



MINISTERUL EDUCAȚIEI NAȚIONALE



Republic of North Macedonia  
Ministry of Education and Science

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## ADVISORY GROUP ON SOCIAL DIMENSION FIRST MEETING Zagreb (Croatia), 19 February 2019

### Minutes

#### List of participants

| Delegation                  | First Name  | Surname          |
|-----------------------------|-------------|------------------|
| Austria                     | Josef       | Leidenhost       |
| Austria                     | Marita      | Gasteiger        |
| Belgium – Flemish Community | Willems     | Patrick          |
| Croatia (Co-chair)          | Ninoslav    | Šćukanec Schmidt |
| Croatia                     | Ana         | Jerković         |
| Denmark                     | Julian      | Lo Curlo         |
| EI / ETUCE                  | Annette     | Dolan            |
| ESU (Co-chair)              | Robert      | Napier           |
| EUA                         | Henriette   | Stoeber          |
| European Commission         | Julie       | Anderson         |
| Eurostudent                 | Martin      | Unger            |
| Germany                     | Ronja       | Hesse            |
| Luxembourg (observer)       | Isabelle    | Reinhardt        |
| Poland                      | Magdalena   | Wróbel           |
| Romania                     | Mihai Cezar | Hâj              |
| BFUG Secretariat            | Giovanni    | Finocchietti     |
| BFUG Secretariat            | Susanna     | Taormina         |

United Kingdom representative joined part of the meeting through Skype.

Apologies from: Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, United Kingdom (Scotland).

## **1. Welcome remarks and tour de table**

The representative of the Croatian Ministry of Science and Education, Ana Tecilazić Goršić, welcomed the participants, and acknowledged Social Dimension (SD) as an area of strategic importance for education, science and technology. The representative of Croatia, and Co-chair Ninoslav Šćukanec Schmidt, thanked the Ministry for hosting the event, welcomed all participants, and introduced the Agenda. Ninoslav Šćukanec Schmidt and Robert Napier (ESU) co-chaired the Meeting. It was proposed to postpone the presentation and update about the XX Anniversary of the Bologna Declaration after the point on division of tasks for the next AG's meeting, as some participants had to leave before the end of the meeting. Participants agreed upon the proposal; the agenda was approved without any further modification.

A tour de table was held to allow participants to introduce themselves and the country/organization they represented, as well as connection between their work and SD.

## **2. Discussion on the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Advisory Group 1 on Social Dimension (AG1)**

The Co-chair Robert Napier (ESU) was the presenter of the topic; the Co-chair Ninoslav Šćukanec Schmidt (Croatia) was the moderator of the session. Introducing the structure and contents of the ToR, Robert Napier underlined that they have been agreed by the BFUG as a guide for the work of the Group. He also stressed that it is crucial to stick to the time schedule that will be agreed, so that the BFUG could use the result of the Group's activities for feeding, guiding and steering the drafting of the next Communiqué. Thus, it would be useful to have a draft of the Group's work result by the end of 2019.

With regard to the composition of the Group, Robert Napier informed that expressions of interest by Luxembourg and Sweden to be part of the AG1 were submitted after the deadline. During the last meeting of the BFUG Board, it was agreed that the participation of the two countries should be approved by the other members. In the absence of objections, the participation of Luxembourg and Sweden to the AG1 will be approved. The presenter then introduced the topics of the Overarching Aim and the Objectives of the AG1 as described in the ToR, as well as the Reference to the Paris Communiqué, the agreed Reporting methodology and the Draft meeting schedule.

A roundtable discussion followed, based on the following questions: a) which commitments have been implemented, and which have not?; b) did the implemented commitments have fruitful results?; c) why weren't some commitments followed-up upon?; d) what can the BFUG do to ensure that commitments in the SD are abided to? Introducing the discussion, the presenter underlined the complexity of the definition of the SD and invited the participants to reflect on the crucial question of why there is still the need to define its concept and priorities. He also proposed to start from the existing definitions of SD as developed across the years, to move towards the objectives, and underlined the importance of reaching a common understanding in the Group. The discussion recalled how SD can still be a big issue in some countries, and that the goal of defining and implementing national SD strategies, with countries reporting about implementation, has yielded insufficient results; one of the reasons indicated was the difficulty of integrating the objectives of national policies, e.g. towards

underrepresented groups, and the strategies and initiatives implemented by HEIs in their autonomy. General consensus received the idea that the work done by the Group should produce concrete deliverables that will be not lost, can be used and produce concrete results.

