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Indicators and Descriptors for the Principles of the Social Dimension in the European Higher Education Area

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Indicators and Descriptors
for the Principles of the Social Dimension
in the European Higher Education Area

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Summary

This document enhances the previously approved and adopted "Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA),"[1] which serves as Annex II to the 2020 Rome Communique. It introduces indicators and descriptors for the social dimension, providing valuable guidance to public authorities in implementing the Principles and Guidelines. Together, they form a comprehensive framework that effectively addresses the social dimension within the EHEA.

The framework empowers public authorities and higher education institutions in the EHEA to formulate system-wide and institutional policies, strategies, and action plans for strengthening the social dimension. Additionally, it offers methodologies for monitoring, evaluating, and assessing the impact of these policies. Indicators and descriptors guide the implementation of the Principles and Guidelines, offering practical recommendations for suitable approaches while maintaining flexibility to accommodate diverse contexts and policy options.

Authorities can strategically choose indicators for the social dimension that align with their approach to equity, diversity, and inclusion in higher education, as well as with national priorities and capacities within their higher education system. In certain higher education systems, particularly those with a universal approach, some listed indicators and descriptors may not be applicable. The toolbox approach allows public authorities to omit certain indicators and descriptors, focusing only on those that fit their national higher education system. This flexibility enables them to gauge progress in implementing the principles while remaining aligned with their unique context. It is essential to recognize that various approaches can lead to positive outcomes for the social dimension in the EHEA.

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[1] In the further text we use the abbreviated title 'Principles and Guidelines' instead of the full name of the document.

Introduction

Definition of the social dimension in higher education: Social dimension in higher education is a process containing specific and transversal policies aimed at creating an inclusive environment in higher education in which the composition of the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels corresponds to the heterogeneous social profile of society at large in the EHEA countries. This definition of the social dimension encompasses also the desired inclusive environment in higher education that fosters equity, diversity, and is responsive to the needs of local communities.

Positive impact of the social dimension on societies: Increased participation of vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups in higher education produces wider personal and societal benefits with respect to decreased social welfare provision, improved health outcomes and increased community involvement. Collectively, these wider benefits sustain cohesive, democratic societies where social justice, public good, public responsibility and social mobility prevail. Graduate qualifications acquired by a wider pool of citizens mean better employment prospects, higher earnings and passing on the appreciation for higher education to the existing and the next generation and to local communities.

Beyond reaching the commitments made by the EHEA, taking a holistic and proactive approach to improving the social dimension of higher education further serves to accelerate progress in attaining the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Supporting inclusive learning environments is a necessity and should be seen as an investment towards societies. Public authorities should shoulder the responsibility of ensuring that the proposed principles, guidelines and indicators for the social dimension are adjusted to national realities and implemented, in order to safeguard a better future for our higher education systems.

The comprehensive EHEA framework for the social dimension in higher education: This framework consists of the principles, guidelines, indicators, and descriptors for the social dimension. The framework, with its constituent parts, represents a coherent system that enables public authorities in the EHEA member states and higher education institutions to incorporate social dimension principles and guidelines in the policies and strategies, institutional missions, governance and culture of higher education institutions.

The social dimension interconnects the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Access, participation, progress and completion of higher education should depend primarily on students' abilities, not on their personal characteristics or circumstances beyond their direct influence. With this scope at heart, public authorities should support the implementation of these Principles and Guidelines by providing a legal, financial, administrative, and informative support that can initiate processes of implementation at the national level. This framework promotes inclusive strategies, which provide both specific support for vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented students[2] and staff as well as highlighting broader measures and policies from which the student population and staff at higher education institutions can mutually benefit.

Policy alignment with previous EHEA documents: The broadened understanding of the social dimension defined above builds on the notion of the social dimension as developed in

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[2] A glossary of Terms and Definitions related to the definitions for vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented students is at the end of this document.

the 2007 London Communique. The EHEA framework for the social dimension within this document complements the EHEA strategy "Widening Participation for Equity and Growth", which ministers adopted in Yerevan in 2015 as a mean to further strengthen the social dimension while concomitantly contributing to increasing quality in higher education. Also, the framework fulfils the need expressed in the 2018 Paris Communique to guide member states on how to define and implement policy for improving the social dimension of the EHEA.

