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**Trends in International Mobility of Students  
2000-2016 (EU, UK and the US)**



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## Executive Summary

After decades of liberalization of trade and capital, in the beginning of the new millennia, the focus is placed on the liberalization of movement of labor. These developments favor the mobility of young people in search of education and jobs outside of their birth countries. At the same time, these trends are also recognized as a tool for transfer of knowledge and skills across the nations favoring a more equal distribution of global wealth. The future looks promising, and yet distant, as many times, the international mobility of young people is challenged by the access to finances.

Today there is an emergence of two different paradigms when it comes to the role of higher education providers in the society. The first one, mainly present in the Anglo-Saxon countries (UK, US) perceives the higher education from a market point of view where students are recognized as the creators of demand. As a result, the cost of the Higher education is predominantly borne by the students, while the highest burden is placed on the shoulders of the international students. The US and the UK higher education systems are the main proponents of this paradigm. As a result, the available financial mechanisms for supporting international mobility of students in these countries are limited. It results into a decline in the US global share of international students at undergraduate level from 23% in 2000, to 14% in 2015, while the high share of financially supported graduate students and PhDs only serves towards maintaining the quality of the US educational offer and its attractiveness. Despite growth of international students in the US in absolute numbers, the growth does not follow the growth in the global international mobility, which on the long term may result into a decline of the attractiveness of the US and UK universities for international students, and could cause a decline in the attractiveness of these same universities for their home-based students, who might embrace the trend of international mobility shared by their global peers.

In contrast, the EU brings a new paradigm of the role of higher education institutions in the society, and despite the fear and concerns which changes can bring into the traditional systems, data support the sustainability and longevity of this paradigm. This paradigm sees students as the material, which is transformed during the process of higher education. Students are not the market; they are the product, while the market is the employers, the society at a large. The strong state support of the higher education in almost all EU countries accompanied with the Bologna process and the mechanisms under Erasmus + programme,

remove many of the obstacles for financing the international mobility of students. Tuition fees are symbolic; grants are readily available along with loans. The increasing numbers of international students at EU level serve not only as a tool for the creation of a common EU mind-set; they also support the various EU economies by directly supporting the mobility of labour. Data indicate that these mechanisms are effective; the main issue however is, whether the product, i.e. the student skills meets the demand of employers. Various reports and data indicate that this demand is not met, while at the same time youth unemployment is high. Many of the reports which have been identified as a source of data for the research imply that the skills gap is a quality issue of the Universities; however, the researchers believe that there is a need for primary research in order to objectively conclude whether this is the truth. Other reasons could cause this gap. The most important one concerns the state of development of the EU economy and whether this economy generates high value added jobs, or knowledge-incentive jobs, at a pace required by the supply of students from the HE Institutions.

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## **Introduction**

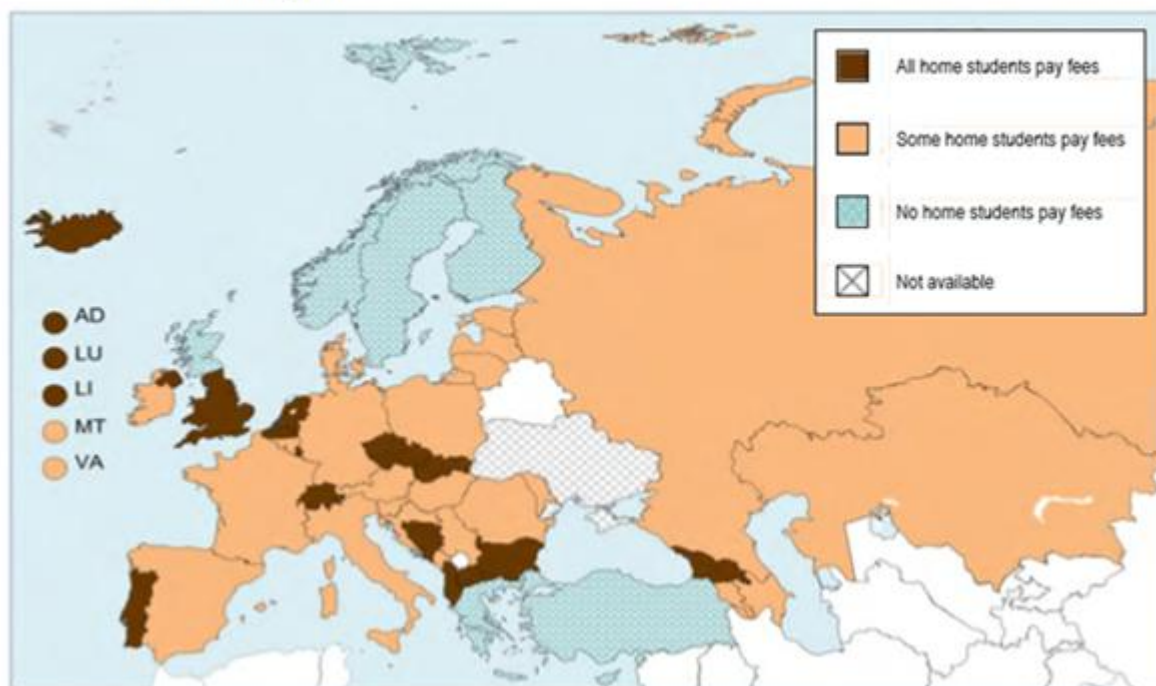
The 21<sup>st</sup> century is a time of many changes in the structure of economies and a period of the birth and formation of new generations of global citizens. As no generation before them, the millennials, surrounded by the globalization, carry the first seed of the global values, and the promise of the birth of a new, fairer world.

