



Relaunch-process of the Austrian National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education

Moving forward

Helga Posset, helga.posset@bmfwf.gv.at

Federal Ministry for Women, Science, and Research Austria

Dpt. I/13 Evidence-based higher education development

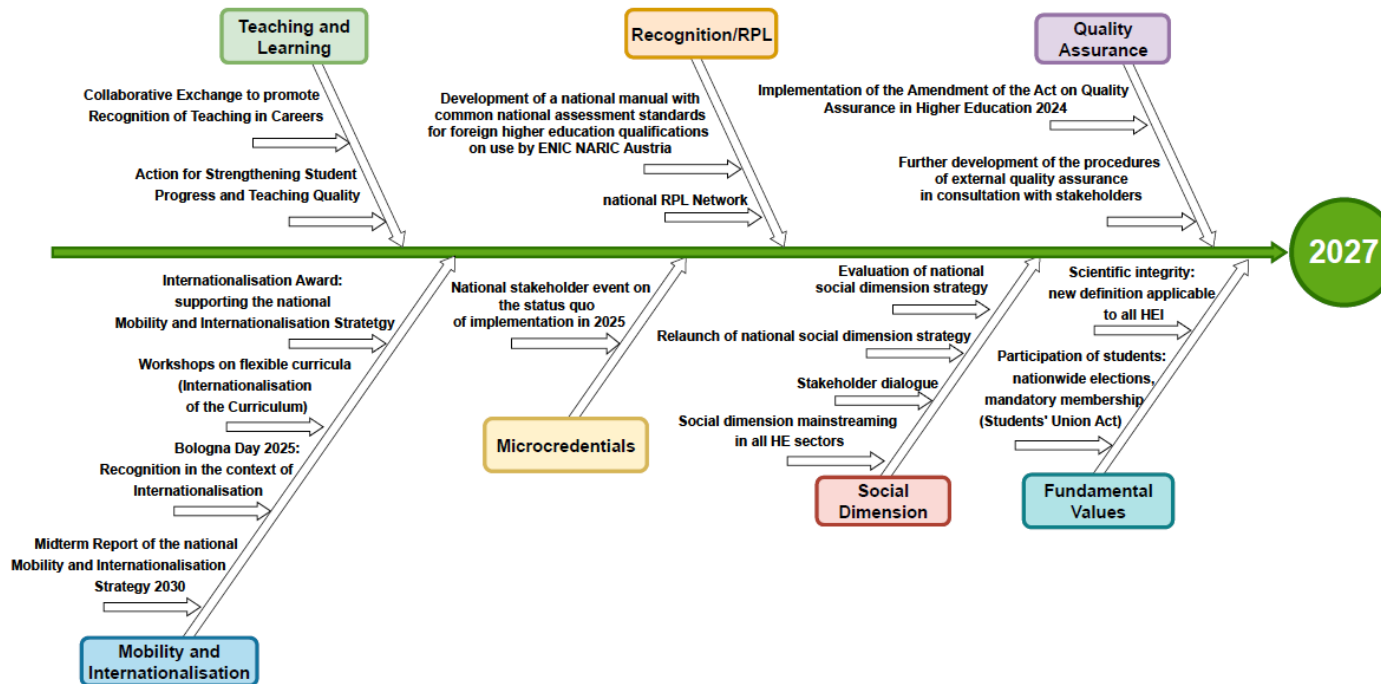


SD action plan part of national action plan on Bologna Key Commitments (and others)

Topics for implementation

- Teaching and Learning
- Recognition
- Quality Assurance
- Mobility and Internationalisation
- Micro Credentials
- Fundamental Values
- Social Dimension

