



AZƏRBAYCAN RESPUBLİKASI
TƏHSİL NAZİRLİYİ

WORKING GROUP ON SOCIAL DIMENSION

Fifth Meeting, Hosted by Malta

Tuesday, 26 April 2022

09.00–17.00 (CET)

Minutes

List of Participants

Country	First Name	Last Name
Austria	Sara	Velic
Belgium French Community	Caroline	Hollela
Croatia (Co-Chair)	Ninoslav Šćukanec	Schmidt
Cyprus	Kyriacos	Charalambous
Denmark	Jacob	Blasius
EI-ETUCE	Annette	Dolan
European Students Union (Co-Chair)	Martina	Darmanin
European University Association (EUA)	Henriette	Stoeber
Eurostudent	Martin	Unger
Germany	Iris	Kimizoglu
Georgia	Tornike	Bakakuri
Malta	Madonna	Maroun
The Netherlands	Berto	Bosscha
Romania	Horia Serban	Onita
Romania	Mihai Cezar	Haj
BFUG Secretariat (Head)	Oltion	Rrumbullaku
BFUG Secretariat	Kristina	Metallari
BFUG Secretariat	Alesia	Gegushi
BFUG Secretariat	Xhesika	Lulaj

Albania, European Commission, France, Italy, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Moldova, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey and UK (Scotland) did not attend the meeting. Belgium Flemish Community, Council of Europe, Estonia, Poland and United Kingdom sent regrets.

Welcoming addresses by the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority

Rose Anne Cuschieri (MFHEA) welcomed the WG members to the first in-presence meeting for the working period 2021-2024, thanking everyone for their contributions and efforts in the area of higher education. Ms. Cuschieri expressed her appreciation for the organization of the in-presence meeting, emphasizing the value of members being able to contribute their experiences, knowledge, expertise and different perspectives on a variety of themes. Ms. Cuschieri praised the BFUG Working Structures' importance and commitment to the education sector, and concluded by wishing for a successful meeting.

1. Welcome remarks and approval of the agenda

The Co-Chairs welcomed everybody to the fifth meeting of the 2021-2024 work period and thanked the Malta representatives for hosting the meeting in-presence. The minutes of the fourth meeting were approved by all members. Moreover, an outline of the agenda was provided, which was adopted without changes.

For more information, please see: [WG SD FR AZ 5 Agenda](#)

For more information, please see: [WG SD FR AZ 4 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) provided a summary of the main outputs of the fourth meeting (17 February 2022), underlining the WG on SD's progress thus far and emphasizing the relevance of the revised definition of SD, the development of methods to help public authorities implement the Principles and Guidelines (PAGs), and the necessity to develop a monitoring framework for 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 together with the timeline, resources and communication channels. Cooperation with other BFUG WGs, such as the WG on Monitoring and, more recently, the WG on Learning and Teaching, has also been created.

The Erasmus+ project¹ was approved in March 2022 and 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.

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 would primarily focus on indicator development for each SD principle, and in the second phase, the development of a monitoring mechanism for each principle would be developed.

Mr. Schmidt presented the timeline of the meetings for this working period, indicating that so far there has been a significant turnout and active participation from members.

Finally, Mr. Schmidt expressed gratitude to the Malta representative for hosting this meeting in-presence, highlighting that the transition to in-person meetings is underway, with invitations to organize future meetings in Belgium, the Netherlands and the UK in 2022.

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

3. Tour de Table

All participants introduced themselves and informed on their respective roles, as well as on their contribution to the social dimension group.

4. Introduction to Workshops 1-3 on indicators for social dimension

Ninoslav Š. Schmidt (Co-Chair) explained the three-round organization of the subgroup workshops using the World Café Method to discuss the first draft of indicators, specifically how the indicators will help public authorities implement the social dimension principles; whether they cover all aspects of the social dimension included in that principle; and the relationship between the subgroups' indicators.

¹ "Peer Learning Activities and Resources to Underpin the Principles and Guidelines for Social Dimension".

