Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe
Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe

Synopsis of indicators | Final report | Eurostudent IV 2008–2011
Project sponsors

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## Country abbreviations

In all figures, the following abbreviations are used to refer to the participating countries.

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The use of travelling is to regulate imagination by reality, and instead of thinking how things may be, to see them as they are.

Samuel Johnson, 1773
Foreword

This publication of the results of EUROSTUDENT IV represents an important contribution to comparative research on European higher education. The study, the 4th in a series, provides a comprehensive Synopsis of Indicators on the social and economic conditions of student life from 24 countries. The EUROSTUDENT research programme has evolved from modest beginnings; only 8 countries were included in the first study published in 2000; 11 countries were included in the 2005 study while the 2008 publication involved 23 countries. The increased scope in coverage has been matched by a corresponding development in methodological sophistication.

It is a compliment to the initiators of this research programme that their acuity and strategic thinking has been recognised by key decision makers who have been entrusted with developing the European Higher Education Area. Both the European Union (Council of the European Union, 2010) and the Ministers Responsible for Higher Education in the 47 countries involved in the Bologna Process (Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué, 2009) have come to emphasise increasingly the importance of the ‘social dimension’ of higher education policy. Both have recognised that a precondition for making progress on this dimension is the availability of relevant and reliable data on social conditions of student life and on mobility. The findings from the EUROSTUDENT Surveys have come to form an important element in the creation of this data base, which is used for policy development and evaluation. Thus, what started out as a modest comparative research project has acquired a strategic importance in European higher education policy making.

The increasing importance of comparative research such as reported here is linked to the nature of the ‘governance processes’ used by the European Union and in the wider Bologna Process. Both have adopted the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), which operates by securing agreement in respect of joint policy objectives through agreed declarations and commitments and through institutionalising stocktaking mechanisms which monitor and benchmark achievements and report on best practice. Comparative research enables policy makers to place the experiences, successes and achievements in their own country within the context of what is happening in other countries. Although perhaps less appreciated it also offers scope for supranational organisations to influence policy making at national level.

The Synopsis of Indicators provides a wide range of data on: transition routes into higher education; the characteristics and the social make-up of national student populations; types and modes of study; time budget for studies and employment; levels and sources of financial resources; patterns of living expenses and student spending; types of accommodation; student mobility; and students’ assessment of their studies and future plans. This publication on indicators is complemented by a series of National Profiles on each participating country which can be downloaded from the website. These National Profiles report all of the data which a country has delivered and include commentaries by the national research team on the quality and comparability of the data. A key element of the reporting structure is the online access which is provided to all of the data provided by the national teams. This invaluable resource will facilitate secondary analysis of the data. The dual publication strategy reflects the methodology adopted. The project is centrally coordinated by HIS, Hanover, Germany, in conjunction with an International Consortium which includes members of the EUROSTUDENT Network, representing participating countries. Each participating country is responsible for its own national survey; country participation is dependent on the adoption of core questions, central data conventions and agreed time lines in data delivery.

The most striking feature of the results brought together in this report is the demonstration of the heterogeneity of the student population. This is evident in all phases from their transition routes into higher education through the examination of the student characteristics, their study and
employment experiences, their resources and living conditions and their experience of mobility. This detailed profiling of the social and economic conditions of students points to the inadequacy of many of the administrative categories used to characterise the student population. For example, while on average over 80% of the student population are classified as full-time, and in 5 countries part-time status does not exist formally, a very significant percentage of students are de facto part-timers (spending not more than 20 hours per week on their studies). In some countries the link between formal status and the time students allot to their studies is weak. More than 20% of students with a full-time status spend no more than 20 hours per week on study-related activities in some countries. In contrast, on average 1/5 of part-time students spend more than 30 hours per week on their studies. Variation in study-intensity is related to student employment, which is frequent in almost all countries. Predictably, students with a significant work commitment (those working more than 15 hours per week), devote less time to study-related activities.

