



Institute for the
Development of Education



New European Higher Education Area Framework for the Social Dimension: what does it tell us and where are we heading?

Nino Schmidt

Institute for the Development of Education, Croatia – Executive Director
Former Co-Chair of the BFUG Working Group on Social Dimension

EUROSTUDENT Talks, 16 January 2025, On-line at Zoom, 11-12h CET



About us

Institute for the Development of Education, Croatia

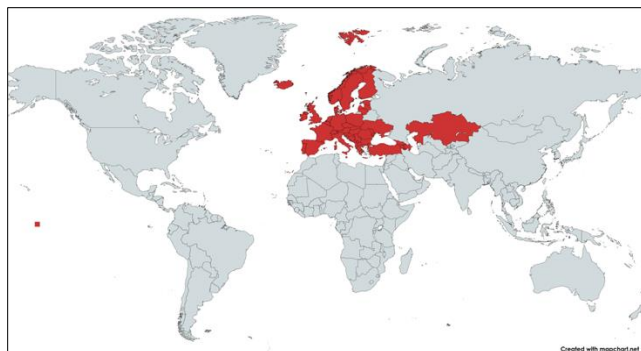
- **European think-tank** committed to advancing **policies in higher education**. Our focus areas include:
 - **Equity and inclusion** in higher education:
Driving the development of the European Framework for Social Dimension
 - **Community engagement** in higher education:
Establishing the European Platform for Community Engagement
 - **Quality assurance** in higher education:
Linking quality with inclusion and engagement with society
- Providing **consultancy services** in key focus areas to public authorities and higher education institutions in Europe. More at www.iro.hr



About us

Nino S. Schmidt

- **Executive Director and Founder** of the Institute for the Development of Education, Croatia
- Former **Co-Chair** of the Working Group on Social Dimension within the **Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG)**
 - 2018 – 2024: successfully led the creation of the **first EHEA Framework for the Social Dimension**, establishing principles, guidelines, and indicators to help 47 EHEA countries improve social dimension policies in higher education.
- 2015 – 2021: Member of the Croatian National Committee for Enhancing the Social Dimension of Higher Education



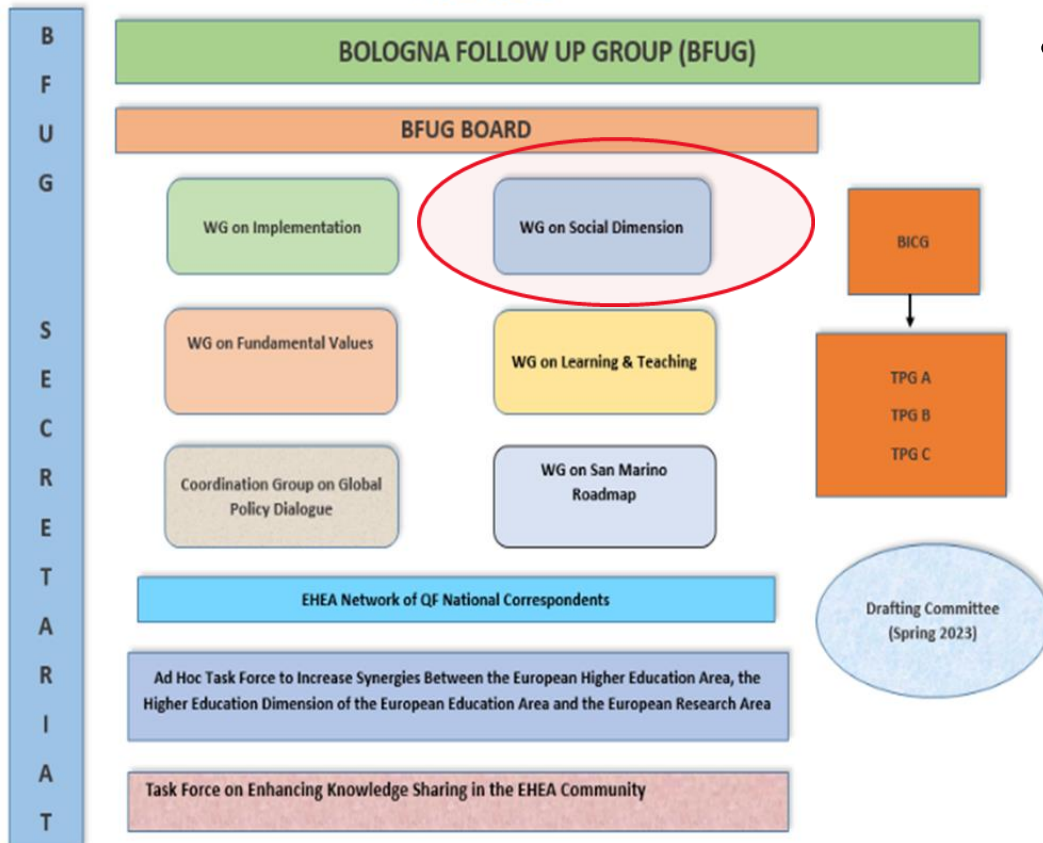
Bologna Process



- The Bologna Process, launched with the Bologna Declaration of **1999**: the main voluntary **intergovernmental cooperation at European level** in the field of higher education.
 - Nowadays implemented in **47 states**, which define the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).
- It guides the **collective effort of public authorities and the European Commission** on how to build more inclusive, innovative and interconnected EHEA.

