A Typology of Admission Systems Across Europe and Their Impact on the Equity of Access, Progression and Completion in Higher Education

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Introduction

In a world confronted with more numerous and diverse challenges than ever, having educated people becomes vital for economic and social development. The EU target stating that by 2020 the average share of 30–34 year-olds in EU member states with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 40% is on track, already reaching 39% in 2016 (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2014). A large part of this has been achieved through expanding the share of upper secondary graduates qualifying to enter higher education. This share increased by 4% between 2008 and 2015.

At the same time, on European level, the demographic decline can no longer be ignored, with some countries being more affected than others. For children and young people aged 0–29, the percentage in the overall EU-28 population has decreased from 41% in 1994 to 36% in 2004, to reach 33% in 2014 (Coyette et al. 2015). This translates into a smaller pool of potential students from which HEIs can select. And this demographic decline is starting to impact on European countries' higher education systems, with the absolute numbers of higher education entrants decreasing by 19% in the same timeframe (Orr et al. 2017a).

However, even within this framework, some higher education institutions (HEIs) continue to see growth in their entrants' numbers. When surveyed on this by the

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European University Association's Trend Study, HEIs attributed this overall phenomenon to widening participation, international recruitment and changes in the admission policy (Sursock 2015). So, it could be stated that the time is actually right for more inclusive policies since the pool of "traditional" students is declining in many European countries, and policy-makers and HEIs have to look to more inclusive policies (Orr and Hovdhaugen 2014). At the same time, higher education institutions (HEIs) have been keen to exercise their autonomy in recruitment and selection decisions. As such, higher education has entered a new phase of consolidation and realignment, which requires HEIs to implement new strategies for recruiting students—from focusing on candidates from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who have not been a major focus group in the past, to designing customised selection procedures.

Given this wider educational context, the role of admission systems to higher education becomes more important than ever. The admission system is a process of matching, guidance and selection that enables students to graduate with the new skills required for the networked knowledge society. In this, admission should be seen as a lengthy progression starting sometimes as early as primary education and continuing into the first year of higher education studies.

Moreover, admission systems into higher education are complex and vary across countries. They are the product of different social, historical, political and economic backgrounds, based on contrasting philosophies of education and what education can and should aim to achieve for individuals and society as a whole (Turner 1960). However, despite the great complexity of elements, there are similar features that allow a clustering of the admission systems across the EU Member States, EEA/EFTA countries and candidate countries into a small number of well-defined types.

This article will draw from the data and findings of the "Study on the impact of admission systems on higher education outcomes—EAC-2015-0470" (Orr et al. 2017a), which was commissioned by the European Commission and was published in August 2017. The authors were part of the consortium that was tasked to deliver the study.

It should be noted that this paper takes a "mainstream" view of the respective national admission systems, i.e. it tries to understand the baseline impact of the general system. Almost all higher education systems are confronted with further challenges regarding equity and inclusiveness (see chapters in this section on refugees and working students are just two target groups), and their possibilities for reacting to these are shaped largely by how the baseline system is configured. Furthermore, this approach does not take into account the large differences within higher education systems due to starkly different profiles. For instance, it describes the basic structure for France, but not the difference between general universities and the grandes écoles. For more details on how national admission systems are organised and work for the case study countries (including France), see volume II of the final report which includes detailed national studies (Orr et al. 2017b). In terms of their effects on equity, however, it is clear that greater stratification of higher education will further increase the challenge of achieving participative equity of underrepresented social groups and require even better directly policy initiatives.

Methodology

The study used an innovative qualitative and quantitative mixed method, which aimed to look beyond the usual practices when analysing admission systems. While previous research relied mostly on comparative mapping among individual countries (McGrath et al. 2014), the methodology in this particular case focused on a broader perspective, looking at 36 European countries—the 28 EU countries, the five EU candidate members, as well as the three EEA/EFTA countries, and included focus groups and interviews to understand how the system really works.[1]

An initial extensive mapping was undertaken analysing the 36 countries across 24 indicators that followed students from primary education to the labour market, measuring both quantitative and qualitative aspects. This in itself was a challenging exercise, with identifying relevant data sources that were comparable. The information collected was then validated by national experts in all countries to ensure its accuracy, and a number of characteristics deemed most relevant were selected for further comparative analyses.

