

14-15th September 2023

II FORUM of European Universities Alliances

THEMATIC SESSION VI

Friday 15th September 9:30h-11:00h

**The social dimension in
European Universities:
obstacle or driver of
integration**

INTRODUCTION

As set out in the first principle under the European Pillar of Social Rights, ‘everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning’. Europe has highly accessible higher education compared to the rest of the world. However, disadvantaged or discriminated groups (ethnic minorities, people with migration background, or with disability, people from poor families, children of low qualified parents) are still underrepresented among students, academic staff and researchers.

According to the [“Principles, Guidelines and Indicators to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the European Higher Education Area”](#), the 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 encompasses also the desired inclusive environment in higher education that fosters equity, diversity, and is responsive to the needs of local communities”.

The ‘social dimension’ of higher education in Europe has been highlighted in the European strategy for universities and successive Bologna process communiqués as one of the characteristics that defines and distinguishes European universities from other more marketized higher education systems.

Furthermore, the ‘social dimension’ of universities may be conceived more extensively, including responsiveness to societal needs and demands, raising awareness and commitment to social change towards social justice and a sustainable socioeconomic model, and intensifying interactions with communities and their organizations and stakeholder involvement, including student participation.

The European Universities Initiative faces the challenge to foster diverse and inclusive programs, such as mobility initiatives, to include students and staff from vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented backgrounds, and encourage student participation within the governance of the alliances. It is also about being inclusive towards lifelong learners by offering diverse education opportunities and introducing innovative and student-centered pedagogies, where a diverse student body can build flexible learning paths at all levels of their studies and career. Moreover, it constitutes an opportunity to widen, substantiate and advance the ‘social dimension agenda’ through practical initiatives.

PURPOSE OF THE SESSION

The European strategy for universities recognises both excellence and inclusion as a distinctive feature of European higher education, exemplary for our European way of life. This makes the higher education sector in Europe different from other parts of the world.

Including the social dimension of the European Education Area and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) into the European Universities Initiative is crucial for their success.

As the European Universities Initiative is moving into the next phase, it is important to learn from the pilot phase, identify opportunities and challenges along with practices that can set an example, and discuss policies and mechanisms to ensure that the alliances are open to diversity and participation of a wide student base and contribute to the social dimension agenda.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- What actions have European Universities taken to foster the diversity of the student body entering, participating and completing higher education thus far? How can they contribute to have students of all backgrounds taking advantage of mobility opportunities?
- What actions have European Universities taken to promote life-long learning opportunities?
- What obstacles are students facing that may hinder an inclusive and diverse participation in the alliances?
- What policies and incentives could be implemented to foster the 'social dimension' of European Universities alliances in the next phases of the initiative (i.e., automatic recognition of credits, providing more flexible learning opportunities, providing funding opportunities, inclusive environments, etc.)?
- To what extent have students participated in the governance of alliances? How can student engagement be enhanced to better contribute to the success and 'social dimension' of European Universities?

SESSION OUTCOMES

- **Launch a participatory evaluation of the European universities' initiative:** Develop a bottom-up process of evaluation of the alliances, particularly focused on their ability to create an inclusive environment, include students from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds and ensure students' representation within governance structures. This evaluation should pay careful attention on what is happening on the field and detect local smart practices that might be scaled up. Students' participation will be particularly relevant to identify the needs, demands, and barriers to mobility that students are currently experiencing.
- **Develop common principles for students' involvement in the alliances' governance:** develop a set of common principles for student involvement that can be applied to all alliances. These principles must reflect that student involvement may take a variety of forms and cover both representation in governance structures with power of decision on the matters that affect students most, and participation in the inception and implementation of activities (social, cultural, sports, etc.) to help integrate all students.
- **Expand financial support, services, and information to enhance inclusion:** better financial and accommodation opportunities along with well-organised pre-departure information on these opportunities and foreseen costs are increasingly critical to enhance inclusion, in light of rising housing and energy prices. Therefore, national and local governments are encouraged to provide additional funding, particularly in urban areas with the highest prices. Forms of support may combine individual and context-based solutions at each university and country, with system-level procedures and services to address common barriers to mobility and inclusion.
- **Improve the opportunities for non-eu students:** participation in the alliances by non-EU European students is hampered both by higher tuition fees and visa requirements, which vary from country to country. Member states are encouraged to supply more inclusive scholarships and tuition fees, along with harmonised procedures to apply to visas to facilitate access for these students.

