



## **Report of the BFUG Working Group on the Social Dimension**

**2009-2012**

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## 1. Introduction

### I. Executive summary

This report is prepared by the members of the Social Dimension Working Group (SD WG) and details the work carried out by the Working Group members between 2009 and 2012 on one of the higher education priorities set by the ministers in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve for the decade to 2020<sup>1</sup>, namely the social dimension: equitable access and completion.

The report first sets out the rationale for a social dimension in higher education in the current economic and social climate. The following pages provide a short historical overview regarding the developments of the Social Dimension area in the Bologna Process since its inception. The mandate and achievements of the Working Group's Plan of Work are further described and finally the report presents an analysis on the overall picture of the social dimension area across the EHEA that feeds into the last chapter of conclusions and recommendations. The report concludes with the need to develop a **Pilot initiative to promote Peer Learning on the Social Dimension of Higher Education** with the aim of assisting the EHEA member countries and higher education institutions in implementing social dimension policies.

### II. Context

The rationale for a social dimension in higher education as it has been stated in the report from the Bologna Process Working Group on Social Dimension and Data on Mobility of Staff and Students in Participating Countries (2005-2007)<sup>2</sup> is to enhance the attractiveness and competitiveness of the European Higher Education Area by fostering "social cohesion, reducing inequalities, raising the level of competencies in society and maximizing the potential of individuals in terms of their personal development and their contribution to a sustainable and democratic knowledge society".

A number of studies have also reflected upon the economic and societal gains of a tertiary education. Looking at the financial returns, Education at a Glance (OECD, 2011) shows that employment rates, wage rates and overall earnings increase with each level of education<sup>3</sup>. In all European countries, a person with a tertiary education can expect to earn considerably more than a person with an upper-secondary education. Compared to their counterparts from pre-tertiary education, highly educated women have also benefited<sup>4</sup> from higher financial gains across all OECD countries.<sup>5</sup> Even in times of

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<sup>1</sup> BFUG Work Plan 2009-2012 as at 07/02/2010.

<sup>2</sup> Report from the Bologna Process Working Group on Social Dimension and Data on Mobility of Staff and Students in Participating Countries, "Key issues for the European Higher Education Area – Social Dimension and Mobility", p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> The net public returns (in the form of income taxes, increased social insurance payments and lower social transfers, etc.) of investing in tertiary education is USD 90 000 (aprox. EUR 65 000) for a man and USD 55 000 (aprox EUR 40 000) for a woman.

<sup>4</sup> A net gain of more than USD 100 000 (aprox. EUR 73 000) across OECD countries with comparable data

<sup>5</sup> OECD, Education at a Glance 2011, pp. 158-165.

growing student numbers, earning premiums of university graduates have not declined.

Besides the substantial economic benefits of having a tertiary education for individuals, society is also benefiting from the supply of a highly educated and skilled population<sup>6</sup>. Even if student grants are taken into account, the public benefits outweigh the costs of study on average by a multiple of four. It is also worth noting that the state income benefits from social contributions and higher taxes received from tertiary educated people with a high level income. Furthermore, on the level of societal benefits, higher education attainment is associated with greater civic participation and social cohesion. In its research of the wider benefits of higher education, the Institute of Higher Education argues for the role of tertiary education in providing economic and social benefits: *"Not only are the knowledge, skills and attitudes of graduates critical to business success, they also contribute strongly to civilising and cultural values in society and delivering other social gains. Increasing the number of graduates brings considerable benefits to communities and society."*<sup>7</sup> The OECD also shows that education has an impact on individuals' health. Adults with higher levels of educational attainment report generally a better health, which might translate in choices of healthier lifestyle, access to healthcare, better living conditions (i.e. better nutrition), etc. Other social outcomes of higher education reported by OECD are increased civic and political engagement and interpersonal trust. The learning experiences at tertiary level seem to stimulate political interest and help individuals embrace values of social cohesion and diversity.<sup>8</sup>

On the question of deploying public resources to expand the tertiary education system, the OECD also argues that public investment in education is rational even if countries are running a deficit in their public finances<sup>9</sup>.

The costs of not acting on the social dimension area need to be also acknowledged if the social dimension is to become a driver for policy change in higher education. Without a higher education experience, job candidates would be disadvantaged in relation to the skills needed by the labour market. Not tackling the issues of underrepresented or disadvantaged groups would lead to more social exclusion and discrimination in society. Countries cannot afford the loss of talent and potential of many members of the society by failing to address the social or economic barriers in access and participation in higher education.