The Group also discussed the topic of Peer learning activities (PLAs), for which the ToR indicates the objective of beginning working on. Participants observed that the contents of the PLAs have to be agreed, and those represented in the Group are not the only countries involved: other EHEA countries should benefit of the activities, among which those not having SD as a major issue.

The presenter introduced the application submitted in the Erasmus Plus call KA3 - Strand 2 for the project "Social and International Dimension of Education and Recognition of Acquired Learning". The partnership consists of the Ministry of Science and Education of Croatia, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, the Swedish Council of Higher Education, and ESU - European Students' Union. The Project is divided into 4 work packages, among which the WP3 is focused on "Developing the Social Dimension in the EHEA through the work of the Advisory Group". The Project can contribute to the implementation of the Group's work plan, although at the moment it is not guaranteed that the project will be financed. The selection will end in the coming weeks and the members of the Group will be informed of the outcome of the process.

The last part of the session was dedicated to discussing the time schedule proposed for the following meetings of the Group. Since alternative dates and locations shown pros and cons, and there might be visa problems for some countries, the Co-chairs will promote via e-mail a consultation among Group members to fix dates and locations of the meetings. Countries wishing to host such meetings have been invited to submit their proposals.

It was finally agreed that the Secretariat will create a restricted area on the BFUG website open to co-chairs and members of the AG1 to upload and share literature and documents. The Secretariat will send access credentials and instructions for the use of the restricted area as soon as possible.

*AG\_1\_SD\_Social\_Dimension.pdf*

### **3. Current state of play of the Social Dimension in the EHEA**

Co-chair Ninoslav Šćukanec Schmidt (Croatia) was the presenter of this topic. The presentation was based on the contents referred to the Social Dimension issue in the Paris Communiqué 2018, the Yerevan Communiqué 2015, the Document "Widening Participation for Equity and Growth: a Strategy for the Development of the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning in the European Higher Education Area to 2020 (17 April 2015)", the "Report of the 2012-2015 BFUG Working Group on the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning (17 April 2015)", the Report "The European Higher Education Area in 2018: Bologna Process Implementation Report ", and the results of the "PL4SD - Peer Learning for Social Dimension Project 2012-2015". The concluding remarks of the presentation underlined how, although in all EHEA key policy paper there is recognized importance for the SD for enhancing social inclusion and social cohesion, the question remains as to whether national HE policies give

sufficient priority to this topic. In fact, very few countries have developed national strategies or plans for fostering SD systematically; the majority of countries have some targets related to widening an overall participation in HE, without making reference to specific underrepresented groups. A second remark was referred to an increasing data collection on the composition of the student bodies and on policies to enhance SD; however, not all HE systems monitor the same characteristics of students from entry to completion, and only a minority of systems calculate completion and/or drop-out rates for the underrepresented groups.

#### *AG\_1\_SD\_Current\_State\_of\_Play\_for\_SD\_in\_the\_EHEA*

#### **4. Previous commitments and current state of play of the Social Dimension in the EHEA**

Co-chair Robert Napier (ESU) was the presenter and moderator of the discussion. Participants discussed general aspects of the topic, and analyzed national experiences and perspectives, to report on concrete examples of implementation and to identify possible obstacles to implementation.

Looking at general aspects, it was highlighted the need to analyse choices and study paths of underrepresented groups, to find an answer to the question whether there are restricted possibilities for such groups, and/or less attractive or unattractive study paths due to the economic commitment required, as well as to employability prospects.

Regarding the issue of access, it was emphasized that poor or no data is available on the characteristics of those who would like to study but do not have access to HE. Looking at national experiences, the representative from German reported that there are few changes in the historical trends of access to HE of students with HE- or non-HE background, and that a huge gap in participation is still observed; the representative of Romania reported that, although bridging programs exist for students who do not meet the access requirements, they are not widely used.

Looking at the issues of progression and completion of studies, with related aspects of funding, it was noted that these issues, as well as access to international mobility, are totally the responsibility of the HE sector and institutions. In some countries, many students depend on paid jobs to fund their studies. It was underlined that it is not enough to give financial support to individuals: special learning and teaching services should also be funded targeted to students at risk (e.g. smaller classes, tutorials, mentoring), to reduce dropout rates. The representative from the European Commission reported that the next Erasmus Programme should foresee an increased budget aimed at supporting inclusion, that national agencies should be asked to develop national inclusion strategies, and that virtual mobility could complement existing actions to help increase mobility rates.

