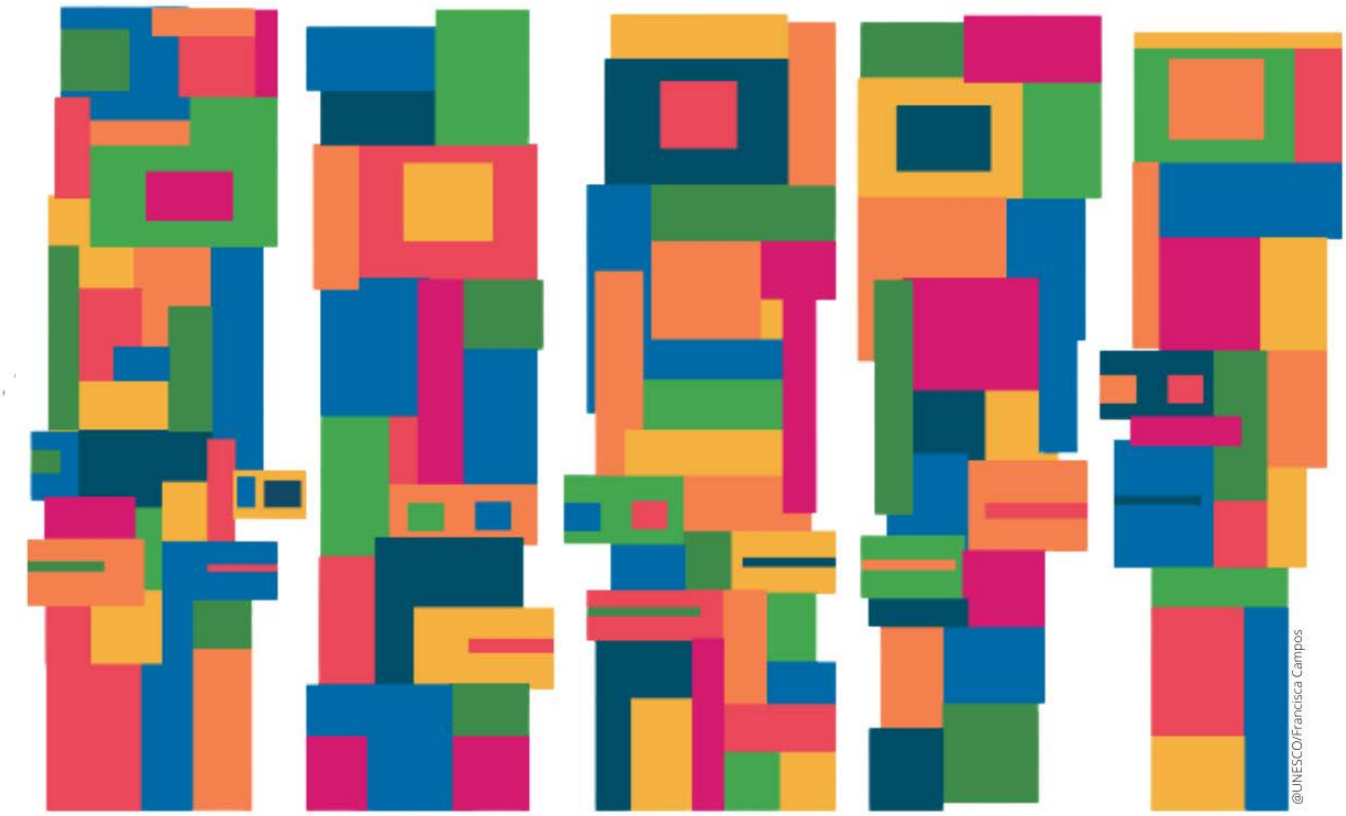


Global Survey Report: The contribution of higher education institutions to lifelong learning

Presented to the UNESCO World Higher Education Conference (WHEC2022)

by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning

Content

Survey and sample overview

This report presents the results of a global survey administered by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) on the contribution of universities and other higher education institutions (HEIs) to lifelong learning (LLL). It was conducted with the aim of developing a knowledge base on how and to what extent HEIs contribute to the implementation of LLL. The survey included questions on the following areas: general information and institutional profile; lifelong learning strategies and planning; funding and organisational structures for lifelong learning; lifelong learning provision and participants; flexible learning pathways; and community engagement.

UIL developed the survey collaboratively with experts from the International Association of Universities (IAU), Shanghai Open University (SOU), the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), and the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC). The online survey was launched by UIL and IAU, and distributed in English, French, Spanish, Chinese and Arabic via their networks.[1] A glossary of relevant terms accompanied the survey to ensure that respondents had a common understanding of what was being asked. After conducting a pilot study with a sample of 18 HEIs from April to May 2020, the survey was launched to collect data between October 2020 and January 2021.

2,191 participating institutions began the online survey, of which 452, i.e., 18 per cent, provided complete responses. After eliminating duplicates and invalid responses, the sample consisted of 399 valid responses from all UNESCO regions. Notably, the survey was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, when universities were facing atypical workloads while navigating official government lockdowns and university closures and shifting to online and distance teaching. Table 1 shows the regional distribution of survey responses.

