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Widening Access to Higher Education: Changing Demographics, Overcoming Old Barriers and the Role of Lifelong Learning

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Introduction

A historic and rapid shift in the demography of many nations, marked by significant immigration, mostly to Western economies, caused in part by the search for jobs as well as attempts to escape war, poverty, and dysfunctional societies. In many parts of the world, largely homogeneous nations and regions (or ones perceived as such) faced the increasing reality of a more diverse population, often with very different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. (Douglass, 2020, p. 17)

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There has been much discussion about the impact of the pandemic on education, including higher education, particularly in terms of rapid moves to virtual and blended modes of teaching (Goedegebuure & Meek, 2021). The work patterns of academic and support staff have had to change rapidly and dramatically in order to 'keep the show on the road' as best they could in uncertain circumstances. There were—and continue to be—enormous pressures on leaders at all levels in higher education institutions as they seek to maintain core activities in the face of a highly volatile situation with unprecedented challenges to the health and welfare of staff, students and the wider community. Many of them are making great efforts to recognise, and cope with, the burdens involved—providing both practical support and, often equally importantly, emotional support in order to sustain morale.

At a wider societal level, the World Health Organisation and others have observed that 'No one is safe until everyone is safe'. The underlying idea behind this phrase is to encourage an inclusive response to the pandemic. Inclusive regarding the equal distribution of vaccines and relevant medication between different global regions, and inclusive also between different generations, as it became evident at an early stage that the impact of COVID-19 is disproportionately severe on older persons.

In this chapter, we consider the matter of widening access to life-long learning in higher education in the context of two major socio-demographic trends—migration and ageing populations. These are, obviously, distinct phenomena but both carry significant moral and pragmatic implications for access to higher education as both form increasing proportions of the population, with specific social and educational needs. Many global regions and countries are experiencing unprecedented levels of immigration as millions of people seek to move elsewhere—whether by choice or for survival—reaching a scale of mobility in recent years unprecedented since the Second World War. At the same time, increasing longevity means that most developed countries are experiencing significant ageing of their populations.

There is considerable diversity in the educational interests and needs both between, and within, these two groups. What they have in common, however, is the fact that they are significantly under-represented as learners in higher education as systems tend to remain,

in most countries, entrenched in a ‘front loading’ model—that is, a model which is designed for school leavers entering universities and other institutions of higher education on a full-time basis, with traditional entry secondary/high school qualifications. It seems to us, therefore, that consideration of the ways in which their respective educational interests and needs are, or are not, being addressed can help give some insight into our two areas of interest. First, how new frontiers may be opening up for such underrepresented groups of potential lifelong learners; and, second, the extent to which there may be pointers to the ways in which innovative responses on the part of higher education may contribute to reducing, if not eliminating some of the long-standing barriers which we identified in previous work with colleagues (Schuetze & Slowey, 2000, 2012).

Our discussion builds on more recent work with many of the same colleagues from twelve OECD countries: five European—Germany, Ireland, Slovenia, Sweden and the United Kingdom; four North and South American—Brazil, Canada, Mexico and the USA; plus, Japan, Australia and New Zealand (Slowey et al., 2020). In that book, authors explored developments in higher education from the perspective of access opportunities for migrant groups and older adults: distinct phenomena which intersect in important ways.

On the one hand, most of the countries of the global north form destinations of choice for increasing numbers of people who seek to move, or are forced to flee, from their home country or region. On the other hand, it is these richer countries of the global north that are also those with ageing populations. So, for the latter, humanitarian concerns can coincide with pragmatic policy objectives of filling skills gaps with potentially qualified workers. In Europe, the case of Germany is particularly illustrative of the converging of these motivations. Few would doubt that moral and humanitarian reasons underpinned the opening of borders to large numbers of refugees over the crisis period 2015–2017. However, as it is projected to become the European country with the highest proportion of older people so that by 2050 approximately 40 per cent of the population are estimated to be over 60 years of age, there are also pragmatic reasons to draw in younger people to the community (*The Economist*, 2017).

