Delayed transition to higher education through alternative pathways: A comparative study of Romania, Lithuania, Austria

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Abstract

For the higher education system to be socially equitable it is commonly agreed upon by European higher education policymakers that the student body should mirror the social structure of the population (EHEA 2020). Many countries have created alternative routes into higher education to address this issue, allowing students to enrol without having completed the traditional upper secondary education or to complete secondary education and start higher education later in life. This paper takes a closer look at the background of students with delayed transition into higher education, particularly in Austria, Lithuania, and Romania, using the EUROSTUDENT VII microdata set (Cuppen et al. 2023). Data shows that 23 percent of students in Austria, 11 percent in Lithuania and 10 percent in Romania enter higher education two years after leaving school at the earliest (excluding international students). While these groups show specific characteristics in each country, overall, it is less likely for them to study abroad, and they more frequently report financial issues. Furthermore, students with a delayed transition to higher education are less likely to have parents with a university degree. However, they devote more time to their studies and are happier with their academic environment. The paper further shows educational regulations and policy measures in Austria, Lithuania, and Romania, that can affect the situation of delayed transition students.

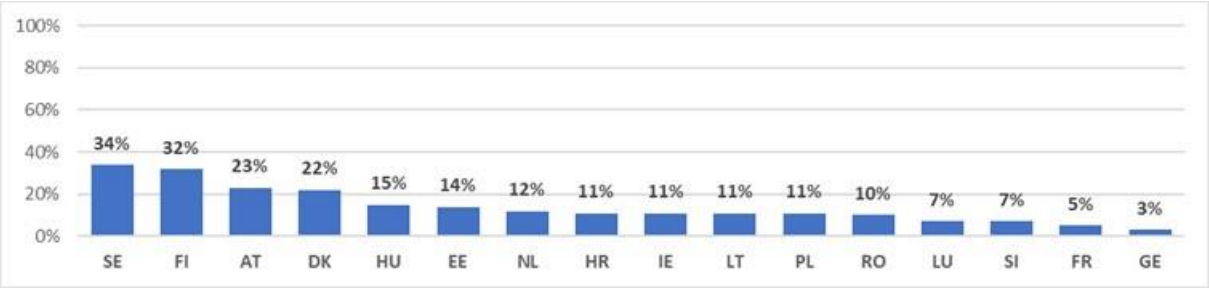
1. Introduction

In less than 20 years, the number of students enrolled in higher education worldwide has more than doubled (Martin and Godonga 2020). Most European higher education policymakers agree that for the higher education system to be socially equitable, the population's social structure should be reflected in the student body's demographic makeup (EHEA 2020). However, a more varied student body also means a wider range of expectations and requests for greater flexibility (Unger and Zaussinger 2018).

In addition to students who continue their education after completing upper secondary school, other students who wish to pursue higher education include adult learners, returnees, migrants, people with caregiving duties, and people with special needs (Martin and Godonga 2020). The international "Education 2030" agenda (OECD 2018) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (United Nations 2015) both acknowledge the need for education systems to be modified to better support flexible learning pathways to promote fairness and lifelong learning. This pushes nations to create well-integrated educational systems that offer learning pathways for every student including entry and re-entry at all ages and educational levels.

To achieve that goal as part of the Bologna process, higher education institution should remove barriers to the recognition of prior learning (e.g. professional experience) for admission (EHEA 2015). However, the recognition of prior learning for admission is currently hardly possible in any country. Fulfilling the countries' standard requirement for accessing higher education (e.g. passing the last year of upper secondary school or succeeding at a specific exam[1]) later in life is therefore often the only possibility to start without a "regular" secondary school leaving certificate. Data from the EUROSTUDENT VII project shows that the share of students with delayed transition varies among countries and currently ranges from 3 % in Georgia, to 34 % in Sweden (see

Fig. 1).[2]



AT: Austria; DK: Denmark; EE: Estonia; FI: Finland; FR: France; GE: Georgia; HR: Croatia; HU: Hungary; IE: Ireland; LT: Lithuania; LU: Luxembourg; NL: The Netherlands; PL: Poland; RO: Romania; SE: Sweden; SI: Slovenia

Fig. 1: *Share of students with delayed transition*

Due to its rapid expansion, the higher education sector is now extremely diversified, which is seen in the increased diversity of learners joining the system as well as the wider range of higher education

[1] E.g. Matura, Abitur, A-Level, Baccalauréat. In Romania it is called "Diploma de Bacalaureat", in Lithuania and Austria it is the Matura.

[2] Delayed transition is defined here as the earliest start of studies two years after completion of upper secondary school or without such a qualification by non-traditional routes.

institutions and study programs (Martin and Godonga 2020). Every country has a distinct socioeconomic, educational, and political setting that can have an impact on students' pathways to higher education. To foster a flexible learning environment, a suitable combination of policies and steering tools is needed, as well as tailored implementation mechanisms in higher education institutions.

