



Disability Funding in Greek Higher Education: Evidence from a Performance-Based Funding System

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This study examines how disability criteria are integrated into the performance-based funding (PBF) system for Greek higher education institutions (HEIs) from 2022 to 2026. It assesses the extent to which the quality-based funding model of the Hellenic Authority for Higher Education (HAHE) includes disability-related indicators, institutional participation in the relevant funding section, and performance trends over time. The research uses a mixed-methods approach, combining policy document analysis with longitudinal administrative data from all 23 Greek HEIs. Results indicate that disability-related indicators represented less than 1.5 percent of total funding weight, were solely input-oriented, and did not consider the operation of Disability Support Units (DSUs). Institutional participation stayed below 44 percent during the period, with no consistent improvement across indicators. The largest HEIs did not participate in the disability-related funding section in any year. The study concludes that, while the Greek PBF system formally acknowledges inclusion as a policy goal, it does not offer sufficient incentives for sustained institutional change. The paper discusses policy implications for better aligning funding systems with disability inclusion.

Keywords: Performance-based funding, disability inclusion, higher education, equity, Greece

JEL: H52, I23, I24

Higher education funding constitutes one of the most important policy instruments shaping the strategic orientation and behavior of universities (Teixeira *et al.*, 2022). Over the past three decades, both in Europe and internationally, funding systems have gradually shifted away from historically determined or negotiated allocations towards models that link public resources to measurable institutional performance, commonly referred to as performance-based funding (PBF) (Biscaia, 2020; Herbst, 2020). At the core of this shift lies a straightforward premise drawn from incentive theory: when funding is tied to specific outcomes, institutions are expected to adjust their behavior in order to improve performance in the measured dimensions (Ortagus *et al.*, 2020; Zerquera and Ziskin, 2020).

At the same time, equity and inclusion have become central to contemporary understandings of quality in higher education (OECD, 2023). Students with disabilities (SWD) represent a growing segment of the student population, yet they continue to face persistent structural barriers. These include lower completion rates, limited physical and academic accessibility, higher dropout risks, and a weaker sense

of belonging within academic environments (Brewer *et al.*, 2025; Kleemola *et al.*, 2025). International and European policy frameworks have increasingly emphasized the obligation of higher education systems to address these inequalities. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006): ratified by Greece, establishes the right to equal access to education at all levels. Similarly, the European Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021 to 2030 (European Commission, 2021) calls explicitly for the integration of disability-related indicators into national education systems, including funding mechanisms.

In the Greek context, university funding policy is undergoing a significant transformation with the introduction of a new allocation model implemented through the Hellenic Authority for Higher Education (HAHE). This reform builds upon a broader trajectory of governance and quality assurance reforms in Greek higher education, in which institutional evaluation has progressively become a central policy instrument (Stamelos and Kavasakalis, 2011). Under this system, a substantial share of institutional funding, increasing from 20 percent in earlier years to 30 percent from 2025 onwards, is linked to qualitative performance indicators (HAHE, 2025; Vikas, 2023). This development places universities at the intersection of two policy imperatives: the efficient use of public resources and the promotion of inclusive educational environments for students with disabilities. The coexistence of these objectives is not straightforward. A growing body of research suggests that PBF systems, when not carefully designed, may inadvertently disadvantage institutions serving more vulnerable student populations (Harvey *et al.*, 2018; Krempkow, 2015; Ortagus *et al.*, 2020). In parallel, the Greek literature points to longstanding structural weaknesses in the support of students with disabilities, including fragmented policies and uneven implementation across institutions (Papadakaki *et al.*, 2022; Vlachou and Papananou, 2018).

Despite the expanding international literature on PBF and its effects on vulnerable groups (Ortagus *et al.*, 2020; Zerquera and Ziskin, 2020): the specific relationship between PBF mechanisms and disability-related funding in European higher education remains largely unexplored. This gap is both empirical and theoretical. On the one hand, no study has systematically examined how institutions behave over time in relation to disability indicators within a PBF framework in a European context. On the other hand, the Greek case has not yet been analyzed from this perspective, despite offering a particularly relevant setting due to the recent introduction of the HAHE model and the availability of multi-year administrative data. Addressing this gap is important, as PBF systems that do not assign sufficient weight to equity-related criteria risk reinforcing, rather than mitigating, existing inequalities (Harvey *et al.*, 2018; Herbst, 2020).

Against this background, the present study examines the integration of disability criteria within the

Greek PBF system and explores how institutions respond to the incentives embedded in it. More specifically, it addresses three interrelated research questions:

RQ1: To what extent does the PBF system of Greek HEIs, as implemented through the HAHE, incorporate substantive criteria for disability funding, both in terms of the breadth of indicators and their funding weight?

RQ2: How many universities choose to be evaluated in the section that includes indicators related to disability and accessibility, and what institutional profile is associated with participation?

RQ3: Do participating institutions show improvement in the relevant indicators over time?

The contribution of this article is threefold. First, it provides the first systematic empirical analysis of the integration of disability criteria within the Greek PBF system, addressing a gap that is relevant both to national policy debates and to the broader international literature on PBF and inclusion. Second, it draws on administrative data covering five consecutive years from 2022 to 2026, offering a longitudinal perspective on institutional behavior. Third, it situates the Greek case within the wider international discussion and formulates evidence-based policy recommendations for strengthening the alignment between funding mechanisms and inclusion objectives.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the literature review and theoretical framework. Section 3 describes the research methodology. Section 4 presents the empirical findings. Section 5 discusses the findings in relation to the research questions and the existing literature. Section 6 concludes the study by summarizing the main findings and contributions. Section 7 outlines the theoretical, practical, and methodological implications of the study. Finally, Section 8 discusses the study's limitations and proposes directions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Underpinnings

The theoretical foundation of this study draws on three complementary traditions: incentive theory in the funding of public institutions, the economic analysis of higher education, and the theory of equity and inclusion.

