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The European Higher Education Area in 2020

Bologna Process Implementation Report

Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency

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CHAPTER 4:
SOCIAL DIMENSION

Chapter outline

This chapter is divided into three sections: The first section examines the social dimension from a historical perspective, charting its understanding, progress and challenges over the years. The second section shows some key statistical indicators related to various aspects of the social dimension, particularly related to participation of under-represented groups. Issues of employability are also examined. Finally, in the third section, commitments made in the Bologna Process are examined through scoreboard indicators on facilitating access and completion of under-represented groups in higher education, and developing recognition of prior learning (RPL).

The 2018 Paris Communiqué

The social dimension in higher education was a prominent topic in the Paris Communiqué. More specifically, the Communique stated that the Ministerial Conference committed to 'developing policies that encourage and support higher education institutions to fulfil their social responsibility and contribute to a more cohesive and inclusive society through enhancing intercultural understanding, civic engagement and ethical awareness, as well as ensuring equitable access to higher education' ([39]). Moreover, the issue of ECTS short-cycle degrees was identified as one potential route in 'facilitating access for many who would otherwise not have considered higher education' ([40]). The Ministerial Conference also recognise that 'further effort is required to strengthen the social dimension of higher education. In order to meet our commitment that the student body entering and graduating from European higher education institutions should reflect the diversity of Europe's populations, we will improve access and completion by under-represented and vulnerable groups. Therefore, we mandate the BFUG to take this issue forward by the next EHEA Ministerial conference' ([41]).

Key messages

- Participation rates of under-represented groups have not improved significantly during the lifetime of the Bologna Process.
- Support for under-represented groups in access and completion exists in some form in each country – yet the impact of support is often not known.
- Work is still needed to develop recognition of prior learning (RPL) and other alternative pathways to higher education across EHEA.

([39]) Paris Communiqué, adopted at the EHEA Ministerial Conference in Paris, 25 May 2018, p. 1.

([40]) Ibid. p. 2.

([41]) Ibid. p. 4.

4.1. History of progress and challenges in social dimension

This section of the chapter provides a historical overview of the progress made in the social dimension of higher education.

4.1.1. Understanding the social dimension

The social dimension has been a part of the Bologna Process since its inception. However, in the early years it was far from clear what the social dimension of higher education was understood to be, and it took until 2007 for a definition to be agreed and outlined in the London Communiqué ([42]). In Communiqué, ministers agreed on the following definition of the social dimension:

> We share the societal aspiration that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations. We reaffirm the importance of students being able to complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background. We therefore continue our efforts to provide adequate student services, create more flexible learning pathways into and within higher education, and to widen participation at all levels on the basis of equal opportunity ([43]).

This definition is still used today, and has recently been widened to explicitly encompass 'the creation of an inclusive environment in higher education that fosters equity, diversity, and is responsive to the needs of local communities' (BFUG Advisory Group on the Social Dimension, 2020). The definition of the social dimension in the Bologna Process thus includes both an outcome component – the representation of the diversity of the population in an inclusive higher education environment – and a process component, i.e., the policies and practices in place to reach the desired outcome (see also BFUG Working Group on Social Dimension and Data on Mobility on Staff and Students in Participating Countries, 2007; Usher, 2015, p. 433). Additionally, the term 'social dimension' is used to refer to underlying factors such as students' social background and living and study conditions before, during, and after their higher educational experience. In this way, the concept of the social dimension is connected to and overlaps with other themes addressed in the Bologna Process, including, e.g., lifelong learning, flexible learning paths, inclusive higher education, and employability. Inherent in all these uses of the term 'social dimension' is an acknowledgement of a desire to ultimately achieve equity in higher education (Usher, 2015). Furthermore, the different terms highlight the fact that the social dimension in higher education should be considered throughout the entire student life cycle and beyond, spanning aspects relevant even before entry into higher education (flexible learning paths, access modes) until after graduation (employability of graduates, returns on education). The somewhat fuzzy terminology associated with the social dimension may have contributed to the lack of a common understanding and common measures addressing the issue.

Typically, three types of arguments have been made for the social dimension's relevance (see BFUG Working Group on Social Dimension and Data on Mobility on Staff and Students in Participating Countries, 2007). Firstly, it is seen to be a question of equal opportunity, thus touching upon questions of equity and fairness ([44]). The second argument stresses that strengthening the social dimension will have positive effects on the development of society ([45]). Finally, an argument for the social dimension

([42]) London Communiqué, adopted in London, 18 May 2007.

([43]) Ibid., p. 5.

([44]) Berlin Communiqué, adopted in Berlin, 19 September 2003; Bergen Communiqué, adopted in Bergen, 19-20 May 2005; Budapest-Vienna Declaration adopted 12 March 2010.

([45]) Budapest-Vienna Declaration, 2010.

is made on the basis of its potential to increase the quality, and in turn the competitiveness, of higher education systems ([46]).

Policy instruments in the realm of the social dimension, i.e., affecting access and social inclusion, can be categorised and understood from different perspectives. They may address areas of regulation, funding, organisation, and information (Kottmann et al., 2019). Measures may differ by target group, addressing either the entire student body or particular disadvantaged and under-represented groups. Policy measures can be implemented at different stages in the educational career – e.g., addressing prospective students with counselling and information services before entering higher education (PL4SD, 2015), or creating aspiration at even earlier stages of school education (Usher, 2015; Working Group 2 on Implementation, 2018). Different actors may implement relevant measures: (national) governments, higher education institutions, student services organisations, as well as other (non-governmental) actors that can and do implement support mechanisms to advance the social dimension of higher education in Bologna countries (PL4SD, 2015). Finally, measures need not be restricted to the educational realm, as removing barriers to inclusive education may require solutions in areas outside the immediate influence of higher education policy (BFUG Working Group on Social Dimension and Data on Mobility on Staff and Students in Participating Countries, 2007, pp. 5-6; Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy [AT], 2017).

4.1.2. The social dimension in Bologna documents

The 'social dimension', although acknowledged, played only a minor role in the first ministerial communiqués of the Bologna Process ([47]), and was not a clearly stated goal of the process from the beginning. However, the social dimension and its importance has evolved over the course of the process. It first gained more prominence – not least due to the insistence of student representative organisations – with the Prague Communiqué ([48]), in which ministers explicitly affirmed 'the need, recalled by students, to take account of the social dimension in the Bologna Process' ([49]). In the following Berlin Communiqué ([50]), ministers explicitly called for data on the social and economic conditions of students in order to ensure that students' studying and living conditions allow them to successfully complete their studies regardless of their background. Ministers renewed their commitment to the social dimension in the Bergen Communiqué ([51]), stating its fundamental importance as 'a constituent part of the EHEA' and calling it 'a necessary condition for [its] attractiveness and competitiveness'. The communiqué identified the social dimension as a priority and for the first time mentions concrete measures governments can take in its support, namely, 'measures […] to help students, especially from socially disadvantaged groups, in financial and economic aspects and to provide them with guidance and counselling services with a view to widening access' ([52]). The Bergen Communiqué also called for comparable data on the social dimension to be included in future stocktaking.

The ministerial meeting in London resulted in an endorsement of the definition of the social dimension that arose out of work carried out on the basis of the Bergen Communiqué ans the subsequent BFUG work programme – BFUG Working Group on the social dimension and mobility (2005-2007). The importance of students of all backgrounds being able to study successfully was reiterated, with ministers committing 'to provide adequate student services, create more flexible learning pathways

([46]) Bergen Communiqué, May 2005.

([47]) Bologna Declaration, adopted in Bologna, 19 June 1999; Sorbonne Joint Declaration, adopted in Sorbonne, 25 May 1998.

([48]) Prague Communiqué adopted at the Ministerial Conference in Prague, 19 May 2001.

([49]) Ibid., p. 3.

([50]) Berlin Communiqué (2003).

([51]) Bergen Communiqué (2005).

([52]) Ibid., p. 4.

into and within higher education, and to widen participation at all levels on the basis of equal opportunity' ([53]). This definition of the social dimension would continue to be referenced and used throughout future communiqués and in the work of the BFUG.

The London Communiqué – again in line with working group recommendations – also marked the start of a joint monitoring of the state of the social dimension and mobility, with ministers asking 'the European Commission (Eurostat), in conjunction with Eurostudent, to develop comparable and reliable indicators and data to measure progress towards the overall objective for the social dimension and student and staff mobility in all Bologna countries' ([54]). Besides data on participative equity, information on employability for graduates was explicitly requested as part of a report for the 2009 Ministerial conference ([55]). With a view to the next meeting, ministers also planned on reporting on national strategies and policies for the social dimension, which were to be developed with the involvement and support of national stakeholders ([56]).

The Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué ([57]) reiterated the social dimension goal. Improving the learning environment, removing all barriers to study, and creating the appropriate economic conditions for students to be able to benefit from study opportunities at all levels were listed as concrete measures to foster the social dimension of higher education. Bologna countries committed to setting measurable targets for 2020 in relation to widening participation and increasing participation of under-represented groups (Bologna Process Stocktaking Report, 2009). For the first time, the interlinkage between higher education and other parts of the educational system was recognised in a communiqué, calling for complementary actions in other parts of the system. The social dimension of mobility was again specifically stressed by expressing the aim of an increased participation rate in international mobility from diverse student groups (pp. 4-5).

Looking back at the first decade of the Bologna Process, the Independent Assessment Report (Westerheijden et al., 2010a; 2010b) pointed out the social dimension as one of the more neglected areas of the initiative, and called for better data as well as a common framework at the Bologna level in order to trigger action at the national levels. Ministers also recognised that the state of the social dimension's implementation varied across Bologna countries in the Budapest-Vienna Declaration (2010) and pledged to increase efforts on the social dimension.

The Bucharest Communiqué ([58]) marked a turn towards the more practical approach to the social dimension, and provided the starting point for the project Peer Learning for the Social Dimension (PL4SD), a three-year project funded by the European Commission. Ministers also again restated the aim formulated in the London Communiqué and vowed to 'provide adequate student support services, counselling and guidance, flexible learning paths and alternative access routes, including recognition of prior learning' ([59]).

At their following meeting in Yerevan, ministers committed to the implementation of the EHEA social dimension strategy developed by the BFUG Working Group on the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning (2015), aiming to make higher education more socially inclusive ([60]). The social dimension strategy (European Higher Education Area, 2015) calls on countries to address the social dimension through a coherent set of measures (access plans and strategies), and reinforces the value of peer learning activities and data collection. Lifelong Learning, flexible learning paths, the quality of teaching

([53]) London Communiqué, 2007, p. 5.

([54]) Ibid., p. 6.

([55]) Ibid., p. 6.

([56]) Ibid., p. 6.

([57]) Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué, adopted in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 28-29 April 2009.

([58]) The Bucharest Communiqué, adopted at the EHEA Ministerial Conference in Bucharest, 26-27 April 2012.

([59]) London Communiqué, 2007, pp. 1-2

and learning, and employability of graduates are named as complementary areas contributing to widening participation in higher education (BFUG Working Group on the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning, 2015).

In the Paris Communiqué ([61]), ministers recognised that further effort to strengthen the social dimension of higher education was still needed. The BFUG was asked to take matters forward by the next EHEA conference. In the following, most recent period (2018-2020), an Advisory Group on the Social Dimension (AG 1) was tasked by the BFUG with developing principles and guidelines for the social dimension of higher education within the EHEA, building on a shared definition of the social dimension. The resulting ten principles with their corresponding guidelines for implementation highlight the role of the higher education institutions in creating inclusive systems. Further tasks of the Advisory Group included gathering data on good practices in the field, as well as exploring EHEA cooperation opportunities and (re-)starting peer learning activities on the topic. As a result of their work, the Advisory Group recommended continuing the work in future Bologna rounds, specifically calling for the development of a system of monitoring of the Principles and Guidelines, as well as the definition of indicators and benchmarks for the principles for the social dimension. It also recommended broadening the Peer Support Groups to include the topic of the social dimension in order to support policy development and implementation within the EHEA. Finally, the Advisory Group proposed that an event focusing on the social dimension be planned in order to discuss progress made within the next Bologna round (BFUG Advisory Group on the Social Dimension, 2020).

Overall, the Bologna Process ministerial texts evolved from rather nebulous statements to a clear definition in 2007. Since then, there have been successive calls for improved data and strategic action. As the process has evolved, the texts have become more practically oriented – no doubt in recognition of the fact that the social dimension requires prioritised attention. However, as the social dimension is very much a context-determined topic, it has proven hard to pin down and difficult to follow.

4.1.3. Developments at national level

How were these developments in the Bologna Process reflected at the national level, and what changes have taken place in national policies? Bologna countries first reported on matters relevant to the social dimension in their national reports to the London ministerial meeting in 2007. Three areas of interest were surveyed: measures to widen access, measures to help students complete their studies without obstacles related to their social or economic background, and involvement of students, as well as staff representative bodies in the governance of higher education institutions ([62]). An analysis of the national responses undertaken by the WG showed that governments were increasingly recognising the need to address equity issues related to access. Measures in this realm appeared to focus mainly on alleviating financial difficulties of students or their families (e.g., grants and loans, scholarships, housing assistance, tax exemptions), or incentivising HEIs to widen access, e.g., through performance indicators and funding.

Fee and support systems are important tools of national policies as they play a role in supporting (or discouraging) access to higher education, and can also have an impact on progression and completion rates. While fees impose a financial burden – which may be more or less significant depending on the nature and level of the fees and the socio-economic conditions of students and their families –, support measures are able to alleviate financial obstacles to study.

([60]) Yerevan Communiqué, adopted at the EHEA Ministerial Conference in Yerevan, 14-15 May 2015.

([61]) Paris Communiqué 2018.

([62]) This aspect was relevant to the social dimension at the time but is now no longer considered a part of it.

Although practically all countries have some form of needs-based support to students facing financial difficulties, policies and practice in this area need to consider student support alongside student fees. It is important to clarify whether all or some students are required to pay fees. If it is some, what are the criteria that determine which students pay fees? How much do students pay? Are the fees paid upon enrolment or after graduation? Similarly for student support, are students or their families able to access public financial support in the form of grants, loans, or tax relief? If so, under what conditions and criteria? The quality and strength of the student support system is also directly related to the amount of money made available through the public budget.

While there has been considerable debate about student financing, in reality few systems have introduced radical change to their system. The United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) stands out as having moved in 2011 to a system charging significant tuition fees for all students – although with payments only beginning after graduation and when in work. Germany also introduced the right to charge tuition fees in 2007, but those regions (*Länder*) that introduced them gradually reverted to the previous system. Capped fees were also introduced in Austria in 2008. A number of countries, including Denmark and Sweden, have also introduced legislation enabling higher education institutions to charge fees to international students, or for programmes not taught in the official language.

