



SIDERAL Final Conference (July 2021)

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Activities

1 BFUG Advisory Group 1 on Social Dimension

2 Principles and Guidelines

3 COVID-19 Impact on Students

3 Next steps



BFUG Advisory Group 1 on Social
Dimension

Meetings of the AG1 on Social Dimension

- First Meeting in Zagreb in **February 2019**

*When setting the vision for the Principles and Guidelines for Social Dimension during its meeting in Zagreb in February 2019, the Advisory Group for Social Dimension recognised that, in fact, **many countries were already carrying out a lot of work in this sphere** that could help developing the Principles and Guidelines. The course for this was set towards meeting the need of providing a guide to member states on **how to define and implement policy on the social dimension**, as identified in the 2018 Paris Communiqué.*

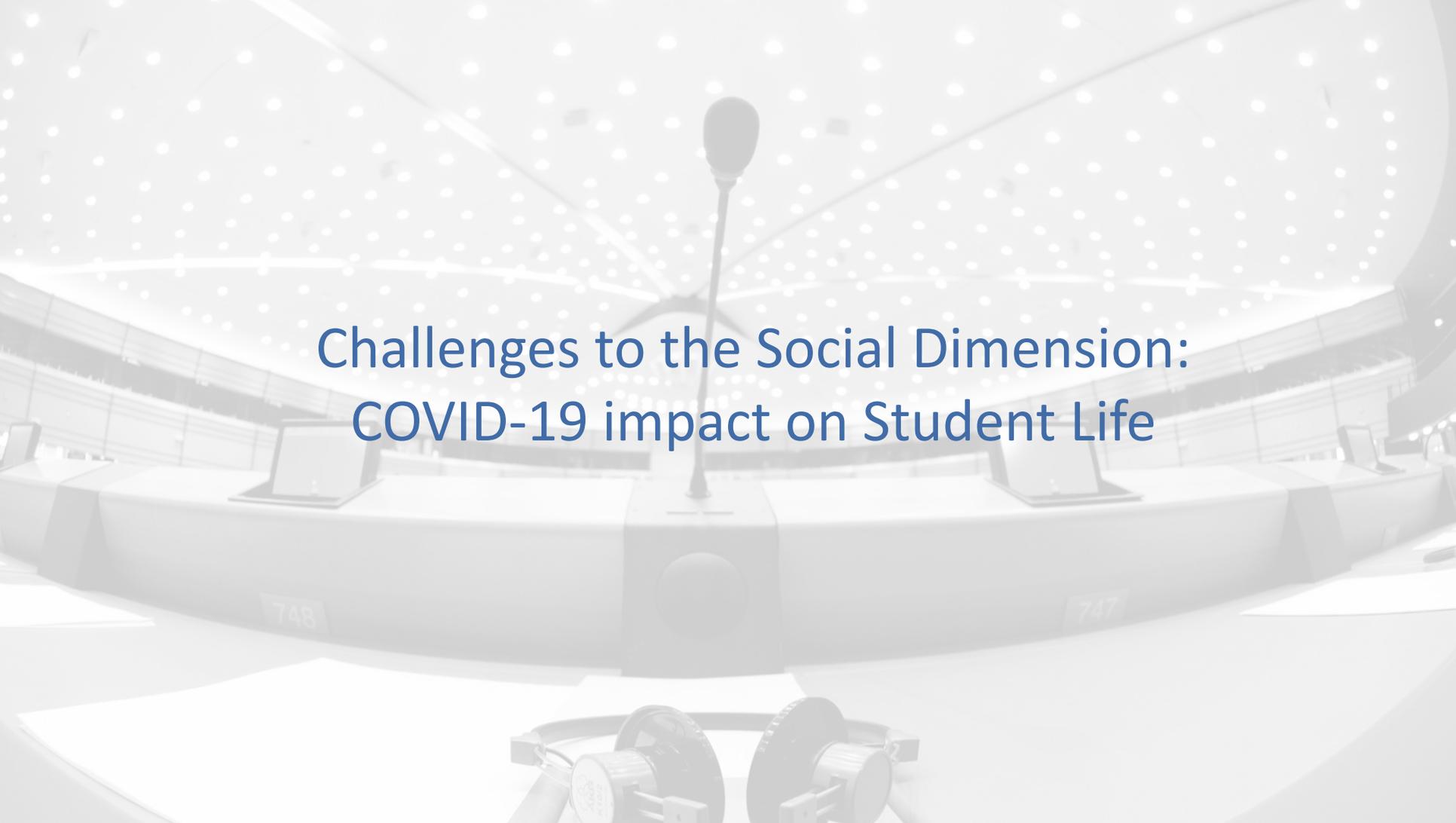
- Second in Brussels (**March' 19**) - structure,
- third in Vienna (**June' 19**) - drafting and consultation with the BFUG,
- fourth in Helsinki (**November' 19**)- amendments and more consultation,
- fifth in Copenhagen (**February' 20**) - finalisation.

Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension

*Avoiding a one-size fits all approach in addressing this call, the Advisory Group for Social Dimension expanded on the definition first provided in 2007, by stressing that the social dimension encompasses the **“creation of an inclusive environment in higher education that fosters equity, diversity, and is responsive to the needs of local communities for improving the social dimension of the EHEA”**. This thus enables for a common understanding that the social dimension goes beyond identifying vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups of students.*

Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension

1. Continuous and **strategic commitment** (concrete targets and broad based dialogue)
2. Enabling legal framework (**flexible and adaptable**, L&T and RPL) -- autonomy
3. **Inclusion in entire education system** (childhood to lifelong)
4. Reliable **data collection**: for evidence based improvements
- 5. Effective counselling and guidance for students**
6. Sufficient and **sustainable funding**
7. Strengthening HEIs **capacity** for diversity and inclusion
8. Inclusive and Equitable international **mobility programs**
9. **Community Engagement** in HE promotes the social dimension
10. **Policy dialogue** between public authorities and relevant stakeholders



Challenges to the Social Dimension:
COVID-19 impact on Student Life

Student Perspective During the COVID-19 Pandemic

- **An online questionnaire**, launched on SurveyMonkey, was filled in by undergraduate and Master's, full-time and part-time students studying at European higher education institutions in April 2020.
- The questionnaire was constructed by a team of researchers from the University of Zadar in Croatia. It consisted of 7 parts which included 31 closed-type questions and 5 open questions **assessing learning and teaching, funding, students' wellbeing and students' services**.
- In total, **17,116 respondents** from 41 European countries accessed the questionnaire. After filling out the socio-demographic and academic characteristics block of questions, **9,196 students** continued with the survey.

Findings of the Study (1)

Learning and Teaching

Students report an **increased workload in digital format.**

Only 41% reported they always have a good internet connection

Students' preferred format is real time video-calls, confirming **preference to face-to-face interaction with academic staff.**

Students, mostly those in their first and final years of studies, **felt that their academic performance had worsened.**

Funding

More than half respondents (65.4%) of the students indicated **difficulty in paying their overall costs of study.**

Around 41% of respondents who were working or planning to work, **lost their job** (12.2% permanently and 28.9% temporarily)

For 75.3% of respondents who pay tuition fees, the fee payment remained the same - 13.8% of students indicated tier institution provided flexible ways of paying fees and 1.8% reported their fee was cancelled.

Students living in rented accommodation and student dorms (as well as master level students) reported more frequent worries about covering costs of studying and living costs compared to students living in their family homes (and undergraduate students at year 1 and 2).

Findings of the Study (2)

Students Wellbeing

Students most frequently felt **frustrated**, **anxious** and **bored** in relation to their academic activities.

Students in the field of Arts and Humanities reported the lowest levels of general well-being when compared to all other groups of students.

Lower levels of general well-being were reported by female students, those who have difficulties paying their study costs, students with mental health problems and students who do not have a quiet place to study.

Student Services

Only 1.5% of students would turn to institutional sources of support such as administrative staff to talk about the **COVID-19 crisis**.

Only 5.8% of students would turn to administrative staff at their institution to talk about problems related to **studying issues (lectures, seminars, practical work)**.

For many problems students may have they do not rely on institutional provision for solutions.

A grayscale photograph of a modern conference room. The room features a curved desk with several workstations, each equipped with a laptop and a microphone. The desk is numbered, with '748' and '747' visible. The ceiling is high and features a grid of small, circular lights. The text "Looking forward..." is overlaid in the center of the image in a blue, sans-serif font.

Looking forward...

Students' Perspective

- Vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups more at risk than ever → *capacity building*
- Incorporate the need to allow inclusive digital education → *focus on equity and justice more than equality*
- Principles and Guidelines more relevant than ever → *Commitment and Vehicle towards implementation*
- Ensure more emphasis in next cycle on Peer Learning & Indicators → *ensure fair distribution of funds and recognize efforts to increase diversity and enhance accessibility*

Objectives of the New SD Working Group to the BFUG

- **Developing a system of monitoring the implementation** of the PAGs
 - Working hand in hand with WG on Monitoring
- **Defining indicators and benchmarks** (enabling measure of broadened definition of social dimension)
- **Organizing peer support activities for social dimension** (consider Thematic Country Reviews for social dimension)
- **Organizing a seminar on the social dimension** at the end of the cycle in 2024 to discuss the progress made in developing social dimension policie

THANK YOU!
