# FACT SHEET
DISABLED STUDENTS

Definition:
Those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006)

Only 29.4% of persons with disabilities attain a tertiary degree compared to 43.8% of those without disabilities (ECEU, 2024).

Research has shown a higher prevalence of depression, anxiety, non-suicidal self-injury, and suicidal risk among students with disabilities, as well as higher rates of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. Additionally, they were also more likely to use mental health services compared to their counterparts without disabilities.
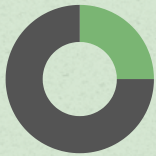
According to a Eurostudent survey, **25%** disabled students often feel out of place in higher education.

15% of students reported having a disability. The types of disability most often reported are mental health issues, physical chronic diseases, or other long-standing health issues (Eurostudent, 2021).

36 % of students with impairments rate the public and institutional support they receive as not at all sufficient (Eurostudent, 2021).

70 % of students report that their impairment is not noticeable (Eurostudent, 2021).

Factors affecting disabled students well-being

- Physical barriers.
- The availability and adequacy of accommodations and support services.
- Experiencing discrimination or microaggressions.
- Lack of social inclusion.
- Managing physical and mental health aspects of their disability.
- Additional costs associated with disability-related expenses.
- Fear of disclosing their disability out of concern of being treated differently.
- Academic underachievement.
- Attitudes of professors and staff.
- Intersectional discrimination and safety concerns.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Prepare summer schools and courses to help students manage the change.
- Implement accessibility measures and services such as making campus accessible via physical accommodations and providing learning materials in alternative formats.
- Provide dedicated support services for disabled students.
- HEIs should strive to provide access to counselling that focuses on psychological and mental health aspects that affect people with disabilities.
- Conduct regular accessibility audits to identify barriers and prioritise accessibility improvements.
- Provide information and communication materials in accessible formats.
- Develop peer support programs and networks.
- Institutions should encourage the creation of culture that will make students feel safe and encourage them to disclose their disability.
- Establish feedback mechanisms, to gather input from disabled students.

DETAILED INSIGHT ON THE WELL-BEING OF DISABLED STUDENTS

Definition:

Based on the UN definition of the Convention On The Rights Of Persons With Disabilities (CRPD) disabled students can be defined as people with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in educational activities without accommodations or support (Hayes, A.M. & Bulat, J. 2017). Enabling the participation of disabled people in higher education is a goal of the EU (Hauschildt, K. et al, 2021).

Disabilities can include but are not limited to:

1.Physical disabilities: substantial and long-term condition affecting a part of a person's body that impairs and limits their physical functioning, mobility, stamina or dexterity. People may be born with them or acquire it late in life due to an accident, injury, illness or as a side effect of a medical condition. Eg. limb loss, cerebral palsy, spinal cord injuries, epilepsy (Berg, V., 2024).

2. Sensory disabilities: usually refers to the impairment of the senses such as sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell, and/or spatial awareness. It may include conditions of visual impairment, blindness, hearing loss, and deafness (Pivin-Bachler, J. et al, 2024).

3. Cognitive disabilities: refers to when an individual has limitations or challenges in performing one or more types of cerebral tasks (FCC, 2016). This may include learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum disorders, or intellectual disabilities.

4. Psychosocial disabilities: a disability that may arise from a mental health issue (NSW Government, 2023). They can include depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

5. Chronic Health Conditions: they are conditions that last 1 year or more and require ongoing medical or limit activities of daily living or both (CDC, 2024). Some examples of chronic health issues include but are not limited to diabetes, chronic pain, or autoimmune disorders.

WELL-BEING FACTS AND FIGURES

Around 101 million people in the EU (27%) have some form of disability. Only 29.4% of persons with disabilities attain a tertiary degree compared to 43.8% of those without disabilities.
- 52% of persons with disabilities feel discriminated against.
- 28.4% of persons with disabilities are at risk of poverty or social exclusion compared to 17.8% of persons without disabilities (European Council of the European Union, 2024).

In a study by Universia group on Spanish disabled students in higher education (Universia Fundacion, 2023):
- 20% of students reported experiences of discrimination in university.
- 20% claimed that there is a difference in how they are treated by their peers compared to other non-disabled peers.
- 15% claimed that professors treat them differently compared to other non-disabled students.

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According to a EUROSTUDENT survey (Hauschildt, K. et al, 2021):
- 15% of students reported having a disability.
- The types of disability most often reported are mental health issues, physical chronic diseases, or other long-standing health issues.
- 70 % of students report that their impairment is not noticeable.
- 36 % of students with impairments rate the public and institutional support they receive as not at all sufficient.
- 25% disabled students often feel out of place in higher education.

Research which compared the mental health needs between disabled and non-disabled students have shown a higher prevalence of depression, anxiety, non-suicidal self-injury, and suicidal risk among students with disabilities, as well as higher rates of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. Additionally, they were also more likely to use mental health services compared to their counterparts without disabilities (Solis Garcia, P. et al, 2024; Coduti, W.A. et al, 2016).

FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE WELL-BEING OF DISABLED STUDENTS

Disabled students in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) may face various challenges related to accessing education, participating in academic activities, and navigating campus environments. These challenges can affect their well-being and may include physical barriers, communication barriers, inaccessible learning materials, discrimination, stigma, and lack of support services depending on the nature of the disability and the specific circumstances of the student. Here are some common examples:

Accessibility and Mobility:
Physical barriers, while many universities have adapted their infrastructure to support students with reduced mobility many haven't. These may include inaccessible buildings, classrooms, and facilities, which can pose significant challenges for disabled students. Lack of ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms, and parking spaces can restrict mobility and hinder access to educational resources and campus amenities.
These barriers have a negative impact on student participation and can lead to feelings of exclusion, shame, isolation, discomfort, sadness and might even force them to change or select programmes and institutions based on their accessibility (Bartolo, P. et al, 2023; Fernández-Batanero J.M. et al, 2022; Brau, L., & Ly, M., 2024). Access to reliable transportation options and mobility assistance is crucial for disabled students to navigate campus, attend classes, and participate in extracurricular activities.

Academic Accommodations and Support Services:
The availability and adequacy of accommodations and support services, such as assistive technologies, note-taking assistance, sign language interpreters, extended time for exams, and accessible formats for course materials, can greatly impact the well-being of disabled students. Difficulty accessing necessary accommodations or experiencing delays in receiving support can contribute to academic stress and feelings of frustration or inadequacy.
Moreover, universities tend to have a one size fits all approach for accommodations instead of an individualised one, meaning some accommodations are ineffective. It can also be the case that they are not granted, and the student must fight for them (Langørgen, E., & Magnus, E., 2018; Kendall, L., & Tarman, B., 2016; Riva, E. et al, 2024). Also, limited or unsupportive disability services can make students feel the university does not care about them (Fleming, A.R, 2017).

Discrimination and micro aggressions:
Students experiencing overt discrimination or ableist microaggressions experienced higher levels of anxiety and depression as well as a lower academic self-concept (Bartolo, P. et al, 2023). Microaggressions can be defined as subtle verbal, behavioural, or environmental slights and insults that communicate a hostile or derogatory message based on an individual's social status (Lett, K. et al, 2019). Institutional environments which promote or respond ineffectively to disability discrimination are detrimental to the well-being of students (Lett, K. et al, 2019).

Social Inclusion:

Disabled students may experience social isolation, stigma, and discrimination, which can affect their sense of belonging and well-being. Barriers to social participation, such as inaccessible social events, lack of peer support, or negative attitudes from others, can contribute to feelings of loneliness and exclusion.

Physical and Mental Health:

Managing the physical and mental health aspects of their disability, as well as any co-occurring health conditions, can impact the well-being of disabled students. Chronic pain, fatigue, medication side effects, and mental health challenges such as anxiety or depression may affect their ability to engage in academic activities and maintain overall well-being.

Additionally, for some students their disability impacted their academic performances as higher education placed substantial demands on them and they needed to work harder than their nondisabled peers to complete assignments (Brewer, G. et al 2023; Langørgen, E., & Magnus, E., 2018).

Financial Concerns:

Additional costs associated with disability-related expenses, such as medical equipment, medications, specialised transportation, accessible accommodation, assistive technologies or personal care assistance, can create financial strain for disabled students. Limited financial resources may impact their ability to access necessary support services and participate in extracurricular activities.

Disclosure and Self-Advocacy:

Decisions about whether to disclose their disability to faculty, staff, and peers, and how to advocate for their needs, can be complex and stressful for disabled students because of the fear of stigma and discrimination.

Concerns about being treated differently or facing negative consequences, may lead to reluctance to seek necessary accommodations or support services, preventing them from accessing the support and accommodation that would help them in their studies (Kendall, L., & Tarman, B., 2016).

Social Isolation:

Stigma surrounding disabilities can lead to social isolation and exclusion for disabled students. Negative attitudes, stereotypes, and misconceptions about disability from non-disabled peers and staff may result in peer rejection, marginalisation, and difficulties forming meaningful social connections. Also, the extra time spent on their studies limits their opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities (Kendall, L., & Tarman, B., 2016).

Psychological Distress:

Experiencing stigma and discrimination can contribute to psychological distress, including feelings of shame, embarrassment, low self-esteem, and depression. Constantly having to navigate negative stereotypes and societal prejudices can take a toll on the mental health and well-being of disabled students. A disability can take away many aspects of your identity, leaving you questioning who you are, what your value is, and where you fit in society. It's easy to start feeling useless and empty, especially if you can't do the same work or activities as you did before.

Academic Underachievement:

The impact of their disability on their daily lives, for some students their disability impacted their academic performances, as higher education placed substantial demands them and they needed to work harder than their nondisabled peers to complete assignments (Brewer, G. et al 2023; Langørgen, E., & Magnus, E., 2018). Due to this disabled students face many misconceptions and stigma regarding their ability to succeed academically (Solis Garcia, P. et al, 2024).

Stigma and discrimination may undermine the academic performance and achievement of disabled students. Fear of judgement or discrimination from peers and faculty members may lead to decreased participation in class discussions, reluctance to seek help or accommodations, and avoidance of challenging academic opportunities.

They can also play a significant role in their well-being as studies have identified them as the most important stakeholder in the classrooms and the lives of students with disabilities (Moriña, A. & Orozco, I., 2020). Some professors are unwilling to implement accommodations with some even disbelieving the student required accommodations, particularly students with invisible disabilities (Bartolo, P. et al, 2023).

This attitude may be due in part to a lack of awareness amongst teaching staff of the different needs that students may have. Additionally, students often must continually ask for the same accommodations to support them however often this support is denied (Kendall, L., & Tarman, B., 2016; McNicholl, A. et al, 2019).

Additionally, some professors are unwilling to adjust their ways of teaching to use a methodology which promotes inclusion in the classroom according to student needs (Hauschildt, K. et al ,2021; Fernández-Batanero J.M. et al, 2022). Moreover, some are unwilling to carry out measures such as sending the lecture notes and slides in advance (Kendall, L., & Tarman, B., 2016).

Intersectional Discrimination and Safety Concerns:
Disabled students who belong to marginalised or underrepresented groups may face intersectional discrimination based on multiple aspects of their identity, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or socioeconomic status. Intersectional forms of discrimination can compound the challenges and barriers faced by disabled students, like bullying, harassment, or victimisation based on disability status.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FRIENDLY HEI FOR DISABLED STUDENTS

To address these factors it is necessary to create an inclusive and supportive environment where all students feel valued, respected, and empowered. Thus promoting the well-being and success of disabled students in higher education.

Creating a friendly and inclusive environment for disabled students in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) requires a multifaceted approach, including implementing a range of supportive measures and accommodations. By implementing these measures HEIs can create a welcoming, inclusive, and supportive environment that empowers disabled students to thrive academically, socially, and personally during their time in higher education.

Here are some recommendations for HEIs to consider:

Transition support mechanisms:
Prepare summer schools and courses to help students manage the change, particularly when they can find it challenging. For example, some summer schools are specifically designed to help students with anxiety or autistic spectrum conditions settle in. It's good to be prepared and know what to expect, and transition guides can be useful to help students get ready for the change.

Accessibility measures:
HEIs can offer accessibility services and accommodations to support students with disabilities. This may include accessible campus facilities through physical accommodations such as wheelchair ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms, and tactile signage.

Also digital accessibility measures are increasingly important, including providing accessible online learning platforms, materials in alternative formats, and assistive technologies. This could include adding subtitles to audiovisual materials, provide class notes in Word format, use different assessment methods, allow the recording of teaching, make course materials detailed and available quickly (Heffernan, T., 2023; OIAHE, 2017; Moriña, A. & Orozco, I., 2020).

Further measures can also include note-taking assistance, and a broad variety of exam accommodations to ensure equal access to education for all students. These initiatives promote inclusivity and remove learning barriers for students with disabilities. Institutions must also ensure that staff and students are aware of the resources and services available across campus.

Dedicated Support Services:

Provide dedicated support services for disabled students, such as disability resource centres or offices of disability services. These services can provide assistance with accommodations, academic support, self-advocacy, careers services for disabled students, guidance on disability-related issues and even additional financial support for disabled students who need to cover additional costs such as accessible transport for attending university (Brewer, G. et al 2023). HEIs must also make sure students are aware of the disability resources and services across campus (Brewer, G. et al 2023).

HEIs should seek to increase resources for the disability support office at the university including funding and more personnel if needed (Fleming, A.R, 2017), provide guidance for students on how to navigate the procedure to request accommodations, clarification on the type of accommodations available and reduce the administrative burden placed on students for them to request accommodations and access support (Brewer, G. et al 2023).

Student Mental Health Services:

Mental health services to support students' emotional well-being are very important in HEIs. These services may include counselling, therapy sessions, mental health workshops, and crisis intervention programs.
HEIs should strive to provide access to counselling that focuses on psychological and mental health aspects that affect people with disabilities (Fleming, A.R, 2017). As many disabled students will be grappling with a variety of physical, interpersonal, and mental health challenges, a comprehensive biopsychosocial framework would be useful to deliver effective care (Coduti, W.A. et al, 2016).

Accessibility Audits:

Conduct regular accessibility audits of campus facilities, classrooms, libraries, dormitories, and other spaces to identify barriers and prioritise accessibility improvements. This may include ensuring wheelchair ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms, signage, and parking spaces are in place.
Moreover, staff involved in disability support services and teaching staff should work together to monitor the effectiveness of the accommodations provided (Parpottas, P. et al, 2023).

Accessible Information and Communication:

Provide information and communication materials in accessible formats, such as Braille, large print, electronic text, and audio formats. Ensure that websites, online learning platforms, and digital materials are designed to be accessible to students with visual, auditory, or cognitive impairments.

Individualised Accommodations:

Offer individualised accommodations and support services tailored to the specific needs of each disabled student. This may include extended time for exams, assistive technologies, note-taking assistance, sign language interpreters, and alternative formats for course materials.

Training for Faculty and Staff /Disability Awareness Training:

Institutions should offer disability awareness training for faculty, staff, and students to increase understanding, empathy, and sensitivity towards disability-related issues. Training may cover topics such as disability rights, accommodations, communication strategies, and reducing stigma and discrimination. Institutions must also, through this training, ensure that staff is aware of what to do if a student discloses their disability (OIAHE, 2017).

Peer Support Programs and networks:

Develop peer support programs where disabled students can connect with and learn from their peers who have similar experiences. Peer mentors can provide valuable emotional support, practical advice, and guidance on navigating campus life and academic challenges.
Having access to supportive relationships and peer networks can positively influence the well-being of disabled students. Connecting with other disabled students, disability support groups, or disability-affirming communities can provide valuable social support, understanding, and validation.

Accessible Transportation:
Ensure that transportation options to and from campus are accessible for disabled students. This may include providing accessible shuttle services, coordinating with local public transportation providers, and offering transportation subsidies for disabled students.

