

What works for underrepresented groups? Identifying effective measures for enhancing access to higher education in Europe





What will we be talking about?

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Equity considerations within the Bologna Process.

02

Access policies between national frameworks and institutional practices.

03

Why do this study? Why choose this approach?

04

Access measures and their effects: What works for underrepresented groups?



Equity considerations



- higher education systems remain **highly stratified** (Marginson 2016)
- gender imbalances still exist between different fields of study, and students with an immigrant background or with parents without a higher education degree have **lower chances to achieve tertiary attainment**, etc. (Bologna Implementation Report 2018)



access to higher education can be defined as entry/admission to HE (Prodan et al. 2015), while more generally it can be defined as the ability of people from all backgrounds to access higher education on a reasonably equal basis (Usher and Medow, 2010; Wang, 2011).

there is no one-size-fits-all type of solution (no mix of policies will work everywhere) and initiatives in the field should address the goal of eliminating both individual and system barriers (e.g. admission selection should be freed of any privilege bias) (Usher 2015)



Access policies - national frameworks



Equity groups include:

first generation students, refugees, children of civil servants and veterans, students with care experience (i.e., foster care or children's home), orphans, youth without parental care, single mothers or families with a certain number of children (i.e., beyond 3), students who do not speak the national language (i.e., in Denmark) etc.

Source: Claeys-Kulik, Jørgensen, and Stöber 2019; Salmi 2018;



Country-level long-term goals and targets for equity groups:

- by 2025 **Austria** aims to have at least 10% of men/women in each study program and increase the proportion of second-generation immigrants among entrants to 30%.
- By 2030, **Scotland** aims to increase the access for students coming from the most deprived backgrounds so that it represents 20% of the entrants.
- By 2020, **the Czech Republic** set out to increase the access of students with specific educational needs in higher education so that their share will be close to share among high school graduates.

Source: The 2018 Bologna Implementation Report.



Why do this study?

-● Insufficient amount of literature to inform and provide reliable data about the successful policy measures. More exploratory approaches are needed.
-● Knowing which of these initiatives work and whether they are achieving the intended goals is of outmost importance for policy-makers.



How did we approach the analysis?



Look for institutional level studies regarding equity policies.



Compare them in terms of the effectiveness of different types of measures.



Formulate recommendations for policy makers.

- **Four types of access measures** were selected for initial study:
(1) guidance, counselling and mentoring; (2) financial support; (3) preparatory courses;
(4) positive action.
- For each the paper presents:
(1) a general description of the measure; (2) several examples of universities that implemented the measure; (3) a synthesis of the evidence collected about the effectiveness of these measures.



What did we look into?

Tested interventions – short description

Outreach, counseling and mentoring

of prospective students serves as a **source of social capital** for first-generation students (Pham and Keenan 2011) helping students coming from disadvantaged groups overcome the lack of social capital, assistance and advice from their parents and families.

Affirmative actions

a tool for inclusive policies **designed to reduce the negative effects of past and present discrimination** over disadvantaged groups (Garaz 2014) – example: in countries like North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovakia and Romania such measures were introduced to **increase the Roma participation in HE**

Preparatory courses and programs

Intensive courses, auditing courses, introductory semesters, general academic preparations = tools to **even out previous inequalities** by helping students at risk of not continuing their studies to get acquainted with HE and prepare for it;

Financial support

Incentives addressing **the financial barriers** aim at reducing financial pressure for students already eligible and include **reimbursable** or **non-reimbursable financial aids**.



What do we know so far about Outreach, counseling and mentoring?

