

Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe



English language summary of final report „Synopsis of Indicators“

The following is a summary and slight modification of key texts from the final EUROSTUDENT report. More information on the project, data and the reporting system can be found on the project website: www.eurostudent.eu.

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Contents

Contents	2
The “social dimension” of studying in the European higher education area and EUROSTUDENT’s role	3
<i>Introduction</i>	3
<i>Data and interpreting the social dimension</i>	5
The students	5
Scope of the report.....	5
Interpreting the social dimension	6
How to read this report	7
Summary of the key findings from the study.....	9
<i>Chapter 1: Demographic characteristics of the student body.....</i>	9
<i>Chapter 2: Access to higher education and structural characteristics of higher education studies.....</i>	10
<i>Chapter 3: Social make-up of the student body</i>	11
<i>Chapter 4: Accommodation.....</i>	12
<i>Chapter 5: Funding and state assistance.....</i>	13
<i>Chapter 6: Living expenses and student spending.....</i>	14
<i>Chapter 7: Student employment and time budget.....</i>	15
<i>Chapter 8: Internationalisation and student mobility</i>	16
Policy considerations.....	17
Policy considerations.....	18
<i>Higher education access and changes to the student body</i>	19
State of development	19
Main challenges.....	21
Policy directions.....	21
<i>Social and economic framework conducive to effective studies</i>	22
State of development	22
Main challenges.....	24
Policy directions.....	24
<i>International mobility of students as an “optional extra”?.....</i>	25
State of development	25
Main challenges.....	27
Policy directions.....	28
<i>Graduation and the value of study completion</i>	28
State of development	28
Main challenges.....	30
Policy directions.....	30
Appendix.....	32
<i>Organisation of the project</i>	32
<i>Method and EUROSTUDENT conventions</i>	33

The “social dimension” of studying in the European higher education area and EUROSTUDENT’s role

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide comparative data on the so-called ‘social dimension’ of higher education in Europe. It is the product of a network of academics and representatives of ministries responsible for higher education in twenty-three countries, who have contributed over the past three years to the EUROSTUDENT project. This is the third round of a continually developing project. The next EUROSTUDENT report is planned for 2011.

All participants of the project are interested in providing data on various aspects of students’ living and studying conditions in order to better understand the national situation and to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their respective frameworks in international comparison with a view to maintaining or improving effectiveness. Such discussions are not only occurring within the EUROSTUDENT Network. One of the most prominent international fora for the exchange of ideas and higher education reforms currently is the Bologna Process, a common initiative for higher education reform in forty-six countries (2008) with an influence on higher education reform in even more regions of the world (e.g. Latin America and Asia). After many years of discussion, the European ministers responsible for higher education have recognised the social dimension as a central concept – even as a leading comparative advantage – for European higher education. The first concrete measure which ministers have agreed on is to collect more data in order to assess this issue as well as differences and similarities between countries.¹ This is an initiative in which EUROSTUDENT is involved and it will be contributing data from the current – third – round of the project.

Higher education is an expensive business with countries spending on average €5422 per student on tuition (EU-27, 2003),² but the recognition of its importance for the development of both society and industry is leading many countries to undertake initiatives to increase the share of the population participating in higher education courses. Even for countries with a comparatively low participation rate, the share of a national population undertaking higher education has risen between 1998 and 2005 (EU-27: by 27%) and the increases by country are significantly higher (participation in Lithuania and Romania has more than doubled → Appendix). These increases have, in general, not led to over-qualification and therefore to mismatches between graduates and the labour market, but are adequate responses to changes in both society, in the labour market and indeed in education and training systems.³ They have nevertheless had significant implications for the expectations of higher education from society and industry as well as for the make-up of the student body, which is now much less socially and economically homogenous than in the past.

In view of both the importance and the expense of higher education provision, one clear objective of policy is to provide effective higher education. That is, to organise and execute higher education to the maximum benefit of both participants themselves (one could speak here of private benefits) and of society as a whole (...and here of public benefits). Such goals include assuring an appropriate participation rate as well as fair access to higher education and subsequently to assure that students are offered study conditions conducive to their successful graduation. In this scenario, high attrition rates

¹ London Communiqué 2007, section 3.4.

² Eurydice/Eurostat (2007): Key data on higher education 2007. Brussels.

³ Cf. OECD (2007): Education at a glance 2007. Paris: pp. 11-15 (editorial).

during studies would be seen as wastage, since either inappropriate candidates entered into the higher education system or these were the appropriate candidates, but the study conditions proved obstructive to successful graduation.

The use of the word effectiveness instead of efficiency is really a nuance, and both terms are often used synonymously. However, the nuance is important: whilst efficiency tends to mean finding the correct balance between input and output in the short-term (e.g. How much does a graduate of higher education cost?), effectiveness looks into the long-term balance (e.g. Can the graduate obtain an adequate job? What is the graduate worth to society?). The emphasis is, therefore, also on quality and outcomes, instead of outputs, which are harder to judge with a commonly accepted objectivity. In this study we are looking at a qualitative aspect of higher education – the social dimension – with exactly this character. The analysis, however, is based on quantitative statistics on a highly aggregated level. That means that many phenomena are only imperfectly reflected in the statistics and that important contextual information is not considered. The advantage is, on the other hand, that a certain degree of comparability can be offered between twenty-three very diverse systems. In other words, the study provides a broad view, but not an in-depth view. Three initiatives have been undertaken in an effort to reduce the disadvantage of this broad view.

- *The aggregate indicators have been developed within a network and over time:* The current round of EUROSTUDENT is the third full round since its inception. Each time the results from the previous round have been discussed with the network and adaptations or more precise specifications have been implemented. Three large workshops have also been organised during this third round (Berlin, Lisbon and Bucharest) in order to encourage discussions and set common conventions between network members.
- *National data delivery is complemented by national data interpretation:* Using the data delivery interface via the internet, national contributors are asked to input their data for a particular subtopic (e.g. share of students living in student halls) and then to interpret this data from a national standpoint. In doing this, they should assure that the most important contextual information is re-linked to the data (e.g. Who provides student halls).
- *Separate National Profiles for all countries:* Besides this Synopsis of Indicators, a national report – the so-called National Profile – can be viewed on the internet and downloaded as a full paper report for each country. These reports include more detailed national data than are presented in this report and contain the national commentaries on the national data for each subtopic. Furthermore, each National Profile includes a general introduction to the structure of the respective higher education system.

Despite these efforts, the limitations of such a report should be recognised and the authors hope, in particular, that this report will lead on to more in-depth studies which focus on fewer countries and/or fewer topic areas.⁴ The purpose of this report, then, is to provide an overview of the social dimension of higher education, which will stimulate policy debates and further research.

The authors of this study recognise that higher education, in general, and the social dimension, in particular, remain tied to multifarious national issues. The structures and processes of a higher edu-

⁴ One report has already been published using the new EUROSTUDENT III data: Schwarzenberger, A. (2008, ed.): Public / private funding of higher education: a social balance. Higher Education Information System (HIS). A further report, which will provide a Swiss reflection on the EUROSTUDENT data, is planned for 2008.

education system and the integration of this system into the structures and processes of a national educational and training system, its relationship with the labour market and indeed the traditional expectations of higher education within society differ between countries. One motivation of the national contributors to EUROSTUDENT for entering the comparative study is, however, the recognition that many of the challenges facing higher education are similar and the value added by participation is to be able to compare solutions to common policy dilemmas. We hope that our publication will aid this process.

Data and interpreting the social dimension

The students

The EUROSTUDENT dataset is based on national surveys. Students with the following characteristics are included:

- The total target population of the EUROSTUDENT statistics consists of all individuals pursuing an education at ISCED 5A level. This includes both students studying their first degree and those studying their second degree or continuing programmes (e.g. second cycle master students). Students in study programmes of ISCED level 5B (practically oriented / occupationally specific) and ISCED level 6 (doctorate students) are not included. In some cases, the indicators differentiate between students studying Bachelor courses and the whole population with a view to observe the effect of changes to study organisation within the framework of the Bologna Process.
- This global population of students is divided into national and foreign population. Only national or permanent resident students are considered the target population of national surveys in each country. Resident students in a particular country, who do not have the respective country's citizenship, are only included in the target population, if they have obtained their higher education entrance certificate in this country and study in this country. By contrast, students of foreign nationality are not included, if they also obtained their higher education entrance certificates abroad.
- The target population consists of all matriculated students; no matter if they are registered with full-time or part-time status. In some cases, the indicators differentiate between age groups. In particular, "21-year-olds" are used as a normative category in order to control for the effects of age.

Scope of the report

The eight main chapters included in this report reflect eight topic areas covered by the EUROSTUDENT dataset. Figure 1 gives an overview of these topic areas and the number of subtopics ascribed to each subtopic area. In essence, the EUROSTUDENT dataset attempts to describe a student's learning biography from entrance into a higher education system, to study conditions during studies, and finally to exit from the higher education system. These three "moments" in a student's biography are shown in the overview. Temporary mobility is indeed a separate activity, but strongly dependent on study conditions.

