

Chapter A2

Introduction

Context of the Synopsis: Monitoring the social dimension of higher education and student mobility in Europe

The EUROSTUDENT Synopsis of Indicators presents key indicators on the social and economic conditions of students in Europe, based on data collected in the context of the eighth round of the project. National research teams conducted student surveys in 25 countries in order to provide a comprehensive overview of students' living and study conditions.

The social dimension of higher education (HE) has played an important role in the Bologna Process of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) since it was chosen as a central theme in the Prague Communiqué (2001) at the beginning of this millennium. With the Rome Communiqué (2020), the ministers responsible for higher education in the EHEA have reinforced the importance of the social dimension by adopting principles and guidelines which should guide member states on how to define and implement policy for improving the social dimension of the EHEA (Annex II to the Rome Communiqué, 2020). According to this document, the main objective of the social dimension is “that the composition of the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should correspond to the heterogeneous social profile of society at large in the EHEA countries”. Furthermore, “the social dimension encompasses creation of inclusive environment in higher education that fosters equity, diversity, and is responsive to the needs of local communities” (Annex II to the Rome Communiqué, 2020). In its Modernisation Agenda for Higher Education, the European Commission also defined “building inclusive and connected higher education systems” as a priority for action (European Commission, 2017).

By collecting data on the social and economic conditions of student life in Europe, the EUROSTUDENT project ensures that important indicators on the current state of the social dimension in many EHEA countries are available and thus provides a data basis for monitoring and evaluation. The current situation of students is the result of many influencing factors from the national and European levels (Figure A2.1). These include the school system, the economic and political system, cultural norms and values, as well as the higher education system. Current and past experiences of students, in turn, influence their future success.

The EUROSTUDENT topics cover all aspects of current student life: 1) their background (demographic characteristics and social background), 2) study conditions and experiences (access to and transition within higher education, study conditions and quality, time budget and mobility), and 3) their living conditions (employment, resources, expenses and housing situation). With regard to international student mobility (ISM),

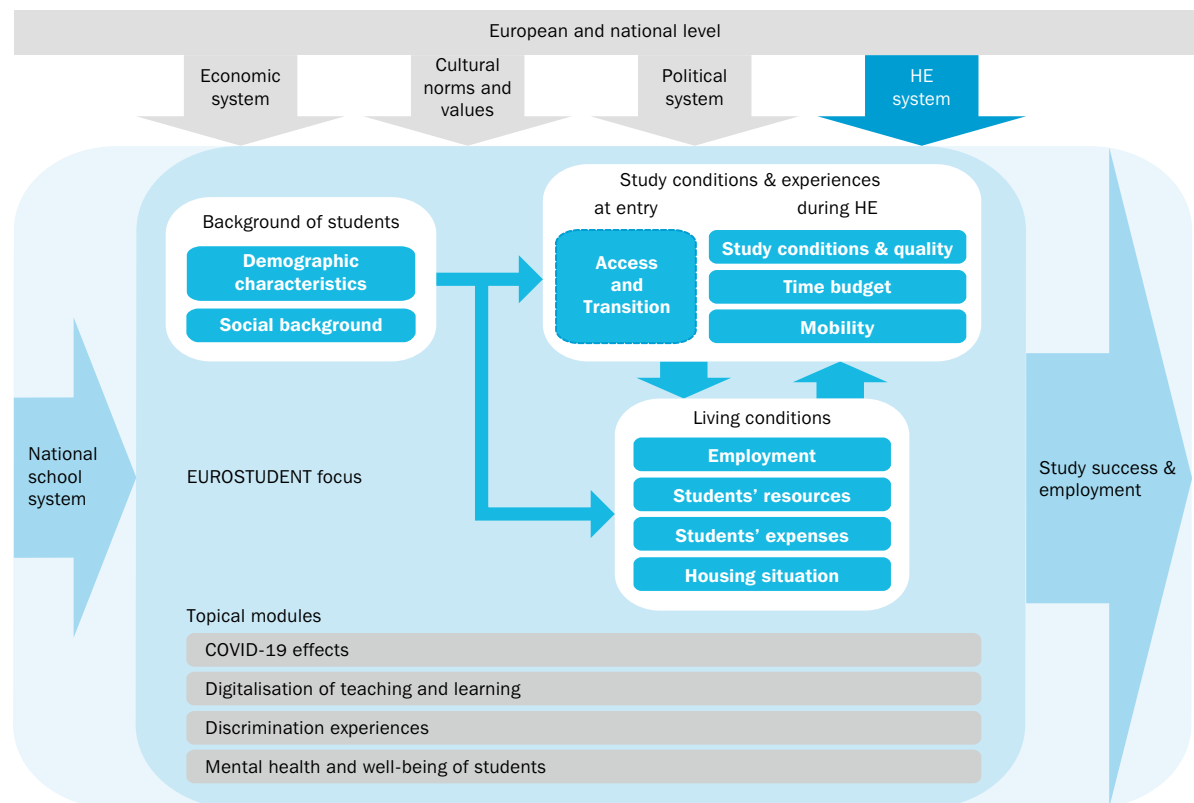
EUROSTUDENT not only offers insights into students' activities abroad and their recognition by higher education institutions (HEIs) in the home country, but also into obstacles to mobility for students who have not been mobile themselves.