After decades of liberalization of trade and capital, in the beginning of the new millennia, the focus is placed on the liberalization of movement of labor. These developments favor the mobility of young people in search of education and jobs outside of their birth countries. At the same time, these trends are also recognized as a tool for transfer of knowledge and skills across the nations favoring a more equal distribution of global wealth. The future looks promising, and yet distant, as many times, the international mobility of young people is challenged by the access to finances.

## **EU Approach towards International Mobility in Higher Education**

European Union has a pragmatic and neoliberal approach towards funding for the higher education and supporting the international mobility of students in tertiary education. Tertiary education is state funded in all 28 member countries of the EU, with the use of symbolic tuition fees – Figure 1. At the same time, the EU aims at integrating the labour market across its member states, which argues for the need for harmonising the provision of higher education. Therefore, the Bologna process of harmonising the higher education provides for the same tuition for national and international students coming from the EHEA countries (countries that belong to the Bologna Process).

**Figure 1. Prevalence of fees in public higher education institutions for home students in the first cycle.**



Source: BFUG questionnaire.

### **The Bologna Process and Actual Costs of Mobility**

The Bologna Process is a European wide system which enabled the transition of the model of European higher education from the long and complex process of awarding first degree, into a flexible and shorter programs based on transferable credits and courses. The Bologna Process supports student mobility between different institutions and countries. From a financial point of view, the Bologna Process supports the mobility of students as it prohibits introducing different tuitions for students coming from the EHEA member states. As a result, the tax payers in one country pay for the higher education of the international student from another. In many instances, there is also a substantial state support coming from the student's country of origin in the form of scholarships and grants, as many talented students are seen as knowledge transfer agents.

