

Cross-Border External Quality Assurance in Europe: an overview from the DEQAR database

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions (HEI) are increasingly developing cross-border educational offers, as one strategy to become more international. But cross-border higher education (CBHE) entails some challenges, namely regarding the quality assurance (QA) of the educational provision. Simultaneously, institutions and governments are looking for international recognition and have began to search for the services of foreign QA agencies. This trend can be related with the failure of the national QA systems in providing the international engagement HEI need. For this reason, they opt for international QA agencies in order to pursuit strategies for new approaches (Stella & Woodhouse, 2010). Both developments, have led to the expansion of Cross-border external quality assurance (CBEQA), as a mechanism both to ensure the quality of CBHE and to promote higher education systems and institutions internationalisation (Hou et al, 2017; Trifiro, 2018; Amaral et al, 2016). CBEQA can be understood by “external QA activities of a QA agency carried out in a country other than the one in which it is based or primarily operates” (ENQA et al, 2017, p.2). These activities can occur through different ways, as depicted in Figure 1.

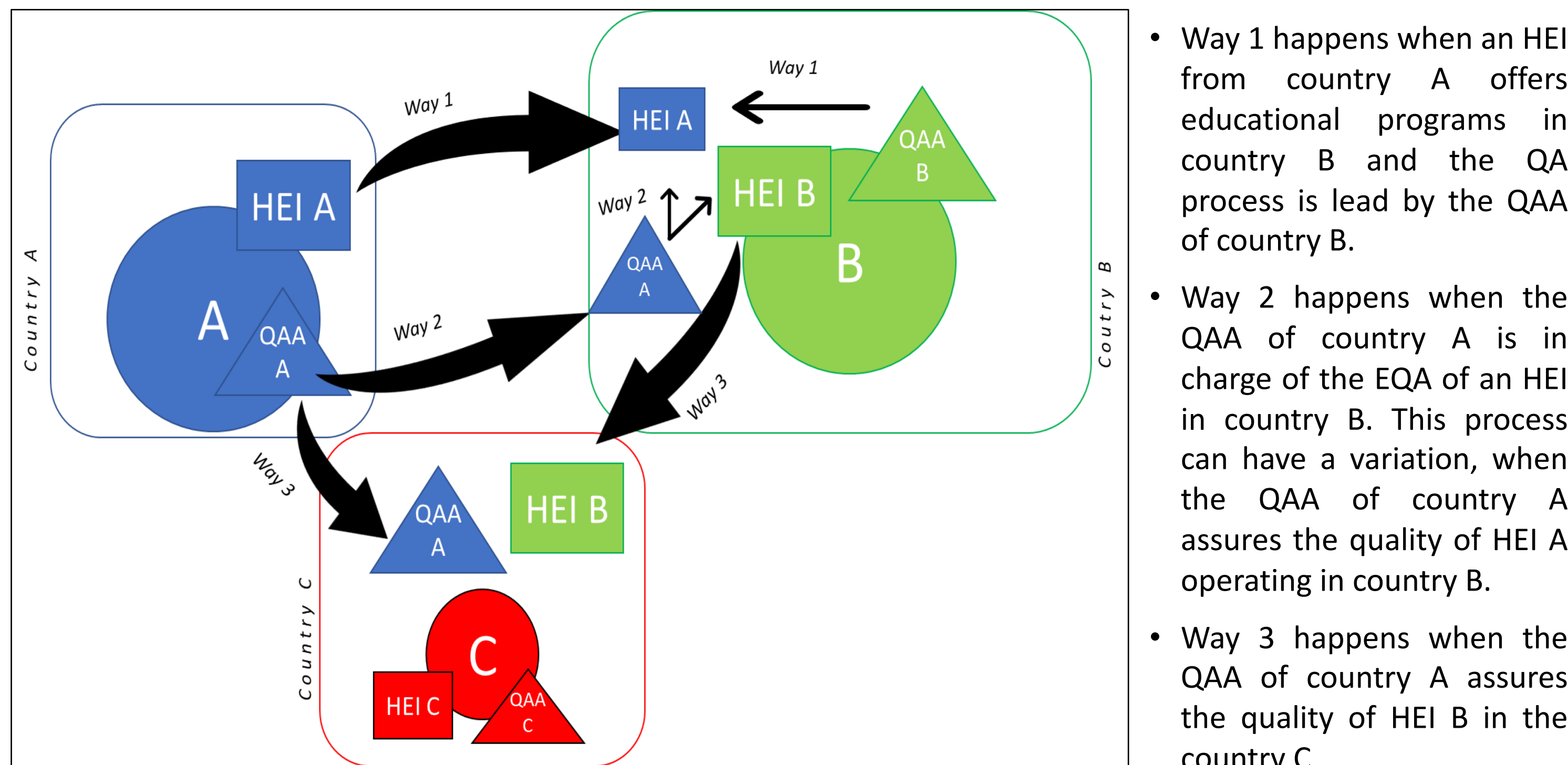


Figure 1 – Different possible ways of CBEQA

Hou (2014) presents four models for CBHE QA, one of which related with the CBEQA. In this model the QA process is conducted by a foreign agency or a quality assurance organization in the local context of the receiving country (Way 2). This model have some advantages for the QA process, since it helps providing information to local and international students on the quality of the CBHE offer. Nevertheless, there is the risk that QA becomes delinked from local authorities, impacting the local quality assurance agencies role in assuring the quality of educational provision at home, while promoting the commercialization of QA processes.

OBJETIVE AND METHODS

This paper aims to provide an overview of the CBEQA scenario in Europe based on the data provided by DEQAR (www.deqar.eu). For this, we used the DEQAR database, namely the following variables: Country; Report_agency; Report_type; Report_status. For additional information we add two variables: Agency_Country and Type_Agency. Data was statistically analysed following a descriptive quantitative research approach, aiming to organize and describe the data, seeking to identify what is typical and atypical, find differences, relationships and patterns (Coutinho, 2016).

AGENCY	COUNTRY		N.º OF ACTIVITIES
AAQ	Switzerland	●	2
AHPGS	Germany	●	139
AQAS	Germany	●	50
ASIIN	Germany	●	738
EVALAG	Germany	●	1
BAC	United Kingdom	●	21
EKKA	Estonia	●	26
FINEEC	Finland	○	1
IEP	International	●	51
MUSIQUE	International	●	39
NCPA	Russia	●	7

