



# Mainstreaming the Social Dimension in the EHEA

Country and HEI SD profiles



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# Preface

In 2015, a few months after the adoption of the EHEA Yerevan Communiqué, Austria announced that it was going to develop the “National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education. Towards more inclusive access and wider participation”. In 2017 the Strategy was launched at the national level with the Bologna Day 2017 and the 2017 international PLA “Mainstreaming Social Dimension in the European Higher Education Area: Strategies, Tools, Raising Awareness”, which Austria hosted.

The social dimension of (higher) education is still high on the international agenda. This shows that there are still a number of challenges, and commitment at the European, national and the institutional level is needed to ensure equity in higher education. This is why the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research invited ministries, higher education stakeholders and higher education institutions to another – this time, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, online – Peer Learning Activity in October 2020 with the title “Mainstreaming Social Dimension in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA): Implementation of a National Strategy”. This PLA, part of the Erasmus+ project, *INternationalisation/INclusion/INnovation: Towards high-quality inclusive mobility and innovative teaching & learning in an internationalised Austrian Higher Education Area (3-IN-AT)*, facilitated an exchange of best practices and challenges at national and institutional levels and should point out the way ahead.

This report not only focuses on future tasks, but also acts as a progress report. Many countries and higher education institutions have developed national and institutional strategies to promote the social dimension. In order to mainstream the SD, the Austrian Federal Ministry agreed on measures for institutional implementation with the public universities in the so called “performance agreements” (i.e. funding contracts), with the possibility to retain up to 0,5% of the global budget in case of non-implementation. All universities showed that they had strategic measures in place in a report at the end of 2020, one third of the institutions decided to develop an institutional strategy on the social dimension. For the next performance agreement period 2022–2024, we are striving for an even broader commitment, mirrored in the implementation of existing strategies, as well as an increase in the total number of institutional strategies. We are furthermore working towards a stronger involvement of the non-university institutions.

The 2020 PLA, “Mainstreaming Social Dimension in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA): Implementation of a National Strategy” showed that this is a trend within the whole European Higher Education Area, as seven countries have contributed national and institutional profiles on the social dimension in advance to the PLA, which are part of this publication. We understand the “Principles and Guidelines to strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA”, which were adopted in November 2020 by the Rome Ministerial Conference of the EHEA, as a framework for our endeavours towards social inclusion in higher education. The P&Gs are a good basis for developing, implementing and monitoring SD strategies. The participation in and coordination of Erasmus+ projects has proven to strengthen international dialogue, motivate peer learning, and to foster progress at European, national, and institutional levels.

I want to thank the authors of this publication for their inputs, the coordinators and project partners of the Erasmus+ KA3 policy support project 3-IN-AT for their work, especially Austria’s Agency for Education and Internationalisation (OeAD), who supported the project from the very beginning, and all the PLA participants and keynote speakers for their active involvement in the peer learning process. The project results will be a valuable contribution towards mainstreaming the social dimension within the EHEA.



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Background,  
Introduction

01

# 01 Background, Introduction

This short introductory chapter describes the context of this publication, which is part of a work package in a thematically broad Erasmus+ project. It gives an insight into the whole project, also touching upon the other work packages and topics and includes a short wrap-up of the PLA “Mainstreaming Social Dimension in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA): Strategies, Tools, Raising Awareness” that took place in 2017 in Linz (Austria). This PLA is viewed as a kick-off event for implementing and developing national strategies on the social dimension of higher education within the EHEA and serves as a reference point for most of the activities within work package 3.

## Short description of the project 3-IN-AT as a whole

This publication is part of work package 3 within the project *INternationalisation/INclusion/INnovation: Towards high-quality inclusive mobility and innovative teaching & learning in an internationalised Austrian Higher Education Area (3-IN-AT)*. 3-IN-AT is an Erasmus+ key action 3 “Support to Policy Reform” project by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF), department IV/11.

The call EACEA/35/2018 “Support to the implementation of EHEA reforms – 2018–2020” was exclusively addressed to the Ministries of Education and Research of countries participating in Erasmus+. The Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, department IV/11 (responsible for European HE Area, EU HE Programs, Bologna Process and Mobility) submitted a proposal under “STRAND 2: Support to the implementation of the other priorities identified in the Paris Communiqué”.

In cooperation with consultative members of the Bologna Follow-up Group (EUA and ESU), Switzerland and Croatia, the work programme offers the Austrian higher education institutions a wide range of consultancy, training and information. It follows the results of the Bologna Process Implementation Report 2018, and the priorities of the Paris Communiqué as well as the suggestions of the Austrian higher education institutions and the national quality assurance agency AQ Austria. As in both preceding projects, AQ Austria is not only providing thematic input but also accompanying the project with external monitoring.

## Thematic focuses and Work packages (WP)

### Quality of Mobility (WP 1 and WP 2)

- Revision of the Austrian Strategy on Higher Education Mobility (<https://oead.at/hms>)
- Two Peer Learning Activities (PLA) with swissuniversities, Austrian and Swiss teacher training universities on “Flexibilisation of the Curriculum” and “Quality of Mobility”

### Innovative Teaching and Learning/structured “studyability” (WP 2 and WP5)

- Three panel discussions continuing the format of “Dialogue on innovative higher education teaching”, including questions of “studyability”, ECTS workload, and digital transformation, accompanying the website [www.gutelehre.at](http://www.gutelehre.at) (“good teaching”) of the BMBWF
- Annual conference Bologna Day 2020: Think Big: Institutional Teaching strategies and their implementation at HEIs
- Annual conference Bologna Day 2021: Future and digital skills – Initiatives, project and teaching practise at Austrian HEIs
- One Peer Learning Activity (PLA) with swissuniversities, Austrian and Swiss teacher training universities on “Digitalisation”

### Social Dimension – Implementation of the national strategy on the social dimension on HE (WP 3)

- International Peer Learning Activity (PLA) on social dimension
- Publication (print run: 300) with country profiles and good practice examples

### Bologna process: Information, networking, peer learning (WP 4, WP 5, WP 6)

- Annual conference Bologna Day 2019: 20 years of EHEA: Reflexion – presence – future
- Up to eight on-site-visits at Austrian higher education institutions by national EHEA experts
- Participation in PLAs in the EHEA and subsequent reporting
- National EHEA implementation report 2020 of the BMBWF

Further information about the project, and the experts involved, can be found at the following websites:

<https://oead.at/de/expertise/europaeischer-hochschulraum/3-in-at-2019-2021>

<https://oead.at/de/expertise/europaeischer-hochschulraum/3-in-at-2019-2021/ehr-experts>

[www.ehea.at](http://www.ehea.at)

## Wrap-up of the PLA in March 2017

On March 22nd, 2017, the Peer Learning Activity “Mainstreaming Social Dimension in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA): Strategies, Tools, Raising Awareness” took place at the University of Linz. The event was held at the time of the launch of the Austrian “National Strategy for the Social Dimension of Higher Education” and served as the starting point to engage in discussions with other countries that were actively working on the issue.

On behalf of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy, Maria Keplinger (head of expert unit on higher education development) emphasised in her introduction that different national contexts require different strategies that are specifically adapted or even tailored to the given circumstances. At the same time, international networking among experts is required in many areas – e.g. within this Peer Learning Activity – to also address challenges that are faced in different contexts likewise. The audience was then given a short insight into the Austrian strategy development process against the background of the national and international political context.

The following paragraphs are extracts from Lea Meister’s (president of the European Students’ Union 2016–17) speech at the event, which concisely summarised the PLA inputs.

**Ana Tecilazić Goršić** from **Croatia** described the current process in Croatia at the time which was part of a bigger education reform. In the case of Croatia, especially the paradigm shift from performance-related grants towards the predominance of need-based grants was mentioned.

Another approach was presented by **Anca Greere** (GB). **Great Britain** relies on different strategies concerning HE access. Bridging courses and the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF 2016) should be mentioned explicitly. The TEF was intended to make HE teaching more attractive for an increasingly diverse student population by awarding certificates to HEIs who fulfil certain criteria concerning Teaching Quality.

**Helga Posset** presented an overview of the **Austrian** National Strategy, allowing some detailed insights into selected quantitative goals. The audience response contained numerous questions with regards to existing parameters for quality assurance and monitoring in the implementation phase.

**Ireland**, represented by **Tony Gaynor**, was in its third cycle of “national strategies” in 2017. The clear definition of goals and that of underrepresented groups had led to sustainable progress (e.g. percentage of graduates in general and quota of students with a disability and students with delayed entry to higher education had risen significantly). Ireland’s input made clear that what is needed for the achievement of such goals are not only significant investments, but also the awareness of the fact that higher education cannot be regarded as a closed system and that difficulties do also occur at the preceding levels of education.

**Maria Kristin Gyalfadottir (Iceland)** presented strategies from a totally different starting point, namely against the background of constraints and cutbacks in the education sector as a result of the economic crisis. The importance of available relevant data to adapt measures to the current situation was emphasised.

**Mary Tupan Wenno from ECHO** (Center for Diversity policy) presented the results of the IDEAS project (Identifying effective approaches to enhancing the social dimension in Higher Education). The purpose of this project (within the life-long learning programme) was to collect good practices on efficient and effective approaches towards the social dimension. Important findings of analysis conducted were that not only the amount of funds, but also the allocation of funds is essential. The role of teachers concerning access to education was highlighted.

Mary T. Wenno's approach was affirmed by **Patricia Staaf**, who presented herself as being at interface of **Malmö University** and the Swedish Network on Widening Participation (INCLUDE). She furthermore emphasised the importance of early-stage interventions (e.g. contact students directly who do not complete any credits) as a low-threshold measure to avoid dropout.

In the final discussion, it became clear that nationally adapted approaches are required, and that international networking is essential. New methods should be tested, and successful methods should be (adapted and) adopted. The involvement of teachers and students is important. Those who will be implementing strategies have to be involved in their development, higher education research can support the process with data and analyses. When prioritising the social dimension, not only funding but also the high-level attention for and reputation of particular activities are relevant.



PLA on Oct. 7th, 2020

02

“Mainstreaming  
Social Dimension  
in the European  
Higher Education  
Area (EHEA):  
Implementation of a  
National Strategy”

## 02 PLA on Oct. 7th, 2020


# “Mainstreaming Social Dimension in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA): Implementation of a National Strategy”

The **Peer Learning Activity** “Mainstreaming Social Dimension in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA): Implementation of a National Strategy” was held online on **October 7th, 2020** from 14:30–18:30. It was co-funded by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Research, as well as by the project 3-IN-AT. It had been planned to take place at the University of Applied Arts Vienna, but due to COVID-19, plans had to be amended, and the University of Applied Arts Vienna hosted the event on Zoom.

The PLA was designed as a follow-up to the Peer Learning Activity in 2017 (see page 4), which was held at the University of Linz (Austria) when Austria launched its “National Strategy for the Social Dimension of Higher Education”. The 2020 PLA focussed on the developments since 2017 in the field of national and institutional strategies on the social dimension of higher education in the European Higher Education Area. The programme of the event already referred to the newly developed “Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA”<sup>1</sup>, in particular the following 5 of them.

1 [https://ehea.info/Upload/Rome\\_Ministerial\\_Communique\\_Annex\\_II.pdf](https://ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique_Annex_II.pdf) [Accessed on 17th of March 2021]



- 
1. The social dimension should be central to higher education strategies at system and institutional level, as well as at the EHEA and the EU level.
  2. Legal regulations or policy documents should allow and enable higher education institutions to develop their own strategies to fulfil their public responsibility towards widening access to, participation in and completion of higher education studies.
  4. Reliable data is a necessary precondition for an evidence-based improvement of the social dimension of higher education.
  6. Public authorities should provide sufficient and sustainable funding and financial autonomy to higher education institutions enabling them to build adequate capacity to embrace diversity and contribute to equity and inclusion in higher education.
  10. Public authorities should engage in a policy dialogue with higher education institutions and other relevant stakeholders about how the above principles and guidelines can be translated and implemented, both at national system and institutional level.

**Some of the guiding questions discussed were:**

- What is the current state of play of the implementation of Strategies for the Social Dimension in the participating countries on national level?
- What progress has been made since 2017?
- What is the current state of play of the implementation of Strategies for the Social Dimension in higher education institutions?
- What are examples of good practice of Strategies for the Social Dimension and their implementation on an institutional level?
- How can successful implementation be measured and evaluated?
  - Which quantitative indicators can be used to evaluate access to higher education for underrepresented student groups and groups with specific needs?
  - For example, how can representative student surveys on student success, engagement etc. be used for the evaluation?
- After the development of the Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA and the focus on social inclusion within Bologna papers – what will be the next steps on European level?
- How do the changes due to COVID-19 impact all of the above questions or issues?

Jamil Salmi (tertiary higher education expert) gave an introductory keynote, presenting the major findings of his worldwide research about national strategies and strategic measures for equity in access to higher education. His presentation included his most current findings about equity in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. He mentioned Austria as being a role model in the field of equity policy in general, specifically in the field of gender equality and support for refugees.

He brought up a number of topics connected to equity and their relation to COVID-19, and illustrated those by describing individual fates of learners. This mode of presentation made the impact of the pandemic as well as the theoretical concepts of equity policy more accessible. One focus of his research was to evaluate which **types of national policy** work to promote equity.

He identified several **groups of learners** that are especially relevant in the equity discussion, and often underrepresented in higher education:

- Low-income groups;
- Females;
- Minorities;
- People with disabilities.

He then distinguished between monetary and non-monetary policies, and gave a comparative overview among countries and their concrete measures and policies.

A central finding of Salmi's research is that the COVID-19 crisis is an amplifier of disparities, he mentioned concrete factors like the limited availability of financial resources, internet access, and the availability of laptops. More individual factors mentioned are the readiness to study online, and emotional distress due to an increased risk of academic failure.

Among Salmi's recommendations are the need for more impact studies, for more disaggregated data on various equity groups and a continued focus on gender issues, including gender parity in STEM programmes, senior academic positions and leadership positions. In addition to that, Salmi recommends paying more attention to the needs of students with disabilities, and refugee students. For Post-COVID times he suggests to revise structural determinants of inequality (funding, assessment), the impact of which became so obvious during the pandemic.

Robert Napier, president of the European Students' Union (ESU) from July 2019 to October 2020 delivered an input about the "Principles and Guidelines to strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA" which were adopted in November 2020 by the Rome Ministerial Conference of the EHEA.

Another main point on the agenda were the tandem presentations from the participating countries, held by one representative of the responsible ministry and one of an HEI in that country. The tandems came from Croatia, Scotland, Ireland, and Austria, which hosted the PLA. With additional participants and scientific observers from Belgium (Flemish community), Hungary, Romania, and Austria present, 35 participants joined the event.

**The lessons learned from the tandem inputs can be summarised as such:**

- Identifying and addressing target groups (underrepresented groups and groups with specific needs) is central to many of the strategies presented.
- The improvement of available data about students is an essential precondition for identifying target groups.
- In some cases, communication targeted at certain groups might be useful, but overall, a low threshold communication that addresses all students best supports SD mainstreaming.

**The biggest challenges discussed were the following:**

- Including all levels of education and institutions concerned (e.g. associations supporting different target groups: refugees/pupils/unemployed, counselling services);
- Coordination of national and institutional levels.



Principles and  
Guidelines  
to Strengthen the  
Social Dimension  
of Higher Education in  
the EHEA

03

# 03 Principles and Guidelines to strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA

By Martina Darmanin  
(European Students'  
Union – ESU)

The social dimension gained traction in the European Higher Education Area through the definition provided back in the 2007 London Communiqué, namely that the 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 in the EHEA countries<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>2,3</sup>.

The Principles and Guidelines also complement the EHEA 2020 strategy “Widening Participation for Equity and Growth”, which ministers adopted in Yerevan in 2015 and that called for “*the development of effective policies to ensure greater access to, participation in and completion of quality higher education for non-traditional learners and students from disadvantaged backgrounds*”<sup>4</sup>. Avoiding a one-size fits all approach in addressing this call, the Advisory Group for Social Dimension expanded 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*”<sup>5</sup>. This thus enables for a common understanding that the social dimension goes beyond identifying vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups of students.

1 European Higher Education Area, London Communiqué, 2007. [http://www.ehea.info/Upload/document/ministerial\\_declarations/2007\\_London\\_Communique\\_English\\_588697.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Upload/document/ministerial_declarations/2007_London_Communique_English_588697.pdf) [Accessed on 17th of March 2021]

2 Vision and SWOT for the future “Principles and Guidelines for Social Dimension”, BFUG AG1 Meeting Zagreb. February 2019, [https://ehea.info/Upload/AG\\_1\\_SD\\_Vision\\_SWOT.pdf](https://ehea.info/Upload/AG_1_SD_Vision_SWOT.pdf) [Accessed on 17th of March 2021]

3 European Higher Education Area, Paris Communiqué, 2018. [http://www.ehea.info/Upload/document/ministerial\\_declarations/EHEAParis2018\\_Communique\\_final\\_952771.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Upload/document/ministerial_declarations/EHEAParis2018_Communique_final_952771.pdf) [Accessed on 17th of March 2021]

4 European Higher Education Area, 2015. Widening Participation for Equity and Growth. [https://ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2015\\_Yerevan/71/5/Widening\\_Participation\\_for\\_Equity\\_and\\_Growth\\_A\\_Strategy\\_for\\_the\\_Development\\_of\\_the\\_SD\\_and\\_LLL\\_in\\_the\\_EHEA\\_to\\_2020\\_613715.pdf](https://ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2015_Yerevan/71/5/Widening_Participation_for_Equity_and_Growth_A_Strategy_for_the_Development_of_the_SD_and_LLL_in_the_EHEA_to_2020_613715.pdf) [Accessed on 17th of March 2021]

5 Report of the Advisory Group 1 on Social Dimension for the BFUG meeting in Kyiv March 2020. [https://ehea.info/Upload/BFUG\\_HR\\_UA\\_69\\_5\\_2\\_AG1.pdf](https://ehea.info/Upload/BFUG_HR_UA_69_5_2_AG1.pdf) [Accessed on 17th of March 2021]

Over and above achieving a common definition for the aforementioned groups of students, the final document annexed to the Rome Ministerial Communiqué sheds light on 10 Principles that would commit public authorities and higher education institutions to conceptualize or improve policies and strategies for the enhancement of the social dimension. The practical implementation of each Principle is then guided by more concrete recommendations for higher education policy makers. Primarily, the document envisages that *“the social dimension should be central to higher education strategies at system and institutional level, as well as at the EHEA and the EU level”*. Tangible targets to widen access, support participation in and completion of studies for all current and future students, such as those elaborated in the country and higher education profiles in Chapters 4 and 5, are recommended to be met following a two-fold approach. This requires both continuous strategic commitment and broad-based dialogue between all key stakeholders in order that such strategies can truly foster equity and diversity, while being responsive to the needs of the wider community<sup>6</sup>.

