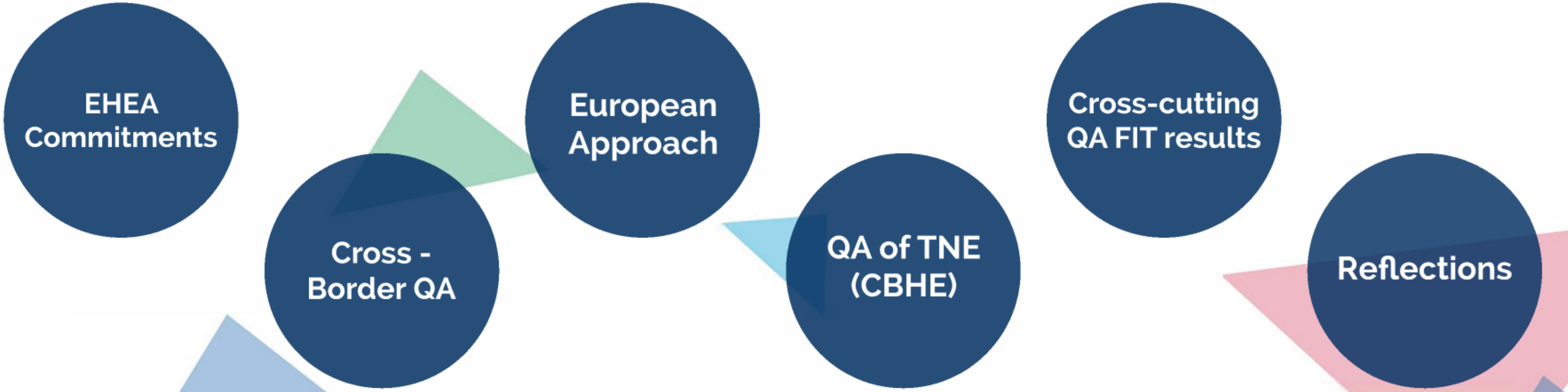
QA-FIT
Quality Assurance Fit for the Future

QA-FIT focus group 'Internationalisation'



EQAR Members' Dialogue - QA-FIT Focus group (9 - 10 November 2023), Granada, Spain
Presenter: Melinda Szabo (EQAR, Deputy Director)

eqar

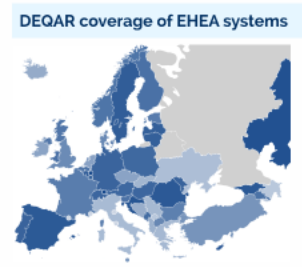
Political commitment re. an European framework for QA

EHEA Key Commitment: All HEIs are expected to be subject to a regular review against the ESG carried out by (an) agency/-ies listed in EQAR.
-> currently 55 registered QA agencies covering some or fully the 47 EHEA higher education systems satisfy this requirement (see DEQAR coverage)

Cross - border QA: enabling higher education institutions to assume responsibility for their QA and choose an appropriate EQAR-registered QA agency for their mandatory evaluation while 'respecting the national arrangements
-> only 64% of EHEA signatories allow their HE institutions to be accredited, evaluated, or audited by any suitable EQAR-registered agency (QA FIT results)

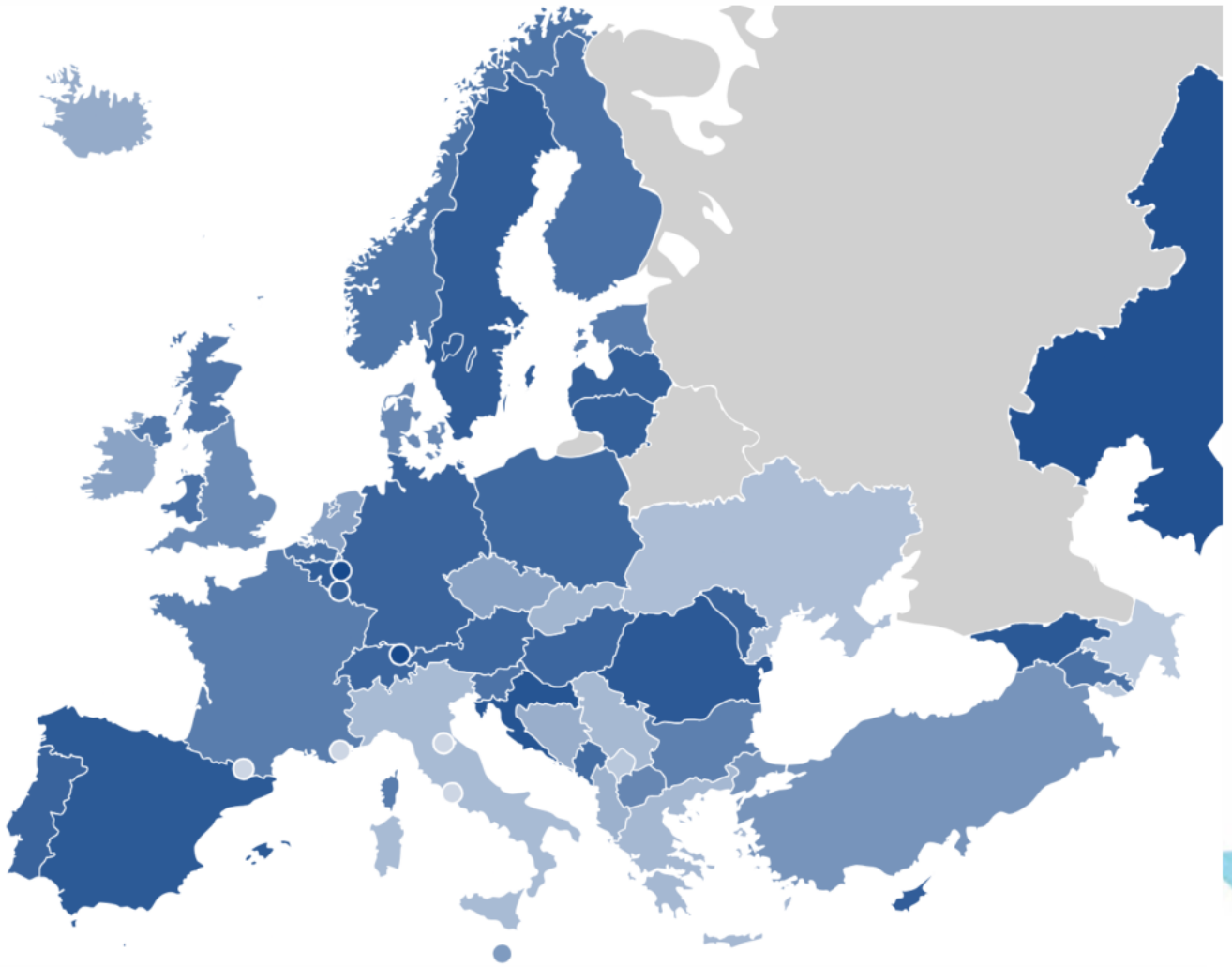
European Approach for QA of JP: ministers aimed to support the development of JP & recognise QA decisions for joint and double degree programmes
-> 20 out of the 49 EHEA member countries have fully embraced the European Approach

QA of TNE: EHEA members pledged to apply equal quality assurance standards to transnational higher education (TNE) as those used for domestic provision.
- but 44% of higher education systems lack provisions in their legal framework concerning the QA of transnational provision



QA FIT Cross-cutting results

DEQAR coverage of EHEA systems



QA FIT project results

Considering the purpose of a European QA Framework, the average responses across all stakeholder groups show that the European QA framework as playing a key role in:

- facilitating international student mobilty (97%).
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- facilitating degree recognition (96%)
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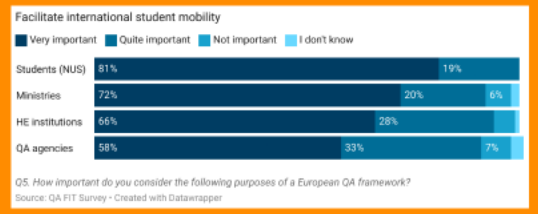
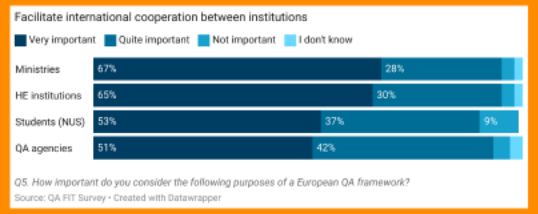
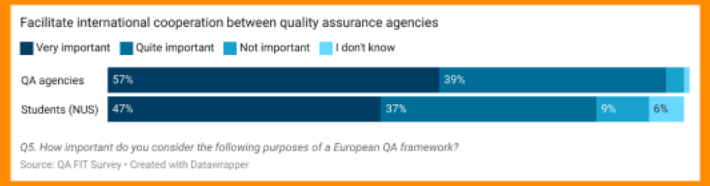




The purpose of the European QA Framework is strongly connected to **the output of the agency's work,** a recognition that would facilitate the mobility of students across HE institutions