Table 1: Participating HEIs by region

UN region	Number of universities participating in the survey	Percentage of all responses
Africa	32	8%
Arab States	34	8.5%
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%*

Enabling policy environments for LLL in HEIs

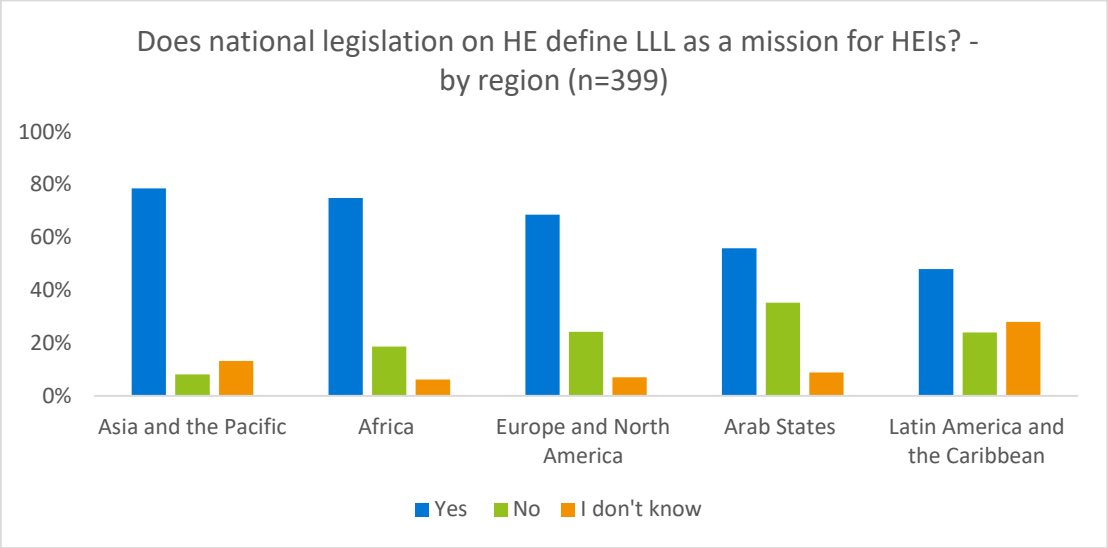
National legislation on LLL in HEIs

National laws and policies demonstrate political commitment and provide the framework for LLL in HEIs. 68 per cent of HEIs from the sample (272 of 399) reported the existence of national legislation defining LLL as a mission for HEIs. This represents 77 of the 98 countries in the sample, reflecting the progressive development and interest of countries and ministries of education in promoting LLL and enhancing related learning opportunities. Figure 1 shows some

[1] According to the association's website (www.iau-aiu.net), IAU has more than 640 members in over 120 countries, 546 of which are institutions, i.e., 'universities or degree-conferring higher education institutions whose main objective is teaching and research, irrespective of whether or not they carry the name of university'.

variation in the prioritisation of LLL in the form of national legislation across regions. However, in all UNESCO regions, half or more of participating universities stated that national legislation on LLL in HE exists in their respective countries.

Figure 1: National legislation on LLL in HE by region



Institutional strategies/policies on LLL

Institution-wide approaches are essential to ensure the provision of coordinated and effective LLL opportunities in HEIs. 68.3 per cent of responding HEIs (272 of 399) stated that they had a LLL strategy/policy at both the institutional and faculty/department level, at the institutional level, or at the faculty/department level, whereby the largest share indicated that a LLL strategy/policy was available at the institutional level. 19 per cent (76 of 399) did not yet have such a strategy/policy but were in the process of developing one. 8 per cent (33 of 399) reported having no institutional strategy/policy, and 5 per cent (18 of 399) answered 'I don't know'. Hence, the majority either has a strategy/policy at one or multiple levels or is in the process of developing one. Figure 2 shows the distribution of survey responses.

Figure 2: Institutional LLL strategies/policies

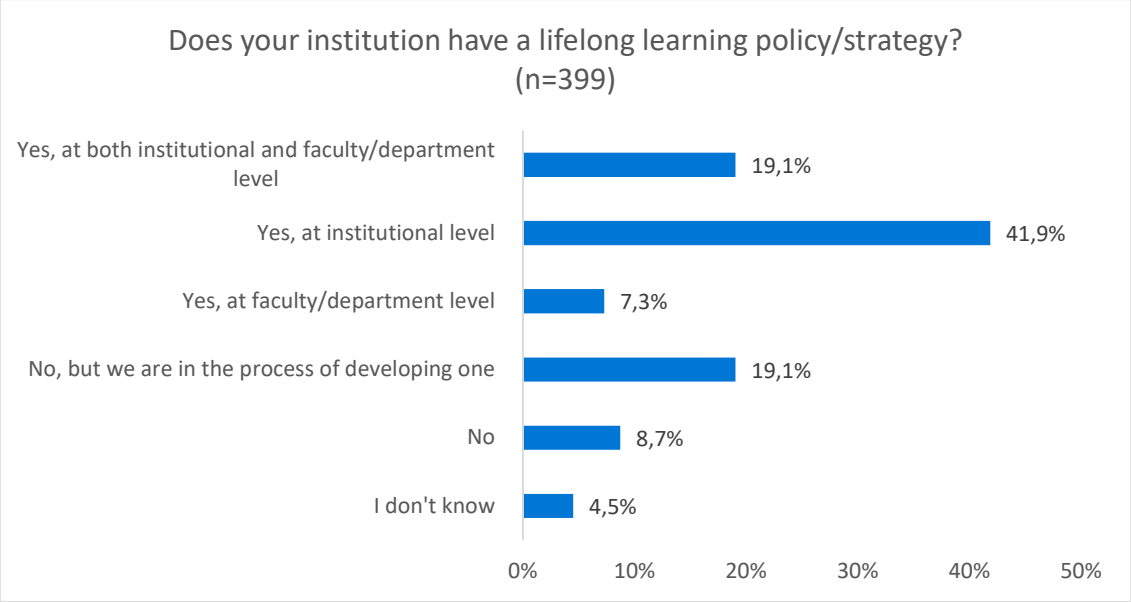
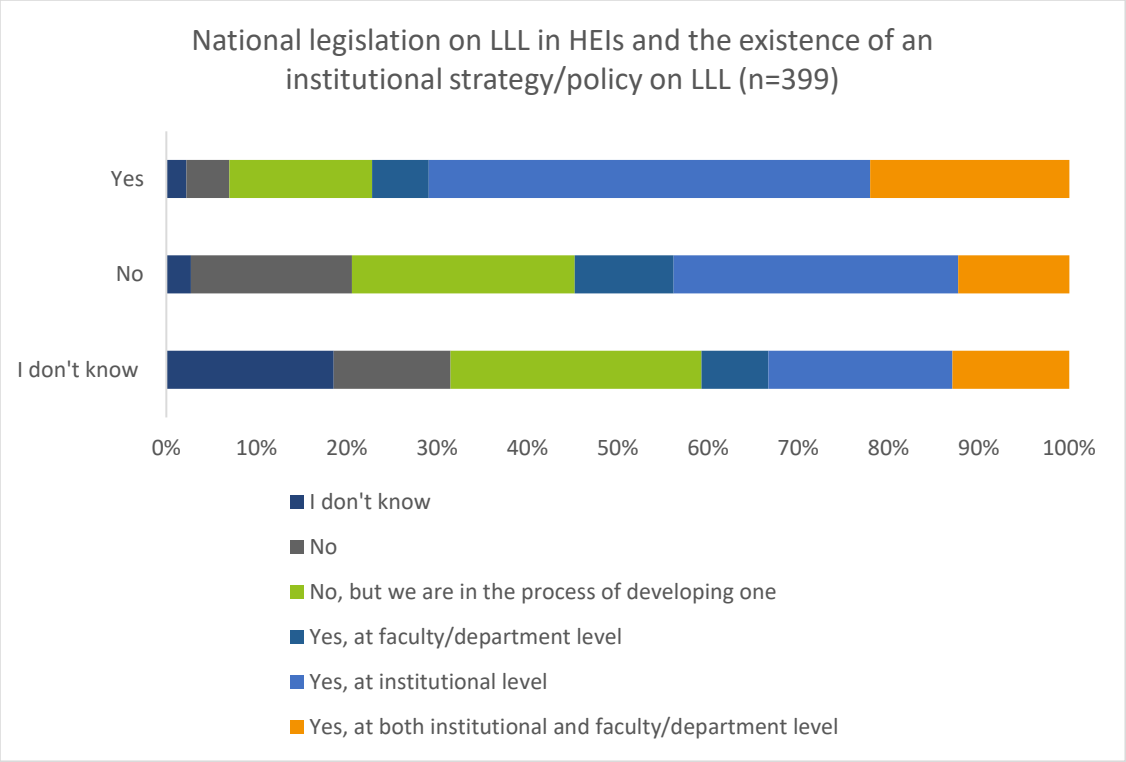


