



The Cinderella syndrome:

*Revisiting
Access & Widening Participation
in Higher education*

Juliette E. Torabian
Postdoctoral Fellow

*Faculty of Social Sciences,
Education, and Humanities
University of Luxembourg*

Topics

- **What is the *Cinderella Syndrome*?**
- ***The Cinderella Syndrome & the miracle of the Utilitarian higher education***

- **Beyond the Miracle of Access**
- ***Access to what?***
- ***Access for what?***

- **The Treatment**
- **Concluding Remarks**



The Cinderella Syndrome



A moral folklore story with equivalents across different societies



Background: The capitalist society



Biased in general but even more gender-biased



Struggle of social classes



Short-lived windows of opportunity for social mobility



Happily-ever-after ending

Access to the utilitarian higher education:

TERTIARY EDUCATION: WHAT IS IT AND WHY INVEST IN IT?

What is Tertiary Education?



All types of formal education following and building upon (upper) secondary education, i.e. including non-university TE and TVET

Why invest in it?



TE is instrumental in fostering long-term growth and boosting shared prosperity in low-, middle-, and high-income countries



Workers with TE are more employable, earn higher wages and cope better with economic shocks



Highest ROI (relative to primary and secondary education)



Wider individual and societal benefits, e.g. health outcomes, political participation, among others



THE WORLD BANK

#INVESTinPeople



Source: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/tertiaryeducation>

The Cinderella Syndrome in Access Rhetoric

Background:
Neoliberal capitalism

Competition of
knowledge
economies and their
Homo Economicus
for ultimate utility

The magic formula:

Higher-level skills
and knowledge
obtained through
'HE for all'

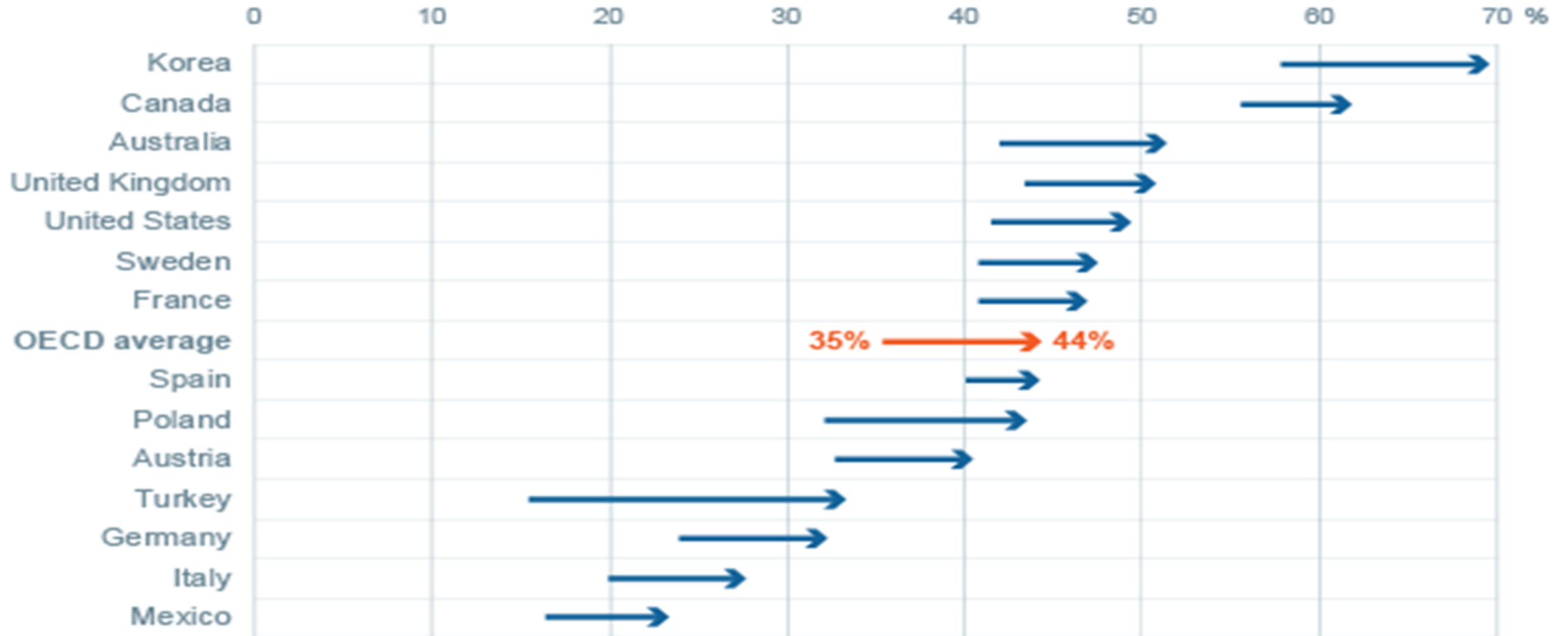
Increased social
mobility (ideally
participative equity)