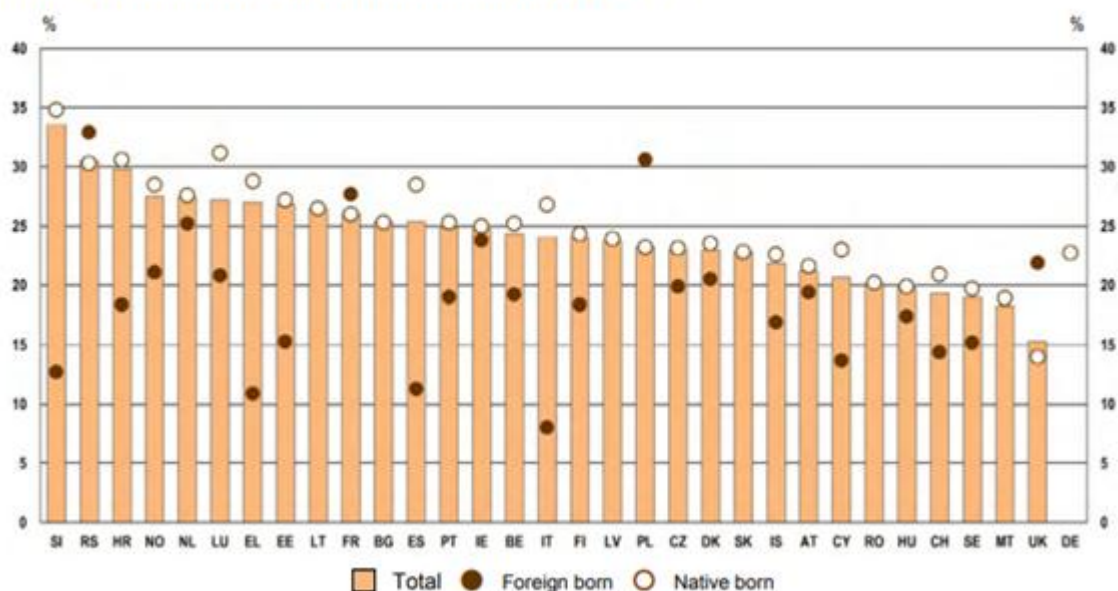
EU countries have integrated their educational structures allowing the system to work in all member and candidate countries of the EU and the EHEA. The empirical analysis of Ozkok (2017) using a panel data on 25 EU countries for the period 1998-2010 indicates that the Bologna dummy variable had no significant effect on public education financing, indicating that the integration goals under this process have not translated into increasing levels of

public expenditure for education of the member countries. Another question is whether they have resulted in asymmetries.

According to the latest EU report on the state of implementation of the Bologna process, the international students make 7-30% of all students, i.e. foreign born students at the HEI of the EHEA countries. Based on Eurostat (2010) report from 2010, Teichler (2012) focuses the analysis on the increase of the student mobility in the first 32 countries which accepted the Bologna process. In these countries in 1999, the number of foreign students was equal to 5.4% of the total student population in higher education. In 2015 the average number was 15%. It is difficult to assess, however, what is the percentage of international students from outside of the EU and EHEA countries compared to students of the EU member countries.

The total absolute growth of foreign students in each of the countries of EHEA has been impressive by 2013 (EC 2015). Already in 2007 it accounted for 53% of the overall growth of foreign students in the world. It argues that EU higher education has become more attractive to global students. In 2013, the highest percentage of foreign students can be found in Poland, the UK, and France – Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Participation Rates in tertiary education among persons aged 18-29, foreign-born, native-born and total population. 2013**



Despite symbolic tuition fees, the cost of mobility does not cover only tuition. Overall, the expenses are comprised out of tuition fees, living costs, and other living expenses. The main challenge in the mobility of students in the EU higher education are the high living costs in



some of the member countries, which discourage the movement of students from the low to the high income countries. Main sources of finance are:

- **Family support** - not relatively available for students coming from low income families (LSE, 2009).
- **Earnings while studying** – Students can earn while studying; however, this option is not favoured by the EU students and the Society, because the earnings are low and insignificant towards the costs of the education while the student is defocused from his studies;
- **Employers** – There are cases when companies invest in educating students towards their future employment; however, rarely do companies finance a mobility of the students while they are studying. Further as the labour markets favour mobility, majority of companies no longer see benefits in supporting the higher education of students as they are not certain that the student will work for them in the future.
- **Grants and loans** – These forms of financing international mobility of HE students are most prevailing in the EU. These grants cover tuition fees, costs of living and mobility i.e. travel costs. A good example is the Erasmus + Programme. These grants however are for short-term mobility – one semester or two, and the size of the grant cannot support the Bologna process benchmark of at least 20% mobile students by 2020. Apart grants and scholarships at EU level, there are also grants and scholarships at national and regional level. The selection criteria vary from a country to a country. For example in the Scandinavian countries, all grants are universal and require a minimum performance on the side of the student. Estonia provides grants for students in specific fields of study. In Greece, grants are provided on the base of merit and only excellent students receive grants. In Belgium, Ireland, Netherlands, Finland, the United Kingdom and Liechtenstein, grants are reserved for students, who demonstrate a financial need. Germany has a developed student loan system; however, grants are also widely available. They transform into loan if the student fails to complete the studies in the agreed period. In the Baltic States, vouchers are provided for students who study specific disciplines, or are unemployed. In ten EU countries there are universal loans which can be used for education (Belgium, Denmark, France, Lithuania, Hungary, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Finland, Sweden, and Norway) (European Commission, 2011a).