The first round would include each subgroup to consolidate its position and the list of indicators. In the second and third rounds, the subgroups' coordinators would present to each subgroup respectively the main results produced, and initiate discussion to collect new feedback.

For more information please see: [Introduction to Workshops using the World Café Method](#)

5. Plenary Session: Share Collective Discoveries

The participants were divided into their respective subgroups to facilitate discussions relating to their corresponding principles and proposed indicators, starting with a round table discussion followed by exchanges between participants. Following the three workshops, a plenary was held to report on the subgroups' findings as follows:

5.1. Subgroup 1 – Proposal of indicators for P1-P3

Berto Bosscha (The Netherlands) reported on the findings of subgroup 1, indicating that their approach centered on identifying existing quantitative indicators from the Eurydice report and suggesting what might be added to enhance the qualitative element of the indicators. He also mentioned that, whilst there is a sufficient number of indicators, they are not adequately *SMART*, thus this will be a future task for the subgroup. One recommendation was to suggest Eurydice to adopt or implement procedures that would make the questionnaire more tangible and result in more in-depth, qualitative responses. Another recommendation included that the indicators be overarching and that clusters of indicators be created.

With regards to Principle 1², it was advised to establish clear and inclusive communication, pre-defined goals, as well as central information on top-level strategies/initiatives for the academic community (academic staff, researchers, student representatives) on themes like diversity, gender balance, etc. Further, participation of stakeholders and funding for implementation of principles (i.e., budget stimulating approaches, budget cuts) were emphasized.

Concerning Principle 2³, it was advised that more emphasis be placed on the need of recognizing prior learning (RPL) and giving more opportunities for bottom-up reflection on how the higher education (HE) system operates, particularly for target groups. For instance, while all countries recognize the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), putting its commitments into reality is more complex. One of the examples, involving Ukrainian refugees, revealed that there are numerous disparities in RPL between countries. As a result, there should be RPL counseling and consulting sessions, as well as personalized learning plans considering RPL. Furthermore, the HE system should have flexible pathways, or at the very least regulations that support self-reflection and feedback. Flexible study arrangements and increased financing in areas such as module selection; target groups (full-time, part-time and incoming students); linguistic skills support; and contact points for inclusion should all be considered. It was also advised that collaboration between HEIs and quality assurance agencies be fostered.

For Principle 3⁴, inclusion was again highlighted as subject of research, alongside non-discrimination policies, data used to detect students with special needs, as well as the utilization of the Erasmus+ project to broaden audiences.

Overall, it was recommended that qualitative indicators be proposed that complement Eurydice's indicators and are overarching across all 9 social dimension principles, as well as include self-reflection and feedback from beneficiaries in the subgroup's principles.

For more information, please see: [Subgroup 1 – Proposal of indicators for P1-P3](#)

² The social dimension should be central to higher education strategies at system and institutional level, as well as at the EHEA and the EU level. Strengthening the social dimension of higher education and fostering equity and inclusion to reflect the diversity of society is the responsibility of a higher education system as a whole and should be regarded as a continuous commitment.

³ Legal regulations or policy documents should allow and enable higher education institutions to develop their own strategies to fulfil their public responsibility towards widening access to, participation in and completion of higher education studies.

⁴ The inclusiveness of the entire education system should be improved by developing coherent policies from early childhood education, through schooling to higher education and throughout lifelong learning.

5.2. Subgroup 2 – Proposal of indicators for P4-P6

Martina Darmanin (Co-Chair) reported on the findings of the second subgroup, stating that their approach focused on identifying existing indicators from the Eurydice report, and suggesting on what can be added. The subgroup also focused on the conceptual process of indicator prioritization.

