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**Title**

Institutional barriers for adults' participation in higher education in thirteen European countries / Ellu Saar ; Kadri Täht ; Triin Roosalu

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**Abstract**

This study focuses on institutional barriers that adult learners experience while participating in higher education programmes. We developed a holistic measure of diversification, accessibility, flexibility and affordability of higher education for adults. Based on pre-economic-crisis data across Europe we then explored the impact of macro-level institutional factors on the formation of the barriers by national welfare state arrangements. We found that perceived barriers are the lowest in liberal and social democratic countries but highest in post-soviet ones, with other post-socialist countries and continental ones in between. While perception of various barriers can be lessened by increasing flexibility of the educational programmes, our findings still show that the level of perceived barriers remains high also in flexible systems, hence other characteristics of higher education systems seem to be of more relevance. Higher education diversification and better affordability of higher education system seems to predict lower level of institutional barriers for adult learners, indicating that these are the crucial aspects. Our study serves as a baseline for further studies on the effects of changes that

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have been put in place since, especially regarding the variety of national responses. (HRK / Abstract  
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