One of the three key priorities in the 2020 Rome Ministerial Communique for the next decade of the Bologna Process is related to building an inclusive EHEA. Therefore, the EHEA ministers adopted the forward-looking strategic document "Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA" as the Annex II to the 2020 Rome Communique and committed to implementing it in the national higher education systems. To facilitate this implementation, the current document complements the adopted Principles and Guidelines by providing indicators and descriptors for each principle, and as such represents an EHEA framework for the social dimension.

Principles and guidelines for the social dimension in higher education: The ten principles in the text below, adopted in the 2020 Rome Communique, should be understood as high-level political commitments that serve as a basis for the conceptualisation of different policies for the social dimension enhancement. The guidelines, which were also adopted in the 2020 Rome Communique, are recommendations intended to help and advice policy makers on how to implement in practice the agreed principles. Public authorities and higher education institutions should integrate these principles into the following dimensions of higher education: learning and teaching, research, innovation, knowledge circulation and outreach, institutional governance and management, as well as in the policies for empowering present and future students and higher education staff.

Indicators and descriptors for the social dimension in higher education: Indicators[3] for the social dimension are tools for measuring progress in implementing the principles of the social dimension in higher education. Each indicator is accompanied by a descriptor that outlines the attributes, features, and characteristics of the indicators in more detail. This provides a better understanding of the indicators and clarifies how they can be effectively implemented. As a result, the descriptor offers specific recommendations for actionable steps. In certain higher education systems, particularly those with a universal approach, some listed indicators and descriptors may not be applicable.

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[3] The 2021-2024 BFUG Working Group on Social Dimension established a fruitful cooperation with the European Commission/Eurydice and agreed that it would adopt most of the Eurydice's indicators developed for the principles for the social dimension and published in the report "Towards equity and inclusion in higher education in Europe" (Eurydice, 2022). Therefore, the indicators listed below contain citations related to Eurydice whenever the indicator takes its main elements from Eurydice. The specific contribution of the BFUG Working Group on Social Dimension is that it expanded the scope of indicators and has also created additional descriptors for each indicator.

1. Principle on strategic approach to the social dimension

Principle [4]

> **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. Strengthening the social dimension of higher education and fostering equity and inclusion to reflect the diversity of society is the responsibility of a higher education system as a whole and should be regarded as a continuous commitment.**

Guidelines

a. Strategic commitment to the social dimension of higher education should be aligned with concrete targets that can either be integrated within existing higher education policies or developed in parallel. These targets should aim at widening access, supporting participation in and completion of studies for all current and future students.

b. In the process of creating strategies there should be a broad-based dialogue between public authorities, higher education institutions, student and staff representatives and other key stakeholders, including social partners, non-governmental organisations and people from vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups. This broad-based dialogue is to ensure the creation of inclusive higher education strategies that foster equity, diversity and are responsive to the needs of the wider community.

Indicators
1.1. Existence of a system level strategy, or a similar major policy document, on social dimension of higher education, which strengthens diversity, equity and inclusion of students (Eurydice, 2022[5]).   *Descriptor:*   Public authorities should develop a strategy or a major policy document on social dimension enhancement in higher education to improve study conditions of underrepresented, disadvantaged, and vulnerable students and to create an inclusive environment in higher education. The strategy or major policy document should take into account all the Principles and Guidelines on Social Dimension from this document.
1.2. Existence of a system level strategy, or a similar major policy document, on social dimension of higher education, which strengthens diversity, equity and inclusion of staff (Eurydice, 2022).   *Descriptor:*   Public authorities should develop a strategy or a major policy document on social dimension enhancement in higher education that improves working conditions of underrepresented,

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[4] The text of the following ten principles and their guidelines in the further text is an integral part of the adopted Principles and Guidelines at the 2020 Rome ministerial conference. However, the text of the indicators and descriptors is new and is proposed by the BFUG Working Group on Social Dimension, in line with the Terms of Reference 2021-2024 for the BFUG Working Group on Social Dimension.

[5] This citation refers to the publication: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice. (2022). Towards equity and inclusion in higher education in Europe. Eurydice report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

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disadvantaged and vulnerable staff and creates an inclusive environment in higher education. It is important to incentivise higher education institutions to have inclusive human resources policies, that pay attention to recruitment in particular, so that the composition of staff reflects the diversity of society.

1.3. Strategies and policies on social dimension of higher education have specific and measurable targets that are assessed and monitored by responsible bodies within concrete timeframes (Eurydice, 2022).
Descriptor:
Public authorities should periodically assess the implementation and impact of the national strategies and policies, together with stakeholders, and monitor whether the selected targets are reached within proposed deadlines. Public authorities should ensure that an appropriate body has the mandate to monitor the social dimension strategies and policies of higher education institutions. Based on national contexts, external quality assurance frameworks could be used for monitoring the implementation of social dimension strategies and policies at higher education institutions.

