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Social Inclusion Policies in Higher Education: Evidence from the EU

Overview of major widening participation policies applied in the EU 28

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Contents

Foreword

This report on access, widening participation and social inclusion in higher education has been developed jointly by the Human Capital and Employment (B.4) Unit of the Directorate Growth and Innovation of the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission and the Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS) at the University of Twente.[1]

[1] Joint Research Centre, Call for Tenders: JRC/IPR/2018/B.4/0008/NC Improving Social Inclusion in Higher Education.

Executive Summary

Motivation for the study

Over the last years, the social dimension of higher education (HE) has become central in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The *Yerevan Communiqué* of 2015 endorsed the commitment to the social dimension of HE, highlighting the need to widen opportunities for access and completion for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (European Commission, 2015). As a follow up, the *Paris Communiqué* of 2018 concluded that further effort is required to increase access to higher education and the completion rates of underrepresented and vulnerable groups (European Commission, 2018). Increasing social inclusion in tertiary education is one of the four key goals of the 2017 European Commission's *Renewed EU agenda for higher education* and is confirmed by the 2017 European Commission Communication on *Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture*.

In spite of widening participation in higher education being high on the policy agenda in Europe for nearly three decades, the most recent progress report on the Bologna process implementation (2018) confirms that students from low socio-economic backgrounds, migrant backgrounds and students with chronic illnesses or disabilities are still underrepresented in higher education. Gender imbalances continue to exist, particularly in some disciplines. Moreover, students from some underrepresented groups are more likely to discontinue their studies and leave HE without a degree. In essence, inequalities in educational attainment still persist and lead to the underutilisation of hidden potential.

Objective of the report

This report provides a review of different policies that promote access to higher education, participation and completion by students from under-represented groups, such as low socio-economic or educational backgrounds, ethnic minorities, migrants and refugees.

This study formulates a typology of main policy levers used by Member States, regions and/or higher education institutions to stimulate widening participation and social inclusion in higher education.

Methodology

The study combines different approaches to enable a structured inventory and review of European, national and institutional policies regarding social inclusion and widening participation in higher education in the EU. Through the review of different policies, the study identifies a typology of policies aimed at enhancing social inclusion in higher education in the EU Member States (EU 28). This is complemented with a review of recent academic literature on the impact of policies directed at improving inclusion in higher education in Europe. Second, eight in-depth case studies describe social inclusion policies in selected countries. Third, examples of good practices in social inclusion policies in EU Member States (EU 28) are provided.

Main results

A scan of policy levers applied across the EU Member States demonstrates sixteen (16) typical policy instruments used to promote social inclusion, which can be categorised within the following four main policy types:

— Regulations explicitly governing access and social inclusion. These cover admission rules, accreditation and prior learning. These are policy measures set up for improving access and completion of HE by underrepresented groups. Their shared characteristic is that they try to facilitate entry into HE or recognition of prior learning by disadvantaged students. This group includes the following policies: a) Accreditation criteria for HE promoting widening participation; b) Admission rules targeting specific groups of students; c) Rules for the recognition of prior learning.

Only one country (CZ) has been identified implementing policy a), while the other two are in place in around half of the countries or more.

— Financial policies: these policies are targeted to students and students' families who lack financial resources to support higher education and/or fear that the return to HE will not compensate for its cost. There are also financial incentives for HE institutions. Six policies are identified within this group: a) Need-based grants; b) Merit-based grants; c) Family allowances; d) Tax-benefits for parents; e) Student welfare benefits/support; f) Incentives to HE institutions. Need-based grants have been identified in all EU countries while the other policies (with the exception of family allowances) appear in around half or more of the countries.

— Organisational policies: these are policies addressing the organisation of education, tailoring the programs, their content and their organization to the needs of non-standard students. It includes three different policies: a) Improving competencies for students who have a disadvantaged background; b) Differentiation/Introduction of (new/shorter) study programmes; c) More flexible provision of education (e.g. distance education; introduction of new time patterns for study programmes; e-learning). All countries have developed organisation policies across EU.

— Information policies: the role of these policies is to inform (prospective) students about programmes, funding and other aspects of HE. It includes four different policies: a) Special support for specific groups for study choice; b) Special regulations and programmes for refugees; c) Monitoring of students - access, progress and retention; d) Dissemination of knowledge from research on barriers to access HE for disadvantaged students. Around half of the countries or more use policies that fall under a) and b), while all countries are implementing monitoring policies.

Conclusions

A number of conclusions can be drawn regarding national (and institutional) strategies and policies for social inclusion. First, countries differ regarding the definition of underrepresented or disadvantaged groups of students and only a few countries have explicit widening participation strategies. Second, in general, funding incentives are the most frequent type of policies used for widening participation and social inclusion, while organisational policies are mostly used to better adapt the provision of higher education to the living situation of a more diverse student population. Third, most countries have taken steps to make higher education opportunities as transparent as possible to potential students but there is still a lack of information on indicators such as the social or ethnic background of students that would provide an insight on the development of social inclusion in HE. Finally, only a few countries make use of structured evaluation frameworks that allow them to assess the impact of individual policy initiatives.

1 Introduction

In Europe, at the highest political level it is recognised that education is important for improving the lives of people, job creation, economic growth, social fairness and enhancing European identity. Social inclusion in higher education – often called the social dimension of higher education – refers to the increasing access to higher education and degree completion for underrepresented groups, improving Europe's human capital and innovation capacity, while fostering social inclusion of citizens and increasing their labour market opportunities. Widening participation in higher education has been high on the policy agenda in Europe for nearly three decades.

The Bologna declaration of 19 June 1999, signed by 29 countries, recognized the need to create more comparable and compatible education systems across Europe (European Commission, 1999), supporting widening access initiatives to tertiary education in Europe and beyond. The social dimension of higher education has been a key discussion point of the Bologna implementation process since the 2001 *Prague Communiqué*. It extends beyond widening participation in higher education to address the inequalities facing students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Over the last years, the social dimension of HE has been addressed in various conferences and papers, and has become central in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), launched in 2010 during the Budapest-Vienna ministerial conference. The *Yerevan Communiqué* of 2015, a ministerial event of 47 EHEA delegations, endorsed the commitment to the social dimension of HE, highlighting the need to widen opportunities for access and completion for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (European Commission, 2015). The *Paris Communiqué* of 2018, a follow-up to the *Yerevan Communiqué* and signed by 48 countries, concluded that further effort is required to strengthen the social dimension of higher education and attain a student body representative of Europe's diverse population (access to higher education and the completion rates of underrepresented and vulnerable groups should be improved; European Commission, 2018). The *Statement of the 5th Bologna Policy Forum* (2018)*,* complementing the *Paris Communiqué* of 2018, concluded that the debate on social inclusion should move beyond fair access and also focus on student success measures such as retention, progression, completion and employability (European Commission, 2018).

For the EU, the objective of expanding access and completion of tertiary education is well expressed by the Europe 2020 strategy target of increasing the proportion of 30-34-year olds having completed tertiary or equivalent education to at least 40%[2] (Council of the European Union, 2013). Increasing social inclusion in tertiary education is one of the four key goals of the 2017 European Commission's *Renewed EU agenda for higher education*[3].

Especially important are also the 2017 European Commission Communication *on Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture*[4] and the 2017 Gothenburg Social Summit of the European Council, where European Heads of State and Government discussed the relationship between education, social inclusion and the development of Europe[5], and created the basis for the European Education Area (EEA). One of the first political measures following the Gothenburg Social Summit is the 2018 Council's *Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching*[6], in which the objective of promoting inclusive education is clearly stated at point 4.

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[2] In 2017 about 39.9% of the EU28 30-34-year olds held a tertiary education qualification, compared to 28% ten years earlier (European Commission, 2017). However, the EU28 average hides significant across-country variation.

[3] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017DC0247&from=EN .

[4] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017DC0673&from=EN ..

[5] http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/12/14/european-council-conclusions-external-relations/.

[6] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0607(01)&from=EN .

Although higher education in Europe has witnessed a massive increase in student numbers since the 1960s (Hadjar and Becker, 2009), this increase in many European countries did not include all social strata. Students from low socio-economic backgrounds, migrant backgrounds or students with chronic illnesses or disabilities are still underrepresented in higher education. For instance, Eurostudent reports that students without higher education experience in their family are also underrepresented in higher education (DZHW, 2018). Besides access to higher education, the chances of completing a higher education degree are to a substantial extent determined by the social background of students. Students from low socio-economic backgrounds and other underrepresented groups are more likely to discontinue their studies and leave higher education without a degree (European Commission, 2015). In essence, inequalities in educational attainment still persist and lead to the underutilisation of hidden potential (Shavit and Blossfeld, 1993; Brennan et al., 2009).

Analogously, the *2015 Bologna Process Implementation Report* concluded that although the goal of providing equal opportunities in higher education is shared by most EHEA countries, parental educational level still has a strong impact on children's educational attainment, immigrant children are less likely to participate and attain higher education qualifications than native children, and gender imbalances in higher education persist, particularly in some fields of study (European Commission, EACEA and Eurydice, 2015). The most recent progress report on the Bologna process implementation (2018) confirms that disadvantaged students still face access barriers to higher education and that students from low and medium-educated families are significantly underrepresented in tertiary education. Gender imbalances continue to exist, particularly in some disciplines. Moreover, disadvantaged students are more likely to dropout from their studies. Despite evidence on these trends, only few countries have introduced measures to improve the conditions for underrepresented groups (European Commission/ EACEA/ Eurydice, 2018).

Due to the political attention given to the social dimension of higher education, various countries increasingly stress the importance of access and widening participation to higher education. Zapata Galindo and Ramírez Rodríguez (2015) in their recent review provide an overview of national policies addressing specific underrepresented groups in higher education such as students from low socio-economic backgrounds, migrants and disabled persons, as well as to policies that address gender inequities. They particularly highlight financial policies that aim to reduce the financial burden of higher education for students. A wide range of policies are applied in Europe to increase access to higher education (Veugelers, 2011t). These include the modularisation of education, increased autonomy and flexibility for higher education institutions, further diversification of higher education providers and programmes and incentives to higher education institutions to stimulate them to engage in widening access to higher education. In 2014, Orr et al. (2014) provided a comprehensive analysis of cost sharing policies and practices in higher education in Europe. However, in the context of the high priority given to social inclusion on the European political agenda, there is currently no structured and comprehensive overview available on social inclusion policies by countries, types of policies and implementation levels. In addition, there is no overview of the effects of these policies.

This report attempts to fill this gap and provides a review of different policies that promote higher education access, participation and completion by students from under-represented groups, such as low socio-economic or educational backgrounds, ethnic minorities, migrants and refugees. In addition, this study formulates a typology of main policy levers – such as regulations, funding, organisation and information – used by Member States, regions and/or higher education institutions to stimulate widening participation and social inclusion in higher education. While data availability and monitoring of students to better understand the process of widening participation is an overarching theme of this report, a special section is also devoted to the academic literature providing robust research evidence on the effectiveness of such interventions.

To this end, the study consists of the following elements:

- A typology of policies aimed at enhancing social inclusion in higher education in the EU Member States (EU 28).
- Eight in-depth country case studies that describe the effects of social inclusion policy mixes in selected countries.
- A review of recent academic literature on the impact of social policies directed at improving inclusion in higher education in Europe.
- Examples of good practices in social inclusion policies in EU Member States (EU 28).
- A selection of policies to enhance social inclusion employed by academic and non-academic entities at other educational levels.

The above-mentioned objectives and project elements also guide the structure of this report. In Section 2, we provide an analytical framework guiding the study to enable a structured inventory and review of European, national and institutional policies regarding social inclusion and widening participation in higher education in the EU. Section 3 is dedicated to the research methodology used to make this structured inventory of policies, practices and – where known – effects of social inclusion policies. Section 4 presents a typology of the major policy instruments used in EU Member States for widening participation and social inclusion in higher education. This is based on the clustered description of national policy instruments across EU Member States formulated in the "policy sheets" in Annex 1. Section 5 focuses on a comparative analysis of the eight in-depth country case studies presented in Annex 2. Section 6 provides a review of the academic literature assessing the impact of some specific interventions to increase social inclusiveness of higher education in Europe. Section 7 concludes by summarising the key messages of the report.

2 Analytical framework

To develop a structured inventory and analysis of policies that address access, participation and social inclusion in higher education, we have drawn up an analytical framework to guide the research. This framework consists of a number of elements. On the one hand we have included the main factors that – according to the academic literature – explain (individual) access to higher education and successful completion. On the other hand, we offer a categorisation of policy instruments that can be used to influence and steer the higher education system and individual higher education institutions in achieving access and widening participation.

2.1 Determinants of inequality in higher education

Research has already achieved a good understanding of what determines inequalities in the transition to higher education (see for example Becker 2017; Jackson et al. 2016; Breen and Goldthorpe 2016; Schindler and Lörz 2012; Vossensteyn, 2005; Goldthorpe 1996). Central to this research is the work of Boudon (1974) who distinguished primary and secondary effects of social origin that influence educational decisions. Primary effects mainly refer to the resources families provide to their children to attend and excel in school. These resources include, amongst others, financial support, moral support, networks and academic preparation. Secondary effects of social origin relate to the expectations and attitudes of the individual with regard to educational choices. Here it is argued that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds or who do not have a parent who has a higher education degree tend to have low expectations with regard to their ability to succeed in higher education, as well as on their prospects of receiving adequate returns on their educational investments. This central idea has been applied in a number of studies that show that students from a higher social background, who are members of the major national ethnic group and do not have a migrant background are more likely to enrol and succeed in higher education than students who do not have these backgrounds. Schindler and Lörz (2012), for example, use Boudon's work to explain the persistently higher transition rate of upper secondary school graduates from lower socio-economic backgrounds in Germany to vocational training. Their findings show that among upper secondary education graduates the absolute number of pupils with lower socio-economic background is higher than that of students with high socio-economic background. However, students of the former group less likely to pursue tertiary education, compared with students from the latter group, preferring to opt for vocational training as it provides faster entrance into the labour market. Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds appear to be less informed about and interested in academic studies and aim for financial independence early on.

Research has also studied structural aspects of educational systems to explain persistent inequities in access and completion of higher education. In particular, educational systems that use early selection to place students in different educational tracks are less socially inclusive with regard to higher education than education systems that use later selection. Research also shows that early selection is often biased by the social background of the students, which often provides an inappropriate and distorted view of their actual educational achievements and academic readiness (Hanushek and Wossmann 2006; Ruhose and Schwerdt 2015). Systems with a high degree of selectivity or where selection takes place early are less likely to integrate students from these backgrounds in higher education (Orr, Usher, Haj, Atherton and Geanta, 2017a, 2017b). When pupils or students have to make early decisions with regard to the direction of their educational career, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds prepare and qualify less often for higher education. However, if educational systems have institutionalised vocational training as tertiary education – for example, by means of a Universities of Applied Science sector (UAS) – then this may have a positive impact on social inclusion with

larger proportions of disadvantaged students attending higher education. Nevertheless, such students are likely to be underrepresented in university education (Orr et al, 2017a).

Over recent decades, the targets of widening access policies have changed. During the 1960s, policies aimed at a general increase in higher education enrolment with a particular focus on female students. The mass expansion of higher education made equity and equality issues more important. From the 1980s and 1990's the policy focus changed towards the social-economic background of students as well as to mature students who might be interested in studying part-time. Currently, widening participation policies address a more diverse range of student background characteristics that include gender, socio-economic background (including first-generation students) and ethnic or migration backgrounds. Students having one or more of these characteristics are frequently identified as disadvantaged students.

2.2 Categorising policy levers

To organise and structure the analysis of the variety of policy levers affecting access and social inclusion in higher education, we distinguish between different types of policy instruments. Based on the typologies of Hood and Margetts (2007) and Van Vught and De Boer (2015), four categories of instruments are distinguished: regulation, funding, organisation and information. These instruments differ in their capacity to affect behaviour. Regulation and funding are generally understood to be "hard" or "strong" policy levers while organisation and information are seen as "weak(er)" or "soft" policy instruments.

- **Regulation:** Regulations are intended to command and to forbid, to commend and to permit. Regulations vary by the degree of restriction they seek to place on the behaviour of higher education institutions or students. For example, authorities regulate admission to higher education, set entry requirements and allow and forbid certain higher education institutions to offer particular types of programmes. Regulations may also affect the procedures or the substance regarding the contents of curricula in higher education (see Berdahl (1983), for a distinction between substantive and procedural autonomy). In unitary states, regulations are developed at the national level, while in federal states they may be set at either federal or state levels. In this report the term regulation refers to explicit (official) rules for access and social inclusion.
- **Funding:** Funding enables governments to use financial sticks and carrots to influence behaviour. Authorities may, for instance, provide a bonus for higher education institutions that are able to attract students from certain disadvantaged backgrounds. Other funding incentives provided to the institutions include additional budgets for innovative teaching programmes or didactical approaches that address the needs of students from underrepresented groups. Targeting the students directly, governments may provide scholarships and grants to students in financial need.
- **Organisation:** Within this category fall all kinds of operational activities directly influencing higher education structures. An example would be establishing a new type of short-cycle programme to address new (underrepresented) target groups of students, or to appoint new education career counsellors in secondary or higher education institutions. In addition, national or local public agencies that guide pupils in making a choice for a particular study area would fit into this category. Organisational aspects also have to do with the structures and procedures regarding teaching and learning. One can think of pathways to and within higher education (e.g. transition rules between institutions and programmes), the opportunities for part-time provision, and the integration of online education provision (e.g. MOOCs).

- **Information:** From its specific position in society, government often is 'a store of information'. Compared with other institutions, governmental agencies are often better positioned to collect data and to develop rather broad, panoramic overviews of societal conditions. Examples would be to make data on opportunities for students available, or to publish skills forecasts and information on the supply and quality of education. Through information and marketing campaigns, governments may aim to stimulate particular groups of students to apply to and enrol in higher education.

3 Research methodology

3.1 Methodology policy sheets

This report is based on extensive desk research. To compile the policy briefs, a screening of scientific and grey literature as well as further web-based material and publications addressing policies to widen access, retention and completion in higher education was undertaken. The screening included different sorts of literature and did not formulate strict requirements for studies to be included. This part of the report mainly aims at providing information about policies and policy developments. It also includes information, where available, about their effectiveness.

The search was performed using different databases and search engines. Google Scholar and Scopus were used to retrieve literature. Other information was found through the websites of higher education ministries, higher education stakeholders as well as authorities offering statistical information. A snowball approach revealed further sources.

The search used the following search terms most frequently:

- Access higher education
- Social inclusion
- Transition to higher education
- Social dimension higher education
- Equal opportunity higher education
- Affirmative action

These terms were used to generate a first overview of the literature. Based on this first overview, search terms were refined (e.g. searching for 'information for refugee students') to find more specific literature. The search terms were translated into other European languages (Dutch, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Latvian) to cover the EU28 to the extent possible. The search aimed for documents that were published after 2008.

This search approach has certain limitations: its openness to different sorts of literature and sources may result in an excess of information and non-relevant issues might be included. As a result of the broad geographical scope, the openness of the search and the limited language coverage the screening might not have included all relevant material. Thus, while the list of major types of policies addresses all available widening participation policies, we might not be able to include all information on the specific implementation of the policies in Member States when information is published in the national language only.

The policy descriptions were developed in a three-step approach. The first step addressed the collection of material on widening participation for each EU 28-member state. These materials were included in internal country reports. Based on a comparison of the country reports, similar types of policies for each of the four policy areas (policy sheets) in the theoretical framework were categorised. In the policy sheets the country specific information was condensed, common characteristics were described, and country examples included. The policy sheets can be found in Annex 1.

3.2 Methodology country case studies

Description of data collection for case studies

The country case studies were also developed through desk research. The case studies employed a similar technique in finding the relevant literature but extended the range of topics to be addressed in the search. The search was amended in line with the elements of the analytic framework, i.e. besides finding the relevant policies, the search aimed at finding information on the countries' problem analysis regarding widening participation, strategic documents and evaluation reports of implemented policies. The search focussed on grey literature, but also addressed scientific publications published in journals and books. To learn about the composition of the student body and how it has developed in recent years, data sources/archives of national statistical offices were used. Statistical yearbooks were also used to find information on changes in the student body.

Some information was also gathered from websites providing information on special funding schemes or websites of ministries. Important sources were also the websites of the higher education authorities who oversee implementing widening participation policies.

Description of country selection criteria

Eight countries were selected as case study countries. The selection aimed at covering a broad range of countries to show the variety of widening participation policies in Europe.

Four criteria guided the selection. The type of admission system to higher education was most important, and was based on the four admission types as distinguished in the report of Orr et al. (2017). These admission types reflect the four entries into a matrix that focuses, on the one hand, on the freedom of HEIs to set their own criteria for student selection, and , on the other one, on streaming policies in the secondary system and whether all streams lead to some form of higher education or not. Second, we wanted to include countries from different parts of Europe: North, West, South and Eastern member countries. A third selection criterion was whether the country has a specific widening participation strategy or addresses widening participation in its overall development strategy. Finally, the development of student numbers in recent years and the overall tertiary level attainment was addressed, covering countries with an ongoing expansion of higher education as well as countries facing shrinking student numbers.

Table 1 provides an overview of the selection criteria used and how these apply to the selected case studies:

Table 1. Selection criteria applied to selection of country case studies

	Admission system higher education Orr et al. (2017)	**Region of the EU28, according to EUROVOC**	**Strategic engagement for widening participation policy**	**Development of student numbers/overall tertiary level attainment (Eurostat)**
Austria	Type 1 – schools select for higher education, one educational pathway not leading to higher education	Western Europe	Has widening participation strategy	Steady increase of student numbers 40,9% of population aged 30-34 have higher education degree
Czech Republic	Type 4: selection by schools and selection by higher education institution	Central and Eastern Europe	Widening participation addressed in higher education strategy	Massive expansion of higher education, current decline of student numbers 34,2% of population aged 30-34 have higher education degree

France	Type 3: all pathways may lead to higher education	Western Europe	Widening participation addressed in higher education strategy	Steady increase in student numbers 44,3% of population aged 30-34 have higher education degree
Ireland	Type 3: all pathways may lead to higher education	Western Europe	Widening participation strategy	Steady increase in student numbers 53,5% of population aged 30-34 have higher education degree
Latvia	Type 2: Selection by higher education institutions	Northern Europe	No widening participation strategy	Massive expansion of higher education, currently decline of student numbers 43,8% of population aged 30-34 have higher education degree
Netherlands	Type 1 – schools select for higher education, one educational pathway not leading to higher education	Western Europe	Widening participation addressed in higher education strategy	Steady increase in student numbers 47.9% of population aged 30-34 have higher education degree
Portugal	Type 2: Selection by higher education institutions	Southern Europe	Widening participation addressed in higher education strategy	Decline in student numbers 33.5% of population age 30-34 have higher education degree
Scotland	Type 4: selection by schools and selection by higher education institution	Western Europe	Widening participation strategy	Slight increase in student numbers 57.5% of population age 30-34 have higher education degree

3.3 Methodology academic literature review

As written in 3.1 and 3.2, in order to provide an inventory of relevant policy initiatives (relevant for Sections 4 and 5), different kind of papers and documents were considered irrespective of the methodological approach used in them. In Section 6 we provide a review of the academic research that has used robust research design in order to infer causality relationships between the intervention and the outcomes. Studies considered here are impact studies, applying either a quasi-experimental or an experimental research design. They are not many, but they receive special attentions as only through them is it possible to truly capture and – in some cases – even quantify the effects of a particular intervention.

In Section 6 we select research papers that consider an intervention aimed either at widening higher education access or improving completion among the socially disadvantaged people in a European country. We only reviewed research that was published between 2008 (included) and (September) 2018 either in a peer-reviewed

journal or as a working paper at a well-established research institution and was written in the English language.[7]

Papers that analyse policies increasing access and completion of higher education targeted at the socially disadvantaged are reviewed, along with studies considering more general policies that aim at supporting (prospective) students irrespective of their origins but distinguishing between outcomes for the socially disadvantaged and other students. As in the rest of the report, by socially disadvantaged we mean students from families with a low socio-economic background (identified either as students from low-income families or as students with parents of low education levels), ethnic minorities as well as students with an immigrant or refugee background. Policy interventions introduced at the national, regional or institutional level are all taken into account. For an overview of the criteria applied in the review, please refer to Table 2.

The systematic search started by a full overview of all the after-2007 issues of the following leading journals in the field: Higher Education, Studies in Higher Education, Higher Education Policy, Journal of Further and Higher Education, British Educational Research Journal, Economics of Education Review, Journal of Education Policy. After the first screening, from these journals, all articles, related to social equality in higher education were selected. A second and more detailed overview of the content of these articles allowed for further selection of those papers that would fit all of the criteria mentioned above. Each study identified with this method was eventually included in the final review, and all the references included in these were followed up – provided that they also fit our criteria. In the end, a total of 15 papers discussing a European case/policy were reviewed. To expand our understanding and to provide a broader context to the European situation, we also selected two recent literature reviews from the field that provide a good outlook to countries outside Europe.

Table 2. Selection criteria applied in the academic literature review

Publication date	2008 – September 2018
Language of the study	English
Geographical coverage	EU MS
Publication type	Articles in peer-reviewed academic journals and working papers published by an established research institute
Policy type	Policy interventions aimed at increasing access to or completion of higher education either in general or for the socially disadvantaged students in particular. In the first case, only studies that evaluated the impact on the socially disadvantaged separately were considered.
Disadvantaged groups covered	Low social background (low-income) and immigrant/ethnic minority students
Method applied in the studies	Impact evaluation using either experimental or quasi-experimental research design (regression discontinuity design, difference in difference approach)

[7] The latest published review on the topic done by Younger and colleagues (Younger, Gascoine, Menzies, and Torgerson, 2018) was conducted in 2012/13, and therefore does not cover the most recent evaluations. It has a broader geographical scope, providing evidence mainly from outside Europe.

4 Typology of social inclusion policies

Based on an elaborate review of academic literature, international comparative policy reports and a variety of national higher education policy documents – such as national strategies, regulations, policy papers, policy reviews, etc. – we drafted a matrix of policy levers that have been related to access, widening participation and social inclusion in the 28 EU Member States. As described in the research methodology, we explored the wealth of literature in a structured way, using a list of aspects related to access, widening participation and social inclusion to detect various policy instruments. Because 28 countries demonstrate a large variety of policy instruments for access, widening participation and social inclusion and because similar-type policy instruments may have different labels across various countries, we developed a typology of instruments.

As discussed before, we first clustered the various measures into the four main categories of policy instruments using the policy typology of Hood and Margetts (2007) and Van Vught and De Boer (2015). The four categories of policies concern regulations explicitly governing access and social inclusion (e.g. laws); funding incentives (for students and for higher education institutions); organisation related policies (e.g. relating to educational structures and organisational units); and information policies (to guide and inform (prospective) students).

In a second stage, we used the policy instruments within each category to arrive at a limited set of typical policy instruments. For example, various types of need-based grants and scholarships, that may have different labels across countries, are clustered under the heading of "need-based grants".

As a result, we reduced the myriad of policy instruments related to access, widening participation and social inclusion to a set of ***16 typical social inclusion policies***. The following section provides a brief overview of each and the policies are further explained in the "policy sheets" in Annex 1 of this report. In the policy sheets you find a detailed description of the policies; a list of European countries where it is being applied and – if any evaluations exists – also some comments on the achieved outcomes of the policy.

4.1 Regulations

In the context of this report, regulations are explicit rules set up for guaranteeing access to and completion of higher education for underrepresented groups. Many, but not all, EU28 countries explicitly guarantee individuals the right to education. This right, however, is not an intervention that improves the situation of disadvantaged students in higher education per se. However, it may make it possible for citizens to claim their right to education. In this report, the focus is more on rules and regulations that can directly affect widening participation in higher education. We distinguished three major types:

1. Measures to widen participation in accreditation criteria: Accreditation requirements can stimulate higher education institutions to develop measures to give specific attention to specific groups of students. This can be done by increasing diversity at the HEIs in terms of types of programmes or didactical approaches or to provide counselling to disadvantaged students. Across the EU-28 we only find the Czech Republic announcing this policy as aiming at increasing diversity at higher education institutions and widening participation in higher education.
2. Change in admission rules for specific groups of students: these can be used to provide access opportunities to talented students who did not achieve a formal entrance qualification to participate in higher education.[8] The policy is moderately used in the EU28. About half of the countries have implemented these measures.
3. Rules for the recognition of prior learning: this can entail alternative access routes to higher education or to provide exemptions for students with prior learning experiences by recognising experiences as equivalent to some courses in order to stimulate retention and completion. Many countries have such rules, but it is unknown to what extent they are implemented.

A shared characteristic of these rules is that they try to compensate disadvantaged students for a lack of chances they may experience in other areas. For instance, including counselling in accreditation criteria forces higher education institutions to take responsibility for high quality counselling services for students. In addition, it might increase the number of first-generation students attending tertiary education as it can make up for the lack of knowledge on higher education that they might have. Accreditation rules that include counselling for disadvantaged or specific groups of students were only found in the Czech Republic.

In some countries, general guidelines for the admission of students are regulated by the State. Opening second chance routes to students who did not achieve the necessary educational entrance qualifications to enter higher education during their school period is applied in some countries. Also setting quotas for specific groups of students in programmes is among these rules. Similar ideas underlie the rules for the recognition of prior learning.

Different studies show that the percentage of students entering higher education via second chance routes is increasing but currently still low (European Commission, 2015; European Commission, EACEA, and Eurydice, 2014; Hauschildt et al., 2018).

4.2 Funding policies

Policies in the area of finance and funding are widely used across the EU28. There are two major beneficiaries: students (and their parents) as well as higher education institutions. Financial incentives can include various policies that aim to tackle a lack of financial resources that might hinder students in their decision to opt for higher education. Further, financial incentives may also target higher education institutions to encourage the inclusion of disadvantaged students.

4.2.1 Financial support for students (and their parents)

Policies in the area of finance and funding primarily target students, particularly those who lack financial resources. Talented students from low-income families often do not opt for higher education pathways as they find the investment too high and fear that the later return will not compensate for their investment (Orr et al., 2015). In addition, students who cannot be supported by their parents often work alongside their study to

[8] In countries outside the EU, such as the US and Hong Kong setting quotas for underrepresented student groups is common practice, but not in the EU.

contribute to their living costs. This work often hinders their focus on their studies and makes them more vulnerable to dropping out and to be less successful in higher education (Callender, 2008; Callender and Wilkinson, 2013). To stimulate access among students from poorer families or other underrepresented groups, many governments provide the following subsidies to students and/or their parents:

4. Merit-based grants: this policy aims to provide talented and high achieving students (from low, medium and high socio-economic backgrounds) with financial support to pursue tertiary education. The financial support can be provided to cover tuition fees and/or living expenses. The underlying assumption is that such a policy would encourage talented students, including those from low socio-economic backgrounds, to enter and complete tertiary education. Merit-based grants can be combined with need-based requirements or grants. Among the EU28 countries, at least 19 countries (67%) offered merit-based grants to students. Thus, it can be classified as a frequently used policy within the EU.
5. Need-based grants: this policy aims to provide students from low socio-economic backgrounds with financial support to pursue tertiary education. The financial support can be provided to cover tuition fees and/or living expenses. The underlying assumption is that grants will encourage prospective students from poor families to pursue tertiary education. Among the EU28 countries, all 28 countries (100%) offered needs-based grants in 2018. Thus, it can be classified as a very frequently used policy within the EU.
6. Family allowances: this policy aims to provide families with additional income support to cover the costs of children, also when they are studying. The support is often provided on a monthly basis. The underlying assumption is that such a policy would encourage children to pursue (tertiary) education, particularly those from low socio-economic families. Among the EU28 countries, at least ten countries (36%) offered family allowances in 2018. Thus, it can be classified as a moderately used policy within the EU.
7. Tax-benefits for parents: this policy aims to provide families with tax deductions or tax credits for dependent children, including those enrolled in higher education. The support is often provided on an annual basis. The underlying assumption is that such a policy would encourage children to pursue tertiary education, particularly those from low socio-economic families. However, tax deduction may be less effective for families with low incomes and tax levels. Among the EU28 countries, at least 16 countries (57%) offered tax benefits to parents in 2018. Thus, it can be classified as a commonly used policy within the EU.
8. Student welfare benefits/support: this policy aims to provide students with subsidised welfare services and facilities (i.e. in-kind contributions). –These benefits include subsidised transport, meals, medical expenses, housing, etc. The assumption underlying this policy is that this support allows students to save money on their living expenses, thus making studying more affordable, and might reduce the need to work during their study period. Among the EU28 countries, at least 13 countries (46%) offered welfare assistance to students between 2015-2018. Thus, it can be classified as a commonly used policy within the EU.

The Report "National student fee and support systems in European higher education" (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017) describes in detail how these policies are implemented. A major distinction can be made between direct support to students – such as grants, scholarships and loans – and indirect support that benefits students through their parents (family allowances and tax benefits) or via HEIs or other public organisations (in-kind support). In general, it is known that financial support to students from disadvantaged groups facilitated the mass expansion of higher education to some extent (Jongbloed and Vossensteyn, 2016a; Jongbloed and Vossensteyn, 2016b). The Eurostudent VI report indicates that disadvantaged students are still underrepresented in higher education and that these students frequently face economic hardship during their

studies. Further, financial support is provided to a small percentage of students only, as most students are still dependent on their families and their own income to finance their higher education (Hauschildt, Vögtle, and Gwosć, 2018, 167ff).

4.2.2 Financial incentives to HEI to address widening participation

This policy is mostly implemented in two major ways: either the incentives are provided as additional funds or widening participation is addressed in the funding formula (e.g. in performance-based funding) for higher education institutions.

9. Incentives to higher education institutions: this policy aims to stimulate higher education institutions to develop measures to increase access as well as retention and completion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Including the inclusion of socially disadvantaged students and their success in the funding formula is moderately used across the EU 28. A few countries apply additional funding.

With this policy, more responsibility is assigned to higher education institutions to strengthen widening participation. The policy of providing additional funds is more recent, although it has been part of the widening participation allocation in England for some time. Studies have found that the widening participation allocation did not make a major impact as higher education still struggles to attract and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Croxford, Docherty, Gaukroger, and Hood, 2014; Evans, Rees, Taylor, and Wright, 2017; Office for Students, 2018; Younger, Gascoine, Menzies, and Torgerson, 2018). In other countries, additional funds are provided in a competitive manner, i.e. institutions apply for funds with project ideas and these are awarded based on the quality of their proposal. How these additional funds facilitate access and retention of students from disadvantaged backgrounds has not yet been evaluated.

4.3 Organisational policies

Policies addressing the organisation of education target degree structures, types of higher education providers or the provision of higher education itself. The inventory revealed three major organisational policies to widen participation of disadvantaged students:

10. Organisational services to better prepare students from disadvantaged groups in terms of their academic competencies: the policy aims at helping students from disadvantaged backgrounds increase their academic competencies before they enter the regular academic programmes. In most of the EU 28 higher education institutions very frequently use the instrument of preparatory courses. There is however a great diversity in this regarding whether or not the courses are geared toward specific groups of students, their timing and the competences trained. Reaching out to and preparing students from specific groups already in secondary education is less often used by higher education institutions.
11. Differentiation/Introduction of (new/shorter) study programmes: a major aim of the policy is to better adapt to the educational demands of an increasingly diversified student population by diversifying the educational provision. The policy also aims to lower entrance thresholds to higher education for specific groups of (underrepresented) students. Short-cycle programmes are used in all EU28 countries. Hybrid study programmes are rarely used, they mostly exist in Germany.
12. More flexible provision of education: Addressing non-traditional target groups of students, such as mature students in the labour market, students with family obligations, etc. Distance education is widely used in the EU28, in almost every country there is distance education institution.

These organisational policies aim to better address the demands for higher education of these groups of students. The measures also aim at supporting these students to better integrate in their programmes. Other policies address the higher risk-averseness of these students by offering shorter degree programmes. Further, increasing the flexibility of the educational provision supports students to better integrate into higher education and to balance this with other duties such as parenthood, care giving or working for a living.

4.4 Information policies

Information policies include various measures that support students as well as higher education institutions. These target different users, on the one-hand students and prospective students, and on the other hand higher education institutions, authorities and other stakeholders.

4.4.1 Information policies for students

Most of the EU28 countries have implemented general information policies to inform (prospective) students about programmes, funding and other aspects of higher education. This information mostly targets all students. Counselling and information for students from specific groups have developed mainly in the past 10 to 15 years. The most typical information policies to address social inclusion are:

13. Special support for specific groups for study choice: this policy provides customised information to students from disadvantaged backgrounds to enable them to establish realistic expectations about higher education. To our knowledge the policy is not widely used in the EU 28. There are of course information portals in most countries, but it does not become clear to what extent these are addressing the specific needs of disadvantaged students.
14. Special regulations and programmes for refugees: this policy aims to facilitate access to, and retention and completion of higher education, for refugee students. Countries that host the majority of the refugees have implemented these rules.

4.4.2 Information policies for higher education institutions and stakeholders

Information policies targeting higher education institutions and stakeholders aim to improve their knowledge about disadvantaged students. Monitoring increases the transparency of the system and helps to identify to what extent different groups of students are attracted to higher education and when in their educational careers they are more at risk of failure than other students. Research sheds light on the causes for not opting for higher education and for students dropping out from higher education. Major policies in this area are:

15. Monitoring of students - access, progress and retention: to learn more about the student population (entrants, enrolled students and graduates, student progression and dropout) and their choices, behaviour and success. More transparency about the student population helps to prepare better targeted policies, also regarding underrepresented student groups. All countries use this policy, however, in the majority of countries no data is collected on students' social, ethnic and migration background.
16. Dissemination of knowledge from research on barriers to access higher education for disadvantaged students: the policy aims at informing practitioners such as policy makers and teachers in higher education about major barriers and problems specific groups of students encounter during the transition to, or after enrolment in, higher education. In addition, the policy aims at disseminating knowledge on how to address these problems. There is no data available on the usage of this policy.

5 Case study analysis

This section provides a comparative overview of the country case studies that are presented in Annex 2. As explained in the research methodology section, we selected eight countries in which to explore interesting policies and, if known, their impact concerning social inclusion in higher education: Austria, the Czech Republic, France, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Portugal and Scotland. These were compared on the following aspects: the major problems they identify in terms of widening participation (5.1), the strategic objectives set in this regard (5.2), the major widening participation policies that have been implemented (5.3), and the monitoring of changes in the student population and the evaluation of widening participation policies (5.4).

5.1 Major access and social inclusion problems

In order to compare countries on how they perceive widening participation and the social inclusion challenges they have identified we first considered which student groups they find less well represented in the student population and second what major obstacles in terms of processes or other problems they have recognised as hindering equity in access.

5.1.1 Underrepresented groups

Countries differ regarding their definitions of less well represented groups. For the Czech Republic, Latvia and Portugal we find that widening participation policies do not address specifically defined target groups. These three countries currently face a decline in student numbers and in the participation and attainment rates in higher education. For these countries, an overall increase in higher education enrolment is seen to be important. For the Czech Republic, some scientific studies have shown that access to higher education is determined by the social background of students. This however is not mentioned in current policy documents. In Latvia, there is also evidence that the socio-economic situation of the students' families plays a role in access to higher education. It seems that the major aim is to increase the educational attainment of a certain age cohort. In Portugal, the overall low tertiary attainment level is perceived as problematic as this could destabilise the economy. In addition, an overall low participation rate appears to have a negative effect on the motivation to enrol as examples or role-models of the benefits of higher education are not present.

In France, Ireland and Scotland student numbers are still increasing, and these countries are aware that this expansion is imbalanced in that some parts of the population are more likely to be enrolled than others. France defines equity in access challenges in terms of socio-economic background and the type of entrance qualification to higher education. Ireland has identified inequities facing particular target groups such as students from manual or unskilled working classes, mature students, disabled/impaired students and students from the Irish traveller community. In Scotland, target groups are defined on the one hand with the help of a deprivation index, but also the imbalances with respect to gender, students with care responsibilities, students from low socio-economic backgrounds, and students from schools with low progression rates to higher education.

Austria and the Netherlands take the view that their student populations already represent the diversity of society to a large extent. In both countries, student numbers are currently increasing – and most societal groups benefit from this expansion. Nonetheless, in Austria there is a recognition that the situation of some groups of students – such as students with no formal higher education entrance qualification or students with families and children need to be addressed in a more targeted way. For the Netherlands, we found a similar approach: to overcome inequities regarding retention and completion, the policy focus is on improving the match between students' interests

and capacities and the study programmes they choose. Particularly underrepresented groups require special guidance to succeed in their programmes as they lack support from their families. In this respect the socio-economic background of students, their ethnic origin and the entrance qualification they hold have been found to be important.

Table 3. Major widening access problems perceived in the case study countries

Country	Underrepresented Groups	Problematic processes/other problems
Austria	Overall, population of students in higher education appears to match with societal diversity Students with no formal higher education entrance qualification Mature students Students with family or children Impaired/disabled students	Some academic programmes do not achieve diversity in participants No gender balance regarding institutional choice and choice of academic programme Institutional choice determined by social background Insufficient student funding – majority of students need to work for living
Czech Republic	Access to higher education strongly determined by social background Expansion of higher education participation increased social inequalities in accessing higher education	Early tracking of students Lack of part-time opportunities No clear regulations for recognition of prior learning
France	Graduation gap in secondary higher education: students with working class backgrounds less well represented Students with upper secondary vocational training less likely to succeed in higher education	Lack of information on relevance of higher education Complex higher education system: lack of transparency, difficult to establish collaboration between HEIs and secondary educational institutions Degrees differ in relevance on labour market in terms of type of awarding institution
Ireland	Student population too homogenous as compared to overall population with regard to age at entrance, social background and region Clear definition of target/equity groups that are less well represented in higher education: • Social background • Non-manual worker group • Semi/unskilled manual workers • (Full-time) mature students • Disabled students • Students with further education qualification • Irish travellers	Lack of awareness of equity problem in access at institutional level Collaboration for equity in access across different government areas needs to be improved Admission to preferred study programme depends on points achieved in final school examination (point system): students from higher social background have more (cultural, financial) resources available to achieve higher outcomes in the final exam.
Latvia	Decline of student numbers due to demographic decline and immigration in recent years No definition of target groups, target is more to increase the overall participation in higher education Therefore, only limited attention to widening participation for disadvantaged groups in current policies Students from families that are "not wealthy" or "not wealthy at all" are not well represented in higher education.	Current funding system does not address well need-based issues in access to higher education Therefore, funding system creates limited opportunities for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Funding system also creates restrictions for part-time study and students. Most students need to work for their living.
Netherlands	Overall, population of students in higher education appears to match societal diversity. To achieve a better fit of programmes with the background, competencies and aspirations of students, to increase	Low retention and completion regarding initially selected study programmes Education policies often target only one educational level; more holistic approaches are perceived as more effective: "education as a

	retention and completion. The following underrepresented groups need attention: • Male or female students in particular subjects • Students from vocational secondary education • Students from poorer families • Students of non-western, non-native origin • Students with functional limitations	chain thinking"
Portugal	Decline in HE participation in recent years Data reveal that participation in education (not only in HE) is strongly determined by socio-economic background. Most important disadvantaged group are: • Students from the Roma community • Disabled and impaired students	Overall, low level of tertiary education attainment in society Low level of social mobility in overall society
Scotland	There exist social class gaps in higher education, particularly based on the following socio-economic characteristics: • Students from geographically deprived areas • Gender • Care-experienced students • Low socio-economic backgrounds • Students from low progression schools (schools with lower percentage of students progressing to higher education)	The following challenges are mentioned: • Early years attainment and school attainment gap • Low aspirations • Lack of parental experience of HE • Lack of quality advice and guidance in schools and in the family home • Secondary school subject choice, including clear advice and guidance on the consequences of decisions • Lack of quality advice and guidance on student finance • Cultural barriers, e.g. the feeling of not fitting in Systemic issues are: • Alignment of pathways between schools, colleges and universities • Lack of evidence on types of access programmes that have most impact • Need for more coherence and collaboration on outreach • The need to expand and maximise the impact of contextual admissions • The need to expand and maximise the impact of articulation pathways • Admissions processes placing greater value on experiences more likely to be available to more affluent socioeconomic groups • Inconsistent approach to using data to identify those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged • The need for better data to support targets and monitor progress

5.1.2 Problematic processes/issues

The investigated countries differ to some extent in what they identify as important barriers to achieving equity in access to higher education. We did not find a clear pattern here, however, in most countries the funding of students is found to be an important barrier to accessing higher education. Also, the lack of information about higher education: its requirements, access routes and opportunities, is identified as a barrier in most of the countries. In Ireland and the Netherlands some barriers are found in relation to the educational system and the policy making process. Both countries believe that widening access policies should use a more holistic approach, either by addressing more than one educational level and by collaborating across different government areas or even by framing education as a chain. Aspects of the educational systems are also addressed in the Czech Republic, where the early tracking of students limits opportunities

for some groups of students. In Portugal, the overall low tertiary attainment level and limited social mobility are found to hinder participation in higher education as role models motivating higher education participation are missing.

5.2 Strategic objectives

Austria, Ireland and Scotland have already implemented widening participation strategies. In the Czech Republic, France, the Netherlands and Portugal widening participation is addressed in the overall development strategies for higher education.

In their strategies, most countries set qualitative and quantitative targets.

Qualitative targets are mostly about establishing new structures and processes or changing old ones that appear to hinder achieving wider participation. In Austria and Ireland, for example, one qualitative target is to establish a better data infrastructure in order to achieve more evidence-based policy making. Further, Ireland aims to better mainstream equity of access in HEIs and to build broader pathways to higher education. In the Netherlands, one qualitative target involves building better support structures for students from targeted groups. Establishing more access routes to higher education appears to be an important qualitative goal across all countries.

In some countries, such as Ireland, Austria and Scotland, concrete quantitative targets are set - percentages of target groups that should be achieved by a certain period. Latvia and Portugal indicate the percentage of the overall population that should attain higher education. France describes changes in the student population more widely, for example in terms of halving gaps.

Table 4. Strategic national objectives regarding social inclusion

Country	**Widening participation strategy implemented?**	**Major targets and objectives Qualitative targets**	**Major targets and objectives Quantitative targets**
Austria	Yes, in 2017	Achieve more integrative access (student population should reflect diversity of overall population) Avoid dropout and improve completion Optimise the higher education system regarding funding, and a diversified provision of higher education and optimise the regulation of higher education policy (aim to better adapt higher education provision to societal needs and needs of students).	Quantitative targets (selection) to be achieved by 2025 Increase participation of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds (reduce probability factor for social background to determine access) 50% of students in medicine and dentistry should come from families with no parent having a degree in medicine or dentistry Promote gender balance in all programmes, achieving minimum of 10% females in all programmes Provide maintenance grants to at least 15,000 students
Czech Republic	No, but there is an overall education as well as higher education development strategy	Decrease educational inequalities Increase diversity Widen access to higher education Better adapt higher education system to needs of students	No quantitative targets established
France	No, but widening participation addressed in other higher education strategies	Stimulate collaboration between secondary schools and higher education institutions Reform orientation and selection process for higher education All public education institutions should take responsibility for	Halve the gap in graduation rates between students from working class and from managerial class Increase participation rates of students with BAC P and BAC T in higher education Provide more need-based grants

		providing transparent education orientation Create more diversified tracks and programmes to better adapt to student profiles Improve student counselling in higher education Improve living conditions of students Improve teaching (develop new courses, modularisation and individualised teaching) Create extra study places and new staff (counsellors, professionals) to implement reforms	
Ireland	Yes, several national access plans since 2005	Mainstream the delivery of equity of access to higher education institutions. Improve funding of higher education Gather accurate data on access and participation in higher education Build broader and coherent pathways to higher education Build regional and community partnership strategies	Overall: Ensure that the student body entering, participating and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population. Concrete targets set for equity groups to be achieved by 2021: Increase in the participation of: Students from non-manual working class (32% of age-cohort 18-20) Students from semi/unskilled working class (40% of age-cohort 18-20) First-time mature students (16% of all full-time entrants; 24% of part-time/flexible entrants) Disabled students (12% of all students) Students in part-time and flexible higher education (22% of all students) Students who hold a Further Education Training qualification (10% of all new entrants) Students from Irish travellers (80 students from all entrants to undergraduate studies)
Latvia	No, but widening participation addressed in several planning instruments	No qualitative targets for widening participation	Increase the participation of people aged 30 to 40 to 40% by 2030
Netherlands	No explicit widening participation strategy, but a strategy to increase quality HE for all students, including disadvantaged students	Secure open access Further development of excellence tracks Improve study success Strengthen collaboration between education sectors to improve match of students and programmes Support transition of MBO students to higher education More attention for diversity in educational provision and practice to facilitate transition of diverse student groups Improve flexibility and attractiveness of lifelong learning	Increase the HE qualifications among 24-34-year olds to 50%

		opportunities	
Portugal	No, but widening participation is a major part the overall higher education strategy	Open higher education to students from professional education Diversify provision of higher education Increase success rates in higher education Increase diversity in student population Increase higher education participation in total	Attract new groups students: Adult learners Students from Roma community Disabled students By 2030, 70% of students with professional upper secondary qualification should progress to higher education
Scotland	Yes, implemented in 2015	Ambitions for widening access to universities include:[9] - Develop shared understanding of widening participation issues through the use of consistent language - Develop a set of minimum entry requirements - Guaranteed offers for care experienced learners - Establish common rules for the recognition of prior learning - Achieve more coherence in national bridging programmes to greater benefit pupils and students - Recommendations from Blueprint for Access Report by the Commission for Widening Access - Increase the participation of students from low progression schools	Reduce gender gap for programmes to 5% in 2030 By 2030, no more than 75% of one gender should be represented in one subject Increase the intake of students who are also care-givers by 31% in colleges and 50% in universities in 2018/2019 Increase completion and retention of care giving students to 71% in 2018/2019 Achieve more equality of access for disadvantaged students, in 2030 20% of students should come from the most deprived backgrounds

5.3 Major policies implemented

The reviewed countries differ regarding the widening participation policies implemented. While in countries that have not yet established a comprehensive widening participation approach, such as Latvia and Portugal, there are only a few widening participation policies, countries in which widening participation has strategic priority have implemented more policies (e.g. Ireland, Netherlands, and Scotland). The following tables highlight some important policies found in the eight countries. To compare countries, we have used the main widening participation policies from Section 4.