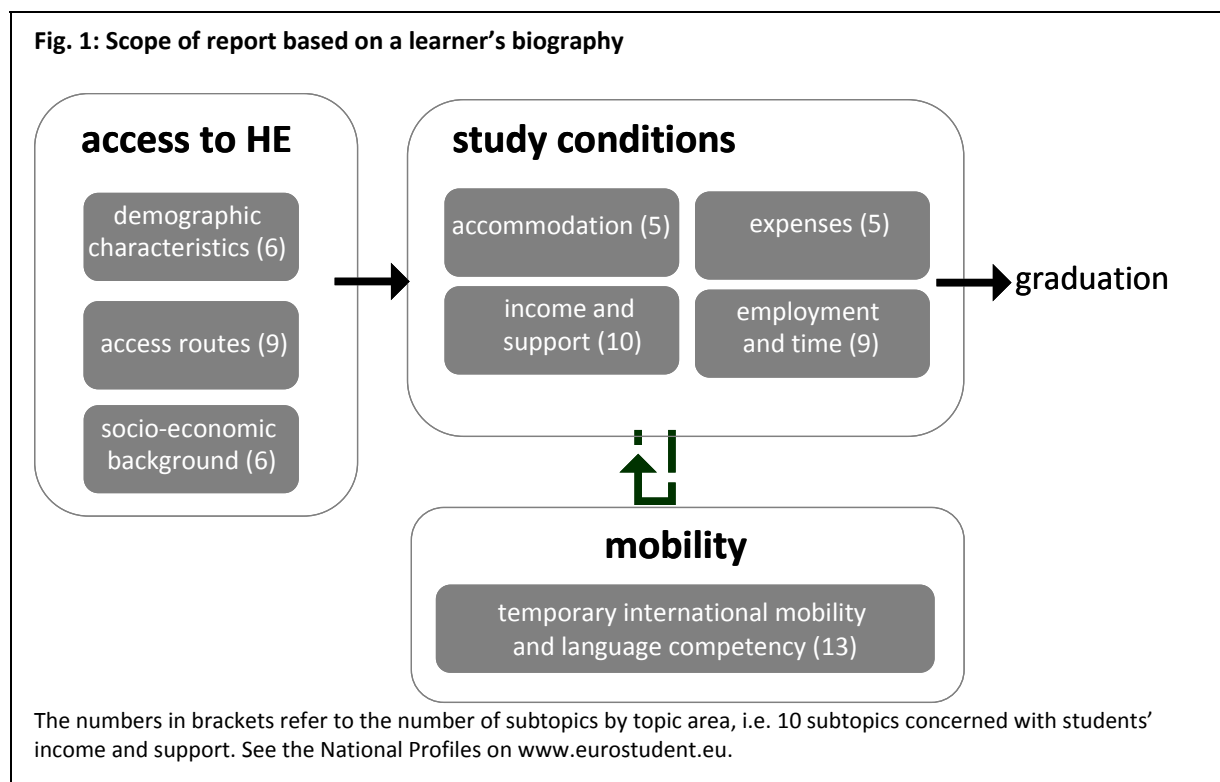


Figure 1 also shows a blind spot in EUROSTUDENT's assessment of the social dimension – there is no data available for student graduation. This is due to the fact that the surveys carried out within the EUROSTUDENT project collate responses from a cross-section of students during their study period and it is not possible to know anything about their graduation. Whilst we have no information on graduation, the EUROSTUDENT dataset does include topics, which are likely to have implications on graduation (e.g. time budget for students).

Interpreting the social dimension

Ideally an analysis of the social dimension should cover all three central moments of a student's learning biography before passing a final judgement on the level of equity and effectiveness in a national higher education system. Figure 2 illustrates this fact for three fictional countries. The criterion, which should be used to assess a country's position, is "participative equity". This term has been defined within the Bologna Process to mean:

"(...) the societal goal that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education should reflect the diversity of our populations."⁵

⁵ Extract from: BFUG Working Group Social Dimension and Data on Mobility of Staff and Students, 2007.

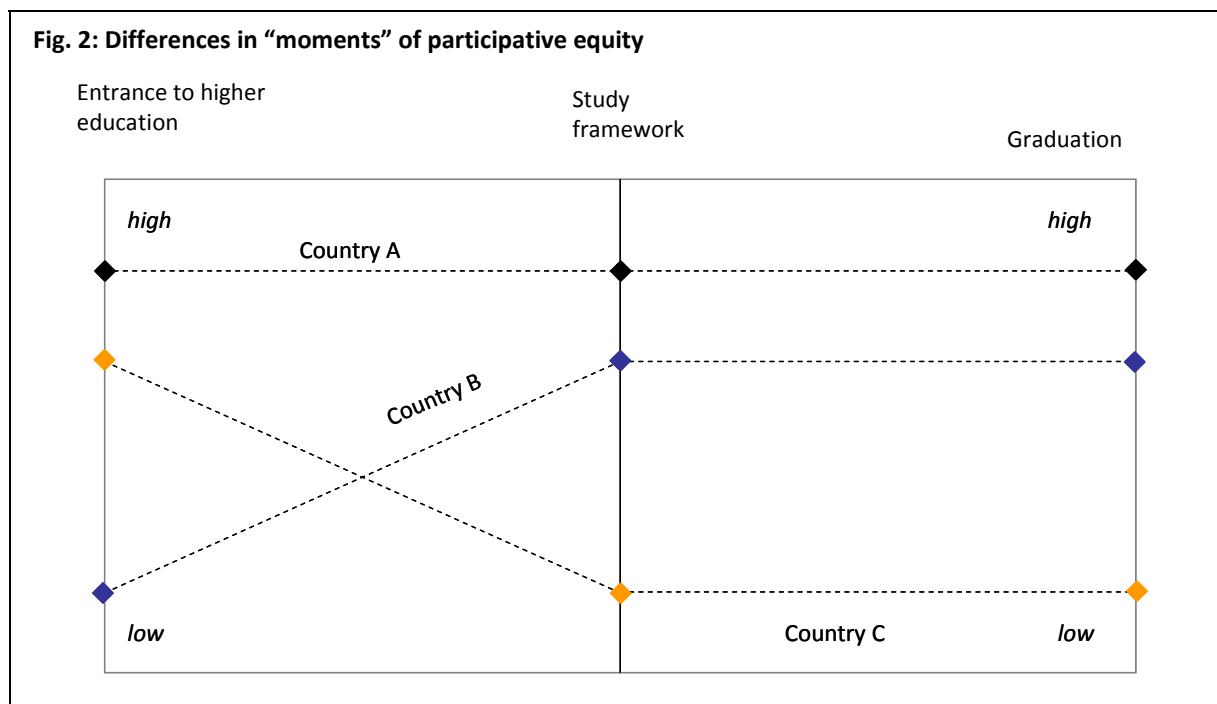


Figure 2 shows Country A to be successful in terms of participative equity – this country has a higher education system which has a high level of equity at entry, a high level concerning the study framework and a high level at graduation. That is to say that disadvantage by individual background – as opposed to merit – is minimal at all three “moments” of study.

Country B is a case, where the socio-economic restriction at entry is high (i.e. low participative equity), but all those students who do enter experience the same framework conditions. That is to say that the participative equity during studies and at graduation is high.

The third case, Country C, shows a higher education system which is characterised by an open system of entry. Such a wide access system leads to a high level of heterogeneity in terms of the requirements for study conditions (e.g. necessary support from the state). Here Country C is less successful at providing conducive conditions for successful graduation.

These examples show that the assessment of the positions of countries B and C is difficult unless all moments of a course of study are considered. On the one hand, Country B appears better than Country C, because of the high level of participative equity for all participants. On the other hand, Country C may have adopted new initiatives to provide an open higher education system, but the initiatives have yet to work through the system and support the new recruits. Both countries have the chance of reaching Country A’s performance in the future.

How to read this report

- Since the aim of this report is to give a comparative overview of the structures in the European Higher Education Area, trends and country clusters are the focus of the analysis. Small differences in the data between countries should not be over-interpreted due to the variety of methods used to collate the data (Fig. 5). See also the appendix for information on any other special notes on data sources per country (→ Appendix).

Summary

- This report is the output of a developing project and is therefore subject to a learning process. In particular, the introduction of more countries to the project, but also the uniqueness of an international data set on the social dimension of higher education and the current period of higher education reforms make every comparison strained. In the cases where data from country participants was available, but the reliability of the data for comparison could not be assured, the data has not been included in this report. It should, however, be highlighted that differences in population coverage, data collection methods and weighting systems remain constraints on the comparability of the data included in this report.

Summary of the key findings from the study

Each chapter in the *Synopsis of Indicators* starts with an overview of the key findings. These key findings are given over the following pages. The analysis in the full report compares the detailed findings across all 23 observed countries and comments on tendencies and country groupings.

Chapter 1: Demographic characteristics of the student body

Information about students' demographic characteristics is of importance not only for knowledge about the social composition of the student body, but also as it constitutes substantial background information for the reception and interpretation of the EUROSTUDENT dataset. In some cases, the student sample used by contributing countries does not represent the general student body in the respective country perfectly. Deviations will be noted in this chapter and can also be found in the Appendix.

