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PECULIARITIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION INTEGRATION OF THE EU COUNTRIES INTO THE EUROPEAN EDUCATIONAL SPACE

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Education plays a key role in shaping the future of individuals and societies, serving as a cornerstone for economic growth, social equity, and sustainable development. In the European Union, there is a robust commitment to enhancing educational attainment among young adults, particularly as the region sets its sights on ambitious targets for 2030.

Addressing these issues is crucial to fostering a more balanced and inclusive educational environment. As higher education institutions increasingly embrace sustainability within their curricula, they are not only preparing graduates for future challenges but are also contributing to wider societal goals.

The aim of the article is to analyse the practices employed by the European Union in the development of higher education, with an emphasis on gaining a comprehensive understanding of the educational landscape in Europe.

The research methodology is based on using the method of analysing key EU documents that regulate the legal field and determine the directions of development of European policy in the field of education and training at the level of higher education.

Conclusion. The EU's education policy is characterised by targeted, multi-vector and multi-level influences to build the European Education Area. The strategic priorities of European cooperation highlight that tertiary education is now the most common qualification in the European Union. However, there are still significant differences between different countries.

The Cohesion Policy reduces socioeconomic differences by promoting equal access to quality education. The European Education Area (EEA) helps EU countries work together to create better and more inclusive education and training systems. In 2025, the European Commission will offer new plans that focus on cooperation goals, national reforms, and updates to targets.

Key words: integration, European Education Area, higher education, sustainability, education and training, reforms.

ОСОБЛИВОСТІ ІНТЕГРАЦІЇ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ КРАЇН ЄС В ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКИЙ ОСВІТНІЙ ПРОСТІР

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Вища освіта відіграє ключову роль у формуванні майбутнього людей і суспільств, слугуючи наріжним каменем для економічного зростання, соціальної справедливості та сталого розвитку. В Європейському Союзі існує стійка тенденція до підвищення рівня освіченості серед молоді, особливо в умовах, коли країни ставлять перед собою амбітні цілі підвищити якість освіти до 2030 року.

Розв'язання цих питань має вирішальне значення для створення більш збалансованого та інклюзивного освітнього середовища. Оскільки вищі навчальні заклади все частіше вносять питання сталого розвитку у свої навчальні програми, вони не лише готують випускників до майбутніх викликів, а й сприяють досягненню ширших суспільних цілей.

***Метою статті** є вивчення практик, що застосовуються Європейським Союзом у розвитку вищої освіти, з акцентом на отриманні комплексного розуміння освітнього ландшафту в Європі.*

***Методологія дослідження** базується на використанні методу аналізу ключових документів ЄС, які регулюють правове поле та визначають напрями розвитку європейської політики у сфері освіти і навчання на рівні вищої освіти.*

***Висновки.** Освітня політика ЄС характеризується цілеспрямованим, різностороннім впливом на процес розбудови європейського освітнього простору. Стратегічні пріоритети європейського співробітництва підкреслюють, що вища освіта сьогодні є найбільш поширеною кваліфікацією в Європейському Союзі. Однак між різними країнами все ще існують значні відмінності.*

Політика згуртованості країн зменшує їх соціально-економічні відмінності, сприяючи рівному доступу до якісної освіти.

Європейський освітній простір допомагає країнам ЄС спільно працювати над створенням кращих і більш інклюзивних систем освіти та навчання. Постійне оцінювання перевіряє прогрес, який отримано під час досягнення освітніх цілей. У 2025 році Європейська комісія запропонує нові плани, які зосереджуватимуться на цілях співпраці, національних реформах та оновленні завдань у галузі освіти.

***Ключові слова:** інтеграція, Європейський освітній простір, вища освіта, сталість, освіта і навчання, реформи.*

Relevance of the article. European integration in education and training is based on the idea of building a common educational space. Its essential characteristics are defined by such documents as the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 [7]; Council Resolution on a Strategic Framework for European

Cooperation in Education and Training Towards the European Education Area and Beyond (2021–2030) [5].

Analysis of significant research and publications. The scientific problem of EU policy and European integration in the field of education and training is studied in the works of M. Cabrera Giraldez et al. [4], N. Russo [11], H. Stevenson [12], and F. Guerra [10].

