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Towards equity and inclusion in Higher Education in Europe

Eurydice report

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Towards equity and inclusion in higher education in Europe

Eurydice report

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FOREWORD



Equity and inclusion are two of the key values at the heart of the European Union and at the core of our vision for a European Education Area. Ensuring them is also a clear priority of the European Strategy for Universities, which we presented in January 2022.

We want all citizens to have the opportunity to fulfil their hopes and dreams, and the European higher education systems should provide these opportunities.

Some of the skills, competences and knowledge necessary to thrive in our society can only be acquired through higher education. Still, some education structures and policies tend to perpetuate the exclusion of socially disadvantaged and vulnerable groups: their participation in higher education remains low across all EU Member States. For example, migrants and foreign-born students are much less likely to participate in higher education than their native-born counterparts. Gender divisions are also growing in many disciplines.

In very general terms, we see an increasing number of young people study for a higher education degree, which is encouraging. Adults however, without secondary education qualifications but with valuable professional experience, find it often difficult, if not impossible, to enter higher education – and it is not because they lack motivation!

The message of this report is clear: we have a long way to go before our education systems provide truly equitable and inclusive higher education. But I believe that it is possible, and more so: it is a social, economic and moral imperative, a necessity. Higher education well done has the power to contribute strongly to inclusive and cohesive societies, and it is high time for us to bring about the necessary changes.

Mariya Gabriel

Commissioner responsible for
Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth

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CODES AND ABBREVIATIONS

Country codes

EU	European Union				EEA and candidate countries
BE	Belgium	CY	Cyprus	AL	Albania
BE fr	Belgium – French Community	LV	Latvia	BA	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BE de	Belgium – German-speaking Community	LT	Lithuania	CH	Switzerland
BE nl	Belgium – Flemish Community	LU	Luxembourg	IS	Iceland
BG	Bulgaria	HU	Hungary	LI	Liechtenstein
CZ	Czechia	MT	Malta	ME	Montenegro
DK	Denmark	NL	Netherlands	MK	North Macedonia
DE	Germany	AT	Austria	NO	Norway
EE	Estonia	PL	Poland	RS	Serbia
IE	Ireland	PT	Portugal	TR	Turkey
EL	Greece	RO	Romania		
ES	Spain	SI	Slovenia		
FR	France	SK	Slovakia		
HR	Croatia	FI	Finland		
IT	Italy	SE	Sweden		

Statistics

(.)	Data not available
(–)	Not applicable or zero

Abbreviations and acronyms

BFUG	Bologna Follow-Up Group
EEA	European Economic Area
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HEI	Higher education institution
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
SEN	Special educational needs
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

INTRODUCTION

The policy background

At the beginning of the 21st century, there is a renewed political, scholarly and public interest in questions of social and economic equality, in general ⁽¹⁾, and in the relationship between education and equality, in particular ⁽²⁾. There is wide recognition that inequality in higher education in Europe is an important and complex problem (Piketty, 2021). This is demonstrated in previous Eurydice reports including the series of Bologna Process Implementation Reports, (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020a, European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018, European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015, European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2012). The Eurydice report on Equity in school education in Europe (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020b) also provides clear evidence that equity issues do not emerge at higher education level, but are deep-rooted in earlier education provision ⁽³⁾.

Policy makers could not have remained indifferent to the challenge inequity poses to our education systems and societies. Following the Gothenburg Summit in November 2017, where European leaders discussed the importance of education for the future of Europe, the European Council conclusions of 14 December 2017 ⁽⁴⁾ noted that education is one of the keys to building inclusive and cohesive societies. As a follow-up, the European Commission's Communication of 30 September 2020 on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 ⁽⁵⁾ defines inclusion as one of its key objectives – to ensure that higher education is accessible to diverse student populations. This has subsequently been followed up by requirements to address equity and inclusion in all main EU project calls.

With a sense of urgency, the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) has also responded by developing the document “Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA” – henceforth referred to as the Principles and Guidelines (P&Gs) – to address the social dimension. This document was adopted by Ministers of Higher Education in the Rome Ministerial Conference, November 2020 ⁽⁶⁾.

In the European Higher Education Area, the definition of the social dimension provided in the 2007 London Communiqué remains relevant. It states that *the composition of the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations*. In 2020, the BFUG Advisory Group 1 on Social Dimension enlarged the definition, by stressing that *the social dimension also encompasses the creation of an inclusive environment in higher education that fosters equity, diversity, and is responsive to the needs of local communities* ⁽⁷⁾.

⁽¹⁾ See, for instance, Piketty, 2021; Savage, 2021; Atkinson, 2015; Pikety, 2014.

⁽²⁾ For example, Laval and Vergne, 2021; Merry, 2020; Douglass Horsford, Scott and Anderson, 2019.

⁽³⁾ See also Laval and Vergne, 2021; Barone, Fougère and van Zanten, 2019.

⁽⁴⁾ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/32204/14-final-conclusions-rev1-en.pdf>

⁽⁵⁾ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on achieving the European Education Area by 2025. Brussels, COM(2020) 625 final.

⁽⁶⁾ Document available at: http://www.ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique_Annex_II.pdf

⁽⁷⁾ http://www.ehea.info/Upload/AG1_Social_Dimension_Final_Report.pdf, p. 23.

The social dimension in higher education

Inclusiveness, equity and diversity are all concepts related to social justice and the fair distribution of rights, resources and ultimately power in society. Education, and especially higher education, is often seen as a means of addressing, at least in part, socio-economic inequalities⁽⁸⁾. Educated people tend to have access to better paid jobs and the higher the level of education, the better the prospects for a highly paid job. According to the latest OECD report *Education at a Glance* (OECD, 2021), young adults (25 to 34 years old) with a higher education degree can earn on average 38% more than their peers who have only completed secondary education⁽⁹⁾.

Whilst higher education bears the promise of social mobility (Piketty, 2021, p. 254), “there are still too many capable students who are excluded from higher education systems because of their socio-economic situation, educational background, insufficient systems of support and guidance and other obstacles”, as the EHEA Strategy of 2015 acknowledges. We know that, for instance, migrants in Europe are twice as likely to have a low level of education compared to natives and that young migrants are more than twice as likely to drop out of school⁽¹⁰⁾. Thus, young people with a migrant background are less likely to pursue higher education. Similarly, students with disabilities are more likely to withdraw from university or to have a lower degree outcome (Shaw, 2021; Moriña, 2017), only 5% of refugees have access to higher education compared to the global average of 39% among non-refugees⁽¹¹⁾ and it is a well-known fact that women are underrepresented in STEM subjects (McNally, 2020), to name but a few problems. Finally, the restrictions on on-site learning resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic-related measures have had a disproportionate effect on socio-economically disadvantaged students⁽¹²⁾.

The underrepresentation of certain social groups, even if it is unintentional, poses problems both at the individual and the collective level. To return to the example of young people with a migrant background, the limited chances of entering and completing higher education implies that they are more likely to encounter unemployment problems or to find employment only in low skilled and low paid jobs. This results not only in economic precariousness, but also in social marginalisation and alienation. Being effectively cut off from higher education affects one’s personal development and career prospects, but it affects also economic productivity and economic growth. As the P&Gs text explains, “increased participation of vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups in higher education produces wider benefits with respect to decreased social welfare provision, improved health outcomes and increased community involvement. Collectively, these wider benefits sustain cohesive, democratic societies where social justice, public good, public responsibility and social mobility prevail”.

It is clear, therefore, not only that there are inequalities in the access to and completion of higher education, but that there are also individual and collective benefits to be reaped by addressing these inequalities. To this end the EHEA Strategy prescribes that “the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of Europe’s populations”. Similarly, the 2020 Commission Communication (p. 15) states that “Higher Education and VET

⁽⁸⁾ For different perspectives on the topic see Barone, 2019; Allen and Goddard, 2017; Low, 2005; Simon, 2005.

⁽⁹⁾ This figure rises to 70% for the 45 to 54 age group.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Social and Economic Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027, COM(2020) 758 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=COM:2020:758:FIN>.

⁽¹¹⁾ <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/tertiary-education.html>.

⁽¹²⁾ According to the findings of a recent European Students’ Union survey (Doolan et al., 2021, p. 5), “younger students, students who do not have a quiet place to study, a good Internet connection and material for studying at their disposal, as well as students with lower levels of digital and social bonding capital, consistently reported lower adjustment during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. In addition, students who reported having mental health problems consistently had lower scores on all indicators of adjustment”.

[vocational education and training] systems need to adapt to strengthen their key role in supporting lifelong learning and reaching out to a more diverse student body”.

The P&Gs aspire to help the national education authorities to improve the social dimension of higher education “by moving beyond widening accessibility clauses and instead focusing on the concept of ‘leaving no one behind’”. Such an ambitious goal requires interventions at multiple levels, within the education system and beyond (Laval and Vergne, 2021; Barone, Fougère and van Zanten, 2019). The P&Gs focus on possible interventions in higher education suggesting that existing higher education structures and policies can be adapted to favour the diversification of the higher education student body.

To progress in terms of inclusiveness and diversity in higher education, it is necessary to do things differently. Nominal or formal equality in higher education, meaning the same rights and obligations for all, is not always a guarantee of actual equality or equality in practice. As research has shown, children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds face relatively more difficulties in school and, therefore, do not enjoy the same chances of entering higher education as students from more privileged backgrounds (e.g. European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020; Piketty, 2021). Even if there are no higher education tuition or registration fees, students from low socio-economic status backgrounds are less likely to enter the more prestigious or sought-after higher education institutions (Piketty, 2021, pp. 254-259). In the end, comparatively more public money is invested in young people from a more affluent socio-economic background, because they tend to stay longer in education and because they are comparatively more likely to study in more costly faculties such as medicine (*ibid.*). Thus, the unconditional equality of chances is not only insufficient for achieving real equality, and therefore justice, in higher education, but there is a strong case that it may even be detrimental to it.

To ensure that the chances of accessing higher education, progressing and completing the studies are independent of students’ socio-economic background, gender, sexual orientation and so on, it is, first of all, necessary to distinguish between nominal and effective equality or, to put it differently, between formal equality and equity. The latter concept, which is adopted by the Principles and Guidelines, places at the centre the interest and well-being of the disadvantaged, vulnerable and underrepresented. It favours the removal of any visible or invisible discriminatory practices that are harmful to these groups, while at the same time allowing for the unequal treatment of unequal groups if it helps rectifying previous mistakes or injustices.

The Principles for strengthening the social dimension of higher education

The ten Principles agreed by EHEA do not specify if or when positive action measures should be taken, but they suggest that steps should be taken to improve the social dimension in higher education, thereby making it more equitable. In fact, most P&Gs point towards measures surrounding the conditions in higher education. Universal changes in the requirements for accessing, progressing or completing higher education, in addition to other system-level changes, may make the conditions more favourable for attracting more students, in general, and students from vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented backgrounds, in particular.

1. The social dimension should be central to higher education strategies at system and institutional level, as well as at the EHEA and the EU level ⁽¹³⁾.
2. Legal regulations or policy documents should allow and enable higher education institutions to develop their own strategies to fulfil their public responsibility towards widening access to, participation in and completion of higher education studies.
3. The inclusiveness of the entire education system should be improved by developing coherent policies from early childhood education, through schooling to higher education and throughout lifelong learning.
4. Reliable data is a necessary precondition for an evidence-based improvement of the social dimension of higher education.
5. Public authorities should have policies that enable higher education institutions to ensure effective counselling and guidance for potential and enrolled students in order to widen their access to, participation in and completion of higher education studies.
6. Public authorities should provide sufficient and sustainable funding and financial autonomy to higher education institutions enabling them to build adequate capacity to embrace diversity and contribute to equity and inclusion in higher education.
7. Public authorities should help higher education institutions to strengthen their capacity in responding to the needs of a more diverse student and staff body and create inclusive learning environments and inclusive institutional cultures.
8. International mobility programs in higher education should be structured and implemented in a way that foster diversity, equity and inclusion and should particularly foster participation of students and staff from vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented backgrounds.
9. Higher education institutions should ensure that community engagement in higher education promotes diversity, equity and inclusion.
10. Public authorities should engage in a policy dialogue with higher education institutions and other relevant stakeholders about how the above principles and guidelines can be translated and implemented both at national system and institutional level.

⁽¹³⁾ Only the parts of the ten Principles highlighted in the official document (http://www.ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique_Annex_II.pdf) are quoted here. The full description of each Principle and Guideline can be found in the opening of the ensuing chapters.

The objectives, scope and structure of the report

The BFUG Advisory Group has clarified that the Principles “should be understood as high-level statements that serve as a basis for the conceptualisation of different policies for social dimension enhancement. Guidelines are recommendations intended to advise policy makers on how the principles should be implemented in practice”. In other words, the P&Gs do not dictate what the national education authorities should do, but offer the foundations for national authorities to build upon.

This report is the outcome of a feasibility project to develop indicators related to the social dimension in higher education as exemplified in the P&Gs. Its goal is to help the competent authorities to improve equity in higher education, by proposing a number of simple and composite indicators (scoreboards), collecting and presenting the relevant data. Quite simply, in order to strengthen the social dimension in higher education and improve equity, we need first to know where we are now in this respect. In short, the report strives to establish how far the European higher education systems are aligned with the P&Gs in addressing the social dimension. It is hoped that the resulting policy mapping will inform policy makers, relevant stakeholders and analysts about progress already made, as well as the areas that remain a particular challenge.

Therefore, the report structure follows closely the topics of the P&Gs. There are ten chapters, as many as the Principles, and each chapter opens with the full exposition of the relevant Principle and its accompanying Guidelines. Following that, we briefly explain how the particular P&Gs relate to equity, present any methodological challenges, explain the choice of the indicators and, finally, we present the collected data, mostly in the form of maps. A scoreboard indicator at the end of the chapter summarises how the various European countries fare in terms of how many of the particular Guidelines are being currently implemented. Finally, a short concluding chapter featuring an overall scoreboard (Figure 11.1) recaps the main findings of the report.

The reference year for information on top-level regulations and policies is the 2020/2021 academic year. All 27 EU Member States are covered, as well as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia and Turkey. Iceland is also a member of the Eurydice Network, but did not take part in this project.

PRINCIPLE AND GUIDELINES 1: STRATEGIES ON HIGHER EDUCATION WITH A SOCIAL DIMENSION

Principle:

The social dimension should be central to higher education strategies at system and institutional level, as well as at the EHEA and the EU level. Strengthening the social dimension of higher education and fostering equity and inclusion to reflect the diversity of society is the responsibility of a higher education system as a whole and should be regarded as a continuous commitment.

Guidelines:

a. Strategic commitment to the social dimension of higher education should be aligned with concrete targets that can either be integrated within existing higher education policies or developed in parallel. These targets should aim at widening access, supporting participation in and completion of studies for all current and future students.

b. In the process of creating strategies there should be a broad-based dialogue between public authorities, higher education institutions, student and staff representatives and other key stakeholders, including social partners, nongovernmental organisations and people from vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups. This broad-based dialogue is to ensure the creation of inclusive higher education strategies that foster equity and diversity, and are responsive to the needs of the wider community.

1.1. Introduction

Principle and Guidelines 1 and equity

Principle 1 is directly related to the social dimension in higher education. The Principle underlines that the commitment to a social dimension should be continuous and reflected in all levels: the EU, the EHEA, the education system and the higher education institutions. Here we examine the commitment mainly at the education system level (national or regional, according to the level of competent education authorities). The commitment of higher education institutions is measured indirectly by asking if quality assurance agencies need to monitor what higher education institutions do (see section 1.2).

Clearly, the existence of a strategy does not guarantee that the social dimension in higher education is addressed in full or that all equity problems are resolved. Similarly, it does not mean that countries having no recent strategy are indifferent to equity in higher education or inactive. What the existence of a strategy does imply, however, is that the top-level education authorities have singled out equity as a policy priority that they are willing to act upon.

A strategy may remain empty or simply a wish list unless specific targets are set. This is why the first Guideline suggests that any strategies should aim to meet concrete targets. Furthermore, these targets should relate specifically to opening up higher education as much as possible. This means not only widening access to higher education institutions, but also supporting students throughout their studies and enabling them to complete successfully.

To ensure that any strategy on equity in higher education is really inclusive, responsive to the real needs of the relevant communities and not a top down imposition on higher education institutions, the second Guideline recommends a broad-based social dialogue to feed into the strategy.

The indicators proposed below aim to capture all these strategy aspects mentioned here, in order, on the one hand, to empirically assess how close the European education systems are in owning at least one higher education strategy with clear social dimension commitment and, on the other, to capture whether equity in higher education is a current policy priority.

Methodological challenges

Translating political statements into measurable indicators comes with certain challenges. Notwithstanding how detailed or explicit the Principles and Guidelines may be, they do not propose specific indicators. Therefore, an element of judgement is involved and judgements are imperfect. Furthermore, no matter how justifiable, robust or useful an indicator may be, it is only an approximation of the aspect under consideration. By definition, an indicator indicates but does not substitute reality. Still, a good indicator is a measurable quantity that can be identified and analysed and consequently used in policy-making. In other words, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. Here, and in all subsequent chapters, every effort has been made to build indicators which, on the one hand, reflect the commitments embodied in the Principles and Guidelines as closely as possible and, on the other, can reflect the current reality of the European education systems.

The ultimate goal of each chapter is to summarise a complex picture, so that every reader can understand where we currently stand in terms of the particular P&Gs under consideration. Hence, a composite indicator, in scoreboard form, closes each chapter. A summary, however, would defeat its purpose if it contained too much information. Therefore, a strategic choice has been made that each scoreboard indicator would consist of no more than four simple indicators or elements.

1.2. The indicators for P&Gs 1

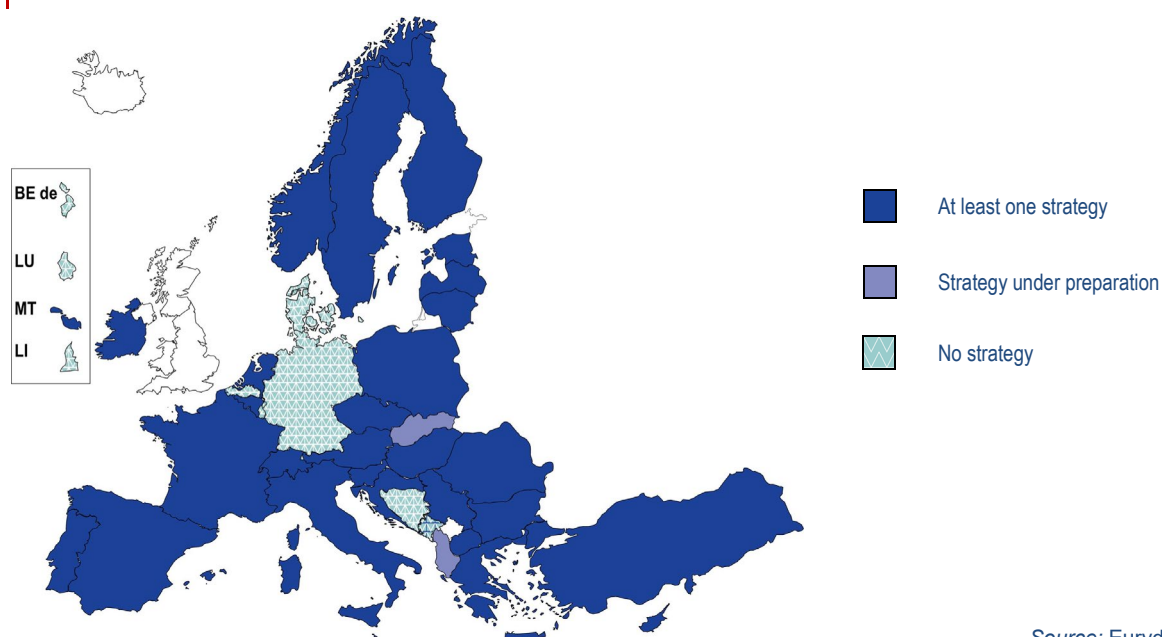
The first chapter proposes indicators that offer answers to the following questions:

1. Is there currently (i.e. during 2020/2021) a strategy, or a similar major policy plan, on higher education with a social dimension that promotes equity, inclusiveness or diversity in the implementation or preparation phase? (Figure 1.1)
2. Does such a strategy have specific and measurable targets? (Figure 1.2)
3. Is such a strategy the outcome of a social dialogue? (Figure 1.3)
4. Are quality assurance agencies required to monitor whether higher education institutions have any policies in place promoting social dimension, equity, inclusiveness or diversity? (Figure 1.4)

Strategies in higher education with a social dimension

The first indicator considers whether higher education systems have a top-level strategy on equity in place. It differentiates between systems where at least one strategy is currently being implemented, shown in dark blue, and those where a strategy is being prepared, indicated in light blue. Countries where no strategy on equity exists are shown in a patterned and very light blue.

Figure 1.1: Existence of a top-level strategy (or other major policy) on equity, 2020/2021



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

The figure shows the education systems where at least one strategy (or similar policy plan) on equity in higher education is currently being implemented or being prepared for adoption.

Figure 1.1 shows that nearly all European countries have at least one strategy or major policy plan related to equity in higher education, while Slovakia and Albania are in the process of preparing such a strategy. Currently, the only education systems without a strategy on equity in higher education are the Flemish and German-speaking Communities of Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Liechtenstein and Montenegro.

It should be noted, that are many reasons behind the absence of a higher education strategy. One of them is that maybe there was such a strategy in the near past. Another possible reason is that policy makers believe the current system addresses the social dimension sufficiently⁽¹⁴⁾.

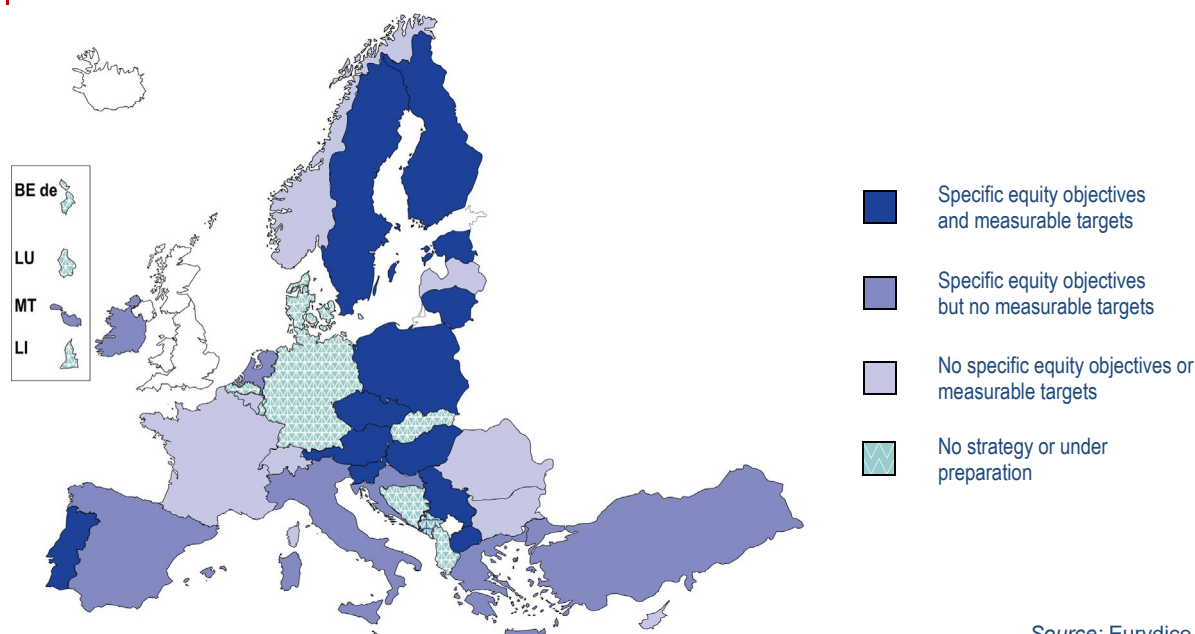
The fact that all the other countries examined here state having a strategy, or similar policy initiative, related to the social dimension, suggests that equity in higher education is of concern to most top-level education authorities in Europe. However, in most countries the social dimension is just one aspect of the strategy and not its exclusive or even main focus. Only Croatia, Cyprus, the Netherlands, Austria, Finland and Switzerland reported that they have a higher education strategy which focuses exclusively on social dimension, equity, inclusion or diversity.

⁽¹⁴⁾ For instance, in Denmark the current policy structure is seen as exhibiting a deep rooted commitment to equity and inclusion. A consensus among political parties that equity in higher education is important, the fact that there are no tuition fees in full-time higher education, that there is a fully developed public grant and loan system to support students (92% of first cycle and 77% of second-cycle students receive grants), in addition to various other measures, all amount to the perception that a separate or stand-alone strategy is not necessary.

Strategy targets

A strategy without specific and measurable targets makes it impossible to measure progress and evaluate its effectiveness. Therefore, a strategy without such targets is unlikely to act as a catalyst for achieving tangible results. This is why the national units were asked to report if any higher education strategy (or broader strategy covering also higher education) contains concrete and quantitative targets related to the social dimension.

Figure 1.2: Strategy (or other major policy) on equity with specific and measurable targets, 2020/2021



Explanatory notes

The figure demonstrates education systems having a strategy (or similar policy plan) mentioning specific or measurable targets. Targets set autonomously by the higher education institutions are not indicated here.

Country-specific notes

Netherlands: Higher education institutions set their own targets for recruiting female professors, but collectively this leads to a national level target (by 2025, 30% of all newly recruited professors should be women). Further measurable targets are currently under development.

Slovakia: The strategy is currently under preparation.

Albania: The strategy is currently under preparation.

As Figure 1.2 illustrates, not all strategies are endowed with specific and/or measurable targets to meet. Some strategies do not even mention any specific targets related to the social dimension, equity etc. In particular, the strategy of the French Community of Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Romania, Switzerland and Norway fall in this category. The remaining countries who reported having a relevant strategy are divided between those mentioning specific but not measurable targets (Ireland, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands and Turkey) and those mentioning targets that are both specific and measurable (Czechia, Estonia, Lithuania, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden, North Macedonia and Serbia). A few examples will make the distinction clearer.

In 2017, Austria adopted the “National strategy on the social dimension in higher education: towards more inclusive access and wider participation”. Running until 2025, the strategy aims at making access to higher education more inclusive, improving academic success, limiting student drop-out and optimising the regulation of higher education in general. By setting clear and measurable targets, it is hoped that Austria will meet the strategy’s general objectives. For instance, one specific and measurable target related to widening access is reducing the ratio “recruitment quota” to “probability of

admission to higher education” from 2.25 in 2010 to 2.10 by 2025. Another measurable target is increasing the number of “non-traditional” higher education admissions to 5300. Last but not least, another target addresses gender balance across study areas. In particular, the strategy stipulates that there should be at least 10% of both sexes represented in all study areas in all higher education institutions.

Austria is not the only country trying currently to widen access to higher education. For instance, Finland, Portugal and Slovenia too have similar targets that are specific and measurable. In particular, Finland’s strategy (adopted in 2021) specifies that by 2030 50% of young adults should have a higher education degree. Likewise, the Portuguese strategy (adopted in 2020) states that by 2030 60% of 20-year-olds should be studying in higher education. Finally, Slovenia’s strategy (adopted in 2011) states that by 2020 40% of the 30-34 age group should have a tertiary education qualification.

Sometimes, however, the strategy targets are not operationalised or open-ended. For example, the Irish strategy (adopted in 2015) aims at increasing the participation in higher education of people from disadvantaged backgrounds, with a disability or of mature students, but no numerical targets have been set. Likewise, the Croatian strategy (2019) aims to stimulate interest among people in underrepresented or vulnerable groups to enter higher education, but no measurable targets have been set. Rather, the strategy’s success is measured with the help of various performance indicators, such as the number of certain programmes, the number of participants and the number of satisfied participants.

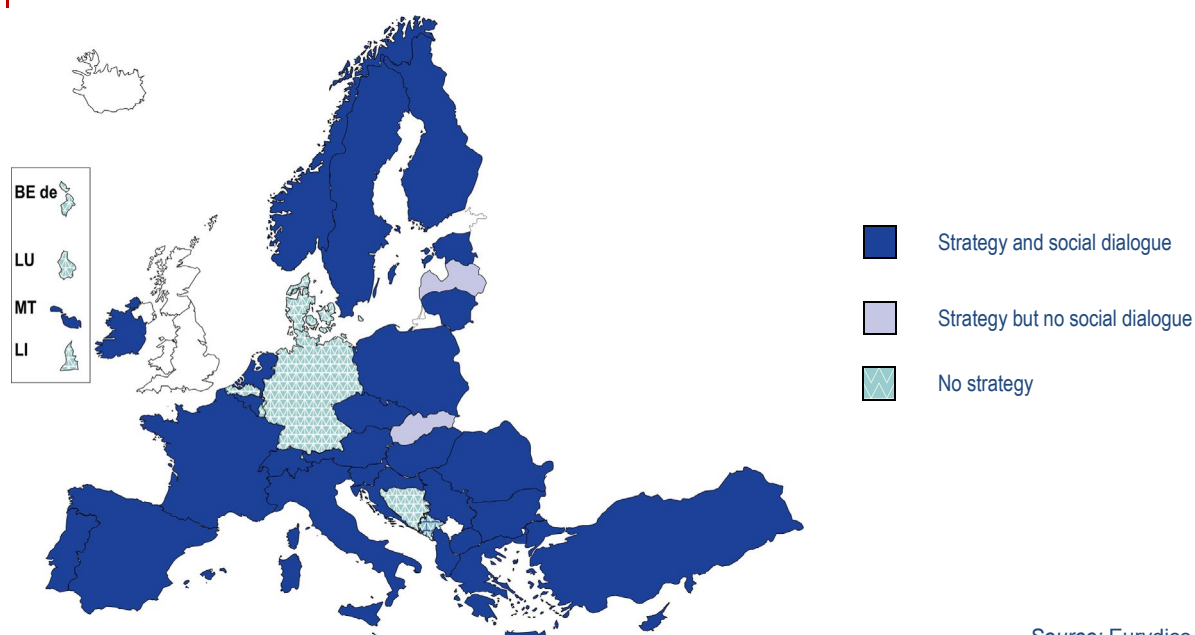
Social dialogue

It is perhaps not uncommon for public authorities to try to take decisions and implement measures without necessarily consulting all stakeholders. Indeed it may be argued that decision-making and ultimately policy making can come to a standstill if there are too many actors involved. However, it is also true that a fully top-down approach, where decisions are taken by the top-level authorities alone without consulting any other stakeholders, may also be counter-productive. Not only are top-level authorities likely to miss important insights in their policy design, they are also more likely to fail to secure the full cooperation of the stakeholders during the policy implementation.

A process of cooperation and consultation becomes even more important when it concerns matters of equity in higher education and the underrepresentation of certain social groups. Given that inequity or underrepresentation is likely to be entrenched within an education system, and given that any inequity problems are likely to be longstanding, it is important that the higher education strategy on equity takes into account the views of relevant stakeholders. In other words, a higher education strategy with a social dimension is more likely to be effective if a social dialogue has taken place.

Since a social dialogue can take many forms and is therefore difficult to compare across countries, we opted for an indicator that captures the most essential aspect of any social dialogue, namely, whether it took place, or whether it is currently taking place if the strategy is still under preparation.

Figure 1.3: Strategy on equity and social dialogue, 2020/2021



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

The figure indicates the education systems where a strategy (or similar policy plan) related to equity in higher education currently exists or is under preparation, in combination with a relevant social dialogue that is either currently taking place or took place before the strategy was adopted.

Country-specific notes

Slovakia: The strategy is currently under preparation but is not linked to a social dialogue.

Albania: The strategy is under preparation and is linked to a social dialogue currently taking place.

Figure 1.3 suggests that a social dialogue is common practice in Europe, at least as far as the adoption of a higher education strategy with a social dimension is concerned. Nearly all countries with such strategy have conducted (or are conducting) a social dialogue. The sole exception is Latvia.

