more relevant for guiding HEIs' LLL involvement).

As the survey data indicate, *business/industry demand* is particularly important for HEIs in Europe and North America (62.6%) as well as in Latin American and the Caribbean (58.7%). *Generating financial income* is a main driver for 48.5 per cent of participating institutions in Europe and North America, followed by 38.2 per cent in the Arab States. However, there appears to be no correlation between HEIs' specific funding arrangements and whether they chose *generating financial income* as a main driver. As for *business/industry demand*, this driver appears more relevant for private, for-profit HEIs.

Just over one-third of participating institutions or less said that widening access to minorities and underrepresented groups, gaining peer recognition and meeting national quotas of adult learners were main drivers for lifelong learning. The Arab States (35.3%) and Latin America and the Caribbean (34.7%) have the highest proportion of HEIs that selected 'widening access' as a main driver, with relatively lower proportions in Europe and North America and Africa (26.3% and 25%, respectively).

2.3 Summary of main findings

The presented survey findings provide an overview of the policy environments, both at the national and institutional level, which influence and shape the participating institutions' lifelong learning activities. As national policies and institutional strategies provide the basis for HEIs' engagement in LLL, these results are fundamental to further understanding the internal structures, mechanisms and operations for LLL implementation, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

As the survey results show, more than two-thirds of participating HEIs stated that national legislation in their country defines LLL as a mission for higher education. This suggests that, at the macro-level, these countries are committed to delivering LLL opportunities in higher education settings for a greater variety of learners. The survey data also provide evidence that there is a relationship between supportive national legislation and the existence of institutional strategies for LLL, underlining the relevance of conducive national policy environments for promoting LLL within HEIs. This finding is supported by the literature, which suggests that national higher education legislation is an important determinant for HEIs' strategic positioning and operational activities, including the provision of LLL opportunities or the establishment of flexible learning pathways (Martin and Godonoga, 2020; Gaebel and Zhang, 2018; Robinson, 2017). In particular, this is relevant with regards to ensuring proper resource allocation. The relationship between national policy and public funding schemes for LLL is also a topic to be considered in the next chapter.

In terms of HEIs' commitments to LLL, the survey asked to what extent LLL is prioritized within mission statements and institutional strategies. A large majority of participating institutions (82.5%) noted that LLL is referred to in their mission statements with either high or medium priority. Mission statements can be an indication of the degree to which LLL is embedded and mainstreamed into HEIs' institutional frameworks, strategic operations and programmes. Prioritizing LLL in mission statements is also mentioned in international statements and frameworks as a key instrument to embrace a lifelong learning culture within HEIs. Also, when asked about their motivations for LLL engagement, 73.2 per cent selected their own mission statement as a main driver.

A second question in the survey was dedicated to institutions' commitment to LLL, asking about the existence of institutional LLL strategies. Here as well the majority of HEIs (68.2%) responded that they have a strategy in place, either at institutional level, at faculty/department level, or both. This finding shows a clear commitment to translating overarching objectives into concrete policy action. Within the scope of this survey, the comprehensiveness of such strategies was not explored, nor was how binding they are for departments and staff. Yet a set of case studies conducted among selected HEIs that participated in the survey indicates that there are varying interpretations of what it means to 'have a strategy in place'. Such strategies were not necessarily understood as a dedicated written document but rather interpreted as having an inherent LLL strategy wherein LLL activities are promoted within different departments with the general support of HEI leadership (UIL and SOU, forthcoming).

When it comes to main drivers for the provision of LLL opportunities, it is interesting to see that the most relevant driver selected by HEIs was *community engagement and social responsibility* (74.4%), which comes before *business/industry demand* (54.4%).

This is remarkable considering the tension that sometimes arises when HEIs are requested to respond to economic needs while at the same time fulfilling a social responsibility. The finding suggests that HEIs define themselves not only as institutions for upskilling and reskilling for the labour market but, more importantly, as social actors with a civic mission. It demonstrates HEIs' motivation to contribute to positive development in society and, particularly, in their local communities (Carlsen et al., 2016; Osborne et al., 2015; Orazbayeva, 2017). Moreover, it suggests that the 'third mission' is indeed a priority of HEIs and guides their actions. Surprisingly, while there is a high commitment to community engagement and social responsibility, less than a third of participating HEIs selected *enhancing access for minorities and under-represented groups* as a main driver for their LLL activities. This means that widening access to higher education and ensuring equitable education opportunities is not necessarily a priority within HEIs' third mission. The least important driver for lifelong learning reported by institutions in the sample is recruiting adult learners to meet national quotas. This low proportion could mean that either such quotas are not common in countries where participating HEIs are located and/or that accountability frameworks in this area are weak and hence not as relevant for HEIs' operations.

Overall, these results show that both national governments as well as higher education institutions around the world have taken relevant steps to integrate and promote a culture of LLL in the higher education sector, with priorities covering both economic and social demands. Based on the findings about conducive policy environments and drivers for LLL engagement, the next chapter will explore institutional practices, covering governance structures, financing mechanisms, quality assurance systems, and strengths and weaknesses of LLL implementation.

3 Institutional governance and implementation

Policies and strategies for LLL in higher education are only effective when translated into institutional practices. As previously mentioned, the transformation into an LLL institution requires the commitment of a wide range of internal stakeholders, first and foremost the HEI leadership, and a holistic approach for implementation. How lifelong learning provision is organized within HEIs depends on the governance structures which have been established. Common models for organizing LLL include having either a central operating unit, a working area in central administration, a unit within a faculty, a scientific centre or an external institute. It has been observed in previous research that categorizing organizational structures for continuing education in HEIs as either central or decentral models is difficult because they often exist in hybrid forms – for example, a central unit may have the main responsibility for LLL or continuing education, yet certain initiatives are organized decentrally within different faculties (Hanft and Knust, 2007). To enable a concerted approach towards LLL, it makes sense to bundle responsibilities for LLL in a central unit that acts in coordination with the university leadership and at the same time maintains close ties to the faculties. The different functions of such units will be further discussed in **Section 3.1** based on the results from the international survey.

In addition to an effective governance model for LLL, a basic requirement for the transition from policy to practice is funding. Without the necessary funds, a gap between rhetoric and practice will exist, resulting in uneven and slow-paced implementation (Bengtsson, 2013; Nesbit et al., 2013). In the last decades, public HEIs in particular have seen a decline in funding. On a global scale, HEIs have been facing multiple funding challenges over the last years. Challenges such as shifting enrolment patterns, insufficient government support, and increasing amounts of institutional and student debt in some countries (James and Gokbel, 2018) have further been exacerbated because of the COVID-19 crisis, worsening the financial situation of HEIs worldwide. The IAU's global survey on the impact of the pandemic has shown that this decline in funding has been seen in both public spending, tuition fees and private-sector funding, although, in general, public funding proved to be more stable, implying that the pandemic has had a particularly strong impact on the private higher education sector (Jensen et al., 2022). These financial challenges not only affect HEIs' core operations but also have an impact on how HEIs can respond to their third mission and the need for LLL opportunities.

Most commonly, funding for LLL in higher education comes from different sources and is more diverse than funding dedicated to traditional teaching (i.e. ISCED levels 6 to 8). Major funding parties for LLL include national and state governments, employers, philanthropic institutions and individual learners. There are different ways in which funding agencies can allocate their contributions: supply-side financing can be provided to HEIs to implement LLL activities (this includes core funding, programme and project funding, etc.) or funds are directed to students or employers as demand-side financing (for example, as direct grants, tax exemptions or deductions, training leave, and loans or individual learning accounts) (Palacios, 2003; García de Fanelli, 2019).

Funding for lifelong learning hinges on how societies and institutions define the mandate of LLL, which may range from a strong socio-cultural orientation to being primarily labour-market responsive. Most likely, as LLL is multidimensional, such mandates will involve both interest-driven learning activities for adults as well as more pragmatic strategies aimed at professional skills development in response to labour market trends (Field and Canning, 2014; Stanistreet, 2020; Candy and Crebert, 1991). How the general mandate for LLL is defined will affect the specific objectives of LLL, public resource allocation and also the conditions attached to the funds provided.

While there has been substantial research and data collection on the topic of higher education financing in general (OECD, 2021a; Strehl et al., 2007; Pechar and Andres, 2011), this is much less the case for the more specific topic of funding LLL within the higher education context. This may be related to the fact that LLL has not traditionally been considered a core function of HEIs. As a result, there has been lower interest in its funding mechanisms. It may also have to do with the range of activities that come under the LLL umbrella (degree programmes for adult learners, online courses, free lectures, community initiatives, etc.) and the difficulty of systematically taking stock of them and tracing their funding sources. Yet, this lack of data has implications on funding LLL itself, as noted by Tuckett (2017, p. 3):

Unlike schools and universities, where the data is easily captured through administrative mechanisms, adult learning is less tidy – adults learn through formal and non-formal courses and through informal learning, and as a result it is more challenging to see who benefits. [...] Yet, governments need that information to prioritize investment.

An issue closely linked to funding LLL in higher education is developing and implementing procedures for quality assurance (QA). Within the context of higher education, quality assurance can be defined as an 'all-embracing term referring to an ongoing, continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining and improving) the quality of higher education systems, institutions, or programmes' (Vlăsceanu et al., 2007, p. 74). As a regulatory mechanism, QA focuses on both accountability and improvement, assessing quality based on a standardized process and well-established criteria. Thus, QA generates information on the quality of education provision and can make visible any deficiencies in management, curricula and pedagogies, forms of assessment, student services, etc., that require improvement.

As funding is often tied to measurable outputs (or key performance indicators), a mechanism to define and monitor these outputs is essential for securing and increasing budgets. However, while quality assurance systems are very advanced for standard study provision, less attention has been paid to QA for LLL provision or to addressing LLL through internal QA at institutions. The general lack of QA for LLL programmes provided by HEIs reflects the broader state of affairs when it comes to LLL in the higher education sector: LLL has yet to be mainstreamed into HEIs' strategic orientations and practices.

When it comes to institutional mechanisms and practices for QA in the context of LLL provision, HEIs are facing several challenges. Part of the problem is that the field of continuing education and LLL is placed at the intersection between university, professional practice, vocational education and training, and other non-formal learning environments. LLL programmes are characterized by features which, in some cases, differ substantially from mainstream higher education provision; for example, they are often less standardized and allow for more flexibility in terms of curricula development, study provision and assessment compared to traditional study programmes. Quality assurance for LLL should be an ongoing process, to be pursued with the same rigor and professionalism as with other higher education programmes, without restricting the flexibility, innovativeness and openness of LLL offerings (Bengoetxea et al., 2011; Chisholm, 2012; Schmidt-Jortzig, 2011). Despite these challenges and slow progress in the field, HEIs have developed and applied diverse procedures for QA in the context of LLL provision, as presented in **Section 3.3**.

The following sections take a closer look at the role of institutional governance and implementation for the provision of LLL opportunities in HEIs based on results from the international survey. **Section 3.1** examines

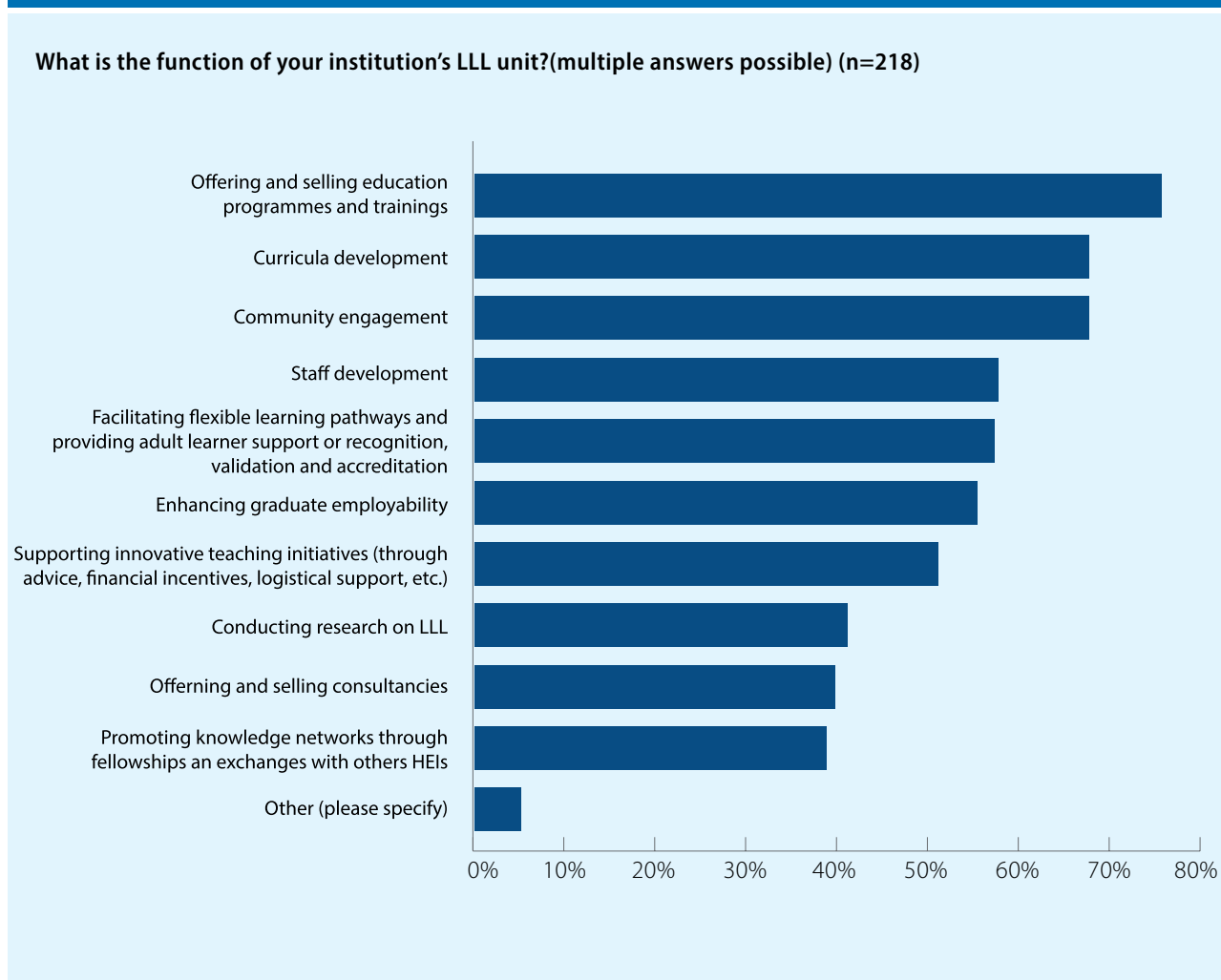
organizational structures, reflected in dedicated units; **Section 3.2** focuses on funding LLL in HEIs, both from the institutional and the learner's perspective; **Section 3.2** includes information on quality assurance mechanisms. In the final section, data on the reported strengths and challenges of institutional implementation are briefly presented.

3.1 Organizational structure for lifelong learning

A dedicated lifelong learning unit can act as an important vehicle to implement institutional LLL strategies (De Viron and Davies, 2015; UIL, 2022a; Taşçı and Titrek, 2020). Depending on HEIs' specific contexts, LLL units can be part of the internal structure or exist as an external unit. How it is embedded in the organizational structure is usually influenced by the functions of the unit, which, in many cases, are focused on providing continuing education programmes. In addition, LLL units may also be tasked with knowledge-transfer activities, community engagement, conducting research in the field of LLL, as well as providing support and guidance services to lifelong learners (De Viron and Davies, 2015; Milic, 2013). As **Figure 6** shows, just over half of the responding HEIs reported having a dedicated LLL unit (53.6%), covering a variety of functions. Among the possible options, most HEIs said that their LLL unit's primary function was *offering and selling education programmes and trainings* (73.4%), followed by *curricula development* and *community engagement* (both 65.6%). Other functions of LLL units, which were selected by at least half of the HEIs with a dedicated unit, were *staff development*, *facilitating flexible learning pathways* and *enhancing graduate employability*. Slightly less common functions were *research tasks*, *consultancies* and *promoting knowledge networks*.

Some participating HEIs (5%) indicated other functions of their LLL units, including strategic and administrative responsibilities such as *addressing strategic issues*, *providing resource efficient systems*, *regulation and making decisions on courses*, and *recruiting adult learners*. Other functions that were stated refer to skills recognition and learning pathways, for example, *evaluating and validating competences of learners* and *developing partnerships with other education providers to simplify progression*. One university also mentioned that its LLL unit is promoting knowledge exchange, for example through a learning city programme, by participating in European-wide projects, and by engaging in national and international networks, policy talks and conferences.

FIGURE 6 Functions of HEIs' lifelong learning units



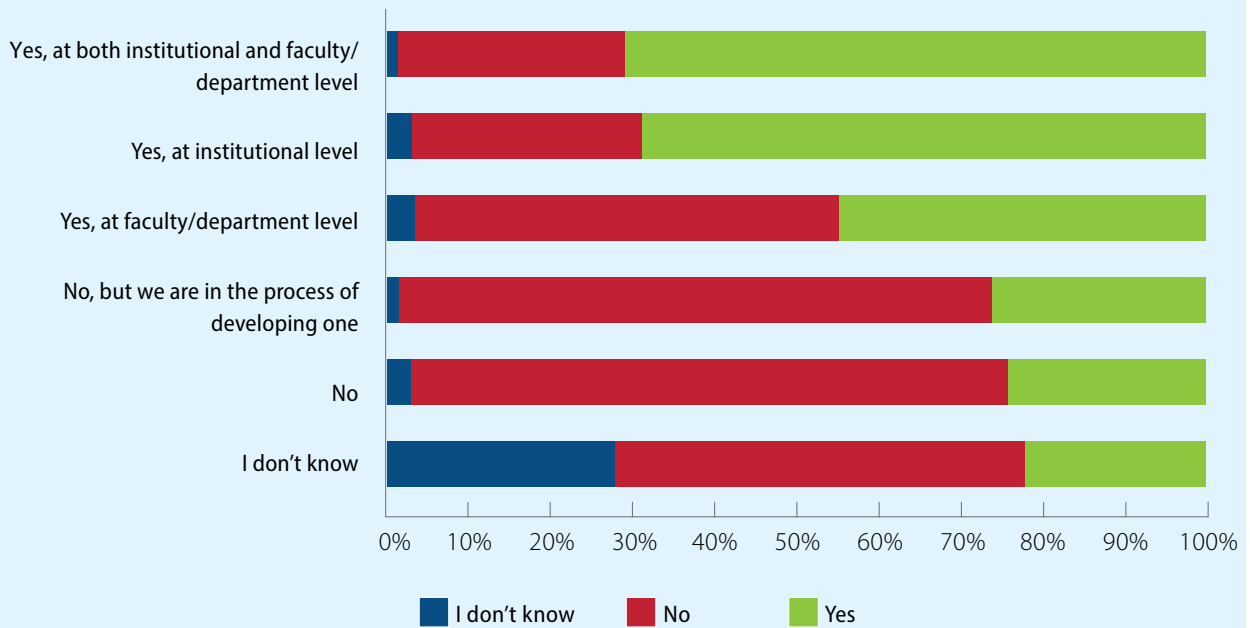
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In general, the main functions of HEIs' LLL units are strongly linked to the field of continuing education (offering education programmes, curricula and staff development), which, in the understanding of HEIs, is often equated with LLL. This focus on continuing education is also in line with the prioritized target groups for HEIs' lifelong learning activities (see **Section 4.1**), among which working people requiring upskilling/reskilling, individuals working in public and private organizations, women, and HEI staff were identified as the most relevant groups.