5.3.1 Regulations

Table 5. Major regulations in the case study countries

	AT	**CZ**	**FR**	**IRL**	**LV**	**NL**	**PT**	**SC**
Accreditation requirements		Institutional accreditation: widening participatio						

[9] https://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/publications/working-to-widen-access/

		n						
Change in admission rules	Studien-berechtigungs-prüfung	Bridging Courses		HEAR DARE		Selection experiment	+23c regime	
Recognition of prior learning	Studien-berechtigungs-prüfung							

Most countries have implemented policies that allow different forms of admission to higher education that go beyond the standard admission rules. The change in admission rules is however implemented differently. In Austria, students with no formal qualification for higher education must pass an exam before enrolment. In the Czech Republic, HEIs offer bridging courses that also improve the academic preparedness of these students. In Ireland, HEAR and DARE offer alternative access to disadvantaged or disabled students who did not perform well in their final exam due to their disadvantaged status or impairment. These students can enter higher education with lower requirements.

In the eight countries studied, there are not (yet) national regulations on the recognition of prior learning, as this is left mostly to HEIs. In Ireland institutional practices of recognition of prior learning are currently being investigated and standardised.

5.3.2 Funding

Table 6. Major funding policies in the case study countries

	AT	**CZ**	**FR**	**IRL**	**LV**	**NL**	**PT**	**SC**
Merit-based grants		Merit-based grants	Aide au mérite		Merit and field-based criteria		Merit-based grants	
Need based grants	Studienzuschuss Studienbeihilfe Selbsterhalterstipendium Studienabschlussstipendium	Social Scholarship	Bourse d'engseignement superieur *sur Criteres Sociaux*	Student Universal Support Ireland Student Assistance Fund 1916 Bursary Funds Fund for Students with Disabilities Back to Education Allowance	Need based elements added to merit based grants	Supplementary grants	Need-based grants +Superior programme	Young Students' Bursary Independent Students' Bursary Disabled Student Allowance
Family allowances	Family allowances Health/accident insurances		Family allowances				Child benefit	
Tax Benefits for parents	Tax benefits per child in HE	Tax benefits per child in HE	Tax relief per Child in HE	Tax relief for tuition fees	Tax benefits per child in HE		Tax deduction	
Student welfare		Financial support for				Free Public		

benefits/ support		accommodation				transport		
Incentives to HEIs	Part of performance contracts between HEIs and Ministry	Institutional development plans	PIA – Plan for Investments in the Future Change in performance funding formula Plan for success Plan for students	Part of block funding Strategic Dialogue		Performance agreements		Widening Access and Retention fund Impact for access Scottish Wider Access Programme
Other						Social loan system		Loans Part-time fee grant

All reviewed countries provide need-based grants for student funding. In Austria, the Czech Republic, France, Latvia, the Netherlands and Portugal there is one scheme for all students in need. Ireland on the other hand uses different funding schemes that address different types of students. As an example, in addition to their universal grant, in Ireland students with children can apply for further financial support through the 1916 bursaries. There are also special grants for disabled students. HEIs can provide financial support to all students in need through the students' assistance funds. In addition, in Scotland there are different funding schemes for the different target groups of students.

Regarding funding institutions, countries have developed different approaches. In Austria, widening participation is addressed in the performance contracts of the HEIs with the Ministry. In the institutional development plans that underlie the performance contracts HEIs must align their planning with targets set out in the national development plans of the Ministry. A similar approach can be found in Ireland. Here the formula for block funding considers the number of students from equity groups, while for the performance budget, HEIs are awarded funds according to their widening participation strategy, which must align with objectives and targets set in the national access plans.

A further important instrument is the provision of additional funding to higher education institutions. This is also done through competitive procedures. In the Czech Republic HEIs can apply for additional funding in the institutional development scheme.

France provides significant additional money for special purposes. The "*Plan d'Investissements pour l'avenir*" (PIA – Plan for Investments in the Future, 2010) involved a €35 billion investment fund in five sectors, including higher education.[10] IDEFI and IDEX are two funds within PIA that impact on higher education. IDEFI (€149 million) funds *Initiatives of Excellence in Innovative Training* aiming to increase education quality and study success. IDEX (€7.7 billion) funds *Initiatives of Excellence*. Both excellence initiatives indirectly aim to enhance the personal development of students and skills relevant to the labour market and society.

5.3.3 Organisation

Among organisational policies, the differentiation of study courses and the implementation of new programmes are most frequently used in the eight countries. Austria and France put special emphasis on the first study year of bachelor programmes. In Austria, students must pass an introductory phase that aims to prepare and equip

[10] This has been implemented in three waves: the first PIA (2010-2013) of €35 billion, the second PIA (2013-2015) of €12 billion, and a third PIA of €10 billion which was recently approved with a stronger focus on teaching (€3 billion to fund excellence initiatives for education: http://www.gouvernement.fr/pia3-5236 (accessed 26-01-2017).

students for their studies but also to reflect their study choice. In France broad introductory first year curricula for bachelor programmes have been established. These allow students to learn more about the different subjects in their area, and to specialise in a later stage of their studies rather than having to choose a specialised bachelor programme at the beginning of their studies. The Netherlands has since the 1980s provided the propedeuse in the first year of study. The propedeuse year aims at supporting students to reflect on their study choice and at testing their competencies. Institutions are free to design the propedeuse, at UAS institutions the propedeuse ends with an exam. UAS students who successfully complete the propedeuse can enrol at bachelor programmes at universities.

In the Netherlands, Ireland and Portugal, short programmes such as Associate Degrees have been introduced. These aim to integrate students that are reluctant to follow longer programmes and have a strong interest in more professionally oriented training. In Ireland, the Springboard initiative aims at providing higher education training to unemployed people. They can select modules, part-time or full-time studies, to refresh or improve their skill profile. In the Netherlands, there are also professional master programmes to better adapt to the demands of students. Another important organisational policy that has been implemented in the Netherlands is the binding study advice. A binding study advice is a decision of a HE institution about students' study progress after one year. A negative study advice means that a student who completed too few credits can no longer be enrolled in the same programme. This started as an experiment in 2006 to stimulate study progress and to reduce delays, in other words to increase the efficiency of higher education. It became obligatory in 2013. Since 2018/2019, institutions can also provide a binding study advice after the second and third years of study (but not for the last study year). Institutions decide how to organise this process and how many credits are required. As many institutions demand a high number of credits per year (often between 40 and 60 out of 60) it now is regarded as a hindrance for students, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, which is why the minister now would like to reduce the demand to a maximum of 40 credits per year.

Table 7. Organisational policies

	AT	**CZ**	**FR**	**IRL**	**LV**	**NL**	**PT**	**SC**
Better prepare students' academic competencies			Contract for educational success Monitoring of progress			Propodeuse (bridging programme)		
Differentiation of study courses/new programmes	Study orientation phase		Broad introductory first year for bachelor programmes	Springboard		Associate Degrees Professional masters	CTeSP (short-cycle tertiary education)	SWAP
More flexible provision of education				Springboard		Flexstudies		
Other						Binding study advice		

5.3.4 Information

Most countries have set up national web portals that provide information to students. The information that is provided differs. In Austria, the website "Studiversum" provides information on HEIs and their programmes, access routes and funding opportunities. In the Czech Republic, similar information is provided via the webpage of the Ministry of Education. In the Netherlands and Portugal, web portals are more comprehensive: these also provide information on the later careers of graduates and the outcomes of student evaluations. In France, a few initiatives have been taken to further improve the information available to students. Among these, the collaboration between upper secondary education institutions and HEIs is important. The recent 'Plan Étudiants' proposes five activity lines to further improve the orientation function towards higher education within the lycées by means of: (1) insuring that each lycée has two senior teachers that provide individual counselling to students working on their study project in the final year of high school; (2) the integration of two orientation weeks in the final year; (3) having an in-depth review of each student's proposed orientation project by the class council; (4) enhancing the dialogue between secondary and higher education institutions under the authority of the Rectors; and (5) the implementation of a "student ambassador" scheme.

The Study Choice Check is an instrument implemented in the Netherlands to support students in checking their study choice. Each HEI must provide students with the opportunity to do such a test before they embark on their study. In the test the students can check if their selected programme would fit their interests and competencies. A negative outcome of the test does not limit students to enrol in their preferred programme, unless they do the test after a certain deadline. Then the outcome can restrict their choices.

Information on institutions plays a role in Ireland and Scotland. Ireland is currently implementing a new data plan to collect data on participation in higher education. The plan will use a small area approach to learn about regional disparities. The new data plan also aims to cover the whole educational life cycle of students to see at which points individuals move out of the educational pathway. The new data aims at better information on higher education policies. In Ireland and Scotland, research on the effectiveness of widening participation policies is undertaken. Scotland generates and shares knowledge on barriers and instruments to widen participation in the 'Impact for Access' scheme: it monitors data from the moment students are admitted to tertiary education institutions up to and including their transition to further study or work. The initiative allows the Scottish Funding Council, as well as universities and colleges, to better evaluate what actions positively affect tertiary education access and helps to produce evidence to support future decisions. The evidence is also used to inform the Scottish Commission on Widening Access (CoWA). In Ireland, the Higher Education Authority engages in this area in commissioning evaluation studies on implemented policies and organising dissemination events.

Table 8. Information policies

	AT	**CZ**	**FR**	**IRL**	**LV**	**NL**	**PT**	**SC**
Supporting study choice	Website: studyversum Consultation officers at institutions Peer-Mentoring	Ministry website on HEI and their programmes	SCUIOIP Admission post bac Close collaboration between upper secondary and tertiary		Career week Career counselling teachers Websites Support by student unions	Study Choice Check Binding study advice Website: Studiekeuze 123	Website: Infocursos	

			education Five lines of orientation in Plan Etudiants					
Monitoring of students	Monitoring of entrants Monitoring of students' social situation			Data plan				Progress reports
Knowledge dissemination: investigating barriers to higher education for disadvantaged students				HEA Dissemination events				Impact for access

5.4 Monitoring and evaluation

5.4.1 Changes in student population

Data on the development of the student population in the different countries in recent years is difficult to trace. In Ireland, Scotland and Austria information on the participation of target groups for widening participation policies is available. In Ireland, some of the targets set in the national access plan for 2019 have already been met (increased percentage of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds) while other targets appear to be difficult to realise (the participation of mature students or access via alternative routes).

Table 9. Major changes in student population

Country	Major changes
Austria	• Number of new entrants has remained stable since 2010 • Between 2009 and 2015 participation of specific groups in higher education hardly changed
Czech Republic	• Steep increase in student numbers and in number of entrants to higher education between 2003 and 2010 • Since 2011 student numbers and number of entrants are decreasing. • Research on access showed that increase in student numbers was mostly among students from higher social backgrounds • No up-to-date statistics on composition of student population
France	• Increase in student numbers • Increase in transition to higher education among students with vocational bac • Relative distribution between students from different socio-economic backgrounds has not changed much in recent years • Gender imbalance in some programmes, women more frequently choosing higher education. • Lower completion among students from disadvantaged groups

Ireland	• Student numbers have shown a steady increase since 2012 at universities • Stable student numbers at Institutes of Technology • Participation of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds has increased • Percentage of mature students has declined • Participation of disabled students has increased • No change in percentage of part-time/flexible students • No change in percentage of students accessing higher education through alternative admission
Latvia	• Decline in student numbers • Targets for higher education attainment (% of population with higher education degree in selected age group) were achieved • Strong gender disparities in attainment rate: attainment among females twice as high as among males
Netherlands	• Increase of student numbers • More diversity in student population • Increase in completion and retention across all groups of students • Gender and ethnicity important determinants for access route to higher education and study choice
Portugal	• No public data available
Scotland	• Already 20% of students come from the most deprived areas • Number of care-experienced students has increased • Gender imbalance: Females represent a higher share • 8.1% of entrants are black minority ethnic students • 20.3% have a declared disability

5.4.2 Evaluation of widening participation policies

The eight countries differ considerably in terms of the evaluation of widening participation policies. France, Latvia and the Czech Republic appear not to have an evaluation framework for higher education policies. This seems to be the case also for Portugal, but there is no English language information available on this issue.

Among the eight countries reviewed, Ireland and the Netherlands engage most strongly in evaluating policies. Ireland has evaluated its higher education funding system including how it affects widening participation. The evaluation of the student funding system led to a change of the funding modalities: grants were increased as well as restored to post-graduate students. Currently there is a discussion on whether funding for part-time students should be made available. In addition, new funding opportunities for students have been developed such as the 1916 bursary that specifically addresses single parents. For institutional funding, the evaluation led to a change in the funding formula and the continued use of the strategic dialogue in the performance related budget.

In the Netherlands, the performance agreements did push institutions to become more transparent about their efforts and successes in areas such as improving students' degree completion (Reviewcommissie Hoger Onderwijs en Onderzoek, 2017). In addition, the stronger focus on teacher qualifications, the monitoring of study performance and more intense study methodologies strengthened the professionalisation and perceived importance of teaching in higher education. This has resulted in a more positive study climate and more attention for students' needs. As such, more students have found an appropriate match in the system and dropout rates, particularly in universities, have decreased.

The major change from basic grants to all students to a full loans system in the Netherlands in 2015 has not led to major participation issues. As the means-tested supplementary grants remained available to students from less well-off families (30%-35% of all students), this did not strongly change the composition of the student body.

Only participation by students from the poorest backgrounds, for example, single mother families, appears to have decreased. Student loans have not deterred students, particularly when they are well informed. However, students in secondary vocational education (mbo) appear to be less well informed about student financing than havo and vwo students. Those who are well informed show less resistance to borrowing (ResearchNed, 2018).

Table 10. Evaluation of widening participation policies

Country	Evaluation framework	Regulation	Funding	Organisation	Information
Austria	Selective evaluations		Review of student funding – Longer periods of funding required Some groups not well funded: disabled, mature students, students from abroad		
Czech Republic	No framework for policy evaluation	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
France	No framework for policy evaluation				
Ireland	Midterm Review of national access plans HEA continuously evaluates policies	HEAR DARE HEA currently reviewing practices for recognition of prior learning	Comprehensive review of higher education funding system - Student funding: increase of funding, new allocation model, restored to postgraduate students, development of new funding opportunities for new types of students - HEI funding: Change of funding formula Performance funding: ongoing strategic dialogue	Review of part-time and flexible studies	Review of current student monitoring, development of new data plan HEA collects knowledge about effective access instruments at institutional level and disseminates it.
Latvia	No framework for policy				Plans to implement graduate

	evaluation				tracking
Netherlands	Has framework for policy evaluation		Effectiveness of the supplementary grant Effect of student loan system on HE participation	Effects of binding study advice Effects of study choice check	Progress of students Transition rates
Portugal	No English language information available	Studies on admission system			
Scotland	No information included in case study report				

6 Widening participation policies in the European academic literature

This section provides a summary from a systematic overview of academic papers presenting robust research evidence on the effects of higher education policies in Europe that aim at supporting disadvantaged students to access and to complete higher education. Research evidence is considered to be robust if it is the result of appropriate research methodologies used to justify real causal relationship between an intervention and its outcomes. Such analyses can be mostly found in academic papers, published either in established academic research journals, a book or academic working papers. For details on the methodology applied in the selection process please refer to Section 3.3.

Main findings from the reviewed research are divided according to the policy lever and policy objective. In the academic literature two out of the four main levers of social inclusion policies discussed in the report could be distinguished: funding policies and information policies – both targeted at students. The papers that discuss a financial support type of policy can be further divided according to the policy aim considered in the analysis. First, we summarise studies that look at the access-effects of student support programmes, then we discuss those papers that consider the completion-effect of the funding. In Annex 3 a detailed overview of all these research papers, covering also the policy context and the methodology is given in two summary tables.[11]

6.1 Funding: financial support for students

As it was reflected in the case study overview, the most often considered barrier to equal access to education relates to financial constraints that lower social status students are facing. Pursuing higher education involves significant costs that might exceed the resources available in low income families. While direct financial costs appear only in countries where higher education is not publicly financed, and tuition fees are in effect, indirect costs are unavoidable and include potentially high costs of living during the studies. Financial support can be considered as a reduction of costs associated with going to university. Economic theory suggests that suboptimal under-consumption of higher education is due to credit constraints that prevent the financing of higher education costs by loans borrowed against future income. While other students can rely upon their parents' savings, for students from low income families, these constraints can become effective barriers of pursuing and successfully continuing post-compulsory studies[12] (see, e.g. Page and Scott-Clayton, 2016).

Financial support to students is both expected to provide better access to these groups and to help them to successfully graduate, i.e. to prevent early drop-outs. To achieve these objectives and thus to reduce social inequalities in higher education, need-based financial support has been introduced in many countries across Europe as discussed in the previous sections and also elsewhere (EC, EACEA, and Eurydice, 2017) but also outside Europe (OECD, 2016). The first part of the present section focuses on studies

[11] A recent review of evidence of effectiveness of widening participation intervention is provided by Younger, Gascoine, Menzies, and Torgerson (2018). This review however – although only recently published - was conducted in 2012/2013, thus it does not include recent studies.

[12] This has important implications for the distribution of educational opportunities. In fact, it has been suggested in the literature (see Checchi, 2006) that imperfect capital markets and credit constraints tend to give rise to outcomes in which only high-ability students from poor households can attend high-quality education[12] (because for them the signalling problem is solved by their observed ability), while poor students characterized by middle and low ability are likely to have access to average-low quality education institutions and skip tertiary education altogether. On the contrary, richer households are more able to support the costs of education of their descendants even if they are not particularly brilliant. Ultimately, this gives rise to low social mobility and low equality of opportunities, and this effect tends to be higher the higher are the costs of education, the lower is public support to education (e.g. financial aid) and the less developed are capital markets.

that investigate the links between financial support programmes and access to higher education, while the second part provides a review of recent European studies assessing changes in drop-out rates and degree completion.

6.1.1 Funding and access to higher education

6.1.1.1 Overview

Student aid (or grant) systems, often targeted at students in greatest financial need, aim at reducing the costs involved in obtaining a degree. As a consequence of reduced costs, students, and especially socially disadvantaged students, are expected to opt for higher education in higher numbers. In the USA, where student fees constitute a large and increasing part of most higher education institutions' revenues, and thus costs associated with college studies are putting an increasing financial burden on the families (Page and Scott-Clayton, 2016), impact evaluation of the different grant schemes are repeatedly reporting significant positive effects on student-enrolment in colleges. Recent reviewers of this literature conclude that *"research definitely shows that aid can be effective in reducing financial barriers to entering higher education".* Research systematically confirms that the associations found between financial aids and student enrolment rates are indeed causal ones (Page and Scott-Clayton, 2016). It is estimated that an increase by $1,000 in the annual subsidy paid for students increase their higher education enrolment by 3 to 5 percentage points on average (Nielsen, Sørensen, and Taber, 2010). Even in the USA however, evidence is scarce on why one support programme works better than the other, and what elements of the programmes contribute to the variations in the effect-size (Dynarski and Scott-Clayton, 2013 p32).

6.1.1.2 Research in Europe

Altogether, we identified five research papers that consider a financial support system's impact on students' higher education enrolment in a European country. In these, the influence of financial support on students' enrollment in the UK, France, Italy, Germany and Denmark are assessed, providing a reasonable mix of the European higher education contexts. In these countries, either a limited but significant (compared to the US) effect, or (in the case of Italy) no enrollment-effect was associated with the grants. Variations in the results are most likely related to the financial costs of university studies and the grant entitlement-criteria applied in various settings.

- The UK study (Dearden, Fitzsimons, and Wyness, 2014) investigated the introduction of a new maintenance grant for students with low-income parents[13] (below 22,500 GBP yearly income). The main results suggest that a 1,000 GBP increase in the grant corresponds to a 3.95 percentage points increase of higher education participation of the targeted population. (Still leaving the social gap quite significant with only 15% of low-income, compared to 26% of higher income students, enrolled in the university.) At that time, no tuition fee applied to UK students enrolled in UK universities.

- In France, Fack and Grenet (2015) investigated several different study-outcomes associated with the country's major higher education support program, the *Bourses d'enseignement supérieur sur Criteres Sociaux* (BCR)[14]. BCR is a national financial support scheme for students from low-income families who want to enter higher education in France and seven distinct levels of grants are defined[15].

[13] From the academic year 2004/2005, a maximum of 1,050 GBP grant was offered to students below this threshold.

[14] For further details on the grant system please refer to Annex 2; Case study 3: France

[15] The amount of grant received depends on parents' taxable income but also the distance between parents' home and institution as well as the number of siblings. Students have to re-apply after each year, and a new assessment of the needs but also of the achievement of some minimum academic requirements is taking place.

Results suggest that an annual cash grant of 1,500 Euros makes a 2.7 percentage points increase in the level of overall enrolment in public universities in France (corresponding to 3.4% of the number of students who apply). Further 600 Euros increments in the grant are related to further, although smaller effects of around 0.7 percentage points, which are also statistically less significant (only at the 0.10 level). Assuming that the effect is linear, a 1,000 Euros increase in the amount of student aid corresponds to a 2 percentage points increase in the level of enrolment.

- In Denmark, a major reform of the student grant system was introduced in 1988. A detailed assessment of the impact (Nielsen et al., 2010) revealed that 1,000 USD increment in the grant resulted in a 1.35% points growth in the enrolment level. Estimates also show that by eliminating the grant, the total enrolment would decrease by seven percentage points. Despite the overall positive impact, however, the findings indicated no effect on social inequality in higher education, as the impact does not vary by parental income. This suggests that borrowing constraints are not severely influencing lower-income students' higher education participation in Denmark.

- In Germany, the enrollment effects of the student grants based on the Federal Education and Training Assistance Act[16] (BAfoeG) were tested by Steiner and Wrohlich (2008). Findings showed that the elasticity of higher education enrollment in Germany is small but statistically significant. An increase of the subsidy by 1,000 Euro per year would increase the cumulated probability (the enrollment rate within five years after high school graduation) from 76.2 to 78.4%. The Authors argued that the relatively small effect might be the result of the fact that the German education system is rather selective at the lower levels.

- In Italy, a province-level educational program launched in the province of Trento in 2009/2010 is assessed in a survey-based study (Vergolini and Vlach, 2017). The intervention aimed at fostering equal access to university by introducing a combined means-tested/merit-based grant available to students that are resident in Trento[17]. Results suggested that, in this case, the aid did not influence the enrolment rates. Authors argue that this might be due to the relatively high achievement-criteria involved, as students with such high grades would most likely decide for attending university even if it is financially demanding. At the same time, the grant led to some re-shifting of the applications to universities outside the province, resulting in a better match, as students applying outside Trento were more likely to enrol in subjects not offered in Trento, hence avoiding potential mismatch problems.

All in all, the small number of evidence suggests that financial constraints might be somewhat less detrimental for higher education studies in Europe than they are in the USA. Still, French, German and also British findings demonstrate non-negligible potentials effects that means tested student funding might have on promoting social equality in higher education. As it has been noted by Vergolini and Zanini (Vergolini and Zanini, 2015), in Europe the effectiveness of financial grants is uncertain, depending on the individual policy contexts. The studies presented here suggest that effect-size is likely

[16] The means-tested grant was introduced in 1971 to promote equal opportunities for all. Students can apply for the grant after being accepted for higher education and eligibility is based on students' and parents' resources. The sum received depends on the difference between estimated needs and the individual resources available. Eligibility is reassessed on a yearly basis.

[17] To gain eligibility, students need to earn a minimum final score of 93 (out of 100) and have a family equivalent income below 30,000 Euros. The amount of grant received depends both on family income and whether the student is enrolling at a university in Trento (1,200-6,000 Euro per year) or outside the Province (1,800-6,000 Euro).

to be bigger if relative costs associated with higher education are high, a reasonable pool of socially disadvantaged students are eligible for higher education studies, and if the merit-criteria associated with grant eligibility is not overly strict.

6.1.2 Funding and completion

6.1.2.1 Overview

A reduction in the direct and indirect costs of higher education studies is generally not only expected to promote low-status students' enrolment to universities but also to keep them on track, i.e. to lower their risk of drop-out and to help them to successfully graduate within a reasonable amount of time. This is so because financial support is expected to stimulate students' intrinsic motivation for continuous and successful studies but also to help low-income students to rely less on work-income and spend more time on study-related activities (Agasisti and Murtinu, 2016; Fack and Grenet, 2015; Glocker, 2011). This is important as excessive work during higher education can prolong the studies and even prevent successful graduation. It has been noted, however, that even fewer studies seem to investigate the effects financial aids have on successful graduation than on enrollment (Agasisti and Murtinu, 2016; Glocker, 2011).

6.1.2.2 Research in Europe

In this section, European research papers looking at outcomes linked to successful completion are discussed in detail. Empirical evidence, in this case, is coming from Italy (3 studies), Germany (1 study), France (1 study)[18] and Denmark (1 study). Some of the interventions assessed here refer to the same funding system that was already considered in the previous section.

- In Italy, two research papers were identified. Both looked at the effects of the national student grant-system[19] on drop-out risk and study continuation. The Italian case is particularly interesting as Italy is characterized by high drop-out rates and a long graduation process. In a 2012 study, (Mealli and Rampichini, 2012) the cohort of first-year students who enrolled to one of four Italian state universities (Catania, Milan, Padova and Salerno) in 1999 were considered. Findings suggested that only in Padova was the grant effectively preventing students from low-income families to drop out, while it had no significant effect on the drop-out risk in the other three cities. Moreover, even in Padova, only students whose economic status is close to the threshold (i.e. those that relatively are less poor) were positively affected, while the grant does not sufficiently improve the situation of the poorer students. The authors concluded that these limitations are most likely due to the amount of the aid being insufficient to influence higher education decisions of the poorest students.[20]

- In another Italian study, first-year students enrolled in Politecnico di Milano (a technical university) in 2007/08 were followed for four years and again the effects

[18] In France, the same study by Fack and Grenet (Fack and Grenet, 2015) was looking at both the enrolment effects and the completion effects of the French grant system.

[19] To become available for the national student grant, at the enrollment at university, both merit- and income-based criteria need to be met. Eligibility criteria include achieving a minimum of 70/100 high school grade and having annual family income and assets below a certain threshold. After receiving the applications, students are ranked based on an equivalence scale, and then an ex-post eligibility criterion is set. The amount they receive depends on the position they hold on this scale, with minimum and maximum amounts defined. During the higher education years, students need to achieve a certain (not very high) number of credits to maintain eligibility for the grant (Mealli and Rampichini, 2012).

[20] In 1999, the minimum level of the grant was around 1,400 Euro per year in Catania and Milan, but it almost reached 3,000 Euro in Salerno, with the maximum levels varying between 2,000 and 3,500 Euros. In Padova, the range in the same year was from 1,551 to 3,600 Euros.

of the Italian student grants were assessed (Agasisti and Murtinu, 2016).[21] Positive outcomes identified include a decreased risk of drop-out in the first- and the second year (-17 and -19.6% respectively) and a 10.3 points increment in the credits students achieved in their first year of study. Receiving the grant also increases the probability to graduate on time by 19.3% and the probability to graduate by the end of the fourth year by 25.9%. The results appeared to be robust across several robustness checks, and they do not change substantially also when the narrower control group is considered. The effects show some heterogeneity across the various groups of students. In particular immigrants (that are underrepresented in the Italian universities and also have higher than average drop-out rates) seem to get more benefits from the support than Italian students do. This mostly appears in the form of additional credit points and decreased drop-out rates. The authors suggest that the apparent general success of the program is likely to be related to the merit-element involved in the eligibility criteria, as they "seem to stimulate higher performances among recipients" (Agasisti and Murtinu, 2016, p. 1125).

- A third study from Italy, on the other hand, was looking at a special regional grant[22], provided by the Regional Agency for the Right of Education to students in the University of Trieste (Graziosi, 2013).[23] In the analyses only students in Chemistry, Physics and Mathematics are considered. In this case, the estimates suggest that the likelihood of enrolling to year 2 (i.e. not dropping out during or after the 1st year) is increasing by 0.18 as a consequence of the grant. With regard to successful graduation, however, neither of the methods showed any significant grant-effect.

- Assessing the consequences of the 1988 Danish reform mentioned in the previous section (Nielsen et al., 2010), another paper looks at the effects the grant has on drop-out rates of students (Arendt, 2013). Controlling for a range of individual but also labour market-related variables, the study identifies a significant impact of the reform on the drop-out rates of students. Drop-out rates were lowered almost by half among students from low socio-economic backgrounds. These are the groups most responsive to the reform. Effects of the reform on the hazard to completion are also found to be positive but statistically not significant (in this case, the social-background specific effects were not estimated). As the reform consisted of several elements, it is difficult to identify which of them contributed the most to the impact.

- In France, the same study that analyses the enrollment effects of the BCS program[24] also assessed the impact it has on study continuation and completion (Fack and Grenet, 2015). Results suggested that even though the grant is more effective in increasing enrollment than in improving continuation from one year to another, the latter effect is also significant. Receiving a grant of 1,500 Euros increases the probability of being enrolled in the second year by 3.7 percentage

[21] In their overview of the student support system, Agasisti and Murtini explained that there are no merit-based eligibility criteria in effect at the stage of application. A (rather low) performance requirement only appears after the first year.

[22] The grant is awarded in the first year of their studies when eligibility is solely based on financial criteria. For maintaining eligibility, in the subsequent years, a minimum credit-level (25 credits for the second and 80 for the third year) has to be achieved. The yearly sum varies from 1,706 to 4,524 Euros (the reference year 2008) depending on the economic and also on the residential status (resident/commuter/non-resident) of the student.

[23] In the same study, effects of another grant were also assessed. The grant offered by the Fonda Foundation is only merit-based, thus it is not targeting low-income students. As in the paper only overall effects of this grant were estimated – that is, no heterogeneity by parental background was considered – this part of the analysis does not fit our selection criteria and was therefore not included in this report.

[24] For some details on the grant system and the methodology of the study see the previous section.

points and the probability of being enrolled in the third year by 4.4 percentage points. However, no significant effect on on-time degree completion is found. Like enrolment effects, continuation effects are also stronger for Master than for Bachelor degree students. Moreover, at the Masters level, the support received at the time of enrolment also positively affects degree completion. Concerning the impact of the grant received for the last year of the study programme (i.e. year three at the Bachelor and year two at Master level) a significant effect both on enrolment for this final year (1.9 percentage points) and on students' chances of completing their degree (3.1 percentage points) is also found. These patterns are consistent with the selection process in the French universities, where selection occurs not at the enrolment stage, but later, as weakest students gradually drop out. Accordingly, it is expected that the remaining, most able low-income students are the ones benefitting the most from the grant.

- Finally, another study from Germany looked at the effects of the German student grant system (Federal Education and Training Assistance Act - BAföG) on the duration of the study and also on the probability of graduation (Glocker, 2011). Results suggested that BAföG significantly decreases the risk of drop-out: an increase of 1,000 EUR in the level of student grant reduces the conditional probability to drop-out by 2.6 percentage points. This is quite an important effect, reducing by almost half the risk of dropping out in the first semester.

Although variations in the specific grant scheme assessed, as well as in the policy environment and in the research methodologies applied make a full comparison difficult, most of the studies reviewed here reveal some statistically significant, sometimes even notable positive effects that student grants have on students' performance at the universities. As we were mainly reviewing needs-based study grants, this implies that their provision effectively contributes to reducing social inequalities in at least some of the European higher education institutions either by preventing early drop-out or by increasing credit achievement among the socially disadvantaged student body. It is also important to notice that the only study which distinguishes immigrant students (Agasisti and Murtinu, 2016) can even identify additional positive effects on this double-disadvantaged group. Again, the existence and also the extent of these benefits vary across systems, and further work is needed to identify the main elements a successful student funding scheme should have – depending also on the institutional environment. Nevertheless, these findings are reassuring as they give reliable evidence to support the common assumption that financial funds can help disadvantaged students to successfully complete higher education.

6.2 Information policies for students

6.2.1 Overview

Research repeatedly shows that students are often under-informed or even misinformed about important aspects of higher education. Information barriers can relate to the range of available courses as well as to the costs and benefits of entering higher education in general, and specific higher education programmes in particular, and also to available financing options (Ehlert, Finger, Rusconi, and Solga, 2017; Wiswall and Zafar, 2015). Further, students might also have inaccurate expectations regarding their chances of success in higher education (Abbiati, Argentin, Barone, and Schizzerotto, 2017; Barone, Schizzerotto, Abbiati, and Argentin, 2017). Such information failures can prevent young people from making well-informed, rational choices when deciding about (dis)continuing their studies and choosing institution and also subject areas (Abbiati et al., 2017; Page and Scott-Clayton, 2016).

It is repeatedly suggested that parents who did not go to higher education might have less information and be less helpful in guiding their children's career plans, which, in turn, makes lack of information particularly salient in the low socio-economic student groups. Research evidence, however, is not fully conclusive in this respect, and it is unclear whether or not socially disadvantaged students hold systematically more biased visions about higher education (for an overview see Barone et al., 2017). Students from low-income families are more concerned about the costs of entering higher education then children of higher status parents who are more likely to attend higher education irrespective of the costs perceived (Ehlert et al., 2017). For all these reasons it is still widely assumed that accessing accurate and adequate information about the costs and returns of attaining university can be of particular importance for students with less financial resources.

Based on these considerations, providing pre-higher education students with timely and adequate information is expected to improve their higher education attendance – and especially so for students from lower social backgrounds. To test this hypothesis, and to help to develop effective intervention programs, a growing body of research is employing randomized experimental research design. This type of research design is a powerful tool to establish causality between factors and thus testing the effectiveness of an intervention, as it creates optimal circumstances to isolate the effect of the intervention from any other possible confounding effects (Bouguen and Gurgand, 2012; Hutchison and Styles, 2010). Typical research designs to investigate the relevance of information-gaps in unequal access to higher education, therefore, consist of randomly selecting a group of students that is then exposed to an information-session (treated group) and comparing their behaviour/intentions to those of a control group not exposed to the treatment. Knowledge about higher education options and intentions of entering into higher education are measured before and after the intervention, and observed changes in both groups are then compared to each other. In some of the studies, available data also allows for testing for differences in the actual enrolment behaviour across the two groups. As studies in the field are typically field experiments – that is experiments that take place in real schools and not in laboratories – this type of research also achieves high levels of external validity. This means that we can expect similarly designed interventions to lead to similar consequences also in a natural, non-experimental setting. The studies presented here can therefore be useful to inform interventions labelled as *Special support for specific groups for study choice* previously in this report.

6.2.2 Findings from outside Europe

Earlier research in the field comes mainly from the USA and some from developing countries.[25] In the USA, the growing complexity of administering college application and navigating across the financing options is claimed to be a major challenge to achieve equality in tertiary education (Page and Scott-Clayton, 2016). Main results generally suggest that providing information can increase students' *knowledge* of the costs and benefits of higher education studies, and this increment is higher for students from low-income families. Also, in most cases, some significant improvement in the level of *aspirations* of these students is found. It is less clear, however, whether or not and under which circumstances a change in *behaviour* – i.e. in the probability of actually applying for university – can also be achieved (McGuigan, McNally, and Wyness, 2016). This is a pressing issue particularly because changes in intentions do not necessarily lead to increased enrollment (See, e.g. Kerr, Pekkarinen, Sarvimaki, and Uusitalo, 2014).

One example of a promising finding on behavioural changes comes from a recent study assessing the impact of a low-cost USA intervention, the ECO-Comprehensive project (Hoxby and Turner, 2016). Here high-achieving low-income students received semi-customized information on the applications process; college costs and they were given

[25] The summary included in this section is based on overviews provided by (Page and Scott-Clayton, 2016; Peter and Zambre, 2017).

no-paperwork application fee waivers. As a consequence, treated students were more likely to apply and be admitted to colleges – particularly to the most selective ones.

So far it is also not well established how the particular conditions of the intervention influence effectiveness. It is important as interventions tested vary significantly in content (*What information? To what detail? Personalized or general messages? Are non-university options discussed? etc*.) but also in the mode of content-delivery (*face to face versus leaflets; internet-based communication or video session – or a combination of some of these*). Within face-to-face support, further variations exist by length and number of the information sessions, but also by whom the session is delivered (trained researcher, school-support staff etc.) and also by the level and amount of interactions involved in the session. (Peter and Zambre, 2017).

6.2.3 Relevance of non-European findings in the European context

When interpreting results coming from the US, one has to bear in mind that college attendance here involves particularly high financial costs, which might make the informational barriers relatively less relevant for students from low-income families who are more constrained by financial barriers. At the same time, however, the US system is also characterized by a rather complex application procedure as well as a complicated system of student aids. Therefore in the support-packages designed to help low-social background students, beside information-provision, also assistance in navigating through the process of the college search and financial aid application is included – making it often impossible to distinguish the effects of the different elements of the intervention (Page and Scott-Clayton, 2016).

Researchers in Italy claim that the introduction of the Bologna process increased the complexity of the system and that the massive changes it introduced made the higher education system more difficult to navigate for the (prospective) students as well as for their parents. Beside the newly introduced bachelor and master cycles, in certain study areas (in Law and Medicine in particular) the old model persists, making the system increasingly differentiated. Further, many years have to pass before it is possible to ascertain the labour market returns offered by the newly introduced programmes – adding to the information gaps students have to deal with (Barone et al., 2017). These changes are by no means unique in Italy. Since the introduction of the three-cycle system has affected all the Member States, significant structural changes have been taking place everywhere, increasing the complexity of the system. These tendencies make the investigation of the role of information gaps increasingly relevant also in Europe.

6.2.4 Research in Europe

In our study, we identified five papers that provide evidence on three different experimental studies that are aimed at promoting equal access to higher education through information-provision in Europe. The three projects come from Germany (two studies), Italy (two studies) and the UK (one study). From the five papers, two consider the effects of an intervention on the actual university-enrolment *behaviour* of the students, while the other three measure changes in the *intentions* to enrol in higher education[26].

- Although plans and intentions are often considered as powerful predictors of actual behaviour, the ultimate aim of these interventions is to change behaviour, i.e. to increase enrolment among the disadvantaged groups. As elsewhere, also in Europe, research so far has been more efficient in demonstrating the role of information provision in improving students' knowledge and promoting their enrolment intentions than in boosting their actual university enrolment. An

[26] As mentioned before we restricted our review to studies that consider the equality effects of the interventions, this is why for example the information provision intervention described in (Kerr, Pekkarinen, Sarvimaki, and Uusitalo, 2014) is not discussed.

important example of such promising finding is coming from a Berlin study (Ehlert et al., 2017) that considers college application behaviour of the treated students who already had an intention to apply to university before the intervention. Students one year before graduation in eight randomly selected secondary schools in Berlin were given a 25 minutes presentation by a trained researcher.[27] After controlling for a range of cognitive and non-cognitive skills[28], treated students from different social backgrounds were compared to their counterparts from the control group (receiving only a baseline treatment – a flyer with some general information and a list of relevant websites), who had similar intentions and comparable parental background. For students whose parents did not have a higher education degree and who already had an intention to enrol into postsecondary education at the time of the intervention,[29] the treatment made a significant difference. Looking at actual college enrolment, in this group, an 18.4% gap between the treated and the non-treated subgroup was identified. The intervention also had a significant – although somewhat smaller – effect in the group of students who only had one parent with a higher education degree, while in the most privileged group (both parents with higher education), no effect was found.

- Another study based on the same experiment offers additional details on those factors that are likely to contribute to the behaviour-change discussed above. This second paper does not look at the behavioural effects itself but considers changes in knowledge and intentions only (Peter and Zambre, 2017). Based on the follow-up surveys it shows that students exposed to the treatment could well comprehend the information provided in the session as treated students had significantly more realistic expectations than did non-treated students. They also find that after the information session, students whose parents hold no higher education degree increased their intentions to enter college and this increased level was maintained even one year after the intervention.

- Findings from a major Italian experiment also confirm the capacity of information-provision to enhance students' knowledge about post-secondary educational prospects. Regarding the behavioural effects – actual enrolment of the treated students – this intervention resulted in mixed outcomes. In this 2013 project, a randomized experiment in 62 Italian schools took place, involving around 9,000 high school seniors. Schools in four provinces were selected and stratified by province and school track. Students in half of the schools were treated and followed up by a longitudinal survey[30]. (Abbiati et al., 2017; Barone et al., 2017).

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[27] Content covered included statistics on earnings and unemployment risks of university graduates compared to vocational training graduates. Different fields of studies as well as funding opportunities were discussed For details on the project see https://www.diw.de/de/diw_02.c.244287.de/ueber_uns/menschen_am_diw_berlin/mitarbeiter/innen.html?id=diw_01.c.409542.de

[28] Cognitive and non-cognitive skills measured in the first wave of the study were controlled for. These include the average of grade points on a scale from 15 (best) to 0 (fail); and appropriate measurements for locus of control, risk aversion and figural cognitive competences.

[29] In the paper it is explained that the study was restricted to those with an intention for the following reasons. "First, we want to study the importance of information deficits for those who are "closest" to college application decisions in terms of eligibility and self-interest. Second, for this group, lower grades should reflect real differences in academic performance rather than anticipations of not enrolling in college. Third, at this advanced stage in their school career, students with college intentions may not have information deficits but rather lack financial resources or parental support." (Ehlert, Finger, Rusconi, and Solga, 2017, p. 194)

[30] The intervention, consisted of a series of three particularly comprehensive counselling sessions, taking altogether five hours. Topics covered in details included the direct and the opportunity costs of entering university, as well as the occupational returns to university when compared to high school diplomas.

- Out of the two studies exploring the impacts of this trial, the first one focuses on changes in students' knowledge and intentions (Barone et al., 2017). The main conclusion here points at significant improvements in students' expectations regarding the costs and benefits of the various educational paths, although the information biases were not completely removed. About enrolment-preferences of the treated students, a shift towards longer university programs as well as towards vocational tertiary education is found. This latter shift is more prevalent in the lower classes, as underprivileged students who had no intention to enter higher education previously, increased their interest in the vocational options.

- The second study based on the same experiment but focused on the actual enrolment behaviour one year after the treatment confirms only partial correspondence between the changes in the intentions and the actual application patterns. (Abbiati et al., 2017). In terms of actual enrolment it shows that the comprehensive information about costs and benefits, led to a more efficient, but not to a more equal educational path-selection of the students. As a consequence of the intervention, redistribution between the various segments of the post-secondary education sector took place. Treated students moved away from weak tertiary education fields – that is fields providing poor credentials in the labour market – and opted more for post-secondary vocational programs. From an economic point of view, the resulting allocation can be considered as a more efficient one: in Italy, post-secondary vocational programs provide a safer option to achieve better employment prospects relative to weak tertiary education fields, this shift improved the prospects of many students. However, it was mainly the students from less educated families that made such a shift. The more privileged students on the other hand were most likely to react instead by moving towards the more rewarding university fields. This shows that better information might lead to better decisions but not necessarily to more equal access to university. Indeed, the study demonstrates the power of information in directing students' educational choices into the more lucrative study programs – let them be inside or outside the university sector. However, social background can affect the direction of this shift. Low social background students might be particularly more likely to choose a vocational study programme, when – as in Italy – the costs of attending university are relatively high, funding opportunities limited and economic rewards modest. According to the Authors, the highly stratified nature of the Italian educational system might further contribute to this tendency, as a large proportion of the students are already on a vocational track in the secondary school.

- In the UK a (partially) comparable study targeted 15-year old students in 2010/11 in 54 London secondary schools (McGuigan et al., 2016). The intervention, in this case, did not involve any face to face counselling. Instead, treated students were given access to a website that offered information on the costs and benefits of continuing their studies after compulsory education, including information on the wage premium and the employment prospects of graduates as well as on tuition fees, maintenance grants and loans available. The follow-up survey 18-12 weeks after the treatment showed that no more than 16% of all the invited students had visited the website – suggesting the limitations of this less intense, albeit undoubtedly cheap form of information-campaign. Moreover, the less advantaged students – i.e. those with fewer books at home, those not in independent schools – were less likely to seek information than others. Nevertheless, for those few who

Emphasis was given to explaining differences by fields of study, and also by Bachelor versus Masters degrees. The last session included a discussion on opportunities to participate in vocational higher education. All sessions were held by professional educators that had been trained by the research team.

visited the website, positive outcomes were found: their knowledge about finance, opportunity costs, and expected benefits of post-compulsory education substantially improved. In the short term at least, they also demonstrated an increased interest in pursuing post-compulsory education – but not higher education. These changes were most likely to occur among boys and students with lower socio-economic backgrounds. Unfortunately, the project coincided with a public announcement that tuition fees will be increased in the UK from 3,000 to 9,000 GBP per year. The announcement evoked massive anger and an intensely negative media coverage. As a consequence, it is hard to establish how students would have had reacted on the experiment without such an additional effect.

To sum up, the few studies discussed here show that decreasing students' information deficit can also make an impact in European settings, although their influence on knowledge and study plans is clearer than their influence on students' application behaviour. Out of the three experiments discussed above, the most promising results come from the German study (Ehlert et al., 2017; Peter and Zambre, 2017). Here a face to face session of a moderate length (45 minutes), delivering detailed information on costs and benefits in a highly standardized manner was associated with a significant increase in the proportion of low social background but ambitious students that applied for higher education studies. The Italian experience however also indicates that behavioural changes induced by information provision are not necessarily promoting social equity. Instead, a better understanding of the costs and benefits of further studies might motivate low social background students to reconsider higher education plans and switch to vocational studies especially if the latter also provides relatively high benefits albeit for lower costs.

7 Main conclusions

This report provides an inventory of policy instruments used across the European Union (EU 28) to promote the social inclusion of students from under-represented groups, such as students from low socio-economic or educational backgrounds, ethnic minorities, migrants and refugees in higher education. Based on a review of academic and policy literature across the EU and eight in-depth country case studies, this study formulates a typology of main policy levers – such as regulations, funding, organisation and information – used by Member States, regions and/or higher education institutions to stimulate widening participation and social inclusion in higher education. In addition, it explores to what extent social inclusion policies are used, monitored and evaluated in the Member States. It also reviews recent research studies that provide methodologically sound impact analyses to assess the effectiveness of some of these interventions in terms of their impact on improving access and completion of tertiary education by disadvantaged students.

