

(HIGHER) EDUCATION IN EUROPE: CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS

Europe's efforts to make higher education meet the challenges and needs of modern society are part of the ambitious initiative calling for the continent's economy to become the most competitive of the world. However, Europe is presently not attracting – because of its humanitarian tradition - the best talents, but the poorest, the endangered, and the prosecuted. Therefore, education is needed in a rather fundamental sense, and university trained “human capital” is required to generate the innovation needed for economic success on a global market.

At present and in the foreseeable future, education in Europe faces three major challenges: (1) Financial resources: Universities as well as schools in many European countries are chronically underfinanced. Also, the social reputation of teachers, whether school or university, has declined, with obvious consequences for the attractiveness of the profession among students. (2) Aging, demography and the gender issue: Populations in Europe are decreasing because of decreasing birth rates which are not compensated by increasing life expectancy. Therefore, the average age of the population increases. In addition, the proportion of women among students increases in higher education, but is still low in advanced positions of public service, business, and industry. (3) Social discrimination: In most European countries, the chances of a child to attend and successfully pass through university are substantially better if the child comes a family environment with high social and educational background. Political programmes designed to cope with this problem have been largely unsuccessful. (4) Migration: Europe is a target region for immigrants mainly from the East and South, most of whom are economically dependent and import traditions, values and convictions different from those of the original population; in particular, education is not always valued highly. Like many of the young, even from non-migrant background, they learn increasingly that in modern societies, access to money and social reputation, can be achieved more efficiently without going through a long and arduous educational biography.

Peter Gaetgens, 2007



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