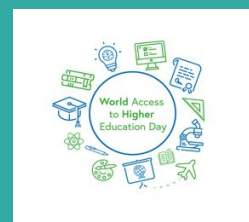# All around the world – Higher education equity policies across the globe

**Authored by: Jamil Salmi**
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## Acknowledgements:

## Author details

Jamil Salmi is a global tertiary education expert providing policy advice to governments, universities, and donor agencies.  Until January 2012, he was the World Bank's tertiary education coordinator. In the past twenty-five years, Dr. Salmi has worked on tertiary education development and strategic planning in about 100 countries all over the world.  Dr. Salmi is Emeritus Professor of higher education policy at Diego Portales University in Chile and Research Fellow at Boston College's Center for Higher Education.  His latest book, "Tertiary Education and the Sustainable Development Goals", was published in August 2017.

## Lumina Foundation

Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation in Indianapolis that is committed to making opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all. We envision a system that is easy to navigate, delivers fair results, and meets the nation's need for talent through a broad range of credentials.

## World Access to Higher Education Day (WAHED)

The first World Access to Higher Education Day (WAHED) will be on the 28th November 2018. The aim of WAHED is to act as a catalyst for local, national and global action to address inequalities in access to higher education across the world. Over 100 organisations from 30 countries will be involved in the first WAHED. WAHED is co-ordinated by the National Education Opportunities Network (NEON) which is the professional organization for access to HE in England.

# Table of Contents

# Glossary

| | |
|---|---|
| ADB | Asian Development Bank |
| ACE | American Council of Education |
| AfDB | African Development Bank |
| CAF | Andean Countries Development Bank (Corporación Andina de Fomento) |
| DHET | Department of Higher Education and Training (South Africa) |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| HE | Higher Education |
| HECS | Higher Education Contribution Scheme (Australia) |
| HEFCW | Higher Education Funding Council for Wales |
| HELP | Higher Education Loan Program (Australia) |
| HEPPP | Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (Australia) |
| IADB | Inter-American Development Bank |
| ICL | Income Contingent Loan |
| KPI | Key Performance Indicator |
| LAC | Latin America and the Caribbean |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| NUC | National Universities Commission (Nigeria) |
| OECD | Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| SABER | Systems Approach for Better Education Results (World Bank) |
| SSA | Sub-Saharan African |
| SEAMO | South Asia Ministers of Education Organization |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization |
| WBG | World Bank Group |

# Executive Summary

*Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mine worker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another.*

*Nelson Mandela*

## Introduction

Charles Dickens' famous line "it was the best of times, it was the worst of times" is mirrored in recent news from the higher education scene worldwide, and their implications for equity.  On the positive side, the elimination of tuition fees for the poorest students in countries as diverse as Chile, the Philippines and South Africa, and the growing availability of grants for Indigenous students in Australia, Brazil or Romania should translate in greater opportunities to study for traditionally underrepresented population groups.  On the negative side, the growing student loan debt in many countries, the legal challenges against affirmative action in the United States, and the difficulties that the rapidly increasing numbers of refugee youths find in trying to access higher education are likely to affect many students adversely from an equity viewpoint.

Available data show that participation in higher education continues to be unequal from a social background perspective.  Research produced by UNESCO in 2016, looking across 76 mainly low-income countries, found that only 1% of the poorest 25-29-year old had completed at least four years of higher education, compared to 20% of the richest.  Furthermore, disparities in access to higher education are amplified by inequalities in success by social background during the course of studies.  Addressing these inequalities will require sustained policy commitment at the national, regional and global level.  However, there is limited information available on the present state of policy focus on these equity aspects.

## What is the Aim of the Study?

Against this background, the main aim of this study is to assess the nature and extent of policy commitments of national governments to address inequalities in access and success in higher education.  The study also analyzes the equity promotion policies of relevant multilateral and regional agencies involved in providing policy advice, technical assistance and financial support.

This study does not seek, however, to analyze the degree of success of national equity policies in the countries surveyed.  It is not about measuring present levels of disparities, assessing the impact of these policies, or understanding which interventions work best and which ones are less effective.  The focus is essentially about the range of equity policies formulated and the level of alignment among the various instruments chosen to implement these policies.

## How Did We Undertake the Study?

This research consisted of two parts. The main part was a global survey of 71 countries across all continents exploring the extent to which (i) national higher education policy documents include reference to equitable access to and success in higher education, (ii) governments set specific targets for participation / success for students from specific equity groups, and (iii) specific strategies / plans to address inequalities in access to and success in higher education are actually in place.  The second part involved consultations with key global or regional inter-governmental agencies to establish whether they have policies in place to address inequalities in higher education, and if resources are allocated to work in this area.

## The Key Findings

### Equity is a 'headline' priority for governments

The survey conducted for this study shows clearly that, with the exception of a few fragile states recovering from a natural catastrophe or a major political crisis, equity is a priority theme in the higher education agenda of governments.  This official commitment reflects the fact that young people all over the world are keenly aware that opportunities for professional success and social mobility are directly linked to opportunities in higher education.

### But policy commitment varies considerably

However, beyond the official statements about equity, which tend to reflect commonly shared principles of inclusion, the survey found a wide range of situations when it came to translating these principles into actual policies and interventions.  A number of countries are still paying only "lip service" to the equity agenda, meaning that, beyond the general policy statements about expansion of access, governments do not spell out clear equity promotion strategies, define concrete targets to enroll and support students in vulnerable conditions, mobilize sufficient resources targeted to underrepresented groups, and put in place actions to help students complete their degrees.

*Overall, only 32% of the countries surveyed have defined specific participation targets for any equity group.*

**Many countries still adopt a narrow definition of equity groups**

As a result, the existence of an equity group that suffers from neglect or discrimination does not translate into official recognition and actual compensatory policies.  Minority ethnic groups are the frequent victims of these "blind spots", as governments may see the recognition of their rights as a threat to the power, prestige or resources or the dominant group. While most nations focus on the barriers faced by traditional equity target groups, including students from low-income households, girls, members of ethnic minorities, and students with disabilities, several countries have added non-traditional equity groups reflecting the social transformation of these countries:

- Victims of sexual and gender violence
- Members of the LGBT community
- Refugees of all kinds (internally and externally displaced; deported)
- Children of people affected by historical violence
- Students with care experience, orphans, youth without parental care.

*Overall, 11% of the countries surveyed have formulated a comprehensive equity strategy.  Another 11% have elaborated a specific policy document for one equity group, gender, people with disabilities, or members of indigenous groups.*

**There is a greater focus on financial aid than non-monetary access interventions**

Many countries' definition of equity policies is still traditional in focus, with a heavy emphasis on financial aid as principal instrument, and a tendency to look at access barriers instead of promoting interventions to boost the chances of success of students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are enrolled in higher education institutions.

*Less than 30% of countries have flexible pathways/ recognition of prior learning.*

Many countries assume for instance that gender parity has been achieved because the proportion of girls enrolled is equal to the proportion of male students, or sometimes even higher.  While this is an important first step, other studies have shown that severe gender disparities persist in the majority of countries in specific STEM programs such as engineering education, and women are generally under-represented in senior academic jobs and in university leadership positions.

The most frequently supported non-monetary programs are affirmative action and reformed admission criteria, outreach and bridge programs, and retention programs.

## Frequency of Non-Monetary Measures
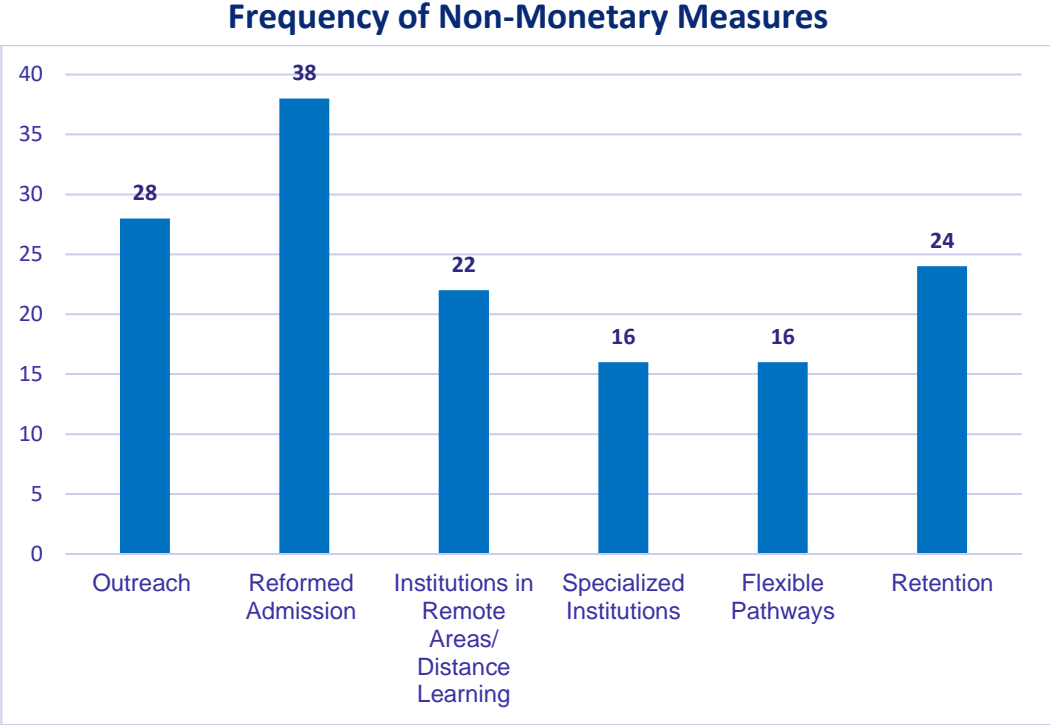


The survey also highlighted much variety in the choice of instruments used to promote equity, beyond the traditional financial aid mechanisms—grants and student loans—that are widely available.  Twelve countries use their budget allocation funding formula or earmarked grants to support equity promotion efforts at the institutional level.

## Frequency of Financial Measures



■ *No fees*  ■ *Grants / Bursaries*  ■ *Student Loans*  ■ *Funding Formula*
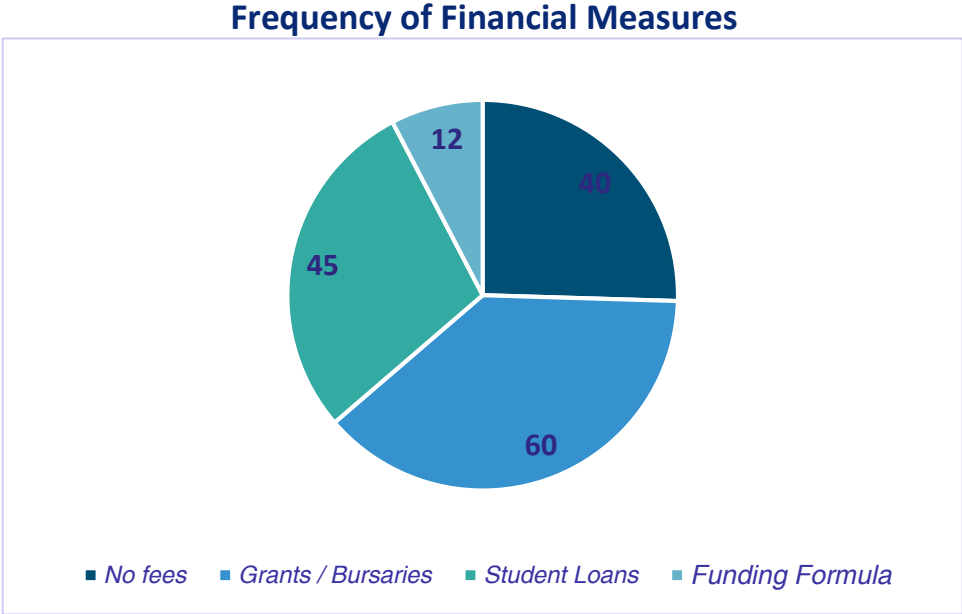
**Some countries are bringing financial and non-monetary interventions together**

The survey did identify two promising trends:

1. A growing number of countries have realized the importance of combining both financial and non-monetary interventions to remove all barriers faced by students coming from disadvantaged groups in a comprehensive way.
2. A few governments have begun to complement the direct support offered to students with incentives for the universities themselves, as a means of pressuring the latter into taking a more proactive role in improving access and success opportunities. This is achieved by incorporating an equity indicator into the funding formula, setting up earmarked funds for equity interventions that universities can benefit from, and including equity-related criteria in the quality assurance process.