To achieve greater analytical depth, EUROSTUDENT differentiates the student population into a variety of focus groups based on their socio-demographic characteristics, living and study conditions, as well as study-related background. In this way, the study experience can be presented in all its diversity. An overview of the EUROSTUDENT focus groups is provided in Table A2.1.

Besides the core questionnaire focusing on the key aspects of relevance for the social dimension, EUROSTUDENT includes 'topical modules'. These modules delve into specific subjects selected by the involved policymakers, aiming to offer insights on current and pressing issues. In the eighth round, the topical modules covered 'The effects of COVID-19 on students in higher education', 'Digitalisation of teaching and learning', 'Discrimination experiences of students in higher education' and 'Mental health and well-being of students in higher education'. Elements of these modules will be drawn on in the reporting throughout the Synopsis of Indicators but are more thoroughly reported in four separate publications (Cuppen et al., 2024; Haugas & Kendrali, 2024; Menz & Mandl, 2024; Schirmer, 2024).

Figure A2.1 [↓](#)

EUROSTUDENT 8 topics



EUROSTUDENT is based on students' self-reported data. Due to the nature of these data, the EUROSTUDENT dataset contains a lot of information that is not available from other sources, e.g. from official statistics. The EUROSTUDENT dataset, therefore, serves an important monitoring function to describe, explain, and assess the state of the social dimension in the EHEA. In addition to Eurostat and Eurydice, EUROSTUDENT data is included in Bologna Process Implementation Reports (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2012; Eurostat & HIS, 2009).

The following sections include some notes on the Synopsis and the EUROSTUDENT dataset that are important for the use of this report, as well as general information about the EUROSTUDENT project. Detailed methodological information on the EUROSTUDENT survey is provided in [> Chapter A3](#).

Concept and structure

Scope

The Synopsis is a compendium of indicators on the social and economic conditions of student life in the EUROSTUDENT countries; in this way, the social dimension of higher education is taken into account. The report is designed to adopt a broad, comparative perspective to allow for simple but meaningful international comparison. It mostly presents analyses on an aggregate level.

Reporting infrastructure

The Synopsis is embedded into a reporting infrastructure consisting of different elements, such as the EUROSTUDENT database, Thematic Reviews, or Intelligence Briefs. In the text, references are made to the other elements of the reporting infrastructure, which is indicated by an arrow and colour highlighting (e.g. [> Database](#)).

Additional information

Each chapter in part B concludes with a table appendix providing additional data on topics covered in the respective chapter. This report further includes a glossary ([> Chapter C1](#)), methodological notes on figures ([> Chapter C2](#)), metadata on the national surveys and key background data on the higher education systems covered in this report ([> Chapter C3](#)), and a list of the national contributors to EUROSTUDENT 8 ([> Chapter C4](#)).

Glossary

To relieve the flow text of definitions and certain concept descriptions, an overview of terms and key concepts is provided in [> Chapter C1](#).

