



## WORKING GROUP ON SOCIAL DIMENSION

Hosted by Croatia, Second Meeting, Online\*  
6 October 2021  
10.00-14.00 (Brussels time)

### Minutes

### List of Participants

Country	Name	Last Name
Albania	Jonada	Shaholli
Belgium French Community	Caroline	Hollela
Croatia (Co-chair)	Ninoslav	Šćukanec Schmidt
Croatia	Mario	Vinkovic
Cyprus	Kyriacos	Charalambous
Cyprus	Alexandra	Petridou
EI-ETUCE	Annette	Dolan
Estonia	Janne	Pukk
ESU (Co-chair)	Martina	Darmanin
EUA	Henriette	Stoeber
Eurydice (Guest)	David	Crosier
European Commission	Lucie	Trojanova
EUROSTUDENT	Martin	Unger
EUROSTUDENT	Kristina	Hauschildt
France	Stephane	Lauwick
Germany	Iris	Kimizoglu
Italy	Rafaella Ida	Rumiati
Italy	Maria Antonietta	Ciclista
Kazakhstan	Indira	Abilmazhinova
Lithuania	Andrius	Zalitis
Malta	Madonna	Maroun
The Netherlands	Berto	Bosscha
Poland	Monika	Przybysz
Romania	Mihai Cezar	Hâj
Romania	Horia	Oniță





Russia	Valeria	Gevondyan
Slovak Republic	Marcel	Vysocký
Slovenia	Maja	Švent
Slovenia	Mateja	Bercan
United Kingdom	Graeme	Atherton
United Kingdom	Angharad	Penny Evans
U-Multirank	Frans	Kaiser
U-Multirank	Anete	Veidemane
BFUG Secretariat	Kristina	Metallari
BFUG Secretariat	Patrik	Bardhi
BFUG Secretariat	Alesia	Gegushi

Council of Europe sent in their regrets. Austria, Denmark and Georgia did not attend the meeting.

### 1. Welcome remarks and approval of the Agenda

The Co-chairs welcomed everybody to the second meeting of the 2021-2024 work period and provided an outline of its agenda, which was adopted without changes. The MoM of the first meeting were approved by all members as well.

Ninoslav S. Schmidt (Co-chair) provided a summary of the main outputs of the first meeting (8 July 2021). He highlighted the objectives and methods of work for the upcoming year and stressed the importance of continuing the work of the previous Advisory Group (AG) on Social Dimension by building on its main outcomes. The previous AG succeeded in creating a broad definition of SD and developed a new strategic document on Principles and Guidelines (PAGs) to strengthen the Social Dimension. Thus, this working group (WG) ought to continue to support these principles and materialize the new definition of Social Dimension through fostering equity, diversity and responding to the needs of the local communities.

To achieve this, the group needs to develop a framework for the implementation of principles and guidelines, which will focus on: supporting public authorities in the implementation of principles at the national level and help them engage in dialogue with stakeholders and HEIs to develop policies for the principles. Specific objectives for this mandate will include the organization of peer support activities to support the development of principles, developing tools for the implementation of principles, defining indicators and benchmarks for the principles and developing a system of monitoring for the implementation process of the principles.



This meeting was dedicated to the peer-learning activity related to the principle number 4, which refers to collecting reliable data for social dimension development. A brief overview of the work plan of the first year (2021/22) was provided, along with the methods of work that will be applied.

For more detailed information, please see *WG\_SD\_SI\_AM\_2\_Summary of Main Outputs of Last Meeting.pptx*

For more detailed information, please also see [http://ehea.info/Upload/Rome\\_Ministerial\\_Communique\\_Annex\\_II.pdf](http://ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique_Annex_II.pdf)

## 2. Update from the European Commission/Eurydice

David Crosier provided a brief introduction on the most recent developments of EC/Eurydice's questionnaire on *Fostering Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education*. He delivered background information on the need for long term indicators to track the implementation of PAGs in the EHEA and to follow the progress on social inclusion in the EEA.