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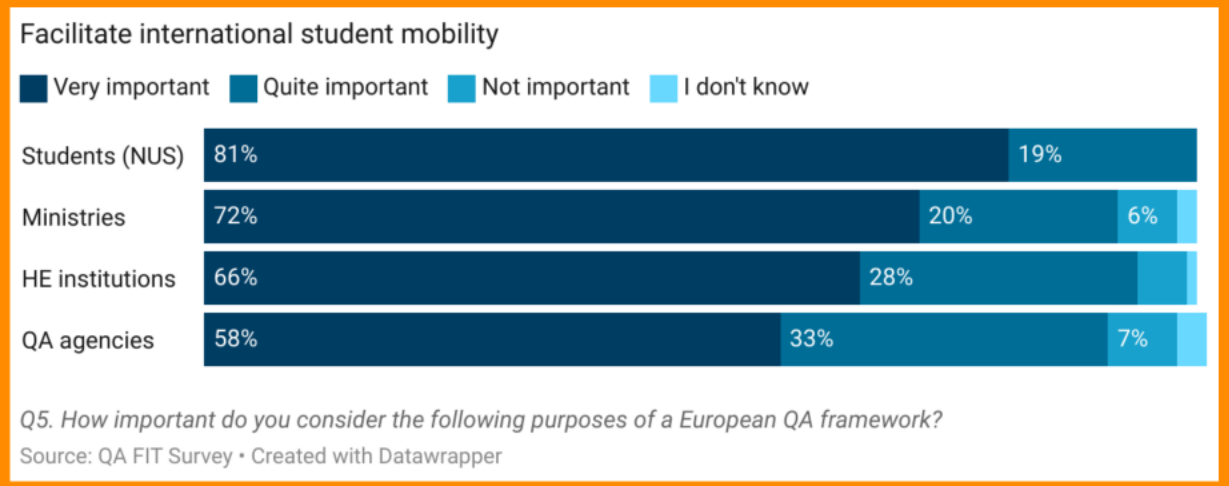

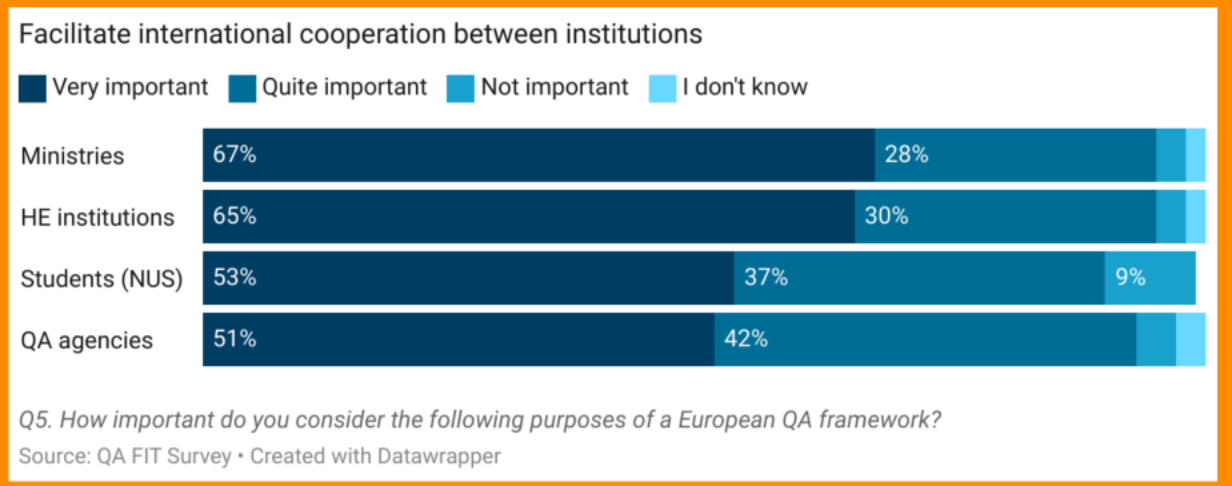

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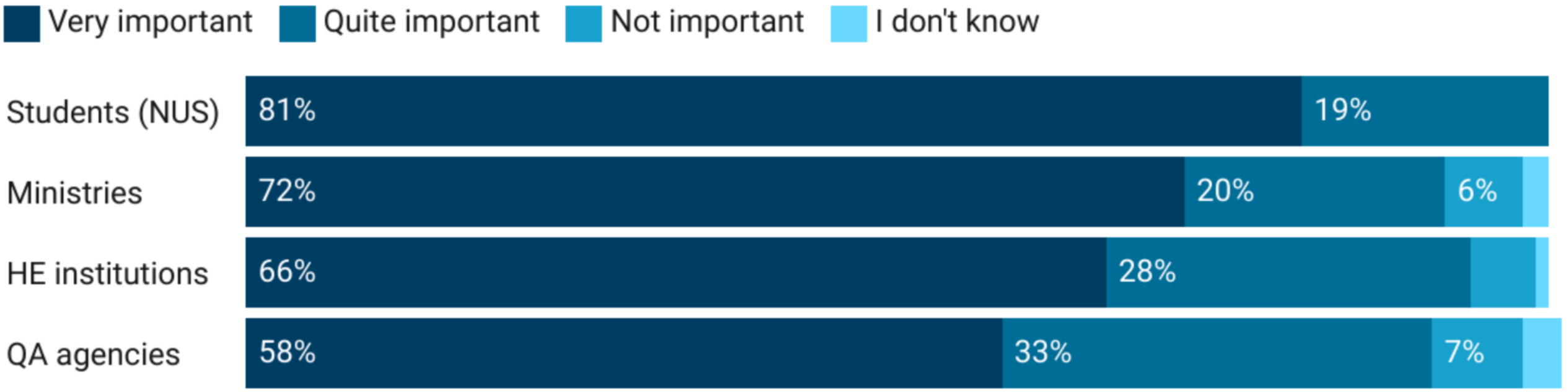
Higher education institutio

Facilitate international student mobility



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Source: QA FIT Survey • Created with Datawrapper

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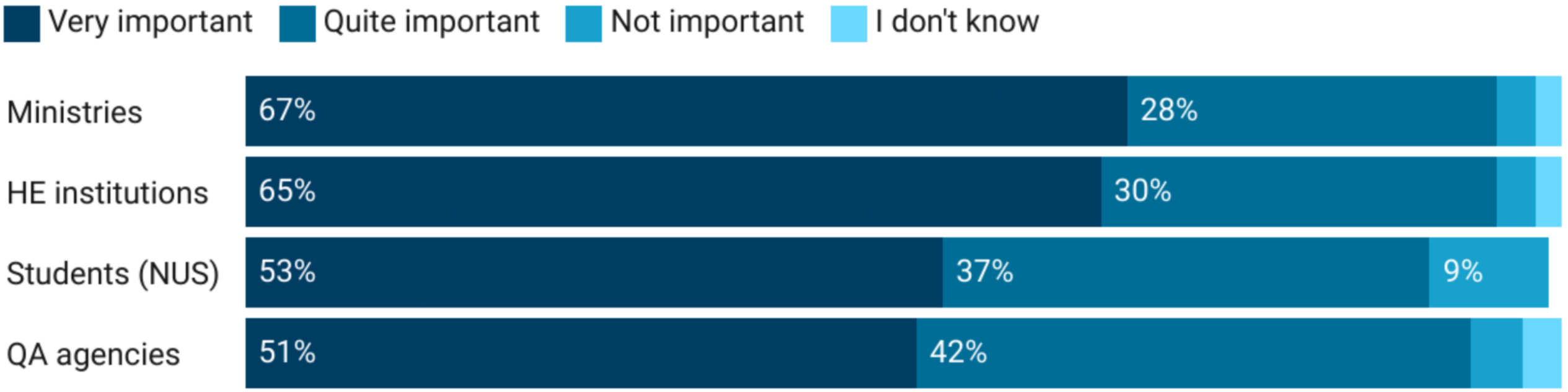

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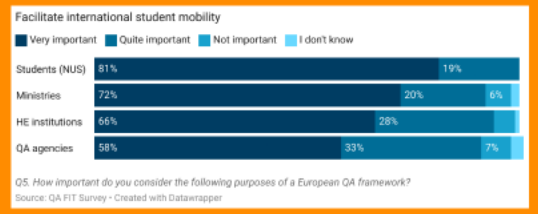

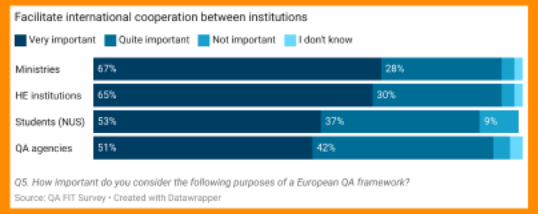

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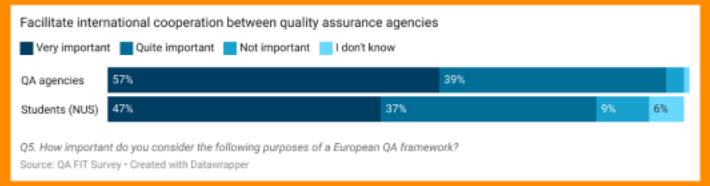

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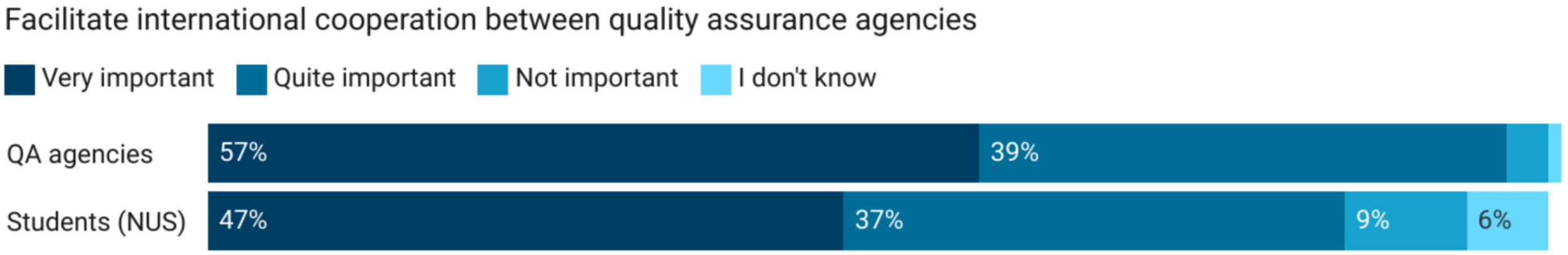

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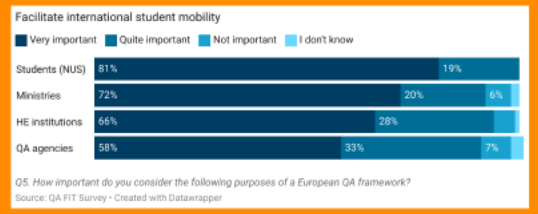

