



WORKING GROUP ON SOCIAL DIMENSION

Sixth Meeting, Hosted by The Netherlands
13-14 June 2022

Minutes

List of Participants

| Country/Organization | First Name | Last Name |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Belgium Flemish Community | Patrick | Willems |
| Belgium French Community | Caroline | Hollela |
| Croatia (Co-Chair) | Ninoslav Šćukanec | Schmidt |
| Cyprus | Kyriacos | Charalambous |
| Denmark | Jacob | Blasius |
| EI-ETUCE | Annette | Dolan |
| European Commission | Lucie | Trojanova |
| European Commission/Eurydice | David | Crosier |
| European Students Union (Co-Chair) | Martina | Darmanin |
| European University Association (EUA) | Alison | Morrisroe |
| Eurostudent | Martin | Unger |
| France | Stéphane | Lauwick |
| Germany | Iris | Kimizoglu |
| Georgia | Tornike | Bakakuri |
| The Netherlands | Berto | Bosscha |
| Poland | Zenon | Hanas |
| Slovenia | Maja | Švent |
| NUFFIC (Guest) | Suzan | Kommers |
| U-Multirank (Guest) | Frans | Kaiser |
| U-Multirank (Guest) | Anete | Veidemane |
| BFUG Secretariat | Kristina | Metallari |
| BFUG Secretariat | Vahidije | Kadiu |

Albania, Austria, Council of Europe, Estonia, Italy, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Malta, Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom and United Kingdom (Scotland) did not attend the meeting.

Welcome remarks by the representative of the Dutch Ministry for Education, Culture & Science

Berto Bosscha, representing the Dutch Ministry for Education, Culture & Science, welcomed the WG to the sixth meeting for the working period 2021-2024. Mr. Bosscha expressed his appreciation for the organization of the in-presence meeting and concluded by wishing for a successful meeting.

1. Welcome remarks and approval of the agenda

The Co-Chairs welcomed everybody to the sixth meeting of the 2021-2024 work period and thanked the Dutch representative for hosting the meeting in-presence. The minutes of the fifth meeting were approved by all members. Moreover, an outline of the agenda was provided, which was adopted without changes. A tour de table was held, during which all of the participants introduced themselves and explained their respective roles within the institutions they represented.

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

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

2. Summary of the main conclusions from the last meeting

Ninoslav Š. Schmidt (Co-Chair) provided a summary of the main outputs of the fifth meeting, 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.

The Work Plan 2021-2024 was presented containing the objectives and work methods together with the timeline, resources and communication channels. Further, 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 during online meetings. However, it was observed that when planning in-person meetings, the attendance rate of members will have to be taken into account. Cooperation with other BFUG WGs, such as the WG on Monitoring and the WG on Learning and Teaching has also been established.

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. The members were informed that the project's kick-off meeting will be held on 15 June 2022, in Belgium, and will be hosted by the Department of Education and Training of the Flemish Community.

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. Following the fifth meeting in Malta, it was decided to have a plenary session to consolidate and ratify the work of the subgroups. It was mentioned that work will commence in the form of the entire WG, and that work in subgroups may continue when the monitoring mechanism is developed.

The previous meeting's conclusions were underlined, demonstrating a prevalent approach to shaping indicators in the form of statements. It was decided to revise and regroup indicators, with Eurydice's indicators largely serving as the main indicators. It was also suggested to include quantitative indicators, in order to measure the level of implementation for each indicator. Moreover, it was proposed to create an online, user-friendly toolbox ('preambula') on how to use indicators and the system of monitoring. Cooperation with ENQA and EQAR was also proposed, and in the instance that ESGs are revised, it was advised to also include statements related to SD enhancement in the PAGs.

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

3. Brief summary of the subgroup work in Malta and of the follow-up work by the subgroup coordinators

Reports from the coordinators of the subgroups related to the work on indicators were delivered, which added to the above-mentioned conclusions from the last meeting. It was disclosed that although there are indicators that may target HEIs as well, the focus was primarily on public authorities (PA). Thus, it was discussed how to go further in-depth with improving indicators, in order to better highlight how broad the SD definition is and to be able to support the efforts of other stakeholders in enhancing the social dimension.

