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Commission

Structural indicators for monitoring education and training systems in Europe

2023

Higher education



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CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Higher education	4
1. Policies for tackling gender equity issues in higher education	4
2. Higher education admissions policy in a lifelong learning perspective	6
Main findings	8
Glossary	8
Annex	13
Acknowledgements	15

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of the 2023 data collection on the structural indicators for monitoring education and training systems in the area of higher education in public and publicly subsidised private higher education institutions.

The report contains two composite indicators on the following key policy areas:

1. policies for tackling gender equity issues in higher education;
2. admissions policy in a lifelong learning framework.

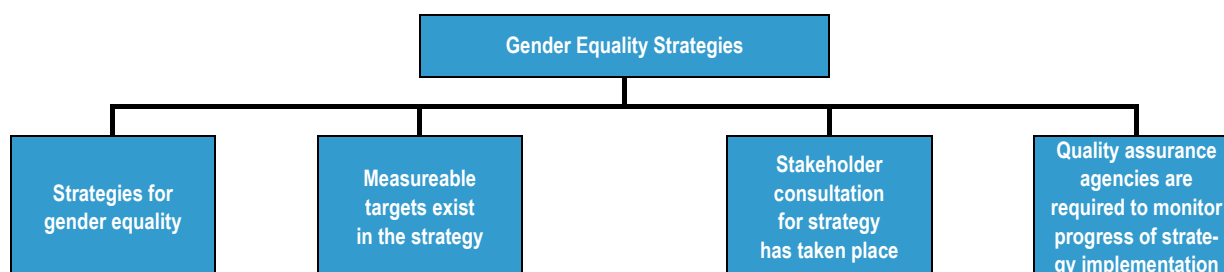
The report contains information for the 2022/2023 academic year. Participating countries include the EU Member States, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia and Türkiye ⁽¹⁾.

⁽¹⁾ This report is based on information from 38 European education systems. Switzerland does not participate in the project on structural indicators for monitoring education and training systems in Europe.

HIGHER EDUCATION

1. Policies for tackling gender equity issues in higher education

For this scoreboard indicator, four areas were chosen.



These indicators have not been previously collected by the Eurydice network. However, they follow the methodology developed for the *Towards Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education* report ⁽²⁾.

The first indicator is whether a strategy for gender equality exists and is in place for all higher education institutions. The concept of strategy can be distinguished from legislation (which may support gender equality objectives in different ways). A strategy refers to an official policy developed by the top-level authorities in an effort to achieve an overall goal. A strategy can comprise a vision; identify objectives and goals (qualitative and quantitative); describe processes, authorities and people in charge; identify funding sources and make recommendations. Depending on the particular education system, a strategy may refer to a specific document using the term 'strategy', but it may refer also to a document (or documents) that describe a major policy plan without, however, bearing the title 'strategy'.

With regard to gender issues, several categories of strategy can be distinguished. One option is for a broad higher education strategy to contain a component on gender issues. The converse would also be possible, whereby a broad gender strategy contains a component on higher education. The third main category would be for a specific higher education gender strategy to be established.

The existence of a strategy on gender equality does not guarantee that all gender issues are fully addressed in higher education, and even less that equality issues are resolved. It does, however, imply that the top-level authorities have singled out gender equality as a policy priority that they are committed to acting upon. For this reason, it takes centre stage in this analysis.

A strategy may reflect good intentions, but is most likely to be operationalised when specific targets are set. This is why the second indicator focuses on measurable targets. For a target to be measurable it must be quantitative in nature, and reference points for measurement need to be put in place. Thus, a target would typically take the form of a statement that, for example, the percentage of women/men in high-level academic posts would move from x % to y % by a certain date.

To ensure that a gender equality strategy is inclusive and responsive to the needs of communities in the higher education sector, the third indicator considers to what extent stakeholder consultation has taken place. The process that may be expected during the elaboration of a strategy is one of social dialogue. This involves mutual exchanges between policymakers and defined stakeholders on issues of common interest related to public policy. The participants of the social dialogue are often specified

⁽²⁾ [Towards Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education in Europe | Eurydice \(europa.eu\)](#)

in advance and expected to contribute their insights in a dynamic communication process. A mark of success of a social dialogue process is that decisions are reached through consensus.

