



*Bosnia and Herzegovina  
Ministry of Civil Affairs*

## WORKING GROUP ON SOCIAL DIMENSION

Eleventh Meeting, Online

12 June 2023

Minutes of meeting

### List of Participants

Country	First Name	Last Name
Albania	Flamur	Bidaj
Belgium French Community	Adriana	Gonfroid
Belgium Flemish Community	Patrick	Willems
Belgium French Community	Caroline	Hollela
Croatia (Co-Chair)	Ninoslav Šćukanec	Schmidt
Cyprus	Kyriacos	Charalambous
EI-ETUCE	Annette	Dolan
Estonia	Janne	Pukk
European Commission (EC)	Svein	Hullstein
European Students Union (Co-Chair)	Horia	Onita
European University Association (EUA)	Gohar	Hovhannisyan
EUROSTUDENT	Martin	Unger
France	Stéphane	Lauwick
Georgia	Tornike	Bakakuri
Germany	Carlotta	Ekloh
The Netherlands	Arthur	Belle
Poland	Krzysztof	Marcynski
United Kingdom	Angharad	Penny Evans
BFUG Secretariat (Head)	Edlira Adi	Subashi Kahani
BFUG Secretariat	Oltion	Rrumbullaku
BFUG Secretariat	Ana	Zhibaj

### 1. Approval of the agenda

The Co-Chairs welcomed everybody to the eleventh meeting of the 2021-2024 work period. The minutes of the tenth meeting were approved, with just one member asking for more time for their remarks. Moreover, an outline of the agenda was provided, which was adopted without any changes. A tour de table took place for the new representatives that have joined the group, during which they 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\\_SE\\_BA\\_11\\_Agenda\\_of\\_meeting](#)



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

Mr. Nino Schmidt (Co-Chair) acknowledged the adoption of the Principles and Guidelines (PAG) for strengthening the social dimension of higher education in the EHEA's Rome Communiqué in 2020. He highlighted the positive impact of the document, as evidenced by the increasing number of countries implementing the principles into their national policies. The BFUG expressed the need for additional support in materializing these principles, adopting the terms of reference of the Working Group (WG) on Social Dimension in 2021. The WG's main objective was to define indicators and descriptors for the principles, which the group successfully accomplished.

Mr. Schmidt highlighted their key achievements, including the development of new indicators and explanatory descriptors for the PAG. The indicators were defined as instruments for measuring progress in implementing the principles, while the descriptors provided detailed attributes and characteristics for better understanding and implementation. It was stated that these indicators and descriptors are not prescriptive, allowing countries to adapt them to their national higher education systems. The cooperation with EURYDICE was also noted, as their reports provided evidence-based support for the indicators. The expanded scope of the document, comprising indicators and additional explanatory descriptors were seen as key reasoning behind the proposal to extend the title of the document as the "*Principles, Guidelines and Indicators to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA*".

It was mentioned that there has been an ongoing consultation process with other BFUG members and relevant organizations. They received extensive feedback, particularly from ENQA, which greatly contributed to improving the document's quality. Consultations with Education International also took place, resulting in the decision to mention both staff and students in the final version of the indicators. The group implemented all the conclusions and feedback received, which resulted in the current version of the document.

The work-plan for the 2023 was presented, which included three meetings held this year and two more planned for 24-25 October and 7-8 December with the locations of the meetings still to be decided. All materials and agenda related to the meetings were made available on the EHEA website and in the cloud folder. The Erasmus+ project supporting the WG through peer learning activities was also discussed, with the next activity scheduled for next days. Participants were encouraged to access the project website for more information.

## **3. Information from the Drafting Committee**

Horia Onita (Co-Chair) presented the work of the Drafting Committee. During the BFUG meeting, the Drafting Committee (DC) presented the draft structure and roadmap for the Tirana Ministerial Conference, and both the roadmap and structure were considered approved.

Moving forward, the DC collected initial input from different working groups. The next step for the DC is to have an in-person meeting in Rome in three weeks, where they will start working on "draft zero" of the Communiqué. This draft will then be presented at the BFUG Board meeting in Tbilisi, following another meeting in September dedicated to refining the draft.

Regarding the approach to the Communiqué, it was decided to include a reference in the introduction to the social-economic situation of students and staff. This demonstrates the DC's commitment to inclusivity and acknowledges the challenges posed by the pandemic and energy prices.

The draft will also have sections dedicated to progress made since the last ministerial, specifically highlighting the work of the Working Group and addressing indicators and explanatory descriptors. Additionally, there will



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be a chapter focused on future objectives for the next cycle (2024-2027), which will determine the goals of the working groups and their continuity. Furthermore, a section will be dedicated to more holistic long-term goals beyond 2030, in alignment with the priority of inclusiveness defined in the Rome Communiqué.

The DC will utilize the input already received to develop "draft zero". This document will be circulated among all working groups and other relevant structures for their feedback and contributions. Continuous feedback will also be sought from the Board and the BFUG.

#### **4. Update and discussion related to the conclusions of the BFUG Meeting in Stockholm**

##### 4.1 Update on the BFUG meeting in Stockholm

The Co-Chairs discussed the progress and updates regarding the BFUG plenary meeting in Stockholm. Prior to the meeting, the Co-Chairs reached out to the representatives of the countries that were against having the main document produced by this Working Group as an Annex in the Communiqué.