Reforms introducing or extending tuition fees appear to have been motivated by other objectives than widening participation, although they have often included mechanisms to ensure that there should not be a detrimental impact on financially disadvantaged students. With regard to student support, most countries that began the Bologna period with grants for students have maintained them. Only the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) have moved away from student grants to student loans. Nevertheless, a number of countries have introduced the possibilities for students to take out loans.

Overall, EHEA countries have tended to maintain their established fee and support system, and not to make substantial new investments in favour of students from under-represented groups.

In the national reports to the ministerial meeting 2007, strategic measures aimed at removing obstacles to successful completion of studies were found to be less commonly reported. This led the WG to stress the importance of achieving student retention as well as access. The WG also called on countries to develop a broader array of measures, including e.g. legislation, student services and outreach programmes, and flexible curricula (BFUG Working Group on Social Dimension and Data on Mobility on Staff and Students in Participating Countries, 2007, p. 42). Furthermore, it was noted that any measures in place were not necessarily part of an overarching strategy. The WG therefore recommended that by 2009, all countries develop and report their national strategies on the social dimension to the BFUG, providing guidelines on compiling and developing such a document.

The analysis of the submitted strategies in 2009 yielded only somewhat meagre results. The Social Dimension Coordination Group report (Bologna Process Stocktaking Report, 2009) stated that while virtually all countries were taking some action to enhance participative equity, only a minority had set up monitoring systems, and even fewer have in place an integrated strategy ‘with synergies between government actions and institutional practices, funding arrangements, lifelong learning strategies, recognition of prior learning, cultural and linguistic minority issues, guidance services, communication policy, social policy, anti-discrimination protection, tax system etc.’. This led the coordination group to the conclusion that there would be ‘still a long way to go’ (p. 139) in order to reach the social dimension goal.

This sentiment was echoed by the Independent Assessment report (Westerheijden et al., 2010b), which noted that ‘there were very few signs of the social dimension being seen as a priority area in

most Bologna Process countries' (p. 9). Yağci (2014) judged the social dimension at this point to be 'stuck in the agenda-setting stage of the Bologna Process, because of the implementation problems it entails and for which no clear policy means have been defined so far' (p. 7). However, some exceptions should be noted – a few countries were revealed already in the first assessment of the existing national strategies to possess an evidence-based plan, reaching across several policy sectors (including labour market, immigration, and budgetary considerations), involving relevant stakeholders, and designed with a long-term view. Ireland's National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-2013 was put forward as an example of such an integrated policy.

The focus in later years turned away from fully integrated plans and focused more on the collection of individual action lines, measures, and policies. The PL4SD project (2012-2015) built up a database of measures to support the social dimension in the EHEA, conducted comprehensive country reviews in Armenia, Croatia and Lithuania, and stimulated peer learning among EHEA stakeholders through several events. An analysis of the (now defunct) database containing more than 300 measures from 33 countries reveals that most measures addressed the general student population, students from a lower socio-economic background, students with disabilities, or prospective students (PL4SD, 2015). The most frequent forms of support in place were in the area of counselling and support services, student financial support, as well as information campaigns. The classification of the measures' objectives shows that a majority aim at supporting students or widening access to higher education, followed by the objective of fostering retention and success. More specific objectives, such as supporting the combination of study and work or fostering international mobility, were the least frequently named. In the face of the PL4SD findings, the working Group on Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning concluded – much in line with previous WGs – that, while each country was to some extent engaged in the social dimension, only very few countries are working on the basis of a coherent, integrated plan or strategy (BFUG Working Group on the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning, 2015). In turn, they recommended that each country develop a set of policy measures and effective national plans or strategies, as laid out in the Strategy for the Development of the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning.

However, more than a decade after the first analyses of national activities, the picture has not significantly changed. Besides Ireland (now in its third cycle of national strategies) (Higher Education Authority, 2015); only a limited number of countries have developed either a dedicated 'social dimension strategy' or access plan (Austria, National strategy on the social dimension of higher education: Towards more inclusive access and wider participation, Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy [AT], 2017; Croatia, Nacionalni plan za unaprjeđenje socijalne dimenzije visokog obrazovanja u Republici Hrvatskoj [National Plan for Improving the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the Republic of Croatia], Ministarstvo znanosti i obrazovanja [Republic of Croatia Ministry of Science and Education], 2019), or have dealt with the social dimension in the context of a coherent higher education strategy e.g., the Netherlands (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science [NL], 2019) and the United Kingdom (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills [UK], 2016). As most of the strategies have been developed comparatively recently, it remains to be seen what their impact on the social dimension in the Bologna countries will be.

4.1.4. Monitoring the state of the social dimension in the EHEA

The first report that was really developed within the Bologna Process framework to highlight social dimension issues on the basis of statistical evidence was 'Key indicators on the social dimension and mobility' (Eurostat, 2009). It focused on widening access, study framework (study environment and the financial situation of students), and the completion of studies, mirroring the common threefold distinction of equity into equity of access, equity of treatment, and equity of outcomes (e.g. Baye et al., 2005; Eurostat, 2009). No single data source could be drawn on for all countries, so several different

sources were employed to generate indicators. It was not possible to present a full picture of the situation in all countries due to a lack of available data. This led the authors to call for an improvement of existing data collections as well as the development of new data structures in countries where none existed. Partly as a result of this, the Eurostudent project, in those countries which implement it, has developed and grown into an invaluable source of data on the social and economic conditions of students, thus providing an evidence base for countries wishing to understand and improved the social dimension of their HE systems. Findings based on Eurostudent data have also informed the development of social dimension strategies in several countries.

Focusing on access to higher education, the indicators in the first key indicator report highlighted a number of concerns that have now informed the general understanding of the social dimension challenges to be addressed in the European Higher Education Area (Eurostat, 2009). The report revealed that:

- Alternative, non-traditional ways of entering and studying were not very widespread.
- Across the EHEA, the majority of students tended to enter higher education with a traditional qualification directly after graduating from secondary school to pursue full-time studies.
- De-facto part-time students, i.e. those spending less than the required amount of time on their studies, made up almost a third of all students in some countries, regardless of their official status.
- The student populations in the EHEA were found to be largely female, with women making up the majority of entrants to higher education in nearly all countries.
- Large gender differences across the fields of study were noted, however – in the sciences, only a third of new entrants were female.
- A common pattern across all Bologna countries was the strong relationship between parental education background and students' educational achievement. The chances of obtaining higher education were much higher for children of highly educated parents than for their peers whose parents did not complete higher education themselves.
- Students' socio-economic background was also found to be strongly related to short-term mobility, with students from highly educated families being up to more than three times more like to study abroad than students from a less highly educated family.

These features of social dimension realities have all been examined in subsequent data-driven reports. Furthermore, the analysis of the framework conditions, particularly the funding of HE, showed that private funding had increased in almost all Bologna countries in previous years. Fees paid by students to higher education institution accounted for up to a quarter of their monthly budgets. The authors pointed out that in order to finance their studies, many students relied on their family and/or job as a main source of income, cautioning that such a lack of financial independence from parents may have an impact on the socioeconomic fabric of the student population, especially if state support is insufficient to compensate for lacking family income.

For countries with available data, average unemployment rates for higher education graduates were low, although this varied by country and field of study. Higher education graduates earned significantly higher wages than medium- and low-educated employees, with men, in turn, earning more than women. Despite these positive findings, data revealed that in the Bologna countries, around one fifth of workers were vertically mismatched, i.e. working in a position not matching their level of education.

For many indicators, the patterns highlighted in the Key Indicators report were confirmed in the following Implementation report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2012). In addition, new data showed that a migratory background also limited the odds to study in higher education in several

countries, although generally not as severely as educational background. Flexible learning arrangements (formal and de-facto part-time students) continued to serve predominantly mature (older) students. With regard to alternative access routes into HE, the authors noted 'very little developments […] taking place across the EHEA' ibid., p. 149), as Bologna countries appear to either have a fully established system of RPL in place, or have not yet undertaken measures in this regard. Accordingly, the student populations include varying shares of mature and/or delayed transition students.

In the face of the diversity of fees and support systems found across the EHEA – from situations where no students pay fees and those where all receive support, and to situations where all students pay fees and few receive support – the authors highlighted the importance of balancing student fees and available support systems. Employability indicators showed that higher education still improved employment prospects in most countries, and contributed to finding a job faster than with lower-level degrees, as well as to higher earnings. Recent graduates, however, were found to face difficulties in entering the labour market in around half of the EHEA countries. The authors note the difficulty associated with disentangling labour market effects from true higher education outcomes, and point towards the overall lack of comparable and reliable indicators on employability for all Bologna countries.

Three years later, some progress was noted, particularly concerning the recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning and alternative access routes in general (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015b). Employment indicators reflected the aftermath of the financial crisis, and indicated that in around a third of the countries with available data, higher education graduates no longer have the most secure position in the labour market. In light of these findings, the need for more detailed information and data on graduates, also on the social dimension of employability, was stressed. In the other areas, few developments could be seen.

The most recent Implementation report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018) bluntly summarises the (lack of) progress on the social dimension as follows:

Disadvantaged learners still face access barriers to higher education; students from low and medium-educated families are strongly under-represented, and are more likely to enter higher education with a delay; gender imbalances, if improving slightly, still persist and remain marked in some discipline areas with significant implications for the labour market and society; and life-long learning is still not a reality for learners in many countries. In addition to barriers to access, disadvantaged students also face difficulties in completing higher education, dropping out in higher proportions. And yet, despite evidence of these trends over a number of years, only a few countries have introduced measures in recent years to improve the conditions for under-represented groups to access and complete higher education. An area of particular concern is the recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning, both for facilitating alternative access routes to higher education, and enabling non-formal and informal learning to be recognised and credited during studies. Despite being emphasised again as an important tool by the Yerevan Communiqué ([63]), 'no education system has taken concrete action to introduce a new top-level framework for the recognition of prior learning since the 2015 Ministerial Conference' ([64]).

Some exceptions to these negative trends were noted: monitoring tools and performance indicators, as well as the introduction of longer-term quantitative objectives and targets, are examples of positive developments on the topics of the social dimension. The unemployment situation of recent graduates had also improved since the previous 2015 Bologna Process Implementation Report, and the income levels of HE graduates had also increased, although these patterns could not be identified in all

([63]) Yerevan Communiqué, paragraph 110.

countries. The overall conclusion nevertheless stated that the social dimension has been slow to develop, and often has done so without an overarching framework to guide and support implementation, leaving 'a lot of room for improvement' (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018; p. 214). The report also called for systematic efforts to improve the relationship between higher education and the labour market and (again) efforts to improve data collection in these areas.

4.1.5. Stakeholders' activities regarding the social dimension

Throughout the process, different stakeholders have observed, commented on, and actively shaped the social dimension in the Bologna Process. The European Students' Union (ESU) – upon whose initiative the social dimension was introduced into the Prague Communiqué – has been repeatedly recognised as the strongest advocate for the social dimension (Vukasovic, 2017; Yağci, 2014). The 'Bologna with Student Eyes' reports, student unions' assessments of the developments in the Bologna Area in time for the ministerial conferences since 2009 (European Students' Union, 2009, 2012, 2015, 2018) have been consistent in pointing out the discrepancy between official commitments to the social dimension and the apparent lack of actual priority given to it in implementing policy measures. The latest 'Bologna with Student Eyes' report concedes 'some indicative trend of improvement in acknowledging the importance of working on the social dimension across Europe' (p. 3), but nevertheless finds 'the overall situation absolutely insufficient' (p. 3). ESU's most recent social dimension policy paper (European Students' Union, 2019) again calls on all stakeholders to prioritise the social dimension.

Activities of the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) in the realm of the social dimension have concentrated on the role of universities of applied sciences in creating equitable conditions for students from all backgrounds. In this vein, the association (as well as ESU) was a partner in the IDEAS project, which aimed at increasing equitable access, participation and completion by producing a toolbox of effective equity approaches. (Tupan-Wenno, M., Camilleri A., Fröhlich M., King S., 2016.) In addition, the recent 6th University of Applied Sciences Leadership Forum was dedicated to the topic of social inclusion as well as civic and democratic values. Furthering short-cycle higher education to enhance opportunities for socially vulnerable groups is also an important aspect of EURASHE's engagement for the social dimension.

The European University Association (EUA) has been an advocate of lifelong learning since the start of the Bologna Process, and notably published a Charter on Lifelong Learning (European University Association, 2008). The Charter asks universities to commit to widening access and lifelong learning, addressing a diverse student population, and calls for concerted action by governments to promote social equity and an inclusive learning society. The Charter was mentioned in the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué (2009) as a useful input for developing strong partnerships between public authorities, higher education institutions, students, employers and employees ([65]).

Some years later, EUA followed up with a project addressing various aspects of developing institutional lifelong learning strategies and their implementation in universities; specifically focusing on providing opportunities for a widening circle of learners (Smidt and Sursock, 2011). Universities' approaches to the social dimension have also been the focus of recent projects investigating universities' strategies and approaches towards diversity, equity and inclusion (Claeys-Kulik and Jørgensen, 2018; Claeys-Kulik, Jørgensen and Stöber, 2019) and within the project of Higher

([64]) Ibid., p. 15.

([65]) Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué, adopted in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, 28-29 April 2009.

Education Reform Experts ([66]). EUA activities have also extended beyond the European Higher Education Area, reaching out to Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Beyond member states and consultative partners of the process, the European Commission as a member of the Bologna Process, after focusing mainly on the social dimension's relevance for economic prosperity and growth in the first decade of the process (Yağci, 2014), has made reducing social divisions in higher education a priority for action in the latest European higher education agenda (European Commission, 2017a), and promotes it as a way to enhance the social dimension of Europe as a whole (European Commission, 2017b). Currently, the European Commission is supporting the development of an inclusive higher education system through Peer Learning Activities, as well as financing studies (Kottmann et al., 2019; Orr, Usher, Haj, Atherton, and Geanta, 2017) and projects to build an evidence base about the social dimension in Europe ([67]).

4.2. Statistical data on access, participation and employability

This section presents statistical data on higher education students in four respects related to their background and characteristics: the impact of parental education on higher education participation, gender balance, participation of immigrant students and mature students in higher education, and data on part-time students. Furthermore, there will be two indicators related to the employability of graduates.