Box A2.1

Methodological note: Reading the Synopsis

- **Watch out for deviations from EUROSTUDENT conventions:** The basis for data comparisons across countries are the EUROSTUDENT conventions. Inter alia, they define the standard target group of the national surveys (> [Chapter A3](#)). Not all countries manage to fully comply with the conventions (> [Chapter A3](#)). This is indicated in the respective figures, with detailed explanations of the deviations found in > [Chapter C3](#). Cases which should only be directly compared to other countries with extreme caution are marked with an asterisk beneath or next to the country abbreviation in figures and tables.
- **Focus groups are not mutually exclusive:** Many indicators further differentiate the figures for all students by so-called focus groups. These are groups of students considered to be particularly relevant (Table A2.1). The various focus groups may overlap, for instance, a student can be a Master student, a delayed transition student, and 30 years or older at the same time.
- **The EUROSTUDENT average refers to unweighted cross-country means/median:** Unweighted mean and median values of all EUROSTUDENT countries with available data on the respective indicator are used in the charts and text as a first orientation. They should be read with caution because they may conceal differences between countries in terms of the size of the national student and sample populations.
- **Comparisons over time are possible only for selected indicators:** For selected indicators, the Synopsis of Indicators undertakes a comparison between indicators from different project rounds. However, such comparisons are not possible for all countries as changes in a target group or in a survey question may have taken place despite the EUROSTUDENT conventions having stayed the same. It should be noted that the indicators for a comparison over time have been carefully selected. Not all EUROSTUDENT indicators can be directly compared over time due to changes in the core questionnaire. Starting with EUROSTUDENT 8, it is planned to leave the core questionnaire unchanged until EUROSTUDENT 10 in order to allow more comparisons over time.

EUROSTUDENT focus groups

The EUROSTUDENT focus groups allow the identification of certain groups of students, based on their socio-demographic characteristics, past and current educational situations, and current living situations throughout the report (Table A2.1). These groups of students are considered particularly relevant for analysing different aspects of the social dimension of higher education as they represent, in many countries, underrepresented, vulnerable, or disadvantaged groups (see also Annex II to the Rome Communiqué).

In addition, for the first time, EUROSTUDENT indicators can be differentiated according to several variables containing information on the higher education institution, drawn from the European Tertiary Education Register (ETER).

Table A2.1

EUROSTUDENT 8 focus groups

Name of variable	Values	Further explanation
Socio-demographic characteristics of students		
Age group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ up to 21 years ◆ 22 to <25 years ◆ 25 to <30 years ◆ 30 years and over 	–
Educational background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ with tertiary educational background ▼ without tertiary educational background 	<p>Students are grouped according to the highest educational attainment of at least one of their parents.</p> <p>In EUROSTUDENT, students 'with tertiary educational background' have parents of which at least one has attained a tertiary education degree. In terms of ISCED 2011, this means that at least one of the students' parents has successfully completed a short-cycle tertiary degree (level 5), a Bachelor's (level 6) or Master's degree (level 7), or a doctorate (level 8) or their national equivalent.</p> <p>Students 'without tertiary educational background' have parents whose highest educational degree is no higher than ISCED 2011 level 4 (post-secondary non-tertiary education).</p>
Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● students with disability limiting them in their studies ● students without disability limiting them in their studies 	<p>This focus group distinguishes between students with and without disabilities in their studies. 'With disability' refers to students self-reporting to be severely limited or limited, but not severely, based on a disability. 'Students without disability' either do not have any disability, or any disability they have does not limit them in their studies.</p> <p>Disabilities include physical chronic diseases, longstanding health problems, functional limitations, mental health problems, sensory, vision or hearing impairments, learning disabilities, and mobility impairments.</p>
Migration background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ students without migration background, domestically educated ◆ second-generation migration background, domestically educated 	<p>EUROSTUDENT categorises students according to their migration background based on their own and their parents' place of birth. In addition, in order to be able to distinguish international students, EUROSTUDENT considers the place of attainment of the higher education entry qualification, or, in absence of this, the place of last attending the regular school system (>Chapter B).</p> <p>'Students without migration background, domestically educated' are students who were born in the country of survey, as were their parents, and who attended/completed the national school system.</p> <p>'Second-generation migration background, domestically educated' refers to students with at least one parent born abroad, who were born in the country of survey, and who attended/completed the national school system.</p>
Sex/gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ male ● female 	<p>The EUROSTUDENT questionnaire is based on the definitions used in national registers of the country of survey, i.e. sex or gender. This report distinguishes only between male and female students; more detailed information on gender is available in the EUROSTUDENT >Database.</p>
Living conditions		
Dependency on income source	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ dependent on family support ✚ dependent on self-earned income ✚ dependent on national public student support 	<p>A student is considered dependent on an income source if one of the three sources 'support from family/partner' (including transfers in kind), 'self-earned income' or 'national public student support' provides more than 50% of the student's total income (total income includes transfers in kind). Students with a mixed budget (i.e. no source providing more than 50% of total income) are not assigned to a group.</p>
Financial difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ students with financial difficulties ★ students without financial difficulties 	<p>This focus group distinguishes between the two groups based on students' self-assessment.</p>
Housing situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🏠 living with parents 🏡 not living with parents 	–
Working students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ students without paid job(s) during the semester ❖ students working in paid job(s) up to 20 hrs./week ❖ students working in paid job(s) > 20 hrs./week 	<p>The groups are differentiated based on the extent of their regular paid employment or employment from time to time during term time, not taking into account paid jobs during the holidays.</p>