1.4. Broad-based dialogue with stakeholders in higher education is fostered and incentivised by the public authorities in the process of developing system-level and institutional strategies and policies on social dimension of higher education.
Descriptor:
Public authorities should co-create strategies and policies on diversity, equity and inclusion with a wide range of stakeholders, including higher education institutions, student and staff representatives, social partners, non-governmental organisations and people from underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. Public authorities should incentivise higher education institutions to co-create strategies and policies on diversity, equity and inclusion at institutional level and to assess their impact with a wide range of stakeholders.

2. Principle on flexibility of higher education systems

Principle

> 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.**

Guidelines

    a. Legal regulations and administrative rules should allow sufficient flexibility in the design, organisation and delivery of study programmes to reflect the diversity of students' needs. Higher education institutions should be enabled to recognise full-time and part-time studies, flexible study modes, blended and distance learning as well as to recognise prior learning (RPL), in order to accommodate the needs of the diverse student population.

b. Public authorities should promote recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning (RPL) in higher education, because it has a positive impact on widening access, transition and completion, equity and inclusion, mobility and employability. RPL enables flexible modes of lifelong learning in the entire education sector, including higher education. Implementing RPL will require effective cooperation amongst the higher education system, employers and the wider community and to enable this the national qualifications frameworks should facilitate transparent recognition of learning outcomes and reliable quality assurance procedures.

Indicators

2.1. Existence of top-level regulations that allow higher education institutions to offer flexible pathways like part-time studies, stacking modules, blended or distance learning programmes (Eurydice, 2022).
Descriptor:
Public authorities should provide funding to ensure that higher education institutions are able to implement inclusive curriculums and tailor teaching and learning modes and methods to the needs of students from underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. Public support should be provided for the development of modules for underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students and staff to enhance their integration within higher education institutions. Public authorities should provide legal regulations for inclusive admission policies, flexible pathways to access into, progress through and complete higher education. There should be a legal framework that values the outcomes of full-time and part-time studies equally.

2.2. Candidates can <u>enter</u> higher education based on recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning and this applies to all higher education institutions (Eurydice, 2022).
Descriptor:
Public authorities should elaborate a national policy of recognising prior non-formal and informal learning for the purpose of accessing higher education, including specific policies for migrants, refugees and students with refugee backgrounds. Public authorities ensure that a National Qualifications Framework facilitates recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning.

2.3. Prior non-formal and informal learning counts towards fulfilment of a higher education study program (Eurydice, 2022).
Descriptor:
Public authorities should elaborate a national policy of recognising prior non-formal and informal learning for the purpose of progressing through and completing higher education. Public authorities ensure that legal provisions require using learning outcomes in the design of qualifications and study programmes, in accordance with National Qualifications Frameworks.

2.4. Quality assurance agencies address the recognition of prior non-formal and/or informal learning in higher education in their external evaluation procedures (Eurydice, 2022).
Descriptor:

Public authorities should ensure that an appropriate body has the mandate to monitor procedures of recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning, preventing parallel and opposing recognition procedures, delays, and additional costs for students. Quality assurance frameworks could be used for monitoring procedures of recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning.

2.5. Existence of a legal framework that enables recognised student and staff representative bodies at higher education institutions to be actively engaged in the enhancement of the social dimension.
Descriptor:
There should be a legal framework which enables both students and staff to actively participate in decision-making processes pertaining to the social dimension within higher education, as well as in initiatives aimed at enhancing their study and working conditions.

3. Principle on the inclusiveness of the entire education system

Principle

> 3. **The inclusiveness of the entire education system should be improved by developing coherent policies from early childhood education, through schooling to higher education and throughout lifelong learning.**

Guidelines

a. It is important to create synergies with all education levels and related policy areas (such as finance, employment, health and social welfare, housing, migration etc.) to develop policy measures that create an inclusive environment throughout the entire education sector that fosters equity, diversity, and inclusion, and is responsive to the needs of the wider community.

b. The social dimension policies should not only support current students, but also potential students in their preparation and transition into higher education. Participation in higher education has to be a lifelong option, including for adults who decide to return to or enter higher education at later stages in their lives. An inclusive approach needs to involve wider communities, higher education institutions and other stakeholder groups to co-create pathways to higher education.

Indicators

3.1. Existence of top-level coordination structures and mechanisms between different levels of education with a focus on diversity, equity and inclusion in education (Eurydice, 2022).
Descriptor:
Public authorities should actively coordinate with stakeholders and advisory bodies at all educational levels and organise a national social dialogue on diversity, equity and inclusion

in education. They could support awareness raising and peer learning activities on diversity, equity and inclusion among children, students, parents, administrative and teaching staff in schools and higher education institutions, among local civil society representatives and other important stakeholders in education.

Public authorities could consider creating a national or regional contact point for dealing with diversity, equity and inclusion of students and staff in the education sector. Such contact point could, among its services, provide support and guidance to educational institutions on how to make the information for underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups publicly accessible.

3.2. Public authorities systematically involve and coordinate with representatives of other related policy areas, such as finance, employment, housing, health, social welfare or other social services in creating shared commitments for the enhancement of diversity, equity and inclusion in education (Eurydice, 2022).

Descriptor:

Public authorities should provide support and guidance to educational institutions and connect representatives of other policy areas to cooperate on solving the financing, employment, housing and related issues to help underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students avoid the obstacles that hinder their involvement in general and further education.

3.3. Public authorities provide support to students with a delayed transition into higher education (Eurydice, 2022).

Descriptor:

Public authorities should provide a legal framework that ensures there are no age-related restrictions on funding students. Higher education institutions and, if the case, public service centres outside of higher education systems should provide information and guidelines on lifelong learning options for students with delayed transition into higher education. Public authorities should provide funding to higher education institutions for offering adequate flexibility and support to those students.

3.4. Initial and continuous teacher training programmes offered in higher education develop competencies on diversity, equity and inclusion in education (Eurydice, 2022).

Descriptor:

Diversity, equity and inclusion in education should be an integral part of the curriculum of all higher education programs offering teacher training for all levels of education.

4. Principle on monitoring and data collection

Principle

4. Reliable data is a necessary precondition for an evidence-based improvement of the social dimension of higher education. Higher education systems should define the purpose and goals of collecting certain types of data, taking into account the particularities of the national legal frameworks. Adequate capacities to collect, process and use such data to inform and support the social dimension of higher education should be developed.

Guidelines

a. In order to develop effective policies, continuous national data collection is necessary. Within the limits of national legal frameworks, such data collection should provide information on the composition of the student body, access and participation, drop-out and completion of higher education, including the transition to the labour market after completion of studies, and allow for the identification of vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups.

b. In order to make such data collection comparable internationally, work on categories for administrative data collection that are relevant for the social dimension should be developed at the EHEA level through Eurostudent or similar surveys. With the aim to rationalise the process and avoid an administrative burden on public administration and higher education institutions, this development should take account of existing national practices and relevant data collection processes.

c. Such national data collection exercises could, where relevant and necessary, be complemented by higher education institutions undertaking additional surveys, research and analysis to better understand vulnerability, disadvantage, and underrepresentation in education, as well as transitions of students across the education system.

Indicators

4.1. Public authorities regularly collect data on student characteristics and experiences prior to entry in higher education as well as at entry in higher education, during studies and upon graduation (Eurydice, 2022).

Descriptor:

There should be regular national surveys or administrative data collection on student characteristics of potential students, students entering higher education and students participating in higher education, that includes data on underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students. Also, there should be regular national surveys or administrative data collection on student dropout. Completion rate data at the end of the first year of the first cycle should be available to top level policy makers (Eurydice, 2022). Data on the trends on transition of graduates to the labour market after completion of studies should also be collected through the national survey(s) and administrative data collection. Public authorities should ensure interoperability of the data collection systems and platforms on student characteristics and experiences with other public registers.

4.2. Data collected through national surveys and administrative data collection on <u>students'</u> characteristics and experiences are used to enhance policies on social dimension in higher education.

Descriptor:

Public authorities should identify the categories of underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students on a national level. They should translate the results of surveys and administrative data collection into student support measures and strengthen the social dimension practices for the identified underrepresented, disadvantaged, and vulnerable groups. It is important to detect obstacles during studying, for underrepresented, disadvantaged, and vulnerable students, as well as analyse this data in connection with other policy areas (such as finance, housing, other social services, etc.). Public authorities should make surveys or administrative data sets accessible to the public, higher education

institutions and researchers to build capacity for diversity, equity and inclusion in higher education. Furthermore, they should provide support to higher education institutions to organise surveys and research on the institutional level to understand underrepresentation, disadvantages, and vulnerability in education.

4.3. Public authorities regularly collect data on higher education <u>staff</u> characteristics and work experiences in higher education.
Descriptor:
Public authorities should organise national surveys or administrative data collection on staff characteristics and their work experiences. Based on the collected and analysed data, they should identify underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable staff at a national level. Public authorities should translate results of surveys and administrative data collection into staff support measures for identified underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable staff.

4.4. Public authorities regularly conduct research on potential systemic barriers to diversity, equity and inclusion from early childhood education, through schooling to higher education and throughout lifelong learning.
Descriptor:
Public authorities should analyse student data through all levels of education, lifelong learning and entry into the labour market to make sure that its social dimension policies are effective and efficient. They could compare graduation data from second level (secondary education) with entrance data into third level education (higher education) to improve transition from second level into third level education.

4.5. Public authorities participate in internationally comparable data collections in higher education.
Descriptor:
Internationally comparable taxonomies should be used for internationally comparable data collection (e.g., ISCED, EQF for levels of study, the EHEA definitions of underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, etc.). Public authorities should participate in European Higher Education Area surveys on student characteristics (e.g., Eurostudent survey) and in graduate surveys (e.g., Eurograduate survey).

5. Principle on counselling and guidance

Principle

5. Public authorities should have policies that enable higher education institutions to ensure effective counselling and guidance for potential and enrolled students in order to widen their access to, participation in and completion of higher education studies. These services should be coherent across the entire education system, with special regard to transitions between different educational levels, educational institutions and into the labour market.

Guidelines
    a. Public authorities should create conditions that enable collaboration between different public institutions that provide counselling and guidance services

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together with higher education institutions to create synergies and omit duplication of similar services. These services should uphold the principles of clarity and user-friendliness, because end users must be capable to understand them easily.

b. Within a diverse student body, special attention should be directed towards students with physical and psychological health challenges. These students should have access to professional support to secure their success in accessing and completing higher education studies. Special focus should be placed on prevention of psychological challenges caused by the organisation of study and students' living conditions.

c. Public authorities should also consider setting up ombudsperson-type institutions that will have the capacity and knowledge to mediate any conflicts, particularly related to equity issues that may arise during accessing or participating in higher education, or conflicts that hinder the completion of studies.

Indicators

5.1. Public authorities ensure and support the provision of free, accessible and timely <u>academic and careers</u> counselling and guidance services to all potential and enrolled students in higher education.
Descriptor:
Public authorities should ensure the provision of free and inclusive academic and career counselling and guidance to all prospective and current students in public centres and/or contact points within educational institutions. They should facilitate the cooperation among all providers of academic and careers counselling and guidance for higher education to enable exchange of good practice and omit duplication. Public authorities should consider funding higher education institutions, which provide free and inclusive academic and careers counselling and guidance to potential and current students.

5.2. Public authorities ensure and support the provision of free, accessible and timely <u>psychological</u> counselling and guidance services to all potential and enrolled students, as well as to staff in higher education (Eurydice, 2022).
Descriptor:
Public authorities should ensure and support the provision of free and inclusive psychological counselling and guidance to all students and staff in public centres and/or contact points within educational institutions. The timely provision of this counselling is key in helping to prevent the negative effects of mental illness for students, such as a worsening of their condition or study delays. They should facilitate the cooperation among all providers of psychological counselling and guidance for higher education to enable exchange of good practice and omit duplication. They should consider funding higher education institutions that provide free, inclusive, and timely psychological counselling and guidance to potential and enrolled students, as well as to staff. Public authorities should help higher education institutions to adapt their organisation of studies and students' living conditions in a way that prevents or mitigates potential psychological challenges.

5.3. Quality assessment of career, academic as well as psychological counselling and guidance services in higher education is required (Eurydice, 2022).
Descriptor:

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Public authorities, in cooperation with higher education institutions, should ensure that an appropriate body has the mandate to assess the quality of career, academic and psychological counselling services in higher education and whether beneficiaries are satisfied with these services.

5.4. Existence of impartial bodies with a formal role in conflict resolution and in mediating conflicts related to the social dimension in higher education (Eurydice, 2022).

Descriptor:

Public authorities should ensure that an impartial body is mandated for conflict resolution and mediation specifically pertaining to the social dimension issues in higher education. Such a body should provide access to counselling and legal services to both students and staff if they have any concerns related to discrimination issues.

6. Principle on funding

Principle

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.