The OECD also reinforces this argument as the consequence of too few highly educated individuals in the labour force creates more income inequalities<sup>10</sup>. The economic crisis has increased the risk for poverty across the European Union, particularly for the most vulnerable people in society (young people, migrants, ethnic minorities, women, people with disabilities, working poor etc.). The Communication from the Commission on the

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<sup>6</sup> OECD, Education at a Glance 2011, pp. 138-139.

<sup>7</sup> The wider benefits of higher education, Report by the Institute of Education, University of London, sponsored by the HEFCE and the Smith Institute. <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/news/hefce/2003/benefit.htm#note2>

<sup>8</sup> OECD, Education at a Glance 2010, pp. 154-161.

<sup>9</sup> OECD, Education at a Glance 2010, p. 147.

<sup>10</sup> OECD, Education at a Glance 2010, p. 118.

European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion<sup>11</sup> indicates a strong risk of poverty for young people<sup>12</sup>. Reducing dropout rates of early school leavers to under 10% would help reduce these worrying trends of poverty. The Communication also states that reaching the 75% employment rate target for men and women set by the European Union by 2020 would in fact lift 20 million Europeans out of poverty. As such, fighting social exclusion and maximising the social and economic potential of all European citizens entails earlier intervention based on a broad set of social policies including targeted education and social policies.

Moreover, due to demographic trends in many European countries the possibilities of having more people in tertiary education willing to innovate needs to be better fostered so as to ensure a strong Welfare State based in a sustainable knowledge society.

Therefore, taking steps in reaching the political commitments from Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve (2009) needs to be followed through with more concrete measures and policies, which should be periodically monitored at EHEA level.

### **III. Historical overview of the Social Dimension in the Bologna Process**

The Social Dimension is one of the overarching Bologna Process themes, appearing for the first time in the Prague Communiqué (2001) where “...*Ministers reaffirmed the need, recalled by students to take account of the social dimension in the Bologna process...*”. At the following ministerial conferences, the social dimension was described as an integral part of the EHEA and a necessary condition for enhancing the attractiveness and competitiveness of the EHEA (Bergen Communiqué, 2005).

With the London Communiqué of May 2007, ministers responsible for higher education agreed on a common definition for the objective of the social dimension: “*We share the societal aspiration that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations*”. Further on, ministers concurred in setting national strategies and policies, including action plans and they agreed to report on their progress at the next ministerial meeting. It was recommended also to work towards defining comparable data and indicators for the social dimension of higher education.

When addressing the social dimension of higher education, ministers agreed to include measures to widen participation and reduce drop-out rates, provide adequate student services and create more flexible learning pathways into and within higher education. Some countries have taken steps towards enhancing equality of opportunities for underrepresented groups in accessing higher education, but very few countries have set specific targets to improve their participation rates. Less has been done to ensure monitoring of the participation of underrepresented groups in higher education.

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<sup>11</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on “The European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion: A European framework for social and territorial cohesion, 2010”, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> The Communication from the Commission on Poverty and Social Exclusion states that one in five people in EU aged under 25 is unemployed and in risk of poverty.

(Eurydice 2009)

In Leuven/Louvain-La-Neuve, ministers further committed to "...set measurable targets to widen participation of underrepresented groups in higher education, to be reached by the end of the next decade..." (Leuven/Louvain-La-Neuve Communiqué, 2009).

It was envisaged that the Working Group on the Social Dimension (2009-2012) in close collaboration with the Reporting on the Bologna Process implementation Working Group would oversee the progress made by countries on the social dimension of higher education through establishing comparable data and indicators and collecting examples of good practice regarding the implementation of social dimension policies in higher education at national and regional levels.

#### **IV. Current Position**

The current report reflects the activities carried out by the Working Group in accordance with its agreed Terms of Reference.

During the 2009-2010 timeframe the Working Group was chaired by Rafael Bonete (Spain). Starting with 2011-2012, the representative from Ireland, Brian Power has been asked to take over a Co-Chairing position and provide assistance in following up on the tasks and activities of the Social Dimension Working Group.