4. Update from the NUFFIC and the U-Multirank on their work related to the social inclusion in higher education

Suzan Kommers (NUFFIC) gave a presentation on how to promote equality and inclusion in higher education (HE) through concentrating on strategies to make internationalization more inclusive. By delving deeper into the differences between equity and equality, Ms. Kommers underlined the importance of acknowledging that granting equal support does not always translate into equal opportunities. She emphasized the need to alter the perspective in which resources are allocated and attention is given.

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

A recently completed project that concentrated on factors that predict which students go abroad was one component of a research-based approach to make internationalization more inclusive. It was found that financial resources are not the only factor that prevent students to study abroad, and that cultural capital (i.e., parents' educational backgrounds) plays a significant effect in this. Another approach involved communication with student organizations, universities and associations to mutually address the issue of inclusivity. Additionally, focus groups are currently being conducted with students in order to learn more about their experiences. Overall, Nuffic evaluates programs at an inclusivity lense and provides guidelines for HEIs, as well as primary and vocational education.

Conclusively, from a research standpoint, it is critical to identify ways for the study being conducted to make an impact, rather than just gather information. As a result, rather than merely considering how to map the current situation, it is also important to raise awareness and inspire action by not just collecting data, but also helping to achieve the desired outcome.

For more information, please see: [Nuffic - Fostering equity and inclusion in higher education](#)

Frans Kaiser and Anete Veidemane (U-Multirank) provided an overview of social inclusion in U-Multirank, with focus on the development of new indicators. Mr. Kaiser gave a brief outline of U-Multirank, indicating that it is a multidimensional, user-driven approach to international ranking of higher education institutions (HEIs) and comparison of HEIs' performances. Information on diversity and inclusion, more specifically information on gender, disability, first generation, and outreach, will be published in the most recent research, which will be issued on June 27, 2022.

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), effective teaching and learning and social inclusion have been identified as three focus areas for the development of new indicators. In order to create new indicators on an institutional and subject level, expert and stakeholder consultations have been conducted through workshops and feasibility surveys. Next steps include formation of guidelines to be used in rankings, monitoring systems, policy making and so on, which focus on:

- Authentic social dimension indicators to extend beyond access through promoting equity, addressing student body, staff, policies;
- Attraction of a diverse student body through targeted outreach and selectivity policies;
- Different reference groups to express the social dimension;
- Social inclusion policies that indicate pro-active steps being taken by HEIs;
- Financial factors to be addressed within the set of (contextualized) indicators.
- Other considerations such as: equal accessibility to all students and staff on international mobility; non-binary gender classification; facilities tools for physical and mental disabilities.

A social inclusion framework including central concepts and the aforementioned guidelines was presented, to assist in the process of establishing proper reference groups in defining what diversity is, as well as its goals and policies.

For more information, please see: [Social inclusion in U-Multirank](#)

5. Discussion with the Co-Chair of the WG on Monitoring the Implementation of the Bologna Process

David Crosier (WG on Monitoring, Co-Chair) provided an overview of the state-of-play of the Bologna Process Implementation Report (BPIR), including the report structure that has been already approved by the BFUG, as well as information on how WGs may provide input. Consultation with the WGs is ongoing and decisions on content will be made early autumn, followed by data collection to be completed on early 2023. Additionally, Mr. Crosier added that the report will have six chapters, about 30 pages long each and downloaded separately to make it more reader-friendly.

One of the chapters, titled "Social Dimension", was emphasized, and included statistical data, survey data and qualitative data on the implementation of the PAGs. The latter was discussed in more detail, signifying that indicators from the 2022 Eurydice report ("[Towards Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education in Europe](#)"), follow the PAGs as closely as possible and could be used in the PAGs as well. Amendments and improvements to indicators are possible, as well as using different indicators. Mr.

Crosier stated that system-level limitations ought to be considered, and encouraged the WG members to consider indicators that HEIs may utilize in their local context as well, in order to enhance their approach to diversity, inclusion and equity. He went on to say that the BPIR should be viewed as one of the potential system mechanisms for the future, however it is limited in its ability to contain a large number of indicators and data. Consequently, it was recommended to create an annex to provide references and additional data for indicators.

The WG on Monitoring's focus in the BPIR lies in the monitoring of PAGs, data and trends, and the report enables for country comparison by using the indicators in a comparative manner in policy implementation. The WG on SD, on the other hand, aims to provide a summary of the indicators that countries can use to enhance the social dimension when they conceptualize the policies. The indicators may not always be used for transnational comparison; instead, countries will be able to determine what is more effectual for their national context.