Because the PAGs are policy-oriented, Ms. Darmanin highlighted that the indicators are primarily qualitative, but that a few quantitative indicators will be needed in the future to offer evidence for policy development. The goal of the subgroup was to broaden the indicators so that they may influence and provide feedback for the Bologna Process Implementation Report (BPIR) and/or subsequent Eurydice reports. The subgroup advocated collaborating with data collection institutions such as Eurostat, EUROGRADUATE, and the European Research Area. In order to assist public authorities in implementing the principles for social dimension, it was proposed that the indicators be broadened to reflect the revised definition of social dimension, identify gaps in policies and allow for improvement in those areas, and help in the implementation of the national action plans that were presented in Yerevan (2015). However, it was identified that these practices may be too idealistic for active implementation.

It was noted that it is too early to assess if there are sufficient indicators per principle; however, even if there continues to be too many indicators, the remaining indicators can be utilized for stakeholders' usage after phase 2, with the development of the monitoring framework. Similarly, it was highlighted that determining whether or not indicators are SMART⁵ was also premature. However, the input obtained so far on the indicators has been constructive and beneficial in determining how to prioritize them. For Principle 4⁶, it was proposed that indicators on how data is used be included, as there are currently just indicators on how data is obtained.

Stakeholder involvement and safety in data collection were proposed as points of consideration, as was the use of Eurostudent indicators in the proposal of indicators. For Principle 5⁷, it was suggested to include free counseling, in-depth examination into the coordination mechanisms that may exist in responsible bodies of counselling, and have an indicator to assess if support is provided in departments/research centers based on counseling that a student has received. For Principle 6⁸, it was noted to have more clarity in terms of automatic valorization through including an indicator on financial support (i.e., cost of living).

For more information, please see: [Subgroup 2 – Proposal of indicators for P4-P6](#)

5.3. Subgroup 3 – Proposal of indicators for P7-P9

Ninoslav Š. Schmidt (Co-Chair) reported on the subgroup discussions and feedback for Principles 7-9. With regards to the approach for development of indicators, it was agreed to integrate numerous dimensions under one indicator, and these dimensions would be measured accordingly with the development of the monitoring framework in phase two. It was also suggested that clusters of indicators be created, in order to have sub-indicators under each cluster and to limit the number of indicators, making them more *SMART*.

⁵ Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time bound.

⁶ Reliable data is a necessary precondition for an evidence-based improvement of the social dimension of higher education. Higher education systems should define the purpose and goals of collecting certain types of data, taking into account the particularities of the national legal frameworks. Adequate capacities to collect, process and use such data to inform and support the social dimension of higher education should be developed.

⁷ Public authorities should have policies that enable higher education institutions to ensure effective counselling and guidance for potential and enrolled students in order to widen their access to, participation in and completion of higher education studies. These services should be coherent across the entire education system, with special regard to transitions between different educational levels, educational institutions and into the labour market.

⁸ Public authorities should provide sufficient and sustainable funding and financial autonomy to higher education institutions enabling them to build adequate capacity to embrace diversity and contribute to equity and inclusion in higher education.

Although it was stated that it is too early to determine whether there are sufficient indicators per principle, it was suggested that the number of indicators be reduced (max. 10 indicators per principle). This subgroup emphasized that the indicators are qualitative. Further, it was proposed that indicators be consistent across all principles (P1-P9), not just within the subgroups. The relationship between the indicators of the subgroup and Eurydice was addressed. It was decided to integrate Eurydice's and the WG on SD's approaches by incorporating indicators from both parts.

Furthermore, Mr. Schmidt highlighted the members' suggestions to have equal engagement for both students and staff included in the indicators. Furthermore, rather than being passive recipients, students should be made a major and active participant in the WG's work.

It was observed that guidelines are needed to assist public authorities in the implementation of the PAGs, for instance, through the usage of a toolbox to consolidate indicators into one tool. A recommendation included organizing Peer Learning Activities (PLAs), via the support of the Erasmus+ Project, to create such guidelines for each principle. The inclusion of the public authority's perspective in the indicators was also deemed important, given some principles are only applicable to higher education institutions. It was also advised to include stakeholders' perspectives (i.e., teachers, students, researchers, community representatives) through the establishment of PLAs in order to learn from best practices. Ministerial support was also emphasized in assisting in the social dimension part of a country; hence a policy brief was proposed to be created, in order to capture their attention.