Bologna Process and European Higher Education Area

Structure



- Implementation of the steps upon which the higher education ministers have decided > the Bologna Process makes use of several **support structures:**

- **Bologna Follow-Up Group – BFUG:** the executive structure supporting the Bologna Process in-between the ministerial Conferences.
- **Working Groups > Working Group on Social Dimension**



Key concepts

Key concepts

- **Diversity:** a fact
‘Learners have different characteristics, backgrounds, needs’
- **Equity:** a principle
‘All learners are considered as equally important and have equal opportunities’
- **Inclusion:** a process
‘Removing barriers to achieve equity in education’

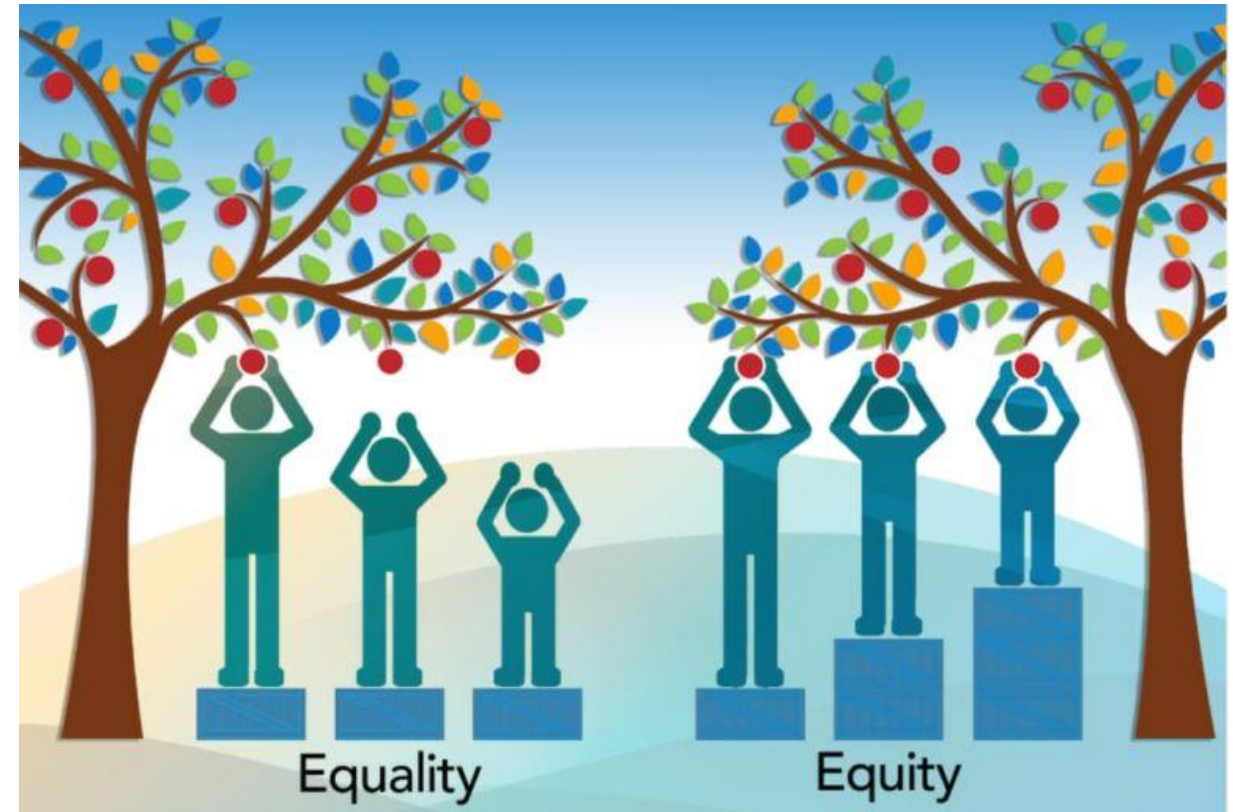


Source: *Inclusion by Design: Insights from Design Week Portland*; Gensler

Source: *definitions of equity and inclusion based on UNESCO (2017)*

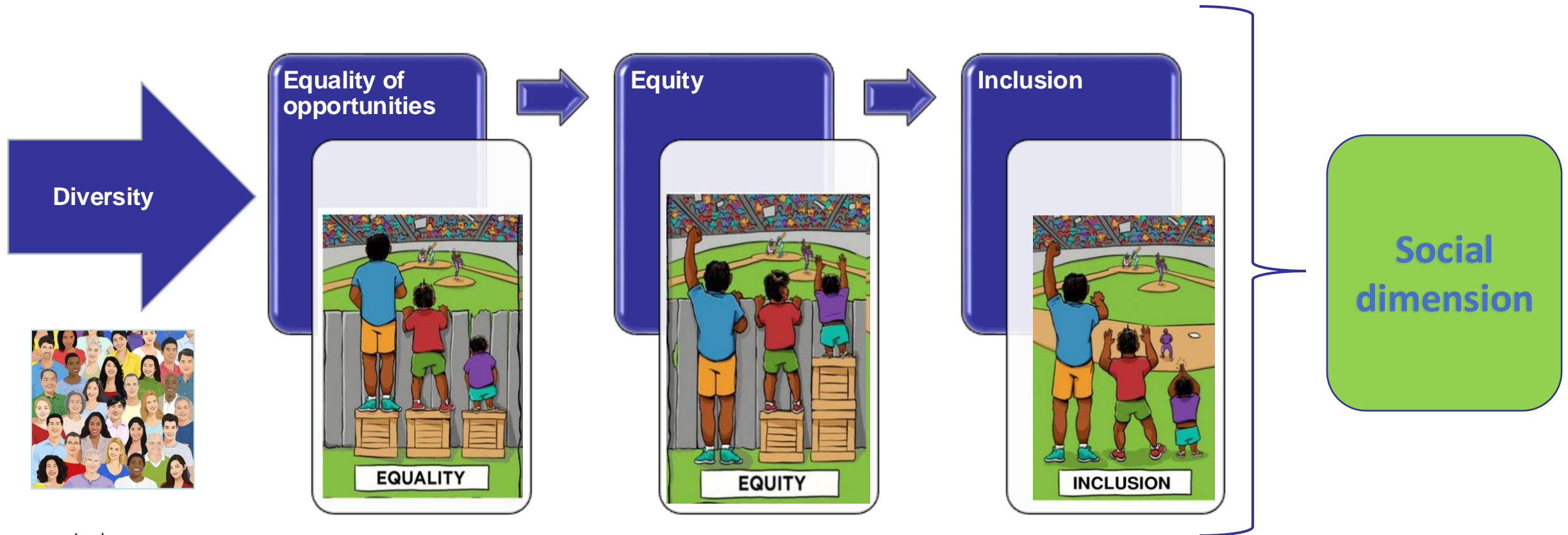
Additional concepts

- **Diversity:** a fact ... but also a goal!
Some groups of learners are underrepresented
- **Equality of treatment** is not the same as equity. While equality implies **uniformity**, equity focuses on creating **fair opportunities tailored to individual needs**.
- **The ‘social dimension of higher education’** (more on this later!)