Key findings

- The average age of students ranges widely between 21 and 27, but most European students are aged 25 or younger. The biggest group of students within this age range is to be found in Turkey, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Italy and Ireland.
- The age of first year students also ranges widely – between 19 and 26. Here two groups are visible: Those countries in which most students commence their studies before their twentieth birthday (e.g. France and Italy) and those in which the majority of students begin between the ages of 20 and 25 (e.g. Slovenia and Finland).
- Sweden, England/Wales and Spain seem particularly successful at re-engaging prospective students long after they have left secondary schooling.
- The share of single students diverges widely between countries and does not appear to be related to students' average age. The highest shares of single students without partner are to be found in Italy and Portugal. The lowest in the Czech Republic, Germany, Romania and Slovenia, where students are more often in long-term relationships.
- In most countries less than one in ten students has a child and there are signs that balancing studies with parenthood remains an obstacle. Finland seems to be particularly successful at integrating parents with young children into studies.

Chapter 2: Access to higher education and structural characteristics of higher education studies

Key findings

- On the basis of a narrow definition of non-traditional routes to higher education based on the accreditation of prior learning between 10% and 15% of students take this route in five countries – England/Wales, Scotland, Estonia, the Netherlands and Slovenia. In contrast, there are eight countries without any students who take this type of non-traditional route into higher education: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Italy, Latvia, Romania, Slovakia and Turkey.
- Work experience prior to entry into higher education is evident in all countries. Over 40% of the student body has this experience in Sweden, Finland and Spain. In all but two countries more students from lower education backgrounds have work experience than students whose parents attained a higher education degree.
- Through relating the ratio of students enrolled in Bachelor and Master programmes to those in special national (pre-Bologna) programmes it is possible to see how advanced the implementation of the Bologna two-cycle study structure is in each country. From this data Portugal, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Bulgaria appear well advanced in the process of Bologna implementation, while Austria, Slovenia and Germany seem less advanced. These advanced countries tend to have lower study durations across all programmes, although duration also varies by subject area.
- The share of students studying part-time either by status or by study intensity is high. In eight countries, the share of full-time students studying less than 21 hours a week (i.e. de facto part-time) is above 20%. The shares are particularly high in Estonia, Slovakia, Finland and Latvia.

Chapter 3: Social make-up of the student body

Key findings

- A snapshot of the current situation shows that an under-representation of low socio-economic groups prevails in all higher education systems. On both measures used here (occupational status and parents' education) Scotland, the Netherlands and Finland appear to be the most open systems. Bulgaria, Latvia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Germany and Estonia are the least open on both counts.
- In some countries the participation rate of students from a low-educated social background is relatively high – notably in the Netherlands, Finland, Spain, Switzerland and Ireland.
- Social selectivity within education systems is not simply a question of the systems' capacity. Comparing EUROSTUDENT countries we find the link between entry rates to higher education systems and social selectivity of students to be weak.
- A connection between structure of secondary schooling systems and entry to higher education is evident: a higher stratification of school systems appears to lead to a lower share of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in the respective higher education systems.

Chapter 4: Accommodation

Key findings

- In most countries the most frequent form of student accommodation is living in a private flat or lodgings. This accounts for over two-third of students in Norway, Finland, Germany, Austria und Sweden.
- Many countries clearly use the provision of student halls to support students' independence. In countries like Estonia, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Lithuania, Turkey, the Czech Republic, Romania and the Netherlands over a fifth of students benefit from this form of accommodation.
- Beyond country differences, age plays a significant role in determining the accommodation form chosen by students. The older the students are, the more the share of family lodgers and dwellers in halls of residence decreases and the share of those students living in private lodgings increases.
- Student satisfaction with their respective accommodation form is high. Satisfaction rates appear to be related to differences in expectations by country – often the most popular form of accommodation is the form of accommodation with which students are most satisfied. For 12 of 20 countries (Portugal, Spain, Italy, Slovenia, Latvia, Lithuania, Ireland, Turkey, the Czech Republic, Romania, the Netherlands, and France) a high proportion of students living in their parents' home is accompanied by a high appreciation for this type of accommodation. This evidence suggests that in Europe parents' home will continue to play an important role as a framework condition for studying in higher education.
- Students who live in private accommodation pay a higher monthly rent on average than their counterparts in halls of residence in all but two countries (Spain and Ireland). The provision of this form of accommodation can therefore be seen as indirect student support. The share of students living in this form of accommodation and the discount rate in comparison to private rents is highest in Bulgaria, Latvia and Slovak Republic, where students pay less than a third of the market price. In the Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania and Slovenia the rent in private accommodations is about double the equivalent in student halls of residence.

Chapter 5: Funding and state assistance

Key findings

- Total monthly income varies significantly by accommodation form and shows family provision of accommodation to be an indirect form of financial support.
- The range of income levels among students is broad in every country. It is widest in Ireland, Spain and the Czech Republic and narrowest in Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands. In Ireland, Spain and France, the poorest students have a monthly income significantly lower than the national legal minimum wage.
- Working alongside studies is a significant income source. Its contribution to total income lies over one fifth in all countries – except for Turkey.
- A focus on younger students (21-year-olds) shows direct family support to be dominant in all but four countries (Sweden, Finland, Netherlands, England/Wales), where state support dominates.
- The composition of a student's income mix is influenced by his/her socio-economic background. Least affected by this factor are students in Finland, Sweden and Scotland, where state support is very strong.
- State support is not always based on need as expressed by socio-economic criteria. The countries in which these criteria seem to play the clearest role are Ireland, Bulgaria and Switzerland. In Finland, Slovenia and Estonia other criteria appear to determine state support allocations.

Chapter 6: Living expenses and student spending

Key findings

- Housing costs are students' biggest financial burden in the majority of countries. The range runs from more than 45% (Sweden) down to 10% (Bulgaria) and clusters at around one third of student expenditure. The minimum-maximum differences can be explained by the national combination of different economic development and different standards of living or by different kinds of public support in the respective countries. Further factors are students' age and study location.
- On the basis of student surveys, the EUROSTUDENT dataset can provide information on the effect of fees on students' expenditure budget. The rates are highest in Turkey, Bulgaria, Portugal, Lithuania and Estonia where fees account for around one fifth of a student's monthly expenditure.
- Students' assessment of the sufficiency of their income is based both on income differences and general expectations. In general, satisfied students have a higher income at their disposal than the dissatisfied. However, it can be assumed that it is not just cash difference which influences students' subjective assessment, but also the different prevailing levels of subjective expectations on a national level.

Chapter 7: Student employment and time budget

Key findings

- Student employment is frequent in all countries and the rate is affected by age and social background. The high level in all countries seems to override the effects of culture and tradition. More than half the students in eleven countries work alongside their studies and in the Netherlands and Estonia this holds for more than two-thirds of students. The difference by social background found in most countries suggests a compensatory function of this income source.
- The financial significance of students' employment differs widely between countries. In the case of the Czech Republic, Spain and Slovakia more than three-quarters of total income is derived from students' self-financing. For some students this income may be essential to make a living, others may just acquire it for improving their lifestyle.
- Under the assumption that differences in time invested in studies affect students' success, the relationship between time spent on work and time spent studying is relevant for an assessment of the implications of working alongside studies. Students who spend between 11 and 15 hours per week on their jobs spend fewer hours on their studies. The number ranges from 7 hours less (Germany, Romania) to one hour less (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Lithuania).
- There are differences in the amount of hours spent working and the amount spent studying by field of studies. In a comparison between engineering and humanities students, humanities students tend to study less and work alongside their studies more hours and more frequently.
- At least one in ten student jobs is closely related to the student's course of study. In Austria, Czech Republic and Estonia there is a comparatively high rate of employment and a relatively close relationship between students' jobs and students' courses.
- Levels of satisfaction with overall workload are related to total hours spent studying and working. In Slovenia, Bulgaria, Portugal, Switzerland and Sweden the difference between students, who are satisfied and those who are dissatisfied with their weekly time budget is over 10 hours per week.

Chapter 8: Internationalisation and student mobility

Key findings

- Foreign study-related experiences are undertaken by more than one in ten students in half of the observed countries. The Czech Republic and Bulgaria are the only new European member states with a participation rate higher than 10%.
- There is a large share of students with definite plans for study-related experiences abroad who represent a potential for future international mobility. In most countries the percentage of students with definite plans ranges between one tenth and one fifth of students. In Austria and Bulgaria around one quarter of students have definite plans for future mobility.
- Students go abroad at various times throughout their studies. However, in most countries the biggest year-to-year increase takes place in the third or fourth year of studies. This finding has significant relevance for plans to encourage mobility whilst concurrently introducing more strict study structures within the Bologna Process.
- There is a difference in international mobility rates by the subject studied. In a contrast between two subject areas, the EUROSTUDENT data show that students of humanities and arts tend to go abroad more frequently than engineering students. The share is more than three times higher in Germany, Latvia, Slovakia and Estonia.
- The rates of both foreign study-related experiences abroad and foreign enrolment are dependent on social background. In Bulgaria, Romania, Portugal, Italy, Slovenia and Turkey the rate of foreign enrolment is at least three times lower for students of low educational backgrounds than for their social counterparts.
- English, French and German are the three most frequently spoken foreign languages. In four countries (Sweden, Austria, Netherlands, Switzerland) 70% of the students or more have fluent or very good skills in English as their first foreign language. The choice of country for foreign study-related experience is influenced by foreign language capability.
- Income disparities in the European Higher Education Area cause a significant strain on mobility movements. The monthly income required to finance a course of study in a particular country means that students from countries, where students' monthly income is comparatively high, have the greatest choice of host countries, whereas students from low-income countries have a narrower choice. In such low-income countries the state often provides a higher level of public support, but it cannot compensate for the existing disparities.

