INSPIRE project updates

TPG-D meeting, October 2026, Malta

Ninoslav Šćukanec Schmidt, Institute for the Development of Education, Croatia
Artūrs Černiševs, Ministry of Education and Science, Latvia

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Reflections from PLA “We make a change’: Making institutional cultures in higher education more inclusive”

Reflections from online PLA “From Campus to Community: Advancing Inclusion through Engagement”

PLA “We make a change’: Making institutional cultures in higher education more inclusive”

18-19 February 2026 | Salsburg

Principle 5 - Counselling and guidance

Principle 7 - Inclusive institutional culture





PLA “We make a change’: Making institutional cultures in higher education more inclusive”

It was very content heavy and appreciated but at points it was difficult to pay attention. It would be great to go into more depth and structure the sessions to have some general take-aways for all countries

Presentations could be grouped by theme and smaller round tables could be organized after each session to draw conclusions

PLA “We make a change’: Making institutional cultures in higher education more inclusive”

Key takeaways:

1. Inclusion goes beyond access

2. Institutional culture matters

3. Belonging is closely linked to student success

4. Data should support early and targeted action

5. Policy needs to translate into institutional practice

6. Inclusion is a shared responsibility

Guidlines for implementing 5&7 P&G

For policy makers	For higher education institutions
1. Make inclusion and student wellbeing strategic priorities through coherent national strategies.	1. Make inclusion a responsibility of leadership, teaching, student services, QA and governance — not only counselling or equality offices.
2. Provide stable funding for counselling, psychological support, mentoring, disability services and academic guidance, alongside professional development for HE staff.	2. Strengthen onboarding, peer mentoring and transition support, while using early identification and targeted interventions to address academic, financial or wellbeing difficulties before disengagement occurs.
3. Include wellbeing, belonging, accessibility, equity and retention in quality assurance and funding frameworks, and involve students in policy development.	3. Monitor participation, progression, wellbeing and student experience, involve them in reviewing practices, and use evidence to improve institutional support.

PLA “From Campus to Community: Advancing Inclusion through Engagement”

5 June 2026 | Online

Principle 9 - Community engagement

Key takeaways:

1. Community engagement is a core mission

2. Inclusion requires a whole-institution approach

3. Partnerships should be reciprocal

4. Community engagement can widen participation

5. Students are active partners

6. Impact needs to be sustained and measured

Guidlines for implementing 9 P&G

For policy makers	For higher education institutions
1. Make community engagement strategic by embedding it in national policies for inclusion, widening participation and the social dimension.	1. Integrate community engagement into strategy, governance, teaching, research and student support.
2. Provide sustainable funding and support cross-sector partnerships with schools, municipalities, civil society and employers.	2. Work with communities as active partners in identifying needs and co-creating solutions.
3. Include community engagement and social impact in monitoring and quality assurance.	3.Support mentoring, ambassador and peer initiatives, while recognising and developing staff and student contributions.

PLA Reports and project information is available

https://esu-online.org/projects/inspire/

Inspire

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THANK YOU !



Institute for the
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20 years

Country Reviews on the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the European Higher Education Area

Nino S. Schmidt

Institute for the Development of Education, Croatia

Executive Director

BFUG TPG-D meeting, INSPIRE PLA meeting, Malta 1-2 October 2026



About me



Nino S. Schmidt

- **Executive Director and Founder** of the Institute for the Development of Education, Croatia
- Former **Co-Chair** of the Working Group on Social Dimension within the **Bologna Follow-Up Group** (BFUG)
  - 2018 – 2024: successfully led the creation of the **first EHEA Framework for the Social Dimension.**

1.

Introduction:

Country reviews for the social dimension in the European Higher Education Area

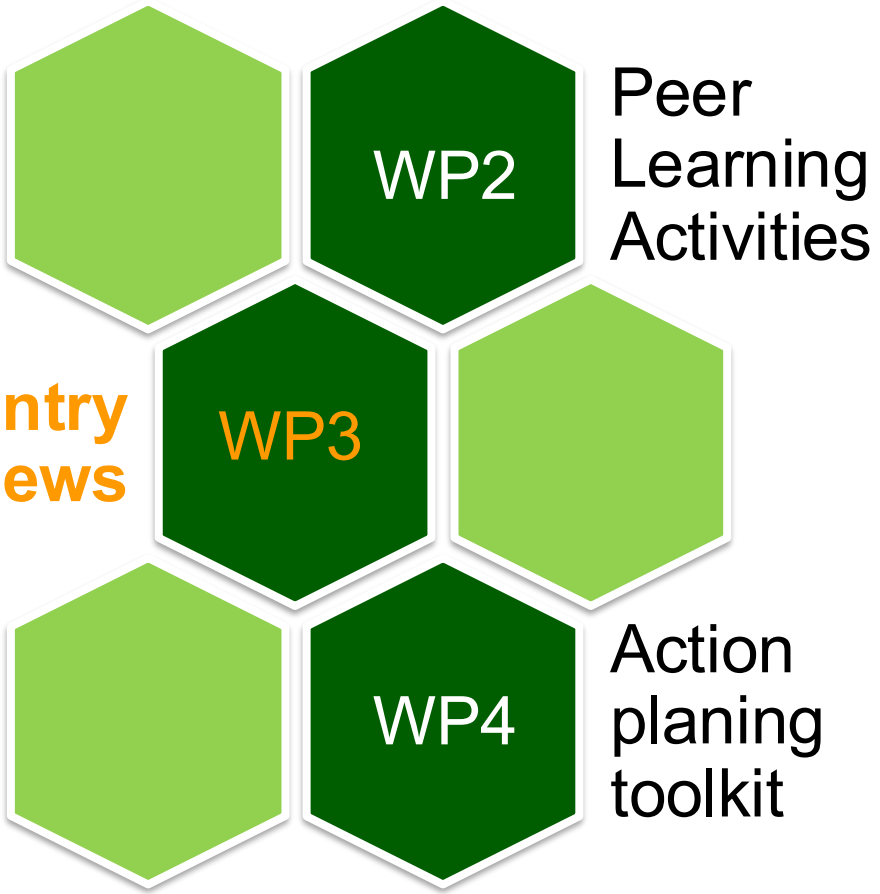
Institute for the Development of Education

20 years

Project INSPIRE

"INSPIRE: Inclusive national strategies for the implementation of EHEA principles for the social dimension"

INSPIRE



- **Objective:** supports the implementation of the 2024 European Higher Education Area **Framework for the Social Dimension** on national levels in the EHEA member states
  - **WP-3 Lead:** Institute for the Development of Education (IDE), Croatia
  - **WP-3 Partner:** Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS), Austria

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Country Reviews (run by the INSPIRE project)

- **Assess the implementation** of the **EHEA Framework for the Social Dimension** at the national level and effectivness of national social dimension approaches in 3 selected **EHEA member states: Austria, Lithuania, Portugal.**
- Identifies **best practices, challenges and gaps** in current national policy approaches through a **systematic review process** of the social dimension policies by **external international experts.**
- Organized within the project INSPIRE in the period 2026-2027 and led by the Institute for the Development of Education (Croatia).

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Country Reviews (run by the INSPIRE project)

The review process follow a **structured Implementation plan**:

1. Developed a standardized template for **background reports** to be completed by the respective **ministries** prior to the country visits > detailing key aspects of the higher education system, student demographics, and the implementation status of the EHEA Framework for the Social Dimension of HE.

2. Guide ministries in developing a **detailed calendar and agenda** for country reviews

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Country Reviews (run by the INSPIRE project)

5. **Organize and conduct on-site visits** to the selected countries, where the peer review team **engages with various stakeholders**, including government officials, higher education representatives, and student organizations

- Selecting and preparing country review teams: 1 (former) student representative, 1 Public Authority officer, 1 expert from the EHEA HEI community for specific topics in the country,1 expert from IDE, 1 expert from IHS = 5 experts

6. Prepare a comprehensive **report for each country review**, and provide targeted recommendations.

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Country Reviews (run by the INSPIRE project)

- Extract **key lessons learned** from each country case to share with other EHEA member states, fostering a culture of knowledge exchange.
- Compile a **synthesis report** that aggregates findings from all three country reviews, presenting overarching themes and recommendations relevant to the EHEA community.
    - To be presented at the 2027 EHEA Ministerial Conference

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Country Reviews: Conclusion

Country Reviews are intended to provide EHEA member states with constructive **external, expert feedback on their social dimension policies** and how these are being implemented:

- It is intended to support and inform national efforts by **offering insights that complement the country's ongoing initiatives** and future developments.
- The outcome of this review will be a **report** offering constructive, non-judgmental feedback intended to inform and enhance national policies on social dimension.
- **Tailored recommendations from international experts** on its social dimension policy and its implementation.

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2.

WP-3 Update:

Country reviews for the social dimension in the European Higher Education Area

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Country Review: AUSTRIA

Austria:

- **18-22 May 2026** – on-site INSPIRE Country Review visit for Austria
- Background Report completed
- Final Report completed; waiting approval by the Austrian ministry BMFWF

External Experts - contracted:

- Ligia Deca, Romania – former Minister of Education, currently Vice-Rector; researcher in higher education policy
- Thomas Boland, Ireland – former Chief Executive of the Higher Education Authority in Ireland and higher education consultant
- Iris Kimizoglu, Germany – former President of the European Students' Union; student representative

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Country Review: LITHUANIA

Lithuania:

- **21-25 September 2026** – on-site INSPIRE Country Review visit for LT
- Background Report completed
- Final Report – ongoing until 6 November 2026

External Experts - contracted:

- Ligia Deca, Romania – former Minister of Education, currently Vice-Rector; researcher in higher education policy
- Liz Thomas – Professor of Higher Education at the University of York
- Horia Onita – former President of the European Students' Union; current Head of the EHEA Secretariat

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Country Reviews: PORTUGAL

Portugal:

- **9-13 November 2026** – on-site INSPIRE Country Review visit for PT
- Background Report – will be completed by 5 October 2026
- Final Report – will be completed by 16 December 2026

Work in progress:

- Agenda for the on-site visit
- Selection of the external experts

3.

Preliminary insights:

Country review - Austria

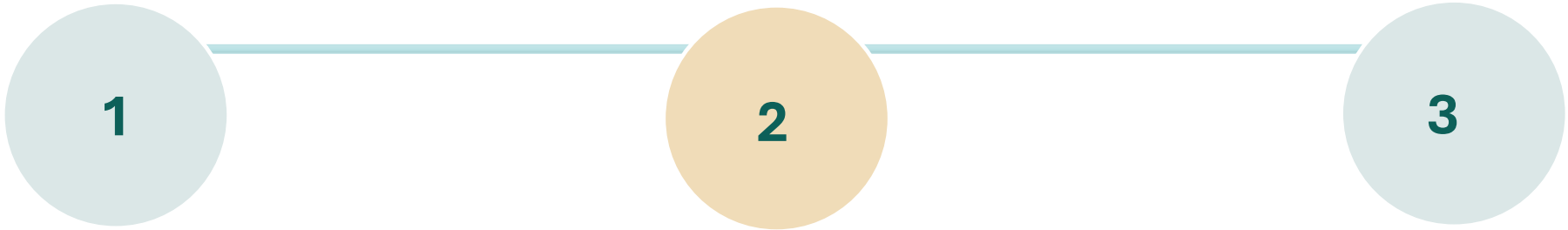
Austria Country Review

DRAFT – pending BMFWF approval

Preliminary insights from the draft Country Review report

Headline message

Austria has a strong foundation for the social dimension; the next phase is about building on it through greater integration, impact and coordination.



Strong foundation

2017 SD strategy
Strong evidence base

Strategic momentum

Strategy relaunch
HE Strategy 2040

Next phase

From implementation to impact
Greater integration and coordination

43 stakeholders interviewed across the Austrian higher education system

Preliminary insights only – wording subject to final validation and approval

Strong foundations to build on

Early policy leadership

- Austria was among the first EHEA countries to adopt a comprehensive national Social Dimension Strategy.

Strong evidence base

- Student Social Survey, administrative data, EUROSTUDENT and EUROGRADUATE provide a rich basis for policy development.

Broad policy and institutional activity

- A wide range of national and institutional measures has developed since 2017.

Growing institutional anchoring

- The social dimension has become more visible and established within Austrian higher education.

Opportunities for the next phase

From implementation to impact

- Better understand **what works, for which students and under what conditions**.

Across the whole student pathway

- Connect access, participation, progression, completion and transition more systematically.

Stronger cooperation and learning

- Encourage more exchange and peer learning across Austria's diverse higher education sectors.

Further institutional embedding

- Integrate the social dimension more systematically into leadership

From a strong foundation towards a more integrated and impact-oriented approach

Thank you for your attention!



Nino S. Schmidt

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- Former Co-Chair of the Bologna Folow-up Working Group on Social Dimension
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Web sites:

- Institute for the Development of Education: www.iro.hr
- European Higher Education Area – social dimension: https://ehea.info/page-social-dimension