

NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION EQUITY POLICY

Switzerland



Policy Frameworks

Does equity with regard to supporting students from low-income or marginalized populations to enter or succeed in higher education feature in any government produced policy documents? If so, which government policy document(s) are these and can you provide website link(s) to them?

Swiss Constitution

<https://www.admin.ch/opc/en/classified-compilation/19995395/index.html>

A guiding principle for equity is the constitutional mandate to ensure the greatest possible equality of opportunity among citizens (Art. 2 para. 3 BV). The implementation of equal opportunity reflects democracy and fundamental rights. Above all, the principle of non-discrimination according to Article 8 of the Federal Constitution is decisive for the elimination of all forms of direct and indirect discrimination based on origin, race, sex, age, language, social position, way of life, religious, ideological or political convictions or based on a physical, mental or psychological disability. In addition, according to paragraph 3, men and women have equal rights in terms of gender. The law must also ensure their legal and actual equality, especially in the family, education and work.

Laws on Federal level:

- The Federal Act on Gender Equality (<https://www.admin.ch/opc/en/classified-compilation/19950082/index.html>, Art. 3 para. 2) as well as the Federal Act on the Elimination of Discrimination against People with Disabilities (Disability Discrimination Act, <https://www.admin.ch/opc/en/classified-compilation/20002658/index.html>, Art. 3 let. f) explicitly also apply to education on all level.
- Education in general falls in the responsibility of the cantons, except for the two Federal Institute of Technology. The role of the Confederation is to provide favourable framework conditions regarding elimination of discrimination. In this context the Confederation provides project contributions for specific measures of the Cantons and/or educational institutions that aim at inclusion/equity in education e.g.:
 - a) Federal Act on Funding and Coordination of the Swiss Higher Education Sector, <https://www.admin.ch/opc/en/classified-compilation/20070429/index.html>, Art. 59).
 - b) Federal Act on Vocational and Professional Education and Training, <https://www.admin.ch/opc/en/classified-compilation/20001860/index.html> , Art. 55 let. a, e, f;

What policies and actions are described in these government policy documents in terms of supporting students from low-income or marginalized populations to enter or succeed in higher education?

In Switzerland, a federation, the Cantons are responsible for Education and Higher Education Institutes. They are responsible to elaborate their policy and actions to implement equity measures, e.g. gender equality, equal rights for disabled persons.

The Federal Confederation undertakes efforts to reduce discrimination in all areas with federal competence. Constitutional basis for formal equality of opportunity at the level of the education system:

- Art. 19 of the Federal Constitution states that the right to an adequate and free basic education is guaranteed
- Art. 61a states that the Conference and the Cantons shall, within the scope of their powers, jointly ensure the high quality and accessibility of the Swiss Education Area.

Is there a standalone policy document dedicated to equity promotion in higher education? If so, which document(s) is/are these? Can you provide a link(s)?

No.

Which equity target groups are identified in the policy documents? (Please choose as many groups as apply in your own country)

- Gender groups
- Students with disability
- Other: see above. Besides the Constitution the laws for specific fields address the equity target: the principles of equity and the related measures to them.

Does the country have concrete targets for the participation of specific equity groups in higher education?

There are no targets on Federal level. But there are Federal funding instruments to encourage gender equality in higher education which take up targets in certain fields to reinforce measures, e.g. for research funding institutions, as well as for research performing institutions like specialized research institutions or universities. Their policy is to enhance gender equality.

Which agency has responsibility for policies related to equity in student participation/success in higher education?

There is no special agency. All institutions in Higher education are responsible to elaborate rules and policies to support and enhance equity. There is monitoring and scientific evaluation to report about the state of play. The Swiss rectors conference (<https://www.swissuniversities.ch>) coordinates and enhances the implementation of measures amongst the HEI.

Which stakeholder groups are consulted during the equity policy formulation? (Please choose all the stakeholders that are invited to the consultation process in your own country)

- Higher Education Institutions' Associations
- Student Organisations/Association
- Other: The white book on Higher Education , Research and Innovation, discussed and voted by the parliament every four years, undergoes consultation in the concerned cercles.

Achieving Policy Targets

Are there any non-monetary instruments such as outreach work between schools and universities, reforms to university admission etc. used to promote access/success for students from specific equity groups in higher education? If so, can you describe what they are?

No.

Are there any financial instruments such as bursaries, scholarships and loans used to promote access/success for students from specific equity groups in higher education? If so, can you describe what they are?

No.

Who is responsible for monitoring the impact of measures used to promote access/success for students from specific equity groups in higher education?

Monitoring and evaluation is part of the policy and the policy cycle according to the field and the specific measures.

What instruments, methods and data are in place to carry out the monitoring and evaluation?

The Swiss Federal Statistical Office is monitoring and publishing the numbers, e.g. in the specific equity groups and including them in thematic surveys conducted periodically. <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/statistics/education-science.html>

The Federal Act on Funding and Coordination of the Swiss Higher Education Sector stipulates a periodical evaluation on the effects of higher education funding. <https://www.admin.ch/opc/en/classified-compilation/20070429/index.html>, Art. 69.

What kind of autonomy do higher education institutions enjoy in reaching the policy targets set by government?

Higher education institutions in Switzerland enjoy a high autonomy. In general, the relevant authority (Confederation, Canton) defines the scope of this autonomy in a performance agreement.

How do you see the role of inter-governmental/international organisations in supporting higher education equity policies? In which areas would be their contribution the most valuable? (1= most valuable contribution 4=least valuable contribution)

1. Facilitating peer learning, exchange of experience among countries
2. Policy setting
3. Technical assistance and capacity building
4. Financial assistance (grants, loan financing, scholarships)

COVID-19 and Equitable Access and Success in Higher Education

How, if at all, has Covid-19 affected the existence and implementation of policies designed to encourage greater access and success on higher education of those from low-income/marginalized groups?

The current situation due to COVID-19 is partially a hindrance to the implementation of measures such as gender equality activities at universities which had to be postponed or even cancelled. Especially for female researchers, work became more difficult to reconcile with family duties that take more time.

The funding for projects and measures were also partially extended.

Sources

This country brief was prepared as part of the *“ASEM National Equity Policies in Higher Education”* report, a collaboration between the [Asia-Europe Foundation \(ASEF\)](#) and the [National Education Opportunities Network \(NEON\)](#). The report was launched at the [8th ASEF Regional Conference on Higher Education \(ARCS\)](#) on *“Inclusive and Diverse Higher Education in Asia and Europe”* on 10 September 2021.

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