Figure 3, below, suggests that national policies defining LLL as a mission for HEIs have a positive effect on the existence of institutional strategies/policies on LLL. HEIs that confirmed the existence of national legislation on LLL in HEIs are most likely to assign a medium or high priority to LLL in their mission statements. Conversely, HEIs from countries that do not have a national policy on LLL in HEIs are less likely to reference LLL in their mission statements or tend to assign it a low priority. HEIs that have a strategy in place at the departmental/faculty level, at the institutional level, or both, are most likely to state that national legislation on LLL in HEIs exists (22 per cent, 49 per cent and 6 per cent, respectively). The least likely to have such a strategy in place answered 'I don't know' when asked about national legislation on LLL in HEIs. Notably, however, 55 per cent of universities that stated that there was no available national legislation on LLL in HEIs nonetheless did have a LLL strategy at the departmental/faculty level, at the institutional level, or both.

Figure 3: National legislation on LLL in HEIs and institutional LLL strategy



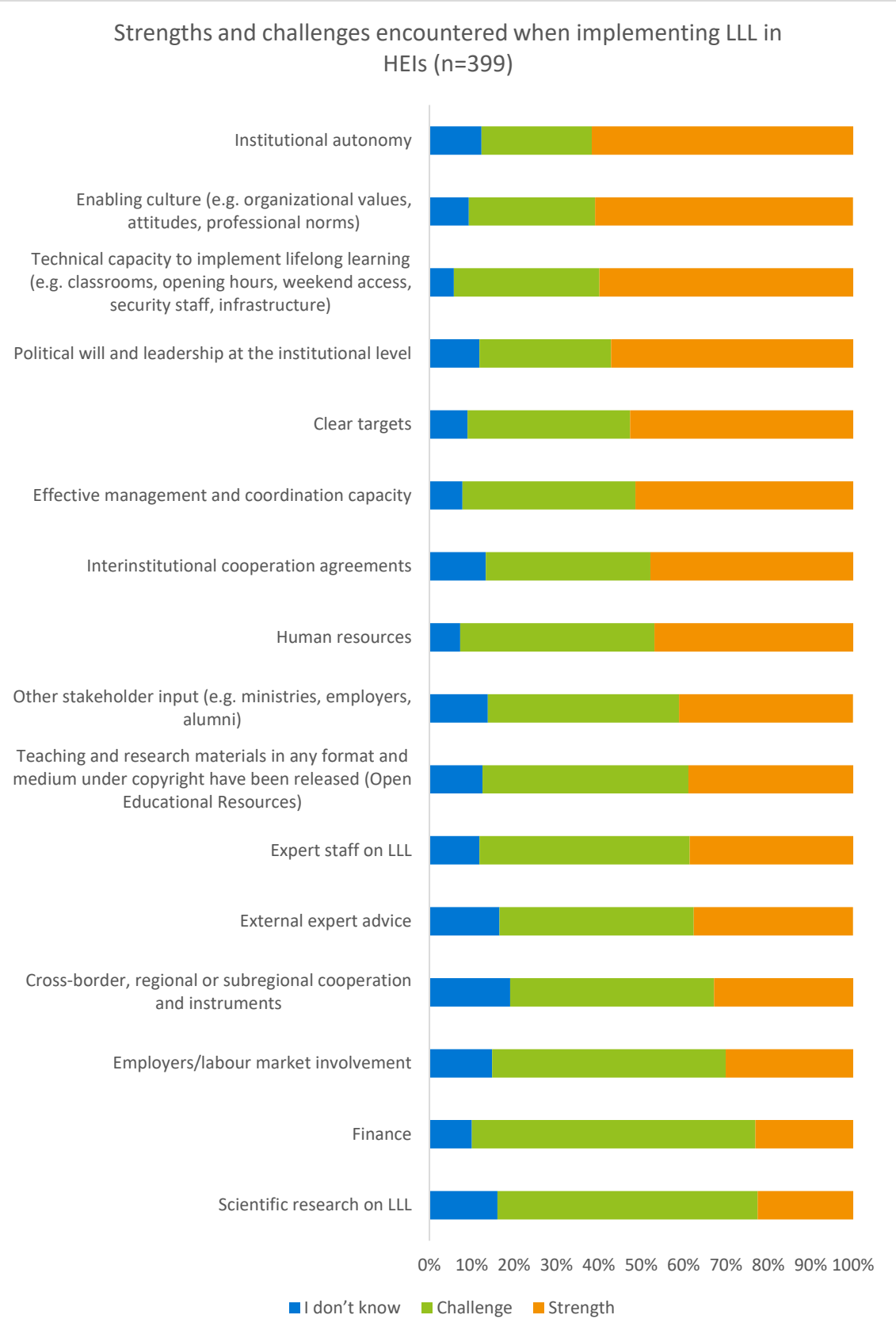
Structures and mechanisms for the implementation of LLL policy

