



Deutsches Zentrum für  
Hochschul- und Wissenschaftsforschung ■

# Equity of opportunity in European higher education

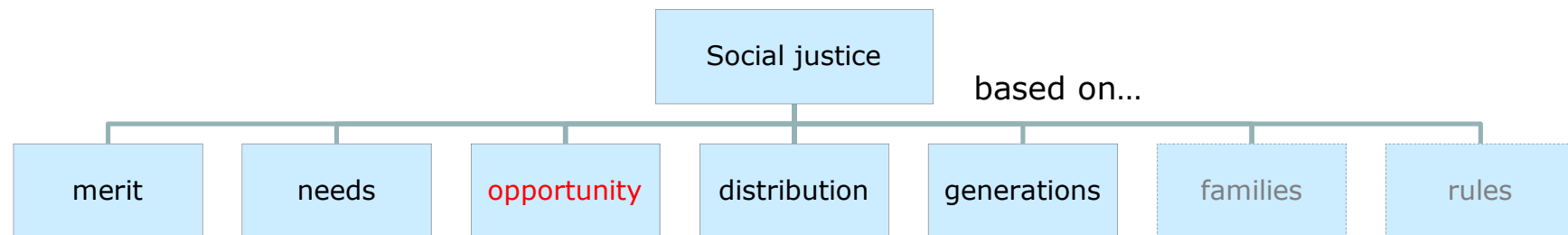
An attempt to measuring the extent of target achievement in the European Higher Education Area

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## Equity of opportunity and the concept of social justice

Concepts of justice often comprise social justice as one part. Social justice refers to the order of society, economy, and the state as a whole. The goal of social justice can be subdivided into several dimensions (Ebert 2010, Enste et al. 2013):





## Equity of opportunity

- The criterion of equity of opportunity refers to...
  - unequal physical characteristics of humans and
  - unequal socio-cultural determinants.
- Equity of opportunity strives for a fair distribution of opportunities and abilities among people to acquire goods and avoid burdens (Ebert 2010).
- With respect to policy, equity of opportunity aims at developing a system for a fair allocation of positions in society, organisations, politics, education and training, as well as employment.
- The allocation system should disregard people's social origin, economic provisions, sex, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, religious and cultural imprinting (Kersting 2010).



## Two basic approaches to equity of opportunity

### Formal equity of opportunity

- Requires the *same* efficiency and motivation of individuals.
- Strives for *approximately* equal chances for human beings.

### Substantial equity of opportunity

- Allows *divergent* efficiency and motivation of individuals.
- Differences between individuals – also generated by personal talents and gifts – are to be equalised by means of policy.
- In extreme, the approach strives for *absolutely* equal chances (→ equality of opportunity).

(Richardt & Shanks 2008, Kersting 2010)



## Equity goal of the European Higher Education Area

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

The Ministers responsible for higher education in the EHEA,

London Communiqué, Towards the European Higher Education Area: responding to challenges in a globalised world, 2007, p. 5.



## Model specifications

- It is referred to the *social* stratification of the total population
- Goal of policy: The social stratification of the population should be *perfectly* reflected by the social stratification of the student population (→ proportional representation)
- Reference groups of the total population are males and females aged 40-60 years
- The social origin is indicated by the highest (formal) educational attainment (in case of students: their parents' highest educational attainment)



## Model specifications

- The highest educational attainment is determined according to ISCED-97 (International Standard Classification of Education, variant 1997)
- It is differentiated between 3 social groups:
  - low education (ISCED-97 levels 0-2)
  - medium education (ISCED-97 levels 3-4)
  - high education (ISCED-97 levels 5-6)



## Model specifications

- Variables used:

$$\tau = \frac{\frac{s_l}{S}}{\frac{m_l}{M}} \quad \kappa = \frac{\frac{s_h}{S}}{\frac{m_h}{M}}$$

