



WORKING GROUP ON SOCIAL DIMENSION

Seventh Meeting, Hosted by European University Association
29-30 September 2022

Minutes

List of Participants

Country	First Name	Last Name
Albania	Jonida	Shaholli
Austria	Sara	Velic
Belgium Flemish Community	Patrick	Willems
Belgium French Community	Caroline	Hollela
Croatia (Co-Chair)	Ninoslav Šćukanec	Schmidt
Cyprus	Alexandra	Petridou
Denmark	Jacob	Blasius
EI-ETUCE	Annette	Dolan
European Commission (EC)	Lucie	Trojanova
European Students Union (Co-Chair)	Horia	Onita
European University Association (EUA)	Henriette	Stoeber
European University Association (EUA)	Amanda	Crowfoot
European University Association (EUA)	Michael	Gaebel
European University Association (EUA)	Gohar	Hovhannisyan
Germany	Iris	Kimizoglu
Malta	Valerie	Attard
The Netherlands	Berto	Bosscha
The Netherlands	Arthur	Belle
Romania	Mihai Cezar	Haj
Slovenia	Maja	Svent
SIHO (Guest)	Valerie	Van Hees
WG on Learning and Teaching (Co-Chair)	Phillipe	Lalle
BFUG Secretariat (Head)	Oltion	Rrumbullaku
BFUG Secretariat	Kristina	Metallari
BFUG Secretariat	Jora	Vaso

Estonia, France, Italy, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey, UK and UK (Scotland) did not attend the meeting. Council of Europe and Georgia sent regrets.

Welcoming addresses by Amanda Crowfoot, Secretary General, EUA

Amanda Crowfoot (EUA) welcomed the WG members, thanking everyone for their contributions and efforts in the area of higher education. Ms. Crowfoot emphasized that this meeting was a great opportunity to discuss on the topics of diversity, equality and inclusion as these are all important components to EUA. She noted that inclusion is becoming a very strategic topic at universities, especially with regard to the content and quality of higher education. Ms. Crowfoot further underlined that diversity is becoming more and more valued throughout the HE system, which is advantageous for HEIs and helps to pinpoint areas of all inequities. Finally, Ms.

Crowfoot expressed her appreciation for the organization of the in-presence meeting, emphasizing the value of members being able to contribute their knowledge and expertise on a variety of themes, and concluded by extending her good wishes for a successful meeting.

1. Welcome remarks and approval of the agenda

The Co-Chairs welcomed everybody to the seventh meeting of the 2021-2024 work period and thanked the EUA representatives for hosting the corporeal meeting. The minutes of the sixth meeting were approved. Moreover, an outline of the agenda was provided, which was adopted without any changes. The new Co-Chair, Horia Onita, was introduced and he emphasized his desire to continue with the programme of work set out for the working group, particularly the focus on the establishment of indicators. He concluded by extending his good wishes for a fruitful meeting and discussions. A tour de table took place, during which all of the participants introduced themselves and explained their respective roles within the institutions/bodies they represented, as well as on their contribution to the social dimension group.

For more information, please see: [WG SD CZ KZ 7 Agenda](#)

For more information, please see: [WG SD FR AZ 6 Minutes of meeting](#)

2. Summary of the main conclusions from the last meeting: how will they guide our future work?

Ninoslav Š. Schmidt (Co-Chair) underlined the WG on SD's progress thus far, emphasizing the relevance of the revised definition of SD, as well as the specific objectives of the WG to organize peer support activities (PLAs) for the implementation of the Principles and Guidelines (PAGs) among the EHEA members, define indicators and benchmarks and develop a system of monitoring the implementation of the PAGs, in order to strengthen the social dimension of higher education in the EHEA.

The Work Plan 2021-2024 was presented containing the purpose, objectives and methods of work. Cooperation with other BFUG WGs, such as the WG on Monitoring, and the WG on Learning and Teaching, has also been established, with four coordination meetings having been held thus far with each WG respectively. Furthermore, a summary of the peer-learning activities (PLAs) that had been completed thus far was provided, allowing for a broad overview of the various initiatives, tools and indicators that have been developed throughout Europe. An Erasmus+ project (Peer Learning Activities and Resources to Underpin the Principles and Guidelines for Social Dimension) was approved in March 2022, and it will support the work of the WG on SD.

To develop indicators for the SD principles, three subgroups were formed within the WG, and their aims and work procedures were outlined. The first phase primarily focused on indicator development for each SD principle, and in the second phase that is expected to begin in October, the establishment of a monitoring mechanism for each principle will be developed.