Name of variable	Values	Further explanation
Study conditions		
Field of study	<input type="radio"/> Education (incl. Teacher Training) Arts and Humanities <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction Social Sciences, Journalism and Information Business, Administration and Law Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics <input type="checkbox"/> Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) Agriculture, Forestry, Fishery and Veterinary Health and Welfare Services	This focus group distinguishes students based on their field of study (according to ISCED-F2013).
Study intensity	<input checked="" type="radio"/> low intensity <input type="radio"/> medium intensity <input checked="" type="radio"/> high intensity	This indicator groups students according to their weekly workload in a typical week for study-related activities (taught and personal study time). Low-intensity students spend between 0 and 20 hours a week on study-related activities. Medium-intensity students spend more than 20 but no more than 40 hours a week on study-related activities. High-intensity students spend more than 40 hours a week on study-related activities.
Type of higher education institution (HEI)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> university <input type="checkbox"/> non-university	Types of HEIs are distinguished based on national legislation and understanding. If a distinction between types of HEIs exists within a country, institutions classified as 'universities' are typically allowed to award doctoral degrees. Other types of HEIs, depending on national legislations, may include universities of applied sciences, polytechnics, professional HEIs and similar institutions which offer higher education programmes covered in the EUROSTUDENT standard target group. These are included in the EUROSTUDENT focus group 'non-university'.
Type of study programme	<input type="checkbox"/> short-cycle programmes <input type="checkbox"/> short national degrees <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Bachelor <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Master <input type="checkbox"/> long national degrees <input type="checkbox"/> other	Within the EUROSTUDENT standard target group, which covers all types of higher education study programmes, students currently enrolled in a Bachelor degree programme and students currently enrolled in a Master degree programme are two special focus groups often used throughout the report.
Study experience	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> first-year students	Students currently enrolled in their first year of higher education (i.e. not current study programme).
Study-related background		
Access route	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> alternative access route <input type="checkbox"/> standard access route	This focus group distinguishes students based on their entry qualification into higher education. Students are classified as having used the 'standard access route' if they possess an upper secondary qualification obtained in direct relation to leaving school for the first time (e.g. Matura, Abitur, Baccalauréat), either in the country of survey or abroad. The 'alternative access route' has been used by students who either do not possess such a qualification or obtained it later in life, e.g. via evening classes or adult learning.
Educational origin	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> international students <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> domestic students	Educational origin of the students is determined based on the origin of the higher education entrance qualification or – in the absence of such a qualification – the place of leaving the school system for the first time. 'International students' are studying in the country of the survey and have left the school system for the first time outside of the country of the survey. That means the status as international student is not related to place of birth, nationality or citizenship. 'Domestic students' hold a higher education entry qualification from the country of survey or have left the school system for the first time there.
Transition duration	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> delayed transition <input type="checkbox"/> direct transition	This focus group distinguishes students according to the duration between leaving the school system for the first time and entering higher education. Direct-transition students have a delay of no more than 24 months between leaving school and entering higher education. Delayed-transition students have entered higher education for the first time more than 24 months after leaving the school system for the first time.
Pre-COVID	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> enrolled before COVID-19 outbreak <input type="checkbox"/> enrolled after COVID-19 outbreak	–

Access to EUROSTUDENT data and figures

The present Synopsis of Indicators presents only a small selection of EUROSTUDENT data. A wider range of data are available online in the EUROSTUDENT [Database](http://www.eurostudent.eu/database) www.eurostudent.eu/database

Any corrections possibly made to the data after the publication of the Synopsis will be updated in the EUROSTUDENT database.