Key findings, cont.

- Organisational support for mobility is provided through mobility programmes, but the share of free-movers is very high. In the Czech Republic, Turkey, Sweden, Slovak Republic and Norway well over half of all mobile students are not part of a programme and the share of free-movers is below 30% in only two countries.
- Financial insecurity and lack of support for mobility in the home country particularly concern students considering going abroad. This is especially evident in the case of Turkey, Estonia, Germany, Slovak Republic and Portugal. However, lack of individual motivation is also an influential aspect. Students from low-educated backgrounds tend to perceive all the issues to be bigger obstacles to mobility than the average student.

Policy considerations

On the basis of data from 23 countries, EUROSTUDENT's Synopsis of Indicators presents a bird's eye view of the social and economic conditions of student life in Europe on the basis of data from 23 European countries. The study shows that global societal developments, cultural, geopolitical and socio-economic factors all play a role in the constellation of a total student experience in Europe. We have seen some common trends which transverse geopolitical boundaries, some which appear to be the result of explicit policy initiatives and some which describe the different characteristics of sub-groups of the student body in particular countries.

The policy-orientated reader is confronted with the challenge of processing this vast array of data and parameters with a view to finding what is policy relevant, to assessing what should be targeted through policy initiatives and to judging what can actually be changed through policy measures. We recognise this situation and will attempt to facilitate this process by highlighting certain trends and possible policy considerations in this chapter.⁶

The basis of this chapter will indeed be provided by results from EUROSTUDENT III, but such a project has limitations. In recognition of this fact, we will also provide references to other studies, where further insightful and relevant findings can be sourced.

Even a cursory look at policy documents and current studies in the field of higher education research shows that many reforms are occurring concurrently. A recent review of tertiary education carried out by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)⁷ covers, for instance, the following eight areas of reform:

- Steering tertiary education and governance
- Institutional funding strategies
- Quality improvement and assurance
- Equity in education systems
- Tertiary education's role in research and innovation
- Strengthening ties with the labour market
- Internationalisation
- The academic career

In each of these areas, reform programmes are sketched and the need for further reform is analysed by the authors of the review. Students play a key role in all areas, either as objects of reform (e.g. provision of a more inclusive higher education and better study conditions), as subjects of reform (e.g. as instruments to improve higher education provision) or indeed as products of the reform (e.g.

⁶ This chapter is based on discussions within the EUROSTUDENT Network and a review of policy debates and current literature elsewhere. Nevertheless, the responsibility for its contents lies with the authors, Dominic Orr and Klaus Schnitzer. It neither expresses the opinion of particular countries nor of the project funders.

⁷ OECD (2008): Final Synthesis Report from the OECD Thematic Review of Tertiary Education. Available online under: <http://oecd-conference-teks.iscte.pt/documents.html>

as better graduates). This makes knowledge of the students' situation highly relevant either as a starting point for reform or for the assessment of the results of reform initiatives. EUROSTUDENT plays a special role here, since it analyses the situation via student surveys and therefore "through students' eyes". However, it should be noted that since a distinction between the situation of students before and after reform cannot be drawn as clearly as one might hope, an assessment of causes and effects is particularly difficult in such phases of wide-ranging reform.

With the additional caveats to the interpretation of the EUROSTUDENT data in mind (→ Introduction, Chapter 1), the ensuing policy considerations should therefore not be understood as criticisms of specific situations in individual countries, but rather as suggestions for further policy-related discussions and research. In line with the analyses in the preceding chapters, this chapter will focus on four specific issues:

- Higher education access
- Study conditions
- International mobility of students
- Graduation

In each case the current state of development will be sketched and the main challenges focused upon. On the basis of this it is possible to make out a number of policy directions for consideration in the future. Although, it is in the nature of a summary over so many countries that some countries may already be pursuing these actions.

Higher education access and changes to the student body

State of development

If students play a central role in higher education, it can be assumed that changes to the student body will have significant effects on the way students play out their role. The EUROSTUDENT dataset does not (yet) present time series because of the developmental nature of the study. However, other studies and policy documents suggest that efforts to increase participation in higher education and a concurrent decrease in the "traditional" student population – which is either occurring now or is expected within the next decade – will lead to an increasingly diverse student population. EUROSTUDENT data reflects the current state of this development in various countries.

The size and make-up of the student population in any higher education system results from a combination of factors, such as:

- Possible routes into higher education (e.g. qualification requirements)
- Distribution of higher education entry qualifications in the population
- Capacity of a higher education system
- Personal motivation of individuals eligible for higher education to take up higher education
- Type of higher education provision and alternative provisions within the education sector

The “normal” route into higher education is considered to be entry through the secondary school system. In many cases secondary schooling not only prepares pupils for their transition to higher education, but also applies a selective filter so that only a certain share of the school population is directed towards higher education, e.g. through certain exit qualifications for entry into higher education.

The main criterion behind this selective function is merit, but as the OECD review states, merit is never pure.⁸ There is a large body of research showing that in most European countries educational attainment is still related to social origin – even though this relationship has become weaker in the course of the 20th century.⁹ Different mechanisms are considered to be the driving forces behind inequality of educational opportunity related to social background. The PISA study, for instance, which compares pupils’ school performance at the age of 15 years, has demonstrated that the socio-economic background of pupils affects both the filtering of pupils into different school types and pupils’ ultimate school performance – both of which have knock-on effects for chances of higher education entry.¹⁰ This situation is one of the main reasons that participation in higher education is biased towards students from privileged socio-economic backgrounds (→Chapter 3).

Since higher education is the last and highest formal stage of an education system, many countries have begun to install measures, which give individuals a second chance to enter higher education through alternative routes. These measures may be the provision of higher education entry certificates for adults, with courses which adults can follow parallel to other daily tasks (e.g. through evening classes). Additionally, special arrangements may be made for the recognition of experiential competences (acquired, for example, through employment) as qualification criteria for higher education entry.¹¹ The EUROSTUDENT study has attempted to quantify the share of national students, who have taken such alternative routes into higher education (→Chapter 2) and suggests that the provision of such measures is a way of making a higher education system less socially exclusive; although this measure is not sufficient on its own (see below).

One reason why governments are now pursuing efforts to reduce the social exclusivity of higher education is because of general plans for further expansion of higher education provision as a foundation of the knowledge society, which requires highly skilled workers.¹² All of the countries observed in the EUROSTUDENT dataset have expanded the number of students participating in academically oriented higher education between 1998 and 2005 (latest year available →Appendix). Over the past decade higher education expansion has been driven by high levels of individual motivation to study and simultaneous expansion of the number of study places and has occurred irrespective of demographic downturns¹³ and there is little reason to expect this trend to subside.

⁸ OECD (2008):113.

⁹ For an overview see Breen, R. & Jonsson, J. O. (2005): Inequality of Opportunity in Comparative Perspective: Recent Research on Educational Attainment and Social Mobility. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 31, 223-243.

¹⁰ OECD (2007): PISA 2006 Science Competencies for Tomorrow’s World. OECD, Paris.

¹¹ Cf. Davies, P. (2006): Norms and Regulations for the Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning in European Universities – An overview. In: Corradi, C. / Evans, N. / Valk, A. (eds): *Recognising Experiential Learning – Practices in European Universities*. Tartu University Press, Tartu: 179-195 and Freitag, W.K. (2007): Permeability in Education, Vocational Training and Further Education – the key to lifelong learning. Working document for German Presidency Conference “Realising the European Learning Area”, Munich 4-5 June 2007.

¹² CEDEFOP (2008): *Future Skills in Europe – Medium term forecast*. CEDEFOP, Thessaloniki.

¹³ OECD (2006): *Education at a Glance*. OECD, Paris: See indicator C2.2.

The development in the demand for a highly skilled labour force and concurrent demographic changes will lead to more heterogeneous student populations in the future. In particular, efforts to re-engage parts of the population after they missed out on higher education the first time around will lead to an increase in the share of older students. Country data suggests that we should not expect a generally older student population, but that it is more likely that old and young students will study side-by-side (→ Chapter 1). Older students tend to live independently of their parents (→ Chapter 4), have dependents themselves and expect both a certain type of life-style and learning style during their study period.¹⁴

Main challenges

It is widely accepted that the main challenge for higher education access is to improve **participative equity**.¹⁵ Indeed it is hardly new to demand that higher education should be open to any persons willing to participate and who are capable of benefitting from it – however, it appears a difficult demand to fulfil.¹⁶ Higher education expansion has led to an increase in the absolute number of students coming from non-traditional backgrounds, i.e. from communities and social groups in which participation in higher education has not been common. However, in many cases it has remained difficult to increase the relative share of these groups in the total student population.¹⁷

One of the reasons for this may be the difficulty in recognising the capability of young people to benefit from higher education, when merit is based on school performance, which itself demonstrates a social bias. If higher education policy-makers and institutions of higher education are keen to increase the share of disadvantaged groups of potential students, it is not sufficient to externalise the issues and delegate its solution wholly to the school sector. Besides school reforms, initiatives at entry to and within higher education are necessary. These include encouraging entry into higher education by **alternative paths** and an emphasis on **student retention**.