It was decided to incorporate a number of Eurydice's indicators in the PAGs as they are in line with and cover all areas of the WG on SD. As a result, the indicators would offer a broad and general perspective, and the WG on SD would provide specifications through their sub-indicators. It was clarified that national PA are the primary target of indicators, and they decide if and/or how to collaborate with HEIs. With this target level, it was suggested to introduce some indicators that can allow for PA to evaluate and assess their national policies.

The risk of excluding the remaining indicators that are not among the 10 scoreboard indicators was raised, and it was noted that countries should be encouraged to look at the complete list of indicators and use them on a national basis. Another comment was made on using various data sources, specifically the Higher Education Sector Observatory, to improve social dimension. This instrument, which is a component of the European Strategy for Universities (January 2022), aims to demonstrate the progress made and prevent duplication of work. The Observatory identified inclusion and the social dimension as key priorities, and as such, all relevant data (which is divided into three levels: individual, institutional, and system) can be found in the Observatory.

To conclude, it was decided to use some of Eurydice's indicators as final output, as well as to create new indicators and/or sub-indicators where necessary. The notion that indicators should be comparable across nations could be used in the group's work to reduce redundant indicators. It was determined that the PAGs should be the primary focus of the BPIR structure, as indicated in the Communique, and that statistical data and other components might be briefly presented in the introduction or in another section of the report. It was also advised to include additional data below the PAGs headline, as well as to include a brief general overview of the student population with a focus on the social dimension in the introduction chapter. Overall, it was encouraged to be critical about the concept and formulation applied to the indicators. The objective should be to reach a consensus for each indicator, as key conclusions from this meeting will be incorporated into the pre-final version of the proposal of indicators, to be submitted to the WG on Monitoring in October 2022.

For more information, please see: [Social Dimension in the BPIR](#)

6. Plenary work on indicators for social dimension

The WG members discussed the proposal of indicators for Principles 1 to 6, and provided feedback on the improvement of the indicators of social dimension.

6.1. Principle 1

▪ Indicator 1

It was proposed to reformulate the statement of the first sub-indicator², as it specifies the inclusion of people with disability only. In response to this, it was proposed to rephrase it as 'disability/neurodiversity'. The text with specifications in the brackets was also advised to be deleted. Following these suggestions, it was decided to use "inclusion of underrepresented, disadvantaged

² PA has developed a strategy on SD that has a broader and more in-depth focus than only the inclusion of people with disabilities.

and vulnerable groups and all other at-risk groups" instead of "disabled", which would be applied throughout the text. Moreover, it was agreed to include a new category (prisoners), and include all of the at-risk student categories in the annex.

For the second sub-indicator³, recommendations were made to encourage NGOs to diversify their own staff through outreach by encouraging broader diversification to apply.

The word 'encourages' in sub-indicators 2 and 3 was considered to be changed into a more explicit and active term (i.e., 'incentivize').

For the fourth sub-indicator⁴, it was advised to implicate, rather than just communicate with the stakeholders, through defining the guidelines by involving them in the discussion process.

▪ **Indicator 2**

It was suggested that the targets mentioned in the sub-indicator⁵ are specified as SMART and able to be assessed. Additionally, a footnote explaining that there are particularities for countries with federal systems was proposed to be added in relation to the phrase in the sub-indicator referring to the "national level".

▪ **Indicator 3**

It was noted that the term *social dialogue*, referenced in this indicator⁶, can be applied in a variety of ways, necessitating a precise definition in order to ensure active stakeholder involvement. Thus, it was proposed to be changed it to *national dialogue*, to be inclusive of not only HEIs.

It was suggested to include examples such as student unions, staff unions, office representatives, higher education rectors, and more specific organizations to help define more concretely key stakeholders in the first sub-indicator⁷. In addition, it was suggested that the phrase "co-creation" be used in place of "encourage" to denote a more active involvement with stakeholders.

▪ **Indicator 4**

Despite the PA not having to explicitly work with the QA agencies, it was proposed to rephrase the first sub-indicator⁸ by replacing the term "PA promotes QA reviewers" to "PA engages with QA reviewers". Additionally, it was recommended to use the term "accreditation" in a more explicit manner, as it was proposed that the standards set by QA agencies should include the accreditation process.