Live happily ever
after!



Higher education is on the rise

Percentage of tertiary-educated 25-34 year-olds, selected countries, 2008 → 2018



Source: Education at a Glance 2019: OECD Indicators



Beyond the Miracle of Access: Access to what?

A. The question of belonging



Studies by e.g., Cureton & Gravestock, 2019; Singh, 2015; Vázquez-Montilla, Wilder and Triscari, 2012; have shown:

'Students from ethnic and religious minority groups as well as from lower SES backgrounds struggle to adapt to the higher education environment and find it difficult to balance belonging and their socio-cultural backgrounds and identity'.

Issues of inclusion, self-confidence, cultural capital, capability to create social capital/networking,....WHY?

Parental Educational Background (PEB) and belonging



Causal relation: PEB exerts strong influence on children's educational pathways and achievement;

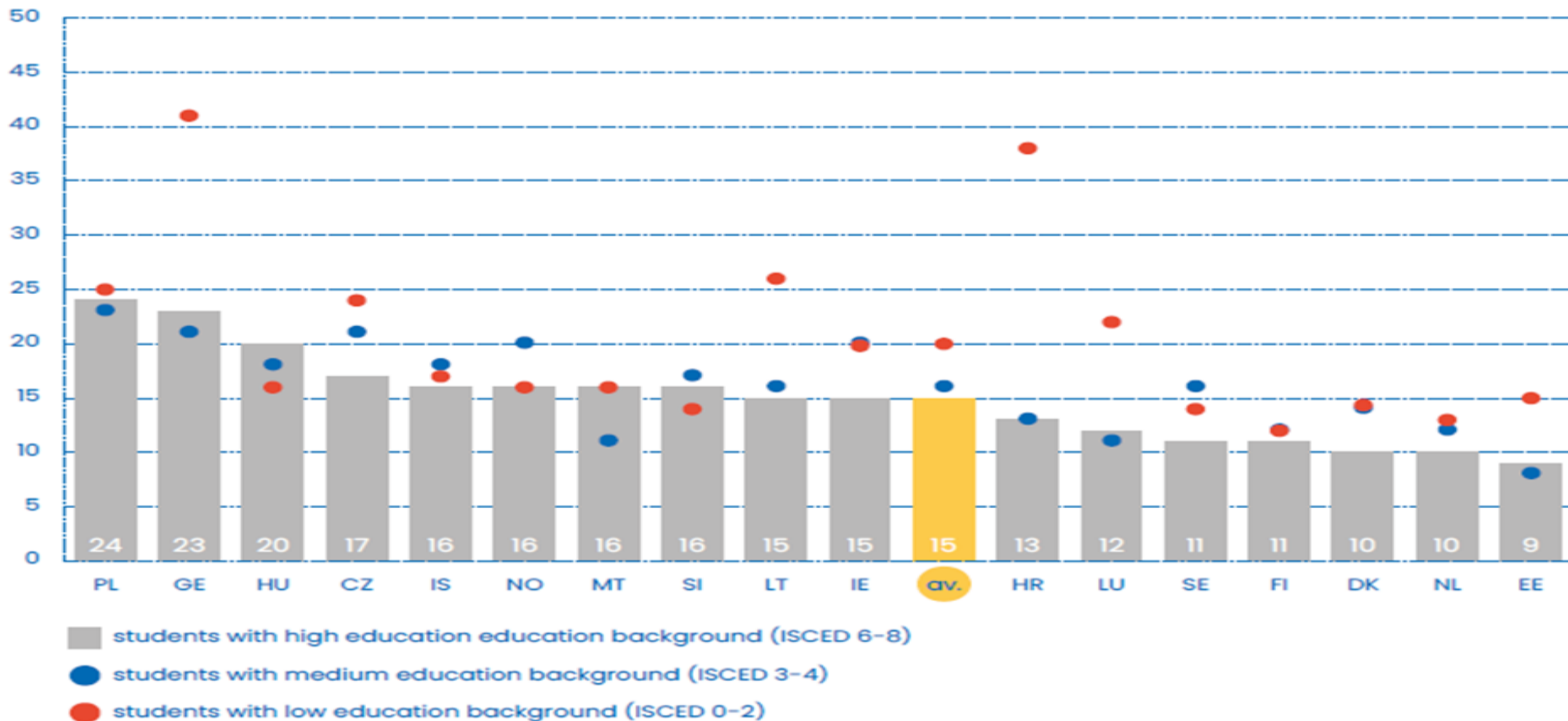
BUT...this is exactly why we try to break the cycle!