As **Figure 7** suggests, there is a relationship between HEIs having strategies for LLL in place and having a dedicated LLL unit. HEIs that have an LLL strategy at either institutional level or at both institutional and faculty/department level are much more likely to also have a dedicated unit for LLL (68.9% and 71.1%, respectively). In comparison, the likelihood of having a dedicated LLL unit drops significantly for those HEIs which did not have, or were unsure of having, an LLL strategy (24.2% and 22.2%).

FIGURE 7 Link between the existence of an institutional LLL strategy and having a dedicated unit for LLL

Does your institution have an institutional LLL strategy and dedicated LLL unit?



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BOX 3 Example of organizational structures for LLL

At the **American University of Beirut (AUB), Lebanon**, several units contribute to implementing LLL and outreach activities: The Continuing Education Center (CEC), founded almost 50 years ago, extends AUB’s resources into the community by providing high-quality educational opportunities for individuals of all educational and professional levels. In addition to courses offered at AUB, the CEC also provides tailored in-house workshops to corporate institutions in Lebanon, the Middle East and North Africa region, and beyond (American University in Beirut, 2019). To cater to the needs of older learners, the University for Seniors provides adults (aged 50 and above) with educational and cultural opportunities, including study groups, lectures, cultural travel programmes, and intergenerational activities with AUB students. Other units contributing to AUB’s third mission are the Executive Education Center, the Advancing Research Enabling Communities Center and the Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service Center, among others.

3.2 Financing of lifelong learning

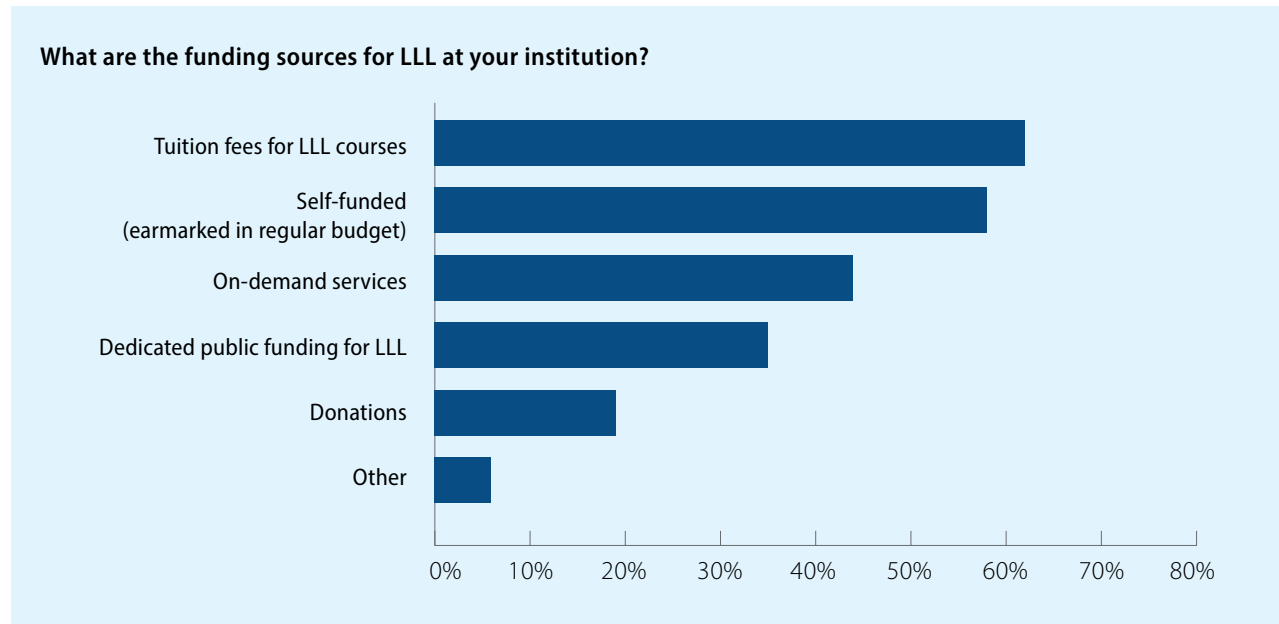
As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the issue of funding lifelong learning in higher education is important at both the institutional and individual learner levels. HEIs need resources to develop and offer LLL programmes; this can be done through dedicated funds within the regular budget, tuition fees and third-party funding, among other options. In addition to covering costs, LLL offerings – especially when it comes to continuing education programmes and customized offerings for companies – can also be a relevant source of revenue for HEIs. Regarding individual learners, there are various ways to fund LLL activities. While examples of free LLL opportunities exist (more commonly for flexible, non-degree offers, such as public lectures, workshops and, in some cases, MOOCs), often learners need to secure funds themselves to cover the cost of LLL programmes. But there are also governmental or other support programmes in place that can support learners in their higher education trajectories. Examples of individual learner support include scholarship, targeted or low-interest loans or fee waivers. The support may originate from public and private sources, which may target all learners equally or focus on particular groups, such as vulnerable and underrepresented groups. In addition to such public schemes and individuals using their own resources to cover fees for LLL, employers play an important role in funding upskilling and reskilling programmes.

As **Figure 8** shows, the most common institutional funding sources for LLL provision in HEIs are *tuition fees for LLL courses* (62.7%) and *self-funding (earmarked budget in regular budget)* (58.7%). These are followed by *on-demand services* (including corporate trainings, consultancies, other income-generating LLL activities) at 44.4 per cent, *dedicated public funding for LLL* (provided by the government, regional and local authorities, etc.) at 35.3 per cent, and *donations* (defined as funds received from, for example, the private sector, foundations, communities and philanthropic organizations) at 19.3 per cent.

Institutions selected on average just over two different funding sources (multiple answers were possible), indicating that HEIs in the sample need to rely on multiple financial instruments to fund their LLL activities. A small number of HEIs reported having other funding sources for LLL, including *partnerships with the private sector*, *a special trust fund* and *performance-based funding*, among others.

When considering the different funding types of HEIs, no relevant differences can be seen in terms of funding sources for LLL, with the exception of *dedicated public funding for LLL* being more relevant for public HEIs compared to private institutions, which is not surprising. There are two funding sources that appear to be most relevant to all types of HEIs, both publicly and privately funded, and all modes of HEIs, including campus-based, distance, open and mixed-mode; these are *tuition fees* and *self-funding*.

FIGURE 8 Funding sources for institutions' LLL provision



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Survey data on individuals' funding sources for lifelong learning (see **Figure 9**) indicate that *personal resources* are by far the most common (73.4%). This is followed by *public funding schemes offered by national, regional and local governments* (47.9%); *scholarships, bursaries and philanthropic donations* (43.6%); and *private funding* from industry and employers (38.9%). A less common funding source for individuals' LLL engagement are *fee waivers* (24.1%). A small number of institutions also responded that other sources are available, including, for example, *discounts given to regular students and alumni* for any LLL programmes provided by the HEI, *fee exemptions for vulnerable groups* such as persons with disabilities, *training offered for free to HEI staff*, and *special trust funds for LLL*.

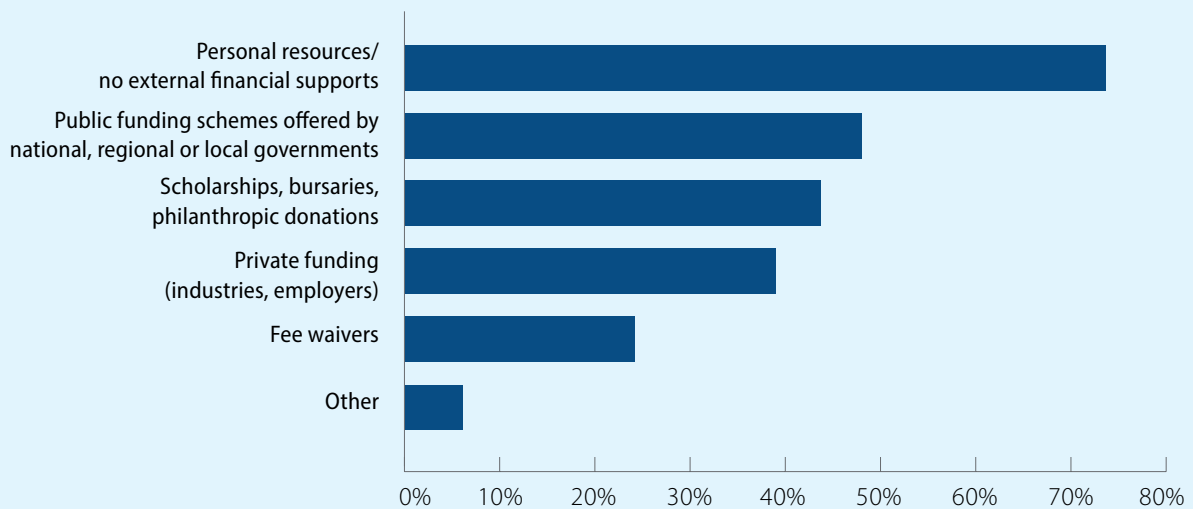
Looking at the relationship between national legislation defining LLL as a mission of HEIs and available funding sources for individuals, the survey data indicate that conducive national policy environments also come with

a larger public budget for supporting individual learners on their LLL trajectory. Of the surveyed HEIs that have such national legislation in place, 52.9 per cent selected *public funding schemes by national, regional or local governments* as a funding source for LLL. In comparison, among those HEIs where national legislation does not define LLL as a mission of higher education, only 37 per cent selected this option.

The research shows that there is also a link between the way HEIs are funded and the funding resources for individuals participating in LLL activities. Public funding schemes are a more relevant source for financing LLL in public HEIs (selected by 57.5% of public HEIs with less than 20% private funds) compared to private institutions (25.9% in the case of private, for-profit HEIs). In contrast, private funding (by industry and employers) is most important for private, for-profit institutions (59.3%) and for public HEIs with more than 20 per cent private funds (51.4%).

FIGURE 9 Funding sources for individuals to engage in LLL

**What are the funding sources for learners to engage in LLL programmes at your institution?
(Multiple answers are possible)**



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BOX 4 Examples of funding for LLL provision

In **Argentina**, higher education is largely funded by the national government. There are no fees for undergraduate and graduate studies offered at public universities and access is guaranteed for anyone with a high school certificate. This also applies to the **Universidad Nacional del Litoral (UNL)**, which, in addition to its regular studies, also offers a range of degree and non-degree programmes for adult learners. In contrast to regular studies, however, most continuing education programmes are fee-based, but at affordable prices. The university also offers tailored programmes for government agencies and the private sector, which constitutes a valuable source of income. The UNL works closely with Las Parejas, for example, which is a conglomerate of industrial companies in the region, and provides trainings on digital transformation, entrepreneurship and agri-food systems, among others. In order to promote LLL for the wider population, UNL follows a cross-financing approach within their LLL engagement: revenue generated from courses and training for private sector partners is channelled into other LLL initiatives, such as community engagement (UIL and SOU, forthcoming).

The **SkillsFuture** movement in **Singapore** is a comprehensive national funding mechanism that promotes LLL in the higher education sector and other contexts. Funding lines include the SkillsFuture Credit (SFC) scheme, which offers all Singaporeans a credit for labour market-oriented skills development (SGD 500, or approximately USD 365) for those aged 25 and above, plus an additional SGD 500 for 'mid-career support' for those aged 40 to 60). The credit can be used on top of existing government course subsidies and is eligible for a wide range of industry-relevant courses and full qualification programmes provided by institutes of higher learning, which include universities, polytechnics, offshore institutes with a local campus, and other colleges. The Career Transition Programme is another funding source within the SkillsFuture movement, which includes modular training courses for industry-relevant skills development in sectors with good hiring opportunities. Funding support for these courses may reach up to 95 per cent of course fees (Government of Singapore, 2022).

3.3 Quality assurance of lifelong learning provision

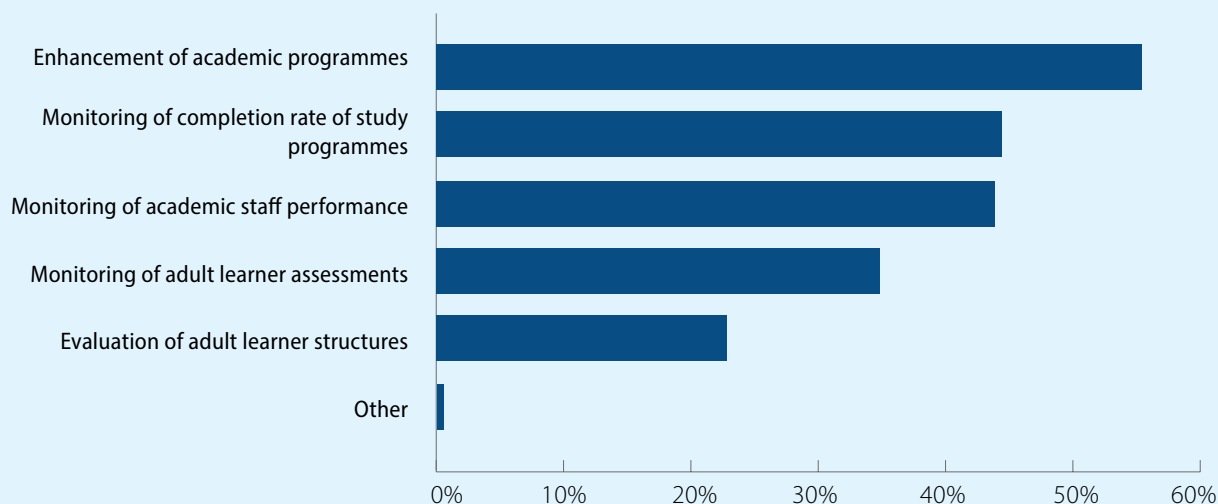
Quality assurance in LLL is a way to guarantee a high standard of provision and continuous improvement in study progress and learning outcomes. To ensure a systematic approach to QA, institutional strategies need to be in place, beginning with a clear vision and mission, which needs to be further translated into specific QA instruments. Depending on the context and conditions, HEIs may not necessarily have a dedicated QA system for LLL programmes in place; instead, they may embed LLL provision into their overarching internal QA system. Either way, a proper quality assurance system for LLL will support transparency of information, comparability, and provide ongoing evidence on the educational programmes' design and the learning outcomes to be achieved (Bengoetxea *et al.*, 2011).

As part of the survey for this report, HEIs were asked whether they had specific and systematic quality assurance procedures in place; 59.1 per cent said that they had, 29.8 per cent reported not having such procedures in place, and 11 per cent did not know. As shown in **Figure 10**, among those HEIs reporting relevant QA procedures (236 institutions), the most common measures were *monitoring enhancement of academic programmes* (55.4%), followed by *monitoring the completion rates of study programmes* (44.4%) and *monitoring academic staff performance* (43.9%). *Monitoring adult learner assessments* (34.8%) and *evaluating adult learner structures* (22.8%) were chosen by far fewer participating institutions.

A very small percentage of participating HEIs (0.04%) responded that they had 'other' quality assurance procedures for LLL. These 'other' procedures included independent learning-achievement measurement

FIGURE 10 Quality assurance procedures for lifelong learning in HEIs

Which specific and systematic quality assurance procedures have been developed for LLL opportunities? (Multiple answers are possible) (n=236)



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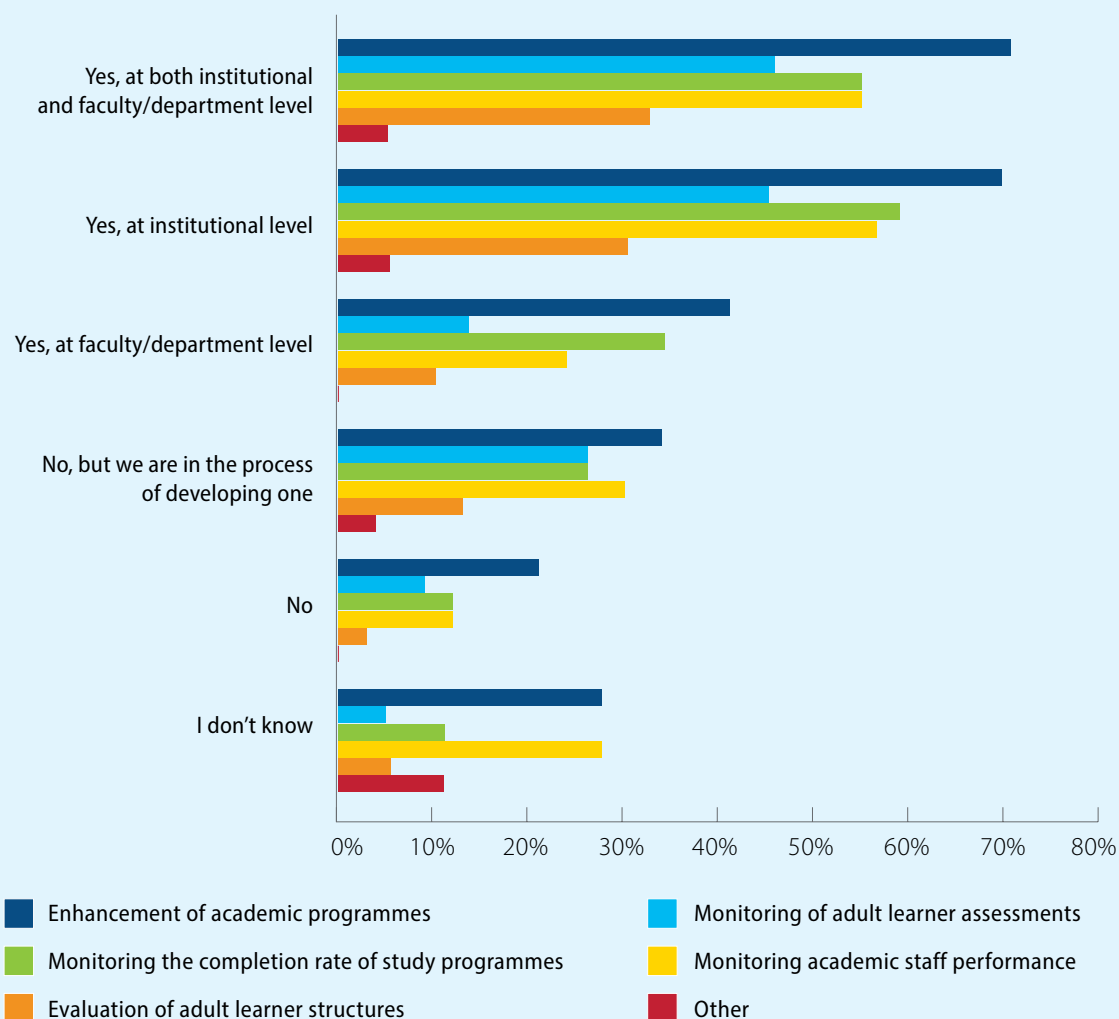
models; different forms of evaluation, surveys and procedures to improve support; and site visits. Assessing internships, learners' conference presentations and alumni impact studies were also cited. A few UK-based institutions said quality is assured through a dedicated support centre for adult continuing education and specific student achievement measures for Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students.

