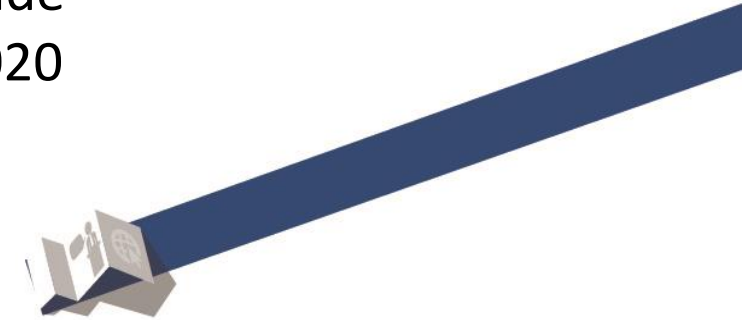




Social Equity in Access to Higher Education: How to Increase the Share of First-generation Students?

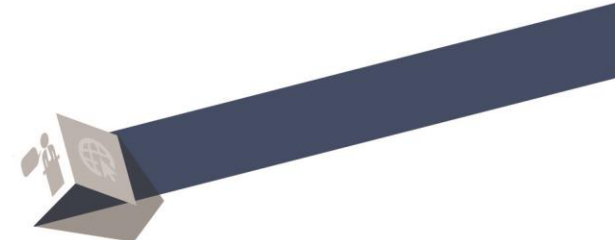
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Bulgarian Comparative Education Society
XVIII Annual International Conference
Educational Reforms Worldwide
Sofia, Bulgaria, 22-26 June 2020





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 - ❑ Methodology
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 - Access to higher education without formal qualifications
 - Preferential policies/ “affirmative action” programmes
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Introduction (1)

Background

The meeting of the European ministers of higher education, held in May 2007 in London can be defined as a turning point in the pan-European understanding of the goals and nature of higher education (HE).

The social dimension of HE was described as one of the priorities in the development of HE and all countries participating in the Bologna process were obliged to present their national strategies and policies with regard to the social dimension of HE, including explicit action plans.

Two of the objectives for the development of HE defined in the London Communication (2007) posed real challenges:

- ❑ to achieve a composition of students which reflects the diversity of the social composition of each country's population;
- ❑ the equality of educational opportunities should not be limited to the legislative abolition of discrimination, but should be interpreted as “effective equality” through the targeted support of the defined underprivileged groups.





Introduction (2)

- ❑ First-generation students (FGS) can be considered undoubtedly as one of the unprivileged groups in HE.
- ❑ FGS are commonly defined as “students at universities/colleges whose parents did not obtain a university/college degree” (Spiegler & Bednarek 2013: 318).
- ❑ Indeed, there is a huge academic research conducted on FGS (eg. Pascarella et al. 2004, Saenz et al. 2007; Soria & Stebleton 2012; Ford 2018). This research has shown that in many aspects FGS face some disadvantages compared to their counterparts (eg. in terms of their access to the system, academic engagement and outcomes) but has mainly focused on the American HE.
- ❑ The studies of FGS in Europe focus mainly on selected countries as case studies (eg. Ribeiro 2014 on Portugal and Bocsi 2020 on Hungary).

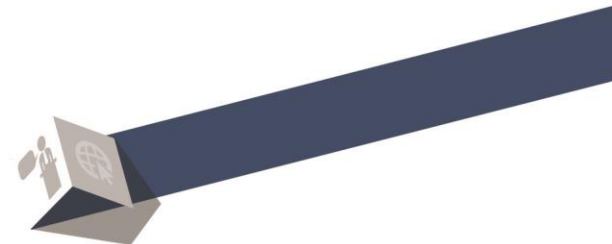




Introduction (3)

Aims

1. *to conceptualise social equity in access to HE;*
2. *to reveal the trends of social equity of FGS across European countries;*
3. *to discuss policies and practices for promoting social equity in access to HE.*



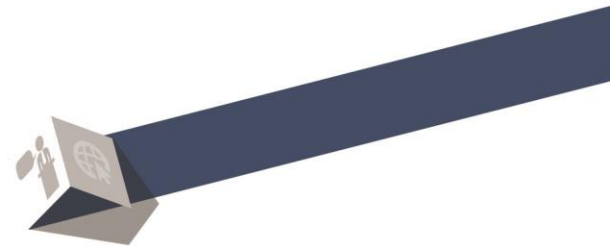


Theoretical considerations (1)

- ❑ There are different views about what is meant by social equity in (access to) HE, the direction of its change over time and the models to be used in measuring it.
- ❑ To a great extent differences in understanding social equity in HE reflect the variety of views on the very essence of social justice and how it can and should be conceptualised.