Guidelines

a. Higher education funding systems should facilitate the attainment of strategic objectives related to the social dimension of higher education. Higher education institutions should be supported and rewarded for meeting agreed targets in widening access, increasing participation in and completion of higher education studies, in relation to vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups. Mechanisms for achieving these targets should not have negative financial consequences to higher education institutions core funding.

b. Financial support systems should aim to be universally applicable to all students, however, when this is not possible, the public student financial support systems should be primarily needs-based and should make higher education affordable for all students, foster access to and provide opportunities for success in higher education. They should mainly contribute to cover both the direct costs of study (fees and study materials) and the indirect costs (e.g. accommodation, which is becoming increasingly problematic for students across the EHEA due to the increased housing, living, and transportation costs, etc.).

Indicators

6.1. Public funding is attributed to higher education institutions that meet targets in widening access, increasing participation or completing higher education, in particular in relation to underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups (Eurydice, 2022).

Descriptor:

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Public authorities should take into consideration the local/regional contexts of higher education institutions and the socio-economic context of students and staff for determining the amount of public funding that higher education institutions receive to support underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. Public authorities could provide funding to higher education institutions to have a contact point for dealing with diversity, equity and inclusion of students and staff.

6.2. Public authorities provide universal or need-based grants for students, that cover direct and indirect costs of study (Eurydice, 2022).
Descriptor:
Public authorities should provide universal or need-based grants for underrepresented, disadvantaged, and vulnerable students. These grants should cover both direct costs (tuition fees, administration fees, other fees, study materials, personal IT equipment, etc.) and indirect costs (accommodation, transport, meals, etc.) for students both for full-time and part-time study programmes. Access to higher education should be promoted through ensuring free universal education or, if not possible, for underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students, especially in the first cycle. The type and amount of the student financial support should depend on factors such as a student's regional socio-economic background and the place of study. Public authorities should collect data on the share of students that receive universal or needs-based grants.

6.3. Public authorities provide top-level indirect student support for covering the costs of study.
Descriptor:
There should be a top-level policy regarding raising accessibility, affordability and quality of higher education through indirect support, which should include public funding support for dormitories, canteens, transport services etc. to lower the costs of these services for all types of students, including international students. Public authorities should collect data on the funding provided to indirect student support schemes and compare their share with the share of funding provided to direct student support.

6.4. Public authorities provide information, assistance and communicate effectively on available student financial support to all students, in particular to underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students.
Descriptor:
Public authorities should provide comprehensive information and assistance on available student financial support to both potential and enrolled students, with a particular emphasis on underrepresented, disadvantaged, and vulnerable students. The information they provide should be transparent, up-to-date and provided through suitable and easily accessible communication channels.

7. Principle on inclusive institutional culture

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Principles

> **7. Public authorities should help higher education institutions to strengthen their capacity in responding to the needs of a more diverse student and staff body and create inclusive learning environments and inclusive institutional cultures.**

Guidelines

a. Public authorities should support and provide adequate means to higher education institutions to improve initial and continuing professional training for academic and administrative staff to enable them to work professionally and equitably with a diverse student body and staff.

b. Whenever possible, external quality assurance systems should address how the social dimension, diversity, accessibility, equity and inclusion are reflected within the institutional missions of higher education institutions, whilst respecting the principle of autonomy of higher education institutions.

Indicators

7.1. Public authorities enable higher education institutions to offer training on diversity, equity or inclusion to academic and administrative staff, and students (Eurydice, 2022).

Descriptor:

Public authorities should support the creation of common concepts, frameworks and tools that can be used in the delivery of the training on diversity, equity and inclusion in all higher education institutions. These common tools should be created together with student representatives and higher education institutions. Public authorities should provide funding for the provision of initial and continuing academic and administrative staff and student training on diversity, equity and inclusion (e.g. training on equal opportunities, universal accessibility, universal design, etc.).

7.2. Existence of support offered by top-level public authorities to higher education institutions to offer trainings on diversity, equity or inclusion to staff and students (Eurydice, 2022).

Descriptor:

Public authorities should support a mentoring network at the local, regional or national level for both staff and students in order to involve, guide and assist them on how to best interact with the needs of a more diverse student and staff body. Public authorities should provide higher education institutions with tools and other non-financial means of support on diversity, equity and inclusion for students and staff.

7.3. Existence of an appropriate body has the mandate to monitor whether higher education institutions offer training on diversity, equity or inclusion to staff and students.

Descriptor:

Public authorities should ensure that an appropriate body periodically monitors the quality of initial and continuous staff and student training. Students and staff representatives should be included in this monitoring, including representatives of underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students and staff. In some national contexts, quality assurance frameworks could be used for the monitoring.