4.2.1. Access and participation

Central to the social dimension of the Bologna Process is the aim that the student body should reflect the diversity of the population, and that the background of students should not have an impact on their participation in higher education. Given the diversity of socio-economic and cultural realities across the EHEA, it is left to each country to decide which characteristics to take into account when comparing the composition of the student body with the total population. The societal groups which are then identified as under-represented in higher education also differ between countries.

Nevertheless, some common themes are inevitable across countries: low socio-economic background (in the form of low income or the low educational background of parents), gender, immigrant status and disability are often taken as main aspects of disadvantage. Furthermore, mature students are specifically targeted in many countries, as students from under-represented groups often enter higher education with a delay.

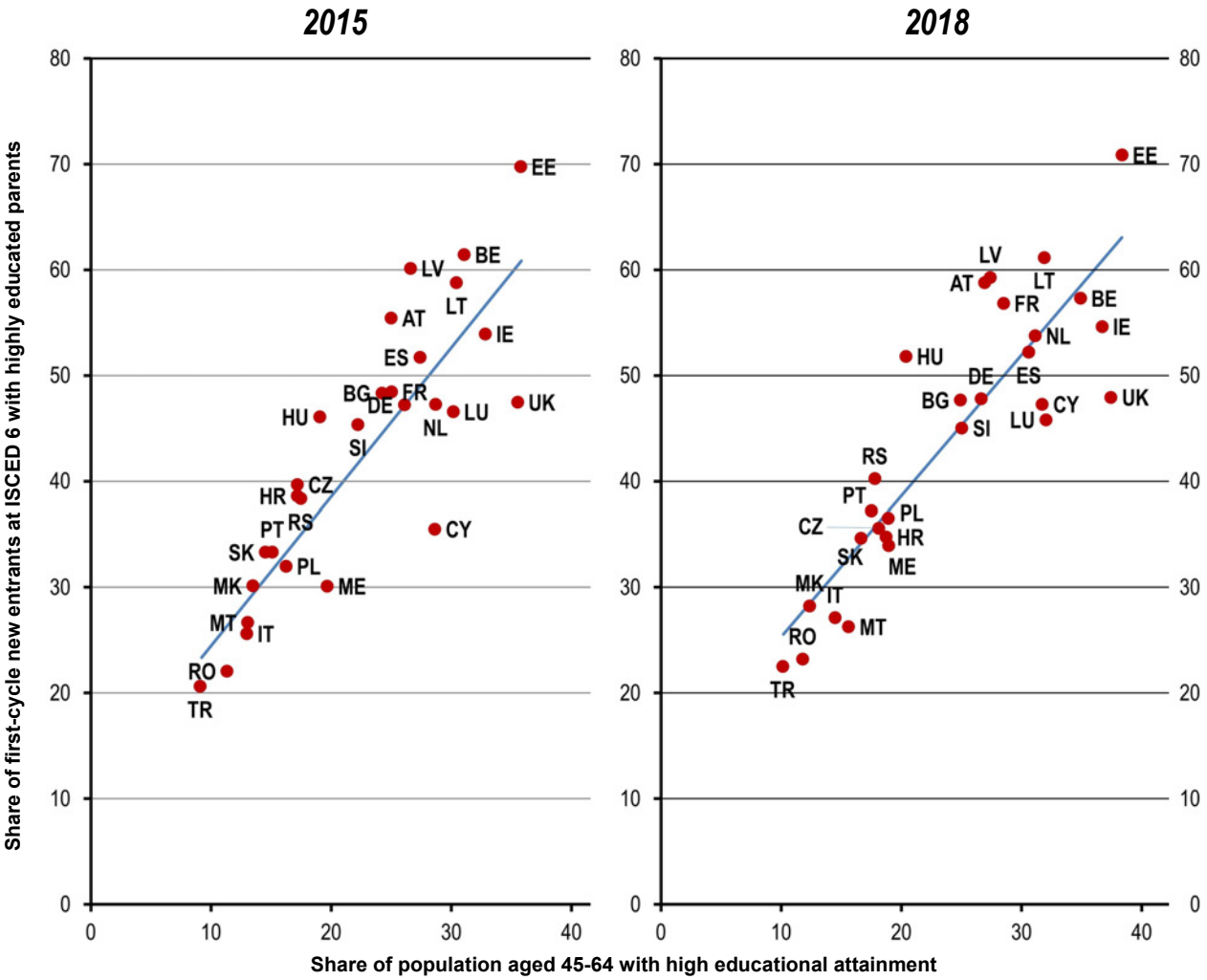
Parental background

The educational background of parents is often regarded as one of the most important factors influencing the chances of learners to participate in higher education. It is widely known that students with parents with tertiary educational attainment are over-represented in higher education study programmes. Figure 4.1 depicts the proportion of fist-cycle new entrants (ISCED 6) with parents of high educational background (ISCED 5-8) in the hypothetical parents' cohort (population aged 45-64 with high educational background). The figure compares the situation in 2015 and 2018.

([66]) http://supporthere.org/

([67]) e.g., EUROSTUDENT (www.eurostudent.eu) on the social and economic conditions of students, Eurograduate feasibility, Eurograduate pilot (see Council Recommendation of 20 November 2017 on tracking graduates; Council of the European Union, 2017), U-Multirank, Peer Learning for the Social Dimension (PL4SD).

Figure 4.1: Relationship between the educational background of first-cycle new entrants (ISCED 6) and the educational attainment of their parents' cohort (population aged 45-64), 2015 and 2018



Source: Eurostat, EU-LFS.

Notes:

High educational attainment: ISCED 5-8. For definitions of ISCED levels, see the Glossary and Methodological Notes.

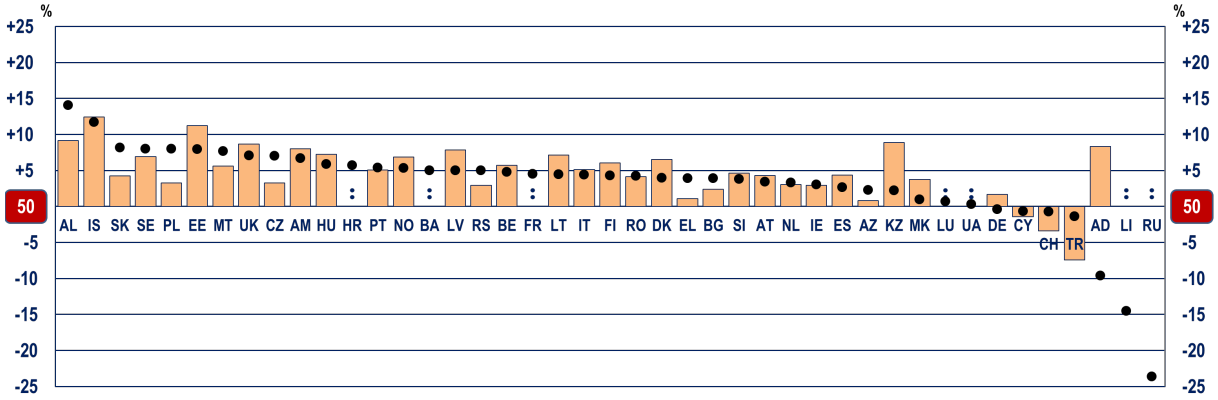
New entrants: Students who are entering any programme at a given level of education for the first time.

As seen from both scatterplots, there is a very clear linear relationship, around 0.86 and 0.87 in 2015 and 2018 respectively. Hence, the overall situation is very similar in both years. Countries are clustering around the trend line denoting that the share of new entrants with highly educated parents among all newly first-cycle entrants depends strongly on the high educational attainment of their parent's cohort. Thus, it would seem that the educational background of parents is still to a large extent a predictor of whether you are likely to participate in higher education. Given that the time difference between these two datasets is only three years, significant changes in this type of data cannot be expected to happen.

Gender

Equal opportunities for men and women to participate in higher education is a central concern of the social dimension. It is important to consider not only trends regarding overall numbers, but also gender distribution in different fields of study. Figure 4.2 illustrates the share of women among new entrants in tertiary education in 2005 and 2017.

Figure 4.2: Percentage change in the share of women among new entrants in tertiary education (ISCED 5-8), 2005 and 2017



%	AL	IS	SK	SE	PL	EE	MT	UK	CZ	AM	HU	HR	PT	NO	BA
2005	59.2	62.5	54.3	56.9	53.3	61.2	55.6	58.7	53.3	58.0	57.3	:	55.1	56.9	:
2017	64.1	61.7	58.2	58.0	58.0	57.9	57.7	57.1	57.0	56.7	55.9	55.7	55.4	55.4	55.0
Variation (%) 2005-17	8.3	-1.2	7.2	2.0	8.9	-5.4	3.7	-2.7	7.0	-2.3	-2.4	:	0.6	-2.7	:
	LV	RS	BE	FR	LT	IT	FI	RO	DK	EL	BG	SI	AT	NL	IE
2005	57.9	52.9	55.7	:	57.2	55.1	56.0	54.2	56.6	51.1	52.4	54.6	54.3	53.0	53.0
2017	55.0	55.0	54.8	54.5	54.5	54.4	54.3	54.3	54.0	54.0	53.9	53.8	53.4	53.4	53.1
Variation (%) 2005-17	-4.9	3.9	-1.7	:	-4.7	-1.3	-3.1	0.2	-4.5	5.6	2.9	-1.5	-1.6	0.6	0.2
	ES	AZ	KZ	MK	LU	UA	DE	CY	CH	TR	AD	LI	RU		EHEA
2005	54.3	50.8	58.9	53.8	:	:	51.7	48.6	46.6	42.6	58.3	:	:		54.8
2017	52.7	52.3	52.3	51.0	50.7	50.3	49.6	49.3	49.3	48.6	40.4	35.5	26.4		54.3
Variation (%) 2005-17	-3.1	3.0	-11.3	-5.2	:	:	-4.0	1.6	5.7	14.1	-30.7	:	:		-0.9

Source: Eurostat and additional collection for the other EHEA countries.

Notes:

EHEA: Refers to the EHEA median, which was calculated based on countries with available data for both reference years.

New entrants: Students who are entering any programme at a given level of education for the first time. Data for the year 2010 instead of 2005 for Serbia, Portugal and Latvia.

Variation means the change between 2005 and 2017 in percentage, not percentage points.

In the vast majority of countries, the percentage of women entering tertiary education exceeded 50 % in 2017, being over 60 % in Albania and Iceland. Luxemburg, Ukraine, Germany, Cyprus and Switzerland almost reached gender parity. Male entrants is the majority in Turkey and Andorra, but gender imbalance was stronger in Liechtenstein and Russia where female participation was below 36 %. As the figure demonstrates, looking at the change since 2005, the EHEA median stayed relatively stable (around 54 %), but it had a slight decrease over the twelve-year period.

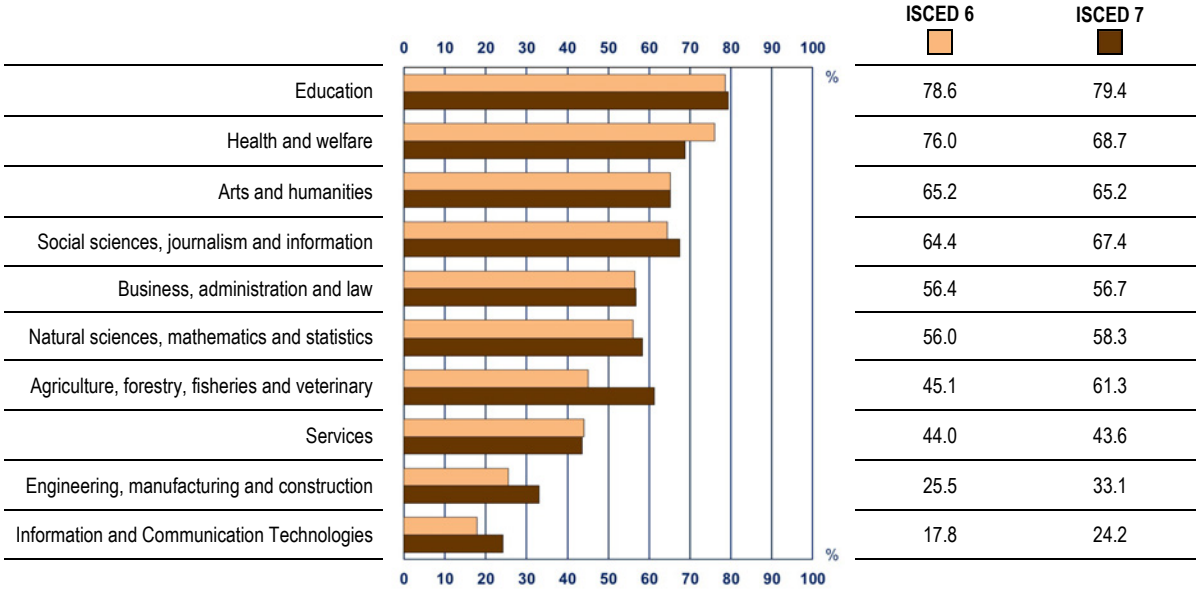
This indicates that although men remain under-represented in higher education, but to a lesser degree in most countries than 12 years ago. Decreases of over three percentage took place in Finland, Spain, Germany, Denmark, Lithuania, North Macedonia and Estonia; nevertheless, in Estonia, the share of women among new entrants was still among the highest in the EHEA.

Over the period examined, Austria, Ireland and Cyprus almost doubled the absolute number of women starting a study programme in tertiary education. Despite this doubling the number of students, the

balance between male and female student population remained nearly the same. Albania and Turkey however managed to triple the number of female entrants since 2005, achieving also the highest increase in the share of women (8.3 % and 14.1 % respectively), along with Poland (8.9 %). A few other countries saw a further increase in the share of women, but to a much lesser degree: Greece (5.6 %), Switzerland (5.7 %), Czechia (7.0 %) and Slovakia (7.2 %).

While the overall change in shares of female and male students is one important part of the story, a clearer picture emerges through analysis of gender shares in different study fields. Figure 4.3 depicts the median share of women among enrolled students in the first and second cycle by field of education.

Figure 4.3: Median percentage of women among enrolled students in Bologna structures by field of education and level of Bologna structure (first and second cycle, ISCED 6 and 7), 2017



	ISCED 6	ISCED 7
Education	78.6	79.4
Health and welfare	76.0	68.7
Arts and humanities	65.2	65.2
Social sciences, journalism and information	64.4	67.4
Business, administration and law	56.4	56.7
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	56.0	58.3
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	45.1	61.3
Services	44.0	43.6
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	25.5	33.1
Information and Communication Technologies	17.8	24.2

Source: Eurostat, UOE and additional collection for the other EHEA countries.