Though widening access to tertiary education is a long-standing policy priority in many EU countries, specific attention to the social inclusion of students of diverse disadvantaged and underrepresented groups is more recent. **Including the social dimension as a key focus in the Bologna process by means of the 2001 Prague Communiqué, has had the effect of spurring national debates and policy implementation to widening participation and social inclusion**. In many Member States, the perceived need for widening the knowledge base of Europe's economy – partially triggered by the Lisbon process – has led to many governments explicitly focusing their attention on expanding access for underrepresented groups.

A scan of policy levers applied across the EU Member States demonstrates sixteen (16) typical policy instruments used to promote social inclusion, which can be categorised within the following four main policy types: regulations; funding; organisation; and information. In the following table each policy instrument is presented together with an indication how frequently they are currently used across the European Member States.

From the eight case studies, a number of conclusions can be drawn regarding national (and institutional) strategies and policies for social inclusion:

- **Countries differ regarding the definition of underrepresented or disadvantaged groups of students**. Countries with a declining student population (Czech Republic, Latvia and Portugal) apply broader access policies to attract potential students from all social groups of society. In countries with growing student numbers, some identify serious underrepresentation of particular student segments (France, Ireland and Scotland) and hence define equity problems in terms of either socio-economic background or entrance qualifications. Austria and the Netherlands have a more balanced student participation and focus their policy attention on non-traditional students (mature students or those without entrance qualifications) and on equity issues regarding persistence and completion for those in higher education.
- **Only a few countries have explicit widening participation strategies** (Austria, Ireland and Scotland) whereas other countries address widening participation within a broader strategy for higher education. Very few countries have adopted explicit widening participation or social inclusion targets, whereas most countries apply more qualitative social inclusion objectives.
- Though many policy initiatives need to be codified in regulations, **regulations** by themselves are not very frequently used types of policies to steer social inclusion in higher education. Only rules regulating admission, such as selection procedures, are a widely used policy tool. National standards for the recognition of prior learning are not yet widely established.

Table 11. Sixteen typical social inclusion policies and how often they are used in Europe

Types of policy levers	Typical social inclusion policies	Number of countries using policy
Regulations	➢ Including measures to widen participation in accreditation criteria	
	➢ Change in admission rules for specific groups of students	
	➢ Rules for the recognition of prior learning	
Funding	➢ Merit-based grants	
	➢ Need-based grants	
	➢ Family allowances	
	➢ Tax-benefits for parents	
	➢ Student welfare benefits/support	
	➢ Incentives to higher education institutions	
Organisation	➢ Organisational services to better prepare students from disadvantaged groups in terms of academic competencies	
	➢ Differentiation/Introduction of (new/shorter) study programmes	
	➢ More flexible provision of education	
Information	➢ Special support for specific groups for study choice	
	➢ Special regulations and programmes for refugees	
	➢ Monitoring of students - access, progress and retention	
	➢ Dissemination of knowledge from research on barriers to access HE for disadvantaged students	no data

*only 1 country known

10 countries or less identified

around half of the countries or more identified

all countries

- **Funding incentives are the most frequent type of policies used for widening participation and social inclusion.** Need-based grants, tax benefits to parents and performance contracts with higher education institutions in particular are widely used to stimulate social inclusion regarding access, retention and completion. In some countries, performance contracts stimulate higher education institutions to engage in widening access and in aligning their objectives with national priorities.
- Organisational policies are **mostly used to better adapt the provision of higher education to the living situation of a more diverse student population.** Short degree programmes aim to stimulate participation by students interested in more professionally oriented higher education, while part-time and flexible studies aim to accommodate students who have care-responsibilities and/or already work. The establishment of broad first year curricula in bachelors' programmes helps students to better orient to higher education.

- Almost all countries provide web portals where prospective students can gather information on study programmes, higher education institutions and funding opportunities for higher education. **Most countries have taken steps to make higher education opportunities more transparent to potential students.** Some of the web portals also provide information about the careers of graduates and the overall satisfaction of students with their programmes and institutions. In France, the improvement of information has been a major policy lever to widen participation. This has been accomplished through extensive preparatory classes and the provision of information in upper secondary education, web portals, and counselling services at higher education institutions and at regional centres.
- Monitoring of access and social inclusion is conducted in almost all case study countries. However, there is **still a lack of information on indicators such as the social or ethnic background of students that would provide an insight on how equity in access has developed,** and which student groups should be addressed by widening participation policies. Only a few countries invest in developing knowledge on the barriers to and facilitators of access for disadvantaged groups of students.
- **Only a few countries make use of structured evaluation frameworks that allow them to assess the impact of individual policy initiatives**. Such evaluations of social inclusion and widening participation policies provide greater transparency about social inclusion issues and create a more positive attitude towards access and inclusion. However, hard evidence for effects is rare or may relate to a wider set of policy initiatives. The poorest and most disadvantaged groups appear to be most positively affected by grants and scholarships.

Despite the growing political attention to the issue, from the past ten years only a small number of studies could be identified that applied robust analytical econometric techniques to explore the benefits of a policy intervention seeking to increase social inclusion in the European Higher Education Area. All in all, academic research confirms the general hypothesis -as well as the policy-evaluations carried out in some Members States- that financial support to students can significantly contribute to social inclusion in higher education – both by helping to attract more disadvantaged students to universities and by promoting their successful graduation. Further, experimental studies also give some insight into the potential use of special information support for specific student-groups for study choice.

- Research on financial support to students indicates that **need-based financial support** in most cases **can indeed contribute to increasing the number of disadvantaged students in higher education**, although the effect sizes are typically lower than in the USA. For example in France it was estimated that 1,000 EUR increase in the amount of student aid corresponds to a 2 percentage points increase in the level of enrolment. Furthermore, well-targeted grants **can also increase the completions rates and reduce drop-out among the disadvantaged students**. An increase of 1,000 EUR in the level of the Federal Education and Training Assistance Act support in Germany for example was found to reduce the probability to drop-out by 2.6 percentage points. Effect-sizes vary though, and there is not yet sufficient evidence to identify the main factors associated with a successful study grant scheme.
- Experimental studies testing the impact of information provision to high-school students give some **promising evidence on the usefulness of providing timely, evidence-based, standardised information on higher education**. European studies confirm US findings inasmuch as they show that with a well-designed information provision session it is possible to improve students' knowledge as well as their intentions to apply for higher education. Further studies would be needed to better understand which methods are more effective in increasing the application as well as the enrolment rates of disadvantaged students.

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List of abbreviations and definitions

Country codes

AT	Austria
BE	Belgium
BG	Bulgaria
CY	Cyprus
CZ	Czech Republic
DE	Germany
DK	Denmark
EE	Estonia
EL	Greece
ES	Spain
FI	Finland
FR	France
HR	Croatia
HU	Hungary
IE	Ireland
IT	Italy
LT	Lithuania
LU	Luxembourg
LV	Latvia
NL	Netherlands
PL	Poland
PT	Portugal
RO	Romania
SC	Scotland
SE	Sweden
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia
UK	United Kingdom

Abbreviations

ET 2020	Education and Training 2020
EU	European Union
HE	Higher Education
VMBO	upper secondary vocational education which qualifies for University of Applied Sciences programs in the same field. NL
HAVO	5-year general upper secondary education diploma. NL
VWO	6-year academic stream that qualifies for university education NL
UAS	Universities of Applied Science sector, NL

Annex 1: Policy sheets with typical social inclusion policies

As explained in Section 2, based on the analytical framework, which includes the factors that appear to be important for access to higher education as well as four different types of policies, we clustered the relevant policy instruments of the 28 EU Member States into 19 "typical social inclusion policies" applied in several member states. These are presented according to the policy typology: regulation, funding, organisation and information policies.

Regulations: these are policy measures explicitly governing access and social inclusion in higher education. This report provides information on:

1. Including measures to widen participation in the accreditation standards
2. Change in admission rules for specific groups of students
3. Rules for the recognition of prior learning

Financial incentives: they include all kinds of policies that aim to tackle a lack of financial resources that might hinder students in their decision to opt for higher education. Further, financial incentives also target higher education institutions to engage in the inclusion of disadvantaged students. The screening revealed the following policies:

4. Merit-based grants
5. Need-based grants
6. Family allowances
7. Tax-benefits for parents
8. Student welfare benefits/support
9. Incentives to higher education institutions

Policies addressing the organization of education: they target degree structures, types of higher education providers or the provision of higher education. This study describes the following major types:

10. Organisational services to better prepare students from disadvantaged groups regarding academic competencies
11. Differentiation of/Introduction of (new/shorter) study programmes
12. More flexible provision of education

Information and support policies: they include various measures and support students as well as higher education institutions. Major policies in this area are:

Informing students

13. Special support for specific groups for study choice
14. General information on studying in higher education for refugees/for other groups in higher education

Informing higher education institutions and stakeholders

15. Monitoring of students - access, progress and retention
16. Dissemination of knowledge from research on barriers to access HE for disadvantaged students

Regulations

1. Including measures to widen participation in accreditation standards

Name:	Including measures to widen participation in accreditation
Aim of policy:	Stimulate higher education institutions to develop measures to provide consultancy to specific groups of students. The major objective is to increase diversity at HEI and to improve accessibility to higher education.
Used in the following countries:	Czech Republic
Implementation level:	National, Institutional level
Intervention type:	Regulations
Target group:	Accredited programs and institutions
Description of policy:	The strategy of the Czech Education Ministry states that accreditation standards for institutional accreditation should include the institutions' activities to reach out for specific groups of students, such as "students with lower socio-economic status, parents with children, members of language and ethnic minorities, students with specific educational needs and health difficulties and students enrolled in further education while employed." In detail the strategy aims: • To include the requirements on consultancy and support for specific groups of students in the standards for institutional accreditation HE • To assess the policies of HEIs concerning access to study and successful completion within their applications for institutional accreditation. The current accreditation standards stipulate as standard the following (Government Regulation No. 274/2016, on standards for accreditation in higher education, 2016): "The higher education institution has established an effective system ensuring equal access to study for all applicants for study and students. The higher education institution provides services and other supporting measures to balance opportunities to study at the higher education institution for students with specific needs."
Policy frequently used?	To our knowledge, this policy is only hardly used. Across the EU-28 we only find the Czech Republic announcing this policy as aiming at increasing diversity at higher education institutions and widening participation in higher education.
Achieved outcome/ Evaluation of impact:	No evidence available if HEIs already implemented consultancy for specific groups.
Studies on policy available?	No.

2. Change in Admission Rules

Name:	Change in Admission Rules
Aim of policy:	Provide opportunities to talented students who did not achieve the formal eligibility to participate in higher education
Used in the following countries:	Austria, Belgium-Wallonia, Belgium-Flanders, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland
Implementation level:	National level, Institutional level
Intervention type:	Regulations
Target group:	Students not meeting the formal requirements to access higher education
Description of policy:	In these measures, rules are laid down at the national level to regulate access to higher education for groups that miss formal qualifications to access higher education. The regulations determine the formal educational qualifications and vocational qualifications to be recognised as equivalent to those required otherwise. The policy is implemented differently across countries: Some countries recognise vocational or professional degrees, while others focus on professional and/or other life experience. In some countries, students without formal qualification can enter higher education through an entrance exam. According to the Bologna Report 2018 (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018), this applies currently to Austria, Belgium-Wallonia, Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal and Spain. Flanders require persons without formal eligibility, but a talent for HE studies to attend preparatory studies before enrolling in a programme. Also, countries differ regarding the responsibilities in recognizing prior learning. Some have implemented regulations at the national level, in other higher education institutions decide individually about recognition. In Ireland for example, some HEIs offer alternative admission routes for mature student who do not meet the entrance criteria, e.g. exploring how relevant their life, work and educational experiences are to the course(s) that they wish to pursue (done at Trinity College).
Policy frequently used?	The policy is moderately used in the EU28. About half of the countries have implemented these measures
Achieved outcome/ Evaluation of impact:	Ireland monitors the percentage of mature students among new entrants (Higher Education Authority, 2010). The midterm review reveals that in 2010 set goals were not achieved. No data were found on retention and success rate of mature students. In Germany, an extensive research programme was implemented called *Offene Hochschule* to offer pathways to higher education for persons with professional or vocational training.
Studies on policy available?	The webpage https://de.offene-hochschulen.de/publikationen/bibliothek# provides a good selection of literature and studies on measures for widening access to persons without formal eligibility for higher education: Cendon (2018), Miller, McIntyre, and McKenna (2018), Rettig (2017)

3. Rules for the recognition of prior learning

Name:	Rules for the recognition of prior learning
Aim of policy:	In the area of access: establish alternative access routes to higher education (see also change of admission rules) In the area of retention and completion: provide exemptions for students with prior learning experiences by recognising experiences as equivalent to some courses.
Used in the following countries:	Recognition of prior learning for access: Austria, Belgium – Wallonia and Flanders, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, England, Scotland. Recognition of prior learning for retention and completion: Belgium – Wallonia and Flanders, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland
Implementation level:	National and institutional level
Intervention type:	Regulations
Target group:	Students who have already collected other learning experiences prior to HE
Description of policy:	The Bologna Report 2018 (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018) distinguishes three major types for this policy: • The implementation of top-level (national) frameworks to guide the institutional recognition process • Institutional rules for the recognition of prior learning • No rules but ad hoc practices The recognition of prior learning experience as equivalent to higher education learning is not new but gained importance in the Bologna process where it was defined as a measure to widen access. According to the report in 2018, top-level frameworks were established in the countries mentioned above. Institutional rules for recognition existed in Ireland, Malta and Slovenia. The establishment of top-level frameworks is motivated differently across countries. In Estonia, e.g., universities engaged in establishing general rules (Valk, 2009). To achieve similar standards across the 16 German states, the standing conference of educational ministers agree on common guidelines. There are also different situations where the recognition of prior learning experiences takes places: in some countries, recognition is only related to access, in other countries the recognition is also applied by study programs to exempt students from selected study requirements. For Luxembourg and Denmark, the rules theoretically allow that recognition of prior learning can lead to award a degree (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018, p. 208).
Policy frequently used?	Many countries have such rules, but it is unknown to what extent it is used.
Achieved outcome/ Evaluation of impact:	Recognition policies in the area of access to higher education appear to be successful to some extent. In some countries, the number of students entering higher education via this route is increasing. According to Eurostudent data currently, about 10% of all students access higher education via an alternative route. This percentage is higher among students who already collected work experiences before their study (81% of them entered higher education through an alternative pathway (Hauschildt et al., 2018, p. 73)). With regard to recognizing prior learning experiences as equivalent to higher education achievements, the situation is different. Valk (2009) shows that students with prior work and learning experiences hardly use these regulations. He states that the recognition of prior learning and work experience benefits from the followings: a national qualification framework recognising prior

	experiences; well-informed students about recognition possibilities, more flexible curricula allowing exemptions of certain courses; and finally trained teachers and staff. The current Eurostudent Report states that recognition of prior work experience has contributed to widening access, but that the percentage of students using this opportunity is still low (Hauschildt et al., 2018).
Studies on policy available?	See as examples Wihlborg and Teelken (2014) and Stenlund (2012)

Funding policies

4. Merit-based grants

Name:	Merit-based grants
Aim of policy:	This policy aims to provide talented students from a low, medium and high socioeconomic background with financial support to pursue tertiary education. The financial support can be provided to cover tuition fees and/or living expenses. The support can be provided on annual or monthly basis. The underlying assumption is that such a policy would encourage talented students, including those from a low-socioeconomic background, to pursue tertiary education. Often merit-based grants are combined with needs-based grants.
Used in the following countries:	2018: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia
Implementation level:	National
Intervention type:	*Financial incentives – support for students*
Target group:	*Students with an excellent academic performance*
Description of policy:	Merit-based grants are mainly awarded based on educational outcomes either during higher education studies or based on secondary school results or performance in admission tests. The policy is applied widely across the EU28. However regulations around the merit-based grants differ among the countries (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2017). A shared characteristic is that the grants are awarded to a smaller percentage of students to encourage outstanding performance. Participation is between 10 and 20 percent across countries. Countries also use merit-based grants to stimulate participation in specific disciplines and programs, e.g. Latvia uses merit-based grants to increase interest/enrolment for science/engineering programs. In Estonia students following ICT programs can qualify for higher merit-based stipends (compared to other fields of study). Merit-based grants also cover different costs, though the grant mostly aims to cover indirect study costs as the provided annual amounts range between 500 and 1,000 EUR. Furthermore, the financial support offered through merit-based grants in 2017/2018 varied considerably across the countries. In most EU countries merit-based grants are rather low, and the emphasis of the financing model is placed on needs-based grants. On the contrary, in few countries merit-based grants are substantial. For example, in Bulgaria, the grants range from BGN 70(~36 EUR) to 150(~77 EUR) per month, and in most cases are issued for ten months a year. There is no support for part-time students. In 2016/17, 12.2 % of full-time students in Bulgaria received grants. In Estonia, students may apply for a merit-based grant of EUR 100 per month based on excellent study results. This grant was awarded to 3.8 % of the student population in 2016/17. A further merit-based grant is EUR 160 per month (1 600 per year). For computing and information technology curricula, the amount of the grant is EUR 160-300 per month (EUR 1,600-3,000 per year). Part-time students in teacher training programs can also apply for a

	specialty grant. Approximately 6 % of all students received the specialty grant in 2016/17. In Germany, the amounts of scholarships range from EUR 300 to 1,035/month for 12 months/year. About 4 % of students receive merit-based grants (from public and private sources). In France, students who receive a need-based grant can also get a complementary merit-based grant (based on school performance from the baccalauréat results) which amounts to EUR 900 per year. Specific and occasional support is also available. In Ireland bursaries of EUR 2,000 may be awarded based on merit- and need-based criteria. 0.05 % of first cycle students received such bursaries. In Cyprus, the grants are more substantial. The State Scholarship Foundation awards scholarships based on students' academic performance and socioeconomic status. Students studying in first cycle programmes may receive up to EUR 3,000 per year, in second cycle programmes EUR 4,000 per year, and EUR 4,000 in a PhD programme (third cycle). In some countries, merit-based scholarships can be granted to students who excel outside academia. For example, in the Czech Republic, merit-based scholarships are granted by all public HEIs for excellence in studies, research, artistic and other activities. About 7 % of the students received this grant for excellent study results in 2015/16, and around 7 % received the scholarship for research, artistic and other activities. One student may receive both these types of scholarships. Similarly, in Slovakia merit-based scholarships, provided by both the state budget and HEIs, are granted by the higher education institutions for excellent results in studies, research and development, artistic or sporting activity. The state subsidy for this purpose is calculated at an average rate of EUR 420/student for 10 % of full-time students. Universities are provided with additional finances for merit-based scholarships (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017).
Policy frequently used?	Among the EU28 countries, at least 19 countries (67%) offered merit-based grants to students. Thus, it can be classified as a frequently used policy within the EU.
Achieved outcome/ Evaluation of impact:	In general, grants and scholarships do help recipients to meet costs of study. They also positively influence the decision to study from students of disadvantaged backgrounds. However, because merit-based grants also are provided to students of middle- and upper-class families, the impact is limited.
Studies on policy available?	Orr, Usher and Wespel (2014), Do changes in cost-sharing have an impact on the behaviour of students and higher education institutions?, Brussels: DG EAC

5. Need-based grants

Name:	Need-based grants
Aim of policy:	This policy aims to provide students from a low-socioeconomic background with financial support to pursue tertiary education. The financial support can be provided to cover tuition fees and/or living expenses. The support can be provided on either an annual- or a monthly basis. The underlying assumption is that such a policy would encourage prospective students coming from families with low socioeconomic background to pursue tertiary education.
Used in the following countries:	2018: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom.
Implementation level:	National
Intervention type:	Financial incentives – support for students
Target group:	Socio-economically disadvantaged students
Description of policy:	Most systems offer need-based grants to support the participation of disadvantaged students financially. Eligibility is determined based on a set of socio-economic criteria. The most prevalent criteria are family income. Other criteria include whether students live with their families, parents' employment status and/or education, special educational needs or orphan status or whether students have dependent children. The needs-based grants vary across the countries and are often combined with merit-based grants. Seven countries (Bulgaria, Greece, Ireland, France, Italy, Cyprus and Austria) have developed grants based on a mixture of need- and merit-based criteria (award based on an assessment of the financial situation/socio-economic conditions of the students and academic performance; countries may differ based on the weighting they give to certain criteria). Latvia had no need-based grants in its student support system until recently yet added need-based criteria to its merit-based grant in 2017/18. Consequently, Latvian HEIs issue need-based support once per semester. In 2017, Malta extended the eligibility period for the stipend: students who undertake an additional year beyond the standard programme duration or change to another programme at the same or lower level may continue to receive the stipend for an additional year (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017, p. 16). Although needs-based grants are common across the EU, in some countries the number of students who qualify for these grants is very limited. For example, in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Lithuania and Romania 10 % or fewer students receive need-based grants (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017, p. 17). Furthermore, the financial support offered in 2017/2018 varied considerably across the countries. Belgium, Czech Republic, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Cyprus, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Sweden and United Kingdom (Scotland) provide

	between EUR 1,000 and 3,000 per year to students. In Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Hungary, Slovakia, the most common annual need-based grants do not exceed EUR 1,000. At the other end of the scale, in Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Austria and United Kingdom (Northern Ireland) grants that most students receive are between EUR 3,001 and 5,000, and in Germany, United Kingdom (Wales) and Switzerland the most common amounts exceed EUR 5,000. In Germany, high grant amounts are coupled with no tuition fees. In the United Kingdom (Wales) and Switzerland, these grants need to be seen in the context of high study fees for full-time students (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017, p. 18)
Policy frequently used?	Among the EU28 countries, all 28 countries (100%) offered needs-based grants in 2018. Thus, it can be classified as a very frequently used policy within the EU.
Achieved outcome/ Evaluation of impact:	Some countries report on the financial situation of students, in Germany, for example, there is regular reporting on this issue (Deutsches Zentrum für Hochschul- und Wissenschaftsforschung GmbH [DZHW] and Deutsches Studentenwerk [DSW]). Also, the BaFoeG requires that bi-annual reporting on the effect of the money granted to students takes places (Deutscher Bundestag, 2017). Ireland has monitored the student assistance fund (Higher Education Authority, n.d.) Also, Eurostudent addresses the financial resources in their report. The evaluation found mostly state that the number of funded students is quite low and that students from disadvantaged backgrounds still face financial and economic hardship.
Studies on policy available?	Scientific research studies student funding extensively. Recent reviews can be found in (Jongbloed, B. W. A. and Vossensteyn, J. J., 2016) Other studies: for example Harrison, Davies, Harris, and Waller (2018) For an overview of European impact studies see Section 6.

6. Family Allowances

Name:	Family Allowances
Aim of policy:	This policy aims to provide families with additional income to support children that are studying. The support is often provided on a monthly basis. The underlying assumption is that such a policy would encourage children coming from families with a low socioeconomic background to pursue tertiary education.
Used in the following countries:	2018: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Slovakia
Implementation level:	National
Intervention type:	Financial incentives – support for students
Target group:	Students´ parents
Description of policy:	Family allowances are commonly linked to students' nationality/residence, age and financial status. To qualify for these allowances, students must fulfil a few requirements. Among others, they need to be enrolled in full-time programs and be citizens or residents of the country/region. Additionally, students are required to be below a certain age threshold (usually between 23-26 years of age), without personal income and should live with their family. Some of the requirements vary across the countries. For example, in France and Luxembourg family allowance is conditional on having at least two dependent children; in Lithuania, eligible families need to have three children. In Belgium and Germany, family allowance is awarded for each studying child and increases by the number of children. In the Czech Republic, Poland and Portugal, family allowance can be obtained only if the family's income is below a minimum income threshold (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017, p. 20). Furthermore, the financial support offered in 2017/2018 varied considerably across the countries. In Austria students' parents can receive family allowances (EUR 158.90 per month per child) if the student is under 24 (in exceptional cases till 25 years of age) and is studying. In Belgium, family allowances range from EUR 93.93 to 259.49/month per child depending on the number of children under 25. In Germany students' parents can receive a monthly family allowance (child benefit) of EUR 192 (2018: EUR 194) for the first two children, EUR 198 for the third (2018: EUR 200) and EUR 223 (2018: EUR 225) for any further child. In France, family allowances are paid for two or more dependent children that are under 20 years old. The amount for families with two children is EUR 129.86 per month although the amount is reduced for high income. In Lithuania, students' parents can get family allowances if the family has three or more children under 18 years and/or older children who are full-time students (until 24 years old). The allocation depends on the difference between state-supported income (non-taxable EUR 153) and the family's income. In Luxemburg family allowances of EUR 500 are awarded if another child from the same household is eligible for financial support for higher education (EUR 500 per studying child per academic year). In Greece parents of the first cycle students may claim annual EUR

	1,000 housing allowance if their family income does not exceed EUR 30,000 and students study outside their hometown In Portugal, family allowance – child benefit – is granted to families with children under the age of 24 years and enrolled in higher education. It is required that the household income does not exceed 1.5 times the social support index times 14 (2017: EUR 8,847.72) and that family assets are less than 240 times the social support index (2017: EUR 101,116.80). In the Czech Republic, a child allowance of CZK 700 (27 euros) per month is paid if the family's income is below 2.4 times the subsistence level until the student reaches the age of 26. In Slovakia, family allowances of EUR 23.52/month are paid to parents of full-time students up to 25 years of age, unless the student interrupts his/her studies. In some countries, family allowances are available for certain groups of students. In Poland, besides low-income families, family allowances are available to students with disabilities.
Policy frequently used?	Among the EU28 countries, at least ten countries (36%) offered family allowances in 2018. Thus, it can be classified as a moderately used policy within the EU.
Achieved outcome/ Evaluation of impact:	No public evaluation of the policy available in the reviewed literature.
Studies on policy available?	There is no public evaluation is available in the reviewed literature.

7. Tax Benefits for Parents

Name:	Tax benefits for parents
Aim of policy:	This policy aims to provide families with tax deductions or tax credits for dependent children, including those enrolled in higher education. The support is typically provided on an annual basis. The underlying assumption is that such a policy would encourage children coming from families with a low socioeconomic background to pursue tertiary education. Tax deduction may be less effective for low-income families.
Used in following countries:	2018: Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Slovenia, Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, France, Lithuania, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Switzerland and Liechtenstein
Implementation level:	National
Intervention type:	Financial incentives – support for students
Target group:	Students´ parents
Description of policy:	Tax benefits for parents are frequently linked to parental income and the number of children. Additionally, it depends upon students' nationality/residence, age and financial status. In numerous countries parents that benefit the most from tax benefits are those with a medium- or a high income. Only Poland and Portugal have tax benefits favouring low-income families. Poland, for example, sets an upper ceiling to family income, and only families earning below this ceiling can receive benefits. In Portugal, the tax benefit depends upon the family income with increased support for families with lower incomes. Tax benefits can take various forms – annual deductible lump sums per studying child (the Czech Republic, Germany, Latvia, Malta, Austria, Poland, Slovakia and Liechtenstein), a tax-allowance – tax free income up to a certain amount (Belgium), or a percentage of study fees can be deducted from parents' personal income taxes (Italy – 19%, Lithuania – 15%, Portugal – 30%). In Greece, students' parents are subject to a lower tax-rate. In the Czech Republic, tax benefits for parents may increase from 2017 retrospectively if policy plans are approved (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017, p. 20). Furthermore, the tax benefits offered in 2017/2018 varied considerably across the countries. For example, in Belgium (French community) the tax-free minimum earnings threshold is increased by EUR 1,370 for one, 3,520 for two, 7,880 for three, 12,750 for four and +4,870 for each further child. While the amounts vary across different regions in Belgium, the main principle remains the same. In the Czech Republic, tax benefits for parents are provided in the form of tax relief for each dependent child (students up to the age of 26 years). From 2016, CZK 13,404/year is allowed for the first child (~516 EUR), CZK 17,004(~654 EUR) for the second child, and CZK 20,604 (~793 EUR) for the third and fourth child. In Italy, a tax credit of 19% of the expenses for attending higher education can be made. Tax benefits are applicable if the child is tax-dependent on his/her parents. In Latvia tax benefits of EUR 213 per year are awarded to parents

	and students (payers of personal income tax). A parent has additional personal income tax relief for a child under 24 studying in higher education. In Malta parents whose children are in tertiary education benefit from an annual tax rebate of between EUR 150 and EUR 840 until their children are 23 years of age. In Austria students' parents can receive tax relief (EUR 58.40 per month per child) if the student is under 24 (in exceptional cases till 25 years of age) and is studying. In Poland a tax relief of PLN 1,112.04 (~259 EUR) per child per year (2016) for parents/guardians of students up to 25 years of age available provided income did not exceed a specified level, and if the student did not earn a taxable income (including capital gains) exceeding PLN 3,089(~719 EUR)/year. There is no relief dedicated to students. In Portugal tax benefits for parents are provided through tax deduction on educational expenses. The tax benefit is 30% of all education expenses, to the limit of EUR 800. There can be additional restrictions depending on the total income of the family, decreasing the benefit as the total income increases. In Slovenia tax benefits for parents are provided in the form of tax relief for each dependent child and the amount depends on the number of supported children (EUR 2436 to EUR 7957 per year in 2016). Only those parents whose children are enrolled in higher education institutions, are not employed or conducting business, and are under 26 years old when enrolling are eligible for this benefit. In Slovakia tax benefits for parents consist of a lump sum tax deduction of EUR 21.41/month. No tax benefit is offered to working students. In some countries, tax benefits are tailored to certain groups of students. In the Czech Republic for parents with disabled children, the amount of tax relief for the child is multiplied by two.
Policy frequently used?	Among the EU28 countries, at least 16 countries (57%) offered tax benefits to parents in 2018. Thus, it can be classified as a commonly used policy within the EU.
Achieved outcome/ Evaluation of impact:	No public evaluation of the policy available in the reviewed literature.
Studies on policy available?	No public evaluation of the policy is available in the reviewed literature.

8. Student Welfare Benefits/Support

Name:	Student welfare benefits/support
Aim of policy:	This policy aims to provide students with subsidized welfare services and services (i.e. in-kind contributions). Among these are – among other things - subsidized transport, meal-plans, medical expenses, housing, etc. The assumption underlying this policy is that support allows students to save money on living expenses, make studying more affordable, and might reduce the need to work during their study period.
Used in the following countries:	Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Romania, Slovakia
Implementation level:	National
Intervention type:	Financial incentives – support for students
Target group:	Students
Description of policy:	Student welfare/service benefits are often linked to their enrolment status. Mostly full-time students receive this support. Welfare benefits may include housing, meals, social, psychological and medical support, and childcare. Various welfare services have been offered in Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, France and Italy (European Commission, EACEA, and Eurydice, 2015, p. 16) Several European countries provide subsidized (sometimes even free) accommodation (e.g. Croatia, Denmark, Finland (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017, p. 51), Greece, Luxembourg, Slovakia) or meals (e.g. Croatia, Greece, Slovakia) to students, as well as travel support (e.g. Croatia, the Czech Republic, Netherlands (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017, p. 55) and Romania). In some cases, all students are eligible for such support; in others, students from under-represented groups (e.g. students from low socio-economic backgrounds, students with disabilities or refugees) are specifically targeted (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018, p. 186). Additionally, Hungary and the Czech Republic provide health insurance benefits to students aged 26 or below (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018, p. 189). Moreover, in some cases, students must achieve certain academic goals to qualify for student welfare. For example, Croatia has linked its student welfare to the ECTS obtained. Students are required to obtain a certain number of ECTS to qualify for different services. Students are required to complete 18 ECTS in the previous year of study to have the right to subsidised meals; 40 ECTS per year to have the right to subsidised accommodation; and 45 ECTS per year to be eligible for a state scholarship. Students failing to complete at least 55 ECTS credits per year are required to co-finance their tuition fee (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018, p. 204).
Policy frequently used?	Among the EU28 countries, at least 13 countries (46%) offered welfare assistance to students between 2015- 2018. Thus, it can be classified as a commonly used policy within the EU.
Achieved outcome/ Evaluation of impact:	No public evaluation of the policy available in the reviewed literature.
Studies on policy	Orr, Usher and Wespel (2014), Do changes in cost-sharing have an

available?	impact on the behaviour of students and higher education institutions?, Brussels: DG EAC

9. Incentives to higher education institutions

Name:	Incentives to higher education institutions
Aim of policy:	This policy aims to stimulate higher education institutions to develop measures to increase access as well as retention and completion for students from disadvantaged backgrounds
Used in the following countries:	Belgium – Flanders, Denmark, England, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden and Scotland
Implementation level:	Institutional level
Intervention type:	Funding – support for higher education institutions
Target group:	Students from disadvantaged backgrounds
Description of policy:	These incentives can be part of the funding formula of higher education, or they can also be provided to higher education institutions as additional funding. In some countries, there are also initiatives of higher education stakeholders that provide funding and/or prizes to higher education institutions that have developed such practices. When being included in the formula for performance-based funding higher education institutions are rewarded according to the number/percentage of newly enrolled students with a disadvantaged background (and/or their retention and completion). This applies currently to Belgium – Flanders, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden and Scotland (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018). A special form of incentive to higher education institutions is the Student Opportunity Allocation in England (previously: Widening participation allocation (Vossensteyn et al., 2015)). Institutions receive additional funds with reference to the profile of their student population and with the goal to increase equity in access and study success among the 'riskier' population. HEIs charging fees above £6,000 must indicate in an access agreement how they spend this additional money. (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014). Since 2018 new authorities (Office for students) became responsible for administering equity of access to higher education and they have developed access and participation plans.[31] "France implemented in 2007 the "*plan pour la réussite en licence*" (plan for success in obtaining a bachelor's degree). This multi-annual funding scheme included several measures for the 2008-2012 period, such as didactical innovations and instruments to reduce dropout. (Cour des Comptes, 2012, p. 658). In October 2017, France implemented the 'plan étudiant' (MESR, 2017) that – among others – provides funds to higher education institutions to implement personalized support for each student.
Policy frequently used?	The inclusion of socially disadvantaged students and their success in the funding formula is moderately used across the EU 28. A few countries apply additional funding.
Achieved outcome/ Evaluation of impact:	Due to the nature of performance-based funding, the performance reviews of higher education institutions lead to monitoring.

[31] https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/access-and-participation-plans/

	The use of additional funds is often accompanied by either research or monitoring
Studies on policy available?	The Student Opportunity Allocation, as well as the Widening Participation Allocation, are closely monitored, formerly by HEFCE, now by the Office for Students (HEFCE, 2017, HEFCE, 2017). The English Widening Participation Programme has also been widely studied: the studies of Croxford, Docherty, Gaukroger, and Hood (2014), Evans, Rees, Taylor, and Wright (2017), and Younger et al. (2018) are examples. NESET published a report on the efficiency of different kinds of equity funding in education, among these also the effectiveness of additional funding (Bevc and Ursic, 2008). The funding of higher education institutions and how this relates to access to higher education has been extensively studied in Jongbloed, B. W. A. and Vossensteyn, J. J. (2016), in particular in the critical review of Parry (2016).

Organisational policies

10. Organisational services to better prepare students from disadvantaged groups regarding academic competencies

Name:	Organisational services to better prepare students from disadvantaged groups regarding academic competencies
Aim of policy:	The policy aims at helping students from disadvantaged backgrounds increase their academic competencies before they enter their regular academic programmes.
Used in the following countries:	All EU-28 countries
Implementation level:	Institutional level, bridging between higher education and secondary education
Intervention type:	Information
Target group:	Students from a disadvantaged background
Description of policy:	This preparation of students is implemented in two major ways: either as sort of bridging courses for new entrants to higher education at the level of higher education or at the level of secondary education, to train pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds to better start in higher education. *Courses at higher education institutions* Bridging courses supporting students to increase their skills and knowledge in certain areas such as mathematical competences or academic writing in advance of the start to their academic programme have already been established at universities for quite some years. Mostly these do not address specifically students from disadvantaged backgrounds but all students who are interested in improving their skills and prepare for their study. At some higher education institutions, these preparatory courses became more oriented towards the needs of students from specific groups (and to train teachers to learn about these). At quite a number of German higher education institution, introductory years for refugee students have been established, e.g. at the Technical University of Braunschweig the project bridge4refugees.[32] The University of Applied Science in Frankfurt, for example, has defined refugees and students with a migrant background as a target group for whom it has established special support structures that help them in the first year (EUA, 2018, 19ff). To increase academic competences of refugees the so-called Welcome Year for refugees was implemented. Refugee students who had to discontinue their study in their home country due to their flight and continue at the UAS are entitled to this Welcome Year. During this year these students receive intensive German language training or other languages required for their study programme. They can also complete an internship with a German company to learn more about the country. In addition to the Welcome Year, the UAS Frankfurt uses Refugee Buddies. These are volunteers who do not necessarily have a role at the UAS but who are willing to support refugee students in their day-to-day activities. The UAS also plans to collaborate with the Goethe-University Frankfurt to set up special language programmes for students with a Turkish, Arabic or Polish background. The aim of the programme is to strengthen their competences in using their background language

[32] https://www.tu-braunschweig.de/Medien-DB/sprachenzentrum/exposebridges4refugees_mitfotos.pdf

and to support them in learning about their background culture. This aims to value the competencies of these students that are often neglected by study programmes, but that can be useful for future labour market success.

The University College of Oxford has implemented the 'Opportunity Programme' to increase the number of admitted students from disadvantaged backgrounds.[33] The programme first increases the number of available study places by 10%. These places are only open to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. "These students are offered a bridging programme before embarking on their degrees, in the form of an intensive summer school, giving them academic skills that go beyond the curriculum, placing them in the best position to succeed at Oxford."[34]

In Hungary, until 2017 the Central European University had a special programme for Roma students, called the Roma Access Programme. It mainly aims at already graduate students from the Roma community to become more internationally mobile and to embark on Master or PhD programmes. The programme trains academic competences in the area of social sciences and humanities during an eight months period. In addition, it trains English proficiency for 9 months (Padilla-Carmona and Soria-Vilchez, 2015, 20f).[35] The programme transformed to a new unit at the CEU, the Romani Study programme.

At some Dutch universities of applied sciences (e.g. Hogeschool Windesheim) special curricula for students from secondary vocational institutions (MBO) have been established. During their last grade student can follow courses at the UAS and train academic and further skills such as self-organisation or presentation. These programmes, however, do not target a specific group of disadvantaged students but aim to better prepare all MBO students to succeed in higher education.

The Westfälische Hochschule in North Rhine-Westphalia has implemented the project „Meine Talentförderung" (My Talentpromotion).[36] This project aims at targeting highly talented students. Though talent is the major criteria, the project also aims at motivating highly talented students with lower socio-economic status and/or migrant background to participate in higher education. The project offers a broad range of activities, including one-on-one consulting throughout the whole study process, consulting on study finance as well as a course programme for students from grade 10 onwards.

Preparation of students in secondary education

Another form to attract a higher number of disadvantaged students and to better prepare them for academic success are initiatives that address prospective students already during secondary education, mostly during their last grade. This policy aims at identifying highly talented students from non-traditional groups of students to encourage them to select higher education. These projects often work with personal consultancy, mentoring and tutoring. Some of the projects are done as civil-society projects where volunteers provide the consultation and training to the students. In Germany, the initiative Arbeiterkind.de has established a country-wide network of volunteers that provide consulting services to (prospective) students from a working-class background and/or

[33] https://www.univ.ox.ac.uk/learn-at-univ/opportunity-programme/
[34] https://www.univ.ox.ac.uk/learn-at-univ/opportunity-programme/
[35] https://romanistudies.ceu.edu/
[36] https://www.w-hs.de/studieren/meine-talentfoerderung/

	first-generation students
Policy frequently used?	In most of the EU 28 higher education institutions very frequently use the instrument of preparatory courses. There is however a great diversity in this regarding whether or not the courses are geared toward specific groups of students, their timing and the competences trained. Reaching out to and preparing students from specific groups already in secondary education is less often used by higher education institutions.
Achieved outcome/ Evaluation of impact:	Recent projects aiming at specific groups of students are more likely to be evaluated than preparatory courses that are offered to all students. Some of these evaluations found a positive effect on the academic competences of students. This increase, however, does not fully guarantee for retention and completion of these students. Their social integration also plays a crucial role.
Studies on policy available?	The effect of preparatory courses (whether or not they increase academic competences) has been studied widely. Johnson and O'Keeffe (2016) for example study the impact of mathematical bridging programmes on adult learners. Healion (2013) investigate the effects of an academic enrichment programme that links between school and higher education.

11. Differentiation/Introduction of (new/shorter) study programs

Name:	Differentiation of/Introduction of (new/shorter) study programmes
Aim of policy:	A major aim of the policy is to better adapt to the educational demands of an increasingly diversified student population by diversifying the educational provision. The policy also aims to lower entrance thresholds to higher education for specific groups of students.
Used in the following countries:	All EU28 countries
Implementation level:	National level, Institutional level
Intervention type:	Organisation
Target group:	Students
Description of policy:	One major hindrance to enrolment in HE for students from disadvantaged backgrounds is their expectations that their investment in a long study period (e.g. up to 6 years when completing a bachelor programme and a successive master) would not reveal sufficient reward in their later careers. Among these students, there is also the demand for shorter study programmes that specifically provide training for specific jobs rather than broadly qualifying for a range of jobs. There are also students who would like to test first if they will be successful HE, rather than taking the risk of failing in a long study programme. To overcome such problems short cycle programs in tertiary education at EQF level 5 have been established. Another way to stimulate access for such students is to establish hybrid study programmes that include vocational training as well as higher education and award a higher education degree. • Short-cycle programmes in tertiary education An example of a short cycle programme is the so-called Associate Degree as introduced in the Netherlands in 2013.[37] These programmes are provided by Universities of applied sciences. In these programmes, students must earn at least 120 ECTS. On successful completion, students are awarded an Associate Degree. The degree is meant to prepare for professional tasks and targets students from secondary vocational schools. Upon completion degree holders can continue in higher education, e.g. pursuing a bachelor's degree at both UAS and universities. Short-cycle programmes in tertiary education are widely used across the EU28, in some countries, they are by secondary education institutions. • Hybrid Study programmes/Dual study programmes Also, hybrid study programmes are professionally oriented. Their major feature is that here companies and higher education institutions collaborate. I.e. students are employed by companies and during their study programmes periods of training at the higher education institution and practice-oriented training at their employer alternate. Upon successful completion, students are awarded a bachelor's degree.
Policy frequently used?	Short-cycle programmes are used in all EU28 countries Hybrid study programmes are rarely used, they mostly exist in Germany

[37] https://www.nvao.net/beoordelingsproceduresnederland/associate-degree

Achieved outcome/ Evaluation of impact:	There was a mid-term evaluation of the Dutch associate degrees experiment (SEO, 2008) as well as an evaluation of the more mature programs (SEO, 2015). The study focusses on the educational background of students, not on their social background.
Studies on policy available?	There are some scientific studies on short-cycle programmes available. Troiano and Elias (2014) for example investigate for Spain how the social background of students determines their choice of study programmes. They found that working-class students are more likely to choose short-cycle programmes with a clear professional profile. Their choice is mostly motivated by a stronger degree of risk-aversity. Daale (2010) reports on the historical development of the associate degree in the Netherlands.

12. More flexible provision of education

Name:	More flexible provision of education
Aim of policy	Addressing non-traditional target groups of students, such as mature workers (students) in the labour market, students with family obligations, etc.
Used in the following countries:	All EU28 countries
Implementation level:	Institutional level
Intervention type:	Organisation
Target group:	Non-traditional students in higher education
Aim of policy:	This policy aims to provide higher education in a more flexible manner to students who could not – due to their living situation – in a traditional higher education programme. These living situations include: working alongside the study, parenthood, caring for (elderly) family members, living in remote areas. The policy aims to make higher education available independent of time and location.
Description of policy:	There are three major types of more flexible provisions of higher education: • Distance education • Introducing new time patterns for study programmes • Providing e-learning *Distance education* This policy aims at reaching out to students who – due to their living situation – are not able to follow a study programme in a traditional manner. This means that they either are not able to be physically present at the location of the study programme and/or that they are not available for education during the regular schedule. Distant education leaves it to the student to self-organize his or her study. For distant education mostly, special study programmes have been developed that are hosted by a distance education institution. In these programmes periods of self-study and periods of conventional course programme alternate. Mostly periods of conventional course programme are rather short and take place on weekends. *Introducing new time patterns for study programmes* This mainly relates to the introduction of part-time studies with the aim to better adjust the educational offer to the needs of students, working alongside their study and/or have other duties, caregiving duties. Recent studies showed that the share of students in part-time studies varies strongly across the EU28 (Gehlke, Hachmeister, and Hüning, 2017). In Poland and Sweden, there is a high percentage of students in part-time study programmes. Mostly part-time students are more mature (i.e. aged above 30 years) and have already been working for several years/received vocational training before. The percentage of part-time students is also contingent with the funding regulations of higher education. In countries, such as Poland that charge relatively high tuition fees, the percentage of part-time students is higher, as many students must earn alongside their study. *Provision of e-learning* The provision of eLearning is one educational technology that is widely used. E-learning serves several purposes, besides better adapting to learning styles of students the policy also aims at making study material available independently of lectures or other

	face-to-face meetings at the institution.
Policy frequently used?	Distance education is widely used in the EU28, in almost every country at least one such institution can be found.
Achieved outcome/ Evaluation of impact:	There is hardly any data available to tell whether or not distance education is effective in engaging students who would otherwise not enrol in higher education.
Studies on policy available?	There is a lot of didactical research around distance education and eLearning, studying adequate teaching methods to assure engagement of students in it. We did not find recent studies investigating how distance education contributes to widening access to higher education. Part-time studies are mostly studied when addressing the impact of part-time work next to higher education (Callender, 2008).

Information policies

13. Supporting study choices for students from disadvantaged backgrounds

Name:	Supporting study choice for students from disadvantaged backgrounds
Aim of policy:	To provide customized information to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, to establish realistic expectation about higher education in these students
Used in the following countries:	Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Ireland, Italy, England
Implementation level:	National level, Institutional level, voluntary work
Intervention type:	Information – Informing students
Target group:	Students from disadvantaged background
Description of policy:	Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are often not familiar with HE as their parents and other family members might not have experienced it. This can lead to unrealistic or wrong perceptions that might lead to not choosing to enroll in HE. Information for these groups of students should address their risk-aversiveness. I.e. the information should set out clearly required competences and what HE can mean to individuals. Also, there should be information on practices in higher education, but above all about funding opportunities for students from disadvantaged groups. In Ireland, at the national level, the 'National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019' foresees to establish better information routines addressing specific needs of disadvantaged students. The plan foresees to develop measures that include (Higher Education Authority, 2015, p. 31): • A 'whole-of-education' approach to access. • Communication of the value of higher education. • Provision of clear information on education pathways. • Reinforcement of HEIs' engagement with communities and other stakeholders. • The use of mentors/role models from within communities – to enable students to make informed decisions about their post-secondary education options. • Involvement of parents and teachers as key advisers to students. It is planned that measures should target students more specifically and address their information needs. Further, information should address regional aspects and involve parents and teachers. Mentoring appears to be central to more targeted information provision. To our knowledge, there is no information yet, how these plans have been implemented. To better address information needs of students with a migrant background, some German universities use coaching and mentoring programmes to reach out for these students to facilitate access and to support retention (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2011). In the coaching and mentoring, students can address their specific questions, learn about their strengths and competences as well as about funding and other opportunities. Mentoring is also at heart of the voluntary initiative "Arbeiterkind.de" that aims at supporting first-generation students with a working-class background (irrespective of their migration background).[38] In this initiative, the mentoring is done by graduates/students with a

[38] https://www.arbeiterkind.de/

	similar background who share their experiences. A special initiative in this area is the Scottish STEP programme that aims at creating educational equity for travellers in Scotland.[39] The initiative, among other things, provides informational support to traveller families, informing about educational pathways as well as showing the reward of educational credentials.
Policy frequently used?	To our knowledge, the policy is not widely used in the EU 28. There are of course information portals in most countries, but it does not become clear to what extent these are addressing the specific needs of disadvantaged students.
Achieved outcome/ Evaluation of impact:	To our knowledge, there is no evaluation available yet.
Studies on policy available?	Studies on policy not known. For a review of experimental studies assessing the impact of information provision please efer to Section 6.