Conclusions from the two previous WG meetings in Malta and the Hague were highlighted, with the underling aim to revise and finalize the PAGs document in this meeting, prior to being submitted to the WG on Monitoring, for the 2024 Bologna Process Implementation Report (BPIR). Finally, Mr. Schmidt expressed gratitude to the EUA representatives for hosting this corporeal meeting.

For more information please see: [WG overview of progress in 2021-2022](#)

3. Presentation of the project "Peer Learning Activities and Resources to underpin the Principles and Guidelines for Social Dimension" (PLAR-U-PAGs)

Valerie Van Hees (Support Centre for Inclusive Higher Education in Flanders, (SIHO)) provided an overview of the PLAR-U-PAGs project, which was selected for funding in the Erasmus+ KA3 call "Support to the implementation of EHEA reforms 2019". The general objective of this project was highlighted, that is to support national public authorities and higher education institutions (HEIs) across EHEA in the implementation of the PAGs, and to support the activities of the BFUG WG for Social Dimension 2021-2024.

Ms. Van Hees outlined the resources that will be made available as outputs of the project: a toolkit for the PAGs; a framework for self-assessment and guidelines on mental health; and a report on the PLAs to be held. She noted that all the sources will be accessible on the platform. A list of the project partners and experts was also provided.

Ms. Van Hees proceeded to introduce the Work Packages (WP) and their specific objectives. It was stated that WP1 will focus on project and quality management, monitoring and evaluation, followed by the WP2 with a focus on PLAs and aiming to ensure their successful completion regarding the PAGs for ministry representatives, higher education representatives and ESU correspondents. Each PLA will focus on 3-4 principles, with the first PLA focusing on principles 1,5 and 10, to be held in Croatia on November 2022, followed by the remaining ones on February, June and October 2023 respectively. It was explained that the PLAs are intended for 30 participants from up to 15 EHEA countries in different implementation stages, that will be engaged in mutual sharing and exchange of knowledge, issues, ideas on the PAGs. For each PLA, an open call and survey of the current status of implementation and good practices will be distributed by the BFUG Secretariat to the ministries of education of the EHEA countries.

It was also reported that WP3 will focus on the development of a toolkit that includes information on the PAGs and tools allowing HE authorities and institutions to support, monitor and assess the implementation of the PAGs at national and institutional level. Ms. Van Hees informed the meeting that the toolkit will be available on their website. In addition she stated that WP4 will focus on the development of a counselling and informative tool on student financial aid at the EHEA level, directly targeting potential and current students, and administrative staff involved in student counselling, as well as students' families and academic staff at HEIs indirectly.

The structure and organization of the PLAs was discussed. It was clarified that the PLAs were not exclusively for this WG, but open to BFUG members. The participation of HEIs particularly was discussed, to which it was informed that opportunities for HEIs have been facilitated through toolkits and surveys on mental health. According to the nomination made by the ministry representative responsible, the BFUG countries will also include the participation of two representatives, one of whom may be from the ministry and the other from the HEI. Additionally, it was encouraged to look for chances to collaborate with the WG on L&T and, when possible, involve them in some PLAs.

This complementary approach was highly praised, and as it was stated that it would assist in enhancing communication between ministries and HEIs. To accomplish this, as well as build national policies, the website and toolkits were noted as very helpful resources. Furthermore, by giving countries information and examples of best practices it was considered to be beneficial in assisting them to achieve or improve their HE system.

The members approved a proposal to connect the WG and PLA sessions by arranging them consecutively so that the WG could receive insights and feedback on the PLA discussions. In accordance with the dates Ms. Van Hees would provide for the next PLAs, the Secretariat would organize the doodle and coordinate the dates for the WG meeting.

For more information please see: [Peer Learning Activities and Resources to underpin the Principles and Guidelines for Social Dimension: Valerie Van Hees, Coordinator, SIHO](#)

4. Plenary work on indicators for social dimension

The Co-Chairs presented the PAGs document which would be revised by the WG, in order to be updated and shared with WG on Monitoring, subsequently presented for consultation and approval at the following BFUG meeting.