This latter issue presents a particular challenge to higher education systems which accept a certain level of attrition through student drop-outs as a further filter of adequate student ability. This is wrong-headed in many cases as the phenomenon of dropping out is not singularly caused by inappropriate ability, but also by inappropriate study conditions.¹⁸ Furthermore, drop-outs cost the public purse money.¹⁹

Policy directions

- In order to motivate prospective students, especially those whose parents did not themselves graduate from higher education (so-called first generation students), policy initiatives

¹⁴ Cf. Knapper, C. / Cropley, A. J. (2000): Lifelong Learning in Higher Education. Routledge, London.

¹⁵ See: London Communiqué 2007 from the Bologna Process. Available online under: http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/declarations_communique.htm

¹⁶ For the UK see the discussion of the impact of higher education expansion through the 20th century in particular reference to the Robbins Report from 1963 which called for exactly these personal traits to be the determinants for higher education provision: Lowe, R. (2002): Higher Education. In: Aldrich, R. (ed.): A Century of Education. London, Routledge: 75-91.

¹⁷ Cf. Clancy, P. / Goastellec, G. (2007): Exploring Access and Equity in Higher Education: Policy and Performance in a Comparative Perspective. In: Higher Education Quarterly, Vol. 61, No. 2: 136-154

¹⁸ Heublein, U. / Spangenberg, H. / Sommer, D. (2003): Ursachen des Studienabbruchs [Causes of dropping out (in Germany)]. Hochschulplanung Nr. 163. Hochschul-Informationssystem, Hannover.

¹⁹ For this reason a Eurydice report refers to student drop-outs as “wastage”: Eurydice (2000): Two decades of reform in higher education in Europe: 1980 onwards. Eurydice, Brussels: 107ff. Available online under: http://www.eurydice.org/ressources/eurydice/pdf/009EN/006_chap3_009EN.pdf

and institutions of higher education should take measures to actively encourage potential students at school level to continue their education career in higher education. One way of doing this is to send university delegates into schools. In the United Kingdom, for instance, so-called “school liaison officers” are already an integral part of strategies for widening higher education participation.²⁰ They provide information and advice to prospective students and their parents on the benefits of higher education participation.

- One method of overcoming the partial social bias in school qualifications is to take account of other factors than formal qualifications in the access procedure, which provide more holistic criteria for determining whether applicants have the appropriate competencies for a successful participation in higher education.
- Research on student retention has shown that the first year in higher education is formative regarding both academic and personal issues. Special support should be offered to all students in this first year, but especially focused on non-traditional students.²¹
- The recruitment of non-traditional students is a risk for an institution of higher education; especially if its allocation of public funding is tied to graduate numbers. States should provide premium institutional funding for institutions of higher education which recruit non-traditional students both as an incentive for such recruitment and in recognition of the higher costs of providing the appropriate study conditions for such students.

Social and economic framework conducive to effective studies

State of development

The European Commission has published a communiqué emphasising the complementarity of two terms – efficiency and equity – which were previously seen in policy circles as contradictory. The Commission argues that only treating both topics together can lead to an effective higher education system.²² According to this, it is not sufficient just to provide access to higher education, but students need to be supported during their studies to enable successful graduation. This argument concurs with research on student retention, which shows that student engagement is a decisive factor for persistence and success in higher education. Prior schooling, personal skills, individual attributes and

²⁰ Cf. The Higher Education Liaison Officers’ Association (HELOA) at: <http://www.heloa.co.uk/>

²¹ Research has particularly shown that non-traditional students need assistance in learning “the rules of the game” at the start of their studies – see: Hatt, S. / Baxter, A. (2003): From FE TO HE: Studies in Transition: A comparison of students entering higher education with academic and vocational qualifications, in: Widening participation and lifelong learning, vol. 5, no. 2: 18-29. Furthermore, that unmet expectations are one of the main causes of students dropping-out – see: May, S. / Bousted, M. (2004): Investigation of Student Retention Through an Analysis of the First-Year Experience of Students at Kingston University, in: Widening participation and lifelong learning, vol. 6, no. 2: 42-48. In the USA the National Resource Center for First Year Experience and Students in Transition was set up at the University of South Carolina in the 1980s to deal with such issues and offer exchanges of best practice on a national level – see: <http://www.sc.edu/fye/>

²² Commission of the European Communities (2006): Efficiency and Equity in European Education and Training Systems. European Commission, Brussels and Schleicher, A. (2006): The Economics of Knowledge – Why education is key for Europe’s success. Lisbon Council Policy Brief, available online under: http://www.lisboncouncil.net/force-download.php?file=/media/publications/lisbon_council_economics_of_knowledge.pdf

family background influence this engagement, but more generally it is also shaped by two critical factors:²³

- Time and effort put into study and study-related activities
- Institutional conditions, which promote or inhibit a conducive environment for learning, including the provision of services and direct resource allocation

The task of providing an appropriate learning and living environment for different students has become an even more acute challenge due to two concurrent developments in Europe:

- Efforts to widen access to higher education, which increase the heterogeneity of the student population
- The introduction of tuition fees, which leads to an increase in the cost of participation in higher education for students

The result for both policy makers and institutions of higher education is the need to provide an appropriate study framework for students, which recognises students' divergent living conditions during their studies. One aspect of student living conditions that heavily impacts on both the amount of time and effort students can invest in higher education is student financing.

In most higher education systems in Europe students are seen as occupying a special transitory phase between economic dependence on their families and economic independence in the future. They therefore have little personal wealth and have supplementary expenses due to their participation in higher education. In the respective chapter above, two types of system were discussed and country data compared (→ Chapter 5): the principle of a continued financial dependence on parents and the principle of students' independence and self-responsibility.

Across all of the countries, EUROSTUDENT data has shown a high dependency on parents' or families' contributions. It has also shown that the relative contribution made by this income source is lower for students with a low social backgrounds (indicator: low-educated parents), but that this decrease is not fully compensated for by state support. If this is the case, students have to work alongside their studies in order to cover their expenses.

The effects of work on study progression and study engagement can be assumed to be different between countries and to be dependent on the study structure and the possibility of following curricula with different intensity (e.g. part-time studies → Chapter 2). Indeed, to a certain extent, working may be beneficial to an individual's studies and his/her employment chances following graduation, if it is related to the individual's studies (→ Chapter 7).²⁴ For some students, however, working in gainful employment alongside studies may simply be a coping strategy in order to make up their necessary monthly income (→ Chapter 5).

The various situations within the context of the recruitment of a more diverse student body will lead to more diversity in students' monthly income and how they acquire it and, consequently, to more diverse study experiences in higher education.

²³ Kuh, G. D. / Kinzie, J. / Buckley, J. A. / Bridges, B. K. / Hayek, J. C. (2006): What Matters to Student Success: A review of the literature: 31-32, available online under: http://nces.ed.gov/npec/pdf/Kuh_Team_Report.pdf

²⁴ Cf. Storen, L. A. / Arnesen, C. A. (forthcoming): Chapter 7: Winners and Losers. In: Allen, J. / van der Velden, R. (Eds.): The Flexible Professional in the Knowledge Society: General Results of the REFLEX Project. Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market, Maastricht University, Netherlands: p. 229. [unpublished draft]

Main challenges

With growing numbers of students, the concurrent issues of **affordability** and **efficiency** have, therefore, become the biggest challenge for higher education frameworks. It is necessary to assure that students have sufficient funding in order to realise their studies and to reach graduation within a reasonable time. Despite recognition of this fact, many countries have carried out parallel reforms of institutional funding. The critical question of how much institutions of higher education need to function effectively has even been answered in many cases with an approach to shift more costs from government to students.²⁵ Tuition fees are seen as a solution to reducing the public share and increasing the private share of higher education costs, and as a way of introducing market mechanisms into higher education. Such changes necessitate a review of existing student support schemes which may be neutralised by increasing student costs through a participation charge (e.g. tuition fees).

This counteraction between strategies for institutional funding and funding for students particularly affects affordability in Eastern and Southern European countries, where bottlenecks in public funding (inter alia due to increased participation rates) have led to the introduction of tuition fees and the abolition of subsidized accommodation and nutrition. Although low in absolute terms, the introduced tuition fees are extremely high in relative terms. In some of these countries contributions to institutions make up more than one fifth of an average student budget (→Chapter 6). Thus, regional imbalances in the affordability of higher education constitute another challenge for shaping the social dimension of the European Higher Education Area.

Although students require more support, the public purse is seen as constrained across most of Europe and some policy-makers have adopted the strategy of providing students with temporary liquidity through offering them financial support in the form of a loan. This may enable them to offer more students more support within a limited budget and is, in this case, laudable. However, it is important to bear in mind the psychological limitations on the effectiveness of this form of support in reaching certain student groups, since non-traditional students are more often risk-averse than their counterparts.²⁶ Students with high levels of risk aversion might avoid building up debt and, despite the offer, take up jobs alongside their studies.