While the ageing of populations is particularly a feature of the global north, parts of the developing world are also growing older. Overall, the long period of increasing longevity is widely regarded as a positive development, reflecting improvements in nutrition, public health and education. Although there seems to be some evidence of reversals in recent years overall, the richer countries of the global north have had many decades of gradual improvements in average lifespans. For many poorer countries in the developing world, however, increasing longevity has been accompanied by increasing birth rates thereby accelerating the challenges they face.

In what follows, we explore some key implications of these developments for access to higher education through consideration of the experiences of European two countries with different socio-demographic profiles and different traditions of higher education—Germany and Ireland. The discussion is organised in three parts. The first outlines educational challenges facing migrants, including refugees (with or without a recognised status as such) who have recently come to form increasing proportions of the populations of developed countries. We outline the situation in Germany and Ireland as a way of illustrating more general issues. In the second part, we turn our attention to another significant feature of contemporary socio-demographic changes: increasing longevity, ageing populations and the associated issues of access for older adults. The third section draws attention to a number of examples of the ways in which higher education institutions are being proactive in seeking ways to address some ‘old barriers’ in order to better support the lifelong learning needs of these two groups. We conclude by reflecting on the questions of *agency*, in particular, the role of institutional leadership in supporting conditions and developments which encourage and facilitate policies and practices which are inclusive, innovative and outward looking: potentially pointing to forms of higher education that might genuinely support lifelong learning for all sections of the societies of which they are a part.

People on the Move: Migrants and Refugees

From the Middle Ages to the present day ‘there has been a close interweaving of access to higher education and citizenship’ (Goastellec, 2021, p. 132): a relationship that she highlights was built into the origins of European higher education with the distinction between the *Studium Generale*—which attracted students from various political territories—and the *Studium Particulare*, which only registered local students.

There are enormous variations in the levels of social, cultural and economic capital that individuals bring with them when they move permanently to another country. In this section, we concentrate on migrants and a special group among them: refugees. We are not discussing another important group ‘on the move’, international students, which for long have formed a core element of the internationalisation—and financial—strategies of higher education institutions across the globe (de Wit & Altbach, 2021). By and large, such students usually intend to return to their home country upon the completion of their studies: although some do stay on permanently in their host country in line with the policies of some to attract highly educated workers.

People leave their own country permanently for very different reasons: they are driven either by choice and the quest for a better life for themselves and their families or are forced to flee by extreme circumstances such as war, violence, gender oppression, religious persecution or the effects of climate change.

Various international agencies have different definitions of who is a ‘refugee’. The Council of Europe summarises four main categories, the first three of which are protected under UNHCR international law: refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons.

- i. A **refugee** is defined as someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.
- ii. **Asylum-seekers** are individuals who have sought international protection and whose claims for formal refugee status have not yet been determined.

- iii. **Internally displaced persons** are people who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised state border.
- iv. There is a fourth group whose members face similar problems and human rights violations, although they might not have changed their place of residence at all: stateless persons. They are people who are not considered nationals by any state; therefore, they cannot enjoy the rights provided only for citizens. There are a variety of reasons why somebody can become stateless, including the break-up of countries such as the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia, or the creation of new countries due to decolonisation. According to estimations, there are some 12 million stateless people in the world.

So, the reasons for seeking relocation are enormously varied: economic or educational, as well as to having to flee from natural disasters, escape persecution, human rights abuses, threats to life or physical integrity, war and civil unrest (Ktistakis, 2013). Importantly, for the purposes of our discussion on access for adults to lifelong learning and higher education, almost half (47 per cent) of all refugees are over 18 years old. These are adults with educational needs which are quite distinctive to those of children.

The number of non-EU citizens within the European Union before 2015 was estimated as being close to 20 million (around four per cent of the total population of the EU) (Huddleston et al., 2015). The same survey estimated that people with lower levels of formal educational qualifications comprised thirty-seven per cent of working age non-EU immigrants: pointing to the importance of providing opportunities to widen access to further develop higher level skills and knowledge among this cohort. At the other end of the scale, approximately a quarter had already achieved university equivalent level of education, indicating the potential for accessing ongoing lifelong higher education. Furthermore, the numbers of 'non-citizen-migrants' have risen quite substantially in some of the EU member countries: for example, Germany in 2015

accepted approximately 1.5 million refugees, so that between 2010 and 2019, the share of the non-national population in Germany rose from 9 per cent to 13 per cent.

