Addressing the challenges of the social dimension:

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Brief history of the social dimension in EHEA

- Absent from the Bologna Declaration, and first used in 2001 (Prague), following push from ESU (then ESIB)

- Defined in 2007 (London) "*the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations »*

- Next decade: calls for national policy and targets (eg *measurable targets for widening… and increasing participation of underrepresented groups*)

- 2018 Paris: shift to "*policies that support higher education institutions to fulfil their social responsibility and contribute to a more cohesive and inclusive society*"

- 2020: Adoption of *Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA"* -> **Gamechanger**

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Why is social dimension policy needed?

Ex 1: Impact of parental educational background

*Share of first-cycle new entrants with highly educated parents*
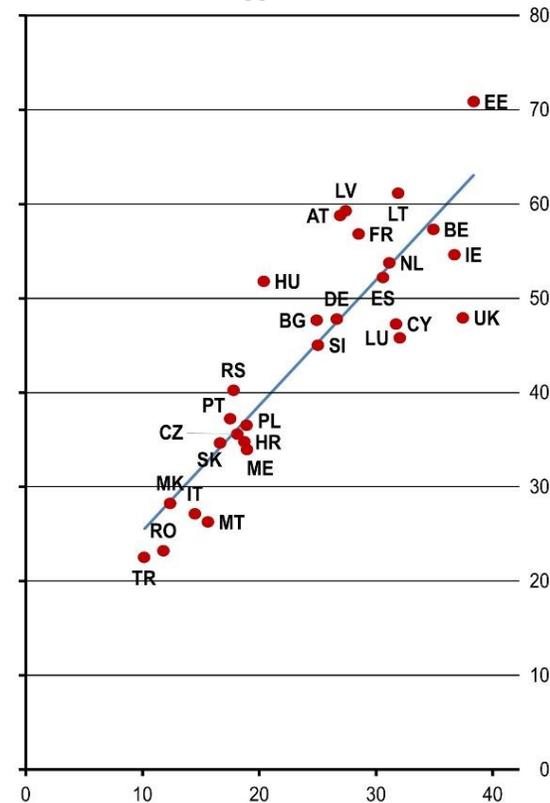
Share of population aged 45 – 65 (parents cohort) with high educational attainment

- Over-representation of students with highly educated parents
- (which means under-representation of students with medium/low education level)

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Why is social dimension policy needed?

- Ex 2: gender: female students by subject area
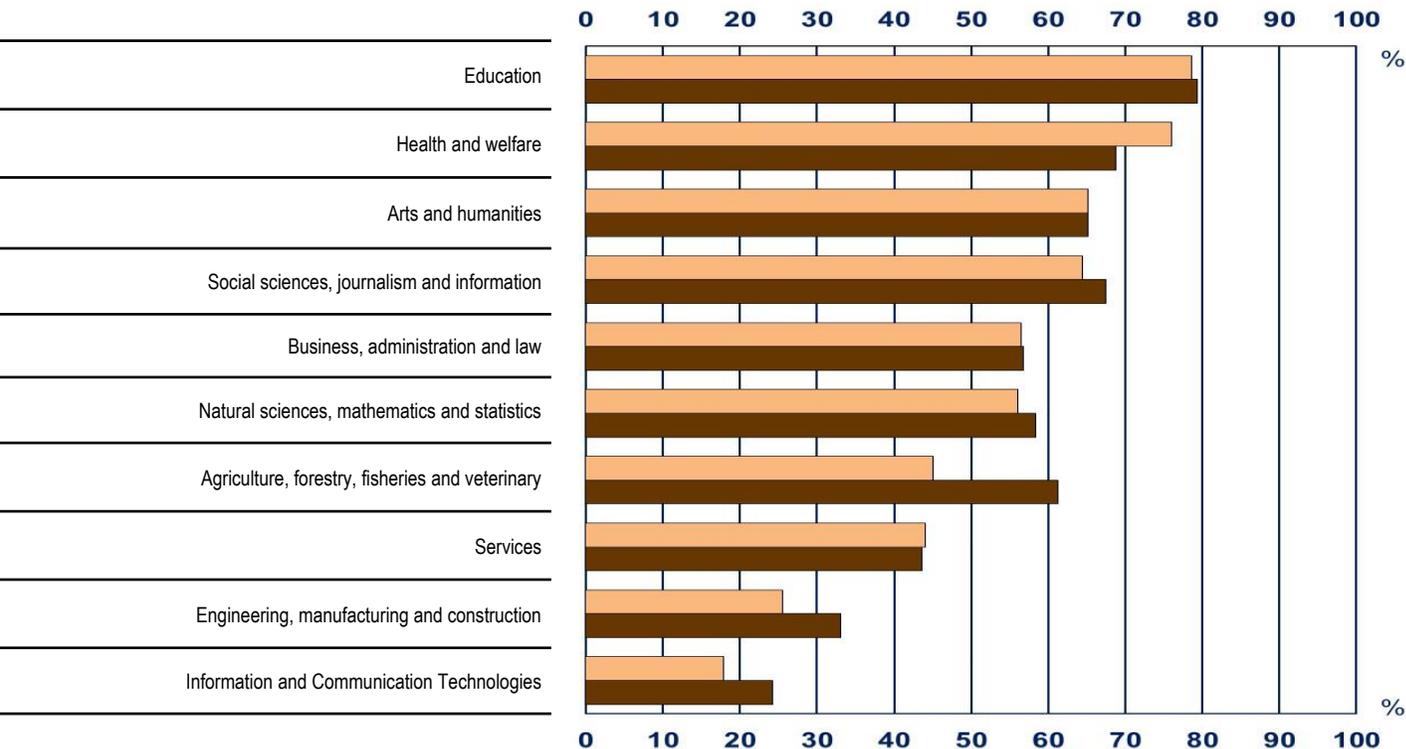
ISCED 6 (first cycle)
ISCED 7 (second cycle)