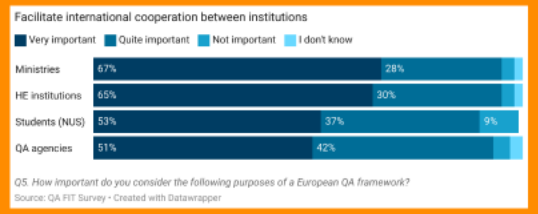

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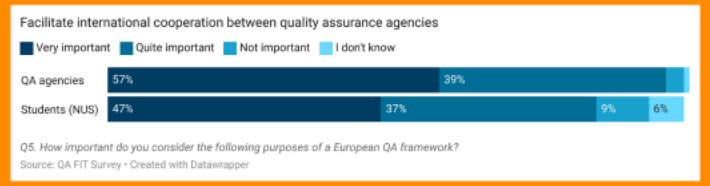

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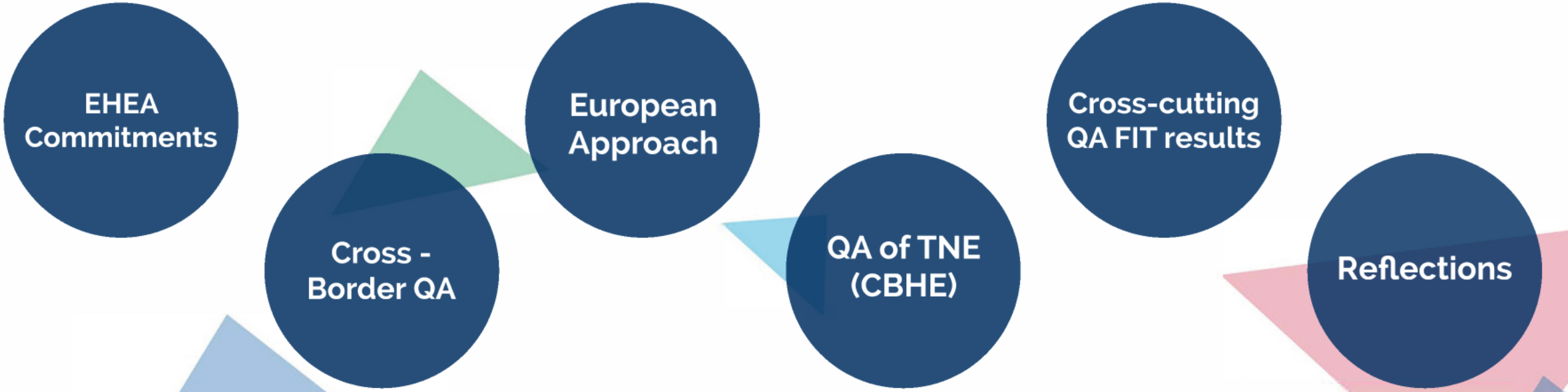

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Status of cross-border QA

DEQAR data (September 2023): 43 countries of the 47 EHEA members had at least one EQA by a foreign EQAR-listed agency

The share of cross border QA procedures within EHEA is more common but increasing in recent years for non-EHEA regions.

CBQA activities within the EHEA mostly carried out within countries that have a legal framework recognising foreign EQAR-registered agencies, but 'openness' to such reviews lagging behind.

National Requirements for CBQA

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cross-border-qa/key-

Level of official recognition by legal frameworks of cross-border external QA (September 2023)

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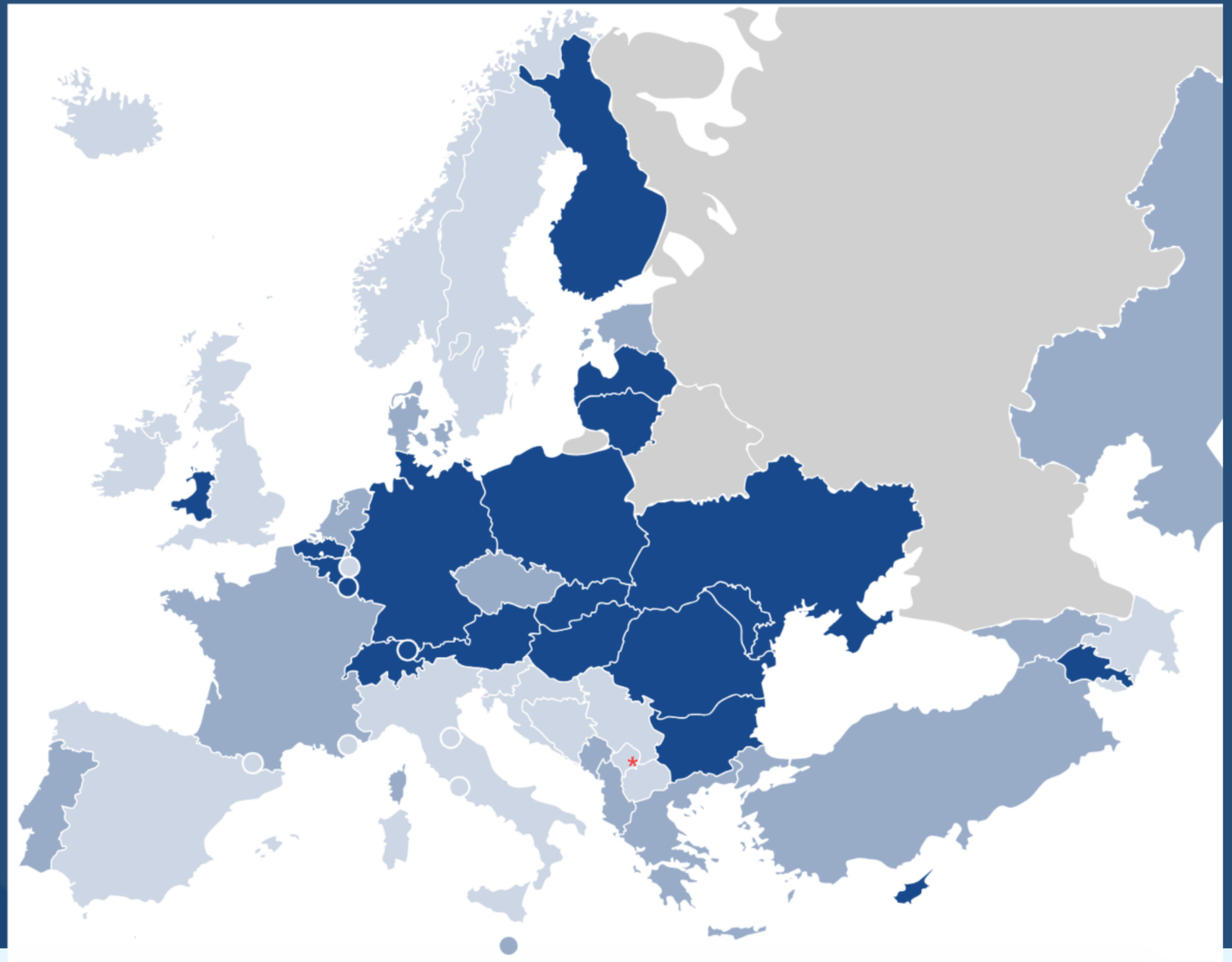

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Requirements for QA agencies to operate in another country

1. **Eligibility requirements** e.g., approvement by a competent national body

2. **Conditions for the agency's work** e.g., use the regulations and frameworks of the national higher education system

3. **System level limitations** e.g., only certain HEIs or programmes may use CBQA

4. **Recognition of reviews** e.g. the approval of the report & decision by a competent national body or the national QA agency

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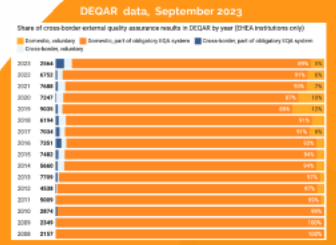

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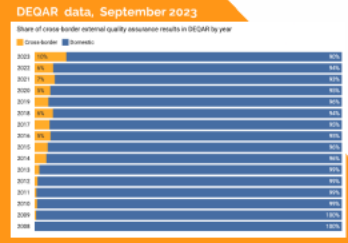
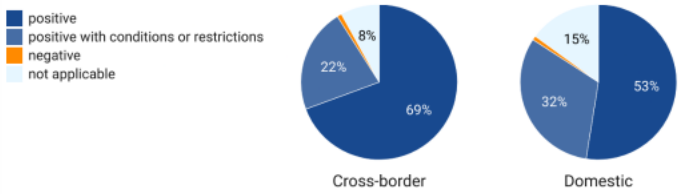
Cross-border external QA by year (May 2023)



External QA Decisions

Decisions by cross-border vs domestic external quality assurance reports



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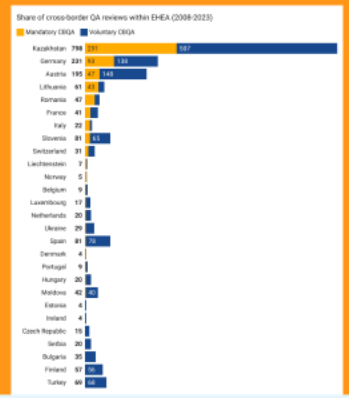
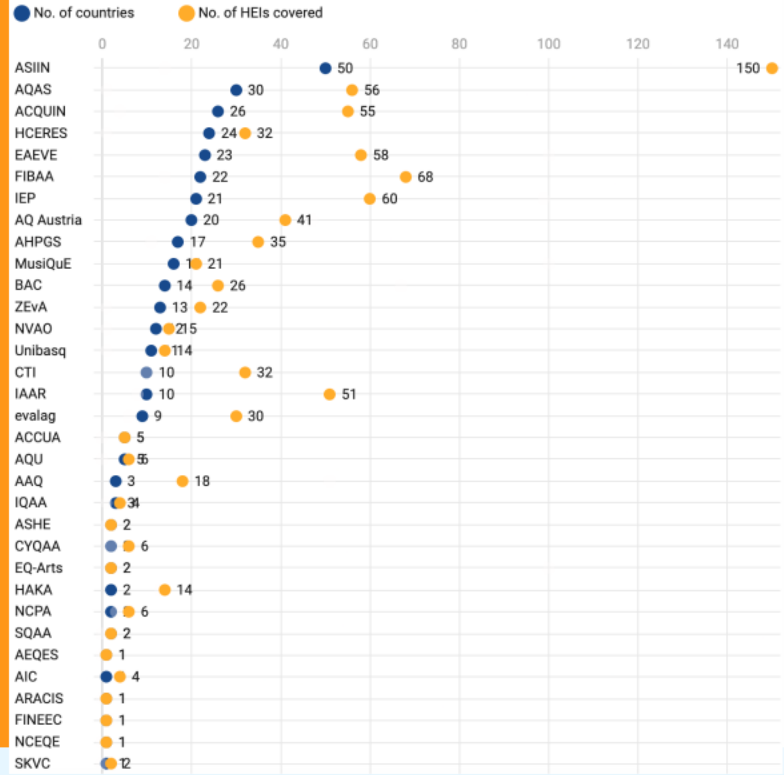