NAP Key Commitments – Tirana Communiqué 2024



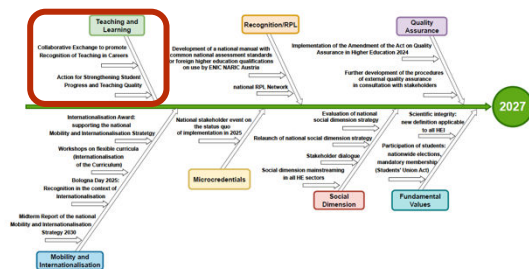
1. Teaching and Learning

Plans

- In order to valuing teaching performance on par with research the plan is to develop joint principles for recognizing teaching performance.
- Assuring student-oriented teaching and learning and HEIs responsibility for quality development

Status quo

- Collection of current practices at all universities took place in December 2025, spring 2026 is devoted to preparing further cooperation among universities.
- Universities autonomously promote pedagogical and didactic support for their teaching staff.
- Universities report on QA measures in teaching in performance agreements process.





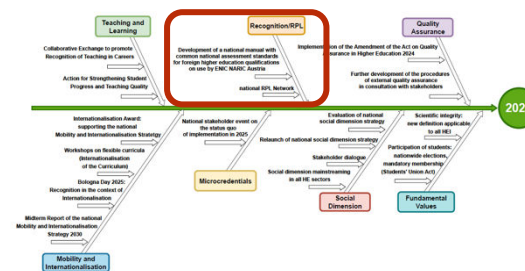
2. Recognition/RPL

Plans

- Development of a national manual with common national assessment standards for foreign higher education qualifications on use by ENIC NARIC Austria
- National RPL Network: The network aims to facilitate the recognition of prior learning through strengthening the development and implementation of quality-assured recognition procedures and the exchange of expertise at national and European level.

Status quo

- Ongoing
- The RPL network has expanded, raised the awareness and reported about the opportunities of flexible learning paths and the implemented procedures in all HE sectors



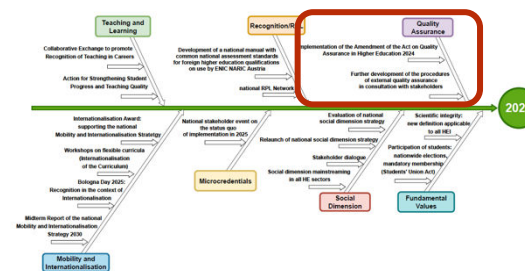
3. Quality Assurance

Plans

- Implementation of the Amendment of the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education 2024
- Further development of the procedures of external quality assurance in consultation with stakeholders

Status quo

- Implementation ongoing



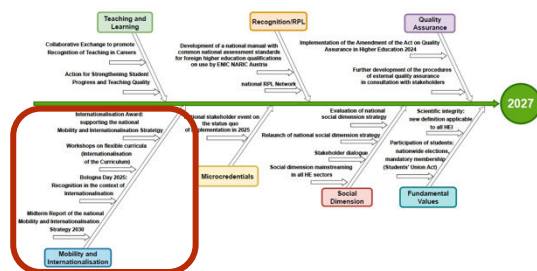
4. Mobility and Internationalisation

Plans

- Annual *Internationalization Award* supporting the national Mobility and internationalization Strategy (HMIS)
- Workshops on flexible curricula (Internationalization of the Curriculum – IoC)
- Underrepresented groups in mobility

Status quo

- 1st *Internationalization Award* awarded in Nov. 2025 at the University of Applied Science Kufstein; has been a success with great feedback by HEIs (respective units responsible for internationalization felt recognized and valued).
- IoC workshops: planning stage – dates TBA
- Bologna Day 2026 on Internationalization and Mobility: 17th of June: probably results of mid-term report on the (HMIS)
- Mid-term report on the HMIS – to be published Q1/2026



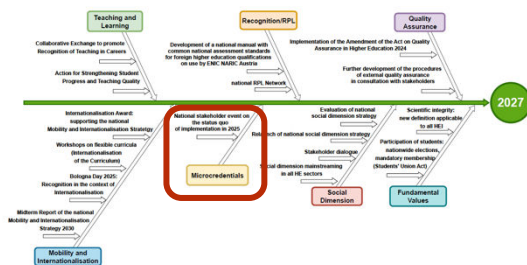
5. Microcredentials

Plans

- National stakeholder event on the status quo of implementation in 2025

Status quo

- May 2025: two main take aways from the event: a) There is no need for action with regard to legal or organizational framework conditions. b) The higher education sectors greatly appreciated the exchange in this highly interactive format and are requesting the BMFWF to organize a follow-up event.
- A follow up is planned for 2026 in Q4.