Much of the heterogeneity in the student experience is related to age. In almost 1/2 of the EUROSTUDENT countries 1/3 of students are aged 25 or over. Older students are more likely to have entered by an ‘alternative route’, to have come from lower socio-economic groups and are more likely to be de facto part-time students with higher levels of employment. While in most countries the dominant form of housing among all students is living with parents, older students are more likely to be living with partners/children. It is still the case that about 2/3 of students take a direct route from school leaving to higher education, but this report provides an important insight into the varied experiences of the other 1/3, examining the extent of the delayed entry and of prior experience of the labour market and the kind of alternative qualifications presented. Large country variations are evident on these dimensions.

The mobility experience of higher education students is also a differentiating factor in the student experience. The foreign enrolment rates vary from below 5% in many South-Eastern European countries to more than 10% in the Scandinavian countries and in The Netherlands. However, the authors argue that, if future intentions to participate in study-related activities are taken into account, the potential foreign enrolment rates are likely to exceed the 20% goal in the majority of countries. Foreign enrolment is socially selective and while public support is the primary source of funding in most countries, the foreign enrolment experience also requires support from students’ families.

The level and sources of student resources are highly variable. While the level of funding reflects relative levels of affluence in different countries, there is even more variability in the relative contribution made by parents/partners, income from employment and income from the public purse. For 11 countries employment is the main source of student income for students who are living with parents; for 6 other countries, family/partner is the main source of income; while in the other 6 countries for which data are available, public support is the main source of income. The study offers an important analysis of the level of concentration of income in the different countries, i.e. whether income levels are similar across the student body (low concentration) or divergent (high concentration). Differentiating between four separate levels of concentration; the countries with the highest levels of concentration are Estonia, Ireland, the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic and Latvia, while The Netherlands, Germany, Malta, Denmark and Switzerland have lowest levels of concentration. While acknowledging the importance of this finding on the very different economic conditions confronted by students within particular countries, the authors have not been able to find any simple explanation for this difference. However, levels of public support and relative reliance on self-earned income would appear to be significant in at least some instances.
The data on student expenditure reveal that in all countries students have to spend the biggest share of their income on living costs. For 16 of the 20 countries for which these data are available the percentage of monthly income spent on living expenses exceeds 75% of total expenditure for students not resident with their parents. And even for students living with their parents, expenditure on living expenses exceeds study-related costs in all countries; for 12 of the 20 countries living expenses consume 75% or more of total expenditure. Expenditure on study-related costs accounts for a larger percentage of total expenditure in Portugal, Lithuania, Malta and Turkey.

An important feature of this and of the earlier EUROSTUDENT surveys is the data which they provide on the social make-up of the student body. These data are important both for individual countries and for comparative researchers who have had an abiding interest in examining the role of the higher education system in the reproduction of the class system. For too long those interested in comparative levels of stratification have had to rely on cohort data, which by definition are largely historical, to assess whether increasing enrolments have influenced the levels of inequality. A unique feature of this research programme is the provision of comparative data on the social make-up of the student body, based on contemporary enrolments. The study presents data on both the educational and occupational background of the parents of the higher education students although it is acknowledged that the latter presents more serious measurement problems. In an earlier paper, which presents a secondary analysis of the data from the 2005 and 2008 EUROSTUDENT surveys, I have argued that they provide a relatively robust indicator of comparative inequality in access to higher education in Europe (Clancy, 2010). Furthermore, in respect of those countries for which data were available in both surveys, there was a striking consistency of findings from the 2005 and 2008 surveys. The publication of the data reported here will enable researchers to extend this analysis.

The replication of these surveys, at 3 year intervals since 2005, and the plans to continue the programme into the future are a critical value-added factor which enhances its importance. While the main rationale for this publication and for each of its predecessors is the comparative focus, facilitating comparisons of the social and economic conditions of student life from 24 European countries, the added dividend arising from repeated rounds of the survey is the scope for analysing changing trends across the European area. Each new round facilitates the monitoring of change over time within individual countries as well as between countries.

Dominic Orr and his colleagues on the project management team at HIS, the 6 other international partners who constitute the Consortium and the national survey teams are to be congratulated on the successful completion of this 4th EUROSTUDENT survey. They have provided us with a fascinating picture of the social and economic conditions of higher education students in Europe. This Synopsis of Indicators, together with the associated national reports and the online data base, provide an important resource for higher education policy makers and researchers.

Professor Patrick Clancy
University College Dublin
Chapter 1
Introduction

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

The Synopsis of Indicators is a compendium of key indicators on the social dimension of higher education. It presents the findings of the 4th round of the EUROSTUDENT project. In line with the suggestions of the Bologna Process Working Group on the Social Dimension and Mobility (Swedish Ministry of Education and Research, 2007) and the stipulations of the London Communiqué (2007), the authors of the Synopsis understand the social dimension as the process leading to the outcome that “the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels [reflects] the diversity of (...) populations” (p. 5) in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). In higher education systems with a strong social dimension, students should be able “to complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background” (p. 5).

In recent years, strengthening the social dimension of higher education has become a key political goal within the EHEA. This endeavour is pursued based on the belief that equitable higher education systems not only contribute to creating equal opportunities for individuals, but also to fostering the cohesion of European societies and to establishing a basis for increasing the competitiveness of European economies (Council of the European Union, 2010). The London Communiqué and the Council conclusions on the Education and Training 2020 Framework (Council of the European Union, 2009) highlighted the fact that designing policies to promote the social dimension of higher education requires the availability of relevant and reliable data depicting the status quo. In fact, these documents acknowledge “the need to improve the availability of data on both mobility and the social dimension across all the countries participating in the Bologna Process” (p. 6).

With a view to complementing the existing official data collection mechanisms, the EUROSTUDENT Network has accepted the challenge of building a framework to monitor the social and economic conditions of student life in Europe and to provide policy-relevant analyses. In the London Communiqué (2007), “the European Commission (Eurostat), in conjunction with Eurostudent, [was asked to] develop comparable and reliable indicators and data to measure progress towards the overall objective for the social dimension and student and staff mobility in all Bologna countries” (p. 6). The result of the collaboration between Eurostat and EUROSTUDENT was a publication presenting a set of key indicators on the social dimension and mobility (Eurostat & HIS, 2009). This publication stressed that progress had been made in the development of a monitoring architecture for the social dimension of higher education. At the same time, it emphasised that establishing a European-wide monitoring system takes time and that many challenges remained in improving the comparability of the existing national statistical data sources. Against this background, the authors hope that the EUROSTUDENT IV Synopsis of Indicators will contribute to the ongoing process of
establishing a European-wide monitoring infrastructure of the social dimension of higher education.

**The EUROSTUDENT Network**

EUROSTUDENT is a network of researchers as well as data collectors, representatives of national ministries and stakeholders who have joined forces to examine the social and economic conditions of student life in higher education systems in Europe. The work of the EUROSTUDENT Network is based on the conviction that cross-country comparisons facilitate learning about the strengths and weaknesses or simply idiosyncrasies of other higher education systems and – thereby – help countries to see their own higher education system in a new light. In the 4th round of EUROSTUDENT, 25 countries were active contributors to the EUROSTUDENT Network.1 A further 8 countries have an observer status (Belgium, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Luxembourg, Scotland, Ukraine); they were updated about the main developments within the Network and occasionally attended EUROSTUDENT events. An overview of participating and observing countries is given in Figure 1.1. More information on the contributing network members can be found in >Appendix B.

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1 Data for Slovenia are not included in the Synopsis, as they could not be delivered before the completion of the report.
The 4th round of EUROSTUDENT lasted from November 2008 to October 2011. It was made possible by the funding of the European Commission (Lifelong Learning Programme, LLP) and the contributions of national project sponsors. Considerable national contributions came especially from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (MinOCW).

Since the creation of the EUROSTUDENT Network in 1999, the project has been managed by combining a central coordination approach with the principle of shared responsibility. The central coordination is led by the Higher Education Information System (HIS), which is based in Hanover, Germany. In its function as central coordinator, HIS is the head of a consortium consisting of 7 international partners. Next to HIS, these partners are the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS, Vienna, Austria), the Center for Control and Assessment of the Quality in School Education (UKOKO, Sofia, Bulgaria), the Federation of Estonian Student Unions (EUL, Tallinn, Estonia), the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (MinOCW, The Hague, The Netherlands), the Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education (NIFU, Oslo, Norway) and the Centre for Higher Education Research and Innovation (CHERI, London, England). Each of these partners has its own responsibilities within the Network (Figure 1.2). The work of the Consortium is supported by an international steering board, which gives strategic advice. Members of this board represent the European Commission (EC), the European University Association (EUA), the European Students’ Union (ESU), the Council of Europe, the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) and the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).
The implementation of the national student surveys lies within the responsibility of the contributing countries. If a country wants to become a contributor to the EUROSTUDENT project, it has to adopt the EUROSTUDENT Conventions and use the core questionnaire. Throughout the project, the central coordinators remain in close contact with the members of the contributing countries to assure a common understanding of and thus compliance with the central data conventions. Common timelines must also be respected. Once data are delivered by the national contributors, they are evaluated by the central coordinators as well as by a task force on data quality based at the IHS. Only after further discussions and several plausibility checks by the national teams are the data analysed and published in the Synopsis.

The network character of the project brings together the knowledge of experts from different countries. This assures that the design of the project is suitable for international comparative analyses and that country-specific context information is taken into account, which is indispensable for a balanced interpretation of data from such a large and diverse group of countries.

Data collection conventions and mechanisms
The EUROSTUDENT project was initiated in 1999 by researchers from countries in which national student surveys existed already. Therefore, an output harmonisation approach was adopted. This is to say that the countries which first joined EUROSTUDENT are still conducting their national student surveys according to their national information needs. At the same time, however, they make provisions to guarantee that the data collected are compatible with the standardised EUROSTUDENT principles.

The set of tools intended to ensure the comparability and quality of the data collected is commonly referred to as the EUROSTUDENT Conventions. These Conventions have evolved over the EUROSTUDENT project cycles and are the result of many discussions during a variety of project meetings, intensive seminars, workshops and conferences organised by the EUROSTUDENT Network. They are recorded in a number of handbooks that are at the disposition of all national contributors as well as the interested public. To begin with, the Conventions comprise definitions of the most important constructs used in the national surveys (Data Delivery Handbook). Secondly, they include a core questionnaire with 47 questions that should be embedded into all national surveys (Data Delivery Handbook). This, thirdly, allows the national distributors to deliver data on 81 precisely described subtopics (Data Delivery Handbook). Finally, methodological guidelines for the execution of the national surveys have been elaborated during the 4th round of EUROSTUDENT (Handbook on the Planning and Execution of Online Surveys). Next to the core questionnaire, the most important methodological specification concerns the standard target group to be surveyed by the national contributors (Box 1.1).

On the one hand, the EUROSTUDENT Conventions are meant to help countries improve and align their national survey methodologies, so as to allow for cross-country comparisons based on the data collected. On the other hand, they provide orientation to researchers in those countries where student surveys have been implemented only

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2 All EUROSTUDENT Handbooks can be found on the project website: http://www.eurostudent.eu/about/docs/index.html
In the context of the EUROSTUDENT project. It is intended that the current output harmonisation approach will in the long-term be superseded by an input harmonisation approach, i.e. once all Conventions are fully implemented by all participating countries. For the time being, however, it should be noted that countries sometimes cannot fully comply with the EUROSTUDENT Conventions (Box 1.2). In case the national contributors judge their data to be of limited international comparability, this is noted in the so-called Data Reporting Module (DRM). The DRM is a publicly accessible online database containing data and comments on the EUROSTUDENT indicators; it is further described below.

In the national surveys, different survey instruments were used. However, with a view to improving the comparability of the data collected, the national contributors were encouraged to use online surveys. In fact, the majority of countries used online surveys as their main survey instrument in the 4th round of EUROSTUDENT (Figure 1.3).3

### Box 1.1

#### The standard target group of EUROSTUDENT IV

Following a survey among administrators, researchers and users of EUROSTUDENT data as well as a workshop in Vienna in December 2008, the EUROSTUDENT Network has agreed on a standard target group of students to be surveyed by all national contributors. An optional target group was also defined, but this is not covered in the Synopsis of Indicators (> Data Delivery Handbook). In defining the standard target group, the agreements of previous rounds of EUROSTUDENT as well as the UOE Data Conventions were taken into account. The following is the standard target group of EUROSTUDENT IV.

- Students who currently have a permanent residency in the respective country and who have finished their prior education in the respective country, independent of their citizenship
- Both full-time and part-time students, differentiated by their formal status
- Students in ISCED 5A programmes (Bachelor, Master and all other types of national programmes at ISCED level 5A)
- Students at all higher education institutions offering programmes at ISCED level 5A (specialist higher education institutions such as military academies are excluded)
- Distance students, provided that they are not enrolled at an institution providing distance education only (such as the Open University in the United Kingdom or the FernUniversität Hagen in Germany)

3 Croatia, Denmark, Malta, Poland and Slovenia were given particular support to carry out online surveys through the project’s Common Survey Hosting (CSH) component, which was operated by ResearchNED and the IHS.
The main technical device for the output harmonisation approach is the so-called Data Delivery Module (DDM). This is an online interface through which the national data providers deliver their data centrally to the Coordination Team. The national teams do not provide the coordinators with raw micro data, but with aggregate data on 81 pre-defined subtopics. For each of these subtopics, a precise description of the pertaining indicators and the manner in which they should be calculated is available on the DDM platform, so that countries are guided through the data delivery process. This is supposed to assure adherence to the Conventions whilst calculating the indicators.

As a further means of quality control, data providers are automatically shown the results of their data entries as on-the-fly graphics. This helps them to identify mistakes in the data (e.g. in case stacked bars which are supposed to do not add up to 100% or the resulting data pattern is different to the one expected). Most importantly, national researchers comment on the data they provide. This not only helps the Coordination Team in interpreting the data. It is also a valuable aid to orientation for interested researchers wishing to work with the EUROSTUDENT data themselves.

Box 1.2

Note on the national samples

For a number of reasons, some countries cannot fully comply with the EUROSTUDENT Conventions. One important reason is that national contributors who executed student surveys already before the initiation of EUROSTUDENT intend to ensure the comparability of their data across rounds, which would not be possible if they followed all Conventions. Another reason is that a few countries have redefined the target group of their surveys (e.g. by including ISCED 5B students), the reason being that the EUROSTUDENT standard target group does not reflect the majority of their student populations. Below, an overview of the most important deviations of national samples from the EUROSTUDENT Conventions is provided. More details on the national samples are available in >Appendix C.

- **Denmark**: The Danish sample includes only ordinary full-time students that do not pay fees. Part-time students, who have to pay fees, are not included. Students with high education background (ISCED 5–6) are overrepresented.
- **Estonia**: The Estonian sample includes students enrolled in professional higher education programmes at ISCED level 5B.
- **Latvia**: The Latvian sample includes only full-time students.
- **Malta**: The Maltese sample comprises all students enrolled at ISCED levels 5A and 6. Apart from students being in Malta with the ERASMUS programme, all students who have obtained their higher education entrance qualification outside the country are included in the sample.
- **Portugal**: The Portuguese sample was drawn from two sources, the pool of recipients of statal support and a register which captures all students entering public higher education. The register, however, was introduced only in 2008. For these reasons, students receiving statal support and young students are overrepresented in the Portuguese raw sample, which was attenuated through the weighting procedure.

The main technical device for the output harmonisation approach is the so-called Data Delivery Module (DDM). This is an online interface through which the national data providers deliver their data centrally to the Coordination Team. The national teams do not provide the coordinators with raw micro data, but with aggregate data on 81 pre-defined subtopics. For each of these subtopics, a precise description of the pertaining indicators and the manner in which they should be calculated is available on the DDM platform, so that countries are guided through the data delivery process. This is supposed to assure adherence to the Conventions whilst calculating the indicators.
**Scope of the Synopsis within the EUROSTUDENT reporting infrastructure**

The main target groups of the Synopsis are higher education policy makers and stakeholders at national and European level (e.g. ministerial bureaucrats, members of the BFUG and representatives of interest groups such as ESU). An ancillary target group are representatives of other pertinent research projects and individual researchers who would like to use EUROSTUDENT data. The selection of these target groups explains the structure and layout of the Synopsis.

The Synopsis is the main deliverable of the EUROSTUDENT IV project, but by no means the only one. It should be considered as being embedded into an elaborate reporting infrastructure. While the Synopsis is designed to adopt a broad, comparative perspective and mostly presents analyses on an aggregate level, the other elements of the reporting infrastructure provide in-depth analyses of selected themes and additional country-specific context knowledge.

A key element of the reporting infrastructure is the so-called *Data Reporting Module (DRM)*. This is a publicly accessible online database containing the totality of data gathered from the national contributors. The data are commented by the national teams. The *DRM* can be used by the interested public wishing to learn more about the interpretation of a specific indicator or by researchers wishing to work with the EUROSTUDENT data themselves. For each indicator, data sheets with all entries from all countries can be downloaded via the DRM.

For all countries, so-called *National Profiles* are available through the *DRM*. These profiles are downloadable reports containing all data that a country has delivered on the set of EUROSTUDENT indicators. In addition, they include the commentaries made by the national research teams on the quality and comparability of their data. For the majority of indicators, interpretations of the data from a national perspective are also available.

The EUROSTUDENT *events* should equally be considered as an element of the reporting infrastructure. Throughout the project lifetime, a number of project meetings, intensive seminars, workshops as well as conferences were carried out. On each of these occasions, findings of members of the EUROSTUDENT Network were presented and discussed. These meetings are always coordinated with national ministries or agencies of higher education to assure the technical and methodological discussions leading to the generation of indicators that are policy-relevant.

Next to these elements, which lie in the responsibility of the Central Coordination Team, there are other crucial elements that the national teams are in charge of. Most importantly, the majority of national teams publish *national reports*. These reports include in-depth analyses of students’ social and economic conditions within a specific country. They are often based on time series data and can therefore present analyses of changes over time.

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4 The National Profiles for both EUROSTUDENT III and EUROSTUDENT IV can also be downloaded from the project website: [http://www.eurostudent.eu/results/profiles](http://www.eurostudent.eu/results/profiles)
A few countries publish special associated reports. These reports adopt the perspective of a single country and discuss this country’s data in an international comparison, i.e. against the background of data from all or a selection of EUROSTUDENT countries. By bringing in an international perspective, these reports highlight idiosyncrasies of national higher education system that could not be observed from a strictly national perspective. A number of reports in this vein will be produced within the framework of EUROSTUDENT IV (e.g. for Germany).5

To complement the existing reporting infrastructure, a new instrument is currently being developed: so-called Intelligence Briefs. These are short, stimulating documents presenting information and interpretive help on specific topics covered in the EUROSTUDENT data set. They may be focused analytically on a certain topic area or group of students or stylistically on a certain target reader group.

Structure of the report
The structure of the 4th Synopsis of Indicators is the result of a discussion process involving the entire EUROSTUDENT Network. Inter alia, this process aimed at further improving the structure and at streamlining the chapter sequence of the EUROSTUDENT III Synopsis of Indicators. The result is illustrated in Figure 1.4.

The Synopsis focuses on 3 main topic areas: access to higher education and organisation of studies (Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6), students’ resources and expenses (Chapters 7, 8, 9) as well as international student mobility (Chapter 10). In addition, a short analysis of students’ assessment of their studies and their plans for future studies is presented at the end of the empirical section of the report (Chapter 11). The chapter sequence reflects a lifelong learning student’s course of study, from the transition into higher education to a forecast on future activities. The model underlying Figure 1.4 considers the possibility that students might re-enter higher education at a later stage in their lives – and thereby acknowledges that former ‘one-stop students’ are gradually becoming lifelong learners. However, it is important to note that EUROSTUDENT is based on student surveys and is therefore not designed to provide information on student graduation or students’ transition into the labour market.

The chapters of the Synopsis all follow the same structure. At the beginning of each chapter, the Key findings are summarised on one page. Subsequently, the Main issues dealt with in the respective chapter are pointed out. In detail, this section highlights the main questions which a chapter addresses and puts these questions into a broader political or research context. It also explains methodological issues and discusses the quality of the data used for the chapter. The main part of each chapter is the section called Data and interpretation. It presents a selection of EUROSTUDENT indicators and interprets them in the light of context knowledge provided by the national teams. The majority of chapters include Boxes that elaborate on methodological issues or emphasise particularly interesting phenomena visible in individual countries. To conclude this introduction, Box 1.3 brings together all important issues that should be kept in mind.