Incentive theory provides the primary analytical lens for understanding performance-based funding systems. According to its established formulation, such systems operate by translating policy priorities into financial incentives. Indicators that are measured and funded tend to shape institutional behavior,

while those that are either absent or weakly weighted generate limited incentives for change (Biscaia, 2020; Herbst, 2020). Consequently, the relative weight assigned to specific indicators is expected to influence the extent to which institutions prioritize them within their strategic planning and resource allocation decisions. Disability-related indicators that remain weakly weighted or optional are therefore unlikely to generate sustained institutional engagement or long-term organizational change. This perspective suggests that institutional responses are not driven by stated policy goals alone, but by the relative importance assigned to different indicators within the funding model. In this context, if disability related indicators carry limited weight or remain optional, institutions are unlikely to prioritize them. At the same time, institutions that do not perform strongly in highly weighted categories may turn to alternative areas, such as disability related indicators, as part of a strategy to improve their overall performance. This behavior has been described in the literature as strategic adaptation within performance systems (Ortagus *et al.*, 2020; Zerquera and Ziskin, 2020). From this perspective, institutional participation in disability-related indicators is expected to reflect strategic calculations regarding potential performance gains rather than normative commitment to inclusion alone.

From the perspective of the economics of higher education, public intervention in disability funding is justified as a response to market failure. Students with disabilities face additional costs and barriers that may limit access and participation in higher education. Without targeted support, these barriers can lead to under participation and unequal outcomes. The allocation of resources for disability therefore plays a central role in ensuring equitable access and participation (OECD, 2023; Swärd and Ramberg, 2026).

Equity theory further emphasizes that fair funding systems must account for structural disadvantage. The presence of equity related indicators is not sufficient in itself. Their effectiveness depends on their weight within the funding system and on whether participation is mandatory or optional. Without these conditions, equity considerations are unlikely to influence institutional behavior in a systematic way (Harvey *et al.*, 2018). Accordingly, funding systems that formally incorporate equity-related indicators without attaching substantial incentives to them may reproduce rather than mitigate institutional inequalities.

Empirical Review

Performance-Based Funding and Equity

The international literature on performance-based funding consistently highlights a tension between efficiency and equity objectives. European PBF systems tend to prioritize indicators such as graduation rates, time to degree, research output, and employability, which often favor institutions enrolling more advantaged student populations (Biscaia, 2020; Herbst, 2020). This creates an uneven landscape in which institutions serving students from vulnerable groups may be placed at a disadvantage.

Empirical research shows that performance indicators can shape institutional behavior in unintended ways. Harvey *et al.* (2018) demonstrate that commonly used indicators may penalize institutions enrolling students with greater support needs. They propose a set of principles for more equitable funding systems, including the avoidance of penalizing institutions with more complex student populations and the need for transparency in measurement.

Evidence from the United States indicates that PBF systems may lead institutions to adjust admission practices in response to performance pressures. Zerquera and Ziskin (2020) find that institutions may become more selective in order to improve performance metrics, a phenomenon often described as cream skimming. A broader synthesis by Ortagus *et al.* (2020) shows that performance-based funding produces both intended effects, such as improvements in completion rates, and unintended consequences, including the marginalization of vulnerable groups. This limitation is further reflected in the way disability inclusion is operationalized in higher education systems, which is often reduced to administrative or input-based indicators that fail to capture substantive outcomes and student-level experiences (Bartolo *et al.*, 2025). A key conclusion emerging from this literature is that the inclusion of equity indicators does not automatically address these tensions. For such indicators to influence institutional behavior, they need to carry sufficient weight and to be applied consistently across institutions. Krempkow (2015) proposes the added value approach as a way to account for differences in student population characteristics, thereby enabling fairer comparisons between institutions. The added value approach shifts institutional evaluation from absolute outcomes to performance relative to institutional context and student composition. Within performance-based funding systems, this approach may reduce the risk that institutions enrolling larger numbers of students with disabilities are disadvantaged by standardized performance indicators. By incorporating contextual adjustments, it aligns more closely with equity-oriented funding principles and strengthens the compatibility between accountability and inclusion objectives.

Students with Disabilities in Higher Education

Research on students with disabilities in higher education identifies persistent barriers to access, participation, and success. A systematic review by Madaus *et al.* (2024) indicates that students with disabilities face multiple challenges, including physical accessibility issues, limited availability of appropriate accommodations, and social barriers within academic environments. The review also highlights that the presence of structured support services is associated with improved academic outcomes.

Longitudinal evidence further illustrates differences in academic trajectories. Knight *et al.* (2018):

analyzing data from more than thirty thousand students, show that students with disabilities can achieve comparable graduation outcomes over extended time periods, but often require more time to complete their studies. This finding is particularly relevant for performance-based funding systems that emphasize timely completion, as such criteria may inadvertently disadvantage both these students and the institutions that support them.

European data confirm similar patterns. The EUROSTUDENT VII survey reports that students with disabilities experience lower levels of belonging, higher intentions to drop out, and lower perceived academic success compared to their peers (Kleemola *et al.*, 2025). Research also highlights the importance of disability support services, not only for providing practical assistance but also for supporting student identity and participation within the academic community (Shpigelman *et al.*, 2022).

Disability Funding Models

The design of funding systems plays a critical role in shaping how inclusion policies are implemented. A systematic review by Swärd and Ramberg (2026) shows that different funding approaches create different types of incentives. Input-based models tend to encourage investment in infrastructure and support services, while models that neglect disability considerations may create incentives for avoidance. The OECD (2023) classifies funding approaches for students with special educational needs into three broad categories: input, throughput, and output models. Each approach has distinct policy implications. Input-based models allocate resources according to the availability of support structures, personnel, infrastructure, or other institutional resources, thereby facilitating the development of inclusive capacity but not necessarily ensuring improved educational outcomes. Throughput-based models allocate funding according to students' progression through the educational process, using indicators such as retention, credit accumulation, persistence, or successful transition between stages of study. These models encourage institutions to support students throughout their educational trajectories while avoiding an exclusive focus on final outcomes. Output-based models allocate resources according to achieved results, such as graduation or completion rates. Although they may encourage institutional performance improvement, they also risk disadvantaging institutions serving students with greater support needs if contextual factors are not adequately taken into account.

Internationally, different policy approaches can be observed. In Australia, targeted funding mechanisms have been developed to support institutions serving students with disabilities (Harpur *et al.*, 2025; Harvey *et al.*, 2018). In the United Kingdom, support is largely provided through individual funding schemes such as the Disabled Students' Allowance. Across the European Higher Education Area, levels of development vary considerably, with countries facing fiscal constraints encountering greater challenges in implementing comprehensive support systems (Solís-García *et al.*, 2025).