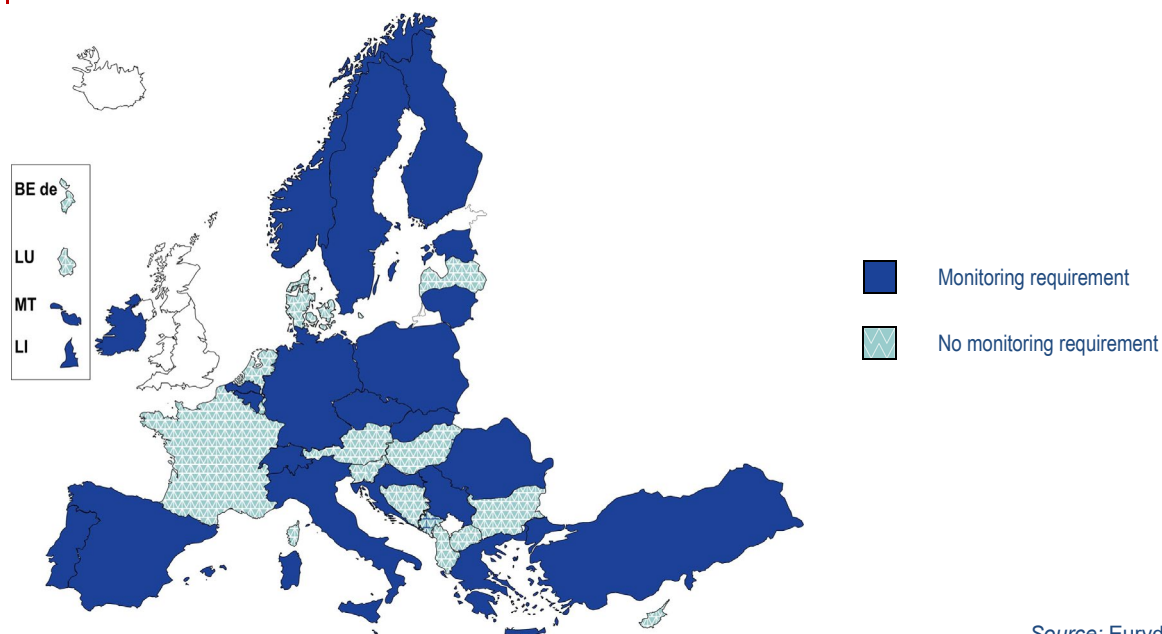
Typically, the social dialogue involves the top-level education authorities, the higher education institution managing bodies (e.g. rector conferences), student unions, other public authorities and regional (and/or local) education authorities. Other stakeholders have been reported by fewer than half the countries where a social dialogue took (or is taking) place. Thus, of the 29 education systems with a strategy linked to a social dialogue, only 14 countries involved staff trade unions in the social dialogue, 13 involved NGOs and representatives of other education levels, 4 student political parties and 4 international organisations, such as the European Commission, the World Bank, UNICEF, USAID, the Council of Europe or the OSCE. Finally, 15 countries mentioned other social dialogue participants who do not fall in any of the aforementioned categories.

The fact that NGOs were invited in the social dialogue of only 13 countries, is perhaps indicative of another interesting finding. Very few countries invited NGOs or other organisations representing specific social groups. Where this was the case, this concerned mainly organisations representing people with disabilities or special education needs (French Community of Belgium, Estonia, Greece, Austria, Slovenia, Finland and North Macedonia). Representatives of other vulnerable or underrepresented groups were invited in even fewer countries. For instance, migrants' representatives were invited only in Finland; representatives of ethnic or racial groups were invited only in Lithuania and North Macedonia; and representatives of gender-based or sexual orientation-based groups were invited only in Spain, Austria, Finland and Sweden.

Quality assurance agencies monitoring equity in higher education

Because of higher education institutional autonomy and because of the large number of higher education institutions in Europe, it is impossible for us to determine what individual institutions do in terms of equity policy development and promotion. An alternative, though obviously imperfect, proxy is whether quality assurance agencies are required by the top-level authorities to monitor what individual higher education institutions do for promoting equity.

Figure 1.4: Quality assurance agencies being required to monitor higher education institution policies on equity, 2020/2021



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

The figure illustrates in which countries (education systems) quality assurance agencies are required to monitor whether higher education institutions have policies in place to improve the social dimension, equity, inclusion or diversity in higher education.

Figure 1.4 reveals that a quality assurance agency monitoring requirement exists in many education systems, but there are also many where there is no requirement. To be precise, in 23 education systems top-level regulations require quality assurance agencies to monitor if higher education institutions have any policies for improving social dimension, equity, inclusion or diversity, and in 15 education systems there is no such top-level requirement. This means that in the majority of European countries we can be fairly confident that higher education institutions do something to promote equity in higher education, and more precise information should be available in the reports from the quality assurance agencies. We can even be cautiously optimistic that the number of higher education institutions that have some policy on equity is higher than what Figure 1.4 suggests. It is conceivable that some higher education institutions take steps on their own initiative to promote equity in their midst, even if there is no expectation by the quality assurance agency or the top-level authorities to do so.

Scoreboard indicator 1: The social dimension in higher education as policy priority

Scoreboard indicator 1 aims to summarise what has been shown thus far, to visually illustrate if equity in higher education is a current political priority in the countries covered by this report. The underlying assumption is that the existence of a higher education strategy (major policy plan) on equity or a broader strategy on equity with a higher education component implies policy interest. To maximise the chances that such a strategy is linked to concrete actions, we examined whether the strategies mention also specific and measurable targets. In addition, we hypothesised that a strategy is more likely to bear an impact on equity if it rests on a process of social dialogue. Finally, the requirement that quality assurance agencies monitor whether higher education institutions have any policies related to equity is a proxy for measuring higher education institutions' involvement in equity promotion.

In sum, an education system gets 4 points if all four of the following elements are in place ⁽¹⁵⁾:

1. At least one strategy (or other major policy plan) related to equity in higher education is being currently implemented.
2. The strategy has specific and measurable targets.
3. A social dialogue related to the strategy took place or is currently taking place.
4. Quality assurance agencies are required to monitor whether higher education institutions have policies with a social dimension (equity, inclusion, diversity).

If any three of the four elements are in place, then the score is 3 ⁽¹⁶⁾. Similarly, for two elements the score falls to 2, for one element the score is 1 and zero points are allocated if none of the aforementioned elements exist.

Leaving aside the education systems for which the data are incomplete or missing, we can calculate the sum of the individual education system scores. The formula is very simple:

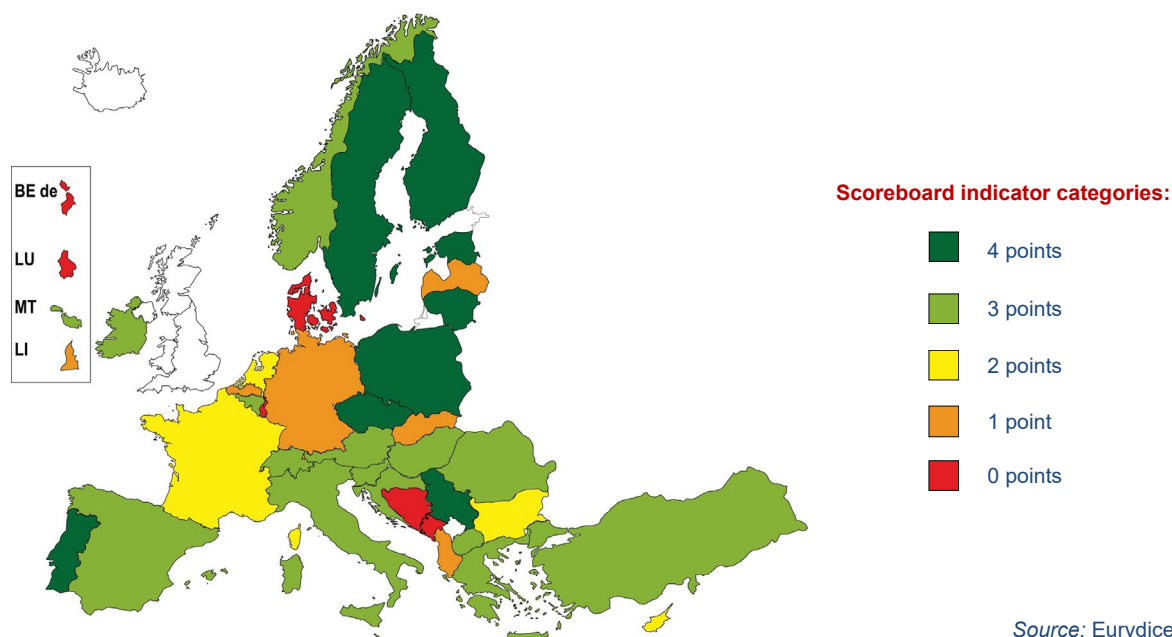
$$\sum_{i=1}^n \text{Score of education system } i$$

Where n is the number of education systems with complete data and consequently $1 \leq n \leq 38$.

The overall actual score can be compared with the maximum possible score. Obviously, the maximum score is a theoretical value, a reference point which can help us assess how far Europe still is from fully implementing the Principle and Guidelines. The theoretical maximum can be calculated by multiplying the highest possible score (4) with the number of education systems having achieved this score. It follows, if there are no missing values (i.e. there are data for all the elements of the scoreboard indicator of all the education systems), then the theoretical maximum is $4 \times 38 = 152$ points.

⁽¹⁵⁾ The scoreboard indicator gives an equal value to all elements because its goal is to reflect how many elements of the Principled and Guidelines are being currently implemented.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Although the individual elements are formally independent (i.e. the score depends on the number of elements and not on which elements are in place), in the case of Scoreboard indicator 1 elements two and three depend on element one. Quite simply, there can be no strategy targets or a linked social dialogue without a strategy in preparation or implementation.

Figure 1.5: Scoreboard indicator 1: Social dimension in higher education as policy priority, 2020/2021

A quick glance of Figure 1.5 shows that a higher education with a social dimension is a current policy priority in most European countries at least to some extent. Eight education systems (Czechia, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Finland, Sweden and Serbia) reach the maximum score (4 points), meaning that they implement a strategy on equity in higher education which has specific and measurable targets and is linked to social dialogue, and that they have a quality assurance agency monitoring policies related to equity. As many as 15 education systems have the second best score (3 points). Only five education systems (German-speaking Community of Belgium, Denmark⁽¹⁷⁾, Luxembourg, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro) are currently in the red (0 points), while six get a score of 1 (Flemish Community of Belgium, Germany, Latvia, Slovakia, Albania, and Liechtenstein) and four a score of 2 (Bulgaria, France, Cyprus and the Netherlands). Hence, the overall score is 91 points. Given that the maximum score is 152 points, it means that the level of implementation of Principle and Guidelines 1, in terms of top-level policies currently in place, is 60%.

Figure 1.5 suggests there is room for improvement, even though in practice the room may be limited. The limitation stems partly from the fact that already a relatively high number of education systems find themselves in the higher categories (dark and light green), and partly from the components of the scoreboard indicator. Once a strategy is in its implementation phase, usually it has already been decided whether it contains specific or measurable targets and any social dialogue in this respect has already taken place. It follows that there can be no improvement in these dimensions, unless new strategies or implementation action plans are adopted.

⁽¹⁷⁾ There is no Danish strategy which means there can be no strategy-related targets or social dialogue. Inevitably, Denmark's score is low, but as explained in footnote 1, the lack of strategy may imply also confidence on behalf of the national authorities that the current policy structure is sufficient.

PRINCIPLE AND GUIDELINES 2: FLEXIBILITY

Principle:

Legal regulations or policy documents should allow and enable higher education institutions to develop their own strategies to fulfil their public responsibility towards widening access to, participation in and completion of higher education studies.

Guidelines:

a. Legal regulations and administrative rules should allow sufficient flexibility in the design, organisation and delivery of study programmes to reflect the diversity of students' needs. Higher education institutions should be enabled to organise full-time and part-time studies, flexible study modes, blended and distance learning as well as to recognise prior learning (RPL), in order to accommodate the needs of the diverse student population.

b. Public authorities should promote recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning (RPL) in higher education, because it has a positive impact on widening access, transition and completion, equity and inclusion, mobility and employability. RPL enables flexible modes of lifelong learning in the entire education sector, including higher education. Implementing RPL will require effective cooperation amongst the higher education system, employers and the wider community and to enable this national qualifications frameworks should facilitate transparent recognition of learning outcomes and reliable quality assurance procedures.

2.1. Introduction

Principle and Guidelines 2 and equity

Principle 2 looks at one of the conditions that would allow higher education institutions to play their part in improving equity. In particular, Principle 2 suggests that sufficient flexibility should be granted to higher education institutions but also to the education system as a whole, to allow for more students entering higher education, progressing with their studies and successfully completing them.

Flexibility is characterised by the availability of alternatives and the possibility of choice. For example, a single access route to higher education, usually via an upper secondary school leaving certificate, offers no alternatives and, therefore, is a mark of inflexibility. There are people who either left school without completing upper secondary education or who failed when they were young to secure the grades that would allow them to enter higher education. Unless a second chance or an alternative means of entry is given to them, they will be excluded from higher education for life. Some of them may regret this, and some of them will have acquired skills and competences after they left school which would allow them to successfully study for a higher education degree. However, if non-formal or informal learning are not officially recognised or if they cannot combine work with study, then they are effectively denied a second chance. It is for this reason that the first Guideline of Principle 2 asks that the rules should allow "flexibility in the design, organisation and delivery of study programmes".

Flexibility will not benefit only working students, but anyone who wishes to study for a higher education degree, but finds the conventional higher education access route (via the upper secondary school) and progression mode (full-time studies requiring physical presence) unsuitable. Limitations of any kind (temporal, financial, physical, mental, etc.) can become less restrictive if potential students can opt for part-time, distance or blended learning studies, or if they can be assured that their knowledge, skills and experience will be recognised and, therefore, appreciated in practice.

“Widening access to, participation in and completion of higher education studies” requires a reformed education system that facilitates flexibility in higher education access, progression and completion. Thus, the indicators proposed in this chapter aim at capturing key aspects of the current degree of flexibility in higher education.

Methodological challenges

Higher education institutions tend to enjoy autonomy in how they run their affairs, which often extends to the conditions surrounding students’ access, academic progression and study completion. Since it is beyond the scope of this project to collect data on individual higher education institutions and their practices, we focus on whether relevant top-level regulations allow higher education institutions to offer more flexible forms of study (part-time studies, blended or distance learning programmes or similar). If top-level regulations allow for flexible study programmes, then it is the responsibility of individual higher education institutions to design and operate them, and it is up to the respective quality assurance agencies to monitor the higher education institutions’ activities in this regard.

Consequently, the first indicator (Figure 2.1) demonstrates whether higher education institutions can offer, rather than whether they actually offer, more flexible forms of study, and another indicator (Figure 2.4) shows whether quality assurance agencies are required by top-level regulations to consider the recognition of prior non-formal and/or informal learning (RPL in short). The other two indicators look at the RPL as an enabling factor for accessing higher education (Figure 2.3) and for academic progression within a given study programme (Figure 2.4). Finally, Scoreboard indicator 2 (Figure 2.5) summarises the data presented in this chapter and provides an overview of the European education systems’ flexibility potential.

The limits between the conditions for progressing and completing a study programme are blurred, in the sense that conceptually both lead to the same end (graduation) and, therefore, empirically may amount to the same thing. This is why we opted for an indicator that relies on the concept of “study programme fulfilment” which in a way covers both progression and completion.

The last methodological point is a technical detail. Higher education study programmes extend to different education levels (ISCED 5-8) and study cycles (short, first, second and third cycle). To present the data on all of them would make the figures unreadable and inundate the chapter with excessively detailed information. To avoid this, we chose to present here the data referring to first cycle study programmes only (typically Bachelor’s or their equivalent), which are also the bulk of higher education study programmes, and the level at which the majority of students are enrolled.

2.2. The indicators for P&Gs 2

The second chapter proposes four indicators which offer answers to the following questions:

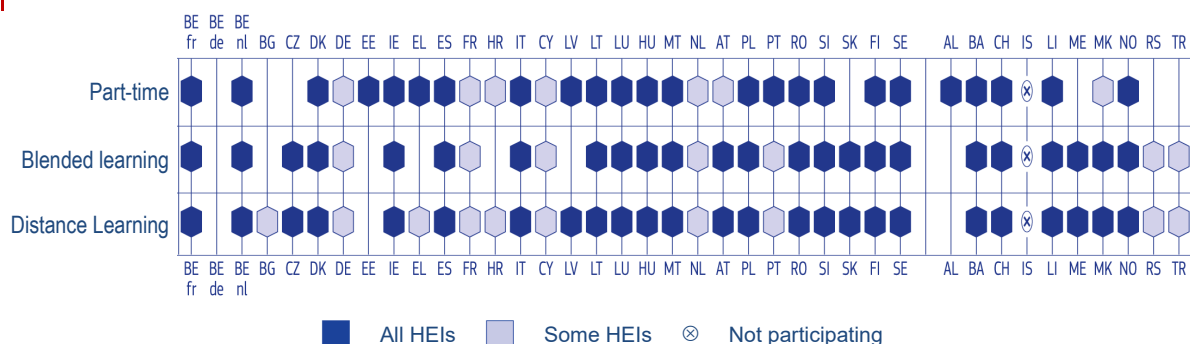
1. Do top-level regulations allow higher education institutions to offer part-time studies, blended or distance learning programmes? (Figure 2.1)
2. Is access to higher education possible without an upper secondary school leaving certificate but on the basis of recognition of non-formal and/or informal learning? (Figure 2.2)
3. Does prior non-formal and/or informal learning count towards the fulfilment of a higher education study programme? (Figure 2.3)
4. Are quality assurance agencies required to address the recognition of prior non-formal and/or informal learning in higher education? (Figure 2.4)

Flexible study programmes

Figure 2.1 shows which countries (education systems) provide the legal conditions for flexible study programmes. By legal conditions, we mean not only the existence of top-level regulations that explicitly permit part-time, blended learning of distance learning study programmes, but also a legal framework that does not prohibit them. Of course, explicitly permitting flexible study programmes is not exactly the same as not forbidding them, because the former offers greater reassurance, especially if there is a fully developed legal framework. However, the absence of prohibition allows pro-active higher education institutions offer flexible study programmes if they wish so. Thus, the possibility of flexible study programmes is offered regardless of whether they are explicitly or only implicitly allowed.

Flexibility in the higher education studies is ensured by offering as many alternative study programmes as possible. Whilst the list is not exhaustive, the main forms of flexible study programmes are part-time studies, distance learning and blended (or hybrid) learning. Part-time studies are typically characterised by providing students a relatively longer timeframe to complete them, either because students are allowed to gain fewer study credits per academic term, or because they are expected to attend fewer classes and study more on their own. Distance learning, as the term suggests, refers to higher education studies where only limited or no physical attendance is required. Finally, blended or hybrid learning combines on-site or classroom-based with distance learning.

Figure 2.1: Education systems where flexible higher education study programmes are permitted, first cycle, 2020/2021



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

The figure shows which countries (education systems) allow higher education institutions the possibility to offer part-time, blended or distance-learning study programmes. The data refer to first cycle (e.g. Bachelor's) degrees only.

Country-specific note

Cyprus: The country's representation in Figure 2.1 is somehow atypical in the sense that flexible study programmes are allowed in all HEIs in all the study cycles except the first (i.e. in the short, second and third).

There are reasons to be optimistic as far as the possibility of flexible higher education study programmes is concerned. According to Figure 2.1, most countries allow the higher education institutions to offer part-time studies, blended or distance learning programmes, at least for first cycle studies. Of the 38 education systems examined here, 24 allow, or at least do not prohibit, part-time studies in all higher education institutions, compared to 7 education systems where this is allowed only in some higher education institutions. Similarly, allowing blended learning is permitted in 31 education systems, in 24 of them for all higher education institutions. Finally, 35 education systems allow distance learning and 25 of them give the opportunity to all higher education institutions.

Overall, even though Figure 2.1 does not show which education systems actually offer flexible forms of study programmes or to what extent, it allows us to extrapolate that equity in higher education can in principle be improved. In most countries flexible study programmes are allowed, which means that

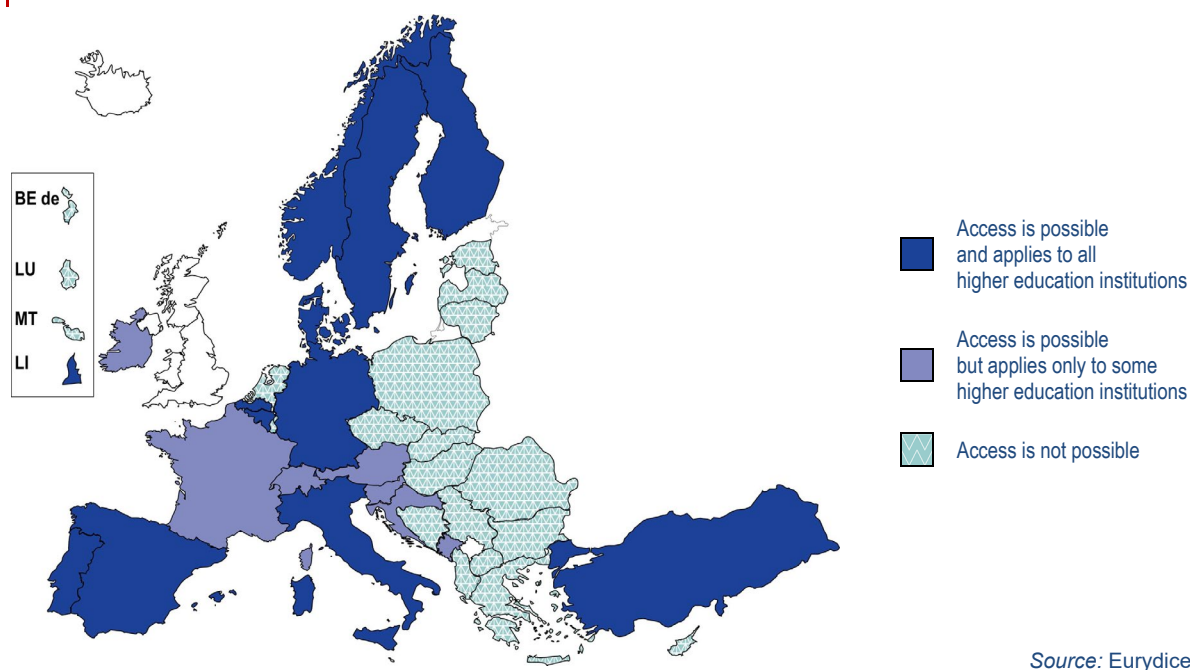
the necessary condition for flexibility in higher education is already in place. Of course, regulatory permission in itself is not enough. Higher education institutions will be looking also for other conditions to be met before offering new or more flexible study programmes. The first Guideline of Principle 2, however, refers only to legal and regulatory permission. From this perspective, most European education systems are already on a good track.

Equity and inclusion are even better served if flexible study programmes are combined with actions specifically targeting disadvantaged and vulnerable groups who tend to be also underrepresented in higher education. For example, in Estonia there are usually tuition fees for part-time study programmes, but these are waived for special education needs (SEN) students. As a result, SEN students in Estonia do not have to worry about such fees encouraging them to access higher education on a part-time basis if they wish so.

Recognition of Prior Learning as alternative access route to higher education

In the vast majority of cases, if not all, access to higher education typically passes through upper secondary education and its successful completion. Consequently, those who did not complete the upper level are unable to enter higher education, unless there is an alternative route. One such alternative is the recognition of prior informal and non-formal learning, or RPL in short. The official recognition of knowledge and skills acquired in non-formal settings, such as in-work training, or informal settings, such as self-learning, can make a great difference in how open a higher education system is.

Figure 2.2: Accessing higher education with non-formal and/or informal learning, 2020/2021



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

The figure indicates education systems where candidates without an upper secondary school leaving certificate can enter higher education on the basis of recognition of non-formal and/or informal learning. The data refer to first cycle studies only.

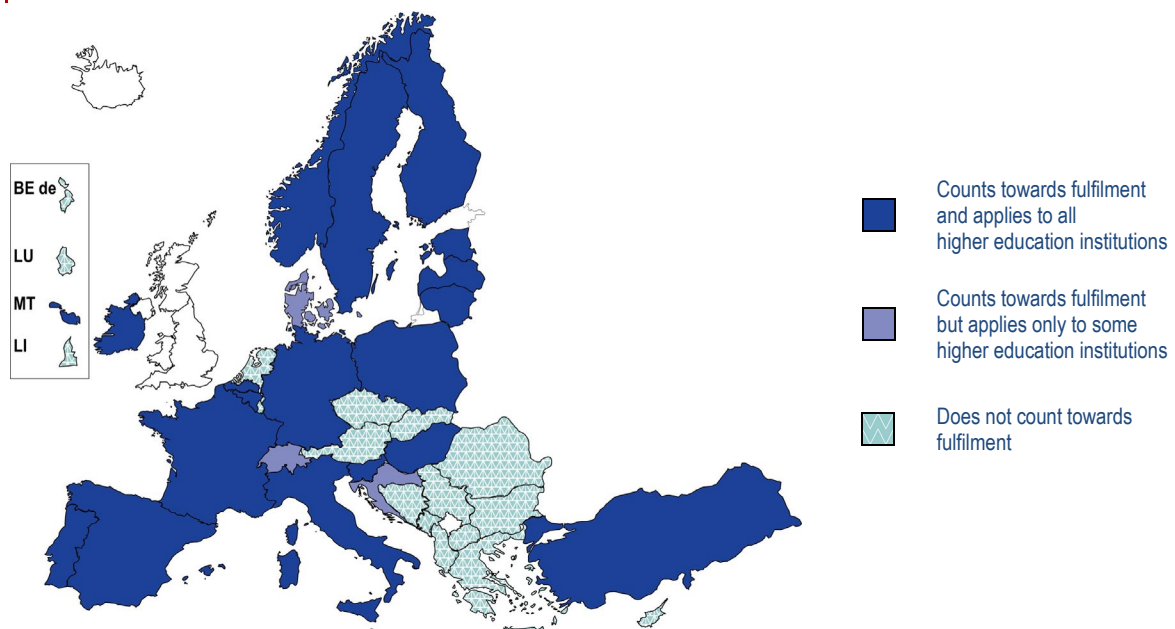
Figure 2.2 summarises the survey findings related to the possibility of accessing higher education through the recognition of non-formal and/or informal learning alone. Unfortunately, only 19 education systems make it possible to access higher education on the basis of RPL without an upper secondary school leaving certificate. Seven of them limit this possibility, by allowing the access to certain higher

education institutions only. As the map in Figure 2.2 shows, there is a more or less clear dividing line. Unlike Western Europe, in much of Central, Eastern and Southeast Europe, access to higher education without completed upper secondary education is not possible at all.

The fulfilment of study programme requirements and RPL

Similar to the second indicator (Figure 2.2), the findings from the third indicator (Figure 2.3) are mixed at best. As we saw above, fewer than half education systems rely on RPL in the first cycle to allow for access to higher education. The number improves slightly with regard to academic progression. Currently, only 22 of the 38 education systems allow RPL to contribute towards the fulfilment of study programme requirements (Figure 2.3). Put simply, informal or non-formal learning does not count toward academic progression in slightly more than half of the education systems. If we consider in how many education systems RPL applies to all higher education institutions, then we find only 19.

Figure 2.3: Prior non-formal and/or informal learning (RPL) counting towards fulfilment of a higher education study programme, 2020/2021



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

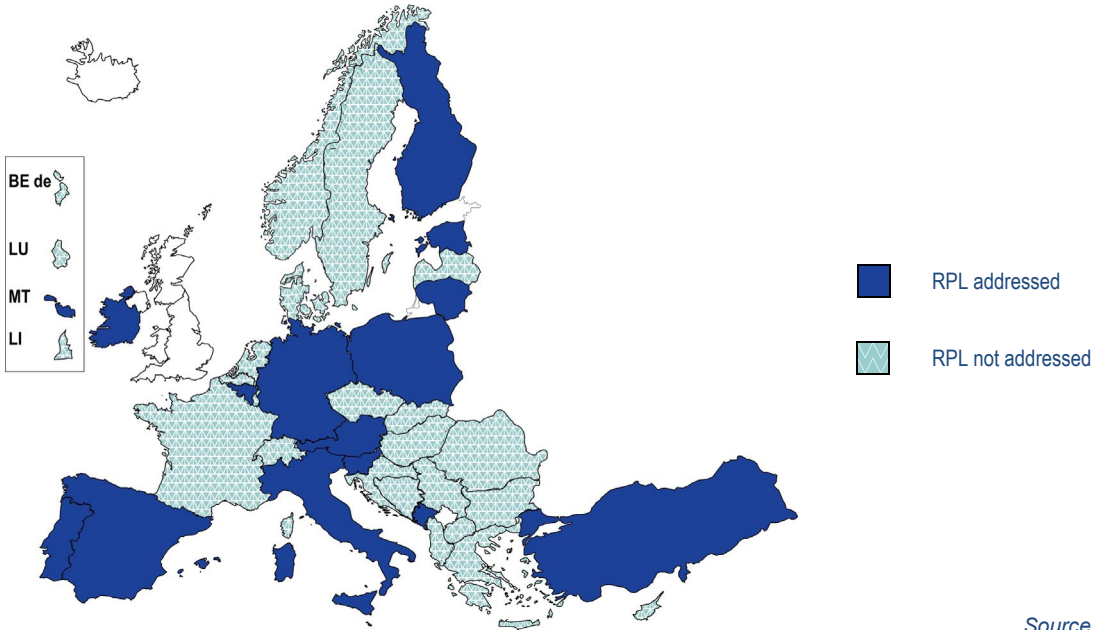
The figure indicates education systems where prior non-formal and/or informal learning counts towards the fulfilment of a higher education study programme. The data refer to first cycle studies only.

Quality assurance agencies and RPL

The second Guideline of Principle 2 explicitly demands reliable quality assurance procedures with regard to RPL. Whilst we cannot assess how reliable the established quality assurance procedures are, we can demonstrate how many countries ask their quality assurance agencies to address RPL in higher education.

As Figure 2.4 illustrates, only a minority of countries have their quality assurance agencies dealing with RPL. In particular, only 15 education systems rely on quality assurance agencies to address any issues related to RPL in higher education. Clearly, there is a lot of potential for improvement in this area, if P&Gs 2 are to be followed by the national top-level education authorities.

Figure 2.4: Quality assurance agencies addressing the recognition of prior non-formal and/or informal learning (RPL), 2020/2021



Explanatory notes

The figure illustrates in which countries (education systems) quality assurance agencies are required to address the recognition of prior non-formal and/or informal learning in higher education.