KEY POINTS

- **Strong** differentiation between study fields

- **Strongest over-representation of women (c80%)**

  in education, health

- **Strongest over-representation of men (c80%)**

  in ICT and engineering

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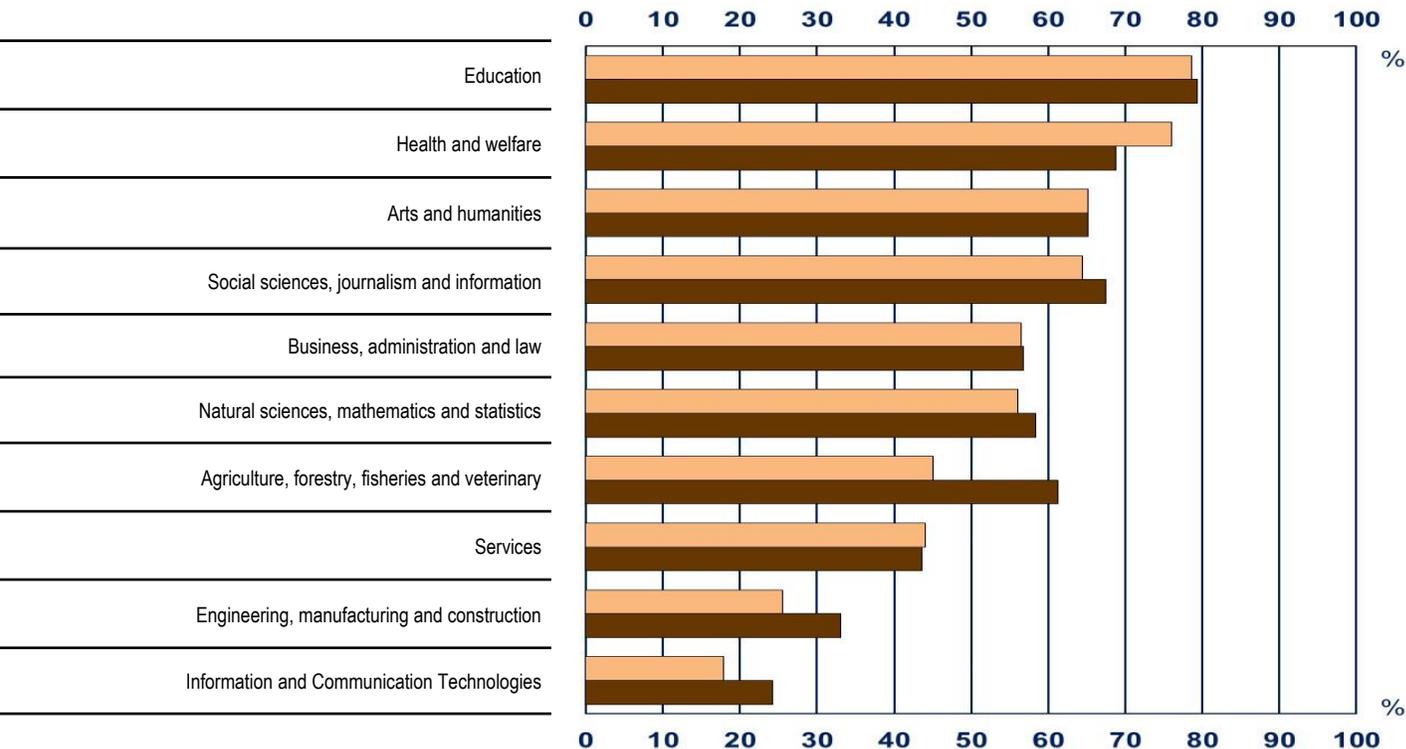- Ex 3: gender: female students by subject area

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- Ex 3: monitoring of student characteristics

	At entry	During studies	Graduation	After graduation
Gender	46	45	41	17
Age	44	43	39	17
Type and level of qualification prior to entry	43	23	19	9
Disability	24	31	15	3
Socio-economic status	21	28	12	5
Migrant status	13	14	9	3
Minority status	12	12	9	7
Other	12	14	11	7
No monitoring	4	2	5	16

Gender, age and qualifications are routinely collected at entry

General decline in attention to characteristics at different stages

Lack of concern for disability, socio-economic status, migrant/minority status

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Overall state of play?

- Inequity remains a strong feature of European higher education, and few countries have yet taken comprehensive action to address this…

- Covid pandemic has affected everyone, but impact has been more severe on the disadvantaged and vulnerable… (Research from Croatia/ESU)

- Energy and cost of living crisis now having an impact

-> Inequity is growing, and the future will be even more challenging

Action needed

- Positive change will take time – but will only happen if action is taken now..

- Engaged political approach putting equity as the central concern should be the key priority throughout education systems: from early childhood to adult education…

- We need to treat this an urgent, core challenge: not one among many priorities

Reasons for optimism…

- Principles and Guidelines cover all aspects of social dimension policy-making

- A roadmap to creating fair, equitable systems

- Agreed and adopted by all countries…

- So now, we just need to implement them ☺

A final thought…

- Equitable doesn't mean "the same for all"…

    "Fair, to some people, means everyone getting the same thing.

    But that's only fair if everyone begins at the same place and needs the same things to succeed"

    Todd Zakrajsek, University of North Carolina

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