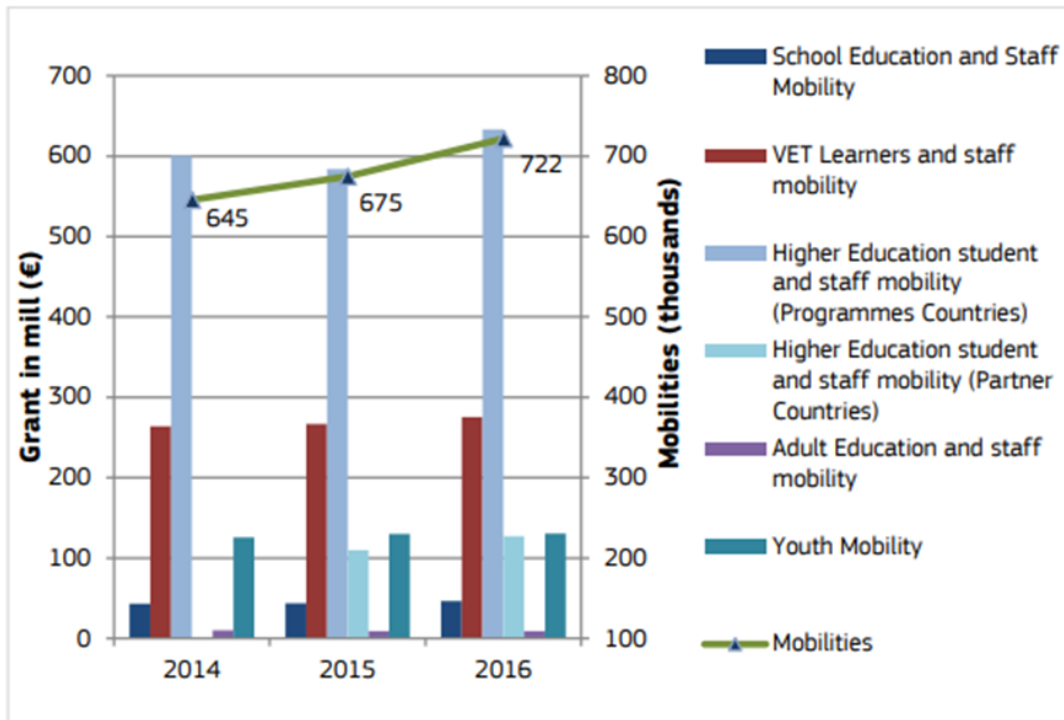
Despite, wide availability of grants and loans, very few of them support mobility. Erasmus + Program is the most significant mechanism.

### **Erasmus + Program**

Launched in 1987, the Erasmus Programme is probably the best known programme in the world that supports short term international mobility of higher education students. More than 2,3 million students have used the Programme since its initiation. The Programme enables students to spend at least one semester at another University, different from the one where they will receive the degree, with compatible programme for the same tuition fees. At the same time, students receive grants to support their accommodation and other expenses. There is no transfer of money between the Universities and no additional tuition fees for the students apart the ones they already paid at their University of choice.

The KA1 of the Programme is an excellent instrument, which financially supports exchange programmes of students in the Programme countries of the EU and EU applicant countries. The program begun in 2014 and is envisioned to last by 2020. One of its main objectives is to cover the costs of the mobility of 2 million students at the higher education institutions across Europe. Its total budget for all actions (KA1, KA2 and KA3) is EUR 14.7 billion. The predecessor programmes of Erasmus plus covered the costs for the exchange of 792,872 students, while the first three years of the programme implementation resulted into the exchange of additional 869,615 higher education students.