[39] http://www.step.education.ed.ac.uk/

14. Special regulations and programs for refugees (not migrants)

Name:	Special regulations and programmes for refugees
Aim of policy:	This policy aims to ease the access to higher education for refugee students. Further, the policy aims at the retention of refugee students
Used in the following countries:	Denmark, England, Germany, Netherlands, Spain
Implementation level:	National and institutional level
Intervention type:	Organisation, Regulations, Finance, Information
Target group:	Refugees
Description of policy:	Due to their origin, refugee students are mostly non-EU students which often mean that they cannot benefit from European Higher Education Area in terms of admission and using freedom to enrol in higher education across Europe, as well as having to pay high tuition fees and could face difficulties regarding the recognition of their prior (formal) learning. Both could hinder them from integrating successfully into their host societies. They are different from migrant students, who often are children from foreign workers in a country. *National arrangements*: In some countries, refugee students are exempted from tuition fees they would have to pay under normal circumstances. In England, refugees are treated as home students once they are granted refugee status or humanitarian protection. Refugees with a different type of status can receive support from the Refugee Support Network.[40] This is an English charity that focusses on the integration of refugees in Education. In Germany, the educational ministers of the Länder agreed in 2016 on common rules for reducing the costs of enrolment for refugee students (KMK, 2016). In general, refugees do not have to pay fees for enrolment, and the fees for special enrolment services (e.g. placement tests) have to consider individual hardship. In Spain the UOC scholarship programme for refugees provides funding. It gives refugees the opportunity to continue their studies despite having been forced to leave their homes because of armed conflicts, attacks on human rights, climate change or poverty. The scholarship programme for refugees and asylum-seekers is funded by the money raised from the charitable enrolment, which consists of the voluntary contribution made by students when enrolling at the University. Studying online is a challenge for many of the students on the programme. For this reason, the figure of the mentor has been included, a volunteer student at the UOC who will accompany each of them in their adaptation to the Virtual Campus and their learning.[41] *Institutional arrangements*: As stated under the policy "Organisational services to better prepare students from disadvantaged groups with regard to academic competencies" several universities have implemented special welcome courses for refugee students. In these courses, mostly their language proficiency is improved, and further academic competences are trained. The programmes also include measures to

[40] https://www.refugeesupportnetwork.org/
[41] http://www.uoc.edu/portal/en/news/actualitat/2017/213-refugees-uoc.html

	socially include refugees, e.g. through mentoring (refer for details to the mentioned policy sheet). *Information for refugees*: In Denmark, an information portal for refugees has been established. The portal "Education and Integration" is aimed primarily at employees in municipalities and asylum centres who initially are in contact with the refugees and educational institutions." The portal also serves employees in public authorities consulting refugees. "The portal introduces and links to information in areas such as: • Educational and upgrading qualification opportunities from Danish lessons to vocational education and higher education • Educational support and financing • Assessment of formal educational qualifications and prior learning • Offers from educational institutions The portal is developed in collaboration between the Ministry of Higher Education and Science and the Ministry for Children, Education and Gender Equality with contribution from other actors." Further, in 2018 in Denmark a law to establish a new national institute that oversees supporting study choice came into force. The use of mentoring is also widespread at the institutional and voluntary level."[42] [43]
Policy frequently used?	Countries that host the majority of the refugees have implemented these rules
Achieved outcome/ Evaluation of impact:	There are no evaluations of these policies available.
Studies on policy available?	Guney (no date) studied in her master thesis the responses of Austrian public universities to the refugee crisis. She found that the institutional training of competences improves access and retention among refugees. Hindrances for refugees to access higher education are mostly lack of financial support, and national policies are not flexible enough to address immediate challenges.

[42] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-reforms-higher-education-18_en
[43] See also policy sheet „ Supporting study choice for students from disadvantaged backgrounds"

15. Monitoring of students

Name:	Monitoring of students
Aim of policy:	Learn about student population (entrants, enrolled students and graduates, student progression and drop-out), increase the transparency of the higher education system
Used in the following countries:	All countries of the EU28
Implementation level:	National and institutional level
Intervention type:	Information – Informing the system, informing the institution
Target group:	National bodies, Higher education stakeholders, educational authorities and
Description of policy:	This policy includes the collection of key data on the number of entrants and students, study progression, dropouts, completion. Regarding widening participation background characteristics of students such as gender, ethnic background, social status, and other criteria are important in defining disadvantaged students. Information on the student population supports policy and decision makers at national and institutional levels to better adapt decisions and interventions regarding widening access, retention and study success. Monitoring students is cost-intensive and to some extent limited by legislative data security regulations. A detailed follow-up of individual students and their study progress is not allowed in some countries (e.g. Germany). Further, defining criteria measuring the background of students is rather complex. This is true for the ethnical and the social background of students. Regarding ethnical- or migration background some countries report difficulties in determining these, as current students might be migrants concerning their descent and still citizens of the country. Regarding social background, valid schemes for classifying groups of students with different social status have to be defined. Class schemes based on the occupational and educational status of parents, i.e. mostly of the father, are not a valid predictor for a deprived status of the students. This is to some extent related to an upscaling of professions that were traditionally understood as indicator of low class. The UK therefore uses a deprivation indicator that is based on regions. Ireland has recently developed a similar approach that is currently implemented. Across the EU28 countries monitor students to a different extent: According to the latest Bologna Implementation report the following countries monitor gender and at least one other criteria of disadvantaged students: Austria, Belgium – Wallonia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland (European Commission/ EACEA/Eurydice, 2018). Our own survey on the availability of statistical data on the background of students revealed that countries rarely collect information on students' social background (except for the UK and Sweden). The ethnic, as well as the migration background of students, are also hardly monitored. When addressing the origin, data mostly

	distinguish between national and international students. This distinction does not sufficiently refer to the ethnical background. Measuring the migration background of students is a huge methodological challenge, as students might be citizens of the country but also have a migrant background, as they are descendants from immigrants.
Policy frequently used?	All countries use this policy, however, in the majority of countries no data is collected on students' social, ethnic and migration background.
Achieved outcome/ Evaluation of impact:	Not applicable
Studies on policy available?	Ruhose, J. and Schwerdt, G. (2015) investigate the impact of early tracking of migrant students

16. Dissemination of knowledge from investigating barriers to access higher education for disadvantaged students

Name:	Dissemination of knowledge from investigating barriers to access HE for disadvantaged students
Aim of policy:	The policy aims at informing practitioners such as policy makers and teachers in higher education about major barriers and problems specific groups of students encounter during the transition to or after enrolment in higher education. In addition, the policy aims at distributing knowledge on how to address these problems.
Used in the following countries:	To be checked
Implementation level:	National, institutional networks
Intervention type:	Information – Informing the system/Informing HEi
Target group:	Policy makers, higher education teachers
Description of policy:	Heart of this policy is the dissemination of (scientific) evidence on the reasons why specific groups of students are less well represented in higher education, why they more often discontinue their studies, what factors determine their decision to study. Further, this research aims at developing, implementing and testing measures and instruments at the institutional level addressing these problems and barriers. Research results are disseminated and shared with other institutions mostly across the country. This policy is implemented differently in the EU 28. • In Scotland for example, the Scottish Founding Council has commissioned a consortium of a research agency and academic partners to develop a 'toolkit for fair access'.[44] The establishment of the toolkit is user-driven: higher education institutions were asked to report on evidence of their best practices in handling students from specific groups, such as from disadvantaged backgrounds. The research will feed into a framework that aims at guiding decision making, planning and implementing interventions to support fair access at Scottish higher education institutions. • A special initiative in this area is the Scottish STEP programme that aims at creating educational equity for travellers in Scotland.[45] The initiative addresses educators and provides them with training and consultancy, e.g. in how to communicate and consult traveller families. • In Germany a more competitive approach was used, the "Wettbewerb Aufstieg durch Bildung".[46] Here the federal ministry set out a call to stimulate HEIs to develop instruments to integrate specific groups of students who are not familiar with higher education and/or do not meet the formal entrance requirements. Higher Education Institutions that were funded in this programme are supported through so-called accompanying research (Begleitforschung) that supports the institutions in researching their interventions and measure and supports the dissemination of good practices and project outcomes. Further, as the funding scheme was already implemented in 2008, higher education institutions funded in the scheme established a cooperative network that mainly addresses practitioners at higher education institutions for consultation and exchange.[47]

[44] http://cfe.org.uk/work/a-scottish-toolkit-for-fair-access/
[45] http://www.step.education.ed.ac.uk/
[46] https://de.offene-hochschulen.de/en/open-universities
[47] https://de.netzwerk-offene-hochschulen.de/public_pages/1

Policy frequently used?	No data available.
Achieved outcome/ Evaluation of impact:	Screening the literature, we did not find evidence whether or not the policy achieves better information of practitioners, contributes to disseminating knowledge and supports higher education institutions in developing their own instruments to facilitate access and retention among specific groups of students. However, we find that several universities develop organisational structures and new professional roles to address diversity. To what extent best practices are adopted or inspire the higher education community has to our knowledge not been researched yet.
Studies on policy available?	To our knowledge, there is no study on this policy available. However, there is a critical discussion on the idea of accompanying research. As a major problem appears that accompanying research is mostly motivated by the interest of the researchers while not adapting well to the knowledge needs of practitioners. Also, the transfer of the results is difficult as the development of innovative measures frequently did not address the needs of potential adopters.[48]

[48] Such a critical statement can be found here: https://de.kobf-qpl.de/blog_posts/23

Annex 2: Country Case Studies

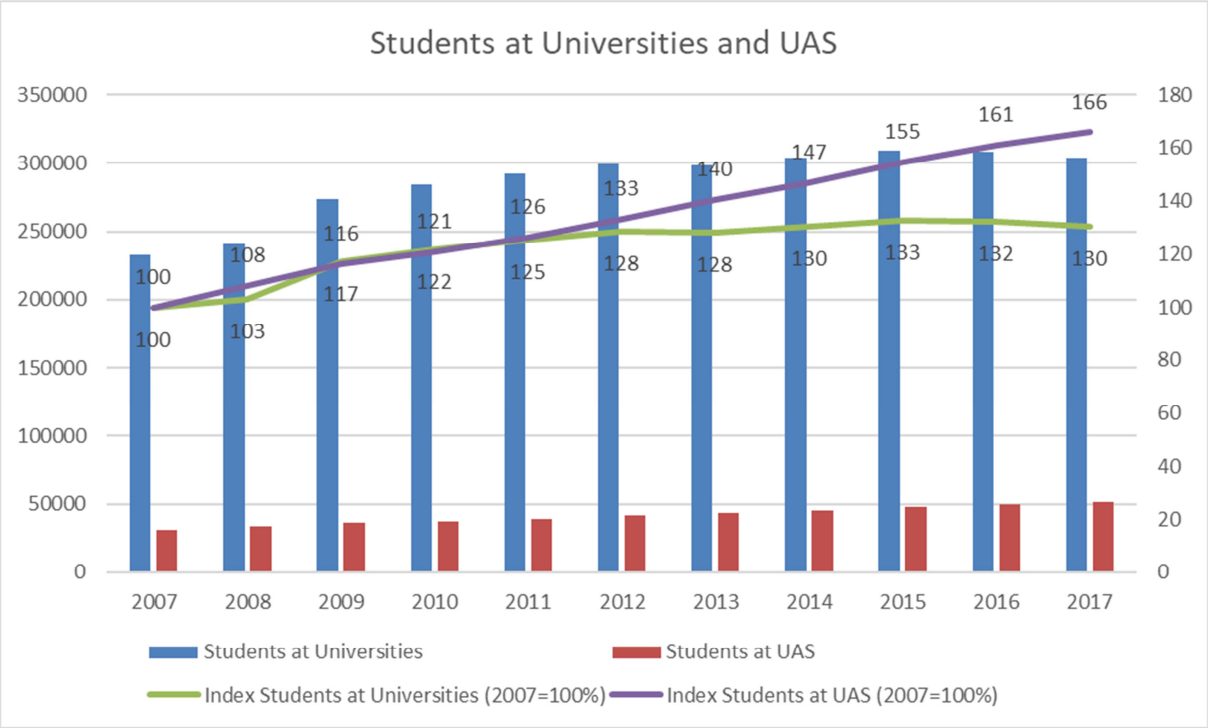
Case study 1: Austria

Introduction

The Austrian higher education system is a binary system with universities and universities of applied sciences. In 2018 there were "22 public universities, 21 universities of applied sciences (Fachhochschulen, FHs), 12 private universities, 14 university colleges of teacher education (Pädagogische Hochschulen, PHs) and three private teacher training courses".

In Austria, student numbers have massively increased in the past years. Between 2007 and 2017 the number of students at public universities has increased by 30%, while students at universities of applied sciences have increased 66%.

Figure A2a: Number of students at Austrian universities and universities of applied sciences



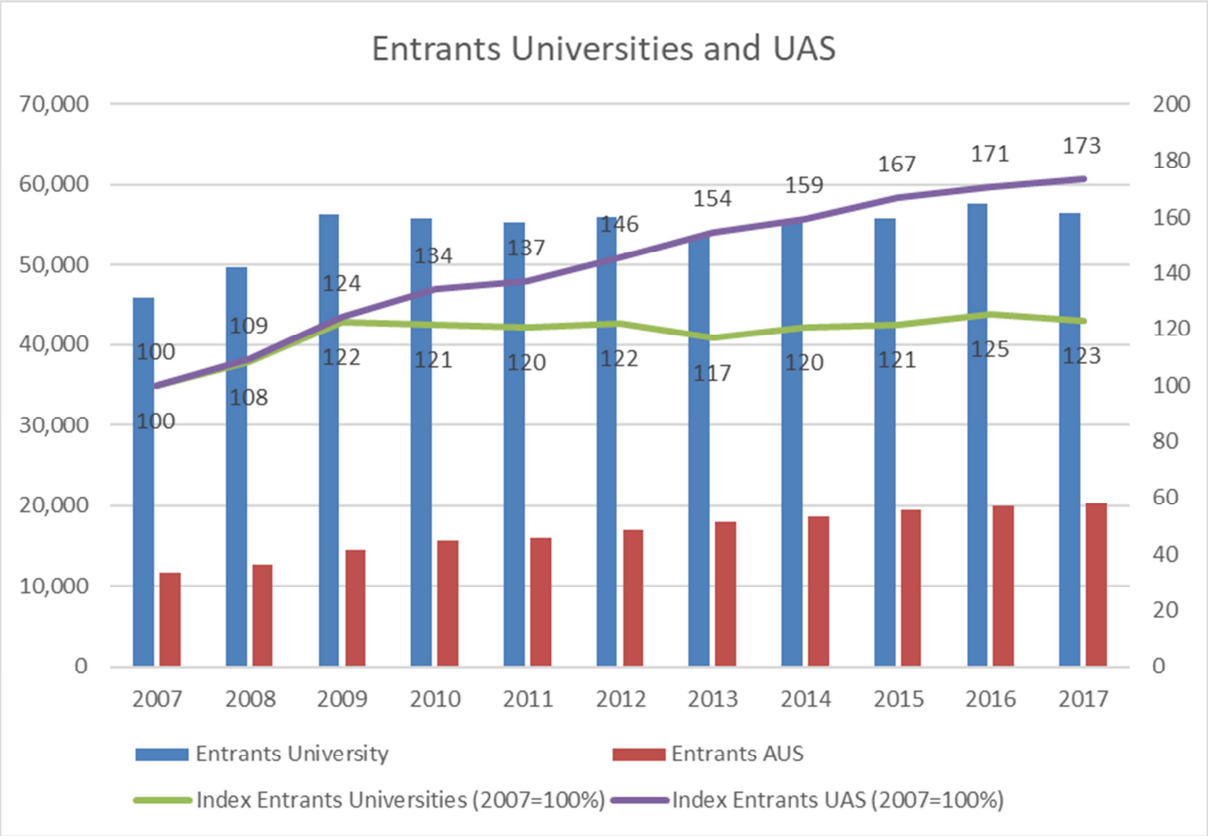
Source: uni-data Austria

Universities of applied science show also a strong increase in the number of entrants (about 73% since 2007). At universities, the number of entrants has remained stable in recent years (about 25% higher than in 2007).

Austrian higher education institutions have a high degree of autonomy. In 2005 they received full autonomy. Governmental steering is mostly done through national and institutional development plans and performance agreements. The latter determines the institutional funding (Boer et al., 2015).

Access to most academic programmes is open, only for a few programmes, such as e.g. human medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, psychology or journalism, access is restricted. The recent report on higher education admission systems in Europe classifies Austria as Type 1 country where selection for higher education is mostly done by schools, where at least one educational pathway is not leading to higher education and where higher education institutions cannot select students for their programmes, except for those programmes where access is restricted (Orr, Usher, Haj, Atheron, and Geanta, 2017).

Figure A2b: Number of entrants at Austrian universities and universities of applied sciences



Source: uni-data Austria

1. Main issues and policy aims regarding widening participation

1.1. Most important access problems

A report on the social situation of students in Austria (IHS, 2016b) states that in 2015 the student population to a large extent reflected the social composition of the overall society. There are however some groups that are less well represented. The University Report 2017 indicates that access to higher education is most strongly determined by the students' social background, in particular, the educational background of the parents. Students who have a father with a higher education degree have a 2.6 times higher chance to participate in higher education compared to young adults whose parents do not have tertiary education (Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung, and Redaktion: Eva Schmutzer-Hollensteiner, 2017; IHS, 2016b). The Migration background of the students is also an important determinant for enrolment in higher education. Among students with migrant background who have acquired an Austrian higher education entrance qualification, only a small percentage enrols into higher education. This is, in particular, true for students who are 2nd generation migrants (parents migrated to Austria) (Bundesministerium für Bildung et al., 2017, 203ff). The University report also states that currently the following groups are not well represented in the student population (Bundesministerium für Bildung et al., 2017, 200ff):

- students with no formal higher education entrance qualification
- mature students (students above 25 years of age)
- students with family or children

- impaired/disabled students.

In addition, besides the overall composition of the student body, also the diversity in selected programmes or fields of study is addressed. First, currently, female students are outnumbering male students across the whole higher education sector. Further, there are female and male-dominated programmes. Females dominate the programmes in pedagogy, social sciences, and health sciences, while male students are more frequently represented in the majority of MINT programmes (bmwfw, 2017, p. 13). Further, social background determines the kind of higher education institution selected: students from lower social backgrounds are more likely to attend universities of applied sciences while students from a higher social background more frequently attend universities (IHS, 2016b, p. 14).

To some students, the need to work alongside their studies appears to be an important obstacle to the retention and successful completion of higher education. In Austria, a high percentage of students, in particular students from lower social backgrounds, needs to work for their living while studying. In their report IHS (2016b) state that this might result in high retention and lower completion rates among these students. Also the national strategy on the social dimension in higher education points to the financial situation of students from lower social backgrounds and their need to work as a hindrance to access, retention and completion of higher education (bmwfw, 2017).

1.2 Policy aims regarding widening participation

Against this problem analysis, an Austrian national strategy on the social dimension in higher education published in 2017 sets out three major target dimensions for actions to better integrate the social dimension into higher education (bmwfw, 2017, p. 20):

I) Achieve more integrative access

II) Avoid dropout and improve completion

III) Create basic parameters and optimise the regulation of higher education policy

The target dimension "achieving more integrative access" relates to achieving a similar social structure of the student population as compared to the general population across all study programmes. As key action to achieving this target, the strategy defines the improvement of the information provided to underrepresented groups of students and students with specific needs. Further, the strategy proposes actions to improve the knowledge base on the determinants of study choice. Achieving better knowledge of what factors impact on the study choice of non-traditional students helps to develop a better outreach and information for these students. Further, to attract talented students with no formal entrance qualification for higher education, the strategy aims at establishing transparent and clear rules for the recognition of prior formal and informal rules.

"Avoid dropout and improve completion" aims at creating the chance to complete the programme he or she started, for each student. Actions related to this target mostly aim to better adapt study conditions to the needs of specific groups of students. Actions include the provision of modularized programmes, improve students' academic competencies and measures to increase the compatibility of study with other aspects of their life.

Finally, the target "Create basic parameters and optimise the regulation of higher education policy" aims at aspects of the higher education system and higher education institutions. At the national level, regulations of programmes should be reconsidered, e.g. if short-cycle programmes meet the needs of specific groups of students. In order to establish or even enhance a culture of addressing the social dimension at institutional levels, different incentives should be used and the social dimension should become part of institutional development plans. The strategy also states that regulations for the funding of students should be adapted to improve the financial situation of students from lower social backgrounds in particular.

In addition, the strategy also states nine quantitative goals that should be achieved by 2025 (see table A2a below). These goals reflect the overall aim to achieve a similar composition of the student body as compared to the general population.

Table A2a: Quantitative goals of the Austrian National Strategy on the Social Dimension in Higher Education through 2025

Quantitative goals through to 2025	
1	Increase the number of "educationally disadvantaged" students in higher education by: Reducing the recruitment quota/probability factor for admission to higher education to 2.25 (2020) and 2.10 (2025) Decreasing the discrepancy in the probability factors between public universities and universities of applied sciences Including private universities and university colleges of teacher education in the calculation of probability factors, adaption of target values
2	Widen inclusive access by: Increasing the number of non-traditional admissions (educational residents) to higher education from the current 4,000 to 5,300
3	Promote gender balance in all degree programmes: Requiring a minimum percentage of 10% men or women in any degree programme (excluding doctoral study) and at any higher education institution Halving the number of degree programmes at each higher education institution where men or women comprise less than 30%
4	Widen participation by: Increasing the percentage of (educational resident) students admitted to higher education who are second-generation children of immigrants from 22% to 30%
5	Increase the percentage of students admitted to higher education in all federal states to 42% by 2025 and towards the Austrian average (47%) with reference to the entire education and vocational education system
6	Establish recognition of the social dimension in mobility by: Increasing participation in overseas study programmes by students whose parents have no university entrance qualifications, to at least 18%
7	With respect to improved compatibility: Increase the number of vocational places (part-time study places for students also having a job) at universities of applied science to 50%
8	Student grants: Increase to 15,000 the number of self-supporting students receiving maintenance grants
9	Promote equal opportunity: Sustained increase in the percentage of student admissions from homes where neither parent has a university degree in medical and dentistry courses towards an eventual target of 50%

Source: Federal Ministry of Science and Research and Economy, p. 11

1.3 Focus of national strategies

The major foci of this recent national strategy are to improve information on higher education to achieve more appropriate study choices and to show opportunities to groups of students who would otherwise choose a different educational pathway. In addition, the strategy aims to better adapt the higher education provision to the needs of students, to stimulate higher education institutions to establish a 'social dimension culture' that allows responding to educational needs of specific groups. The strategy is rather recent, therefore not all mentioned actions have been implemented yet.

The Association of Austrian Universities of Applied Sciences (FHK) in general appreciates the national strategy. However, it also pointed that it is not well integrated with other levels of the educational systems. Therefore it suggested involving stakeholders from

primary and secondary education as well as stakeholders from business and industry.[49] The association's main criticism is that some imbalances in access (e.g. the existence of male and female dominated programmes) appear to be rooted in societal stereotypes and cultures: the latter should be addressed early in the educational trajectory and the problem should not be left to the higher education sector only.

2. Main policy instruments applied for widening participation

In Austria, there are hardly national policies that stimulate higher education institutions to address widening participation. This is due to the special governance structures that have been established for the university sector since the implementation of the University Law 2005 (Universitätsgesetz 2005). The sector of universities of applied science is regulated by the FHStG, which defines Universities of Applied Science as private entities that work in a public area. Austrian higher education institutions have full legal autonomy. Governmental steering is done through national higher education development plans that set the framework for the planning and the development plan of the individual institutions. Governmental control is done/exerted through the performance contracts between individual higher education institutions and the Ministry for education and research. These performance contracts determine the institutional funding (Boer et al., 2015). Therefore policies to widen participation are frequently developed and implemented at the institutional level.

The current national higher education development plan (Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Wirtschaft, 2018) and the national strategy plan set the frame for institutional policies. A recent report lists measures that have been implemented by higher education institutions to address widening participation (3suser, 2016, 16ff).

In the following, the most frequent institutional policies and national policies will be described.

2.1 Regulations

National policies

The national strategy on the social dimension suggests a number of actions that involve changes in regulations. These mostly address regulations for:

- the recognition of prior (formal and non-formal) learning,
- admission procedures for programmes with restricted access
- measures to increase the 'studyability' of modules in current programmes

These initiatives are currently ongoing and there is no information available on the steps that have already been taken.

The University Law (UG) includes some regulations that address the social dimension and might facilitate widening participation. Most important are regulations on access to higher education. §64a (UG) stipulates conditions for access for students who have no formal higher education entrance qualification. §64a regulates the "Studienberechtigungsprüfung", an exam that higher education institutions can implement to grant access to Bachelor and Diploma-programmes to students with no formal higher education entrance qualification. It defines fields of study where this access route can be applied as well as the persons who are eligible for this access route (older than 20 years, completed compulsory schooling, experience, and training in vocational or other professional areas). Persons who already completed vocational degrees such as foremen or master craftsmen can be exempted from these exams and can access higher

[49] http://www.fhk.ac.at/index.php?eID=tx_nawsecuredl&u=0&file=uploads/tx_sbdownloader/FHK_Stellungnahme_zur_Nationalen_Strategie_zur_sozialen_Dimension.pdf&t=1544690379&hash=9de24ab620ea3326530e119bc3b56463c6e42f03

education after applying for access. The law also stipulates the exams that have to be formally part of the "Studienberechtigungsprüfung".

With regard to programmes with restricted access, the University Law prescribes a (minimum) number of study places in highly demanded study programmes that have to be provided by universities (§§71ff). Higher education institutions can implement their own selection procedures for these restricted programmes, but they are obliged to establish transparent selection procedures and to make selection rules publicly available. The current national strategy suggests to evaluate current selection procedures with regard to equity in access and to eventually implement new, more equitable rules.

Institutional policies

Due to the high degree of institutional autonomy, Austrian higher education institutions appear to have developed a variety of regulations with regard to widening participation. The report on widening participation activities in the Austrian higher education sector (3suser, 2016) states these as a type of governance action. This type includes measures such as general rules to guarantee a high degree of accessibility for disabled and impaired students (Alpen-Adria University), admission rules that are sensitive to widening participation (Fachhochschule der Wirtschaft), establishing the role of Ombudsmen for students, who are also responsible for access and inequities (FH Wien), establishing roles for special coordinators and consultants who support students with refugee or migrant background (e.g. at Paris-Lodron-University Salzburg) as well as implementing guidelines for addressing non-traditional students in higher education.[50]

Also, stakeholders in higher education engage in measures to support widening participation. In 2013, the Arbeitnehmerkammer Wien implemented the project "Ufirst" that developed, in collaboration with the University of Vienna and the Austrian Academic Exchange Service, guidelines for addressing first-generation students. In the project, different forms of support were critically reviewed. Among these were e.g. mentoring, buddy programmes, qualification of teaching staff, measures to strengthen academic readiness of first-generation students (Bernhardt, 2014).

2.2 Funding

National policies

Funding for higher education institutions

In Austria, performance contracts are implemented to regulate the funding of public universities. When establishing these performance contracts higher education institutions have to consider the national development plan for the higher education sector. The two recent national development plans foresaw gender equality, diversity and social inclusion as important engagement areas of higher education institutions (bmwfw, 2015; Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Wirtschaft, 2018). The latest development plan states that gender equality, as well as measures to achieve diversity, mainstream the social dimension at institutional level and establish social inclusive cultures, should become part of institutional strategies and activities. All of these elements should also be covered by the performance agreement between the institutions and the ministry.

There is no information if there is any additional funding available to stimulate higher education institutions to engage in widening participation.

Funding for students[51]

Austria uses a number of different funding instruments for students. Firstly, there are need-based grants, the so-called "Studienzuschuß" or "Studienbeihilfe". These need-

[50] A full list of institutional measures is available in 3suser (2016, 72ff).
[51] Detailed information on student funding in Austria is available at www.stipendium.at

based grants target students from disadvantaged backgrounds to motivate them to enrol in higher education. The amount of funding is dependent on a set of criteria that include:

- students' own income and family status
- number of dependents of the student (own children, etc.)
- parental income and family status
- number of further dependents of parents (own children etc.)
- age threshold (students need to start study before age of 30)
- study programme should be longer than 10 semesters (nominal)

To receive the funding students must prove their study success in the first and second semester. Students who do not exceed a certain threshold of awarded ECTS do not receive further funding and have to pay back the grant received up to that point. Students are allowed to change their programme twice but have to prove that they were successful in their prior programmes. The grant is paid to Austrians as well as to foreigners and stateless persons of equal status (including recognized refugees).

The so-called Selbsterhalterstipendium is a maintenance grant for (mature) students who already funded themselves before accessing higher education. This grant is paid to students who have received an own income for more than four years prior to their first enrolment in higher education. The students have to report their own income and dependents, but parental income is not considered. To receive funding students must also prove their study success in the first and second semester. Students who do not exceed a certain threshold do not receive further funding and have to pay back the grant received up to that point. Students are allowed to change their programme twice but have to prove that they were successful in their prior programmes. The grant is paid to Austrians as well as to foreigners and stateless persons of equal status (including recognized refugees)

A further grant (the "Studienabschlussstipendium) funds students to complete/finish studies who are close to graduation but need work to fund their studies and living.

The grant is only paid to students who:

- did not achieve more than 120 ECTS through exams etc.
- have already a topic for their thesis
- are no older than 41 years
- had a part time job (at least 50% of the regular working time or more) for at least 36 months in the 48 months before they apply for funding
- did not complete a first degree yet (except for bachelor degrees)
- did not receive Studienbeihilfe prior to applying.

According to information from the report on National student fee and support system, the grants in 2015/2016 amounted to 9,492 Euro per year for students in the first and second study cycle. In 2015/2016 about 14% of the students in the first and second study cycle received on average 4,850 Euro (Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, p. 45).

In addition, Austria provides financial support to parents and families: "Indirect financing may be a transfer payment to the students' parents (e.g. family allowances and tax relief), or non-cash benefits (e.g. health and accident insurance for students and tax benefits). Students' parents can receive family allowances (EUR 158.90 per month per child) and tax relief (EUR 58.40 per month per child) if the student is under 24 (in exceptional cases till 25 years of age) and is studying." (Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, p. 45)

2.3 Organisational policies

National policies

A major organisational policy that has been implemented at the national level is the compulsory "study orientation phase". This orientation phase is foreseen for first-cycle programmes that have no restricted access. Its aim is to inform students about their study and to test if the programme suits their competencies and expectations. Students are also provided with consultancy in that phase. Further, the study orientation phase needs to be successfully completed by an exam and between 15 and 30 ECTS can be granted for it. To continue their studies students need to successfully complete this phase. While the University Law stipulates the framework for the study orientation phase, it is implemented very differently across the higher education institutions (Unger, M., Thaler, B., Dibiasi, A., Grabher, A., and Zaussinger, S., 2015). The study orientation phase is regulated in §66 UG.

Institutional level

There is not much information available on what measures have been implemented at the institutional level. For example the University of Graz engages in the network unikid-unicare[52] and provides (mostly informational) support to students with children or who have to work to allow them to better integrate their studies with their other duties (Uni Graz, 2017). There is no information available if curricula or study plans can be adapted to the needs of care-taking students.

2.4 Information policies

National policies

The University law provides the student the right to full information and orientation for Bachelors and Diploma studies (§ 60 UG). Improving the information provided is one of the major policies stated in the national strategy for the social dimension in higher education. Among the actions that already have been performed to improve the information was the implementation of a national information platform on studying in Austria. The website www.studiversum.at informs about programmes and other aspects of studying.

There was no information yet on how the different other measures directed at improving outreach to non-traditional students (mentioned in the national strategy) will be implemented by higher education institutions.

Austria has also implemented a monitoring system that informs about the social composition of new entrants to higher education (Bundesministerium für Bildung et al., 2017; IHS, 2016b) and reports on the social situation of students (IHS, 2016b).

Institutional policies

At institutional level institutions have implemented roles as well as departments to consult students (in line with the requirements of the UG). Besides information to inform study choice before enrolling to higher education, higher education institutions have also implemented support for non-traditional students after they have entered into higher education. 3suser (2016) mentions that peer-mentoring is frequently used across Austrian higher education institutions. In peer-mentoring students act as mentors for newly enrolled students from specific groups and help them to integrate into academic life.

3. Policy impact: monitoring, evaluation, and analysis

3.1 National statistics on changes in the composition of the student body

Since 2010 the number of new entrants to universities has remained quite stable, while the number of new entrants to universities of applied sciences is still increasing. In total,

[52] https://www.unikid-unicare.at/

around 60,000 new students enter higher education in Austria each year (see figure A2a in the introduction), around 45,000 enrol at universities, another 15,000 at universities of applied science. Throughout this period, at universities witnessed a larger share of females enrolled, while the opposite is found at universities of applied science.

The Sozialerhebung provides data on the composition of the student body (IHS, 2010, IHS, 2012, IHS, 2016a). Table A2b below compiles data on how the participation of gender, age, migration background, social background, and alternative access routes to higher education have developed between 2009 and 2015 for universities and universities of applied science. Across the board, there is hardly any change in the composition of the student body for the period under review. A slight change is that the percentage of students older than 25 years has increased and that the percentages of students with a migrant background or coming from a lower social background have slightly decreased.

Comparing these numbers to the composition of the population of the new entrants to higher education in 2015 reveals that the composition of the total student body has not changed significantly.[53]

Table A2b: Development participation of specific groups in higher education/composition of the student body

	Universities			**Universities of Applied Sciences**			**New Entrants to higher education (University and UAS)**
	2015	2011	2009	2015	2011	2009	2015
Gender							
Females	55	54	54	48	47	47	56
Males	45	46	46	52	53	53	44
Age							
< 25 years	61	61	64	61	64	66	87
> 25 Years	39	39	37	39	36	34	13
Social Background (Schichtenkonzept)							
low	16	17	18	21	22	23	17
middle	29	30	30	34	34	35	32
upper	35	34	33	33	34	32	34
highest	20	19	19	12	11	10	17
Migration Background							
With migration Background	28	26	32	16	14	20	No data

[53] No more recent data on characteristics of student body available.

Access to higher education							
Alternative access route	6	6	6	12	12	11	8

Sources: Sozialerhebung 2015 – Bd. 3; Tabelle 2, Sozialerhebung 2011, Bd. 2, Tabelle 61; Sozialerhebung 2009, Tabellenband, Tabelle 61; calculations by author

3.2 Results from monitoring and evaluation of policy implications

The data suggest that policies on widening access to higher education that have been implemented until 2015 did not have a huge impact in terms of changing the composition of the student body. Unfortunately, there is no data available that would allow comparing the composition of the student body with the overall composition of society. Some reports state that there would be a high degree of similarity between both, but there is no evidence provided for this statement.

However, some policies mentioned above have been addressed through monitoring and evaluations. In particular, the funding for students has been reviewed in 2015 (Unger et al., 2015), and the study found that the financial support for students helps to prevent dropout and increases completion among students receiving financial support (Unger et al., 2015, p. 277, Unger et al., 2015). Some of the funded students, however, report that the duration of financial support does not align with the study duration. Some students face problems to complete their study once the funding runs out. Overall, the funding accounts for 7% of the completed degrees in Austria (Unger et al., 2015, p. 278). The report further states that the funding provides support to most students in need but also points that some groups are not well covered. Among these are disabled/impaired students, students from abroad, students with parents who are not able to support their children financially (although their income is above the threshold) and mature students (older than 30 years when enrolling to higher education)

4. Conclusions

Austria states that there are no strong social inequalities with regard to access to and participation in higher education. The social composition of the student body and the new entrants is to some extent similar to the social composition of the overall society.[54] Nonetheless, Austria has in 2016 (in a collaborative process) developed a strategy to further widen participation in higher education. The strategy is implemented and feeds into national and institutional development plans. However, currently, it is quite difficult to state conclusions on actions related to widening participation as the strategy is recent and has not yet fully been embraced by higher education institutions.

Austrian higher education institutions have a high degree of autonomy, national development plans for higher education act as a framework for their activities and own development plans.

Due to the high degree of autonomy, national policies mostly address students through funding, information, and some organisational policies. The current strategy foresees a number of policies to improve information provisions for students and a reform of the student funding system. For most of the other areas, it is left to the institutions to develop interventions for widening participation. A recent report found that a variety of these interventions has been already developed (3suser, 2016). Leaving the development to the higher education institutions might allow them to establish interventions that better align with their needs but there is also the risk of inefficiency and excessive variety across the sectors, as well as misalignment of institutional measures. (Funds sufficient to stimulate HEI to engage in widening participation).

[54] This is stated by a number of reports – though there is no evidence provided.

Stakeholders rightly state that the strategy lacks integration with other educational levels. Due to early tracking, information policies and other interventions should be implemented at 'earlier' levels of the educational system.

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Case study 2: Czech Republic

Introduction

Higher education is provided by universities and higher education institutions that are a non-university type. For both types of higher education institutions, there are public and private institutions. University type institutions provide bachelor, master, and doctoral degree programmes. Non-university type institutions provide bachelor programmes only.[55]

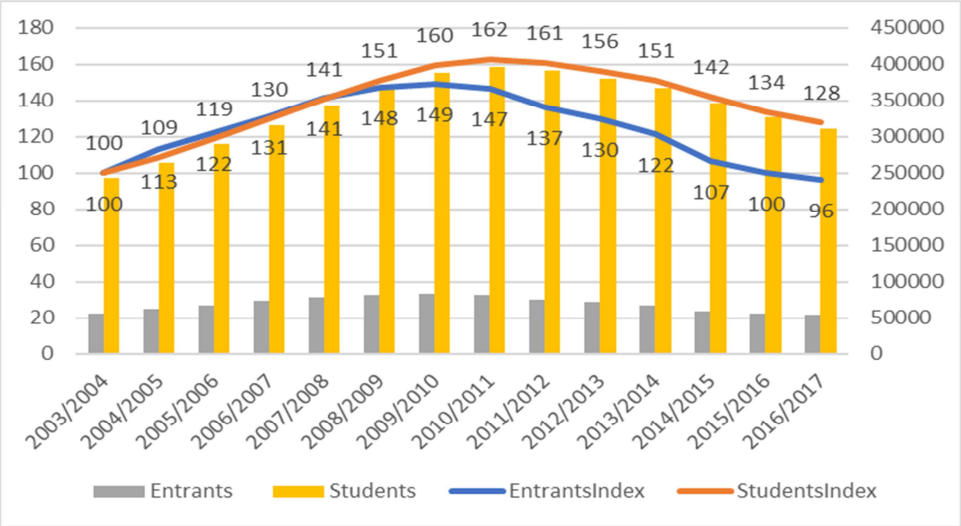
The report of Orr, Usher, Haj, Atherton, and Geanta (2017) classifies admission in the Czech Republic as Type 4 country, i.e. to embark higher education students have to pass two selections: the first takes place in secondary schools when they might be selected for an educational pathway that does not lead to higher education. The second selection is done by the higher education institutions as these are allowed to select their students.

For admission to higher education programmes students need to have completed upper secondary school successfully and received a higher education entrance qualification. Further, higher education institutions are allowed to specify additional criteria for admitting students to programmes. Prospective students have to apply for programmes.

In terms of student numbers, the higher education sector in the Czech Republic was growing strongly until the academic year 2012/2013. Since then, the number of students has declined, the number of new entrants to the higher education system, which peaked in 2009/2010, has decreased to lower numbers compared to the academic year 2003/2004. Demographic changes mostly account for the steep increase of student numbers and the current decline.

In 2016, about 36% of the population aged 20-24 years were enrolled in higher education (Eurostat). Since 2013 this number has slightly been declining (2013: 37% of the 20-24 years old). In 2017 around 21% of the population aged 15 to 64 years had a tertiary degree (level 5-8). This number had increased from 12% in 2008.

Figure A2c: Development of Student Number (absolute number, index 2003/2004) and Number of Entrants to Higher Education since 2003/2004



Source: CZSO Public database, Code VZD12/6, Code VZD 11/7, accessed on December 13th, 2018, calculations by author

[55] See https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/types-higher-education-institutions-21_en

1. Main issues and policy aims regarding widening participation

1.1 Most important access problems

As shown above, in terms of student numbers the Czech higher education system has strongly grown since the beginning of the 2000s. This is on the one hand due to demographic change but also to an increased state and institutional effort in expanding higher education provision. The expansion of higher education, however, did not lead to a decrease in educational inequalities. The recent educational strategy and the higher education strategy both state that access to education is still strongly determined by the socio-economic background and the level of parents' education (Czech Ministry for Education, no date; Czech Ministry for Education, Youth and Sport, 2015). This was already stated by Mateju, Rehakova, and Simonová (2007) who found that the chance to move to higher education was even increasing for students with higher socio-economic and educational backgrounds from more recent birth cohorts. Educational inequalities would, therefore, be persistent and even deepen although the education system expanded.

In addition, both strategies refer to international evaluations of the Czech educational system. These identify the early tracking of students, the lack of opportunities for part-time education and the absence of a clear regulation with regard to the formal recognition of prior learning as major obstacles to achieving more equity in education as well as in establishing life-long learning.

1.2 Policy aims regarding widening participation

The overall HE strategy states as a major aim to decrease educational inequalities. There was no information found on quantitative goals. With regard to higher education, this strategy mentions "guaranteeing free access to a wide range of tertiary education" as a key action to achieving this aim.

The national strategic plan for the development of higher education institutions mentions an increase in the diversity of programs as a major measure to reduce inequalities in higher education and widen access. Central to this plan is to better adapt the higher education to the demands of students.

1.3 Focus of national strategies

To achieve these aims the strategy suggests different actions to achieve a better adjustment of higher education to the educational needs of students. Higher education should reflect the diversity of students and branch out the provision so that it adapts to all students. Social background and other factors that have an impact on accessing higher education should become irrelevant.

The strategic plan mentions a number of actions supporting this aim (Czech Ministry for Education, Youth and Sport, 2015, 12ff):

- A change of the current system of student funding is envisaged. The strategic plan sets out to revisit the current funding and to create better funding opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds
- Also, higher education institutions should be provided with funds that support them in addressing specific groups of students.
- Measures and plans of higher education institutions to reach out, consult, inform and support students from disadvantaged and specific groups on access and successful completion should become part of institutional accreditation.
- It is suggested to improve the knowledge base about students and their movements in the educational system

- Monitoring of students should inform about access to higher education and the permeability of the higher education system
- Researching causes for dropout is expected to improve the adaption to student diversity.
- Higher education institutions should implement monitoring of their students to learn about access and retention from disadvantaged groups.
- The quality and relevance of distance learning should be evaluated.
- Finally, current good practices in recognising prior learning should be reviewed and adapted as recommendations.

2. Main policy instruments applied for widening participation

To date, only a few of the actions mentioned above have been implemented in the Czech higher education system.

2.1 Regulations

The most important recent national policy in the area of regulations was the inclusion of outreach activities in the standards for institutional accreditation. This policy aims to stimulate higher education institutions to develop measures that provide consultancy to specific groups of students. The major objective is to increase diversity at HEI and to improve accessibility to higher education.

The strategy of the Czech Education Ministry states that accreditation standards for institutional accreditation should include the institutions' activities to reach out for specific groups of students. Specific groups of students are defined as "students with lower socio-economic status, parents with children, members of language and ethnic minorities, students with specific educational needs and health difficulties and students enrolled in further education while employed." In detail the strategy aims (Czech Ministry for Education, no date):

- to include the requirements on consultancy and support for specific groups of students in the standards for institutional accreditation HE;
- to assess the policies of HE institutions in the area of access to study and successful completion within their applications for institutional accreditation.

The current accreditation standards stipulate as standard the following (Government Regulation No. 274/2016, on standards for accreditation in higher education, 2016):

"The higher education institution has established an effective system ensuring equal access to study for all applicants for study and students. The higher education institution provides services and other supporting measures to balance opportunities to study at the higher education institution for students with specific needs."

We did not find any information in the English language literature on whether there are already higher education institutions that have implemented consultancy for specific groups.

Currently, to embark on higher education students need to have formal higher education entrance qualification. Students with no such qualification can access studies upon successful completion of bridging courses that provide them with the needed qualification. The Bologna Follow up Report from 2018 states that currently there are no regulations for the preferential treatment of specific groups of student in place (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018b). Also, there are no common rules yet for the recognition of prior learning for entry, but some higher education institutions have established rules for recognition. It appears that there is no recognition of prior learning with regard to study progress. The development strategy foresees to collect information on good institutional practices in recognizing prior learning and establish these as

common rules. There is no information available yet if this process has been implemented and how far it has developed.

2.2 Funding policies

National policies

Funding for higher education institutions

The strategic plan proposes to provide higher education institutions with funds to better reach out and address students from specific groups. Eurydice states that there was a proposal to change the funding system for institutions in 2016, but from the information available it is not clear if these proposals also cover plans for widening participation in higher education. The Bologna Report 2018 states that retention and completion have a role in the current institutional funding formula, but there is no information if this is related to specific groups of students or to the overall retention and completion rate.

In 2016 the Ministry implemented institutional development plans for additional funding. To receive funding higher education institutions have to describe their plans for institutional development. "Within the institutional programme the higher education institutions (HEI) can receive an allowance. HEI submits a request in the form of an institutional plan for the years 2016 to 2018. Institutions set their goals based on the strategic plan of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and on their own strategic plans. At least 10 % of the financial amount allocated to implementation of the institutional plan is then distributed through the HEI's internal competition to the following areas set by the Ministry:

1. supporting the instruction of academic staff and the profiling and the innovation of study programmes at the level of subjects/ courses;

2. creative work of students aimed at innovation of educational activities.

The amount of the allowance is set for 3 years, every year the institution receives one third of the amount based on the report on fulfilling the objectives set."[56]

Another funding instrument is centralised plans for development that fund development projects at higher education institutions. In this programme funding is provided to institutions who hand in project proposals. The funding is competitive as committee evaluates and selects proposals. In recent years development projects mostly funded interventions that aim at improving the quality of higher education or strengthening the international collaboration of higher education institutions.

Funding for students

There was no information available on whether the system of student funding is currently evaluated or if funding policies for students from disadvantaged backgrounds have been established. Currently, need-based grants, the so-called social scholarships, are paid to only a minority of students (around 1%). Financial support to accommodation is paid to around 58% of the students. Around 6 to 7% of the students receive merit-based grants (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018a, p. 42).

In addition, there are tax benefits for parents with children enrolled in higher education. These are granted per child in higher education (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018a, p. 42).

2.3 Organisational policies

There are hardly any organisational policies implemented at the national level yet. However, the development strategy points to

- Introducing new, shorter degree programmes that are more closely aligned to the demands of students.

[56] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-reforms-higher-education-17_en#14_4_Institutional_development_plans_2016_2018

There was already a discussion on the introduction of short-cycle programmes during the reform of higher education. This proposal was rejected by university representatives.[57] Surprisingly, this idea was picked up again for the strategic development plan.

- Improving the collaboration between different levels of education, e.g. the collaboration between secondary and higher education.
- Improve distance learning facilities.

2.4 Information policies

At the national level, there are no information policies that specifically reach out to less well-represented groups of students. Since 2015 the website of the ministry provides an overview of all higher education institutions and the programmes offered (this information targets all students).

There was no English language information available on if and how higher education institutions provide special information to underrepresented groups of students.

3. Policy impact: monitoring, evaluation, and analysis

3.1 National statistics on changes in the composition of the student body

At the national level, there is a central register of students (SIMS).[58] This register collects information of all students enrolling in public or private education institutions in the Czech Republic and follows them up during their educational pathway. The database cannot be accessed publicly as it includes personal data (e.g. the social insurance number). With regard to higher education, we found that the register has information on the age, gender, region, type of study programme enrolled, country of origin, and part-time studies (Vossensteyn et al., 2015). Background information such as ethnic or socioeconomic background is not collected due to the Czech data privacy regulations.

Therefore national statistics cannot help us to report to what extent the composition of the student body has changed recently with regard to the specific groups of students that should be targeted by widening participation policies.

There are a few papers that address inequality in access to higher education (Franta and Guzi, 2012; Konečný, Basl, Mysliveček, and Simonová, 2012; Mateju et al., 2007; Matêjů P., 2009). Mateju et al. (2007) state that student numbers, as well as inequality in access to higher education, were increasing after 1990. In their paper, they discuss various theories explaining this increase. One of them argues that, that while secondary education was expanding and included children from various backgrounds, the tertiary sector did not expand in a similar manner, thus providing a limited number of study opportunities to a growing number of students who had to compete for these places. This competition motivated in particular students from lower socio-economic backgrounds to choose other educational pathways than higher education. The theory argues that these other pathways appear less risky to them.