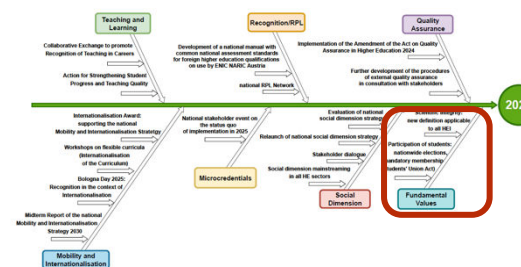
6. Fundamental Values

Plans

- The fundamental values in Higher Education as defined within the EHEA are core principles of the legal framework for universities and other higher education institutions. Some improvement in certain areas, such as the scientific integrity or the participation of students, is done at the moment.

Status quo

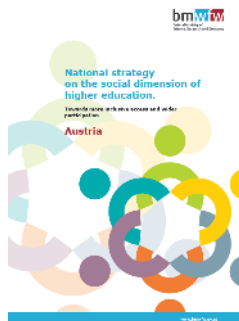
- Implementation of improvements in the area of the Fundamental Values as indicated in the monitoring conducted within the BPIR 2027 as well as the NewFAV2 Project; reflection on the monitoring results in the WG on Fundamental Values and within the national authorities



7. Social Dimension

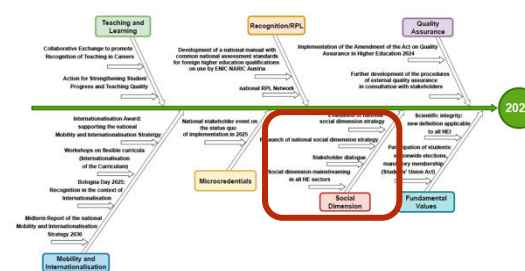
Plans

- Evaluation of the national SD strategy
- Relaunch of the national SD Strategy
- Stakeholder dialogue
- Social dimension mainstreaming