Social Inclusion Initiatives:
Organise social inclusion initiatives and events that promote interaction and friendship among disabled and non-disabled students. This may include disability awareness events, inclusive recreational activities, accessible sports, cultural festivals, and peer-led support groups. Disabled students that have the chance to interact with other students through extracurricular activities performed better academically (Fleming, A.R, 2017; Bartolo, P. et al, 2023).
Ensure events are fully inclusive and accessible for disabled members (Brewer, G. et al 2023).

Accessible Housing Options:
Provide accessible housing options for disabled students, including dormitories with wheelchair-accessible rooms, adjustable furniture, and proximity to campus facilities. Ensure that housing assignments consider students' accessibility needs and preferences.

Feedback Mechanisms:
Establish feedback mechanisms, such as surveys, focus groups, or suggestion boxes, to gather input from disabled students about their experiences and suggestions for improvement. Use this feedback to evaluate and enhance support services, accommodations, and campus accessibility.

Collaboration with External Organizations:
HEIs can collaborate with external disability organisations, government agencies, and community groups to enhance support services and resources for disabled students. This collaboration may involve sharing best practices, advocating for policy changes, and providing referrals for additional support.
Create an open and supportive atmosphere
Institutions should encourage the creation of a culture that will make students feel safe and encourage them to disclose their disability at any time so they can receive the support they need (OIAHE, 2017). This can be done by revising and creating policies that ensure inclusivity and work to create a culture that does not tolerate disrespect (Lett, K. et al, 2019).

EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES AT HEI

Universities of Saint Gallen Basel and Lucerne (Switzerland) help overcome physical barriers through interactive campus maps. They list wheelchair access and disabled toilets, hearing aid loops in auditoriums, disabled parking spaces, pictograms explaining the accessibility of buildings, and monitors to indicate the use of platform stairlifts (Cardoso, C., 2021).

Masaryk University (Czech Republic): the Support Centre for Students with Special Needs guarantees that the physical and virtual environments of the university, including documents and communications, are accessible to people with disabilities. Furthermore, it has developed inclusive educational methods for the university (Claeys-Kulik, A.L. et al, 2019; Muni Teiresias, 2024).

KU Leuven offers guided training sessions in individual and team sports, for people with and without disabilities to participate in sports together and offer peer support groups for students with a disability to get to know each other (KU Leuven, 2024).

Faculty of social sciences at Charles university (Czech Republic) offers the following support services during studies and based on the student's type of disability including digitalisation of study texts, interpreting, transcription, and recording services, copying services, time compensation in examinations, individual tuition, loan of aids, unique information, and counselling services.

ETH Zurich (Switzerland) guarantees that students with specific needs can take examinations at equivalent levels of performance, but under the appropriate conditions (Cardoso, C., 2021).

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FACT SHEET
ERASMUS STUDENTS

Definition:
The Erasmus programme is a "European funding programme established in 1987 offering university students a possibility of studying or doing an internship abroad in another country for a period of at least 2 months and maximum 12 months per cycle of studies. Erasmus+ now offers the possibility to go way beyond the European borders as well" (ESN, 2024).

In the "Mobile Minds in Motion" project preparation, students were asked about their mental health status and how it influenced their Erasmus experience. More than 2500 student filled out the survey from all around Europe. Some of the main conclusions are:
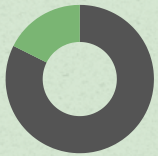
82,7% of the students considered providing mental health support for mobile students was important or very important.

Already more than 15 million participants benefited from the programme during the last 35 years (European Commission, 2024).

72,5% of the students would strongly or very strongly appreciate receiving mental health support related to their mobility experience before, during or after their mobility.

Every year around 246,000 students participate in mobility activities in higher education within the Erasmus programme (European Commission, 2022).

Factors affecting student well-being while on Erasmus

- Language and cultural challenges.
- Academic and administrative issues.
- Housing and Well-being concerns.
- Maintaining physical and mental well-being away from family and friends.
- Concerns about personal safety, especially in large cities.
- Emotional and psychological challenges, such as, feelings of homesickness and loneliness.
- Reverse culture shock after returning home.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Dedicated Support Services
- Incorporate offices/departments dedicated for mental health with Erasmus student support.
- Offer language support services and courses.

2) Student Engagement and Integration
- Develop comprehensive orientation and pre-departure programs.
- Train student mentors on well-being topics.
- Promote physical well-being and the use of student well-being apps.

3) Foster continuous support and feedback
- Conduct regular check-ins.
- Foster a safe, inclusive, and welcoming environment.
- Establish feedback mechanisms for student input.

4) Student Empowerment
- Educate students on key principles: socialise, learn more, get help, strengthen yourself, and step up.

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In the "Mobile Minds in motion" project preparation, students were asked about their mental health status and how it influenced their Erasmus experience. More than 1500 student filled out the survey from all around Europe and responded the following:

- 82.7% considered providing mental health support for mobile students was important or very important.

- Only 17% partook in any kind of consultation or mental health preparation before their mobility, 10% during and only 5.6% after their mobility.

- 44.8% responded that mental health support for mobile students should be provided at an individual level by a student counsellor.

- 72.5% would strongly or very strongly appreciate receiving mental health support related to their mobility experience before, during or after their mobility.

University staff working with Erasmus students responded the following:
- 38% said they had provided support to incoming and outgoing students who dealt with mental health issues before departure, 70.7% during mobility, 27.8% after mobility.

- Only 31,8% felt very or fully prepared to provide mental health support for students.

- 93.3% agreed it is important to support students' mental health before, during or after mobility.

- 95.4% would appreciate it if they could receive comprehensive guidelines or a toolkit on how to support mobile students, both incoming and outgoing, who deal with mental health issues.

WISE Well-being Innovations for Students in Europe

Co-funded by the European Union

FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENT WELL-BEING WHILE ON ERASMUS

Language Barriers:
Language differences can affect their ability to communicate, participate in classes, and navigate daily life interactions, leading to frustration and isolation.

Cultural Adjustment:
Adjusting to a new culture, social norms, and academic environment can be overwhelming for Erasmus students. In a new destination a student will find themselves face to face with a new education system, different language they might not speak, different climate, unfamiliar food, people or subtleties like communication style, humour, or everyday behaviours. They may experience feelings of confusion, anxiety, frustration, disorientation, loneliness, homesickness, fatigue, isolation, or cultural shock as they adapt to their host country (Maastricht University, n.d; ETH Zurich, n.d).

Academic Challenges:
Erasmus students may face academic challenges such as differences in teaching methods, assessment formats, and course expectations compared to their home institutions. Adjusting to these differences and meeting academic expectations while adjusting to a new environment can be stressful, especially if there is a lack of support or guidance from the host institution.

Integration and Socialisation:
Erasmus students may struggle to integrate into the local community and establish social connections. Building friendships with local students and forming a support network can take time and effort. They may feel lonely, or feelings of exclusion may arise sometimes.

Housing and Accommodation:
Finding suitable and affordable housing in the host country can be a significant source of stress for Erasmus students. Limited availability of accommodation, high rental costs, and unfamiliarity with local housing markets can make securing housing challenging.

Financial and Administrative Concerns:
Financial stress may affect their ability to fully engage in academic and social activities, and quality of life abroad which may affect their well-being. This can include managing their Erasmus grant to cover their living expenses, dealing with currency exchange rates or unexpected expenses.

Dealing with administrative procedures such as visa applications, residence permits, and registration requirements can be complex and time-consuming for Erasmus students.

Health and Wellbeing:
Maintaining physical and mental wellbeing while studying abroad can be challenging for Erasmus students. Accessing healthcare services, managing stress, and coping with homesickness are common concerns that may affect their overall experience.

Additionally, countries can have very different attitudes to mental health support, in some countries mental health is still viewed as a taboo subject meaning there might be a lack of counselling services in institutions or will be very hard to find it externally and that caters to foreigners (Husson, A.C. & Hall, D., 2020).

Safety and Security:
Concerns about personal safety, crime rates, or political instability in the host country can affect students' sense of security and wellbeing.

Home Country Relationships:

Maintaining connections with family and friends back home while abroad can be important for students' wellbeing. Feelings of homesickness, loneliness, or missing important events in their home country may impact their overall happiness and satisfaction during their mobility period.

Reverse culture shock:

Students upon their return might deal with reverse culture shock, they might experience change in perceptions, uncertainty over their own identity following the experiences they have gone through while abroad. Also, there might have been changes in their friends and family while abroad which can lead to feelings of frustration, alienation, and mutual misunderstandings. The better integrated a student becomes to the culture of the host country the harder it can be to readjust upon return (Maastricht University, n.d; ETH Zurich, n.d).

Lack of preparation and support by the home institution:

During pre-departure briefings some institutions might not prepare their students to the challenges they might encounter abroad or give them limited information about how to access mental health support services abroad (Lees, D., 2020; Ashenden, A., 2014).

Moreover, counselling services back home might take a long time to reply to students who are struggling, be dismissive of them or might not even be keeping in contact with students which are abroad to see how they are doing even if they are aware of prior mental issues (Ashenden, A., 2014).

Also, students might not have a designated staff member they could turn to at their home institution to contact in case they are struggling during their studies abroad (Ashenden, A., 2014). This is further compounded by staff in charge of exchange programmes who are often not trained to deal with and respond to mental health needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It's important that HEIs take a holistic approach that includes providing comprehensive support services, promoting social integration and cultural exchange opportunities, offering academic guidance, and ensuring access to healthcare and mental health resources for Erasmus students. With adequate support and resources, these students can overcome challenges and have a rewarding experience studying abroad in Europe.

Creating a welcoming and supportive environment for Erasmus students at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) involves several key strategies. Here are some recommendations:

Dedicated Support Services:

Establish dedicated offices or departments specifically tailored to support Erasmus students. These offices can provide assistance with academic advising, course selection, credit transfers, language support, cultural adjustment, and practical matters such as housing and healthcare.

Comprehensive Orientation Programs:

Develop comprehensive orientation programs specifically designed for Erasmus students to help them acclimate to their new environment. These programs should cover academic expectations, campus resources, cultural norms, language support services, and practical information about living in the host country.

Language Support:
Offer language support services, including language courses, tandem partners, language exchange programs, and language proficiency assessments. These resources can help Erasmus students improve their language skills and feel more confident in their academic and social interactions.

Cultural Integration Initiatives:
Organise a variety of cultural integration initiatives and activities to promote interaction and understanding between Erasmus students, local students, and the broader university community. Encourage participation in cultural exchange programs, international festivals, intercultural workshops, and student clubs or societies.

Buddy/Mentorship Programs:
Implement buddy or mentorship programs pairing Erasmus students with local students or faculty members. Mentors can provide guidance, support, and practical advice to help Erasmus students navigate academic, social, and cultural challenges during their mobility period.

Peer Support Networks:
Peer support networks and mentoring programs connect students with experienced peers who provide guidance, advice, and emotional support. It can include encouraging contact between students already abroad, those who are going abroad to the same location and between both groups (Husson, A.C. & Hall, D., 2020). These initiatives help students navigate academic challenges, social integration, and personal development during their time at university.

Regular Check-ins and Support:
Conduct regular check-ins with Erasmus students to assess their needs, address their concerns, and provide ongoing support throughout their mobility period. Establish clear communication channels and support mechanisms, including via email, phone, social media, and in-person consultations.

Health and Well-being Services:
Guarantee access to on campus healthcare services, counselling support, and mental health resources and support groups for Erasmus students. Institutions must ensure that these services are clearly signposted. They must also provide information about local healthcare providers and counselling centres and on how the health system in the host country works.

Additionally, for the sending institution the office in charge of student counselling should be made aware of which students are going on mobility. In order to offer support to any students they may be treating and provide support and counselling after the mobility experience to deal with reverse culture shock if necessary(Terra Dotta, n.d).

Safe and Inclusive Environment:
Foster a safe, inclusive, and welcoming environment for Erasmus students by promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Implement policies and procedures to address discrimination, harassment, and xenophobia, and provide training for staff and students on cultural competence and intercultural communication.

Moreover, Erasmus students should be made aware of safety measures, emergency procedures, and how to access support from university authorities to alleviate any safety concerns they might have.

Feedback Mechanisms:
Establish feedback mechanisms, such as surveys, focus groups, or suggestion boxes, to gather input from Erasmus students about their experiences and suggestions for improvement. Use this feedback to evaluate and enhance support services, programmes, and policies for future cohorts of Erasmus participants.

Support Systems:
The availability of support services and resources for Erasmus students, such as academic advisors, counselling services, language assistance, and cultural orientation programs, can greatly impact their wellbeing. Adequate support and guidance can help Erasmus students navigate challenges and thrive during their mobility period.

For this it might also be necessary too to provide IRO officers with mental health training (Husson, A.C. & Hall, D., 2020) and it might be useful if IROs should where possible connect with counselling staff in partner universities or be able to signpost students to external support in the host locations by building up a database with this information and contacts (Husson, A.C. & Hall, D., 2020; Terra Dotta, n.d).

Physical Wellbeing Initiatives:
Offer sports facilities, fitness classes, and recreational activities to promote physical wellbeing among students. These initiatives encourage regular exercise, healthy lifestyle habits, and stress relief through physical activity.

Financial Support Services:
Institutions can provide additional financial support services, including scholarships, grants, and emergency funds, to assist students facing financial hardship. These initiatives aim to alleviate financial stress and ensure that all students have access to educational opportunities regardless of their financial circumstances.

Organise pre-departure sessions:
- Pre-departure sessions at their home institution can make students aware of the issues they might encounter during their time abroad, particularly those with mental health issues (Husson, A.C. & Hall, D., 2020). These sessions can include
- Intercultural awareness sessions to prepare students for cultural shock.
- Raise awareness about how attitudes about mental health differ around the world, that it might be hard for them to obtain certain medications or mental services in other countries and that students must plan accordingly (Husson, A.C. & Hall, D., 2020).
- Present the counselling and support services that will be available for them and who will be their main contact if they have issues. Also make it easy for them to find this information and to contact their advisor if they have questions or problems (Terra Dotta, n.d).
- Establish a dialogue with students about their concerns and how to overcome them. Also, on the responsibility of the institution and the student in terms of safeguarding their wellbeing (Lees, D. 2020).
- Provide a checklist and resources on what students need to prepare before they go on mobility.

Student Wellbeing Apps:
Providing student wellbeing apps or online platforms that provide resources, tools, and self-help guides for managing stress, improving mental health, and enhancing overall wellbeing. These apps may include features such as meditation exercises, relaxation techniques, and mood tracking tools.

EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES AT HEI

Liege University (Belgium) has a buddy program to help mobility students meet local students and discover Liege (Liege Universite, 2023) .

Ghent University (Belgium): the international office organises two intercultural preparation days where students receive information about culture shock, health and safety while travelling (Ghent University, 2024).

UCL (UK) has a 24/7 support line providing free confidential support including practical information, resources, short term counselling or signposting to other services. It is accessible via phone, email or post and is available for students who are studying abroad (UCL, 2024).

The Erasmus Student Network (ESN) has branches across many European universities in Europe. They often organise activities connecting international mobility students with the local community and on health & wellbeing (ESN, 2024). The ESN chapter for Utrecht for instance has a pre-departure mentor programme connecting students with a student based in Utrecht that will answer questions about life in the Netherlands and have a series of confidants, volunteers that can be contacted by students if they need someone to talk when they encounter a problem (ESN Utrecht, 2021).

Elaborated by the WISE project consortium (2024)

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FACT SHEET

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Definition:
A student who moves to another country (the host country) for the purpose of pursuing tertiary or higher education" (Shapiro, S. et al, 2014). These students typically come from countries outside of Europe, and they enrol in various educational institutions such as universities, colleges, and research institutions.
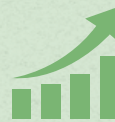

In a study by Student Minds on mental health inequalities for international students in the UK, 47% of international students self-reported having mental health.(Frampton, N., 2022).

