



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE OF UKRAINE

Final Report of the Advisory Group 1 on Social Dimension

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Introduction

The Advisory Group on Social Dimension (AG1 on SD) is co-chaired by Ninoslav S. Schmidt (Croatia) and Robert Napier (the European Students’ Union – ESU). 17 other members and stakeholders are part of this advisory group, and these are: Austria, Belgium Flemish Community, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, EI/ETUCE, EUA, European Commission, EUROSTUDENT, Germany, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania, Sweden, United Kingdom and United Kingdom (Scotland). The group had a total of five meetings between February 2019 and February 2020, and used a multitude of online tools to continue the dialogue and work going in between meetings. In order to inspire better discussions, the group also welcomed a number of guest speakers during the meetings, which helped identify key issues related to social dimension in higher education and develop them accordingly within the Principles and Guidelines.

From its first meeting which was held in Zagreb in February 2019, the Advisory Group decided to focus most of its energy on creating a concrete set of Principles and Guidelines, which are short, concise and can bring about a real change within this field. Before starting to work on this document, we discussed and agreed that the **definition of social dimension (SD) should combine the definitions used in the London 2007 and the Yerevan 2015 Communique, but also should aim to go beyond this.** Within the revised definition adopted by the Advisory Group, social

dimension encompasses the creation of an inclusive environment in higher education that fosters equity and diversity, and is responsive to the needs of local communities. The AG1 SD kept in mind the common understanding that social dimension goes beyond identifying vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups of students and that social dimension principles should be integrated into the core higher education functions, which include among others Learning and Teaching, Research, Knowledge Exchange and Outreach, Institutional Governance and Management and Policies for Empowering Students and Staff.

Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA

For this reason, the AG1 SD is proposing a forward-looking strategic document for higher education development, entitled the *Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA*, which we are proposing to be annexed to the 2020 Rome Ministerial Communique, with a clear commitment to its full implementation over the upcoming decade. Since this document has been widely consulted, not just within the AG1 SD but also within the BFUG at large, we believe it is time to have a clear political commitment from the EHEA ministers to truly improve the social dimensionS of higher education. The document aims to define ten principles for social dimension in higher education for upcoming decade of the Bologna process 2020-2030. Each principle is also accompanied with a set of guidelines that explain the implementation process.

Without entering into the merits of each of the Principles and Guidelines, the following overarching aims led the AG1 SD in the process of creation of the Principles and Guidelines. One of the primary aims of the work of the AG1 SD is to ensure that the social dimension becomes central to higher education strategies at national, regional, local and institutional level, as well as at the EHEA and the EU level. Secondly, through the Principles and Guidelines we want to ensure a holistic approach to social dimension which will aim to create coherent policy measures from early childhood, through schooling and into higher education and throughout lifelong learning. This will mean more connectivity between the work of those responsible for higher education and other ministries and departments, which only together can bring about a tangible change.

Through the adoption and implementation of these Principles and Guidelines, we also want to ensure that public authorities continue to support higher education institutions to strengthen their capacity in responding to the needs of a more diverse student body, particularly through continuing professional training for both academic and administrative staff. It is ineffective advocating to achieve the definition adopted in the London Communique on social dimension, unless efforts are made in this regard.

Data collection is also central to the improvement of social dimension. Whilst understanding the restrictions imposed by national laws, higher education systems should define goals of collecting certain types of data and to develop the necessary capacities to collect, process and use such data to support the social dimension policy. The Principles and Guidelines also put emphasis on the need of ensuring effective counselling and guidance for potential and enrolled students as well as on establishing a strategic framework for higher education funding which promotes social dimension. Mobility programs in higher education should be structured in a way that foster diversity, equity and inclusion. Also, community and civic engagement in higher education should be used to promote social dimensions in higher education.

Legal regulations or policy documents should allow and enable higher education institutions to develop their own strategies to fulfil their public responsibility towards widening access to, participation in and completion of higher education studies. Lastly, public authorities should engage in a policy dialogue with higher education institutions and other relevant stakeholders about how the above principles and guidelines can be translated and implemented both at national system and institutional level.

The AG1 SD has also proposed to the BFUG Secretariat to organize a workshop “The Social Dimension within the Bologna Process: Achievements & Challenges Ahead” in the framework of the Global Summit on Higher Education in Rome in June 2020. The goal of the workshop is to present the new strategic document “Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA” and explain how countries could improve social dimension policies by implementing the document Principles and Guidelines.

Recommendations for the development of social dimension in the period 2020-2023

During the last meeting of the AG1 SD held in Copenhagen in February 2020, the group spent a substantial time on improving the introductory part and introducing a short glossary to the Principles and Guidelines. The glossary is intended to highlight the differences in terminology between three different terms used within the document, namely, underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students. The definitions of these terminologies are not to be understood as legal definitions but rather are intended as explanatory definitions used in relation to the contents of the Principles and Guidelines. The group also managed to streamline the structure of the document, with shorter, more concise principles and similar wording styles for the guidelines.

