

**THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF THE EHEA AND  
WORLDWIDE COMPETITION  
BOLOGNA SEMINAR 27 AND 28 JANUARY 2005**

**CONCLUSIONS WORKSHOP 3:  
THE SOCIAL DIMENSION AND SOCIAL  
COHESION**

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The workshop on the social dimension and social cohesion formulated conclusions about the five following issues:

1. The social dimension and social cohesion should really be set as a priority for the next ministerial meeting in Bergen. In the two years following the ministerial conference in Berlin, no considerable work had been done on the social dimension, nor had any progress been achieved. Participants noted that in some countries the implementation of the Bologna reforms resorted in effects that are directly controversial to the social dimension of Bologna. Therefore the Bologna process should consider the social dimension as an overarching and transversal objective. Social cohesion should not be seen as one of the other action lines, but as a dimension to each and every action line of the Bologna process. This implicates that we have to link discussions about previously agreed action lines to the objective of social cohesion.
2. There is a lack of comparable data on the social dimension in higher education in the different signatory countries. Therefore the workshop welcomed initiatives such as the Eurostudent surveys. All collection of comparable data on the social, cultural and economical backgrounds of students should of course be enlarged to all signatories of the Bologna Declaration. This stocktaking should serve as a tool to evaluate and compare progress made in the process and to analyse and measure a possible negative impact of other Bologna action lines on the social dimension of higher education. This stocktaking process should facilitate the sharing of good practices and the monitoring process.
3. Policies should be developed to abolish financial, social and cultural barriers, that cause the under representation of less privileged groups in higher education. The workshop explicitly warned for limiting the scope of the equal opportunities debate to access opportunities to education. Attention should also be paid to barriers such as access to second and third level higher education and drop out and retention rates of first generation students from low income families. Therefore, measures to enhance social cohesion in higher education should pay equal attention to access as well as to completion of the studies. Seen the fact that the social, cultural and economical background of graduates is also determining for the job opportunities the graduate has, guidance and counselling services should be developed. These services should focus both on the access to the labour marker and on a better pedagogical orientation.
4. The social dimension is essential to create student-ownership of the Bologna process. Instead of seeing students as passive customers, they should be given a more positive and active role in higher education, assuming that they are a full member of the higher education community. Furthermore it is essential to raise awareness about the social dimension and the implications of the Bologna process among all the higher education actors and stakeholders. If all actors and stakeholders are to accept the Bologna implementations, priority should be given to the social dimension.
5. A social cohesive European higher education area is only possible with a well developed social dimension to international mobility. The workshop wanted to stress that all efforts to give international mobility a more social character won't be effective as long as the national level is still suffering from a lack of social mobility. Nevertheless, a lot can still be done to expand the portability of grants and loans. The workshop had a discussion on the threats and challenges posed by the recent European Court of Justice rulings and agreed on the objective that for every student moving abroad within the EHEA, be it for a short or a long time period, sufficient financial support in the form of grants and loans should be provided. Due to time shortage, the workshop did not work out a plan how to achieve this goal. Therefore it decided not to interfere with the conclusions and the recommendations of the bologna Seminar in Noordwijk, dealing with this specific problem. Finally the workshop also mentioned that the social dimension to mobility is not only a matter of financial support, but also of resolving the current visa problems for students. A lot of work still has to be done here.