

Vision for the future “Principles and Guidelines for Social Dimension (PAG)”

Accompanied with the SWOT for achieving the vision.

Produced at the AG1 meeting in Zagreb, MSE, 19/02/2019

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.