Disability in Greek Higher Education

In the Greek context, the literature points to persistent structural limitations in the support of students with disabilities. Participation rates are estimated at approximately three percent, although this figure is likely to underestimate the actual population due to underreporting linked to concerns about stigma (Papadakaki *et al.*, 2022). Studies identify significant barriers related to both physical accessibility and the adaptation of teaching practices (Vlachou and Papananou, 2018).

Students with disabilities also report experiences of marginalization within academic environments. Andreou *et al.* (2021) show that microaggressions and limited institutional support are associated with higher levels of anxiety and reduced life satisfaction. Although Law 4957 of 2022 mandates the establishment of Disability Support Units (DSUs) in all higher education institutions, implementation remains uneven. Some institutions have developed structured services, while others operate at a minimal level of compliance.

More broadly, disability support in Greek higher education often relies on temporary funding schemes, such as European structural funds, rather than on stable institutional funding. This limits the continuity and effectiveness of support services (Ioannidi *et al.*, 2020; Papadakaki *et al.*, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

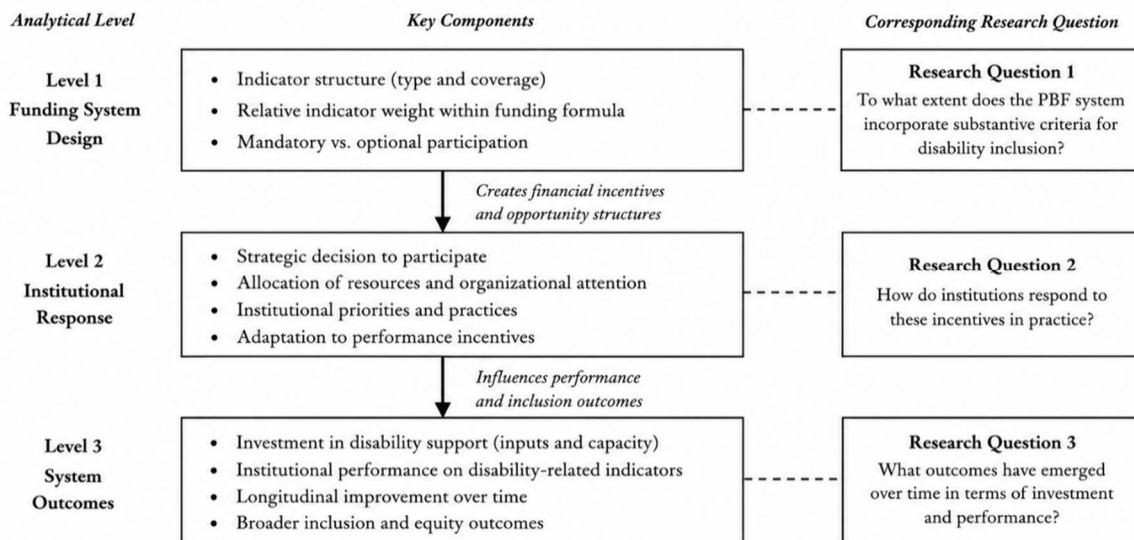
The literature reviewed above points to three central theoretical expectations that inform the analytical framework of the study. First, performance-based funding systems with weakly weighted equity indicators are unlikely to generate sustained institutional investment in inclusion-related policies and practices, as indicators with limited financial weight tend to create weak incentives for institutional change (Biscaia, 2020; Herbst, 2020). Second, financial support constitutes a necessary condition for the development and maintenance of disability-related support structures within higher education institutions, particularly where students face additional participation costs and structural barriers (OECD, 2023; Swärd and Ramberg, 2026). Third, institutional participation in optional funding indicators is expected to reflect strategic adaptation to incentive structures rather than purely normative commitment to inclusion, since institutions tend to prioritize areas associated with higher performance returns (Ortagus *et al.*, 2020; Zerquera and Ziskin, 2020). Consequently, institutional engagement with disability-related indicators is expected to remain selective in systems where participation is optional and the associated financial incentives are limited.

A more contextualized interpretation of institutional performance is particularly important when evaluating equity-related indicators within performance-based funding systems. Institutional performance should be interpreted in relation to institutional context and student composition rather than

through uniform outcome expectations alone. In systems where institutions serve populations with differing levels of support needs, the absence of contextualized evaluation mechanisms may create disincentives for engagement with vulnerable student groups. From this perspective, approaches based on added value and contextualized evaluation may reduce the risk that formally neutral performance measures reproduce existing structural inequalities across institutions (Harvey *et al.*, 2018; Krempkow, 2015).

The first level concerns system design. It includes the structure of indicators, their relative weight within the funding model, and whether participation is mandatory or optional. These elements determine the strength of the incentives created by the system and shape institutional priorities (Biscaia, 2020; Herbst, 2020). This level corresponds to the first research question.

The second level focuses on institutional response. It examines which institutions choose to participate in disability related indicators and whether participation is associated with specific institutional characteristics. This reflects patterns of strategic behavior observed in performance-based systems, where institutions respond selectively to incentive structures (Ortagus *et al.*, 2020; Zerquera and Ziskin, 2020). This level addresses the second research question.



Source: Authors' presentation

Figure 1. Analytical Framework of the Study

The third level concerns system outcomes. It assesses whether the incentives embedded in the funding model are associated with observable changes in performance over time. Previous research indicates that performance-based systems may produce both intended and unintended effects, depending on the design of indicators and their relative importance (Harvey *et al.*, 2018; Ortagus *et al.*,

2020). This level corresponds to the third research question. For a clearer understanding of the three-level analytical framework, please see Figure 1 above.

Based on these theoretical expectations, the study assumes that systems characterized by weakly weighted and optional disability-related indicators will display limited institutional participation and weak longitudinal improvement. This assumption is consistent with incentive-based and strategic adaptation perspectives suggesting that weak or optional incentives do not generate sustained behavioral change at the system level (Harvey *et al.*, 2018; Ortagus *et al.*, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a mixed methods research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches within a unified analytical framework (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). Mixed methods designs were considered appropriate for examining complex policy phenomena that require both contextual interpretation and empirical analysis of institutional performance (Creswell, 2014). The study was situated within the perspective of critical policy analysis, which focuses on examining the assumptions, design features, and institutional consequences of policy instruments, particularly in relation to vulnerable groups (Cardno, 2018; Owen, 2014). The two strands were integrated at the interpretation stage: qualitative findings on indicator design and policy structure provided the explanatory context for interpreting the quantitative patterns of institutional participation and longitudinal performance. This sequential integration follows the explanatory mixed methods model, in which qualitative analysis precedes and informs the quantitative component (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018).

The qualitative component addressed the first research question and focused on the analysis of policy documents and the critical evaluation of disability related indicators within the performance-based funding system. The quantitative component addressed the second and third research questions and involved the longitudinal analysis of administrative funding data covering the period from 2022 to 2026 for all Greek higher education institutions.

Population and Data Collection

The study population consisted of all 23 Greek higher education institutions that were subject to the funding allocation system implemented by the Hellenic Authority for Higher Education (HAHE) during the period 2022 to 2026. Full population coverage was achieved, which eliminated sampling error and allowed for census level longitudinal analysis.

Data were collected from the Funding Allocation Recommendations (FARs) issued annually by the

HAHE for the years 2022 to 2026. These official administrative reports provided detailed information on the scoring of each institution across all qualitative indicators of the performance-based funding system, including the four indicators related to disability and accessibility, namely E3.1, E3.2, E4.1, and E4.2. The five-year time frame enabled the identification of trends across the initial phase of implementation of the funding model. The recommendation for 2026 referred to the official document published in 2025 concerning the allocation of funding for the fiscal year 2026 and was treated as part of the longitudinal dataset.

Variables and Measurement

The analytical dimensions of the study were operationalized in alignment with the research questions. The first analytical dimension, disability indicator design, was examined in relation to the first research question. It was assessed through three dimensions: the number of disability-related indicators included in the system, their relative weight expressed as a percentage of the total qualitative score, and the degree to which participation in the relevant section was mandatory or optional.

The second analytical dimension, institutional participation, was examined in relation to the second research question. It was operationalized as a binary participation measure for each institution and year, where participation was coded as one when an institution submitted data for Section E and zero when it did not.

The third analytical dimension, longitudinal performance trends, was examined in relation to the third research question. It was assessed using the reported values of the four disability-related indicators for each institution and year. Indicator E3.1 was treated as a binary measure indicating the presence or absence of specific support structures. Indicator E3.2 was measured as the number of specialized support staff per one thousand students. Indicator E4.1 was measured as the percentage of institutional expenditure allocated to students with disabilities relative to the regular budget. Indicator E4.2 was measured as the percentage of accessible classrooms.

Missing data were treated as evidence of non-participation or non-submission. This was interpreted as either administrative incapacity or a strategic institutional decision to prioritize other indicators within the funding system.

The study did not employ psychometric scales or latent constructs commonly used in survey-based quantitative research. All measures were operationalized through officially defined administrative indicators published by the HAHE and reported annually within the funding allocation system. Consequently, conventional reliability measures associated with psychometric scale development, such as internal consistency coefficients, were not applicable in the present study.

Analytical Strategy

–Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative component addressed the first research question and was conducted using policy document analysis (Bowen, 2009; Cardno, 2018). Three categories of documents were examined. The first category included the Funding Allocation Recommendations (FARs) issued by the HAHE, which were used to map the structure and weighting of indicators. The second category included national legislation and European policy frameworks, which were analyzed to assess the alignment of the funding system with broader policy commitments related to inclusion and disability rights. The third category included comparative evidence from performance-based funding systems in other countries, which provided a reference point for evaluation.

Documents were analyzed deductively, using a coding framework derived from the theoretical and empirical literature. Three analytical dimensions structured the coding process: the scope of disability-related indicators (breadth and type): their relative funding weight within the system, and the mandatory or optional nature of institutional participation. The criteria used to assess the adequacy of disability-related indicators were derived from the literature on inclusive higher education and funding systems (Campanile *et al.*, 2022; Cerilli *et al.*, 2025; Harvey *et al.*, 2018; Madaus *et al.*, 2024; OECD, 2023).

Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative component addressed the second and third research questions and was conducted at three analytical levels. First, the design of the funding system was analyzed in terms of the structure and weighting of disability related indicators. Second, institutional participation was examined by calculating the number and percentage of institutions that submitted data for “Section E” in each year. Third, performance trends were analyzed for each indicator across time. Visual analytical techniques were used to support interpretation, including grouped bar charts for indicator E3.1, heat maps for indicator E3.2, color coded tables for indicator E4.1, and categorical representations for indicator E4.2. Inferential statistical techniques, such as correlations or regression models, were not employed for two reasons. First, the data constitute a full population census rather than a sample, rendering inferential procedures designed to estimate population parameters from samples neither appropriate nor necessary (Creswell, 2014). Second, the study did not seek to establish causal relationships between variables but aimed to describe and interpret longitudinal patterns in full-population administrative data. The validity of the study was supported by the use of official administrative data from an independent authority, full population coverage, and the longitudinal design spanning five consecutive years. Analytical robustness was further strengthened through the integration of multiple theoretical perspectives. The integration of qualitative and quantitative findings enabled a comprehensive examination of both the design characteristics and institutional consequences of the funding system.

The validity of the study was addressed at multiple levels. With respect to data validity, all quantitative data were drawn from official administrative reports issued by an independent public authority i.e., HAHE, which reduces the risk of measurement bias associated with self-reported or researcher-collected data. Full population coverage further eliminates sampling error and supports the generalizability of findings to the Greek higher education system as a whole.

With respect to the qualitative component, trustworthiness was supported through the systematic application of a theory-derived coding framework and through triangulation across three categories of documents: administrative funding recommendations, national legislation, and comparative international evidence. The consistency of findings across these sources strengthens the credibility of the qualitative interpretations.

A key limitation of the study concerns the exclusive reliance on officially reported data, without independent verification at the institutional level. Reported values may not fully reflect actual institutional practices, and this possibility should be taken into account when interpreting the findings.