Country-specific note

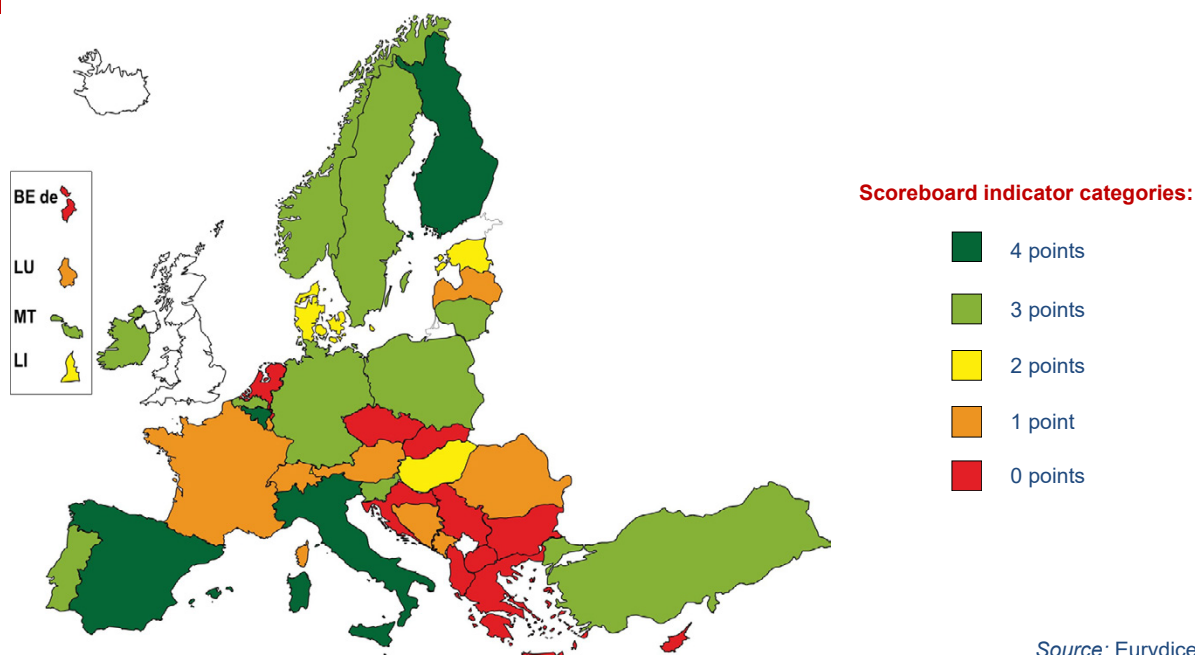
Denmark: The recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning (RPL) is not addressed by the quality assurance agency (Danish Accreditation Institution), but by the Danish Agency of Higher Education and Science (DAHES). According to ministerial orders, it is compulsory for the higher education institutions to ensure RPL in ordinary higher education and in further and continuing education. With regard to further and continuing education, DAHES also monitors the number of institutional decisions regarding admissions based on RPL.

Scoreboard indicator 2: Flexibility in higher education

Scoreboard indicator 2 aims to summarise how well the European education systems fare in implementing P&Gs 2. Like scoreboard indicator 1, the scores range from 0 to 4, depending on how many of the conditions are met. The greater the number, the higher the score. Thus, a score of 4 means that an education system has in place all the elements listed below:

1. Part-time studies, distance learning and blended learning programmes are allowed in the first cycle by all higher education institutions.
2. Candidates can enter higher education on the basis of recognition of non-formal and/or informal learning and this applies to all higher education institutions.
3. Prior non-formal and/or informal learning counts towards the fulfilment of a higher education study programme in all higher education institutions.
4. Quality assurance agencies are required to address the recognition of prior non-formal and/or informal learning in higher education.

Figure 2.5: Scoreboard indicator 2: Flexibility in higher education, 2020/2021



Source: Eurydice.

The results for scoreboard indicator 2 are mixed reflecting that Europe's education systems on average perform well on one indicator (Figure 2.1), but not so well on the other three (Figures 2.2-2.4). As a result, the map in Figure 2.5 is rather colourful. Actually, only four education systems (Belgium – French Community, Spain, Italy and Finland) reach the highest score. As many as 11 perform rather poorly in the sense that they satisfy none of the P&Gs 2 indicators. Eight education systems meet the demands of one indicator, four of two indicators and eleven education systems satisfy the conditions of three indicators. Therefore, the overall actual score is $(4 \times 4) + (3 \times 11) + (2 \times 4) + (1 \times 8) + (0 \times 11) = 65$. Dividing the actual score by the maximum (152), we can conclude that only 43% of the Principle and Guidelines 2 has been satisfied.

In conclusion, both the map of Figure 2.5 and the sum of the scoreboard indicator 2 scores show that Europe is still far from fully meeting the regulatory conditions for a flexible higher education. In other words, even though individual higher education institutions may be having some flexible study

programmes in place, the relevant top-level regulations do not yet allow for full flexibility and its respective monitoring by quality assurance agencies.

PRINCIPLE AND GUIDELINES 3: LIFELONG LEARNING

Principle:

The inclusiveness of the entire education system should be improved by developing coherent policies from early childhood education, through schooling to higher education and throughout lifelong learning.

Guidelines:

It is important to create synergies with all education levels and related policy areas (such as finance, employment, health and social welfare, housing, migration etc.) in order to develop policy measures that create an inclusive environment throughout the entire education sector that fosters equity, diversity, and inclusion, and is responsive to the needs of the wider community.

The social dimension policies should not only support current students, but also potential students in their preparation and transition into higher education. Participation in higher education has to be a lifelong option, including for adults who decide to return to or enter higher education at later stages in their lives. An inclusive approach needs to involve wider communities, higher education institutions and other stakeholder groups to co-create pathways to higher education.

Equity, diversity and inclusion should play a key role in the training of pre higher education teachers.

3.1. Introduction

Principle and Guidelines 3 and equity

This Principle and its Guidelines focus on the education system as a whole, and whether or not social dimension concerns are coherently addressed across different education levels. Behind the Principle is the ideal of creating an education system striving to be as inclusive as possible. Inclusive education is closely related to arguably the most important objective of any education system, namely, to improve the human condition. It is a fundamental role of education in democratic societies to guide all learners towards the fulfilment of their potential. Higher education is an integral component of a larger system whose overall mission is to educate for life.

Inclusion is an objective that has both an individual and a societal basis. Education is a human right, enshrined in both article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ⁽¹⁸⁾ and article 2, protocol 1 of the European Convention of Human Rights ⁽¹⁹⁾. Therefore, the opportunity for each individual to benefit from quality education is an important aspect of our understanding of societal responsibility. Furthermore, investment in education is an investment in personal and societal development. In this sense, inclusion is at the heart of our understanding of democratic culture. We cannot accept limitations on citizens' rights to education as this would be counterproductive for both citizens and society.

The Guidelines translate this vision into action. They look not only at the coordination between different levels of education, but also consider other policy areas, such as finance, employment, health and social welfare, housing and migration.

⁽¹⁸⁾ See <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

⁽¹⁹⁾ https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/convention_eng.pdf

The Guidelines emphasise support not only to actual students but also to potential students, stressing the need for flexibility in system design and for individuals to be able to move back into the education system or to enter higher education for the first time at any time during their lives. It is a crucial aspect of an inclusive higher education system in a lifelong learning perspective that adults should be able to have opportunities to learn throughout life whatever their experience of compulsory education.

Finally, the Guidelines highlight the important role played by teachers, and the consequent need for equity, diversity and inclusion to play a key role in teacher training.

Methodological challenges

This Principle and its Guidelines pose a number of challenges in terms of assessing implementation at national level. First of all, what does “synergies with all education levels” entail and how can it be assessed? How much coordination is needed between people working at the different levels? To make this concept sufficiently specific and measurable, we focus on the existence of coordination mechanisms between education levels that go beyond the existence of a ministry. In other words, while a ministry may have a coordinating function, it is coordination actions often established by a ministry which are examined here.

Assessing involvement of “related policy areas” is also extremely challenging. What level of involvement would be necessary to ensure a healthy relationship for coherent policy development? In this case we have placed the focus upon the actors involved in consultation when equity issues are discussed in higher education policy-making.

With regard to opportunities for potential students (the second Guideline), it is important to consider the many different possible options for an education system to support individual learners. The transition points within the education system are critical for an inclusive approach. Yet there are many different aspects that could potentially be considered, and the choices that are made depend on how the concept of lifelong learning is understood. Thus, in order for comparative indicators to be constructed, the most significant and relevant aspects of systems should be considered from a lifelong learning perspective. This is the reason for the choice made in this report to focus on supporting adult learners either to return to higher education or to enter higher education for the first time.

The third Guideline is probably the most straightforward to assess. Essentially it requires teacher training systems to be considered, and for the role of equity, diversity and inclusion to be articulated.

3.2. The indicators for P&Gs 3

The third chapter proposes indicators which offer answers to the following questions:

1. Are there top-level coordination mechanisms between different levels of education? (Figure 3.1)
2. Are equity and inclusion integrated into the mandate of the top-level coordination mechanisms? (Figure 3.2)
3. Do top-level coordination mechanisms involve related policy areas, such as finance, employment, housing or other social services? (Figure 3.3)
4. Do top-level public authorities provide support to adults accessing higher education? (Figure 3.4)
5. Are equity, diversity and inclusion included in teacher training programmes? (Figure 3.5)

Given the difficulty of translating the rather broad objectives of this Principle into concrete indicators of relevance for national systems, this project has chosen to break down the concepts into clear elements. For the first Guideline, the notion of synergies has been considered in terms of coordination mechanisms (Figure 3.1). Countries have reported on whether coordination mechanisms exist between all education levels. When they do, questions have focused on whether and how they deal with equity issues (Figure 3.2).

The next figure (Figure 3.3) addresses the aspect of higher education policy coordination with related and relevant policy areas. Here national units have reported on whether there is systematic consultation during the higher education policy development process with public sector representatives responsible for matters such as finance, employment, housing or other social services.

Figure 3.4 shows whether top-level authorities take measures to support adults who wish to enter higher education in adulthood.

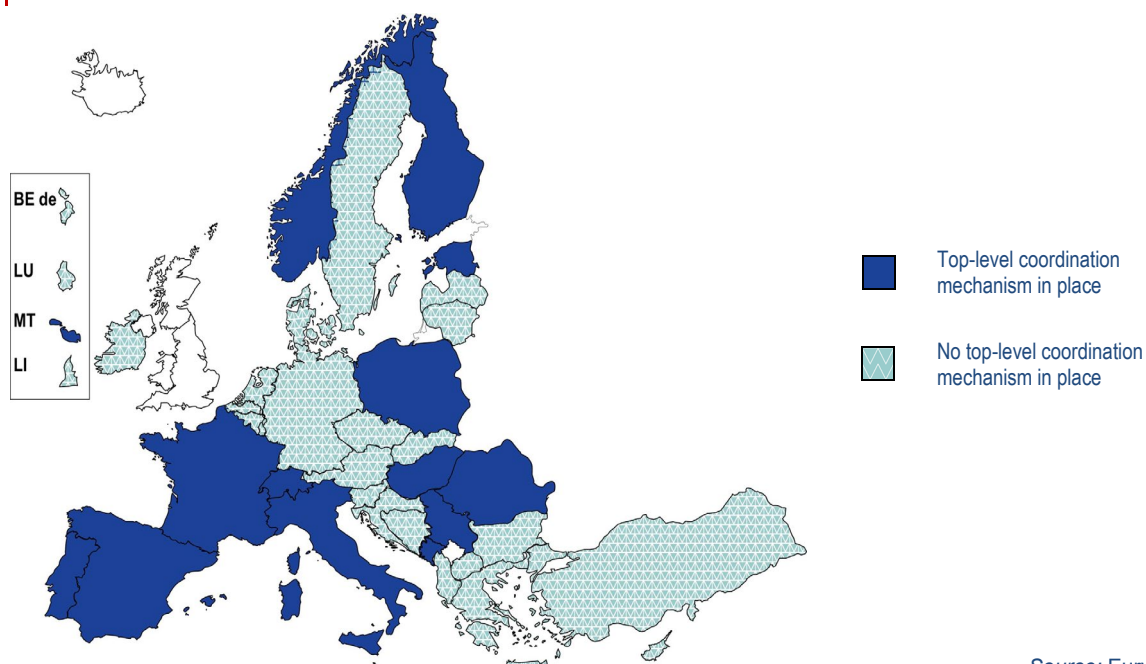
Figure 3.5 looks at whether equity, diversity and inclusion competences are integrated into initial teacher training and continuing professional development (CPD) programmes.

Cross-level coordination mechanisms

Figure 3.1 provides an overview of the education systems that have top-level coordination mechanisms. Countries were asked if a top-level coordination mechanism exists between all education levels – early childhood education and care, school education (ISCED 1-3), initial vocational education and training, continuing vocational education and training and adult education, and higher education.

Only countries where the coordination mechanism covers all of these levels are included in the category “coordination mechanisms in place”.

Figure 3.1: Top-level coordination mechanisms between different levels of education, 2020/2021



Source: Eurydice.

Fourteen countries have coordination mechanisms in place. Typically these are bodies that have been established by the ministry with a broad remit. Norway is included in this group, although it actually has two top-level authorities under the Ministry for Education: one covering early childhood education, school education and initial vocational education and the other responsible for continuing vocational education and adult education, and higher education.

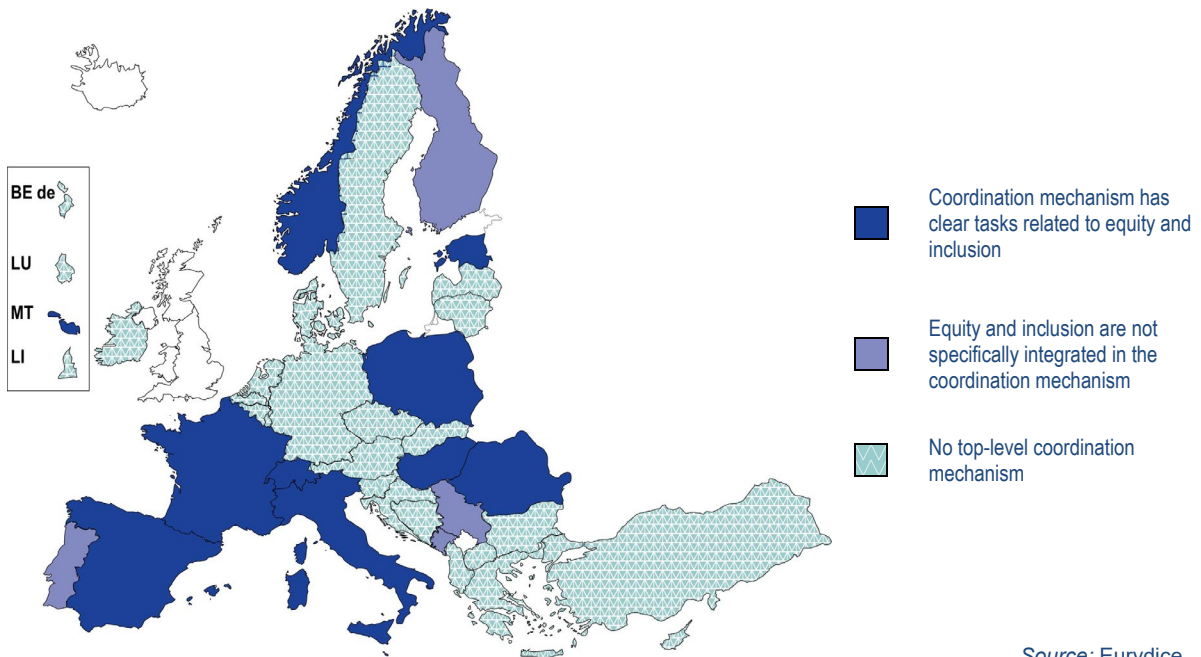
Hungary is an interesting example, whereby coordination has been developed to implement the Hungarian National Social Inclusion Strategy (HNSIS), which covers the whole education spectrum, and has a number of action lines focused on promoting social inclusion and supporting Roma and other disadvantaged groups.

The higher education systems with a coordination mechanism in place are outnumbered by the 24 systems where no such coordination mechanism exists.

Equity and inclusion tasks for coordination mechanisms

Figure 3.2 focuses only on those countries with top-level coordination mechanisms, and examines whether tasks relate clearly to equity and inclusion. A distinction is drawn between those countries where equity and inclusion are specifically integrated into the mandate of the coordination mechanism and those where it is not.

Figure 3.2: Top-level coordination mechanisms dealing with equity and inclusion, 2020/2021

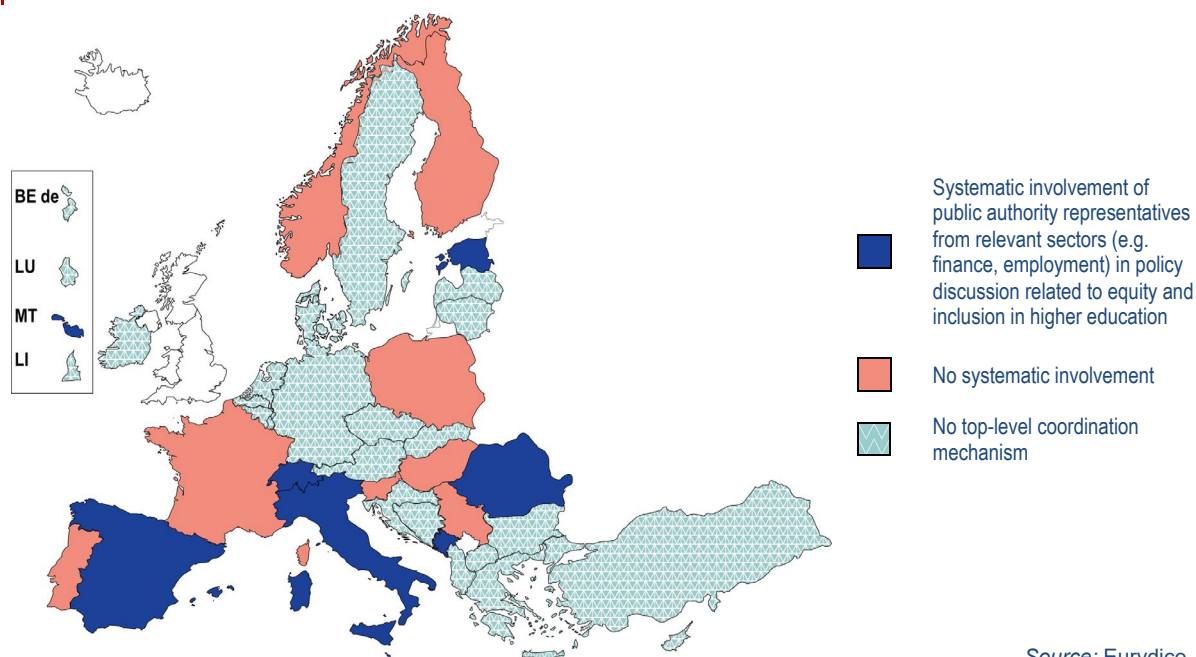


Of the countries with a coordination mechanism in place, ten of them have tasks clearly related to equity and inclusion, although in the case of Poland the focus is specifically on people with disabilities rather than a wider understanding of equity and inclusion. Four countries do not have a specific mandate for the issue of equity and inclusion.

Cross-policy coordination mechanisms on equity and inclusion

Figure 3.3 shows whether those countries with top-level coordination mechanisms involve representatives of related policy areas in discussions on equity in higher education. Countries were asked about the involvement of representatives from areas such as finance, employment, housing or other social services in policy-making discussions on equity and inclusion in higher education.

Figure 3.3: Top-level higher education coordination mechanisms systematically involving related policy sectors in discussions on equity and inclusion, 2020/2021

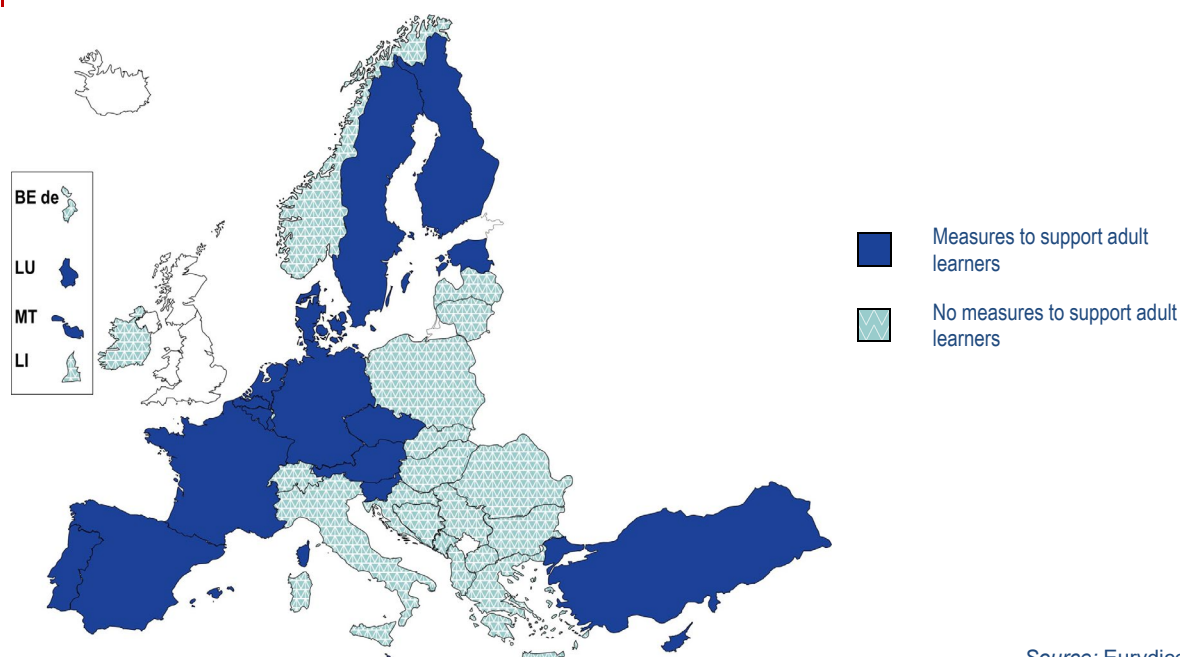


Of the fourteen systems where coordination mechanisms operate, seven of them involve representatives from other sectors in policy discussions on equity in higher education. The other seven countries do not require such involvement.

Measures to support adult learners access higher education

Figure 3.4 focuses on measures taken by top-level public authorities to support adult learners to access higher education. This could include financial support, compensation to employers or adults for study leave to prepare for higher education, support to the development of part-time study, etc.

Figure 3.4: Measures to support adults to access higher education, 2020/2021



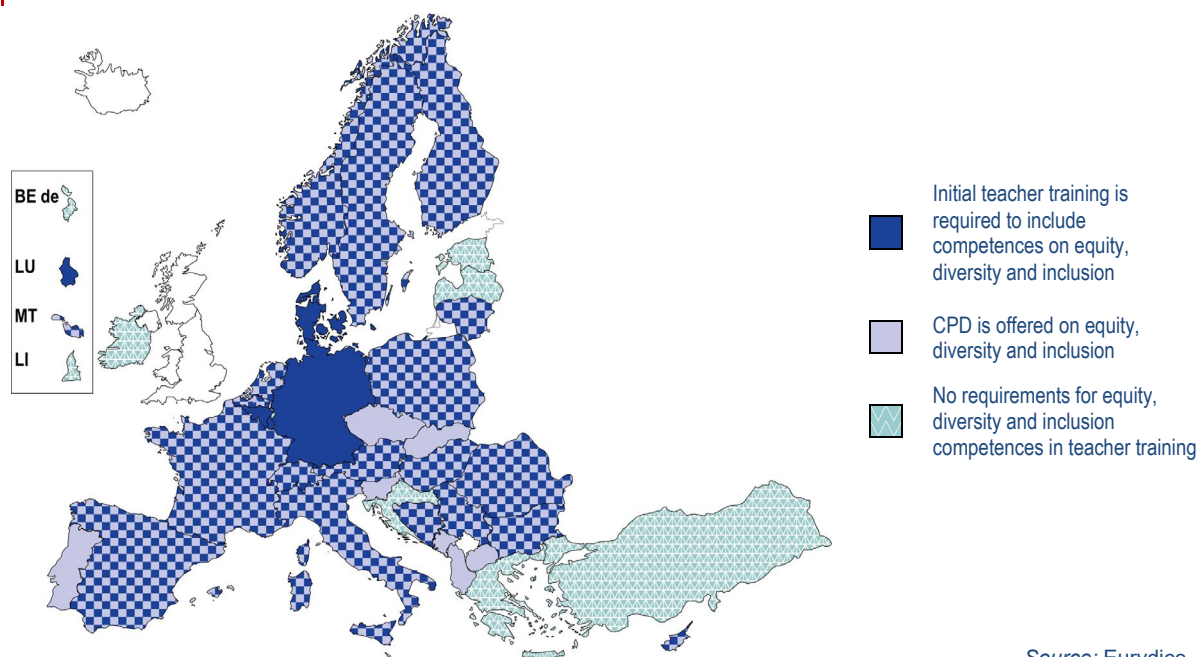
Source: Eurydice.

Eighteen countries responded that they have such measures to encourage adults to access higher education. For example, in Estonia and Finland, working adults are entitled to study leave to attend or complete higher education studies, with financial support provided to compensate the loss of income during a study leave. In Belgium (Flemish Community), the Flemish Public Employment Service (VDAB) provides incentives for adults to undertake training. In Germany, the emphasis is on developing appropriate provision for a wider range of citizens through part-time study and lifelong academic learning. Luxembourg, as well as having individual training leave, is in the process of developing a framework for micro-credentials to support the upskilling and reskilling of adults.

Equity, diversity and inclusion in teacher training programmes

Figure 3.5 shows systems where teacher training programmes systematically provide opportunities to acquire competencies on dealing with diversity and equity challenges for trainee and practising teachers at all education levels.

Figure 3.5: Equity, diversity and inclusion competences in the initial teacher training and continuing professional development (CPD) programmes, 2020/2021



Source: Eurydice.

The majority of higher education systems (22) require training on equity, diversity and inclusion in their initial teacher training programmes. A slightly higher number of systems (26) offer training on these topics through continuing professional development (CPD) programmes. These latter programmes are, however, often optional for teachers. The only countries where such training is mandatory are Lithuania, the Netherlands, Romania and Albania.

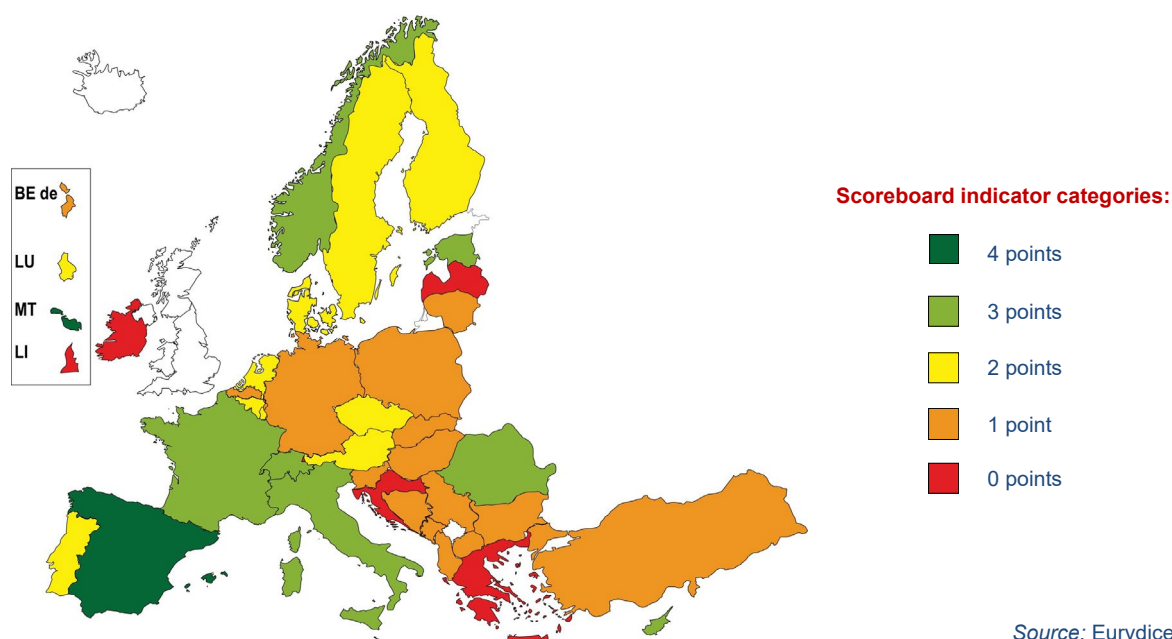
Scoreboard indicator 3: Lifelong learning

Figure 3.6 is a composite scoreboard indicator based on the elements illustrated in this section. An education system receives 4 points if all four of the following criteria are in place:

1. Coordination mechanisms between education levels with a focus on equity.
2. Involvement of representatives of other related policy areas in policy discussions on equity in higher education.
3. Top-level measures to support adult returners.
4. Initial and/or continuous teacher training programmes develop competences on equity, inclusion and diversity.

Where all four elements are in place, the country is shown in dark green and the score is 4. Similarly, countries with three elements are shown in light green and the score falls to 3. Those with two elements are shown in yellow and score 2, and countries with one element are in orange with a score of 1. Countries with none of the elements in place are shown in red and zero points are allocated.

Figure 3.6: Scoreboard indicator 3: Lifelong Learning, 2020/2021



Spain and Malta are the only two countries that can claim to have all of these lifelong learning system elements in place, and the majority of countries have more than one element to develop. Indeed seven systems are in the light green category with three criteria being met. This leaves 30 systems with at least two of the criteria still to be met. Of these, nine systems are in yellow (two criteria met), fifteen in orange (one criterion met) and five systems are in red with all of the criteria to be developed.

Translating these colours into scores gives a total of 62 out of the theoretical maximum of 152. This means that there is considerable progress to be made in this area.

PRINCIPLE AND GUIDELINES 4: DATA

Principle:

Reliable data is a necessary precondition for an evidence-based improvement of the social dimension of higher education. Higher education systems should define the purpose and goals of collecting certain types of data, taking into account the particularities of the national legal frameworks. Adequate capacities to collect, process and use such data to inform and support the social dimension of higher education should be developed.

Guidelines:

In order to develop effective policies, continuous national data collection is necessary. Within the limits of national legal frameworks, such data collection should provide information on the composition of the student body, access and participation, drop-out and completion of higher education, including the transition to the labour market after completion of studies, and allow for the identification of vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups.

In order to make such data collection comparable internationally, work on categories for administrative data collection that are relevant for the social dimension should be developed at the EHEA level through Eurostudent or similar surveys. With the aim to rationalize the process and avoid administrative burden on public administration and higher education institutions, this development should take account of existing national practices and relevant data collection processes.

Such national data collection exercises could, where relevant and necessary, be complemented by higher education institutions undertaking additional surveys, research and analysis to better understand vulnerability, disadvantages, and underrepresentation in education, as well as transitions of students across the education system.

4.1. Introduction

Principle and Guidelines 4 and equity

This Principle and its Guidelines focus on the monitoring systems that are an essential aspect of policy-making and development. While it is important for clear strategies and objectives to be in place, they amount to little more than positive intentions if there is no monitoring of their impact. The Principle highlights that data should be relevant to the goals that are set in place. In addition, if data is collected but not used to support the further development of social dimension policies, then this is also insufficient.

The Guidelines outline the kind of national processes that are required within a successful equity policy. First of all, it is important to collect relevant information on the composition of the student body, access and participation, as well as drop-out and completion of higher education and the transition into the labour market. While there may be some limits to the nature of data on personal characteristics that are collected in some systems (e.g. legislation may forbid collecting data on ethnicity), wherever there are vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups, it is important that they can be identified through the data collected.

The second Guideline encourages systems to improve and develop their monitoring systems using relevant categories of administrative data that can be used for international comparison. It also encourages national authorities to participate in the Eurostudent and similar surveys – as this allows the picture of social dimension progress at European level to be constructed.

The third Guideline encourages more localised research on social dimension issues to be undertaken.

Methodological challenges

This Principle and Guidelines can be considered as relatively straightforward. There are of course challenges in determining whether or not national data are reliable. However, it should be relatively clear-cut to understand whether or not appropriate national data collection exists.

In terms of considering which characteristics of potentially vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented students are captured, we considered three different options. The first was to ask each national unit to list the categories used in national data collection; the second was to provide a short list of most likely categories to consider; and the third was to provide a long list of potential categories with the possibility to expand the list if other categories exist.

The problem with the first option is that countries may describe similar categories using different terminology, and this would lead to challenges in subsequently creating comparable categories. In addition, it would also be possible for some categories to be overlooked even if they exist. The second option would be a pragmatic choice, but would most probably result in incomplete information. The final option (long list with the option to expand with the category “other”) was felt to be the most likely to capture the data categories used in the different countries. Consequently, we chose this last option.