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7.4. Public authorities issue guidelines and provide financial means to make higher education buildings and infrastructure easily accessible and adjusted to the needs of underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students and staff.

Descriptor:

Public authorities should provide financial support to higher education institutions to ensure universal accessibility of their buildings and infrastructure. Public authorities should monitor the implementation of this indicator, ensuring that the implemented improvements align with established accessibility standards and effectively address the needs of underrepresented, disadvantaged, and vulnerable students and staff.

8. Principle on international mobility

Principle

> **8. International mobility programs in higher education should be structured and implemented in a way that foster diversity, equity and inclusion and should particularly foster participation of students and staff from vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented backgrounds.**

Guidelines

a. International experiences through learning mobility improve the quality of learning outcomes in higher education. Public authorities and higher education institutions should ensure equal access for all to the learning opportunities offered by national and international learning and training mobility programmes and actively address obstacles to mobility for vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented groups of students and staff.

b. Besides further support to physical mobility, including full portability of grants and loans across the EHEA, public authorities and higher education institutions should facilitate the use of information and communications technology (ICT) to support blended mobility and to foster internationalisation at home by embedding international online cooperation into courses. Blended mobility is the combination of a period of physical mobility and a period of online learning. Such online cooperation can be used to extend the learning outcomes and enhance the impact of physical mobility, for example by bringing together a more diverse group of participants, or to offer a broader range of mobility options.

Indicators

8.1. A top-level mobility policy is in place, which focuses on vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented students and staff (Eurydice, 2022).

Descriptor:

Public authorities should develop an action plan, or a similar major policy document, with quantitative targets for stimulating international mobility of students and staff from vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups. International mobility opportunities

should be inclusive and suit different needs and aspirations of disadvantaged, vulnerable and underrepresented students (long-term and short-term mobilities, blended and virtual exchanges, joint study programmes at different levels, summer and winter schools, etc.).

8.2. Public authorities have a standard methodology to collect data and monitor the participation and experiences of beneficiaries in all types of international mobility programs, including their background characteristics (e.g., disadvantaged, vulnerable and underrepresented groups).
Descriptor:
Public authorities should ensure top-level monitoring of specific characteristics of students and staff participating in international mobility programs (Eurydice, 2022). There should be annual data collection on the enrolment, retention and graduation rates of international students and staff from underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable backgrounds. Public authorities should collect data on the percentage of students and staff participating in physical vs. blended mobility, particularly in relation to underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students and staff, as well as data collection on the financial support provided to underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students and staff for participating in international mobility programs.

8.3. Public authorities have measures in place to support higher education institutions in creating equitable and inclusive international learning mobility (Eurydice, 2022).
Descriptor:
Public authorities should provide professional training support to higher education institutions on how to successfully organise equitable and inclusive international learning mobility, in particular blended mobility and internationalisation at home, along with the physical mobility. Where necessary, top-level authorities should provide support to higher education institutions on the use of the new technologies for successful participation of underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students and staff in international mobility programs, particularly in blended mobility and internationalisation at home (Eurydice, 2022). Public authorities should consider providing funding support for: 1) guidance services, 2) mentoring services to enhance the performance and wellbeing of students and staff, 3) subsidised accommodation and food/canteens services available and accessible at higher education institutions for incoming and/or outgoing students and staff (Eurydice, 2022).

8.4. Public authorities have measures in place to support vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented students and staff in international learning mobility.
Descriptor:
Public authorities should provide targeted administrative and financial support for students and staff from vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups to help them participate in international mobility. Public financial support for students should be fully portable across the EHEA while taking part in the international mobility programmes.

9. Principle on community engagement

Principle

> **9. Higher education institutions should ensure that community engagement in higher education promotes diversity, equity and inclusion.**

Guidelines

    a. Community engagement should be considered as a process whereby higher education institutions engage with external community stakeholders to undertake joint activities that can be mutually beneficial. Like social dimension policies, community engagement should be embedded in the core missions of higher education. It should engage with teaching and learning, research, service and knowledge exchange, students and staff and management of higher education institutions. Such engagement provides a holistic basis on which universities can address a broad range of societal needs, including those of vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented groups, while enriching their teaching, research and other core functions.

    b. Community stakeholders (e.g. local authorities, cultural organisations, non-governmental organisations, businesses, citizens) should be able to meaningfully engage with higher education actors through open dialogue. This will enable genuine university-community partnerships, which can effectively address social and democratic challenges.

