

**Minutes of the
4th Thematic Peer Group D on Social Dimension meeting
Hybrid (Salzburg, Austria), 18 February 2026**

List of participants

Nr.	Name	Country / Organisation
1	Armela Baka	Albania
2	Helga Posset	Austria
3	Laura Reppmann	Austria
4	Lynn De Palmenaer	Belgium – Flemish Community
5	Đurđica Dragojević	Croatia
6	Sanja Žaja Vrbica	Croatia (online)
7	Kyriacos Charalambous	Cyprus (online)
8	Cleo Savvidou	Cyprus (online)
9	Tereza Vengřinová	Czech Republic
10	Annette Dolan	Education International - ETUCE (online)
11	Jass Juuremaa	Estonia (online)
12	Arno Schrooyen	ESU (Co-chair)
13	Henriette Stoeber	EUA
14	Mia Wallin Hansen	European Commission
15	Martin Unger	Eurostudent
16	Alain Bouhours	France
17	Lasha Zivzivadze	Georgia
18	Emmi Kraft	Germany
19	Tilman Dörr	Germany (online)
20	Nikoletta Chardalia	Greece
21	Bianka Paulovics	Hungary
22	Una Strand Viðarsdóttir	Iceland (online)
23	Arturs Cernisevs	Latvia (Co-chair)
24	Sandra Jurika	Latvia
25	Jessica Sammut	Malta

Nr.	Name	Country / Organisation
26	Berit Johnsen	Norway (online)
27	Maria Svendsen Røed	Norway (online)
28	Maria Boltruszko	Poland (online)
29	Antonela Toma	Romania (online)
30	Monica Cavalli	San Marino (online)
31	Martina Kokavec	Slovakia
32	Sebastian Steele	Sweden
33	Graeme Atherton	United Kingdom
34	Oana Alexandra Țiņțar	EHEA Secretariat
35	Szilvia Besze	Tempus Public Foundation (guest)
36	Märt Aro	DreamApply (guest)

Azerbaijan, EURASHE, Kazakhstan, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain were absent.

1. Welcome & introduction from the TPG D Co-chairs

1.1. Adoption of the agenda

1.2. Acknowledgement of the 3rd TPG D meeting minutes

1.3. Updates from the EHEA Secretariat regarding the activity of the other WS and feedback from the 3rd TPG D meeting

Documents:

- [TPG D 4 CY NO 1 1 Draft Agenda](#)
- [TPG D 4 CY NO 1 2 Updates EHEA Secretariat](#)
- [TPG D 4 CY NO 1 3 Feedback 3rd TPG meeting](#)

The Latvian Co-chair opened the meeting by welcoming the participants and thanking the Austrian colleagues for hosting the event. He then presented the draft agenda. As the participants did not raise any issues, the agenda was adopted as proposed. The Latvian Co-chair also invited participants to take note of the minutes of the 3rd TPG D meeting, which had been circulated to members in their final form and uploaded on the EHEA website.

The EHEA Secretariat member provided an update on recent developments within the BFUG working structures in view of the upcoming BFUG meeting in Cyprus. She informed the group that the BFUG would be expected to adopt the Terms of Reference for the Drafting Committee, noting that the first meeting of the committee had taken place in late January and that it would

be co-chaired by ESU and Romania. She further noted that the BFUG was expected to agree on the revised ECTS Users' Guide and to discuss a further draft of the revised ESG, the latter to be further developed and agreed at a subsequent BFUG meeting in Ireland.

She also referred to ongoing work in the other BFUG working structures and their current progress in implementing the Work Programme. In this context, she informed the group that the Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue was planning a Peer Learning Activity on the right to education, expected to take place in December in Paris, and had expressed interest in engaging with TPG D on this topic. She also noted that the Secretariat was currently in the beta phase of the new EHEA website, which was expected to be officially launched at the BFUG meeting in Cyprus.

The EHEA Secretariat member briefly presented the feedback report from the 3rd TPG D meeting, noting the positive feedback received and thanking the United Kingdom for hosting the meeting.