Institutional LLL strategies have, similar to other aspects of LLL implementation in HEIs, a supportive effect on the systematic implementation of lifelong learning in HEIs. As indicated in **Figure 11**, this positive influence is also evident in quality assurance procedures for LLL provision, which are more likely to exist in those HEIs that have an LLL strategy in place, particularly at *institutional level* or at *both institutional and faculty/department level*. Of participating HEIs in these two categories, over two-thirds said they *enhance academic programmes* based on QA monitoring (71.1% and 70.1%, respectively) and more than half stated they use QA procedures to *monitor completion rates* (55.2% and 59.2%, respectively) and *academic staff performance* (55.2% and 56.2%, respectively).

The pattern significantly changes for those HEIs with an LLL strategy only at faculty/department level, where *enhancing academic programmes* drops to 41.3 per cent, *monitoring completion rates* to 34.4 per cent, and *academic staff performance* to 24.1 per cent. The likelihood of having systematic quality assurance procedures goes further down in HEIs that responded not knowing if an LLL strategy exists in their institution and is lowest for those HEIs without a relevant LLL strategy in place. These results suggest a strong relationship between institutional LLL strategies and the level of advancement when it comes to quality assurance procedures.

FIGURE 11 Link between HEIs’ LLL strategy and quality assurance mechanisms

Relationship between having an institutional LLL strategy and available quality assurance procedures



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BOX 5 Example of quality assurance for lifelong learning provision

The **University of Hong Kong School of Professional and Continuing Education** (HKU SPACE), the People’s Republic of China, is one of the first continuing education providers, which has developed a comprehensive QA system with an LLL perspective. QA mechanisms were formalized starting in 1999, and are regularly reviewed and adapted to meet changing educational requirements, covering both degree and sub-degree programmes, as well as full- and part-time provision. The main QA mechanisms are outlined in the HKU SPACE quality assurance manual (HKU Space, 2016a), which defines several means, including the validation and review of programme design and contents, recruitment and retention of well-qualified staff and monitoring of teaching quality, arrangement of first-rate facilities for teaching and learning, careful moderation of the overall academic standard, and regular monitoring of programmes by relevant academic committees. Considering the different needs of full- and part-time adult learners, the QA manual has been adapted for full-time sub-degree programmes, offered by community colleges (HKU Space, 2016b).

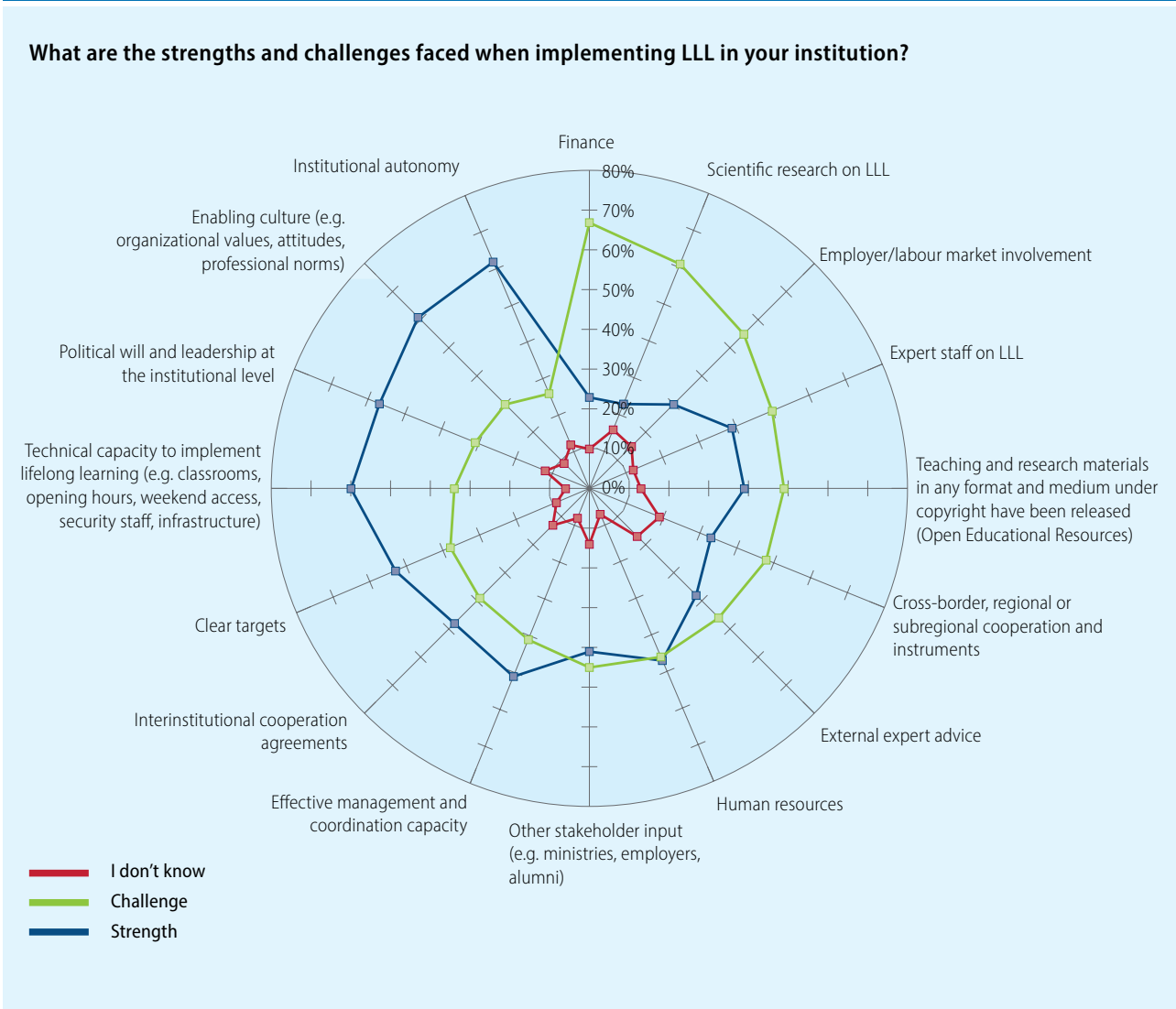
3.4 Strengths and challenges of lifelong learning implementation

Implementing LLL within the higher education sector requires a conducive environment, both at the national level as well as within institutions. HEIs operate inside a particular national and local context that influences their operations relating to, for example, their level of autonomy or dependency from the government, political will to promote LLL, and government spending for higher education. In addition, a set of institutional factors affect LLL implementation, including the leaderships commitment to LLL, organizational values, effective management structures, and technical facilities and services, among many others. All of these features can constitute strengths or challenges for widely promoting LLL in higher education. Identifying these factors can help to interpret the complex environments in which HEIs are

operating and is key to supporting the development of respective strategic interventions both at the political level as well as within institutions.

Survey participants were therefore asked to identify the features that they consider as strengths or challenges for LLL implementation. As illustrated in **Figure 12**, none of the proposed items can generally be called a ‘strength’ or a ‘challenge’ for HEIs; instead, how they are perceived depends widely on the context of each institution. There are however some broad tendencies: the three most relevant strengths for LLL implementation in HEIs are *institutional autonomy* (61.7%), an *enabling culture* (for example, organizational values, attitudes and professional norms) (60.9%), and the *technical capacity to implement lifelong learning* (that is, classrooms, opening hours, weekend access, security staff, infrastructure, etc.) (59.9%). This is closely followed by *political will and leadership at the institutional level*, which was selected as a strength by 57.1 per cent of HEIs.

FIGURE 12 HEIs’ strengths and challenges to implementing lifelong learning



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The most common challenges for LLL implementation are *financing* (66.9%), *scientific research on LLL* (61.4%), and *employer/labour market involvement* (55.1%).

No major differences can be observed when looking at the data by region; however, finance is a more pronounced challenge for HEIs in Africa (81.2%) and Latin America and the Caribbean (73.3%) compared to the overall result (66.9%). Moreover, HEIs with an institutional LLL strategy in place (either at the institutional or at both institutional and faculty/department levels) were much more likely to identify *clear targets* as a strength (65.3% and 68.4%, respectively) compared to those HEIs without an LLL strategy (18.2%) or those that stated being in the process of developing one (30.3%).

A similar pattern can be seen with *effective management and coordination capacity*, considered a strength by 67.1 per cent of HEIs with an LLL strategy at both levels compared to 27.3 per cent of HEIs without a strategy. Similar findings also exist for *political will and leadership* and *enabling culture*, both of which were selected much more often as strengths among HEIs with an LLL strategy in place. These results further emphasize the importance of an LLL strategy to support the effective implementation of LLL.

3.5 Summary of main findings

This chapter took a closer look at the institutional conditions and practices of LLL implementation, focusing on governance structures, funding mechanisms and quality assurance. The sections on these operational areas were complemented with data on the strengths and challenges that HEIs face when implementing LLL.

Becoming a 'lifelong learning institution' requires a transformative process that is ideally overseen by HEI leadership and supported by all faculties, administrative units, staff and partners. To ensure a well-coordinated whole-institution approach, HEIs need to establish an operational structure that ensures the buy-in and collaboration of different stakeholders. Establishing a central unit (either internally or externally) to take responsibility for LLL engagement can be very helpful for internal coordination. Over 53 per cent of HEIs reported having a unit dedicated to LLL, with functions ranging from *offering and selling education programmes and trainings to curricula development and community engagement, facilitating flexible learning pathways, and enhancing graduate employability and research tasks*, among others.

Given the broad scope of lifelong learning and the variety of related operational tasks, it is unlikely that a single unit can fully cover them all. Accordingly, the purpose of a dedicated lifelong learning unit would be coordination

and would be closely linked to the faculties and other specialized units within the HEI. The unit may be involved in research on LLL, for example, or collaborate with the career centre to upskill graduates; alternatively, it may work with an extension unit to provide community training or with the human resource department to support staff development. The main functions of dedicated LLL units in the sample, as indicated in the survey data, are strongly linked to the field of continuing education and professional training.

When it comes to funding LLL, the general financial trends that affect the higher education sector must be considered, not only because they shape HEIs' core operations but also because they influence their priorities for LLL implementation. At the institutional level, *tuition fees for LLL courses* and *on-demand services* constitute relevant funding sources, which means that LLL provision is also considered an income-generating activity (for cost coverage or even for-profit). In addition, *self-funding (earmarked budget in regular budget)*, *dedicated public funding for LLL* and *donations* are other common funding sources, showing that HEIs rely on multiple financial instruments to fund their LLL activities.

Another important operational area to promote LLL in higher education is quality assurance. Even though QA for LLL provision is less advanced compared to that for traditional study provision (in terms of international strategies, frameworks and specific mechanisms), the survey data show that several systematic procedures are applied in HEIs to ensure and improve the quality of LLL programmes. Just over 59 per cent of the institutions surveyed confirmed that they have such procedures in place, with most common measures being the *enhancement of academic programmes, monitoring the completion rates of study programmes* and *monitoring academic staff performance*. The survey data also showed a positive relationship between having established systematic quality assurance procedures for LLL provision and having an LLL strategy in place, particularly at institutional level or at both institutional and faculty/department level. This further underlines the importance of overarching strategies to ensure a comprehensive approach for LLL implementation.

When exploring the strengths and challenges for LLL implementation in higher education, the survey results showed that HEIs perceive *institutional autonomy, an enabling culture, and political will and leadership at institutional level* as important strengths, all of which contribute to a conducive environment for LLL and emphasize the need for an overarching commitment for its successful implementation. Finally, the biggest challenge to implementing LLL programmes is funding, making it necessary for HEIs to rely on various sources to finance their LLL activities.

4 Widening access through diversification and flexibility

Historically, HEIs were the preserve of the social elite (Allais et al., 2020). Since the end of the twentieth century, however, many parts of the world have witnessed a massification of higher education (Tight, 2019; Trow, 2000). The emergence of the knowledge economy in post-industrial societies, as well as the growth of the middle classes in developing countries, has led to a significant rise in demand for higher education and, consequently, to the expansion of the tertiary sector, including an increase of private HEIs, especially in Africa (Altbach et al., 2009). This, coupled with policy focusing on access and equity in many industrialized nations, has resulted in HEIs' enrolment rates increasing steadily over the last decades (Bowl and Bathmaker, 2016). In fact, global enrolment in tertiary education has more than doubled since 2000, with approximately 230 million learners now enrolled in higher education courses (UIS, 2022) and almost 600 million in expected to be enrolled by 2040 (Calderon, 2018). While this massification has facilitated the participation of new learners, traditionally underrepresented groups continue to face barriers to higher education (Martin and Godonoga, 2020).

Widening access is an issue that concerns both traditional study (bachelor's, master's and doctoral programmes) as well as lifelong learning opportunities (including continuing education, public lectures, community outreach, etc.) in higher education. During the past decades, HEIs have sought to make their student bodies more diverse and inclusive by welcoming learners from a broader range of backgrounds, including students from non-academic and vulnerable backgrounds. In particular, initiatives have successfully focused on achieving gender parity (Bowl and Bathmaker, 2016); today, the majority of the global student population at universities is female (Times Higher Education and IESALC, 2022). HEIs in many countries are now also targeting students from other underrepresented groups, especially older students (generally aged 25 and above at the time of enrolment) who are not coming directly from secondary education and are therefore considered 'non-traditional students'. Other target groups include ethnic minorities, older adults and migrants, as well as students who are in full-time employment or have special needs or care-giving responsibilities (Gilardi and Guglielmetti, 2011).

In industrialized countries in particular, HEIs are under increasing pressures to accommodate the changing labour market (Gallacher and Osborne, 2005) and are therefore targeting the (long-term) unemployed and workers in need of reskilling and upskilling (Chiřiba, 2012; De Viron and Davies, 2015). Given this shift of

focus, the notion of the non-traditional student has also broadened. 'Older learners', for example, may now include people with different educational biographies and life experiences who have diverse learning needs and therefore face myriad challenges in accessing and completing higher education (Bowl and Bathmaker, 2016). This suggests that a more nuanced and contextually specific understanding of non-traditional students is necessary to ensure that higher education continues to be accessible to a larger demographic.

Achieving this requires HEIs to shift from the traditional supply-based model of education provision to one that is demand-driven, responding to learners' needs and building on their prior learning (Atchoarena, 2021). Creating more flexible, learner-centered provision is fundamental to accommodating non-traditional students' diverse backgrounds, their additional professional and personal commitments, and their different learning styles and previous life experiences (Guri-Rosenblit et al., 2007; Tight, 2019). This can be achieved by offering greater flexibility regarding the place, pace and timing of delivery (Chen, 2003). Part-time, evening or weekend study options, and the ability to switch between different study modes, allow learners to combine their studies with other commitments, while short-term courses and modular study options pose less of a burden on learners' time and finances. This change to the way learning is provided also calls for a move towards more student-led and participatory content, methodologies and assessment (Vargas, 2014), which entails incorporating non-Western, Indigenous forms of knowledge and decolonizing curricula, promoting place-based teaching and learning, and recognizing the lived experiences of ethnic and linguistic minorities and ensuring their representation at all levels of the institution.

Flexible learning pathways, such as bridging or access courses, are an important tool for widening access, as they increase the number of entry and re-entry points for all ages and educational levels and can therefore enable students without traditional school leaving certificates or other formal qualifications to access higher education (Martin and Godonoga, 2020). An essential ingredient for the successful establishment of flexible learning pathways is the recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) of the full range of knowledge, skills and attitudes that individuals have obtained in various contexts and through various means across different phases of their lives, including in non-formal and informal education settings (UIL, 2012). Some countries have established national formalized procedures for RVA (also referred to as 'recognition of prior learning'; RPL), which evaluate

learners' skills and knowledge in relation to national qualification frameworks (NQF), the country-wide systems that define and certify the level of knowledge and competences achieved and according to which learners' informal and non-formal learning is correlated with a formal qualification.

Similarly, credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) systems allow learners to transition between programmes, institutions and even the vocational and higher education sectors (Cedefop, 2017). In these cases, credits obtained in one degree programme or institution are recognized by another as equivalent to their own, thereby enabling students' progression in a cost- and time-effective manner.

RVA, RPL and CAT are often systemized at the institutional level; as a result, these terms are not always used uniformly, even within the same country (Unger and Zaussinger, 2018). This makes a comparative evaluation of different practices across institutions and countries especially challenging. Quality assurance procedures, which oversee these RVA systems and tools, and which guarantee that the pathway or course meets institutional and national standards, are therefore particularly important. It is also crucial to streamline these mechanisms to ensure that learners' progression is not undermined by quality assurance bodies failing to recognize the alternative pathways learners have chosen to pursue (Martin and Godonoga, 2020).

This 'wide interpretation' of flexible learning pathways also includes the provision of information, guidance and counselling services (Moitus et al., 2020). Offered by individual HEIs or at the national level, these services assist learners in making informed decisions about their study programmes, how to access financial aid and how to combine their studies with other commitments (Martin and Godonoga, 2020). Such support is crucial to the retention of non-traditional learners, who are generally more prone to dropping out, a trend which has been linked to their sense of alienation towards the higher education culture, especially after a prolonged absence from formal learning environments (Reay et al., 2010; Chitturu, 2016; Abrahams and Witbooi, 2016).

Also key to the increase in flexible learning opportunities are digital and online learning tools (Unger and Zaussinger, 2018). More cost-effective and far-reaching than traditional on-campus provision, online teaching enables students from remote areas, with family responsibilities or in full-time employment to learn how and when it is convenient for them (Chawinga and Zozie, 2016).

Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic called attention to both positive and negative aspects of digital learning, highlighting the disadvantaged faced by learners who are unable to access or use the internet or other ICT

tools, and who have no access to a suitable learning environment (Enoch and Soker, 2006; Miller and Lu, 2003). Additional concerns relate to equity and consistency across different learning modes (Atchoarena, 2021). Unless a parity of esteem can be achieved between qualifications obtained on campus and those achieved through digital learning, online learning may further exacerbate the already stratified higher education system and contribute to non-traditional learners being 'directed towards newer, less prestigious forms of HE' (Bowl and Bathmaker, 2016, p. 146). Alternative and digital credentials can play an important role in overcoming this challenge, as they validate the learning undertaken outside of traditional degree programmes, including through online or hybrid learning (Lemoine and Richardson, 2015; Matkin, 2018).

The measures outlined so far in this chapter, which encompass flexible learning provisions and pathways, institutional and national policies and frameworks, guidance arrangements, and technology-enhanced learning, address many of the practical barriers learners from underrepresented and disadvantaged groups may face when (re-)entering higher education. However, for HEIs to become lifelong learning institutions, a more profound review of their traditional approaches to teaching, learning and research is necessary. A lifelong learning approach to higher education requires HEIs to fully commit to their 'third mission', which comprises community engagement, collaborations with public institutions and the private sector and, more widely, their societal responsibilities and efforts to provide LLL opportunities to all members of society.

The next sections of this chapter present and analyse survey results on widening access to LLL in higher education. It begins with an overall examination of the groups targeted through these activities, identifying the most and least prioritized. Next, it explores diversified learning provision, including degree and non-degree programmes as well as alternative credentials. This links well with the topic of flexible learning pathways, with survey results covering data on respective institutional policies and guidance arrangements as well as specific mechanisms for admission and transfer pathways available in HEIs. The survey results on the use of digital technologies also covers data on the provision of massive open online courses (MOOCs), which have gained popularity during the last decade.

The final section in this chapter is dedicated to HEIs' social responsibilities and local partnerships, including their contribution to reaching the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Within this context, data are presented on how HEIs engage with stakeholders in their local communities as well as with the private sector as part of their third mission.

4.1 Reaching out to non-traditional learners and vulnerable groups

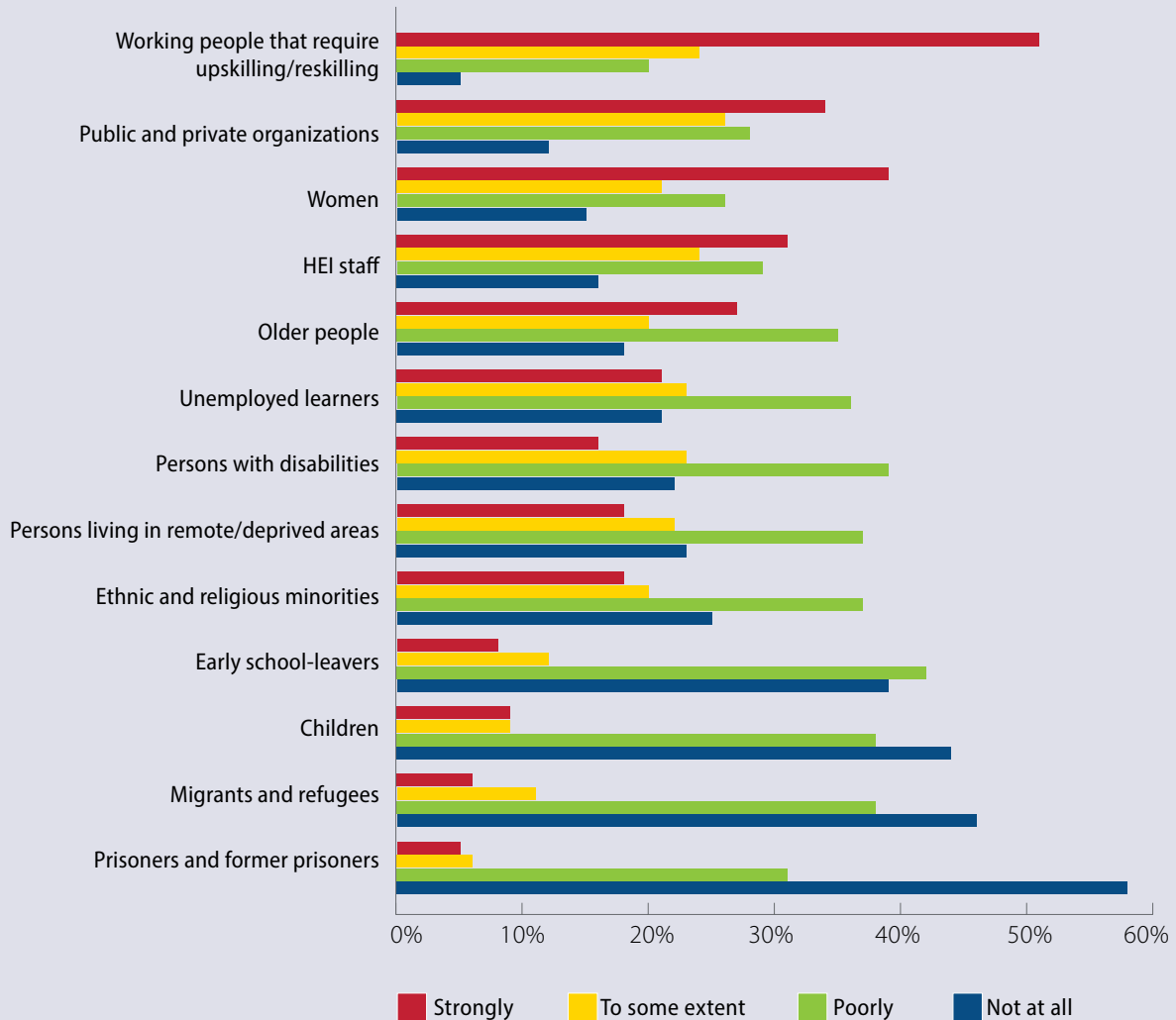
Student populations are changing, which is partly related to a diversification of institutions in the higher education sector (including the proliferation of open and distance universities). At the same time, many HEIs are modifying their operations to include more flexible learning provision. They increasingly recognize non-traditional learners as target groups for higher education and facilitate their participation by offering short-cycle courses, online programmes, alternative credentials and flexible pathways. To explore which learners are now being targeted by HEIs, the international survey asked respondents to rank different groups according to their priorities for LLL provision (**Figure 13**).

The top three target groups which HEIs indicated as being prioritized for lifelong learning activities ('strongly' or 'to some extent') are *working people requiring upskilling/reskilling* (89%), *public and private organizations* (84%) and *women* (82%). The majority of participating HEIs also reported that their LLL activities focus on HEI staff, with 80.2 per cent stating that they were either strongly or to some extent prioritizing this group.

In comparison, *older people, unemployed learners* and *people with disabilities* were targeted to a lesser degree, with around 60 per cent of participating HEIs reporting that they prioritized these groups. Just over half of the survey respondents indicated that their institution's lifelong learning activities prioritize *persons living in remote or deprived areas*, and a similar percentage target *ethnic and religious minorities*. *Early school-leavers, children, and*

FIGURE 13 Prioritized target groups for LLL activities

To what extent does your institution target the following groups through its LLL activities?



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migrants and refugees are an even less important target group for most participating HEIs: the majority stated that these groups were either 'poorly' or 'not at all' targeted.

The least prioritized group were *prisoners and former prisoners*: 75.2 per cent of survey respondents indicated that they were poorly or not at all targeted. These results suggest that the most vulnerable groups are generally less prioritized, while labour market-oriented activities, the unemployed, partner organizations, as well as the training of HEI staff, have become the focus of HEIs' lifelong learning agendas.

In general, no significant differences were observed across the majority of participating HEIs regarding campus-based, open and distanced or mixed-mode learning provision for different groups of learners. Disparities emerge when specific vulnerable groups are taken into consideration. *Prisoners and former prisoners* are targeted to a greater extent by open and distance HEIs (around 45% of these types of institutions indicated prioritizing this group compared to 22% of campus-based and 25% of mixed-mode HEIs). Open and distance HEIs were also slightly more inclined to target *children* and *early school-leavers* than their mixed-mode or campus-based counterparts.

Overall, open and distance HEIs prioritize a wider range of target groups than mixed-mode and campus-based institutions, suggesting that the LLL activities of the former HEIs reach a more diverse audience and are more accessible to underrepresented groups. This is also reflected in the survey data on the overall average percentage of the student body involved in LLL activities: participating distance and open HEIs reported the highest percentages, at 51.6 per cent (distance HEIs) and 46.44 per cent (open HEIs), respectively, while campus-based HEIs had an average involvement rate of 26.3 per cent.

4.2 Diversified learning provision

In order to facilitate learners' access and participation, and to accommodate their diverse learning needs, HEIs must ensure their provision is flexible (Chen, 2003; Tight, 2019). Such flexible arrangements typically include weekend, evening and part-time study, as well as online and blended learning, which allows learners to study at their own pace and are particularly important for learners with other professional or personal commitments. In addition to flexibility in terms of learning times, places and modalities, shorter programmes and courses with modular structures in addition to traditional degree programmes must be made available. Over the past decade, there has been an increasing demand for

non-degree programmes and alternative credentials, which certify learning outcomes and, ideally, are linked to flexible learning pathways, allowing for progression within an academic track or transition to other fields. Alternative digital and non-digital credentials include academic certificates, industry certifications, professional licenses, digital badges and micro-credentials, with the latter receiving particular policy attention in recent years. Micro-credentials are 'typically focused on a specific set of learning outcomes in a narrow field of learning', involve 'assessment based on clearly defined standards' and have a stand-alone value (UNESCO, 2022b, p. 5f).

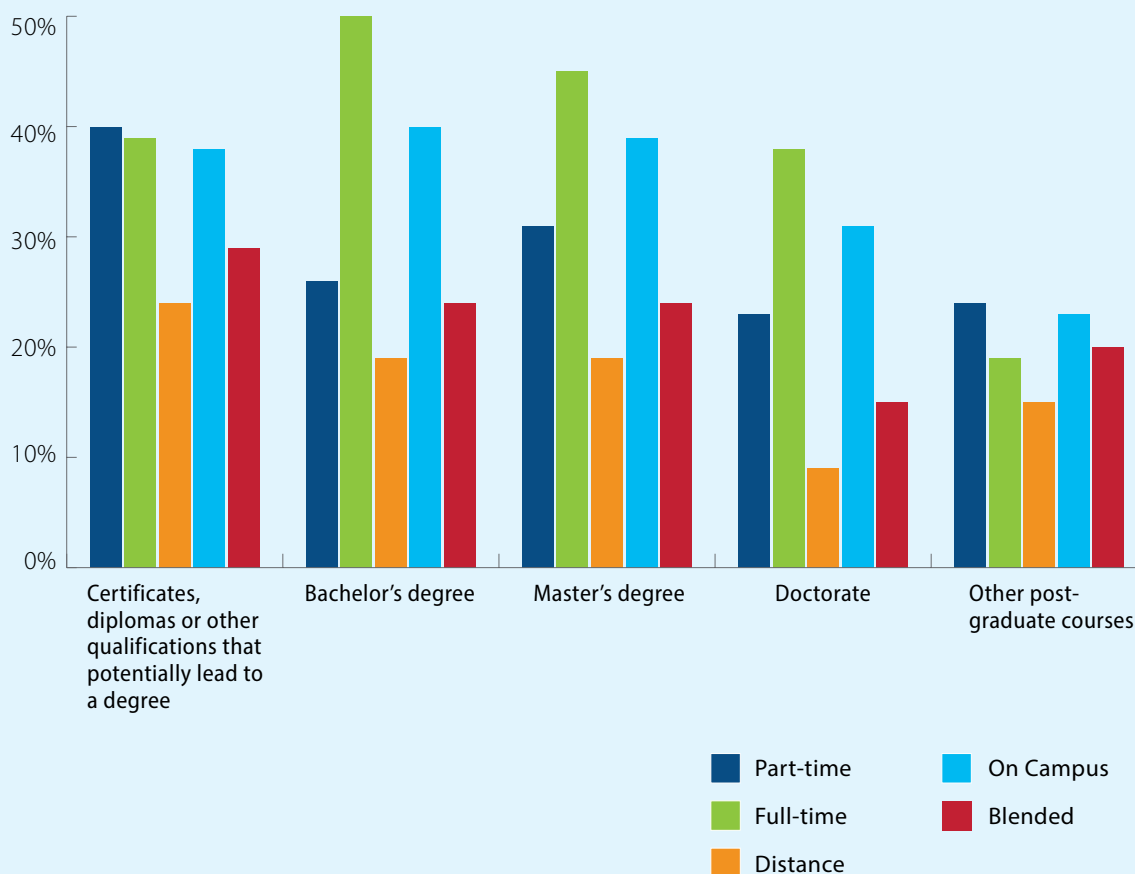
The increasing relevance of micro-credentials is also linked to the rapid growth of online and blended learning provision, including MOOCs, which enable HEIs to reach a wider audience and are therefore a valuable source of income. Online delivery for micro-credentials may be organized directly by HEIs or together with other providers. However, because of rapid technological advancements and the profusion of new forms of online learning provision, the range of higher education programmes is becoming more diverse and complex. This leads to a blurring of the boundaries between formal and non-formal education programmes, with the status of micro-credentials within higher education provision often being unclear (most micro-credentials are currently classified as non-formal education) (OECD, 2021b).

Alternative credentials, and the online and hybrid learning they validate, challenge the conventional structures of degree programmes and offer a model for more accessible and flexible provision. Moreover, because they are well-suited options for reskilling and upskilling, they are often established in collaboration with industries and employers as part of HEIs' efforts to enhance workers' skills and employability. They also have a vast potential to increase and widen access to higher education for traditionally marginalized groups (Moodie and Wheelahan, 2018). Nevertheless, although alternative credentials are widely discussed, there is little evidence of actual implementation within HEIs.

In the survey, 70.3 per cent of HEIs responded that they offer dedicated programmes for adult learners that potentially lead to a graduate or post-graduate degree. Although the results clearly indicate that the main forms of provision for *bachelor's*, *master's* and *doctorate programmes* are full-time and on campus, there seems to be more flexibility for shorter qualifications. As **Figure 14** shows, *certificates, diplomas or other qualifications that potentially lead to a degree* are almost equally offered full-time (39.4%) and part-time (39.9%); for other postgraduate courses, part-time provision is even more common than full-time (23.8% and 18.8%, respectively).

FIGURE 14 Delivery modes of degree programmes

Which types of degree-granting programmes and modes of delivery does your institution offer?
(Multiple answers are possible)



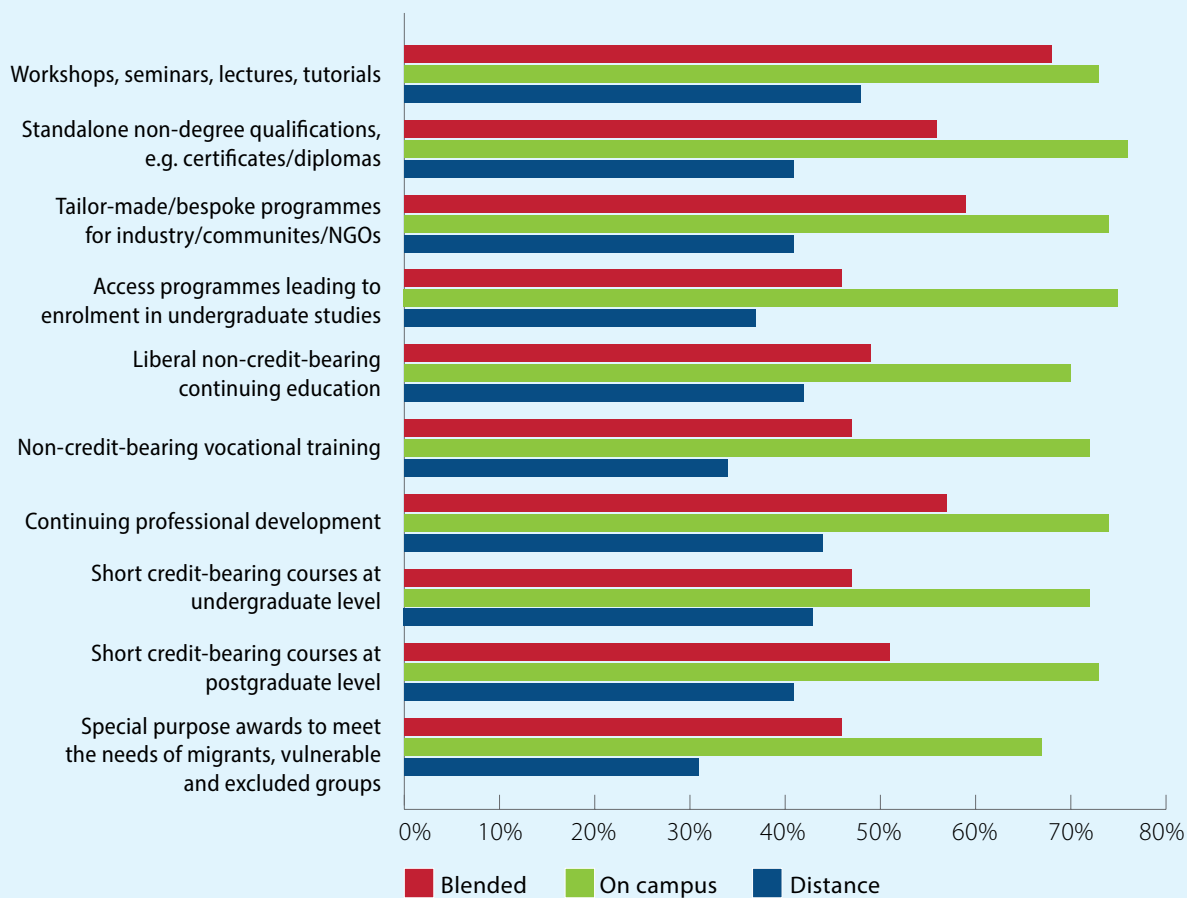
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Three hundred of the 399 HEIs that participated in the survey (75.2%) reported offering learning programmes that did not lead to a degree. With regards to modes of learning provision, the most common option for all programmes was by far on-campus learning. The rates of on-campus provision are fairly steady across all forms of programmes listed in **Figure 15**: between 67.4 per cent for *special purpose awards to meet the needs of migrants, vulnerable and excluded groups*, and 75.7 per cent for *access programmes leading to enrolment in undergraduate studies*. Blended learning and distance learning options were available to a much lower extent. The most popular non-degree offers were *workshops, seminars, lectures and tutorials*, which were primarily offered through blended learning (67.9%) and distance learning (48.2%).