In a survey, 35% of students reported feeling always or quite often stressed or anxious...

In 2021 there were 1.52 million students from abroad undertaking higher education studies in the EU

... and 42% feel that they might not be able to complete their studies (Smitjes, J., 2023).

Around 24.8% of them were studying in Germany, followed by 16,6% studying in France and 8.9% in the Netherlands (Eurostat, 2023).

Factors affecting international students' well-being

- Cultural adjustment.
- Academic pressure.
- Financial stress.
- Limited social support.
- Difficulty finding suitable and affordable accommodation.
- Issues accessing healthcare services.
- Discrimination and Xenophobia.
- Limited proficiency in the language of instruction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish dedicated offices or departments specifically designed to support international students.
- Offer language support services.
- Develop comprehensive orientation programs to help international students acclimate to their new environment.
- Organise cultural integration activities to encourage domestic and international students to get to know each other.
- Establish mentorship programmes.
- Provide counselling and mental health services which are readily available and culturally sensitive.
- Provide financial assistance, if needed.
- Foster a safe, inclusive, and welcoming campus environment.
- Establish feedback mechanisms, to gather input from international students about their experiences and needs.
- Collaborate with local community organisations, embassies, international student associations, and alumni networks.

Co-funded by the European Union

DETAILED INSIGHT ON THE WELL-BEING OF
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Definition:
International students can be defined as a "student who moves to another country (the host country) for the purpose of pursuing tertiary or higher education" (Shapiro, S. et al, 2014). These students typically come from countries outside of Europe, and they enrol in various educational institutions such as universities, colleges, and research institutions.

International students in Europe contribute to the cultural diversity of academic communities, bring different perspectives to classrooms, and often enrich the overall learning environment.
They may come to Europe for short-term programs, such as language courses or summer schools, or for longer-term degree programs ranging from undergraduate to doctoral levels.
Internationally mobile students are different from two other common definitions of international students, namely "foreign students" and "credit-mobile students."

Foreign students: refers to non-citizens who are currently enrolled in higher education degree courses but who have not necessarily crossed a border to study (Migration Data Portal, 2024; Clark, N., 2009).

Credit-mobile students: refers to "study-abroad" or exchange students, such as those in the EU's Erasmus programme. These students remain enrolled in their home countries while receiving a small number of credits from foreign institutions (Migration Data Portal, 2024).

WELL-BEING FACTS AND FIGURES:

In 2021 there were 1.52 million students from abroad undertaking higher education studies in the EU. Around 24.8% of them were studying in Germany, followed by 16,6% studying in France and 8.9% in the Netherlands (Eurostat, 2023).
In the 2022 i-Graduate Global Student Experience survey, 35% of students reported feeling always or quite often stressed or anxious and 42% feel that they might not be able to complete their studies. Furthermore, in another study 59% of international students in the Netherlands reported struggling with mental health (Smitjes, J., 2023).

In a study by Student Minds on mental health inequalities for international students in the UK, 47% of international students compared to 62% of UK domiciled students self-reported having mental health issues. However, they did report high levels of concern on a range of issues such as well-being (81% for mental well-being and 70% for physical well-being), quality of their student experience, finances or a need for greater support (Frampton, N., 2022).
According to the report this misalignment might be due to the way in which well-being and mental health is conceptualised, understood and communicated which might differ from other cultures and countries. In fact, 62% of international students with experience of mental health issues reported having no intention to disclose them to their university compared to 52% of UK domiciled students (Frampton, N., 2022).

FACTORS AFFECTING WELL-BEING OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

International students play a crucial role in enriching the cultural and academic landscape of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) worldwide. However, they often encounter unique needs and challenges during their educational journey:

Cultural Adjustment:
Adapting to a new culture, language, and social norms can be challenging and may lead to feelings of isolation, loneliness or homesickness.

Academic Pressure:
The demands of coursework, exams, and assignments can be overwhelming, especially when coupled with language barriers or unfamiliar academic systems.

Financial Stress:
International students often face financial challenges, including tuition fees, living expenses, and currency exchange rates, which can impact their wellbeing and ability to focus on their studies.

Social Support:
Limited social networks and a lack of familial or community support systems may contribute to feelings of loneliness or isolation.

Accommodation and Housing:
Difficulty finding suitable and affordable accommodation, navigating rental agreements, or experiencing housing issues can add stress to an international student's life.

Healthcare Access:
Accessing healthcare services, understanding health insurance policies, and navigating healthcare systems in a foreign country can be daunting and impact physical and mental wellbeing.

Discrimination and Xenophobia:
International students may face discrimination, xenophobia, or racism based on their nationality, race or cultural background, which can negatively affect their sense of belonging and overall well-being.

Language Proficiency:
Limited proficiency in the language of instruction may hinder academic performance and social integration, leading to stress and frustration.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FRIENDLY HEI FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Addressing the diverse needs and challenges of international students in Higher Education Institutions, is crucial for fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment. By implementing targeted support services and policies, HEIs can enhance the educational experience and success of international students, enriching the global academic community.

By implementing these recommendations, HEIs can create a more inclusive and supportive environment that enhances the wellbeing and success of international students studying in Europe. Here are some recommendations:

Dedicated Support Services:
Establish dedicated offices or departments specifically designed to support international students. These offices can provide assistance with visa and immigration issues, academic advising, cultural adjustment, and practical matters such as housing and healthcare. This may involve creating integrated support centres or hubs where students can access a range of services in one location.

Orientation Programs:
Develop comprehensive orientation programs to help international students acclimate to their new environment. These programs should cover academic expectations, campus resources, cultural norms, and practical information about living in the host country.

Language Support:
Offer language support services, including language courses, conversation partners, and language proficiency assessments. This can help international students improve their language skills and feel more confident in their academic and social interactions.

Cultural Integration Initiatives:
Organise events, workshops, and cultural exchange programs to promote interaction and understanding between international and domestic students. Encourage participation in student clubs, societies, and cultural organisations to foster cross-cultural friendships and collaborations.

Mentorship Programs:
Establish mentorship programs pairing international students with experienced mentors, such as faculty members, staff, or senior students. Mentors can provide guidance, support, and practical advice to help international students navigate academic and social challenges.

Accessible Counselling Services:
Ensure that counselling and mental health services are readily available and culturally sensitive. Provide counselling sessions in multiple languages and train counsellors to address the unique challenges faced by international students, including homesickness, cultural adjustment, and academic stress.

Financial Assistance:
Offer scholarships, grants, and financial aid packages specifically for international students to help alleviate financial burdens. Provide information about part-time job opportunities, internships, and work-study programs to support students in covering living expenses.

Safe and Inclusive Campus:
Foster a safe, inclusive, and welcoming campus environment by promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Implement policies and procedures to address discrimination, harassment, and xenophobia, and provide training for faculty, staff, and students on cultural competence and intercultural communication.

Feedback Mechanisms:
Establish feedback mechanisms, such as surveys or focus groups, to gather input from international students about their experiences and needs. Use this feedback to continuously improve support services and programs.

Partnerships and Collaboration:
Collaborate with local community organisations, embassies, international student associations, and alumni networks to provide additional support and resources for international students. Strengthen partnerships with employers to facilitate internships, job placements, and career development opportunities.

EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES AT HEI

<u>Charles University (Czechia):</u> the university offers an array of services to international students. Some include a student well-being advisor who provides support for international students during their adaptation to another country, on visa issues, overcoming language barriers and even support when they feel lonely or overwhelmed by their studies. They also organise online pre-arrival meetings, for incoming international students to answer practical questions, meet other students, to reduce stress from moving to a foreign country and provide useful tips for an easy start.

<u>Maastricht University (Netherlands):</u> they offer an International Student Ambassador programme. It aims to help new students adapt to life in Maastricht by pairing a group of new students with an ambassador (a current student), during their first weeks in the city (Maastricht University, 2024).

<u>University of the Arts London (UK)</u> developed a series of workshops for all students on intercultural exchanges (Ofs, 2023).

<u>University of Bradford (UK)</u> developed a virtual housing fayre to help international students make informed accommodation choices before they arrive in the UK (Ofs, 2023).

Elaborated by the WISE project consortium (2024)

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FACT SHEET

LGBTIQA+ STUDENTS

Definition:
LGBTIQA+ Stands For:
L is for lesbian
G is for gay
B is for bisexual
T is for transgender
I is for intersex (Intersex individuals are born with physical sex characteristics that do not fit typical binary definitions of male or female).
Q is for queer (Questioning)
A is for asexual/aromantic (Asexual individuals do not experience sexual attraction, while aromantic individuals do not experience romantic attraction).
+ is for other diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

In a UNESCO survey (2021) of young people in Europe, 54% of LGBTIQA+ people said they had been bullied at least once based on their gender identity or sexual orientation.

In the FRA survey (2020) on LGBTIQA+ individuals in Europe, 37% of respondents felt discriminated against in areas of life other than work which included university.

Only 20.6% of trans students and 36.7% of LGB+ students feel completely safe in campus and LGBTIQA+ students who have experienced some kind of homophobic or transphobic harassment are 2-3 times more likely to consider dropping out (NUS UK, 2014).

Young cohorts of LGBTIQA+ individuals are more likely to experience poor mental health including depression compared to heterosexual individuals (IGLYO, 2013).

Factors affecting LGBTQIA students well-being

- Discrimination and stigma.
- Lack of acceptance and support.
- Mental health challenges.
- Identity exploration and affirmation.
- Physical safety concerns.
- Access to care and supportive resources.
- Intersectional identities.
- Legal and policy context.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide culturally competent support and counselling services.
- Provide comprehensive health services.

- Create safe and inclusive spaces.
- Provide LGBTIQA+ affirmative training.
- Establish inclusive and anti-discrimination policies.
- Provide accessible resources including gender affirming resources.
- Promote on campus visibility and representation.
- Foster community partnerships.
- Encourage peer support networks
- Seek feedback and collaboration from LGBTIQA+ students and organisations.
- Be respectful, use the terms, names and pronouns that people use to describe themselves.
- Offer gender-inclusive facilities.
- Foster LGBTIQA+ representation in curricula.
- Support LGBTIQA+ student organisations.
- Instil a sense of belonging amongst LGBTIQA+ students.

DETAILED INSIGHT ON THE WELL-BEING OF
LGBTIQA+ STUDENTS

Definition

LGBTIQA+ Stands For:
L is for lesbian
G is for gay
B is for bisexual
T is for transgender
I is for intersex (Intersex individuals are born with physical sex characteristics that do not fit typical binary definitions of male or female.)
Q is for queer (Questioning)
A is for asexual / aromantic (Asexual individuals do not experience sexual attraction, while aromantic individuals do not experience romantic attraction)
+ is for other diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (Green Party, 2024)

"LGBTIQA+" is an inclusive acronym that represents a diverse range of sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions. Each letter in the acronym stands for a different identity or characteristic within the LGBTQ+ community. The "+" symbol indicates that the acronym is inclusive of additional identities and variations within the LGBTQ+ community. Other variations of this acronym exist and acronym choice can vary depending on the groups or issues being discussed and the available evidence (Carman, M., et al, 2020).

Understanding and using the language/terminology associated with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual and other sexually or gender diverse (LGBTIQA+) is very important.

Moreover, LGBTIQA+ people are not a homogenous group. There is a great deal of diversity within and across LGBTIQA+ communities. There is also a wide range of terms and language related to bodies, gender, sexual orientation, sexual attraction, sexual behaviour, and legal and medical processes.

The LGBTIQA+ Spectrum Is Made Up Of:

- Sexual or romantic orientations: this is romantic and sexual attraction to people of different genders, the same, to more or none (Green Party, 2024).
- Gender identities: one's sense of whether they are a man, a woman, both, or neither. Gender identity may or may not match a person's biological sex (CFCA, 2022; Green Party, 2024). Therefore, there are two main groups of people depending on their gender identities:
- Cisgender people: those whose gender identity corresponds with what they were assigned at birth (CFCA, 2022).
- Trans people: those whose gender differs from what was assigned at birth (Trans Hub, 2024).
- Intersex conditions: They are people who have innate sex characteristics that do not fit medical and social norms for female or male bodies (Intersex Human Rights Australia, 2021). Some people have physical characteristics, primarily and/or secondary of both sexes. These conditions may include: chromosome disorders, atypical genitalia or reproductive organs, overproduction or underproduction of sex-related hormones (Green Party, 2024).

The assumption that people are heterosexual, cisgender or have sex characteristics that fit medical norms for female or male bodies (dominant model) has a negative effect on the health, education and well-being of LGBTIQA+ people. The binary model is very inappropriate to explain the complexity and diversity around those questions.

These students may face unique challenges related to discrimination, prejudice, and lack of visibility in educational environments. Providing support, resources, and inclusive policies can help create safe and affirming spaces for LGBTIQA+ students in European higher educational institutions.

WELL-BEING FACTS AND FIGURES

Research shows young cohorts of LGBTIQA+ individuals are more likely to experience poor mental health including depression, self-harm and suicidal feelings compared to heterosexual individuals (IGLYO, 2013). Moreover, they tend to perceive their university campus's climate as more hostile and dangerous than their heterosexual peers (Amodeo et al, 2020).

In a UNESCO survey of more than 17000 young people in Europe aged 13 to 24, 54% of LGBTIQA+ people said they had been bullied at least once based on their gender identity or sexual orientation (UN, 2021).

According to the report by the Fundamental Rights Agency (2020) on their survey on LGBT people in Europe, 37% of respondents felt discriminated against in areas of life other than work which included university.

According to the survey on LGTB+ individuals in Europe by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2020):

- 37% of respondents felt discriminated against in areas of life other than work which included university.
- 29.36% of young respondents felt discriminated against by school or university personnel (IGLYO & ILGA, 2022).
- Respondents aged 15 to 24 experienced higher rates of harassment, with over half of these aggravations involving someone from school, college (Avila Rodriguez, R., 2021).

Data from the NUS UK study on LGBTIQA+ students' experiences in higher education (2014):

- Just 20.6% of trans students and 36.7% of LGB+ students feel completely safe in campus.
- 20% of LGB+ and 33% of trans students have experienced at least one form of bullying and harassment on campus.
- LGBT+ students who have experienced some kind of homophobic or transphobic harassment are 2-3 times more likely to consider dropping out.

FACTORS AFFECTING THE WELL-BEING OF LGBTIQA+ STUDENTS

Several factors can significantly impact the well-being of LGBTIQA+ students in educational settings. These factors are often interconnected and may vary depending on the individual's experiences, identity, and social context. Here are some key factors that can affect the well-being of LGBTIQA+ students:

Discrimination and Stigma:

LGBTIQA+ students may face discrimination, prejudice, and stigma based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression. This can manifest in various forms, including verbal harassment, physical assault, bullying, social exclusion, and institutional discrimination, leading to feelings of shame, fear, and rejection.

In higher education homophobia and transphobia continue to be significant problems. Research has shown that microaggressions and heterosexist harassment were linked to worsening academic outcomes and as a risk factor for dropping out of university due to a lack of feelings of belongingness and social acceptance (Byrom, N. et al, 2022; Amodeo, AL., 2020).

An apparent lack of clear procedures to protect LGBTIQA+ students from harassment means they are less likely to report these incidents as they do not believe anything will be done about them (Bachmann, C L., Gooch, B., 2018; Acciari, L. et al, 2014).

