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Internationalization of the EU higher education and non-EU students

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Abbreviations

HE	Higher Education
IoHE	Internationalization of Higher Education
MS	Member States
DHIP	Developing Higher Education Institutions' Internationalization Policies
EMJMD	Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree
MUP	Metropolitan University Prague
EMN	European Migration Network

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Abstract

The research examines the access of non-EU students to the EU higher education. The analysis of the topic takes place under the context of Internationalization theory. The research begins with an introduction to familiarize the readers with the whole topic and then the theoretical framework follows. Through the analysis, the EU with its partnerships and programs and its efforts to work with its Member States to internationalize the European education, are highlighted.

The goal is to answer to the research question that is set in the introduction. The international students' experience from their studies in the EU is, also, very important in order for the readers to form a comprehensive opinion on the subject. Although the limitations in the research were many, it finally achieves to reach on a conclusion and help the readers understand the whole process.



Introduction

The research intends to examine the following topic: “The access of non-EU students to the higher education of the EU under the concept of Internationalization”. For this reason, the first step is the analysis of the actions of the EU to internationalize its HE system. Then, a list of the documents that non-EU students need to get access to it, is presented, while some students’ testimonies are quoted in order to make this research informative for them too.

The mission is to present EU’s international collaborations and programs regarding HE and connect it with the access of non-EU students to it. For this reason, this research question has been set: has the EU done enough things regarding the internationalization of its HE so as all the non-EU students have the same opportunities to enter it or not?

Regarding the topic, numerous difficulties were shown up, and many gaps, inaccuracies, and different information were discovered, especially in the part about the bureaucratic process. This happens because of the role of national education systems. However, the research tries to cover the gaps and present a general framework for the European Universities.

So, to help the readers answer to the research question, the paper first sets the work hypothesis. So, the following assumption shall be made: EU’s actions were helpful enough for all international students to enter its HE system without discriminations or difficulties. Through the analysis the readers will find out if they can reject or approve this, at the conclusions.

Theoretical Framework

The study is carried out under the theory of Internationalization. The most accepted definition of Internationalization is “the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight, 2008). In other words, Internationalization is a concept that has been applied by the EU in many fields, especially in the field of HE.¹

IoHE is a phenomenon that has emerged over the last 30 years or so, but its roots lie in previous centuries, in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance period. The fact that the European Commission named its flagship mobility program after the Dutch philosopher Erasmus, an exemplary pilgrim of that period, reflects this historical connection. After a period of de-Europeanisation around the 19th century, the 20th century came and brought again the international cooperation among the nation states’ first priorities.¹

Internationalization has been promoted by both cooperation and competition between countries and universities globally. However, greater progress is needed as many



universities still have not been familiarized with the process of Internationalization or they do not consider non-EU students as a priority to focus on. But further than this, there is a big challenge that seems serious for the most institutions and communities, the international opportunities may be accessible only to students with financial capability.²

This theoretical framework motivates many professionals, students, and ordinary people to deal with the specific issue of what the EU has done to promote its HE internationally and if the non-EU students face difficulties in their effort to study in the EU. This is the attempt behind this project and through this, readers will finally answer to the research question.

Analysis

➤ EU higher education and international cooperation

One of the EU's priorities regarding the HE is to promote common values and support the mutual understanding between different cultures. For this reason, the EU tries to help its MS to internationalize their national education and training systems.³ Multilingualism, for example, is one of the goals that the EU tries to achieve with its MS. There is an availability of study programs in English in many European universities and the efforts for a bigger network of English-teaching programs continue growing.²

Moreover, through the Bologna process, the European countries agreed to make their educational systems more attractive and competitive worldwide. The goal was to bring a higher quality in the teaching methods and mutual recognition of the qualifications earned abroad. Although these reforms have not been applied in the same way in all the 48 countries that participate in the Bologna process, a more ambitious European Higher Education Area is the main goal of the EU by 2025.⁴ Furthermore, while trying to achieve a better international cooperation and alliance and promote the IoHE, three EU MS started in 2018 the DHIP Project with three Latin American countries. The project is co-financed by the EU Erasmus+ Program, in the frame of its KEY ACTION 2: Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices.⁵