Of the HEIs participating in the survey, 54.6 per cent responded that they offer at least one form of alternative digital and non-digital credentials beyond traditional degrees, diplomas and certificates. Among those, *non-credit certificates* were the most common credentials offered (43.9%). Other options included *industry certifications*, selected by 17.5 per cent of HEIs, followed by *occupational or professional licensures* (16.8%), *stackable credits* (12.8%), and *badges and other micro-credentials* (10.8%). A small number of respondents (4.5%) selected *other credentials*, which, for example, includes 'attendance certificates for some training purposes' (see **Figure 16**).

FIGURE 15 Delivery modes of non-degree programmes

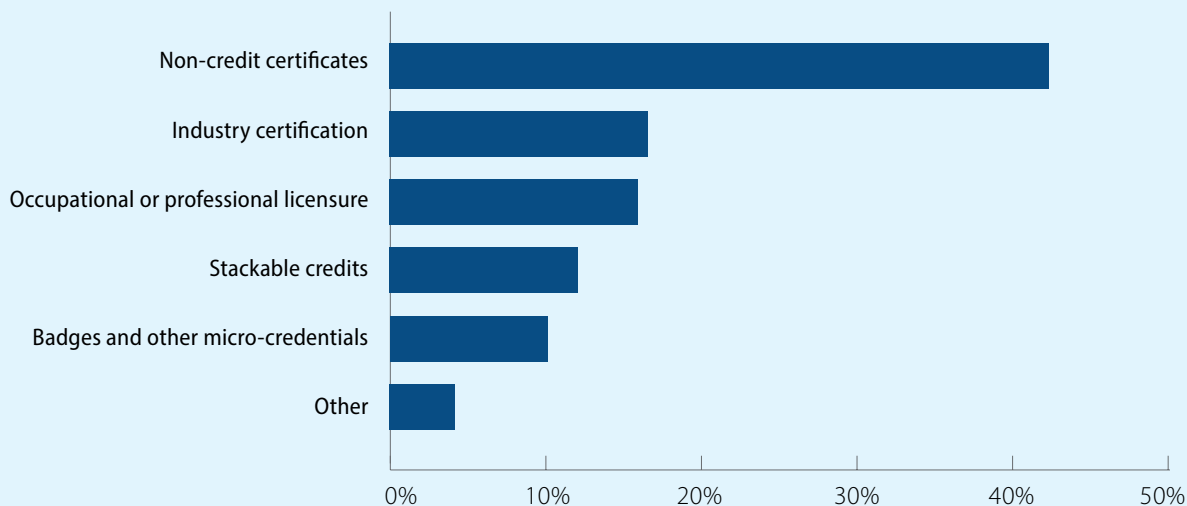
What are modes of delivery are available for the following programmes? (Multiple answers are possible)



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FIGURE 16 Alternative digital and non-digital credentials

Alternative digital and non-digital credentials offered beyond traditional degrees, diplomas and certificates (Multiple answers are possible) (n=218)



UIL StatLink: bit.ly/UIL_HEI-LLL_fig16

4.3 Flexible learning pathways

Paramount to ensuring wider parts of society have access to higher education and LLL are flexible learning pathways (FLPs); these include programme articulation, and foundation, bridging and open-access programmes, which enable learners without traditional school-leaving qualifications to access study at the tertiary level (Martin and Godonoga, 2020). The successful establishment of FLPs within higher education institutions calls for respective frameworks and mechanisms at the national level, including regulations for credit accumulations, transfer and admission systems, and interinstitutional transfer arrangements. Such regulations allow students to switch between different HEIs, and between vocational and higher education, and increase the permeability between formal, non-formal and informal learning structures (Brennan, 2021).

As the results of an international survey on FLPs in higher education conducted by UNESCO-IIEP in 2019 suggest, countries widely recognize the importance of providing continuous learning opportunities for individuals and in helping them to take advantage of these opportunities. While there is a strong commitment to FLPs at the national level, the vast majority of countries do not have a single policy on FLPs in place, but rather support flexibility through a mix of policies, particularly targeting the development of information and guidance systems, NQFs and LLL. Policies for the recognition of prior learning and credit accumulation and transfer are less developed, however, pointing to ‘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’ (UNESCO-IIEP, 2022, p. 44).

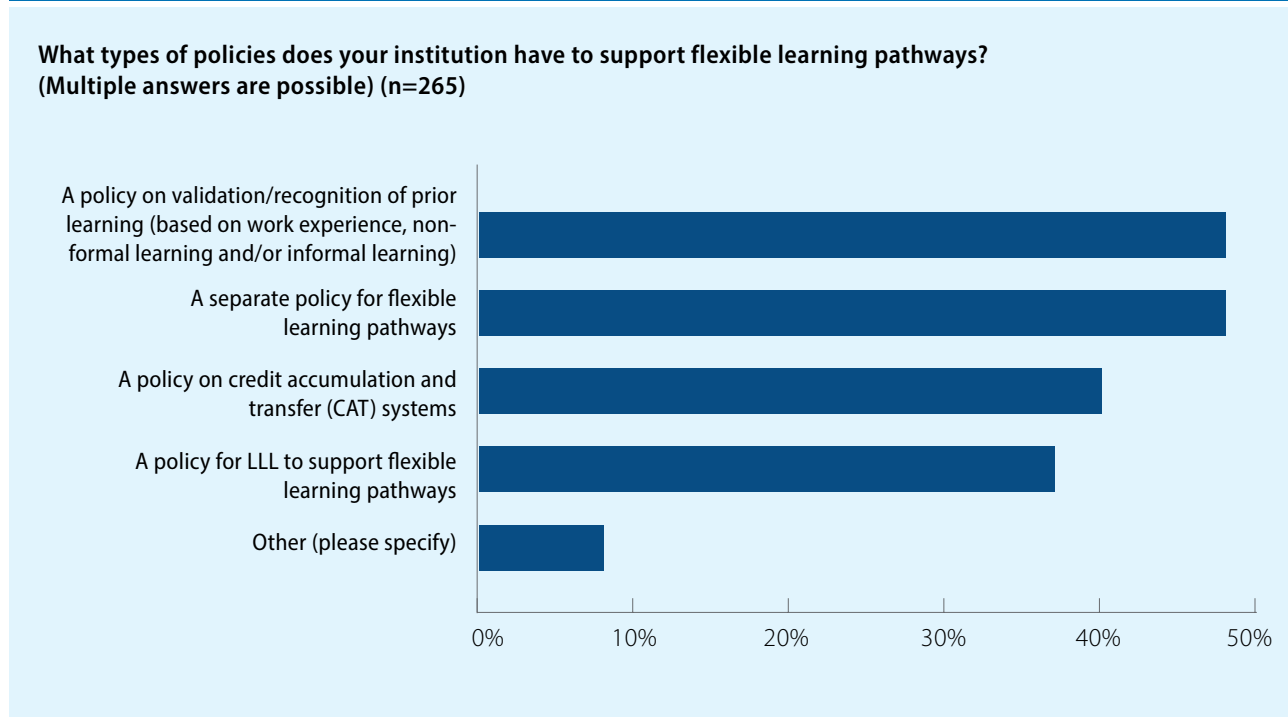
Another challenge is the alignment of policies and instruments for FLPs. While NQFs in many countries support links between higher education and vocational education, there are still gaps when it comes to the integration of adult education and the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Wider institutional awareness and understanding of FLPs are equally important, as is the provision of guiding arrangements for students, which are key to ensuring non-traditional learners’ access to and progression in higher education programmes.

Of the 399 HEIs that participated in the survey for this report, 265 institutions (66.4%) indicated having policies in place to support flexible learning pathways. Rates varied significantly according to the type of institution however: 85.2 per cent of private for-profit institutions reported that they had a policy in place compared to around 66 per cent of private, not-for-profit institutions and the same percentage of public institutions with less than 20 per cent private funding. Of the public institutions with more than 20 per cent private funding, 59.5 per cent had a policy for FLPs in place.

When asked to specify the type of policy they had to support FLPs (**Figure 17**), 47.7 per cent of participating HEIs said they had a *separate FLP policy* and an equal number indicated having a *policy related to the recognition of prior learning (RPL)*. Policies on *credit accumulation and transfer systems* and policies for *lifelong learning to support FLPs* were slightly less prevalent – these could be found in around 40 per cent of participating HEIs. A small percentage reported having *other* policies in place to support these pathways (7.9%).

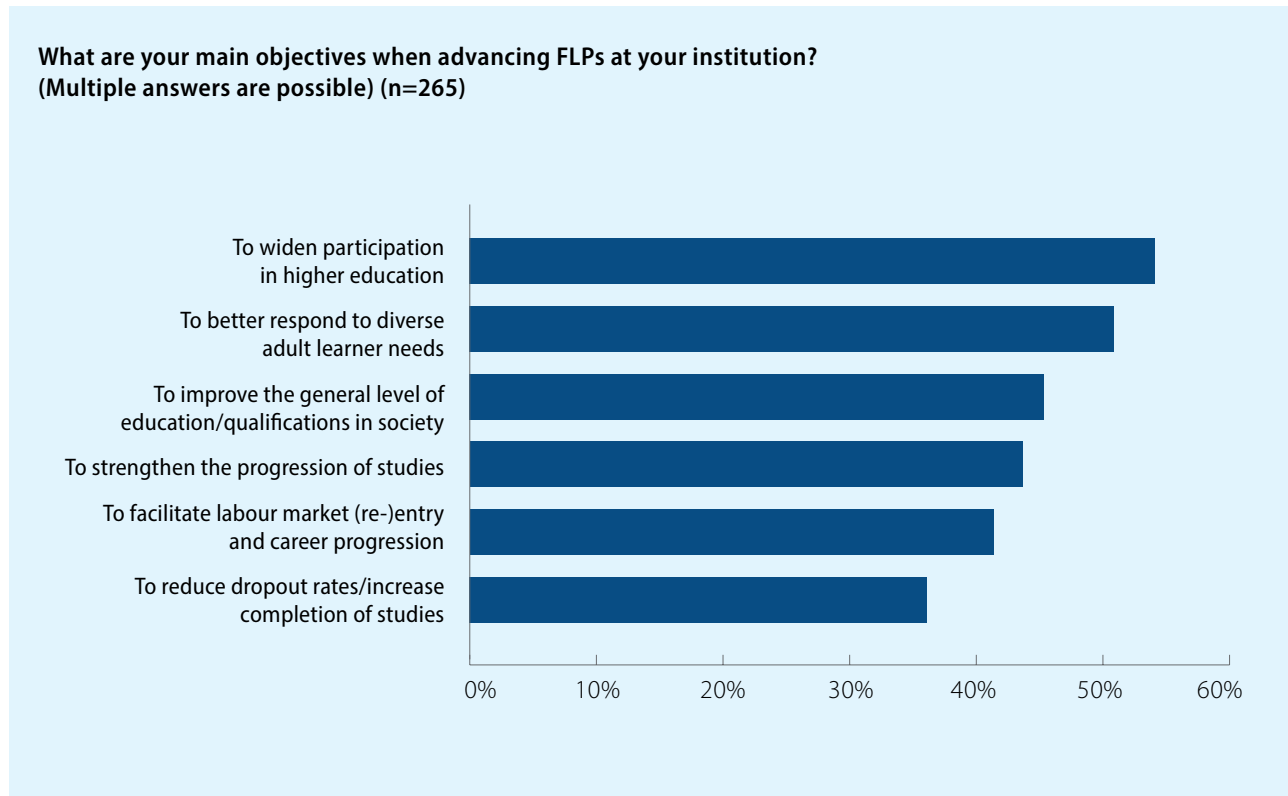
The survey also asked questions regarding the participating HEIs’ aims when implementing FLPs. As shown in **Figure 18**, the two most commonly selected answers were to *widen participation in higher education* (54.1%) and *better respond to the diverse needs of adult learners* (50.8%). Less common objectives included *improving the general level of education and qualifications in society* (selected by 45.4% of respondents), *strengthening study progression* (43.6%), *facilitating labour market (re) entry and career progression* (41.3%) and *reducing dropout rates and increasing study completion rates* (36%). This wide distribution of responses indicates that participating HEIs are pursuing a range of objectives through their FLPs, although issues of widening access and the diversification of the student population were prioritized over the more practical concerns of labour-market orientation and learner attrition.

FIGURE 17 Types of policies to support flexible learning pathways



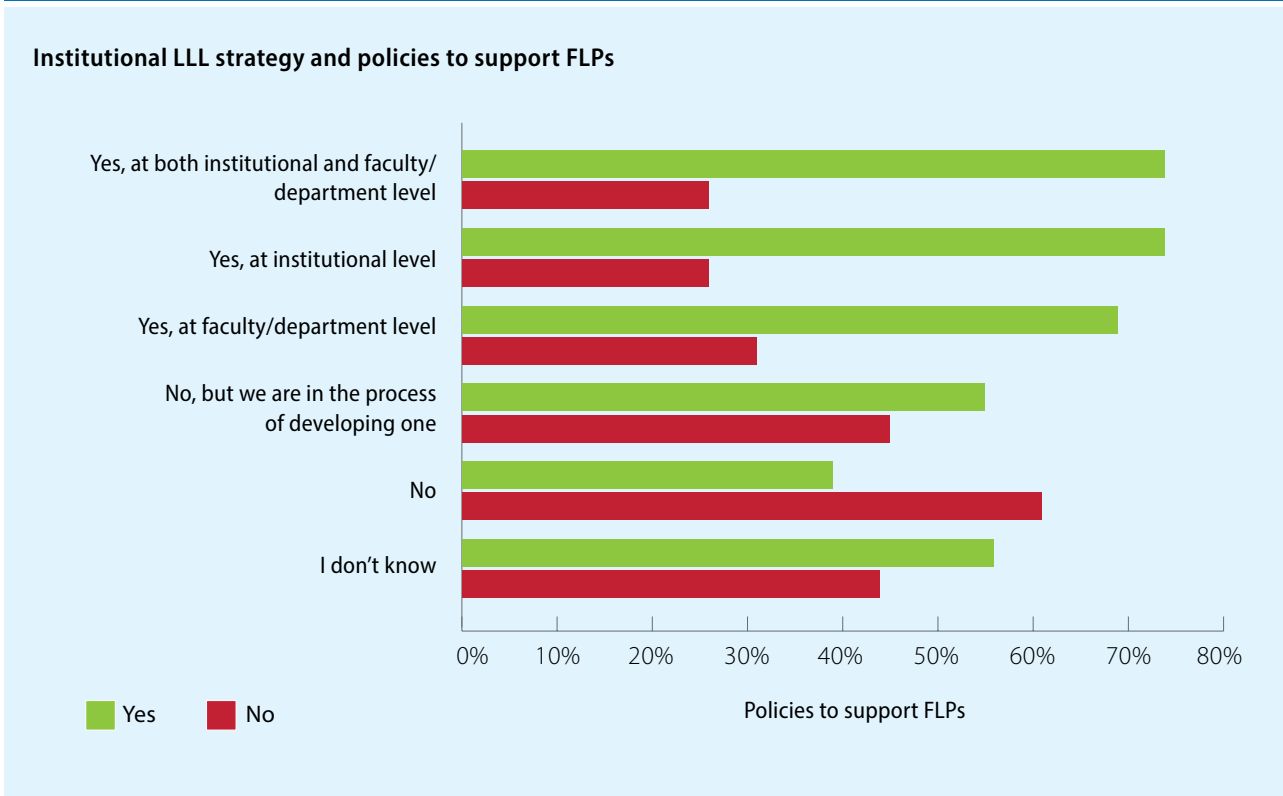
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FIGURE 18 Objectives of flexible learning pathways in HEIs



UIL StatLinks: bit.ly/UIL_HEI-LLL_fig18

FIGURE 19 Links between institutional LLL strategies and policies to support FLPs

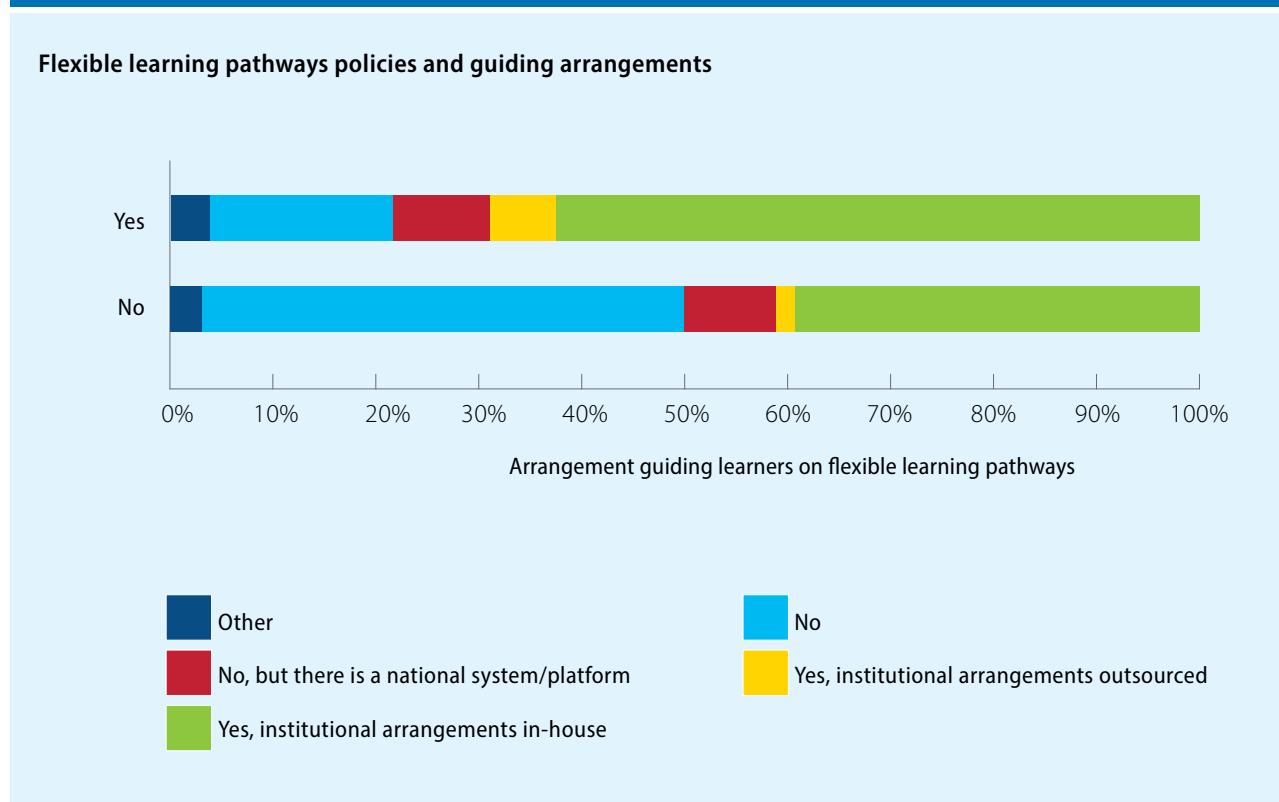


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Figure 19 demonstrates that there is a strong association between participating HEIs having policies for FLPs and having an LLL strategy in place, either at *institutional level* (74.2%), *faculty/department level* (68.9%) or at *both institutional and faculty/department levels* (73.6%). Among the institutions currently developing an LLL strategy, 55.2 per cent said they have policies for FLPs; those without a strategy are less likely (39.3%) to have FLP policies. Among those unsure of whether an LLL strategy exists at their institution, a slight majority reported having FLP policies (55.5%).