The second Principle stipulates that *“legal regulations or policy documents should allow and enable higher education institutions to develop their own strategies to fulfil their public responsibility towards widening access to, participation in and completion of higher education studies.”* In this regard, it is advised that the development and management of study programmes should not be restricted by rigid laws, policies and administrative procedures that do not allow sufficient flexibility for the reflection of the diversity of students’ needs in accessing, participating and completing these programs. A variety of higher education strategies for flexible study modes exist, overall a common overarching goal that could interconnect them would be that *“access, participation, progress and completion of higher education depend primarily on students’ educational abilities not by advantage of personal characteristics or circumstances beyond their direct influence.”*<sup>7</sup>

Recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning (RPL), full-time and part-time study modes as well as blended and distance learning are examples of ways higher education institutions promote accessibility and the right for lifelong learning through flexibility. Maintaining high quality learning and study programs while offering flexible modes to enter, such as RPL, and study is not an unrealistic standard to achieve if public authorities invest in the capacity of the higher education system and strengthen cooperation with employers and the wider community. This cooperation should include national qualifications frameworks facilitating transparent recognition of learning outcomes and reliable quality assurance procedures in par with continuous professional training and support for both academic and administrative staff running these procedures.<sup>8</sup>

6 European Higher Education Area, Rome Communiqué, 2020. Available from: [http://ehea.info/Upload/Rome\\_Ministerial\\_Communique\\_Annex\\_III.pdf](http://ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique_Annex_III.pdf)

7 Report of the Advisory Group 1 on Social Dimension for the BFUG meeting in Kyiv March 2020. [https://ehea.info/Upload/BFUG\\_HR\\_UA\\_69\\_5\\_2\\_AG1.pdf](https://ehea.info/Upload/BFUG_HR_UA_69_5_2_AG1.pdf) [Accessed on 17th of March 2021]

8 European Higher Education Area, 2015. Widening Participation for Equity and Growth. [https://ehea.info/media/ehea.info/file/2015\\_Yerevan/71/5/Widening\\_Participation\\_for\\_Equity\\_and\\_Growth\\_A\\_Strategy\\_for\\_the\\_Development\\_of\\_the\\_SD\\_and\\_LLL\\_in\\_the\\_EHEA\\_to\\_2020\\_613715.pdf](https://ehea.info/media/ehea.info/file/2015_Yerevan/71/5/Widening_Participation_for_Equity_and_Growth_A_Strategy_for_the_Development_of_the_SD_and_LLL_in_the_EHEA_to_2020_613715.pdf) [Accessed on 17th of March 2021].

Continuous and reliable data collection is emphasized in the 4th Principle as central to have evidenced-based improvement of the social dimension. While abiding to national legal frameworks, higher education systems should define transparent goals for collecting data to provide information on the composition of the student body. This should include data on students seeking access and participating in higher education (that would allow for the identification of vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups), drop-out and completion of higher education as well as transitions to the labour market after completion of studies. When relevant and necessary, national data collection practices should seek to complement those carried out by higher education institutions. This can serve to understand better vulnerability, disadvantages, and underrepresentation in education. Furthermore, such practices should be taken into account when developing categories for administrative data collection relevant for the social dimension on the EHEA level, through Eurostudent or similar surveys, in order to make data comparable internationally.<sup>9</sup>

It is impossible to ignore the serious threat that under-funding poses to the improvement of the Social Dimension in HE. Principle 6 commits public authorities to provide sufficient and sustainable funding and financial autonomy to higher education institutions, as this enables them to build adequate capacity to embrace diversity and contribute to equity and inclusion in higher education. The set-up of funding systems is recommended to support and reward higher education institutions for meeting agreed targets for widening access, participation and completion of higher education studies, in particular in relation to vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups. It is furthermore recommended to ensure that public student financial support systems can cover both direct and indirect costs of studies, while secondly being primarily needs-based in order to ensure higher education is affordable for all students.<sup>10</sup>

Lastly, the 10<sup>th</sup> Principle commits public authorities to engage in policy dialogue with higher education institutions and other relevant stakeholders for the development of policy measures tailored and fitted towards implementing the Principles and Guidelines on both the national system and institutional levels. Policy measures should respect institutional autonomy and avoid any unnecessary administrative burden in order to enable progress towards diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education. It is evident that, at this point, the social dimension requires more peer support initiatives and other exercises to exchange good practices, as we still see conflicting levels of policy development and implementation within the EHEA<sup>11</sup>. Barring that, the pandemic further exacerbated pre-existent shortcomings in terms of accessibility of our education systems.

Undoubtedly, it is a crucial and pertinent time for translating the Principles and Guidelines from simple words into tangible and measurable actions. Strengthening rather

9 Report of the Advisory Group 1 on Social Dimension for the BFUG meeting in Kyiv March 2020. [https://ehea.info/Upload/BFUG\\_HR\\_UA\\_69\\_5\\_2\\_AG1.pdf](https://ehea.info/Upload/BFUG_HR_UA_69_5_2_AG1.pdf) [Accessed on 17th of March 2021]

10 Ibid.

11 European Students' Union, Bologna With Student Eyes, 2020. <https://www.esu-online.org/publications/bologna-student-eyes-2018-2> [Accessed on 17th of March 2021]



than neglecting the social dimension of higher education in times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, allows higher education to play an important role in defending social justice. It is furthermore important that funding streams ensure both fair distribution and recognition of efforts to enhance accessibility and diversity. As stated in Annex II of the 2020 Rome Communiqué *“increased participation of vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups in higher education produces wider benefits with respect to decreased social welfare provision, improved health outcomes and increased community involvement [...] Graduate qualifications delivered to a wider pool of citizens means better employment prospects, higher earnings premiums and the passing on of an appreciation for the benefits of higher education to the next generation and to their local communities.”*<sup>12</sup>

The Principles and Guidelines provide the solid ground for policy makers and administrators of higher education systems to implement accessibility cooperatively and tangibly, inclusiveness and equity in higher education with the aim of maintaining a level playing field for all current and future students to succeed. More than that, the door is open for higher education institutions to integrate the PAGs into the core missions and functions of higher education, including learning and teaching, research, innovation, knowledge exchange and outreach, institutional governance and management as well as in policies for empowering present and future students and higher education staff. Incorporating the principles of equity and accessibility in learning and teaching is one such example when referring to inclusive digital education amidst the shift to online learning during the pandemic.

With regard to the 2021–2024 cycle of the BFUG, the (a) development of a system of monitoring the implementation of the Principles and Guidelines and (b) definition of indicators and benchmarks for the principles for social dimension are among the foremost objectives of the new mandate of the Working Group on Social Dimension. Alongside these objectives is the organization of peer support activities and other exercises to collect systematically country needs for peer support. Finally, the progress made in developing social dimension policies will be addressed in a seminar on the social dimension at the end of the cycle in 2024.

The responsibility now rests on the members of the Bologna Process and the Bologna Follow Up Group to demonstrate and prove the relevance of the Principles and Guidelines in the third decade of the EHEA. Will they be treated as a simple checklist, or rather will they serve as the basis for a new narrative defined by increased cooperation and open dialogue between public authorities and higher education institutions to implement and improve inclusive and evidence-based policies for the social dimension on the national and institutional levels?

12 Report of the Advisory Group 1 on Social Dimension for the BFUG meeting in Kyiv March 2020. [https://ehea.info/Upload/BFUG\\_HR\\_UA\\_69\\_5\\_2\\_AG1.pdf](https://ehea.info/Upload/BFUG_HR_UA_69_5_2_AG1.pdf) [Accessed on 17th of March 2021]



# Country profiles 04

## 04 Country profiles

 **Belgium**  
(Flemish Community)

**Authority in charge with “Social Dimension”**  
Flemish Ministry of Education and Training

**Person in charge/contact**  
Patrick Willems, Policy advisor, [patrick.willems@ond.vlaanderen.be](mailto:patrick.willems@ond.vlaanderen.be)

**Rationale for your strategy: Why do you work on/with a national Strategy and/or a coherent set of measures and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension? Would you say that it addresses one or more of the principles mentioned in the introduction? If yes, which? (Indicate the numbers, e.g. Principle 6., Principle 10.)**

**Policy objectives are:**

- the 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;
- getting more young people to and through higher education in a way that promotes social cohesion, social mobility, ‘democratisation of higher education’ and that addresses the demographic trends;
- improving the attainment and achievement for those who are most at risk of failing in higher education programmes;
- reducing the educational attainment gap between the different groups participating in higher education.

**Driving forces or rationales are:**

- increasing the student numbers and the participation rates;
- the belief that a diverse student population enriches learning experiences;
- social justice: higher education has an important role to play in fostering equity and social justice to the wider society;
- contributing to social and economic development;
- tapping the pool of talent;
- participation in higher education is important because of its implications for an individual’s chances in life.

Central to the policy is access to and participation in higher education, but also progression and success within it. It is not just about access to higher education but it is also about completion.

### Principles of SD

**Principle 1:** SD is not a central HE policy strategy, but an increasingly more important one. It has become much more central than it was a number of years ago. There is a distinct shift from a disadvantaged group-based approach (SD as a peripheral matter) to an overall inclusive approach (SD becomes more central in HE policy).

**Principle 2:** Flemish HEI have a large autonomy in developing their own SD strategies. The Flemish government provides for a general framework.

**Principle 4:** Flanders has some reliable data concerning some disadvantaged groups, but is trying to enlarge its data pool in dialogue with the HEI. At the end of 2017, a long debate and discussion resulted in all the Flemish HEI drawing up a Charter on collecting and monitoring data of disadvantaged groups in a uniform way. The Charter defines nine disadvantaged groups: students with a disability, students with a migration background, first time students, students with other home language(s) besides Dutch, working students, grant students, near-grant students and students originating from a short-educated or medium-skilled environment.

HEI have since then collected data on their students from disadvantaged groups on the basis of the definitions as agreed upon in the Charter. Debate is currently going on about collecting these data in an already existing governmental HE database or in a database to be constructed by the umbrella organisations of the HEI. A central issue in the debate is the ownership of the data and privacy matters.

**Principle 6:** Extra funding has been set at the disposal of the HEI, beginning as a separate project-based funding channel (Aanmoedigingsfonds/Social Dimension Support Fund), but quite soon integrated in the overall financing mechanism of HEI, giving the HEI a large financial autonomy towards further developing a genuine SD-policy (see also country profile 2017).

**Principle 10:** Government policy on SD has always been the result of a dialogue between all stakeholders (including HEI, students and social partners).

**Does your national definition of “Social Dimension” correspond to the one above quoted from the EHEA BFUG AG1 draft Principles and Guidelines?**

Yes, we endorse the SD definition in the Principles and Guidelines.

**Please give a short explanation of the status of your national strategy and/or your coherent set of measures and tools and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension (ongoing discussions, target groups involved, implementation, evaluation, monitoring, adjustments ...)**

Flanders has no national strategy with quantitative targets.

Basics of our national strategy are:

- Flemish government provides a legal framework for HEI in which they are able to develop their own SD policy;
- Flemish government offers a number of measures (financial or otherwise) to support HEI in the development of their SD policy;
- The legal framework and other supportive measures are the result of a structural dialogue between government and stakeholders (eg HEI, students, social partners);
- HEI have a large autonomy to develop their own SD-policies.

**How has your strategy been implemented; which measures have been put into practice and how?**

- Legal framework: number of laws passed in Parliament, following dialogue and debate with stakeholders;
- Funding for SD integrated in overall financing mechanism for HEI: Separate funding for student social services (embedded by law); Lower tuition fees for scholarship students;
- An extra weighting factor (1.5) in the funding formula for students from a lower socio-economic background, disabled students and students who combine working with studying;

A number of small or specific funding/measures, including

- Project financing on student tutoring for disadvantaged groups;
- Development of tools for improving study choice of pupils venturing to enter HE;
- national aptitude test toolkit for new entrants allowing aspirant students to test/ evaluate their motivation/interests/aspirations, their way of studying and learning, their preparedness for a particular discipline; the toolkit provides feedback to the aspirant and new students and the institutions offer remedial courses and activities;
- establishment by law and financing of a Support Centre for inclusive higher education (SIHO). SIHO supports HEI in developing an institutional policy on students with disabilities and supports the Flemish government in the development of a national policy on studying with a disability in HE.

**Does your strategy (or: your set of measures) include quantitative targets for certain target groups? (e.g. raise the participation of people with migrant background). If yes, please indicate them below and elaborate which data you use to monitor the achievement of these targets and how this data is collected. If not, please give a short statement.**

No, our strategy/our set of measures does not include quantitative targets, because following debates on the matter, HEI and the Flemish government prefer other approaches. There is one exception, namely in the case of participation in international

mobility, where the target was set that in 2020 of all students that participate in international mobility 33% should come from disadvantaged groups (Action Plan Brains on the Move).

**Can you name 3–4 examples of institutional best practices of higher education institutions having a concept of mainstreaming the SD (coherent set of measures, strategy; not only projects ...)?**

SIHO: Support Centre for Inclusive Higher Education

Most of our universities have a coherent set of measures and strategy, or are in the course of developing one. Very good examples are Artevelde University College of Applied Sciences, Ghent University, Antwerp University, ...

For more detailed info contact: [patrick.willems@ond.vlaanderen.be](mailto:patrick.willems@ond.vlaanderen.be)

**Websites/main online sources for your core Social Dimension initiatives and/or strategy:**

Not much material is available in English, SIHO has an English webpage:

[www.siho.be/en](http://www.siho.be/en)

**Does/Did the COVID-19 crisis have an influence on your endeavours to write or implement your national strategies on the social dimension? If yes, please describe the changes/challenges/benefits.**

It is still early to see the full impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the further implementation of the SD strategy.

**Authority in charge with “Social Dimension”**  
Ministry of Science and Education

**Person in charge/contact**

Ana Jerković, ana.jerkovic@mzo.hr

Đurđica Dragojević, durdica.dragojevic@mzo.hr

**Rationale for your strategy: Why do you work on/with a national Strategy and/or a coherent set of measures and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension? Would you say that it addresses one or more of the principles mentioned in the introduction? If yes, which? (Indicate the numbers, e.g. Principle 6., Principle 10.)**

The national Strategy for Education, Science and Technology (2014) stipulated that the social dimension is one of the key objectives for the policy developments in HE, and that a specialized strategic document should be developed taking into account all levels of education. In particular the Objective 6 of “upgrading student standard with special care for social dimension is directed to making HE accessible to all”. This objective has been set up as a part of a broader, European policy with the aim that the social profile of “the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education should reflect the diversity of our population” (the London Communiqué 2007). For that purpose, a National Group for Social Dimension in Higher Education was set up in 2015. The Group developed two documents *Vulnerable and underrepresented groups of students*, and *National Plan for improving social dimension in higher education*, both adopted by the Government in 2019.

The Plan addresses all of the principles mentioned in the Principles and guidelines. Namely, the Ministry of Science and Education has provided support to the BFUG Advisory group for social dimension and one of two co-chairs in charge of developing the document, Mr. Ninoslav Šćukanec Schmidt, is also a member of our National Group, assuring that documents are compatible and improving one another.

**Does your national definition of “Social Dimension” correspond to the one above quoted from the EHEA BFUG AG1 draft Principles and Guidelines?**

No, it does not correspond, we define it as follows: There is no concrete definition of social dimension in the national steering documents.



**Please** give a short explanation of the status of your national strategy and/or your coherent set of measures and tools and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension (ongoing discussions, target groups involved, implementation, evaluation, monitoring, adjustments ...)

The National plan for enhancing social dimension in higher education was adopted in 2019 alongside two more documents: Underrepresented and vulnerable groups of students and Guidelines for improving support to students with disabilities. Since then the Ministry of Science and Education has implemented several measures. Based on acquired studies and experience, we are planning to evaluate the Plan and adjust some of the measures in the next national policy document due in 2021.

**How** has your strategy been implemented; which measures have been put into practice and how?

The National plan is in its mid-stage and most of the goals have already been implemented to some level. For instance, implementing the social dimension within quality assurance procedures has already been done before the adoption of the Plan (draft plan was developed in 2016), scholarships or additional points in scholarship calls for several vulnerable groups (Roma, genders underrepresented in STEM, socio-economic status, first-generation students, students having caring duties) have been introduced in 2019.

Out of the remaining several goals of the Plan, the following was accomplished:

- studies on educational experiences of underrepresented and vulnerable groups acquired (qualitative study);
- methodology for data collecting developed;
- a survey with HEIs on measures conducted;
- several joining policies developed, such as RPL (recognition of prior learning) guidelines, special student support for different groups of students (housing, Erasmus mobility addition, support in recognition procedures and language skills for refugee student, other).