**There is much variety in the forms and degrees of engagement of Inter-Governmental Organizations**

The survey found that, by nature, inter-governmental organizations differ in terms of mandates, constituencies, resources and intervention modalities. Among these organizations, the types of intervention in support of higher education equity include the following instruments:

- Policy setting

- Technical assistance

- Grant and loan financing, and

- Provision of scholarships to young people from equity target groups

**Can we compare equity policies between countries?**

A first attempt at comparing equity policies internationally from the viewpoint of comprehensiveness and consistency has been attempted. The findings are of course tentative, considering the limited information available in English for some of the countries surveyed. The 71 countries surveyed were classified into four equity policy categories defined in the following way:

- *Emerging:* the country has formulated broad equity policy principles and goals but has accomplished little in terms of concrete policies, programs and interventions (9 countries).

- Developing: the country has put in place the foundations of an equity promotion strategy, but has not defined many policies and programs, is not investing much in this area, and has implemented few policies and programs (33 countries).

- Established: the country has formulated an equity promotion strategy and has put in place aligned policies, programs and interventions to implement the strategy (23 countries).

- Advanced: the country has formulated and implemented a comprehensive equity promotion strategy. Some countries in this category even have a dedicated equity promotion agency (6 countries).
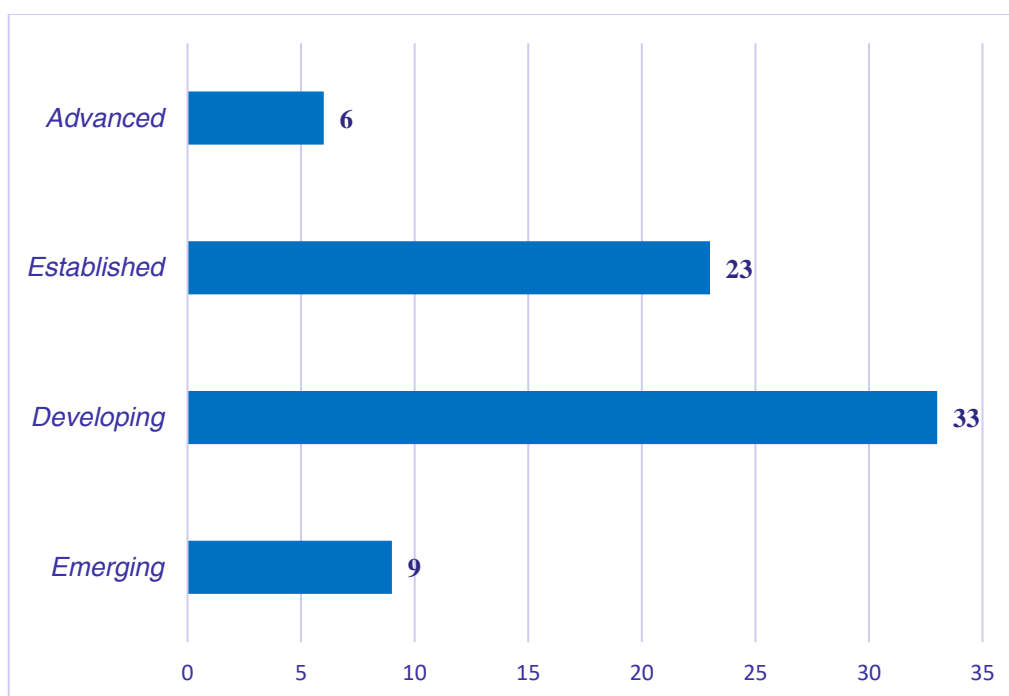


Most countries fall into the second or third category (developing or established). The distinction between the two is not due principally to the wealth of the countries concerned. The "established" category includes several developing countries that may not be able to devote the same amount of resources as OECD economies but they have fairly comprehensive policies to promote equity in higher education.

The countries that appear as "emerging" from an equity policy viewpoint are essentially fragile states that have had neither the resources nor the political stability necessary to elaborate and sustain solid equity policies for higher education over the long run.

The few nations labeled as "advanced" show a great degree of consistency over time in terms of comprehensive strategy, policies, goals and targets, and alignment between their equity goals and the range of instruments—financial and non-monetary—used to promote equity in higher education. Most of these countries are relatively rich Commonwealth countries with mature higher education systems, meaning that access is less of an issue than in developing countries, which have paid increasing attention to the obstacles to success faced by students from underrepresented groups. The other nation included in the list is Cuba, which for ideological reasons has consistently put a great emphasis on equity since the 1959 socialist revolution.

> *The countries that are most advanced in their policy commitment on behalf of providing equal opportunities of access and success in higher education have a comprehensive equity strategy—sometimes even a dedicated agency—, and they seek to ensure consistency over time in terms of alignment among policy objectives, improvement targets for various equity groups, resources, and quality assurance criteria. Among all the countries surveyed, Australia, Cuba, England, Ireland, New Zealand and Scotland stand out in that respect.*

## Next Steps

This survey of national equity policies in higher education barely scrapped the surface of the issues and challenges involved in seeking to improve opportunities for access and success at the post-secondary level. By design, it focused on reviewing government strategies, policies and plans, but it did not touch upon the degree of effectiveness of the various policies formulated and implemented, nor did it attempt to measure their actual impact on the concerned equity target groups. This could perhaps be the main focus of the next phase of investigation of equity policies in higher education, looking at which interventions are most successful, and under what conditions.

This is also a first report looking at equity policies in this way. We want to extend the countries covered in the study and also update the information on the existing countries in the study as they grow their commitment, we hope, to equitable access to higher education. The individual country reports and the inter-governmental agency reports are located on the World Access to Higher Education Day (WAHED) website at www.worldaccesshe.com.

# 1. Introduction

*Equality of opportunity: the impertinent courtesy of an invitation offered to unwelcome guests, in the certainty that circumstances will prevent them from accepting it.*

*R.H. Tawney*

**Background**

Charles Dickens' famous line "it was the best of times, it was the worst of times" seems to be mirrored in recent news from the higher education scene worldwide, and their implications for equity.  On the positive side, the elimination of tuition fees for the poorest students in countries as diverse as Chile, the Philippines and South Africa, and the growing availability of grants for Indigenous students in Australia, Brazil or Romania should translate in greater opportunities to study for traditionally underrepresented population groups.  On the negative side, the growing student loan debt in many countries, the legal challenges against affirmative action in the United States, and the difficulties that the rapidly increasing numbers of refugee youths find in trying to access higher education are likely to affect many students adversely from an equity viewpoint.

The recent report 'Charting Equity: Drawing the Global Access Map' showed that, in every country where data is available, participation in higher education continues to be unequal from a social background perspective (Atherton et al., 2016).  Research produced by UNESCO in 2016, looking across 76 mainly low-income countries, found that only 1% of the poorest 25-29-year old had completed at least four years of higher education, compared to 20% of the richest.  Furthermore, disparities in access to higher education are amplified by inequalities in success by social background during the course of studies.

Addressing these inequalities will require sustained policy commitment at the national, regional and global level.  However, there is limited information available on the present state of policy focus on these equity aspects.  Available evidence leads to concern.  In Europe, for example, out of 34 countries committing to setting measurable targets for increasing participation for those from lower income backgrounds by 2015, only six have actually done so (Salmi and Sursock, 2018).  Similarly, few developing countries appear to have explicit policies in place to reduce disparities in access and success in higher education beyond expanding coverage as a general policy.

**Objective**

Against this background, the main aim of this study is to assess the nature and extent of policy commitments of national governments to address inequalities in access and success in higher education by social background.  The study also analyzes the equity promotion policies of relevant multilateral and regional agencies involved in providing policy advice, technical assistance and financial support in various parts of the world.

This study does not seek, however, to analyze the degree of success of national equity policies in the countries surveyed.  It is not about measuring present levels of disparities, assessing the impact of these policies, or understanding which interventions work best and which ones are less effective.  The focus is essentially about the range of equity policies formulated and the level of alignment among the various instruments chosen to implement these policies.

## Methodology

This research consisted of two parts. The main part was a global survey exploring the extent to which (i) national higher education policy documents include reference to equitable access to and success in higher education, (ii) governments set specific targets for participation/success for students from specific equity groups, and (iii) specific strategies / plans to address inequalities in access to and success in higher education are actually in place.

Considering the limited time available to carry out the survey, instead of sending a written questionnaire to all countries in the world in a systematic way, the principal investigator consulted materials available on the websites of government agencies to conduct preliminary research and then used his global policy research network to reach out to policy makers and/or academic experts across the world to validate the results of the preliminary work and help complete this survey.  The survey was guided by an effort to cover a reasonably wide sample of countries from the main world regions.  Annex 1 provides the list of countries actually included in the survey.

The second part involved consultations with key global or regional inter-governmental agencies to establish whether they have policies in place to address inequalities in higher education, and if resources are allocated to work in this area. Annex 2 lists the nine organizations included in the study.

The principal investigator developed two instruments for the purpose of this study: (i) a template to analyze government policies and mechanisms used to promote equity in higher education (Annex 3); and (ii) a template for carrying out the survey of global and regional agencies (Annex 4).  The following analytical works guided the development of these two templates:

- OECD study Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society, which defines equity in higher education, looks at the role of higher education in reducing disparities, and reviews country policy responses (OECD, 2007).

- Opportunities for All? The Equity Challenge in Tertiary Education, which proposes an analytical framework to measure the scope of inequalities in higher education, understand their determinants, and assess equity promotion measures (Salmi and Bassett, 2011).

- Access and Completion for Underserved Students: International Perspectives, which explores the range of equity promotion policies that can be observed at the national and institutional levels (Salmi and Sursock, 2018).

## Outline of the Study

This report starts by presenting the results of the study of national equity policies, looking at who formulates these policies, what goals are defined, which groups are targeted, and how the impact of equity policies is monitored.  It then explores the range of financial and non-monetary instruments used to implement equity policies.  Based on these results, it proposes a benchmarking matrix of the countries surveyed.  It then looks at the contribution of international and regional inter-governmental institutions to the equity agenda in higher education.  Finally, it sets forth an agenda for further research, taking the findings of this study into consideration.

# 2. Equity as Part of Higher Education Policy-Making

## 2.1. Governance

The governance of higher education systems can be defined as "all those structures, processes and activities that are involved in the planning and direction of the institutions and people working in higher education" (Fielden, 2008).  At the national level, governance relates to the laws, policies, guidelines, mechanisms and processes put in place by the State with the purpose of providing a favorable context for higher institutions to be able to operate effectively and efficiently.  The State exercises its stewardship through its vision for the future development of higher education, the agencies that coordinate and make policies, the legal and regulatory framework, and the incentives available to steer higher education institutions.

