



WORKING GROUP ON SOCIAL DIMENSION AND
DATA ON MOBILITY OF STAFF AND STUDENTS

BFUG8 4d
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Update and Discussion Paper for the BFUG April 6-7 2006

The terms of reference for the Working Group (WG) on Social Dimension and Data on the Mobility of Staff and Students in Participating Countries were decided by the BFUG in November 2005. The terms of reference are summarized as follows:

- to define the concept of social dimension based on the ministerial communiqués of the Bologna Process
- to present comparable data on the social and economic situation of students in participating countries
- to present comparable data on the mobility of staff and students
- to prepare proposals as a basis for future stocktaking

At present the work of the WG is focussing on the first and second bullet points – the social dimension. The work on these two points will be further presented below. A number of questions to be discussed by the BFUG on April 6 are also presented in this document.

The Social Dimension of the Bologna Process

The work in relation to the social dimension centres around the two following WG tasks included in the terms of reference:

1. Definition of the concept of social dimension based on the ministerial communiqués of the Bologna Process.
2. Presentation of comparable data on the social and economic situation of students in participating countries. The WG should collect and explore existing data concerning the social dimension. The WG should prioritize the data that will be or would require being collected and identify data gaps as a basis for future stocktaking. A restricted number of key indicators should also be proposed.

1. DEFINITION

The WG has started by identifying the political commitments concerning the social dimension already made in the official Bologna documents. The commitments concern both the social dimension in the home country of the student and the social dimension of mobility. The commitments are considered to cover all three cycles.

Social dimension – Commitments made in the official Bologna documents

The social dimension in the home country of the student

1. Quality higher education should be equally accessible¹ to all (Berlin and Bergen communiqués)
2. Students should have appropriate studying and living conditions, so that they can complete their studies within an appropriate period of time without obstacles related to their social and economic background (Berlin and Bergen communiqués)
3. Opportunities for all citizens, in accordance with their aspirations and abilities, to follow the lifelong learning paths into and within higher education should be improved (Berlin Communiqué)
4. Governments should take measures to provide students with guidance and counselling services with a view to widening access (Bergen Communiqué)
5. Students are full partners in higher education governance and should participate in and influence the organisation and content of higher education (Prague and Berlin communiqués)
6. Governments should take measures to help students, especially from socially disadvantaged groups, in financial and economic aspects with a view to widening access (Bergen Communiqué)

The social dimension of mobility

7. Ministers should take measures to facilitate the portability of national loans and grants (Berlin and Bergen communiqués)
8. Mobility should be promoted by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement with particular attention to:
 - for students, access to study and training opportunities and to related services
 - for teachers, researchers and administrative staff, recognition and valorisation of periods spent in a European context researching, teaching and training, without prejudicing their statutory rights (Bologna Declaration)

¹ Access in the sense of the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

Transforming political commitments into actions

The political commitments in the Bologna Declaration and the subsequent communiqués are to a large extent general in character, stating for example that “students should have appropriate studying and living conditions, so that they can complete their studies within an appropriate period of time without obstacles related to their social and economic background”. In order to implement the commitments made, to collect data and identify possible key indicators for the social dimension the concept needs to be turned into a series of actions.

The WG has made an attempt to transform the political commitments into possible political actions that would deliver these commitments. Among all the political actions suggested, the WG has identified a number of actions that could be considered the core of the social dimension. In arriving at this list of actions, the WG focussed on actions that would not be covered by the work of other Bologna working groups.

The actions proposed by the WG cover different aspects and levels of policy. Political objectives agreed in the Bologna Declaration and in the communiqués should be followed by strategies to implement the objectives and concrete actions to realize the strategies. The objectives, strategies and actions are addressed to governments and higher education institutions, according to the allocation of responsibilities in each country. It is also the opinion of the WG that the social dimension policies should be monitored and evaluated.

The political commitments already made cover the social dimension in the home country of the student as well as the social dimension of mobility. The prerequisites of the social dimension at home and abroad vary on several important points. This is why these two categories have been considered separately in the following draft proposal for objectives, strategies and actions.

The task of the WG in relation to the social dimension concerns the situation of the students. Concerning mobility, two groups are targeted – staff and students. Due to this, the WG felt that it was logic to include staff in category II. The social dimension of mobility.

Draft proposal for prioritization of objectives, strategies and actions within the social dimension. The proposal will also serve as a basis for the exploration and collection of data and future stocktaking.

I. The social dimension in the home country of the student

Objectives:

- Equal opportunities for access to and participation in quality higher education
- Widening access to and participation in quality higher education (in input, in the higher education process and in output through ensuring successful completion)

Strategies:

The participating countries should establish national policies for

- widening participation in higher education for underrepresented groups (gender, ethnic origin, socio-economic status and background, disability, geography)
- cooperation between higher education and other educational levels and sectors
- formal and actual student influence on and participation in higher education governance
- the role of lifelong learning within higher education

Actions and tools to be in place in the participating countries:

Measures to promote equal opportunities

- Anti-discrimination legislation or other measures covering higher education
- Admission rules that are simple, fair and transparent

Measures to widen access to and participation in higher education

- Outreach programs for underrepresented groups
- Flexible delivery of higher education
- Flexible learning paths into and within higher education
- Recognition of prior learning

Study environment that enhances the quality of the student experience

A, Provision of academic services

- Guidance (academic and careers)
- Retention measures (modification of curricula, flexibility of delivery, tracking academic success etc.)

