



Working Group on Social Dimension (WG on SD)

First Meeting, Hosted by Croatia, Online*

Thursday, July 8, 2021

10.00-13.00 (Brussels time)

Minutes

List of Participants

Country	Name	Last Name
Albania	Jonada	Shaholli
Austria	Nada	Taha Ali Mohamed
Belgium Flemish Community	Patrick	Willems
Council of Europe	Katia	Dolgova-Dreyer
Croatia (Co-chair)	Ninoslav Ščukanec	Schmidt
Croatia	Mario	Vinković
Cyprus	Kyriacos	Charalambous
Denmark	Jacob	Blasius
EI - ETUCE	Annette	Dolan
ESU - European Students' Union (Co-chair)	Martina	Darmanin
EUA - European University Association	Henriette	Stoeber
EUROSTUDENT	Martin	Unger
France	Stéphane	Lauwick
Georgia	Khatia	Tsiramua
Germany	Iris	Kimizoglu
Italy	Raffaella Ida	Rumiati
Italy	Maria Antonietta	Ciclista
Lithuania	Neda	Zutautaitė
Malta	Madonna	Maroun
Poland	Monika	Przybysz
Romania	Mihai Cezar	Hâj
Romania	Horia	Oniță
Slovak Republic	Marcel	Vysocký
Slovenia	Mateja	Bercan
Spain	Margarita	de Lezcano-Mújica
Turkey	Lütfiye	Durak Ata
United Kingdom	Graeme	Atherton
United Kingdom	Angharad	Penny Evans
United Kingdom (Scotland)	Lynn	Kilbride
Eurydice	David	Crosier





BFUG Secretariat (Head)	Enida	Bezhani
BFUG Secretariat	Kristina	Metallari
BFUG Secretariat	Patrik	Bardhi

Kazakhstan Moldova and Russia did not attend the meeting. The Belgium French Community and the Netherlands sent in their regrets.

***Note:** Due to the extraordinary circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic, this meeting was held online.

Welcome and introduction to the meeting by the Co-chairs

Ninoslav Ščukanec Schmidt (Co-chair) and Martina Darmanin (Co-chair) welcomed everybody to the first meeting of the 2021-2024 work period and underlined the importance of developing SD (SD) policies that will create an inclusive environment in higher education, through fostering equity, diversity and responding to the needs of local communities

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda of the meeting was adopted without changes.

For more detailed information, please see *WG on SD_SI_AM_Draft Agenda*.

2. Achievements related to the SD of higher education in the European Higher Education Area: focus on the period 2018-2020

Ninoslav Ščukanec Schmidt (Co-chair) provided an overview of the developments of SD in the EHEA from 2003 to date, with special focus on the work of the BFUG Advisory Group on SD in 2018-2020.

The key output of the work of the 2018-2020 BFUG Advisory Group on SD was the development of a new, forward-looking strategic document for the period 2020-2030, aiming to develop a common understanding of the concept of the SD in HE, as well as principles and guidelines for SD.

The presentation also highlighted future steps and actions to further the work of the working group (WG)¹, which included:

¹ Under the 2021-2024 Work Plan, the previously called Advisory Group on Social Dimension is referred to as the Working Group on Social Dimension.



2.1. Future of principles and guidelines to strengthen the SD of the Higher Education in the EHEA

A new definition of *SD* has been developed, elaborating on the initial definition defined in the 2007 London Communiqué, integrating new needs of the local communities and fostering diversity and equity.

Forward, the WG on SD should define indicators and benchmarks for the principles of SD. In addition, the group should develop a system of monitoring the implementation of the principles.

2.2. New needs (due to the impact of Covid-19 on the SD of the EHEA)

The Covid-19 pandemic will have a negative impact on equity and social inclusion in pre-tertiary education, by reducing equal access to higher education and lowering the level of participation of at-risk students in higher education in the upcoming years.

Long-term 'scarring' effects will result in an unprecedented decline in social mobility, due to the rising economic and educational inequalities. As a result, new measures should be undertaken to overcome to some extent the effects of Covid-19.

2.3 New policy developments and opportunities for the SD of the EHEA

The development of policies ought to focus on placing the inclusion of underrepresented, vulnerable and disadvantaged groups as a top priority in the efforts to address the disruption caused by COVID-19.

2.4. Building a European movement for the SD of the EHEA

The main work of the group should focus on:

- Developing tools for the implementation of principles for the SD;
- Developing a system of monitoring the implementation of the principles and guidelines;
- Organizing peer support activities on SD, to support the implementation of the principles and guidelines among the EHEA members;
- Building a network of institutions and alliances, to organize capacity building events on SD in the EHEA and connect with European Universities initiatives.

For more detailed information, please see [Achievements of the SD by N.S.Schmid WG SD 7-2021.pptx](#).

3. Presentation of the Terms of Reference of the BFUG Working Group on SD 2021-2024

Martina Darmanin (Co-chair) provided an overview of the Terms of Reference (ToRs) of the WG on SD, which were approved in the BFUG meeting, hosted by Portugal on April 15-16, 2021. She emphasized the expected specific tasks and overall objectives to be achieved over the next





three years. The Co-chairs encouraged the members to participate in the planned upcoming projects, providing some examples of previous projects and progress achieved (i.e., SIDERAL, 3-IN-AT).

For more detailed information, please see *WG_SD_SI_AM_TORs*.

For more detailed information on the 3-IN-AT project, please see: https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/dam/jcr:73e8477b-ebe9-4b87-8aff-39524e7411a1/Mainstreaming_Social_Dimension_EHEA.pdf

4. Tour de Table

All members of the WG on SD introduced themselves and informed on the roles they hold within the organizations they represent.

