

Quo Vadis? Analysing the cross-border quality assurance of EQAR-registered agencies beyond EHEA

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Introduction

One of the major intentions of the Bologna Process is to encourage cooperation between European countries in higher education with corresponding frameworks. This also means "mutual trust in and acceptance of quality assurance systems" (Prague Communiqué, 2001). It was supported through various Bologna commitments, EQAR-registered agencies were allowed to perform activities within EHEA while they were complied with national requirements and it was encouraged with recognizing decisions for joint and double degree programs (Bucharest Communiqué, 2012), then HEIs were allowed to choose suitable EQAR-registered agency beyond borders (Yerevan Communiqué, 2015). As a result, we reached the point, where majority of countries in EHEA without or by some conditions recognize cross-border activities by EQAR-registered agencies, that additionally to perks of need-based choice, prevents unnecessary duplication of work for HEIs (RIQAA report, 2014). Concurrently to changes in EHEA that supports cross-border within it, at a glance, DEQAR data shows that recognizable amount of countries and higher education institutions beyond EHEA are covered in cross-border EQA by EQAR-registered agencies.

Aims and Objectives

This paper delves into cross-border quality assurance through exploring the data from DEQAR to overview the current trends and draw conclusions on cross-border QA activities beyond EHEA.

Methodology

Study is based on data given in DEQAR using the full dataset from 2009 to 2021. For the analysis descriptive quantitative research approach was used to define data, find patterns and trends and make comparative analysis.

Analysis and Results

According to DEQAR data, cross-border external quality assurance activities have a minor share of 4% (2823) in overall amount (70236) (figure 1), however, it is clearly seen that tendency is growing, especially from 2012 and then 2015, that coincides with policy changes in EHEA and Bologna commitments. The same trend applies to cross-border beyond EHEA, the amount of activities increased drastically from 2017 to 2019, almost tripling the digits and then decreasing from 2019 as activities within EHEA and can be explained by COVID-19 Pandemics.

As shown in figure 2, the share of cross-border EQA activities beyond EHEA is 26% in the overall cross, however, it has more since 2017, it shows more stable numbers compared increasing more rapidly and decreasing more slowly, also it needs to be mentioned that from 2018, the share of cross-border activities beyond EHEA in the total amount of cross-border EQA is more recognizable: 31% in 2018, 40% in 2019, 39% in 2020 and 39% in 2021. (figure 2).

Outlining the data by agencies shows that in the case of some agencies, the majority of cross-border EQA activities are held beyond EHEA, such as HCERES, IAAR and NCPA. In total 17 EQAR-registered agencies have at least such activity, where ASIIN has an impressive 342, IAAR 106, AHPGS 47 and HCERES 45 (figure 5).

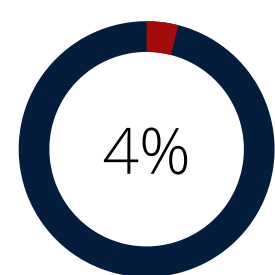


Figure 1. Share of cross-border external quality assurance activities in overall EQA activities

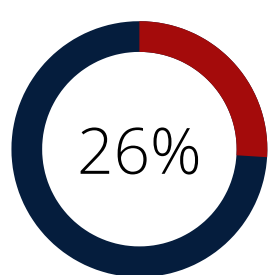


Figure 2. Share of cross-border external quality assurance activities beyond EHEA in overall cross-border EQA activities