Notes:

The country coverage varies across different study fields (see the Glossary and Methodological Notes).

The median percentage of women varied quite strongly between the various fields of study in 2017. Education and health – related study fields were clearly female-dominated, while in engineering, manufacturing and construction as well as in information and communication technologies, women were markedly under-represented. In these fields of study, the median percentage of women was less than one third, and also lower in the first than in the second cycle. Services and agricultural studies are the other fields where in the first cycle the median percentage of women is below 50 %. For all other study fields, men are under-represented.

With regard to gender equality, the field of study is a more significant factor than the level of education and quite dramatic variations can be found in different fields of study.

In almost all fields, the percentage of women was higher in the second cycle. The percentage was equal, or almost equal in arts and humanities, and services. Only in health and welfare, was the median share substantially lower in the second cycle (68.7 %) than in the first (76 %) – despite still being very high.

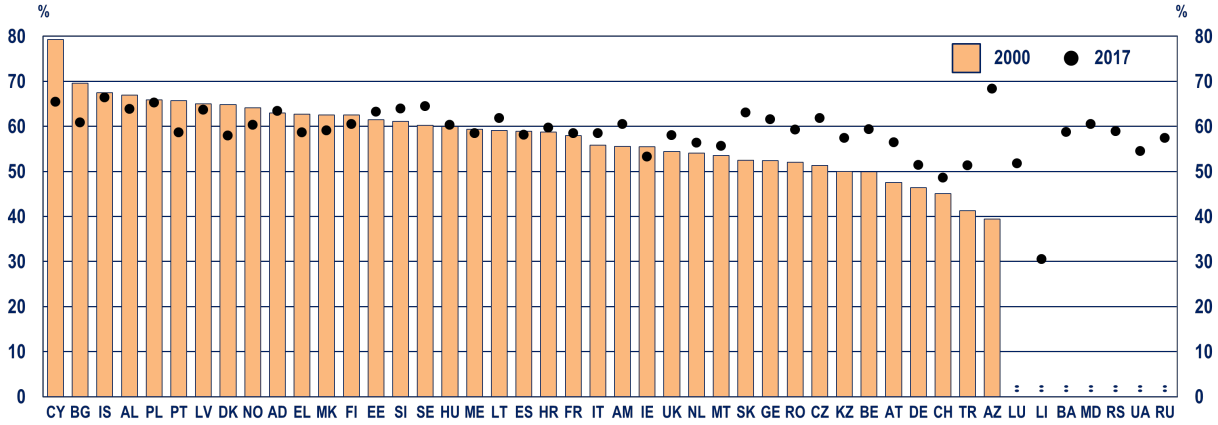
The opposite trend can be seen regarding female participation in information and communication technologies, as well as in engineering, manufacturing and construction – both fields of study where women are strongly under-represented. Here female participation is notably significantly higher in the

second cycle than in the first. Women are also enrolled in the second cycle of their studies in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary to a much greater degree – around 16 percentage points – compared to the first cycle.

The differences in gender participation by study fields should be seen in the context of total enrolment numbers in these fields. Across the whole EHEA, more than a quarter (25.9 %) of the students in the first and second cycle of tertiary education (ISCED 6 and 7) were enrolled in study programmes in the fields of business, administration or law in 2017. Nearly 15 % were studying engineering, manufacturing or construction, while a considerable share of students were enrolled in arts and humanities (12.1 %), health and welfare (11.8 %), as well as social sciences, journalism or information (11.1 %). Women accounted for the vast majority of the students within the latter two fields (64 % and 70.4 % respectively); for business and administration women slightly outnumbered men at a rate of 50.3 %. By contrast, almost three quarters of the students in engineering or related fields were male (72.3 %). When these numbers are considered in relation to the gender split in different fields, the largest number of female students are found in business-related programmes with health studies comprising the second largest field of education, followed by arts and social sciences.

Figure 4.4 shows the percentage of female graduates in tertiary education programmes for bachelor and master programmes or equivalent.

Figure 4.4: Percentage of female graduates in bachelor and master programmes, 2000 and 2017



%	CY	BG	IS	AL	PL	PT	LV	DK	NO	AD	EL	MK	FI	EE	SI	SE	HU	ME	LT	ES	HR	FR	IT
2000	79.3	69.6	67.4	66.9	65.9	65.7	65.0	64.9	64.1	63.0	62.7	62.5	62.5	62.5	61.5	61.1	60.3	60.0	59.3	59.1	58.9	57.9	55.8
2017	65.5	60.9	666.4	63.8	65.3	58.7	63.7	58.0	60.3	63.4	58.7	59.1	59.1	60.5	63.2	63.9	64.4	60.3	58.5	61.8	58.2	58.4	58.4
	AM	IE	UK	NL	MT	SK	GE	RO	CZ	KZ	BE	AT	DE	CH	TR	AZ	LU	LI	BA	MD	RS	UA	RU
2000	55.5	55.5	54.4	54.0	53.5	52.5	52.4	52.0	51.3	50.0	50.0	47.5	46.4	45.1	41.3	39.4	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
2017	60.5	53.3	58.1	56.3	55.6	63.0	61.6	59.2	61.8	57.4	59.4	56.5	51.5	48.6	51.4	68.3	51.8	30.5	58.8	60.5	58.9	54.5	57.4

Source: Eurostat and additional collection for the other EHEA countries.

In 2000, the largest percentage of women in bachelor and master programmes (over 65 %) were found in Cyprus, Bulgaria, Iceland, Albania, Poland, Portugal and Latvia. The lowest rates (less than 50 %) were found in Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Turkey and Azerbaijan. The largest increases in female participation took place in Azerbaijan (29 percentage points), Slovakia, Czechia and Turkey (over 10 percentage points) for bachelor and master degrees. There were moderate increases in most countries, but some countries experienced a decrease. The highest decrease took place in Cyprus (almost 14 percentage points), Bulgaria and Portugal (over 7 percentage points).

Migrant status

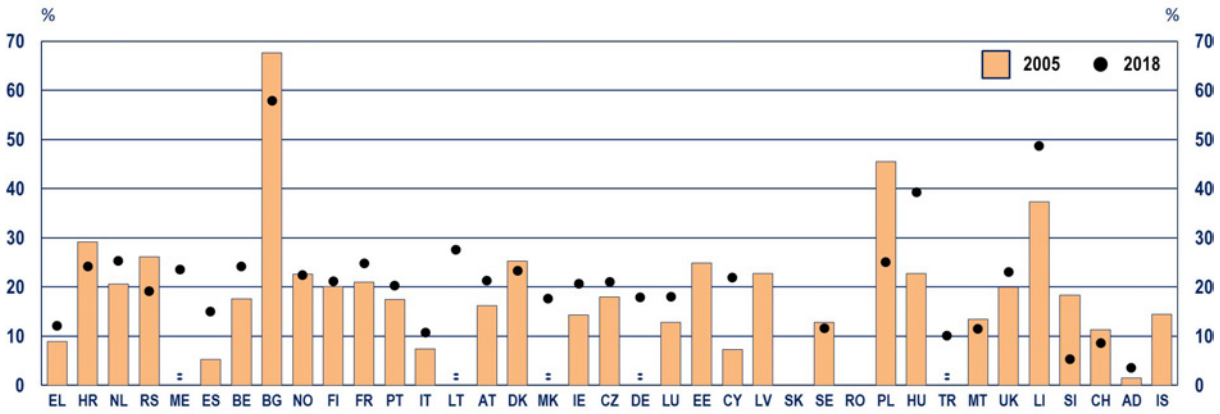
Having a migrant background is also considered as an important factor influencing the chances of learners accessing higher education, especially if it coincides with low parental education. Immigrants and children of immigrants might lack the sufficient cultural, economic and social capital, which have important effects on educational success (see e.g. Griga and Hadjar, 2014).

Yet, it is difficult to gather comparable information on the participation of migrant students in higher education. Eurostat data presented in Figure 4.4 uses the country of birth as the criterion defining migrants, and this has two major limitations. Firstly, the group of foreign-born students includes not only migrants who become students, but also students who moved to the country just for the purposes of study, i.e. mobile students. Not only does the concept of 'foreign born' mix groups with very different characteristics, but when numbers of mobile students are substantial, as they are in a number of countries, the picture is distorted.

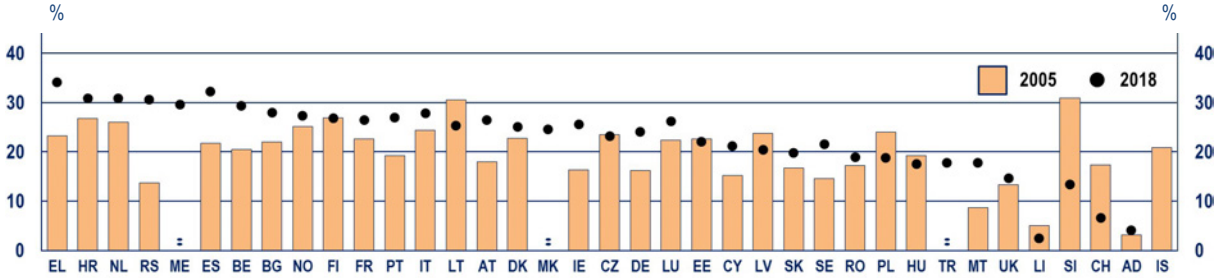
The second limitation of this data is that children of immigrants born in the country (often referred to as 'second-generation immigrants') are excluded. For these reasons, data have to be interpreted with caution. Figure 4.5 presents the participation rates in tertiary education of students aged 18 to 29 as a percentage of the respective total population based on their migration status, showing the situation in 2005 and 2018. The graph showing the foreign-born population thus provides the participation of the 18-29 year olds compared to the total foreign-born population in this age group, and similarly the graph below shows the participation of native-born 18-29 year olds as a proportion of the total native-born population in this age group. This enables clear comparison between the two groups.

Figure 4.5: Participation rates in tertiary education among people aged 18 to 29, foreign-born, native-born and total population, 2005 and 2018

Foreign-born:



Native-born:



Source: Eurostat and additional collection for the other EHEA countries.

%	EL	HR	NL	RS	ME	ES	BE	BG	NO	FI	FR	PT	IT	LT	AT	DK	MK	IE	CZ
Foreign-born (2005)	8.9	29.1	20.6	26.2	:	5.3	17.5	67.6	22.7	20.1	21.1	17.5	7.5	:	16.2	25.3	:	14.3	18.0
Foreign-born (2018)	12.1	24.2	25.4	19.2	23.6	15.0	24.2	57.9	22.4	21.2	24.8	20.3	10.7	27.6	21.3	23.4	17.7	20.6	21.1
	DE	LU	EE	CY	LV	SK	SE	RO	PL	HU	TR	MT	UK	LI	SI	CH	AD	IS	
Foreign-born (2005)	:	12.8	24.9	7.3	22.7	:	12.8	:	45.5	22.8	:	13.5	20.0	37.4	18.3	11.3	1.6	14.5	
Foreign-born (2018)	17.9	18.0	:	21.9	:	:	11.6	:	25.0	39.3	10.1	11.5	23.0	48.7	5.4	8.6	3.6	:	

%	EL	HR	NL	RS	ME	ES	BE	BG	NO	FI	FR	PT	IT	LT	AT	DK	MK	IE	CZ
Native-born (2005)	23.3	26.8	26.0	13.7	:	21.8	20.5	22.0	25.2	26.9	22.6	19.3	24.4	30.5	18.0	22.7	:	16.3	23.5
Native-born (2018)	34.1	30.8	30.9	30.6	29.6	32.3	29.4	28.0	27.3	26.9	26.5	27.0	27.9	25.4	26.4	25.1	24.6	25.6	23.2
	DE	LU	EE	CY	LV	SK	SE	RO	PL	HU	TR	MT	UK	LI	SI	CH	AD	IS	
Native-born (2005)	16.2	22.4	22.6	15.3	23.7	16.8	14.6	17.3	24.0	19.2	:	8.7	13.3	5.1	30.9	17.3	3.2	20.9	
Native-born (2018)	24.1	26.3	22.1	21.2	20.4	19.8	21.6	19.0	18.8	17.5	17.7	17.8	14.7	2.4	13.4	6.6	4.1	:	

%	EL	HR	NL	RS	ME	ES	BE	BG	NO	FI	FR	PT	IT	LT	AT	DK	MK	IE	CZ
Total (2005)	21.9	25.6	25.4	13.6	:	19.4	20.1	16.5	24.9	26.6	22.5	19.1	23.1	30.5	17.7	22.9	26.1	16.0	23.4
Total (2018)	32.7	30.5	30.4	30.1	29.3	29.1	28.6	28.2	26.8	26.5	26.5	26.5	25.7	25.4	25.4	24.9	24.7	24.4	23.1
	DE	LU	EE	CY	LV	SK	SE	RO	PL	HU	TR	MT	UK	LI	SI	CH	AD	IS	
Total (2005)	15.6	19.2	22.7	13.6	23.7	16.8	14.3	17.3	24.0	19.2	12.5	8.5	14.2	14.2	30.5	15.9	2.4	20.2	
Total (2018)	23.0	22.6	21.7	21.3	20.6	19.8	19.5	19.0	18.9	17.9	17.5	17.0	16.1	14.8	12.8	7.0	4.0	:	

Source: Eurostat and additional collection for the other EHEA countries.

The total participation rates of young adults in tertiary education in 2018 ranged across the EHEA from a minimum of 4 % in Andorra to a maximum of 32.7 % in Greece. The vast majority of countries with available data had more than 20 % of the total young population comprised of highly educated students.