The following countries and stakeholder organisations are represented on the Working Group: Andorra, Austria, Belgium/Flemish Community, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", UK/EWNI, UK/Scotland, European Commission, BUSINESSEUROPE, ESU, EUA, EURASHE, Eurostat and Eurostudent.

According to its Terms of Reference for 2009-2012, the Social Dimension Working Group has the following aims:

- To identify obstacles and how some countries have overcome these obstacles and analyse good practices put in place in some countries within the EHEA for reaching the goal that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity of the European population.
- To analyse the actions taken in other parts of the educational system within the EHEA in order to increase the level of equity in Higher Education.
- To analyse national/regional strategies at governmental level to widening access to Higher Education.
- To analyse good practices and national experiences in the field of elaborating core indicators used for measuring and monitoring the relevant aspects of the Social Dimension in higher education.
- To analyse the responsibility of HEIs taking into account the social (and thus employment) perspectives of their graduates.
- To explore the feasibility of including the increasing relevance of social responsibility of HEIs in Europe (considering aspects related to innovation-based

regional and urban development in Europe and social engagements) in the concept of Social Dimension.

- To explore the possibility of creating a European Observatory on the Social Dimension of Higher Education (SD Observatory).

To help accomplish its mandate, the Working Group has also set a number of specific tasks as follows:

- Collection of good practices in Social Dimension implementation in Higher Education at national and regional level;
- Collection of measures taken in other parts of the educational system within the EHEA in order to increase the level of equity in Higher Education;
- Collection of good practices and national experiences in defining core indicators used for measuring and monitoring the relevant aspects of the Social Dimension in Higher Education;
- To collect information on successful examples of improving employability due to the good practices of HEIs;
- To encourage peer-learning activities (seminars, workshops etc.);
- To discuss the pros and cons of elaborating a wider concept of the social dimension for the near future.

## **2. Social Dimension Working Group – achievements of the Plan of Work (2009-2012)**

### **I. Analysis on the data collection exercise for Social Dimension**

The SD WG has been supporting the work of the Reporting Working Group concerning the social dimension section of the implementation report. More specifically, the WG was asked to<sup>13</sup>:

1. **Review and confirm** the data collectors' understanding of the social dimension or **make proposals** for modifications.
2. **Discuss** the scope of the seven issues and indicate priorities for the Integrated Report.
3. **Discuss** how the relationship between nationally specific information and comparative European statistical information should be managed in the Integrated Report.
4. **Discuss** the draft list of indicators on the social dimension in view of the priorities recommended for the Integrated Report and **make proposals** for further work.
5. **Consider** how the other tasks of the Working group can be undertaken, and how the results will be used.

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<sup>13</sup> Draft outline of contents for the BFUG Integrated Implementation Report (BFUG (ES) 20\_9a). Indicators on the social dimension of the Bologna Process, pp. 1-2.

At their first meeting in Madrid<sup>14</sup> (20 May 2010), the SD WG discussed the indicators on the Social Dimension of the Bologna Process and provided contextual data and policy-related information on the social dimension related topics covered in the implementation report.

A preliminary first draft of Chapter 4 of the implementation report: 'the Social Dimension in the European Higher Education Area' was made available for consultation to the Working Group members by the data collectors.

At their following meeting in Berlin (11 July 2011) the Social Dimension Working Group discussed the social dimension chapter of the implementation report. Specific references were made to the structure and the general direction of the chapter. An overview of the discussions was sent to the data collectors for further consideration.

Moreover, the examples of good practice collected by the Social Dimension Working Group were also forwarded to the Reporting on the Bologna Process Implementation WG to facilitate insights on the subject and comparison for the Integrated Report.

The conclusion section from the end of the WG report highlights the results of the analysis carried out by the Data Collectors in the implementation report on the Social Dimension Chapter.

## **II. Collection of good practice examples on the implementation of the Social Dimension in higher education**

According to its Terms of Reference, the SD WG has committed to collect a series of examples of good practice on implementation of the social dimension at national, regional and institutional levels across the EHEA. The BFUG Secretariat was asked to provide support in this process and to make the collection of good practices more easily available on the EHEA website.

Before the meeting in Berlin (11 July 2011), a call was launched to members of the group to provide practices and examples of successful implementation of different action lines and measures on social dimension implementation in their institutional or national context. Cases of good practices were sent by Belgium/Flemish Community, Croatia, Germany, Ireland, France, Norway, Spain, UK/Scotland and UK/England.

