Developing Flexible Learning Pathways in Higher Education:

Findings from an International Survey

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International trends have put FLPs in the policy focus

Expansion of higher education - global enrolment doubled from 100 million in 2000 to 221 million in 2017 and is expected to reach 590 million by 2040.

Diversification of higher education - different types of HEIs, modes of delivery, types of learners emerged as a result.

Yet **the Education 2030 Agenda** emphasizes flexible leaning pathways for **equity** and **life-long learning**
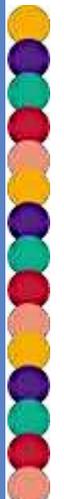
Why conduct an international survey on FLPs?

Literature on FLPs is scarce and policies and practices are poorly documented.

Highlight good examples of existing measures that support the development of FLPs for different types of students with diverse learning needs.

What did the survey study?

1 Alternative admissions pathways

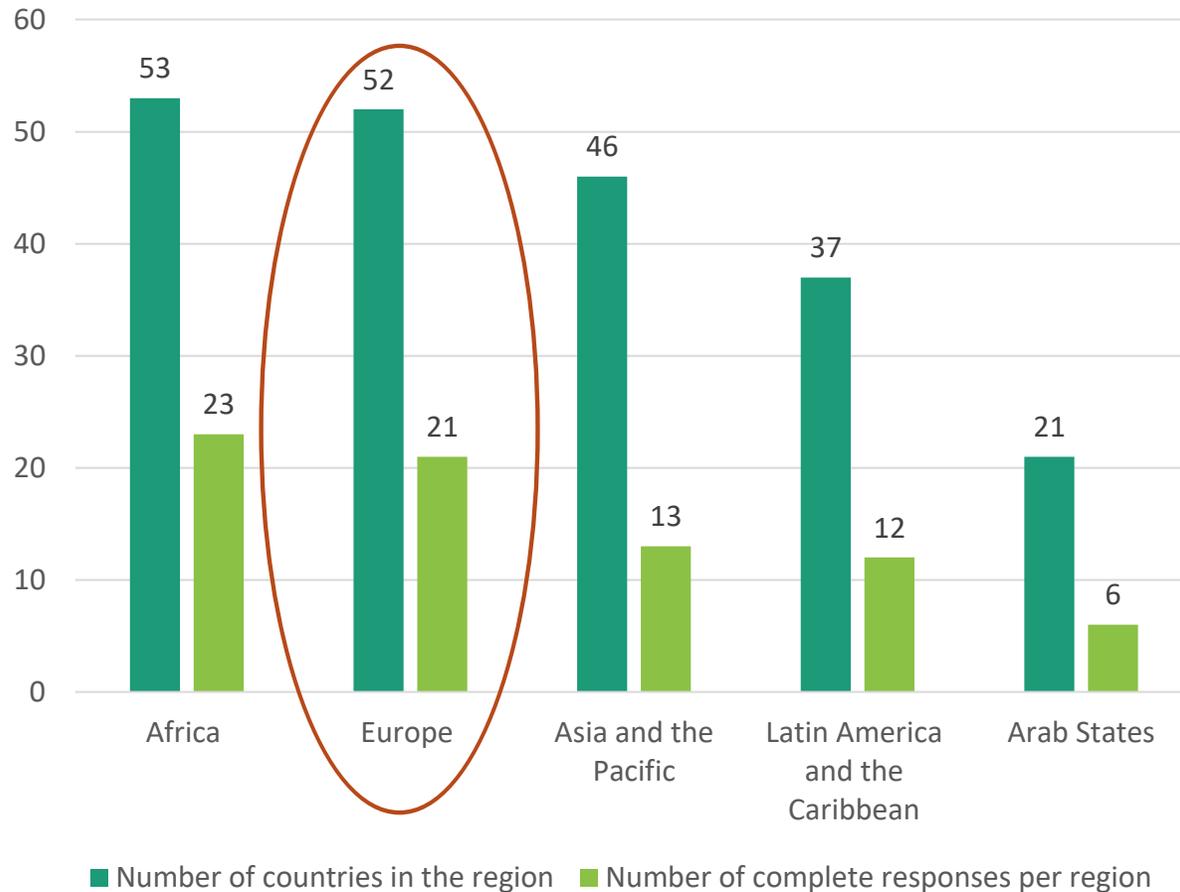**2** Role of national qualifications frameworks