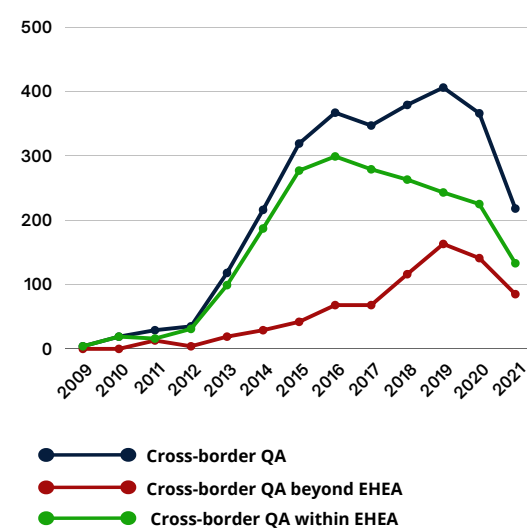


Figure 3. Number of cross-border external quality assurance activities

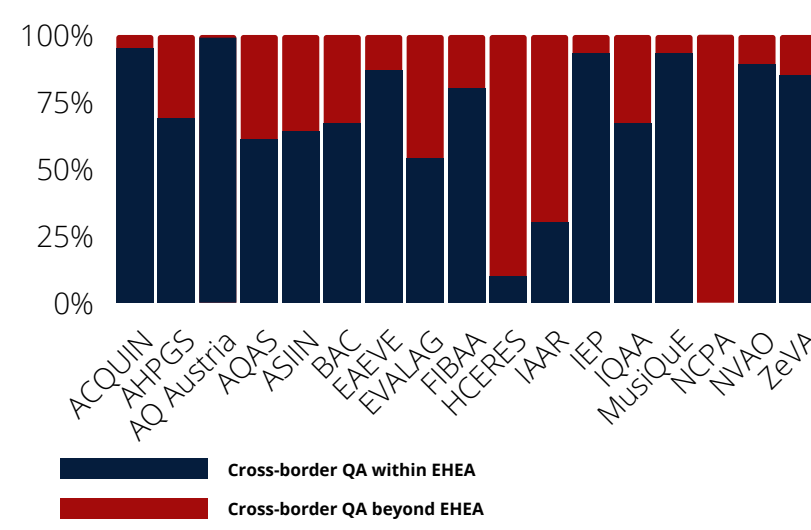


Figure 4. Percentage distribution of cross-border QA activities within and beyond EHEA

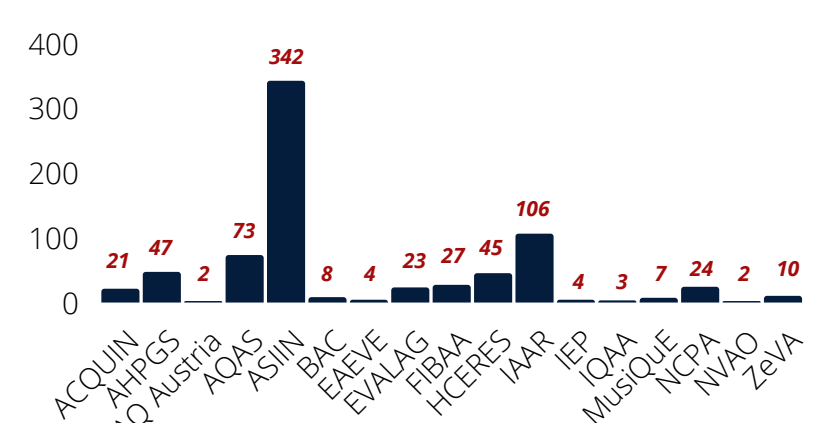


Figure 5. Amount of cross-border QA activities beyond EHEA

In total, 748 activities have been held by EQAR-registered agencies beyond EHEA, where only 1% is recognized as a part of the obligatory EQA system and the rest 99% have a "voluntary" status (figure 6). Results of EQA activities show, that there is a slight difference within and beyond EHEA for activities where the result was applicable, Positive results are 75.3% in activities beyond EHEA compared to 73.9% within, Positive with conditions is 23.9 to 26.1 and within EHEA, results of almost 1% of evaluations were negative, when we do not have such result beyond EHEA.

Comparative analysis of activities within and beyond EHEA also shows that some countries beyond EHEA are actively engaged, 17 countries have at least 10 and 7 countries have at least 30 activities, where Saudi Arabia has 122, Kyrgyzstan 96 and Australia 56 activities, and some of the countries have intensive collaboration with an EQAR-registered agency, as they have undergone majority of cross-border evaluations by the single agency (Map 1). On the other hand, 20 countries within EHEA have 10 or fewer activities and among them, 7 countries do not have such an experience, when 2 countries from this list are recognizing EQAR-registered agencies as part of the national external QA requirements.

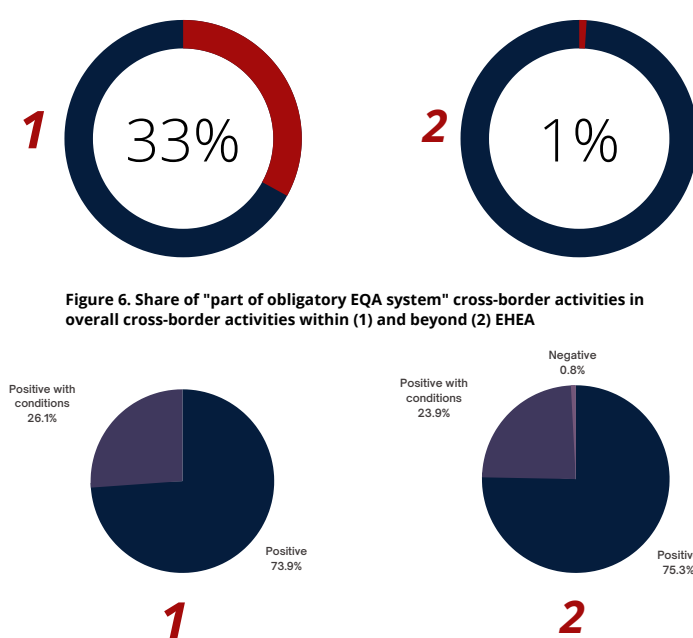


Figure 6. Share of "part of obligatory EQA system" cross-border activities in overall cross-border activities within (1) and beyond (2) EHEA