➤ Projects and Scholarships

The “Study in Europe Project” provides information regarding the HE in Europe and the advantages that offers to students. Also, it helps build a connection between the students and the HE organizations. The project supports students both from the EU and outside the EU in order to study in 1 out of 33 countries that also participate in the Erasmus+



Program⁶. These countries are the 27 EU MS plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Serbia, North Macedonia, and Turkey.⁷

General, the EU offers 100,000s of scholarships and financial support schemes to international students. The EMJMD provides EU-funded scholarships to the best student candidates applying under annual selection rounds. The study must take place in at least two involved countries and lasts from 12 to 24 months.⁸ Moreover, students from the 33 countries we mentioned before, can borrow money for a Master's degree program from the "Erasmus+ Master loan". The "EURAXESS" and the "Scholarship Portal" are two sites supported by the EU with information about scholarships and funding schemes even for doctoral studies for international students.⁹

➤ The difficult and complicated process of documents required

Visa. Students with a non-EU nationality need a visa and a temporary residence permit to study in the HE institutions in the EU. These two types of visas need a renewal after a certain period, which differs according to the country.¹⁰

Health Insurance. This is necessary for the students to cover any costs related to their medical treatment because of an illness or an injury that may occur during the period of validity of their residence permit.¹⁰

Certificate that confirms the lack of any convictions for crimes. It is not needed from all the EU countries.¹¹

Certificate of acceptance by a HE institution. This is required to verify that the purpose of the stay is to pursue studies.¹¹

Sufficient financial resources. The students need to prove sufficient financial resources to support themselves and cover the tuition fees for the University, if needed. Some countries such as Greece, for example, do not charge the Bachelor programs.¹¹

Medical Test. In some countries, such as in Luxemburg, it is obligatory for the students to undergo a medical test with their entrance in the country.¹²

Accommodation. In most countries, students have to pay their accommodation, and also, the agent that mediated to find them an apartment, if this happened. Even if they choose to stay in the University dormitories, they usually have to pay a monthly rent. The students need to verify their accommodation.¹³

Certificates of English language or of the language the course is delivered in. Sometimes, students have to take an evaluation test according to the requirements of the courses they want to attend.¹⁴



Because of each country's different national law, some information is different from country to country (such as the validation period of visa, as we mentioned before). However, the students can find all the information they need here: <https://ec.europa.eu/immigration/>, for each EU MS separately.

➤ Non-EU students' testimonies

This research presents an interview with Ilura Love, from the USA. Ilura went to MUP with the Erasmus+ program in 2020 (the documents needed are almost the same as for a longer study period). She focused on the fact that getting a visa was the most difficult process among all the documents because of the different types of visas and permits. Ilura also emphasized on the language barrier. However, she mentioned that this experience was unforgettable to her.

Mariana de Paula from Brazil went for a M.Sc. in the Trinity College in Dublin in 2014. She wrote at the University's site that the application process was very different from the one in her country, but she had all the help she wanted. She improved many skills and had a great cooperation.¹⁵

Unfortunately, there are also some cases of students who failed to study in the EU. Hisham Barg is one example and for this reason, a small interview with him is also presented here. Hisham is from Libya and went in Athens to study for a Bachelor's in International Relations. He faced difficulties with the visa because of the war in his country. Then, he had many problems with the certificate of nationality and until it was issued, the other documents had expired, and the University rejected him. Hisham will return to Libya to continue his studies.

The list of documents required, table1(2013) below, shows that EU citizens need on average fewer documents to get a visa. The proof of sufficient financial means needed for 87% of all non-EU/Schengen citizens, is a major obstacle for people from less favorable socioeconomic backgrounds.