In order to reflect the diversity of countries in Europe in terms of higher education participation, to have a balanced geographical coverage as well as a focus on countries developing new initiatives in this area, eight countries[2] were then selected to perform an in-depth analysis which included both interviews with the policy-makers and key informants (representatives from ministries dealing with upper secondary and higher education and from other bodies responsible for the admission process, registrars from a number of public and private universities), and focus groups with students in the last year of upper secondary and first year of higher education. This provided a comprehensive view of the admission system from all stakeholder perspectives.

The results were refined and translated into a new typology of admission systems, under the form of a two-dimensional matrix built on what were deemed the most important dimensions of admission—streaming in upper secondary education and further selection by HEIs.

For the streaming in upper secondary education, the authors took into account the existence of significant learning pathways through upper secondary schooling that do not lead to higher education to split the countries in two groups:

- at least one pathway through the school system does not lead to a qualification enabling higher education entry (to some part of the system)[3]
- in general, all pathways may lead to higher education entry (in some part of the system).

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[1]For consistency purposes, Liechtenstein was excluded from the further statistical analysis.

[2]France, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Spain.

[3]Streams that led to ISCED 4–5 programmes were not taken into account.

Table 1 Types of admission systems in European countries

Selection / Streaming	(Nearly all) HEIs can select with additional criteria	HEIs cannot select with additional criteria (in normal circumstances)
At least one pathway through the school system does not lead to a qualification enabling higher education entry (to some part of the system)	*Type 4: Double selection* *Croatia, Czech Republic, Iceland, Montenegro, Norway, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, United Kingdom*	*Type 1: Selection by schools* *Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia*
In general, all pathways may lead to higher education entry (in some part of the system)	*Type 2: Selection by HEIs* *Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Portugal, Lithuania, Latvia*	*Type 3: Least selection* *Albania, France, Greece, Ireland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Malta, Sweden, Turkey*

Source Orr et al. (2017a)

Regarding the extent of higher education autonomy in further selection of students, countries were also split into two groups[4]:

- (Nearly all) HEIs can select with additional criteria, which included countries where most of the HEIs can also base their decision on secondary school exit results: results in the "secondary school exit exam";
- HEIs cannot select with additional criteria (in normal circumstances), which included countries where most of the HEIs cannot organise any further assessment of students and the decision regarding students is taken based on:

  - national regulations with regard to the related discipline which pupils have achieved when graduating from high school and a random allocation mechanism;
  - national regulations regarding school exit results: results in the "school exit exam" or the grades for some disciplines in high schools;
  - a national entrance exam that provides further assessment.

The two-dimensional matrix has led to identifying four types of admission systems: Type 1—Selection by schools, Type 2—Selection by HEIs, Type 3—Least selection and Type 4—Double selection. These types were then reviewed for their impacts on equity, efficiency and effectiveness of higher education admission. This paper focuses mainly on the equity dimension in the analysis of admission systems (Table 1).

[4]Exceptions may exist for medicine, military, arts and EU-regulated programmes.

Conceptual Background

There are three main mechanisms for selection that take place within the education system: limiting the share of pupils achieving the qualification necessary to enter higher education, selecting after secondary schooling at the point of transition, and selecting during the study process. Whilst the first process is part of how the school system is organised, the following two are about how prior academic qualification, student choice and HEI recruitment interact with one another.

The Pipeline Through a School System

In all school systems over the course of a pupil's learning career, the secondary school system assigns grades to students, which can be used to examine their relative academic capabilities in various fields. The pathway into which a pupil is placed during their time in a secondary system can determine to a greater or lesser extent their future options. In some countries, a major "sifting" occurs at the end of primary or lower secondary when students are streamed into different pathways based mostly on perceived academic ability. The difference between countries concerning streaming is in the timing and the consequences of selection procedures. In some school systems, the pathway into which a pupil is placed during lower secondary schooling can determine whether he/she is likely to obtain the qualification necessary to enter higher education, whilst in others all routes lead to the likely attainment of the entry qualification but the part of the higher education system they are likely to enter is different. The final school exit examination, present in a multitude of educational systems, will also play a key role in the students' future educational path.