On a more general note, it is necessary for policy-makers and institutions to make their support more transparent and to assure that it is communicated to the right “clients”. In some countries, for instance, a large share of government support is transferred to students in a non-transparent manner, e.g. as indirect support via their parents.²⁷ Such state provisions are invisible for students and often deemed by them as their parents’ own contribution. By that, public support is unable to exert direct steering effects and lacks incentives for improving academic performance.

Policy directions

- The matching of private and public investment in higher education is embedded in historical, political and cultural settings which determine national priorities. The European Higher Edu-

²⁵ OECD (2008): Vol. 1, p.160.

²⁶ Vossensteyn, J.J. (2005): Perceptions of Student Price-Responsiveness – A behavioural economics exploration of the relationships between socio-economic status, perceptions of financial incentives and student choice. CHEPS, Center for Higher Education and Policy Studies, Enschede.

²⁷ Schwarzenberger, A. (2008, ed.): Public/private funding of higher education: a social balance. Hochschul-Informationssystem, Hanover. See also Chapter 5, Box 5.1 above.

education Area has to acknowledge the diversity of different frameworks conducive for a harmonized academic system. However, the task remains to improve the different national frameworks and align the national support systems aiming at higher and fair participation and an improvement in the knowledge process in higher education. The common criteria for assessment and improvement should be equity, affordability and efficiency and the reconciliation of these targets.

- Effective communication and transparency of support are vital to set incentives for student recruitment and progression. Social groups with high levels of risk aversion need extensive information to overcome psychological barriers. The potential benefits of loans as compared to strategies of self-financing should be explained in detail. Countries with student support systems containing indirect transfers – which are invisible to students – should consider converting transfers into direct student support related to study progression.
- Students who prefer to bear part of tuition and living costs through employment should be provided with formal structures within the higher education system (e.g. special status, reduced fees, work-study opportunities, balanced teaching and workload) which allow effective learning at different speeds.

International mobility of students as an “optional extra”?

State of development

International mobility of European students has high policy relevance on a European level, where it is seen as a component of competitive advantage in comparison with other higher education areas and a foundation of common understanding for the European project (cf. Lisbon Agenda and Bologna Process). Additionally, research on international student mobility suggests that spending time studying abroad can pay off in terms of smoothing the transition to the labour market after graduation.²⁸

Under the term “internationalisation”, however, various forms of mobility are meant including temporary periods abroad, cross-border enrolment for short study periods (e.g. a semester), cross-border enrolment for a complete study programme and participation in programmes in the home country provided by institutions from abroad.²⁹

The EUROSTUDENT dataset focuses on temporary cross-border periods either for studies, internships or language courses. The significance of the data stems from the possibility of differentiating between organised programmes, which provide structures and support for such periods abroad, and self-initiated (non-programme) mobility. The data shows that a large share of students undertake self-initiated short periods abroad – in fact in half of the observed countries this share is above 40% (→ Chapter 8). This means that programmes such as Erasmus and Nordplus are only reaching one

²⁸ Teichler, U. (forthcoming): Chapter 6: International Dimensions of Higher Education and Graduate Employment. In: Allen, J. / van der Velden, R. (Eds.): *The Flexible Professional in the Knowledge Society: General Results of the REFLEX Project*. Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market, Maastricht University, Netherlands: p. 212. [unpublished draft]

²⁹ cf. Wächter, B. (2008a): *Stocktaking Bologna – The Impact of ‘Bologna’ on Mobility and Inputs for Benchmarking*. Presentation at workshop of the European Benchmarking Initiative. Available online at: <http://www.education-benchmarking.org/storage/documents/Bernd%20Wachter.pdf>

share of the mobile students and, despite the significant past and planned future growth of such programmes, this situation is unlikely to change.

The analysis has also shown that participation in international mobility is socially selective. The extent of this selectivity is mitigated or amplified by – inter alia – the following factors:

- The overall mobility rate, where countries with a higher rate often have a lower level of social selectivity
- The type of mobility, where foreign enrolment is more selective than other forms
- The field of study, where humanity students are more mobile than their counterparts in engineering

These tendencies are not explanations, but describe differences which must be better understood. Therefore, insights into what students view as barriers to their own mobility can provide policy directions. The main barriers seen in the EUROSTUDENT dataset are financial insecurities and lack of self-motivation or lack of external support. In other words, students' propensity for being mobile is influenced by a combination of push factors – i.e. the student wants to take part – and pull factors – i.e. conditions being laid which encourage students to take part. These factors affect students in different student groups (e.g. traditional vs. non-traditional students) and students in different countries (e.g. high-income vs. low-income countries) to a lesser or greater extent.

The reform of study structures within the Bologna Process is often highlighted as a contribution to facilitating international mobility. For some countries (especially those with a tradition of long duration courses, e.g. Germany), the introduction of Bachelor and Master “cycles” has led to a more transparent study structure, with a clearer hierarchy of progression. Additionally, the implementation of credit points as the “currency” of study content accumulation and progression is also seen as presenting students with the opportunity to change study locations during study progression and integrate, for instance, a foreign semester into their degree without prolonging the time to graduation. However, early evidence from Germany suggests that international mobility may actually drop for students within the new study structures.³⁰ This is partly due to the division of a study course into two parts (Bachelor then Master) and partly to do with concurrent developments in Germany, e.g. the introduction of tuition fees, which aim to increase students' study efficiency. The former case refers to a potential underestimation of the number of mobile students, because mobile students may have left one college, following graduation of their Bachelor, and pursue international mobility before being matriculated at the new college for their Masters course. The latter case relates to the fact that encouraging students to study more efficiently may lead to even more students seeing international mobility as an “optional extra”, which would be nice, but is not necessary and will only be taken when all other study conditions are sufficiently met. That is to say, that there is a direct connection between general study conditions and mobility rates. This situation is likely to be amplified for non-traditional students or for students in low-level income countries thereby further reducing their mobility rates.

³⁰ cf. Heublein U. / Hutzsch, C. (2007): Internationale Mobilität im Studium. Studienbezogene Aufenthalte deutscher Studierender in anderen Ländern (Untersuchungsergebnisse im Überblick). Working paper for joint DAAD / BMBF conference on international mobility. Available online under: <http://www.his.de/pdf/21/auslandsmobilitaet.pdf>

Main challenges

A policy perspective on these results must start from the real and concrete objectives behind mobility programmes:

- If policy sets a priority on the acquisition of new knowledge related to a student's specific home study programme, then programmes such as Erasmus and Nordplus must be seen as the main instruments for promoting mobility. This type of mobility is often termed "credit mobility", since the aim of the student is to collect credit points for achievements in a foreign programme, which will be recognised at home. The study gains may be seen as providing a broader view of the subject area (horizontal mobility) or the opportunity to benefit from specialist knowledge not available at home (vertical mobility).³¹
- If policy sets a priority on personal development and learning more about cultures and indeed offering students the opportunity for self-reflection, then self-initiated mobility must be further promoted.³²

Neither priorities are mutually exclusive, but a look at the current situation would suggest that a view should be taken on the relative importance of **organised programmes versus self-initiated mobility** and on an appropriate balance between the two.

The advantage of organised programmes is that they can be used to follow specific objectives for target groups. It might, for instance, be important to promote mobility flows which cover the whole of Europe and do not centre on high-income or English-speaking countries. In this example, a programme could provide encouragement and support to help students learn more about a culture and its language before they commence their study-related period abroad.

At the same time, programme development can take inspiration from self-motivated students and the purposes of their study-related periods abroad. Indeed, since motivation is one key factor affecting mobility, it would be useful to compare the motivations and purposes followed by both groups (programme and non-programme students) to better understand the potential for mobility programmes. One important issue is what students expect from their studies abroad. If students search for difference and diversity, the increasing provision of English language courses in many foreign countries and efforts to design common curricula across Europe may be counterproductive.

The challenge remains to embed both forms of mobility sensibly into the study structure of a student's course to assure both the private and societal benefits of such programmes. This may be particularly difficult in reference to part-time and adult learners, but it is equally necessary.

Furthermore, the data has shown that mobility is affected by study conditions and that, therefore, **affordability** and **efficiency** continue to play an important role in participation in mobility programmes.

³¹ cf. Wächter, B. (2008a).

³² cf. Wächter, B. (2008b). General Report on "Intercultural Dialogue on the University Campus". Council of Europe seminar, 4-5 March 2008, Strasbourg. Available online under:
http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/InterculturalDialogue/Final%20report_Bernd%20Wachter.pdf

Policy directions

- Each country and each institution of higher education should review mobility issues within the context of a concrete mobility strategy. This strategy should be the basis for initiating mobility programmes and providing special support to students.
- The profile of students, who would most benefit from mobility programmes, should be investigated and appropriate study conditions and initiatives to encourage participation in international mobility should be developed. In particular, special support for students from low socio-economic backgrounds is necessary.
- Students who desire to participate in study-related activities abroad on their own initiative should be encouraged to do so. This entails offering them advice on how to arrange their stay and on how best to benefit from a period abroad.
- Some issues cannot be solved entirely at national or institutional level, including the provision of sufficient financial support to make a study-related stay abroad feasible. In this particular case, an intergovernmental fund could be established, which would provide supplementary funding for students from low-income countries, who want to go abroad.
- On a European level more thought could be given to student flows within the context of promoting linguistic and cultural diversity.