Lack of Acceptance and Support:
Many LGBTIQA+ students experience a lack of acceptance and support from peers, family members, educators, and institutions. Rejection from loved ones, negative attitudes from classmates, a lack of safe social spaces where LGBTQA+ can meet and interact and a lack of visibility or representation in curricula and policies can contribute to feelings of isolation, loneliness, and alienation. Among young people suicide and attempted suicide rates are higher than for heterosexual people (IGLYO et al, 2023).

Despite evidence of negative experiences and challenges, LGBTIQA+ students overall still had a positive view of universities and tended to find university a 'safer space' than the rest of society. Some research has shown that attending university enabled LGBTIQA+ students to begin a new stage in life. Where they could form new social networks and in a way be themselves, by coming out as LGB or trans, as they might not have been able to display this part of their identity in their original environment (Pichardo Galán. J. I. & Puche Cabezas, I., 2019; Formby, E., 2017).

Mental Health Challenges:
LGBTIQA+ individuals are at higher risk of experiencing mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers. Minority stress, internalised homophobia, and gender dysphoria can exacerbate mental health challenges among LGBTIQA+ students, impacting their overall well-being and academic performance.

Identity Exploration and Affirmation:
LGBTIQA+ students may experience a process of identity exploration and affirmation during their time in education. This process can involve coming out to themselves and others, navigating questions of identity and belonging, and seeking validation and support from peers and mentors. Positive experiences of affirmation and acceptance can enhance well-being, while negative experiences of rejection or invalidation can have adverse effects.

Physical Safety Concerns:
LGBTIQA+ students may face safety concerns related to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression, both within and outside of educational settings. Fear of harassment, violence, or bullying based on their perceived or actual identity can impact their sense of safety and security, leading to hypervigilance and avoidance behaviours.

Access to care and supportive Resources:
Access to supportive resources, services, and communities is essential for the well-being of LGBTIQA+ students. This includes access to LGBTQ+ student organisations, safe spaces, affirmative counselling services, and knowledgeable healthcare providers who understand their unique needs and experiences.
LGBTIQA+ people are more likely than the general population to report unfavourable experiences accessing healthcare. These negative experiences contribute to a deterioration of well-being because they will delay or not seek out care (IGLYO, 2013; Zeeman, L et al, 2017).

According to IGLYO (2013) these bad experiences stem from negative reactions from healthcare practitioners when they disclosed their sexual orientation, a lack of understanding from healthcare professionals of LGBTIQA+ health issues, lack of access to comprehensive information on health that is not inclusive to other genders and sexual identities and concerns over confidentiality and privacy.

Another issue is a lack of essential mental health resources. Crucial support systems, such as gender-affirming care for transgender people or general therapy for LGBTQIA+ individuals, remain out of reach. There are often long wait times, they are expensive and there is also a lack of professionals with specific training for the unique mental health care needs of LGBTQIA+ people (IGLYO et al, 2023).

Intersectional Identities:
LGBTIQA+ students may have intersecting identities based on factors such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, and immigration status. Intersectional forms of discrimination and marginalisation can compound the challenges faced by LGBTIQA+ students, exacerbating disparities in access to resources, opportunities, and support.

Legal and Policy Context:
The legal and policy context surrounding LGBTQ+ rights and protections can impact the well-being of LGBTIQA+ students. Legal recognition of same-sex relationships, anti-discrimination laws, and inclusive policies in educational institutions can contribute to a more supportive and inclusive environment for LGBTIQA+ students, while gaps or limitations in legal protections may pose barriers to their safety and well-being.
Studies have shown a clear link between a European country's stigmatising legislation and attitudes and the life satisfaction of LGBTIQA+ individuals living in that country. Especially as LGBTIQA+ legal rights and protection, population attitudes and acceptance of LGBTIQA+ people vary across individual countries (Bränström, R. et al, 2024). With countries like Hungary banning legal gender recognition (IGLYO et al, 2023).

Moreover, LGBTIQA+ issues are at times more politicised which makes it harder for universities to address them. In societies where these issues are divisive topics it is harder to gain consensus about including them in institutional policies (Claeys-Kulik, A.L. et al, 2019).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressing these factors requires a multifaceted approach that involves creating inclusive and affirming educational environments, implementing anti-discrimination policies, providing comprehensive support services, fostering allyship and advocacy, and centering the voices and experiences of LGBTIQA+ students in decision-making processes. By prioritising the well-being and inclusion of LGBTIQA+ students, educational institutions can create safer, more supportive, and equitable learning environments for all students.

Here are some recommendations for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to effectively care for LGBTIQA+ students:

Provide Culturally Competent Support and Counselling Services:
Ensure that counselling services are staffed with professionals who are knowledgeable about LGBTIQA+ issues and provide culturally competent care. Offer individual and group counselling sessions that address the unique challenges and experiences of LGBTIQA+ students, including coming out, navigating relationships, and managing mental health concerns. Offer targeted career support to LGBT+ students to enhance their employability (University of Essex, 2017).

Provide Comprehensive Health Services:
Ensure that health services on campus are inclusive and responsive to the needs of LGBTIQA+ students. Provide access to LGBTIQA+ affirming healthcare providers, mental health counselling services, sexual health resources, and gender-affirming care for transgender and nonbinary students. Improving access and engagement to appropriate services is important, due to the poorer mental health and substantially higher rates of depression, anxiety and suicide experienced by LGBTIQA+ people compared to the general population.

Create Safe and Inclusive Spaces:
Designate safe spaces on campus where LGBTIQA+ students can gather, connect with peers, and access resources in a supportive and affirming environment. Ensure that these spaces are free from discrimination, harassment, and judgement, and promote visibility and inclusion of LGBTIQA+ identities across campus.

Provide LGBTIQA+ Affirmative Training:
Offer training and professional development opportunities for staff, faculty, and student leaders on LGBTIQA+ terminology, allyship, cultural competency, what constitutes anti-LGBT+ discrimination or abuse and how to tackle it and best practices for supporting LGBTIQA+ students (Formby, E., 2019; Acciari, L., 2014; Bachmann, C L. et al, 2018).
This training should emphasise the importance of creating inclusive and affirming environments and provide strategies for addressing bias and discrimination. Training should be incorporated into orientation programs and ongoing professional development initiatives.

Establish Inclusive and Anti-Discrimination Policies:
Develop and implement inclusive policies that recognize and affirm the gender identities and expressions of all students. This includes policies related to name and gender marker changes, toilets and housing accommodations and anti-discrimination policies that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.
Enshrine, enforce, and promote zero tolerance policies regarding homophobic, transphobic behaviour, harassment, and bullying both on campus and accommodation run by the university (Acciari, L., 2014; Bachmann, C L., 2018). Additionally, ensure that anti-discrimination policies are clearly communicated and signposted to all students, faculty, and staff, and enforce procedures for addressing complaints of discrimination or harassment (Acciari, L., 2014; Bachmann, C L., 2018). Establish a point of contact so that students can easily report abuse or discrimination against them or someone they know and what to expect once a report has been made (Acciari, L., 2014; Bachmann, C L., 2018).

Provide Accessible Resources:
Ensure that information, resources, and support services related to LGBTIQA+ issues are easily accessible to all students, including those who may be studying remotely or have limited mobility. Offer online resources, virtual support groups, and remote counselling services to reach students who may not be able to access campus-based resources.

Promote Visibility and Representation:
Increase visibility and representation of LGBTIQA+ identities and experiences through awareness campaigns, cultural programmes, curricula, and extracurricular activities. Celebrate LGBTIQA+ Pride Month and other LGBTQ+ awareness events with activities such as pride parades, guest speakers, film screenings, educational workshops and art exhibits that promote inclusion, understanding and acceptance.
The institution's commitment to LGBTIQA+ inclusion should be visible and be present via the implementation of and support for appropriate policies and practices and for it to be materially and symbolically present across campus spaces (Formby, E., 2019; Pichardo Galán. J. I. et al, 2019).

Foster Community Partnerships:
Collaborate with local LGBTIQA+ community organisations, healthcare providers, and advocacy groups to expand support services and resources available to LGBTIQA+ students. Establish partnerships that provide access to LGBTIQA+ affirming healthcare, legal assistance, and social support networks both on and off campus.

Encourage Peer Support Networks:
Facilitate peer support networks and mentoring programs where LGBTIQA+ students can connect with peers who share similar experiences and identities. Provide opportunities for peer-led initiatives, support groups, and social events that promote community building and peer support among LGBTIQA+ students.

Seek Feedback and Collaboration:
Regularly seek feedback from LGBTIQA+ students and organisations on their experiences, needs, and priorities for improving support services and creating a more inclusive campus environment. Collaborate with LGBTIQA+ students in decision-making processes, policy development, and programming to ensure that their voices are heard and respected by creating avenues for students to provide input on policies, programming, and initiatives that directly impact their lives and well-being.

Be respectful
Use the terms, names and pronouns that people use to describe themselves. If you're not sure about someone's pronouns, you can ask them respectfully. Staff working on campus should be made aware of the need for sensitive and non-discriminatory language use. Such as to not misname or misgender any students (or staff) and to avoid making assumptions about students using language which can unintentionally exclude them

Offer Gender-Inclusive Facilities:
Ensure that campus facilities, including restrooms, changing rooms, and housing options, are gender-inclusive and accessible to all students, regardless of gender identity or expression. Provide gender-neutral toilets and housing accommodations to accommodate the needs of transgender and nonbinary students and make sure they are clearly signposted (Formby, E. 2015 & 2017).

Offer Gender-Affirming Resources:
Provide resources and support for transgender and nonbinary students seeking to affirm their gender identity, including access to gender-affirming healthcare, counselling, legal resources, and information on name and gender marker changes (Acciari, L., 2014; Formby, E. 2015).

Foster LGBTIQA+ Representation in curricula:
Increase visibility and representation of LGBTIQA+ individuals and experiences in curricula (Byrom, N. et al, 2022; Acciari, L., 2014), textbooks, and classroom discussions across disciplines. Incorporate LGBTQ+ history, literature, and contributions into academic programming to promote understanding and appreciation of diverse identities and experiences. Increase the visibility of LGBT+ staff and students through the development of role models, testimonials, and case studies (University of Essex, 2017).

Support LGBTIQA+ Student Organisations:
Provide funding, space, and administrative support for LGBTIQA+ student organisations and advocacy groups on campus. Collaborate with these organisations to organise events, workshops, and initiatives that promote LGBTIQA+ visibility, education, and advocacy. LGBTIQA+ students tend to be very active in student organisations and in some instances even play a role in LGBTIQA+ student's choice of university. They provide a lot of support to them once they are there (Acciari, L., 2014; Pichardo Galán. J. I. et al, 2019).

Instil a sense of belonging
HEIs should strive to instil a sense of belonging through academic and social integration. It can help prevent student dropout, foster academic development and higher academic success. This can be done for instance by allaying LGBTIQA+ students' fear about safety on campus, encouraging positive interactions with faculty and academics, promoting open dialogue, and organising activities that seek to reduce stigma (Formby, E., 2015; Acciari, L., 2014; Byrom, N. et al, 2022; IGLYO, 2023).

EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES AT HEI

Southampton Solent University held human library events, open to students, staff and local communities. The initiative lends out people who talk about themselves and their lives to encourage understanding and empathy for people whose sexuality, religion or mental health condition has made them subject to prejudice and stigma (BBC, 2019).

University of Worcester organised a training programme for students and staff on transgender education and support (Callander, J., 2020).

University of Iceland: Together NGO Samtökin '78 signed an agreement where everyone participating in teacher training will be trained on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIGESC) issues (IGLYO, 2022).

University of Valencia, University of La Laguna and University of Castilla La Mancha have adopted protocols regarding transgender students and how to accommodate them (IGLYO, 2022).

University of Zaragoza: They have introduced a strategic plan on encouraging respect, diversity, and equality of LGBT+ people (OUAD, 2024).

Complutense University of Madrid: They established an office of sexual diversity and gender identity where they offer support in case of discrimination, help with name change for transgender students, offer training and seminars, and organise events (Unidad de Diversidad, 2024).

Ruhr University Bochum: They installed gender neutral toilets and changing rooms (Ruhr University Bochum, 2024).

Elaborated by the WISE project consortium (2024)

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FACT SHEET

NEURODIVERGENT STUDENTS

Definition:
Neurodivergent student refers to individuals whose neurological development and functioning diverge from the typical or "neurotypical" population. This includes students with conditions such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette syndrome, and other neurodevelopmental differences (Develop Diverse, 2024).

It is thought that about 15-20 percent of the population is neurodiverse. This includes up to 10 percent of people who are diagnosed with dyslexia, 6 percent with dyspraxia, 5 percent with ADHD and 1-2 percent with autism (Doyle, N., 2020). In a survey by Unite Students of 2038 higher education university applicants, neurodivergent higher education students responded that:
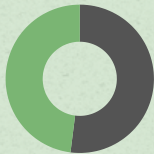
52% experienced depression compared to 30% of the average for all applicants (Unite Students, 2023).

They are also more likely than average to have experienced OCD (Obsessive Compulsive disorder), eating disorders, personality disorders and PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) (Unite Students, 2023).

63% experienced anxiety in the last two years compared to around 49% of the average for all applicants (Unite Students, 2023).

Scored the same for life satisfaction and believing their life is worthwhile but lower on happiness and on having low anxiety compared to other students (Unite Students, 2023).

Factors affecting neurodivergent students well-being

- Social interaction challenges.
- Sensory sensitivities.
- Academic stress.
- Navigating social norms.
- Access to support services.
- Stigma and discrimination.
- Transition challenges when moving into higher education.
- Mental health concerns, neurodivergent individuals are at increased risk of experiencing mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and mood disorders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide accessible campus facilities, resources, and services and offer accommodations for their studies.
- Establish specialised support services.
- Provide neurodiversity training for faculty, staff, and students.
- Implement peer mentoring programs where neurodivergent students can connect with peers.
- Offer flexible learning options.
- Incorporate Universal Design for Learning.
- Provide individualised academic support and tutoring service.
- Create sensory-friendly environments on campus that minimise sensory overload.
- Develop transition programs and orientation sessions.
- Collaborate with disability services offices, counselling centres, and other relevant departments.
- Establish feedback mechanisms.
- Encourage students to develop self-advocacy skills.
- Address anxiety which tends to accompany neurodivergence.
- Encourage the development of positive social support networks.

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Well-being Innovations for Students in Europe

Co-funded by the European Union

DETAILED INSIGHT ON THE WELL-BEING OF
NEURODIVERGENT STUDENTS

Definition:

Neurodivergent students and disabled students are distinct categories, although there can be overlap between the two groups. Here's how they differ:

Neurodivergent students refer to individuals whose neurological development and functioning diverge from the typical or "neurotypical" population. This includes students with conditions such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette syndrome, and other neurodevelopmental differences (Develop Diverse, 2024).

Neurodivergent individuals may have unique cognitive styles, sensory sensitivities, communication preferences, and ways of processing information that differ from the majority of their peers. They may experience differences in communication, social interaction, sensory perception, executive functioning, and learning styles, which can impact their academic performance, social integration, and overall well-being in higher education settings.

Disabled students encompass a broader range of individuals, *"those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others"* (European Commission, 2024). Disabilities can include mobility impairments, visual or hearing impairments, chronic health conditions, mental health disorders, learning disabilities, and other impairments (FixSmallArt, 2020) that may require accommodations or support services to ensure equal access and opportunity.

While some neurodivergent individuals **may also identify as disabled**, not all neurodivergent individuals experience disability, and not all disabled individuals are neurodivergent (Luc, K., 2024). Though some students who have neurodivergence might need accommodations (Wiginton, Keri, 2023). It's important to recognize that disability is a social construct that arises from the interaction between an individual's impairment and societal barriers that limit their participation and inclusion (PWDA, 2023).

Both neurodivergent and disabled individuals may face stigma, discrimination, and barriers to access and inclusion in higher education and society, but the specific challenges and experiences may vary based on the individual's unique characteristics and circumstances.