Just as the circumstances of individuals who migrate are highly diverse, so also are the contexts of their host countries, as well as the institutional structures and responses to the higher education interests and needs of migrants. Here, we briefly consider contrasting migration trends in two European countries as illustrative of the ways in which such patterns are closely associated with the national social, economic and political conditions prevailing at different historical periods, with associated differing implications for accessing higher education opportunities: Germany and Ireland. For very different socio-economic and political reasons, both countries have been historically associated with significant levels of migration—outward and inward at different times.

Germany

The numbers of migrants coming to (West) Germany after World War Two increased significantly compared to earlier times. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the country attracted migrants, for example, workers for the mining industry in Silesia and the Ruhr area. Conversely, in the 1930s the Nazi government drove millions of Germans into exile (those fortunate enough to escape forced labour and death in concentration camps), in particular the Jewish population and those openly opposed to Nazi rule.

Since World War Two, there were several major waves of immigration, each of which carried different implications for access to lifelong learning and higher education (Wolter, 2020). The first was the massive wave of approximately fourteen million German refugees from the East of German territories that became parts of the Soviet Union and Poland as a result of the war. Although called ‘Flüchtlinge’, they were not refugees in the sense of the above-quoted definition since they were German citizens and spoke German. Their integration into West Germany was largely a problem of finding shelter, food and other basic needs as most had to leave all their belongings behind.

The first large wave of people from other countries was the immigration of foreign workers during the period known as the ‘economic miracle’. These migrant workers (called ‘guest workers’ as they were expected to return home after working in Germany) were mainly from Mediterranean countries. Between the mid-fifties and the mid-1970s approximately six million ‘guest workers’ followed the promise of work and good wages in Germany, many of the older ones joined later by their families. Some of these workers went back to their home countries as expected, but many stayed and became German citizens. Although most came with little more than basic education, the great majority of these foreign workers did form significant demand for access to higher education, partly due to widespread adult education provision and opportunities for work-based learning.

There were several much smaller waves of immigrants in the 1990s from Eastern Europe, mainly as a result of the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, generating some demand for access to ‘second-route’ high school diplomas (*Abitur*) or university-level professional certifications. As mentioned above, the numbers seeking asylum in Germany have grown dramatically over the last decade, with a culmination in 2015 when the country opened its borders to refugees who were stranded in Eastern and Southern Europe when many other European countries closed their own borders. While the number of refugee seekers arriving in Germany in 2015 was almost 1.5 million, numbers have declined since (to 727,000 in 2019), primarily because of the policy of the EU to limit and strictly control the influx of refugees. The refugee populations arrived with varying levels of qualifications. Of the 1.8 million people with a refugee background (in 2018), 75 per cent were younger than 40 and, while most had higher levels of education than other migrants, only about one per cent had a good knowledge of German (Wolter, 2020).

As a result of these different waves of immigration, approximately one-quarter of the German population (21.9 million) are people ‘with a migration background’: while, in 2018, it was estimated that in relation to refugees, 23 per cent had participated in some form of education—school, vocational training or university studies—and, overall about 60 per cent were employed, pursued education or had participated in

training measures, while the overwhelming share of the remaining 40 per cent was actively seeking jobs or on parental leave (Göttsche et al., 2020).

A number of factors explain what can be interpreted as a positive result. First, there was an infrastructure in place regarding adult education, providing not only language courses but also general education courses leading to formal qualifications, for example, a high school diploma. There are long-established special institutions for international students, providing preparatory courses for university studies, including for academic language and writing (Jungblut et al., 2020). In addition, a government-funded service provides scholarships for which all foreign students are eligible (DAAD—German Academic Exchange Service). The federal government has also set up a special higher education programme for refugees that covered a wide range of services such as language courses or practical assistance for helping integration into university life. The money for these activities (100 million Euros over four years for the ‘Welcome’ and ‘Integra’ programs) goes to some 160 universities and other higher education institutions. Many universities have adapted specific mechanisms to support refugees, such as special information and counselling services and subject-specific language courses: there remains, however, a need for further reforms (Unangst, 2019).

One particular problem that many refugees have is to prove their previous educational achievements—an issue we highlighted in our previous work on other groups of ‘non-traditional students’ and to which we return later. To facilitate access without documentation the German Rectors’ Conference, the standing committee of the presidents of universities and other higher education institutions, has agreed on a simplified process of verifying education credentials of refugees without formal documentation.

Ireland

In contrast to Germany, Ireland illustrates the case of a country that changed, rapidly, from one with historically high levels of emigration to one of net inward migration during the economic boom of the late 1990s

and early 2000s. While rates of immigration declined sharply as a result of the banking crisis and recession, by 2015, net migration was positive once again, leading to Ireland having one of the highest proportions of foreign-born residents in the EU (McGinnity et al., 2020).

In Ireland, as elsewhere, many migrants seek to have their qualifications recognised through the relevant authorities. However, Arnold et al. (2019) note that awareness of the service through the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) system is limited, and that soft barriers have been reported, such as a lack of familiarity with foreign university qualifications.

This can lead to a situation where migrants' skills and qualifications are not recognised, even if they are highly educated. All too frequently they may be working in jobs for which they are overqualified. The finding that those who are likely to have come through the international protection system experience particular difficulties in the Irish labour market points to the additional support needed (UNHCR, 2013).

Overall, migrants arriving in Ireland are more likely to hold a third-level qualification (or to gain a third-level education in Ireland) than the Irish-born population—a pattern which remains when controlling for age and gender (Faas, 2020). In this respect it is, of course, important to take account of the strong selection effects that are likely to be at play: as, in common with many other countries, educational level is frequently a pre-condition for immigration. Thus, for example, while approximately 82 per cent of Indian migrants in Ireland hold a third-level degree, the rate of educational attainment in India is considerably lower (McGinnity et al., 2020).

So, migrants come from very different backgrounds, with varying motivations, bringing different levels of knowledge and skills and with some suffering dramatic effects of war, violence and trauma. Their educational needs are hence, as mentioned earlier, also highly diverse. By taking the initiative in seeking to identify, and respond to, these needs in proactive ways, universities and other higher education institutions can become, we suggest, part of a pathway by which they may make a major contribution to a lifelong learning mosaic of provision.

The Irish higher education system has been successful in achieving relatively high participation rates for young adults, reaching over 60 per

cent of school leavers (Clancy, 2015). Importantly, beyond increasing numbers there has been a major policy focus on widening access for six groups identified in a National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education, NAP (Higher Education Authority, 2015).

These are:

- Entrants from socio-economic groups that have low participation in higher education
- First time, mature students
- Students with disabilities
- Part-time/flexible learners
- Further education and training award holders
- Irish travellers

The overall objective is that no group should have participation rates in higher education that are less than three-quarters of the national average, and that all socio-economic groups should have participation rates of at least 54 per cent by 2020. The NAP also indicated subgroups that require particular support, including lone parents, teen parents, and ethnic minorities and additional indicators that help to inform progress on implementation including entry to higher education from students who have attended schools in designated areas of disadvantage, students in receipt of the special rate of the grant, and data based on postcodes. A mid-term review of this access plan indicated that some progress had been made in reaching these targets (Higher Education Authority, 2018).

Despite this policy focus on equality, it is notable that the NAP makes no explicit reference to the particular groups we mention above: migrants, refugees or 'students with a migration background'. Many relevant access initiatives are, of course, open to such potential students, for example, the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) an alternative to the standard Leaving Certificate (*Abitur* equivalent) requirements. In the wider context of internationalisation of Irish higher education, a parallel strategy was also laid out for the period 2016–2020 (DES, 2016). However, the focus of the latter was primarily on recruitment of non-EU,

and therefore full fee-paying, students. This policy remains a considerable barrier for many migrant groups, as in Ireland such fees can be up to three times higher than for EU students.