Considering the variety of the collected models of good practice, a "typology table for the collection of SD measures"<sup>15</sup> was developed and used as a reference to set up the catalogue. The table with examples of good practice has been uploaded on the EHEA website and made available [here](#).

The shared experiences point to a range of different measures taken at institutional, regional and national levels or in different sectors of higher education by member countries to improve student access, participation and completion of studies at different stages (before entry to higher education, at higher education entry or during study

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<sup>14</sup> Social Dimension Working Group minutes, 20-05-2010.

<sup>15</sup> The typology is an adaptation of a standardized classification table proposed for the collection of good practices within the SD Observatory.

progress). Moreover, the collected examples are intended to provide examples of policy development on equity and access issues across EHEA member states. Furthermore, the measures and policy initiatives could provide solutions to similar issues other member countries might face in their implementation of social dimension measures in higher education.

### **III. Development of a pilot initiative to promote Peer Learning on the Social Dimension of Higher Education in Europe**

One of the proposals established in the WG's Terms of Reference was to explore the possibility of developing a European Observatory on the Social Dimension of Higher Education (SD Observatory). At the WG's meeting in Madrid<sup>16</sup> the idea was further developed. It was proposed to have the Observatory pool data on the social dimension and provide a basis for reflection and action on social dimension issues. Additionally, it was considered that the Observatory could also function as a pool of expertise.

EUROSTUDENT was approached to further build upon this initial idea of the Observatory and develop a concept proposal of the European Observatory on Social Dimension in Higher Education Observatory.

Following discussion on the concept proposal developed by EUROSTUDENT and further development of the proposal by the Working Group, agreement was reached on the following objectives for the Observatory:

1. To monitor relevant aspects of the implementation of initiatives related to the social dimension across the EHEA (i.e. national targets and national action plans on the social dimension).
2. To examine and compare how EHEA countries collect and analyse data on the social dimension of higher education.
3. To facilitate peer learning by collecting good practices and successful examples of "what works" at national, regional and institutional level (i.e. exchange good practice on how to increase participation of underrepresented groups in higher education, access routes, flexibility of studies).
4. Provide the facility for the evaluation of national practices in the area of the social dimension of higher education by international peers on request.

The first three objectives of the SD Observatory are directly connected with the Terms of Reference of the SD WG, while the fourth objective was conceived as an innovative component of the project. This additional objective aims to offer a voluntary mechanism for the evaluation of national practices and policies in the area of the social dimension.

The project provides a practical mechanism to measure and improve implementation of the social dimension of higher education while focusing on "removing barriers to entry, participation and successful completion in higher education<sup>17</sup>". It would have the overarching purpose of supporting structured and systematic peer learning between

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<sup>16</sup> Minutes of the Social Dimension Working Group Meeting, Madrid, 20 May 2010.

<sup>17</sup> SD Observatory concept proposal



countries and institutions in order to lead to measurable improvements in the social dimension of higher education across the European Higher Education Area.

Some concerns were expressed about the concept of a "European Observatory" during the BFUG meeting held in Copenhagen on 18/19 January 2012, given that it might be construed as a new organisational structure for which Ministers might become financially or otherwise responsible. It was explained that the concept envisaged only task-focused activities and that no new organisational structures, financial or staffing responsibilities would be involved. However, taking into account the potential misunderstanding that might arise from the use of the term "European Observatory" and suggestions subsequently made by the BFUG members during the Copenhagen meeting, we have developed the concept as a **Pilot initiative to promote Peer Learning on the Social Dimension of Higher Education.**

It is envisaged that this initiative would operate as a project with financial assistance from an appropriate EU funding line between 2012 and 2015 and could become self-sustainable if the national reviews are considered to be sufficiently valuable to provide a basis for national policy formulation that countries are prepared to pay for them. The decision on following-up the project after 2015 would be taken at the next Ministerial Meeting on the basis of the contribution of the peer learning initiative in improving the social dimension of higher education.

#### **IV. Development of the Social Dimension area on the EHEA website**

The Social Dimension WG has a [reserved area](#) on the EHEA permanent website. Here information is provided concerning the composition, purpose, activity and focus of the Working Group. Furthermore, an overview of the Social Dimension policy aims in the Bologna Process is also presented [here](#). The WG's area on the website has been regularly updated with news and documents of interest concerning the ongoing work of the group.

The catalogue of good practices has been also made available on Social Dimensions' area on the EHEA website and can be accessed on the following address: <http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=244>.

In addition to the public information provided on the EHEA website, a restricted area on the EHEA backoffice is used by the members of the Working Group to access drafts and final documents from all WG meetings.

### **3. Conclusions and recommendations for the future**

The Social Dimension is one of the policy areas of the Bologna Process where objectives have not been translated into regulatory frameworks<sup>1819</sup>. As Eurydice reports, countries have struggled to keep pace with the latest developments and changes happening in their higher education systems. Furthermore the social dimension hasn't been deployed yet as a driver for change in their higher education policy. The Eurydice report finally concludes that the social dimension needs to be addressed more "forcefully and coherently" at EU and national level.<sup>20</sup>

Efforts have been made to cover the existing information gap in defining policy measures with new and reliable data. The reporting on the progress of the implementation of the Bologna Process, carried out by Eurostat, Eurostudent and Eurydice has contributed to this end and facilitated the monitoring of progress and collection of evidence-based data on the social dimension area of higher education. The Social Dimension Working Group has collaborated closely with the Data Collectors by providing assistance in the process of reviewing the indicators and analysing the overall picture of the social dimension across EHEA member countries.

In light of the work carried out by the Social Dimension WG and considering the data collected in the integrated implementation report, the WG would like to highlight a number of conclusions and provide further recommendations.

#### **I. Conclusions**

The previous report of the Social Dimension Coordination Group (2007-2009) stated that national reports on the Social Dimension compiled in that phase on the basis of a detailed questionnaire were unequal in their specificity, quality or focus. While some countries presented in great detail actions and policy measures to foster different aspects of the social dimension, others considered that they did not have underrepresented groups in their higher education system at all, or have provided information that was at odds with the data supplied by Eurostat and Eurostudent reports on the Social Dimension.

Following those conclusions, ministers in the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué (2009) maintained Social Dimension as a high priority for European Higher Education and asked data collectors to use available information to help monitor the progress made in the attainment of the objectives. The main Social Dimension issues highlighted in the communiqué reflect the subject of equality of opportunities and the provision of

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<sup>18</sup> Bologna Beyond 2010, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> However Council of Europe's "Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities" and the "European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages" provide a legal framework for a number of social dimension issues.

<sup>20</sup> Eurydice - Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Funding and the Social Dimension 2011, [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/thematic\\_studies\\_en.php](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/thematic_studies_en.php), pp. 51-62.

appropriate learning conditions for all students, irrespective of their particular situation (widening access).

With respect to the goal of providing equality of opportunity for all in higher education the integrated implementation report indicates that this goal has yet to be achieved. Referring to the trends in participation rates since the inception of the Bologna Process, the report shows that the move towards “massification” of higher education can be detected in most of the EHEA countries. Some countries registered a progressive increase in student numbers since the beginning of the Bologna Process, but participation rates have been uneven and some countries have reported a decline in student numbers over several years.

Looking at the participation and representation rates of different societal groups in higher education, the integrated implementation report highlights the fact that gender imbalances are present in most EHEA countries when it comes to choice of study fields for women and men. Furthermore, representation of students with a migrant background seems to be much lower in countries that report a high rate of early school leavers. This indicates that measures to foster participation of people with a migrant background must begin at earlier levels in their education.

One of the findings of the Eurostudent IV study also indicates a certain propensity for students coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds to be underrepresented at Master’s level, while having a better level of representation in some fields of study. On the basis of the evidence presented, humanities and arts appear to be more supportive of social mobility when compared to areas such as engineering, manufacturing and construction.<sup>21</sup>

The fairness of the higher education system seems also to be questioned by the reduced chances of certain groups of students to attain tertiary education. In almost all EHEA countries the odds ratio of those attaining higher education is still very strongly correlated to those with highly educated parents in comparison with students with parents who have lower levels of educational attainment.

Policy measures targeting underrepresented groups have been reported as being implemented across many BFUG countries. However, the approaches and policy actions in some countries concentrate more on targeted measures, while in other countries they concentrate on general policy actions or a combination of both approaches. Countries reporting *general policy approaches* often make a reference to structural changes in their higher education system.