Source: *Equity vs Equality*. Northwestern Health Unit

Bologna Process: new definition of the social dimension (2020)



Three dimensions of equity and inclusion



Access

Ensuring the conditions and removing barriers for individuals to access educational institutions or programmes that match their needs or educational objectives



Well-being

Ensuring an optimal experience for all learners in the educational system, leading to a comprehensive and balanced development of each individual's potential



Achievement

Reducing differences in educational achievements among different groups of learners, preventing dropout and stimulating further education.

Croatian Lifelong Learning for All Network (Source: Farnell et al., 2023)



Bologna process:

Overview of policy development related to equity and inclusion in EHEA

Overview of policy development: Social dimension in higher education in the period 2001 - 2018



2001 – 2018: the notion of a social dimension has been **embedded** into the policy objectives of the **Bologna Process**



rather than being derived from the research that informed these policy objectives



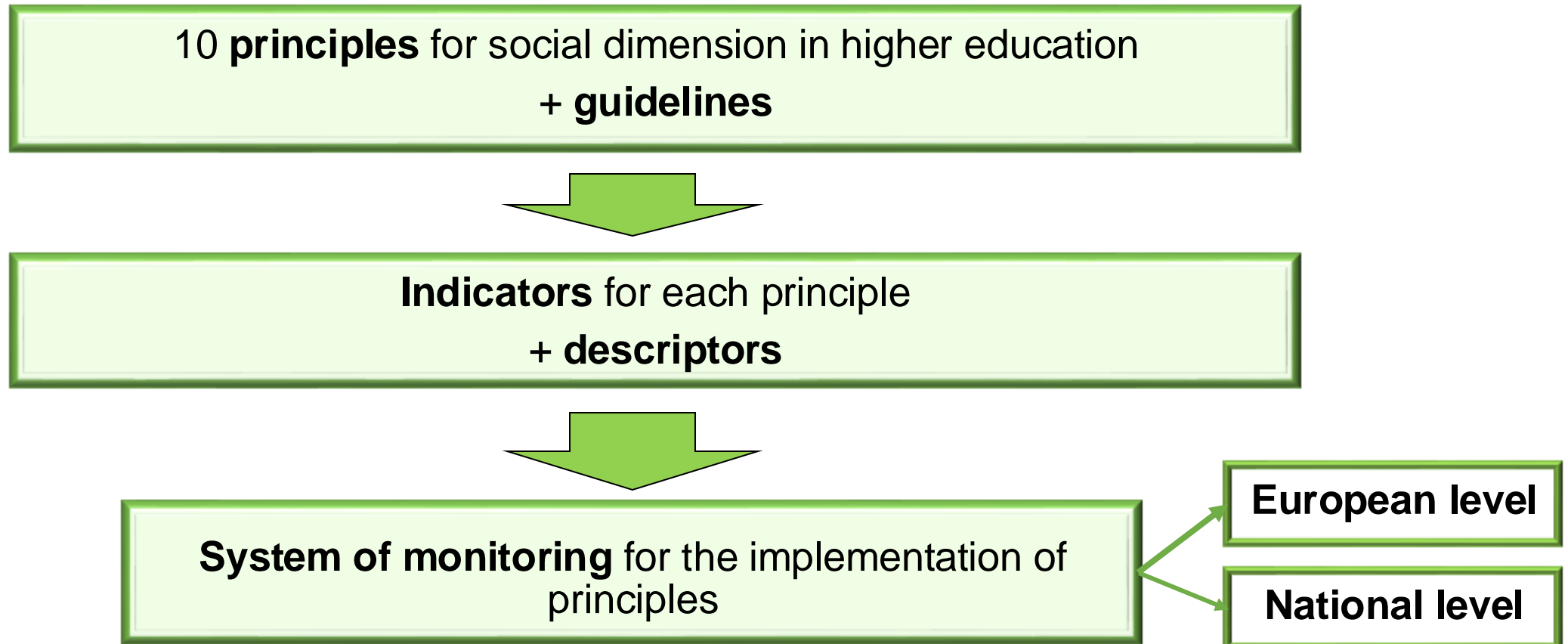
definitional anarchy

Overview of policy development: Social dimension in higher education in the period 2018 - 2024

