Presentation by Irina FERENCZ, Director, Academic Cooperation Association (ACA)

Irina was asked to make a 10-minute presentation focusing on the following 3 questions to provide food for thought for the expert group:

1. What is your take, how inclusive are higher education internationalisation policies and practices currently, what is the status quo?
2. What potential risks do you foresee that could jeopardize greater inclusion in HE internationalisation in the next 10 years?
3. What opportunities, leverage points do you see to promote in HE internationalisation in the next 10 years?

Irina started her presentation by discussing the concept of inclusion in International Higher Education (IHE). She presented that there variety in the terminological, and different expressions are used to describe similar ideas: social dimension, widening access, widening participation, inclusiveness, inclusivity, etc.

- For example, the social dimension of inclusion is defined as “the creation of an inclusive environment in higher education that fosters equity and diversity, and is responsive to the needs of local communities” (BFUG Advisory Group 1 for Social Dimension, 2020).
- From the context of internationalisation, inclusion is defined as “the process of taking targeted measures to correct access inequalities of specific underrepresented groups to internationalisation activities and/or to their full benefits. (ACA Reflection Paper, 2019).

After discussing the different dimensions of inclusion, Irina focused on discussing the target groups, WHO should be further included in international HE? A number of target groups identified by Irina are the following:

- **Students with disabilities** (physical, mental, sensory, educational, etc.)
- **Students from disadvantaged backgrounds**, namely students:
  - From lower socio-economic backgrounds or without a higher education background, first-generation in higher education students
  - From minority groups (based on race, ethnicity, sexual or religious orientation, gender, identity, etc.)
  - With a migrant or refugee background
  - Working students
  - With family obligations, etc.
- **Non-mobile or less-mobile students** (e.g. specific subject areas like teacher training)

After discussing the question of WHO, Irina discussed the WHERE, which specific international higher education activities should be more inclusive?
Irina explained the delineation between *internationalisation abroad* (e.g. mobility, TNE) and *internationalisation at home* activities, and the hybrid activities (e.g. joint programmes, partnerships). Currently, and thus far, the primary focus of ongoing discussion is *inclusive mobility*. However, there are emerging discussions on inclusive collaborations and inclusive admissions amongst universities.

Irina presented data on inclusion in IHE illustrating the **Status Quo**:

A caveat, Irina explained that data on inclusion in higher education institutions is limited. Nonetheless, Irina presented the data specifically focused on participation in Erasmus+ international mobility. It can be observed that there is an increase in the rate of students participating in Erasmus+ international mobility when students’ parents have background in higher education. Notably, the rate of participation increases as well when the parents of students have a background in international mobility.

Irina identified the following **opportunities, leverage points to promote inclusion in HE internationalisation in the next 10 years**:

- **Inclusion is high on the policy agenda at European level** (EU and EHEA).
  - Bologna Process Paris Communiqué – need to develop more inclusive and innovative approaches to teaching and learning. Considered as step one for inclusive societies.
  - 2020 Draft *Principles and Guidelines* to strengthen the Social Dimension of HE in EHEA.
  - Erasmus+ 2021-2027 (triple beneficiaries, inclusion chapter, EU and national strategies to be developed, indicators)
- European Universities Initiative – from ‘excellence vs. inclusion’ to “excellence through inclusion”.
- Earmarked funding – Erasmus+.
- COVID-19 – awareness of new avenues to inclusion and new dimensions of discrimination (e.g. nationality).
In terms of **risks that could jeopardize greater inclusion in HE internationalisation in the next 10 years**, she made the following points:

- Formal instead of substantive leadership commitment (linked to awareness)
- Time pressure to launch strategies and initiatives
- Great variety across countries in level of awareness, experience with inclusion and resources
- Over focus on mobility only
- Luring power of assumptions and misconceptions (e.g. digital options are by default more inclusive, no underrepresented groups)

After Irina’s presentation, members of the expert group shared their inputs, reflections related to the risks and opportunities presented.