3 Role of quality assurance

4 Role of credit accumulation and transfer systems

Regional distribution of responding countries

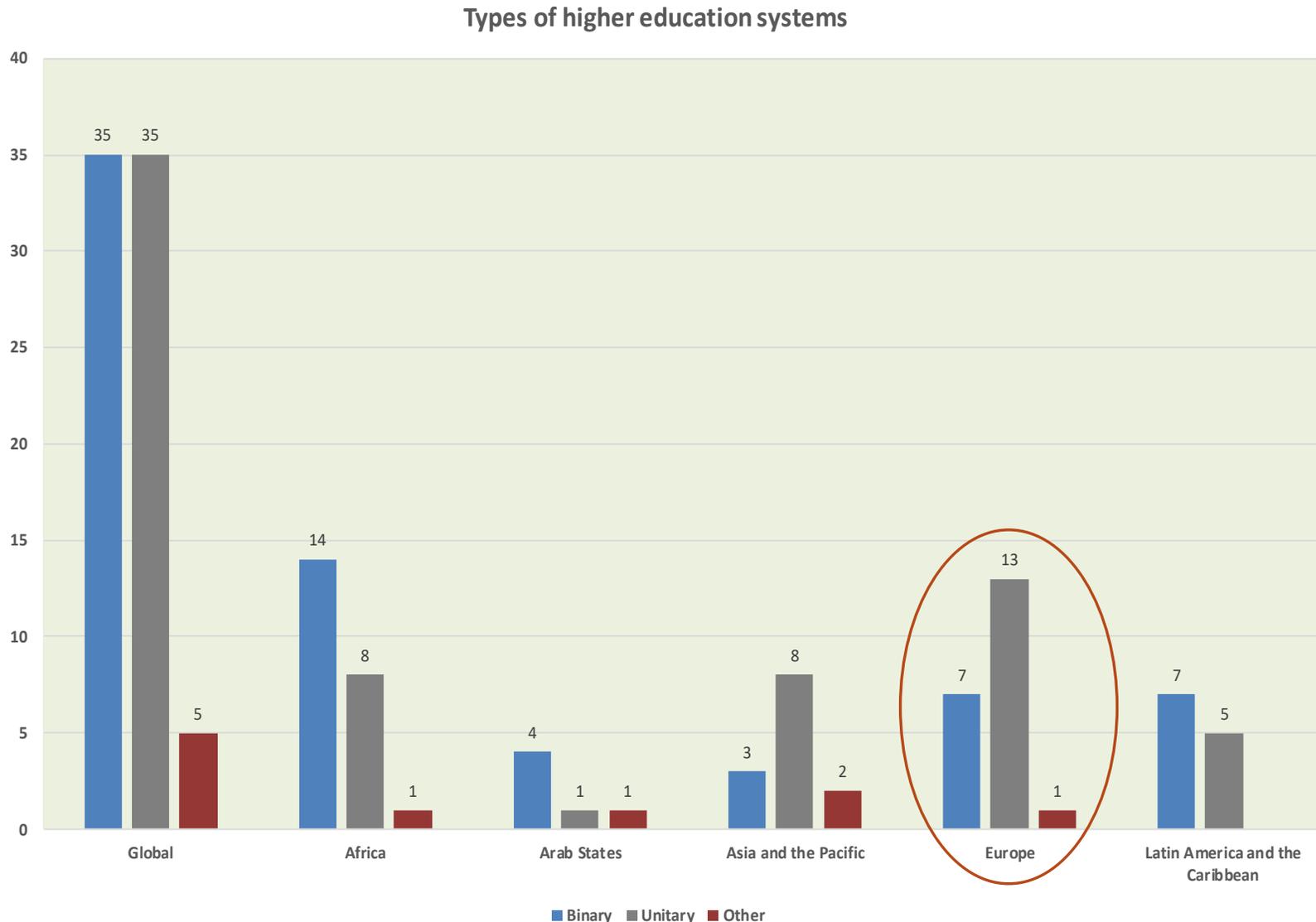Figure 1. Response rates per region. IIEP-UNESCO, 2020.

A total of 87 country responses were received, 75 responses were exploitable.

Most of the regions were well represented. In Europe 21 responses out of 52 countries were received.

Types of higher education systems

Types of higher education systems

Evidence suggests that unitary systems can minimise horizontal differences and reduce inefficiencies and fragmentation.

Both unitary and binary systems are equally represented globally. In Europe, there are more unitary systems than binary ones.