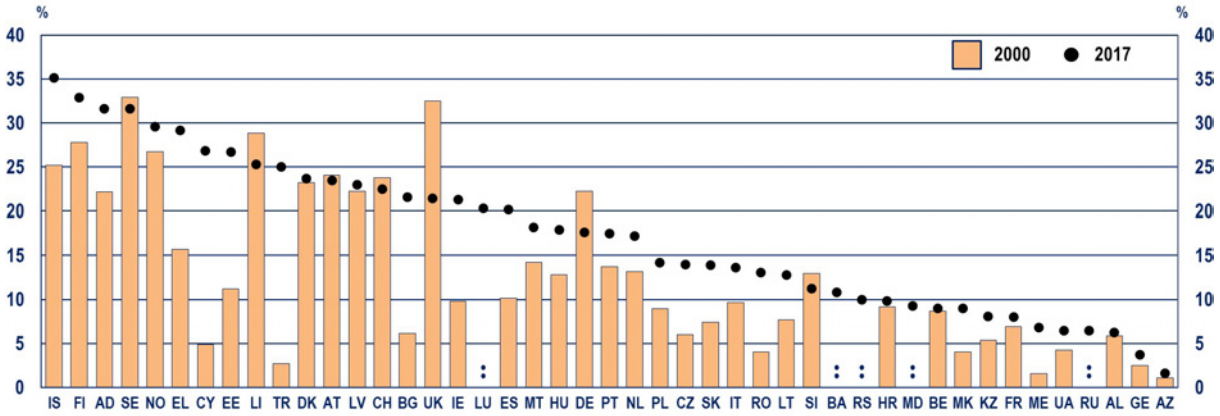
In 2018, in 26 out of 36 countries, the level of participation was lower for foreign-born students compared to native-born counterparts. Disparities are much more evident in southern Mediterranean countries with participation rates being more than twice as high as for natives (Italy, Greece and Spain). The situation is completely opposite in the United Kingdom, Bulgaria, and especially Hungary for which the share of foreign-born students rates was almost twice as high as that of native-born students.

As a general rule, trends for native-born students follow closely the pattern of the total young population, since they comprise the largest part of it. The most pronounced increase in participation of native-born students can be seen in Serbia and Malta (more than 100 %), while Switzerland had the largest decrease among EHEA countries (61.8 %) in this category. During this thirteen-year period, the share of foreign-born students increased the most in Cyprus (200 %), Andorra (181.2 %) and Spain (132 %), but changes in this direction were also found in 15 other countries out of the 27 with available data.

Mature students

An important aspect of the social dimension is that higher education should be open to non-traditional learners who missed the opportunity to enter higher education when leaving secondary education. The number of over 30-year students can indicate different issues. First, it may be the result of longer study times in general, which has been the case in the Nordic countries historically, for example. Second, it can indicate the number of students with a delayed transition to higher education (starting studies at least two years after finishing secondary education). Also possible is a combination of these issues, for example in Germany (longer study times combined with longer school time and compulsory military service). Figure 4.6 examines the proportion of 'mature' students in tertiary education who are aged 30 years or older in 2000 and 2017.

Figure 4.6: Percentage of students enrolled in tertiary education, 30 or more years old, in year 2000 and 2017



%	IS	FI	AD	SE	NO	EL	CY	EE	LI	TR	DK	AT	LV	CH	BG	UK	IE	LU	ES	MT	HU	DE	PT
2000	25.2	27.8	22.2	32.9	26.8	15.7	4.9	11.2	28.9	2.7	23.2	24.1	22.2	23.8	6.2	32.5	9.8	:	10.1	14.2	12.9	22.3	13.7
2017	35.2	32.9	31.6	31.6	29.6	29.1	26.9	26.7	25.3	25.0	23.7	23.5	23.0	22.5	21.6	21.4	21.3	20.3	20.2	18.2	17.9	17.7	17.5

%	NL	PL	CZ	SK	IT	RO	LT	SI	BA	RS	HR	MD	BE	MK	KZ	FR	ME	UA	RU	AL	GE	AZ	EHEA
2000	13.2	8.9	6.0	7.4	9.6	4.0	7.7	13.0	:	:	9.2	:	8.7	4.0	5.4	6.9	1.6	4.2	:	5.8	2.5	1.1	10.1
2017	17.2	14.2	14.0	13.9	13.6	13.0	12.8	11.3	10.8	9.9	9.8	9.3	9.0	9.0	8.1	8.0	6.8	6.5	6.5	6.3	3.7	1.6	17.3

Source: Eurostat, UOE and additional collection for the other EHEA countries.

Notes:

EHEA: Refers to the EHEA median. Data for Greece, Cyprus, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, Croatia, Albania and Georgia for 2005 instead of 2000.

When looking at the EHEA-median, it has increased from 10.1 % in 2000 to 17.3 % in 2017, which is a significant increase. While there probably is not one clear explanation for the increase of mature students in most countries, one reason for the increases from 2000 could be the effects of the 2008 economic crisis, and the weakened job prospects in many countries even after subsequent economic recovery. Thus, it may be more attractive to stay in education for longer, and study for another degree, for example, if you have not found a job matching your education.

While there has been an increase in the number of mature students overall, according to the figure, student population is composed mainly of young participants and mature students are always in a minority. For 2017, the share of mature students was below 10 % of the tertiary student population in 13 countries out of 45 in total, with a minimum of 1.6 % in Azerbaijan and 3.7 % Georgia. A higher share, between 10 % and 20 % was recorded again in 13 countries; yet, the highest share, exceeding 20 % of all students, was found in 19 countries, with the highest share of around 35 % in Iceland.

Comparing the percentage of mature students between 2000 and 2017, reveals that nearly 28 out of 35 countries have registered an increase across the EHEA area. The strongest increase was observed in Turkey, Cyprus and Montenegro, where the respective percentage moved from 2.7 % to 25 %, 4.9 % to 26.8 %, and 1.6 % to 6.8 % from 2000 to 2017 respectively. Similarly, increases took place in Bulgaria, Romania, Estonia, Czechia, North Macedonia, Ireland and Spain, where their equivalent share of mature students more than doubled. From the remaining 30 countries, half of them experienced a significant rise of more than 20 percentage points compared to 2000, eight countries a moderate grow between 2 % and 20 %, while eight countries decreased the share of mature students by at least 2 percentage points. At the end of the spectrum of the last group are Germany (20.1 %) and the United Kingdom (4 %), where the share of mature students has been continuously declining during this period. It is worth mentioning however, that although the four Nordic countries – including Iceland, Norway, Finland and Sweden – as well as Andorra were not consistent with a systematic upward trend, they have been on the top of the countries with the highest number of mature students within the examined period of time.

The main output of higher education is higher education attainment that indicates the proportion of the population having obtained a higher education qualification. Figure 4.7 shows the percentage of persons with tertiary education by age group, year 2005 and 2018.

Figure 4.7: Percentage of persons with tertiary education by age group, year 2005 and 2018

Source: Eurostat and additional collection for the other EHEA countries.

% 2018	CY	UA	IE	LT	LU	CH	KZ	NO	UK	NL	SE	BE	IS	FR	DK	ES	EE	PL	EL	LV	SI	AT
23-34 years old	58.5	57.9	56.2	55.6	53.7	51.2	50.8	48.5	48.1	47.6	47.6	47.4	47.1	46.9	46.8	44.3	43.7	43.5	42.8	41.6	40.7	40.5
35-44 years old	49.1	51.7	53.8	49.7	53.3	49.5	39.7	48.8	49.6	44.2	52.3	45.8	51.9	44.9	46.0	44.2	44.0	39.8	34.2	39.6	40.4	37.5
45-54 years old	35.3	47.2	42.9	33.7	38.5	40.4	30.2	42.0	40.3	34.1	39.5	38.8	43.4	32.8	36.4	35.1	38.5	23.0	29.2	29.0	28.7	29.6
55-64 years old	27.9	43.6	31.2	30.1	27.4	33.6	21.2	34.2	34.4	29.1	32.6	30.7	31.1	24.0	30.3	25.1	38.2	15.3	21.9	25.9	21.2	23.8

% 2018	FI	MT	SK	AD	HR	PT	ME	BG	MK	CZ	AL	RS	DE	TR	HU	MD	IT	LI	BA	RO	EHEA
23-34 years old	40.3	39.6	37.2	35.5	35.4	35.1	34.3	34.0	33.6	33.3	32.8	32.8	32.3	32.1	30.6	30.5	27.7	25.9	25.3	24.9	40.6
35-44 years old	50.3	29.0	26.0	32.0	29.7	32.0	22.9	29.1	20.8	26.7	15.5	26.5	31.5	19.4	28.8	21.7	23.0	25.0	13.1	22.7	38.6
45-54 years old	47.8	21.7	17.7	23.7	18.8	20.5	16.0	26.3	11.2	18.9	12.3	18.0	27.0	11.3	22.5	14.6	15.7	20.7	8.2	13.8	28.9
55-64 years old	39.7	9.9	15.6	17.5	18.7	14.2	22.3	23.5	13.6	17.3	9.4	17.6	26.3	8.5	18.2	13.3	13.0	15.9	8.5	9.4	22.9

% 2005	CY	UA	IE	LT	LU	CH	KZ	NO	UK	NL	SE	BE	IS	FR	DK	ES	EE	PL	EL	LV	SI	AT
23-34 years old	41.3	45.36	40.7	36.9	37	31	28.9	39.5	35.6	33.3	36.5	40.6	35.8	39.9	39.8	40.7	33.1	25.4	24.9	21.7	24.7	19.7
35-44 years old	28.2	45.78	30.4	24.7	26.7	31.8	24.19	34.9	29.6	28.1	28.2	33.4	34	25.4	34.8	30.3	35.7	15.7	25	21.5	21.5	19.1
45-54 years old	25.9	44.91	21.8	24	21.9	28.6	22.38	30.4	28.2	28.1	27.6	26.9	28.8	19.2	32	21.3	34.5	12.1	18.7	18.4	17.5	17.3
55-64 years old	15	37.08	16.7	19.1	18.6	22.1	18.84	24	23.7	22.1	24.8	21.8	20.5	16.1	27.3	14.5	28.5	12.7	11.3	19.3	16.3	13.7

% 2005	FI	MT	SK	AD	HR	PT	ME	BG	MK	CZ	AL	RS	DE	TR	HU	MD	IT	LI	BA	RO
23-34 years old	37.5	17.8	16.2	25.64	18	19	20.26	23.7	11.59	14.2	:	18.98	22.5	16.8	19.6	14.07	16.2	21.99	:	13.5
35-44 years old	40.9	10.8	12.9	20.63	15.3	12.6	16.58	23.1	13.49	14.2	:	16.88	26.3	11.4	17.2	15.92	12.8	20.45	:	10.7
45-54 years old	33.6	8.7	13.9	17.33	16.1	10.3	17.11	22.1	15.3	12.9	:	17.19	25.6	8.3	16.3	14.67	11.2	16.58	:	10.6
55-64 years old	26.5	8.2	12	14.18	15.2	7.3	15.21	17.1	13.76	10.7	:	16.08	22.9	7.4	14.6	12.5	8	12.41	:	8.5

Source: Eurostat and additional collection for the other EHEA countries.

Notes:

EHEA: Refers to the EHEA median, which was calculated for 2018 based on countries with available data for both years.

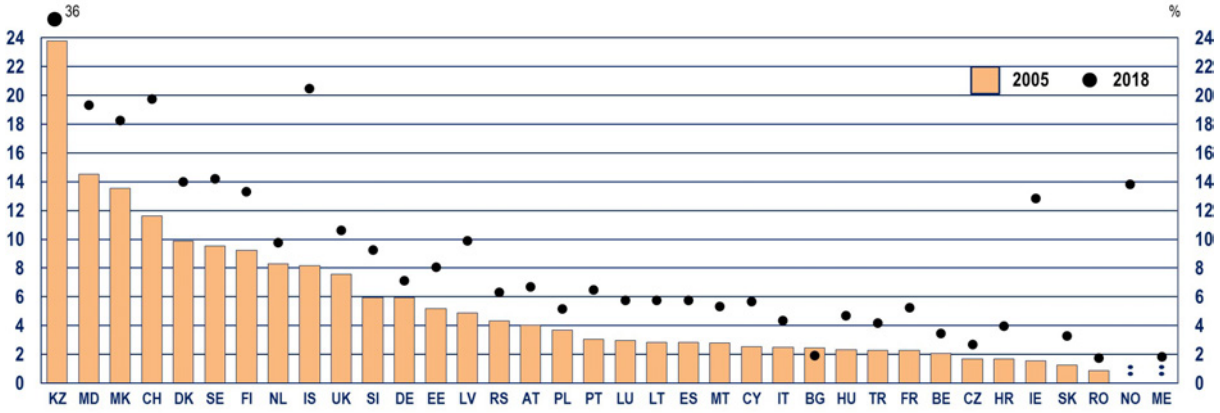
In 2018, the EHEA median was 40.6 % for the 25-34 age group, 38.6 % for the 35-44 age cohort, 28.9 % for the 45-54-year-old group and 22.9 % for the 55-64 age group. From 42 countries with available data, 17 countries were systematically below the median in all age groups, with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Turkey deviating the most. In the youngest age group, higher education attainment reached 40 % in more than half of the countries; likewise, it reached slightly less than half of the countries in the second youngest age group. It was only Ukraine that reached this threshold in all age groups. At the other end of the scale, the lowest rates in almost all age groups were found in Romania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, yet neither of them was below 20 % in the younger generation.

The dominant pattern within EHEA was that the lower the age, the higher the rate of education attainment, except for Finland, Sweden and to a certain extent the United Kingdom, where adults aged 35 to 44 were more likely to have a higher education degree than their younger counterparts, with a share of 10 %, 4.7 % and 1.5 % respectively. This can be explained by the high share of mature students (30 years or older) enrolled in tertiary education particularly in Finland and Sweden (see Figure 4.6). The largest gap of more than 25 percentage points between the tertiary attainment level of the oldest and youngest age cohorts could be found in Cyprus, Malta, Kazakhstan, Poland, Luxembourg, Lithuania and Ireland. In contrast, Germany, Estonia and Finland had the smallest gap (no more than 6 percentage points).

Compared to 2005, attainment levels have been steadily rising in all EHEA countries and all age groups, especially in the youngest groups. Countries with the largest increase in tertiary attainment in the youngest age group were North Macedonia, Czechia and Slovakia. Finland and Spain showed the smallest changes, but their attainment level was already high, around 40 %.

Having information on the share of the population obtaining their tertiary education degree in adulthood is also important for understanding the position of mature students in higher education. Figure 4.8 shows large variations among countries in this regard.

Figure 4.8: Adults (30-64) who attained their tertiary education degree during adulthood (aged 30-64) as a percentage of all adults (30-64), years 2005 and 2018



%	KZ	MD	MK	CH	DK	SE	FI	NL	IS	UK	SI	DE	EE	LV	RS	AT	PL	PT	LU
2005	23.8	14.5	13.6	11.6	9.9	9.5	9.2	8.3	8.2	7.6	6.0	6.0	5.2	4.9	4.3	4.0	3.7	3.1	3.0
2018	35.6	19.3	18.3	19.7	14.0	14.2	13.3	9.8	20.5	10.6	9.3	7.1	8.1	9.9	6.3	6.7	5.2	6.5	5.8

	LT	ES	MT	CY	IT	BG	HU	TR	FR	BE	CZ	HR	IE	SK	RO	NO	ME	EHEA
2005	2.9	2.8	2.8	2.5	2.5	2.4	2.3	2.3	2.3	2.1	1.7	1.7	1.6	1.3	0.9	:	:	3.4
2018	5.8	5.8	5.3	5.7	4.4	1.9	4.7	4.2	5.2	3.5	2.7	4.0	12.9	3.3	1.7	13.8	1.8	6.4

Source: Eurostat, Labour Force Survey (LFS) and additional collection for the other EHEA countries.