Among the contemporary perspectives on equity there are two very prominent:

- **the institutions-centred approach of John Rawls** (1971) – it is concentrated on identifying perfectly-just institutions and, in its essence, is arrangement-focused.
- **the human-centred approach of Amartya Sen** (2009) – it adheres to the idea that justice may be achieved on the basis of making comparisons between different ways in which people's lives may be led, and thus ascertaining which one is more or less just.





Theoretical considerations (2)

We conceptualise **social equity in HE** by differentiating two aspects of participation in it: inclusion and fairness (Marginson 2011) and argue that they need to be analysed separately for different types of HE and different social groups.

INCLUSION

- Increase of the participation of one social group in HE regardless of the achievements of other social groups
- Growth in the absolute number of people

FAIRNESS

- Access to HE does not depend on circumstances like social status, gender or ethnic background
- Proportional distribution of student places between different social groups



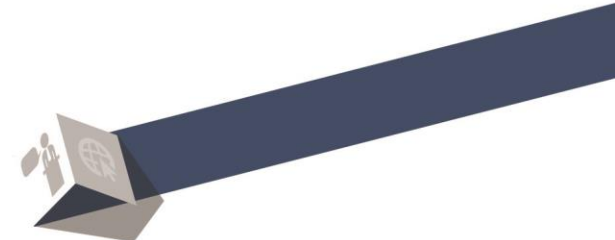


Methodology

Data

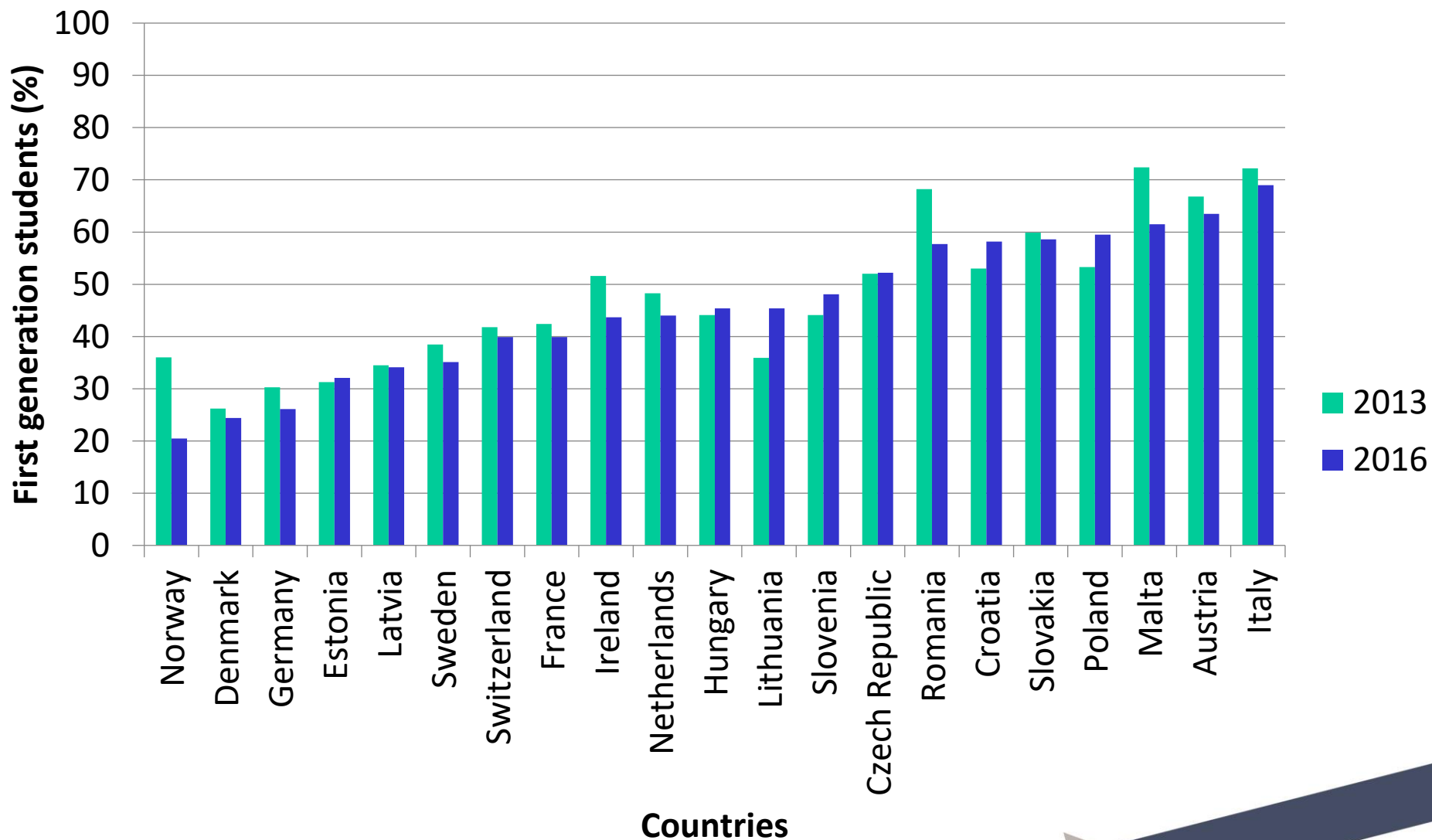
- ❑ EUROSTUDENT survey - rounds V (2012-2015) and VI (2016-2018) and the official statistics (Eurostat)
- ❑ European Social Survey Round 9 (2018/2019) Rotating module which includes question on fairness of educational opportunities

