

NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION EQUITY POLICY

Austria



Policy Frameworks

Does equity with regards to supporting students from low-income or marginalized populations to enter or succeed in higher education feature in any government produced policy documents? If so, which government policy document(s) are these and can you provide website link(s) to them?

The National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education (BMFWF: 2017).

http://sozialerhebung.at/sozdim/strategiepapier/Strategie_2017_englisch.pdf

What policies and actions are described in these government policy documents in terms of supporting students from low-income or marginalized populations to enter or succeed in higher education?

Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program (HEPPP):

The “National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education” outlines its overarching equity goals with 3 target dimensions with 3 action lines each and respective measures for each action line (for more details see pages 20-30)

Target Dimension I: More inclusive access:

- ➔ Action line 1: Improve quality and accessibility of information materials
- ➔ Action line 2: Outreach activities and diversity-sensitive course guidance
- ➔ Action line 3: Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal skills.

Target Dimension II: Avoiding drop-out and improving academic success

- ➔ Action line 4: Ease entry into higher education
- ➔ Action line 5: Structure of study programmes and quality of teaching
- ➔ Action line 6: Increase compatibility of studies with other areas of life

Target Dimension III: Creating basic parameters and optimizing the regulation of higher education policy

- ➔ Action line 7: System-related issues in higher education
- ➔ Action line 8: Integrate the social dimension into strategic planning for higher education and create appropriate governance structures
- ➔ Action line 9: Further develop the Student Support Scheme

Is there a standalone policy document dedicated to equity promotion in higher education? If so, which document(s) is/are these? Can you provide a link(s)?

National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education (BMFWF: 2017).

http://sozialerhebung.at/sozdim/strategiepapier/Strategie_2017_Kurzfassung_barrierefrei_englisch.pdf

Which equity target groups are identified in the policy documents? (Please choose as many groups as apply in your own country)

- ➔ Low-income or lower socio-economic background students
- ➔ Gender groups
- ➔ Older or mature learners
- ➔ People from rural backgrounds
- ➔ Other groups under-represented in HE
- ➔ Students with disability
- ➔ Refugees of all kinds (internally and externally displaced; deported)

- ➔ Students with specific needs (e.g., students in employment; students with children)
- ➔ Students with a migrant background
- ➔ Students with delayed entry into higher education (i.e., at least two years after leaving school or “second chance” education)

Does the country have concrete targets for the participation of specific equity groups in higher education?

The National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education specifies the following goals and targets (page 10): (same as 2018)

- ➔ Increase the number of “educationally disadvantaged” students in higher education by:
 - Reducing the recruitment quota/probability factor for admission to higher education to 2.25 (2020) and 2.10 (2025)
 - Decreasing the discrepancy in the probability factors between public universities and universities of applied sciences
 - Including private universities and university colleges of teacher education in the calculation of probability factors, adaption of target values
- Widen inclusive access by: Increasing the number of non-traditional admissions (educational residents) to higher education from the current 4,000 to 5,300
- Promote gender balance in all degree programs:
 - Requiring a minimum percentage of 10% men or women in any degree program (excluding doctoral study) and at any higher education institution
 - Halving the number of degree programs at each higher education institution where men or women comprise less than 30%
- ➔ Widen participation by:
 - Increasing the percentage of (educational resident) students admitted to higher education who are second generation children of immigrants from 22% to 30%
 - Increase the percentage of students admitted to higher education in all federal states to 42% by 2025 and towards the Austrian average (47%) with reference to the entire education and vocational education system
- ➔ Establish recognition of the social dimension in mobility by:
 - Increasing participation in overseas study programs by students whose parents have no university entrance qualifications, to at least 18%
- ➔ With respect to improved compatibility:
 - Increase the number of vocational places at universities of applied science to 50%
- ➔ Student grants: Increase the number of self-supporting students receiving maintenance grants to 15,000
- ➔ Promote equal opportunity:
 - Sustained increase in the percentage of student admissions from homes where neither parent has a university degree on medical and dental courses towards an eventual target of 50%

Which agency has responsibility for policies related to equity in student participation/success in higher education?

Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, GD Higher Education, Evidence Based Higher Education Development, Dept, IV/13.