Main EHEA "importers" of cross-border external QA (May 2023)

Cross-border external QA by no. of countries & HEIs



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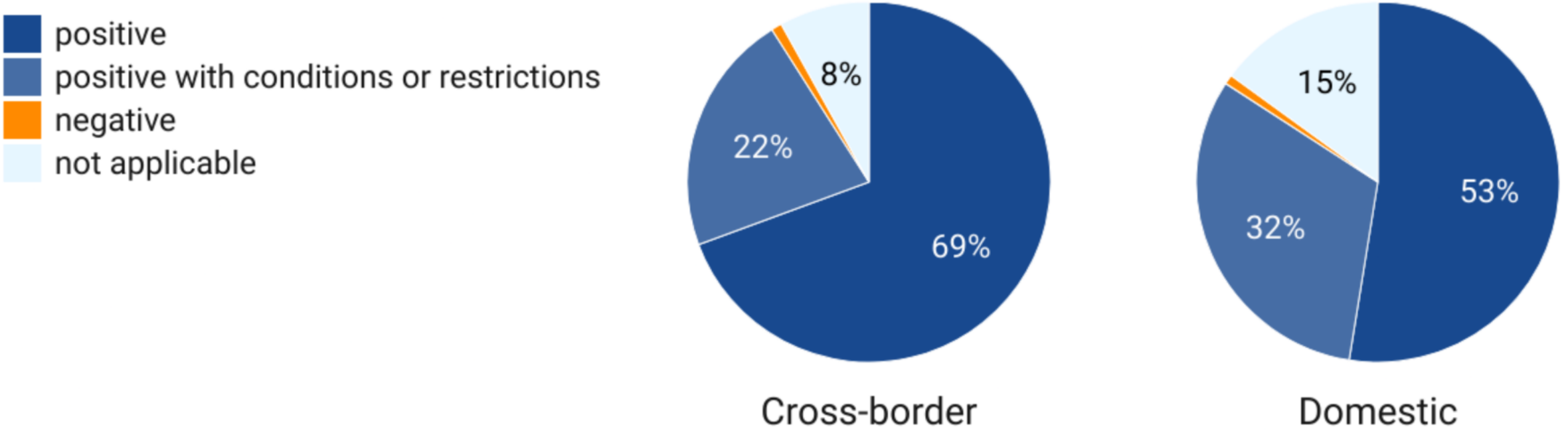

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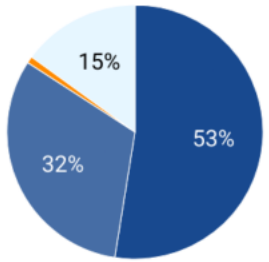
Share of cross-border QA reviews within EHEA (2008-2023)

ce reports



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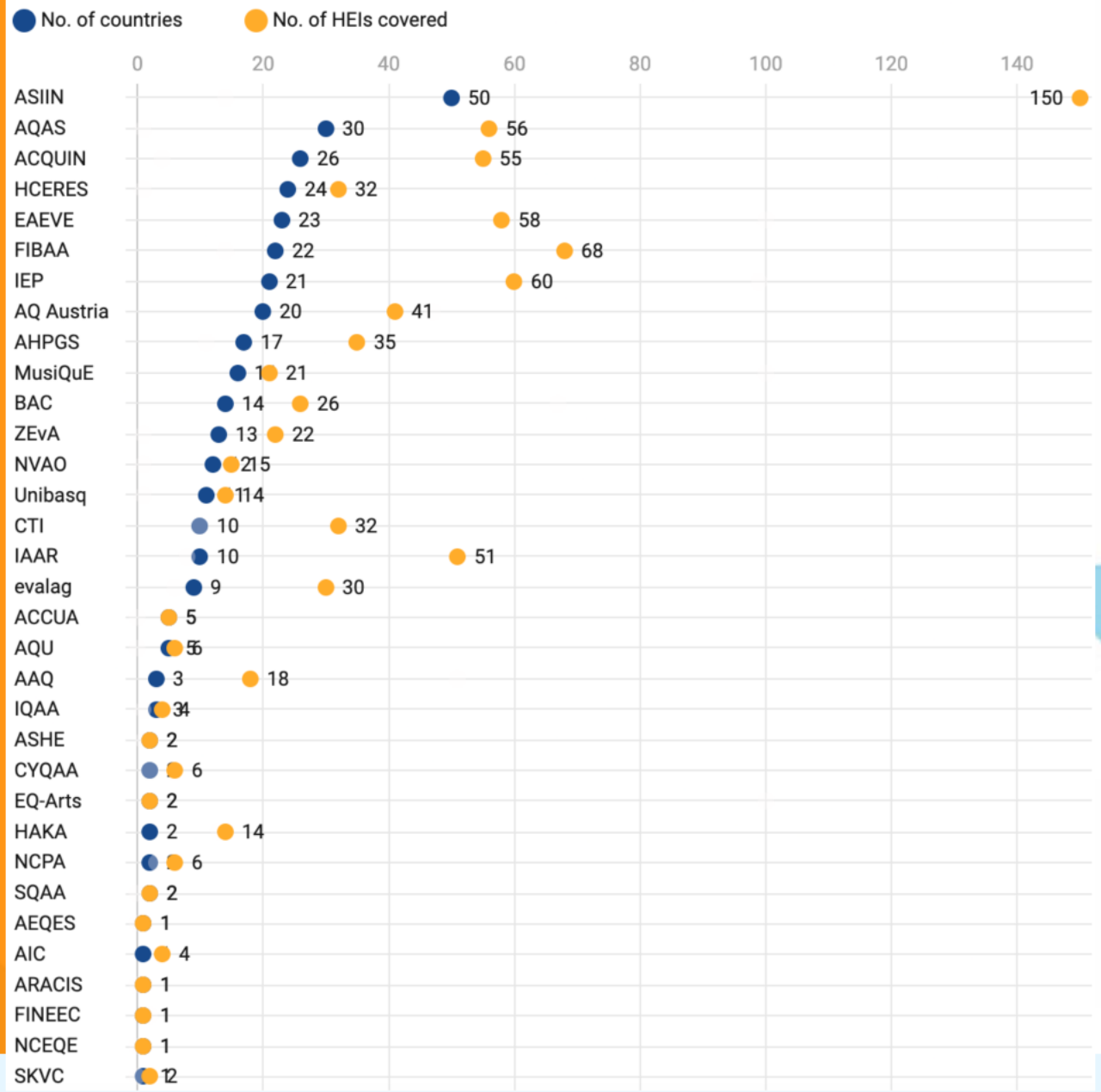
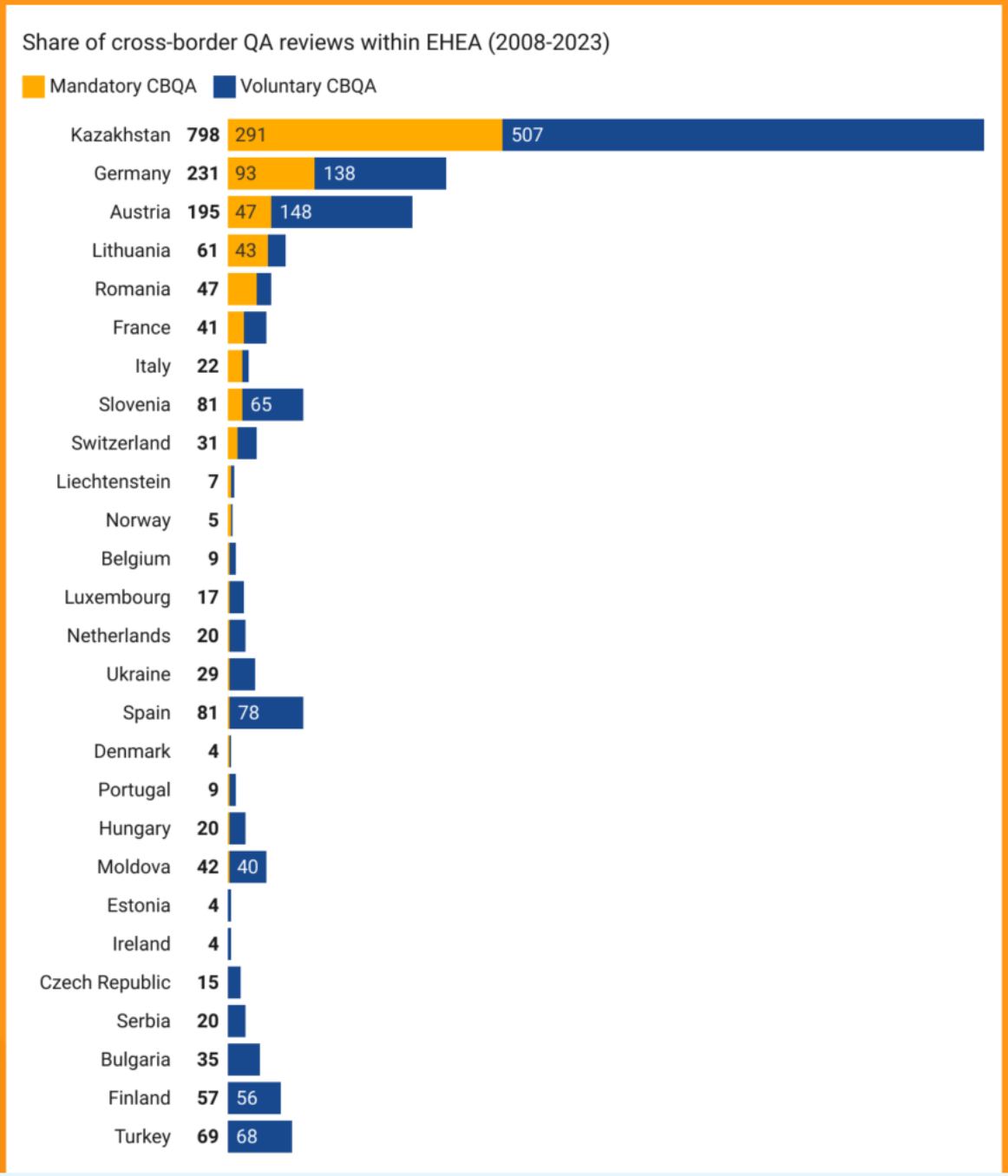