Figure 1 provides an overview of this pipeline for Germany: pupils are streamed into one of three main tracks in upper secondary schooling, and only two of these provide direct access to higher education – the Gymnasium is the academic route, and around one third of all pupils take this route; the Realschule used to be the higher vocational route, but this is being expanded to other streams and can be a direct route into higher education too, this accounts for 22% in the Realschule and a further 25% in a mixed stream system; those in the so-called Hauptschule, around 12%, do not usually progress into upper secondary schooling. A particular development in Germany has been the increasing share of pupils in mixed stream schools and decline of the Hauptschule, generally giving more pupils the chance to enter higher education.
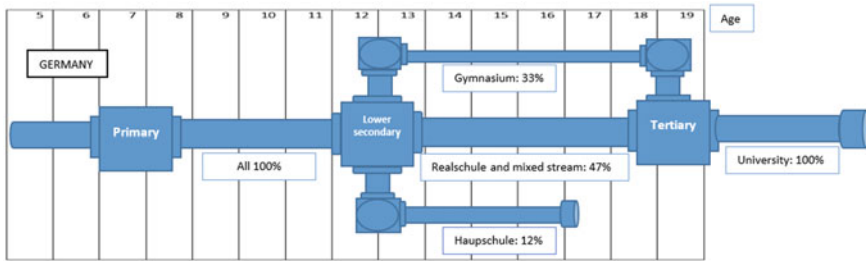
Fig. 1 Overview of the pipeline to higher education in Germany. *Source* Orr et al. (2017a). *Note* The missing 8% of pupils are those in other school forms, especially those supporting pupils with learning difficulties

The Role of HEIs

With the increasing autonomy and institutional diversity of higher education in Europe, a large number of higher education systems have given their HEIs more freedom to decide which type of applicants they enrol and how many (Eastermann et al. 2011; Fumasoli and Huisman 2013). HEIs contribute to student selection based on the level of existing autonomy, which sometimes allows them to apply additional criteria in order to select and enrol those deemed more academically fit for the study programmes provided. Institutional mission, legal constraints, financial incentives awarded, innovative selection procedures or specific policies targeting different groups of students are all drivers that impact HEIs' selection.

Students as Agents in the Admission System

Students are actors in the HE admission process. HE admission is not something that just happens to students, they shape it themselves with their choices—albeit choices that are constrained by the behaviour of the other actors in the system. The process through which students select a particular HEI or study programme is possibly the most complex one amongst the three. Apart from the information and guidance received throughout various educational stages and the academic results obtained, students rely heavily on the proximity network (friends and family) when making a study choice. The focus group work showed that the pressure stemming from the multitude of choices and the "cost" of wrongful selection weighs greatly on students when making a final decision on their study programme.

Types of Admission Systems Across Europe and Their Link to Equity

For the purpose of the rest of this article, the authors have concentrated on the equity side of the analysis where an equitable admission system is considered to be one focusing largely on students' potential to succeed irrespective of their social background.

One of the most important policy challenges in European higher education over the past decades has been the expansion of opportunities in higher education. While **equity** features high on the European and international educational agenda (European Commission 2010; United Nations 2016), significant efforts are still required to narrow the gaps and allow for better access to (higher) education for under-represented groups. An OECD review of equity in tertiary education famously stated that "merit is never pure" (OECD 2008). Initiatives designed to make all forms of higher education more accessible to diverse populations should evaluate prospective students' *potential* rather than simply their past scholastic achievements in the school system, but this is rare.

The article now takes a closer look at each type of admission system and attempts to describe how it works in terms of equity. Proxy quantitative indicators for success used in the following quantitative analysis were participation by social background (attainment by parental social background), participation by gender and participation by age (for mature students). It should be noted that the typology based on the two dimensions in Table 1 represents only a snapshot of current policies and practices. Taking into account the limitations of the simple statistical analysis on the typology, the authors have tried to partly overcome this through the in-depth analysis of the case studies. Despite this limitation, this basic model can be used by policy-makers in European countries to evaluate different policies, thus enabling any country to consider some of the consequences of shifting from one category to another.

Type 1—Selection by Schools

The countries in this category have educational systems where students are being placed in various streams, sometimes as early as primary education, and at least one of these streams awards qualifications that do not allow access into higher education. Moreover, most HEIs do not have the autonomy to select students using additional criteria.

These systems also have the lowest relative participation rates by students from low social backgrounds.[5] One might therefore say that, while they are effective

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[5]The study used attainment by educational parental background as a proxy measure of socio-economic background while recognising the limitations of this approach.

systems, as countries with this type of system have low rates of unemployment among recent graduates, they are *only effective for those who have social advantages,* to begin with.

