



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



International Institute  
for Educational Planning

# IIEP-UNESCO research on flexible learning pathways in higher education: research overview

National Webinar on  
Flexible learning pathways in Finnish higher education

October 30, 2020

Dr. Michaela Martin

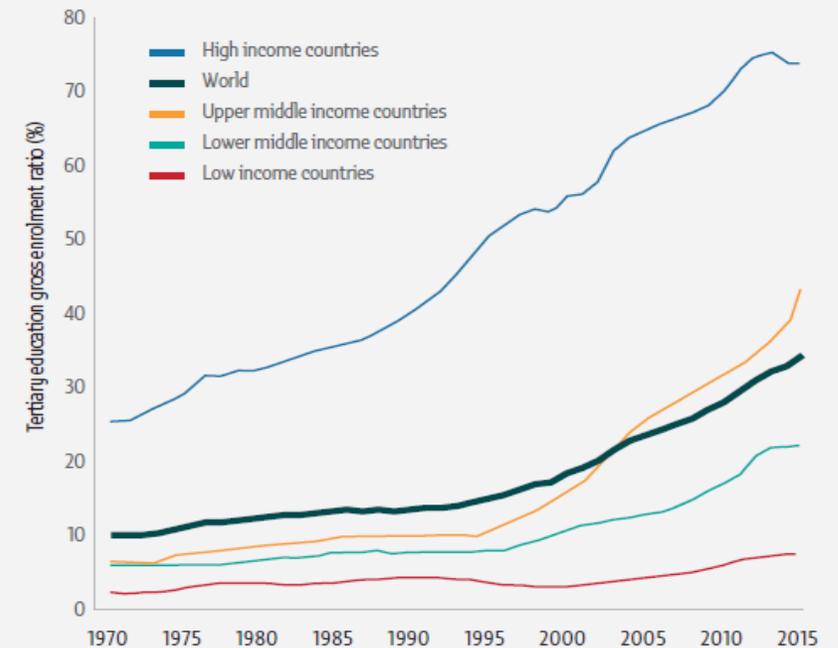
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Programme Specialist

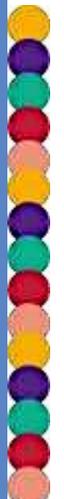
# Background

- Higher education expansion
  - Growth in the demand for higher education
  - Growth in numbers of HEIs
- Higher education diversification
  - Diverse types of HEIs and programmes
  - Diverse modes of delivery
  - A diverse student population

**Enrolment in upper-middle income countries has grown by 7% per year in the past 20 years**  
Tertiary education gross enrolment ratio, by country income group, 1970-2014 (%)



Source: UIS database.



# Research rationale (1)

## **The expansion and diversification of HE is creating challenges:**

- HE systems are becoming more fragmented and less integrated
- More students are getting into HE but representation of disadvantaged groups remains low
- Expansion calls for a HE provision adapted to lifelong learning, which is not always reflected in practice