Measures

- ❑ **Inclusion** – % of FGS (those whose parents' educational level is ISCED 0-4).
 - ❑ **Fairness** – % of FGS divided by the % of people aged 45-64 with levels ISCED 0-4 in the general population.
 - ❑ **Perception of fairness regarding educational opportunities.** QG4: *Compared to other people in the country you live, I have had a fair chance of achieving the level of education I was seeking.* 11 point scale from 0 *Does not apply at all* to 10 *Applies completely* (regression coefficients)
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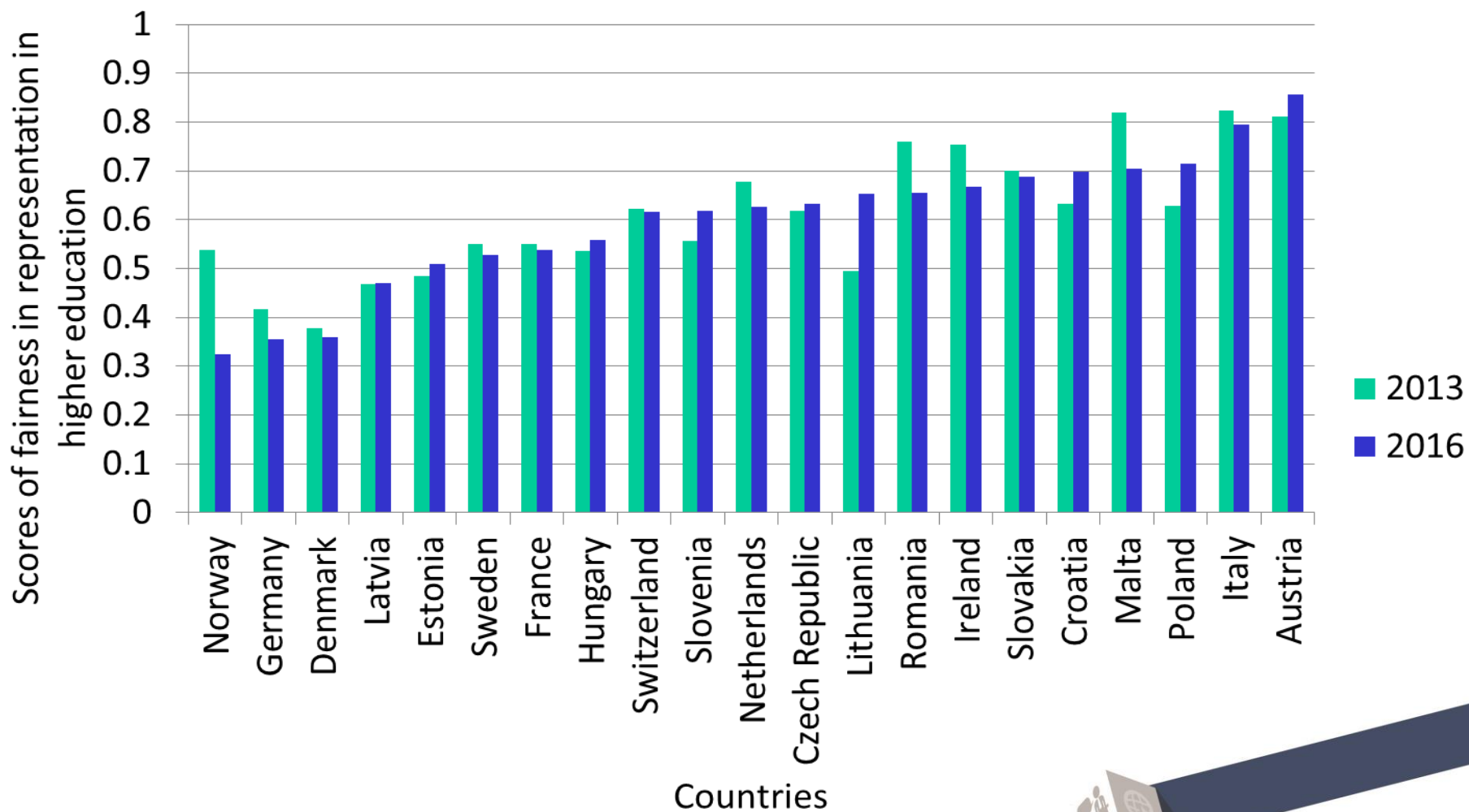
Inclusion of FGS in 2013 and 2016 (%)