The statistical data on the odds ratio of young adults (25–34) with highly educated parents (i.e. tertiary educational attainment) completing tertiary education over young adults (25–34) with medium educated parents (i.e. upper-secondary—ISCED 3 or post-secondary non-tertiary education—ISCED 4) show that countries with Type 1 admission systems perform the poorest in terms of equity, as children of medium-educated parents have much lower chances of attaining higher education than children of highly-educated parents (Fig. 2).

Between the two factors of influence, streaming has a slightly larger impact on selection than HEIs autonomy, which means that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds have more chances of being put in streams that do not lead to higher education. Furthermore, when looking at the existence of career guidance services, data collected from the 2015 Bologna Process Implementation Report questionnaire (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2015) show that in countries with no career guidance services targeting underrepresented groups, children of medium educated parents have much lower chances to attain tertiary education than children of highly educated parents.

Looking at the qualitative data from the case studies where these trends can be analysed in depth, one can see that a*t the school level*, **streaming determines greater social inequalities**, meaning that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds tend to have less chances of entering higher education. There are
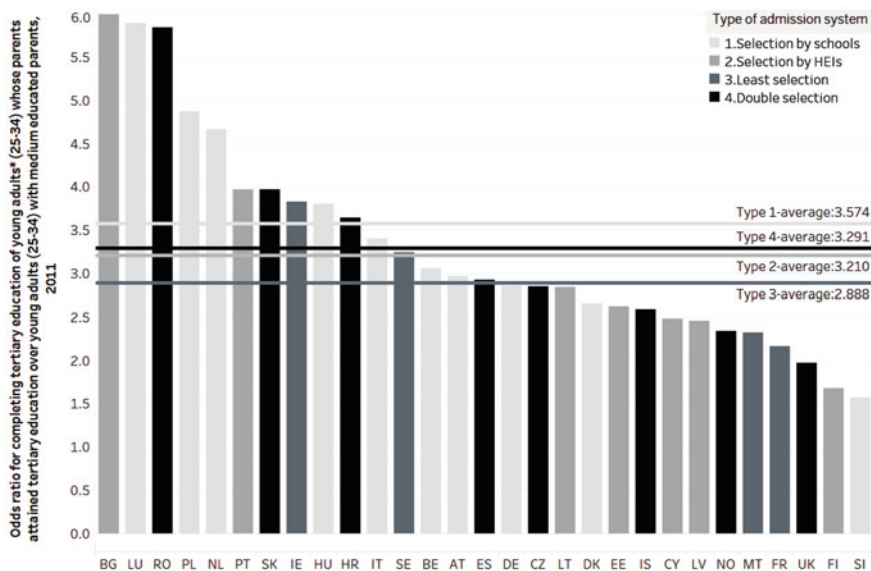

Fig. 2 Attainment by educational parental background, 2011. *Source* Orr et al. (2017a)

different stages in the educational process when school pupils are placed on paths with a higher or lower likelihood of leading to higher education entry. In some countries, a division is made between those expected to go on to higher education and those expected to go into vocational training or the labour market (sometimes as early as the age of ten, in the case of Germany), while in others students are not divided until the exit or transition phase in upper secondary schooling. Whether the streaming is based on academic merit or teachers' recommendations, there is also a direct correlation with parents' socio-economic background. Students put into vocational streams have lower chances of re-entering the path to higher education, although in theory transition between academic and vocational tracks is possible (as is the case for the Netherlands). However, if this transition occurs, it usually takes place from academic to vocational, not the other way around.

Merit is often solely defined as students' ability to perform in secondary school examinations. Evaluations throughout secondary education focus exclusively on academic performance, without taking into account students' additional skills or interests or even their socio-economic background. While this may be perceived as an objective, system level method of assessment by schools, students often consider that too much emphasis on standard examination does not allow for their full potential to be discovered.

In many educational systems, especially where HEIs do not benefit from autonomy at admission level, the main criteria used for selecting students is the secondary school exit examination. Thus, **the exit examination may not be fit for purpose**, as it serves two sometimes contradictory roles: measuring the secondary education students' performance level and placing students into specialised higher education study programmes. As highlighted by policy-makers, HEIs representatives and students themselves through interviews and focus groups, the principal role of the exit examination should be to assess the students' performance at the end of secondary education. Given the importance awarded to this exam, teachers are often shifting focus from providing students with a meaningful learning experience to a better preparation for successfully passing the final test. Furthermore, as many times the examination method is not indicative of future academic success or is not in line with HEIs study programmes.

