



*Last updated: 06/12/2021*

## WORKING GROUP ON SOCIAL DIMENSION

Third Meeting, Online,  
16 November 2021  
10.00-14.00 hours (CET, Brussels time)

### Minutes

#### List of Participants

No.	Country	Name	Last Name
1	Albania	Iliriana	Topulli
2	Austria	Nada	Taha Ali Mohamed
3	Belgium Flemish Community	Patrick	Willems
4	Belgium French Community	Caroline	Hollela
5	Council of Europe	Katia	Dolgova-Dreyer
6	Croatia (Co-chair)	Ninoslav Šćukanec	Schmidt
7	Croatia	Mario	Vinkovic
8	Cyprus	Kyriacos	Charalambous
9	Cyprus	Alexandra	Petridou
10	Denmark	Jacob	Blasius Thomsen
11	EI - ETUCE	Annette	Dolan
12	Estonia	Janne	Pukk
13	ESU (Co-chair)	Martina	Darmanin
14	EUA	Henriette	Stoeber
15	European Commission	Lucie	Trojanova
17	EUROSTUDENT	Martin	Unger
18	France	Stéphane	Lauwick
19	Georgia	Khatia	Tsiramua
20	Germany	Iris	Kimizoglu
21	Italy	Raffaella Ida	Rumiati
22	Italy	Maria Antonietta	Ciclista
23	Lithuania	Andrius	Zalitis
24	Malta	Madonna	Maroun
25	The Netherlands	Berto	Bosscha
26	Poland	Monika	Przybysz
27	Romania	Mihai Cezar	Hâj
28	Romania	Horia	Oniță
29	Russia	Valeria	Gevondyan
30	United Kingdom	Graeme	Atherton
31	United Kingdom	Angharad	Penny Evans



32	SIHO – Support Centre Inclusive Higher Education (Guest)	Valerie	Van Hees
33	European Commission (Guest)	Svava	Berglind
34	European Commission (Guest)	Nadia	Manzoni
35	BFUG Secretariat	Kristina	Metallari
36	BFUG Secretariat	Irma	Sheqi
37	BFUG Secretariat	Patrik	Bardhi

Liechtenstein, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom (Scotland) were absent.

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

The Co-chairs welcomed everybody to the third meeting of the 2021-2024 work period. The agenda of the meeting was adopted without changes and the minutes of the second WG on SD meeting were approved without additional remarks. Martina Darmanin (Co-chair) provided an overview of an informal meeting with the Task Force on Increasing Synergies among EHEA-EEA-ERA to consider methods to establish cooperation and synergies amongst the existing entities such as the ERA Forum for Transition and the EEA Working Groups. This cooperation would complement the Terms of Reference of the SD WG as the new SD definition presumes that the SD Principles are supposed to be engrained into the core HEI mission: learning and teaching, research and outreach as well as the implementation of the PAGs serve to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, that is one of the specific topics tasked for this cooperation mechanism.

For more detailed information, please see [WG SD SI AM 3 Draft Agenda](#).

### 2. Summary of the main conclusions from the last meeting (6 October 2021)

Ninoslav S. Schmidt (Co-chair) summarized the major conclusions from the WG's most recent meeting. He highlighted the need to materialize the new definition of social dimension, through creating an inclusive atmosphere in higher education that fosters equity, diversity, and local community needs. The importance of creating a framework for implementing the Principles and Guidelines (PAGs) and contextualizing the group's work with the other BFUG working structures was further emphasized. The SD WG has already established good cooperation with the WG on Monitoring and the Ad-hoc TF on increasing synergies among EHEA-EEA-ERA, and aims to start collaboration with other working structures in the long run. PLAs, workshops on how to establish tools, indicators, and a monitoring system were listed as the methods of work. The first PLAs focused on the establishment of a monitoring system and on Principle No. 4 (collection of reliable data) of the PAGs, with U-Multirank and EUROSTUDENT colleagues as guest speakers to provide information on indicators on social inclusion and contribute to the data collection process.

### 3. Principle and Guideline No.8: Peer-Learning Activity

#### 3.1. Support Centre Inclusive Higher Education (SIHO)



Valérie Van Hees (SIHO) presented an overview of the SIHO project aimed to make mobility programs more inclusive. The SIHO initiative intends to assist policymakers and HEIs in developing and implementing equity and inclusion measures for the higher education system. The importance of inclusive mobility was emphasized at both the national and European levels. The methodology was introduced, which included desk research; surveys of students, universities, Ministries; as well as focus groups. It was critical to conduct a multi-perspective study as the data initiated institutional and national level dialogue on the issues faced by students, HEIs, and national authorities, through peer learning and coaching activities.