Strengths of and challenges to LLL in HEIs

The implementation of LLL in HEIs requires dedicated institutional structures and mechanisms, as well as concerted stakeholder efforts. Figure 4 presents the key strengths of and challenges to LLL implementation as identified by participating HEIs.

The factors identified as key strengths – institutional autonomy, an enabling culture, technical capacities, and political will and leadership – are promising given their relevance for institutional implementation. At the same time, financing for LLL in HEIs was identified as a challenge by 67 per cent of participating HEIs, a crucial finding given that adequate funding is a prerequisite for the implementation of programmes.

Figure 4: Strengths of and challenges to LLL implementation



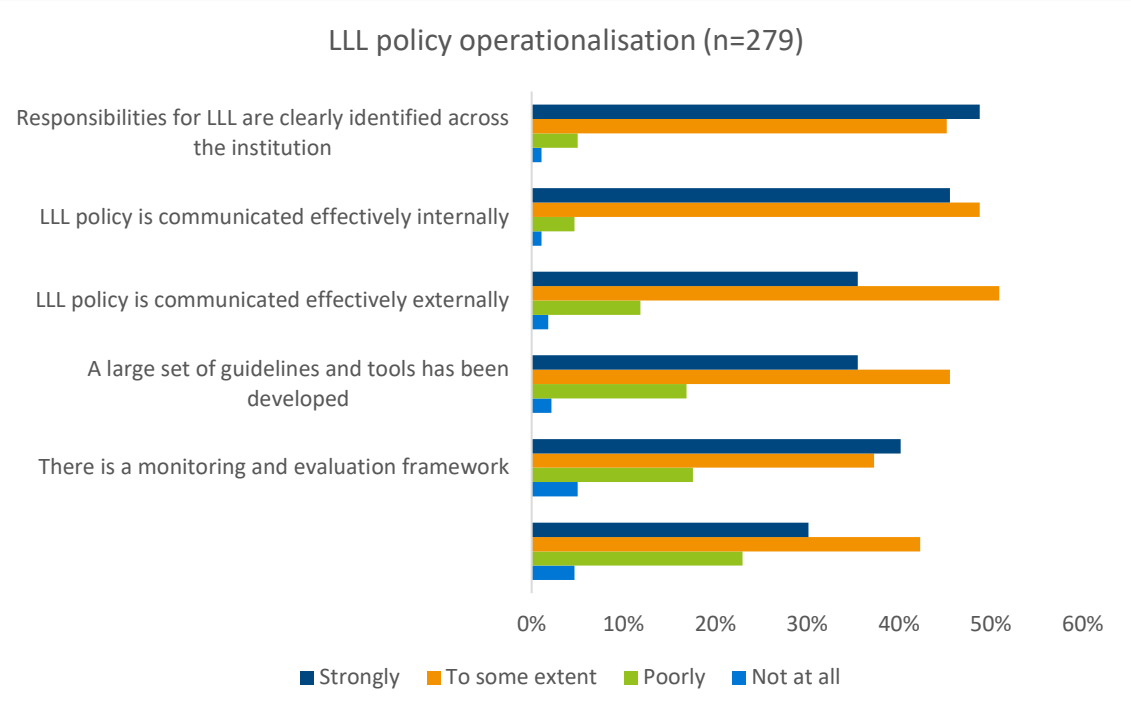
In 63 per cent of HEIs (250 of 399), tuition fees comprised the main source of funding for LLL Self-funding (through regular budgets) constituted the second most common source of financing, selected by 59 per cent of participating HEIs (234 of 399). Generally, tuition fees and self-funding appear to be the main sources of funding for LLL, although the importance allocated to these funding sources varies according to university type, mode and size, and the availability of national legislation. The existence of national legislation does not have a significant impact on the share of institutions identifying funding as an ongoing challenge.

Personal resources constitute the main source of funding for learners according to 73 per cent of institutions in the sample (293 of 399). The existence of national legislation on LLL in HEIs affects this insofar as it may provide a larger public budget to fund learners. Institutions that state that national legislation on LLL in HEIs exists have a larger proportion of learners whose funding comes from public government schemes (53 per cent) than those without national legislation (37 per cent) and those who answered 'I don't know' (37 per cent).