Principle 1

- Indicator 1¹

For the first sub-indicator, it was decided to reformulate it as follows: *"Public authority (PA) has developed an implementable strategy or a policy on social dimension enhancement in higher education that improves study and working conditions of underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students, and aims to create an inclusive environment in higher education."*

Following the first indicator, it was decided to divide students and staff as two separate indicators, adding another indicator as follows: *"Public authority (PA) has developed an implementable strategy or a policy on social dimension enhancement in higher education that improves working conditions of underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable staff, and aims to create an inclusive environment in higher education."*

The Co-Chairs clarified that the indicators should be used for the BPIR 2024 cycle as stand-alone items, while for the purpose of the BPIR 2024 the sub-indicators would serve more as guidance for the countries to follow when completing the survey. Even though the sub-indicators would not be taken into consideration by the BPIR 2024 by their own, they may be followed and/or assessed in another policy documents at the EHEA level, so they would be retained in the document for prospective use at a later time or to assist PA in future developments for their national environment.

Another comment included being more precise with wording. For instance, in relation to the term 'incentivize' it was suggested that this term to be clarified and changed to a more specific term, because ministries can interpret it in many ways. For example, when an interpretation might lead to the term "incentivize" being synonymous to funding, it was advised to directly use the term funding. Another similar verb mentioned was 'values' It was advised to explain through a methodological note on how the sub-indicators and indicators will be used, in the introduction of the document.

Further, a cultural distinction was observed, as in some countries a national strategy plan is not taken in consideration but major policy plans are, and vice versa. Thus, in order to help PAs comprehend each term and its meaning, it was decided to include a glossary list.

- Indicator 2

It was decided to remove the word 'easily' from the indicator formulation, and add the timeframe in the main indicator, not just in the sub-indicator. Hence, it was reworded as follows: *"Strategies and policies on social dimension of higher education have specific and measurable targets that are assessed and monitored by responsible bodies within concrete timeframes. (Eurydice, 2022).*

¹ Existence of a national strategy, or a similar major policy plan, on social dimension of higher education, which strengthens diversity, equity and inclusion of students and staff (Eurydice, 2022).

- Indicator 3

It was decided to remove the word 'broad-based'. Moreover, it was suggested that the indicator be defined more precisely, in relation to who the stakeholders are. In addition, it was decided that part of the second sub-indicator, namely "PA encourages the participation of representatives of underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students and staff in those assessments.", to be included as a separate, third sub-indicator.

- Indicator 4

It was decided to rephrase the first sub-indicator as follows: *"Quality assurance agencies provide structured training on social dimension in higher education to external reviewers engaged in external evaluations. This training should be delivered and co-created with underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students and staff."* It was mentioned in the second sentence of this sub-indicator that it might not be feasible to do this; while the wording "should be" is acceptable, it should be stated that it is challenging to accomplish. In general terms, it was agreed that when dealing with the activity of QA agencies

, we should directly mention the QA agencies, instead of referring to the PA which supports/requires/provides etc, since QA agencies are independent.

- Indicator 5

The following rephrasing was applied to the indicator: *"Existence of a national legal framework that enables recognized student representative body at HEIs to democratically represent all students, and to actively engage in the enhancement of social dimension."*

It was clarified that the "representative body" was applied as a middle ground term for unions, organizations and representatives. Furthermore, it was suggested that the word "regardless" be omitted.

Principle 2

- Indicator 1

On the first sub-indicator, the following changes were made: *"PA provides funding and requires HEIs to implement inclusive curriculum and tailor teaching and learning modes and methods to the needs of students and staff from underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups."* The term 'inclusive curriculum' was advised to be defined more concretely.

It was also suggested to change "endorses" to "provides support for" on the second sub-indicator. It was noticed that the third sub-indicator can be ambiguous because it can be interpreted as referring to staff as well. In this regard, the sub-indicator was clarified according to the proposal put forward by the WG.

The final sub-indicator was revised, and agreed to be re-formulated as: *"PA values outcomes of full time and part time studies equally."* It was advised that the text in the brackets be added as two distinct sub-indicators under Principle 6 due to the focus on funding. Hence this new sub-indicator would be formulated as 'Students from both full-time and part-time study programmes have access to adequate funding' and 'Students from both full-time and part-time study programmes have access to student support services'.