The data used for the figures in the Synopsis, as well as high-resolution pdf files of the figures, can be directly downloaded by clicking on the download symbol in the top left-hand corner of each figure: [↓](#)

All EUROSTUDENT data, as well as this Synopsis of Indicators, including its figures and tables, are available under an Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International Licence (CC BY-SA 4.0 DE).

Data from EUROSTUDENT rounds VII and 8 are available at the Research Data Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies in the form of a Scientific Use File based on national-level micro data on application (coverage varies).

About the Eurostudent project

Project organisation

EUROSTUDENT is a network of researchers, data collectors, representatives of national ministries and other stakeholders who have joined forces to examine the social and economic conditions of student life in higher education systems in Europe. The eighth round of the project took place from September 2021 to August 2024.

Responsibilities in EUROSTUDENT

EUROSTUDENT combines a central coordination approach with a strong network of national partners in each participant country. The EUROSTUDENT consortium provides a core questionnaire and extensive instructions for data cleaning and the calculation of indicators. The implementation and analysis of the national student surveys in line with the central conventions lies within the area of responsibility of the contributing countries. Throughout the project, the EUROSTUDENT consortium collaborates closely with the participating countries to ensure a common understanding of and compliance with the data conventions. More information on the methodology behind EUROSTUDENT can be found in [Chapter A3](#).

The network aspect of the project allows bringing the knowledge of experts from different countries together. This enriches not only the project, but also ensures that its design is suitable for international comparative analyses and that country-specific context information is taken into account.

EUROSTUDENT participant countries

EUROSTUDENT 8 data cover a large part of the EHEA: The participants reach from Iceland in the north all the way to Malta in the south and from Portugal in the west to

Azerbaijan in the east. The EUROSTUDENT 8 indicators presented in this report are based on survey responses collected of more than 290,000 students (> [Chapter C3](#)).

Figure A2.2 and Table A2.2 provide an overview of the 25 countries participating in EUROSTUDENT 8. More information on the contributing network members can be found in > [Chapter C4](#).

The eighth round of the project was funded with the support of all EUROSTUDENT countries and co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union, the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), and the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (MinOCW).

Figure A2.2 [↓](#)