Modes of delivery of higher education
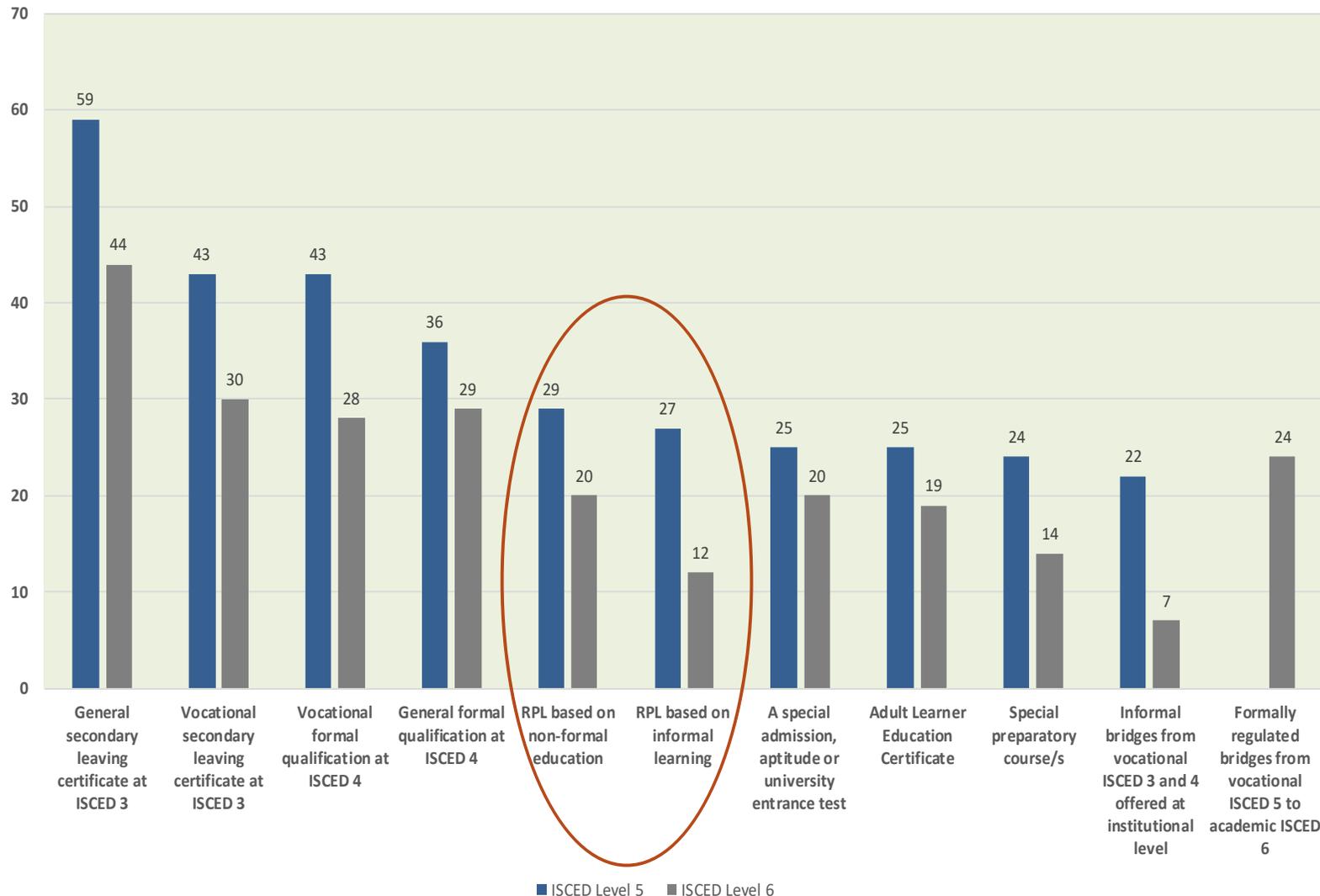
Modes of delivery of higher education