RESULTS

Qualitative Findings

–RQ1: Structure of Disability Indicators in the Greek PBF

Policy document analysis indicated that the Greek performance-based funding system was structured with 70 percent of total funding allocated on the basis of objective size criteria and the remaining 30 percent allocated on the basis of qualitative indicators (HAHE, 2025). Disability related criteria were included exclusively within “Section E”, which referred to the quality of the university environment, and

Section	Section Title	Maximum Total Score
A	Continuous improvement of core academic activities	≤1,040
B	Research activity, excellence and staff performance	≤430
C	Engagement with society, the labor market, and knowledge transfer	≤520
D	Internationalization	≤690
E	Quality of the university environment	≤510
Total		≤3,190

Source: HAHE, Funding Allocation Recommendations 2022–2026 (HAHE, 2025)

Table 1: Sections and Scoring Bases of the HEI Qualitative Assessment System

were operationalized through four indicators distributed across two criteria. The structure of the qualitative

scoring system determining 30 percent of higher education institution funding based on qualitative indicators (HAHE, 2025) is presented in Table 1 above.

The four disability related indicators included in “Section E” collectively corresponded to a maximum of 140 points. This represented 27.45 percent of “Section E” and 4.38 percent of the total qualitative indicator score. When calculated as a proportion of total funding, the contribution of these indicators ranged from approximately 0.88 percent in earlier years to 1.32 percent from 2025 onwards (see Table 2).

Code	Criterion	Indicator	Description	Points
E.3	Student support services	E3.1	Existence of psychological support service (YES/NO)	40
		E3.2	Specialized scientific support staff per 1,000 students	0–40
E.4	Improvement of SWD Accessibility	E4.1	SWD accessibility expenditure as % of regular budget	0–30
		E4.2	Percentage of classrooms accessible to SWD	0–30
Total				≤140

Source: HAHE (2025)

Note: The four indicators collectively represent ≤140 points, constituting 27.45% of Section E and approximately 0.88% to 1.32% of total HEI funding, depending on the year.

Table 2: Section E. Indicators Related to Disability/Accessibility

Pursuant to Ministerial Decision 58959/Z1/31–5–2024, four categories of point calculation were defined. For Type A indicators, the maximum achievable score was set at three times the base score. Within “Section E”, Type A indicators had a combined base score of 220 points, corresponding to a theoretical maximum of 660 points. When combined with the fixed maxima of Type C and Type D indicators, amounting to 130 points, the theoretical maximum score of “Section E” reached 790 points. The maximum of 510 points presented in Table 1 reflects the base scoring structure, whereas the higher theoretical value results from the application of multiplier rules for specific indicator types. The methods of point allocation are presented in Table 3 (see Appendix–I).

The analysis showed that disability related indicators were characterized by low overall weight within the funding system and were limited to input-based measures. No indicators referring to processes or outcomes were identified. In addition, no indicator captured the operation or effectiveness of Disability Support Units (DSUs).

Quantitative Findings

–RQ2: Institutional Participation (2022–2026)

Analysis of administrative data showed that participation in “Section E” remained limited throughout the period under examination. The distribution of institutional scores per year is presented in Table 4 (see Appendix–II).

The number of institutions that participated in “Section E” ranged from 7 in 2023, corresponding to 30.4 percent of the population, to 10 in 2026, corresponding to 43.5 percent. The average number of participating institutions across the five–year period was 8.2 per year. In each year, more than half of the institutions did not submit data for “Section E.”

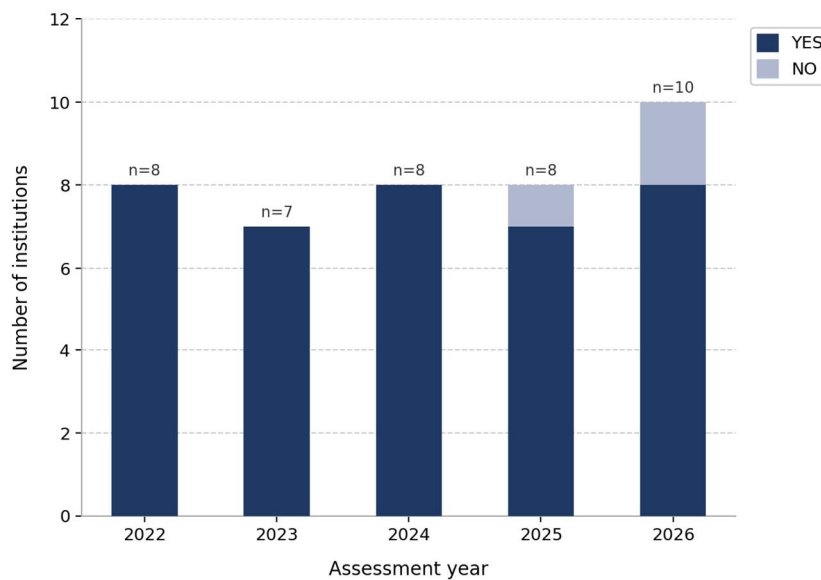
Four institutions with the largest student populations, namely AUTH, NKUA, NTUA, and UPATRAS, did not participate in “Section E” in any of the years examined. Participation was observed primarily among a group of smaller institutions, including UOM, HUA, UOI, UOP, UNIWA, and IU.

A gradual increase in participation was observed over time, from 34.8 percent in 2022 to 43.5 percent in 2026. This increase coincided with the entry of additional institutions in later years.

–RQ3: Longitudinal Performance Analysis per Indicator

Indicator E3.1: Existence of a Psychological Support Service

The distribution of institutions according to the status of indicator E3.1 is presented in Figure 2.