At the third level, in order to qualify for ‘free fees’, migrants must be either an EEA citizen, have official refugee status, or have humanitarian leave to remain in Ireland and have been resident in a European country in three of the last five years. For most non-EEA nationals, fees can be substantial, though they vary among third-level colleges. Even with ‘free fees’, the cost of third-level education may also be prohibitive for low-income migrants. (McGinnity et al., 2020, p. 29)

The widespread use of English means that many migrant groups are interested in moving to, and potentially studying in, an English-speaking country. In Ireland, it has been estimated that full-time international students (as defined above) combined with first-generation students with a migration background represent approximately one fifth of the higher education student body in Ireland (Bruen & Kelly, 2020). This linguistic diversity carries significant implications for educational approaches in higher education in order to avoid a deficit model of ‘monolingual mindset’ in the context of super diversity (Pauwels, 2014). Additionally, lecturers should not ‘assume an in-depth knowledge of the culture and society of the country which is acting as host to the students’. It is, for example, suggested that

a focus on the culture of the target language is advisable in more diverse classrooms. Where cultural comparisons are felt to be valuable, allowing students flexibility in selecting the country or culture to be compared with the target language culture helps recognize the diversity within the classroom. (Bruen & Kelly, 2020, p. 125)

Simultaneously with the impact of addressing the higher education needs of migrants and refugees, and issues raised by increasing cultural and ethnic diversity of the student body, the populations of Germany and Ireland are, in common with those of most developed countries, also growing older. This is a matter to which we turn our attention in the next section.

Increasing Longevity, Ageing Populations and Changing Life Course Patterns

A popular book on the topic entitled *The 100-Year Life* (Gratton & Scott, 2016) points to this lifespan being a realistic possibility for many people in the global north, with North America, many European countries and Japan being prime examples. Populations were ageing prior to the pandemic and recent data from Europe and the US suggested this trend is, if anything, likely to increase (Harper, 2021). Spain, for example, showed the lowest monthly level since comparable records began in 1941 with even ‘pro-natal France’ experiencing the biggest month-on-month drop in 45 years, while USA data suggests a decline of up to half a million births in 2021. At the other end of the age range, it is suggested that higher mortality rates of older people due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic are unlikely to be translated into long-term reductions in life expectancy. This can be seen in previous sharp increases in mortality, such as the 1918 pandemic in the UK, where in a relatively short time life expectancy recovered and continued to increase.

There is extensive evidence about changing life course patterns, with both delayed family formation for younger cohorts, and people working—by choice or necessity—beyond conventional retirement ages for older cohorts (Slowey & Zubrzycki, 2018). How is the tertiary education system responding to these changes? Often the English-speaking countries are taken as examples of education systems that may be more flexible in addressing these needs for ongoing educational engagement for professional and personal purposes, offering part-time study opportunities. However, in the USA, higher education is facing what has been termed by Kasworm (2020) ‘a critical disjuncture’ between its historic paradigm of catering to young full-time students, and the growing life-long learning needs to serve the broad spectrum of adults, many of whom can only participate in limited time periods due to family and work obligations.

In a similar vein, in Canada, despite overall enrolment increases, including an increase in the absolute number of older students (over 35), the *proportion* of older students has remained constant at two per cent of the full-time undergraduate population (Archer & Kops, 2020). While

the UK also still predominantly caters for young, full-time students: 795,000 of the 2.53 million total are aged 25 or older, and students aged 30 or older make up less than half that number (Scott, 2021, p. 82). Furthermore, recent developments in England are ‘even more skewed’ towards full-time study due to a fee disincentive for part-time study. In Germany, for example, it remains very difficult for students to interrupt their studies (apart from on health grounds) other than in the *Fernuniversität* (University of Distance Studies) and a small number of private institutions (Schuetze, 2022).

Of course, universities are only part of the landscape of tertiary education and in many countries colleges of various types have an important contribution to make. The work of Jim Gallacher—honoured in this volume—with others has highlighted the important role played by the further and community education college sector in the promotion of social inclusion. Many such institutions have

been associated with the provision of more general education for a wide range of students, including many older adult returners. This provision has often focused on the more socially and economically disadvantaged and has become part of a wider set of policies and provision to promote social inclusion. (Gallacher & Reeve, 2019, p. 15)

Reworking of detailed PIACC (Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies) data shows how intergenerational educational inequalities are exacerbated, as younger people disproportionately benefit both from increasing opportunities from mass systems of higher education, and from employer-supported training (Desjardins, 2020). There are of course extensive opportunities offered with higher education and employer-supported training which are specifically tailored to older adults such as the University of the Third Age, and the U3A (Findsen, 2019). Our interest here lies rather in the ways in which these matters are addressed within the core teaching and research activities of higher education institutions.