Many EHEA member countries indicate that they have put in place monitoring activities to observe the composition of the student body and therefore are able to evaluate the effect of measures aiming at widening participation. However, the monitoring systems do not always cover all of the groups defined as underrepresented and/or they do not allow

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<sup>21</sup> Eurostudent IV – Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe, Synopsys of Indicators, 2008-2011., pp. 78 – 80.

for the capturing of all relevant student characteristics. Furthermore, an assessment of the actual impact of monitoring activities on policy developments across the EHEA is still required.

In the majority of EHEA countries alternative entry routes to higher education are not subject to regular nationwide monitoring. Eurostudent research<sup>22</sup> shows that students belonging to the category of delayed transition students or those coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds more often take non-traditional access routes into higher education. This also provides an indicator of the social inclusiveness of higher education institutions.

Efforts to achieve equity in higher education are sometimes complemented by measures that can take place at upper secondary level, in the form of guidance and counselling services or at the level of preparatory programmes for higher education candidates.

Student support services<sup>23</sup> are regarded as crucial to ensure an inclusive higher education system and to guarantee the quality of the student experience in a widened higher education system. The majority of countries provide academic and career guidance to all students while the provision of psychological counselling services is not as common. Although the ways in which student affairs and services are provided differ from one context to the next, the diversity of the institutional setup of student affairs and services in Europe could gain from an exchange of professional experience, transfer of knowledge, and peer-learning to achieve a better social support<sup>24</sup>. The quality and strength of student support systems is directly linked to the amount of money made available through public budgets and in the current economic circumstances the continued provision of these services is coming under greater pressure.

Although public funding remains the main source in the financing of higher education system, half of EHEA countries charge some sort of fees to students. There are major system differences in terms of fee charged, criteria used to determine which student pays fees and the amount to be paid. As such, issues of student fees and support are difficult to understand and compare accurately at the EHEA level. The ways in which higher education funding systems are structured also have an impact on the social dimension.

Direct financial supports to students - grants or loans for both maintenance (or living costs) and towards the cost of fees - are among the principal policy instruments for ensuring equity of access for all students and realising the social dimension in many

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<sup>22</sup> Eurostudent IV – Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe, Synopsys of Indicators, 2008-2011, pp. 51-52.

<sup>23</sup> The student support services are here referred to as academic guidance services, career guidance and services of psychological counseling as they were assessed in the reporting exercise. The Working Group notes that student support services are a broader concept.

<sup>24</sup> See the Berlin Declaration on Social Dimension – Recommendations for strong student affairs and services in Europe [http://www.student-affairs.eu/tl\\_files/student-affairs/content/BerlinDeclarationSocialDimension2011\\_EN.pdf](http://www.student-affairs.eu/tl_files/student-affairs/content/BerlinDeclarationSocialDimension2011_EN.pdf)

countries. However, there are considerable differences in the levels of financial support provided to students across the EHEA - these are outlined comprehensively in the recent Eurydice publication entitled "*Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Funding and the Social Dimension*". In addition, it is likely that these types of direct financial supports will be most vulnerable to the imposition of fiscal consolidation measures or expenditure reductions being introduced by many governments.

University degree holders (ISCED 5/6) have better chances of being employed - therefore, with the greater threat of the exclusion of disadvantaged or underrepresented groups that the current economic crisis brings, work on the social dimension is more urgent than ever and takes on an even greater significance and priority.

## II. Recommendations

Recognising the role of the social dimension in enhancing the attractiveness and competitiveness of the EHEA, the Social Dimension Working Group would like to reiterate the Leuven/Lovain-la-Neuve Communiqué objective of widening access and participation for underrepresented groups in higher education. On this aim by 2015 at the latest, EHEA member countries should reaffirm their commitments and targets for widening overall access and increasing participation and completion of underrepresented groups in higher education, according to the diversity of the national populations, with the aim to reach these targets by 2020.