**Does** your strategy (or: your set of measures) include quantitative targets for certain target groups? (e.g. raise the participation of people with migrant background). If yes, please indicate them below and elaborate which data you use to monitor the achievement of these targets and how this data is collected. If not, please give a short statement.

No, our strategy/our set of measures does not include quantitative targets.

**Can you name 3–4 examples of institutional best practices of higher education institutions having a concept of mainstreaming the SD (coherent set of measures, strategy; not only projects ...)?**

University of Rijeka

**Websites/main online sources for your core Social Dimension initiatives and/or strategy:**

- <https://mzo.gov.hr/UserDocImages/dokumenti/Obrazovanje/VisokoObrazovanje/RazvojVisokogObrazovanja/Nacionalni%20plan%20za%20unaprjeđenje%20socijalne%20dimenzije%20visokog%20obrazovanja%20u%20Republici%20Hrvatskoj%202019.%20-%202021..pdf>
- <https://mzo.gov.hr/UserDocImages/dokumenti/Obrazovanje/VisokoObrazovanje/RazvojVisokogObrazovanja/Podzastupljene%20i%20ranjive%20skupine%20u%20visokom%20obrazovanju%20u%20Republici%20Hrvatskoj.pdf>
- <https://mzo.gov.hr/UserDocImages/dokumenti/Obrazovanje/VisokoObrazovanje/RazvojVisokogObrazovanja/Smjernice%20za%20unapređenje%20sustava%20potpore%20studentima%20s%20invaliditetom%20u%20visokom%20obrazovanju%20u%20Republici%20Hrvatskoj.pdf>
- <https://mzo.gov.hr/UserDocImages/dokumenti/Obrazovanje/Strategija%20obrazovanja,%20znanosti%20i%20tehnologije.pdf>

**Links to other resources related to the Social Dimension of higher education (empirical studies, relevant events, video clips, documentaries ...):**

- <https://mzo.gov.hr/istaknute-teme/odgoj-i-obrazovanje/visoko-obrazovanje/razvoj-visokog-obrazovanja/nacionalni-plan-za-unaprjedjenje-socijalne-dimenzije-visokog-obrazovanja/1977>
- <https://mzo.gov.hr/istaknute-teme/odgoj-i-obrazovanje/visoko-obrazovanje/razvoj-visokog-obrazovanja/sideral/233>

**Does/Did the COVID-19 crisis have an influence on your endeavours to write or implement your national strategies on the social dimension? If yes, please describe the changes/challenges/benefits.**

No.

### Authority in charge with “Social Dimension”

Ministry for Innovation and Technology; Deputy State Secretariat for Higher Education



### Person in charge/contact

Dr. Laura Sinóros-Szabó head of Department for Strategy and Institutional Development in Higher Education, [laura.sinoros-szabo@itm.gov.hu](mailto:laura.sinoros-szabo@itm.gov.hu)

**Rationale for your strategy: Why do you work on/with a national Strategy and/or a coherent set of measures and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension? Would you say that it addresses one or more of the principles mentioned in the introduction? If yes, which? (Indicate the numbers, e.g. Principle 6., Principle 10.)**

Social dimension and as a part of it inclusion are key elements of the “Shifting of Gears in Higher Education Mid-Term Policy Strategy” accepted by the Government in 2016 and it also appears in the regulatory environment and the domestic and EU funded programmes.

On 11 and 12 April 2019, the ET2020 working group organized a workshop to promote the integration of disadvantaged, underrepresented target groups into HE. The aim of the workshop was to explore tools available to HE managers and HEIs to facilitate the integration of disadvantaged, underrepresented target groups into HE. Inclusive education is important for Hungary because educational inequality is associated with lower educational attainment, higher unemployment, lower social mobility and the spread of intergenerational poverty. According to analysis based on the Integration of Administrative Databases in the framework of the Graduate Tracking System of the Education Authority, in each of the years under review, it can be clearly seen that lower educational attainment levels mean lower domestic labour market activity, higher rates of stay abroad and higher presumed rates of stay abroad (not classified).

Also, the skills and abilities of the entire population need to be developed to address the challenges and exploit the opportunities of 21st century technologies. In view of all this, the Hungarian higher education policy field initiated a common thinking on social dimension in May 2020, the first step of which was to gather the groups of students from various higher education regulators and programs supported in some way. The ultimate goal and task of the cooperation is to review the existing equity higher education target groups, to redefine and expand them as necessary, and then to define policy measures following the review.

In the national higher education strategy it is stated that it is an essential expectation for any level of education to support social mobility, and consequently, in the strategy social inclusion is more related to ensuring accessibility to higher education. Equal opportunities to higher education are especially considered in disadvantaged regions. Examining the relationship between the disadvantaged regions and the participation of students in higher education in Hungary, it can be stated that the place of

residence and its characteristics have a significant influence on the students' willingness to apply for admission.

The strategy and its action plan address Principle 1., 2., 4., 6.

**Does your national definition of “Social Dimension” correspond to the one above quoted from the EHEA BFUG AG1 draft Principles and Guidelines?**

No, it does not correspond, we define it as follows.

The strategy aims to increase participation and graduation rates in HE for the low-income, underrepresented and disadvantaged social groups by the following objectives and related measures:

- **supporting student success:** The measure improves the competence level of those admitted to a higher education institution. For lower achieving tertiary students as part of their studies catch-up courses will be launched to reduce drop-out and to improve the level of specialist knowledge required in the field. During the training competence measurement is required in order to monitor progress. To launch dropout reduction programs and student services, linguistic and professional skills development extracurricular courses is a priority.
- **opportunity creation, social upliftment, wide access insuring education system:** The Higher Education Information System of the Education Authority needs to be improved for intensive monitoring of the students concerned. The goal is to ensure national coverage of higher education service by maintaining all current training places and community higher education training centres. The restructuring of the scholarship system in order to contribute more effectively to access to higher education for disadvantaged young people in need, and thereby for their social mobility is also important. Another goal is to expand the network of Roma colleges.

**Please give a short explanation of the status of your national strategy and/or your coherent set of measures and tools and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension (ongoing discussions, target groups involved, implementation, evaluation, monitoring, adjustments ...)**

The national strategy was published in 2016. (“Shifting of Gears in Higher Education Mid-Term Policy Strategy (2016).”) The action plan of higher education strategy for 2017–2020 was accepted in 2017 (1359/2017. (VI.12.) Government Decision).

**How has your strategy been implemented; which measures have been put into practice and how?**

The revision of the action plan 2017–2020 of the strategy is currently being undertaken. The action plan of higher education strategy for 2017–2020 was accepted in 2017 (1359/2017. (VI.12.) Government Decision). The Deputy State Secretariat for

Higher Education is submitting a report for the Government on the implementation of the measures included in the action plan 2017–2020 in October 2020. We intend to submit the action plan for 2021–2024 to the Government latest in spring 2021.

**Does your strategy (or: your set of measures) include quantitative targets for certain target groups? (e.g. raise the participation of people with migrant background). If yes, please indicate them below and elaborate which data you use to monitor the achievement of these targets and how this data is collected. If not, please give a short statement.**

Yes, our strategy/our set of measures includes quantitative targets:

- a. Dropout rate decreases by 10 percentage points in basic and undivided training on average: 2013: 35%, 2023: 25%
- b. In Human Resources Development Operational Program: Proportion of disadvantaged students among graduates: Among the students who graduated in the given year, the proportion of graduates whose family background index was lower than -0.5 according to the data of the National Competence Survey. The family background index is recorded on the basis of the data recorded in the 10th grade during the National Competence Measurement. If the given student does not have a 10th grade CSHI index, the most recent data from the previous measurements is authoritative. 2015: 8.56% 2023: 10%. (2017: 9.02%)

**Can you name 3–4 examples of institutional best practices of higher education institutions having a concept of mainstreaming the SD (coherent set of measures, strategy; not only projects ...)?**

Let's Teach for Hungary! programme for social inclusion and sensitization was launched in December 2018 by the Ministry for Innovation and Technology and the Ministry of Human Capacities with the help of the Klebelsberg Center and the National Union of Students in Hungary. The program started in the 2019 /2020 academic year in 4 counties in fifty settlements. As part of this, students mentor 7 and 8 grade schoolchildren for a monthly grant of 30,000 forints. If student results improve, mentors can expect additional benefits. The 50 institutions participating in the program are selected from over 70 schools, in addition to the results of competency measurements, they consider the number of disadvantaged children with special educational needs in the institution. The program operates in an ascending system: in January 2019 the training of mentors started at 4 universities (University of Debrecen, University of Miskolc, University of Pécs, University of Nyíregyháza). Nearly 200 mentors worked with about 800 children. From January 2020, two more universities joined the program (Károly Eszterházy University, Eötvös Loránd University). In the 2020/21 school year, the goal is to increase further the number of mentors and mentees in order to enable students from as many small settlements as possible to join the program. The indicated cost requirement of the program is 269,796,195 Hungarian forint (754,548.03 euros).

**Websites/main online sources for your core Social Dimension initiatives and/or strategy:**

- National Social Inclusion Strategy in Government Decree 1430/2011. (XII. 13.) and the Hungarian National Social Inclusion Strategy II. (MNTFS II.): [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/assessment\\_implementation\\_hungary\\_national\\_strategy\\_2015\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/assessment_implementation_hungary_national_strategy_2015_en.pdf)
- National Reform Program: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2020-european-semester-convergence-programme-hungary\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2020-european-semester-convergence-programme-hungary_en.pdf)
- National Disability Program (2015–2025): [https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/10/Hungary\\_National-Disability-Program-2015-2025.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/10/Hungary_National-Disability-Program-2015-2025.pdf)
- Shifting of Gears in Higher Education Mid-Term Policy Strategy 2016: <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/download/9/19/d1000/Hungarian%20Higher%20Education%20Mid-Term%20Policy%20Strategy%20-%20Action%20Plan%202016-2020.pdf>

**Does/Did the COVID-19 crisis have an influence on your endeavours to write or implement your national strategies on the social dimension? If yes, please describe the changes/challenges/benefits.**

Yes: The policy field collected the best practices on equitable access to distance and online education in May 2020. Most of the higher education institutions (HEIs) acted proactively and assessed (through a survey or other means) whether students needed any help; some of the HEIs invited students to signal through the usual channels (disability coordinator, social committee etc.) if they needed help, a few of them expected that students signalled their needs if any (this was not a typical attitude).

A great number of HEIs offer personal help beyond educational and learning problems on a continuous basis for students; they are aware that this unprecedented situation causes different difficulties (also personal in nature). One of the factors affecting different HEIs' attitude is the number of students: for HEIs with a lower number of students measures are more personal in nature. In the action plan of the higher education strategy for 2021–2024 the findings and results of the survey will be implemented.

### Authority in charge with “Social Dimension”

Ministry of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science



### Person in charge/contact

Enda Hughes, Principal Officer, Head of Higher Education Equity of Access Section,  
enda\_hughes@education.gov.ie

**Rationale for your strategy: Why do you work on/with a national Strategy and/or a coherent set of measures and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension? Would you say that it addresses one or more of the principles mentioned in the introduction? If yes, which? (Indicate the numbers, e.g. Principle 6., Principle 10.)**

Equity of access to higher education is a national priority for the Ministry and Government. This is demonstrated by successive Programme for Government commitments and the publication of periodic National Plans for Equity of Access to Higher Education (NAP). To date, Ireland has published three NAPs. The current NAP covers the period from 2015 to 2021. A new NAP will be drafted and published in late 2021 to cover the 2022–2026 period.

Ireland has developed a national strategy on the social dimension, which encompasses most of the principles mentioned in the introduction. It provides a shared vision for a more equitable higher education (HE) sector.

The national strategy:

- Provides a coherent framework to coordinate the efforts of relevant stakeholders;
- Outlines roles and responsibilities for those stakeholders and sets targets for improvement in participation in HE by underrepresented groups; and
- Includes actions that are time bound and assigns responsibility for the completion of each action, thereby ensuring accountability for delivery. Higher Education Institutions are required to have their own access strategy which complements national policy.

The publication of National Access Plans every five to seven years affords us the opportunity to energise and renew our commitment to broadening participation in HE from groups and communities who are underrepresented; in particular, those living with social disadvantage, mature students, people with disabilities and Irish Travellers.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Irish Travellers are an ethnic group which share some similarities with the Roma community.

Having a clear vision of what we want to achieve has been beneficial in terms of gaining buy-in from stakeholders and leveraging funding to support the NAP and our target groups. The NAP is supported by designated funding to support its targets. It has:

- Dedicated access offices in the Ministry and the Higher Education Authority;<sup>2</sup>
- A number of targeted access funding initiatives;
- Financial incentives for higher education institutions (HEIs) where the annual core grant is topped up for each access student attending each institution. This additional funding supports institutional autonomy and enables each HEI to develop its access infrastructure to meet the needs of its student cohort;
- Research.

The development of National Access Plans (NAPs) takes place within the context of a range of other national anti-poverty and social inclusion policy measures in Ireland. A wide and on-going consultation with relevant Government Departments is in place to ensure alignment with cross-sectoral policies. The current NAP will end in 2021 and will be replaced by a new NAP. A wide consultation process will inform the development of the new NAP for the 2022–2026 period.

**Does your national definition of “Social Dimension” correspond to the one above quoted from the EHEA BFUG AG1 draft Principles and Guidelines?**

Yes. The current national strategy is entitled ‘The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education, 2015–19’. The core vision is *“To ensure that the student body entering, participating in and completing Higher Education reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland’s population.”*

**Please give a short explanation of the status of your national strategy and/or your coherent set of measures and tools and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension (ongoing discussions, target groups involved, implementation, evaluation, monitoring, adjustments ...)**

The national strategy was published in December 2015. A “Progress Review of the National Access Plan and Priorities to 2021”, which was published in 2018, extended the lifetime of the current plan to 2021. The current national strategy targets six underrepresented groups, as well as some sub-groups that are common to one or more of the main target groups. There are specific targets for each target group. The strategy contains five key goals and twenty-eight actions to be progressed over the period to 2021.

<sup>2</sup> The HEA is a public body funded by the Ministry. It has a statutory responsibility for the effective governance and regulation of the higher education system.



**How has your strategy been implemented; which measures have been put into practice and how?**

Access to higher education is central to both the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 and to the Department's System Performance Framework for the Higher Education System.

A Steering Group oversees the implementation of the NAP. The Group is chaired by the Ministry and has representation from other public bodies, HEIs, students and advocacy groups representing our target groups.

The Annual NAP Forum provides an opportunity to report on progress and achievements over the course of the previous year to a wider stakeholders group and to get feedback and set priorities for the following year.

The process for the development of the current National Access Plan began in 2013 when the existing plan (the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008–2013) was coming to the end of its lifetime.

The approach taken in developing the current NAP involved the following stages:

1. Data collection to establish figures on access and participation in higher education and analysis of the data relating to access and participation;
2. Wide consultation with stakeholders in higher education and in the wider community and analysis of the outcomes of the consultation process;
3. Development of the National Access Plan; and
4. A progress review in 2018 to determine if the NAP was achieving its goals and to inform policy regarding the remaining lifetime of the plan

The overall strategy in relation to equity of access as set out in the overall strategic framework is articulated in the National Access Plan.

The vision of the National Access Plan is to ensure that the student body entering into, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population.

The NAP identifies the target groups that currently are underrepresented in Higher Education, which includes entrants from socio-economic groups that have low participation in higher education, Irish Travellers, students with disabilities, first time mature student entrants, part-time/flexible learners and further education award holders.

The NAP has five goals:

- To mainstream the delivery of equity of access in HEIs;
- To assess the impact of current initiatives to support access;
- To gather accurate data on access and participation and to base policy on what that data tells us;
- To build coherent pathways from further education and to foster other entry routes to higher education; and
- To develop regional and community partnership strategies for increasing access, with a particular focus on mentoring.

**Does your strategy (or: your set of measures) include quantitative targets for certain target groups? (e.g. raise the participation of people with migrant background). If yes, please indicate them below and elaborate which data you use to monitor the achievement of these targets and how this data is collected. If not, please give a short statement.**

Yes, the NAP identified six priority groups who have been underrepresented in higher education and sets quantitative targets for each group: These are:

- Entrants from socio-economic groups that have low participation in HE;
- First time, mature students;
- Students with disabilities;
- Part-time/flexible learners;
- Further education and training award holders; and
- Irish Travellers.

The Progress Review in 2018 acknowledged a number of significant positive developments and characterised the first phase of implementation of the NAP as a period of achievement and investment. Some key findings include:

- A substantial increase in participation in the semi/unskilled manual worker group from 26% to 36% – exceeding the target of 35% for the lifetime of the NAP. A 10% increase in participation by this target group since the commencement of the Plan.
- The non-manual worker group increasing from 23% to 27% – the review concludes that the targets of 30% for the non-manual worker group will be achieved within the lifetime of the NAP.
- The overall target for students with a disability of 8% that was set for the lifetime of the NAP has been exceeded with overall participation rate increased to 10%. Since the review, latest data shows this figure has further increased to 10.5%.
- The target of 22% surrounding part-time and flexible provision will pose a challenge to achieve, despite a marginal increase 0.8% increase since the commencement of the implementation of the NAP.
- Mature student participation has experienced a decline since the commencement of the implementation of the NAP. Participation has fallen from 13% to 9% for full-time students, and by 3% for full- and part-time students.
- There has been a 17% increase in the numbers of Irish travellers – from a very low baseline of 35 students. The aim for the lifetime of the plan is 80 students and at progress review stage we had reached a figure of 41 Travellers.

In response to the progress review an Action Plan for Increased Traveller Participation in Higher Education was published in 2019. A Report on Mature Students is currently being prepared, and it will be published early 2021.

One of the NAP goals is to gather accurate data on access and participation and to base policy on what that data tells us. As part of this goal an Access Data Plan was published in 2018. Flowing from this plan, the HEA published a report in 2019 titled “A Spatial and Socio-Economic Profile of Higher Education Institutions in Ireland”.

