New decade for the social dimension within the Bologna Process

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2020-2030: The decade of the social dimension in the EHEA – WHY?

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2020-2030: The decade of the social dimension in the EHEA – WHY?

1. Impact of COVID-19 on the social dimension of higher education
Impact of COVID-19 on the social dimension

- At-risk students will be disproportionately affected.
- COVID-19 crisis is exacerbating pre-existing education disparities, rather than causing those disparities.
  - Now at-risk students face a range of additional challenges in accessing higher education, participating fully in their study programs and successfully completing their studies.

(NESET Analytical Report, Farnell et al., 2021)
WHAT: overview of challenges faced by the EHEA students during COVID-19 pandemic

Learning and teaching challenges:
• almost 60% reported they do not always have a reliable internet connection
• almost 70% reported they do not always have access to course study materials
• almost 35% of students did not often have a quiet place to study

(ESU Survey, Doolan et al., 2021)
Immediate impact of COVID-19 on the social dimension

WHAT: overview of challenges faced by the EHEA students during COVID-19 pandemic

Funding challenges:

• almost 40% of students who worked during their studies lost their jobs
• almost 15% of students had significant financial concerns about their study costs

(ESU Survey, Doolan et al., 2021)
Immediate impact of COVID-19 on the social dimension

WHAT: overview of challenges faced by the EHEA students during COVID-19 pandemic

Students’ well-being challenges:

• Students have frequently felt frustrated and anxious in their academic activities since on-site classes had been cancelled.

• Lower levels of general well-being were reported by students who do not have a supportive social network:
  • almost 10% of students indicated that they do not have several people they can trust to help solve their problems.

(ESU Survey, Doolan et al., 2021)
Immediate impact of COVID-19 on the social dimension

**WHO:** identifying students more likely to face difficulties in adjusting to studying during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown:

- Students at lower levels of study
- Students lacking a supportive social network
- Students who reported having mental health problems
- Students with lower levels of digital skills
- Students who do not have a quiet place to study, a good internet connection and material for studying at their disposal

(ESU Survey, Doolan et al., 2021)
Conclusion: Impact of COVID-19 on the social dimension – short term (next year) and medium term (up to 2025)

- Pandemic will have **negative impact on equity and social inclusion in pre-tertiary education** creating a knock-on effect of:
  a) **reducing equal access** to higher education
  b) **lowering the level of participation** of at-risk students in higher education in the upcoming years.

  o Long-term ‘**scarring’ effects** for young people under the age of 25 – the ‘COVID generation’ – resulting in an **unprecedented decline in social mobility** due to rising economic and educational inequalities.
2020-2030: The decade of the social dimension in the EHEA – WHY?

2. New policy developments and opportunities for the social dimension in the EHEA
New policy developments and opportunities for the social dimension

• Important to consider > what opportunities that the COVID-19 crisis provides for addressing challenges faced by higher education systems and universities.

• Provides an opportunity to place the inclusion of underrepresented, vulnerable and disadvantage groups as a top priority in the efforts to address the disruption caused by COVID-19.

• 2020 Rome Ministerial Communiqué > 49 ministers of higher education committed to build an inclusive, innovative and interconnected European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2030.
New policy developments and opportunities for the social dimension: EHEA

2020 Rome Ministerial Communique - an inclusive EHEA:

- Adopted a new strategic document “Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA”
  - Novelty (for the 1st time): guidelines intended to advise policy makers on how the principles should be implemented in practice
  - Integral part of the 2020 Rome Ministerial Communique - ministers have politically committed to its implementation
New policy developments and opportunities for the social dimension: EHEA

European University Association (2021): “Universities without walls: a vision for 2030”

- **Priorities for action**: one of the three key areas in which European universities “see major potential for moving forward in increasing societal engagement and contributing to sustainable development” is **strengthening of their civic engagement**
  
  - “**Diversity and social cohesion** are important components of sustainable development”
  - “Universities and **their missions will widely benefit from equity and inclusion**, and it is therefore **in their core interest to promote these values in society**”
New policy developments and opportunities for the social dimension: EU

• Achieving the European Education Area by 2025 (European Commission, 2020):
  