2. Updates from the INSPIRE project - detailed timeline and future PLAs

Documents: [TPG D 4 CY NO 2 Updates INSPIRE project](#)

The ESU Co-chair provided a brief update on the INSPIRE project, focusing on developments under Work Package 2 and Work Package 3. Regarding Work Package 2, he presented the planned Peer Learning Activities (PLAs). The next PLA would take place online in the first week of June and would focus on community engagement. A second PLA would be organised in person, in Malta on 1-2 October, in conjunction with the 5th TPG D meeting, and would address monitoring and data collection. A final PLA, focusing on funding, was planned for January 2027 and would also be organised online.

The Eurostudent representative then presented updates related to Work Package 3, which focuses on country reviews of social dimension policies. Five countries had applied to participate in the reviews, and three had been selected: Austria, Lithuania and Portugal. The country review in Austria was scheduled for the end of May, while the reviews in Lithuania and Portugal were expected to take place in October and November. He explained that guidelines and a template for the background reports had been prepared for the participating countries and international reviewers. The template already included relevant indicators and data from sources such as Eurostat and Eurostudent in order to facilitate the preparation process. The project team was currently coordinating with the selected countries to finalise the dates of the visits and establish the review teams. The country reviews aim both to provide feedback to the participating countries and to generate findings that could be useful for other countries across the European Higher Education Area.

The Austrian representative asked about the expected outputs of the country reviews and how the results would be used. In particular, she asked whether the findings could be further discussed within TPG D. In response, the Eurostudent representative explained that the project team aimed to present the results of the country reviews during a session at the Ministerial Conference, potentially together with key findings from the PLAs. The intention would be to involve the participating countries in presenting their experiences and reflecting on the benefits of the review process, as well as on lessons that could be relevant for other EHEA countries. He

also noted that, as the project duration extends beyond the current Bologna cycle, additional opportunities for dissemination and exchange could be organised after the Ministerial Conference.

3. Updates regarding the narrative text for the Social Dimension chapter of the BPIR 2027. Discussion on the general directions

The ESU Co-chair introduced the discussion on the preparation of the narrative text for the Social Dimension chapter of the Bologna Process Implementation Report 2027. He recalled that the indicators for the chapter had already been discussed at the previous TPG D meeting and that Ninoslav, former Co-chair of the Working Group on Social Dimension, had agreed to take the lead in drafting the narrative text, with input and feedback from TPG D members. The purpose of the discussion was therefore to gather initial ideas on the main topics and developments that should be reflected in the narrative contribution.

The Austrian Co-chair of the Working Group on Monitoring explained that the narrative texts were intended to complement the indicator-based analysis prepared by Eurydice by highlighting developments, initiatives and implementation efforts that may not yet be reflected in the available data.

The European Commission representative suggested that the narrative text could also reflect developments related to the Union of Skills initiative, in particular forthcoming work on widening access to higher education and promoting more flexible learning pathways for different age groups.

The ETUCE representative emphasised the importance of addressing the social dimension not only from the perspective of students but also of staff, in particular regarding mobilities, noting that this aspect had received limited attention in the previous report. The ESU Co-chair suggested that the issue of student housing could also be considered in the narrative text, given the growing importance of housing challenges for access to higher education across Europe.

The EUA representative noted that the narrative contribution should focus on concrete developments and priorities discussed within TPG D, including those reflected in national action plans, rather than providing a historical overview as in previous reporting cycles. The ESU Co-chair invited participants to share further suggestions with the TPG D Co-chairs after the meeting.

4. Relaunch of the Austrian SD strategy - work in progress throughout 2026

Documents: [TPG D 4 CY NO 3 Relaunch Austrian SD Strategy](#)

The Austrian representative presented the ongoing process for the relaunch of the Austrian National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education. She briefly recalled that the social dimension forms part of Austria's broader national action plan related to the implementation of the Bologna key commitments and other priority areas, including teaching and learning, recognition, quality assurance, mobility and internationalisation,

microcredentials and fundamental values. She explained that the relaunch process builds on the evaluation of the existing strategy and includes a structured stakeholder dialogue aimed at identifying priorities for the next phase of implementation. The results of the evaluation were presented at a national stakeholder conference in November 2025, which also marked the formal start of the relaunch process.