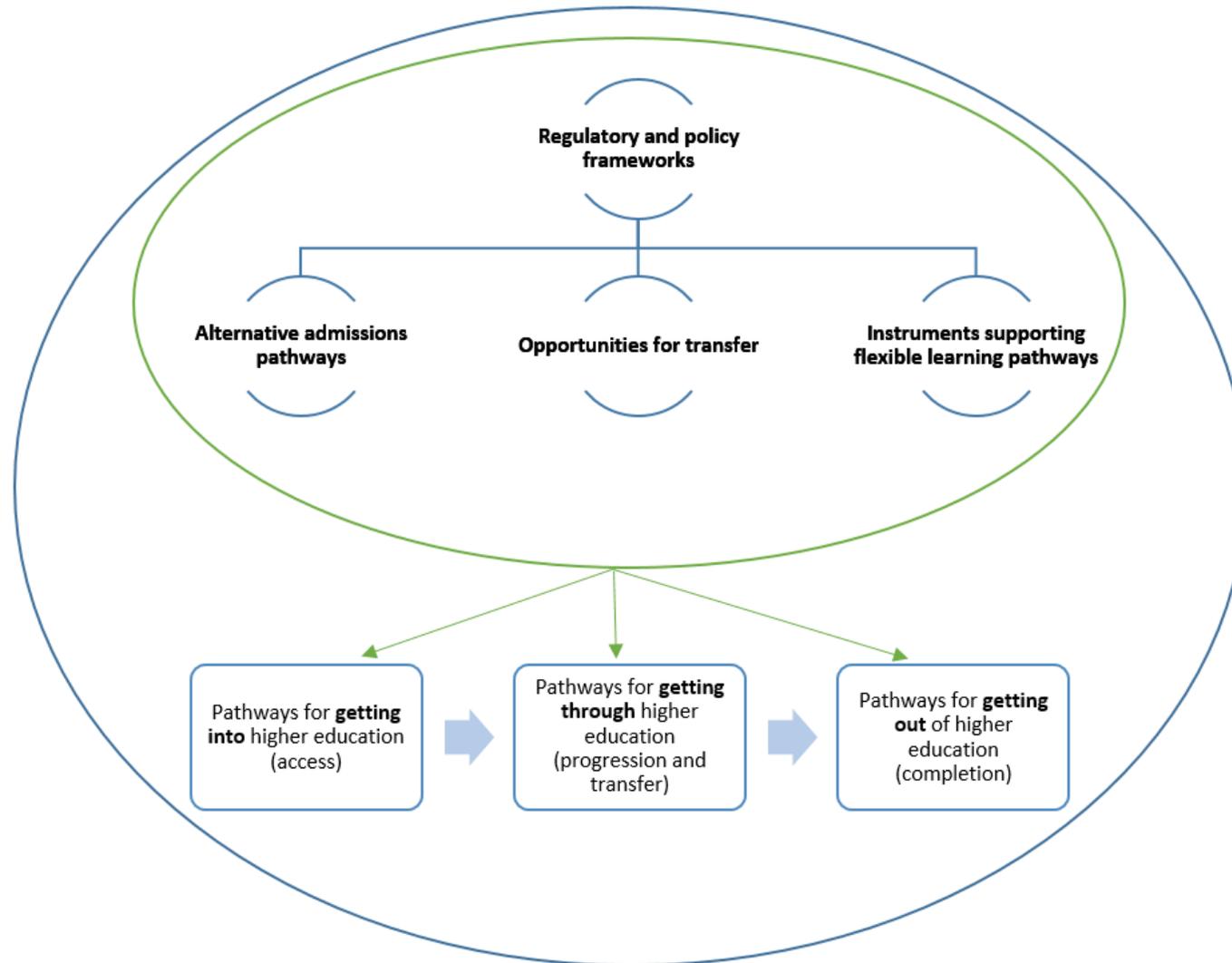


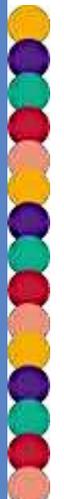
## Research rationale (2)

SDG4 and Education 2030 Agenda call for more flexible learning pathways in HE that can support equity and lifelong learning

- **Flexible learning pathways** refer to entry points and re-entry points at all ages and all educational levels, strengthened links between formal and non-formal structures, and recognition, validation and accreditation of the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through non-formal and informal education (Education 2030 Agenda, 2015)

# Dimensions of flexible learning pathways





# Focus of the research project (1)

## **Overarching objective:**

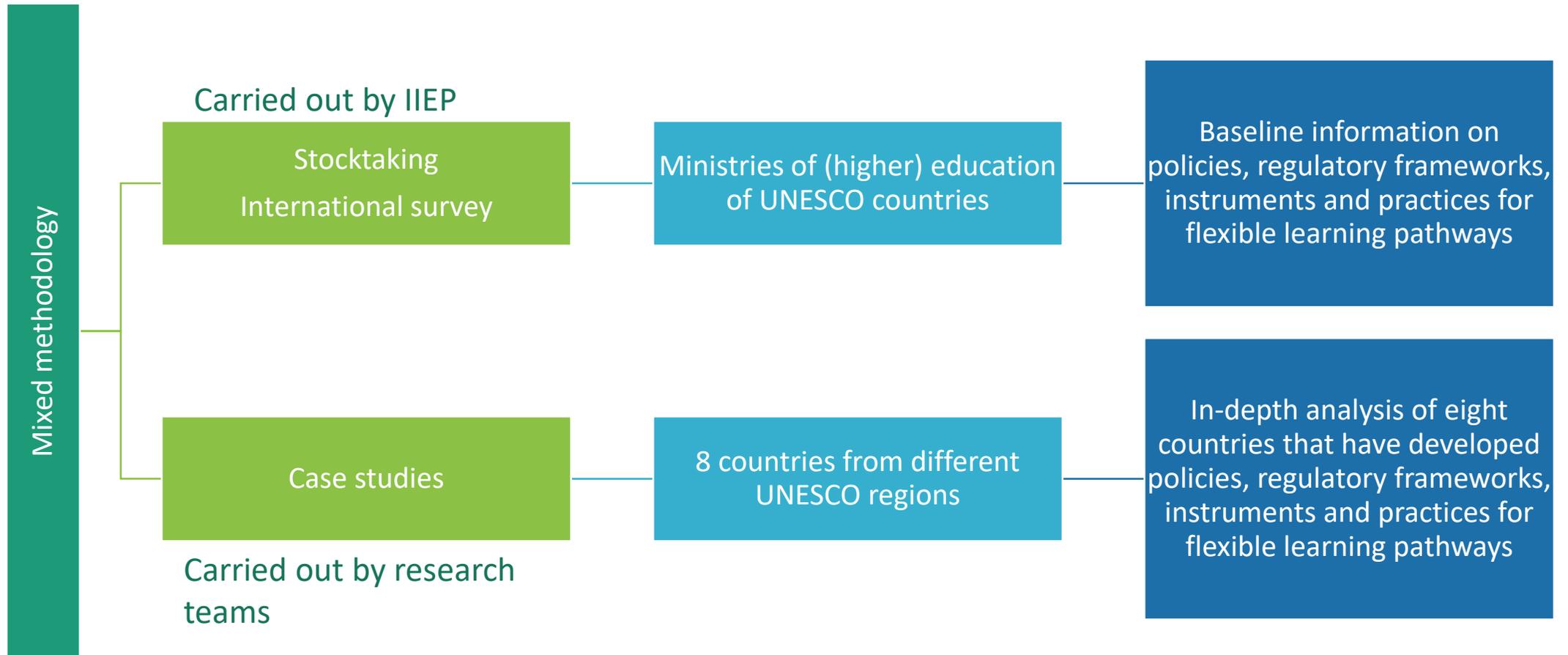
To produce knowledge and provide evidence-based policy advice to higher education authorities located in different development contexts who are considering building or strengthening flexible learning pathways as an area of future reform.