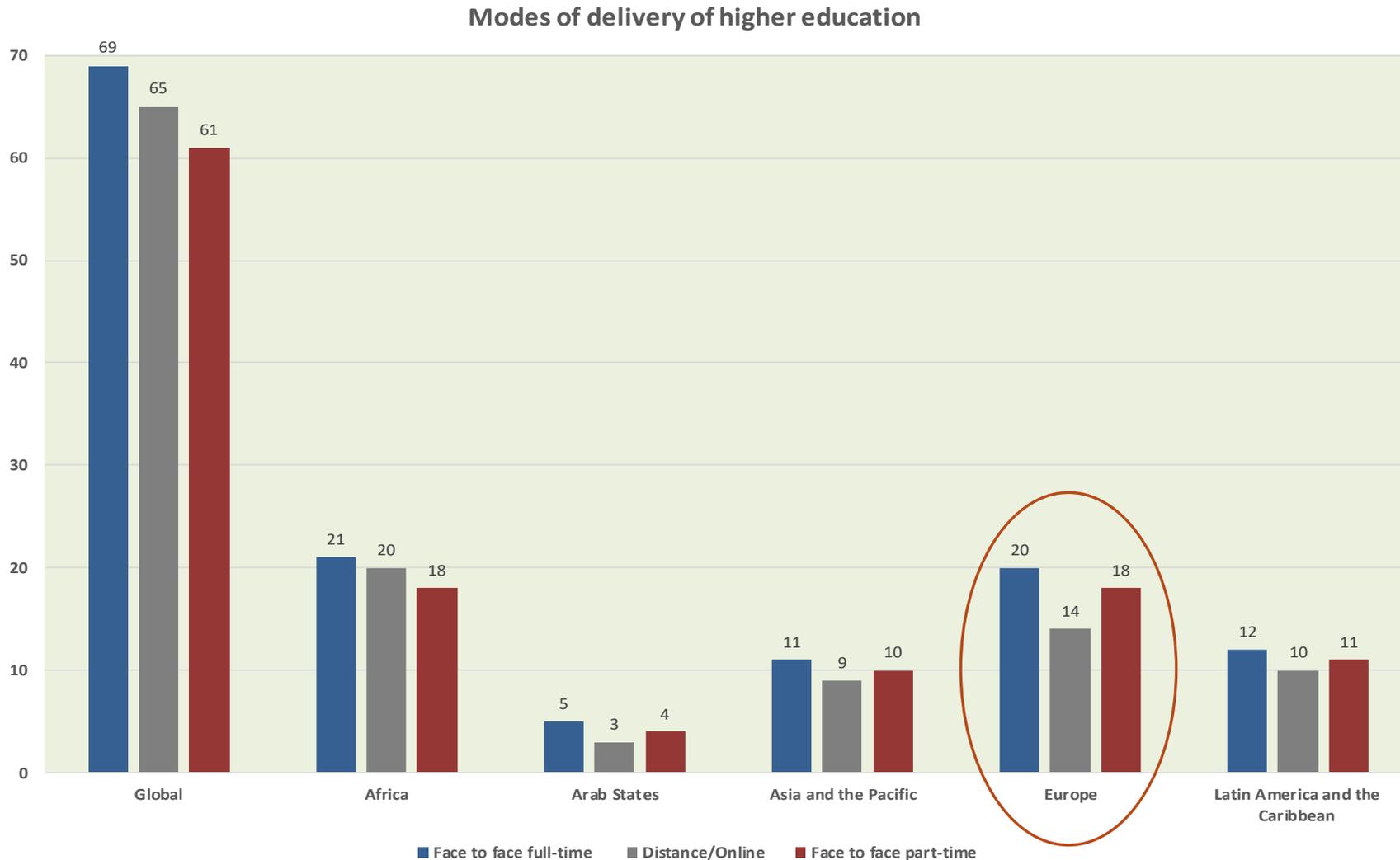
Before COVID 19, a vast majority of countries have introduced more flexible modes of delivery.