Graduation and the value of study completion

State of development

The EUROSTUDENT dataset does not cover the topic of graduation as the data comes from surveys of current students. However, the introductory section of this report already emphasised the need to set developments concerning the social dimension within the context of graduation. This is because it is not sufficient to adopt initiatives to open up university access, if the study conditions are not organised in such a way as to assure successful study completion (→ Introduction, Fig. 2). Indeed, it is not sufficient to provide high participative equity, if the final qualifications of higher education graduates do not secure appropriate employment opportunities.

This connection has been emphasised by the OECD Review, which warns that certain modes of diversification of higher education provision do not lead to real participative equity, but instead to a new hierarchical, compartmental system of higher education qualifications.³³ In other words, the non-traditional student is offered participation in higher education, but not parity in opportunity to obtain qualifications of the same value.

A further critical factor is the assurance of employment following graduation. This factor is not essentially tied to the topic “social dimension” as it is a relevant issue for all developments in higher education that have implications for the quality and quantity of graduates. However, it can be considered particularly relevant to the social dimension, since ensuring the employability of non-traditional

³³ OECD (2008): pp. 79ff.

students requires especially high efforts by students themselves as well as by institutions of higher education and public policy.

According to an often cited research brief for the United Kingdom's then Department for Education and Employment,³⁴ employability is made up of the following four components which comprise a mixture of individual soft skills, qualifications and the situation on the labour market.

1. *Assets*: An individual's assets are a combination of knowledge (what they know), skills (what they do with what they know) and attitudes (how they do it).
2. *Deployment*: This is linked to how an individual recognises and exploits their knowledge, skills and attitudes to the best strategic advantage regarding his/her own career management and job skills.
3. *Presentation*: Critical to obtaining employment is the question of what an individual has to present (e.g. work experience and specific qualifications) and how he/she presents it (e.g. interview technique).
4. *Context of personal circumstances and labour market*: A person's personal situation affects his/her ability to seek out and take up certain employment opportunities (e.g. his/her household status). Macro-economic developments affect, in turn, the pattern and level of job opportunities on the labour market.

It is important to bear this list in mind when looking at data on the opportunities for graduate employment from both the perspective of official administrative statistics (e.g. Eurostat data) and graduates' personal perceptions (e.g. REFLEX project).³⁵ For instance, the list shows that the value of a formal "paper" qualification is only one of a plethora of interdependent factors related to employment success.

Nevertheless, higher education qualifications should incorporate necessary skills for the labour market, thereby legitimising both the private (student's) and public (tax payer's) investment in higher education provision. Whilst many studies show the benefits for the average student, it is necessary to focus on the benefit for specific student groups. This need is reflected in the data from the OECD's Education at a Glance 2007, which shows that (i) the higher the educational attainment of a person, the higher his/her financial gain on the labour market in comparison to the rest of the working population, but also that (ii) this gain may be minimal for a certain share of higher education graduates. For instance, 12% of higher education graduates in Norway earn more than double the average earnings (median before tax), whilst another 12% of higher education graduates earn a maximum of half of the average income.³⁶

³⁴ Hillage J / Pollard E (1998): Employability: developing a framework for policy analysis. Research Report RR85, Department for Education and Employment. Available online under: <http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/pubs/summary.php?id=emplbly>

³⁵ This project is based on an international graduate survey and deals with the need for flexible professionals in the knowledge society. It therefore has a particular focus on the transition from higher education to the labour market. Project website: <http://www.fdewb.unimaas.nl/roa/reflex/>

³⁶ OECD (2007): Education at a Glance. OECD, Paris. See: table A9.4a.

Main challenges

The challenge is simple to formulate: Countries should embed strategies to increase equity in higher education in **comprehensive plans** which consider the school system, higher education entry, student retention, course provision, international mobility and relevant higher education outputs for society and the labour market.

It should be mentioned that broad national strategies need to reflect the specific study conditions at higher education institutions. It is beyond the scope of this report to analyse the institutional and social mediation of learning. Available studies suggest that “what is learned at university” is influenced by conditions like teaching style, class size, learning resources etc. and by the social environment (e.g. student composition of a higher education institution, students’ networks etc).³⁷

Comprehensive national strategies are, therefore, difficult to implement because of the transversal nature of such a topic area, which cuts across different systems and the responsibilities of different institutions, including ministries; but they are essential.

Policy directions

- It is necessary to embed the discussion of equity within a strategy for promoting the personal efficiency and effectiveness of study progress. In other words, students should receive support in order to help them graduate successfully.
- The topic of successful graduation should be extended to include an emphasis on successful transition into the labour market. This is particularly important for non-traditional students’ success at completing their aspired qualifications and achieving employment post-graduation.

After viewing international similarities and differences, it remains to be stated that the best way to understand the policy-relevance of the data presented in the report is to use it to supplement national policy debates. Even if a perfect comparability of the data is not given, viewing one’s own country within the context of international data is like looking into a mirror which offers the chance for self-reflection. On the basis of this opportunity for self-reflection, both scholars and policy-makers may take a view on whether change is desirable or indeed necessary.

In this, it is useful to consider the differentiation offered by Clark Kerr for viewing change in higher education. He differentiates between response and reform:³⁸

- *Response* is something that must be done in reaction to a given situation
- *Reform* starts out with a set of values and aims in order to achieve improvements through innovation

³⁷ Brennan, J. / Edmunds, R. / Houston, M. / Jary, D. / Lebeau, Y. / Osborne, M. / Richardson, J. T. E. (forthcoming): Improving What is Learned at University: an exploration of the social and organisational diversity of university education. London: Routledge-Falmer.

³⁸ Kerr, C. (1986): Foreword. In: Cerych, L. / Sabatier, P. (Eds.): Great Expectations and Mixed Performance – The implementation of higher education reforms in Europe (European Institute of Education and Social Policy). Trentham: Trentham Books: p.xvi.

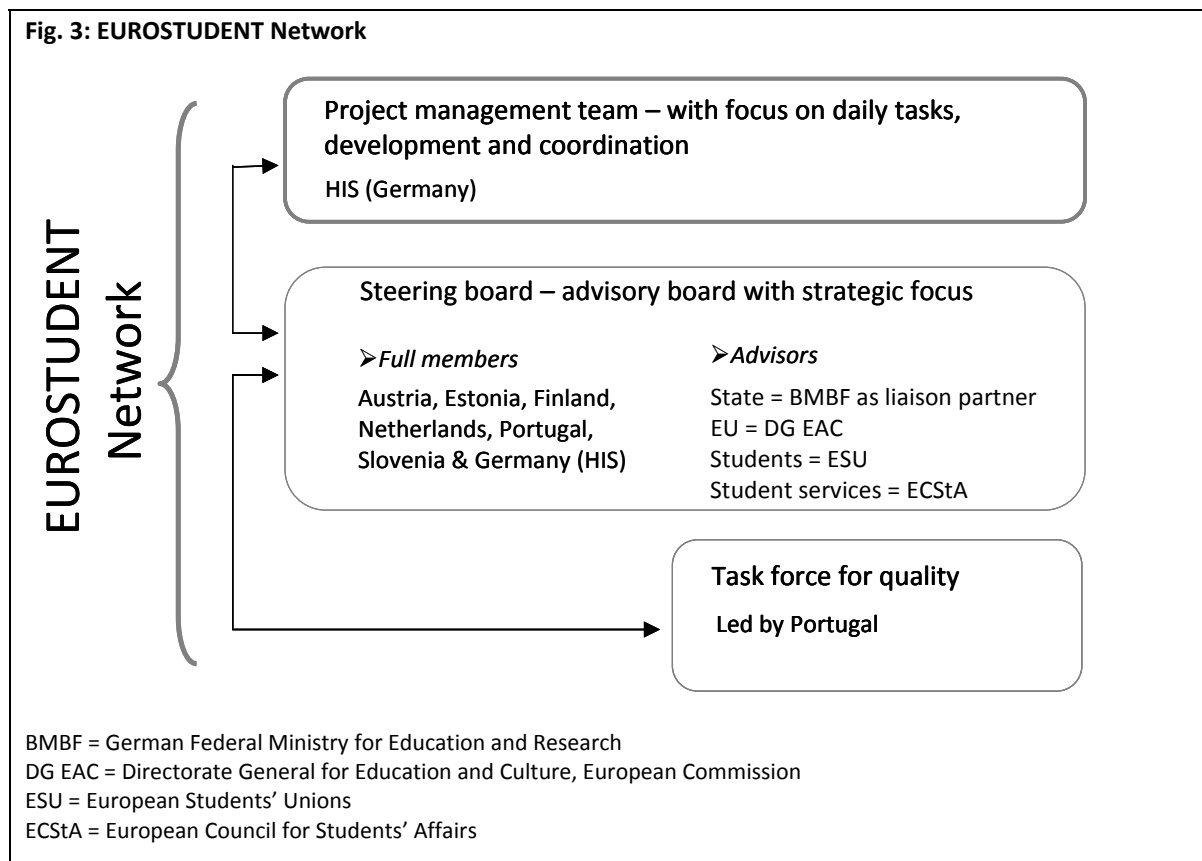
The data provided by EUROSTUDENT offer the chance to review common practices and their effectiveness in the light of European trends and with the insight that alternatives are possible and, in some cases, actually being practised by neighbouring countries. This may help national higher education systems to adapt to changing environments (response) and indeed to improve their provisions and performance (reform). EUROSTUDENT is committed to assisting this process.