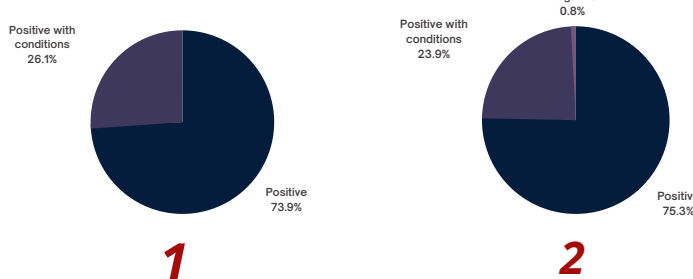
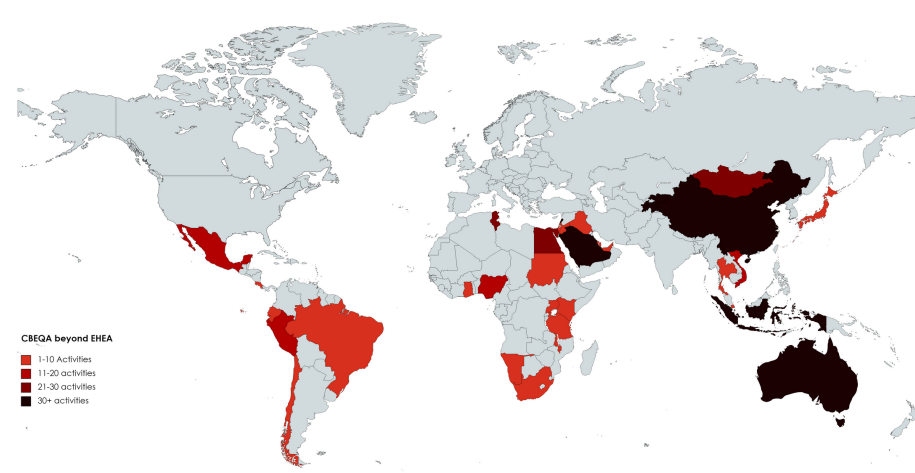
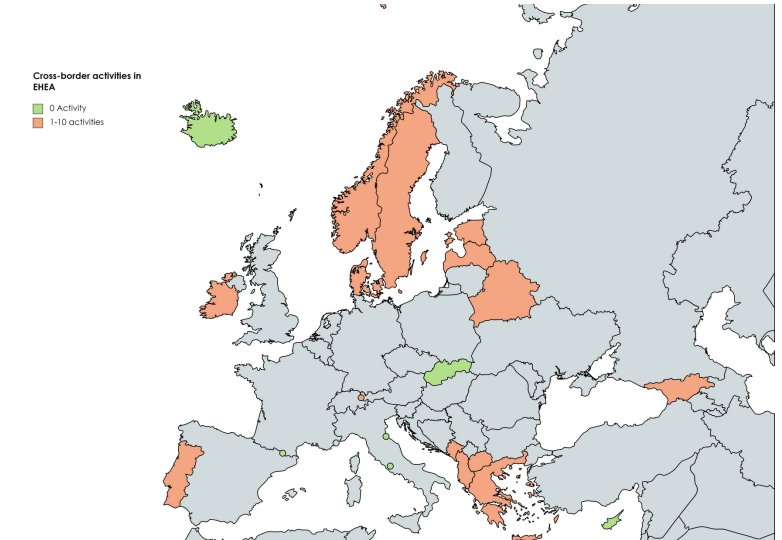


Figure 7. Results of EQA activities in 1. EHEA and 2. Beyond EHEA



Map 1. Distribution of CBEQA activities beyond EHEA



Map 2. Countries in EHEA with few or no cross-border QA activities

Conclusion

In conclusion, analysis of quantitative data from DEQAR shows, that cross-border accreditations take considerable share in overall cross-border and the trend is rising within cross-border activities. Some countries beyond EHEA are engaged more than 1/3 third of EHEA, where besides of encouraging policy, opportunities are used moderately or not at all.

Questions for Discussion

- What are the decisive factors for EQAR-registered agencies to go for EQA activity in the country beyond EHEA?
- What role does cross-border EQA activities play shaping quality assurance systems and higher education policies in host countries beyond EHEA?
- Are borders beyond EHEA opening for EQAR-registered agencies, is this process really expanding?
- Why some of EHEA countries are still moderately engaged in process, when other countries beyond EHEA are relatively active?

Related Literature

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