Source: EUROSTUDENT V & VI



Fairness in representation in HE of FGS in 2013 and 2016

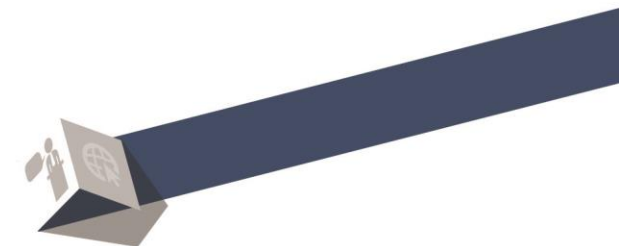
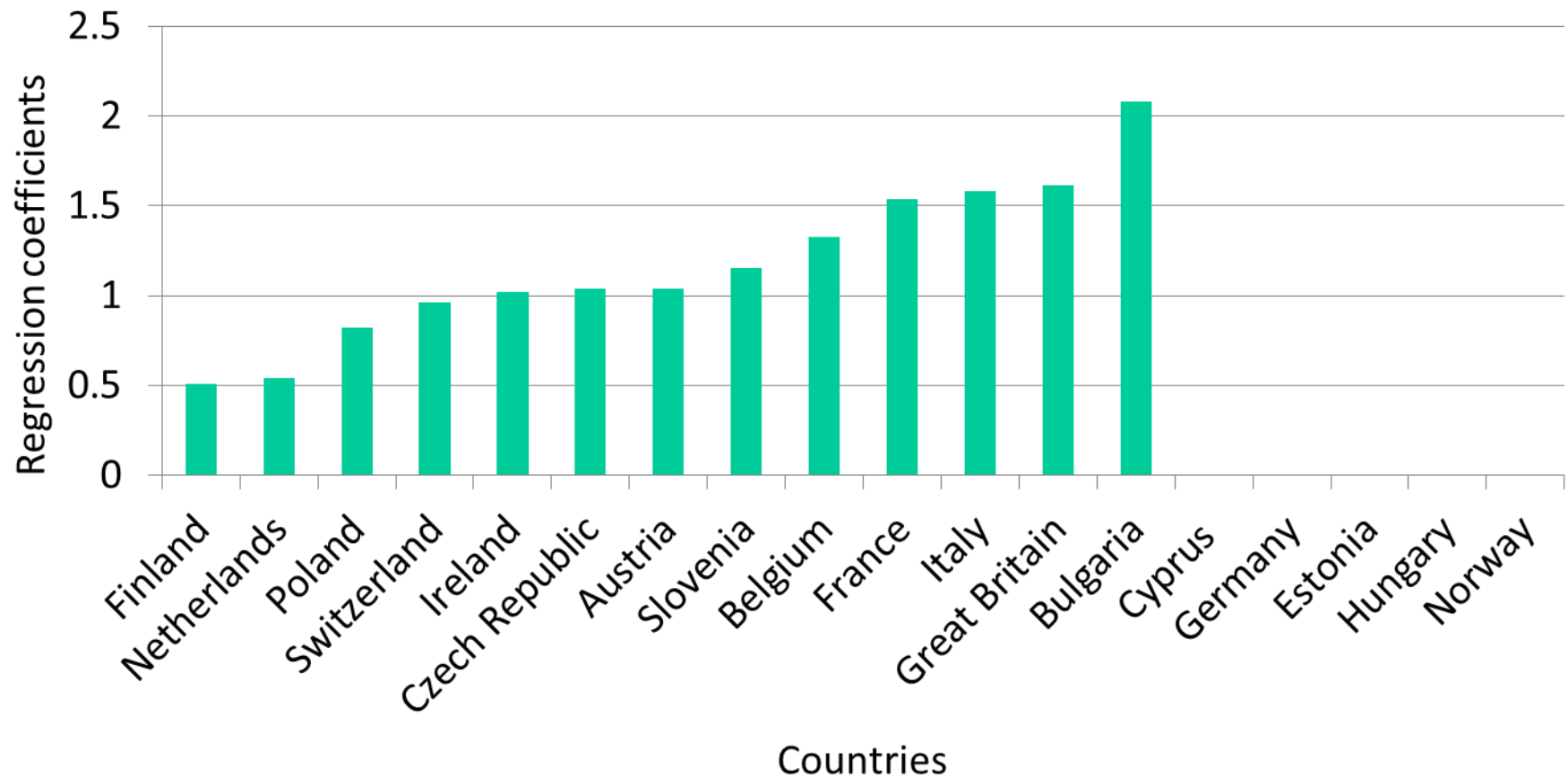
Source: EUROSTUDENT V & VI





Regression coefficients measuring the effect of second-generation vs FGS on the perception of fairness of educational opportunities

Source: European Social Survey (2018/2019)





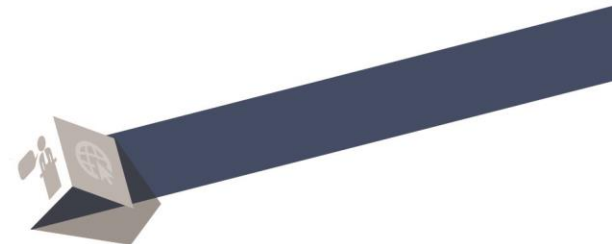
Equality of educational opportunities

Liberal concept

- ❑ excludes the use of preferential policies in the form of quotas
- ❑ allows "soft" forms of support - scholarships, preparatory courses, active advertising campaigns, incentives for universities