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5 On the project website (www.eurostudent.eu), an example of an associated report produced in the 3rd round of EUROSTUDENT can be found: Office fédéral de la statistique (2008). La dimension sociale dans les hautes écoles. La Suisse en comparaison européenne. Statistique de la Suisse. Neuchâtel: Office fédéral de la statistique. Future associated reports will also be published on the project website.
mind whilst reading the Synopsis.

Box 1.3

How to read the Synopsis of Indicators

Notes on the concept of the Synopsis

- **Scope**: The Synopsis is a compendium of indicators on the social and economic conditions of student life in the EUROSTUDENT countries. It is designed to adopt a broad, comparative perspective. It mostly presents analyses on an aggregate level.

- **Chapter structure**: Each chapter is structured into 3 main sections: Key findings, Main issues, Data and interpretation. Additional boxes elaborate upon methodological issues and provide context information on individual countries. In the text, references to other chapters are indicated by an arrow (e.g. >Introduction).

- **Appendices**: This report includes a glossary of the terms employed (>Appendix A), a list of the national contributors to EUROSTUDENT IV (>Appendix B), metadata on the national surveys (>Appendix C) and key background data on the higher education systems covered (>Appendix D).

- **Reporting infrastructure**: The Synopsis is embedded into an elaborate reporting infrastructure. In the text, references are made to other elements of the reporting infrastructure. This is indicated by an arrow (e.g. >DRM).
Notes on the EUROSTUDENT data

- Student survey: EUROSTUDENT collates data from student surveys. In contrast to graduate surveys, it is not designed to provide information on student graduation and the transition into the labour market.

- 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 (Box 1.1). Not all countries manage to fully comply with the Conventions (Box 1.2). For this reason, the data of some countries were excluded from the calculations of some indicators. This is indicated in the respective figures.

- Choice of Indicators: The Synopsis presents only a selection of the indicators for which data were collected. Commented data on all indicators are available in the DRM and in the National Profiles. However, it should be noted that some countries did not provide data on all indicators.

- Focus groups: Many indicators further differentiate the figures for all students by so-called focus groups. These are groups of students considered as particularly relevant from a political point of view. The 11 focus groups are: female and male students, Bachelor and Master students, direct and delayed transition students (Chapter 2), students from low and high social backgrounds (Chapter 3), students up to 24 years and students 30 years or older (Chapter 4), and low-intensity students (Chapter 5). The focus groups overlap. For instance, a student can be a Master student, a delayed transition student and 30 years or older at the same time.

- Aggregate data: The analyses presented in the Synopsis are made based on aggregate data collected from the national contributors. Micro data and thus information on the standard deviations of values are not at the disposition of the Coordination Team. For this reason, differences between countries cannot be tested for statistical significance.

Notes on the interpretation of EUROSTUDENT indicators

- No rankings: The data in many charts are assorted in ascending or descending order. This should not be misinterpreted as a suggestion for a strict ranking of countries. Rather, this is done to enable the recognition of country clusters.

- Interpretation of differences: Small differences between countries should not be over-interpreted, as it cannot be excluded that they arise from methodological differences in conducting the national surveys.

- Mean and median values: Occasionally, unweighted mean and median values of all EUROSTUDENT countries are used in the charts as a first orientation. They should be read with caution because they conceal differences between countries in terms of the size of the national student and sample populations.

- Comparisons over time: The Synopsis of Indicators does not include time series analyses. This is for 2 reasons: On the one hand, the focus of EUROSTUDENT is to facilitate cross-country comparisons in order to better understand the general picture and the diversity of situations between (groups of) countries. On the other hand, small changes in the EUROSTUDENT Conventions, which were meant to improve the cross-country comparability of the data, limit the ability for comparisons over time. We therefore believe that national reports or indeed reports comparing a limited number of countries are better suited to provide comparisons over time.
Stimulation of further research and debates: The aggregate figures presented in the Synopsis provide an overview of the characteristics of different national student populations. They often do not facilitate the identification of the causes for the phenomena observed. The authors hope that the general overview will encourage further research and policy debates trying to explain the findings of the Synopsis from national standpoints.

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