Analyzing the governance of higher education among the surveyed countries reveals a large variety of setups, reflecting the political history and culture of each country and, in the case of many developing countries, the governance tradition of the former colonial power.  Some countries have a department of higher education within the Ministry of Education; others have a dedicated Ministry of Higher Education; and yet others, such as Pakistan, rely on a semi-independent Commission.  Several Commonwealth nations (India, Bangladesh for instance) rely on both a government department and a buffer body to formulate policy and implement them, respectively.  Graph 1 and Table 1 show the various categories of organization and configurations found in the countries surveyed.  Overall, the majority of countries do not have a ministry dedicated to higher education policy, but a general ministry / department of education that is responsible for higher education.  Many Commonwealth countries rely on a buffer body, usually called university grants committee, to implement government policies for higher education, especially when it comes to budget allocation.
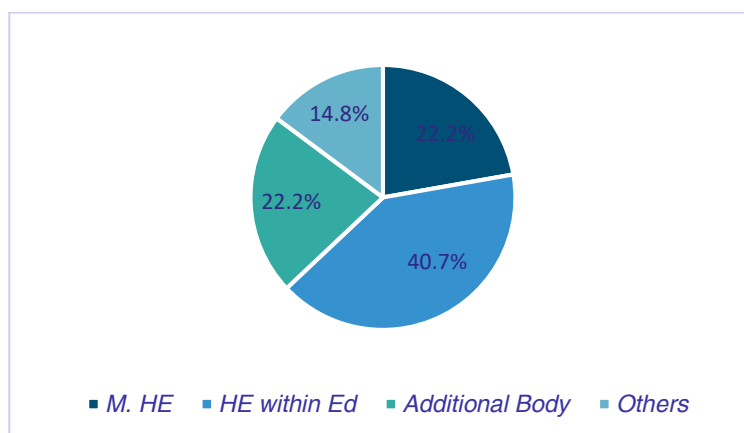
*Graph 1 – Overall Distribution of Governance Forms*



■ *M. HE*    ■ *HE within Ed*    ■ *Additional Body*    ■ *Others*

*Table 1 – Government Department /Agency in Charge of Higher Education (HE)*

| Modality / Region | Ministry of Higher Education | HE Department within Ministry of Education | Ministry or Department with Additional Higher Education Body* | Others |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| East Asia (11) | Indonesia, Malaysia | Cambodia, China, Japan, Laos, Myanmar, South Korea, Thailand, Vietnam | 0 | Hong Kong |
| Eastern Europe & Central Asia (5) | Russia | Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Romania | 0 | Hungary |
| Latin America and Caribbean (19) | Cuba, Ecuador, Venezuela | Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Haiti, Mexico Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Uruguay | Argentina, Dominican Republic, Paraguay | Costa Rica Guatemala |
| Middle East & North Africa (4) | Morocco, Tunisia | 0 | Egypt | Israel |
| North America (2) | 0 | United States | 0 | Canada |
| Pacific (2) | 0 | 0 | New Zealand | Australia |
| South Asia (5) | Afghanistan | 0 | Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka | Pakistan |
| Sub-Saharan Africa (13) | Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Senegal | 0 | Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Uganda, South Africa, Zimbabwe | Liberia |
| Western Europe (10) | Denmark, France | Austria, Netherlands, Norway | England, Scotland, Spain | Ireland, Wales |
| Total (71) | 19.7% | 36.6 % | 28.2 % | 15.5% |

* Note: Additional bodies are agencies such as university grants commissions that play an important role in the implementation of government policies for higher education, especially budget funding allocation.

Some countries have trouble making up their mind. At times they have a separate Ministry; other times they merge the various education ministries and integrate higher education within the overall Ministry of Education, as happened recently in Mauritius and Saudi Arabia. In Denmark, the Ministry of Industry and Innovation became in charge of higher education in the mid-2000s, reflecting the perception by the then government of the importance of universities

for economic growth and productivity increase.  Today, Denmark is back to having a standard Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

The case of countries with a federal government is worth commenting upon.  In Canada, Germany and the United States, the primary responsibility for orienting and financing higher education institutions rests with the state or provincial governments, with the exception of federal research and some student aid programs in the case of Canada and the United States.  In Brazil and Pakistan, by contrast, the central department in charge of higher education (within the Ministry of Education for the first two and outside in the case of Pakistan) is principally responsible for defining and financing higher education policies at the national level.

Finally, there are noteworthy outliers, with uniquely original set ups.  In Pakistan, for example, the government transferred in the early 2000s the responsibility for overseeing and leading reforms in the higher education sector from the Ministry of Education to a powerful, semi-independent public agency called the Higher Education Commission (HEC).  Costa Rica and Guatemala are the only countries in the world where there is no government agency responsible for higher education.[1]  In Costa Rica, the Constitution establishes that the four public universities regulate the higher education sector on behalf of government, the Minister of Education serving as the executive secretary of the rectors' council.[2]  In Guatemala, the main public university (Universidad San Carlos) is the body legally responsible for regulating and promoting higher education, as prescribed by the Constitution.  Canada and India also occupy a unique place among federal countries.  They are the only federal systems without a ministry or department in charge of higher education at the national level, although in both cases the federal government does make equity-related policy decisions, especially in the area of financial aid, through the Ministry of Human Development.

A small number of countries have set up a body dedicated to equity in higher education.  In Australia, the federal government funds a center located within Curtin University, whose mission is to study and monitor equity in higher education, and provide government with evidence-based advice.  Similarly, the government of India provides funding to several university-based centers to conduct research on equity issues.  England, interestingly, used to have an Office for Fair Access fully dedicated to equity promotion.  In 2017, however, the government eliminated that Agency and transferred its responsibilities to the newly created Office for Students, which has a more comprehensive span of responsibilities in higher education.

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[1] Peru is another country that had a similar situation for many decades 2014, when the new Higher Education Law gave formal responsibility for higher education to the Ministry of Education (University Law 30220).  In 2016, the Ministry of Education established two departments of higher education (one for universities and one for technical institutes) within the Ministry of Education's vice-ministry for pedagogical management.

[2] *Interestingly, when the Costa Rican government established a fifth public university in 2008, the other four did not accept the new university within their rectors' council, for fear of having to share budgetary resources with the young institution.*

Spain is the latest country to set up an official agency in charge of monitoring progress towards meeting equity goals in higher education. Established in 2010, the University Observatory of Financial Aid and Academic Results (Observatorio Universitario de Becas, Ayudas al Estudio y Rendimiento Académico) brings all concerned stakeholders together (government, universities, student representatives, regional authorities in the analysis of the effectiveness and impact of financial aid and other support mechanisms with respect to student success.

## 2.2. Higher Education Policy Documents

The second aspect reviewed in this study is the extent to which countries have policy documents that formulate a clear vision and a long-term strategy for the development of higher education. Table 2 illustrates the range of situations found in the countries surveyed.

As the survey shows, very few countries do not have any kind of development strategy for higher education. When it happens, the countries concerned are usually fragile nations, countries that are very poor, countries that have experienced a civil war and/or a natural catastrophe. Haiti, which suffered several political crises and a devastating earthquake, is one of the emblematic examples in this respect. Paradoxically, countries in this category are perhaps those that are most in need of harnessing the capacity building potential of universities for reconstruction and development efforts (Salmi, 2017).

*Table 2 – Higher Education Policy Documents*

| Degree / Region | Higher Education Law Only | Vision, Strategy, or Plan Only | Combined HE Law and Vision, Strategy or Plan | HE as Part of Overall Education Documents |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| East Asia (11) | 2 | 6 | 2 | 1 |
| Eastern Europe & Central Asia (5) | 1 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Latin America and Caribbean (19) | 0 | 1 | 15 | 3 |
| Middle East & North Africa (4) | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| North America (2) | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Degree / Region | Higher Education Law Only | Vision, Strategy, or Plan Only | Combined HE Law and Vision, Strategy or Plan | HE as Part of Overall Education Documents |
| Pacific (2) | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| South Asia (5) | 1 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| Sub-Saharan Africa (13) | 0 | 8 | 4 | 1 |
| Western Europe (10) | 5 | 0 | 5 | 1 |
| Total (71) | 16.9% | 26.8% | 45.1% | 11.3% |

The other countries are divided into two groups: a minority of countries (11.3%) that have an overall education strategy, of which higher education is a component; and most countries having separate documents dedicated to higher education development and reform.  In the latter case, the higher education law tends to be the most frequent platform for spelling out higher education policies.  However, many countries find it also important to elaborate vision documents or white papers at critical moments in their history.  In South Africa, for instance, the government produced a document on the "Shape and Size of Higher Education" a few years after the democratic transition and abolition of apartheid (2000).  Similarly, Mozambique produced its first vision for the future of higher education in the mid-1990s, after the end of the civil war.  Finally, a few nations formulate comprehensive higher education plans on a regular basis to define long term goals and investment priorities for the medium term.  China and Malaysia are examples of countries with a long tradition in this respect.

## 2.3. Equity Policy Goals

The third question to consider is whether the policy documents explicitly identify equity as an important policy goal.  Here again the situations are quite diverse.  First, there are countries that do not put equity on their agenda in an explicit manner.  This may be for two reasons.  A few countries do not seem to care much, not realizing that equity serves fundamental social justice and economic efficiency purposes.  Others assume that providing open access and tuition-free public higher education are sufficient to guarantee equality of opportunities.  In that perspective, governments make the assumption that expanding access overall is enough to take care of any equity concern.

However, the large majority of countries do make deliberate reference to equity as a key policy goal.  What sets countries apart is the degree of equity emphasis, which varies from including equity as one of the policy goals among others, designing a comprehensive equity strategy, and elaborating a standalone equity policy document.  In total, 11% of the countries surveyed have elaborated a comprehensive equity policy document.  Another 11 % have formulated an equity policy document for a specific group, either gender, people with disabilities, or students from indigenous groups.  Table 3 provides the list of countries in these two categories.

*Table 3 - Countries with a Standalone Strategy or a Target-Specific Equity Policy*

| Standalone Higher Education Equity Strategy | Higher Education Strategy for a Specific Target Group |
|---|---|
| Australia, Austria, Colombia, India, Ireland, Morocco, Scotland, Wales | Afghanistan, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, New Zealand, Paraguay, Peru |

Some of the countries in this category, such as Australia, Costa Rica, India and Paraguay, have even set up a body dedicated to studying and monitoring equity in higher education.

## 2.4. Target Groups

The fourth dimension of analysis is whether countries define specific equity target groups in the higher education policy documents and which groups are included.  The template used for the survey relied on the following broad equity groups: (i) students from low-income families, (ii) females, (iii) minority groups, and (iv) students with disability.  Table 4 and Graph 2 present the frequency of mention of these equity target categories in the countries surveyed.

The results show the following pattern.  Low-income students and students with disabilities are the two groups most often included in the policy documents. Gender equality and the needs of members of ethnic minorities also come up often.  The frequency analysis indicates that most countries include at least two categories in their equity considerations, reflecting the acknowledgement that these categories are not mutually exclusive.  In fact, quite the opposite is true.  In all societies, the principal dimensions of inequalities often overlap in several ways.  For example, ethnic minorities tend to be more predominant in rural areas and are commonly affected by poverty.  Being a girl with a disability in a low caste in rural India or in a Roma community in Eastern Europe is without any doubt a passport to a life of exclusion and discrimination.

In a few cases, in addition to identifying population categories as equity target groups, some governments have formulated a specific strategy to improve the access and success opportunities of these groups.  In Afghanistan, for instance, the Ministry of Higher Education has a gender strategy.  Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala and New Zealand have a strategy for students from indigenous groups (in the LAC countries) and Maori students in the case of New Zealand.

*Table 4 – Frequency of Appearance of Equity Groups*

| Category / Region | Low-Income Students | Gender | Minority Groups | Students with Disability |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| East Asia (11) | 10 | 4 | 9 | 7 |
| Eastern Europe & Central Asia (5) | 4 | 2 | 4 | 5 |
| Latin America and Caribbean (19) | 17 | 10 | 3 | 16 |
| Middle East & North Africa (4) | 1 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| North America (2) | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Pacific (2) | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| South Asia (5) | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 |
| Sub-Saharan Africa (13) | 9 | 11 | 6 | 10 |
| Western Europe (10) | 8 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| Total (71) | 57 | 43 | 40 | 58 |

It is worth noting that, in some of the countries surveyed, people that can be considered as members of a minority group in terms of educational opportunities represent in fact the majority of the population or the largest ethnic group.  This is the case, for example, of indigenous people in Bolivia (62%), in Guatemala (24%), in Peru (24%) and in Mexico (15%). Malaysia is perhaps the one country in the world that has been more systematic in clearly defining its majority group (Malays) as an equity target worthy of special measures to improve their access and success opportunities.  By contrast, some countries completely ignore important groups in their society who may face less opportunities to study at the higher education level.  In Chile, for example, official higher education policy documents make no mention of indigenous people (mainly Mapuche), even though they represent close to 12% of the total population.