Appendix

Organisation of the project

The EUROSTUDENT Network is open to all European countries. Currently, twenty-three countries are active participants and have delivered data for this third round of the study. A further six countries (Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Georgia, Greece and Hungary) are observers in the current round and will potentially join the project in the fourth round, which begins in 2008.

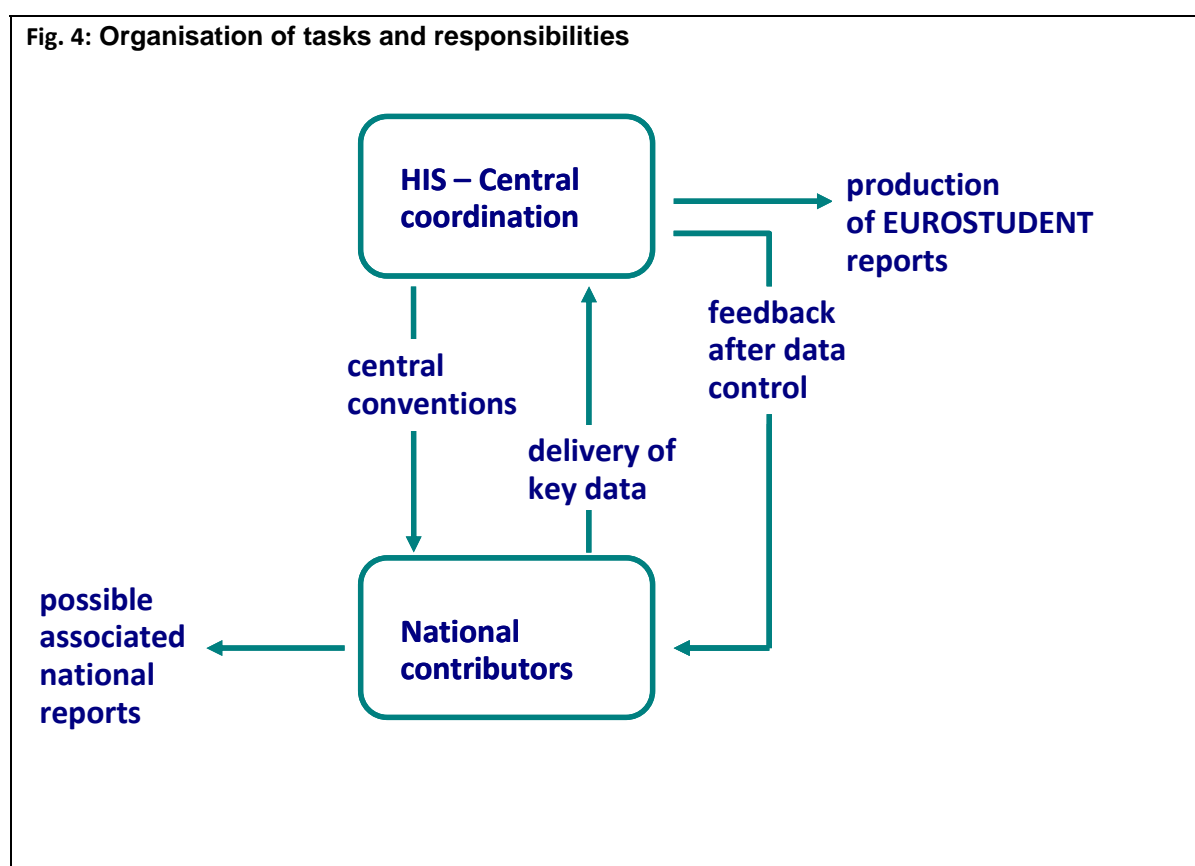
The EUROSTUDENT project has a decentral structure, which sees the project participants as members of a network. The EUROSTUDENT is centrally coordinated by the Higher Education Information System (HIS), Hanover, Germany. The coordinators' work is aided by an International Steering Board involving members of the EUROSTUDENT Network as full members and certain agencies relevant to the policy area as advisors (see Figure 3).



As quality assurance in terms of comparability and data reliability is such an important topic for EUROSTUDENT, one of the first initiatives of the Steering Board was to establish a Task Force for Quality, which proceeded to organise a workshop on paths to improved quality in data collection and analysis in March 2007 attended by over 40 delegates from 21 countries and opened by the Portuguese State Secretary for Science, Technology and Higher Education, Prof. Manuel Heitor. A further workshop on collection and interpretation of data on the social dimension in higher education took place in November 2007 and was opened jointly by the Romanian Minister for Education, Research and Youth, Cristian Mihai Adomnitei, and the Director of UNESCO-CEPES, Jan Sadlak. This workshop

was attended by 50 delegates from 20 countries. The topic of this workshop was the preparations necessary in order to produce adequate country comparisons.

The EUROSTUDENT Network is organised on the basis of shared responsibility – see Figure 4. The implementation of the national surveys lies within the responsibility of each participating country. However, participation in the EUROSTUDENT project is dependent on the adoption of the EUROSTUDENT core questions and central data conventions. The coordinators remain in close contact with members of each participating country to assure common understanding and the adherence to data conventions. Common timelines must also be observed. Once the data is received by the EUROSTUDENT coordinators, it is evaluated and only after further discussions and cross-checking to assure quality, is the data used for analysis.



Method and EUROSTUDENT conventions

The first EUROSTUDENT reports were based on already existing national surveys which covered the same topic areas, but otherwise differed in methodological approach. Although this is true for the third round of EUROSTUDENT in a minority of cases, the EUROSTUDENT study remains the product of a decentralised network. Therefore, the coordinators of the network have adopted an output harmonisation approach to the execution of the study.

The aim is therefore to obtain high quality results through a harmonised list of variables and indicators, together with their related definitions. These definitions of indicators require the use of the set of core questions to assure the “fit” of collected data (31 core questions → Appendix). Methodologi-

cal guidelines provide additional guidance on the target population, sampling frames, sampling design, survey instruments etc. that should be respected in the national survey methods.

They should, on the one hand, help countries to improve and align their national survey methodologies. On the other hand, countries that are newly introducing student surveys can find orientation regarding how to implement such surveys at national level.

The main instrument of the output harmonization approach is the Data Delivery Module which is the interface for data transfer from national production to central assembly. It constitutes the mould into which all data are poured. The corresponding Handbook of Data Conventions and Data Input Templates gives instructions for the definitions and demarcation of data for the predefined tables of the Data Delivery Module. Countries, therefore, do not provide the international coordinators with raw micro data, but with calculated aggregate indicators for 63 subtopics.

By outlining the preferential methodological approaches it is expected that an input harmonization approach, based on a uniform questionnaire and survey method, will evolve as the project develops. Figure 5 shows that the majority of countries used on-line surveys in the third round of EUROSTUDENT (→ Appendix).

Fig. 5: Countries' methods of data collection

	Online survey	Face-to-face interview	Paper and pencil	Telephone interview
Countries	AT, BG, CH, CZ, EE, FI, IE, LV, NL, RO, SI, TR	ES, E/W, LT, NO, PT, SCO, SK	DE, FR, SE	IT
Total	12	7	3	1

The statistical unit in this study is the single individual pursuing a formal education at ISCED 5A level as a home student on the reference date. In detail these conventions are:

- EUROSTUDENT gathers information on academically-orientated tertiary education (ISCED-level 5A). The focus is on publicly funded higher education, i.e. according to Eurostat definitions, public or government-dependent private institutions (only those institutions of higher education which obtain over 50% of their funding from public sources are included, i.e. not private higher education).
- The total target population of the EUROSTUDENT statistics consists of all individuals pursuing an education at ISCED 5A level. This includes both students studying their first degree and those studying their second degree or continuing programmes (e.g. second cycle master students). Students in study programmes of ISCED level 5B (practically oriented / occupationally specific) and ISCED level 6 (doctorate students) are not included. In some cases, the indicators differentiate between students studying Bachelor courses and the whole population with a view to observe the effect of changes to study organisation within the framework of the Bologna Process.
- This global population of students is divided into national and foreign population. Only national *or* permanent resident students are considered the target population of national surveys in each country. Resident students in a particular country, who do not have the respec-

tive country's citizenship, are only included in the target population, if they have obtained their higher education entrance certificate in this country and study in this country. By contrast, students of foreign nationality are not included, if they also obtained their higher education entrance certificates abroad.

- The target population consists of all matriculated students; no matter if they are registered with full-time or part-time status. In some cases, the indicators differentiate between age groups. In particular, "21-year-olds" are used as a normative category in order to control for the effects of age.

Box 1: Summary of central EUROSTUDENT conventions

The survey is restricted to students who are

1. studying courses at the ISCED level 5A
2. national or permanent resident students.

The survey does include all students enrolled at higher education institutions studying at ISCED level 5A. This comprises both students studying their first degree and those studying their second degree or continuing programmes (e.g. master students). Students in study programmes of ISCED level 5B (practically oriented/occupationally specific) and ISCED level 6 (doctorate students) are not included.