"On average, students from lower educational backgrounds (ISCED 0-2) more often feel they do not belong in higher education than their peers with medium (ISCED 3-4) or high education background education (ISCED 6-8)", (EUROSTUDENTS, 2019)

Students' sense of lack of belonging by educational background

(Strong) agreement with the statement "I often have the feeling that I don't really belong in higher education"

Share of students, in %



Data source: EUROSTUDENT VII (preliminary data based on national surveys conducted in 2019). Note: students with parents with ISCED level 5 (short-cycle tertiary education) not shown due to the varying character of this level of education across countries.

Disabilities and belonging



Inclusion has been the buzz word across all levels of education and has turned into regional and national policies:

International: The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD) is the first international, legally binding instrument

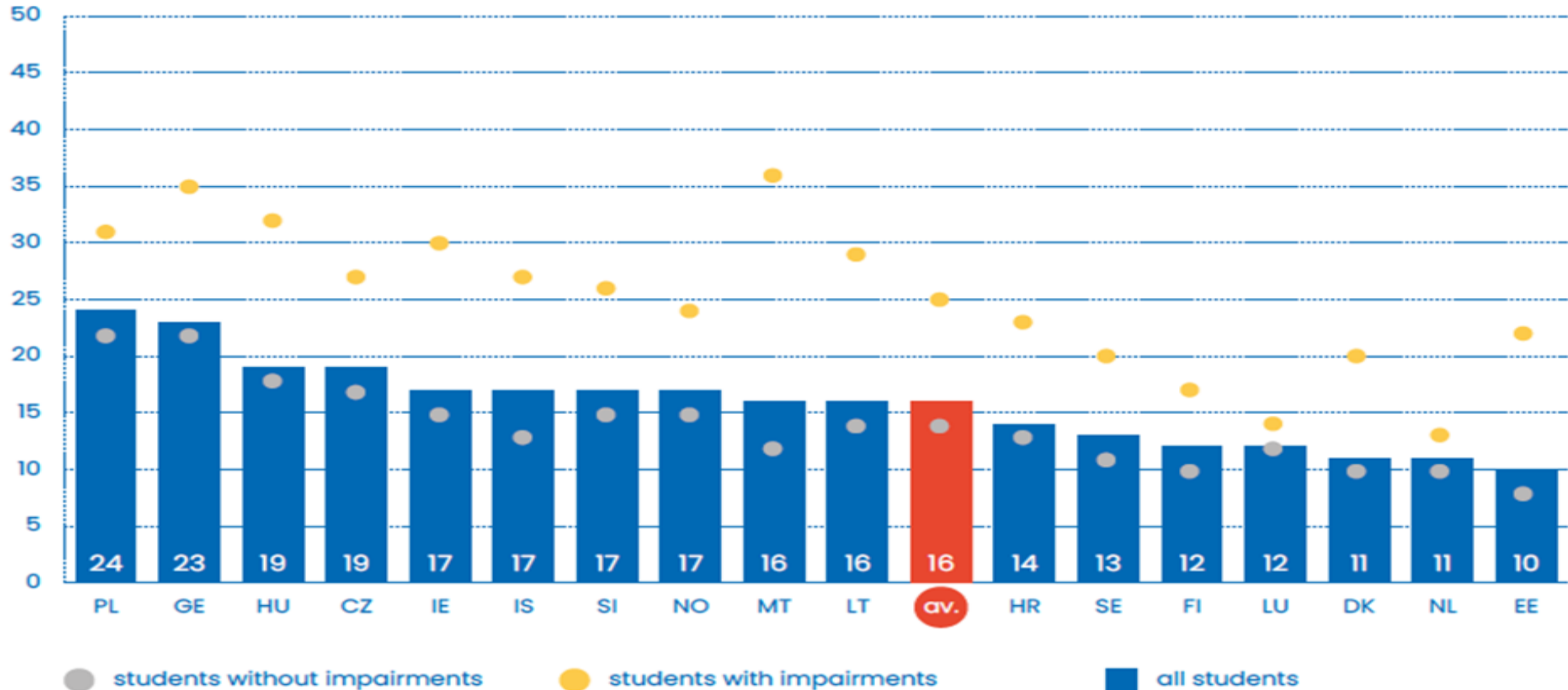
THE UK: In/direct forms of discrimination in treating disabled is against the law (<https://www.gov.uk/rights-disabled-person/education-rights>)