Konečný et al. (2012) simulated the effect of alternative admission systems on the access of talented students from lower socio-economic backgrounds to higher education. They found that just testing the academic aptitude of students for admission would increase the participation of these groups of students.

Franta and Guzi (2012) found that the spatial distribution of universities also determines inequalities in access to higher education. Students from lower social backgrounds who are not living close to any university are more likely to not apply for higher education than students with a higher social background from the same area. Two major reasons account for this pattern. First, it is motivated by a cost-saving attitude where the student wants to avoid additional living costs. Second, the study found that these students are

[57] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/czech-republic/short-cycle-higher-education_en
[58] http://www.msmt.cz/vzdelavani/vysoke-skolstvi/sims-sdruzene-informace-matrik-studentu-1

less well informed about study and funding opportunities as well as about the costs of higher education.

3.2 Results from monitoring and evaluation of policy implications

No English language monitoring and evaluation studies on widening participation policies were found.[59]

3.3 Good practices

No good practices described in the English language.

4. Conclusions

Inequality is still a major problem with regard to higher education access in the Czech Republic. Unfortunately, we did not find a study that reports on inequality in access.

An OECD review published in 2009 (OECD, 2009) stated that the lower participation of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds is a problem in the Czech Republic. The current general education strategy and the development strategy both address educational inequalities as main activity areas in further developing the educational sector.

Mostly, the strategies use the term ‘specific groups of students' when referring to those groups that are not well represented in the higher education sector. Unfortunately, we did not find a clear definition of these specific groups and a more thorough analysis of access and retention yet. The strategy states that more knowledge of educational inequalities should be generated but there is no information available if this has been started and whether national statistics will also start collecting data on the students' background characteristics. Research on educational inequalities could also support understanding to what extent the current double selection admission system hinders widening participation in higher education.

The development strategy for higher education institutions proposes a number of interventions that could help reduce educational inequities. A major aim is to diversify the educational provision to better adapt to the life of students and their educational needs. Inspecting recent higher education reforms reveals that some of them support their implementation while others block innovations. E.g. providing additional funds to the higher education institutions for developing interventions to enhance the quality of the education could support the development of interventions for specific groups of students. From the information available it appears that widening participation is not addressed as a supported target by the development projects initiative. Further, although the strategy aims at diversifying the educational provision, an initiative to establish short degree programmes did not go through.

Overall, both strategies could also better link the higher education to other educational levels, e.g. by providing more targeted information about higher education, study opportunities and costs already during upper secondary school. Establishing common rules for recognition of prior learning would also be helpful.

4. Conclusion

In the Czech Republic interventions for widening participation interventions appear to be not well coordinated. Recent higher education reforms make little reference to the goals of reducing educational inequalities and increasing the diversity of the courses on offer. A particular problem is that there appears to be no reliable knowledge about the current extent of educational inequality and its causes.

[59] With regard to publications available in the English language.

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Case study 3: France

Introduction

The French higher education system consists of a variety of institutions: universities, "grandes écoles" (elite schools), and other schools and institutes outside of universities (Eurydice, 2015). In total, there are 420 separate institutions, or 315 if we consider inter-academic communities of universities and institutions (COMUE).[60]

There are mainly two types of higher education institutions in France: the selective institutions and the non-selective universities. The latter admit students on the basis of the general secondary education leaving certificate or baccalaureate (BAC). The selective institutions concern the 'grandes écoles', the two-years professional diplomas ("instituts universitaires de technologie" - IUT (hosting about 5% of students) or "sections de techniciens supérieurs" - STS (about 5% of students) and institutions providing three or five years professional diplomas. "Grandes écoles" are highly selective institutions mainly admitting students on the basis of an entrance exam taken by students who attended "classes préparatoires aux grandes écoles" (CPGE) and dispense a high level of training and qualifications (mainly 5 years degrees). Grandes écoles are mostly engineering colleges (5% of students) or business schools (5% of students), but they also include other more specific institutions such as Institut d'études politiques (IEP), or "écoles normales supérieures" (ENS).

Universities make up the largest part of the higher education sector in France and admitted about 58% of the 2.5 million higher education students in 2015/16. They have a much broader mission than selective institutions. In practice, a vast majority of students enter university programs because they were not admitted to the professionally oriented selective institutions. It is estimated that about 42% of the students enter higher education on a non-selective basis as universities also select some groups of students for two-year professional diplomas (IUT), health professions, engineering schools integrated into universities (65 out of 205), other university diplomas and doctoral training (MESR, 2017a). Since 2017 all masters have the possibility to become selective (MESR, 2017b).

In France there is no national selection exam for higher education. Access to programs on the Bachelor level at universities is not restricted. Admission to higher education is processed via a web-based application system known as *Admission Post BAC* (APB), which was set up in 2008. Students can assemble portfolios to submit to institutions and make up to 24 ranked program choices. The APB system assigns students to programs and institutions based on their choices, BAC stream, and the availability of places. With a non-selective program, students tend to get their first choice. Where demand for places exceeds supply, students are prioritised first by their BAC program (i.e. how closely their chosen field of study at secondary level is matched with their chosen field in higher education) and second by their chosen ranking. In some rare cases where a program is still oversubscribed, APB will use a lottery to determine who is permitted to take a place in the system.

Students can apply for admission to a HEI from January in the year in which they are supposed to complete secondary education. Despite the BAC being a guarantee of access to higher education, a wide variety of courses (*fillières*) are selective, particularly in law, psychology, kinesiology (known as *sciences et techniques des activités physiques et sportives*, or *STAPS*) and health studies (known as *première année commune aux études de santé*, or *PACES*). These programs have restricted entry in order to deal with excess demand; some institutions use lotteries to determine places in these fields. In PACES, universities are in fact permitted to take in 500 students for every 100 places they have

[60] About 220 institutions are under the influence of the ministry, among which 60 are private, 71 are universities. Page 36, Ministère des Finances et des Comptes Publics (2016a).

in selective medical programs – with many students being dismissed from the system in the first year of their higher education studies.

Next to the public universities, there are various selective study programs/institutions, such as the *grandes écoles* and the *instituts universitaires de technologie* (IUT). They all have their own entry criteria, usually including a separate set of entrance exams ("concours") and up to two years of extra study in *cours prépas*. Technically-orientated programs within HEIs require students to pass an interview or to prepare an application based on professors' recommendations and grades form the last two high school years in order to be admitted. In the "concours", students can only chose a limited number of institutions for which they would like to apply.

The public HEI has essentially no autonomy in its decisions: it is bound to follow national regulations. Its IUT does of course have the ability to select and is autonomous, in the sense that its own admission committee uses its judgement and discretion in selection, based on interviews. Both the Catholic private HEI and the selective institution are largely autonomous in the selection procedures. For the Catholic HEI, which is largely reliant on tuition fees, there is an incentive to leave admission relatively open – or at least, no less open than at competing public HEIs in the area. Nevertheless a majority of its programs are to some degree selective, because provides prestige and because they are labour market focused with students participating frequently in internships.

Access to selective programs, especially "grandes écoles", has gradually been widened by allowing students to access in the second or third year. This is not the result of a national policy or a regulation but of gradual changes in individual institutions' recruitment practices. In addition, selective institutions also use their autonomy to design their own special admission systems for students from underprivileged areas.

1. Main issues and policy aims regarding widening participation

Overall, recent legislation and large policy initiatives focus on increasing access and the relevance of university education for the labour market, particularly regarding the 3-years Bachelor degree programs. Main drivers of reforms were the new laws in 2007 and 2013 which both made the French system less centralised than before. The 2007 law (Law no. 2007-1199; Legifrance, 2007) provided more (financial) autonomy to universities (MESR, 2017b) and allowed institutions to specialise and differentiate with less micro management by the Ministry. The 2013 law (Law no. 2013–660; Legifrance, 2013) aims at improving the quality of the training offered while guaranteeing equal value of the diplomas across all national territory.

In addition, a national strategic plan and a major white paper guided access and the relevance of higher education in France. The objective of the 2007 plan (Plan Campus) was to improve study success at the level of bachelor programs ("plan pour la réussite en licence", MESR, 2015). The primary objective of the 'plan for study success' was to reduce drop out in universities (50% at the time, see also MESR, 2013, p. 4), but it also aimed at delivering a better 'bachelor degree' in view of finding employment. Since the Bologna process and implementation of the Licence, Master and Doctorate degrees in France, it became clear that universities were not prepared to deliver 3-years professional diplomas for many students. They were rather organised for longer studies such as five years diplomas and even PhDs. The new degree structure confronted universities with a strong increase in students with a professional or a technical secondary school leaving certificate (BAC pro or BAC T) rather than a general upper secondary school leaving certificate (BAC). These students are more likely to fail in higher education (Hetzel, 2006).

The 2013 law ordered a national strategy for higher education ("stratégie nationale d'enseignement supérieur" or StraNES). The strategy – Forstering a Learning Society – unveiled in 2015 is the first of its kind in France (Béjean and Monthubert, 2015) and will be operationalised in white papers in successive years. The strategy sets national targets

for the next 10 years based on 5 strategic axes (building a learning society and supporting the economy; increase internationalization; boost social mobility and social inclusion; design 21st century HE; and address aspirations of youngsters). StraNES will have to be monitored every 2 years by the parliament, and revised every five years.

1.1 Most important access problems

The strategy – Fostering a Learning Society – of 2015 (StraNES, Béjean and Monthubert, 2015) mentions the following key problems regarding social mobility, social inclusion and democratising access to higher education. First of all, there is a major gap in the graduation rate between students from working class and those from managerial class families in secondary schools and higher education. One of the causes is found in the orientation process for higher education, particularly for those on technological and vocational tracks. All public institutions (preparatory classes, post-secondary tracks in secondary schools, university tracks, and *grandes écoles*) will have to stronger share and cooperate in their joint responsibility to offer more diversified tracks and program options geared to student profiles.

Because of the complex (higher) education system, more transparency and collaboration is needed between education institutions, particularly in local ecosystems (Béjean and Monthubert, 2015).

The 2017 *Plan Étudiants* (MESR, 2017c) indicates that many students are not well informed about their higher education opportunities. As a result, close to 50% of students drop out of university or change subjects after one or two years of study. In addition, students from professional and technical secondary schools are strongly underrepresented in higher education. They only form 18% to 30% of the professional STS programs or technological IUT programs respectively. Furthermore, students from lower socio-economic classes form about 14% of university enrolments, 32% in IUT and 39% in STS.

1.2 National strategies and policy aims regarding widening participation

The national strategic documents mentioned above refer to the following strategic objectives and policy aims to strengthen access, social inclusion and widening participation.

The 2015 StraNES document - Fostering a Learning Society – envisages the following policy aims (StraNES, Béjean and Monthubert, 2015):

- to halve the gap in the graduation rates between students from working class and managerial class families (currently 28% and 65% respectively);
- to increase the proportion of graduates of professional and technical schools in higher education;
- to stimulate the collaboration and mutual exchange between secondary and higher education institutions;
- to reform the orientation and selection process for access to higher education (e.g. including individualized study plans/contracts, bridging classes, monitoring access at local level);
- to make all public institutions (preparatory classes, post-secondary tracks in secondary schools, university tracks, and *grandes écoles*) take responsibility in providing more transparent study orientation initiatives;
- to create more diversified tracks and program options adapted to student profiles;
- to regulate entrance into master's programs and to eliminate selection between the 1st and 2nd year of master's programs.

The 2017 *Plan Étudiants* (MESR, 2017c) mentions the following (overlapping) policy objectives:

- to improve the guidance and support for study orientation in secondary education such as the lycées (e.g. to appoint study advisors; to integrate study orientation

weeks in the curricula; to integrate study orientation projects; to stimulate the dialogue between rectors of schools and universities);
- to create a more fair and transparent admission and selection process;
- to improve student counselling and modern didactical approaches in higher education;
- to improve the conditions of life of students (60.000 extra student residences; €100 million to increase the number and value of need-based scholarships);
- to increase the public budget with €450 million to develop new courses, modularization and individualized teaching;
- to increase the public budget with €500 million to create extra study places, new study counsellor positions and new professionals to accompany the innovations and reforms.

2. Main policy instruments applied for widening participation

To address the strategic ambitions regarding access and participation in French higher education several policy initiatives and instruments were introduced in the last decade. We will discuss the most important ones below, differentiating between four types of instruments: regulations, funding instruments, organisational policies and information policies.

2.1 Regulations

In French education, a number of regulations and laws apply with the specific aim to stimulate access, participation and completion of qualifications and degrees among a wide target population. The most important rules and regulations concern:

- Since 2014, Priority Education Networks (*Réseaux d'education prioritaire*) have been established to closer connect local/regional schools at pre-primary, primary and secondary education level. These networks aim to diminish the impact of social and economic inequalities on school success by reinforcing pedagogical and educational action in the schools and institutions of the geographical regions that face the greatest social difficulties. Next to reducing class size (to potentially 12 pupils per class), other network priorities are: to master reading, writing, speaking and teaching; to strengthen a caring and demanding school; to cooperate with parents and partners; to foster collective work; to support and train staff; to strengthen the management of the networks (http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid187/l-education-prioritaire.html).

- Promoting language training in all its dimensions at nursery school level to contribute to the reduction of inequalities, especially those resulting from differences in language skills due to divergent socio-economic backgrounds. The acquisition of language skills is necessary to a child's cognitive development. The first priority of early-childhood education therefore is to focus on the reproduction and structure of oral language. Pupils also have to progressively learn writing skills throughout nursery school. (http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid131304/working-on-language-in-all-of-its-dimensions-at-nursery-school-level.html)

- The Homework done program (*Devoirs faits*) is a program to overcome increasing social inequalities by offering a supportive context for vulnerable pupils to progress at school. The Homework Done program is organized within schools and helps to improve synergies between class time and homework. All children have the possibility to work individually, in a quiet environment, to complete assignments, repeat lessons, deepen learning or work on memory and analytical exercises, benefiting from help when they need it. In this manner, the Homework Done program helps reduce inequalities in access to knowledge

(http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid131710/offering-a-supportive-context-for-students-to-progress.html; http://eduscol.education.fr/cid118508/devoirs-faits.html).

- The Higher Education Laws of 2007 and 2013 also aimed at concentrating institutions. It started in 2007 with the PRES ("pôles de recherche et d'enseignement supérieur") to establish virtual and physical campuses of cooperating higher education and research institutions. From 2014 onwards, the PRES were further grouped into "Communautés inter-académique d'universités et d'établissements" or COMUE (inter-academic communities of universities and institutions). The obligatory collaboration process between two or more PRES resulted in 25 COMUE's in 2016. The COMUE reform is important regarding "access" as the 5-year contracts each COMUE has with the Ministry also focus on the quality and employability of graduates (Court of Auditors, 2015).

2.2 Funding policies

France employs a number of financial policies to address their access agenda, particularly including a number of scholarship programs for pupils and students:

- The Return to school grant (*Allocation Rentrée Scolaire*) is introduced in 1974 and helps pupils to meet costs when they return to school (after dropout). This is a grant available at the start of each school year (la rentrée) and covers costs like clothing and stationery. It is payable to each child between the ages of 6 and 18 years attending school or apprenticeship training. It is a means-tested grant, with relaxed criteria to measure family resources. The maximum income level for eligibility depends on the number of dependent children. The amount of the grant for the academic year 2018/19 varies: for children aged 6-10 years the sum is €369; for those 11-14 it is €389; for those aged 15-18 years it is €403 (https://www.french-property.com/guides/france/public-services/school-education/grants/).

- The *Bourse Collège* is a scholarship available to pupils from low economic backgrounds attending (lower) secondary education. This is a means-tested grant based on family resources and the number of dependent children or adults in the household. The maximum net income to qualify (2017/18) is €14,831 if you have one child and €18,253 for two children, €21,675 for three children, and so on. (https://www.french-property.com/guides/france/public-services/school-education/grants/college-grant/).

- There are six different types of scholarships available for pupils from disadvantaged (economic) backgrounds in upper secondary education. (https://www.french-property.com/guides/france/public-services/school-education/grants/lycee-grants/):

    - Lycée Grants –Basic grant are depending on household income and family circumstances which are translated into a point system determining eligibility and amount of the scholarship. The award of the basic grant also gives access to a range of other grants.
    - Lycée Grants –*Prime d'entrée* are scholarships payable at the start of the school year for each year at lycée. Those who repeat a year are not eligible for the grant.
    - Lycée Grants –*Prime d'equipement* are scholarships for children entering lycée and is designed to meet the costs of purchasing certain items of equipment and materials for pupils undertaking certain specialist courses e.g. mechanics, fashion, industrial engineering.
    - Lycée Grants –*Prime à la qualification* and scholarships for pupils at lycée undertaking the Certificat d'aptitude Professionnelle (CAP) or Brevet d'études Professionnelles (BEP).

- Lycée Grants –*Prime à l'internat* are scholarships to cover extra costs for pupils attending boarding schools.
- Lycée Grants -*Bourses au mérite* are scholarships for pupils at lycées with a very good academic record and who before were entitled to a bourse de collège and who obtained high marks in the award of the lower secondary school national diploma, the Brevet des Collèges. On a discretionary basis it may be available to other others who distinguished themselves by their achievements at collège, on application to the lycée in the first instance. It is also available to pupils who receive a *bourse de lycée* who have demonstrated good performance at lycée. Thus, it may be attributed after the first term at school. The grant award is made by the *Inspector d'academie*, but initial enquiries should be addressed to the lycée. The continued award of the grant is subject to satisfactory progress and study results.

- *Bourse d'enseignement supérieur sur critères sociaux*. These are scholarships to assist students attending higher education who on the basis of social criteria face material and financial difficulties to pursue higher studies. It is meant as complementary to the legal obligation of parents to maintain and support their studying children as long as these are not able to provide for themselves (as defined by Articles 203 and 371-2 of the Civil Code). The income and expenses of the family are taken into account to determine the rate of the scholarship fixed according to a national scale. Eligibility for the scholarship is subject to conditions of progression in studies, attendance at classes and exams. These scholarships are only available to students in higher education programs falling within the competence of the Minister for Higher Education leading to a national diploma in higher education or entitled to receive qualifications. The student must also meet criteria of age, diploma and nationality (http://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/pid20536/bulletin-officiel.html?cid_bo=132210&cbo=1).

- *Aide au mérite* concern scholarships for higher education students with very good academic records and who also receive scholarships on the basis of social criteria. To receive a merit-based scholarship, one has to have passed with the distinction "very good" at the last session of the French baccalaureate, and the student should have filed a social file through the digital portal "etudiant.gouv.fr". Merit support cannot be requested by the student himself, but the Rector of the Academy is responsible for sending the list of graduates with "very good" from the last session of the baccalaureate. Upon receipt of this list, the identification of students meeting the merit criteria takes place. The final decision to award or not award merit support is made by the rector and notified to the candidate. Merit support is paid in nine monthly instalments and the amount is fixed by inter-ministerial decree. It can be combined with international mobility assistance and one-off assistance granted under the specific aid scheme. A student cannot benefit from more than three merit-based scholarships. Eligibility of merit-based support is subject to educational registration, attendance at classes and attendance at examinations for higher education and scholarships based on social criteria. In the case of repetition, a student will no longer be eligible for merit support unless the repetition is based on medical reasons. (http://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/pid20536/bulletin-officiel.html?cid_bo=132210&cbo=1).

- The "*Plan d'Investissements pour l'avenir*" (PIA – Plan for Investments in the Future, 2010) concerned a €35 billion investment fund in five sectors, including higher education.[61] IDEFI and IDEX are two funds of PIA impacting also on higher education.

[61] The plan is implemented in three waves: the first PIA (2010-2013) of €35 billion, the second PIA (2013-2015) of €12 billion, and a third PIA of €10 billion was recently approved with a stronger focus on teaching

IDEFI (€149 million) funds *Initiatives of Excellence in Innovative Training* aiming to increase education quality and study success. IDEX (€7.7 billion) funds *Initiatives of Excellence*. Both excellence initiatives indirectly aim to enhance personal development of students and skills relevant to the labour market and society.

- Changes in the funding formula for universities since 2008 also indicate that universities must offer quality and programs relevant for society. As such, it now includes indicators on retention (students re-enrolling in the 2nd study year), the number of Bachelor graduates and graduate employment (with the indicator "% of employed graduates three years after completion of their diploma"). The performance-based funding formula covers about 20% of public funding for universities (Sénat, 2017). The government not only rewards good performance but also helps those having difficulties, e.g. by funding 6000 additional support staff and professors in the 2013-2017 period.

- The "*Plan pour la réussite en licence*" (Plan for Success, 2008-2012) provided top-up funds to universities to increase their performance in: (1) revising the 1st year bachelor programs (implementing multidisciplinary refreshing fundamentals); (2) enhancing study choices through better information on study programs and the labour market; (3) changing the selection procedures of short-term selective institutions (MESR, 2007). Within this framework, higher education institutions implemented measures to stimulate better study and career choices of students. Many universities have reorganized departments that were providing services for students and merged them into single offices providing a comprehensive personalized support for students, including career advice, accommodation and other administrative tasks. Another important measure at the institutional level was to increase personalized educational support up to five hours per week during all three years of a bachelor program. Moreover, institutions have also initiated mentoring by a teacher and tutoring. Finally, regulations to smooth transition between study programs after the first semester have been established frequently.

- The 2017 *Plan Étudiants* (MESR, 2017c) proposes to increase the higher education budget with €950 million to develop new courses, the modularization and individualized teaching (€450 million); and to create extra study places, new study counsellor positions and new professionals to accompany the innovations and reforms (€500 million).

- In addition, the Plan Étudiants envisages to improve the conditions of student life, by creating 60.000 (to 100.000) extra student residences by 2023 and to raise the public budget by €100 million to increase the number and value of need-based scholarships.

2.3 Organisational policies

France initiated some policy levers that address organisational aspects of (higher) education to stimulate access to higher education:

- *Cordées de la Réussite*. Since 2008, the networks for study success (cordées de la réussite) have been established. These are partnerships between higher education institutions, high schools and colleges focused at tutoring and accompaniment actions to help young people from disadvantaged backgrounds or neighbourhoods to overcome psychological and cultural obstacles that often prevent potential students from committing to higher education studies. The networks provide support for easier transition between school education and higher education, e.g. by showing successful

(€3 billion to fund excellence initiatives for education: http://www.gouvernement.fr/pia3-5236 (accessed 26-01-2017).

paths that have been used frequently by pupils of previous generations, by increasing the attractiveness of long-term training through the communication of experiences and successful career paths towards social advancement. (http://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/pid26250/cordees-de-la-reussite.html).

- The 2007 law requested universities to establish career orientation offices and to monitor the careers of graduates. The 2013 law reinforced these requirements.
- In 2007 the evaluation agency, HCERES, has been established to evaluate study programs at public universities, research units and HE institutions (about 300) every 5 years. This replaced the old system of getting approval before opening a program ("habilitation") with accreditation afterwards. The agency is conducting its evaluations based on data provided by the institution and evaluates among other things the quality of the training, of the educational project, and employability. These evaluations are used by the government when negotiating the 5-year contracts with the universities.
- The 2013 law also decreased the number of titles for both bachelor and master degrees to facilitate recognition by prospective students choosing a program and by employers (Legifrance, 2013). Since 2014, the Bachelor's degree is based on two levels (MESR, 2014) with a broader introductory year in large disciplinary areas (arts, humanities, languages, law, economics, management, humanities and social sciences, science, technology, health) and 45 specialisations (instead of 322), 173 professional Bachelors, and 245 Masters. Previously, there were 1,400 Bachelors, 2,200 professional Bachelors and 1,800 masters for 5,900 specialisations (Des Finances et des Comptes Publics, 2016).
- The government regulates the number of study places with APB system ("admission post bac") (Admission, 2017). The students in upper secondary education now have to be consulted about study and career choices three years before completion of upper secondary school. The aim is to stimulate a better match between students, study programs and the labour market (MESR, 2017). In addition, a quota is reserved for students with technical and professional leaving certificates (baccalaureates) into short-term selective professional degrees (2 or 3 years STS or IUT). This process has to be annually monitored by a committee of the regional authorities and a centralised website to fine-tune choices and admissions.
- Various stakeholders indicated that modernising teaching methods recently gained policy attention. Until now teachers were only rewarded according to age/experience and research achievements but not for the teaching efforts. Therefore, StraNES proposed to provide incentives to teachers through the third PIA (€ 10 billion as from 2017). A large portion of these funds will be devoted to pedagogical innovation such as competence or computer-based teaching in order to develop more attractive study programs and to better prepare students for the labour market. The government also promotes innovative teaching methods with the National Days of Pedagogical Innovation in Higher Education, e.g. by sharing good practices (https://goo.gl/HEhdi7). The professionalization of academic staff in universities with regard to teaching, i.e. to enhance their teaching skills, is regarded as a key factor to improve the quality of teaching, access and study success.
- The 2017 *Plan Étudiants* initiates a fairer and more transparent admission and selection process. To this end, the minister aims to abolish student selection by drawing lots as much as possible; to make the ABP system a more simple and transparent platform; to reduce the number of preferred study options from 24 to

maximum 10; to provide more information on the expectations for success in the desired field; and better reckon with the profile of each high school student in their study choices.

- The 2017 *Plan Étudiants* envisages to better support and guide students in higher education in order to be more successful and to prevent dropout. The most important instruments to be developed include: a "contract for educational success" to better monitor the student's progress; integrate more tailored, personalized and modular education in the first cycle; to enhance student tutoring and support (appointment of a director of studies per discipline); to encourage new didactical forms and approaches (e.g. project-based learning, flipped classrooms, peer teaching, etc.).

2.4 Information policies

The following policy levers that influence the information provision to students have been implemented to address access in higher education in France:

- *Le Service commun universitaire d'information et d'orientation et d'insertion professionnelle* (SCUIOIP). Since 1986, the SCUIOIP system is used to provide (prospective) students counselling services in the form of individual advice; optional or compulsory modules on the personal and occupational guidance projects; open-door days; fairs and forums on training offers; professional fairs and forums; presentations in lycées; on-line information; and educational documents. (https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/guidance-and-counselling-higher-education-23_en).

- The government has setup information systems with APB ("admission post bac" see above) and outcome indicators. With APB, the students in upper secondary education are consulted and supported for a period of three years with relation to their future study choices, also taking into account labour market prospects, personal interest and skills.

- The 2017 *Plan étudiants* proposes 5 activity lines to further improve the orientation function towards higher education within the lycées by means of: (1) having at each lycée two senior teachers to provide individual counselling to students doing their study project in the final year of high school; (2) the integration of two orientation weeks in the final year; (3) having an in-depth review of each student's proposed orientation project by the class council; (4) enhancing the dialogue between secondary and higher education institutions under the authority of the Rectors; and (5) the implementation of a "student ambassador" scheme.

3. Policy impact: monitoring, evaluation and analysis

In recent decades there has been a significant growth in participation in French higher education because of the overall increase in the percentage of cohorts receiving a baccalaureate. This development had been induced by law in 1985 when Jean-Pierre Chevènement, then Minister of education, announced that 80% of each generation from then onwards should attain at least a baccalaureate.[62] One of the main measures to achieve this objective was the establishment of the professional baccalaureate (in addition to already existing technical baccalaureates). The objective of the professional baccalaureates was to provide students with more educational options, preparing them for both higher education and the labour market. In 2013, 74% of the students have the

[62] http://legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000693428

baccalaureate while it was only 29% in 1985.[63] The goal has been achieved primarily through professional baccalaureates (20%). Between 1985 and 2013 the general baccalaureate has increased from 20% to 38% and the technical baccalaureates from 10% to 16%.

However, there are a number of problems related to this development. The most important is that the majority of students would prefer to enrol at one of the selective higher education institutions rather than at a (public) university. Further, access to the different types of institutions is segmented with regard to the students' socio-economic background and the type of baccalaureate. Students of higher socio-economic background and a traditional type of the baccalaureate are more likely to enrol in one of the selective higher education institutions. The strong preference of students to enrol at one of the selective higher education institutions leads to a mis-orientation of students as some students consider enrolling at university a second-best choice. They are very likely to discontinue their university studies as soon as they will be selected for a study program at one of the selective higher education institutions. Moreover, students with a professional and technical baccalaureate are also said not to be adequately prepared for university studies (Hetzel, 2006). According to the OECD (2014, p. 67), 75% of students with a professional baccalaureate who enrol in a university bachelor program will not complete their bachelor's degree.

The strong preference for students and the - to some extent biased - selection of students for selective higher education institutions causes inefficiency in the French higher education system. This affects especially university bachelor study programs. In 2012 every second student enrolled as a first year student in a bachelor program at university dropped out of that program (MESR 2013).

3.1 National statistics on changes in the composition of student body

The French Ministry of Education and Research annually publishes key statistics – Facts and Figures – and analyses on higher education and research (MESR, 2017). The main findings related to access and participation in French higher education are reported below.

Student enrolments are accelerating in recent decades. At the start of the 2015-16 academic year, 2,551,100 students were enrolled in higher education. Growth in numbers of baccalauréat graduates within an age group, appeal of higher education and demographic factors all contribute to on-going growth in student numbers, which has been even faster in the recent period. Private higher education has seen the greatest advancement in its student numbers since the early 2000s (+ 62% between 2000 and 2015).

633,500 of the candidates who sat examinations in 2016 were awarded a baccalauréat, the main entrance qualification for HE. The proportion of people in a relevant age group that hold a baccalauréat was over 60% in 1995 and rose to 78.6% in 2016.

Nearly 75% of those who obtained a baccalauréat (of any kind) in 2015 went on to enrol on higher education courses immediately. Almost all of those with general baccalauréats and three-quarters of the technological baccalauréat holders were enrolled on higher education courses at the start of 2015-16. Most of those with vocational baccalauréats went straight into employment, so the proportion of this group enrolling in higher education was lower. However, it has nonetheless risen sharply in ten years (to 36.7% in 2015, as compared with 17.1% in 2000). In terms of access and social inclusion, this is one of the main target groups to widen participation. A significant number of students with vocational baccalauréats also continued on to higher education via work-study programs.

[63] http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau.asp?reg_id=0&ref_id=NATTEF07252

Given the proportion of a relevant age group that is now obtaining a baccalauréat, and the percentage that are continuing secondary education, it follows that nearly 60% of young people are now accessing higher education.

The overwhelming majority of those with general baccalauréats go on to university, many of whom enrol on general or healthcare courses. The most popular choices other than university programs are vocational short courses at University Technology Institutes (IUT) or Advanced Technician's Sections (STS) and CPGEs.

The appeal of university education varies significantly between different disciplines. Between 2005 and 2015, the number of students enrolled in Health training rose sharply (+15.0%) both during the period 2005-2010, marked by a certain slackness in student numbers, and between 2010 and 2015 (+10.0%), a period of general increase in the number of students. Progress is also strong in Law, even though the past five years have a less dynamic profile. Between 2010 and 2015, the scientific subjects and physical education and sports science and techniques (STAPS) saw the largest growth, whereas student numbers in these fields of education had settled at 2.5% between 2005 and 2010. Just like the Sciences and STAPS, the Arts and Human and Social Sciences have followed a clear path of significant decline in numbers followed by more than 10% growth in the recent period (2010-2015).

Higher education is becoming more accessible to students from all social backgrounds and to women, but there remain significant differences between those from different social backgrounds, as well as between courses.

The drive to make higher education more widely accessible continues: in 2014, 58% of those aged between 20 and 24 had attended higher education courses (regardless of whether they graduated), as compared with 33% of those aged between 45 and 49.

76.8% of those aged 20-24 who came from more privileged backgrounds and whose parents worked as managers or in middle management were studying or had studied in higher education. However, the participation rate among those whose parents were manual workers or employees are substantially lower: 43.7% of those aged 20-24 were studying or had studied at higher education institutions. The proportions are lower for students from different age groups, but the pattern remains the same: students from better socio-economic classes participate relatively more often in HE. There is thus still a large gap between the two social groups in terms of access to higher education. This also holds true for qualifications: on average, over the period 2013-2015, 74% of those whose parents worked as managers or in middle management held a higher education qualification, compared with 38% of those whose parents were manual workers or employees. This is shown in the graph below. The relative distribution between students from different socio-economic backgrounds has not changed much over time.

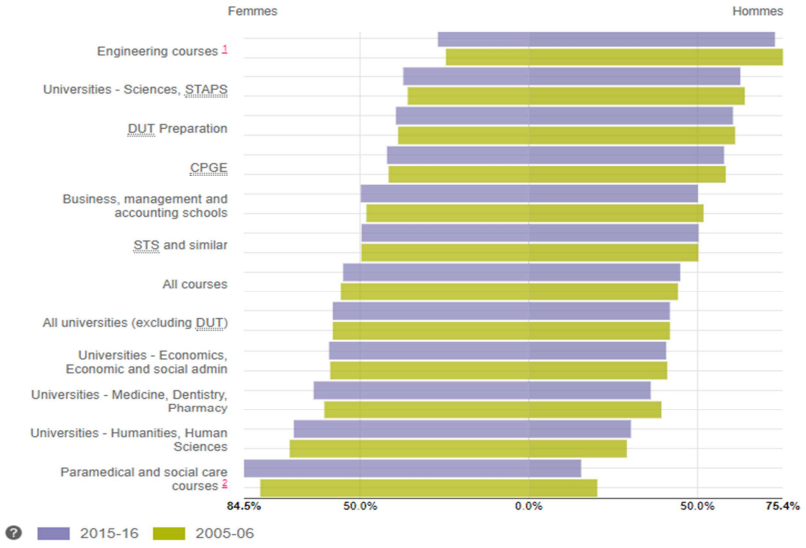
21.02 Access to higher education in 2015 by age and social background (%)

Source: MESR, 2017.

Although there was little distinction in terms of social background on technological short courses, such as BTS and DUT, divisions were much more noticeable in the case of universities (excluding IUTs) and Grandes Écoles.

More than half of students (55%) are women. Women make up the vast majority (70%) of those studying Arts or Human Sciences subjects, as well as paramedical and social care courses (84%). However, they are in the minority when it comes to the most selective courses, such as CPGEs and IUTs, and in Science courses. In 2015-16, just over a quarter of students (27%) at engineering schools were women. This is shown in the graph below.

13.02 Proportion of women in the main higher education courses in 2015-16 (%)



1 including engineering courses dependent on universities, National Polytechnical Institutes (INP), technology universities and engineering courses run in partnership.
2 2014-15 instead of 2015-16.

Source: MESR, 2017.

The labour market is less favourable for women and their access to employment is slower. They are less likely to have permanent employment contracts and more likely to

work part time. More specifically, 3 years after leaving higher education, a quarter of women are employed as managers, compared with more than a third of men.

The pass rates for certain higher education qualifications were strongly influenced by students' academic backgrounds. This was true of general Bachelor's degrees, University technology diplomas (DUT) and BTSs. Those with general baccalauréats were likely to do better on these courses than their counterparts with technological or vocational baccalauréats. However, the type of baccalauréat held by students had little influence on the pass rate for vocational Bachelor's degrees.

Only 45% of students on Bachelor's degree programs obtained their qualification in 3, 4 or 5 years. Nearly three quarters of those who were awarded a general Bachelor's degree in 2015 stayed on at university the following year to do a Master's degree (including Master's in Education). One in two Master's degree students were awarded their degree in two years, and one in ten in three years.

The pass rate is relatively high for short courses. Thus, nearly three-quarters of students registered initially in STS (Advanced Technician's Section) achieved a higher education diploma.

In 2014, 45% of young people aged between 25 and 34 held a higher education qualification, compared to an average of 41% in the OECD countries. However, nearly 75,000 young people every year leave higher education without obtaining any qualification.

3.2 Results from monitoring and evaluation of policy implications

In France, there is no overarching monitoring framework to assess the progress of the reforms and to evaluate the impact of various policy instruments. The general impression is that progress is made in many areas, whilst the reforms are far from being completed. Demontès in 2015 conducted the only evaluation of various "study success" initiatives and the relationship between the higher education system and the socio-economic environment. The authors looked at various policies and collected evidence through interviews. This led to partial information only. As a consequence, the report recommends – amongst others things – that more systematic policy evaluation is required.

Stakeholders' opinions – measured in two studies of the European Commission on study success and HE relevance (Vossensteyn et al., 2015, 2018) – show that many French higher education stakeholders agree that the reforms in general had a positive impact, but also that efforts are still needed to achieve the expected outcomes. For example, socio-economic background remains a main determinant in HE access and completion, the orientation and integration into HE can be improved, and having graduated from a university is no guarantee of finding a job. The level of quality is said to be heterogeneous across the country. The recent strategic documents indicate that long-standing access problems have not been solved. As such, the 2017 Plan Étudiants proclaims many new initiatives to improve the orientation towards studies in higher education, to reduce the access gap between students from different socio-economic classes and with different entrance qualifications, to reduce dropout and to improve the conditions of life of students. All of these demonstrate that social inclusion and widening participation remain policy concerns that have been only partially addressed so far.

However, the Facts and Figures presented by the Ministry of Higher Education and Research (MESR, 2017) and related analyses show that the French government does monitor general trends in the system, however without explicit impact assessments and evaluations of specific reforms and policy initiatives.

3.3 Good practices

Regardless of a structured policy evaluation system, one can detect various good practice examples of programs and universities that translate national policies into improvement approaches used in day-to-day practice. We will mention a few.

First of all, the *Program régional de Réussite en Études Longues* in the Hauts-de-France district allows young people from disadvantaged families to prepare and succeed in higher education. All higher education institutions in the region, universities, colleges and Grandes Écoles, as well as their partners, collaborate to offer better orientation, supervision and guidance. First, pupils and students get more personalized pedagogical follow-up by a referent teacher and tutoring provided by students. Secondly, a Springboard-initiative organises a transition year between high school and university in which disadvantaged students in small group sessions, supervised by a teacher, are assimilated in new ways of working and receive orientation for their study career. Thirdly, disadvantaged students get a personalized half-yearly progressive educational support, tutoring by students, and help with integration into university life. Fourthly, they can receive extra financial support (500 € per semester) and strategic support in the development of the personal study project. (http://www.hautsdefrance.fr/program-regional-reussite-etudes-longues/).

Another good practice is shown by the University of Nantes which in 2007 prepared the "*plan d'action pour la promotion de la réussite des étudiants*" (plan to improve completion), an action plan for promoting student success. The plan proposed the establishment of the following new roles/organizational units to improve study success: information and orientation office (1 position), pedagogical and didactic support unit (3 positions), career services (1 position), mentoring and coaching centre (2 positions), student service centre (1 position), and a centre for diagnostics and assessment (1 position). In total, the plan proposed to establish 9 additional positions at the university; these were funded by various external stakeholders. These new positions were installed in the Centre for Information and Orientation (SUIO) that provides several services to welcome, guide and support (prospective) and assimilate students. Besides the services provided by the Centre, the university has set up specific curricula for students in their first semester in higher education (Vossensteyn et al., 2015). The curricula aim to help students integrate in the university. Besides a welcome week to improve students' social integration, courses to improve their academic preparedness are offered (e.g. trainings on note taking, time management, documentary research, group work, critical analysis of information, writing a paper and oral presentation).

The University of La Rochelle designed Bachelor curricula allowing students to follow their own study paths during undergraduate study and test courses. This measure is relatively unique in France, and has proven very successful. Dropout rates in Bachelor programs have fallen by 20% on average. After a transition period of five weeks following the start of their studies, students can choose among four different pathways according to their abilities and motivations: a classical pathway; an excellence pathway (attending additional courses); an adapted pathway where the courses of the first study year are spread over two years; and a reorientation of their study choice. To orient students in this choice, there are additional services offered: an aptitude test and interview to assess the academic preparedness of the student; five weeks of preparatory courses; Consultation by the *Maison de al Réussite et de l'Insertion Professionelle* about later career possibilities; a final interview based on results of test and experiences in the preparatory courses.

4. Conclusions

France has a relatively complex education system with various alternative routes qualifying students for higher education. It also comprises non-selective as well as highly selective higher education opportunities, such as the Grandes Écoles, private institutions, STS and IUT. Access to higher education can thus be selective and non-selective. If selection applies, the various institutions can employ their own selection mechanisms and

criteria. This may create some lack of transparency for prospective students. Orientation towards higher education has to be improved.

Main access problems in French higher education are regarded to be related to the gap between students from different socio-economic backgrounds that qualify for higher education. Students from working class families much less often qualify for general higher education than those from managerial class families. A major underlying reason is said to be the orientation towards higher education, which is less well organised and perceived by prospective students from professional and technological schools.

A problem related to the fact that many prospective students are not well informed about HE opportunities is that many students drop out of their studies in the first 2 years (about 50%).

France only recently started to develop national strategies for higher education. The 2015 strategy – Fostering a learning society – was among the first of its kind. Before, all was covered into the laws that govern higher education. The national strategy (StraNES) in terms of access puts strong focus on reducing the participation gap between students from working and from managerial classes and to increase participation among students from technical and professional schools. Major policy instruments relate to improving the information and orientation of prospective students towards HE opportunities. Therefore, stronger collaboration between various education institutions is needed. In addition, higher education institutions are stimulated to better integrate students into academic and social life in HE, by offering more diverse and flexible study opportunities, orientation possibilities and support to students in their study career.

France applies a range of policy instruments, including legal, financial, organisational and information instruments. The higher education law-reforms concentrate on the development of larger regional networks of institutions to better address needs of various student groups. In primary and secondary education, the laws focus on improving language skills and educational (academic) preparation.

France has a range of predominantly means-tested scholarships for secondary and higher education students. These are available to about 25%-30% of the students. Other funding instruments relate to boost excellence and collaboration between regional (higher) education institutions and to improve the quality and attractiveness of study programs. Only recently, more explicit funding is available to organise better support and integration to new students.

Organisational policies particularly look at the transition from secondary to higher education, such as orientation, selection and academic integration. New information and counselling services are key achievements. In many cases, universities have to shape the practical instruments. This leads to variation in the extent to which policies are implemented.

Information policies include a new study information system, selection mechanism (and platform) and strengthened role for secondary education schools and HEIs to support students in their decisions for HE (more recently).

In general, the impact of policies in not monitored and evaluated in a structured way. Besides some national key statistics, there appear only very few evaluation studies to measure the impact of various policy instruments. National statistics show that access to higher education is high, the gap between male and female participation changed into a slight advantage of women over men, but also that the inequalities in participation between socio-economic classes have been slightly reduced but overall persist.

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Case study 4: Ireland

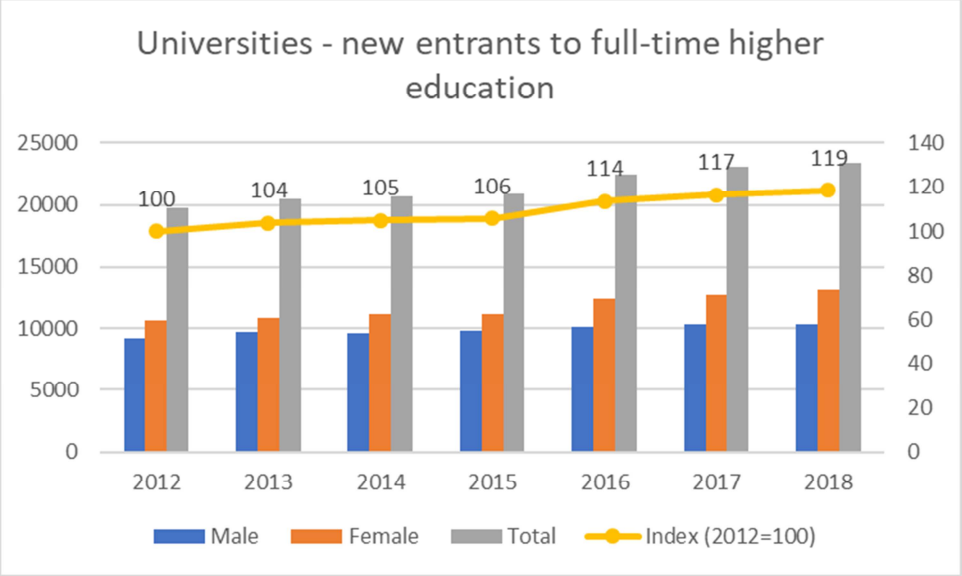
Introduction

In Ireland, higher education universities and non-university higher education institutions provide tertiary education. In 2018 seven state-supported universities and five recognised colleges of the National University were established; further, there were about 14 Institutes of Technology. Universities are allowed to award PhD-degrees. Also, most of the Institutes of Technologies have the right to do so. However, the Institutes of Technology primarily provide undergraduate education.[64]

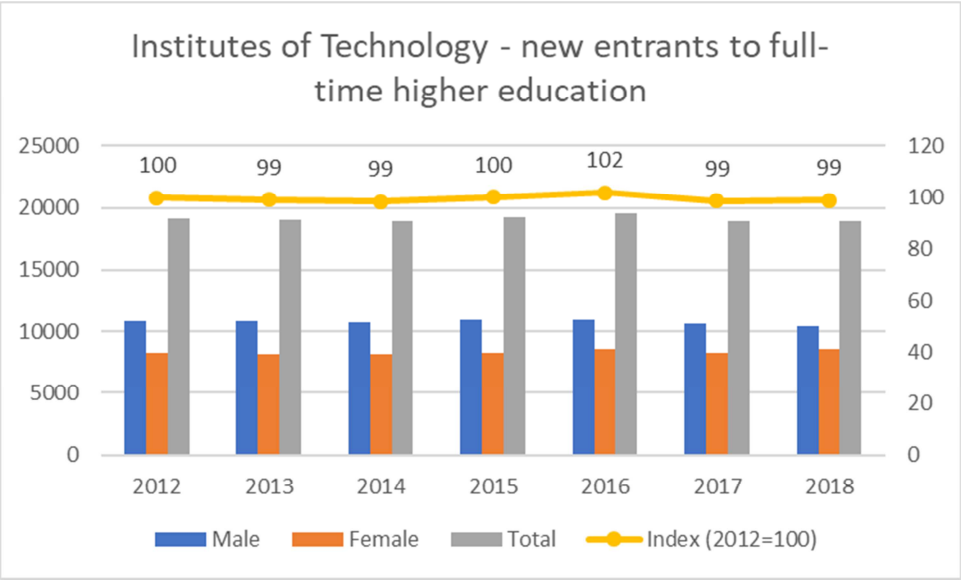
The Central Application Office processes the applications to state-supported Universities and Institutes of Technology.[65] Higher education institutions are allowed to select their students. Central to admission to higher education is the school leaving certificate. The allocation of study places is done with the help of a so-called points system where results from the school leaving examination are converted to points. The number of points is used in the allocation of study places when the number of applicants exceeds the number of available places. Higher education institutions have to select students against the background of the point system. In their selections, higher education institutions use their own entrance requirements which they define autonomously (Orr et al. 2017).

At universities student numbers have been increasing in recent years: since 2012 the number of new entrants for full-time higher education has been increasing by 19%. At Institutes of Technology, numbers remained stable in the same period.

Figure A2d: developments in student numbers in Irish higher education



[64] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/ireland/types-higher-education-institutions_en
[65] https://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Higher-Education/Higher-Education.html



Source

1. Main issues and policy aims regarding widening participation

In Ireland, there is a longstanding and strong commitment to achieving equity in access to higher education. The higher education authority has a fundamental role in this. Since the beginning of the 2000s, the HEA and the Irish Department of Education and Skills in collaboration with Irish higher education institutions have implemented three national access plans. The current national access plan has been developed in 2014 and covers the period 2015 to 2019. Loxley et al. (2017) provide a detailed overview of how access to higher education as a topic/field has developed in the Irish higher education policy in the two recent decades.

In the past, the national access plans have been a collaborative effort of the Irish Higher Education Authority and the Department for Business and Skills and Irish higher education institutions. All plans are based on a thorough analysis of the social composition of the student body and other factors such as funding or barriers and facilitators that are important in accessing higher education. All access plans have been subject to mid-term reviews to what extent set targets have been achieved and to what extent identified challenges changed, and what new challenges have to be considered.

The current national access plan has also been established in such a process. Besides an analysis of the statistical data, there was also a consultation process that involved higher education stakeholders, and other groups and bodies that are related to higher education. Both sources of information fed into the plan, principles, goals, and targets of the national access plan have been concluded from these.