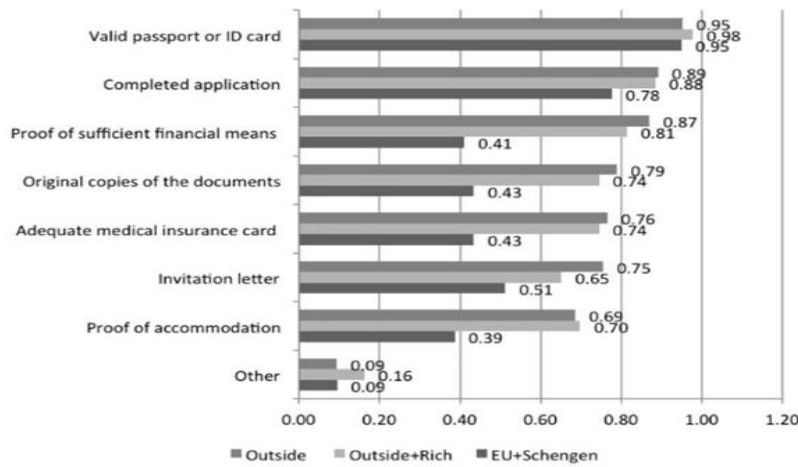


Table1

Required documents for the application, Research Study on visas and residence permits (2013),

Source: ESN

➤ Results

The EMN published in 2018 a study on 25 EU countries' efforts (-Slovenia, -Romania, -Denmark, +UK) to provide opportunities for international students. So, in 2017, the most popular destinations for non-EU students were UK, France, and Germany whereas the highest number of them came from China, the USA and India.² This preference has to do with many factors but the most important is the residence permits. And as readers can see in the table2 below, these three countries provided more residence permits for study reasons among the other country.

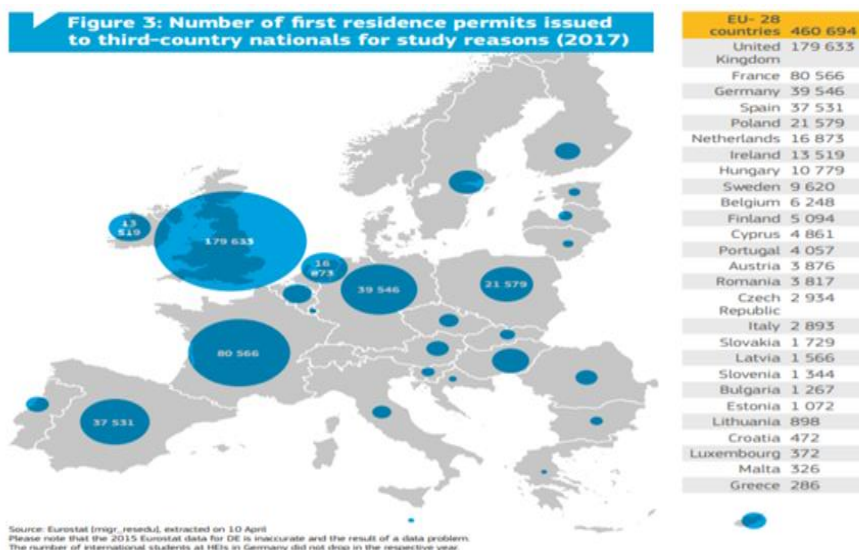


Table2

Number of first residence permits issued to third-country nationals for study reasons, Attracting and retaining international students in the EU (2017),

Source: Europa.eu



Conclusion

Finally, the goal of the research, the analysis of the EU IoHE and the access of non-EU students to it, has been covered. The theory of Internationalization helps readers understand the problem better and they can now answer to the research question if the EU's actions regarding the IoHE were enough to have access to it all the non-EU students without discriminations or difficulties.

The actions of the EU were very innovative and helpful but still more things need to be done especially for the affected countries. The research shows that some students do not have access to the European Universities and for this, maybe there is a need to simplify the process and the MS should better implement the EU directives in their national education systems. Although, there is a significant progress, the MS need to try harder to attract non-EU students.

So, regarding the work hypothesis, it cannot be neither rejected nor approved. However, the EU will continue to promote the IoHE and find solutions for same opportunities for all international students.

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