$\tau$ : index low education background

$\kappa$ : index high education background

$s_l$ : number of students whose father acquired low education

$s_h$ : number of students whose father acquired high education

$S$ : total number of students

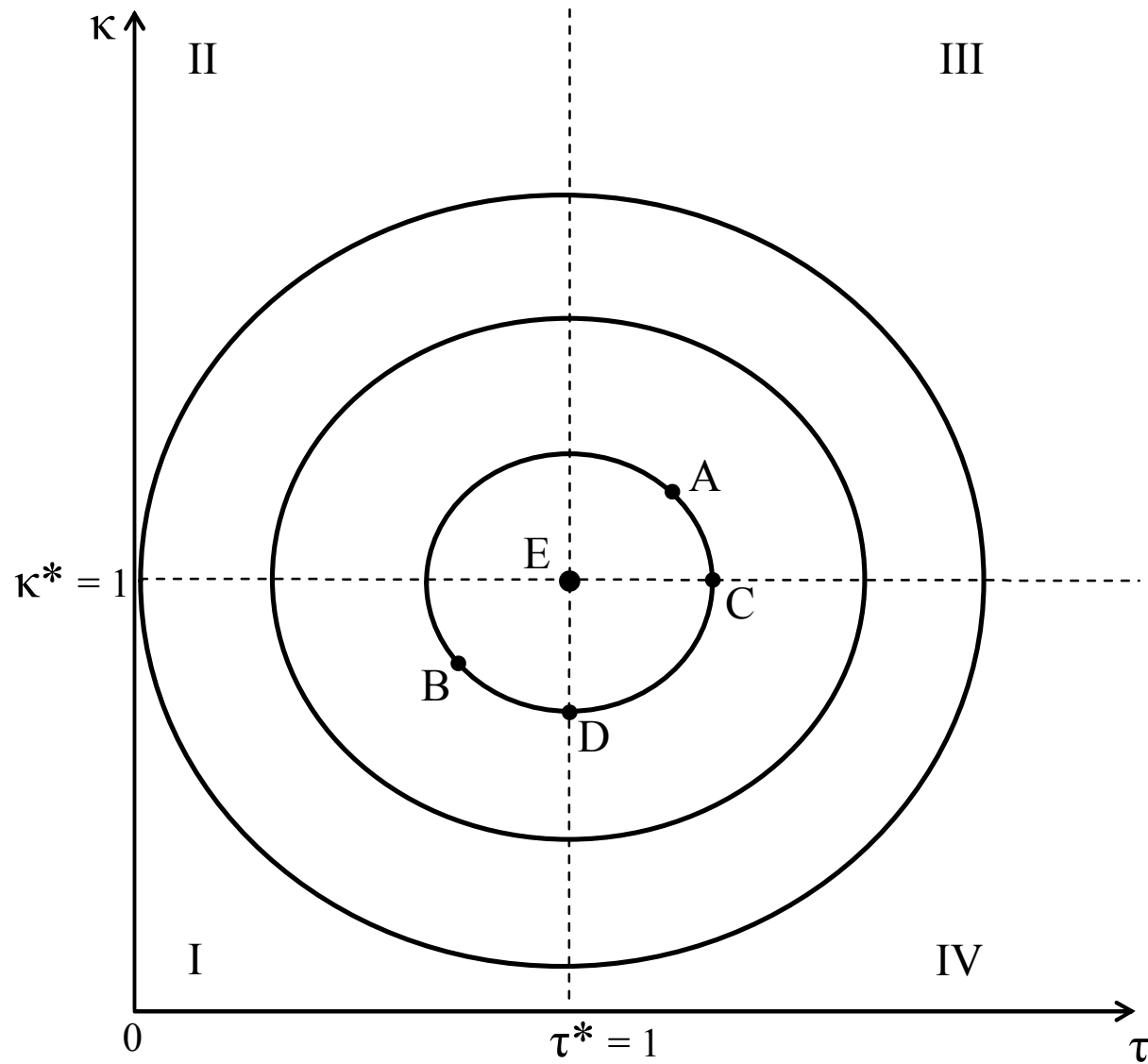
$m_l$ : number of men with low education aged 40-60 years