Examining delayed transition to higher education among students from different countries offers the opportunity to gain a thorough grasp of the variables affecting this occurrence. Taking a closer look at three specific countries: Austria, Lithuania, and Romania, with their different student populations and political measures in place can help advance our understanding of the variables impacting educational transitions and what this specific group of students might need to be better supported. The following research questions will be at the centre of this study:

- Which students experience delayed transitions?
- Where are delayed transition students found?
- To what extent do delayed transition students combine study and work?
- How do delayed transition students perceive their study situation?
- What educational regulations and policy measures are in place in Austria, Lithuania and Romania that constrain, or help delayed transition students?

The underlying methodology is presented before showing and commenting the results of this research.

2. Methodology

The microdata set utilized in this research stems from the EUROSTUDENT VII project (2018–2021) (Cuppen et al. 2023) and includes all aspects of modern-day student life, including the students' backgrounds (social and demographic), experiences and learning environments (quality, time, budget, and mobility), and living situations (work, resources, expenses, and housing situation). 16 of the 26 participating countries – AT, HR, DK, EE, FI, FR, GE, HU, IE, LT, LUX, NL, PO, RO, SE, and SL – provided their microdata for the study.[3]

Students self-report the data that the EUROSTUDENT project uses. Because of the nature of this data, the EUROSTUDENT dataset contains a substantial quantity of valuable information not found in other sources, such as official statistics. It must be kept in mind, that the COVID-19 pandemic hit Europe during data collection for EUROSTUDENT VII. While Romania surveyed their students with a reference period during this unusual situation (2020), all the other countries' data included in the used microdata set was collected with a reference period before the pandemic-related constraints (2019).

The study considers only domestic students, i.e., those who attended the regular school system (excluding evening classes or schools for adults) in the country of observation regardless of their citizenship. Delayed transition is defined as starting studies at the earliest two years after leaving school. In the analytical sample, 23 % students in Austria, 11 % in Lithuania and 10 % in Romania are classified as delayed transition students. Pearsons Chi-square and Fisher's Exact tests were used to evaluate the relationship between the variables of interest. A p-value < 0.05 was considered significant (*), < 0.001 considered highly significant (**).

Additionally, guided interviews with policy makers from Austria, Lithuania and Romania were conducted to obtain information on policies in the countries. The interviews (~1 h/interview, 2 virtually, 1 in person) have been recorded, transcribed, and thematically analysed (Froschauer and Lueger 2003).

[3] The data set is available at FDZ/DZHW free of charge for scientific purposes: https://metadata.fdz.dzhw.eu/en/data-packages/stu-es7?page=1&size=10&type=surveys

This paper builds on results from the projects "EUROSTUDENT VII" and "Study conditions and motives of non-traditional study beginners in Austria, Lithuania and Romania" (commissioned by OEAD).[4]

3. Characteristics of students with delayed transition

Students' socioeconomic status, age, gender, and disability are listed as potential impediments to access, participation, and completion of higher education in the EHEA's social dimension principle and guidelines (EHEA 2020). Giving the chance to start higher education later in life can potentially ease the situation for groups that would not decide in favour of studying otherwise. A closer look at the data allows to check if students with delayed transitions are different regarding their socioeconomic attributes.

Typically, female students make up the majority of students (Gwosc et al. 2021). While this is also the case in all countries under consideration of this research, a different picture is painted for delayed transition students in several countries, including Austria and Romania. Here, most students with a delayed transition are male (see

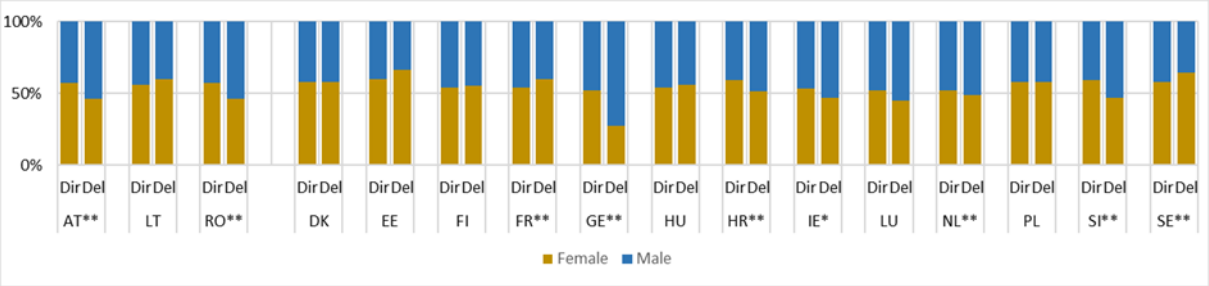


Fig. 2). This reflects the fact that delayed transition students can increasingly be found in male dominated study fields (see section 4).