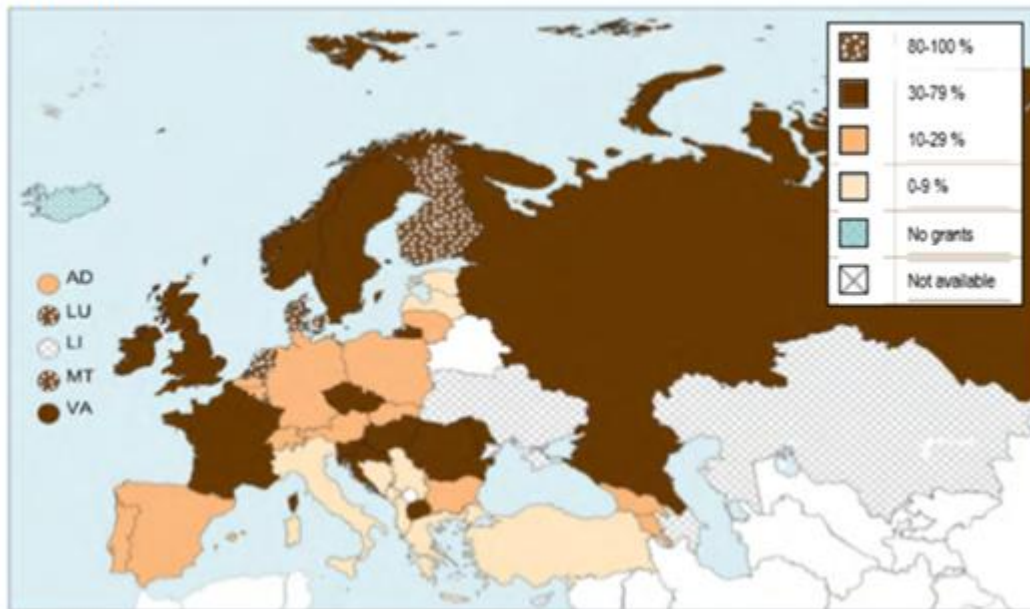
**Figure 3. Erasmus + Key Action 1. Trends 2014-2016.**



Source EC (2016)

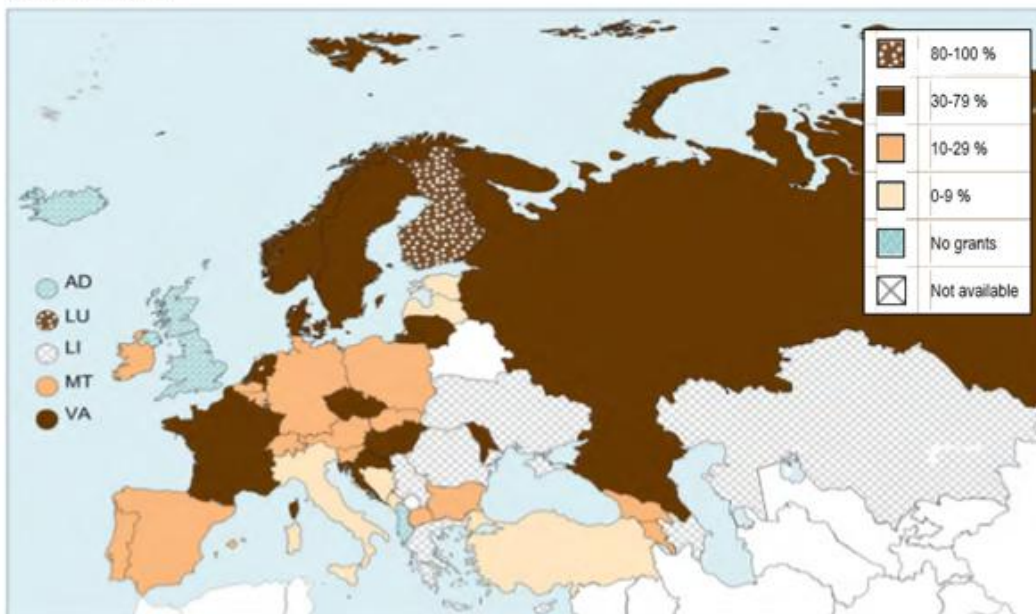
The Erasmus + programme has an instrument for loans designed for master, i.e. second cycle students. These loans provide partial guarantee for banks for issuing loans to students, who would like to enrol in master’s studies at another Erasmus plus program country. The scheme was launched in 2015 in Spain, and there are still no official data on the current use of these loans. By December 2016, 247 recipients had received financing over the whole programme period (mainly from Spain). In general, the majority of ESHA countries offer grants and scholarships for the second cycle of studies; thus, the actual use of these loans is a large unknown – Figure 4.

**Figure 4. Proportion of Students receiving Grants/Scholarships  
First Cycle**



Source: BFUG questionnaire and World Bank.