The final element of the composite picture concerns the role of external quality assurance agencies, and in particular whether they are required to monitor the implementation of the strategy within the higher education institutions. If quality assurance agencies are required to monitor implementation, this gives a strong sense of the importance of gender issues in the higher education sector.

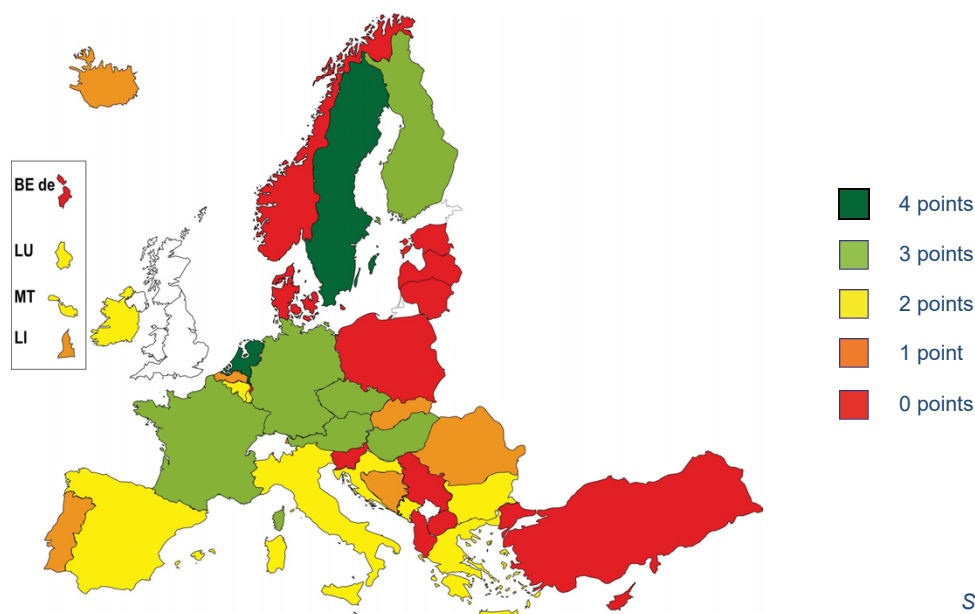
Figure 1 is a composite scorecard indicator based on the elements illustrated in this section:

1. a strategy for gender equality exists for ALL institutions;
2. quantitative targets exist in the strategy;
3. stakeholder consultation for gender equality strategy has taken place;
4. quality assurance agencies are required to monitor whether higher education institutions address gender issues.

Where all four elements are in place, the country is shown in dark green and the score is 4. Similarly, countries with three elements are shown in light green and the score falls to 3. Those with two elements are shown in yellow and a score of 2, and those with one element are in orange with a score of 1. Countries with none of the elements in place are shown in red and zero points are allocated.

When examining the overall picture, almost half of the education systems have implemented two or more measures in this policy area. Also, in about one third of the education systems there are no measures. When examining the sub-indicators, a strategy applying to all institutions exists in about half of them. However, only three education systems (Czechia, the Netherlands and Sweden) have quantitative targets for the implementation of the strategy. In about one third of the education systems, stakeholder consultations for the strategy have taken place. Quality assurance agencies are required to monitor whether gender issues are addressed in more than a third of the education systems. For more detailed country-specific information, please see Figure 1A in the Annex.