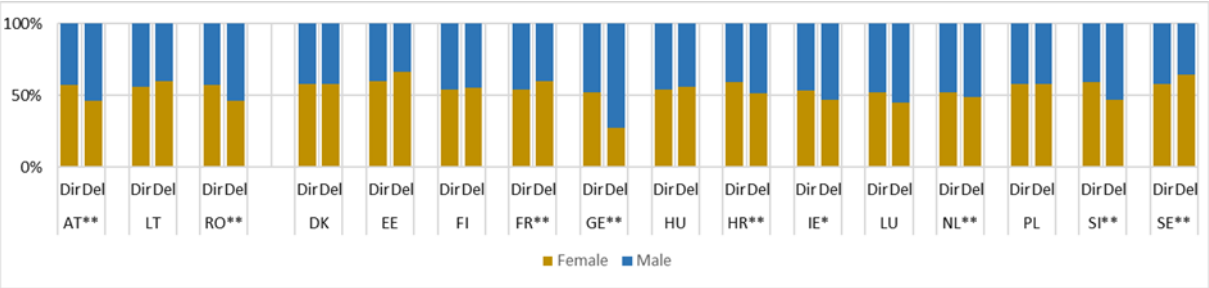


Fig. 2: *Share of female/male students by direct/delayed transition*

The age of students frequently plays a role when it comes to laws and regulations relating to their studies. For instance, it might have an impact on one's ability to receive free or subsidised health insurance, more general benefits, or public student assistance. Older students frequently live in different situations, have different histories and experiences, and have more obligations than younger students (such as those related to family or employment). Generally, the regular student population is mostly younger than 25 years old (Gwosc et al. 2021). Students with a delayed transition are by definition already older when they start studying than those who experience a direct transition. Nevertheless, the significantly higher percentage of 30+ years old students among delayed transition students indicates that in certain countries, this group is far older: There are ten times more students over the age

[4] See: https://www.eurostudent.eu/ and https://www.ihs.ac.at/ru/higher-education-research/projects/studienbedingungen-und-motive-von-nicht-traditionellen-studienanfaengerinnen-in-oesterreich-litauen-und-rumaenien/

of 30 among delayed transition students in Slovenia, nine times more in France, 8.4 times more in Lithuania (64 percent of all delayed transition students), 5.5 times more in Romania (67 percent), and 3.5 times more in Austria (46 percent). In Finland and Luxembourg, around twice the proportion of students with a delayed transition are over 30 years old.

In several countries, there is a higher percentage of students with study-limiting impairments among students who experienced a delayed transition (these conditions are typically either chronic physical illnesses or mental health problems) – in France and Slovenia this share was even twice as high (see

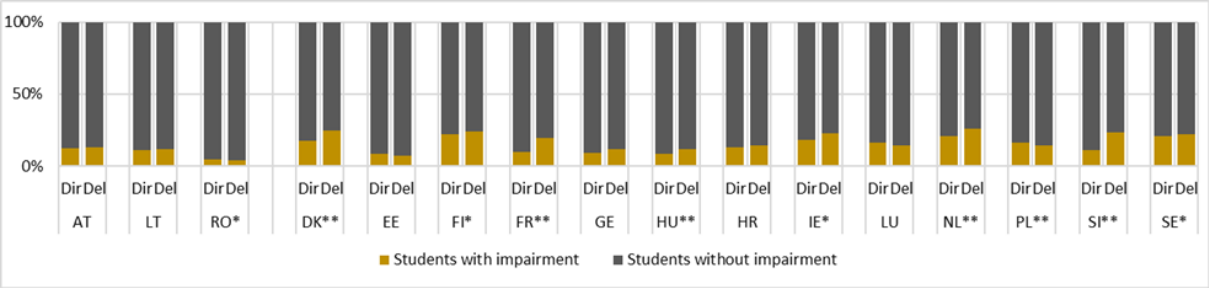


Fig. 3). Romania, on the other hand, has significantly less students with impairments in the group of delayed transition students.

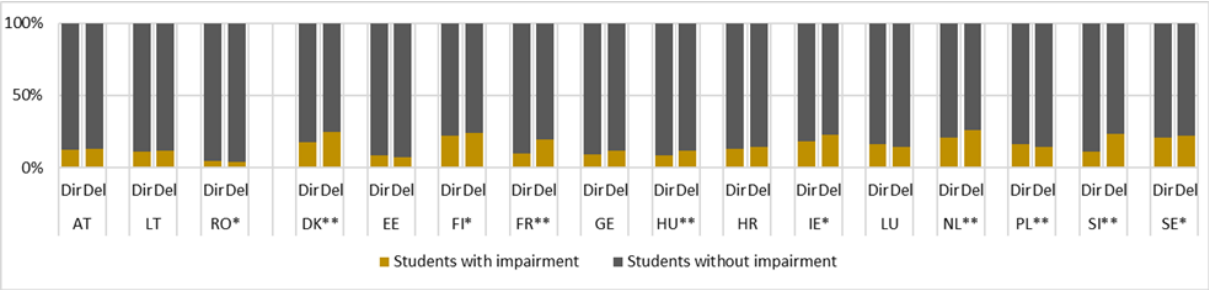


Fig. 3: *Share of students with/without study limiting impairment by direct/delayed transition*

