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EUA warns of the impact of widely divergent trends in public funding of higher education in Europe

The European University Association (EUA) has today expressed its concerns that the economic and financial crisis could lead to major divisions across Europe in terms of levels of public investment in higher education. EUA's monitoring of the economic crisis has shown widely divergent trends in public funding for higher education across the continent and worrying signs that higher education funding in many countries in eastern and southern Europe is more affected by the crisis than in many countries in northern and western Europe (although there are notable exceptions).

The impact of the economic crisis is just one of several topics related to the future of university funding that is being discussed during the EUA Funding Forum currently taking place (11-12 June) at the University of Salzburg in Austria. EUA's Public Funding Observatory, monitoring the effect of the economic crisis on higher education (carried out since 2008), has shown that while national systems have been affected very differently across Europe, no national higher education system has been left completely unaffected. Even those HE systems which have had no cuts or very minor cuts in public funding are facing a range of other pressures and challenges (such as increased student numbers, increased use of co-funding by public authorities and difficulties attracting additional income sources).

A number of countries mainly in the south and east of Europe, some of which already have lower overall public investment levels (as a % of GDP) in higher education, have made major or substantial cuts in higher education budgets since 2008. EUA believes therefore that this poses the risk of creating deep divisions across Europe.

This trend could also risk provoking a 'brain drain' of talented researchers from these countries, and could make it harder for universities in these countries to participate in European funding programmes, such as the research Framework Programme (FP7), which work under the principle of co-funding (i.e. the university must provide funding alongside the European funding for projects). EUA's work on university funding has already shown that European-level funding programmes are becoming increasingly important income sources for European universities. EUA believes therefore, that the next generation of European research programmes should not only take the economic context into account but also the long-term financial sustainability of Europe's higher education system and fund activities on a full cost basis.

Future European funding programmes (for the period 2014-2020) is another issue that will be tackled during EUA's Funding Forum in Salzburg. The event has been designed to bring together different higher education stakeholders to discuss future funding models for higher education.

EUA's President Professor Helena Nazaré told the Forum audience that it was absolutely crucial that the economic crisis should not eclipse the longer term challenges facing society and reminded policy makers of the importance of sustainable public funding for higher education and research, underlining that funding for higher education and research should be seen as an investment rather than expenditure.

Find out more about the EUA Funding Forum here: <http://www.eua.be/eua-funding-forum.aspx>

EUA's presentation on the impact of the economic crisis, given at the Funding Forum, can be downloaded [here](#).

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The European University Association, as the representative organisation of both the European universities and the national rectors' conferences, is the main voice of the higher education community in Europe. EUA's mission is to promote the development of a coherent system of European higher education and research.

Notes for editors

- EUA has been monitoring the evolution of the economic crisis and its effects on higher education systems in Europe since its onset in 2008 and has published several reports. The monitoring is conducted in close cooperation with EUA collective members, the National Rectors' Conferences, which report on developments within their national higher education systems on a regular basis. The main objective of the monitoring is to look at the impact of the crisis on universities' public funding and to identify in particular the trends in public funding across Europe. It also explores how the crisis has affected the nature of public funding and how such shifts are influencing universities at institutional level.
- EUA will publish its next full economic monitoring report later in June following the Forum in Salzburg.
- The EUA Funding Forum is supported by the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme.