EU Insight - Mobility in Higher Education and Research

The increasing mobility of students in tertiary education and researchers, is a key feature of the global science system. This issue of *EU Insight* will touch on recent mobility trends in tertiary education and explore the implications of the different aspects of mobility developed in one of the science policy briefs by the European Science Foundation's Member Organisation Forum ‚European Alliance on Research Careers Development' entitled *New Concepts of Researcher Mobility – a comprehensive approach including combined/part-time positions*.

In 2011 the number of students in tertiary education enrolled outside their country of citizenship reached 4.3 million, which is more than double when compared to the year 2000 (see Figure 1).

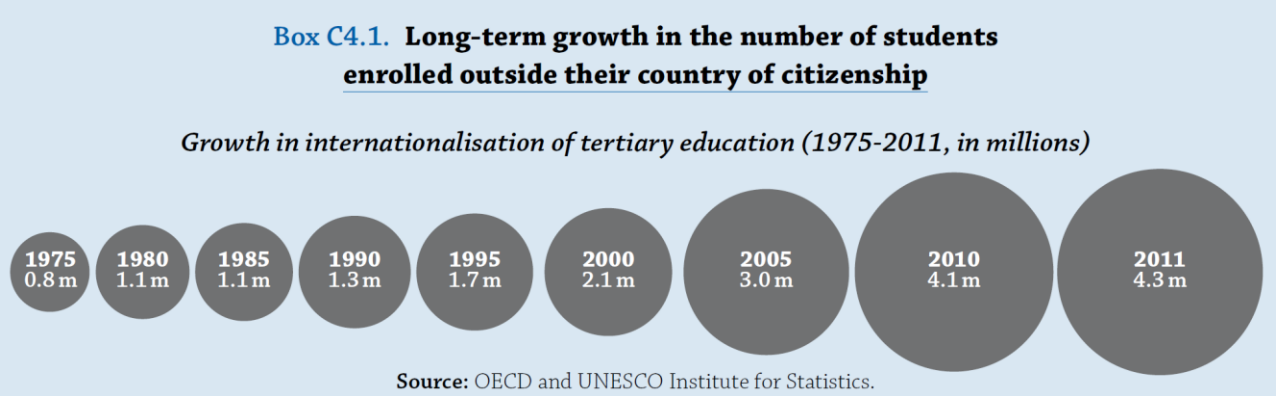

Figure 1: Growth in internationalisation of tertiary education [2]

Europe is the top destination for students at the tertiary level of education enrolled outside their country of origin, hosting 48% of these students, followed by North America, which hosts 21% of all international students.

The factors driving the general increase already in student mobility include the exploding demand for higher education worldwide, the perceived value of studying at prestigious post-secondary institutions abroad, specific policies that aim to foster student mobility within a geographic region and countries' and institutions' efforts to attract students from outside their boundaries. The top five source countries for internationally mobile students are China, India, South-Korea, Germany and France. Overall, 53% of the world's mobile students come from Asia.

Interestingly, 90% of the mobile students in Europe are European and 75% originate from EU member states. This data is not surprising, as the Bologna process has been strongly encouraging the bidirectional student mobility within Europe for the past 20 years.

It is widely accepted that international researcher mobility and cross-disciplinary research collaboration are indispensable for fruitful scientific research and also essential for the realization of the European Research Area. As the Science Policy Briefing *New Concepts of Researcher Mobility – a comprehensive approach including combined/part-time positions* explains,

Mobility is not a goal in itself, but rather a means for international research collaboration across fields and sectors.

At the same time brain drain from less scientifically attractive areas should be counteracted.

The paper introduces four different types of mobility:

International mobility which means physical mobility across countries and is hampered by the challenges in establishing smooth immigration and work permit procedures for incoming researchers, or the incompatibility of different systems for social benefits, pension rights, etc.

Two further aspects of mobility, *intersectoral* and *interdisciplinary mobility* refer to mobility across academia, industry or the public sector and mobility across different research fields, respectively. While both forms of mobility are widely encouraged, they can imply later disadvantages caused, i.e., by the limitation on research publications due to stricter IPR rules in industry or by individual and thus disciplinary review procedures.

A last form of mobility introduced in the report is *virtual mobility*, which encompasses virtual platforms, such as multidisciplinary network research centers. Such platforms facilitate the collaboration between excellent research groups worldwide without the need for physical mobility. Such flexible opportunities should be encouraged, stimulating the effective use of human and financial resources in research.

Mobility leads to the diversification of careers that will require new concepts when it comes to researcher positions or transnational institutional research collaboration. Examples for transnational institutional research collaboration include the existing European Molecular Laboratories, the Nordic Centres of Excellence or the first schemes for industrial PhD degrees.

One of the new concepts presented to address researcher mobility is based on a Harvard University/MIT scheme: the implementation of a ‘Professor 2’ combined/part-time position scheme. Here full professors could have a 20% position at another university or employees in industry have a 20% position in academia. Such schemes could be introduced as part of existing EU instruments, i.e. the Marie-Curie-Skłodowska-Actions or in combination with the proposed ERA Chairs programme. As stated in the Science Policy Brief „such combined part-time positions may also counteract brain drain by preserving the link to frontline research institutions for future collaboration.“

The European Science Foundation is currently focusing on the responsible winding down of its traditional research instruments and the transfer of policy activities to Science Europe, an association of European Research Funding Organisations (RFO) and Research Performing Organisations (RPO), based in Brussels. Science Europe promotes the collective interests of the RFOs and RPOs of Europe. It supports its Member Organisations in their efforts to foster European research. It will strengthen the European Research Area (ERA) through its direct engagement with key partners.

Sources:
[1] European Science Foundation
[2] Science Europe
[3] European Science Foundation Science Policy Briefing: New Concepts of Researcher Mobility
[4] OECD Education at a Glance 2013
[5] University World News, 2 February 2014: Special Report on student mobility