6.2. Principle 2

▪ **Indicator 1**

It was decided to remove the term 'allows' and keep 'encourages' only in the first sub-indicator. It was also suggested that sub-indicators 1 and 2 are very similar, thus the second sub-indicator could be removed, as it is already covered in the first one. Moreover, it was agreed to focus on general teaching and learning (T&L) not ILPs, as well as to specify the first sub-indicator as tailoring to the needs of underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students and staff.

In sub-indicator 3, the examples (stacking modules or micro-credentials) were decided to be removed, and to define in this sub-indicator that "PA provides legal regulations to access and progress for flexible pathways."

For sub-indicator 4, it was initially proposed to include it in Principle 5, however, it was conclusively determined as positive to have a contact point specifically for understanding flexible pathways.

³ PA encourages HEIs to diversify their own staff and reflects the diverse composition of society.

⁴ PA communicates the SD PAGs to all HE stakeholders.

⁵ The methods for measuring all targets are mapped in favour of inclusive HE and assessed at the national level.

⁶ Existence of social dialogue as basis for developing a strategy or other major policy on diversity, equity and inclusion in higher education.

⁷ PA encourages HEIs to involve a wide range of stakeholders, including students and staff from underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, to participate in the creation of strategies and policies on diversity, equity and inclusion at institutional level.

⁸ PA promotes that QA reviewers are trained and provided with SD assessment toolkit in the external QA evaluation procedures at HEIs.

- **Indicator 2**

The indicator headline⁹ was decided to be changed to reflect that candidates can enroll in higher education on the basis of recognition of non-formal and informal learning (applied to all HEIs), not specifically through upper secondary school leaving certificate.

It was proposed to rephrase the first sub-indicator as "Existence of the system of recognizing formal and/or informal learning for the purpose of accessing, progressing and completing in higher education.

It was proposed to reformulate sub-indicator 2 as "NQF facilitate the system of recognition of formal and informal learning".

Sub-indicator 4 was decided to be removed as it is already included in the Principle 1 indicators.

To avoid social exclusion by focusing on the approach of emergency RPL rather than the target group specifically, it was decided to not specify the term 'refugees' in the fifth sub-indicator, but formulate the text to include "refugees, refugee-like background groups or other groups of at-risk students."

- **Indicator 3**

It was proposed to create two sub-indicators for joint working of QA agencies and HEIs to avoid that the end user or the HEI has to bear extra costs and excessive/opposing or delayed procedures.

- **Indicator 4**

It was decided to move this indicator to Principle 4.

6.3. Principle 3

It was suggested to feature a new indicator referencing the incorporation of skills in equity, diversity and inclusion in teacher training and CPD on all levels in this Principle, rather than in Principle 7.

- **Indicator 1**

Sub-indicator 1 was reformulated as "PA actively coordinates with stakeholders at all levels by organizing social dialogue/advisory bodies."

Sub-indicator 2 was reformulated as "Awareness raising activities in/about HE programs to students, children, parents and guardians at all levels."

- **Indicator 2**

It was decided to include other examples than just caretaker in the first sub-indicator, such as student unions.

- **Indicator 3**

Sub-indicator 2 was reformulated to reflect that PA analyze and track different student data on issues that relate to other policy areas (i.e., housing, employment).

- **Indicator 4**

The term *adults* in the indicator headline was advised to be changed to 'students with delayed transition' (indicating students that have left the school system for more than 2 years).

6.4. Principle 4

- **Indicator 1**

It was decided to omit the data presented in the indicator to make it concise. Further, the formulation of the indicator was modified as "Existence and frequency of national data collection on student characteristics prior to entry, at entry, during progression and upon graduation."

⁹ Existence of alternative ways to access higher education if candidates do not possess an upper secondary school leaving certificate.

Sub-indicator 1¹⁰ was rephrased as "Existence of survey or administrative data collection among potential students.", and the text on the brackets was decided to be omitted.

The second sub-indicator would refer to the period of entrance and progression in HE, whereas the third sub-indicator would refer to the period upon graduation.

The fourth sub-indicator would suggest that HEIs should have access to central data on student characteristics. Consequently, the fifth sub-indicator would show that HEIs use and analyze this student data to influence policies.

▪ **Indicator 2**

Following the first indicator, it was decided to create a new, separate indicator with the aim to collect and analyze data for staff, as well as to focus on promoting and reflecting staff diversity. This indicator was formulated as "Existence of survey or administrative data collection on staff characteristics."