EU: Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030

<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1484&langId=en>

Students' sense of lack of belonging by impairment

(Strong) agreement with the statement "I often have the feeling that I don't really belong in higher education"
Share of students, in %



B. The vicious circle of stratification

- Sen's Capability and Functioning Approach,
- HE reflects the social structure :
- Structural stratification leads to self-stratification
- 'HE with price barriers evoke larger self-stratification effects and are more likely to empty out degree completion altogether in the bottom SES layers' (Marginson, 2016)



The Fabrication of Inequalities

The goal of 'Access and widening participation policies and practices' is **PARTICIPATIVE EQUITY**.

This is why we have created new routes of entry that are more flexible, shorter, part-time, etc.; this is also the reason behind support mechanism for mobility (https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/topics/higher-education_en)

BUT: We are reproducing the same stratifications!

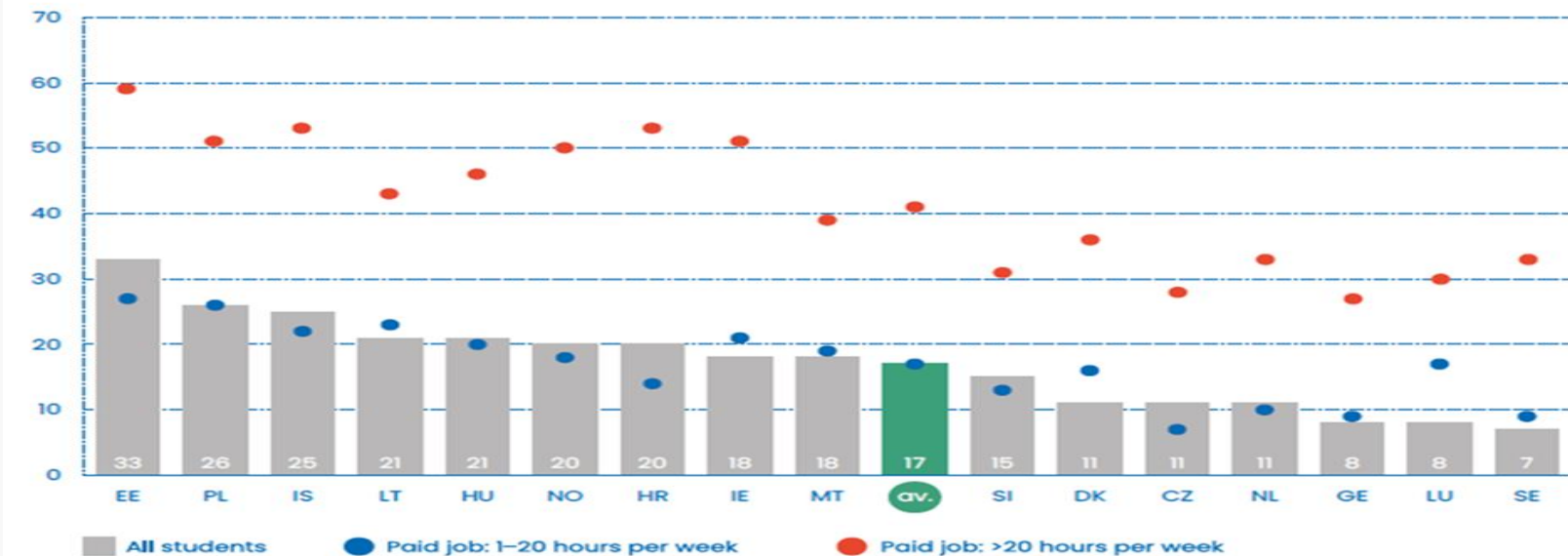
HOW?