The [InclusiveMobility.eu](#) was presented as the European platform for exchanging information on inclusion and support services offered by HEIs, NA and Ministries of Education to international students. The platform is the result of a collaboration between the Belgian Flemish Ministry of Education and Training and the SIHO-Support Centre for Inclusive Higher Education on the Erasmus+ project EPFIME. The platform's main goal is to provide information about inclusion measures in relation to mobility programs from both HEIs and public authorities in the EHEA. The inclusive mobility definition was introduced, and it was noted that it was quite similar to the inclusive mobility definition used by this WG. The Inclusive Mobility framework and Self-Assessment Tool were designed as tools of the InclusiveMobility Platform aimed for HEIs, NA and Ministries of Education.

The Inclusive Mobility framework focuses on measures on a national level and provides information on different areas (i.e., inclusion in mobility strategies, awareness and cooperation, promotion, funding), whereas the Self-Assessment Tool provides a visual overview in order to set up a concrete plan on an institutional/national level. One of the recommendations from the Self-Assessment Tool, was to encourage students who went abroad to share their experiences with other students. It was suggested that the Inclusive Mobility framework and Self-Assessment Tool could help with the implementation of Principle 8, within the SD principles and guidelines.

SIHO is also working on a new internationalization strategy, with action points including the coordination of the Learning Network on inclusive mobility, equality in higher education institutions, etc. On a similar topic, the Welsh government announced the beginning of a new international learning exchange program. Belgium Flemish Community was identified as a good practice example in terms of cooperation with public authorities and HEIs, development of social dimension policy and their methods of work with HEIs. Other country examples of cooperation with public authorities and organization of PLAs included Austria and the Netherlands. To conclude, the importance of the previously mentioned tools was emphasized as very relevant for the implementation of the SD Principle no. 8, related to inclusive mobility.

For more information, please see [SIHO-Support Centre Inclusive Higher Education](#)

### 3.2. Inclusiveness in the new Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027

Martina Darmanin (Co-chair) introduced the session indicating the main topics of discussion:



prioritization of social inclusion in the new Erasmus program; support of the implementation of P&G on inclusive mobility. The horizontal priorities for the new Erasmus+ program (2021-2027) were listed: inclusion and diversity; digital transformation; environment; participation in democratic life.. The role of the European Commission, Erasmus+ National Agencies and HEIs in the framework of the new Erasmus+ program was explained.

A comparison of the Erasmus+ (2014-2020) and Erasmus+ (2021-2027) programs was presented. The Erasmus +program's target group was redefined from "students of a disadvantaged background" to "students/recent graduates with fewer opportunities". Blended mobility was highlighted as a stepping stone to long-term mobility with the aim of introducing new and more flexible mobility formats; encouraging collaborative online and international learning and most importantly reaching all types of students and cycles. Given that this is the first year of the program, the data collecting and monitoring systems should be properly configured so that the designed decisions and financial instruments can be monitored on whether they are yielding an effect. The templates for all Erasmus+ survey questions have been regulated to detect whether the financial support is adequate enough. Moreover, the NA will begin developing inclusion strategies and monitoring how HEIs assist their students, as well as marketing ERASMUS mobilities. The Erasmus+ app was described as a tool that empowers students by providing information about the mobility journey (in all E+ languages), peer support, and BuddySystem integration. This software is intended to aid students in providing support prior to their mobility, which has previously been a problem for them.

Concerns about the new program components that may arise were discussed, including whether the increased top-ups would have an impact on the number of students schools will send on Erasmus in the first year of the program, when HE funding is lower. More issues focused on the procedure for monitoring the European Charter for Higher Education (ECHE), as well as data privacy of students applying to participate in the program, and the risk of stigmatization due to the stratification of students.

During the discussion, the Dutch example was shared wherein national agencies wanted to give the HEIs the possibility to choose which groups to support with the top-ups. This was received negatively and reinstated as a national competency as different institutions had different criteria on which groups of students to choose, causing unequal treatment of students from the same social groups but from different institutions. Other discussion points included the suggestion that equality and inclusion officers play a more practical role in supporting students with fewer opportunities; introducing reserved places/quotas as a positive way of motivating students with fewer opportunities to participate in the program; and, demonstrating the program's benefits to students from similar backgrounds.