*Graph 2 – Frequency of Equity Target Groups Mentioned*
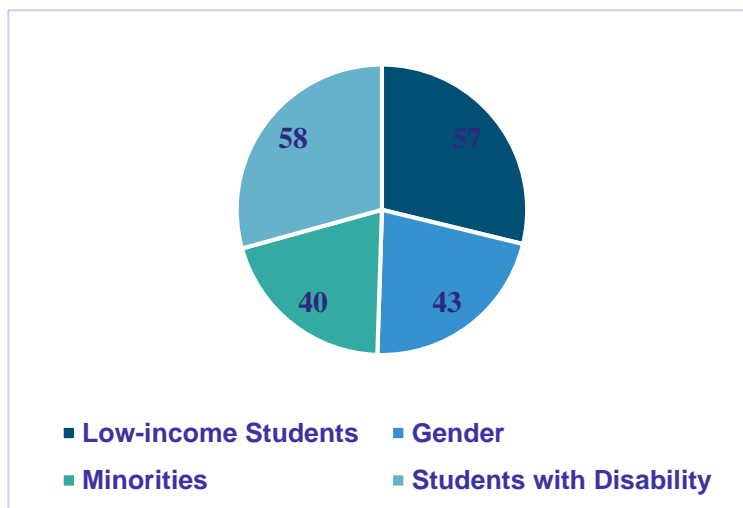


An interesting finding of the survey is the emergence of new sub-categories of equity groups within the broad "minority" classification.  Traditionally, minority groups were defined in terms of their ethnic, linguistic, religious, or residence characteristics (OECD, 2007; Salmi and Bassett, 2011).  The survey showed that several countries are considering additional categories, as illustrated by Table 5.

*Table 5 – New Categories of Equity Groups*

| Equity Groups | Country Examples |
|---|---|
| First-generation students | United States |
| LGBTQIA[3] | Brazil, Colombia |
| Victims of sexual abuse / violence | Colombia, Ecuador, Spain |
| Deported migrants | Ecuador, Mexico |
| Children of invalid veterans or civil servants | Mexico, Russia, Vietnam |
| Foreign refugees | Australia, Colombia, New Zealand |

[3] *LGBTQIA stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual, and others.*

| Equity Groups | Country Examples |
| --- | --- |
| Children of military families | England |
| Internally-displaced people as a result of civil war or natural catastrophes | Colombia, Georgia |
| Demobilized guerrilla fighters and paramilitaries | Colombia |
| Students who do not speak the national language | Denmark |
| Students with care experience, orphans, youth without parental care | Austria, England, Georgia Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Scotland |
| Single mothers | Ecuador |
| Families with more than 3 children | Georgia, South Korea |
| Children of parents deported during the Soviet era | Georgia |
| Jailed people, ex-offenders | Venezuela, Wales |
| Students from occupied territories | Georgia |

A growing number of countries are paying attention to the specific needs for academic, economic and psychological support of first-generation students, who often come from families with limited cultural capital.  While quite a few countries in the world have passed legislation in recent years to affirm and protect the rights of the LGBT community, this has not been reflected yet in national equity policies for higher education.  Brazil, Colombia and India are commendable exceptions.  In Brazil, following the initiative of a state university, one of the state governments (State of Bahia) endorsed the recognition of the rights of LGBT students.  In Colombia, the outgoing government passed a decree in March 2018 to protect the rights of the LGBT community in terms of access to education at all levels.[4]  In India, the State of Kerala has allocated two spaces for transgender students in all universities and affiliated arts and sciences colleges.[5]

Colombia, Ecuador and Spain have taken the innovative step of considering the victims of sexual violence as an equity group worth supporting and monitoring at the higher education level.  Mexico is the only country, so far, that is paying specific attention to the needs of students among people suddenly deported from the United States.  Vietnam identifies, among students in need of support, the children of war veterans who have been left disabled.  Even though many countries are challenged by large refugee populations, Australia and New Zealand are the only countries among those surveyed that have specifically identified refugees and holders of humanitarian visas as an equity group deserving specific measures.

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[4] *After the election of a conservative president in September 2018, religious groups have organized demonstrations to pressure the government into revoking the decree.*

[5] http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=2018070706002042

Colombia, which has the largest internally-displaced population on the planet, as a result of its 50-year long civil war, considers students from this group as an equity category. It is also looking at the learning needs of former guerilla fighters, paramilitaries and Venezuelan refugees. Denmark and Georgia make provisions for the language needs of students coming from households where Danish is not the language of communication. Finally, the Scottish Funding Council defines students with care experience as "anyone who has been or is currently in care or from a looked after background at any stage in their life. It includes people who have been in foster care, kinship care, and those who are looked after at home with a supervision requirement."

The identification and inclusion of these new categories by several countries reflects historical events (Vietnam war for instance), recent political crises (Syrian refugees in Europe; Venezuelan refugees in South America), the growing presence of migrant groups in industrial countries, and contemporary shifts in the social acceptance of particular groups in the case of sexual orientation.[6] It will be interesting to observe whether countries are compelled to put in place new instruments to address the specific needs of members of these emerging equity groups. While the present study does not have sufficient elements to answer this question, this is an issue worth researching in the future.

Georgia is the country with the largest number of equity groups to be catered for. In total, it identifies nine groups, including orphans, students from conflict areas, students from other language groups (Armenian and Azerbaijani), and students from remote areas in the mountains.

From a methodological viewpoint, not all equity target groups can be analyzed in the same way for the purpose of international or regional comparisons. Table 6 indicates which type of analysis can be envisaged for each of the main equity groups.

*Table 6 – Equity Groups and Type of Analysis Possible*

| Equity Groups | Type of Analysis |
|---|---|
| Individuals from low-income groups | Country-specific studies Cross country-comparisons |
| Females | Country-specific studies Cross country-comparisons |
| Individuals from groups with a minority status | Country-specific studies |
| People with disabilities | Country-specific studies |

Not all groups can be characterized on the basis of an objective definition that applies universally. In fact, members of minority groups and, in most cases, country specific, and

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[6] *At the same time as a growing number of societies have become more open in accepting members of the LGBTQIA community, many countries still criminalize homosexual behavior. In countries as diverse as Russia, Tanzania, Uganda and Uzbekistan, for instance, being identified as "gay" is punishable with prison.*

definitions of disability vary from country to country. This means, concretely, that enrollment rate by income quintiles and the proportion of females are the only indicators that can be easily measured and compared across nations.

## 2.5. Specific Equity Improvement Targets

The next question explores whether countries determine specific targets to improve the higher education access and success rates of various equity groups. Table 7 shows the frequency of mention of concrete and specific equity targets in the countries surveyed. It appears that, overall, only 32% of the countries surveyed have defined specific participation targets for any equity group. Among the regions with quite a few countries in the sample, Western Europe and Latin America have the highest proportion. However, quite a few countries or territories—Hong Kong for example—affirm the general principle that no academically qualified students should be limited by lack of financial resources.

*Table 7 – Frequency of Equity Targets*

| Region / Targets | Frequency of Countries with Equity Targets | Proportion of Countries with Equity Targets |
|---|---|---|
| East Asia (11) | 2 | 22.2% |
| Eastern Europe & Central Asia (5) | 0 | 0.0% |
| Latin America and Caribbean (19) | 10 | 52.6% |
| Middle East & North Africa (4) | 1 | 25% |
| North America (2) | 0 | 0.0% |
| Pacific (2) | 1 | 50.0% |
| South Asia (5) | 0 | 0.0% |
| Sub-Saharan Africa (13) | 3 | 23.0% |
| Western Europe (10) | 6 | 60.0% |
| Total (71) | 23 | 32.4% |

At the other end of the spectrum, one of the countries surveyed, Hungary, stands out in a worrisome way. Not only does Hungary put little emphasis on equity in its higher education policies, but in addition the government of Viktor Orbán, the conservative prime minister since 2010, decided in 2018 to strictly ban any teaching or research activity related to gender and migration studies (Fodor, 2018). Many nations throughout the world put restrictions on

academic freedom, but it is the first time that a supposedly-democratic country specifically prohibits the scientific study and teaching of social and economic issues pertaining to the situation of equity groups, females and migrants in this case.[7]

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[7] In its 2017-2018 report, Scholars at Risk, the international NGO dedicated to the defense of academics throughout the world, signals violations of academic freedom in countries as diverse as Bangladesh, Cameroon, China, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Gambia, India, Iran, Israel, Malaysia, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey and the United States (Scholars at Risk, 2018).

# 3. Financing Instruments to Promote Equity in Higher Education

While the survey could not easily find data on the amount of resources that governments devote to equity promotion in higher education, it identified the following categories of financing instruments that countries use to remove financial barriers for students and encourage institutions to promote diversity:

- Fully or partially subsidized education;
- Needs-based scholarships and grants / grants targeted for equity groups others than low-income students;
- Student loans;
- Equity-linked financial incentives built into the funding formula to allocate public resources to higher education institutions; and
- Financing-related regulations.

Table 8 and Graph 3 show which policies are more frequently practiced among the countries surveyed.

*Table 8 – Financing Instruments in Support of Equity*

| Category / Region | No Tuition Fee / Fee Exemption | Scholarships & Grants | Student Loans | Funding Formula / Institutional Grants |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| East Asia (11) | 3 | 10 | 8 | 0 |
| Eastern Europe & Central Asia (5) | 3 | 5 | 2 | 1 |
| Latin America and Caribbean (19) | 11 | 18 | 15 | 4 |
| Middle East & North Africa (4) | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| North America (2) | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Pacific (2) | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| South Asia (5) | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

| Category / Region | No Tuition Fee / Fee Exemption | Scholarships & Grants | Student Loans | Funding Formula / Institutional Grants |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sub-Saharan Africa (13) | 8 | 7 | 5 | 1 |
| Western Europe (10) | 8 | 10 | 8 | 2 |
| Total (71) | 40 | 60 | 45 | 12 |

*Graph 3 – Frequency of Financial Instruments for Equity Purposes*



■ *No fees*    ■ *Grants / Bursaries*    ■ *Student Loans*    ■ *Funding Formula*
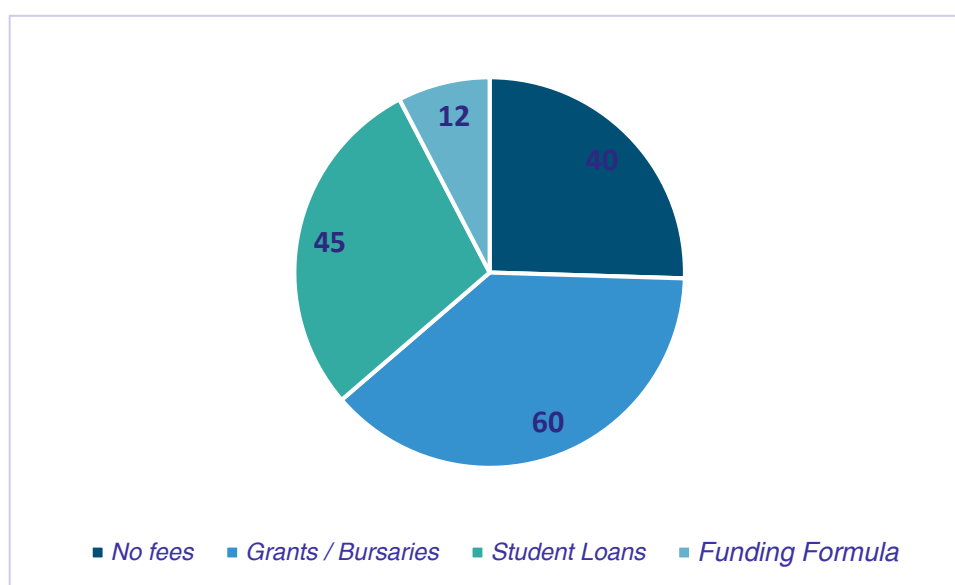
As could be expected, scholarships, bursaries and grants are the most commonly used financial aid instruments, followed by student loans and then tuition fee policies to reduce the financial burden on students.  The data collected indicate clearly that countries do not use a single financial aid instrument but rather tend to rely on several measures in a complementary manner.


## 3.1. Tuition Fees Policy

The first financial instrument used to promote equity in the countries surveyed is their tuition fees policy.  The study encountered the following range of approaches:

- Universal subsidies: students enrolled in public higher education institutions do not pay fees or make a very small financial contribution.  This is the most common policy, found in the majority of Western European countries (with the exception of England, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Wales), in South America (with the exception of Chile), in North Africa and the Middle East, in most Sub-Saharan Africa countries

(SSA), and in most Asian countries (with the exception of China, Japan, South Korea and Vietnam).

- <u>Subsidies for some students</u>: high school graduates with the best academic results are able to study free of charge while the other students must pay fees to access the same programs (former socialist countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, a few Anglophone countries in Sub-Saharan Africa).