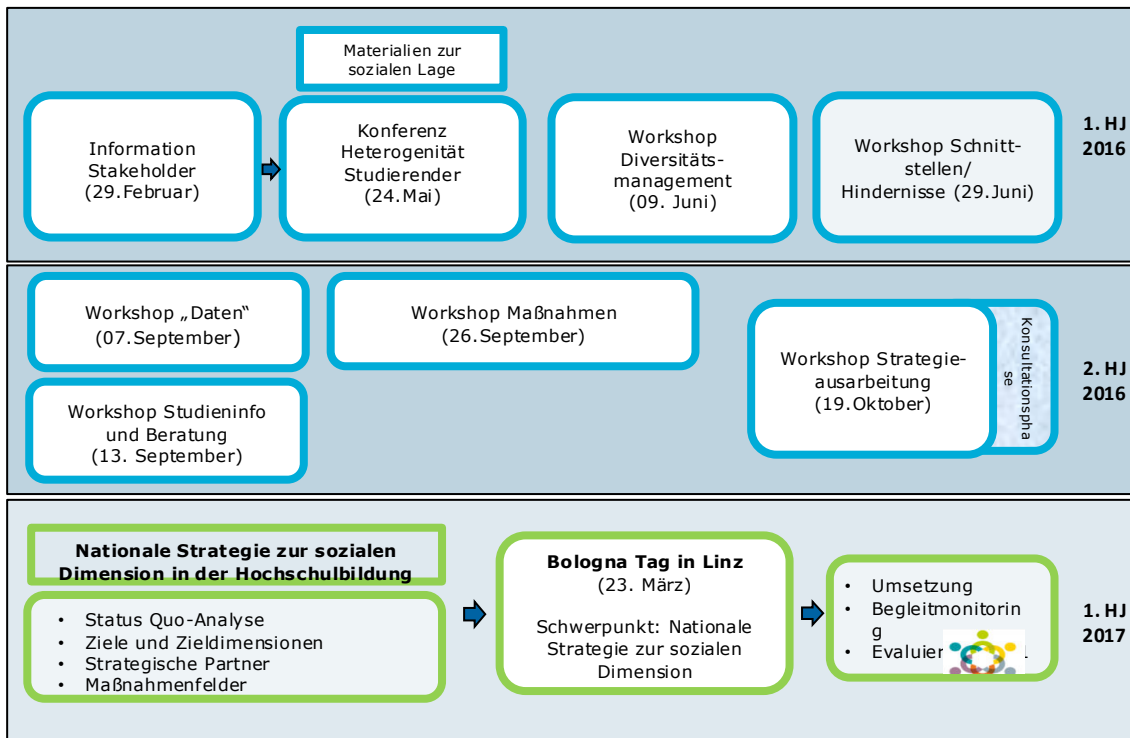


Status quo

- Results presented at national stakeholder conference November 2025
- Relaunch process started with stakeholder dialogue
- Ongoing (EU 9, INSPIRE Country review)



National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education





National Strategy on the SD in HE: 3 Target Dimensions

Target Dimension I: More inclusive access

- AL 1: Improve quality and accessibility of information materials
- AL 2: Outreach activities and diversity-sensitive course guidance
- AL 3: Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal skills

Target Dimension II: Avoid drop-out and improve

- AL 4: Ease entry into higher education
- AL 5: Structure of study programmes and quality of teaching
- AL 6: Increase compatibility of studies with other areas of life

Target Dimension III: Create basic parameters and optimize regulation of higher education policy

- AL 7: System-related issues in higher education
- AL 8: Integrate SD into strategic planning for HE and create appropriate governance structures
- AL 9: Further develop the Student Support Scheme



Underrepresented groups and groups with specific needs in Austrian HE

Underrepresented groups

- Students whose parents don't have a HE entrance qualification
- Men/women in certain study fields
- Students with migrant backgrounds (with an Austrian entrance qualification)
- Students with a disability and/or chronic illness

Groups with specific needs

- Students with children/care responsibilities
- Students with disability/chronic illness
- Students with delayed/non-traditional entry to higher education (i.e. at least two years since leaving school or "second chance" education)
- Students in employment



9 quantitative goals through to 2025

| | | | |
|----|--|---|--|
| 1a | Reduce the recruitment quota/probability factor for admission to higher education to 2.25 (2020), and 2.10 (2025) | 5 | Increase the entry rates to higher education in all federal states to at least 42% by 2025 and towards the Austrian average with reference to the entire education and vocational education system |
| 1b | Decrease the discrepancy in the probability factors between public universities and universities of applied sciences | 6 | Increase participation in study programmes abroad by students whose parents have no university entrance qualifications, to at least 18% |
| 1c | Include private universities and university colleges of teacher education in the calculation of probability factors, adapt target values | 7 | Increase the number of extra-occupational study places at universities of applied sciences to 50% |
| 2 | Increase the number of non-traditional admissions (educational residents) to higher education to 5,300 | 8 | Increase the number of self-supporting students receiving maintenance grants to 15,000 |
| 3a | Minimum percentage of 10% men or women in any field of education at any higher education institution (excluding doctoral study) | 9 | Sustained increase in the percentage of student admissions from homes where neither parent has a university degree on medical and dental courses towards an eventual target of 50% |
| 3b | Halve the number of fields of studies at each higher education institution where men or women comprise less than 30% | | |
| 4 | Increase the entry rates to higher education of 2nd generation migrant students to 30% | | |



Learnings and Conclusions: Strategy Development & Implementation

Strong commitment/clear
messages

Success factors

- Strong commitment from political side/minister
- Strong agenda in Bologna process, EC, international regarding societal challenges of HE
- Top down and bottom up approach: involvement of stakeholders (management, practitioners, administration, students)
- Valid data and expertise
- Clear messages (“simple”, understandable strategy)