LLL policy operationalisation in HEIs

Translating LLL policy into action at the institutional level requires a coherent understanding and communication, as well as monitoring and evaluation. In terms of policy operationalisation and implementation, particularly the distribution of responsibilities and internal and external communication stand out. Some areas of LLL policy operationalisation within HEIs require improvement, however, particularly monitoring and evaluation efforts and internal reviews.

Figure 5: LLL policy operationalisation

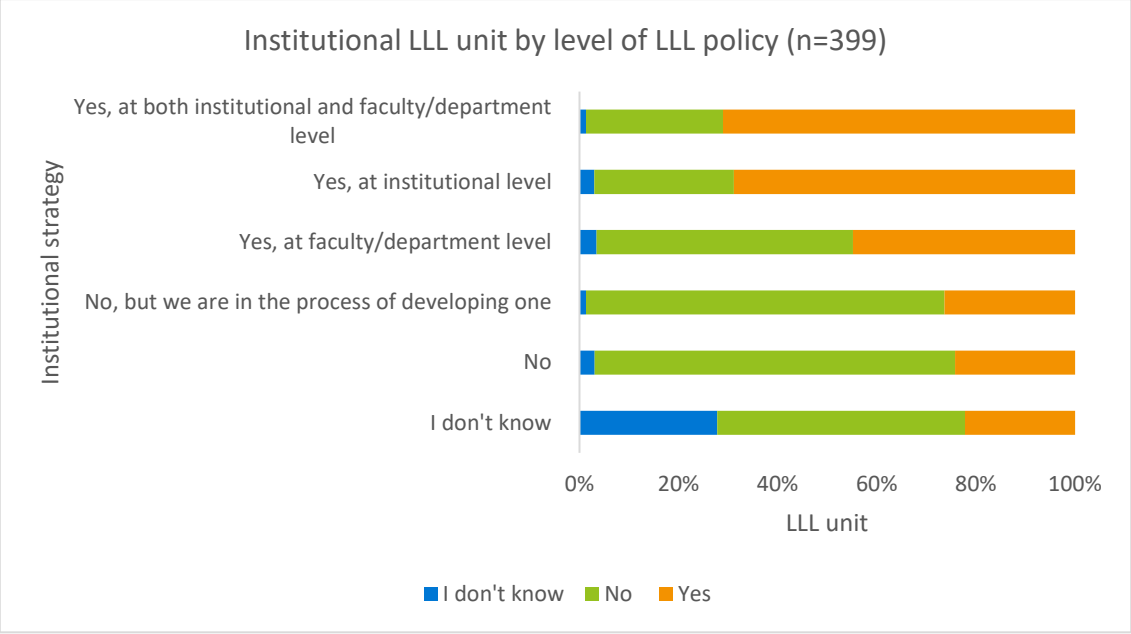


Almost all institutions that have a LLL strategy at the departmental level, the institutional level, or both, indicated that at least one of the listed measures had been operationalised strongly or to some extent. 45 per cent of institutions with a LLL strategy in place stated that measures had been operationalised to some extent, while 39 per cent stated that measures had been strongly operationalised.

LLL units

Strong institution-wide approaches to LLL in HEIs may manifest in the establishment of a LLL unit that centralises and professionalises activities. HEIs with an institutional LLL strategy/policy were more likely to report that they had a dedicated LLL unit. 71 per cent of participating HEIs that have both an institutional and a faculty-/department-level strategy/policy have a LLL unit; 69 per cent of participating HEIs that have an institutional-level LLL strategy/policy have a LLL unit; and 45 per cent of HEIs that have a LLL strategy/policy at the faculty/department level have a LLL unit. The percentage of HEIs that have a LLL unit is considerably lower among those that do not yet have a LLL strategy/policy but are in the process of developing one (26 per cent); those without a LLL strategy/policy (24 per cent); and those who answered, 'I do not know' (22 per cent). Results indicate that having an institutional strategy in place correlates with an institutional manifestation of that strategy in the form of a LLL unit.

Figure 6: Institutional LLL strategies/policies and LLL units



The most commonly reported functions of LLL units were to offer and sell educational programmes and training (73 per cent), promote curriculum development (66 per cent), and foster community engagement (66 per cent). The least commonly reported functions were to promote knowledge networks through fellowships and exchanges with other HEIs (38 per cent), offer and sell consultancy services (39 per cent), and conduct research on LLL (40 per cent). This can hinder meaningful LLL implementation. For instance, knowledge networks constitute a significant means of ensuring effective knowledge-sharing and learning among institutions and practitioners and play an important role in facilitating the transition to participatory learning approaches.

Dedicated academic staff for LLL in HEIs

HEI staff that can dedicate at least part of their time to LLL are important for the expansion of LLL opportunities and the integration of a variety of learners from different backgrounds into higher education (HE). 45 per cent of HEIs (180 of 399) stated that they employed full-time academic staff to implement LLL activities. An additional 22 per cent (88 of 399) reported that they employed part-time staff to implement LLL provision. For the latter, the main incentives to participate in LLL activities were financial revenue (51 per cent) and academic merit

(support for career progression) (47 per cent). Financial revenue and the reduction of core obligation, i.e., staff who take on LLL responsibilities will see a reduction of their workload in other areas to compensate, are less prevalent. Findings suggest that there is a need to increase staff support mechanisms for LLL in HEIs.