**Comments on Opportunities:**

- Currently, there is more ‘formal leadership’ rather than ‘substantive leadership commitment’:
  - Experts acknowledge that this is an important point. There is a formal commitment to inclusive and diverse higher education. However, there is a significant lack in the substantive leadership component to inclusion in the status quo.
  - In other words, ‘formal leadership’ refers to noble agreements on paper. ‘Substantive leadership commitment’ refers to taking action, transforming what is agreed on paper into a reality.
  - But what does substantive mean in this context? There is uncertainty whether there is practical evidence, experience and data-driven analysis, or other dictionary definitions to prove this point.

- Awareness of existing opportunities is not high, experts interpreted this point as an opportunity to identify new data and map the inclusion landscape of higher education in Asia and Europe. The opportunity to do so also includes determining key indicators of inclusion to help determine where things stand and plot where we would like to be in terms of inclusion.

- Experts identified a research opportunity as well. There is a lack of awareness, information, and knowledge on inclusion opportunities in higher education, which calls for new, evidence-based research. Experts believe data-driven analysis is a high impact opportunity to promote greater inclusion in the higher education sector across borders. An additional positive impact of data-driven research is the promotion of transparency by strengthening established networks and connections which share information and data, consequently promoting transparency. ASEF could potentially lead and convene the actors for this cause.

- Lastly, experts identified the opportunity of developing academic platforms which promote access to students’ research activities a means of promoting inclusivity.

**Comments on Risks:**

- There is the risk of ‘green washing’ inclusion. For instance, an organization can place inclusion in their agenda “without going in-depth and without being critical of inclusivity.” It is possible organizations do this because inclusion is very beautiful and positive, but it also comes with challenges which are not always easy to address.

- In relation to ‘formal leadership’ rather than ‘substantive leadership commitment’: According to an expert from Asia “there have been many conferences and many meetings with high-level officials from universities and ministries”. These are what experts refer to
as ‘formal leadership’. However, when it comes to leadership in practice (i.e. leaders acting on the ground, recognition of agreements, etc) change happens slowly. Hence, there is a great concern with formal leadership not necessarily translating to substantive leadership.

- Experts identified that students from underrepresented groups do not have the same pool of choices as students from more privileged backgrounds, which has potential risks for further improvement of inclusion.

- In consideration of Irina’s point on “over focus on mobility only”,
  - Experts say that even if there is greater focus on the awareness of opportunities for exchange and collaboration, underlying concerns remain as unaddressed risks.
  - This specific risk identified by experts is known as *migration cost*. Experts suggest that there is an imbalance between what students achieve/gain while visiting a foreign university and the cost for this exchange. Thus the comment and suggestion of the experts in this breakout session to strike a balance between the cost of migration and what the students gain and learn from the exchange.
  - At the same time, there is a lack of awareness among students about their potential gain, especially a lack of awareness of longer-term gains.
  - Lastly, with a growing focus on mobility, the risk is that schemes and programs focus on science and technology programs and neglect social science programs.

- Risks in relation to the “luring power of assumptions and misconceptions” listed by Irina as a risk:
  - Assumptions are made when defining *inclusivity*. From a European perspective, it is seen from a broad scope down to very thorough and detailed approaches which leads to full conceptualization of the different underrepresented groups and targeted measures.
  - According to the experts, there are a lot of misunderstandings until today, particularly about who is to be included and how to include them. There are misconceptions with regard to whom we must include, depending on specific contexts, which must be unpacked deconstructed.

- Risks with regard to “to launch strategies and initiatives”
  - In the European context there is a push for inclusion, it is very much in the ‘limelight’. This is positive in many aspects but at the same time it comes with high expectations to develop new initiatives extremely fast. The risk, therefore, is the possibility that these initiatives for inclusion are happening faster than they would perhaps be optimal. Inclusion is a very complex endeavour and it requires detailed foundational work, it requires proper mapping, proper foundations, it requires time. Due to the prioritizing action towards inclusion, there is a risk of not having enough time that is ideally needed to ensure these new initiatives are sound, that they really deliver on what they hope to deliver.
  - According to experts in this breakout session, the prioritization of inclusion and mobility in higher education has only just begun. At this point in time, there is already political pressure, and government funded schemes and sponsorships, to advance these.
  - It was acknowledged by members of this breakout session that Asia has the benefit of learning from Europe in terms of inclusivity and mobility, considering that Europe has engaged in mobility initiatives for much longer.

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