Type 2—Selection by HEIs

The countries that fall under Type 2 are characterised by the lack of secondary school streams that hinder the students' right to access higher education. The selection can be, nevertheless, influenced by HEIs ability to organise a further selection of students.

In terms of equity, these higher education systems are not as restrictive as Type 1 systems. However, since HEIs are allowed to apply additional criteria when enrolling students, they will seek efficient ways to do so, which means they will
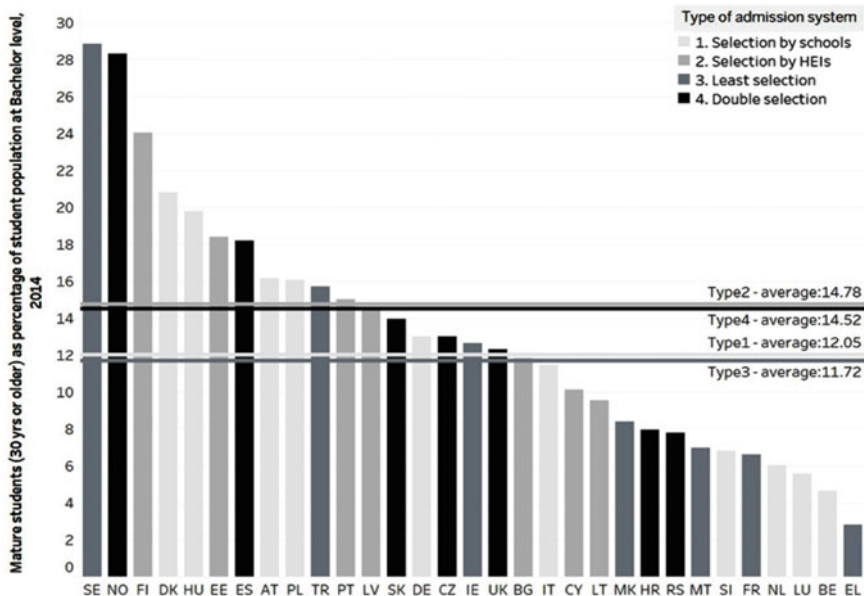
Fig. 3 Mature students (30 years or older) as percentage of student population at Bachelor level by admission type, 2014. *Source* Orr et al. (2017a)

most likely focus on scholastic achievement as the main criterion, thus indirectly limiting the chances for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

But even in this case, as the secondary school exit examination does not solely perform the role of entry criteria, higher education institutions are able to admit more mature students.[6] The figure below shows the degree to which older students are welcome within the system. This is done by measuring the percentage of total Bachelors enrolled by country and cross-tabulating with the level of autonomy the HEIs possess in organising admissions. A high value indicates a higher percentage of mature students in the student body. As the difference between type 4 (double selection)/type 2 (selection by HEIs) and type 1 (selection by schools)/type 3 (least selection) is the level of autonomy HEIs have in selecting with additional criteria, it appears that this is an important factor in terms of access of older students (Fig. 3).

Looking at the qualitative data regarding the impact of HEIs autonomy on equity, the case studies showed that **social inclusion does not score high amongst institutions' priorities**. With the typology developed, where HEIs autonomy plays a significant role in the admission process, this translates into perpetuating inequality. Where HEIs can further select their students, they will aim for a

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[6]This increased participation of mature students does not necessarily translate also into high completion rates for mature students.

meritocratic approach, looking mostly at scholastic results rather than looking beyond, and selecting more students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Irrespective of existing autonomy at admission level, **HEIs benefit from instruments that allow them to manage student pathways**—before, during and after admission. Before admission, HEIs can actively promote their study programmes in schools as part of information and counselling. They can additionally target specific groups of students—by promoting positive discrimination for underrepresented students (i.e. specific study places for Roma students in Romania or places specifically for students attending high schools in economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods for one HEI in France). At entry level, individual initiatives are implemented, but the Netherlands has introduced the "Study Choice Check", an innovative approach through which students can test if they are a good fit with the desired study programme either by direct interviews, online testing or spending a day at the institution and performing academic student activities. This results in a recommendation from the HEI on the prospective match between the student and the study programme; while not mandatory, this can provide better insights for prospective students. After admission, some HEIs implement tools to make the transition phase easier for students—such as mentoring and buddy systems or preparatory courses.