Research indicates that students who are the first of their generation to pursue higher education typically face more challenges during the transition to higher education, including limited financial resources, fewer support systems, and a lack of basic knowledge about the process (Mehta et al. 2011, Oldfield 2012, Pascarella et al. 2004). Therefore, it is not surprising that in nearly every EUROSTUDENT country, students from lower educational backgrounds are underrepresented relative to the population (Gwosc et al. 2021).

The share of delayed transition students whose parents completed higher education (ISCED 6-8) is significantly lower to that with direct transition in all countries of this study except Denmark, where the two proportions are roughly equal (see

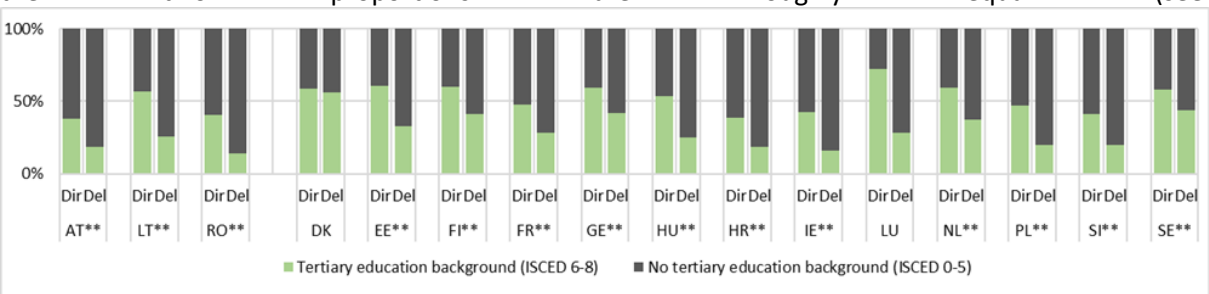


Fig. 4). In Sweden, a quarter fewer people with delayed transition have parents who have completed higher education. In nine countries, including the three countries we are taking a closer look at in this paper, the percentage of people with parents who completed higher education is, at most, half that of people who underwent a direct transition. In Austria only 18 % of the students with delayed transition have a tertiary education background, in Lithuania 26 % and 14 % in Romania. It is therefore not surprising, that this group less frequently indicates, that it was always obvious for them to study in higher education one day.

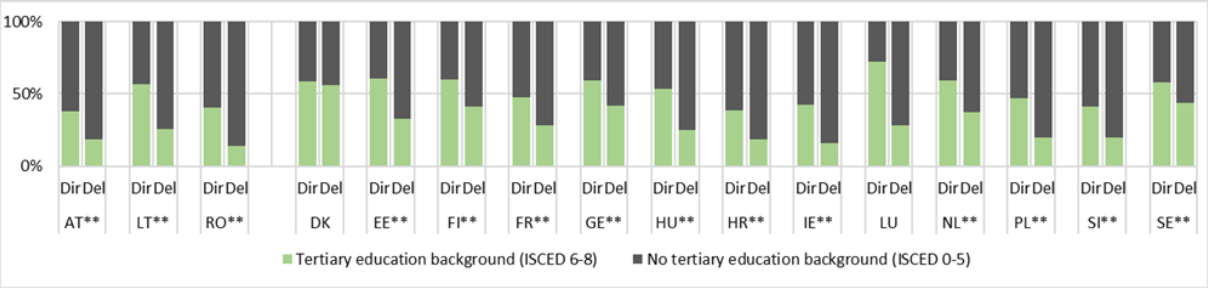


Fig. 4: *Share of students with/without tertiary education background by direct/delayed transition*

4. Where to find students with delayed transition?

All the EUROSTUDENT countries (except Romania and Sweden) have a substantial "non-university" sector with labour market-oriented higher education institutions often with a specific focus (e.g. on Health subjects (but not Medicine) or Business/law). It is significantly more likely for students with delayed transition to be found in the non-university sector. Compared to students with direct transition, nearly twice as many with delayed transition (34 % of them) study in the non-university sector in Austria, and more than twice as many (63 % of them) do so in Lithuania (see

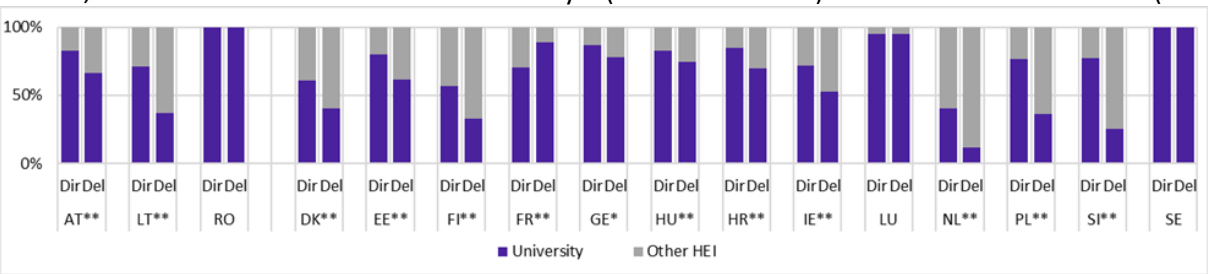


Fig. 5). Moreover, parents of students in the non-university sector are typically less well-off than those of students in the university sector.