The presentation highlighted some of the main findings of the evaluation, including the continued relevance of the strategy as a steering mechanism and the importance of strong stakeholder engagement and reliable data for monitoring progress. At the same time, it was noted that progress in several quantitative indicators has been relatively slow and that structural factors outside the higher education system can influence developments in the social dimension.

She also outlined the planned activities for 2026 within the relaunch process, including stakeholder events, discussions on the results of the Student Social Survey, and further exchanges on inclusive mobility and other policy priorities. In addition, the INSPIRE country review for Austria is expected to contribute to the relaunch process through peer exchange and the identification of relevant policy topics.

Following the presentation, participants raised several questions regarding specific elements of the Austrian strategy. Clarifications were requested on measures related to the study entry and orientation phase (STEOP), which aims to support students during the initial stage of their studies and facilitate better orientation within study programmes.

Additional questions addressed the inclusion of international students in social dimension measures, the planned establishment of first-generation competence centres, and the indicators used to monitor progress in the implementation of the strategy. In response, the Austrian representative explained that the strategy mainly focuses on access and participation in higher education, particularly for domestic students, while initiatives targeting international students are primarily addressed within the national strategy on internationalisation and mobility.

Further clarifications were provided regarding the monitoring framework, including the use of administrative data and national higher education statistics, as well as the role of outreach activities and cooperation with schools in supporting wider access to higher education.

5. Breakout session - Finalising the TPG D Action Plan and shaping future directions for TPG D meetings

The ESU Co-chair recalled that each Thematic Peer Group in the Bologna Process develops an Action Plan outlining the priorities and activities for the current work programme period. A draft Action Plan for TPG D had been prepared and circulated to members in advance of the meeting. He noted that, compared to the Action Plans of the other TPGs, the draft for TPG D remained relatively concise. This reflected the fact that TPG D had been established only during the current work programme cycle and that the group was still in the process of identifying its working methods, priorities and concrete activities.

As a first step, participants were invited to contribute to a Mentimeter exercise addressing several guiding questions focusing on identifying implementation bottlenecks faced by countries, useful formats for future PLAs, mechanisms for follow-up after PLAs, priorities for future TPG D meetings, and the types of outputs that could support implementation at national level.

Regarding implementation bottlenecks, the most frequently mentioned challenges were funding constraints and gaps in available data. Participants also referred to issues such as the lack of political commitment, coordination challenges between ministries and with the school system, limited human resources, institutional engagement, and difficulties related to data collection and data protection. When discussing formats that could best support implementation through future PLAs, participants most frequently highlighted case studies, workshops and peer exchanges. Other suggestions included sharing good practices, thematic discussions, exchanges between countries and feedback from existing projects.

Participants also reflected on mechanisms that could ensure systematic follow-up after each PLA in order to support concrete progress at national level. Proposed approaches included enhanced information sharing between countries, dissemination of reports and good practices, feedback surveys, action lists identifying possible follow-up steps, and continued exchanges between countries, including through online meetings. With regard to the future focus of TPG D meetings, participants emphasised the importance of sharing experiences between countries, discussing implementation challenges and identifying concrete action points that could be followed up between meetings. Several participants also suggested focusing on specific policy topics, including student funding, housing issues affecting access to higher education, and working conditions for students and staff. The possible involvement of external experts, including researchers and representatives of higher education institutions, was also mentioned.

Participants further discussed the types of outputs that could be produced following PLAs to support implementation of the social dimension commitments. Suggestions included guidelines, recommendations, reports summarising key conclusions, collections of good practices, contact lists facilitating further cooperation between countries, and short summaries highlighting key takeaways.

Following the Mentimeter exercise, participants were divided into two smaller groups to further discuss these questions and elaborate on possible elements to be reflected in the final version of the TPG D Action Plan.

