Providing policy-makers and practitioners with resources to improve the social dimension of the European Higher Education Area

Guidelines for the background report

for a country review

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Contact us for further information

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1   Country review self-report template

1.1 Purpose of this document

The country review is one element of the project entitled PL4SD, which has the objective of facilitating peer learning on policies and practices to improve the social dimension of higher education in EHEA.

As a basis for the external evaluation a background report is prepared by the PL4SD expert group with the support of the responsible authority from the reviewed country. The background report will be used to prepare the five day on location visit to the country in question and the outline of the final country review report.

The present document provides the guidelines for the background report, which will be submitted to the ministry responsible for higher education for feedback at least eight weeks before the scheduled site-visit as convened in the Terms of Reference. The reviewed country will be asked to make additions or elaborate on points which are not covered sufficiently in the background report, provide interpretations from the point of view of the ministry on how to understand certain developments or measures or to make corrections to factually incorrect assertions. The background report will be treated confidentially and not published or otherwise circulated without the agreement of the responsible authority.

1.2 Basis of the template

This template is based on the instruments used and the experiences made in the following initiatives:

➢ The template used by the BFUG working group to collate national strategies on the social dimension from BFUG representatives in the period 2007-2009
➢ The BFUG questionnaire on the social dimension used in the period 2009-2012
➢ The Irish national plan for equity of access to higher education 2008-2013

1.3 Concept of the "social dimension" for the country review

The country review looks at measures and strategies, which focus on reducing barriers to entering higher education, facilitating appropriate study conditions and assuring successful completion of studies for all students. It is founded on the recognition that a convergence of three factors tend to determine educational success: student ability, material and immaterial (e.g. social and cultural) resources and opportunity. In particular, non-academic factors such as social background and aspiration, and study framework conditions (e.g. balance between work and studies) affect participation and success in higher education. Indeed, visible student ability may have been affected by a person's material and immaterial resources at a previous (e.g. secondary) educational level.

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The "social dimension" entails looking at various stages of the education system and adopting measures, which can help <u>individuals</u> to overcome any barriers or disincentives to continue into and through higher education. These individuals might differ from country to country; there may be a focus on students from certain socio-economic backgrounds, from certain regions of the country, of certain ethnicity or simply of different ages (e.g. mature students). We see the social dimension as trying to make higher education as inclusive as possible.

These measures for improving the social dimension may be necessary at different stages of the education system. They may be adopted before a person has finally decided whether to go on to higher education or not, at entry to higher education, during students' studies and at study completion.

For each of these types of hindrance, measures may be taken, for instance:

1. *Before entry to higher education*: Measures to raise aspirations of school-leavers who had not considered entering higher education (e.g. school liaison officers, information campaigns).

2. *At entry to higher education*: Measures to provide remedial classes for school-leavers who have knowledge gaps (e.g. summer schools, access courses) and provide second chance routes of entry for adult learners (e.g. recognition of prior learning).

3. *Study framework*: Measures to provide more flexible forms of learning in higher education for students, who work alongside their studies, to offer student counselling and to provide material support (such as grants and loans) during the study phase for students from certain backgrounds.

4. *Graduation and transition*: Measures to provide career advice and support the transition into the job market or further education.

This is a very wide and all-encompassing definition and is likely to be different from the more specific definition(s) used in individual countries.

2 Background information for the self-report (Chapter A)

In order to understand the context of the issues concerning the social dimension, it is necessary to have background information and supporting data on the four key stages of higher education, as highlighted in the scheme above. This will be the content of Chapter A.

Each of the stages will be briefly described (approx. 2 A4 pages) and as much information as possible will be drawn from the official texts provided by countries in the Eurypedia databank (as this is already written using international descriptors): https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Main_Page

In each case, the descriptive information would be supported with data in the form of tables and charts drawn from national data sets. Full tables and charts will be put in Annex 1, with reference made to this data in the respective sections.

This data would be used to provide evidence for changes and developments in the national higher education system during the last 5 to 10 years. The data would, as far as possible, highlight developments particularly relevant to the social dimension of higher education (e.g. the participation or support of different student groups). In the following suggestions for supporting data are made.