Cross-border QA by no. of countries and HEIs (DEQAR, September 2023)



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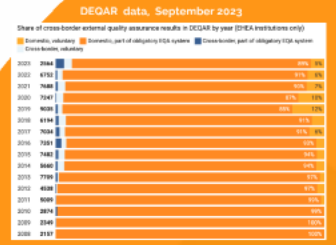

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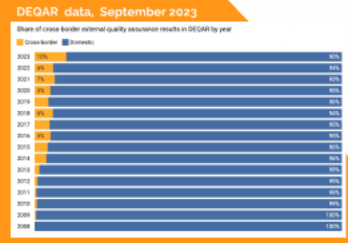

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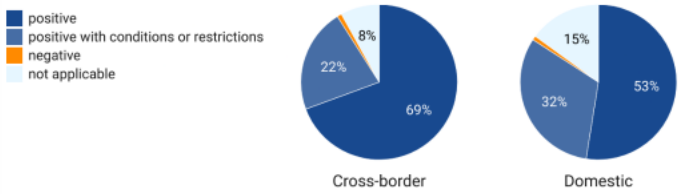

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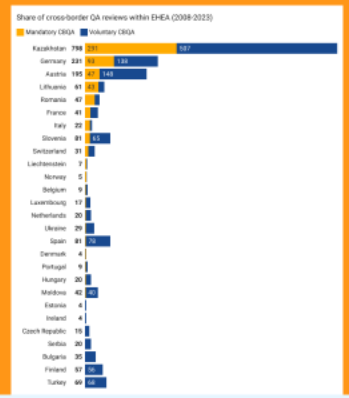

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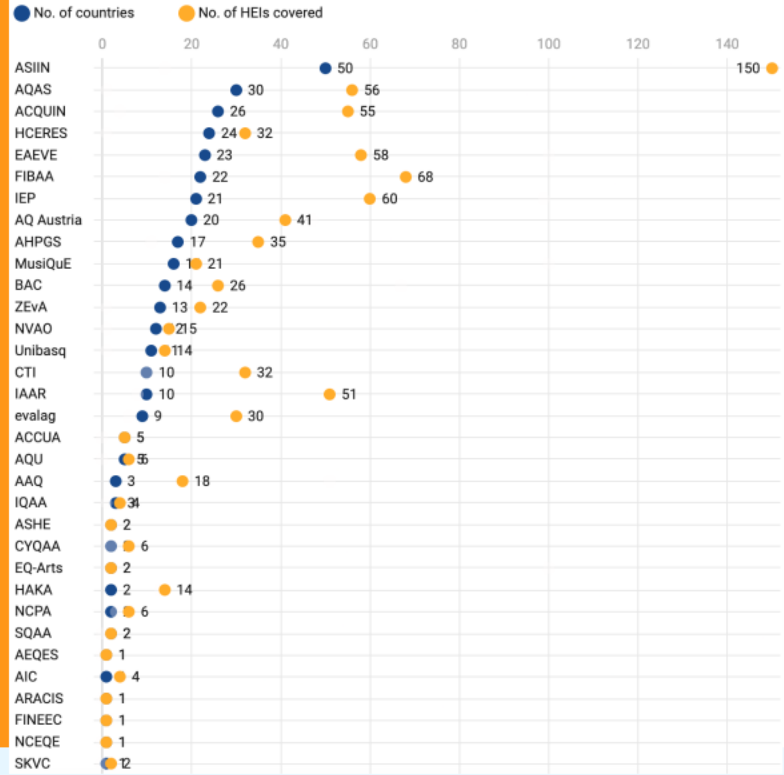

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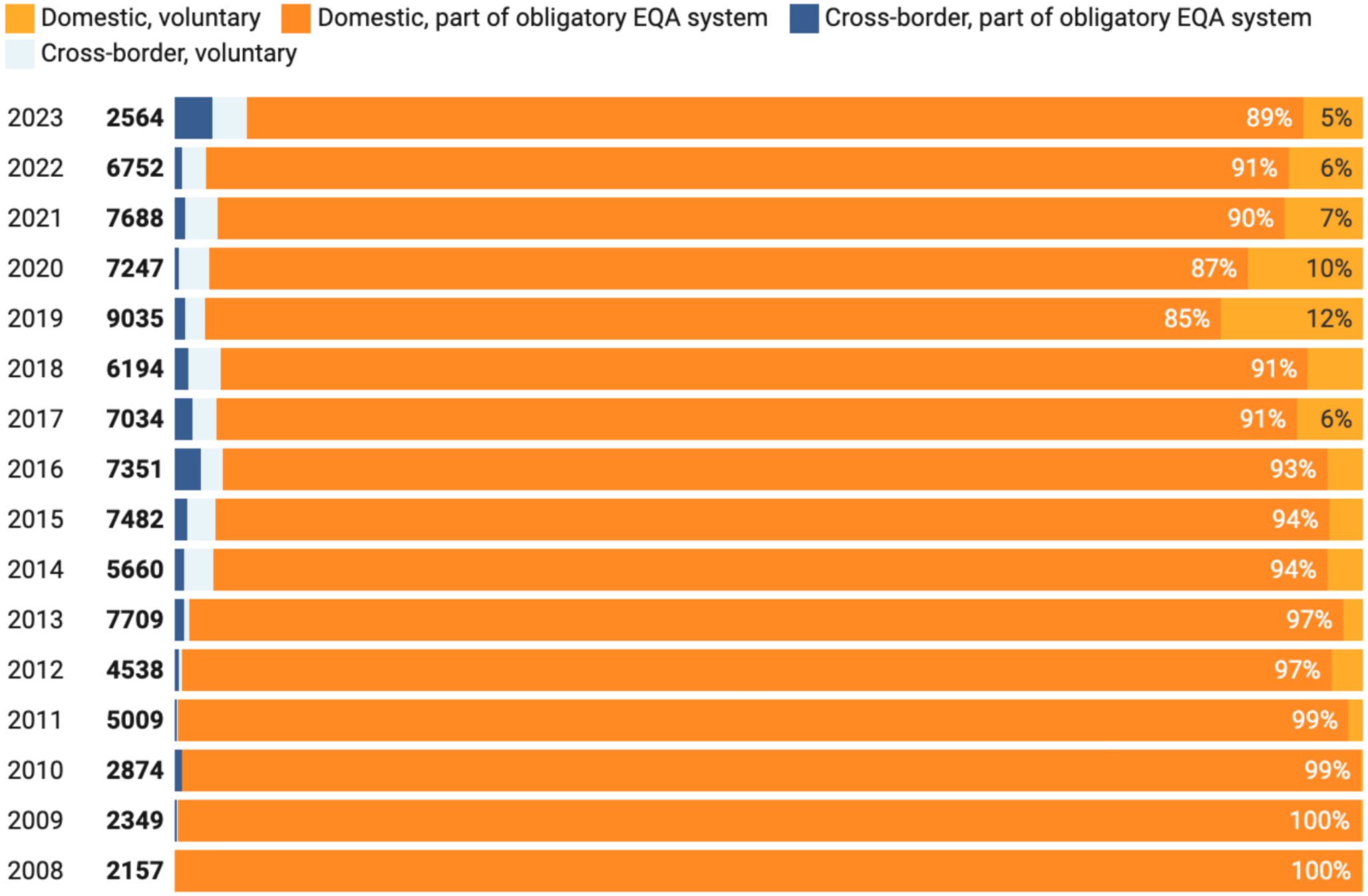
Cross-border external QA by year (May 2023)

Share of cross-border external quality assurance results in DEQAR by year (EHEA institutions only)