- Indicator 2

It was decided that part of the first sub-indicator "progressing through and completing higher education" be inserted as a separate sub-indicator in the third indicator. Hence, the first sub-

indicator would be as follows: *"PA has elaborated a national policy of recognizing prior non-formal and/or informal learning for the purpose of accessing higher education."*

- Indicator 3

It was agreed to remove part of the sub-indicator text, and it was revised as follows: *"PA ensures that legal provisions require using learning outcomes in the design of qualifications and study programs, in accordance with National Qualifications Frameworks."*

A new sub-indicator was added: *"PA has elaborated a national policy of recognizing prior non-formal and/or informal learning for the purpose of progressing through and completing higher education."*

- Indicator 4

The first sub-indicator was reworded as follows: *"Quality Assurance agencies and HEIs work jointly on the recognition of prior non-formal and/or informal learning to prevent parallel and opposing procedures, delays and extra costs for students."*

Principle 3

- Indicator 1

In the third sub-indicator, it was decided to remove the term 'incentivizes'. Moreover, it was suggested to add 'peer-learning-activities' in the second sub-indicator text.

- Indicator 3

For the first sub-indicator, the term 'incentivizes' was replaced and the following was proposed: *"PA provides support and guidance, and connects educational institutions and representatives of other policy areas to cooperate on solving the financing, employment, housing and related issues to help underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students avert the obstacles that hinder their involvement in general and further education."*

- Indicator 4

The 'delayed transition' term in the indicator text was referred to as vague, and one proposal suggested that it be reworded as "PA provides support to adult learners into HE."

In the first sub-indicator, it was agreed to remove the term 'senior' and the following was proposed: *"PA provides legal frameworks that ensure that there are no age-related restrictions on funding students."*

Recommendations for the second sub-indicator included replacing the term 'ensures' with 'support'; the term 'brochures' with 'information', and the following was concluded: *"PA supports public service centers outside of higher education system are equipped with information and guidelines for adults in higher education and lifelong learning options in higher education."*

Principle 4

- Indicator 1

In the indicator text, it was advised to indicate a frequency or time period for the data collection process, hence it was decided to include the term 'regular national data collection'.

It was decided to incorporate the statement "with focus on underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable learning groups", in the first sub-indicator, and modify the text to reflect this. In the sixth sub-indicator, the following reformulation was proposed: *"PA incentivises HEIs to organise regular, national surveys and research on the institutional level to understand underrepresentation, disadvantages, and vulnerability in education."* Following this, the text 'regular, national surveys' was advised to be included in all the respective, applicable sub-indicators.

The seventh sub-indicator was reformulated as: *"PA consults and collects data from HEIs and other stakeholders to identify barriers and good practices to support the social dimension enhancement."*

- Indicator 3

An addition was proposed in the text of the indicator: *"Existence and frequency of national data collection on staff characteristics and experiences in higher education, in order to enhance social dimension policies in higher education."*

- Indicator 5

It was decided that the first and second sub-indicators be reformulated as one: *"Participation in relevant EHEA or EU level student and graduate surveys (i.e., Eurograduate, Eurostudent, etc.)."* Moreover, the final sub-indicator² was agreed to be removed.

Principle 5

It was agreed to include the wording 'to potential and enrolled students' throughout the sub-indicators text.

- Indicator 1

In the text of the indicator, the word timely was added (together with free and accessible). In the second sub-indicator, the term 'supports' was reworded as 'facilitates'. In the third sub-indicator the term 'incentivizes' was reworded as 'requires and supports'.

- Indicator 2

The indicator text was adjusted as follows: *"The existence of a top-level legal requirement to provide free, accessible and timely psychological counselling and guidance services to potential and enrolled students as well as to staff in higher education (Eurydice, 2022)."*

The first sub-indicator was reworded as follows: *"PA supports access of students and staff to free and inclusive psychological counselling and guidance in higher education."*

The third sub-indicator was reworded as follows: *"PA provides funding to HEIs that provide free and inclusive psychological counselling and guidance in higher education."*

The final sub-indicator was reworded as follows: *"PA funds and requires HEIs that adapt their organization of studies and students' living conditions in a way that prevent or mitigate potential psychological challenges."*

Principle 6

- Indicator 1

² PA provides support to HEIs for the participation in the U-Multirank project, which uses multidimensional and user-driven approach to create a better understanding of HEIs performance, also in fostering social inclusion.

For the sub-indicator, the following change was amended: *"Local and regional context HEIs and socio-economic context of their students and staff is considered for determining the amount of public funding that higher education institutions receive to support underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups."* Further, it was proposed to add potential students and staff in brackets, in the sub-indicator text.