Short description

Includes personal and professional professional counselling, mentoring and tutoring systems or general academic support;
Applied for education problems, psychological issues, career guidance, and disability guidance;
Offered by: HEIs / NGOs;
Source: Wulz, Gasteriger and Rul and 2018

Aspects of Effectiveness

Positive effects;
Reluctance to attribute enrollment to such measures (even though some measure the rate of enrollment after these programs);
Source: Gumaelius et al. (2016)

Universities that implement it (institutional practices)

HEI	Type of measure and components	Target group	Intended goal(s)
University of Barcelona, Spain	Full tuition scholarship, housing, free language course, mentoring, legal advice, psychological support and dental care	Refugees	Widen access and ensure participation
University College Dublin, Ireland	Outreach - Student Access Leader Programme	Students with disabilities, mature and part-time learners, and students from socio-economic disadvantage	Widen access and ensure participation
University of Lille, France	Financial and pedagogical support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds during their first year of study	Supporting students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds	Ease access to graduate and postgraduate studies
University of Strathclyde, UK	Introduce prospective students to the life on campus and deliver tailored learning activities	Prospective students	Increase students' awareness of various HE aspects (i.e., courses and entry requirements)



What do we know so far?

Tested interventions – information interventions

Gumaelius et al. (2016)

most outreach initiatives aimed at increasing interest in science and technology impacted the enrolment to a degree programme in the STEM field;

Kerr et al. (2018)

In Finland: **the information intervention** did not affect the likelihood of being enrolled in a post-secondary program or the type of programs where the students were enrolled. + the application patterns among students graduating from the treatment and control school are indistinguishable from each other.

Ehlert et al. (2017)

Information interventions determined **an increase the application rates overall**, including for students without academic background parents, with one-college-educated parent, but **no significant effect when both parents have an academic degree**.

Abbiati et al. (2018)

Personalized information about the costs make students enroll less often in less remunerative fields of study in favour of postsecondary vocational programmes (the latter was mainly due to the offspring of low-educated parents)



What do we know so far?

Tested interventions – guidance and mentoring

Cullen (2013)

Positive impact on the drop-out rates: institutions that adopt peer and mentoring support programmes have lower rates of dropout.

Wulz et al. (2018)

Positive impact on widening participation along with student facilities.

Doyle and Griffin (2012)

Positive effects on students' aspiration-raising and access to higher education when combined with other measures such as campus visits or guest lectures.

CONCLUSIONS

- Outreach, counselling and mentoring of prospective students** have a positive impact while combined with other types of measures like:
- student facilities;
 - a “school culture that values and promotes going into tertiary education, that sets high expectations for participation in HE and offers a curriculum that attracts and supports students in their postsecondary and career development” (Salmi and Bassett 2012);
 - a clear set pathway towards HE through secondary education (Usher, 2015).



What do we know so far about Affirmative measures?

Short description

Affirmative action includes reserved places and quotas.
Adopted to provide equal access and chances for those minority groups that are marginalised or discriminated against.

Universities that implement it

HEI	Type of measure and components	Target group	Intended goal(s)
Sciences Po University, France	Dedicated seats	Students from disadvantaged areas	Open up elitist universities to underprivileged students

Aspects of Effectiveness

Unexplored areas (difficult to test, drawbacks in implementation hinder the studies regarding the effectiveness of the measure)
Positive effects;
Reluctance to attribute enrollment to such measures (even though some measure the rate of enrollment after these programs);
The measure ignores the cultural issue assuming that students from disadvantaged backgrounds will thrive if given the place ignoring the risk of being unprepared and thus not complete their studies.
Source: Gumaelius et al. (2016), Usher (2015), Cismaru et al. (2015)



What do we know so far about Financial aid measures?

Short description

Non-reimbursable financial aids: needs-based grants and scholarships that target students from families with lower income, certain ethnic minority groups or rural areas, women or students with disabilities; tuition fee waivers or subsidies.

Reimbursable financial aids: student loans.

HEI	Type of measure and components	Target group	Intended goal(s)
Open University of Catalonia, Spain	Scholarships and online learning	Professionals, refugees and asylum-seekers, people with functional diversity	Providing flexible distance learning degree programs
Universities of Glasgow, York, Barcelona, Edinburgh, Sussex, Warwick	Scholarships (i.e., waiving fees, providing tuition scholarships, and offering free courses)	Refugees	Widen access and ensure participation
University of Vincennes in Saint-Denis, France	Scholarships for refugees with little knowledge of French – Diploma University (DU)	Refugees	Preparation for additional academic courses

Universities that implement it



What do we know so far about Financial aid measures?