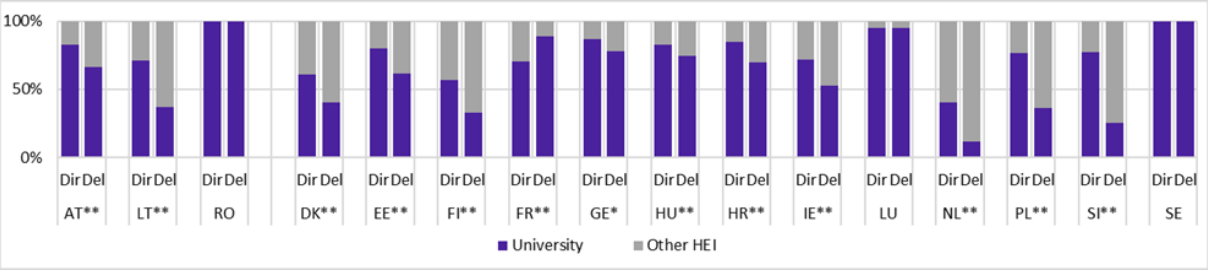


Fig. 5: *Share of students from universities/other higher education institutions by direct/delayed transition*

Enabling graduates to work in specialised professions is one of the key drivers for investments in higher education. For the selection of study fields, numerous patterns, most notably in relation to sex and socioeconomic status, have been noted in previous research (e.g. Georg and Bargel 2017, Sobieraj and Krämer 2019). This raises the question of whether there are also differences regarding types of transitions.

In all EUROSTUDENT countries, Business/Law, Health/Welfare and Engineering are the study fields which the largest proportions of students choose (Gwosc et al. 2021). Taking a closer look at students with delayed transition, one can see that the popular study field Business/Law is significantly more frequently selected by them in several countries, including Austria (1.1 times), Lithuania (1.3 times) and Romania (1.3 times). "Health/Welfare" is selected 1.3 times more frequently by delayed transition students in Lithuania but in contrast less frequently in Romania (0.7 times).

In seven of the 16 countries, students with delayed transition chose the study field Education significantly more often than students with direct transition. In Lithuania this field is 3.2 times more often chosen by students with delayed transition and in Romania 1.8 times. Hardly studied by students with delayed transition in Lithuania and Romania is Information and Communications Technology (ICT). However, it is 1.2 times more popular among this group in Austria. This may be due to the fact that in this country the range of ICT programmes is being continuously expanded specifically for working professionals. But in general, the choice of field of study in Austria differs very little between students with a direct or delayed transition.

Another aspect is that students with a delayed transition are less likely to study abroad temporarily (e.g. ERASMUS+). They more often see financial difficulties, the loss of their paid employment and separation from their partner or children as the main obstacles to study abroad.

5. Working experience of delayed transition students

Starting to study later in life often goes along with gaining some work experience before (Mishra 2016). In Austria, Lithuania, Romania and nearly all other countries under study, about 90 % of the students with delayed transition have worked before they started higher education (see

Fig. 6).

Fig. 6: *Share of students who worked/did not work before studying by direct/delayed transition*

Working then often continues while studying, which, besides creating an income, can increase the chances for getting a job after graduation and even help to secure higher-paying positions (Jackson et al. 2017; Irwin et al. 2019). While part-time work lengthens study time somewhat, it greatly shortens the time needed to find a job after graduation if the employment is connected to the study content (Franzen et al. 2002). Some students decide to work alongside because they are performing exceptionally well in their studies, and others choose to begin working because they are not sure to be able to finish their higher education (Moulin 2013). In most countries, including Austria, Lithuania and Romania, the share of students working more than 20 hours per week is around twice as high (or more) among students with delayed transition.

Sometimes, education is rather seen as an addition to paid employment than the other way around and the money earned can be required for financing students' expected lifestyles (Beerkens et al. 2011). In Austria, Lithuania, and Romania, the share of students who proclaim they depend on self-earned money is twice as high among delayed transition students who perceive themselves foremost as workers studying aside. However, it is the students with delayed transition who are more likely to experience financial difficulties. In Austria the share of students facing those troubles is 19, in Lithuania 29 and in Romania 10 percentage points higher than among students with direct transition.