▪ **Indicator 3**

The initial second indicator was moved as the third indicator. In this indicator, the members proposed a revision of the sub-indicators' as below:

- Sub-indicator 1: Participation in Eurostudent, Eurograduate and other relevant EHEA level surveys.
- Sub-indicator 2: The application of internationally comparable taxonomies for data collection (e.g., ISCED for fields of study, EQF for levels of study, the EHEA definitions of underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups etc.)

It was decided that other types of data will be included in the Annex.

6.5. Principle 5

It was emphasized that indicators in the form of questions should be formulated as statements. Moreover, the existing indicators 2 and 4 were decided to be erased.

▪ **Indicator 1**

It was decided to exclude "psychological counselling services" from the initial statement. Hence, this indicator was rephrased as "Existence of legal requirement to provide academic and career guidance services to prospective and current students."

The third sub-indicator¹¹ was decided to be moved under Principle 7.

▪ **Indicator 2**

Following the first indicator, it was decided to create a new indicator to include "psychological counselling services", which was formulated as "Existence of legal requirement to provide psychological counselling services to prospective and current students."

▪ **Indicator 3**

Following the second indicator, it was decided to create a new indicator: "Existence of ombuds/ombudsperson types of institutions within HE for students."

▪ **Indicator 4**

The initial third indicator was moved as the fourth indicator. This indicator would focus on QA that refers to the three types of services, and was phrased as "Existence of QA mechanisms for career, academic and psychological counselling services is required."

¹⁰ Survey or administrative data collection among potential students (at least during last year in school and on non-linear pathway to HE).

¹¹ Existence of legally recognized autonomous student body to hear and democratically represent all students regardless of political association, ethno-cultural affiliation, gender identity, sexual orientation and other characteristics.

6.6. Principle 6

Indicators 1 and 5 would be reviewed and rephrased accordingly by the subgroup coordinator. For indicator 1, it was stressed that funding is not restricted with regards to students' academic performance and should be kept in consideration when formulated.

▪ **Indicator 2**

It was emphasized that financial support systems should aim to be universally applicable to all students, however members pointed out that additional financial aid should be allocated to students who require it in order to fund their higher education.

In order to reflect the fact that financial aid should be primarily need-based, it was suggested that the indicator be reformulated as "Existence of student financial aid provided by PA that is primarily need-based".

▪ **Indicator 3**

This indicator was reformulated as "Existence of targeted outreach with information on student financial aid for underrepresented, disadvantage and vulnerable groups".

For more information, please see: [Proposal of indicators for social dimension](#)

5. Concluding remarks and division of tasks for the next WG meeting

Ninoslav Š. Schmidt and Martina Darmanin (Co-Chairs) informed the members on the next steps regarding the work on the indicators. The subgroup coordinators would send a revised version of the proposal that would take into account the comments made at this meeting. The members were invited to send comments/feedback on indicator development for Principles 1 through 9, as well as propose indicators for Principle 10. The consultation process on the indicators would be done via email initially, and furthered in the next WG meeting. The subgroup coordinators thanked the members for their contribution and input on the development of indicators.

It was proposed to organize the upcoming WG meeting in-presence. As the original date of the seventh WG meeting (4 October 2022) conflicts with the date of the BFUG Board meeting LXXXI¹², a doodle will be organized by the Secretariat to establish a new meeting date. Potential hosting countries will be contacted to select a final country, after the meeting date has been determined.

6. AoB

Relevant events/forums/activities related to the social dimension theme were highlighted, with a particular focus on the multilingual online meeting on equality of opportunity and inclusion in higher education in Belgium and in Europe, organized by the three Belgium communities on 10 June 2022, to discuss their own policy and equality measures in higher education, explaining best practices and innovative projects. The Belgium French Community representative offered to share presentations from this meeting with the WG members.

Martina Darmanin (Co-Chair) informed the group that this was her last meeting in her capacity as Co-Chair. The members thanked her for her significant contribution and ongoing assistance to the WG on Social Dimension, and wished her success in future work endeavors.

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 sixth meeting of the WG on SD was successfully concluded.

¹² Eighty-first Bologna Follow-Up Group Board meeting, hosted by Kazakhstan (Nur-Sultan), 5 October 2022.