Effectiveness

The amount of aid had direct effects on HE enrolment and access. Fack and Grenet (2015):

- A fee-waiver had a small positive effect on enrolment;
- A 1500 euros allowance increased enrolment with 5-7%.

Source: Fack and Grenet, 2015;

Cash-waivers and/or fee-waivers has determined increased student enrolment (a small positive effect. Observation: sometimes it is statistically insignificant for enrolment of low-income students);

Bursaries strengthen students' motivation to succeed and underpin their persistence and success, thus **helping students from low-incomed families to continue their studies** beyond the first year of studies.

Source: Baumgartner and Steiner, 2006; Hatt et al., 2005.



What do we know so far about Preparatory courses/programs?

Universities that implement it

HEI	Type of measure and components	Target group	Intended goal(s)
Leuphana University, Germany	A first semester as an induction period	Mainstream students	Familiarity with academic life and reduce drop-out
Technical University of Munich, University of Tuebingen and Bielefeld, Germany	Free German language courses	Refugees	Prepares students for higher education study at German universities
Central European University, Budapest	Preparatory, non-degree language and academic courses, tutoring – OLIVE, Roma Graduate Preparation	Roma, Refugees and asylum-seekers	Prepares students for higher education study at international universities
Brunel University, UK	Preparatory monthly sessions in key subjects, guest speakers and role models - The Urban Scholars Programme	Prospective talented students from deprived areas	To increase achievement and HE aspirations
University of Vienna, Austria	Free academic courses - Open Learning Initiative	Individuals with refugee or asylum seeking status	Preparation for the Austrian academic higher education system pursuing
Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences, Germany	Intensive language course, attending modules over two semesters - Welcome Year for Refugees	Refugees	Offering the opportunity to take on or continue a degree course
Metropolia University of Applied Sciences	Training courses, application processes support	Persons with an immigrant background	Increase the ability of immigrant people to enter higher education



What do we know so far about Preparatory courses/programs?

Effectiveness

Positive influence on students' confidence;
Increased their awareness about the benefits of higher education and thus helped more students to decide to continue their studies.

Source: Rostas 2017, Pinheiro-Torres and Davies (2008), Walker (2010)



Author(s)	Measure type	Effects	Author(s)	Measure type	Effects
Gumaelius et al. (2016)	Outreach	+	Crosby, Iyer, and Sincharoen (2006)	Affirmative action	+/-
Kerr et al. (2014)	Information	0	Fack and Grenet (2015)	Fee-waiver	+
Ehlert et al. (2017)	General information	+	Baumgartner and Steiner (2006)	Financial aid	+/-
Abbiati et al. (2018)	Personalized information	+	Hatt et al. (2005)	Bursaries	+
			Lannert and Garaz (2014)	Scholarship	+
Cullen (2013)	Counselling	+	Roma Education Fund (2015)	Scholarship mix	+
Wulz et al. 2018	Counselling	+			
Doyle and Griffin (2012)	Mentoring	+	Berg (2018)	Language	+
			Rostas (2017)	Mixed	+
McCaig and Bowers-Brown (2007)	Mentoring	-	Pinheiro-Torres and Davies (2008)	Mixed	+
Idrizi (2013)	Quota	+/-	Casey, Smith, and Koshy (2011)	Mixed	+
Cismaru, Fiț and Gologan (2015)	Reserved places	+/-			
Usher (2015)	Reserved places	+/-	Walker (2010)	Pre-university summer school	+/-



What do we know so far?

Main conclusions so far....

Research availability



- Little publicly available studies
- The existing studies cover a selected number of equity-linked policy measures

Impact assessment



- Attributing cause and effect is Impossible due to difficulties in isolating the effects of such policies
- Most of the available studies **do not provide a comprehensive geographical overview** of the studied measures

Successful stories



- Combining **financial measures** with measures targeting to overcome the non-financial barriers;
- **Cooperation** between Governments, HEIs, NGOs, public authorities etc.
- Setting **high expectations for the students** and motivating them to believe in themselves and their potential.

Work in progress...

Thank you!

Any **questions / feedback** ?