### Second Cycle



Source: BFUG questionnaire.

## Trends of International Mobility of Students in the US and UK

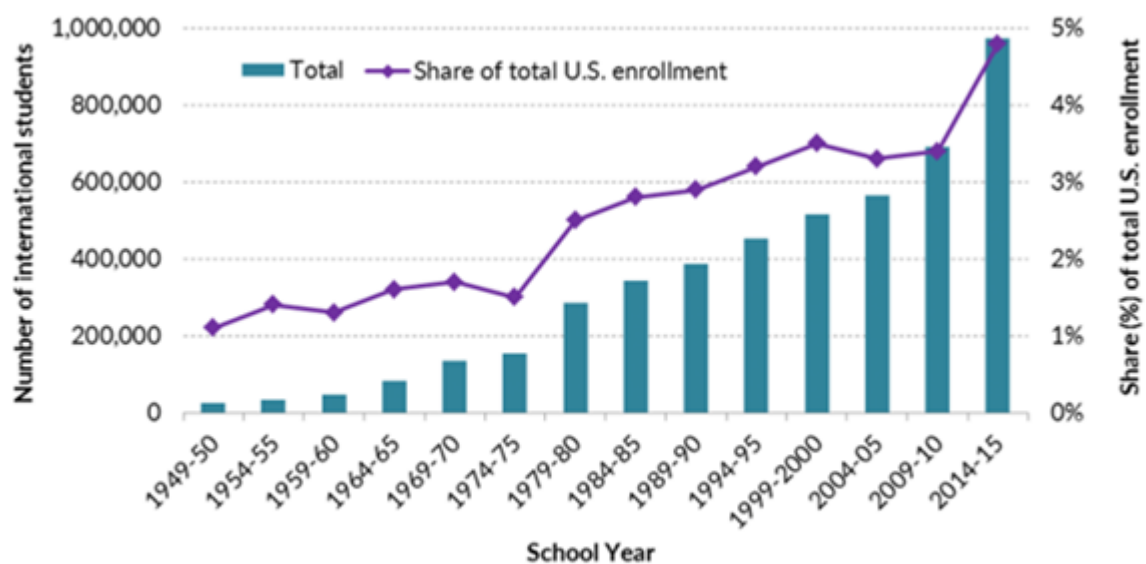
The situation in the United Kingdom is complex. The UK does not have symbolic state higher education tuition as the rest of the EU countries. The approach is similar to the US higher education. In the UK, national and EU students have to pay the maximum fee of GBP 9,500 (EUR 10,870) (Eurydice, 2013). Tuition fees for students coming from outside of the EU are three times of this amount. Grants and loans are provided for students, while loans are

transformed into grants, if after the finalization of education, the student fails to earn an annual salary higher than 25 000 GBP.

The current trends on international mobility in the UK indicate the following: 19% of the UK undergraduate students are international students (6% from the EU and 13% from the rest of the world). 42% of the students at postgraduate level are international students from outside the EU. The UK undergraduate and postgraduate higher education institutions are a large industry. Merit scholarships and grants are available; however they are few. Loans are not available for international students. The exchange programmes of the Erasmus + was widely used by the international students to come to the UK in the past.

Similar to the UK, the US higher education is challenging for access of international students. The main obstacle are finances. That said, it does not mean that international students do not choose US higher education institutions, rather, that the US institutions are hosting the global wealthy elite. Open Data (2018), emphasise that the annual growth of international students at US universities was 3.4% in 2016/2017 and amounted to stunning 1.08 million students. It is the 11<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of growth. Despite growth, international student body represents just 5% of the more than 20 million students enrolled in U.S. higher education – Figure 5.

**Figure 5. Share of International Students in the US**



*Source: Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange (Washington, DC: IIE, 2015)*

Students from the top two countries of origin — China and India — now represent approximately 50 percent of the total enrolment of international students in the United States.

HE expenses are comprised out of tuition fees, living costs, and other living expenses. Data indicate that 60.9% of international students coming to the US, finance their studies with family support. Only 6% are financed by foreign government, an international organization or a foreign sponsor. Out of the rest of the international students, 16% finance their studies through employment in the US, and 15% through grants and scholarships of the host university. This category mainly covers graduate students, who work on research grants for the university sponsoring their studies.

