



BFUG Working group on Social Dimension

Report for the BFUG LXXXVI meeting in Madrid on 16-17.11.2023.

Date: 9 November 2023

Background

During the preceding BFUG mandate from 2018 to 2020, the BFUG Advisory Group 1 on Social Dimension achieved significant milestones. The Advisory Group successfully formulated fundamental principles, guidelines, and introduced an updated definition for the social dimension of higher education within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). In 2020, during the ministerial conference held in Rome, the EHEA ministers officially adopted a forward-thinking strategic document entitled 'Principles and Guidelines to Enhance the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA'.¹ This document defines 10 principles of the social dimension of higher education for the upcoming decade of the Bologna Process, in the form of high-level statements that serve as the basis for conceptualizing policies for the enhancement of the social dimension. Notably, the Principles and Guidelines with the revised definition were integrated as Annex II to the 2020 Rome Ministerial Communiqué. The aim of the Principles and Guidelines is to support convergence of social dimension policies in the EHEA through shared commitments and provide support to EHEA member countries in their ongoing endeavors to refine policies related to the social dimension and facilitate their effective implementation at the national level to achieve the objective of an inclusive EHEA for all students and staff by 2030.

In 2021, the BFUG established a new BFUG Working Group on Social Dimension for the period 2021-2024. The task of this Working Group is to complete the new framework for the social dimension in Europe, initiated during the previous BFUG period 2018-2020, during which the Principles and Guidelines were completed. The main objective of the 2021-2024 BFUG Working Group on Social Dimension is to define indicators for the principles and guidelines of the social dimension.

Progress during 2021-2022

In 2021-2022, the BFUG Working Group on Social Dimension collaborated effectively with the European Commission/Eurydice to develop indicators of the social dimension. By the end of 2022, the Working Group agreed to adopt most of Eurydice's indicators² for each of the 10 social dimension principles, which typically include three to five indicators per principle. The Working Group's unique contribution is the creation of additional descriptors for each indicator. These descriptors provide detailed information about the indicators, making them easier to understand and implement, and offer practical recommendations for action.

At the end of 2022, the Working Group created a proposal for a new document titled 'Principles, Guidelines, and Indicators to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA.' This document includes the previously adopted principles and guidelines for the social dimension in 2020, as well as newly added indicators and descriptors.

¹ In the further text we use the abbreviated title 'Principles and Guidelines' instead of the full name of the document.

² Published in the report: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice [EC-Eurydice] (2022). Towards equity and inclusion in higher education in Europe. Eurydice report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Retrieved from: <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/publications/towards-equity-and-inclusion-higher-education-europe>



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The document begins with a narrative section that defines key concepts, provides instructions on how to use the document, and establishes connections with previous BFUG communiqués. During the BFUG Meeting in Brno on November 7-8, 2022, the BFUG Working Group on Social Dimension initiated a consultation with all BFUG members regarding the content of this new document.

Progress during 2023

The BFUG Working Group on Social Dimension presented updated versions of the document 'Principles, Guidelines, and Indicators to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA' at BFUG Board meetings in Kazakhstan and Georgia, as well as at the BFUG meeting in Sweden. Feedback was gathered from EHEA members during these meetings and through written submissions afterward. Following each round of consultations, the Working Group made refinements to the document.

In 2023, the Working Group held four additional meetings alongside the BFUG Board and BFUG meetings, aiming to make further improvements. These meetings involved extensive consultations with members of E4 (ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE) and Education International – ETUCE (European Trade Union Committee for Education). The discussions led to a mutual agreement on enhancing the document for the benefit of all stakeholders. In total, there were 19 iterations of the document throughout 2023.

To finalize the aforementioned document, the Working Group organized also an online consultative meeting for all BFUG members on September 6, 2023. The purpose of this online meeting was twofold: (1) to gather feedback on the document's content and (2) to discuss the modalities of adopting the document at the end of the BFUG cycle in 2024. The online meeting was attended by 20 BFUG representatives who expressed their support for the document and suggested additional improvements. All participants in the meeting reached a consensus that the document should be adopted by the ministers, with the majority opting towards adopting it in the same manner as it was in 2020, as an annex to the 2024 Tirana Communiqué. Alternatively, the EHEA ministers could opt to adopt the document as a standalone document, provided there is a clear reference to its adoption in the communiqué's text.

The Working Group facilitated the submission of written comments until September 25, 2023. Following this final round of consultation, the Working Group thoroughly discussed all the received comments during their meeting in Ghent on October 24-25, 2023, and subsequently produced a revised version of the document for presentation at the BFUG meeting in Madrid.

According to the preliminary 2024 Bologna Implementation Report, the Working Group affirms the effectiveness of the current social dimension indicators. This marks the second validation of these indicators, following their initial use by the European Commission/Eurydice in the 2022 report 'Towards Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education in Europe.'³ This evidence underscores the importance of the principles and indicators for EHEA member states in enhancing their social dimension policies.

Way Forward Proposal

³ Ibidem



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Over the past 12 months, the Working Group meticulously analyzed all suggestions, comments, and written contributions received from EHEA members, and they have been incorporated into the latest version of the document (annexed to this report). Following extensive consultations conducted by the Working Group with BFUG members regarding the document 'Principles, Guidelines, and Indicators to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA,' each BFUG member had the opportunity to provide recommendations for its enhancement in several stages. Therefore, the Working Group recommends that the current version of the document be adopted by the BFUG during the meeting in Madrid. Subsequently, the document should be prepared for adoption by the EHEA ministers of education in Tirana in 2024.

Furthermore, based on the conclusions drawn from the aforementioned consultation, the Working Group proposes to the BFUG that the document be adopted primarily as an annex to the 2024 Tirana communique or alternatively as a stand-alone document, with the condition that the communique text contains a clear reference to its adoption.

Annex I

Document 'Principles, Guidelines, and Indicators to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA'

This report has been prepared by the Co-Chairs of the BFUG Working Group on Social Dimension:

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