Challenges

- Working on SD is not a success story ☹ very slow changes, great effort
- Progress is not seen quickly and easily in quantitative monitoring
- Perception of societal challenges is changing very quickly
- No HEI can solve all problems at the same time – need to develop a “profile” (mission, orientation), priority setting



Learnings and Conclusions: Social Dimension Mainstreaming

Success factors

Mainstreaming SD
Societal responsibility

Challenges

- Mainstreaming the SD
 - SD is overlapping with diversity & inclusion agenda
 - Mainstreaming needs different approaches according to different types of HEIs (differences in terms of location; surroundings, size, study offer)
 - Societal responsibility of HEIs/univ. → strong need to work on interfaces; like third mission, sustainability
- SD measures have to be compatible with other HE measures
 - Efforts on “translation” necessary
 - Tension between excellence and merit driven approaches in HE and SD: often seen as opposing each other
 - HE is at the end of the “education chain” (reduces opportunities to foster diversity, equity; e.g.: students with non-academic background, girls (for STEM fields) get “lost” sooner in the educational career)

→ **What HE system do we want?**



Evaluation 2025

Qualitative evaluation of the strategy as a whole

- HEIs say that the SD **strategy was useful** and that the **priorities of the strategy match their own priorities** → each > 4 on a scale of 1 (not useful) to 5 (very useful)
- External stakeholders see strategy as a **useful steering mechanism**
- Generally, HEIs think that there should be a **strategy relaunch** of some kind



Evaluation 2025

Qualitative evaluation of target dimensions and action lines

Success factors for measures:

- Target group addressed successfully
- Sustainability of measures
- BUT: scalability only plays a role in half of the measures that HEIs regard as „successful”



Factors for unsuccessful measures:

- Lack of innovative potential
- Lack of scalability

Conclusions from evaluation on quantitative indicators

Possible reasons for slow quantitative progress:

- Short time frame (8 years) for implementation
- Indicators are not in the responsibility of HEIs alone, e.g.:
- Lack of systemic interventions in the previous educational stages (pathways?)
- Political responsibility for resources for student support, etc.

Recommendations from the authors:

- Targeted programs and financial support for underrepresented groups
- Virtual mobility formats as part of the quantitative indicators?



**ERGEBNISSE DER EVALUIERUNG DER
NATIONALEN STRATEGIE ZUR SOZIALEN
DIMENSION**



Evaluation 2025 by CHE, Germany



Recommendations for the Strategy Relaunch

✓ General recommendation to relaunch the strategy (**P1**)

✓ Focus on whole student lifecycle when designing quantitative indicators (**P3,7**)

✓ Longterm timeframe recommended (e.g. 8 years like last time)

✓ Continuous support through an expert group (**P10**)

~ Recommendation to extend the strategy to include all educational levels (**P3**)

~ Slight adaptation of structure (action lines)

~ Stronger communication policy to promote strategy

? Tool/platform to exchange HEI good practices

Evaluierung der Nationalen Strategie
zur sozialen Dimension in der
Hochschulbildung.

Durchgeführt im Auftrag des Österreichischen Bundesministeriums für Frauen, Wissenschaft und Forschung

ABSCHLUSSBERICHT



November 2025



Evaluation results 2025 – quantitative indicators

Slow quantitative progress (monitoring of 9 quantitative indicators)

- Slight improvements for gender balance
- Slight increase in recipients of certain scholarships
- Slight improvement in regional balance (BUT: still imbalance urban > rural)
- Decrease in non-traditional access numbers
- Decrease in student mobility participation for students from lower educated background (general decrease in participation for all students)

Networking Conference 25th November 2025

„Diese Strategie beinhaltet bis heute eine klare Ansage: Der Zugang zu Hochschulbildung soll sozial gerechter und die Studierenden sollen gesellschaftlich repräsentativer sein.“