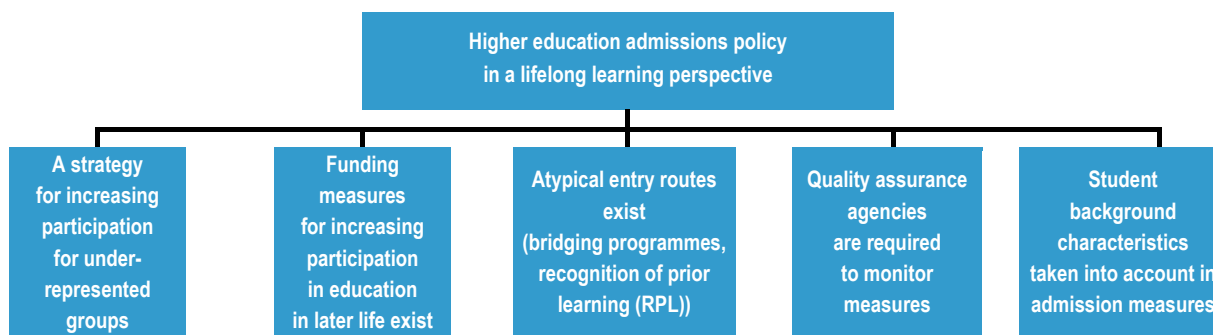
Figure 1: Scoreboard indicator on policies for tackling gender equity issues in higher education, 2022/2023



Source: Eurydice.

2. Higher education admissions policy in a lifelong learning perspective

The objective of this indicator is to encourage the development of a supportive admissions policy in a lifelong learning framework. For this scorecard indicator, the following five areas were chosen.



Lifelong learning refers to the concept of continuous education and training throughout a person's life, with the aim of acquiring new knowledge, skills and competences that can serve for both personal development and professional development. Lifelong learning is not restricted to formal education; it encompasses various forms of learning experiences such as formal, non-formal and informal learning.

The European Commission's focus on lifelong learning is based on the belief that all individuals should have opportunities to learn and acquire new knowledge and skills at all stages of their lives, regardless of age, background or previous educational attainment. The indicators selected for this section aim to assess to what degree admissions policies in higher education at the national level are aligned with this concept.

As with gender strategy, the notion of a strategy for increasing the participation of under-represented groups goes beyond legislation. Strategy, in this context, refers to a top-level vision for equitable participation in higher education which has been conceived with clear (qualitative and quantitative) objectives and goals and applies to all higher education institutions. It may describe processes, authorities and people in charge, identify funding sources and include recommendations. The strategy may or may not be enshrined in a specific document bearing the term 'strategy'. In this case, a strategy for the participation of under-represented groups would probably begin with specifying which groups are known to be under-represented in the higher education system.

Although the existence of a strategy for increasing the participation of under-represented groups does not imply that issues regarding under-represented groups have been addressed or solved in higher education, it does indicate that this is a policy priority.

The second indicator examines funded measures for increasing participation in education in later life. This is particularly important in a fast-changing labour market that requires a skilled workforce and where educational opportunities are therefore not only needed for young people but also for more experienced adults.

The third indicator considers the existence of atypical entry routes into higher education, and in particular whether bridging programmes exist, and whether non-formal and informal learning may be taken into account in admissions. In the majority of cases one main route exists for admission, and that is via the successful completion of upper secondary education. However, those who do not complete upper secondary education but later wish to enter higher education may find themselves blocked unless there is an alternative route available. The most prevalent alternative routes include bridging programmes and the recognition of prior informal and non-formal learning.

Informal learning refers to learning that takes place in everyday life – through activities like reading, observing, experimenting and interacting with others – without a structured curriculum or assessment.

In contrast to informal learning, non-formal learning takes place in organised and structured environments but outside of the formal education system. It includes workshops, seminars and training events, and does not necessarily lead to education qualifications.

Recognition of informal and non-formal learning is a process of assessing and validating the knowledge and skills acquired and providing learners with appropriate recognition and credits.

The fourth indicator concerns quality assurance, and in particular whether external quality assurance agencies are required to monitor higher education institutional admission policy measures. If quality assurance agencies are required to monitor implementation, this gives a strong signal that the importance of admission policy and practice is recognised.

Finally, in assessing the measures for encouraging the participation of under-represented groups, the last indicator considers whether at least two characteristics (other than age and gender) are taken into account in the measures. In such cases this shows that under-represented groups are defined in a more sophisticated way.