He also highlighted key aspects of the Eurydice's feasibility study (to be completed by February 2022), mainly on the collection of data at the national level, so that the state of national policy action to implement the PAGs can be analyzed. Nonetheless, assessing implementation in HEIs remains a challenge.

Mr. Crosier gave an overview of the state of play on the questionnaire and underlined that that national units have completed it and the information obtained is currently being analyzed and evaluated. Once the analysis stage is completed, indicators will be developed and discussed for further use by this group. An initial draft of the report structure was provided. With regards to the PAGs, Mr. Crosier also highlighted observations/challenges that arose specifically for each PAG.

An idea was proposed that due to its comprehensive data, this questionnaire could potentially serve as a monitoring tool for the PAGs for this group. However, while some of the conclusions of the report can be applied in assessing the implementation of some PAGs, the questionnaire does not cover any institutional level data, so the Co-chairs will need to include some other tools. The questionnaire results will serve as a strong starting point, but will not include all that is needed for this group.

Martina Darmanin (Co-chair) added that one of the advantages of this questionnaire is that, in many sections, it includes questions on whether QA agencies are responsible for assessing aspects of the PAGs. Through this, the WG



on SD can assess the empirical reality, as well as the extent of provision that would be too complex to assess through the Bologna Implementation Report (BPIR).

Overall, the response rate was relatively positive, despite some countries having yet to complete the questionnaire. And although it was difficult to attain a balanced level of detail through all sections and remove all areas of ambiguity in the structuring of the questions, the data obtained indicates a reasonably good information base to construct indicators.

To conclude, the questionnaire should be considered as a system of monitoring the implementation of PAGs, but not as a standalone system. The possibilities on how to establish close cooperation with other BFUG working structures and the European Commission will also be explored. From the preliminary results, it was noted that countries have not begun to implement the PAGs yet. Therefore, the Co-chairs will work with the BFUG working structures to find ways on initiating the implementation process at the national level and encouraged members to do the same (via their work with public authorities).

For more detailed information, please see *WG\_SD\_SI\_AM\_2\_Eurydice\_Equity Questionnaire\_2021.pptx*.

### **3. Principle and Guideline No. 4: Peer-Learning Activity IA**

Kristina Hauschildt and Martin Unger (Eurostudent) presented key findings from the [Eurostudent VII Synopsis of Indicators report](#) on the social and economic conditions of student life in Europe. Kristina Hauschildt provided an overview of the key EUROSTUDENT survey results, as well as some background information on different demographics and topics, mainly:

- the underrepresented, disadvantages and vulnerable student groups;
- impact of age in education;
- financial reliance on family/partners to complete one's studies;
- educational and financial background of family members/relatives;
- study conditions.

Information was presented in regard to the EUROSTUDENT data collection process, as well as key considerations and challenges of students (i.e., time budget, financial difficulties, housing costs, insufficient grants, employment).

The project included 25 countries, from which aggregated indicators were provided according to international standards, with some countries also providing micro data (available for scientific purposes). Limitations of the EUROSTUDENT





study were also identified, such as national specifics and sometimes small samples leading to insufficient data. Therefore, it is recommended to organize (whenever possible) qualitative studies (along with quantitative EUROSTUDENT surveys), in the form of an online "focus groups" to obtain more analytical data.

Overall, the EUROSTUDENT representatives stressed the importance of focusing on students' needs. They suggested that:

- All countries should conduct student surveys and invest in larger samples and national research to obtain a detailed analysis for their country according to their specific needs;
- A permanent research team be in place in every country to make use of the various data sources available.

#### **4. Principle and Guideline No. 4: Peer-Learning Activity IB**

Frans Kaiser (U-Multirank) presented the key findings from the [U-Multirank concept paper](#) on new indicator development on social inclusion (2020) and the proposal for New Social Inclusion Indicators in U-Multirank (2021) in the context of BFUG. He highlighted the need for new indicators to be developed, as a result of HEIs being increasingly expected to contribute to societal issues. Their current contribution and progress need to be measured by internationally comparable and meaningful indicators.

