

ICT as a catalyst to enhance equity in European higher education: which way forward?

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Agenda

1. A little about EQUINET
2. Interpretation of few findings
3. ICT & equity in HE
4. What's next

EQUNET

- 8 partners from 6 countries
 - 4 research organisations
 - 4 stakeholder organisations
 - Expanding network of informal partners
- 3 year project
- 600,000 EUR budget – financed by the EU 's Lifelong Learning Programme

EQUNET tackles barriers due to

- Educational background (issues revolving around recognition of non-formal and informal education, or non-traditional types of formal learning such as access for young persons who have been schooled at home, and distance learners)
- Socioeconomic conditions (issues revolving around access for people in employment, with family commitments, coming from divergent income groups, by level of dependency upon parents etc)
- Structural problems in Higher Education (dealing with issues such as curricula, governance structures, admissions standards, funding policies etc).

An evidence based policy network

- policy advocacy, by contributing to shaping EU and if possible national policies in its field
- dissemination and cross fertilisation, by promoting the EQUINET research findings and by fostering the exchange of best HE equity practices among relevant stakeholders and communities.
- resources documentation, by supporting the creation of an open archive for equity-related documents and resources.

Access accross the EHEA

is inequitable

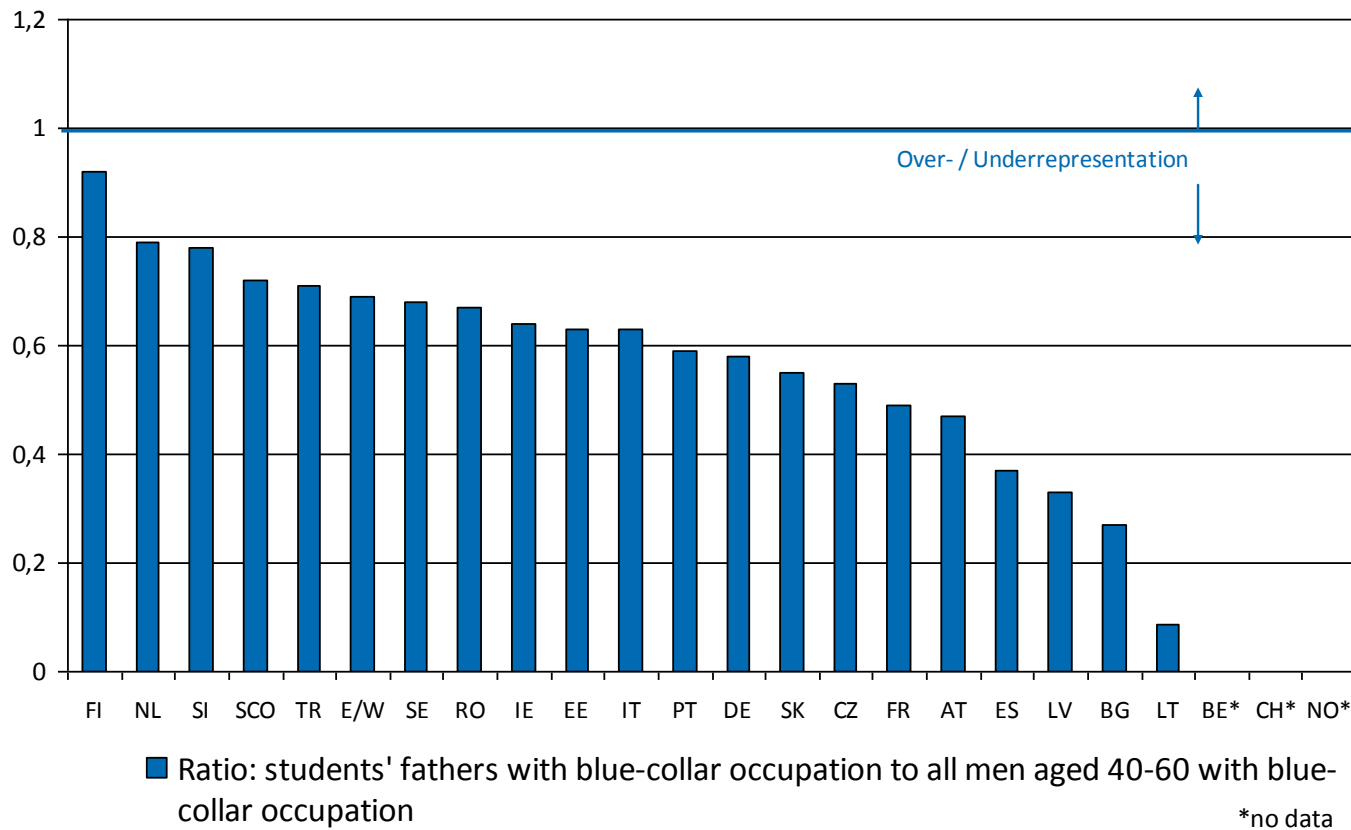
Countries so wide divergences on:

- gender balance
- net entry rates
- entry via alternative routes
- participation based on occupational / educational background
- income gap of students
- Ratios of foreign students

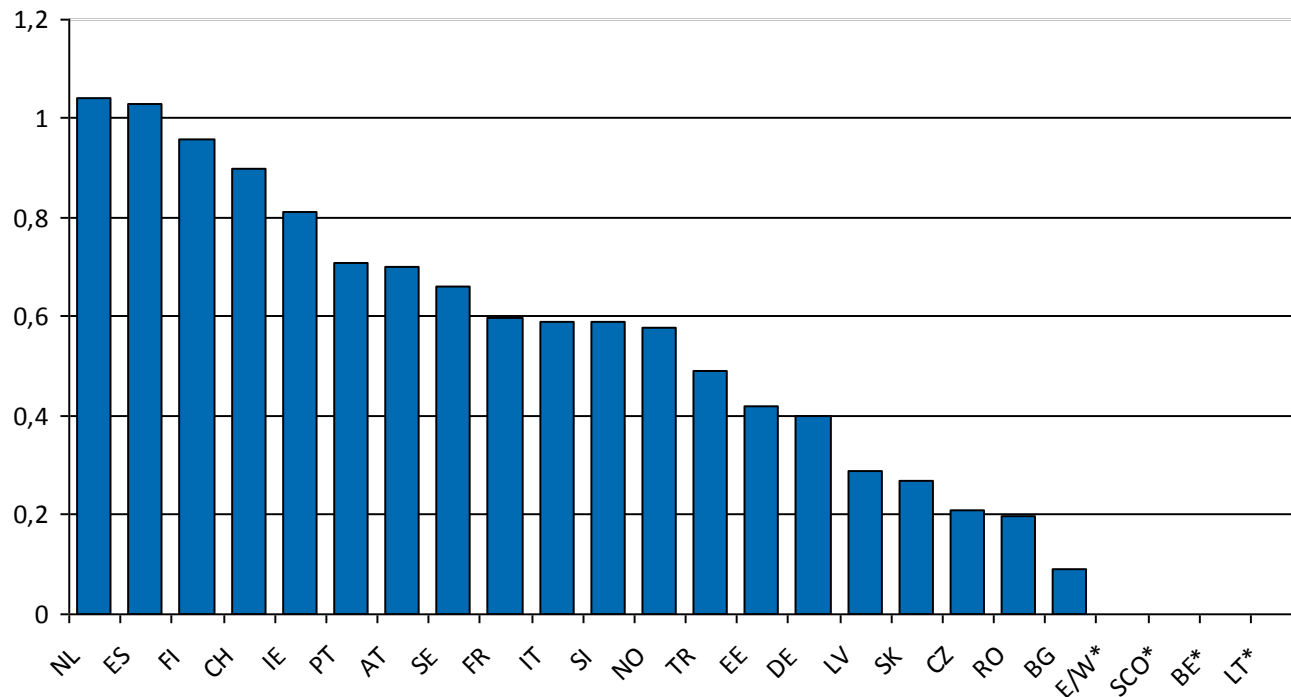
Lower socioeconomic backgrounds are:

- less likely to attend Higher Education
- likely to choose different courses of study
- more likely to work during studies
- far less likely to have a mobility experience

Example: Socioeconomic Background



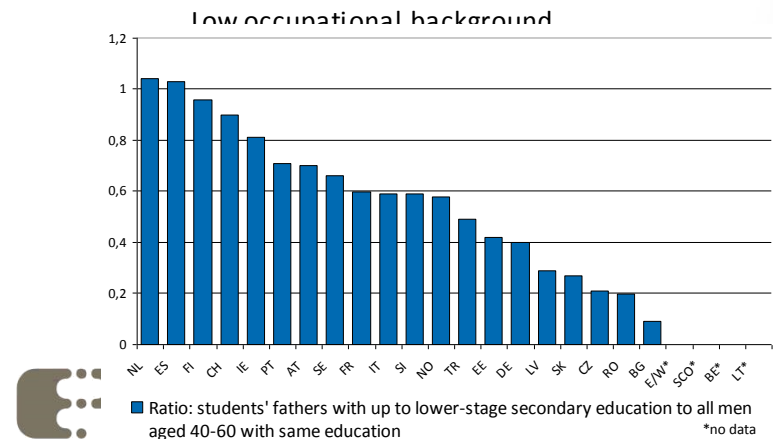
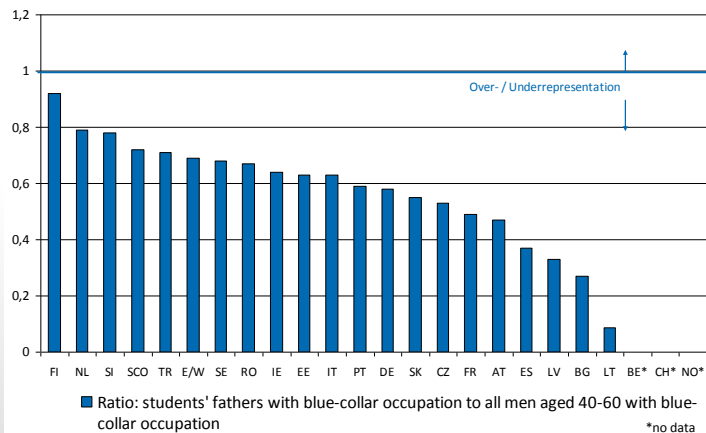
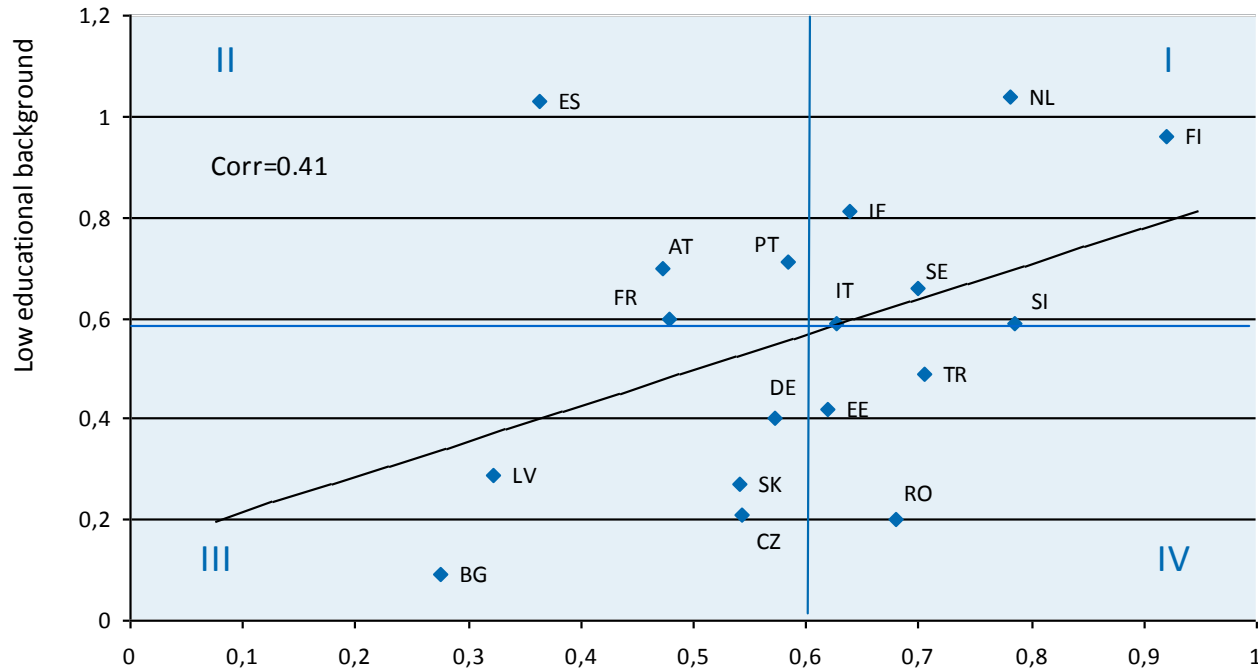
Example: Socioeconomic Background