In order for a country to be considered to have each of the measures in place, the following more specific aspects have been taken into account: a strategy for admission policy for under-represented groups has to exist for all institutions; there are measures for increasing participation in education in later life (for example atypical entry routes through bridging programmes / informal prior learning; quality assurance agencies are required to monitor progress of strategy implementation; at least two different student background characteristics (other than age and gender) are taken into account in the measures for encouraging the participation of under-represented groups.

Figure 2 is a composite scoreboard indicator based on the elements illustrated in this section.

1. A strategy for increasing participation for under-represented groups exists for all institutions.
2. Funding measures for increasing participation in education in later life exist.
3. There are atypical entry routes, such as bridging programmes, entry through RPL etc.
4. Quality assurance agencies are required to monitor whether higher education institutions correctly implement measures related to admission to higher education.
5. At least two characteristics (other than age and gender) are taken into account in the measures for encouraging the participation of under-represented groups.

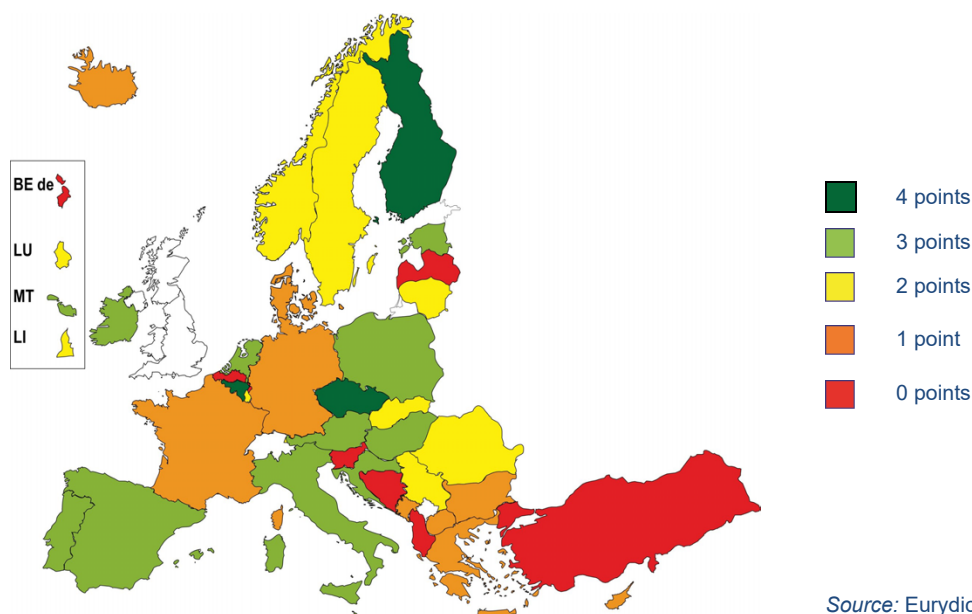
The points for the scoreboard Indicator are allocated slightly differently, as it includes five different elements. Where all five elements are in place, the country is shown in dark green and the score is 4. Similarly, countries with four elements are shown in light green and the score falls to 3. Those with three elements are shown in yellow and have a score of 2, and those with two elements are in orange with a score of 1. Countries with only one or none of the elements in place are shown in red, and zero points are allocated.

When examining the overall picture for strategies for admission of under-represented groups, it is more positive than for measures for gender equality. More than half of the education systems have implemented three or more measures, while a third of them have implemented four or five measures. Three education systems (French Community of Belgium, Czechia and Finland) have implemented all five measures. Conversely, only three education systems (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Turkey) have implemented no measures.

The most common measures are related to atypical entry routes (bridging programmes, recognition of prior learning), which have been implemented in more than two thirds of education systems. A strategy to increase the participation of under-represented groups in all institutions exists in more than

half of education systems. In about half of the education systems, there are funding measures to increase participation in later life education, and students' background is taken into account in admission measures. Quality assurance agencies are required to monitor measures in only a third of the education systems. For more detailed country-specific information, please see Figure 2A in the Annex.