Changing life course patterns also, importantly, carry implications for new ways of engaging with younger students. One such is what has been termed the *60-Year Curriculum* (60YC) which is largely driven

by the digital economy, extending the two-year to eight-year university experience and other traditional forms of education and training to ‘learning throughout a lifetime’. This comprises an ‘evolving relationship between the student and the university’ which begins with first contact and extends through 60 years. How will universities adapt infrastructure and administrative processes to support such dynamic and continuing relationships (Dede & Richards, 2020)?

Higher Education—Some Responses

Critiques of contemporary higher education are widespread. One key argument is that, despite rising geopolitical tensions, ‘universities are now more directly deployed in a race for influence through which powerful groups in influential nations assert their own preferred political, economic and cultural models’:

the focus on “world class universities” has led to prestigious university partnerships building even higher walls to exclude students from disadvantaged social groups. They apply a decontextualised form of academic merit which assumes that all students regardless of social background have the same opportunity to compete. (Naidoo, 2017, p. 3)

A great deal has been written about new public management associated particularly with modernisation policies pursued in the UK with resonances in many other countries:

What matters perhaps was not the proliferation of theoretical frameworks – Fordism, post-Fordism, neoliberalism ... – nor whether these frameworks have always been used with proper academic rigour, but the impression left on the academic community. In the 1960s the forms of governance and (limited) management, in the university sector at any rate went largely uncontested – with the brief exception of the assault mounted by leftist student radicals. By the end of this period the new forms of institutional governance and management had come to be sharply contested. (Scott, 2021, p. 73)

However, despite political pressures, despite increasing managerialism, corporatisation, marketisation and the like, as autonomous institutions in Western liberal democracies, universities have considerable opportunity to demonstrate *agency*, being proactive in taking steps to address some of the challenges outlined in the previous two sections. While not underestimating the challenges involved, in our view this is where the role of leadership—at all levels—can play a crucial role in setting the tone and shaping the culture of a university (Deem et al., 2007; Middlehurst, 2008, 2012; Meek et al., 2010; von Lüde, 2015).

Here we consider briefly three examples that seek to respond to challenges presented by migration and also longevity. In both Germany and Ireland to quite an extent these have largely developed ‘bottom up’—in other words, through the commitment of individual and groups of academics and other members of staff acting as, to use an overused term ‘change agents’, often then securing support from institutional leaders.

The three examples are: *Universities of Sanctuary*; *Refugees Welcome* and *Age Friendly Universities*.

Universities of Sanctuary is an initiative of the *City of Sanctuary* movement. In Ireland, for example, all universities have now committed to this initiative which

celebrates the good practice of universities welcoming sanctuary seekers into their communities and fostering a culture of welcome and inclusion for all. A University of Sanctuary should be a place where anyone can feel safe, welcome and able to pursue their right to education. (Irish Universities Association, 2021)

The Universities of Sanctuary initiative encourage universities ‘to learn about what it means to be seeking sanctuary, in general and at a university’. This encompasses any activity on training staff, teaching students or holding events to raise awareness on what it means to be seeking sanctuary. They also commit to ‘taking positive action to embed concepts of welcome, safety and inclusion within the institution and the wider community’. This involves ensuring that a sustainable culture of welcome is established within the institution to bring about far-reaching, tangible and long-lasting changes.

Universities of Sanctuary commit to sharing the university's vision, achievements, what they have learned and good practice, with other universities, the local community, the media and others. And, to:

- Do everything possible to secure equal access to higher education for refugees.
- Reach out to and support refugees in their local communities who could benefit from university resources in a sustainable way.
- Undertake activities to nurture a culture of welcome and an inclusive atmosphere within their institutions such as among staff and students.