■ Ratio: students' fathers with up to lower-stage secondary education to all men aged 40-60 with same education

*no data

Socioeconomic Background



How do you like this?

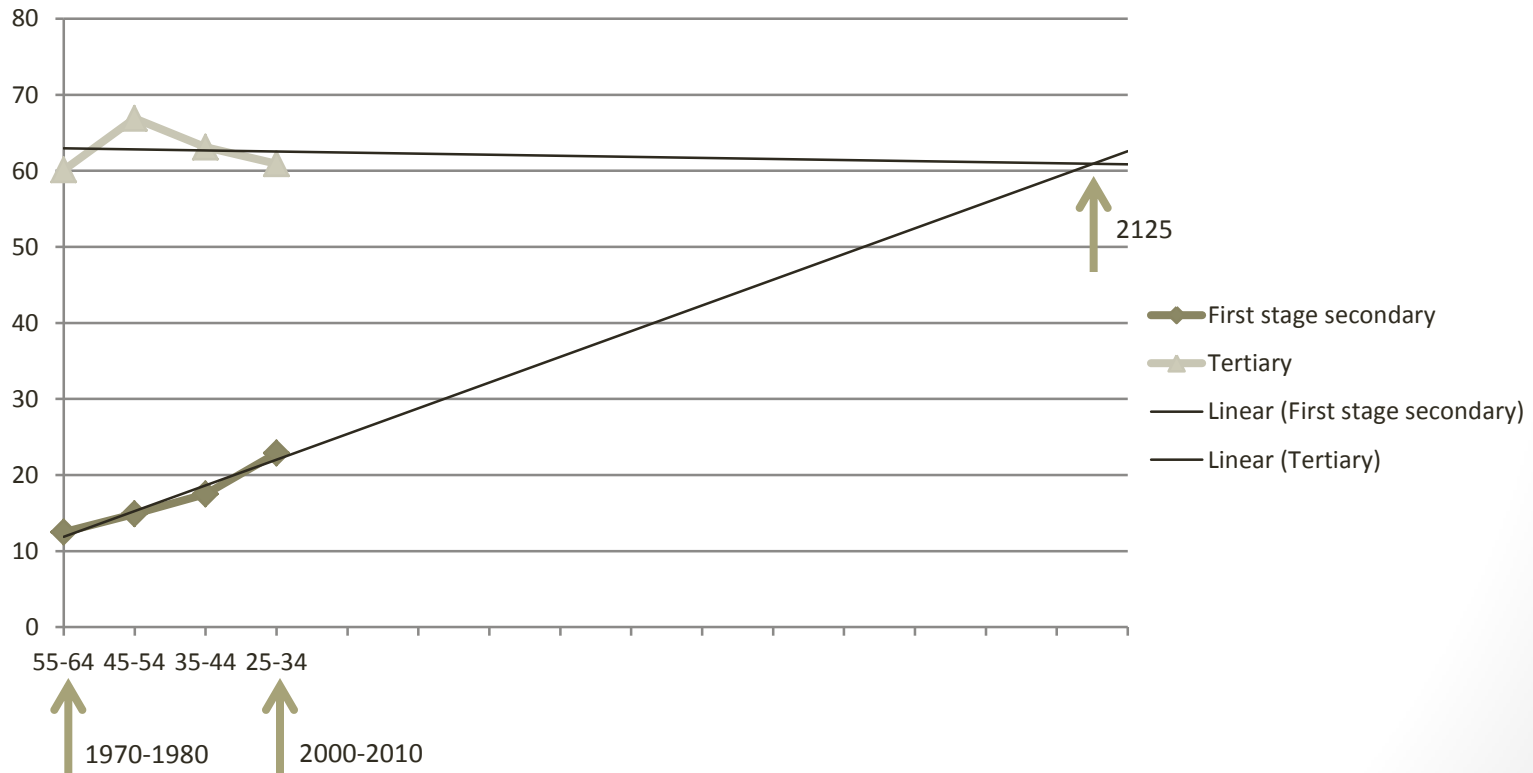
“A student from a low socioeconomic background, in Europe is, when compared with his or her peers:

- a) Less likely to attend Higher Education,
- b) Likely to choose different courses of study,
- c) More likely to work during studies and
- d) Far less likely to have a mobility experience.

Consequently, **they are more likely to become unemployed**, more likely to earn less, and, assuming equity continues to increase at the historical pace, more likely to have children who also underperform.”

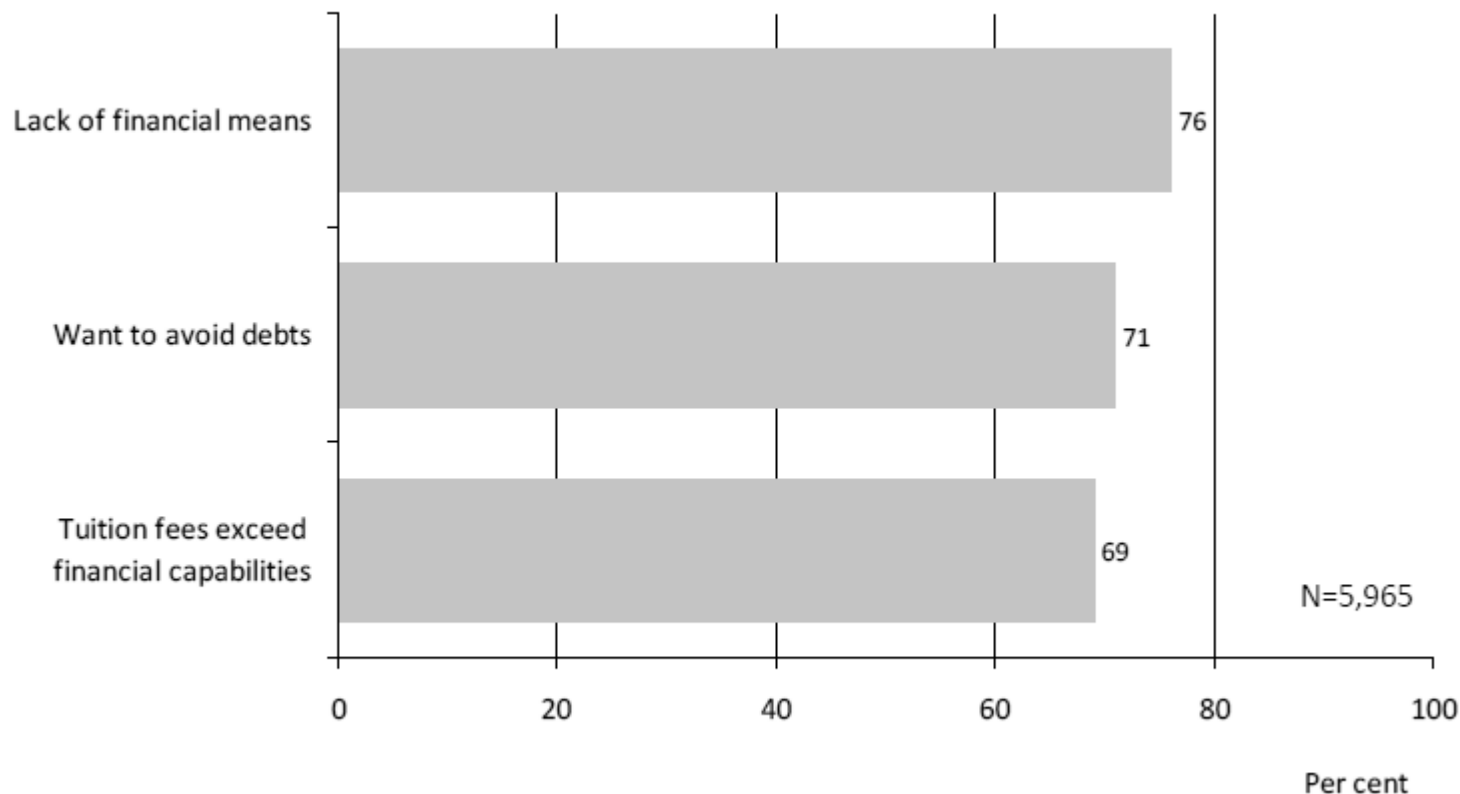
Progress is happening

but slowly



Effect of Tuition Fees

Reasons for German school leavers not to enroll into HE (2008)*



* Share of persons who responded that this aspect has influenced their decision to a (very) large extent

Source: Heine, Quast, Beuße 2010

Validation of Prior Learning Seems to Improve Equity in Higher Education Systems

Our data leads us to hypothesise a link between recognition of prior learning (RPL) and equity.

Five of the worst-performing countries on our occupational/educational status equity indicator (Germany, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Latvia, Slovakia) show practically no entries to Higher Education through this type of alternative route. Consequently, **countries with developed RPL systems also perform better on the equity indicator.**

Note: Data on RPL is not extensive enough to definitively confirm this hypothesis; however the data available does indicate a strong probability of its accuracy.

Can ICT help increasing equity?

Three caveats

Go beyond the relation between ICT and efficiency

ICT is NOT a way to save money (virtual mobility)

ICT should be seen as a tool to change mindsets

ICT & equity

ICT can make teaching and learning more flexible and individualized.

Equity is not only a problem of access to HE, but also a concern to make sure that all students are facilitated in their learning and personal development process in line with their individual characteristics.