Figure 7: Dedicated academic staff for LLL

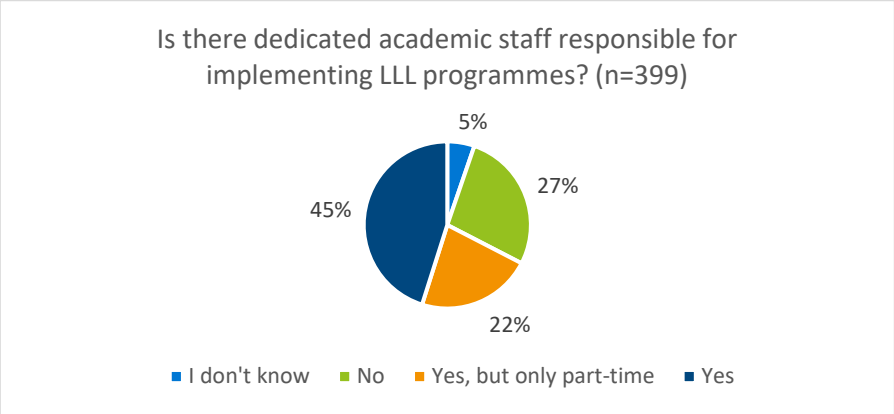


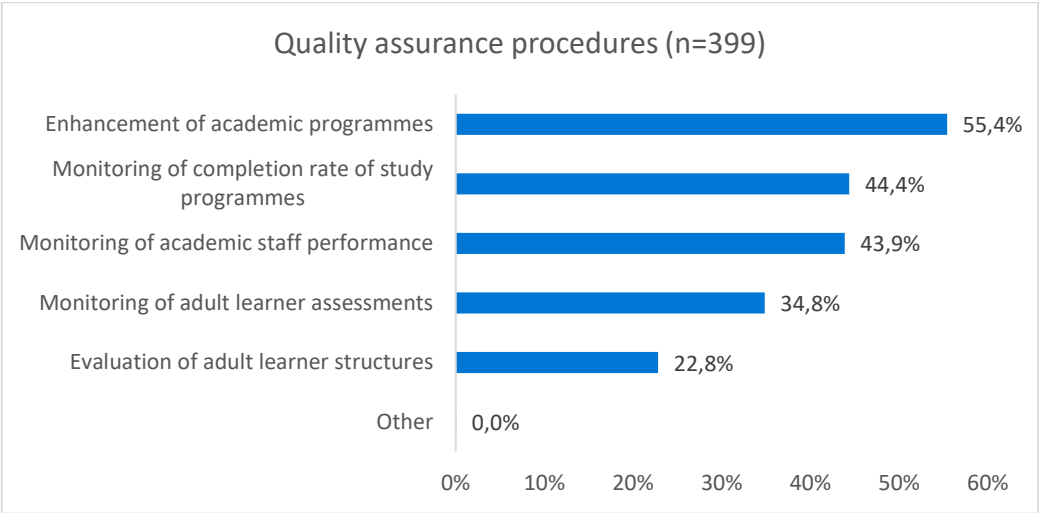
Table 2: Staff support mechanisms and incentives

Staff support mechanisms and incentives	Percentage of adult learners	Number of institutions	Percentage of institutions
Academic merits	43.6%	188	47.1%
Defined as core obligation	37.1%	118	29.6%
Financial revenue	35.4%	203	50.9%
Reduction of core obligations	31.6%	76	19.1%
Other	29.2%	54	13.5%

Quality assurance procedures

Monitoring and evaluation measures for LLL programmes and structures, reflected in well-established quality assurance procedures, professionalise LLL and help to support the expansion of academic and financial resources for LLL provision within HEIs.

Figure 8: Quality assurance procedures



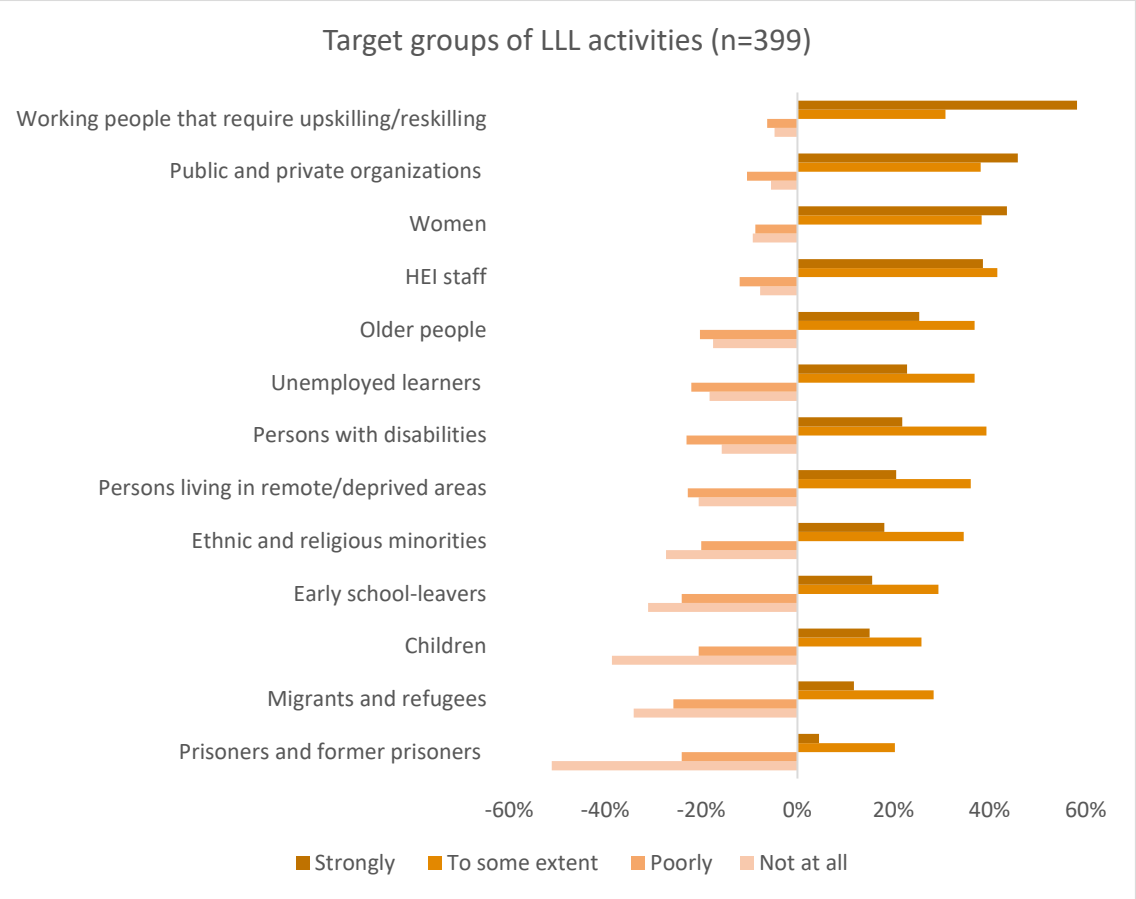
While a considerable number of institutions have quality assurance mechanisms in place, these require increased attention in some areas, as demonstrated in Figure 8. Overall, 59 per cent of participating institutions (236 of 300) reported having quality assurance procedures in place for LLL, compared to 30 per cent that do not, and 11 per cent that answered, 'I don't know'.