Due to the close monitoring and evaluation of the implemented interventions, the National Access Plans build on each other. In the following, we will, therefore, concentrate on the current plan.

1.1. Most important access problems

Research on inequalities in access to higher education in Ireland gained in importance during the 1990s. First studies showed that higher education was mostly attended by a homogenous group of 18-22-year-old students that came from 'professional, "lower professional" and "employers and managers" socio-economic groups' (Loxley et al. 2017, p. 46). Overall, the student body did not well present the social structure of the Irish society and was stratified with regard to gender, age, ethnicity, institutional and programme choice (Loxley et al. 2017, p. 46).

At the beginning of the new millennium, an action group on access to third level education identified three so-called 'equity groups' that interventions should address (Loxley et al. 2017, p. 55). Firstly, these are students from socio-economic groups where participation rates in higher education are lower compared to their overall percentage in society. Second, students with disabilities, and finally mature students, i.e. entrants to higher education that are older than 23 years. These groups still form the major target groups of the national access plans. However, the definition has become more detailed. Based on an analysis of statistical sources, the current National Access Plan (2015-2019) states that access to higher education is problematic among some groups (Higher Education Authority 2015, p. 16–17), identifying the following challenges:

- Students from semi-skilled and unskilled socio-economic groups less frequently participate in higher education than students from higher professional groups.
- There are strong regional disparities, in some areas the higher education enrolment rate is much lower than in other areas.
- There are differences in access among disabled students: students with sensory disabilities are less well represented than students with other disabilities.
- The participation of mature students (i.e. students older than 23 years) in full-time higher education is still low. An increase in the number of mature students in higher education is due to the increase in student numbers in part-time/flexible studies.
- The participation rates of Irish Travellers in higher education are too low.
- There are a number of groups that need special support for access: lone parents, teen parents, and ethnic minorities.

The current access plan is less explicit with regard to identifying processes or factors that play a role for access. It mentions that hindrances to access might result from a lack of awareness of the problem in higher education institutions as well as across the different government areas. Also, the lack of sufficient financial resources among students and institutions is mentioned as an obstacle to achieving equity in access.

Other research mentions that the admission system, in particular the point system, impacts on access. As the number of points achieved in the school leaving exam is decisive for achieving the wanted study place (Loxley et al. 2017, p. 53), students put a lot of effort on achieving good grades. This puts a lot of stress on the students in school, but also students who can afford private tuition achieve better (Smyth 2009; Orr et al. 2017).

1.2. Focus of national strategies

The current national access plan is embedded in a number of other strategies and plans that target the reduction of social exclusion and poverty, aiming at achieving more equity in society. National access plan picks up on strategies such as the disability plan etc. and international documents, in particular, the Bologna declaration. Loxley et al. (2017) also mention that access policies strongly relate to poverty reduction and social inclusion policies, and establish a relationship between higher education and labour markets. They mention that since 2009 higher education is understood as "an integral part of the strategy for national economic renewal." (Loxley et al. 2017, p. 53)

As a major goal, the national access plan sets out that participation in higher education should represent overall society. Thus, national access plans align with the Bologna declaration on widening participation.

In order to achieve wider participation, the national access plan sets eight principles for its implementation. These principles state that planning and implementing intervention addressing access should consider the following aspects (among others) (Higher Education Authority 2015, p. 15–21):

- Interventions should not only address one educational level – but consider the whole educational cycle.
- Besides higher education stakeholders also students and their families should more strongly be involved. Strong communication relationships with families and students should be established.
- The development of interventions should be informed by students from target groups - to better adapt to their requirements and needs.
- Interventions should aim to broaden pathways to HE, i.e. to make other access routes more prominent and attractive.
- Interventions should show benefits of higher education to the variety of stakeholders, due to regional disparities in higher education participation also regional benefits should be highlighted.
- As funding forms an obstacle in access to higher education the funding system for students and institutions should be overhauled to improve support for access and retention among the equity groups.
- Overall, the national plan foresees that some mainstreaming of equity into the life of institutions should take place to improve the quality of learning for all students.

1.3. Policy aims regarding widening participation

As stated above, the major objective of the national access plan is to achieve that the student population reflects the overall population: "To ensure that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population." (Higher Education Authority 2015, p. 8).

In addition, the current access plan sets out a number of quantitative goals (see table below) with regard to the participation of "equity groups".

Table A2c: Targets for equity groups as per 2015 action plan

	Percentage in 2015	2019 target
Non-manual worker group(percentage of 18-20 cohort)	23%	30%
Semi/unskilled manual worker group*(percentage of 18-20 cohort) * Includes agricultural worker group	26%	35%
Full-time mature entrants to higher education(percentage of all new entrants)	13%	16%
Full and part-time/flexible (combined) mature entrants (percentage of all new entrants)	19%	24%
Students with disabilities as a percentage of all new entrants to higher education	6%	8%
Number of students* with physical/mobility disability	390	570
Number of students* who are deaf/hard of hearing	210	280
Number of students* who are blind/have a vision impairment	140	220
Percentage of students studying on a part-time/flexible basis (all undergraduates and postgraduates)	19%	22%
Percentage of new entrants to higher education whose basis for admission is a further education qualification	6.6%	10%
Number of Irish Travellers in higher education (full and part-time undergraduate new entrants)	35	80

Source: (Higher Education Authority 2015; Loxley et al. 2017)

Against the background of its analysis and the principles stated above, the national access plan objectives relate to these targets, i.e. the objectives set out major activities to achieve the quantitative targets (Higher Education Authority 2015, p. 24):

1. To mainstream the delivery of equity of access in HEIs.
2. To assess the impact of current initiatives to support equity of access to higher education.
3. To gather accurate data and evidence on access and participation and to base policy on what that data tells us.
4. To build coherent pathways from further education and to foster other entry routes to higher education.
5. To develop regional and community partnership strategies for increasing access to higher education with a particular focus on mentoring.

2. Main policy instruments applied for widening participation

2.1. Regulations

To our knowledge, Ireland is quite unique with regard to stating in the University law as well as in the regulations for Institutes of Technology that facilitating equity in access is a legal duty of higher education institutions (Loxley et al. 2017). This duty has been established in the late 1990s. The legislation obliges universities to orient their actions towards promoting equality of opportunity and access. Further, the universities act directs institutions to engage in gender balance among their students and staff/employees, and in the promotion of university access and education for economically and socially disadvantaged people and other groups that are significantly underrepresented in the student body. Also, other sections refer to engaging in equity or equality in opportunities and access.

Other national regulations deal with admission to higher education. The HEAR and DARE scheme provide special places to disadvantaged or disabled students who have lower educational attainment due to their status.

Higher education Access Route (HEAR)[66]

Another regulation is the HEAR scheme where different eligibility criteria for admission to higher education are employed. In detail, the scheme offers study places to students from disadvantaged backgrounds who did achieve the required number of points in their school leaving exam. Colleges and Universities participating in the scheme also offer extra support for these students. HEAR applicants must meet a range of financial, social and cultural indicators to be considered for a reduced points place and extra college support. The HEAR is only for students under the age of 23.

Disability access Routes to higher education (DARE)[67]

The DARE scheme works similar to the HEAR scheme but targets disabled students. Colleges places at reduced points are provided for them, and they also receive extra support from participating institutions. To participate in the scheme the disability needs to have impacted on the students' educational outcomes.

Admission of (mature) students with no formal higher education qualification and recognition of prior learning

Currently, alternative pathways to higher education and the recognition of prior learning are managed by higher education institutions, i.e. they can set up their own standards for recognising prior learning or professional learning. The National Access Plan 2015-2019 proposes as key actions that national standards for the recognition of prior learning should be achieved in order to broaden pathways to higher education (Mission no. 4)

[66] http://accesscollege.ie/hear/about-hear/what-is-hear/
[67] http://accesscollege.ie/dare/about-dare/what-is-dare/

2.2. Funding policies

Institutional funding

The funding for Irish higher education institutions currently consists of three major parts: First, there is core or block funding that covers recognized costs. The second part is called 'top slices' and cover costs of further strategic development of higher education institutions. Finally, there is a performance-related part in institutional funding, the strategic dialogue funding.[68]

All three parts of the funding relate to the access and retention of students:

- The core or block funding considers student numbers and attaches a higher weight to students from target or equity groups. These students count 1.33 in the funding to cover any additional costs related to supporting them with regard to access and retention.
- Top slices and strategic funding also address the further development of teaching and learning and therefore access and retention among all groups of students.
- For strategic dialogue funding, higher education institutions and the higher education authority agree on a compact, a performance related funding tool implemented in 2014. In the compact higher education institutions describe their development plans with regard to selected topics that align with national priorities and development goals in higher education. In the compacts, the higher education institutions determine their own performance related targets for the topics and can adapt them to their needs and mission. Funding is provided based on the evaluation of the compacts. Compacts run for a period of four years. The compacts are subject to continuous monitoring as higher education institutions have to provide progress reports and to reflect and adapt their targets.

Access and retention are among the topics higher education institutions have to address, and they have to develop interventions considering their specific challenges with regard to equality of opportunities and access. For the majority of institutions developing these interventions requires a thorough analysis of their specific access problem, i.e. identifying their specific target or equity groups.

In 2016 an Expert group was established to review the Irish higher education funding system. Among others, the expert group was requested to review the extent to which the current funding supports access in line with the current national access plan. Also, changes in the funding should be reflected to develop interventions improving performance in access (Higher Education Authority 2016a).

Programme for Access to Third Level - PATH

The Programme for Access to Third Level (PATH) fund has been implemented in 2017. PATH aims to support the implementation of the national access plan. The scheme provides competitive funds to higher education institutions. In 2017 the Department for Business and Skills issued calls for PATH2 and PATH3. PATH2 provides funds for the 1916 Bursary Grant (see below). PATH3 provides money the higher education access fund to regional clusters of higher education institution to support their plans in attracting students from underrepresented groups. Further, PATH 3 provides additional money to the Student Assistant Fund (see below).[69]

Funding for students

The financial support for students currently includes the following major instruments to widen access:

The Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI)

[68] See http://hea.ie/funding-governance-performance/funding/how-we-fund/
[69] https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2017-Press-Releases/PR2017-08-23.html

This is the major financial support for students in Ireland. The scheme is administered by the Department of Education and Skills. The support is a need-based grant that is paid to full-time students in undergraduate and postgraduate courses. These courses, as well as the host institution, must be approved. Grants are paid to Irish, EU, EEA and Swiss citizens, who reside in Ireland. The income of students is most decisive for grant eligibility and the size of the grant. With regard to income, students are classified as dependent or independent students.[70] For independent students their own income is used, for dependent students, the income of parents will be assessed.

The Student Assistance Fund

The Student Assistance Fund is a second important funding source for students. The money is provided by higher education institutions to students facing economic hardships or financial problems. The funds can be paid in addition to the student universal grant. It covers costs for needs such as living costs and books or other costs. The Fund cannot be used to pay tuition fees. The Funds are administered by approved higher education institutions who receive a certain amount each year based on the structure of their student population. Students have to apply for funding at their institutions.

The 1916 Bursary Fund

This fund was introduced only recently in 2017. The fund provides additional funding to students from target groups, in particular, lone parents. The money will be provided to around 600 students from background prescribed in the implementation guidelines, in particular to lone parents, who should form 20% of the funded students (Higher Education Authority 2017b). Most important to receiving the fund is that the student is from a socio-economically disadvantaged group. Students can receive both – the Student Universal Support and the 1916 Bursary Fund.

The Fund for Students with Disabilities

This fund is provided to disabled students to facilitate their full participation in higher education. Students cannot apply directly to the funds but through their institutions that evaluate their needs and costs. Since 2017 also part-time students with disabilities are eligible for funds.

The Back to Education Allowance

The allowance is designated to persons who are unemployed, disabled or receive social welfare payments for other reasons. To receive the funds, persons must enrol to full-time higher education courses that are also approved for the Student Grant Scheme. To qualify for the Back to Education Allowance persons participating in undergraduate courses must be older than 21 years, for postgraduate courses older than 24 years. Postgraduate courses must lead to a higher education diploma or a professional master. Students receiving the Back to education allowance do not qualify for the maintenance fund of the Student grant scheme.

Thus, in Ireland, financial support instruments for students from disadvantaged backgrounds reflect the strong commitment to equity in opportunity and access. In line with the overhaul of the higher education funding system, some of the instruments have been reviewed. These results are referred to in section 3 below.

2.3. Organisational policies

Already in 2012, the Higher Education Authority reviewed part-time and flexible higher education in Ireland. The promotion of part-time and flexible higher education was already stated as a major goal in the prior national access plan. Part-time education was identified as a means to widen participation and promote life-long learning (Higher Education Authority 2012). Further, the provision of part-time and flexible learning was

[70] Dependent students are defined as younger than 23 years when enrolling first to higher education; students who are older than 23 years are also classified as dependent in case they live with their parents. Independent students are those older than 23 years; they are also classified as mature students.

identified as a means to provide persons who lost their jobs in the economic recession in the late 2000s with additional opportunities.

To promote part-time and flexible higher education, targeted funding is provided by the Higher Education Authority (e.g. the Strategic Innovation Fund) (Higher Education Authority 2012). The Springboard scheme offers opportunities in part-time higher education to persons who were hit by the economic recession.[71]At national level admission to part-time education is facilitated through a variety of routes and application systems to reach out for non-traditional students. These measures included the bridging courses and projects to standardize the recognition of prior learning (EINE project).

Implementing part-time and flexible higher education is done at the institutional level. The 2012 report mentions that the majority of institutions proactively increased part-time provision of courses. Flexible provisions alter standard provision mostly in the following areas (Higher Education Authority 2012):

- Courses are offered as evening/weekend courses
- Courses are taught at alternative venues off campus to move closer to students
- Courses employ blended learning
- Course modularization to adapt to the learning speed of learners (Accumulation of credit point and certification of subjects)
- Providing special adult education bachelor programmes
- Provision of online and distance learning.

2.4. Information policies

The current national access plan states three major areas of information policies for widening participation. These include the improvement of data on access and retention of the target or equity groups. Further, to improve and enhance knowledge about problems target and equity groups face with regard to access to higher education. Finally, the improvement and dissemination of knowledge about effective access policies and interventions are mentioned.

With regard to improving data on access and retention, the Higher Education Authority is currently implementing a new data plan (Higher Education Authority 2017a). With the new data plan, the Higher Education Authority expects to collect more accurate data on individual educational progression and retention throughout the whole educational trajectory. In addition, the new data plan will employ a more accurate measure of social background, the deprivation index score. It is expected that the new data will provide better insights at what point in their educational trajectory students decide for a different educational pathway than higher education and what groups are most affected.

Recent research revealed that access to higher education is also a problem for groups that are not defined as equity or target groups. Rather, lone parents or students with migration background face access problems. The 1916 bursaries attempt to address the groups of students.

Dissemination of knowledge on effective access policies and interventions also took place through seminars, organized with the support of the higher education authority.

[71] https://springboardcourses.ie/

3. Policy impact: monitoring, evaluation, and analysis

3.1. National statistics on changes in the composition of the student body

In December 2018 the Higher Education Authority published a progress review of the current National Access Plan (Higher Education Authority 2018). This publication summarizes to what extent targets and goals set in 2015 have been achieved. The table below shows that some of the quantitative targets have been achieved already. In particular, the percentage of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds has been increasing, there is also an increase in the number of disabled students. Targets for mature students and students accessing higher education via alternative pathways have not been met, and there is even a decline compared to the baseline data from 2015.

Table A2d: Achievements on 2019 targets for equity groups as per progress review 2018

	Percentage in 2015	2019 target	Achievement according to progress review 2018*
Non-manual worker group(percentage of 18-20 cohort)	23%	30%	27%
Semi/unskilled manual worker group*(percentage of 18-20 cohort) * Includes agricultural worker group	26%	35%	36%
Full-time mature entrants to higher education(percentage of all new entrants)	13%	16%	9%
Full and part-time/flexible (combined) mature entrants (percentage of all new entrants)	19%	24%	16%
Students with disabilities as a percentage of all new entrants to higher education	6%	8%	10%
Number of students* with physical/mobility disability	390	570	667
Number of students* who are deaf/hard of hearing	210	280	306
Number of students* who are blind/have a vision impairment	140	220	174
Percentage of students studying on a part-time/flexible basis (all undergraduates and postgraduates)	19%	22%	19,8%
Percentage of new entrants to higher education whose basis for admission is a further education qualification	6.6%	10%	7,3%
Number of Irish Travellers in higher education (full and part-time undergraduate new entrants)	35	80	41

*Data refer to 2016/2017
Source: Higher Education Authority 2018, p. 18

3.2. Results from the monitoring and evaluation of policy implications

The progress review summarizes achievements made on the priority goals (Higher Education Authority 2018, p. 47).

1. To mainstream the delivery of equity of access in HEI

With regard to this priority goal, the review mentions that most of the actions planned have been completed. The consultation revealed that mainstreaming of equity has not fully been realized as HEI are insecure with regard to practice and functioning of equity

actions. Mainstreaming equity is also not identified as a strategic priority by HEI. Therefore the review recommends that a shared vision of what mainstreaming of equity means should be developed across the institutions. The new compacts established in 2018 also put more weight on equity in access.

2. Assessing the impact of current access initiatives

To this end, the national access plan mentioned reviewing the different higher education funding instruments as well as the overall funding system. The majority of reviews have already been completed (Higher Education Authority n.d., 2016b, 2016a, 2017b, 2016b) and several actions were taken to address weaknesses. Overall there was an increase in funding for higher education. For the RGAM (recurrent grant allocation model), i.e. the block funding of institutions, it was recommended to include also part-time students from target and equity groups in the funding formula. The universal grant for students was restored to post-graduate students, its allocation model was updated and innovated, and plans to widen the grant to part-time students were included. New funding opportunities for disadvantaged students that are not among the primary equity and target groups such as the 1916 bursary have been established. For the Student Assistance Fund, an expert group supervises the implementation of the recommendations such as standardising rules for the allocation of funds to students at the institutional level or the development of a new allocation model for the institutions that better addresses the individual percentage of target group students at the institutions.

The so-called Cassels-Report discusses different scenarios of a complete change of the higher education funding system (Department of Education and Skills, 2016).

3. To gather accurate data and evidence on access and participation and to base policy on what that data tells us

A number of initiatives have been taken to improve data and knowledge about access to and progression of students in higher education. A new data plan has been developed that is currently becoming implemented. The new data plan will use a small region approach, i.e. deprivation will be measured for regions such as post-code areas. The socioeconomic background of students will be identified with the help of the region in which their parents reside.

Further, some initiatives have been started in order to develop a mechanism for collecting data on students' progress, dropout, and completion. These initiatives, however, currently explore the limitations due to the GDPR – the EU *General Data Protection Regulation*, as this might not allow collecting data at the individual student level

The goal to gather accurate data also foresaw to collect more data on student experiences. Here progress has been achieved with regard to informing access policies by student experiences. Students have been consulted for the development of interventions and, among others, for the development of the midterm-review.

The Higher Education Authority has engaged in a number of events where knowledge and information on successful access policies have been shared. There are also plans for further events.

4. To build coherent pathways from further education and to foster other entry routes to higher education

For this priority goal, there is less progress compared to the other goals. Working groups have been established or scoping has been done to set out first ideas on how to establish broadened pathways to higher education in a more systematic way. Discussions include if the DARE and HEAR scheme should also include students from further education routes. The collaboration of HEI and Further Education institutions has increased and already some courses that facilitate access to higher education have been established in these collaborations.

5. To Develop Regional and Community Partnership Strategies for increasing access to Higher Education with a Particular Focus on Mentoring

The PATH2 and PATH3 schemes play an important role in realizing the fifth priority goal. Additional funding was made available to groups of students that are not part of the traditional equity groups but have been identified as having access problems (e.g. lone parents). This goal includes the set-up of mentoring initiatives at the regional level. These initiatives reach out to students at the secondary level and are done in collaboration with school, communities groups, and enterprises. Currently, the Higher Education Authority monitors these initiatives to identify best practices.

3.3. Good practices

Widening participation has a long tradition in Ireland. It uses mostly an holistic approach used when implementing widening participation policies. This holistic approach considers:

- that measures should target different educational levels.
- that the development of measures should be evidence-based
- that policies should be evaluated for their effectiveness
- to consult different stakeholders, in particular students from target groups, regarding widening participation measures
- to address peculiarities of regions.
- to identify responsibilities for the implementation of access priority goals and actions.
- to include national access goals in funding and other policies as well as in other development plans and strategy to mainstream the equity of access and educational opportunities.

4. Conclusions

Widening participation is high on the educational agenda in Ireland. Already since 2000, national access plans have been developed and implemented. Widening Participation is among the major responsibilities of the Higher Education Authority.

To date, Ireland has made a number of achievements in this area. There was an increase in the participation of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and disabled students. For these groups, targets have already been met. However, there is still a problem in widening access to mature students, enrolment in part-time or flexible studies or enrolment of students who do not fulfil the formal requirements for higher education.

Currently, Ireland changes the focus of defining target groups. To date, disadvantaged groups of students have been identified with regard to their family or socioeconomic background. These criteria might not always reflect educational inequities. The new data plan will use a regional approach that identifies deprived areas. This approach can support the identification of educational inequities that might not have been visible when using socio-economic characteristics.

Overall, the Irish approach appears to achieve set targets. However, the bouquet of measures that are currently implemented might be difficult to be fully overlooked.

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Case study 5: Latvia

Introduction

The legal framework of Latvian higher education system has evolved since the country gained its independence in 1991. The same year a "Law on Education" was introduced, which initiated a transition from a fully state-regulated and state-funded education system to a more autonomous model. The new model gave a place for both public and private higher education institutions, introduced tuition fees and enabled HEIs to obtain funding from diversified sources (OECD, 2016).

Nowadays, compared to other European countries, the Latvian higher education system is classified high on financial and staffing autonomy while the scores on organizational and academic autonomy range between medium to low. Latvian HEIs are free to set tuition fees for self-paying national, EU and non-EU students at bachelor's, master's and PhD levels. Furthermore, HEIs can partially determine admissions procedures at Bachelor's level and are fully in charge of admissions procedures at Master's level (EUA, 2017).

In 2016 Latvia had 60 tertiary education institutions and colleges. These institutions are classified into three clusters – 1) universities, 2) other higher education institutions and academies and 3) colleges. Universities and other higher education institutions and academies can offer both academic and professional tertiary education degrees, while colleges are allowed to provide only professional tertiary education (OECD, 2016).

All six universities are public while other higher education institutions and academies are both public and private. To obtain university status, at least 65% of an institution's academic staff must hold a doctoral degree and be active in research. In academies the threshold for academic staff with doctoral degrees is set to 50% while in other tertiary institutions 40% is required. The degree structure in Latvia follows the Bologna Process distinguishing between three cycles of tertiary education - bachelor's (undergraduate), master's (graduate) and doctoral-level studies (OECD, 2016).

In Latvia compulsory single-structured basic education is offered from grade 1 to 9. It is split into 6 years of primary education (grade 1-6) followed by 3 years of lower secondary education (grade 7-9). Most students proceed to upper secondary education for another three years (grade 10-12). Upper secondary education is offered in general and vocational pathways and full-time and part-time study modes. Students in general upper secondary education who pass the centralized state exams are awarded the certificate of general secondary education. The certificate allows them to enter tertiary education. Students who have completed 3-year vocational education, need to complete another year of general study ("bridging year") to be able to enter tertiary education (OECD, 2016).

According to a recent report on higher education admission systems in Europe, Latvia is classified as a Type 2 country. This means that "little pre-selection occurs within the schooling system, but HEIs generally use additional criteria for making recruitment decisions" (Orr, Usher, Haj, Atheron, and Geanta, 2017). A similar HE admissions approach is used in neighbouring Lithuania, Estonia and Finland as well as Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus and Portugal (Orr, Usher, Haj, Atheron, and Geanta, 2017).

In 2017 roughly 41.3% of Latvian population aged 25-35 had obtained tertiary education, slightly below the OECD average of 44.5%. The attainment rate among the older generation (55-64 year-olds) the same year was only 27.1% while the OECD average was 27.4%. This indicates a substantial increase in higher education attainment rate among young adults. Furthermore, the participation of men (29.8%) was significantly lower than women (53.9%) (OECD, 2018) although the difference appears to be shrinking (European Comission, 2017).

1. Main issues and policy aims regarding widening participation

1.1 Most important access problems

The total number of students enrolled in Latvian HEIs have dropped by more than 37% between 2005 (131,125) and 2017 (81,602). Currently, around 40% of students are admitted to state-subsidized study places, meaning they receive a tuition-fee waiver (CSB, 2018). The considerable drop in student numbers has been a result of a demographic decline and intense emigration due to the economic crisis, which consequently reduced the number of people willing to pay for higher education (OECD, 2016). Additionally, Latvia joined the EU in 2004 enabling Latvian citizens to access HE market in other EU countries for the local tuition fees. Between 2005 and 2016 the majority (74%) of all Latvian emigrants chose to go to other EU countries (CSB, 2017).

In 2014 the World Bank reviewed the funding model of Latvian higher education. While it recognized some advantages of this system, it identified several key issues. On the upside, the existing funding model incentivizes talented students to pursue higher education and promote competition. Furthermore, since state-subsidized study places are aligned with labour market needs, good students are offered a chance to specialize in high priority areas (World Bank, 2014).

Since 1991 Latvia has employed a dual system of student financing. Merit-based and field-based criteria are used to differentiate between students eligible for state funding and those required to pay fees. Students with better academic performance in high school and centralized state exams are admitted to state-subsidized study places and are exempted from paying study fees (OECD, 2016). In 2016/2017 academic year 42% of students studied under state-subsidized study places (free tuition) while the remaining 58% were privately funded. In total, 31% of the total expenditure on tertiary education comes from households (European Comission, 2017). Almost all part-time students pay tuition fees (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017).

Furthermore, the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) determines the number of state-subsidized study places at each HEIs and study field. The decision is based on a consultative process with multiple stakeholders. Past performance of HEIs and labour market forecasts among other factors are considered when deciding upon the number of study places (OECD, 2016). For example, the government plans to increase the number of state-subsidized study places in STEM fields from 44% in 2013 to 55% by 2020 (OECD, 2017).

Each HEI can set its own fees. Tuition fees tend to be lower in regional HEIs and are the highest in the capital city - Riga. For the first and second cycle students' annual fees range from EUR 1,100 to 6,900 for full time students and between EUR 900 and 2,900 for part-time students. The fees for long-cycle programs are higher and vary between EUR 2,600 to 12,500. Students from socially or economically disadvantaged families can be transferred to state-financed study places. Fees for international students coming from outside the EU are higher, and can go up to 14,000 a year (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017).

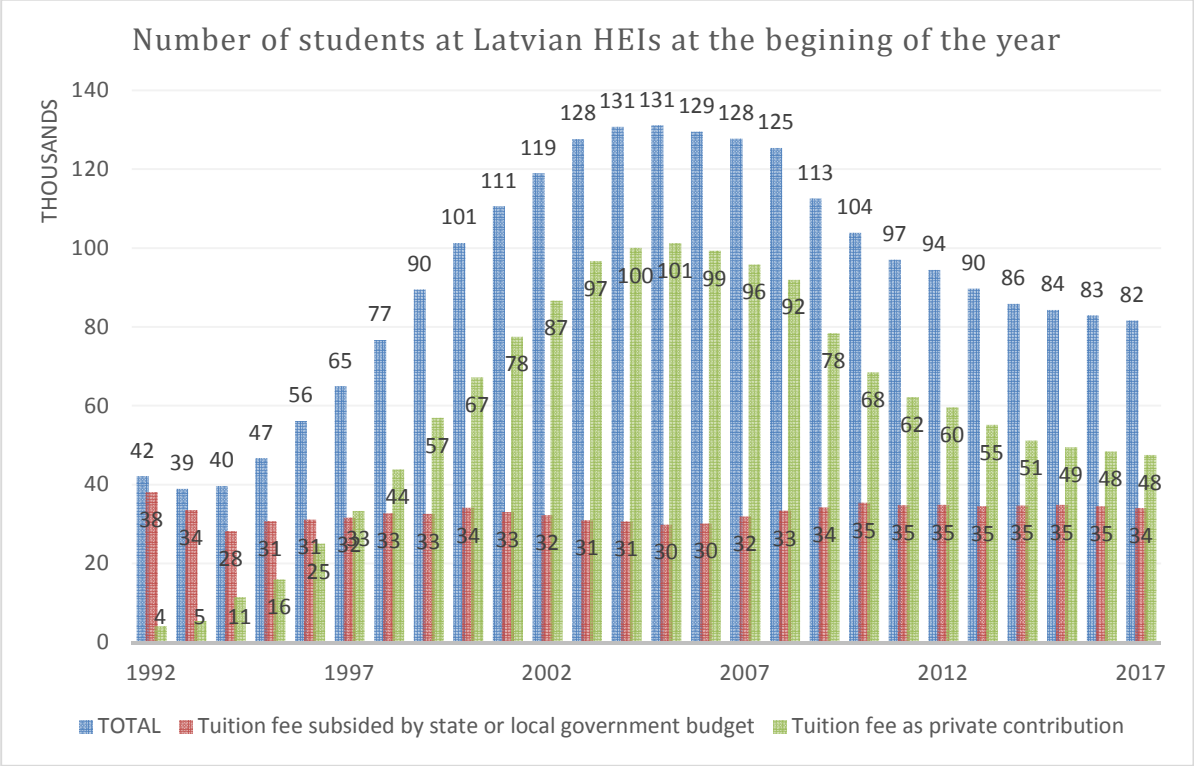
Nonetheless, the existing funding model has strong emphasis on merit-based funding while needs-based funding is neglected. Consequently, students with low socioeconomic background have limited opportunities to enter HE while students from good socioeconomic background disproportionally benefit from the state subsidized study places. Moreover, student loans are not attractive to large groups of students, particularly to students with low-socioeconomic background, due to guarantor requirement. Thus, the dual track system with full-fee paying and state-subsidized students further deepens social inequalities (World Bank, 2014). Similar conclusions were later reached by OECD (2016). The Latvian government was advised to introduce more needs-based funding mechanisms to widen HE access and promote equity. As a result, the government introduced needs-based criteria in its merit-based funding model in 2017/2018 (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017).

Furthermore, the current funding model has placed restrictive measures on part-time students. Part-time students are neither eligible for state-subsidized study places (World Bank, 2014) nor public grants (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017). The initial rationale behind this approach was that part-time students are likely to be in a more favourable financial position since they are more likely to receive labour income. Yet it did not recognize that students from low-income families might need to work during their studies to support their living expenses even if they have gained access to state-subsidized study place. Additionally, Eurostudent VI report indicated that around 61% of full-time students surveyed worked during their studies (Eurostudent, 2017). This indicates that some flexibility would benefit also those students that are currently enrolled in full-time studies.

Similarly, students with children would benefit from state-subsidized part-time options. The most recent Eurostudent VI survey indicated that 14.7% of students surveyed in Latvia had at least one child (Eurostudent, 2017). As the demographic decline leads to a lower number of students, the higher education system should provide opportunities for life-long learning and non-traditional students (World Bank, 2014). This is also aligned with Latvia's Education Development Guidelines 2014-2020, which sets life-long learning as one of its priorities and emphasize its role in reducing social inequalities (MoES, 2013).

The most recent Eurostudent survey revealed that out of 2,363 full-time students surveyed, around 16% reported that their family is either "not wealthy" or "not wealthy at all". The wealth status reported by students correlated with their parents' educational attainment. On average, students who had at least one parent with higher education qualification reported higher family wealth than students whose parents had no higher education qualifications. Students coming from less wealthy families were four times as likely(23% vs 5%) to report that their income is insufficient to purchase food or allows to purchase the bare minimum when compared to students from more wealthy families (self-reported wealth status). Approximately 28% of respondents reported experiencing financial difficulties during their studies (Eurostudent, 2017).

Figure A2e: Development of student numbers in Latvia since 1992, total, main source of funding



Source: (CSB, 2018)

The outcomes of Eurostudent report also indicated that on average students spend 635,02 EUR on monthly basis. More than 90% (91%, 581,30 EUR) is spent on living expenses while the rest covers study-related expenses. Both living and study expenses are higher in Riga (618 EUR, 70 EUR) than in the peripheral areas (485 EUR, 12 EUR) (Eurostudent, 2017). This indicates that access to financial support to cover living expenses is needed as they constitute a large majority of student expenses, particularly given the fact that 16% of students surveyed reported coming from families with below-average wealth and 28% reported having experienced financial difficulties during their studies.

1.2 Focus of national strategies

In 2013/14 Latvia was one of the 13 countries in EHEA area that reflected the objective of widening participation in steering documents through general policy statements. Yet no concrete measures were put in place. In the remaining 32 countries, these objectives were reflected through a set of concrete measures (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015). The limited focus on widening access in policy documents might be partially attributed to a large number of reforms realized in other areas of higher education, and human resources required to realize these reforms. As OECD 2016 review indicated, the Latvian Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) has limited capacity for policy analysis and monitoring as well as implementing reforms proposed by the OECD, the World Bank and the EC.

In recent years several major reforms have been ongoing in the Latvian education system, including changes in higher education funding model, the establishment of quality assurance agency for the higher education sector, consolidation plans of higher education institutions, development of curriculum for vocational education and the introduction of work-based learning. Additionally, a strong focus has been placed on modernizing research and innovation capacity (OECD, 2016; OECD, 2017; European Commission, 2017b). Also, the government intends to raise the number of state-subsidized study places in STEM fields from 44% in 2013 to 55% by 2020 (OECD, 2017). The total number of state-subsidized places will remain approximately the same.

Given a large number of ongoing reforms, limited attention has been paid to widening access for disadvantaged groups. At the same time, the lack of needs-based funding has been identified as a major obstacle in widening HE participation for students with a low-socioeconomic background and was recently addressed by the Latvian government (World Bank, 2014; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017; European Commission, 2017). To some extent, emphasis on life-long learning, work-based learning and vocational learning can also be seen as widening access to HE although these developments are out of the scope of this review.

1.3 Policy aims regarding widening participation

Several Latvian medium and long-term planning documents have touched upon social inclusion and widening participation in HE education between 2010 and 2020. "Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030" (Latvia2030), adopted by the Parliament in 2010, is the main long-term planning document. As one of its key priorities, it recognizes a paradigm shift in education. Two indicators under this priority are directly related to HE participation rates. Firstly, the proportion of young adults aged 30-34 with higher education should be above 40% by 2030. Secondly, the percentage of adults aged 25-64 participating in adult education should exceed 14% by 2030 (Saeima of the Republic of Latvia, 2010).

The "National Development Plan of Latvia for 2014–2020" (NDP2020), adopted by the Parliament in 2012, is the highest medium-term national planning document. It is closely linked to Latvia2030 as well as the National Reform Programme for the Implementation of the EU2020 Strategy (NRP). It introduces a vision of Latvia in 2020 "Economic

Breakthrough—for the Greater Well-being of Latvia" specifying multiple strategic objectives. One of the strategic objectives is "development of competencies." A key indicator related to widening higher education access is "percentage of persons aged 25 to 64 involved in adult education", set to reach 15% by 2020 (Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre (CCSC), 2012).

Additionally, the "National Reform Programme of Latvia for the Implementation of Europe 2020 Strategy" (NRP), endorsed by the Cabinet of Ministers in 2011, represents an economic policy coordination and surveillance tool at the EU level. It defines national development goals in the context of Europe 2020 strategy, also covering such topics as modernization of higher education and research. The goal set for tertiary education is "the percentage of population aged 30-34 years with tertiary education qualifications", which should reach 34-36% by 2020 (Ministry of Economics, 2011). Moreover, NRP also emphasized the intention to ensure equity of higher education and improve mechanisms for granting scholarships and student loans. Additionally, it intended to restore its loan repayment procedure, where specialists employed in state-defined professions and institutions could repay their loan from the state budget. The intention was to set these initiatives in motion as of 2013. The objective of these initiatives was to provide a larger number of people with an opportunity to pursue higher education and increase the attractiveness of certain study fields deemed important by the state (Ministry of Economics, 2011).

2. Main policy instruments applied for widening participation

2.1 Regulations

In January 2016, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted amendments to the Regulations on Scholarships. Among other adjustments, new one-time needs-based scholarships were introduced. Additionally, further enhancement of students' support system was planned in 2017 to ensure efficient student loan granting system. Unfortunately, there was no information available if and how the loan system was changed. Also, the regulations on state guarantees for student loans will be improved to reduce the administrative burden currently placed on loan takers (Government of Latvia, 2017).

2.2 Funding policies

For more than two decades Latvian HE system has relied upon merit and field-based criteria for student funding. Only in 2017/2018 Latvia introduced needs-based funding element in its merit-based funding model. Once per semester universities provide need-based grants of 99 EUR to eligible applicants. Additional needs-based grants are available for the first and second cycle students. The amount of 99.60 EUR is provided on monthly basis for 10 months. The factors considered are a disability, orphan status, students from large families or in economic need. In 2016/2017 approximately 13% of the first cycle students, 8% of the second cycle students and other 8% of short-cycle students received this grant (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017).

Student loans are necessary to provide access to HE to those students who do not qualify for state-funded study places or need additional support. Two types of loans exist in Latvia. The first loan type covers tuition fees while the second, capped at 170.74 per month, covers living expenses. Repayment of the loans needs to start 11 months after the end of the degree programs. In 2016/2017 just under 11% of fee-paying students took out a loan, and this percentage has been declining since 2009. These loans are administered by commercial credit institutions, which are selected based on credit rate auctions. Every loan has its own interest rate (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017).

While the repayment conditions of these loans can be considered attractive, students in high need may not be eligible to obtain the loans due to the requirements set by credit institutions. This raises questions about equity, especially since state subsidized study-

places and scholarships disproportionally benefit the students with high socioeconomic status (World Bank, 2014).

Two types of tax benefits are offered to students who pursue higher education or their parents. A tax benefit of 213.43 EUR per year is awarded to parents and students pursuing higher education (payers of personal income tax). Also, parents can have additional tax relief for children under 24 who pursue higher education. Family allowances are not provided (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017).

2.3 Organisational policies

No specific information on organizational policies to widen HE access and inclusion were found. Students pursuing tertiary education in Latvian HEIs can receive support that goes beyond study information such as psychological support as well as career counselling (European Comission, 2015).

2.4 Information policies

To improve access to career support for students in general and vocational education the ESF (European Social Fund) project was launched in 2016. The project aims to have 328 general and vocational education institutions providing career support for students by 2020. The total funding available for the project is 23 million EUR, including ESF funding – 19.6 million EUR. The number of teachers – career consultants in general and vocational schools grew from 54 (academic year 2012/2013) to 196 (at the beginning of the academic year 2016/2017). Most of them work part-time. Furthermore, similar to previous years, career development support and information events were arranged in 2016. Approximately 140 thousand children and youngsters attended more than 4500 events organized as part of the *Career Week*, an annual national-level event (Government of Latvia, 2017).

These events indirectly support students in their choice of tertiary level studies. Career consultants at schools can further direct students to websites that explain the links between different professions and education needed to enter these professions. For several years the government has been hosting a website called profesijupasaule.lv [the world of professions] (State Education Development Agency (VIAA), 2018), where students can find such information. Furthermore, the State Education Development Agency has set up a platform to support career consultants, and provide links to informative EU websites covering topics related to career guidance (State Education Development Agency(VIAA), 2018).

Additionally, the Student Union of Latvia (LSA) represents interests of students studying in Latvia on a national and international level. It is a member of the European Student's Union (ESU, 2018). LSA provides informative resources to prospective and enrolled students. Together with the Ministry of Education and Science and other stakeholders LSA organizes a campaign called "Augstskolu Anatomija" [*the Anatomy of Higher Education Institutions*]. The goal of the campaign is to provide prospective students with information and advice on higher education matters that were either not available online or were not explained in sufficient detail. The campaign has been running for over a decade (Student Union of Latvia (LSA), 2018).

3. Policy impact: monitoring, evaluation and analysis

3.1 National statistics on changes in the composition of student body

As part of Europe 2020 strategy, a goal was set for tertiary education attainment rate for population aged 30-34. The ambition was to reach a tertiary education attainment rate of 34-36% by 2020 (Ministry of Economics, 2011). Latvia achieved its target for tertiary education attainment rate in 2011 (35.9%) and surpassed it in 2012 (37%). By 2013 Latvia also exceeded the EU wide target of 40% (40.7%) and attained 43.8% in 2017. Nonetheless, Latvia showed strong gender disparities with 56% attainment rate for

women, but only 32.1 % for men (2017 data) (European Comission, 2018). This difference appears to be shrinking (European Commission, 2017).

3.2 Results from monitoring and evaluation of policy implications

According to BUFF survey data, Latvia has undertaken one out of four measures to support access of underrepresented groups to higher education. Namely, it monitors the student body at entry (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018). To date, this information has not been published. The Central Statistics Bureau also does not provide data on underrepresented groups in higher education in its database. Information on age, gender and distribution of students across regions is available. As the report is relatively new, the information on the monitoring processes might follow in the next few years.

Furthermore, in 2016 the Latvian government amended the *Law on Institutions of Higher Education* to initiate data collection on students and graduates' transition into employment (European Comission, 2017). In 2017 Latvia introduced a Register of Students and Graduates for graduate tracking. The instrument collects and stores data to produce insights on employment of graduates, aggregated by study programmes and by institution. These insights will be used to facilitate targeted funding of higher education and to assist prospective students in their choice of study programme (European Comission, 2018). It appears that at this point in time, the intention is to focus on graduate success and labour market outcomes. However, in the future, such a system could potentially facilitate tracking on social inclusion indicators as well.

3.3 Good practices

The recent initiatives to incorporate need-based criteria in the current student-support system are a welcomed step. Furthermore, the intent to reduce the administrative burden on student loans for those in need of the loans is another promising initiative (Government of Latvia, 2017). These actions are likely to reduce some of the obstacles students, particularly students with lower socioeconomic background, might be facing. Furthermore, as a result, the tertiary education sector might be perceived as more inclusive and fair (World Bank, 2014).

Additionally, the ESF project "Improving access to career support for students in general and vocational education institutions" is promising. It aims to have 328 general and vocational education institutions providing career support for students by 2020 (Government of Latvia, 2017). Selecting the right study path can be challenging for young adults, and having structured guidance available at school can considerably facilitate the decision-making process.

Additionally, the ongoing campaign "Augstskolu Anatomija" [*the Anatomy of Higher Education Institutions*] organized by the Student Union of Latvia (LSA) can be highlighted as another good example. For already more than a decade LSA together with other stakeholders including Ministry of Education and Science is reaching out to students to provide customized guidance and support with regard to study choices (Student Union of Latvia (LSA), 2018).

4. Conclusions

As previously suggested, Latvia was one of the 13 EHEA countries, which recognized the importance of widening participation in its steering documents yet had no concrete measures put in place (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015). Since then international organizations have advised Latvia to adjust its student financial-support model to create a more inclusive study environment (World Bank, 2014; OECD, 2016;

European Comission, 2017). Until recently the student financial-support model was solely based on merit and field-based criteria. Now need-based criteria have been incorporated. A new initiative has been set in motion with one-time need-based scholarships available on annual basis. Moreover, the administrative burden placed on students taking out loans should be reduced as the new regulations on scholarships are adjusted (Government of Latvia, 2017).

Latvia has exceeded its *Europe2020* target for tertiary education attainment rate for 30-34 year-olds set to 34-36% by 2020 and also surpassed EU wide target of 40%. Its attainment rate was 43.8% in 2017. The country shows strong gender disparities with 56% attainment rate for women, but only 32.1% for men (2017 data) (European Commission, 2018) although the difference appears to be shrinking over time (European Commission, 2017). The issue has not been directly addressed in the policy documents. Additionally, in 2016 the Latvian government amended the *Law on Institutions of Higher Education* to initiate data collection on students and graduates' transition into employment (European Commission, 2017). Although the goal is to understand the link between studies and labour market, the new system could also provide some insights on the social dimension, particularly when combined with data sources on the socioeconomic status of students. Going forward, more concrete measures need to be developed to move from recognizing the importance of widening participation to actively working on it. Additionally, increased attention needs to be directed towards the social dimension of higher education. Besides widening participation, policymakers need to assess both the representativeness of the student population and the success of students from low socioeconomic background.

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Case study 6: the Netherlands

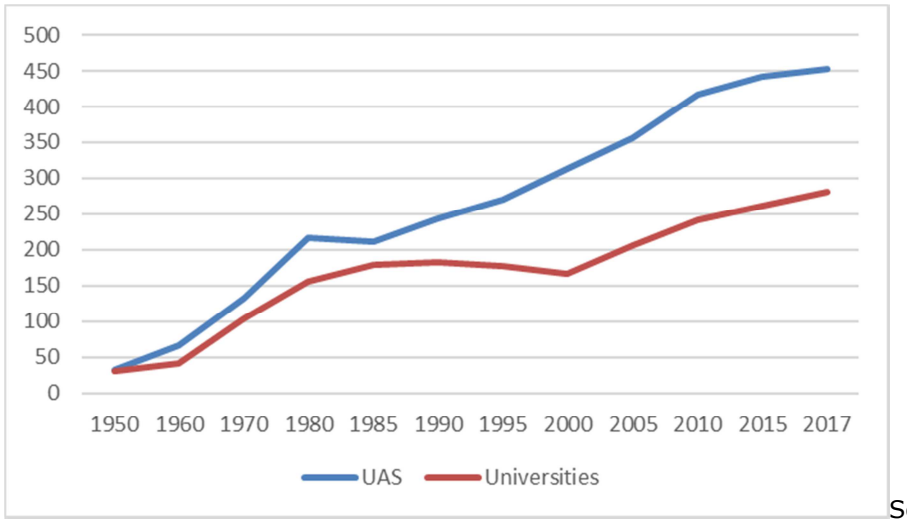
Introduction

Higher education in the Netherlands is provided by research universities and universities of applied sciences. Including the Open University, there are 14 research universities, which provide bachelor, master and PhD degrees. In academic year 2017/18 they enrolled around 280,000 students. There are 37 Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS), which provide associate, bachelor, and master degrees (Vossensteyn et al., 2015). In academic year 2017/18 they enrolled around 453,000 students. The UAS institutions provide more professionally oriented programs whereas universities offer academically oriented programs (CBS, 2018).

After attending elementary education, Dutch children (by that time usually 12 years old) go directly to secondary education (*voortgezet onderwijs*). Based on the advice of the elementary school teachers and on the results of centrally organized test scores (the *Cito*-test), pupils and their parents can choose between three main streams of secondary education: vocational, general secondary and academic (vmbo, havo or vwi; explained below). The first year is often used as an orientation year after which pupils can easily transfer into another stream. Most secondary education schools offer all education routes. The havo stream (5-year general upper secondary education diploma) qualifies students to enter Universities of Applied Sciences, the 6-year academic (vwi) stream qualifies for university education. Students following the vocational stream, after 4 years of vmbo can also choose to continue into upper secondary vocational education (mbo) which also qualifies for University of Applied Sciences programs in the same field.

Because the pre-UAS track in secondary education takes 5 years and the pre-university track takes 6 years, the bachelor programs in UAS generally take 4 years to complete while in universities they take 3 years. Figure 1 demonstrates that higher education enrolments almost continuously increased in the past 65 years.

Figure A2f: Development of Student Numbers in universities and universities of applied sciences (1950-2017)



Source: CBS (2018) Statline.

Figure A2f shows a continuous increase in student number attending universities and UAS. Striking is that in the Netherlands the majority of students attends professionally oriented programs in UAS (over 60% of all students). Particularly since the mid-1980s, the UAS sector has been used to expand and democratise higher education.

1. Main issues and policy aims regarding widening participation

Participation is an issue of ongoing concern in Dutch higher education (Vossensteyn, 2013). The Netherlands faced a rapid democratisation and massification of higher education during the 1960s, 70s and 80s, reflecting the increasing democratisation of society. A general feature in Dutch HE is the policy of open access: all students who qualify for higher education (HE) have to be offered a study place. Limits through selection only operate for a few study programmes that are very expensive to offer or that otherwise would lead to labour market difficulties, such as in medicine, veterinary science, dentistry and architecture.

In order to achieve strong progression to higher education, some reforms in secondary education are designed to better equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary for independent study. Based on the philosophy that all upper-secondary education students could make the step into HE, such reforms have to address the whole secondary education system. Thus, because the Dutch secondary education system is organised into three main tracks, one solution was to postpone the previously relatively early decision regarding which of the three main secondary education tracks to pursue.