ICT can support the modernization of assessment procedures. Traditional assessment methods can represent a barrier to fruitful completion of HE study by some students, especially by the ones who work during university.

ICT can contribute to overcome physical barriers. This is true both for students that for disability reasons cannot access university courses (some cases are reported in the website of the Agency for Special Needs Education) and for students that cannot participate in international mobility exchanges for whatever reason.

ICT & equity

ICT can help breaking down cultural barriers. EQUINET found that one of the reasons for the lower participation of citizens with low-social background is the perception that these citizens – parents in particular – have of university study, as a “non-productive” and expensive life path.

ICT can make guidance and counseling more effective. This can be done by complementing existing physical guidance activities such as information days and HE fairs with ICT-based information provision; not only this information can be customized, but they can accompany students along their secondary school career.

ICT can facilitate the recognition and accreditation of prior learning. The use of ICT tools such as e-portfolios - as well as an effort to make these tools interoperable with the systems of European universities – can facilitate meaningful entry into HE from non-conventional paths and can therefore increase LLL rates in Europe.

What's next on the EquNet agenda

- The EquNet competition (open now)
- The second EquNet research report (October 2011)
- The Second Equnet Conference (November 2011)
- The EquNet-ENAR campaign (from November 2011 until spring 2012)

Thank You for Your Attention

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Presentation available from:

<http://www.equnet.info>