

Looking for data, strategies and exemplary practices to improve equity in higher education: The work of the BFUG Working Group on the Social Dimension



Lifelong Learning Programme



Education and Culture DG



European Commission

TEMPUS

Dr. Dominic Orr | EUROSTUDENT IV
orr@his.de

Plan of presentation



1. What is the social dimension?
2. Why should be worry about it?
3. Starting points within the Leuven Communiqué 2009
4. Finding a balance between two policy principles
5. What does the working group want to achieve?
6. Achievements until now and next steps

What is the social dimension?



In general, countries have an idea of what is meant by the term, but to encourage debates and improvements we have to find common ground

Common ground:

1. It is about **who** gets into and is successful in higher education (and as a graduate on the labour market)
2. It is argued that everyone should have the same **opportunities** to participate in higher education = participative equity
3. It is further argued that **participative equity** is not given

Why should we worry about it?



The Bologna documents and debates point to the following justifications:

1. Higher education is a public good
2. Higher education institutions have a social responsibility for their communities
3. We are moving towards a knowledge economy which requires more highly qualified workers
4. The forthcoming demographic changes mean that new participants for higher education must be sought
5. The social dimension can be seen as a competitive advantage in the global competition for the best minds

Under-representation:

*“...the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of the populations.”
(Para. 9)*

Providing the appropriate learning conditions:

“This involves improving the learning environment, removing all barriers to study, and creating the appropriate economic conditions for students to be able to benefit from the study opportunities at all levels.” (Para. 9)

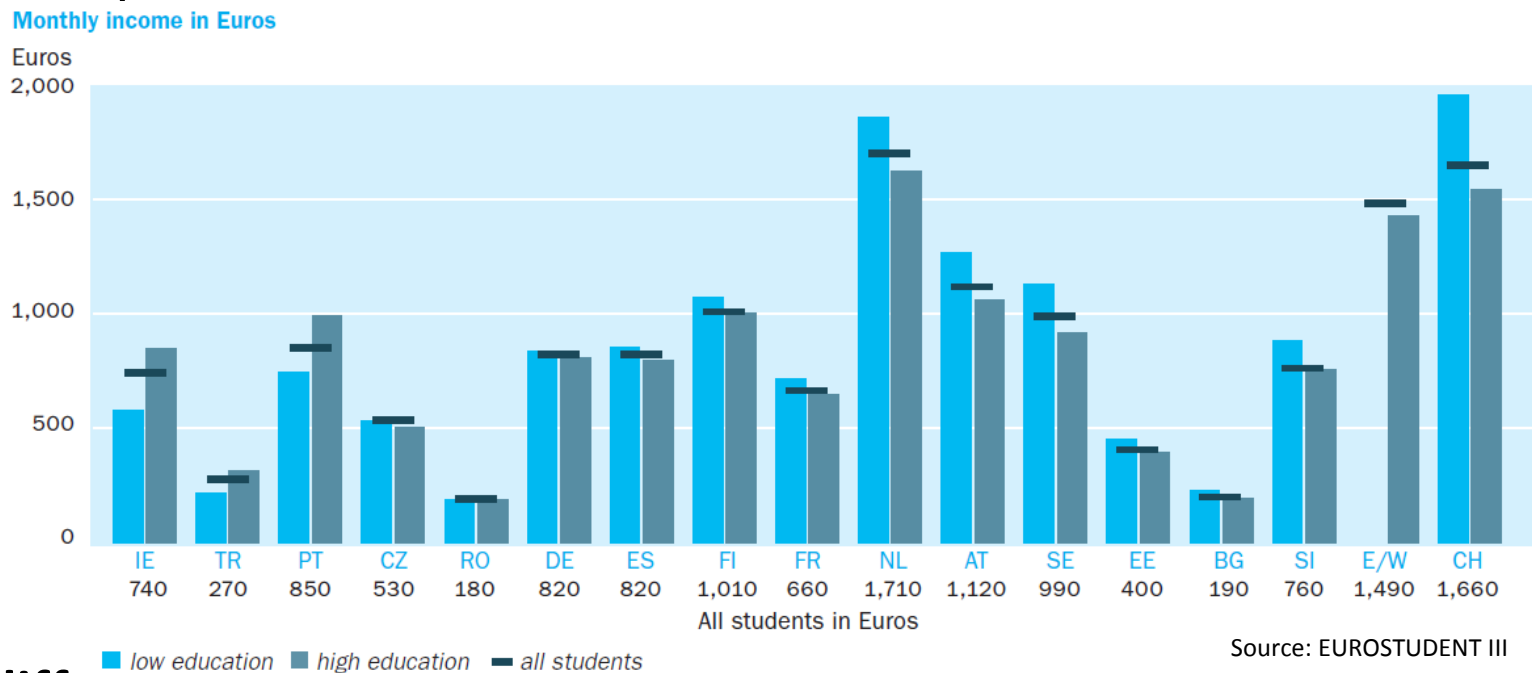
“Lifelong learning implies that qualifications may be obtained through flexible learning paths, including part-time studies, as well as work-based routes.” (Para. 10)

Finding a balance between two policy principles



1. Make everyone similar:

This involves, e.g. providing means-tested grants to students to cover living costs and/or tuition costs



2. Accept differences:

This involves, e.g. providing flexible learning paths

What does the working group want to achieve?



- Gather and disseminate national strategies
- Set up a European Observatory on the Social Dimension of Higher Education providing help by categorising initiatives so that common goals or measures are easily identifiable, e.g.

| | Aimed at (prospective) students | Aimed at providers |
|---|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| Specific measures inside higher education | | |
| Measures before entry to higher education | | |
| Benchmarking initiatives | | |

- Support standardised monitoring on a European level through the Bologna Implementation Report (2012)

Achievements until now and next steps



Achievements

- Ministers of higher education have taken on the “social dimension” as a part of the reform agenda. A large Eurostat/Eurostudent report on the subject was published at the last ministers’ meeting.

Next steps

- We know too little about what policies countries implement and how effective these policies are in practice.
- Countries must develop targets (can you?)
- We need your help in this!

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[Further information]



Chair of working group: Rafael Bonete, Spain

EHEA Website: <http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=12>

My details:

Dominic Orr

International coordinator EUROSTUDENT

HIS-Institute for Research on Higher Education

Hannover, Germany

orr@his.de