HEIs are expected to produce graduates who are well prepared for the labour market, however, evidence from the existing data and case studies show that there is a **loose link between the distribution of study places and labour market**. While HEIs could adjust their allocation of study places either by analyses of trends across the labour market or changing student demands, few institutions tend to do so. This is the result of a variety of factors: in some countries, reallocation of study places is negotiated at both national and regional level (e.g. Spain), thus taking a long time; in other countries, there are no financial incentives for institutions to do so (e.g. Romania, France, Germany), while in specific instances, this is not the perceived role for higher education (e.g. Germany). However, private HEIs are at an advantage here, their flexibility in the decision-making process enabling them to react faster to labour market changes and design study programmes accordingly.

While HEIs advocate for more autonomy, this also comes with additional challenges. Across Europe, HEIs autonomy varies between countries—in Spain (for public institutions), Germany or Norway this is limited, and HEIs act under a clear framework set at national level. On the other hand, HEIs in Romania, Lithuania or Ireland benefit from extensive autonomy which allows them to make choices in the interest of institutional benefit. In terms of selection of students, representatives of various HEIs have expressed in favour of more autonomy, equally aware of the financial and human increased costs for such an approach or the overall admission timeline which sets additional constraints.

Type 3—Least Selection

The countries in this cluster are characterized by the absence of streaming at secondary school level (with all pathways providing access into various parts of the higher education system), and no further selection at the level of HEIs. In such systems, if neither the school systems limit nor the HEIs select students, then students have the widest choice in terms of academic pathways.

As it might be expected, since Type 3 systems put up the fewest academic barriers to access, they are also the one with the most equitable outcome as shown in Fig. 2—Attainment by educational parental background where the authors look at the odds ratio of young adults (25–34) with highly educated parents completing tertiary education over young adults (25–34) with medium educated parents. This is also the system where information, advice and guidance play the most important role in supporting students to make the best-informed choices in selecting their desired study programme.

However, a more inclusive system is not also a more efficient system, as the data analysis shows. While a more diverse student body gains access to higher education, HEIs inability to further select means that they will not be able to get students that best fit with the study programmes provided. This is reflected in the completion rates (ISCED 5A) indicator, which is the lowest for Type 3 systems (Fig. 4).

From *young peoples' perspective*, the in-depth case study analysis showed that **students tend to make study-related decisions under pressure**. There are two
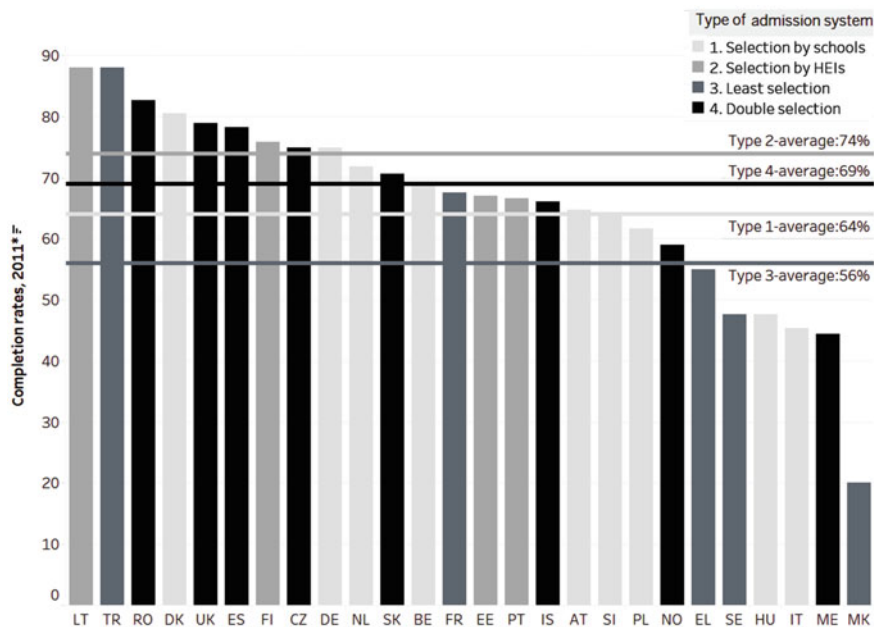