It's important to recognize that neurodivergence is a natural variation in human cognition and behaviour, rather than a deficit or disorder (Develop Diverse, 2024). **Neurodivergent students bring diverse perspectives, talents, and contributions to the university community, and their inclusion enriches the learning environment for all students.**

WELL-BEING FACTS AND FIGURES:

Neurodivergent people are increasingly involved in higher education. However, they continue to face serious barriers and obstacles on college campuses. These obstacles are not only related to disability functional differences and accommodation needs, but also to stigma and prejudice toward neurodivergent people (Dwyer, P., et al, 2023).

Albeit, statistics on the prevalence of neurodiversity in higher education are difficult to obtain as they rely on self-disclosure, are subject to variations in definitions and tend to be condition specific (BPS, 2022). However, prevalence can be extrapolated from general population data.
It is thought that about 15-20 percent of the population is neurodiverse (Doyle, N., 2020). This includes up to 10 percent of people who are diagnosed with dyslexia, 6 percent with dyspraxia, 5 percent with ADHD and 1-2 percent with autism (Doyle, N., 2020).

In a survey by Unite Students of 2038 higher education university applicants, neurodivergent higher education students scored the same for life satisfaction and believing their life is worthwhile, but lower on happiness and had slightly more anxiety compared to other students (Shaw, J. & Selman, F., 2023).

Respondents of this survey also responded that :
- 52% had experienced depression compared to 30% of the average for all applicants
- 63% experienced anxiety in the last two years compared to around 49% of the average for all applicants

They were also more likely than average to have experienced OCD (Obsessive Compulsive disorder), eating disorders, personality disorders and PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder).

FACTORS AFFECTING WELL-BEING OF NEURODIVERGENT STUDENTS

Several factors can influence the well-being of neurodivergent students in higher education. These factors may vary depending on the individual's specific neurodivergent condition, personal experiences, and the support available to them. Here are some common factors that can affect the well-being of neurodivergent students:

Social Interaction Challenges:
Neurodivergent students may experience difficulties in social interaction, communication, and forming relationships with peers. Social isolation, loneliness, and feelings of exclusion can impact their emotional well-being and sense of belonging within the university community.

Sensory Sensitivities:
Many neurodivergent individuals have heightened sensory sensitivities to stimuli such as noise, light, touch, and textures. Exposure to sensory overload or sensory discomfort in academic environments can lead to stress, anxiety, and sensory overload, affecting their ability to concentrate and participate in learning activities.

Academic Stress:
Neurodivergent students may face challenges related to executive functioning, organisation, time management, and task initiation, which can impact their academic performance and increase stress levels. Difficulty with planning, prioritising, and completing assignments on time can contribute to feelings of frustration and anxiety.

Navigating Social Norms:
Neurodivergent students may struggle to navigate social norms, expectations, and unwritten rules in academic settings. Misunderstandings, social faux pas, and challenges in interpreting social cues can lead to feelings of alienation, rejection, and self-consciousness, impacting their self-esteem and confidence.

Access to Support Services:
Access to appropriate support services, accommodations, and resources is essential for the well-being of neurodivergent students. Limited access to specialised support, delays in obtaining assessments or accommodations, and gaps in support services can create barriers to academic success and exacerbate stress and anxiety.

Stigma and Discrimination:
Neurodivergent students may face stigma, prejudice, and discrimination based on stereotypes and misconceptions about their condition. Negative attitudes, bullying, and microaggressions from peers, faculty, or staff can contribute to feelings of shame, insecurity, and low self-worth, impacting their mental health and well-being.

Transition Challenges:
Transitioning to higher education can be challenging for neurodivergent students, particularly if they are moving away from home, adjusting to new routines, or facing unfamiliar academic expectations. Changes in environment, social support networks, and independence can cause stress and uncertainty, affecting their emotional well-being.

Mental Health Concerns:
Neurodivergent individuals are at increased risk of experiencing mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and mood disorders. The intersection of neurodivergence and mental health can create complex challenges for students, including difficulty in recognizing and articulating their needs, accessing appropriate support, and managing symptoms effectively.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FRIENDLY HEI FOR NEURODIVERGENT STUDENT

Creating a welcoming and supportive environment for neurodivergent students in HEIs involves implementing a range of initiatives and accommodations. Here are some recommendations for HEIs to consider in caring for neurodivergent students:

Accessibility and Accommodations:
Ensure that campus facilities, resources, and services are accessible to neurodivergent students. This includes providing accommodations such as quiet study areas, being able to take the exam in a smaller quiet room (Fleming, A.R. et al, 2027), sensory-friendly spaces, assistive technologies, and alternative formats for course materials to support students' diverse needs and preferences.

Institutions must also offer individualised support accommodations tailored to the needs and severity of an individual's disability. HEIs should be open minded to the kind of accommodations that can be offered, encourage students to report any problems and changes in their condition and how to best communicate accommodations to teaching staff (Fleming, A.R. et al, 2027; OIAHE, 2017).
Furthermore, staff involved in disability support services and teaching staff should work together to monitor the effectiveness of the accommodations provided (Parpottas, P. et al, 2023).

Specialised Support Services:
Establish specialised support services or offices dedicated to meeting the needs of neurodivergent students. These offices can provide individualised support, academic accommodations, assistive technology, and resources to help students succeed academically and navigate university life effectively.

Neurodiversity Training:
Provide neurodiversity training for faculty, staff, and students to raise awareness about different neurodivergent conditions, dispel myths and misconceptions, and promote understanding and acceptance of neurodiversity. Training should emphasise the strengths, talents, and contributions of neurodivergent individuals to the university community.

Peer Mentoring Programs:
Implement peer mentoring programs where neurodivergent students can connect with peers who provide guidance, support, and practical advice. Peer mentors can share their experiences, offer strategies for academic success, and provide social support to neurodivergent students navigating university life.

Flexible Learning Options:
Offer flexible learning options such as online courses, asynchronous learning modules, and self-paced programs to accommodate the diverse learning styles and preferences of neurodivergent students. Flexibility in course delivery allows students to customise their learning experience and access educational content in ways that suit their needs.

Universal Design for Learning:
Antiquated pedagogical practices can be a big challenge to neurodivergent students because of their difficulty in organising notes, managing time, sticking to schedules and other essential skills, known as executive functions. Teachers must be trained with new approaches. The incorporation of Universal Design for Learning approach in combination with assistive technologies could help increase the participation and inclusion of disabled students (Moriña, A. & Orozco, I., 2020; McNicholl, A. et al, 2019).

Individualised Academic Support:
Provide individualised academic support and tutoring services to help neurodivergent students overcome academic challenges, improve study skills, and achieve their academic goals. Tailor support services to address specific needs related to executive functioning, organisation, time management, and learning strategies.

Sensory-Friendly Environments:
Create sensory-friendly environments on campus that minimise sensory overload and accommodate the sensory sensitivities of neurodivergent students. This may include reducing noise levels, providing calming spaces, using soft lighting, and offering sensory tools and equipment to help students regulate their sensory experiences.

Transition Programs:
Develop transition programs and orientation sessions specifically designed for neurodivergent students to help them adjust to university life, academic expectations, and social norms. Provide information about available support services, accommodations, and resources to empower students to navigate the transition to higher education successfully.

Collaboration with Disability Services:
Collaborate with disability services offices, counselling centres, and other relevant departments to ensure coordinated support for neurodivergent students. Foster partnerships with community organisations, advocacy groups, and healthcare providers to enhance access to specialised services and resources.

Feedback Mechanisms:
Establish feedback mechanisms, such as surveys, focus groups, or advisory committees, to gather input from neurodivergent students about their experiences, challenges, and suggestions for improvement. Use this feedback to evaluate and enhance support services, programs, and policies for neurodivergent students.

Address anxiety:

Anxiety often accompanies neurodivergence, which experts say can be a barrier to learning. Techniques to reduce anxiety might include mindfulness, like practising deep breathing; encouraging students to take care of themselves physically, such as avoiding caffeine and getting enough sleep; and using simple tools like visual schedules so students know what's coming next.

Self-Advocacy Skills:

Developing self-advocacy skills is crucial for neurodivergent students to communicate their needs, preferences, and accommodation requirements effectively (OIAHE, 2017). Limited self-awareness, assertiveness, and advocacy skills can hinder their ability to access support services, accommodations, and resources essential for their well-being and academic success.

Family and Peer Support:

Support from family members, friends, peers, and mentors plays a significant role in the well-being of neurodivergent students. Positive social support networks, understanding, validation, and encouragement from loved ones can bolster their resilience, confidence, and sense of belonging, acting as a buffer against the impact of stress and adversity.

EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES AT HEI

Dublin City University (Ireland) offers access to sensory pods for students who are or suspect they are autistic, they give these students a chance to reduce sensory overload (DCU, 2023).

University of Exeter (UK): the department of psychology at the institution offers to its neurodivergent students the opportunity to borrow ear defenders to help them with sensory difficulties. It provides versions of the lecture slides with a non-white background, which are uploaded 24 hours in advance to allow time for reading and note taking before the classroom. The university also has an Autism Spectrum Community (ASC) Social Group for students with autism spectrum conditions (University of Exeter, 2024).

Vilnius University (Lithuania): the disability coordinator oversees students with disabilities during their studies using an individualised approach towards accessibility. When a student commences their studies, they can fill out a survey on their support needs. Then in agreement with the student, the disability coordinator develops recommendations to adapt the study process, learning material or assessment methods and coordinates with the relevant departments. This process can be repeated every semester depending on the needs, and the student can also decide to discontinue the measures should there be no need for them anymore (Claeys-Kulik, A.L. et al, 2019).

Canterbury Christ Church University (UK) offers an online module for everyone introducing people to the signs of neurodiversity, educating people on techniques and conditions for learning (Canterbury Christ Church University, 2021).

Elaborated by the WISE project consortium (2024)

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FACT SHEET
PHD STUDENTS

Definition:
PhD or Doctor of Philosophy is an abbreviation of the Latin phrase 'philosophiae doctor', is a doctoral research degree and the highest level of academic qualification a student can achieve. It takes between 3 and 4 years to complete, culminating in a thesis offering an original contribution to a specific field to a high academic standard (Benett, M., 2023; Times Higher Education, 2023).

In a survey study by the university of Groningen (Netherlands) more PhD students reported doing a PhD had a negative effect on their mental health than a positive effect (van Rooij et al, 2018). Another study by Levecque et al (2016) on the mental health of PhD students in Flanders (Belgium) showed that the prevalence of health problems amongst PhD students is high with:
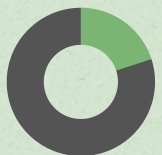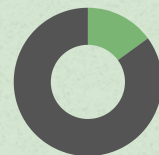
80% feeling unhappy and depressed.

28% report sleeping issues caused by worries.

16% feel worthless

15% express inability to make decisions.

42% of UK Doctoral Researchers answered that they believe having a mental problem during your PhD is the norm and that most of their peers experienced them (Hazell C.M. et al, 2021).

Almost one third of the PhD students in Flanders are at risk of having or developing a mental health disorder. They were also found to experience significantly more mental health problems compared to the highly educated general population.

Factors affecting PhD students' well-being

- The independent nature of PhD work can create isolation.
- Lack of good role models.
- Bullying, harassment and discrimination are extended within academia.
- Financial insecurity.
- Lack of knowledge of the well-being resources and services available.
- Well-being services and initiatives do not meet the needs of PhD students.
- Feelings of inadequacy and impostor syndrome.
- Difficulties maintaining a work/life balance
- The existing research culture widely considered as toxic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish dedicated spaces for PhD students on campus.
- Acknowledge systemic issues caused by the research culture.
- Establish good supervisor-student collaboration.
- Embed well-being into the PhD curriculum.
- Ensure PhD students are fairly compensated by being provided with a living wage.
- Ensure PhD students know where to find well-being support and services.
- Offer targeted services and training for PhD students.
- Develop mentorship programmes and peer to peer support groups.
- Foster the development of a PhD community.
- Involve PhD students and staff in discussions about well-being.

WiSE
Well-being Innovations for Students in Europe

Co-funded by the European Union

DETAILED INSIGHT ON THE WELL-BEING OF
PHD STUDENTS

Definition:
PhD or Doctor of Philosophy is an abbreviation of the Latin phrase 'philosophiae doctor', is a doctoral research degree and the highest level of academic qualification a student can achieve. It takes between 3 and 4 years to complete, culminating in a thesis offering an original contribution to a specific field to a high academic standard (Benett, M., 2023; Times Higher Education, 2023).

WELL-BEING FACTS AND FIGURES:

There is a growing body of literature looking at PhD mental health and well-being. With existing research consistently finding higher stress levels, mental health concerns and even physical symptoms reported by students. Even studies that sought to explore the positive emotions associated with the doctoral experience reported negative emotions as the dominant affective state for PhD students (Sverdlik A. et al, 2018).

A study on the mental health of PhD students in Flanders (Belgium) showed that the prevalence of health problems amongst PhD students is high with (Levecque et al, 2016):
- 41% reporting constant strain,
- 30% feeling unhappy and depressed.
- 28% report sleeping issues caused by worries.
- 16% feels worthless,
- 15% express inability to make decisions.

Almost one third of the PhD students in Flanders are at risk of having or developing a mental health disorder. They were also found to experience significantly more mental health problems compared to the highly educated general population.

In a study in the UK by PRES only 14% of post graduate researchers reported low levels of anxiety compared to 41% of the general population (Williams S., 2019).

In a survey study by the university of Groningen (Netherlands) more PhD students reported doing a PhD having a negative effect on their mental health than a positive effect and they rate their current mental health substantially lower than during their Bachelors and Masters. Almost 50% of respondents expected that their mental health would improve once they started working outside academia after finishing their PhD (van Rooij et al, 2018).

In a study on the mental health of UK Doctoral Researchers 42% answered that they believe having a mental problem during your PhD is the norm and that most of their peers experienced them, 35.8% considered ending or taking a break from their studies due to poor mental health (Hazell C.M. et al, 2021).

WHAT AFFECTS PHD STUDENTS' WELL-BEING:

Isolation:
The independent nature of PhD work can create isolation. Quite often PhD students must work in isolation for long periods of time, like for example while doing fieldwork, visiting archives, working from home or while writing their thesis. Additionally, PhD students working in interdisciplinary fields might also feel isolated if they do not feel they belong in any department. Isolation can hinder learning, lead to increased anxiety, impact sleeping schedules and focus and can even lead to a decrease in the perceived meaningfulness of their studies and even to complete disengagement (Ayres Z.J, 2022; Metcalfe J. et al, 2018; Watson D. et al, 2022; Sverdlik A. et al, 2018).

Lack of good role models:
This is a person who is looked up to by others as an inspirational example to be imitated. These role models are particularly important for women and PoC who are underrepresented in academia. This lack of representation can lead to feelings of not belonging, isolation, and loneliness which can affect their productivity and mental health at work (Nicholls H. et al, 2022).

Bullying, harassment, and discrimination:
Bullying, harassment and discrimination are extended within academia with women, disabled, LGBTIQA+ , people of colour and mixed-race researchers more likely to experience it; they are groups which have tended to be excluded by academia. Often top-down power dynamics can prevent the disclosure of bullying, harassment, and exploitation (Nicholls H. et al, 2022; Ayres Z.J, 2022).

Financial difficulties:
Another common issue relates to financial support from doctoral programs and the financial insecurity students face. In a recent survey, 50% of students reported financial issues as something they are most concerned with since starting their studies. Students with financial struggles have a greater risk for depression (Pervez A. et al, 2021).

