



MINISTRY
OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE
OF UKRAINE

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Report of the Advisory Group 1 on Social Dimension

Preparation of the European Principles and Guidelines to strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education

The Advisory Group on Social Dimension Advisory Group (AG1 on SD) is co-chaired by Ninoslav Schmidt (Croatia) and Robert Napier (the European Students' Union – ESU). 17 other members and stakeholders are part of this advisory group, and these are: Austria, Belgium Flemish Community, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, EI/ETUCE, EUA, European Commission, EUROSTUDENT, Germany, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania, Sweden, United Kingdom and United Kingdom (Scotland).

From its first meeting which was held in Zagreb in February 2019, the Advisory Group decided to focus most of its energy on creating a concrete set of Principles and Guidelines, which are short, concise and can bring about a real change within this field. Before starting to work on this document, we discussed and agreed that the **definition of SD should combine the definitions used in the London 2007 and the Yerevan 2015 Communiqué, but also should aim to go beyond this**. Within the new definition adopted by the Advisory Group, social dimension encompasses the creation of an inclusive environment in higher education that fosters equity and diversity, and is responsive to the needs of local communities. The AG kept in mind the common understanding that social dimension goes beyond identifying vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups of students and that social dimension principles should be integrated into the core higher education functions, which include among others Learning and teaching, Research, Knowledge exchange and outreach, Institutional governance and management and Policies for empowering students and staff.

For this reason, the Advisory Group is proposing a forward-looking strategic document for higher education development in this field, which we are proposing to be annexed to the Ministerial Communiqué, with a clear commitment to its full implementation over the upcoming decade. We believe that this document has been widely consulted, not just within the AG but also within the BFUG at large, and that therefore it is time to have a clear political commitment from ministers to truly improve the social dimensionS of higher education. The document aims to define ten principles for social dimension in higher education for upcoming decade of the Bologna process 2020-2030. Each principle is also accompanied with a set of guidelines that explain the implementation process.

Without entering into the merits of each of the PAGs, it is good to note the following overarching aims that the group intends to improve with the adoption and implementation of this document. Before doing this, it is also crucial to note that the Advisory Group notes that the Introductory part of the document still needs to be thoroughly improved. The aim is to take the feedback received into consideration, and concretely propose an Introduction to the group by our next (and last) meeting which will take place in Copenhagen on the 11th of February. The intention is also to finalise the wording of the PAGs during this meeting, as we hope to finalise the entire document ideally by the next BFUG meeting.

One of the primary aims of the work of the AG1 is to ensure that the social dimension becomes central to higher education strategies at national, regional, local and institutional level, as well as at the EHEA and the EU level. Secondly, through the PAGs we want to ensure a holistic approach to social dimension which will aim to create coherent policy measures from early childhood, through schooling and into higher education and throughout lifelong learning. This will mean more connectivity between the work of those responsible for Higher Education and other ministries and departments, which only together can bring about a tangible change.

Through the adoption and implementation of these PAGs, we also want to ensure that governments continue to support higher education institutions to strengthen their capacity in responding to the needs of a more diverse student body, particularly through continuing professional training for both academic and administrative staff. It is useless advocating to achieve the definition adopted in the London Communique on social dimension, unless efforts are made in this regard.

Data collection is also central to the improvement of social dimension. Whilst understanding the restrictions imposed by national laws, higher education systems should define goals of collecting certain types of data and to develop the necessary capacities to collect, process and use such data to support the social dimension policy. The PAGs also put emphasis on the need of ensuring effective counselling and guidance for potential and enrolled students as well as on establishing a strategic framework for higher education funding which promotes social dimension. The Group also demands that Mobility programs in higher education should be structured in a way that foster diversity, equity and inclusion and that community and civic engagement in higher education are used as an instrument to promote the same and not the opposite.

Lastly, the PAGs demand that Governments ensure that legal regulations enable higher education institutions to work effectively to improve the social dimension policies in accordance with the rest of the principles and that they ultimately engage in a policy dialogue with higher education institutions about how these principles can be implemented both at national system and institutional level.