Indicators

9.1. Top-level authorities provide financial support to higher education institutions in developing community engagement activities focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion (Eurydice, 2022).

Descriptor:
Public authorities should provide financial support, such as additional funding through funding agreements or additional earmarked funding, for the development of community engagement activities of higher education institutions that promote diversity, equity and inclusion.

9.2. Existence of local, regional, or national networks that support development of community engagement activities in higher education, particularly those focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Descriptor:
Public authorities should support higher education institutions in implementing community engagement activities by initiating and supporting local, regional, or national networks for exchanging good practices and facilitating peer learning and training for students and staff. Public authorities could support networks which provide recognition for community engagement activities in higher education that foster diversity, equity and inclusion.

9.3. Existence of a policy framework which enables that community engagement activities of staff employed at higher education institutions contribute to the advancement of their professional careers.

Descriptor:
Public authorities should engage with higher education institutions to create a policy framework which will enable that community engagement activities of staff should be recognised as one of the criteria for career progression in higher education and as a part of the designated teaching and research workload.

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10. Principle on policy dialogue

Principle

> **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.**

Guidelines

a. Such policy dialogue should allow to develop fit-for purpose policy measures, which should respect institutional autonomy, avoid any unnecessary administrative burden, and thus enable concrete progress towards diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education.

b. Within the scope of the above principles and guidelines, peer support and exchange of good practices are crucial among EHEA countries in order to facilitate progress towards the inclusiveness of higher education systems.

Indicators
10.1. Top-level authorities have established policy dialogue in a specific forum dedicated to the implementation of the Principles and Guidelines (Eurydice, 2022).   *Descriptor:*   Public authorities should actively engage relevant stakeholders, including higher education institutions and their representative bodies, student and staff unions, in the development, elaboration, monitoring, evaluation and review of all policies affecting the social dimension of higher education. Public authorities should regularly track progress towards the implementation of the Principles and Guidelines based on the collected data. They should regularly survey the satisfaction of relevant stakeholders related to their participation in the decision-making and consultation process on strengthening the social dimension of higher education.
10.2. Public authorities support and participate in international peer learning activities and exchange of good practices on strengthening the social dimension of higher education.   *Descriptor:*   Public authorities should actively engage in international knowledge exchange and collaborative practice-sharing initiatives to strengthen the social dimension of higher education. This engagement will deepen their understanding of the social dimension and enable them to establish meaningful partnerships that foster greater success in formulating, effectively implementing and evaluating policies to enhance the social dimension of higher education.

Glossary of Terms and Definitions [6]

This glossary defines the three central terms in this document, namely underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students. The definitions are not to be understood as legal definitions and therefore do not conflict with any existing legal regulations, rather they are intended as explanatory definitions used in relation to the contents of the Principles and Guidelines.

Underrepresented students:
A group of learners is underrepresented in relation to certain characteristics (e.g. gender, age, nationality, geographic origin, socio-economic background, ethnic minorities) if its share among the students is lower than the share of a comparable group in the total population. This can be documented at the time of admission, during the course of studies or at graduation. Individuals usually have several underrepresented characteristics, which is why combinations of underrepresented characteristics ("intersectionality") should always be considered. Furthermore, underrepresentation can also impact at different levels of higher education – study programme, faculty or department, higher education institution, higher education system. This definition is complementary to the London Communiqué, *"that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations"*, but does not fully cover it.

Disadvantaged students:
Disadvantaged students often face specific challenges compared to their peers in higher education. This can take many forms (e.g. disability, low family income, little or no family support, orphan, many school moves, mental health, pregnancy, having less time to study, because one has to earn ones living by working or having caring duties). The disadvantage may be permanent, may occur from time to time or only for a limited period. Disadvantaged students can be part of an underrepresented group, but do not have to be. Therefore, disadvantaged and underrepresented are not synonymous.

Vulnerable students:
Vulnerable students may be at risk of disadvantage (see above) and in addition have special (protection) needs. For example, because they suffer from an illness (including mental illness) or have a disability, because they are minors, because their residence permit depends on the success of their studies (and thus also on decisions made by individual teachers), because they are at risk of being discriminated against. These learners are vulnerable in the sense that they may not be able to ensure their personal well-being, or that they may not be able to protect themselves from harm or exploitation and need additional support or attention.

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[6] This glossary is also adopted as an integral part of the Principles and Guidelines at the 2020 Rome Ministerial Conference.