Studying for a PhD can be very expensive. According to Ayres Z.J (2022) Some self-fund their studies while others receive some sort of funding from their institution, however they are poorly funded in some circumstances they are being paid at or around the poverty level, especially due to the increased inflation which has not been accompanied by an increase in PhD funding to keep up with this increase. Also, students might face having to pay upfront for attending conferences.

Financial insecurity can impact student's well-being in that they have to worry about paying rent, other living expenses and can make prioritising self-care including eating adequately more difficult due to its unaffordability. To cover these costs some PhD students might consider working additional jobs. Some international students may be constrained by their Visa stipulations in terms of employment hours per week and be unable to take an extra job to cover costs (Ayres Z.J, 2022).

Lack of knowledge of the resources and services available:
Sometimes PhD students may not be aware of the services available at their institution, might hold the erroneous perception that they are unsuitable for them or may not be able to properly address their needs and that these services are mainly geared to undergraduate students. This perception may be caused by a lack of signposting or adequate communication through the channels PhD students interact with or because the focus of most well-being campaigns in their campus is on issues that are more likely to affect undergraduate students (Waight E. et al, 2018).

Well-being services and initiatives do not meet the needs of PhD students:
In a 2019 survey only 29% of PhD students said that the mental health services at their institutions were tailored and appropriate to their needs. Most institutions have a reactive approach to supporting students, particularly regarding mental health where they wait until an issue arrives before intervening. Moreover, much of the well-being offer is a one size fits all, they are generic meant to act as a catch all, although this is also due to lack of funding or simply adapted from a similar version for undergraduates. As a result, these initiatives feel disingenuous and as a tick box instead of benefiting students (Ayres Z.J, 2022).

Additionally, these services and initiatives do not acknowledge the underlying systemic issues causing problems to students in the first place. They mainly focus on what the PhD student can do to look after themselves. Thus in a way relieving institutions from the responsibility of tackling these systemic issues, which would require a lot more resources to accomplish (Ayres Z.J, 2022).

Furthermore, they tend to not be developed in collaboration with PhD students, not considering cultural differences amongst students and much of the advice tends to be ableist resulting in well-being support not being fit for purpose. Also, some people delivering support might be unfamiliar with what PhD programmes are like and thus struggle to provide adequate support when requested (Ayres Z.J, 2022).

Lack of permanent employment and uncertainty about the future:
The academic career carries a lot of uncertainties; there are very limited opportunities for young academics to become permanent academic staff members in institutions. Currently many of the contracts are temporary, with poor working conditions and uncertainties about reappointments. Many PhD students who opt for an academic career risk having to constantly move from one contract to another, without having the opportunity to establish themselves in a particular research programme. This has led to some countries struggling with academic staff retention and a decrease in the number of students pursuing a PhD (Huisman J. et al, 2002).

Feelings of inadequacy and impostor syndrome:
Impostor syndrome "is a mental state characterised by feelings of persistent self-doubt, fraudulence, and fear of failure" despite evidence of recognition and achievements. (Pervez A. et al, 2021)

PhD students tend to develop impostor syndrome because during their undergraduate studies they might have excelled, however in their PhD they find themselves surrounded by other students who are as intelligent as them and they go from exceptional to average amongst their peers which often comes as a shock (Ayres Z.J, 2022). Furthermore, in more prestigious institutions PhD students keep being told that they are in one of the best institutions, that only selects the best and that you need to excel to succeed in academia. This can also contribute towards them feeling they are not up to the institution's standards and expectations (Metcalfe et al, 2018).

Other elements that can also cause impostor syndrome can include the culture of criticism embedded in many PhD programmes, with professors and other peers looking for weaknesses in student's work (Ayres Z.J, 2022). Additionally, PhD students strive to live up to this ideal image of what it means to be an academic, which is someone who can withstand large amounts of stress, can juggle huge workloads and be a high achiever in their field. This might discourage them from seeking help so they are not perceived as frauds and that they cannot live up to what is expected of them. This can lead to PhD students to feel like they do not belong, that they don't deserve their position, that they are not good enough and that their supervisor made a mistake (Ayres Z.J, 2022).

Difficulties maintaining a work/life balance:
Academia and its inherent overworking culture often reinforce the notion that dedication to a PhD overrides everything else, including student's personal lives. Many students struggle to juggle social, familial, and even self-care due to the financial constraints, lack of time and motivation caused by the demands of their PhD programme. Which often causes guilt on students for 'wasting' time on social interactions which is seen as detracting from academic progress (Sverdlik A. et al, 2018; Ayres Z.J, 2022).

This work/life imbalance has been found to correlate with higher levels of burnout, depression, and lower well-being. Additionally, if this imbalance continues for a long time students might even consider dropping out of their programme which would be a colossal loss for both the student and the institution in terms of economic, psychosocial and opportunity cost. (Sverdlik A. et al, 2018; Schmidt M. et al, 2018).

The existing research culture:
Research culture in higher education is widely recognised as toxic, often down to the way success is measured in academia. Where hard work is valued above all else and PhD students must often forgo work/life balance to get ahead, by ensuring enough results are produced on a regular basis. Even if they need to work during the weekend or beyond working hours (Martin R. et al, 2023; Ayres Z.J, 2022).

Further issues it is plagued by include, problems with personnel management, peer pressure, high workload demands, paper deadlines, pressure to publish, bullying and harassment, overwork, a prevalence of stress and poor mental health, a lack of diversity, job precarity, frequent evaluations and brutal competition amongst peers. The latter one creates an unkind and aggressive working environment, often preventing them to reach out to their peers for help and support and contributes to an environment where showing weakness can cause the loss of opportunities. A 2019 survey found that about 36% of PhD students had sought help for anxiety or depression for research work associated with stress and 76% responded working over 41+ hours per week. (Martin R. et al, 2023; Nicholls H. et al, 2022; Schmidt M. et al, 2018; Ayres Z.J, 2022; Metcalfe J. et al, 2018)
It is also widely perceived by PhD students that mental health problems are inevitable and consider those who did not experience them as lucky. They also perceive that the culture seems to normalise and even celebrate suffering in academia. Where PhD students felt they had to show the right amount of struggle and difficulty if they did not, they felt that the whole department and their supervisor did not believe they were taking their PhD seriously. Also academics were seen as encouraging unhealthy work practices and PhD students felt they did not care about their well-being, as some overlook the severe challenges their students might face in academia because if they made it so can everyone else (Ayres Z.J, 2022; Hazell C.M. et al, 2020).

Poor experiences with research supervisors:
The structure and quality of the working relationship between PhDs and their supervisors has been identified as a key factor influencing PhD well-being. (Watson D. et al, 2022). A PhD student's relationship with their supervisor can truly make or break their PhD (Ayres Z.J, 2022). Supervisors have been found to play a major role in student satisfaction, persistence, and academic achievement.
(Watson D. et al, 2022).

They can be a source of support on the one hand by providing emotional support, containing worries, strengthening the doctoral researcher's confidence, pushing them to be a better researcher advocate for their success beyond their PhD and increasing motivation.

On the other they can be a stressor and negatively impact mental health if supervision does not meet the students' needs and expectations, was unhelpful or harmful if for instance the supervisor bullied or gaslight the student (59% of PhD students that had experience bullying said the perpetrator was a supervisor) (Ayres Z.J, 2022; Scmidt M. et al, 2018; Watson D. et al, 2022; Nicholls H. et al, 2022).

Some factors that can lead to poor supervision include the supervisor not having the right capabilities and a lack of training on how to effectively supervise PhD students. It can be the case that someone can be greatly respected by their academic achievements and expertise and be a terrible supervisor (Ayres Z.J, 2022; Nicholls H. et al, 2022).

They might also be hesitant to provide pastoral support. Could be because they feel unsure this is something that is expected from a supervisor and whether they should be the one to provide it. Are concerned they do not have the right expertise for this since they have not received adequate training on how to support students well-being needs and there might not be adequate guidance on how to do this (Waight E. et al, 2018; Martin R. et al ,2023; Metcalfe J. et al, 2018).

Some supervisors may carry some particularly damaging biases that can damage student well-being. Such as the belief that a PhD is meant to be hard, that suffering while completing a PhD is a rite of passage and since they were able to complete it and be successful you should be able to do it. Which ignores the existence the PhD student may experience which are not applicable to their PhD experience. Another bias is that pastoral care is not their responsibility or they are simply disinterested in the well-being of their students. This can make it difficult for students to receive well-being support from them. Finally, for some supervisors sympathetic to the plight of their students, they might dismiss it after some time because they assume they have gotten over the problem or forgotten about it. (Metcalfe J. et al, 2018; Ayres Z.J, 2022; Waight E. et al, 2018).

Further factors include supervisors not having enough time to act as supervisors to their students, as they are under constant pressure to publish to bring in more funding grants (Ayres Z.J, 2022). PhD students picking up from their supervisors some of the most toxic and unhealthy behaviours, that are part of the current research culture of which supervisors act as conduits for, after whom they role model themselves from. Which include prioritising research over everything or answering emails after working hours, because their supervisors do it and feel they must do it too (Ayres Z.J, 2022; Hazell C.M. et al, 2020; Martin R. et al, 2023).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish dedicated spaces for PhD students on campus:
This helps create attachment to the university and help foster a sense of belongingness, an important element of well-being (Nicholls H. et al, 2022). This space can be used by PhD students to discuss work, life, and research with other colleagues. This can be done via peer networks, mentor programmes or events on topics related to life within academia like retreats, PhD cafes or thematic days within departments and even the provision of designated physical spaces on campus or in university buildings for PhD students (Hazell C.M. et al, 2020; Universities Denmark, 2023).

Acknowledge systemic issues caused by the research culture:
HEIs must recognise the role research culture in institutions plays in causing significant stress to PhD students (Ayres Z.J, 2022). Research has shown that there seems to be a culture of normalising and even celebrating suffering in academia (Hazell C.M. et al, 2020). HEIs must realise that the issues are sector wide and systemic, not just specific to a particular institution. This may help PhD students manage their well-being during their PhD (Ayres Z.J, 2022).

For this a two-pronged approach is necessary, which manages symptoms and addresses the causes of systemic issues and moves away from the deficit model towards the social model. It is imperative that efforts to improve and protect the well-being of PhD students is endorsed by the whole institution (Hazell C.M. et al, 2020). Thus staff should lead by example by following health habits such as not making working overtime the rule and taking time off when sick. (Ayres Z.J, 2022).

The pivotal role of supervisors on PhD student well-being:
Several studies claim poor well-being is often related to poor supervision (Universities Denmark, 2023). Thus, it is essential to establish good supervisor-student collaboration, by constituting clear and constructive communication, that forms professional and personal expectations on the direction and quality of the project of both PhD students and supervisors (Universities Denmark, 2023). Moreover, HEIs need to be able to deal firmly with any issues arising in the supervisory relationship, warranting that these occurrences are dealt with swiftly, transparently and fairly for parties (Metcalfe J. et al, 2018).

Additionally, supervisors should be trained to understand, identify, and address well-being concerns or to be able to direct students to the right support and resources available at their institution and how PhD students can access them. Supervisors play an important role in supporting PhD student well-being. as they are ideally placed to notice when their students are becoming stressed, as they are their first point of contact and perform a line management role for them (Metcalfe J. et al, 2018). By being aware of PhD student struggles they can be more open and receptive to discussing them with their students (Pervez A. et al, 2021). Therefore, HEIs should embed emotional support in supervisor training, including training in mental health literacy and the development and use of tools/strategies to manage and improve the supervisory relationship (Watson D. et al, 2019, Metcalfe J. et al, 2018).

Supervisors can also help with combatting impostor syndrome by ensuring their students are getting positive feedback, before moving onto the next research objective supervisors should take a moment to compliment the work their student has done (Ayres Z.J, 2022).

To effectively support PhD students supervisors must also feel their own well-being is a priority for the institution. For this HEIs can reflect the role of supervisor in PhD student well-being in job descriptions, performance reviews, and promotion and progression systems showing the institutional culture fosters well-being and that there is an expectation for supervisors to provide pastoral care (Metcalfe J. et al, 2018). To support supervisor well-being HEIs can also create a peer-to-peer forum for supervisors where they can obtain feedback from other supervisors. Supervisors must also receive regular feedback on their supervision skills (Kismihók G. et ak, 2022; Universities Denmark, 2023).

Embed well-being into the PhD curriculum:
This can entail academic supervisors allocating time to allow students to bring up any concerns that might be affecting them and by creating a targeted and sustainable well-being programme. By having this programme take place frequently it would help cement the idea that well-being is a priority for the institution, where everyone should contribute towards an inclusive and pleasant work environment (Ayres Z.J, 2022; Universities Denmark, 2023).

Alleviating financial pressures:
HEIs should look into understanding the financial needs and concerns of their PhD students and ensure that they are fairly compensated by being provided with a living wage, while keeping pace with inflation and that internships are not paid in experience. Also, reimbursements from paying upfront study related costs such as attending a conference should be quick or these costs should be covered by the institution and a hardship fund should be available for students that need it. This could help alleviate a portion of the psychological distress associated with being a PhD student (Pervez A. et al, 2021, Ayres Z.J, 2022).

Ensure PhD students know where to find well-being support and services:
HEIs should endeavour to integrate PhD students into the community during induction and throughout their PhD. During induction PhD students should be introduced to the organisational, professional, and social communities, the obligations associated with their employment and the institutional working life (Universities Denmark, 2023).

Also, during induction, they should be signposted to the services available to them. They can be communicated in a tailored manner to PhD students via posters, in student handbooks or online. This approach could contribute towards changing the support culture at the university by giving visibility to the institution's well-being efforts and demonstrating that well-being is an accepted part of the PhD process (Waight E. et al, 2018).

PhD students must also be made aware about their rights and what resources are awarded to them. This can include clarity on how to change supervisor, sick leave, maternity leave etc (Ayres Z.J, 2022). Further, it must be confirmed students know whom they can turn to for assistance to challenges related with their supervisors or supervision (Universities Denmark, 2023).

Offer targeted services and training for PhD students:
HEIs must guarantee open access to well-being resources, training, and services to PhDs. In many universities they are not able to access these services because they are not permanent staff members or students (Nicholls H. et al, 2022). They must also make sure well-being initiatives are organisationally and economically well established to ensure their continuity and quality and that they are known to PhD students (Universities Denmark, 2023).

Some targeted services and training HEIs can include:

- Counselling and therapy specifically geared to the needs of PhD students (Ayres Z.J, 2022).
- Workshops designed to facilitate personal development, combat impostor syndrome, build individual resilience, and teach strategies that students could use to sustain their own mental health such as mindfulness for example (Watson et al, 2019 and another).
- Psycho education programmes that introduce PhD students to a variety of self-care strategies, allow them to find the strategies that work for them and encourage PhD student to make time to regularly execute their preferred strategies (Hazell C.M et al, 2020)
- Training, counselling, workshops, and seminars in project management, on how to structure and write a dissertation, on delivering teaching which are important parts of the PhD experience. Providing this kind of training can contribute towards well-being as it reduces uncertainty of the PhD process and its quality (Universities Denmark, 2023).
- Training which prepares PhD students to establish and maintain good collaborations especially with their supervisors (Universities Denmark, 2023).
- Careers seminars to reduce uncertainty about the future after completing a PhD. Where PhD students can hear about career paths both within and outside academia. This will help them with knowing which skills and networks are useful to develop and the existing demands for a variety of career paths (Universities Denmark, 2023).
- Add a section on PhD well-being and non-academic support on the student services website. It would allow students who are not on campus to easily find resources and often serves as a first port of call to find information to students. It can help overcome some potential barriers to access support such as embarrassment or stigma. Therefore, universities should make efforts to understand what sources of online support PhD students access and use, and which may be the most helpful (Waight E. et al, 2018).