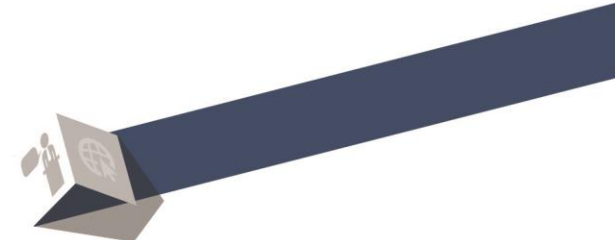
Arguments against the liberal concept:

- ❑ A radical meritocratic society would create deep inequalities of the outcomes, which would threaten social cohesion (Anthony Giddens)
- ❑ Meritocracy is the replacement of one principle of stratification with another (Daniel Bell) - "fair meritocracy"
- ❑ Meritocracy is a democratic idea, but is unfair (John Rawls) - "difference principle": the inequalities by birth are undeserved and should be compensated



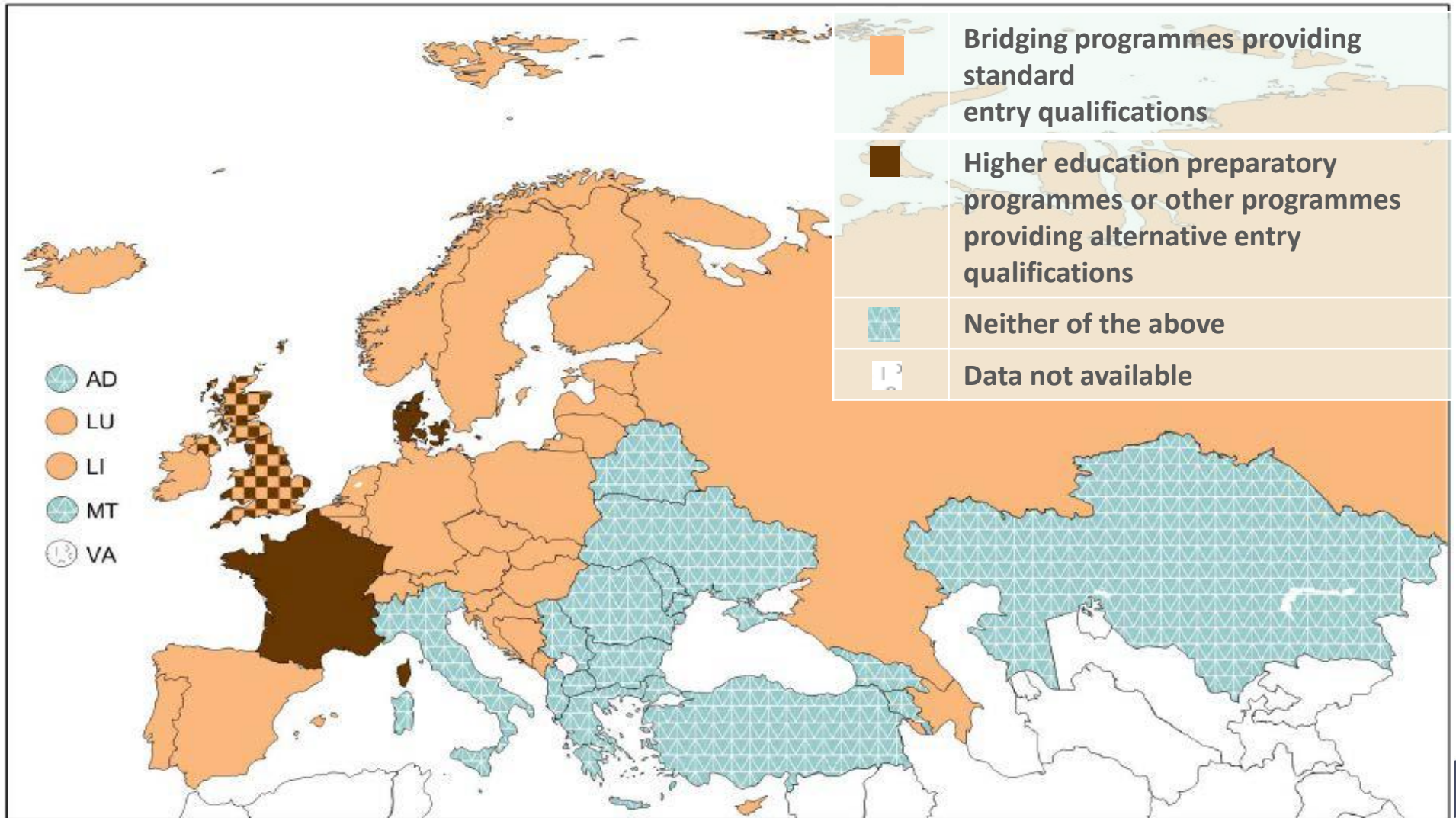


European policies for widening participation