1. **Before entry to higher education**

 A description of the earlier stages of the education system (before higher education) will be included with reference to the following questions: How is secondary education organised and regulated? Is it divided into different sectors (e.g. vocational and academic)? Are there different types of secondary schools with a different focus? Which qualifications from which part of the education system qualify a person to enter higher education?

➢ Eurypedia will be referenced as a basis for the responses from the following sections: 6, 2.2, 2.3 and 2.5.

➢ Supporting data will be included in Annex 1 for the number and share of pupils in each of the sections of the school system.

2. **At entry to higher education**

 A description of the regulations and procedures related to entering higher education and how students choose their subject and place of study will further developed in this section.

➢ The following sections in Eurypedia will provide for the basis of the responses: 7, especially the sections on admission requirements.

➢ Supporting data will be provided in Annex 1 on enrolment by age of student, by field of study, by institution type (university, university of applied science, other) and by sector (public or private). An examination on the applicants to higher education (including those who did not gain a study place) and what qualifications students used to enter higher education will be envisaged. The data will be differentiated by under-represented groups.

3. Study framework

A description on how study programmes tend to be organised, how progression is regulated and the degree of time-flexibility possible in study programmes. This may be different for different types of programmes and different providers of higher education. Furthermore, please describe any additional provisions of support for studies which are standard procedure, e.g. counselling during their (first year) studies, provision of student housing etc. This section should also cover funding aid and study costs.

➢ The following sections in Eurypedia will be referenced for the basis of responses: 7, especially the sections on progression of students through their studies, 3.2 for funding aid and 12.6 for additional support.

➢ Supporting data will provided in Annex 1 on enrolment by intensity of study (e.g. part-time, full-time or other forms of flexibility). Data on funding aid, study costs and information on how many people make use of support services and what their impact is on study success will be included as well.

4. Graduation and transition

A description will be included on the transition processes between higher education and the labour market, which may be different for different types of programmes and different providers of higher education and the support measures that might be in place to support the transition.

➢ The following sections in Eurypedia will be referenced as basis of responses: 7, especially the sections on employability.

➢ Data will be provided in Annex 1 on how many people make use of support services and what their impact is on study success.

3 Questions for the background report on social dimension strategy (Chapter B)

Chapter B will describe aspects of a planned or existing strategy for the social dimension. In the following, specific requirements are set for more information. (approx. 2 pages) Responses will be drafted with the assistance and support from the responsible authority from the Ministry. The responses will reference national policy or steering documents (irrespective of whether the documents are available in English or not).

In each case, the information should be supported with data in the form of tables and charts drawn from national data sets. Full tables and charts should be put in Annex 1, with reference made to this data in the respective sections.

Problems

1. **What are the problems, which have been identified concerning the social dimension and which groups of students are particularly affected by them?**

Countries will be asked to provide their own definition of the social dimension, if this is available, and a description of the issues and the rationale for adopting measures to improve the access to and completion of higher education for particular student groups. For instance, in terms of access, certain groups will be underrepresented (e.g. students from low socio-economic backgrounds). Additionally, there may be other student groups, which are not underrepresented at entry, but who struggle particularly to complete their studies (e.g. adult learners or students, who work alongside their studies). If available, please reference policy steering documents, which focus on the need to adopt measures to support the student groups mentioned.

Policy Approach

2. **What policy approach(es) has(have) been adopted or are planned to improve the issues mentioned above and why?**

Is the approach intended to make general changes to the whole education or higher education system or is it rather an approach with targeted measures or clusters of measures focussed on only one or two student groups. Different issues may call for different approaches, so that a policy mix is also possible. Reviewed countries will be asked to describe the situation from their national viewpoint and give the rationale as to why a certain approach has been chosen.

Actions

3. What measures have been adopted or are planned in order to alleviate the problems for the above-mentioned student groups?