Source: Authors' presentation

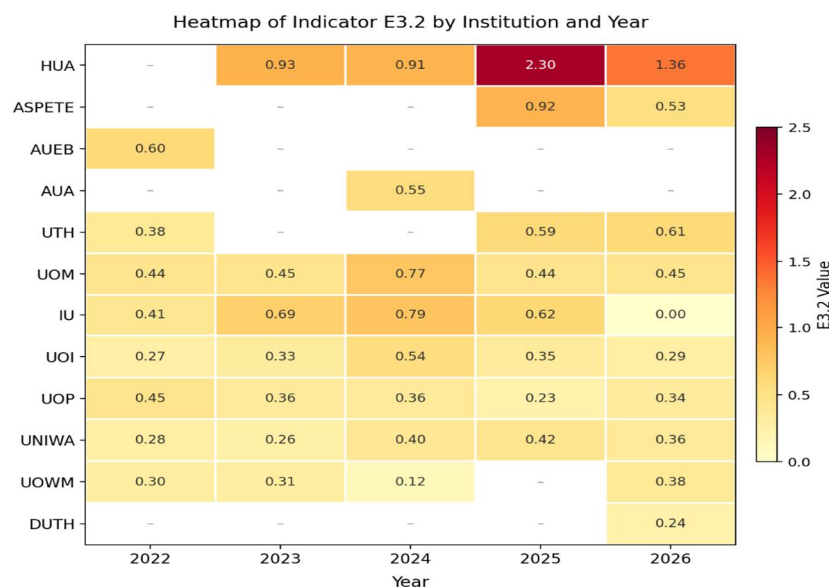
Figure 2. Distribution of Institutions by E3.1 Indicator Status

Indicator E3.1 was measured as a binary variable, with a value assigned for the presence or absence

of a psychological support service. Full participation among reporting institutions was recorded during the period 2022 to 2024. In 2025, the proportion of institutions reporting a positive value decreased to 87.5 percent, and in 2026 it further decreased to 80.0 percent. Changes in reporting were observed in individual institutions across years.

Indicator E3.2: Specialized Support Staff per 1,000 Students

The values of indicator E3.2 are presented in Figure 3 for the institutions that reported at least one value during the period 2022 to 2026.



Source: Authors' presentation

Figure 3. Heat Map of Indicator E3.2 (Specialized Scientific Support Staff per 1,000 Students) per HEI and Year (2022–2026)

Indicator E3.2 was measured as the number of specialized support staff per one thousand students. Values varied across institutions and across years. In several cases, increases in reported values were observed, while in others stability or fluctuations were recorded. For a number of institutions, data were not available for all years, resulting in incomplete time series.

Indicator E4.1: Accessibility Expenditure as a Percentage of the Regular Budget

Expenditure related to accessibility and support for students with disabilities is presented in Table 5 below.

Indicator E4.1 was measured as the percentage of institutional expenditure allocated to accessibility and support for students with disabilities relative to the regular budget. Reported values varied substan-

tially across institutions and across years. In several cases, higher values were observed in specific years, followed by lower values in subsequent periods. For the majority of institutions, reported values remained below one percent of the regular budget. Data were not available for several institutions across the entire period.

Institution	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
AUA	—	—	0,35%	—	—
AUEB	0,05%	—	—	—	—
UNIWA	0,00%	0,01%	0,04%	0,22%	0,00%
UTH	1,21%	—	—	3,49%	0,00%
UOM	16,77%	4,15%	1,29%	6,07%	0,32%
UOP	0,00%	0,00%	0,12%	0,00%	0,91%
UOWM	0,57%	0,31%	0,02%	—	0,52%
UOI	0,00%	2,00%	1,18%	2,74%	0,00%
HUA	—	0,00%	0,00%	2,52%	0,00%

Source: HAHE Indicator Evaluation Data (2022–2026)

Note. "—" indicates data not submitted due to non-selection of Section E.

Table 5: Expenditure on SWD Support/Accessibility Measures as a Percentage of the Regular Budget per HEI (2022–2026)

Indicator E4.2: Percentage of Accessible Classrooms

The percentage of accessible classrooms per institution is presented in Table 6 below.

Indicator E4.2 was measured as the percentage of classrooms that were accessible to students with disabilities. High values were recorded for some institutions across all years, while others showed increase over time. Variations in reported values were observed across institutions and years. Data were not available for several institutions, including those with large infrastructure.

DISCUSSION

The findings present a consistent and theoretically coherent picture that aligns with the expectations derived from the analytical framework and the broader international literature on performance-based funding and equity.

With respect to the first research question, the results indicate that the integration of disability criteria within the Greek performance-based funding system remains structurally limited. The distinction between

Institution	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
ASPETE	0%	0%	0%	85.0%	90.0%
DUTH	0%	0%	0%	0%	91.0%
IU	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
AUEB	100.0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
UNIWA	40.2%	40.2%	40.2%	40.0%	99.0%
UTH	100.0%	0%	0%	74.0%	71.0%
UOM	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
UOP	81.9%	81.9%	90.0%	90.0%	90.0%
UOWM	100.0%	24.0%	24.0%	0%	42.0%
UOI	82.9%	84.2%	81.8%	82.0%	82.0%
HUA	0%	82.4%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

■ ≥90%
 ■ 70–89%
 ■ 40–69%
 ■ 0% / no data

Source: HAHE Indicator Evaluation Data (2022–2026)

Table 6: Percentage of Accessible Classrooms per HEI (2022–2026)

the existence of indicators and their effectiveness prove crucial. Although disability related indicators are formally included, their design characteristics restrict their capacity to influence institutional behavior. Their relatively low weight within the funding formula, their exclusive focus on input-based measures, the optional nature of participation, and the absence of indicators capturing the operation of Disability Support Units (DSUs) collectively limit their practical impact. This finding reinforces the argument advanced in the literature that the inclusion of equity indicators alone does not ensure behavioral change unless they carry sufficient weight within the funding system (Harvey *et al.*, 2018; Herbst, 2020). At the same time, it supports the position that comprehensive approaches to equity require a combination of input and output measures, as emphasized by the OECD (2023).

The results further highlight the implications of the relative scoring mechanism embedded in the funding model. Institutional performance is assessed in relation to other institutions rather than in absolute terms, which introduces a competitive dynamic into the system. This feature shapes institutional strategies by linking performance to relative positioning within a closed distribution of resources (Biscaia, 2020; Teixeira *et al.*, 2022). As a result, improvements across all institutions do not necessarily translate into changes in funding outcomes, while relative declines may occur even in the absence of deterioration in absolute performance. This dynamic has been documented in the literature on performance-based systems and reflects the broader challenges associated with competitive allocation mechanisms (De Boer *et al.*, 2015; Westerheijden *et al.*, 2014).