The publication of this report marked a significant milestone in terms of evidence based decision making which will help to inform the new targets for improving access to HE for socio economic disadvantaged groups in the next National Access Plan.

A new funding programme has been introduced called the Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) which supports new innovative initiatives supporting students from the target groups. The PATH fund contains:

- New Innovative approaches to improve access;
- Includes clusters of HEIs working in partnership while maintaining autonomy and flexibility;
- Structured regional and community partnerships;
- A Targeted Bursary Fund;
- Access supports to encourage underrepresented groups into the teaching profession as a way to create role models in underrepresented communities;
- Supporting regional clusters of HEIs to develop regional and community partnerships strategies for access;
- Explicit quantitative and qualitative targets for each strand.

**Can you name 3–4 examples of institutional best practices of higher education institutions having a concept of mainstreaming the SD (coherent set of measures, strategy; not only projects ...)?**

As part of the annual strategic dialogue process, the HEA, formally reviews the performance of each HEI on its agreed targets. In relation to equity of access, HEIs must be able to show the steps they are taking to advance the national priority for equity of access (specified in the Higher Education System Performance Framework) and how they are contributing to the goals, objectives and targets set out in this National Access Plan. The HEA also works with HEIs (including those participating in the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) and Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) schemes through the strategic dialogue and agreement of compacts process, to ensure that students from those target groups and communities are more equitably represented across different disciplines and professions. Guidelines/regulations for funding schemes are reviewed and published every year.

New initiatives and impact assessments of existing initiatives to support diversity in HE provide on-going opportunities to adopt innovative and creative approaches to supporting diversity as we increasingly move in the direction of diversity being the norm. A major element of both progress to date and the future implementation of the NAP has been the increased investment in new access initiatives since the original publication of the National Access Plan. The Government has committed more than 38 million euros in funding over six years as part of the Programme for Access to Higher Education Fund (PATH). Its three strands with their distinct focus on initial teacher education, bursaries for the most socio-economically disadvantaged students and building relationships between higher education institutions and regional community partners are a tangible

commitment on the part of Government and the higher education system to supporting and further developing equity of access to HE. The impact of PATH will be long-lasting and ensures better targeting of the most disadvantaged groups in Irish society. It will help set up new pathways to HE, enhances support for students and embeds sustainable models of community engagement.

The development of a *Spatial and Socio-Economic Profile of Higher Education Institutions* has created a fuller picture of how individual HEIs are performing in terms of access by underrepresented groups. This has allowed HEIs to compare their performance with other HEIs and to reflect on how they can improve their access programmes. The richness of the data collected will inform future policy decisions regarding the development of the next NAP and is being used to inform funding decisions, with the best performing HEIs received higher access funding.

**Websites/main online sources for your core Social Dimension initiatives and/or strategy:**

- National Access Plan, 2015–21: <https://hea.ie/policy/access-policy/national-access-plan-2015-2019>

**Links to other resources related to the Social Dimension of higher education (empirical studies, relevant events, video clips, documentaries ...):**

- Progress Review of the National Access Plan: <https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2019/01/HEA-Progress-Review-2021-NAP.pdf>
- Review of the Student Assistance Fund: <https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2017/06/Review-of-the-Student-Assistance-Fund.pdf>
- This is the website of our National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning. This webpage focuses on the recent publications by the Forum which include reviews relating to non-completion, transition from Further Education into Higher Education, and Recognition of Prior Learning: <http://www.teachingandlearning.ie/forum-resources/national-forum-publications>
- *A Spatial and Socio-Economic Profile of Higher Education Institutions in Ireland*: <https://hea.ie/2019/10/21/higher-education-spatial-socio-economic-profile-2017-18-enrolments-published>

Further data sets on the *Spatial and Socio-Economic Profile of Higher Education Institutions in Ireland* – the data is colour coded with affluent areas in blue and disadvantaged areas in orange.

- <https://hea.ie/statistics/data-for-download-and-visualisations/socio-economic-data-and-maps/wherewhatdostudentsstudy1819>
- <https://hea.ie/statistics/data-for-download-and-visualisations/socio-economic-data-and-maps/where-and-what-do-students-study-2018-19-lcpoints>
- <https://hea.ie/statistics/data-for-download-and-visualisations/socio-economic-data-and-maps/socio-economic-profilefieldsstudy-2018-19-enrolments>

**Does/Did the COVID-19 crisis have an influence on your endeavours to write or implement your national strategies on the social dimension? If yes, please describe the changes/challenges/benefits.**

The COVID-19 crisis has had a detrimental effect on society as a whole but more so on the NAP target students who represent our most vulnerable learners. It is profoundly affecting the students that are at risk of educational disadvantage, as a result of imposed restrictions.

Since the crisis many stakeholder groups have held their own surveys to identify the extent of the difficulties imposed on the students. The NAP Steering Group which was set up to oversee the implementation and to monitor the progress of the NAP have held additional meetings during the crisis. These meetings have helped to highlight emerging issues and enabled the development of policy responses.

The key issues arising are:

- ICT equipment and connectivity issues;
- Lack of study spaces and challenging home environments;
- Financial Stress and the loss of opportunities due to lockdowns; to engage in part-time employment to fund studies; and
- Mental health issues.

Some of the priority policy responses have included:

- Financial Solutions
  - Direct student supports to enable participation;
  - Extending flexibilities for HEIs to deploy existing funding;
- ICT Solutions
  - A central procurement of laptops for disadvantaged students;
- Mental Health and Social Interaction (also looking at space considerations)
  - Wider than National Access Plan – additional resources provided;
  - Rethinking Approaches to Access Strategies in HEIs;
  - Community of Practice to be set up.



## Romania

Authority in charge with “Social Dimension”

Ministry of National Education

### Person in charge/contact

Haj Mihai Cezar, [cezar.haj@uefiscdi.ro](mailto:cezar.haj@uefiscdi.ro)

**Rationale** for your strategy: Why do you work on/with a national Strategy and/or a coherent set of measures and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension? Would you say that it addresses one or more of the principles mentioned in the introduction? If yes, which? (Indicate the numbers, e.g. Principle 6., Principle 10.)

I am currently coordinating a strategic project implemented by UEFISCDI and the Ministry of Education and Research aimed at increasing access and the completion of studies especially for students in vulnerable categories. I am also the Romanian delegate in the BFUG and member in the SD working group. The Romanian Strategy for Higher Education 2015–2020 addresses Principle 1, 4 and 10. The National Strategy for Tertiary Education 2015–2020 aims at improving tertiary education attainment, quality, and efficiency, and at making HE more relevant to labour market needs and more accessible to disadvantaged groups. The vision for the development of tertiary education in Romania 2015–2020 is developed as an inter-related structure of support and pillars, which will be supported by several short, medium and long-term measures and initiatives.

**Does** your national definition of “Social Dimension” correspond to the one above quoted from the EHEA BFUG AG1 draft Principles and Guidelines?

Yes, it (mostly) corresponds, we define it as follows:

There is no official definition of the “social dimension” but the current national policy framework refers to the whole meaning of the social dimension as defined by the BFUG.

**Please** give a short explanation of the status of your national strategy and/or your coherent set of measures and tools and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension (ongoing discussions, target groups involved, implementation, evaluation, monitoring, adjustments ...)

The National Strategy for Tertiary Education is based on three pillars, one of which aims at: “improving participation in higher education” including concrete objectives and measures.

This Strategy includes important legislative initiatives and programs with impact on tertiary education such as coordination with Bologna Process reforms, improved autonomy for higher education institutions, new funding models.

The pillar that focuses on tertiary education attainment has, as objectives to:

- Establish clear routes from vocational and other secondary education into tertiary education;
- Complement merit-based fee waiver with a program of need-based grants;
- Implement a student loan program;
- Encourage outreach to students from underrepresented groups and to non-traditional learners, including adults;
- Increase the transparency of information and provide guidance on educational opportunities and outcomes to inform study choices and reduce drop-out rates.

Following the strategic objectives, the following measures are proposed:

- Development of clear progression routes from vocational and other secondary education types into tertiary education;
- Strengthen the education pipeline;
- Improving the scholarship system, by increasing the number of needs-based social grants;
- Launching a student loan program;
- Encourage outreach to students from underrepresented groups and to non-traditional learners, including adults by development of institutional outreach strategies for under-represented groups; national government to incentivize recruitment strategy and retention of under-represented groups by providing financial incentives for doing so; institutions can be encouraged to perform outreach and shift enrolment balances at a field-of-study level through financial incentives for meeting or exceeding certain enrolment thresholds.

At this moment, there is no public report on the implementation, but measures were taken by the national institution in support of the social dimension and in accordance with the strategy.

### **How has your strategy been implemented; which measures have been put into practice and how?**

The following measures have been put into practice:

- Enhancing the social scholarship system: a new legal framework was adopted that better regulates the implementation of the scholarship system. Also, more money from the public budget was given to universities for scholarships. Due to this, the values of social scholarships have increased.
- Financial incentives for students from disadvantaged groups: a new policy was adopted which involved allocation of budget funded study places for students that come from a rural high school. For students from disadvantaged groups there are also other measures in place as, for example, the allocation of budgeted study places for Roma students.
- New funding instrument (FDI – institutional development fund) was put in place.

Based on a competition, it funds universities, projects that promote equity (<http://www.cnfis.ro/finantare/dezvoltare-institutionala>). Universities can fund local projects aimed at reducing the drop-out rate and enhancing access to higher education.

- Big infrastructure projects for new student dormitories – the construction of 30 new students' dormitories has started.
- Implementing the ROSE (Romanian Secondary Education) project – that implements university-level-interventions aiming to support the needs of students at risk of dropping out. It has as activities: the development of summer bridge programs, implemented by faculties and the establishment of learning centres, for the benefit of the whole university, meant to increase the retention rate in higher education of at-risk students.

**Does your strategy (or: your set of measures) include quantitative targets for certain target groups? (e.g. raise the participation of people with migrant background). If yes, please indicate them below and elaborate which data you use to monitor the achievement of these targets and how this data is collected. If not, please give a short statement.**

Yes, our strategy/our set of measures includes quantitative targets, including definite percentages:

- Increase the share of the student population within higher education aged 25–34 to reach 29% by 2020 from the current 25.5% reference;
- increase the share of the student population living in rural areas that completed tertiary education programs in the 30–34 year old bracket to 8.3% in 2020 from the current 7.8%;
- increase the share of female tertiary education graduates in science, mathematics and IT to reach 4.2% in 2020 from the current 3.1% reference.

For the strategic objectives related to social dimension, there are the following targets:

- Facilitating the transition and career development of young people between various forms and levels of education, in particular from secondary education to HE – 42,800 (number of beneficiaries);
- Removing barriers to potential and current students to achieve their educational goals – 385,977 (number of beneficiaries);
- Teacher training (for increasing participation to higher education) – 9,250;
- Counselling young people to make informed decisions about their professional path in tertiary education – 30,000 (number of beneficiaries);
- Increasing the access and participation of disadvantaged groups in the higher education system (especially non-traditional students) – 50,000 (number of beneficiaries).

**Can you name 3–4 examples of institutional best practices of higher education institutions having a concept of mainstreaming the SD (coherent set of measures, strategy; not only projects ...)?**

There are several measures put in place at university level to foster the social dimension of higher education such as:



- Bridging measures and projects for improving the transition of students from high-school to university. Many universities offer free counselling and/or courses for high-school students in order to help them perform better in the bacculaureate exam;
- Scholarships for students from under-represented groups (over the national social scholarship system funded from the Ministry of Education budget);
- Increasing the number of free study places for Roma students (above the number allocated from national level);
- Tutoring programs for first-year students to support their integration in the academic community.

**Websites/main online sources for your core Social Dimension initiatives and/or strategy:**

- [https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/fisiere%20articole/Strategie\\_inv\\_tertiar\\_2015\\_2020.pdf](https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/fisiere%20articole/Strategie_inv_tertiar_2015_2020.pdf),  
English version: <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/395381496304455206/National-Strategy-for-Tertiary-Education-in-Romania-mare.pdf>
- Ministry of Education: <https://edu.ro/proiecte>
- The reports from the project "Educated Romania" implemented by the Presidential Administration: <http://www.romaniaeducata.eu/rezultatele-proiectului>;  
English details: <https://www.presidency.ro/en/commitments/educated-romania>
- Publications on HE (include policy briefs on access and participation) from UEFISCDI: <https://uefiscdi.gov.ro/index.php>
- ROSE project: <http://proiecte.pmu.ro/web/guest/rose>

**Links to other resources related to the Social Dimension of higher education (empirical studies, relevant events, video clips, documentaries ...):**

- Publications from a national strategic project ("Higher Education Evidence Based Policy Making: a necessary premise for progress in Romania" project) implemented by UEFISCDI: <http://pp-is.forhe.ro/ro/rezultate>
- The equity component of another national project ("Internationalization, equity and university management") implemented by UEFISCDI: <http://iemu.forhe.ro/echitate/rezultate-obtinute>

**Does/Did the COVID-19 crisis have an influence on your endeavours to write or implement your national strategies on the social dimension? If yes, please describe the changes/challenges/benefits.**

No.

**Authority in charge with “Social Dimension”**

Scottish Government

**Person in charge/contact**

Debra Macfarlane, Quality Assurance Agency Scotland, [d.macfarlane@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:d.macfarlane@qaa.ac.uk)

**Rationale for your strategy:** Do you work on/with a national Strategy and/or a coherent set of measures and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension? Would you say that it addresses one or more of the principles mentioned in the introduction? If yes, which? (Indicate the numbers, e.g. Principle 6., Principle 10.)

Yes, there is a national Strategy and key mechanisms for progressing work on inclusion and fair access, including:

- **The Scottish Government National Performance Framework:**  
<https://nationalperformance.gov.scot> – The framework is for all of Scotland and aims to create a more successful country; give opportunities to all people living in Scotland; increase their wellbeing; create sustainable and inclusive growth; reduce inequalities and give equal importance to economic, environmental and social progress. One of the key pillars is inclusion and part of the purpose is to, ‘reduce inequalities and give equal importance to economic, environmental and social progress’. The framework is not specific to HE but sets the context for the work outlined below. (P1, P4).
- **A Blueprint for Fairness:** The final report of the Commission on Widening Access (CoWA) 2016: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/blueprint-fairness-final-report-commission-widening-access>. This document presents a system wide plan to achieve equal access to HE. The Scottish Government’s Programme for Government 2014–15 set out the ambition that a child born at that time in one of Scotland’s most deprived communities should, by the time of leaving school, have the same chance of going to university as one born in one of the country’s least deprived areas. (P1, P2, P4, P6, P10).
- **Scottish Framework for Fair Access:** <http://www.sfc.ac.uk/access-inclusion/commission-widening-access/scottish-framework-fair-access/scottish-framework-fair-access.aspx> – launched in May 2019 to respond to CoWA Recommendation 2 which seeks to identify access activity with the highest impact at each stage of the learner journey, from early learning through to higher education, and provide best practice guidelines on its delivery and evaluation (P1, P4).
- **Scottish Funding Council (SFC) Outcome Agreements:** <http://www.sfc.ac.uk/funding/outcome-agreements/outcome-agreements.aspx> – Outcome Agreements (OAs) set out what each University will aim to deliver in return for their funding. SFC expect continued and rapid progress with the implementation of the recommendations made

by the Commission on Widening Access (CoWA). SFC outline that universities must ensure that good progress continues to be made towards achieving the targets set by the Commission and that these are clearly reflected in their OAs (P1, P2, P4, P6, P10).

- **Scottish Funding Council report on Widening Access 2018–19:** <http://www.sfc.ac.uk/publications-statistics/statistical-publications/2020/SFCST062020.aspx> (published 2020) – this report summarises the most recent data on CoWA targets, and on Scottish- domiciled entrants to higher and further education in Scotland by socio-economic deprivation, gender, ethnicity, disability, care experience and age.
- **Quality Assurance Agency – Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR):** <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/enhancement-led-institutional-review/elir-reports> – Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) is an evidence-based method of cyclical peer review of universities, meaning that staff and students from other institutions join a team of reviewers to assess what each higher education institution does on a five-year cycle. ELIR results in a judgement and a set of commendations and recommendations relating to the way the institution is securing academic standards and improving the student experience, and to which the universities must respond. ELIR specifically considers the evidence available on institutional approaches to recognising and responding to equality and diversity in the student population, including widening access and mode and location of study. (P1, P4, P10).

**Does your national definition of “Social Dimension” correspond to the one above quoted from the EHEA BFUG AG1 draft Principles and Guidelines?**

No, it does not completely correspond, we define it as follows: “A child born at that time (originally 2014–15) in one of Scotland’s most deprived communities should, by the time of leaving school, have the same chance of going to university as one born in one of the country’s least deprived areas”.

**Please give a short explanation of the status of your national strategy and/or your coherent set of measures and tools and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension (ongoing discussions, target groups involved, implementation, evaluation, monitoring, adjustments ...)**

The national strategy was published in 2016 – see above for monitoring and evaluation (SFC OAs and reporting).

**How has your strategy been implemented; which measures have been put into practice and how?**

Yes, see above.

**Does your strategy (or: your set of measures) include quantitative targets for certain target groups? (e.g. raise the participation of people with migrant background). If yes, please indicate them below and elaborate which data you use to monitor the achievement of these targets and how this data is collected. If not, please give a short statement.**

Yes, our strategy/our set of measures includes quantitative targets.

The following explicitly quantitative targets are set out in the Commission on Widening Access (CoWA) recommendations.

Recommendation 32 outlines targets: The Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council should implement the following targets to drive forward the delivery of equal access in Scotland: To realise the First Minister's ambition of equality of access to higher education in Scotland:

- By 2030, students from the 20% most deprived backgrounds should represent 20% of entrants to higher education. Equality of access should be seen in both the college sector and the university sector.