The survey instruments will be used to describe in detail each of the measures, which are planned, have been adopted recently or in the past. It is important to make sure that the described measures are aligned to the information provided above on the issues and groups of students (question 1) and the policy approach taken (question 2). Please refer to Annex 2 for the description template.

Actors

4. Which actors in the system are most active in taking measures to improve the social dimension of higher education?

The description will identify actors from any part of the higher education system or outside and what measures they take. This could be, for instance, student groups, university, colleges, academics from certain disciplines, people in certain regions of your country, business and industry representatives etc. This information will also be used to organise meetings with these groups during the in-country review.

Coordination

5. Does the country bring together all of the measures mentioned in response to question 3 to form one comprehensive national strategy for the improvement of the social dimension?

The response will describe (i) whether there is a single organisation, which is responsible for evaluating and developing the coherence of the individual activities, (ii) whether there is a single budget assigned to this organisation and (iii) whether specific national targets or benchmarks have been set to monitor and evaluate progress. If there is no single organisation the response will describe how the various organisations responsible for the measures coordinate their activities and engage in dialogue with other responsible organisations.

Outlook

6. What are the current or future challenges for improving the social dimension in higher education in your country? (to be completed following the reply for the Ministry)

Are there plans for specific measures or systemic changes, which are being discussed at the moment? What could the situation regarding the social dimension look like in 10 year time? What will affect the chances of this situation becoming reality?

Additional Information

7. Further comments

If anything else should be added separately from the previous chapters (points of clarifications, explanations or other relevant additions) they should be included in this final section.

Annex 1 – Data, charts and tables

The national team will be asked to provide some background data as required in section 2 for Chapter A and supporting data and evidence for the points raised in section 3 for Chapter B.

Annex 2 – Template for the description of individual measures (PL4SD Questionnaire)

This template should be used for the description of measures in Chapter B. The template is the same as the one being used for the general project database for the description of individual measures. The reviewed country will be asked to provide the PL4SD expert group with a forms describing key measures related to the social dimension using this template.

➢ This template should be used to describe each individual measure separately.

Basic information about the measure

Please name the measure.

In national language:

In English:

Link to web page of the measure or to a further description of it:

| |
| |

Contact for further information about the measure (to be published on PL4SD website):

Title (Ms/Mrs/Mr)	First name	Last name	Email address

How would you categorise the measure (multiple answers possible)?

Student target group(s) of the measure
☐ General student population
☐ By gender
☐ From ethnic minorities
☐ From lower socioeconomic backgrounds
☐ From migrant backgrounds
☐ From rural or remote regions
☐ International students
☐ Mature students
☐ Orphans
☐ Prospective students
☐ With children
☐ With disabilities
☐ With siblings
☐ Without the normally required qualifications
☐ Working students
☐ Other, please specify _____

Objective of the measure
☐ Widening access
☐ Retention and success
☐ Combining study and work
☐ Lifelong learning
☐ International mobility
☐ Monitoring and evaluation
☐ Student support
☐ Other, please specify _____

Type of measure
☐ Direct student financial support
☐ Indirect student financial support (provision of subsidised/affordable accommodation, meals, transport, etc.)
☐ Funding incentives for institutions
☐ Counselling and other specialised support services for groups of students
☐ Teaching and learning
☐ Information campaigns
☐ Alternative entry routes
☐ Cooperation with schools
☐ Data collection and research
☐ Other, please specify _____

Description of the measure

Please describe the measure. Include the challenge the measure was intended for, the objective, and the target group(s) of the measure. *[no character limit]*

Impact of the measure

Please describe the outcome and impact of the measure. Is it regularly monitored and evaluated? *[no character limit]*

Overall assessment

Please describe the prospects of the measure in the future. What can an international public learn from the described measure? What worked well, what could be improved? Would you recommend the measure for other countries? Why / why not? *[no character limit]*

Keywords for searching the database

Please provide up to 5 keywords describing the measure, its objective and target population(s) that best enable others to search for the measure. *[no character limit]*

Other information [optional]

Please feel free to add any other information about the measure you want an international public to know about it. *[no character limit]*

Thank you for contributing to the project!

The PL4SD consortium

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