### **Comparison of Trends in International Mobility of Students in the EU vs. UK and US**

The comparison of trends in the international mobility of students between EU and the US as two specifically different systems in terms of mechanisms for supporting International Mobility indicates that in relative terms (percentages), EU provides far better mechanisms for international mobility of students. The average ratio of international to home based students in the EU countries in average is 20%, while in the US, the ratio is 5%.

In absolute numbers, US still attracts the highest number of international students; however US share of international student body has decreased from 23% in the 2000, to 16% in the 2010 and 14% in 2015. These numbers indicate that HE students like to be mobile and study in other countries, however; they do not find US system supportive enough for their goals as they did in the past.

At the same time, the impact of the Bologna process on the public finances of participating EHEA countries is insignificant. As a result the only measurable obstacle for international mobility of students in the EHEA countries are the living expenses, while the tuition costs are symbolic (at least at undergraduate level). Having in mind the global goal of the EU for creating a harmonised economy in terms of prices and salaries, the international mobility of labour, supports the sustainability of the international mobility of students.

The US and the UK higher education (from 2012), despite exceptions still lag behind in terms of available mechanisms for supporting international mobility. There is a lack of innovation in the revenue model of the US and the UK Universities.

In terms of the EU mechanisms there is a slight concern over the asymmetries in the Erasmus + mobility numbers in terms of the sources and destination of HE institutions and countries. For example in 2011/2012, the last year for which there is available data, the top receiving and sending country was Spain with more than 30 000 students in both directions. UK however, sent 8,600 students abroad, and received 17,500 students. Similar situation exists in France, and Ireland, while net exporters are Poland, Latvia, Germany and Turkey. This situation increases the pressure on some HE Institutions and at the same time it develops a competitive advantage in the higher education in some nations (Gérard et.al. 2017).

In the UK, the tuition fees for EU students are equal to the national student fees, while the UK Universities charge three times higher tuition fees for the overseas students. Thus, Erasmus mobility has been problematic for the UK HEIs, despite the fact that these are only short term motilities. Murphy (2014) reports that 8,6% of the UK HEI funding comes from international students, and thus scattering resources on the EU students on behalf of the much more expensive international students was not accepted with delight. As a result the UK withdrew the state support for the national students, and increased the state annual tuition to 9500 GBP in 2012.

### **Impact and Benefits from the International Mobility of Students**

In general there is no availability of data on the fate of international students. Do they return in the home country, do they stay in the country which provided the education, or do they end up in a new country (destination country)? If they do not return, there is the fact of a *brain drain* for the sending country, and *brain gain* for the recipient country (Gerard et.al. 2017). The question which emerges however is whether the concepts of *brain drain and gain* have any meaning in an increasing globalization and liberalization of economies, where movement of labour is the new reality (Gagliardi, 2014). The only thing which is certain is that the benefit of the higher education is becoming an individual benefit for the student.

Interestingly, Felbermayr and Reczkowski (2014) are showing results that have been confirmed by the research of Van Buwel and Weggens (2014) as well. According to their sample of countries, the average retention rate - which represents the computed part of the incoming students that remains in the country after graduation - is about 70%. The fact is that this percentage is managed by the Anglo-Saxon countries, firstly from New Zealand, then Australia and the United States, while that number very rarely has value of more than 5% in

Continental Europe, with the exception of Netherlands. On the other hand, in comparison, the same rate in the UK is much higher i.e. 35%. One has to have in mind though that the continental EU countries have very high ratios of international students compared to home based students to begin with – see Figure 2. Compared to the Anglo-saxon countries, a percentage of 5% is very high in terms of absolute numbers of students that stay after the mobility.

Furthermore, Van Bouwel and Veugelers (2014) in their migration scheme study of young Europeans, who received a Doctorate (PhD) from an American University, argue that about 70% of the above-mentioned international graduate students remain in the United States and continue their work overseas. This is supported by our findings on the financial mechanisms available for graduate and PhD students in the US higher education institutions, where a stunning 30% of students are international students – Table 4.1. The last further supports the conclusion that the US Higher Education System attracts the international wealthy elite; however, it is also focused on developing a growing academic faculty made out of the global talent (Researchers, Assistant Professors, and Professors).