In a complementary manner, the second example, *Refugees Welcome Map*, was developed under the auspices of the European University Association (EUA, 2022). This map draws attention to universities in different countries which are taking steps to develop initiatives tailored to the needs of both refugees—both students and staff. Examples of such initiatives include: incorporating knowledge concerning migrants and refugees into teaching and research; opportunities to address specific problems concerning migrant and refugee candidates concerning recognition of their studies and prior learning; preparatory courses (including local language education); integration measures; potential financial support and/or employment opportunities for researchers and teaching staff. The *EUA Welcome Map* is complemented by a range of projects and reports such as the monitoring exercises undertaken under the auspices of the EU which includes reviews of activities undertaken by member states and higher education institutions aimed at facilitating access for refugees and other migrant groups (European Commission, 2019). These reviews indeed show proactive agency on the part of institutions and systems of higher education, but they also highlight the significant barriers which remain.

In the third example, the *Age Friendly University* (AFU), we turn our attention to an international higher education initiative which seeks to address the challenges of increasing longevity and changing life course patterns (Mark, 2022). The AFU is a strategic approach initially piloted by three universities in Ireland, Scotland and the USA: Dublin City

University, Strathclyde University and Arizona State University (Slowey, 2015). This has subsequently developed into a global network of institutions that have signed up to the challenge of trying to incorporate the 10 Principles of Age-Friendly University into their core activities (Gerontological Society of America, 2022), as listed in Fig. 5.1.

An important element of the AFU approach involves the encouragement of intergenerational activities in which older and younger students can learn from each other to their mutual benefit (Corrigan et al., 2013). The AFU and the other examples considered above could, of course, be critiqued as constituting little more than statements of lofty ambition, or—even worse—opportunistic exercises in ‘branding’. Undoubtedly,

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1. To encourage the participation of older adults in all the core activities of the university, including educational and research programs.
 2. To promote personal and career development in the second half of life and to support those who wish to pursue second careers.
 3. To recognize the range of educational needs of older adults (from those who were early school-leavers through to those who wish to pursue Master's or PhD qualifications).
 4. To promote intergenerational learning to facilitate the reciprocal sharing of expertise between learners of all ages.
 5. To widen access to online educational opportunities for older adults to ensure a diversity of routes to participation.
 6. To ensure that the university's research agenda is informed by the needs of an ageing society and to promote public discourse on how higher education can better respond to the varied interests and needs of older adults.
 7. To increase the understanding of students of the longevity dividend and the increasing complexity and richness that ageing brings to our society.
 8. To enhance access for older adults to the university's range of health and wellness programs and its arts and cultural activities.
 9. To engage actively with the university's own retired community.
 10. To ensure regular dialogue with organizations representing the interests of the ageing population.

Fig. 5.1 The 10 age-friendly university principles

more evidence is needed to assess the impact of such initiatives on migrant groups and older members of the population. However, in our view they represent, at a minimum, pointers to intentions: not only do they establish frameworks against which progress can be assessed over time, but also they are public commitments on the part of university leaders to which they can be held accountable—by the wider community, potential and actual students, staff, national and international policymakers.

As an example, it is interesting to note that Martha Deeve, Stanford Institute of Longevity, recently drew the attention of members of the World Economic Forum to this initiative.

Living longer lives will likely lead to longer working lives as well. There is growing evidence that working longer than the traditional retirement age has health and longevity benefits. It is good for our health if we stay mentally, socially, and physically active for longer. Longer work lives will require retraining and reskilling. Employers and educators are seeing the importance of creating programs and environments to support this.

One initiative started at Dublin City University is the Age-Friendly University Global Network. This is a network of higher education institutions committed to being age friendly and age inclusive with their programs and policies. (World Economic Forum, [2022](#))

Concluding Reflections

How significant and well-founded are the achievements analysed in this chapter in the wider context of the overall culture and strategic dispositions of contemporary higher education? Clearly, as we have demonstrated, there have been some notable advances in both general accessibility and in the specific opportunities for the two groups of ‘non-traditional’ learners we have considered here: migrants and refugees, and older adults. These progressive developments are reflected in a number of positive features of the contemporary higher education systems in most Western liberal democracies.