Time poverty

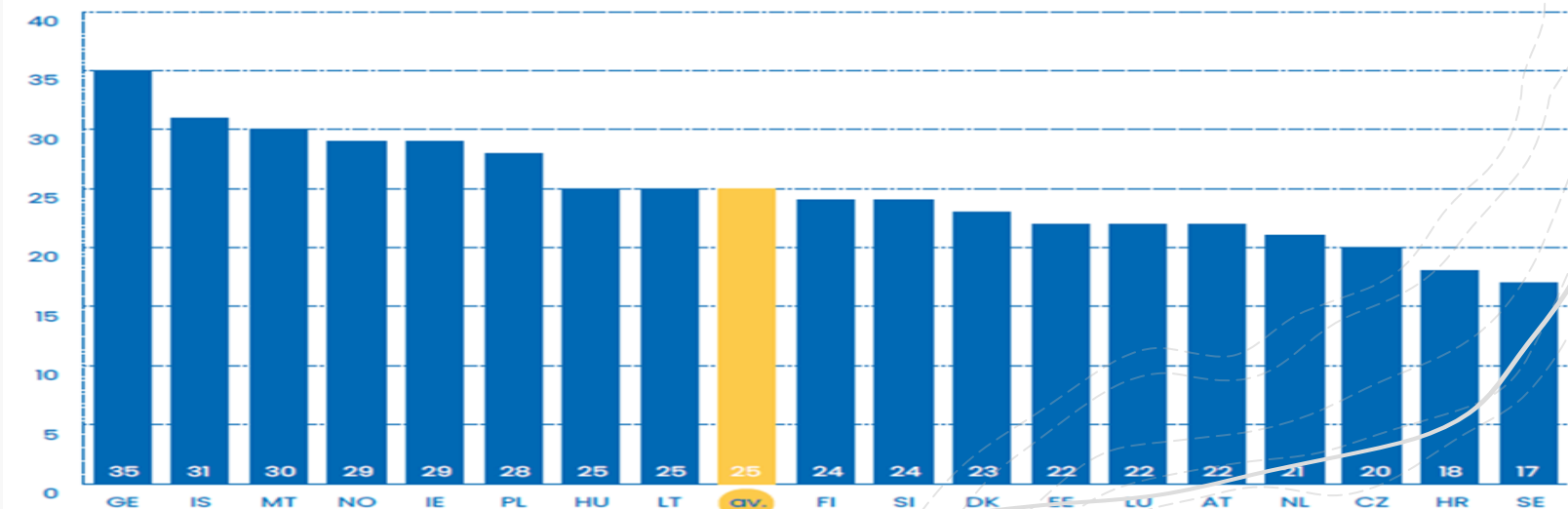
- Working and studying is not a choice but a must for many!
- Lower learning, vocational capacity, and intellectual formation (Arum & Roksa, 2015) have been reported among SES students.