In general the US economy has the lowest unemployment rate in the world and also faces fewer challenges with youth unemployment. In general salaries and wages for the college graduates are twice as higher compared to the employed with the secondary education. The graduates are not the only one benefiting from the higher education, the economy also benefits from the higher productivity of labour and the higher taxes. It is questionable however, whether international graduates from US Universities actually participate in the primary sectors of the US economy, as many are engaged by the hosting HE institutions, maintaining US HEI quality in global terms.

A similar benefit can be seen in the EHEA countries. According to the recent research, the latest figures show that in almost half of the Bologna countries, the unemployment rate for people with a low level of education is 16% higher compared to the people with secondary and higher levels of education. According to Eurostat (2009), the unemployment rates in these categories amounts to 10% for secondary level and 6% for higher level of education. Another fact is that higher educated people have a higher chance of future employment in the OECD countries. On average the employment rates are higher for highly educated individuals.



The current situation in most of the EU member countries regarding this issue is more or less contradictory. While HEIs and students pride themselves with their academic achievements, the youth unemployment rates are soaring to a whopping 40% of the young population, while at the same time there are 2 million unfulfilled jobs. European education and training systems continue to produce shortcomings in providing genuinely real and practical skills for employment and do not work adequately enough with other bodies such as businesses or employers in order to bring the learning experience closer to the reality of the work environment. The report of McKinsey & Company in 2014, argues about the inadequacy of the labour market and the professional work skills required for the market, as although there are more job seekers, the EU employers cannot find the skilled workers they need. According to these analyses, 74% of the Europeans as providers of education are confident that their graduates are ready to work. On contrary, only 38% of the young people and 35% of employers agree with this allegation (Mourshed et.al. 2016, p. 2).

At the moment the EU focus is placed on filling this gap with higher education which will meet the needs of the economy; however, it is unclear whether the economies of the single market generate jobs in the high valued and knowledge-incentive industries?! If not, then the economies of other countries will benefit from the publically supported education system in the EU.

### **Higher Education Mobility: Opportunities and Challenges**

Today in the world there is an emergence of two different paradigms when it comes to the role of higher education providers in the society. The first one, mainly present in the Anglo-Saxon countries (UK, US) perceives the higher education from a market point of view where students are recognized as the creators of demand. As a result, the cost of the Higher education is predominantly borne by the students, while the highest burden is placed on the shoulders of international students. The US and the UK higher education systems as private driven, are the main proponents of this paradigm. As a result, the available financial mechanisms for supporting international mobility of students in these countries are limited. The family, or the student personally, has to bear these costs. Availability of scholarships and grants are very limited, there is insignificant financial aid based on need, and insignificant financial support from the sending countries. It results into a decline in the share of international students at undergraduate level, while the high share of financially

supported graduate students and PhDs only serves towards maintaining the quality of the US educational offer and its attractiveness. Despite growth in absolute numbers of international students in these systems, the growth does not follow the growth in the international mobility which on the long term may result not only into a fall of the attractiveness of the US and UK universities for international students, but also into a decline in the attractiveness of these same universities for their home-based students, who might embrace the trend of international mobility shared by their global peers.

In contrast, the EU brings a new paradigm of the role of higher education institutions in the society, and despite the fear and concerns which changes can bring into the traditional systems, data support the sustainability and longevity of this paradigm. This paradigm sees students as the material which is transformed with the process of higher education. Students are not the market; they are the product, while the market is the employers, the society at a large. The strong public support of the higher education in almost all EU countries accompanied with the Bologna process and the mechanisms under Erasmus + programme, remove many of the obstacles for financing the international mobility of students. Tuition fees are symbolic; grants are readily available along with loans. The increasing numbers of international students at EU level serve not only as a tool for the creation of a common EU mind-set among the young population; they also support the various EU economies by directly supporting the mobility of labour. Data indicate that these mechanisms are effective; the main issue however is, whether the product, i.e. the student skills meets the demand of the employers. Various reports and data indicate that this demand is not met, while at the same time youth unemployment is high. While many of the reports which have been identified as a source of data for the research imply that the skills gap is a quality issue of the Universities, the researchers were not able to objectively conclude without a primary research whether this is the truth. Other reasons could cause this gap. The most important one concerns the state of development of the EU economy and whether this economy generates high value added jobs, or knowledge-incentive jobs, at a pace required by the supply of students from the HE Institutions.

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