Fig. 4 Completion rates by type of admission system, 2011*. *Source* Orr et al. (2017a)

major events in terms of academic life that occur almost simultaneously at the end of upper secondary education: selecting the study programme in which to enrol and preparing for the final examination. While, in terms of selection, the trend in Europe is to select a study programme first and then look at HEIs that provide it, prospective students have a multitude of options available. Inadequate choices can additionally be costly since any mistake in the selection of courses will translate into a delayed entrance on the labour market. This makes the information, advice and guidance instruments extremely important because if these are not sufficient or properly provided, it puts an enormous pressure on the young people. As focus groups revealed, stress is also emphasised by teachers who tend to further highlight the importance of their choices. At the same moment, students also prepare for the final examination at the end of secondary education, which in many systems is the main criterion for higher education access. As such, many feel the burden of major life decisions in a very short period of time.

With students relying heavily on their proximity network in making decisions, providing adequate information and guidance becomes of utmost importance for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, especially in countries with Type 3 admission systems, where extra weight is put on students.

Type 4—Double Selection

Countries with Type 4 admission system are characterised by both streaming into secondary education and HEIs ability to further select students using additional criteria.

One would expect these systems to perform poorly when it comes to equity. Surprisingly, when looking at Eurostat data on attainment by educational attainment data—Fig. 2, Type 4 systems come second, after Type 3 systems. Differences emerge when taking a closer look at the participation of mature and female students. HEIs autonomy in further selection is reflected, as for Type 2, in the enrolment rates of mature students, which are relatively high. Nevertheless, this high enrolment rate for mature students does not necessarily translate into high completion rates for them.

A distinct feature is the higher participation of female students, resulting from this double selection. Looking at the data, in countries with type 4 admission system, more female students tend to go into higher education. Female students also perform slightly better in terms of completion rates. As female students receive better academic results in secondary schools, this result is intuitive: they have better academic results and so are more likely to be selected in a competitive system. On the other hand, male students are more likely to enter in vocational routes, where these are available.

This conclusion is highlighted in Fig. 5, which looks at the degree to which female students are welcome within the system. This is done by measuring the difference between the percentage of females in upper-secondary schools and
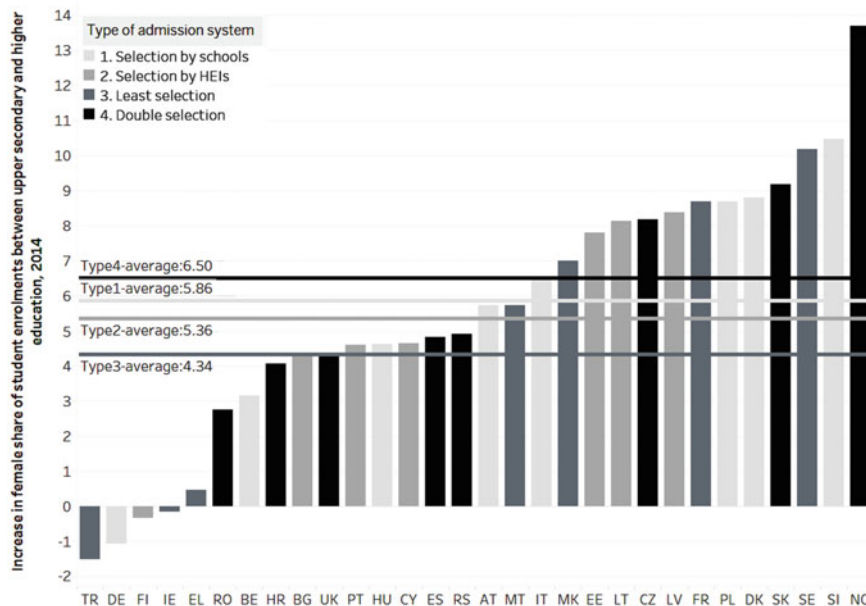
Fig. 5 Increase in the female share of student enrolments between upper-secondary level and higher education by admission type, 2014. *Source* Orr et al. (2017a)

the percentage of females in higher education (ISCED 6). A higher value means that the proportion of women in higher education has increased compared with secondary education.

Further related to the issue of equity, the analysis shows that **second chance routes, which could be implemented by HEIs to attract students not choosing the "traditional route", are not well-developed as the availability of these routes and the number of students using these routes are still limited**.