To ascertain to what extent FLP policies are supported by wider institutional and national policies and practices, survey respondents were asked to what extent the NQF in their country contributed to flexible learning pathways, with 62 per cent indicating that this was the case either 'strongly' or 'to some extent'. Also, 64.7 per cent agreed ('strongly' or 'to some extent') that external quality assurance and accreditation are supportive of FLPs. Respondents were also asked to determine the extent of staff's awareness of the flexible learning pathways available at their institution: 74.7 per cent of respondents said staff were either 'strongly' or 'to some extent' aware of such policies.

FIGURE 20 Link between having FLP policies and availability of guiding arrangements



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Affirming the importance of information and guidance services to ensure flexible pathways are not only available but that learners actually take advantage of them, the survey also asked about the aspect of promoting FLPs; 57.39 per cent of the participating HEIs responded that they have institutional arrangements in place (including both in-house services as well as external guidance/counselling services). **Figure 20** indicates that participating HEIs with policies that promote FLPs are more likely to have guidance arrangements for learners who pursue these pathways: among HEIs with FLP policies, in-house institutional guidance arrangements were the most common (62.3%) while a smaller proportion said these arrangements are outsourced (6.4%). Both among HEIs with FLP policies and those without, just under 10 per cent indicated that they do not have institutional arrangements but that there is a national system or platform in place.

In addition to policies for flexible learning pathways, HEIs were asked about direct access to study programmes (that is, bachelor and master degrees, and short-cycle tertiary programmes) through various admission pathways, such as general and vocational leaving certificates or informal or formal bridging programmes.

Unsurprisingly, general secondary leaving certificates provided the most direct access to bachelor-degree programmes (59.9%), whereas vocational qualifications and certificates at upper- and post-secondary level provided access to bachelor-degree programmes in approximately 40 per cent of HEIs surveyed. Only 22.8 per cent of participating HEIs indicated that learners were able to access their bachelor’s degree programmes through validation or recognition of prior learning based on non-formal education and training, with the majority (59.4%) reporting that none of their study programmes were accessible through this pathway. Informal bridges from vocational or post-secondary institutions were also not commonly recognized: nearly three quarters of surveyed HEIs indicated that this pathway granted ‘no access’ into bachelor’s, master’s or short-cycle programme. Open access (that is, no qualifications required) was only a possible pathway into short-cycle programmes in 11 per cent of participating HEIs (see **Table 4**).

TABLE 4 Admission pathways available at HEIs (Multiple answers were possible per row)

Which of the following admission pathways are available at your institution (e.g. Can an applicant enter a bachelor's degree programme through recognition of prior learning)?	Direct access to short-cycle tertiary education	Direct access to bachelor's degree programme	Direct access to master's degree programme	No access
General secondary leaving certificate from upper-secondary education institution	13.78%	59.90%	2.01%	24.31%
Vocational secondary leaving certificate from upper-secondary education institution	17.04%	42.11%	1.50%	39.35%
General formal qualification from post-secondary, non-tertiary education institution	13.03%	42.36%	5.01%	39.60%
Vocational formal qualification from post-secondary, non-tertiary education institution	13.28%	36.09%	3.76%	46.87%
A special admission, aptitude or higher education entrance test (without requirement of formal secondary school-leaving certificate)	12.28%	25.81%	1.50%	60.40%
Adult learner education certificate, giving access to higher education	15.04%	35.59%	2.51%	46.87%
Validation/recognition of prior learning (RPL) based on non-formal education and training	11.53%	22.81%	6.27%	59.40%
Formally regulated bridging programmes from vocational, short-cycle or tertiary education institution, enabling progression to academically oriented programmes	14.04%	29.07%	3.51%	53.38%
Informal bridges from vocational upper-secondary education institution and post-secondary, non-tertiary education institution, not regulated by national policy but offered by an institution	11.78%	12.53%	2.26%	73.43%
Open access (no qualification required)	11.03%	8.02%	2.01%	78.95%

UIL StatLinks: bit.ly/UIL_HEI-LLL_table4

TABLE 5 Transition pathways available at HEIs (Multiple answers were possible per row)

Which of the following transfer pathways are available at your institution?	From any HEI	Across faculties of the same institution	Between programmes of the same faculty	Not available
Through a regional or sub-regional credit-transfer system (cross-national)	32.08%	17.04%	13.78%	58.90%
Through a national credit-transfer system	42.61%	27.82%	24.31%	44.36%
Through institutional agreements with other education and training providers	44.61%	22.81%	20.80%	41.60%
Through a credit transfer or exemption that reduces the total amount of units to be completed in order to graduate from a programme	55.39%	48.62%	44.86%	25.56%

 UIL StatLinks: bit.ly/UIL_HEI-LLL_table5
BOX 6 Examples of flexible learning provision and pathways in higher education

The Centre for Lifelong Learning (C3L) at **Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD)** offers a range of flexible learning opportunities and pathways for lifelong learners. UniBridge is a one-semester full-time programme that offers members of the public who do not yet meet the necessary entry requirements an alternative to gain access to UBD's bachelor programmes. It comprises specially designed modules related to the academic field intended to be studied as well as an introduction to student life and academic culture (Universiti Brunei Darussalam, 2022a). Another flexible LLL opportunity at the C3L are 14-week blended-learning courses, which are open to everyone. Topics include digital technology, business management, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy, among others. Credits obtained can be used towards achieving a diploma or degree qualification (Universiti Brunei Darussalam, 2022b).

The **Academic Credit Bank System (ACBS) in the Republic of Korea** is an open educational system that recognizes diverse learning experiences gained in formal and non-formal contexts, providing alternative paths for degree acquisition in higher education. It is coordinated by the Korean Ministry of Education (MoE) and the National Institute for Lifelong Education (NILE). Individuals benefit through a recognition of prior learning and flexible opportunities for continuing education at the systemic level; the ACBS therefore helps to strengthen links between formal and non-formal educational domains, both vertically and horizontally. The ACBS defines a standardized process: students who wish to receive a degree must register with NILE or a provincial office of education and can then start to accumulate credits until the point of graduation. After completing the necessary credit requirements for bachelor degrees or diplomas, candidates submit a degree application, which has to be screened by NILE and approved by the MoE (NILE, 2022).

Under the **Australian** Government's higher education relief package, a new higher education qualification type – the **Undergraduate Certificate (UC)** – has recently been developed and added to the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). In response to the COVID-19 crisis, and based on community and industry needs, HEIs have been encouraged to develop six-month online courses, focusing on identified national priorities. The UC is not located at a particular level in the AQF but may be used to articulate into an existing qualification from Level 5 (higher education diploma) to Level 7 (bachelor's degree). It qualifies individuals with knowledge and skills for further study, professional upskilling, employment and participation in lifelong learning (Australian Government – Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2022; UIL, 2022b).

In addition to admission pathways, HEIs were also asked about the possibility to transition between HEIs, faculties and programmes. As **Table 5** shows, the most widely available option for students to transfer to different programmes within or between institutions is through a *credit transfer or exemption, reducing the total amount of units to be completed in order to graduate from a programme* (55.4% of HEIs allow for transition from any HEI through this option). Transfers between HEIs *through institutional agreements with other education and training providers*, or through a *national credit transfer system*, are less common (offered by 44.6% and 42.6% of participating HEIs, respectively), as are transfers through a *regional or sub-regional credit transfer system* (available at just under a third of participating HEIs). Interestingly, transfer pathways within institutions, either across faculties or between programmes in the same faculty, seem less well-developed than across different HEIs. This observation applies to all transition pathways listed in the survey. Almost 60 per cent of survey respondents stated that *transfers through a regional or sub-regional credit transfer system* were not available at their institution. Regarding formal partnerships with other education providers, or other organizations through which FLPs were offered, 42 per cent reported not to have any. It is worth noting that several respondents did not know whether such partnerships exist.

4.4 Technology-enhanced learning

Digital and online technologies have been a crucial factor in the development and expansion of flexible learning provision for learners from underrepresented groups and have supported the implementation of HEIs' lifelong learning activities. Going far beyond online lectures and seminars, technology-enhanced learning has come to encompass a broad spectrum of innovative educational activities and pedagogical tools. Recent developments in mobile learning, including the use of social media, for example, have allowed students to become more active collaborators in the teaching and learning process (Kukulska-Hulme, 2012). MOOCs have allowed HEIs to reach learners beyond their local communities and catchment areas and have been particularly successful in making learning available in developing countries and remote areas, and therefore in addressing regional socioeconomic disadvantages, because they enable learners to access content from anywhere and at any time (Daniel et al., 2015; Lambert, 2020). Meanwhile, technologies such as adaptive learning and e-portfolios

have allowed learners to tailor their learning experience to their needs, and to accommodate other personal or professional commitments (Alamri et al., 2021). Blended learning options have also become more widespread and integrated in lifelong learning activities and have proven particularly successful in targeting non-traditional learners due to the flexibility they offer while still providing the benefits of in-person provision (Jones and Lau, 2010).

The survey results show that the use of technology-enhanced learning in lifelong learning activities is in general slightly more common among mixed-mode and open and distance HEIs as compared to campus-based HEIs. As indicated in **Figure 21**, *live online lectures and seminars*, as well as the *increased use of blended or hybrid learning*, are by far the most popular technological approaches among participating campus-based HEIs (used by 80.8% and 77.4% of HEIs, respectively), mixed-mode HEIs (80%), and open or distance HEIs (82.8% and 80%, respectively).

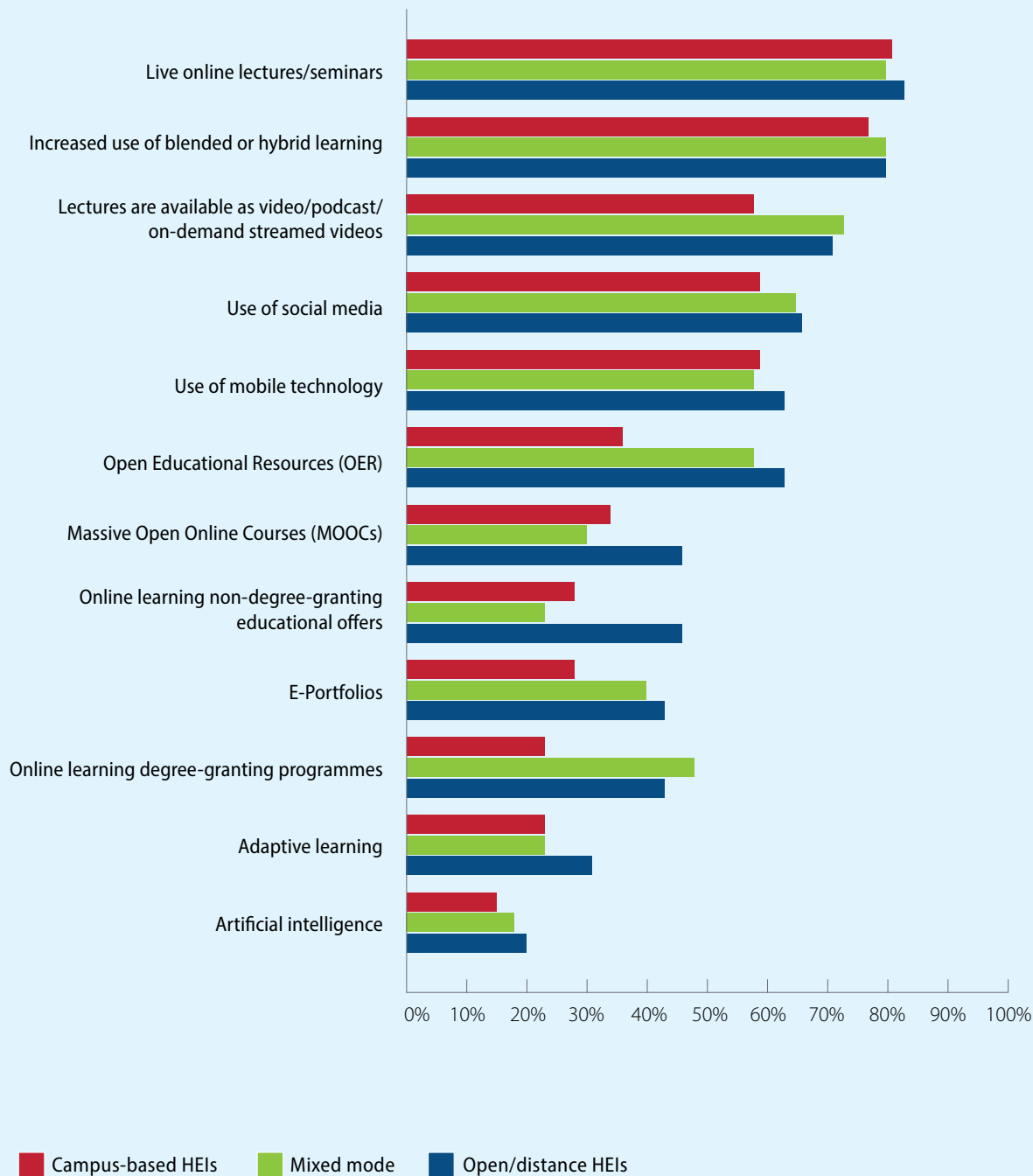
In terms of *lectures available by video, podcast or another on-demand medium*, mixed-mode and open or distance HEIs reported higher shares (72.5% and 71.4%, respectively) than campus-based HEIs (58%). Similar results can be observed for participating HEIs' use of *social media and mobile phones*, which were both highest among open or distance HEIs, and lowest among campus-based HEIs. Open or distance HEIs also reported the highest share of *open educational resources (OERs)* at 62.8 per cent (compared to 36.4% among campus-based HEIs), *MOOCs* and *online learning that is not degree-granting* (both 45.7%).

By region, Africa has the highest share of OERs (53.1%), followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (50.7%), Asia and the Pacific (39.6%), Europe and North America (35.4%), and the Arab States (29.4%). Artificial intelligence (AI) is the least common technology used across all three modalities, yet, of these, distance or open HEIs use them at the highest proportion (20%). By region, participating HEIs in Latin America and the Caribbean reported the highest use of AI (21.3%) compared to Europe and North America, which reported the lowest (12.1%).

Among all participating HEIs, 34.6 per cent reported that they offer MOOCs. As demonstrated in **Figure 22**, the survey data indicate that larger HEIs are more likely to offer MOOCs, suggesting a strong relationship between the two variables (that is, size and MOOC provision).

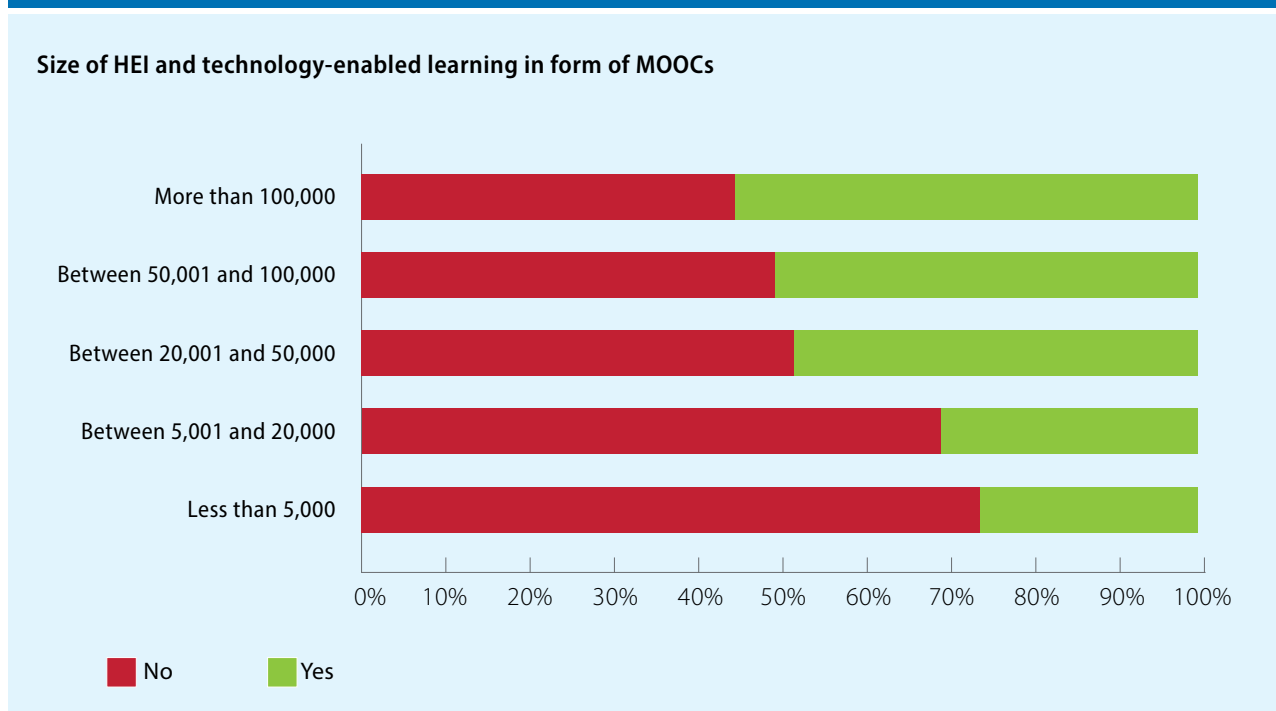
FIGURE 21 Use of technology-enhanced learning in LLL provision

Which of the following technology-enabled learning innovations has your institution incorporated into the provision of LLL activities? (Multiple answers are possible)



UIL StatLinks: bit.ly/UIL_HEI-LLL_fig21

FIGURE 22 Link between institution size and technology-enhanced learning through MOOCs



UIL StatLinks: bit.ly/UIL_HEI-LLL_fig22

BOX 7 Examples of promoting LLL through technology-enhanced learning

The **Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile** (UC Chile) offers a wide range of online and blended-learning opportunities for people interested in developing their skills as well as companies and institutions concerned with staff development. With this aim, the university created TELEDUC, an online portal that offers online and distance learning courses across a wide range of subjects, supported by resources such as online libraries, video conferencing and interactive media, among others. The Executive Class provides online specialization programmes for working professionals who wish to advance in their careers. Furthermore, UC Chile offers several degree and certificate programmes and more than 40 MOOCs on Coursera, covering a broad range of topics. In 2021, UC Chile launched its Integrated System of Continuing Education Management, an online platform that allows students to access their online courses, emails, certifications and services, and which facilitates the overall management of the university's continuing education offer (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, 2022).