Develop mentorship programmes and peer to peer support groups:
Studies have shown that isolation is toxic for PhD students, and that social support can protect against poor mental health. Spending time with peers could be beneficial if there is a sense of shared experience and of walking alongside each other. Friendship was also seen to buffer against stress and protect against mental health problems, through the provision of social and emotional support and help in identifying struggles. Therefore, initiatives that provide PhD students with the opportunity to network and socialise both in and outside of their studies are likely to be beneficial (Hazell C.M et al, 2020).

An example of these initiatives are peer support groups and mentoring. They are an important source of good mental health and professional development as they can facilitate peer to peer learning, experience sharing and help students develop confidence and problem-solving skills (Universities Denmark, 2023; Watson et al, 2019). They have also been found to help with reduced academic anxiety and isolation and help build a sense of community by facilitating social and emotional support (Watson et al, 2019; Watson D. et al, 2022).

Also, mentorship and peer groups can supplement supervisors by providing other avenues through which students can obtain essential information and benefit from opportunities to further develop the skills and experience required to complete their programmes (Lorenzetti D. et al, 2019). It can be rewarding for PhD students to share knowledge and experiences about the PhD process with others in a similar situation to them, outside of the supervision space (Universities Denmark, 2023).

HEIs could consider facilitating peer support through professional development and training to encourage buy-in from PhD students and others. Furthermore, institutional investments in mentorships and peer support groups can yield significant rewards in terms of student retention, skills development, and programme completion (Lorenzetti D. et al, 2019; Watson D. et al, 2019; Panayidou, F. et al, 2021).

Foster the development of a PhD community:
HEIs should facilitate the development of a PhD community using an array of methods suited to the circumstances of the institution. This can include virtual communities, cohort training programmes, student-led initiatives, as shared working space, or social events (Watson D. et al, 2019).

Studies have identified the creation of communities as important for well-being. They can serve as a mechanism for sharing knowledge, a repository of resources that could be useful for coping and succeeding in Ph.D. study or even provide emotional support and practical problem solving of issues related to PhD studies and assist with professional and personal development. They are also key for international students who might have limited social networks (Watson D. et al, 2019; Watson D. et al, 2022).

Involve PhD students and staff in discussions about well-being:
When discussing PhD well-being students should be consulted by gathering feedback and evaluating their needs. Additionally, PhD associations should be involved in discussion on well-being as well as academic staff. Inputs from all parties will help staff understand the issues specific to this cohort, especially if supervisors are out of touch with what a PhD programme is like (Nicholls H. et al, 2022).

In these discussions honest conversations about mental health management and mental health literacy should be encouraged. Finally, a good framework with enough resources, with the correct actors included and integrated in the institution's organisation and goal setting should be established (Ayres Z.J, 2022; Universities Denmark, 2023).

In this framework a clear division of responsibility of which well-being tasks should be assigned to who and how relevant well-being initiatives can be included in the PhD student's everyday life should be enacted (Universities Denmark, 2023). For instance, at department levels academic leaders can introduce initiatives to create supportive environments for PhD students. This could include promoting mentorship and guidance, fostering a culture of collaboration and a sense of belonging, training people in the department to increase their mental health awareness, and encouraging a work–life balance through social events with family and friends (Nicholls H. et al, 2022).

EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES AT HEI

University of Manchester (UK): the university offers courses, resources, and toolkits to support PhD supervisors. Including cultivating well-being for PhD supervisors and supporting PhD mental health and well-being (University of Manchester, 2024).

Loughborough University (UK) has a PhD social and support network, organised by other doctoral researchers, where they support PhD students through non-academic issues and organises activities for PhD students to socialise and connect with other students (Loughborough University, 2023; Loughborough PhD Social Support Network, 2023).

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Spain) offers a series of transversal courses for its PhD students they include courses on mindfulness to deal with stress, PhD thesis writing and defence in English, how to write abstracts for scientific articles (UAB, 2023).

University of Southern Denmark (Denmark): its library has established special facilities for PhD students such as conversation pods, which can be used for interviews or supervisor meetings, a lounge area, and an open area, which can be used for presentations (Universities Denmark, 2023).

Technical University of Denmark (Denmark) implemented a PhD reform by making clear where PhD students can exert more influence. There is now one PhD committee per PhD school and these new PhD committees concentrate on development and initiatives at the school level where the student's perspective is significant. Also the institution's PhD association is included in several development initiatives at the institutions and is financially supported in relation to its activities (Universities Denmark, 2023).

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FACT SHEET

REFUGEE STUDENTS

Definition:
Refugee students "are students in higher education or preparatory programs who have experienced forced international migration" (Berg, J, 2023).

The population of forcibly displaced and stateless people in Europe is set to rise to 24.9 million in 2024 (UNHCR, 2024).

Refugees have a higher prevalence of mental health conditions, with rates for PTSD being higher compared to the general population. Prevalence amongst refugees is around 31.46% compared to 3.9% in the general population (Mental Health Foundation, 2024).
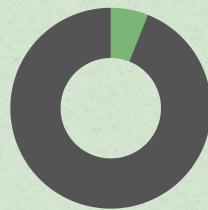
The UNHCR estimates the enrolment rate in higher education for refugees worldwide is 6%.

Refugees often face traumatic events in their home country, in their migration journey and while navigating their new post migration environment.
It can provoke feelings of guilt, despair, grief, and anger and can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), sleep disturbance, anxiety disorders, or even depression (UNHCR, 2024).

Factors affecting refugee students well-being

- Trauma.
- Cultural adjustment.
- Language barriers.
- Educational disruption.
- Financial hardship.
- Discrimination.
- Legal and immigration issues.
- Access to healthcare.
- Uncertainty about the future.
- Stigma against mental health care.
- Lack of trained staff in HEIs able to address the complex and diverse needs of refugee students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish dedicated support services including trauma-informed support services and counselling.
- Offer language support services.
- Provide financial assistance, scholarships, grants, or fee waivers.
- Develop inclusive admission policies, that take into account the unique circumstances and educational backgrounds of refugee students.
- Provide pre-arrival support and orientation programs.
- Provide cultural sensitivity training.
- Establish peer support networks or mentorship programs and access to social Support Networks such as family, friends or community organisations.
- Encourage community engagement and participation in extracurricular activities, volunteer opportunities, and cultural events.
- Establish feedback mechanisms to gather input from refugee students about their needs, experiences and suggestions for improvement.
- Offer professional development opportunities tailored to them.

DETAILED INSIGHT ON THE WELL-BEING OF REFUGEE STUDENTS

Definition:
Refugee students "are students in higher education or preparatory programs who have experienced forced international migration" (Berg, J, 2023). Refugee students in Europe may come from diverse backgrounds and countries of origin. They may have varying levels of education, language proficiency, and prior academic experiences.

These students may have experienced displacement, trauma, and loss as a result of their refugee status and may face various challenges in accessing education and integrating into the host society.

WELL-BEING FACTS AND FIGURES:

The population of forcibly displaced and stateless people in Europe is set to rise to 24.9 million in 2024. 5.8 million of them are Ukrainian refugees across the region (UNHCR, 2024).

Refugees often face traumatic events in their home country, in their migration journey and while navigating their new post migration environment. Which can provoke feelings of guilt, despair, grief, and anger and can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), sleep disturbance, anxiety disorders, or even depression (UNHCR, 2024).

Research has shown that compared to the host country population refugees have a higher prevalence of mental health conditions, with rates for PTSD being higher compared to the general population. Prevalence amongst refugees is around 31.46% compared to 3.9% in the general population (Mental Health Foundation, 2024; OECD, 2022).

A study on Ukrainian refugees in Germany showed (Buchcik, J. et al, 2023):
More than 60% of the participants reported substantial or severe psychological distress attributed to a loss of sleep.
Nearly 50% reported depressive symptoms, while over 50% reported anxiety symptoms.

A study on adult Syrian refugees showed prevalence rates of (Peconga EK, Høgh Thøgersen M., 2019):
43% for PTSD
40.9% for depression
26.6% for anxiety

The UNHCR estimates the enrolment rate in higher education for refugees worldwide is 6%. Higher education has been described as empowering for refugees. It can support their sense of belonging, psychosocial well-being, self-esteem and help them overcome trauma. Some have also described it as an act of resistance itself which defies stereotypes and other negative attributions (Berg, J, 2023).

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FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE WELL-BEING OF REFUGEE STUDENTS IN EUROPE (I)

It's important to note that while refugee students may face unique challenges related to their refugee status, they also possess diverse skills, knowledge, and experiences that contribute to the cultural diversity and enrichment of educational institutions in Europe. Supporting refugee students in accessing and succeeding in education is essential for promoting their integration, empowerment, and long-term well-being in their host countries.

Refugee students face a multitude of challenges that can impact their overall well-being. These challenges stem from their experiences as displaced individuals and the specific circumstances they encounter in their host countries. Here are several factors that can affect the well-being of refugee students:

Trauma and Mental Health:
Many refugee students have experienced traumatic events such as conflict, violence, persecution, displacement, and loss of loved ones. These experiences can lead to mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and other psychological distress, which can impact their overall well-being and ability to engage in academic activities.

Cultural Adjustment:
Refugee students often experience challenges related to cultural adjustment and integration into their host communities. Differences in language, social norms, customs, and educational systems can create feelings of disorientation, isolation, and alienation, affecting their sense of belonging and well-being.
It might also make them reluctant to seek help and speak to professionals they do not know or cannot relate to. Some students perceive there is a lack of cultural and refugee competence within HEI support services, making them sceptical to what extent the service could understand and respond adequately to their needs and background. They may not understand what they have gone through and the cultural norms and attitudes that shape their help seeking behaviours (Jack, O., Chase, E., & Warwick, I., 2019).

Language Barriers:
Language barriers present significant obstacles for refugee students in accessing education, communicating with peers and teachers, and navigating daily life in their host countries. Limited proficiency in the language of instruction can hinder academic progress, social interaction, and integration into the educational system.

Educational Disruption:
Many refugee students have experienced disruptions to their education due to conflict, displacement, and forced migration. Gaps in formal schooling, lack of access to quality education, difficulties with acknowledging their past educational experience or credentials (Berg, J., 2023) and interruptions in learning can affect their academic skills, knowledge acquisition, and educational attainment, leading to feelings of frustration and inadequacy.

Financial Hardship:
Refugee students often face financial challenges, including limited access to resources, employment opportunities, and financial support for education. Economic hardship can impact their ability to afford tuition fees, school supplies, transportation, and other essential expenses, increasing stress and financial insecurity.

Discrimination and Stigma:
Refugee students may encounter discrimination, prejudice, and stigma based on their refugee status, nationality, ethnicity, religion, or cultural background. Discriminatory attitudes and behaviours from peers, teachers, and community members can contribute to feelings of marginalisation, exclusion, and low self-esteem, affecting their mental health and well-being.

FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE WELL-BEING OF REFUGEE STUDENTS IN EUROPE (II)

Legal and Immigration Issues:
Refugee students may experience uncertainty and anxiety related to their legal status, asylum application process, and immigration regulations. Concerns about deportation, family reunification, and access to residency rights can create additional stress and instability, impacting their ability to focus on their studies and plan for the future.

Access to Healthcare:
Refugee students may face barriers in accessing healthcare services, including physical health, mental health, lack of awareness of services on offer and specialised support for trauma and psychological distress. Limited access to healthcare facilities, language barriers, cultural differences, and lack of health insurance coverage can hinder their ability to address health concerns and receive appropriate care.

Uncertainty about the Future:
Many refugee students experience uncertainty about their future, including prospects for resettlement, family reunification, educational and career opportunities, and long-term integration into their host countries. Uncertainty about their legal status, residency rights, and prospects for returning to their home countries can contribute to feelings of anxiety, stress, and hopelessness.

Stigma against mental health care:
In some cultures, and communities, mental health is still seen as a taboo subject precluding people from discussing mental health issues, looking for support or lacking awareness about mental illness. For instance, in the context of Ukrainian refugees they fear that a mental illness diagnosis will result in them being seen negatively by their communities. This stigma persists from the Soviet era from where people who opposed the Soviet regime were often accused of being mentally ill and confined to asylums (Jack, O. et al, 2019; Vitruk, O., 2023).

Lack of trained staff in HEIs:
HEIs face structural challenges such as a lack of trained staff and often struggle to find enough specialists, which may include language teachers, instructors with intercultural training or psychologists that are able to address the complex and diverse needs of refugee students. Additionally, some faculty members may feel insecure about how to best address refugee students or deal with practical questions such as determining whether some documents are valid (Berg, J., 2023).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FRIENDLY HEI FOR REFUGEE STUDENTS

Addressing these factors requires a holistic approach that involves providing comprehensive support services, culturally sensitive interventions, trauma-informed care, language assistance, educational resources, and opportunities for social integration and community participation. By addressing the unique needs and challenges of refugee students, educational institutions can promote their well-being, academic success, and long-term integration into their host societies.

Below are some recommendations for HEIs to create a welcoming and supportive environment for refugee students in HEIs:

Dedicated Support Services:

Establish dedicated support services or offices specifically tailored to meet the needs of refugee students. These offices can provide assistance with academic advising, counselling, enrollment procedures, financial aid applications, language support, cultural integration, and referrals to external support services.

Further services institutions can offer refugee students to make them feel welcome and integrated may include law clinics, accompaniment during visits to authorities, childcare, translation services, medical care, regular get-togethers, festivals, joint sports, theatre, and music events, help with apartment search, and guided tours of the city (Martin, M., & Stulgaitis, M., 2022).

Holistic Admission Policies:

Develop inclusive admission policies that take into account the unique circumstances and educational backgrounds of refugee students. Consider alternative admission pathways, flexible entry requirements, recognition of prior learning and qualifications obtained in the students' countries of origin. Have a designated person for refugee students to refer to which is easy to identify and contact, if any issues arise within departments or students' services (Slaven, G., 2018).

Pre-arrival Support:

Provide pre-arrival support and orientation programs for refugee students to help them navigate the transition to higher education in a new country. Offer information about educational opportunities, visa requirements, housing options, cultural norms, and available support services.

Additionally institutions can also provide personalised tutoring services for refugee students to better choose their classes, accelerate their learning and performance. These can be in the form of supplementary teaching on a one-to-one basis or in small groups and can be complemented with mentoring services or psychological counselling (UARRM & SVR, 2021; Hajisoteriou, C., 2023).

Language Support:

Offer language support services to help refugee students improve their language proficiency and academic skills. This may include language courses, tutoring sessions, conversation partners, and language exchange programs to facilitate communication and academic success.

Financial Assistance:

Provide financial assistance, scholarships, grants, or fee waivers to support refugee students with the cost of tuition, books, housing, and living expenses. Ensure that financial aid programs are accessible and inclusive, taking into account the financial constraints faced by refugee students.

Cultural Sensitivity Training:

Provide cultural sensitivity training for faculty, staff, student volunteers and even engage in public outreach within the wider community to raise awareness about refugee issues, cultural diversity, effective communication strategies and to fight against harassment and prejudice. Training should emphasise the importance of creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for refugee students.

Peer Support Networks:

Establish peer support networks or mentorship programs where refugee students can connect with peers, faculty mentors, or alumni who provide guidance, support, and practical advice. Peer support networks can help refugee students with combating loneliness, isolation and navigate academic challenges. They can also help with social integration and cultural adjustment by creating social connections with local students. They can even become a source of belonging, resilience and as a buffer against xenophobia and discrimination (Martin, M., & Stulgaitis, M., 2022; Kalocsányiová, E. et al, 2022).

Social Support Networks:

Access to social support networks, including family, friends, community organisations, and school personnel, plays a crucial role in the well-being of refugee students. Strong social support systems can provide emotional support, practical assistance, and opportunities for social connection and integration, buffering the effects of stress and adversity.