Examining the results drawn from the implementation report on the Social Dimension Chapter, the Working Group appreciates that the social dimension area needs further progress to ensure that the empirical realities on the ground can be addressed. In light of these assessments the group would like to make the following recommendations:

- In order to fully tap into the potential of all members of society, EHEA countries need to commit further to **implementing socially inclusive policies** in their higher education systems by addressing the causes and consequences of educational exclusion. Students coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds are still underrepresented at higher degree levels of studies, are more inclined to enter more accessible fields of study and are less likely to enrol for study abroad.
- To increase the participation of underrepresented groups into higher education while emphasising **the benefits of alternative access routes into higher education**. Furthermore, entry requirements and other barriers should be assessed in terms of equity to ensure the possibility of those who have the capacity to follow higher education studies are enabled to do so, regardless of prior formal learning achievements.
- As the issue of the Social Dimension is a wide and overarching theme, national and institutional policies need to be better correlated with other Bologna Process working areas. In this frame the systemic approach to **developments regarding learning outcomes, ECTS, diploma supplement and the implementation of**

**national qualifications frameworks** are essential to ensuring widening access, progress and completion of studies through more alternative and flexible access routes into higher education. A systemic approach is also required in co-operation with the policy areas of **mobility** and the **portability of student grants and loans**, given the lower propensity of disadvantaged students to engage in studies abroad.

- Higher education offers students the chance of future financial benefits and sustainable social advancement independently of their economic background. Such chances are decisive in order to raise participation of societal groups with traditionally low educational attainment. Higher education institutions have the responsibility to **take the social and employment perspectives of their graduates in account** when they design study programmes.
- **Measures to foster participation** of people coming from disadvantaged backgrounds with a focus on prospective students from migrant backgrounds must begin at earlier levels in their education.
- The **monitoring process of the composition of the student body** needs to be better linked to social dimension policies. Also, the monitoring process needs to be carried out in a systematic way that will permit monitoring of the effectiveness of policy measures for widening access and participation at institutional, regional, national and European levels.

Achieving the commitments set in the Bologna Process depends to a great extent on a **shared responsibility and involvement of all actors in society**. The working group advocates the benefits of a broader societal dialogue focusing on the impact of the social dimension in higher education.

This highlights the need for further efforts to **raise awareness about the meaning of the social dimension** and its economic and social significance, as well as the need to launch national discussions on how to define the social dimension in the specific national context, and how to approach identified issues through policy measures.

The social dimension should also be linked to other on-going discussions on diversification, classification or performance funding. Assessment of higher education institutions might include some measure of the effectiveness of their policies for widening participation of their potential student body or how they manage to reduce dropout rates.

Furthermore, strengthening our **efforts to promote greater access, participation and completion, providing adequate services for all students** and encouraging the cooperation of all the relevant actors in pursuing these objectives, including students, student affairs and services organisations, university faculty and administrative staff and policy makers, are among the key elements necessary for making the social dimension a reality and a key pillar in higher education in Europe. In doing so, European higher

education will not alone become more equitable and promote greater social cohesion, it will also become more attractive to external students, more competitive and serve to better sustain Europe's economic and social development into the future.

To assist EHEA countries in developing, implementing and monitoring Social Dimension policies, a **Pilot initiative to promote Peer Learning on the Social Dimension of Higher Education** should be developed, in order to support structured and systematic peer learning among countries and institutions and thus make possible measurable improvements in the social dimension of higher education across Europe. The Working Group recommends that the proposal on the **Pilot initiative to promote Peer Learning on the Social Dimension of Higher Education** be adopted for consideration at the Bucharest Ministerial Meeting in 2012.

#### **4. Acronyms**

EHEA – European Higher Education Area

SD Observatory - European Observatory on Social Dimension of Higher Education

EU – European Union

HE – Higher Education

HEI- Higher Education Institution

ISCED - International Standard Classification of Education

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

SD WG – Social Dimension Working Group

UK/EWNI – United Kingdom/England, Wales, Northern Ireland

#### **5. Annexes**

The Social Dimension Working Group report is accompanied by the following documents as annex:

1. The SD WG Terms of Reference
2. Membership of the Social Dimension Working Group

## Social Dimension Working Group

### Updated Terms of Reference

<b>Name of the working group</b> <b>Social Dimension</b>
<b>Contact persons (Chairs):</b> Rafael Bonete ( <a href="mailto:rbonete@usal.es">rbonete@usal.es</a> ) – Spain Brian Power ( <a href="mailto:brian_power@education.gov.ie">brian_power@education.gov.ie</a> ) – Ireland
<b>Composition</b> Andorra, Austria, Belgium/Flemish Community, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, UK/EWNI, UK/Scotland, European Commission, BUSINESSEUROPE, ESU, EUA, EURASHE, Eurostat, Eurostudent
<b>Purpose and/or outcome</b> (with a reference to paragraph 9 in the Leuven Communiqué) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To identify obstacles and how some countries have overcome these obstacles and analyze good practices put in place in some countries within the EHEA for reaching the goal that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity of the European population.</li><li>• To analyze the actions taken in others parts of the educational system within the EHEA in order to increase the level of equity in Higher Education.</li><li>• To analyze national/regional strategies at governmental level to widening access to Higher Education</li><li>• To analyze good practices and national experiences in the field of elaborating core indicators used for measuring and monitoring the relevant aspects of the Social Dimension in higher education.</li><li>• To analyze the responsibility of HEI taking into account the social (and thus employment) perspectives of their graduates.</li></ul>



- To explore the feasibility of including the increasing relevance of social responsibility of HEIs in Europe (considering aspects related to innovation based regional and urban development in Europe and social engagements) in the concept of Social Dimension.
- To explore the possibility of creating an European Observatory on Social Dimension of Higher Education (SD Observatory)

### **Reference to the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué**

Paragraph 9, 21, 26.

### **Specific tasks**

- Collection of good practices in Social Dimension implementation in Higher Education at national and regional level.
- Collection of measures taken in other parts of the educational system within the EHEA in order to increase the level of equity in Higher Education;
- Collections of good practices and national experiences in defining core indicators used for measuring and monitoring the relevant aspects of Social Dimension in Higher Education;
- To collect information of successful stories of improving employability due to the good practices of HEIs;
- To encourage peer-learning activities (seminars, workshops etc.).
- To discuss the pros and cons of elaborating a wider concept of social dimension for the near future.

### **Reporting**

Minutes of working group meetings or the results of online activities will be made available by the Bologna Secretariat.

BFUG should also receive regular reports and updates.

To allow for good communication with BFUG as a whole and for the necessary consultations, progress reports should be submitted at least two weeks before each BFUG meeting. In between BFUG meetings, updates can be circulated by the Bologna Secretariat via e-mail.

### **Meeting schedule**

20 May 2010

First half of 2011

September 2011

**Liaison with other action lines**

The chair of the working group will participate in meetings of the working group on reporting on the implementation of the Bologna Process in order to liaise with stocktaking and data collection.

Cooperation with other working groups, in particular those on mobility will be organized in the relevant context.

## Annex 2

**Membership of the Social Dimension Working Group  
2009-2012**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Country/Organisation</b>	<b>Name</b>
1.	Spain	Rafael Bonete Co-Chair of the Social Dimension Working Group
2.	Ireland	Brian Power Co-Chair of the Social Dimension Working Group
3.	Andorra	Enric Garcia
4.	Andorra	Mar Martinez
5.	Austria	Helga Posset
6.	Belgium/Flemish Community	Linda De Kock
7.	Croatia	Thomas Farnell
8.	Czech Republic	Prof. Petr Matějů
9.	Estonia	Janne Pukk
10.	Estonia	Heli Aru
11.	France	Fabien Emmanuelli
12.	Germany	Achim Meyer auf der Heyde
13.	Germany	Danja Oste
14.	The Netherlands	Mary Tupan
15.	The Netherlands	Trinh Ngo
16.	The Netherlands	Marlies Leegwater
17.	Norway	Gro Beate Vige
18.	Portugal	Ana Cristina Jacinto
19.	Slovenia	Slavko Gaber
20.	"the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"	Nadezda Uzelac
21.	United Kingdom/EWNI	Cliff Hancock
22.	United Kingdom/Scotland	Carolyn Fishman
23.	European Commission	Lene Oftedal
24.	BUSINESSEUROPE	Henning Dettleff

<b>25.</b>	European Students' Union	Florian Kaiser
<b>26.</b>	European Students' Union	Allan Päll
<b>27.</b>	European University Association	Michael Gaebel
<b>28.</b>	European University Association	Ralf Drachenberg
<b>29.</b>	EURASHE	Žarko Nožica
<b>30.</b>	EUROSTAT	Fernando Reis
<b>31.</b>	EUROSTUDENT	Christoph Gwosc
<b>32.</b>	EUROSTUDENT	Dominic Orr
<b>33.</b>	BFUG Secretariat	Ligia Deca
<b>34.</b>	BFUG Secretariat	Melinda Szabó