The third Guideline is impossible for this project to assess as it is a matter for individual higher education institutions. It is beyond the scope of this project to assess when additional surveys and research would be considered “relevant and necessary”.

4.2. The indicators for P&Gs 4

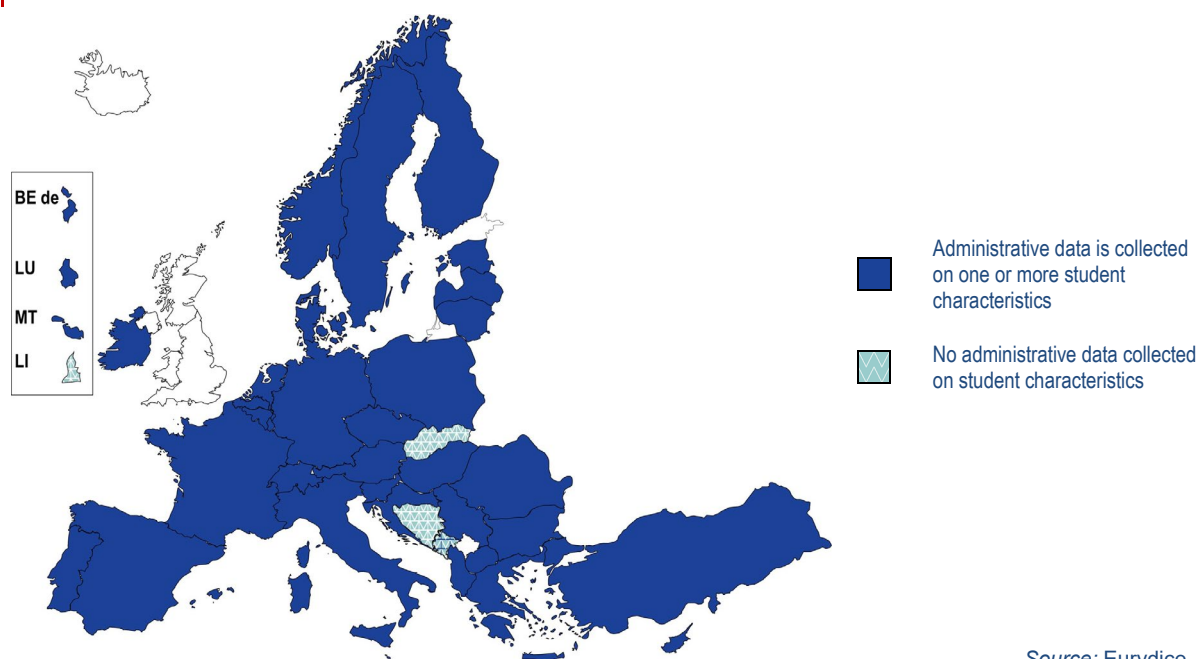
The fourth chapter proposes indicators to answer the following questions:

1. Is administrative data collected at national level on student characteristics? (Figure 4.1)
2. Is data collected on degree completion rates at the end of the first cycle? And is this data linked to specific student characteristics? (Figure 4.2)
3. Is data collected on completion rates at the end of the first year of the first cycle? (Figure 4.3)
4. Did the countries participate in the Eurostudent VII survey project? (Figure 4.4)

Administrative data on student characteristics

Figure 4.1 shows whether administrative data on student characteristics at national level is collected at all, and this is followed by a table of the specific characteristics monitored in each country.

Figure 4.1: Administrative data on student characteristics, 2020/2021



Source: Eurydice.

The majority of higher education systems (33) collect administrative data on several student characteristics. However, four systems (Slovakia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Liechtenstein and Montenegro) report that there is no administrative data collected by top level public authorities on student characteristics.

Table for 4.1: Administrative data on student characteristics, 2020/2021

	Age	Gender	Sexual orientation	Labour market status prior to HE entry (*)	Non-standard entry qualifications	First generation	Residing in certain geographical area	People with special educational needs	Disability	Ethnicity or race	Migrants or from a migrant background	Refugee status	Religious affiliation	Low socio-economic status	Family background (**)	Other
BE fr	●	●		●	●	●	●					●				●
BE de	●	●					●									
BE nl									●					●	●	●
BG	●	●					●									●
CZ	●	●		●			●									●
DK	●	●		●		●	●		●		●			●	●	●
DE	●	●		●	●	●	●		●		●			●		●
EE	●	●						●								
IE	●	●			●		●		●	●				●	●	
EL																
ES	●	●					●				●			●		
FR	●	●		●			●	●	●					●		
HR	●	●				●	●	●	●			●		●	●	
IT	●	●					●									
CY	●	●					●	●		●						
LV	●	●					●									
LT	●	●				●			●		●			●		
LU	●	●														
HU	●	●					●	●	●							
MT	●	●			●	●	●	●	●		●			●		
NL	●	●			●	●	●	●	●		●					
AT	●					●					●			●		
PL	●	●							●							
PT	●	●		●	●	●	●		●		●			●	●	
RO	●	●					●	●	●	●				●	●	●
SI	●	●										●				
SK																
FI	●	●		●	●	●	●				●			●		●
SE	●	●				●	●				●				●	
AL	●	●					●		●				●			
BA																
CH	●	●			●		●				●					●
LI																
ME																
MK	●	●		●			●	●	●	●				●	●	
NO	●	●														
RS		●					●									●
TR	●	●				●			●							●

(*) (e.g. unemployed, already working)

(**) (e.g. single parent, care home upbringing)

As far as characteristics are concerned, age and gender are routinely collected. Attention to specific geographic areas is also commonplace, with 24 systems collecting such data. Disability data is collected by 16 systems, data on low socio-economic status by 14, and data on migrant status in 11. There are no systems which collect data on sexual orientation, while the most common specification for the answer “other”, which occurs 11 times, was nationality.

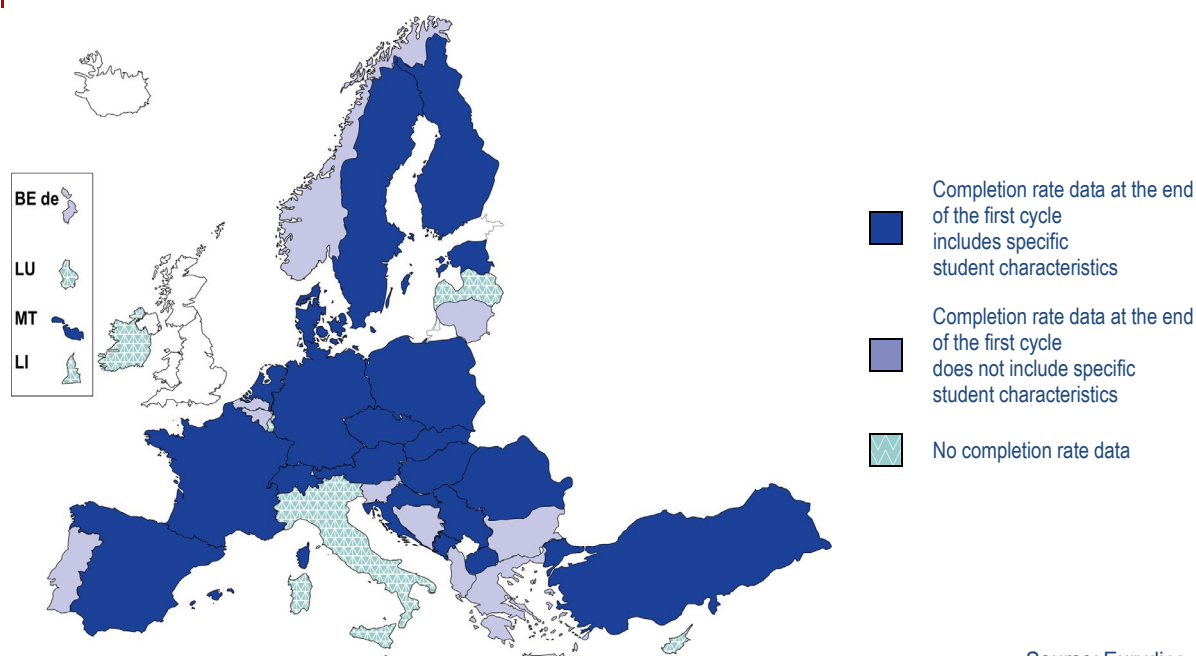
It is also interesting to note that countries that participate in the Eurostudent project (see Figure 4.4) generally collect a wider range of information on student characteristics compared to those that do not. It is, however, impossible to know if countries have expanded their range of data collection as a result of the experience of participating in the Eurostudent project, or if those countries already collecting a wider range of student data were more inspired to participate in Eurostudent.

Completion rates and student characteristics

Figure 4.2 shows whether degree completion rate data is collected, and whether this data can be linked to specific characteristics of students. This means, for example, that it would be possible to find out whether a higher proportion of students who fail to complete their studies are from disadvantaged or vulnerable categories, and hence to use the data to make appropriate policy interventions.

The figure considers the end of the first cycle as the point where completion rate data is considered. The reason for this choice is that the first cycle involves the greatest number of students, and is therefore likely to be the most representative cycle.

Figure 4.2: Administrative data on completion rates and student characteristics at the end of the first cycle, 2020/2021

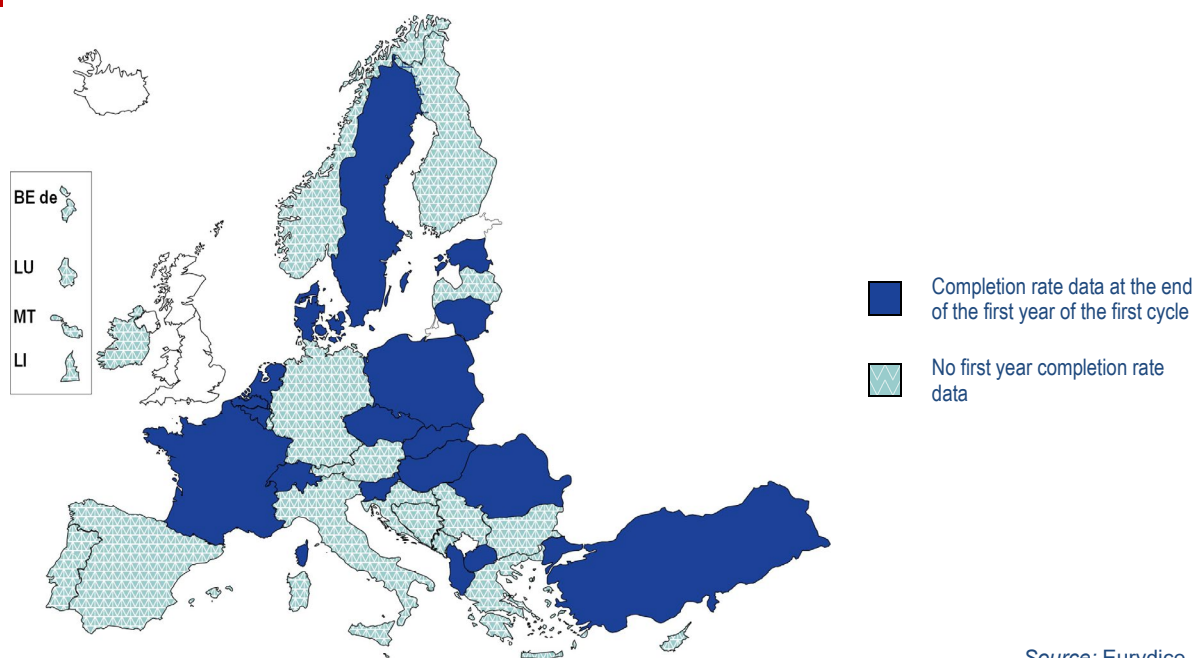


There are 32 higher education systems where public authorities collect completion rate data at the end of the first cycle. Of these, 21 are able to identify specific student characteristics. Six systems do not collect completion rate data at the end of first cycle study programmes.

Completion rates at the end of the first year of the first cycle

Figure 4.3 shows whether data is collected on completion at the end of the first year of the first cycle. This is the point where most drop-out occurs, and hence any effective policy interventions to address this challenge would be assisted by reliable data.

Figure 4.3: Collection of first year completion rate data, 2020/2021



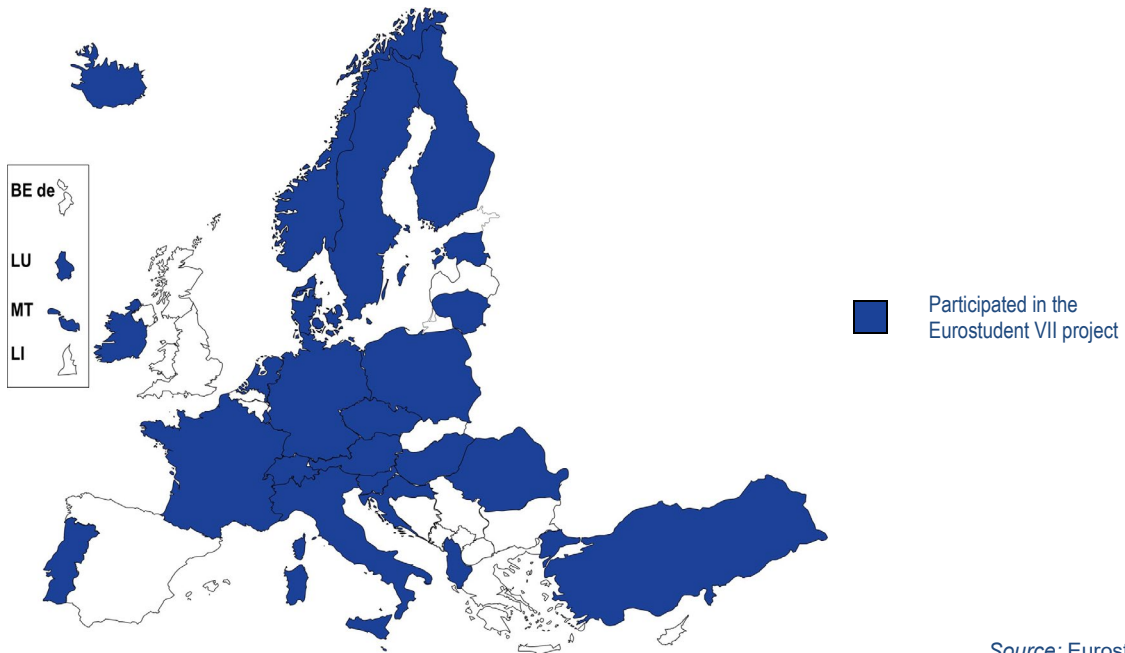
Source: Eurydice.

The map shows that European countries are quite evenly split between those where completion rate data is collected at the end of the first year of the first cycle (18 systems) and those where it is not (19 systems).

Participation in the Eurostudent survey

Figure 4.4 shows the countries that took part in the most recent Eurostudent survey project, Eurostudent VII (DZHW, 2021).

Figure 4.4: Countries that participated in the Eurostudent VII project, 2018-2021



Source: Eurostudent.

Despite the high quality of the information that Eurostudent provides about the living conditions of students, there are still several countries that choose not to participate in the project. The reasons behind this negative choice have not been explored in this project.

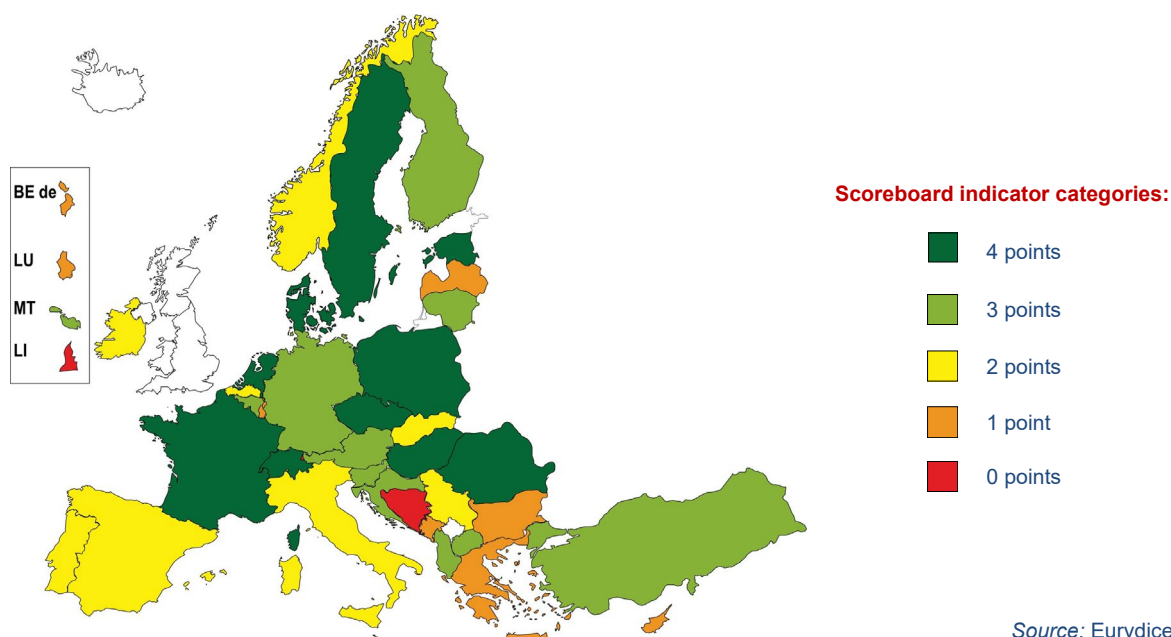
Scoreboard indicator 4: Data 2020/2021

Figure 4.5 is a composite scoreboard indicator based on the elements illustrated in this section. In sum, an education system gets 4 points if all four of the following criteria are in place:

1. At least one student characteristic, in addition to gender and age, is monitored at entry, during studies or upon graduation. For this criterion, administrative data is considered.
2. Vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups of students can be identified in completion rate data.
3. Completion rate data at the end of the first year of the first cycle is available to top level policy makers.
4. Participation in Eurostudent, with Eurostudent VII as the reference publication.

Where all four elements are in place, the country is shown in dark green and the score is 4. Similarly, countries with three elements are shown in light green and the score falls to 3. Those with two elements are shown in yellow and score 2, and with one are in orange with a score of 1. Countries with none of the elements in place are shown in red and zero points are allocated.

Figure 4.5: Scoreboard indicator 4: Data 2020/2021



Twenty-one higher education systems are divided between the dark (10) and light green (11) categories. A further nine systems are in yellow, while six systems are in orange, and two in red.

Overall, countries score a combined 97 out of the maximum 152, and are thus more advanced with this scoreboard indicator than with the others in this report.

PRINCIPLE AND GUIDELINES 5: GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

Principle:

Public authorities should have policies that enable higher education institutions to ensure effective counselling and guidance for potential and enrolled students in order to widen their access to, participation in and completion of higher education studies. These services should be coherent across the entire education system, with special regard to transitions between different educational levels, educational institutions and into the labour market.

Guidelines:

Public authorities should create conditions that enable collaboration between different public institutions that provide counselling and guidance services together with higher education institutions in order to create synergies and omit duplication of similar services. These services should uphold the principles of clarity and user-friendliness, because end users must be capable to understand them easily.

Within a diverse student body, special attention should be directed towards students with physical and psychological health challenges. These students should have access to professional support to secure their success in accessing and completing higher education studies. Special focus should be placed on prevention of psychological challenges caused by the organisation of study and students' living conditions.

Public authorities should also consider setting up ombudsperson-type institutions that will have the capacity and knowledge to mediate any conflicts, particularly related to equity issues that may arise during accessing or participating in higher education, or conflicts that hinder the completion of studies.

5.1. Introduction

Principle and Guidelines 5 and equity

This Principle and its Guidelines focus on the capacity of guidance and counselling systems to support both potential and enrolled students to succeed to the best of their abilities. The Principle draws attention to the need for coherence in service provision across the entire education system.

The impact of guidance and counselling is an under-researched area at European level. This is no doubt related to the complexity of understanding the very different guidance and counselling systems that exist in Europe, and also related to the area not being acknowledged as a priority. Nevertheless, research gives credence to the view expressed in the Principle and Guidelines that such services can play an important role in supporting widening participation and ensuring educational achievement for disadvantaged students. For example, Herbaut and Geven (2019) find that outreach policies are broadly effective in increasing access for disadvantaged students when these policies include active counselling, but not when they only provide general information on higher education. Also, Sneyers and De Witte (2016) show that student-faculty mentoring has a significant positive effect on both retention and graduation.

The first Guideline points to the conditions that enable collaboration and also notes the need for clarity and user-friendliness of such services.

The Guidelines emphasise support not only to actual students but also to potential students, stressing the need for flexibility in system design and for individuals to be able to move back into the education system at any time during their lives.

Finally, the Guidelines highlight the need for institutions that have the capacity to mediate conflicts, particularly related to equity issues.

Methodological challenges

While information was also gathered on academic and career guidance services, this report has chosen to focus in particular on psychological counselling, designed to support the wellbeing of students and in particular those learners who face challenges with their mental health. Research suggests that specific attention to wellbeing can play an important and positive role in supporting students. While this is true at all times, it may be particularly important in light of the impact of the pandemic (and measures to contain it) on students' mental health. An analysis of this particular category of services, therefore, seems to be particularly significant at the present time.

This project has also considered that it may be unhelpful to mix information on psychological counselling services with information on academic or careers guidance services. However, the analysis of this category could provide a solid basis to elaborate similar indicators to focus on other services, such as academic guidance or career guidance, in the future.

The next challenge is to find out whether there is a top-level legal requirement to provide psychological counselling services accessible to higher education students and, if there is, who is responsible for these services. Extending from this information, the project explores whether psychological counselling services are focused on students with specific characteristics.

One important methodological problem is that psychological counselling services may exist, but may not necessarily be easily accessible for all students. One way of addressing this is to find out if there are requirements for quality assurance of such services. While quality assurance does not guarantee that all learners who have a need for such services are able to access them, a robust quality assurance system would certainly consider user needs.

The second Guideline states that special attention should be directed towards students with physical and psychological health challenges. A necessary condition is that such students are aware of the relevant service provision. From the service provider perspective, this can be done through specific programmes or information campaigns.

Finally, the last Guideline focuses on the existence of institutions that have a formal role in mediating conflicts in higher education. This is relatively straightforward to monitor. However, there are cases where institutions may exist with a partial or limited role. For example, bodies within higher education institutions (such as student organisations) may be involved in such mediation processes or national bodies may have responsibility for interpreting and amending a legal framework, but not necessarily in resolving conflicts. This project has chosen a broadly inclusive approach to such cases.

5.2. The indicators for P&Gs 5

The first indicator provides information on the existence of a top-level legal requirement to provide psychological counselling services. The second indicator identifies if the service providers are the higher education institutions themselves or other public bodies. The third indicator looks at whether the service provision focuses on students with specific characteristics. The fourth indicator addresses the issue of quality assurance, examining whether a quality assurance system is required in different

countries. Finally, the last indicator corresponds to the last Guideline and shows in which education systems there are institutions that play a formal role in conflict mediation.

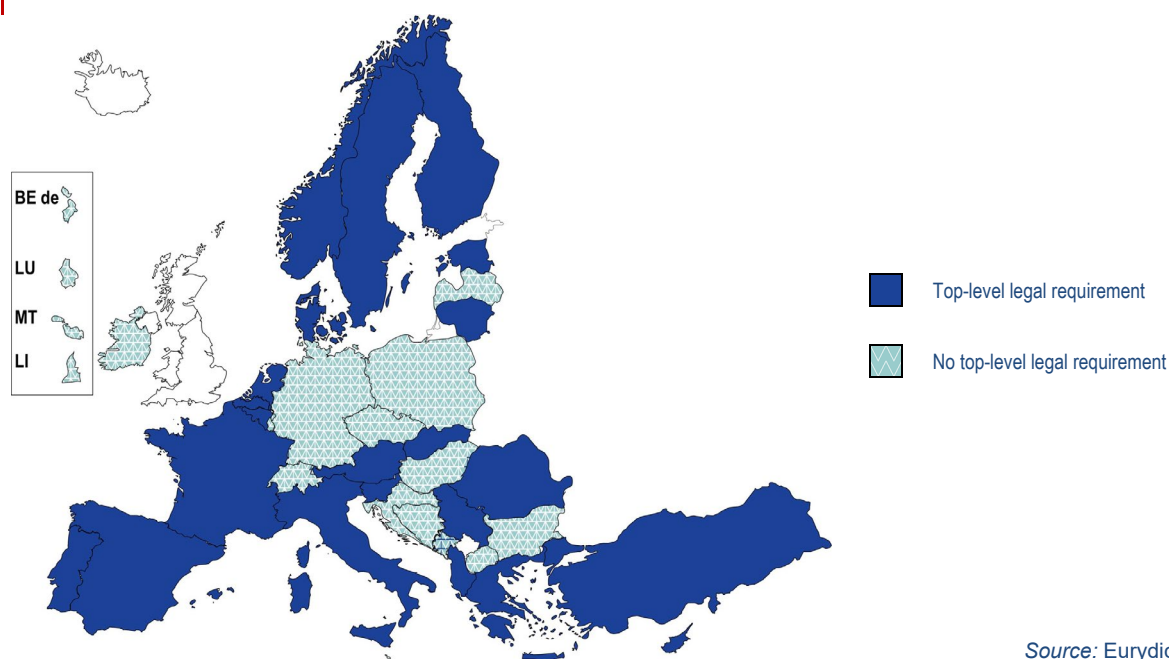
The fifth chapter proposes indicators which answer the following questions:

1. Do educational systems have a top-level legal requirement to provide psychological counselling services? (Figure 5.1)
2. Who are the main providers for psychological counselling services among higher education institutions or public authorities in each country? To what extent is the availability of services spread out at different levels? (Figure 5.2)
3. Do psychological counselling services focus on students with specific characteristics? (Figure 5.3)
4. Is quality assurance of psychological counselling services required by law? (Figure 5.4)
5. Do countries have public institutions with a formal role in mediating equity-related conflicts in higher education? (Figure 5.5)

Top-level legal requirement

The first indicator focuses on whether or not there is a top-level legal requirement to provide psychological counselling services. The criterion for the indicator is that the top-level legal requirement should specifically address at least one of these two categories: students already enrolled in higher education institutions or potential students, that is, upper secondary school students or adults interested in entering higher education.

Figure 5.1: Education systems that have top-level legal requirement to provide psychological counselling services, 2020/2021



Source: Eurydice.

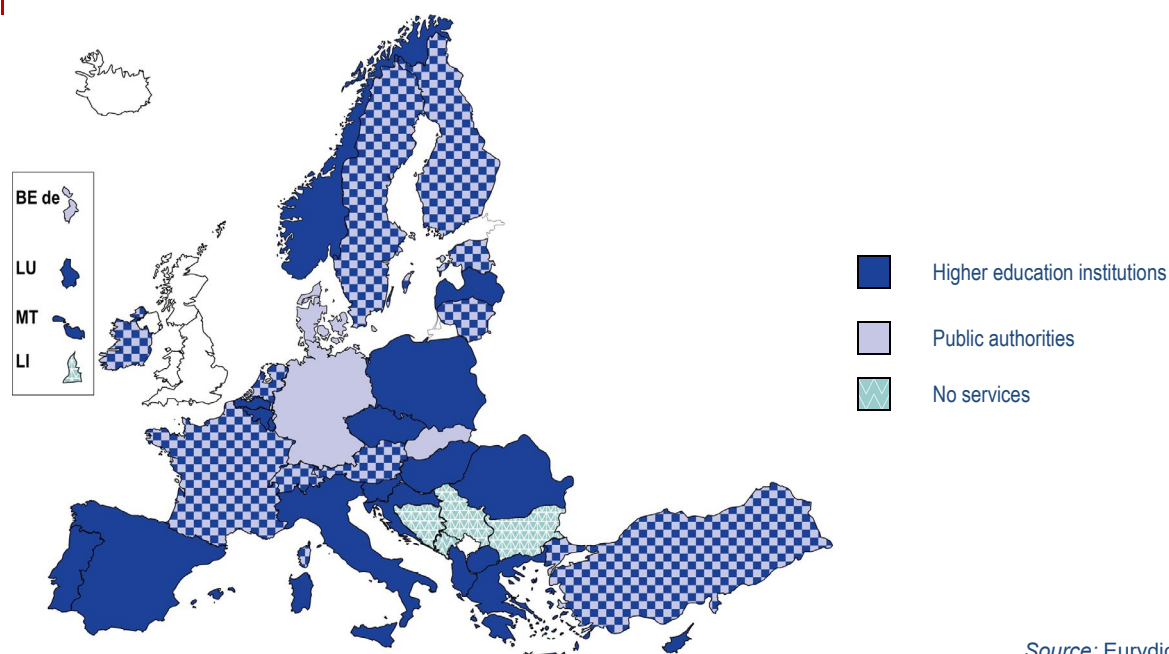
Figure 5.1 shows that of the 38 countries that provided data, 22 have a top-level legal requirement to provide psychological counselling services.

Service providers

If the first indicator offers an overall picture of the de jure presence of psychological counselling services, it is useful to have information also on the de facto presence of these services. The second indicator is complementary to the first, as it offers an overview of the provision of services regardless of whether they are guaranteed by law.

Figure 5.2 shows who the main providers of psychological counselling services are in each country: higher education institutions or public authorities (local or regional public authorities, or top-level public authorities).

Figure 5.2: Providers for psychological counselling services, 2020/2021



Source: Eurydice.

In most countries (29) higher education institutions are the main providers of psychological counselling services. In 14 countries, public authorities provide services, and in Belgium (German-speaking Community), Denmark, Germany and Slovakia they are the sole provider. In most countries where public authorities provide psychological counselling services to students they are following a legal requirement to do so. The exception is Germany, which does not have a top-level requirement to provide psychological counselling services and where services are organised by publically funded student support organisations.

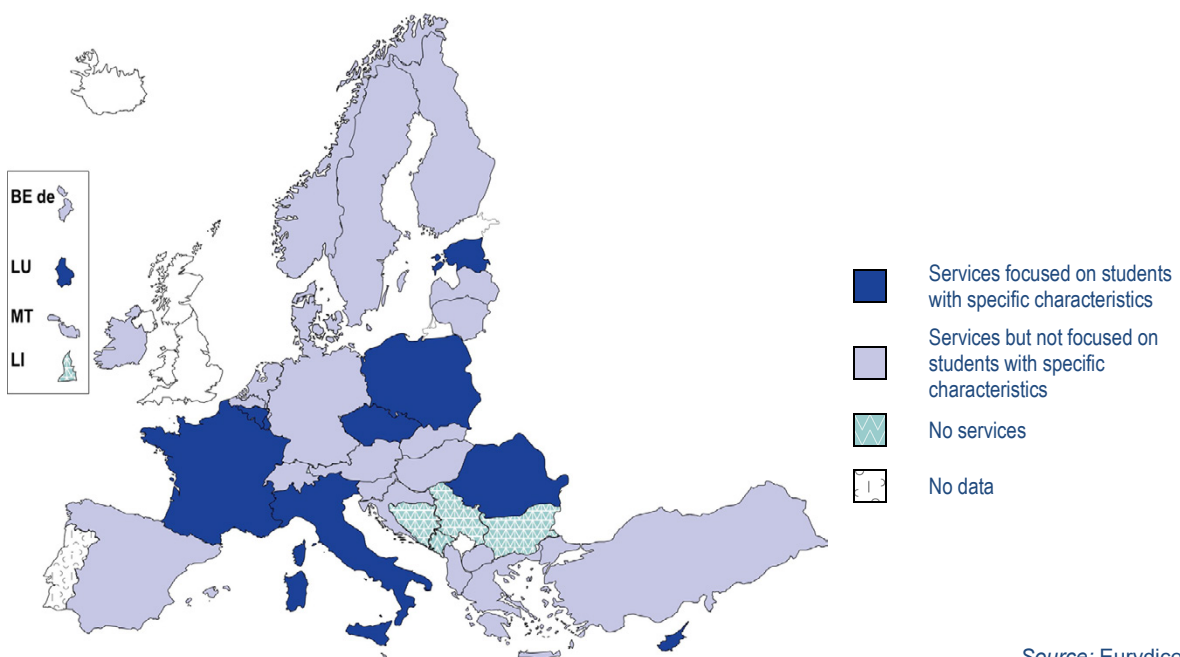
Comparing Figure 5.2 to Figure 5.1, it is striking that in several countries – Latvia, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Switzerland and North Macedonia – psychological counselling services are provided to students even when there is no legal requirement in place. In most of these countries, it is higher education institutions that are the main providers of services. However, it is unclear if services are provided by all higher education institutions or by only some. This ambiguity may be a consequence of having no legal requirement to provide such services.