The data collection process and methodology were introduced. A literature review was conducted, including relevant policy documents and existing indicators in rankings/projects. In addition, an indicator assessment by stakeholders was performed.

Anete Veidemane (U-Multirank) presented categories of existing indicators and proposed new indicators of social inclusion for these categories. The next steps for the development of new indicators were proposed:

- Inclusion of new questions on the prepared questionnaire;
- Engagement in discussions with experts to identify challenges and current practices;
- Determination of concrete actions from the expert meetings and presentation of a short list of promising indicators;
- Results of the process to be displayed through webinar sessions and three papers.





The Co-chairs observed that all the organizations which presented their contributions to the group (U-Multirank, Eurydice, and EUROSTUDENT) support the implementation of Principle No

. 4, as well as other interconnected principles.

Brief overview of the discussion related to the presentations of the EUROSTUDENT and U-MULTIRANK:

An observation was made that in the U-Multirank questionnaire, focus is placed on students following research university-focused curricula and are high achievers. However, U-Multirank explained that they include not only research university-focused curricula and high-end institutions in their questionnaires, but also study programs related to universities of applied sciences and many other smaller higher education institutions.

It was suggested that a differentiation be made between domestic and international students by U-Multirank, when it comes to the reference group. This is due to the diversity in terms of the background of international students. Thus, when creating a reference group, focus should be placed rather on a highly domestic or regional group of students. This was considered a valid point by U-Multirank, however, the final decision needs to be made by the experts.

The EUROSTUDENT representatives were asked about the small sample size of their questionnaire and that they replied that this depends on the country's HE system or country's investment in this area, financial restrictions or capacity-building restrictions.

From the projects conducted, an upwards trend has been observed by the EUROSTUDENT, but with a gradual growth, with some countries showing reluctance to join. One of the conditions to join is the willingness of the Ministry to take the decision to join, to collect the data, to find experts and researchers with the experience and availability, to execute the survey and work with EUROSTUDENT. Also, EUROSTUDENT creates a network of the participating countries, so that countries have the opportunity to exchange practices on what can be done to work on the social dimension strategy, how to use data in order to improve policy solutions, etc. Croatia and Austria are good country examples of best practices.

The members of the WG were encouraged to send any additional proposals in regard to the development of the indicators to the U-Multirank representatives, as well as any proposals for the EUROSTUDENT questionnaire. These proposals can be sent to the BFUG Secretariat, which will then deliver to the relevant





representatives.

## 5. Finalizing Workplan 2021-2024 of the BFUG Working Group on Social Dimension (WG SD)

Mr. Schmidt presented an outline of the work plan for the first year 2021/22, including the potential activities and methods of work (tools, indicators, benchmarks, system of monitoring). This WG will hold 5 meetings per year. The third meeting in the 2021 will be held online on November 16, 2021, where experts will be invited to present what has been developed for Principle No. 8 on 'Inclusive mobility' and its different tools. The Co-chairs will provide an update to the BFUG Board and BFUG meetings respectively, on the work plan, recent developments and progress of the group.

Several proposals on the work plan for the first year were presented:

- For Principle No. 8, it was suggested that the European Commission presents an overview of the Erasmus+ program due to its priority for social inclusion. The program has in place a strategy and funding framework to achieve inclusivity (to be published in November). Thus, the Commission could provide valuable comments and further inform the group on this area. The Commission confirmed that a presentation on the Erasmus+ program can be delivered in the next meeting;
- A bottom-up approach was suggested for students, so that they can exchange information among each other. This in turn can help in the process of policy-making for HEIs and national governments. If this is achieved, the group should think of developing indicators to monitor this process;
- Inclusiveness ought to also focus around internationalization and mobility. The group was encouraged to focus on ways to make the HE system more accessible and give more students the opportunity to participate in internationalization activities. If this is achieved, the group can work on defining and monitoring the participation rate of students in these activities;
- An exchange of information among members was suggested to be included in the next meeting, so that they can share their experiences/practices with their respective national agencies/public authorities. This can help in the identification of best practices in relation to the implementation process of the PAGs;
- A proposal was made to obtain some input from experts that specialize in the development of monitoring systems, to help the group in creating their





own monitoring system. Further suggestions on the monitoring system within the EHEA framework stated that the development should be done with the help of the WG on Monitoring.