With regard to national policies, it has been observed that few countries have developed national strategies for SD, and that significant national differences can be observed in the identification and definition of underrepresented groups, and that in some countries the SD does not appear to be a priority. It was recalled that some aspects of personal data protection codes prove to be obstacles to the implementation of support to SD, e.g. not allowing to register

the students' social background or ethnicity. Some contributions to the discussions were focused on country experiences. The representative of Austria reported that the national strategy for SD is complemented by strategies developed at university level, and that part of the national funding to the institutions is given according to SD issues. The Belgian/Flemish Community representative reported on the good results of national support policies for students with disabilities at all levels of the education system. The representative of Romania reported the case of underrepresentation of the Roma component in the HE student population, also due to the failure to complete studies at lower levels, despite existing subsidies and funding.

Looking at possible actions at EHEA level, on one side the importance was underlined of defining indicators for SD and of moving towards tools such as, e.g., an equity scale or some form of benchmarking. On the other side, emphasis was placed on avoiding the oversimplification of analyses, and it was once again recalled that prescriptive actions would violate the voluntary nature of the EHEA processes. The discussion ended with the invitation to upload in the restricted area of the AG documents and relevant literature on the topics relevant for the work of this AG1.

## **5. Workshop: How to create Principles and Guidelines for the Social Dimension in Higher Education (PAG)?**

The Co-chairs Robert Napier (ESU) and Ninoslav Šćukanec Schmidt (Croatia) were the moderators of the Workshop, that was introduced by the latter. The Workshop was divided into two parts, with a lunch break:

- Part I was focused on the vision for the future PAG. The aim of this activity was to think in a 'visionary' way about how the future PAG should look like (structure, content, etc.). There were two teams. Each team worked to develop a rich picture of their vision of the PAG, and to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) to achieving this vision.
- Part II was focused on operationalizing the vision statement agreed in former Part I. There were also two teams, which started planning practical steps for the creation of the PAG. They took into consideration the SWOT analysis. Finally, they produced a Workplan 2019-2020 for the AG1 SD, which contains a list of main activities and outputs, methodology of the AG's future work, content of the AG's future meetings and a precise timeline until the end of the AG's mandate.

## **Group 1**

### **Part I: Vision for the future PAGs**

- **PAGs should be specific to different target groups**
  - Ideally, we won't have a one-size-fits-all when it comes to PAGs, but rather try to have different ones (for example: specific PAGs for Governments, others for HEIs, others for students etc.)
  - The group would ideally also identify which groups to focus on within these PAGs

- **PAGs should be structured in a manner that allow comparability**
  - Each PAG should be drafted in a manner that allows to have an overarching aim, and then clear indicators which can be monitored
- **HEIs should see PAGs as a central goal**
  - This would mean that these PAGs should be based on rational arguments, and ideally would be such as to allow support by other entities, including governments
- **PAGs should serve as a template for national strategies**
  - Ideally this would also mean that once these national strategies are adopted, then HEIs will need to report on progress
- **PAGs should keep in mind several policy areas and ensure synergies between them**
  - These policy areas include: living conditions, academic considerations (recognition), student socialization (ex. Mentors)

## SWOT for achieving the above vision

### Strengths

- High Willingness and momentum about the topic of Social Dimension (this is also an opportunity)
- We have a lot of countries who have done quite a lot in this sphere, and therefore this can serve as an inspiration for other countries

### Weaknesses

- Time limitation- there is very little time before the next Ministerial Conference
- There are no sanctions in case of non-implementation
- The topic of SD is very complex
- There is lack of pedagogical training in how to deal with a diverse student population

### Opportunities

- A lot of high-level forums are discussing the issue of SD, and therefore it is an opportunity to start taking concrete steps in improving the SD of HE
- Student unions in Europe and other social movements are committed and dedicated to develop the state of SD in HE
- We are facing a demographic reduction in Eastern Europe, and this can be used as an opportunity to deal concretely with improving the SD of HE to avoid catastrophic results
  - This is also an opportunity for the integration of migrants within the systems



- Digitalization in HE is also an opportunity to work on achieving the vision of the PAGs. However, if not treated wisely, digitization can also be a threat, as it will end up leaving students behind rather than aiding the SD

## Threats

- Funding
  - More specifically under-funding, remains a massive threat to the improvement of the Social Dimension in HE
- The fear of PAGs turning into a checklist rather than guidelines on how to improve the situation
  - Countries might start thinking they are ticking boxes by doing the bare minimum, and this can be very dangerous
- The issue of merit vs equity

## Group 2

### Part I: Vision for the future PAGs

- PAG should be a **short policy document (2-3 pages long)**:
  - Short and focused document will secure that policy makers will read it and will incorporate the most important principles in the next 2020 ministerial communique.
  - If we have a short document, it could be annexed to the communique.
- PAG should be structured in the following way:
  - PAG will contain a list of key **principles** necessary for the implementation of the social dimension in HE.
  - Each principle will be accompanied by the **guidelines** that will explain how to implement a principle.
  - Each principle should be underpinned by data.
  - Each principle should contain a brief description of **desired outcome** (related to its implementation in practice).
- Principles should cover the following areas:
  - Harmonization of data collection related to the social dimension. Collected data should allow comparisons of different indicators.
  - Importance of peer learning and exchange of good practices in the implementation of principles related to the social dimension.
  - Student population should reflect diversity of our populations.
  - Financial support for HEIs from public sources for widening participation activities.
  - Increase of access, retention and completion of students at HEIs.
  - Enhance progression routes through different levels of education.
- PAG should contain references to the previous ministerial commitments – similar form as in the ‘Bologna Implementation Reports’.

- PAG should be divided in chapters directed towards the following stakeholders: ministries, HEIs, students, BFUG.

## SWOT for achieving the above vision

### Strengths:

- We already have the on-line PL4SD database of measures and best practices for the development of the social dimension in the EHEA countries. We already have 3 PL4SD country reviews for the development of the social dimension.
- We already have concrete outputs related to the work of previous social dimension working groups within the BFUG. These outputs are already adopted by the EHEA ministers:
  - Widening Participation for Equity and Growth: A Strategy for the Development of the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning in the EHEA to 2020
  - Guidelines to assist countries in developing national plans or strategies for access, participation and completion in HE
  - Report of the 2012-2015 BFUG Working Group on the Social Dimension

### Weaknesses:

- Urgency: very short period for the creation of the PAG.
- Social Dimension of HE is not priority and interesting policy area for some EHEA countries.
- Name of the document (Principles and Guidelines) is not appealing. It sounds bureaucratic.
- Huge differences in data collection for the social dimension in HE among the EHEA countries.
- It is difficult to break the cycle that prevents disadvantaged students to participate under equal condition in HE as is the case for their peers.
- There are many stakeholders that should participate in the implementation of the measures for enhancing the social dimension.

### Opportunities:

- Existent public funding streams that support development of the social dimension (public grants, loans, performance-based funding agreements between the state and HEIs etc.)
- Commitment to the development of the social dimension by important international policy makers: EHEA ministers through their communiques, European Commission, UNESCO etc.
- Available funding for the social dimension projects and research through different EU funding streams: Erasmus+, Horizon 2020 etc.



- Student unions in Europe are dedicated to the development of the social dimension in HE.
- Europe faces a need of better integration of refugees into European societies: opportunity for further development of the social dimension in HE.
- Many European countries face a problem related to the negative demographic trends: many European universities already face a challenge with the enrollment quotas because of the lack of available cohort of students. This represents opportunity for further development of the social dimension in HE.
- There is an opportunity to establish cooperation on social dimension with pretertiary sector: it could improve social dimension in HE.
- New EU parliamentarians will be elected in 2019: opportunity for advocacy for the social dimension.
- There is opportunity to make comparative analysis of the work on developing social dimension between the EHEA countries: we could learn from each other.

### **Threats:**

- Social changes in our societies are very fast: social dimension policy could be in delay.
- BFUG policy recommendations are not mandatory: there is no obligation for countries to implement social dimension goals.
- Insufficient public funding for the support of the social dimension.

Cross-cutting issue in SWOT: HEIs autonomy – it could influence positively and negatively development of the social dimension.

## **Group 1 & 2 (combined)**

### **Part II: Planning action and identifying priorities for the creation of the PAG**

#### **Workplan 2019-2020 for the AG1**

##### **I. After the first meeting in Zagreb, and before the second AG meeting Provide AG members with relevant documents:**

- Minutes of the meetings
- Relevant literature for the AG's work
- Build on the work of previous WGs for the social dimension: consult their reports
- Provide relevant data that should underpin the AG's work.
- Define together headlines and priorities for PAGs (co-chairs to ask members to send these in two weeks before the next meeting)

- AG members should provide briefs on agreed topics for the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the AG: guidelines on data collection, social dimension in the key Bologna policy documents, Bologna with student eyes, and EUA surveys.

