FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION - BOLOGNA PROCESS RESEARCHERS' CONFERENCE (FOHE-BPRC), FORTH EDITION

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Session 2: Access and success for every learner in higher education

1. **Access to and experiences of higher education across Europe: the impact of social characteristics**, *Rachel Brooks (University College London, UK), Jessie Abrahams (University of Bristol, UK), Predrag Lazetic (University of Bath, UK), Achala Gupta (University College London, UK) and Sazana Jayadeva (University College London, UK)*

Policymakers across Europe have increasingly emphasised the importance of paying close attention to the social dimension of higher education and taking further steps to ensure that the composition of Europe's universities more adequately reflects the diversity of the wider population. While there have been a number of studies that have explored this through analyses of European- and national-level policy, and others that have assessed a range of quantitative indicators related to student diversity, this paper assumes, in contrast, an interpretivist stance; it is interested in the perspectives of those studying and working 'on the ground' within the European Higher Education Area. Specifically, we seek to answer this research question: To what extent do students and staff, across Europe, believe that higher education access and experiences are differentiated by social characteristics (such as class/family background, race/ethnicity/migration background, gender and age)? In doing so, we draw on data from a large European Research Council-funded project, including 54 focus groups with undergraduate students (a total of 295 individuals) and 72 in-depth individual interviews with members of higher education staff (both academic and non-academic). Fieldwork was conducted in three higher education institutions in each of the following countries: Denmark, UK-England, Germany, Ireland, Poland and Spain – nations chosen to provide diversity with respect to welfare regime, relationship to the European Union and mechanisms for funding higher education. We explore commonalities and differences between staff and students, and between different countries, before identifying some implications for policymakers keen to promote further social inclusion within Europe's higher education institutions (HEIs).

2. **What does it take to build a social dimension strategy? A cross-country comparative analysis of Romania and Austria**, *Simona Torotcoi (Central European University, Austria/Hungary)*

Unlike other action lines of the Bologna Process, slow progress has been made towards making the social dimension an implementable policy. The social dimension had to overcome a significant start-up difficulty. It entered the Bologna Process with no clear definition, guidelines or projection of concrete policy measures. In 2015, with the adoption of the Strategy for the Development of the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning in the EHEA to 2020, participating countries were asked to come up with concrete national plans to address participation of underrepresented groups in higher education. This paper looks in depth at two country cases that attempted to create the necessary conditions for such strategies Austria and Romania, and asks what are the successful conditions for building a social dimension and lifelong learning strategy, in line with the Bologna requirements? The common point for these countries is that both of them attempted to build a social dimension and life-long learning strategy however, one of the countries came up with a strategy, yet other national strategies and

policies were in contradiction with what the strategy promoted, whereas in the second country no strategy was developed besides the involvement of the main stakeholders. The data for the analysis comes from interviews conducted in November 2017 with stakeholders involved in the formation of these strategies, ranging from student representatives to educational experts, and governmental representatives.

3. **Networked in or networked out? What can we learn from diverse learners' experiences of progressing with and completing doctoral studies?** *Maeve O' Regan (Trinity College Dublin, Ireland)*

Discourse on student success has tended to emphasise academic attainment and retention (York, Gibson, & Rankin, 2015). However, influences such as globalisation, increasing diversity of student populations and the potential of digital technologies to support the student experience require redefining and expanding how success is understood in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) worldwide (York et al., 2015). The current paper will examine student success in the context of a sample of students' experiences of accessing academic and personal support during doctoral candidature.

This article focuses on a preliminary study which investigated if full and part-time doctoral candidates reported differences in terms of access to programme-based information and academic and personal support networks during the doctoral process. Outcomes from the initial exploratory phase of the research (completed in December 2018) are based on responses from eighteen doctoral candidates (11 full-time and 7 part-time) from a single research-intensive university in Ireland. Participants were undertaking studies in different disciplines and were at various stages of the doctoral research journey.

The results suggest that "one size does not fit all" and different students can encounter various barriers and enablers to accessing programme-based information and participating in academic and personal networks during doctoral candidature.

The current paper explores how HEIs might harness both face-to-face and online resources to enhance access to programme-based and social support to meet the needs of different learners. The findings from this study can provide insights to policy makers and practitioners on supporting a diverse body of students within higher education in Europe, not just within the doctoral process, but at different stages within the Bologna Qualifications Framework.