Besides the open entrance approach, the Dutch government has initiated a number of policies that may support the increase in participation rates in general and for non-traditional student groups in particular.

In 2010, the Committee on the Future Sustainability of Dutch Higher Education (the Veerman Committee, 2010) explored the potential consequences for Dutch HE of the expected continuous growth in student numbers by some 30 per cent between 2008 and 2020. A major issue was that a high level of tertiary education participation is welcomed under the condition that it insures the provision of high quality education. As such, much policy attention is focused on strengthening the quality of education, reducing dropout rates and increasing study progress, next to attracting particular student groups that are structurally underrepresented in Dutch higher education.

1.1 Most important access problems

In general, higher education in the Netherlands is regarded as sufficiently accessible. All interested students can find their way into the system, in general students are very satisfied about their programmes and institutions and the quality is regarded as very good and HE is perceived affordable (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2018).

However, the overarching challenge with regard to access and participation in HE is to create opportunities that match with the capacities, ambitions, interests and backgrounds of students (MinOCW, 2018). It appears that the ambition of equal opportunities is still not met. OECD research demonstrates that inequalities in education opportunities particularly stem from an accumulation of inequalities at each transition in the education system.

The figures indicate that about 40% of new entrants in Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) and 26% in Universities quit their initially chosen study programme. This demonstrates that improvement is necessary and possible (Min OCW, 2015). This is particularly the case if one takes into account the substantial participation and dropout rates among students from different backgrounds in terms of entrance qualifications, gender and socio-economic backgrounds. Special attention is needed for students with a vocational secondary education entrance qualification (mbo) and students from non-western non-native origin.

In addition, students with a functional limitation (e.g. a handicap, dyslexia, etc.) face problems to progress during their studies and as a result often take longer to complete a programme.

Another issue revolves around education programmes or domains that are linked to labour market segments with a shortage of professionals, such as education (teacher training), health care and engineering.

As a result, providing access to higher education on the basis of suitable trajectories for students from different backgrounds, with different capacities and interests or different attitudes is regarded as the main challenge. This, however, is not regarded as a problem of higher education alone, but more of a problem of the total education chain. Pupils and students in primary, secondary and higher education should be prepared for the opportunities and routes in successive stages of education. For example, students who belong to the high achievers in primary or secondary education, should be given the opportunity to enter trajectories for high performing students further on in their education career as well. As such, collaboration between education institutions is regarded crucial in facilitating suitable transitions for individual students: a cultural shift towards education-chain-thinking is required. However, as most policies relate to specific education sectors, this way of thinking is not easily implemented.

Finally, as education is no longer limited to students at a young age, permanent education and lifelong learning are considered important. However, lifelong learning, particularly part-time education is poorly developed in the Netherlands.

1.2 Policy aims regarding widening participation

Students with family backgrounds without higher levels of education, non-native origin, non-traditional entrance qualifications (often with vocational secondary education (mbo)) are underrepresented in higher education, and these groups should be a prime focus of policy initiatives (Veerman *et al*., Vossensteyn, 2013). To cater for the great diversity of target groups, it is believed that higher education should differentiate in terms of types of programmes offered, educational concepts and modes of study. There is a need for flexible learning paths and tailor-made solutions in higher education as well as in secondary education. It is the ambition of the Minister to offer better fitting attention for groups of students that stem from different backgrounds. To this end, educational institutions at various levels have a collective responsibility and need to collaborate more to offer tailor-made solutions (MinOCW, 2015; 2018). To this end, seven ambitions have been formulated:

- Secure open access as much as possible;
- Further develop talent-programs, such as honours trajectories;
- Improve study success;
- Strengthen the collaboration between education sectors to enable students getting into programmes that suit their ambitions, interests and talents to facilitate more successful transitions in their education career;
- Additional attention for mbo students in their transition to UAS programmes;
- Increase attention to flexibility and transitions within the higher education system, e.g. by means of increasing diversity in education practices to cater for diversity among students;
- Improve the flexibility and attractiveness of lifelong learning opportunities in the HE system for those in the labour market to also continue their higher education career.

1.3 Focus of national strategies

In close connection to the problems concerning access and participation formulated above the main ambitions of Dutch higher education revolve around offering all students the opportunity to develop themselves at the level that suits their capacities, ambitions, interests and backgrounds. This is important for the individual students as well as for society at large. The national higher education strategy argues that to support a high level knowledge economy we need all talents in society, as well with professional and academic skills (MinOCW, 2015). Extra attention is needed for sectors with labour market shortages, such as education, health and care and engineering. As a result, it is the ambition to get "every student at the right place", particularly students for whom it is not obvious that (higher) education is the most likely solution. Therefore it is regarded crucial that higher education is maximally accessible for those interested and that all hindrances to enter higher education – in terms of cultural, financial or information

barriers – are eliminated. This strategic ambition has been restated in a recent policy brief from the Minister of Education to the Parliament, titled: "Access and equality of opportunities in higher education" (MinOCW, 2018). These ambitions form the heart of the new Strategic Agenda for higher education to be published in 2019. The Minister differentiates between measures to be taken before entrance into higher education and measures that can facilitate students already in the HE system. The key elements regarding entrance into higher educations are the following:

- Collaborations between education sectors to facilitate easy transition into higher education;
- Stimulate deliberate and well-considered study choices by providing proper orientation opportunities;
- Strengthen the transition from vocational secondary education (mbo) to UAS programmes such as associate degrees and professional bachelor;
- A more critical analysis of the need for numerus fixus programs and selection;

For students already in higher education, most attention should focus on:

- Stimulate the expression of mutual expectations with regard to the study programme from both the student and the higher education institution;
- A reconsideration and flexibilisation of the "binding study advice" at the end of the first study year;
- Increase interventions that aim to prevent student dropout and study switch; i.e. the change of the study programme after a certain period;
- Stimulate more inclusive higher education by training teachers to apply more often education techniques appropriate for the diversity among students;
- Making selection processes more transparent and more similar across institutions and programmes.
-

2 Main policy instruments applied for widening participation

The strategic ambitions regarding access and participation in higher education have led to several policy initiatives and instruments in the last decade. We discuss the most important ones below, differentiating between four types of instruments: regulations, funding instruments, organisational policies and information policies.

2.1 Regulations

In Dutch education, a number of regulations and laws apply with the specific aim to stimulate participation and completion of qualifications and degrees among as wide a target population as possible. The most important rules and regulations concern:

- Regulation called the "leerplicht" obliges children of 5-16 years to attend school. Parents are responsible to send their children to school. This also applies to persons with a non-Dutch nationality residing in the Netherlands (e.g. refugees). The Education Inspectorate oversees that this truly happens (http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0002628/2018-07-28).
- In addition to the obligation to attend school, children are obliged to obtain a "basic qualification" (kwalificatieplicht). As such, all 16-18 year olds have to be enrolled in education to attain a start qualification (i.e. secondary education or vocational education diploma) relevant for the labour market or for further studies (i.e. access to higher education). Its aim is to reduce dropout from school and to enhance the chances of young persons in the labour market. The education inspectorate checks whether schools and students comply with this law.

- Furthermore, the Law on Higher Education defines that all students with an upper secondary education qualification are entitled to enter higher education. (http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0005682/2018-09-02#Hoofdstuk7). This is the Dutch principle of "open access" which materializes in obligatory acceptance of all qualified applicants in most HEprogrammes, except for those with and entrance limitation, such as medicine, dentistry, veterinary sciences, architecture, arts and a few other programmes.
- In 2007 an experiment started to allow some higher education programmes to select their students. This temporary adjustment of parts of the national Act on Higher Education aims to stimulate excellence and to increase higher education participation. For a limited number of programmes, it is possible to select students, to enrol students flexibly and to differentiate tuition fees (in the Netherlands normally all students pay the same fee). Selection would imply that institutions could select excellent students, leading to 'excellent programmes' (enhance quality). Furthermore, it implies that institutions would get more discretion in enrolments. In 2007, this experiment has been prolonged (Staatsblad 2007, 198). In 2011, this policy was made more permanent.
- In 2005 a law was adopted to force schools to have policies addressing Dutch language competences, citizenship (addressing Dutch society's norms / values / principles / habits), and the creation of a community of peers from different cultures. The law aims to counteract the increased segregation of students based on their religious, ethnic or SES backgrounds through education (Staatsblad 2005, 678).

2.2 Funding policies

The Dutch government initiated a number of financial policies to address the widening participation agenda:

— In 1998, additional funding became available for education provided in foreign languages. However, it has been abolished in 2004. This additional funding was introduced in 1998 with the idea that non-native children learn better in their native languages. It was meant to prevent that children from non-Dutch backgrounds would lag behind in school performance. As this delayed the integration of non-native pupils in schools, it was abolished again in 2004.

— In 2002, the wide system of special needs education was complemented with specific personal budgets for children in need in special primary and secondary education. Such children should be more often integrated in normal schools. The subsidies allow schools to pool resources and hire ambulant remedial teachers to serve special needs of various pupils. These changes have been adopted in the respective education laws (Staatsblad 2002, 288, 631). In 2012, this personalized extra funding for students requiring extra support (special needs) was replaced by a system that provides larger budgets to large co-operations of schools in a municipality or even larger geographical territory. The aim was to enhance the access of special needs children to (regular) schools. In this way, larger groups of schools would collaborate and get to efficiency gains regarding the provision of special needs education.

— In 2005, changes in the law abolished the tuition fees in secondary education and vocational education for students up to 18 years old. The aim was to eliminate any financial hindrances to attend secondary and vocational education for 16-18 year-olds.

— In 2006, the funding for educational counselling and guidance (ensuring that students can successfully complete primary and secondary education) is distributed directly to schools, instead of to municipalities. The same happened with the funds that allow schools to give more attention to pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g. from low-income families or with immigrant backgrounds). Next to stimulating autonomy of schools this intended to provide schools a more direct incentive to provide good

student counselling and to combat differences in education performance due to differences in socio-economic backgrounds. Schools with additional funds can have a better pupil/teacher ratio.

— In 2008, by a change of law secondary education schools provide teaching materials for free (e.g. books and access to digital teaching materials). Schools were financially compensated by the State. As such, parents pay less for the education of their children.

— In 2008, agreements were made about additional investment in the study success of students from non-native non-Western backgrounds. Based on that, the Ministry of Education made agreements with five UAS institutions (G5) in the four large cities in the Western part of the Netherlands (called the *Randstad*). There the proportions of non-native students are the highest, with potential negative impacts on the quality of education and study success. These UAS were: The Hague UAS, UAS Utrecht, UAS Rotterdam, the UAS of Amsterdam and UAS INHolland. The five institutions received an extra budget of €12 million for improving the results of non-native students.

— In 2017, a fund has been established to which schools can submit proposals to stimulate equal education opportunities (*Gelijke kansen in het onderwijs*), such as: development of special groups that better equip pupils for the transition between education levels (primary – secondary / secondary – higher education) (*Schakelklassen*); coaching to vulnerable children; language support project. The investment for such projects is equal to €87 million, to be reduced to €26 million after 2020. Information on these projects is displayed at: www.gelijke-kansen.nl and in 2018 a "Dashboard Gelijke Kansen" has been developed (https://www.ocwincijfers.nl/onderwijs/dashboard-gelijke-kansen).

— In 2011-2012, to stimulate quality and diversity in Dutch HE, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science concluded performance agreements with each individual HEI. HE-institutions were asked to submit a strategic plan for the years 2012-2016, showing their ambitions and targets to improve educational achievements, to strengthen their research profiles and to increase the utilization of research. Given their own history, context and student population, HEIs were asked to set their own strategic goals and to formulate targets for 2015 on various quality-related indicators: dropout rate of first year bachelor programs; switch in first year bachelor programs; bachelor completion rate for students enrolling in second year (nominal duration + 1 year); % of students in excellence trajectories; student satisfaction scores; % of teachers with teaching qualifications; number of contact hours; and relative spending on overheads. In 2016-2017 the agreements were assessed by an independent review committee. In total, 7% of teaching funds was related to the outcomes of this assessment.

— In 2015, a new student financial support scheme (called "Social Loan System") was implemented (*Wet studievoorschot hoger onderwijs*, Staatsblad 2015, 50). This meant a major change in the way students are financially supported in their studies. From September 1st, 2015 new Bachelor and Master students can apply for a loan known as the "advance instalment for studies" (*studievoorschot*). At the same time, the existing basic grant for all full-time students was abolished. The loan is taken out with the government and is subject to favourable repayment conditions, including a 35-year repayment term with maximum monthly instalments that cannot exceed 4% of their income. Anyone with an income below median income does not need to make any repayment. Any open balance after 35 years is forgiven. The revenues from changing grants into loans are explicitly used to improve the quality of HE whilst maintaining accessibility. The government expects that up to €1bn can be invested in (a) better student supervision, (b) more contact hours and (c) rewards for high quality teaching by academic staff. At the same time, students are expected to become more aware of the costs of studying, thus to make more conscious study choices and to limit their time to completion (in order to limit debts).

2.3 Organisational policies

The Netherlands has a substantial number of policies that address organisational aspects of (higher) education to stimulate widening participation:

- The "Study Choice Check" (*Studiekeuzecheck*) has been made mandatory since 2017, meaning that every student applying to a Dutch HEI and who completed their prior education in the Netherlands (or one of the former colonies) must undergo a "check" to evaluate their fit with their selected study programme. The idea is to improve the match between the Student and the programme as to reduce the likelihood of dropout. The outcome of the Study Choice Check is an advice to help students get a better understanding of their own interests, abilities, personal situation and motivations as well as to obtain a more realistic picture of the study programme and the career opportunities associated with it. The check can take the form of a (face-to-face) interview or a digital questionnaire. Based on the results, HEIs make a recommendation to the student about their suitability for their chosen programme. HEIs may, on the basis of the results, recommend students to reconsider their programme choice and offer suggestions about how to find another one. The choice, however, remains with the student; a HEI may not reject a student because of a perceived bad fit.
- In 2006, Associate degrees were introduced in Dutch HE. This policy allows UAS to award the new 2-year associated degree programmes, specifically tailored to those that otherwise would not have entered higher education or to those who already have (some) professional experience (De Graaf en Van den Berg, 2011). The Associate degrees intend to increase enrolments from secondary vocational training and are geared towards the labour market needs for professionals above mbo-4 level. In 2007, these AD programmes were offered on a limited scale, in 2013 they have been established permanently (Staatsblad 2013, 298). Currently there are more than 150 AD programmes offered.
- Since 2003, UAS institutions are allowed to offer professional master programmes, next to their regular offer of bachelor programmes. This not only was a response to labour market needs for more high-level professionals in particular fields, such as education and (health) care, but also offers further professionalization opportunities tailored to those who with (some) professional experience already https://www.verenigingenhogescholen.nl/system/knowledge_base/attachments/files/000/000/582/original/Professionele_Masters_-_Uitgangspunten_verdere_uitbouw.pdf?1465974455.
- Since 2003, with the introduction of the bachelor-master system, most universities developed "bridging programmes" to allow bachelor graduates from other type of programmes to enter master programmes. Each university, often in collaboration with UAS institutions, developed their own regulations for such bridging programmes that should better prepare bachelor graduates to continue in a master. Such programmes vary from 15 to 60 EC trajectories, often obliging the students to take an extra semester or year to complete a master's degree.
- In 2013, the Binding Study Advice (*Bindend Studieadvies*) has been implemented. A binding study advice is a decision of a HE institution about study progress after one year. A negative study advice means that a student who completed too few credits can no longer be enrolled in the same programme. This started as an experiment in 2006 to stimulate study progress and to reduce delays, in other words to increase efficiency in higher education. It became obligatory in 2013. Since 2018/2019, institutions have the opportunity to provide a binding study advice after the second and third year of study (but not for the last study year) as well. Institutions decide how to organize this process and how many credits are required. As many institutions appear to demand many credits per year (often between 40 and 60 out of 60) it is now regarded as a hindrance to students, particularly for those from disadvantaged

backgrounds. Currently there is a discussion if the maximum should be set at 40 credits, but no decision has been taken yet.

— In 2016, the Decree Experiments Flexible Higher Education introduced an experiment to stimulate 'flexstudies' ('flexstuderen'). It provides students more possibilities to study according to their own pace (e.g. combining work and study). It should further increase access to higher education, particularly for students also active on the labour market. Instead of paying full cost-covering tuition rates, the experiment also includes a subsidy for part-time students in particular UAS-studies. They would then pay only a share of the regular fulltime tuition rate (about €2020) depending on the number of modules they actually participate in. They would receive a voucher if the HEI offers sufficient flexibility and if the employer involved makes a financial contribution as well.

— The 2006 changes in the laws allowed schools to be more flexible in the courses that are included in the four education profiles (strands) of pre-university education (vwo) and higher general secondary education (havo). This provides schools, teachers and students more room to make their own educational choices in terms of content and delivery. Consequently, it provided schools more autonomy to modernize their education.

— In 2015, it was made mandatory for schools to have safety policies concerning the social, psychological and physical safety of pupils (and teachers). In particular, the policies are to address the issues of teasing / bullying at schools.

— In 2017, the regulations regarding the selection of students in *numerus fixus* programmes have been changed from a centralised lottery system into a decentralised selection system. HE institutions may now decide on the conditions applicants have to meet in order to gain access to such programme. The requirements have to be made known in advance. Decentralised selection may be a stand-alone selection mechanism, or it may be used in conjunction with the lottery system.

2.4 Information policies

The following policy levers that influence the information provision to students have been implemented to address widening participation issues:

— In 2006 a new study choice information platform was established. Since then, Studiekeuze123 provides independent online student choice information on HE opportunities (http://www.studiekeuze123.nl). This is an extended national web portal that – on the basis of factual information on each Bachelor and Master programme regarding access requirements, content and labour market prospects – helps (prospective) students to make well-considered choices for their study career. It contains also results from the National Student Survey (NSE) on the satisfaction of students with their studies. The portal also links to open days and similar orientation events, to online tests of interest in fields, etc. It is a joint initiative by the 2 universities associations and student organizations and is funded by the Ministry.

3 Policy impact: monitoring, evaluation and analysis

3.1 National statistics on changes in the composition of student body

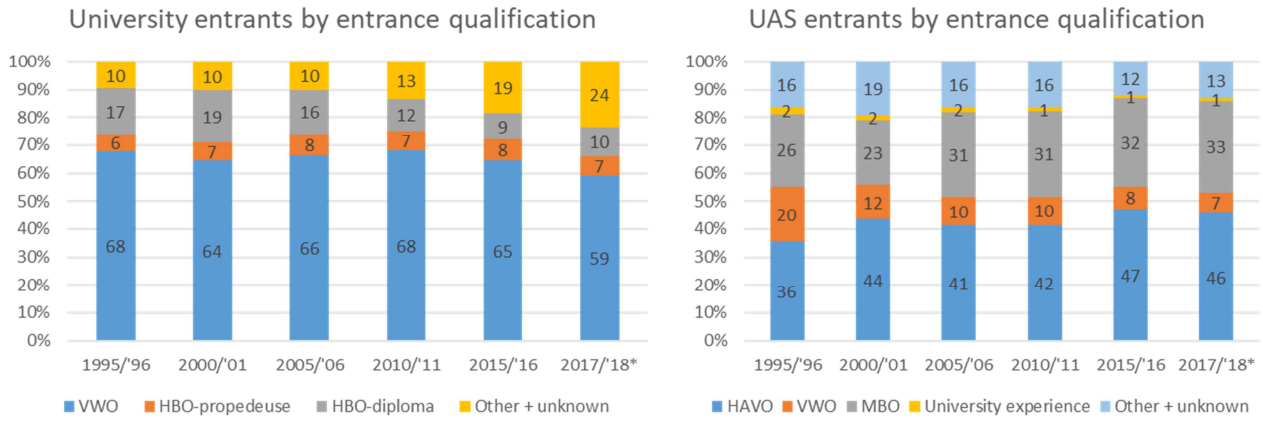
Though the Netherlands has relatively well-structured statistical databases with regard to HE statistics, data concerning the topic of 'widening participation' are relatively scarce because a number of key characteristics concerning target groups are not collected or structurally linked to access and study success data like progression, retention and degree rates. Dutch statistics do show some differences between students from various ethnic backgrounds, but not by parental education or by parental income. Ethnic background is generally defined as:

— Native (Dutch students);
— Non-native Western (first or second generation non-natives coming from European countries [excl. Turkey], North America, Oceania, Indonesia and Japan);
— Non-native non-Western (first- or second-generation non-natives coming from other countries, who mostly have Dutch nationality).

The data on student enrolment in HEIs are collected every year on 1st October and published in February the following year. These data include international students that pursue a full study programme (degree mobility). The number of students has been continuously growing since the mid-1990s in the Netherlands and this growth is estimated to continue up to 2020 (Veerman *et al.*, 2010). Data concerning access, enrolment, study success and transition into the labour market are collected and published by Statistics Netherlands (CBS, 2018: http://www.cbs.nl/), the Universities' Association (VSNU, 2018: www.vsnu.nl) and the Association of the Universities of Applied Sciences (Vereniging Hogescholen, 2018: http://www.verenigingh ogescholen.nl/).

In the following figures we present some basic statistics on enrolments and new entrants by entrance qualification and ethnic origin.

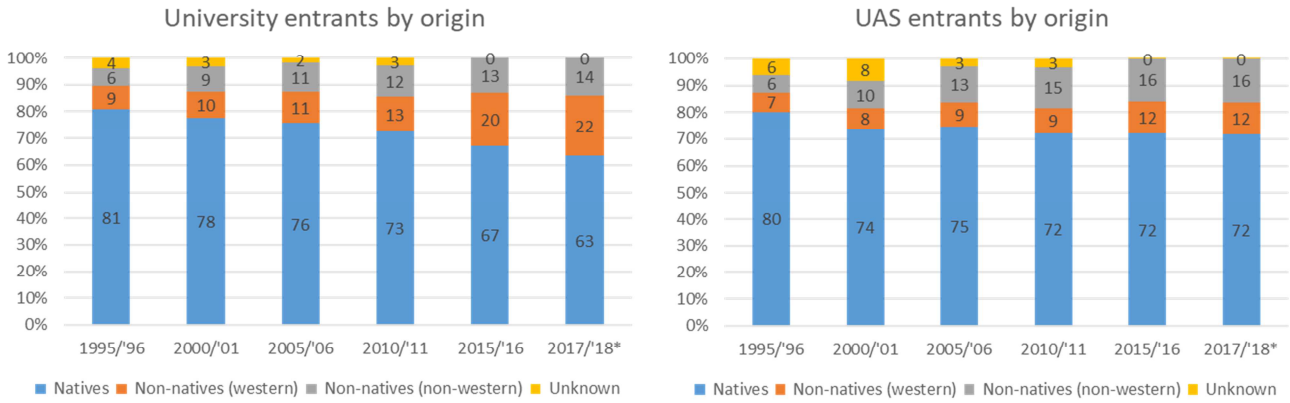
Figure A2g: New entrants by entrance qualification (1995-2017)



Source: CBS (2018) Statline.

Figure 2 documents that the new entrants of universities show a more homogeneous group compared to UAS institutions. Both sectors attract the largest group of students directly from the traditional pre-qualifying secondary education institutions, pre-university education (vwo) in universities and general upper secondary education (havo) in UAS. In universities, the category "other" is much larger, particularly as these include foreign students. UAS attract relatively many students from upper secondary vocational education (mbo). As explained elsewhere in the case study, these students often require additional attention as their academic preparedness is different from those who completed havo.

Figure A2h: New entrants by origin (1995-2017)



Source: CBS (2018) Statline.

Figure A2h shows the number of new entrants by origin, distinguishing between native (Dutch) students; non-native Western students (from OECD countries); and non-native non-Western students. In general, most HE students are of national origin. However, since 2000 the number and proportions of non-native students is increasing, also better reflecting the diversity in society. This suggests that social inclusion to some extent is better achieved nowadays compared to former times. Universities have a larger intake of Western non-natives, while UAS demonstrate a larger share of non-Western non-natives. The latter group of students is particularly representing large groups of students form bigger non-native parts of Dutch population, such as from Morocco, Turkey, Syria, etc. As such, currently UAS appears to have a stronger widening participation role than universities, hence contributing more than universities to upward mobility.

As non-native non-Western students appear to have more difficulties to retain and complete higher education, UAS institutions face bigger challenges in offering equal opportunities to students in terms of study success. As stated in the first sections of this case study, this is also a strong priority in the Dutch higher education policy agenda.

3.2 Results from monitoring and evaluation of policy implications

As discussed in Section 2, in the Netherlands a substantial number of policies have been implemented that address issues of widening participation. Even though it is common practice that policy instruments with a foundation in legal regulations have to be evaluated within five years after implementation, evidence for real policy effects is scattered, scarce and often showing unexpected outcomes due to difficulties to find causal relationships. The most comprehensive overview of policy effects is shown by annual studies conducted by the Policy Monitor (*Monitor Beleidsmaatregelen*) conducted and published by ResearchNed since 2013 (Broek, A. van den *et al*., 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017 and 2018). We provide a summary of the main outcomes reported in these studies, complemented with some other evidence.

Participation, access and study choices

In general, participation in higher education in the Netherlands has steadily increased over the past decades. This is particularly due to the fact that the number of students in secondary education institutions qualifying for tertiary education has increased in a similar manner and that the transition rates to higher education have remained relatively stable. Overall, about 63% of those who qualify for higher education directly continue in higher education. This is about 83% for students from pre-university education (vwo), 77% for students from general upper secondary education (havo) and 41% for students from upper secondary vocational education (mbo). In general, male students tend to

enter higher education directly after completing secondary education more often than women. These transition rates have temporarily gone down in 2014-2015, particularly due to the changes in student financing (from grants to loans), but in most cases they have gone back to the previous levels (since 2016). More students now take a gap-year to make better-informed study decisions.

Also the number of foreign students in Dutch higher education has increased significantly, from 11.000 in 2014 to 17.000 in 2017. However, the number of first-generation students gradually went down, as the average education level in the Dutch population increases. Most students with lower educated parents start in UAS education in Associate degree programmes or bachelor programmes.

The transition to higher education is strongly related to the socio-economic background of students. In general, students with higher qualified parents and from families with higher income levels show higher transition rates into HE. This is particularly evident for students with an mbo qualification.

Gender and ethnicity

Though in general male students more often directly enter higher education after secondary education, female students appear to be more motivated and successful (Broek, Van den *et al*., 2018). Male students more often choose subjects with high labour market opportunities, but also drop out and switch more often. Female students aralso more like to work during their studies.

Students with a non-Western migration origin more often enter higher education, particularly via the mbo-UAS route (Broek, Van den *et al*., 2018) than students with other backgrounds. Nevertheless, this group of students makes less use of various information sources and more frequently chooses on the basis of extrinsic motivations (job opportunities). They are less motivated and less likely to be high achievers, while they spend more time on their studies. Their less conscious study choices are correlated with higher switch and dropout rates, particularly in UAS bachelor programmes. They less often work and have higher study debts.

First generation students (the first in a family to enter HE) often use less information sources to prepare for studies. Those with a pre-university (vwo) entrance qualification more often choose a bachelor in UAS, compared to regular vwo graduates. First generation students are more often extrinsically motivated, more often have paid jobs while studying. They also more often receive means-tested supplementary scholarships and borrow because they really need to. They have a higher likelihood to drop out, particularly when they enter UAS with an mbo qualification.

Selection and matching

As a follow-up on the recommendation of the Veerman Committee (Veerman *et al*., 2010), many institutions also started implementing "soft selection", which is also called "matching mechanisms". These include online or physical information sessions, self-assessments, motivation letters, entrance tests and intake interviews. All of these instruments result in advice to the prospective students as to whether a particular programme fits their interests, motivation and/or capability. The advice is not binding, but helps students prepare much better for their actual study choice and it helps institutions and study programmes to sharpen their profiles compared to similar programmes elsewhere. In 2009/2010 about 4000 intake interviews were conducted in Dutch HE. This number has substantially increased since then due to a wider implementation of this practice across the system (OCW, 2011). The policy of an obligatory Study Choice Check (since 2017) has led to a situation in which all Dutch HEIs apply such a check for all individual students. In the UAS about 50% of the applicants use face-to-face interviews and 50% an (online) survey for the Study Choice Check. In universities personal interviews are much less often applied, while students tend to prefer intake interviews (Broek, van den, et al., 2018). About 20% of the students indicates that they have not had such a "check". Those who did have a Study Choice

Check experience a better match between their study programme and their interests or capacities. Students who actively participated in study orientation activities less often switch or drop out of studies.

Binding Study Advice, dropout and switch

Since the 1980s students have had to successfully complete all subjects in the first study year within two academic years in order to progress into the second year of study. In 1993, the Higher Education Act allowed institutions to provide "Binding Study Advice" (BSA) which demands students leave the programme in case of low study progression in the first year. Since 2005 HEIs were legally expected to expel students who underperformed in the first study year. The Education Inspectorate showed that most institutions had implemented such a policy (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2010). Since 2013, the BSA is obligatory. It is generally believed that the BSA has helped to increase the number of students that more rapidly transfer into second-year courses and complete their whole programme within the nominal duration of studies. However, it also has contributed to increase the drop out of students during the first year of studies.

In general, dropout from HE has never been as low as in recent years (31,2% in 2017; 35% in UAS, 23% in universities). Most of them switch to other programmes during or after the first year. Only 15% of UAS students and 6% of university students completely abandon HE (Broek, Van den, *et al*., 2018). Many students get somewhat delayed during their studies. This is most prominent for students with a functional handicap or with a non-native background. In UAS, about 50% of the students complete a degree within the nominal duration plus 1 year (in total 5 years). In universities, almost 80% of the students completes the degree within the nominal duration plus 1 year (in total 4 years). These figures are relatively stable through time (Broek, Van den, *et al*., 2018).

Large city initiative to improve study success for non-native students

In 2008, agreements were made about additional investment in the study success of students from non-native non-Western backgrounds. Based on that, the Ministry of Education made agreements with five UAS institutions (G5) in the four large cities in the Western part of the Netherlands (called the *Randstad*), where the proportions of non-native students are the highest, putting at risk the quality of education and study success. These UAS were: The Hague UAS, UAS Utrecht, UAS Rotterdam, the UAS of Amsterdam and UAS INHolland. The five institutions received an extra budget of €12 million for improving the results of non-native students. In 2009 for each UAS more concrete target agreements were made in relation to student dropout and first-year success rates. In 2010, the Ministry called for an evaluation of the performance of the G5 institutions on the quality and success of students from non-native non-Western backgrounds (Hobéon, 2011). This qualitative evaluation showed that two out of five institutions made unsatisfactory progress towards the objectives: they did not have a coherent vision on how to improve study success among the target groups; and the policy instruments and initiatives were too diverse and fragmented within the organisations. As such, the HEIs started to work on more comprehensive and generic measures, e.g. by appointing "outreach coaches" and more non-native staff.

Funding initiatives and student financing

In the Netherlands, the performance agreements did push institutions to become more transparent about their efforts and success in areas such as improving students' degree completion (Reviewcommissie Hoger Onderwijs en Onderzoek, 2017). Also, the stronger focus on teacher qualifications, monitoring of study performance and more intense study methodologies strengthened the professionalization and perceived importance of teaching in higher education. This resulted in a more positive study climate and more attention for students' needs. As such, more students find an appropriate match in the system and dropout rates, particularly in universities, decreased.

The major change from basic grants to all students to a full loans system in 2015 did not yet lead to major participation issues. As the means-tested supplementary grants

remained available for the students from less well-off families (30%-35% of all students), the transition from basic grants to loans hardly affected the composition of the student body. Only participation by a few very specific groups, e.g. single mother families, slightly decreased. Student loans do not deter students, particularly when they are well informed. However, students in secondary vocational education (mbo) are less well-informed about student financing than havo and vwo students. Those who are well-informed show less resistance against borrowing (Broek, Van den, *et al*., 2018).

3.3 Good practices

Because many policy instruments leave ample space for individual HEIs to internally implement processes, procedures and instruments, we can identify several good practice examples of how HEIs try to accommodate social inclusion and widening participation.

To facilitate the preparation of prospective students, mbo and UAS teachers in The Hague jointly developed a programme in which mbo students in the economics domain can study and experience how it is to be a UAS student.

The Free University of Amsterdam offers first generation students the opportunity to attend 6 workshops in three days at the university for free. There is attention for research skills and academic writing. They also get familiarised with the VU Student Life Community.

Maastricht University recently replaced some of its Binding Study Advice (BSA) programmes by an intense personal interview about the progress made by the student and his/her match with the programme/university. This appears to be related to lower dropout and switch rates compared to programmes with a BSA.

The UAS Windesheim (in Zwolle) experiment with offering students a flexstudy option in which second year students can make an agreement on how many credits they will achieve during an academic year. This more individualised approach reduces the need for generic measures such as the BSA.

The UAS Utrecht offers counselling and flexible arrangements for taking exams to students who perform "caring tasks" (*mantelzorg*) for relatives or friends at home.

As various other universities, Fontys UAS started with a pre-university programme to get prospective students acquainted with studying in HE. Students who take this 3-days programme can become a role model and coach other prospective students. This initiative aims at stimulating equal opportunities to enter higher education.

4 Conclusions

Widening participation and social inclusion in higher education are high on the political agenda in the Netherlands. They are closely connected to the strategic triangle (or trilemma) of access, education quality and effectiveness of the HE system.

A first conclusion is that participation in higher education has continued to increase in the past decades. A policy of open access contributed to increase the share of secondary education school leavers entering higher education. The policy focus has shifted from democratisation, affordability, completion and satisfying labour market needs to quality, study success and equal opportunities (social inclusion). Attracting students from different backgrounds is a renewed cornerstone of Dutch HE policy, with a high priority given to offering students from different backgrounds, interests, ambitions and capacities more equal opportunities to progress towards a degree.

As a result, policy instruments in the last decade have been centred around getting students into a study programme that suits their personal characteristics, ambitions and abilities. This results in policy instruments that have:

— to better prepare prospective students;

— to provide and stimulate the use of clear and updated information on the study options;
— to monitor, council and guide students to the right (a suitable) study place;
— to offer intensive and high quality (stimulating) teaching environment
— to encourage and support students to complete a decree and to continue in successive education levels.

Regardless of all policy efforts, equal opportunities, access, success and degree completion have not been achieved yet. Long standing differences between students from different socio-economic groups have reduced in size, but they have not been resolved yet. This means that students from migrant backgrounds, lower educated families, poorer families and first generation students still show lower performance in terms of access, level of education, study success, dropout, study switch, completion, debt aversion, etc. The only equity issue that has been solved or reversed is the gender imbalance. Until the 1990s, female students were underrepresented and since the mid-1990s they are slightly overrepresented in higher education.

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Case study 7: Portugal

Introduction

Portugal has a binary higher education system, consisting of university education (ensino universitário) and non-university/polytechnic education (ensino politécnico). Higher education is offered by public and private higher education institutions. In general, there are four types of institutions: Public Higher Education Institutions, Military and Police Higher Education Institutions, Private Higher Education Institutions, and Concordatory Education - Catholic University. In 2016, there were 52 university institutions and 57 non-university institutions (Nuffic, 2016).

Portugal implemented the bachelor-master structure fully in 2009/2010. The bachelor's degree (Licenciado) has a study load of 180 or 240 ECTS. The master's degree (Mestre) has a study load of 60 or 120 ECTS.

Access to public higher education institutions is partially regulated through entrance examinations (concurso nacional). In addition, students can use the results of the national exam with which they partially complete their secondary education (Diploma/Certificado/Certidão do Ensino Secundário) to gain access to higher education.

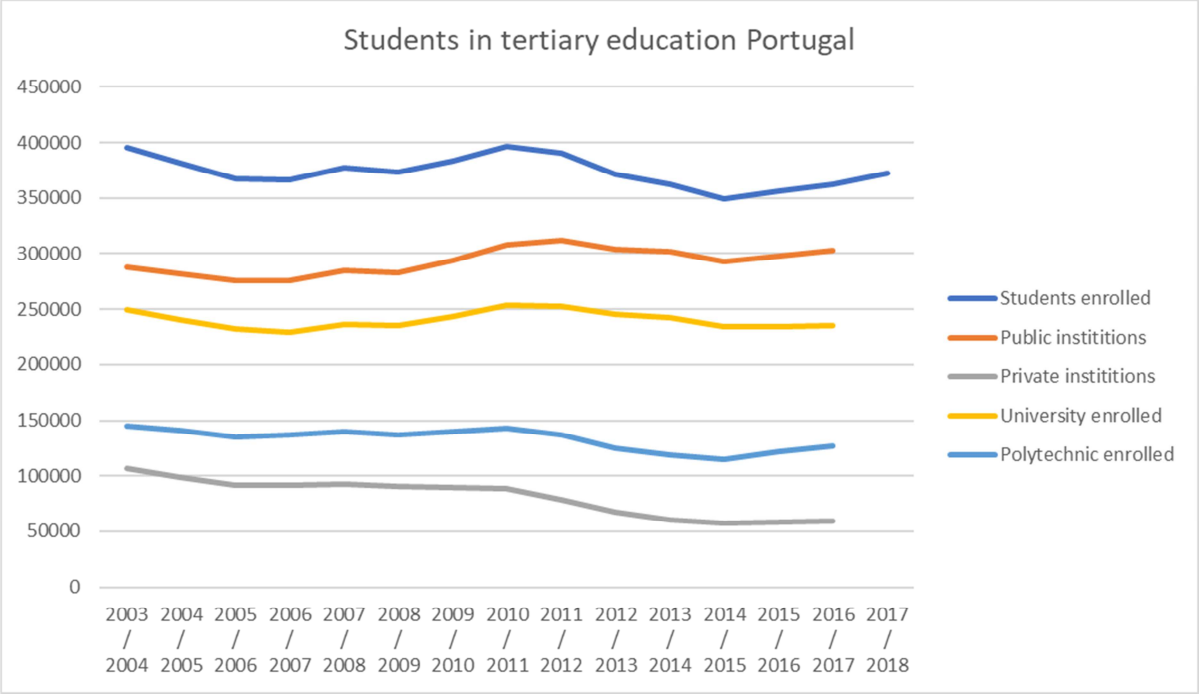
In consultation with higher education institutions, the Ministry of Education sets the number of places available in study programmes (numerus clausus) (Fonseca, et al., 2014). The grades of the entrance examination(s) (combined with grades achieved at school) determine the probability of enrolment at their preferred higher education institutions. A minimum grade on the examination(s) is needed to gain access to higher education; students scoring below this threshold are not allowed to progress to higher education. Private institutions may set their own access requirements.

Applicants aged 23 or older may follow a special exam process – even if they have not completed secondary education. This admission process usually entails Portuguese and school or course-specific exams and an interview.

The report by Orr, Usher, Haj, Atherton, and Geanta (2017) classifies admission in Portugal as Type 2, meaning that the schooling system itself has a limited role in pre-selection, while higher education institutions generally use additional criteria for making recruitment decisions.

In 2016, about 30% of the population aged 20-24 years were enrolled in higher education (Eurostat/educ_uoe_enrt08). The tertiary educational attainment in the age group 30-34 went up from 19.5% in 2007 to 33.5% in 2017 but is still below the EU 28 average (39.9% in 2017) (Eurostat/ t2020_41). Though educational attainment has been improving in the recent years, Portugal has seen a decline in the number of enrolled students in tertiary education (from 396,000 in 2010 to 372,000 in 2017) (See figure below).

Figure A2i: Students enrolled in tertiary education



Source: Statistics Portugal

1. Main issues and policy aims regarding widening participation

1.1 Most important access problems

In Portugal, problems in access to higher education are connected to three major issues: first, the limited participation in higher education; second, the low tertiary educational attainment; and third, limited social mobility.

Although participation in tertiary education increased substantially over the last decades, the last few years have seen a decline in enrolments (OECD, 2018b). It is in this context that the OECD suggests that Portugal should widen access to tertiary education further (OECD, 2018b). The suggested measures to this end include flexibility in programme provision modes (e.g. to facilitate adult learners), allowing and facilitating access to higher education for holders of professional secondary education degrees, and reforming the student financial and preparatory support system (OECD, 2018b).

Limited participation in higher education is directly linked to the comparatively low tertiary educational attainment. Based on OECD calculations the population aged 25-34 with a tertiary-level qualification was 35% in 2016, compared to the OECD average of 43.1% (OECD, 2018d). Regarding gender differences, a larger share of men did not attain an upper-secondary education degree (OECD, 2018c). The lower educational attainment is also linked to strong income inequalities (OECD, 2018c).

In its 2018 edition of 'Education at a Glance', the OECD (OECD, 2018c) notes that in Portugal educational inequalities start from an early age. In fact, "children under the age of 3 are more likely to be enrolled in early childhood education and care (ECEC) programmes or to be cared for by professional caretakers, if they come from relatively advantaged socio-economic backgrounds or if their mothers have completed tertiary education. The difference in participation between children whose mothers have attained tertiary education and those whose mothers have not is of about 17 percentage points (OECD average: 10 percentage points) […] In Portugal, about 78% of 18-24 year-olds do not have a tertiary-educated parent, but these persons only represent 61% of the new entrants to bachelor's or long first-degree programmes. Moreover, individuals without

tertiary-educated parents who do enter tertiary education are more likely to do so after the age of 25 than those with at least one tertiary-educated parent." (OECD, 2018c, p. 2). Participation in higher education is therefore limited by socio-economic and educational backgrounds of students' families.

Except for a national strategy, we did not find any official English language reports on problems in access to higher education.

1.2 Focus of national strategies and policy aims regarding widening participation

In 2018 the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education published its national strategy for Higher Education, Research and Innovation in Portugal. Among others, the strategy sets out goals for educational attainment and participation to be achieved by 2030.

More specifically, the strategy aims to achieve a level of 40% of tertiary education graduates in the 30-34 years old age group by 2020, and 50% by 2030, with 60% of those aged 20 participating in higher education by 2030.[72] To achieve these goals, the ministry wants to:

- *Attract new students – particularly adult learners (aged between 28 and 32) – to higher education. Especially in short courses (Higher Education Professional Technical Courses, "TESP"). Likewise, a boost in digital skills is needed.*
- *Opening-up access to higher education, particularly to guarantee that students concluding secondary education via professional education have access to higher education (in 2015, 13% of this group continue to enrol in higher education, whilst the goal for 2030 is 70%)*
- *Improve success rates in higher education, in both universities and polytechnics*

In addition to the national targets, two target groups have been highlighted: Roma youngsters and students with disabilities. First, the National Roma Communities Integration Strategy 2013–2020 sets special attendance and completion targets for Roma youngsters. More specifically, the aim is to have by 2020 3% of Roma youngsters attending higher education and ensuring that 2% complete higher education.[73] Second, the government aims to promote access to higher education for students with a disability of 60% or more.[74]

2. Main policy instruments applied for widening participation

2.1 Regulations

The access system as described in the introduction to this Section is a regulatory policy instrument. One feature of this system is that since 2016 there is a new pathway to higher education that provides adults older than 23 years with the opportunity to access tertiary education. The track allows adults "to sit a special exam, distinct from the one taken by graduates of secondary education to enter higher education programmes at the bachelor level. This so-called "+23" regime requires that a 5% minimum of total vacancies in universities and polytechnics be earmarked for students older than 23 years. This percentage can be increased to 20%, or even more if there are unoccupied vacancies in the general regime of access. Conversely, if 5 % of places are not taken by students older than 23, they can be occupied by younger students" (OECD, 2018a, p. 80). Participation went from 10,000 adults in 2007-2008 to 6,000 in 2013-2014. More recent figures were not available.

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[72] https://www.fct.pt/noticias/?id=313&/2018/2/Higher_Education,_Research_and_Innovation_in_Portugal_%E2%80%93_Perspectives_for_2030

[73] https://www.acm.gov.pt/documents/10181/52642/ENICC_en.pdf/bc4d6288-1626-4fcd-baa0-9feb8da7860d

[74] https://www.dges.gov.pt/en/pagina/grants-attendance-students-disabilities?plid=1533

2.2 Funding policies

Funding policy instruments related to access to higher education appear to particularly focus on students and their families.

In Portugal, family allowance – child benefit – is granted to families with children under the age of 24 years and enrolled in higher education. It is required that the household income does not exceed 1.5 times the social support index times 14 (2017: EUR 8,847.72) and that family assets are less than 240 times the social support index (2017: EUR 101,116.80). Likewise, tax benefits for families are in place. The tax benefit depends upon the family income, with increased support for families with lower incomes. The tax benefits for parents are provided through tax deduction on educational expenses. The tax benefit is 30% of all education expenses, to the limit of EUR 800. There can be additional restrictions depending on the total income of the family, with reduced benefit as the total income increases. These policies can be interpreted as an attempt by the government to support families with children that plan to attend or already attend higher education.[75]

Students are supported through need-based grants and merit-based grants. The need-based grant is an "annual monetary benefit for sharing the expenses with the attendance of a course or the completion of a compulsory internship, awarded by the State, non-repayable, whenever the student´s household does not have an adequate minimum level of financial resources. The grant is awarded for a full school year, except in some cases. The conditions for awarding a grant are defined in the legislation currently in force, namely in the Regulation for the Allocation of Grants to Higher Education Students."[76] In 2014, the maximum need-based grand was €5,677, provided to students in monthly instalments over the 10 months of the academic year.[77]

Merit-based scholarships are "awarded by Public and Private Higher Education Institutions to students with exceptional performance, regardless of their income, in accordance with the Regulation of Allocation of Scholarships for Students of Higher Education Institutions."[78] The number of available scholarships depends on the size of the awarding institution (in 2014/2015 for public institutions, ranging from 2 to 89 at the University of Lisbon). The merit-based scholarship has an annual value equal to five times the amount of the monthly minimum wage.[79]

Students with a disability of 60% or more may apply for an additional grant which covers tuition fees.[80]

Attending higher education is also supported through the +Superior Programme. This programme aims to contribute to the higher education participation targets by encouraging students with economically disadvantaged backgrounds to pursue higher education at institutions in regions with lower demographic growth. Eligible students are awarded a grant of up to 1,500 Euros per year (Williams, 2017).[81]]

2.3 Organisational policies

Since 2014 the Portuguese higher education system provides short degree programmes. The Cursos Técnicos Superiores Profissionais (CTeSP) are short-cycle tertiary educational programmes, classified at EQF Level 5 (OECD, 2018b). The programmes aim to attract more mature students, i.e. they particularly focus on adult learners. The programmes are exclusively provided by polytechnic institutes and are geared towards deepening

[75] See: https://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/gc21/comunicacao/noticia?i=governo-quer-reduzir-custos-das-familias-com-o-ensino-superior (accessed 09-01-2019)
[76] https://www.dges.gov.pt/en/pagina/grants-general-information?plid=1533
[77] See: http://www.european-funding-guide.eu/articles/grants-and-loans/grants-and-loans-portugal (accessed 09-01-2019)
[78] See: https://www.dges.gov.pt/en/pagina/merit-grants?plid=1533 (accessed 09-01-2019)
[79] See: https://ciencias.ulisboa.pt/pt/bolsas-de-estudo-por-m%C3%A9rito-a-estudantes-de-institui%C3%A7%C3%B5es-de-ensino-superior (accessed 09-01-2019)
[80] See: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-reforms-higher-education-53_en (accessed 09-01-2019)
[81] See: https://www.dges.gov.pt/en/pagina/superior-programme-general-information?plid=1533 (accessed 09-01-2019)

vocational knowledge and skills due to their close collaboration with labour market stakeholders. The programmes last two years (120 ECTS) and include one internship semester. Graduates may continue their studies in higher education. There is a steep increase in the number of students enrolled in these short programmes: in 2014, there were 395 students, 6,340 students in 2015, and 11,048 in 2017 (OECD, 2018a).[82] This growth shows that the programmes are appealing to students and might be successful in attracting non-traditional students to higher education.