- <u>Targeted free tuition</u>: students from the lowest income quintiles are exempted from paying fees.  This is a relatively new approach implemented in the past few years in the Canadian provinces of Ontario and New Brunswick, Chile, Ireland, Italy, Japan, the Philippines and South Africa.[8]

- <u>Subsidies for certain equity groups</u>: in some countries, tuition fee exemptions are available to equity target groups (for instance ethnic minorities in India and Vietnam).

It is also interesting to observe how countries apply these tuition fee policies with respect to the type of institutions students enroll in.  The principal distinction governments usually make is between public and private institutions.  Universal subsidies are generally available only to students going to public sector institutions, with a few exceptions.  In Belgium, the state has traditionally subsidized church-founded universities, which enroll 57% of all students (Levy, 2016).  Similarly, in Chile, the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua the state has subsidized the oldest private universities at the same level of funding as public universities.

Universal public subsidies can, however, represent an equity challenge.  Even though, intuitively, keeping higher education free of charge for all is seen as the best way of promoting equal opportunities, evidence shows that free higher education can in reality be highly inequitable, except in countries with a highly progressive income tax system, as is the case in the Nordic nations.  Experience in many parts of the world indicates that there is a strongly regressive element in most publicly funded higher education systems, because students from advantaged backgrounds tend to access universities disproportionately at no personal cost and obtain higher remuneration after graduating, yet rely on less-advantaged general taxpayers to fund their education (Salmi, 2017).[9]

The second and fourth categories (subsidies for some groups) also go to students in public universities generally, with the exception of Kazakhstan that runs a voucher-like scheme, whereby top students benefiting from a state education grant can elect to enroll in an

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[8] *Usher and Burroughs (2018) were the first ones to coin the expression and write about this emerging phenomenon.*

[9] As early as 1875, Karl Marx and Frederic Engels wrote about this danger in their Critique of the Gotha Program (Chapter IV): "If in some states of the (United States) higher education institutions are also "free", that only means in fact defraying the cost of education of the upper classes from the general tax receipts".

accredited private university.  These categories face the same equity challenge as universal funding, in so far as the better-qualified students from an academic viewpoint tend to come from wealthier families or from families with high cultural capital in the former socialist societies.

Targeted free tuition programs could theoretically be considered as an ideal financial instrument for equity purposes in as far as they actually focus on the neediest students rather than giving subsidies to all students, rich and poor alike, as the other categories are likely to do.  But they can also face equity challenges, as the cases of Chile and South Africa reveal. In the first instance, the majority of students, who are enrolled in younger private universities that are not part of the group of institutions that traditionally receives direct government subsidies, will not be tuition exempt under the recently passed financing law.  In South Africa, similarly, low-income students enrolled in private institutions are not eligible for government subsidies available under the new tuition free policy announced in December 2017.  This discriminatory treatment is a paradox in a nation that has been trying hard to eradicate the sequels of apartheid since the transition to democracy.

## 3.2. Grants and Scholarships[10]

Grants and scholarships are the second financial instrument that countries rely on to promote equity in higher education.  They come in two forms.  First, in quite a few countries, low-income students receive a grant to help with the tuition fees or to cover their living expenses, as a complement to free or low tuition.  Colombia's Ser Pilo Paga program, for example, gives a generous grant to students from the lowest two income quintiles who get top scores in the university entrance exam.  Second, governments use grants and scholarships to promote access for girls (Pakistan for example) or members of ethnic groups or populations living in remote areas (Vietnam for instance).  Grants are also available to students with disabilities in Ireland and Scotland, for instance.

Depending on the country, these grants and scholarships may or may not be available to students enrolled in private higher education institutions.  Two former French colonies in North and Sub-Saharan Africa, Côte d'Ivoire and Tunisia, can be contrasted in that respect. While Ivoirian students in private institutions get a scholarship to pay their tuition fees, their Tunisian counterparts benefit from a grant to help with their living expenses only if they attend a public university.  The Colombian program mentioned above finances studies in both public and private universities.  In Venezuela, the government of the state of Zulia gives scholarships to students enrolled in private universities.  Statistics from Latin America reveal that the proportion of public subsidies devoted to scholarships ranges from 1.4% (Ecuador) to 7.7% (Bolivia) of the higher education recurrent budget (Graph 4).

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[10] *The terms used to describe non-repayable forms of student aid vary widely among countries.  They include grants, bursaries, scholarships, fellowships, and others.  This study uses the convention of referring to need-based aid as grants and merit-based aid as scholarships (Salmi and Hauptmann, 2006).*

*Graph 4 – Scholarships as a Proportion of the Recurrent Budget*
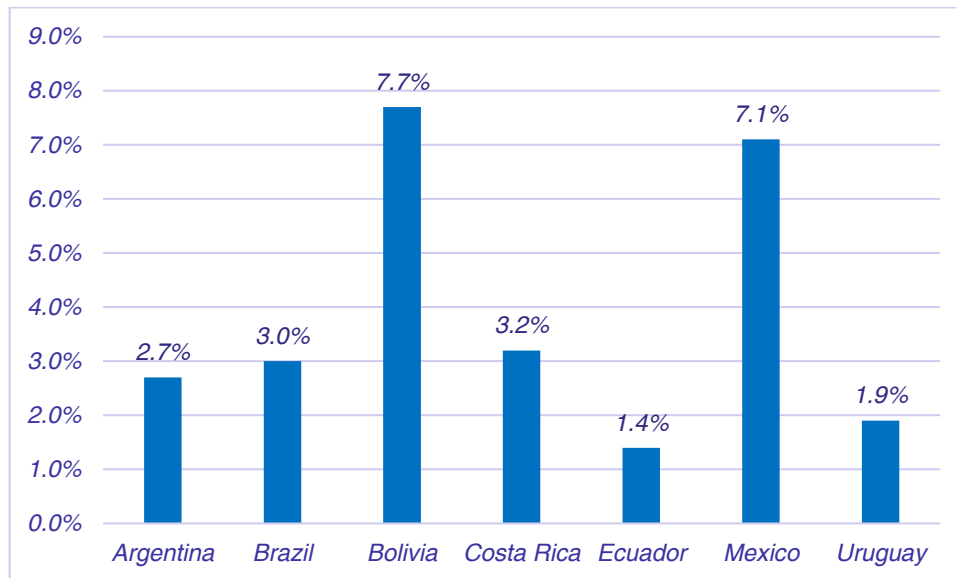


## 3.3. Student Loans

As confirmed by the survey, many countries have set up student loan programs to provide financial aid aiming at alleviating tuition fees in public systems with high level of fees (China and England for example), supporting students who attend private universities (Colombia and Malaysia for instance), or helping students with their living expenses (Vietnam).

Student loans come in two main categories:

- Income-Contingent Loans; and
- Mortgage-Type Loans.

Countries such as Australia and New Zealand, which rely on an income-contingent student loan scheme (ICL), are able to provide near universal coverage of financial aid. Countries that put in place mortgage-type student loans generally achieve only partial coverage of the student population. Colombia, which was the first country ever to establish a national student loan agency (ICETEX), has not managed to reach more than 20% of all students.

In many countries, student loans are available in principle to students enrolled in both public and private institutions. But more often than not, the student loan system was primarily set up to attend the financing needs of private sector students. Colombia and Malaysia are good examples in that respect. By contrast, in South Africa the student loan program has been designed since its inception to serve only students in public universities.

## 3.4. Budgetary Incentives

An interesting new feature that came out of the survey is reliance on the funding formula used to allocate public resources to promote the government's equity agenda. By introducing indicators that measure some dimension of equity, for example access or completion rates for specific groups, governments are able to put pressure on higher education institutions to be more proactive in seeking out students from vulnerable groups. This is the case in South Africa, for instance, where universities with a higher proportion of Black students get additional resources. In Ireland, similarly, the funding formula that allocates a block grant to higher education institutions on the basis of enrollment numbers and cost of disciplines provides a 30% premium for each student enrolled from any of the priority equity target groups defined by government.

Besides the budget allocation funding formula, some countries also have competitive grants available as an incentive to secure the participation of higher education institutions in equity schemes put in place by the government. In Australia, for example, the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) supports the efforts of universities to improve access and retention. The Disability Support Program has the same goals to increase access and success for students with special needs. Mexico finances activities that universities carry out to increase the intake of students from various indigenous groups (Programa para la Inclusión y la Equidad Educativa). Similarly, India offers General Development Grants to support universities' work on equitable access. In Ireland, the Fund for Students with Disabilities is available to higher education institutions for the provision of services and support to full-time and part-time students with disabilities.

## 3.5. Other Measures

Besides programs that give support to under-represented students, the survey has revealed a few innovative ways of inducing higher education institutions to actively take part into the national equity agenda. First, governments can impose regulations to compel universities and other institutions to give grants, scholarships or bursaries to students from under-represented groups, as the following examples show:

- In Mexico, private universities must provide financial aid to at least 5% of their students in that way.
- In Indonesia and Vietnam, the same type of requirement applies to all public universities (20% and 10% of their student population, respectively).
- In England, each higher education provider commits, through an Access and Participation Plan, to a fixed proportion of their tuition fee income which can be spent on scholarships and bursaries.

The Universities for All program (ProUni) launched in 2006 in Brazil is an interesting variation of a voucher scheme to support increased access of low-income students. Under that program, the Brazilian government uses tax incentives to "buy" places in private universities for deserving, academically qualified low-income students who were not admitted in the top public universities, because of the limited number of places and their lower scores in the

selective compared to children of wealthy families who are better prepared for the highly competitive entrance examination (Vestibular) at expensive private high schools.

Another important policy instrument used by countries is fees regulation. For example, the government of South Africa has carefully controlled the level of fees applied by public universities. This is common practice in most countries in the world, where government and/or the parliament determine the yearly increase that public universities are allowed to implement, if any. In some of the former Soviet republics, such as Azerbaijan, government also strictly regulates the level of fees in private universities. Other countries do it in an indirect manner. In Chile and Côte d'Ivoire, for instance, the government establishes a reference price that is used to calculate the amount of the scholarships for low-income students enrolled in private institutions.

The last item worth mentioning is the financial support that some countries give students through highly subsidized food, housing and transportation. Mauritius, for example, grants all university students free transportation[11]. Most Francophone countries in North Africa and SSA, following the example of France, run subsidized cafeterias and dormitories. These subsidies are rarely targeted, for lack of technical capacity or political will, except in Senegal and Tunisia where there has been a deliberate effort to restrict the subsidies to those who actually do not have sufficient financial resources to live as students.

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[11] *Interestingly, the 2011 Chilean student protest movement that led to demands for the abolition of tuition fees—implemented in 2017—started with a mere request by students that the free transport pass, which was valid for the 10 months of the actual academic year, be extended to the entire calendar year. After the Government's initial rejection of the students' request, the students escalated their demands to obtain tuition-free education.*

# 4. Non-Monetary Instruments to Promote Equity in Higher Education

Inadequate academic preparation and schooling, low educational expectations and aspirations, absence of college knowledge or awareness, scarcity of support for tertiary planning, competing family or cultural interests and personal uncertainties are just some of the barriers preventing students from marginalized communities from successful participation in higher education (Eggins, 2010).  Indeed, information access, motivation, inflexibility of university admission processes (Gerald and Haycock, 2006), and lack of capital cultural linked to disadvantaged family environments are some of the non-monetary factors that have been recognized as important determinants of the poorer participation of low-income individuals in higher education (Nybroten, 2003; Finnie et al, 2004).
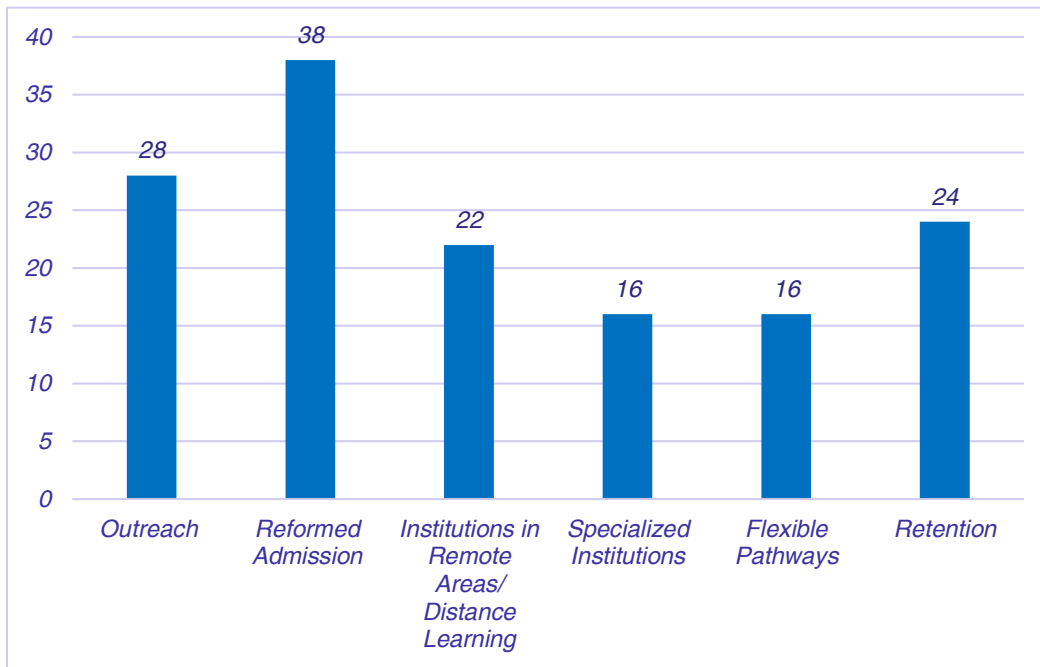
For these reasons, many countries have put in place policies that seek to overcome the non-financial barriers faced by high school graduates.  Calling these policies "non-monetary" measures does not mean that they do not have any financial cost, quite the opposite.  But the cost of these measures goes towards increasing the students' chances of success in their academic career rather than just eliminating financial barriers.