Having a restricted overall time budget, working students naturally have less time to devote to their studies (Creed et al. 2015; Callender et al. 2015; Keute 2017; Moulin et al. 2013; Masevičiūtė et al. 2018). The percentage of delayed transition students who study at low intensity (up to 20 hours per week for courses and independent study) is significantly higher than the share among direct transition students in nine countries, including Austria, Lithuania, and Romania, with shares of 32 %, 21 % and 19 % (see

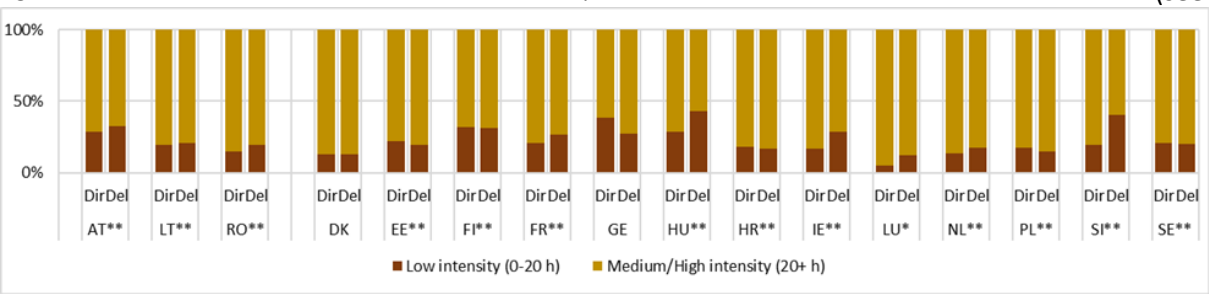


Fig. 7).

Furthermore, they less often indicate a lack of motivation for their studies as a challenge (34 % direct vs. delayed 9 % in Lithuania; 32 % vs. 7 % in Romania[5]).

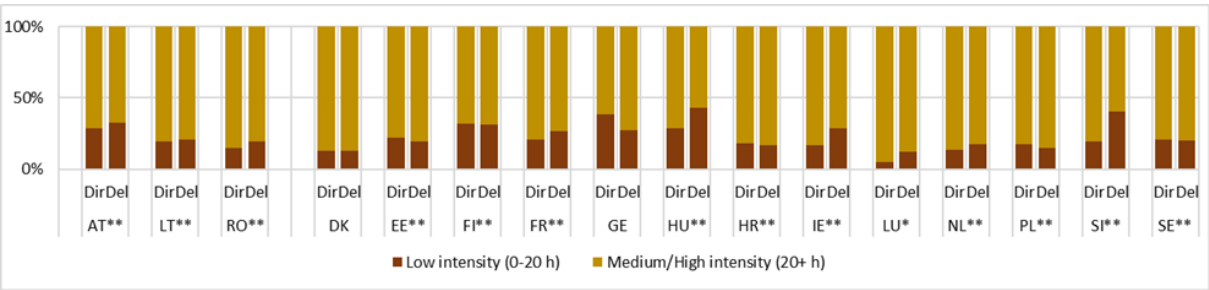


Fig. 7: *Share of students who study 20 h/more than 20 h per week with direct/delayed transition*

[5] There is no information on Austria since this question module has not been part of the Austrian questionnaire.

6. Perceived study quality of students with delayed transition

The growing diversity in student populations has led to a renewed emphasis on teaching standards (Wolter 2015). Clear instructions have proofed central for grades, persistence in learning and wellbeing of students (Roksa et al. 2017). The quality of higher education also became a focal point of the Bologna Process with the Berlin Communiqué (EHEA 2003), and the Bucharest Communiqué (EHEA 2012) adopted norms and principles for quality assurance.

Compared to students who started higher education immediately, students who have experienced delayed transition evaluated their teachers' abilities and the teacher-student interaction far more favourably. In Romania, particularly, students with delayed transition find that teachers can explain well. In a similar vein, delayed transition students frequently indicate that their teachers listen to them and encourage them to work hard; this is particularly true for Lithuania and Romania. This goes hand in hand with this group typically recommending their study program more frequently in the three countries. Generally, compared to students with direct transfer, students with delayed transition rank several aspects of their study environment as more satisfactory. In Austria this could be due to the fact that special programmes are offered for working people, in Lithuania the increased support at non-universities might be the reason for this. Furthermore, it can be speculated that due to their older age delayed transition students have a different basis for communicating with teachers and more experience of working in a self-structured way.

Not only is the interaction with teachers relevant for the outcome, but research further shows that students who are integrating better with their peers are more driven and persistent (Garza et al. 2021; Hausmann et al. 2007; Noyens et al. 2019; Snyder 2017; Tinto 2017). Delayed transition students feel less alone from their peers in Lithuania and Romania, while in Austria, there is hardly any difference between the two groups. However, students with delayed transitions often rate their own study performance as equal to that of their peers, whereas students with direct transitions more often believe that they are better performing than their peers in Austria, Lithuania, and Romania.

