Revision of the ESG and trends in external QA in Europe

Aleksander Šušnjar
EQAR Director

Riga, Latvia
30 October 2025

Līdzfinansē Eiropas Savienība
2027 Nacionālais attīstības plāns
Akadēmiskās Informācijas Centrs
IEGULDĪJUMS TAVĀ NĀKOTNĒ

European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR)

Mission:

Enhance transparency and trust, promote international recognition

Role:

Official register of QA agencies that comply with the ESG

- Established by and for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)
- Founded by the E4 organisations (ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE), jointly governed with HE ministries
- Non-profit, independent and acting in the public interest

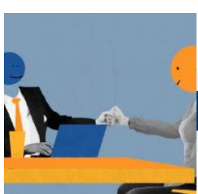
Registration and monitoring

Initial application & review against ESG

Annual updates on activities

Substantive Change Reports

Third-party complaints



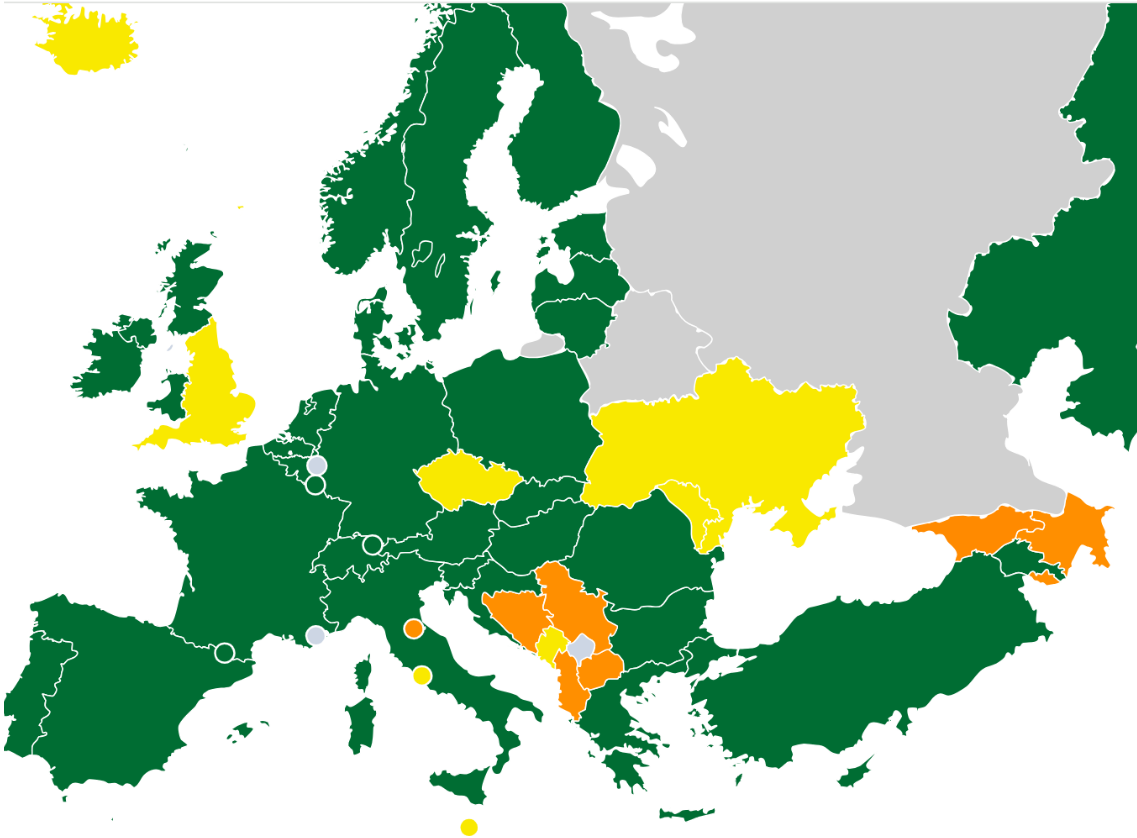
Periodic renewal every 5 years

EHEA Key Commitment on QA

- 34 EHEA countries **fully realise** commitment
- Remaining countries:

  Yellow: only some HEIs with external QA by an EQAR-registered agency

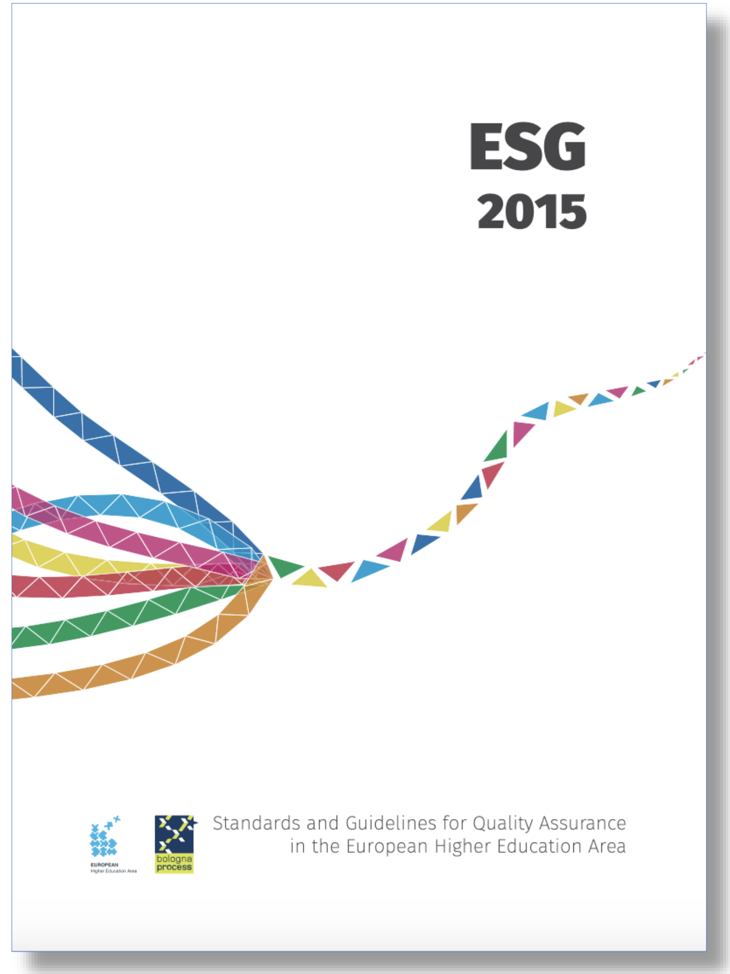
  Orange: national QA agencies not fully aligned with ESG yet



Source: EQAR website

Standards and Guidelines for QA in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)

- Common framework for QA
- Developed by stakeholders and adopted by ministers responsible for higher education
- Initial version 2005, revision adopted in 2015, upcoming revision planned for 2027
- Three parts:
  1) Internal quality assurance
  2) External quality assurance
  3) Quality assurance agencies



Revision of the ESG

ESG Part 1: for universities

Standard 1.1 Policy for QA

- Require the IQA policy to reflect links between L&T and other institutional missions and activities.

Standard 1.2 Design and Approval of Programmes

- To be merged with the standard on monitoring and periodic review of programmes.
- Emphasise societal relevance, graduates’ competences and employability.
- Reinforce involvement of stakeholders, including students, in programme design/monitoring.

Standard 1.3 Student-centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment

- Updated understanding of student-centred learning and focus on the role of QA in supporting this.

ESG Part 1: for universities

Standard 1.5 Teaching Staff

- Updated understanding of the role of the teacher + expansion of standard to cover other staff involved in education delivery.

Standard 1.6: Learning Resources and Student Support

- Expanded to cover the whole learning environment.
- Added reference to accessibility and inclusiveness.

Standard 1.10 Cyclical External Quality Assurance

- Add the need to demonstrate improvements between external QA activities.

ESG Part 2: external QA

Standard 2.1 Consideration of Internal QA

- Address internal QA in general and all Part 1 standards specifically.

Standard 2.2 Design and Approval of Programmes

- Highlighted dual purpose of accountability and enhancement.

Standard 2.3 Implementing Processes

- Make clear the room for flexibility and other justified approaches to external QA methodologies.
- Emphasise focus on in-person site visits.

Standard 2.4 Peer-review Experts

- Reinforce importance of ensuring the competences, independence and professionalism of experts.

ESG Part 2: external QA

Standard 2.5 Criteria for Outcomes

- Change to *Processes and criteria for outcomes* and address decision-making more explicitly.

Standard 2.6 Reporting

- In addition to publication of the reports, emphasis on their usability and accessibility.

Standard 2.7 Complaints and Appeals

- Clarify the difference between complaints (process) and appeals (outcomes) + agencies should have processes for both.

ESG Part 3: for QA agencies

Standard 3.1 Activities, Policy and Processes for QA

- Involvement of stakeholders should be flexible in terms of category and type of involvement.