In Europe, distance and online education were somewhat less developed.

Pathways to access higher education: globally

Entry pathways to higher education, global

Legend: ISCED Level 5, ISCED Level 6

Data by category:
- General secondary leaving certificate at ISCED 3: 59, 44
- Vocational secondary leaving certificate at ISCED 3: 43, 30
- Vocational formal qualification at ISCED 4: 43, 28
- General formal qualification at ISCED 4: 36, 29
- RPL based on non-formal education: 29, 20
- RPL based on informal learning: 27, 12
- A special admission, aptitude or university entrance test: 25, 20
- Adult Learner Education Certificate: 25, 19
- Special preparatory course/s: 24, 14
- Informal bridges from vocational ISCED 3 and 4 offered at institutional level: 22, 7
- Formally regulated bridges from vocational ISCED 5 to academic ISCED 6: 24

A short-cycle degree programme can be accessed through multiple pathways.

A bachelor's degree programme is more difficult to access.

Recognition and validation of prior learning is not yet a common practice.

Short-cycle programmes facilitate entry also to higher-level studies.

National Qualifications Frameworks

**Types of education included in the National Qualifications Framework, global**
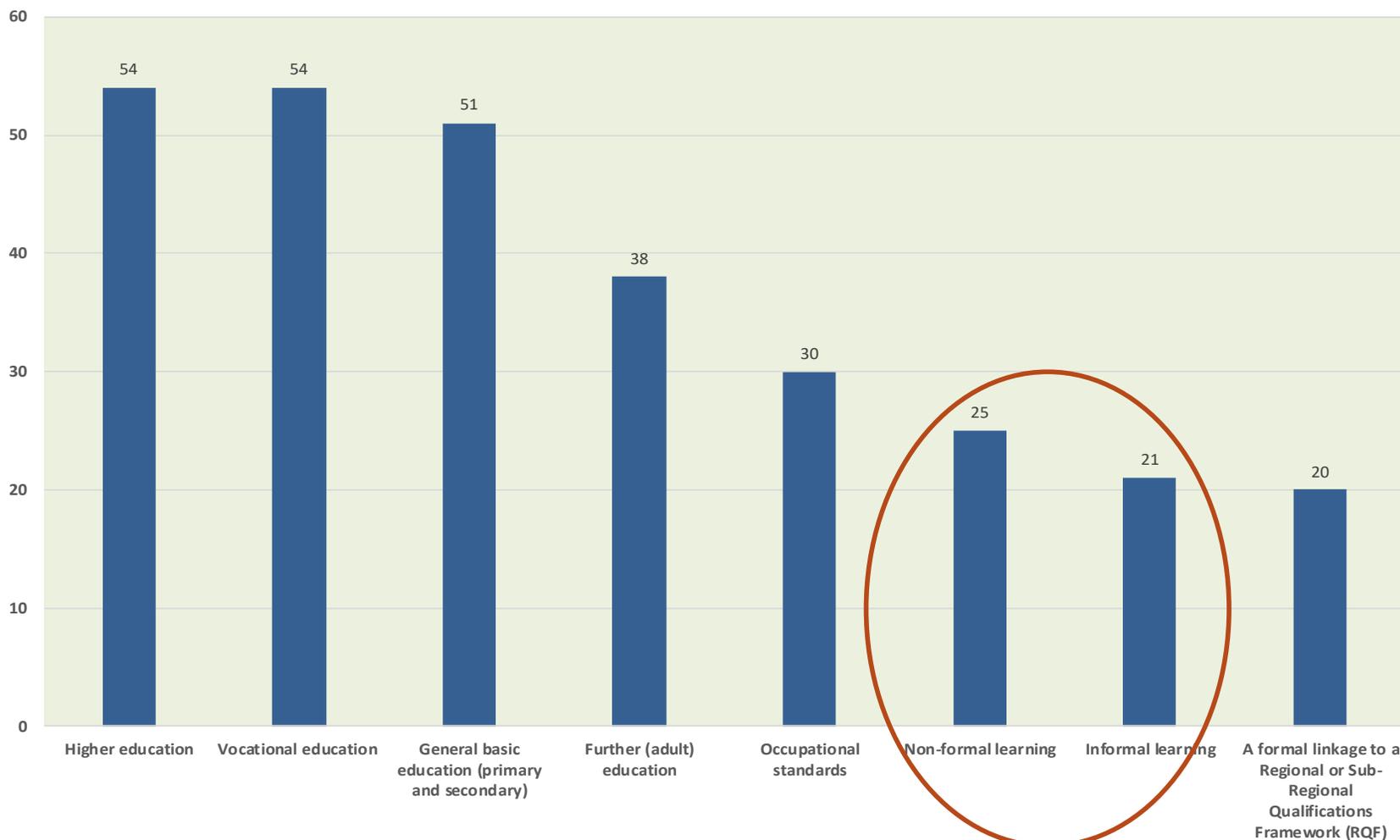
A vast majority of countries have a NQFs that includes HE, vocational education and general basic education.
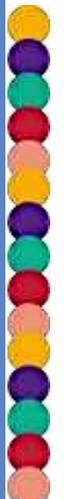
NQFs that recognise integration of adult education, non-formal and informal learning are not yet as widespread