The BFUG has now approved the content of the Principles and Guidelines, which we now hope will be annexed to the communique and adopted by ministers for implementation in Rome (or online) in November. Following the discussion in the last AG meeting, it was also decided to make recommendations for the BFUG 2020-2023

working period. It is essential to bear in mind that the adoption of Principles and Guidelines should only be seen as the beginning of a journey to holistically improve the social dimension of higher education in the EHEA. The proposed document should not be seen as a checklist, but rather as an instrument which can help bring about concrete and tangible change over the next decade and beyond. In order to be able to do this, **it is crucial that the BFUG enables the establishment and work of the Advisory Group for Social Dimension in the next BFUG cycle.** The co-chairs have taken the liberty of drafting up a set of terms of reference for this new Advisory Group, based on the discussions of the current AG (see annex). The main objective for the new mandate of the Advisory Group for Social Dimension should be (a) developing a system of monitoring of the Principles and Guidelines and (b) defining indicators and benchmarks for the principles for SD.

In the meantime, in order to avoid the scenario of having no improvement over the next three years, while the indicators and monitoring mechanisms are being developed, we suggest that the Peer Support Groups (PSG) are broadened to incorporate the topic of social dimension. Despite having a very short time frame to operate within, the current PSGs have been successful in helping countries support each other. The social dimension requires more peer support at this point, as we still see significant discrepancies in the level of policy development and implementation within the EHEA. The current AG1 SD suggests that this is done in parallel to Thematic Country Reviews for the Social Dimension, because it could ensure that the relevant areas for peer support are identified and acted upon.

Lastly, the AG1 SD recommends to organize a seminar or conference on social dimension at the end of the next Bologna cycle with the aim of discussing progress in social dimension in the EHEA. The AG1 SD hopes that by holding such a conference, countries and stakeholders alike will be able to come together and analyse the impact of the work done on the social dimension, which will further enhance the development of this important policy.

Annex: Terms of Reference of the Advisory Group on the Social Dimension 2020-2023

Name of the Advisory Group Advisory Group on the Social Dimension
Contact persons (proposed Co-Chairs) The group should be co-chaired by members of the Bologna Follow Up Group with different statuses within BFUG. Ideally this would include one Full Member and one Consultative Member.
Composition An open call will be issued to the members of the BFUG. The composition of the group should not necessarily reflect the countries that will voluntarily participate in the thematic country reviews.
Overarching Aim The overarching aim is to support the EHEA members in developing social dimension policies that will create inclusive environment in higher education that fosters equity, diversity, and is responsive to the needs of local communities. The Advisory Group will follow up and will further develop the main outcomes of the work of the AG1 on Social Dimension 2018-2020: " <i>Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA</i> ", which is annexed to the Rome Communiqué.
Objectives <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Developing a system of monitoring the implementation of the <i>Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA</i>. It will enable measuring the impact of the broadened definition of the social dimension in the Principles and Guidelines on the work of different higher education institutions.2) Defining indicators and benchmarks for the principles included in the <i>Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA</i>.3) Organizing peer support activities for social dimension to support the implementation of the Principles and Guidelines among the EHEA members. The Advisory Group should consider establishing partnerships for implementing Thematic Country Reviews for Social Dimension to systematically collect country needs for peer support.4) Organizing a seminar on the social dimension at the end of the cycle in 2023 to discuss the progress made in developing social dimension policies in the EHEA members.
Reference to the Rome Communiqué <i>{The text below is subject to change}</i> We adopt the "<i>Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA</i>" and commit to implementing them in our systems. We endorse the broadened definition of social dimension, and will engage in wide-ranging policy dialogue on how to implement the principles and guidelines fully at national level. We will support our higher education institutions in integrating them into their institutional

culture and core higher education missions: learning and teaching, research and innovation, knowledge circulation and outreach, institutional governance and management. We will report in 2023 on the concrete steps taken and the related monitoring measures to assure an evidence-based follow-up.

Reporting

Minutes of working group meetings and key documents developed by the Advisory group will be made available on the EHEA website www.ehea.info. The Bologna Secretariat will provide administrative support for the work of the Advisory Group.

The BFUG should also receive regular reports and updates from the group. To ensure good communication and consultations with the BFUG as a whole, progress reports should be submitted at least two weeks before each BFUG meeting.

Draft meeting schedule:

The content and timeline of the meetings will be discussed amongst the co-chairs and the members of this Advisory Group; however, the following can be seen as a draft schedule:

Year 2021 – 1st quarter:

- Defining the Workplan for the mandate of the AG with the methods of work

Year 2021 – 2023:

- Organizing peer support activities for social dimension

Year 2021 – 2022 (1st quarter)

- Defining indicators and benchmarks for the principles included in the Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA.

Year 2022 (1st quarter) – 2023 (1st quarter)

- Defining a system of monitoring the implementation of the Principles and Guidelines

Year 2023 (in the framework of the ministerial conference)

- Organizing a seminar on the social dimension