The principles of formation of the European dimension of higher education and prospects for further development in Ukraine are highlighted in the works of A. Sbruieva [2].

Aspects of the European space – the higher education area, the European research area, and the European educational area – are studied in various studies of O. Lokshyna, A. Dzhurylo, C. Kravchenko, O. Shparyk, O. Topuzov [3].

The European Education Area is framed by the EU as a comprehensive framework within its borders. It encompasses all types, levels, and contexts of lifelong learning, and is guided by the objectives of the EU's policy on cooperation in education and training [3].

The European Union has established a target for 2030, indicating that at least 45 % of individuals aged 25 to 34 should attain tertiary educational qualifications. Furthermore, it is projected that a minimum of 20 million individuals will be employed as information and communication technology (ICT) specialists by the year 2030.

Over the past decade, there has been a significant expansion of higher education across the EU. As of 2023, higher educational attainment is now the most common qualification among young adults. The tertiary attainment rate for 25 to 34-year-olds reached 43.1%, reflecting an increase of 1.1 percentage points from the previous year [8].

While the overall trend across the EU is positive, 14 countries experienced a decrease in their attainment rates between 2022 and 2023. When examining the long-term trend since 2014, almost all countries have seen an increase of more than 7.2 percentage points at the EU level. The only exceptions are

Finland, Hungary and Romania, where a decline has been recorded from 2014 to 2023.

Looking ahead, positive trends in the number of new entrants – students enter higher education for the first time – are expected to support this growth. This progress will help the EU achieve its 2030 target of at least 45%, a goal that is currently just 1.9 percentage points away.

Higher education levels vary greatly within countries, especially between regions. This results in fewer highly qualified individuals in certain areas, which harms economic, social, and regional balance. Having a higher degree is less common in rural areas (31,7 %) compared to cities (53,3 %), where most education and job opportunities are available. In the past decade, the gap between urban and rural education levels has increased, growing from 19,7 percentage points in 2014 to 21,6 percentage points in 2023 [8].

Migrant status and gender reveal clear differences in term of inequality. Men are less likely to have bachelor's degrees, with only 37,6 % having obtained them, compared to 48,8 % of women. This gap has grown since 2014 in the EU. Among adults aged 25 to 34, those born outside the EU and whose parents were also born outside the EU have the lowest rate of bachelor's degrees at 37,1 % in 2023. This rate increases by 5,8 percentage points for adults born in the reporting country whose parents were born outside the EU. For those born in the reporting country with parents who were also born there, the rate rises to 44, 6 % [8].

Higher education helps people and societies become more sustainable by giving graduates the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed in a changing world. It also focuses on researching and developing solutions in a changing world. To support this idea, higher education institutions are including sustainability in their mission statements, programs, and strategies.

For example, Ghent University in the Flemish community of Belgium has committed to integrating sustainability into various subjects across the university. In the European Union,

many higher education institutions are creating programs to train specialists in this area [6].

Malta has introduced undergraduate and postgraduate programs in environmental management, sustainability, environmental monitoring and assessment, and sustainable energy and development.

In Finland, the University of Helsinki offers bachelor's and master's degrees through its Institute of Sustainability Science, focusing on environmental change, global sustainability, and urban studies and planning.

The CHARM-EU alliance of European universities (an organization that creates flexible, student-led educational programmes focused on identifying and solving specific challenges) provides a joint master's degree in Global Challenges for Sustainability. Their objective is to create a new, innovative model for European Higher Education in line with the European Values, the European Green Deal and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

To improve completion rates and ensure fairness in education, governments can provide grants to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Most EU education systems give grants based on socio-economic factors, with family income being the most common. In six systems, fewer than 10% of students in bachelor's programs receive needs-based grants. This indicates that these systems choose to support only a small number of students.

If higher education institutions receive increased funding to improve completion rates, it will also benefit all students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds. On the other hand, offering grants to disadvantaged students can reduce financial barriers that prevent them from participating and completing their studies. Many of these students need financial support, which may show that there are not enough funds for student assistance.