7. Educational regulations and policy measures in Austria, Lithuania, and Romania

In this section, the three countries that are the focus of this research are presented in more detail, showing what opportunities exist to start a degree programme (later in life) and what political priorities are set in the countries that can have an influence on the decision to study later in life as well as the perceived study quality.

7.1 Austria

In Austria, 23 % of students started higher education at the earliest two years after leaving upper secondary school. Besides regular admission, there are three alternative options to start tertiary education in Austria. The “Berufsreifeprüfung” is a fully-fledged Matura (second-chance education) that entitles you to study any subject at any university in Austria and the European Union. The university entrance qualification examination (“Studienberechtigungsprüfung”) allows you to study selected subjects that correspond to your professional background. At Universities of Applied Sciences, it is possible to study without a Matura but with a vocational qualification if additional examinations (usually German, English, Maths) are taken.

In Austria, some policies support older students and those with prior work experience. For individuals who have worked at least for four years (earning money above a certain threshold), and who are a maximum of 32 years old at the start of the programme, there is a study grant independent from parental income of at least 943€/months available. Over the past few years, the maximum age to

receive this support has been progressively raised.[6] Of all students with delayed transition, 28% receive such a scholarship; among beginners with delayed transition, the figure is 34%.

While part-time studies are an option to encourage (older) people that are working to start higher education in several countries, there is no established program for part-time study in Austria.[7] However, it is possible to study according to individual semester plans at many higher education institutions (especially public universities). As a result, many students acquire significantly fewer than the 60 ECTS credits per academic year, which extends the duration of their studies accordingly (and can lead to the loss of student funding and the payment of tuition fees). Thus, effectively many students in Austria study part-time in full-time programmes.

There are very few 100% online programmes (including a very popular law programme). However, there is a cooperation with the Distance-Learning University in Hagen (Germany), for which there is an examination centre in each federal state.

7.2 Lithuania

11 % of the students in Lithuania can be classified as delayed transition students. In order to gain entry into the Lithuanian higher education system, candidates must pass at least one state Matura exam and achieve minimal learning outcomes, as determined by performance outcomes, entrance exams, and additional standards set by the higher education institution (Eurydice 2023a). Prior learning is sometimes recognised as credits for a qualification but cannot be used for admission to it, which makes it harder to access higher education later in life.

Lithuania presently has a voucher program in existence that enables some students to get free education. The government is planning to introduce in 2024 a measure that might encourage more people to start studying later in life. 10 % of the vouchers will be awarded to students who have worked for a few years in each study field, encouraging them to continue their education later in life.

In Lithuania, part-time study programmes exist officially. Their duration is 1.5 times longer than that of a full-time program, allowing students to pay the same tuition for the entire program but with a reduced workload each semester. However, (especially since start of the COVID-19 pandemic) more programs now offer nighttime study, blocked classrooms, and partially distance learning (at least 5 % of instruction must be in-person). This is why fewer of part-time study programs have been offered recently. By making their programs more flexible, many higher education institutions aim to draw in non-traditional students, such as those who entered the field later than usual or who work part-time in addition to their studies.

7.3 Romania

In Romania, 10 % of the students had a delayed transition to higher education. However, as in Lithuania, it is not possible to access higher education without an upper secondary certificate (Eurydice 2023b), limiting the possibilities to study later in life. While there has been some talk about microcredits, and the 2015–2020 National Strategy for Tertiary Education contains some commitments to flexibility, there is currently no prior learning assessment and recognition system in place in Romania,

[6] Up to the age of 37 at the start of studies, the study grant can be drawn if an additional year of self-support is proven for each age over 32.

[7] Universities of Applied Sciences offer "part-time" programmes that require fewer hours per week, but last more weeks per year and thus involve the same annual workload as full-time studies and are therefore also classified as such.

which would make it easier for students to enrol in alternate pathways to higher education (Dervis 2022).

Recently, Romania passed new education regulations that include a nationwide initiative to address higher education dropout rates, with a particular emphasis on students who experience a delayed transition. Prior research conducted in the nation revealed that older students (primarily those with delayed transitions) have higher dropout rates than younger students.

Although they are not very prevalent, part-time study programs are also available in Romania. Higher education establishments are free to set their own tuition rates, while they typically give reduced rates (per semester) for courses taken part-time, which take longer to complete. There is no financial help available for working students in Romania because they are not a defined target group for political measures. However, some universities try to assist working students by providing evening classes, for example. Like in Lithuania, full online programs are prohibited; however, blended learning options with some in-person lectures are permitted.