The first group first reflected on the main implementation bottlenecks faced by countries, noting that funding and data availability appeared to be the most significant challenges. In this context, participants discussed the upcoming PLA on funding and whether such a topic would benefit from an in-person format given its complexity. It was suggested that the results of the online PLA could be revisited during a subsequent in-person TPG D meeting to allow further exchange. Participants also discussed the importance of addressing both national-level policies and institutional practices in future PLAs. While national funding frameworks and data systems were considered essential for understanding the broader policy context, participants emphasised that institutional examples could provide valuable insights into how policies translate into practice. It was therefore suggested that future PLAs could combine national perspectives with concrete institutional case studies.

During the discussion on implementation challenges, participants also highlighted that some effective measures related to the social dimension may not necessarily require significant financial resources. It was suggested that identifying and sharing innovative measures that are relatively simple and low-cost could be particularly useful for countries facing financial constraints.

With regard to the formats of future activities, participants underlined the value of case studies combined with interactive workshops. Several participants suggested that workshops should focus on allowing countries to reflect on how a presented practice or initiative could be adapted to their own national contexts. Smaller discussion groups and breakout rooms were considered particularly useful for enabling more in-depth exchanges, especially in online meetings.

Participants further discussed mechanisms for strengthening follow-up after PLAs. Suggestions included facilitating connections between participants from different countries to enable follow-up exchanges, making contact details of speakers available, and improving the dissemination of examples and resources emerging from PLAs. Some participants also suggested exploring ways to make relevant outputs more accessible to higher education institutions, including through the EHEA website.

The group also reflected on organisational aspects of TPG D meetings. Participants suggested that providing clearer descriptions of agenda items and expected outcomes in advance of meetings could help delegates better prepare national input.

The second group focused primarily on issues related to data collection and monitoring in the context of the social dimension. Participants discussed several challenges associated with collecting and using data, including legal constraints, data protection considerations and the risk of stigmatization when collecting information related to vulnerable or underrepresented groups. Particular attention was given to the practical difficulties encountered when relevant data is held by different ministries or authorities, making inter-ministerial cooperation necessary but sometimes challenging.

Another topic discussed was disability and the need to better understand how higher education systems address the inclusion of students with disabilities. Participants expressed interest in potentially organising a dedicated PLA on this topic, noting that many ministries are currently working on disability-related policies and that an exchange of experiences could be particularly valuable.

In terms of formats for future activities, participants suggested that workshops could be organised in smaller discussion groups allowing more direct exchanges between countries. One proposal was to bring together countries with well-developed practices in specific areas - such as data collection - with countries that are still developing their approaches, in order to facilitate more targeted peer learning.

Participants also discussed the importance of supporting transitions from secondary education and broader strategies covering the entire education system.

The ESU Co-chair concluded the session by noting that the discussions had provided useful input on the priorities and future activities of TPG D. He informed participants that the Co-chairs would revise the draft TPG D Action Plan based on the ideas collected during the session. The updated draft would be circulated to members for feedback, allowing participants to

provide further comments and suggest additional elements before the document is finalised ahead of the next TPG D meeting.

6. Next steps - timeline and objectives. Any other business and closing remarks

The Latvian Co-chair outlined the next steps following the meeting. He informed participants that the Co-chairs would provide an update on the revised TPG D Action Plan within the following 2 months, based on the input collected during the discussions. He also reminded participants that the next PLA would take place in the first week of June and would be organised as a short online webinar focusing on community engagement.

The ESU Co-chair encouraged members to provide input for the Social Dimension chapter of the forthcoming Bologna Process Implementation Report 2027. Participants were invited to consult colleagues within their ministries or institutions and share examples of national initiatives or topics that could be reflected in the narrative text.

The EHEA Secretariat member informed the group that the guidelines for drafting narrative contributions would be shared again with TPG D members in order to clarify the expected types of input, including examples of implementation efforts and initiatives at national or European level. She also noted that a save-the-date for the 5th TPG D meeting, planned to take place on 1-2 October 2026, would be circulated in the coming days.

The Co-chairs thanked participants for their contributions and closed the meeting.

There was no other business. The meeting ended at 12:56 CET.