DEQAR data, September 2023

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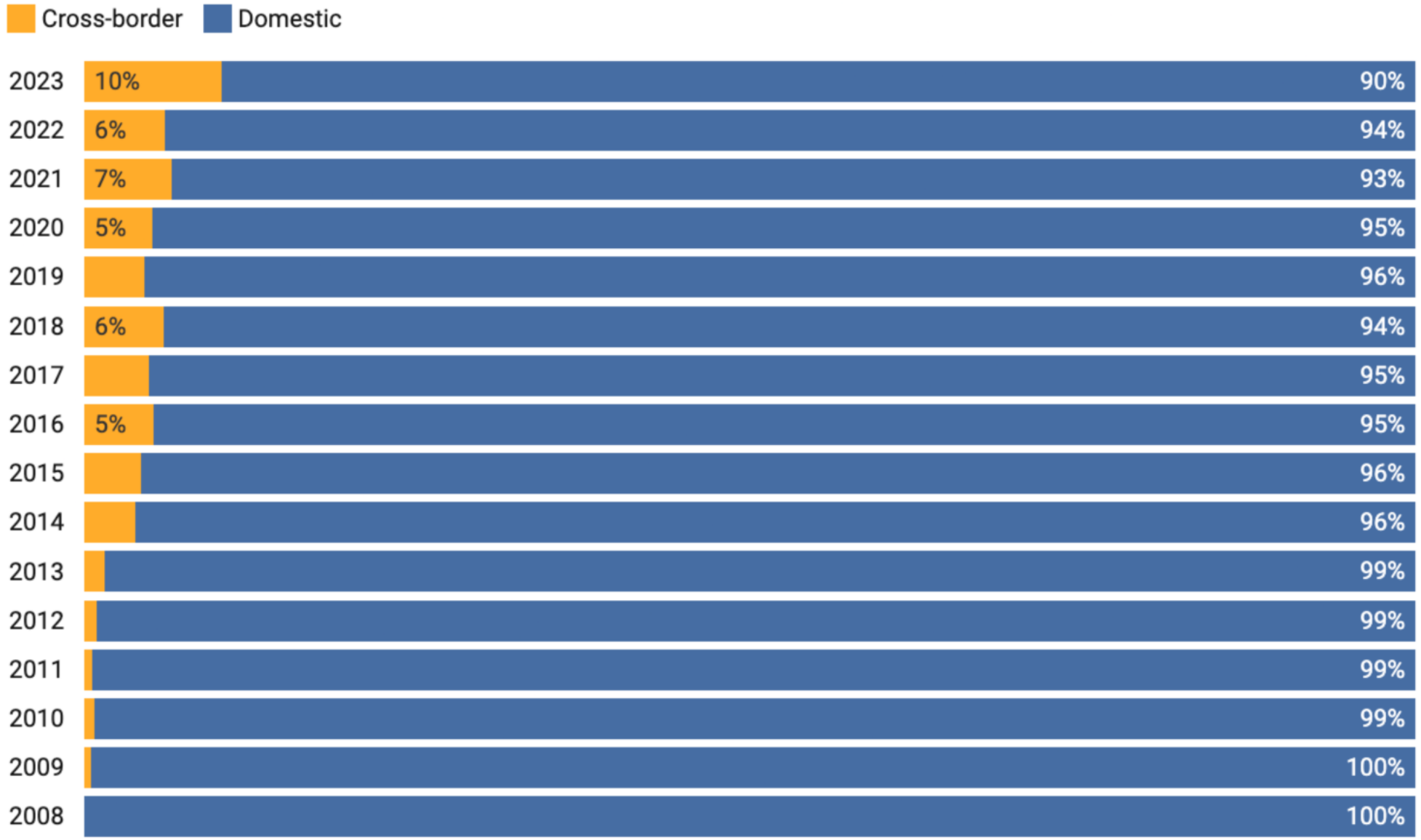

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Rationale for CBQA

- **Pull factor**: external perspective, broader view and possibility for comparison; offering better market opportunities and higher employment of graduates;
- **Push factor:** Lack of trust in the domestic QA agency, a one size-fits all approach in the national lack of international exposure, narrow pool of reviewers in smaller HE systems.
- QA agencies may also choose to be involved in a cross-border review as part of their strategy for internationalisation, as a way to broaden their horizon, to improve their own processes, motivation of staff, as well as for financial reasons.

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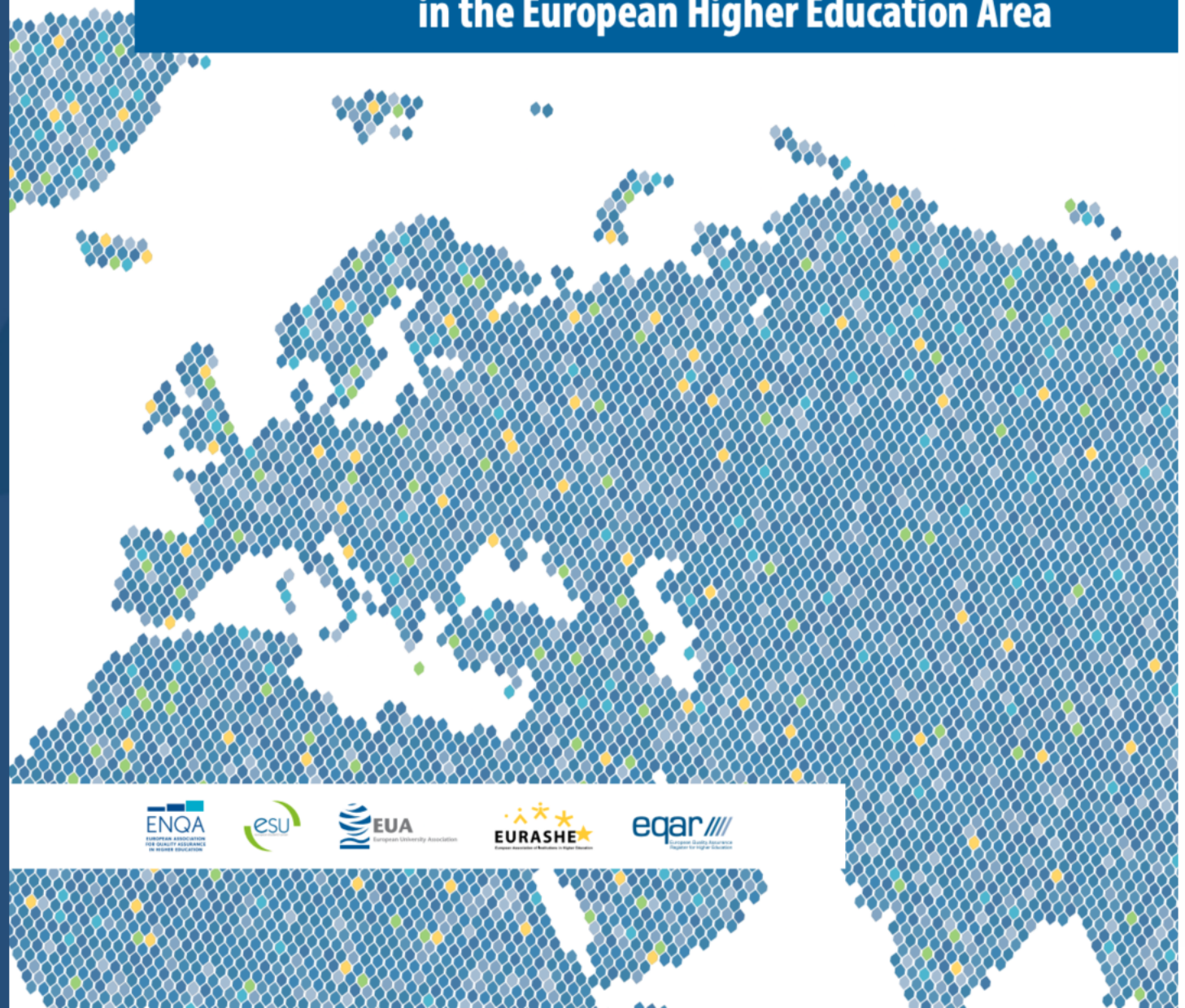
Key Considerations for Cross-Border Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area



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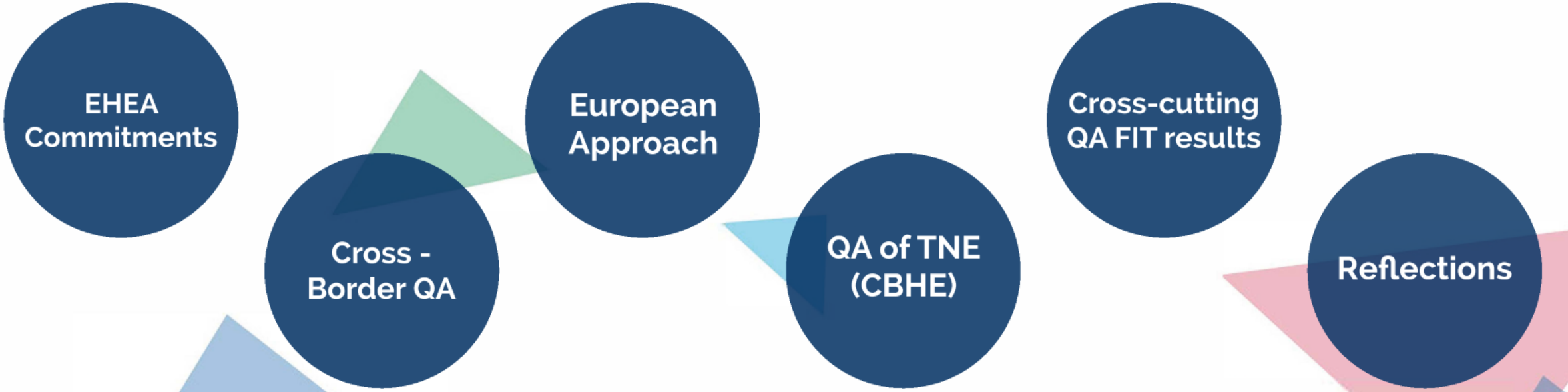
Quality Assurance Fit for the Future

QA-FIT focus group 'Internationalisation'



EQAR Members' Dialogue - QA-FIT Focus group (9 - 10 November 2023), Granada, Spain
Presenter: Melinda Szabo (EQAR, Deputy Director)

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The European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes within EHEA

Why a European Approach?