Standard 3.3 Independence

- Organisational, operational and independence of formal outcomes.
- Ensure independence from any single party (internal or external).

Standard 3.4 Thematic Analysis

- Broaden to cover enhancement activities more generally.

ESG Part 3: for QA agencies

(*new*) Standard 3.6 Integrity and professional conduct

- Clear and transparent communication.
- Conflict of interest mechanisms.
- Consistent application of QA methodologies in international reviews.

Standard 3.7 Cyclical External Review of Agencies

- Requirement for development since previous review.

Public consultation

17 November 2025 until early January 2026

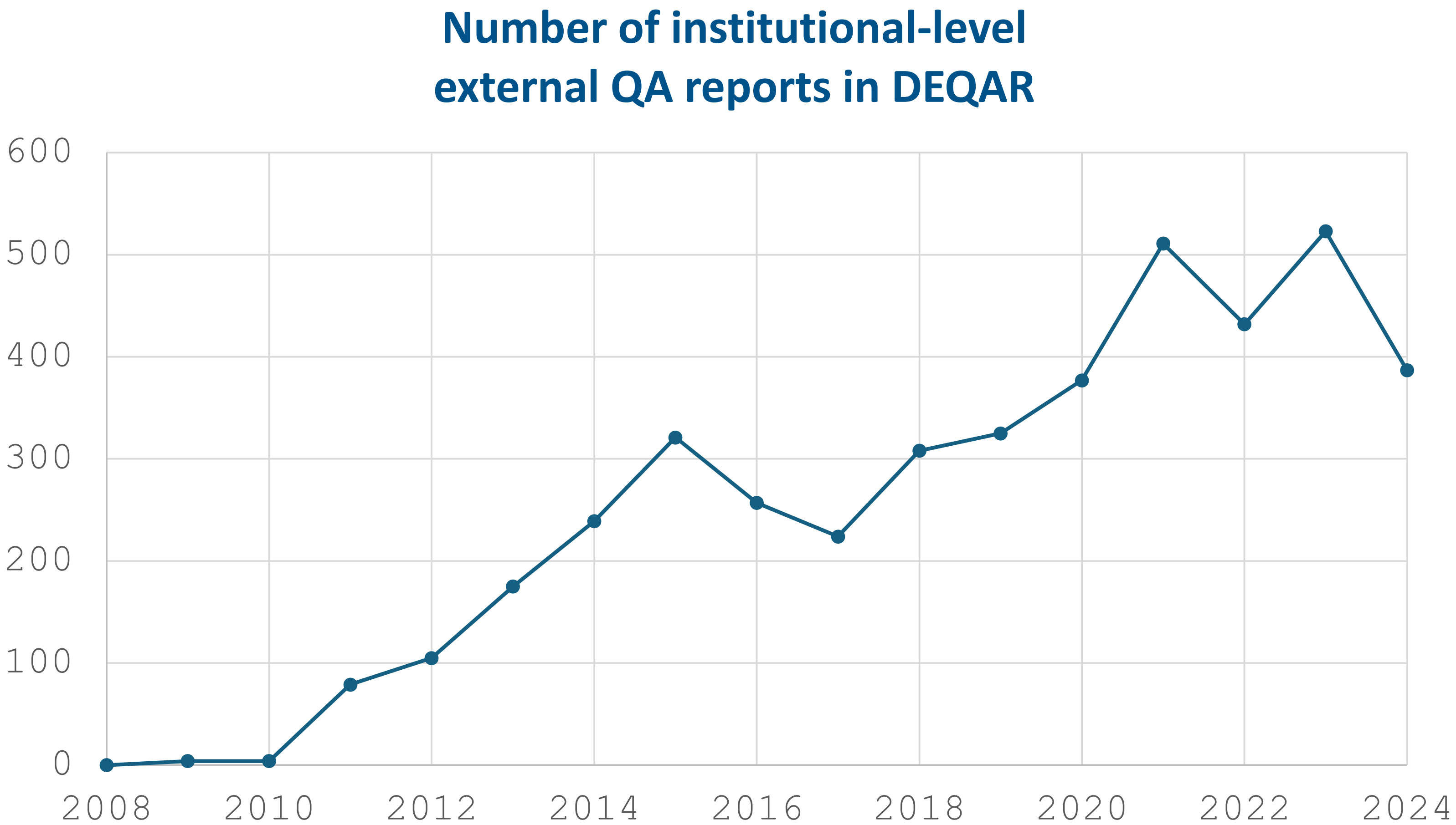
Full draft text of the ESG (introduction and 3 parts)