5. Liaison with the BFUG Working Group on Monitoring the Implementation of the Bologna Process

David Crosier, Co-chair of the WG on Monitoring the Implementation of the Bologna Process provided an update on the development of indicators to assess the SD in HE and identified the overlapping points between the WG on SD and the WG on Monitoring. Furthermore, key findings related to SD in the recent *"The European higher education area in 2020: Bologna process implementation report"* were presented, indicating low levels of progress, as inequity remains most notably a strong feature of the European HE, with only a minority of countries having taken serious actions to address this issue.

An update was also provided on development of indicators to assess the SD in higher education by:

- Sticking closely to the spirit of the principles and guidelines;
- Providing clear conceptual definitions for data collection;
- Seeking objective, reliable information.

Several challenges were highlighted in relation to implementation and respecting different cultures and identifying specific characteristics of underrepresented groups. This was followed by potential solutions and indicator development approaches for future application.

Mr. Crosier affirmed that the Eurydice questionnaire has been sent out to their national units and data collection is ongoing. A forward-looking workflow was presented:

- Data collection to be finalized over the summer;
- Indicators should be available by early 2022, together with an initial picture of where Eurydice countries stand;
- Indicators to be discussed/adapted and proposed for the 2024 BPIR.

The EUA representative elaborated on the data collection and development of trends for 2023, emphasizing that EUA's work for the previous working periods consisted on developing trends



that were very closely in line with what was asked in the BPIR, from the viewpoint of the higher education institutions (HEIs). However, in the last round, EUA developed trends following a specific theme (i.e., L&T). Nonetheless, EUA proposed to take a more traditional approach, as well as review the nature of the questions by including themes on SD, institutional strategies for diversity and inclusion, the implementation process etc. As previously mentioned, this WG will work closely with the WG on Monitoring, therefore, the EUA representative welcomed consultations on questions to be included in the EUA questionnaire.

Several remarks were made on the development of indicators:

- *The total population of students:* As some countries have a high number of international students enrolled in their HE systems, it was suggested to look at domestic students only. Thus, a proper definition of the total population of students was required, in order to assess indicators on the topic;
- Gender segregation is a very common factor when looking at differences between social groups. However, the *choice of degrees and education subjects/programs* is affected by the diversity of the social groups as well. This is an underexplored area and it can be beneficial to look into it when developing the indicators;
- It was observed that there are legal limitations that prevent data collection on students' ethnicity. While some countries may not have legal constraints in this area, per se, it is still not ethical to collect such data.

These remarks were acknowledged by Eurydice, adding that their team will determine where data protection regulations are in place, so that this area can be clarified. Furthermore, it was stated that the Eurydice project is more of a starting point to indicate what is feasible for European level indicators in relation to the guidelines. The Eurydice questionnaire was agreed to be shared among members as it can provide this group with valuable feedback for the upcoming works.

6. The development of indicators and benchmarks for the principles included in the "Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen (PAGs) the SD of Higher Education in the EHEA"

The goal of this discussion was to collect different views on how to develop indicators and benchmarks for the SD principles included in the PAGs. The draft Work Plan indicates that in the period September 2021 – June 2022, the focus of the WG meetings will be on peer-learning activities and on examples of best-practices related to the implementation of the PAGs' principles (it also includes discussion on new indicators related to the PAGs). Subsequently, the Co-chairs suggested inviting stakeholders in the last quarter of 2021 WG's meetings, to gather their input and viewpoints in relation to the implementation of the PAGs: through their direct experience in the implementation process or indirectly through their assessment expertise of the implementation of the PAGs. The group members were invited to provide suggestions on stakeholders that can contribute to the development of indicators or the implementation process. The main outcomes of such discussions with the stakeholders will be used to define



the approach on how to implement the principles and how to develop indicators for each principle.

Following the meeting, an online questionnaire would be sent out to the members to collect ideas on developing new indicators for the social dimension principles. Following the first meeting, David Crosier will share the Eurydice questionnaire (for feed-back from the WG-members). The Co-chairs will prepare another questionnaire to be sent to the WG members, following the WG meeting in November 2021.

For more detailed information, please see Workplan 2021-2024_N.S.Schmidt_WG SD_7-2021.

7. Workplan 2021-2024 with the timeline of key activities

A draft Work Plan of the WG on SD for the period 2021-2024 outlining the way of working and the timelines of the key activities was presented. Peer learning activities will be organized and examples of best practices on the implementation of principles will be provided. The dates for the second and third online meetings were proposed - October 8, 2021 and November 19, 2021 respectively. It was decided that the Work Plan would be finalized at the second meeting of the WG on SD.

The future work will focus mainly on discussions related to the development of indicators and benchmarks for the PAGs, as well as development of a monitoring system for the implementation of principles. The Co-chairs suggested that 2 meetings be organized until the end of 2021 and 3 meetings be organized during January -June 2022 (concrete dates to be decided in November 2021). The BFUG Secretariat will send out doodle surveys to confirm the meeting dates for 2021.

The Co-chairs would keep the members updated on the upcoming steps related to the work of the WG on SD.

8. Wrap up and conclusions

The Co-chairs listed a number of resources (literature, policy briefs, WG on SD documents) found on the EHEA website (www.ehea.info) and underlined the work methods, involving communication via Co-chairs and the BFUG Secretariat.

9. A.O.B

No other business was brought forward, therefore, the first meeting of the WG on SD was concluded.