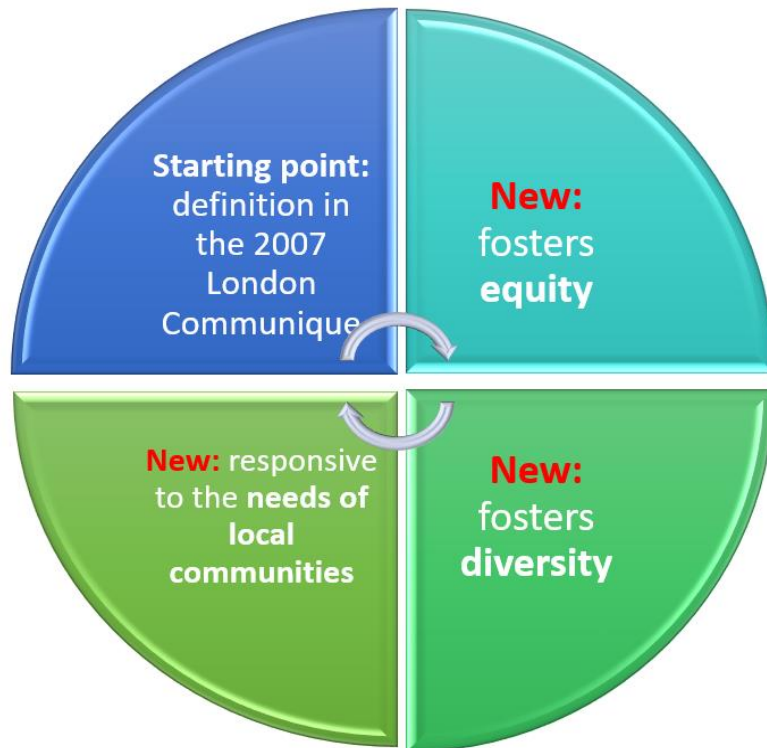


- 2020 Rome Communiqué: the **first official definition** of the social dimension and the **formulation of 'Principles and Guidelines** to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA'
 - **'Game-changer'** for the further development of social dimension in the EHEA
- 2024 Tirana Communiqué: **'Indicators and descriptors** for the Principles of the Social Dimension in the EHEA'
 - Principles and guidelines + indicators and descriptors = new **EHEA framework for the social dimension** in higher education

EHEA policy framework for the social dimension in higher education adopted in 2024:



New definition of the social dimension – adopted in 2020



Social dimension in higher education is

- **a process** 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**.



Principles and Guidelines – adopted in 2020

10 principles for the social dimension for the upcoming decade:



- **Principles** = should be understood as high-level statements that serve as **political commitments** and as a **basis for the conceptualization of different policies** for social dimension enhancement.
- **Guidelines** = recommendations intended to advise policy makers on how the principles should be implemented in practice.



Principles and Guidelines

10 principles for the social dimension for the upcoming decade:

1. Principle on **strategic approach** to the social dimension
2. Principle on **flexibility** of higher education systems
3. Principle on the **inclusiveness of the entire education system**
4. Principle on monitoring and **data collection**
5. Principle on **counselling** and guidance
6. Principle on **funding**
7. Principle on **inclusive institutional culture**
8. Principle on **international mobility**
9. Principle on **community engagement**
10. Principle on **policy dialogue**





Indicators = tools for measuring progress in implementing the principles of the social dimension in higher education.



Descriptors = each indicator has its descriptor, which outlines characteristics of the indicators in more detail providing a better understanding of the indicators and how they can be implemented.



- **Not prescriptive – toolbox approach!** > enable the EHEA countries to implement the indicators in a way that suits their national higher education systems
- Important for creating **European-level and national-level SYSTEMS OF MONITORING and evaluating** the progress in the implementation of the principles for the social dimension.

Figure 11.1: Results of the 10 scoreboard indicators on Principles & Guidelines, 2020/2021

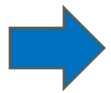
	P&Gs 1	P&Gs 2	P&Gs 3	P&Gs 4	P&Gs 5	P&Gs 6	P&Gs 7	P&Gs 8	P&Gs 9	P&Gs 10	Points per country
Belgium (BE fr)	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	20
Belgium (BE de)	Red	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red	6
Belgium (BE nl)	Yellow	Dark Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Dark Green	Red	Yellow	18
Bulgaria	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	11
Czechia	Dark Green	Red	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	23
Denmark	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Red	Dark Green	Red	Red	16
Germany	Yellow	Dark Green	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Yellow	Dark Green	Red	Red	14
Estonia	Dark Green	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Yellow	Dark Green	Red	Red	25
Ireland	Dark Green	Dark Green	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red	14
Greece	Dark Green	Red	Red	Yellow	Dark Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Yellow	15
Spain	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	Red	Yellow	25
France	Yellow	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Dark Green	Yellow	Red	25
Croatia	Dark Green	Red	Red	Yellow	Red	Dark Green	Yellow	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	18
Italy	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Red	Red	28
Cyprus	Yellow	Red	Dark Green	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red	15
Latvia	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Yellow	8
Lithuania	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red	17
Luxembourg	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Dark Green	Red	Yellow	Red	Red	11
Hungary	Dark Green	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Red	14
Malta	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Dark Green	Red	Red	25
Netherlands	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Yellow	Dark Green	Yellow	Red	18
Austria	Dark Green	Yellow	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Yellow	Dark Green	Red	Red	21
Poland	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Yellow	Dark Green	Red	Red	20
Portugal	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Red	19
Romania	Dark Green	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Red	Red	24
Slovenia	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Red	Red	20
Slovakia	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red	9
Finland	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	27
Sweden	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	Red	25
Albania	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Dark Green	Yellow	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	7
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red	Yellow	Red	Red	Red	Red	3
Switzerland	Dark Green	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Dark Green	Red	Red	19
Liechtenstein	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	6
Montenegro	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red	Red	5
North Macedonia	Dark Green	Red	Yellow	Dark Green	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Red	13
Norway	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Yellow	24
Serbia	Dark Green	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	Red	Red	Red	Yellow	12
Turkey	Dark Green	Dark Green	Yellow	Dark Green	Dark Green	Red	Red	Yellow	Red	Red	15
Points per P&Gs	91	65	62	97	76	73	51	68	27	24	635

■ All criteria are met (4 pts)
 ■ Most criteria are met (3 pts)
 ■ Some criteria are met (2 pts)
■ Few criteria are met (1 pt)
 ■ No criteria are met (0 pts)

There is still much to be improved in the EHEA in addressing the social dimension!