The co-presence of service providers (in Estonia, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Austria, Finland, Sweden and Switzerland) shows that services may be spread out at different levels (associations, higher education institutions, local or regional public authorities). Having a range of service provision may be a factor that facilitates access for students.

Need-based psychological counselling services

The third indicator provides more specific information on the psychological counselling services. It inquires whether services are particularly oriented to students with specific characteristics. Having a particular orientation does not mean that only certain categories of students are able to access psychological counselling services. Rather it means that the services may focus their outreach activities at particular categories of students. This might cover special educational needs, disability, gender identity and sexual orientation, migrants and refugees, socio-economic status or any other characteristics of the student population where particular support may be required. The criterion for this indicator is that at least one specific characteristic should be a focus of attention.

Figure 5.3: Psychological counselling services focused on students with specific characteristics, 2020/2021



Source: Eurydice.

Country-specific note

Portugal: Higher education institutions, within the framework of their autonomy, define the profile of the services and the students they target.

Figure 5.3 shows that of the 32 countries that provide psychological counselling services 9 orient the services particularly to students with specific characteristics. Most commonly, these are students with disabilities, with special educational needs, or from a migrant background. One notable exception is Belgium (French Community) where the focus is on students in the first year of their study programme.

Quality assurance

The fourth indicator provides information on quality assurance. Countries were asked whether quality assurance of psychological counselling services is required by law. The criterion for this indicator is that at least one actor (“higher education institutions”, “external quality assurance agency” or “other”) is indicated as legally responsible for quality assurance.

Figure 5.4: Requirement for psychological counselling services to be subject to quality assurance, 2020/2021

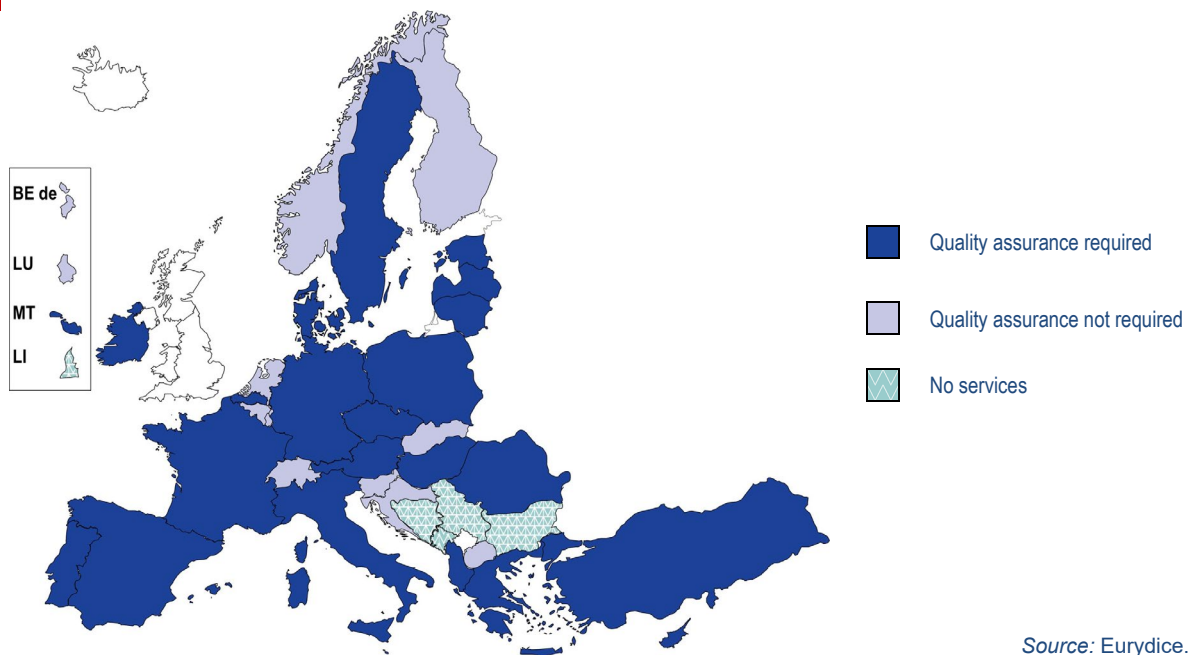
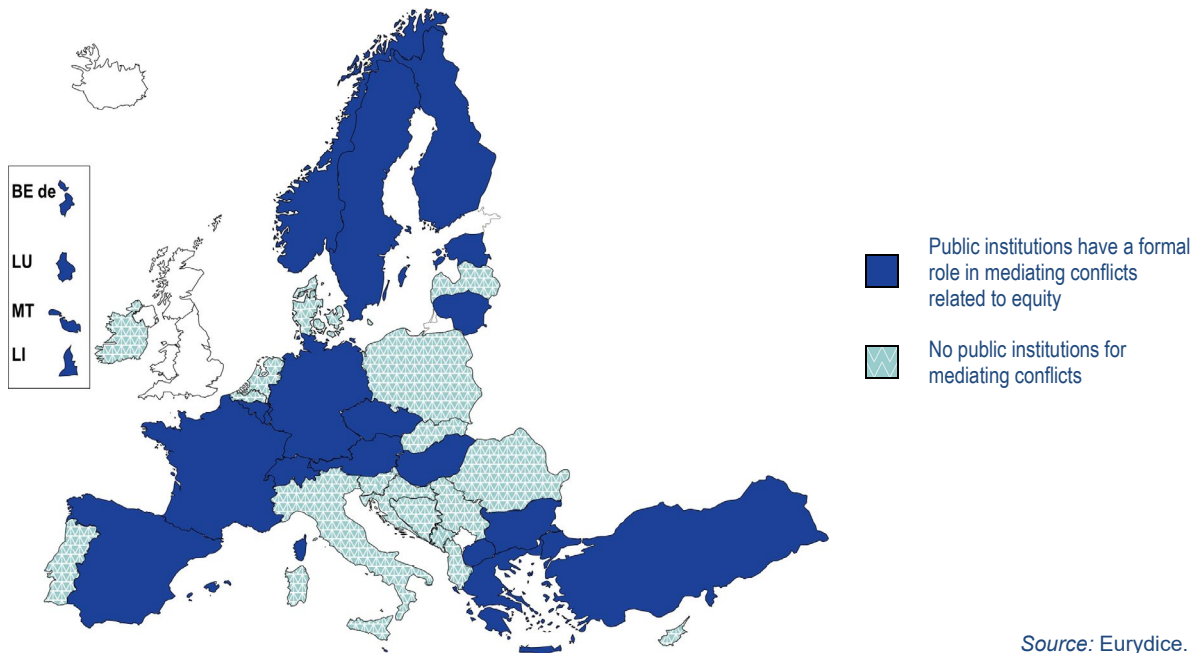


Figure 5.4 shows that the vast majority of European countries offering psychological counselling services also have a requirement for quality assurance to be in place. In some of these cases, there may be no requirement for higher education institutions to offer psychological counselling services. However, when such a service is provided, there is automatically a quality assurance requirement attached to the service provision. This is the case, for example, in Hungary.

Mediation and conflict resolution

Figure 5.5 shows those countries where public institutions provide formal mediation for conflicts. The conflicts in question also need to include equity in order for these public institutions to be shown in this figure. The criterion for this indicator is that the presence of such formal mediation related to equity is guaranteed either at access, during higher education studies or at graduation.

Figure 5.5: Public institutions that have a formal role in mediating equity-related conflicts in higher education, 2020/2021



A conflict mediation service is present in the institutions of slightly more than half of the countries participating in the project (21 systems). This service may play a role in relation to equity issues.

Germany and Switzerland are countries with very diversified mediation services. In both countries, the role of the ombudsman focuses mainly on the mediation of conflicts related to studies and research, but can also address conflicts related to equity. In Germany, for specific equity issues, higher education institutions guarantee the intervention of specialised intermediaries such as “gender commissioners” that support the promotion of gender equality. Other advocates or lobbies also represent students with disabilities and have an important function as intermediaries between the students and the governing boards of higher education institutions.

In Belgium (French Community) public institutions have a broad formal role in mediating conflicts. “Commissaires et Délégués” are appointed by the Government of the French Community, and carry out supervisory and advisory missions with regard to higher education institutions. They are responsible for ensuring the legality of decisions taken by the institutions; informing students about their eligibility for funding; receiving appeals from students against any decision taken by institutions in relation to a refusal of enrolment, or of non-payment of enrolment/registration fees. Equity is part of their mandate.

In Czechia, the position of “school ombudsman” established in 2014, deals with issues of equity in higher education as well as at lower levels of the education system. There is also an institute of the “public defender of rights” (ombudsman) that may intervene in case of discrimination.

Sweden has two relevant bodies. The Higher Education Appeals Board is the public authority responsible for hearing appeals against decisions made in the higher education and post-secondary higher vocational education sectors. The Equality Ombudsman receives information and complaints about discrimination, risks of discrimination and deficiencies in employers' and education providers' efforts to prevent discrimination. It investigates impartially whether the Discrimination Act has been, or risks being contravened.

Scoreboard indicator 5: Accessibility of psychological counselling services

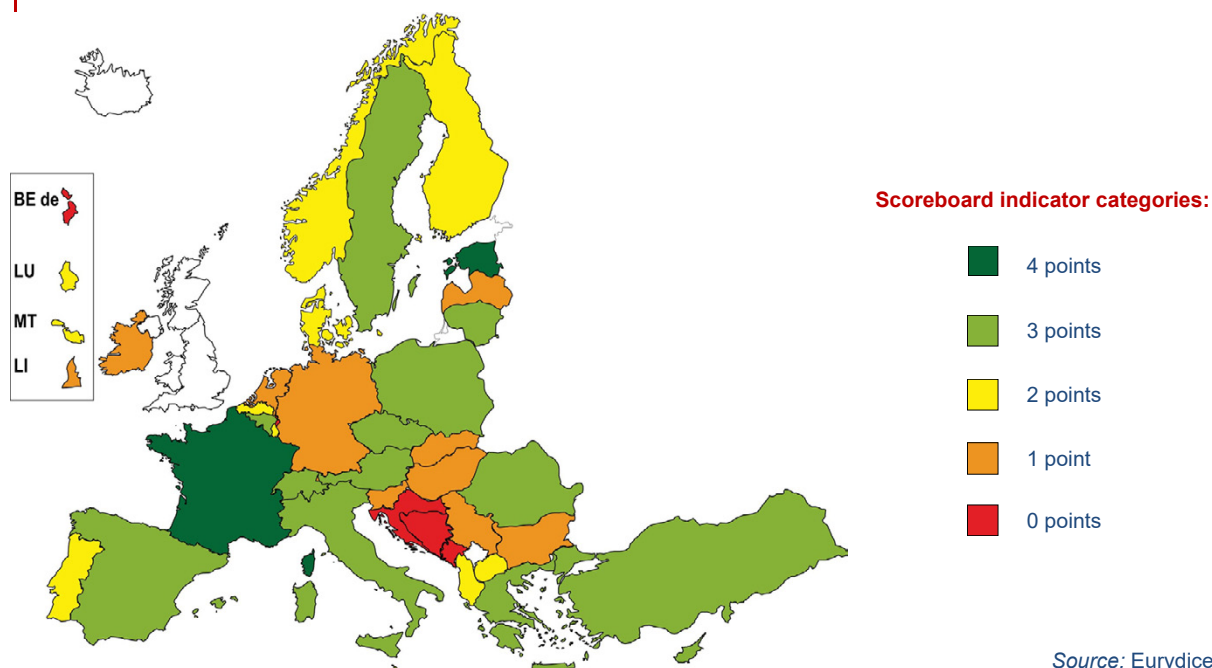
Scoreboard indicator 5 aims to summarise all the information above, and to display visually the extent to which countries take responsibility for the accessibility of psychological guidance and counselling services in higher education institutions.

Figure 5.6 is a composite scoreboard indicator based on the elements illustrated in this section. In sum, an education system gets 4 points if the four following elements are in place:

1. Top-level legal requirement to provide psychological counselling services for potential or enrolled students.
2. Psychological counselling services focused on students with specific characteristics.
3. Quality assurance of psychological counselling services is required.
4. Presence of public institution(s) with a formal role of mediating in conflicts related to equity in higher education.

Where four elements are in place, the country is shown in dark green and the score is 4. Similarly, countries with three elements are shown in light green and the score falls to 3; those with two are shown in yellow and score 2, and one criterion is represented in orange with a score of 1. Countries with none of the elements in place are shown in red and zero points are allocated.

Figure 5.6: Scoreboard indicator 5: Psychological counselling systems to support both potential and enrolled students, 2020/2021



Source: Eurydice.

This scoreboard indicator shows that two countries –Estonia and France – meet all the criteria for the dark green category. Thirteen countries are in the light green category and score three points.

Nine countries are in the yellow category with two criteria achieved. Ten systems are in the orange category where one of the elements is in place. Four systems (the German-speaking Community of Belgium, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro) are concentrated in the red category, with none of the criteria being met.

Overall, the combined score for the countries participating in the report is 76 out of a theoretical maximum of 152. In other words, countries are approximately half way along the journey towards fulfilling this particular commitment.

PRINCIPLE AND GUIDELINES 6: FUNDING

Principle:

Public authorities should provide sufficient and sustainable funding and financial autonomy to higher education institutions enabling them to build adequate capacity to embrace diversity and contribute to equity and inclusion in higher education.

Guidelines:

Higher education funding systems should facilitate the attainment of strategic objectives related to the social dimension of higher education. Higher education institutions should be supported and rewarded for meeting agreed targets in widening access, increasing participation in and completion of higher education studies, in particular in relation to vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups. Mechanisms for achieving these targets should not have negative financial consequences for higher education institutions' core funding.

Financial support systems should aim to be universally applicable to all students, however, when this is not possible, the public student financial support systems should be primarily needs-based and should make higher education affordable for all students, foster access to and provide opportunities for success in higher education. They should mainly contribute to cover both the direct costs of study (fees and study materials) and the indirect costs (e.g. accommodation, which is becoming increasingly problematic for students across the EHEA due to the increased housing, living, and transportation costs, etc.).

6.1. Introduction

Principle and Guidelines 6 and equity

This Principle and its Guidelines focus on two key objectives of higher education public funding. First, that it should be sufficient and sustainable. And second, that higher education institutions should have and should use autonomy to embrace diversity and contribute to equity and inclusion.

The first Guideline proposes that higher education funding systems should be closely aligned to strategic objectives related to the social dimension. Higher education institutions should be supported and rewarded for meeting agreed targets, such as widening access, increasing participation in, and completion of, higher education studies, especially in relation to vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups. However, this should not be done at the expense of core funding.

The second guideline focuses on financial support systems to students. The aim should be for financial support to be universally applicable. However, where this is not possible, support should be primarily need-based, rather than rewarding academic performance. Support should also contribute to direct and indirect costs of study.

Methodological challenges

Financing of higher education is essentially a matter of top-level policy and how it is implemented. As such it can be assessed with clear and objective criteria. The difficulty is that the criteria need to be understood in the framework of countries' particular socio-economic and cultural conditions. For example, in some countries it may be a "free" policy choice to restrict student support to certain categories of students. In others, the same reality could arise as the result of a government not having sufficient resources to distribute more widely. It is, therefore, important to be aware of a broader socio-economic picture when comparing country realities.

With regard to assessing financial support systems, any indicator choice will necessarily simplify a complex policy area, and has to compare countries operating in very different socio-economic and cultural realities. Needs-based grants are far more significant to students (and their families) with great financial disadvantage than they are to those who are more affluent. However, no indicators are capable of accurately taking account of such differences, and we have made what we believe to be the most reasonable and pragmatic choices to respond to the policy objectives stated in the P&Gs 6.

6.2. Indicators for P&Gs 6

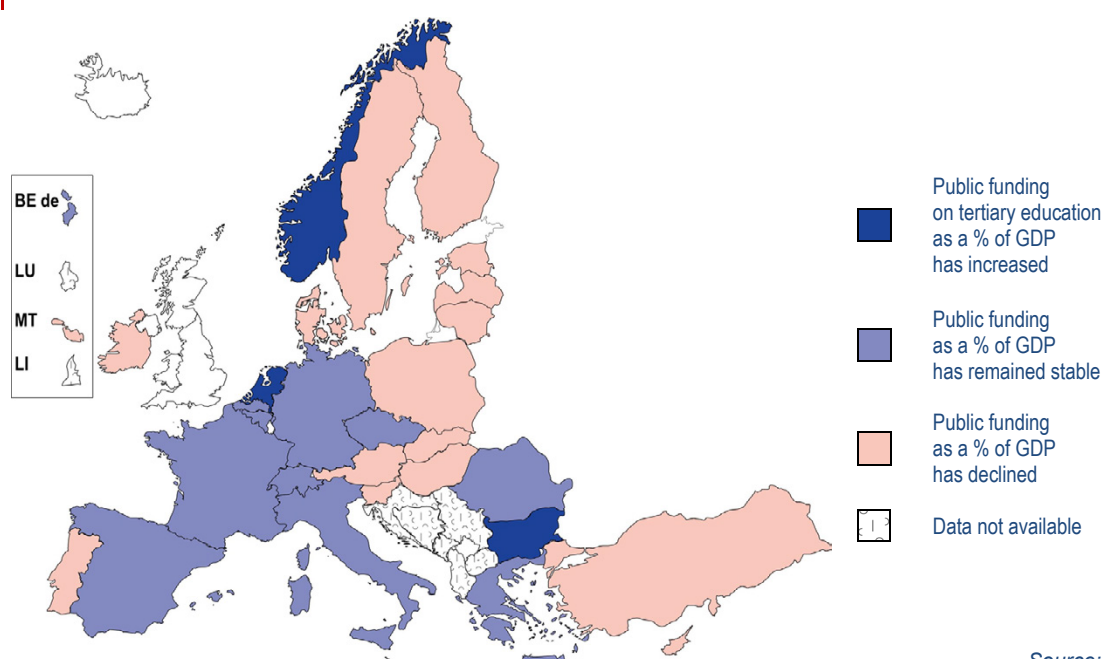
The sixth chapter proposes indicators which offer answers to the following questions:

1. What is the trend in countries' public expenditure on tertiary education as a percentage (%) of GDP over the five-year period 2013-2018? (Figure 6.1)
2. Is public funding attributed to higher education institutions to meet agreed targets in widening access, increasing participation or completing higher education studies? (Figure 6.2)
3. What is the percentage of full-time, first cycle students receiving universal or need-based grants in each country? (Figure 6.3)
4. How many countries provide indirect top-level support for accommodation, transport and meals? (Figure 6.4)

Public expenditure on tertiary education

The first indicator portrays the levels of public funding on tertiary education over a five-year period (2013-2018). The reason for presenting this information is that the first guideline specifies that any mechanism for achieving targets related to widening participation should not have negative financial consequences for higher education institutions' core funding. This indicator serves as a proxy for this situation, as it shows if there is a positive or negative trend in the level of public expenditure on higher education. The year 2018 is used as it is the most recent year with Eurostat data available, and 2013 provides a five-year comparison. Figure 6.1 shows in which European countries there is a positive evolution, a stable situation and a decline in public expenditure.

Figure 6.1: Trends in public expenditure on tertiary education as a % of GDP, 2013-2018



%	BE	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU
2013	1.5	0.65	0.88	2.28	1.27	1.37	1.14	0.66	0.97	1.24	:	0.81	1.15	0.96	4.58	:	0.9
2018	1.49	0.76	0.92	2.20	1.27	1.17	0.91	0.67	0.92	1.23	0.87	0.77	0.95	0.74	0.79	0.4	0.81
	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	IS	LI	NO	CH	RS	TR	EU 27
2013	1.75	1.62	1.8	1.21	0.9	0.72	1.13	0.97	2.01	1.96	1.5	:	1.91	1.32	1.28	1.53	1.24
2018	1.28	1.71	1.7	1.06	0.78	0.75	1.01	0.76	1.54	1.79	1.23	:	2.08	1.29	:	1.49	1.19

Explanatory notes

The figure shows three trends for the funding of higher education systems: increasing, decreasing and remaining stable. Systems where the change was less than .05 percentage points between 2013 and 2018 – whether increasing or decreasing – are shown as stable.

Country-specific note

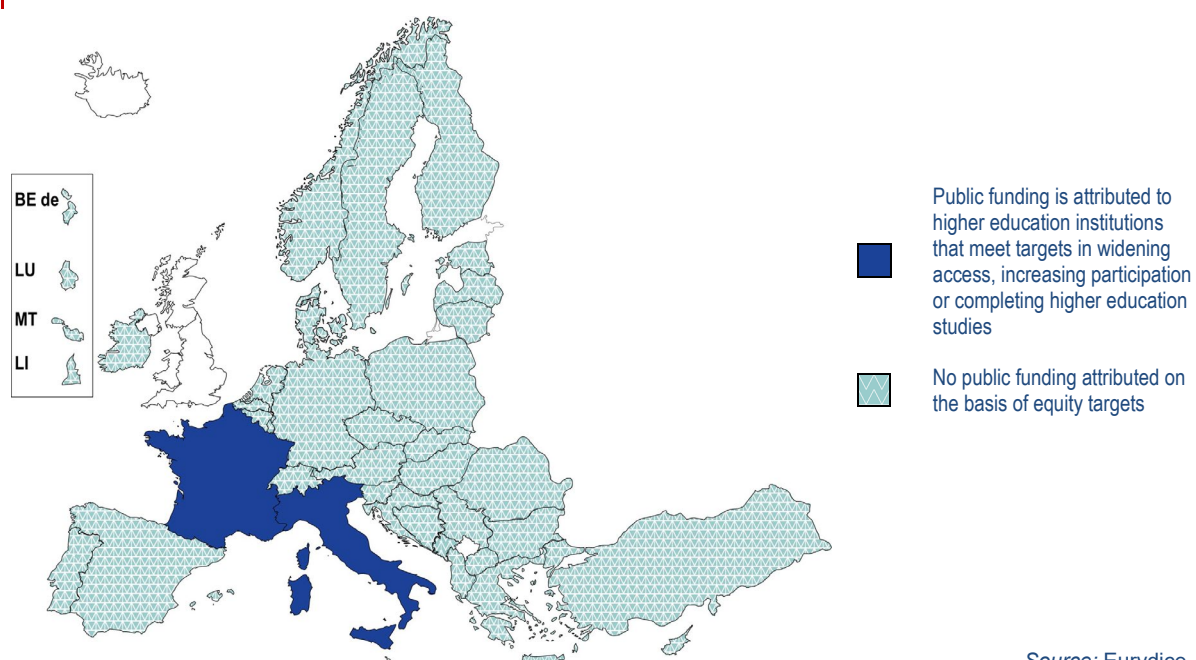
Lithuania: The reference year 2013 is atypical in the sense that the level of public funding (as percentage of GDP) was exceptionally high compared to the preceding and subsequent years. For 2012 it was 1.4%, for 2014 1.33% and for 2015 it was 1.18%.

Only three countries (Bulgaria, the Netherlands and Norway) display a noticeable positive trend of increased public funding on tertiary education. In the majority of countries (16), public funding declined over this five year-period, while it was stable in 11 countries.

Public funding on the basis of equity targets

The next indicator examines whether higher education institutions are supported and rewarded for meeting agreed targets in widening access, increasing participation in and completion of higher education studies, in particular in relation to vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups.

Figure 6.2: Public funding attributed on the basis of equity targets, 2020/2021



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

This figure shows systems where higher education institutions are supported and rewarded with public funding because they meet agreed targets in widening access, increasing participation or completing higher education studies.

Only two countries, France and Italy, award public funding for targets set in relation to widening access, increasing participation or completing higher education. In France, these targets are set in relation to widening access, and concern students with low socio-economic status, with disabilities or special educational needs, and from particular geographical areas, including overseas French territories. In Italy, the same student characteristics are also used in target-setting, as are numbers of migrants and refugees. In Italy, targets are set for a three-year period both in relation to widening participation and to completion. If higher education institutions fail to meet their targets, the money that they have received to support their achievement has to be repaid.

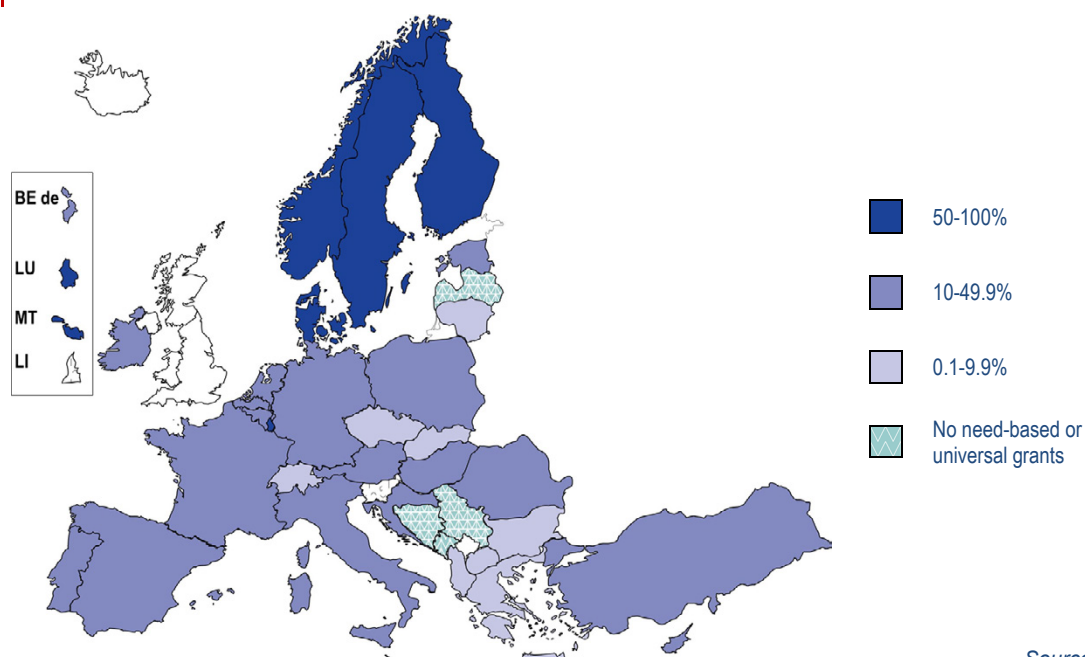
Universal or need-based grants

Figure 6.3 focuses on the second Guideline which is about student support. Direct financial support can be provided by public authorities in the form of grants or loans. The difference between the two forms of support is that grants are direct financial aid from the public budget that students do not have to pay back, while loans have to be repaid.

Grants are the more widespread form of direct support in Europe, existing in all higher education systems participating in this project. Publically-subsidised loans exist in around two-thirds of the participating countries, although the level of public subsidy may vary considerably. The level of public financial support from grants is far more significant in Europe than that from loans, and for this reason grants have been considered as a stronger basis for an indicator of public financial support. Only grants that are awarded on the basis of financial need have been taken into account.

Figure 6.3 is based on data collected for the Eurydice report, National Student Fee and Support in European Higher Education, 2020/2021 ⁽²⁰⁾. It shows the percentage of full-time, first cycle students receiving universal or need-based grants. Three main categories are considered: systems where more than 50% of students receive need-based grants; systems where 10-49.9% of students receive need-based grants, and systems where 0.1-9.9% of students receive need-based grants. There is also a category for systems with no need-based grants (in these countries grants exist, but are awarded on the basis of other criteria, such as academic performance).

Figure 6.3: Percentage of full-time, first cycle students receiving universal or need-based grants, 2019/2020



Source: Eurydice.

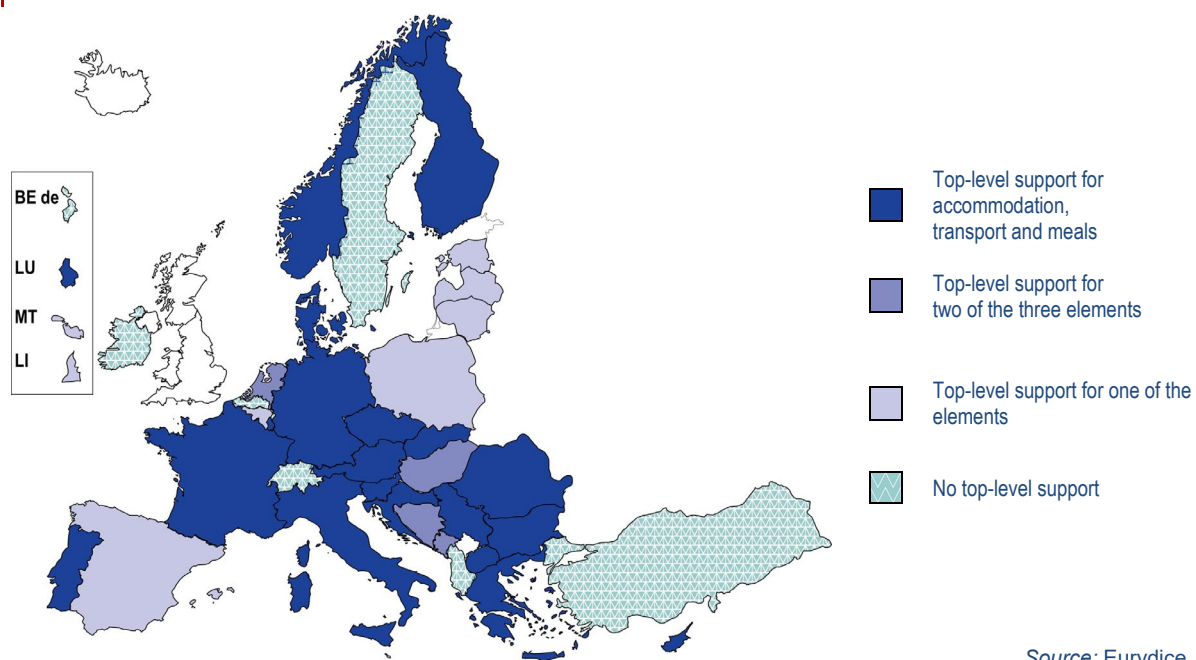
Six countries (Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta, Finland, Sweden and Norway) provide need-based or universal grants to more than 50% of students. Eighteen systems offer these kind of grants to between 10-49% of students, while nine systems provide such support to less than 10% of students. Four countries (Latvia, Albania, Montenegro and Serbia) provide no need-based grants.

⁽²⁰⁾ Report available at: <https://op.europa.eu/s/vVML>

Top-level support for student accommodation, transport and meals

Figure 6.4 considers the main forms of indirect support – student accommodation, transport and meals in the first cycle of higher education studies. Countries are classified according to whether they provide support to all of these elements, one or two of them or none.