For 2018, Kazakhstan and Iceland had particularly high proportion of adults aged 30-64 attaining their tertiary degree in adulthood (aged 30 or older), over 35 % and 20 % respectively. In Switzerland, Moldova and North Macedonia, as well as the four Nordic countries (namely Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland), the United Kingdom and Ireland, the share of adults was between 10 % and 20 %. This is in line with the fact that mature students in the Nordic countries constitute a substantial share of the student population.

A relatively high proportion of adults who achieved their higher education qualification as an adult – around one in ten – could also be observed in Latvia (9.9 %), the Netherlands (9.8 %) and in Slovenia (9.3 %). At the lower end of the scale, the percentage share was very low in Eastern European countries, with rates below 2 % in Montenegro, Bulgaria and Romania. In addition to the latter two, Austria, Germany, Hungary, Estonia, Lithuania ,Portugal, Spain, Cyprus, Malta and Turkey recorded a small percentage of adult graduates (below 8 %). This is not consistent with Figure 4.6 on mature students, whose share in the student population ranges between 17 % and 27 %. One possible explanation could be that polices supporting adults' participation have been introduced only recently, or that completion rates of mature students in these countries are quite low.

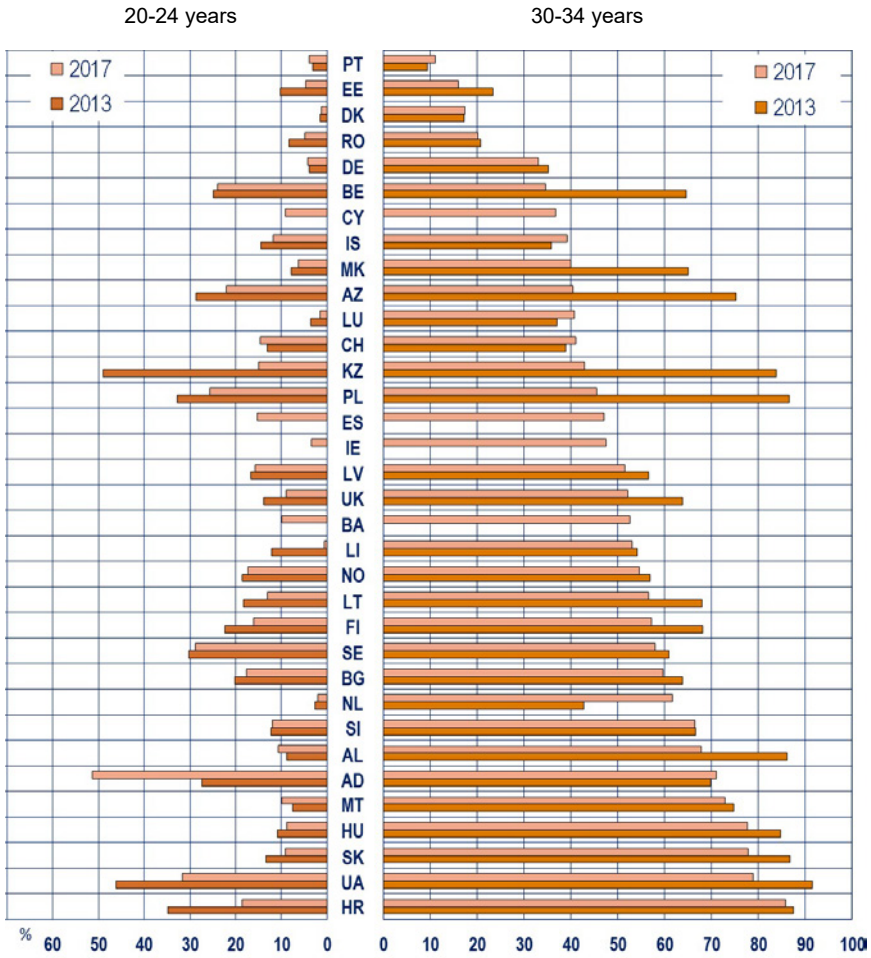
Examining the evolution of adults' graduation rates back to 2005, there has been a clear upward trend in all countries, except for Bulgaria (decrease of 21 %). Increases of more than 90 % took place in 14 out of 34 countries, and the minimum growth was found in Germany and the Netherlands, around 20 % each. All in all EHEA, the median share has almost doubled in 2018 compared to 2005 (6.5 % from 3.4 % in 2005).

Part-time students

The opportunities for part-time studies in a higher education system are also linked to issues of social dimension. Full-time study may not be possible, or at least not very easy, for people from lower socio-economic background, for example: they may have to be in full-time employment during their studies, and part-time study may also be a more feasible option due to lower fees per academic year.

Figure 4.9 shows the percentage of students enrolled as part-timers among students aged 20 to 24 and 30 to 34.

Figure 4.9: Students enrolled as part-timers in tertiary education. by country and age (%), 2013 and 2017



	%	HR	UA	SK	HU	MT	AD	AL	SI	NL	BG	SE	FI	LT	NO	LI	BA	UK
Y20-24	2013	34.8	46.1	13.3	10.9	7.6	27.4	8.8	12.3	2.6	20.2	30.2	22.4	18.3	18.6	1.8		13.8
	2017	18.6	31.7	9.1	8.9	9.9	51.4	10.6	12.0	2.0	17.6	28.9	16.0	13.1	17.3	0.6	10.0	8.9
Y30-34	2013	87.5	91.6	86.7	84.7	74.8	69.9	86.2	66.6	42.8	63.9	61.0	68.2	68.1	56.9	51.9		63.9
	2017	85.8	78.9	77.8	77.7	72.9	71.1	67.9	66.4	61.8	59.6	58.0	57.2	56.6	54.7	53.0	52.6	52.1
		LV	IE	ES	PL	KZ	CH	LU	AZ	MK	IS	CY	BE	DE	RO	DK	EE	PT
Y20-24	2013	16.8			32.8	49.0	13.1	3.6	28.6	6.1	14.5		24.9	3.9	8.4	1.6	10.3	3.1
	2017	15.8	3.5	15.3	25.7	14.9	14.7	1.6	22.1	5.6	11.8	9.2	23.9	4.3	4.9	1.3	4.8	3.9
Y30-34	2013	56.6			86.6	83.9	38.9	37.2	75.3	56.0	35.8		64.6	35.3	20.8	17.2	23.4	9.4
	2017	51.5	47.6	47.1	45.5	43.0	41.1	40.8	40.5	43.2	39.3	36.8	34.7	33.1	20.2	17.4	16.1	11.1

Source: Eurostat, UOE custom extraction and additional collection for the other EHEA countries.

Notes:

Countries are arranged by the participation of mature students (30-34 years old) in part-time studies in 2017.

As illustrated, the older the students are, the more likely they are to study part-time. Indeed, the share of part-time students in the older age group is more than 1.5 times higher than the younger age group across most countries for which data are available in 2017. In Liechtenstein, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Ireland and Denmark, the share of part-timers in the older age group is more than ten times higher than among younger students.

Behind the above general pattern, there are substantial differences between countries in the two age groups. In 2017, the share of part-time students in the age group 30-34 varied between 11 % in Portugal to 86 % in Croatia. In 18 countries, part-time students in the older age group represented more than half of the students of the same age group. In four countries, namely Croatia, Ukraine,

Slovakia, Hungary, more than 75 % of students aged 30-34 were part-timers in 2017. Countries with the highest proportion of young part-timers (aged 20-24) were Andorra (51.4 %), Ukraine (31.7 %), Sweden (28.9 %) and Poland (25.7 %).

Figure 4.9 also indicates that part-timers aged 30-34 accounted for over 75 % in 2013 in eight countries (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Hungary, Albania, Poland, Slovakia, Croatia and Ukraine), thus suggesting a significant drop in 2017 in the respective share in Kazakhstan, Poland and Azerbaijan (a reduction of 35 percentage points or more). This was the case in another 19 countries across the EHEA for part-time students aged 30-34. A notable exception was the Netherlands, which recorded an increase in the percentage of part-time students aged 30-34 of 19 percentage points between 2013 and 2017.

Similarly, the pattern between 2013 and 2017 is the same for younger part-timers (aged 20-24); a decreasing trend is recorded in 23 countries. The most pronounced ones were observed in Kazakhstan, Croatia and Ukraine. On the contrary, Malta, Albania, Switzerland, Portugal and Germany had an increase in the share of part-time students in the age group of 20-24, although those did not exceed 2.5 percentage points.

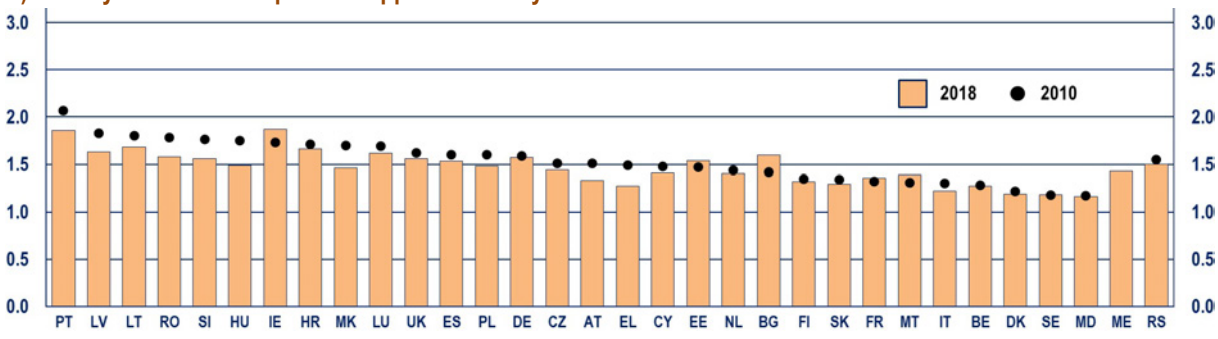
4.2.2. Employability

The issue of graduate employability has been a central concern of the Bologna Process since its inception. Degree structure reforms, the efficacy of quality assurance systems and innovation in learning and teaching, all focus on the value of higher education for the learner. While higher education also has other purposes than providing society with highly skilled workers, the relevance of higher education can be assessed by considering the value attached to higher education qualifications in the labour market. This value is of course dependent on a variety of societal and economic conditions. Nevertheless, it is vitally important that higher education continues to bring benefits to graduates and society in the world of work. This section considers some of the ways in which the value of higher education qualifications can be measured.

One simple measure is to compare the income of higher education graduates with that of employees with different levels of qualifications. This is depicted in Figure 4.10.

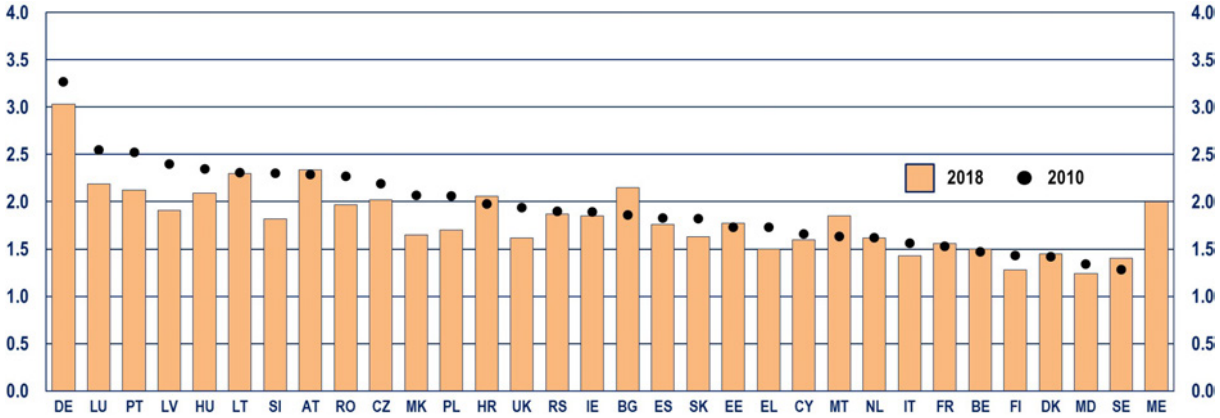
Figure 4.10: Ratio of median annual gross income of employees with tertiary education to the median annual gross income of employees with lower levels of education, 2010 and 2018

A) Tertiary education compared to upper secondary education



	PT	LV	LT	RO	SI	HU	IE	HR	MK	LU	UK	ES	PL	DE	CZ	AT
2010	2.07	1.83	1.80	1.78	1.76	1.75	1.73	1.71	1.70	1.69	1.62	1.60	1.60	1.59	1.51	1.51
2018	1.86	1.63	1.68	1.58	1.56	1.49	1.87	1.66	1.46	1.62	1.56	1.53	1.48	1.57	1.44	1.33
	EL	CY	EE	NL	BG	FI	SK	FR	MT	IT	BE	DK	SE	MD	ME	RS
2010	1.49	1.48	1.47	1.44	1.42	1.35	1.34	1.32	1.31	1.30	1.28	1.22	1.18	1.17	:	1.55
2018	1.27	1.41	1.54	1.40	1.60	1.32	1.29	1.36	1.39	1.22	1.27	1.19	1.18	1.16	1.43	1.50

B) Tertiary education compared to lower secondary education



	DE	LU	PT	LV	HU	LT	SI	AT	RO	CZ	MK	PL	HR	UK	RS	IE
2010	3.27	2.55	2.52	2.40	2.35	2.31	2.30	2.29	2.27	2.19	2.07	2.06	1.98	1.94	1.90	1.89
2018	3.03	2.19	2.12	1.91	2.09	2.30	1.82	2.34	1.97	2.02	1.65	1.70	2.06	1.62	1.87	1.85
	BG	**ES**	**SK**	**EE**	**EL**	**CY**	**MT**	**NL**	**IT**	**FR**	**BE**	**FI**	**DK**	**MD**	**SE**	**ME**
2010	1.86	1.83	1.82	1.73	1.73	1.66	1.63	1.62	1.56	1.53	1.47	1.43	1.42	1.34	1.28	:
2018	2.15	1.76	1.63	1.77	1.50	1.60	1.85	1.62	1.43	1.56	1.50	1.28	1.45	1.24	1.40	2.00

Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC (Statistics on Income and Living conditions).