- to address the challenges posed by specific national criteria and varying accreditation processes in European higher education.
- to avoid multiple administrative procedures, clashing criteria, differing accreditation periods and uncertainty and potential conflicting decisions
- facilitate the planning and organisation of such joint programmes

Uptake of the EA

Limitations in the use of the EA

Limitations in the use of the EA

Uptake of the EA

Year	No of EA procedures	No. of international joint programme procedures (including EA)	No. of national joint programme procedures
2016	1	2	5
2017	2	6	5
2018	3	3	7
2019	6	13	10
2020	2	2	27
2021	6	9	16
2022	6	6	5
2023/06	6	5	0
Total	32	46	75

- 16 of 32 jointly designed study programmes are part of an **Erasmus Mundus Master for Joint Programmes**
- clear **preference in choosing a QA agency** from one of the countries involved in the programme consortium
- most joint programmes are carried out at **second cycle, as well as most procedure with the EA are** (30 of 32 procedures)
- the EA procedure covers higher institutions in **29 of the EHEA members countries and 6 other non-EU countries (see countries in dark blue)**

EHEA countries in which the EA can be used to replace programe level EQA (November 2023)

Institutions involved in programmes accredited/ evaluated with the EA (November 2023)

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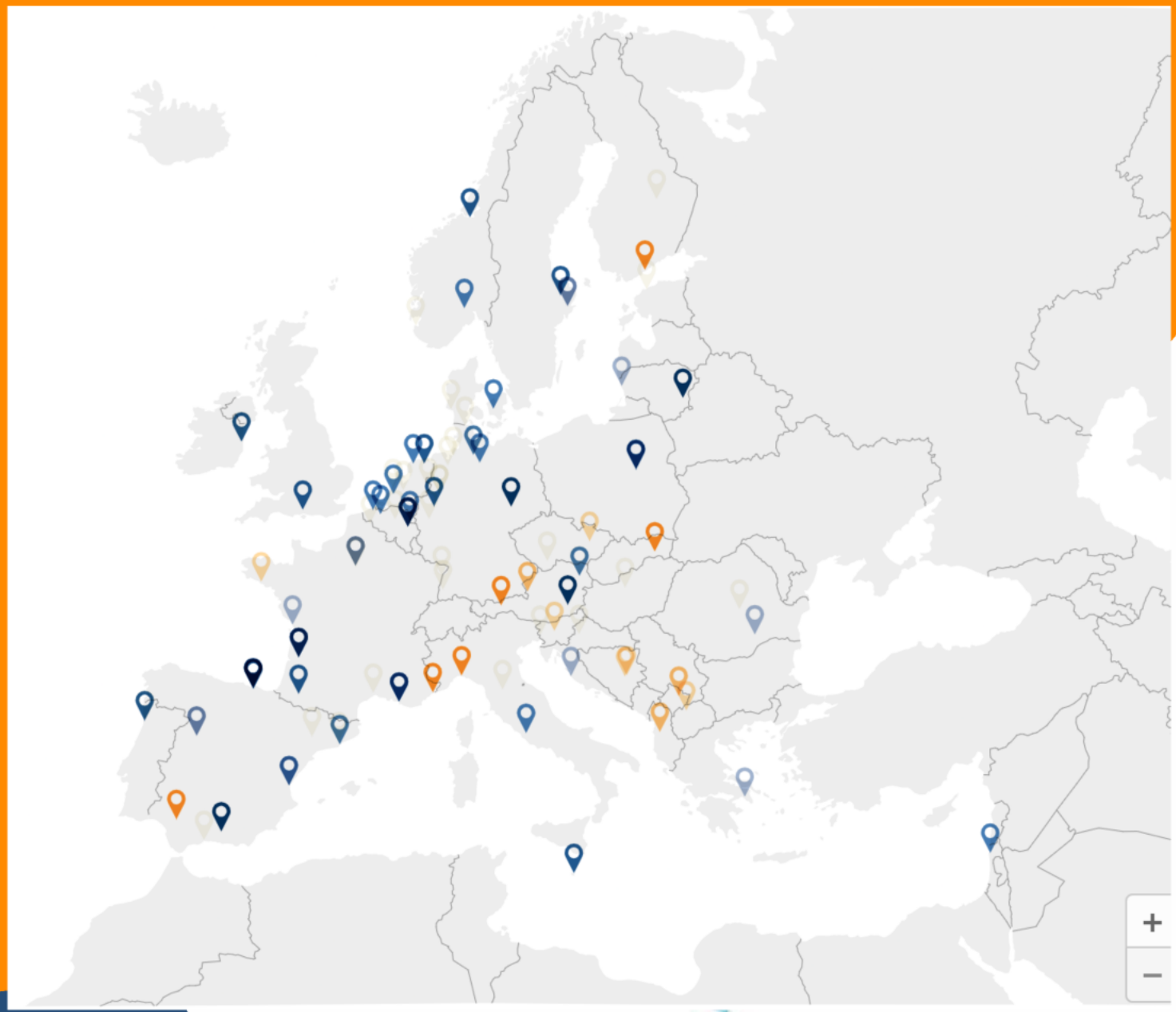

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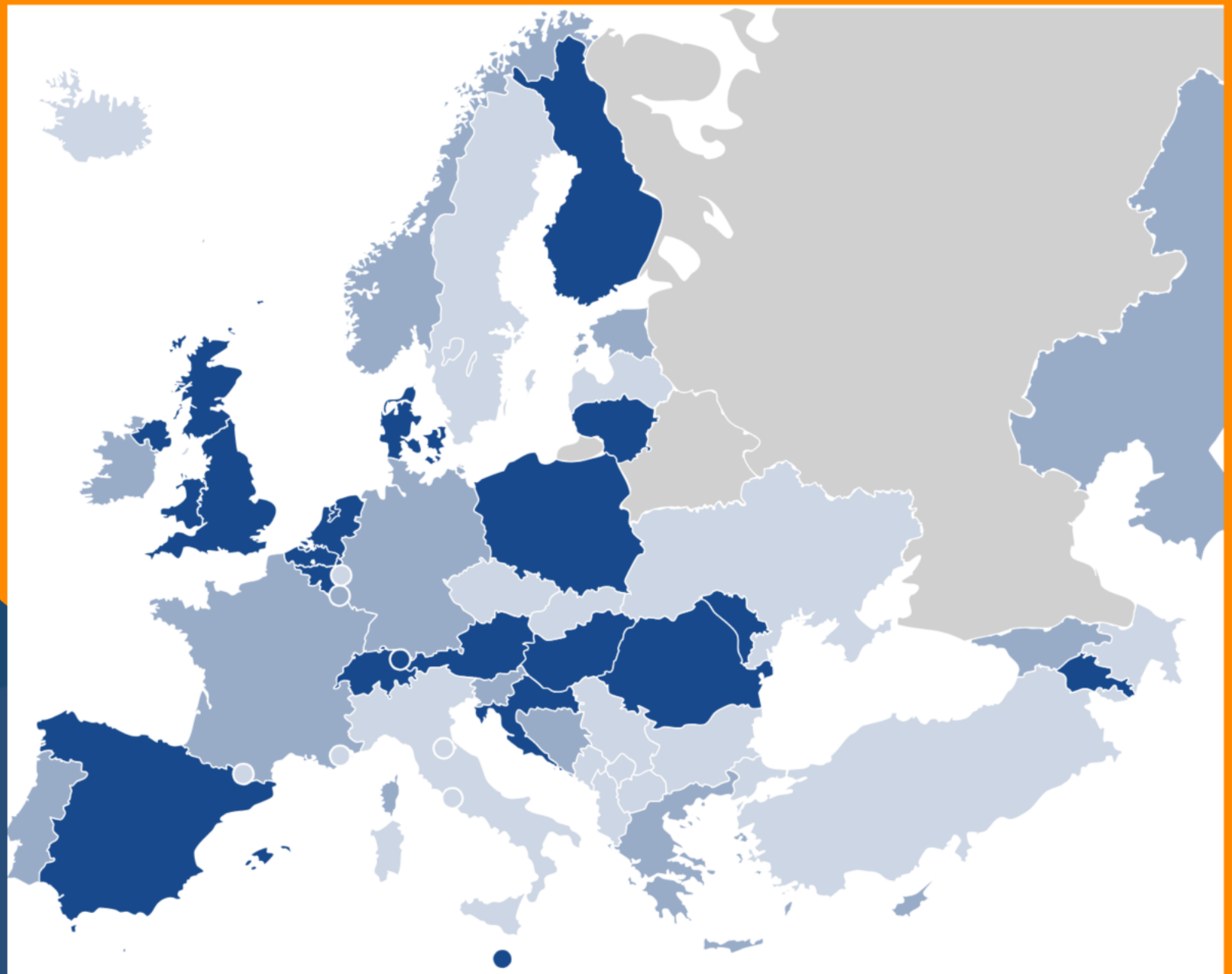

Limitations in the use of the EA

- a **limited familiarity** with the procedure;
- difficulty in carrying out the EA due to **additional requirements that go beyond the EA standards** e.g.,
  - requirements linked to the number of ECTS
  - credits assigned to the final Master thesis or the credits for certain modules or components,
  - the length of the external QA cycle,
  - the required language of the review report, etc

- exceptions being made for a specific procedure, but **no real enabling changes in the legal framework**

- **discrepancies in the definition of joint programs** among various systems (affecting eligibility for the European Approach)
- variations in the overarching objectives of joint program accreditation

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Limitations in the use of the EA

Limitations in the use of the EA

Conditions in applying the EA

Conditions but not necessarilly restrictions:

- the other higher education partners have to have obtained the right to provide instruction in the corresponding study programme group and academic cycle.
- only if no substantial shortcomings have been identified in the assessment report.

Restrictions:

- the joint programme needs to have previously undergone an assessment by an EQAR registered agency (no ex-ante possibility)
- the draft agreement of institutions implementing the joint higher educational programme has to be 'pre-approved' by the national QA boy
- institutions participating within the European University Alliance are expected to employ the European Approach, whiile Institutions that are not members of a European University Alliance are required to undergo the regular programme accreditation for any joint programmes they may offer.