Because one of the responsibilities of the SD WG is to build a monitoring framework, and one of the principles and guidelines (Principle 8) refers to inclusive mobility, it was suggested that the new Erasmus+ monitoring system be used by this WG as well. The NA and HEIs' data sources were discussed so that the WG is aware of what this monitoring system will provide. It was emphasized that HEIs have access to resources to help them implement the ECHE, including increased organizational support, funding, and NA support. Universities could collaborate to develop a blended intensive program on how to apply the ECHE, according to one suggestion. It was noted that for each category of students with fewer opportunities, information and awareness about the program's prospects and inclusion support mechanisms



may need to be imparted and customized to their national and sector-specific context. In order to accomplish this, Erasmus+ and European national agencies are encouraged to provide appropriate and accessible material, establish various outreach and information channels, share best practices, and proactively target and contact organizations working in the fields of inclusion and diversity. Inclusion and diversity officers will be appointed in national agencies to help with the implementation of these objectives.

#### **4. Discussion: How to create indicators, benchmarks and a system of monitoring the implementation of the 'Principles and Guidelines'?**

Based on prior Peer-Learning Activities organized within the WG SD, it was discussed on how to find ways of creating indicators, benchmarks, and a monitoring system for the 'Principles and Guidelines'. As the EC/Eurydice questionnaire on *Fostering Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education* is not structured for institutional level monitoring of the implementation of the 'Principles and Guidelines', it was discussed how to deal with this limit and how to make this questionnaire relevant for the entire EHEA.

The WG SD will collaborate closely with David Crosier to explore if the Eurydice questionnaire may help with the implementation of the SD principles and recommendations by supplementing the Bologna Implementation report. It was also proposed that collaboration with the European Commission be pursued in order to avoid duplication of effort. It was proposed that the findings of the Eurydice questionnaire, as well as sources from EUROSTUDENT, EUA and ESU can help in identifying indicators that can be monitored at national level, as well as indicators that can be monitored at institutional level.

It was concluded that the WG SD should continue organizing PLA's in order to cover all the principles listed in the PAGs – this could be achieved by extending the duration of the meetings in upcoming years. Additionally, it was concluded that it will be important to intensify activities related to the creation of the indicators and the system of monitoring – this could be achieved by creating subgroups, with the goal of working on different tasks between meetings and coming up with proposals for indicators or a monitoring system to present at the WG plenary meetings. The separation into subgroups was considered very valuable and it was recommended that the subgroups to be formed in February 2022.

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

The 2021-2024 Workplan proposal, containing the methods of work and timeline of key activities, was discussed in order to conclude upcoming steps related to the work of the WG SD. Based on the conclusions during the discussion, the co-chairs stated that they will create a finalized version of the workplan before the next meeting. Five meetings have been planned per year, however this is subject to change as work progresses. It was decided to have more discussions on how to create indicators for SD and system of monitoring the implementation of the PAGs in the upcoming meetings next year. The Malta representative offered to host the next WG on SD meeting in person, if Covid-19 regulations will allow. The meeting dates



presented by the co-chairs for the next 5 meetings in 2022 were confirmed by members. Further, the co-chairs notified that all relevant information and documents will be available on the EHEA website.

To conclude, the co-chairs will inform the WG at the beginning of January on the type of meeting to be held on February 17, 2022. The workplan will be prepared by co-chairs in December 2021, incorporating all the comments and information from this meeting. The final version of the workplan will be sent to the group members in December 2021/January 2022 by email for confirmation, to have the final document before the next WG SD meeting in February 2022.

## 6. AoB

The participants were asked to present any relevant updates on important initiatives that could enhance the work of WG SD. Both co-chairs stated that they will be attending the conference on the World Access to Higher Education Day and encouraged members to join as well. The UK representative provided some information on the speakers/organizations that will be present on this conference. Moreover, the co-chairs informed the members that they will be providing an update on the progress of the WG (main outcomes, work methods, workplan) at the BFUG meeting that will take place on December 1-2, 2021. After this meeting, a more concrete input on the Task Force for enhancing synergies between the EHEA-EEA-ERA will be available to the members, in order to create a link and enhance collaboration between this WG and the TF.

## 7. Concluding remarks

The co-chairs thanked the guest speakers for their contributions and feedback on Principle No. 8, as well as on how to structure the work on the indicators and monitoring system. All the meeting materials will be made available on the EHEA website. No other business was brought forward, thus the third meeting of the WG on SD was successfully concluded.