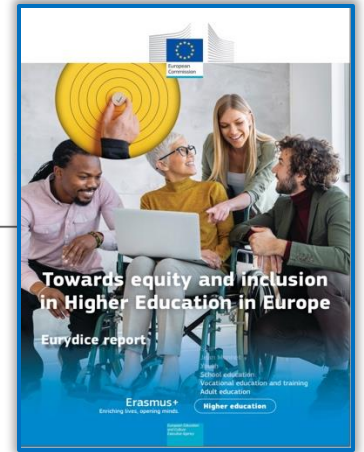
Eurydice report (2022) shows that the **total number of points achieved** by the countries covered by this report is **635**.



If all the education systems had been in the dark green category, **the total number would have been 1 520** (38 education systems × 40 points).



The result indicates that **EHEA systems have put in place policies for nearly 42% of the interventions** required to meet the commitments.



European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice. (2022). Towards equity and inclusion in higher education in Europe. Eurydice report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.



Monitoring

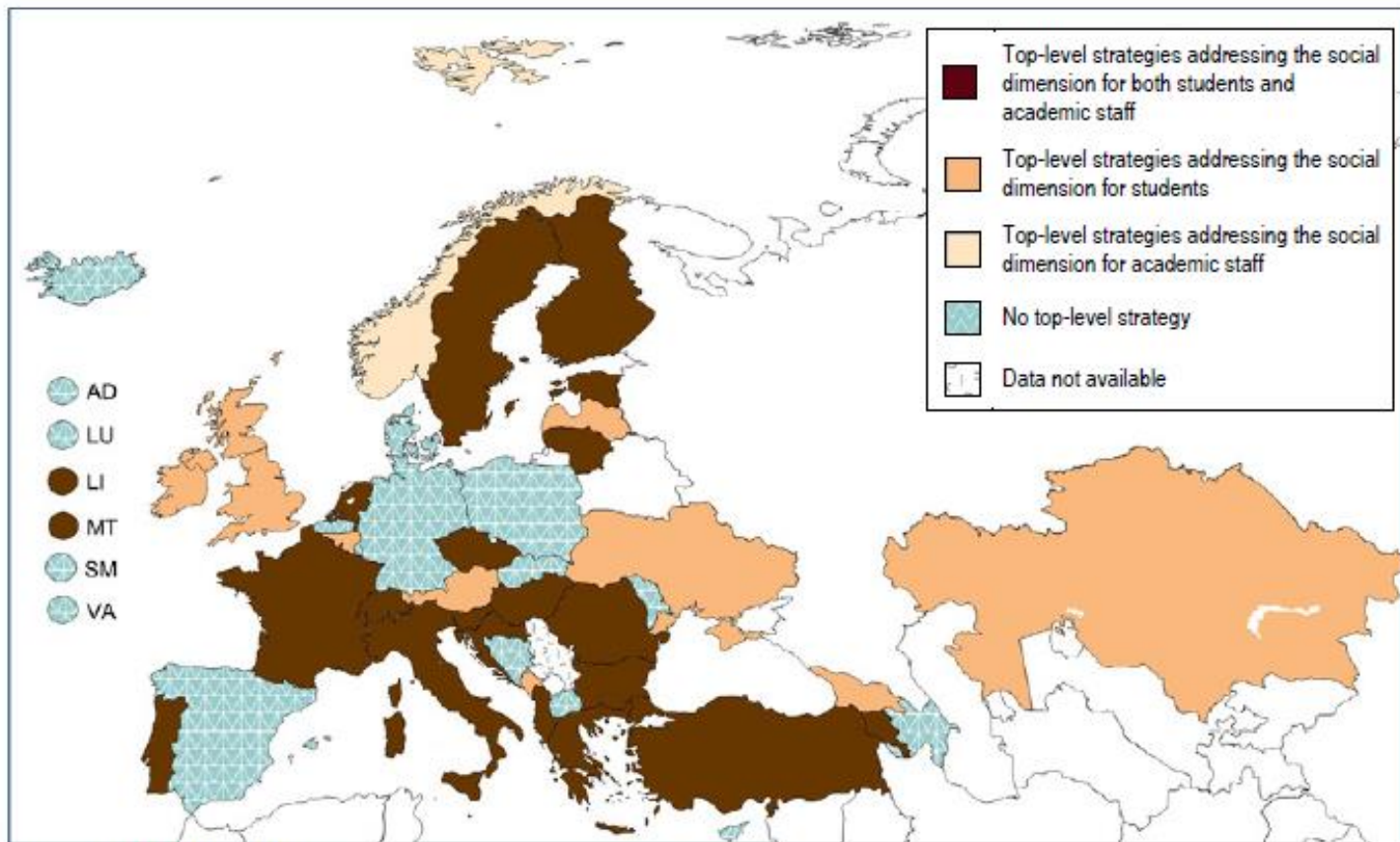
**the implementation of
the EHEA Framework for the Social Dimension**



Monitoring: Principle 1 on strategic approach to the social dimension



Figure 4.1: Strategic commitment to the social dimension of higher education: top-level targeted strategies, action plans and measures, 2022/2023



Source: BFUG data collection.