During the plenary meeting, the Co-Chairs jointly presented the outcomes of their Working Group's efforts. They effectively showcased the key results and the current version of their document, encompassing principles, guidelines, and indicators. The participants expressed satisfaction with the quality of the work and the document's content. However, three representatives proposed against adopting the principles, guidelines, and indicators as an annex to the Tirana Communiqué. They contended that these technical components should not be incorporated into the ministerial Communiqué. Overall, the discussion concluded by acknowledging the need for the BFUG to leverage the Working Group's work and adopt the principles, guidelines, and indicators, but no specific proposals for the form of adoption were put forth.

The Co-Chairs assured the BFUG meeting participants that they would carefully examine the presented arguments. They committed to preparing a new proposal and outlining the forthcoming steps, which would be presented at the upcoming BFUG Board meeting in Tbilisi in October and the plenary meeting in Madrid in November. The Working Group was assigned the task of finalizing the text and suggesting a method for the adoption of the document.

##### 4.2 Discussion of the conclusions post BFUG meeting in Stockholm

The discussion progressed by introducing proposals for the path forward. One suggestion involved seeking assistance from native English speakers to improve the quality of the document after the last minor changes that can be received content-wise after the meeting. This task was expected to be undertaken during the summer. Additionally, it was mentioned that the structure of the document can be open for discussion and could require additional clarifications. In addition, comparisons were drawn to other technical documents, such as the diploma supplement and qualifications framework, which received ministerial approval despite their complexity.

Following this, it was proposed to send an invitation to the BFUG inviting them to provide written comments on the current version of the document. The aim would be to prepare a new version of the document for the BFUG Board meeting in late October and subsequently for the BFUG meeting in November in Madrid.

Another proposal was the creation of a short online questionnaire, to gather input from BFUG members regarding their suggestions on the adoption of the indicators for the social dimension.





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The discussion revolved around the approval of the document as an annex or without being an annex, and the need for ministerial approval to give the document authority and credibility. Alternatives were considered, but it was highlighted that they should be consistent with other documents, and coherence should be maintained.

In relation to the concerns raised regarding prescriptiveness, it was noted that steps were taken to address this by explicitly stating in the text that the document is not intended to be prescriptive. It was acknowledged that the issue of prescriptiveness became less prominent after implementing improvements to the document. There appeared to be a consensus that the existing structure of the document is appropriate and offers policymakers a comprehensive framework.

To proceed, three main proposals emerged with the consensus of the WG members:

- Persist with the original plan of adopting the document as an annex and make efforts to advocate for its inclusion. This approach entails engaging with the three countries and emphasizing the broad support received from other BFUG members.
- If adopting it as an annex proves unsuccessful, consider approving the document independently without it being an annex. This alternative option would serve as a second-best solution while preserving the core elements of the original plan.
- Organize an informal online meeting in September to present additional proposals and alternatives.

Ultimately, the decision regarding the document's progression will depend on further discussions, consultations with individual delegations, and informal meetings that will take place in the upcoming months.

## **5. Discussion related to the improvement of the current text of the Principles, Guidelines and Indicators for the Social Dimension**

Nino Schmidt (Co-Chair) invited the members to discuss the current PAG, where it was noted that the text had been previously discussed, resulting in significant improvements. All participants agreed that the current version of the text was much better, with important conclusions reached during the meeting in Brussels. The proposal put forth was to focus on improving the text stylistically, without making any content changes. Some minor suggestions were noted, such as removing repetitions and enhancing coherence, which would be shared in a track-changed document after the meeting.

It was suggested to add a phrase about the importance of free, timely, and psychological counseling as an explanatory descriptor in the second indicator of the fifth principle. They believed that highlighting this criterion would enhance the effectiveness of such counseling.

It was agreed to collect additional suggestions in writing, implement the changes and have an improved version ready by June 20. Native English speakers would review the text after June 26 to ensure language quality.

The revised version of the document, along with the invitation to the meeting in September, would be sent to the delegations. They would be asked to provide written comments on the document before the meeting. It was agreed to have a new version of the text by September 17, which could be considered in the Board meeting in October. It was suggested to have the revised document ready when sending the invitation for the September meeting, allowing participants time to review it during the summer.





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## **6. Preparation of the next WG on Social Dimension meeting**

The preparation of the upcoming WG meeting in October was discussed. The dates for the meeting were set for October 24 to 25, but the location was yet to be determined. It was agreed that an in-person meeting was necessary for making final decisions on the proposed text. The agenda for the meeting was also discussed. It was decided that the primary focus would be on the Tirana Communique and post-Tirana topics for the future of the social dimension beyond the current mandate. Additionally, there was a proposal to discuss the organization of a seminar in Tirana at the Bologna Policy Forum. Three potential locations for the meeting were suggested: Brussels, Ghent, or Croatia, with Vienna also being considered, pending budget approval.

## **7. AOB**

An update was provided on the upcoming Peer Learning Activity (PLA) related to social dimension in the Erasmus+ project PLAR-U-PAGs. The PLA focuses on principles three and nine, which involve community engagement in higher education and connecting higher education with other levels of education for social dimension improvements. Participants were invited to participate in the PLA.

Horia Onita (Co-Chair) mentioned establishing contact with the Co-Chair of the Global Policy Dialogue, to explore possibilities of cooperation and social interaction with other regions of the world. They will discuss potential avenues of cooperation in an upcoming meeting.

Nino Schmidt (Co-Chair) informed the group about an upcoming webinar on inclusive student engagement<sup>1</sup> and extended an invitation to all members.

No other discussions were put forward and the meeting was successfully concluded.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://iro.hr/2023/05/31/pridruzite-se-nasem-webinaru-unleashing-the-power-of-inclusive-student-engagement-enriching-higher-education-institutions/>