B, Provision of social services

- Counselling
- Targeted support for students with special needs
- Subsidised housing for those who most need it

Student participation in the governance and organization of higher education

- Legislation or other measures for student participation in higher education governance
- Provisions for the existence of and exercise of influence by student organisations

- Student evaluations of courses and programmes, including actions and follow-up

Finances in order to start and complete studies

- Financial and legal advice for students
- Appropriate and coordinated national financial support systems that are transparent
- Targeted support for socially disadvantaged groups
- Supportive measures for students with children

Monitoring:

The participating countries should establish national measures, in conjunction with students, to monitor and evaluate the impact of their social dimension policies.

II. The social dimension of mobility

Objectives:

- Equal opportunities for access to studies and teaching periods in a foreign country
- Widening access to studies and teaching periods in a foreign country

Strategies:

The participating countries should establish national policies for

- the removal of obstacles to the free movement of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff
- the promotion of studies and teaching periods abroad

Actions and tools to be in place in the participating countries:

Measures to promote equal opportunities

- Information on admission rules and application processes in other countries and to potential foreign students
- Information on appointment procedures for academic staff in other countries and to potential applicants from abroad

Measures to widen access to and participation in higher education

- Information on studies and living conditions in other countries and to potential foreign students and teachers
- Actions targeted at underrepresented groups
- Recognition of foreign teaching experiences

Information and services in the hosting country

- Access to academic and social services in the hosting country
- Fast and efficient issuing of visas

Finances

- National financial support systems that are portable
- Scholarships/solidarity funds for the mobile students who most need it

Monitoring:

The participating countries should establish national measures, in conjunction with students, to monitor and evaluate the impact of their social dimension policies.

Questions for the BFUG:

1. The objectives, strategies and actions listed above have been selected from a list of possible actions that would take forward or support the delivery of the political commitments made. They have been considered to be at the core of the social dimension. Do you agree?
2. The selection of prioritized objectives, strategies and actions will guide the collection of data and identification of possible key indicators for taking stock of the social dimension in the period after London 2007. Which of the items on the list are most important for the advancement of the social dimension in the Bologna countries?

2. COLLECTION AND EXPLORATION OF DATA

The WG has created a technical subgroup for the collection and exploration of data. As also laid down in the Bergen communiqué comparable data should be identified “on the mobility of staff and students as well as on the social and economic situation of students”.

This entails a two-fold approach: on the one hand it involves identifying where and to what extent comparable data exist on staff and student mobility as well as on the social and economic situation of students and thus also identifying gaps.

On the other hand, the remit of the working on the social dimension goes two steps further. It advocates both the collection of data, as opposed to identifying their availability and likely gaps, and widening the field of data collection to the broader concept of the social dimension. Thus, it includes objectives like equal opportunities for and widened access to higher education or the study environment. Since the social dimension will be part of the post London stocktaking, the terms of reference of the WG indicate that the latter should prioritize the data that will or would require to be collected. The WG should also propose a restricted number of key indicators.

The work of the subgroup has so far focused on exploring the availability of data on the topics mentioned above, except for data on mobility. It has also checked with the relevant organisations about their plans.

The main sources of expertise to identify and select data from concerning the social and economic situation of students in participating countries are:

- Eurydice
- Eurostudent
- Eurostat with OECD and Unesco

Some data on the social dimension will also be found in the national reports (2005-2007) before the London ministerial meeting, Trends V and ESIB surveys.

Eurydice has agreed to carry out a joint thematic study together with Eurostat on the national financial framework for students in higher education in order to complement the data available. The study will provide a descriptive picture of the situation concerning financial contributions from students in higher education and financial support for students. The study will cover the EU countries, EU candidate countries and the EEA countries. The sources of information will be laws, decrees and regulations in the countries covered by the study. The latter will encompass the relevant legal provision of the social security and tax systems.

Eurostudent takes the Eurydice approach further by analysing how the system works and by adding data on the social make-up of the student body. However, while Eurostudent offers a comprehensive approach, it only does so for a more limited number of countries.

Eurostat provides data on access and on output that are general in nature and which indicate how efficient a system is without thereby saying how socially inclusive it is.

While there is a wealth of data available, two issues arise. The one is about timing. The Eurydice report will be available for the London gathering whereas the deadline for Eurostudent is 2008 and beyond. Eurostat do their collection on an annual basis, but will widen its scope in 2008 to include among others data on mobility. The second issue is about coverage. Not all 45 Bologna countries are covered and are unlikely to be covered in the foreseeable future.

Generally speaking, data should comprise system descriptors as well as information on how these systems work. The main challenge is the comparability and reliability of the information. It is therefore necessary that data should come from international organisations, whose work programme only partly reflects that of the Bologna Process and who have their own timing.

Question for the BFUG:

3. The main challenge for the collection and exploration of data and for the future stocktaking on the social dimension is the comparability and reliability of data. The BFUG should, in a first round, give advice to the WG on what arrangements could be made together with the organisations presented above.

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Mise en forme : Puces et numéros