Trauma-Informed Care:

Offer trauma-informed support services and counselling to address the mental health needs of refugee students who may have experienced trauma, violence, or displacement and ensure refugee students are aware of the services available to them. Provide culturally sensitive counselling cognisant of the diverse refugee backgrounds and experiences to be relatable and if possible, in languages relevant to the refugee populations. Also offer therapy sessions, and psychosocial support to help refugee students cope with their experiences and promote healing and resilience. This can be achieved by working with counsellors who are culturally equipped and versed in issues the refugee student population faces (Jack, O., Chase, E., & Warwick, I., 2019; Kalocsányiová, E. et al, 2022). Therefore, the institution should first reach out to counsellors at their institution and discuss the possibility of providing counselling towards this population (UARRM & SVR, 2021).

Community Engagement:

Encourage community engagement and participation in extracurricular activities, volunteer opportunities, and cultural events. Facilitate partnerships with local refugee support organisations, community groups, local governments and cultural centres, to understand the needs of refugee students and support their transition into higher education (Kalocsányiová, E. et al, 2022), provide opportunities for social interaction, networking, and community involvement. Institutions can also mobilise staff and students to volunteer within the local refugee community through for example language teaching, providing support navigating bureaucracy, organising events (Slaven, G., 2018).

Feedback Mechanisms:

Establish feedback mechanisms, such as surveys, focus groups, or advisory committees, to gather input from refugee students about their needs, experiences and suggestions for improvement. Use this feedback to evaluate and enhance support services, programs, and policies for refugee students.

Offer professional development opportunities:

Institutions can provide professional development opportunities on campus tailored towards refugee students and other underrepresented populations. They can also partner with private businesses that are willing to provide internship opportunities for refugee students (UARRM & SVR, 2021).

EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES AT HEI

Multiple universities in the UK: the Universities of Sanctuary are a network of universities that have pledged to make their institutions accessible and welcoming to asylum seekers and refugees (Slaven, G., 2018).

University of Bath (UK): provides a named contact in the Student Services Money Advice and Retention team. This staff member provides personal support to refugee students throughout their entire programme, and works directly with them to ensure they know about the pastoral, academic and employability support offered across the nstitution (Slaven, G., 2018).

De Montford University (UK): programme of outreach activities that shares the skills, expertise, and research of the University with and for the benefit of refugees and migrant communities across the UK. Projects in the De Montford University refugee support programme include free English lessons, teaching IT skills, providing mentoring for young people and offering free legal advice (Slaven, G., 2018).

University of Oslo (Norway): created a project called Academic Network. Where groups of four to eight refugees and an equal number of student guides from matching academic fields, met every two weeks during one semester to exchange academic experiences and learn from each other. The activity provided refugee students with the opportunity to build networks and friendships and learn about the experiences of other students (Martin, M., & Stulgaitis, M., 2022).

Berlin School of Economics and Law (Germany): they hired an Arabic speaker to offer psychological and social support services twice a week for refugees (Streitwieser, B. et al, 2017).

Ghent University (Belgium): organises the "Preparatory higher education programme". It lasts one year and includes additional Dutch language lessons, study skills training, guidance, and counselling, as well as optional modules in English, mathematics, research skills etc. The institution also cooperates with the city services responsible for immigrant integration (In-Gent), which provides scholarships for the university language courses as well as other assistance concerning language training, job opportunities, counselling etc (Jungblut, J. et al, 2018).

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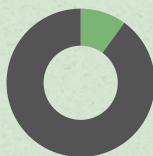
WORKING STUDENTS

Definition:
European Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the term "working students" typically refers to individuals who are enrolled in academic programs while also working in some capacity.

According to Eurostat (2023) 25% of young Europeans (aged 15-29) were working and studying.

Research showed that students who work upwards of 21 hours a week have a 160% higher dropout rate than non-working students and are also more exposed to experiencing burnout (Draghici, G. L et al, 2022).

1 in 10 students is a parent and, most likely, a worker (Eurostudent, 2018).

60% of students work to gain experience for the labour market (Eurostudent, 2018).

50% of working students are unable to afford studying without their job (Eurostudent, 2018).

Factors affecting working students' well-being

- Time management.
- Financial stress.
- The demands of employment can impact working students' academic performance.
- Balancing work and study commitments, while managing stress, fatigue, and other health-related issues can take a toll on their physical and mental health.
- Working long hours or irregular shifts can lead to fatigue and burnout.
- Achieving a balance between work, study, and personal life can be challenging.
- Limited social life and social isolation.
- Employment conditions such as working hours, job type, wages.
- Working students may face challenges in gaining relevant work experience, networking with professionals, and pursuing career development opportunities while balancing their academic commitments.
- May have limited access to support services and resources offered by the university.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Offer flexible course scheduling.
- Develop transparent and flexible credit transfer policies, to recognise and award academic credit for prior learning and work experience.
- Provide financial aid programs, scholarships, grants, and tuition waivers.
- Establish work-study programs that integrate academic study with paid work experiences, relevant to students' fields of study.
- Enhance career services offerings to support working students in exploring career options.
- Expand mental health and counselling services to meet their needs.
- Provide time management workshops.
- Facilitate peer support networks and mentoring programs.
- Solicit feedback from working students on their experiences, challenges, and suggestions for improvement.

WiSE
Well-being Innovations for Students in Europe

Co-funded by the European Union

DETAILED INSIGHT ON THE WELL-BEING OF
WORKING STUDENTS

Definition:
In European Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the term "working students" typically refers to individuals who are enrolled in academic programs while also working in some capacity. These students balance their academic responsibilities with work commitments, which may be part-time or full-time employment, internships, apprenticeships, or other forms of work-related activities.

Working students in HEIs may pursue various types of employment to support themselves financially, gain practical experience in their field of study, or enhance their professional skills.
Working students face unique challenges and opportunities in managing the demands of both work and study. They must effectively balance their time, prioritise responsibilities, and develop effective time-management and organisational skills to succeed academically while meeting work obligations.

Considered a non-traditional group of students, they face specific challenges as HEIs are not oriented to their needs (Lowe & Gayle, 2007) and they are "invisible", among students (Thomas et al., 2021). When these students also juggle the role of father/mother, the balance between the three roles can represent a very heavy physical, mental, and psychological burden, facing barriers and not having a full experience of Higher Education (Marandet & Wainwright, 2010). Gender differences should also be considered for a comprehensive understanding (Remery & Schippers, 2019).

In the last decades, European HEIs have attracted non-traditional students for two main reasons: for social reasons (focus on equality of opportunities), and for economic reasons (contributing to a knowledge society that leads to innovation) (Marandet & Wainwright, 2010). Also, other economic gain can be observed, with the decrease of birth rates and a lower intake of new (and traditional) students. However, the institutional culture of HEIs did not make necessary adaptations to new audiences. This gap creates several obstacles to the daily experience of non-traditional students and asks for changes in the training environment (Marandet & Wainwright, 2010).
Specific challenges faced by working students can be split in three domains: learning-teaching activities, belonging issues, and well-being concerns. Nevertheless, all these factors act in combination with each other, as students should be understood as a whole person, with several roles (Lowe & Gayle, 2007).

FACTS AND FIGURES

According to Eurostat (2023) 25% of young Europeans (aged 15-29) were working and studying. Not all European countries show the same results, northern European countries have higher percentages, as opposed to Eastern European countries (i.e., the Netherlands, 73%, in contrast with Romania, 2%) (Eurostat, 2023).

It is also important to distinguish between students who work (often part-time) and who have not yet formed an independent family from mature students, who work and already have family responsibilities. Data from Eurostudent (2018) points that one in ten students is a parent and, most likely, a worker (Masevičiūtė K. et al, 2018).

According to Eurostudent, on average 69% of working students do so to cover their living costs, with 50% of working students being unable to afford studying without their job. Also 60% of students work to gain experience for the labour market (Masevičiūtė K. et al, 2018).
Working while studying can hinder their academic achievements and limit their time devoted to studying. It can lead to them interrupting their studies and can also be an obstacle for pursuing study abroad mobility as they might lose their job if they do so. Research has shown that students who work upwards of 21 hours a week, have a 160% higher dropout rate than non-working students (Draghici, G. L et al, 2022; Masevičiūtė K. et al, 2018).

Working students are more exposed to experiencing burnout because they are in a precarious position where they must combine their job requirements with those of those of the academic environment and are unable to devote all their time to a single objective (Draghici, G. L et al, 2022). Student's work-related problems have been found to affect health, cause constant stress, anxiety, and social integration deficit. This can manifest with an array of symptoms such as lack of sleep, difficulty concentrating, feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness or guilt, lack of energy or even a loss in appetite (Verulava T. et al, 2022).

FACTORS AFFECTING WORKING STUDENTS' WELL-BEING

The well-being of working students in Europe can be influenced by various factors, including their employment status, academic workload, financial situation, and personal circumstances, such as family structure/parental status. Here are several key factors that can affect the well-being of working students in Europe.

Time Management:
Probably, the most demanding challenge for students that work. This group of students practically restricts contact with HEI to academic activities, as the remaining time is spent on work and/or family responsibilities (Zerquera et al., 2016). For this reason, relationships with faculty members is a pivotal one, and issues related to teaching-learning, including methodological, technological, and evaluation aspects, cannot fail to be analysed in conjunction with belonging and well-being matters (idem). Some of these areas depend also on the quality of the relationship with non-academic staff members (librarians, ICT, among others) (Dominguez-Whitehead, 2018). Balancing work hours, class schedules, study time, and personal commitments can be challenging for working students. They must effectively manage their time to meet deadlines, attend classes, complete assignments, and fulfil work obligations.

Financial Stress:
Working students often face financial pressure as they juggle the costs of tuition, textbooks, rent, utilities, and other living expenses. Managing a tight budget, covering expenses with limited income, and dealing with financial uncertainty can lead to stress, anxiety, and financial strain. When working students are also parents, other financial issues are considered, such as childcare related expenses(Remery & Schippers, 2019).

Academic Performance/Demands:
The demands of employment can impact working students' academic performance, as they may have less time and energy to devote to studying, attending classes, and participating in extracurricular activities. Balancing work and study commitments while maintaining academic standards can be challenging. Heavy academic workloads, tight deadlines, and conflicting schedules can increase stress and pressure, affecting their well-being.

Health and well-being:
Balancing work and study commitments while managing stress, fatigue, and other health-related issues can take a toll on the physical and mental health of working students. They may experience sleep disturbances, poor dietary habits, lack of exercise, and neglect of self-care, leading to overall declines in health and well-being.

Stress and Mental Health:
The pressure of balancing work and study commitments, along with financial stressors and academic pressures, can contribute to stress, anxiety, and mental health issues among working students. Coping with multiple responsibilities while managing academic and personal challenges can be emotionally taxing.

Fatigue and Burnout:
Working long hours or irregular shifts can lead to fatigue and burnout among working students. Balancing work and study commitments while trying to maintain a healthy work-life balance can take a toll on their physical and mental health.
Studies on students' burnout correlate it negatively with academic achievement, but also self-esteem or engagement, and academic burnout is higher than work-related burnout (Draghici and Cazan, 2022). Students in this condition have more difficulties with coping strategies (Fiorilli et al., 2022), which affects them physically and mentally. Gender differences were observed to the detriment of the female gender (idem).

Work-Life Balance and Family Responsibilities:
Achieving a balance between work, study, and personal life can be challenging for working students. They may struggle to find time for self-care, relaxation, and leisure activities amidst their busy schedules,
leading to feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, and struggling with maintaining a healthy work-life balance. This highlights the importance of distinguishing working students (often part time work, to financially support the costs of studying) from working and caregiving students (mature working students that usually work and are responsible for their descendants or ascendants).

Working students who are also parents or caregivers may face additional challenges in balancing their work and study commitments with family responsibilities. They may struggle to find affordable childcare, manage household duties, and fulfil caregiving obligations, leading to increased stress and pressure.

Limited Social Life and Social Isolation:
The time constraints of work and study commitments may limit working students' opportunities for socialising, participating in campus activities, and building relationships with peers. They may feel isolated or disconnected from the campus community due to their busy schedules, leading to feelings of loneliness and social isolation.

Employment Conditions:
The nature of students' employment, including the type of job, working hours, wages, and work environment, can significantly impact their well-being. Factors such as job insecurity, low wages, long hours, and lack of job satisfaction can contribute to stress, fatigue, and dissatisfaction among working students.

Career Development:
Working students may face challenges in gaining relevant work experience, networking with professionals, and pursuing career development opportunities while balancing their academic commitments. Limited time for internships, networking events, and professional development activities can impact their career prospects after graduation.

Limited Support Services:
Working students may have limited access to support services and resources offered by the university, such as academic advising, tutoring, counselling, and career services. They may face barriers in accessing these services due to conflicting schedules or limited availability, impacting their ability to seek help and support when needed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

HEIs may offer support services and resources tailored to the needs of working students, including flexible course scheduling, online learning options, career counselling, financial aid, and assistance with job placement and internships. By recognizing and accommodating the needs of working students, HEIs can help facilitate their academic success and professional development. Addressing these difficulties requires a multifaceted approach that involves providing support services, resources, and accommodations tailored to the needs of working students.

Below are some recommendations for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Europe to better support working students:

Flexible Course Scheduling:
Offer flexible course scheduling options such as evening classes, weekend courses, and online learning modules to accommodate the diverse schedules of working students. This flexibility allows students to balance work and study commitments more effectively.

Credit Transfer Policies:
Develop transparent and flexible credit transfer policies to recognise and award academic credit for prior learning and work experience. This allows working students to leverage their professional experience and accelerate their progress towards degree completion.

Financial Aid and Scholarships:
Provide financial aid programs, scholarships, grants, and tuition waivers specifically tailored to the needs of working students. Consider offering need-based and merit-based financial assistance to alleviate financial burdens and support students in pursuing their educational goals.

Work-Study Programs:
Establish work-study programs or cooperative education opportunities that integrate academic study with paid work experiences relevant to students' fields of study. These programs provide students with valuable professional experience and networking opportunities while pursuing their degrees.

Career Services:
Enhance career services offerings to support working students in exploring career options, developing job-seeking skills, and advancing their professional goals. Provide career counselling, CV writing assistance, job search workshops, and networking events tailored to the needs of working students.

Mental Health and Counselling Services:
Expand mental health and counselling services to meet the unique needs of working students. Offer flexible appointment scheduling, evening hours, and online counselling options to accommodate students' busy schedules. Provide support groups, workshops, and resources to address stress, anxiety, and burnout.

Time Management Workshops:
Offer time management workshops, seminars, and resources to help working students improve their time management skills, set priorities, and balance competing demands. Provide strategies for effective time management, goal setting, and stress reduction to support students in achieving academic success.

Peer Support Networks:
Facilitate peer support networks and mentoring programs where working students can connect with peers, share experiences, and provide mutual support. Encourage peer-to-peer mentoring, study groups, and informal networking opportunities to foster a sense of community and belonging.

Accessibility and Accommodations:
Provide accommodations such as flexible exam scheduling, assistive technologies, and alternative formats for course materials to support students' academic success and participation.

Feedback and Evaluation - co-creating solutions:
Solicit feedback from working students on their experiences, challenges, and suggestions for improvement. Use surveys, focus groups, and advisory committees to gather input and identify areas for enhancement in support services, programs, and policies for working students.

EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES AT HEI

<u>University of Antwerp (Belgium):</u> established Centrum WeST, a Centre for Work and Studying. It provides information and guidance to students who combine a full or part time job with a degree-oriented study programme. It offers for instance evening sessions and workshops to learn or refresh skills that are required for academic studies for students who have not studied for a long time (Universiteit Antwerpen 2024)

<u>Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Belgium):</u> Offers working students the option to spread their studies tailored to specific individual scenarios, including designing a personalised study plan with a study path counsellor (VUB, 2024).

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