PARTICIPANTS

MODERATOR

Marcos Ros is a Spanish Socialist MEP and a full member of the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education.

He holds a PhD in architecture and is professor of urban planning on leave at the Polytechnic University of Cartagena (EUT+).

Among his main activities in this committee, he has been the representative of the Socialists in the report on the European Education Area.

In addition, his extensive university teaching experience allows him to follow closely the development of the Erasmus+ programme and the European universities initiative in the European institutions..



PARTICIPANTS

PANELLISTS

Tine Delva works as deputy Head of Unit in the higher education department of the Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture (DG EAC).

Tine is fully involved in the European Universities initiative and the European strategy for universities.

Before, Tine worked in the economic department of the Secretariat-General of the European Commission, where she was contributing to the work of the European Commission in areas such as economic governance and the EU follow-up to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Before Tine entered the European Commission, she was a cabinet member of two Members of the European Parliament. Tine has an academic background in economics, complemented with European affairs.

She is co-author of the book "The functioning of Europe, after Lisbon" (2010, 2015, in Dutch).



PARTICIPANTS

PANELLISTS

Tanguy Guibert joined the student movement in France seven years ago while attending nursing school.

He advocated primarily for improving life and studying conditions of the students, at the local and national levels by working on improving the quality of internships, access to mobility, and student services.

After 2 years as international officer in the French national student union, he now serves as Vice-president of the European Students' Union (ESU), working on European Education Area, Internationalization and Mobility, Youth and Sustainability.

Tanguy studies international political science at the Institute of Political Science in University Paris Est Créteil.



PARTICIPANTS

PANELLISTS

Rita Dias is 27 and comes from the coast of Portugal. She is president of the Erasmus Students Network (ESN).

She holds a bachelor's in Political Science and International Relations and a Master's in Public Policy.

Rita did her Erasmus in Leuven, Belgium, and worked at the United States Embassy in Lisbon in 2018 and in the Political Observatory in the Association for Political Studies and Scientific Research in 2020.

She joined ESN in 2018 when she moved to Lisbon to start her master's. She held several positions in the network, such as President of Portugal and Liaison Officer for Inclusive Mobility.

As president, she is responsible for the general coordination of the organization, external relations, policy, and advocacy. Her main priorities include increasing participation in learning mobility and fostering civic engagement and participation of young people through Erasmus.



PARTICIPANTS

PANELLISTS

Matej Bizaca is currently studying for a bachelor's degree in law at Comenius University of Bratislava (Slovakia), ENLIGHT University Alliance member.

From March to June of this year he was a Panel Participant in the 2nd European Student Assembly 2023 (ESA23) in the European Parliament in Strasbourg, organized by the European University Alliances and other partners. He took part in "Panel 1: Democracy", which created proposals on the topic of: "Deliberative versus representative democracy? How to reduce the gap between citizens and policy-makers and create a more united Europe?".

He holds both a Sailplane Pilot License and a Private Pilot License.



PARTICIPANTS

PANELLISTS

Krista Trendafilova is a Master's student in Global Challenges for sustainability in CHARM – EU. She started the program in Budapest, followed by a semester in Barcelona.

She is originally from Bulgaria. She obtained her bachelor's in molecular biology in the Netherlands.

Krista is a passionate environmentalist with a special interest in water sustainability and wastewater treatment.

She is an active student representative in CHARM trying to contribute to the improvement of the program and participates in the Capstone council responsible for the thesis project semester.

During her bachelors' honors' program, she was a dedicated member of a think tank with a goal of improving the accessibility and distribution of student support services at her university.