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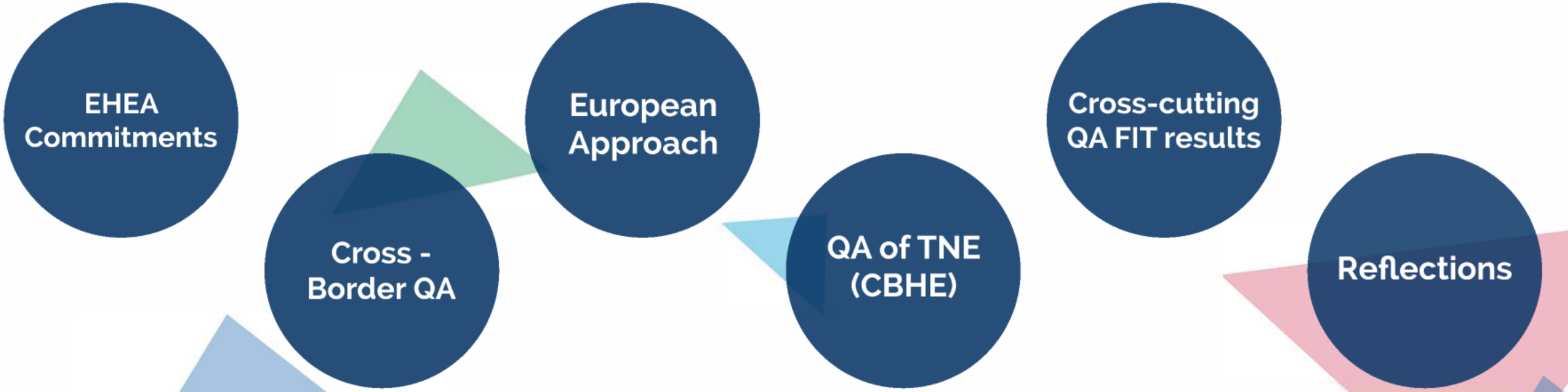

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QA of TNE

TNE or CBHE = any learning activity in which the students are based in a different country from the country in which the institution providing the education is located

Rome Communique (2020)- national EQA arrangements should cover transnational higher education with equal standards to those used for domestic provision

TNE provision - a steady increase in the number of new TNE programmes being offered and in new forms of delivery
-> at least 30 higher education institutions from 17 different EHEA systems have TNE provision in different higher education system (DEQAR data)

Legal framework

Challenges, benefits, risks

Key Considerations for TNE

TNE in EHEA: Framework and Practice

- Most countries do not have specific legislation regarding TNE
- Some countries HE institutions are legally prohibited to open transnational provision abroad
- EQA approach often different for TNE provider as opposed to the national provision
- 42% of agencies cover transnational education in their external QA procedures, thus ensuring an ESG coverage of such providers, but
- 24% of QA agencies use different evaluation criteria for transnational education (QA FIT, QA agency Survey)

Reflections from the EHEA TPG C & PLA meetings

Reflections:

- For importing countries of TNE the benefit of an 'education export' is generally the import of knowledge for exporting countries serves internationalisation policies but also different national educational objectives.

- but, the TNE provision may be also used for getting access into the labour market by less reputable providers.

- The high diversity of TNE provision and the lack of a commonly agreed definition often leaves a gap in how to address such provision as part of the regular review of QA agencies

- There is a need for a transparent and standardised information about outgoing and incoming CBHE provision and its QA/regulation missing.

--> *"What gets measured gets managed "*

Key considerations from the PLA (March 2023)

- The 'exporting' HEIs should provide clear, easily accessible information on admission regulations, curriculum, assessment requirements, conditions of study, mentoring, academic fees and the degrees it awards.

- If the TNE courses lead to a recognised degree in the exporting country, the exporting institution should ensure its accreditation according to national standards. If ESG aligned these standards should be easily recognised by the accreditation system of the host country.

- National systems should assure the quality of the exporting TNE while lessening the burden on the incoming cross-border providers if they have been accredited by an EQAR-registered agency.

- Important to gather data for institutions with TNE as well as on the legal framework and QA requirements for such provision. EQAR could expand its Knowledge Base of legal frameworks to consider the QA of TNE provision.

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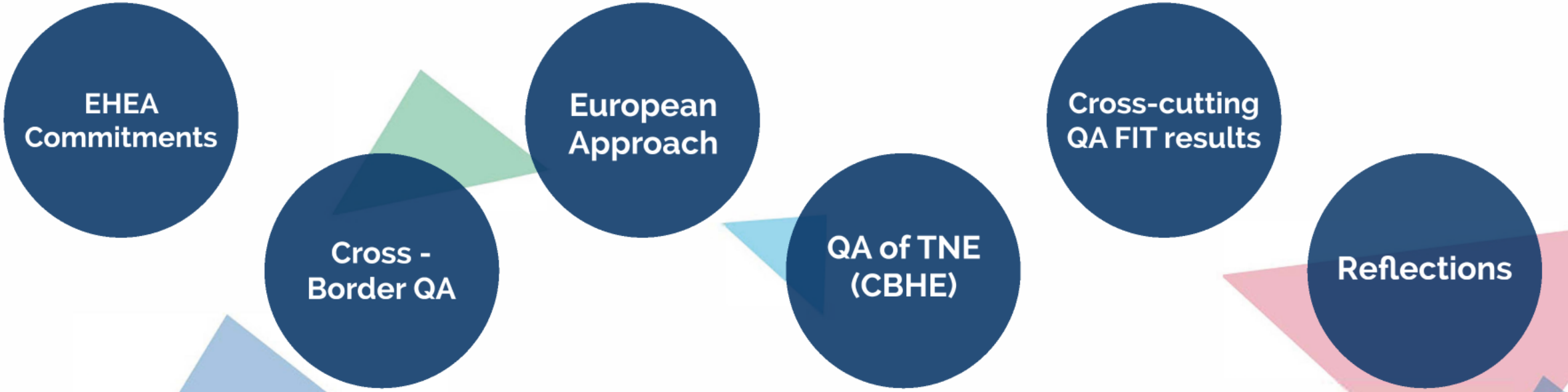

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Cross-cutting QA FIT results

- **while consensus both within and between stakeholder groups as to the value of a European framework for QA to support internationalisation implementation of existing tools and policies has been patchy and slow**

- **European University Alliance - has put cross-border cooperation back in the spotlight,**
  - agreement on setting up an external QA evaluation system for European university alliances for 59% of student respondents, 51% of agency respondents

Survey respondents agree to some form of revision of the current ESG, but not to reducing the ESG to a few core standards:

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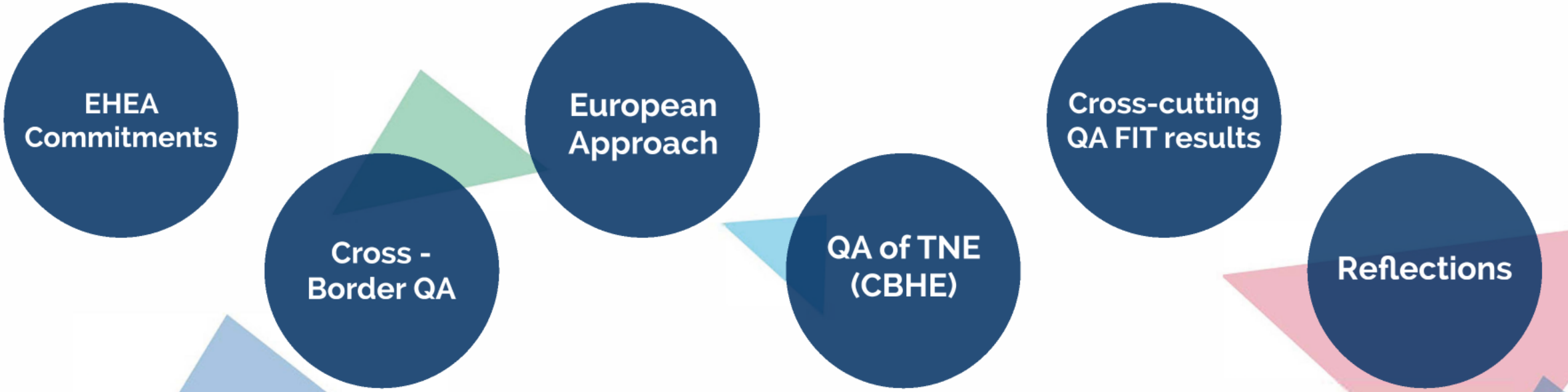

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Reflections

Thank you

Thank you for your attention

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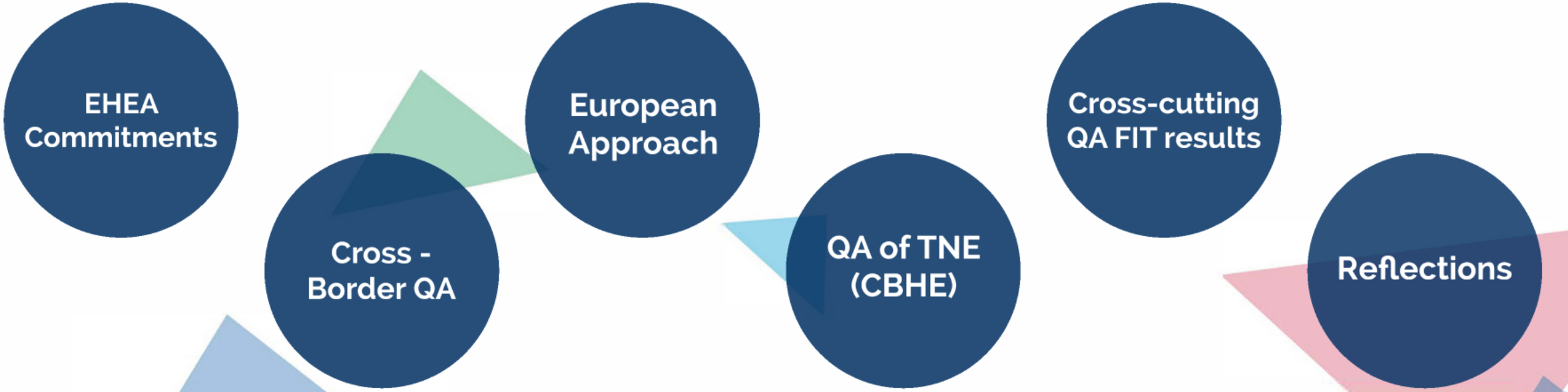

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