Figure 6.4: Top-level support to student accommodation, transport and meals in the first cycle, 2020/2021



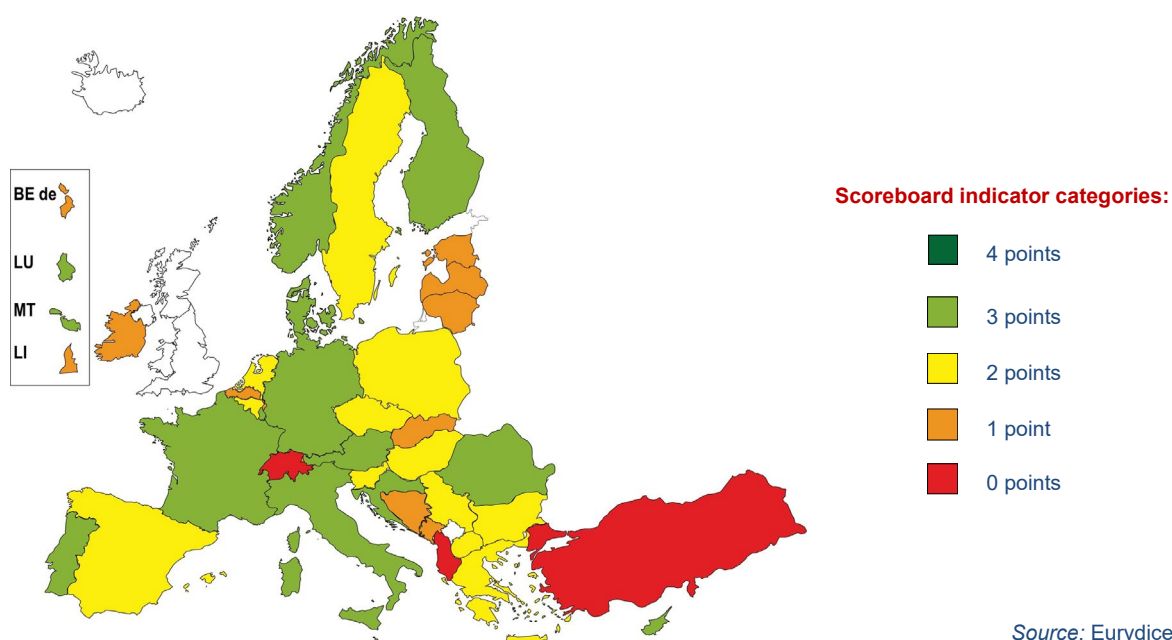
Eighteen systems provide support to all three of these elements. Five systems provide support to two elements, while eight provide support to one element, most commonly transport.

Scoreboard indicator 6: Funding to support equity and inclusion

A composite, scorecard indicator is proposed on the basis of the key elements from the maps in this section. The criteria regarding the award of need-based grants has been divided so that one point is attributed when 10-49% of students receive such support and two points when more than 50% receive it. Meanwhile, if top-level financial support is provided for two or three of the elements of accommodation, transport and meals, one point is awarded. Overall, the points have been attributed to the elements as follows:

1. Public funding is attributed to higher education institutions that meet targets in widening access, increasing participation or completing higher education, provided that public funding has remained stable or increased between 2013 and 2018: 1 point
2. Need-based or universal grants are awarded to over 50% of the first-cycle student population: 2 points
3. Need based grants are awarded to 10-49% of the first-cycle student population: 1 point.
4. Top-level support is provided for at least two of the following elements: accommodation, transport and meals: 1 point.

Figure 6.5: Scoreboard indicator 6: Funding to support equity and inclusion, 2020/2021



On this indicator, no countries reach the dark green category. Thirteen are in light green, twelve in yellow, ten in orange and three in red. The overall score is 73 out of a possible 152. There is, therefore, a wide variety of situations, and considerable scope for improvement.

PRINCIPLE AND GUIDELINES 7: STAFF TRAINING AND INSTITUTIONAL MISSION

Principle:

Public authorities should help higher education institutions to strengthen their capacity in responding to the needs of a more diverse student and staff body and create inclusive learning environments and inclusive institutional cultures.

Guidelines:

- a. Public authorities should support and provide adequate means to higher education institutions to improve initial and continuing professional training for academic and administrative staff to enable them to work professionally and equitably with a diverse student body and staff.
- b. Whenever possible, external quality assurance systems should address how the social dimension, diversity, accessibility, equity and inclusion are reflected within the institutional missions of higher education institutions, whilst respecting the principle of autonomy of higher education institutions.

7.1. Introduction

Principle and Guidelines 7 and equity

This Principle and its Guidelines focuses on the relationship between public authorities and higher education institutions with regard to strengthening their capacity to respond to the diversity of the student and staff body. It considers the learning environment and the learning culture.

The first Guideline focuses on the role of public authorities in supporting and providing adequate means to higher education institutions to improve initial and continuing professional training for academic and administrative staff in the area of diversity and inclusion. Working “equitably and with a diverse student body and staff” is not necessarily easy or obvious. Therefore, appropriate training can help academic and administrative staff to respond better to the needs of a diverse student body and to work better with colleagues of different backgrounds and/or orientations.

The second Guideline considers the topic from the perspective of quality assurance. It examines whether quality assurance systems focus on equity and inclusion, and also whether these issues are integrated into the institutional missions of higher education institutions and/or their study programmes. The second Guideline, therefore, is about whether equity and inclusion inform the core values of the higher education institutions and/or of their study programmes.

Methodological challenges

Principle and Guidelines 7 pose a number of challenges in terms of assessing implementation at national level. First of all, it is difficult to determine the nature and level of resources that would constitute an “adequate means to improve [...] initial and continuing professional training for academic and administrative staff”. While financial resources are clearly essential for higher education institutions to be able to improve their training offer, public authorities may also be able to offer other forms of support.

The second Guideline focuses on the role of external quality assurance systems in addressing the social dimension, diversity, accessibility, equity and inclusion. It suggests that external quality assurance systems should be considering how effectively these challenges are addressed by institutions, while also respecting the principle of autonomy for higher education institutions to tackle the challenges.

This second Guideline effectively provides a recommendation to external quality assurance agencies. It does not delve into the detailed reality that agencies operate at different levels – some focusing on institutional evaluations or audits, and others having the task of evaluating and/or accrediting study programmes. Nevertheless, this differentiation is presented in this report, as it may help to provide a more comparable picture.

7.2. The indicators for P&Gs 7

This project has broken down the Guideline concepts into its constitutive elements, and ends with a scoreboard indicator based on the main positive elements.

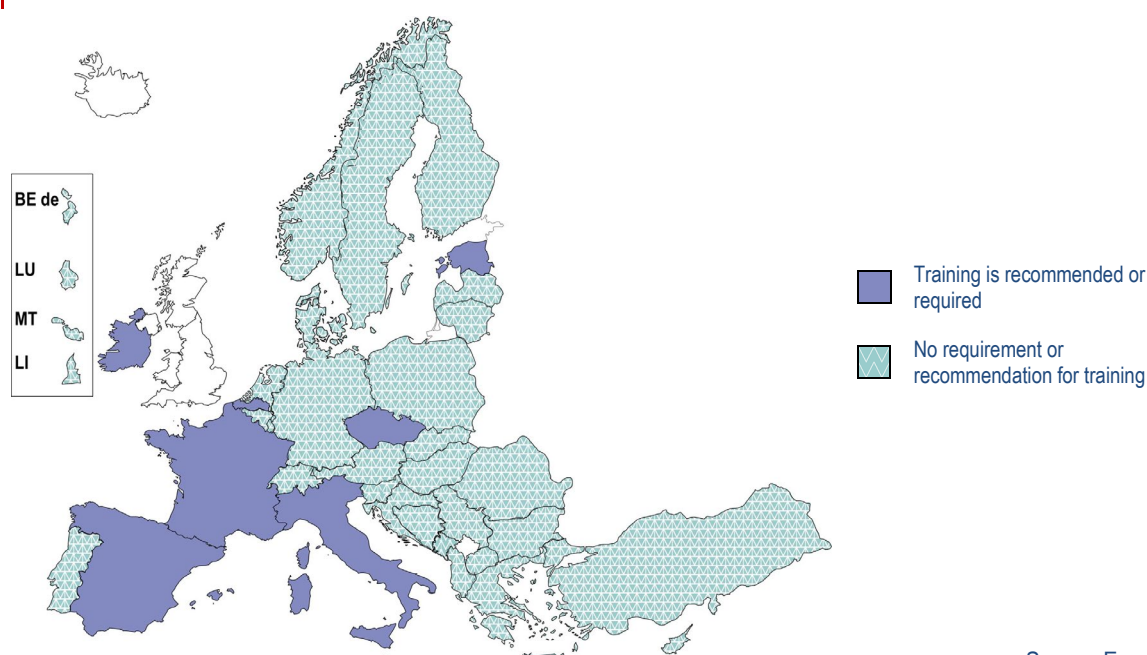
The seventh chapter proposes indicators which offer answers to the following questions:

1. Which countries (education systems) have top-level regulations or recommendations requiring or recommending higher education institutions to offer training on diversity or inclusion to academic and administrative staff? (Figure 7.1)
2. What kind of support is offered by top-level public authorities to higher education institutions to provide diversity or inclusion training to academic and administrative staff? (Figure 7.2)
3. Do top-level authorities instruct external quality assurance agencies to examine the mission of higher education institutions or their study programmes? (Figure 7.3)
4. Do public authorities issue guidelines to quality assurance agencies to consider whether social dimension is addressed in the mission of higher education institutions and/or in their study programmes? (Figure 7.4)

Training to academic and administrative staff on diversity or inclusion

Figure 7.1 provides an overview of the higher education systems where training on diversity or inclusion is required or recommended to academic and administrative staff. The figure does not differentiate between academic and administrative staff, as the responses from national units showed a very high level of consistency where an offer is in place. In other words, if public authorities recommend higher education institutions to provide training on diversity or inclusion the recommendation will generally apply both to academic and administrative staff.

Figure 7.1: Top-level requirements/recommendations for higher education institutions to offer training on diversity or inclusion to academic and administrative staff, 2020/2021



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

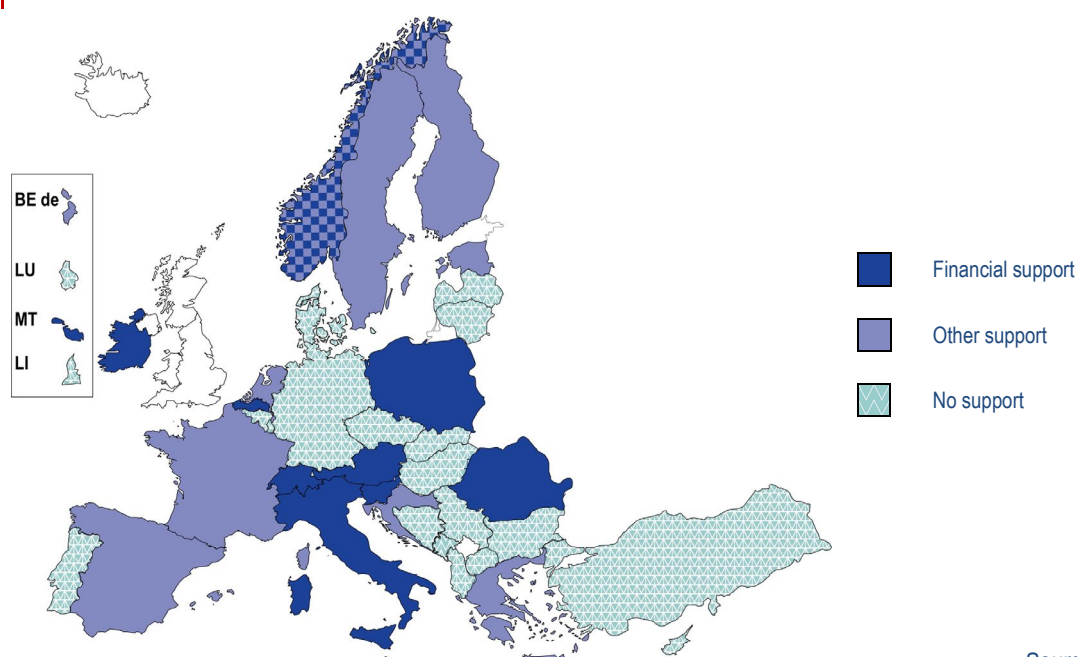
The figure shows which higher education systems have top-level regulations or recommendations requiring or recommending higher education institutions to offer training on diversity or inclusion to academic and administrative staff. Note that the absence of top-level regulations does not preclude regulations or recommendations in this area from lower level education authorities or training offered on the basis of higher education institutions' own initiative.

No country has obligatory training requirements for higher education institutions in this area. Moreover, public authorities in only seven systems (Belgium – Flemish Community, Czechia, Estonia, Spain, France, Ireland and Italy) make recommendations to higher education institutions on such training. The vast majority of higher education systems (31) make no requirements on, or recommendations to, higher education institutions in this matter.

Support for training on diversity and inclusion

Figure 7.2 shows the different forms of support which are offered by public authorities to higher education institutions with regard to training on diversity or inclusion to academic and administrative staff. This support can be provided irrespective of whether there is a requirement (or recommendation) for higher education institutions to provide such training. The category “Other support” regroups administrative support, provision of pedagogical materials and provision of instructors.

Figure 7.2: Support offered by top-level public authorities to higher education institutions to offer training on diversity or inclusion to academic and administrative staff, 2020/2021



Source: Eurydice.

Ten higher education systems (Belgium – Flemish Community, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Austria, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Norway and Switzerland) provide financial support to higher education institutions for the purpose of training on diversity and inclusion to academic and administrative staff. Poland and Romania specify that this support is provided in the form of grants for which publically funded higher education institutions may apply. Ireland and Italy stress that their funding is part of the core budget to higher education institutions, while Austria specifies that this funding is built into performance agreements. The responsibility for organisation of training nevertheless stays with higher education institutions.

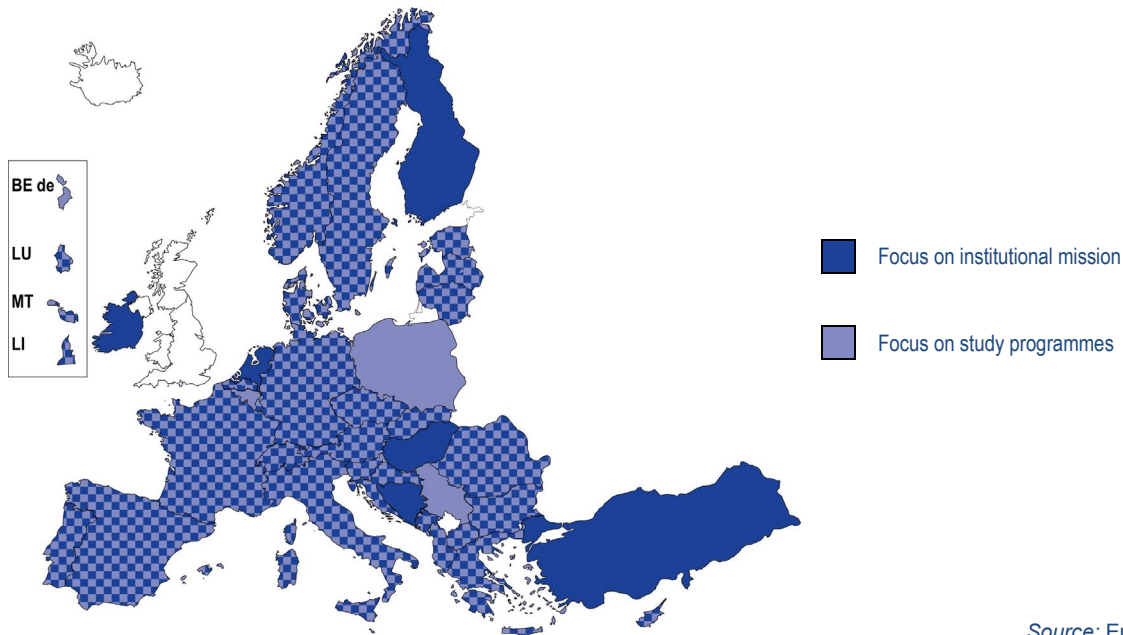
The funding mechanism identified by Slovenia is focused on training higher education teachers and professional associates in new teaching methods, but this can extend to issues of diversity and inclusion. Belgium (Flemish Community) also provides funding for such training, and has an institution, the *Steunpunt Inclusief Hoger Onderwijs* (SIHO) that has a specific objective to provide training on diversity and inclusion to institutions as part of its mission. Malta’s financial support can be triggered by a demand from higher education institutions under a budget for capacity building.

Overall, however, financial support by public authorities in this area is not a widespread European phenomenon. Other support is offered by ten systems. This may be administrative or logistical support, or recommending and providing trainers on the relevant topics.

External quality assurance

Figure 7.3 is related to the second Guideline on external quality assurance systems. It is an indicator that does not relate to equity directly, but it provides the necessary context to better understand the next indicator that deals with equity. More specifically, the indicator presented in Figure 7.3 focuses on whether external quality assurance agencies undertake their evaluations at the level of institutions or of study programmes.

Figure 7.3: Focus of external quality assurance agencies, 2020/2021



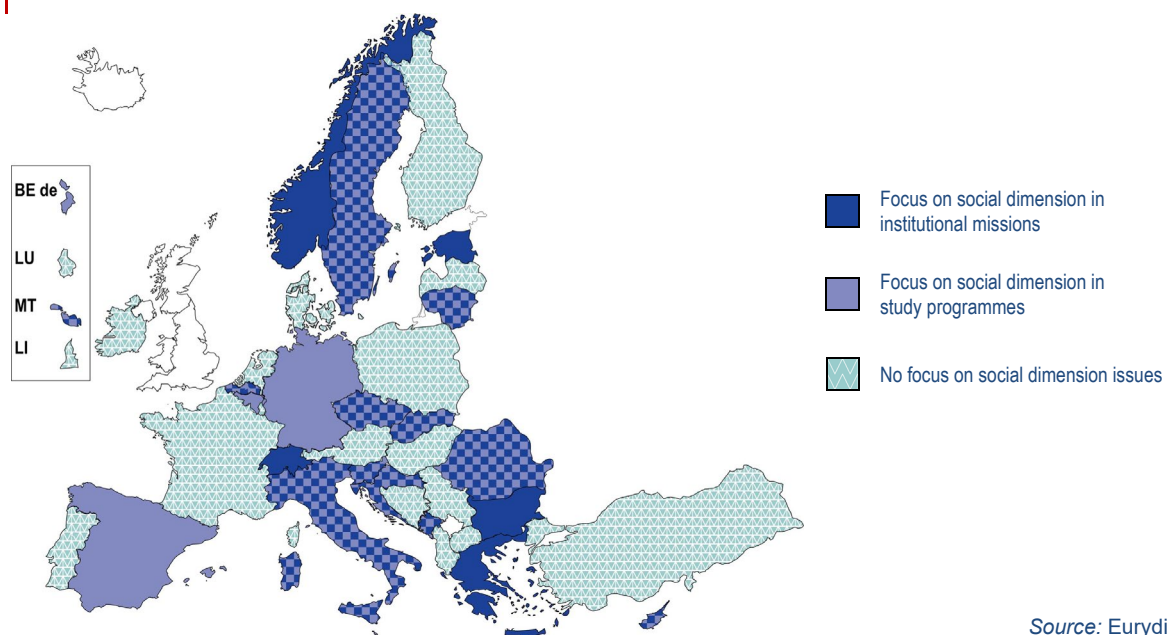
Source: Eurydice.

Most external quality assurance systems can be characterised as hybrid – with a dual focus both on institutional mission and study programmes. The exceptions can be classified in two groups. The first group, with a focus only on study programmes, contains Belgium (French and German-speaking Communities), Poland and Serbia. The second group, focusing only on institutional mission, consists of Finland, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Turkey.

External quality assurance focus on social dimension

Figure 7.4 examines the issue of whether social dimension issues are considered in external quality assurance processes. Following the logic of Figure 7.3, it distinguishes between the institutional and the study programme level, and is based on the question of whether public authorities issue guidelines to quality assurance agencies to consider if social dimension is addressed in the higher education institutions' mission and/or in their study programmes.

Figure 7.4: Focus on social dimension in external quality assurance processes, 2020/2021



Twenty systems claim that quality assurance agencies are required to consider such issues in their external evaluations. Among these systems, twelve operate a hybrid model with issues of inclusion and diversity being considered at both institutional and study programme level.

Seventeen systems have no requirements for external quality assurance agencies to consider social dimension issues.

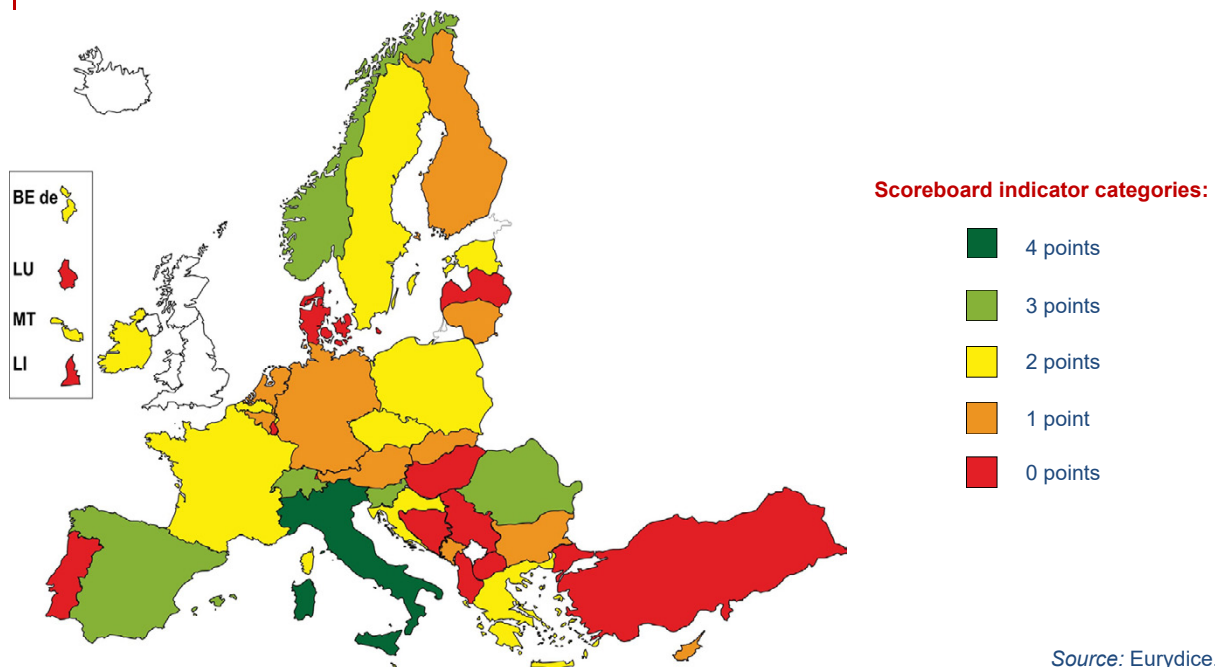
Scoreboard indicator 7: Training on equity and inclusion

Figure 7.5 is a composite scoreboard indicator based on the elements illustrated in this section. It is composed of four criteria:

1. Requirement or recommendation for higher education institutions to offer training on equity.
2. Public authority financial support for training.
3. Other (non-financial) public authority support.
4. Focus on equity and inclusion in quality assurance.

On this basis countries with four points are shown in dark green, three points in light green, two points in yellow, one point in orange and zero points in red.

Figure 7.5: Scoreboard indicator 7: Training on equity and inclusion, 2020/2021



This scoreboard indicator shows a broad diversity of situations in Europe. The majority of systems are concentrated in the red category (11 systems), with none of the criteria being met, or the orange category (10) where one of the elements is in place. Eleven systems are in the yellow category with two criteria, or more precisely two points, achieved. Five systems achieve three points and are in the light green category. Italy is the only country that, on the basis of the information submitted, meets the criteria for the dark green category.

Overall, the combined score for this indicator is 51 points out of a possible 152. Clearly, there is considerable scope for future policy attention to these issues.

PRINCIPLE AND GUIDELINES 8: MOBILITY

Principle:

International mobility programs in higher education should be structured and implemented in a way that foster diversity, equity and inclusion and should particularly foster participation of students and staff from vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented backgrounds.

Guidelines:

International experiences through learning mobility improve the quality of learning outcomes in higher education. Public authorities and higher education institutions should ensure equal access for all to the learning opportunities offered by national and international learning and training mobility programmes and actively address obstacles to mobility for vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented groups of students and staff.

Besides further support to physical mobility, including full portability of grants and loans across the EHEA, public authorities and higher education institutions should facilitate the use of information and communications technology (ICT) to support blended mobility and to foster internationalisation at home by embedding international online cooperation into courses. Blended mobility is the combination of a period of physical mobility and a period of online learning. Such online cooperation can be used to extend the learning outcomes and enhance the impact of physical mobility, for example by bringing together a more diverse group of participants, or to offer a broader range of mobility options.

8.1. Introduction

Principle and Guidelines 8 and equity

This Principle and its Guidelines focus on equity within mobility policies. More specifically the scope covers the capacity of top-level mobility policy to increase the accessibility of and participation in mobility programmes for higher education students from vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented backgrounds. Not all students have equal access to learning mobility opportunities. Evidence shows that students from low socio-economic backgrounds and students with disabilities are less likely to participate in such programmes (DZHW, 2021; European Commission, 2019). Disadvantaged students, therefore, miss-out on the benefits conferred by these experiences, further deepening the divide with their peers.

The first Guideline emphasises the need for public authorities and higher education institutions to ensure equal access for all students to all learning opportunities offered by mobility programmes. This means that institutions need to address difficulties or impediments that might hinder or even completely prevent access to mobility programmes especially for students from vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented groups.

The second Guideline focuses on the support provided by public institutions in fostering student participation in physical mobility. This support extends from full portability of grants and loans across the EHEA, to the accessibility of information and communication technology programmes (ICT) for all students. The Guideline particularly underlines the importance of new technologies in supporting blended mobility and promoting internationalisation at home. Integrating physical mobility with online learning would facilitate the bringing together of a more diverse group of participants as well as offering a broader range of mobility options.

Methodological challenges

With regard to understanding the nature of national mobility policy, the first difficulty lies in distinguishing the forms of support offered by national programmes from those provided by European mobility programmes, such as Erasmus+. The first challenge of this project is, therefore, to identify national mobility policies, which may be intertwined with European programmes and support, and to understand whether they are tailored to students with specific needs.

One way of addressing this issue is to find out if countries have top-level monitoring systems of specific characteristics of students participating in physical learning mobility. The presence of a well-established top-level monitoring system, even if this does not guarantee equal access to mobility programmes, creates the possibility to take specific needs into consideration, to analyse the participation of groups of students with specific characteristics in mobility programmes, and finally to use comprehensive data to tailor programmes towards these needs.

A second issue addressed by the Guidelines is the accessibility of mobility programmes and the forms of support that guarantee it. In particular, the first Guideline calls for higher education systems to “actively address obstacles to mobility for vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented groups of students and staff”. However, it remains unspecified which aspects should be addressed to facilitate access to mobility programmes for these groups of students. Hence, the next challenge for this project is to determine the measures or types of mobility support available. While the portability of grants and loans across the EHEA is clearly one important mechanism for higher education students to be able to participate in mobility programmes, higher education institutions may also offer other forms of support, such as tailored guidance or mentoring services.

The second Guideline indicates the use of information and communication technology (ICT) as an essential tool to support blended mobility. However, while new technologies are important to improve the learning offer, their availability does not guarantee access for all students to such technology. One way to ensure broad access to technology is to find out whether high-level authorities advise and support higher education institutions to take specific actions to consider the needs of different groups of users in implementing new technologies.

To address the requirements of P&Gs 8, we propose five indicators. The first indicator follows the first Guideline and provides information on the presence of a top-level mobility policy focused on specific characteristics. The second indicator shows whether countries have a top-level monitoring system of the specific characteristics of students participating in physical learning mobility. The last three indicators focus on the accessibility of mobility programmes, insofar as they provide information on the different types of support available to mobility programmes in different countries. In particular, the third indicator addresses the issue of portability of grants and inquires whether needs-based and/or universal degree or credit grants are available for students participating in mobility programmes. The fourth indicator shows whether specific measures are in place to support students with special needs participating in learning mobility, in particular guidance and mentoring services, and subsidised accommodation and canteen services for incoming and outgoing mobile students. Finally, the last indicator corresponds to the last guideline and shows whether public authorities advise higher education institutions on the use of new technologies.

8.2. The indicators for P&Gs 8

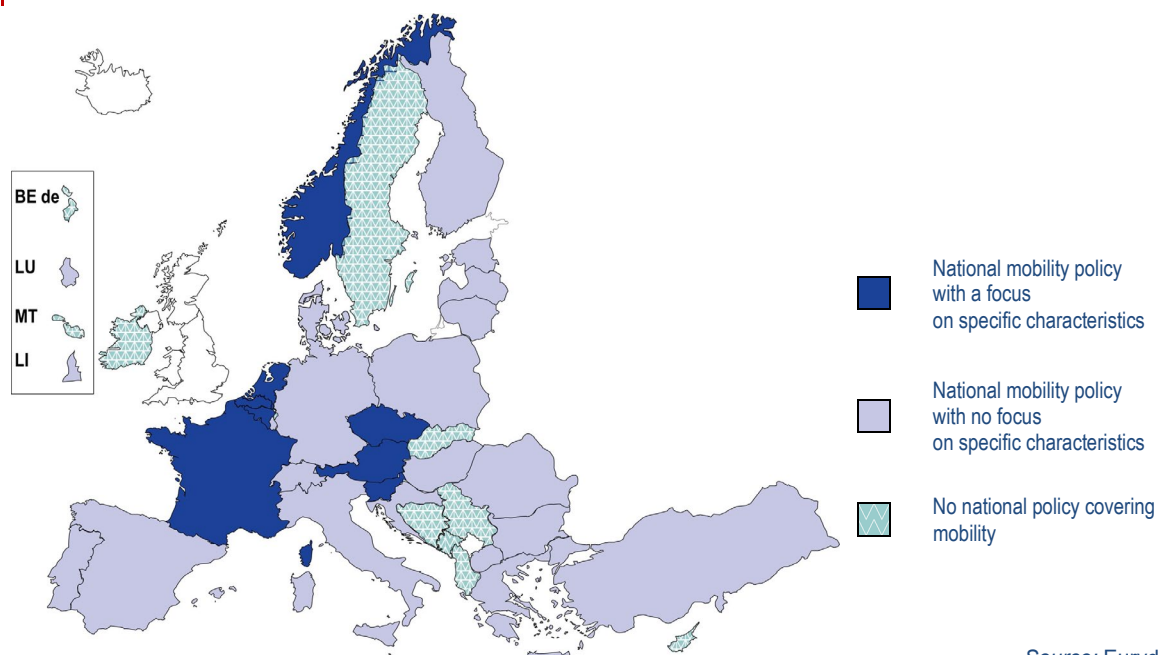
The eighth chapter proposes indicators which offer answers to the following questions:

1. Do countries have national top-level mobility policy focused on students with specific characteristics? (Figure 8.1)
2. Do countries have a system of top-level monitoring of specific characteristics of students participating in physical learning mobility? (Figure 8.2)
3. What is the portability of grants for degree and credit mobility in different countries? (Figure 8.3)
4. Are there specific measures in place in higher education institutions to support vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented students in participating in learning mobility? (Figure 8.4)
5. Do top-level authorities advise and support higher education institutions on the use of new technologies in teaching and learning? (Figure 8.5)

Top-level mobility policy

Figure 8.1 shows whether countries have national top-level mobility policy, which focuses on at least one specific student background characteristic in addition to gender. The characteristics that could be considered as specific characteristics include, but are not restricted to, age; ethnicity; socio-economic status; migrant background; refugee status; special educational needs; disability and sexual orientation.