The EUROSTUDENT 8 network

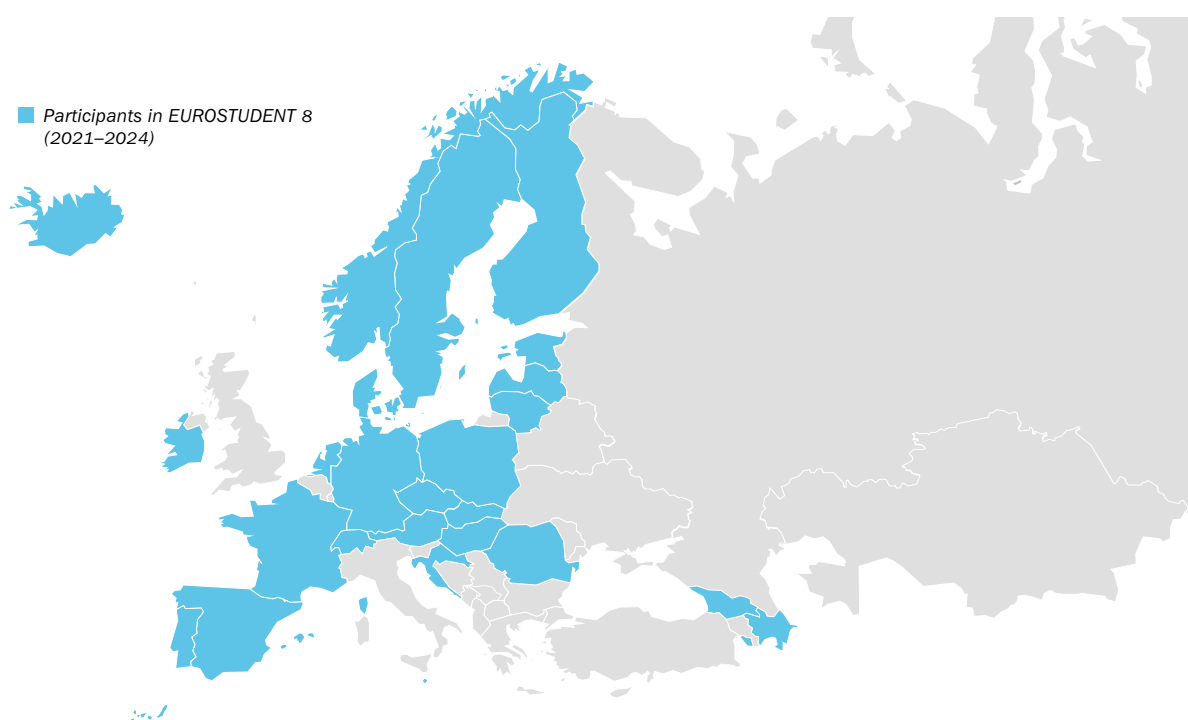


Table A2.2

EUROSTUDENT 8 participant countries

Participating countries in EUROSTUDENT 8		
Austria	Germany	Poland
Azerbaijan	Hungary	Portugal
Croatia	Iceland	Romania
Czech Republic	Ireland	Slovakia
Denmark	Latvia	Spain
Estonia	Lithuania	Sweden
Finland	Malta	Switzerland
France	Norway	The Netherlands
Georgia		

EUROSTUDENT consortium

The central coordination of the EUROSTUDENT project is directed by the German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies (DZHW), which is based in Hanover, Germany. In its function as the central coordinator, DZHW heads the EUROSTUDENT consortium consisting of six international partners:

- German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies (DZHW, Germany)
- Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS, Austria)
- ResearchNed (the Netherlands)
- Think Tank Praxis (Praxis, Estonia)
- Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA, Malta)
- The Swiss Federal Statistical Office (FSO, Switzerland)

EUROSTUDENT steering board

The steering board guides the EUROSTUDENT consortium in the development of a reliable, contextually sensitive and policy relevant comparative study of the social dimension in European higher education. On the basis of the assigned tasks, the steering board actively contributes especially to the middle- and long-term development of the project. The EUROSTUDENT 8 steering board was composed of representatives from the European Commission (EC), the European Students' Union (ESU), the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG), the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (MinOCW), as well as three country representatives of the fee-paying countries from France (L'Observatoire national de la vie étudiante, OVE), Sweden (Swedish Council for Higher Education) and Austria (Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research).

Acknowledgements

EUROSTUDENT thrives on the collaborative efforts of numerous individuals and institutions across Europe, creating a network vital to the project's success. The Central Coordination Team at DZHW extends its profound gratitude to the network partners from ministries and research bodies in the 25 participating countries (> [Chapter C4](#)) for their crucial contributions to the national surveys and their dedication to providing precise and reliable data on EUROSTUDENT indicators. Furthermore, the insights gained from the discussions and feedback during various EUROSTUDENT conferences and workshops have been invaluable for understanding the national and international contexts. We wholeheartedly thank all those who have engaged and offered their input in these gatherings. The insightful guidance and recommendations from both past and present members of this round's Steering Board (Odile Ferry, Carina Hellgren, Maria Höchstädter, Svein Hullstein, Charlotte Johannson, Yiannis Katsenavakis, Brenda Langezaal, Elke Laudy, Marit Metternich, Horia Onita, Helga Posset, Anna Spexard, Lucie Trojanova, Christina Wildenauer, and Paul Zeer) are greatly valued. Immense gratitude is extended to all our partners in the EUROSTUDENT 8 consortium for their significant contribution to a highly successful and enjoyable collaboration. The colleagues from the Research Data Center for Higher Education Research and Science Studies (FDZ-DZHW) Daniel Buck and Andreas Daniel provided invaluable advice and practical support on the creation of the project's Scientific Use File. We are grateful to our 'chapter buddies' Joris Cuppen, Jana Kazarjan, Nicolai

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