As a consequence, for the few countries that clearly provide such opportunities (e.g. Spain, Norway), the student population targeted is marginal. Additional efforts have been made, either by allowing access from vocational routes into higher education (e.g. Germany, Norway) or allocating places for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g. places for Roma students in Romania). Thus, numerous potential students are not being considered for higher education.

From Conclusions to Recommendations

With relevant and comparative information, policy-makers can re-evaluate and perhaps realign their admission system in line with national or European equity strategies. This paper had the objective of using the typologies developed during the SASH study to draw comparative findings, notwithstanding the fact that Europe has

a very diverse higher education landscape. Therefore, any policy recommendation needs to be contextualised.

Based on the results of the analysis and case study insights, eight general recommendations can be made:

- Systems where streaming occurs at an early age (especially in Type 1—selection by schools) appear to embed social inequality into higher education entry and, as students get older, make further policy interventions related to equity harder to deliver. So, with a focus on the policy framework, **policy-makers could reshape the selection processes at secondary education level** by reducing the consequences of allocating pupils to different upper secondary streams and/or re-designing the exit examinations in such a way that more students gain the necessary qualification to access higher education study programmes or specific HEIs.

- To better match students with the educational offer, **HEIs should be allowed to experiment with ways of identifying student potential** (especially in systems where HEIs want more autonomy—Type 1 and Type 3 admission systems). While accepting the need for balance, HEIs should be given greater autonomy to select their students, regulated by a legal framework that enhances rather than constrains equitable admissions. There are various ways to achieve more inclusive entry, either by expanding the existing access routes to higher education or by creating new ones in accordance with specific strategies for inclusion.

- Evidence suggests that HEIs already have institutional tools to deploy resources more proactively in order to help such students enter and succeed; yet in most instances, HEIs are not stepping up because they do not see this as their responsibility. As the paper from Vlk & Stiburek in this publication states: many HEIs are following the strategy: "striving for excellence, acknowledging the social dimension". **Incentives should be provided for HEIs to become more inclusive** (especially in Type 2—selection by HEIs), in order to select, support and help graduate more students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, thus no longer perpetuating inequality. An example could be the English case with the universal system of equity performance agreements which, despite the very high cost of student tuition, has increased higher education participation amongst students from lower socio-economic groups.

- In order to relieve the pressure experienced by students when making study choices, **HEIs could use Bologna tools to facilitate transition throughout higher education** by extensive use of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) to facilitate movement between different study programmes and institutions. Reducing the consequences of "mistakes" would take much of the pressure off the experience for students. Making credits easier to transfer from one programme to another could achieve this.

- **HEIs should improve their communication of the choices provided to students** (especially in Type 3—least selection), which would give prospective students more accessible and relevant information about their future academic

paths. Providing students with study programmes that better fit their skills and interests is desirable, however, there should be a balance between better study opportunities and an overwhelming number of choices.

- **Schools and HEIs** should **improve the information, advice and guidance** available. While counselling exists across Europe in various forms, the tendency is to focus on providing timely and accurate information. Indeed, better guiding services would enable students to select the best study programmes for them, alleviating misinformed competition is some cases (i.e. because a share of students is applying for study programmes based on misinformation). This, however, implies deep knowledge of both the higher education system and the individual students. The situation is further complicated by the human resources available and the way counselling is provided, which varies significantly (i.e. one counsellor per 800 students in Romania to an extensive counselling system in France). With students relying heavily on their proximity network in making decisions, providing adequate information and guidance becomes of utmost importance for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, especially in countries with Type 3 admission systems where the focus is particularly on student choice.
- **Schools can reduce pressure on students during their final year of secondary school** (especially in Type 3—least selection) by supporting them to make choices about higher education earlier, together with providing adequate information, advice and guidance. The tension between the needs of the schooling system and those of higher education is a difficult challenge to resolve in the final year of secondary school. That is why it is important to ensure that students think about higher education choice much earlier than in the final year of secondary schooling, which should be the final stage of a much lengthier process. This is also very important for Type 4—double selection, as the streaming in secondary school and the HEIs additional selection process can severely limit the options a student has.
- This all leads to **one** final recommendation, which is perhaps the most important one: for **an increased collaboration between schooling and higher education as a** way of overcoming the tensions between the needs and purpose of the schooling system and those of higher education. Working together, they would help construct better, fairer and more inclusive education systems.

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