In ten systems, grants are awarded to 10–30% of students based on need, and in five systems, over 30 % receive these grants. Some countries, like Denmark, Finland, Luxembourg,

Malta and Sweden, provide universal grants, which are available to all students, regardless of their socio-economic background [8].

Most European Union member states provide grants based on financial need to facilitate the access of disadvantaged students to higher education.

Disadvantaged students can receive indirect financial support to make higher education more affordable. Seventeen education systems in the European Union provide subsidies to help cover costs for accommodation, transport, and meals [8]. Higher education institutions can also receive funding to help them reach goals that increase access and participation in education of this level for disadvantaged groups. However, only a few EU countries implement this type of support [8].

Nowadays, computer and information literacy are considered as key parts of higher education, including data management and artificial intelligence. However, the EU faces a serious shortage of digital experts, which could slow down the growth of new technologies. To address this, the EU aims to employ 20 million ICT professionals by 2030, requiring a significant increase in ICT graduates. In 2022, only 3,9 per thousand people aged 20–29 graduated in ICT.

In that period, just 5,1 % of new students chose ICT programs, one of the lowest rates among all fields. Gender disparities are significant: 9,0 % of male students entered ICT programs, compared to 1,9 % of female students. Though women are the majority of graduates in the EU, only 21,3 % of ICT graduates are women, and female entrants to ICT programs make up just 20,2 %, an increase of only 1.6 percentage points since 2016. This highlights the ongoing male dominance in ICT.

Between 2016 and 2022, the number of new students entering ICT (Information and Communication Technology) programs increased by only 0,7 percentage points. While more students are entering ICT, the number entering engineering, another STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) field, has dropped by 0,9 percentage points. This

shows that, despite the high demand for jobs in STEM fields, they are not attracting more students.

Higher education must meet the needs of the labour market to fill skills gaps and strengthen EU competitiveness:

- Croatia's National Plan for 2021–2027 introduces performance agreements, updates quality assurance methods, and revises accreditation procedures and study programs;

- Latvia aims to enhance its STEM education to produce more STEM graduates. The reforms include a new funding model that gives institutions more control over government funding and a new PhD model to address the shortage of researchers.

The EU is working to gather data on graduates to better match their skills with job demands. The EUROGRADUATE 2022 survey (a pilot survey of higher education institution graduates) targets graduates who earned bachelor's or master's degrees between 2017 and 2021. Graduates share information about their education, work history, job skills, mobility experiences, and social outcomes.

The 2022 pilot surveyed 17 countries in the European Economic Area: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The European Commission plans to include 80% of these countries in the next phase [9].

Conclusion. The higher education attainment rate among young people aged 25 to 34 has increased significantly, reaching an impressive 43,1 % in 2023. This figure means that higher education is firmly established as the most common qualification among young people in the European Union. However, it is important to note that significant differences remain between individual countries.

To promote equal access to higher education, EU countries provide a variety of financial support, both direct and indirect. Students from low-income backgrounds can benefit from need-based grants, which are available in almost every EU education system, although the extent of their coverage varies con-

siderably. In addition, subsidies are available in 18 of these education systems to help students cover basic costs such as food, transportation and accommodation, easing the financial burden of higher education.

The EU has set a goal to train 20 million ICT professionals by 2030. However, the reality is concerning: we have made little progress in increasing the number of applicants and graduates in the ICT sector. This shows a troubling gap between what higher education offers and the needs of the job market. It is important to find ways to close this gap.

The European Commission supports EU countries in improving their education systems. From 2021 to 2027, EU funding for education and training will exceed 130 billion euros. The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) offers 75,1 billion euros for reforms and investments in education.

The Cohesion Policy helps reduce socioeconomic differences by promoting equal access to quality education. Firstly, the European Commission has 864 million euros available for 2021–2027 to assist countries with reforms in the education area. Additionally, fostering a culture of evaluation in education policy is important for effectively using EU funding. Secondly, the European Education Area (EEA) helps EU countries collaborate on creating stronger and more inclusive education and training systems. An ongoing evaluation assesses progress toward education targets. In 2025, the European Commission will suggest new plans focusing on cooperation goals, national reforms, and updates to targets.

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