- ❑ The Yerevan Communiqué, 2015 - by 2020 to achieve an EHEA where “higher education is contributing effectively to build inclusive societies”.
 - ❑ A new strategy on Widening Participation for Equity and Growth, 2015.
 - ❑ **The main message:** widening participation is not only about widening access, but also about ensuring that those who enter higher education complete it successfully.
 - ❑ Countries differ with regard to the policies and measures used for widening access to higher education.
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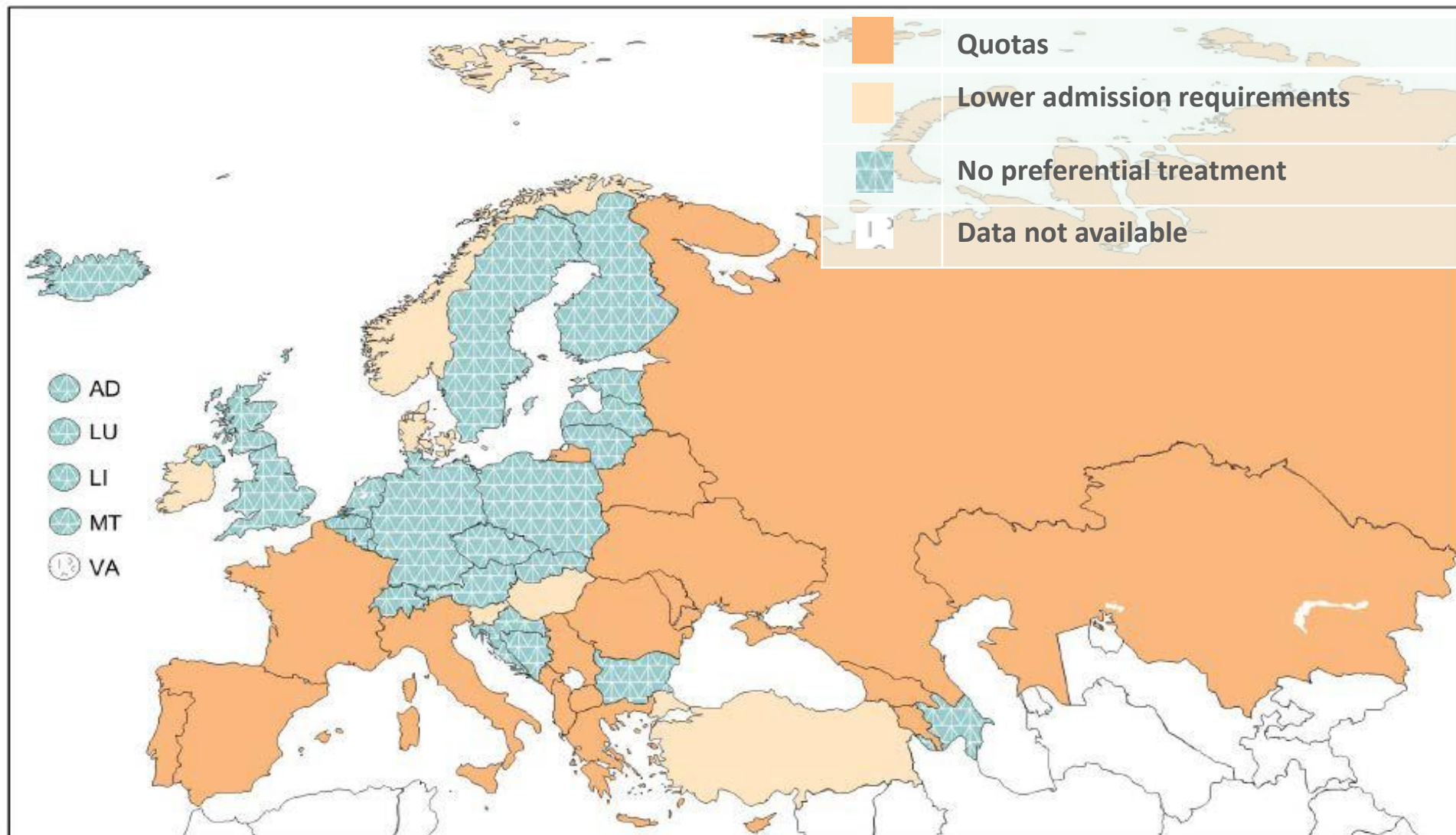
Second-chance routes to first-cycle HE: standard or alternative qualifications, 2016/17