Online survey

Open to all interested parties
(individual and organisational)

A few reflections on the process towards institutional external QA

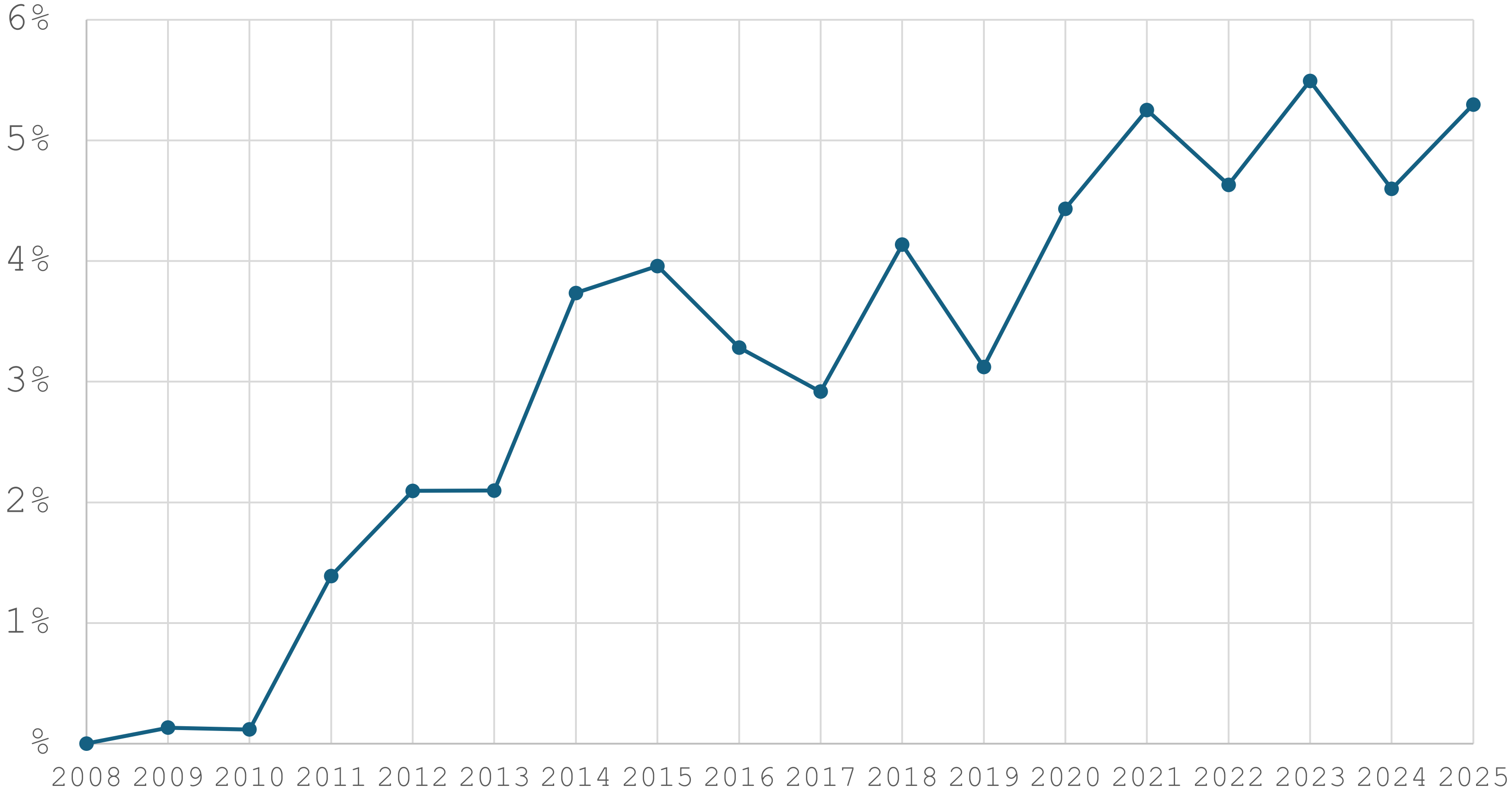
DEQAR data



Source: DEQAR

DEQAR data

Percentage of institutional-level external QA reports in DEQAR



Source: DEQAR

Key considerations

- → Adaptability and generic character of the ESG
- → Requires a high level of responsibility from each actor in the system, in line with the principle of the ESG: *primary responsibility for quality of higher education lies with the universities*
- → Prerequisite: high level of trust among key stakeholders

Thank you!

Contact:
aleksandar.susnjar@eqar.eu