Widening access and participation in LLL

LLL target groups in HEIs

LLL extends to non-traditional students, meaning those who do not enter higher education after finishing secondary education and before the age of 25. LLL thus encompasses a variety of target groups from different backgrounds, with varying prior experiences of education, and with a range of learning needs to which HEIs must respond. Figure 9 provides an overview of these target groups.

Figure 9: Overview of target groups of LLL activities



Flexible learning pathways

Flexible learning pathways enable people to enter and re-enter higher education at various stages of their lives, thus encouraging individualised learner trajectories that reflect individual needs and interests. 66 per cent of HEIs (265 of 399) have policies in place to support flexible learning pathways; 34 per cent (134 of 399) do not. 48 per cent of HEIs in the sample reported having a policy in place to validate/recognise prior learning (RPL/RVA) and/or a separate policy to ensure flexible learning. 40 per cent have a policy on credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) systems. 37 per cent have a LLL policy to support flexible learning pathways.

Figure 10: Admission pathways

When asked to specify the availability of various admission pathways, the largest share of participating HEIs selected the response 'no access', suggesting that admission criteria are a major obstacle to widening access to LLL in HEIs. Responses suggest few alternative pathways into higher education. The options 'General secondary leaving certificate from upper secondary education institution', 'Vocational secondary leaving certificate from upper secondary education institutions' and 'General formal qualification from post-secondary non-tertiary education institution' are the most common prerequisites for degree-based

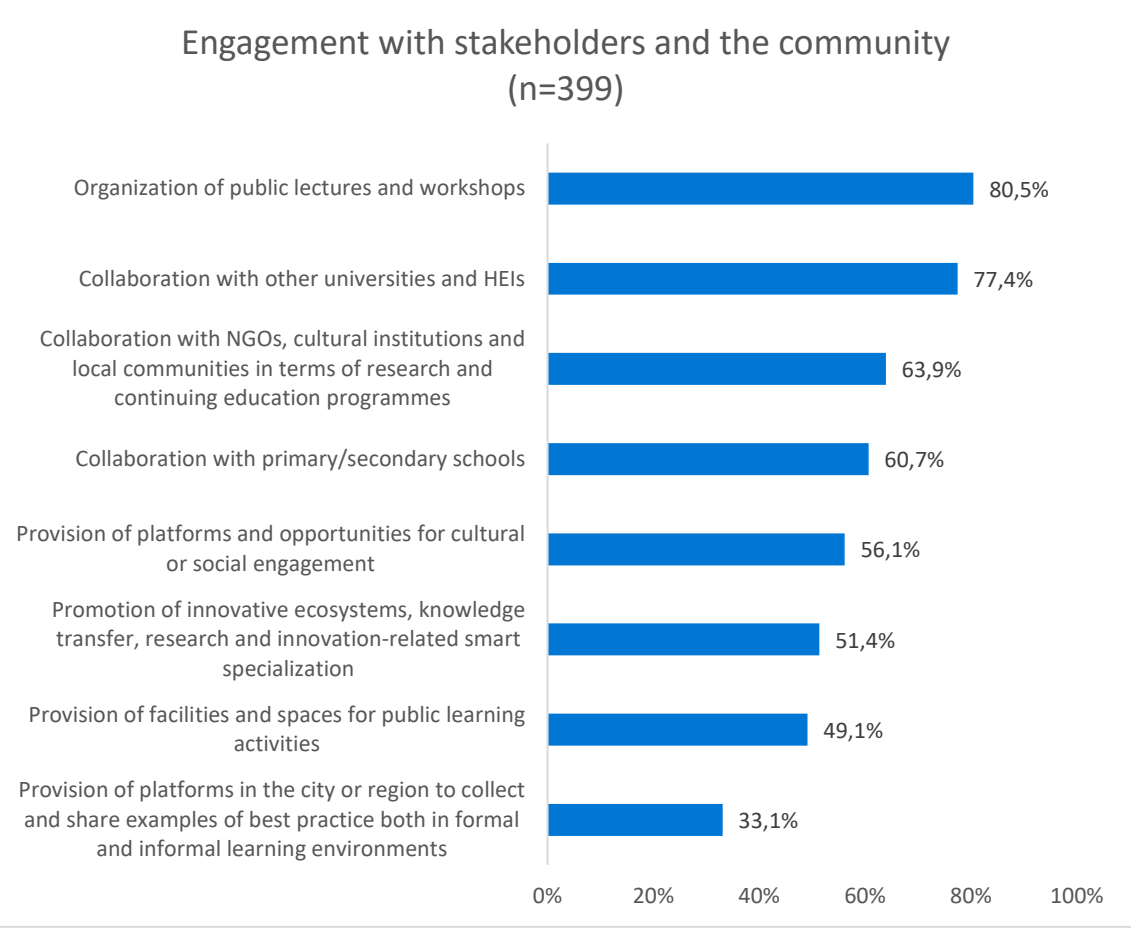
programmes. There is a clear link between flexible learning policies and alternative admission pathways. Overall, Figure 10 shows the limited availability of alternative admission pathways for non-traditional learners, which in turn is a major obstacle to widening access to higher education.