Difficulties due to job obligation by extent of working
Self-assessed experience of current difficulties in studies due to job obligation
Share of students, in %



Data source: EUROSTUDENT VII (preliminary data based on national surveys conducted in 2019).

Financial difficulties
Self-assessed very serious and serious financial difficulties
Share of all students, in %



Data source: EUROSTUDENT VII (preliminary data based on national surveys conducted in 2019).

Gender and Age Inequalities



- 'Less than 15% of new entrants to bachelor's programmes study engineering, manufacturing and construction and less than 5% study information and communication technologies, despite these sectors having among the highest employment rates and earnings. Women are particularly under-represented, making up fewer than one in four entrants, on average, across OECD countries.'
- The gender gap in earnings persists across all levels of educational attainment and the gap is wider among tertiary-educated adults. Women earn less than men, even with a tertiary degree in the same broad field of study (OECD, Education at a Glance, 2019);
- Adult and professional students CAN indeed enroll; BUT....
- lack of instructors' training on adult learning; lack of mentoring in online learning; cognitive dissonance; balancing time-work-study (Torabian, 2010; Pozdinyakova & Pozdinyakova, 2017)

Migration & Inequalities

- Convention on Human Rights (Article 26.2), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 13c) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 28c), “access to higher education is a human right”. UNESCO’s 2019 Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education (<https://en.unesco.org/themes/higher-education/recognition-qualifications/global-convention>) has also been a meaningful step towards integrating refugees and migrants.
- Europe received a total of 4.3 million migrants in 2016 and 4.4 million in 2017 of which 47% were from third countries in 2016 and 46% in 2017. On EU average, 52% of first-time asylum applicants is in the age group typically associated with university studies (18-34 years old);
- Despite commitments to multi-stakeholder approaches, in some countries the implementation remains highly centralised, with a top-down approach, low degree of subsidiarity and little decision-making power delegated to decentralised bodies or stakeholders.
- There are **Barriers to Access; Barriers to integration**

TandEM report 2019

NATIONAL LEVEL	INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL		INDIVIDUAL LEVEL
Access barriers	(A) Access barriers	(B) Current integration approaches & challenges	(TCN/refugee)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ LEGAL/POLICY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ links between integration and higher education policy ▪ access requirements, ▪ recognition procedures – LRC implementation, ▪ autonomy in admissions, ▪ student support, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ CULTURAL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ language, ▪ academic culture, ▪ study & research skills, ▪ teaching approaches etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ INTERNAL POLICY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ strategy and mission links, ▪ recruitment priorities, ▪ admission & recognition practices, ▪ third mission, ▪ outreach, etc. ▶ SERVICES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ admissions, ▪ language training, ▪ consultation, ▪ funding, etc. ▶ STUDENTS, STAFF <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ volunteering, ▪ mentoring, ▪ outreach, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ QUALIFICATIONS ▶ NEEDS & EXPECTATIONS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ interest in higher education, ▪ financial situation, ▪ info gap, etc. ▶ INTEGRATION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ cultural, ▪ societal, etc. ▶ LEGAL STATUS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Visa or international protection

C. Status Drop-outs



- HESA-UK report (2019 and 2017): 8.8% of disadvantaged students in 2017 did not appear as second year students compared to 6% of students from more advantaged backgrounds. The gap has widened by 0.3% since 2016 as a total of 13.3 per cent students from affluent backgrounds dropped out; Adults not continuing (11.7%) in 2014/15 compared to younger students;
- NCES-US report (2020): Despite positive trends in completion rates and female students doing better than male students, in 2019 the percentage of 25- to 29-year-olds with high school completion or higher was higher for those who were Asian (97 percent) and White (96 percent) than for those who were Black (91 percent) and Hispanic (86 percent). Stigmatisation and racial inequalities are believed to be at the root of non-completion rates (APA, 2016)
- OECD (2019): In the 19 OECD countries for which data are available, 31% of students fail to complete their course in tertiary education (making for a completion rate of 69%). Dropout rates range from more than 40% in Hungary, New Zealand and the United States to below 24% in Belgium (Fl.), Denmark, France, Germany and Japan.