In relation to the second research question, the findings provide empirical support for the presence of strategic behavior in institutional responses to the funding system. The absence of the largest higher education institutions from participation in disability related indicators suggests that institutions with strong performance in highly weighted categories face limited incentives to engage with lower weight indicators. In contrast, participation is concentrated among smaller institutions, which appear to utilize these indicators as an alternative means of improving their overall performance. This pattern is consistent with existing research indicating that institutions respond selectively to incentive structures, prioritizing areas that maximize potential returns (Ortagus *et al.*, 2020; Zerquera and Ziskin, 2020). The results therefore suggest that participation in disability related indicators appears to be shaped primarily by strategic considerations rather than by a uniform commitment to inclusion.

With regard to the third research question, the findings indicate that no systematic improvement is observed across the examined indicators over time. This outcome can be interpreted in light of the strength of incentives embedded in the funding system. When the weight of specific indicators remains limited, their capacity to drive sustained institutional change is correspondingly constrained. The observed pattern of irregular or discontinuous investment in accessibility related expenditure reflects this dynamic. Rather than supporting long-term planning, the structure of incentives appears to be associated with episodic or short-term responses.

The findings also position the Greek case within the broader international discussion on performance-based funding and equity. In systems such as those of the United States and Australia, the literature has primarily focused on the unintended consequences of performance-based funding, particularly in contexts where equity indicators already carry meaningful weight. In contrast, the Greek case highlights a different stage of development. The limited weight assigned to disability-related indicators suggests that the system has not yet reached a point where such tradeoffs become fully visible. Instead, disability appears to be formally recognized without being substantively integrated into the funding logic, creating a form of policy decoupling between inclusion-oriented discourse and institutional incentive structures. This observation is consistent with research on policy development in the European Higher Education Area, which identifies varying levels of institutional maturity across national systems (Solís García *et al.*, 2025).

From a theoretical perspective, the findings support a refined interpretation of incentive theory in the context of higher education funding. While performance-based systems are often associated with the expectation that measured dimensions improve over time, the results suggest that this relationship depends critically on the relative importance assigned to those dimensions. Indicators that are weakly weighted or optional do not appear to generate sufficient incentives to alter institutional behavior in a

sustained manner. In this sense, the relationship between measurement and improvement is conditional rather than automatic, and is mediated by the design features of the funding system.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the position of disability within the performance-based funding system of Greek higher education institutions during the period from 2022 to 2026 and provides a systematic empirical assessment of how disability-related criteria are incorporated and operationalized within the funding model.

The findings collectively indicate that disability remains weakly embedded within the system. In relation to the first research question, disability-related indicators represent a very limited share of total funding, focus exclusively on input-based measures, do not include the functioning of Disability Support Units (DSUs): and are applied on an optional basis. In relation to the second research question, participation remains consistently limited, with fewer than half of institutions engaging with the relevant indicators and the largest institutions remaining absent throughout the examined period. In relation to the third research question, no consistent pattern of improvement is observed across the indicators, while institutional responses appear fragmented rather than sustained over time.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the formal inclusion of disability within the funding system does not translate into substantive incentives for institutional change. The results support the theoretical proposition that the effectiveness of performance-based funding depends not on the presence of indicators alone but on their relative weight and design characteristics. When indicators are weakly weighted and participation remains optional, their capacity to influence institutional behavior is limited. The study contributes to the literature in two main ways. First, it provides empirical evidence that equity-related indicators within performance-based funding systems require sufficient weighting in order to produce measurable effects. Second, it introduces a distinction between initial institutional recognition and substantive integration of disability within funding systems, offering a conceptual lens for analyzing similar policy contexts.

Overall, the Greek case illustrates that the relationship between measurement and improvement is conditional and mediated by incentive structures. Performance-based funding does not automatically generate change across all measured dimensions, particularly when the incentives associated with specific indicators remain weak.

IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to the literature on performance-based funding and incentive theory by providing empirical evidence from a European context on the conditions under which equity-related indicators influence institutional behavior. The findings indicate that the presence of such indicators alone does not suffice to generate change. Instead, their effectiveness depends on their relative weight within the funding system and on the extent to which participation is required.

In this respect, the study advances a conceptual distinction between initial institutional recognition and substantive integration of disability within performance-based funding systems. This distinction offers a useful analytical lens for examining similar reforms in other national contexts, particularly in systems that formally adopt equity principles without embedding them in incentive structures. More broadly, the findings support the view that the relationship between measurement and improvement in performance-based systems is conditional and mediated by design features rather than automatic. Simply introducing performance indicators does not, by itself, generate sustained institutional improvement; meaningful change depends on the strength of financial incentives and the extent to which participation is required.

Practical Implications

The findings inform a set of policy directions aimed at strengthening the integration of disability within the Greek performance-based funding system.

First, the range and scope of disability-related indicators can be expanded and refined. Additional indicators may include the existence and staffing levels of Disability Support Units (DSUs): the number of enrolled students with disabilities by category, the proportion of students receiving reasonable accommodations, completion rates adjusted for flexible study duration, and measures of student satisfaction with support services.

Second, the relative weight of disability-related indicators within the funding system can be gradually increased. A more balanced allocation may ensure that these indicators represent a meaningful share of “Section E” and a visible proportion of the overall qualitative funding component.

Third, a minimum set of disability-related data can be made mandatory for all institutions, independently of whether they choose to be evaluated for funding purposes. This may include core variables such as the number of students with disabilities, the existence of support structures, and the provision of accommodations.

Fourth, the development of a national data collection system for disability in higher education can support consistency and comparability. Such a system may include standardized definitions aligned with international frameworks, regular data collection procedures, and a central repository accessible for policy and research purposes.

Fifth, the adoption of an added value approach may allow for the contextualization of institutional performance by taking into account differences in student composition and support needs across institutions. Under the current model, universities are evaluated primarily through standardized indicators that do not adequately reflect the additional resources and flexibility often required to support students with disabilities. This may unintentionally disadvantage institutions that enroll larger numbers of students requiring accommodations or extended study duration. An added value approach could partially address this limitation by evaluating institutional progress relative to initial conditions and contextual characteristics rather than relying exclusively on absolute performance measures. Such an approach may contribute to fairer comparisons across institutions and reduce disincentives associated with equity-oriented missions.