Community engagement and outreach

In line with what is often referred to as their 'third mission' – to engage with societal needs alongside their mandate to teach and research – HEIs are increasingly fostering community engagement, which in turn is transforming them into key stakeholders for sustainable development. A majority of institutions (66 per cent) stated that their LLL policy aimed to contribute to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, compared to 14.8 per cent that stated that it did not, and 18.8 per cent that answered, 'I don't know'.

98 per cent of participating HEIs (390 of 399) interact with local stakeholders and the community in at least one of the ways presented in Figure 12, suggesting that they have a prominent social mission. Only nine universities indicated that they had no involvement with the local community. Links with stakeholders are mainly established by organizing public conferences and workshops, collaborating with other universities and HEIs, and working with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), cultural institutions and local communities to carry out research and promote continuing education programmes. An analysis of survey responses shows no significant preferences with respect to the types of initiatives and (public or private) organisations involved.

Figure 12: HEIs' engagement with stakeholders and the community



Summary of key findings

An analysis of the results of the global survey provides insights into the current state of LLL in 399 HEIs around the world, shedding light on existing strategic policy frameworks; the opportunities and challenges inherent in implementing LLL measures; and the different approaches that exist with respect to widening educational access.

Most participating institutions report that national policies for LLL in HEIs are in place, although the extent varies across the UNESCO regions. While this is promising, there is still room for improvement. The transformation of HEIs into LLL institutions requires national policies, strategies and frameworks that demonstrate a greater level of political commitment, establish an enabling environment, and provide guidance for changes at the institutional level. National frameworks encourage the development of institutional strategies and can have a multiplier effect on LLL opportunities through their impact on institutionalisation, funding and quality assurance processes in HEIs. This argument is further underscored by the survey finding that national legislation that defines LLL as an integral part of HEIs' mission has a significant and positive influence on the existence of institutional LLL strategies. At the institutional level, while most participating HEIs report having institutional LLL policies and strategies at different levels, about a third has no such strategies in place, is not aware of the existence of any such strategies or is still in the process of developing them. Institutional strategies and policies set out the parameters of and conditions for transforming HEIs into LLL institutions. There is a better chance of implementing LLL systematically if HEIs have comprehensive institutional policies or strategies are in place, which apply to all of their constituent departments and units, are backed up with strong commitment from senior leaders, and are supported by staff at all levels. The existence of an institutional policy/strategy also increases the likelihood of establishing a dedicated unit that is responsible for coordinating the implementation of LLL activities.

Although the 399 institutions in the sample have to some extent implemented LLL through structures and systems at the institutional level, some aspects have proven particularly problematic. Funding remains a key challenge and must be further expanded in order to enable LLL's inclusion in HEIs. Innovative financing strategies are required, such as the establishment of partnerships with other organisations or companies to diversify funding resources. As regards the operationalisation of LLL, provision for monitoring & evaluation and internal reviews is currently underdeveloped. This is particularly relevant in the context of funding context since the allocation of financial and academic resources for the promotion of LLL is often tied to measurable outputs.

Staff development is a further area in need of attention. Although effective staff development plays an important role in transforming institutions, the survey results indicate that a number of staff support mechanisms – such as financial incentives, academic merits, the definition of LLL provision as a core responsibility, or the reduction of core obligations – have yet to be fully established across institutions.

While different forms of quality assurance are in place for roughly half of the HEIs in the sample, these should be expanded, including for non-formal LLL, to ensure the recognition and effectiveness of LLL provision in HEIs. Well-established quality assurance procedures contribute to professionalizing LLL and are thus a crucial tool for promoting the expansion of academic and financial resources for LLL in HEIs.

HEIs respond to wider societal needs by expanding community access to LLL, e.g., by including non-traditional learners in higher education. Their main target groups are working people who require upskilling/reskilling; public and private organisations; HEI staff; and women. The groups currently least targeted by LLL activities are prisoners and former prisoners; children; migrants and refugees; and early school leavers. Given that these latter groups are particularly

vulnerable, it is vital that HEIs reach out to them with targeted support. To make learning opportunities and content relevant to non-traditional students in higher education, HEIs can redesign their curricula, for example by offering a wider range of LLL modalities and formats. Flexible learning pathways are key to integrating non-traditional learners into HEIs and are currently supported by approximately two-thirds of HEIs in the sample. Such pathways are an important tool for LLL, allowing learners to enter and re-enter higher education at various stages of their lives, and enabling the provision of individualised and learner-centred education However, admission procedures (including RPL/RVA) remain a major obstacle to widening access that needs to be addressed.

As regards HEIs' broader engagement in society, almost all participating institutions report that they are working with local communities. This reflects a strong commitment to the 'third mission' of HEIs, and their awareness of wider societal needs. It is particularly important to ensure that localised engagement of this kind is based on a respectful and mutually beneficial relationship, manifesting in a manner that values local knowledge and expertise.

While the global survey did not obtain complete responses from enough HEIs to be statistically representative, the results nonetheless provide valuable insights into important areas for action, i.e., the creation of favourable policies for LLL in HEIs; and the provision of sufficient resources to implement inclusive LLL opportunities at the institutional level. Both areas should receive further attention in order to enable HEIs to widen access and integrate LLL into their core mission. Overall, the survey shows that HEIs are invested in and committed to LLL, despite variations in the extent to which it is operationalised. These survey results could serve as inspiration for policymakers and other stakeholders to initiate change and lead the way in turning universities and other tertiary education institutions into LLL institutions. Furthermore, the survey makes a valuable contribution to the field of LLL/HE research by providing an overview of the many aspects that need to be taken into consideration when redesigning HEIs to provide LLL opportunities.