To drive progress toward this goal:

- By 2021, students from the 20% most deprived backgrounds should represent at least 16% of full-time first-degree entrants to Scottish HEIs as a whole.
- By 2021, students from the 20% most deprived backgrounds should represent at least 10% of full-time first-degree entrants to every individual Scottish university.
- By 2026, students from the 20% most deprived backgrounds should represent at least 18% of full-time first-degree entrants to Scottish universities as a whole.
- In 2022, the target of 10% for individual Scottish universities should be reviewed and a higher-level target should be considered for the subsequent years.

Drilling down, CoWA Recommendations task the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) with monitoring. Outcome Agreements between SFC and individual institutions set out specific annual targets for universities to achieve in order to receive their funding.

**Can you name 3–4 examples of institutional best practices of higher education institutions having a concept of mainstreaming the SD (coherent set of measures, strategy; not only projects ...)?**

Over the current cycle of Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) 2018–21, 10 out of 18 institutions have been reviewed. The following institutions have been commended by peers for their approaches to widening participation (commendations are included below). Full reports citing the evidence used to come to the recommendation are available via the link above.

- **University of Aberdeen:** Widening access – the University's strategic focus on widening access has resulted in the development of a broad range of activities and measures including pre and post-entry support, with students confirming they are positively supported and prepared to succeed with their studies.

- **Abertay University:** Transition support into higher education – there is a deliberate and sustainable strategy for providing effective support to students entering the University from its partner colleges. This is demonstrated through its progression data and by the University’s wide range of support activities including dedicated student transition officers, collaborative approaches to curriculum development and delivery, outreach work with local communities and the Teaching, Learning and Enhancement (TLE) team providing staff development opportunities for staff of the University’s partners.
- **Edinburgh Napier University (Note: See HEI profile in chp. 5):** Strategic approach to widening participation – the sustained, strategic, systematic and evidence-based approach to widening participation and direct entry which is having a continued positive impact on the number of widening participation students admitted to and progressing through the University. Effective interventions are evident at all stages of the learner journey from pre-admission through contextualised admissions arrangements to induction, transition and on-campus support. These include the student-led and University supported peer network of students from a widening participation background (Establish), the Countdown to Zero induction programme and introduction of dedicated widening participation student ambassadors.
- **University of Glasgow:** Strategic approach to widening access – the University has a long-established strategic approach to widening access which it continues to develop through its engagement with a wide variety of stakeholders. Data and sector benchmarks are used effectively to underpin and inform the University’s work in this area, which is helping students to succeed. Through its research-informed approach, the University is influencing the wider sector, for example, the University’s 2016 Impact for Access Report includes findings which have informed Scottish Funding Council policy.
- **Queen Margaret University:** Widening participation – The University’s holistic and student-centred approach to widening participation represents excellent practice. Students are supported at each stage of their learner journey and the University’s commitment both to widening participation and ensuring students succeed is demonstrated through the broad range of outreach activities it has in place. These include hosting the Children’s University and working with schools, colleges, community groups, the third sector and voluntary agencies.
- **Royal Conservatoire of Scotland:** Widening access – there is substantial strategic commitment and a range of support in place to promote student access to the Conservatoire. There is a wide variety of practical assistance for individual students provided on a systematic basis.
- **University of the West of Scotland:** Widening access – the University demonstrates a strategic approach to recruiting and supporting a diverse range of students, based on a clear understanding of its student population and a strong commitment to meeting the needs of the communities in which it is located. A range of widening access initiatives are in place which are tailored to particular student groups including targeting engagement with areas designated as SIMD 20 and promoting partnership

with local colleges to support student articulation. The University has made significant progress in improving the retention of students who enter from underrepresented groups.

**Websites/main online sources for your core Social Dimension initiatives and/or strategy:**

These are linked throughout this document; the main ones are outlined in the first section on rationale.

**Does/Did the COVID-19 crisis have an influence on your endeavours to write or implement your national strategies on the social dimension? If yes, please describe the changes/challenges/benefits.**

No. However, in September the Scottish Government published its annual Programme for Government (PfG) 2020–21: <https://www.gov.scot/programme-for-government>, setting out the actions the Government is taking to ensure Scotland's economic, health, and social recovery from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and beyond.

The following points relating to HE and fair access were included:

- Free education naturally gets re-protected, but “we know that the availability of free education by itself cannot overcome other inequalities”. Therefore we will continue to work to implement the recommendations of the Independent Commission on Widening Access. We will build on work to scale up outreach activities and reform admissions to “reflect the potential” that a young person may have, and will continue to develop a “School Engagement Framework” to support pupils into the right choices – a modern apprenticeship, college, university, or employment.
- In the context of significant growth in the sector, the government will next year conduct a review of Purpose Built Student Accommodation in parallel with wider work to “ensure rent affordability” and “improving standards” across the private rented sector.
- It will continue to work with the Scottish Funding Council as it takes forward the recommendations of the Equality and Human Rights Commission’s inquiry into racial harassment in British Universities published in 2019.
- On mental health, it will continue to deliver on its 2018 PfG commitment for more than 80 additional counsellors in colleges and universities over four years (it is currently over two-thirds of the way to meeting that commitment.)
- And it will work hard to salvage what it can from ongoing EU negotiations given “the collaborations that our universities have established with research partners across the continent”.

**Authority in charge with “Social Dimension”**

Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research – department IV/14 Higher Education Development

**Person in charge/contact**

Dr. Maria Keplinger, maria.keplinger@bmbwf.gv.at

**Rationale for your strategy: Why do you work on/with a national Strategy and/or a coherent set of measures and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension? Would you say that it addresses one or more of the principles mentioned in the introduction? If yes, which? (Indicate the numbers, e.g. Principle 6., Principle 10.)**

Austria works with a national strategy because it was developed with the commitment of different stakeholders in Higher Education (Principle 10), and it is a useful frame of reference for institutional strategies and policy measures (Principles 1, 2). The data that was needed to develop and evaluate the 9 quantitative targets, is mainly provided by the Student Social Survey that is commissioned by the ministry every 3–4 years (Principle 4).

**Does your national definition of “Social Dimension” correspond to the one above quoted from the EHEA BFUG AG1 draft Principles and Guidelines?**

Yes, it (mostly) corresponds, we define it as follows: The goal formulated in the London Communiqué was the basis for our strategy development; we have expanded the definition as follows: Participation in education and further training at all levels improves the potential for social, economic and political participation and integration in equal measure. In addition to ability and motivation, there are various other factors (e.g. regional and educational background, gender) that help or hinder access to education and training. These can be described as part of the “social dimension”. (National Strategy, page 7)

**Please give a short explanation of the status of your national strategy and/or your coherent set of measures and tools and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension (ongoing discussions, target groups involved, implementation, evaluation, monitoring, adjustments ...)**

The national strategy was published in February 2017; it is currently being implemented with an interim evaluation planned for 2021 and a final evaluation in 2025.

**How has your strategy been implemented; which measures have been put into practice and how?**

Steps of implementation were

- the integration of measures into the performance agreements with public universities (with the possibility to retain up to 0,5% of the global budget in case of non-implementation);
- the integration of the social dimension into the “Development and Funding Plan for Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) through to 2023/24”;
- connected to the narrative of the promotion of the SD on a national level was the quantitative and qualitative development of the student support system (focal points, funding); extra support for mobility;
- annual networking conferences:
  - 2018 “Enabling study success”;
  - 2019 “From school into higher education”;
  - 2020 “webinar on equity in higher education” plus online networking;
- Participation in Erasmus+ project as partner, e.g. PLAR-4-SIMP (social inclusion in mobility programmes).

**Does your strategy (or: your set of measures) include quantitative targets for certain target groups? (e.g. raise the participation of people with migrant background). If yes, please indicate them below and elaborate which data you use to monitor the achievement of these targets and how this data is collected. If not, please give a short statement.**

Yes, our strategy/our set of measures includes quantitative targets including definite numbers/percentages.

**Can you name 3–4 examples of institutional best practices of higher education institutions having a concept of mainstreaming the SD (coherent set of measures, strategy; not only projects ...)?**

- University of applied arts Vienna (institutional strategy; part of the performance agreements with the ministry 2019–21);
- University of applied sciences Upper Austria: keyword “Diversity Wheel”;
- University of applied sciences FH Campus Wien: keywords “code of conduct” and “diversity map” (Landkarte).

**Websites/main online sources for your core Social Dimension initiatives and/or strategy:**

- [www.sozialerhebung.at/sozdim](http://www.sozialerhebung.at/sozdim)



**Links** to other resources related to the Social Dimension of higher education (empirical studies, relevant events, video clips, documentaries ...):

- National Student Social Survey: [www.sozialerhebung.at](http://www.sozialerhebung.at)
- Erasmus+ Project on inclusive mobility; coordinated by Belgium (Flanders): [www.plar4simp.eu](http://www.plar4simp.eu)

**Does/Did** the COVID-19 crisis have an influence on your endeavours to write or implement your national strategies on the social dimension? If yes, please describe the changes/challenges/benefits.

Yes: We had to cancel/postpone our national networking conference, which was planned for Oct. 8th at the university of applied arts in Vienna.



# HEI profiles 05

## 05 HEI profiles

 **Belgium**  
(Flemish Community)

### Support Centre Inclusive Higher Education (SIHO) – Artevelde University of Applied Sciences

Organizational unit in charge with “Social Dimension”

Director Education and Student Policy

Person in charge/contact

Valérie Van Hees, Support Centre Inclusive Higher Education – Artevelde University of Applied Sciences, [valerie.vanhees@siho.be](mailto:valerie.vanhees@siho.be)

**Rationale for your strategy:** Why do you work on/with an institutional Strategy and/or a coherent set of measures and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension? Would you say that it addresses one or more of the principles mentioned in the introduction? If yes, which? (Indicate the numbers, e.g. Principle 6., Principle 10.)

Artevelde University of Applied Sciences (AUAS) embraces diversity as an asset. In its policy, organization, educational vision, quality assurance and implementation, AUAS takes into account the diversity of society and its student population in particular.

AUAS aims to be an example and a source of inspiration for the wider society in terms of diversity. It profiles itself as a dialogue university where identity and diversity in the broadest sense are discussed.

Based on its pursuit of excellence, AUAS wants to offer every talent the opportunity to develop to the full, regardless of any obstructing diversity factors such as language, gender, disabilities, age, socio-economic status or specific ethnic-cultural background.

Central to the policy is access to and participation in higher education, but also progression and success within it. It is not just about access to higher education but it is also about completion.

Due to its long tradition on diversity, AUAS is mandated to coordinate the Support Centre Inclusive Higher Education (SIHO). SIHO is a collaboration between the Flemish government and all Flemish Higher Education Institutions. SIHO serves both policy-makers and institutions in the development and implementation of inclusion and equity measures for inclusive higher education.

**Driving forces or rationales** aligning with the Flemish framework:

- increasing the student numbers and the participation rates;
- the belief that a diverse student population enriches learning experiences;
- social justice: higher education has an important role to play in fostering equity and social justice to the wider society;
- contributing to social and economic development;
- tapping the pool of talent;
- participation in higher education is important because of its implications for an individual's chances in life.

**Principles of SD:**

**Principle 1:** SD is a central HE policy strategy. There is a distinct shift from a disadvantaged group-based approach (SD as a peripheric matter) to an overall inclusive approach (SD becomes more central in HE policy).

**Principle 2:** The Flemish government provides a general framework. HEIs including AUAS have a large autonomy in developing their own SD strategies.

**Principle 4:** AUAS follow the Flemish charter on collecting and monitoring data of disadvantaged groups in a uniform way. The Charter defines nine disadvantaged groups: students with a disability, students with a migration background, newcomer students, students with a first language other than Dutch, students with another first language(s) besides Dutch, working students, study grant students, near-grant students and students from a short-educated or medium-skilled background. AUAS follows the monitoring of the participation of those target groups.

**Principle 6:** Extra funding has been set at the disposal of the HEI, beginning as a separate project-based funding channel (Aanmoedigingsfonds/Social Dimension Support Fund), but in 2012 this has soon integrated with the overall financing mechanism of HEI, giving the HEI more financial autonomy towards further developing a genuine SD-policy (see also country profile).

**Principle 10:** AUAS is involved in dialogue around government policy development on SD (including UAS, universities, students and social partners). AUAS coordinates the Support Centre for Inclusive Higher Education (SIHO).

**Please give a short explanation of the status of your institutional strategy and/or your coherent set of measures and tools and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension (ongoing discussions, target groups involved, implementation, evaluation, monitoring, adjustments ...)**

AUAS puts an inclusive policy first. Through the approach of 'Design for all' or 'universal design', AUAS strives for an accessible educational context and service provision in which all students are given opportunities to develop their talents. This pursuit of an inclusive policy is combined with a dynamic diversity approach aimed at removing specific barriers based on diversity characteristics. Despite the pursuit of an inclusive policy, specific characteristics of persons or target groups may require additional measures. AUAS wants to continue to respond proactively to this.

Therefore, AUAS invests in an accessible learning environment and uses learning and evaluation methods as a basis for differentiation. All staff members take on an exemplary role in dealing with diversity. We want to provide all of our students with equal opportunities to gain information, solve problems, make well-considered choices and to participate in education.

Whenever possible and desirable the programs offer diverse study tracks (distance learning, dual learning, modular learning ...) and reasonable modifications. AUAS offers students the opportunity to define their own professional identity through optional course units, extracurricular course units and activities, internationalisation@home or during training/an internship abroad.

AUAS integrates the diversity and equal opportunities policy in the quality assurance of the university of applied sciences and provides forms of registration and monitoring. In recent years, AUAS has developed a framework concerning figures on student diversity. The university of applied sciences optimizes this framework in close coordination with the other higher education institutions (see further, the Charter of registration).

**How has your institutional strategy/set of measures been developed, which stakeholders were involved in the development and how were they involved?**

AUAS involves its employees, students, partners and society in the development of its diversity policy. All stakeholders together form a dynamic learning network in which they can work together as co-creators in openness, trust and equality and think about diversity.

**Did you identify any target groups? If yes, which ones?**

At the end of 2017, a long debate and discussion resulted in all the Flemish HEI drawing up a Charter on collecting and monitoring data of disadvantaged groups in a uniform way. The Charter defines nine disadvantaged groups: students with a disability, students with a migration background, students newcomers, students with a first language other than Dutch, students with another first language(s) besides Dutch, working students, grant students, near-grant students and students from a short-educated or medium-skilled environment background. AUAS follows these guidelines.

**How is your institutional strategy/set of measures linked to a strategy/coherent set of measures on the national level?**

AUAS' measures align with the Legal framework: e.g.

- Student support through social services (embedded by law; separate funding for students);
- Lower tuition fees for scholarship students;
- Special need support for students with disabilities (regulation for inclusive higher education).

**How** has your strategy/set of measures been implemented; which measures have been put into practice and how?

**Educational Concept:**

<https://www.artevelde-uas.be/about-us/educational-concept>

- Accessible learning environment (universal design);
- Distance learning;
- Dual learning;
- Modular learning;
- Reasonable adjustments (study and exams);
- Optional course units;
- Extracurricular course units and activities;
- ...

**Tailor-made Guidance:**

<https://www.artevelde-uas.be/student-services/tailor-made-guidance>

- Active guidance and support during studies;
- Reasonable adjustments for disadvantaged students (special status);
- Individual coaching for students with disabilities;
- Language support, remedial courses;
- Refugee support services;
- Close contact with intercultural student associations;
- Quiet rooms on different campuses;
- ...

**Student support:**

[https://www.artevelde-uas.be/sites/default/files/stuvo\\_digitaal\\_algemenefolder\\_en\\_11jun20.pdf](https://www.artevelde-uas.be/sites/default/files/stuvo_digitaal_algemenefolder_en_11jun20.pdf)

- Financial support;
- Studies without worries;
- New buddies;
- ...

**Support Centre Inclusive Higher Education:**

[www.siho.be/en](http://www.siho.be/en)

- The Support Centre for Inclusive Higher Education (SIHO) is a collaboration between the Flemish government and all Flemish Higher Education Institutions. AUAS is appointed as a coordinating institution.
- SIHO serves both policymakers and institutions in the development and implementation of SD strategy, inclusion and equity measures for inclusive higher education.

**Does your strategy (or: your set of measures) include quantitative targets for certain target groups? (e.g. raise the participation of people with a migrant background). If yes, please indicate them below and elaborate which data you use to monitor the achievement of these targets and how this data is collected. If not, please give a short statement.**

No, SD strategy/our set of measures does not include quantitative targets, because following debates on the matter, HEI and the Flemish government prefer other approaches.

**Does your institutional strategy/set of measures address potential students as well, if so: how?**

Yes, our strategy/our set of measures addresses potential students in the following way(s):

- “Role models” (currently enrolled disadvantaged/vulnerable students) go along on school visits in secondary education and tell about their higher studies from their own experience. Through this, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds can contact the “role models” with all their questions about higher education;
- Tutoring and remedial programs before/at/during enrolment;
- Development of tools for improving study choice of pupils venturing to enter HE;
- National aptitude test toolkit for new entrants allowing aspiring students to test/evaluate their motivation/interests/aspirations, their way of studying and learning, their preparedness for a particular discipline. The toolkit provides feedback to the aspiring and new students, and accordingly, the institutions offer remedial courses and activities; tailor-made study advice.
- ...

**Websites/main online sources for your core Social Dimension initiatives and/or strategy:**

see above

**Does/Did the COVID-19 crisis have an influence on your endeavours to write or implement your institutional strategy on the social dimension? If yes, please describe the changes/challenges/benefits.**

It is still early to see the full impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the further implementation of the SD strategy.