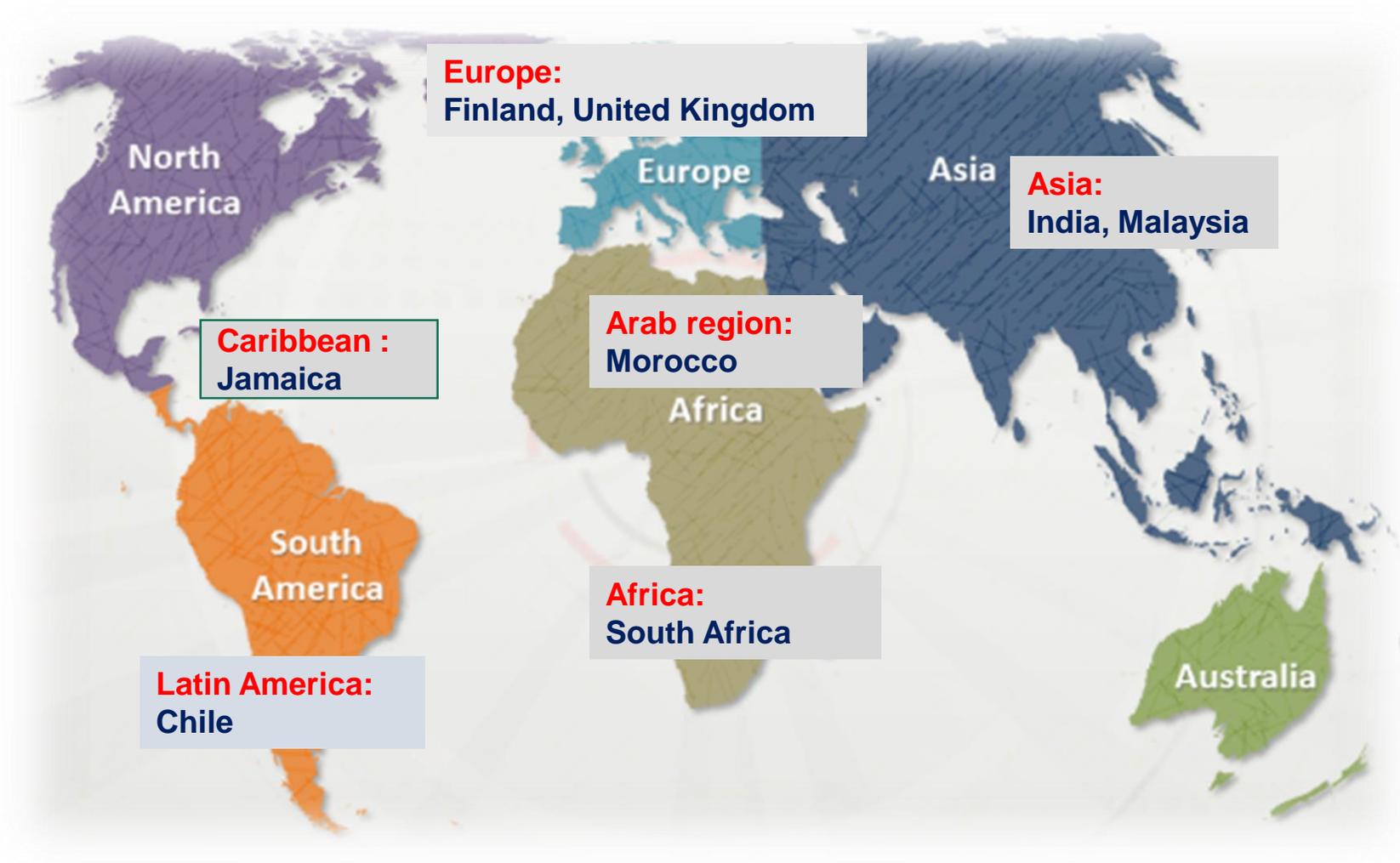
# Focus of the research project : questions (2)