Figure 8.1: Top-level mobility policy focused on students with specific characteristics, 2020/2021



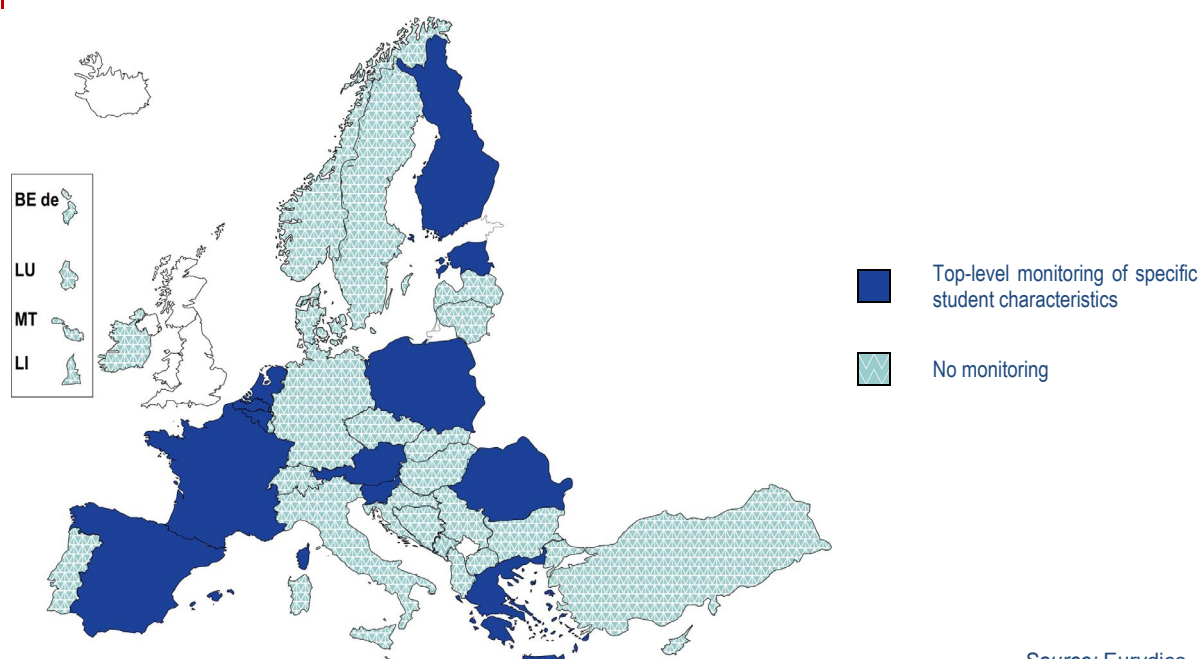
Currently, the great majority of countries participating in this project have a national mobility policy, independent of the European mobility programmes. However, only a few education systems (Belgium – French and Flemish Communities, France, the Netherlands, Austria, Slovenia and Norway) focus

their mobility policy on students with specific characteristics. For example, Slovenia has a policy focused on the mobility of students from lower socio-economic background. France has policy support towards qualified refugees to support their mobility to France. It also has a specific strategy (“Bienvenue en France”) tailored to non-European students, which simplifies visa requirements and introduces differentiated registration fees. Nevertheless, “differentiated” fees means that non-European students can be charged higher fees, potentially having a negative impact on equity.

Top-level monitoring of specific characteristics

Figure 8.2 shows whether countries have a top-level monitoring system of specific characteristics, in addition to gender and age, of students participating in physical learning mobility.

Figure 8.2: Top-level monitoring of specific characteristics of students participating in physical learning mobility, 2020/2021



Source: Eurydice.

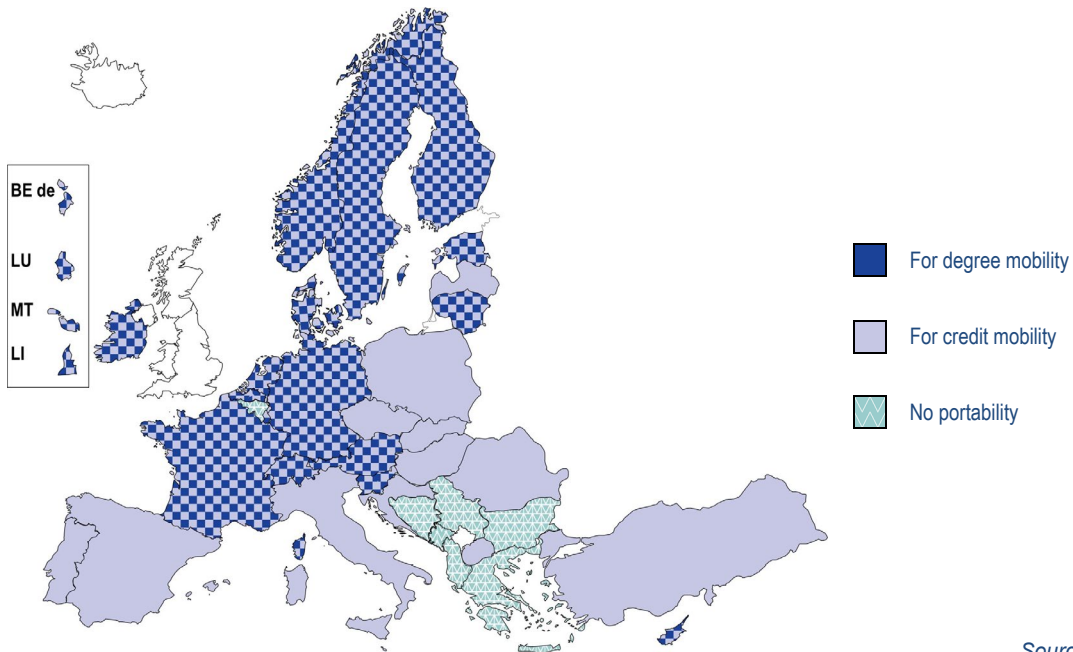
Of the 38 education systems that provided data, only 12 have a monitoring system of specific characteristics of students participating in physical learning mobility. Particularly interesting is the case of the Netherlands that has developed a comprehensive assessment system. This system provides information on a continuous basis, not only concerning a broad range of specific characteristics and needs of students participating in mobility programmes, but also in regard to assessing their participation in learning mobility. For example, with regard to outgoing mobility, the specific characteristics captured, in addition to gender and age, comprise first generation students, those with special education needs or disabilities, ethnicity, migrant background, refugee and employment status prior to higher education.

Although reporting that there is no systematic top-level monitoring, Sweden points to ad hoc studies that are used to provide information on students that study abroad. For example, Statistics Sweden and The Swedish Council for Higher Education (Statistics Sweden, 2019) produced a study called “The road to study abroad” that concluded that students who choose to study abroad are more likely to have parents with high incomes and a long background in education.

Grants portability

One of the measures that can play a role in supporting students, and particularly disadvantaged students, to benefit from mobility, is the ability to be able to keep and use their grant support when abroad. Figure 8.3 provides an overview of the portability of grants in the different countries by distinguishing degree and credit mobility.

Figure 8.3: Portability of grants for degree and credit mobility, 2020/2021



Source: Eurydice.

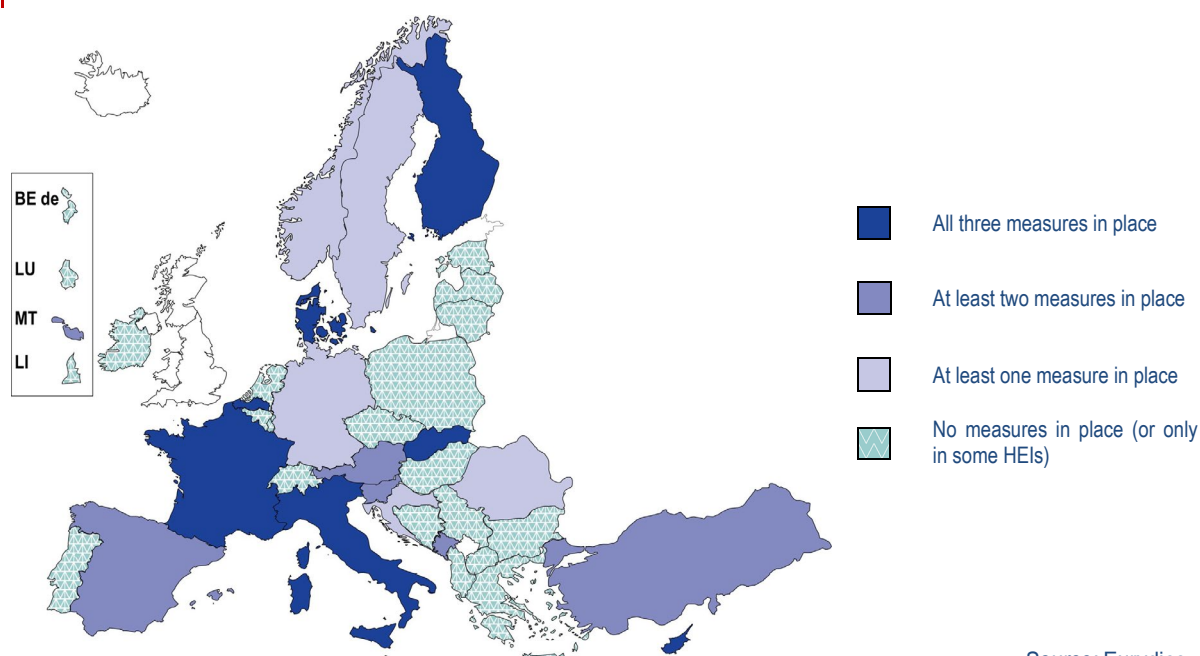
This figure shows that in the great majority of countries (30) there are needs-based and/or universal grants that are fully portable for a period of learning mobility. Of these countries, more than half have grants for both credit and degree mobility.

Measures to support vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented students in learning mobility

Figure 8.4 shows if there are specific measures, beyond portability of student grants, in place to support vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented students in participating in learning mobility. In particular, the indicator looks at the availability of the following: 1) guidance services, 2) mentoring services to enhance the performance and wellbeing of students and 3) subsidised accommodation and food/canteens services available and accessible for all students.

The figure shows whether countries have at least one, two or all three measures in place. All the measures indicated should be systematically available for incoming or outgoing students, or for both categories.

Figure 8.4: Measures in place to support vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented students in learning mobility, 2020/2021



Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory notes

The figure shows which countries (education systems) offer systematically to incoming and/or outgoing students one or more of the following: guidance services, mentoring to enhance student wellbeing and performance, subsidised accommodation and food/canteen services accessible to all students.

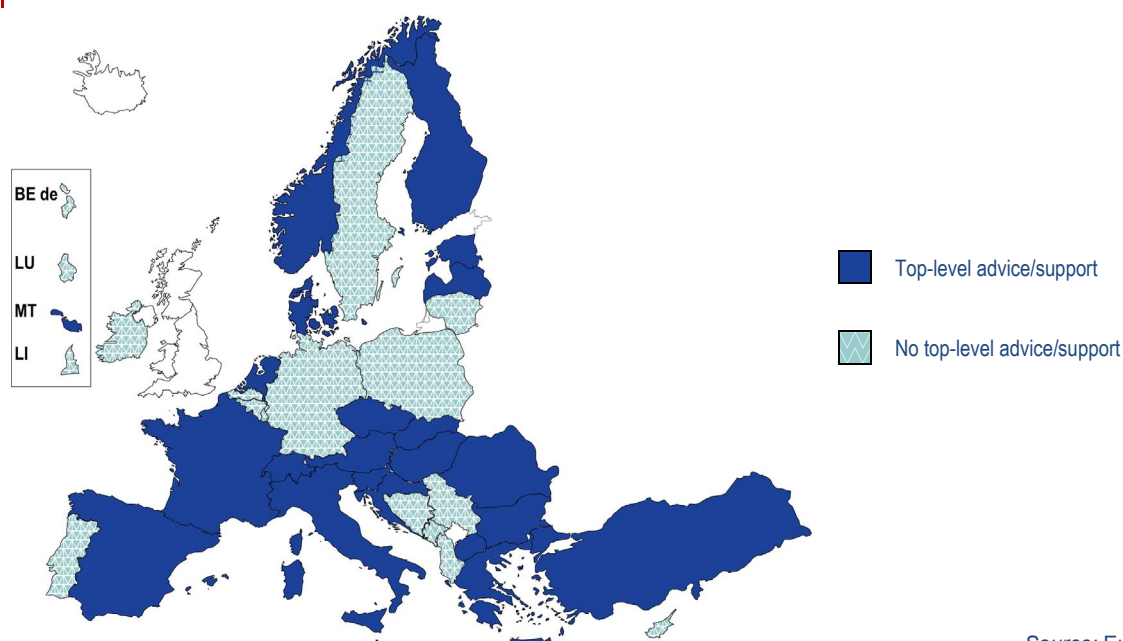
There are very few countries (Belgium – Flemish Community, France, Italy, Cyprus, Slovakia and Finland) where all three measures are systematically in place. Part of the explanation for the lack of implementation of all three measures may be that this is an area where top-level regulation is relatively weak and higher education institutions are free to take their own decisions. The reality in higher education institutions may, therefore, be considerably more varied than this overview picture shows.

In the same vein, we should bear in mind that there are also other means for supporting the international learning mobility of vulnerable, disadvantaged or, in general, of underrepresented students. For instance, in Lithuania students can apply for funding to study abroad. The selection process is based on a point system and students with disabilities or from a low income household get additional points thus boosting their chances to succeed in their application.

New technology accessibility and implementation

Figure 8.5 shows if the top-level policy addresses the implementation and accessibility of new technologies. In particular, countries were asked if top-level authorities advise and support higher education institutions on the use of such technologies in teaching and learning.

Figure 8.5: Top-level authorities advising higher education institutions on the use of new technologies in teaching and learning, 2020/2021



Source: Eurydice.

The map shows that over half (21) of the countries who provided data offer support and advice to higher education institutions. This may be done in different ways. For example, the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA) published Guidelines in 2021 for Quality Assurance for Online Learning Providers in Malta, focusing on the use of new technologies in teaching and learning. Denmark launched a national action plan for higher education concerning digital competencies and digital learning in 2019. One of the main objectives of the action plan was to strengthen digital learning through providing training for academic staff in digital competencies.

Scoreboard indicator 8: Equity and inclusion in mobility programmes

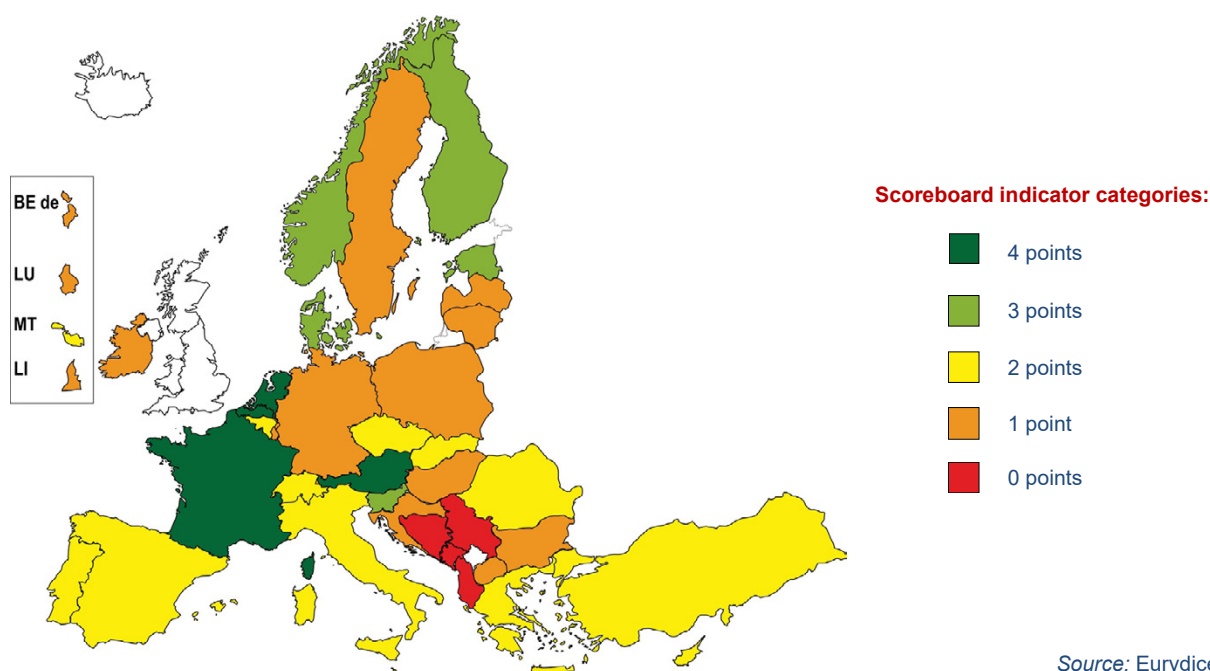
Scoreboard indicator 8 summarises the information presented in this chapter, displaying if countries guarantee and increase accessibility to mobility programmes for HE students from vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented backgrounds.

The scoreboard indicator is composed of four criteria, which are as follows:

1. National mobility policy with a focus on specific characteristics.
2. Portability of degree and credit mobility grants.
3. Guidance, mentoring services, subsidised accommodation, food/canteens are in place in all higher education institutions for incoming and/or outgoing students.
4. Top-level authorities advise higher education institutions on the use of the new technologies in teaching and learning.

Where all four elements are in place, the country is shown in dark green and the score is 4. Similarly, countries with three elements are shown in light green and the score falls to 3. Those with two are shown in yellow and score 2, while one of the criteria is represented by orange with a score of 1. Countries with none of the elements in place are shown in red and zero points are allocated.

Figure 8.6: Scoreboard indicator 8: National mobility policy and equity, 2020/2021



This scoreboard indicator shows that four countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia) are concentrated in the red category, with none of the criteria being met, while thirteen countries are in the orange category where one of the elements is in place. Twelve countries are in the yellow category with two criteria met and two points achieved. Five systems achieve three points and are in the light green category, and four systems (the Flemish Community of Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Austria), based on the information presented, meet all the criteria for the dark green category.

Overall, on this indicator, the combined score is 68 out of a maximum of 152. This suggests that policy support geared towards improving equity in mobility still has a considerable way to go.

PRINCIPLE AND GUIDELINES 9: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Principle:

Higher education institutions should ensure that community engagement in higher education promotes diversity, equity and inclusion.

Guidelines:

Community engagement should be considered as a process whereby higher education institutions engage with external community stakeholders to undertake joint activities that can be mutually beneficial. Like social dimension policies, community engagement should be embedded in core missions of higher education. It should engage with teaching and learning, research, service and knowledge exchange, students and staff and management of higher education institutions. Such engagement provides a holistic basis on which universities can address a broad range of societal needs, including those of vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups, while enriching their teaching, research and other core functions.

Community stakeholders (e.g. local authorities, cultural organisations, nongovernmental organisations, businesses, citizens) should be able to meaningfully engage with higher education actors through open dialogue. This will enable genuine university-community partnerships, which can effectively address social and democratic challenges.

9.1. Introduction

Principle and Guidelines 9 and equity

This Principle and its Guidelines highlight the important role of higher education institutions in developing community engagement activities. Community engagement is understood as a process whereby higher education institutions engage with external community stakeholders to undertake joint activities that can be mutually beneficial. Such stakeholders can be local authorities, cultural organisations, non-governmental organisations, businesses and citizens or citizens' groups. Higher education institutions and external community stakeholders may collaborate on issues that concern the local or regional environment and the general wellbeing of citizens. As the guidelines point out, community engagement can be developed and enhanced through the work of higher education institutions in teaching and learning, research, service and knowledge exchange. It can also be an important vehicle for developing supportive actions with and for vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups.

Methodological challenges

The main methodological challenge for this project is the difficulty in assessing the extent of community engagement action and support from public authorities. There may be considerable work taking place in higher education institutions on community engagement which remains hidden to public authorities, unless they purposefully seek to find out about it or have a clear wish to support it. In such cases, it would be likely that public authorities would establish a mechanism for higher education institutions to report on their activities, particularly if financial or other support is provided. It would also be logical for community engagement activity to be considered in external quality assurance evaluation procedures.

As a consequence, the project has decided firstly to examine whether public authorities are providing support to higher education institutions for community engagement activities, and secondly whether community engagement is considered during external quality assurance activities.

9.2. The indicators for P&Gs 9

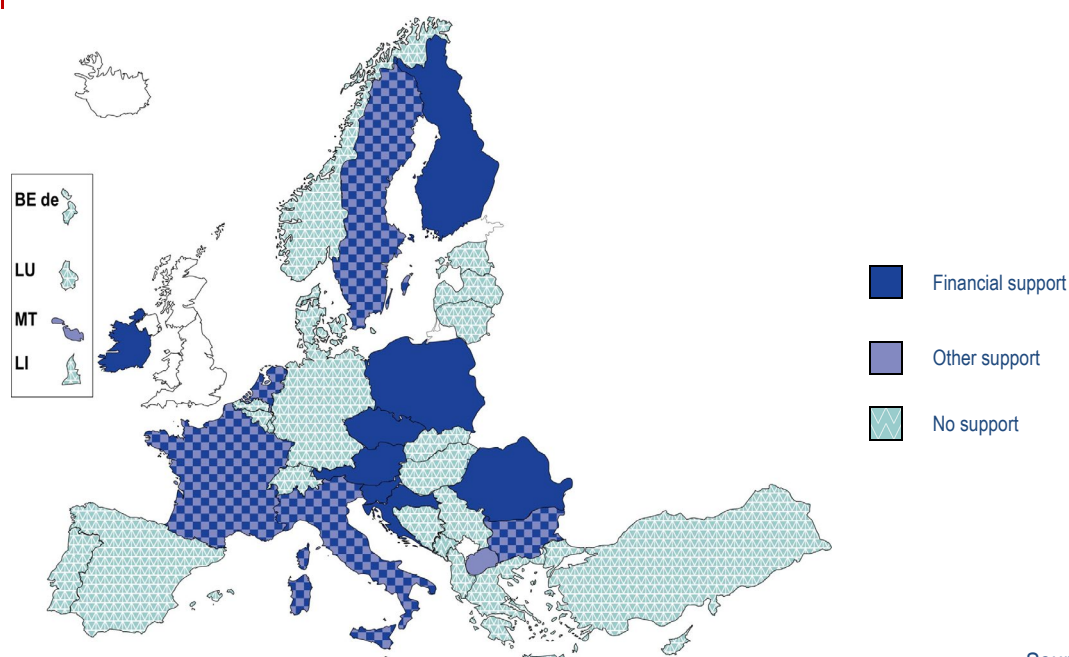
The ninth chapter proposes indicators which offer answers to the following questions:

1. Do top-level authorities provide support to higher education institutions in developing community engagement activities focused on equity and inclusion? (Figure 9.1)
2. Are there requirements for external quality assurance agencies to evaluate community engagement activities of higher education institutions focused on equity and inclusion? (Figure 9.2)

Support in developing community engagement activities

Figure 9.1 shows whether top-level authorities provide support to higher education institutions in developing community engagement activities focused on equity and inclusion. This indicator shows whether countries provide financial or non-financial support.

Figure 9.1: Support provided to higher education institutions to develop community engagement activities focused on equity and inclusion, 2020/2021



Source: Eurydice.

The majority of countries do not provide support to community engagement activities focused explicitly on equity and inclusion. This is the case for 23 of the education systems. Amongst the others, 13 systems provide financial support, 5 both financial and non-financial support and 2 only non-financial support for community engagement.

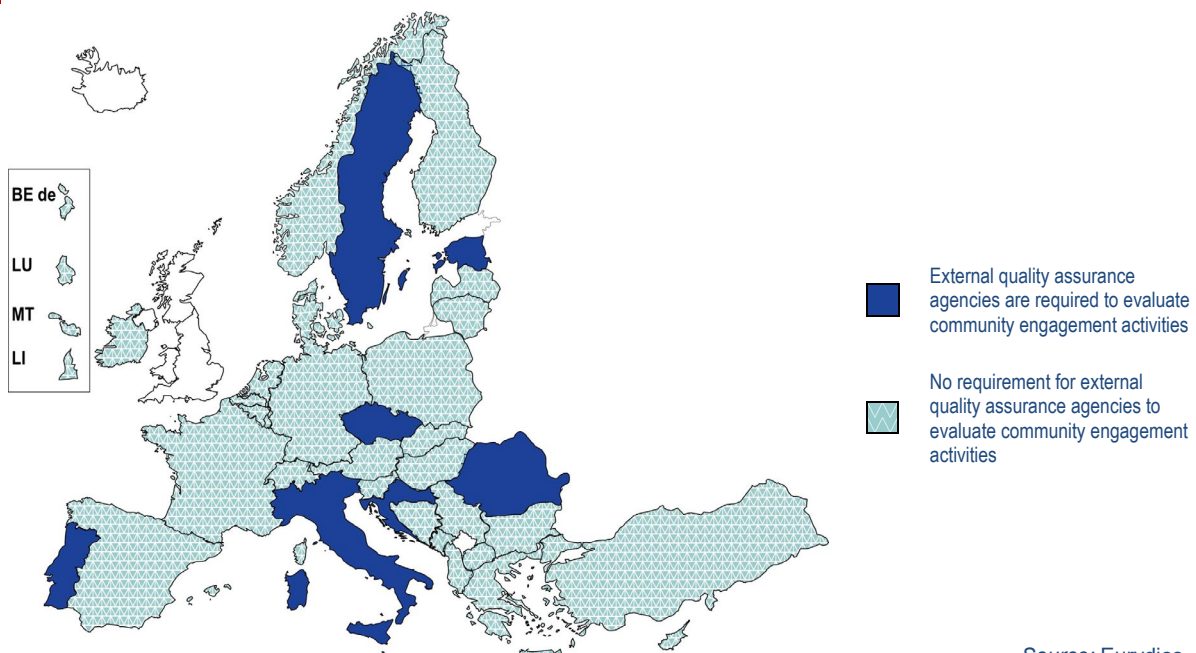
When countries provide financial support for developing equality and inclusion through community engagement activities, the premise is often a broad understanding of the role of higher education institutions. For example, in Estonia, the mission of higher education institutions includes cooperation

with wider society, and the administrative agreements concluded between the state and universities, which are the basis for funding, include requirements to support lifelong learning and broaden access to higher education, taking into account the needs of different groups in society. Meanwhile, in Sweden, the mandate of higher education institutions includes collaboration with the surrounding community, and ensuring that higher education knowledge and expertise brings benefit to society. In Slovenia, there are collaborative projects between higher education institutions and organisations in the economic/non-economic sectors to address a variety of societal challenges through activities such as mentor schemes. In Poland, the scope of activities is more focused, with funding targeting attitude change and greater accessibility for people with disabilities.

External quality assurance

Figure 9.2 considers whether there are requirements for external quality assurance agencies to consider the community engagement activities of higher education institutions focused on equity and inclusion. As external quality assurance requirements focus on priorities for public authorities, this figure provides an indication of the importance attached to community engagement. It also acts as a proxy indicator of whether community engagement is understood as part of the core functions of higher education institutions.

Figure 9.2: External quality assurance agencies required to evaluate community engagement activities focused on equity and inclusion, 2020/2021



Only seven countries (Czechia, Estonia, Croatia, Italy, Portugal, Romania and Sweden) have top-level requirements for external quality assurance agencies to evaluate higher education institutions' community engagement activities. In Portugal, public authorities provide no support to higher education institutions for community engagement, yet they require any such activities to be evaluated by external quality assurance agencies – a situation that may be considered slightly paradoxical. It is also interesting to note that eight countries (Bulgaria, Ireland, France, the Netherlands, Austria, Slovenia, Finland and Sweden) that provide funding for community engagement activities do not require these activities to be considered in external quality assurance evaluations.

Scoreboard indicator 9: Public authority support to higher education institutional community engagement

A composite, scoreboard indicator is proposed on the basis of the elements from the two maps in this section. It is composed of three criteria as follows:

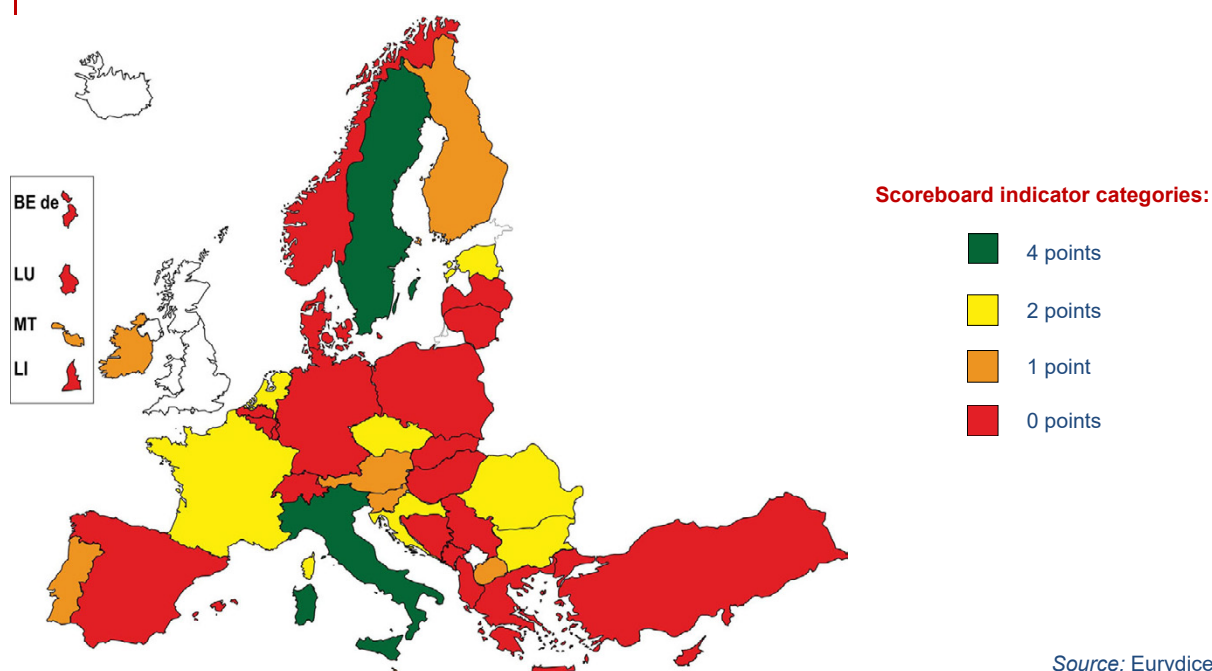
Public authority financial support to community engagement activities focused on equity and inclusion.

Other public authority support to community engagement activities focused on equity and inclusion.

External quality assurance agencies required to evaluate community engagement activities.

Where three elements are in place, the country is shown in dark green and scores four points. In this case there is one point per element, plus a bonus point for having all three elements in place as there is no light green category used. Where there are two elements the country is shown in yellow and receives two points, one element is depicted in orange and scores one point, and countries with none of the elements are shown in red and don't score any points.

Figure 9.3: Scoreboard indicator 9: Public authority support to higher education institutional community engagement, 2020/2021



Source: Eurydice.

This scoreboard indicator shows that there is considerable progress to be made. Twenty-two education systems are in the red category, with no support or attention being given to the community engagement role of higher education institutions. At the opposite end of the spectrum, only two countries – Italy and Sweden – are in the dark green category, with public authorities providing financial and other support, and external quality assurance agencies required to pay attention to this work in their evaluation procedures. Seven countries are shown in yellow with two criteria being met, while another seven fulfil one criterion and are shown in orange.

Overall this provides a score of 27 out of a possible 152. This is therefore an indicator which leaves a great deal of room for progress.

PRINCIPLE AND GUIDELINES 10: POLICY DIALOGUE

Principle:

Public authorities should engage in a policy dialogue with higher education institutions and other relevant stakeholders about how the above principles and guidelines can be translated and implemented both at national system and institutional level.

Guidelines:

Such policy dialogue should allow to develop fit for purpose policy measures, which should respect institutional autonomy, avoid any unnecessary administrative burden, and thus enable concrete progress towards diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education.

Within the scope of the above principles and guidelines, peer support and exchange of good practices are crucial among EHEA countries in order to facilitate progress towards the inclusiveness of higher education systems.

10.1. Introduction

Principle and Guidelines 10 and equity

This Principle and its Guidelines focus on the implementation of the set of the Principles and Guidelines overall. It aims to ensure that dialogue between public authorities, higher education institutions and other relevant stakeholders is established to take forward the implementation of the different P&Gs.