Source: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2018: 175)



Supporting the access of under-represented groups through standard entry routes: preferential treatment, 2016/17

Source: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2018: 173)





The “Affirmative action”/ preferential programmes

There are different arguments in support and against the preferential policies (eg. Glazer 1987; Nieli 1991; Abram 1997; Lipset 1993; Steele 1997; Pojman 1997; Bowen & Bok 1998).

Arguments in support of preferential policies:

- compensation for injustices suffered in the past
- mechanism for the creation of diverse social environment
- creation of role models for minority groups
- challenging of existing social stereotypes

Arguments against preferential policies:

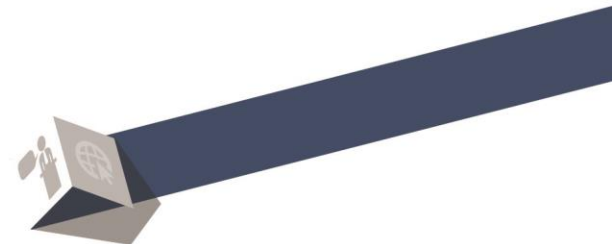
- reverse discrimination
- stimulate mediocrity and incompetence
- increase the syndrome of inferiority in the minority groups
- difficult to establish and justify the borders of implementation of preferential policies



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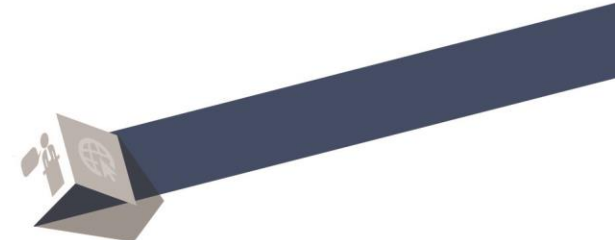
The social dimension of HE – academic and/or social problem?

“And yet freedom will not suffice. . . You cannot free a man who has been shackled in chains for years, to take him to the starting line of the race and tell him “You are free to compete with others”, and to believe that you have done the right thing. It is not just enough to open windows of opportunity. All our citizens must be able to go through these windows. . . We do not strive only for... equality as a right and as a theory, but as a fact and as an outcome” (President Lyndon Johnson, 1967)





Conclusion

- ❑ Increasing the share of first-generation students is a way for widening participation in HE and promoting social justice.
 - ❑ In order to increase equity in higher education it is better to rely on:
 - ✓ soft measures - scholarships, preparatory courses, active advertising and outreach campaigns, incentives for universities
 - ✓ long-term strategies;
 - ✓ structural changes such as making organisational structures in HE institutions more transparent instead of offering special support programmes only for FGS (Spiegler & Bednarek 2013);
 - ✓ both specific social policies in and outside the sphere of higher education.
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Acknowledgments

The authors gratefully acknowledge the support of the project “Dynamics of inequalities in participation in higher and adult education: A comparative social justice perspective” – JustEdu (2020–2024), funded by the National Science Programme Vihren of the National Science Fund (No. KP-06-DV-2, 16.12.2019), Bulgaria: <https://justedu2020.eu/>





THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

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