Principle 1:

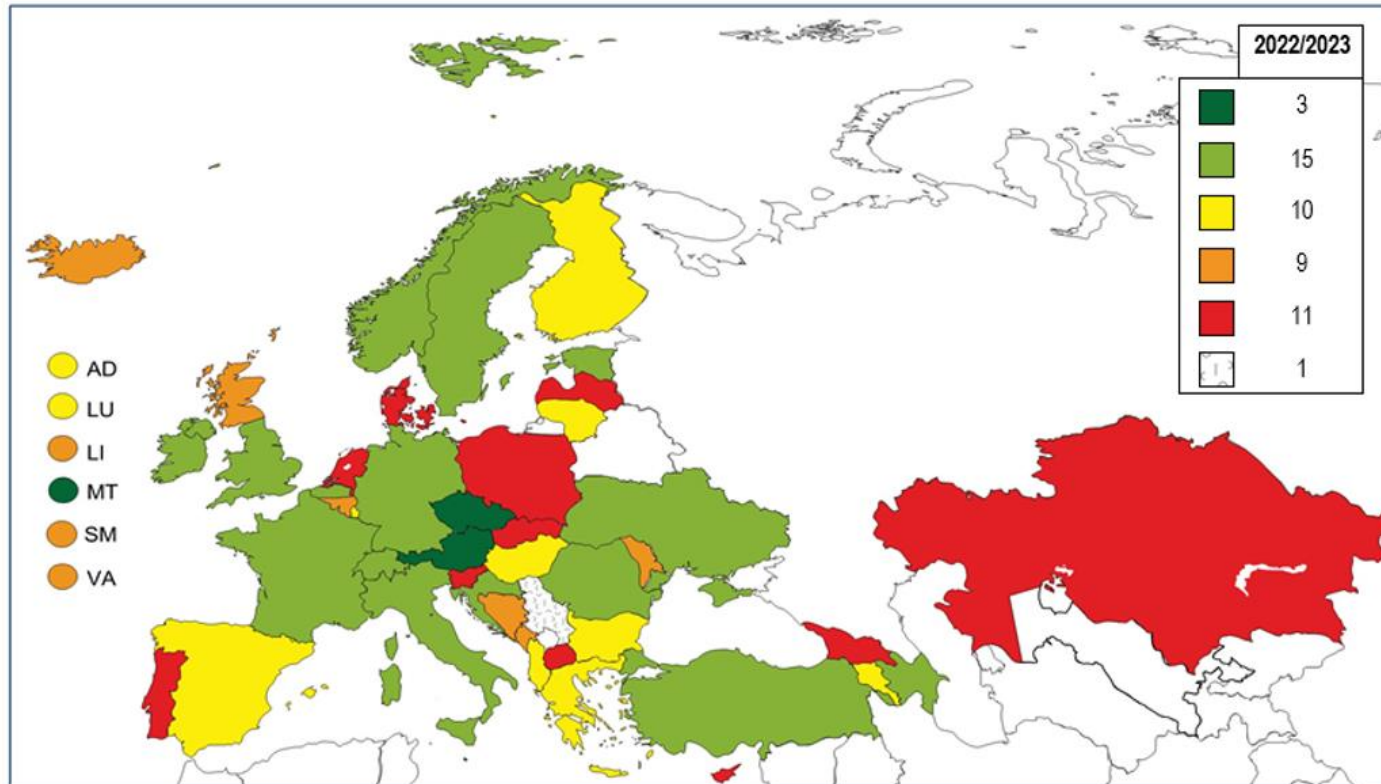
“The social dimension should be central to higher education strategies **at system and institutional level**, as well as at the EHEA level.”

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice [EC]. (2024). The EHEA in 2024: Bologna Process Implementation Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Monitoring: Principle 7 on inclusive institutional culture



Figure 4.14: Scorecard indicator n°15: P&G 7: Inclusive learning environment and institutional culture, 2022/2023



Source: BFUG data collection.

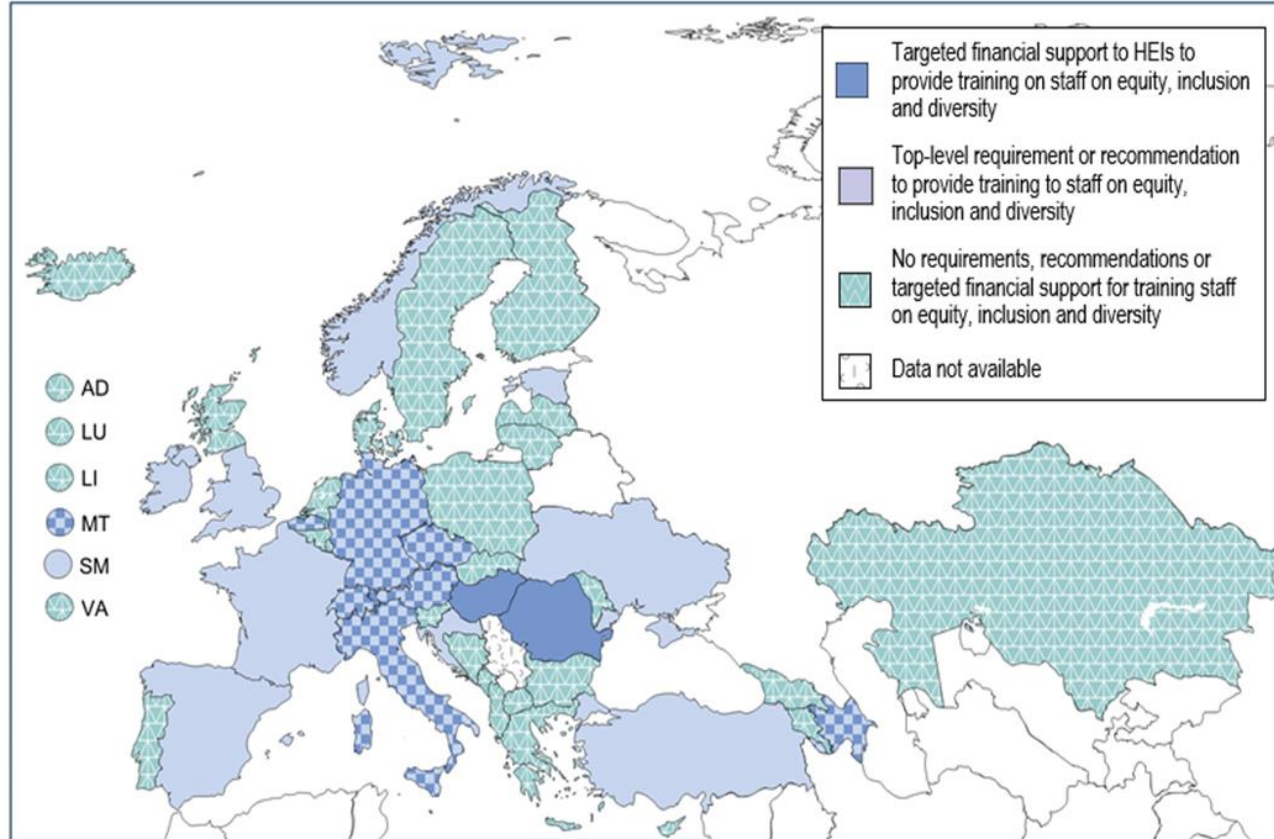
“Public authorities should help higher education institutions to strengthen their capacity

in responding to the needs of a more diverse student and staff body and

create inclusive learning environments and inclusive institutional cultures.”

