

The aim of the project is to examine how politics and ideology influence the adoption of specific solutions in the area of student support and tuition fees in a given country. This issue is important because the way studies are financed affects the outcomes of higher education. It is important to know which political context is conducive to implementing solutions beneficial to students, society and the economy. We will also investigate how different instruments of student finance influence the activity of students on the labour market during the academic year. If students work too much, it can have a detrimental effect on their study performance and development of skills that are essential for a nation's competitiveness. In the project, these issues are analysed from the perspective of comparative social policy. We analyse student finance systems in more than 20 OECD countries in years 2006-2018. Research mainly uses quantitative methods. They will allow us to compare the values of indicators created specifically for the purposes of the project and to compare the situation and changes in different countries.

Student finance policy determines who and to what extent covers the costs of studying related to tuition fees and living costs. The cost burden can be relieved by multiple instruments of student support, which typically include direct support for students: repayable aid (loans) or non-repayable aid (need- and merit-based grants/scholarships, in-kind support like subsidised student housing), and indirect support (for students' families) - e.g. tax benefits and family allowances. All these financial instruments, along with tuition fees, constitute what can be called a national system of student finance.

The project will use new, original data collected at the Swedish Institute for Social Research (SOFI). Importantly, these data have not been previously used in any studies. Obtaining access to them by the Principal Investigator during his research stay at SOFI will allow us to conduct three interrelated studies, while the third one will also utilise survey data from the European Labour Force Survey. The purpose of these studies is:

- 1) to explain how politics determine student finance arrangements in different advanced democracies;*
- 2) to explain why did the Central-Eastern European (CEE) countries establish different systems of student finance after 1989;*
- 3) to investigate the influence of student support and tuition fees on the involvement of students in paid jobs during the academic year.*

The data will allow us to create a novel, theoretical framework for analysing student finance systems through the lens of social rights approach, which is often used in social policy studies. It allows one to analyse who is entitled to a given social benefit, what are the conditions for receiving them, and how generous they are. From this perspective, the following overarching research questions emerge: *Who is, to what extent, and why, expected to take the responsibility for providing students with means that would allow them to cover the cost of their studies? Is it the state, family, or students themselves through their ongoing or future employment?* It is claimed in the literature that in the recent years many developed countries have moved from a system where the costs of higher education are covered primarily by taxpayers to a system where students or their families pay increasingly larger share of the costs. This can in turn lead to excessive involvement of students in paid jobs. However, this is not obvious because of the lack of adequate data in the past. Thus, it is worthwhile to take a look at these issue again and reflect upon the causes and consequences of changes.

In some countries, different types of student support can be made available just for low-income students (targeted aid), while in other everyone studying is entitled to support (universal provision). Thus, another important research question emerges, which is related to the issue of redistribution: *who gains and who loses from a given student finance policy? In other words, to what extent the financial burden imposed on students and the support they are entitled to vary depending on the financial position of their households?* This problem is important since student finance policy can influence income inequalities. To be able to answer it, we need to look at the benefit and the cost side of student finance simultaneously and to compare students from hypothetical families with different incomes.