Figure 2: Scoreboard indicator on admissions policy in a lifelong learning framework, 2022/2023



Source: Eurydice.

MAIN FINDINGS

There were marked differences in the two scorecard indicators examined. More progress has been made in strategies related to admission procedures for under-represented groups than in strategies for gender equality. For gender equality, only two education systems have implemented all four measures, and only six education systems have implemented three out of four, while a third of the education systems have taken no measures.

When it comes to strategies for admission for under-represented groups, the picture is more positive; more than half of the education systems have implemented three or more measures, while a third of them have implemented four or five measures. Conversely, only three education systems have implemented no measures.

The overall conclusion, therefore, is that more work is required in most education systems to advance strategies related to gender equality. While the situation in admission policies for under-represented groups is more positive than when it comes to gender equality, there is still room for improvement in this policy area in most of the countries.

GLOSSARY

Access routes to higher education. Routes to higher education are the different formal access requirements that are defined to be the necessary conditions of higher education access. Questions of selection or acceptance into a programme are not part of the definition.

Standard route. Entering higher education with a standard entry qualification. The standard entry qualification is the most widely used diploma or certificate issued by a competent authority attesting the successful completion of an education programme and giving the holder of the qualification the right to be considered for admission to higher education (typically the upper secondary school leaving certificate).

Alternative access route. Entering higher education without a standard entry qualification, based on requirements other than the standard entry requirements (e.g. based on qualification other than the standard entry qualification or based on the recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning).

Admission (to higher education institutions and programmes). The act of, or system for, allowing qualified applicants to pursue studies in higher education at a given institution and/or a given programme (see the Lisbon Recognition Convention) ⁽³⁾.

Bridging programmes. Upper secondary education programmes (e.g. evening classes, additional follow-up years, etc.) aiming specifically at students who followed vocational educational or training tracks not giving access to higher education; and/or students who dropped out of school without obtaining an upper secondary school leaving certificate in order to support them in acquiring an upper secondary school leaving certificate, which provides access to higher education. These programmes are sometimes also called second-chance programmes.

Cycle. One of the objectives in the Bologna Declaration in 1999 was the ‘adoption of a system based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate.’ In 2003, doctoral studies were included in the Bologna structure and referred to as the third cycle. The EHEA thus defined a hierarchy of three Higher education cycles (first cycle, second cycle and third cycle). Short-cycle higher education – i.e. ISCED 5 programmes up to 180 ECTS with learning outcomes below the level of the first cycle - was added in 2018. Disability: Any long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder a person’s full or effective participation in society on an equal basis with others

Disadvantaged students. Students who face specific challenges of such nature, that compared to their peers in higher education they are in a disadvantaged position. The challenge can take many forms (e.g. disability, low family income, little or no family support, being an orphan, many school moves, mental health problems, pregnancy, care duties). The disadvantage may be permanent, temporary or occasional. Disadvantaged students may be part of an underrepresented group, but not necessarily. Therefore, the terms disadvantaged and underrepresented students are not synonymous.

Equity (in higher education). A principle of social justice that reflects the notion of fairness. In the context of this report, fairness refers to equal opportunity for all in terms of accessing higher education and progressing towards the completion of studies. A broad definition of equity refers not only to nominally equal access and progression rights (i.e. same rights for all), but also to targeted measures and rights that enhance the access and progression of individuals who tend to be underrepresented in higher education institutions (HEIs), even if they appear to contradict the nominal equality principle (i.e. allowing for special rights reserved to certain categories of people only).

First cycle. Bachelor's or equivalent level (ISCED 6)

Higher education institution (HEI). Any institution providing services in the field of higher and/or tertiary education, as defined by national law. Three types of higher education institutions are distinguished (the first two are covered by this report): public higher education institutions, government-dependent private higher education institutions and private higher education institutions. A public higher education institution is an institution directly managed by a government

⁽³⁾ <https://ehea.info/cid102107/lisbon-recognition-convention.htm>.

agency/authority or by a governing body, most of whose members are either appointed by a public authority or elected by public franchise.