- Indicator 2

It was proposed to add 'share of first cycle students' to the indicator text. In addition, the second sub-indicator was reworded as: *"Existence of a mechanism that takes into account the local, social and economic context of students as a criterion for deciding on the type and amount of the student financial support."*

- Indicator 3

The term 'indirect' in the indicator text was decided to be added to the glossary for further clarification. Additionally, a decision was made to compile a list of quantitative indicators as an annex to the paper rather than disperse them throughout the text.

Concerning the second sub-indicator, several topics were explored. First, it was suggested that it should be more specifically stated as to whether it requires the precise number of students or if this number genuinely persists. Moreover, it was noted that the technological component (i.e., laptops, phones, mobile data) should be addressed by incorporating the digitalization feature into the sub-indicator wording. Therefore, it was changed to read as follows: *"PA collect data on the share of short, first, second and third cycle students that receive student financial support to cover accommodation, transport, meals and study materials/equipment."* A quantitative indicator on the share of students receiving financial support would be added in the list of quantitative indicators.

Principle 7

- Indicator 1

The term 'mandatory' for the first sub-indicator would be omitted. In addition, it was decided to remove the second sub-indicator, as training and development were seen as being equivalent.

- Indicator 3

It was argued that the first sub-indicator belongs in Principle 1, hence it was suggested that it be removed, or included in Principle 1 (Indicator 4) as slightly modified. The second sub-indicator would be rewritten to indicate that QA agencies should assess if HEIs are addressing the implementation of initial and ongoing staff and student training.

Principle 8

- Indicator 1

The content in the brackets in sub-indicator 3 on 'degree and credit mobility' was decided to be omitted. Sub-indicator 4 was reformulated as follows: *"Public financial support for students, is fully portable across the EHEA while taking part in the international mobility programmes."*

- Indicator 3

A discussion was made on the first sub-indicator with regards to 'blended mobility', with the goal of modifying it to reflect inclusive mobility. Therefore, it was decided to reformulate it with *international learning mobility, particularly blended mobility and internationalization at home* to be incorporated in the phrasing of this sub-indicator. Additionally, it was decided to delete the second sentence of the text (Professional training encompasses topics related to the

integration of international students and staff, particularly those coming from vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented backgrounds).

- Indicator 4

It was suggested that this indicator be inserted as a sub-indicator in the first indicator of this Principle. Additionally, it was decided that the sub-indicator would be removed.

Principle 9

- Indicator 2

In the sub-indicator text, it was decided to remove the term 'engaged' in the fourth dimension including students. Further, to provide continuity in throughout the document, it was decided to change 'employees' to 'staff'.

- Indicator 4

Indicator 4 was removed.

Principle 10

- Indicator 1

The first sub-indicator was reformulated as: *"PA actively engages relevant stakeholders, including student and staff unions, in the elaboration, adoption, monitoring, evaluation and review of all policies affecting the social dimension of higher education."*

5. Concluding remarks: division of tasks for the next WG's meeting

Ninoslav Š. Schmidt and Horia Onita (Co-Chairs) informed the meeting that they will incorporate all the comments and suggestions received by members from the previous session, and send the finalized draft to the WG on Monitoring. They also advised that they would also work on the glossary and consult on concepts that require clarification.

The term "sub-indicator" was proposed to be changed to "descriptors," "dimensions covered by the indicator," "explanatory descriptors," or "attributes." Because it is a complex term that ought to be defining, it was suggested to also speak with the Eurostudent representative and evaluate this matter in a research context, in order to suggest a term that is applicable and more precise. An additional remark was made to take in consideration the length of the PAGs document, in order to be in line with the criteria of the BFUG and get approval of document as an annex of the 2024 Ministerial Communique, the objective the WG agreed on as future steps after the list of indicators is finalized.

Next steps included creating an introductory section to explain the objective and focus of the indicators, followed by establishment of annexes. The members were tasked to consult with researchers on the field in order to develop some ideas for the proposed adjustment of the term "sub-indicators," which would be finalized as a topic in the following meeting.

The agenda for the upcoming meeting would include the start of work on the development of a monitoring system, which would primarily be directed at public authorities. It was decided to hold the forthcoming meeting online on 14 November, at 12.00-15.00 (CET). Furthermore, it was suggested that the 5 future meetings for the following year be held as 3 in-person and 2 online, connected with the PLAs. However, it was noted that this was subject to change depending on developments.

The Co-Chairs thanked the guests and members for their contributions and input to the meeting, as well as on the organization of the work on the indicator development. No other business was brought forward, thus the seventh meeting of the WG on SD was successfully concluded.