The TUM Institute for Lifelong Learning at the **Technical University of Munich** (TUM), Germany, has several initiatives to support innovation in teaching and continuing education, experimenting with new education technologies and pedagogical concepts. The Centre for Digital Leadership Development creates tools to enhance learning experiences, including, for example, the digital coach Emma, which was developed for the Executive MBA. It accompanies participants throughout the leadership training and helps them to integrate their learnings into their daily work practice. Another initiative is the Extended Reality Lab, which promotes the use of virtual reality, apps and social media tools for formal training sessions and informal learning in the workplace. In addition, the university offers a wide range of MOOCs on international platforms (Coursera and edX), and the media centre offers active support to teaching staff to produce such formats (Technical University of Munich, 2022).

4.5 Social responsibility and local partnerships

As part of their third mission, most HEIs collaborate with external stakeholders in their community, city or region. These collaborations may encompass community projects and volunteering, joint activities with cultural institutions, policy advice and consultancies, and private-sector collaborations, among others. In doing so, HEIs can contribute to social well-being, economic prosperity and welfare in their regions and more widely support efforts for global sustainable development.

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, many HEIs have started to adapt and institutionalize the SDGs, supported by international initiatives and networks, such as the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI, 2022), an open partnership between several United Nations entities and the higher education community founded in 2012; the Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI, 2022b), which was created in 1999 and defines itself as a reference institution in the implementation of the Agenda in higher education; and the International Association of Universities' Higher Education and Research for Sustainable Development Portal (IAU-HESD, 2022), which has been a working priority of the IAU since 1993.

In addition to the research, partnership and advocacy efforts of these international networks, there has been increasing interest in recent years to measure the contribution of HEIs to sustainable development. A first attempt to assess universities' progress around the SDGs are the THE Impact Rankings (Times Higher Education, 2022a), which are based on a set of indicators for each SDG, covering research, stewardship, outreach and teaching, and also including several indicators relating to lifelong learning measures within SDG 4 (Times Higher Education, 2022b).

The 2030 Agenda provides an important context for defining the role of higher education in society, which is strongly linked to the notion of the public good, and relevant at both global and local levels. 'The public good' can be conceptualized in two main ways (Singh, 2014), which partially overlap: higher education as a public good (open to the wider society, providing LLL opportunities, etc.) and higher education for the public good (enabling conditions and creating knowledge for the benefit of the public). Both notions are strongly related to HEIs' social responsibility and their engagement with the wider community.

Community engagement implies a relationship between HEIs and communities, which is mutually beneficial for both parties and adopts a bi-directional flow of information between the two. It can take several forms,

including engaged research, teaching and learning, student volunteering, evidence-based strategies and advocacy, among others. To be effective, these need to be part of a university's broader strategy of becoming engaged and socially responsible.

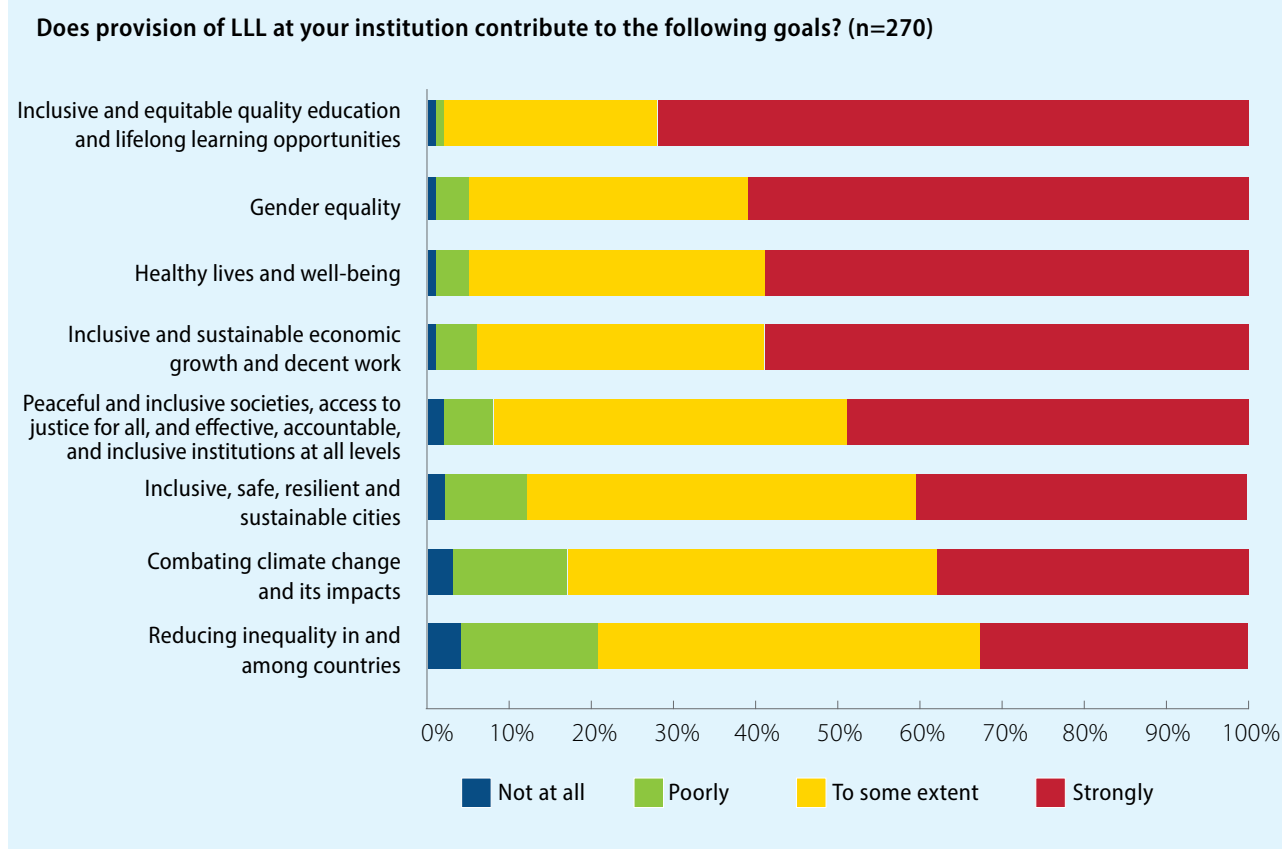
Another way in which HEIs can make active contributions to the development of their regions and beyond is through collaborations with the private sector. For example, HEIs educate graduates, which, in turn, may stay and work in a region and enhance the local skills base, productivity, innovation and, ultimately, economic growth (Cai and Liu, 2013). To ensure that graduates are well-prepared for the tasks ahead of them, cooperation with business partners – in teaching and curriculum design – can be valuable (Davies, 2018; Silva et al., 2016). Collaborative research with regional business or industry partners, including the creation of spin-offs (new ventures that commercialise academic research) are also common forms of partnerships (Brekke, 2021; Miner et al., 2012).

Taking into consideration that public funding for higher education has generally not kept pace with growing enrolment rates, partnerships with external stakeholders are also a vital way to secure alternative funding, as well as to adapt to economic and technological changes (Sam and Van der Sijde, 2014). Nevertheless, while working with local partners can lead to HEIs addressing specific employment needs and increase demand and financing support from industry and the private sector, such external influence also comes with the danger of compromising academic freedom. When private actors decide to allocate funds to universities in a particular way or for particular projects, they gain significant influence over the overall direction of teaching, learning and research.

HEIs fulfil a complex role within society when it comes to LLL, outreach activities, partnerships and social responsibility. As education and research institutions, they play a 'crucial and highly complex role in enriching society that goes way beyond producing marketable human capital and technology transfer' (Brown, 2016, p. 12). The increasing pressure on universities to prioritize the private benefits of tertiary education and research need to be evaluated against wider public benefits with more long-term societal gains, which are often not immediately visible (Abbott et al., 2015).

In terms of promoting the SDGs, 66.4 per cent of HEIs responded that their institution's LLL strategy aims to contribute to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In general, these 270 institutions show a high commitment towards all selected SDGs that were listed in the survey. As **Figure 23** shows, nearly all (98.2%) said their provision contributes strongly or to some extent to achieving *inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities*, which encapsulates SDG 4.

FIGURE 23 LLL provision contributing to sustainable development



UIL StatLinks: bit.ly/UIL_HEI-LLL_fig23

Almost as many said their LLL provision contributes strongly or to some extent to *gender equality* (94.8%), *healthy lives and well-being* (94.8%) and *inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work* (94.5%). Just a few percentage points behind, participating HEIs also said their lifelong learning provision promotes *peaceful and inclusive societies* (91.9%). Other goals, which have slightly lower rates, but still reflect a high level of commitment by responding institutions, include *inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities* (87.4%), *combating climate change and its impacts* (83.3%), and *reducing inequality in and among countries* (79.6%).

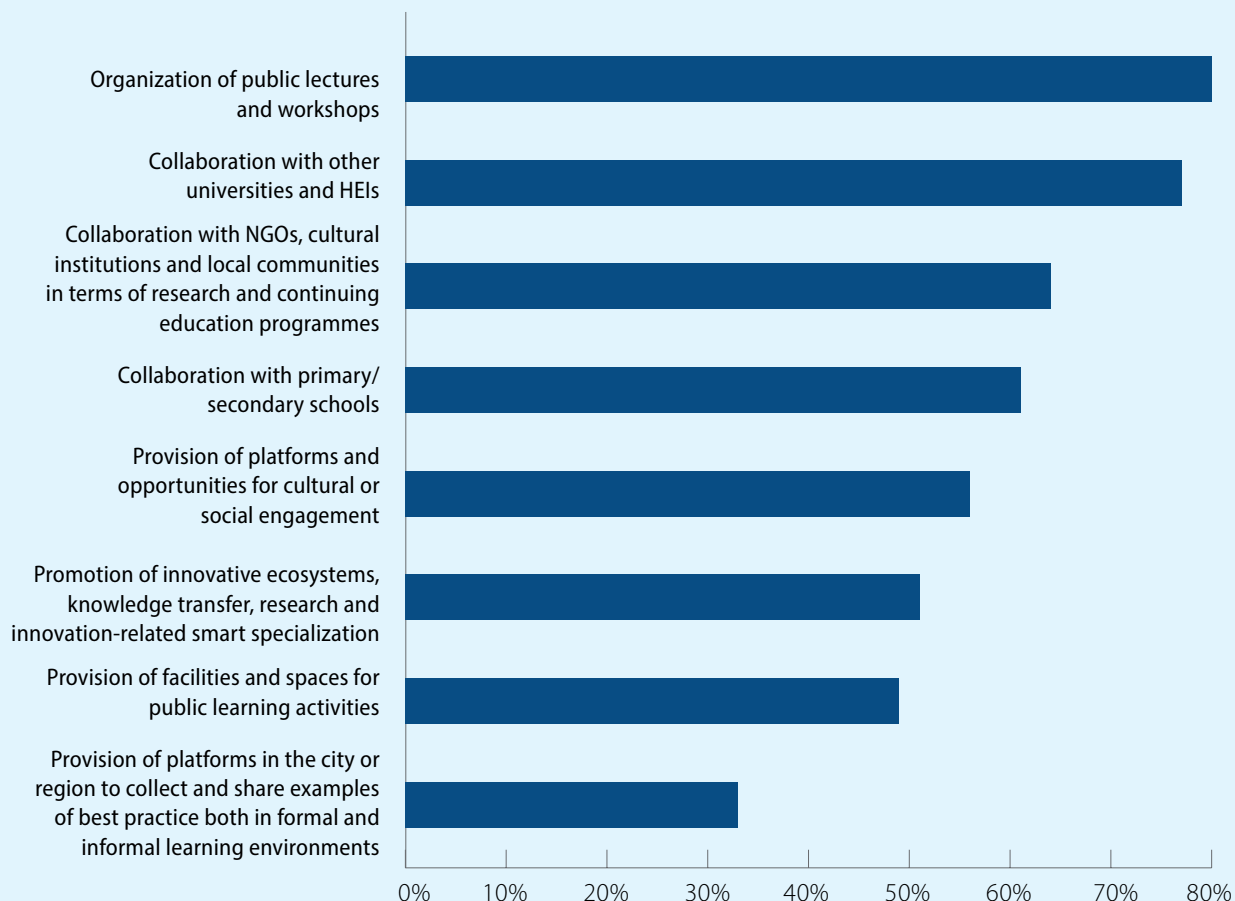
Almost all participating HEIs (98%, or 390 out of 399) responded that they engage with stakeholders and their local communities. As indicated in **Figure 24**, the most common ways of doing so are by *organizing public lectures and workshops* (80.4%) and *collaborating with other universities and HEIs* (77.4%). The majority indicated that they also *collaborate with NGOs, cultural institutions and local communities to promote research and continuing education programmes* (63.9%), while slightly fewer HEIs also *work with primary and secondary schools* (60.6%) or

provide platforms and opportunities for cultural or social engagement (56.1%). Just over half (51.3%) of survey respondents reported *promoting innovative ecosystems, knowledge transfer, research and innovation related to 'smart'*⁶ *specialization* through their engagement with external stakeholders, and slightly fewer institutions in the sample said they provide facilities and spaces for public learning activities (49.1%).

6 The concept of 'smart' specialization refers to an 'industrial and innovation framework for regional economies that aims to illustrate how public policies, framework conditions, but especially R&D [research and development] and innovation investment policies can influence economic, scientific and technological specialisation [sic] of a region and, consequently, its productivity, competitiveness and economic growth path' (OECD, 2013, p. 17).

FIGURE 24 HEIs' engagement with their communities

**How does your institution engage with stakeholders and the community in support of LLL?
(Multiple answers are possible)**



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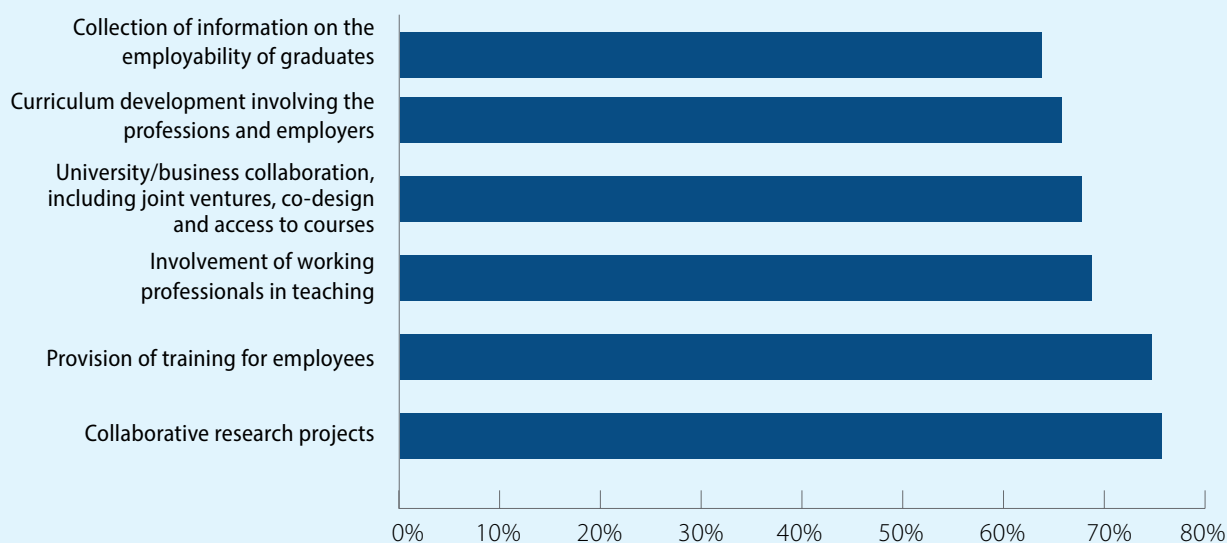
The least common type of engagement with external stakeholders among participating HEIs was *providing platforms in their city or region to collect and share examples of best practices in formal and informal learning approaches* (33%). The survey data indicate no significant

correlation between HEIs' approach to engaging with their communities and the type of HEI, whether public or private. The ways that participating campus-based and open or distance HEIs reported engaging with their local communities are fairly similar to each other, though the latter are slightly more active, especially in *organizing public lectures and workshops* (88.6% compared to 80.3%), *collaborating with other universities and HEIs* (82.9% compared to 76.2%), and *promoting research and innovation* (68.6% to 49.4%).

The large majority of HEIs in the survey (98%; 392 out of 399) confirmed engagement with the private sector. As indicated in **Figure 25**, the most popular forms of engagement are *collaborative research projects* (75.6%) and the *provision of employee training* (75.1%). Fewer participating HEIs, though still over 60 per cent, said they *involve working professionals in teaching* (68.6%) and participate in *university-business collaborations* (68.2%), including joint ventures and co-designing and creating access to courses. A similar proportion of HEIs also reported *involving the professions and employers in curriculum development* (66.4%) and *collecting information on graduate employability* (64.4%).

FIGURE 25 HEIs' engagement with the private sector

How does your HEI engage with the private sector? (Multiple answers are possible.)



UIL StatLinks: bit.ly/UIL_HEI-LLL_fig25

BOX 8 Examples of HEIs' community engagement

At **Concordia University, Canada**, the Office of Community Engagement's mandate is to develop and support mutually beneficial relationships between the university and the diverse communities of Montreal, including community-engaged teaching, research and action. The centre is committed to the decolonization and indigenization of Concordia, for example by supporting the transmission of traditional knowledge to students and young Indigenous artists. It further spearheads a number of initiatives, including the University of the Streets Café, a series of public conversations held in community spaces across Montreal, which bring together diverse groups of citizens to share their perspectives on topics of interest to them (amounting to 500 events organized since 2003). Another example is the university's partnership with Bâtiment 7, a resident-led initiative on a former industrial site, which now includes a broad range of community-run cooperative businesses and arts and non-profit organizations (Concordia University, 2020).

In 2016, FECAP (Fundação Escola de Comércio Álvares Penteado), a higher education institution based in São Paulo, **Brazil**, launched the **FECAP Institute of Finance**, which aims to support the Brazilian population to better handle their personal finances. Services are offered through a set of projects. One example is the Tax and Accounting Support Center (NAF), a project developed by the Federal Revenue in partnership with FECAP, which offers free services in accounting, tax and foreign trade to individuals and companies with lower purchasing power. Another example is the FECAP Financial Guide, which consists of several financial simulators and aims to help people to make better financial decisions (FECAP, 2022).