$m_h$ : number of men with high education aged 40-60 years

$M$ : total number of men aged 40-60 years



## Social representation and equity optimum



Own source

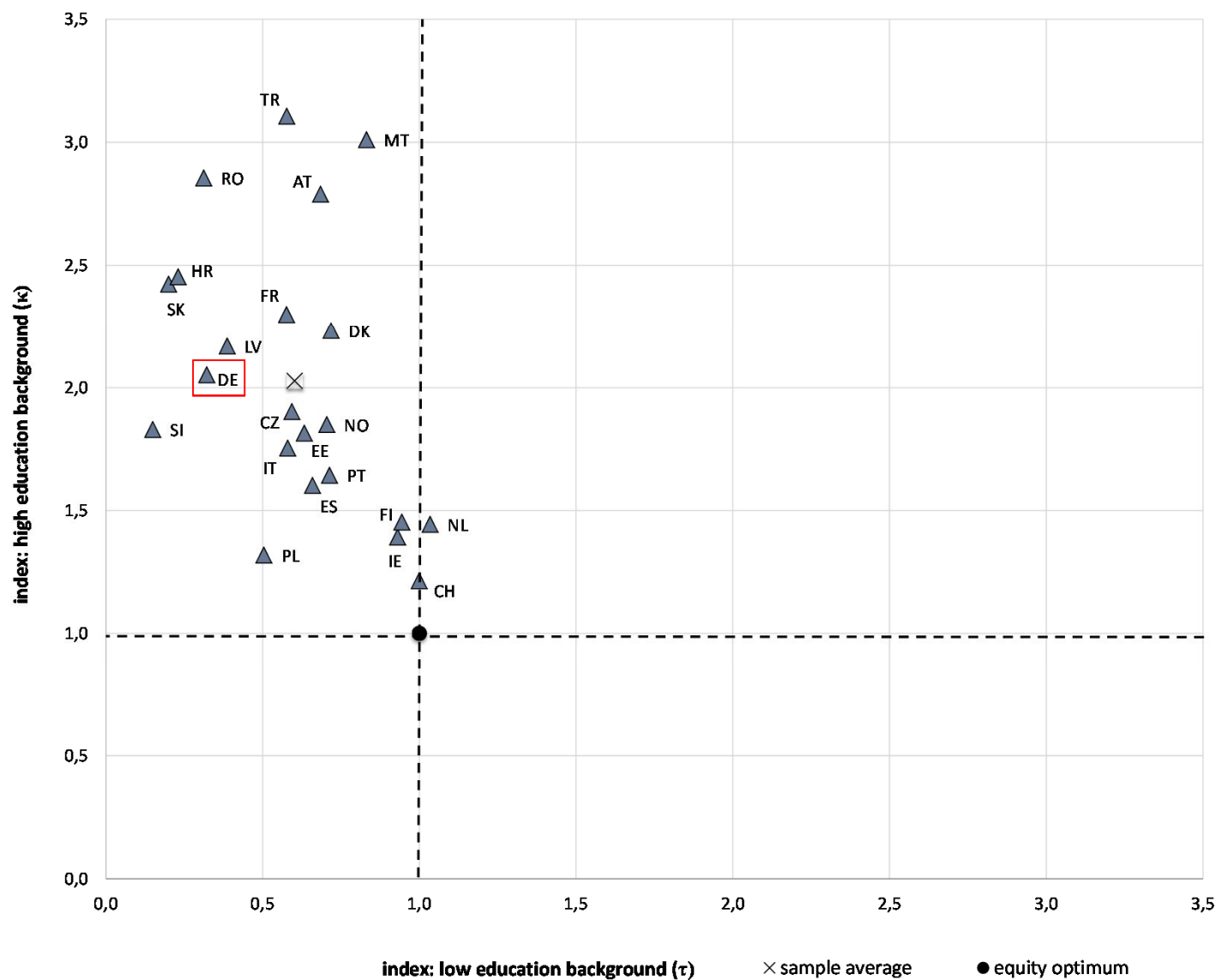


## Data set used

- For data on students and their parents, data from the fourth round of the EUROSTUDENT project were used (aggregate data).
- The project regularly collects internationally comparable data on the social and economic conditions of student life in Europe.
- In the fourth round of the project, which lasted from 2008 to 2011, 25 countries forming part of the EHEA have participated.
- Across all countries, more than 200,000 students were surveyed. Countries' final sample sizes range from 1,004 (LT) to 31,640 (AT).
- Data on the population were taken from national statistics and the Eurostat Labour Force Survey.