Figure 2 – Number of CBEQA activities performed by QAA of different countries

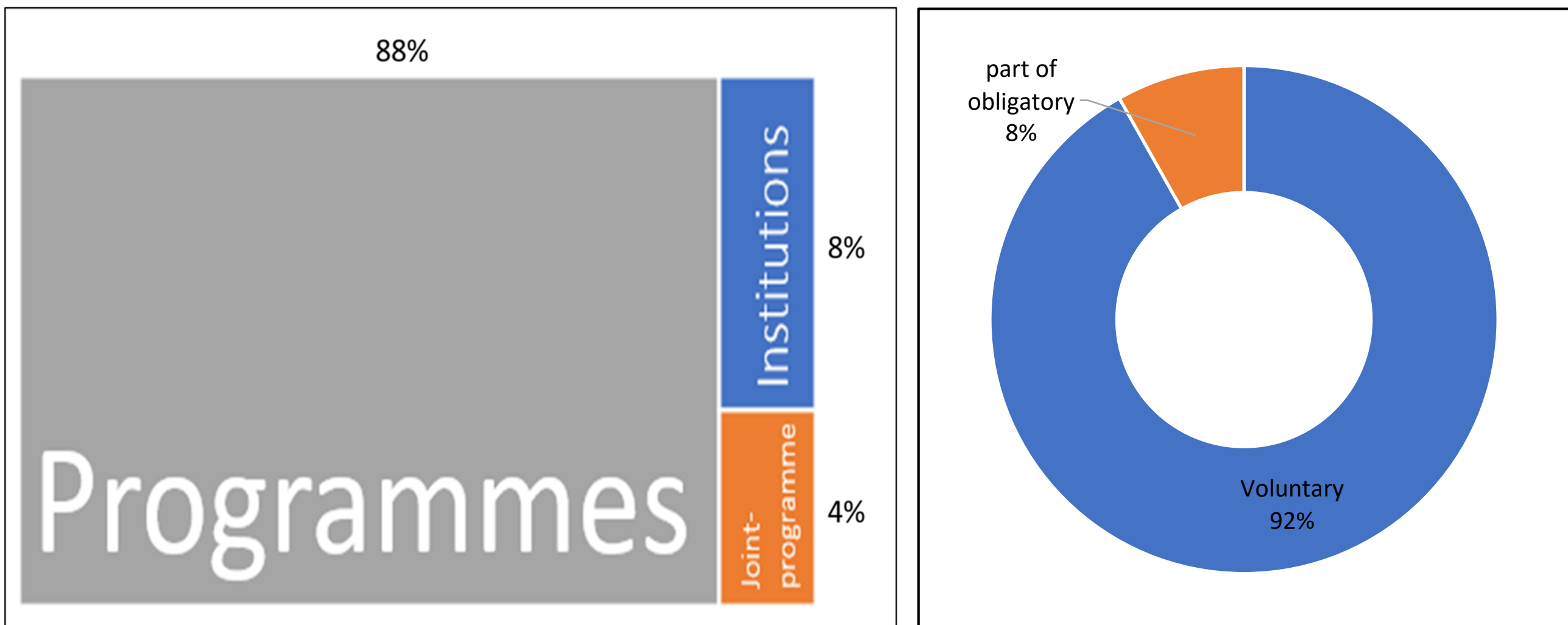


Figure 3 - Tree Map of the CBEQA activities by type.

Figure 4 – Distributions of CBEQA activities by status.

RESULTS

Around 2% of the quality activities reported in the database occur in HEI from countries which are different from the QA agency one, representing 1075 activities, in 177 HEI, from 54 countries (Figure 7). Additionally, the vast majority of CBEQA activities are voluntary (92%) (Figure 4). As for the ways in which CBEQA activities occur, Way 2 was found as the most predominant in the DEQAR database: the QAA of country A assures the quality of the HEI in country B (Figure 5).