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice [EC]. (2024). The EHEA in 2024: Bologna Process Implementation Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Figure 4.13: Support to higher education institutions (HEIs) for staff training on equity, inclusion and diversity, 2022/2023



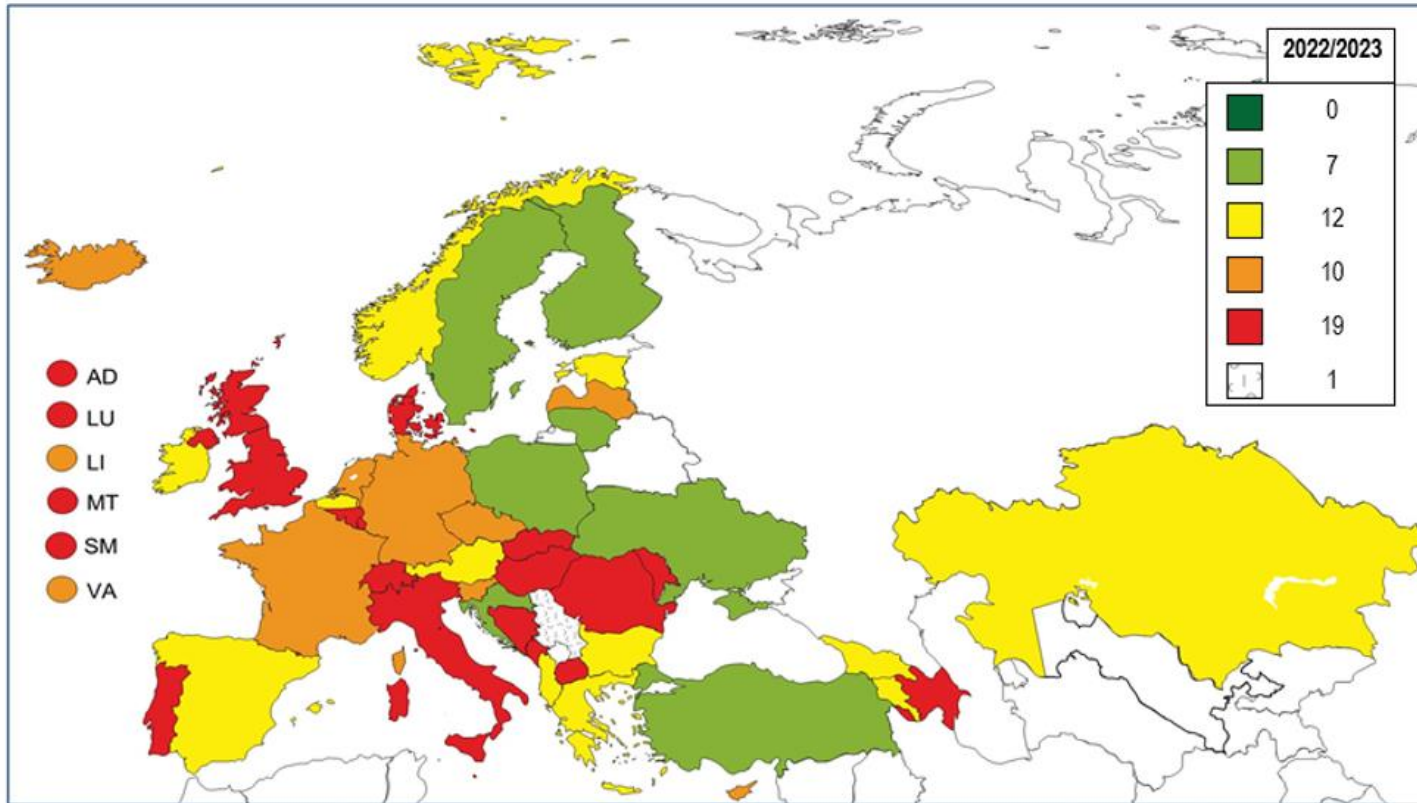
Source: BFUG data collection.

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice [EC]. (2024). The EHEA in 2024: Bologna Process Implementation Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

P-7 Practices:

- **Ireland's fourth National Access Plan (2022-2028) > supplemented by **targeted funding opportunities** that promote **teaching and learning enhancements**, especially in **universal design**.**
- **Belgium, Flemish Community > in 2023 **financial support** was given through SIHO to develop and organize **training on student mental health issues**.**

Figure 4.20: Scorecard indicator n°17: P & G 10: Policy dialogue on implementation of principles and guidelines, 2022/2023



Source: BFUG data collection.