- Strategy next Academic Year: Blended learning plus: the educational program of 2020–2021: [https://www.artevelde-uas.be/sites/default/files/a5\\_kaartje\\_1920\\_eng.pdf](https://www.artevelde-uas.be/sites/default/files/a5_kaartje_1920_eng.pdf)



### Organizational unit in charge with “Social Dimension”

Decentralized – mainly University Counselling Centre and Centre for Studies

### Person in charge/contact

Aleksandar Šušnjar, University of Rijeka, aleksandar.susnjar@uniri.hr

**Rationale for your strategy: Why do you work on/with an institutional Strategy and/or a coherent set of measures and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension? Would you say that it addresses one or more of the principles mentioned in the introduction? If yes, which? (Indicate the numbers, e.g. Principle 6., Principle 10.)**

The rationale for this strategy (or rather this part of the UNIRI's Strategy) and a whole set of activities in the area of social dimension is simply part of UNIRI's identity as a socially sensitive and socially responsible university. Current Rector of the UNIRI also places a great deal of importance on social dimension and it features prominently in her plan of work for the current mandate (e.g. “removing barriers which might influence successful studying and completion for underrepresented groups”), which has also resulted in carrying out several international projects on social dimension currently.

Directly, the set of measures for social dimension at UNIRI refer mostly to principles number 1, 4 and 10 out of the ones listed in the introduction.

**Please give a short explanation of the status of your institutional strategy and/or your coherent set of measures and tools and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension (ongoing discussions, target groups involved, implementation, evaluation, monitoring, adjustments ...)**

The UNIRI does not have a separate strategic document on the social dimension, but these goals are integrated into the overall strategy and mission and vision of the University. One of the strategic lines of the strategy sets the goal of: “*Removing barriers to successful study resulting from previously acquired competencies, motivation, socio-economic reasons, and/or belonging to a vulnerable group (students with disabilities, mature students, students with children etc.)*”.

The current draft of the next University Strategy emphasises that UNIRI is to be inclusive and foster social responsibility, inclusivity and pluralism.

This goal (along with the goals of the plan of work of current Rector's mandate) is then translated into a series of measures aiming at increasing participation and success of vulnerable student groups.

**How has your institutional strategy/set of measures been developed, which stakeholders were involved in the development and how were they involved?**

In developing both the overall UNIRI Strategy and the set of measures for the social dimension, all internal stakeholders were involved. This included representatives of faculties and departments, social dimension experts, students and staff, while there is also a Strategy Committee working on developing these measures.

**Did you identify any target groups? If yes, which ones?**

Identified target groups are the students with a lower socioeconomic status, students with disabilities or learning difficulties, mature students, students with children, students without higher education family background (first academic generation in their family).

**How is your institutional strategy/set of measures linked to a strategy/coherent set of measures on the national level?**

The main point of alignment between the institutional measures and national strategy are the target groups (vulnerable and/or underrepresented groups of students).

There is also a degree of overlap in action lines (measures), for example in the removal of barriers in accessing higher education, mechanisms of financial support for certain groups of students or flexibilisation of university study programmes.

**How has your strategy/set of measures been implemented; which measures have been put into practice and how?**

Measures implemented by the UNIRI are divided into material, non-material and combined measures.

Material (mainly financial) support includes university grants and accommodation subsidies for students with a lower socioeconomic status, additional Erasmus mobility grants for vulnerable students, project financing from the Students' Council for vulnerable or underrepresented groups and tuition fee exemption offered by (some) faculties/departments.

Non-material support includes student counselling service, preparatory courses before the first year targeting students from vocational high schools, learning materials adaption and recognition of informal learning.

Combined support includes exemptions from study progression rules for certain vulnerable groups of students (which is also connected with tuition fees), removal of physical barriers and physical assistance for students with disabilities.

**Does your strategy (or: your set of measures) include quantitative targets for certain target groups? (e.g. raise the participation of people with a migrant background). If yes, please indicate them below and elaborate which data you use to monitor the achievement of these targets and how this data is collected. If not, please give a short statement.**

The Strategy describes the aims in terms of trends:

- the number of students from vulnerable groups who completed a degree programme in the previous academic year;
- the number of students participating in barrier-removing activities organised by the UNIRI;
- the number of architectural barriers removed.

**Does your institutional strategy/set of measures address potential students as well, if so: how?**

Our Strategy and accompanying measures address potential students, although they are not the primary target groups. The strategic goal of developing mechanisms of stronger cooperation with local educational institutions is related to this, as it enables stronger outreach activities towards groups underrepresented in higher education.

Additionally, some of the action lines/measures are targeted towards students without higher education family background or students with disabilities, who might be less motivated or discouraged in studying in higher education.

**Websites/main online sources for your core Social Dimension initiatives and/or strategy:**

Spread over different public information hubs: University Counselling Centre, University financial grants, Students' Council website ...

**Does/Did the COVID-19 crisis have an influence on your endeavours to write or implement your institutional strategy on the social dimension? If yes, please describe the changes/challenges/benefits.**

Strategic activities were mostly not endangered, as most of them continued being carried out regularly. However, certain vulnerable groups of students were additionally troubled by the current situation. Online lectures demanded certain technical equipment from the students, which some students might not possess. Lockdown also worsened the living situation of some students. Finally, the University Counselling Centre was only offering its services to students online during a 3-month lockdown period. These online consultations were not the ideal solution for certain vulnerable groups of students, although the number of support groups increased in order to try to mitigate the situation.

## University of Szeged (SZTE)

### Organizational unit in charge with “Social Dimension”

Several units are dealing with “Social Dimension” at the institution, the main ones being the Directorate-General for Quality Management and Strategy (institutional strategy and strategic goals), Directorate for Education (educational programmes, admissions), Employees’ Equal Opportunity Committee, Students’ Equal Opportunity Committee, Student Counselling Centre (for students tackling life management difficulties).

### Person in charge/contact

Péter Szakál, Director for Academic Affairs, szakal.peter@rekt.szte.hu

**Rationale for your strategy: Why do you work on/with an institutional Strategy and/or a coherent set of measures and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension? Would you say that it addresses one or more of the principles mentioned in the introduction? If yes, which? (Indicate the numbers, e.g. Principle 6., Principle 10.)**

The University of Szeged (SZTE) is a competitive, high-quality institution and the main intellectual centre in the Southern Great Plain region in Hungary working in close cooperation with the society and the economy of the region and the country. SZTE is engaged in its social environment and the local communities. Being the greatest institution in the Southern Great Plain region, it considers its main responsibility to play an active part in facilitating regional social, economic and cultural development, while with its charitable activities it serves to influence the life of local citizens and acts in solidarity towards them. Recognizing the multiple and long-term benefits that the creation of an inclusive environment brings to the society and towards attaining the UN Sustainable Development Goals, SZTE aims at continuously improving the access and qualification rate of underrepresented groups.

The institutional strategy (Institutional Development Plan, IDP, the main strategic document of the university which sets up its detailed 4–5-year plan) and further strategic documents (e.g. Equal Opportunity Plan – EOP, revised every year) as well as policies and regulations (Organizational and Operational Regulations, Equal Opportunity Regulations, Ethics Regulation) address all the principles mentioned above: Principles 1, 2, 4, 6 and 10.

**Please give a short explanation of the status of your institutional strategy and/or your coherent set of measures and tools and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension (ongoing discussions, target groups involved, implementation, evaluation, monitoring, adjustments ...)**

The Institutional Development Plan was published in 2016 and set up the overall detailed 4-year plan of the university (until 2020) including for the social dimension. The next period's IDP is currently under development. The Equal Opportunity Plan is evaluated in the annual Equal Opportunity Report, and it is revised every year. IDP and EOP are both adjusted regularly. Tracking and monitoring (e.g. of underrepresented groups etc.) are continuous through regular institutional self-evaluations, reports, as well as the institution's statistical data collected in its electronic administration and study management systems

**How has your institutional strategy/set of measures been developed, which stakeholders were involved in the development and how were they involved?**

Institutional strategy, goals and measures are elaborated through and/or taking into account the cooperation with various actors (professionals, NGOs, civil society organizations), and in line with national policies and strategies. The institution's Employees' Equal Opportunity Committee and Students' Equal Opportunity Committee operate to ensure the enforcement of the principle of equality. These committees also take an active part in developing strategy and measures.

**Did you identify any target groups? If yes, which ones?**

Target groups include the following categories (for students and employees as well):

- socially disadvantaged;
- Roma;
- with disabilities;
- with small children;
- caring for their elder parents;
- women;
- Hungarian diasporans;
- career entrants;
- employees over 40.

**How is your institutional strategy/set of measures linked to a strategy/coherent set of measures on the national level?**

SZTE's operation, institutional strategy and strategic goals are in line with national rules and strategies (e.g. Act CXXV. of 22 December 2003 on Equal Treatment and Promotion of Equal Opportunities; "Change of Pace in Higher Education" Strategy; Hungarian National Social Inclusion Strategy; National Disability Programme). Furthermore, official materials (local, regional, national policies, laws and regulations under preparation) are usually sent to the Institution to express our opinion related to these documents.

**How has your strategy/set of measures been implemented; which measures have been put into practice and how?**

Strategy and measures are implemented and put into practice continuously through institutional policies and regulations, various ongoing national and international projects concerning social dimension, as well as through the operation of the Employees' Equal Opportunity Committee, the Students' Equal Opportunity Committee, the Student Counselling Centre, etc.

**Does your strategy (or: your set of measures) include quantitative targets for certain target groups? (e.g. raise the participation of people with a migrant background). If yes, please indicate them below and elaborate which data you use to monitor the achievement of these targets and how this data is collected. If not, please give a short statement.**

Yes, our strategy and set of measures include quantitative targets, these mostly describe trends/challenges (increase the number of underrepresented students etc.), but often (e.g. in projects) they also include definite numbers or percentages.

**Does your institutional strategy/set of measures address potential students as well, if so: how?**

Yes, our strategy and set of measures address potential students in the following ways:

- scholarships available for low-income students to access university;
- Stipendium Hungaricum Scholarship Programme launched in 2013 by the Hungarian Government (offered for students from low-income countries as well).

**Websites/main online sources for your core Social Dimension initiatives and/or strategy:**

See e.g. the following links and documents (available mostly in Hungarian):

- Institutional Development Plan: <https://u-szeged.hu/download.php?docID=63648>
- Equal Opportunity Plan: <https://u-szeged.hu/download.php?docID=2243>
- Annual University Reports: <https://u-szeged.hu/gsz/gazdalkodasi-اداتok>
- Equal Opportunity Report: <https://u-szeged.hu/download.php?docID=92319>
- Equal Opportunity Statistics: <https://u-szeged.hu/palyazati-iroda/iroda/eselyegyenloseg>
- Students' Equal Opportunity Committee: <http://www.eletv.u-szeged.hu/eselyegyenloseg/eselyegyenloseg?folderID=22568&objectParentFolderId=22568>
- SANSZ Mentor Programme: <http://www.sansz.hu>

**Does/Did the COVID-19 crisis have an influence on your endeavours to write or implement your institutional strategy on the social dimension? If yes, please describe the changes/challenges/benefits.**

Institutional operation in social dimension continued successfully after the break-out of the COVID-19 crisis. Of course, the unprecedented conditions and circumstances were (and are continuing to be) taken into consideration, e.g. through the newly introduced “bridging” scholarship for students whose studies may be endangered by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, through students’ support during the crisis, through online education, etc.

**Organizational unit in charge with “Social Dimension”**

Directorate of Academic Affairs

**Person in charge**

Dr Jim Murray, Director of Academic Affairs

**Contact**

Sean O’Reilly, sean.oreilly@thea.ie

**Rationale for your strategy: Why do you work on/with an institutional Strategy and/or a coherent set of measures and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension? Would you say that it addresses one or more of the principles mentioned in the introduction? If yes, which? (Indicate the numbers, e.g. Principle 6., Principle 10.)**

The Technological Higher Education Association (THEA) represents the eleven institutes of technology (“universities of applied science”) in Ireland. THEA staff participate in national networks on behalf of / and alongside personnel from member institutions. One key network is the Steering Group for the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education.

This steering group, convened by the ministry and the statutory HE policy and funding body, the Higher Education Authority (HEA), maintains a role in oversight and implementation of the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education. The stated vision for the 2015–2019 plan is to ensure that “the student body entering, participating in, and completing higher education at all (NQF) levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland’s population.” Consultation is underway on updating the current plan.

Implementation of the National Access Plan reflects each of the principles mentioned in the introduction. National consultation leads to the development of the plan. A specific Access Policy office in the HEA leads on the implementation of the plan alongside a HE Equity of Access unit in the ministry. Individual higher education institutions provide data to the HEA on an annual basis on a wide range of issues, including the social dimension. Institutions are free to a significant extent to determine the most appropriate manner to contribute to national targets. Performance agreements, known as “compacts” are negotiated between institutions and the HEA and these include equity of access.

In addition, specific national programmes relate to the social dimension. One such example is the Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH). This is a dedicated



fund (of €16.5m established in 2017), broken into three strands, committed to increasing participation by under-represented groups in higher education. The three strands address increasing numbers of under-represented groups in initial teacher education; bursaries of €5,000 per year for the most disadvantaged students as identified by clusters of institutions; and development of regional and community partnership strategies.

**Please give a short explanation of the status of your institutional strategy and/or your coherent set of measures and tools and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension (ongoing discussions, target groups involved, implementation, evaluation, monitoring, adjustments ...)**

The existence of a national framework via the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education means that institutional strategies and approaches fit within mainstream strategic planning and processes. Negotiated performance agreements between institutions and the HEA use a specific objective from the system performance framework to demonstrate that each institution *“Significantly improve the equality of opportunity through Education and Training and recruits a student body that reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland’s population”*.

An example of how the social dimension is included within institutional strategic planning is provided in the next section.

**How has your institutional strategy/set of measures been developed, which stakeholders were involved in the development and how were they involved?**

A national consultation was undertaken for development of the National Access Plan.

Individual institutions consult widely with national and regional stakeholders to develop institution’s strategic plans. The THEA Board is currently chaired by the President of Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT). The LIT Strategic Plan (2018–2022) provides one example of how strategic planning is undertaken in the institutes of technology. A number of extracts follow to illustrate the process. The URL to access the full plan is provided later in this document.

*“The plan is based on wide-ranging consultation with those who have an interest in what we do: industry and commerce, local government, schools, education and training boards, our staff and their trades unions and our current student body. That consultation was deeply rooted in the key LIT value of being relevant to and engaged in the needs of the Limerick City Region and of Tipperary.”*

*“A reorganisation of the senior management team has been carried out to ensure that every key objective in the plan has a capable and accountable executive responsible for accomplishing it.”*

*“In early 2018 the HEA launched a number of important documents, one a reflection on the sector for the period 2014–2017 (HE System Performance) and a new HE System Performance Framework to cover the period 2018–2020. It has also been announced that there will be a new round of Compact agreements for the coming period. LIT has*

*reviewed the outcomes of the 2014–2017 period, and has mapped the priorities and actions of the new Framework to the plan herein.”*

One of five priorities identified in LIT’s strategic plan is to grow student numbers and to diversify the student population with key actions identified as:

- *“Analyse the Institute’s programme portfolio to ensure continued suitability and to identify new discipline areas*
- *Maintain and enhance appropriate pathways and necessary supports to enable students continued progression through their educational journey*
- *Enhance our flexible model of education to include new online and blended programmes that increase student enrolments, support continuous professional development (CPD) and enable life-long learning.”*

**Did you identify any target groups? If yes, which ones?**

The vision of the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015–2019 is to ensure that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland’s population (for details on NAP see chapter 4).

**How is your institutional strategy/set of measures linked to a strategy/coherent set of measures on the national level?**

As noted previously, negotiated performance agreements are put in place as a result of discussions between individual institutions and the HEA. The System Performance Framework identifies a number of high-level targets for the relevant objective which is *“Significantly improves the equality of opportunity through Education and Training and recruits a student body that reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland’s population”*.

The targets are:

- All HEIs will have a Student Success Strategy in place by 2020 which will embed whole-of-HEI approaches to institutional access strategies.
- Implement new data initiatives and indicators to support the development and implementation of evidenced-based National Plans for Equity of Access by 2019.
- Implement the strands of the Programme for Access to Third Level (PATH) Fund to support the implementation of the National Plan for Equity of Access 2015–2019.
- Sustain the expansion from underrepresented groups with 2,000 additional enrolments from socioeconomically disadvantaged groups and 1,000 from Further education access programmes.
- Increase in enrolments from DEIS schools by ensuring that every such school will be participating in an HEI led access programme.
- Completion rates for students from disadvantaged cohorts will be specifically targeted for improvement.

**How has your strategy/set of measures been implemented; which measures have been put into practice and how?**

The national-level implementation measures are described elsewhere in this response.

**Does your strategy (or: your set of measures) include quantitative targets for certain target groups? (e.g. raise the participation of people with a migrant background). If yes, please indicate them below and elaborate which data you use to monitor the achievement of these targets and how this data is collected. If not, please give a short statement.**

National targets exist for some indicators and institutional performance agreements may provide additional detail for individual institutions. The national report of results of system performance provides relevant data under system objective 2, equity of access and student pathways <https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2018/01/Higher-Education-System-Performance-2014-17-report-1.pdf>

Individual institutions and clusters of institutions report regularly to the HEA Access Policy office.

Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) data is reported to the Steering Group for Equity of Access to HE regularly.

**Does your institutional strategy/set of measures address potential students as well, if so: how?**

Yes, our strategy/our set of measures addresses potential students in the following way(s):

- Broad engagement of higher education providers with schools and community education providers to promote opportunities and pathways;
- Engagement for specific initiatives such as Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH 1) initial teacher training. As of February 2020, 800+ school students had engaged in related events; almost 90 schools engaged by PATH 1 centres.