  • *One of the six dimensions necessary to further develop the EEA refers to inclusion and gender equality.*
  
  • “Educational attainment and achievement should be decoupled from social, economic and cultural status, to ensure that education and training systems boost the abilities of every individual and enable upward social mobility”
New policy developments and opportunities for the social dimension: EU

- **European Universities** initiative (European Commission 2019-2020):

  - 2021-2027: the Commission will further optimize the vision of the European Universities “to address big societal challenges, become true engines of development for cities and regions and promote civic engagement”
  - fostered by the European Universities alliances whose **mission is dedicated to fostering inclusive higher education** - as the alliance Young Universities for the Future of Europe (YUFE) already demonstrates
2020-2030: The decade of the social dimension in the EHEA – WHY?

3. Future of ‘Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA’
Key output of the BFUG Advisory Group for Social Dimension 2018-2020: a **NEW forward-looking strategic document** for the period 2020-2030

**Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA**
• **Definition**: composition of the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should correspond to the heterogeneous social profile of society at large

• Policy levers for identifying and improving the prospects of **underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students**

• Embraces a **social justice agenda**

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**New: enlarged definition** that goes beyond the London definition - by stressing that the 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.

**Starting point**: definition in the 2007 London Communiqué

**New: fosters equity**

**New: fosters diversity**

**New: responsive to the needs of local communities**

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**New: moving beyond widening accessability clauses and focusing on public good agenda** by integrating principles in core HE mission and governance

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**New: Public authorities and higher education institutions need to integrate the principles into the core higher education mission**: learning and teaching, research, innovation, knowledge exchange and outreach, institutional governance and management, policies for empowering students and staff.
Principles and Guidelines

10 principles for the social dimension for the upcoming decade:

- **Principles** = should be understood as high-level statements that serve as a basis for the conceptualization of different policies for social dimension enhancement.

- **Guidelines** = recommendations intended to advise policy makers on how the principles should be implemented in practice.

**Glossary of Terms and Definitions:**
- Underrepresented students
- Disadvantaged students
- Vulnerable students
Principles & Guidelines for social dimension

Supportive legal framework:
Flexible and adaptable L&T, RPL

Inclusiveness of the entire education system:
From early childhood edu to lifelong learning

Reliable data: for evidence-based improvements

Effective counselling and guidance for students

Sufficient and sustainable funding

Strengthening HEIs’ capacity for diversity

Inclusive and equitable international mobility programs

Community engagement in HE promotes social dimension

Policy dialogue between public authorities and HEIs

Effective counselling and guidance for students

Learning & teaching: reflect diversity of students’ needs

Effective counselling and guidance for students

Learning & teaching: reflect diversity of students’ needs
Principles and Guidelines: Conclusion

• Principles and Guidelines are not to be seen as a checklist, but as an instrument for developing fit-for purpose national and institutional strategies and policies for social dimension enhancement

  o Enabling concrete and tangible progress over the next decade
2020-2030: The decade of the social dimension in the EHEA – WHY?

4.

Building a European movement for the social dimension of higher education
Building a European movement: recommended policy approaches

**TOP-DOWN approach:**

- Focus on **building capacities** of public authorities and universities for the social dimension and on **facilitating a learning journey**, rather than on compliance
  - Explore transnational learning and capacity tools
  - Scale up through incentives
- **BFUG Working Group for Social Dimension 2021-2024** (www.ehea.info):
  - Developing **tools for the implementation of Principles** for the social dimension
  - Developing a **system of monitoring the implementation** of the Principles and Guidelines
  - Organizing **peer support activities** for social dimension to support the implementation of the Principles and Guidelines among the EHEA members
Building a European movement: recommended policy approaches

BOTTOM-UP approach:

- Identify public authorities and universities committed to the social dimension
- **Build a network of institutions** committed to the social dimension and organize capacity building events with them
- **Build other alliances and scale up**: connect the social dimension agenda to the European Universities initiative and similar global networks, etc.

(NESET Analytical Report, Farnell et al., 2021)

**TOP-DOWN approach + BOTTOM-UP approach = building a European movement for the social dimension**
Thank you for your attention!

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