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice [EC]. (2024). The EHEA in 2024: Bologna Process Implementation Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

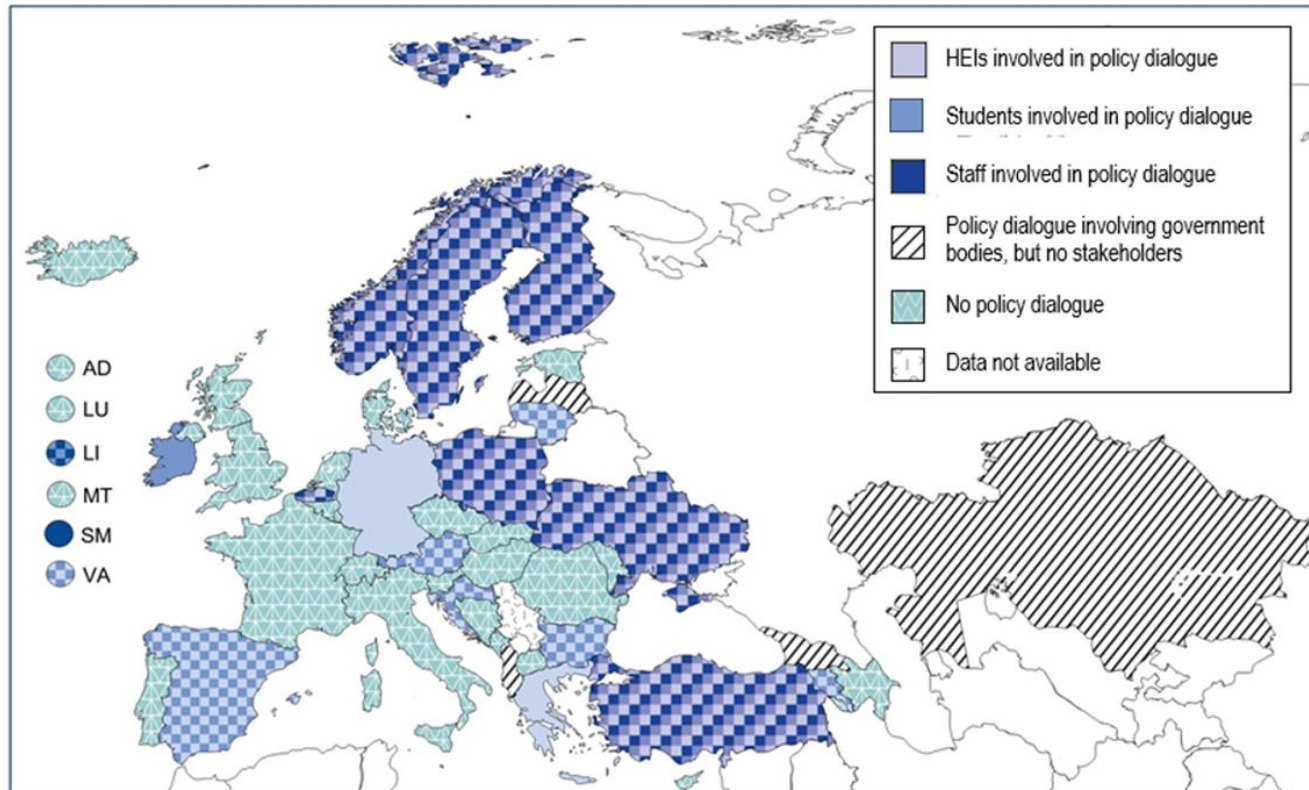
Principle 10:

“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.**”

Figure 4.19: Participants in policy dialogue to implement the principles and guidelines on the social dimension, 2022/2023



Source: BFUG data collection.

P-10 Practices:

Austria's approach > involves **annual networking conferences** that bring together a wide array of stakeholders from the higher education sector.

- conferences are crucial for presenting and **discussing interim evaluations of the national strategy on the social dimension**, ensuring continuous **stakeholder engagement** and feedback.

Report on Peer Learning Activities for the Social Dimension in the European Higher Education Area



Download the report

**Report on Peer Learning Activities
for the Social Dimension in the
European Higher Education Area**

Within the Erasmus+ Project 'Peer Learning Activities and Resources to Underpin the Principles and Guidelines for Social Dimension across the European Higher Education Area'



Co-funded by
the European Union

- The report **synthesizes findings and best practices from the four peer learning activities** organized within the project PLAR-U-PAGs in 2022-2023.
- The objective was to **enhance the exchange of best practices among EHEA countries** at varying levels of **implementing the principles** of the social dimension.
- The report provides **conclusions and recommendations** on how national authorities, higher education institutions, and other stakeholders can collaborate more effectively to implement the principles of the social dimension.

Overview of policy development: Social dimension in higher education in the period 2020 - 2024



- Significant development of the **policy architecture** in the period **2020 – 2024**
- **Long term policy landscape** for the implementation of the EHEA framework for the social dimension is **yet to be developed**



Future: 2024 - 2027



How can the Bologna Process support the future development of equity and inclusion?

Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) 2024-2027: **Thematic Working Group D on Social Dimension**

- EHEA member states can participate **as members of the TPG D**: they can nominate other stakeholder representatives to take part in the TPG D activities
- Plan: **peer-learning activities and exchange of good-practices** among EHEA member states to support the implementation of the Principles and Guidelines for the social dimension
- Plan: **EHEA level monitoring and data collection** related to the implementation of the Principles and Guidelines for the social dimension
- Plan: Erasmus+ project that will financially support the participation in the TPG D activities

Conclusion



- BFUG period 2020-2024: positioned the social dimension as a **central pillar within the EHEA**, providing a robust **EHEA framework for enhancing equity, diversity, and inclusivity** across 47 higher education systems.
- Achievements of the BFUG Working Group on Social Dimension:
 - Epitomize a **collaborative, innovative, and strategic approach** to fostering a more **inclusive and equitable higher education landscape**
...paving the way for **continued progress** in EHEA in the years ahead.



Thank you for your attention!

Nino S. Schmidt

- Executive Director of the Institute for the Development of Education, Croatia
- Former Co-Chair of the Bologna Follow-up Working Group on Social Dimension
- nscukanec@iro.hr



Web sites:

- European Higher Education Area – social dimension: <https://ehea.info/page-social-dimension>
- Institute for the Development of Education: www.iro.hr