– Federal Minister Eva-Maria Holzleitner, BSc

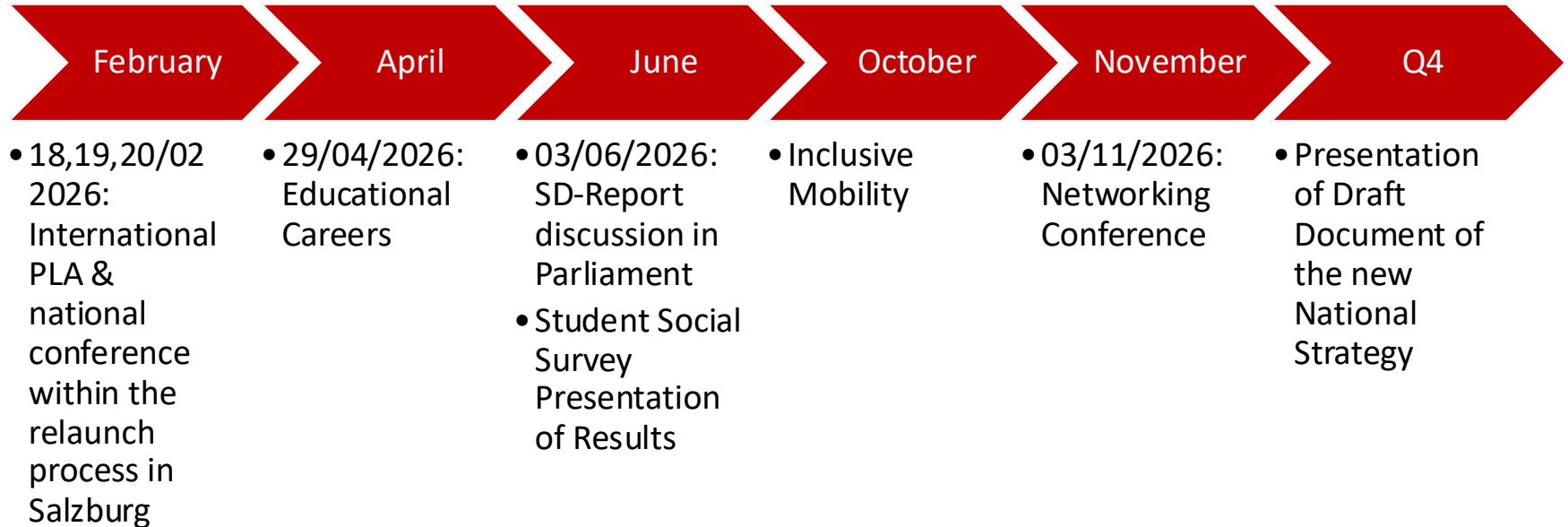
“To this day, this strategy contains a clear statement: access to higher education should be more socially just and students should be more socially representative.”



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Next steps 2026





Further topics / possible workshops

- 1st generation competence centers
- Indicator workshop (system level – HEI level)
- Measures (how to plan, develop, accompany, and evaluate)
- Add-ons: Evaluations with a SD-focus according to Universities Act 2002 (§ 143)
 - StEOP (§ 66)
 - Admission procedures (§ 71)



INSPIRE - Country Review Austria

- Will support re-launch process through
- Country Report Austria
- Discussion of focal topics
- Peer exchange (Portugal, Lithuania)





Contribution to Austrian Higher Education Strategy 2040

- Austrian Higher Education Strategy 2040 for the entire Austrian Higher Education Sector
- Development process throughout 2026, to be published Q1 2027
- 8 working groups: (#1) joyful and active; (#2) attractive and full of prospects; (#3) international and visible; (#4) innovative and excellent; (#5) high quality and efficient; **(#6) open and socially just**; (#7) cooperative and division of labour; (#8) higher education and democracy
- **# 6 Open and socially just:** Facilitate a diverse and inclusive future at Austrian Higher Education Institutions

HOCHSCHUL STRATEGIE

2040 ▶

Thank you for your attention!

Questions? Comments?

Let's discuss 😊

Helga Posset, helga.posset@bmfwf.gv.at

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