The survey identified the following categories of non-monetary measures that countries promote to increase opportunities for access and success of students from under-represented groups.

- Outreach and bridge programs
- Reformed admission procedures / Affirmative action programs
- Institutions set up in remote areas
- Distance education available to equity groups living in remote areas
- Specialized institutions targeting underrepresented groups
- Academic and career guidance and counseling
- Flexible pathways and transfers / Recognition of prior learning
- Retention programs

Graph 4 and Table 9 show the frequency and distribution of non-monetary equity promotion measures found in the countries surveyed.  The most frequently programs supported are affirmative action and reformed admission criteria, outreach and bridge programs, and retention programs.  As in the case of monetary measures, governments appear to think that it is more effective to apply two or more interventions to effectively support students from underrepresented groups.  Interestingly, the former socialist nations in Eastern Europe and Central Asia do not use non-monetary interventions, reflecting the assumption that the main guarantor of equality is to have a meritocratic university entrance examination, most of which were introduced as part of the transition from socialism to market economies.

*Graph 4 – Frequency of Non-Monetary Measures*

| Measure | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Outreach | 28 |
| Reformed Admission | 38 |
| Institutions in Remote Areas/ Distance Learning | 22 |
| Specialized Institutions | 16 |
| Flexible Pathways | 16 |
| Retention | 24 |

*Outreach and bridge programs*: These are early interventions and collaborative partnerships between universities and schools at lower levels to motivate and inform young people about higher education.  Several countries among those surveyed offer support to their universities for designing and implementing outreach and bridge programs, for example England, India, Indonesia and the United States.  In Latin America, Argentina, Cuba, Costa Rica and Uruguay also promote such programs.  A central part of outreach and bridge programs is to provide early counseling on academic programs and career prospects.  Evidence from the United Kingdom points to the importance of reaching out to young people at a younger age than the last years of high school; it may be even more effective to provide primary school children with information about academic opportunities to start motivating them early on (Birchall, 2018).

*Reformed admission*: Many countries have introduced affirmative action programs to boost access for under-represented groups, including through quotas.  Bolivia, Brazil, India, Malaysia, the United States and Venezuela provide relevant examples of such policies at the national level.  In Brazil, for instance, the Law of Social Quotas, enacted in 2012, requires public universities to reserve half of their admission seats for high school graduates coming from the public secondary sector and to vastly increase the enrollment of students of African descent.  In Georgia, the government has established adapted admission conditions for students from the Armenian or Azerbaijani communities who attended a high school that teaches in their mother tongue.

*Table 9 – Non-Monetary Equity Promotion Measures*

| Category / Region | Outreach and Bridge Programs | Reformed Admission / Affirmative Action / Quotas | Institutions in Remote Areas/ Distance Learning | Specialized Institutions for Minority Groups | Flexible Pathways/ Recognition of Prior Learning | Retention |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| East Asia (11) | 3 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Eastern Europe & Central Asia (5) | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Latin America and Caribbean (19) | 10 | 12 | 4 | 8 | 3 | 13 |
| Middle East & North Africa (4) | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| North America (2) | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Pacific (2) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| South Asia (5) | 1 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Sub-Saharan Africa (13) | 4 | 5 | 7 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Western Europe (10) | 8 | 6 | 3 | 0 | 6 | 6 |
| Total (71) | 28 | 38 | 22 | 16 | 16 | 24 |

*Institutions in remote areas*: many governments think that bringing higher education institutions close to where under-served populations live is an effective way of increasing access. Scotland's University of the Highlands and Islands is a relevant example. In Latin America, Bolivia, Colombia and Cuba have implemented such policies as a way of reaching out to potential students in remote areas. In SSA, Malawi has set up satellite colleges to reach students in rural areas far from the main universities. The Colombian experience is interesting in that regard. The government encouraged the creation of regional higher education centers (Centros Regionales de Educación Superior CERES) as partnerships among higher education institutions, local authorities and firms that pooled their resources to offer relevant programs in remote places where higher education opportunities were insufficient or did not exist. These centers aim to bring quality education to marginalized

communities and create opportunities for economic and social development.  Today, 241 CERES operate throughout the country, serving around 30,000 students.

_Specialized institutions for minority groups_: Bolivia, Cuba, China, Mexico, New Zealand, Nicaragua and the United States are examples of countries that have established specialized universities or community colleges to provide a welcoming learning environment that is closer to the cultural traditions of members of indigenous groups.

_Online universities_: one of the challenges of online programs is that it is more difficult to use effectively for those who could benefit most, precisely because they are under-served and under-prepared.  While few countries have set up virtual universities with an explicit equity focus, India's Swayam Project seeks to offer better educational opportunities to members of the main equity target groups in the nation and the Tunisian Virtual University works with students enrolled in brick-and-mortar universities, especially in the geographically most remote regions, to support them in their academic work.

_Retention programs_: to reduce high dropout rates among students from under-represented groups, especially first-generation students, countries are promoting a large range of measures, such as first-year induction, early detection of academic difficulties, academic advising, tutoring and mentoring, and psychological counseling for personal support. England, India and Scotland provide incentives for retention programs.  In Latin America, where the issue of dropouts is one of the biggest challenges faced by universities, many governments support retention programs.

# 5. Benchmarking Countries from an Equity Policy Viewpoint

In the early 2010s, the World Bank started developing a benchmarking framework aiming at comparing the performance of higher education systems.  It resulted in the launch of a new instrument, called SABER-TE (Systems Approach for Better Education Results - Tertiary Education), whose purpose is to "collect, synthesize, and disseminate comprehensive information on tertiary education to enable policy makers, the World Bank Group (WBG) staff, and development partners to learn how countries address similar policy challenges" (Marmolejo, 2016).  Along the same lines, the OECD has begun work on its own version of benchmarking aimed at comparing the results of higher education systems across countries and regions (OECD, 2017).

While the World Bank framework does not look explicitly at equity policies, it is possible to apply the same analytical principles to classify the countries surveyed for the purpose of this study into four equity policy categories defined in the following way:

- _Emerging_: the country has formulated broad equity policy principles and goals but has accomplished little in terms of concrete policies, programs and interventions.
- _Developing_: the country has put in place the foundations of an equity promotion strategy, but has not defined many policies and programs, is not investing much in this area, and has implemented few policies and programs.
- _Established_: the country has formulated an equity promotion strategy and has put in place aligned policies, programs and interventions to implement the strategy.
- _Advanced_: the country has formulated and implemented a comprehensive equity promotion strategy.  Some countries in this category even have a dedicated equity promotion agency.

The countries surveyed were assigned to one of the four stages based on the findings of the survey regarding the following key questions:

- Is equity a prominent part of the higher education development strategy?
- Has the country explicitly formulated an equity promotion strategy for higher education?  How comprehensive is the strategy?
- Are all relevant equity target groups included?
- Have concrete equity targets been defined?
- Has the country put in place clear policies and programs to implement the equity strategy?
- Has the country maintained the course over the years?
- Has the country committed a significant share of public resources to implement its equity agenda?
- Does the country have a dedicated equity promotion agency / institution?
- Are equity targets being carefully monitored?
- Does quality assurance include equity dimensions in the review process of higher education institutions?

*Graph 5 and Table 10 show the results of this benchmarking exercise, which is a first attempt at comparing equity policies internationally from the viewpoint of comprehensiveness and consistency. The findings are of course tentative, considering the limited information available in English for some of the countries surveyed.[12]*

*Graph 5 – Overall Benchmarking Results*
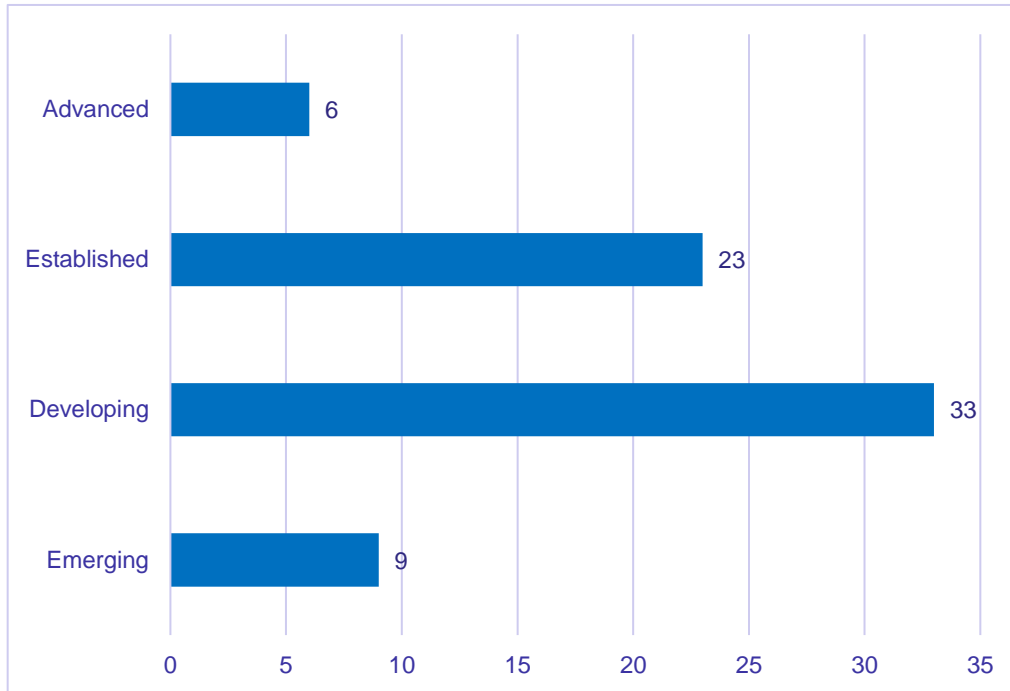


Most countries fall into the second or third category (developing or established). The distinction between the two is not due principally to the wealth of the countries concerned. As a matter of fact, the "established" category includes several developing countries that may not be able to devote the same amount of resources as OECD economies but they have fairly comprehensive policies to promote equity in higher education.