It was suggested that the Erasmus+ project be utilized to collect data on national action plans, as this was set as a previous commitment and needs to be followed up on. It could also be used to gather data on the strategy adopted by national authorities in identifying vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups. All this information can be compiled into a preliminary paper that includes principles and guidelines, to subsequently develop better quality indicators. It was also suggested that levels of implementation for indicators be created in order to measure the depth of implementation, and because this activity needs more resources, it was suggested that it be linked to the project as well.

To conclude, the Erasmus+ Project will help in furthering the work of the WG on Social Dimension by organizing PLAs, creating a preliminary paper and gaining ministerial support for the social dimension.

For more information, please see: [Subgroup 3 – Proposal of indicators for P7-P9](#)

5.4. Next steps on indicators' development

Overall, it was established that there is similarity among subgroups in terms of the approach in development of indicators. However, it was discussed whether subgroups should have long-term consistency in their approaches or whether there should be some flexibility. Currently, the flexibility of approaches was praised by the subgroups, with focus on content rather than format being emphasized as more important.

Moreover, despite all subgroups agreeing that it is too early to decide whether or not to have both qualitative and quantitative indicators, two proposals were made to use qualitative indicators and include statements only, or use both qualitative and quantitative indicators as long as all dimensions are covered within the principles.

Further, it was agreed that the indicators should be made more *SMART* by improving indicator formulation and addressing more complex matters for public authorities. The subgroups should also focus on identifying the most significant themes that ought to be covered.

Finally, it was proposed to invite David Crosier from Eurydice in the upcoming WG meeting to discuss the Eurydice report and BPIR, as well as potential progress of the indicators.

6. Wrap-up of the discussion on indicators and instructions for the subgroup work until next WG-meeting

Ninoslav Š. Schmidt and Martina Darmanin (Co-Chairs) informed the members on the next steps regarding the work of the subgroups. The Co-Chairs invited members to send comments/feedback on indicator development to the BFUG Secretariat. This feedback would then be distributed to the subgroup coordinators accordingly, who would subsequently develop a new version based on the comments received via email and during the workshops.

The amended version would then be shared with members so that they could have a full view and submit additional feedback before the scheduled meeting on June 14, 2022. The work of the subgroups will continue, and it was suggested that only two workshop rounds be included in the next WG meeting.

The subgroup coordinators thanked the members for their contribution and input on the development of indicators.

7. Coordination related to the WG-meetings in 2022: locations and hosts

Martina Darmanin (Co-Chair) informed that the upcoming meeting in 14 June 2022 has been proposed to be organized by three hosts (Belgium, the Netherlands, the UK). Following further discussion, it was agreed to accept the proposal to organize the upcoming meeting in Hague, the Netherlands.

As the Erasmus+ project's kick-off meeting is scheduled for June 15, 2022, it was suggested that this activity be included in the WG meeting's agenda as well. Furthermore, after this kick-off meeting, the Co-Chairs will inform the members of the extent to which the Erasmus+ project will support the activity of this WG.

The two subsequent meetings were scheduled to be conducted on the 4th of October 2022 and the 15th of November 2022, with the latter meeting taking place in Belgium. However, the meeting to be held on the 4th of October 2022 was advised to be rescheduled, as the BFUG Board meeting LXXXI will be conducted in-presence on October 5, 2022.

It was decided to organize a doodle poll in late September or early October to determine on the WG meeting dates for 2023.

8. AoB

Relevant events/forums/activities related to the social dimension theme were highlighted, with a particular focus on the 2022 [European Quality Assurance Forum \(EQAF\)](#), which will address issues such as student involvement and equity, among other topics. The forum is scheduled for November in Romania, and a call for contributions is presently open.

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. All the meeting materials were announced that will be made available on the EHEA website.

No other business was brought forward, thus the fifth meeting of the WG on SD was successfully concluded.