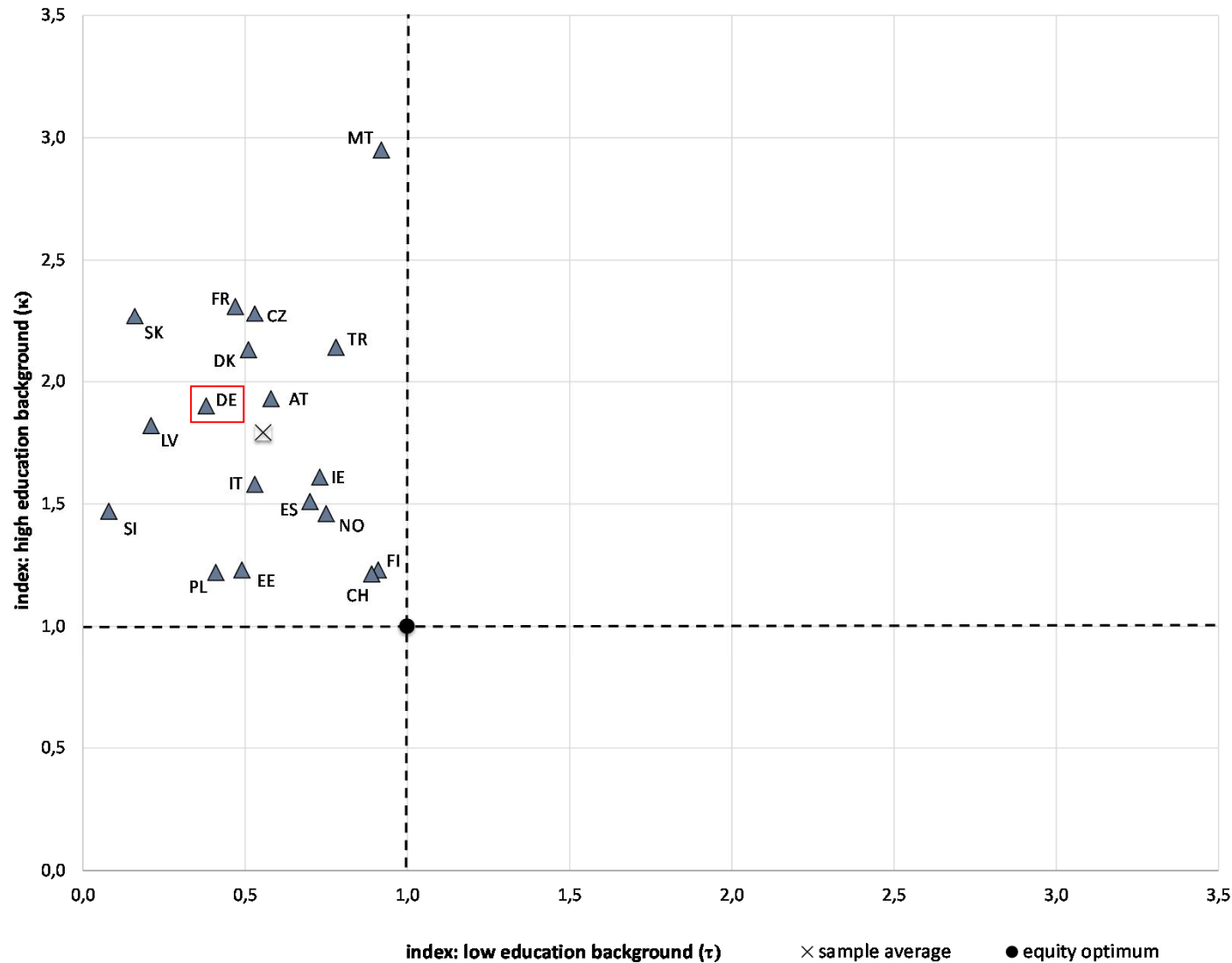
## Social representation at higher education institutions by students' fathers' highest educational attainment 2009/2010



Source: EUROSTUDENT (2011), subtopic C.3, own calculations. No data: E/W, LT, SE.



## Social representation at higher education institutions by students' mothers' highest educational attainment 2009/2010



Source: EUROSTUDENT (2011), subtopic C.3, own calculations. No data: E/W, HR, LT, NL, PT, RO, SE.