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*[12] The research team tried to validate the results of the survey, as much as possible, by sharing the findings with experts in the countries involved. In the countries for which the validation could not take place, the research team may have missed relevant information that was not available online or could not be found through secondary sources.*

*Table 10 – Degree of Maturity of Equity Promotion Policies*

| Countries | Emerging | Developing | Established | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Afghanistan | | √ | | |
| Argentina | | √ | | |
| Australia | | | | √ |
| Austria | | | √ | |
| Bangladesh | | √ | | |
| Bolivia | | | √ | |
| Brazil | | | √ | |
| Cambodia | | √ | | |
| Canada | | | √ | |
| Chile | | | √ | |
| China | | √ | | |
| Colombia | | | √ | |
| Costa Rica | | √ | | |
| Côte d'Ivoire | | √ | | |
| Cuba | | | | √ |
| Denmark | | | √ | |
| Dominican Republic | | √ | | |
| Ecuador | | √ | | |
| Egypt | √ | | | |
| El Salvador | | √ | | |
| England | | | | √ |
| France | | | √ | |
| Georgia | | √ | | |

| Countries | Emerging | Developing | Established | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ghana | | | √ | |
| Guatemala | | √ | | |
| Guinea | | √ | | |
| Haiti | √ | | | |
| Hong Kong | | √ | | |
| Hungary | | √ | | |
| India | | | √ | |
| Indonesia | | √ | | |
| Ireland | | | | √ |
| Israel | | | √ | |
| Japan | | √ | | |
| Kenya | | √ | | |
| Kyrgyzstan | | √ | | |
| Laos | √ | | | |
| Liberia | √ | | | |
| Malawi | | | √ | |
| Malaysia | | | √ | |
| Mauritius | | √ | | |
| Mexico | | | √ | |
| Morocco | | √ | | |
| Myanmar | √ | | | |
| Netherlands | | | √ | |
| New Zealand | | | | √ |
| Nicaragua | √ | | | |
| Nigeria | | √ | | |

| Countries | Emerging | Developing | Established | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Norway | | | √ | |
| Pakistan | | √ | | |
| Panama | | √ | | |
| Paraguay | √ | | | |
| Peru | | √ | | |
| Romania | | | √ | |
| Russia | | √ | | |
| Scotland | | | | √ |
| Senegal | | √ | | |
| Sierra Leone | √ | | | |
| South Africa | | | √ | |
| South Korea | | √ | | |
| Spain | | | √ | |
| Sri Lanka | | √ | | |
| Thailand | | √ | | |
| Tunisia | | | √ | |
| Uganda | | √ | | |
| United States | | | √ | |
| Uruguay | | √ | | |
| Venezuela | | | √ | |
| Vietnam | | √ | | |
| Wales | | | √ | |
| Zimbabwe | √ | | | |

The countries that appear as "emerging" from an equity policy viewpoint are essentially fragile states that have had neither the resources nor the political stability necessary to elaborate and sustain solid equity policies for higher education over the long run.

The few nations labeled as "advanced" show a great degree of consistency over time in terms of comprehensive strategy, policies, goals and targets, and alignment between their equity goals and the range of instruments—financial and non-monetary—used to promote equity in higher education. Most of these countries are relatively rich Commonwealth countries with mature higher education systems, meaning that access is less of an issue than in developing countries, and that they have been able to pay more attention to the obstacles to success faced by students from underrepresented groups. The other nation included in the list is Cuba, which is the only socialist country that has consistently put a great emphasis on equity since the 1959 revolution.

Overall, Southeast Asian countries do not appear to see equity in higher education as a major policy responsibility of government, even in former socialist countries such as China, Laos and Vietnam. This may reflect the priority given to economic development and innovation considerations. When China introduced tuition fees in undergraduate education in the late 1990s, the country did not have any financial aid mechanism in place. Today, Vietnam has policies in place to develop and upgrade its university system in terms of improved quality and strengthened research. But it has one of the lowest levels of public investment in higher education (0.4%), with the expectation that public universities can become self-sustaining through high tuition fees. While the government is making serious efforts to boost the representation of students from ethnic groups in rural and remote areas, few public resources are available to remove the monetary obstacles faced by low-income students.

Looking at the countries surveyed that have a federal political system reveals that they tend to have difficulties in articulating comprehensive equity policies at the national level, as illustrated by the examples of Canada, Nigeria and the United States. Australia and Brazil seem to be the exception, with a national department of higher education that has succeeded in better aligning national and state level policies.

In general, it is difficult to isolate any single factor that determines and explains the degree of maturity of a country's equity policy. For example, the analysis of governance frameworks and equity policies of the countries surveyed does not seem to reveal any noticeable difference in equity policies that could be easily linked to differences in governance setups. The only relevant observation is that advanced countries sometimes have a dedicated agency to elaborate equity policies, coordinate their implementation and monitor their impact against concrete targets.

In all cases, assessing the comprehensiveness and depth of equity policies formulated and implemented by countries requires looking at the combination of factors linked to the questions asked earlier and their articulation in a comprehensive, standalone policy document that spells out the nation's objectives for offering greater opportunities of access and success to all segments in its population, especially the underrepresented groups, and then translates them into concrete plans that are well funded.

Consistency over time is also important. The survey found several Latin American countries (Colombia, Mexico, Peru) with quite comprehensive equity policies for higher education that were even aligned with the nation's overall equity strategy for the entire nation. But their efforts were not pursued in a systematic and consistent way over time because of frequent changes in government and a lack of institutional continuity.

Inclusion of equity considerations into a country's quality assurance criteria and process, and monitoring capacity of equity policies are also important factors. Table 11 presents the results of the survey in that respect. Western Europe is the region with the highest proportion of countries combining attention to equity dimensions in their quality assurance process and solid monitoring systems of equity results in higher education. This may reflect growing focus on the social dimensions of higher education as part of the Bologna agenda (Curaj et al., 2018).

*Table 11 – Monitoring of Equity Policies and Reliance on Quality Assurance*

| Category / Region | Frequency of Countries who Monitor Equity only | Frequency of countries who include equity in QA only | Frequency of countries who do both QA and Monitoring) |
|---|---|---|---|
| East Asia (11) | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Eastern Europe & Central Asia (5) | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Latin America and Caribbean (19) | 0 | 7 | 4 |
| Middle East & North Africa (4) | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| North America (2) | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Pacific (2) | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| South Asia (5) | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Sub-Saharan Africa (13) | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Western Europe (10) | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| Total (71) | 3 | 13 | 9 |

Finally, the study confirms the observation that countries sometimes make changes to their equity policies without judiciously assessing the long-term consequences of their decisions.

This does not necessarily happen as the result of a careful evaluation of what works and what needs adjustment or improvement, but for ideological reasons, because of an economic downturn, after a change in government, or under the pressure of student protests.  The sharp reduction in public subsidies at the state level, suffered by many universities and community colleges throughout the United States since the 2007-2008 financial crisis, has significantly constrained the ability of public higher education institutions to offer affordable tuition fee, resulting in a greater student loan debt burden.  Box 1 provides illustrations of this phenomenon through three recent examples from Chile, Colombia and South Africa.

*Box 1 - The Road to Hell is Paved with Good Intentions*

*In Chile, what started as a request by secondary school students that their free transport pass be extended from 10 months to the entire calendar year evolved into a full-blown confrontation between university students and the entire government over the students' demand for free higher education for all.  It shaped the 2013 presidential election campaign and has dominated the government agenda since.  Ironically, even though Chile was the only Latin American country charging high tuition fees, its higher education system was relatively more equitable than others in the region, including the Brazilian one, where students—usually from rich families who good afford good private high schools—access the most prestigious, highly selective, tuition-free public universities. This was due to the fact that Chile had put in place a comprehensive program of scholarships and student loans for needy students.  The government could have addressed the students' demands by improving the financial aid schemes that were in place to protect students from excessive loan burden, which was one of the triggers of student unrest.  Instead, it opted for eliminating fees in the public and subsidized private universities, thereby abandoning some of the most innovative features of its higher education system.  The new policy, which discriminates against poor students enrolled in private institutions, may compromise the long-term financial sustainability of the system.*

*In the Colombian case, a new Minister (of the same presidential administration) decided to introduce a scholarship scheme for poor students, which has put in jeopardy the long-standing student loan system.  Called Ser Pilo Paga ("good students will be rewarded"), the new scheme offers a full scholarship to low-income students with excellent academic results in Saber-11, the national test used for admission to universities.  Beneficiaries of Ser Pilo Paga can choose in any accredited university; most of them have elected to enroll in one of the most selective and expensive private universities.  While, taken on its own, the scheme has merits as a powerful instrument to help low-income students, it has been widely criticized for taking budgetary resources away from the public universities and*

*undermining the financial viability of ICETEX, Colombia's student loan agency—actually the first-ever such institution in the world (created in 1951), which has served under-represented students well over the years.*

*In South Africa, President Zuma ceded to student pressure and resolved to eliminate fees after two years of harsh protests. In December 2017, as he was being ousted from his leadership position by the ANC, he announced his decision against the advice of the Special Commission (Hehe Commission) that he had himself appointed to make recommendations. Since then, the Treasury has been struggling to find the budgetary resources to implement the new policy. All students from households with less than 350,000 Rands are eligible for free tuition. That is all students, except students enrolled in private institutions, because of the democratic government's ideological aversion to the private sector. As a result, students from black townships such as Soweto, whose family income make them eligible for free tuition in principle, are excluded from the new policy, a sadly ironic outcome in a country strongly opposed to apartheid.*

*Source: Salmi, 2014; and the author's own observations while working in South Africa in the past two years.*

# 6. The Role of Inter-Governmental Organizations

The survey also included nine international and regional inter-governmental organizations comprised of UNESCO, the OECD, the World Bank, four regional development banks, the European Commission, and SEAMEO, the organization supporting the South East Asian Ministers of Education in the higher education area (Annex 2).  By nature, these organizations differ in terms of mandates, constituencies, resources and intervention modalities.

With the exception of the Asian Development Bank, the regional development banks do not focus on equity in higher education.  The African Development Work does not actually work in higher education.  The two banks that are active in Latin America, the Andean Development Bank (CAF) and the Inter-American Development (IDB), provide grants and loans for higher education, but this sub-sector is not a priority in their education portfolio and equity promotion is not a policy dimension that the two banks pursue actively.  However, some of their projects finance higher education interventions that have a positive equity impact through expansion of coverage (infrastructure, scholarships) and quality improvements.  By contrast, the Asian Development Bank regularly does policy work on equity in Central, South and Southeast Asia, provides technical assistance in this area, and finances higher education projects with equity components.

Among the nine organizations surveyed, the OECD and the World Bank play a global role in setting the policy agenda in higher education.  In that context, both organizations have done important and extensive work on equity, analyzing the determinants of disparities and exploring policy options to promote equity in higher education.  Equity features prominently in the assessments of national tertiary education systems that the two organizations conduct, sometimes jointly as was the case in Chile, Colombia, Egypt and Kazakhstan.  While the OECD does not finance interventions in its member and associated countries, it does provide some policy advice and technical assistance on higher education in general and equity in particular.

The World Bank has a large higher education portfolio in all the regions of the world where it is active, including Sub-Saharan Africa.  Its interventions combine policy advice, technical assistance and loans in support of higher education reform and development, with a heavy emphasis on equity, especially gender equality.  The World Bank also has a scholarship fund for postgraduate students from developing countries that actively targets young women.

Besides its convening power as a member state organization of the United Nations, UNESCO makes a crucial contribution through the formulation of normative instruments for higher education.  In the past decade, UNESCO has designed and implemented five regional Conventions on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications designed to ensure equity of access to higher education based on merit and the elimination of discrimination based on gender, nationality, religious/faith and socio-economic backgrounds.

SEAMEO, the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization, works through its Regional Center for Higher Education and Development (RIHED), to abolish barriers to inclusion in education.  Even though SEAMEO-RIHED does not have a formal equity promotion program, its "empowering higher education institutions" program helps universities in the member countries build their capacity to increase access, improve quality and strengthen research.  The program also allows higher education institutions to share good practices on how to improve access and success for students from vulnerable groups.

The European Commission supports higher education through policy advice to member states, facilitation of policy cooperation, and by funding programs for the development of higher education systems and institutions in member states.  The higher education agenda of the Commission has three pillars: addressing skills mismatches, strengthening research in member states universities, and working to eliminate social divisions, which prevent students from disadvantaged groups from entering and completing higher education.  To promote equity in higher education, the Commission seeks to build inclusive and connected systems by orienting Erasmus + support to "help HEIs in developing and implementing integrated institutional strategies for inclusion, gender equality and study success from admission to graduation."  It also supports the "recognition of qualifications held by refugees to facilitate their access to higher education" (EU, 2017).

The survey indicates that, apart from the Asian Development Bank, the regional banks tend to focus on basic education rather than investing in higher education.  Considering the importance of equity for social justice and economic development considerations, it would be important for the regional development banks to widen the scope of their interventions in support of developing a comprehensive education system and promoting equity at all levels, including higher education.