**Websites/main online sources for your core Social Dimension initiatives and/or strategy:**

- Higher Education Authority – System Performance Framework: <https://hea.ie/funding-governance-performance/managing-performance/system-performance-framework/>
- Details of the process leading to negotiated agreements, known as “compacts”, for individual institutions are publicly available at: <https://hea.ie/funding-governance-performance/?v=1>
- Higher Education Authority – Access Policy: <https://hea.ie/policy/access-policy>
- National Plan for Equity of Access to HE: <https://hea.ie/policy/access-policy/>

national-access-plan-2015-2019

- Higher Education Authority – Programme for Access to Higher Education: <https://hea.ie/policy/access-policy/path>
- Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science: <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/departments-of-higher-education-innovation-and-science>
- National Action plan for Education, 2019: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c6976-the-action-plan-for-education>
- Technological Higher Education Association – Access: <http://www.thea.ie/access>
- Limerick Institute of Technology – Strategic Plan: <https://lit.ie/getmedia/1c35e9a1-974f-4125-b6fb-d075511249ec/LIT-Strategic-Plan-2018-2022.pdf>
- Aontas, the national adult learning organisation, Mitigating Educational Disadvantage discussion papers: <https://www.aontas.com/aontas-covid-19-response>

**Does/Did the COVID-19 crisis have an influence on your endeavours to write or implement your institutional strategy on the social dimension? If yes, please describe the changes/challenges/benefits.**

Additional disadvantages for learners were noted as well as an increase in the number of learners now facing disadvantage. A specific working group was established as part of a system-wide approach to managing post-school educational provision alongside Covid-19. The Mitigating Educational Disadvantage working group included more than 30 participants from further and higher education, community education, students' representatives and other national stakeholders. A series of discussion papers were published and are available at <https://www.aontas.com/aontas-covid-19-response>

Key issues included access to digital devices and reliable internet; engagement of learners; developing appropriate assessments; financial impact on learners; mental health and wellbeing.

### Person in charge/contact

Associate professor Mădălin Bunoiu, madalin.bunoiu@e-uvt.ro

**Rationale for your strategy: Why do you work on/with an institutional Strategy and/or a coherent set of measures and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension? Would you say that it addresses one or more of the principles mentioned in the introduction? If yes, which? (Indicate the numbers, e.g. Principle 6., Principle 10.)**

West University of Timișoara (WUT) views the social dimension of the university as a priority. As one of the most important institutional entities in the West Region of Romania, WUT has assumed/assumes and will assume responsibility and contribute consistently to the societal development through research and direct action at local, regional, national and international level. Even if there is no specific institutional strategy, the social dimension of the university is present in the Managerial Plan of the Rector and within most of the institutional regulations, methodologies, and procedures.

The sets of measures regarding the social dimension comprise all the principles mentioned in the introduction of this survey:

- Principle 1 – WUT assumes its role as an important societal actor by continuous involvement through applied research and direct action in the life of the community;
- Principle 2 – WUT has developed its own strategies adapted to specific realities to increase participation and completion of higher education studies;
- Principle 4 – WUT is constantly preoccupied with empirically documenting social dimension elements through research. Extensive studies were undertaken on issues like higher education abandonment, labour market status of the graduates, effective methods of developing support services for students;
- Principle 6 – WUT has accessed public funds to develop the social dimension of the university;
- Principle 10 – WUT representatives are involved in different local, regional, national and international workgroups (which also include public authorities) that target the development of more cohesive, inclusive and intercultural societies and civic participation.

**Please give a short explanation of the status of your institutional strategy and/or your coherent set of measures and tools and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension (ongoing discussions, target groups involved, implementation, evaluation, monitoring, adjustments ...)**

WUT has no specific institutional strategy but the social dimension is strongly represented in the Managerial Plan and a diversity of regulations and procedures (such as the Institutional Development Strategy of WUT, The Students Code, Regulation on the award of scholarships and other forms of material support for students, WUT Accommodation Regulation, The regulation for volunteering activities).

The measures that target social dimensions are periodically revised (annually, in most of the cases) to be adapted to social realities.

Currently, there are discussions concerning the elaboration of a targeted institutional strategy for the social dimension of the university.

**How has your institutional strategy/set of measures been developed, which stakeholders were involved in the development and how were they involved?**

Besides WUT representatives, the stakeholders, who have been regularly involved in the elaboration of the regulations, including on the social dimension elements, are the student organizations and the social partners of WUT, including public authorities, potential employers and representatives of the civil society.

Student representatives are part of the workgroups that develop and update the regulations and procedures that target support services for the students.

Social partners of WUT are involved in establishing the applied research priorities of WUT regarding the social aspects of the local communities and, therefore, are partners in different social actions implemented by WUT (fundraisings, awareness campaigns).

**Did you identify any target groups? If yes, which ones?**

The targeted groups of the social dimension measures implemented by WUT are:

- Students – support measures are implemented generally for all WUT students, but especially for the non-traditional categories:
  - students with disabilities;
  - Roma ethnics;
  - students from rural areas;
  - mature students;
  - students with low-income families.
- The local community – WUT implements socially themed projects whose aim is to target the local communities, promoting inclusive and multicultural societies.

**How is your institutional strategy/set of measures linked to a strategy/coherent set of measures on the national level?**

The measures regarding the social dimension undertaken by WUT are mainly linked with the Romanian National Strategy for Tertiary Education, addressing three main pillars of the strategy:

1. improving participation in all areas of tertiary education;
2. promoting the development of high quality, flexible study programmes, correlated with labour market requirements;
3. strategic commitment to the economic sector.

**How has your strategy/set of measures been implemented; which measures have been put into practice and how?**

The main measures regarding the social dimension of the university put into practice by WUT are:

- Support services for students:
  - Counselling and Career Orientation Centre development – free psychological counselling for students;
  - Peer to Peer tutoring program for the 1st year students;
  - specific programs for the abandonment rate reduction, e.g. ROSE project;
  - extensive accessibility measures for students with disabilities (Braille inscriptions, adapted website, adapted educational materials and forms of evaluation);
  - investments in the infrastructure – affordable living spaces and eating spaces.
- Improved access to higher education:
  - targeted promotion of WUT's educational programmes to non-traditional candidates (mature students, students with disabilities, or students from socially disadvantaged areas).
- Improving civic engagement of the students:
  - emphasis on volunteering activities – students are encouraged, supported, and rewarded for their involvement in volunteering activities;
  - promoting the participation of students in decision making on all levels;
  - a set of free extracurricular activities for students;
  - constantly evaluating the satisfaction level of the students, actions for the development of students' transversal competencies.
- Support for the local communities:
  - stimulation of applied research initiatives in support of the local community;
  - support, through research of public interest, and direct involvement in actions and events within the civil society.

**Does your strategy (or: your set of measures) include quantitative targets for certain target groups? (e.g. raise the participation of people with a migrant background). If yes, please indicate them below and elaborate which data you use to monitor the achievement of these targets and how this data is collected. If not, please give a short statement.**

No, our set of measures does not include quantitative targets, but we intend to include in the future targeted strategy on the social dimension of WUT quantitative targets and a clear description of monitoring their achievement.

**Does your institutional strategy/set of measures address potential students as well, if so: how?**

Yes, our strategy/set of measures addresses potential students in the following way(s):

- we organize summer schools with potential students in which social issues (like social inclusion, discrimination, vulnerable categories of population, civic participation) are debated;
- targeted promotion actions of WUT's educational programmes to non-traditional candidates (mature students, students with disabilities, or students from socially disadvantaged areas).

**Websites/main online sources for your core Social Dimension initiatives and/or strategy:**

The main online sources for Social Dimension initiatives of WUT are the following:

- Career Counseling and Guidance Center of WUT: <https://ccoc.uvt.ro>
- Psychopedagogical Assistance and Integration Centre of WUT: <https://caip.uvt.ro>
- Social Diagnosis Centre of WUT: <https://cds.uvt.ro>
- University Clinic of Therapies and Psychopedagogical Counseling of WUT: <https://clinica.uvt.ro>

**Does/Did the COVID-19 crisis have an influence on your endeavours to write or implement your institutional strategy on the social dimension? If yes, please describe the changes/challenges/benefits.**

Yes.

The COVID-19 crisis has had an impact on a series of measures traditionally implemented in the social dimension category by WUT. Volunteering activities, extracurricular activities have been limited. The direct support services for students such as counselling and orientation have had to be adapted to the online environment and to the current different needs of the targeted students.

A set of new challenges arises from the crisis and supplementary resources were allocated to be able to continue offering support services to our students.



## Organizational unit in charge with “Social Dimension”

Widening Participation

## Person in charge/contact

Head of Widening Participation post is currently vacant – interim contact

Carole Mooney

**Rationale for your strategy: Why do you work on/with an institutional Strategy and/or a coherent set of measures and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension? Would you say that it addresses one or more of the principles mentioned in the introduction? If yes, which? (Indicate the numbers, e.g. Principle 6., Principle 10.)**

Inclusion is one of Edinburgh Napier University’s core values and attracting, recruiting and supporting students from a wide range of backgrounds is essential in demonstrating this value. Higher Education Institutions in Scotland are set targets by the Scottish Funding Council (through our Outcome Agreements) with regards to recruiting and retaining students from widening access backgrounds and this is an enabler to increasing underrepresented groups within higher education. We are required to provide data and annual updates on our progress in achieving these targets (Principle 4).

**Please give a short explanation of the status of your institutional strategy and/or your coherent set of measures and tools and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension (ongoing discussions, target groups involved, implementation, evaluation, monitoring, adjustments ...)**

Edinburgh Napier published its Widening Participation Strategy in 2017. It can be accessed: <https://www.napier.ac.uk/~media/documents/equality-and-diversity-documents/widening-participation-strategy-2017.docx>.

**How has your institutional strategy/set of measures been developed, which stakeholders were involved in the development and how were they involved?**

The strategy was developed to meet both internal and sector-wide strategic objectives. The measures and targets were set out to align with SFC Outcome Agreement requirements.

**Did you identify any target groups? If yes, which ones?**

The strategy sets out a number of priority groups including individuals from socially deprived backgrounds (including care-experienced, estranged, unpaid carer, students from low progression schools); protected characteristics (gender imbalance; BME; disabled applicants); as well as other backgrounds (including refugees and the children of refugees and applicants from military or ex-military backgrounds) – specific criteria is set out in the strategy.

**How is your institutional strategy/set of measures linked to a strategy/coherent set of measures on the national level?**

The SFC Outcomes Agreement targets provide a national coherent approach.

**How has your strategy/set of measures been implemented; which measures have been put into practice and how?**

The strategy has been implemented in a number of different ways.

To provide some examples:

- We introduced a contextualised admissions policy which recognised that applicants from under-represented groups may not have had an equal opportunity to demonstrate their potential in their previous education setting (<https://www.napier.ac.uk/study-with-us/widening-participation/minimum-offers>).
- We supported a student-led initiative, Establish, which provided peer-to-peer support to students from under-represented backgrounds.
- We supported initiatives such as men into nursing events and campaigns and workshops to challenge gender stereotypes from primary school onwards through outreach activity in our School of Computing.
- We have created roles and resources within the University to support students at risk of dropping out (<https://my.napier.ac.uk/wellbeing-support-and-inclusion/keep-on-track>).
- Supporting the development of University Inclusion networks to create visible role models for members of the University community (<https://staff.napier.ac.uk/services/hr/workingattheUniversity/inclusion/Pages/Staff-Networks.aspx>).

**Does your strategy (or: your set of measures) include quantitative targets for certain target groups? (e.g. raise the participation of people with a migrant background). If yes, please indicate them below and elaborate which data you use to monitor the achievement of these targets and how this data is collected. If not, please give a short statement.**

Yes, our strategy/our set of measures includes quantitative targets set around percentages. The measures set and agreed annually as part of our SFC Outcome Agreement set more specific targets (numbers and percentages).

**Does your institutional strategy/set of measures address potential students as well, if so: how?**

Yes, our strategy is primarily related to seeking applicants (potential students).

We are committed to admitting any student who has the potential to succeed, providing guidance, support and tailored transitions. We have dedicated information pages for Widening Participation applicants <https://www.napier.ac.uk/study-with-us/widening-participation>.

**Websites/main online sources for your core Social Dimension initiatives and/or strategy:**

- <https://www.napier.ac.uk/about-us/university-governance/equality-and-diversity-information>
- <https://www.napier.ac.uk/study-with-us/widening-participation>
- <https://staff.napier.ac.uk/services/hr/workingattheUniversity/inclusion/Pages/EqualityDiversity.aspx>

**Does/Did the COVID-19 crisis have an influence on your endeavours to write or implement your institutional strategy on the social dimension? If yes, please describe the changes/challenges/benefits.**

We consider inclusion and widening participation to be a core activity at Edinburgh Napier, and work has continued throughout the crisis to mitigate the impact on our students/applicants. The Scottish Funding Council did amend expectations relating to 2020/21 Outcome Agreements and targets in recognition that priorities may need to be amended through the crisis.

**Organizational unit in charge with “Social Dimension”**

Gender &amp; Diversity Management-Conference

**Person in charge/contact**

Dr. Martina Gaisch

**Rationale for your strategy: Why do you work on/with an institutional Strategy and/or a coherent set of measures and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension? Would you say that it addresses one or more of the principles mentioned in the introduction? If yes, which? (Indicate the numbers, e.g. Principle 6., Principle 10.)**

The aim is to ensure that the vision of diversity as a valuable resource within all university-related processes and structures becomes lived reality.

Social dimension categories are important issues within diversity management, quality assurance, didactics (teaching & learning). In addition, they are addressed (and evaluated) by the Higher Education Research & Development department of the University of Applied Sciences Upper Austria.

FH OÖ's strategy addresses principles 1, 2 and 4 (mentioned in the introduction). The remaining principles (6, 10) are covered indirectly.

**Please give a short explanation of the status of your institutional strategy and/or your coherent set of measures and tools and/or another way of mainstreaming Social Dimension (ongoing discussions, target groups involved, implementation, evaluation, monitoring, adjustments ...)**

The institutional strategy was published in 2019 on the occasion of the 25th-anniversary celebration. The implementation process is still ongoing. The institutional strategy aims at increasing underrepresented student groups, raising student success, raising awareness/strengthening competencies among staff, supporting and inclusive culture as well as developing monitoring and evaluation instruments.

Several organisational units are involved in the implementation process: Diversity management, Quality assurance, Didactics, Higher Education Research & Development. (For more information see answers below).

**How has your institutional strategy/set of measures been developed, which stakeholders were involved in the development and how were they involved?**

The process was set up in a participatory way. It involved top-down as well as bottom-up approaches. All internal stakeholders (employees, students), as well as policymakers, representatives from business, and the social and health sectors were involved in discussing and developing strategic goals.

**Did you identify any target groups? If yes, which ones?**

It is particularly important for us to address underrepresented groups (non-traditional students, learners at a later life, returners, drop-outs).

**How is your institutional strategy/set of measures linked to a strategy/coherent set of measures on the national level?**

The strategy of the University of Applied Sciences Upper Austria follows the three target dimensions and nine action lines of the national strategy on the social dimension in HE. The target dimensions are related to the student life cycle, which serves as an organisational framework for improving student attainment.

**How has your strategy/set of measures been implemented; which measures have been put into practice and how?**

FH OÖ's institutional strategy has been launched in 2019. The implementation process is still ongoing. Several organisational units are involved in the implementation process: Diversity management, Quality assurance, Didactics, Higher Education Research & Development. Several measures have been implemented, others are still work in progress. Many initiatives are project-based (e.g. staff training developed within an Erasmus+ project, learning analytics is developed by a research group), others are initiated by FH OÖs Gender and Diversity-Management Conference/respective academic head of this committee (eg. gender-sensitive language, ambassador academy, Girls in Stem initiative, etc.).

The following measures have been put into practice, measures in brackets are planned/not implemented yet:

**Increasing participation of underrepresented student groups (action line 1, 2, 3, 8)**

Outreach measures:

- (preparation of ambassador academy);
- Durchstarten@FHOÖ;
- (Enhancing counselling and information);
- Bridging courses.

### **Raising student success, reducing drop-out (action line 4, 5)**

Consistent development of internal support structures:

- “Need Some Help?” campaign and brochure;
- Care-Line (counselling phone service for students and staff with care responsibilities);
- Supporting the development of new pedagogical concepts and formats (e.g. Blended formats, flipped classroom, career promoting study options, etc – ongoing process);
- Buddy systems, mentoring;
- (Community building course for first-semester students);
- (Prizes for students’ outstanding achievements (e.g. In spite of care obligations, etc.));
- (Student experience platform: the web-based platform will offer anonymous support);
- (Learning analytics);
- Establishing an orientation and introduction phase within degree programmes, including specific courses and modules (with full recognition of credits for the study programme finally pursued) – partly done.

### **Raising awareness, strengthening competencies among staff (action line 5, 8)**

- Blended-Learning Training: Diversity-sensitive study-programme-management;
- (Training to sensitize teaching staff and administrative staff (2 formats) for student’s diverse needs);
- IDM Toolbox ([www.idmtoolbox.eu](http://www.idmtoolbox.eu)) providing practical methods and tools on inclusion and diversity management;
- Guidelines for diversity-sensitive didactics.

### **Supporting an inclusive culture/study environment (action line 6, 8)**

- Guideline for gender-sensitive language;
- Events and workshops (eg. Diversity Day, Durchstarten@FHOÖ, F(h)rauentag der Akademie, Frauennetzwerk@FHOÖ);
- (Guideline for more inclusive meetings).

### **Developing monitoring and evaluation instruments**

- Diversity Yearbook;
- (Learning analytics);
- (Self-assessment – measuring own awareness, and competences/skills in dealing with student diversity);
- (New indicators showing the effectiveness of taken measures).

**Does your strategy (or: your set of measures) include quantitative targets for certain target groups? (e.g. raise the participation of people with a migrant background). If yes, please indicate them below and elaborate which data you use to monitor the achievement of these targets and how this data is collected. If not, please give a short statement.**

No, our strategy/set of measures does not include quantitative targets.