In summary, these can be grouped under three interrelated headings. First, many more higher education institutions now welcome a

wide variety of ‘non-traditional’ learners who are from previously under-represented sections of the community. Secondly, emergency responses to the pandemic have accelerated, and transformed, the pre-existing trend for more flexibility in terms of online and blended modes of provision, potentially a transformative step in widening access. Thirdly, the rapid expansion of student numbers in almost all societies coupled with increasing diversity in types of institutions, means that higher education systems as a whole are more aware of the importance of their relationships with their local and regional communities; and, the importance of being proactive in developing partnerships in a variety of contexts.

This appears to be an extensive and positive list of achievements: and, in many ways, it is. However, there remain formidable and well-founded barriers to securing fundamental cultural and meaningful change in the global higher education system. These may be grouped under five interrelated headings. First, the marked reduction in the provision of higher education funding coming directly from the state has, in most countries, led to a corresponding diminution in higher education institutions’ autonomy. They are, in most contexts, increasingly beholden to those bodies—often commercial, private sector organisations—that provide much of the external funding. Second, the pervasive and dominant neo-liberal ideology of most Western societies has produced a far more ‘marketised’ system whose students often see themselves at least in part as ‘customers’ seeking qualifications that will provide them with ‘marketable skills’. The factors cited both militate against the allocation of appropriate resources for more social objectives—such as widening access or providing specialist services for migrants and refugees.

Third, and particularly relevant for the specific concerns of this chapter, international rankings have become increasingly important for higher education institutions, especially those regarded as ‘top universities’. For these types of institution, their global, elite ranking depends very largely upon research achievements, both in terms of high-quality scholarly publications (especially in recognised ‘quality’ academic journals), and in terms of monetary levels of external research funding. Such priorities necessarily relegate ‘teaching and learning’ concerns—for example, accessibility, diversity of the student body, and reaching

out to the local community—to secondary objectives, at best. There has thus developed a pattern whereby the initiatives described in this chapter—accessibility for migrants and for older students—are increasingly confined to higher education institutions that are regarded (and often regard themselves) as lower status, largely ‘teaching only’ (non-research) bodies.

Fourth, higher education institutions have become far more managerial in their culture, with policy, strategy and overall culture determined largely by a senior management cadre, rather than tenured academics (through bodies such as senates and faculty boards). Correspondingly, an increasing number of academic staff are non-tenured, part-time and often ‘teaching only’ and on fixed-term contracts. However, as committed such staff may be to accessibility, their opportunities for furthering such objectives are extremely limited. Fifth, any idea that even countries such as Germany and Ireland which have achieved high levels of participation are effectively moving to systems of *universal* higher education is, as Gallacher and Parry (2017, p. 78) put it, quite misleading

when OECD figures continue to suggest that a large proportion of the population, in most countries even those with high participation rates, does not gain access to any form of higher education, and is unlikely to do so in the future.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, we are thus left with a picture of higher education continuing to be a contested ideological arena. In this chapter we have focused on two key aspects of contemporary debates: such concerns are not discrete; they are a part of a wider ideological debate and dispute about the future development of higher education systems appropriate for liberal democracies in the twenty-first century.

Here, we concur with Zgaga (2020, p. 295):

We know many universities have opened their doors to migrants and refugees in recent years. Many of them were already known in the past for their open, cosmopolitan orientation. If, however, we would browse through the list of one of the global university rankings, we could quickly find that aspirations for academic excellence often do not coincide with

efforts to provide organized assistance to refugees and migrants. This calls for an effort to rethink and discuss the various purposes and the wider role of higher education in society today.

Note

At the time of publishing this volume, a major international crisis arose. In March 2022, in the first two weeks after Russia invaded Ukraine, some two and a half million refugees left Ukraine to flee the war—with many more expected. Beyond the shock and disbelief that a new war could be started in the middle of Europe after the horrors and millions of victims of World War Two, the host countries of these refugees scrambled to provide them with shelter, food and other necessities of life. As many of the refugees were families with children and young adults, one of the challenges was to offer places in schools and tertiary institutions. The focus of our chapter on refugees thus, regrettably, gained an additional salience that we had never envisaged when we completed it.

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