Table 12 (on page 49) summarizes the various modalities of intervention corresponding to each of the inter-governmental organizations included in the survey.

*Table 12 – Modalities of Interventions*

| Organizations | Policy Setting & Regulatory Frameworks | Technical Assistance | Grants | Loans | Scholarships to Individuals |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| African Development Bank | | √ | | | |
| Andean Development Bank | | √ | √ | √ | |
| Asian Development Bank | √ | √ | √ | √ | |
| European Commission | √ | √ | √ | | |
| Interamerican Development Bank | | √ | √ | √ | |
| OECD | √ | √ | | | |
| SEAMEO | | √ | | | |
| UNESCO | √ | √ | | | √ |
| World Bank | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |

# 7. Conclusion

*"The potential consequences of failure include the corrosion of aspirations,
damage to social fabrics, the loss of leadership and other skills that are critical
to cohesive societies and the unforgivable waste of human potential."*
*Oxford Emerging Markets Symposium (2012)*

It would be hard to find a Minister of Higher Education anywhere on the planet who said that she/he did not care about equity.  The survey conducted for this study shows clearly that, with the exception of a few fragile states recovering from a natural catastrophe or a major political crisis, equity is a priority theme in the higher education agenda of governments.  On paper, most nations are committed to ensuring equality of access and success in higher education, aware that opportunities for members of disadvantaged groups are in most cases still markedly less than those of mainstream groups.

This official commitment reflects the fact that young people all over the world are keenly aware that opportunities for professional success and social mobility are directly linked to opportunities in higher education.  Sometimes, their keenness to take advantage of these opportunities takes tragic forms, from waves of suicides of Mexican high school graduates who could not enter public university (where studies are free of charge) to fatal stampedes in Afghanistan and South Africa on the day of university registration, to recent street protests in Mauritania because of the government's decision to limit access to university to students younger than 25 years.[13]

However, beyond the official statements about equity, which tend to reflect commonly shared principles of inclusion, the survey found a wide range of situations when it came to translating these principles into actual policies and interventions.  For instance, as far as the definition of equity target groups is concerned, while most nations focus on the barriers faced by traditional equity target groups, including students from low-income households, girls, members of ethnic minorities, and students with disabilities, several countries have added non-traditional equity groups reflecting the social transformation of these countries.  The victims of sexual and gender violence, members of the LGBT community, refugees of all kinds (internally and externally displaced), children of people affected by historical violence, are examples of these new categories of equity target groups.  The survey also highlighted much variety in the choice of instruments used to promote equity, beyond the traditional financial aid mechanisms—grants and student loans—that are widely available.

A few findings are of concern.  Firstly, a number of countries are still paying only "lip service" to the equity agenda, meaning that, beyond the general policy statements about expansion of access, governments do not spell out clear equity promotion strategies, define concrete targets to enroll and support students in vulnerable conditions, mobilize sufficient resources

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[13] http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20181016131401818

targeted to underrepresented groups, and put in place actions to help students complete their degrees.  In several countries, especially in Latin America, this problem is compounded by the lack of continuity in policies over time.  The common practice of replacing entire ministerial teams with new people each time there is a change of government (or sometimes only after the arrival of a new minister) results in a lack of stability in policy objectives and a loss of institutional capacity to carry out equity interventions in the long term.

Secondly, many countries' definition of equity policies is still traditional in focus, with a heavy emphasis on financial aid as principal instrument, and a tendency to look at access barriers instead of promoting interventions to boost the chances of success of students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are enrolled in higher education institutions.  Gender equity is a case in point.  Many countries assume that gender parity has been achieved because the proportion of girls enrolled is equal to the proportion of male students, or sometimes even higher.  While this is an important first step, severe gender disparities persist almost everywhere in specific STEM programs such as engineering education, and women are generally under-represented in senior academic jobs and in university leadership positions.

Thirdly, many countries still adopt a narrow definition of equity groups.  As a result, the existence of an equity group that suffers from neglect or discrimination does not translate into official recognition and actual compensatory policies.  This may happen by neglect—for example people with disabilities are often treated as the "invisible" population—, lack of voice of the concerned groups, or political reasons.  Minority ethnic groups are the frequent victims of these "blind spots", as governments may see the recognition of their rights as a threat to the power, prestige or resources or the dominant group.

On the positive side, the countries that are most advanced in their policy commitment on behalf of providing equal opportunities of access and success in higher education have a comprehensive equity strategy—sometimes even a dedicated agency—, and they seek to ensure consistency over time in terms of alignment among policy objectives, improvement targets for various equity groups, resources, and quality assurance criteria.  Among all the countries surveyed, Australia, Cuba, England, Ireland, New Zealand and Scotland stand out in that respect.

In addition, the survey identified two promising trends.  Firstly, a growing number of countries have realized the importance of combining both financial and non-monetary interventions to remove all barriers faced by students coming from disadvantaged groups in a comprehensive way.  To use the classification of education policies proposed by the OECD in its 2015 study on "Making Reforms Happen", countries are moving from untargeted "content" policies focusing on a single policy lever to "comprehensive" and "targeted" reforms that represent an all-inclusive approach in support of the various equity target groups in any given country (OECD, 2015).

Secondly, a few governments have begun to complement the direct support offered to students with incentives for the universities themselves, as a means of pressuring the latter into taking a more proactive role in improving access and success opportunities.  This is achieved by incorporating an equity indicator into the funding formula or setting up earmarked funds for equity interventions that universities can benefit from.  Including equity-related

criteria in the quality assurance process is another important way of encouraging higher education institutions to take the access and success of underrepresented groups seriously.

Thirdly, an interesting observation arises from the fact that, in a few cases (Brazil and India), government passed policy measures inspired by initiatives coming from the universities themselves, for example in the areas of positive discrimination in favor of underprivileged ethnic groups and support to the LGBT student community.  Similarly, in Colombia, the regional center program was born from the initiative of a few universities that set up such centers in their region of implantation.

This survey of national equity policies in higher education barely scrapped the surface of the issues and challenges involved in seeking to improve opportunities for access and success at the post-secondary level.  By design, it focused on reviewing government strategies, policies and plans but it did not touch upon the degree of effectiveness of the various policies formulated and implemented, nor did it attempt to measure their actual impact on the concerned equity target groups.  This could perhaps be the main focus of the next phase of investigation of equity policies in higher education, looking at which interventions are most successful, and under what conditions.
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# 9. Annexes

## Annex 1 – List of Countries Reviewed

| East Asia | Sub-Saharan Africa | Latin America and the Caribbean | Western Europe | North Africa and Middle East |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cambodia | Côte d'Ivoire | Argentina | Austria | Egypt |
| China | Ghana | Bolivia | Denmark | Israel |
| Hong Kong (China) | Guinea | Brazil | England | Morocco |
| Indonesia | Kenya | Chile | France | Tunisia |
| Japan | Liberia | Colombia | Ireland | |
| Laos | Malawi | Costa Rica | Netherlands | |
| Malaysia | Mauritius | Cuba | Norway | |
| Myanmar | Nigeria | Dominican Republic | Scotland | |
| South Korea | Senegal | Ecuador | Spain | |
| Thailand | Sierra Leone | El Salvador | Wales | |
| Vietnam | South Africa | Guatemala | | |
| | Uganda | Haiti | | |
| | Zimbabwe | Mexico | | |
| | | Nicaragua | | |
| | | Panama | | |
| | | Paraguay | | |
| | | Peru | | |
| | | Uruguay | | |
| | | Venezuela | | |
| Eastern Europe and Central Asia | North America | Pacific | South Asia | |
| Georgia | Canada | Australia | Afghanistan | |
| Hungary | United States | New Zealand | Bangladesh | |
| Kyrgyzstan | | | India | |
| Romania | | | Pakistan | |
| Russia | | | Sri Lanka | |

**Annex 2 – List of International Organizations Reviewed**

- African Development Bank (AfDB)
- Andean Development Bank (CAF)
- Asian Development Bank (ADB)
- European Commission
- Interamerican Development Bank (IDB)
- Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)
- Southeastern Asia Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO)
- United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO)
- World Bank

## Annex 3 – Template for National Higher Education Equity Policy

**Governance**
**Who is responsible for defining national policies in higher education?**

- Ministry of Education with a higher education department
- Ministry of Higher Education
- Buffer Body (University Grants Council, Higher Education Commission, etc.)
- Council of University Presidents / Rectors / Vice-Chancellors
- Others (specify)

**Higher Education Policy Documents**
**What are the current official documents defining the national higher education strategy / policies?**

- National Vision
- National Strategic Plan
- White Paper
- Higher Education Law (indicate what year)
- Others (specify)

**Equity in Policy Documents**
**What broad and specific equity objectives do the policy documents identify?**
**Which equity target groups are identified in the policy documents?**

- Low-income students
- Gender groups
- Minority groups (ethnic, religion, language, geographical location, age, migration background, refugee status, etc.)
- Students with disability
- Others (please specify)

**Does the country have concrete targets for the participation of specific equity groups? Is there a standalone policy document dedicated to equity promotion in higher education?**

**Are there specific anti-discrimination provisions?**

**What specific interventions and/or instruments of equity promotion are included in the official strategy and policy documents (monetary and non-monetary)?**

**Monetary Policy Instruments**

**What are the main financial instruments to promote equity?**

- No tuition fees or low fees in public institutions / No fees for certain groups
- Needs-based scholarships and grants / Other grants targeted for equity groups
- Student loans
- Equity-linked financial incentives built into the funding formula to allocate public resources to higher education institutions
- Others (please specify)

**Non-Monetary Policy Instruments**

**What are the main non-monetary instruments to promote equity?**

- Institutions set up in remote areas / Support from more advanced universities to institutions in remote areas / Distance education available to equity groups living in remote areas
- Specialized institutions targeting underrepresented groups
- Outreach and bridge programs
- Academic and career guidance and counseling
- Flexible pathways and transfers / Recognition of prior learning
- Reformed admission procedures / Affirmative action programs
- Retention programs
- Others (please specify)

**Financial Resources**

**What financial resources does the country devote to equity promotion measures?**

- Amount / amount per beneficiary
- Proportion of higher education budget

**Quality Assurance**

**Do the quality assurance criteria take equity elements into consideration?  In what way?**
**Monitoring and Evaluation**

- Who is responsible for monitoring the impact of equity promotion measures?
- What instruments, methods and data are in place to carry out the monitoring and evaluation activities?

**Dedicated Equity Promotion Agency**

**Does the country have an agency dedicated to equity promotion in higher education?**
- What are the responsibilities of this agency?
- What are the resources of this agency?
- Proportion of higher education budget?

## Annex 4 – Equity Policy Template for International Agencies

Higher Education Policy Documents
Does your agency have an official higher education strategy?

- Standalone higher education strategy
- Part of overall education strategy
- Others (specify)

Equity Policy Documents
What broad and specific equity objectives does the strategy document identify?
Is there a standalone equity promotion strategy for higher education?
Which equity target groups are identified in the strategy document(s)?

- Low-income students
- Gender groups
- Minority groups (ethnic, religion, language, geographical location, age, migration background, refugee status, etc.)
- Students with disability
- Others (please specify)

What specific interventions and/or instruments of equity promotion are recommended to partner countries in the official strategy document (monetary and non-monetary interventions)?

Monetary Policy Instruments
What are the main financial instruments to promote equity?

- No tuition fees or low fees in public institutions / No fees for certain groups
- Needs-based scholarships and grants
- Student loans
- Others (please specify)

Non-Monetary Policy Instruments
What are the main non-monetary instruments to promote equity?

- Outreach and bridge programs
- Academic and career guidance and counseling
- Recognition of prior learning Reformed admission procedures and/or affirmative action programs
- Specialized institutions targeting underrepresented groups
- Retention programs
- Others (please specify)

Equity Interventions

What modalities and instruments does your agency rely on to promote equity in higher education in partner countries?

- Grants to government or institutions
- Loans
- Free technical assistance
- Reimbursable technical assistance
- Scholarships for individual beneficiaries
- Others (please specify)

Financial Resources
What financial resources does your agency devote to equity promotion programs/projects in higher education?

- Number of programs / projects / scholarships / studies / other modalities
- Total resources for equity
- Proportion of higher education budget