8. Summary: Students with a delayed transition in Europe, particularly in Austria, Lithuania, and Romania

Students with delayed transition are a group that has received little attention so far and is often not the target of political measures. Nevertheless, they sometimes represent a remarkable proportion of all students: in the EUROSTUDENT countries an average of 13% (with a standardized number of cases per country, i.e. regardless of the population or sample size), in Austria 23%, in Lithuania 11% and in Romania 10%.

A logistic regression (direct vs delayed transition), which cannot be presented in detail here for reasons of space, shows across all EUROSTUDENT countries[8] (R^2=0.480) that regular employment before starting university (min 20h/week for at least 1 year), older age (especially over 25) and the rejection of the statement that "it was always clear I would study in higher education one day" provide the highest explanatory contributions for those who study with delayed transfer. A higher educational background of the parents, on the other hand, has a significantly negative effect (i.e. the higher the parents are educated, the lower the probability of studying with a delayed transition). The fields of study (reference = Humanities) Education, Business/Law, Health and Services have a weakly positive effect, while science has a negative effect. Gender and the other fields of study have no significant effect. The extent of employment only has a bivariate positive effect, in the multivariate model this becomes negative.

This "European model" can also be seen across the board in our three countries of comparison, particularly age and work experience before studying. In addition, in Austria (R^2=0.631), women have a significantly lower effect to study with delayed transition, as well as (compared to Humanities) the fields of Education, Business/Law, Sciences, ICT and Engineering, while all other fields of study have no significant effect. The parents' educational background also has no significant effect. In Lithuania (R^2=0.573) Agriculture/Fishery/Veterinary medicine has a strong positive effect, and tertiary background of parents has a strong negative effect, as well as Social Sciences and Engineering. Gender has no significant effect. In Romania (R^2=0.482), the educational background of the parents also plays a strongly negative role. The smaller the extent of studying, the more likely someone is to study with a delayed transition, and male also has a very small positive effect. However, no field of study has a significant effect.

[8] Number of cases per country standardised in order to compensate for the different population and sample sizes.

	EUROSTUDENT	Austria	Lithuania	Romania
Work experience before studying	↑↑	↑↑	↑↑	↑↑
Older age	↑↑	↑↑	↑↑	↑↑
"it was always clear I would study in higher education one day"	↓↓	↓↓	↓↓	↓↓
Female		↓		↘
Higher educational background of the parents	↓↓		↓↓	↓↓
Extent of employment	↘	↘		
Extent of studying	↘	↘		↘
Fields of Study (Ref: Humanities)				
Education	↗	↓		
Social Sciences			↓↓	
Business & Law	↗	↓		
Sciences	↓	↓		
ICT		↓		
Engineering		↓	↓↓	
Agriculture/Fishery/Veterinary medicine			↑↑	
Health & Welfare	↗			
Services	↗			
Financial difficulties		↗		
Impairment	↗			
Not living with parents	↗			
R^2	*0.480*	*0.631*	*0.573*	*0.482*

Table 1: *Logistic regression: Probability of being a student with delayed transition*

Even though in EUROSTUDENT delayed is defined as "only" at least two years after the regular upper secondary school leaving certificate, most students with delayed transfer are significantly older. In Austria, 80% are over 25 years old (46% over 30 years old), in Lithuania 88% (over 30y: 64%) and in Romania 86% (over 30y: 67%). It is therefore not surprising that in the multivariate analysis, biographical characteristics (age, employment before starting university, self-assessment that it was *not* always clear to study one day and (except in Austria) the educational background of the parents show the greatest effects. Gender and the positive or negative demand for individual fields of study are also added in individual countries. However, numerous other variables do not show any significant effects.

Not included in the model are non-traditional higher education admissions (because they are implicitly part of the definition of delayed) and non-university higher education sectors because they do not exist in all countries. But both non-traditional approaches and a preference for the non-university sector are visible in all countries where this is possible or exists.

It is assumed, that because delayed transition students often are already in professional life, they tend to choose a career-orientated education, which increasingly takes place at non-universities. In addition, some subjects (which are predominantly found at universities) are less likely to be started at an older age due to their longer duration (e.g. medicine). In addition, non-universities are generally more widely distributed throughout the country and therefore easier to access for working students.

Of the three countries, only Austria (the country with the highest share of delayed transition students) offers alternative options to standard admission to higher education. While prior learning (e.g. working experience) cannot be used (or in Austria seldomly be used) for admission to higher education in the three countries, it is sometimes possible to get professional experience recognized for credits of single courses.

In none of the three countries there are comprehensive measures in place targeting delayed transition students directly. However, in Austria there are policies specifically for older students and those who have worked before. For the latter Lithuania plans to offer particular funding as well. In Romania there is a focus on decreasing drop-out rates, also considering delayed transition students.

Since many delayed transition students are working, offering greater flexibility for their studies can benefit their situation. Official part-time programmes are available in Lithuania and Romania. With no (complete) distance learning in place, students in all three countries have benefited from the fact that online programmes – or at least individual online courses within a degree programme – have been expanded in course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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