2.4 Information policies

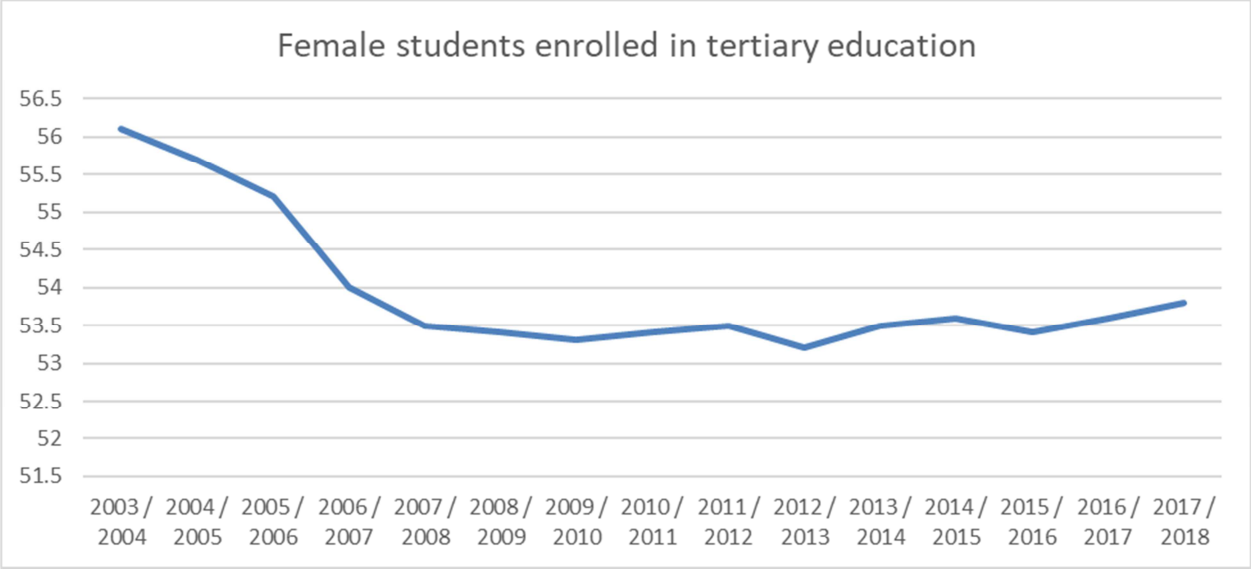
Established in 2014, the website 'Infocursos' allows prospective students to find information on study programmes and higher education institutions. The website includes general information on study programmes, such as duration and degree level, and specific information about admission scores and choice (first, second choice), student retention, switch and drop-out, and profiles of enrolled students (age and gender). Statistics from DGEEC (Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência) are used for the website.

3. Policy impact: monitoring, evaluation, and analysis

3.1 National statistics on changes in the composition of the student body

Statistics on higher education access are published by Statistics Portugal and DGEEC. The statistics cover background information, such as the age of students/adult students, gender (see figure below), first-time enrolment (see figure below), enrolment by region, field of study, and foreign students. However, information on ethnic or socio-economic background appears not to be reported publicly (in English). Therefore, through the available national statistics, we cannot report on changes in the composition of the student body – particularly with respect to the groups highlighted by the policy aims (Roma youngsters and students with a disability).

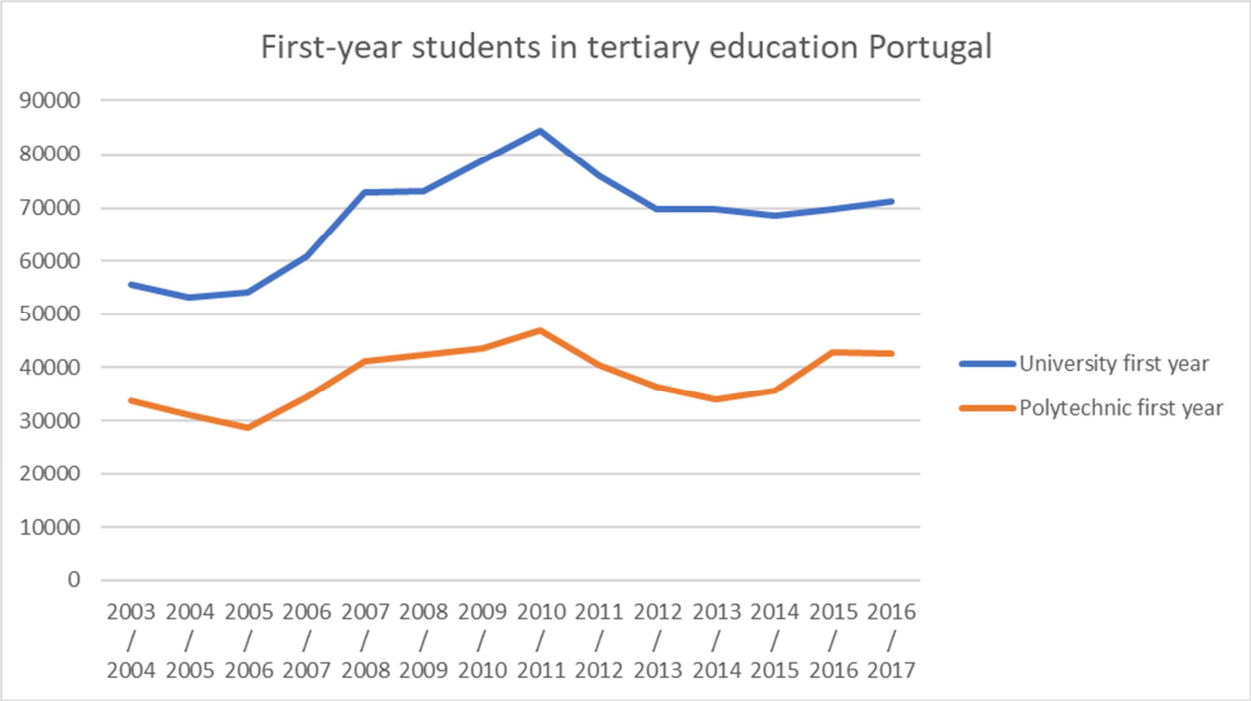
Figure A2j: Female students enrolled in tertiary education (source: Statistics Portugal)



Source: Statistics Portugal

[82] Also see: http://www.dgeec.mec.pt/np4/estatglobal/%7B$clientServletPath%7D/?newsId=308&fileName=DGEEC_DSEE_PERFIL_DO_ALUNO_1617.pdf, 7.1.2. Alunos inscritos (e distribuição percentual), por sexo e ciclo de estudos

Figure A2k: First-year students enrolled in tertiary education



(source: Statistics Portugal)

3.2 Results from monitoring and evaluation of policy implications

Although no explicit policies were found that aim to improve access to higher education for Roma youngsters, the Ministry of Education did create "a database of students from itinerant families to monitor school attendance and help ensure completion of compulsory education" (OECD, 2018d p. web). Likewise, an advisory group for Roma communities was created to monitor progress (OECD, 2018d).

Also related to monitoring access, the latest Bologna Implementation report suggests that Portugal monitors gender and at least one other criteria of disadvantaged students from entry to completion (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018). However, we did not find any public data in the English language on this.

Other than the information provided above, we did not find any English language monitoring and evaluation studies on widening participation policies conducted by the government. However, a few academic publications have addressed access to higher education in Portugal. For example, Neves et a. (2017) expose a potential weakness in the admission system. In particular, privileged students who attend private secondary education benefit more from the admission system that also uses the students' school grades in the calculation of the entrance exam score. On average these students receive higher grades due to the grade inflation in their institutions, which provides them with a higher entrance exam score and therefore better chances to enrol at the more sought-after higher education institutions. Hence, the grade-based admission system perpetuates existing inequalities to some extent. Likewise, Fonseca et al. (2014) study of the admission system suggests that admission based on grades creates a wave of dissatisfaction. First, students may not be enrolled in their first preferred study programme, but in their second, third, fourth, fifth, or sixth choice. Among others, this may affect a crowding out of students who selected these programmes as their first choice but would need a higher exam score to succeed with their first choice. Having dissatisfied students from the onset of their higher education career might hamper their study success thus leading to drop-out and lower completion rates.

3.3 Good practices

In the absence of official policy evaluations (in English), it is difficult to determine with certainty which policy practices can be recognised as good. However, a promising policy appears to be the introduction of short-cycle tertiary educational programmes (Cursos Técnicos Superiores Profissionais) as this enhanced the access to higher education for adult learners (OECD, 2018b).

4. Conclusions

Comparatively, higher education attainment rates are low in Portugal and have been low for years. Nonetheless, over time policy reforms were able to increase attainment rates, though not to level targets. Over the past decade, the financial crisis, which affected Portugal substantially, limited the possibilities of addressing the issue. The 2018 strategy for Higher Education, Research and Innovation in Portugal, 'Perspectives for 2030' will possibly generate a renewed interest in widening participation. Moreover, a positive sign is that overall enrolment rates are increasing since 2014. Likewise, early signs from the short-cycle tertiary educational track are positive as it appear to allow particularly adult learners to access higher education.

Adult learners are, however, not one of the target groups specifically mentioned with respect to widening access to higher education. For students with disabilities, a financial policy is in place to enhance their access. Roma youngsters are also mentioned as a specific target group, but no policy instruments for this target group were found. Likewise, the collected statistics on higher education participation and completion appear not to include the two latter target groups (i.e. students with a disability and Roma youngsters).

To address the access to higher education, authorities might have to reconsider the set-up of the admission system. There are signs that it creates unwanted externalities, such as perpetuating inequalities and creating dissatisfaction amongst students. However, benefits of the admission system should not be disregarded as it is a relatively transparent steering instrument for the higher education authority, allowing, for example, the use of quotas to enhance access for disadvantaged groups of students.

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Case study 8: Scotland

Introduction

Since the late 1990s administration and responsibility for education in the UK have been devolved to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Thus, while some characteristics are common across the UK, certain aspects are unique to Scotland. In the UK HEIs are autonomous self-governing bodies with degree-awarding powers. Most notably, Scotland differs from other parts of the UK with its policies on tuition fees and student support, funding for institutions and governance arrangements (SAAS) (EC/Eurydice, 2018).

Scotland has 19 higher education institutions, 16 universities and 3 other institutions. Tertiary education can also be pursued in Scotland's colleges offering further education courses (EC/Eurydice, 2019a). In 2015/2016 227,258 students attended Scotland's 26 colleges and 235,565 students enrolled in Scotland's 19 higher education institutions (EC/Eurydice, 2019b). Scotland's higher education follows Bologna process distinguishing between three cycles of tertiary education – first-cycle (undergraduate), second-cycle (graduate) and third-cycle (doctoral-level) studies. The most common first-cycle programmes are the 4-year-long bachelor's degree with honours. It is, however, possible to obtain a general Bachelor's degree in three years. Secondary education in Scotland lasts between four and six years for pupils aged 12 to 16-18. It is divided into general lower secondary education (ISCED 2) and general and vocational upper secondary education(ISCED 3). Lower secondary education is compulsory while upper secondary education is classified as post-compulsory. Upper secondary education can be offered both in secondary schools or colleges. In Scotland, no programmes are categorised as post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED 4) (EC, Eurydice, 2019d). In 2016 the Scottish education system provided educational services for 684,415 school pupils in 2,542 publicly funded schools (EC/Eurydice, 2019b).

According to a recent report on higher education admission systems in Europe, the UK is classified as a Type 4 country. This means that "both the school system and HEIs select students and therefore limit their decision spectrum" (Orr, Usher, Haj, Atheron, and Geanta, 2017). The same approach is also used in Iceland, Norway and Spain (Orr, Usher, Haj, Atheron, and Geanta, 2017). All the UK students apply to undergraduate studies through the UCAS (the Universities and Colleges Admission Centre website) website (Study in Scotland, 2019). Nonetheless, since 1990s Scotland has pioneered contextualised approaches to admission, also considering data on students' socioeconomic background when granting admission to tertiary education. Currently, Scottish HEIs use different approaches for contextual admission due to a lack of robust evidence. Nonetheless, the recent assessment study on the contextual admission concluded that this approach "will be an important mechanism for achieving Scotland's widening participation targets" (Boliver, Gorard, Powell, Moreira, 2017).

The Scottish Funding Council (SFC), established in 2005, plays an important role in Scottish higher education (HE) and particularly in widening access to HE. It invests around £1.8 billion of public money each year in Scotland's colleges and universities to stimulate research and innovation, widen access to HE, and bring together colleges and universities to provide people with more routes to access tertiary education (Scottish Founding Council, 2018). The SFC has an Outcome Agreement with each of the 19 HEIs. These agreements specify what HEIs intend to deliver in return for their funding from the SFC (EC/Eurydice, 2018).

In Scotland full-time short-cycle and first-cycle students from Scotland and the EU do not have to pay fees. Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) – an executive agency of the Scottish Government – transfers a tuition fee of GBP 1,820 on the students' behalf to their chosen institution. Students from England, Wales and Northern Ireland are still required to pay tuition fees up to a maximum of GBP 9,000, in line with the maximum fee charged in the rest of the UK. The tuition fees cover teaching and all associated

administration costs. The tuition fees for second-cycle full and part-time programmes are unregulated and vary widely. The most common fee for the full-time second-cycle program in 2017/18 was GBP 4,195. Fees for part-time students are unregulated and usually represent a proportion of the full-time equivalent fee. For student support purposes, part-time students receive different status than full-time students. Fees for international (non-EU) students are also unregulated and set by the higher education institutions (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017).

1. Main issues and policy aims regarding widening participation

1.1 Most important access problems

The Scottish Government has frequently emphasized its commitment to social justice and recognized the need to address the social class gap in higher education participation. However, until recently the gap in university participation between young people from the most and least deprived areas was more pronounced in Scotland than in the other parts of the UK. Only in the last few years the indicators for Scotland have been improving. In 2015 Scottish 18 year-olds from the least deprived areas were more than four times more likely to directly enter university than those from the most-deprived areas (Blackburn, Kadar-Satat, Riddell, and Weedon, 2016).

Scotland uses the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SDIM) to identify "small area concentrations of multiple deprivation across all of Scotland in a consistent way" (Scottish government, 2018). It uses such criteria as poverty, crime rate and unemployment among others (Scottish government, 2016) to rank the areas from the most deprived to the least deprived. People analysing the SIMD data usually focus on areas below a certain rank such as the 10% or 20% most deprived zones (Scottish government, 2018). It is important to note that not everyone living in the deprived area is deprived and that deprived people also live in non-deprived areas (Scottish government, 2018).

The most recent news published by the Scottish government demonstrates that considerable progress has been achieved in widening HE access in the last few years, particularly for underprivileged groups. For the third year in a row, a record number of students from Scotland's most deprived areas have successfully gained a place at university (Scottish Government, 2018). However, this progress required significant time. A 2016 report on the efforts to widen HE access in Scotland indicated that between 1996 and 2014 nearly no progress had been achieved in narrowing the gap between the most and the least deprived students, particularly in the highly selective universities (Blackburn, Kadar-Satat, Riddell, and Weedon, 2016).

1.2 Focus of national strategies

The Scottish government has defined four priority areas for widening HE access, namely gender imbalance, care experienced students, students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students from low progression schools, i.e. from secondary schools where the transition rate of students to higher education is below average. The national strategies for widening access have largely been linked to these four priorities.

SFC's Gender Action Plan (GAP) for colleges and universities in Scotland supports HEIs to tackle gender imbalance and inequality. Gender Governance Group meets at least three times a year to supervise the implementation of the plan. GAP recognizes that a large number of courses in both colleges and universities are heavily gendered where students tend to be either predominantly male or female. Often these courses are closely linked to specific occupations and have a considerable effect on future career options. SFC recognizes that addressing these imbalances will require close collaboration across national and local education institutions (Scottish Funding Council, 2018). SFC's Gender Action Plan (GAP) is aligned with Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy, SFC's Letter of

guidance and the Scottish Government's Economic Strategy (Scottish Funding Council, 2018).

Another SFC's priority area within widening HE access initiatives is "care experienced" students. The term "care experienced" is used to include anyone who has been or is currently in care or comes from a looked-after background. This includes residential care, foster care, kinship care and someone who has been looked after at home with a supervision requirement. SFC has a national ambition to address the underrepresentation and poor outcomes for this group in a tertiary education setting. SFC's strategic document "national ambition for care experienced students" explains the challenges that care experienced students face, and sets measurable goals to address these issues and further enhance outcomes for this group (SFC, 2015).

The Scottish government has also set a clear goal for widening HE access to include students from Scotland's top 20% most deprived areas based on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SDIM). The Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2014-2015 set out the ambition "that a child born today in one of our most deprived communities should, by the time she or he leaves school, have the same chance of going to university as a child born in one of our least deprived" (Scottish Founding Council, 2018). As a result, the Commission on Widening Access was established to advise Ministers on how this ambition can be met. As previously explained, the goal set for 2030 is to have 20% of students coming from most deprived backgrounds representing 20% of all entrants to Scottish higher education (CoWA, 2016). SFC intends to develop this priority through Access and Inclusion Committee (AIC) as well as the new Access and Inclusion Strategy in colleges and the Access and Retention fund in universities. Concrete outcomes and measures are defined both for universities and colleges in Outcome Agreements (SFC, 2018).

One more priority area set by the SFC is low progression schools. SFC funds two national schools programmes to support schools with a low number of pupils progressing to higher education. These programmes are Schools for Higher Education Programme (SHEP) and Access to High Demand Professions (AHDP). Both programs are explained in more detail in section 2.3 – Organisational Policies.

1.3 Policy aims regarding widening participation

The policy aims for widening participation are closely linked to three out of four priority areas for widening HE access - gender imbalance, care experienced students and students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Scottish government has set specific long and medium-term goals for these priority areas.

The plan for Gender Action Plan phase aims to reduce the gender gap between male and female participation in undergraduate study programs from 15.4% to 5% by 2030. By the same time, no subject should have extreme gender imbalance where one gender represents more than 75% of total students (SFC, 2016).

In 2015 SFC's strategic document "national ambition for care experienced students" specifies multiple ambitions for care experienced students. The first ambition aims to increase the intake of care experienced students in colleges by 31% and in universities by 50% by academic year 2018/2018. The second ambition focuses on care experienced student success. It aims to increase the number of full time higher education (FTHE) students that progress to the second year in universities and complete their courses in colleges from 54% to 71% by 2018/2019 (SFC, 2015). Multiple other ambitions have been specified in the document.

Moreover, SFC has committed to ensuring equality of access for disadvantaged students. The goal set for 2030 is to have 20% of students coming from most deprived backgrounds representing 20% of all entrants to Scottish higher education (CoWA, 2016). To achieve this goal, several intermediate goals were set. The closet one indicates that by 2021, students from the 20% most deprived backgrounds should represent no

less than 16% of full-time first-degree entrants to Scottish universities as a whole (CoWA, 2016).

2. Main policy instruments applied for widening participation

2.1 Regulations

The 2005 Act on Further and Higher Education established a Scottish Funding Council (SFC). Today Scottish Funding Council (SFC) holds substantial regulatory power in relation to fair access for post-16 education bodies. SFC has a board and seven committees, one dedicated to HE access issues. The Access and Inclusion Committee (AIC) advises the SFC on its access, inclusion, equality and diversity ambitions and facilitates SFC's implementation of its strategic plan. AIC aims to achieve equal outcomes for all students and provide evidence for this goal. It advises and oversees SFC's response to the implementation of the Scottish Government's Blueprint for Fairness recommendations including those recommendations specific for the intake from the 20% most deprived communities and care experience (SFC, 2018).

As part of the 2014-15 Programme for Government, the Scottish Government set out its ambition that every child, irrespective of their socioeconomic background, should have an equal chance of accessing higher education. Consequently, a Commission on Widening Access (CoWA) was established to advise ministers on the steps required to achieve this goal. In 2016 CoWA published its final report on widening access in higher education- A Blueprint For Fairness. In its final report, CoWA recognized that effective inclusion actions must be supported by an appropriate framework of regulation. In addition, CoWA stressed that to ensure fair access it is necessary to embed fair access into the regulatory frameworks of all sectors. For example, schools and providers of early learning who also play a role in closing the access gap, should be actively involved and take responsibility (CoWA, 2016).

2.2 Funding policies

Funding policies play a key role in promoting HE Access in Scotland, and the Scottish Funding Council has a significant regulatory power to influence HEIs via Outcome Agreements. Furthermore, the Widening Access and Retention fund (previously Regional Coherence Funding) was established to provide funding to universities that have the highest widening access intake of students. These universities show commitment to the support, retention and successful outcomes of students from the most disadvantaged and deprived backgrounds, especially to those from the 20% most deprived areas (SFC, 2018). SFC funds various programs and initiatives that aim to support the less privileged students or adults with limited or no qualifications in their pursuit of tertiary education. For example, SFC funds such initiatives as "Impact for Access", "Schools for Higher Education Programme" and "The Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP)" (SFC, 2018).

The financial support available to students is another factor that affects students' access to HE in Scotland. Both grants and loans are available to full-time first-cycle students in Scotland. The amount offered is determined by assessing the level of household income. Bursaries are administered by Students Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) – an executive agency of the Scottish Government. In 2016/17 approximately 64 % of full-time students took out a loan. The 'Young Student's Bursary' is offered to students under the age of 25 at the beginning of their course with a household income below GBP 19,000. The students receive GBP 1,875 per year. Furthermore, the 'Independent Students' Bursary' of up to GBP 875 per year is offered to those students aged at least 25 with a dependent child or married/cohabiting, and with a household income below GBP 19,000. Financial support is also offered to students who incur additional costs related to a disability or learning difficulty under the Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017).

Additionally, depending on household income, 'young students' are entitled to take out a maximum loan of GBP 5,750 per year, and 'independent students' can receive up to GBP 6,750 per year. Irrespective of household income, eligible students can apply for a student loan of GBP 4,750 per year. Students are only required to repay their loans as of the April after they have graduated or left the study course. Students who chose to take out loans after 1998 pay an interest rate of 1.25%.Repayments of loans are deducted from earnings by employers at the rate of 9% for income above GBP 17,775. In 2015/16 a majority of full-time students (65%) took out living cost loans. In 2017/18 the maximum available support package combining grants and student loans was GBP 7,625 (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017).

Besides, part-time students from Scotland and the EU studying between 30-119 SCQF credits (equivalent to 15-59.5 ECTS) per academic year are eligible for part-time fee grant. The amount offered is calculated based on the study workload and study fees. Second-cycle students are entitled to apply for a fee loan of up to GBP 5,500 for full-time courses (GBP 2,250 for second-cycle part-time studies). Additionally, eligible second-cycle students can also apply for living cost loan of up to GBP 4,500 (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017).

Recently the Scottish Government announced that over £21 million will be invested in improving the financial support available to students at Scottish universities and colleges. The funding will be used to increase the bursary for care-experienced students in further and higher education to £8,100 in 2018, aligning the support available with the Scottish living wage. Furthermore, in 2019 £16 million will be invested to increase college bursaries and university grants for students from the lowest income families. Moreover, the repayment threshold for student loans will be increased to £25,000 from April 2021. In 2018 the maximum repayment period for student loans will be lowered from 35 to 30 years (Scottish Government, 2018).

2.3 Organisational policies

The Scottish government has set up several initiatives, most of which are linked to key priorities for widening access, relevant strategic documents and necessary funding. Various initiatives have already been mentioned such as "Schools for Higher Education Programme (SHEP)" and "Access to High Demand Professions(AHDP)". SHEP supports regional collaboration between schools, colleges and universities to encourage students coming from schools with traditionally low entry rates to tertiary education to enter tertiary education. The second program, ADHP, is a group of seven institutions supporting individuals from low progression, low socio-economic or under-represented backgrounds to apply to high-demand subjects at Scottish universities. This programme has two branches - REACH (access to law, medicine, veterinary medicine and dentistry) and ACES (access to creative education, Scotland) (SFC, 2018).

In addition, "the Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP)" collaborates with colleges and Higher Education Institutions across Scotland to offer alternative routes into higher education for adults with limited or no qualifications or those whose qualifications are out-of-date. SWAP Access Programmes are provided in a form of one year full-time courses at colleges across Scotland. Usually, successful completion of a SWAP Access Programme can lead to a guaranteed spot on a Higher National or degree course at a college or university (SFC, 2018).

SFC also funds an initiative called "Become", which intends to increase the number of care experienced young people entering and staying in further and higher education. The website of this initiative, Propel, shows the support offered to care experienced students in various institutions across Scotland (SFC, 2018).

2.4 Information policies

Scottish government actively monitors its widening access targets. SFC's statistics progress reports have been published on annual basis since in 2005 (SFC, 2018). Furthermore, "Impact for Access" initiative aims to gather evidence regarding impact

achieved with access initiatives for the full student cycle. It monitors data from the moment students are admitted to tertiary education institution up to and including their transitioning to further study or work. The initiative allows SFC as well as universities and colleges to better evaluate what actions positively affect tertiary education access, and helps to produce evidence to support future judgements. The evidence is also used to inform the Commission on Widening Access (CoWA) (SFC, 2018).

3. Policy impact: monitoring, evaluation and analysis

3.1 National statistics on changes in the composition of student body

Scottish Funding Council has published its progress reports almost every year since 2005. The recently released "Report on Widening Access for 2016/2017 period" showed statistical data relevant for measuring the Scottish Government's HE access targets in priority areas as well as the wider access measures in higher and further education. The wider access measures covered socio-economic deprivation, gender, ethnicity, disability, care experience and age. The report on widening access is published on an annual basis and is also the successor publication to SFC's "Learning for All" publication first published in 2005 (SFC, 2018).

The results of the most recent progress report indicated that in 2016-17 13.8% of Scottish domiciled full-time first-degree entrants to Scottish universities represented the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland (SFC, 2018) using the SIMD20 indicator. The goal set for 2030 is to have 20% of students from most deprived backgrounds representing 20% of all entrants to Scottish higher education. The intermediate goal for 2021 is to have no less than 16% of full-time first-degree entrants to Scottish universities from the 20% most deprived backgrounds (CoWA, 2016). This means that the share of students from the least privileged backgrounds should increase by 2.2% in the next 4-5 years.

The 2016/2017 progress report also indicated that the overall retention rate for Scottish domiciled full-time first-degree entrants was 91.8% in 2016-17, compared to 87.4% for the 20% least privileged entrants in Scotland and 87.0% for entrants with care experience backgrounds. In addition, in 2016-17, only 13.1% of Scottish domiciled full-time first-degree qualifiers from a university were granted to students coming from the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland (SFC, 2018).

The same report also indicated that in 2016-17 students with care experience backgrounds represented 0.6% of all entrants at full-time first-degree level and 0.6% of all entrants to undergraduate higher education (SFC, 2018). On an upside, across all levels of study, the number of reported care experienced entrants increased from 1,500 in 2015-16 to 2,070 in 2016-17. Yet a performance difference of 7.4 percentage points for retention could be observed at a university between students with care experienced backgrounds and those without. The largest gap was in a successful completion of full-time FE courses at college, where the gap was 13.1 percentage points in 2016-17 (SFC, 2018).

Even though no measurable target has been set for students with care experience, the CoWA recommended that by 2017 prospective students with a care experience background, who meet the set access threshold, should be entitled to the offer of a place at one of the Scottish universities. Entitlement should also be applicable to those with a care experience who have had to previously take a break from higher education and would like to return. Learners should be evaluated against the minimum entry level criteria in 2017 and the access threshold thereafter (CoWA, 2016).

Scotland monitors race and gender among other factors to better evaluate their HE access outcomes. In 2016-17 females represented a higher share of entrants at all levels, except part-time HE in colleges where males accounted for 57.0% of entrants. The highest proportion of females was at first-degree level where they represented 64.1% of part-time entrants and 58.1% of full-time entrants. Additionally, the highest

share of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students were in part-time FE study at college, followed by full-time first degree level at university, where students with BME background represented 8.1% of all new entrants in 2016-17. The highest share of students with a declared disability in each of the last four academic years was at full-time FE level in colleges. In 2016/2017 approximately 20.3% of entrants had a declared disability (SFC, 2018).

3.2 Results from monitoring and evaluation of policy implications

The Scottish government recently published an update stating that considerable progress has been achieved in widening HE access in the last years, particularly for students from the most deprived areas. A record number of students from Scotland's most disadvantaged areas have successfully gained a place at university. The record has been set the third year in a row according to UCAS statistics. Furthermore, the UCAS figures indicate that the number of prospective students from the 20% most deprived areas – SIMD 20 - successfully getting a place at a UK university has increased by 5% for all ages and by 9% for 18 year-olds since 2016. The total number of Scottish students admitted at Scottish universities has also reached a new record of 28,970, up 4% relative to the last year. (Scottish Government, 2018).

3.3 Good practices

Scotland has actively tackled HE access issues for over a decade. It has a comprehensive, long-term plan, required financial and human resources as well as the necessary data to evaluate their actions. Only recently the numerous initiatives have shown positive results. Thus, it is important to note that the positive results are likely to stem from a symbiotic relationship of aforementioned factors as well as the external factors not accounted for.

Firstly, to tackle HE access issues the Scottish government has defined several priority areas and aligned these areas with its long-term plans and related goals. To achieve these goals, the government actively monitors and evaluates the progress on regular basis.

Secondly, the Scottish Funding Council is actively engaged in funding widening access initiatives. Nowadays SFC holds significant regulatory powers. SFC has established financial incentives for HEIs through Outcomes Agreements, which specify what HEIs intend to deliver to obtain funding from the SFC (EC/Eurydice, 2018). This aligns the funding mechanisms with the widening access objectives. Moreover, the Widening Access and Retention fund (previously Regional Coherence Funding) was established to provide funding to universities that have the highest widening access intake of students. Thus, financial incentives are actively used to stimulate further inclusion of unprivileged groups in Scottish HE.

Thirdly, the necessary manpower is dedicated to specifically address HE inclusion issues. The Access and Inclusion Committee (AIC) is one of SFC's seven committees. It advises the SFC on its access, inclusion, equality and diversity ambitions and facilitates SFC's implementation of its strategic plan. Furthermore, a Commission on Widening Access was established (CoWA) to advise ministers on the steps required to achieve their goals for widening HE access.

Finally, the relevant data is collected on a regular basis to assess progress and impact and evaluate strategies and objectives. The SFC has published statistical progress reports on widening access initiatives on an almost annual basis since 2005 (SFC, 2018) and performs various in-depth studies to gain a deeper understanding of highly relevant issues.

4. Conclusions

Scotland has a clear ambition to achieve a more inclusive tertiary education system. It has defined four priority areas to widen HE access. These include 1) tackling gender imbalance, 2) supporting care experienced students, 3) increasing representation of students from 20% most deprived areas and 4) supporting pupils from low progression schools.

The government has aligned these priority areas with its strategic documents, regulatory framework and funding mechanisms. The widening access initiatives have designated governing bodies such as the Commission on Widening Access (CoWA) and Access and Inclusion Committee (AIC). Moreover, Scotland offers free tuition for first-cycle students and provide access to student loans. The Scottish Government has set long-term HE access goals and is constantly improving its strategy and initiatives. Furthermore, it is actively monitoring outcomes and incorporating the feedback. The targets and relevant access data are monitored on an on-going basis, and necessary actions to reach the set goals are reviewed and further enhanced.

All in all, the Scottish widening access initiatives can be used as an example of good practices in other countries aspiring to widen their HE access. Nonetheless, only the most recent statistics have shown a positive trend for less privileged students even though many access initiatives have been running for years. This suggests that persistence and on-going enhancement is necessary to achieve ambitious inclusion goals in tertiary education sector.

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Annex 3: Summary Tables for the Academic Literature Review

Table A3a Summary of studies looking at student funding

Country /Region /City	Date of reform/cohort considered	Intervention	Research design, data used	Reference	Outcome assessed	Analysis	Main findings
UK	2004/05	Centralized, means-tested maintenance grant introduced in 2004/2005 for students with parental income below GBP22,500. Amount: a maximum of GBP 1,050 per student. No other change during these two years. (From 2016 on, flat rate tuition fees introduced together with an increase in the maintenance grant)	UK Labour Force Survey data for the period 1993-2006. Academic age students identified and their eligibility for grant calculated from parental income applying the actual policy rules for the given year.	Dearden, Fitzsimons, and Wyness, 2014	enrolment	Difference-in-difference approach applied to compare changes over time in 1st year HE participation of those affected by the change of policy and those not affected. Treatment group: students with parents below GBP 22,500 income, control: with parents above GBP 22,500. Only eligibility and not actual treatment observed.	GBP 1,000 increase in grants equals to 3.95% point increase in participation. Still, the gap in participation remains wide: 15% vs 26% participate in HE.
DK	1988	Grant eligibility was dependent on parental income until age 20 before- and until age 19 after the reform in 1988. Level of grants increased by more than 25% for all students above 19 years of age. The maximum annual earning of the student allowed was lowered by 5% while receiving the grant. A voucher system was also introduced that allowed students to allocate the money across a longer period. Practically: before the reform up to a certain parental income a fixed sum	Register-based data for the cohorts graduating from 1985 to 1990.	Nielsen, H. S., T. Sørensen, and C. R. Taber. 2010.	enrollment	Individuals ranked according to parental income and before-reform students matched with post-reform students at the same place of the income distribution. A difference-in-differences approach, as well as a structural model is used. To account for borrowing constraint, parents' assets are considered. Different specifications tested.	Subsidy increases enrollment, (but less so than in the USA). A 1,000 USD yearly increase in the stipend increases enrollment by 1.35% points. Eliminating the subsidy would reduce the total enrollment by 7% points. The effect of the subsidy does not significantly vary according to parental income. Fully eliminating the borrowing constraint would increase enrolment rates from 33.3 to 33.7% in the constrained group. If the stipend were doubled, the importance of borrowing constraints would be eliminated.

Country /Region /City	Date of reform/cohort considered	Intervention	Research design, data used	Reference	Outcome assessed	Analysis	Main findings
DK		was received, then the amount was gradually reduced depending on the income level, and no stipend above a certain income. After the reform, a universal, increased flat amount for each recipient was paid. Application procedure simple, uptake close to 100%. The subsidy is large: corresponds to 6,000 USD per year.	Administrative longitudinal data on educational histories from 1984 to 1991. Students enrolled in Master programmes prior to the reforms (between 1984 and 1988) considered.	Arendt, 2013	drop-out and completion of education	Uses variation in financial aid from reform in 1988 when the grant level increased by up to 57% and loan rates by up to 46%. Discrete version of a duration model was estimated on the whole as well as on the sub-samples. General labour market conditions are controlled for using education specific unemployment levels. Samples are narrowed to cohorts enrolled in the same year of study. Individual characteristics also controlled for.	Drop-out rates cut almost in half for students in their 3rd and 4th year. Hazard to completion is increased, but not to a statistically significant extent. Impact on drop-out rates only significant for students ts from a lower socioeconomic background.
FR	Persons applying for grants before enrollment in 2008-2010	*Bourses sur Criteres Sociaux (BCS) program*: national financial support scheme for low-income students who want to enter higher education. About 1/3 of students receive the grant. No other forms of financial support available. The amount received depends on: parents' taxable income; distance between parents' home and institutions; number of siblings. Seven distinct levels of grants defined: (L0) exempts from paying tuition fees but no grants received; (L1) also provides an annual allowance of appr. 1,500 Euros. Amount then gradually increases across the levels,	Administrative microdata on students applying for need-based grants in French higher education, between 2008 and 2010 are linked to data on all higher education students in France. Only BCS grant applicants aiming to enrol in nonselective public institutions are considered.	Fack and Grenet, 2015	enrolment rates	Uses sharp discontinuities in the grant-assessment formula: regression discontinuity design, focusing on applicants at the thresholds. (No grants, L0/L1; L1/L2…) Internal validity and robustness tests performed.	An annual cash grant of 1,500 Euros makes a 2.7 points increase in the level of enrolment (corresponding to 3.4% in the number of enrolled students.). Additional 600 Euros increments are related to further, although smaller effects of around 0.7 percentage points, which are also statistically less significant (only at the 0.10 level). Assuming that the effect is linear, a 1,000 Euros increase in the amount of student-aid corresponds to a 2 percentage points increase in the level of enrolment. Estimates are stable over time and gender.

Country /Region /City	Date of reform/cohort considered	Intervention	Research design, data used	Reference	Outcome assessed	Analysis	Main findings
FR		reaching a maximum of 42,000 Euros at level 6. Every year a new application has to be made, with a new assessment of income and other requirements. Also, a minimum academic achievement needs to be demonstrated.			continuation of studies; completion		Effects of receiving the grant at the time of enrolment remain significant and contribute to student persistence. A grant of 1,500 Euros increases the probability of being enrolled in the second year by 3.7 percentage points and being enrolled in the third year by 4.4 percentage points.No significant effect on on-time degree completion. Continuation effects are also stronger for a graduate than for bachelor degree students. At the graduate level, also degree completion is positively affected. Grant received for the last year of the study programme has a significant effect both on enrolment for this final year (1.9 percentage points) and on the chances of completing a degree (3.1 percentage points).
DE	Persons with entrance level degree for the university in the years 1999-2005	Student aid: transfers based on the *Federal Education and Training Assistance Act (BAfoeG)* was introduced in 1971. It is a need-based, amount meant to cover living expenses during studies. "to create equal educational opportunities for students from low-income families by providing governmental subsidies." Students after being accepted to HEI can apply, eligibility is based on students' and parents'	Pooled German Socio-Economic Panel data (SOEP) data is used. All persons that state that they completed the entrance-level degree for university in the years 1999-2005 (599 individuals). SOEP allows tracking parental income of all high-school alumni. Observations tracked for max 5 years.	Steiner, V., and K. Wrohlich. 2012.	enrolment, timing of enrolment	Tax-benefit microsimulation model based on the SOEP data is used to simulate the potential amount of BAfoeG claim. Simulation of the detailed BAfoeG regulations is integrated into the tax-benefit model. Discrete-time hazard rate model with two competing risks: vocational training and enrollment into university. Sensitivity checks performed.	An increase of the monthly BAfoeG by 100 Euro would increase the transition to uni rate by 3.3% points. (Also parental income kept equal). An increase of 1,000 Euro per year would increase the cumulated probability (the enrollment rate after 5 years) from 76.2 to 78.4%. Somewhat smaller than effects found in the USA. Application to university also occured somewhat earlier would the grant be increased.

Country /Region /City	Date of reform/cohort considered	Intervention	Research design, data used	Reference	Outcome assessed	Analysis	Main findings
DE	Students enrolled in university between 1984-2007	resources. Sum depends on the difference between resources available and estimated needs. Provided only for the standard period of study. Yearly re-evaluation. Half of the aid is to be repaid later. Since 1991, 50% of the aid (Berufausbildungsfoerderungsgesets) is paid as a grant and 50% as a loan. After 2001, the monthly maximum is 585 Euro (before 550). Threshold 1,440 Euro per month for parents living in the same household without other children (1.161 before).	SOEP data. Students below 30 at time of enrollment, not living with parents, single, and being in first course of study are considered. 1984-2007	Glocker, 2011	drop out, hazard to graduate	Discrete duration model framework allowing for competing risks and unobserved heterogeneity. Mixed multinomial logit model that allows for unobserved heterogeneity.	Aid-eligible students are more likely to drop out and less likely to graduate. The average marginal effect of student aid: 1,000EUR increase in aid would lead to a decrease in the conditional probability of drop out by 2.6% points: which equals to almost half in the first semester. No direct effect on the hazard to graduate - but the sign suggests that the aid increases time spent in HE. Similar effects also from private transfers and scholarships but with these the prolongation of studies effect is much stronger, and also their negative effect on dropout is weaker. From different scenarios, greatest benefit is found for an average student who works and receives a minimum level of parental transfer. A 1,200 EUR per semester increase of aid increases the probability to graduate by 17% points. The (very high) probability to drop out decreases from 61 to 44%.
IT Trento	2009/2010	Grant 5B scholarship awarded by merit and demonstrated financial need. A top-up to the existing schemes. From 2009/10 on. Means - tested, covers indirect costs. Target population: students resident in the province of Trento for at least 3 years, final score in upper secondary school above 93/100, family equivalent income below 30,000 Euros. For students enrolling in Trento 1,200-6,000 Euros per year, outside Trento 1,800-6,000 Euros. For renewal, certain number of credits are required.	Survey of upper secondary graduates linked to administrative records	Vergolini and Zanini, 2015	enrollment	regression discontinuity design	No effect on enrolment rates - most likely because really capable students (with 93/100 achievement) will enroll in uni anyway. The grant alla ows for better match: large positive effect (40%) to enrol outside the province of residence, especially in fields not covered by the local uni. As a consequence, granted students achieve a similar level of outside-region enrolment as students from better socioeconomic backgrounds.

Country /Region /City	Date of reform/cohort considered	Intervention	Research design, data used	Reference	Outcome assessed	Analysis	Main findings
IT Catania, Milan, Padova, Salermo	Students enrolled in 1999	Italian university grant: merit and economic criteria based. Minimum high school grade=70/100, ex ante eligibility criteria refer to family income and assets. Ex post criteria also consider household size. Available for a limited number of students.	Secondary analysis of data from 4 universities in Catania, Milan, Padova and Salerno. Students enrolled in 1999. Students do not live in the city and can not commute are considered.	Mealli and Rampichini 2012	dropout in the first year	Regression discontinuity design using the parental economic situation threshold defined as a criteria for eligibility of the student grant that is different from the ex post threshold applied. Also difference-in-difference approach applied.	For the uni of Padova at the threshold, the grant is effectively preventing students from low-income families from dropping out. However, the effect is becoming insignificant as we move towards the poorest students. No significant effect in the other cities.
IT Milan	Students enrolled in 2007/08 for 4 years	National, need-based eligibility grant that prescribes some minimum credit-achievement for continuation after 1st and 2nd year. Beneficiaries do not pay tuition fees and receive a contribution towards living costs - depending on place of residence's distance from university.	Administrative data on Politechnico di Milano, students enrolled in 2007/08 for 4 years	Agasisti and Murtinu, 2016	number of credits achieved in first year; dropout in the first year; dropout in second year; graduation in the legal duration	Administrative data, propensity score matching approach. Cohort followed for 4 years. Control group: students in similar family-income brand, but not receiving grants. Narrower control group: those who tried to get the support but failed.	On average: positive impact on several outcomes, including +10 credits achieved in the first year; dropout in 1st year decreased by 17% points; in the second year by 19.6% ; probability of graduation on time increases by 19.3%, to graduate by the end of the 4th year by 25.9%. Findings are also significant (even stronger) against the narrower control group. Particularly strong effects for immigrant students, for students from other regions; engineering students.
IT Trieste	Students enrolled from 2002/03 until 2007/08	*Regional Agency for the Right of Education grant* eligible students (weak merit criteria) from low-income families. Amount varies between 1,706 and 4,524 Euros. In the first year only income is considered, then the number of credits obtained are also taken into account. Sum depends on being resident / commuter / non-resident.	Italian students enrolled from 2002/2003 to 2007/2008 in Chemistry, Physics and Math.	Graziosi 2013	dropout and completion of education	Counterfactual analysis using Genetic and Coarsened Exact Matching. Grant receivers are compared to those fitting the criteria but do not receive a grant.	Receiving the grant is increasing the likelihood of enrolling to the second year by 0.18 (=decreasing the likelihood of drop-out). No significant effect on the likelihood of finishing the studies within the expected 3 years.

Table A3b Summary of studies looking at information provided to students

Country/Region/City	Date	Intervention	Research design	National context	Reference	Outcome assessed	Analysis	Main findings
DE **Berlin**	2013	Information sessions delivered in high-schools with an academic orientation. Independent person provides a 45 minutes session on benefits of HE (salaries, career perspectives, unemployment risk, gain in lifetime earnings - conditional on having an Abitur. Gender differences also discussed) Benefits are compared to benefits from vocational training. Costs (only indirect costs such as living and opportunity costs) and available funding (student aid and student jobs) discussed. Standardised information with a video session included. As a baseline treatment, also control group members received a flyer with general information and with a list of information sources.	Randomised controlled trial (RCT). Part of a larger project "Best Up". Randomly selected high schools in Berlin treated. Stratified sample of 27 schools - students in areas of low educated families oversampled. Schools randomly assigned to treatment vs. control. Treatment one year prior to the graduation exam. In the end, 8 treatment and 18 control schools. Pre- and post-treatment surveys. 1st wave one year before graduation, in 2013. (1578 interviewed students.) 2nd wave in the beginning of the last year, 3rd wave right after the deadline for applying for college programs.	Formally less selective unis when compared to other countries, no tuition fee, very low administration fee, relatively easy application process. Lower-income students eligible for means-tested financial aid, up to 670 Euro per month. Returns to degrees lower than US but substantial.	Peter and Zambre, 2017	intentions	Post-treatment intended college enrolment by treatment status compared controlling for pre-treatment intention combined with a two-stage least squares approach.	Sig. increase in enrollment intentions among non-academic background (= first generation) students. Intentions shortly after high-school graduation are considered to be a good proxy of actual application - but also 2-3 months after intervention intentions are measured. Survey shows that students correctly comprehend the information. In the short-run, low educated background students increased their intended student enrollment by around 8% points; high ed. background students decreased by 5.6% points. (p<.10)
					Ehlert, Finger, Rusconi, and Solga, 2017	behaviour (actual enrolment)	Only students with college intentions in wave 1 considered. 428 students with non-college parents and 292 with parents that have a HE degree. The analysis takes into account whether students' knowledge about HE has increased after the info-session. Controls for average grade points, locus of control, risk aversion also. As groups are not perfectly randomised, reweighting was applied.	Among non-college parents students, a 11.9% points difference between treated and not treated in the rate of actual enrolment (corresponds to 18.4%). Also positive and sig treatment effect for students with one graduated parents and no for students whose both parents have HE.

Country/Region/City	Date	Intervention	Research design	National context	Reference	Outcome assessed	Analysis	Main findings
IT	2013	Comprehensive counselling, 5 hours, face-to-face session. Content covered: direct costs, opportunity costs, occupational returns to different fields, to bachelor vs masters', opportunities to participate in vocational HE; estimates of individual drop-out risk. Specifically trained community workers. Groups-counselling, but individualized information also given. 3 meetings several months apart.	Randomised experiment in 62 Italian schools, 4 Italian provinces, 9,000 high school seniors. Sample stratified by province and school track. Half of the schools treated. Longitudinal surveys. Survey 1st wave October 2013, 2nd: May 2014 after the treatment.	Increasingly differentiated HE system. Economic returns are difficult to predict. Weak counselling service.	Abbiati, Argentin, Barone, and Schizzerotto, 2017	Behavior: actual enrollment	Separate linear probability model estimating Average Treatment effects on the Treated for each potential outcome (enrolling for a strong university field / intermediate field / weak field / vocational programme / no tertiary enrolment)	Mixed results. Socially differentiated treatment effect. Overall: less enrolment into weak university fields and more to tertiary vocational tracks (more efficient allocation!) Lower social class students moved from university to vocational programmes; children of more educated families shifted towards the more rewarding fields within uni education.
					Barone et al 2017	knowledge and intentions	Average Treatment effect on the Treated models.	After the treatment, more realistic expectations on graduate earnings. No effect on uni attendance plans – no change in the social differences either. Reshuffling of plans across fields and educational paths: interest in longer tracks increased but in shorter ones decreased as well as in weak fields. At the same time, there was an increase in the interest for vocational tracks - particularly among children from the working class and the petty burgoise.

Country/Region/City	Date	Intervention	Research design	National context	Reference	Outcome assessed	Analysis	Main findings
UK **London**	2010	Information campaign: website was set up, password protected. Info on costs and benefits of continuing after compulsory education, wage premium and employment prospects, tuition fees, maintenance grants, loans. + One-page leaflet, 5-minutes video, + PPP Also teachers had access. After 2 weeks, students received an email with info about website.	15-year old (year 10) students - one year before the end of compulsory schooling. Randomised controlled trial. 2010-11. Paired randomization of all secondary schools in London. 54 schools selected - not representative. Two surveys, the second 8-12 weeks after the first.	Trebling of uni fees from 3,000 to 9,000 was announced during study period. Announcement was followed by great anger and negative media coverage during 2010. The complexity of the loan repayment system was not so much discussed. It is expected that research-outcomes were also effected by this.	McGuigan, McNally, and Wyness, 2016	intentions	"Intention to treat" effect (effect of receiving the info packet) and treatment effect (effect of actually checking the information) estimated.	Only 16% of students visited the website. More those students with better family resources (books); girls, independent school students, more self-esteem; likes math more. Accessing the website positively influenced students' knowledge of finance, opportunity costs and expected benefits. Also intentions to pursue post-compulsory education - but not HE! was affected. Also no effect on perceived financial constraints implied by going to uni. Positive effects mostly for lower socioeconomic background and boys.

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