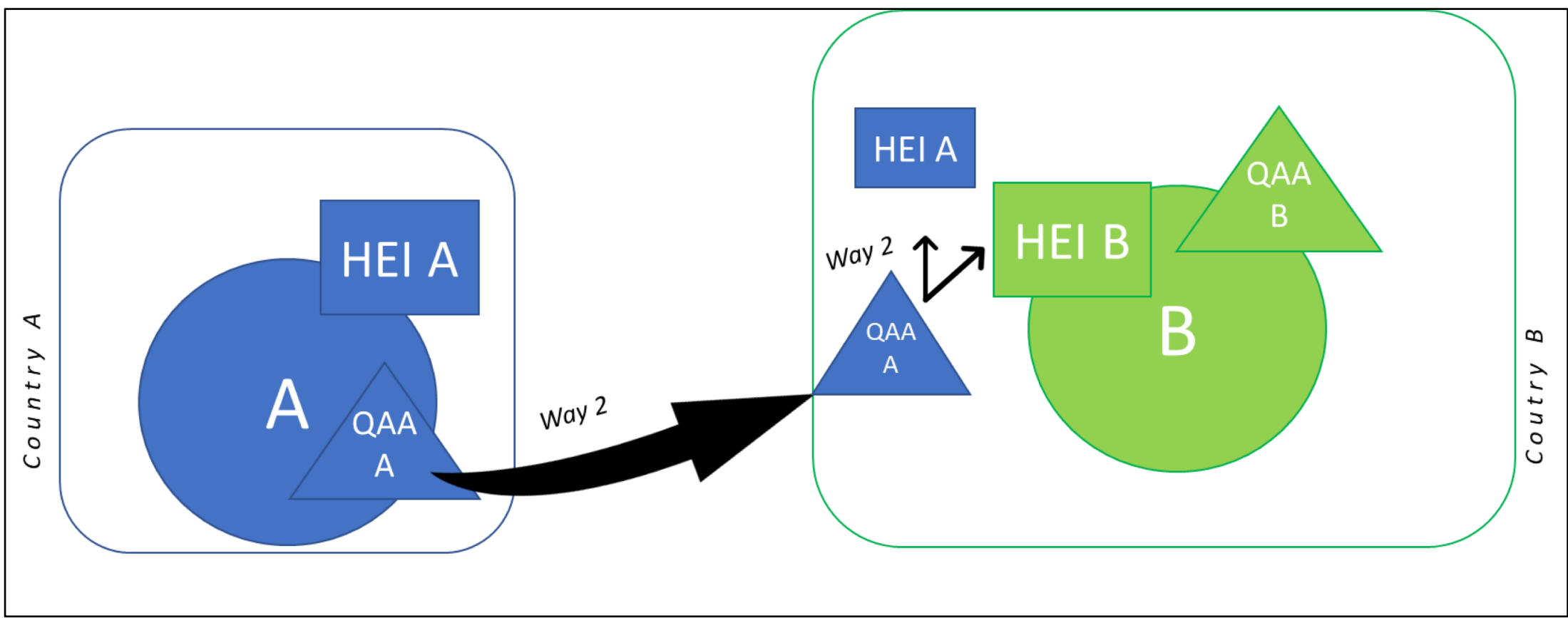


Figure 5 – Most frequent CBEQA way in the DEQAR database

Looking at the type of quality activity, 88% address the individual programme, while 8% concern the institutions and 4% joint-programmes (Figure 3). The prominence of programmes' accreditation in the DEQAR database may be related to the fact that accrediting a programme is easier and demands less resources, being, as such, less expensive than getting a full institutional accreditation, while also having an impact not only in the programme international recognition but also on the internationalisation of the institution itself. When analysing the agencies included in the DEQAR database, it was found that 11 out of 31 are involved in CBEQA activities; these agencies are located in 6 countries and 2 more are identify as not national agencies (Figure 2). Indeed, almost 90% of the CBEQA activities are conducted by German agencies, with one of them being responsible for 68% of all CBEQA activities reported (ASIIN) (Figure 6). Indeed, ASIIN emerges as a very relevant agency in the scenario for CBEQA represented in the DEQAR database. This may be related with some European seals ASIIN offers as part of its external QA reviews, namely the EUR-ACE, Eurobachelor, Euro-info and Euromaster ones. In fact, the DEQAR data shows that currently agency is responsible for most the reviews leading to these seals and that those reviews currently contributes with almost 35% of the agency's CBEQA reports.