4. **What works for underrepresented groups? Identifying effective measures for enhancing access to higher education in Europe,** *Simona Torotcoi (Central European University, Austria), Anastasia Kurysheva (University Medical Center Utrecht, The Netherlands) and Delia Gologan (University of Bucharest, Romania)*

Over the last three decades, policymakers from the EHEA have developed numerous measures, policies, projects and programs with the intention to increase the enrollment and participation of underrepresented groups (e.g. ethnic and religious minorities, different socio-economic groups). Despite the deceptive plentitude of measures, higher education remains stratified (i.e. by field of study/ university prestige) for students with a precarious socioeconomic status, students belonging to a different race/ethnicity, first generation students, etc. A significant number of countries and higher education institutions invested significant resources with the aim of widening access for such groups (i.e., through quota systems, preparatory programs, etc.), however little is known about the ways in which such initiatives (with distinct and/or uncoordinated purposes) shape opportunities for potential students. Knowing which of these initiatives work and whether they are achieving the intended goals is of outmost importance for policy-makers. Provided the level of autonomy in general and the

flexibility higher education institutions have in selecting students and organizing admissions processes, this paper addresses the relative effectiveness of initiatives at the higher education institutions level. This paper aims to collect, document, scrutinise and critically analyse the current research literature which assesses the effectiveness of different programs, projects, policies and measures for widening access for underrepresented groups, and at the same time to identify gaps and make recommendations for potential further research.

5. **Which person is presumed to fit the institution? How refugee students' and practitioners' discursive representations of successful applicants and students highlight transition barriers to German higher education,** *Jana Berg (German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies, Germany)*

During recent years, German higher education institutions implemented a variety of support programs for refugees on their way to higher education. This newly highlighted questions of widening participation and informal as well as formal access barriers to higher education. This paper looks into discourses on successful students as a form of knowledge that implicitly highlights transition barriers to higher education. The qualitative study is based on expert interviews with teachers, program coordinators and student counsellors as well as interviews with prospective refugee students in a case study of a preparatory college ('Studienkolleg') and a university in a case-study of one city in Germany. They are analysed using Keller's (2007) approach to discourse analysis. The paper describes personal, institutional and structural characteristics of ideal higher education transitions. Institutional presuppositions and assumptions about individual characteristics, the social organisation of time, academic practices and knowledges as well as discursively represented norms are discussed as crucial factors influencing higher education transitions. The paper ends with a working hypothesis on the influence of discourses on transitions and recommends that institutional settings should develop more awareness of and adapt to diverse applicants and students in order to widen access to higher education.

6. **Syrian University Students in Turkish Higher Education: Immediate Vulnerabilities, Future Challenges,** *Armağan Erdoğan (University of Ankara, Turkey) and Murat Erdoğan (Turkish-German University, Turkey)*

Since 2011 millions of Syrian people were displaced and had to drop out of their education. They became refugees mostly in the neighbouring countries and some managed to reach Europe. In their new life in the new countries their cultural, social and economic vulnerabilities in addition to lack of language proficiency and traumas they faced make their access and participation to higher education more challenging both for themselves and also for the higher education systems and universities in the host countries. Turkey, having the largest student population in the European Higher Education Area, has been suffering from some challenges in higher education such as supply and demand imbalance for the national students. Demographic factors, shortcomings of the higher education system and unemployment rate among the university graduates have been some long-term challenges in Turkish higher education. Moreover, a common misconception both in public opinion and in the media that the Syrian refugees are admitted to the Universities in Turkey without fulfilling the requirements adds new challenges for the future policies. In a country like Turkey, where there is a high competition between students (and to some extent parents) to pass the nationwide university selection exam each year, promoting the Syrian students into higher education seems to be a knife edge situation. Now, the new challenges appeared in higher education after the mass immigration flow, which reached over 4.1 million. Both the numbers and also the emergency of the situation triggered immediate actions in terms of structure, legislation or mind-set, to respond to the many challenges this migration flow created, including in the area of higher education.

This paper will examine immediate vulnerabilities and future challenges for the Syrian university students in Turkish Universities, but it will also give insights on EHEA. This paper will be based on field work of a research conducted in the context of Hopes-MADAD project entitled "Elite Dialogue II-Dialogue with Syrian Refugees in Turkey through Syrian Academics and Students" in 2017-2019. Quantitative data was collected from 750 Syrian students attending the Universities in Turkey through online survey. The main research question of the research is which type of vulnerabilities the Syrian university students face and how they can integrate into society in Turkey. The motivation behind the research was to define the Syrian students and academics as "elite" groups to play a role to mediate between their community and Turkish society. New approaches and definitions are needed to touch the actual needs of the refugees to be actively involved into society. Nevertheless, research on the higher education practices of vulnerable groups in general, and of Syrian students in particular is largely missing.