Methodological challenges

This Principle and Guideline can be considered as relatively straightforward. The main task at this stage is to establish whether any specific policy dialogue is taking place on the implementation of the set of Principles and Guidelines. In future updates of the indicators in this report more detailed information can be captured on the thematic areas under focus, as well on the outcomes of the policy dialogue. This project has limited its attention to whether or not policy dialogue is taking place.

10.2. The indicators for P&Gs 10

This chapter proposes an indicator which offers the answer to the following question:

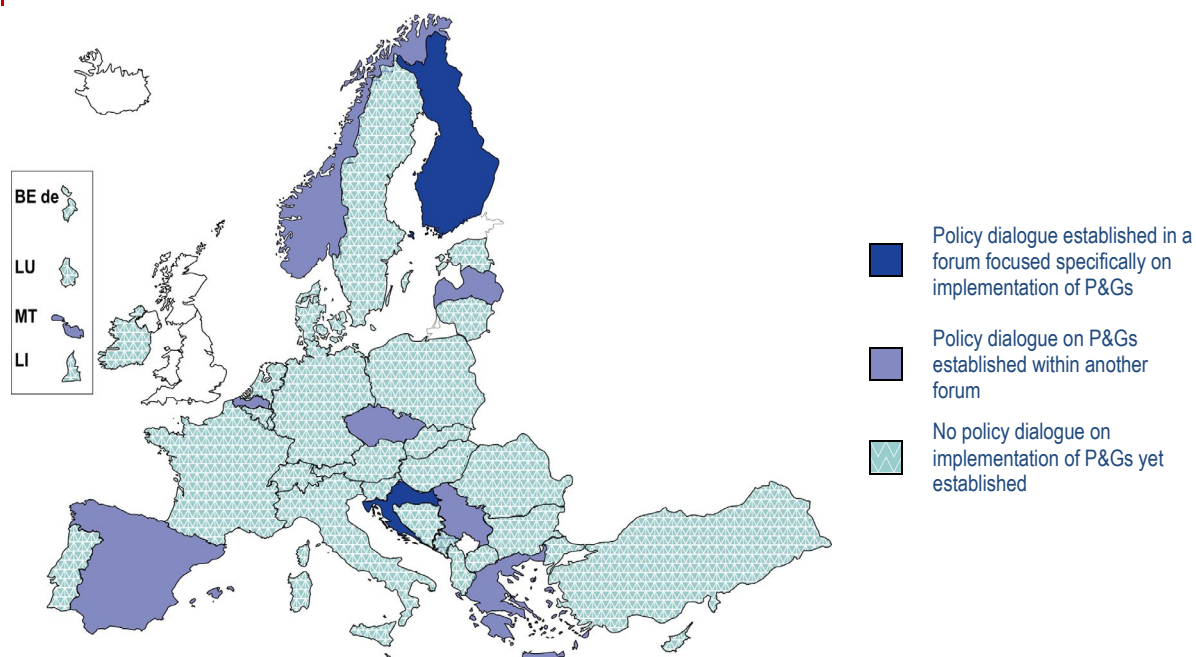
Has a top-level dialogue been established on the implementation of the Principles and Guidelines since their formal adoption in November 2020? (Figure 10.1)

The indicator is depicted in scoreboard format in Figure 10.2

Policy dialogue on the implementation of Principles and Guidelines

Figure 10.1 shows whether a policy dialogue has been established. It differentiates between higher education systems where a specific forum for dialogue has been established to ensure that the Principles and Guidelines are implemented, and those where an existing body has been given responsibility for the implementation.

Figure 10.1: Policy dialogue on the implementation of Principles and Guidelines, 2020/2021



Source: Eurydice.

Croatia and Finland are the only two countries that have established a specific policy forum dedicated to the implementation of the Principles and Guidelines. A further eight systems report policy dialogue on the implementation of the P&Gs taking place within an already established national higher education policy body or forum. For the majority (28) of participating countries, no policy dialogue on the implementation of the Principles and Guidelines has yet been established.

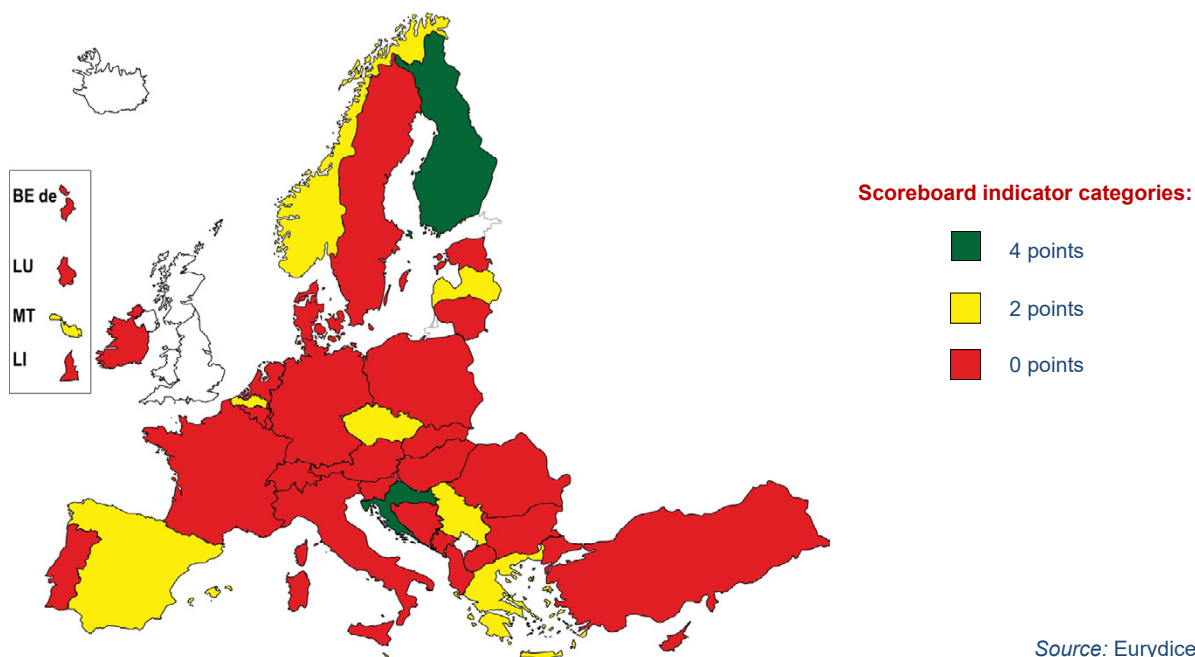
Scoreboard indicator 10: Policy dialogue

Figure 10.2 is a scoreboard indicator based on the elements illustrated in this section.

Where policy dialogue is established in a forum specifically focused on ensuring implementation of Principles and Guidelines, the country is shown in dark green and receives four points. If policy dialogue on the Principles and Guidelines is taking place within another forum that has other purposes, the country is indicated in yellow with two points. The reason for this distinction is that the method of implementation whereby a forum that has other tasks is given these new additional responsibility is considered to be less focused than implementation through a dedicated policy forum. Finally, when no policy dialogue on the implementation of Principles and Guidelines has been established, the country is shown in red with 0 points.

There are no light green and orange categories for this indicator. In order to keep a comparable overall picture of progress on the ten scoreboard indicators, two points rather than one have been attributed for the criteria that are met in this indicator.

Figure 10.2: Scoreboard indicator 10: Policy dialogue, 2020/2021



This scoreboard indicator shows that most countries (28) are concentrated in the red category, with none of the criteria being met. Eight countries are in the yellow category where they receive two points as a result of reporting policy dialogue on the implementation of the Principles and Guidelines taking place within an established forum. Only two countries, Croatia and Finland, meet the criteria for the dark green category.

When translated into points, the score is 24 out of the maximum possible 152, reflecting the reality that few countries have taken the required follow-up steps since the adoption of the Principles and Guidelines in November 2020.

CONCLUSIONS

The report *Towards equity and inclusion in higher education in Europe* set out to develop indicators to assess the state of policy attention in European systems to equity and inclusion in higher education. The method chosen was to analyse the current level of alignment of European higher education systems with the Principles & Guidelines agreed by all EHEA countries as a blueprint to take forward the commitment of improving the social dimension.






The ten Principles agreed by ministers in the EHEA suggest measures that should be taken to improve the social dimension in higher education and thereby make it more equitable. The Principles are as follows:

1. The social dimension should be central to higher education strategies at system and institutional level, as well as at the EHEA and the EU level.
2. Legal regulations or policy documents should allow and enable higher education institutions to develop their own strategies to fulfil their public responsibility towards widening access to, participation in and completion of higher education studies.
3. The inclusiveness of the entire education system should be improved by developing coherent policies from early childhood education, through schooling to higher education and throughout lifelong learning.
4. Reliable data is a necessary precondition for an evidence-based improvement of the social dimension of higher education.
5. Public authorities should have policies that enable higher education institutions to ensure effective counselling and guidance for potential and enrolled students in order to widen their access to, participation in and completion of higher education studies.
6. Public authorities should provide sufficient and sustainable funding and financial autonomy to higher education institutions enabling them to build adequate capacity to embrace diversity and contribute to equity and inclusion in higher education.
7. Public authorities should help higher education institutions to strengthen their capacity in responding to the needs of a more diverse student and staff body and create inclusive learning environments and inclusive institutional cultures.
8. International mobility programs in higher education should be structured and implemented in a way that foster diversity, equity and inclusion and should particularly foster participation of students and staff from vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented backgrounds.
9. Higher education institutions should ensure that community engagement in higher education promotes diversity, equity and inclusion.
10. Public authorities should engage in a policy dialogue with higher education institutions and other relevant stakeholders about how the above principles and guidelines can be translated and implemented both at national system and institutional level.

In order to visually illustrate the result on the practical implementation of the Guidelines in the European countries that participated in the study, the report has made use of a number of composite scoreboard indicators. The following figure provides a point-based assessment of the social dimension in higher education per country on the basis of the analysis carried out in the previous chapters, thus collecting all the results of the 10 scoreboard indicators on the Principles & Guidelines.

Figure 11.1: Results of the 10 scoreboard indicators on Principles & Guidelines, 2020/2021

	P&Gs 1	P&Gs 2	P&Gs 3	P&Gs 4	P&Gs 5	P&Gs 6	P&Gs 7	P&Gs 8	P&Gs 9	P&Gs 10	Points per country
Belgium (BE fr)	3	4	2	3	3	2	1	2	0	0	20
Belgium (BE de)	0	0	1	1	0	1	2	1	0	0	6
Belgium (BE nl)	1	3	1	2	2	1	2	4	0	2	18
Bulgaria	2	0	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	0	11
Czechia	4	0	2	4	3	2	2	2	2	2	23
Denmark	0	2	2	4	2	3	0	3	0	0	16
Germany	1	3	1	3	1	3	1	1	0	0	14
Estonia	4	2	3	4	4	1	2	3	2	0	25
Ireland	3	3	0	2	1	1	2	1	1	0	14
Greece	3	0	0	1	3	2	2	2	0	2	15
Spain	3	4	4	2	3	2	3	2	0	2	25
France	2	1	3	4	4	3	2	4	2	0	25
Croatia	3	0	0	3	0	3	2	1	2	4	18
Italy	3	4	3	2	3	3	4	2	4	0	28
Cyprus	2	0	3	1	3	3	1	2	0	0	15
Latvia	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	2	8
Lithuania	4	3	1	3	3	1	1	1	0	0	17
Luxembourg	0	1	2	2	2	3	0	1	0	0	11
Hungary	3	2	1	4	1	2	0	1	0	0	14
Malta	3	3	4	3	2	3	2	2	1	2	25
Netherlands	2	0	2	4	1	2	1	4	2	0	18
Austria	3	1	2	3	3	3	1	4	1	0	21
Poland	4	3	1	4	3	2	2	1	0	0	20
Portugal	4	3	2	2	2	3	0	2	1	0	19
Romania	3	1	3	4	3	3	3	2	2	0	24
Slovenia	3	3	1	3	1	2	3	3	1	0	20
Slovakia	1	0	1	2	1	1	1	2	0	0	9
Finland	4	4	2	3	2	3	1	3	1	4	27
Sweden	4	3	2	4	3	2	2	1	4	0	25
Albania	1	0	1	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	7
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3
Switzerland	3	1	3	4	3	0	3	2	0	0	19
Liechtenstein	1	2	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	6
Montenegro	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	5
North Macedonia	3	0	1	3	2	2	0	1	1	0	13
Norway	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	3	0	2	24
Serbia	4	0	1	2	1	2	0	0	0	2	12
Turkey	3	3	1	3	3	0	0	2	0	0	15
Points per P&Gs	91	65	62	97	76	73	51	68	27	24	635

 All criteria are met (4 pts)
 Most criteria are met (3 pts)
 Some criteria are met (2 pts)
 Few criteria are met (1 pt)
 No criteria are met (0 pts)

An education system receives 4 points and is placed in the dark green category if it contains all the elements required by the Guidelines taken into consideration. If the country meets one criterion less, it receives 3 points and is shown in the light green category. Yellow is equivalent to 2 points, orange to 1 point, and lastly, when a higher education system has none of the required elements, it falls into the

red category which is equivalent to 0 points. This allocation of points and colours was possible thanks to the indicators designed for each Guideline. The results are based on the responses of national units to the questionnaire proposed for the purpose of the report, and are therefore based on official, administrative documentation.

Figure 11.1 shows that the total number of points currently achieved by the countries covered by this report is 635. If all the education systems had been in the dark green category, the total number would have been 1 520 (38 education systems × 40 points), so the current result indicates that European systems have implemented nearly 42% of the policies required to meet the commitments. This means that there is still much to be improved in Europe in addressing the social dimension in higher education.

The countries that achieved the highest scores, as shown in the table above, are Italy with 28 points, and Finland with 27 points. These are followed by Estonia, Spain, France, Malta and Sweden, all with 25 points, and Romania and Norway with 24 points. This suggests that these are the countries that currently have the most developed social dimension policies in higher education, according to the information provided for this project.

Figure 11.1 also shows which policy areas require the most progress and which can be further developed from a relatively advanced starting point. The scoreboard indicator that achieved the highest result is that of the Principle & Guidelines no. 4 (*Data*) with 97 points and of the Principle and Guidelines no. 1 (*Strategies on higher education with a social dimension*) with 91 points. The policy areas that have received the least attention, as judged by the current state of play, are the Principle and Guidelines no. 9 (*Community engagement*) and no. 10 (*Policy dialogue*), which scored 27 and 24 points respectively.

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GLOSSARY

Academic guidance: information services, special sessions or courses designed to support students' individual academic learning path.

Access (to higher education): the right of qualified candidates to apply and to be considered for admission to higher education.

[\(see the Lisbon Recognition Convention\)](#)

Access routes to higher education: routes to higher education are the different formal access requirements that are defined to be the necessary conditions of higher education access. Questions of selection or acceptance into a programme are not part of the definition.

Standard route: entering higher education with a standard entry qualification. The standard entry qualification is the most widely used diploma or certificate issued by a competent authority attesting the successful completion of an education programme and giving the holder of the qualification the right to be considered for admission to higher education (typically the upper secondary school leaving certificate).

Alternative access route: entering higher education without a standard entry qualification, based on requirements other than the standard entry requirements (e.g. based on qualification other than the standard entry qualification or based on the recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning).

Admission (to higher education institutions and programmes): the act of, or system for, allowing qualified applicants to pursue studies in higher education at a given institution and/or a given programme.

[\(see the Lisbon Recognition Convention\)](#)

Blended learning: a mode of learning that combines online teaching with classroom-based learning.

Bridging programmes: upper secondary education programmes (e.g. evening classes, additional follow-up years, etc.) aiming specifically at students who followed vocational educational or training tracks not giving access to higher education; and/or students who dropped out of school without obtaining an upper secondary school leaving certificate in order to support them in acquiring an upper secondary school leaving certificate, which provides access to higher education. These programmes are sometimes also called second-change programmes.

Careers guidance: information services, special courses and/or contacts with potential employers designed for (higher education) students.

Certification/recognition: the process or act of recognising an educational outcome resulting from a period of training (or education). Such recognition can take the form of providing a certificate and/or of granting a number of credits for the attended training (or education). In the specific context of question 7.3, certification/recognition refers to a training certificate provided or recognised by the top-level authorities.

Coaching: task-oriented development approach based on the use of one-to-one interaction to enhance an individual's skills, knowledge and competences.

Community engagement (of higher education institutions): involvement and participation in action for the welfare of the local or regional community. Includes volunteer action, humanitarian activities, and is generally motivated by values and ideals of social justice.

Completion: the successful finishing of a study programme (graduation).

Credit (ECTS): ECTS credits express the volume of learning based on the defined learning outcomes and their associated workload. 60 ECTS credits are allocated to the learning outcomes and associated workload of a full-time academic year or its equivalent, which normally comprises a number of educational components to which credits (on the basis of the learning outcomes and workload) are allocated. ECTS credits are generally expressed in whole.

Credit mobility: credit mobility is a short-term form of mobility – usually a maximum of one year – aiming at the acquisition of credits in a foreign institution in the framework of on-going studies at the home institution.

Cycle: one of the objectives in the Bologna Declaration in 1999 was the “adoption of a system based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate”. In 2003, doctoral studies were included in the Bologna structure and referred to as the third cycle. The EHEA thus defined a hierarchy of three higher education cycles (first cycle, second cycle and third cycle). Short-cycle higher education – i.e. ISCED 5 programmes up to 180 ECTS with learning outcomes below the level of the first cycle – was added in 2018.

Degree mobility: degree mobility is a long-term form of mobility which aims at the acquisition of a whole degree or certificate in the country of destination.

Disability: any long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder a person’s full or effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Disadvantaged students: students who face specific challenges of such nature, that compared to their peers in higher education they are in a disadvantaged position. The challenge can take many forms (e.g. disability, low family income, little or no family support, being an orphan, many school moves, mental health problems, pregnancy, care duties). The disadvantage may be permanent, temporary or occasional. Disadvantaged students may be part of an underrepresented group, but not necessarily. Therefore, the terms disadvantaged and underrepresented students are not synonymous.

Distance learning: education of students who are not present at an institution. This may be through online education or correspondence courses.

Drop-out: the phenomenon of students starting but not continuing or finishing a study programme.

Equity (in higher education): a principle of social justice that reflects the notion of fairness. In the context of this report, fairness refers to equal opportunity for all in terms of accessing higher education and progressing towards the completion of studies. A broad definition of equity refers not only to nominally equal access and progression rights (i.e. same rights for all), but also to targeted measures and rights that enhance the access and progression of individuals who tend to be underrepresented in higher education institutions (HEIs), even if they appear to contradict the nominal equality principle (i.e. allowing for special rights reserved to certain categories of people only).

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS): ECTS is a learner-centred system for credit accumulation and transfer, based on the principle of transparency of the learning, teaching and assessment processes. Its objective is to facilitate the planning, delivery and evaluation of study programmes and student mobility by recognising learning achievements and qualifications and periods of learning.

External quality assurance: external quality assurance refers to the process of evaluation or audit of a higher education programme and/or institution undertaken by a specialised body outside the institution. Typically, the body may be a quality assurance or accreditation agency. The evaluation will involve the collection of data, information and evidence for assessment either against agreed standards or towards defined goals.

Fee: any sum of money paid by students with which they formally and compulsorily contribute to the cost of their higher education. This may include, but is not restricted to e.g. a registration fee, tuition fees, graduation fees, administrative fees, etc. Payments to student unions are not taken into account.

First generation (student): student whose parents and grand-parents did not complete a tertiary education qualification (ISCED 5-8).

First time student: a student who participates in higher education (short-, first-, second- or third-cycle) and has not yet obtained a higher education qualification at the level in which s/he is enrolled.

Formal learning: learning which takes place in an organised and structured environment, specifically dedicated to learning, and typically leads to the award of a qualification, usually in the form of a certificate or a diploma. It includes systems of general education, initial vocational training and higher education.

see: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32012H1222%2801%29>

Grant: public financial support provided directly to students, which does not need to be paid back.

A need-based grant is awarded on the basis of financial hardship/socio-economic background of students, which is commonly evaluated based on parental income and/or students' income. Universal grants do not target any specific category(ies) of students, and are, in principle open to all students, i.e. are "universally available". These grants are either provided as a flat-rate contribution (all students receive the same amount), or the amount takes into account students' financial situation, i.e. the grant is not awarded or is reduced if the student has another source of personal income above a specified amount are awarded to (almost) all students.

Higher education institution (HEI): an institution providing services in the field of higher and/or tertiary education, as defined by national law. Three types of higher education institutions are distinguished (the first two are covered by this report): public higher education institutions, government-dependent private higher education institutions and private higher education institutions.

A public higher education institution is an institution directly managed by a government agency/authority or by a governing body, most of whose members are either appointed by a public authority or elected by public franchise.

A government-dependent private higher education institution is an institution controlled/managed by a non-governmental organisation or where the governing board consists of members not selected by a public agency but receiving 50 percent or more of its core funding from government agencies, or whose teaching personnel are paid by a government agency – either directly or through government.

Higher education preparatory programme: a programme providing alternative qualification to the upper secondary school leaving certificate. Common to these programmes is that they are offered to learners not having the standard upper secondary school leaving certificate, and that at the end of the programme learners are awarded a qualification which is equivalent to the standard upper secondary school leaving certificate, but is not the same. Students who successfully complete such programmes

can gain access to higher education institutions without the standard upper secondary leaving certificate.

Higher education qualification: any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority attesting the successful completion of a higher education programme.

[\(see the Lisbon Recognition Convention\)](#)

Home students: students who are citizens or residents in the country of study, as well as those students who have the same rights as these citizens or residents. For example, within the European Union, students who are citizens of EU Member States have the status of home students.

Incentives: apart from regulations, educational authorities can also encourage higher education institutions to follow certain policy lines (e.g. support under-represented groups, enhance completion, include work placements or mobility windows into study programmes, etc.) through incentives. Incentives can be financial, based on funding formulas or performance-based funding, or can include organisational or managerial support.

Inclusion/social inclusion: the process of improving the ability, opportunity and worthiness of people, disadvantaged on the basis of their identity, to take part in society. (Source: World Bank 2013: Inclusion Matters: The foundation for shared prosperity.)

Incoming/Inward mobility: incoming mobility refers to students that moved (i.e. crossed a national border) to a specified country to study.

Indirect costs of participating in higher education: any costs related to accommodation, transport, meals that students need to cover while participating in higher education. These are often mentioned next to direct costs of participating in higher education, which are typically study fees that students have to pay, cost of study books, etc.

Informal learning: learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure and is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support; it may be unintentional from the learner's perspective; examples of learning outcomes acquired through informal learning are skills acquired through life and work experiences, project management skills or ICT skills acquired at work, languages learned and intercultural skills acquired during a stay in another country, ICT skills acquired outside work, skills acquired through volunteering, cultural activities, sports, youth work and through activities at home (e.g. taking care of a child).

See: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32012H1222%2801%29>.

Institutional mission: the official or general mission of the higher education institute (HEI). The institutional mission may outline the principles permeating the foundation or the function of the HEI and/or the general objectives it strives to meet through its function.

International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED): has been developed to facilitate comparisons of education statistics and indicators across countries on the basis of uniform and internationally agreed definitions. The coverage of ISCED extends to all organised and sustained learning opportunities for children, young people and adults, including those with special educational needs, irrespective of the institutions or organisations providing them or the form in which they are delivered.

Local/regional socio-economic context (of higher education institutions): it refers to the socio-economic factors at a local or regional level that may influence an individual's life chances including access to education. These socio-economic factors usually include overall levels of education in the population, housing situation, labour market activity, wealth, but also cultural and religious discrimination, density of population, levels of corruption and crime, etc.

Mainstream (policy measures): measures that are aimed at all or the vast majority of students without specifically targeting students with certain characteristics. E.g. academic guidance services that are open to all and any student.

Mentoring: relationship-oriented development approach based on the use of one-to-one interaction to enhance an individual's performance and wellbeing.

Migrants or from a migrant background: people who move from one country to another, or whose parents or grand-parents have moved from one country to another. In the European Union, citizens moving to another Member State are not considered migrants but EU mobile. Consequently, only people born in a non-EU country are considered migrants in the EU.

Monitoring: the process of systematic data gathering, analysis and use of information by top-level authorities to inform policy. Systematic monitoring must include mechanisms of cross-institutional data gathering and allow cross-institutional data comparability.

National qualifications frameworks for higher education: national qualifications frameworks describe qualifications in terms of level, workload, learning outcomes and profile. They relate qualifications and other learning achievements in higher education coherently and are internationally understood.

Non-formal learning: learning which takes place through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives, learning time) where some form of learning support is present (e.g. student-teacher relationships); it may cover programmes to impart work skills, adult literacy and basic education for early school leavers; very common cases of non-formal learning include in-company training, through which companies update and improve the skills of their workers such as ICT skills, structured on-line learning (e.g. by making use of open educational resources), and courses organised by civil society organisations for their members, their target group or the general public.

see: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32012H1222%2801%29>

Online programme: a higher education programme that is provided primarily or entirely through the use of an Internet-connected computer, rather than attending a programme in a traditional higher education institution/campus setting.

Outward mobility: outward mobility refers to students that left their country of residence (i.e. crossed a national border) to study elsewhere (in which they are counted as inwardly mobile students).

Part-time study: in opposition to full-time study, part-time study is based on taking fewer course credits, for example fewer than 60 ECTS per year.

Part-time student status: the distinction between different student statuses is often based on the workload of students, measured either in ECTS credits or hours/weeks. In some countries, however, the definition does not refer to the workload, but to a limited participation in study sessions. This means that part-time students should in principle achieve the same number of credits as full-time students, but they are expected to attend fewer class-based learning sessions, and to dedicate more time to self-study activities.

Portability: the possibility to take the support available to students in their home country abroad (within EHEA) for credit mobility (credit portability) or degree mobility (degree portability).

Psychological counselling services: psychological support structures which aim to improve interpersonal relations, and hence the academic performance of students. This may include a variety of professional services aimed to increase students' capacity to overcome personal and social problems that hinder their attainment of academic success.

Public non-cash support: public support measures to students in the form of goods or services, such as, for example, subsidised accommodation, subsidised transportation, subsidised meals, etc. This typically includes a payment of public funding to a third party, which is responsible for providing the particular good or service. In contrast, public cash support to students and their families includes public grants, publicly subsidised loans, tax benefits and family allowances.

Quality assurance agency: a body established by public authorities with responsibility for external quality assurance. Agencies are intended to play a strong role in ensuring accountability of higher education institutions and may have specific objectives and developmental roles regarding enhancing quality.

Quantitative objectives: measurable targets defining a goal to be reached by a specified time in terms of a concrete percentage or number.

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning: validation and formal recognition of learners' non-formal and informal learning experiences in order to:

- provide higher education access to candidates without an upper secondary school leaving certificate;
- or
- within a higher education programme, allocate credits towards a qualification and/or provide exemption from some programme requirements.

Retention: the successful continuation of a study programme.

Short cycle: programmes of less than 180 ECTS (or lasting less than 3 years), leading to a qualification that is recognised at a lower level than a qualification at the end of the first cycle. Short-cycle qualifications are recognised as level 5 in the overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA), at level 5 in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and also at level 5 in the ISCED classification.

Social dialogue: an organised process of mutual exchanges and communication between policy-makers and defined stakeholders on issues of common interest related to public policy. Often a social dialogue aims to help policy-makers to consult stakeholders, but unlike typical consultation processes, the participants of the social dialogue are specified in advance and are expected to contribute their insights in a dynamic process of exchanges of views. In some cases, social dialogue is a form of negotiation. Normally, a social dialogue involves actual meetings between the participants, although these meetings can be also virtual or disjointed (i.e. there is a flow of exchanges between the participants at different moments). Often a mark of success of a social dialogue process is that any decisions or conclusions have been reached through consensus.

Socio-economic status: a combined economic and sociological measure of an individual's or family's economic and social position relative to others, based on income, level of education, and occupation. Definitions of socio-economic status might differ depending on the national context.

Special educational needs: learning difficulties or disabilities that make it harder for individuals to learn than for their peers.

Steering documents: official documents containing guidelines, obligations and/or recommendations for higher education policy and/or institutions.

Strategy (or other major policy plan): an official policy document developed by the top-level authorities in an effort to achieve an overall goal. A strategy can comprise a vision, identify objectives and goals (qualitative and quantitative), describe processes, authorities and people in charge, identify funding sources, make recommendations, etc. Depending on the particular education system, a strategy may refer to a specific document bearing the term 'strategy', but it may refer also to a document (or documents) that describe a major policy plan equivalent to a strategy without, however, bearing the title 'strategy'.

Top-level or top-level authority: the highest level of authority with responsibility for education in a given country, usually located at national (state) level. However, for Belgium, Germany and Spain, the *Communautés*, *Länder* and *Comunidades Autónomas* respectively are either wholly responsible or share responsibilities with the state level for all or most areas relating to education. Therefore, these administrations are considered as the top-level authority for the areas where they hold the responsibility, while for those areas for which they share the responsibility with the national (state) level, both are considered to be top-level authorities.

Top-level coordination mechanism: a working group, body or institution which is set up or has a specific mandate to coordinate top-level policies in a well-defined field. Its members typically represent different top-level authorities and stakeholders which are responsible for the development and implementation of top-level policies in a specific field.

Underrepresented students: a group of learners is underrepresented in relation to certain characteristics (e.g. gender, age, nationality, geographic origin, socio-economic background, ethnic minorities) if its share among the students is lower than the share of a comparable group in the total population. This can be documented at the time of admission, during the course of studies or at graduation. Individuals usually have several underrepresented characteristics, which is why combinations of underrepresented characteristics ("intersectionality") should always be considered. Furthermore, underrepresentation can also impact at different levels of higher education – study programme, faculty or department, higher education institution, higher education system. This definition is complementary to the London Communiqué, "that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations", but does not fully cover it.

Upper secondary level (ISCED 3) completion: according to the ISCED 2011 classification, this includes education programmes with classification codes: 343, 344, 353 and 354.

Vulnerable students: vulnerable students may be at risk of disadvantage (see above) and in addition have special (protection) needs. For example, because they suffer from an illness (including mental illness) or have a disability, because they are minors, because their residence permit depends on the success of their studies (and thus also on decisions made by individual teachers), because they are at risk of being discriminated against. These learners are vulnerable in the sense that they may not be able to ensure their personal well-being, or that they may not be able to protect themselves from harm or exploitation and need additional support or attention.

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Towards equity and inclusion in higher education in Europe

This Eurydice report focuses on the topic of equity and inclusion in higher education in Europe. It analyses the current level of alignment of European higher education systems with the ten 'Principles and Guidelines agreed by all EHEA countries' as a blueprint to take forward the commitment of improving the social dimension. There are ten chapters, addressing each Principle. Each chapter opens with the full exposition of the relevant Principle and its accompanying Guidelines. Following that is a succinct explanation of how the particular Principles and Guidelines relate to equity, the methodological challenges that are addressed, and the choice of the indicators. Finally, the data collected is presented mostly in the form of maps. A scoreboard indicator at the end of each chapter summarises how the European countries perform based on the extent of implementation of the particular Guidelines. This gives the reader a clear visual picture of the current level of attention in European systems to equity and inclusion in higher education. Finally, a concluding chapter recaps the main findings of the report. The report's prime source is information on top-level regulations and policies collected from Eurydice National Units, representing 38 education systems across 36 European countries, with the academic year 2020/2021 as a reference.

The Eurydice Network's task is to understand and explain how Europe's different education systems are organised and how they work. The network provides descriptions of national education systems, comparative studies devoted to specific topics, indicators and statistics. All Eurydice publications are available free of charge on the Eurydice website or in print upon request. Through its work, Eurydice aims to promote understanding, cooperation, trust and mobility at European and international levels. The network consists of national units located in European countries and is co-ordinated by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA).

For more information about Eurydice, see:

<https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/>.