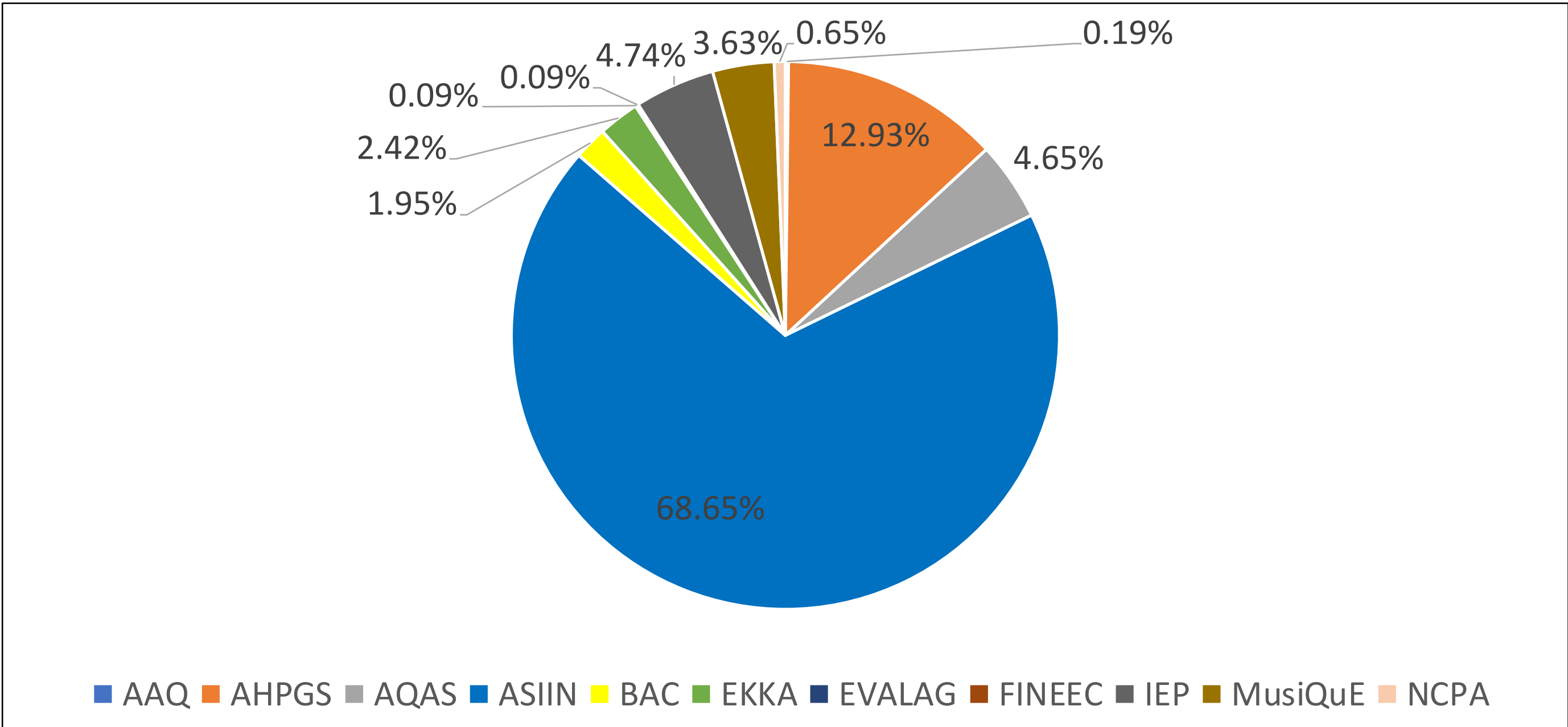


Figure 6 - Distribution of CBEQA activities by QA agency

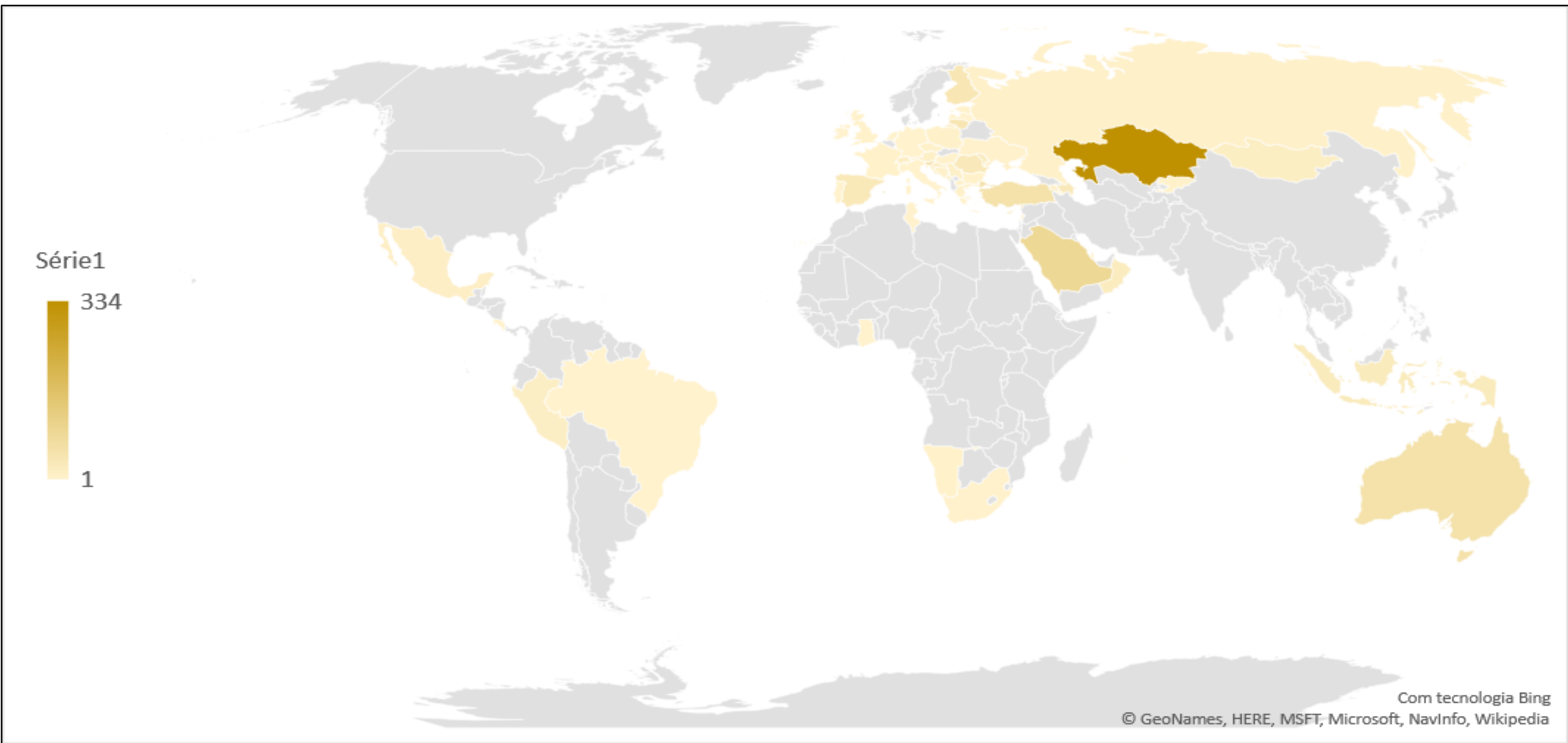


Figure 7 – Geographic distribution of CBEQA activities

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Is CBEQA really expanding? Why? Is it only a matter of getting international recognition or is it also a way of dealing with CBHE quality challenges?
- DEQAR data shows that mainly the programmes look for external QA. Why? Is our provisional explanation a possibility?
- Why is ASIIN so involved in CBEQA? Or is this just a result of DEQAR data limitations?

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