Sixth, closer alignment between funding mechanisms and national and European policy frameworks can be pursued. Explicit connections between performance indicators and broader policy objectives related to disability rights and inclusion may enhance coherence and policy effectiveness.

Methodological Implications

The study demonstrates the value of combining policy document analysis with longitudinal analysis of administrative data for examining funding systems in higher education. The use of official data from an independent authority enables a comprehensive and reliable assessment of institutional behavior over time.

This methodological approach may be extended in future research through the incorporation of primary data collection methods, such as interviews or surveys, in order to capture institutional perspectives and complement administrative records. Such extensions may provide a more comprehensive understanding of how funding incentives are interpreted and implemented at the institutional level.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study is subject to several limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the findings. First, the analysis relies exclusively on officially reported administrative data, without independent verification of the reported values at the institutional level. Although the use of official data ensures consistency and comparability, it does not allow for the assessment of potential discrepancies between reported and actual practices. Future iterations of the Greek performance-based funding model could strengthen data reliability through the incorporation of independent verification mechanisms. These may include periodic external audits, standardized reporting protocols, cross-validation procedures, and

clearer documentation requirements regarding disability-related expenditure and support services. The integration of such mechanisms could improve transparency, consistency, and policy accountability within the funding system.

Second, the study does not incorporate primary data collection methods, such as interviews or surveys with institutional actors. As a result, the motivations underlying institutional participation or non-participation in disability-related indicators are inferred from observed patterns rather than directly examined. Third, the longitudinal design captures trends over time but does not fully control for external or contextual factors, such as changes in staffing, organizational priorities, or the availability of external funding, which may influence institutional behavior independently of the funding system.

These limitations point to several directions for future research that may extend and deepen the present analysis. A first direction concerns the use of qualitative methods to explore institutional decision-making processes. Interviews with higher education administrators, members of Disability Support Units (DSUs): and policy actors may provide insights into the strategic considerations that shape participation in performance-based funding indicators. Such research may enable a more direct examination of strategic behavior and its variation across institutional contexts.

A second direction focuses on the student perspective. Research centered on students with disabilities may examine experiences of access, participation, and support, as well as perceptions of the effectiveness of institutional services. This line of inquiry may contribute to linking funding mechanisms with lived educational outcomes.

A third direction involves comparative analysis across national systems. Studies may examine performance-based funding models in other countries within the European Higher Education Area that operate under similar fiscal or institutional constraints. Comparative research may help to determine whether the pattern of limited integration of disability observed in the Greek case reflects a broader stage in the development of funding systems.

A fourth direction concerns the longitudinal evaluation of policy implementation. As the provisions of Law 4957 of 2022 are progressively implemented, future research may examine the development, staffing, and effectiveness of Disability Support Units (DSUs): as well as their integration into institutional structures and funding mechanisms.

Finally, future research may extend the analytical framework of the present study by incorporating additional variables related to institutional context. Factors such as leadership priorities, organisational culture, and internal governance structures may be examined as potential mediating or moderating variables in the relationship between funding incentives and inclusion outcomes. The integration of such variables may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how performance-based funding interacts with institutional dynamics.

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Appendix-I

Indicator Type	Section E Indicator Codes	Method of Point Allocation per Indicator
A. Ratios or proportions	E1.1, E1.2, E1.3, E3.2, E4.1, E4.2, E5.1, E7.1	The mean value of the indicator is calculated for all HEIs* participating in this section, and the total points allocated by the indicator correspond to this value. The allocation of points per indicator for each HEI derives from the ratio of the indicator for the specific HEI to the mean value, multiplied by the total points allocated by the indicator. Each indicator in this category allocates to an HEI at most three times the points corresponding to the mean value.
C. Qualitative YES/NO measurement	E3.1, E6.1, E6.3	The allocation of points per indicator for each HEI derives from the total points corresponding to the indicator, provided the indicator takes the value YES.
D. Qualitative or quantitative measurement based on a scale	E2.1, E6.2–	The allocation of points per indicator for each HEI is based on a scale of three or more levels (the same for all HEIs). The HEI receives the bracket (all or part of) the points corresponding to it, provided it is deemed to meet the requirements of the criterion.

Source: Pursuant to Ministerial Decision 58959/Z1/31-5-2024, Table III

Note. Type B does not appear in Section E. *HEI = Higher Education Institution.

Table 3: Methods of Point Allocation for Individual Indicators Based on Indicator Type

Abbrev.	Institution	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
A. HEIs that participated (≥ 1 year)						
UOM	University of Macedonia	570	594	580	598	527
UOI	University of Ioannina	278	531	502	529	408
HUA	Harokopio University of Athens	—	528	463	487	540
UOP	University of Peloponnese	210	184	289	257	397
UNIWA	University of West Attica	217	240	256	236	365
IU	Ionian University	136	323	391	317	268
UTH	University of Thessaly	383	—	—	430	394
UOWM	University of Western Macedonia	280	230	166	—	389
ASPETE	ASPETE (School of Pedagogical and Technological Education)	—	—	—	121	119
DUTH	Democritus University of Thrace	—	—	—	—	384
AUEB	Athens University of Economics and Business	396	—	—	—	—
AUA	Agricultural University of Athens	—	—	342	—	—
B. HEIs with no participation in any year						
AUTH	Aristotle University of Thessaloniki	—	—	—	—	—
NKUA	National and Kapodistrian University of Athens	—	—	—	—	—
NTUA	National Technical University of Athens	—	—	—	—	—
UPATRAS	University of Patras	—	—	—	—	—
UOC	University of Crete	—	—	—	—	—
AEGEAN	University of the Aegean	—	—	—	—	—
IHU	International Hellenic University	—	—	—	—	—
UNIPi	University of Piraeus	—	—	—	—	—
PANTEION	Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences	—	—	—	—	—
TUC	Technical University of Crete	—	—	—	—	—
HMU	Hellenic Mediterranean University	—	—	—	—	—
Total participating	8 (34.8%) 7 (30.4%) 8 (34.8%) 8 (34.8%) 10 (43.5%)					

Source: HAHE, Funding Allocation Recommendations 2022–2026

Note. "—" indicates that the institution did not choose to be evaluated in Section E.

Table 4: Section E Points per HEI and Evaluation Year (2022–2026)