NQF linkages to Programme QA

**NQF linkages to Programme Quality Assurance, global**
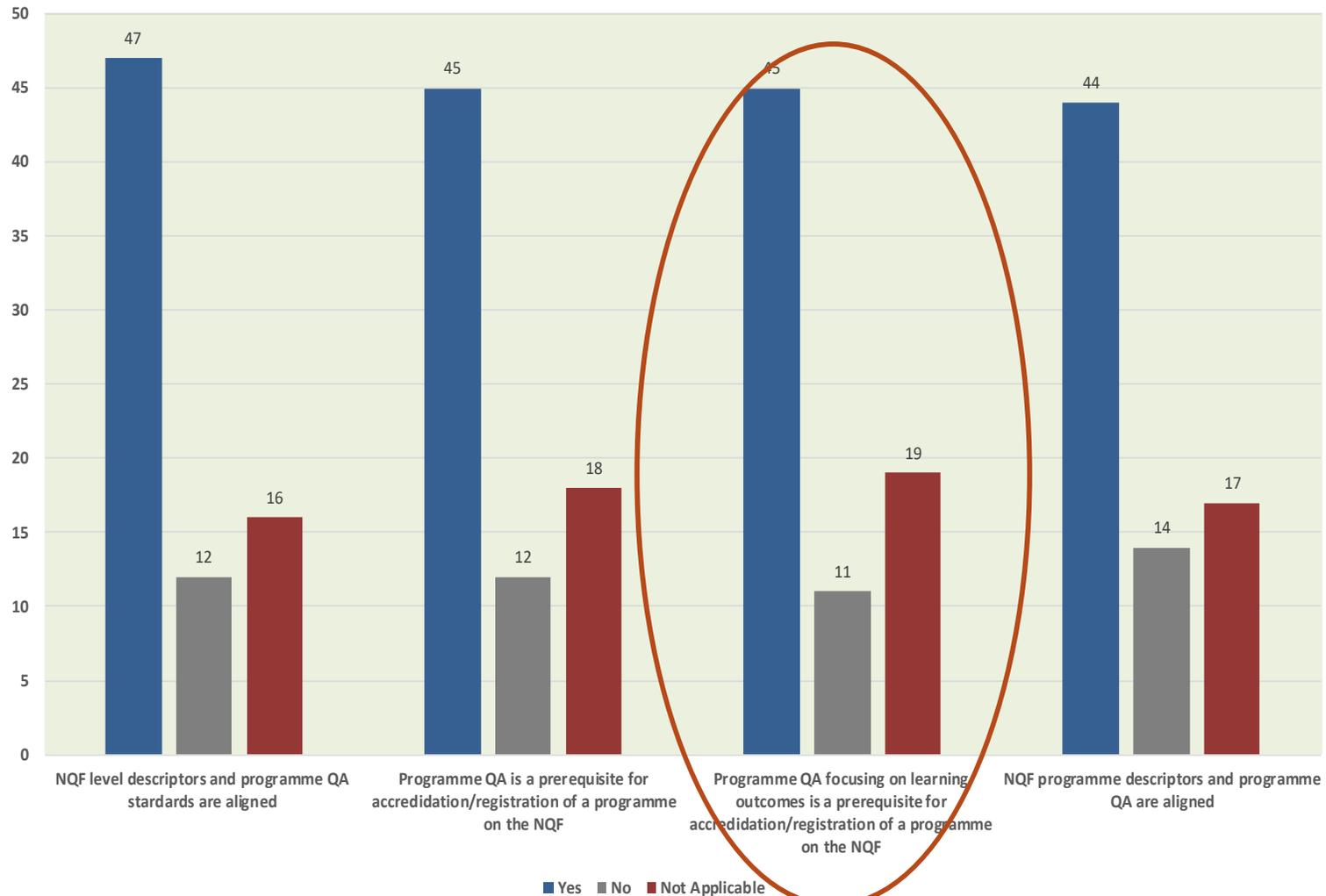
45 countries, programme QA focusing on learning outcomes as a prerequisite for accreditation or registration of a programme on the NQF.

Lessons learned

❑More diverse pathways are used to facilitate entry at the level of a short-cycle qualification compared to a bachelor's;

❑RPL based on non-formal and informal learning is less common, and more often used to access short-cycle rather than bachelor-level programmes;

❑COVID-19 has shown the need for alternative and flexible admission approaches, NQF and quality assurance can enable this flexibility;

❑By linking QA standards and NQF descriptors, systems can facilitate recognition of prior learning in different contexts, including formal, nonformal and informal and enable students to move more flexibly through the higher education system.
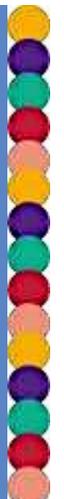
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Thank you for the attention!