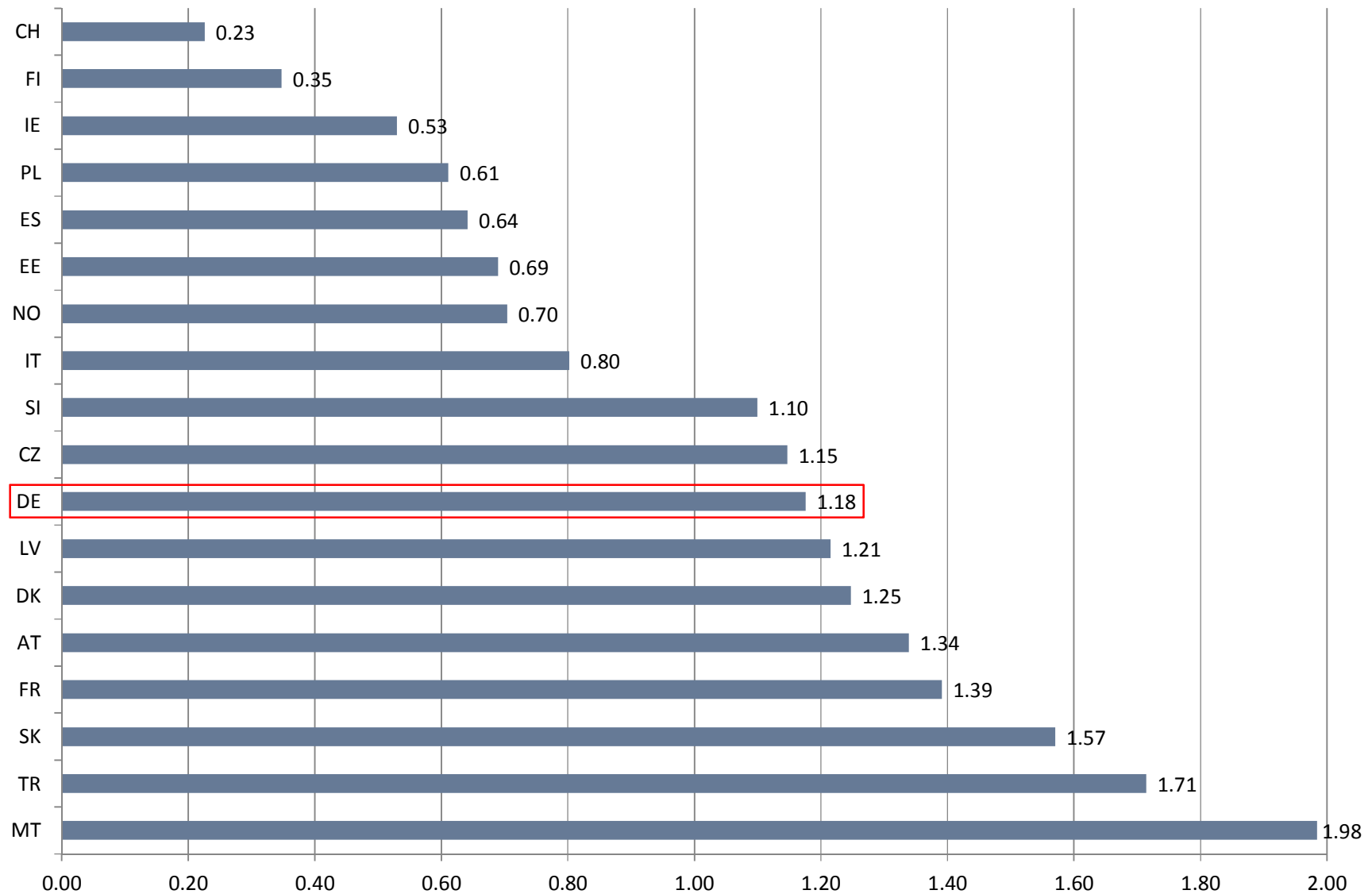
## Distance to equity optimum by reference groups

Country	Radius male reference groups	Radius female reference groups	Radius differential
AT	1.82	1.02	- 0.80
CH	0.21	0.24	+ 0.03
CZ	0.99	1.36	+ 0.37
DE	1.25	1.09	- 0.16
DK	1.26	1.23	- 0.03
EE	0.89	0.56	- 0.33
ES	0.69	0.59	- 0.10
FI	0.46	0.25	- 0.21
FR	1.37	1.41	+ 0.04
HR	1.65	n/a	-
IE	0.40	0.67	+ 0.27
IT	0.86	0.75	- 0.11
LV	1.32	1.14	- 0.18
MT	2.02	1.95	- 0.07
NL	0.45	n/a	-
NO	0.90	0.52	- 0.38
PL	0.59	0.63	+ 0.04
PT	0.70	n/a	-
RO	1.98	n/a	-
SI	1.19	1.03	- 0.16
SK	1.63	1.52	- 0.11
TR	2.15	1.16	- 0.99

Own source. No data: E/W, LT, SE; female reference groups: HR, NL, PT, RO.



## Countries' average overall distance to equity optimum 2009/2010



Source: Own calculation. No data: E/W, HR, LT, NL, PT, RO SE.



## General findings

- With respect to achieving the goal of equity of opportunity in higher education, there are large differences between the EHEA countries observed.
- However, there are also common features that could be identified:
  - The low education group is underrepresented at higher education institutions in *almost all* countries observed (exceptions: Switzerland and the Netherlands when referring to male reference groups).
  - The high education group is overrepresented at higher education institutions in *all* countries surveyed (holds for both male and female reference groups).
  - The overall picture is in line with findings from various studies (e.g. European Commission 2012, Orr et al. 2011, Koucký et al. 2010, Orr et al. 2008, Wößmann & Schütz 2006, partially Hauschildt et al. 2015).
- Based on the overall index, some countries (Malta, Turkey, Slovakia) show a rather high degree of missing proportional representation in higher education. In contrast, other countries (Switzerland and Finland) seem to perform already quite well.



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