A government-dependent private higher education institution is an institution controlled/managed by a non-governmental organisation or where the governing board consists of members not selected by a public agency but receiving 50 percent or more of its core funding from government agencies, or whose teaching personnel are paid by a government agency – either directly or through government.

Higher education preparatory programme. A programme providing alternative qualification to the upper secondary school leaving certificate. Common to these programmes is that they are offered to learners not having the standard upper secondary school leaving certificate, and that at the end of the programme learners are awarded a qualification which is equivalent to the standard upper secondary school leaving certificate, but is not the same students who successfully complete such programmes can gain access to higher education institutions without the standard upper secondary leaving certificate.

Informal learning. Learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure and is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support; it may be unintentional from the learner's perspective; examples of learning outcomes acquired through informal learning are skills acquired through life and work experiences, project management skills or ICT skills acquired at work, languages learned and intercultural skills acquired during a stay in another country, ICT skills acquired outside work, skills acquired through volunteering, cultural activities, sports, youth work and through activities at home (e.g. taking care of a child).

See: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32012H1222%2801%29>

Migrants or from a migrant background. People who move from one country to another, or whose parents or grand-parents have moved from one country to another. In the European Union, citizens moving to another Member State are not considered migrants but EU mobile. Consequently, only people born in a non-EU country are considered migrants in the EU.

Monitoring. The process of systematic data gathering, analysis and use of information by top-level authorities to inform policy. Systematic monitoring must include mechanisms of cross-institutional data gathering and allow cross-institutional data comparability.

Non-formal learning. Learning which takes place through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives, learning time) where some form of learning support is present (e.g. student-teacher relationships); it may cover programmes to impart work skills, adult literacy and basic education for early school leavers; very common cases of non-formal learning include in-company training, through which companies update and improve the skills of their workers such as ICT skills, structured on-line learning (e.g. by making use of open educational resources), and courses organised by civil society organisations for their members, their target group or the general public.

see: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32012H1222%2801%29>

Part-time study. In opposition to full-time study, part-time study is based on taking fewer course credits, for example fewer than 60 ECTS per year.

Part-time student status. The distinction between different student statuses is often based on the workload of students, measured either in ECTS credits or hours/weeks. In some countries, however, the definition does not refer to the workload, but to a limited participation in study sessions. This means that part-time students should in principle achieve the same number of credits as full-time students, but they are expected to attend fewer class-based learning sessions, and to dedicate more time to self-study activities.

Quality assurance agency. A body established by public authorities with responsibility for external quality assurance. Agencies are intended to play a strong role in ensuring accountability of higher education institutions and may have specific objectives and developmental roles regarding enhancing quality.

Quantitative objectives. Measurable targets defining a goal to be reached by a specified time in terms of a concrete percentage or number.

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Validation and formal recognition of learners' non-formal and informal learning experiences in order to:

- provide higher education access to candidates without an upper secondary school leaving certificate; or
- within a higher education programme, allocate credits towards a qualification and/or provide exemption from some programme requirements.

Second cycle. Master's or equivalent programmes (ISCED level 7).

Short cycle. Programmes of less than 180 ECTS (or lasting less than 3 years), leading to a qualification that is recognised at a lower level than a qualification at the end of the first cycle. Short-cycle qualifications are recognised as level 5 in the overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA), at level 5 in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and also at level 5 in the ISCED classification.

Social dialogue. An organised process of mutual exchanges and communication between policy-makers and defined stakeholders on issues of common interest related to public policy. Often a social dialogue aims to help policy-makers to consult stakeholders, but unlike typical consultation processes, the participants of the social dialogue are specified in advance and are expected to contribute their insights in a dynamic process of exchanges of views. In some cases, social dialogue is a form of negotiation. Normally, a social dialogue involves actual meetings between the participants, although these meetings can be also virtual or disjointed (i.e. there is a flow of exchanges between the participants at different moments). Often a mark of success of a social dialogue process is that any decisions or conclusions have been reached through consensus.