**Does your institutional strategy/set of measures address potential students as well, if so: how?**

Yes, our strategy/set of measures addresses potential students in the following way(s): Addressing and gaining acceptance from new target groups/underrepresented groups is an important goal for us.

- Girls in STEM: Durchstarten@FHÖÖ;
- Non-traditional students: ambassador academy (not implemented yet).

**Websites/main online sources for your core Social Dimension initiatives and/or strategy:**

- Vision, mission, and strategy 2030: <https://www.fh-ooe.at/ueber-uns/vision-leitbild/strategie>
- Quality Management (student lifecycle): <https://www.fh-ooe.at/ueber-uns/qualitaet/student-lifecycle-management>
- Diversity Management: <https://www.fh-ooe.at/en/gender-diversity>

**Does/Did the COVID-19 crisis have an influence on your endeavours to write or implement your institutional strategy on the social dimension? If yes, please describe the changes/challenges/benefits.**

The strategy had already been launched at the beginning of the crisis. Still, some implementation measures had to be adapted.

Due to COVID-19, the deadlines for the admission were extended, the admission interviews had to be conducted virtually.

We currently observe that students seem to feel more stressed than before the pandemic. Thus, additional efforts and measures to ensure psychological support are required.





Comparative Analysis

06

# 06 Comparative Analysis

By Gohar Hovhannisyan  
(European University  
Association – EUA)

The social dimension (SD) of higher education has been one of the continuously addressed, but slow-progressing policy areas of the Bologna Process<sup>1</sup>. While it was already addressed in the 2001 Prague Communiqué, on the initiative of the European Students' Union concerned about the inequity of mobility<sup>2</sup>, the SD was defined for the first time in 2007 in the London Communiqué.

Differences in the social situation and national welfare systems made it challenging to define common measures and approaches, beyond the commitment for every country to develop the necessary measures and collect data. In 2015 in Yerevan, the EHEA Ministers committed to the implementation of the EHEA SD strategy<sup>3</sup> which stated an agreement of developing a coherent set of policy measures, such as national strategies/access plans, including implementation monitoring, by 2020: a commitment that remained without much follow-up at the Bologna level. In 2018, based on commitments of the Paris Communiqué, an Advisory Group on SD was set up with a task of developing the Principles and Guidelines for the SD of Higher Education (PAGs) in the EHEA, the draft of which served as a basis of the questionnaire for collecting information on the country and institutional profiles for the 3-IN-AT PLA.

The compilation of the seven institutional and seven country profiles filled by the participants of the survey shows a wide diversity of policies, practices and tools used to promote, develop and implement the SD of higher education. Most of these approaches had been initiated even before the discussions on PAGs commenced which certainly indicates that even though the SD has not been structurally implemented by the Bologna Process, there has been an impact from its policy discussions and good practice sharing, at least in some countries and institutions. The majority of the profiles – both country and institutional – are able to point out links to the then draft **PAGs**.

The present analysis looks for conducive links between the country and institutional profiles and also compares development trends in the different countries and institutions.

Already in 2014, the **Croatian** National Strategy for Education, Science and Technology (2014) stipulated SD as a key objective for HE and followed up with a creation of a National Group for improving the SD in Higher Education in 2015. The outcomes

- 1 The European Higher Education Area in 2020. Bologna Process Implementation Report, Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2020, page 121. [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/eurydice/files/ehea\\_bologna\\_2020\\_chapter04.pdf](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/eurydice/files/ehea_bologna_2020_chapter04.pdf) [Accessed on 25th of February 2021]
- 2 Prague Communiqué 2001, page 2. [http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2001\\_Prague/44/2/2001\\_Prague\\_Communique\\_English\\_553442.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2001_Prague/44/2/2001_Prague_Communique_English_553442.pdf) [Accessed on 2nd of March 2021]
- 3 Yerevan Communiqué 2015, page 4. [https://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2015\\_Yerevan/70/7/YerevanCommuniqueFinal\\_613707.pdf](https://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2015_Yerevan/70/7/YerevanCommuniqueFinal_613707.pdf) [Accessed on 1st of March 2021]

produced by the group, including the National Plan for Improving SD in Higher Education were adopted only in 2019. The example of the University of Rijeka (UNIRI) shows the impact of national actions on institutional measures. UNIRI identifies the National Group's document "Vulnerable and Underrepresented Groups of Students" as important for its definition of the target groups of students in need of support. An interesting aspect of the comparison between the national and institutional profiles relates to the fact that COVID-19 did not influence the national strategy implementation but had a strong impact on several aspects of the university life identified by UNIRI.

In the **Irish** profiles, there is a high level of alignment for both short- and long-term actions. Ireland is in its third cycle of implementing SD focused national strategies<sup>4</sup>. Hence it is not surprising that the analysis of the national and institutional profiles shows a robust system of national coordination and collaboration for the development and implementation of the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education. The vision of this Plan is based on the London Communiqué's definition of the SD with an aim for the Irish student body to represent the diversity of Ireland's population. Through several tools, the National Access Plan translates into actions on the institutional level, for example, through annual data collection from HEIs, negotiated performance agreements addressing equity of access and a commitment of all HEIs to have a Student Success Strategy in place by 2020. Notably, the National Access Plan as such is part of a range of national anti-poverty and social inclusion policy measures in Ireland, which is not common practice in other countries.

A similar comprehensive approach is seen in **Scotland** where the National Performance Framework of the Scottish Government sets the context for reducing inequalities and giving importance to social progress. Different mechanisms ensuring HEIs take actions for this target are highlighted in the country profile, including the application of enhancement-led quality assurance reviews which, among other areas, look into how institutions are recognising and responding to equality and diversity in the student population. Like in the Irish case, the Scottish Government sets targets to HEIs through Outcome Agreements and a regular reporting process is in place. The latter ensures well-established communication mechanisms between the different levels and provides that in emergencies like with COVID-19 timely adjustments of targets can be made as indicated in the institutional profile.

The national and institutional strategies described in the **Austrian** profiles are fairly recent – launched in 2017 and 2019 respectively. The institutional strategy is based on the target dimensions and the action lines of the national strategy, however, unlike the national level, the institution does not set quantitative targets. Due to its recent launch, only some of the measures of the actions of institutional strategy are currently ongoing while some interesting action-based approaches are identified for future implementation, for example, SD focused awareness-raising and competence-building training for

4 The European Higher Education Area in 2020. Bologna Process Implementation Report, Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2020, page 97. [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/eurydice/files/ehea\\_bologna\\_2020\\_chapter04.pdf](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/sites/eurydice/files/ehea_bologna_2020_chapter04.pdf) [Accessed on 25th of February 2021]

the staff, events and workshops on inclusive culture, and community building activities. COVID-19 impacted both institutional and country-level SD approaches, albeit differently: for the institution, it affected deadlines and provision of student support services, while for the national level it disrupted the organisation of SD-related networking events.

In the **Flemish** case, there is no particular strategy for the SD, neither in the governmental nor the institutional profiles. Different legal frameworks and laws, dialogues with stakeholders, HEI funding schemes and targeted small-scale funds are the main measures taken at the national level for mainstreaming the SD. An important document for the alignment of regional<sup>5</sup> and institutional policies is the Charter on collecting and monitoring data of disadvantaged groups in a uniform way as it clearly defines the disadvantaged groups of students and hence serves as a framework for HEIs. Another interesting practice is the establishment of the Support Centre Inclusive Higher Education (SIHO) as a result of the collaboration between the Flemish government and all Flemish HEIs. Among others, SIHO fulfils a targeted measure to support (1) HEIs in developing an institutional policy on students with disabilities and (2) the Flemish government in the development of a national policy on studying with a disability in HE.

A different type of focus is seen in the **Hungarian** profile. The overarching national strategy on higher education (adopted in 2016) stresses the support for social mobility of students, to provide equal access opportunities to students from disadvantaged regions. This is primarily achieved by restructuring the scholarship system. Another target identified on the national level is the reduction of the drop-out rates of students through various support mechanisms. The alignment between the national and institutional level measures does not appear to be clear as the system is in the phase of development. In 2020 first steps were taken towards enhanced SD of higher education with goals of (1) reviewing the existing target groups for higher education equity, (2) redefining and expanding them as necessary, and (3) defining policy measures following the review.

**Romania** shows an integral approach to addressing the SD of higher education. Both, the National Strategy for Tertiary Education on the country level and the Managerial Plan on the institutional level focus on the SD with the overall aim of improving participation. There is no strategy on SD in place at either level, but the institutional profile indicates the possibility of developing one. Interestingly, on the national level, there are multiple quantitative targets identified with definite percentages for diverse under-represented groups, while on the institutional level no quantitative targets are present. However, an interesting practice of collaboration between the national and institutional levels is the so-called institutional development fund of the Ministry of Education, which provides on a competitive basis funding for equity-promoting university projects.

Some targets and measures are shared by several countries and institutions, such as

- increasing the share of female graduates in STEM subjects (examples from Romania, Croatia and Austria).
- embedding SD in quality assurance procedures (examples from Scotland and Croatia).

5 In Belgium, responsibility for higher education is involved to the regions, in this case, Flanders.

- reducing the drop-out rates in (examples from Hungary and Romania).
- increasing the level of participation of students with disabilities for the majority of the countries/institutions studied.
- implementing performance agreements with universities (examples from Austria, Ireland and Scotland).

All the participating institutions have identified the SD as a priority for their strategies/policies, however, the ways of addressing it are different: the majority does not have a separate strategy for the SD but addresses the topic either through the general strategy or some other policies. This is confirmed by the findings of the INVITED<sup>6</sup> project led by the European University Association (EUA), in which 85% of surveyed institutions (159 in total) indicated diversity, equity and inclusion is addressed at the central level by their strategy or policies<sup>7</sup>.

All HEIs indicate that their strategy and/or measures for SD address also potential students. For some institutions, ensuring diversity and inclusion of the potential students is a primary target (e.g. Edinburgh Napier University), while for others it is not (e.g. UNIRI). Findings of the INVITED project show that collaboration with schools/other educational institutions is the most common way (75% of respondents) of ensuring diversity, equity and inclusion while reaching out to potential students<sup>8</sup>.

The final observation from the profiles concerns the impact of COVID-19. All HE institutions indicate that they had to adapt their SD policies/measures to some degree due to the crisis. The country profiles, surprisingly, give a different picture as, for example, for Croatia and Romania there was no immediate impact on developing/implementing their national strategies or measures. Possible explanations for this can be that the existing approaches were assessed and found sufficiently fit for purpose, or that there has been a lack of information exchange about the actual impact of COVID-19 faced by institutions.

The commitments made at the Rome Ministerial Conference, including the adoption of the PAGs, are promising to take the efforts to another level with a vision of engaging “in wide-ranging policy dialogue on how to fully implement the principles and guidelines at national level. We will support our higher education institutions in integrating them into their institutional culture and core missions: learning and teaching, research and innovation, knowledge circulation and outreach, institutional governance and management.”<sup>9</sup> The need for such integration is visible through this analysis and will require actions from multiple levels in order to be met.

6 <https://eua.eu/resources/projects/737-invited.html> [Accessed on 17th of March 2021]

7 A.L. Claeys-Kulik, T.E. Jørgensen, H. Stöber (2019), Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in European Higher Education Institutions. Results from the INVITED project, page 15. [https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/web\\_diversity%20equity%20and%20inclusion%20in%20european%20higher%20education%20institutions.pdf](https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/web_diversity%20equity%20and%20inclusion%20in%20european%20higher%20education%20institutions.pdf) [Accessed on 1st of March 2021]

8 Ibid, page 26.

9 Rome Ministerial Communiqué 2020, page 5. [https://eha2020rome.it/storage/uploads/5d29d1cd-4616-4dfe-a2af-29140a02ec09/BFUG\\_Final\\_Draft\\_Rome\\_Communique-link.pdf](https://eha2020rome.it/storage/uploads/5d29d1cd-4616-4dfe-a2af-29140a02ec09/BFUG_Final_Draft_Rome_Communique-link.pdf) [Accessed on 25th of February 2021]

# Next steps and outlook

The introductory chapter tried to give the international context of this publication, and in this final chapter, we will try to focus on current and future steps of implementation in Austria that are connected to the activities on the social dimension as part of 3-IN-AT.

The *National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education* was published in 2017. At the end of 2021 an interim evaluation will be conducted to critically review qualitative and quantitative progress along the student lifecycle, and in the field of policy framework. A final evaluation will be carried out by the end of 2025.

Policy measures that were taken since the publication of this strategy paper include:

- The implementation of social dimension through the **performance agreements** between the Federal Ministry and each of the 22 public universities. There is a new legal regulation on university financing from 2018: “[...] To ensure the implementation of measures for the SD [and the] inclusion of underrepresented groups into HE, the federal minister can retain up to 0,5% of the overall university budget” (approx. 45 mio. euros). In a report to the Federal Ministry at the end of 2020 the universities presented their institutional strategies/strategic measures towards implementing the National Strategy on the SD of HE. About one third of the public universities agreed to developing an institutional strategy on the social dimension, the other universities came up with strategically connected measures to promote the social dimension at their institution. As a result, all universities fulfilled the condition to strategically promote SD mainstreaming, and therefore received the retained funds.
- The **Development and Funding Plan for Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS)** through to 2023/24 includes references to the National strategy on the SD and plans for an expansion of the UAS sector.
- The **funds for student support** were raised: The overall funds for direct financial student support (“Studienförderung”) were raised by 39% between 2016 (191 million euros) and 2018 (265 million euros). The average amount of funding was raised by 24%. There are improvements for older students, e.g. top-ups at the age of 24 and 27 for students who receive a maintenance grant (= for students who have worked for at least 4 years before beginning their studies). This is not a direct result of the National Strategy, as it had already been discussed and prepared before 2017, but against the new social dimension narrative of the strategic policy work, this decision was certainly promoted and accelerated.

Besides policy measures and legal adaptations, it is important to promote **dissemination and awareness raising** through national and international exchange and discussion.

The national and international networking activities show that it is important to further develop and promote the topic of the social dimension and that most countries face similar challenges and problems in the implementation of the social dimension. It is part of the implementation plan of the Austrian National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education to organise annual networking conferences after stakeholders had agreed during the strategy development process that regular networking activities were an essential part of mainstreaming the social dimension.

Annual networking conferences:

- 12/2018: Networking conference: “Enabling study success”;
- 12/2019: Networking conference: “From school into Higher Education”;
- 10/2020: Webinar: “Equity of higher education in times of COVID-19”.

International activities:

- Eurostudent participation (= European Student Social Survey)
- Participation in international Peer Learning Activities
- Erasmus+ projects on e.g. inclusive mobility (PLAR-4-SIMP) and institutional strategies (3-IN-AT)

The *National Mobility and Internationalisation Strategy for Higher Education 2020–2030* was published in November 2020. It includes references to underrepresented groups in mobility and offers ways of promoting mobility for certain groups. Although there are no quantitative targets set in the strategy, it certainly includes a commitment to increase the participation of those students.

Although the National Strategy on the Social Dimension of Higher Education was published for the first time in 2017 and is therefore a rather recent document, it is by far not the only policy measure in the field of equity in higher education. Since 2016, the department “Equity and Diversity management” of the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, for example, awards a prize for diversity management called “**Diversitas award**” every two years to HEIs that present the most convincing measures and projects. Awards and prizes are certainly only one aspect, but they help to put emphasis on mainstreaming certain issues within higher education.

# Further reading and links

**Social Dimension in the European Higher Education Area:**

<https://ehea.info/page-social-dimension>

**Rome Ministerial Communiqué Annex II: Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA (2020):**

[https://ehea.info/Upload/Rome\\_Ministerial\\_Communique\\_Annex\\_II.pdf](https://ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique_Annex_II.pdf)

**Eurostudent Project** (aiming at collecting and analysing comparable data on the social dimension in European higher education):

<https://www.eurostudent.eu>

**European Students Union (ESU): Bologna with student eyes 2020:**

<https://www.esu-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/0037-Bologna-Publication-2021-WEB3.pdf>

**Ludeman, R. B. & Schreiber, B. (Eds.): Student Affairs and Services in Higher Education: Global Foundations, Issues, and Best Practices, third edition, published by the International Association of Student Affairs and Services (IASAS) in cooperation with Deutsches Studentenwerk (DSW) (2020):**

<https://iasas.global/student-affairs-services-in-higher-education-global-foundations-issues-and-best-practice>

**European University Association (EUA): Diversity, equity and inclusion in European higher education institutions: results from the INVITED project (2019):**

[https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/web\\_diversity%20equity%20and%20inclusion%20in%20european%20higher%20education%20institutions.pdf](https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/web_diversity%20equity%20and%20inclusion%20in%20european%20higher%20education%20institutions.pdf)

**Lumina Foundation/ World Access to Higher Education Day (WAHED): All around the world – Higher education equity policies across the globe (2018):**

<https://worldaccesshe.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/All-around-the-world-Higher-education-equity-policies-across-the-globe-.pdf>

**European University Association (EUA): Universities' Strategies and Approaches towards Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (2018):**

<https://eua.eu/resources/publications/311:universities%E2%80%99-strategies-and-approaches-towards-diversity,-equity-and-inclusion.html>



**IDEAS (Identifying effective approaches to enhancing the social dimension) project:**  
<http://www.equityideas.eu>

**IDEAS tool kit** – Effective Approaches to Enhancing the Social Dimension of Higher Education (2016):  
<http://www.equityideas.eu/toolkit>

**EAN – European Access Network:**  
<https://www.ean-edu.org>

**European Commission:** The impact of COVID-19 on higher education:  
a review of emerging evidence:  
[https://nesetweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NESET-AR4-2020\\_Full-Report.pdf](https://nesetweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NESET-AR4-2020_Full-Report.pdf)

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