In 2015, Okayama Prefecture, **Japan**, was the first region appointed by the UN as a Regional Center of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Since then, **Okayama University** has undertaken a wide range of activities to contribute to the sustainability of the region as well as the personal growth and knowledge of local residents. To further strengthen its commitment, in 2017, the university formulated a set of action guidelines for working to realize the SDGs (Okayama University, 2022a) and, one year later, established an SDGs Promotion Headquarters to allow for a coordinated approach for integrating the SDGs in the university's administration and for strengthening partnerships with local and international communities. Many of the numerous projects relate directly to SDG 4. As an example, the library-led initiative 'Providing lifelong learning for children, students and citizens making use of valuable materials housed by Okayama University Library' involves exhibitions and workshops, which are organized in collaboration with the Faculty of Education (Okayama University, 2022b).

Proportions of participating HEIs engaging with the private sector by type remain relatively consistent, though two points stand out. Private, not-for-profit HEIs more commonly provide employee training (84.9%), involve the professions and employers in curriculum development (77.3%) and collect information on graduate employability (71.7%). Public institutions with more than 20 per cent in private funding more commonly participate in university-business collaborations (75.6%), involve working professionals in teaching at higher rates (78.3%), and are more likely to collaborate on research projects (89.1% – the largest proportion of all).

4.6 Summary of main findings

As the academic literature and international statistics show, global enrolment rates in higher education have risen massively over the last decades (Bowl and Bathmaker, 2016; Tight, 2019; UIS, 2022); yet there is also evidence that the massification of higher education has not necessarily brought down the barriers for participation for less privileged and underrepresented groups (Martin and Godonoga, 2020). The lack of priority given to non-traditional learners is also reflected in the data collected through the international survey.

As the results show, the two most prioritized groups targeted for LLL activities by HEIs are *working people requiring upskilling/reskilling* (selected as being strongly or to some extent prioritized by 89% of HEIs) and *individuals working in public and private organizations* (84%). By contrast, *early school-leavers, migrants and refugees*, as well as *prisoners and former prisoners*, are only targeted by 25 per cent of HEIs or less. These results indicate that the most vulnerable groups are generally less prioritized by HEIs for LLL activities, while educational offers for professional development are much higher up on institutions' LLL agendas. This prioritization is also reflected in the selection of main drivers for LLL involvement (see **Figure 5**), where only 30.1 per cent of HEIs stated that widening access to minorities and underrepresented groups is a main driver for them (making it one of the three least selected drivers).

On the other hand, the above stated-results on the most prioritized target groups is remarkable in light of the most selected drivers for LLL – *community engagement and social responsibility* (74.4%). In contrast, much less relevance was given to *business/industry demand* (54.4%), and *generating financial revenue* was only stated to be a main driver by 35.6 per cent. These results seem contradictory with regards to HEIs' motivation to be involved in LLL on the one hand (mainly related to social purposes) and the groups they aim to target with their LLL activities (mainly related to labour-market demands). Understanding these tendencies in detail would require further research; however, a possible explanation is

that the findings reflect the complex nature of both the economic and humanistic rationale that HEIs bring together in their LLL missions, responding to both the needs for upskilling and reskilling as well as fulfilling their social responsibility.

To address the diverse needs of lifelong learners, more flexible provision of educational programmes is required, including flexibility in terms of learning times, places and modalities, as well as considering shorter, non-degree programmes and alternative credentials to certify learning outcomes. As the survey data show, on-campus learning is still the most common form of provision for all degree and non-degree programmes, yet blended and distance options are more likely to be offered for shorter programmes, including certificates, diplomas and other postgraduate courses.

Interestingly, while on-campus and full-time provision continue to constitute the dominant forms of provision (particularly for all degree programmes), when asked about available options for online learning, participating HEIs indicated rather high levels of technology-enhanced learning as part of their LLL provision. *Live online lectures and seminars* and *increased use of blended or hybrid learning* were by far as the most popular technological approaches among participating HEIs (used by around four out of five HEIs). These numbers drop significantly when it comes to *online learning non-degree granting educational offers* and *online learning degree-granting programmes*, both of which show rates between 22.5 per cent and 47.5 per cent, depending on the type of institution.

Regarding alternative credentials, just over half of the HEIs responded that they offer at least one form of alternative digital and non-digital credentials beyond traditional degrees, diplomas and certificates. These results indicate that, while flexible study options, including online learning, are available in the higher education sector, there is still a need for more programmes to be offered part-time as well as in blended or distance mode. Based on the findings, it can further be assumed that, while online learning is considered as a way to deliver some lectures and seminars within programmes, more comprehensive approaches, including elaborate online and blended learning concepts for degree and non-degree programmes, are still scarce. These forms of provision will however gain even more importance with the increasing need for upskilling and reskilling of working professionals or people with other commitments, allowing them to pursue their studies in a flexible way.

Ensuring flexibility not only concerns study modalities but also available learning pathways, enhancing access to higher education and supporting transfer options between institutions and programmes (Martin and Godonoga, 2020). FLPs require national frameworks that provide the legal foundation and which motivate HEIs to develop institutional mechanisms. To ensure individuals

can benefit from FLPs, institutional awareness of available pathways as well as guiding arrangements for students are crucial to ensure access and progression in higher education programmes, in particular for non-traditional learners.

As for institutional mechanisms, 66.4 per cent of HEIs indicated that they have policies in place to support FLPs, with private for-profit institutions showing higher rates compared to other types of HEIs.

Among the objectives for implementing FLPs proposed in the questionnaire, there were no major differences in selected objectives, with *widening participation in higher education* and *better responding to the diverse needs of adult learners* appearing as the most common aims. In general, the survey data indicate that social aims were slightly prioritized over labour market considerations. The data also show that those HEIs which have policies for FLPs in place are also more likely to have guidance arrangements for learners who wish to pursue these pathways. This underlines the importance of overarching institutional strategies to allow for coordinated and holistic implementation, including a high service-orientation towards students.

When it comes to admission and transfer pathways, the higher education sector still appears as rather restrictive, with a general secondary school-leaving certificate providing by far the most common form of access. In particular, access to degree programmes is highly regulated with few options for alternative access, for example from vocational tracks. Unsurprisingly, flexible options are more available for short-cycle programmes,

but even here they are limited. Transfer pathways within the higher education sector are slightly more flexible, with credit transfer or exemption, reducing the total amount of units to be completed in order to graduate from a programme being the most common option, available at more than half of all responding HEIs.

The last thematic section of this chapter presented results related to HEIs' social responsibility and engagement with local communities, exploring HEIs' role within society. Nearly 80 per cent of HEIs responded that their institution's LLL strategy aims to contribute to achieving the SDGs, generally expressing a high commitment towards all the goals proposed for selection in the survey. As for community engagement, the data show that HEIs' most common way of outreach (among the proposed options) is through organizing public lectures and workshops (selected by four out of five HEIs), followed by collaborations with other HEIs, research collaborations with other institutions, as well as working together with schools.

Rates of private sector collaborations were also very high, with 98 per cent of HEIs confirming some form of engagement, with collaborative research projects and the provision of employee training being the most popular (both slightly above 75%) and collecting information on graduate employability being the least selected option (64.4%). While the responses show a generally high level of engagement with stakeholders in local communities and the private sector, they also indicate that HEIs tend to focus on those operations which are traditionally most established (teaching, research, collaboration with other formal education institutions).

5 Concluding remarks

The results of the international survey presented in this report provide important and unique information about how higher education institutions contribute to lifelong learning. They are based on responses from 399 HEIs from 96 countries in all world regions. While the data are not representative of all HEIs around the globe, it is a first successful attempt to take stock of LLL advancements worldwide and therefore makes a strong contribution to the state of research in this field. The survey design was based on a holistic understanding of lifelong learning in light of HEIs' third mission, going beyond the field of continuing education and including items such as flexible learning pathways, community engagement and HEIs' contribution to sustainable development.

Against the background of several frameworks developed during the last decades to promote LLL in higher education (for example, the Mumbai Statement in 1998, the Cape Town Statement in 2001, and the EUA's Charter on LLL in 2008, among others), the issue has gained increasing prominence for HEIs' mission and their responsibilities to society. By committing to LLL as part of their mission, HEIs can serve as important agents of change, helping to shape economic and social dynamics mainly originating from technological advancement and changing demographics. As traditional hubs of teaching and research, HEIs can play a critical role in upskilling and reskilling youth and adults to provide them with better employment opportunities and support them to take an active role in society.

To ensure inclusive and equitable higher education opportunities for people of all ages, it is important for HEIs to widen access and make their knowledge available to all groups of society. Yet, as the higher education sector has traditionally been rather elitist (Allais et al., 2020) and focused on the education of young cohorts of students, this requires a profound transformation process, which is challenging and often slow. This is also evident from the results of the international survey, which show that, while there are significant advancements, LLL is not yet fully mainstreamed into the strategic orientations and practices of the higher education sector. By providing LLL opportunities, HEIs are also reaching out to new groups of learners. In the survey, institutions were asked to indicate which groups of learners they prioritize in their LLL provision. The results show that, among the groups listed, HEIs rarely target the most vulnerable groups (such as early school-leavers, migrants and refugees, prisoners and ex-prisoners) as compared to other groups such as *working people requiring upskilling/reskilling or HEI staff*, both of which are considered a much higher priority for LLL provision.

As this report illustrates, successfully including lifelong learning as a mission of HEIs involves strategic action at multiple levels and concerns the whole institution. In many countries, HEIs benefit from a high level of autonomy, even more so when it comes to their third mission and LLL provision, which are usually less regulated. Nevertheless, national policy environments are relevant as they define HEIs' scope of operations and the parameters for resource allocation and mobilization. As such, they can serve as important drivers for engaging HEIs in LLL provision. In the survey, more than two-thirds of institutions responded that the national legislation defines LLL as a mandate of higher education. Out of these, 77.2 per cent of HEIs reported having institutional strategies for LLL in place at some level (institutional level, faculty/departmental level, or both). This number drops to 54.8 per cent for HEIs that reported no conducive legislation exists for HEIs' engagement in LLL.

Institutional strategies are crucial to ensure a whole-institution approach to LLL, which enables proper coordination of activities and a buy-in of all departments and units. As evident in the survey results, institutions with such a strategy in place are much more likely to also have a dedicated unit for LLL, to have developed specific quality assurance procedures, and to have a policy to support flexible learning pathways. These results further underline the value of an institutional LLL strategy and how it influences systematic LLL developments within HEIs.

To ensure effective implementation of such institutional strategies, it is important to operationalize them. The survey showed that among those HEIs that have a LLL strategy in place, an overwhelming majority responded that their LLL policy is communicated effectively internally (94.3%) and externally (86.4%) and that responsibilities for LLL are clearly identified across the institution (93.9%). These processes are critical to ensure broad stakeholder involvement. As for internal coordination, 53.6 per cent of HEIs reported having a dedicated LLL unit, with most common functions being *offering and selling education programmes and trainings* (73.4%), followed by *curricula development* and *community engagement* (both 65.6%). Having a central unit for LLL can be considered a strong indicator for the level of institutionalization and – based on the survey results – it can be said that further efforts are needed to ensure well-coordinated approaches for LLL (in contrast to scattered initiatives).

A basic condition for mainstreaming LLL into HEIs operations is funding, which according to the survey comes from a variety of sources, involving both direct financing of LLL provision through tuition fees (62.7%) and revenue from on-demand-services (44.4%) as well as general sources such as self-funding (58.7%) and dedicated public funding for LLL (35.3%). More coherent and streamlined financing mechanisms will be critical to enable wider participation in LLL, particularly for non-traditional learners and vulnerable groups. This requires conducive national policies that define LLL as a mandate of higher education and allocate specific funds to reach these groups. Also, as so far little data exist on financing LLL in higher education, more research on funding mechanisms for institutions and individuals would certainly help to develop targeted public financing schemes.

Quality assurance procedures contribute to producing information on the relevance and effectiveness of LLL provision, which not only helps to ensure and improve quality on a continuous basis but also influences funding opportunities. While 59.1 per cent of HEIs stated in the survey that they have specific and systematic QA procedures in place, mainly targeting the enhancement of LLL programmes, internal quality assurance that addresses LLL remains an underdeveloped area. While there are international and regional frameworks for QA in higher education, there appears to be a gap when it comes to QA frameworks for LLL provision. It can be assumed that QA procedures are more advanced for standardized continuing education programmes (mainly degree programmes) as compared to more open and flexible LLL formats. Following this, it would be particularly interesting to further explore what specific approaches have been applied to less standardized LLL formats.

When it comes to flexible learning provision, the survey results showed that the most common delivery mode for both degree and non-degree programmes is on-campus learning. At the same time, however, HEIs also make use of a wide range of technology-enhanced learning options, most prominently *live online lectures and seminars*, as well as *increased use of blended or hybrid learning*, both of which were selected by around 80 per cent of respondents. As for MOOCs, the survey showed that they are particularly popular among larger institutions, considering that the number of HEIs offering MOOCs across the sample is 34.6 per cent, whereas this number rises to at least 50 per cent among HEIs that have more than 50,000 students. Given the rapid pace of technological developments and the experiences of the COVID-19 crisis, which forced HEIs around the globe to teach programmes at distance, the share of hybrid and online learning is expected to further increase significantly in the years and decades to come. These developments will continue to significantly change how

people learn (in terms of times, places and pedagogies) and will have a lasting impact on LLL provision in higher education.

In addition to such flexible learning modalities, alternative learning pathways are an important element to enhance flexibility and to widen access, participation and progression in higher education, particularly for non-traditional learners. In the survey, 66.4 per cent of HEIs indicated to have policies in place to support flexible learning pathways. The results also showed that private HEIs are more advanced in offering FLPs (with 85.2% having such policies) compared to public institutions, which seem more focused on traditional pathways. As was elaborated in the report, flexible learning pathways are key to ensure people can progress in their learning journeys and are therefore a core element for enabling LLL in higher education sector. The development of national frameworks and respective institutional mechanisms, importantly including information and guidance services, will be critical to advance in this field and to enhance learning opportunities for people at all stages of life.

A higher education institution fully committed to LLL must engage with surrounding communities and partners from different sectors, and more broadly serve society at large. An overwhelming majority of HEIs (98%) responded in the survey that they engage with stakeholders and their local communities, most commonly by organizing public lectures and workshops, collaborating with other universities and HEIs, and by working with NGOs and cultural institutions to promote research and continuing education programmes. Similarly, 98 per cent responded that they engage with the private sector, with most popular forms of partnerships being collaborative research projects and the provision of employee training. These results show that HEIs are highly engaged with their surroundings in a variety of ways. Nevertheless, further research is needed to understand how these connections and collaborations with communities, institutions and businesses can become deeper, support comprehensive local development initiatives and contribute to communities' empowerment.

Overall, this report provides an overview of the relationship between higher education and lifelong learning worldwide. Far from being a marginal issue for universities, LLL is of central relevance for many. However, more needs to be done to establish a culture of lifelong learning within higher education institutions. Given the challenges that lie ahead, such as ageing, the future of work, digitalization and climate change, no time can be wasted in making our societies and economies resilient. Lifelong learning is central to a sustainable future. This report is therefore also a call to the global higher education community to confront, through lifelong learning, the pressing challenges of the twenty-first century.

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Appendix

a) Distribution of institutions participating in the survey by country

Countries	Number of HEIs	% of the sample
Algeria	3	0.75
Andorra	1	0.25
Argentina	9	2.26
Armenia	1	0.25
Austria	3	0.75
Azerbaijan	1	0.25
Bahrain	1	0.25
Bangladesh	2	0.50
Belgium	2	0.50
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	1	0.25
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1	0.25
Brazil	4	1.00
Brunei Darussalam	1	0.25
Bulgaria	4	1.00
Burkina Faso	1	0.25
Cameroon	1	0.25
Canada	4	1.00
Central African Republic	1	0.25
Chile	3	0.75
China (People's Republic of)	23	5.76
Colombia	12	3.01
Costa Rica	1	0.25
Cyprus	2	0.50
Czechia	1	0.25
Democratic Republic of the Congo	1	0.25
Ecuador	11	2.76
Egypt	4	1.00
Ethiopia	3	0.75
Fiji	1	0.25
Finland	3	0.75

France	7	1.75
Georgia	2	0.50
Germany	2	0.50
Ghana	2	0.50
Greece	1	0.25
Hungary	6	1.50
India	18	4.51
Indonesia	1	0.25
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	2	0.50
Iraq	1	0.25
Ireland	2	0.50
Israel	2	0.50
Italy	4	1.00
Japan	23	5.76
Jordan	2	0.50
Kenya	4	1.00
Korea (Republic of)	4	1.00
Lebanon	3	0.75
Libya	1	0.25
Lithuania	1	0.25
Luxembourg	1	0.25
Malaysia	1	0.25
Maldives	1	0.25
Mexico	24	6.02
Mozambique	1	0.25
Myanmar	1	0.25
Namibia	4	1.00
Netherlands	1	0.25
Nicaragua	1	0.25
Nigeria	6	1.50
Oman	6	1.50
Pakistan	14	3.51
Palestine (State of)	5	1.25
Panama	1	0.25
Peru	5	1.25
Philippines	50	12.53
Poland	1	0.25
Portugal	6	1.50

Romania	1	0.25
Russian Federation	5	1.25
Saudi Arabia	1	0.25
Serbia	1	0.25
Singapore	1	0.25
Somalia	1	0.25
South Africa	2	0.50
Spain	15	3.76
Sri Lanka	1	0.25
Sudan	3	0.75
Sweden	3	0.75
Switzerland	2	0.50
Syrian Arab Republic	1	0.25
Thailand	3	0.75
Tunisia	1	0.25
Uganda	1	0.25
Ukraine	1	0.25
United Arab Emirates	1	0.25
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	8	2.01
United Republic of Tanzania	2	0.50
United States of America	5	1.25
Uruguay	2	0.50
Uzbekistan	2	0.50
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	1	0.25
Viet Nam	9	2.26
Yemen	1	0.25
Zambia	1	0.25
Zimbabwe	1	0.25

b) Survey questionnaire

The survey questionnaire is available here: bit.ly/UII_HEI-LLL_questionnaire

c) Glossary of terms

The glossary of terms is available here: bit.ly/UII_HEI-LLL_glossary

Against the background of a global education crisis and a growing recognition of the importance of lifelong learning, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) and the Shanghai Open University (SOU) conducted a comprehensive research project from 2020 to 2022 that included, among other components, an international survey on the contribution of higher education institutions to lifelong learning, the results of which are presented in this report. Based on the comprehensive sets of quantitative and qualitative data collected across all world regions, this research constitutes a major step forward in building an international knowledge base on the role of HEIs in establishing lifelong learning opportunities for all.