1. What are the policies, regulatory frameworks, instruments and practices that support flexible learning pathways in higher education?
2. How effective are these policies, regulatory frameworks, instruments and practices in establishing flexible learning pathways and building closer linkages between and within higher education levels and institutions?
3. How does the establishment of flexible learning pathways influence the access, progression, transfer and completion of those identified as disadvantaged groups in the case countries?
4. What lessons can be learned from the experience of case countries regarding the key enablers and factors lacking in the implementation of flexible learning pathways in higher education?

# Three stages in the research methodology



# Eight in-depth national case studies

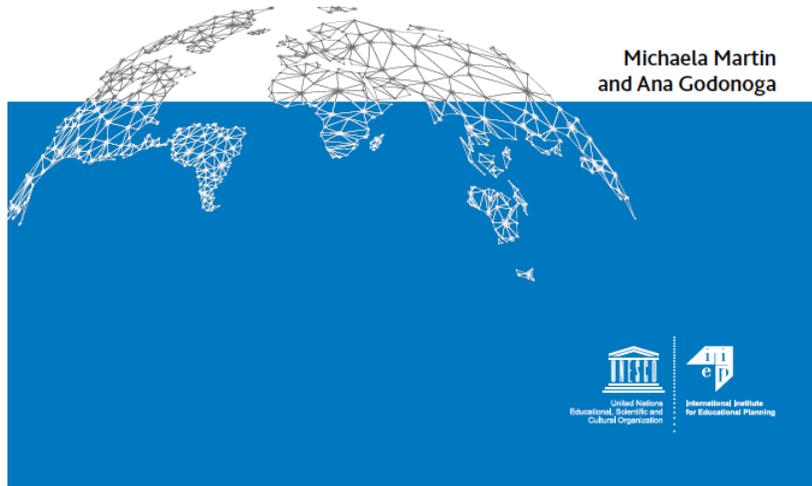




IIEP-UNESCO  
Working Papers

## SDG 4 - Policies for Flexible Learning Pathways in Higher Education

Taking Stock of Good Practices  
Internationally



**International stocktaking exercise**



## FLEXIBLE LEARNING PATHWAYS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Finland's country case study for the  
IIEP-UNESCO SDG4 project in 2018–2021



Sirpa Moitus | Leasa Weimer | Jussi Välimaa

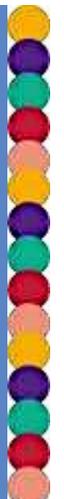
PUBLICATIONS 12:2020

**National case study**



# Why the choice of Finland?

- Choice of countries: representing diverse regions with different stages of implementation and focus of FLPs
- A country with a strong track record of policies favouring lifelong learning
- A country with a strong focus on equality and equity policies
- Interesting set of holistic FLP policies on:
  - Flexibility in access (open studies, RPL)
  - Flexibility during studies (cross-study, specialisations)
  - Flexibility towards graduation (studification of work)
- FLPs are widely implemented across HEIs, interesting lessons to share internationally



# References

- IIEP-UNESCO website: <http://www.iiep.unesco.org/en/our-expertise/flexible-learning-pathways-higher-education>
- IIEP-UNESCO (2020). Achieving SDG4: Flexible learning pathways in higher education. Findings from the international survey. Draft.
- Martin, M., & Godonoga, A. (2020). SDG 4: policies for flexible learning pathways in higher education: taking stock of good practices internationally. URL: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000372817>
- Moitus, S., Weimer, L., & Välimaa, J. FLEXIBLE LEARNING PATHWAYS IN HIGHER EDUCATION. URL: [https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2020/09/KARVI\\_1220.pdf](https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2020/09/KARVI_1220.pdf)
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# Thank you for the attention!