In 2018, employees with a tertiary degree in every country analysed had an income advantage over people with either upper or lower secondary education. According to Figure 4.10.A, the ratio of income with a tertiary qualification to income with upper secondary education ranges from 2.1 in Portugal – which means that the median annual gross income of tertiary qualified employees is over twice as high as the income of upper secondary qualified employees – and 1.8 in Latvia and Lithuania to 1.2 in Denmark, Sweden, Moldova and Montenegro.

The impact of completing tertiary education instead of only lower secondary schooling on the median annual gross income is stronger in several countries (see Figure 4.10.B). The ratio exceeds 3 in Germany and is 2.2 in Luxembourg. In a number of other countries, the ratio is around two, indicating a high wage premium when gaining a tertiary level degree. The income disparity between the low and the highly educated is lowest in Moldova and Finland. This may be as a result of greater social equality, or potentially as a result of lack of capacity in the labour market to employ highly skilled graduates. In either case, having a higher education degree in these countries does not give as strong monetary benefits as in other countries.

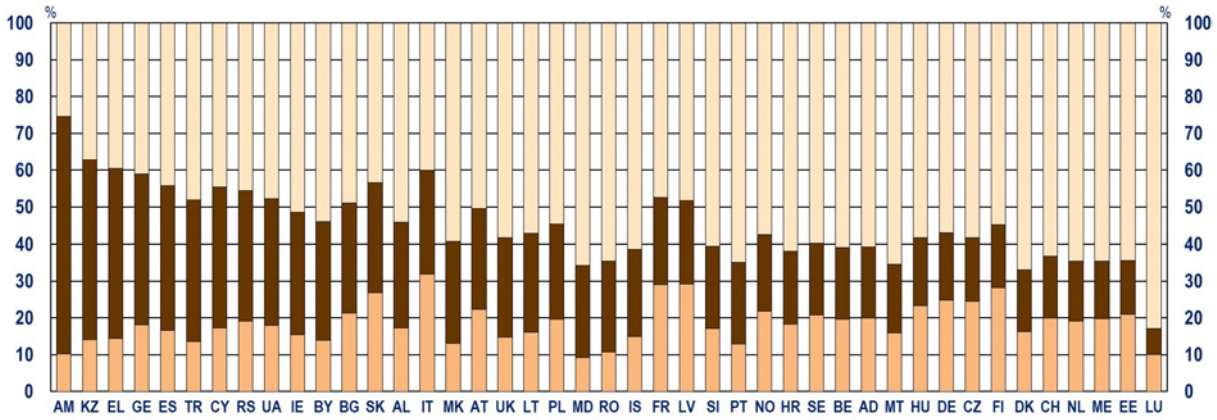
Changes in the median gross annual income since 2010 have been rather stable, with small decreases in income inequality in the majority of countries, when compared to both upper and lower secondary education. Compared to upper secondary education, Hungary experienced the largest decrease (-0.26) between the ratios in the two years, and compared to lower secondary education, the largest decrease took place in Latvia and Slovenia (almost 0.5). The largest increase took place in Bulgaria (0.14 and 0.29 respectively) when comparing to both upper and lower secondary education.

Another indicator of the labour market prospects of graduates is so-called vertical mismatch, which occurs when there is a discrepancy between graduates' level of education or skills and the level of education or skills required by their job (Cedefop, 2010, p. 13). Such vertical mismatch can occur in terms of qualifications or skills, and conclusions can be very different depending on which one is being examined.

Figure 4.11 looks at over-qualification rates – defined as the percentage of young people with tertiary education occupying a post not traditionally regarded as requiring a tertiary qualification (International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) occupation level 4 to 9, including clerks, service workers, agricultural and fishery workers, craft and related trades workers, plant and machine

operators or elementary occupations ([68])). Figure 4.11 shows the distribution of people aged 25-34 with tertiary education qualifications and employed in ISCO 1 or 2 (legislators, senior officials, managers and professionals), in ISCO 3 (technicians and associate professionals) and in ISCO 4 to 9.

Figure 4.11: Distribution of people with tertiary education aged 25-34 and employed in ISCO 1 or 2 (legislators, senior officials, managers and professionals) in ISCO 3 (technicians and associate professionals) and in ISCO 4-9, (%), 2018



%	AM	KZ	EL	GE	ES	TR	CY	RS	UA	IE	BY	BG	SK	AL	IT	MK	AT	UK	LT	PL	MD	RO
ISCO 1 or 2	25.5	37.3	39.5	41.0	44.3	48.1	44.6	45.6	47.8	51.4	53.8	49.0	43.4	54.0	40.1	59.1	50.5	58.2	57.0	54.6	65.8	64.7
ISCO 4 to 9	64.3	48.7	46.1	41.0	39.0	38.4	38.1	35.4	34.3	33.2	32.4	29.8	29.8	28.7	27.9	27.8	27.3	27.0	26.9	25.8	25.0	24.6
ISCO 3	10.2	14.1	14.4	18.0	16.6	13.5	17.3	19.0	17.9	15.4	13.9	21.2	26.8	17.3	31.9	13.1	22.2	14.8	16.1	19.6	9.2	10.7
	IS	FR	LV	SI	PT	NO	HR	SE	BE	AD	MT	HU	DE	CZ	FI	DK	CH	NL	ME	EE	LU	EHEA
ISCO 1 or 2	61.5	47.5	48.3	60.6	64.9	57.3	61.9	59.7	61.0	60.7	65.4	58.2	56.8	58.1	54.7	66.9	63.3	64.7	64.5	64.4	82.9	57.7
ISCO 4 to 9	23.7	23.4	22.5	22.3	22.2	20.9	19.9	19.6	19.5	19.3	18.6	18.5	18.3	17.4	17.1	16.9	16.8	16.2	15.7	14.6	7.1	23.6
ISCO 3	14.8	29.1	29.2	17.2	12.9	21.8	18.3	20.7	19.5	19.9	16.0	23.3	24.8	24.5	28.1	16.2	19.9	19.1	19.8	21.0	10.0	18.6

Source: Eurostat, Labour Force Survey (LFS) and additional collection for the other EHEA countries.

In 2018, the median over-qualification rate was 23.6 %.This means that in half of the countries, almost a quarter of young graduates were employed in occupations for which a lower qualification level should be sufficient. The countries with the highest over-qualification rates (above 30 %) are Armenia (64.3 %), Kazakhstan (48.7 %), Greece (46.1 %), Georgia (41.0 %), Spain (39.0 %), Turkey (38.4 %), Cyprus (38.1 %), Serbia (35.4 %), Ukraine (34.3 %), Ireland (33.2 %) and Belarus (32.4 %). In contrast, the countries with relatively low over-qualification rates (below 15 %) are Estonia (14.6 %) and Luxembourg (7 %).

4.3. Qualitative indicators on social dimension

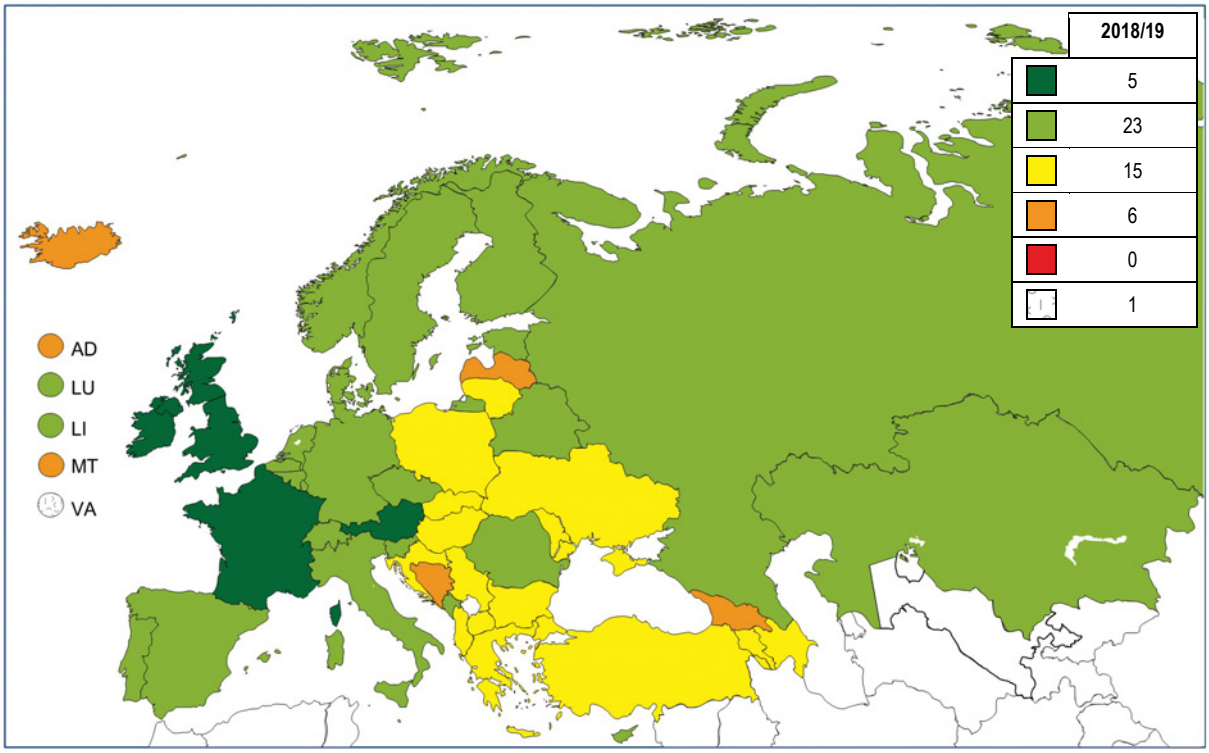
4.3.1. Supporting under-represented groups

The data in section 4.2 illustrate that the EHEA is far from reaching the level of ambition set in policy declarations. Equal access to higher education for students from different backgrounds remains aspirational, and requires holistic social and educational policy-making set at earlier levels of education systems.

Nevertheless, higher education policy has its role to play, and Figure 4.12 sets out to capture the main measures supporting disadvantaged learners in entering higher education. The aspects included are: 1) monitoring the student body at entry, 2) long-term quantitative objectives, 3) support provided through different access routes and 4) financial support. The indicator is in scorecard form and each of the elements carries equal weight and value.

([68]) See the Glossary and Methodological Notes for more details.

Figure 4.12: Scorecard indicator n°9:
Measures to support the access of under-represented groups to higher education 2018/19



Source: BFUG data collection.

Scorecard categories

	The following measures are undertaken to support the access to or increase the participation of under-represented groups in higher education: 1. The composition of the student body is monitored based on gender and at least one other under-represented category at entry. 2. There are longer-term quantitative policy objectives for the access/participation of students from under-represented groups. 3. Under-represented student groups' access to higher education is supported in at least two of the following three ways: ○ Preferential treatment of specific groups of students during the standard admission process; ○ Learners are supported in getting the standard higher education entry qualifications; ○ Learners can access higher education without the standard higher education entry qualifications. 4. There is financial support targeted at under-represented groups of students **OR** mainstream support is provided to more than 50 % of students.
	Three out of the four types of measures are undertaken.
	Two out of the four types of measures are undertaken.
	One out of the four types of measures is undertaken.
	None of the four types of measures are undertaken.
	Data not available

All education systems with available data implement at least one of the measures supporting the access of disadvantaged learners to higher education. Six education systems have undertaken only one out of the four outlined measures: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Malta and Andorra (financial support) and Latvia (monitoring). Most education systems are in the yellow and light green category, implementing two or three types of measures supporting disadvantaged learners. Finally, four countries (Austria, France, Ireland and the United Kingdom) have implemented a wide range of support measures to increase the inclusiveness of their higher education systems, including monitoring, setting quantitative targets, facilitating the access of non-traditional learners through adapting their admission systems as well as providing financial support.

4.3.2. Recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning

The importance of the recognition of knowledge and skills gained through non-formal and informal learning has been stressed by communiqués of ministerial conferences for years. With the Bucharest Communiqué ministers explicitly agreed to 'step up [their] efforts towards under-represented groups to develop the social dimension of higher education, reduce inequalities and provide […] alternative access routes, including recognition of prior learning' (Bucharest Communiqué, 2012, pp. 1-2). The Yerevan Communiqué further stresses that structural reforms – such as providing a framework for the recognition of prior learning – agreed upon earlier should be implemented 'by policy makers and academic communities and [with the] stronger involvement of stakeholders' (Yerevan Communiqué, 2015, p. 3). For countries of the European Union, the recognition of prior learning has been encouraged through a Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning ([69]).

Policies related to the recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning (RPL) in higher education can concern two interlinked areas: 1) RPL for access to higher education studies; 2) RPL for study progression. The first option refers to situations where candidates without upper secondary school leaving certificate enter higher education based on the recognition of their non-formal and/or informal learning. The second option denotes the allocation of credits towards a qualification and/or exemption from some programme requirements.

The recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning as an option for *access to higher education* is currently in place in less than half of all EHEA systems (Bucharest Communiqué, 2012, pp. 1-2). Frameworks for the recognition of prior learning exist primarily in western European countries. In most cases, a recognition procedure is enough for applicants to gain access to (selected) higher education programmes. Nevertheless, such a recognition procedure is not always compulsory for all higher education institutions, but is an option institutions can choose to apply in their admission procedure. Furthermore, in three countries (Austria, Germany and Portugal), the recognition procedure in itself is not enough for applicants to gain access to higher education: they also have to pass an additional entrance examination.

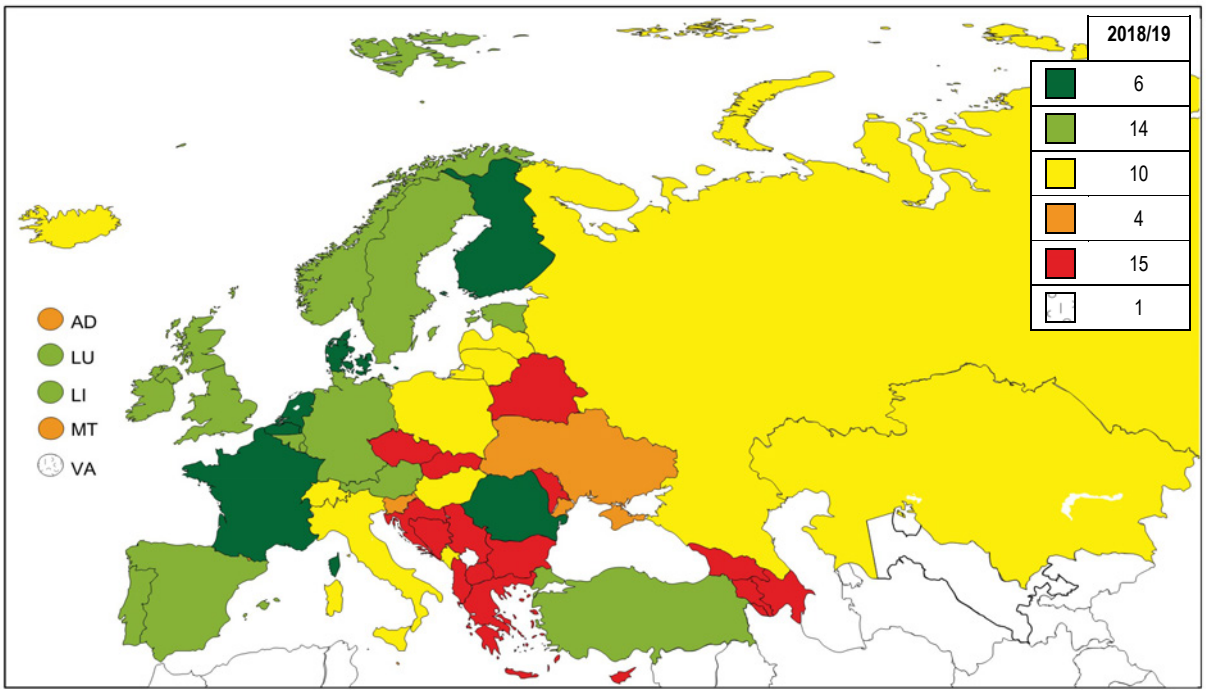
The recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning is not only an important instrument for widening access. If prior non-formal and informal activities are recognised by higher education institutions as parts of study programmes (in the form of credits, for example), these procedures can also help students completing their studies.

At present, around half of all EHEA systems allow the recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning for *study progression in higher education*. In most systems, this is made possible by a top-level framework: laws, regulations, guidelines or policies oblige or guide higher education institutions in establishing the relevant recognition procedures. Nevertheless, such top-level frameworks do not exist everywhere: in five higher education systems (Andorra, Switzerland, Iceland, Malta and Slovenia), higher education institutions have recognition procedures for the allocation of credits in place without the presence of a top-level framework.

Scorecard indicator n°10 (see Figure 4.13) summarises information on the recognition of prior learning for both the access and progression in studies. In addition to examining these two possibilities, the indicators also considers whether national authorities regularly monitor relevant institutional activities.

([69]) Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, 20 December 2012 (2012/C 398/01). Available at: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2012:398:0001:0005:EN:PDF

Figure 4.13: Scorecard indicator n°10:
Recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning, 2018/19



Source: BFUG data collection.

Scorecard categories

	There are nationally established procedures. Guidelines or policy for assessment and recognition of prior learning as a basis for 1) access to higher education programmes, and 2) allocation of credits towards a qualification and/or exemption from some programme requirements. AND these procedures are monitored regularly by top-level authorities.
	There are nationally established procedures. Guidelines or policy for assessment and recognition of prior learning as a basis for 1) access to higher education programmes, and 2) allocation of credits towards a qualification and/or exemption from some programme requirements. BUT these procedures are not monitored regularly by top-level authorities. **OR** There are nationally established procedures. Guidelines or policy EITHER for 1) OR for 2) (see above). AND these procedures are monitored regularly by top-level authorities.
	There are nationally established procedures. Guidelines or policy EITHER for 1) OR for 2) (see above). BUT these procedures are not monitored regularly by top-level authorities.
	There are no specific procedures/national guidelines or policy for assessment of prior learning. but procedures for recognition of prior learning are in operation at some higher education institutions or study programmes.
	No procedures for recognition of prior learning are in place EITHER at the national OR at institutional/programme level.
	Data not available

As the figure depicts, there are only six higher education systems (Belgium – Flemish Community, Denmark, Finland, France, the Netherlands and Romania) in the dark green category, thus fulfilling all the requirements of the scorecard indicator. In these systems, there are nationally established and regularly monitored procedures, guidelines or policy for the assessment and recognition of prior learning as a basis for both accessing higher education programmes and the allocation of credits towards a qualification.

14 higher education systems are in the light green category. In these cases, two possibilities exist. First, there are nationally established procedures, guidelines or policy for the recognition of prior learning as a basis for both accessing higher education programmes and the allocation of credits towards a qualification, but these procedures are not monitored regularly. This is the case in Germany, Norway and Portugal (where the procedures for the recognition of prior learning for progression are not monitored), and the French Community of Belgium, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Spain,

Sweden and the United Kingdom (with no central level monitoring). Second, there are nationally established and regularly monitored procedures, guidelines or policy for the recognition of prior learning as a basis for either accessing higher education programmes or the allocation of credits towards a qualification, but not for both. This is the case in Austria and Turkey (with a recognition framework only for accessing higher education programmes, and Estonia (with a recognition framework only for progression in studies).

The yellow category comprises education systems where there are nationally established procedures, guidelines or policy for the recognition of prior learning as a basis for either accessing higher education programmes or the allocation of credits towards a qualification, but not for both, and these procedures are not monitored regularly. This is the case in nine education systems (Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Poland, Russia and Switzerland).

In the four education systems in the orange category, recognition procedures are in operation in higher education institutions without nationally established procedures. This is the situation in Andorra, Slovenia and Ukraine (for the recognition of prior learning for progression in studies), and in Malta (for the recognition of prior learning for both access and progression in studies).

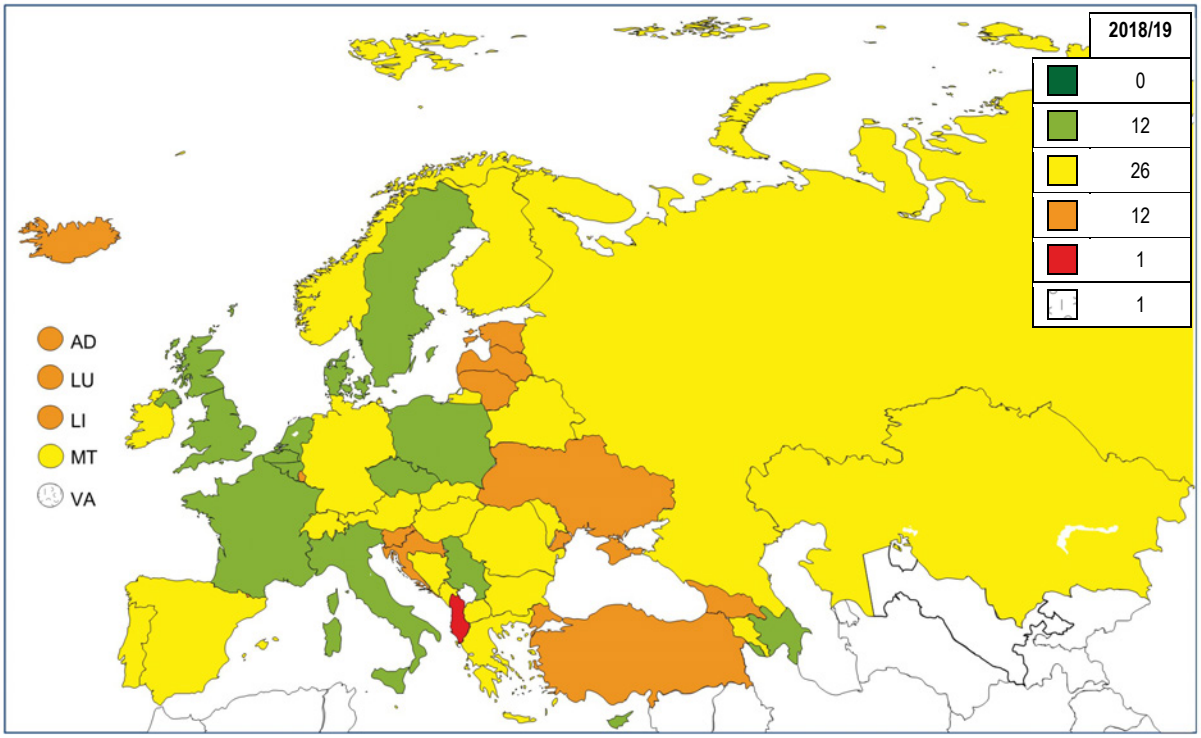
Finally, in 15 education systems, no procedures for the recognition of prior learning are in place either at the national or at institutional/programme level.

To some extent, the map illustrates that recognition of prior non formal and informal learning has been developed more in the countries of Western than Eastern Europe.

4.3.3. Measures to support the retention and completion of students from under-represented groups

Figure 4.14 summarises the measures supporting the retention and completion of disadvantaged learners in the form of a scorecard indicator. This composite indicator includes elements on 1) monitoring the composition of the student body during studies and at graduation, 2) quantitative objectives for the attainment/completion of students from under-represented groups, 3) general measures aiming to improve completion rates, as well as 4) targeted measures aiming to improve the completion of disadvantaged learners specifically.

Figure 4.14: Scorecard indicator n°11:
Measures to support the retention and completion of students from under-represented groups, 2018/19



Source: BFUG data collection.

Scorecard categories

	The following measures are undertaken to support the higher education completion of students from under-represented groups: - Monitoring the composition of the student body based on gender and at least one other under-represented category during studies and at graduation; - Longer-term quantitative policy objectives for the attainment/completion of students from under-represented groups; - Top-level measures targeting the retention of students and/or financial incentives for HEIs to improve completion rates; - Top-level measures targeting the completion of students from under-represented groups specifically.
	Three out of the four types of measures are undertaken.
	Two out of the four types of measures are undertaken
	One out of the four types of measures is undertaken.
	None of the four types of measures are undertaken.

In line with Bologna commitments, most of these elements require a specific focus on vulnerable or under-represented groups. While general policy measures may also enhance the retention or completion of disadvantaged learners (hence their inclusion among the scorecard categories), given the vulnerable position of students from under-represented groups, this indicator aims to capture the presence of targeted policies in EHEA countries.

As the figure illustrates, measures supporting the retention and completion of students from under-represented groups are much less common than measures supporting these groups to enter higher education. There is no education system implementing all types of the listed measures, and only 12 education systems (Azerbaijan, Belgium – Flemish Community, Czechia, Cyprus, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden and the education systems of the United Kingdom) undertake three types of support measures out of the four. Most education systems are in the yellow category, thus implementing two support measures targeting the retention or completion of disadvantaged learners. Another 12 education systems implement one type of measure out of the four, therefore are placed in the orange category. Nevertheless, only Albania provides no top-level support for the completion of under-represented groups in any of the areas analysed in this section.

4.4. Conclusions

The social dimension of the Bologna Process has been slow to develop as a policy area. Currently, the main objective as formulated in the London Communiqué (2007) – that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education should reflect the diversity of the populations – is far from being reached. Even considering the aspirational rather than concrete nature of the objective, the small numbers of countries that have developed and implemented a coherent set of measures to address matters relevant to the social dimension illustrates stuttering progress in this area.

The social dimension objective leaves quite some room for interpretation with respect to the relevant aspects of diversity, as well as the complexity inherent in any yet-to-be-adopted measures. This may play a role in explaining why most countries have apparently not been prioritising the improvement of the social dimension.

The goal formulated by ministers of the Bologna countries in the London Communiqué (2007) has since been upheld throughout several periods of the Bologna Process. Over the past decade, the Eurostudent project, in those countries which implement it, has developed and grown into an invaluable source of data on the social and economic conditions of students, thus providing an evidence base for countries wishing to understand and improved the social dimension of their higher education systems. Findings based on Eurostudent data have also informed the development of social dimension strategies. The social dimension has also garnered interest particularly in a peer learning context. From the beginning, seminars, conferences and peer-learning activities, organised by volunteering countries and stakeholders, have provided valuable opportunities for participants to discuss ideas and learn about the implementation of the social dimension in other countries and institutions.

The data in this report show that monitoring of student characteristics beyond age and gender cannot be considered a common practice in the EHEA. Data on students' background and the social and economic conditions of their studies and lives are not only needed to understand systemic, as well as day-to-day challenges students face, but are crucial in order to set measurable targets for the participation of under-represented and vulnerable groups and to assess the impact of any measures taken.

One of the main goals of social dimension in higher education – widening participation – is still very much work in progress when examining both the statistical data and qualitative indicators. Looking at the statistics, the participation of under-represented groups, especially migrants, remains low across EHEA, and the background of parents is still a very strong predictor whether children decide to attend university. In nearly all countries, women are in the majority among higher education entrants. However, the situation varies significantly depending on the study field. The number of mature students has increased quite significantly since 2000, suggesting that people may be starting higher education later. Also, study times may have become longer in some countries where the employment situation has not completely recovered since the economic crisis.

All Bologna countries should therefore strive to collect and analyse comparable quantitative data on the situation of their student populations, as recommended in the EHEA Social Dimension Strategy, supplemented by qualitative research to better understand the concrete mechanisms at play in determining the individual student's experience and choices. The number of countries participating in the Eurostudent project, although increasing over its roughly twenty year history to generally between 25 and 30, is still far lower than that of all Bologna countries, indicating that gathering data on the social dimension is not a priority issue across the EHEA. Information on the situation of graduates is additionally needed to assess whether higher education is successfully conveying the relevant skills in order for the graduate to benefit from their education and find adequate employment.

The number of students has increased over the last 20 years (see Chapter 1), but the monetary benefit from a degree has decreased slightly in the majority of countries. Hence, more and more people are obtaining a higher education degree, but this does not necessarily bring the same monetary rewards as in previous years. This reality could also be linked to continuing skills mismatches, as a significant proportion of graduates work in jobs that may not require a higher education degree.

When examining the qualitative indicators in this report, more work needs to be done both in developing recognition of prior learning and in providing support for access and completion of under-represented groups.

In the mid-to long-term, in order to fulfil the commitments made in the ministerial communiqués, all EHEA countries should be able to demonstrate a coordinated approach to fostering the social dimension of higher education, ideally in the form of a national social dimension strategy that mainstreams the social dimension and builds on best practice in higher education institutions.

Perhaps the most significant challenge, as it goes beyond the remit of the Bologna Follow-Up Group, will be to establish successful linkages with other areas of policy – particularly developing coherent strategic approaches to equity with previous stages of the education system – in order to fulfil ambitions for the social dimension.

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