The members discussed on the system of monitoring and whether to use the one from Eurydice or propose a new one. Additionally, the question whether new indicators should be developed or use the existing indicators from organizations like U-Multirank, the European Commission and EUROSTUDENT was pondered. Due to the available indicators, it was suggested that it would be better to use the existing ones and focus on the development of tools to support the implementation of the principles.

EUROSTUDENT observed that the Bologna Process extends beyond the European Union (EU), and in many initiatives, it has been observed that countries outside the EU do not engage regularly. It was stated that it is not necessary to develop new indicators for social dimension, however more precise questions should be asked in the Eurydice questionnaire, in relation to the programs or tools that the countries are participating in or using. Countries should firstly generate data on their own and use the data to improve the situation of their students at a national level (either from EUROSTUDENT or by themselves). Then, the second step would focus on the comparison of data at an international level.

Mr. Crosier explained that the Eurydice questionnaire has geographical limitations. He suggested that more countries be participating in EUROSTUDENT, so as to challenge these limitations, as the aim is to get the best possible value of what already exists and see what better developments and data collection can take place.

The willingness to have the meetings as of 2022 in person or as hybrid was also emphasized by the members. Following this meeting, the delivered presentations will be shared with all the members via the BFUG Secretariat and will be uploaded online on the EHEA webpage. The Co-chairs encouraged the members once again to make proposals or suggestions on the work plan and share them with the BFUG Secretariat to be further distributed to the Co-chairs.

It was agreed that the Secretariat will send Doodle polls to the WG SD members for all the WG SD meetings in 2022 (5 meetings) – the Doodle would be sent following this meeting. The Co-chairs will inform members on the Doodle results at the next meeting on November 16 with the goal being to confirm the dates for all meetings in 2022 already then. Members concluded that place/venues of the 2022 meetings should be decided gradually in the upcoming months, taking into





the consideration the current state of the Covid-19 pandemic. At the meeting on November 16, 2021, members should decide about place/venue of the WG SD meeting for February 2022:

- The meeting could be held on-line, in the hybrid mode or only on-site;
- In the event the members of the WG on SD decide to hold the meeting on-site and/or in the hybrid mode, country representatives/Ministry representatives will be invited to propose hosting the WG on SD meeting in their country/in their premises.

## 6. AOB

The Co-chairs invited members to provide any update on important initiatives that could enhance the work of the WG on SD. Graeme Atherton (UK) provided an update on initiatives related to social dimension of HE:

- World Access to Higher Education Day 2021: An online conference ('Equitable access and success through and post the pandemic'), will be held on November 17, 2021, which will entail discussions and activities on how to shape a more equitable future for higher education and address access, equality and success in higher education.
- Research projects related to practices and policies to achieve access and success in SD and HE across the world, due to the impact of the pandemic on HE. Events will be organized in partnership with relevant organizations to discuss and potentially adjust some of the gaps in participation and success caused by the pandemic, as well as identify the steps/actions necessary to ensure that policy makers provide solutions for mitigating negative impact of pandemics on HE and more specifically on SD. These projects will be focused on a global scale, thus, a greater exchange of information and experiences will be available.

The Co-chairs updated the group of a new Erasmus+ project application (application submitted on October 7), in partnership with the Ministry of the Belgium Flemish Community. The project application supports the implementation of SDPAGs and will involve peer learning activities. Through this project, the group would be able to organize more PLAs for SD and will provide more opportunities for the members to participate in such activities in the upcoming three years. The results of the application process will be announced by the Co-chairs at the



beginning of next year.

### 7. Concluding remarks

The Co-chairs notified members that their suggestions will be taken in consideration for the agenda of the next meeting, and for the organization of this group's work in general. They thanked everyone for their participation and concluded the second meeting of the WG on SD.