Socio-economic status. A combined economic and sociological measure of an individual's or family's economic and social position relative to others, based on income, level of education, and occupation. Definitions of socio-economic status might differ depending on the national context.

Steering documents. Official documents containing guidelines, obligations and/or recommendations for higher education policy and/or institutions.

Strategy (or other major policy plan). An official policy document developed by the top-level authorities in an effort to achieve an overall goal. A strategy can comprise a vision, identify objectives and goals (qualitative and quantitative), describe processes, authorities and people in charge, identify funding sources, make recommendations, etc. Depending on the particular education system, a strategy may refer to a specific document bearing the term 'strategy', but it may refer also to a document (or documents) that describe a major policy plan equivalent to a strategy without, however, bearing the title 'strategy'.

Third cycle. Doctoral or equivalent level (ISCED 8)

Underrepresented students. A group of learners is underrepresented in relation to certain characteristics (e.g. gender, age, nationality, geographic origin, socio-economic background, ethnic minorities) if its share among the students is lower than the share of a comparable group in the total population. This can be documented at the time of admission, during the course of studies or at graduation. Individuals usually have several underrepresented characteristics, which is why combinations of underrepresented characteristics (“intersectionality”) should always be considered. Furthermore, underrepresentation can also impact at different levels of higher education – study programme, faculty or department, higher education institution, higher education system. This definition is complementary to the London Communiqué, “that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations”, but does not fully cover it

Upper secondary level (ISCED 3) completion. According to the ISCED 2011 classification, this includes education programmes with classification codes: 343, 344, 353 and 354.

Special Educational Needs. Learning difficulties or disabilities that make it harder for individuals to learn than for their peers.

ANNEX

Figure 1A: Policies for tackling gender equity issues in higher education, 2022/2023

	A strategy for gender equality exists for ALL institutions (General legislation addressing issue does NOT count)	Quantitative targets exist in the strategy	Stakeholder consultation for gender equality strategy has taken place	Quality Assurance agencies are required to monitor whether HEIs address gender issues
BE fr	●		●	
BE de				
BE nl				●
BG	●		●	
CZ	●	●	●	
DK				
DE	●		●	●
EE				
IE	●		●	
EL	●			●
ES	●		●	
FR	●		●	●
HR	●			●
IT	●			●
CY				
LV				
LT				
LU	●		●	
HU	●		●	●
MT	●			●
NL	●	●	●	●
AT	●		●	●
PL				
PT				●
RO				●
SI				
SK	●			
FI	●		●	●
SE	●	●	●	●
AL				
BA	●			
IS	●			
LI				●
ME	●		●	
MK				
NO				
RS				
TR				

Figure 2A: Admissions policy in a lifelong learning framework, 2022/2023

	A strategy for increasing participation for under-represented groups exists for ALL institutions	Funding measures for increasing participation in education in later life exist	There are atypical entry routes, such as bridging programmes, entry through RPL etc	QA agencies are required to monitor whether higher education institutions implement correctly measures related to admission to HE	At least two characteristics (other than age and gender) are taken into account in the measures for encouraging participation of underrepresented groups
BE fr	●	●	●	●	●
BE de			●		
BE nl			●		
BG	●	●			
CZ	●	●	●	●	●
DK		●	●		
DE			●	●	
EE	●	●	●		●
IE	●	●	●		●
EL	●			●	
ES	●	●	●		●
FR			●		●
HR	●		●	●	●
IT	●		●	●	●
CY		●			●
LV			●		
LT	●	●			●
LU		●	●	●	
HU	●	●	●		●
MT	●	●	●	●	
NL	●	●	●	●	
AT	●		●	●	●
PL	●	●	●		●
PT	●	●	●		●
RO	●			●	●
SI			●		
SK	●		●	●	
FI	●	●	●	●	●
SE		●	●	●	
AL					
BA					
IS	●		●		
LI		●	●	●	
ME	●				●
MK	●				●
NO		●	●	●	
RS	●			●	●
TR					

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