Which stakeholder groups are consulted during the equity policy formulation? (Please choose all the stakeholders that are invited to the consultation process in your own country)

- ➔ Higher Education Institutions' Associations
- ➔ International Organisations
- ➔ Student Organisations/Association
- ➔ Employers and industry associations
- ➔ Higher Education Institutions' Representatives
- ➔ Representatives from Ministries in charge (e.g., Ministry of Education)

Achieving Policy Targets

Are there any non-monetary instruments such as outreach work between schools and universities, reforms to university admission etc. used to promote access/success for students from specific equity groups in higher education? If so, can you describe what they are?

Higher Education Institutions have measures in place to improve equal access (e.g., outreach measures; cooperation with schools; evaluation of admission procedures) and equal participation in higher education (e.g. tutoring/mentoring programmes for students for first generation students, students with migrant background, female students in MINT subjects etc.)

Are there any financial instruments such as bursaries, scholarships and loans used to promote access/success for students from specific equity groups in higher education? If so, can you describe what they are?

- ➔ The overall funds for student support („Studienförderung“) were raised by 39% between 2016 (191 million euros) and 2018 (265 million euros). The average amount of funding was raised by 24%. There are improvements for older students, e.g., top-ups at the age of 24 and 27 for students who receive a maintenance grant (= for students who have worked for at least 4 years before beginning their studies).
- ➔ Amendment (2018) to Universities Act 2002, §12a, par.4: Integration of SD into the performance agreements (i.e., funding contracts between ministry and public universities): To ensure the implementation of measures for the social dimension in teaching as well as the inclusion of underrepresented groups into HE, the federal minister can retain up to 0,5% of the overall university budget. This was implemented in the performance agreement period 2019-2021 and is still in place for the period 2022-2024.

Who is responsible for monitoring the impact of measures used to promote access/success for students from specific equity groups in higher education?

Federal Ministry of Education, Science, and Research and Higher Education Institutions.

What instruments, methods and data are in place to carry out the monitoring and evaluation?

- ➔ Student Social Survey (conducted in 2015, 2019; planned for 2023)
- ➔ Interim Evaluation (2021) and final evaluation (2025) of the National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education
- ➔ HEI have their own surveys, evaluation methods, data to monitor their progress

What kind of autonomy do higher education institutions enjoy in reaching the policy targets set by government?

Public HEIs (public universities, and universities of applied sciences and public university colleges of teacher education) are mainly funded by the state but autonomous in developing their own measures according to the strategic government documents. Each HEI type is furthermore bound to certain steering documents (e.g., performance agreements and the Austrian National Development Plan for Public Universities for public universities, UAS Development and Funding Plan), and to legal regulations that vary for different HE types. One example is the legal obligation to set up equality plans in the statute, since 2021 this is also applicable for universities of applied sciences and private universities. Public universities are bound to the most elaborate and specific legal regulations in connection to equality, e.g., they have to set up organizational units for gender equality, and gender research.

How do you see the role of inter-governmental/international organisations in supporting higher education equity policies? In which areas would be their contribution the most valuable? (1= most valuable contribution 4=least valuable contribution)

1. Facilitating peer learning, exchange of experience among countries
2. Policy setting
3. Technical assistance and capacity building
4. Financial assistance (grants, loan financing, scholarships)

COVID-19 and Equitable Access and Success in Higher Education

Covid-19 has shown that inequalities are strengthened during times of crisis, and that the groups targeted by equity policy need more support during and after a crisis. The FMESR (Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research) has implemented some measures as “emergency responses” to the Covid-19 crisis in the field of financial improvements and support services for students in higher education:

- ➔ Students have been granted a "neutral semester": they can receive student support for one additional semester, and are not excluded from child support, tax benefits, insurance...
- ➔ Students in a physical mobility programme within Erasmus+ didn't have to pay back their mobility grants in case of non-achievement (ECTS) and there was greater flexibility concerning the refund of additional costs (e.g., cancelled flights)
- ➔ Expansion of psychological student counselling

Sources

This country brief was prepared as part of the [“ASEM National Equity Policies in Higher Education”](#) report, a collaboration between the [Asia-Europe Foundation \(ASEF\)](#) and the [National Education Opportunities Network \(NEON\)](#). The report was launched at the [8th ASEF Regional Conference on Higher Education \(ARC8\)](#) on “Inclusive and Diverse Higher Education in Asia and Europe” on 10 September 2021.

All information in this country brief was provided by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science, and Research Austria as of 30 June 2021.