Beyond the Miracle of Access: Access for what?

A. Doing & Undoing neoliberalism in HE

In the capitalist world, even those graduated from HE enter into what Professor Chomsky calls: **rental relations**.

In a world where 1% of the population controls 99% of the global wealth (WEF, 2020; OXFAM, 2020 & 2021), and 88 million have been added to already 150 million in extreme poverty in 2020; (Worldbank, 2020), and when a quarter of the global population lives below 3.20 USD, and more than 40% (3;3 billion live below 5.50 USD)

*Access to higher education and its happily ever after story does indeed carry a **Cinderella syndrome!***

WHY?

Staggering inequalities, reproduction and continued discrimination against billions of Cinderella cannot be addressed by access and participation higher education alone! Particularly if the HE is reproducing the same patterns of inequalities and stratification;

The **background** and the **theme** of the story have to be changed! That is, **Neoliberalism and its Utilitarian HE must be UNDONE!**



B. Academic Freedom: What type of graduates?

- Academic freedom and institutional autonomy have been under attack in Europe (Steinel, 2021);
- During the CV-19 pandemic: largest declines in academic freedom in Belarus, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka, and Zambia (Afi data, 2020);
- ongoing repressions in Turkey, Iran, Suadi Arabia, China, and Thailand.
- In the US and the UK similar trends have been noticed (the creation of Academic Freedom Alliance, 2021 in the US; in the UK the Chinese alaraming meddling, 2019)
- During the pandemic and under the hegemony of recorded classes, many academics have been self-censoring (Poliakoff, 2020) have avoided sharing life expérences and sufficed to share facts and figures rather than engaging or 'provocative' discussions (Torabian, ongoing research, 2021)
- A research by Professor Patterson (BERA Conference, 2018) revealed higher levels of education do not neccesarily mean more civic engagement or political participation;



The Treatment

1. Structural shift beyond HE including

- *Fiscal policies and public responsibility;*
- *Social-mobility funding and awards across education levels;*
- *Revising ranking systems in line with social mobility, (HEPI, 2021), Academic freedom, (Afi, 2020), Gender equality and inclusion index*
- *Regulating private funding of research.*

2. Shift in our perception of inequalities and forms of capital

(what about Prince Charming, for instance?)

3. Undoing Neoliberalism in HE: Depatterning and repatterning pedagogy for *résistance* and disruptive capacity buiding (Great Transition Initiative organisation)



Concluding remarks



- + **Access to what?** If HE reproduces the same social stratifications and inequalities;
- + **Access for what?** If HE does or can not “cultivate our gardens” to use Voltaire’s words (freedom of speech, civic and political engagement for social justice, critical thinking)
- A circular shift in perceptions, policies as text and discourses (Ball, 1993), practices, narratives is required to do away with the Cinderella syndrome and the happily ever after stories of accessing higher education
- Differences in human capital are constructed before entry to HE, therefore, ‘The key part of any strategy to reduce socio-economic inequalities in degree acquisition and performance should be to increase the attainment of those from the poorest families earlier in the school system’ (Crawford, 2014).

Meanwhile....

STUDENT POPULATION: It is estimated that by 2030 there would be 377.4million, 471.4 million by 2035 and 594.1 million students by 2040 (Calderson, 2018);

SHIFT IN SKILLS: The World Economic Forum launched 'the Education 4.0' in Jan 2020, in line with the 4th Industrial Revolution to reskill teachers and students;

SHIFT IN ECONOMY: The European Circular Economy Action Plan was launched in Oct 2020



It has been a great pleasure!

Contact details:

Juliette.torabian@uni.lu

P.S.1. Paper to be published 2021

P.S.2. Still wondering how Cinderella could dance and run with high heels glass shoes?!



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