**II. At the second meeting (29 March 2019, Brussels)**

- Analyse the information and documents sent by the members: briefs, literature, headlines & principles (related to the future PAG)
- Decide on the structure and headlines for the PAGs
- Have a drafting committee composed that will deal with the drafting of the PAGs

**III. At the third meeting (5 June 2019, Vienna TBC) :**

- Analyse the first draft of the PAG document- this is going to be a very brief draft and therefore at this stage all comments and remarks should simply be added to the document
- Over the summer period, the drafting committee will work more concisely to shorten all remarks and comments into the three-pager PAGs that we want to put forward (this will only be a draft)
- Compose a committee for working on the Report of the AG1

**IV. Second draft of the PAG to be ready to be presented at the BFUG meeting in November 2019 (September-November 2019)**

- The drafting group will once again discuss the draft with the members of the AG and send the draft to the BFUG for their comments
- This phase will include on-line work and on-line consultations between members of the AG

**V. At the forth meeting (11 November 2019, Helsinki TBC)**

- Confirm final structure and content of the PAG
- Discuss feedback on the PAG from the BFUG (if any at this point)
- Discuss a draft version of the Report of the AG
- Decide on the remaining steps to be taken in 2020

**VI. At the fifth meeting (11 February 2020, location TBC)**

- The AG should take into consideration all comments put forward by the BFUG
- Decide on the final version of the PAG Decide on the final version of the Report of the AG

*AG\_1\_SD\_Workshop\_Intro*

**6. Division of tasks for the next meeting**

The following division of tasks has been agreed:

#### **a) BRIEFS:**

The following briefs will be prepared in time for the next meeting:

- Data collection on social dimension (Martin to take the lead, and Ronja to help out). Furthermore, Julie also offered to send in a brief of the data from the ET Monitoring report.
- Henriette agreed to offer a brief on the data collected by EUA in the latest survey - it was agreed that this information will be sent later than the date established above.
- Bologna with Student Eyes - the full publication can be found on ESU's website, but Robert will prepare a summary of this as well.
- Social Dimension in Key Bologna Documents (the co-chairs will work on this with the help of Annette).

It was agreed **to send these in by latest the 18th of March by using Secretariat's email [secretariat@ehea.info](mailto:secretariat@ehea.info)**

#### **b) LITERATURE:**

Participants agreed that all members of the AG could send relevant literature to be uploaded on the AG's web site. It was agreed **to send these also by the 18th of March by using Secretariat's email [secretariat@ehea.info](mailto:secretariat@ehea.info).**

#### **c) HEADLINES & PRINCIPLES:**

It was agreed that all members will send the Headlines & Principles that are most important for them as stakeholders in relation to the Social Dimension of HE. Participants agreed that no strict format is to be applied, however members are asked to give some context for the principles which they think should be prioritised. It was agreed **to send these also by the 18th of March by using Secretariat's email [secretariat@ehea.info](mailto:secretariat@ehea.info).**

#### **d) RESTRICTED AREA at the EHEA AG's web site:**

AG members will receive login credentials to access the AG's web site, where relevant documents and literature will be available.

#### **e) PROPOSED DATES for the future AG's meetings:**

- 29th March (Brussels)
- 5th June (expression of interest by Vienna to host this meeting)
- 11th November (there will be explored to host this meeting in Helsinki before the BFUG Meeting, however location still TBC)
- 11th February 2020 (venue still to be confirmed)

### **7. Presentation and update about the “XX Anniversary of the Bologna Declaration *Bologna beyond 2020: the fundamental values of the EHEA*”**

Giovanni Finocchietti (Italian BFUG Secretariat) was the presenter of the topic; the Co-chair Ninoslav Šćukanec Schmidt (Croatia) was the moderator of the presentation. The event includes in the 1<sup>st</sup> day a celebration of the Bologna Declaration and, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> day, parallel sessions on topics selected by the organizers; the results of those sessions will be presented in a plenary that will conclude the event. Among the five themes, the "Social Dimension in Higher Education" directly concerns this AG1; members were therefore invited to disseminate information on the XX Anniversary to facilitate the submission of relevant scientific papers. In the discussion the question was raised on how the outcomes of the event will fit the BFUG workplan; the Secretariat informed that, after the BFUG Board meeting in Skopje, the question has been already forwarded to the organisers; suitable solutions should be found since the organization is still in progress.

*AG\_1\_SD\_Presentation\_Bologna\_Anniversary*

## **8. Meeting conclusions**

The Co-chairs thanked the Croatian Ministry of Education, Science and Education for hosting the meeting and for an excellent organization. They also thanked participants, expressing satisfaction with their proactive attitude, allowing very positive outcomes.